



# A Journey in Two Worlds

Dedicated to the memory of my father,  
Milton Maidenberg, who always wanted  
to make this trip.

[Revised October, 2012]

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Many thanks to my son Daniel and to my wife Kitty, who helped in so many ways to put this journal together.

## Introduction

My trip to Ukraine and Moldova was a journey in two worlds: the largely vanished civilization of European Jewry, from which our family sprang, and the contemporary social and political scene in two states that once were welded into the monolith of the Soviet Union.

The two worlds occupy the same geography and speak to each other. The ghosts of the destroyed Jewish world are still visible, making their presence felt, always asking the question of what might have been.

It is more than half a century since the end of World War II, the paroxysm that killed so many millions in the states where the Pale of Settlement once existed. It is almost a full century (90 years, to be exact) since Grandfather David emigrated to America. The passage of so much time has seen the physical record erode, the memories fade.

The American descendants of Solomon Maidenberg possess far more information about their origins and family history than most families. Two of the seven children of Solomon and Pearl emigrated to America: David and Esther. David's son Milton, my father, and Esther's daughter, Sylvia Greenberg, helped maintain a remarkable 40-year correspondence, first with Joseph, brother of David and Esther, then with Joseph's son, Amnon Maidenberg of Kishinev, Moldova. Dad and Aunt Sylvia also corresponded with Manya, Solomon's youngest daughter.

For his part, Amnon Maidenberg was the indispensable link to the vanished world. A brilliant and articulate man who speaks 10 languages, Amnon Josefovich had a sure grasp of the Maidenberg family's history, which he conveyed in beautiful letters and precious photographs.

Yet it is clear that the American branch of our family, making its way in a new world, followed the typical pattern. The emigrants themselves wanted to forget the Old Country. Their children didn't press their living parents for memories. It is the grandchildren who begin the search for the past, only to learn how much knowledge has passed away.

I am one of those grandchildren fortunate enough to make this search on the actual ground where our family once walked. I had the opportunity to glimpse the world

that was, to walk its cobblestone streets, enter its aging buildings, see its overgrown cemeteries. I was able to speak with Amnon, his sister Ida, and with the daughter and granddaughter of Elkeh, another of the five children of Solomon who did not emigrate.

I wrote in my journal every day, hoping to keep a full record of what I saw, experienced and felt. I wanted everyone who read it to be able to take, in his or her own way, the same trip I took. The journal is augmented by hundreds of photographs and hours of videotape. Its perspective would not have been possible but for the illumination provided by the scores of letters to which so many of our family, living and dead, contributed.

Michael Maidenberg  
Grand Forks, North Dakota  
August, 1996

**The next pages contain genealogical reports and maps related to the journal.**

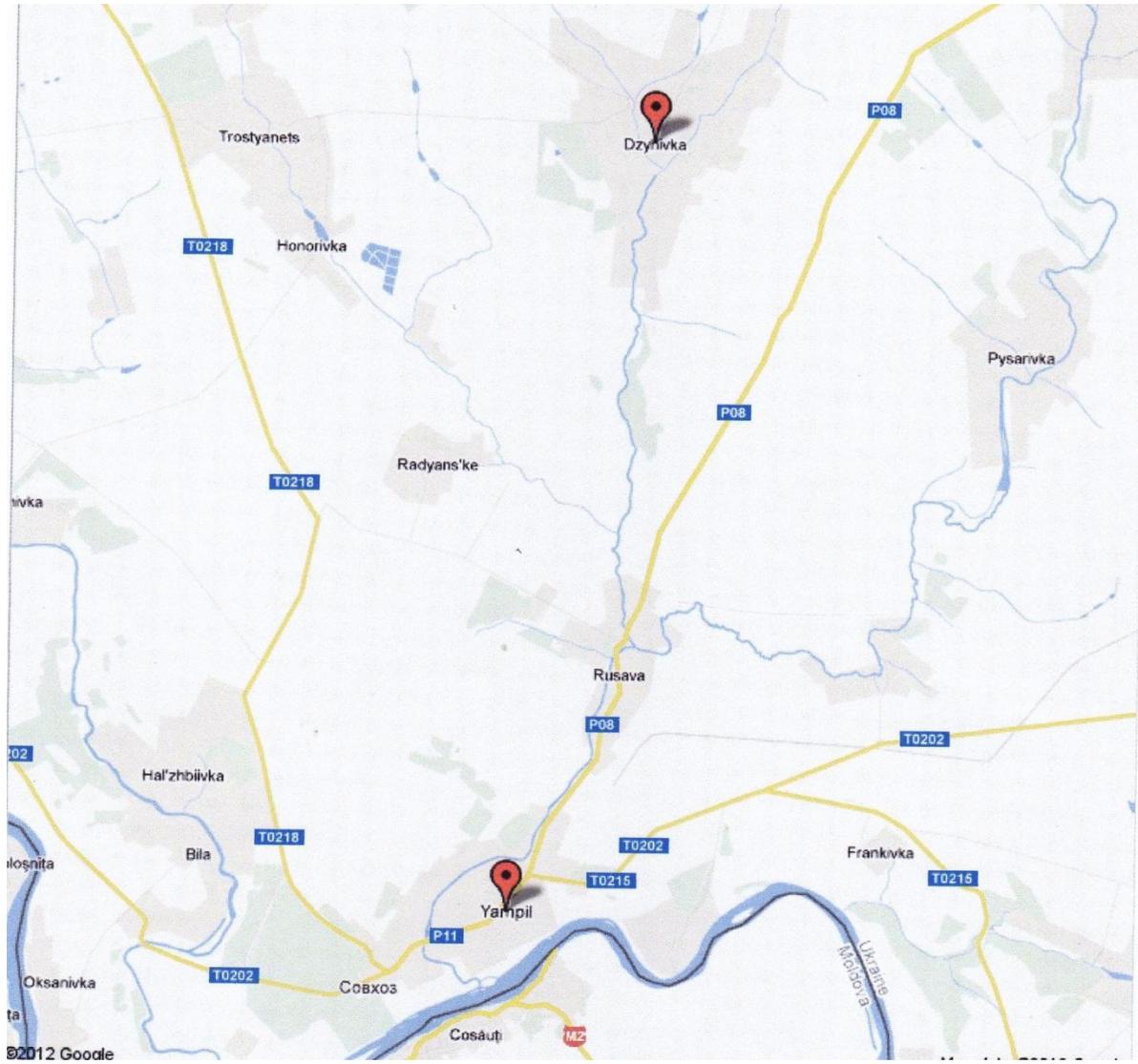
**Descendant Report for Solomon bar Meir Isaac Maidenberg showing the seven children of Solomon and Perel. Of the seven, only David, my grandfather, and his sister Esther came to America.**

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- 1 Solomon bar Meir Isaac Maidenberg b: 1860 in The Pale of Settlement, possibly Podolia Gubernia, then Russia now Ukraine, d: 25 Dec 1939 in Dzygovka [Rus] Dzygivka [Ukr], Podolia Gubernia, Ukraine
- ... + Pearl-Deborah Rizher b: Abt. 1865 in The Pale of Settlement, possibly Podolia Gubernia, then Russia now Ukraine, d: 23 Dec 1939 in Beltsy, Moldova
- .....2 **Malkeh** Maidenberg b: Bef. 1881 in Dzygovka, Ukraine, d: 1941 in Yampol, Ukraine
- ..... + Eliyahu (Elly) Balaban b: Abt. 1880 in \_\_\_\_\_, m: Aft. 1908, d: 12 Dec 1941 in Lodizhin (concentration camp in Ukraine)
- .....2 **Goldeh** Maidenberg b: Bef. 1883 in Dzygovka, Ukraine, d: 1918 in Odessa, Ukraine (probably)
- ..... + Name unknown m: \_\_\_\_\_
- .....2 **David** Maidenberg b: 15 Oct 1884 in Dzygovka, Ukraine, d: 25 Jul 1949 in Marion, Indiana
- ..... + Rosa (Rukhel) Vinokur b: 05 Apr 1885 in Rashkov, Moldova, m: Mar 1906 in Odessa, Ukraine, d: 18 Mar 1969 in Marion, Indiana
- .....2 **Joseph** Maidenberg b: 05 Mar 1885 in Dzygovka, Ukraine, d: 30 Jan 1971 in Kishinev, Moldova
- ..... + Sarah Blecher b: 1885 in Beltsy, Moldova, m: 1907 in Beltsy, Moldova, d: 28 Mar 1963 in Kishinev, Moldova
- ..... + Hannah Marmor m: Kishinev, Moldova, d: 1989 in \_\_\_\_\_
- .....2 **Elkeh** (Olya) Maidenberg b: Sep 1892 in Dzygovka, Ukraine, d: 27 Mar 1973 in Chernigov, Ukraine
- ..... + Melech Perelroisen b: 1892 in Klimbovka, Ukraine, m: 1919 in Dzygovka [Rus] Dzygivka [Ukr], Podolia Gubernia, Ukraine, d: 18 Dec 1948 in Chernigov, Ukraine
- .....2 **Esther** Maidenberg b: 1896 in Dzygovka, Ukraine, d: 28 Feb 1976 in Chicago
- ..... + Moishe (Morris) Perelroisen (Rosen) b: Abt. 1890 in Dzygovka, Ukraine, m: Abt. 1921 in Probably Dzygovka, d: 11 Oct 1974 in Chicago
- .....2 **Malieh** (Manya) Maidenberg b: 16 Jun 1902 in Dzygovka, Ukraine, d: 25 May 1981 in Odessa, Ukraine
- ..... + Solomon Rosenberg b: 30 Aug 1905 in Dubossary, Moldova, m: 1928 in Dzygovka, Ukraine (probably), d: 08 Aug 1995 in Odessa, Ukraine

Key places cited in the journal, general view. See detail next page.





## A Journey in Two Worlds

Wednesday, May 15, 1996, Gatwick Airport, London

I look up at the monitor for the posting of Ukraine International Airways flight 702, which today will take me to Kiev and into the history of our family.

The Maidenberg family's origin is a small village called Dzygovka, located in Ukraine just a few miles east of Moldova, near the region known as Bessarabia. In the saga of our family (as in so many Jewish families) lies a recapitulation of modern western history. We are directly marked by the extermination of European Jewry, the war against Hitler and the Nazis, the emergence of America as the great global power, the birth of Zionism, the fall of the Czar and the rise of Communism.

It is 11:38 a.m. I have just said good-bye to Kitty, who is returning to Grand Forks after our four days here visiting Ted. The monitor now says Gate 23. The journey is beginning.

When I step foot in Dzygovka, Ukraine, and when I grasp the hand of Amnon Maidenberg in Kishinev, Moldova, I will be closing the circle of history wrenched apart 100 years ago.

### Aboard the flight

1:05 p.m. The flight has just taken off. The airplane is a Boeing 737, well outfitted. Seats are six across. I am at a window seat. The middle is vacant. On the aisle is an Englishman carrying a battered leather briefcase. In front of me is a young Ukrainian woman who places a dozen red roses in the middle seat.

The English countryside passes below us. Irregular fields, very green, with some bright yellow patches (mustard?) dotting the horizon. There is a light covering of clouds.

I recall that Grandfather David's application for citizenship said that he and Rose departed for the U.S. from England. The year was 1906. Now I retrace the trip eastward. It probably took them 30 days to get from Ukraine to England. I will make my trip in 3 hours.

1:25 p.m. We have crossed the Channel and are over the continent. Thick clouds now obscure the land.

Flying over the cloud bank is appropriate. It matches the sense of tumbling backward through memory to a time only hazily discerned.

The airline meal is served. It seems to be nondescript international fare. There is a salad of chopped peppers and tomatoes, a dish of minced beef on top of which is a crust of mashed potatoes. There is a small piece of cheese, and a small chocolate cake.

Three rows in front of me, two beefy men in suits are seated across the aisle from each other. They are passing a fifth of vodka

3:10 p.m. The pilot comes on the intercom to say we are flying over Poland and that in 10 minutes we will be over Ukraine. The cloud cover has lifted. I realize that the ground I see below me is the Pale of Settlement,

the area of Eastern Europe where the Czars permitted Jews to live and work for most of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century.

I see dark green forests and lighter green fields. Villages and roads are strung out, looking remote and peaceful. As always, the view of a landscape from the air looks tranquil. There are no borders marked, no delineation of peoples or religions or political ideologies.

It is only when one descends, coming closer and closer to man, that the centuries-old bloody history of this part of the earth comes into focus.

I set my watch ahead by two hours. It is now 6:06 p.m. Kiev time. We are over the city. The wide Dnieper River is on the eastern horizon. The city's buildings are dominated by huge concrete blocks shining white in the setting sun. They remind me of the elementary building blocks of childhood, rectangular and simple.

Off to the north, the familiar architecture of a nuclear power plant with cooling towers. They remind me that Chernobyl is not far from Kiev.

### Arrival in Kiev

We land at 6:14 p.m. As we get off, I am surprised (and relieved) to see a pretty young girl holding up a sign which read, "Maidenberg, Mikel." She is Larissa, of the "VIP Service" which for a fee helps visitors get through customs and immigration.

I learn later that another of Miriam Weiner's customers had some problems at the Kiev airport, forcing them to hang around in the heat for three or four hours. So Miriam, a pioneer in Jewish genealogical travel who arranged my trip, had Vitaly Chumak, my guide-translator, get me the VIP.

With Larissa is a thin, red-haired kid named Oleg who carries the bags and makes himself handy. While waiting for the luggage carousel to turn on, Oleg climbs through the opening. He has my luggage claim checks with him. Evidently, had he been able to spot my bags, he would have grabbed them ahead of everyone else's.

Larissa sweeps me to the front of the passport line, very much in the fashion of party bigwigs in days gone by, I think. No one blinks an eye as I go through.



Borispol Airport, Kiev, May 15, 1996

We have no problem with customs, although the authorities make me open one bag which carries several bottles of aspirin, which I plan to take to the health clinic in Dzygovka.

Once into the terminal I find Vitaly. We load my bags into his Russian-made Fiat. (The Lumina van is being repaired. It needed a new alternator which was flown in from the U.S. via Germany a few hours earlier.) Then we head down an empty, six-lane highway into Kiev, 12 miles to the west.

