

Australia

1 April 2012

SPIDERWEB FOR ETERNITY

I am weaving a spider web.

My dad taught me how to do it. It is so strong and it will keep together forever. This is just what I would like it to do. I will put all those names on it - mums, dads, grandparents, kids, uncles and aunts - anyone who will have some drops of that magic liquid in them that makes them a "family".

Dad started it all some 30 years ago. He wanted to know who his great-great-great grandfather was. He travelled all over Holland to churches, councils and organisations where he could find any records related to his "family". He did find them! All the way back to 1555, with records to prove it.

For his five kids he made this "family Tree", neatly typed, photocopied and even a crest on the front. About ten years ago he gave one to me. I looked at it briefly and put it in a drawer. No time for all that now!

About a year ago I realised that one day my children, when they reached my old age and had some more time, would also like to know their roots beyond nana and grandpa who are now gone forever. I put all the family my father searched so long for on the tree of "my Heritage". I finished it within a month and from far away countries people popped up through "matches" that were far back in time related to my family.

It was time to start with Martin's family. My husband's parents had both died only a few years ago, but before that I had managed to get some information from them about their respective families. I scribbled it all on a piece of paper and put it in that same drawer where I kept my own family history.

Now finally that I had some time to start, it was easy. Dad in law Phil's father came from Austria, a town called Tocal (that was written on his wedding certificate) and mum in law Mary's parents came from Russia. I added all those names and dates on the Tree and started searching for the rest of their ancestors. I had gone as far as Martin's grandfather Norman and his brother Peter. Both came to Australia from Austria in 1890.

Although raised in Europe (and I was pretty good at geography in school), I had never heard of the town Tokal. I searched and found it easily in Austria, but no Lentz family! As a matter of fact only very few Lentz's in Austria. Then some clue led me to Hungary... bingo! There had been Lentz's there, but sadly most were killed by the Nazis. I could only find one female who had lived in Budapest before the war but the great grandparents of Martin were not on any list. Via Google (magic thing!) I found a link to JewishGen, became a member in January 2011 and searched for Tokal, Austria...nothing! However I did learn about different ways of handwriting in those days and found the 'T' was an "S", so the town I needed to find was Sokal.

By then it was June 2011. I typed in Lentz-Sokal and the world opened up! I found great grandpa Norman AND his parents, and on top of that the whole family on record! I had them in no time on the Tree, but had no proof of great grandparents.

I started reading anything I could find about Sokal-Ukraine. Yes, Phil was right, his father did come from Austria but he and I never knew that Ukraine once was part of that. I had heard about Galicia, but I lived in Spain for some years and believed that was what all the talk was about.

I could not believe what I read! Sokal, this tiny town in Galicia-Ukraine, had over 20,000 people before WW11 and about 43% were Jewish. As far as the record goes, only about 30 survived the slaughter and I wondered how many people in addition to Martin and our kids were living descendants from these survivors. By now I had some 100 people on the Tree and found some more Lentz's on the records that left Sokal or other towns in Galicia before WW11.

I wanted to know if Hitler had actually managed to "get rid" of all the Jews in Sokal. There was only one way to find out. Put all the Jewish people of Sokal on my Tree and hope to get some response from someone in this world. After about 200 names it slowly started.

I had spun the first threads of the web. .. Contact!.....More and more people popped up and I had some "matches" with other families from all over the world who were very distantly related to Martin.

As I went along, averaging some 50 more names on the Tree every day, I found those names became people, real people, who were all related to each other and this fine spider web became larger and larger. Every male had a daughter who married X. They had a daughter who married Y and so on. Every son married Z and in no time I realised that I had to keep track and research all those new families as well. I got to know them very well. A daughter married and I could see in my mind the whole family together for those wedding celebrations. Cousins, nieces, uncles, aunties, brothers, sisters all together and so happy and maybe even squabbling like any normal family. The little kids were there who I just put on the Tree as newly born but within some months or weeks I found their death had to be registered! It happened far too many times. My heart would (and still does) sink every time again when I write those records down. The pain never eases.

One family strikes me most. They had seven children - every year another one and every year one died. Finally, number eight survived into adulthood, married and the couple had their first child. Such joy and happiness for those grandparents after all those years of heartache. But Hitler put a stop to that happiness. Not one of this family survived the Shoah, not one emigrated or moved out of Sokal before the war. There is no one to remember them, ever...
Isn't there anyone?...

