

POLAND IS COMPLICATED

**PRESERVE
EDUCATE
PROMOTE**

Winter 2018 ISSUE 3



By Izydor Marmur
President ASPJ

Following my recent trip to Poland, I am often asked: Noo, so how was it?, What about the political situation and how is it for the Jews?

More often than not my first response is, Poland is complicated. It is also a

response I got from Polish people—from cab drivers, academics, clergy and politicians. I guess it means that there is no simple answer.

Like in many countries around the world, and especially in eastern Europe, Poland took a turn toward the right.

It is clear that Poland is going through some major political turmoil. The changes that the Polish government is trying to implement, or is implementing, are not seen favourably by many, especially among the younger Poles. While in Poland, we were aware of a number of very large demonstrations. From pro-women's rights, pro-choice, pro-democracy, against changes to the high court and against making changes to the constitution. And many others.

Of course, there are pro-government rallies as well. And also many other agendas, such as pro-life, anti-immigration, anti-refugee intake, anti-gay marriage,

anti-Muslim and anti-Jewish. Thankfully, the last two mentioned are rare.

Some young Poles we met are uncertain about the future and are considering moving out, some are quite content and some are active in trying to make a change for the better.

Is there antisemitism in Poland? Yes there is. Just as it exists elsewhere. Some like to dismiss it as a small minority of misguided Poles and others see it as a mass movement. One thing for sure is that the recent political developments have allowed nationalistic antisemitic groups to come out into the open. However, this is not as obvious as it is in other places in Europe. Every Jewish person I spoke to feels safe in Poland.

Among students and intellectuals there is great interest in learning the history of Jewish life in Poland, acknowledging the positive contribution Jews have made to Polish culture, as well as learning the truth about the complicated relationship between Jews and Poles during that history.

The revival of Jewish life in Poland is gathering momentum. Today there are Jewish Community Councils in most major cities. Jewish schools, kindergartens and religious institutions are opening up.

Non-Jewish Poles are involved in restoration of Jewish sites, volunteering at Jewish events and studying Jewish subjects.

Continued on page 2

IN THIS ISSUE

Poland Is Complicated
Meyn Gedanken (My Thoughts)
Krakow Jewish Culture Festival
In One Voice
The Jewish Historical Institute
Fay's Journey

Page 1-2
Page 3
Page 4-5
Page 5
Page 6-7
Page 8

Zduńska Wola Is Not a Town
Without Jews
Jewish Community In Lodz
March '68 Exhibition In Lodz
Poland and Israel-
Frosty Relationship Continues

Page 9-11
Page 12-13
Page 14
Page 15-16



Lazienki Palace. Warsaw

We have visited Dr Kamila Klauzinska, who has been working on preserving and restoring the Jewish graveyard in her town and who is part of a network of young Poles preserving Jewish Memory in their towns. (See page 9.)

Agnieszka Rudzińska, at the Jewish Historical Institute in Warsaw, is working on a 'Oneg Shabat' project dedicated to preserving rare documents from the Warsaw Ghetto. (See page 6.)

Justyna Tomaszewska from The Mark Edelman Dialogue Centre introduced us to the work that the Centre is involved in and the exhibitions and programs they run. (See page 15.)

Shabbat dinner at the Jewish Community Council in Krakow was a wonderful experience. Most of the volunteers who work there are not Jewish.

The highlight was the Krakow Jewish Cultural Festival. Since its inception almost thirty years ago the festival, under the leadership of Janusz Makuch, has grown into

the largest Jewish festival in Europe. (See page 4.)

There are a number of small but active and vibrant Jewish communities in Poland. Many Jews from abroad are finding business opportunities, discovering their heritage, studying and enjoying what Poland can offer them.

There are still many difficult issues to be resolved in the relationship between Jewish and non-Jewish Poles. Sensitivities on both sides need to be understood and addressed.

I believe that the future success of Poland lies in the hands of the new generations. Through education and dialogue, perhaps Jewish life will find a place in Poland again.

On the personal side, from the moment we arrived in Warsaw, we were made welcome. We met many wonderful people, visited many beautiful villages, towns, cities, spent time in nature, ate great meals and enjoyed Polish hospitality.

BOARD OF MANAGEMENT

President:
Izi Marmur

Vice-Presidents:
Eva Hussain
Ezra May

Treasurer:
Andrew Rajcher

Secretaries:
Lena Fizman
Peter Schnall

Board Members:
Moshe Fizman
David Prince
Estelle Rozinski

CEO:
Bernard Korbman, OAM

Telephone: +61 (0)3 9523 9573
Email: lfizman@bigpond.net.au
Website: www.polishjews.org.au

Mailing Address:
PO Box 56,
Elsternwick, Vic., 3185,
Australia

MEYN GEDANKEN (MY THOUGHTS)



By Bernard Korbman
CEO, ASPJ

A people cannot and should not be judged by legislation passed by its government.

After all, even in a democracy, of which there are many forms, political maneuvering

for power, coalitions of unlike minded ideologies, as well as the right of breaking election promises depending on whether they are “hard core or non-core promises”, are all part of the political process.

Also, as hidden agendas by political parties are obviously never publicly debated before an election, ‘surprise’ legislation is not uncommon. We have seen this in countries around the world, including here in Australia.

And, so it is in Poland. In the Bill introduced in the Polish Parliament on 26 January 2018, (*amending the Act on the Institute of National Remembrance - Commission for the Prosecution of Crimes against the Polish Nation, the Act on war graves and cemeteries, the Act on museums and the Act on the responsibility of collective entities for acts prohibited under penalty*), a number of criminal charges and penalties, including fines and imprisonment, were introduced to prevent harm to Poland’s reputation.