The city seems large and spread out, but with oddly little automobile traffic. Buses and trams are crowded with people. It looks as if business has shut down by 7 p.m.

Vitaly points out a few monuments, but for the most part we talk about our next 10 days together. We decide to leave Kiev early tomorrow to get to Dzygovka. Vitaly tells me that in an earlier visit he discovered the grave of Solomon Maidenberg in the huge and overgrown Jewish cemetery there. This is an exciting piece of news.

We check into the Kievskaya Rus, a former Intourist hotel situated high up on a hill. The Rus' accommodations are on the level of a Days Inn. The prices are strictly Waldorf (\$200 a night).

I have a room with two single beds, each under a hideous brown bedspread. The phone is a red dial phone. There is a room refrigerator, a nice touch. The shower and toilet look fine. There are some "Western" touches: shampoo, soap in a nice plastic container, terry cloth slippers. There is no air conditioning. I open large casement windows to bring in a breeze.

Vitaly and I have dinner in the deserted hotel restaurant. I order chicken. Sorry, not available tonight, the waiter says. He recommends steak with lemon, which turns out to be a kind of cube steak with lemon slices on the side. There are excellent fresh rolls. I drank a Dab, a German beer. Vitaly pays for the meal with local currency, the "Kupon" (coupon). Cost: about \$65.

Vitaly asks the hotel to make a breakfast for us, since we will be leaving at 6:00 a.m., before the restaurant opens. They do this on the spot. We are given two large packages wrapped in heavy paper.

Vitaly is a trim man of 46, pleasant, whose English is decent if not fluent. He is well informed and eager to please. He's handy with tools, has a good sense of humor and keeps a watchful eye over his American customers. Although he is not Jewish, he has become quite knowledgeable about Jewish history and tradition. He lives in Otaci, Moldova, which is just across the Dniester from the Ukrainian city of Mogilev-Podolsky. He was once mayor of Otaci. The Bronfman family (founders of the Seagram Corporation) has its origins in Otaci. Vitaly has worked with them.

I make contact with Eric Rubin, political officer at the U.S. Embassy. We plan to have dinner when I return to Kiev in a week. Eric points out that when you are at a hotel in the former Soviet Union, you must search a chart for the exact telephone number to your room. There is no hotel switchboard. (Was it designed this way because it was easier to tap? Or just an outcome of central planning?) I find the chart, which is a complicated table of numbers.

Before going to sleep, I cruise the channels. There are 37 available, including a French version of MTV; CNN; German, Polish, Italian and British television; the NBC "superchannel"; TNT; Eurosport; Russian and Ukrainian channels.

Thursday, May 16, Kiev to Dzygovka

8:00 a.m. We are at a dusty roadside café outside Zhitomir, 75 miles west of Kiev. The café's name is "Café Food from Home," Vitaly translates. It is one of the new private ventures now allowed by the state. It consists of three plastic tables and chairs, a trailer, and a wood-fired grill for shashlik. It's a beautiful, sunny day. We are making good time.

We got an early start, 6 a.m. The streets are mostly deserted. The part of Kiev we traverse has a tired, run-down look, very drab and plain. I see some nice parks (I would later see that Kiev's extensive parks are the glory of the city), a zoo, and the huge polytechnic institute, the place where those legions of engineers are trained.

We are stopped for speeding. Vitaly says he was doing 85 km in an 80 zone. The cop who pulls us over is young, rail-thin, unkempt, with a cigarette dangling from his lip. The ticket costs about 80 cents. "Bubkes," laughs Vitaly, using one of his favorite Yiddish words.

The road to Zhitomir was four-lane, in pretty good shape. The speed limit for most of the way is 70 km per hour. Vitaly has an American-made radar detector.

We are stopped again by the Ukraine *miliziani* or uniformed state police, this time for "control" purposes. I would learn that this type of police stop is very common. The police would check vehicle papers, passports, identity cards. They would look us over, ask a few questions, generally snoop around. They had the power to search the vehicle, although this never happened to us. Most drivers seem to regard them as a necessary part of the landscape.

The highway goes through many villages. I see an occasional horse and wagon, scenes straight out of the 19<sup>th</sup> century or earlier.

The traffic is very light, reminding me of North Dakota. The landscape, on the other hand, reminds me of Indiana: flat, with gentle, rolling hills, tree lines here and there breaking the vista. I don't see a lot of work being done in the extensive fields, which look to be mostly wheat. This is the breadbasket region of Ukraine, which was once a major world exporter of grain through the Black Sea port of Odessa. The grain trade was dominated by great Jewish trading houses which are still in existence, only relocated to New York and Paris.

We drive through Zhitomir, Berdichev, Nemirov, Bratslav, Tulchin on the way to Dzygovka. It's like going through a checklist of great Jewish sites, yeshivas, centers of learning. I remember reading at our last Seder a Hasidic tale told by Rabbi Levi Yitzhak of Berdichev.

There is now little outward sign of the vital Jewish life that once existed. Many cities were 30, 40, 50 percent Jewish or more. For example, Soroki, a town of about 31,000 twelve miles west of Dzygovka, was 57 percent Jewish in 1897 (this town also has records of Maidenbergs living there, possibly related to us).

Vitaly says Berdichev has an American rabbi, Hasidic but not Lubavitch. We drive by the single synagogue there, also past an enormous Jewish cemetery. Zhitomir has a rabbi from Israel, and also maintains a religious school.

There are no monuments or memorials to the Jews who once lived in this area, Vitaly says. In the Soviet ideology, there were no ethnic groups, only "Soviet people." I remark to Vitaly about entrenched anti-Semitism in Poland.

"Ukrainian anti-Semitism one-half Polish people," he replies.

Both Zhitomir and Berdichev have a worn, drab look. The buses are packed with people. Along the streets are tumble-down kiosks, the first attempts at private enterprise. I notice one man carrying a newspaper. People are dressed in worn, cheaply-made clothing.

We stop at a "gas station", three or four crude pumps set in a dirt lot just off the highway. There is no unleaded. Half a dozen men lounge around, chatting and smoking.

As we proceed along the highway, I notice cows and goats tethered to nearby trees, munching the lush grass. I realize the highway feels so different from America because of what I don't see: billboards, road signs, the marks of a consumer economy. Trees are planted far closer to the road than in the U.S., giving the sensation of driving along a "country road."

Vitaly remarks on the widespread unemployment and underemployment. Factories pay workers in product rather than wages. Business taxes are set so high they are essentially confiscation. Much of the economy has reverted to a barter level. A fair number of entrepreneurs make a living by going to Poland, Rumania, even Moldova, to buy goods for resale back in the Ukraine.

We stop to buy bananas (imported) at a cluster of roadside shacks outside a *kolkhoz*, or collective farm. Heavily-set women in light house dresses are selling potatoes and apples out of buckets. Most of the produce comes from the peasants' private plots, although some is probably "shrinkage". The name of this *kolkhoz* is "Red Partisan."

We are nearing Dzygovka. I think how Solomon and his son David would have seen many of the same sights I now behold: horse-drawn wagons led by old men and women, a boy tethering a cow, apple trees blossoming.

Beyond the trees enfolding the road I see a landscape that looks remarkably like that of northern Indiana. I wonder if this is one reason why David settled where he did.

12:30 p.m. We turn off the highway to take the road to Dzygovka. There is a big army base just outside the town. Vitaly takes my picture by the town sign.



A Maidenberg returns to Dzygovka (Dzyhivka in Ukrainian)

The village is divided by a small river, the Korytna. The further side, where the town center is located, was where most of Jews lived.

As we slowly drive in, I see Dzygovka as poor and ramshackle in appearance, yet set off by glorious flowering chestnut trees and lilac bushes. We turn down a rough cobblestone street, which surely was walked by my grandfather. "These were Jewish houses on the left," Vitaly says, pointing to a row of small, battered dwellings.

We reach "city hall," where I am to greet the mayor. He is not there, we are informed. He has gone home for lunch. The ancient dial phone does not work. Vitaly drives off to find him, while I look around and jot in my journal.

I study the map of Dzygovka which I have brought along. It was prepared when Miriam Weiner was here in 1992. It shows the location of Solomon Maidenberg's home, the synagogue, the cemetery.



The location of Solomon's tobacco store and home. The building is new.

I hear roosters crowing, children laughing, a train hooting in the distance, sounds calling forth feelings of sentiment, sadness and a little dread.

Across the cobblestone street is a house with a grape arbor. I recall Grandma Rose's arbor behind the house on Third Street in Marion. The vine is still there.

City Hall is a two-story brick building, set on a concrete foundation that raises it high up one side of the narrow street. The foyer is devoid of any furniture except a desk and two chairs.

When the mayor cannot be located, we go to the cemetery. Vitaly had spent a whole day here before my arrival. After a long search he found the grave site of Solomon Maidenberg. Vitaly was able to identify it because the name is written in Russian as well as Hebrew (which Vitaly cannot read).

The cemetery extends over a large area. There is a new section, neatly maintained, but most of the older part is overgrown with grass, weeds, bushes. Some of the headstones have fallen. We have to tear out some weeds to get a clear look at Solomon's grave. The date of death is December 25, 1939. We can find no other Maidenbergs buried nearby. (Solomon's wife Pearl is buried in Beltsy, Moldova, where she had gone in 1940 to live with her son Joseph.)

The headstone gives the name of Solomon's father: Meyer. Now we know that the eldest of David's four sons was named for his grandfather.



The tombstone of Solomon Maidenberg in the overgrown cemetery.



In Hebrew: Solomon bar Meir Isaac

In Russian: Maidenberg Shloma

1939



There are only 10 Jews left in Dzygovka, all aged and infirm. We spend time with two of them. They recall the thriving Jewish life that once existed here, the six synagogues, the busy shops off the central square, an area now a concrete desert holding a statue of Lenin.

One of the Jews is a former soldier who regales us with stories of life in the Red Army. He swears he remembers the Maidenberg family, but he can give no details.

The other is the oldest Jewish resident of the town, a man named Feldman, who is 92 and lives with his addled daughter in the "nursing home," a horrific place for those who have nowhere else to go before they die. Feldman is blind. He too says he remembers the Maidenberg family, but he too can recall no details.

Feldman says the Maidenberg family was considered wealthy. Its house and shop was near the square, a prime business location. Later, walking through the village, I stop at the site marked on the map. There is a shuttered building where the residence and tobacco store stood.

Aside from the statue of Lenin, the square now houses a *Univermag* or general store. The store is closed. Across the square is a Soviet-era "cultural center", and a large monument to those killed in World War II, and a school.

Today Dzygovka seems dead-tired, drained of vitality.



Mike with head of collective farm, center, and mayor

We meet with the mayor and the head of the collective farm. The mayor is Vladimir Vassilivich Ordatii. The head of the kolkhoz is Alexander Ivanovich Kushna. The mayor is in his mid-thirties. He is a sturdy, open-faced man who is mildly puzzled to be visited by an American in search of distant history. He is pleasant and cooperative, but covers his bases by making sure Kushna comes by, along with the town policeman.

Kushna is a little older than the mayor. He is cagey, talkative, swaggers a bit, and drives a big old Russian-made Volga, a sort of Your Commissar's Oldsmobile.

The mayor has not been paid for fourth months. His salary comes from the collective farm, the main economic engine of the town.

Kushna is contemptuous of the new economic order. He is supposed to return the kolkhoz to private ownership, but he has no idea how he is to do this. There are 1,200 employees of the farm, and it supports another 1,200 pensioners. How is it possible to divide the land and assets among all these claimants, he asks rhetorically.

It is clear he has no incentive to do so. As head of the farm, he has wealth, power and prestige.

We talk for some time about the Jews of Dzygovka, who once were likely half the population. Neither the mayor nor the chief of the kolkhoz evidences any anti-Semitic attitude. But neither do they say anything about the horror in which Jewish life was destroyed. They were once here, and now they are gone. The question of how and why they disappeared hangs in the air, unanswered.

"Why don't they care more?" I later ask Vitaly.

"What do they know? They are too young," he answers.

He mentions extenuating circumstances. There was the oppressive power of the Soviet state, with its rewriting of all history. The Communists were hostile to all religions. (The main synagogue in Dzygovka was destroyed not by the Nazis but by Stalin in the 1930's.) World War II decimated the entire population, numbing sensitivity to any single group.

As we prepare to leave Dzygovka, we are invited to share in the town's hospitality. The mayor, the head of the kolkhoz and a visiting bigwig from Odessa, whose mother lives in Dzygovka, invite the "Americanski" to the "forest" for a banquet.



The "picnic in the forest" in honor of the American. Good food. Lots of vodka .



There were many toasts, a few too many for the Americanski.

This turns out to be one of those "Russian" experiences I had been warned would take place, and so it did. The "forest" is a muddy road that runs through a clump of trees. Kushna takes a dirty blanket out of his car, spreads it over the hood, and lays out a spread. It includes a round loaf of crusty bread made in Dzygovka, roast chicken, fatty sausage also produced at the kolkhoz, radishes, pickled vegetables, whole eggs, and a can of unspeakable white fish. Three bottles of vodka appear, along with champagne and cognac.

I try to eat bread as fast as I can, hoping to delay the effect of the vodka, which in Russian tradition I must take in one gulp.

"Only a poor person drinks in three swallows," my hosts shout.

I down the first one, with a round of toasts to one and all. My glass is immediately refilled. I eat more bread, nibble the chicken, and try to lessen the vodka load by "discreetly" pouring some on the ground. But I am caught out, and have to drink a special toast to family and friends who have departed the earth, because this is who I honored when I poured my vodka on the ground.

The vodka is warm and powerful. My hosts fill up shot glasses and kitchen glasses and start chugging away. They are in much better training than I for this kind of exercise, and go at it with relish, getting looser and friendlier by the glass.

The vodka reminds me of the cheap gin Orwell wrote about in *Orwell's 1984*---manufactured to keep the masses besotted and quiet. The bigwig from Odessa, who has the same build and peasant shrewdness as Khrushchev, supplies much of the drink. He drives, or rather is driven about in, a fairly new Ford Explorer, dark blue, modified with large chrome-mounted fog lights which give the vehicle an appearance of snarling aggression. His Odessa-based collective farm, named "Avangard", controls huge acreage and produces many items besides vodka. I cannot imagine him looking forward to privatization.

