

Official visit of the Speaker of the Polish Senate to Australia

By Bernard Korbman and Izi Marmur

On 15-21 June, the Speaker of the Polish Senate Mr. Bogdan Borusewicz and a delegation of Polish Parliamentarians paid an official visit to Australia, which included Canberra, Melbourne and Sydney.

Izi and I were privileged to be among a group of Jewish community representatives invited to meet with the Polish delegation and discuss matters of common concerns and interests. Also present were the Polish Ambassador HE Mr. Pawel Milewski, the Polish Consul General Ms. Regina Jurkowska and the Honorary Polish Consul General Dr George Luc-Kozica.

Among the delegation of seven was Senator Andrzej Person, Head of the Committee for Emigration Affairs and Contacts with Poles Abroad, Senator Piotr Koperski, representative of the International Affairs and European Union Office of the Chancellery of the Senate and Senator Stanislaw Karczewski, Deputy Speaker of the Senate.

Senate Speaker Borusewicz and the three aforementioned Senators had portfolios which dealt specifically with Polish Jews

in and outside Poland and with Poland-Israel relations. The conversation centred mainly on three topics: the burgeoning Jewish community in Poland, Israel, and Russian expansionism.

The Polish government and the opposition are both strong supporters of Israel and in fact Poland is one of relatively few champions of Israel in the European Parliament. Among the close ties mentioned were trade agreements, scientific and military cooperation and cultural exchanges. There is a very close relationship between Yad Vashem and a number of Polish educational institutions and the Institute of National Remembrance, the body responsible for Holocaust education throughout Poland. Quite a number of high-ranking public servants, educators and politicians have completed courses and seminars at Yad Vashem. Senator Person's daughter is one such example and she now lectures in Holocaust History.

After the scheduled meeting ended, Izi and I were invited to stay behind and continue our talks in a less formal manner. Izi spent time with the opposition senators and I stayed with the Speaker and his team. Both sides of politics strongly reiterated their strong stance on Israel and their support in helping the Polish Jewish community grow and develop its necessary infrastructure so that it will become once more a dynamic part of Polish culture. It was clearly stated to us that without the Jewish input into Polish history and culture, Poland would have been much the poorer.

The ASJP was praised for its efforts in engaging in honest and sometimes difficult and sensitive dialogue, and for its support of modern Poland where the vision of a truly multicultural society with tolerance, respect and understanding between Poles of all ethnic and religious affiliations is achieved.

Museum of the history of Polish Jews Core exhibition to officially open 28th October 2014



Utilising the latest in cutting-edge multimedia technology, the Core Exhibition of Warsaw's Museum of the History of Polish Jews will officially open on 28th October 2014.

Developed by a team of international scholars and curators under the direction of Professor Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, it was designed and created by London-based Event

Communications and Nizio Design International from Warsaw.

The Core Exhibition is a journey through 1,000 years of the history of Polish Jews – from the Middle Ages through to today. It will focus on answering several questions. How did Jews come to Poland? How did Poland become the centre of the Jewish Diaspora and the home of the largest Jewish community in the world? How did it cease to be one, and how is Jewish life being revived?

The exhibition, made up of eight galleries spread over an area of 4,000 sq.m., presents the heritage and culture of Polish Jews, which still remain sources of inspiration for Poland and for the world. The galleries portray the successive phases of history, beginning with legends of arrival, the beginnings of Jewish settlement in Poland and the development of Jewish culture. It will show the social, religious and political diversity of Polish Jews, highlighting dramatic events from the past, the Holocaust, and concluding with contemporary times.

The design and creation of the Core Exhibition was financed and overseen by the Association of the Jewish Historical Institute of Poland, with the support of donors from around the world.

For more about the Museum, www.jewishmuseum.org.pl/en

70th anniversary of the Litzmanstadt Ghetto liquidation

By Eva Hussain



It's impossible to talk about my recent trip to Poland without going back in time. I left the proletarian city of Zgierz near Lodz at the age of 18, arriving in Australia in 1986, after a difficult year in France. My identity is probably best described in the words of the late Joan Rivers: 'Jew-ish', flavoured by my family's patriotism towards Poland and my loyalty for my adoptive motherland, Australia. I come from an integrated family of academics and business people who humbly co-existed alongside the diverse population of Lodz. We took these things for granted.

I was working late one evening in May when I received an email out of the blue from the Centre for Dialogue in Lodz asking if I was related to the Sztorch family. Well yes, I told them, the Sztorchs as well as the Wartskis were indeed my relations and several of them were in the Ghetto, living on Fischer Straße. I was then invited to represent our family at the 70th anniversary of the Litzmanstadt Ghetto liquidation. I cried on the evening I received the email and I cried throughout the day of solemn commemorations. I felt fortunate to be alive, sensing my ancestors' presence all around me. I also felt robbed by the war, disconnected from my tribe for decades by the heinous events. But most of all, I felt at peace in the new country that Poland has now become, with the people who came to pay their respect to those who lived and died here.

