

The First-Ever Documentary about the Pogroms

My Dear Children

The Quest to Unravel
a Family Mystery



A film by LeeAnn Dance and Cliff Hackel

mydearchildrendoc.com

A Letter from LeeAnn Dance Co-Director, *My Dear Children*

Thank you for hosting a screening of *My Dear Children*.

This guide has everything you need to organize, promote, and host your screening. It also includes questions to get people thinking and talking about the film. Your audience will leave entertained, enlightened, and moved.

My Dear Children is based on the memoir of Feiga Shamis, a Jewish mother of 12, who wrote about her life from the late 1800s through the year 1921 — the year she sent two of her youngest children to an orphanage a continent away.

I learned of Feiga’s story from her great-grandson, Dr. Steve Nathan, a family friend since our sons were toddlers together. Steve gave me the memoir in 2011 thinking it might be an interesting subject for my work. But when I first read it, I was perplexed. Feiga wrote of a period of violence I had never heard about, and I consider myself to be fairly up on history. So I set the little book aside, hoping to understand it better when I had time to do more research.

Two years later Steve told me that his cousin, Judy Favish, whose father was one of the children Feiga placed for adoption, was going to Ukraine to learn more about her grandmother’s life and to visit the places she had written about. Steve asked if I wanted to go along, and I didn’t hesitate to say yes. It was the beginning of a four-year journey of discoveries and insights I could have never predicted.

Judy knew little about her beloved late father’s past, only that something traumatic had happened to him as a child, and she hoped her quest would help her better understand him. Her efforts took her not only to Ukraine, but then to New York, and also to an obscure archive in her home country of South Africa.

Judy’s journey, and Feiga’s writing, are centered around a surprisingly little-known chapter of Jewish history — anti-Jewish massacres, or pogroms, in the wake of World War I — that ravaged what is today Ukraine, Belarus, and Moldova. These atrocities, overshadowed by the Holocaust and hidden behind the Iron Curtain, are still unfamiliar to many.

My Dear Children finally brings this history to light; helps Jews everywhere understand their connection to this forgotten piece of the Jewish experience; and, we hope, honors the countless victims. Perhaps it’s a history shared by your ancestors too.

LeeAnn Dance

LeeAnn Dance
Vienna, Virginia



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About the Film

In 1921, amid the brutality of anti-Jewish violence in the former Russian Empire, Feiga Shamis, a Jewish widow and mother of 12, sent two of her youngest children to an orphanage a continent away. Those children, Rose and Mannie, grew up and had families of their own, but for the rest of their lives refused to talk about their childhood. Years later, in an effort to explain what she endured and how she tried to save her children, Feiga wrote a memoir, a letter to her children. They never read it and remained silent.

Nearly 100 years after Feiga's devastating choice, Mannie's daughter Judy Favish, a South African Jew eager to learn more about her beloved father's past, uses Feiga's letter to trace her family's past. Her journey uncovers not only her own family's story, but also the history of tens of thousands of other families like hers that were victims of the pogroms.

The far-reaching impact of the anti-Jewish massacres following World War I is a surprisingly unfamiliar story to many, despite the fact that it marked the beginning of the near-obliteration of Jewish life from an area to which 80% of the world's Jewry can trace its roots.

With the help of scholars, archivists, and the powerful words of Feiga herself, Judy's quest to unravel her family's past brings this history to life.



The Family



Feiga Shamis

Feiga Mirel Misler was born in 1878 in a small shtetl called Verba in what is now Ukraine. At age 16 she married Kalman Shamis, who was 20. They had 12 children and were married 22 years when he died. After her teenage son was killed in the pogroms and her oldest children were married or had emigrated to the U.S., Feiga took her youngest four to Warsaw to flee the violence. Still, after years of struggle, in 1921, she made the heartbreaking decision to send her son Mannie, age 8, and her daughter Rose, age 10, to an orphanage in South Africa to ensure their survival. Years later, when Feiga had escaped Eastern Europe and settled in Palestine, she wrote a lengthy letter to Mannie and Rose about her life and the horrifying circumstances that led her to relinquish them as children. That extraordinary first-person account of the pogroms inspired her descendants to learn more, and eventually led to *My Dear Children*. Feiga died in Israel in 1950.



