



Rosh Hashana Sameach from the board of ASPJ

Rosh Hashanah Artist: Arthur Szyk

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PRESERVE EDUCATE PROMOTE

“Australian Society of Polish Jews and Their Descendants (ASPJ) is dedicated to preserving and promoting the historical and cultural heritage of Jewish life in Poland and to fostering understanding between current and future generations of the Polish and Jewish communities”

The ASPJ coordinates with the established Jewish and Polish communal bodies, religious leadership, governmental, parliamentary and diplomatic bodies, as well as historical, cultural and educational organisations in both Australia and Poland.

Polish–Jewish dialogue in Poland today is growing, particularly among the post-communist, educated young. There is a growing understanding and acceptance of the past, both the good and the bad. A new spirit of positive cooperation has emerged. Young Catholic Poles, more than ever before, are expressing an interest in the Jewish history of their country. This dialogue and interest needs to be nurtured and encouraged.

We organise educational and cultural events that cover the broad range of Polish–Jewish relations.

Our *Haynt* magazine is published three times a year, showcasing cultural, social and political articles of interest to Polish and Jewish communities.

ASPJ is a resource for educational material and offers a speaker service in a variety of topics relating to Polish–Jewish relations.

The Henryk Slawik Award is bestowed by the ASPJ to a person or institution that helps foster a deeper understanding of Polish–Jewish history and relations.

ASPJ Oration invites national or international speakers who can address complex and relevant issues regarding Polish–Jewish concerns.

Based in Melbourne and Sydney, Australia, we invite all people, Jewish and non-Jewish, whose roots lie in Poland, to join our organisation.

Disclaimer

The opinions expressed in this publication are those of the authors. They do not purport to reflect the opinions or views of ASPJ or its members.

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FROM THE PRESIDENT



Ezra May
President ASPJ

Dzien dobry and welcome to our latest edition of Haynt.

In our last edition, a mere few months ago in Autumn 2021, we were optimistic that after what seemed a long, dark, continuous Covid impacted 2020, we were on our way to returning to a more normal, albeit CovidSafe, permanent existence.

However, as everyone is only too acutely aware, Covid remained an ever present threat throughout the world and returned with a vengeance in Australia in late June, first hitting Melbourne before hitting Sydney harder. Although we remain thankful for the relatively low, at least by international standards, illness & death rate here, we sincerely hope for the Covid pandemic to quickly dissipate as our vaccination rates rise.

The intermittent return to circuit-breaker and snap lockdowns throughout 2021, makes me think that if the buzz phrase for 2020 was 'we are living in unprecedented times', this year it could be 'we are living in unpredictable times'. With the uncertainty of being able to schedule in-person events, as outlined in previous editions of Haynt, the Australian Society of Polish Jews & their Descendants (ASPJ) was again significantly impacted in our original suite of planned 2021 events & functions.

However, building on our 2020 pivot to hosting online webinars, I am very proud of the range of ASPJ lectures we continued to offer. Of particular acclaim was our webinar: History on Trial, with acclaimed Holocaust historian Jan Grabowski. This webinar along with our other ones featuring: Poland Chief Rabbi Michael Schudrich; Michael Rubinfeld, Director of FestivALT; and Dariusz Popiela, a Polish Olympian and founder of People, not Numbers are available for viewing on our website www.polishjews.org.au and

our recently launched Youtube page search for ASPJ.

Indulgently, a highlight for the ASPJ was the awarding of a Medal of the Order of Australia (OAM) to Izydor Marmur in the 2021 Queen's Birthday Honours List for "service to the Jewish community". Izi, having served two terms as President of the ASPJ for a total of 6 years, as well as being Vice-President for 3, is well known to many of our members and friends. The friendships, relationships and connections Izi formed, particularly with leaders of the local Victorian Polish community, was of critical importance to the successful establishment of the ASPJ. Additionally, Izi's professional production of our newsletter *Haynt* greatly increases the reach of the ASPJ, both nationally & internationally.

Personally, the guidance, support and encouragement given to me by Izi from my first involvement in the ASPJ onwards has been most rewarding and appreciated. And on behalf of the ASPJ, Izi - congratulations on your OAM. It is most well deserved. For those unaware, Izi has recently decided to retire formally from the ASPJ and devote more time to pursuing his artistic passions. Izi's contributions will be sorely missed, although he will still remain involved in its activities.

Looking forward, the ASPJ is seeking to boost its Board and we look forward to being able to make some announcements in this regard shortly. The ASPJ is also continuing to develop & produce future webinars with a range of local and international guests in the short term. We also have an outstanding line-up of guests who have accepted invitations to visit Australia, when possible. Our preliminary 2022 & 2023 calendars appear very impressive.

Regrettably, we have still not been able to host a function to formally launch our NSW chapter of the ASPJ, originally planned for March 2021. We are hopeful of being able to do so when the situation in NSW permits.

Continued next page

Finally, after its postponement last year, the ASPJ is working towards hosting in December 2021, as an in-person attendance event, its Henryk Sławik Award to an individual or organisation which contributes to a greater understanding of the unique and dynamic contribution by the Polish Jewish community to the all-embracing Polish culture and ethos.

We look forward to seeing as many of you as possible at both our upcoming online and especially in-person functions.

As we approach the upcoming Jewish New Year season, the ASPJ wishes everyone a Sweet & Happy New Year. May it be a year full of health & happiness and importantly may we return to living both pandemic- and restriction-free!

Shana Tova, Szczęśliwego Nowego Roku, Happy New Year.

Ezra May
President

FROM THE NEW SOUTH WALES DESK



Estelle Rozinski
Vice President

Dear Friends,

It is hard to remember a time when we were not in lockdown. The NSW team is in a form of suspended animation but our ideas continue to take shape with our Sydney launch still scheduled for October 2021.