I do!... and thousands of other Jewish people can do so soon. They will be Remembered for Eternity, once the names of those 10,000 and their ancestors are on this Tree as a family, all connected through this spider web of bloodlines. Hopefully one of their relatives will have left or escaped Sokal. These surviving relatives don't know just yet, but one day, someone, somewhere will write a Page of Testimony for them so they will live forever in someone's memory.

With many thanks to Geshet Galicia: <http://www.jri-poland.org/index.htm> and Yad Vashem: <http://yadvashem.org/> where I found most of the records.

Next May Martin and I will go to Sokal. I want to see the houses where those 7500 Jewish people could have lived in. I want to visit the market square where they would meet each other and laugh, but where also horrible things happened to them. I want to walk along the river and in my mind see those little children throw stones in the water. I want to visit the Synagogue where they would be

together with G_d. I want to visit the cemetery where Jewish people were laid to rest and hope to be able to take pictures of headstones (if any). Maybe there are some inscriptions left on them for those few family members scattered all over the world.

I wish I could find 7500 of those members!

I don't know how I will feel once I am there. I don't know how Martin will feel, finally seeing the place where his family lived, loved, danced and cried - where all of them were murdered by the Nazis.

I don't know.

24 April 2012

Martin and I are wary.

We don't know what to expect in Sokal. Over the last 12 months we have learned about the hatred the Ukrainians had towards the Jews. How they would have their Pogroms and kill Jews just because of the fact they were Jews!

Would their feelings have gone after 70 years? Have their parents passed on their hatred to their kids? We decided to go very quickly into Sokal, do our thing and not publish our Jewishness.

How stupid!

We are going to take pictures of everything Jewish. Who are we kidding?

After two hours the whole town possibly knows that two old Jews are visiting!

25 April 2012

G-d must have watched us. An e-mail from Alan Charak put me in contact with Judy Maltz who made a documentary about the survival of her family in Sokal "No 4 Street of our Lady" and I simply asked her the question.....How did you feel when you were in Sokal?

Judy responded immediately and put our fears to rest. Judy was warmly welcomed and found the Ukrainians very nice.

We are going to Sokal without any worries ...!

27 April 2012

We are going to do it.....I found my soul mate. Judy is just as passionate as I am about putting Sokal on the world map.

Together we will find all these descendants from all over the world and put 10.000 people back into Sokal.

29 April 2012

Martin and I are crying. Some 2 years ago I saw the movie "The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas". Martin had never seen it until we watched it together today.

It shows how G-d meant this world to be. Seen through the eyes of children, one German, one Jewish, who simply became friends and loved each other, regardless of their ethnic background.

A big lesson for the grown ups and the “wise” old people.

24 May 2012

Kiev

We are leaving to L’viv in a few hours.

We arrived here two days ago. What a lovely city, these beautiful old buildings. We regret not having booked a couple more days here.

The view from our hotel/boat is like a picture. Martin bought an English-Russian phrase book in an English bookstore under the metro. Another two “tourists” were standing outside talking to their guide and later that evening in our hotel restaurant the same happened. Wherever you are in the world, you just see a “soul mate”. An understanding smile is the only exchange one needs in the Ukraine to confirm you are here to do the same kind of “sightseeing”.



I bought “Treblinka” in the store and finished reading it just a few minutes ago. There are no words to express my feelings, understanding what happened there is a huge struggle. Thinking about wanting to have a good night sleep now feels like thinking about committing a crime.

25 May 2012

L’viv

Can’t stop myself. We are walking through this absolutely beautiful town. One can imagine the streets with ladies in long dresses, horse driven carriages; everything seems the same as around 200 years ago. Then I see the very old cobblestones and think about the poor Jews who were ordered by the Nazis to clean them on their knees in the freezing cold at four am. I was warned by a member from Israel about those feelings which could spoil seeing the beauty of L’viv. I do need to separate my thoughts.



26 May 2012

We are trying to rent a car to go to Sokal. The rates charged by the well known companies are exorbitant, seems to be a different rate for the locals and tourists. We look at US \$700 bond and US \$300 rental for one day. Must find another way to get there, maybe buying a car is cheaper!

The desk is strewn with papers about Sokal and the Holocaust. Must put them in a drawer when we go out. It's crazy, but we still feel uncomfortable with people knowing about our mission here - don't know why. Wonder if other Jews felt the same when they were visiting here.

Visited the Religion History Museum today. It does display all religions and has some very old Jewish Scrolls and Torahs and a drawing of the Golden Rose Synagogue, but again, no mention that it was destroyed by the Nazis.

