

Discovering Felshtin

by Sora Ludmir

“I was right there with them. I lived the very words of the book. I felt what they felt. I understand their language. I am a Felshtiner.”

While translating the Felshtin yizkor book, I was taken back to a time and place that all of us could only try to imagine.

I relived the horrendous massacres, the pogroms that took the lives of our ancestors. My own great-grandfather, Yosel Hoffman, or as he was better known in the book, Yosel Chana's, was cruelly bludgeoned to death. Every account described by the survivors brought me to tears. I felt their pain and anguish, their loss, and their helpless hopelessness. I felt their total devastation. I don't know how they were able to withstand such pain and continue to live with such haunting memories.

The yizkor book is at least the only tangible manifest left of Felshtin, the little shtetl, our very own roots. I did my best to make it all come alive in

English.

I laughed and cried all at once, reading about the life in the old home. The people of Felshtin were so poor, they lived in poverty and under circumstances very few of us would have been able to survive. There were no bathrooms, very little clothing, very little food and very little money. Yet, in spite of the poverty, the unsanitary conditions, cold winters, hot summers, dilapidated houses, and hunger, Felshtin is described and remembered by the authors of the book with love, nostalgia and longing. In the book, the town is described in minute detail. Every road, every brick, and every aspect of their lives right down to the many expressions which are so vivid, sad and funny.

The Cheder boys' antics are portrayed with bitter sweet humor. The secret rendezvous between the boys and girls takes us back to years when romance was exciting, forbidden and pure. Their dreams and aspirations were to own a horse, or a new pair of boots, or something new to wear for Shabbos. To the

people of Felshtin, Shaboos and Yom Tov was a spiritual elevation, one they waited for from Sunday to Friday. They observed these holy days to the exact letter of the law, and they loved these days so much that they were able to forget the miseries of the rest of the week.

The Beth Hamedrash was the nucleus of their lives. It was the heart of their very being and the place where they really came alive.

I think we all have a lot to learn from our loved ones of yesterday. All they really desired in life was to see the next generation smarter, wealthier, more educated, and not having to endure the hardships they themselves bore.

To these people, the shtetl was their family, depicted by the fact that every person was known by his or her first name and to whom they belonged, such as Yosel Chana's or Avrohom Ber Leib's or Sholom Leib Pollick's ... They lived together, laughed together and cried together. And they were murdered together. Complete houses,

entire families, fathers, mothers, children, babies.

I was right there with them. I lived the very words of the book. I felt what they felt. I understand their language. I *am* a Felshtiner.

The only way Felshtin will live on as a memory of a real Jewish shtetl will be if the Judaism-Yiddishkeit, learned, lived, and practiced here, will continue throughout the coming generations. You and I can only ensure this by upholding our Jewish heritage and instilling this flame of Yiddishkeit in our own children.

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Sora Ludmir completed a translation of the 670-page Felshtin yizkor book in 1999. © Copyright 1999 by Sora Ludmir. Permission to reprint must be obtained from the author. Photograph by Rhoda Shaievitz.

