

THE IVANSK PROJECT e-NEWSLETTER

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***Editor:** This is the last in the series of e-Newsletters devoted entirely to the rededication of the Ivansk Jewish Cemetery. It was a memorable experience for those who were there. Those of us who could not make the trip owe them a debt of gratitude for representing our far-flung Ivansker community and for sharing their memories with us. The e-News will continue to encourage and welcome additional essays from those who went to Poland.*

Our work in the cemetery is not over (and never will be). We have an obligation to assure that the site is cared for and not allowed to revert back to nature. We also have to correct the mistakes made during reconstruction: the Yiddish inscription on the plaque at the cemetery entrance was not properly prepared, and the obelisk was placed in the middle rather than near the entrance of the cemetery, as we had instructed. Having the memorial near the entrance will facilitate maintenance of the site. We are currently exploring our options to have both issues rectified.

Torontonian Witnesses Polish Cemetery Reclamation

by Andy Levy-Ajzenkopf

Staff Reporter, The Canadian Jewish News

January 4, 2007

14 Tevet, 5767



Susie Kaplan (R) and her sister Evy Eisenberg (L) stand next to the Iwaniska Stone on the Treblinka grounds.

Susie Kaplan remembers Monday Oct. 23, 2006, as one of the most bittersweet days of her life.

That day, the 58-year-old Toronto native stood at the historic rededication ceremony for the Jewish cemetery in Iwansk, Poland.

It's where her grandmother is buried, along with an unknown number of other Ivansker Jews killed by the Nazis more than 64 years ago.

"It was a very special, emotional day," she said. "When we got there we saw TV reporters, local personalities, a Polish

ambassador... and the townspeople came out to walk with us as we marched towards the cemetery."

Kaplan, her sister Evy Eisenberg and 45 other Iwansk Jews' descendants from Canada, America and Israel, took part in an eight-day trip to Poland organized by retired Pennsylvania pathologist Norton Taichman, who himself is the progeny of Ivanskers.

Taichman, 70, founded the Iwansk Project in 2001 to learn more about the history of the area's Jews and eventually to raise funds to reclaim their cemetery.

The project culminated in last October's trip and ceremony.

The group visited the Warsaw monument, as well as Treblinka and Auschwitz, among other sites.

Thanks to maps procured by Taichman, Kaplan and others were also able to pinpoint where their families' dwellings used to be in Iwansk.

"It was so emotional," she said. "My sister and I just cried and cried on the spot where my father's house once stood."

The Iwansk shtetl, known as Iwaniska to modern-day Poles, had a prewar Jewish population that numbered in the thousands.

In the evening of Oct. 13, 1942, upon hearing that the Nazis had overrun a neighbouring town, Ivansk's Jews obtained a permit to conduct a sombre burial for their Torah scrolls to protect them from Nazi defilement.

According to witnesses, the town's rabbi proclaimed that Ivansker survivors should come back, exhume the scrolls and reclaim the town.

The next day, the Nazis swarmed Ivansk, executed dozens of Jews and forced the rest onto trains bound for Treblinka, where most perished.

Upon learning this story and visiting the town for the first time in 1996, Taichman, whose father was born in Ivansk, took up the cause.

Writing to The CJN via e-mail, Taichman stated, "For me, this forgotten, violated and abandoned graveyard became a universal symbol for what happened to our people during the course of European history," he wrote. "This desecrated ground became the driving force for me to try to pay homage to my ancestors."

Taichman set up an account with the Fundacja Ochrony Dziedzictwa Zydowskiego (FODZ), the Polish Foundation for Preservation of Jewish Heritage, and used the group as an intermediary to pay Polish contractors for work on the cemetery. The project also relied on the assistance of the Poland Jewish Cemetery Restoration Project (PJCRP), a non-profit U.S. foundation based in Buffalo, N.Y.

While visiting Ivansk on numerous occasions since 2001, Taichman oversaw construction of a wall around the cemetery, as well as the grooming of its grounds, the erection of a monument, the placement of a memorial plaque and the recovery of numerous tombstones.

But the Torah scrolls were never found.

According to Taichman's research, the scrolls were dug up by locals and the leather used to make shoes.

As a further insult, most of the tombstones were used in the foundations of new buildings and are thus lost forever.

The cemetery itself was protected over the past decades as a heritage site by Polish law – the only reason it, too, was not converted for other uses.

Though he worked obsessively to see the project to its completion, Taichman took ill just prior to the October trip and never made it to the dedication.