27 May 2012

We hired an English speaking guide to show us L'viv but the last two days we had been walking around L'viv and had seen quite a lot. We realised there was not much more we could see by just driving around Lviv all day. The solution was simple - off to Sokal instead. With a surprised guide, who did not know much of Sokal at all, we started our journey. Turned out our guide Maya was Jewish, born and raised in L'viv. We totally relaxed, now we could talk freely.

On the way to Sokal Bob (her husband) did a detour to the small town of Belz and showed us the Jewish cemetery there, unspoiled, well looked after, just needed good lawn mowing.



It would be great if the remnants of the cemetery in Sokal could also be looked after like this one.

And now finally, S O K A L !!

We went straight to the main square.....Took from left to right pictures of all buildings and shops. There were some festivities going on and Maya found out soon that it was the celebration of Sokal Town established some 700 years ago.

We wandered into the side streets where still some old Jewish houses existed. We could see the marks on the door frames of where the mezuzah had been.

We took pictures of every Jewish house! Hope one of them belonged to your family.

Tenacious Maya stopped some old ladies in the park and they told her about the horrors that had happened. One of the ladies recalled time after time about the children killed in front of their mothers. She had tears in her eyes.

The old people seemed very willing to talk to us. The younger ones gave us mostly suspicious looks.

In the mean time some other old woman with goats stopped me and kept talking to me, but I do not speak any Ukrainian and the two words she kept repeating were Ghetto and Familia. Familia...no translation needed there.

Maya did not stop. She was on a roll and getting the info she wanted!! She would ask questions of every old person in her sight and go into the private backyards and even houses to get any information related to the Sokal Jews.

After this little area with houses we went to the old Jewish "suburb" nearby where the Synagogue is located. Thank G_d, now it is a big park and not some new Ukrainian suburb.

At the entrance of the park are still the remnants of an old wall which probably surrounded a house.



All the houses have gone but the two main streets, which were like a fork, are now paths in the park. Using the old 1925 maps we had, we could locate the areas where family members of Martin had their properties. The path to the right leads to the Synagogue, where the old fence is still standing. Inside trees had grown and there was just one big heap of rubbish. It seemed as though nobody in Sokal gave a darn about the Jewish, and the town's history.



Maya had stopped an old man who told us that what was left of the Synagogue was used as the community centre. The building was a lot bigger, with Shul on the left of the existing brickworks, underneath large cellars. After the war the Shul was bulldozed and the cellars filled in to make the park bigger, and the existing path was extended.

Coming into the park, going to the left on what once was Ulica Grotgera is all park. The path has paving which looks like it was preserved from previous times as it has decorative markings, but I cannot be sure of that. At the end is a monument, terrible damaged with graffiti and we saw marks that looked like the Star of David had been there. Again, we are not sure of that.

To the right of the monument were the remnants of steps down to the Bug River. Probably used a lot by the Jewish community.

We wandered back to the main Jewish Square where there are still some houses and shops and today a big stage was build for the concert to be held later that day.

Eerie, seeing these festivities, knowing what happened on that square.



We had to find nr 16 Ulica Wysoczanski, where Alan Charak's father once lived. Anyone we asked did not know where the street was and we did not know the new name. We nearly gave up until we realised we all had overlooked it on the old map. Off we went and arrived there very soon, the name had not changed at all so the "helpful" Ukrainians should have known!

We took pictures of the whole street and every house on it. Number 16 was still there in its old glory - no renovations we could notice...Alan, hope you can make your dad very happy!



In the meantime while we were making pictures, Maya did some more exploring. She found the old hospital nearby, built more than a century ago and in very good condition, still in use.



I had promised I would take pictures of anything or any piece of gravestone I could find on the old Jewish Cemetery. I knew there was not much to expect but the smallest bit might mean a lot to someone else.

We knew the street where to find it but could not see it. It was probably a bit further at the back of the street or some house so (yes) Maya asked this lady standing at the gate of her house. She told us bluntly...there is no cemetery anymore. The woman was born in the house right opposite the cemetery and knew it very well. She was very friendly and invited us to use her toilet, according to Maya a great honour to strangers.

The lady also told us one of her sons married a Jewish girl and now lives in Israel. Ironic that she will one day be the grandmother of Jewish children who will probably also one day play in Sokal,



children fathered by a descendant possibly of a Ukrainian who may have hated the Jews. Still hope for the future here!

To our astonishment there now was a house right on top of the cemetery, a new fence build on top of the old wall and all what was left were the old steps leading up to the cemetery.

Behind the house another four houses have been build. There is not a sign of what once was there and we wondered if the people now occupying these houses know about that.

