

POST-SOVIET JEWRY REPORT

January 2014 Editor: Judy Patkin

Assisting Jews in the former Soviet Union since

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POOR UKRAINIAN ECONOMY RESULTS IN MORE JEWISH EMIGRATION



Left to right: Elena Proskurnya (head of Chesed) with Tanya Sidelkovskaya (head of Adopt-a-Bubbe in Ukraine) in front of Chesed building, Melitopol

Although there are no official figures, unemployment is high in Melitopol, Ukraine. Factories close and lay off large numbers of workers. Small businesses close, too. Those with salaries are taxed 45%, and the government wants to raise that to 50%. After graduation, there are no jobs. As a result, young people leave for Israel. "These young people are our future and they are leaving."

Melitopol has no transportation system, so people take taxis. The Jewish community pays 600 hrv. or \$75 per week to be able to request an unofficial taxi.

The minimum pension is 400 hrv./month or \$50. Subsidies are supposed to bring pensions up to 1,000 hrv./month or \$125, but the

government has no money. "We're like Greece!" Retirement age for men is now 65 and they want to change that to age 67. Women retire at age 60. Women used to retire at age 50 and men at age 60, so these are huge changes.

There are around 3,000 Jews in Melitopol out of a total population of 168,000. There has been no increase in the total population for the last seven years, which is unusual for cities. The oldest gravestones in the Jewish cemetery date to 1716.

The Chesed center we were in was built in 1790 and was originally a school for young children. The small building next door was the rabbi's home. There used to be two synagogues. The remaining smaller one on the street is in very bad shape and cannot be used. The larger one was destroyed in WWII.

In 1997 the building was given back to the Jewish community and Chesed (the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee) repaired the building and re-opened it as a Jewish community center in 1998.

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ADOPT-A-BUBBE VISITS IN 2013



Below: Food Roza received on our visit with her



Above, left to right: **Faina Teplitskaya** (Adopt-a-Bubbe coordinator in Poltava, Ukraine) with client **Roza Klepach**. Roza was born in Poltava on January 25, 1947. She was an only child and never married, so there are no relatives. She formerly worked in a factory on quality control.

Roza's pension is 1,050 hrv. or \$131/month. Her rent and utilities are subsidized at 200 hrv. or \$25/month. She also rents out a room to a 20-year-old female student for 400 hrv. or \$50/month, but has to keep quiet about this or she will lose her rent subsidy.

Roza is a Type II diabetic and also has hypertension. Medicine is paid for from her pension. A month ago, she had surgery to remove her gall bladder, and she is still recuperating. She is just now feeling better and ready to go outside.

Roza receives clothing, food and artificial sweetener from Adopt-a-Bubbe. Today's food package contained chicken, fish, apples, cheese and a liter of cooking oil. She is very grateful.

Right: **Zoya Avronova**, born in 1948 in Poltava, Ukraine. Zoya lives with her disabled son, **Maxim**, born May 15, 1992. In the photo, she is showing us clothing and shoes received from Adopt-a-Bubbe for Maxim. She also receives food. Zoya used to teach Soviet history and studied English for three years, although she no longer speaks it, but understands.

Zoya does not know exactly what is wrong with Maxim, but he is obviously disabled. He was often ill as an infant and at age six couldn't walk alone. He walks and talks strangely, but is quite likable. He cannot be left alone, either inside or out. He gets lost outside and gets into trouble in the apartment. He sees a neurologist and is on medication, but in 2012 he got into the supply, took too much and had to be hospitalized.

Because of the stress of taking care of Maxim, Zoya has heart trouble. She needs more tests done, but they cost too much. Her pension is 1,000 hrv. or \$125/month. Maxim is considered Disabled 2nd Class and receives a pension of 900 hrv. or \$113/month. They have a subsidy for rent and utilities which is 362 hrv. or \$45/month. Maxim's meds cost 130 hrv. or \$16/month.

Maxim went to a good school which used the Montessori method, and Zoya attended with him. He reads well, but is unable to do math or use a computer. He recited some poems for us and sang.



UPDATE ON ANTISEMITISM

The following items are part of e-mail messages received on antisemitism in the FSU.

August 28, 2013; Derdent, Russia: According to Jewish staff for Alexei Navalny who campaigned for mayor of Moscow, he never made a statement praising the Holocaust. The statement was false and reportedly part of a smear campaign to damage Navalny's image with liberal voters.