On 26 September, Covid restrictions notwithstanding, the Sydney Jewish Museum will showcase four animations entitled "...and he taught the canaries to sing", celebrating life in pre-war Jewish Poland. Originally sponsored by the Polish Consulate in Woollahra, this event will include a Q&A with the respective animators, Stephen Durbach and David Asher Brook, and a short taster of music

in Polish, Yiddish and English performed by Klezmer musician Michael Seef on clarinet, singer Ella Haber and Yianni Adams on guitar.

It is also our hope that this creative program will be on show to the public again at the Waverley Library galleries in 2022, coupled with a dynamic series of lectures on Polish-Jewish life past and present to be part of the libraries public programming.

In other exciting news it gives us great pleasure to welcome our new board member, Professor Lucy Taksa. Professor Taksa brings with her a wealth of experience ranging across all areas of industrial relations law, history and archival research. In 2019, she was named one of the Australian Financial Review Women of Influence in Diversity and Inclusion. Her incisive vision, proactive disposition and creative approach will be an asset to our organisation. We look forward to working with her.

Please stay safe in these difficult times.

With warm regards,
Estelle Rozinski

FROM NIEMCZA TO OAM



By Izydor Marmur OAM
Past Co-Vice President

I was born in 1949 in Niemcza, a small town in Poland. I have no memories of this place, as I was still very young when my family moved to Wroclaw, a city devastated during the second world war. The atmosphere was gloomy not only because of the destruction, but also due to the oppressive Communist regime. I was old enough to sense the pressures that my parents, our family, as well as our friends and neighbours felt.

I didn't experience antisemitism directly, but I knew that a lot of Jews did. Seeing the writing on the wall for Jews in Poland and little opportunity for a good future for me and my brother, our parents made a few unsuccessful attempts to leave. Finally, in 1962 the family managed to leave for Australia.

Of all the members of my family, it was easiest for me to adjust. Though I felt some nostalgia for my childhood, arriving in Australia seemed like coming out of darkness into the light. I embraced my new country and it embraced me.

In college and in the following years I felt a sense of belonging in the multi-ethnic, multicultural group of friends, where everyone was comfortable in their identity. At that stage, my Polish and Jewish background didn't feature much in my consciousness.

In 1973 I spent some time in Israel, where I met my wife. We came back to Australia together and, through her, my connections to the Jewish community in Melbourne became stronger. We worked for a while with the Jewish Welfare Society, later did work for the Jewish Holocaust Centre, and the involvement gradually grew.

Bernard Korbman OAM, at the time the CEO at the Jewish Holocaust Centre, proposed the idea of forming an organisation dedicated to breaking down stereotypes and building a dialogue and goodwill between the Polish and Jewish communities in Victoria and wherever else it is possible. He was aware of deeply entrenched prejudice against Poland and Polish people in many within the Jewish community. Among those who carry the burden of the Holocaust memory, many see Poland simply as a Jewish graveyard and regard all Poles with suspicion.



Me (right) and a friend in Wroclaw

We felt that continuing to hold such attitudes and prejudices against an entire group of people is unfair and harmful to everyone involved, and that creating some bridges could enhance harmony and well-being. This was the motivation behind the creation of the Australian Society of Polish Jews and Their Descendants (ASPJ).

My Polish background became relevant in these circumstances, and my portfolio within the organisation was the liaison with the Polish community. I had the privilege of meeting and

working with many wonderful people from the Polish community in Melbourne, who want to patch up differences between us and move on to better relations. I am grateful for the support and friendship afforded me by these people over the years.

As part of my involvement with ASPJ, I visited Poland several times and have become aware of a growing number of people in Poland who are fighting hatred and prejudice, are committed to preserving Jewish heritage in Poland and are the guardians of Jewish sacred sites.

Though there is much room for improvement everywhere, it is good to acknowledge progress and to continue supporting those who work for a better world.

Although I have retired from my post on the board of ASPJ, by no means am I giving up on the important task at hand. I will do as much as I can to help ASPJ continue on their mission.

Thank you to everyone who supported, worked with me and thought me worthy of the honour of OAM bestowed on me.



L-r: Marian Pawlik OAM, Natalie Sulleyman MP, Bernard Korbman OAM and Izydor Marmur OAM

THE WHITE STORK SYNAGOGUE IN WROCLAW POLAND



White Stork synagogue in Wrocław today

From Wikipedia

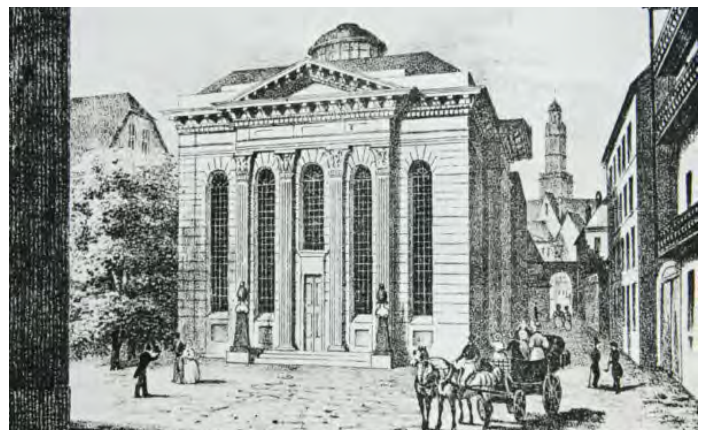
The synagogue, which opened in 1829 when the city was known as Breslau and part of the Kingdom of Prussia, is a three-story Neoclassical designed by the architect Carl Ferdinand Langhans (1781–1869). Langhans was one of the foremost 19th-century architects of Silesia. He was among Germany's foremost theater designers. He also designed the Breslau Actors' Guild Theater and Opera House. The original interior, now lost, was designed by the painter Raphael Biow (1771–1836) and his son Hermann Biow (1804–1850). The name was taken from an inn of the same name which had previously stood on the site.