Kaplan said her experiences on the trip left her both relieved and angry.

In Ivansk, she encountered an elderly man who remembered her grandfather and regaled her with stories about him.

It had a profound effect on her.

"I never called my father's father 'grandfather,' but now I can say it. Now I know he was a real person," she said.

But it was also very difficult being around the Poles, she said. “You walk around and look at them and you’re suspicious of all of them.”

Kaplan suggested that Jews pause to think before returning to Poland for sentimental visits.

“Polish interest in Jewish history is all about money and tourism,” Kaplan said. “There is a strange phenomenon happening in Poland now. There is a Jewish revival, but without Jews.”

Still, having experienced the rededication of the cemetery and after visiting her father’s town, Kaplan managed to retain some fondness for Poland.

“There are a lot of Poles who are very sympathetic [to Jews],” she said.

And from what one of her knowledgeable guides told her, there may be a reason for that.

“He knew a lot about the history of Polish Jewry,” Kaplan said. “We asked him if he was Jewish. He said, ‘I’m not. But if you scratch the skin of any Pole, you’ll find Jewish blood.’”

My Father’s Shtetl: A Trip to Remember

by Evy Eisenberg

Toronto, Ontario, Canada

Our trip to Poland was something that I’ll never forget; it helped to fulfill one of my dreams. It was such an emotional journey, and until this day there are many times when a particular moment, a unique experience or an unforgettable sight floods into my memory. I knew I needed to go to Poland many years ago, probably after the deaths of my parents, certainly not before their passing because they didn’t want to hear any of those notions. My kids went on “March of the Living”, and the only thing my mother asked of them was to bring back dried mushrooms. Otherwise my folks had no desire to ever go set foot on Poland again.

As a consequence of Norton Taichman’s reports about the trips he had taken to Ivansk and after reading the recollections of former Ivanskers that appeared in the e-Newsletters (especially my Uncle Yechiel Eisenberg’s memoir (see: *The Ivansk Project e-Newsletter #16, Jan - Feb 2006*), I gradually developed an obsession about going to the shtetl.

I am the oldest of 4 sisters and I spoke to each of them about the trip. Two for sure had no desire to visit Poland; on the other hand, Susie (Kaplan) my second sister initially told me that she would go. But she soon backed off: I told her I would go with her or without her. A few hours later she called back and agreed to go.

I work at the Baycrest Centre for Geriatric Care in Toronto and when I received the trip itinerary, I immediately asked many Holocaust Survivors at the Centre if they recognized the names of the places we were going to visit and to give me as much detail as they could remember.

Susie and I actually spent the first day of our trip touring Amsterdam and arrived in Poland late at

night on October 19th. Landing at Warsaw airport, Susie was very emotional: all the stories and anguish that appeared on the faces of our parents when they talked about the Holocaust and their former homes and their families, seemed to flood over us. We were satisfied to finally be in the country where so much of our family history had taken place; where our parents were born. Here, our paternal (Fayga and Nuta) and maternal (Chava and Israel) grandparents raised their children. Here, my aunts Devorah, Chana, Esther, Malka Masha and my uncles Baruch, Shaya, Shulim and Yoina were once vibrant and full of life. Only my father and my Uncle Yechiel survived.

But yet it was so unbelievably sad and frightful to be standing in a country that was bathed in so much Jewish blood.

There are so many things that stand out from the trip.

I remember the first morning going down to breakfast and meeting all my new Ivansker "relatives". There were so many from all over, and I knew instantly that we were linked together. I finally felt like I had AN EXTENDED FAMILY! And getting to know everyone during those 9 days on the bus was so special.



Treblinka: Susie (R) and I at the Opatow (Apt) marker, our mother's birthplace.

I remember walking through the huge Warsaw cemetery and its amazing array of tombstones. I was especially moved by the memorial to the million Jewish children who were murdered by the Nazis. Then there was Treblinka where I could hear the haunting voices of dead Jews in the wind that swept across the open field. On to Auschwitz, following the train tracks, imagining the unbelievable. The immenseness of Birkenau encased by double rows of barbed wire; the endless ranks of wood and stone barracks, the privy with dozens of holes cut out from the stone slabs where all sense of dignity was lost. And then inside the barracks of another concentration camp, Szkarjzit-Kaminko where my mother slept

squeezed together with hundreds of lice-infested women. And worst of all, the gas chambers and the crematorium. It was enough to drive one mad.



At the bus stop in Iwaniska



Our father's home once stood here.