We took a picture of the steps, the ONLY memory left.....Treasure it.



Now to the old brick factory - a bit of a puzzle as there a several brick factories in and around Sokal.

The first one was surely the wrong one as we did not see any crumbled leftovers of walls as we knew should be there from records we read. So, which one to go to now?

Maya asked a very old woman who was working in her vegetable garden if she knew where the brick factory was which was used as a ghetto. She did not know about a ghetto, just that all Jews and lots of Polish people were forced to work in this one and they seemed to be working day and night as she hardly saw anyone leaving the factory.



She had lived here all her life and knew a lot about what happened in the war period. She insisted that this was the one factory we were looking for but now this factory is in full production again. Maya asked the guard if we could go and have a look inside but he needed to get permission. Eventually the guard came back and the answer was a simple no, we had to forget having a look at the brick factory inside.

Maya talked to the old woman about the Jewish girl the woman had saved shortly before the war ended. The old woman's name was Zosya (Sophia) Salyga. She was born in 1925 and was the same age as the Jewish girl she knew. This girl had come regularly to her house to sell goods like shoe laces as the Nazis had taken everything from her family and nobody had any work. The Jews tried anything to make some money to survive.

Sophia told the story how the girl one day arrived at her house "looking like me now at 87" battered, bruised and wounded. The girl and her sister had fled to the woods when one of the Nazi round-ups was going on and asked for help from the banderivtsi (nationalist movement) who were hiding there. The partisans instead pack raped and tortured her and left her for dead in the woods (it's not clear what ordeal her sister went through). Somehow the girls managed to escape and went

to the brick factory where they could get help from family and friends. But they could not get in and it was Sophia's father who let the forlorn Jewish girl in and Sophia's elder sister hid her on top of the stove wrapped in a sheet dipped in whey to heal her wounds. Just as they put the girl there fascists entered and demanded "peck and tipple" (alcohol). Old Sophia told Maya she froze from fear when they approached the stove, but in spite of being under threat of death nobody gave away the Jewish girl. The fascists tortured the family for a while and left only after being given food and "samogonka" (home made vodka).

The girl stayed for a week or so and then the family helped her obtain a Christian birth certificate from the church. She fled Sokal with the Soviet troops on their way to Poland where she re-united with her sister.

The older sister was already married, and Sophia had been in touch with the girl the family helped after the war when the girls moved to Palestine and "her" girl got married too.

Sophia offered (insisted is a better word) to show us the spot we call "The Pit", where thousands of Jews were murdered and buried. She came with us in the car even though we were complete strangers and we ended up on the other side of town again - the same road where the hospital is.

After about 3 minutes she told us to stop and there was a long piece of unused land about one meter lower than the road - very high grass and some scrubs. Sophia told us that it was unused land as the Ukrainians "don't like it here".



Buried there lay our relatives, about 3000, which is nearly half of the Jews of Sokal. Tortured, shot, murdered...then dumped like a piece of trash into the pit which Sophia said was more than 300 meters long and about 3 meters wide. She also told us how this same road was covered in blood, like a river, every time the Nazis had one of their 'Aktions'.

I don't think I have to explain how we felt at that spot, we left our pebbles from Australia, for all of them to be remembered forever. Martin told me later he felt he finally had "closure" visiting that spot and remembering his family and others who were buried there. There needs to be a memorial erected here!! Maybe even buy that piece of land so no one ever can build on it.

We brought Sophia back to her house next to the brick factory and we had to make one more picture - Martin under the sign of the town hall of Sokal.

Back in the car, ready to leave Sokal, Maya and I were talking about this wonderful woman Sophia, who talked all the time as though she was happy someone finally, after 70 years, wanted to hear the stories no one in Sokal wanted to hear.

Then it clicked! Two daughters of Nachman Lenz, 1st cousin of Martin's grandfather Nachman, survived the Holocaust by pretending to be Ukrainian peasants and working on farms. They had tried to find some missing teenage boys from Sokal who were taken away by the Nazi's to "work" but never came back. One of the girls was married, one single. These were the same girls Sophia talked about, the girls we have been trying to find....and Sophia knew where they lived!

Maya, of course, suggested we must go back and ask Sophia the names of the girls and their addresses. There it was: Hava and Hitla Batzk daughters of Majorca and Faiga, one of the girls married to a Hestra. Although these names are not the same as I have (we wrote them down as we heard them), I do know we were talking about the same girls and it would not take long to sort it all out and finally find them. Then Sophia got the family photos out because she had one photo Hava had sent her from Argentina.