The main prayer hall is surrounded on three sides with women's galleries. Two levels of galleries to the north and two on the south flank a single gallery on the eastern Torah ark wall. The wooden frame of the Torah ark and the damaged tablets of the Ten Commandments are all that remain of the original religious features.

During the Kristallnacht the interior of the building was destroyed by the Sturmabteilung who also tore up the Torah scrolls. On the same night, the New Synagogue, which served the city's Liberal community was burned

to the ground by the Nazi paramilitary groups. The White Stork synagogue, which at the time served Conservative Jews escaped that fate, because it was located close to other buildings and the participants in the pogrom were concerned that any fire would spread to non-Jewish structures.

The synagogue was renovated by the city's Jewish community and became a place of worship for Jews of all sects until 1943. In that year, the Nazis took over the building and turned it into a warehouse for stolen Jewish property. The city's Jewish inhabitants



Proposal for White Stork synagogue 1820. Completed 1826.

were rounded up and sent to death camps, with the synagogue's courtyard serving as a collection point, in the same way as Umschlagplatz in Warsaw.

After the war, the city's Polish authorities turned over the building to the new Jewish community in the city. It functioned as both a community center and a place of worship, despite underfunding, the emigration of Wrocław's Jews abroad, and repeated vandalism by so-called "unknown perpetrators" ("nieznani sprawcy" a Communist era Polish code word for individuals committing crimes on behalf of the secret communist police). After the 1968 Polish political crisis, which saw a Communist-sponsored anti-Semitic campaign, most of the city's Jews left Poland and shortly thereafter, religious ceremonies in the synagogue were suspended.

The synagogue was in use until 1974, when the authorities expropriated it and gave it to the University of Wrocław, which used it as a library. In 1989, the

university transferred the building to the Musical Academy. It was purchased by a private firm in 1995. It was subsequently returned to the Jewish community and was under renovation for over a decade. The renovations were completed and the synagogue rededicated in 2010. There are plans for the synagogue to be used as a Jewish Museum.

On October 11, 2012, during the local gay rights parade, a small window of the synagogue was broken with a stone thrown by an unidentified vandal believed to have belonged to an anti-gay sympathizer of the right-wing Polish popular revival protesting on the sidelines. Police analyzed the video, but no arrest was made. The incident was assessed by authorities as simple act of vandalism.

In 2014, it celebrated its first ordination of four Reform rabbis and three Reform cantors since the Second World War. The German Foreign Minister attended the ceremony.

ADOLF RUDNICKI – FIGHTER AND AUTHOR

Adolf Rudnicki was born to a Hasidic Jewish family. After attending a trade school, he worked as a bank clerk. His writing career began in 1930 when he published his short novel *Death of the Operator* in the current events journal *Kurier Poranny*. He first gained popularity in Poland with his 1930s novels *The Unloved* and *The Rats*.

He was captured by the Nazis during the invasion of Poland, but managed to escape. After a brief period of service in the Polish Army, he went to Lwów and joined the National Jewish Committee. Around 1942, he returned to Warsaw and was active in the underground. He joined the Home Army in 1944 and took part in the Warsaw Uprising. After the war, he published the novels *The Golden Windows* and *The Merchant of Lodz*, and the short story collection



Epoch of the Ovens, all concerning the Holocaust and the Jewish resistance. The widely used term "epoka pieców" (*Age of the Ovens*) comes from one of his works.

After 1953, he began writing essays on a wide range of topics which were ultimately collected in a series of volumes called the *Blue Pages*. During the 1960s, his works took on a mystical tone. In 1964 he was one of the signatories of the so-called Letter of 34 to Prime Minister Józef Cyrankiewicz regarding freedom of culture. He spent most of the 1970s in Paris, where he was married and

had a son. He returned to Poland, largely forgotten, in the 1980s and lived in Warsaw until his death.

His story *The Unloved* was made into the film *Niekochana* (1966).

PROFESSOR LUCY TAKSA JOINS THE ASPJ BOARD



Professor Lucy Taksa, PhD was born in Wałbrzych, Poland. Her maternal grandparents, who came from Okuniew and Stanislawow, survived World War Two in the Caucasus region of the Soviet Union. After the war, together with their daughter, they resettled in Wałbrzych, previously Waldenburg. Through assistance from HIAS and the Australian Jewish Welfare Society, Lucy migrated to Australia with her parents and maternal grandparents in 1961. Her paternal grandmother arrived in Sydney two years later.

Originally trained as an historian at the University of NSW, where she later worked as an academic, Lucy has investigated the lives of working people and migrants, using oral history and archival research. She has published on these subjects, memory and memorialising and tangible and intangible cultural heritage, and various dimensions of management and the organisation of work, gender, cultural diversity, EEO and multiculturalism. She co-authored

an article with Rabbi Ninio, on Being Jewish and Feminist in Australia and later contributed to a chapter comparing Jewish working lives in Australia, France, Israel and the U.K.¹ Most recently she has published on migrant entrepreneurs and the integration of humanitarian migrants to Australia.

Previously, she contributed to oral history projects and exhibitions funded by the Australia Council, the NSW Bicentennial Authority, the NSW Council on the Ageing and NSW Migration Heritage Centre, among others, and to historical documentaries.

She was a non-judicial member of the Equal Opportunity Division of the NSW Administrative Decisions Tribunal, between 1996-2007 and Chair of the Board of NSW State Records and Archives from 2007 until December 2012. During the latter period, while she was Vice President of the Emanuel Synagogue Board, Chair of its Social Justice Group and member of the NSW Jewish Board of Deputies Social Justice Group, she promoted connections between Emanuel Synagogue and Indigenous communities.

