

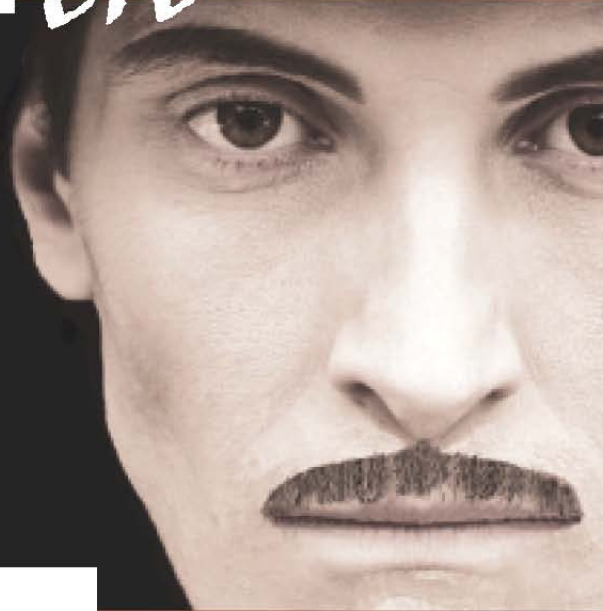
DAVID R. SEMMEL

11<sup>th</sup>



*of*

AV



# **11***th of* **Av**

David R. Semmel

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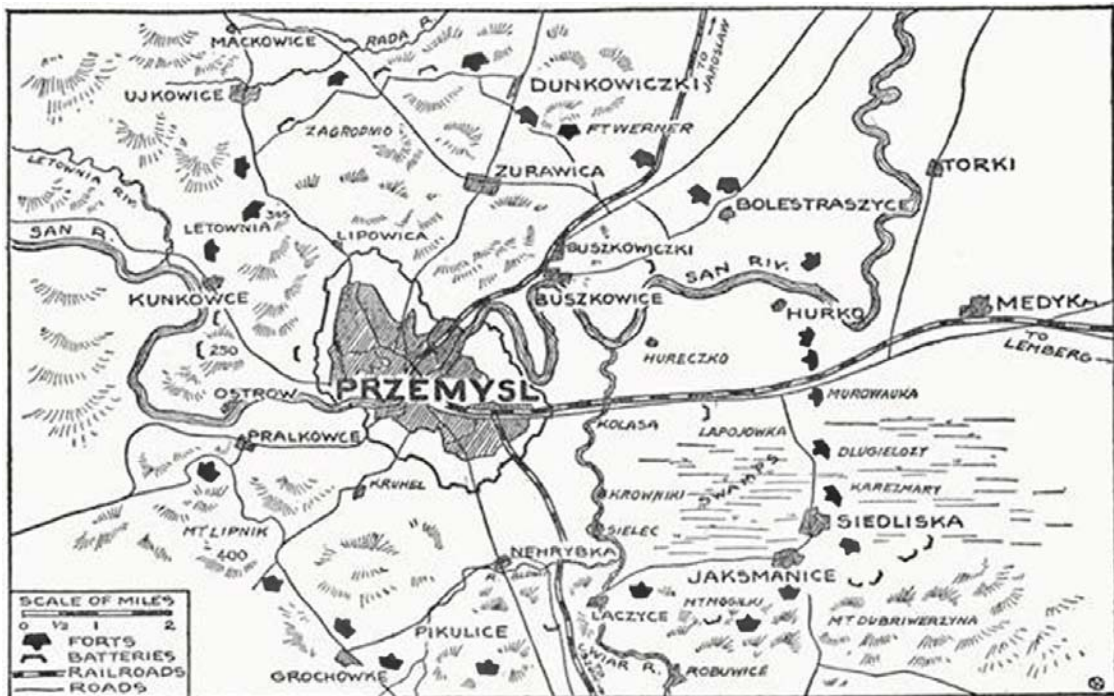
To my mother, Sally Dorothy (as in "Solidarity")  
Semmel and her parents from Przemyśl, Fannie  
(Metzger) and Emanuel Silberman.

