

Budapest, Monday, 7/16/01 4:00 AM

My family is asleep in our room at Hotel Ventura. I've been waking up around 4 AM since arriving on the 11th. It's some combination of jet lag, Neia's snoring, and the preparation for this trip that's getting me up early; I don't know how much of each.

I've done big trips with my family before, in China and Japan – places where I don't speak much of the local language – but the coming trip to the Ukraine has been the most difficult to plan. I came to Budapest for a few days around New Year's, 1985-1986. That was during a month of voluntary unemployment between jobs – I had finished up my U. of Wisconsin post-doc at CERN, and I was due to leave for Illinois in a week or two to start a new job as a physics professor. (One week after that, I met Neia in Urbana, at my first Illinois contradance.) During my month of unemployment, I was seeing as much of Europe as I could cram in. I was certainly aware of things Jewish as I traveled. In Andalucia, Spain, a country that expelled, converted, or murdered Jews 500 years earlier, it was wonderful to stand in Maimonides' schul. About a week after Spain, I went to Paris for the first time and walked the streets of the Jewish quarter. Europe is a largely Christian place. Churches everywhere, streets named after saints, church holidays I had never heard of – my favorite still is *Buss und Bett Tag* in Germany because of the irreverent, incorrect translation that occurs to native English speakers. But in little pockets throughout Christendom, every so often there was a place where I didn't feel like a visitor.

The first time I went to Budapest, I was most interested in seeing Hungary because it was behind the Iron Curtain. I had already been to the DDR (East Germany), but Hungary was very different. East Germany felt like it was under the heel of a Russian boot. Soviet propaganda was evident in daily lives. You didn't have to look very hard to see bullet holes in walls or unrepaired damage from the war. It carried a subliminal message for the population of the DDR. The USSR was still punishing the Germans for WWII. Hungary, despite the Communist yoke and the economic problems it brought, was a more joyful place. Even the Soviet tanks of the 50's hadn't been able to crush Hungary's spirit. Hungarians tolerated Communism because they had no choice, but they went on living.

The sun is now up and there's a little traffic to interrupt the morning's quiet. The rumble of the city is back. Every so often, a tram goes by.

My first trip to Budapest was in the winter, and I spent one morning ice-skating in a big, open air rink – even bigger than Manhattan's Wollman rink in Central Park.

Jack just fell out of bed and looked around sleepily, trying to integrate what had happened to him. I whispered to him that he had fallen out of bed and that he probably should get back in. He nodded and climbed back. I gave him a kish on keppie and now he's settled himself in.

After skating, I went to eat at a relatively fancy restaurant nearby that proudly advertised that the then Prime Minister of England, Margaret Thatcher, had been entertained there. I was utterly astounded to find on the menu, chicken soup with *kneidlach*. Wasn't as tasty as my own, or my parents', or my grandparents', or Neia's, but it wasn't bad at all. Still, the menu spoke of the relative comfort the Jews of Hungary must have enjoyed under the Ottoman and Austro-Hungarian Empires.

During my first Budapest trip, I visited a bathhouse, and I couldn't help but think how Grandpa Jack's eyes would have popped out. One of the luxuries in his life was the *schvitz*, the steam room at the lockers in Coney Island. Nearly every summer day when I was little was spent on the beach

at Coney Island. At the end of the day, we'd go back to the lockers and the steam room. When I was old enough (5 or 6 years old?) I had to go by myself to the men's side. The special part of the end of the day was warming up in the steam room with a pail of water to pour over yourself if you got too hot. I don't think any of us enjoyed the steam room as much as Grandpa Jack. Sometimes Grandpa Jack and Grandma Lucy would take care of Stevie (my brother) and me, and we'd go to their part of the beach by Cook's Baths, which was closer to Stillwell Avenue. Their lockers were much larger than ours at Jefferson Baths, which was further west. There was a whole community inside the lockers. I think some of the men never made it to the beach. They'd sit naked playing gin rummy and smoking cigars all day. I have very distant memories of the women's side from when I was little. I think the women played *Mah Jongg*. Grandpa Jack's pride was palpable as he walked through the lockers with his grandsons or when he took us to the *schvitz*, introducing us to his friends. The *schvitzes* of Coney Island were utilitarian and dingy. The baths of Budapest were (and are) magnificent. Grandpa Jack would have gone bug-eyed. A poor person in Hungary, even Hungary under the Soviets, could afford this bit of splendor left over from the Ottoman Empire.

In two days we will leave Hungary, the "civilized" part of Eastern Europe, for the Ukraine.

