

# The Bilingual Family Newsletter



Editor:

George Saunders

1985 SPECIAL ISSUE

## EDITORIAL

This is a special issue of the *Bilingual Family Newsletter* which comes to readers in addition to the normal issues at no extra cost. This was made possible thanks to a subsidy from the Fishman Family Foundation for Yiddish Culture. (This Foundation was founded in 1965 and honours the memory of Aaron, Sonia and Rukhl Fishman.) This special issue, prepared by guest editors Joshua and Gella Fishman, concentrates on Yiddish speakers, a group facing special problems in passing on their language, e.g. their lack of backup support from a "linguistic homeland" where the language thrives in all walks of life. However, whilst this issue does focus on Yiddish, I am sure that parents who speak other languages will find that they have much in common and can gain encouragement from the hopeful enthusiasm expressed by the Yiddish speakers.

George Saunders

## THE SPECIAL PURPOSE OF THIS ISSUE

There are many minorities all over the world, but Yiddish speaking Jews are a minority within a minority. Outside of Ultra-Orthodox (usually Hasidic) communities, Yiddish speakers are a minority even within the Jewish fold. As young Jewish families settle in regions and cities throughout the world where their parents and grandparents have not resided, they have even fewer community resources to fall back upon in order to help them maintain the language that many of them treasure: *Yiddish*. This issue is particularly oriented towards such families, families who cannot settle together and fashion a mini-community for themselves and their children. Their position is *not* hopeless. There is much that they can do in order to implant Yiddish in their children, nourish it, foster it, and see it blossom into family use. Some young families are luckier; they can cluster together and, together, strengthen each other's use of Yiddish. This issue is for them as well. But it is particularly for the 'isolates' (and there are such families with other mother-tongues as well: German, French, Italian, Japanese, etc.) that this issue is intended. We will be happy to hear whether and how it has been of help to *them* all.

## ABOUT THE EDITORS OF THIS ISSUE

Joshua and  
Gella Fishman

Joshua and Gella Fishman are modern Orthodox grandparents living in the Bronx, New York with children in San Francisco (California), Cambridge (Massachusetts) and the Bronx. They made Yiddish the language of their home, speaking Yiddish to their children to this very day. Now that they have a newborn grandchild (in Cambridge) the Fishmans are eager to contribute to his bilingualism as well.

Joshua Fishman grew up in a Yiddish speaking home in Philadelphia (Pennsylvania) and attended Yiddish supplementary secular schools there throughout his childhood and, indeed, until he left for New York in 1948 to pursue doctoral studies in social psychology at Columbia University. He is an internationally recognised sociolinguist with particular expertise in the sociology of bilingualism, language planning and bilingual education. Although his books have appeared in half a dozen languages, he has maintained an active concern for Yiddish, both at intellectual and at daily, practical levels. He has edited and contributed to several volumes dealing with Yiddish (e.g. *Never Say Die! A Thousand Years of Yiddish Jewish Life and Letters*, Mouton, 1981; *Readings in the Sociology of Jewish Languages*, E. J. Brill, 1985) and writes a regular column on Yiddish sociolinguistics for the Yiddish quarterly *Afn Shvel*.

Gella Fishman grew up in New York City and learned Yiddish in a supplementary secular elementary and high school. She graduated from the Jewish Teachers' Seminaries in New York and Montreal, Canada, and has taught Yiddish at every level: elementary school, high school, college, teachers training courses, and adult courses. She is the author of the introductory reading and writing text *Sholem Aleichem Kinder* (Jewish Education Committee of New York, 1959) and of *A Curriculum for Teaching Yiddish in the Upper Grades of Modern Traditional Day Schools* (Yeshiva University, 1983), as well as the Director of "Yiddish Unlimited", a translation agency.

The Fishmans are eager to correspond with and to assist other parents and grandparents who are interested in fostering Yiddish in their own homes and neighbourhoods. The Fishmans are trilingual and value Hebrew too, but feel that it is Yiddish which is threatened and needs as much help as it can get.





## The Society for Yiddish Culture

8914 N. Central Park  
Evanston, Illinois 60203

Dr. Khane-Feygl Abraham, Exec. Dir.

(312) 675-3335

### b) Excerpts from a letter to members of the Chicago-based Society for Yiddish Culture describing their activities:

- ★ Our newsletter, "A Yiddish Vort," has become a clearinghouse for information on what's happening in Yiddish in the greater Chicago area. It lets you know where you can take classes, hear lectures and see Yiddish films.

Its literary pages have brought you Yiddish poems and stories in the original Yiddish, in transliteration and in translation.

The *Kinder-Korner*, the children's page, helps to perpetuate our *mame-loshn* (mother tongue) by entertaining and teaching our future generation of Yiddish speakers.

For those who don't speak Yiddish yet, or for those whose Yiddish is minimal, each newsletter has a short instructional conversation corner which lists helpful words and phrases.

But without the help and support of our membership, we couldn't possibly have accomplished half the things we did this year. For example:

- ★ Our children's holiday parties which attracted dozens of *kinderlakh*.

- ★ Our Yiddish film series, which to date has included such classics as *Image Before My Eyes*, *Hester Street*, *Vu iz Mayn Kind* and more recently, from the depths of Yiddish film archives, the 1940 musical comedy *The Great Advisor* in its Chicago premier.

- ★ Our Yiddish Author Lecture Series included talks on such great writers as Mani Leib, Itzik Manger, I. L. Peretz and Sholom Aleichem. This is also something only The Society for Yiddish Culture has done. True to its name, it brings you Yiddish culture in all of its various forms.

We were so encouraged by the response to the Yiddish musical comedy, *The Jewish Gypsy*, that we offered our first Subscription Series, a film, an afternoon of authentic Klezmer Music and a discussion of Jewish Humor – all in addition to a party with the cast after this year's musical extravaganza *Oy Mama, Am I in Love*, the culmination of the series.

As you can see, Yiddish is alive and well at The Society for Yiddish Culture.

For further information contact:

Dr. Khane-Feygl Abraham at the above address.



### c) A Neighborhood Yiddish Week

Even in neighborhoods where most Jews no longer speak much Yiddish an annual Yiddish week can still be a successful cooperative undertaking involving various community agencies. Students at local Jewish schools can be taught songs for a program that they present for their parents, grandparents, and residents at nearby "golden age" homes. Jewish adolescents can be mobilized to canvass the neighborhood for old Yiddish books that should be turned over to The National Yiddish Book Center (Amhurst, Mass.) which recycles them to university libraries and Jewish agencies throughout the world. Local synagogues can sponsor the viewing of a Yiddish film (rented from the Yiddish Film Library, Brandeis University, Waltham, Mass.) or a traditional *tabnud shiur* (lesson) in Yiddish. The Jewish Community Center can sponsor a lecture on a Yiddish literary theme or invite a Yiddish theatrical group or a singer of folk-art songs to perform as guest artists. All in all, an intensive week of "Yiddish for Everyone" is not hard to arrange as a stimulating annual event.