I remember arriving in Ivansk and crying my eyes out. It was overwhelming to realize that my ancestors, my father's parents, his brothers and sisters all walked here. This is where I came from. Finding the place where my father's house once stood on the Road to Stazsow, across from the well; collecting stones to bring home with me; a chance encounter with a Polish man who knew my grandfather and who added inform-

ation about our family that we never knew before; the hospitality that the children and other people extended to us. All this was too much.

I remember walking to the cemetery along the same path that my family followed the day before they were taken away to Treblinka. I remember standing in the cemetery wondering where my grandmother Fayga was buried ... was her grave on the right or left side? I remember being so proud that at last there was a monument and a gate with a huge Jewish star to commemorate the memory of our people in Ivansk.

Leaving Poland, I knew I had no desire to ever go back. It would be too hurtful to return. I understood why my parents could never stomach seeing Poland again. They came to Canada to make a new life, and I don't know how they managed. Not only did they arrive with nothing, but the only relative they had in Canada was my great aunt who had immigrated before the war.

My father worked 16 hours a day buying and selling chickens in Kensington (at that time Toronto's "Jewish market"); later he went into the cattle business. My parents always put my sisters and myself before themselves; my mother never bought new things for herself only for us. They were robbed of their teenage years and suffered all their lives from what the Nazi's did to them. That's why my father called his daughters his "*feer barlant*", his four diamonds. He always thought he would have a son, and before my youngest sister's birth he had even arranged for a bris!

In later years, my mother was known as the lawyer, doctor, marriage councilor, judge. She was so wise and so capable. My mother never said "NO" or ever raised a hand to us. She was the kindest, most giving person, and from listening to some friends, she was the best mother in the world. My children only knew to give her and my father the most respect anyone can have. They loved their grandmother with all their hearts and until this day she is the biggest loss to all of us. But we feel her presence around us. As a matter of fact, a few months after her death, I was speaking to one of my sisters and said, "The thing I really miss is having mummy put her arms around me and give me a hug".

The next day my last patient in the dental clinic at the Baycrest Centre was a blind lady who was confined to a wheelchair.

And all she kept saying over and over again was, "Will someone please give me a hug?"



Thoughts on Anti-Semitism Arising from the Trip to Rededicate the Ivansk Cemetery

by Ellen Shumak Monheit

Kitchener, Ontario, Canada



Warsaw, Erev Shabbat: my husband Sonny and I enjoy dinner in the Florian Restaurant near the Nozyk Synagogue.

October, 2006

The Jewish Cemetery in Warsaw was an awesome site. The monuments were older than any I had previously seen. My great-grandfather's surname was **Warshafsky** which literally translated means "**from Warsaw**", and I wondered how many distant relations of mine might have been interred there. The monuments and memorials to the children who perished in the Holocaust and the pictures of them elicited tears of anguish and fury because of my belief that only monsters can torture and kill innocent children.

I ask myself: **"How are these monsters incarnated?**

What can future generations do to ensure the world's children's safety from these monsters?"

I pray for the wisdom to know my place in the "grand scheme" of things - **to educate, to illuminate, to set an example, for the prevention of such crimes in the future.**

On the way to Ivansk, I see many cows through the bus window. They look very similar to Canadian cows I have seen, as does the countryside on this beautiful October morning.



#5 ul Rakowska: My cousin, Mollie Bloomberg and I are photographed where our fathers' family once lived. My father, Moishe Behr Shumak and Mollie's father, Abe Shuman were brothers. I doubt whether the house that now occupies the site is the dwelling that the brothers knew.

In Ivansk I find the house in which my father was born, #5 ul Rakowska. My husband Sonny takes my picture in front of this house, and beside it. I would like to go inside but hesitate to ask. Besides, we are on a tight schedule.

I cannot describe my feelings. Disbelief that I am here for sure!

I am in the town's junior high school and the Polish children are performing a dance for us. One of the male dancers reminds me of my oldest grandson.

I am in the Ivansk Town Hall, and I have been asked to read the "**Funeral Document**" in preparation for our walk to rededicate the cemetery [see: *The Ivansk Project e-Newsletter* #3, March-April 2004). I choke with tears at the part describing **the slaughter of the children**.



In the Town Hall: I am reading the compelling story of what happened in the Ivansk Cemetery the day before our people were cruelly expelled to their deaths.



My Bubba Gitel

I am unprepared for the frenetic emotions I experience when I enter the grounds of the Ivansk Cemetery. Thoughts of the blood-soaked earth and my ancestor's bones pervade my brain. But there's also an intense sense that my coming to this shtetl and this cemetery on another grandson's sixth birthday, was the very right, very normal place for me to be!!