Mannie Shamis

Mannie Shamis was born in Verba in 1912. One of 12 children, Mannie and his family endured repeated vicious attacks during the pogroms of that era. At age 8 he was brought to South Africa by philanthropist Isaac Ochberg, who rescued nearly 200 Jewish children from Eastern Europe. Mannie was adopted there by Israel and Shaina Favish, grew up, married his wife Nora in 1946, and had two children. He got his law degree at the University of South Africa and as an attorney was known for his integrity, compassion, and pursuit of fairness. He practiced law until his death in 1994. In the 1940s, his biological mother Feiga wrote him a lengthy letter about her life and his childhood. Though he kept it in a safe all of his life, he never read it. Mannie never discussed it, or his past, with his family.



Judy Favish

Judy Favish is the daughter of Mannie Favish, and Feiga Shamis's granddaughter. She traveled across the world, working with experts and archivists in an effort to learn more about her father's childhood and grandmother's past. She generously shares those efforts in *My Dear Children*. A former anti-apartheid activist and an expert in social justice and education for empowerment, Judy has spent her personal and professional life working on these issues. She feels that her strength, resilience, and commitment to human rights comes from Feiga.



Tess Peacock

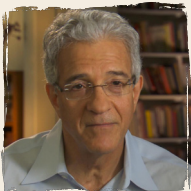
Tess Peacock is Judy's daughter, Mannie's granddaughter, and Feiga's great-granddaughter. She joined her mother in the quest to learn more about Feiga's life and their European ancestors. She is a human rights attorney in South Africa currently focused on social investment initiatives to bring about large-scale change within the education system.

The Experts



Irina Astashkevich
*Jewish Historian,
Brandeis University*

Born in Moscow, Irina Astashkevich has worked in various archives in Russia, Lithuania, and the U.S, as well as in Jewish philanthropic organizations. In 2013 she defended her dissertation, “Pogroms in Ukraine 1917-1920: An Alternate Universe,” and received her Ph.D. from Brandeis. She received her M.A. in History, Jewish History and Archives from the Project Judaica—a joint program of the Russian State University of Humanities, Historical Archival Institute, Jewish Theological Seminary of America, and the YIVO Institute of Jewish Research in New York. Her book, *The Story of Rape: Gendered Violence During the Pogroms of 1919* (Academic Studies Press) comes out in 2018.



Omer Bartov
*Historian and Author,
Brown University*

Omer Bartov is one of the foremost experts on the history of Jewish life in Eastern Europe and one of the world’s leading authorities on the subject of genocide. He was born in Israel and is an accomplished author. Bartov’s latest book, *Anatomy of a Genocide: The Life and Death of a Town Called Buczacz*, was published by Simon and Schuster in 2017.



Alex Dunai
Historical Guide

Alex Dunai lives in Lviv, Ukraine, where he has worked as a professional genealogy researcher for more than 20 years. Fluent in English, Russian, Polish, and Ukrainian, he uses his knowledge of Jewish life and archival systems in Eastern Europe to guide genealogists and others in their efforts to connect with ancestors. Learn more at alexdunai.com.



James Hopper
*Trauma Expert,
Harvard Medical School*

Jim Hopper, Ph.D., is a nationally recognized researcher and lecturer on childhood trauma. He has helped therapists, police officers, prosecutors, judges, senior military commanders, and higher education administrators better understand and respond to victims of child abuse. Learn more at jimhopper.com.



Natan Meir
*Lorry I. Lokey Associate
Professor of Judaic Studies,
Portland State University*

Natan Meir is the author of *Kiev: Jewish Metropolis, 1861-1914* (Indiana University Press, 2010) and co-editor of *Anti-Jewish Violence: Rethinking the Pogrom in East European History* (Indiana, 2010). His forthcoming book is entitled *Stepchildren of the Shtetl: The Jewish Destitute, Disabled and Dispossessed in Eastern Europe*. He leads Jewish heritage and study tours throughout Eastern Europe with Ayelet Tours and lectures widely on East European Jewish history and culture.



