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Ukrainians who saved Montrealers honoured

By JANICE ARNOLD, Staff Reporter

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MONTREAL — Philip Goldig had not seen her in 65 years, but he had a sense that the elderly Ukrainian woman in the traditional kerchief across the room was the daughter of the farmer and his wife who had saved his life and those of his parents, aunt and uncle and cousin during the Holocaust.

Philip Goldig, left, and his cousin, Dr. Eva Andermann, centre, meet for the first time in 65 years the daughters of the Ukrainian farmers who hid them during the Holocaust, Yaroslava Subota, right, and Irina Sokol. Second from right is an interpreter.

Goldig was, indeed, laying eyes for the first time since those terrifying days on Yaroslava Subota, 75, the eldest child of Mikola and Julia Krawczuk and the same age as him.

The Montreal auctioneer and cantor was at the Israeli embassy in Kiev with his younger first cousin, Dr. Eva Andermann, who was instrumental in locating the Ukrainian family and obtaining Yad Vashem's Righteous Among the Nations honour posthumously for the Krawczuks and another Ukrainian gentile who helped their families.

Subota and her sister, Irina Sokol, 73, had travelled from the eastern part of the country to accept the citation on behalf of their late parents.

“They were extremely poor, barely had enough to eat themselves, and had three children, but they took all six of us in, and we stayed there for 22 months,” Goldig said. “For me, it was a very, very emotional experience, to say the least, to see the people you owe your life to, and who, without doubt, would have been killed if we were discovered.”

Goldig, probably best known for his performances with the Dora Wasserman Yiddish Theatre, was born in the western Ukrainian town of Mielnica, then under Polish control, in November 1933 to Baruch, a grain merchant, and Rachel.

Andermann (née Deutsch), also of Montreal and an internationally renowned neuroscientist, was born in Przemysl, Poland just after the war's outbreak in October 1939. Her parents, both psychiatrists, escaped with her to Mielnica in 1941, which proved to not be any safer.

About half of Mielnica's population of 10,000 was Jewish. In 1941, virtually all of the Jews in the town were brought to a ghetto in nearby Borszczow, where Goldig and his parents spent one year until they escaped into the forested countryside.

The Deutsches, Mina and Leon, however, had been allowed by the Germans to remain in Mielnica because there was a typhus outbreak and a shortage of doctors.

By 1942, after hearing that other Jewish doctors who had been relatively safe like themselves were being deported to ghettos and camps, the Deutsches decided to go into hiding.

Andermann's father approached a farmer, Mikhail Kukurudza, whose son he was treating for tuberculosis, promising to continue to do so if he could find them a hiding place. He brought them to the Krawczuks in the village of Babince.

"Somehow my parents got word to Eva's parents that we were in the forests, and they sent word for us to come to Mr. Krawczuk's farm," Goldig said. That was in July or August 1942.

The six Jews lived literally underground in a bunker dug out by Goldig with his father and uncle that could be reached through a small opening off of a potato cellar behind the farmhouse. The ceiling was probably no higher than 4-1/2 feet.

"The first year, we came out sometimes at night. But in the last year, we did not go out at all. The farmer brought us food and emptied the slop pails," Goldig recalled. They only emerged after the Russians liberated them in the spring of 1944.

Andermann, a toddler at the time, has only the vaguest memories, but she relived those times repeatedly through the accounts of her parents. Her mother, who died in 2004, became a well-known psychiatrist in Montreal and wrote a memoir of her Holocaust experience in 1994.

"My mother-in-law had the force of character that helped save the family," said Eva's husband, Dr. Fred Andermann, a native of Czernowitz, Ukraine, who spent most of the war years in Bucharest.

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There were close calls, such as the time the Germans came to raid the chicken coop above the bunker. Eva's mother quickly extinguished the wick they burned, and they all held their breath hoping the little girl wouldn't wake up and make a noise.

The Goldigs and Deutsches spent time in different displaced persons camps after the war and lost track of the Krawczuks, who they would later learn left the farm in 1950 for Mikola to work in a mine in eastern Ukraine.

The two families immigrated separately to Canada in 1948, sponsored by an uncle, William Kimmel, in Perth, Ont.

Eva remembers her parents sending parcels to the Krawczuks in the 1960s and '70s, but then contact ended.

Goldig – who was old enough to have traumatic memories of prewar anti-Semitism, as well as the horrors of the ghetto and life in a virtual tomb – never had any desire to go back to Ukraine. And although he didn't have any contact with the Krawczuks or their children, he never forgot their humanity.

"The only reason I went back this time was to see these people."

Andermann's interest in her rescuers was rekindled in 1997, when she and her husband, also a famous neuroscientist and long associated with the Montreal Neurological Institute, were invited to lecture in Ukraine in the wake of the Chernobyl nuclear disaster. Their two daughters and her mother, then 86, came with them, and they visited their hiding place, by then called Urozhaine, not Babince.

They met the husband of Mrs. Krawczuk's sister, and learned that while they were sheltered, she had bought food for them in the village, which was risky because it could have aroused suspicions. Andermann tried to obtain the Righteous designation for her, too, but, as her husband commented, "Yad Vashem said 'We don't give medals for shopping,' which is entirely inappropriate because she put her life on the line for over a year on a daily basis."

The Andermanns visited Ukraine again in 2006, when they found through a granddaughter of that sister the addresses of the Krawczuk sisters. The other child the family had during the war had since died.

In addition to the Krawczuks, the two cousins also gave testimony to Yad Vashem on behalf of the other farmer, Kukurudza, and his wife. Two grandchildren accepted the posthumous award at the same Kiev ceremony, which took place in a restored synagogue.

Andermann spoke on behalf of the family, while Goldig sang Kel Malei Rachamim, the Jewish memorial prayer.

Also honoured that day were several other Righteous Ukrainians. The gathering was addressed by Kateryna Yushchenko, the American-born wife of the president, and was attended by the Israeli ambassador, the mayor, church officials and leaders of the Jewish community. It was reported on the national television news.

Andermann and her husband, along with Goldig and his wife, Lorna, put up the honorees, who had come with their children and grandchildren, overnight in a hotel. They also had dinner with them and took an organized tour of Kiev. In all, they were 13 people.

"We had a wonderful time. We cried and laughed together," he said. Eva Andermann knows some Russian and Polish, but they had to rely mainly on an interpreter.

Although their parents did materially compensate the Krawczuks at the time, Andermann and Goldig are convinced the couple's motivation was primarily altruistic.

"They were very fine, decent and compassionate human beings," Goldig said.

"When we first had the idea about getting the Righteous award we were not sure if they [the daughters] would accept it – a lot have refused – but they were very anxious to do it," Goldig said.

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