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Dear Family,

Report on trip to Ukraine and Azerbaijan, April 20 - May 2, 2015

We had a head start for this trip with the help of three branches of the Fayneberg/Feinberg family: Judy Taback from the Berg family, Gary Pokrassa from the Pokrassa and Feinberg families and U.S. leader of the Zolotonosha community for JewishGen.org; and Janet Billig from the Pokrassa and Boguslavsky families...all united by descent and marriage from the original trio of Abraham, Rachel and Anna Fayneberg/Feinberg who were born in Zolotonosha, Russia, now Ukraine. Judie Fein's nostalgic and lively "The Spoon from Minkowitz" fully displays her deep talents as a travel writer extraordinaire and her encouragement of our trip was welcome and delightful. The trip simply could not have been made without these expert researchers, networkers and family pillars. Thank you!

This report is more than anyone might wish, but we have divided it into five sections so consider it a buffet of your choice:

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About Ukraine

Vivian (Lowery Derryck), my wife, and I had been invited to Kiev to attend a conference celebrating the contributions of young people to the new Ukraine and its civil society, academic and business leaders. The aim was to underline the responsibilities of citizens in a democracy..such a good theme for citizens of any democracy. It was stirring to see the amazing optimism and hopes of the 400 or so people there. It was organized by the Bohdan Hawrylyshyn Foundation of Geneva. Bohdan is a board colleague of an international policy group. At age 89 and a former dean of a famous Swiss management school, he is active and highly honored in his country.

Ukraine is in a small set of countries that has had an almost constant history of misery and oppression. After a few months of genuine independence in 1917, the Ukrainian People's Republic was in military contention until 1922 when the Red Army conquered it and Ukraine became an integral part of the Soviet Union. During that same period pogroms killed an estimated 100,000 Jews.

Civil war, economic dislocation, Lenin's attack on all organized religion, the arrest and the death/gulag of 5,000 intellectuals in 1929 all was capped by Stalin's cruelly imposed famine in 1932-3 that led to greater losses of life in Ukraine than in any other part of the USSR. No clear records were kept because death was everywhere, but it is estimated that 6-7 million died in the Ukraine (around 25% of the population) in breaking the back of Ukraine's agricultural system. A weak recovery ill prepared the country for the 1941 occupation by Germany that lasted for two horrendous years.

The first killing of Jews and others by the Germans was of the intelligencia, an echo of Lenin and Stalin. Ukraine lost more people in WW II than any other country..some 7-8 million out of a pre-war population of 40million. The holocaust in Ukraine took a huge loss. Estimates range from 850,000-900.000 to 1.4-1.5million Jewish lives lost. In addition some 3 million non-Jews were murdered and some 2 million Ukrainians were taken to Germany as slave labor. Military conquest and Stalin's policy of destroying anything possible as the Nazi's moved forward left the economy at rock bottom.

Better times occurred after World War II, particularly when Nikita Khrushchev (former head of the Communist party in Ukraine) led Russia. Ukraine became an industrial and scientific center, backed by a strengthened military, and built on expanded social services. The Chernobyl disaster of 1986 was a major setback with lingering regional consequences.

The core economy in the Ukraine was based upon state run corporations, a house of cards once real independence in 1991 took place. The better state corporations were picked up by quickly enriched oligarchs who were/are talented in graft of all kinds. Indeed many of the very richest are still quite influential in a government brought to power by an amazing outpouring of the West and Central Ukrainians in late 2013 – early

2014 centered on the Maidan (Independence Square) in Kiev. The current rich froth of politics is featured by popular idealism that encourages romantic and innovative thinking, while underneath the old system simmers. Of key importance are some very impressive new leaders (such as the president..a reformed oligarch..and the US-raised Minister of Finance, whose policies have steered the country through difficult economic times, but whose ministries have little depth. Now with Putin exercising the kind of disruptive politics he has mastered in all his former Soviet neighbors to keep them off balance and beholden to him, the East of the Ukraine is now in contention while the rest of the country seems to show few signs of the war. The signs of war one sees in every town and village are the Soviet monuments to the Red Army and to local population losses, and, most interestingly, to those lost in the popular uprising of 2013-14.