Back in 1986, I didn't give traveling to the Ukraine a second thought. I'm sure I'd have been as interested in seeing Novaya Ushitsa then as I am now. Bubbie had died only about 10 years earlier, but it just wasn't something that I considered. I don't know if it would even have been possible to enter that part of the Soviet Union as a tourist back then. I didn't have any ready source of information, and the prospect of figuring out logistics once in the Ukraine would have been daunting. Even today, there is very little information in travel guides about the more remote parts of the Ukraine. Some mention the bigger towns in and around Podolia – Kamenets-Podolsk, Chernivtsy, Khmelnytsky, for example, but there is no travel guide to the shtetls of the Ukraine. There's a book waiting to be written!

Without the Internet, this trip wouldn't have happened. In late 1984 or 1985, I started sending email to Stevie. I don't think listservers of the Usenet existed yet. If they did, I didn't know about them. Sometime during the late 80s, I found Novaya Ushitsa in an atlas at the SLAC (Stanford Linear Accelerator Center) library. I think Stevie had tipped me off that he had found it first in an atlas. Stevie's the map nut in the family. You can't go somewhere unless you know where it is, and now I knew. But the Soviet empire was still going strong, or at least not yet showing very large cracks. And knowing how to get from here to there was a problem.

I remember trying out the web shortly after it was invented, probably around 1992. These were the days before Netscape Navigator and Internet Explorer. I used a public domain browser from NCSA (National Center for Supercomputing Applications) called Mosaic, which had a nasty habit of crashing my Mac.

Neia just turned over, opened her eyes a crack, saw me writing, and went back to sleep.

There still wasn't much content on the web, or search engines to index it, or metaengines to harvest the search engines. I think the Usenet was around, but I was busy establishing a high energy physics group at UT Dallas and didn't have as much time to play as I would have liked.

In that vein, it's time for me to shower and start my day – I'm here for a physics conference.

Budapest, Tuesday, 7/17/01 5:45 AM

Up early again. Yesterday after my conference session, Neia met me with the kids. Neia went off to hear an organ concert for conference attendees, and I took the kids to Vidam Park. They had gone there earlier in the day with Neia, but Jack wanted to save his first ride on a big roller coaster to do with me. (Jack will be 9 in August.) We did the wooden one first. Relatively small compared with the Cyclone in Coney Island or my first roller coaster at the Palisades Amusement Park in New Jersey (that doesn't exist any more), but Jack liked it and it was fun going on with him. Becca opted out, even though she was willing to do the log ride with Jack and me that had a coaster-like drop. Then we did the bumper cars, and then Becca held our packs while Jack and I did the steel rail roller coaster with a loop-the-loop. Then off to dinner at a Czechoslovakian restaurant that served the original Budweiser beer.

The first stop on my WWW research in preparation for this trip was the Ellis Island Database. I'd been meaning to look up Bubbie and Zeydie and Grandpa Jack and the Crabapple (Grandma Lucy). Finding the Crabapple wasn't so hard, but it took a few tries. I think I looked for her maiden name with her Roumanian first name first. Next, I tried Lucy. Then I widened the search and spotted her Hebrew name, Leah and checked the image of the ship manifest. It was very thrilling. I was doing my EIDB (Ellis Island Data Base) research late at night, and went at it again the next morning. Sent email to Mom, Dad, Stevie, and my cousins.

Still, haven't found Bubbie, Zeydie, and Aunt Rose's entry, nor have I found Grandpa Jack, Big Bubbie, and my great grandpa. Will have to look some more.

While the Ellis Island searches were going on, I used a meta engine to look up Kamenets-Podolsk and Novaya Ushitsa. Web searches turned up the dearndest things. I found a number of women from Kamenets-Podolsk looking for America husbands. Well, I was already taken, but it was kind of neat to realize that Kamenets-Podolsk was still a real place with real people. Other avenues were more useful. The sequence of when I found out what is fuzzy because I tend to pursue several leads in parallel when I do WWW research. One thing I found were links to an online map which showed Kamenets-Podolsk and Novaya Ushitsa. I remember writing to Stevie, and then answering my own questions before he wrote back, but he had found Kamenets-Podolsk and Novaya Ushitsa on a different online map. Actually, these online maps and another scanned map I eventually found on a Ukrainian website were useful when I told travel agents where I wanted to travel by train, because no one knew of these towns.

Alarm rang. Time to shower and start my last full day in Budapest. Tomorrow afternoon, we'll be off to the Ukraine!

From: "Ilya Royzner"
To: <Joe@utdallas.edu>
Subject: We are waiting
Date: Tue, 17 Jul 2001 15:09:06 +0400
Hi Joe,

I guess your conference is coming to its end. Tomorrow you are going to Ukraine. You gave us the number of your train and of your seats, but not the number of your carriage (wagon). But it doesn't matter, I think we'll meet at the central entrance.

