

**PRESERVE
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AUTUMN 2019 ISSUE 5



**Professor
Dariusz Stola
to deliver ASPJ
Inaugural
Oration.**

Please see page 9 for more details.

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MEYN GEDANKEN (MY THOUGHTS)



By Bernard Korbman
Co-President/CEO

When trying to identify who we are, one of the key descriptors used is that our culture and heritage is based on, and equated with, Western civilisation, with its tradition of strong ethical values, philosophical

curiosity, creative artistic endeavours and a belief in the rule of law and democratic principles.

We certainly are Western, geographically speaking, and we do share a European historical heritage, but the fundamental designation of "civilisation", no longer applies. We have reached a high level of science, technology and industry, part of the definition of civilization, but sadly we have degenerated in terms of empathy, compassion, ethical behaviour and the concept of government for the people, the other components of a civilised society. Thus, we have become most uncivilised.

Authoritarian governments and fascist-like pressure groups have taken power in many parts of Europe, where xenophobia under the pseudonym of patriotism is used to isolate minority groups and political opponents, where creating "the other" dehumanises those who do not conform or are opposed to government legislation, and where hate speech has become the tool for fermenting violence and leading to the death of the voices of reason and those fighting for an inclusive and compassionate society.

The basic foundation of democracy, which obliges a government to rule on behalf of all its citizens, like-minded or not, has disappeared. Those who vote against the winning party are now marginalised and disempowered so as to stifle any form of democratic debate and opposition. Legislation is introduced to ensure that only the party line survives.

Some European governments have undermined the democratic process by interfering with the independent status of organisations and institutions deemed to

be independent of a single party's personal ideology. Positions in institutions of learning, the media, social welfare groups, human rights groups and other bodies which safeguard freedom of speech and expression are either closed down or wiped clean of their staff and replaced by government appointed lackeys to help implement the destruction of any real opposition.

The brutal murder in Poland of Pawel Adamowicz, the tireless, hard working mayor of Gdansk, who had a reputation for inclusiveness, for empathy with marginalised and disempowered groups, is just one sad example of hate speech leading to murder. Those who plant the seeds of violence and then step back denying any responsibility for the deeds that follow are morally corrupt and as guilty of murder as the actual murderer.

A little story:

In a small Eastern European town, a man went through the community slandering the rabbi. One day, feeling suddenly remorseful, he begged the rabbi for forgiveness and offered to undergo any penance to make amends. The rabbi told him to take a feather pillow from his home, cut it open, scatter the feathers to the wind, then return to see him. The man did as he was told, then came to the rabbi and asked, "Am I forgiven?"

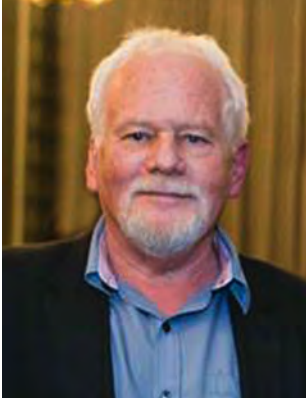
"Almost," came the response. "You just have to do one more thing. Go and gather all the feathers." "But that's impossible," the man protested, "The wind has already scattered them." "Precisely," the rabbi answered. "And although you truly wish to correct the evil you have done, it is as impossible to repair the damage done by your words as it is to recover the feathers."

From *Words That Hurt – Words That Heal*, by Joseph Telushkin

Unfortunately, we treat words as an inconsequential resource rather than a precious commodity. May the memory of Pawel Adamowicz and the many others who have died for their humanitarian beliefs remain with us all and strengthen our unflinching efforts to serve all in our community, to the best of our ability

Bernard Korbman OAM
President

LOOKING TOWARDS THE FUTURE



By Izydor Marmur
Vice President. Editor

Welcome to the first issue of *Haynt* in 2019.

I wish everyone a Happy New Year filled with good health and happiness.

The last few years in particular were very

challenging for us at ASPJ, due to some very disturbing events that were of concern to the Jewish community. These events are relevant to the important work that we are engaged in. Thankfully, together with Polish Community Council of Victoria and President Marian Pawlik (recipients of The Henryk Slawik Award 2018), we were able to overcome many difficulties and are still working on resolving some others. Due to these challenges we became stronger and even more determined to continue the dialogue between us.

There are some exciting changes taking place that will ensure long term success of ASPJ.

This year I have decided not to take up the post of President. I, as well as our board, believe that it is time to hand the leadership over to our younger generation who will carry our work into the future.