### d) A Suggested Family Workshop

#### YIDDISH WORKSHOP LET'S SPEAK YIDDISH AT HOME

*Introducing Yiddish into non-Yiddish-speaking homes*

#### Weekly Sessions

#### Yiddish for:

- Table talk
- Family celebrations
- Sayings and Proverbs
- Folksongs
- Shabbes and Yontef

#### Workshop Materials:

- A collection of Yiddish guides for home use



## A BASIC BIBLIOGRAPHY FOR BILINGUAL YIDDISH SPEAKING FAMILIES



*Leah Russin of  
Northampton, Ma., USA  
tastes the world of her  
ancestors.*

*Photograph by Aaron Lansky.*

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2. Gold, David L., *Elementary Yiddish 101*, Regents of the University of Wisconsin System and Yivo Institute for Jewish Research, 1983.
3. Miller, David, *The New Yiddish Source Finder: A Guide for the Student*. Yugntruf Youth for Yiddish, New York. 1982 (Where to find Yiddish specialists and materials all over the USA.)
4. Mlotek, Eleanor Gordon, *Mir Trogn A Gezag*, Workmen's Circle Education Department. 1977 (Songs in Yiddish, transliteration, translation and notes).
5. Mlotek, Chane and Gottlieb, Malke, *Yontefdiqe Teg*, Jewish Education Press, Board of Jewish Education. 1972 (Holiday songs translations and transliterations).
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7. Roskies, Diane K. and David G., *The Shtetl Book*, KTAV Publishing House, Inc. 1975, 1979 (and guide book)
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13. Weinreich, Uriel, *Yiddish La Universita* (Hebrew edition of College Yiddish), Yivo Institute for Jewish Research, N.Y. and the Magnes Press, The Hebrew University, Jerusalem, Israel. 1977.
14. Yehoash, *Tanakh*, three volumes, Yehoash Farlag Gezelshaft, USA. 1941 (Available from National Yiddish Book Center or CYKO).

### SOON TO APPEAR:

The World Jewish Congress is planning to publish a comprehensive Yiddish Resource handbook that will include up-to-date listings on all aspects of Yiddish creativity - from audio materials, books, camps, clubs, courses - to theatre, toys and games, translating services, typewriters and video.

For further information contact:

Contact details removed

## BILINGUAL CHILDREN: GUIDANCE FOR THE FAMILY

278 pages. 1982

GEORGE SAUNDERS

Paperback ISBN 0-905028-11-2 £5.90 (US\$10.50)

Children's acquisition of bilingualism is shown to be something normal, something positive, which can be a rewarding and enriching experience for both children and their parents. Since the book was written with the general reader in mind, it is composed in a very readable style and has clear, easily understandable explanations of any technical matters. Containing much useful information and practical advice, *Bilingual Children: Guidance for the Family* should be of interest not only to parents contemplating or actually already raising their children bilingually, but also to educators, researchers and health workers.

"This is one of the most convincing and most readable contributions to the field."

*Times Educational Supplement*

## LANGUAGE ACQUISITION OF A BILINGUAL CHILD

A Sociolinguistic Perspective (to age ten)

280 pages. 1985

ALVINO E. FANTINI

Paperback ISBN 0-905028-39-2. £8.90.

Available in USA from College Hill Press, San Diego, price \$25.00.

This book is a sociolinguistic analysis of language acquisition based on the longitudinal observation of one child, bilingual in Spanish and English. Data were collected on the child's speech through diary notes and tape recordings made at regular intervals from birth to age ten.

Among the several aspects of bilingual acquisition examined are the effects of socialization on developing bilingualism, particularly the attitudes and behaviour of the child's caretakers, who exert the greatest influence on the child during his pre-school years. Their influence affects the child in learning how to use language, which language to use in a given situation, when to speak and when not to speak, and a notion of appropriateness of speech in content and style.



## A "WHERE TO FIND IT" YIDDISH RESOURCE LIST

1. *Storybooks, Textbooks, Games, Posters, Greeting Cards*
  - A. Workmen's Circle  
45 East 33rd Street, New York, N.Y. 10016.
  - B. National Yiddish Books Center  
PO Box 969, Old East Street School, Amhurst, Mass. 01004.
  - C. Bais Rochel School  
225 Patchen Avenue, Brooklyn, N.Y. 11233.
2. *Records, Cassettes, Songbooks, Language Course Tapes*
  - A. Louis Stavsky Co.  
147 Essex Street, New York, N.Y. 10002.
  - B. Workmen's Circle  
45 East 33rd Street, New York, N.Y. 10016.
3. *T-Shirts, Buttons, Yiddish Memorabilia*
  - A. Yugntruf  
3328 Bainbridge Avenue, Bronx, N.Y. 10467.
  - B. Workmen's Circle  
45 East 33rd Street, New York, N.Y. 10016.
4. *Magazines for Children and Young Folks*
  - A. Jewish Holiday Packets (for young children and families)  
Workmen's Circle  
45 East 33rd Street, New York, N.Y. 10016.
  - B. Yugntruf (for teens and young adults)  
3328 Bainbridge Avenue, Bronx, N.Y. 10467.
  - C. Shmuesn Mit Yidishe Kinder (for teens and young adults)  
Kehot Publishing Co., 770 Eastern Parkway, Brooklyn, N.Y. 11213.
5. *Yiddish Novels, Poetry and Non-Fiction for Adults*
  - A. CYKO (Central Yiddish Culture Organization)  
25 East 21st Street, New York, N.Y. 10010.
  - B. National Yiddish Book Center  
PO Box 969, Old East Street School, Amhurst, Mass. 01004.
6. *Yiddish Theatre Groups That May Travel*
  - A. Folksbine Playhouse  
123 East 55th Street, New York, N.Y. 10022.
  - B. Golden Land Productions  
45 East 33rd Street, New York, N.Y. 10016.
  - C. Jewish Players Caravan  
2600 Netherland Avenue, Bronx, N.Y. 10463.
  - D. The Yiddish Theatre of the Saiyde Bronfman Centre  
5170 Chemin de la Cote, St Catherine, Montreal, Quebec, Canada.
7. *Intensive Summer Courses on Yiddish Language and Literature*
  - A. Uriel Weinreich Summer Program at Columbia University  
For information contact: YIVO Institute for Jewish Research,  
1048 Fifth Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10028.
  - B. The Oxford Programme in Yiddish  
For information contact: Oxford Centre for Postgraduate Hebrew  
Studies, 45 St Giles, Oxford OX1 3LW, England.
8. *Other Organizations That Encourage Yiddish Activities*
  - A. The League for Yiddish  
200 West 72nd Street, New York, N.Y. 10023.
  - B. YKUF (Yiddish Culture Federation)  
1123 Broadway, New York, N.Y. 10010.
  - C. World Council for Yiddish and Jewish Culture  
9 Mendele Street, Tel Aviv, Israel.  
(Branches in USA, Canada, Latin America and Europe)
  - D. YIVO Institute for Jewish Research  
1048 Fifth Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10028.
  - E. Congress for Jewish Culture  
25 East 21st Street, New York, N.Y. 10010.
  - F. Yiddish Committee of the Canadian Jewish Congress  
1590 McGregor, Montreal, Quebec, Canada.
9. *Yiddish Films and Video*
  - A. JWB Media Service  
15 East 26th Street, New York, N.Y. 10010.
  - B. Ruttenberg and Everett Yiddish Film Library  
Brandeis University, Lown Building, Waltham, Mass. 02154.

If you do not already subscribe to the Bilingual Family Newsletter use the form below to enter a subscription for the next four issues. The same form should be used to buy any of the books advertised in this issue.

If you know of any other bilingual families please help to secure the future of this publication by entering their address on the form and we will send them a free sample of a recent issue.

To: Multilingual Matters Ltd,  
Bank House, 8a Hill Rd,  
Clevedon, Avon,  
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1985 (SI)  
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☐ Please send a copy of Language Acquisition of a  
Bilingual Child. £8.90  
☐ Please send Vol. .... No. ....  
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### YIDDISH FAMILY MATCHMAKER'S BUREAU

Would you like to establish contact with other bilingual Yiddish speaking families? In that way you could exchange ideas, share materials, discuss challenges and offer mutual support to one another.

