

Faces of Dynów

by Nina Talbot, GG Member

IN SEPTEMBER 2013, I made a long awaited trip to my grandmother's Galician ancestral town of Dynów. As a child growing up in New York City, I heard many stories about Bella's town. She described her house, which was built into a hill. She spoke of jumping rope and playing jacks with pebbles on her home street, Łazienna Street. I always thought of going there since then. My close bond with Bella motivated this dream.

When we changed planes in Warsaw en route to Rzeszów, my husband and I saw a group of Orthodox Jewish men walking up the ramp to the plane. We were surprised, as we did not expect to see any Jewish people in this neck of the woods in the current day. When we spoke to them, it turned out that they too were coming from Brooklyn! They told us about the Polish Jewry Heritage Center in Dynów, led by a Rabbi Pincas Pomp, who made it his mission to create the center as a living museum and memorial to the Jewish loss of lives by the Nazi invasion in 1939, as well as including lodging for pilgrims visiting the ohel (memorial gravesite) of the famous Dinover Rabbis, Rabbi Tzvi Elimelech Shapira, his son, Rebbi Dovid the Tzaddik of Dynów, Isaiah Naftali Hertz, the head of Bes Din (court) of Dinov, and Chana Mindel, wife of the Bnei Yisaschar.

Zdzisław picked us up from the Rzeszów airport and drove us to his inn in Dynów. As we approached the town from the zig-zag of roads, the townscape appeared on the horizon from my



DYNÓW TOWNSPEOPLE

left passenger seat, and with a wave of his hand he proclaimed, "Dynów." That set off a string of emotions starting with the image of Bella telling me about her childhood growing up in this Polish shtetl from her perch in 1964 on the stool at the candy concession stand in my father's New Yorker Theatre, where she worked as the candy lady. Bella told me about playing "jacks" using little pebbles with her friends, as they did not have the actual metal jacks. In the summer, she showed me how that was done, and indeed it was more difficult without a bouncing rubber ball, as she would throw up one stone in the air, and swoop up the other little pebbles without the benefit of the extra time that the bounce of the ball would have afforded. She also spoke about jumping rope with a string, swimming in the San River, and skipping down Łazienna street.

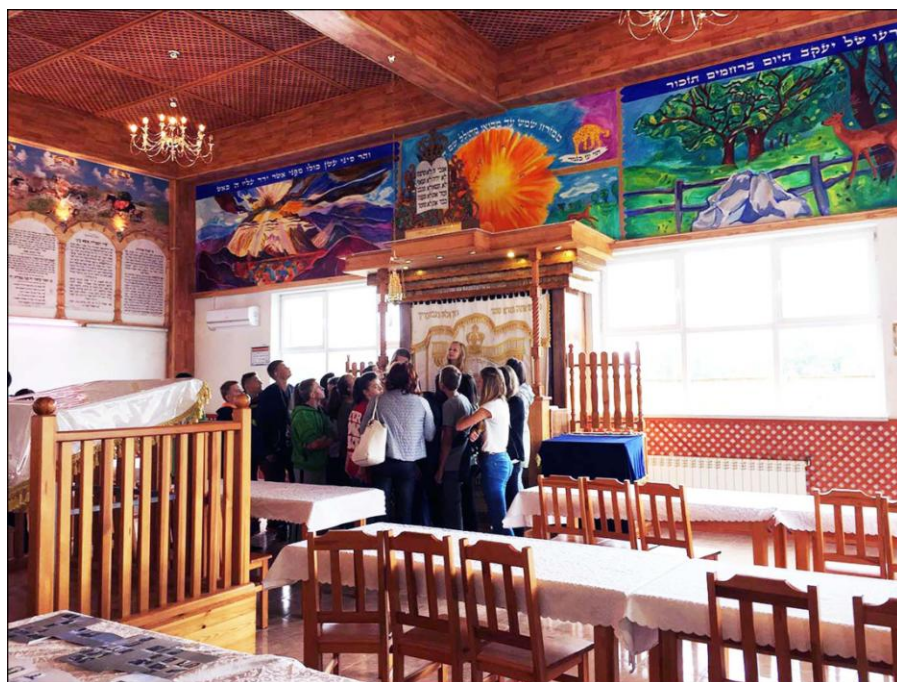
Bella was born in Dynów, the daughter of Avraham Neger, a kosher butcher and cattle dealer, and Taube Neger. Bella was the eldest of