Lucy is currently the Director of the Centre for Workforce Futures at Macquarie University's Business School. In the past she has been Director of the Industrial Relations Research Centre, Head of the School of Organisation and Management and Associate Dean Education in the Faculty of Commerce and Economics at UNSW and the Head of the Department of Marketing and Management and Associate Dean (Research) in the Faculty of Business and Economics at Macquarie University. Since 2015 she has been a Non-Executive Board member of Settlement Services International Ltd., (SSI) one of the largest not-for-profit organisations providing settlement, employment, disability and out-of-home care support services for migrants and refugees. She helped set up the SSI Refugee Student Scholarship Scheme in 2015, now funded by Allianz. In 2019, she was named one of the Australian Financial Review Women of Influence in Diversity and Inclusion.

“JEWISH MUSIC IN POLAND BETWEEN THE WORLD WARS”

Extract summary from a *Jewish Music in Poland between the World Wars*. A book by Issakhar Fater.

During the 19th century, music was the most neglected branch of art in Jewish cultural and social life. While there were numerous congresses about literature and theater, and many art exhibits, the Jewish community still lacked organized musical activities. The great musical revolution achieved in Russia by Joel Engel and his associates from the Jewish Music Society in Petersburg was possible thanks to good advice of non-Jewish musicians, such as Rimsky-Korsakov and his students who were convinced of the value of the Jewish musical heritage. Jewish contemporary music developed in three great musical centers: America, Palestine, and Poland. The musical traditions of each of these centers were different; each carried its own burden of foreign influences that needed to be controlled.

Jewish musicians in America sought integration. Many Jewish musicians moved away from tradition and adapted all that was characteristic for American styles; atonal Indian cantilenas, angular melodic contours, and modern harmony based on sonance.

In the Palestine, from the time of “Chibat Zion” movement, Jewish music was a faithful reflection of the new life in the old/new country. At first, the music mixed famous styles, expressing enthusiasm and patriotism, religious and familial feelings. However, younger generations of composers did not maintain close connections to the musical past. The Jewish folk music traditions tended to be neglected.



Emmanuel Mané-Katz's *Klezmer Musicians*

During this time the best conditions for the development of Jewish music existed in Poland where the music remained a continuation of the past. Folk song was a part of daily Jewish life.

At the time when the first organizations were created to collect and preserve Jewish song in Petersburg and Moscow, Warsaw and Lodz already had Jewish concert organizations, sponsoring a rich musical life. Even before World War I there were hundreds of choirs in many cities. Liturgical music had the highest position in society, but the development of music for

theatrical performances was also quite impressive. In the Interbellum Poland there were many theatres and theatrical ensembles, each with its own orchestra. Many songs by Josef Kaminski, Isa Szajewicz, Henech Kon, and others became very popular. Various parties, groups and cultural societies initiated the creation of music schools, organizations, institutions, and courses. During the 30s these activities intensified, as Jewish musicians began to lose their jobs elsewhere and Jewish community organizations established Jewish concert series and orchestras. Nonetheless, the greatest wonder in the world of Jewish music in Poland was the Jewish audience filling the halls for an immense number of performances, concerts, opera spectacles and other musical occasions. Concerts given by cantors, symphonic orchestras and choirs became holidays, with halls filled to the brim. When discussions about “What is Jewish Music?” were conducted in America and in the Palestine, Jewish composers, conductors, and music lovers, as well as choirs and orchestras were thriving in Poland. On the shores of the Vistula they composed, arranged folk songs, gave concerts, and enjoyed the traditional Jewish melodies.

NEW HENRYK SŁAWIK MONUMENT UNVEILED



Sławomir Pastuszka, Vice-President of the Jewish Religious Community in Katowice at the unveiling of the monument

Representatives of Hungarian, Israeli and Polish organizations took part in the official unveiling of the Henryk Sławik monument.

Also present were a number of organisations, central and local authorities plus most of all the inhabitants of Szeroka Street. Everyone unanimously emphasized that the hero deserves great respect for his deeds.

The monument stands right next to the house where he was born.

The unveiling of the monument was preceded by an ecumenical prayer led by clergy of three denominations: Roman Catholic, Evangelical-Augsburg and Judaism.

'Let the attitude of Henryk Sławik mobilize us to unity, build bridges of friendship that last longer than war, hatred and all human turmoil,' Bishop Adam Wodarczyk appealed at the end of prayers.

The monument standing in front of the church in Szerocki was officially unveiled by Anna Hetman, Mayor of Jastrzębie-Zdrój, together with Marta Ritecz-Sekulic, Deputy Consul General of Hungary in Poland.

'The monument is to become a symbolic place, uniting people and showing the values of patriotism, courage, nobility, love of freedom and the belief that every human being is important regardless of religion, place of birth or social status,' emphasized Anna Hetman.

Thanks to the forward-looking, efficient organization established by Henryk Sławik and his cooperation with the Hungarian side, tens of thousands of Poles survived. According to historians, several thousand Polish Jews were included in this number. In the face of Germany invading Hungary, these people would share the fate of Hungarian Jews, said Dr. Andrzej Sznajder, director of the Institute of National Remembrance in Katowice, who emphasized that it was an important moment in the history of Poland, Hungary and Israel.

This was also pointed out by Sławomir Pastuszka, Vice-President of the Jewish Religious Community in Katowice, who additionally noted that Sławik's history and fate show that what counts is what unites people, not what divides them.

'Henryk Sławik showed us what it means to be human. That differences do not count, but what matters is what lays within. Each of us has the right to life and freedom. Sławik showed what freedo

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THE UNCOMFORTABLE TRUTH



Prof. Jan Grabowski. Image source: YouTube

By Karen Pakula

Jan Grabowski is unafraid to speak the uncomfortable truth. “The history of the Shoah – of the fate and extermination of the Polish Jews – has become a huge, unresolved Polish problem, not a Jewish problem,” he said in an exclusive interview for ASPJ’s webinar series. “And this is true whether you are dealing with fascists and antisemites, or with democrats in the centre, or left-wing people – it is where politically split sections of society come together.”