Bernard Korbman took on the role as co-President together with Ezra May, in order to mentor and give Ezra time to ease into the new role.

I have taken on a role of co-Vice President together with Estelle Rozinski. Estelle lives in Sydney and is developing ASPJ's presence in NSW.

I retain my portfolio of liaison with the Polish community and look forward to having more time to contribute to the task that is dear to my heart.

With great help from my wife Esther, I will continue as the designer and editor of *Haynt*.

We are forever chasing articles that are relevant and of interest to not only both communities, but to the wider readership. We would like to give our readers an opportunity to contribute to our newsletter. If you do have something you would like to share with our readership, please email your contribution to izi@izigraphics.com.au. All articles will be considered and chosen at our discretion. The submissions need to be no longer than 500 words, respectful and relevant to Jewish and/or non-Jewish Polish topics.

Past issues of *Haynt* are available on our website: www.polishjews.org.au

I wish to take this opportunity to thank my fellow board members and our friends in the Polish community for giving me the goodwill and support in my past two years as President.

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2018 HENRYK SŁAWIK AWARD



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.

ASPJ has decided to honour individuals and/or organisations that have worked towards enhancing mutual respect and understanding between the Polish and Jewish communities.

The recipients of the 2018 Henryk Sławik Award were Marian Pawlik OAM, and the Polish Community Council of Victoria Inc.

One of those at the forefront of bringing our two organisations – and our two communities – closer together has been Marian Pawlik OAM, current President and long-serving Board member of the PCCV.

Through his efforts and those of the PCCV, together, we have endeavoured to highlight those things

which our two communities have in common, particularly throughout history. The PCCV and Marian have endeavoured to make us an integral part of Polish community activities. Their continuously extended hand of friendship ensures that the steps which we have taken together thus far bode well for an even closer relationship into the future.

The Award is presented in recognition of efforts made towards enhancing mutual respect and understanding between the Polish and Jewish communities. Marian Pawlik OAM and the Polish Community Council of Victoria are worthy Award recipients.

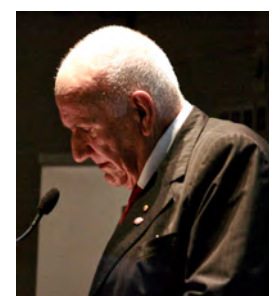
This year's Guest Speaker was newly-appointed Polish Ambassador to Australia, Michał Kołodziejcki. We were also honoured to have this year's Award presented in the presence of three currently-serving members of the Polish Senate – Senator Elżbieta Stępień, Senator Dr. Tomasz Latos and Senator Grzegorz Długi.

A special award was presented posthumously to the family of the late Andrew Korab, who sadly passed away in January 2018. As the President of the Polish Club Albion, he was a good friend to the ASPJ and a strong supporter of our efforts in bringing our communities together. Polish Club Albion Acting President, Dr Marek Kijek, (pic right) accepted the certificate on behalf of the Korab family and read a very moving letter from Andrew's wife.

As in previous years, the Award's musical interlude was provided by members of Melbourne's well-known klezmer band "Klazmania".

Also at this year's Award night were Dr. George Luk-Kozika (Honorary Polish Consul-General in Melbourne) and his wife Denise, Frances Prince (Jewish Community Council of Victoria and 2017

Henryk Slawik Award recipient), Christopher Lancucki AM (Imm.Past Pres., Polish Community Council of Victoria and 2016 Henryk Slawik Award recipient) plus many other leaders of Victoria's Jewish and Polish communities.



JEWISH HERITAGE OF KAZIMIERZ DOLNY



By Izydor Marmur

When planning my trip to Poland, a number of my Polish friends suggested that a visit to Kazimierz Dolny is a must. They described the beauty of the town, the landscape and the connection to Poland's Jewish history. When I pressed them further their answer was, go and see for yourself. Their answer of course only increased my curiosity about the place and I was very keen to go there.

The first opportunity presented itself when I, together with my friend Bernard Korbman, visited Poland on behalf of ASPJ.

We were there for only a day during that visit but it was enough for me to want to return for a longer time.

During the next trip to Poland, this time with my wife Esther, we visited Kazimierz Dolny and stayed there for a number of days.

It was then that I really fell in love with the place. As we walked, I felt the history and imagined the life there in the old days. I touched the stones of the castle that dates back to the middle ages, looked into every nook and cranny, admired the architecture and the Vistula river, smelled the flowers and acquired a sense of the town's history.

