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Dear Family,

Report on trip to Ukraine and Azerbaijan, April 20 - May 2, 2015

We had a head start for this trip with the help of three branches of the Fayneberg/Feinberg family: Judy Taback from the Berg family, Gary Pokrassa from the Pokrassa and Feinberg families and U.S. leader of the Zolotonosha community for JewishGen.org; and Janet Billig from the Pokrassa and Boguslavsky families...all united by descent and marriage from the original trio of Abraham, Rachel and Anna Fayneberg/Feinberg who were born in Zolotonosha, Russia, now Ukraine. Judie Fein's nostalgic and lively "The Spoon from Minkowitz" fully displays her deep talents as a travel writer extraordinaire and her encouragement of our trip was welcome and delightful. The trip simply could not have been made without these expert researchers, networkers and family pillars. Thank you!

This report is more than anyone might wish, but we have divided it into five sections so consider it a buffet of your choice:

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## About Ukraine

Vivian (Lowery Derryck), my wife, and I had been invited to Kiev to attend a conference celebrating the contributions of young people to the new Ukraine and its civil society, academic and business leaders. The aim was to underline the responsibilities of citizens in a democracy..such a good theme for citizens of any democracy. It was stirring to see the amazing optimism and hopes of the 400 or so people there. It was organized by the Bohdan Hawrylyshyn Foundation of Geneva. Bohdan is a board colleague of an international policy group. At age 89 and a former dean of a famous Swiss management school, he is active and highly honored in his country.

Ukraine is in a small set of countries that has had an almost constant history of misery and oppression. After a few months of genuine independence in 1917, the Ukrainian People's Republic was in military contention until 1922 when the Red Army conquered it and Ukraine became an integral part of the Soviet Union. During that same period pogroms killed an estimated 100,000 Jews.

Civil war, economic dislocation, Lenin's attack on all organized religion, the arrest and the death/gulag of 5,000 intellectuals in 1929 all was capped by Stalin's cruelly imposed famine in 1932-3 that led to greater losses of life in Ukraine than in any other part of the USSR. No clear records were kept because death was everywhere, but it is estimated that 6-7 million died in the Ukraine (around 25% of the population) in breaking the back of Ukraine's agricultural system. A weak recovery ill prepared the country for the 1941 occupation by Germany that lasted for two horrendous years.

The first killing of Jews and others by the Germans was of the intelligencia, an echo of Lenin and Stalin. Ukraine lost more people in WW II than any other country..some 7-8 million out of a pre-war population of 40million. The holocaust in Ukraine took a huge loss. Estimates range from 850,000-900.000 to 1.4-1.5million Jewish lives lost. In addition some 3 million non-Jews were murdered and some 2 million Ukrainians were taken to Germany as slave labor. Military conquest and Stalin's policy of destroying anything possible as the Nazi's moved forward left the economy at rock bottom.

Better times occurred after World War II, particularly when Nikita Khrushchev (former head of the Communist party in Ukraine) led Russia. Ukraine became an industrial and scientific center, backed by a strengthened military, and built on expanded

social services. The Chernobyl disaster of 1986 was a major setback with lingering regional consequences.

The core economy in the Ukraine was based upon state run corporations, a house of cards once real independence in 1991 took place. The better state corporations were picked up by quickly enriched oligarchs who were/are talented in graft of all kinds. Indeed many of the very richest are still quite influential in a government brought to power by an amazing outpouring of the West and Central Ukrainians in late 2013 – early 2014 centered on the Maidan (Independence Square) in Kiev. The current rich froth of politics is featured by popular idealism that encourages romantic and innovative thinking, while underneath the old system simmers. Of key importance are some very impressive new leaders (such as the president..a reformed oligarch..and the US-raised Minister of Finance, whose policies have steered the country through difficult economic times, but whose ministries have little depth. Now with Putin exercising the kind of disruptive politics he has mastered in all his former Soviet neighbors to keep them off balance and beholden to him, the East of the Ukraine is now in contention while the rest of the country seems to show few signs of the war. The signs of war one sees in every town and village are the Soviet monuments to the Red Army and to local population losses, and, most interestingly, to those lost in the popular uprising of 2013-14.

## Kiev Conference

We returned to Kiev on the evening of April 24<sup>th</sup> and Alex kindly showed us the area near our hotel...the national parliament, below,



the president's office building, and the "must see," the Maidan (Independence Square) where in late 2013 and early 2014 hundreds of thousands demonstrated against the then president because of his switch of policies from pro-West to pro-East. The police and army, Alex said, took positions in the top floors of nearby buildings, like the hotel in the picture below, taking pot shots at the demonstrators.