Even at his home in Canada, where for decades he has taught at the University of Ottawa, the award-winning Holocaust historian and author has attracted the wrath of Poland’s nationalist authorities and popular press.

In 2014, his seminal book, “Hunt for the Jews”, which examines the extent to which Poles gave up Jews to the Germans in WW2, became a lightning rod for nationalists enraged by the stain it left on the good name of Poland. Internationally, however,

the work received plaudits, winning Yad Vashem’s International Book Prize.

Since the election of PiS, the pressure in Poland on Grabowski and his academic colleagues has only intensified. A Government-sanctioned narrative of the Holocaust holds that Poles are both the noble victims of Nazis and the unimpeachable saviours of Jews. Nationalist organisations have been bolstered by Government funds to monitor historical research. And in 2018, the so-called Holocaust Law made it an offence to accuse the Polish nation of Nazi crimes against Jews.

At the time of writing, Professor Grabowski was awaiting the outcome of an appeal of a libel suit brought over a single passage in 2018’s “Night Without End”, a two-volume, 1700-page academic work co-edited by Grabowski that, once again, examines the relationship between Poles and Jews during the war. Despite significant praise, this book, too, has become a mobilising force for the gatekeepers of Poland’s reputation. The libel suit – sponsored by the government-affiliated Polish League Against Defamation – was launched against Professor Grabowski and his co-editor Barbara

Engelking. It was the first time that Poland's Memory Wars were waged in court and an ominous omen of things to come.

"It triggered a violent reaction on the part of the Polish State and aligned NGOs and so-called patriots," Professor Grabowski said. "One of the most powerful organisations – the Institute of National Remembrance – formed a special detachment of historians, whose only role was to look at each and every footnote trying to find an error in order to discredit or destroy the reputation of all the authors."

In the space of one week, Professor Grabowski had the dubious honour of being on the front page of a major circulation Government-aligned weekly magazine. "So this happened," he said. "My face, with the words, 'falsifier of history'... I don't think an Australian Prime Minister would go out of his way to pinpoint as a traitor of the nation and an enemy of the people a historian working at a local university. But this is what happens here."

At the very core of Polish national identity, he said, is the idea that "WW2 had been a time not only of sacrifice but of the highest moral standards of Polish society". At the same time, the Poles had been the victims of brutal and ruthless occupation. "Which is entirely true – we had been occupied and murdered by the Soviets on the one hand, and by the Nazis on the other. And around this narrative, generations have been schooled."

This official Holocaust narrative leaves no room for any Polish wrongdoings, such as the pogroms at Kielce and Jedwabne. But these two infamous events were just the tip of the iceberg, according to the research of Professor Grabowski and his colleagues. "Wherever you put your finger on a map, it will bleed," he said.

In the current political climate, he continued, "critical history is no longer allowed in Poland."

To see the webinar with Professor Grabowski, go to www.polishjews.org.au

Australian Society of Polish Jews and Their Descendants Presents

Jewish Łódź today

Featuring

**Joanna
Podolska**

The Marek Edelman
Dialogue Center, Łódź

**Kasia
Jeleń**

Guardians of Memory
Association, Łódź

**Dawid
Gurfinkiel**

HaKoach,
Łódź

Wednesday 18 August 2021 at 7.00 pm

Zoom Webinar ID: 820 5900 5738

Please click the link below to join the webinar:

<https://polaron-au.zoom.us/j/82059005738>



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

...AND HE TAUGHT THE CANARIES TO SING



Photographer Jasmine Jahani

By Ruth Tofler-Riesel

Late in 2020, the consulate of the Republic of Poland with the support of the Consul General of the Republic of Poland Monica Konczyk sponsored a small pilot project of three animations celebrating the diversity of Jewish life in Poland before 1939.

When the project was launched on 20 May 2021 at the Polish Consulate in Sydney, it quickly became apparent that the appreciative audience was hungry for more stories. On this evening they saw, they felt, and they learned about aspects of Jewish life in pre-war Poland that had frequently been lost amidst a more pressing historical narrative.

'...and he taught the canaries to sing' is the creation of Sydney artist, curator and educator Estelle Rozinski who uses her art practice to explore the commonalities and differences that make up our communities. The animated vignettes created by celebrated Australian artists Anita Lester, David Asher Brook and Steven Durbach are visually rich, engaging and transporting..

The vignettes portray simple yet heart-warming scenes from everyday life in Poland before the war: pranks played on the streets of Lodz, a father teaching canaries to sing, and the antics of a sister, a brother and their grandfather clock. Rozinski hopes



Photographer Jasmine Jahani

L-r. The Consul General of the Republic of Poland Monica Konczyk, Izidor Marmur OAM, Esther Marmur and Estelle Rozinski

these animations will help challenge the stereotypes of pre-war Jewry, and leave us wanting to know more about the shape and texture of the ordinariness of everyday life. Her aim with this project is to bring a new perspective to the stories of Jewish Poland, offering us a warm and rich history to coexist with the tragedy of the Holocaust.

A discussion between curator Rozinski and the artists was followed by a musical performance that drew us further into Polish Jewish life. Michael Seeff and his Klezmer clarinet lured us into the richness of days gone by; Ella Haber (vocals) accompanied by Yianni Adams (guitar) captivated the audience with her compelling rendition of Polish, Yiddish and Hebrew songs specially learnt for this event.

Of particular poignancy was Haber's rendition of Geshen Tsar Me'od in Hebrew and Polish, *'The world is a narrow bridge but the most important thing is not to be afraid'*, underscoring the importance and power of individuals and friendship.



