

## 2014 Henryk Sławik Award Presentation



(l-r) Magda Szubanska, Bernard Korbman OAM, Dr. George Łuk-Kozika OAM, Pauline Rockman OAM, and Arnold Zable



(l-r) Ruth Mushin and Judy Kolt



Guests and representatives of various Polish organisations

**The Henryk Sławik Award is presented to honour the spirit of the life and deeds of Henryk Sławik, who saved over thirty thousand lives in occupied Hungary, five thousand of those being Jews. The Board of Management of the ASPJ has decided to honour individuals who, or organisations which, have worked towards enhancing mutual respect and understanding between the Polish and Jewish communities.**

The recipient of the 2014 Award is Pauline Rockman OAM, President of Melbourne's Jewish Holocaust Centre.

Pauline was presented with the award by actress Magda Szubanska, whose yearning to meet Polish Jewish descendants, and compare their stories with those of her own Polish grandparents, had led to long conversations with Pauline.

Having visited Poland the first time 11 years ago, Pauline realised that the country was not just a place of death and suffering, but also a place where Poles and Jews had lived together for centuries.

This led to Pauline advocating for the betterment of Polish-Jewish relations and for mutual respect and understanding.

Guest speaker at the presentation event was writer Arnold Zable who spoke on the theme of "Towards a Better Society".

The 2014 Award was presented in the presence of the Honorary Polish Consul-General in Melbourne, Dr. George Łuk-Kozika, who was the recipient of the inaugural Award in 2011.

# From the President

Bernard Brzegowski-Korbman

**I believe that the Australian Society of Polish Jews, together with a number of diverse groups representing the Polish community in Australia, have come a long way in a rather short period of time. This is due to the strong personal bonds that have developed between us and which have enabled honest dialogue about what have at times been contradictory views of our historical narratives.**

I would like to briefly explore the theme of victimhood versus resilience, as I am convinced that in a multifaceted manner it is representative of both our communities and binds us historically. The Tanach, commonly known as the Old Testament, commands us to remember, using the Hebrew term *zachor*, and to teach our children about our history and what our enemies have done to either subjugate or try to destroy us.

How should we interpret this? To my mind there are two possibilities. The first is the path of victimhood. We can blame our history, be it imperialism, colonialism, invasion or any other forms of subjugation and repression. We can create a mythology of others being solely responsible for all of our ills and misfortunes. We can surround ourselves with an ideology of hate for all “others”, and whilst wallowing in our misery and self-pity, we become exclusive and perhaps even violent towards those we blame.

On the other hand, we can follow the intended approach of our sages, the path of resilience. Yes, we must never forget the atrocities committed against our people. Yes, we must recount the humiliations and suffering inflicted on us because of who we are; however, more importantly, when tragedy and evil befall us, we must gather up all our strength and rebuild. We need to rebuild the infrastructures that are necessary for us to live as Jews. We must remain positive and embrace what the world has to offer, such as education, science and technology and use these tools for the benefit of our community, our families and for the interest and prosperity of mankind. The horrors we remember are to remind us of man’s inhumanity

towards others and that we should never lose the virtues of compassion and empathy. As we say during our *Seder*, the Passover service, remember that we too were once slaves.

It is at this point that I draw a parallel with the Polish people. When I look at Polish history I see a resilience that I believe has very few equals in the history of a sovereign European nation. For much of her history, Poland has been invaded, partitioned, and subjugated by foreign powers. After only a few years of independence between WWI and WWII, Poland fell under Nazi occupation for six years and then under Communist rule for over 40 years.

Yet, since regaining her independence, modern Poland has become not only the most stable democratic country in Eastern Europe, but also a bastion of democracy and pluralism in Europe as a whole. Poland is economically stable, has undergone and is continuing to undergo a genuine review of her past history and of her current place in world affairs. Poland is flourishing as a multi-cultural society and this is reflected in the art, music and film industries as well as in the organisations and institutions which are now part of government policy, such as the Institute of National Remembrance, whose many activities include Holocaust education throughout Poland.