However, as in many parts of Poland, the Jewish absence is palpable. As the Jews played a huge part in the history of the area and the town, I decided to explore this history further. Following is a very brief history of the Kazimierz Dolny Jews.

Kazimierz Dolny lies on the Vistula (Wisla) river, about thirty kilometres east of Lublin. In the 14th century, King Casimir III The Great built his summer palace on the site and granted the nearby settlement the status of town.

Jews had lived in the area since the 12th century and were allowed many rights by the local rulers. In 1264 they were granted a charter in a writ issued by Prince Boleslaw V The Pious. In 1334 King Casimir III The Great further broadened the rights of the Jews.

Jewish houses and most of the Jewish shops, as well as the prayer house, were situated near the market. The Great Synagogue was first built in the 15th century, in an alley near the market. According to the records from the 16th century, Jews sought permission to rebuild the synagogue in brick, as the wooden structure was destroyed in a fire. The present day building was erected in the 18th century and was famous for its architecture and numerous reliefs of animals and landscapes of Eretz Israel.

According to the legends, Jews of Kazimierz Dolny and all of Poland are connected to the royal palace through Esther, the Jewish lover of Casimir The Great.

By the 15th century Kazimierz Dolny was an important commercial centre and most of the local trade was in Jewish hands. In the first half of the 17th century Kazimierz Dolny was considered to be one of the richest and most beautiful towns in Poland. It became a favourite place of residence for the nobility.

The population at that time was around 3,000, many of them Jews. Restrictions on the right to dwell and keep shops at the market place were placed on the Jews. In spite of this, the community prospered.

During the Swedish invasion in the 17th century, Jews suffered greatly and, following the defeat of the Swedes, many were killed or injured in the pogroms perpetrated by the Polish cavalry as they celebrated their victory.

At the beginning of the 18th century, through trade in grain, the Jewish population recovered.

Following the partition of Poland and the disruption of the trade route on the Vistula, Kazimierz Dolny declined in importance. The majority of Poles left the town, so at the beginning of the 19th century most of the inhabitants were Jewish. In time, thousands of Hassidim passed through the town and it became a Hassidic centre.

Following the Russian revolution, Jewish families from Russia settled in Kazimierz Dolny and brought with them the ideas of the enlightenment movement Haskala.

During World War I, as the fighting moved close to Kazimierz Dolny, Jews were evacuated but soon returned and, under Austrian occupation, managed to rebuild their community.

Following World War I and Poland's independence, many Jewish youth movements and Zionist organisations set up local branches in Kazimierz Dolny.

At the time, the relations between Poles and Jews were good. Many Poles spoke Yiddish. The town prospered due to it becoming a popular tourist destination for the Jewish and other wealthy holiday makers.

However, in the 1930s, due partly to the economic crisis, Jews experienced a new wave of anti-Semitism.

On 1 September 1939, as World War II began, Kazimierz Dolny was occupied by the German army. Jews between the ages 18–45 were taken to forced labour camps. Jewish children and Jewish teachers were removed from Polish schools. Studies took place at the synagogue, until the building was confiscated and turned into a stable for horses.

On 23 March 1942, the Jews were ordered to move

to the ghetto in Opole, and from there all were put on trains and taken to the extermination camp at Belzec.

Kazimierz Dolny was liberated in the spring of 1945 by the Soviet army.

The little that remained of Jewish life was in ruins. The tombstones from the cemetery were used to pave the courtyard of the local monastery. The building of the Great Synagogue, whose ritual objects disappeared and its decorative reliefs had been plundered, was turned into a cinema by the communist authority.

The outer walls of the synagogue were reconstructed in the 1960s and a memorial plaque for the missing Jewish community was installed there. Also, there is a museum and a photographic exhibition of old photographs showing the market place and the Jewish traders before the last war. The market place is still there, but without the Jews.

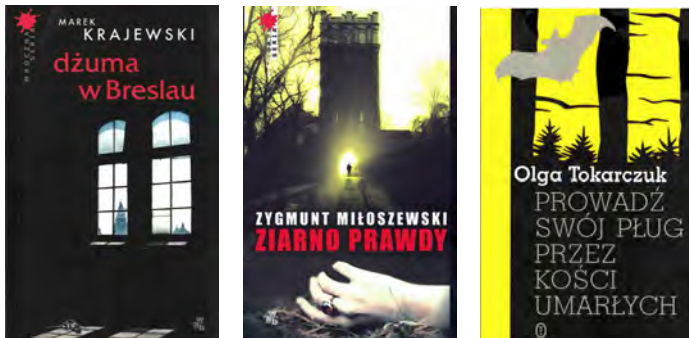
There are many eating places, among them a number of Jewish-style restaurants with cuisine that reminded me of my childhood in Poland. Not to mention locally produced chocolate, great coffee and sour cherry vodka to finish the meal.