This legislation has been condemned worldwide as an act which limits freedom of speech, violates academic and journalistic freedoms and inhibits historical research and artistic representations of the Holocaust.

After the passing of the initial legislation, tensions between Israel and Poland rose to boiling point and to help overcome this impasse, a review of the bill took place. Although the Polish Government amended the bill and removed the penalty of imprisonment from the legislation, historians at Yad Vashem are clearly angered that the legislation still obstructs, interferes with and prohibits genuine research and debate and ensures that a dark side of Polish history is hidden from many of its own citizens as well as the rest of the world.

As abhorrent as this legislation is, the charge by some that Poland is a country filled with anti-Semites could not be further from the truth.

The most recent research on Jewish-Polish relations during the Holocaust, especially the murder of Jews by individual Poles, Polish groups or villagers in rural Poland has been published by current Polish academics, with no punches pulled.

NIGHT without an END. Fate of Jews in selected counties of occupied Poland edited by Barbara Engelking, Jan Grabowski, Tomasz Frydel, Dariusz Libionka, Dagmara Swaltek-Niewińska, Karolina Panz, Alina Skibińska, Jean-Charles Szurek and Anna Zapalec, is a two volume publication that was released in April this year. This is one of many academic works by Poles searching for the truth.

It is also a fact that not all Poles agree or adhere to the Holocaust legislation, as journalists, academics and writers have already written articles and made public statements testing the new legislation. Brave Poles indeed. It is also a fact, that individuals have been fired from their positions in the media, education and the public service for speaking out against the government.

Of course there is anti-Semitism in Poland, as there is around the world, including Australia, where it is certainly on the rise. I also note however, that in countries usually associated with a history of tolerance and acceptance of Jews, such as England, Norway, Sweden, Denmark, Holland, Belgium and other Western European nations, an insidious and pernicious form of anti-Semitism has risen, where anti-Israel and anti-Jewish attitudes have become entrenched and accepted as part of legitimate public debate.

I never thought I would see “The Jewish Problem” type debates in this day and age. Yet, one only has to note statements and policies of major political parties such as the Labour Party in England, policies of individual provinces and/or municipal councils throughout Western Europe, especially with regard to boycotting Israeli products, writers, scientists, musicians, artists and so on to see the virulent nature of global anti-Semitism.

When you look for anti-Semitism you will always find it! Go to Poland, be adventurous, travel by train and go from town to town, talk to the locals and you will find a warm and welcoming people whose concerns, passions, interests and worldview are similar to yours. The stereotype is definitely not the reality.

TO THE FRIENDS OF THE KRAKOW JEWISH CULTURE FESTIVAL



By Janusz Makuch
Founder and director

This year marks the 30th anniversary of the Jewish Culture Festival in Krakow. This is the moment that precedes the date of Poland's regaining of true independence which took place in the memorable year of 1989 – the Year of Solidarity.

For 30 years, together – the Poles and the Jews – have been building the Reconciliation Bridge, a bridge that rises above the river of history with the effort of many generations of people of good will. I am sure that our effort has not been wasted.

Recent days have brought a lot of bad and a lot of good.

It was a bad thing that the new law intended to defend the good name of Poland brought Poland criticism that has been unheard of for decades. The government must realise that in matters as complex and painful as the Polish-Israeli-Jewish relations, they should thoroughly consult such schemes with all the interested parties. There was no such consultation. In a democratic state there is no consent to decree history or penalise people for expressing their feelings and thoughts.

But it may be for the best because the moment has come when our efforts, achievements, plans are subject to historical assessment. The time has come to check how much we're worth.

There is far too much good behind us and ahead of us to get depressed, have doubts, experience disbelief and give up hope today. Today's Poland does not only stand

for the errors of the ruling party, the bad law on IPN (The Institute of National Remembrance), the resurgent extreme nationalism, anti-Semitism and fascism. It is also, and perhaps above all, Poland of cultural, religious and political pluralism, open to an exchange of ideas, with free press and independent courts. Any action to challenge any of these values is by definition anti-Polish.

The Polish ethos is incompatible with chauvinism, nationalism, xenophobia, anti-Semitism, Bolshevism or fascism. Someone who wants just such Poland is not a son of my homeland. They are not Polish.

The Jewish Culture Festival in Krakow was initiated by the Poles and is organised by the Poles. In this sense, this very Jewish festival is one of the most Polish festivals. Its mission is to build a better world here and now – equally good for the Poles and the Jews, those from Israel and the Diaspora.

We do not divide the world – we unite it. We do not judge the world – we co-create it. We do not close ourselves in a ghetto – we open ourselves to the world.

We who build the Bridge of Reconciliation are more numerous than those who try to destroy it. I know – it's easier to destroy ...

Almost 30 years ago Poland was reborn. During these 30 years the Polish Jews reappeared in Poland. We have never ever lost HOPE – we the Poles and we the Jews. Why should we lose it today?

It is unimportant that so much divides us if there is still so much which brings us together.

Far from pathos, I read once again the words from our national anthem:

*Poland has not died yet,
As long as we live.*

And I think about how Israel's anthem is so similar to the Polish one:

*Our hope will not die,
Hope of two thousand years,
To be a free people in our land,
In the land of Zion and Jerusalem.*

There is no doubt that Naftali Hirsh Imbir, a Polish Jew from Złochów and a Zionist, introduced the spirit of the Polish national anthem to the national anthem of Israel. And there is no doubt that Józef Kajetan Wybicki, the author of the words of Dąbrowski Mazurka, the Polish

anthem, was also permeated by the spirit of hope.

The Poles and the Jews, despite the verdicts of history, have always cultivated unshakable hope – Hatikva.

They hoped to return to their homeland – to Poland, to Zion.

This hope has come true.

