

HAYNT



Australian Society of Polish Jews
and their Descendants

**PRESERVE
EDUCATE
PROMOTE**

WINTER 2019 ISSUE 6

**Vale Moshe Fizman OAM z"l
1921–2019**

IN THIS ISSUE

Meyn Gedanken (My Thoughts)
Preserving the Polish Jewish heritage
Vale Moshe Fizman OAM
Inagural Oration 2019
Lodz. Its Jewish heritage

Page 2
Page 3
Page 4-5
Page 6
Page 7-8

Polish envoy to Israel interview
House of remembrance
POLCUL Foundation
Cracow Bnai Brith on restitution
Genealogy open day

Page 9-13
Page 14
Page 15-18
Page 19
Page 20

MEYN GEDANKEN (MY THOUGHTS)



By Bernard Korbman
Co-President/CEO

Difficult times should unite all people of goodwill and demand an even greater effort and commitment on our part.

We live in difficult times. It would not be an overstatement to suggest

that we are experiencing apprehension and distress over Jewish–Polish relations, particularly in Poland. Tensions have also risen between the Polish and Israeli governments, as well as throughout the Jewish diaspora.

The blatantly anti-Semitic Easter sermon by Bishop Andrzej Jez of Tarnow, accusing Jews of being divisive, lacking patriotism and only serving their own needs, as well as a Polish crowd, including children in the town of Pruchnik, putting Judas Iscariot on public trial for betraying Jesus and then beating and burning a Judas effigy with sidelocks, hat and dressed in the attire of ultra-Orthodox Jews, has sent shockwaves throughout the Jewish world.

Holocaust survivors have recalled their own pre-war fears of the Easter festivities in Poland, and the actions mentioned above have reignited these fears for the safety and well-being of the current Jewish population of Poland.

It must be said that the Polish Catholic Church has condemned the actions in Pruchnik and, when notified, the Polish Ambassador to Australia, although unable to comment directly on Bishop Jez's sermon because of the separation of Church and State in the Polish constitution, has publicly denounced any form of hate speech or action against Jewish Poles, or for that matter against any other Polish minority group.

We do acknowledge that there are many Poles and Polish organisations working behind the scenes to ensure that in this day and age, Polish Jews are treated and respected with the same impartiality and acceptance as any other Polish citizens.

Whilst we try to support our brethren in Poland,

we the Australian Society of Polish Jews and Their Descendants are aware that it is not always possible to either change or influence international occurrences or circumstances. We can write letters to governments and their representatives, religious organisations, media outlets and so on, and take part in presenting the views of Australian Jewry. Some pressure through lobbying can be applied, but when it comes to societal attitudes in Poland, we have limited options available to us.

However, we are strong and influential enough in Australia to make a difference. Our major commitment then must be to enhance the relationship between Australian Poles and Australian Jews of Polish descent so that a flow-on effect can be effective and take place in Poland.

This cooperation has to some degree been achieved and has brought along the way many positive and at times unforeseen benefits. Through our relationship with the Polish community leadership, we now have close ties with the Polish Roman Catholic Church, with the Polish government, through his Excellency Ambassador Michal Kolodziejewski as well as the two previous Ambassadors to Australia, and to other historical and cultural organisations in both Poland and Australia.

The myths and untruths held by many in both communities must be shattered. These strongly felt negative views must be challenged through dialogue and education, with open minds, honesty and candour as its guiding principles. Both communities must be prepared to listen, to at times feel uncomfortable by the other side's perceptions and to be able to discuss the "elephant in the room" with honourable and sincere intentions.

There are many more Poles of goodwill both in Australia and abroad who support close ties and fellowship with the Jewish people. Rather than obsessively troll the net for examples of anti-Semitism in Poland, let us form alliances with the numerous Poles who oppose any form of discrimination, bigotry and hatred, and above all, let us not paint an entire nation as hostile or guilty of anti-Semitism because of the actions and words of a minority. Not only is this untrue, but it is morally reprehensible.

PRESERVING THE POLISH JEWISH HERITAGE



By Izydor Marmur
Vice President. Editor

For towns and cities across Eastern Europe, but especially in Poland, the issue of how to preserve the heritage of the Jewish people is a pressing one.

There is a real danger that centuries-long histories of Jewish communities will be lost.

The Holocaust, years of Communism and migration have meant that most urban and rural areas are left with no Jewish communities to ensure the protection and meaningful interpretation of Jewish heritage.

Since the fall of Communism there has been a strong movement towards not only preservation but, more importantly, education about the rich Jewish history in Poland.

A number of both Polish and Jewish organisations, as well as individuals, have taken on this important but also often difficult task and are seeing positive results.

Here in Australia the task of preserving the memory of the people and places that were once occupied by the Jewish communities falls on the Landsmannschaft organisations.

As the living memory of the towns and places passes

on, it is up to the new generations of descendants to ensure continuation of the legacy left by their predecessors.

ASPJ values the role Landsmannschaften play in honouring the past communities and preserving their histories.

We plan to include their stories in our newsletter, one story per issue.

If you would like to tell the story of your Landsmannschaft please contact Izydor Marmur by email: lzi@izigraphics.com.au.

Former Polish diplomat takes up an appointment as a director of Polish Jewish Heritage Organisation.

The Foundation for the Preservation of Jewish Heritage in Poland (FODZ), a partnership of the World Jewish Restitution Organization (WJRO) and the Union of Jewish Communities in Poland, is pleased to announce the appointment of Piotr Puchta to the position of Director.

Mr. Puchta will continue FODZ's efforts to recover, preserve, and commemorate physical sites of Jewish significance and cultural heritage throughout Poland. Mr. Puchta will lead FODZ's efforts in the handling of restitution claims pertaining to real estate owned by prewar Jewish religious communities, especially synagogues and cemeteries.

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VALE MOSHE FISZMAN OAM, 29 NOVEMBER 1921–13 MAY 2019

Moshe Fiszman OAM was a strong-willed Holocaust survivor who made it his mission to testify to the horrors, brutality and humiliation that he experienced and witnessed during his many years in death camps, as a forced labourer in industrial complexes, quarries and a number of death marches.

Moshe was angry and incensed by the baseness of those who planned and were complicit in the murder of six million European Jews and of those who took

revisionists on Facebook, and, not only from his own perspective, but with his amazing in-depth knowledge gained from devouring hundreds of books, publications, films, documentaries, and newly released archives, he would fiercely oppose these pseudo historians and their anti-Semitic agenda.

