

Anna (Rissman) Guyer, 1905-2004

Bernard Guyer, Baltimore MD, August 5, 2004



Our mother died on July 22, 2004, in her 100th year; at the time of her death she was the oldest living Jewish Gombiner.

We were blessed to have a mother who reached that old age; it meant that my sisters and I knew her best when we were adults. We were able to learn from her in ways that young children can't appreciate. She was a remarkable woman: strong, stubborn, highly opinionated, and funny. She was mother, grandmother and great grandmother to many of our friends and their children. She had a prodigious memory and was a living historian of her Jewish life in the 20th century.

Our mother taught us two great lessons: *Yiddishkeit* and family loyalty. Her *Yiddishkeit* came from Gombin, a place that she seared into our consciousness. In her own way, she never left

Gombin. I believe that every day of her life she thought about the place, her beloved father and sisters, and the old friends and characters of Gombin. She loved to tell and retell us the stories. We loved them and were bored at the same time. I'm grateful to her, however, for giving us such a strong heritage. She always knew exactly who she was and what she stood for!

She wasn't really a holocaust survivor, having left Gombin in February 1939 - 6 months before the war began. She saw the old country through the eyes of a young woman and mother, rather than as a victim. She was involved with courtship and marriage, the daily gossip of a busy market town, and with raising young children. She suffered the loss of her first born, Pinchus, but his memory and *matzevah* survived miraculously (as documented in Minna Packer's film, *Back to Gombin* and on Ada Holtzman's web site). She lost her much loved and respected father, Manele, who perished most probably at Chelmno. She crossed the perilous Atlantic with her young daughter, Evelyn, and started a whole new life in Detroit with her beloved husband, Sydney (*Simcha Chaja*), and near her dear brother, Max Rissman. After the war, the Gombiner survivors- young men like *Benny Guyer, Mendle Wruble, Leon Green, Sam and Manny Laski, Saul Tatarka, Saul Simon*, and others- came to our house to begin rebuilding their lives. She was a fantastic historian of Gombin; to site just one example, Jane and I spent hours with her going through the 1927 Business Directory of Gombin and identifying the various families and occupations.

Our mother had a tremendous will to live, going from *simcha* to *simcha*. Above all, she lived to see all of her grandchildren and great-grandchildren grow up. To her, *mishpachah* came first and foremost. Kate Guyer summed up the relationship of the grandchildren to their grandmother in a poem (written in 1992 when she was 16)
(Continued on page 8...)