Today I hope for the continuation of our difficult history. We open the doors of the Festival and invite you all: Poles, Israelis, Jews from all corners of the world.

Today's Poland includes us all.

This year, we are celebrating the hundredth anniversary of Poland's (and Polish Jews') independence, the seventieth anniversary of the State of Israel, the thirtieth anniversary of the Festival.

Our hope will not die, / As long as we live.

Janusz Makuch has received Israel's "Friend of Israel" distinction marking the 70th anniversary of the country's foundation. Makuch is the only Pole to receive the title.

BEING HEARD IN ONE VOICE



By Ezra May
Co-vice president ASPJ

On 18 March 2018, The Australian Society of Polish Jews & their Descendants (ASPJ) hosted a stall at the 2018 *In One Voice* community festival. *In One Voice* is the largest communal celebration of Jewish culture in Melbourne, where thousands of people walk through the streets of Elsternwick seeing, hearing, tasting and experiencing Jewish Melbourne.

The ASPJ stall, manned by members of the ASPJ Board, was popular with many of the *In One Voice* attendees who paused to review the various ASPJ publications on display including editions of *Haynt Magazine* as well as information pamphlets regarding various ASPJ events & initiatives.



Many people advised of their Polish Jewish heritage & ancestry, with much interest being generated in the mission & events of the ASPJ. It was particularly heartening to see so much interest and thirst for knowledge from the younger generation, particularly the school children & youth group members in attendance.

Given the current high publicity & controversy surrounding the recently introduced new Polish 'Holocaust Law', as expected, some festival attendees took the opportunity to engage in a discussion regarding its nature & possible impact.

Participation in the *In One Voice* festival led to increased awareness of the ASPJ within the Jewish community as well as new members signing up.

The KRAKOW Project

Celebrating the vibrancy and diversity of the Jews of Krakow before 1939.

If you are from, or a descendant of Krakow, I am inviting you and your family to be represented in this project.

Please contact me, Estelle on 0413 557 133 or by email: thekrakovproject@gmail.com

THE JEWISH HISTORICAL INSTITUTE.



Professor Paweł Śpiewak.
Director of the Jewish Historical Institute

The following two articles are taken from the Jewish Historical Institute website. www.jhi.pl

The mission of the Jewish Historical Institute is to spread knowledge about the heritage of the thousand years of Jewish presence on the Polish lands.

The institution realizes its aim among others through presenting its collections as temporary and permanent expositions, organizing various kinds of artistic events, academic conferences and public education meetings, as well as educational and publishing activity. The Institute is both a depository of the memory of the past and a living cultural center – a place that actively participates in the process of creating historical awareness and forming civic attitudes.

The Jewish Historical Institute's objective is to care for the Jewish legacy preserved in the archives of our Institute. Our collections consist of seven million pages of varied documents. The most significant part of the collections is the Underground Archive of the Warsaw Ghetto, also known as the Ringelblum Archive.

At the Institute, we look after Jewish cultural monuments across Poland and see to their documentation. In addition, we are developing the largest Judaic library in Poland. As of today, the collection numbers over 85,000 volumes, including a few thousand old prints and manuscripts that require special maintenance.

We want to expand our publishing activity in order to publish, among others, Holocaust testimonies and works presenting the history of the Jews in Poland and around the world.

A special task of the JHI is the development of genealogical work. For people from around the world who are searching for their roots, our Institute's archives, together with the experience and knowledge of our employees, are of invaluable help.

We protect and preserve Poland's largest collection of works of art of Jewish interest which is held in our storerooms. It consists of over 15,000 pieces that we want to present to the widest possible audience. In our collection, there are works of artists of Jewish origin, as well as a rich collection of crafts and Judaica.

The Jewish Historical Institute is actively involved in educational and cultural activities that show a wide audience — especially those with a special interest in the subject — the history and culture of Polish Jews.

We want to continue our existing cooperation with partner institutions, as well as to establish new working relations with the biggest research and display centers in Poland and throughout the world that are devoted to the subjects of Jewish history, Holocaust memory and museum management.

We have the biggest research team in Poland dedicated to Jewish heritage. There are research teams working at the Jewish Historical Institute that have enabled us to develop our program of educational activities and lectures. Our primary and most important task involves conducting research in the areas of Jewish history and culture, with particular emphasis on JHI Archives-based research.

Today, the Emanuel Ringelblum Jewish Historical Institute is the longest-functioning Jewish scientific institution in Poland. As a state institution of culture, builds a scientific and academic base for the development of knowledge about history and culture of Jews, especially the history and culture of Polish Jews; it popularizes research results, provides access to surviving material testimony, and ensures complex care for resources.

“WHAT WE’VE BEEN UNABLE TO SHOUT OUT TO THE WORLD”

A permanent exhibition dedicated to the Underground Archive of the Warsaw Ghetto and its creators – the Oneg Shabbat group.

For the first time in 70 years, we present original documents of the Archive – one of the most important testimonies of the Holocaust of Polish Jews, as well as one of two authentic containers in which the documents were buried underground. The Archive, unearthed in two parts in 1946 and 1950, has become a part of the world’s memory.

The title of the exhibition, *What we’ve been unable to shout out to the world*, is a quote from the last will of 19-year old David Graber, one of three people who hid the first part of the Archive in the basement of the Nowolipki 68 (Ber Borochov Jewish secular primary school before World War II). The archive was buried in the ground during the extermination action in Warsaw.

The main subject of the exhibition will be the activity of Oneg Shabbat (Hebrew: The Joy of Sabbath), a secret group active in the Warsaw Ghetto, and the story of the unique archive they created – from its beginnings until present day. History recorded on the pages of the Archive tells the story of its authors. We want to allow them to speak after 70 years. The founder and main creator of the Archive was a historian — Dr Emanuel Ringelblum. Oneg Shabbat’s work, a proof of intellectual and spiritual resistance, was made according

to scientific guidelines, with care for objectivity and language diligence.