Yet, amongst all this evil, Moshe met the Baroness Irmgard Von Neurath, who visited one of the camps in which Moshe was incarcerated, and who took it upon



advantage of Jewish suffering and displacement to enrich themselves. He also could never forgive the bystanders, who saw emaciated Jews being tormented and marched through towns on their way to quarries or other places of hard labour, and who just stared or looked away. The words, “we never knew” rang hollow for Moshe Fiszman, as he stated, “to them we were ghosts, we didn’t exist.”

As a survivor guide and in recounting his experiences, Moshe always told it as it was. Although sensitive to children who visited the Holocaust Centre, to adult audiences, Moshe pulled no punches. There was no way he would sanitise the Holocaust or allow others to do so. He took on many deniers and historical

herself to help the Jewish prisoners by secretly bringing food and by interceding with the Nazi camp commander on their behalf. Moshe never forgot her kindness and for years, fought to have Baroness von Neurath declared a Righteous Among the Nations.

There was, however, another side to Moshe’s identity and sense of being. There was Moshe the poet, the lover of music, song and hazzanut. Moshe, who right to the end, could recite Yiddish and Polish poetry from memory, quote passages from books and recall amazing stories and fables from a world gone by.

There was the Moshe who again refused to bow down and who with strength and courage publicly took on

all those who denied Israel's right to exist. And, finally, there was the Moshe Fizman the proud Australian, grateful for the opportunities this country gave him, grateful for the established institutions which maintain the democratic principles which allowed him and his family to live in a safe and civilised society.

I will allow Moshe to have the last word, just as he would when we met in cafes, through a letter that he wrote to the then Prime Minister, Tony Abbott.

Dear Mr Abbott,

I beg you to abandon your plans to change the Racial Discrimination Act.

You might think you are increasing freedom but let me assure you that you will be taking away the freedom of communities such as mine. The freedom to live without hatred and without lies being told about us.

That is why every single ethnic community is against this change. Some 39 communities have protested against it. Australia is a beautiful country because, like the United States, we are all migrants – not minorities. But if this law gets up, we will be made to feel like minorities.

You might think you are increasing freedom, but this change will hurt disadvantaged, underprivileged groups, like the Aborigines who regularly visit the Jewish Holocaust Museum. Most people are unaware that the Aborigines were one of the first groups to protest against the treatment of the Jews in Europe.

Like the Jews, Aborigines know what it is like to be discriminated against. I remember protesting in my broken English when they took the children away, and people asked me what I knew about it. I told them that I had seen children taken away from their mothers and that Australia would be sorry for it – and we are.

I came to this country because it was the furthest away from Europe I could get. Also, I had four years behind bars as a refugee after the war because nobody wanted me, so I had plenty of time to check out what Australia was made of. I researched its constitution and so forth, and I liked it.

We are quite happy with the freedom we have got at the moment. There is nothing wrong with it. For God's sake, you can do whatever you like in this country. We are even freer than in the United States.

What do they want to change this law for? If you start playing around with it, where will it end up? Who is it giving the freedom to? They want the right-wing loonies to have a free rein so they can write and say whatever they like and get away with it scot-free. Holocaust deniers like the Adelaide Institute.

They are talking about freedom of speech. I am free to speak. You are free to speak. People are free to speak. Who needs the improvement?

What they are trying to do, under the cover of free speech, is to give a free hand to people who should not speak in the first place. It is madness.

I tell students every day that freedom and liberty were given to you by God and no politician should have the right to take it away from you.

This is my opinion as a survivor, the opinion of a man who went through living hell for five-and-a-half years, on death row for 24 hours a day. I am dead against it. Don't let them touch the freedom of the people in the country.

At the moment I am an Australian. I am not defined as being a Jew or a Catholic or a Protestant. But if these laws go through, we will end up as members of minority groups. Then God help us.

I love this country. There is no other country in the world as free as ours. Please don't change the law, Mr Abbott.

Yours sincerely,

Moshe Fizman.

Moshe Fizman was a highly valued member of the Australian Society of Polish Jews and their Descendants, who, with his daughter Lena, attended all committee meetings and functions until health issues prevented him from doing so.

Moshe was very well respected and in demand by members of the Polish community who listened attentively as he regaled them with his reminiscences of past events as well as his knowledge and understanding of Polish-Jewish culture.

Moshe was an amazing individual who touched all those who knew him. Franka, Lena, Anna and Mark, we send you our deepest condolences and may his memory be a blessing.

From all at the ASPJ

ASPJ INAUGURAL ORATION 2019



Professor Dariusz Stola

On Wednesday 3 April 2019 the inaugural 2019 ASPJ Oration was held.

An almost capacity crowd of 200 people filled the auditorium at Monash University Caulfield Campus to hear Professor Dariusz Stola, Director of POLIN Museum, Warsaw, deliver the 2019 ASPJ Oration.

In a distinguished lecture focusing on the anti-Zionist campaign in Poland in 1968 and its reverberations and echoes, particularly regarding the current Polish debate on the Holocaust, Professor Stola delivered a fascinating and informative insight into the events of 1968; the lead-up, what actually occurred and its consequences.

The Anti-Zionist campaign of 1968 is perhaps a less well understood chapter in the 20th Century history of Jewish life in Poland, and Professor Stola enthrallingly and entertainingly described the lead-up following the 1967 Arab-Israeli War, the internal power struggle within the Soviet Bloc and the Polish leadership and the impact of the anti-Zionist and anti-Semitic campaign shuttering the small remaining functioning community of Holocaust survivors and their families in Poland.

Mrs Nina Bassat provided warm introductory remarks as well as skillful moderation of the post lecture Q and A.

Ezra May, Co-President ASPJ, delivered the vote of thanks recounting his meaningful personal experience of visiting Polin Museum in 2018 and also thanked the main sponsor, the Wolf & Dora Rajcher Memorial Fund, for making the inaugural ASPJ Oration possible. Feedback of the 2019 ASPJ Oration was overwhelmingly positive and further enhanced the ASPJ's reputation for organising functions that fulfill its Statement of Purpose:

"To preserve and promote the historical and cultural heritage of Jewish life in Poland and to foster understanding between current and future generations of the Polish and Jewish communities."