September 29, 2013; Russia: Sheriff Akhmedov, alleged shooter of Rabbi Artur Ovadia Isakov in Dagestan, Russia, was killed in a raid by Russian security forces. Akhmedov had been wanted since 2011 for alleged involvement in bombings and attacks on police. He is believed to be behind the July 24 shooting of Isakov as he left his car and headed into his home in Derbent. Rabbi Isakov was seriously wounded and is recuperating in Israel, but plans to return to Dagestan.

Last October, unknown assailants detonated a bomb in the interior yard of Derbent's main synagogue. No one was hurt. Some 2,000 Jews live among a predominantly Muslim population in Dagestan.

October, 2013; Medzhybizh, Ukraine: Two hasidic men were beaten while on a pilgrimage to the birthplace of Rabbi Israel Baal Shem Tov, founder of the hasidic movement. The two were chased by seven Ukrainians screaming, "Jews stink!" before the beating.

October 1, 2013; Lviv, Ukraine: Investigators in Lviv are looking into claims that two policemen assaulted and urinated on a Jewish businessman, Dmitry Flekman, age 28, in a Lviv police station. Police peed right at him saying, "Hitler did not like Jews and neither do I." Flekman claims he was arrested on his way from a bank, then beaten and his tailbone fractured. "They picked on me because they thought they could get money from

me. It turned antisemitic when they discovered that my mother's name is Rosenberg." The two policemen demanded that he give them \$10,000. They later took away his credit card and demanded the code, or otherwise, they would search his apartment for cocaine. Flekman was eventually released at night, collapsed on the street and was taken to the hospital by passers by.

October, 2013; Baku, Azerbaijan: An Iranian Citizen was sentenced to 15 years in jail in Azerbaijan for planning an attack on the Israeli Embassy in Baku. Twenty-two people were arrested in Azerbaijan in March on suspicion of planning to attack American, Israeli and Jewish targets, including the U.S. and Israeli embassies, a Jewish Agency for Israel facility and an American fast-food restaurant.

In January, at least two men were arrested after planning an attack on two Israeli teachers and chabad emissaries at the Or Avner Jewish Day School, Baku.

October 9, 2013; Yekaterinburg, Russia: Shots were fired at the Yekaterinburg synagogue, breaking windows, but no one was injured.

Yekaterinburg is Russia's fourth largest city, and has a Jewish population of approximately 6,500, according to Michael Oshttrakh, chair of the Sverdlovsk Regional Society of Jewish culture, Hatikva.

October 15, 2013; Kiev, Ukraine: Ira Forman, the Obama administration's

special envoy to monitor and combat antisemitism, cancelled his attendance at a landmark conference in Kiev due to the U.S. government shutdown. Forman was scheduled to be opening speaker at the two-day conference marking the 100th anniversary of the Menachem Mendel Beilliss blood libel trial.

The Beilliss trial was based on an anti-semitic blood libel that czarist Russian authorities fabricated in Kiev. Beilliss was acquitted in 1913 of allegations that he murdered a Christian to use his blood for worship. Beilliss' grandson, U.S. born Jay Beilliss, attended the conference.

Gideon Behar, Forman's Israeli counterpart, told the conference that, "Unfortunately, blood libels are still around even 100 years after the trial of Beilliss, largely thanks to Iran's efforts to propagate them."

October 24, 2013; Balta, Ukraine: The Jewish community of Balta in Ukraine lost its bid to gain possession of a former synagogue. The 100 year-old Savranskaya synagogue, now abandoned is owned by a communications company Ukrtelecom.

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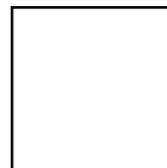
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NOT ALL HOLOCAUST VICTIMS RECEIVE COMPENSATION



We met **Raisa Zeligman** at the Melitopol Chesed center where she came for a Kabbalat Shabbat service and a hot meal.

Raisa was born in 1937 and spent a year in the Melitopol ghetto with her mother. However, she only has one living witness, so receives no Claims Conference funds. This witness lives in Israel. Raisa showed us an official letter, which verifies the time spent in the ghetto.

Another woman who was in a concentration camp and has a number tattooed on her arm, receives compensation every three months. As Raisa said, "I guess they couldn't erase the tattoo!"

*A portion of funding for
Adopt-a-Bubbe is made possible
by the Combined Jewish
Philanthropies and the
Dnepropetrovsk Kehillah Project
of the JCRC of Greater Boston.*