The exhibition presents documents, letters and testaments left by people who were about to die, accounts of witnesses and genocide victims – all hidden in one of the ghetto basements, by people who risked their own lives. These accounts, which contain pain and suffering of individual persons, have been collected and archived in a salvaged building of the Main Judaistic Library, currently – the home of the JHI.

The title of the exhibition, *What we were unable to shout out to the world*, is a quote from the testament left by Dawid Graber, a 19-year old who participated in hiding the first part of the Archive during the liquidation of the Warsaw Ghetto. While burying the Archive, he wrote: *One of the streets next to us has been already blocked. The moods are horrible. We expect the worst. We’re in a hurry. [...] Goodbye. I hope we will manage to bury it. [...] What we were unable to shout out to the world, we buried in the ground.*

The Ringelblum Archive is considered to be one of the most significant archive complexes. It was included on UNESCO’s Memory of the World list in 1999.

The exhibition is curated by Professor Paweł Śpiwak.

For more information about JHI and current exhibitions: www.jhi.pl



FAY'S JOURNEY



Judy Menczel

By Judy Menczel
Film director and producer

'Fay's Journey' was a short documentary shown on ABC TC Compass on March 26, then on iview.

The film was cut from a larger film called 'Pockets of Hope', which screened at the Jewish International Film Festival in Sydney and Melbourne.

I am the Director and Producer of both films.

My journey with these projects began many years ago when I would watch my beloved Polish Jewish stepfather Dr Abraham Feldman laughing with his friend while listening to the Jewish comedians Dzigal and Schumacher. It brought them so much joy.

When I would try and learn more about what life was like before the Holocaust, the mood completely changed and all he would talk about was how his family was taken away by the Nazis in Warsaw and Lublin and how dangerous it was to return to Poland, where his brother was shot by Poles while returning to the family home.

Poland was always described as a place of terror, and that was how I thought of it for many years.

My mother Serena was Slovakian and her entire family were taken to Auschwitz. Miraculously, she and some of the family survived.

I have been a director and producer in mainly documentary production for over 30 years, having worked at the ABC, SBS, Channel 9 and 7 and then as an Independent. Many of my films have had Jewish content such as *Angst*, a feature documentary about three comedians who were children of survivors, *When Friends Were Enemies*, about the Dunera Boys, *Old Songs in a New Land*, a history of Jews in Australia, and recently *Last Witnesses*, about child survivors of the Holocaust.

Fay Sussman is a wonderful Jewish singer. At one of her concerts in Sydney, my friend Estelle Rozinski brought her cousin Jan Gronski. He had been doing family research in Zduńska Wola, a small village near Lodz where their family had resided. In Zduńska Wola he had met Dr Kamila Klauzinska, a young woman who had preserved the Jewish graveyard in the town and who was part of a network of young Poles working on similar projects.

He introduced Kamila to me and Fay Sussman, via Skype. On hearing Fay's album, a plan was hatched.

Fay Sussman and I met with Daniel Groman, the then Consul General at the Polish Consulate in Sydney, and presented the idea of making a film showcasing these young people. Fay would sing in the small towns where no Jewish music had been performed since the Shoa, and use the tour to showcase the work and enormous interest in Jewish culture and dialogue. He organized a study tour for us to Poland and Paul Green joined the team and filmed all the people we met and the concerts we organized with Dr Kamila Klausinska.

In order to bring over the musicians and complete the film we crowd funded. With the hours of footage, we created 'Pockets of Hope' and 'Fay's Journey' and we plan to organise an educational program in the future.

Having met so many people searching for healing through knowledge and culture, I realised that my previous perception of Poland was based on only part of the true narrative, and that there is hope for a better future.

ZDUŃSKA WOLA IS NOT THE TOWN WITHOUT JEWS!



Dr Kamila Klauzińska

By Dr Kamila Klauzińska

Author and the initiator of the project

When in 1998 I began assembling the materials for my M.A. dissertation I only knew a little about the Jews of Zduńska Wola. Indeed, the teachers at the elementary school did not deal with that topic at all. I do not remember my history teacher saying the word 'Jew' ever. In the nineties, following the fall of the USSR, we came to love all that is 'western'. However, as before, our new history teacher did not mention that Jews had lived in our city. All the information about the former residents of Zduńska Wola comes exclusively from my family remembrances. Also the love of the 'western' world was not easy: like most youth in this small town, I did not know any foreigner. There were no meetings between Polish and foreign youth. And we still had to learn the Russian language (which in fact became useful many years later).

Unaffected by these events, the Jewish cemetery lasted but was often vandalized. Despite this, it always reminded me of an enchanted garden, in which among the greenery an unidentified artist put his stone sculptures. As a child I often visited there. Together with friends we invented stories based on the sepulchral

symbols. Some day in high school our painting teacher led us there and told us that exotic letters and mythical creatures would arouse our imagination and be an inspiration for our future artistic works.

Today I can clearly say, perhaps paradoxically, that the most wonderful people I know in my life I met thanks to this cemetery. In Jewish culture a cemetery is named by any of the following names: *beit ha-kwarot* – the house of graves, *beit olam* – the eternal place, – the good place, *beit ha'haim* – the place of life, *beit moed le-kol hai* – the final place for all living. To me, it is a good place, place of life. In 1998 I first met Asher Ud (Sieradzki), who arrived in Zduńska Wola with a group of youngsters from Israel. I wondered why Asher was doing this and I believe that the most appropriate answer was that suggested by Louis Armstrong when he was asked 'What is Jazz?': '*Man, if you gotta ask, you'll never know!*'. Every year Asher brings groups of pupils from the Israeli schools to Zduńska Wola. It is his way to answer questions and to bring closer to them the tragedy of the Jewish nation in WW II. Since they did not experience the Holocaust, Asher wants to show them those places, to tell them about those days so that they will never forget and they will transmit this memory to the next generations. I wanted that as well, but also something different: to bring our common history closer to Zduńskawolers.

