

A Journey on the Path of the Holocaust": June 26- July 4, 2017"

Organized by the head of the "Transnistria Survivor's Association", Mr. Dan Marian; led by President and Chairman of "The World Organization of Bukovina Jews and Descendants", Mr. Yochanan Ron Singer; a group of close to 50, 1st, 2nd and 3rd generations of Holocaust survivors set out on a journey into the past through Bukovina, Transnistria, Ukraine and Romania, to remember, or to see and feel for themselves what they, or their parents and grandparents had gone through for over 3 years, beginning exactly 76 years ago

DAY 1: Kiev

We began our day with an early visit to Kiev and the National Museum of the Ukraine in WWII, with its Russian "Motherland" statue overhead celebrating the strength of the Russian/ Soviet people, whether in war or peace. Here, among the statues, even victims appear strong, and ironically undefeatable



<https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/thumb/2/2b/Big-babijar14.jpg/220px-Big-babijar14.jpg> Evacuation order for Jews in Kiev

The next very emotional stop was Babi Yar; where an estimated 100,000 people, more than half of them Jews, were shot and killed in a ravine in the forest; including 34,000 Jews killed by Nazis within a two-day period in 1941. We were informed of the facts of the brutal period from 1941 to 1943 by our guide, Shula, who despite not being fluent in Hebrew, gave her explanation with such delicate emotion that there was not a dry eye left among our group



:Day 2

Berdichev

In Berdichev, Jews were mentioned as early as in 1593, and their numbers had risen to almost 50,000 by the mid-19th century. Jews were usually between 50-80% of the population, but, by 1939 their numbers had reduced to 37%. On July 7, 1941, the Germans occupied Berdichev, and between August 1941 and June 1942 most of the Jews were annihilated in several mass killings and pogroms, including the one that took place at the Barefoot Carmelite Monastery where 960 Jewish children were murdered



Memorial plaque for 30,000 Jews killed during 1941 by 'Fascists' at the Berdichev cemetery with its unique "boot-shaped" gravestones

As historian Simon Geissbueller entitled one of his articles, "He Spoke Yiddish like a Jew", so in this case Yiddish spoken by a non-Jew became a useful tool in getting almost 1,000 Jewish children hiding within the catacombs of the old monastery to come out as a Romanian soldier, raised by a Jewish caretaker, called out to them in perfect Yiddish; "Children, children, come out now, it is safe." The children emerged to find mass graves already prepared and as they were forced to lie down, bullets not wasted on them; they were all buried alive. As the Soviet plaque, next to the mass grave indicates, the 960 victims were 'Soviet citizens' who died during WWII; with no mention made of either fact: that they were Jewish or .that they were all children



Leah-le" by Abraham Gunther"

(a poem about the massacre at the monastery from the original Yiddish)

Three cedars had seen this

,Three cedar trees; tall and thin

Now they sway - to and fro

.above the pit of bones

,They were brought here from town; the quiet little children

,Their clothes taken off; even their shirts

,And the pit was ready for all of them

....And little Leah-le did not understand

,She thought innocently - that this was a game

,And lively Leah-le lifted her head

,Who is spilling sand on her? The little one wants to know

:And Leah-le said to the German above her

- 'Uncle, why do you pour sand into my eyes' -

.....But the 'uncle' breathed harder and spilled sand even faster

.....Over little Leah-le's eyes and fingers

.If only I had been there beneath her

,Three cedars had seen this, three cedar trees; tall, thin and silent
.....Now they sway - to and fro; they cry and they moan

,No sap ever drips from these trees

,Only blood on its leaves - like needles

.My children, my doves, you will live on forever

:Day 2

:Hitler's "Werewolf" Bunker near Vinnitsa, Ukraine

Built by 15,000 Soviet POW's between 1941-1942, most of whom died or were killed, Hitler is said to have visited the bunker at least three times, and ordered it blown up during the Nazi retreat in 1944



German soldiers cross the border of the U.S.S.R.; June 22,1941



A portion of the blown-up bunker and a photograph from a film of Hitler
underground at the bunker

:Day 3

:Transnistria Camps

On this morning, I had taken a private car and guide to a tiny village called Politanki, two hours from Vinnitsa, where my mother and grandparents had worked at slave labor and had been hidden for three years, while the rest of our group headed out on scheduled excursions. I caught up with them later in the early afternoon at Pechora, one of the horrific concentration and death camps of Transnistria