Naturally, you can use our computer, in any time, it's entirely at your disposal. See you in Khmel'nitsky.

Anna.

Budapest, Wednesday, 7/18/01 5:30 AM

Today's the day our adventure will begin. Yesterday at the conference I was waiting on line with my friend Andrzej from Poland for a computer. On a whim, I asked him if he knew of Prince Adam Czartoryski who figures prominently in the history of Podolia ("Podola" in Polish according to Andrzej) that I was reading about in The Road from Letichev by David Chapin and Ben Weinstock. Andrzej immediately recognized the historical character and said he knew of Czartoryski's descendants in Krakov today. I told him that one of the things that surprised me as I was reading the history was the number of Poles and Ukrainians that had been friendly to Jews in Podolia. While there certainly were atrocities and horrific events, I was struck by the accounts of friendliness and decency. The prevailing opinion I encountered growing up in the US was that most Poles and most Ukrainians and most Russians were anti-Semitic. But mixed in with the horrible, there were some clear acts (at times) of official governmental friendliness by the Poles. Supposedly most peasants were anti-Semitic, but that didn't reconcile with the accounts of Jews on the run from Nazis who would purposefully look for the poorest peasant homes when coming to a new town in order to ask for food, shelter and directions. Andrzej commented that the Polish community was aware of the blanket view of Poles as anti-Semitic and that widely held view/prejudice had spawned a backlash of resentment. I replied that I could understand how an unprejudiced person could resent being prejudged as a bigot. Then Andrzej commented that on the other hand, Poles who resented their image as prejudiced were very troubled by information about a massacre that was coming to light. This was of an area where the Nazi and Soviet Armies marched back and forth and in the process, the Jews were wiped out. Poles assumed that either the Nazis or the Red Army was to blame, but evidence had emerged that it was the local Poles who had killed the Jews during a period when both armies weren't present. Then the conversation took a turn, and I pointed out that the reason that I might be reading this many accounts of individual acts of peasant kindness was that there was a selection bias – those who didn't encounter decency were dead and telling no tales. This is a rather ironic twist – selection bias is rather topical at the moment. Andrzej and I are on competing experiments of a few hundred people each trying to measure CP violation in mesons containing bottom quarks. Physicists in both experiments, in order to protect ourselves against our own biases voluntarily "blind" ourselves to our result until all analysis choices are finalized. The controls for bias when making historical judgements aren't as straightforward.

Back to the tale of my WWW search. I found much more than maps. I found Avotaynu, a publishing company that specialized in books of interest to the Jewish genealogical community. They had two books of interest to me, one entitled *Kaminits-Podolsk & Its Environs*, translated from the Hebrew by Bonnie Schooler Sohn, and another genealogical resource book, *Jewish Roots in Ukraine and Moldova* by Miriam Weiner. The thrilling part about this tome was that it reproduced an early 20th century postcard showing Nova Ushitsa from a nearby hill. My first and to date only image of Novaya Ushitsa. Another gem I found was a first person account of a trip to Podolia in 1995 by David Chapin on the Dallas Jewish Genealogical Society web site. Here was someone who had taken a trip just like I had – a potential source of valuable information – only there was no email or contact info. I wrote to the head of the society and asked whether he knew of Chapin's whereabouts. Unfortunately he didn't, but he asked me to let him know if I ever found out. Lest one think my research was a straight line, I actually did a people search for David Chapin in the Dallas area and thought for sure I had found my man. One awkward telephone call later, I was back to square one. Since my people search failed, I broadened my net and did a Metacrawler search on "David Chapin" and that led me to the web site for David's book, *The Road from*

Letichev. Through the web site I was able to get in touch with David and eventually his coauthor, Ben Weinstock.

Alarm rang – Time to start this day. Next installment on the train to the Ukraine.

Záhony, Hungary, Wednesday, 7/18/01 9:00 PM

We're at the border crossing on the Hungarian side. Just been controlled by the Hungarian border police. This is a 50-minute stop. Then we cross into the Ukraine and stop at Tchop (Чоп), presumably to be controlled on the Ukrainian side and to change wheels. Neia's next to me reading a printout of Bobby Furst and Joan Adler's trip. So far, the big surprise was that this Russian train has a no-smoking car, though we can tell someone is cheating. Got some help from a Russian woman with our deklaratsia, i.e., customs declaration. I had a go at it myself, but it is all in Ukrainian and didn't exactly match the guidebook. Between pantomiming and showing her stuff, I think I managed to convey how much cash I had and how much in traveler's checks. In the middle of all this Russian, I heard "zwei kinder". I asked, "Sprechen Sie Deutsch?" She shook her head, but said something in Russian that had a word sounding like "Hebrew" in it. So I asked if she understood Yiddish. That got a response. What a surprise that a gentile Russian would know a little Yiddish.