# Przemyśl

Pronounced “p-shem-ish-ul” in Polish

An ancient town straddling the San River, nestled in the Carpathian foothills of south-eastern Poland. On the eve of The Great War, a total of fifty-thousand Jews, Poles, and Ruthians (Ukrainians) lived there joined by at least eighty-thousand Austro-Hungarian Soldiers manning the forty-three forts that formed the perimeter of Fort Przemyśl, the largest citadel in the East.

Ukrainian:	Перемишль Peremyshl
German:	Prömsel
Yiddish:	לשימעשפּ Pshemishl
Russian:	Peremishl





Germany

Berlin

Lodz

Prague

Munich

Vienna

Gyor

Budapest

Alps

Graz

Milan

Italy

Venice

Kobarid

Trieste

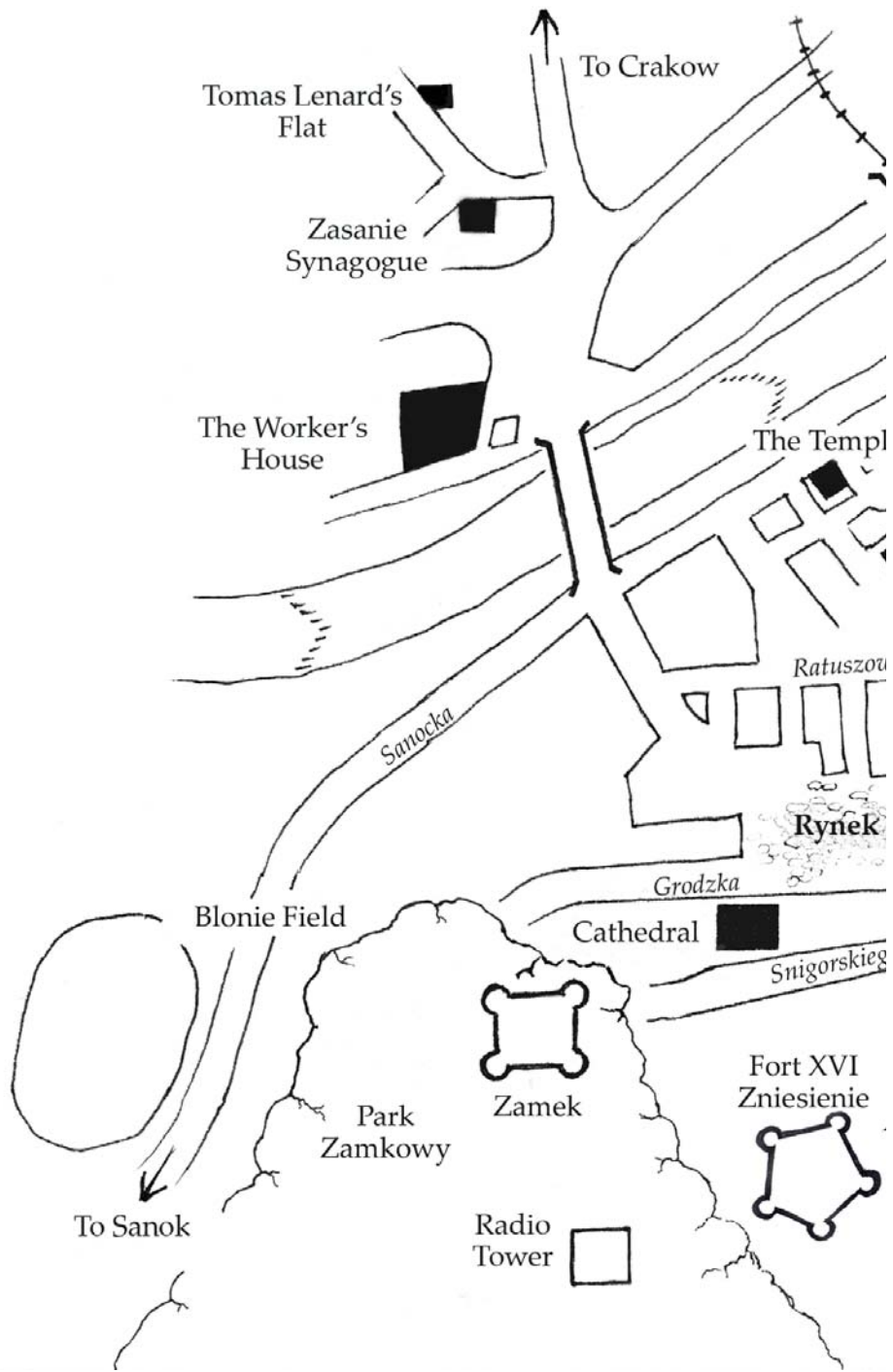
Austria

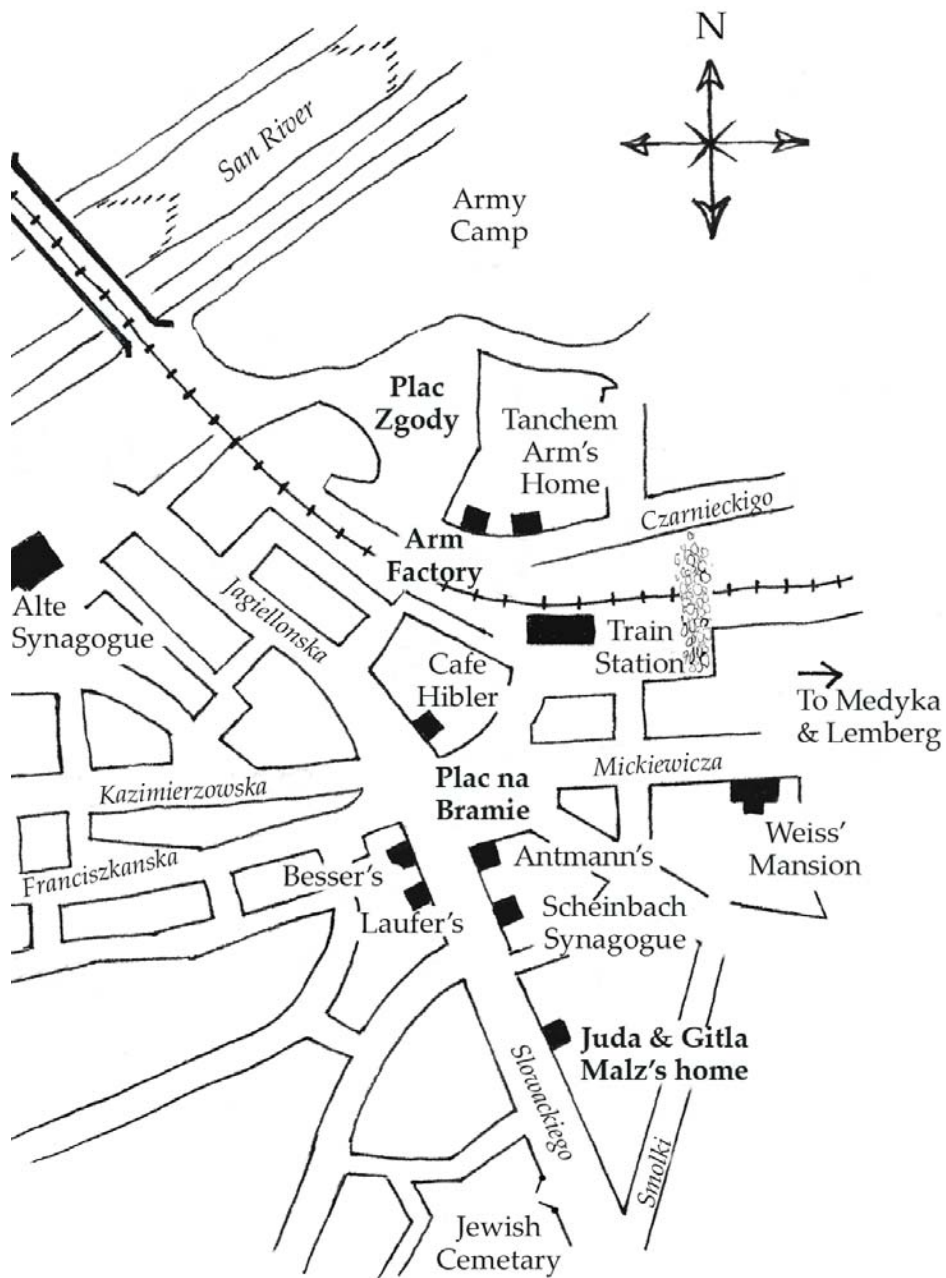
Apennine Mountains

Sarajevo

**Eastern Europe - 1914**







## Elia's Przemyśl c. 1914





## Afterword

If it is axiomatic that you only experience your grandparents in their senior years, then how can you know who and what they were in their youth? For those with great family continuity, taking stock of them in their early years is comparatively easy – just look at your parents or your own early life and extrapolate back in time. But what could I do? My grandparents were immigrants from a place with strange traditions, different languages, and an opaque history. Comparisons rang hollow and my experience was worthless because there just wasn't anything analogous between my youth in Vietnam-era America and Belle Epoch Imperial Austrian Galicia where they spent their formative years.

