

THE IVANSK PROJECT e-NEWSLETTER

Issue Number 28 January – February 2008

Contents

- **The Road From Ivansk** *by Seymour Sherry*
Time and space are not enemies for Seymour; the memory of his Ivansk-born father and his ancestors inspire and give meaning to his life.
- **Wrestling With Reality: Ivansk Cemetery Monument Fuels Controversy in Poland**
by Norton Taichman
The wording of the inscription on the monument that we erected in the Ivansk cemetery has sparked an uproar in Poland. This report details the circumstances of why and how this happened.
- **After Words: Readers Respond to “Wrestling With Reality”**
Our readers react to the troubles concerning the Ivansk Jewish Cemetery.

VOLUNTEER(S) NEEDED TO TRANSLATE ARCHIVAL DOCUMENTS FROM YIDDISH TO ENGLISH

More documents from Ivansk, all written in Yiddish, have just been made available for study by the **YIVO Institute for Jewish Research**. Here are the details:

Territorial Collection – Poland 1, 1919 -1939

Location	Title	Date
Box 4, Folder 16	Iwaniska: Material on Iwaniska. Economic situation, 1930s. List of inhabitants. Budget of the Kehillah, 1932.	1930s

The archive consists of over 40 pages, including narratives and lists of individual inhabitants accompanied by economic data. These papers will undoubtedly illuminate much about the lives of our people during the 1930s. The project requires one or more persons reasonably fluent in Yiddish and English. If you are interested in participating in this project, please let me know as soon as possible: < nstaichman@comcast.net >

The Road from Ivansk

by Seymour Sherry New York, USA

Jews have a different concept of time. Our tradition erases the bounds of time. Although thousands of years have elapsed, distance in time is nonexistent for Jews; we are able to walk back and forth.

I have read many of the Ivansk Project e-Newsletters in which heartfelt feelings relating remembrances and experiences from the past have been expressed by contributors. In particular, efforts to restore and rededicate the shtetl's cemetery are an indication that many generations of Ivanskers continue to perpetuate the memory of our families that lived and died in Ivansk.

My father, **Moishe (Czerecenai) Cherry** was born in Ivansk in 1900: 54 years have elapsed since he died; to me it seems as if he is still alive. I'm thinking how his life can acquire a new significance after so many years have passed. As a Jew, I believe that time has no bounds, and by recalling and sharing his experiences as he related them to me I can, in a small way, help to cherish his



Bubba Chaija Visits Some of Her Children
Toronto, mid 1930s
Standing(L-R): Moishe, Frimet & Sonia
Seated: Gittle & Bubba Chaiia

memory. Unfortunately, I regret not asking the questions that can no longer be answered. But I'm certain if I could ask my father he would say, 'Don't forget me.'

My Zaydah, my father's father, **Shumel Czerecenai** lived and died in Ivansk. He earned his living as a harness maker and saddler. My Bubba was **Chaija Czerecenai**; she died in Ivansk in 1939 just before the outbreak of the war. My family lived in New York at that time and I remember the day the letter came from Poland with the sad news of Bubba Chaija's death. I was a 10-year-old avid stamp collector eager to remove the Polish stamp from the envelope. I watched my father closely as he read the letter and was taken aback by the tears streaming down his face, something that I never witnessed before. He explained that his mother had died but added nothing more. In 1942, three years after her death, Chaija's children, **Yussel** and **Laya** and her grandchildren probably perished in Treblinka. I say 'probably' because we heard nothing from them or about them after all these years. Since I'm the last of my family of that era, these words that I'm writing may be the last words said about them.

My grandparents had seven children: three sons, **Hershel, Yussel, Moishe** and four daughters, **Laya, Gittel, Frimet** and **Sura Tema**. Moishe, my father, was the youngest.

When he was in his early twenties Moishe decided to leave Ivansk after receiving an 'invitation' to become a member of the Polish Army for an indeterminate length of time. Together with his sister

Sura Tema, they devised a plan to escape from Poland. He had no regrets about abandoning the shtetl, but the thought of leaving his mother and father was not easy. Life in the shtetl was hard: working as a maker of harnesses and saddles was heavy and dirty and offered not much of a future for a young man, even if he was not called into the military. But his escape plan could be dangerous.



**My Father
Moishe (Czerecenai) Cherry
Toronto, late 1920s**

Sura Tema had already immigrated to Russia as a very young girl, much to the chagrin of her parents. There, she became a successful actress and performer on the Yiddish stage. Through her professional contacts and money paid to the 'right' persons, Sura Tema arranged for my father to illegally cross the border. If there was a slip-up my father could have been treated as a deserter on the Polish side or as an illegal immigrant on the Russian side. But the plan succeeded and he met up with his sister, whose name was now, **Sonia**. They intended to eventually move on to Toronto where their sisters **Frimet** and **Gittel** had already settled with their families.

I can't remember my father telling me how he fared on his journey from Russia to Toronto. But I recall overhearing conversations amongst family and 'landsleit' of the many hardships he and Sonia experienced. The overland trip from Russia to a port on the Atlantic Ocean took weeks and many obstacles had to be overcome; by the time this segment of the journey was completed, they were unable to make out what was happening to them. The ocean crossing took about a week and left them exhausted for lack of rest, poor food and

being cramped into steerage in the bowels of the ship overlying the constantly grinding propeller shaft. In addition, they were very anxious about having to pass the scrutiny of Canadian immigration authorities after docking.

Finally, the voyage was completed and there was the joyful reunion with Frimet and Gittle in Toronto. Now came the time for Moishe to be pampered and attended by the family, especially since he was the youngest sibling.

My Tanta Sonia was a free-spirited, beautiful lady. Her career as an actress suited her personality. She married and continued as an entertainer in Canada, but she was past her prime. Later, Sonia immigrated to the U.S. and found some work as a comedienne and singer of Yiddish songs at private parties, such as 'landsmanshaften' events. A happy soul, she would always cheer us up, and even the neighbors enjoyed listening to her singing Yiddish melodies. My lovely Tanta lived near us in Manhattan and died in the late 1940s.

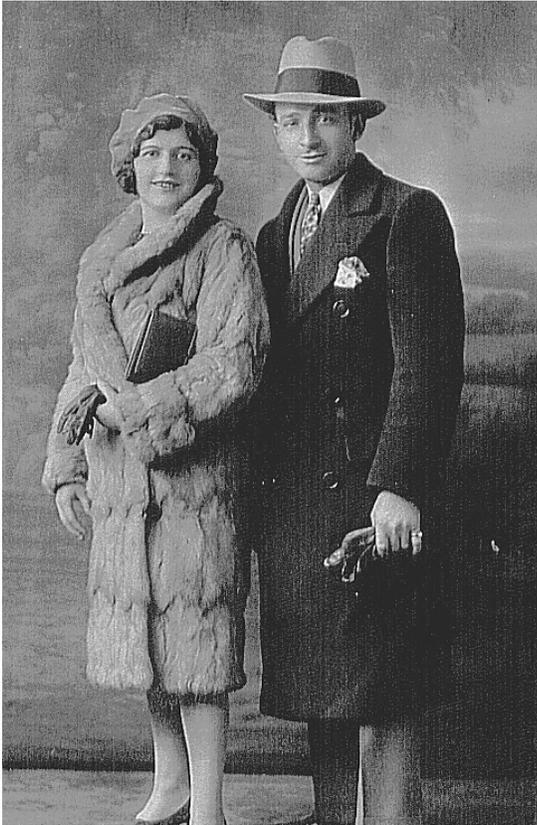


**Tanta Sonia In Costume
Russia (probably 1920s)**

My father's sister, Frimet was married to **Joe Drukarsh** and they had three sons. One son, **Charles Drukash** became a provincial judge, a source of great pride to the family. My father's sister Gittle married **Itzak Freedman** and they had three sons and two daughters. Interestingly, Itzak ran a harness business just like my grandfather in Ivansk. Itzak and

Gittle's son, **Sam Freedman** also grew up in the trade, and after Itzak died expanded into producing and fitting harnesses for race and show horses. Sam became very well known in that field. When my father had first arrived in Toronto he worked with Itzak bringing with him the experience gained helping my Zaydah in Ivansk.

Soon after immigrating to Canada my father changed his name to **Morris Cherry**. His brother Hershel lived in New York and changed his name to **Harry Cheresnick**. So **Czerecenai**, our family name in Ivansk, became **Cherenick, Cherry** or **Sherry** in the new land, a sign of many other changes yet to come.



**My Parents, Fannie and Morris
New York, 1920s**

My mother, **Feigle Keijman**, (later to become **Fannie Kasman**), was born in Klimintov, a shtetl located down the road from Ivansk. My mother's brother, Usher knew my father's brother, Hershel. Together, they introduced my parents to each other in Ivansk. Their friendship grew but was interrupted when my father left Poland. My mother knew of Moishe's whereabouts through her family also living in Toronto and when she moved to New York they were able to communicate by mail. In 1928 they were married in Toronto.

Following their marriage, my father decided that they should leave Toronto for New York believing that opportunities for a better life would be found there. But there was a 'small' technicality...my father had to become a U.S. citizen before he could live and work in the U.S. Since my mother was already a U.S. citizen my father automatically became eligible for citizenship. But his hopes for better opportunities in New York were soon dashed because the Great Depression coincided with the move to the "big city".

I was born in New York in 1929 and my brother, Irwin followed in 1938. We lived in the area of Manhattan called the Lower East Side, a slum where millions of Jewish immigrants settled and passed through as they took advantage of the opportunities that were not available to them in the old country. Some went on to

become famous entertainers, artists, politicians and businessmen. This was a place where Yiddish was commonly heard and spoken, especially on the streets where push-cart peddlers and vendors sold their wares from horse-drawn wagons. It was the time when the '*Yiddische tayater*' (Yiddish Theater) was still alive and well. That's the way it was as I was growing up.