Send us whatever information about your family you think would be of assistance – and we will help “match you up” with at least one other family in your part of the world.

Gella and Joshua Fishman

We still have available a small number of back issues of THE BILINGUAL FAMILY NEWSLETTER, which include the following articles:

1984. Vol.1, No.2: Turkish-English Bilinguals; Mother Tongue Playgroups  
No.3: Bilinguals & Saturday Schools; Listening to your Children Read  
No.4: Educating Bilingual Children at Home; School and the Bilingual Child  
1985. Vol.2, No.1: A Case of Family Language Planning; In Defence of Saturday Schools  
No.2: The Monolingual versus the Bilingual View of Bilingualism; “Life with Two Languages” – a Book Review

Price per issue is £0.90 (US\$1.25) including postage.



## WHAT IS YIDDISH AND WHAT ARE ITS SPECIAL PROBLEMS?

Yiddish is today, and has been for the past five hundred years of its one thousand year history, the most widespread diaspora Jewish language. It has been associated with Ashkenazi Jewry (originally German and, subsequently, almost all Central and Eastern European Jewish communities and in turn their immigrant "daughter communities" in Western Europe, the Americas, Israel and South Africa) since its origins in Alsace-Lorraine in the 10th Century. Although it has definite Hebrew-Aramaic and Slavic components, it is primarily a Germanic language. However, over the course of centuries the latter component has undergone considerable independent development and dialectal differentiation, increasingly so as the major body of Yiddish speakers emigrated from German speaking territories and became increasingly exposed to other European influences (e.g. Slavic, English) and, in addition, consciously rejected New High German influences on ideological grounds. Today, when some 3.6 million Jews claim Yiddish as a mother tongue (down from a high of 10.6 million in 1939), most of its varieties are no longer easily inter-comprehensible with German.

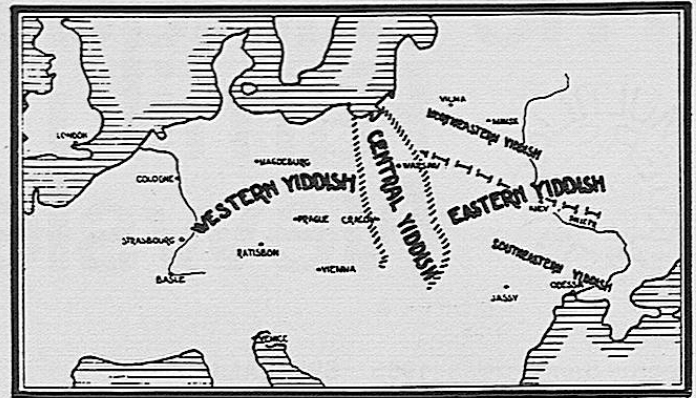
**Table I** *Yiddish mother tongue claimants: then and now*

	1940	1980
Eastern and Central Europe .....	6,767,000	950,000
North America .....	2,987,000	1,600,000
Western Europe .....	317,000	185,000
Palestine/Israel .....	285,000	500,000
South and Central America .....	255,000	350,000
Africa .....	56,000	40,000
Asia (excluding Palestine/Israel) .....	14,000	1,000
Australia .....	9,000	25,000
<b>Total .....</b>	<b>10,690,000</b>	<b>3,651,000</b>

Most Yiddish speakers have always been bilingual. During earlier periods, when most Jews had too few contacts with co-territorial non-Jews to learn the languages of their neighbours, they were nevertheless bilingual because prayer, biblical and talmudic study and almost all writing required substantial familiarity with Hebrew-Aramaic. In the past two centuries, when mastery of co-territorial languages has become common among Jews, most Yiddish speakers have been trilingual or even quadrilingual. This state of affairs did not threaten the home and intimacy functions of Yiddish, or even its use in education, newspapers, popular literature, theatres, etc., as long as concentrated and tradition-influenced settlements remained intact. However, since the 1930s, several external factors (the Nazi-conducted extermination of East European Jewry and the opposition of Soviet authorities to most institutional expressions of ethno-religious Jewish identity) and internal factors (the opposition of Zionism and the growing linguistic acculturation of Jews in the Western democracies) have begun to threaten the survival of Yiddish in all but the most traditional and self-segregated communities. As a result, most parents concerned for the continuity of Yiddish within their families must take special steps to foster it.

It is the purpose of this Special Issue to provide ideas, contacts, assistance and encouragement to those parents whose response to the threat to Yiddish is the same as their response to other threats to their ethno-religious continuity: *Never Say Die!* With a modicum of ingenuity and insistence all interested families can enrich their lives and relationships by adding to them Yiddish expressions, songs, stories, games, holiday rituals – and more! – which will help maintain the link from former to future generations and, through the essential vehicle of Ashkenazi culture, strengthen Jewish identity.

## *The major dialects of Yiddish prior to World War II.*



Source: *Basic Facts About Yiddish*, Yiddish Scientific Institute - N.Y., 1952.

## YIDDISH IS FOR YIDDISHKAYT

The ultimate home of every language is the unique ethno-cultural tradition with which it is associated. Every language indexes that tradition better than does any other, simply by virtue of possessing all of the vocabulary and phraseology that corresponds to the tradition's individuality or uniqueness relative to other cultures. Every language also is *part-and-parcel* of the traditional way of life alongside which it developed: the greetings of that culture, its tales, jokes, riddles and songs, its laws and its folk-philosophical pronouncements, its educational routines and folk-religious expressions. These are the things we all ultimately revert and resort to when the increasing "sameness" of all modern, western or westernised life becomes oppressive. How can little languages, or the languages of minorities as a whole, compete with English or French for studying physics, for singing the latest pop-tunes or for getting the family car "tuned-up"? "Physics is physics", we are told and, therefore, why bother with physics in Dutch, or in Danish, or in Serbian if it can be "done" in English. Indeed, often the last line of defense for minority parents abroad is that a trip will soon be taken to visit "grandma and grandpa in the old country" and, obviously, the language must be learned if the children are to speak to their relatives there.

However, in the case of Yiddish the "old country" too has generally vanished since, by and large, the long standing Yiddish speaking communities in the Old World have been tragically destroyed. That being the case, it is truly the ethno-religious tradition that must become the best refuge of Yiddish in those families in which that language is no longer the language of everyday life. Where the tradition too has been lost, then it is not only the language co-associated with it that is in danger, but the minority community itself as a viable entity.

All holidays have traditional Hebrew songs associated with them. Yiddish songs can be added too. Yiddish games, Yiddish proverbs, are available for every festive occasion. The Yiddish names of grandparents and great-grandparents are waiting to be reassigned to the younger generation and, thereby, to revive memories of the past and add personal roots to the present. Holiday meals are suitable occasions for serving Jewish foods and calling them by their Yiddish names. Holiday greetings are available for use, as are holiday stories as soon as a modicum of familiarity with the language is restored. The traditional culture of Ashkenazi Jews is called Yiddishkayt (Jewishness, the Jewish way of life). In the final analysis, that is what Yiddish is for and it is better for that purpose than any non-Jewish co-territorial language.



## FOUR INTERVIEWS: CASE STUDIES

### The Waletzky - Brooklyn, New York

Josh was born in New York. His mother and father were both born in New York City to immigrant parents and spoke Yiddish to their three children. His father, now deceased, was, as his mother is, a Secular Yiddishist. For both, their first language was Yiddish, but they spoke English to their siblings, while with their parents they spoke both languages.