Trip to Zolotonosha..ancestral home of the Faynebergs/Feinbergs.

The city is one of 20 raions (districts) in the Cherkasy oblast (province) which itself is 3.5% of the country's population.

Zolotonosha means "gold carrier" as the little river that cuts across the town had glittery sand.



Jews first settled there in the 18th century. Census data shows:

	<u>Jews</u>	<u>Total population</u>
1799	134 (males only)	
1835	988	
1862	1864	6902
1897	7714 (greater area)	
	2769 (town only)	8739

((More up to date census figures would be welcome))

The town is said to have 30,000 people now, but it certainly seemed more like 15-20,000 to us. Many came to work in a major truck parts factory, now closed. The town is surrounded by rich, larger farms. So it is a modest rural supply center.

Here is how we proceeded:

On April 22nd we were met at the Hotel Kyiv by Alex Denishenko, a guide from Lviv who specializes in helping Jews from abroad trace their Ukrainian ancestry. Alex was nicely listed in the guide prepared by the US Ukrainian Jewish association. He was also featured in the delightful and poignant book by Judith Fein, “The Spoon from Minkowitz,” reporting her family research and tour conducted by Alex. Alex is a serious scholar of family histories, attends global conferences on family history research, is familiar with the archives in his country, and is also a very fine field researcher.



Alex with rich soil of the Ukraine behind

I drove us (Alex, Vivian and me) through the four hour trip from Kiev to Zolotonosha almost all through farming areas of the richest possible soil, past the birthplace village of Sholem Aleichem.

The two lane road is lined with trees that had basketball sized “ornaments” on them of mistletoe.



The road we took paralleled at a distance the East bank of the Dnieper River. It is also possible to make the trip by bus or train.

Zolotonosha is announced by a large sign and little else.



Soon we passed by an enormous sugar beet factory, likely the site of the biggest massacre in the area..the killing of 7,000 Jews in September, 1941.

We then entered the town on a pretentiously wide main street on either side of which not much was happening.



The town is low key, quiet, and seems built for a larger population. There are many “used to be’s” in this town. It used to have a very substantial Jewish population. It used to have a few quite large Soviet-built factories. It used to have a more adequate tax base. It used to have Jewish culture and Jewish places of worship. In the post war period it used to have new apartments being built. What it now has is a smaller list: small stores except for one supermarket; the sugar beet factory; a vodka distillery that has been in business since 1896; and people living in Soviet style buildings (maybe 70% of the population) with the rest in small houses.

It is clear that the early years of the last century were a boom period for the town. There still are a major high school (gymnasium) built in 1901, a cultural center and theatre built in 1905 and a printing/publishing house established in 1907. All of these still function. And there are two parks from recent decades, one of which we quickly toured as it was the main Soviet monument to those lost in WW II. Around the park’s central monument were three mounted plaques each saying “this is in commemoration to those lost in the Fascist killing of Ukrainians.” The first one had the number 157 on it, likely for gypsies and clergy; the second had 175 on it, likely for mentally defectives and LGBT; and the third identical plaque had 12,090 on it, clearly the number of Jews killed in WW II. A new monument is now in the same area to remember those who were killed in protesting in 2014 for government change (after now former President Viktor

Yanukovych decided to link with Russia rather than the EU).



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Along the main street there was one abandoned building that looked to Alex to be the former main synagogue of Zolotonosha. Its external plaques were no longer readable, the inside was bare, windows were broken. A possible mikva at the back is also abandoned. Efforts to reach the one person said to represent the Jewish community there had been futile and it certainly seemed to us as we toured the town that there is no

organized Jewish community there anymore.