Photographer Jasmine Jahani

Artists Steven Durbach and David Asher Brook in conversation with Professor Konrad Kwiet



Photographer Jasmine Jahani

Yianni Adams on guitar with singer/musician Ella Haber



Photographer Jasmine Jahani

President of the Polish Community Council of Australia Malgorzata Kwiatkowska with Estelle Rozinski



Photographer Jasmine Jahani

Artist/animators Steven Durbach and David Asher Brook



Photographer Jasmine Jahani

Yianni Adams on guitar and Michael Seeff on clarinet



Photographer Jasmine Jahani

The Consul General of the Republic of Poland Monika Konczyk, the consulate staff and Estelle Rozinski

THE SHUDEKER FELDSHER



Illustration: Izidor Marnur

By Rahel Cohen- Łażyczak

Translated and abridged by:

Beni Warshawsky, Los Angeles

Yizkor Book Page 244

Many of us have never heard of a feldsher, but a feldsher was the main source of health care for the poor people of Zdunska Wola. Who could afford to go to a doctor? Reb Yosef Łażyczak was the Shudeker Feldsher, as he was known in the city and the surrounding area. Presumably, he got the name Shudeker Feldsher because he originated from the neighbouring town of Shudek (Szadek in Polish). Legends are told of the extraordinary way he conducted himself both as a Jew and equally as a feldsher.

Reb Yosef went to Breslau for his studies to become a feldsher. There he received his diploma and received his license to prescribe medicine. However, when he returned home he did not become the type of feldsher

normally found in the Jewish world of the time. Many a Jew, upon becoming a feldsher, would abandon or at the very least bend, their Jewish practice and of course modernise their attire to increase their standing among Jews and non-Jews. Reb Yosef was cut from a different cloth.

Reb Yosef did not change. He remained a warm-hearted traditional Jew observing to the last detail the established Jewish way of life. His religiousity was not limited to performing ritual acts, but he acted out his Jewish beliefs in his daily activities. Quite often a patient lived far away and whether it was summer or winter, rain or snow, Reb Yosef found these were insufficient reasons to hire a horse and carriage and transgress the Sabbath. On the Sabbath, even though he himself was not a rich man and had a large family, Reb Yoseph refused to take payment for his services. He was often called to treat people who suffered physically and were in difficult financial straits. In those cases, he would not take any fee for his visit but would rather discreetly leave a few coins under the patient's pillow, so as not to cause unnecessary embarrassment.

He wasn't the kind of person who shut himself off in a little corner of religious observance, but was active in communal life, an active member of various philanthropic institutions, including the leadership of the Chevra Bikur Cholim, the Society for the Care of the

Sick. To the end he remained a caring, selfless Jew true to his ethics, who alleviated the suffering of his fellow man. Reb Yosef passed away in 1917. May his memory be a blessing for all.

FELCZER Z SZADKA

Autor: Rahel Cohen- Łażyczak

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Pewnie niewielu z nas wie co znaczy słowo felczer. W swoim czasie dla biedoty zduńskowolskiej był on głównym dostarczycielem opieki zdrowia. Kto mógłby sobie na to pozwolić by pójść do lekarza! Reb Josef Łażyczak był znany w mieście i okolicy jako Szudeker felczer, a znany był tak dlatego że pochodził z pobliskiego miasta Szadek. Legendy chodziły o jego nieskazitelnym zachowaniu jako felczer i jako Żyd.

Reb Josef studiował we Wrocławiu gdzie otrzymał uprawnienia felczerskie i prawo do przepisywania leków. Gdy wrócił do domu, w odróżnieniu od wielu innych felczerów, pozostał wierny tradycjom i zwyczajom żydowskim. Wielu po otrzymaniu dyplomu felczera, dla zwiększenia swego prestiżu, porzucali bądź też modyfikowali tradycje i zmieniali strój.

Reb Josef był zupełnie innym człowiekiem. Nietylko że dalej skrupulatnie przestrzegał zwyczaje i tradycje, ale również dlatego jego pobożność nie ograniczała się do wykonywania wszelkich rytuałów religijnych. Dzień w dzień wdrażał w życie swoją wiarę. Często było tak że trzeba było w szabes pomóc choremu który mieszkał bardzo daleko, a drogi były zasypane śniegiem lub zalane wodą. Uważał on iż nie jest to dostatecznym powodem by wynająć konia lub bryczkę i łamać szabesowe prawa.

Nie był bogatym człowiekiem, ale nigdy od nikogo w szabes nie przyjmował zapłaty. Bywało i tak, żeby oszczędzić wstydu, pod poduszką biednego zostawiał kilka złotych.

Był on również zaangażowany w życie społeczne. Był członkiem wielu organizacji filantropijnych, między innymi był jednym z członków kierownictwa Chevra Bikur Cholim, Towarzystwa Opieki Chorych.

Do dnia swego ostatniego, pozostał pełnym miłości do człowieczeństwa altruistą, którego celem życia było niesienie ulgi bliźniemu.

Reb Josef zmarł w maju 1917. Błogostawiona niech będzie Jego pamięć.



Street scene. Zdunska Wola pre world war two.

SUMMARY OF THE PRESENTATION BY PROFESSOR BARBARA ENGELKING



Professor Barbara Engelking

By Prof. Gosia Klatt
President AIPA

The Australian Institute of Polish Affairs (AIPA) held an on-line event with Professor Barbara Engelking from the Centre for Holocaust Research at the Institute of Philosophy and Sociology of the Polish Academy of Sciences.

Bio: Professor Barbara Engelking is the author of many books related to the issues of the Holocaust. Her research focuses on the experiences of the Holocaust in the accounts of the Survivors, attempts to describe this experience also in the light of all other available sources (official and personal documents, letters, accounts, memories) and perspectives (victims, witnesses, executioners). The Centre for Holocaust Research of the Institute of Philosophy and Sociology of the Polish Academy of Sciences focuses on conducting interdisciplinary research, combining different methodologies, breaking existing patterns of describing the Holocaust, serving to reveal various

cognitive perspectives and points of view, and showing the heterogeneity and ambiguity of historical matter.