With mosquitoes emerging and the evening approaching, Vitaly and I are able to excuse ourselves from the merriment. We return to the highway and

head nine miles west to Yampol, a border town on the Dniester River, across from which is Soroki, in Moldova.

Seeing Yampol causes a chill to rise. It was there that Malkeh, the eldest of Solomon's seven children, was murdered by German soldiers. When the war began in 1941, she fled from Yampol, her home, to Dzygovka, which was more remote. But after a year she decided to walk to Yampol to see what had become of her house. She was caught and clubbed to death.

We head north along the Dniester to the town of Mogilev-Podolsky. This is the town where Miriam Weiner has set up operations. It is in Ukraine, but conveniently across the river-border from Otaci. Miriam had to move a bureaucratic mountain or two to obtain the right to own a three-room apartment in Mogilev. It was there I was to spend the night.

The streets of the Mogilev are in an advanced state of deterioration. The pavement is cracked to the bare earth, huge ruts and potholes threaten to swallow the little Fiat we are driving. Vitaly carefully pokes along at 10 miles per hour. There is no money to fix the streets, he explains, no money for any public work.

Miriam's flat turns out to be a perfect place of refuge. Vitaly offers to turn on the intricate and dangerous-looking hot water system. I decline, thinking I'll shower tomorrow in the hotel in Kishinev. Vitaly's wife has brought blinis and cutlets, enough to feed three. Vitaly leaves to spend the night with his wife. I nibble a few of the blinis, drink my bottled water and finish the last of the chocolate I have brought with me from London.

All in all, it has been a great first day. I sleep well.

Friday, May 17, Mogilev-Podolsky, Ukraine, to Kishinev, Moldova

Vitaly knocks on the door promptly at 7:30. I come down with my bag to a pleasant sight: the Lumina van, roomy and air conditioned, is parked outside, its new alternator humming away. My driver and companion for the next nine days, Slava Rymar, is ready to depart.

Slava is 43, a short, barrel-chested man with four gleaming gold teeth. He has worked for Vitaly for many years, beginning when Vitaly was mayor of Otaci, and continuing now that Vitaly has become a genealogical guide.

They are related: Slava's grandmother and Vitaly's grandfather were brother and sister. Slava has a wife and one son.

I will come to see Slava's careful, taciturn personality expressed in his driving. He is very careful to observe the speed limit and all other rules of the road. He has the unusual habit of pulling his seatbelt across his body, but placing the snap end under his right leg instead of putting into the buckle.

Mogilev is on the Ukraine side of the Dniester, across from Otaci. Every bridge built during the time of the Soviet Union is now a border between two new states.

We get to our crossing at 7:45 a.m. It is the East European border of my imagination. A steel pole mounted between two posts marks the boundary. Impassive guards in ill-fitting uniforms stand around, casually looking over the traffic, human and vehicular. They know they have the power to make life miserable. The half-mile bridge is lined bumper to bumper with tanker trucks headed into Ukraine from Rumanian oil fields. The road surface is pitted and stained. At each end of the bridge are flimsy buildings which function as

border posts. Vitaly ducks in, carrying my passport and visa. All goes smoothly. Later he tells me that when he was mayor of Otaci, he hired many of the men who now are the border officials.

We cross the border bridge and drive the streets of Otaci, which are as bad as Mogilev's, to Vitaly's pleasant, roomy two-story house, which he privately built. His wife Ludmilla has made a heart-stopping breakfast of blinis, cutlets, sausage, mashed potatoes, toast and jam. She is a bookkeeper at the dairy across the street from their home. Vitaly's son has a private business, a bakery; Vitaly's daughter works there as well.

Vitaly's early education was as an agricultural engineer, specializing in dairy. He spent many years getting up at 4 a.m., he says. Then he was promoted into construction, where he gained more experience (and influence). He was obviously both a hard worker and a shrewd operator. He was elected mayor of Otaci a few years before independence in 1991.

Over and over again, Vitaly remarks on "The System" that was Communism. "I know this system," he says with finality. A story shows Vitaly's understanding of how things worked, and his resourcefulness.

When he was mayor, he got a call from the director of the regional newspaper. Newsprint is unavailable, and we cannot publish. Can the mayor do something? Vitaly said he would make a few calls. The first went not to the newsprint company, but to the director of the company which made vodka. The paper got its newsprint soon thereafter.

Vitaly talks bitterly of corruption in the Moldovan government. He is cynical about how much "The System" has actually changed.

After disappointing Ludmilla by eating too little, we depart. Our first stop is the main bazaar in Otaci. Slava pulls up in the Lumina, yells out to a group of three or four guys in their early twenties. They carry plastic bags full of different currencies, and quote today's exchange rates. Walking ATM's, I think. Vitaly changes dollars into Moldovan lei. There are roughly four lei to a dollar.

We drive south toward Kishinev, over rough roads that cause us to slow to a crawl in places. There is the same empty feeling: no billboards, no money, no vitality. Yet I see some decent-sized homes under construction, some with attached garages. These are privately built, Vitaly says. Perhaps the beginning of a middle class. The homes are constructed of a soft white limestone that is quarried locally.

The Moldovan landscape is hilly, reminiscent of Pennsylvania or Virginia. It looks fertile. There are many fruit trees. The rains have been good this year, the grass along the road is lush and green.

In Moldova, the road signs are in the Roman alphabet, with Cyrillic underneath. I am cheered to be able to read again, but know how divisive language rules can be.

The police are as thick as in the Ukraine. In Moldova they are the *Politia Rutiera*, the Highway Patrol.

About 15 miles from Kishinev we begin to see grapevines. Moldova produces sweet red and white wines. We are not far from Beltsy, the city where Joseph lived, where he tended his beloved vineyard until driven out by German bombardment at the beginning of the war.

(In the interwar years, Moldova was a province of Rumania. The Dniester was the border between then fascist Rumania and Communist Ukraine, which in the 1930's had suffered horribly from famine deliberately engineered by Stalin as he collectivized agriculture.)

About six miles out of Kishinev I see an unusual sight: a new, western-style gas station, called "Moltex" (a Texaco subsidiary?).

We enter Kishinev just after noon. The pace of life and commerce quickens. We buy a newspaper from a street hawker. The paper is in Russian and is called *Makhler*, which Vitaly cannot translate. I learn later the translation is "broker" or "dealer". It is what would call a "shopper" in America.

There is no news, only pages and pages of things to buy or sell. I see an ad in English offering to import chicken from America.

We pass a bustling used car lot. Coke and Pepsi signs appear, along with other billboards. I see a restaurant with couples sitting outside. Another restaurant, this one called "Quicky." Streets are crowded and the buses are packed full.

We cross Boulevard Stefan cel Mare, the main street. Like all other main streets in cities of the former Soviet Union, this was once called Lenin Avenue.

The hotel where we planned to stay has lost our reservation and has no rooms. It takes several calls for Vitaly to choose the replacement. I learn later he asks each hotel if it has hot water. We take the one which says it does.



The National Hotel, comparable to a YMCA hotel, with occasional hot water.

This turns out to be the Hotel National, a huge multistoried edifice not far from Amnon's apartment. The rooms are YMCA level, but at least we pay Y prices. Mine is about \$25 a night. The sign posted at the desk says openly that foreigners pay 20 percent more.

The National's hot water is an on-and-off experience, but I am able to shower. As I leave the room, the floor manager comes by to replace the coarse gray toilet paper with a more refined roll of white.

Kishinev's main streets are buzzing with traffic. Off the main arteries, there are quieter, tree-lined streets with pleasant, low-rise buildings, fronted with broad sidewalks. There are signs of commerce and street life.

The refined scale is shattered over and over again by brutish, ugly, utilitarian Soviet-era construction. I would see this in all cities.

We leave the National around 2 p.m., heading three blocks and a world away to the apartment of Amnon Maidenberg.

To get there we have to navigate through the bazaar, a sprawling open-air market that lines one street after another, including Tighina Street, where the entrance to Amnon's apartment is situated. Normally, most of the bazaar is held in an interior area, but for some reason it is closed, so all the vendors are crowded on the sidewalks.

Amnon, Shura and Edward live together on the second floor of a once-elegant apartment house facing on Boulevard Stefan cel Mare, but entered through a dingy rear courtyard. They live in a *comunale*, which means they share the kitchen and bathroom with two other families.



We ring the bell and wait. Amnon opens the door. When he sees who is there, he gasps and cries out, "Oh, my dear!". We embrace and hold each other for a long time. We have at long last joined two families sundered by the fateful choices of two brothers.

Amnon is a small (5' 8" I would guess), compact man who looks like my memory of Grandpa Dave. He is wearing a soiled short-sleeve shirt. He apologizes, taking us into the *comunale's* kitchen to show where a chunk of the plaster ceiling had caved in the night before.

He is slightly hard of hearing, but understands and speaks English well. He introduces us to his wife Shura, a cheerful, heavysset woman who appears to be in the early stages of Parkinson's disease.

Amnon goes to change his shirt while Shura brings out wine, vodka, lemon soda and mineral water.

The apartment itself is small and cramped, with worn furniture. In one corner of the main sitting room is an upright piano. The family occupies three rooms of their own: the sitting room, a study which doubles as a bedroom, and a small dining area which doubles as the studio of their only child, Edward, an artist. There is natural light and street noise from the window that overlooks Stefan cel Mare. In the Kishinev heat, the room is stuffy.

We sit down, still unbelieving our meeting is actually taking place. Over and again we break down in emotion to take the other's hand or embrace.

Amnon asks about each member of the family. He knows something about most of them. He wants most to have news of "my great good friend Milt." When I tell him of Dad's recent stroke, Amnon begins to weep.

Amnon himself had a heart attack and recent mild stroke. He cannot write more than a few lines without cramping pain in his hand. He has cataracts, and finds reading difficult. He complains of loss of memory.

I show him photos of our family and our home. I give him a copy of the Herald, along with the Russian-language version of the *Forward*, which Dad had sent along.

Amnon is pleased with the Forward. "Your father likes to read about politics, and so do I," he says.

Shura brings in a huge meal: chopped tomatoes covered in sour cream, fried eggs, cucumbers, whole pickled tomatoes, herring (salty and bony, a favorite of Amnon's), roast chicken, bread. The vodka, wine and soda remain. Shura also brings out some tea.



Shura prepared a feast, and played the accordion.

The meal is an extravagance, but the Kishinev Maidenbergs are determined to be hospitable.

After the food, Shura gets her accordion and plays a medley of music, from Moldovan folk melodies to Klezmer to Hava Nagila. She sings many of the songs, occasionally joined by Amnon, who has a fine voice.

Amnon taps his toes as Shura plays. He says he used to love to dance when he was younger.



Edward ("Edik") comes in, and we greet each other. He is 36, of slight build, with a bristly beard, flashing smile and warm personality. He is the last direct descendant of our family in the Old Country to carry the Maidenberg name.

Edward works on and off as an illustrator, graphic artist and "photo journalist". His most recent assignment was for the newspaper put out by the chief rabbi of Moldova and Kishinev, a Lubavitcher named Zalman Leib, whom I would later meet.

Amnon and I talk about the origin and meaning of the name "Maidenberg". He is certain that it was taken from the German city of Magdeburg, but when and under what circumstances is unknown.

Amnon is convinced the name was used by unrelated families. He recalls that when he was younger, he found Maidenbergs in the Odessa phone book and called all of them. None could trace a relationship to Solomon of Dzygovka.

I marvel at the image of Amnon looking for Maidenbergs in phone books of other cities. I tell Amnon the same search was being conducted by his American relatives on the other side of the globe.



Amnon is Kishinev's first reader of the Grand Forks Herald.

I tell Amnon about the discovery of the grave of Solomon. I ask him about a brother of Solomon who, Amnon had written in one of letters, had gone to France.

Amnon explains that when the brother reached France, he wrote a letter to Dzygovka saying that was where he was. The brother was never heard from again. It is possible he remained in France, but he could also have emigrated to America or somewhere else. We do not know the brother's name.

I ask Amnon for details about what happened to our family during World War II. (He had written about the war in his letters, which I am transcribing in preparation for distribution to the family.) Amnon talks first about his parents.

Joseph and Sarah lived in Beltsy when the war began in June, 1941. Beltsy was subjected to devastating German bombardment as the Nazis invaded the Soviet Union, backed by their Rumanian allies. This was the southernmost of the three fronts upon which the Germans attacked.

Joseph, who was then 56 years old, fled eastward with his wife and daughter, Ida. (Amnon, then 28, had already joined the army.) When Sarah suffered heat exhaustion, the family decided to head for Dzygovka, 50 miles east of Beltsy. They knew relatives of Pearl, Joseph's mother, were still living there.

They reached Dzygovka safely and spent the war there, interned by a Rumanian detachment which turned the village into a Jewish ghetto. Remarkably, compared to what happened elsewhere, this particular Rumanian unit did not kill Jews.

Amnon says the only time he ever saw Dzygovka was after it was liberated by the Red Army in May, 1944. He was an officer in intelligence, the head of his unit, and was able to get to the village to search for his parents. He found them in pathetically weak condition but alive, and was able to get them out, first to Soroki and then to Kishinev after it was liberated in August, 1944.

Amnon's account is reflected in modern historical research. Here is a description in Lucy Dawidowicz' *The War Against the Jews, 1933-1945*:

*In Bessarabia, over 200,000 Rumanian army units working with Einsatzgruppen D in southern Russia dismayed the Germans with their passion for killing and their disregard for disposal of the corpses.*

*In August 1941 the Rumanians began to expel Bessarabian Jews across the Dniester, in territory under German military occupation. The Germans resisted having this area become a dumping ground for unwanted Jews, but then agreed that Transnistria, the area between the Dniester and the Bug rivers, could serve as a reservation for Rumanian Jews.*

*By mid-November 1941 over 120,000 Jews had been deported there, and by late 1942, according to a conservative estimate, some 200,000 Rumanian Jews had been shipped to Transnistria, nearly two-thirds of whom had already died of hunger and epidemics.*

*By September 1943, only some 50,000 Rumanian Jews remained alive in Transnistria, along with 25,000 to 30,000 Russian Jews, native inhabitants of that area.*

I ask Amnon some details about his father.

