

Impressions of a Visit to Felshtin

by Mina Huberman

Iwould like to take this opportunity to share with you, my fellow countrymen, the impression that our town Felshtin made on me when I visited there a few years ago.

I was attracted to Felshtin like a magnet. I wanted to see, with my own eyes, if the destruction of our town was as great as the people here in America portrayed it to be. It was on a Friday afternoon, May 12, 1931, when my youngest daughter, Leahle, and I arrived in Felshtin.

Dear friends, my trip to Felshtin was a number of years back and today, as I write these words, my limbs are stiff, my speech is poor, my pen shakes, my memory lacking, and it is difficult to describe the impression that the town and its inhabitants made on me. Truth be told, I have waited a long time; yet, even in my worst nightmares, I could never have imagined such loneliness and darkness.

I do not exaggerate, my friends and countrymen, when I say that it appeared to me that ever person I encountered, man, woman and child, made the same impression. It was as if they wanted to pull themselves out of their graves to protest against the evil servants of the inquisition.

Every single one, with no exception, was a skeleton, skin and bones, emaciated from hunger, naked and barefoot, in the full sense of the word. It was just impossible for me to describe these people. Even the wealthy, who at one time played an important role in Felshtin, were now equal to the poor. In every town I visited, I found the people bloated from hunger. I met young mothers with infected lungs whose husbands had either died or been drafted into the army, leaving them desolate and alone,

wandering around with their hungry children crying for a little bread (mostly from baked bran) that cost two rubles and 50 kopeks a pound. Not everyone had the fortune of acquiring this valuable commodity!

Most of the homes were barren. No furniture, no beds; they slept on mattresses made of boards. The houses were covered in black soot that had accumulated over the years. I saw workers -- those who had the good fortune of finding work -- especially the bourgeois, old white bearded Jews, naked and barefoot, going miles to twist rope. Many worked in the fields.

One afternoon a certain Moshe Avrohom hitched up his wagon and brought the workers a pot of black grain and a quarter pound of bread for each worker. This was their entire sustenance for the day, their compensation for the day's work.

A few of the girls of Felshtin worked twisting mesh and earning five kopeks for producing 28 inches of it. I spent eight sad days sharing the suffering of my countrymen, helping them as much as I could. I gave them everything I owned!

The day I left was like Yom Kippur in town. I left with a broken heart, but with the firm determination to help them myself, and see to it that others also help these poor half-dead men, women and children of Felshtin.

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