A small number of tombstones were found at the 19th century cemetery. A monument to the Jews of Kazimierz Dolny, constructed from broken remains of tombstones, now stands as a powerful reminder of the community that no longer exists. Many stones have been placed on the monument by Jewish visitors.

Kazimierz Dolny is a town that has endured many ups and downs during its long history, and is now going through another revival. It attracts tourists from within Poland and from abroad. Many artists found, and still find, inspiration there. It has something for everyone.



POLISH NOIR ON THE RISE



By Magda Szkuta

Curator of East European Collections, British Library

This year Poland is the guest of honour at the London Book Fair. Consequently there will be a series of cultural events featuring Polish writers at the Fair and other locations. Within its rich programme the British Library is hosting the Crime Writing from Poland event on Tuesday 14th March with two outstanding writers, Olga Tokarczuk and Zygmunt Miłoszewski.

Crime fiction is one of the most popular and widespread literary genres in Poland. It has recently followed in the footsteps of Nordic Noir and includes some excellent writers whose novels are well received both at home and abroad. They represent all forms of crime writing from period drama through thrillers to modern crime addressing contemporary social issues. In 2003, only four thrillers were published, while ten years later over a hundred crime novels made their way into bookshops.

What makes Polish crime writing distinctive? It is inevitably the excellent use of Poland's diverse and tumultuous 20th century history as a background, exhaustive research and credible characters – all combine in the attractive form of a crime story. The first recognised crime fiction writer of that generation is Marek Krajewski. He made his name with a retro series of four novels featuring Inspector Eberhard Mock masterfully solving criminal mysteries in pre-war Breslau, a German town, which in 1945 became Wrocław in Poland. Krajewski, a fan of the city, superbly recreated the spirit of Breslau, making it the second character in his series. As early as 2005 Krajewski received a literary reward for his crime novel

The End of the World in Breslau. This was the turning point – crime fiction, previously regarded as lowbrow literature, was now accepted as a distinct literary genre.

One of the best-selling authors is Zygmunt Miłoszewski, famous for his trilogy with the phlegmatic Teodor Szacki, State Prosecutor, as the main character. He successfully investigates a murder case in modern Warsaw, *Uwikłanie* (Entanglement), and he next moves to Sandomierz, a provincial town in south-east Poland, to face the sensitive issue of Polish anti-Semitism *Ziarno prawdy* (A grain of truth). Miłoszewski also tackles Polish-German relations in *Gniew* (Rage), the last in the series, setting the plot in the provincial town of Olsztyn in north-east Poland, formerly a German territory.

A rising star in the genre of crime fiction is Katarzyna Bonda, named the 'Queen of Crime' by Miłoszewski. She has so far published four crime novels featuring the Silesian police psychologist Hubert Meyer and the female profiler Sasza Załuska as the main protagonists. Bonda touches upon various social issues in her novels such as alcoholism in women, the trauma caused by the loss of a child, or problems concerning ethnic minorities. Her meticulously-researched books make use of police criminal records and the expert knowledge of consultants. She also wrote a non-fiction book, *Polskie morderczynie* (Polish female murderers), portraying women sentenced for heinous crimes.

Crime fiction appeals not only to readers but also to writers. Olga Tokarczuk, the most popular Polish author of her generation whose literary output includes over a dozen highly acclaimed books, applied crime conventions in *Prowadź swój pług przez kości umarłych* (Drive your plough over the bones of the dead). As in her other novels she mixes mythology with reality to convey important messages about the condition of modern society.

Crime writing, which explores all facets of human nature together with historical and social issues, is a very interesting and diverse form of Polish modern literature. So it is not surprising that some of the novels were made into films, e.g. Agnieszka Holland's latest *Pokot* (Spoor), inspired by Tokarczuk's book mentioned above. For the same reason a significant number of Polish crime novels have been translated into other languages, including English.

LETTER TO AN OLD FRIEND



By Izydor Marmur

We met the first time when I was around six years old and you were already ancient.