Richard Mendelsohn
*Historian and Author,
University of Cape Town*

Richard Mendelsohn has taught history for many years and written extensively about South African Jewish history. His most recent book (co-authored with Milton Shain) is *The Jews in South Africa: An Illustrated History* (Jonathan Ball, 2008), the first major general history of South African Jewry in 50 years.



Andrii Rukkas
Historian, Taras Shevchenko University

Andrii Rukkas is an expert in Ukrainian and Polish history and is based in Kiev. His particular area of interest is the military history of Poland and Ukraine 1914-1939.



Jeffrey Veidlinger
Professor of History, University of Michigan

Jeffrey Veidlinger teaches history and Judaic Studies and is the Director of the Frankel Center for Judaic Studies at the University of Michigan. He is an award-winning author of books including *In the Shadow of the Shtetl: Small-Town Jewish Life in Soviet Ukraine* (Indiana, 2013) and is the Editor of *Going to the People: Jews and Ethnographic Impulse* (Indiana, 2016). He is currently working on a book about the pogroms of the Russian Civil War. Follow him on Twitter at @Veidlinger.



Steven Zipperstein
Professor of Jewish History, Stanford University

Steven Zipperstein has taught at universities in Russia, Poland, France, Israel, and at Oxford, in addition to his work at Stanford. He is an award-winning author of eight books and is currently writing a cultural history of Russian Jewry at the turn of the twentieth century. His articles have appeared in *The New York Times Sunday Book Review*, *The Washington Post*, *The New Republic*, *The Jewish Review of Books*, and *The Chronicle of Higher Education*. His 2018 book, *Pogrom: Kishinev and the Tilt of History* (Liveright) explores the 1903 rampage using new evidence.



Polly Zavadivker
History and Jewish Studies, University of Delaware

Polly Zavadivker specializes in Modern Jewish and East European History. She is the author of *1915 Diary of S. An-sky: A Russian Jewish Writer at the Eastern Front* (Indiana, 2016) and her current book project is a study of Jewish responses to the catastrophic wars that took place between 1914 and 1945. In her teaching she uses interdisciplinary methods to convey the varieties of Jewish experience in the Diaspora and modern Israel, and emphasizes the use of primary sources including diaries, literary works and official documents, as well as photographs, works of art and film, and material objects.

Want to learn more?

Interested in learning more about pogroms?

Visit mydearchildrendoc.com/resources for a list of resources. We used many of those listed in our research but continue to update the list as the resources expand.

Want to connect with or learn more about the Ochberg Orphans?

- > Visit the Ochberg Orphans Descendants and Friends Facebook page at [facebook.com/groups/27042498440](https://www.facebook.com/groups/27042498440).
- > Contact Hertzel Katz, the acting chairman of the Ochberg Orphans Committee at hertzadv@netvision.net.il.
- > Get the book *The Ochberg Orphans and the Horrors from Whence They Came* by David Solly Sandler. You can reach him at sedsand@iinet.net.au.

Sample Press Release

The example below is for a hypothetical screening of *My Dear Children* sponsored by the (fictitious) Anytown USA Jewish Community Center on January 15, 2018.

Amy Aaron
Anytown USA Jewish Community Center
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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

JCC Brings “*My Dear Children: The Quest to Unravel a Family Mystery*” to Anytown Local experts to discuss anti-Semitism, the power of family, and finding your roots

(Anytown, USA)—The Anytown Jewish Community Center will be holding a one-time screening of the documentary *My Dear Children* at the Historic Anytown Theatre on Monday, January 15, 2018, at 7:00p. Admission is free.

My Dear Children: The Quest to Unravel a Family Mystery weaves together the modern-day efforts of a Jewish woman to learn more about her Eastern European heritage and the century-old history of the massacres that fractured her family. Through the deeply personal journey of Judy Favish, a South African Jew, and the astonishing written memoir of her grandmother Feiga Shamis, *My Dear Children* sheds light on the largely untold story of the pogroms and the impact this humanitarian tragedy has had on multiple generations.