ASPJ Co-President Ezra May presenting a gift to Prof. Stola



Mingling with the audience



Meeting locals at the Healsville Sanctuary



Meeting with PCCV. L-r: Krystyna Gasz, Teresa Koronczewska, Prof. Dariusz Stola, Zofia Dublaszewska, President PCCV Marian Pawlik, and ASPJ Co-Vice President Izydor Marmur

ŁÓDŹ – THE THIRD LARGEST CITY IN POLAND AND ITS RICH JEWISH HERITAGE



Linat Orchim guest house

By Ezra May
Co-President, ASPJ

My trip to Poland in June 2018 was primarily to visit my ancestral hometown of Krakow and the current capital Warsaw. Additionally, I also included a visit to Łódź – which I am so glad I did.

It seems that most people without a direct family connection to Łódź, if they go at all, do it in 4 hours, including 1.5hrs drive each way from Warsaw. Many of the group tours to Poland have on their itinerary a drive straight to the Łódź cemetery, a quick drive around the ghetto area and then back on the bus to Warsaw. I stayed in Łódź for 5 nights.

The hub of the current Łódź Jewish community is located in a single building, with a guest house Linat Orchim on Pomorska 18. It is the single campus for the Geminder (Jewish council) and the community

center, including a Kosher kitchen and the sole functioning synagogue. The local Rabbi as well as some other employees and functionaries of the community all live on site.

Pomorska 18 is centrally located, with all the main sites and places of interest – both Jewish & non-Jewish – in walking distance.

Interestingly for Europe, Łódź as a city is really only 200 years old. In 1810 it only had 190 people and two intersections. However by 1905 it had exploded to 345,000 people. In 1925 it had grown to 540,000, and in 1939, just prior to WW2, to 670,000 of which 230,000 (30%) were Jewish.

In 130 years Łódź grew from zero to 230,000 Jews, becoming Poland's second biggest Jewish city and one of the biggest Jewish cities in the world.

This phenomenal growth and population explosion, both Jewish and non-Jewish, was primarily due to Manufacturing. Particularly Knitting Mills.



Survivors' Park - The Marek Edelman Dialogue Center in Łódź

The most famous citizen of Łódź, who still dominates the city today, is Izrael Poznanski. His former manufacturing plant where he had 70,000 knitting mills operating 24 hours a day has now been redeveloped into Manufaktura – a modern arts center, shopping mall & public space.

Poznanski was ahead of his time as an employer, as he provided on-site for his workers: a dormitory, health clinic, church, kindergarten and mechanic workshop. He even had his own personal fire station. Everything an employee as well as the business needed was on site to reduce downtime and keep his knitting mills spinning.

Other famous citizens of Łódź include Marek Edelman, Max Factor, Julian Tuwim, Arthur Rubinstein, and Jan Karski.

The main Jewish sites of interest are the Łódź (or Litzmannstadt) Ghetto. This was established by the Germans in 1939 with 210,000 people passing through it. Most of them were deported to the Chelmno Concentration Camp for extermination, beginning in 1942. At liberation by the Russians on 19/01/45, only 877 Jews were found alive in the ghetto.

The Łódź Jewish Cemetery, established in 1892, the largest Jewish cemetery in Poland, contains 200,000 individual graves as well as mass graves from the ghetto victims.

There are many other general museums and places of interest well worth visiting. However, even there, Łódź cannot and does not attempt to ignore its Jewish influence. In Palac Poznanski, the family candlesticks & Kiddush Cup are displayed and in the City of Łódź Museum they have a mock 19 century house exhibit. They actually have two. Side by side. A standard Łódź home with what its kitchen & living room would have looked like, and then a standard Jewish home. Jews were such an integral part of Łódź that in the City Museum they also present outfits of the Bishop & Rebbe.

The current Jewish community, although small, is very warm and welcoming. The Rabbi and kosher kitchen supervisor are both born & bred in Poland, having studied in Israel, but returned to Poland to live. Although they acknowledge that people have busy schedules when visiting Poland, they do regret that most don't take the time to at least stop and visit the



The Łódź Jewish Cemetery

current community. I can personally attest that it is well worth taking the time, even for an extra day as there is plenty to see and do in Łódź, and the local community is most appreciative and welcoming of visitors.



POLAND'S ENVOY RECOGNISES INDIVIDUAL HOLOCAUST CRIMES, FIRMLY REJECTS COMPLICITY

By RAPHAEL AHREN

Times of Israel. 11 February 2019

Amid controversy over Nazi era, Marek Magierowski complains 'little is known worldwide about what really occurred in German-occupied Poland'; notes diverging views with Yad Vashem.

Some Poles "committed abominable crimes" against Jews, Poland's ambassador to Israel acknowledged this week, saying he had no problem admitting that Polish nationals were involved in anti-Semitic atrocities before, during and after World War II.

But in a far-ranging interview dealing with the whole breadth of bilateral relations between Poland and Israel — historical and political — Marek Magierowski also said that in addition to the need to remember the painful past, there was a "moral obligation to tell the whole truth." For instance, he strongly rejected the term "Polish complicity," arguing that it implies the country deliberately aided the Nazi regime in carrying out the Holocaust.

"It insinuates that Poland was consciously and willingly collaborating with Germany in the extermination of the European Jewry. No, it was not," he insisted.

During the war, six million Polish citizens died — half of them Jews, the ambassador noted — and the country's cities and villages were destroyed. "Poland was devastated. This is the not-so-unimportant context that is too frequently missing from the spectacular headlines about the alleged 'Polish complicity,'" Magierowski, 48, said.

"And yes, some of my fellow countrymen committed abominable crimes against their Jewish brethren — before, during and after the war. I have no reservations in saying that they were Poles. Not 'bandits,' not 'criminals,' not 'non-Jewish neighbors.' No need to conceal their nationality. They were Polish, they spoke

Polish, they were born in Poland.”

And they “excluded themselves from Polish society,” he added, citing a speech Polish President Andrzej Duda delivered two years ago at an event commemorating the 1946 Kielce pogrom, during which Poles killed 42 Jewish Holocaust survivors.

Historians estimate that between 1,000 and 2,000 Jews were killed by Poles in the aftermath of World War II.

The role of Poles during the Holocaust has been a major sticking point in Israeli ties with Poland, after the Polish government passed a law last year prohibiting blaming the Polish nation for the atrocities.