It was winter and the ground was covered in snow. I was on a sleigh being pulled by my brother Eddy. He was running, and the freezing cold and snowflakes were stinging my face. We stopped at your feet to rest. You protected us from the cold wind and it was then that I became aware of you. I touched your frozen skin and wondered how cold you must be. After a while we continued on our way.

As the time went by, I sought your protection from wind and snow under your bare arms in winter, hid under your shade from the spring rain and the hot sun in summer. In autumn I kicked your fallen golden leaves.

On warm summer days I imagined armies passing by and King Beleslaw Chrobry resting with his knights

where I was resting. Soon I became one of the knights on the way to do battle. Then, mounting my white stallion, armed with my home-made wooden sword, I was ready to face anything. With a simple change of props I skipped a few centuries and fought imaginary Germans with my stick gun. The only constant was that I was the brave hero.

You became my best friend. I spoke to you in silence, venting my anger and frustrations. I told you about my dreams and my attraction to a girl, my fears and my secrets. You always listened, patiently and intently. You offered no advice or criticism. Sometimes I could hear the creaking of your arms in the wind, and thought I heard you whisper.

When my family was about to leave Poland for good, I came to see you for what I thought will be the last time. I believed that I'll never see you again.

As I was growing older in far-away Australia, I often thought of you and wished I could share my thoughts with you, to be in your presence. I never forgot you and often dreamed of visiting you.

In 1979 I was again in Wraclaw with my wife and two small daughters. The city was gray and still bearing the scars of war. I felt sad and disappointed, and when I saw you for a brief time, it was hard to resurrect the child I used to be.

When I planned my visit to Poland in 2015, I was determined to spend more time with you. As I walked toward you, there were tourists milling around the great cathedral and there was the sound of many different languages spoken. A drunk was leaning against your trunk, young lovers were sitting on the grass and mothers were chatting, while the children ran around. Someone had scarred you with a knife and others used you as a canvas for their graffiti. A religious message was nailed to your skin.

The city of my youth is so different now. Almost gone are the scars of war. Where we defended our 'castles' built in the ruins, stand new buildings. Where there was greyness now there is colour.

The sixty-six-year-old me stood under your great canopy again; I touched your skin and was taken back to my boyhood. The din of the city vanished and I was there alone with you again.

MY PERSONAL IMPRESSIONS OF PROFESSOR DARIUSZ STOLA

By Andrew Rajcher

ASPJ Board Member and Treasurer

I've been a volunteer English-language translator for the POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews in Warsaw for almost nine years. In fact, I've been told that I'm now the POLIN Museum's longest serving volunteer.

I started before the POLIN Museum was even a hole in the ground and, at the time, it consisted of only two websites – the website about the future Museum and the "Virtual Shtetl". So that I've been involved with POLIN before and during the entire period that Professor Stola has served as the Museum's Director.

In March 2018, I witnessed an example of the respect that Professor Stola enjoys amongst the POLIN Museum personnel. At the monthly staff meeting which I was invited to attend, he announced that he would be applying to have his position as Director extended for a further term. The very positive response of those present to this announcement was a testament to the regard in which he is held by the POLIN Museum staff.

His biography is impressive to say the least. Professionally, he is internationally respected, receiving regular invitations to speak from around the world. He has the reputation of speaking truths – even if they are uncomfortable truths. He understands that museums have that same responsibility – an example of this being the recent POLIN temporary exhibition marking the fiftieth anniversary of the events of March 1968. It received some criticism from elements of the political right. However, Professor Stola stood tall and very publicly defended POLIN Museum's dedication to historical truth – even if it be uncomfortable, inconvenient or otherwise.

At a personal level, I have always found Professor Stola to be open and welcoming of the ideas of others. In my discussions with him, I've been amazed at the depth of his knowledge and his analysis of historical events and their consequences – both short-term and long-term.

Professor Stola is a most fitting person to be our Inaugural 2019 Orator.

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AUSTRALIAN SOCIETY OF POLISH JEWS & THEIR DESCENDANTS

ASPJ INAUGURAL ORATION 2019

DELIVERED BY:

PROF. DARIUSZ STOLA

EVENT MC: NINA BASSAT AM



Professor **Dariusz Stola** is a historian, director of the Polin Museum of the History of Polish Jews and professor at the Institute for Political Studies, Polish Academy of Sciences. He has authored six and co-edited four books, and published more than a hundred scholarly articles on the political and social history of Poland in the 20th century, the Holocaust, international migrations and the communist regime. He has served on academic boards of several Polish and international institutions and journals.

