

The most important thing about memories is to have somewhere to stay and make memories there.

-Terry Pratchett

Why Do I Come Back to Dynów?

-E. Hadam

## A VALENTINE FOR DYNÓW

By Nina Talbot

In September of 2013 my life changed forever when I made my first trip to Dynów, where my grandmother Bella Neger came from.

Not only did this trip define who I have become, but it also put a finger on a pivotal time in history that wiped out a third of Dynów's population – the Jewish population in 1939 – when the Nazis invaded.

My grandmother Bella told me of her childhood in this magical setting where she lived with her parents Abraham and Taube and her seven brothers and sisters at 1 Lazienna Street. She told me about the fragrant lilacs, picking mushrooms and mulberries (maliny) in the forest and jumping rope down her street with her friends.

Then her life dramatically took a turn for the worse in 1914 when Cossacks raided Dynów in a pogrom chasing the Jewish people out of town. Bella, aged ten years old at the time, never forgot seeing the Jewish baker's head slashed off with a saber, and her head rolling down the street.

After a year in exile, the family returned to Dynów without Taube, Bella's mother, who succumbed to cholera on the way home. Bella, the eldest of eight children, was further traumatized when her father Abraham remarried. He was a kosher butcher and needed a wife to care for his children. Bella moved in with her grandmother Chaya Spinrad, who lived across the street. Chaya arranged for Bella to emigrate to the US in 1921.



Fig. 1, Abraham Neger, circa 1937



Fig. 2, Bella Neger, 1921

Because of my love and closeness with Bella, I always knew that I would travel to Dynów one day and in 2013, after overcoming my fear of flying, that dream came true when my husband Mark Rand and I made the trip. We discovered the Polish Jewry Heritage Center, founded by **Rabbi Pinchas Pomp** the first day that we arrived in Dynów. A plaque in the sanctuary displayed the mission of the center, honoring the famous Dinover rabbi, Elimelech Spira, a giant in the Chassidic world of Galicia, and the mission of memorializing Dynów's Jewish citizens, who were brutally murdered by the Nazis.

My husband called me over to point out the names on the plaque, written in Hebrew of the many members of the Neger family, among the other Jewish families who were slaughtered by the Nazi demons. That was a defining moment for me when I knew that I had to do something – something meaningful to memorialize my family.

That day, Rabbi Pomp let Agnieszka Kędzierska take the afternoon off work at the center to help me locate my family's landmarks based on photos I had from Bella's brother Sam Neger's photos from a trip he took to Dynów in 1996. I owe many thanks to Rabbi Pomp.

Rabbi Pomp continued to support the completion of my projects related to the memory of my family, starting with that day when he let Agnieszka Kędzierska take me around town to help me find my family's landmarks.



Fig. 3, Sam Neger, circa 1946

The following year of 2014, I had already started my painting series, "Faces of Dynów." For my first project, I created prints of the first four paintings, which Rabbi Pomp installed in his gallery of artifacts. That year's commemoration of Rosh Hashanah, where there is an annual lighting of 400 candles representing the murdered Jewish citizens of Dynów, groups of students from the local junior high and high schools attend, and partake in the lighting. The students toured the gallery, and there was a question and answer lesson focused on the imagery in my prints of 'history portraits.'

The second project was the thirty-seven foot wide painted mural installed on the eastern wall of the Jewish Center. The imagery in the mural is based on descriptions from the Dynów Yizkor (memory) book, written by survivors, of paintings that were in one of the three synagogues that were burnt down by the Nazis. Rabbi Pomp and I were in constant communication about the details and authenticity of the mural's trueness to the originals in the old synagogue.

Another project was the creation of 36 granite plaques in memoriam to my family that were installed on the outside of the *ohel* (tomb) of the rabbis from Dynów, located in the old Jewish Cemetery, with the ribbon cutting coinciding with the annual commemoration in 2018.

The plaques are dedicated to the memory of the victims of the Neger and Spinrad families, thirty-seven souls, men, women and children, among four hundred Jews of Dynów who perished that day, the second day of the Jewish New Year, Rosh Hashanah, September 15, 1939, all murdered by the Nazis.

I will describe my additional projects with the assistance of friends we made from Dynów, who have become so important to me.

I created a series of nineteen oil paintings, "Faces of Dynów," history paintings of my family, rabbis and current residents of Dynów. That series was exhibited in three venues: The Judaica Foundation in Kraków, The Synagogue Center of the Foundation for the Preservation of Jewish Heritage in Zamość, and the family home of Andrzej Stankiewicz, Under the Linden Tree, in Dynów.

Another project was the creation and installation of a new gate and plaque for the 'new' Jewish cemetery on Karolówka Street. The writing on the plaque reads:

*"In eternal memory are buried here the remains of 200 Jewish victims of Dynów and the surrounding area who were murdered by Nazis in September 1939, in addition to those buried before WWII. Jews lived in Dynów since the 16th century. In 1921 there were 1237 Jews (46% of the population). In September 1939 Hitler's Nazis killed Jews in a mass execution in the town and in the area. Those who survived were forced over the San River to the Soviet-occupied zone. Only a few survived the Holocaust. The Nazis not only destroyed Jewish communities, but also their descendants of future generations. May their memory be a blessing. This memorial plaque was funded by the Talbot, Rand, Gamiel, Neger and Spinrad families."*

I will forever be thankful to my many friends in Dynów who helped me with these projects. I will write about that now.