Sadly my father took ill when we were still children, and in 1943 he died. He suffered from ulcerative colitis for many years and had been hospitalized several times. Finally, surgery to remove his colon was suggested, a procedure that was quite new at that time. The doctors recommended that the operation be carried out at the Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minnesota, one of the most renowned medical centers in the country. My father was an upholsterer but illness kept him from working, and my parents could never afford the cost of the medical bills. Medical insurance was unheard of then and would have been out of the question in any case. Somehow, arrangements were made for him to go to the Mayo Clinic.

I will never forget the day we said goodbye for the last time. He traveled all alone; my mother was a sewing machine operator and could not accompany him, leaving her job and my brother and me

behind. He was hospitalized for about one month before the operation; technically, it was a success and we were told he was expected to be discharged in a few weeks. But a few days later he died from a blood clot. (He was spared knowing that his brother, Hershel had died from a heart attack several weeks earlier.) The night we got the terrible news changed our lives and it is still painful for me to think about it. Through all this I was not fully aware of our financial predicament. After my father's death I vaguely remember that my mother was hassled for a long time by the hospital for unpaid bills. The amount was relatively small but enough to spell disaster. The situation was finally resolved; I don't know how.

Besides the death of my father, the first half of the 1940s was not an easy time. The war was raging and even on the home front life was difficult. Terrible news about the slaughter of innocent people and heartbreaking telegrams about sons injured, missing or killed in action hit almost every family and added to their worries. This was the setting in which my dear mother raised her children without my father. She worked long hours in the factory; worn out at the end of the day she still managed to do the shopping from the pushcarts and "mom and pop" stores on the way home from work. Then, she put together supper and tended to the many things that kept the house in order. My mother was truly a woman of valor!

I was 14 years old when my father died and had just started high school. I felt compelled to look for a trade to help my mother meet expenses. An uncle on my mother's side was in the furniture upholstery business, and he offered me the chance to learn the trade (at the rate of \$10.00 a week). So, when I graduated from high school at the age of 17, I became an upholsterer just like my father ... no doubt he would have derived little pleasure from this development.

I worked for my uncle for 3 years and then for the next 5 years was employed by different furniture manufacturers. But I knew this would lead nowhere and I resolved to do better. The opportunity came when my mother married again about 8 years after my father's death to a very good man, **Dave Spodek**, who was also an immigrant from Poland. This allowed me to abandon upholstery and sign up to study technical illustration at the School of Visual Arts in New York City. My brother Irwin went on to college and graduated as an engineer. He is married, has a son and daughter and lives in Los Angeles. He retired several years ago and took on a new career in real estate.

After completing my education I started work as a draftsman for a consulting engineering firm engaged in projects such as interstate highways and bridges. About this time (1957) my wife, Myrna, and I married and began to build a family, with God's help. After 40 years in civil engineering as a senior detailer and draftsman, I became involved with something quite different. I had a good friend, **Jerry Yablons**; we knew each other for more than 20 years; together we were enthusiastic runners in the New York Marathon in the 1980's. Jerry owned a large company called, "P. O. P. Displays – International". His clients included top of the line companies, such as Revlon, Wal-Mart and Lancôme. P. O. P. Displays designed/manufactured 'point of purchase' displays for beauty aids and other commodities. Jerry asked me to join him as the quality assurance/production liaison to coordinate design with production to minimize costly errors and improve client satisfaction. The business was so successful that it was taken over by an international conglomerate; unfortunately, several months later Jerry died of cancer. I retired in 2001.

With gratitude to Hashem, we have two grown children. Our daughter **Sari** (Sura Frimet b. Shmuel) was born in 1960; after graduating from a community college she worked at the Jewish Agency in New York City, where she met **Ari Horowitz** her husband. They moved to *Male Adumin* in Israel where our grandson son, **Amiad** was born. Circumstances soon forced the family to return to the USA and they had another child, **Natanya** in 1987. They live in East Brunswick, New Jersey but return to their new apartment in *Male Adumin* frequently, where Amiad lives when he's not attending Bar Ilan University. The past 3 years my wife and I have been together with them for Pesach.

Our son **Michael** (Moishe b. Shmuel, named after my father) was born November 26, 1963, the exact date of my father's death in 1943, which made his birth even more significant since I had always wanted to name a son after my father. Michael is the senior editor at "Data Conversion Laboratories" that convert information into computer language for clients including governmental agencies. This past June Michael was married to **Julie Adams**, a physical therapist, and they live in New York City.



2006
With Amiad Serving in the Israel Defense Force
(L-R): Myrna, Natanya, Amiad, Seymour, Sari

While children are their parents' crown, grandchildren are its jewels. Several years ago my grandson, **Amiad** visited Poland with the March of the Living to pay his respects to the memory of the Martyrs. He now lives in Israel and just completed three years of service in the Israel Defense Force. My granddaughter, **Natanya** attends Yeshiva University for Girls and also joined the March of the Living last year. When they were growing up I would tell them bedtime stories and talk to them about Ivansk and Klimintov. As young adults I often discussed our family's past so that they would know where we came from and who we are.

Throughout my life I have visited my relatives in Toronto. I especially remember that as a 10 year old we spent the entire summer up there. My **Uncle Itzak** took me along to deliver a repaired harness to a farmer. We traveled by horse and buggy through open countryside, and I was allowed to hold the reins and imitate the clicking sounds he made with his tongue to encourage the horse to keep moving on. For a 10 year old from the "Big Apple" (where horses and open spaces no longer

existed) this was quite an experience. This as well as other memories of those times fill me with warm feelings of belonging. As I said in the beginning, it all has to do with being able to live in the present while passing through the bounds of time, backward and forward.



Michael Sherry & Julie Adams Wed in New York
June, 2007
Standing (L-R): Ari Horowitz, Natanya Horowitz,
Julie & Michael Sherry, and Seymour Sherry
Seated: Sari Horowitz and Myrna Sherry

The road from Ivansk was long and hard for my father, **Moishe b. Shmuel**. He would be content knowing that his short life had meaning and importance to the people he cared for. In turn, those who came before or after have not forgotten that his life's journey was relevant to them. If we care about being remembered, we should be aware that our tradition teaches, 'although thousands of years may have elapsed, distance in time is nonexistent'. We have an obligation to treasure the memory of our dear ones. This is what I've tried to do in this essay.

Wrestling With Reality: Ivansk Cemetery Monument Fuels Controversy in Poland.

by **Norton Taichman (USA)**

In 2006 a monument was erected in a small Jewish cemetery outside a rural Polish town called Iwaniska. The memorial honored the town's former Jewish inhabitants and is situated in an ideal setting, serene and pleasing to the senses, surrounded by carefully tended farmland. However, the monument has become the subject of heated debate that has received widespread attention in the Polish media. The controversy continues to boil.

No doubt you suspect that this is all just making believe. I wish it was. But it's real and it's serious. The story is complex, and I will try to tell it to you as it happened.

The reclamation of our decimated cemetery was undertaken to pay tribute to our people who lived in the shtetl and to remember those who were consumed in *The Shoah*. A new perimeter wall, gate and an obelisk were erected, and the rededication ceremony was held in October 2006 attended by about 50 Ivanskers and over 100 local residents and officials. The event not only paid homage to our ancestors but also signaled a new direction in the relationship between Iwaniskers and Ivanskers. It was the beginning of something good, but in July 2007 something happened to overshadow these expectations.

It began when I received an e-mail from **Ms. Monika Krawczyk**, CEO at the Foundation for the Preservation of Jewish Heritage in Poland (**FODZ**). Below is an excerpt taken from her letter:

From: "Monika Krawczyk"
Sent: Thursday, July 26, 2007
Subject: Polish Authorities claim inscription on the Ivaniska plaque is "controversial"

I would like to inform you of the following: 10 days ago we got a letter from the Secretary of the Council on Protection of Polish Memorial Sites, **Mr. Przewoznik**. He notifies us, that the District Governor pointed out that the memorial plaque "contains controversial wording" - however he did not indicate what he meant by that. The wording on the plaque is as you wished; the only thing that I can imagine to be "controversial" was "collaborators". Further, Mr. Przewoznik threatened that unless he gets all construction documentation, he will "start the procedure on dismantling the monument".

I could not understand what this was all about. We had complied (or so I thought) with all regulations and ordinances governing the erection of the monument and we had submitted drafts of the proposed text that was to appear on the memorial to the authorities for review and official sanction. In fact, we were informed that everything had been approved and that we could proceed with the final stages of the restoration. **Mr. Lech Janiszewski**, an official representing the Council on Protection of Polish Memorial Sites (The Council) at its *Voivodship* (district) office in Kielce, attended the rededication and in his speech expressed strong support and pleasure for what had been accomplished.

What could have gone wrong?

ABBREVIATIONS:

FODZ: Foundation for the Preservation of Jewish Heritage in Poland (Warsaw)

The Council: Council on Protection of Polish Memorial Sites (Warsaw; district offices throughout Poland)

The Union: Union of Jewish Religious Communities of Poland (Warsaw)

PJCRP: Poland Jewish Cemetery Restoration Project (Buffalo, USA)

Briefly, this is what happened: in Poland the word “collaborator” has only one meaning...a Pole who betrayed his country to the Germans. Thus, the word “collaborators” on our monument was viewed as an affront to Poland’s national honor and sacrifice during WWII. The inscription was supposed to be reviewed and authorized by Polish authorities BEFORE it was placed on the monument. Had the authorities questioned the word, it would not have appeared on the monument. But the authorities had not seen a draft of the inscription because Mr. Omasta, the PJCRP Project Manager in Poland, lied about submitting and securing approval for the inscription. Mr. Omasta and his superior, Dr. Norman Weinberg (PJCRP Executive Coordinator) are responsible for these and other irregularities in the reclamation of the cemetery. As a consequence of their mismanagement, the integrity of the monument and our relations with the people of Iwaniska are in turmoil. The PJCRP must take steps to redress the harm it has caused.