The entire city of Lodz came out in force for the series of interfaith events that took place over several days, including religious leaders, media and government, but also average, everyday people. The main day of commemorations, 29th of August, was just so beautiful and well organised, from the official speeches in the morning to the moving classical concert in the evening, through the prayers and march to the Radagast station, where the transports departed from in 1944. There was just a handful of survivors present, many of them frail but of strong spirit. I walked in my family's footsteps, imagining what it must have been like for them in vivid, real colours, representing those that are still alive but couldn't make it.

There are approximately 530 trees and plaques at the park at the Centre. Five of them belong to my family. They represent just a tiny number of those who lived here but are a strong visual reminder of the most difficult times Polish Jews ever encountered. Lest we forget.



Makabi Warszawa rises from the ashes after 70 years

To the casual observer, it was just another football match being played on a Sunday afternoon in Kraków. In fact, on 6th July 2014, it was the first time that ŻTGS Makabi Warszawa had played ŻKS Kraków in over seventy years!

The original Makabi Warszawa was founded in 1915 and rose to become one of the most powerful and multi-faceted Jewish sports clubs in Europe. Its motto was *Bądź silny i odważny* (Be strong and brave). It even had its own stadium, the site on which Poland's National Stadium stands today.

Of course, when the Nazis marched into Warsaw, all that came to an end.

Now, a group of young people from Warsaw's growing Jewish community has decided to revive Makabi Warszawa in order



to provide sporting and social opportunities for themselves and others.

Support for this initiative has also come from Australia. ASPJ Vice-President and Treasurer, Andrew Rajcher, is also a Board Member of Melbourne's North Caulfield Maccabi Football Club (NCMFC).

"Our club is very excited about the revival of Makabi Warszawa", he said. "When I'm in Poland next October, talks will take place on how we in North Caulfield can help, in practical terms, our namesake club in Warsaw to continue their revival and again

become an established Jewish sporting club in Poland. We already consider them as our sister club and, hopefully, we will be able to formalise this connection."

Makabi Warszawa's Facebook page can be found here: <https://www.facebook.com/makabi1915>

Jewish Poland – A Bright Spot on the Map of Europe

By Jonathan Ornstein



Three weeks ago, on the first day of the current hostilities, mainstream European newspaper headlines across the continent screamed “Israel bombards Gaza” and “Gaza under attack”. Here in Poland, where I’ve been living for 13 years, the main Polish newspaper announced “Tel Aviv under rocket attack from Gaza”.

Over the last three weeks, Europe has seen tens of thousands demonstrate violently against Israel and acts of aggression against Jews on a scale not seen since World War II. In Poland, there have been a few small pro-Palestinian demonstrations and counter demonstrations with little fanfare.

The question of why Europe has got it so wrong is a larger question than I care to deal with here, but what about the other question: Why is Poland getting it right?

There’s something very special going on in today’s Poland and it is in the Jewish world’s interest to take notice.

Poland in the Jewish sense is mostly seen as a place of tragedy and loss; a place defined by the Holocaust; a place that the Jewish people escaped from and visit in order to mourn the loss of a once great community.

But in Krakow, the city that I live in, barely an hour’s drive from Auschwitz, Jewish life is thriving in ways that other European cities wouldn’t believe possible.

The Jewish Community Centre of Krakow (JCC Krakow), opened by Prince Charles in 2008, of which I’m the executive director, has 500 Jewish members and 7,000 visitors a month who spend time in a beautiful, modern, colorful space dedicated to building a Jewish future in Krakow. Alongside the 35 staff, Jewish and non-Jewish, there are 50 non-Jewish volunteers – dedicated young people who want to see Krakow’s Jewish community prosper and give their time every day to help achieve that goal.

The center is open and welcoming in a way that you cannot find in a Europe today whose Jewish buildings, sadly, are often fortress like.

Krakow’s Jagiellonian University, founded in 1364 is home to a large Jewish Studies Department where 150 students, 95% of whom aren’t Jewish are getting a master’s degree in Jewish studies.

The Jewish Culture Festival in Krakow, Europe’s largest Jewish festival was founded 26 years ago by two non-Jews who felt the void created by the Holocaust and 45 years of communist oppression and wanted to fill it with Jewish culture. Over 30,000 visitors a year now participate in hundreds of events culminating in a huge, open air, free concert in one of Krakow’s Jewish squares. 20,000 Jews and non-Jews, Poles and visitors dancing and singing together, celebrating a culture that they understand was not lost.