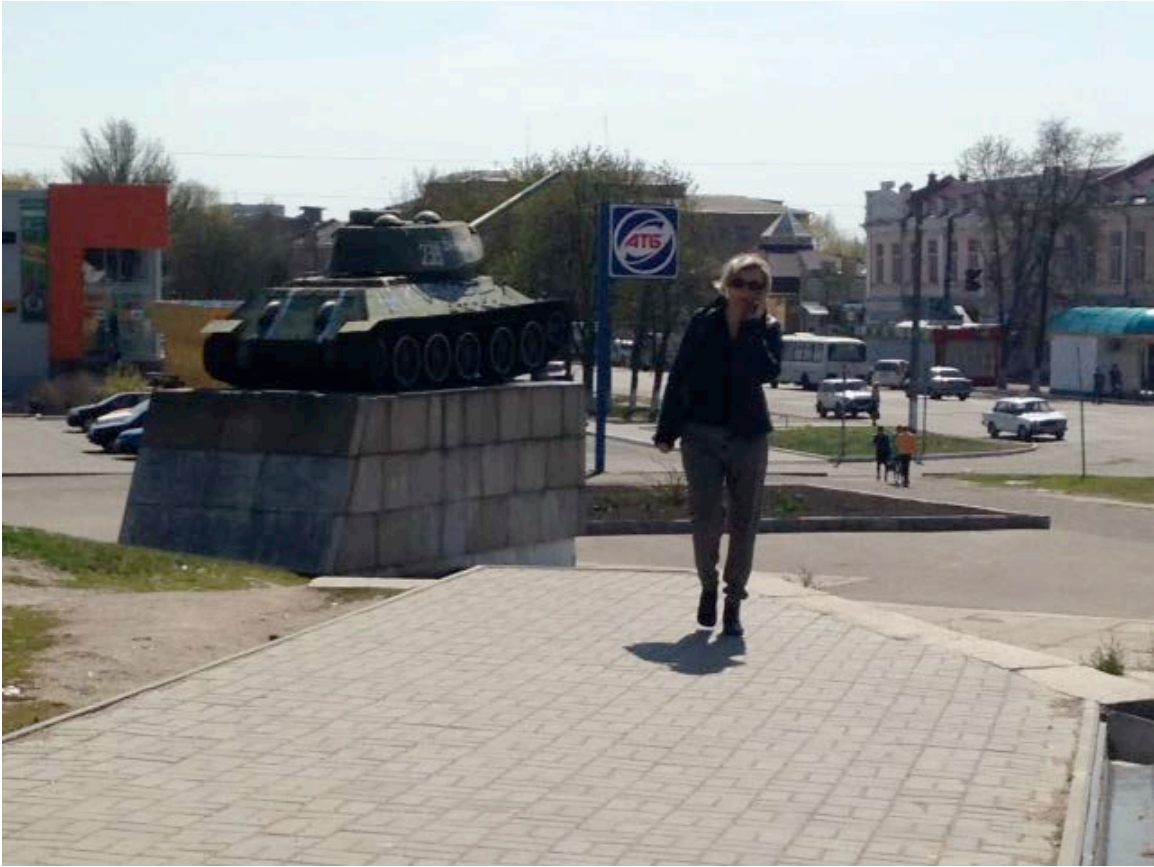
(The possible Mikva)

Also along the main street was a two story building with a low fence, really a grill along the front edge of the roof. Alex said it could well have been a Jewish establishment that followed the religious injunction: “Protect the roof of your house,” but it might also have just been a traditionally designed building.



We went into some of the stores on main street and in a nearby market area. Basic goods were there. As in Judie Fein's book, I also have a spoon my father had inherited from his parents. The spoon is silver and dates from the 1880, i.e., around the time grandfather Abraham Fayneberg ("Papasha") left Zolotonosha (perhaps a wedding present?) but it was hard to believe one could now buy a silver spoon in that town.