In her letter Monika indicated that both she and **Mr. Piotr Kadlcik** (President of the Union of Jewish Religious Communities of Poland; The Union) had already sent strong letters to Mr. Przewoznik to protest and to express shock at the threat to demolish the monument. They stated that construction of the monument had been carried out according to all legal requirements. Moreover, they pointed out that the cemetery is under the jurisdiction of the FODZ and is considered to be the “private” property of the Jewish community. Consequently, the Council on Protection of Polish Memorial Sites (The Council) had no lawful basis for demanding that any changes be made on the grounds of the cemetery.

I immediately contacted Monika; she assured me that the FODZ and The Union were committed to protecting Polish-Jewish cemeteries and were also concerned about the situation. She advised that I leave this in her hands pending further developments. I forwarded copies of Monika’s letter to Gary Lipton and Grzegorz (Greg) Gregorczyk, Action Committee members who were involved in carrying out the cemetery restoration. Both expressed disbelief at what was happening; in Warsaw Greg went to work to learn more.

It turned out that Monika’s suspicions were correct: “**collaborators**” was indeed the offending word forming part of a sentence inscribed on the obelisk in English, Hebrew, Polish and Yiddish:

“Finally, on 15 October 1942, Jewish life in Iwaniska ceased when the Nazis and their collaborators brutally transported the town’s Jews to their deaths in Treblinka.”

We did not have long to wait for something to happen. During the first week of August the Polish news media got hold of the story and all hell broke loose on the web, radio, TV and in the national and local press. The primary questions raised in all venues were:

- What really happened in Iwaniska?
- Did Poles actually collaborate with the Nazis?
- Was this accusation yet another slur against the Polish nation?

I was contacted by newspaper reporters who asked that I comment on the intended meaning of the word. Below is the initial e-mail I received from **Mr. Paweł Reszka** of the “Gazeta Wyborcza”:

From: "Paweł Reszka" <pawel.reszka@lublin.agora.pl>
To: <nstaichman@comcast.net>
Sent: Monday, August 20, 2007 10:57 AM
Subject: Dear Professor

Dear Professor,

I am a journalist of "Gazeta Wyborcza" newspaper, a leading Polish daily. I am interested in the history of the cemetery in Iwaniska which was renovated with your help. Accordingly, I have a few questions about that. The office workers from the Voivodeship Office in Kielce have some doubts about the following text on the cemetery monument:

"Finally, on 15 October 1942, Jewish life in Iwaniska ceased when the Nazis and their collaborators brutally transported the town's Jews to their deaths in Treblinka. Only a very small number survived the war."

Controversies arise because of the word "collaborators". The office workers from the Voivodeship Office in Kielce believe that it may imply participation of the local inhabitants in the murder of Jews.

Hence, my questions are as follows:

- Who does the word "collaborators" refer to?
- Do you know any reports about the cases of collaboration of Polish people from Iwaniska with Germans?
- How would you define the scale of that phenomenon, i.e. the scale of collaboration?

I read a terrifying report of Itzhak Goldstein which was in the third newsletter [see: "The Funeral". Ivansk Project e-Newsletter, No 3, March-April 2004]. Was the information included in the report verified by you in some way? Itzhak Goldstein describes the burial of the Torah on the local cemetery in a touching way. Asked by the rabbi, the Jews present at the ceremony took the oath to come back some day for the sacred books. Did you try to find the sacred books when you were renovating the cemetery? And what influence did the Itzhak Goldstein's report have on your efforts to renovate the cemetery?

Thank you in advance for your reply,

Sincerely yours
Paweł P. Reszka
Gazeta Wyborcza, Lublin

I was reluctant to communicate with any reporters because at this point I did not have all the facts. But I felt that if I remained silent it would be interpreted as an indication that I was trying to conceal something. So, I responded to Mr. Reszka's inquiry as follows:

From: "Norton S. Taichman" <nstaichman@comcast.net>
To: "Paweł Reszka" <pawel.reszka@lublin.agora.pl>
Sent: Thursday, August 23, 2007 1:01 PM Subject: The Jewish Cemetery in Iwaniska

Dear Mr. Reszka

It is a privilege to respond to your letter of 20 August inquiring about our use of the word "collaborators" in the text on the memorial that was erected in the Jewish Cemetery outside Iwaniska. Naturally, we are concerned that our intent may have been misinterpreted and want to clear up any misunderstanding.

To begin, the Nazis' war against the Jews was a highly complex and organized program to exterminate an entire people. Extensive research indicates that they could not have accomplished their objectives without the support of many people in Germany and other axis countries. In addition, some individuals in occupied

lands assisted the conquerors in their quest to destroy Europe's Jews. The Nazis did not carry out their grizzly mission in a vacuum; capitalizing on a long-standing history of Judeophobia in Europe they were able to recruit the moral dregdes of society to serve their purpose. Many of these volunteers were assigned to army-like units known as the *Einsatzgruppen* which liquidated Jews as well as other "inferiors (eg, The Roma) in Eastern Europe. This lesson must be understood to help prevent similar genocides in the future and that is why the word "collaborators" was inscribed on our memorial. It is imperative to categorically state that the word "collaborators" was not meant to target the people or any individual of Iwaniska.

In this context, "collaborators" was used in a generic sense to signify those who willingly joined the campaign to annihilate the Jews of Europe during WWII. With the exception of the Nazis and the Germans we intentionally made no reference to any other nation or peoples, including individuals from Iwaniska as being party to the destruction of the Jews of Iwaniska. The reason for this was simple: we had no irrefutable proof that any specific person or individuals in the town had any direct involvement in the expulsion.

You indicated that you have read Yitz'hak Goldstein's testimony, 'The Funeral', describing the extinction of Jewish life in Iwaniska in October 1942. As far as we know this is the only documented account of the "Aktion". In his deposition Goldstein provides a compelling account of the appalling events that transpired over a period of 3 days, and we have verified the general tenor of his account by interviewing 3-4 Polish elders in Iwaniska who witnessed the round up and the expulsion of the Jewish population.

Goldstein stated that "the gendarme, together with the local firefighters, surrounded the shtetl. The firefighters knew every corner and every back lane of the shtetl, so that nobody could escape." [quoted from the English translation of the document, Paragraph 10]. We suspect that "the gendarme" consisted of German military or SS elements as well as a contingent of Ukrainian guards. As to the "local firefighters", it is likely that they resided in the town or its environs since they were very familiar with the layout of Iwaniska.

We do not know more about the firefighters. None of the Polish people we interviewed mentioned the firefighters and without verification we cannot categorically accept Goldstein's assertion. In an effort to clarify this as well as other aspects of Goldstein's testimony, we have been searching for Jewish survivors who actually witnessed these events. Thus far we have not been able to locate such witnesses. It would be important to know if local firefighters participated and whether they volunteered or were compelled by the Germans to take part in the roundup. Baring any additional evidence it would be irresponsible to intimate or to accuse any citizen of Iwaniska as being a "collaborator" in cleansing the town of its Jewish citizens.

Even if there is no substantiated evidence of Polish collaboration in the actual deportation of Ivanskers (Yiddish for Jewish inhabitants of the town), it would be a mistake to think that there were no anti-Jewish elements in Iwaniska. In another document written by Goldstein he outlines numerous anti-Semitic acts perpetrated by local Poles before and after the deportation (This document was published by Yad Vashem, Archive 03/1252; an English translation appears in The Ivansk Project e-Newsletter, No 3, March-April, 2004). Goldstein even names several individuals. As before, we have not been able to verify the specific details in this report.

However, interviews with Polish people who lived during that period affirm that a small minority in Iwaniska betrayed Jews who were hiding from the Germans. Moreover, I had always assumed that it was the Germans who ravaged the Jewish cemetery outside the town. Local residents have since told me that it was Polish people who desecrated the cemetery after the Soviets had pushed back the Germans.

Now to your question about whether we have been able to recover the Torahs and other sacred Jewish texts that had been buried in the cemetery prior to the deportation. We have testimony from Polish residents that these objects were unearthed by Poles who used the leather materials for the manufacture of footwear. In fact, two Ivanskers returned to the cemetery after the war to search for the hallowed objects; of course they found nothing.

It is very important for me to emphasize that the testimonies of Goldstein as well as other former Ivanskers are not entirely negative about their relationships with their Christian neighbors. Indeed, we have come away with an overall feeling that the vast majority of Iwaniskers behaved honorably and with kindness towards their former Jewish neighbors. In the Yad Vashem document Goldstein praises the mayor, the priest and other Polish citizens who helped Jews at great risk to themselves and their families. Likewise, other

survivors have spoken highly of the assistance and concern extended to them by Iwaniskers. Some Jews survived the war thanks to direct intervention of Polish people in the town. For instance, Yechiel Eisenberg mentions that he found 2 Jewish boys being sheltered by Poles when he briefly returned to the town after liberation (see Ivansk Project e-Newsletter No 16, January-February, 2006). Likewise, we have acquired testimony from two Jewish women who as children were taken in and saved by Christian families (to be published).