At the very beginning of my participation in the Ivansk Project, I dedicated my efforts in memory of my Bubba Gitel Bas Leibish Warshafsky Ve Rifka Baron. Her first husband David Schuchmacher [Shumak] – my grandfather, died when their five children were very young, and after a suitable period, she married Yankel Brawerman (Prawerman?) who was one of her suitors before she married my grandfather. Unfortunately, she was widowed once again. In 1923 she immigrated to Toronto with her third husband Moishe Chaim Teperman to join her children and her father who had been brought over in the preceding years. She and Moishe Teperman resided at 13 Kensington Ave in Toronto until their deaths. My Bubba's eyes have been my inspiration in the quest to learn more about her. "**Dahnim Oigen Hohbin Mir Tzihgiszoigen**" ("Your Eyes Drew Me In") is the label I put to a framed portrait of this amazing woman from Ivansk.



I feel my Bubba's hands on the small of my back, and I am absolutely sure that she wants me here to honour and pay my respects to her ancestors (and mine) who are buried here, as well as to all the Jews of Ivansk who perished here, or on the way to destruction in the gas chambers of Treblinka.

I gaze over the wall surrounding the cemetery at the top of this gentle hill, looking down at the shtetl of Ivansk in the distance. This is a beautiful, quiet location, and surprisingly I feel intensely serene.

We are in Krakow. Sonny and I have spent a couple of hours at the Rynek (town or market square) in Krakow. It is twilight and the Rynek is enormous, illuminated, old and majestic. Almost for the first time, I finally feel that I am in Europe, and not in a city or town in North America. I cannot get over the number of people enjoying this place on a week night.

We meet our group for dinner at the “Estera Restaurant” in the former Jewish quarter of Kazimierz. I am so very disappointed in the simulated Jewish food offered at this so-called “Jewish” restaurant. I am similarly disappointed in the phonetic, passionless rendering of so-called “Klezmer” music.

Auschwitz-Birkenau is a horrendous experience. I cannot believe that I have come to this terrible place where such monstrous things occurred. I imagine the indescribable pain, fear and despair felt by the unfortunate souls incarcerated here. It is hard to imagine that **human beings were capable of such inhumanity, callousness and insanity.**



At the entrance to Auschwitz I
“Arbeit Macht Frei”
(Work Brings Freedom)

The pond by the crematorium has been burned into my memory for all eternity. The water is perpetually grey from the human ashes that were discarded in it.

I am surprised at how ravenously I eat my very late lunch served to us just steps away from the camp. This was one of the best meals I had while in Poland. Everything tastes better if you are hungry – even the grass that the inmates would have eaten to stay alive.

When I read Sid Freedman’s erudite and magnificent memoir of the Ivansk Cemetery Rededication trip (see: The Ivansk Project e-Newsletter #22, Jan-Feb 2007), I sensed the anguish and dismay in his tone. While I understand and share his torment about the past I feel somewhat more positive about the future and wanted to

share my emotions and my point of view of the trip with the readers of the e-Newsletter.

Each of us has **individual** and **unique** feelings depending on our age, our birth order, and circumstances surrounding us, be they local or world-wide events. For example, my sister is *seventeen* years my senior, and the second oldest of my three siblings. Before I was born she lived, together with my mother and father and two older brothers, in Toronto ...a city and a time that I did not know. The Toronto my sister remembers is not the same city that I recall, nor would it have been the same one that my parents remembered when my father arrived in Toronto from Ivansk and my mother from Kielce in 1913. My parents were fifteen year olds who had not yet met one another in this new land. Both had lost one of their parents in Poland. Neither went to school in the new land; both worked in the sweat shops to earn enough money to pay the passage to Toronto for other relatives left behind in Poland. I was told many years later that the weather, the food and Ontario landscape resembled the setting they had abandoned in Poland. They met one another, married, had four children, and despite the hardships experienced soon after World War I and through the Great Depression, they knew with certainty that they had gifted their children and grandchildren better lives by leaving behind the oppression and hatred of Poland.

Unfortunately, they encountered anti-Semitism in Toronto. The plague still exists here and is forcefully emerging again in many other parts of the world. While I was growing up the anti-Semitism that I personally witnessed in Toronto was minor compared to more blatant anti-Semitic

incidents endured by my older siblings. I have lived in Kitchener, Canada, a predominantly German heritage city for over forty years, and I can assure you that anti-Semitism is alive and well here.