THE 1968 "ANTI-ZIONIST CAMPAIGN" IN POLAND AND ITS ECHOES TODAY – POLISH DEBATES ON THE HOLOCAUST

WEDNESDAY 3 APRIL 2019

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KRAKOW AND SURROUNDS



By Ezra May
Co- President

A highlight of my recent trip to Poland in June earlier this year was spending time in my ancestral hometown of Krakow.

Before arriving in Krakow, I had visited Lodz & Warsaw, from which I then made my way to Krakow via a two-day detour to explore some of the surrounding towns and villages, including Dukla – the birthplace of my great-grandfather.

The first town we toured was Lancut. This town hosts not only one of the most magnificent still existing castles in all of Poland, but also the Lancut Synagogue – a rare surviving 16th century Baroque Synagogue. It is one of the most famous in all of Europe, with magnificently restored decorative plasterwork and vibrant colourful paintings, featuring traditional Jewish and Bible images adorning its pillars, walls and ceiling.

As impressive as the synagogue is, so is the castle, one of the most beautiful Polish nobility residences in

Poland, resplendent with intricate carpentry, marble & crystal. Even though these two buildings are literally next door to each other, they are both popular tourist attractions in their own right. Unfortunately it seems not many people visit both.

As you enter the castle, you are greeted perhaps somewhat incongruously by a six foot menorah. The guide explained this was a gift from the local Jewish population in the 1920s to the resident count. It seems that it was received well enough, having been given such a prominent position.

Following Lancut, I visited one of the most famous Jewish graves in the world – that of Reb Elimelech of Lezajsk, known by Poles throughout Poland as the Tzadik Elimalcha. Perhaps surprisingly, Poles visit his grave too. His tomb in Lezajsk is open 24 hours a day and even though I was alone, there were still lit candles from visitors earlier that day. On the anniversary of his death each year, tens of thousands of Jews fly in from Israel, Europe and America.

The next day we visited Dukla, the birthplace of my great-grandfather Nota Aron May. Dukla is a small town of just over 2,000 people at the foot of the Carpathian mountains. The Dukla Synagogue remains a ruined shell, post a 1942 Nazi demolition. In the Jewish cemetery, although restored with a gate & signage in 2012, none of the tombstones are able to be read. It is possible, even perhaps likely, that some of my ancestral relatives lie there.

About 250m up a random nondescript track about 10km further up the highway, I paid respects at a small monument in the middle of an outline on the ground, in the midst of an overgrown forest. There 500 Jews deemed too old for transport for labour from the towns of Rymanow & Dukla were taken, forced to dig their own grave and shot by the Nazis. Perhaps due to its simplicity, as no structures were built or infrastructure required like at the concentration camps, it appears today the same as it would have appeared then. Little imagination is required to visualize what happened. A truck pulled up, they walked, dug and were then murdered. Again, who knows if relatives, perhaps great-great uncles or cousins of great-grandparents were killed there. And in many ways, that doesn't matter. They were 500 Jews shot by the Nazis simply for being Jews. It wasn't personal. The experience at being at this mass execution and burial site in the Bludna Mountains was

profoundly moving due to its raw simplicity and eerie silence.

After an almost three-hour drive, I ended up Friday afternoon in Krakow. Krakow doesn't attempt, not that it could, to avoid its Jews. Rather Krakow seems to embrace its Jewish heritage. Especially around Kazimierz, the Jewish central suburb of Krakow. The Jewish aspects of Krakow feature in all the general tourist information.

Kazimierz hosts many Jewish-themed restaurants with full recreations of chasidim, klezmer music, menorahs and Jewish-themed menus. It can be viewed in some ways as a Jewish Disneyland. Some have a harsher view that the locals are mocking & dancing on Jewish graves as you can't have genuine Jewish culture without Jews.

However, every Jewish Krakowian that I met didn't share that assessment. They view it as demand from local Krakowians and tourists to experience what they regard as an essential component of Krakow. Not only is there an increasing awareness of the Jewish flavour of Krakow, but there is a recognition that Krakow without its Jewish character is simply not Krakow.

The vast overwhelming patronage for these Jewish-themed restaurants are locals. The argument that it is a trap to earn money from Jewish tourists doesn't fit reality. These establishments are the last place most Jewish tourists will eat at; the observant ones obviously, but many of the non-observant ones would prefer to try different cuisine. And some, of course, wouldn't eat at a Jewish-themed place in Poland, on principle.