I must tell you that when I began my research I tended to dwell on the minority who behaved shamefully towards the Jewish population, but my focus has shifted 180 degrees. I now devote most of my time trying to learn more about the majority of decent Iwaniskers who I respect and admire. This change in outlook has been fortified by my on-going interactions with the several people in the town, as outlined below.

Goldstein's "The Funeral" has played a defining role in stimulating Ivansker descendents throughout the world to undertake the restoration of the Jewish Cemetery in Iwaniska. Goldstein's terrifying account of what happened to our people has awakened our consciousness not to abandon those who are buried in the Jewish cemetery. In Jewish tradition it is a sacred duty to pay homage to the dead. We have not forgotten, and we will never forget!

But none of this would have been possible without the support and on-going encouragement of the former Mayor of Iwaniska (Mr. Kazimierz Zoltek), the Parish Priest (Father Stanislaw Kolasa) and numerous other Iwaniskers. In addition, the warm reception and cooperation extended by District Manager (Mr. Kazimierz Kotowski) and his administration in Opatow is greatly appreciated. We are confident that the newly elected mayor of the town, Mr. Marek Staniek will continue to foster this climate of mutual respect and cooperation.

I have visited Iwaniska on several occasions and look forward to a return in the near future. I have always received the warmest of welcomes and have been invited into the homes of Iwaniskers, many of whom I consider as my friends. Several have cooperated with us in learning more about the lives of our ancestors. In addition, we have established good relations with the faculty and students in the local middle school. In short, during the past 3-4 years a new awareness and mutual interest has emerged between Iwaniskers and the worldwide community of Ivansker descendents. We very much value this reconciliation and want to assure that it continues to grow stronger in the future.

As indicated earlier I have attached a copy of The Ivansk Project e-Newsletter Issue #3, which contains the documents written by Yitz'hak Goldstein. You are most welcome to read all the e-Newsletters which have been published and on our temporary web site: <http://www.ivansk.thirdeyview.net/>. I think you will find numerous articles in the e-newsletters that pertain to the issues which you placed before me.

I hope my response adequately addresses the issues you listed in your letter. If you require further information or clarification, please do not hesitate to contact me.

In closing, I want to assure you that the mission of "The Ivansk Project" was to create awareness among the descendents of Jewish Ivanskers of their rich heritage. We rebuilt the walls of our ancestor's cemetery and erected a monument to commemorate their lives and to symbolically honor those who were consumed in the Holocaust. It would be a grievous wrongdoing for anyone to politicize our work or to exploit it for political interests.

Many thanks again for your interest in our work!

Sincerely
Norton S. Taichman

Mr. Reska handled the story in a professional manner, interviewing several people and considering many sides of the story. I provide an English translation (thanks to Grzegorz Gregorczyk) of his article, which will serve as a preface for what was to happen in the months ahead.

[Editorial inserts and footnotes have been entered to explain or elaborate on some of the material.]

Pyta wojewoda świętokrzyski, pyta wójt gminy Iwaniska Jacy kolaboranci?

– Byłoby nieroztropnie posądzać kogokolwiek z mieszkańców miasteczka o to, że kolaborował z Niemcami

PAWEŁ P. RESZKA

W Iwaniskach pod Opatowem żydowski cmentarz był przeorany drogą i otoczony śmieciami. Żydzi odbudowali mur, wstawili bramę i postawili obelisk z napisami w trzech językach:

„Ostatecznie 15 października 1942 roku żydowskie życie w Iwaniskach zostało bestialsko przerwane, kiedy to hitlerowcy i ich kolaboranci deportowali iwaniskich Żydów do obozu śmierci w Treblinkę”.

Sformułowanie „kolaboranci” uderzyło mieszkańców.

Lech Janiszewski, wicewojewoda świętokrzyski, zdenerwował się: - Polska była krajem, który nie kolaborował z Niemcami. Mam swoje lata, interesuję się historią i nigdy o czymś takim nie słyszałem. Z tych

Na macewy uczyli też swoich uczniów nauczyciel angielskiego z gimnazjum. Dwoje rodziców zdecydowało się je zwrócić, dzieci dostały po pilce ufundowanej przez wójta. - Macew szukałem też z uczniami osobiście - wspomina były wójt. Wsiadli w samochód i pojechali do gospodarza, u którego gimnazjalista coś widział. Ale ten za macewę chciał pieniędzy. Wójt pozcił się nieswojo i już dalej nie jeździł.

Napisu nie czytałem

O interwencji wojewody Janiszewskiego w gminie jest głośno od niedawna. Wcześniej na napis sformułowanie „kolaboranci” niewiele zwróciło uwagę.

Były wójt: - Byłem na uroczystym odsłonięciu pomnika. Napisu jednak nie czytałem. Jako wójt byłem bardzo zapracowany. Nie miałem zastępcy ani sekretarza, który zapadł na długotrwałą chorobę. Byłem sam.

Stwierdza: - Ja nie jestem stąd, ale



Żydowski cmentarz w Iwaniskach. Według tablicy Żydów deportowali do Trebinki „hitlerowcy i ich kolaboranci”

nim odbył się na kirkucie. Gdy stało się jasne, że miejscowa społeczność Żydów czeka zagłada, starszyzna zdecydowała, że trzeba ukryć święte księgi w grobie, by nie zniszczyli ich Niemcy i Polacy. Na pogrzeb przyszedł, kto tylko mógł. Ceremonię prowadził rabin.

Cukier za Żyda

Z Iwanisk hitlerowcy wywieźli do Trebinki 1,6 tys. Żydów. Wcześniej do lasu uciekło trzysta osób: młodzi mężczyźni, kobiety i dzieci. Wśród nich Goldstein. Kilka miesięcy ukrywał się w okolicy Iwanisk oraz Staszowa.

„Okoliczni chłopcy i Niemcy wylapali nas bez żadnego wysiłku, niszczyli nas systematycznie”.

„Wielu Polaków zwykło mówić, że Jezus Chrystus wysłał Hitlera, żeby pozbył się Żydów”.

Opowiedział też izraelskim historykom o człowieku, który jeszcze przed wysiedleniem z grupą innych osób pod-

ści czy konkretnych mieszkańców Iwanisk? - oświadczył. Ten zwrot - wyjaśnił - został użyty w ogólnym znaczeniu i odnosi się do tych, którzy skwapliwie dołączyli do Niemców w kampanii unicestwienia Żydów w Europie. Nie ma niepodważalnych dowodów, by ktoś z Iwanisk brał udział w destrukcji społeczności żydowskiej.

Jeżeli chodzi o relację Goldsteina, profesor przyznał, że nie są w stanie potwierdzić wielu jej szczegółów. Byłoby nieroztropnie posądzać kogokolwiek z mieszkańców o to, że kolaborował z Niemcami. Choć faktycznie ludzie z miasteczka potwierdzili w rozmowie z Taichmanem, że mała grupka Polaków zdradziła Żydów, którzy się ukrywali. „Jednocześnie - co profesor podkreślił - wielu Żydom pomogło.

Nastawienie

Po wojnie do Iwanisk wróciło dwóch ocalałych Żydów. Próbowali odnaleźć za-

The Head of Swietokrzyskie Voivodship and Mayor of Iwaniska are Asking:

WHO WERE COLLABORATORS?

Accusing anyone from Iwaniska of collaborating with Germans would be a mistake.

There was once a forgotten Jewish cemetery in Iwaniska near Opatow, surrounded by a ploughed field with a road cutting it in the middle with tons of garbage around it. Jews came and have had the wall reconstructed; they have had the gate installed; they also have had the memorial erected with an inscription on it saying in four languages: *"Finally, on 15 October 1942, Jewish life in Iwaniska ceased when the Nazis and their collaborators brutally transported the town's Jews to their deaths in Treblinka."* And *"collaborators"* is in fact the term that raised so much controversy among local people.

Mr Lech Janiszewski¹, vice head of the Swietokrzyskie Voivodship looked pretty upset - Poland did not collaborate with Germans. I am quite advanced in years and am very much interested in this story but I haven't heard of such things. My father's family is from this area. They all say they are unaware of such facts. Neither is IPN (Institute of National Remembrance).

The Chief Secretary of the Council for Preserving the Memory of Polish Warfare and Martyrdom [The Council], Mr. Andrzej Przewoznik, considered it appropriate to write a complaint to the Jewish Religious Community in Warsaw [The Union]. He stated in his letter that according to the head of the Voivodship, the memorial has been erected without necessary legal permits and what is more, that the content of the inscription has not been approved by him. The wording of inscription raising so many controversies is against the local community. He ends up his letter stating that "in case formal and legal requirement are not still met" the council will be in obligation to initiate the procedure of dismantling the monument".

¹ **Lech Janiszewski:** Mr. Janiszewski was the district representative of The Council and was based in Kielce. We met with him in Kielce in December, 2007. Our discussion will be described later.

"I am simply shocked" - says Mr. Piotr Kadlcik, head of the Jewish Religious Community. - I used to believe that the Council is supposed to build memorials, not tear them down. The monument in Iwaniska has been erected according to all legal procedures. We are not required to consult any wording with anybody."

I'm not afraid! The memorial and the cemetery itself has been reconstructed by the Ivansk Jewish Landsmanshaft. The society gathers descendants that immigrated from Poland long before WWII. When an Ivansk representative² made his appearance in Iwaniska in 2004 he got a very warm reception from the former mayor, Mr Kazimierz Zoltek³. Overwhelmed with good feelings he afterwards submitted a report to other members of the community in which he spoke about the mayor being a good-listener, about his willingness to be of help and about the medal commemorating 600th anniversary of the town of Iwaniska that he received from the mayor at the very end of the conversation. "This will make me lots of enemies but I am not afraid!" - the mayor revealed to his guest. "I was trying to avoid sensitive issues" - reported the representative of the Landsmanshaft.