Rabbi Barry Baum of the Anytown Synagogue and Professor Cara Cantor from Anytown College will participate in a public discussion forum after the screening. Rabbi Baum is widely recognized as an expert on social justice movements and the effects of anti-Semitism. Professor Cantor teaches Jewish history and leads summer tours to Eastern Europe for local members of the Jewish community who want to learn more about their ancestry. Both are available to talk to the media in advance of the screening or at the event.







“I am so grateful for Judy’s generosity in sharing the revelations and heartache of her journey. That she uses the writing of the grandmother she never met as a roadmap makes it even more poignant,” said Cantor. “It is quite emotional when you see someone connect to their past and begin to understand it in a new way.” Rabbi Baum notes that the screening will be held on Martin Luther King, Jr. Day: “There is no more appropriate occasion to remind ourselves of the need to stand up to hatred and violence. This hundred-year-old story is quite relevant today.”

My Dear Children premiered on WPBT2 in 2018. It uses never-before-seen archival film and photos along with original footage of Judy’s travels. Commentary and analysis from world-renowned experts is woven throughout. Learn more about the film and view the trailer at mydearchildrendoc.com.

For information about this and other cultural programming offered by the JCC, please visit anytownjcc.org.

Discussion Questions

It is our hope that these questions give viewers of *My Dear Children* the opportunity to think deeply about Feiga's story, Judy's journey, and their own family history. We hope viewers consider how history—in all of its interpretations—has an impact on us today. We encourage you to look at all the questions offered and choose those that make the most sense for your group.

-  Feiga's Experience
-  Judy's Journey
-  History
-  Art
-  Religious Persecution/Social Justice
-  Genealogy
-  Trauma



Had you ever heard of the pogroms before this film? In what context? How much did you know and were you surprised by what you learned? Does this seem like the same time and place as *Fiddler on the Roof*?



When the Favish family went to see the movie *Sophie's Choice*, Mannie's reaction to the film set Judy's curiosity in motion and changed her life. Can you think of any examples where a film (or play, television show, song, photo, or painting) ever changed your life? Why is art so powerful?



One of the first experts featured in the film is a trauma expert. What did you think when you saw him on screen? Did you anticipate trauma as a theme of this film? How does the trauma experienced by Mannie impact his life? Do the effects of trauma get passed down in families like other inherited traits?



In today's world, we often talk about psychological trauma and its effects—whether it be PTSD, anxiety, denial, or other responses—but that was not the case when Mannie was young. How do you think Mannie's life may have been different if his childhood trauma had been addressed in a modern, therapeutic way?



That Feiga's memoir was written by a woman is one of the factors that makes it so extraordinary. How might our understanding of history be different if women's voices and experiences were more prominent? What do you think we miss out on when history is largely written by people of one gender, one race, one religion, or one socio-economic class? How might our understanding of specific historical events be different if the stories were told from other points of view? What are some examples of "alternative" historical interpretations?



The time period Feiga writes about has been "curiously under-explored" according to scholars. Why do you think that is? How can an era of brutality resulting in hundreds of thousands of deaths go unreported or unlearned? Can you think of other troubling historical chapters that have been similarly overlooked? What about modern examples of events going unreported?



Mannie refused to talk about his childhood, indeed many survivors of the pogroms found it too difficult to discuss. Do silent survivors bear some responsibility for this history going under-explored? How does the hesitation of previous generations to share their experiences help explain the modern tendency to reject silence in the face of adversity?



Feiga’s memoir was written without regard for other interpretations of that era—she had no “official” guide when writing her story and no understanding of how that time period had been reported and characterized by others. How do you think that affected her writing? How would her account be different had she been aware of what others were saying and writing? How do other versions of events impact our own interpretation when we experience or report them?



Do you think there are other chapters of Jewish history we don’t know about? What about history from other cultures? What is the risk of not knowing? Are there any benefits to not knowing?



At the train station in Lviv, Judy remarks that she is in the very same place where her grandmother would have boarded a train. How did that moment make you feel? Why is it so meaningful for Judy to be in an actual place where Feiga stood a century earlier?