Taube and Avraham's eight children. Taube died of cholera, which she contracted during a pogrom in 1914, when the Cossacks pillaged the town to drive out the Jewish people. Bella, 10 years old at the time, returned to town without her mother. In her grief, she spent every night at her grandmother Chaya's apartment, which was across the street from her father's house. Her father remarried after Taube's death, and had five more children with his second wife. This second marriage further traumatized Bella and Chaya encouraged her to go to America and arranged for her passage.

She arrived in New York in 1921 by ship, the S.S. Gothland, from the port of Antwerp, and went to Buffalo, NY to stay with relatives. Soon afterwards, Bella worked in a hat factory in New York's Lower East Side. Eventually she met her husband Joseph Tolpen. They moved to the Bronx and started their family there.

Pieces of Bella's story related to me as a child included her description of staying with an aunt on the Lower East Side at the time she got the job in the hat factory. The apartment was very small, and only contained one bed. Bella reported that her four male cousins would tell her, "Sleep fast, I need the bed," as they took turns sleeping. In the hat factory, Bella started on the factory line assembling pieces of hats together, but eventually was promoted to designer when the boss noticed her facility with draping the hats in her own original way. I have two velvet hats Bella made.

Bella's presence at the movie theatre concession was like that of a queen—an Eastern European Jewish grandmother transplanted to the New Yorker art house dispensing Milk Duds, Mars bars, bonbons, and popcorn. I stayed there after school almost every day throughout elementary school, which was just three blocks away. I would do all of my homework on the red leather



I installed a mural in the sanctuary of the Polish Jewry Heritage Center in Dynów, dedicated to the Jews that were murdered there. The imagery in the mural is based on paintings that were part of one of the Dynów synagogues as described in the 1949/50 Dynów Yizkor book. This mural was unveiled at the 2015 Rosh Hashanah memorial service.

banquette in the lobby next to the concession. Upon completion, I was allowed to help Bella scoop popcorn from the hot popper into blue and white striped boxes.

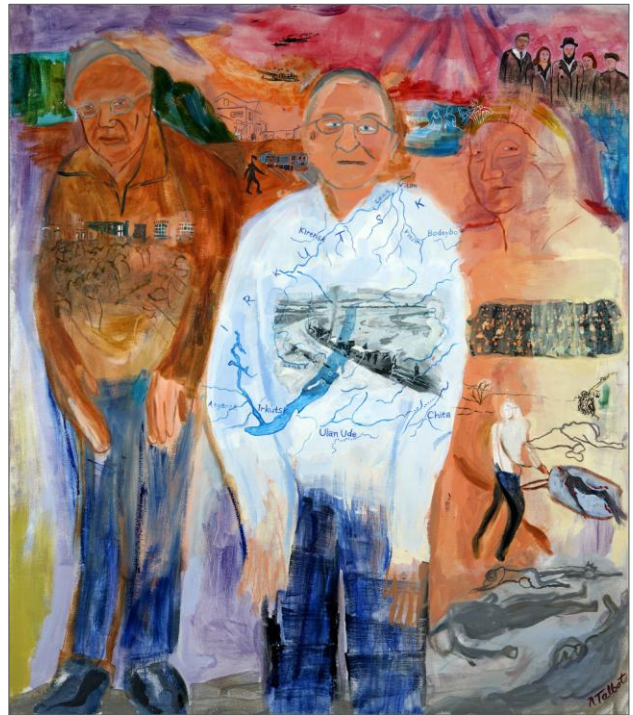
Bella was known as the “neighborhood shrink.” People came to visit her, ask her advice about boyfriends, situations, their looks. Often they were not going to see the movies, but to visit Bella and share their problems. Bella was a great listening ear, never judgmental. She was able to see the person, who they were inside, their potential. The drug addicted, prostitutes, and lost souls were the subjects of her listening ear.