One day a friend from Israel told me about his very first visit to Poland. About the worries he had when he set foot on the Polish ground. As he had to find a taxi to take him to the Jewish cemetery in Lodz, to find the graves of relatives, he realized that he was watching suspiciously the taxi-drivers, trying to choose one that would not look like an anti-Semite! **But ... how does an anti-Semite look like?!**

That same year we already had begun to organize a new type of lessons in Zduńska Wola's schools. We tried to show that there had been nearly 200 years of common history between Poles and Jews in our town. All the schools accepted us very warmly and with time we began organizing similar lessons directly on the cemetery grounds. Co-operation of our schools with Israeli schools developed and documentation activities were organized in the necropolis. Following one of these meetings, I clearly remember that one Polish woman

said: *'It is so strange, they look exactly the same as us!'. Amazing, isn't it? How should they look like?!*

Our grandfathers built Zduńska Wola. They lived in the same houses. Tragedies took place in Zduńska Wola and hit both Poles and Jews. In 1905 a big fire erupted in town, in one of the tenement houses on Łaska street. Sixteen persons were burnt and died, eight Jews and eight Poles. The newspaper *Kaliszanin* described the victim's funeral in this way: *"On day 6 of this month (...), two funerals took place. At about 2 o'clock p.m., Jews bore their dead on eight stretchers, with a desperate crowd accompanying the funeral, inconsolably. At about 7 o'clock p.m. a second funeral crowd accumulated at the place of the catastrophe and a procession was led by the new priest [...] to church. Many Jews accompanied the funeral, and together with others they spontaneously and willingly contributed money that was collected for Tomasz Biegalski, who was left without a family and any legacy [...]"* (*Kaliszanin*, 1905, No 186, p. 2).

Jews and Poles worked in the same factories. They walked on the same streets. They took part in the same wars. My great grandfather Ignacy was a translator during the Japanese–Russian war in 1905, the same war in which Juda, the grandfather of Menachem Daum, took part. Later he was called Juda Japanski. Ignacy knew Polish, German and Yiddish. He lived on Sieradzka Street, which was inhabited mainly by Jews before the war; merely a few dozen meters from Menachem's grandfather's house.

In 1925 Poles, Jews and Germans celebrated together the 100th anniversary of Zduńska Wola. The President of Poland at that time, Stanislaw Wojciechowski, visited Zduńska Wola. The newspaper *Kaliszanin* described that day in the following way: *"Frantic work is going on in preparation for the jubilee ceremonies in Zduńska Wola. The town gets solemn decorations in the streets which Mr. President will cross[...]. Then Mr. President, accompanied by his escort, will go to the Catholic and Evangelical churches and to the synagogue, where he will be welcome by the clergy [...]"*. (*Kaliszanin*, 1925, No 123, p. 3)

Could my history teachers ever imagine that some day these three nationalities would again celebrate together the birthdays of our town ?

Well, we did not know anyone who organized something similar: this was all new to us. Lessons on Jewish topics in schools, presentations for city residents, an Open Day in the Jewish cemetery,

creating maps of the Jewish cemetery, organizing guided visits in the cemetery, creating records of the burials, organizing a competition on Jewish topics for pupils... Was it possible to do all this? George Gershwin said: *"Life is a lot like jazz... it's best when you improvise..."*. With my Israeli friend we decided to improvise. And we took risks. To start with, there were only four of us, a mini-club of Polish and Israeli friends. But a club that suddenly, and completely unexpectedly, became interesting for a much wider crowd. With each new stage of the documentation work, new enthusiasts appeared, people with a passion and a desire to discover something different, completely new to them. A long journey had begun, whose aim was to better know our common world, and discover unknown chapters of the history of our town. This journey transformed us irremediably. There was no place anymore for xenophobia in Zduńska Wola. The local residents got accustomed to a great number of foreign visitors, and of groups of Israeli youth. These visitors became a permanent element of the local scenery. However, this was not enough: there was still a strong need for catalysts to unlock people's minds regarding Jews and Jewish matters.

Thinking about this common past, we first and foremost need to remember and to tell. And this needs to be done jointly. I can provide contact and cooperation with a large number of members of The Organization of Former Residents of Zduńska Wola in Israel, and with many descendants of the Jews from Zduńska Wola in the whole world. We want honestly to learn and integrate what was lost and forgotten. And to





reconstruct broken ties.

The association of Zduńska Wola Descendants in Israel was one of the first to organize into a community after WWII. In 1946 they brought to Israel remaining ashes of their close family members, and buried them in the Trumpeldor cemetery in Tel-Aviv. In 1968 a group of Zduńskawolers published there the Zduńska Wola book of memory – (*Yzkor Book*). However, more recently this group began to dwindle, as older Zduńskawolers found it increasingly hard to attend ceremonies. Moreover, they did not make any serious attempt to establish a contact with the town of Zduńska Wola. The authorities of Zduńska Wola, similarly, did not show either any initiative or interest. It was more comfortable to argue that the Jewish cemetery in town was an abandoned place since there were no Jews anymore. This issue had become taboo for them. When in 2001 we decided to make a small noise in the local media and to show the habitants of Zduńska Wola that the Jewish cemetery was effectively being destroyed by the residents of the town, the authorities suddenly decided to speak. In a dishonest article they held the owner of the necropolis (the Jewish community of Lodz) responsible for the sad state of things. They flatly declared that real efforts and concerns for the cemetery were actually mainly made by the town administration! They told our little group that there was no point to invest sporadic efforts by Israeli and Polish students.