"I tried to build a bridge of reconciliation between Jews and Poles", says ex-mayor, Mr Zoltek (currently a teacher). He asked me not to get him too much involved in the matter as he has been target of many attacks during the recent election campaign and he just needs to rest a bit now. "I just see it this way: we would all want in Poland that Polish cemeteries abroad to be in good shape and taken care of, and this is precisely what I want for this Jewish cemetery here. "

Matzevot. Town hall workers have cleaned the cemetery area, the district head helped to build and the local priest asked his parish people to look for matzevot. Right after the war most of them were taken away from the cemetery and served as good material for foundations for houses. After one Sunday's sermon someone secretly brought fragments of three matzevot to the cemetery.

Take another example: English teacher from the junior-high school⁴. Two families decided to give matzevot back: the mayor awarded two footballs for their kids. "I was personally involved in seeking matzevot", says ex-mayor. "I remember we once went to a house in which one of the students saw a tombstone. However these people wanted money in return." The mayor felt somehow strange and he stopped looking for more matzevot.

I didn't read the inscription. The ex-mayor indicated that only a few people spotted "collaborators" on the inscription on the obelisk. "I attended the ceremony of the rededication. However I admit not having read the inscription. I was quite busy during that time. My deputy and secretary were not there at that time, one of them got very ill. I just had to act alone". Then he continues: "I'm not originally from here but my wife's grandfather, Adam Kijanka, used to be a blacksmith here. He told me stories about how well Jewish neighbors got along with Poles on a daily basis.

New mayor (a teacher by profession), Mr Marek Staniek says: "I have been informed about the inscription. I told everyone not to dig in the past when the monument was being erected. Nothing can be built on the past. One should look beyond into the future. I find the inscription offending toward local people as my grandparents used to help Jewish people, for instance they were providing them with food. Now the term "collaborators" must be considered as a painful slap delivered against their memory. No historical evidence can confirm that Poles used to murder Jews here."

Mr Ryszard Łucki, head of the town council (a farmer): "Pretty much everyone is upset over here. It's simply so impolite of Jews!"

No Poles involved. Mr Andrzej Omasta⁵ from the Poland Jewish Cemetery Restoration Project (PJCRP) was in charge of supervising the works on the cemetery. "There is not a trace of Polonophobia in the inscription! People misunderstood

² **Grzegorz Gregorczyk** was the Ivansk representative who met with Mayor Zoltek in Iwaniska

³ **Kazimierz Zoltek**, the former Mayor of Iwaniska, openly supported our effort to restore the cemetery.

⁴ **Pawel Skowron** is the English teacher. On numerous occasions he assisted us in reclaiming the cemetery.

⁵ **Andrzej Omasta** is the PJCRP Manager in Poland.

⁶ **Jadwiga Pawlik** is the "unofficial guardian" of our cemetery. She seems to turn up whenever visitors enter the site sharing her childhood memories of what happened in the graveyard during WWII. Her father was the official watchman-caretaker of the graveyard before the war.

⁷ **Bronislaw Wolanski**, a former history teacher, states that the Jews buried their "Golden Idol" in the cemetery. Perhaps he is referring to Torah ornaments, such as the breastplate or the crown.

⁸ **Goldstein's** testimony is archived in Yad Vashem and is reproduced in the Ivansk Project e-Newsletter No. 3, March-April 2004.

⁹ **The Funeral** is reproduced in the Ivansk Project e-Newsletter No. 3, March-April 2004.

the term "collaborators"! It refers to Ukrainians and Russians. And Ukrainian squad took part indeed in liquidation of the Iwansk ghetto in 1942.

Head of the Voivodship, Mr Lech Janiszewski, says: "We are going to further clarify that issue in writing. Time for conclusions have not come yet."

Mayor Staniek (in a conciliatory manner): "I would suggest we should chose dialogue. The Jews should come and tell the town people loud and clear what collaborators they had in mind. The local community deserves it."

Tribute. Very recently a metal crucifix and a rosary were placed on the wall of the cemetery. A picture of Sister Teresa of the Child Jesus was placed in front of the obelisk.

Mrs Jadwiga Pawlik⁶ leaves nearby: "The priest said we shouldn't do so as Jews don't do the same things as we do on Christian graveyards." However Mr Piotr Kadlcik from the Jewish Religious Community considers it rather as a deep proof confirming that the cemetery has become important to local people. [The photo is still in place; we agree that it is intended as a mark of respect.]

Golden Idol... There are legends circulating about the Jewish cemetery in Iwaniska: "Before the ghetto was liquidated, the local Jews went to bury at the cemetery their golden idol that they worshiped", reveals Mr. Bronislaw Wolanski⁷, a keen enthusiast of the local region. "Everyone must have heard of it here. People are telling stories about some Poles that tried to look for it after the war."

... **or Holy Scrolls** "To live in, the forest was more and more difficult. Every day, the local peasants were catching Jews and returning them to the Germans. The Germans paid back the peasants for their service in many different ways. At the beginning for catching a Jew, a peasant would get a bag of sugar and one liter of vodka. After a while, the Germans were giving clothing", said Ignacy Goldstein from Iwaniska in 1959 to the historians from Yad Vashem⁸. His testimony seems to be probably the only one from before the deportation that took place on October 15, 1942. It is impossible to assess how many Jews survived the war. Only two persons are registered after the war as survivors in the files of the Jewish Historical Institute, Goldstein being one of them. He just couldn't forget "The Funeral"⁹. In anticipation of the pending expulsion, a meeting was called with members of the town's Judenrat. Its purpose was to arrange for the burial of the Torah Scrolls in the Jewish Cemetery, so that they would not fall into the hands of the Germans or Poles and thus be destroyed. Everyone that was able to walk attended the ceremony.

A bag of sugar for one Jew. Some sixteen hundred Jews were deported from Iwaniska. But before it happened, some 300 young people escaped to the adjacent forests. Goldstein was one among them. He used to hide near Staszow. "Nearby peasants and Germans were catching us without any major effort and they were destroying us systematically." "Many Poles used the saying that Jesus Christ sent Hitler over in order to get rid of the Jews."

He has also told Israeli historians in Yad Vashem about a man who set fire to houses in Iwaniska with some other men and then accused 10 Jews for having done it. As a result Germans ended up shooting 9 of them. On the other hand, Goldstein is also mentioned those who helped Jews, among them the local priest, the mayor and the head of the local police station. And also a farmer who gave him shelter.

"Goldstein's account seems to be very trustworthy", says Mrs Alina Skibinska from Holocaust Research Center at Polish Science Academy. "It is a very well balanced testimony indeed. Many other testimonies confirm that Germans used to pay local farmers for denouncing Jews."

It isn't about Iwaniska. Ignacy Goldstein's testimony can be found online in one of the Iwansk Landsmanschaft e-Newsletters. Mr. Norton S. Taichman, editor in chief, retired professor of pathology from Penn University (his father's family comes from Iwaniska) when asked about the "collaborators" explains it as follows in his e-mail to me:

"It is imperative to categorically state that the word "collaborators" was not placed on our monument to target the people or any individual of Iwaniska. In this context, "collaborators" was used in a generic sense to signify those who willingly joined the campaign to annihilate the Jews of Europe. There is no irrefutable proof that any specific person or individuals in the town had any direct involvement in the expulsion of the Jewish community".

As far as the Goldstein's testimony is concerned, the professor admits not being able to confirm many of its details. Accusing anybody from Iwaniska of collaborating with Germans would be a mistake. He said that interviews with Polish people who lived during that period affirm that a small minority in Iwaniska betrayed Jews who were hiding from the Germans. However, many were helping and assisting Jews.

Approach. Only two Jews from Iwaniska returned to the shtetl after the war. They were trying to find the hidden Torahs. In vain. Long after, during their numerous visits to the town Ivanskers asked about the holy scrolls written on the lamb skins. "We have been told by some town people that these scrolls have been found indeed and Poles made shoes of them".

Norton S. Taichman says that when he began his research he tended to dwell on the "minority" who behaved shamefully towards the Jewish population, but his focus has shifted 180 degrees. This change in outlook has been fortified by his on-going interactions with the several people in the town and the warm reception and assistance by many of them: town and district officials, the priest and many others. Some of them he considers as his friends that he admires and respects.

Cemetery overgrown with vegetation again. Jewish descendants live in the hope that the town hall is going to take care of their cemetery. Although only one year has passed since it has been renovated, the cemetery is overgrown with high vegetation again. The mayor has just received a letter from professor Taichman in which the professor asks the town to assume a custodial care of the cemetery: "We live thousands of miles from Iwaniska and cannot effectively monitor or tend to the cemetery that means so much to us". *[During our visit to Iwaniska in December 2007 (see below) Mayor Staniek declined to assist us in maintaining the cemetery. We are currently exploring other possibilities...to be reported in a future e-Newsletter.]*

With all the media frenzy I felt it might be a good idea to go to Poland to meet with officials of The Union, The Council as well as the Mayor and people of Iwaniska. I wanted to explain why we employed the word "collaborators" and what we intended it to mean. I also wanted to prove that we had obtained the permits to erect the monument and official authorization for the inscriptions on the obelisk. To assemble the relevant documentation I contacted **Dr. Norman Weinberg** (PJCRP Executive Coordinator in Buffalo, NY) and **Mr. Andrzej Omasta** (PJCRP Manager of Projects in Warsaw) who were entrusted to represent our interests in Poland. Both responded to my requests in an evasive manner. I tried again with the same results. In his reply of 2 September 2007 Mr. Omasta stated, "*All permissions and documents for the monument building were given to Piotr Kadlcik and his position is clear that this text is not anti-Polish*". I could not understand why Piotr Kadlcik, who represented The Union was given "all permissions and documents" while our request was being ignored. Something was amiss.

