

Lynn & Jorge Covarubias
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5 Reflections

After thoughts As Jorge and I reflected on our journey, we spoke of many things. One thing we were struck by was the eye color of many of the residents of Belogorodka. We both recognized many of them had eyes just like mine. It was almost shocking how much we were alike in that regard.

I also remembered my mother talking about her home in Belogorodka, saying that they shared it with their parents. Yulia explained that Jewish homes of the area often were two houses joined together. As I child I remember imagining two separate houses joined by a long hall. But what we saw all over the Ukraine was that when Yulia pointed out what used to be a Jewish home, it was a long house, half of which might be painted another color (or not) but obviously from the inside it was two houses. Now I could see what Mom meant.

Mom also mentioned having a basement where they and others from the village would hide belongings. She specifically mentioned that they hid valuables from the Russian soldiers who would come to ransack their homes. Again, Yulia said it was common for Jewish houses to have basements whereas Ukrainian homes did not. In houses we passed we could sometimes see there were basements, other times we couldn't tell.

The samovar in the museum—perhaps it was like the one that was tipped over and burned Uncle Izzy's scalp. How many times have we heard some of those stories?

When I was a child I remembered Mom talking about their family as rich, or at least wealthier than some of their neighbors. She said there was a governess and other people to help in the household. She also said once while peeling potatoes that her mother told her not to cut the skins so fine (in other words to leave more potato with the skin) because they were giving the peels to the poor. This is actually much in sync with what Anastasiya remembers also.

Finally we were awed by what the families must have gone through to leave the Ukraine, travel to a port in an unknown country to set sail over the ocean to another unknown country. I don't know how long the journey took for my grandparents, Chaika & Yussel Katz, but she was 7 months pregnant when she arrived. Obviously necessity drove them to seek better lives. But what a price they paid for that transition, one that my generation so benefited from and now takes for granted.

What irony, too, that my mother's memory is now gone, so she doesn't register it when I tell her each day that I actually visited her hometown. Perhaps that was the final motivator, to seek a connection that even Alzheimer's can't erase.

It was a joy to be at home again, with indoor plumbing and water safe to drink. But what an unforgettable experience, to be in the towns my parents and grandparents lived in when they were young. In some ways the whole Ukraine cried of death, yet there I was, alive, the next generation able to return to the land that shaped my parents' lives. What a strange mixture of chance, history, luck and determination made that possible. It feels like that by going back, we were able to bear witness to something essential that survived, something Jewish, something human, something connected to life. Still, with keener appreciation of our daily freedoms, we were glad to be home.