Josh graduated from the Sholem Aleichem (after-school Yiddish Secular) school and from the United Miltshul (High School). Like his parents before him, he was a camper and later worked on the staff of Camp Boiberik, a bilingual Yiddish/English secular summer camp. Through his work experience there, he increased his Yiddish language facility and developed the ability to use the language as a source and resource tool for researching and writing Yiddish poetry, songs, creating camp programs for children and later writing original material for some city-wide Yiddish programs. He is a gifted musician and composer of Yiddish music and played the piano and sang in *Kapelye*, a New York based Klezmer orchestra. He was director, editor and researcher of the Yiddish short film "*Dos Mazl*" and the widely acclaimed bilingual film "*Image Before My Eyes*", and is presently working on a film about the Partisans of Vilna in which 70% of the interviews are in Yiddish.

He married Reyzl Kalifowicz ten years ago and they have one child, David-Judah age four, whom they call Duyudl (the contraction for his Yiddish name Duvid-Yudl). Reyzl was born in Austria after World War II and went with her family to Israel when she was a little more than a year old. When she was ten, they all settled in New York. Yiddish is her family language to this day, as it was in Israel. In the street she spoke Hebrew, at home Yiddish. Now English is the street language, but she remains trilingual. In New York she attended a Lubavitch girls' school for three years where she learned to read and write Yiddish. After graduating from Hunter College, she moved to Boston where she was a Yiddish teacher to adults and children. Much later, upon entering Graduate School at Columbia University, she attended the Uriel Weinreich Yiddish Summer Program and also YIVO/Columbia University courses in Yiddish studies. She has taught in the Workmen's Circle Schools, Lincoln Square Synagogue and at the City University.

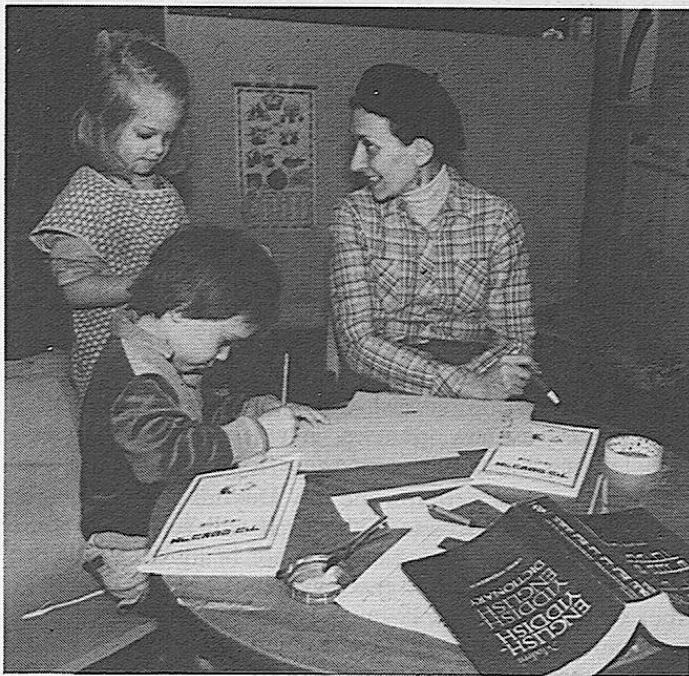
Josh and Reyzl speak Yiddish to one another 90% of the time and to their son all the time. If someone comes into their home who doesn't understand Yiddish, the language they use to Duyudl depends on whether the other person is Jewish or not. If s/he is Jewish, they will continue to speak to Duyudl in Yiddish, thereby assuming that this person will be accepting, but in the presence of a non-Jew the conversation takes place in English. "Duyudl understands this system. It's no longer a matter of principle but rather a habit." Sometimes, Josh and Reyzl will use English, when they don't have the terminology for a specific topic, but this occurs rarely, and they use the dictionary when necessary.

A decision was made when they were courting, that they would speak only Yiddish to one another, for Reyzl to retain the language and for Josh to enrich his knowledge of it. Josh feels that their relationship has been enriched "because the language carries with it a culture, a heritage of our people that binds us closer together. We feel secure and comfort-

able enough in our American environment and we wanted to live in two languages, to have a home language and a 'world' language."

Duyudl speaks Yiddish to Reyzl's family and English to Josh's mother because she speaks more English than Yiddish to him.

Reyzl feels confident that raising their son in both languages is a thoroughly enriching experience. "It gives him another view of the world as well as unity with his people and culture. It expands feelings and reinforces loyalty to one's own heritage. Yiddish is his language. It is our language."



"Wherever we go we take him along. We take him with us wherever Yiddish is used: to the Yiddish theatre, to see a Yiddish film, to YIVO lectures and programs, to a Kapelye concert. We listen to the Yiddish radio programs at home and play records. Music is very important". Since there are no children in the neighborhood who speak Yiddish, they joined the *Pripetshik* Group where their son meets with other children who have at least one parent who speaks Yiddish to them at home. Parents of the *Pripetshik* Group go together with their children to various Yiddish public activities, but the children converse with one another in English.

If Duyudl says something to Josh in English, Josh simply answers him in Yiddish. He doesn't make a point of correcting him but would rather repeat his words in correct Yiddish. During an English conversation with other children Duyudl turns to his father and says: "Tate, du veyst vos mir geyen ton? Mir geyen makhn a lumber company." (*Daddy, you know what we're going to do? We're going to make a lumber company.*) Josh will then say: "O, ir geyt makhn a holts firme?" (*Oh, you're going to make a lumber company, (giving the Yiddish term).*) And Duyudl responds: "Yo, (yes) a holts firme."



If Duyudl needs a Yiddish word, Josh will give it to him through his question and answer. Josh's goal is to give him the word but not to call too much attention to it. His aim is to communicate. Reyzl, on the other hand, has always corrected his errors and pronunciation not only in Yiddish, but in English as well, from a very early age and feels that this approach has greatly contributed to her son's achievements in both languages. "His nursery school teacher has commented that he speaks English very well."

There are many Yiddish children's books in their home. Reyzl searches everywhere for them and is presently researching children's material in Yiddish at the YIVO Institute for Jewish Research. The parents of the *Pripetshik* Group, of which she is an active member, are working on a project to reproduce Yiddish children's books for distribution.

Duyudl has always been very interested in reading. Reyzl started reading English books to him when he was only a few months old. She didn't have any Yiddish children's books at that time. At age two, she introduced the Yiddish books *Arele*. Josh and Reyzl would read to him at all times of the day, at the table, and of course at bedtime. When he was interested in dogs, they read to him the Yiddish book *Laptsik* by Khaver Paver. When Snoopy caught his eye, they read a Snoopy Book in English. "But the discussion and questions about the content of the books are always in Yiddish". Duyudl now reads English at a second grade level. He writes both in English and Yiddish, but at present his Yiddish is in "Mirror image". "But that will pass," Reyzl says.

The biggest problem is obtaining Yiddish children's books that are "Balebatish" (*tasteful and attractive*). "After all, their fantasy world is in English and we need more Yiddish books that will catch their attention and keep them interested."

Josh always sings Yiddish songs to his son and together they make up new phrases, new rhymes, and create parodies, new lines to their song repertoire.