The law was heavily criticized in Israel and elsewhere, leading Warsaw to amend it so that such claims are no longer a crime punishable by prison. Israel and Poland also subsequently issued a joint declaration that many Israeli historians condemned as inaccurately adopting Poland’s narrative of the Holocaust.

For instance, the statement condemned “every single case of cruelty against Jews perpetrated by Poles during...World War II,” but noted “heroic acts of numerous Poles, especially the Righteous Among the Nations, who risked their lives to save Jewish people.”

Critics said the wording downplays anti-Jewish atrocities committed by Poles while overstating the role of Poles who rescued Jews.

The Yad Vashem Holocaust memorial center recognizes 6,863 Poles as Righteous Among the Nations, the highest number among any nation. Historians debate how many Poles aided the Nazi death machine during World War II, with estimates ranging from tens of thousands to hundreds of thousands.

Magierowski, who started his term as Poland’s envoy to Tel Aviv last August, did not respond directly when asked if he disputes Yad Vashem’s assertion that “at least tens of thousands, if not hundreds of thousands, of Polish Jews perished during the war due to actions of their Polish neighbors.”

But he did express “boundless” appreciation for Yad Vashem, stressing the need to “work together to preserve the memory of the Holocaust.” At the same time, he acknowledged “diverging views we may have on several issues regarding historical research” and “differing narratives.”

The joint declaration, issued simultaneously by Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and his Polish counterpart, Mateusz Morawiecki, on June 27, 2018,

also rejected, in the same paragraph, both anti-Semitism and “anti-Polonism.”

Some opponents of the statement argued that the juxtaposition appeared to equate the two phenomena, a claim Magierowski rejected.

“There is no intention to draw a parallel between anti-Semitism and anti-Polonism,” he said. “Nonetheless we cannot turn a blind eye to the anti-Polish commentaries, statements and even unsavory jokes, based solely on ethnic prejudices.”

Magierowski, who speaks fluent Hebrew, also addressed at great length the increasingly warm political and diplomatic ties between Jerusalem and Warsaw, calling Israel “one of our most important partners in the Middle East.”

At the same time, he said Poland currently has no plans to move its embassy to Jerusalem, because “we cherish our international credibility.”

Netanyahu is set to travel to Warsaw on Tuesday to attend the government’s so-called “Ministerial to Promote a Future of Peace and Security in the Middle East,” a conference expected to deal heavily with Iran. Magierowski said the summit is “definitely not anti-Iranian,” but rather a “serious, global initiative aimed at reviving the moribund talks about the future of the Middle East.”

Next week, Morawiecki is due in Israel to attend a meeting of the so-called Visegrad Group, a consortium of four Central European nations. Netanyahu is working to strengthen ties with the group because he believes it can help fight what he considers the European Union’s unfair policies toward Israel.

“My personal view is that Poland perhaps understands Israel’s sensitivities a little better than some of our partners in the EU,” Magierowski said.

Asked if Warsaw recognizes Israel as a Jewish state, the ambassador replied that Poland recognizes Israel “as a state, within its internationally acknowledged borders,” adding that it was up to Israelis to define their own state.

Magierowski was born in Bystrzyca Kłodzka, a small town in southwestern Poland that was part of Germany until 1945. He worked as a journalist for most of his adult life, until he became President Duda’s spokesperson in 2015. Two years later, he quit to become deputy foreign minister, a position he held until the summer of 2018, when he moved to Tel Aviv.

Following is a transcript of our interview, which was

conducted via email, lightly edited for clarity.

The Times of Israel: Prime Minister Netanyahu is headed to Poland on Tuesday; Polish Prime Minister Morawiecki is scheduled to visit Israel next week, in the framework of the V4 Summit. It seems we're currently witnessing springtime for Israel-Poland relations. What's the reason for this blooming of bilateral diplomatic relations?

Marek Magierowski: Let's leave diplomacy aside for a while. First of all, it's about people. Thousands of Israeli tourists visiting Poland, thousands of Poles landing at Ben Gurion, day in, day out. Nearly 40 direct flight connections between major Polish cities and Israel. A 90 percent increase of the number of Polish visitors in Israel, an 80 percent increase of the number of Israeli tourists in Warsaw, Krakow, Gdańsk...

I have worked here as ambassador for seven months now and I have yet to meet someone who has not been to Poland recently, for a holiday or on a business trip. And all talk about Poland highly: it's safe, friendly, modern. Israelis appreciate high living standards and excellent food. Many are truly bewildered: "I expected a drab, post-communist, gray landscape. And suddenly I encountered a Western country in Eastern Europe."

Now, fast forward to old school diplomacy. Last year you celebrated the 70th anniversary of the establishment of the State of Israel. So many of Israel's founding fathers spoke Polish (also to each other!), so many Polish Jews — most of them Holocaust survivors and their descendants — were instrumental in the social and economic development of your country.

And, conversely, it's impossible to talk about Polish history, Polish culture, without mentioning the invaluable contribution of Jewish writers, musicians, entrepreneurs, politicians.

That's why our bilateral relations are so vital. Israel is, quite obviously, one of our most important partners in the Middle East, for political, economic and historical reasons. There's no doubt whatsoever that the unwavering support for the very existence of the State of Israel is one of the pillars of Poland's policy in the Middle East. As is its relentless combat against terrorism.

We also share the same ironclad alliance with the United States. The political and military cooperation between the US, Poland and Israel is of utmost relevance to us.

There's another intriguing parallel: the astonishing

economic growth of both Poland and Israel over the last three decades. Polish startups and young entrepreneurs are seeking new opportunities in the Israeli market. Israeli companies have heavily invested in Poland, mostly in real estate, the retail sector and high-tech, lured by the stable business environment and highly educated workforce. No wonder that all those flights between Poland and Tel Aviv are fully booked...

The Times of Israel: Netanyahu is traveling to Warsaw in order to attend the Ministerial to Promote a Future of Peace and Security in the Middle East. This conference is said to focus mainly on criticizing Iran and on strategising against it. Why did Poland choose to organize a conference focused on attacking Iran, something that pleases Israel and the US but not so much your European neighbors?

Marek Magierowski: Firstly, the event will not focus on a particular country but the whole region and the challenges it is facing, be it civil wars, terrorism, energy or cyber security. So the nature of the upcoming conference is, in our view, definitely not anti-Iranian.

