Remembering the Jewish Community of

Rakhov, Czechoslovakia

Remembered by Linda Winiker

I have taken most of my information from Eldad's translation of a chapter in the book, Sefer Marmarash. I have also used a chapter from the book AMCHA: An Oral Testament of the Holocaust. This chapter was written by a woman, Esther Bittman, who was born and lived in Rakhov.

The town of Rakhov was first settled by Jews in the 1860s. In the early 1900's, it was known for its skiing resorts and mineral springs. It attracted tourists from all over Europe. Rachov is located at the tip of the Carpathian Mountains, jutting into Rumania. The population was a mix of Czechs, Hungarians and Ukrainians. Rakhov passed through the sovereigns of three countries in one year. Of the 10,000 people who lived in Rakhov before World War II, twenty percent were Jewish. Many were merchants and tradesmen. There were large factories- sawmills, flourmills and an electric power plant. Jews worked as clerks and hired laborers. There was also a layer of Jewish intelligentsia: a judge, two doctors, three lawyers and four dentists.

The Jews got along with their Czech neighbors and felt no hatred from them. The Ukrainians, however, were more zealous in their hatred of the Jews. I quote from Esther Bittman who was born in 1927 in Rachov: "I remember on Passover when a Gentile girl got lost, the Jewish community was afraid that if they found her dead they would be blamed. There was always the story that the Jews needed blood. The Ukrainians especially were very fanatic. They blamed the Jews for needing blood for matzos: Thank G-d she was found unharmed."
Rakhov had 5 synagogues. There was a Chevra Kaddisha, two communal Torah study organizations and other charitable groups. The Jewish youth were involved in sports-soccer and tennis. Twice a year on Chanukah and Purim amateur theater plays were performed in Yiddish. Among the plays performed were The Dybbuk and The Selling of Joseph.

When the Hungarians took over Rakhov in August 1940, the Jews suffered. The Hungarians divided the property owned by the Jews, and assembled a black list of Jews be marked for death. Most of these Jews had fled from Poland to escape the Nazis. In July 1941 these Jews were rounded up, sent by railcars and then by trucks back to Poland, where they were murdered. The Hungarians also established curfews for the Jews. They could not keep their stores open nor go to synagogue.

The day after Passover 5704, April 16, 1944, the general round up of all of Rakhov's Jews began. They were housed in the school opposite the town council building. It took eight days to complete the round up. On the ninth day, the Jews were taken to the railroad and sent to the ghetto in Matte-Salks. There, twenty to thirty families were placed in each house, where they remained for approximately a month. Eventually they were packed into cattle cars and transported for twelve days to Auschwitz. It is estimated that about twelve hundred of Rakhov's Jews died at Auschwitz or at other camps. After the war, most of the few remaining Jews who had returned to Rakhov left for Israel. Today there is not even a minyan of Jews left in Rakhov.

My mother was born in Rakhov to Moshe Fogel and Lena Morova on December 25, 1922. Her parents divorced when she was just under two years of age. My mother was sent to the U.S. and was adopted by her paternal aunt. She left behind in Rakhov her mother and twin sister, Chana. Her father left for Paris where he died in 1930. My mother never again had contact with her mother or sister. She tried unsuccessfully to
search for them after the war. One can only assume their fate was linked with the tragic stories of the Jews of Rakhov.

Here is an excerpt from a Yizkor book about Rakhov. According to The Encyclopedia of Jewish Life Before and During the Holocaust, Rakhov was occupied by Hungary in March 1939.