Josh states that perhaps one day Duyudl may feel alone in school with respect to Yiddish. It will remain a home language, and may create a feeling of being different. But presently, in the nursery school which he attends, there are other children who speak languages other than English to their parents, just as he speaks Yiddish to his parents. Duyudl is very conscious of the fact that he is a Jewish child because he speaks Yiddish. But since the major part of his personality and intellectual interest will develop more in English than in Yiddish, he may later on not have the necessary Yiddish vocabulary to communicate within all language domains. "If he can't express his feelings or observation in Yiddish, it might be a problem. He may say it in English at first and we will then, as we do now, guide him into Yiddish".

Josh feels the need for TV programs in Yiddish, children's cartoon programs, and Yiddish children's books. But most important of all, he feels is the opportunity to meet with other families and children who speak Yiddish.

"Mir shvimen in a yidisher vel", (*We are immersed in The World of Yiddish*) he says, referring to his own family and their social relationships. However, both he and Reyzl stress the need for contact with other Yiddish speaking families, so as to enlarge the circle and give support to one another. "Perhaps a get-together once a year", Josh suggests.

In the Fall, Duyudl will enter a bilingual Hebrew-English day school. Although Yiddish is presently not being taught there, Reyzl and Josh are actively involved in having the language introduced as an elective in the program. Although Duyudl has no need for such an elementary class, it will give him moral support and the knowledge that others appreciate the language of the family.

## Adina Singer - New York City

Adina was born in Mexico City. Her father was born in Poland and came with his family as a small child to Mexico. Her mother was born in Kovne (Latvia) and came to Mexico at age 15. Adina's parents spoke only Yiddish at home. She has a large extended family in Mexico City and all speak Yiddish to one another. Adina spoke Yiddish to her parents and Spanish to her two siblings. She attended a trilingual Jewish Day School (elementary - high school) where the three languages of instruction were Hebrew, Yiddish and Spanish. In addition, she attended several courses at the Jewish Teachers' Seminary.

Her husband Mike was born in London, England. His mother was born in Poland, but grew up in Leipzig (Germany) where his father was born and also grew up. There they married and one year before the outbreak of World War II, arrived in London where they had two children, Mike and an older brother. They spoke mainly English and some German at home. Adina visited there on several occasions and through friends and relatives met her husband. They married in Mexico, lived in London for one and a half years, then came to New York nine years ago. Mike is an economist and Adina is close to completing her doctorate, a sociological study of Mexican Jewry.

They have one daughter, Yaira, who is five years old. Adina and Mike speak English to one another. Mike understands Yiddish well now, since he always hears it spoken in her family. He speaks only English, Adina only Yiddish, to Yaira. The child's first language was Yiddish, since Adina spent the first year at home and devoted all her time to being with her. The child quickly picked up English as her second language.

Adina didn't feel that she wanted to speak English to her child. It would be unnatural and artificial. "I had to have a language which is close to me, that I feel comfortable with and in which I can transmit ideas and feelings. I didn't have a childhood in English and I don't feel or express myself well in English." Though Adina is as fluent in Spanish as she is in Yiddish, she chose to speak Yiddish with her child for other ideological/philosophical reasons. "It has to do with my own self-identity as a person and as a mother. It has to do with my upbringing and education and also with my desire to express and transmit my own emotional authenticity. It has been a clearly defined choice - a way of defining Jewish survival, of maintaining a way of life for myself. And if I need it for myself, then I also need it for my child. The language is a tool that helps us maintain our culture, customs and traditions."

"It certainly would have been much easier if I had picked any other second language. Maintaining Yiddish is much more difficult." Adina points out that in most Jewish communities around the world, Yiddish is no longer the language of daily life and therefore "we (Yiddish speakers) are not only a minority but a super-super minority." The Yiddish vocabulary of the child therefore becomes relatively poorer and more limited, because while Yiddish may remain the language of the home, it no longer is an expression of a vibrant society and doesn't serve as many functions. "That's what makes it so difficult. But we do what we can".

Yaira joined the *Pripetshik* Group and Adina and her husband are part of a small circle of affiliated parents who meet on a regular basis to discuss mutual language needs and experiences.

While Adina speaks only Yiddish to her daughter and Mike only English, she doesn't feel that their child has or will experience any problems "If each of us is consistent so that she will identify the language with each of us separately." Yaira started to speak Yiddish very early, and in the beginning spoke Yiddish to her father too. As her English



vocabulary increased, she differentiated between language and parent and spoke only English to him.

Adina feels that her daughter speaks Yiddish well, expresses herself freely, has a rich vocabulary for a child her age and can also disagree and argue very well with her mother. When she interjects an English word into a Yiddish sentence Adina will, in a playful tone, say "Oy, vi zogt men dos af yidish?", (*Oh, How do you say that in Yiddish?*), or occasionally will say "Red tsu mir af yidish vayl ikh red yidish tsu dir." (*Speak to me in Yiddish because I'm speaking Yiddish to you.*) But she doesn't want to create a conflict, "a war", between the two languages.

In the past two years, this situation has presented a greater challenge, since Yaira's English vocabulary has become much larger. As much as possible, Adina tries to substitute the Yiddish equivalent for the English word, learning it herself when necessary; both thereby enrich their Yiddish vocabulary together.

Their daughter has a small circle of family members in New York, in particular her mother's aunt, with whom she speaks only Yiddish. In addition to attending the *Pripetshik* Group once a week, they visit the family in Mexico City once or twice a year and the family there visits them here too. Each visit lasts two to three weeks. At those times she gets an "intensive Yiddish course." While in Mexico, Yaira now is able to speak Spanish to the children on the street, though nobody taught her the language. "She's picked it up on her own simply by playing with them."

Her husband has a very positive attitude toward the Yiddish language and to its use at home. "Since Yiddish is the language of my home, he was not surprised that I wanted to use it." A few years ago he started to study Yiddish formally on a regular basis once a week.

If Yaira makes a grammatical error in a sentence, Adina's method of correcting her is often similar to that of a teacher. She slowly and clearly repeats the sentence using the correct word and phrase, without making much ado about it. Yaira accepts these corrections in good spirits.

Yaira was first introduced to Yiddish through music and songs. "I love music and sing a great deal. I would improvise with the words of the songs and make up my own rhymes. The language was a game and we played with it."

In the second stage of Yiddish language use, Adina would tell (not read) Yiddish versions of popular children's stories, mostly at meal time when they would sit together, and also at bedtime, e.g.

Yentele - Royt - Mentele

(A revised Yiddish version of Little Red Riding Hood in which the wolf enters the house but doesn't eat up anyone because the hunter comes and chases him out.)

Adina has a repertoire of Yiddish folk tales which she tells with dramatic flair. She has agreed to put a few of her stories on tape for possible distribution to other families.

The third stage (when Yaira was about two years of age) was the introduction of little children's books (e.g. Cinderella) in English and Spanish which Adina would read to her in Yiddish while she looked at the pictures in the book.

Gradually Yiddish children's books were introduced and "Here's where the problem started." With few exceptions their child didn't have the same interest in these books. The illustrations were not colourful and attractive, the rhymes not sufficiently playful and child-oriented. Adina feels that the content of the material is old-fashioned. "It's impossible to compete with children's books in English."

Adina and Yaira did enjoy reading a few Yiddish books together. But, for the most part, Adina "reads" in Yiddish that which is printed in English. "I read an ad hoc translation". Now that Yaira recognises letters and words and can visually distinguish between the two languages, she frequently will ask that a book written in English be read in English since she is then more involved in the language of

the book. "Often, I will read a version of the book in Yiddish and my husband will read the same book in English," Adina explains.

Adina has a large collection of Yiddish records and cassettes. She buys whatever is available but here too, she feels very limited and frustrated. She wishes there were more records for children, with singing voices that are simple and charming (not operatic), with the Yiddish words clearly pronounced and the repertoire varied and children-orientated.

