

### 0.34 B TORCZYN FIFTY YEARS AFTER THE WAR.

In 1995 Aaron and 2 sons visited Torczyn. They peered into the hole where the Jews were hidden and they met with Shanka, his wife, Marishka and Shanka's son who, as a 14 year old boy had helped feed the hidden Jews. They attended the wedding of Shanka's grand daughter, and Aaron's sons danced and had a few drinks. Marishka, now in her 80s or 90s rode in the mini va that brought Aaron and his sons to Torczyn. She seemed in good health. Shanka, on the other hand had trouble standing, walking and speaking. Time had not been kindly to his body.



Young Shanka &

Marishka

**Marishka, Aaron, son**

**Son, Marishka, Aaron**



Shanka cried when he saw Aaron





Torczyn was still a small village just off the east-west highway between Luts'k and Hrubieszow. The town Church was now surrounded by a chain link fence. The Communists who ruled this land for over 40 years and were ideologically opposed to religion; the houses had running water but the bathrooms were outhouses.



During the 50 years after the Second World War the Ukraine was an important Russian state. The arms industry and high tech research were a huge part of the economy. Two chairmen of the Communist party, Nikita Khrushchev and Leonid Brezhnev were Ukrainians.

On April 26, 1986 the Ukrainian nuclear plant at Chernobyl exploded. The fallout contaminated large areas of northern Ukraine.

On Nov. 9, 1989, Berliners started tearing down the wall that divided their country and the Soviet block started to crumble. Two years on August 24, 1991 the Ukraine decided to break away from mother Russia, and on December 1, Ukrainian voters made it official.

And the Jews? For more than three centuries, millions of Jews made Eastern Europe more than a home. They became a nation within a nation in an area that is now the Ukraine, Belarus, and Poland. When the Czar ruled they were Russians. After the First World War they were Poles. They served in the armies, paid taxes, saluted the noble men, and did business with the ethnic majorities of the lands. They learned the languages of the ruling classes, but their main vehicle of communication was Yiddish. They did not accept Jesus as the Messiah and continued to pray to the ancient God of their people. They were craftsmen and traders, and were a substantial part of the population of the cities, towns and villages in this part of the world.

Then in the early 1940s the Nazis became their masters. They evilly murdered the Jews, annihilating an entire people. The non Jews that lived in Eastern Europe saw the ruthlessness of the Nazis and were afraid. Some did what they could to help the victims; some participated in the slaughter.

The Jews that populated that part of the world are gone. Individuals remain here and there but the Jewish nation in Eastern Europe no longer exists. By the time Aaron revisited Torczyn in 1995, the Second World War had been over for 50 years. Most Ukrainians (certainly everyone under the age of 55) had never seen a Jew. They grew up during the rule of the Soviets, faced the disaster of Chernobyl, and witnessed the struggle for independence. We don't know what their elders told them about the old days, but I suspect they know little or nothing about the time when Hassids wandered these lands.

**Aaron Katko's son dances at Shanka's granddaughter's wedding**







a few relics can be found in the Jewish Cemetery



Shankas grand children with George Nudleman, Kolnick, and Richard Moel, a Canadian doctor whose grandfather was from Torczyn

Aaron and Shanka



On a later visit to Torczyn one of the group posed before a tombstone memorial that now stood in the cemetery where 50 years earlier the Jews of the town had been murdered.