Joseph had married the daughter of a well-to-do miller and landowner in Beltsy. Joseph at one time studied in a Yeshiva in Kovno (Poland), but came under the influence of the Haskalah or modernizing movement. Joseph left the Yeshiva to go to Odessa, where he enrolled in an agricultural institute. He studied viticulture, which helped him start a vineyard on his father-in-law's land near Beltsy.

"My father was always a lover of nature," Amnon recalls. "He loved working on the land."



Catching up on family news.

I ask about my grandfather.

When David left Dzygovka as a young man, he went to Odessa, where he worked as a longshoreman, as a bread delivery man, and as a clerk in a green

grocery. After David went to America he sent Joseph money or documents for emigration, but Joseph decided against leaving.

(The details of this matter are sketchy, but could be the cause of a bitter falling out between the two brothers.)

Amnon has kept the letters sent him and his father by his American relatives. Earlier letters, those prior to World War II, were lost during the bombardment of Joseph's home in Beltsy. Amnon believes Joseph was in contact with Esther, and David to some extent. Amnon remembers a photo sent by David, showing him carrying a curly-haired Meyer on his shoulders.

We continue talking into the evening. More food is served. I present Amnon, Shura and Edward gifts from our family and from Sylvia's.

They are dumbfounded by the bounty which comes out of my old leather suitcase: shirts, pants, running suits, blouses, pens, razors, paper, a digital clock, candy, Tylenol, aspirin, a sewing kit, sweaters, a tablecloth. Each gift elicits a cry of pleasure. I feel uncomfortable when each clasps his hands together and touches his forehead in a gesture of thanks.

Shura says it is as if I have come from the sky.

I do not know if we have the right sizes. If not, they can be exchanged in the bazaar. I realize that we had shopped according to a list of items that Amnon had sent three years earlier, when there was nothing available in the stores. Now, everything we brought is for sale on the street outside the apartment house---but few have the money.

We walk back to the hotel around 9:00. Tomorrow, Amnon says, Edward will show us around Kishinev.

Saturday, May 18, Kishinev

Vitaly, Slava and I breakfast at the National. A plate with sliced cheese, greasy sausage, and a pat of butter is already set at each place. There is a plate of bread on the table. We can choose blini, more sausage, or fried eggs. I take the blini, which are cheese-filled and decent. The orange juice comes from a paper carton. It's not bad. I look at the label, and see the company is owned in part by Coca Cola. Coke and Pepsi have carried their global marketing war into the heart of Eastern Europe.

There are two waiters serving us, plus a matronly guard who checks our room numbers when we enter. There are only a few other diners in the cavernous dining room, which is also the hotel ball room. An ancient air conditioner wheezes in the corner. The room is humid, and the smell of humanity wafts about us.

There is no hot water in all of Kishinev today. I shivered through my morning shower. I am surprised to learn that central hot water is a feature of most ex-Soviet cities. On reflection, it makes sense. All of life was under central control, so of course water would be too. The public transit systems are mostly electric-driven trolleys, using centrally-produced electricity. These days the authorities put off burning fuel for hot water in order to provide electricity.

When I remark on this, Vitaly becomes impatient.

"Before, if no hot water, everyone becomes agitated. Someone is in trouble. Now---who knows? Who cares?"

I remark to Vitaly how so many of the younger generation who remained in the Old Country say they never knew of the existence of American relatives, or had only faint knowledge.

"I know this system," Vitaly says. He describes how each individual had a central dossier, each with a document called in Russian an *ankieta*. This file was filled out over and over again by families and individuals at different stages in life. It asked many personal questions, among them whether you had relatives living abroad. If you gave different answers on the different occasions when you filled out your *ankieta*, this was a sure cause for suspicion by the KGB. If you said you had relatives in America, this could easily prevent you from advancing in your education or career.

I ask Vitaly if he was once a Communist. "Of course!" he immediately answers. Being in the Party was stupid and routine, but how else to get ahead? How else to move from the dairy farm to construction?

After breakfast we walk over to Amnon's where, of course, we are obligated to eat again. We continue the discussion.

Amnon refers to the "transition period" the economy is going through. Before, people had money, but there was nothing to buy; now, there is plenty to buy, but people have no money. His pension was decimated when the Soviet Union fell. He gets about \$32 a month; Shura gets \$30; Edward helps out. They own the flat, so pay no rent.

Amnon well remembers The System. It had good aspects. Everybody could work, eat, see a doctor, go on a vacation. Life might have been poor, but it was comfortable, and cheap. Rent for housing was "symbolic", food and basic services cost only pennies.

No one knows where the transition period will lead. But neither Amnon nor Vitaly can envision The System returning.



With Edik at the ruins of the Kishinev Yeshiva.

We say good-bye to Amnon and Shura, and begin the tour with Edward. I again notice the street life, the commerce, the sense that people here have just a little more bounce in their step.

Our first stop is a ruined Yeshiva. It was once a grand building, but now looks bombed out. It fell into disrepair during the thirties, and further deteriorated during the war (it might have received some bomb damage). After the war the Communist government turned it into a printing plant. It is now largely abandoned.



Memorial to Kishinev ghetto.

We drive to a memorial to the Jews killed in the Kishinev ghetto. Such was the scale of Nazi slaughter that events such as Kishinev (and many similar cities) are little known to us. There was no explanation or background on the small monument, which is set in a park not far from the center of the city.

I would later learn that on the eve of the World War II, 41,000 Jews lived in Kishinev. Historian Martin Gilbert writes:

*With the return of Soviet rule to Bessarabia [largely present-day Moldova] in June 1940, all Jewish institutions were closed and on 13 June 1941 many of the Jewish leaders, as well as wealthy Jews, were exiled to Siberia, where many died. But with the arrival of the Nazi killing squads in July 1941, the scale of murder exceeded anything previously known.*

*The first 'five-figure' massacre of Jews by Einsatzgruppen D in Kishinev took place on between 17 and 31 July 1941. Some 12,287 perished.*

*Following the initial killings, internment camps were set up throughout the province. At the camp in Edineti [35 miles from Dzygovka], after the initial slaughter, 70 to 100 people died every day in July and August 1941, mostly of starvation.*

*Then in September the Jews of Bessarabia were forced out of the province in hundreds of death marches. In all, more than 148,000 Bessarabian Jews perished in the ghettos and camps of Transnistria. [This was the area of Ukraine under control of Rumania---it included Dzygovka, but is not the Transnistria in existence today, which I visited and describe later].*

*During these marches more than half of the victims died: of exposure, disease, hunger, thirst and the savage brutality of the Rumanian and German guards, who would often pick a group of marchers at random, order them aside, and shoot them.*

We next drive to the street where the pogrom of 1903 began. This was the classic pogrom, in which Czar Nicholas II and his followers sought to fan hatred of the Jews as a counter to anti-government fervor. Some 50 persons were killed, 500 injured, and hundreds of stores and homes were destroyed.

Though the violence was small by comparison with what was to come, the pogrom raised international protest and set off alarms among all Jews in the Pale. Many began to doubt their future in Europe.

There was a second pogrom in Kishinev, in 1905, and a pogrom in Odessa as well, the year before David and Rose emigrated. Surely a large part of David's motivation to leave was what he saw happening around him.

Vitaly takes a video of me in front of the 1903 site. I am speaking into the camera when two Americans happen by, hear my American English and introduce themselves. They turn out to be Peace Corps volunteers halfway through their tour. Their jobs involve developing Moldova's private business sector. I tell them about my own Peace Corps background teaching English in India. I am sure I appear to be a relic of the Kennedy era.



American Embassy, Kishinev.

We drive to the big central park, where I seek out an English newspaper. The *Herald Tribune*, alas, is unavailable. I find something called *Welcome*, which is a chatty, newsy paper for English-speaking expatriates.

The newsstand displays 10 or 15 newspapers in Moldovan and Russian. There are some East European magazines and two or three booklets of hard-core pornography.

From the park we go to the section of town where Joseph lived after the war. The area had been razed and built over with a Soviet "Youth Palace" but there is an old stone wall and other signs of the neighborhood that once existed. I imagine Joseph in his apartment, laboring over letters to his American relatives.



Neighborhood  
where Joseph lived after  
World War II.

We drive out to a park where there is a Holocaust memorial. It takes us some time to find the location. Few passers-by seem to know where it is, or even what it is. The memorial shows fists bound by barbed wire rising from the earth. It is not great art, but it is striking enough to warrant some explanation should a visitor come upon it. But there are no signs or markers of any sort.



We return to the city center to experience the booming street market that exists all around Amnon's building. It is a remarkable taste of the free-wheeling, buy-and-sell bazaar that drives so much of the economy. Hundreds if not thousands of vendors participate, each occupying a small

space on the sidewalk, each typically selling just one or two items: sunglasses, tote bags, cooking oil, bread, scarves, a baked dessert, tomatoes, laundry detergent, shoes, candy and so forth. Chicks and piglets are available. Con artists run shell games for any and all takers.

There are a profusion of goods lining the streets. The vendors are oddly silent as they display their goods. It gives the sense of walking through a living retail tableau.

We lunch with Amnon and Shura. Amnon brings out a large glass jar of pickled, spiced tomatoes which he put up himself. They are delicious, and of course I can't help but remember Grandma Rose's dill pickles.



Genealogical research of the most basic type.

Amnon says he takes his blood pressure three times a day. He watches what he eats. He pumps his arms across his chest to stimulate his circulation. He limits himself to five cigarettes. If his blood pressure is too high, he won't drink wine.

We spend most of the afternoon going over documents, photographs, recollections. Vitaly leaves while Amnon and I work. He comes back later, to join us for dinner.

Amnon has made kreplach, which are quite good. He serves them topped with sour cream or mayonnaise. Edik works on a pencil sketch of me. He says his work has been shown in many exhibitions, including the local art museum.

Earlier in the day I asked Edward if he ever considered emigrating. Yes, he replied, but he doesn't think he will. All his friends and contacts are in Moldova or Russia. He doesn't speak much English. He is not attracted by Israel, with its conflicts and stresses. He is concerned about the health of his parents.

Amnon and I talk about history and genealogy. The Jews of the Pale were peripatetic, frequently moving. Solomon was "from Dzygovka" but the family may have moved many times previously. Unlike many Jews at the time, Solomon

was literate. He was a kind and sensible man who often helped neighbors with documents and letters, Amnon recalled.

Esther, Solomon's daughter and mother of Sylvia, had a "quick tongue" and was quite outspoken for a woman of her time, Amnon laughed. The same was true of Rose, David's wife.

Elkeh, another of Solomon's daughters, died after a long, debilitating illness which kept her bedridden and blind the last five years of her life. Elkeh was a wise and good-hearted woman. "Her fate was very tragic," Amnon reflected.

I ask Amnon about the time my parents planned to visit the family. They first were welcomed, but then advised not to come. What happened?

Even today, Amnon finds it difficult to speak of the matter. He searches for his words carefully.

He begins by saying that Manya, the youngest of Solomon's children, was a simple woman, who knew only her family. But her husband, Solomon Rosenberg, grew alarmed when he learned, through Manya, that Joseph had opened up correspondence with his American relatives. He was afraid for his own job, and was worried about his son, Danya, a career officer in the Red Army. Other relatives grew alarmed as well.

"Fanya, she too was a good-hearted, simple woman, a doctor. But she also said, 'Why? Why? Why? What a man this Joseph is, what a man. He doesn't think of us!' She had relatives in Moscow. She was afraid. She was very agitated. So was Dora.

"After Gorbachev came to power, I wrote Fanya and told her that things have changed once and forever. I told her I had written to Sylvia's daughter, I had sent a blessing for her wedding. But Fanya still said, 'I am a Party member. I will be dismissed.'"

Amnon pauses frequently during our conversations. He tires easily and has difficulty finding words. In one instance, it takes him a minute or so to remember the word, "clan."

"I am a man who when I want to do something, I can, but it takes me very much time. And after three shocks---three strokes, do you understand?--- the aftereffects of all this, I was a man who spoke like all people, who spoke well, people said I had a ready tongue, and now if I tell something, I must look into a script in order not to lose the thread of my mind."

Both Amnon and Vitaly use the expression, "All politics is prostitution." There is a deep-seated distrust of government, which makes me wonder how democratic institutions and concepts, particularly one such as self-government, can take root in such hostile ground.

We walk back to the National around 8 p.m.

Sunday, May 19, Kishinev

It is another warm, sunny day, which is good because there is no hot water. I take another chilly shower.

Vitaly and I continue our discussion of The System and The Transition Period. He points out that some bottled water we purchased in Kishinev for \$1.00 would cost \$4.00 in Kiev.

"You mean, in the hotel there?" I ask.

"No, everywhere, in the markets too."

"Maybe it is Ukrainian taxes."

"No, not that much."

"Well," I say, "sooner or later there will be a competitor who will sell water for less than \$4.00."

Vitaly looks doubtful. "There should be a policeman to tell the sellers, only so much profit, you are getting too much!"

So Vitaly, who grew up in The System and mastered it, is naturally disposed toward regulation. Nothing is as simple as it looks, of course. The price of bottled water in Kiev could be controlled by some sort of cartel, or perhaps organized crime.

We stroll over to Amnon's around 9:30 a.m. Shura is dressed to the nines. She is going to a music recital for former teachers of music. She has on her best outfit, and asks Vitaly to take some photos.

Edward joins us, and we set off for the cemetery where Joseph and Sarah are buried.

The cemetery is a half mile or so from the center. We reach it driving up a narrow cobblestone lane. The rough stone wall of the cemetery is on our left, modest houses are situated on our right. As we near the entrance, we pass the ruin of a mikveh where bodies were taken for washing prior to burial.

We reach the graves of Joseph and Sarah following a twisting path through the closely spaced tombstones. The cemetery seems to be kept up, although in many places vegetation had grown over the markers.



Tombstones of Sarah and Joseph, with special inscriptions.



We look over the crumbling mikveh. There is some graffiti on the door, but more the usual idiocy ("Move your ass", in English) than the overtly anti-Semitic. On the ledge near the door I find a small plastic soldier. I throw it over the wall.

From the cemetery we visit an undistinguished monument to Jews murdered in the pogrom of 1903. The monument is in a park where another Jewish cemetery once stood. The Soviets had brutishly bulldozed the graves to create a park, as they did in many other cities.



Monument to Jews killed in the infamous Kishinev pogrom of 1903.