You can't truly experience Krakow without experiencing its Jewish life. Although Warsaw had more Jews and they were a greater percentage of the population, (pre-war being 1 million out of 3 million inhabitants whilst Krakow was only 60,000 out of 250,000), the impact & flavour of Jewish life in Krakow, led by the suburb of Kazimierz, seemed much greater and has remained so.

There is a regular stream of Jewish tourists, including many Ultra-Orthodox and it is not uncommon to see a yarmulka in Krakow. In Kazimierz even some Poles & non-Jewish tourists walk around in one, as they are constantly entering synagogues, so it is easier, or perhaps they enjoy the experience of wearing a yarmulka for an afternoon.

No visit to Krakow is complete without a visit to the Krakow Jewish Community Centre (JCC), one of the most innovative & dynamic JCC in the world. It is the hub of Jewish life in Krakow and hosts a full range of programs for all ages & interests. This year, in its 10th

year since being opened by HRH Prince Charles, it commenced a childcare centre to Jewishly educate the children of the growing local Polish Jewish community. Friday night in Krakow is pumping at the JCC as they host anywhere from 70 to 700 people for a meal. It is a real mix of locals and tourists from all countries and all religious affiliations. The JCC Director, Jonathon Orenstein does an amazing job raising 95% (USD1m+) of the JCC budget from overseas. Yet Orenstein also displays empathy & concern for all segments of the community, being hands-on in tandem with Rabbi Avi Baumol, an ex-American Israeli who is the official Rabbi in Krakow, appointed by and representative of Polish Chief Rabbi Schudrich. Rabbi Baumol flies in & out of Krakow, and amongst other rabbinic duties delivers lectures at the JCC, mostly in Polish, to young & old Krakow Jews.



The JCC is the foundation stone of current Jewish life in Krakow – religiously, culturally & socially. It is amazing what an impact it has had in only 10 years. The JCC in many ways is the community.

Saturday afternoon I spent with some of the local community whom I quickly discovered live a normal life. Just as exciting or boring as any other Jewish life anywhere in the world. Busy with university, work, politics and life in general.

This is a sentiment shared by other locals I met in Lodz and Warsaw. They don't see themselves as special, certainly not as an anomaly or as rebels resisting the



pages of history by living where some people feel they shouldn't.

Whilst almost all the surviving Polish Jewish world shifted post Holocaust to Israel and America, with a smattering in UK, South Africa & Australia, current local Jewish Poles don't view being born & raised Jewish in Poland as abnormal, let alone offensive to survivors. In fact, currently they seem to enjoy a much higher quality of Jewish life than a lot of places in the world, including Europe.

One young local made an interesting comment. One of the major themes in Judaism is "You shall teach your children". That is the focus of Passover and underpins so much of the Jewish ritual: to educate our collective history to the next generation; to ensure and maintain the 3,300-year-old tradition.

However, this generation in Poland today is unique. It is possibly the first generation in history where this works in reverse. It is where the children come home from school or classes at the JCC and relay what they have learned about their tradition to their parents.

In post-war communist Poland, Jewish education for the remaining Jews ground to a halt. But now, 70 years later, it is reborn and this generation is aware they are learning not only for their own future, but also to go home and

educate their parents and grandparents. It is not an uncommon phenomenon for people to know their parents were Jewish but have no concept what that means. Many may even have been raised as Catholics or at least participated in Catholic rites. Now however, primarily thanks to the efforts of the JCC & Chief Rabbi Shudrich, although still small, there is a healthy, living Jewish community again in Poland.

Being in Krakow, I grabbed the opportunity to visit some of the residences and addresses of my ancestors that I had successfully mined back to 1730, when earlier visiting the genealogy department of the Jewish Historical Institute in Warsaw.

I visited the prewar homes of my great-grandparents in the early 1900s at 29 & 33 Krakowska St. These apartment buildings, apart from cosmetic maintenance, look like they haven't structurally changed at all.

What I found particularly interesting was the 1900 Krakow census listed home of my great-grandfather Nota Aron May. He was born in Dukla in 1877, married Schifra Schmeidler born 1878 in Krakow, and by 1900 had moved to Krakow, where it seems he joined his father-in-law's business.

Their residence is currently the Alef Hotel. As distinct from the famous Alef Restaurant in Szeroka Sq,

Kazimierz, this is the Alef Hotel, less than a ten-minute walk away in 5 Agnieski St, Krakow. The building was refurbished in 2012 into the Alef Hotel with heavily Jewish-themed pictures of rabbis and traditional Jewish scenes adorning the corridors and rooms. The restaurant serves traditional Jewish food and, as self-declared, tries to recreate the atmosphere of pre-war Krakow.