To pursue my premonition I asked Monika Krawczyk to contact Piotr Kadlcik; I wanted her to ask him if he had information pertaining to these issues. On 3 September she informed me that Piotr had confirmed that permits had been obtained "*only for construction process... and NOT for the **WORDING on the monument***" (capitalization of "NOT" and "WORDING" as in the original e-mail)!

Thus, Mr. Omasta deliberately deceived us. It was now clear why we were embroiled in this storm of controversy: the integrity of the monument was now at risk, and our hard work to earn the respect and cooperation of the people of Iwaniska had been dealt a severe blow. Had Mr. Omasta done what he was supposed and paid to do, none of this would have occurred. It was never our intent to spark political controversy or to embarrass the town: if the authorities had objected to "collaborators", it would have been deleted or substituted by another word or phrase. Had we known about Mr. Omasta's deception **before** the media got on to the story, we would have revealed his duplicity to the authorities and the press, and the outcome might have been different. Now, the idea that Ivanskers had purposely provoked this crisis had been planted in the public mind, and it would be difficult to reverse these perceptions.

Actually, the revelations about Mr. Omasta's dishonesty did not come as a complete surprise; previously we had become disillusioned by PJCRP mismanagement of other aspects of the restoration process (details will be provided below). Indeed, on numerous occasions we informed Dr. Weinberg about our suspicions of Mr. Omasta's behavior but he chose to take no effective action to address our concerns.

On 4 September I wrote to Dr. Weinberg holding him entirely responsible for what had happened: "*In my view it is incumbent upon you to assume responsibility for this episode and to reveal, to*

apologize and to take appropriate remedial action for these shameful and hurtful events.” No apology or acknowledgements of misconduct were forthcoming. In fact, Dr. Weinberg continued to express his confidence in Mr. Omasta. It was pointless to continue communicating with Dr. Weinberg and alternate strategies are now being considered (see below).

At this juncture I forwarded letters outlining what we had discovered to several individuals and organizations in Poland who were directly or indirectly affected by what had happened. And I intended to follow this up with a visit to Poland. While there was no legal basis for anyone to take down the obelisk, I was fearful that hooligans might use the turmoil as an excuse to defile the monument. I wanted to show the town that I was concerned about what had happened and that we had acted in good faith and were anxious to resolve the issue. But friends in Poland as well as my family advised postponing the trip until spring when tempers would have had a chance to cool down. I accepted this suggestion after Grzegorz and Monika reported that they had driven to Iwaniska and found that there was no evidence of damage in the cemetery.

At the end of September I phoned Hank Mishkoff to apprise him of what had happened. Hank had organized an e-mail network of PJCRP coordinators so that we could share our experiences as a means of facilitating our work. I sought his advice on how to handle the situation. A few days later he wrote:

And speaking of advice: The more I think about it, the more I think that you should hop on the next flight to Ivansk. Every day you're not there you risk making enemies of the people who aren't sure how they feel about the situation -- they'll drift into the "anti" camp, while your presence could pull them firmly into the "pro" camp. Tell them how terrible you feel about the misunderstanding, and that you're especially concerned that you might have inadvertently hurt the feelings of the people who helped you so much, and that you fear that they might feel betrayed, and that you flew across the ocean to do whatever was necessary to put things right.

That cinched it; I had to go, and on November 30 my daughter Audrey and I flew to Warsaw. There, we met up with **Grzegorz Gregorczyk, Monika Krawczyk, David Blumenfeld and Henriette Kretz**. Together we planned to travel to Kielce to meet with **Mr. Lech Janiszewski** (representing The Council) and then to Iwaniska to speak with the **Mayor Marek Staniek**. In Iwaniska we had also arranged meetings with a group of teachers from the junior high school and with various friends in the town. David wanted to continue gathering material for his video documentary, "Within These Walls. The Death and Life of Ivansk" (see Ivansk Project e-Newsletter No 10, January-February 2005). Henriette is an Ivansker who lives in Antwerp, Belgium. She was a child when the Nazis invaded Poland. Her father, Mundeck Kretz was a physician (her mother was Elsa), and the family's home was on the Road to Staszow. Both of Henriette's parents were murdered, but she survived thanks to the intervention of Polish Christians. She wanted to accompany us and also wanted to introduce us to her childhood nanny, Helena (Lenart) Zawada in Ostrowiece. Although her nanny was advanced in age her memory was still sharp, and we hoped that she might provide us with testimony about Ivansk before the expulsion. Henriette's story will appear in a future e-Newsletter.

Before leaving Warsaw we met with Piotr Kadlcik at The Union. We wanted to hear what Monika and Piotr thought we were likely to encounter in Iwaniska and Kielce. In general Monika and Piotr felt that the situation had improved; they anticipated that our appearance and explanation of what had happened would quell any residual animosity and that the matter would be closed. Buoyed by what we had hoped to hear, we drove south to Sandomierz. At dinner we enjoyed beer, pizza and camaraderie. We looked forward to a good day ahead.

The following morning (December 3) we drove to the office of The Council in Kielce where we were received by Mr. Lech Janiszewski. We pointed out that "collaborators" were found in every

European country that was occupied by the Germans...there were no exceptions. We emphasized that “collaborators” was employed to acknowledge the widespread collusion that made it possible for the Nazis to kill 6 million Jews. Our condemnation was directed at all those of any nationality who aided the Nazis; our denunciation was not specifically directed against Poles. We admitted that we were not aware of the sensitivity of the word in Poland and regretted that we did not have an opportunity to avoid this misunderstanding because of the misconduct of the PJCRP.

Mr. Janiszewski, who is fluent in English, chose to respond in Polish to assure that he expressed his view as succinctly as possible. While he appreciated our predicament he was adamant that “collaborators” would have to be removed from the monument.

We tried to get him to modify his position pointing out that Poland was the only country in the world where “collaborators” was interpreted to have only one, explicit meaning. This failed to open any avenue for compromise. I then posed a rhetorical question, “Why are we wasting so much time trying to protect the dredges of humanity when they deserve only our contempt?” To overcome the unintended negative interpretation of our inscription, I took it upon myself to offer to install a plaque on the obelisk which honored those Poles who risked their lives to help their Jewish neighbors. In my view this would have been a progressive rather than a regressive step in clearing the record. But Mr. Janiszewski remained unmoved. The discussion was over.

We left Kielce empty-handed, but we were hopeful that things would change in Iwaniska.

We drove to Iwaniska in two cars, one of which was involved in a road accident outside Opatow (Apt). The driver of a truck entered the highway without seeing us, and in an attempt to avoid slamming into the back of this vehicle we almost collided with on-coming traffic. (In those milliseconds I had visions of being buried in the Ivansk cemetery). Thankfully, no one was injured, but our car had been “cosmetically” damaged and we had to wait for the police to arrive and prepare an accident report.

We arrived almost 2 hours late for our appointment with the Mayor, his secretary and Mr. Bronislaw Wolanski, a former history teacher (who was interviewed for the article in *Gazeta Wyborcza*, Page 13). The discussion basically went along the same lines as described in Kielce. The bottom line was the Mayor would accept nothing less than the removal of “collaborators” from the monument. It was absolutely clear that we had come up against an impenetrable wall; there was no point continuing the meeting. My fears about the potential threat to the obelisk resurfaced. In addition, I reminded myself that we would NOT have used the word in the first place if Omasta had done his job. I felt that I had no other option than to commit to removing “collaborators” from the monument.

You can imagine that we were not very up-beat as we drove back to the hotel in Sandomierz.

December 4th was our last full day in Poland, and we intended to lunch with a group of teachers, meet with some friends in the town and visit Henriette’s nanny. The purpose of the luncheon was to explore ways to enhance the teaching of ethnic and racial tolerance in the junior high school. The kids in Iwaniska are full of life and do not appear to be poisoned by the prejudices of the adult world. We wanted to explore ways to maintain their acceptance of different cultures, persuasions and life styles before it was too late.

But just outside Iwaniska our car was rear-ended by a bus. No one was injured but this time the car was no longer drivable. The insurance company provided transport to get us back to Warsaw and the meetings with teachers, friends and Henriette’s nanny had to be cancelled.

It would be an understatement to say that the trip was a big disappointment; we failed to accomplish what we had come to do.

In Poland many people, including some political and religious leaders, still refuse to accept the fact that some citizens dishonored their nation during WWII. It is as if there was absolutely no government sponsored anti-Semitism before the war; no wanton killing and betrayal of Jews by individual Poles during the war and no violent attacks by individual Poles against Jewish survivors returning home after the war. To them it is a black and white issue: unlike any other nation in Europe there has never been any Judeophobia in Poland and not one Pole had ever collaborated with the Nazis. In reality, there's not a single nation, including Poland that does not have something that it wants to hide or forget. Those that confront the monsters of their past and attempt to atone for wrongs committed against others become morally stronger and gain the respect of other nations. It is a critical step in building a just society.

My purpose is not to try to win over those who remain bound by ignorance and close-mindedness. It's a waste of energy. But I want my colleagues as well as other enlightened Poles to know that we honor their countrymen who, despite the risks, tried to help their neighbors during the war. And we appreciate the courage that it takes today for them to confront the lingering prejudices of the past. I can imagine how such ignorance causes them great embarrassment and distress. Things will not change in the near term; I have no doubt the fight will eventually be won...but one day at a time. While we gained nothing tangible from our trip, we registered our concern and our commitment for the truth and in so doing we supported those who will be the pride of Poland in the future.