Have you ever learned about a specific site in history—such as the Pyramids or a Civil War battlefield or Ground Zero or Graceland—and then visited it in person? How does being in that same physical space make you feel? Do you feel more connected to history when you are there in person?



For generations before the pogroms, Jews in the Pale of Settlement lived among Russians, Poles, Ukrainians—“a mish-mash of ethnic and religious groups.” But eventually Jews became the target of violence and persecution. How does a (for the most part) calmly co-existing population turn against a racial, religious, or ethnic group? Can you think of other groups throughout history that have been targeted in this way? What about in modern times?



The pogroms of the late 1800s and early 1900s are depicted in the film through artwork and rare archival photographs—this was not a time when everyone walked around with a camera in their pocket. What did you think of those images? Is there a difference in how you respond to paintings vs. photographs? Is one more disturbing than the other? Is one more relatable?



Feiga was married at age 16 and was 34 years old when she had Mannie, her 11th child. That’s different from how most women live today. When you hear those numbers, what do you think?



Feiga’s story is just one account. How does it make you feel to know that tens of thousands of women lived through this time and these circumstances?



How did you feel when you heard there was not one Jewish person left in Vishnevetz and no photographs or really any evidence at all that less than 100 years prior there had been a large Jewish population? Can you think of other instances where a culture has been erased from someplace? Who is responsible for making sure people remember?



The peak of Jewish immigration to the U.S. was in the early 1900s, as many Russian and European Jews realized there was no future for them in their native lands. How does this history figure into your own family’s story?



How does the depiction of Jewish immigration to the U.S. in the early 1900s make you feel about present-day refugees and immigration issues? How are current situations similar? How are they different?



At the cemetery where Judy’s grandfather, Feiga’s husband, was likely buried, Judy says she is beginning to understand why her father and his sister were such “undemanding” people. What other personality traits were likely influenced by the experiences of their early childhood?



As Judy notes to the tour guide, there are many times throughout Feiga’s story where in order to demonstrate their allegiance to Russia, she tells people that she and her husband had a picture of the Czar on the wall. What are some of the ways people exhibit their political views and affiliations today? In what circumstances might people today think it’s important to show their political leanings?



In her book, Feiga mentions nothing of world events like World War I, the collapse of the Russian government, Theodore Roosevelt, The Titanic, etc.—and she was probably not even aware of them. Yet, Feiga’s account *is* history. What do you think of that juxtaposition? Does it make you think differently about the people who were alive during various historical periods?



One of the scholars says that after a few years of pogroms, the violence became “normalized” and it was just accepted that someone could go into another’s home, take what they wanted, and slaughter the people there. Can you think of other instances when violence and thievery have been normalized or expected?



During the time Feiga describes, elder Ukrainians tried to help Jews, but the younger generations, literally the children of the elders, were intensely anti-Semitic. If young people didn’t learn that hatred from their parents, where did it come from? Can you think of examples in modern times where attitudes have changed so abruptly from one generation to the next? Can you think of positive examples of this?



How does knowing that two of Mannie’s siblings were sent to the U.S.—meaning that Judy and Feiga have relatives here—make you feel about this story? Does it feel more relevant or closer to you?



At the time Feiga lived in Shumsk, there were about 2,200 residents there, more than 1,900 of them Jews. Now there is just one. The tour guide says that there is no one left, no one of whom to ask questions. How does genealogy research help to fill this gap? What are other ways Jews today can learn about their family history?



There is some talk in the film about whether the attacks of Feiga’s time should be called “pogroms” or “genocide.” How do specific words affect the way we view history? Are there words we use now to describe current events that impact the way we see the world? How might attitudes about current events be different if the language were different? Can you think of examples where language has made a difference?



Solly Jossel, who died in 2015, was one of the last surviving Ochberg Orphans. What does losing the last of that generation mean for the history and genealogical study of this period?



Feiga put her children into an orphanage for safekeeping. As a child, or a parent, how does that make you feel?



Judy got goosebumps when the archivist in South Africa showed her the actual note from Feiga giving permission for her children to go. She also found an armband worn by an Ochberg Orphan. How do these tangible artifacts make you feel about the story? When you see actual items from a time period you’re interested in, do the objects themselves make you feel more connected to the history? How does the experience of going to a museum differ from reading about history?