Over 20 guests attended the event with Prof. Engelking, where our speaker introduced a genesis of her research interests and her academic career. She graduated with a university degree in psychoanalysis of children however her personal interests, stimulated at home by her father who was a university Professor, led her to undertake her PhD in history focusing on Jewish history and culture. As can be expected individual testimonies and personal interviews of survivors become her most important data collection instrument. However, in the 1980s there was little interest in sharing these stories in Poland. It was 1989 which brought a significant shift in a willingness of Holocaust survivors to share their stories. "It was like a floodgate after 4 June 1989" which resulted in 40 interviews and a new publication titled *Zagłada i Pamięć* recording the experience of Holocaust and its consequences based on autobiographic material. That was a breakthrough research experience which led to further publications and collaborations including: *The Warsaw Ghetto – a guide around non-existent city* (2001) with Jacek Leociak.

It is a description of the Warsaw ghetto from the time when it was closed to the outside world (16 November 1940) up to its liquidation (16 May 1943), based on information from literature on the subject and on published and unpublished testimonies: memoirs, diaries, documents, and letters. It presents a reconstruction of the topography of the ghetto, the public transport routes, the institutions (the Jewish Council and others), schooling, trade and other aspects of economy in the ghetto, as well as social and cultural life. It also includes much information about everyday life in the ghetto and numerous illustrations and maps.

In 2003, at the Institute of Philosophy at the Polish Academy of Sciences, she successfully completed the 'habilitation' process and was promoted. This provided her with the opportunity to create her own research group and thus create the Polish Centre for Holocaust Research. Since then this completely independent Institute has been focusing on undertaking research and broadly disseminating the findings through a variety of platforms.



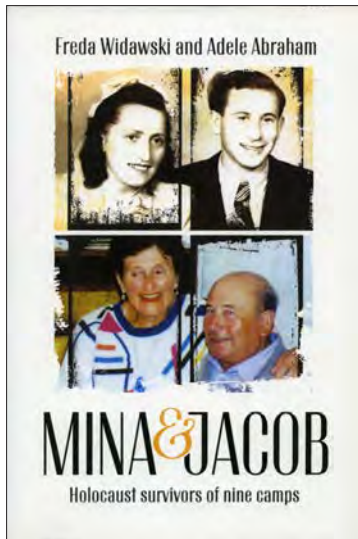
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MINA & JACOB – A STORY OF SURVIVAL AND MIGRATION



In December 2019, the book *Mina & Jacob – Holocaust survivors of nine camps* was launched at the Sydney Jewish Museum. It is the result of a labour of love by Adele Abraham and Freda Widawski, who wrote it in order to honour the memory of their parents, the memory

of family members who perished in the Holocaust, and at the same time to celebrate their parents' humanity, their love of life and indomitable spirit. In her speech, Adele said,

We are grateful to our parents for sharing with us their life philosophy: be positive and love life; acceptance of others, Jacob stressing that even during the darkest years he was helped by others' humanity. We remember his generosity of spirit, which allowed him to see goodness in people during the worst of times, when so many behaved so cruelly.

Professor Konrad Kwiet, resident historian at the Sydney Jewish Museum, who launched the book, acknowledged the depth and the seriousness of the research undertaken by Freda and Adele:

What they undertook can be called 'memory work', producing a monumental study which goes far beyond the limits of a 'memoir'. The study was long in the making, Much time has been spent to trace and evaluate the 'sources' – the empirical evidence on which the study rests. Freda and Adele have accessed and examined historical records kept in archives across the globe. They have worked through the relevant literature, published in Polish, German and English. And, most importantly, they have listened to the voices of Holocaust survivors, recorded in 'Oral History' programs.

First and foremost, to the testimonies of Mina and Jacob, then to the testimonial accounts of other survivors and last, but not least, to their own recollections. One of the hallmarks of this study is the skilful integration of historical narratives and testimonial accounts. If you like, the mix of history and memory. What emerges, is an epic family story...

Freda described this process:

At the core of the book are Mina's and Jacob's recorded testimonies which provided the roadmap into their past: the places, people and events that shaped and impacted on them; as did the testimonies of friends and strangers who had common experiences.

Along the way we met amazing people, strangers and loved ones, who contributed in many ways in bringing this book to fruition. Lifelong friends who shared their memories of our parents. Dedicated staff of numerous institutions in Poland, Germany, Israel, the USA, who assisted with searching through archives and providing records. Our extended families in Israel, France and the US, provided vital information about our families. And those who took on the onerous task of translating documents and testimonies from German/Hebrew/Yiddish. We are grateful to them all, and to each one of you who simply asked 'how is the book going', giving us the support needed to move forward.

It has been a slow and at times a painful process, but incredibly enriching. Over the years, Adele and I have shared many journeys together, starting with the epic one that brought us to Australia as children. But this journey by far has been the most rewarding. We laughed, we cried, we agonized over a word/paragraph. But always tried to hold foremost in our minds the image of these two amazing people, walking hand in hand together.

IS RESTORING ISRAEL-POLAND TIES A SISYPHEAN TASK?

By Sebastian Rejak and Zvi Rav-Ner

Over the last 30 years, Israel and Poland have built a friendly, mutually-valued relationship and yet almost destroyed it. A relationship needs time to grow strong, but it can sometimes dismantle overnight.

It may then need even more time and good will for parties to rebuild trust. That is exactly what Poland and Israel will need.

Bad decisions, bad emotions

Reading the exchange of statements and social media posts between the countries, we are moved to ask "What went wrong?"

One would be tempted to answer by noting the latest bill amending the Polish Code of Administrative Procedure that sharply affects the process of property restitution. But the story starts a bit earlier than that, and events of three years ago set the stage and the tone for what we are witnessing today.

