

# YadPOT: An Aid to Creating Pages of Testimony

by Moishe Miller

Yad Vashem is dedicated to commemorating the six million Jews murdered by the Germans and their collaborators, as well as the numerous Jewish communities destroyed during the Holocaust, so that they will have an eternal remembrance.

Since 1955, Yad Vashem has worked to fulfill its mandate to preserve the memory of the Jews who perished in the Holocaust by collecting their names. One of the central means in accomplishing this task is the Page of Testimony (POT).

Pages of Testimony are designed to restore the personal identity and brief life stories of each individual victim, which the Nazis and their accomplices tried so hard to obliterate. Submitted by survivors, relatives or friends, Pages of Testimony contain the names, biographical details and, when available, photographs, of the victims. They are preserved in the Hall of Names, in Yad Vashem's Holocaust History Museum complex.

Computerization of the Pages of Testimony collection commenced in 1992, and has subsequently evolved into The Central Database of Shoah Victims' Names, which contains additional names identified from various archival sources. In November 2004, the entire Names Database was uploaded to the Yad Vashem website at [www.yadvashem.org](http://www.yadvashem.org) where one can freely access information on the over 3 million Jewish victims identified so far, as well as submit additional names and information online. Millions more victims remain unnamed. The effort to identify them continues.

## The Jewish Genealogist

Jewish genealogists are a great and mostly untapped resource for many of these names. The challenge until now has been the time and resources it takes to create a POT. Though creating one page is relatively simple, transcribing hundreds or thousands of pages from genealogical software and paper records has proven to be a barrier to most genealogists.

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Genealogy, editor Gary Mokotoff noted, "Over the years, I have submitted 82 Pages of Testimony, but there are now nearly 300 Holocaust victims on my family tree. A check of the Shoah Victims' Names Database demonstrated that very few of the persons I have not submitted have Pages of Testimony. I have a data entry task to do over the next few months."

## Existing Software Options

Today there are resources to facilitate the completion of POTs. Genealogists can obtain a copy of DoroTree from Jerusalem software maker DoroTree Technologies Ltd. With DoroTree's type-in adapted forms, a genealogist can type in the information on their personal computer, print out the completed forms, sign them and send them to Yad Vashem in Jerusalem. DoroTree's type-in Pages of Testimony forms presently exist in English and in Hebrew.

Alternative software has been created by Incline Software, based in South Jordan, UT. In 2001, Incline Software released the new "Jewish Edition" of Ancestral Quest version 3.0. A press release dated May 24, 2001 detailed the creation of the special "Page of Testimony" feature. These features of the AQ 3.0 Jewish Edition were added to the standard edition of Ancestral Quest 2002 (version 10.0), and have been included in the subsequent releases of Ancestral Quest 11 and the newest version, Ancestral Quest 12.1. There is no longer a special Jewish Edition of AQ, instead, the standard edition of Ancestral Quest simply provides these features.

While these two software products enable some level of automation in the creation of POTs, neither is a preferred solution for most genealogists. There are over 50 items of data that need to be incorporated into a POT. Even needing to address a handful of them for each POT would become insurmountable when dealing with a large number of POTs. Furthermore, with well over 20 different software products on the market, many genealogists do not use DoroTree or Ancestral Quest. They may not want or be able to migrate to another software product.

## A Meeting with Hall of Names Director Alex Avraham

In 2004 an idea was presented to Yad Vashem for the extraction of POTs directly from existing software products that did not offer POT support. Chief in mind was Family Tree Maker, one of the most popular software products on the market (this is not an endorsement of this or any other software product). Yad Vashem indicated a strong interest in the idea.



The Hall of Names

Moishe Miller, a computer programmer and amateur genealogist, together with Gregory Chernomaz, another computer programmer, developed a plan for automating the creation of POTs. They named the project YadPOT. Yad is Hebrew for handle or extension (see commentaries to Isaiah 56:5) and also represents Yad Vashem itself. POT is the acronym for Pages of Testimony.

They decided the product should be able to read any type of genealogical software file or GEDCOM file and determine who was a victim of the Holocaust. The program would then create a pdf in the form of a fully populated POT.

Genbridge, a utility produced by Wholly Genes, has the ability to natively read almost all genealogy files. The company graciously donated the software for use with YadPOT.

activePDF was also approached with the idea and they donated a copy of their activePDF Toolkit. This allowed YadPOT to programmatically create a pdf file with extracted date fields from the Genbridge process.

Chernomaz and Miller had hoped the delivery system of the product could be the web. Still of concern was that those who submitted POTs were not submitting fraudulent data. JewishGen, which is a password protected site and reaches deeply into the Jewish genealogical community, seemed an ideal vehicle. Unfortunately, when approached with the concept in December of 2004, JewishGen did not have the resources or the time to commit to the project. Without an entity to host the web-portal and a means to validate the submitter as legitimate, the project seemed over.

### A Meeting with Hall of Names Director Alex Avraham

Moishe Miller had over 1500 undocumented Holocaust victims in his own family tree. He knew that he would never create those POTs on his own. Not wanting the project to stop, the two programmers implemented the pieces they had as a Windows-based product. By early 2005, they had a working proto-type and approached Yad Vashem again.

On January 31, 2005, the director of Yad Vashem's Hall of Names, Alexander Avraham, met with Moishe Miller in Jerusalem to discuss the project outline. It was decided that a process that could automate the creation of

POTs on a large scale would need to accomplish three basic tasks:

1. The automatic creation of the actual POTs, including submitter's information and signature.
2. Excel Spreadsheets detailing the various facets of the data in the forms, in three separate reports:
  - a. Overview Report
  - b. Detail Report
  - c. Picture Report
3. A DVD of all the original pictures submitted in the POTs and cross-referenced via the Picture Report.