Judy was unable to find her grandfather’s grave, her uncle’s grave, accounts of the Shumsk pogrom, or any photos of the time her family lived in shtetls. Does this make her journey a failure? Even without these proof points, Judy says her efforts have made Feiga’s story more real to her. Why might that be?



What did you think about the discussion of rape as a weapon of war? Does it have more meaning when you’re looking at history through the eyes of a woman telling her story?



Were you surprised to find out that Mannie had reunited with his mother 20 years after he was relinquished for adoption? How did you feel when you learned that their visit ended after a day, rather than the week that was planned? What might that have felt like for Feiga? For Mannie? Is that kind of outcome to be expected? What sorts of outcomes do people expect when they start researching their family history?



The archival footage of the pogrom in Lviv shows actual moving images of Jews being beaten. How does your reaction to that footage compare to your reaction of the pogroms depicted in paintings as shown earlier in the film?



Does knowledge of the pogroms and the violence against Jews during that period make it somehow more believable that the Holocaust was able to occur two decades later? How does sustained, systemic violence in one generation affect the following generations? Can you think of other periods in history, or events in modern day, that might be similarly connected?



Consider the point of view of the artists who painted images of the pogroms. What do you think their creative experience was like? Similarly, what might it have been like for the camera operators and photographers who captured the era on film? Think about when you personally see or do something while taking photos or video of it. How does that change the way you experience it? What if you painted something from memory rather than took video as it was happening?



Feiga wrote her brutal account of the pogrom era about two decades after it happened. Do you think her perspective changed in that time? How so? Did the trauma subside for her or did it grow? How would her story have been different if she had written about it in real time, like a diary? How does memory change over time? When you think now about past events in your life, do you see them more clearly? Less clearly? Do traumatic memories stay sharper than happy ones?



What did you feel when you learned that Feiga's older children, those who survived the pogroms and stayed in Russia and Eastern Europe, all died in the Holocaust?



One historian in the film notes that Feiga's actions might seem impossible to us, but what she did actually saved two of her children from the Holocaust, which makes Feiga's story one of triumph rather than loss. What do you think about that? Do you think Feiga would agree? Would Mannie agree? What about Judy? Or Tess? How does the passage of time and viewpoint of subsequent generations change the view of history?



When the Ochberg Orphans arrived in South Africa there was a wave of excitement among South African Jews and efforts to support the rescued children. How does that compare with the current refugee situations?



Isaac Ochberg was one man who saved about 200 children, which doesn't seem like a lot of people. Yet those lives touch many thousands more. What does that make you think about the impact a single person can have?



How does the Talmudic notion of "If you save one life you save the world" fit into this story? How does it fit into today's world? Into your personal life?



Rose and Mannie's children know that their parents' early life experiences had a huge impact on subsequent generations, even if they were never told about it explicitly. Rose's daughter talks about her mother's fierce devotion to family. Judy was taught by her father to fight injustice and has tried to pass that on to her own children. How do traits like this get handed down in families? Is it possible to inherit a passion for social justice or education? Are qualities like bravery and fearlessness a part of our DNA?



After her journey, Judy says that it is everyone's responsibility to remember what happened and to live their lives in a way that gives credence to the pain and sacrifice of those who came before—but it is particularly the responsibility of Jewish people because of their history of persecution. What do you think she means by this? What are some ways that people can fulfil this responsibility?



In the letter to her children, Feiga says, "I decided to write you about my life because I want you to know how I suffered." How do you feel about her motivation?



Feiga's children never read her letter, but thanks to the generosity of her descendants and the attention of the filmmakers, so many more are now aware of her story. What do you think about that? What do you think Feiga would say about it?



What do you think is the impact of Feiga's story?



Reflections from Judy Favish

After toying a long time with the idea of going to Ukraine to see where my father was born, I finally decided to do so in 2013 after reading several accounts of other people's journeys to seek information about their families' backgrounds. I wanted to go to try and get a better understanding of the factors that made my father the sort of person that he was. I adored my father and wanted to continue the work that my mother started to keep the memories of his heritage alive. I invited other members of my extended family to join me but in the end only my daughter Tess was able to come.