So much of my personal ties to Galicia, and to Dynów in particular, were re-awakened on the occasions of both 2013 and 2014 Rosh Hashanah when I was at the Polish Jewry Heritage Center to participate in their annual memorial to the victims, with a candle lighting of 400 candles.

On Rosh Hashanah, September 16, 1939, 400 Jewish residents of Dynów were murdered by the Nazis. Some managed to escape—of those, many were captured by the Russian Army and sent to Siberia for years of hard labor. A lucky few survived, among them three of my great-uncles. Such horror was felt in many other towns throughout Eastern Europe. At least 40 members of our family in Dynów—including my great-grandfather, two great-uncles and aunts, and my great-great-grandmother were killed during the invasion (this is the last death toll number on record, which continues to grow as I continue my research and contact with descendants of survivors).

Jews were burned alive in one of the three Dynów town synagogues along with their records. The disappearance of vital records meant that their existence and memory, particularly for those who perished, was intangible. Jews, and

any trace of Jewish people, were similarly annihilated in other towns in Poland.



WERTENTEIL SIBLINGS

On the 2013 trip, we met Josef K., born 1930 in Dynów. He was nine years old during the Nazi invasion, and lived up the street from where 200 men were marched to dig a trench, and shot into it. Josef (through a translator) described hearing and seeing this event. He was eyewitness to the round up in the rynek (town square) in which the men were separated from the women and children. He remembered the story of a young girl who was bribed with a piece of bread to tell the Nazis who the Jewish families were, and where they lived. To this day, Josef recalls the sounds and actions of what took place on that horrible day.

On the flight back home from Warsaw to New York City I felt the wave of an idea to put paint to canvas and tell my Dynów family history.

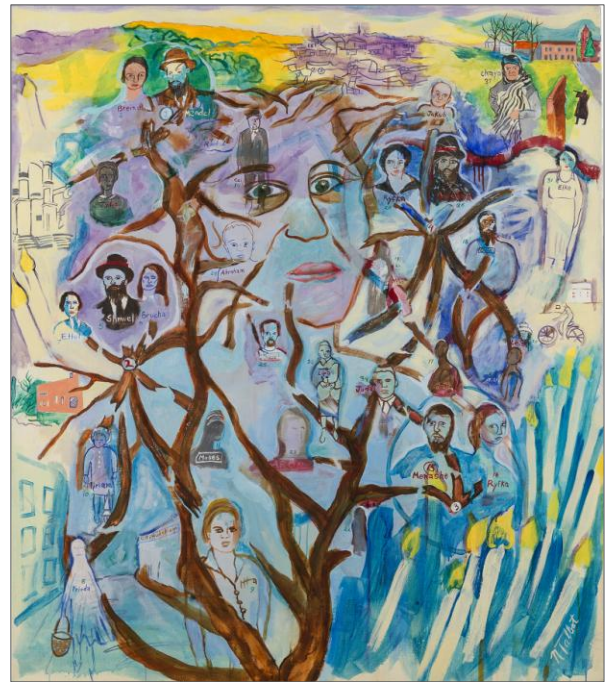
I am a painter. My paintings have always focused on historical themes seen through portraiture, but my current series, "Faces of Dynów," carries a particularly personal historical weight. These oil paintings are a collection of portraits of my ancestors, their town and the tragic consequences of the war, and testaments to the current residents, whom I have come to know.

The work is a result of my trips there in 2013, 2014, and 2015. The images magnify individual stories of my relatives as well as current townspeople of Dynów, and reflect a broader history of Eastern European Jews. They tell the story of several time periods in this history: the relatively peaceful, but still with anti-Semitic undertones, coexistence of Jews and non-Jews; the invasion of Nazis and subsequent murders and captures; and finally, the migration of survivors to America, Israel, and other places.

