

Harnessing the Power of Genetic Genealogy to Help Holocaust Survivors Find Family

Rootstech 2025

Adina C. Newman, Ed.D.

Jennifer Mendelsohn

info@holocaustreunions.org

www.holocaustreunions.org

DNA Resources:

- As an endogamous population, Ashkenazi Jews have thousands of DNA matches that will be completely untraceable, but there are strategies to help determine researchable matches
- “No, You Don’t Really Have 7,900 4th Cousins: Some DNA Basics for Those With Ashkenazi Jewish Heritage” by Jennifer Mendelsohn
<https://clevertitletk.medium.com/no-you-dont-really-have-7-900-4th-cousins-some-dna-basics-for-those-with-jewish-heritage-857f873399ff>
- DNA Painter for tools the Shared cM Project, and “What are the Odds” tool:
<https://dnapainter.com>
- Facebook resources: [The Jewish DNA Group](#). For a solid grounding DNA methodology, including conducting unknown parent search techniques, we recommend [DNA Detectives](#) and [Genetic Genealogy Tips and Techniques](#).

General Resources:

- [The JewishGen FamilyFinder](#): a simple but effective tool to connect with people searching for certain surnames in certain locations.
- Facebook genealogy groups: [Tracing the Tribe](#), [Jewish Genealogy Portal](#)
- For translations, <https://www.facebook.com/groups/GenealogicalTranslations>

Major Databases & Repositories

- JewishGen / www.jewishgen.org
 - Look at the country databases for where your family was from
 - USC Shoah Foundation – Survivor Interviews
 - Yizkor books, Yizkor Book Necrology Database
 - Can provide social history and names of family
 - Findings at other sites like Yad Vashem, Arolsen Archives, Israel Genealogy Research Association (IGRA), JRI-Poland, Gesher Galicia
- Yad Vashem / www.yadvashem.org
 - Most popular is probably The Central Database of Shoah Victims' Names
 - Pages of Testimony
 - Examples of Other Records include Evacuation and transport lists, passports

- United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM) / www.ushmm.org
 - Try the Holocaust Survivors and Victims Database
 - Searching on site isn't the most forgiving, so try many variations for names of interest
 - When a record is found online, can be sent immediately to your inbox
 - ITS search availability

- Below is example of records readily available at USHMM, while others need to be requested

KL: Konzentrationslager Stutthof

Häftlings-Personal-Karte

Jude
HML-Nr.: 72 347

Fam. Name: Maruch
Vorname: Leibe
Geb. am: 2.06 in: Witno
Stand: verh. Kinder: -
Wohnort: W.O.
Strasse: Stefanskastr. 21
Religion: mos. Staatsang.: Lit.
Wohnort d. Angehörigen: Ehefrau Olga - KL Klooga
Eingewiesen am: 23.8.44
durch: Sipo Riga
in KL: Stutthof
Grund: unbekannt
Vorstrafen: keine

am: 24.11.1944 an KL: Buchenwald
am: _____ an KL: _____
am: _____ an KL: _____
am: _____ an KL: _____
am: _____ an KL: _____
am: _____ an KL: _____
Entlassung: _____
am: _____ durch KL: _____
mit Verfügung v.: _____

Personen-Beschreibung:
Größe: _____ cm
Gestalt: _____
Gesicht: _____
Augen: _____
Nase: _____
Mund: _____
Ohren: _____
Zähne: _____
Haare: _____
Sprache: _____
Bes. Kennzeichen: _____
Charakt.-Eigenschaften: _____
Sicherheit b. Einsatz: _____
Körperliche Verfassung: _____

Strafen im Lager:
Grund: _____ Art: _____ Bemerkung: _____
Grund: _____ Art: _____ Bemerkung: _____
Grund: _____ Art: _____ Bemerkung: _____

St.-S.-n 44 800.000

- Arolsen Archives / <https://arolsen-archives.org/en/search-explore/search-online-archive/>
 - Over 30 million documents with information on 17.5 million people
 - Focus on Displaced Persons (example below), Concentration camp, ghetto records

✓ (1) REGISTRATION NO. 505150

A.E.F. D.P. REGISTRATION RECORD

Original ☐ Duplicate ☒

M. ☒ Single ☐ Married ☒
F. ☐ Widowed ☐ Divorced ☐ POLISH JEW

(2) Family Name OKSMAN, NACHMAN (3) Sex (4) Marital Status (5) Claimed Nationality