What is the constant?

In my opinion, it is the **individual human being**, with the capacity for **good or evil**.

I believe that we have a **responsibility** to learn the truths – pleasant or not, so that we can **teach** these **truths** to the **young** – so as **NOT TO HATE**.

In order to do so, we must live and believe in the **Ten Commandments**, and we must practice the **Golden Rule**. **We must be as tolerant as we wish our enemies to be to us**.

Sonny and I flew to Warsaw via Lot Polish Airlines, a partner to Air Canada. While waiting to board in Toronto, I was mistaken by many “returning Poles” as a “fellow Pole” because I obviously did not look “Canadian” or “Jewish”. Several attempted to engage me in Polish conversation. The Polish man sitting directly behind me on the plane also thought that I was Polish. He gestured hostilely toward two Hassidic fellow passengers while using the term “*Yid*” in a nasty, conspiratorial tone. It finally became apparent to him that I was not Polish, that I was Jewish, and that he had made a fool of himself in front of others. For the next several hours he indulged in endless drink, became intoxicated, loud, incoherent, and obnoxious. He woke me from a sound sleep at 3 a.m., placing his hand on my head and muttering, “**Yid, Yid, Put Seat UPI!**” Sonny managed to get a flight attendant to steer the besotted lout to the rear of the plane, where the attendants kept an eye on him for the rest of the flight.

The entire incident illustrated very dramatically the sometimes **dormant** nature of anti-Semitism, but also the fact that it was **one individual**, and that a number of other native Poles on the same flight were angry, embarrassed, and ashamed of the occurrence, and they told me so at the end of the flight.

We must **never fool ourselves** into believing that **anti-Semitism** doesn’t exist: even if it’s “invisible”, it is still potentially **deadly**. It is everywhere because of **ignorance, jealousy, avarice, greed, illiteracy, and poverty**.

This propensity towards **hatred** against people who are **different** (differences due to **race, religion, colour, class distinctions, and income**) is not exclusive to anti-Semites. We Jews are also susceptible to such behavior and must be ultra-careful to **be tolerant of not just our fellow Jews, but of Gentiles as well**.

Sonny and I were part of the group who took part in commemorating the anniversary of the 1942 deportation of our people from Ivansk. After Auschwitz-Birkenau we revisited the Ivansk Cemetery and assembled in the town square. From this place on 4 Cheshvan the Jews of Ivansk were force-marched to the train station at Cmielow. Those who survived the march boarded the cattle cars to their deaths in Treblinka. We retraced their march to Cmielow by bus.

While in Ivansk that afternoon, I wanted to buy something from Ivansk to take home with me. I entered a couple of stores in the Rynek and could not see anything I wished to purchase.

Just as I was about to leave, my eyes locked with the big blue eyes of a beautiful little blonde Gentile Ivansker girl being held in her mother’s arms. The little girl flashed me a most wondrous smile and the girl’s mother smiled on approvingly.

I was ready to leave Ivansk now because I knew that this smile from an innocent child was what I would bring back from Ivansk!! There is hope!!

Perhaps I am naïve, or my naiveté might be a certainty.

Do I want to live in Poland? The answer is no!

Would I return? The answer is uncertain.

I would, however, go back in an instant with my children and grandchildren to ***teach about the past, to teach how NOT to hate, to teach love of humanity and diversity, and to teach tolerance.***



Thanks to everyone who shared their photos with us!!!

Going Home Again – To A Place I Had Never Been Before

by Lisa Newman Greenspan

Toronto, Ontario, Canada



Savta Lisa
enjoying the company of
Joseph Rachamim Newman

After I returned from Poland I found myself speechless, strangely silenced, quite unable to speak or to write about it.

What finally loosened me up was my commitment to give a talk about the trip, to a “lunch & learn” at the shul I attend, a group of about 100 people many of whom I have known for most of my life.

It was while preparing my talk that I realized my self-imposed silence was akin to the silence of trauma survivors, who are often unable to speak about traumatic events till some time after they occur.

From my reading and from interviewing over a hundred Holocaust survivors to tape their memories (including for the Spielberg Oral History Project) I am very familiar with the difficulty that Holocaust survivors had in speaking about their horrific ordeals. Very often their new friends and neighbours, and even their own families, could not hear or understand the horrors, and they themselves did not begin to speak out publicly for many years after the events.