Train's moving again. We crossed the border. Now we've been boarded by Ukrainian guards – well, that's my guess. One of them has walked by with a German shepherd. Two of the border guards are coming down the corridor checking papers.

They checked our passports and asked about Ukrainian Medical Insurance. I said, "No." They checked our kids' passports. The kids are reading next door. Now they've walked off with our passports, the Russian woman with them, and are checking other compartments. This is my most interesting border crossing since the time when a French douane guy insisted on inspecting my backpack when I crossed over from CERN (Centre Européen de la Recherche Nucléaire), and reached in and pulled out a very used handkerchief.

We're rolling again and we don't have our passports back. Can't imagine we'll go too far as we haven't changed train wheels yet. Set our clocks ahead 1 hour. The deklaratsia woman is coming down the aisle.

Later...

I'm back – just in time for the thump as the train, new wheel carriage and all, was dropped back down to the tracks.

While the deklaratsia woman was checking us, one of the passport control guys asked me to come with him. We left the train and went into a Soviet 1950's style building that made the old terminal in Beijing airport look fancy. Bits of plaster were missing here and there. I was brought to a short line, and in about 15 minutes I paid for Neia's and my Ukrainian health insurance policy. The kids didn't need insurance. The woman doing the forms spoke a little English. One of the guards asked if I spoke German, and we had a short conversation. I think he was proud that he spoke German and wanted to practice. I was able to dump my last 3000 florint that I had forgotten to spend in Hungary. I received 6 hryna back in change for the insurance for a week's stay for two people. When I was done, I was led back out, but the train was gone. I had a wonderful image of Neia panicking as the train left without me. Actually, Neia figured out that they were just changing wheels, but after about half an hour,

when the train started moving again, she began to worry. She looked up “husband” in the dictionary and asked the Russian train lady who dismissed her and showed her back to her cabin. Neia thought that meant not to worry.

Meanwhile, out in front of the passport control building, the guard was getting frustrated trying to tell me something about the train in Ukrainian. I went through my inventory of languages, and his ears perked up when he heard Deutsch. He motioned me to stay and brought back another control guy, but the second guy’s German wasn’t good enough to explain what he wanted to say so he went back and got the traveler who had been ahead of me on line. I had noticed that the traveler had a German passport but spoke fluent Ukrainian. René (I think) had a Ukrainian mother, but had lived in Germany since he was three. The guards told him the train was changing wheels a few hundred meters down the track, and the two of us went off down the track in search of our train cars. They were decoupled and up on very big jacks.

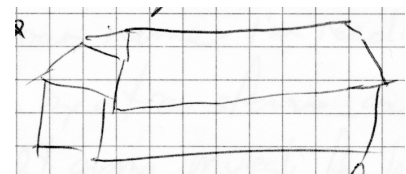
Time to stop and have some Hungarian salami and bread for dinner. The crossing was easier than I expected. Everyone was polite.

On the train in the Ukraine, Thursday, 7/19/01 5:30 AM

Just woke up and am too excited to sleep. It’s getting light outside. Beautiful countryside and forests. Fog on the hilltops. Hay stacked differently from anywhere else I’ve been. Neia’s still asleep on the bunk below me. Last night, another mystery was solved – why my Argentinian relatives spelled our name Aizen. When the Russian train woman wrote Neia’s name on the deklaratsia, she spelled it “Айзен”. I pointed out that this was different from the spelling on our Ukrainian visas – “Ізен”. She said that this was the Russian spelling – mystery of the leading “A” solved.

To finish the tale of my Internet research. The search for Kamenets-Podolsk turned up interesting stuff; it led me to a site with testimony from the Eichmann trial by a witness/survivor of the first Nazi massacre of the Hungarian and local Jews. Other sites led to descriptions of Simon Petliura’s pogroms – probably the single person most responsible for Bubbie and Zeydie’s move to America. I also turned up JewishGen, and it was already on my list to check out when the Avotaynu person who took my order suggested I look it up.

The sun is rising and I can see more of this beautiful countryside. Hand-cut hay piles. Farmhouses shaped like buildings in a Chagall painting, with a slanted panel breaking the ridgeline in front and back. Some ridgelines not quite true. Two very different thoughts. This must have been the train line used to deport the Jews of Budapest 60 years ago. The other is the Yiddish folk song that Theodore Bikel sings (Di Ban) about a shtetl Jew’s description of a train. Just spotted Orthodox churches amongst the farmhouses. Struck by the contrast of these farmhouses with not quite straight ridgelines and the complex symmetrical curves of the onion domes.