WWII Soviet monument. Main street in background

There was a contemporary looking café that was distinct for the town. We snacked there and watched a birthday party for a perhaps 9 year old girl and her 20 boy and girl friends. A middle aged woman, maybe a teacher, kept them interested with her animated talk, and at times the boys ran around as boys will. The birthday girl and some of the other girls were wearing fancy dresses as were a few of the attending mothers. It was by far the most lively scene we saw in that town.

Finally along the main street there is a modern supermarket..very large, and with an impressive, not to say staggering, 40 feet or so of display racks of vodka. Indeed, the one major industry within the town that we saw was the Zlatagor vodka distillery, which has been in operation since 1896. It had a store in town selling its wares along with candy bars, most prominently Roshen chocolate, founded in 1996 and owned by the current president of Ukraine (since June 2014), Petro Poroshenko.

Due to diligent research by family experts, we knew the streets where family had lived and found many of them, but Alex felt all the people on those streets were a combination of Christians and Gypsies. For example, a woman we met on the main street where the Faynbergs and other relatives lived told us that there used to be a Jewish dentist living on that street, but years ago he had moved to Moscow and now no Jews lived there.



(Our key informant on Bolnechya Street and her dog)

The first street we went to was Bolnechya Street, literally “Hospital Street.” In Ukrainian it is Lecarnanya Street and means the same. And indeed it comes just after the town’s hospital.





(Entrance to the hospital and map of it)





At the bottom of a path from the town's main and perhaps only hospital we found Hospital Street, a street of small one story homes, each perhaps 15 feet by 25 feet, set along the street that went straight for a few blocks and then made a loop.



Most of the houses had yards and some of those included vegetable gardens or pens for small ruminants. Most of the houses had t.v. dishes, many had an automobile parked near or inside their gate, many had yellow gas pipes leading into the house head high (rather than buried), nearly all had a chimney. A few of the houses were more fancy, but most were traditional looking, painted white, several with colored shutters.









(Hospital Street visitors)



(a particularly old house. Note railing on top. Likely formerly Jewish home)

Alex felt a number of houses where the bricks looked hand made could well have been early 20th century. We mainly saw adults walking the street with no children in evidence, but our two trips to Hospital Street were during school hours.

Next we found Sadova “Garden” Street.



It is only a few blocks long and it is a rather lovely street, being the administrative center of the city and district. We saw the Mayor’s office, a two story green and pink building,



administration buildings, the printing/publishing house established in 1907,



(Printing/publishing house, Zolotonosha)

and the high school established in 1901..all in very good shape, however the school had a bullet hole in a window.



There was a building set back from the street that now seemed to be some kind of cultural center that Alex felt might have been a synagogue at one time.



The street is only a few blocks long and has next to no houses on it. It ends at a park, with a statue of poet, and nearby Soviet-style apartment blocks. The park looks like a post-WWII addition.



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Troitsky “Trinity” Street was another street of only a few blocks. Alex felt the people he saw on it were gypsies and Slavic people. The street was made of concrete slabs, typical, Alex said, of Red Army construction. There was an old school at the end of the street.





(above picture shows pre-fab flooring on “Trinity Street”)



(Old school, still being used)

Soburna “Cathedral” Street runs off of the main street westerly for two blocks. Across the main street is the town’s old Eastern Orthodox cathedral, recently repainted so it looks fairly new.



The short street features almost entirely Soviet era construction..mainly apartments.



(likely small merchant store of former Jewish ownership..Near Cathedral Street)

Through the excellent research of Lo-tishkach.org, the European Jewish Cemeteries Initiative, we could locate important sites regarding the death of Jews in Zolotonosha. We first went to the Zolotonosha Jewish Cemetery and then to a Mass Grave at the Strunkovka Ravine.

Alex was particularly clever to suggest we take a taxi to the cemetery and Ravine as they each took travel over several unmarked, often dirt roads that only taxicab drivers would know.

The cemetery had been decimated by either the Soviets (in their effort to destroy organized religion) or the Nazis (much more likely) but could have been the victim of Cossacks. I would vote for the Nazis as the culprits.



There were two areas: older grave stones had been taken away or defaced while post WW II gravesites were in good shape. First the old.