**Alina Kędzierska**, who wrote about Dynowians returning to their hometown in the Easter issue of *Dynowinka*, has become one of my dearest friends. She has also supported me in numerous ways to connect to my ancestral town. Alina and I see each other frequently in New York City where we both live. Alina's father **Józef Kędzierski** was one of the first people we met in Dynów on the second day of that first trip. Mr. Kędzierski took us around town pointing out landmarks of the former Jewish community – the buildings where they lived around the rynek, the site of the former synagogue where he remembered seeing the Nazis drag out the precious Torah scrolls, set them on fire, and force some of the Jewish men to stomp on them. He recounted seeing the Nazis throw the rabbi into the synagogue, which they had set on fire, and entrapped many of the Jews who were inside, who had been observing Rosh Hashanah, the holy Jewish New Year.

Józef pointed out the courtyard next to the church where 200 Jewish men were rounded up and forced to march down Ożoga Street to the site of a former church, ordered to strip, dig a trench and were shot into it. Józef reported to us that as a nine-year-old child, he was able to hear the shots and see some of this action from his family's apartment. It has also been a pleasure getting to know Mr. Kędzierski's wife Elżbieta and his younger daughter Iwona as well.

Another valued friend is **Jurek Warchoń**, who introduced us to many people over the years, especially elders who remembered Dynów during WWII. Jurek also translated for us during these many visits.

**Ewa Czyżowska** made many round trips from Dynów to the granite foundry several kilometers away to make sure the plaques being made as memorials to my family were being corrected properly. She also communicated to me through Alina by email as the many corrections were being made. When I wanted to at least pay Ewa for money on the gas for her trips that she spent, she adamantly refused, and cried, saying that she made all her efforts in tribute to one of my relatives, Muna Neger, who was shot through her door by a Nazi, holding her twin baby girls.

**Maciej Jurasiński**, a loyal educator and dear friend has supported my work from day one when we met on the street near the rynek, introduced to me by one of his former students, Agnieszka Kędzierska, who took me around that first day in Dynów. Maciej gave me a book about the Jewish Community from Dynów written by Professor Waclaw Wierzbieniec, with an index in the back listing the murdered, among them my large family of Negers and Spinrad.

Since that day, over the years Mr. Jurasiński has written poetry for my grandmother, educated his students about the terrible massacre that happened in Dynów, using my paintings, *Faces of Dynów*, as a teaching tool through the painted stories.

Professor Wierzbieniec's book was the first resource I came upon that referenced my family in Dynów. Since then, the professor has been a huge support in many ways. He was invited as the keynote speaker at the reception for the "*Faces of Dynów*" exhibition at The Judaica Foundation in Kraków in 2016. Also, the professor invited my husband and I to participate in a conference on "The Jews of Galicia" in Kraków in 2019, and in 2020 to the International Holocaust Days of Memory in Rzeszów and Dynów.

Back to the afternoon with Agnieszka – she located the homes of my family based on those photographs from my great-uncle, Sam Neger, Bella's brother, when he visited Dynów in 1996. It was truly amazing when Agnieszka found the man who was living in the home of Chaya Spinrad, Bella's grandmother. Not only that, but the man invited us in for tea. I couldn't believe that I was standing in the home of my great-great grandmother!

Another Dynów resident who has become a friend is **Stefan Kowalczyk**, who has also helped me in numerous ways over the years. Stefan has a vast knowledge of the history of Dynów, and made himself available to me for help with many things. We communicate regularly about news of Dynów and the surrounding area, as well as articles and books of interest.

**Andrzej Stankiewicz** made it possible for the exhibition of “Faces of Dynów,” both in Kraków, at the Judaica Foundation, and then at his family’s home, “Under the Linden Tree,” where I had the opportunity to meet many residents who turned out for the reception. At the reception I spoke of the fact that at least eight of my relatives survived because local residents hid them. I only wish that I had their names, so that I could thank these families. Mr. Stankiewicz has also made a commitment to the legacy of the paintings permanence in Dynów.

**Wiesława Marszałek** has taken on the enormous task of insuring that the grounds of the “new” Jewish cemetery on Karolówka Street will always be taken care of. I give thanks to Ms. Marszałek’s mother Stefania, and father who were caretakers of the cemetery before her. Wiesława Marszałek’s grandfather was one of the workers who dug up the remains of the murdered bodies from the Żurawiec Forest and had them reinterred into the Jewish cemetery. Bella’s grandmother, my great-great grandmother, Chaya Spinrad was among those bodies.



Fig. 4, Dora Neger, circa 1947



Fig. 5, Chaya Spinrad, circa 1938

**Zdzisław Ponczocha**, proprietor of the Oberza, where we always stay, first introduced my husband and I to Dynów, when he picked us up from the airport in Rzeszów, and as we approached the beautiful landscape of the sub-Carpathians of Dynów with a sweep of his hand, announced, “Dynów.” I will never forget the emotions that washed over me in that moment.

I sincerely thank **Mayor Zygmunt Frańczak**, who has attended all the above receptions for these projects. It means everything to me that the mayor of Dynów has supported my family and me in this very visible way.



Fig. 6, Nina, Dynów, 2013

My mother told me that during the WWII years, her parents heard Hitler on the radio in the family's apartment in the Bronx, New York where her parents Bella and my grandfather Joseph Tolpen, who was also from Galicia, lived. Previously Bella sent packages of money and gifts to her father back in Dynów. My mother told me that at some point Bella stopped sending the packages.

Though I didn't grow up in Dynów, I wouldn't be in this world without my grandmother Bella Neger, who came to America with the wishes and dreams like those of many immigrants to build a new life.

Again, I thank my friends in Dynów for making my dreams of creating meaning of my family's stories come to fruition – both those stories of tragedy, and the stories of those who survived in hope for future generations.

And this is why I keep coming back to Dynów.