Another important void that needs to be filled is that of a children's Yiddish theatre. Her daughter experiences such joy when they take her to a children's performance in English. "The Yiddish language would have a new reality for children if there were a Yiddish children's theatre to take them to."

A major concern, according to Adina, is that there are no schools which teach Yiddish. Yaira presently attends Kindergarten at the RAMAZ school in Manhattan, a Bilingual Modern Orthodox Jewish Day School where Hebrew studies are combined with secular English studies. "But where will she learn to read and write Yiddish? Maybe we'll have to find a private teacher." On the other hand, as the children in the *Pripetshik* Group get older, the interest in introducing Yiddish reading and writing skills will increase. These parents are now in the early stages of discussing the feasibility and practical implications of developing such a program in the framework of the *Pripetshik* Group.

## Alta Zilberstein - Palo Alto, California

Alta's parents were born in Moscow and Leningrad, Russia. They came to Montreal, Canada after World War II. The family consists of seven children and they all speak only Yiddish to one another.

Her husband's mother is also from Russia. His father, was born in Hungary but raised in Belgium and Yiddish was the language of his home. Alta met her husband in Belgium. Her husband couldn't speak any English at that time and learned English after they were married. They have always spoken only Yiddish to one another. They are an Orthodox Lubavitch family - her husband is a Khabad Rabbi.

They have two sons, Dovidl 3½ and Moyshle 2½ years old, who were born in Montreal, Canada. They settled in Palo Alto two years ago. Both parents speak Yiddish to the children. The older son speaks Yiddish better and more frequently because he had more intensive language immersion before they came to Palo Alto. But he doesn't speak Yiddish all the time, "only when he feels like it", since all the other children speak English. Both children understand everything in Yiddish and they can speak the language, but they usually don't, and their pronunciation is not clear.

Yiddish language usage is very important to Alta for several reasons "Firstly, this is the language in which they can converse with their grandparents. Secondly, it is a Jewish language and is a fundamental part of our Jewish heritage. It's not a matter of choice. In order for a child to live a full Jewish life, it is essential that he speak the language that generations before him have spoken."

Alta almost always speaks Yiddish to her children. If the child answers in English, there are several ways in which she deals with this. "It depends upon the age of the child. At age two it is generally difficult for a child to express himself and tell what he wants. We found especially with our first son, that when we insisted that he speak only Yiddish he would become annoyed and frustrated." But the children under-



stand everything and frequently translate from one language into another.

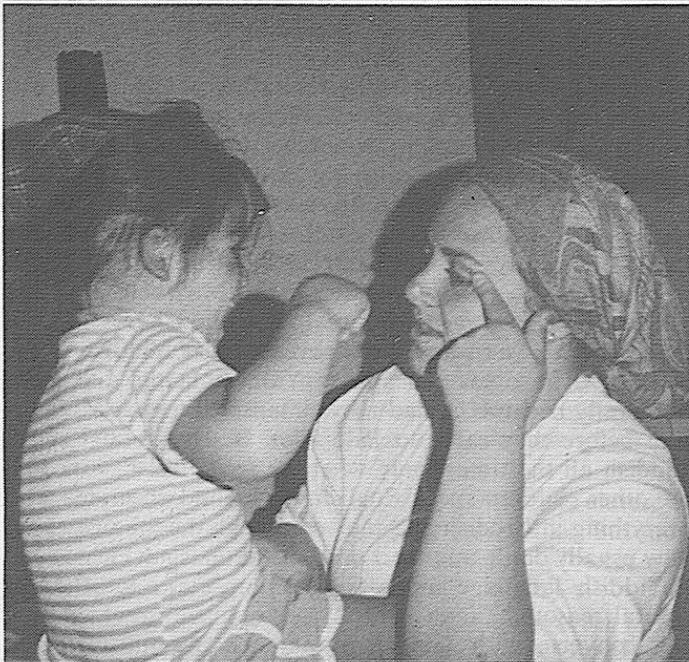
Alta says that sometimes they ask their 3½ year old to repeat his English sentence in Yiddish and at other times, they let it pass. It depends on the situation. The two brothers speak to one another in both languages. "It depends upon what they are talking about." If they play by themselves, or talk about some home-related topic, they will often speak to one another in Yiddish, but if they play with other children, or if they relate something that occurred outside of the home, then they will speak in English."

When the family is together at the table the parents speak only Yiddish to their children and the children use Yiddish only once in a while.

There is a radio but no television set in their home, and they have records and tapes for the children both in Yiddish and in English.

Dovidl and Moyshale have lots of friends, but none that speak Yiddish, and "this is a great problem. If they had but two or three other children with whom to speak Yiddish, it would make a tremendous difference for them, and Yiddish would not only be the language of the home." There is not a single other family in their community and in surrounding communities that speaks Yiddish to their children. There are two Jewish families who could speak Yiddish at home, but don't. They say that they were not raised in Yiddish (though their parents speak Yiddish well) and it is not comfortable for them to do so with their children. Alta feels that both sets of parents can express themselves well in Yiddish but they are not committed to doing so.

The ten Lubavitch families in Palo Alto have founded a small traditional Jewish school for their young children – a Kheyder for children between the ages of 3–4½ – but the curriculum does not include the use of Yiddish. Even if the parents wanted to introduce Yiddish, the teacher doesn't know any. "The school will not teach them to read and write Yiddish and we will have to do that ourselves."



So Yiddish remains the language of the home. When asked if she sings Yiddish songs to the children Alta responds "A Bisl" – (a little) and adds that they have some children's *Yontev Erlekh* tapes and Uncle Moyshale tapes "and that's about it. Mostly we speak and we also read story books to them in Yiddish."

Alta's parents live in Montreal and her husband's parents live in Antwerp, and the children speak only Yiddish to their grandparents. They know that they don't speak any English and must therefore speak Yiddish to them. "It's

really very interesting. They can be in the company of their grandparents and a cousin or a friend and speak Yiddish to their grandparents and then turn to the other person and speak English. Many people ask me if that doesn't confuse the child." But Alta doesn't see any problems related to that. She speaks about her own childhood and education, that she learned both languages at the same time; "at home I spoke Yiddish, and in the street I spoke English", and she is convinced that a child can easily learn more than one language.

Moyshale can sing a number of Yiddish songs very nicely, e.g.:

UNTER MOYSHELE'S VIGELE

SHTeyT A KLOR VAYS TSIGELE

DOS TSIGELE VET FORN HANDLEN

KOYFN ROZSHINKES MIT MANDLEN

ROZSHINKES MIT MANDLEN IZ ZEYER ZIS

UN MOYSHELE VET ZAYN GEZUNT UN FRISH

MOYSHELE VET LERNEN TOYRE

TOYRE IZ DI BESTE SKHOYRE.

גונטער משהלעס ויגעלע

שטייט א קלור ווייס ציגעלע

דאס ציגעלע וועט פארן האנדלען

קויפן ראזשינקעס מיט מאנדלען

ראזשינקעס מיט מאנדלען איז זייער זיס

און משהלע וועט זיין געזונט און פריש

משהלע וועט לערנען תורה

תורה איז די בעסטע סחורה.

(Under Moyshale's cradle stands a pure white little goat. The goat will go to market to buy raisins and almonds. Raisins and almonds are very sweet and Moyshale will be healthy and bright. Moyshale will study TORAH (Jewish religious subjects). TORAH is the best kind of merchandise.)

The only time Alta speaks English to the children is when someone is with them who doesn't understand any Yiddish.

