

Poetry Porch: Poetry

Outskirts of Sierpc

By Richard Fein

An old Jewish woman hobbled up to me at the YIVO reception honoring the publication of the Memorial Book for Sierpc and shouted at me, *Ruvn Yankev, du bist nokh in lebm?* “Are you really still alive? Let me touch you. Speak. How I remember your *kretchme shtiklekh*, those jokes and antics you picked up in the tavern your family ran back there for the goyim on the outskirts of Sierpc.” She was taking me in my ’60s beard for my great grandfather. It was overwhelming and frightening—her recollection screech—and I, caught in that dream that I knew I was in as I dreamed it. I felt the direct line back to the thatched inn my family owned. It was a quivering moment of replica and I was akin to our brood of Jews back there in Central Poland in ’38.

Transported to Sierpc from this gathering at E. 86th Street off of Fifth Avenue, I imagined I was now waiting to be served from the big iron pot of boiling kasha. I was waiting with a fork in my hand, watching the veiny hand of my great grandfather throwing a chunk of cheese into the stirring kasha in the heavy pot. I was holding my plate and waiting for the cooked grain.