We went to the site of the orphanage in Warsaw, to Verba where my father was born, and to several villages where he and his family had spent time as they moved around trying to escape the pogroms. We also met with experts and did research in South Africa. We went to New York to learn more.

When I made the decision to go to Ukraine I had no idea that the trip would enable Feiga's story to have an impact way beyond the family. I have no doubt that LeeAnn's decision to do this documentary will contribute to addressing a vacuum in Jewish history and to creating an awareness of the horror and scale of the pogroms which have not received the necessary attention they deserve.

I like to think that in the course of my life I have been guided by a set of fundamental values. These values include: non-racialism, non-sexism, and support for advancing human rights and people's capabilities, equality, social justice, ending exploitation, and democracy. I always felt that the importance of these values was imparted to me by my parents—my father because of what he experienced in his early years, and my mother because she was raised by parents committed to the cause of social justice.

However, reflecting on this experience and all that I've learned has made me appreciate that Feiga and my grandparents were probably also heavily influenced by values of fairness, compassion, and concern for others, as found in the Torah. The journey renewed my commitment to doing whatever I can to fight against all forms of discrimination, exploitation, and persecution. As Jewish people, I believe we have particular responsibilities in this regard because of our history of persecution. This vision and sense of morality is the essence of what being Jewish means to me.

“ The journey renewed my commitment to doing whatever I can to fight against all forms of discrimination, exploitation, and persecution. ”

What People Are Saying

If the lessons of our family's suffering can be shared across societies and religions, then the ripple downstream message will be the triumph of kindness over hate, benevolence over barbarism, equality over dehumanization, and the value of a single life. From a simple diary, written in a forgotten language, this will be Feiga's immortalized mark that is undiminished by time, tyrants, or Twitter. It is not just our family story, it is the story of many families, and one for all humanity, for all generations.

Dr. Steve Nathan, great-grandson of Feiga Shamis

I found "My Dear Children" incredibly touching, and actually breathtaking – as I watched, it occurred to me that over the years I'd simplistically (and perhaps shamefully) made "Fiddler on the Roof" my mental touchstone for the word "pogrom," when in fact the reality was a holocaust before the Holocaust. To say thank you might not exactly be appropriate, but you have created a very, very necessary and important testament.

**Julie Sherman, Chair,
The Harrisburg Jewish Film Festival**

Finally! A visual presentation of the holocaust that preceded the Holocaust. "My Dear Children" is significant for its moving presentation of the dire environment facing Eastern European Jewish families in the early 20th Century. Powerful.

**Paul F., Attendee, International Association
of Jewish Genealogical Societies Conference 2017**

My mother's mother comes from a family of 17, and I had always heard that 14 of them were killed towards the end of WWI. I found that odd. What was going on in Ukraine that I didn't know about? It was well before the Holocaust...I never found out more about that, until now.

**Louis Kessler, Attendee, International Association
of Jewish Genealogical Societies Conference 2017**

Kudos on discovering and making a film about such an amazing story. What courage and life that mother had, and I learned so much. An incredible unknown story of our past.

**Aviva Kempner, Director of The Life
and Times of Hank Greenberg, The Rosenwald
Schools, and The Partisans of Vilna**

This film is really, really special. I don't think I've ever cared so much about Jewish history since reading "Mila 18." I can tell, based on being a storyteller myself, that it's an extraordinarily difficult story to tell. The archival work is astounding. I genuinely think it's only slightly hyperbolic to say ["My Dear Children" is] preventing history from vanishing.

**Jeffrey E. Stern, Author,
The Last Thousand and The 15:17 to Paris**

We have quite a lot of testimonies and stories about the Holocaust period and the interwar period, but that period of the first World War and the end of the first World War, I don't think it's very well known or described in the books well enough. If you go as a genealogist to the documents of that time – 1918, 1919, 1920 – you find almost nothing. The value of [Feiga's] book [is that] it gives you the experiences of the person who survived, who went through that. A unique and invaluable document from my point of view.

Alex Dunai, Historical Guide, Ukraine