.Mass graves near the former Pechora camp

Yad Vashem Photo Collection, 243B06

In this pastoral setting, which had been used before WWII as a recovery center for patients, had been turned into a horrific camp where 35,000 Jews were crowded into areas originally allocated to hold dozens; 150-200 dying daily, with at least 8,000 ultimately dying or murdered there. Forced in some cases through rape, disease, and starvation, to incidents of

cannibalism, madness and suicide. Incredulously, the area has been refurbished and is being used once again as a children's summer camp and .rehabilitation center

:Day 4

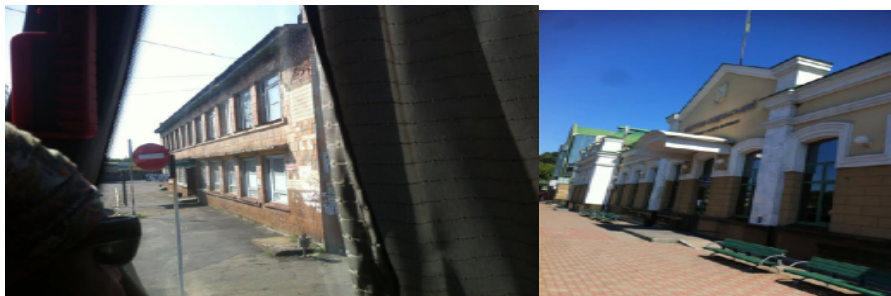
Moghilev Podolsk and Memorial Ceremony at the Dniester River



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On June 29, 2017, a ceremony took place on the bank of the Dniester River in Moghilev to commemorate the tens or hundreds of thousands of Jews; largely from Bukovina, and Bessarabia, after deportations and "death marches", who passed through Moghilev on their way to other camps, .ghettoes and many to their deaths in Transnistria

Participating were the mayor of Moghilev, leaders from the Jewish community, Mr. Yochanan Ron Singer, Mr. Dan Marian, members of the local education department, pupils who took part in the ceremony, local .residents from the Jewish community, and our group



The main reception building and train station in Moghilev through which all Jews passed .on their way to labor camps and ghettoes in Transnistria

:Day 5

:Sadigura and Commemoration Ceremony in Chernovitz

We began the day with an early visit to the birthplace of the Sadigura sect of Hasidism outside of Chernovitz. The elaborate building from the 18th century was the original center of the large Sadigura culture which

continues in Israel. One of the major events of our journey took place later that day near Theatre Square and the Jewish Center with the participation of the Mayor, leaders of the Jewish community in Chernovitz, and members of our organization. A 'March of Life' took place on the city's streets, with Israeli and Ukrainian flags waving. It was quite an impressive site as the city came to a stop to commemorate the Jews of Chernovitz murdered during the Holocaust



Dan Marian, Mayor of Chernovitz, Oleksy Kaspruk, Yochanan Ron Singer with members of our group at the March of Life ceremony in central Chernovitz on June 30, 2017

:Day 6

Chernovitz: Meeting with the Mayor

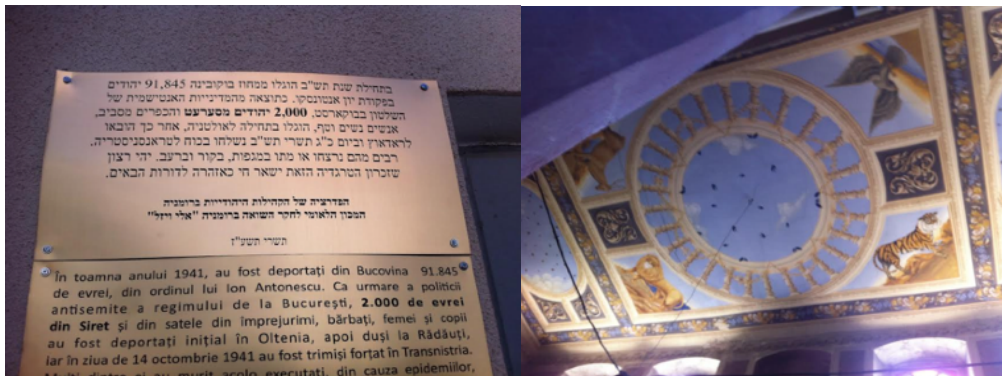
After the previous day's emotional and successful ceremony; the Mayor of Chernovitz decided to invite our group for a special meeting at his office. With cooperation between the Chernovitz government, the "World Organization of Bukovina Jews", and the city's Jewish community continuing to grow; it is apparent that a renewal of Jewish culture exists in Chernovitz today, due in part to the effective work of these and other organizations