In January 2018, Poland adopted a law that sought to regulate what can and cannot be said about responsibility for the Holocaust. Those ascribing to the Polish nation or Polish state responsibility or co-responsibility for Nazi crimes committed by the German Third Reich would have been punished for up to three years in prison.

That understandably caused an outcry among Holocaust scholars and was met by criticism from Jewish organizations, Israel, and the U.S. State Department. Although authors of statements about forms of Polish complicity in the Holocaust can still be sued in court, the penal element was removed from the law.

Could it be worse? Yes.

In February 2019, yet another chapter in Polish-Israeli distrust was penned when then-foreign minister Israel Katz, allegedly quoting former prime minister Yitzhak Shamir, said in a TV interview that Poles imbibe anti-Semitism with their mothers' milk. (Shamir had retracted those words in two press interviews in the 1990s, but who would remember such "details"?)

Poland then refused to send a high-ranking official to a political summit in Israel where the prime ministers of the Czech Republic, Hungary and Slovakia had arrived for a meeting of Visegrad Group leaders with then-prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

The following two years were marked by almost complete silence between top Israeli and Polish officials. During that time Israel went through four elections, the last one leading to a new coalition government sworn in on 13 June. In the meantime, while anti-Semitism was becoming more visible in the public square in Poland, economic cooperation between the countries continued to grow.

A new opening that wasn't

With a new government, one might have thought there is a chance for a new political opening. And that is not entirely irrational. Psychologically this is a mechanism that we often see work in politics: new people have new ideas, a different approach, a different language. However, that did not happen.

Poland's parliament, led by the majority Law and Justice party, and joined by the Peasant Party, the far-right Confederation, the Left, and a few other opposition MPs, adopted a highly controversial bill amending the Polish Code of Administrative Procedure.

The amendment was relatively simple, on the face of it. Its objective was to strengthen the reliability of law, particularly when it comes to administrative decisions pertaining to property.

The reason for the law, legislators explained, was to implement the Constitutional Tribunal's May 2015 verdict. The Tribunal aimed to limit the possibility to challenge Communist-era administrative decisions on nationalization of property.

Not surprisingly, reactions in Israel were emotional, as reflected in the foreign minister's comment on Twitter.

"No law will change history," he wrote. The bill "is a disgrace that will not erase the horrors or the memory of the Holocaust."

"This is not the first time that Poles have tried to deny what was done in Poland during the Holocaust," he said.

Polish Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki responded that he would make sure his country won't pay a penny "for German crimes."

So, a law that was clearly imperfect and would have made it impossible to declare invalid administrative decisions older than 30 years, was understood as another example of Poles wanting to deny (at least parts of) Holocaust history.

The controversy was also depicted as a "Polish-Jewish" clash, a conflict over which narrative of World War II and the Holocaust is right.

However counterproductive the law is, and we both think it is, presenting it as a threat to the memory of Jewish Holocaust victims is questionable and rather misleading.

An estimated 80-85% of property claimants are not Jewish. As the World Jewish Restitution Organization pointed out in its June 22 press release, "The proposed legislation ... would harm claimants, including Holocaust survivors and their families as well as many other Jewish and non-Jewish rightful property owners."

Can the law be fixed?

But let's come back to the law itself and the rationale for it. It is often repeated that the Polish parliament had no other option than to act in line with the Constitutional Tribunal's verdict of 2015. Is that really so?

The short answer is yes. The long answer is generally yes, but in practice the parliament could have chosen a thousand different solutions. In its ruling, the Tribunal itself made it clear that "the legislator is free to choose the legal instruments serving the implementation of the constitutional values indicated by the Tribunal."

At least two questions, therefore, have to be asked. First, why only 30 years and not 50 or 70 years after which decisions could not be declared invalid? The other is about the moment the law would enter into force after it is promulgated (the so-called adaptive period or *vacatio legis*).

Why could this law not enter into force one, two, or even three years after it is passed, rather than just 14 days? The process of property restitution is already very complicated, so why make it even less user friendly?

Also, the provisions at hand could include exceptions with regard to cases pertaining to property nationalization resulting from the last war and how it affected the question of factual and legal dimensions of property ownership.

At issue is unimaginable destruction of property and huge changes in social structure for which victims of

World War II do not bear responsibility. The singular specificity of those dramatic changes has to be taken into account so that claimants, Jewish or non-Jewish, are not wronged yet another time – first during the war, then by Communist laws, and now by unjust solutions to a problem that is indeed historically, legally, and morally complex.

Can the relationship be fixed? Or at least can a healing process be started?

Instead of asking who is to blame, parties should think how they can work together to find a solution to the problem.

It is certainly difficult to undo decisions or be always driven by rational choices rather than emotions. A return to basics, it seems, is needed since basic things have been neglected.

All relationships, between individuals or states, depend heavily on communication.

Communication must precede, not follow, decisions, so much more if these decisions affect sensitive issues. This, of course, starts with how well you know your partner, what you think your partner cares about and pays attention to. And, yes, it's also about knowing where your partner may be oversensitive or may overreact.

This, too, is part of the mechanics of bilateral cooperation. If dialogue or mutual trust need to be rebuilt, it cannot start by asking the question "What should they do, what should they change for our relationship to be fixed?"

In a situation like the one between Israel and Poland, both parties should admit the following: there is too little chemistry binding them and too much destructive energy involved. Sincere communication between top leaders is necessary for the relations to start moving forward positively.

They should see each other as valued partners, which is what our countries have long been. If that is the leaders' decision, Jerusalem and Warsaw have to focus in the coming 8-10 weeks on preparing the ground for basic talks.

Importantly, they will have to realize that they bear responsibility for a relationship that a generation of Poles and Israelis have built at great price, with huge efforts.

What will leaders in Warsaw and Jerusalem choose?

Dr. Sebastian Rejak is Acting Director of American Jewish Committee (AJC) Central Europe and Zvi Rav-Ner served as Israel's Ambassador to Poland from 2009 to 2014



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