The question that remains unresolved is how to hold the PJCRP and those who started this mess to account?

I said earlier that we had become disillusioned with the PJCRP that was entrusted to oversee the restoration of our cemetery. This is not the place to recount the full history of our encounter with this organization. But I want to draw your attention to the most recent and perhaps the most egregious examples of what has happened because of PJCRP mismanagement. These are not simple, excusable oversights committed by Dr. Weinberg and Mr. Omasta but a failure to perform and to live up to their responsibilities; they must bear the blame and pay the price for what has happened:

The obelisk was positioned in the wrong place in the cemetery because it stands over the graves of our ancestors; this may violate Halachic guidelines. We had clearly instructed Mr. Omasta and the contractor to place the memorial inside the cemetery immediate to the entrance to the graveyard. This location was selected because numerous witnesses assured us that there were no graves in this part of the cemetery. Mr. Omasta never questioned our decision, but he took it upon himself to have the monument erected in the "middle" of the cemetery over the ground where our ancestors are buried. He did so without seeking or obtaining our permission or rabbinic authority.

We provided Mr. Omasta with photos and detailed drawings of the monument that we wanted installed in the cemetery. The design was modeled on the obelisk that stands in the Ivansker Section of the Bathurst Lawn Cemetery in Toronto. In negotiations with the stone mason Mr. Omasta assured us that our wishes were achievable and would be adhered to. But for unexplained reasons, and once again without seeking our approval, he altered the design of the monument. The structure in the cemetery bears little or no resemblance to the design we paid for and provided to Mr. Omasta. It is unacceptable.

A plaque has been placed on the outside wall at the entrance to the cemetery; the plaque is inscribed in English, Hebrew, Polish and Yiddish. We provided Mr. Omasta with hard copies of these inscriptions. The documents had been carefully checked and re-checked for accuracy by our side, but Mr. Omasta insisted that they be reviewed by his own "private expert" (and at additional expense). The result: the Yiddish text on the plaque has been inscribed backwards.

Finally, Mr. Omasta lied to us in claiming that he had sought and obtained approval for the inscriptions

on the obelisk in the Ivansk graveyard. His actions sparked the unfortunate consequences that I have described.

We are currently exploring remedies to hold the PJCRP to account for the damage it has caused. At a minimum we intend to demand that the PJCRP correct the following:

- 1. Dismantle the current monument and replace it with one that adheres to the original design we provided to the PJCRP.**
- 2. Locate the new monument near the entrance to the cemetery as originally instructed.**
- 3. Replace the English, Hebrew, Polish and Yiddish plaques on the obelisk omitting the word “collaborators” and substituting another word or phrase that is acceptable to the local authorities.**
- 4. Replace the plaque at the entrance to the cemetery to correct the error in the Yiddish text.**

I take no pleasure in revealing what has happened. We are hopeful that this matter can be resolved without undue delay and that the PJCRP will take the required steps to assure that this happens. I have relied heavily on the encouragement of my family as well as colleagues, Gary Lipton, Grzegorz Gregorczyk, Monika Krawczyk, Margaret Daniel and other Ivaskers to deal with this trouble. I also want to acknowledge the work of Piotr Kadlcik in securing the integrity of Polish-Jewish cemeteries. I decided to wait until all the facts were on the table and until I had met with officials in Poland to apprise you of what was going on. I shall keep you abreast of ongoing developments.

Restoration of our ancestor’s cemetery was a noble and fulfilling mitzvah. It is and will continue to be a source of great pride and inspiration for us and for generations to come.

After Words: Readers Respond to “Wrestling With Reality”

Correspondents are listed alphabetically.

From: Sydney Kasten (Israel)

Although I read *Tehillim* over it, said *Kaddish* and *El Molei Rachamim* over it, your comments on its realization allow me to admit that the monument did not really speak to me aesthetically. In fact, I would almost be inclined to destroy it and start from scratch except for the idea of further disturbing the bones of our ancestors. A Rabbinic input could guide a decision to move, alter or rebuild it. I could see adding a column on to the existing base, or replacing the existing apex with stone of a different color to suggest a flame. Fiscal considerations are also important.

It's a dreadful feeling that all of the human-to-human work that Ivanskers have done is in danger of being undone, but I have no doubt that the word "collaborators" has to be erased, even if it means grinding out the whole inscription and hewing it out anew.

First of all the law is the law, and apparently the law against implying Polish collaboration with both the Nazi's and the communists exists. I think in all our contacts with the Poles it should be made clear that our efforts have been to commemorate not to condemn.

Seriously, the Polish government did enact and maintain laws that impoverished our families in Ivansk, but this was before the Germans took Poland. But I don't know if it would be constructive to stand on this point at this time. Any excuse that they might make about this undeniable historical fact would be lame and embarrassing. I regrettably feel that the Poles will need their own "Nasty Girl" to awaken them; a Polish historian that will have the courage. I don't think it's our job. (This is beginning to happen as in the coming to light of the case of Jedwabne, the town that herded its Jews into a barn and burned them.)

As for the people of Iwaniska I'm not sure how I feel. It was a previous generation that despoiled the cemetery of its stones. But it was the same generation that acknowledged its location. The Jews didn't grow up in Ivansk cowed by the *Goyim* (synonym for Gentile or non-Jew). My mother told me of having been bothered by *shkutsim* (non-Jewish smart alecks, troublemakers) while carrying water up from the river, but her teenage uncle was enough to chase them away. I think its safe to say that Ivansker immigrants in general came with a strong sense of self confidence, fostered in *de heim* ("home"... the shtetl), that allowed them to establish themselves in all fields without feeling the need to hide their Jewishness.

The atrocities that my mother recalled were perpetrated not by the locals but by Russian Cossacks. The fires that she recalled were not set by the Goyim. Of the two that she mentioned, one was set by Jews who had stolen a flock of geese, which were hidden in a cellar. The fire was set to destroy the evidence when the "*Heat*" was closing in. Another, also set by Jews, involved a project to bring electricity to the town. The company went bankrupt.

This reminds me of the story of two business men:

"How's business?"

"Terrible! I just had a flood."

"Hmm. That's interesting. How do you set a flood?"

In general I have felt many glimmerings of good will in Poland and from Poland, more than enough and strong enough to give me the patience to watch a healing process unfold.

From: Henriette Kretz (Belgium)

I carefully read your report about the controversy in the Ivansk Cemetery. I understand your concern about not jeopardizing the integrity of the cemetery, but permit me to advise you not to go along with the odious changes that have been forced upon us.

Many Poles are instinctively and deeply rooted in their anti-Semitic attitudes, which are a mixture of envying their Jewish scapegoats as well as feeling their own inferiority. All this is reflected in a distorted sense of patriotism expressed by an attitude that Poles can do no wrong. All forms of internal criticism are regarded as a betrayal of the nation and all external disapproval is viewed as an attempt to harm Poland.

I was born in Poland and have remained in close contact with many Polish people. I think I know them pretty well. I admire many Poles...I owe my life to several courageous individuals. But no nation is entirely good or bad. In Poland there are all shades; those with high ideals and humanitarian compassion; those with no outstanding characteristics, one way or another (the majority); and those who are frankly blood thirsty scoundrels. All these segments of Polish society played their part during the dark time of the Holocaust.

In Poland and the Ukraine persons rendering assistance to the Jews were put to death with their families. No other nation in Europe was faced with such a heavy penalty; and yet in Poland more people helped Jews than in any other European country (but by no means en masse as some would like us to believe). Despite such heroism most Poles remained impassive to the plight of the Jews. And there is irrefutable evidence that Jews suffered at the hands of Poles during the war and that Poland was the only country in Europe where Jews were confronted by numerous pogroms after the war. The most infamous was the slaughter in Kielce; it is commonplace to hear that this atrocity was perpetrated by the "communist regime" rather than by private citizens. While not as well known, the pogrom in Krakow Zakopane is perhaps even more odious because its primary victims were Jewish orphans who had somehow survived The Shoah. These episodes mirror the basest instincts of the mob.

Iwaniska is located in a relatively poor region of Poland. Anti-Jewish prejudice has been the rule, not the exception in this area; in general, it was widespread during and after the war and persists even to this day. It may now be fashionable to try to hide these feelings but in many instances it lies just below the surface.

I have a good friend of many years, a professor of archeology at the University of Krakow. A while back, during the heat of discussion he told me, "You are a Jew and you can never be a part of the Polish nation and feel like a real Pole."

So dear Norton, we should not give in and try to help Poland represent itself as a nation of heroes...a nation that helped the Jews against all odds. Yes, a small minority was real heroes, but just like every other nation most remained indifferent and some used the occupation as a signal to engage in horrific, hateful acts against innocent Jews. These collaborators were everywhere in Europe but some countries are trying to make amends for the part they played in the destruction of the Jews.

Poland must do the same; Poles also suffered during the war but we should not allow them to use this to "hide" from the fact that some played a role in of the most gruesome chapters of world history. If we do, we are collaborating with them to subvert history.

From: David Lederman (Israel)

Dear Norton

It was for me a very disagreeable surprise to read your last e-newsletter and I understand your disappointment of Mr.Omasta's dishonesty and irresponsibility of Dr. Weinberg. After all the time and efforts you and others invested in the project you found out that not everything is so simple. There are always people looking for their own profit, no matter what.

There is no basis to the allegation that the word "collaborators" should not be mentioned in the inscription on the obelisk. Nothing is truer than this word in the statement. Not using this word is like denying the Holocaust. If I am not wrong and my memory is still working, the President of Poland in one of his speeches, asked for forgiveness in the name of the Polish people for all the atrocities committed by many of them. As well as we cannot deny that there were also many others who risked their lives in order to save many Jewish souls.