Sketch of a Chagallesque farmhouse scanned from my journal.

It’s 6:15, and we’ve pulled into Стрий = STRI. Lot of people waiting for the train. Some got on. Others just standing around, maybe waiting for another train? Saw my first babushkas. There’s the pifer, and we’re off again. (When I was little, my mother played her Bikel phonograph records for us, and on Di Ban, she, Stevie, and I would make a train around the

living room.) On the way out of Стрий, I noticed that the road along the track was paved but the side roads perpendicular to it weren't. Some scraggly fruit-laden apple trees in house yards. Now we are back in the countryside.

Just had a breakfast of day-old bread. Bunch of goats with beards alongside the tracks. Now a chicken. Missed the town name – I'm reading cyrillic, but just not so fast yet. Now ducks by a transformer substation. It's foggy again. Neia brought some müesli for breakfast, but I'm not desparate enough to face UHT milk. UHT is to milk what Euorpean orange juice is to Tropicana. I like the white birch stands in the forest. About 45 minutes south of L'vov – Львов. Passed a small town with some grain elevators and some smokestacks. Saw my first cows and a horse grazing. The roofs are mostly corrugated metal, but some have tile. The sun is back again, but mist is rising from a pretty big river that is paralleling us to the east. Must have rained recently. There is a little flooding.

When I was setting up this trip I realized it would be very difficult to do without some contact to help us in the Ukraine. I posted to JewishGen's Ukrainian Special Interest Group. Information started coming back about Marco, a Russian-speaking guy from LA who travelled in the area by himself. I was pointed to Bobby Furst/Joan Adler, and someone else pointed me to Martin Gellman and David Bickman. I had enough leads going that I started to lose track of whom I was writing to.

Completely independently, I began looking for a university in Kamenets-Podolsk that might have a physics department. As a visiting professor from the US, I thought I might find a connection. I think there was a university in Kamenets-Podolsk, but I couldn't find it on the WWW. I did find the State Agrarian and Engineering Academy. On a shot in the dark, I wrote an email addressed to their International Relations office. I explained that I was a US professor hoping to visit, but this was a private trip with my family to see the region where my grandparents were born. The next day, I got an email back from someone in the International Relations office saying she would help. BINGO! That was the point at which I knew this trip was really going to happen.

Going to stop writing for a while. The chain smoker is awake, and smoke recirculates each time he goes to the bathroom to satisfy his nicotine addiction. It is giving me a headache. I think I see L'vov a few miles away.

A bit later...

Pulling into L'vov. Saw some old train cars that were fitted with chimneys. Looks like home for someone. Train yards and factories. Buildings date from the 70s, but I would have guessed they were from the 1920s if in the US. Some really fine old buildings and churches, but I don't have a good view. People on the platform are definitely city people. Pulling out of L'vov on time. They pulled the cars terminating here off the front of the train. Now we are the first car behind a newly coupled electric engine.

I went for a little walk up and down the platform in L'vov. Brand new buffet stands of wood with copper roofs. Looks like they will last many years.

Heard from the State Agrarian and Engineering Academy (SAEA) just before driving out to SLAC for the summer.



First morning in the Ukraine.

Booked our tickets with a return from Bucharest, and started looking for a travel agent to write us a Budapest to Ukraine ticket. Everything was on hold while we took a slow route to SLAC via Capulin Volcano, Zion and Great Basin. Pulled into California and stayed up all night checking email because I had to leave for Beijing the next morning. SAEA had advised that we stay in a private home rather than the Kamenets-Podolsk hotel. I had heard from Marco that the Kamenets-Podolsk hotel was rather primitive so I agreed, but SAEA offered housing in a university official's home for \$600/week. That seemed a little pricey so I asked if an apartment was possible. Around this time, a JewishGen'er forwarded my email to someone who knew of Martin Gellman's trip to Podolia and the Royznerns who hosted him there. I had so many conversations going with travel agents all over the world trying to figure out how to book Budapest to Ukraine to Bucharest train tickets and side conversations with JewishGen'ers and David Chapin, that when Anna Royzner's email arrived from Dunaevtsi in impeccable English, I was confused. I couldn't tell whether she was a professional travel facilitator or a private person offering to help. I didn't recognize that she was the Gellmans' host a few years back. There were emails already waiting explaining the connection, as I learned when I waded through them, but I was getting over 150 emails a day between work and Ukraine planning. After searching so hard for Ukrainian helpers, all of a sudden I had two. I continued email conversations from my lab in Beijing, then was out of touch for a few days at my Beijing Spectrometer meetings, and more emails were waiting for me what I got back to Beijing. My SAEA contact dropped out during this period. It turned out she was having email trouble at SAEA and finally got herself a Yahoo email. She had found a contact in the Kamenets-Podolsk Jewish community, Myhail Lamm, and an apartment for \$300/week, but Anna had suggested we stay in Dunaevtsi because it was more central to most of the places I was interested in visiting, and she would be able to arrange things. It was getting a bit awkward having two "helpers". It turned out that Myhail Lamm was going to be travelling during our visit, and we never established whether he spoke English, Yiddish, German, or French (languages I can communicate in to a greater or lesser extent). Anna was such a reliable correspondent, and Martin had written warmly of his visit with the Royznerns that just after returning from China, I decided to trust Anna's advice. I sent her my web site URL with pictures of my family, and she emailed me pictures of her family. We'd been exchanging emails regularly since the beginning of July. Some chatty stuff, but mostly about travel arrangements; train travel in the Ukraine is horrendously difficult to arrange from the U. S. Nearly all U. S. travel agents are useless unless you give them all the information on how to do things in Eastern Europe. I also talked with Marty by phone after getting back from China.