Luckily, a few months before my grandmother died, I flew down to Miami to spend the weekend with my Bubbie Fannie before heading to the beach with my college friends. Over the course of two late nights she told me her life story - not the familiar, middle-aged one that I knew by heart that started with my mother's birth, but another one. It was a story about her when she was *my* age.

It was a story of war, of siege, of cannons and marauding Cossacks. It was set in some unpronounceable town in a nation that no longer exists in a time before radios and airlines. A beautiful place with rivers, castles, forts, forests and parks; a place where people stayed up late, drinking and smoking in cafés and beer halls or taking in theater and cinema. There was joy and love, but there was also hardship, heartbreak, and death; the highs seemed higher, the lows, definitely lower. This wasn't the gray, drab shtetl I'd imagined; it was dangerous, dynamic, edgy, and dare I say, *fun*. To my utter astonishment, Grandma and Grandpa were, once upon a time, *cool*.

"11th of Av" is a work of fiction. Nonetheless, the inspiration

for much of the plot and many of the personalities are drawn from the memory of that weekend some thirty years ago.

Elia and Rivka were inspired by my mother's parents, Emanuel Silberman and Fannie Metzger. Both grew up in Przemyśl and were there for the Great War and the siege. Emanuel (or Manny as I knew him) really did work in a furniture factory and was a dedicated socialist, at least until the Nazi-Soviet pact of 1939. He served in the Polish Army and saw action at Caporetto on the Austrian side of the Italian front where he contracted malaria. To the best of my knowledge, Fannie never killed anything other than the occasional piece of *flanken*.