Alta relates that at Dovidl's "Opsherenish" (hair cutting ceremony) when he was three years old, Dovidl gave a very short Droshele (talk) in Yiddish. "He said it all loud and clear even though none of the guests understood what he was saying". Alta explains that they wanted him to speak Yiddish because at a traditional Jewish ceremony a Jew should speak a Jewish language.

And when the time comes for the boys to learn Khumesh (the study of the Bible) instead of fartaytshn (translate) the text into English, they will learn to do it in Yiddish, "for I am sure that my husband will teach them at home to do that." Alta states that this is very important to them, because her sons will one day study in a Yeshiva where Yiddish is spoken and they don't want their children to be behind in their religious studies. "Even if the Yeshivas ultimately teach only in English, my sons should be able to learn together with my husband in the manner that he learned."

Alta's husband spoke several languages while he was growing up: Yiddish at home and both French and Flemish in school. Later he learned Hebrew and English. Growing up with these languages didn't create any problems for him.

Alta believes that she and her husband will create the kind of Yiddish speaking environment for her children in which they will naturally speak the language. As an example of how, with a will there is a way, she cites her



friend who lives in Sydney, Australia, where for generations not many Jews have spoken Yiddish. Her friend's mother grew up in America and didn't speak Yiddish well. But it was very important for her friend that "she raise her children to speak Yiddish at home and to speak a refined Yiddish without mixing English words. They look up necessary words in the dictionary. Their children even call all fruits by their Yiddish names. She is very strict about it and the children speak beautifully. And this is in a part of the world where nobody outside of the home speaks Yiddish to the children. It all depends on how much the parents are involved and committed. It's very easy to start speaking to one another in English and to be lax about the children speaking Yiddish. It all depends on what you want."

Alta describes the Yiddish her parents used at home. They would occasionally mix words from other languages in their speech patterns and, not being "Yiddishists", spoke naturally and didn't make an issue of it. And this is the way she speaks to her child. "My own Yiddish has many English words." Her husband speaks a purer Yiddish "because in Antwerp they don't mix words from other languages."

Alta says that she has Yiddish books to read to the children at bedtime or in the afternoon when she wants them to rest. She rarely reads to them in English though there are children's English books at home. If one of the children brings a book and asks her to read to him in English, she will, but they have enough Yiddish books. "And very often I'll tell stories, without a book."

Alta acknowledges that passing on a minority language is not always easy. "Siz an unternemung vos men darf in dem araynleygn koykhes." (*It's an undertaking which requires effort*).

"I have to make compromises. My children go to a school where they don't learn Yiddish. They play with children who don't speak Yiddish. But at home - that's different."

## Dr Khane-Feygl Abraham - Evanston, Illinois

Khane-Feygl was born in Zampol, Russia. At age four, after World War II, she came to New York with her parents and younger sister. She has always spoken only Yiddish to her parents, but to her sister she spoke English. Only now, when her sister is getting married (to a native Yiddish speaker), do the two sisters converse in Yiddish again.

Khane-Feygl graduated from an Arbeter-Ring (after school secular Yiddish) school in New York, but didn't continue on to the Mitlshul (high school) because the family was Orthodox and the classes were conducted on Saturdays. Years later, when she was invited to teach a Yiddish adult education course in Cleveland, Ohio, she taught herself formal Yiddish in preparation for her classes with Weinreich's textbook *College Yiddish*. Upon completion of her doctorate in English Poetry and the Arts, she came to New York to attend the Uriel Weinreich Summer Yiddish Program at Columbia University, married and moved to Chicago. She became an instructor at the Teachers Institute - Women's Division of the Skokie Yeshiva - where she taught Jewish content subjects.

The Yiddish language has always brought her a feeling of personal joy - "a kind of mystical fulfillment". In the World of Yiddish, she was an exception - different - not like all the others. It drew attention to her and she felt good that through Yiddish she could have a sense of achievement and recognition that others didn't have and that she didn't feel she could have in the World of English. For her Yiddish was warmth and culture and a "Shlisl tsu a nay lebn" (*a key to a new life*).

When she became pregnant for the first time, she made the decision that she would speak Yiddish to her children, because "if it brings me joy, then it would bring my children





joy". The twins Jeremy and Joshua (Yamele and Shiye, as they are called at home) were born in 1976. Their mother sat them on her lap and carried Uriel Weinreich's dictionary in her hand as she looked up the words she needed to know. Her husband, born in New York, didn't know any Yiddish, but expressed an interest in learning the language. He spoke Hebrew to the children. Two more children were born Jessica (Sure-Yite) now six years old and Jonathan (Nisi) four years.

All four children speak only Yiddish to her and she to them. When Yamele was five, he began to speak English to her. She made believe that she didn't understand. He became frustrated "I hear you speaking English on the telephone!" Her reply was "To others I speak English, but to my children I speak Yiddish because we're special and we have a special language."

The children spoke only Yiddish at home until they started school. "Now, when they speak English, I take away their dessert, and when I remind them, they go back to Yiddish". The children speak Yiddish to her sister on the phone and to an adult friend of the family. They don't know any other children who speak Yiddish, though there is one family they know where the mother speaks Yiddish to the children, but the children answer in English and "she doesn't insist that they speak Yiddish to her."

"But I do what I think is right". She is confident that Yiddish "will come in handy for my children". "When they remember me, they will remember that I spoke Yiddish to them. It will be a warm feeling. Any second language adds a new dimension, but Yiddish, our own language, will touch them in a special way and will help them remain observant Jews. The language has a Jewish soul".

She reads stories in Yiddish to the children at bedtime, uses English children's books, translating into Yiddish as she reads to them. Now that the children are older and are learning to read English in school, sometimes the book is read in Yiddish and other times in English. She reads to all the children together.

Through her new position as director of the Society of Yiddish Culture in Chicago, she has gathered up used children's books that families have contributed to the Society. She uses them, adapting them to her needs.

She puts great emphasis on singing Yiddish songs and writes original children's songs for all occasions, especially rhymes with a moral lesson. She has prepared a cassette of the songs and uses it in her classes with young parents who know no or little Yiddish and wish to use the language at home. The content of the songs she writes pertains to her children's interests and situations that arise. In the beginning, the songs were very simple. Now they are longer and more involved, e.g.:

#### A BIRTHDAY SONG

TSU MAYN GEBURTSTOG HAYNT

ZENEN GEKUMEN ALE GUTE FRAYND

GEBN A BROKHE UN VINTSHN HATSLOKHE

TSU MAYN GEBURTSTOG HAYNT.

DI MAME HOT GEBAKN A TORT.

DE TATE HOT TSUGEGBEN A GUT VORT.

A VORT FUN DER TOYRE, GELOYBT IZ DER BOYRE.

VOS KH'HOB MIT MAZL GEYERT ZIKH HAYNT.

IKH VIL A IKH BADANKEN HAYNT,

ALE MAYNE GUTE FRAYND

FAR GEBN A BROKHE UN VINTSHN HATSLOKHE

TSU MAYN GEBURTSTOG HAYNT.

צו מײַן געבורטסטאָג האָבן

זענען געקומען אלע גוטע פֿרײַנד

געבן אַ ברכה און וײַנטשן הצלחה

צו מײַן געבורטסטאָג האָבן.

די מאַמע האָט געבאַקן אַ טאָרט.

דער פאָטער האָט צוגעגעבן אַ גוטע וואָרט.

אַ האָרט פֿון דער חורא, געלויבט איז דער בורא.