By the way, we have excellent relations with the US, although we support the JCPOA [the Iran nuclear deal] and the Americans withdrew from it. And it was a Polish deputy foreign minister who traveled to Tehran to explain to the Iranians what the conference will actually be about.

Secondly, the summit is not about "pleasing" this or that country. It is not about empty slogans and hollow promises. It is a serious, global initiative aimed at reviving the moribund talks about the future of the Middle East, probably the most volatile region of the world.

We co-organize this conference not in spite, but — precisely — because of our EU membership, our special relationship with the United States and our good relations with most Arab countries, which we have nurtured for decades. Poland is simply the most appropriate host in terms of diplomatic convenience.

Poland perhaps understands Israel's sensitivities a little better than some of our partners in the EU

Thirdly, the primary objective is to assemble all the pivotal actors in one place and kick start a process in which everybody would hold a stake. Peace and stability in the Middle East are our common responsibility. It is about time to put all hands on deck.

We can't solve the regional problems with the European Union and without President Trump. But we also cannot

solve the same problems with Trump and without the key players from all over the world.

The Times of Israel: Will the Israeli-Palestinian conflict play any role at the conference, and if so, in what way?

Marek Magierowski: We are not entitled to restrain participants from touching upon a particular topic, but we do not intend to focus on the Middle East peace process at the Ministerial. There are other international fora dedicated to this important issue.

The Times of Israel: What are Poland's positions on the core issues of the conflict: settlements, Jerusalem, security? Would Poland consider moving its embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem even before a final Israeli-Palestinian peace deal is signed? The US and Guatemala recognized Jerusalem as Israel's capital. Russia, the Czech Republic and Australia have recognized West Jerusalem as Israel's capital. What's Poland's stance?

Marek Magierowski: Very briefly: in this respect, we stick to international law. As an EU member state and as a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council, we have our commitments and, like I said before, we cherish our international credibility. Therefore, the relocation of the Polish embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem is not being contemplated right now, surely not before the status of Jerusalem is finally defined.

The Times of Israel: Does Poland recognize Israel as a Jewish state (as Germany, the US and other states have done?)

Marek Magierowski: Poland recognizes Israel as a state, within its internationally acknowledged borders. How the Israelis define their own state — it is up to you.

The Times of Israel: Netanyahu has made no secret of his desire to get closer to Eastern and Central European nations to subvert what he describes as the EU's "hostile" attitude toward Israel. How do you view Warsaw's role vis-a-vis Israel-EU relations? Would you agree to let Netanyahu instrumentalise warming bilateral Israel-Poland ties to improve his country's standing in Brussels?

Marek Magierowski: All EU member states run their own foreign policies, even though there is coordination in multiple areas. Besides, several different formats exist within the European community — V4 being one of them. It is no secret that some Western governments have a "cooler" approach to the Israeli

government and Mr. Netanyahu himself.

My personal view is that Poland perhaps understands Israel's sensitivities a little better than some of our partners in the EU. However, the warming bilateral ties with Israel do not necessarily jeopardize our relations with other EU countries.

The Times of Israel: One of the most controversial topics in Israel-Poland ties was last year's joint statement on Poland's role in the Holocaust. How do you respond to the harsh criticism Yad Vashem (and senior Holocaust historians) issued of the statement? Is Yad Vashem's understanding of what happened during the Holocaust flawed?

Marek Magierowski: The Polish embassy cooperates with Yad Vashem on a regular basis. My appreciation for this institution and its research efforts is boundless. On the other hand, the Yad Vashem historians also realize how important Poland and the Polish contribution is in the wider context of their commendable endeavor, particularly in terms of managing the archives and sharing the scholarly expertise.

Notwithstanding the diverging views we may have on several issues regarding historical research, despite the differing narratives, I strongly believe it is our common duty to overcome the discrepancies and work together to preserve the memory of the Holocaust.

The Times of Israel: Why did the Polish government make such great efforts to promulgate this document, translating it into several languages and publishing it in newspapers across the globe?

Marek Magierowski: Every Polish government, regardless of its political leanings, has the duty to combat stereotypes and plain lies about Poland's role in World War II. It is really puzzling how little is known worldwide about what really occurred in German-occupied Poland during the Holocaust.

The infamous term "Polish death camps" is just the tip of the iceberg. Let me give you an example of another blatant semantic distortion. "Germans" are no longer "Germans." They are "Nazis." Unless you read a story about, say, a "German woman who rescued a Jewish family."

Whereas when you read about Poles who collaborated with the German occupiers and denounced Jews, they are invariably "Poles." Unless you read a story about a Pole who rescued a Jewish family. Then this Pole, quite mysteriously, becomes... "a non-Jewish neighbor." It's a gross manipulation.

The Times of Israel: Israeli historians took particular offense to the joint declaration seemingly downplaying Polish complicity in Nazi crimes and equating anti-Semitism with “anti-Polonism.” In hindsight, can you understand their criticism? Or do you maintain that the joint declaration correctly juxtaposes those two terms?

Marek Magierowski: Let me quote one of the paragraphs of said declaration: “It is obvious that the Holocaust was an unprecedented crime, committed by Nazi Germany against the Jewish nation, including all Poles of Jewish origin. Poland has always expressed the highest understanding of the significance of the Holocaust as the most tragic part of the Jewish national experience.”

The Holocaust was unique and incomparable to any other genocide in the history of mankind. As is anti-Semitism — an unacceptable, abhorrent attitude that we should do our utmost to eradicate. There is no intention to draw a parallel between anti-Semitism and anti-Polonism.

Nonetheless we cannot turn a blind eye to the anti-Polish commentaries, statements and even unsavory jokes based solely on ethnic prejudices.

Polish Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki speaks to six Poles who rescued Jews during the Holocaust in Warsaw, Poland, February 26, 2018. (AP/Czarek Sokolowski)

The Times of Israel: Poland makes great efforts to remember the Holocaust, but seems very keen on minimizing, if not entirely ignoring, Polish complicity in Nazi crimes. On International Holocaust Remembrance Day earlier this month, Polish officials issued statements hailing Polish people risking their lives to rescue Jews and highlighting the suffering of Poles at the hands of the Nazis, but making no mention whatsoever of Poles keenly aiding the Nazi death machine. Do you dispute Yad Vashem’s assertion that “at least tens of thousands, if not hundreds of thousands, of Polish Jews perished during the war due to actions of their Polish neighbors”? If so, how would you describe Polish complicity in Nazi crimes? Do you think it serves the memory of the Holocaust,

and Polish-Jewish relations, to entirely ignore Polish complicity, as if there had been no such thing?