We drive back to visit the synagogue run by the Lubavitchers, for whose newspaper Edward has done some recent work. We meet Rabbi Zalman Leib, a bluff, imposing Muscovite who radiates energy, and who has been in Kishinev since 1991.

I ask him to translate the marriage certificate of David and Rose, which I have in my genealogical files.

"Not a problem!" he roars (in Russian, he speaks no English), and proceeds rapidly through the document. It names the witnesses, who include David's father Solomon, and it gives Rose's name, Rukhel or Rachel. Reb Zalman looks at the date of the marriage, which is given in the Jewish calendar, then takes out a book and converts it to the secular calendar. He says David and Rose were married in March, 1906, almost certainly in Odessa.

This fits with other family information. We know Rose was pregnant with Meyer during the voyage to America. Since Meyer was born in February, 1907, Meyer was conceived in May. The couple probably left Odessa in June. They landed in Ellis Island June 30, 1906.



Kishinev synagogue.



Rabbi Zalman Leib translates my grandparents' marriage certificate.

We thank Reb Zalman, and proceed to another Jewish site in Kishinev, the Agudat Israel Yeshiva. This turns out to be mainly a boarding school for Jewish teens. Agudat teaches them about Judaism, then tries to place them in Jewish schools in America or Israel.

The rabbi is Mordechai Tokarsky, who is in his mid-thirties. He was born in Russia, but lived in New York for 15 years before taking this assignment. He is a pleasant, rotund man, well aware of the challenges of dealing with the present Jewish population of Kishinev and Moldova.

There are 40,000 Jews in Moldova today, he says, 30,000 of them in Kishinev. There is little sense of community. Most of the students at the Yeshiva are offspring of parents who are both Jewish. The Yeshiva's goal is to create a sense of Jewish identity, then to encourage aliyah to Israel or emigration to America. About 500 Jews emigrate to Israel every year, and another 100 to America. Tokarsky is doubtful a Jewish community can be built on the remains of the Holocaust and Communism.

We return to Amnon's apartment, where he and I go over more photographs and documents.

When I relate our visit to Reb Zalman, Amnon comments on Hasidic philosophy. He says he has always been impressed with the Hasidic belief that like attracts like (unlike the "natural" magnet, which attracts opposites). A Hasid believes that if he is happy, then he will bring more happiness into life. This is why Hasidism has so many joyous expressions of song and dance, Amnon says. Even if they are starving and oppressed, they act as if they have a feast set before them and are living in perfect freedom.

It's a wonderful belief, I agree. But what puts me off about Hasids, especially the Lubavitchers, is their zealotry and intolerance, their...

"Fanaticism?" Amnon completes the sentence.

We chat a little about the forces of nationalism in Rumania and Moldova. The Rumanians talk about annexing Moldova, which once belonged to them and whose language is essentially identical. Moldovans resist this, but they have their own agenda, much of it revolving around language, as is frequently the case in the republics that were once part of the Soviet Union. Shura says her concern is that over 40% of the population of Kishinev does not speak Moldovan.

We have a light supper and say good night. Tomorrow I must say good-bye to my uncle and go to Odessa.

Monday, May 20, Kishinev-Tiraspol-Odessa

We check out of the National, and walk to Amnon's at 8 a.m. He is in a grumpy, agitated mood. He wants to make the right impression on the video greeting we are sending to America, but has great difficulty writing out his words, and more trouble saying them on camera. He refuses to read the words he has written. He wants to memorize and recite them, and to do so perfectly. He barks at Edik, orders Vitaly to stop and start the camera, and asks me over and again for more time.



Bittersweet farewell toast.

We wanted to depart at 9:30 or 10 at the latest. By the time we have done the video, toasted each other with champagne, and embraced in the courtyard, it is past 10:30. As we pull away, I turn to wave farewell to Amnon, this remarkable man who has kept the family history.

We are on our way to Odessa, Ukraine, with a stop in Tiraspol, where Amnon's sister Ida and her family live. To get there we must enter the strange breakaway Republic of Transnistria.

As we leave Kishinev, we are stopped by the *Politia*. As usual, they raise their hands to their caps, saluting the driver whose papers they are about to go through. We have no problems, and move along.

The highway south goes through an area which is prone to earthquakes. The last big one (5 or 6 on the Richter) happened a dozen years ago.

The villages have that prosperous Moldovan look. I see shashlik stands firing up for the lunchtime crowd. Apple trees and vineyards are on either side. Here and there a herd of sheep graze. The highway markers are freshly painted and regular.

Some 30 miles out from Kishinev, near the city of Bendery, we go through a curious checkpoint. It is run by the Moldovan army. There are concrete barriers which force us into S-curves. Slava gets out of the car, chats with an officer, and we are on our way.

Suddenly all the road signs are back in Cyrillic, even though we remain in Moldova. Not more than a quarter mile down the road, we are at the Transnistrian "border". Soldiers loiter near a checkpoint flying the Transnistria flag. We obtain a slip of paper, but do not have to show passports.

We enter Bendery, passing the expansive ruins of an Ottoman fort. Slava says the fort is now a base for the Russian 14<sup>th</sup> Army, which is based in Tiraspol, an island of Russian military power.

We are stopped at another checkpoint by a young gun-toting soldier. We show him our papers, but to no avail. We have to buy our way through, for about \$15.00.

We come into Tiraspol, passing another 14<sup>th</sup> Army installation, proudly and defiantly displaying a red star. There are army vehicles and soldiers everywhere. The impression is of a fortified town.

We go to the train station on the main street (still called Lenin here) and meet Viktor Voskoboinik, husband of Ludmilla, daughter of Ida, Amnon's sister. He guides us to his apartment, where the family has gathered. Before we get there we are stopped by police again, show our papers and proceed.

Tiraspol is a quiet, tree-lined city of about 200,000. I notice many dilapidated apartment blocks, reminiscent of the Ukraine.



Lunch in Tiraspol with Ida, Amnon's sister, and families.

We have a warm and welcoming lunch in Viktor and Ludmilla's flat, crowded around a large table set up in one of the apartment's spare but pretty rooms. I explained who I am on the family tree, and why I am there. They are fascinated to meet one of their American "cousins."

Ida and her husband Yasha Dekhtyar are both retired teachers, she of geography, he mathematics. Ida is a sweet, white-haired woman whose piercing eyes and forceful manner show a steely intelligence.



Amnon's sister Ida and her husband Yasha Dekhtyar. During the war, Ida was interned in Dzygovka, a ghetto but not a killing zone.

Ludmilla teaches elementary school mathematics. Viktor is a computer programmer. They have a son, Vadim, who was recently married and lives in Moscow, where he works as an economist.

Ludmilla's sister Polina is a music teacher. Her husband Syoma Uchitel is a mechanic at a local textile factory. Their two sons join us. Alexander is a lanky college student who plays guitar and teaches dancing. Rostislav is in high school, and also plays the guitar.

The lunch is bountiful: two kinds of salad, a plate of radishes and cucumbers, spaghetti and meatballs, a plate-sized pierogi with meat inside a bread dough. Ludmilla serves vegetable borscht, green rather than the expected beet red. The dessert is a sweet cake called "red and yellow", which is usually served on holidays and special occasions. Rostislav explains the tradition to me as he polishes off one piece after another.

They are a bright, engaging group. I can't help but picture them in America, enjoying their company. Yet here they are in the garrison city of Tiraspol, speaking to me in Russian, the future unclear for all the generations represented there. I encourage Alexander and Rostislav to study English well, and to write me if they have questions or ideas about America.

After lunch, I asked Ida her memories of the war. She was in the Dzygovka ghetto with Joseph and Sarah, her mother and father. She remembered the Rumanian commandant as an old man who didn't want trouble, and who didn't need to impress the Germans by killing Jews. Dzygovka was a small, out-of-the-way place. The current nearby highway hadn't been built. The railway was some miles away. The village's remoteness and obscurity saved the Jewish inhabitants if they did not venture beyond the ghetto walls.

Because Dzygovka was a relatively "safe" ghetto, thousands of Jews sought refuge there. Four or five families would live in a single small house. Ida and her parents lived with Hersh, brother of Joseph's grandmother.

Ida remembers an old woman in Dzygovka who told her that a great rabbi once lived in the town, and that he had prophesied no harm would come to Jews there.

After lunch, the two boys play guitar, and the entire family sings, including a lovely song which has a meaning like Auld Lang Syne. I am moved as we say good-bye.

Leaving Tiraspol the land flattens out into the delta region that edges the Black Sea. The collective farms here are enormous in scale. Vitaly points out one that has 40 square kilometers planted to apple trees. It strikes me as rather too hot and humid a climate for apple trees, but stranger decisions were made by Soviet agriculture.

We cross from Transnistria into Ukraine without much difficulty. I do have to go into the border post and buy another visa from a skinny young guard who sat in a stifling office, bare except for a radio telephone, a desk and some battered files. He used carbon paper so worn I was amazed an image came through. After some negotiation between him and Vitaly I acquire a new visa, at a modest price, of course.

After an hour's drive, we reach Odessa. It seems less modern than Kishinev. There is less street life, fewer free-wheeling kiosks.

As in all the cities I visited, there are numerous buildings on which construction has stopped, the rooftop cranes silent and rusting. The System has literally ground to a halt.



Welcome to Odessa.

Odessa's prime construction material is soft limestone like that I saw in Moldova. The Odessa variety is a rich, dark, peach color. The older parts of the city are entirely made of it.

We drive down Pushkin Street, paved with Belgian block and lined with shade trees behind which rise two or four story buildings. The wide sidewalks give a feeling of leisure and restfulness. Street life begins to appear: cafes, restaurants, small hotels, Coca Cola signs. Men and women are nicely dressed. It's late afternoon, and many are returning home from work, carrying briefcases and items for the moment (an ice cream cone) or for later (a tray of eggs).

We check into the *Chornoye Morye* ("Black Sea") Hotel, another dreary Intourist relic, but with hot water! Before going out, I call Kitty. It is wonderful to make contact, to hear her voice. I feel like an astronaut coming around the dark side of the moon.

Vitaly and I take a long walk before dinner. Our first destination is the lovely Primorsky Boulevard, a promenade that overlooks the seaport. Mothers with children, couples, and groups of young people sit on park benches, chatting and eating ice cream.



The Maritime stairs, made famous in the movie "Battleship Potemkin."

The boulevard opens into a square, and a long set of stairs descends to the port. These are the Maritime Stairs, known to the world as the Potemkin Stairs after their starring appearance in Sergei Eisenstein's 1925 film, "Battleship Potemkin."

The stairs are less dramatic than I expected, not just because there is no baby carriage bumping down them chased by Czarist soldiers. The stairs are not as wide and steep as the film made them appear.

They are still a tourist attraction. Vitaly takes my picture after waiting for several other groups to pose. At the top of the stairs stands a statue of the Duc de Richelieu, one of the French nobles whom Catherine had hired to lay out Odessa in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century.

The port over which we looked is huge, but oddly quiet. Only a few cranes are dipping into berthed ships, a far different sight than in the past, Vitaly says in disgust.

We walk back along Primorsky, stopping at the elegant Hotel Londonskaya to see if we can locate a Herald Tribune. No luck. We continue on, stopping for a picture in front of an oriental facade I recalled seeing in a painting at either Victor's or Dima's. We skirt the imposing Opera House (which in "Potemkin" was where the gilded elite danced and drank until shelled by the battleship), and head over to Deribasivska Boulevard, a pedestrian street lined with cafes and shops.



Opera House.

Vitaly says that Odessans are known for their sense of humor. I feel a lightness and joie de vivre in Deribasivska.

The cafes are composed of plastic tables and chairs, shaded by umbrellas furnished by beer or cigarette companies. We pick one out, and sit down to have dinner and watch the street life. Pairs and threesomes of girls walk by, dressed to kill. Groups of boys, all looking as if they had not a care in the world, join the parade. Across the street two guys are singing Everly Brothers classics in accented English.

We order beer (Tuborg, Danish), a snack (peanuts, German), and a dish Vitaly translates as chicken shashlik. It turns out to be a plain leg and thigh of broiled chicken. It is piping hot and accompanied by fried potatoes.



A beer before dinner with Vitaly in Deribasivska Square .

We walk back to the hotel in the gathering twilight. A wind has come up, blowing dust and dirt in swirls around us. The air smells of half-burned gasoline and diesel, the predominant aroma of Ukraine.

Before turning in, Vitaly changes \$100 into kupons at the exchange desk in the hotel. He received two 3" stacks of little bills. (The exchange rate is 180,000 to the dollar.) The money changer counts them twice, Vitaly counts them twice. The transaction takes five minutes.

Vitaly pays for his hotel room in kupons. As a foreigner, I have to pay in dollars.

Tuesday, May 21, Odessa

We're up early, breakfasting at 7:30 a.m. The Chornoye Morye's water isn't exactly hot, but it's not jump-back cold like the National in Kishinev. I am able to stand comfortably under the shower for the first time in three days. It feels wonderful.

The shower is a small tiled affair, with a Rubik's Cube folding door that encloses it. I never get the hang of it, so there's lots of water on the floor to mop up.

Breakfast is in the hotel dining room. I have blinis, tea, bread, cheese. I skip the watery orange drink. A Brit two tables over has his teacup's handle break off in his hand, splashing hot tea down his shirt. He yelps and swears.



Oriental architecture graces parts of Odessa.

An American one table over hears me speaking, introduces himself as Bob Heileman, who is in Odessa to research Germans from Russia. He knows many of the experts in North Dakota. I tell him I am going to speak at the Germans from Russia convention in July. Heileman is studying the remnants of four German colonies in the Odessa area. The colonies at one time farmed 30% of the arable land in the region, he says. He passes along the name of a nearby restaurant.

Vitaly and I make small talk. He is amused by the difference in how Russians and Americans approach food. Russians eat to live, he says; they eat

everything on a chicken, even the feet. Americans have so much food they have the luxury of counting calories.

We are going to visit the widow of Solomon Rosenberg, whose first wife was Manya Maidenberg. She lives in one of the vast apartment complexes built outside the center.

As we drive along, Vitaly and Slava joke about Odessa drivers, in the same way we might talk about New York taxi drivers. They cut in front, won't let you in, speed through red lights, in general have an "up yours" attitude.