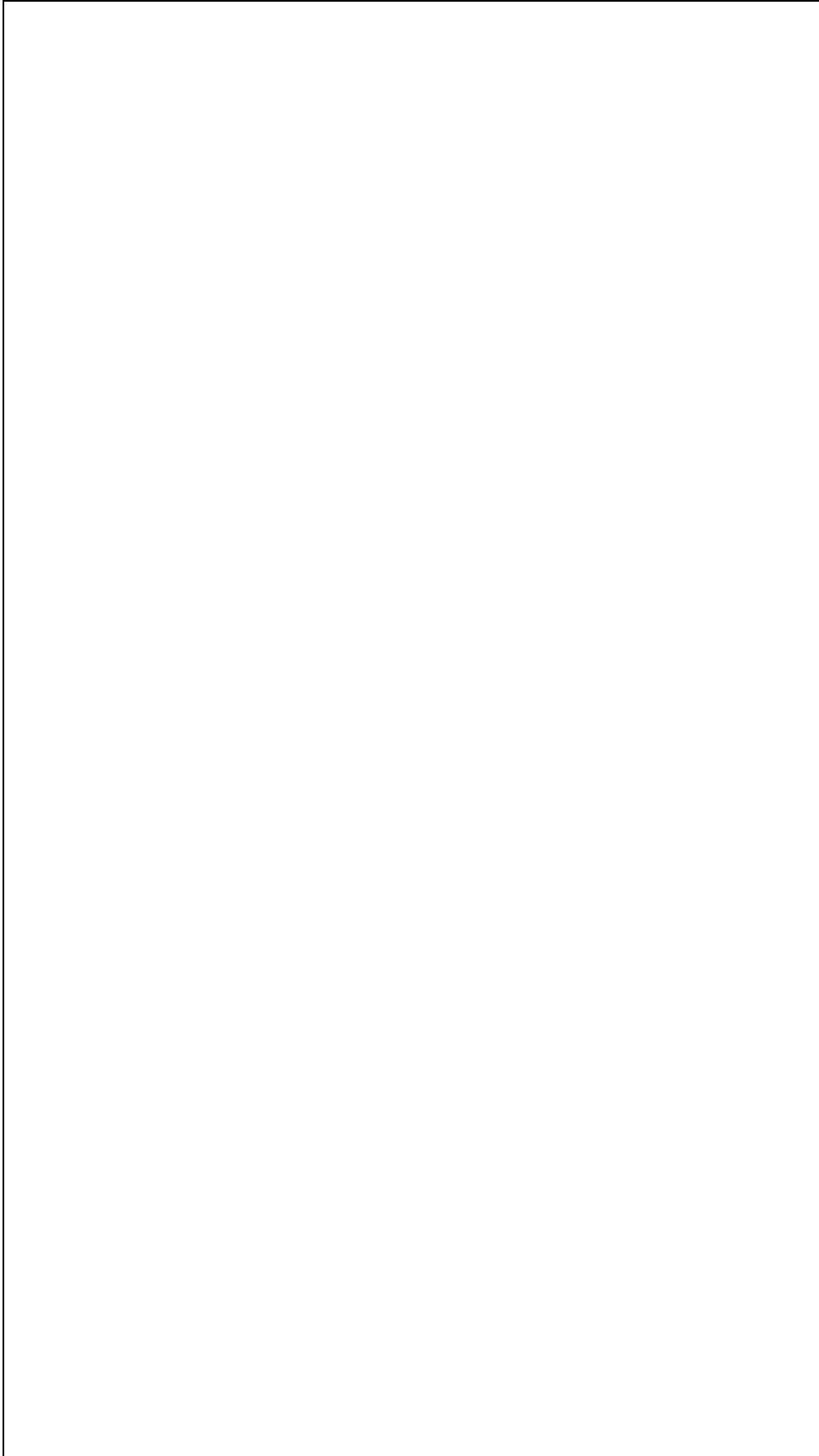




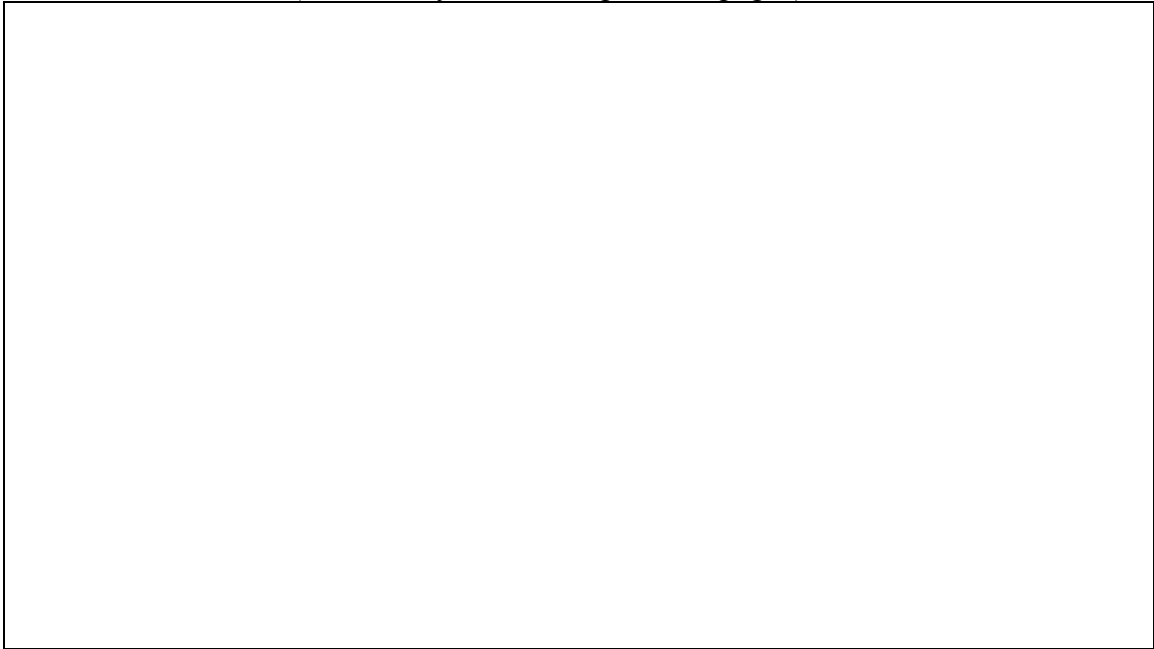


Almost all the old headstones were removed. For example, there is no monument to the mass grave burial there of victims of the terrible 1920 pogrom.

We did make one major find of value for the family and that is we could make out the name Vishnevsky on one of the very few remaining old headstones.



(Vishnevsky tombstone previous page?)



(Post WWII part of cemetery)

An old and poor woman (with some gold teeth) came to greet us as we walked around. She said she tries to keep up the cemetery but has only been able to do so since the city helps with maintenance. However, since there was only one burial there in the past year, the city had indicated they would likely stop supporting the maintenance of the cemetery.



1. Our last stop was the most dramatic of our trip to Zolotonosha. It was to the site of one of the two major mass killings of Jews by the Nazis. In November 1941 some 3,500 to 3800 Jews were trucked (probably around 4am) past some agricultural fields to a place not 2 miles from Zolotonosha where the land drops off on three sides. On one side is the Strunkovka Ravine.