האָט כ'האָב מיט מזל געיערט זיך הײַנט.

איז חיל איך באַדאַנקען הײַנט

אלע מײַנע גוטע פֿרײַנד

פֿאַר געבן אַ ברכה און וײַנטשן הצלחה

צו מײַן געבורטסטאָג האָבן.

(On my birthday today, all my good friends came to give me a blessing and wish me success, on my birthday today. Mother baked a cake and father said some wise words from the Torah. Thank God that I got a year older today. So, I want to thank you today, all my good friends, for giving me a blessing and wishing success on my birthday today.)

She founded the Society of Yiddish Culture, in order to create a Yiddish environment for herself, her children and for other interested families. She organized a toddler class of children aged 3-5, and families gather to celebrate Jewish holidays together. "It's a way for them to learn Yiddish painlessly."

She corrects her children's Yiddish when they make grammatical errors. "Hob gegangen?", she asks surprised and one child will give the correct usage "iz gegangen." When they mix English with Yiddish she asks "Vi zogt men dos af Yidish?" (How do you say that in Yiddish?) and when the child gives the correct answer, she kisses him/her and gives "positive reinforcement".

"Whoever hears me speak Yiddish to my children is very happy, but they don't work at it themselves. It's just like keeping a diet. It's a discipline. They say they can't because they don't speak it well, but I say a little Yiddish is better than none at all. If we don't work at it, it will disappear. I want to transmit to my children that which is precious in Yiddishkayt, and Yiddish is one of those components".

She would like to produce a children's record with the songs she has written. "It's difficult to find Yiddish children's records". She wishes she could find other children who speak Yiddish. "That's really more important than books and other materials. I need a Svive (social environment). But then, my four children together make up a Svive."

The Kraus family, another Yiddish speaking family in Winnipeg, had at one time suggested to her that they exchange cassettes on which their children speak to one another in Yiddish. "Maybe we should work on that".

Her children attend the Hillel Torah Yeshiva where they have a bilingual program of English and Hebrew studies.



but no Yiddish is taught there. She doesn't see any opportunity for them to study Yiddish in a formal setting. They learn to read Yiddish from her at home. Since they have already learned the Hebrew alphabet, the transition to Yiddish is not difficult.

She speaks the Polish Yiddish dialect at home and the children learn to read in Standard Yiddish. She feels it is important that they know both.

They write to their Zeyde/Bobe (*Grandfather/grand-mother*) and speak one or two times a month to them on the phone to New York.

"Even though they hear very little Yiddish spoken outside the home, they speak a good Yiddish for their age because their mother is exceptionally verbal." She's considered the possibility of going with the children to Monsey, N.Y. or to another Orthodox Yiddish speaking community for the summer. It's not possible for her to do that yet. She needs a "Kosher" environment. "For me Yiddish is not enough. I want it all. The language *and* the observances and that combination is hard to find. I believe that if I want it, I have to create it myself. I don't have the energy to do everything I want and need, but I do what I can."

## EXAMPLES OF PATHS TO YIDDISH

YUGNTRUF YOUTH FOR YIDDISH • ייִדישע יוגנט פֿאַר ייִדיש יוגנט

Contact details removed

### a) Excerpts from printed descriptions of the Yugntruf – Youth for Yiddish organisation and the Pripetshik children's group:

YUGNTRUF – Youth for Yiddish, is an organization dedicated to keeping Yiddish alive among young people. With a membership of over 2,500 spread across the United States and Canada, as well as France, England and Israel, YUGNTRUF invites young Jews of various ideological affiliations – religious, non-religious, Zionist and socialist – with one common goal: the preservation of the Yiddish language and culture as a living legacy of the Ashkenazic Jewish heritage. YUGNTRUF publishes a Yiddish magazine written and edited entirely by college students and young people, organizes conferences, Yiddish retreats and cultural events for young people in Yiddish.

One of the most exciting projects we sponsor is *Pripetshik* – a 30 week Yiddish immersion program for young children between 2 and 7 years, the age when language learning is crucial if it is to be mastered as a native language. Begun two years ago as an experiment, Pripetshik has grown to a group of 10 children. Parents participating in the program speak Yiddish to their children at home. Pripetshik affords them the chance to bring these children together Sunday mornings at the centrally located Park Avenue Synagogue. Here the children's Yiddish language skills are reinforced through various experiential activities – music, art, cooking and reading – all conducted entirely in Yiddish under the guidance of two professional early childhood teachers. The variety of activities gives the children an opportunity to expand their Yiddish vocabulary to the fullest. In addition, the participation of other children reinforces for each of them the notion that Yiddish is not just a family language but also a language of their peers. This is psychologically very important in that the children learn to feel that Yiddish is something they can relate to, and thus Yiddish will be more likely to play an important role for them in the years ahead.

Pripetshik's first years have been used in defining the program, developing a curriculum and amassing a core group of families from which to expand. Now that we have identified a constituent group – i.e. children of Holocaust survivors and of Yiddish speaking immigrants – and have gained support within the Yiddish speaking community, we feel that we can begin to play a major role in ensuring a future for Yiddish in the "youngest" generation. There is a growing interest among young parents in raising their children in Yiddish. We believe, however, that the dedicated attempts of these parents will not succeed without the support provided by the Pripetshik program.

The Pripetshik program serves all Jewish non-Hassidic families who wish to raise their children in Yiddish. This includes families where only one spouse knows enough Yiddish to achieve this goal. Ideologically, the families range from modern Orthodox to secularist, from Zionist to Socialist. To date the parents tend to be second generation Americans and children of Holocaust survivors.

This year eight families will be participating in the Pripetshik program. In the years to come, as the student population of YUGNTRUF gradually marries and raise their own children in Yiddish, they too will be able to benefit from the Pripetshik program in addition to young Yiddish speaking parents who are not directly affiliated with the Yiddish community.

Specifically Pripetshik aims to:

- 1) provide a weekly setting in which non-Hassidic Yiddish speaking children can meet and work together;
- 2) provide the children with a variety of language learning materials and activities to maximize their fluency;
- 3) provide a support system for parents raising their children in Yiddish where they can meet and share their experiences;
- 4) provide the families with a variety of children's books in Yiddish to counteract the overwhelming influence of English books and television;
- 5) publicize our efforts in the Jewish community in order to attract potential participants not directly involved in the Yiddish community.

In order to achieve the aforementioned objectives, Pripetshik will be concentrating on three areas:

- a) *Outreach* – We are presently compiling a bilingual brochure on the Pripetshik program which we plan to distribute to Jewish community centers, organizations and synagogues in the metropolitan area. In addition we will be placing advertisements in Jewish magazines and newspapers in order to inform young Jewish families about our services. In person presentations will also be made if requested by interested groups.
- b) *Children's Library* – Due to the overwhelming influence of English through television and appealing children's books, we have begun to build a Yiddish children's library in four ways:

- 1) by purchasing books which are still in print here in New York as well as in Canada, Mexico and other countries where such books are available;
- 2) by reproducing rare children's books in Yiddish which are no longer in print;
- 3) by translating contemporary English children's books into Yiddish;
- 4) and by creating modern children's books in Yiddish dealing with issues relevant to the American Jewish child of today.

- c) *Classroom Materials* – While parents and friends have donated and built much of our equipment we are still in desperate need of specific supplies such as a phonograph, tape recorder, cooking utensils and arts and crafts materials.

Reports of Pripetshik activities are published regularly in the Yugntruf magazine, whose readership includes a large number of Yiddish speaking young couples, in addition to the Anglo-Jewish press.

For further information contact:

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