Finally, in these troubled days perhaps most significantly, I turn to the relationship between Poland and Israel. No country in the European Union is more supportive of Israel than Poland. Poles demonstrate this not only at government level, but also through the Polish media and popular support in the streets of the major cities. During the recent crisis in Israel and Gaza, Poland stood out as one of the few true friends of Israel and the Jewish people.

I believe the strength and resilience of our two communities is based upon our remembering and acknowledging our past, and then taking all the positive steps necessary to ensure that our future is built upon the foundations of trust, friendship and the sanctity of human life.

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# Roman Talikowski honoured at Canberra ceremony for saving Jews from ghetto

This article by Phillip Thompson appeared in [WAtoday.com.au](http://WAtoday.com.au) on November 18, 2014

**The Holocaust memorial centre bestowed on him the Righteous Among the Nations award, and the baby girl he saved from the Nazis' clutches, now an elderly woman, sent a video of thanks, writes Phillip Thomson.**

Jack Talikowski accepts an award of Righteous Among the Nations, on behalf of his father the late Roman Talikowski.

Jack Talikowski accepts an award of Righteous Among the Nations, on behalf of his father the late Roman Talikowski.

A baby named Joasia Przygoda was once given two sleeping pills by her father, put in a backpack with only a small hole for air and walked out of the Warsaw ghetto as Nazi checkpoint guards were bribed along the way.

But the baby needed to be hidden somewhere once outside the ghetto.

So Roman Talikowski, a man who sold gloves, organised a hiding place.

Mr Talikowski, a Catholic merchant, risked the death penalty to save the lives of numerous Jews in Poland during the Holocaust.

He smuggled food and money into the Warsaw ghetto and organised false papers and safe houses.

On Tuesday at the Israeli embassy in Canberra, the late Mr Talikowski was honoured by Holocaust memorial centre Yad Vashem as being "Righteous Among the Nations", the highest award bestowed on gentiles.

Son Jack and other family members travelled from Perth for the ceremony.

"I'm very proud of my father," said Jack, a 68-year-old retired electrical engineer.

The baby in the backpack - Joasia is now an elderly woman - sent a video message.



In it she said three of the seven members of her family helped by Mr Talikowski survived the mass slaughter.

Mr Talikowski, who died years after the war, had been "open-minded enough" to risk his life for those different to him.

Israel ambassador Shmuel Ben-Shmuel said Mr Talikowski's actions showed the best of humanity when the worst qualities of mankind had consumed his society.

"He found courage when others were paralysed by fear and made a stand against violence and atrocities," Mr Ben-Shmuel said.

"He had the conviction to act upon what he knew was right."

Yad Vashem's website said many acts of courage during the Holocaust followed decisions made in an instant.

"This was usually an instinctive human gesture, taken on the spur of the moment and only then to be followed by a moral choice," it said.

"Often it was a gradual process, with the rescuers becoming increasingly involved in helping the persecuted Jews.

"Agreeing to hide someone during a raid or roundup - to provide shelter for a day or two until something else could be found - would evolve into a rescue that lasted months and years."



Jack Talikowski receiving a Yad Vashem medal of honour from His Excellency Shmuel Ben-Shmuel, Ambassador of Israel to Australia

# Honoured for saving Jewish lives during the Holocaust.

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. The 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 granddaughter Jolanta.

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.



White Stork Synagogue in Wrocław

Smykała Stefania and her father Michael Dabrowski were honoured at the request of 86-year-old Joseph Sroka. In 1943 the daughter and 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 were handed to the granddaughter and daughter of the two heroes.

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.

## Jewish Motifs International Film Festival

**"Jewish Motifs" International Film Festival (Międzynarodowy Festiwal Filmowy "Żydowskie Motywy") is a major Jewish-themed film festival held every April in Warsaw, Poland. The festival has been held every year since 2003.**

"The biggest European festivals focused on Jewish themes in contemporary cinematography", according to the Polish Embassy in Bern.

The 11th edition is scheduled to take place in early May 2015. The Festival dates are always on the anniversary of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising; that is why the precise dates are changing but always in same season (usually in April).