Marek Magierowski: Firstly, let me quote again the Morawiecki-Netanyahu joint statement: “We acknowledge and condemn every single case of cruelty against Jews perpetrated by Poles during World War II.” What does the Polish government try to hide here?

Secondly, I must strongly protest against the very term “Polish complicity.” It insinuates that Poland was consciously and willingly collaborating with Germany in the extermination of the European Jewry. No, it was not.

Poland was invaded and occupied — by Germany and the Soviet Union. Polish soldiers fought the Germans on all fronts. There was no Polish puppet government. No Polish [Vidkun] Quisling, no Polish [Phillipe] Petain. No Waffen-SS division composed of Polish nationals.

We must not forget the painful past, but it is also our moral obligation to tell the whole truth, no matter how complex, in all its aspects.

We lost six million citizens, approximately half of them of Jewish descent. We lost cities, villages, infrastructure, artworks. Poland was devastated. This is the not-so-unimportant context that is too frequently missing from the spectacular headlines about the alleged “Polish complicity.”

And yes, some of my fellow countrymen committed abominable crimes against their Jewish brethren. Before, during and after the war. I have no reservations in saying that they were Poles. Not “bandits,” not “criminals,” not “non-Jewish neighbors.” No need to conceal their nationality. They were Polish, they spoke Polish, they were born in Poland.

And they “excluded themselves from the Polish society,” as Polish President Andrzej Duda once famously said [in a July 2016 speech], referring to the perpetrators of the pogrom in Kielce in 1946. We must not forget the painful past, but it is also our moral obligation to tell the whole truth, no matter how complex, in all its aspects.

HOUSE OF REMEMBRANCE

to older brothers in faith



The memory of Jews who for centuries inhabited Polish villages, towns and cities should be preserved by their successive generations. It is their

children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren who should look after Jewish cemeteries, light candles in synagogues, and sweep the acid out of the Jewish corners. Unfortunately, after the horror of the Holocaust, the Jewish shtetl was deserted, the noise of Jewish disputes, prayers, conversations and singing died away. The paths to Jewish cemeteries have overgrown, and in what were Jewish houses, looking for pictures of fathers, mothers, Sabbath candlesticks, mezzuzah at the entrance and a violinist on the roof is in vain.

Years ago, the Pope from Poland – John Paul II, called the Jews our elder brothers in faith. Later, he often called Jews with that name. He took his steps to the Birkenau fields, to the monument at

the Umschlagplatz in Warsaw and to the Nozik synagogue. We heard that voice. We saw the traces he left behind. We want to follow this path, taking up the heritage of memory entrusted to us “older brothers in faith”

We want to rediscover the traces that they – Polish Jews – have left here, where we live today. We want to call them by their first name. We want to listen to their stories. We want to mention and mourn their tragic death. We want to remember them as brothers and sisters.

We are Catholics in whom Pope John Paul II instilled this quest. We will visit the places where Jews lived, where they worked, where our older brothers died in faith. We will read their names. We will honour their memory.

We do not intend to set up any organization, association, initiate actions or raise funds. We want to be in the places of Jewish history and the Jewish tragedy. Where there are no Jewish descendants, we want to retain the memory of our Jewish brethren.



A plaque was placed on the memorial wall in the Rżuchowski Forest. there is a memorial plaque commemorating Hersz Gumprich, who in September 1942 was brought here from the Łódź ghetto.



Dom Pamięci representatives took part in Israel's Independence Day celebration at Warsaw's Nozik Synagogue.

JERZY BONIECKI AND HIS POLCUL FOUNDATION



Jerzy (Jurek, George) Boniecki

By Jan Pakulski

Director of Polcul Foundation. Vice-President of AIPA

Jerzy (Jurek, George) Boniecki (1929-2003) was a heroic figure, and his life (or his six lives, as he joked) was extraordinarily rich and dramatic. It could provide material for more than one novel or film.

Boniecki was a Holocaust survivor, a miraculous survivor, one may say. Born in an educated Jewish family in Warsaw in 1929, he was nine years old when the German and then Soviet troops invaded Poland, and he was 12 when he and his parents were forced by the German occupiers to Warsaw Ghetto amidst terror, hunger, humiliation and death. Facing almost certain death, his father split the family and ordered each of the three members to escape from

the ghetto individually. Jurek was smuggled through the ghetto walls – this was the first of many miracles that saved his life, as he later told – and walked to his suburb, where he was sheltered, and later adopted, by a Polish Catholic family of three brave women living in a small apartment nearby. For Jurek, this adoption was a second miraculous escape. For his Polish saviours it was a heroic act of bravery. Under the German occupation in Poland, hiding a Jew was punished by immediate execution of all involved: the Jewish escapees and all those who hid them. Jurek's saviours were aware of this, so they promptly procured, with the help of a local priest, false identity papers and introduced a "visiting cousin" – now Jerzy Boniecki – to their neighbours.

Jurek embraced this new identity and his new family with reciprocal love and devotion that lasted for the rest of his life. He helped them to survive the years of hunger and destruction under German occupation by selling newspapers, but his heart soon drifted to armed resistance, the legendary Polish Home Army (AK) or rather its youth section, "Orleta" (Young Eagles). Jurek joined the "Orleta" enthusiastically at the age of 14. Together with about two dozen other patriotic youths he was preparing in nearby Milanówek for "military action" – the long-awaited Warsaw Uprising. Little did he know that the forthcoming Uprising, that started in August 1944, would turn into a bloody disaster consuming his beloved city and over 200,000 of its inhabitants. The commander of his detachment sensed that, and he delayed the departure of the young fighters to the battle for so long, that they found themselves separated from the city by German reinforcements and unable to reach the frontline. That was Jurek's third miraculous escape – perhaps the most fateful one. A new chapter in his life started with a "long march" south, away from the burning ruins of Warsaw and the approaching Red Army.