(6) Birthdate 1.2.12 Birthplace PIOTRKOW Province LODZ Country POLAND (7) Religion (Optional) JEWISH (8) Number of Accompanying Family Members: 5

(9) Number of Dependents: 5 (10) Full Name of Father OKSMAN, ISRAEL (11) Full Maiden Name of Mother OKSMAN, LAJA

(12) DESIRED DESTINATION PALESTINE (13) LAST PERMANENT RESIDENCE OR RESIDENCE JANUARY 1, 1938.
City or Village PIOTRKOW Province POLAND

(14) Usual Trade, Occupation or Profession Zuckerbäcker (15) Performed in What Kind of Establishment (16) Other Trades or Occupations

a. Polish b. Jewish c. (17) Languages Spoken in Order of Fluency (18) Do You Claim to be a Prisoner of War ☒ Yes No (19) Amount and Kind of Currency in Your Possession

(20) Signature of Registrant: SIGNED (21) Signature of Registrar: H.S. Date: 5.12.46 Assembly Center No. Hall

(22) Destination or Reception Center:

(23) Code for Issue

Name or Number	City or Village	Province	Country
1 <u>OKSMAN, FRIMETA - FRAU</u>			
2 <u>BUCHLA -</u>			
3 <u>CHAIM -</u>			
4 <u>JOSEF -</u>			
5 <u>HINNA -</u>			

(24) REMARKS KINDER

NEW IDENTITY CARD ISSUED
No. 631273 26 FEB. 1948
10-57781-1

- ITS Searches
- International Tracing Services (ITS)
 - International Tracing Services, originally only available through Arolsen Archives
 - Now, institutions worldwide can perform ITS searches
 - Examples: USHMM, Yad Vashem, Wiener Holocaust Library
 - Worth requesting search at multiple locations because each repository may have unique records and records may be updated regularly
 - It's free, but survivors are priority

Other Databases and Repositories of Interest

- Ancestry, MyHeritage draw from other sites as well as have unique databases, trees of interest
- FamilySearch
 - Many JewishGen records indexed lead to here
 - Use catalog for area of interest
 - Also, make sure to check Wiki for record availability in your place of interest
- European Holocaust Research Infrastructure Project (EHRI) Portal
- WorldCat
- Country/regional sites
 - E.g., for Poland, JRI-Poland, Jewish Historical Institute (JHI)
- National Archives (NARA) at College Park, Md
- USC Shoah Foundation
- Yizkor books also available through Yad Vashem, YIVO Institute for Jewish Research, New York Public Library, Library of Congress
- Israel Research Genealogy Association (IGRA)
- Search Engines
 - Google! You never know what you might find
 - Use wildcards *, quotation marks "", AND/OR, and different combinations in your search
 - Try searches in different languages
 - Can use Google Translate to assist you
- Tips for success
 - Try different spelling variations, broaden searches (e.g., last name instead of full name)

- Don't rely on a single site
- Some sites can be temperamental in searches, so best to try the same search in multiple places
- Learn the social history
- Don't rely solely on the index
- Not everything is online!

Case Examples in the Press

The Jackie Young story:

- Times of Israel article: <https://www.timesofisrael.com/uk-man-who-survived-concentration-camp-as-baby-finally-learns-his-familys-identity/>
- Interview on WBUR "Here and Now" <https://www.wbur.org/hereandnow/2022/12/15/holocaust-dna-family-history>
- The Jewish Chronicle: <https://www.thejc.com/news/holocaust-survivor-rebuilt-lost-world-dna-testing-to52c4cm>

Polish Jewish Sisters:

- <https://www.thejc.com/news/polish-jewish-sisters-orphaned-and-separated-80-years-ago-are-reunited-by-dna-test-u6i9jn8f>

Washington Post feature on The Holocaust Reunion Project:

- <https://www.washingtonpost.com/dc-md-va/2023/12/13/holocaust-survivors-dna-test-ancestry-genealogy/>

Boston Globe cover story on Vilunya Diskin:

- <https://www.bostonglobe.com/2024/12/31/metro/vilunya-diskin-holocaust-survivor/>