Of course it would be presumptuous in the extreme to compare my experience to the horrors suffered by Holocaust survivors. I was born in Toronto, over fifty years after my grandfather fled here from Ivansk in 1893. I grew up in the quiet safety of Canada, and my postwar generation has never experienced war, deportation, etc. Jews are increasingly powerful in today’s Canadian society, and anti-Semitism while not absent is no longer socially acceptable as public policy.

And yet at many points during our trip to Poland I felt I was coming home again - to a place I had never been before. This was a trip back in time, not only in space.

This first occurred to me at the beginning of our tour, on our very first morning. As we got off the bus at Warsaw’s the huge Jewish Cemetery, the group was directed to walk the length of a brick wall from our parking spot to the cemetery entrance. Being one of the last off the bus, I looked ahead and saw our line of Jews doing as they were told, walking straight ahead in somewhat disorderly but determined fashion. At that moment, there was a kind of short circuit in my brain, as I contemplated this scene and realized it duplicated thousands more like it during the Holocaust.

This was not a rational reaction, but rather something very deep – it was as if the perception evaded all the cognitive centers of my brain and went straight to some primitive, emotional collective memory of our people.

Another moment came when our group attended the award ceremony for the Iwaniska junior high school students for their essays about the history of Poles and Jews in their town. The young teenagers put on a well-rehearsed folk dance presentation for us [I am sure I was not the only one among us who couldn’t help staring at their Cossack-type boots, with all their associations of pogroms and violence.], and then a presentation of what could best be described as Klezmer music. Again, the feelings aroused by the music – in this case, joyful ones – seemed to short

circuit in my brain and bypass all intellectual activity to connect with something deep within me that, if it had words, would perhaps say, "Here we are at a bar mitzvah/wedding, so let's get up and dance!" And get up we did, dancing an impromptu and very emotional *hora* right there in the school gym.

Food was as instinctive as music in connecting me to the Polish past of my ancestors. At the hotel buffet on my last morning I lifted the silver lid of a large serving platter to find sweet cheese blintzes with raisins, just the way I like to make them for my family. The Warsaw supermarket had familiar, Polish names for food products I previously only knew as Jewish or Israeli [like vaffelim, kajshe], and the dried mushrooms I bought in the market were the same ones so highly prized by Polish-Jewish housewives.

Poland, it seems, is in my blood, even though I don't speak the language, have only a fumbling knowledge of Yiddish, and have never before visited the country. I am reminded of Chava Rosenfarb's¹ epilogue to her wonderful novel "Of Lodz and Love" describing a young Jewish woman, leaving Poland in 1947 after World War II. The Polish passport control officer examines her one-way ticket and asks, "How long have you lived in Poland?" and, though the answer that springs to her lips is, "A thousand years", she simply says, "I was born here" and continues on her journey, never to return.

My Jewish ancestors were Poles and at the same time they were not. To Jews the Pole was the "Goy"; to Poles, we Jews were foreigners, the archetypical "other" in Polish society, even though we were 10% of the whole and were represented at every level and in every class. Perhaps because of their own history of victimization by Sweden, Russia, Austria and Germany, Poles tend to be suspicious of foreigners and put a high value on Polish ethnic purity. This goes along with a commonly held view in Poland that all the evils of the Holocaust were perpetrated by the Germans,

In this mind set Poles see themselves as innocent victims of Nazi brutality and cannot accept the fact that they themselves perpetrated atrocious crimes against their Jewish neighbours.

Stereotyping and labeling another person or group is never helpful in understanding their behaviours, and I want to steer clear of the oft-repeated saw that all Poles are anti-Semites, that "they drink it in with their mother's milk". While it cannot be denied that many Poles were complicit in murdering or betraying Jews to the Nazis,² it is also true that Poland is the country which produced the greatest number of Righteous Gentiles recognized at Yad Va Shem. Poles' self-identification as victims may conveniently excuse them from responsibility for their cruelty to Jews, but there is also truth to the assertion that Poland and the Poles were victimized during the war. The more one delves into the subject of Polish-Jewish relations, the less simple it seems. Daniel Mendelsohn in an interesting book "The Lost"³ compares the history of Jews and Poles to the troubled, at times violent relationships between the biblical brothers Cain and Abel, Jacob and Esau, and to his own difficult relationship with a brother whose arm he once deliberately broke in a jealous rage.

Anti-Semitism in Poland did not end with the destruction of Polish Jewry. Today the anti-Semitic Radio Marija enjoys support among Poles, and I was told by a native speaker that in Polish "Zyd" is a negative, not a neutral term.