Under constant threat of arrest – and immediate execution – Jurek and his partisan friends escaped to the mountainous southern region of Poland, staying in abandoned schools, earning their upkeep by helping the villagers, and awaiting further orders. The war had finally ended leaving Poland forcibly allocated to what was euphemistically called the "Soviet

sphere of influence". The Soviet occupation started, with ubiquitous political terror and propaganda intensifying on the "liberated" territories. For the young AK fighters, the end of war brought neither peace nor happiness. The Home Army soldiers were declared "enemies of the people" and they were mercilessly hunted down. They knew that their days of freedom were numbered. The threat of arrest by the notorious communist MBP (Security Forces) was growing. Following the orders of the chief commander of the Home Army, the local commander formally dissolved their detachment, but most of the fighters had nowhere to go. After a few months of wondering around, Jurek decided to return to Warsaw and find his new family. He was lucky again. He found his loved ones in the same flat he left them, and re-started his new post-war life, uncertain about his future.

This is when the fourth miracle intervened. The commander of Boniecki's AK detachment was soon arrested by the Security Forces, brutally tortured, and then sent to a show trial falsely accused of molesting his young troopers. The miracle was that, even when tortured, the commander did not give away the names of his soldiers. Jurek was safe – for a while. He entered the University of Warsaw, successfully completed law degree (just in case!), learned English and French, and started working in foreign trade, where he soon earned a position of respect and appointments abroad. But he never felt safe, though he got married and settled in Warsaw. His marriage suffered the consequences of this persistent fear and anxiety, so he decided to start a new safe life abroad. After an appointment as a trade attaché to India, where he became aware of many problems of under-development and environmental degradation, Jurek was sent to Australia, where he promptly asked for political asylum, divorced, and started a new life with a new family: his beloved Zosia and her young son. He left behind the storm of political threats and denunciations.

Australia provided Jurek's fifth miraculous escape. He left Poland just before some of his AK comrades were arrested. But the beginnings of his "fifth life" down under proved very difficult. Jurek (George to his Australian friends) and Zosia had no money, no friends, and no stable employment. For a while they were selling doonas from door to door. And then the sixth miracle happened. Boniecki started a small import business, and soon struck a proverbial

gold. His company, called "Sto lat" ("Bottoms up" in Polish) had blossomed allowing Jurek to re-start his social life, political engagement and intellectual pursuits.

He was fiercely anti-communist – as one would expect of a political refugee from the communist-dominated Poland – but equally fiercely pro-democratic and supportive of the budding Polish dissident movement. He soon befriended the like-minded family of a Polish-Jewish-Australian refugee, Richard Krygier, the founder and editor of the *Quadrant* magazine, and started collaboration with the anti-communist Polish émigré circles in Australia and overseas. He also befriended the legendary editor of *Kultura* (a Polish magazine published in Paris), Jerzy Giedroyc, a famous writer, Gustaw Herling-Grudziński, a widely admired wartime underground hero and later director of the Polish section of Radio Free Europe, Jan Nowak-Jeziorański, and a famous Polish dissident writer and the future post-communist minister, Andrzej Drawicz. This was a very powerful circle of friends to which he invited all of us, his Australian collaborators.

Boniecki had a rare gift – for which we envied him. He was attracting most interesting and talented people, winning their trust, and turning them into close friends. He also had many other gifts: good-natured companionship, business acumen, literary talent and, above all, a good judgement of people and politics. He published in the best Polish émigré journals, wrote novels, maintained links with famous anti-communist dissidents and organised pro-democratic political lobbies. By the mid 1970s, he had formed an Association in Support of Andrei Sacharov, a famous Soviet dissident-physicist. When the Solidarity movement erupted in Poland in 1980, he founded his beloved Polcul Foundation – his favourite child, as he used to say.

Till 1980, Boniecki and most of his Polish and Australian friends thought that communism would start collapsing in its birthplace, the Soviet Union – hence his initial support for Soviet dissidents and their East European sympathisers. The sudden eruption of the Polish Solidarity movement changed his mind. It convinced him that the Big Change would start in Poland – not where communism was born, but where it was challenged by a mass pro-democratic movement. But this challenge had to be supported not only morally and politically, but also materially, especially in the face of mass persecution

of Solidarity activists. Such practical support became the main aim of Polcul – Independent Foundation Supporting Polish Culture.

Polcul Foundation

Polcul was a brilliant idea and an immensely successful political initiative (as he subsequently realised), in spite of the fact that the Foundation operated clandestinely for the first ten years. Polcul granted annually 30-40 financial awards of US\$500 – an equivalent of a good annual salary in then communist Poland – to the most distinguished pro-democratic writers, publicists and social activists (mainly from the Solidarity and affiliated movements) in Poland. One award per year was granted to non-Polish dissidents in neighbouring communist countries – an acknowledgement of interdependence of oppositional activism and solidarity with international democratic movements. The Foundation was registered in NSW and run – on a purely voluntary basis – by Boniecki himself with the help of four Australian friends who became Foundation directors. The funds came mainly from the “anonymous Australian businessmen” (Jurek kept his financial backing secret until the late 1990s), as well as private donations from a few Polish migrants, a one-off grant from NED (National Endowment for Democracy), and numerous small contributions from staff and supporters. The laureates were nominated by prominent Polish dissidents and were selected from among the pool of candidates by an international Jury consisting of the prominent Polish intellectuals in the West, including Jerzy Giedroyc, Jan Nowak Jezioranski, Gustaw Herling-Grudzinski, Leszek Kolakowski and many others. The Awards, known in Poland as “polkule”, were smuggled into Poland by trusted “couriers” and distributed to the winners through the clandestine network of political dissidents and Solidarity activists. The list of laureates – many under false names, to avoid persecution – were published in Paris *Kultura* and the main underground publications in Poland. The whole operation – clandestine till 1990 – was supervised and coordinated in Poland by a legendary underground Solidarity activist and prominent astronomer, Jan Hanasz and his Solidarity friends.