Subject: Hello from Ukraine

Date: Thu, 19 Jul 2001 22:31:48 +0400

Hi Mom, Dad,

All's well in Ukraine. An interesting border crossing on the train, but no problems at all. Anna, Ilya and their children met us at the station, and we spent the afternoon in Khmel'nitsky before heading to Dunaevtsi. The Ukrainian countryside is beautiful. Houses are still built with the style of roof that you see in pictures of shtetls, and there are lots of animals - cows, sheeps, goats, chickens- along the roads. We visited the site of a mass grave from the Proskurov massacre by the Petliuran forces in Feb. 1919 - Bubbie and Zeydie must have had this in mind when they were trying to decide whether to go into hiding, and then when they emmigrated. Also visited the place where the Nazis did there dirty work. Sobering.

On the way from Kmelnitsky to Dunaevsti, just before town, there was a road sign to Nova Ushitsa. It's only 30 km away. Tomorrow, we'll be going to Kamenets-Podolsk.

Anna and Ilya are taking very good care of us. They are warm people, and are going out of their way to show us things we want to see, and to tell us the history of places, although by now, I've actually learned a lot in preparation for this trip. We are staying in an apartment above theirs whose owner is away.

On the train, I solved a mystery that always bothered me. We got help from the Russian train woman – in German, the word is schaffner, I don't know it in English – the one who is responsible for the people on her train car. The customs deklaratsia was in Ukrainian. I was able to fill in my name in English and Ukrainian, but she helped with the rest of my deklaratsia, and all of Neia's. I noticed that the spelling of Neia's name in Ukrainian was different from what she had written on the deklaratsia. I pointed out the difference thinking it was an error, but she said it was OK, that they had spelled it in Russian. The straight transliteration of the Cyrillic characters was Aizen. That's why our South American relatives spell Izen with an A. It wasn't a quirk of immigration.

I'm kind of wiped out and will be going to bed now. If you'd like to write back – it really is no problem to get email, but please send it both to my account *and* the email that is sending this letter. Anna and Ilya will let me know if I have email, but I'd like a copy at home for my archives.

There will likely be a change of itinerary. We will be getting to Bucharest a day later, on 7/27. Long story that I'm too tired to write now.

Love,
Joe

Dunaevtsi, Ukraine, Friday, 7/20/01 6:20 AM
(continuing to write about Thursday, 7/19/01)

Up before the rest of the world again.

Yesterday, as we got close to Khmelnitsky, we loaded up our frame packs, put them on, and squeezed through the door into the “foyer” of the train – the area just above the steps. When we pulled into Khmelnitsky, the younger Russian train woman opened up one side of the train, but she had second thoughts as we were about to leave. She looked out the other side of the train, but then hustled us out the original side. A bright, sunny day. There were no Royznors waiting, just lots of Ukrainians milling around. Neia was a little concerned, but I told Neia that Anna and I had arranged a backup meeting place at the station's entrance.

Neia is sawing wood in the bedroom as I write, but the kids are still asleep despite that and cocks' crowing in the distance.

I looked around for a stationhouse at the ends of the platforms, but there were just tracks. In the middle, the platform dropped to the level of the track, but we couldn't cross anywhere because another train was a few tracks over. I figured that the “walkway” over the tracks was to the terminal, but we were hemmed in by trains in both directions. I knew our train was due to leave in about five minutes, and sure enough, when the train pulled out, there were Anna, Ilya, Marina, and Kostia waving, and we went over and made out introductions.

It's about 7:00, and I heard life in the next room.

