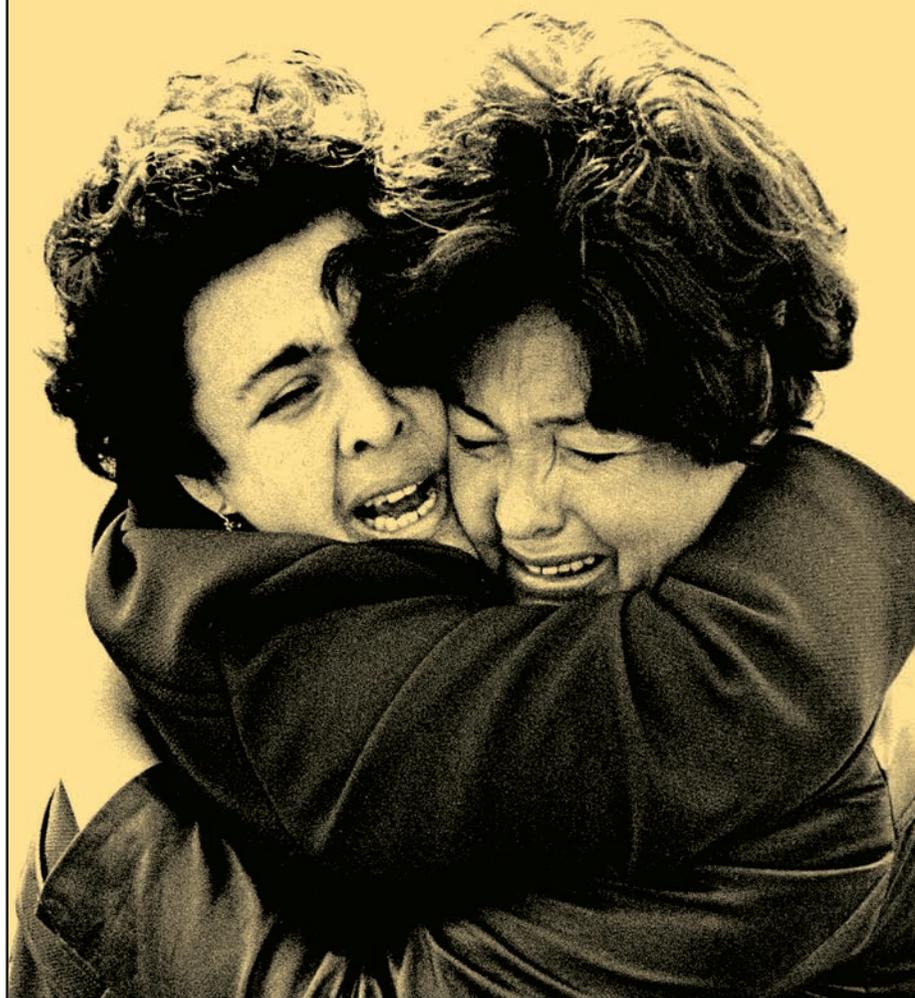


**The International Undertaking
that Rescued 1.5 Million Jews**



MISSION POSSIBLE



**Jewish Family Service
Annual Meeting**

An unforgettable evening with
Natan Sharansky

along with Marvin Lender and Chair Joel Tauber to
commemorate Operation Exodus and Jewish Detroit's
role in building new lives for 7,000 refugees from
the former Soviet Union.

**Tuesday, May 17, 2016
Congregation Shaarey Zedek
6:30 p.m.**

Register at jfsannualmeeting.org

Reservations required due to limited seating

For more information about sponsorships, pre glow,
and Ad Book contact:

**Amy Singer
248.592.3975 • asinger@jfsdetroit.org**

Sponsorships received by
March 10th will be listed
on the invitation.



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**A Genealogy
Treasure Hunt**

**Robbie Terman's
great-grandmother,
Bessie Plotnik**

John Hardwick

Searching through history on the
Michigan Jewish Cemetery Index.

Robbie Terman | Special to the Jewish News

Genealogy enthusiasts rejoice! The Irwin I. Cohn Michigan Jewish Cemetery Index is online at jewishdetroit.org/community-guide/jewish-cemetery-index.

Anyone who has embarked on a genealogy search knows it is a frustrating pastime. One can spend hours searching for a small nugget of information. But if you know the right places to look, you can avoid a long search. Many years before I became the director of the Leonard N. Simons Jewish Community Archives, I had no idea a Michigan Jewish cemetery index existed.

And I was about to chase a genealogical mystery.

Imagine this: A 3-year-old boy runs on to Hastings Street in Detroit, straight in the path of an oncoming streetcar. His mother pushes him out of the way, only to be struck and killed herself. Grief-stricken, the child's father gives him away to a neighbor.

The year was 1918 . . . The mother was my great-grandmother Bessie. And the boy, my grandfather Isadore.

My mother and I had heard the story many times, but it was not until after my grandparents passed away that we began to wonder where Bessie was buried. Each year, we received a yahrzeit reminder from Hebrew Memorial, but a call to them revealed she was not buried there. A search through my grandparents' records came up empty.

For the next five years, my mother and I combed every genealogy website and resource we could find, but we still had not located Bessie. By this time, my grandfather's story came into doubt. He had been 3 at the time of her death. Did he correctly remember the story? Or had it been passed down and told so many times it was mired in inaccuracy? Could Bessie be a nickname and we were searching under the wrong name? The questions were as endless as our search.

The break finally came in 2009.

A friend suggested requesting my grandfather's Social Security application from the state of Michigan vital records

department. His mother's name would be included on the application. At that time, you sent a check to the state for \$35, along with the person's Social Security number and crossed your fingers that someone would respond.

A couple months later, when we had given up hope, the Social Security application arrived in the mail. So did the discovery that my grandfather had changed the spelling of his last name, and all these years we had been searching incorrectly. With that new information, we found Bessie's death certificate online within five minutes and, on it, the place of her burial (as well as her cause of death, which confirmed the legend).

Her burial location was listed as Beth David (now B'nai David) Cemetery, and we quickly jumped into the car and headed to Detroit to pay our respects. But we did not make it into the cemetery that day. Instead, we discovered the cemetery, begun by a now-defunct synagogue, only opened twice a year. It took several months for us to get inside.

Finally, on Mother's Day, 91 years after her death, Bessie's granddaughter and great-granddaughter visited her grave.

If you are searching for a long-lost loved one, consider starting your journey with the Irwin I. Cohn Michigan Jewish Cemetery Index.

This resource was initiated in 1993 with the goal of constructing a master database with a record for every burial in Metro Detroit's Jewish cemeteries. At this time, the database includes burials from the earliest recorded information to 1999. We currently are working to bring the database to the present.

The index has several exciting new features, including the ability to upload photographs, as well as to add records that currently are not on the index. The cemetery index is easy to use and, best of all, free.

Happy searching! ✨

Robbie Terman is director of the Leonard N. Simons Jewish Community Archives. This story first appeared on Federation's myjewishdetroit.org.