"Only in Odessa!" they shout when some rude vehicular act is committed.

They are also amused to see most of the signs are in Russian and English, rather than Ukrainian. A sign of language conflict to come.

Getting to the apartments is an adventure. We have no map, only a general idea of the right direction. We drive a mile or two, then stop to ask. Each answer gets us a little closer, until finally when we ask, a pedestrian points directly at the building.

The apartments remind me of failed housing projects in America. They are poor, run-down, surrounded by weedy patches. Yet there seems to be little crime or other social pathologies.

Tatiana Renkel, a diminutive, red-haired woman of 84, lives on the 9<sup>th</sup> floor. We get there in a small, creeping elevator. Tatiana lives in two small but clean rooms. She is proud but very poor. We learn her pension amounts to \$35 a month. Because her first husband was a military officer, she pays no rent for the tiny apartment.

She offers me homemade wine. She declines to drink any, pleading that she has not had breakfast, which turns out to be a crust of bread.

Tatiana provides some interesting facts. The date of the photo of Solomon and Pearl with the five daughters was 1906. When Manya got married in 1927, David Maidenberg sent 500 rubles for the wedding, a generous gift. Elkeh and Esther fell in love with two brothers, which is not permitted under Jewish law, so Esther and Moishe had to emigrate.

Solomon was from Dubossary, Moldova. He worked in a sugar mill near Dzygovka. He came to a dance in the village, and there met Manya.

After service in the Red Army, Solomon's main employment was as a bookkeeper at the "Fontane" sanitarium in Odessa. Manya never worked.



With Tatiana Renkel, second wife of Manya's husband Solomon Rosenberg.

We drive Tatiana to the main Jewish cemetery in Odessa. On the way she points out where another Jewish cemetery once stood, razed by the Soviets in the 1960's and replaced by a flat, dusty park.

We buy flowers at the cemetery. We first visit her mother's grave, then Manya's and Solomon's. Tatiana speaks to the dead, telling her mother how she misses her, and bidding her dear Solomon to rest well.

Vitaly tells me later that when he bought the flowers at the cemetery, Tatiana reproached him, asking if he thought she was too poor to even buy flowers.

When we bring Tatiana back to her apartment, I give her \$20 as a gift for her upcoming birthday.



The grave and tombstone of Malieh or Manya Maidenber, youngest of the seven siblings. She was born in 1902, and was only four when her brother David, my grandfather, emigrated to America.

We spend the rest of the day touring what remains of Jewish Odessa. I learn the mayor of Odessa is Jewish, but this seems of little consequence.

Jews were instrumental in the building of Odessa. When Grandpa David left the city, its population was 200,000, 35% of whom were Jews. I later would find this historical note:

*Odessa became the intellectual capital of the Jews. Vilna was the religious capital.*

*Unlike Lithuania, in Moldavia tradition yielded easily to Haskalah (Jewish enlightenment). While Odessa was hardly in Moldavia politically, it was the literary capital of Jewish Moldavia and the source of modern Zionism. Orthodox Jews said: "The fire of Hell burns around Odessa to a distance of 10 parasangs."*

*The first secular school for Russian Jews was founded in Odessa (1824), the first synagogue choir (1840) and organ (1901). The first Russian Jewish newspaper (Rasvet, 1860), and the Hebrew newspaper (Ha-Melitz, 1860).*

*Jews attended the university, and many great writers of modern Jewish literature were active in Odessa. It was the seat of Hovevei Zion (1890-1914).*

Before the Russian Revolution of 1917, Jews in Odessa dominated the grain trade. They accounted for a majority of physicians, bankers, lawyers and shop owners. To this day, Odessans speak Russian with a Yiddish inflection.

Despite the migrations of Jews to America and Israel, on the eve of World War II there were 180,000 Jews living in Odessa. Few survived the war. On October 23-26, 1941, Nazis, aided by their Rumanian allies, massacred 26,000 Jews.

There were more than 40 synagogues in Odessa at the height of Jewish culture there. Today there are two. We visited one, where we met a man who identified himself as the head of the Jewish community. This synagogue is falling apart because of structural problems.

The other synagogue is connected to Chabad, and is being rebuilt. The leader there is Velvel Verkhovskiy. He and his wife Kira also operate "Migdal-Or" ("Lighthouse" in Hebrew), a musical theater company founded in 1991 with the help of a French foundation and the Joint Distribution Committee of the United Jewish Appeal.

We visit Migdal-Or, which is located in a former synagogue which during Soviet times was used by the KGB.

That evening we dine at the place recommended by Bob Heileman, the "Old Odessa". It's a basement restaurant reached down a narrow staircase. A wheezing air conditioner keeps the room barely comfortable.

We order Heinekens, a meat soup, and shashlik, which this time comes out on a spit. There are the usual fried potatoes, plus a salad of chopped carrots, cabbage and beets. We get a large tray of the good dark bread, which is flavored by rye.

I talk with Vitaly about his genealogical detective work. He mentions several gripping stories about finding people whom American relatives thought had been murdered.

We go over some Maidenberg information which Vitaly came across. He found a list of Maidenbergs who were merchants in the "colony of Lublin" in Soroki, across the Dniester from Yampol and just a few miles from Dzygovka. It seems likely these Maidenbergs, whose dates go back to 1818, are related, but we do not know the precise relationship.

The list includes three sons and five grandsons of a Leizor Maidenberg, birthdate unknown. They are Baruch, born 1818, with son Isaac, born 1841; Mot, born 1821, with sons Leizor Michael, born 1846, and Volko, born 1852; and Volko, born 1826, with sons Kiva, born 1850 and Mordko-Meier, born 1851.

Could Mordko-Meier be the father of Solomon, whose tombstone gives his father's name as "Meyer"?

Vitaly cautions me not to think too literally of Jews of those times being "from" somewhere. They moved frequently to avoid the regime's harsh regulation or to escape military registration. Often they moved simply for business reasons.

When we return to the hotel, we receive a visit from an Isaac Maidenberg, whom we had contacted because his name appears in the Odessa phone book. He is a slight, intense man of 50 whose wife and older daughter have emigrated to Israel. He will follow when his younger daughter, who is 10, finishes her piano studies.

We are unable to establish a relationship. Isaac's father Moishe was born in 1913, and died in Kadera, Israel in 1995. Moishe's father was Nochim-Boruch, who was in the clothing business and who died in 1958 at the age of 70.

Isaac says his grandfather told him that one of his brothers emigrated to America. I wonder which of the Maidenbergs we have run across in America might be related to him.

Wednesday, May 22, Odessa-Kiev

Today is the longest single drive of the trip. The distance is 480 kilometers, or about 300 miles. Vitaly and Slava are concerned about road conditions. They estimate it will take us 10 hours.

We have breakfast at the hotel, and are on the road around 8 a.m.

We are soon driving through the great flat fertile plain that lies north of Odessa. I see what appears to a housing development. "Dachas," says Vitaly, being built for up-and-coming Odessans.

We're on a good four-lane road, like the expressways in many parts of America before the interstate system was built. We cross a bridge under slow repair. The girders are rusting in the open. There is the usual sight of Soviet-built cars broken down at the side of the road. We see a few hitchhikers. The sign is holding the arm straight out as if to flag the car down.

About 75 kilometers out of Odessa, the road narrows to two lanes and deteriorates. Villages hug the highway. Trees are close by on either side, again giving the feel of a U.S. "country" road. The villages here are composed of small square huts crowded together, painted in pastels. I can see wells still in use.

There are bazaars near most villages. They consist of two rows of tables with vendors selling liquor and some meager consumer items. Men wielding scythes cut grass alongside the road, to use as fodder. Most villages feature women selling potatoes out of buckets.

The roadway deteriorates unpredictably. When it does, we have to slow to 20 mph, otherwise we keep up a steady 55 to 60. At the police checkpoints Slava creeps through at 5, hoping not to be noticed. Some checkpoints have smashed cars mounted on posts, a practice akin to putting the heads of rebels on pikes outside the city walls.

We stop at the gas station "Svetlana." Gasoline costs 45 cents a liter, Vitaly says, or about \$1.70 a gallon.

Seeing the cars in Ukraine (and Russia) is like entering some automotive Galapagos where cars have evolved into something strange yet familiar. Here is a vehicle that surely descends from the Ford Falcon family. There are mutations of Packards and Studebakers. That one is a deformed 1958 Buick, this could only have come from a Nash Rambler.

The cars, like the buildings, all have the Soviet tendency to form into simple shapes. There are few curves or details, anything that gives personality and character. Squares are the easiest and most efficient shape for the state to make, so it makes lots of them.



Uman, tomb of Rabbi Nachman and a pilgrimage site for his followers.

At 10:30 a.m., we turn off the highway to visit the town of Uman, famed among Hasidism because it contains the grave of Rabbi Nachman, great-grandson of the Baal Shem Tov.

As we come into the lower part of Uman (the main part of town occupies a bluff, and was known for its fortress), we pass some fields marked into squares. There are many people tending them. "Private plots," Vitaly remarks. He casually adds that the same area once held a large Jewish cemetery.

Uman was the site of a typical slaughter of Jews as the Germans invaded Ukraine in the summer of 1941. The Einsatzgruppen had established a pattern. When entering a town, they would work with their local allies---Ukrainians here---to find out the name of the rabbi and whatever Jewish notables

remained. They would then demand that the Jewish leadership tell the Jews to assemble for registration and relocation to a "Jewish region."

(Historians point out that there was little knowledge of Nazi anti-Semitism inside the Soviet Union, especially since the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact of 1939. All references to Nazi attitudes toward the Jews, even in works of fiction, were suppressed.)

When the Jews appeared, they would be taken outside the town, where they were usually machine-gunned and dumped into ravines that became mass graves.

There is an eyewitness account, by a German officer, Lt. Erwin Bingel, cited in Martin Gilbert's The Second World War:

*...Bingel was at Uman on September 16. There, as recalled four years later, he saw SS troops and Ukrainian militiamen murder several hundred Jews. The Jews were taken to a site outside the town, lined up in rows, forced to undress, and mowed down with machine gun fire.*

*"Even women carrying children a fortnight to three weeks old, sucking at their breasts, were not spared this horrible ordeal. Nor were mothers spared the sight of their children being gripped by their little legs and put to death with one stroke of the pistol butt or club, thereafter to be thrown on the heap of human bodies in the ditch."*

What happened in Uman was repeated over and over again throughout the Ukraine. It took place that same month on a massive scale in Kiev, at the ravine called "Babi Yar."

This method of killing Jews (and others: "commissars", gypsies) was horrific and inefficient. Some German officers thought it was damaging to troop morale. After witnessing one such mass murder in Minsk, Himmler ordered the SS to find a better way. Thus developed the use of Zyklon-B, eventually deployed at Auschwitz and other death camps.

We turn onto a steep, twisting road up the bluff. At the top is an open plaza fronted by apartment blocks, near which stands a low, open building shaded by a plastic roof. This is Rabbi Nachman's tomb.

On the plaza is parked, incongruously, a huge double-deck bus of the best European style. Even more striking are the people emerging from the vehicle: black-hatted, side-curved, bearded Hasidim, some holding the hands of young sons.

It is as if the bus had gone back through time and is bringing into the present the lost world of Hasidism. Though persecuted by Russians, murdered by Nazis and oppressed by the Soviets, these Jews had survived, seemingly unchanged.

They had flown to Kiev that day on a chartered flight from Tel Aviv. They planned to stay through Shabbat. During the High Holy Days, 4,000-5,000 followers of Rabbi Nachman would come to Uman.

We follow them to the grave site. Rows of chairs are set in front of the grave. They are occupied by men chanting and davening. Many wear tefillin.

Vitaly asks permission to take some video and photographs. One of the elders says it will be all right as long as we do not disturb the

worshippers. Some are clustered in front of the actual tomb, loudly praying and swaying.

As we walk out, a younger Hasid approaches me. He speaks English, and says his name is Jeshua DeLuv. He was born in Belgium, and had spent time in Australia. I tell him why I am in Ukraine. He is thin, sharp-featured, with pale blue eyes. His scraggly beard is gray. He wears a black hat and a black gabardine coat. He speaks with an urgent tone.

"You are American?"

"I am."

"You are Reform, yes? You drive on Shabbos?"

"I do."

"Your ancestors were Maskilim. Stay with us. Stay here through Shabbos. Do teshuvah ("return"). You must do this. You will see if you do this. You will not go back. Ha-shem is everywhere. Ha-shem sees over us, yet we have free will. There are strange things going on in Eretz Yisrael, things we have never seen before. We must prepare for Moshiach. We must also do teshuvah. We are not perfect."

As I pull away from him, he reaches into his pocket and gives me two cards, one of which shows a smiling rebbe, both with the key sayings of Rabbi Nachman. I cannot read them, but I am touched by his gesture.

I consider how all zealots have in common a belief that the end of days is near.

We leave Uman after an hour's stay. In the car, Vitaly jokes that it's good we didn't tell the Hasids what kind of shashlik we ate last night (pork). They would have thrown us out.

Slava says something about "Meester Mike" in Russian, and Vitaly laughs.

"Slava say, what will Meester Mike's family think when he comes back to them in beard and peyos?"

We drive at a steady pace. The villages and towns not only have "entering" signs, when you leave there is the same sign with a red line through it, showing that you have departed.

I see hay bales stacked "breadloaf" fashion. The fields here are wheat, stretching to the horizon. They seem mostly weed free.

At one village we pass through, I see people selling tires and inner tubes instead of potatoes from buckets. Vitaly explains that in this village there is a factory which makes the tires and tubes. The workers are paid in product rather than wages.

A little further down the road, the villagers are selling 50 kilo bags of sugar. There is a sugar refinery here.

A little further, I see evidence of the entrepreneurial spirit. They are selling both bags of sugar and tires.

I ask Vitaly why people would buy sugar in such large quantities.

"It is to make, how you say, moondrink."

Vitaly's English sometimes failed him, as "moonshine" did in this case, but he was usually able to communicate well. I grew accustomed to some Vitalyisms: "Okey-dokey" (pronounced "okye-dokyeh"); the use of "he" for "they" ("When the Germans come, he order all the Jews to the center of the city"); and "What-what?" instead of a single "What?" (this was picked up from the Russian use of double whats).