¹ **Chava Rosenfarb** lived through the Jewish ghetto of Lodz and Nazi concentration camps. She immigrated to Montreal where she continued her writings in Yiddish, the language of those who were slaughtered by the Nazis. The intensity of her narrative and her insights based on her experiences during and after the war earned Rosenfarb a wide audience. Today in her 80s, she lives in Lethbridge, Alberta.

² See: **Jan T. Gross's** latest publication, "Fear: Anti-Semitism in Poland after Auschwitz: An Essay in Historical Interpretation". Random House, Inc. 2006. New York.

³ **Daniel Mendelsohn**. "The Lost: A Search for Six of Six Million". HarperCollins. 2006, New York.

On a pleasant stroll through a Warsaw market I contemplated the delicious-looking fruits and beautiful flowers and remembered our guide telling us how proud Poles are of their healthy produce, not contaminated by chemicals. It was when I decided to look around for some folk art among this plentiful produce that I saw, sitting atop one merchant's cash register a primitively carved figure of a caricatured Jew complete with *strahmel* (traditional round fur hat worn by Chassidim) and long cloak, clutching a sack of gold.

There are Poles alive today who have robbery and murder of Jews on their consciences, both during and after the war. But not all Poles are the same, any more than all Jews are the same. There are Poles today who are discovering and honouring their own Jewish roots; there are Poles who are fascinated by Jewish literature, music and culture, as strange as that seems in a country with only a tiny remnant of its Jews. And there are many Poles who wish to see their country, newly readmitted to the E.U., revert to its multicultural past, when Jews were 10% of Polish society.

And just as different people react differently, different towns behave differently: in nearby **Ozarow**, all the Jewish gravestones were left standing during the war. My grandmother's town, **Zawichost**, at its own expense put up an impressive memorial on the spot from where the Jews were deported. By contrast, in Ivansk the local people looted the Jewish cemetery of all its stones and even searched in the ground for the Jews' buried Torah scrolls which they used to make shoes.

The trip was an extremely overwhelming experience for me; there was a moment when I looked down at my digital camera flashing "memory bank full" and felt that message summed up my own state of mind pretty well. So many thoughts, perceptions, feelings crowded in; I will continue to ponder their meanings for a long time.

Will I revisit Poland? I doubt I will seek out another visit, though I do hope to take my children and perhaps my grandchildren there in the future, to make the same pilgrimage that we made.

I am very glad to have participated in the cemetery restoration project. The graves of our ancestors, while still unmarked, now lie within an orderly setting that will be cared for going forward, and there is appropriate documentation on the memorial plaques erected in the cemetery of the Jewish presence in Ivansk for hundreds of years. This would have been the task of generations before us, had there been no Holocaust. But a whole generation of Ivansk Jewry was decimated and we who mostly descend from Ivanskers who emigrated before the war have discharged the responsibility to the best of our ability. I am glad too that in carrying out this project we recreated a 'virtual community' of Ivanskers. Ivansk had not seen so many Jews within its boundaries, on its roughly paved streets for 64 years, since October 1942. And we who congregated in the town, many of us meeting one another for the first time, were acutely aware that our coming together to walk in the footsteps of our ancestors served as an existential link in the continuity and the history of our people.

A word about the uniqueness of the infrastructure for this project: it was accomplished almost entirely by a few individuals, without a formal organizational structure, without formal meetings, minutes, slates of officers, etc. Throughout the almost five years that we worked on it, the project seemed to find the people it needed, almost as if it was bigger than any of us. I feel privileged to have participated in this *Tikun Olam*, as I do feel it is possible to ameliorate if not correct the past in such ways. And I am very, very grateful to Norton Taichman, who showed us all that it was possible

Ah, Es Shmeckt Just Azoy Vee In Der Heim!

by Norton Taichman

Narberth, Pennsylvania, USA

“Ah, Es Shmeckt Just Azoy Vee In Der Heim!”

Translated from Yiddish it means, “Ah, It Smells Just Like Home!”

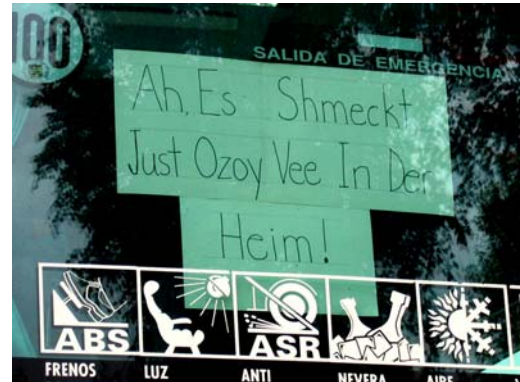
What in the world does this have to do with Ivansk????