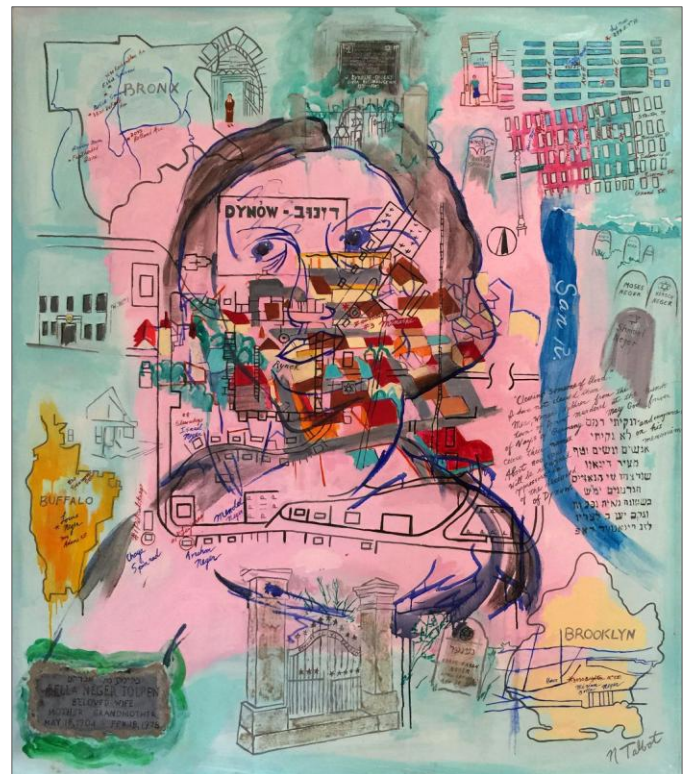
My extensive research was conducted to try to restore and resuscitate stories that these events rendered invisible. The onslaught of Nazi forces not only destroyed Jewish communities—it took away the foundation for their memory.

Primary sources used to create the portraits include interviews, Yizkor books (first-person accounts of the Holocaust and pre-war life), genealogy, photographs, censuses and ship manifestos. A Yizkor narrative from Dynów laments the "graves for which there will be no headstones."

Faces of Dynów is a visual incarnation of the memory of the stories and names of individuals, and by extension, millions of Jews that were victims of the Nazis.



BROKEN TREE



PLACES

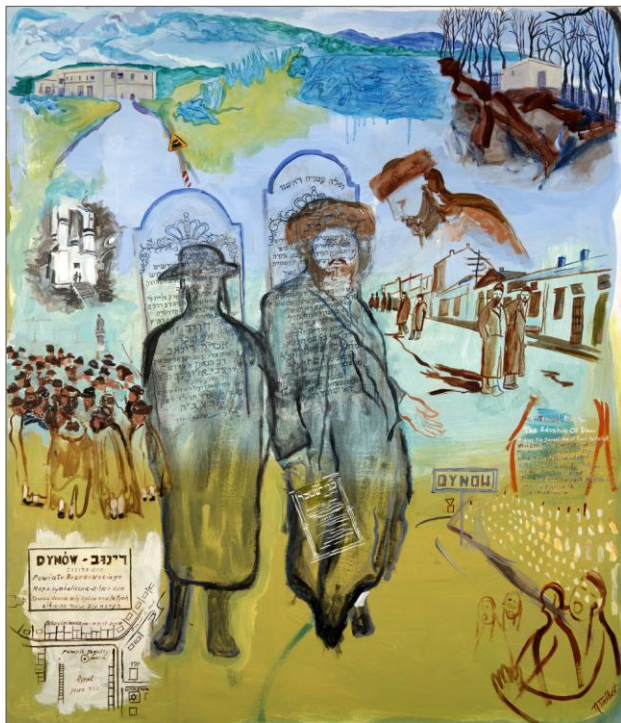


THE FACES OF DYNÓW by Nina Talbot

These are stunning representations of a "vanished world" that was once so vibrant, better remembered with such color and clarity.



BELLA NEGER



DINOVER REBBE DYNASTY



CHAYA SPINRAD



SAM NAGER