Why is all this going on?

A generation of non-Jewish Poles is seeking to understand Polish history and realizes that in order to understand Poland, you must understand the role the Jews played during the thousand year common history.

Jewish Poles coming of age after communism ended 25 years ago, are finding out about their Jewish roots as Jewish life has emerged from the deep freeze of communism and the devastation of the Holocaust. They are coming to institutions like our JCC and the brand new JCC in Warsaw and asking us to teach them what it means to be Jewish.

It is easier, safer, and better to be Jewish every day in Krakow. I do not know of any other community leader in Europe who can say the same about his or her community.

Poland is also Israel’s best friend in Europe today. Not a friend like Germany, whose government supports Israel as her citizens call for her destruction, but a true friend, one whose government support mirrors the will of the people.

Why?

I think there are two reasons for Poles’ strong pro-Israel sentiment.

First, Poland is located between Germany and Russia, which is historically a very tough neighborhood to be in and therefore identifies with Israel, which has a pretty rough neighborhood as well.

Second, in the Polish collective memory, Jews are studious, intelligent, and bookish. 60% of the lawyers and 40% of the doctors in pre-war Poland were Jewish. The idea that the same Jews who lived in Poland for 1,000 years went to Israel and became bloodthirsty killers doesn’t add up to Poles.

So as we sit frustrated and watch as Israel struggles to defend her citizens and the world rushes to condemn her for doing so, remember there’s a country in Europe with 38 million citizens, with a thousand year Jewish presence, that is a friend to Israel and a safe, welcoming place for Jews.

The Jewish revival in Poland is one of the most important and uplifting stories in the Jewish world today. Help tell it and by doing so, help Israel and the Jewish world.

About the Author

Jonathan Ornstein has served as the Executive Director of the Jewish Community Centre of Krakow since its opening in April 2008. He is a founding member of “Przymierze,” the Krakow Association of Christians and Jews where he serves on the board. Prior to the JCC’s opening in 2008, he lectured in Modern Hebrew at the Jagiellonian University Department of Jewish Studies for six years and founded the “Gesher” association for Polish-Israeli dialogue. A native of New York City, Jonathan moved to Israel in 1994, living for seven years on a kibbutz in the Negev desert and serving for two years in a combat unit in the I.D.F. before making his way to Poland in 2001.

Honoured for saving Jewish lives during the Holocaust.

Translated from Gazeta Wrocław. Sylwia Foremna 03.03.2014



At the White Stork Synagogue in Wrocław, Vice-Ambassador of Israel in Poland Nadav Eshcar awarded the righteous who saved Jewish lives during the Holocaust.

The title of "Righteous Among the Nations" has been given since 1963 by the Yad Vashem Institute in Jerusalem. The honoured recipients are those who selflessly risked their lives during the Holocaust providing aid to persecuted Jews.

Medals and honorary diplomas, are awarded on the basis of the testimonies of survivors.

On Monday, there were four recipients: Józefa Ruszała, Jadwiga Kozłowska-Borkowska, Michał Dąbrowski and his daughter Stefania Smykała.

Józefa Ruszała was nominated posthumously by 86-year-old Helena Besser a survivor living in Argentina. During the war, Józefa moved to and lived in Lvov alone raising her 10-year-old

son. Even though she herself was in a difficult situation, she helped rescue from Lvov ghetto and then hide the daughter of his neighbour.

Despite many dramatic moments, all managed to survive till the end of the occupation. Distinction was received by the grandchildren of Józefa Ruszała: Jolanta Stachurska, Mariusz Ruszała, Roman Ruszała and Sławomir Ruszała. - Grandma was wonderful. She loved people. She loved flowers, old churches and cemeteries. She would take us for walks in those places - says Jolanta granddaughter.

Jadwiga Kozłowska-BORKOWSKA was honoured thanks to the preserved testimony of Irena Neuman. Throughout the occupation of Krakow this brave woman's house was a refuge for many Jews.

In addition, Jadwiga provided food and medicine to other people hiding in the so-called Aryan side in Wieliczka. Her posthumous award was received by: Lucylla Grabowska and Gregory Puzio.

Smykała Stefania and her father Michael Dabrowski were honored at the request of 86-year-old Joseph Sroka. In 1943 Daughter and Her father welcomed to their home in Krakow 16-year-old Joseph Sroka. Provided with false papers the boy could go to work and stay on the "Aryan" side, but all were aware that if denounced the entire household faced death. Despite having lost contact with his rescuers, Joseph Sroka who now lives in Israel, never forgot about them.

Medal and honorary diploma was handed to the granddaughter and daughter of the two heroes: Irena Przybyła.