The festival organizers declare as the aim and objectives:

- Raising awareness on subjects related to "Jewish identity and experience throughout history, to the preservation of Jewish culture and tradition as a source of Judeo-Christian civilization – through the art of cinema"
- Promote films on Jewish culture "to reach the young audience who is confronted today with the complex problems of our times, such as terrorism, intolerance and hatred"
- "Through artistic expression in the form of films we want to find ways of communicating with all religious,

Continues on next page

national and cultural communities in order to better know each other and better understand their diverse motives” especially when emphasizing common elements.

- “Present non-profit productions, pioneer or seek new ways of expression, which do not clash with the universal requirement of truth in artistic work.” Special focus of the festival films is on those produced in the Central-Eastern European region. Active participation of the audience is a focus of the festival, which organizes direct meetings with the film directors after each screening. Organizers and other experts participate also in the debates and meetings accompanying the shows and post-festival shows, which gives them opportunity for direct interaction. That is why the festival is often described as direct networking, meeting, and not the festival of red carpets.

The festival also partners with other similar Jewish film festivals in Brighton (England), Vienna and Stockholm.

The Festival was organized for the first time in 2003. According to its director, Mirek Chojecki, it was supposed to be a one-time event aiming to present the tradition of the Jewish cinema, from pre-war Yiddish movies made in Poland, up to modern cinema of 21st century. The festival received such positive attention both from international guests and Polish local audience that at the closing ceremony Chojecki said, “see you next year,” and with this promise the festival continues. The “Jewish Motifs” festival became an annual event and since 2004 has become “Jewish Motifs” International Film Festival. Traditionally, the closing and opening ceremony is lead by Andrzej Wajda (Polish film director) and Józef Hen (Polish/Jewish writer).

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## The 18th Day of Judaism in Poland

**The Day of Judaism, which has been observed since 1997 by the Catholic Church in Poland, is an annual day of Christian-Jewish reflection, held on January 17. It aims to foster a dialogue with the Jewish community and “to present anti-Semitism as a sin.”**

The Catholic Church in Poland has called on Polish Catholics to care for Jewish cemeteries, synagogues and other physical traces of the pre-war Jewish population, and also care for the graves of Holocaust victims.

The Polish Episcopate made the appeal on Friday 17 January 2015, the day marked in Poland as the church’s 18th Day of Judaism, an observance aimed at promoting Catholic-Jewish dialogue and relations.

“It is our moral duty to take care of the places where people who had been our neighbours for many years were murdered and buried,” Bishop Mieczysław Cisło, chairman of the Committee for Dialogue with Judaism of the Polish Episcopate’s Council for Religious Dialogue, told the newspaper *Rzeczpospolita*.

The appeal issued called on priests to lead the initiative “to commemorate the Jewish community in those places where they lived, and to the faithful and local authorities to help in this work.”

The bishops said no one should just shrug and say it’s none of their business. Rather it is a duty of conscience



Poster promoting the Day of Judaism at a Polish Catholic Church

to see that former synagogues, Jewish cemeteries and the graves of victims of the Holocaust are not forgotten.

“Do not let the signs of life and faith disappear from the face of the earth,” the appeal states. If material evidence is gone, then as a sign of memory, a memorial plaque informing that a Jewish community lived here should be placed. This, it states, would also be an important gesture to the contemporary Jewish community which, though small, is developing dynamically in Poland as part of a pluralistic society.

“People often no longer realize that for centuries Jews, our elder brothers in faith, neighbours and fellow citizens, lived and worked in Polish towns and cities alongside Catholic Poles. This history was captured in the permanent exhibition of the Polin Museum of the History of Polish Jews, which was opened in October. It is our duty as Christians to care for the salvation of their memory and transmit their memory to our children and grandchildren,” the proclamation stated.

The appeal echoed the words of the late Polish-born Pope John Paul II who, years ago, declared: “These Jewish cemeteries are part of our common history. These are places of particularly profound spiritual, eschatological and historical importance. Let these places unite Poles and Jews, for together we await the Day of Judgement and Resurrection.”