We arrive in Kiev around 3 p.m., much ahead of schedule. An enormous Soviet-built sign outside the city welcomed visitors to the "Hero City of Kiev", referring to its experience in World War II.

The city looks much prettier on my second entry to it. I notice wide green parks, broad streets lined with chestnut trees.

The public transportation is jammed, as usual.

For some reason two policemen have set up a checkpoint on the street we planned to take to the hotel. So we take a circuitous detour, passing some new, well-constructed apartment buildings, which have dozens of satellite dishes hanging from them like barnacles.

Once again, we check into the Kievskaya Rus. Like Kiev itself, the hotel looks better this time around. I buy western newspapers and shower in hot water.

We spend the rest of the afternoon touring Kiev. We begin at the big Slava Museum, dedicated to World War II. Inside are artifacts and dioramas about the war, with a few references to Jews (it shows the notice that demanded all Jews assemble near the Jewish cemetery next to Babi Yar). Despite the heavy-handed Soviet style, the exhibit is moving and powerful.

The museum provides the sobering numbers of the war. Some 27 million Soviets were killed, of whom 8 million were Ukrainian. Total American deaths in the war were 400,000.

There are photographs of what Kiev looked like after the war. There was vast destruction there and throughout the land that the Soviet Union once occupied. I could understand how these horrors would affect the survivors and their descendants for generations to come.

Crowning the Slava is an enormous silvery statue of a woman brandishing a sword. This is the "Mother of the Country", despised by just about everyone I met.

We drive to the historic Jewish district called Podol, passing by a synagogue still in use (Lubavitch rabbi). We walk up a steep, twisting cobblestone street called Andrivsky Uzviz. There are cafes, shops and galleries. It is Kiev's Greenwich Village. I spot American tourists, wearing shorts and talking loudly.

We drive next to the wide main boulevard, Khreshchatik, rebuilt after the war, but with some grace. This leads to Maidan Nezhalezhnosti, now Independence Square, formerly October Revolution Square. The expansive open plaza is bustling with people.

We park the car and do a little shopping. We find a small store which carries traditional Ukrainian crafts. I purchase a blouse for Kitty and some lacquerware. The store doesn't take credit cards, so Vitaly goes out to

change money. He comes back with about four inches worth. Two inches pays the bill.

That evening we eat at the hotel. I would learn later that the most reasonable food for the price is at the hotels. The fancy private restaurants were exorbitant.

The hotel had an extensive menu, with a number of amusing translations: "faked shrimp", for example.

It is a 13 million kupon dinner for Vitaly, Slava and myself. Here's what we had: beer ("Dab" from Dortmund, Germany), vegetable borscht (green rather than red), vareniki (one order filled with potatoes and mushrooms, the other with cabbage), good bread, and our main courses (mine was a kind of rolled beef, rather tasteless).

We don't order dessert. When I get back to the room, I eat bananas purchased in Odessa and raisins bought from a street vendor in Kiev.

#### Thursday, May 23, in and around Kiev

In the morning we are joined by an old friend of Vitaly's, Felix Pechorsky, who "knows Kiev like a glove knows a hand." Felix is on a pension now. He was an architectural or construction engineer (what else?) who did business with Vitaly when the System was in full flower. He is about 60, speaks only a little English, but has a dry wit and is good company.

As we drive through the leafy streets, Felix conducts a monologue. That's where Golda Meir was born; Shalom Aleichem lived there; Brodsky was the biggest, wealthiest merchant---that bazaar is named after him; this used to be the Brodsky Hospital, the Brodsky synagogue is that way.

Felix says his mother was from Vitebsk, once in Poland, now in Belarus. She was a neighbor of Marc Chagall.

Our destination this beautiful spring morning is Babi Yar, "Grandma's Ravine." There are actually two memorials to this terrible place. We drive to the first, which was constructed in 1976 and dedicated to "Soviet citizens" who were "victims of fascism." There is no mention of Jews, who were the prime victims. Nor is this memorial even in the right place. The Soviets put it in an artificially dug ravine almost a mile from the true site.



With Felix Pechorsky, our knowledgeable guide to Kiev, including Babi Yar.

It was not until after Ukrainian independence that the second memorial was erected, with the help of the Israeli government. The new memorial is marked by a simple menorah. It was dedicated in 1991, the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the slaughter.

We reach the menorah walking down a long brick sidewalk. To one side is a huge television tower, on the other, a factory. Where the tower stands was once a Jewish cemetery. The factory marks the site of a huge concentration camp that the Nazis operated throughout their occupation of Kiev.

Babi Yar is usually associated with the three-day mass killing that took place in September, 1941, during Rosh Hashanah. Seeing the place makes it clear why the Germans chose it. There is a network of ravines, each 40 or 50 feet deep. Once the men, women and children were machine-gunned, they could be thrown into the pits, covered with a layer of earth, upon which the next rank of victims would be thrown. Many who were not killed outright died of suffocation or bled to death. Some 34,000 were killed in the first three days.

The killers were made of mostly of German SS units. They were assisted by Ukrainian militiamen.

The horror of Babi Yar is overwhelming.

Felix moves his hands up and down. He says, "The ground shook for five days."

A written account says that "for years afterward, blood spurted up from the earth."

Felix says that after the war, the ghastly remains of Babi Yar were excavated and released. Some flowed into the rivers and streams, causing terrible epidemics.

The concentration camp operated throughout the occupation. The ravines eventually received over 150,000 dead, most of them Jews. Soviet prisoners of war, Ukrainian resistance fighters, gypsies and others were also victims.

On this bright sunny day, it is difficult to conceive what happened here. I walk to the edge of a ravine near the menorah and peer down. The foliage is lush. The pit is bathed in sunshine and shadow.

We walk to another part of the ravine, near where the concentration camp stood. A small part of the Jewish cemetery that once existed here still stands. A single headstone can still be read. When we look into the ravine, we see other headstones strewn along the slope.

Incongruously, and profanely, at the top of the ravine is a picnic area, with children's playground equipment. Several young people are at a table, laughing and enjoying themselves. I cannot help but wonder if they even know where they are. Are they blissfully innocent, or intentionally disrespectful?

Trash from the picnic area has been tossed into the ravine, next to some of the tombstones.

Babi Yar was a symbol of the Soviet position toward Jews. It was also an episode in which courageous opponents of the regime exposed the falseness of Soviet doctrine. Benjamin Pinkus, an historian of Jews in the Soviet Union, writes:

*In the end, the fight of the liberal intelligentsia against anti-Semitism in general, and official anti-Semitic policy in particular, came to be symbolized by the affair of Babi Yar, which aroused intense emotions and stimulated debate.*

*On 10 October, 1959, Kiev-born writer Viktor Nekrasov for the first time publicly raised the question of the absence of a monument in Babi Yar. He attacked the Kiev municipal council's "wicked" plan to make a public park and football field there, instead of putting up a monument to the victims of Nazism. He did not specifically name the Jews, speaking rather of "Soviet people"; but his attack made a great impression and invoked a widespread response from the public.*

*Yevtushenko's poem, written after he visited Babi Yar, was published in September 1961 in Literaturnaya Gazeta, after much debate by the editorial board of the Writer's Union. He discarded all disguise and tackled the question of putting up a monument in Babi Yar by attacking the anti-Semitism that had generated the atrocities of the Nazi conquest.*

*Publication of the poem was important because it brought into the open the existence of anti-Semitism in a socialist society in spite of, or perhaps because of, the official statement that it had disappeared...He violated yet another taboo in his poem: he broke the "conspiracy of silence" over the Jewish Holocaust that had been maintained by the government for so many years, by hiding the extermination of the Jews under descriptions of general Fascist anti-Soviet actions.*

Ginsburg notes the poem angered Khrushchev and the Soviet leadership, who fiercely attacked Yevtushenko. Eventually, under pressure, the poet agreed to two changes in the poem. He added Russians and Ukrainians as victims, and he put in a line "to the effect that under the Czars Russian workers had actively opposed pogroms."





Pecherska Lavra historical site, with guide Tatiana Kroha.

At the entrance, Vitaly arranges for an English-speaking guide. By luck of the draw, we get Tatiana Kroha, a vigorous, forthright woman who has a doctorate in the humanities. Her thesis was on the English Renaissance, specifically Sir Francis Bacon. She recalls scornfully how her fellow students wanted to specialize in Communist Dialectics. She turned instead to the past.

Her English is excellent, and she has mastered the history of the Lavra. She had taken Yitzhak Rabin through when he visited the monastery, and was present when President Clinton toured.

I am more impressed by her opinions of recent history and current events than the gold-encrusted relics and ancient icons she shows us. She is strongly religious and a Ukrainian patriot.

Khrushchev was worse than Stalin in terms of closing churches and synagogues, she says. Peter the Great was the "first Bolshevik" because he too destroyed churches. The "Motherland" statue should be cut off at the knees and taken to Chernobyl to be melted down, joining two symbols of Russian ignorance and oppression.

We go into one church, which she remembers turned into a "Museum of Atheism" in Khrushchev's time. Where the altar is used to be an exhibit of Soviet astronauts.

We end our tour with a walk through one of the caves. We obtain candles as our light source, then move through the narrow rocky passages. I worry about claustrophobia, but it is wide enough and short enough to be tolerable.

As we leave we tip her \$30. She bows.

"I live thanks to my tourists," she says.

We stop next at the Jewish Council of Ukraine, where I chat with Ilya Levitas. I learn later he leads one of two factions of the Jewish community.

He is allied to the government. The society's newspaper has a prominent photo of him with Ukraine's President Leonid Kushma.

He has two phones on his desk, which ring frequently. He is busy, but affects a busier air than necessary. I ask him about the future of Jews in Kiev.

They can have a good future, he responds impatiently. Here there are no pogroms, no public anti-Semitism. He has been to New York and Los Angeles, where there are many anti-Semitic incidents every year.

Levitas is surprised to learn about Dzygovka. He says he has studied many Jewish villages, and this is the first one he has encountered in which there was no outright killing of Jews.

We leave Levitas around 2 p.m., stop at a row of kiosks for a fast-food lunch of bananas and oranges. Most of the other kiosks are briskly selling goods in higher demand, shots of vodka or cognac.

We drive a few miles out of town to the Museum of Folk Architecture and Folkways. It is a sprawling park in which buildings from various regions and eras have been assembled. It has added a "living history" component, with men and women in traditional dress using traditional implements.

We hike around, looking into reconstructed homes, churches and taverns. It's a mildly interesting place which gives a glimpse of typical architecture of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and earlier.

There are groups of schoolchildren being lead through the grounds. I notice also a number of stray dogs, the mangy, diseased kind I used to see everywhere in India. I have seen such dogs in many places in Ukraine, each time recalling lines from Blake:

*A dog starved at his master's gate  
Predicts the ruin of the state.*

We return to the city, drive by a large building. Felix says it is a hospital used only by government officials.

I said I thought that happened only when the Communists were in power.

"The same!" Vitaly laughs.

At the Rus there is a cluster of luxury cars, Mercedes and Lexuses, with beefy drivers standing nearby. Who would own cars like these, I ask Vitaly.

"New Russians," he replies.

That evening we have dinner at the Hotel Dniepro with Eric Rubin, political officer at the Embassy, whom I had contacted my first day in Kiev. I knew about Rubin through Tom Bachner, son of Toby's friends Frank and Jane. Tom had been a foreign service officer in Kiev.



Dinner with Eric Rubin, political officer at Embassy. Good Hungarian wine, bad Chicken Kiev.

Rubin is 35, from Westchester, a Yale graduate who studied history and Russian. His wife also works for the State Department, for the Agency for International Development. They have no children. They've been in Kiev for two years, and have enjoyed the assignment. He will be going back to Washington in August.

Rubin is very knowledgeable about Ukraine, Russia, East Europe in general. I tell him what I have seen, and check my impressions against his perspective.

Ukraine is the most important country in Europe in terms of America's relationship with Russia, he says. Keeping Russia within its present borders will be an historic challenge, given Russia's tradition of expansionism. It's a huge country for its population size; they should use what they already have.

Ukraine has sent its intermediate range ballistic missiles to Russia. Long-range missiles still reside in Ukrainian territory, but no one knows for sure if Ukrainians have the codes. Ukraine has pledged to the U.S. that it will be a non-nuclear power.

Ukraine is more friendly toward the U.S. than is Russia. There are considerable differences between western Ukraine, bordering Poland, and eastern Ukraine, oriented toward Russia.

Rubin and his wife have found Kiev a pleasant place to live. They have a pleasant apartment, even if it does not provide sufficient heat in winter. Kiev is getting many new restaurants: Italian, Chinese, Vietnamese, even American barbecue. The expatriate community is small and friendly.

There is a large Peace Corps presence in Ukraine. Half teach English, the others are in "business development," helping private businesses learn capitalistic behavior.

Rubin says he came to run the "Jewish desk" by happenstance. He is Jewish, and his family came from Ukraine. He answered some questions from American citizens interested in Jewish matters, and soon found himself the resident expert.

The Jewish community in Kiev is divided, one part "official" (Ilya Levitas), the other trying to be independent of government, along the lines of Western Jewish communities. The official wing is hesitant about putting pressure on the government, for example, by developing Babi Yar into the great historic site it deserves to be. Others are more activist, pressing for the government to buy the factory building where the concentration camp once stood.

I ask him about Israel, whose embassy we had seen that day. The Israelis, he says, are indifferent toward the discovery and preservation of Jewish history in Ukraine. They see it as an exercise in nostalgia, a turning toward the past rather than the future. The Israelis want young people to make aliyah. They accept all Jews, but do not encourage the elderly and infirm.

I ask him about the future of Jews in Ukraine.

There will be a future, he believes, and this is the most important fact. There are 500,000 Jews in Ukraine, 100,000 in Kiev. Not all will go to Israel or the West. There will be a Jewish life of some sort, and American Jews should be aware of this.

Rubin has come to view as heroes the Hasidic rabbis who serve the remnant congregations of Ukraine. They are hard-working, selfless, totally dedicated to preserving Judaism, but only the Orthodox version in which they believe.

There is room, indeed demand, for Conservative or Reform leadership, but life in Ukraine is too hard to attract such rabbis away from their suburban pulpits, he suggests. So the field is left to the Lubavitchers and other well-organized Hasidic sects.