One of the other properties I visited was the shop premises of a great-great-grandfather Hirsch Schmeidler from the 1891 Gailcia Business Directory at 5 Bozego Ciala St. This is currently tenanted by Kuku Café & Wine. Again, apart from cosmetic changes, which are significant, as it is quite the modern café that wouldn't be out of place in Melbourne, the building of which there was only ever one shopfront, seems unchanged.

By design, my time in Krakow coincided with the 2018 Krakow Jewish Cultural Festival (KJCF), one of the longest-running and biggest Jewish festivals in the world.

2018 was the 28th edition of the Festival and its theme was Zion, celebrating the 70th anniversary of the State of Israel and the 50th anniversary of a united Jerusalem. The KJCF featured a diverse, high-quality program of over 260 individual lectures, concerts, performances, workshops and events on many Jewish subjects.

Around 30,000 participants attended over the ten days of the Festival. They were predominantly locals, but with an increasing number of Israelis and American tourists, as the festival gains greater international recognition.

There were lectures on themes including historical Jewish Poland, Polish-Jewish relations, Yiddish, Zionism, Jewish genealogy, Klezmer, Cooking, Art, Torah, Ben Gurion, Herzl, Hatikvah, to list a few. These were presented by a variety of local & international presenters, artists & experts from Europe, America & Israel.

Publicity for the 2018 KJCF was ubiquitous. Given the 2018 theme was Zion, or Syjon in Polish, Krakow was plastered with billboards & posters on trams, buses, bus stops & buildings with the word Syjon. And not just in Kazimierz, the Jewish area, but throughout the Old Town and New Town.

It is remarkable that although this is not only Jewish but explicitly Zionist, there was no graffiti or vandalism. If you were to compare this to the current situation in Paris, London or even Melbourne, you might expect these signs to be plastered with "Free Palestine" at best, or "Zionism = Racism" or "Israel is Apartheid" slogans.

What also is strange for today's world, is that all these

different events required no advance registration, apart from the few concerts that were ticketed and sold out. All the Festival locations had no security. You could simply walk in and walk out with no questions or bag checks. The events were openly advertised and open for all.

I attended some superb concerts, events & lectures. On the Sunday evening, the Cantor Concert which officially launches the KJCF was spectacular, held in the magnificent setting of the Temple Synagogue, featuring the world class cantors the Lemmer Brothers from America as well as a choir and piano maestro from Israel. During the opening welcome, the Mayor of



Ezra May with Janusz Makuch, director and co-founder of the Jewish Festival of Culture in Krakow

Krakow proclaimed that, "the KJCF helps revive the lost Jewish culture of Krakow".

My only complaint is that throughout the day there were often three or four overlapping events at different venues, making it impossible to attend everything I wanted to.

Whilst in Krakow I also visited the Old Town with its magnificent Main Market Square featuring the Sukiennice, Wawel Castle, and the nearby Wielicka Salt Mine as well as the nearby infamous Nazi Concentration Camp KL Auschwitz.

I highly recommend a visit to Krakow, even if your family roots are not there. Krakow boasts many places of general Jewish historical significance. I'd also strongly encourage a visit to the welcoming local Jewish community. It is a most enlightening and rewarding experience.

Through the Glass Flower

A project about life

Through the Glass Flower is a living history project which brings to life the vibrancy and diversity of the Jewish community of Krakow before 1939 by entwining family memories and narratives.

It will take the form of an installation of more than one thousand glass flowers, honouring and naming each of the families and making their stories accessible by QR code.

Estelle Rozinski, Melbourne born artist and curator, is the child of Holocaust survivors and uses her art practice to explore the sameness



and differences that make up our communities.

Estelle's ongoing exhibition, **my place + your place = a better place**, threads together the life stories, traditional experiences and sacred elements of Aboriginal, Jewish and Korean artists.

Her permanent installation **The Missing Mezzuzot of Zdunska Wola** is the first of her Polish series. It explores the interwoven stories of Jewish Poland and gives us a warm and rich Jewish history to coexist with the tragedy of the Holocaust.

Proudly supported by:



If you have roots in Krakow and would like to honour your family's memory please contact:

Estelle Rozinski thekrakowproject@gmail.com

Or, if you would like to make a donation to support this project please go to:

www.givenow.com.au/throughtheglassflower

Donations are tax deductible in Australia