The Royznern looked very much like their photos. Anna and Ilya are about our age (around 40). Their daughter Marina is much older than our kids, but Neia and I were “old” – 34 and 33 when we married. Marina is going to be a junior in college. Anna teaches English to schoolchildren. She loves teaching and took only six months off when Kostia was born. She comes from a long line of schoolteachers in her family. She has short, neat, black hair and a friendly face. Her spoken English is excellent. I can think of only one Russian scientist I know who speaks about as well as she, with just a light Russian accent. Her word choice is slightly formal, but her grammar is excellent. When we were first corresponding, I couldn’t tell whether she was a native English speaker. When I learned she wasn’t, I was a little embarrassed, and I started to pay more attention to the English I wrote to her.

The local rooster is crowing now. Neia’s not taking the hint.

Ilya has a moustache and slightly greying hair. Martin had described him as a car nut. He loves fixing and tinkering with cars. He teaches automotive mechanics in a school. He knows just a few words of English, and a little Yiddish too. He learned Yiddish, I think, to talk to his *babushke* – his grandmother. Both he and Anna are knowledgeable about local history, but Ilya’s information is deeper than Anna’s. I asked where he learned. He said he learned a lot from his sister Tatiana who’s the real historian, but he’s always been interested. He grew up in a big house that his grandfather owned. It was divided, and his father’s family was on one side and his uncle’s family on the other, so that he and his cousin Leo (we visited Leo’s family in San Francisco before coming) grew up like brothers. Leo and his wife Alla used to live in Khmelnytsky, but the families visited each other all the time. (Anna interprets for Ilya – she is very good.)

Marina is a pretty young woman who smiles a lot, and when she smiles, her whole body says she is happy. She’s studying English and German at University, but she has had only about a year of German.

My tsveyten tug yontif woke up, and Neia just shushed the kids.

Becca’s talked a mile a minute to Marina all of yesterday afternoon. Marina’s brain must hurt! Marina said that all her classmates want to be interpreters, but she wants to be a teacher like her mom in the family tradition.

Kostia’s a cute little boy, about five years old. Becca glommed on to him right away, and when we walked through Khmelnytsky, she and Kostia held hands. Becca, Jack, and Kostia played nicely together all day. Kostia’s a light, picky eater like Becca.

Waiting for us outside the train station was our driver Peter and his VW van. Both families piled in, and we were off to the Khmelnytsky WWII massacre site near the Yuzhny Bug¹. Lots of new construction in evidence near the river – bigger houses with interesting shapes intended for the “New Ukrainian” or *biznessmeni*, probably including a few mafia. A stop or two to ask directions along the way. Anna and Ilya...

¹ The name of the river near Proskurov/Khmelnytsky

Dunaevtsi, Ukraine, Saturday, 7/21/01 6:30 AM
(continuing to write about Thursday, 7/19/01)

feel free to ask anyone on the street or in the countryside about the locations of Jewish sites. I haven't seen the slightest hesitation to answer, nor the slightest pause as people do the calculation and realize that we are Jewish. Marina confirms that her friends at the university, all Christian, know that she is Jewish, but it doesn't interfere with any friendships. She's completely accepted, as anyone else. The main problem for a young person is that the Jewish community has shrunk so much in recent years (in Dunaevtsi, a 120-family community is down to 40 families) that there isn't anyone Jewish to go out with. It seems the Jewish community is finally emerging from the shadow of the Soviet Union and shtetls are establishing Jewish community centers and religious groups, but for the smaller shtetls, it may be too late. Emmigration is their future. In Kamenets-Podolsk, Mykhail Lamm runs a Jewish community center across from the train station. The communities are small enough that there tends to be a single leader who organizes things. In Dunaevtsi, that's Ilya's sister, Tatiana. But I am digressing.

The World War II site in Khmelnytsky is completely overgrown. There's a monument that is painted blue. Were it not for the monument, I would not have recognized the spot from the grisly photo on page 689 of the Chapin/Weinstock book. My guess is that the exact site lies just below the monument toward the Yuzhny Bug, but the little track behind the monument was nearly overgrown. It was hard to tell one spot from another, and mosquitoes were starting to bite.

From the Khmelnytsky massacre site, we went to a pretty park with a monument to the Soviet soldiers who died in World War II. Anna and Ilya said that there was a

local tradition of newlyweds, Jew and gentile alike, taking a picture in front of the monument, so Neia and I asked Ilya to take one of us – newlyweds of eleven years.



Memorial near the Yuzhny Bug.



Detail of plaque on the memorial.



From the left: Joe, Marina, Kostia, Ilya, Becca, Anna, Neia.



Newlyweds of 11 years in Khmel'nitsky.



Jack and the Dragon at the Khmelnytsky pedestrian mall.



Kostia and Becca in the bouncing room.

