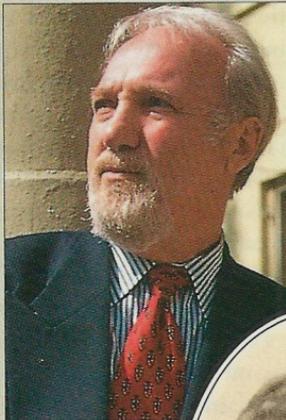


# Return of the Native

When the Nazis marched into Taras Hunczak's village in Ukraine and ordered his family to evacuate, the 12-year-old thought relocation meant settling in a village down the road. Instead, the boy and his family were sent to a German labor camp. After being liberated by American troops, Hunczak spent four years in a displaced persons camp before settling in Buflo in May 1949 at the age of 17. "I've thought many times how things could have been different," says Hunczak, a history professor at Rutgers-Newark since 1960.

Never having forgotten his roots, he has devoted much of his life to studying, writing, and teaching about the nation that, in 1991, regained its independence after more than 300 years of Russian domination. Hunczak helped found the Children of Chernobyl Relief Fund, which raises money for hospitals in the region, and, as editor of the journal *Suchasnist*, he has tracked and influenced the political and cultural changes occurring in recent years.

"The journal and one of my books, *Russian Illusionism*, kept me personally there for many years," says Hunczak, who taught in Ukraine as a



**H**UNCZAK  
TODAY  
AND AS A  
GRADUATE  
STUDENT IN  
1960 AT THE  
UNIVERSITY  
OF VENNA.



Fulbright scholar in 1994. "In 1989, because of glasnost and perestroika, I was first invited by the authorities to lecture at various institutes and academies and to appear as a guest on Ukrainian television talk shows."

Each time Hunczak returns to Ukraine, he brings along a few computers—which are scarce there—to donate to schools and other institutions. As editor of *Suchasnist*, he has interviewed and written about President Leonid Kuchma and former president Leonid Kravchuk.

"The Russians stripped much of the natural resources of Ukraine and attempted to change the culture," says Hunczak. "But Ukraine is the only place in eastern Europe where minorities have been granted national autonomy and where there is a revival of Jewish life."

Ukraine still has progress to make before it becomes "a government under the law," says Hunczak, who was recently awarded an honorary degree by Kiev Polytechnic Institute. "In communist society, there's a slogan: 'If you do not steal, you do not survive.' Unfortunately, many of the people who ran things under communism still govern. But in time that will change, too."