Please be patient ... read on.

Study the picture to the right. That’s the rear window of the tour bus that transported our group in Poland. There in the window for all to see and to wonder is a sign about “It” smelling just like home.

What’s this all about?

Well, it’s about my paternal grandfather, Chaim (Chamol) Teichman. He immigrated to Canada in 1910; he may have left Ivansk, but Ivansk never left him.



Bell Ewart, Ontario, Summertime, 1940s:

During July and August our family vacationed in Bell Ewart, in those days a hamlet of cottages situated on the shores of Lake Simcoe about 50 miles north of Toronto. Not much ever happened in Bell Ewart; the town’s only industry was *The Belle Ewart Ice Company* (note the “e” tagged onto the end of the “*Belle*”). In winter *The Belle Ewart Ice Co* harvested blocks of ice from the frozen lake, stored them in a large barn and shipped them by rail to Toronto. Back then, many households still refrigerated food in “ice boxes” instead of electric-powered refrigerators.

Bell Ewart hibernated in winter but came alive in summer when nearly all of Toronto’s Polish Jews migrated north to escape the heat and humidity of the big city. Many of these “refugees” were Ivanskers. During these respites the men played endless rounds of 4-handed Clobyosh, the woman knitted oversized children’s sweaters (good for at least 2 wearing seasons) and everyone chewed on pumpkin or sunflower seeds. It was not unusual for the Ivanskers to recognize that their shtetl and Bell Ewart had a lot in common. For instance, the cottages had no indoor plumbing; ice boxes were the norm; personal, private functions were carried out in the “outhouse”; there was no heat to subdue the morning chill; many cottages were still not connected to electric power; gravel roads were pocked with bottomless pot holes and when it rained, it was just as wet inside as out.

On Sundays one of my uncles was always recruited to drive my Zaidah Chamol and Bubba Rhuda into the countryside to join us for a relaxing day in the bucolic ambience of Bell Ewart (Zaidah Chamol did not drive). The county road leading to B.E. threaded its way among the rolling hills of Southern Ontario passing numerous small farms whose fertile fields were manicured with freshly-minted horse and cow manure.

The stench was overwhelming!! I'm not exaggerating.

Everyone in the car gasped for breath, cupping their hands over their noses.

But not Zaidah Chamol! He rolled down the car window and slowly drew in a long, deep breath.

“Ah”, he earnestly exclaimed, **“Es Shmeckt Just Azoy Vee In Der Heim!”**

And as I was growing up that's how Ivansk was cataloged in my senses. ***It still is!***

Fast forward to Poland, October 2007:

When I realized that I would not be able to attend the rededication of the Ivansk Cemetery, I wrote an e-letter to the participants telling them about my Zaidah Chamol. Here's what I requested:

As you approach Ivansk, roll down all the windows in the bus.

Stick your head out the window. Inhale deeply.

And with deep conviction say together,

“Ah, Es Schmeckt Just Azoy Vee In Der Heim!”

Bonnie Lipton took command and painstakingly printed a poster inscribed with the hallowed exclamation. As the tour bus neared Ivansk, Bonnie stepped forward to the front of the vehicle. Holding the poster high for all to see, she instructed everyone to open their windows and to yell at the top of their lungs,

“Ah, Es Schmeckt Just Azoy Vee In Der Heim!”

And that's exactly what happened.

Now you know what to do when and if you ever go to Ivansk!

Ivansk Project Action Committee		
Fred Apel	USA	fredapel@usa.net
Grzegorz (Greg) Gregorczyk	Poland	Gregorz.Gregorczyk@telekomunikacja.pl
Sydney Kasten	Israel	kostens@012.net.il
Shelly Kesten	Israel	s_kestn@hotmail.com
David Lederman	Israel	dalederman@bezeqint.net
Gary Lipton	Canada	glipton@indsales.com
Ellen and Sonny Monheit	Canada	sonnell@rogers.com
Len Monheit	Canada	len@npicenter.com
Lawrence (Laurie) Naiman	USA	lnaiman@comcast.net
Lisa Newman	Canada	lisa.newman.a@utoronto.ca
Betty Provizer Starkman	USA	bettejoy@aol.com
Norton Taichman (Project Coordinator)	USA	nstaichman@comcast.net
Arthur Zimmerman	Canada	arthurz@look.ca