

Our Yiddish Club in Chelm and the Garden of Eden

by Philip *Fishl* Kutner

Our Yiddish Club from Yenemsville journeyed to Chelm to learn more about their ancestral heritage. In the last issue the tired but eager group spent their first night on a high note. They looked forward to a good night sleep. Everyone called home and assured their loved ones that they had arrived safely, and were treated like royalty. All looked forward to the next morning when they would take their first sightseeing tour—to the *Garden of Eden*.

Early the next morning, before departing, **Chelm's Chief Fool (CCF)** briefed us. He was one of the wisest men we ever met. He started his presentation by quoting our own **Mark Twain** who said, "The first day of April is the day we remember what we are the other 364 days of the year."

"One should not visit the *Garden of Eden* without a prior knowledge of its history. The docents there are young college kids and do not have the knowledge and experience of an *old fool*."

"You all have read about the creation of the *Garden of Eden* in your *chumash*, but what happened to it after Adam, Eve, the snake and all the rest were kicked out? No, it did not cease to exist. Geologists know about Continental Drift. It seems that the earth's crust is in constant flux. There are areas where plates are being submerged in subduction zones and others that are emerging in mountain building. Thus the ancient area where our ancestors were first created has moved to Poland and just north of where we are. Someday it will be right here where you are now standing."

With that magnificent and erudite introduction we loaded the bus and headed for Poleski National Park. It is in the western section of the Leczynsko-Wlodawska Plain and is located between the Wieprz and Bug Rivers. The size of the park is almost 10,000 hectares. The park is about 24,000 acres in size. A hectare is = to a square, 100 meters on a side. Our guide told us that the park has floodplains, lakes swamps and peat bogs. While it is beautiful, we did not find it a *gan eydn*.

This was our first disappointment, but we all decided that the real reason for our visitation to Chelm was to find out about our ancestors and help the Chelmites. We were all sure that there would be many stories to take home about our visit to Chelm. On the bus ride back to Chelm we worked out our game plans. Our 13 Yenemsville Club members had started their task of seeing and trying to experience their ancestors' occupations.

Gitl the Gardener was disappointed in the Garden of Eden. Her dream, of seeing the dreamed flora and fauna of the biotic origin of all life, proved less than inspiring. Nonetheless, she was upbeat with the belief that most of the others would find their experiences rewarding. After all, hadn't **Benny the Beer Brewer, Bobe the Baker, Pincus the Pickle Maker and Heshy the Chocolate Maker** all had a magnificent banquet at the hotel? "Yes, we all had a great meal," added **Nar the Narrator**.

On the way back the bus driver sensed that **Gitl the Gardener** was displeased with the Garden of Eden. He said we could stop at the Chelm Landscape Park, located in Chelm, Sawin, Dorohusk, and Ruda Huta. He happened to be an amateur ornithologist and told us that more than 1050 species of plants, 150 species of birds and more than 800 species of butterflies live there. This made us all feel better.

Before going back to the Hotel we stopped at the Chelm Tourist Information Center located at: 22-100 Chelm, ul. Lubelska 63. They can be reached at: tel. (+48 82) 565 36 67, tel/fax (+48 82) 565 41 85, and their e-mail address is: itchelm@wp.pl check their website at: www.um.chelm.pl/it.htm The clerk told us that our Kamena Hotel, located at: 22-100 Chelm ul. Armii Krajowej 50, had good tourist information. Its telephone is +48 82)565 64 01

We were told that the Pre WW II Chelm population was 30,000, and over half of them were Jewish. There was a story told about an elderly couple, **Berl der Blinder un Blume di blinderke** who saw the world through rose-colored sunglasses.

The question came up about Chelm being the City of Fools. The Director of Information laughed and reminded us about Meiringen in Switzerland; Hums in Iran; Lagos in Mexico; Montieri in Italy; Kampen in the Netherlands; Bemböle in Finland; Tälje in Sweden; and Mols in Denmark; Durachosok the imaginary Russian town of fools and of Schildburg the German market town that was the laughing stock of Europe. The Director said he'd be available if we needed any assistance. We then went back to the hotel, tired after our first full day in Chelm.

At dinner it was decided that **Leybl the Librarian Tova the Teacher, and Mendel the Computer Maven** would visit schools and libraries. They'd learn how the Chelmites are educated, and suggest how to better use cyberspace. So, do come back next month and follow the adventures of Our Yiddish Club from Yenemsville in their visit to Chelm.