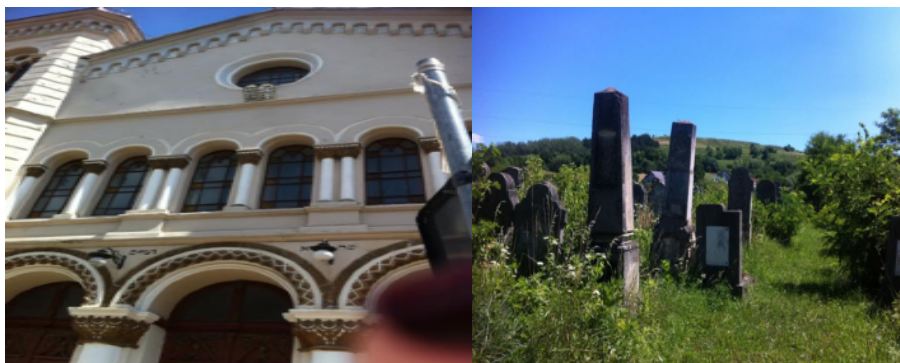
.Inside the mayor's mansion and beautiful, central Chernovitz

:Day 7

Romania: Siret, Suceava, Radauti



Plaques seen in almost every synagogue with similar wording: that 91,845 Jews from Bukovina were deported by order of dictator Antonescu in 1941. In this case, 2,000 Jews from Siret and its surroundings were first sent to Oltenia, afterwards to Radauti, and on October 14, 1941, were deported to Transnistria; most of whom were killed by plague, cold or starvation. It is also written that these words be taken as a warning to future generations. .(The 'Elie Wiesel' Federation of Jewish Communities in Romania)



In Suceava there had been a thriving Jewish community from the 15th century onward until the Nazi invasion in 1941. On October 8, 1941, a ghetto was created and 3 days later all Jews in Suceava were deported to Transnistria. After the Holocaust, the Jewish population rose to 6,000 as survivors from Suceava and other areas such as Chernovitz and Bukovina also arrived. Most of these Jews ultimately emigrated to the new State of Israel in 1949. Between the two World Wars about a third of the population in Radauti were Jews. On June 22, 1941, the Romanian army fought alongside the Germans against the USSR, and in early July 1941, 1,000 Jews from Radauti were deported from the city. On October 11, 1941, 9,169 Jews from Siret, Radauti and neighboring areas were ordered to leave within two days and on October 14-15 they were transported by train to transfer camps at Ataki and Marculesti. Ninety percent of the deportees to Marculesti died and of 1,500 Jews expelled from Radauti only 210 were still alive in February .1942

:Day 8

Iasi

Romanian dictator Ionescu already had a plan for "cleansing the land" of Jews so was quite prepared on June 28th for the ensuing pogroms. A week earlier young Jews had been taken by force to the Jewish cemetery, (where graves of Jewish soldiers who had fought and died for their country in WWI are lined up in rows), to prepare huge pits for mass graves. On the eve of the 28th, 5,000-8,000 Jews were collected at the 'Castura' police building .and beaten or shot to death; some by machine gun



This makes the discrepancy even harder to face as the mass graves in the shape of train cars lie silently unmoving in the cemetery a mere kilometer from the railroad tracks where the second deadly phase of the pogrom took place. On June 30, 1941, 2,500 Jews were put into airless train cars; 120-150 in each car normally holding 40, and travelled back and forth until they reached Podu Iloaiei, about 20 kilometers from Iasi. After many hours, more than 2,000 bodies were removed from the train, stripped by locals and gypsies of clothes and gold teeth and then taken by wagon to the nearby

Jewish cemetery and prepared mass graves. Estimates now are that 20,000 Jews were killed in the combined pogroms at and near Iasi.



https://media2.s-nbcnews.com/j/newscms/2017_26/2058121/170630-iasi-train-aftermath-1-ac-629p_82bf2954f8ec98fba418bd45d98d5b9.nbcnews-ux-600-480.jpg



Meeting with the Mayor of Iasi: Mihai Chirica



Dan Marian, Yochanan Ron Singer, with leaders of the Jewish community and the Mayor of Iasi Mihai Chirica at a meeting in his office

It was clear by his words and generous invitation to his office that the Mayor of Iasi is committed to a complete memorialization of the events of the summer of 1941 in and around Iasi during the Holocaust in Romania, and encourages an open dialogue between Romania and Israel today



The Palace and Cultural Center of Iasi today; surrounded by modern shopping centers, hotels, lovely restaurants and pubs. A sharp contrast to the earlier events of the day but a clear reminder that indeed that life goes on with a warning; to take care not to let history repeat itself

:Written by Carol Elias for

The World Organization of Bukovina Jews and Descendants

President and Chairman: Yochanan Ron Singer

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