The two programmers went about implementing the enhanced specifications. However, a variety of personal obstacles prevented them from completing the project at that time, including job transitions for both of the programmers.

### Adopted Standards

What was in place was a program that could read genealogy software. They tested it on Miller's ftm files, which had over 15,000 individuals and over 1500 victims.

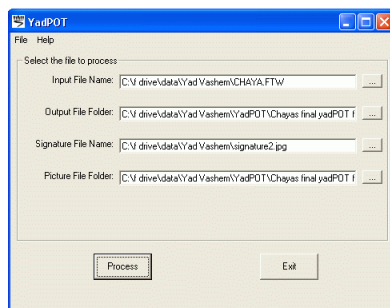
In the Jewish genealogical community no firm standards have been adopted as to how to record victims of the Holocaust. The programmers decided to conduct an informal survey of some amateur genealogists. They discovered that several unconnected genealogists used similar conventions. They recorded the fact that someone had been a victim in the Holocaust in the Fact Field of *Died* or *Place of Death* field as **PIH** or **Perished in Holocaust**. As an alternative, a Fact Field entitled *PIH* with a value of **Y** was also a valid indicator. They also checked the *Notes* field for the first characters containing "**Holocaust Victim**", "**Perished in Holocaust**" or "**PIH**". A dynamic check was also added so that any one datafield and data value pair could be added to the program's check during runtime. Currently these are the options that YadPOT utilizes for determining if an entry should have a POT created.

Handling of names was another process in need of standards. A person can potentially have a title, given legal or civil name, a nickname, a Hebrew name, a Yiddish name a last name or family name, and a maiden name.

Victim's first name (also nickname):  
**BYNTZA GITTEL (GIZI)**  
**בילצה גיטל**

### Sample output from YadPOT with Hebrew

Additionally the Hebrew name might be stored in English or in Hebrew in the genealogy software program. YadPOT captures all of these permutations. The adopted



Screen shot from YadPOT

standard for names was based solely on Miller's entries in FTM. A Genbridge function retrieves the name, including the *This person is also known as (AKA)*. YadPOT also uses the Fact Fields of *Hebrew Name* and *Hebrew Name in Ahroni*. In the case of the latter, it actually outputs that part of the name of the victim in Hebrew. The name is first, followed by any nickname in parenthesis and any Hebrew, in the lower right hand of the box. This standard was used for all names; victim, spouse, father, and mother.

Dates were also handled in two ways. Aside from extracting the standard date, there was a check for a Fact Field of *Yahrtzeit*. If present, it was appended to the date. As an example, "1 AUG 1942 - MENACHEM AV 18" could be outputted.

Permanent Residence on the POT was extracted from the Fact Field of *Residence* only. The actual Fact Fields of *Street1*, *Street2*, *City*, etc. were concatenated as Address (this feature may only be available with Gedcom, Family Tree Maker and Legacy software files). Pictures are handled in one of two ways; embedded in the genealogy file or stored externally. For external files, a Fact Field of *Picture* was used to lookup the filename of the picture and insert it into the POT (the actual location of the directory of the file is entered on the main YadPOT screen). *PictureCaption* was used to insert a caption into the POT above the picture. YadPOT, utilizing the activePDF product, can insert TIF and JPG images. Other formats are attempted without a guarantee of success. In the alternate option, YadPOT is programmed to retrieve image objects embedded in the genealogy file. It checks for a primary exhibit that is an image. If no image is marked as primary, then all other objects associated with the victim are parsed for an image. If an image is found, the image is extracted and added to the POT along with the associated caption. The image is also copied and saved to the filename directory specified in the main YadPOT screen.

A Fact Field of *Occupation* was used for Occupation. A separate YadPOT Submitter Information screen gathers the author's information that will appear on the bottom of the POT form. Included in the information solicited is email address. This is added to the very bottom of the form so that future researchers can contact submitters directly. A JGFF number is also solicited, although at this time it has no function.

FamilyStatus was another Fact Field that was necessary. No every victim that did not have a spouse or child was "single. This Fact Field gives the genealogist the ability to record the information of a victim being "single" for use in the creation of a POT.

YadPOT's main screen solicits 4 file locations:

- ❖ The source file, such as the location of the ftm file.
- ❖ The output directory where all the POTs will be written.
- ❖ Optional location of a signature file. YadPOT offers the submitter the option of having the program use their signature to sign every page.
- ❖ Optional file folder where all pictures to insert can be found.

### Fast Forward to 2009

Moishe Miller published a family history book in 2003 and also assisted on a second edition in 2007. He had pledged to one of the sponsors of the book to submit POTs for all the family members that had perished in the Holocaust. In January of 2009 Moishe Miller made good on that pledge. He again met with Director Avraham and gave him a DVD with 1743 signed POTs from his own family research. All the pages were produced automatically via the YadPOT program. It took 10 minutes to create the output which contained 468mb of data. One hundred twenty POTs had embedded photographs. Also delivered were all three data reports and a separate directory of the original photographs.

### The Future

What next? Make a difference. We are looking for a group of genealogists willing to participate in the next phase of testing. Help us to help you. Create all your POTs by sending your data to [www.yadpot.org](http://www.yadpot.org).

Are there privacy concerns? What about opportunity for misuse? There will always be questions. But now there are no more excuses. As a community, we can supply the missing 3 million names. Be a part of it.

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POT produced by YadPOT