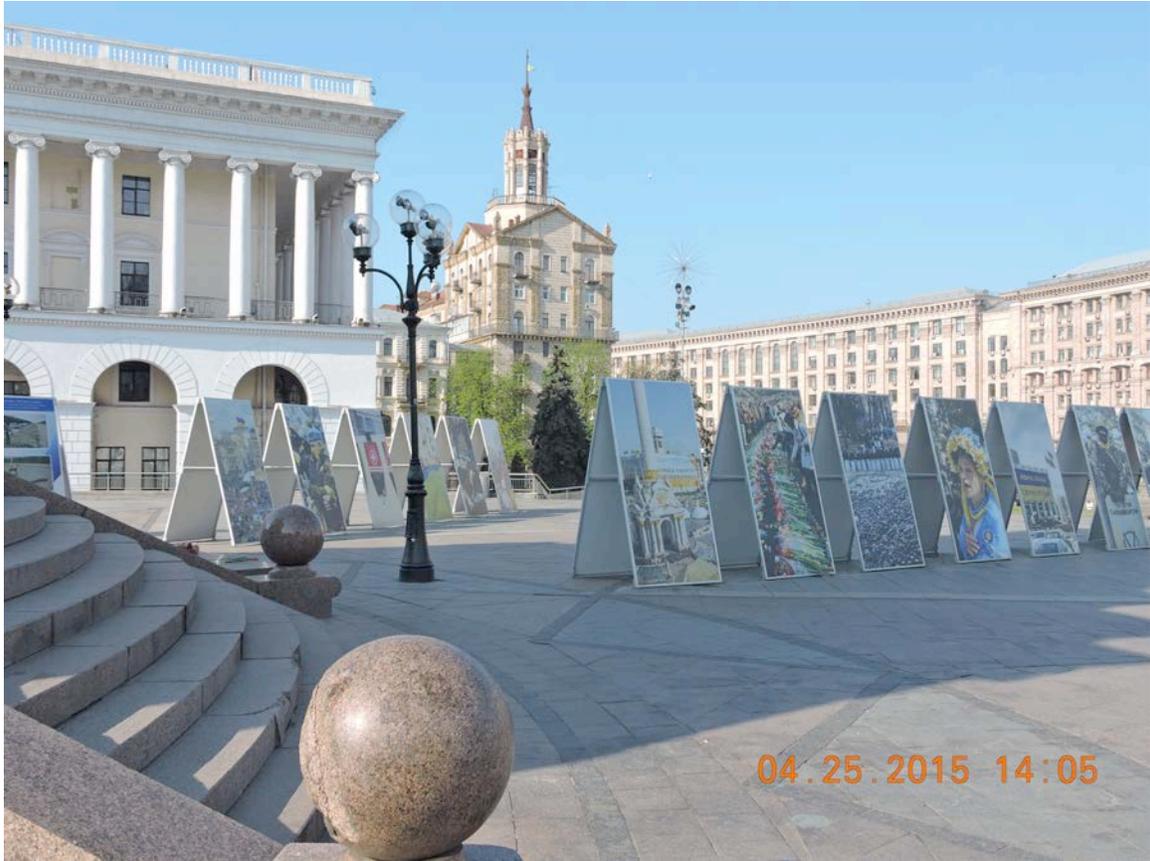
Well over 100 died and where they fell is marked by body outlines in white paint in their fallen shapes, like a U.S. crime scene.



Much of the Maidan is now a memorial to these fallen heroes.









We were in Kiev at the invitation of the Bohdan Hawrylyshyn Charitable Foundation (based in Geneva), established by an elderly revered figure in Ukraine.

Bohdan is a colleague from the World Academy of Art and Science, was dean of a globally famous management school in Switzerland, and is a dear fellow. He has given scholarships to over 400 young Ukrainians so they can have short-term internships with organizations around the world to get a taste of how modern institutions work.



(Vivian and Bohdan, with some young leaders behind)

The conference program featured some of the new thinkers, and they were just terrific. Among the stars were a think tank leader talking about the opportunity to make Ukraine environmentally responsible, a banker talking in socially inspired terms like we in the West haven't heard in decades, and a university rector whose Catholic university will commence leadership training, a big step up from the ten years he had spent in a Russian gulag..

World Academy leaders Ivo Slaus and Garry Jacobs gave extremely impressive presentations synthesizing and integrating numerous global issues.



Bohdan with World Academy leaders Ivo Slaus (Croatia) and Garry Jacobs (India/US)

We left that conference feeling hopeful for Ukraine. The odds of true progressive, effective government are long, but there is very strong leadership now (I had heard their Minister of Finance speak in Washington and she is very very impressive) and the slide in the economy has stopped. The war in the East has stalemated and Russia has yet to attempt to provide the kind of humanitarian and civilian support that could win over the East. As it is, 40% of the East has moved West and the remainder in the main depend upon pensions no longer being paid, women and children and bread earners who can't earn much. So the national government may be able to pull it off by being patient. Nonetheless, one person at the conference (a former foreign minister) said he will sponsor a referendum by the end of this year on joining NATO..just what Putin needs as an excuse for further incursions. So as my late friend Saburo Okita (one of Japan's most distinguished minister of foreign affairs) would say whenever I would ask him a question "Too soon to tell."

Robert Berg with Photos from Robert and Vivian

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