It is an enjoyable evening in the faded elegance of the Dniepro's dining room. Vitaly talks with Rubin about Miriam's work, sharing a draft of her amazingly detailed compilation of information about the Jewish communities of Poland.

I had decided that this would be my best opportunity to have Chicken Kiev in Kiev, so this is what I order. It turns out to be overly fried, dry and generally tasteless. We have an excellent appetizer of mushrooms and sour cream. Rubin orders varenikis. The Hungarian red wine and the good dark bread help everything.

#### Friday, May 24, Kiev-Chernigov-Kiev

It's cool, gray and rainy as we start out to see Fanya and Luda in Chernigov, which lies about 65 miles to the north and east of Kiev. Fanya is the daughter of Elkeh and Melech Pearlroisen. Melech was the brother of Moishe, who married Esther. In America, Moishe became Morris Rosen.

It's a good four-lane road. To the west, about 25 miles away, is Chernobyl. I console myself by remembering how the prevailing winds blew the radiation to the north and west.

We pass a sign saying we have entered Chernigov Oblast. Slava mentions there were many partisans in this area during the war. The partisan war waged by the Soviets was a critical factor in tying down German divisions. Although there were no set battles or sieges, the hit-and-run guerrilla fighting was every bit as deadly and destructive.

A driver coming toward us flashes his lights. It's the universal signal for cops ahead. Slava slows to 30 as we pass three idle-looking police.

"If he stop you, he fine you," Vitaly observes.

A little further on we go by a man driving an ancient motor scooter. He is carrying a long wooden scythe.

The landscape is gentle rolling farmland. Here too Ukraine reminds me of Indiana.

We stop for a photo opportunity at the large sign marking Chernigov's city limits. There is writing on the sign, which I ask Vitaly to translate.

"It says, 'Revolutionary Town, Good Workers, Important Partisans.'"

"So this is Chernigov's slogan?"

"Garbage. Communist garbage."

It's 11 a.m. as we start the quest for the address. After half an hour of trial and error, we reach a pedestrian who points to a building across the street.

Fanya and Luda live in two modest but pleasant apartments in the same bloc. We first meet Luda, 52, who lives on the fifth floor. Fanya's apartment is on the second floor.

Luda is a voluble, excitable woman who teaches music. She has a problem walking, making her fifth floor walk-up a difficult daily obstacle. She uses a cane. She speaks so fast that Vitaly has trouble keeping up with her.

Fanya, to outward appearances, is a sweet old woman of 76 who speaks with a quiet, quavering voice. In her youth she was a dedicated doctor and a committed Communist.



Fanya, daughter of Elkeh. She lives in Chernigov, as does her daughter Luda.

They are both very short. I tower over them.

The Chernigov cemetery is weedy and untended. Many markers are down. Fanya and Luda say there is no one to take care of it, and what's more, the government has announced it will be bulldozed in five years. Vitaly and I are both skeptical, associating this kind of official vandalism with the Communists, but the women stick with their story.

There is neither a synagogue nor a rabbi in Chernigov today.

The graves of Elkeh and Melech are plain and unadorned. We do not linger there long.

Back at Luda's apartment, I begin talking with Fanya about her life and her memories of the family.

Golya, the son of Goldeh, lived with Fanya's parents for many years, she recalls. He also lived with Solomon and Pearl. She has many photographs of Golya, who was evidently a favorite with the family. He was killed in the opening days of World War II, in 1941, in Latvia.



With Luda at the unadorned grave of Elkeh, David's sister (1892-1973).

Fanya does not know the name of Goldeh's husband. She believes he lived in Odessa after Goldeh's died in childbirth.

Malkeh's autistic daughter was named Rukhel. Fanya believes Rukhel was killed with Malkeh. In 1948, Fanya met a family friend who gave her an account of what happened in Dzygovka during the war. According to this version, Elly was also killed by the Germans on the road to Yampol.

Fanya says both she and Dora were born in the home of her Grandfather Solomon. She remembers him as a merchant, mainly in buying and selling tobacco. He was an intelligent man, who helped people write letters and fill out documents.

Her mother, Elkeh, and father, Melech Pearlroisen, rented a five-room, two bedroom house in Dzygovka for five rubles a month. She studied for three years in a Jewish school in Dzygovka, then went to Ukrainian schools when her parents moved to Monasterische, 80 miles south of Kiev, in 1931. In 1933, the family then went to Chernigov, where Fanya completed secondary school.

She then went to Kiev to study in a medical training institute. When the war broke out, and the Germans invaded, the institute relocated itself further east, to Kharkov. This was not remote enough, however, and after two months it moved to Chelyabinsk. At the same time, a second institute relocated from Kharkov to the city of Frunze, Kirghizia. This would turn out to be where Fanya would finish, after which she was inducted into the army, as a doctor.

In May, 1944, she became pregnant and returned to Chernigov.

Luda's father, Sasha Shamachmudov, was a Kirghizian who was serving as an air force officer. He stayed in contact with her and his daughter, writing letters, sending gifts, giving help.

"But he went back to his home," Fanya says with a sigh.

Sasha did visit from time to time. Fanya has several photos of him with the young Luda, who carries her father's dark and handsome face. Over time, the family lost touch with him. Fanya does not know if he is still alive.

Fanya's voice breaks and her eyes seem to fill when looking at the photos of the dashing Sasha and herself as a young woman.

We talk about how her family and the family of Solomon and Manya Rosenberg were able to escape the invading German armies.

Manya Rosenberg and her children, Lidia and Danya, were in Monastarische, closer to the front line, when the war broke out. (Solomon had already joined the army.) The family fled, in a harrowing journey, to Chernigov, where they joined the Pearlroisens. Manya was exhausted by the trip, and said she did not want to go further, but Chernigov soon was threatened.

Melech Pearlroisen saw the danger, swept the tired Manya up, and took her and her family to the Desna River, which flows through Chernigov. He put the Rosenbergs on a boat, along with his wife, Elkeh and daughter Dora. He stayed behind, telling his family he would find them wherever they would be relocated.

The boat went down the Desna to the Dnieper. It safely reached a place where the families were able to register with the authorities and be moved a further east. The Soviet Union had a well-established system for moving not only people but whole factories to the east, beyond the reach of the invading armies.

Elkeh was able to send Fanya a postcard saying the family had been relocated in Tambov province, 200 miles southeast of Moscow. The card brought joy to Fanya, who at the time was in Kharkov, and, having heard that the Germans had occupied Chernigov, was mourning the likelihood her entire family had been wiped out.

Because the postcard said Melech had not joined them, Fanya was concerned for her mother. So she left Kharkov to go to Tambov province, where she found her mother working in a train station in a little village. Life was very difficult.

Meanwhile, Melech had evaded the German invasion, and had somehow found where the family was in Tambov province and went there. He was given work in the town of Tambov. Melech was a bookkeeper.

"My father wrote a letter to every village" in Tambov province, Fanya recalls. He finally found out where they were living, and was reunited with them.

Melech was concerned with the climate, the difficulty of finding work, and with Fanya's leaving medical school. So he decided the family would move again. The family went to Frunze, in the state of Kirghizia. Melech could not find work in that town, so had to move to another in Kirghizia. But Fanya was able to resume her studies in the medical institute which has relocated there from Kharkov.

The Rosenbergs also went to Kirghizia. It was there that Solomon, who was in the army, was able to locate them and be reunited with them.

After the war, Melech and Elkeh returned to Chernigov, as did Manya and her children. Solomon, however remained in the army for two or three years after the end of the war, rising to the rank of Lt. Colonel. When he returned to civilian life, he moved with the family to Odessa.

Frida Rosenberg and her son Fima were in Uzbekistan during the war. Melech arranged for them to come live with them in Chernigov. In 1946 or 1947, Frida and Fima moved to Odessa.

Fanya's specialty is neurology. She first worked in a military hospital in Chernigov, then when it closed in 1957 worked at the city hospital. She continued working long after she could have retired.

Luda serves a sumptuous lunch: cognac, egg salad, herring, red caviar, sardines, cheese, sausage, tomatoes, cucumbers, bread, along with a main dish, a stew of meat and potatoes.



Luda and Fanya served a delicious lunch. Note the gorgeous carpets on the wall.

Fanya and I go through many photographs. One in particular astonishes me.

The note on the back is addressed to Solomon Maidenberg "*from your niece and nephew Maidenberg.*" This is clear evidence that Solomon did have a brother whose children sent him this photo. I take the photo with me, to see if the mystery can be unraveled back in America.

Fanya has the photograph of the five sisters, but she could not identify it.

As we prepare to leave, I give Fanya and Luda a present, two blouses picked out by Kitty. I also give them an envelope from Viktor Brenner.

Luda immediately makes a generous response. She takes a pin from one of her own dresses and gives it to me for Kitty.

Fanya holds me close, saying over and again, "This visit is like a dream come true."



Comparing notes and photos with Fanya.



Farewell to Fanya and Luda.

Saturday, May 25, Kiev and departure

I spend an hour packing. Once we have loaded the Lumina we will not return to the Rus before catching my 3:30 p.m. flight to Amsterdam.

I decide not to take any of the wine or cognac that was given to me as gifts. Vitaly is dumbstruck. No Russian would do this, he says, and tells a story.

There are three sportsmen out camping together. They are telling each other tales.

One says, "I was out hunting when six birds appeared on a branch. I had six shots in my rifle, so pow-pow-pow, I shot them down one by one."

The other two say, "It's possible, it's possible."

The second sportsman says, "I too was out hunting, but I only had one bullet. Three deer came by. I waited for them to line up just right, then bang! I put one shot through all three."

The other two say, "It's possible, it's possible."

The third sportsman says, "I went out fishing the other day. I had a bottle of vodka with me, but no glass. So I brought it back."

The other two look at each other. "Impossible!"

After a small hassle at check out (the hotel needed to clear my Visa charge through Moscow), we leave, picking up Felix first.

We see some sights, including the National University, then stroll through a huge street fair set up to honor Kiev Day. The roads are blocked off and the sidewalks jammed with vendors. I buy a wooden basket with an engraved star of David. It costs \$5.00.

We stop by the imposing Santa Sophia Cathedral, established by Yaroslav the Wise in 1037 and described in the books as a masterpiece of world architecture. Unfortunately, it is closed to visitors. On the sidewalk outside the main gate, there is an odd sight: a grave of the Patriarch Volodymyr. His supporters buried him there when the government denied access to the cathedral grounds. This remains an ongoing controversy, Vitaly says. It involves three branches of the Orthodox Church, and has overtones of extreme Ukrainian nationalism. There is an informational kiosk and a kind of honor guard near the grave, manned by old men in brown uniforms. Occasionally a passerby places a flower near the sidewalk cemetery.

Santa Sophia rises over a large square, which now carries its name. At the other end of the square is a monstrosity of gray Communist stonework which was the headquarters of the Party. The central offices of the then KGB are in another building overlooking the square.

The symbolism of the sacred at one end and the secular (one might say profane) at the other couldn't be more telling. The centuries-old force of faith has vanquished the decades-old doctrine of Communism.

In the center of the square is a statue of Bogdan Khmelnytsky. The square was once named for this figure from the 17<sup>th</sup> century who is a folk hero to many Ukrainians but a figure of fear to most Jews.

In Cecil Roth's *History of the Jews*, and in many other sources, the Khmelnytsky persecution is described as an early Holocaust:

*In 1648, the Cossacks of the Ukraine, under the hetman [leader] Khmelnitsky, rose against the oppression of their Polish masters, whose political and economic tyranny they deeply resented. In all of this, in their eyes, the Jews were implicated. Their religion was even more hateful to the Greek Church than the Roman Catholicism which the Poles professed and endeavored to impose.*

*Jews, moreover, acted as stewards of the Polish nobles estates, as collectors of the taxation, as administrators of the revenue, as lessors of the forests and the inns and the mills. Accordingly, the Cossack hatred against them burned ever more deeply than their detestation of the Poles.*

*Throughout the country, massacres took place on a scale and of a ferocity which beggared anything which had been known in Europe since the time of the Black Death; and the horrors which were accentuated by the tortures by which they were accompanied.*

*In every city or township which was entered, a veritable holocaust took place, in many instances the Poles betraying their Jewish neighbors in the mistaken hope of saving their own lives.*

Khelmnitsky's place in Ukrainian history is undergoing revision. After leading his peasant revolt, he reached an alliance with the Russian Czar. This was regarded as a great alliance when history was read through Soviet eyes. Today, Khelmnitsky appears all too accommodating for Ukrainian patriotic tastes.

Felix nods toward the statue, looks about him, and says, "The first bandit."

It obviously makes any Jew uneasy to see not only statues but tourist ware (replicas of the spiked mace, Khelmnitsky's weapon of choice, are sold everywhere) dedicated to such a brutish anti-Semite.

Before heading for the airport, we watch the unveiling of a statue to Olga, a Kievan duchess who helped introduce Christianity to the area. There is a parade of officialdom, music, speeches, and a blessing by black-robed Orthodox priests.

Around the crowd are men in ill-fitting suits talking into phones or radios.

"KGB", Vitaly says with contempt.



The three travelers, Mike, Slava and Vitaly, and the trusty Lumina van

Around 1 p.m., we head toward the airport. We arrive at the entrance, only to find a long line of cars backed up by a roadblock. A variety of police backed by soldiers cradling machine guns are checking cars, looking at papers, occasionally opening up luggage.

"They are looking for smugglers," is the only explanation Vitaly can offer. We are scrutinized, but pass through without being searched.

Even though Communism is gone, the remains of the police state remain. It is with some relief that I shake hands with Vitaly, wave good-bye to Felix and Slava, and pass through a series of airport checkpoints, showing my passport and various entry documents.



Departure,  
May 25, 1996.

Once in the outbound departure lounge, I begin to think of home. There is a group of Americans nearby, speaking with what sounds like Texas or Oklahoma accents. Elsewhere is a cluster of Indians. I hear some Dutch, German and French as we line up to board the KLM flight to Amsterdam.

We take off heading west, climbing once again above the Pale of Settlement, where East European Jewry rose and was destroyed, where so much blood of all nations has been shed in the name of futile ideologies and hatreds.

It is the same direction David and Rose traveled 90 years earlier, toward a new world. It's been a wonderful trip, from start to finish, but I am glad to be going home, to America, following the path my grandparents blazed for me.