

# Breaking the Silence

By Sid Shaievitz



*Adapted from Remarks Delivered at  
the Felshtin Society Meeting  
February 7, 1999*

**M**y mother was Rose Uberman. Her father was a victim of the pogrom, having been stabbed to death in his home. She arrived in this country in 1920 at age 14 with her mother and brother, Charlie. They were taken in by her brother, Abe Uberman, and his wife, Rose Oksman, also a Felshtiner. They lived in a two- or three-family building in the South Bronx with their three daughters and Joe and Izzie Oksman and their families.

My mother hardly spoke to me about the Felshtin experience. This is a recurring theme among many Felshtiner descendants. Whether her silence was prompted by the trauma or to shield me from those events, I don't know.

After my mother died, I needed to know the name of her father; I did not know his name. I looked at the list of martyrs in the yizkor book and, low and behold, I found number 84, Shlomo Huberman, my grandfather, "stabbed in the house." I then realized that I was named after him. That started my interest in getting the book translated. I discovered that my cousin Alan Bernstein was also interested in getting the book translated. We encouraged each other. We had the chapter written by Sarah Oksman translated.

In August 1997, I invited my cousins over to my house. Little did they know what I had in mind. I passed around the hat to start a translation fund, and they all contributed. That was fine, but there's only so much I can get out of the Uberman family. We're only a small

group, and we're not wealthy.

Two considerations convinced me that the timing was right to get the book translated. First, we -- Rabbi Novoseller, Mel Werbach, Joan Wilder, Julius Hoffman, Norman Oksman, Phyllis Nevins, Barbara Fischkin and others -- are the first generation of Americans after the pogrom. It is my belief that if our generation does not get the book translated, no one will. The next generation's roots to the past have been diluted. My generation still has a pull to the old country. It was now or never.

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*"What our ancestors did for us lasted, and what we are doing now is our gift to future generations."*

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Second, the Internet greatly facilitates outreach and genealogical research. I started looking at [jewishgen.org](http://jewishgen.org) on the web and found Ben Weinstock, the first person outside my family with an interest in Felshtin. I got names from the late Herbie Hoffman. Other people contacted me through the Internet. That's how it got started. We networked. I sent out letters to the people whose names I had been given. The response was enthusiastic. I then sent out 174 letters to people with Felshtiner family surnames and received about half a dozen positive responses. All of this motivated me to continue.

I came in contact with Phyllis Nevins and her husband, Mike. She and Mike have been

tremendously supportive. Mike provided me with historical information about events subsequent to the pogrom, including the assassination of Petlura and the defense of his assassin, Shalom Shwartzbard, by Henry Torres. I also came to appreciate the importance of the Felshtin yizkor book beyond the Felshtin community.

Everyone was very enthusiastic and wanted to revitalize the Felshtin Society. We met on November 15, 1998, formalized the organization, and elected officers. I'm president. Mike Nevins is vice president. Pamela Avraham, a CPA, is treasurer and Barbara Fischkin, a writer, is our secretary.

As you know, the Felshtin book was written in Yiddish, the language of our forefathers. There is a chapter in English written "for our children, who don't understand Yiddish." They wrote the book for us. Our forefathers debated whether to erect a monument to Felshtin. They realized that monuments erode with time, but a book is everlasting. The book was their way of speaking to us, voices from the past telling us about the terrible hardships they endured and how the Felshtiner adjusted to life in this country. Although my mother didn't speak much to me about Felshtin, the book tells me what she could not bring herself to talk about.

The yizkor book chronicles shtetl life from another era. There is nothing comparable. The National Yiddish Book Center informed us that the Felshtin book is the most detailed work about the Ukrainian pogroms and Jewish life of that era.

We estimated that the book would cost more than \$15,000 to translate -- 670 pages at \$25 per page. Then we had the very good fortune of meeting Sora Hoffman Ludmir, a professional translator and Felshtin descendant who agreed to do the job for the money we had raised, well under half the estimated cost. Now it's finished. Sora has done a magnificent job. She deserves our gratitude. If it weren't for Sora, we'd still be raising funds to translate the book.

Although the Felshtin Society has only been reinvigorated recently, we already have a number of projects underway. The publication of the translated yizkor book will require effort and funding. The Felshtiner section of the Baron Hirsch Cemetery in Staten Island is in a state of disrepair and needs our assistance. We are going to publish a newsletter. We will go online. We want to conduct archival Research in Russia while the records are still accessible.

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*"We're all one family. With the revitalized Felshtin Society, we're now also bound by friendship and camaraderie."*

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We would like to launch a membership drive to extend membership beyond the few families we've been able to reach so far. If you or your relatives have names and addresses of Felshtin landsleit, please send them to me at 299 Glenwood Avenue, Bloomfield, New Jersey 07003. If you have stories or information about Felshtin, please share them by sending them to our newsletter editor.

If we could go back far enough in Felshtin history, we would probably find that we are all related by marriage. We're all one family. With the revitalized Felshtin Society, we're now also bound by friendship and camaraderie.

It has been said that when you do something for yourself, it goes with you to the grave. When you do something for someone else, it lasts after you. What our ancestors did for us lasted, and what we are doing now is our gift to future generations. Lastly, I thank my wife, Rhoda, for her great patience, encouragement, and understanding during the past year-and-a-half while I devoted so much of my free time to Felshtin affairs.

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