I began to wonder about the impressions of my Israeli friend concerning his first visit in Poland. Perhaps he was right to fear anti-Semitic attitudes in Poland...

The situation started to change radically when our mini Polish-Israeli club began its activities in Zduńska Wola. At the same time the Zduńska Wola Association in Israel decided to elect Daniel Wagner as the new President of the organization. Our activities in Zduńska Wola stimulated the Association in Israel to life. What used

to be a static group with no initiatives began to change into a buoyant organization. More and more youngsters came to the meetings in Israel. That year, a record number – more than one hundred people – attended the ceremony near the Zduńska Wola memorial in the Trumpeldor cemetery in Tel-Aviv.

The authorities of Zduńska Wola decided to help us with cleaning the cemetery and cutting the grass and shrubs. They put signs on the streets of the town to indicate the way to the Jewish cemetery. And they agreed to help organize the Day of the Jewish Community for the celebration of the 180th anniversary of the town.

During a meeting with local politicians in 2007, someone asked me why Jews could not restore the cemetery in just one year, since they have so much money? This not only shows that such people do not know anything about the Jewish communities, and Jews in general, it also reveals some deeply rooted feelings of jealousy and classical stereotypical attitudes. And did the authorities of the town really understand the essence of our activities? Would Zduńska Wola students get to know their young friends from Israel? Would students from Israel have any chance to see in Poland a place that is not only the country where their grandfathers were exterminated?

I wish to share with you what I view as one of our greatest achievements, a single most wonderful thing I never expected that would ever result from our activities: In 2007, during the ceremony organized for the opening of a new gate in the cemetery, a young man, a resident in Zduńska Wola, approached me with a little boy. After a brief polite exchange he suddenly said that the reason he came to the cemetery was that he wanted to show his son the place of burial of his great grandfather... Jewish history and Jewish genealogy have become an integral part of my life.

We are now in 2018. I am still taking care of the Jewish cemetery, with great help from a few men from Zduńska Wola; still giving lessons to Zduńska Wola students if they ask for it; am still a guide for Zduńskawolers who visit their ancestral town, and each year I continue with the Open Day at the cemetery.

This year will mark the 20th anniversary of my involvement with the Jewish cemetery. Sadly, not everyone in town approves of my involvement, and as a result I sometimes feel like a persona non grata in my own town. But I won't let this stop me from doing what I believe is the right thing to do and will continue to try and change such negative attitudes.

THE JEWISH COMMUNITY IN THE CITY OF LODZ



The Jewish Community of Lodz building.

By Eva Hussain
Vice President ASPJ

The news of our deputy president Ezra May's trip to the Polish city of Lodz got me excited. It was his first visit to Poland and Lodz isn't on everyone's radar, especially if their ancestors don't hail from there. As a former textiles production powerhouse, Lodz has an image issue: it is known as one of Poland's ugliest cities, somewhat forgotten, dirty and unappealing. Much to the locals' dismay, it has even been called "miasto meneli" or "the city of tramps" by Boguslaw Linda, a Polish film star.

Since I was born just outside of the city and my family has lived and worked here for many generations, I take it upon myself to promote the image of Lodz to the rest of the world. I admit I have probably been blinded by nostalgia, but the city I know is beautiful, progressive and modern. It's a city of four cultures (Polish, Jewish, German and Russian), all of which have left a significant mark on its architecture, people and urban soul. Yes, it may still be a bit rough around the edges and there is much to do to get it to its former pre-war glory but I jump at every opportunity to show it off. Those that are in the know will be aware that Lodz was the only city in Poland that had the word "miasto" or "city" added to its name. People make fun of the expression "miasto Lodz" today, but before the war it indicated industrial strength, glamour and urban appeal, given that most of Poland was rural and small towns in those days.

Back to Ezra May.

With my work colleague Paula, we picked him up from the newly rebuilt Lodz Fabryczna train station. He arrived at this world class facility from Warsaw and we were to take him to ul. Pomorska 18, where he was staying for the next few nights. As we drove through the somewhat deserted city streets and as evening was setting upon us, I was working hard at diverting Ezra's attention to its more glamorous parts, hoping he wouldn't peek around street corners too much. I was also very concerned about limited food options for Ezra. Prior to his arrival, we have looked everywhere for somewhere for him to eat. In fact, there are two Jewish-themed restaurants in Lodz called Anatewka but none of them kosher. Poles are known to be hospitable. Feeding people is our only aim in life, so not being able to provide Ezra with food on his first night in Lodz was a source of much angst to us. In fact, we were mortified.

At 8 pm, we arrived at Kehila Kedosza on ul. Pomorska 18, the headquarters of the Jewish Community in Lodz, and the only place that provides kosher food in the city, hoping the restaurant or the little shop may still be open. The facility has a 100+ bed hostel, a synagogue, mikveh, kosher restaurant and even a kindergarten. Built in 1875, it was returned to the Jewish community of Lodz in 1997 and entered into the city's heritage register in 2013. The building and the surrounds are very much in their original condition: spartan, tired and outdated in places. We helped Ezra check into the hostel and left him in the seemingly capable hands of a clerk, still hoping he may get some food. Alas, no such luck. Poor Ezra went to bed hungry.

In the morning, things improved somewhat and we took Ezra sightseeing after breakfast. We even found a solution to the food crisis: beer. It improved our mood and Ezra's Polish language skills no end. Over the next few days, I was able to showcase my home town to Ezra after all. We visited the Jewish cemetery, the old synagogue, the Centre for Dialogue and walked along ul. Piotrkowska, the longest open-air shopping strip in Europe. We even attended a jazz concert, hoping we could sustain him on beer for just a bit longer. The concert didn't end that well, with my friend Wanda having to administer first aid to a young reveller, but Ezra

didn't seem too fazed. We, on the other hand, as his hosts, were left feeling mortified once again.

