Remembering the Jewish Community of

Sokol, Ukraine (formerly Poland)

Remembered by Rachel Melemed

My mother is from the village of Krystanopal in the Ukraine. Her cousin Moshe Maltz lived in a neighboring town called Sokal. My mother’s family escaped while the Germans were invading Poland. They crossed the Bug River into Russia and stayed with a daughter and her family until they were forced to leave by the Russian government. They worked in labor camps in Russia and then traveled the Ural Mountains and settled in Buchara for the duration of the war. Her cousin, Moshe and his family survived by hiding in a hayloft above a pigsty for 2 years. He kept a diary of his family’s survival through the war 1939-1945. A portion of the information given is garnered from his diary called "Years of Horror: Glimpse of Hope." This was made into the film "#4 Street of our Lady". The Maltz family is the only surviving relative that my mother had in the U.S.

Sokal in 1939 had 6000 Jews. In 1945 only 30 Jews survived. Of those who survived, 15 Jews including the Maltzes were hidden on the property of Francesca Halamajowa, a very courageous and righteous Polish Catholic woman in her 50's.

The Maltz family was involved in the sale of cattle to the villages and towns in the area. Jews constituted an urban class trading mainly in farm produce. (My grandfather was a wheat dealer.) Sokal was described as a "nice town with nice people." They lived a normal life." Before WWII, it was described as a lively town with an active market place and an active cultural life. It was not cosmopolitan because it was on the bodies were stiff after crouching for 2 years in a hayloft. (Three members were in a dug out basement under the kitchen floor). During the war, they told stories, played chess, read old newspapers and Moshe wrote in his diary. After the war, Mrs. Halamajowa did not
want it known she sheltered the Jews during the war. The Poles would have been upset with her for protecting them.

More than 100 descendants are living today because of their survival!!

Here is a website about the history of Jewish Sokal. The Jewish Week has a thoughtful article about Francisca Halamajowa, who hid the Maltz family, three other Jews, and a German deserter. Fay Maltz, a child member of the group hidden my Mrs. Halamjowa tells a chilling story about how her fellow captives made a failed attempt to poison her because of her crying. Mrs. Halamajowa died in 1960. Her herosim was not recognized until 60 years later when survivors brought her deeds to the attention of the public.