Fannie immigrated to the Lower East Side of New York in 1925. Manny was detained at Ellis Island as an "anarchist," denied entry into America, and deported to Havana where he worked as a waiter and joined a "cell" that included Fulgencio Batista. He made at least one attempt to sneak into America as a stowaway, spending four months in jail at Ellis Island in 1928 before again being deported. Family lore has it that Fannie bribed an immigration clerk into allowing Manny to enter the U.S. in 1931. A garment union organizer for the International Worker's Order after immigrating to America, and a pressman back when the presses were made of asbestos, Manny was also a life-long smoker of unfiltered Chesterfields. He died of lung cancer way too young.

Teddy and Rosa are Theodore Bowie and Rosa Muriechowski Bowie, my wife's father and grandmother. She was from Odessa and really did marry a U.S. Naval doctor in Japan. If you happen to be in Nagasaki, you can visit Dr. Robert Bowie's grave in the Sakamoto Foreigner's Cemetery. Theodore Bowie grew up in Nice, France and was, if anything, smarter, wittier and even more cultured in real life than I was able to portray in this story.

Isidore Besser, the baker, is the name of my father's

grandfather. In real life his daughter Rose married Morris Semmel, my grandfather. Rose and Morris were the owner-proprietors of the Ansonia Bakery in Brooklyn from the mid-'20s through the depression. I believe that they made *semmel* rolls.

Most of the other characters stem from very small slivers of family lore. An aunt mentioning a second cousin who “left her husband and came to America because he was a drunk,” was the inspiration for Jette. My great-great grandmother Blima Malz was a well-known Przemysl midwife. She morphed into Gitla.