In the first decade of clandestine operations (1980-89) Polcul awarded about 450 pro-democratic dissident intellectuals, writers, activists and journalists in Poland, and about a dozen “neighbours”. Today, the list of those early laureated reads like

Who’s Who of Polish pro-democratic opposition and the subsequent Solidarity governments, regardless of their orientation: Bogdan Borusewicz, Zbigniew Bujak, Jacek Czaputowicz, Jacek Fedorowicz, Wladyslaw Frasyniuk, Bronislaw Geremek, Zbigniew Herbert, Jan Jozef Lipski, Jacek Kuron, Tadeusz Mazowiecki, Adam Michnik, Jan Olszewski, Donald Tusk, to mention just a few. It included, among others, the current President of the European Council, three subsequent post-communist prime ministers of Poland and more than a dozen ministers. While Polcul’s reputation grew, so did the interest of the communist secret services. Fortunately, the conspiracy worked well, and the Polcul network never suffered political betrayal – which all of us, Jurek’s friends, attributed to Jurek’s skills and “Boniecki’s Luck”.

When European communism finally collapsed in 1989, Polcul was revamped into a foundation supporting the budding democratic civil society in Poland, and many Foundation’s activities – now officially celebrated by the government – moved to Poland. Boniecki was soon identified as Polcul founder and decorated with the Golden Cross of Merit by Lech Walesa. The number of volunteers involved in Foundation’s activities has doubled, and the award ceremonies were moved to the Senate, and then to the Museum of Warsaw Uprising. We celebrated the 20th anniversary of Polcul Foundation in Sydney and Warsaw, but soon after that Jurek fell ill and died, leaving Polcul to the care of his closest friends. He also left a significant part of his estate to the Foundation. We have renamed it “Polcul – Jerzy Boniecki Foundation”, and have continued its activities, now increasingly focused on supporting Poland’s young democracy and budding civil society. For the last five years the awards have been presented twice a year, in the presence of by the Australian Ambassador in Poland, still in the Library of the Museum of Warsaw Uprising, and under the portrait of Jurek Boniecki. Last year we presented the 1600th Polcul award, and this year we start preparations for celebrating the Foundation’s 40th birthday.

The Jewish roots

This brief reminiscence would be incomplete if it failed to mention Boniecki’s attitude to his Jewish roots. It was a complex attitude, as all Polish-Jewish relations are, and Boniecki seldom talked about it. He never hid his Jewish roots, and mentioned them



Polcul Award Laureates, May 2018. On the right, Polcul Directors: Adam Warzel and Jan Pakulski

proudly, though reluctantly, which is understandable, considering the trauma of war and the Holocaust. He had many Polish-Jewish friends in Sydney, and he enthusiastically supported ALPA (when it was formed in 1991) in developing Polish-Jewish dialogue in Australia.

But he was reluctant to talk about his Jewish family and started a search for his Jewish parents only after arriving in Australia. Jurek discovered soon that his mother, who escaped “to the east”, to the then Soviet-occupied Lwow, committed suicide a few months after her escape from the Warsaw Ghetto – though Jurek never believed the “suicide story”. To his happy surprise, he discovered that his father, who escaped “to the west”, not only survived the war, but also started a new family in the USA. Surprisingly – and that upset Jurek – his father did little to find him in Poland, though such a search would have been near impossible, considering Jurek’s new identity.

Jurek had visited his father in America, but the meeting was not a happy one. Obviously, they grew apart, and

there were some difficult questions they asked each other. He also disliked his communist half-brother on mother’s side. But he rejoiced meeting his American niece, who cultivated her Jewish identity and traditions. They had met and corresponded until Jurek’s death. He also joked about his Family’s intense political involvements, though – as it turned out – on both ends of the political-ideological spectrum. While Jurek hated communism – which he experienced in the worst Stalinist version – one of his nieces fell for the leftist revolutionary icon, Che Guevara, got pregnant with him, and escaped with Guevara to Bolivia (where both were killed). Since learning about it, we jokingly called Jurek “Che’s Uncle”. When I asked him on one occasion whether he identified as Jewish, Polish, or Australian, he laughed and said, if I recall correctly, “all the above – and this is possible only in multicultural Australia”. He was probably right, but I think that not only the multiple identification, but also such an intense and miraculous life as led by Jurek Boniecki could only be happily completed in Australia.

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KRAKOW B'NAI B'RITH APPALLED AT POLAND'S REFUSAL TO PROVIDE RESTITUTION TO HOLOCAUST VICTIMS



Polish politician Konrad Berkowicz puts a skullcap on the head of Law and Justice Party lawmaker Anna Krupka.

5 May 2019

B'nai B'rith International President Charles O. Kaufman and CEO Daniel S. Mariaschin have issued the following statement:

B'nai B'rith is appalled at the absolutist stance of the Polish government that it will never provide any restoration or compensation to Jews whose property was stolen during the Holocaust.

Polish Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki and his Law and Justice party have clung to the view that because Poland was also a victim of Nazi Germany it cannot be held responsible for crimes committed against Jews. They are therefore denying rightful and long-overdue compensation to Polish Jews whose property was stolen during World War II. However, some Poles did participate in crimes against Jews, before, during and after the war.

Poland's post-war Communist regime nationalized much of the property stolen from Jews. Morawiecki says any restitution to Jews must be paid by Berlin.

Last year in the shadow of a Polish law that would have criminalised talk of Poland's complicity in the Holocaust, we noted that Poland must acknowledge a history of anti-Semitism that preceded the Holocaust and persists to this day.

We also condemn the disgraceful and brazen act of anti-Semitism by Polish politician Konrad Berkowicz, who forced a kippah on the head of Law and Justice Party leader Anna Krupka while saying she is "selling the country to the Jews." When Poland denies its history, acts like these further illustrate the country's problem. This event is especially despicable considering that it took place in Kielce, the home of a horrific pogrom carried out against Jews in 1946.

ASPJ GENEALOGY OPEN DAY!

11th August 2019

Featuring **Michal Majewski.**



Michal Majewski. Historian, graduate of the Institute of History of the University of Warsaw with professional specialization – archiving and management of documentation and completed thematic block – history and culture of Jews in Poland (2009).

From 2013, he studied at doctoral studies at the Historical Institute of the University of Rzeszowskiego. Since 2015, member of the Board of the Association of the Jewish Historical Institute in Poland.

From 2013, he is an employee of the Museum of History of Polish Jews, currently as head of the historical information section.

Specialist in archival research, coordination and supervision of researchers' works including archival queries, indexing of archived inventory materials and coordination of translations of historical materials. Michal was one of the curators of the On the Jewish Street (interwar years) gallery of the POLIN Museum core exhibition.

He also runs his own genealogical search laboratory "Mishpaha".

More information coming soon.



**Australian Society of Polish Jews
and their Descendants**