The following day, we met with the deputy president of the Kehila Kedosza community, Tomasz Roslonski, who enthusiastically told us of the grand redevelopment plans he has been working on with his committee for the past two years. Ezra had to sit through an hour of uninterrupted Polish delivered at 100 miles an hour but once again, he managed to get through it. My brave attempts at interpreting what was being said got us nowhere fast, so I just whispered: "I'll tell you later, Ezra".



The Reicher Synagogue.

With approximately 300 members, the Lodz community is quite small but active. With the only kosher kitchen and synagogue for miles, it also attracts people from nearby cities such as Piotrkow, Aleksandrow, Ozorkow and Zgierz. The community secured significant funding and is planning to start building a hotel, conference

centre, restaurant and the first synagogue in post-war Poland next year. Whilst some private investment is yet to be locked in, building plans have already been approved.

During our meeting, Mr Roslonski called his mother, who is in her 90s, several times to check names of some people we may know in Melbourne. She is as sharp as a tack and lives independently, with daily visits and food deliveries from her son. The family did immigrate to Sweden in 1970s but returned to Poland after a few weeks because ... they couldn't find bread that they liked. So they've lived in Lodz ever since, doing their best to preserve Jewish life in Lodz.

As lunchtime was approaching, we went down to the restaurant at the invitation of Mr Roslonski. I can't remember what Ezra ended up eating but my strawberry pierogi dish has left a very pleasant and lasting memory in my mind. In any case, the food was kosher, delicious and homely. Tick!

Work duties meant I had to leave Lodz but Ezra stayed for a few more days, sight-seeing, hanging around the community and the city itself. All in all, I think he liked it, despite all the difficulties.

We caught up again in Warsaw and Krakow, where Jewish life is more active, structured and visible. But I do hope that the Lodz Jewish community will rise above all its challenges and the next few years will see it achieve the prominence it once had. Now is the time for Jews with a Polish connection to make their mark on a country with a once vibrant and significant community. So if your family is from "miasto Lodz", go visit and see the rebirth of the Jewish life for yourself.

**DID YOUR FAMILY
COME FROM
POLAND?**

Discover the power of
dual citizenship for you
and your family!

UNIA EUROPEJSKA
RZECZPOSPOLITA
POLSKA



Polaron
European Citizenship

**TALK TO US
TODAY!**

1300 88 55 61

polaron.com.au

citizenship@polaron.com.au

THE MAREK EDELMAN DIALOGUE CENTER

March '68 CONTEXTS Exhibition

The exhibition aims to present the events that took place in Poland in March '68 in a clear, easy to understand way.

Its primary view is to present the basic factography of March '68 and to focus the attention on to the main activities that played a part during this time. Therefore, the main sections such as the political crisis in the ranks of the PRL, student rebellion, anti-Semitic purges, anti-intellectual campaign and finally the emigration of people of Jewish origin.

In other words, March '68 is presented in the context of the political, social and cultural processes that together contributed to its uniqueness in comparison to other "Polish months".

The narration of the exhibition is shown in three contexts. It takes into account both the national and the local Lodz context, and the global dimension of the year 1968, together with the birth of the generation of young opposition. However, the exhibition concentrated mainly on the first two perspectives i.e. Nationwide and Lodz.

Chronologically, the exhibition goes far beyond the title March '68, although no doubt this is the event that played a decisive role.

Although concentrating mainly on the so-called March events the exhibition does not omit the phenomena that preceded them, such as the eruption of six day war in the Middle East, the National Theatre poster for Mickiewicz play "Dziady", or the growing aspirations of the group of Communist activists gathered around Mieczysław Moczara, the so-called Guerrillas.

Likewise, the story does not end in March '68. The most numerous Jewish departures occurred in the years 1969–1970, which is after the formal completion of the brutal anti-Semitic campaign.

The part of the exhibition dedicated to the realities of March '68 in Lodz tells of the widespread persecutions



of student leaders and the anonymous students at local universities, who were imprisoned and expelled from the university for expressing their views.

The power of the then youth protests in the city and the very difficult social climate in which they were carried out is shown in this part of the exhibition.

In addition, there are examples of local media campaigns and also selected stories of people who felt most strongly the brutal force and stigmatization. Treated as strangers and unwanted, many had to leave the country and only recently had become full citizens again.

The exhibition intends to provide the visitor with the basic knowledge, in order to encourage further exploration and conversation about our common past.

A PhD student at Lodz University, Andrzej Chizhevsky, prepared the *Contexts* exhibition.

The exhibition is open until 30 September 2018.

Frostier: the deterioration of the Warsaw–Jerusalem relationship following the amendment to the Act on the Institute of National Remembrance



By Ewa Rogala
Journalist and a media professional

Polish–Israeli relations have deteriorated greatly of late. They've become particularly tense since January of this year, when a very controversial amendment to the Act on the Institute of National Remembrance (IPN) was passed. Although the laws were once again amended in June (Article 55a, removing, among others, the charge of imprisonment for attributing the responsibility for the crimes of the Third German Reich to the Poles), the bitter taste remains. Short term at least, the diminished trust towards Warsaw may be difficult to rebuild.

After six months of criticism and written exchanges, Poland and Israel signed a joint declaration regarding the amendment to the Act on IPN. Both governments reject the attribution of guilt for the crimes committed by the Nazis and their collaborators to Poland and the entire Polish nation, condemning all forms of anti-Semitism, anti-Polonism and other negative national stereotypes. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu expressed his satisfaction, saying that “the Polish government, the Parliament, the Senate and the President have withdrawn in their entirety the laws causing the storm

and dismay in Israel and amongst the international community”.