In the twenty-plus years since the last of my grandparents passed away, I’ve come to see that not only were they “cool,” they were also driven, courageous, loving people replete with all the warts and flaws we all share as human beings. Were they Elia and Rivka? No, they were real people with infinitely complex, interwoven lives that we can only minimally access and crudely recreate.

They were not Elia and Rivka, but they could have been.

## Acknowledgments

There are so many people I'd like to thank for helping me to finally bring this novel to print. Forgive me if I've forgotten someone: my parents Dorothy and Melvyn Semmel, my sister Lisa Sharp, aunt and family matriarch Evelyn Blustein, dear friends Mark and Marcie Achler, Lee Rosenberg, and Alanna Clare, readers Randall Marks and Roma Baran, editors Rebecca Peters-Golden and Kathleen Connors, map maker Martin Bordovsky Horne, graphic artist Lesa Petersen, design and technology whiz Robert Wadholm, Jewish Przemyśl experts Dr. John Hartman and Lukasz Biedka, and Yiddish maven Professor Jeffrey Veidlinger.

Several sources were used in researching this novel. First and foremost, there is the Przemyśl Memorial Book, Sefer Przemyśl, published in Israel by Irgun Yotzei Przemyśl, 1964 in Hebrew and Yiddish, translations from the JewishGen Yizkor Book Project website at: <http://www.jewishgen.org/yizkor/przemyśl/przemyśl.html> I'd also like to thank the Austro-Hungarian Land Forces 1848-1918 website at <http://www.austro-hungarian-army.co.uk/index.htm> for an excellent history lesson.

Finally, there is my muse, my uber-editor, and the love of my life, my wife, Jocelyn Bowie. Exacting, demanding, yet unwaveringly supportive, Jocelyn talked me through each plot turn and re-united all my infinitives while keeping me focused on the character's motivation, personality, and soul. Without her, this novel would just be a pile of words. Thank you, sweetheart.

## Historical Characters

*Béla Guttmann*: Hungarian-Jewish football star and coach

*Vladimir Medem*: Russian Bund leader

*Jozef Pilsudski*: Polish Nationalist Leader

*Generalmajor Unschild von Melasfeld*: Commander 47<sup>th</sup>  
Infantry Brigade

*Hermann Kusmanek von Burgneustätten*: Austrian  
Commander of Przemyśl

*Field-Marshal-Lt. von Tamassy*: Hungarian second in  
command, Przemyśl

*General Artamonoff*: Russian Commander of Przemyśl,  
1915

*Ruben Fulgencio Batista Zaldívar*: Cuban dictator 1930s-50s

## Notes

- 1 Excerpts from Bund and Zionism A. Merezhin, July, 1918
- 2 Quote of Archduke Franz Ferdinand
- 3 In 1914 Colonel Unschild was in command of the 71st regiment.
- 4 German: *Kaiserlich und königlich*. Imperial and Royal. Refers to the Dual Monarchy of Austria-Hungary.
- 5 Kusmanek speech quoted from The Great War part 48, July 17, 1915 Edited by H. Wilson.
- 6 From The War of the Nations Edgar Wallace, CHAPTER LXII
- 7 From the Communist Manifesto K. Marx and F. Engels.
- 8 New York Times article, "Przemysl and its defenders" March 25, 1915. Un-attributed quote.



David R. Semmel has been a software entrepreneur, a hedge fund manager, and a venture capitalist. This novel, his first, was inspired by stories his grandmother Fannie told him about growing up in Galicia during the Great War.

All of the net proceeds from the sale of this novel will be donated to charities involved in the restoration and upkeep of Jewish sites in Przemyśl, Poland.

# 11<sup>th</sup> of Av

is a story of love, death and dreams set in 1914 in the often-besieged Galician town of Przemyśl, a fortress on the socially dynamic, multicultural frontier of Austria-Hungary. It is the story of a tough, passionate, and optimistic generation – the flowering of eight centuries of Jewish life in Eastern Europe – who believed, despite overwhelming odds, that they could build a better world.

It is also the story of the beginning of the end of Eastern Jewry. When an orgy of war topples Franz Josef's Austro-Hungarian Empire, his Jewish subjects find themselves scattered and stateless, and compelled to carve out new lives in an unfamiliar and increasingly dangerous world.