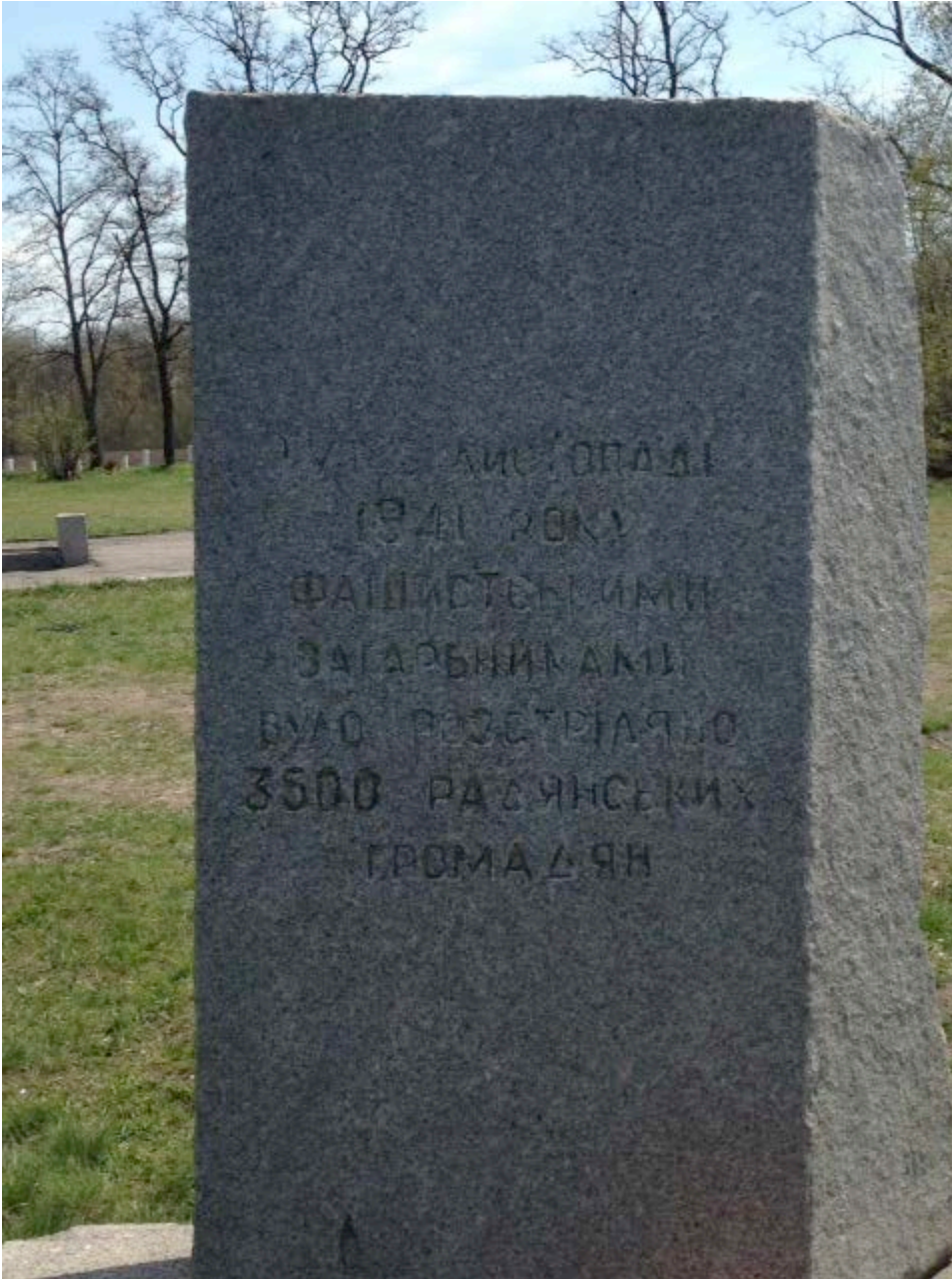




While the area on top is grassed over with a quite good monument and a second monument, the ravine is a steep drop of probably 80 feet. God knows what horrors took place in the killing of those Jews. Our guide has seen a lot of these memorials in Ukraine, but he and we were stunned into silence and grief.







After a long period of silence, Alex said how he wished that in his city of Lviv there was a monument to the Jews killed there. I asked him how many had been killed there and he said “over 200,000.”

To those who think the plight of Jews in Ukraine is totally hopeless, you are invited to read about Kremenchuk