Despite this, not everyone is happy with the joint declaration of the Prime Ministers of Poland and Israel. Yad Vashem criticised the joint statement of Mateusz Morawiecki and Benjamin Netanyahu. In their opinion, even after the amendments, the Act “hinders research and supresses the Holocaust historical memory “ and “contains serious errors and lies”.

Penalties for “falsifying history”

The amendment to the Act on IPN adopted in January stated, among others, that “anyone who publicly or against the facts ascribes responsibility or co-responsibility to the Polish nation or the Polish state for crimes committed by the Third German Reich or other crimes against humanity, peace and war crimes”, was subject to fines or imprisonment of up to 3 years. The same punishment applied to those who “grossly undermine the responsibility of the actual perpetrators of these crimes”.

The amendment adopted by the Parliament came into force on 1 March. During the signing, the Polish President Andrzej Duda announced that the Act would be referred to the Constitutional Tribunal in order to examine its compliance with the Constitution.

He stressed that the laws should be formulated in an accurate, precise and clear manner. In his view, “criminal laws must not threaten the testimony of the truth about the Holocaust”.

The new laws were harshly criticised before they even came into force. Government representatives of Israel, the United States, Ukraine and other countries complained to the President. Information about the new laws was received with great concern. Interestingly, the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs appeared not to notice the critical reactions. In an official communique, the Ministry expressed hope that “work on the amendment, despite differences in how changes that were being introduced were perceived, would not affect the strategic partnership between Poland and the USA”.

Public opinion

Poles have been divided about the amendment from the very beginning. In a survey conducted early in the year by the *Rzeczpospolita* daily newspaper, 36% of respondents showed support for the new laws. Slightly more, 39%, said that the laws should be stopped, giving the international criticism as the reason for their vote.

In the CBOS (Centrum Badania Opinii Społecznej – Centre for Public Opinion Research) survey, 40% of the respondents expressed support for the criminal sanctions in the amendment of the Act on IPN for publicly spreading lies about the responsibility of the Polish state or nation for the World War II crimes. More than half (51%) of respondents believe in a different approach to misleading information. A similar number of people believe that Polish parliamentarians, while formulating provisions to protect the good name of Poland and the Polish nation, should take into account the fears expressed by the Jews.

According to Professor Szewach Weiss, the amendment affected the political situation and “harmed bilateral relations”. Perhaps, however, only “temporarily”: “The March of the Living is a symbol and a sign that we do not want to break up”, said the former Israeli Ambassador to Poland in an interview with TVN24BiS.

The current Israeli Ambassador, Anna Azari, asked by journalists for her opinion, said during an interview with TOK FM radio: “I think that we have moved on from emotions, we are now looking at decisions. (...) We are waiting”. She stressed that the Polish–Israeli relationship has not returned to normal since the amendment, but that it was not suspended. She did admit, however, that some activities were put on hold. “Diplomats from our Embassy, when invited to a meeting with Ministries, think twice whether to go”, said Ambassador Azari in a radio interview.

The Israeli Foreign Ministry “categorically opposed” the adoption of the amended law. “No law will change facts” – they stressed. Their greatest concern is that difficult episodes from the history of Poland and anti-Semitic incidents during the Second Polish Republic may get “white washed”.

The head of the German diplomacy Sigmar Gabriel reassured Poland in a special statement that Germany is taking full responsibility for the Holocaust and will condemn falsifications of history such as the “Polish concentration camps” statements.

The words of Israel Katz, the former head of Israel’s diplomatic corps and its Defence Minister, were critical. In his opinion, Poland “rejects responsibility and it lies about participation in the Holocaust”.

According to *Jerusalem Post*, sixty deputies in the 120-person strong Knesset supported a draft Act, under which the Polish amendment to the Act on IPN,

should it be adopted, would constitute Holocaust denial. The project was supported by members of the ruling coalition and some members of the opposition.

Meanwhile, across the ocean...

During discussions on the amendment to Act on IPN, the ‘US Justice for Uncompensated Survivors Today’ law is often presented as a counter argument.

In December, it was approved unanimously by the US Senate. The law gives the American authorities the right to assist international Holocaust victim organisations, supporting them through diplomatic channels in the recovery of Jewish property without heirs.

Views have been expressed that these provisions should worry Poland and that some Poles may be concerned about claims from Jews who left Poland, or their descendants.

Professor Marek Jan Chodakiewicz, a Polish–Jewish relations scholar, announced (in an interview with the Polish Press Agency) that should Act 447 be adopted “one would expect various activities to take place” (“negative pressures” or attempted bribery were discussed unofficially).

One thing is for sure: if the aim of the Polish authorities was to eliminate the term “Polish death camps”, the exact opposite occurred. People who haven’t heard the phrase before have most certainly heard it now, thanks to the controversial Act.

“Whoever spreads the misleading wording about the “Polish camps” harms the good name and interests of Poland. The makers of the Act have been promoting this vile slander worldwide as effectively as nobody else before them.” - wrote the President of the European Council, the former Polish prime minister, Donald Tusk on Twitter.

<https://twitter.com/donaldtusk/status/958993407602495489>

Indeed: most articles on the amendment to the Act on IPN repeat the controversial wording, with the proviso that it is wrong and misleading. But if it continues to be repeated, the debate can only become more heated with the mood remaining as tense as ever.

Ewa Rogala is a well-known journalist and a media professional who has worked for Polish Radio Warsaw and the BBC World Service.

With thanks to Eva Hussain, Vice President of ASPJ, founder and CEO Polaron European Citizenship, for translating the article (www.polaron.com.au)