Afterward, we went to downtown Khmelnytsky and walked around in the area set off for a pedestrian mall. A happy area. Kostia was already treating Becca like a lifelong friend and the two of them walked hand-in-hand. Jack spotted some blow-up carnival rides for kids. One was a dragon, and Ilya invited him to go on it. Jack was happy bouncing around the dragon whose mouth would close from time to time. Jack doesn't like to show when he's pleased, but he's totally incapable of hiding it. Becca declined to go on herself. I think she felt she was too old, but when Kostia, who is usually timid about carnival rides, wanted to go into the bouncing room with her. Becca took him, and the two of them were all smiles. Jack joined them in the bouncing room.

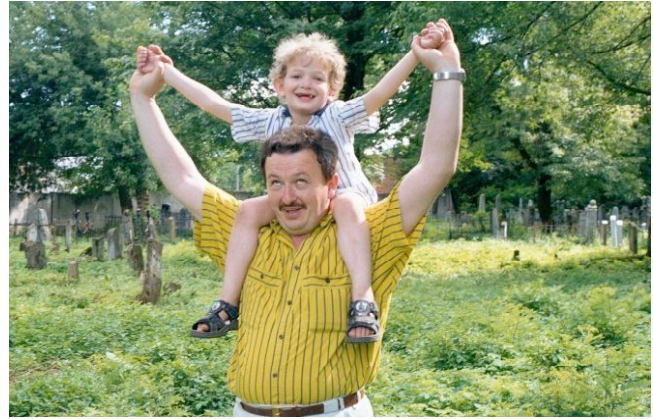
After the kids came out, we sat down outside a fast food pizza place. Ordering pizza is always an ordeal for our family. Jack and I won't touch cheese, and Becca turns up her nose at anything that looks like meat or a vegetable. The Royznerns said that Kostia turns up his nose at everything. Becca said she could identify with that. She said she knew what it was like when everyone wanted you to eat foods you didn't like. Ilya and Marina were very patient as I practiced my Cyrillic reading on the ingredients – I recognized some and Marina translated others. Marina said the place was like a McDonald's. Actually, a Pizza Hut would have been a closer description, but the pizza was tastier here. Becca was at her best and ate a slice and a half, even though it had some ham on it. Had my first Ukrainian beer with Ilya, a Slavutich draught.

After lunch, we went to the site of the mass grave from the Proskurov pogrom in 1919 – the site pictured on *The Road from Letichev*, page 507. There's no mound in evidence, but there's a long cemented area surrounded by a gate with a design suggesting menorahs. There's a stone-filled Magen David in the center. While we were there, workers were building a memorial, but it wasn't finished.

On the way to the mass grave, I had noticed a cemetery. That was, in fact, the Jewish cemetery. The postwar section showed some signs of maintenance, but the rest was overgrown. Stones tended to be in Cyrillic and Yiddish/Hebrew. The cemetery is no longer being used for new graves. For some reason, there are A LOT of graves dated 1963. When you see a lot of Jewish deaths in a single year in this part of the world, all sorts of dark thoughts occur, but Anna and Ilya didn't know of anything in particular that happened then. There were a number of graves in the older section from 1941. Most of the remaining stones were from the 30s. Evidence that older graves were desecrated – who knows whether by Petliurans or Nazis?



Mass grave of Jews murdered in 1919
Proskurov pogrom.



Proskurov (Khmelnitsky) Jewish Cemetery.

Time out. Anna just brought up our milk and fresh currants and sour cherries from market. Just rinsed them off in boiled water and am going to have breakfast.

My family's up now. Partly sunny day. Cock crowing outside. Today's the big day. In an hour, we leave for Novaya Ushitsa.

One interesting style of monument – a tree with cut off limbs and a diagonally cut top – represents the tree of life which has been cut. (Yesterday (7/20/01) in Kamenets-Podolsk, we saw a similar style monument in front of the Catholic church.)

After the cemetery, we drove “home” to Dunaevtsi. Anna and Ilya had arranged for us to stay in the apartment above theirs; they were watching it for their neighbors who were away. The apartment block is very square and nondescript. It reminds me a lot of the apartments in Beijing. Bare, dirty stairwells, but inside you know you are in a home, complete with nice rugs, furniture, and wall decorations. A small living room, one bedroom, a small kitchen, and a bathroom. All together, about 80 m² – about 800 ft². A small balcony is outside the living room. No screens. There is running water, hot and cold, but the hot water is turned on only in the winter. Some people put in their own hot water heaters, but they aren't supposed to. Our apartment just has cold water, and the cold water valve in the kitchen doesn't work, so we fill up our pots in the bathroom. We are being very careful to boil our drinking water. So far, no problem. The water tastes fine, but we notice a milky white sediment at the bottom of the pot.