We went home with the one and only photo we ever had of our relatives from Sokal!



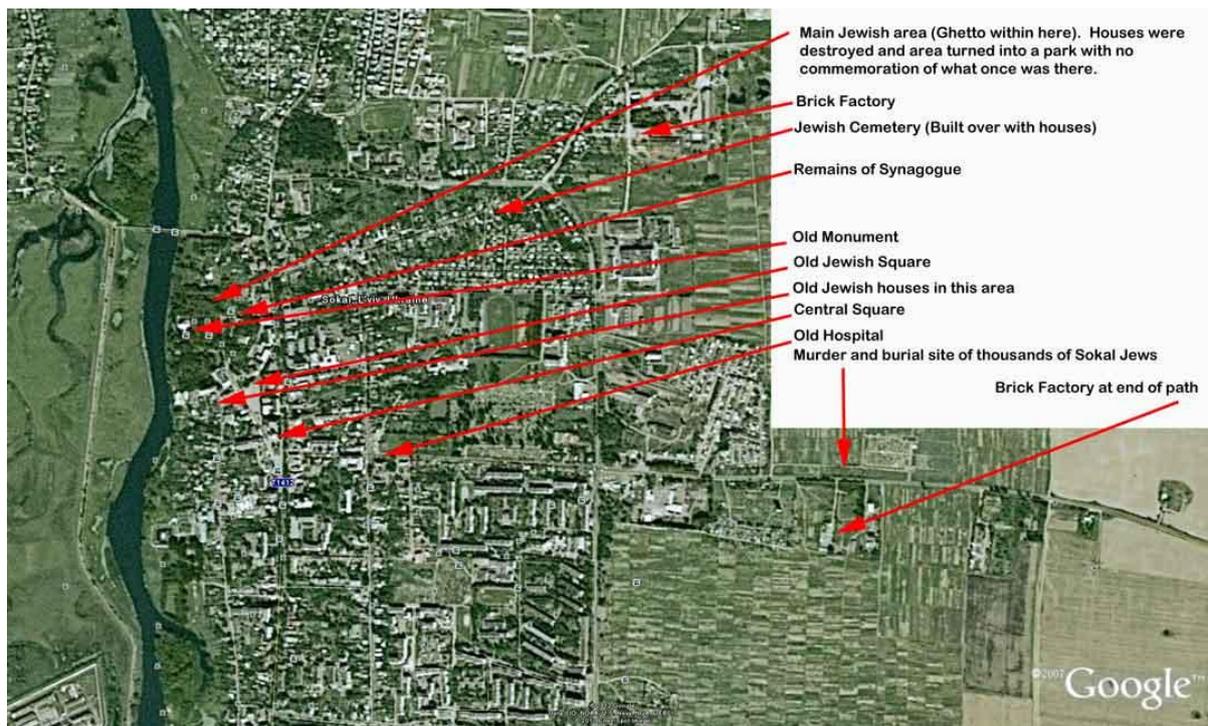
On Sunday 27 May 2012 we left Sokal, exactly 69 years to the date the Nazis shot the remaining Ghetto Jews from Sokal. And the local population were celebrating the foundation of Sokal with no remembrance of any Jewish history.....

CONCLUSION

We never again want to go back to Sokal, never again to the Ukraine.

The total disrespect shown by most Ukrainians after the war towards the Jews is heartbreaking. Nowhere in Sokal could we find a memorial or even a mention of the Jews. It is as if they did not exist.

We do remember and it makes us even stronger putting all on record for our children and their children - for the whole world. There is no "tourist" map for Jewish visitors to Sokal so we made one.



If you can, DO make that visit to Sokal, for you can say goodbye and it will make you feel very close to the ones you lost and will remember forever....

I have to continue weaving the web.....

Patricia Lentz

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In Lviv is a Jewish community which takes care of Memorials in Lviv and some other places (like Krakow and Prague) and there are guided tours around Jewish places.

Maya wishes to express gratitude to those Jews from other countries who donated and assisted in erecting memorials in Lviv and Ternopil regions.

Jewish guide/interpreter: Maya Yaroslavska – L'viv e-mail: ymaya@yandex.ru

Sokal family tree, maps and photo's :

<http://www.myheritage.com/site-165123192/families-from-sokal-galicia>

Family Tree Data compiled from records of:

- **Jri-poland.org** <http://www.jri-poland.org/index.htm>
- **Yadvashem.org** <http://yadvashem.org/>
- **and descendants of Sokal families**