So far, Yad Vashem has honoured 25,000 people from 47 countries, including nearly 5.5 thousand Poles whose names appear on a special stone tablets in the Garden of the Righteous at the Institute.

From the President

Dear Members and Friends,

We recognize that in the past four years, we have made great progress in achieving many of our goals.

We have developed a close relationship with the Polish Diplomatic Corps in Australia, Polish communal organisations, the Polish Catholic clergy, cultural organisations in Melbourne and a number of different Polish groups and organisations with leanings on all sides of the political spectrum.

Now, the time for consolidation has arrived. In the past, due to our enthusiasm, we undertook some projects that we did not complete. I believe that we tried to be too many things to too many people. We have therefor decided to work on a three-year plan, so that we do not become distracted by good ideas, which are then left to flounder because of a lack of resources and manpower.

We will continue to present the Henryk Slawik Award, bestowed upon any person who, or any organisation that enhances Polish and Jewish relations in Australia and/or in Poland.

In partnership with the Institute of National Remembrance (IPN) in Poland, whose charter includes Holocaust Education throughout Poland and who are the custodians of the history of Polish Jews in the 20th Century, we will organise a major seminar to take place in Melbourne in 2015. (Dates to be announced).

Our focus will be to make the ASPJ a link/conduit between Polish and Jewish organisations so that people of similar interest might want to meet together and take advantage of one another's expertise.

For example, our scouts, our historical societies, our musicians, our sportsmen and women may want to share ideas and experiences.

To this end, we have decided that our newsletter will take on a new look and direction. Our content will now include interviews with both Polish and Jewish people who are in the same field, be they entertainers, sporting identities, professionals, historians and ordinary folk who might share their migrant experience during a particular era in Australian history. News from Poland and Australia will still be covered.

Finally, we will develop a database from which we hope to develop close relationships with communal authorities in Poland which will allow those of Polish descent in Australia to forge bonds with present-day Poles should they decide to visit Poland.

Last, but not least, we want to ensure that the current burgeoning Jewish communities throughout Poland are given the opportunity to interact with Australian Jews so that the idea of Terra Nullius, as far as Jews outside Poland are concerned, is buried once and for all.

Bernard

HENRYK SŁAWIK AWARD



**Tuesday
28 October
7.30pm**

This year's award recipient will be

Pauline Rockman OAM

for fostering understanding, respect and strong ties between Jewish and non-Jewish Poles

Key note speaker **Arnold Zable**. Award winning Australian writer, educator and human rights advocate, will address the theme 'Towards a Common Humanity'

Special guests: **Magda Szubanski**. Australian actress, comedian, television presenter, radio host and author will present the award to Pauline Rockman

Dr George Luk Kozika. Honorary Consul for the Republic of Poland will acknowledge Pauline Rockman's contribution to both communities

Kadimah, 7 Selwyn Street, Elsternwick

Bookings and information:

Lena Fiszman **0413 351 852** Bernard Korbman **0418 194 802**



Australian Society of Polish Jews
and Their Descendants Inc.

The Henryk Sławik Award is dedicated in memory of the great Polish diplomat, politician and humanitarian who saved several thousand Jews between 1940 and 1944, and who was subsequently murdered in the Mauthausen concentration camp in Austria.

The Henryk Sławik Award is bestowed upon an individual who, or organisation that, contributes to a greater understanding of the unique and dynamic contribution by the Polish Jewish community to the all-embracing Polish culture and ethos.

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Legendary Jewish director Szymon Szurmiej passes away



Legendary Jewish actor and director Szymon Symcha Szurmiej passed away in Warsaw on 19th July 2014, aged 91. For many years, he was General Manager of Warsaw's Ester Rachel Kaminska and Ida Kaminska Jewish Theatre and was a former director of the Yiddish Theatre of Warsaw.

He survived the anti-Semitic purges of 1968 and, as well as heading the Theatre since 1970, he served as long-time President of the Social and Cultural Association of Polish Jews (TSKZ), one of the few Jewish organisations that were permitted to exist under the Polish communist regime.

Born in 1923 in Lutsk (now Ukraine), he made his debut as an actor in Wrocław in 1951, before moving to Warsaw in 1969. Over the years, he produced numerous adaptations of Jewish classics by S. Ansky, I.L. Peretz, Sholem Aleichem and Abraham Goldfaden.

Szurmiej served as a member of the Polish Sejm (parliament) in the 1980's and represented Polish Jewry in many international Jewish organisations. He was honoured many times by the Polish government, being awarded the *Commander's Cross of the Order of Poland Restituta*, and was an Honorary Citizen of Warsaw.

He is survived by his wife, famed Jewish actress and singer Golda Tencer, and four children. We wish his family long life. May his memory be a blessing.

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