I hope that after all everything will be fixed. It is a good idea to install a plaque on the obelisk which honored those Poles who risked their lives to help their Jewish neighbors I hope also that the obelisk will be placed inside the cemetery immediate to the entrance to the graveyard as well as correct the Yiddish text on the plaque that has been inscribed backwards.

From: Gary Lipton (Canada)

The events that you relate in "Wrestling With Reality" regretfully happened. What some of our readers may not fully appreciate is the fact that the PJCRP operates in Poland without any checks and balances inviting both sloppy workmanship (e.g., the reversed Yiddish inscription at the gate) and deceit (e.g., no authorization permit requested or received for the inscriptions). The issue before us is twofold; what action do we take in regard to the "collaboration issue", and should we press the PJCRP to change the monuments, both the wording and the location?

First, I will address our role in responding to the collaboration issue. I have felt at times that in your eagerness not to offend both the citizens of Iwaniska and Polish authorities, you have been a touch too conciliatory to people who deny and revise history. I would challenge the Polish authorities to take down our monument, for the truth is inscribed on it.

Jan Gross, a Polish Jew and an historian at Cambridge University, has recently published two important books, "Neighbours" and "Fear" of which the subject deals with incidents in which Polish citizens murdered Jews in vigilante acts both during and after WW II. He also documents that some government and military officials were either complicit or were aware and chose not to intervene. The incidents which Gross describes are well known; pogroms in Kielce and Krakow after the war, as well as the more recent revelations of the murder of the Jewish citizens of the town of Jedwabne at the hands of the Polish citizenry during the war. In every example of these repugnant acts reputable historians and high-level Polish government officials accept that the atrocities did occur. But these findings are contested by elements in the general population (especially the older generations), in the Church and in "lower levels" of government. This denial is endemic in Poland and is a significant component of the modern Polish identity.

In "Wrestling with Reality" Mr. Lech Janiszewski is quoted as saying, "Poland did not collaborate with Germans" (see: *"Who Were Collaborators?"*, page 12). His statement is true as far as it goes: unlike France, Hungary, Norway and other occupied countries Poland did not establish a collaborative government with the Nazis (Poland maintained a government in exile in London). But Mr. Janiszewski avoids talking about individuals and organizations that forgot or ignored all moral codes of behavior. He (purposefully?) skips over the mountains of testimony that report on the brutality of some Poles against Jews. While these revelations do not directly pertain to what happened to Jews in Iwansika, there is sufficient testimony from survivors and from some locals to indicate that predators used the occupation as a pretext to move against their Jewish neighbours.

I suggest we should defy such lower level, disingenuous authorities and stay mum, as much as possible. The more actively we protest and try to defend our good intentions, those who live in

denial will become more emboldened and active in their contempt of us; they will be even more convinced that Jews are out to "get them" and that we have purposefully manipulated world sympathy to minimize the suffering of Poles under the Nazis. We don't want to be drawn into the national obsession of denial and revisionism; the more we try to engage in productive dialogue the more we complicate the issue. Jan Gross has the education, the tools and the time to engage the Polish media, academics and public opinion. But these issues are simply too vast and complicated for us. I believe that it is still not likely that the authorities will have the determination to dismantle our monument and if this does happen it will turn out to be a public relations nightmare for Iwaniska and Poland. For what it is worth, both the directors of the FODZ and the Jewish Union have insisted that this is unlikely to happen. If the monument is vandalized, another possibility, we will deal with that eventuality at that time. In conclusion, say little and leave the monument as is with the word "collaborators".

From: Hope Melnick (USA)

I agree: we certainly should support the people in Poland who assisted our people during The Shoah despite their own peril. But there were collaborators throughout Europe, not just Poland, who served the Nazis in one way or another. Today, there are deniers of history even among the well educated; perhaps we should call them ostriches. This is not surprising: we've been scapegoats for just about every ill that has befallen humanity and have been vilified and punished for being who we are. Even in the 21st century there are those who continue to derive nourishment from ignorance and hatred. It's hard to believe.

A thought that comes to my mind has to do with semantics...while the Polish translation of "collaborators" may have one specific meaning, this is not so in English. Perhaps a more "acceptable" word could be substituted on the memorial in the Polish text while leaving "collaborators" in the English, Hebrew and Yiddish passages. (I make this suggestion with tongue in cheek.)

Without oversight, the PJCRP can function, more or less, in any way it chooses. Given this reality, I am trying to put into perspective the fact that PJCRP is a constituent agency under the aegis of *The Foundation for Jewish Philanthropies* in Buffalo, NY. This arrangement gives PJCRP the appearance of legitimacy and validates its existence. It is likely that we are not the only group that was "abused" by the PJCRP, but I would guess that not many of them complained about their experience beyond trying to communicate directly with Dr. Weinberg and his Project Manager. We have seen that this approach yields little or no satisfaction. As an alternative, I suggest that you place our case before The Foundation for Jewish Philanthropies. As the "umbrella" for the PJCRP, The Foundation must be very concerned about maintaining its reputation for integrity as a charitable organization and would want to know about PJCRP mismanagement of our project. The Foundation would be in a position to pressure the PJCRP to fix its mistakes or expel them if they fail to fulfill their obligations. I would also suggest that you inform other groups that were dissatisfied by the shoddy service rendered by the PJCRP; I'd bet many would join us in expressing their displeasure to The Foundation.

I hope my comments are of some help; it is my wish that things will begin to look up without too much difficulty!

From: Lisa Newman (Canada)

My dear Norton

I just finished reading the latest newsletter and am full of feelings: mostly dismay, rage, sadness, outrage and so forth.

From: Betty Joy Starkman (USA)

Dear Norton.

I was devastated and heartbroken when I read of the recent events in Iwaniska.

I must admit that it caused me to weep.

We had great of problems with the Ilza restoration. We paid a great deal of money and many of the Polish promises were not kept. We were not given a single shard. My grandmother age 32 and great grandparents were buried there.

From: Darren Taichman (USA)

Has the Ivansk Project Failed? Was it worth it?

What if 10 years from now the Jewish Cemetery in Ivansk is overgrown with weeds and littered with garbage?

What if 10 years from now the Jewish cemetery is not visited by a single Jew?

Does this mean that nothing will have changed? That everything remains as it was in 2004 before the Ivansk Cemetery Project started? Does this signify that in the end, it was all for naught?

The answer is a resounding, "No!"

Even if the graveyard is unkempt, even if the monument is disfigured or dismantled, and even if not a single Jews visits the site – I believe that 10, 20 or more years from now The Project will have made a difference for both Jews and Poles.

For us Jews, it is easier to answer why.

Why? Because a group of committed individuals and their families honored their ancestors. That story, that spirit, that resolve was witnessed by their children and grandchildren. It has become and will remain a source of pride, adding depth to the Jewish identity of their children and grandchildren.

Why? Because around the world – around the globe! – Jews who previously knew precious little, or absolutely nothing of their ancestors' world now know something. The voices of Yitz'hak

Goldstein (Ivansk Project e-Newsletter, Issue # 4), Hinda Katz (Issue #27), Yechiel Eisenberg (Issue #16) and Zvi Weissdorf (Issue # 13), amongst others, are now part of our collective heritage. And the faces of the young Ivanskers that Zvi Silberstein once knew now illuminate the world that no longer exists (Issue #6). Our people's joys and terrors are ours. That matters. A lot.

Why? Because around the world – around the globe!- people who would have otherwise never made contact with “lost” family members now know their names and faces. The Project made this possible. Familial bonds – the concept of family itself among these individuals – would otherwise have been completely lost.

Why? Because around the world there are Jews who have made new-found friends in Poland. Jews feel a deep bond of friendship with Grzegorz Gregorczyk; with Kazimierz Kotowski, Boussenna (Marco) Mahfoud, Jadwiga Pawlik, Pawel Skowron, Kazimierz Zoltek and many, many others. Because such friendships are worlds more powerful, more important, and yes more *Jewish* than the hate many of us thought should be in us. We are better people for that.

Why? Because even if we only return to the cemetery once in 10, 20 or 30 years to clean it up and recite Kaddish, it will signify that we have triumphed over the forces of evil. Yes, it is OK to say *we triumphed*. No, we did not win – everyone lost – but *we survived, damn it all, and to hell with those who aimed to see otherwise. Here we are!*

Yes, I believe that if just one Jew comes to our ancestors' graveyard to say Kaddish it will proclaim, “**We Are Here!**” Such an affirmation matters to us, to our parents, and to our grand and great-grandparents. It matters to our collective memory; indeed, it matters to our very souls.

But what of the Poles? Even with the weeds and accumulated trash, a forlorn memorial, and even without a single visiting Jew – I believe that 10, 20 or more years from now the Ivansk Project will have made a difference for Poles as well.

Why? Because a group of young, innocent and blissfully naïve school children of Ivansk enjoyed the company of a nutty Professor and his assorted friends who came to their town from around the world. These visitors were friendly. They were funny. They were Jews!

Of course by the time they reach adulthood these kids will certainly hear some bad stories about Jews. But, I believe they'll remember: they'll remember that time when they sang songs for us when we visited their town. They'll remember how we got up and danced with them. They'll recall how we laughed together and took silly pictures that we exchanged by e-mail. And many of these former junior high school students will still have copies of those photos.

Why? Because a few people in the town reached out to us in friendship and assured that an important memory and lesson were not lost. I believe these people represent the feelings of the majority – but even if they do not, so what? They stood up for us. They stood with us. And we stood with them.

Why? Because even if not spoken in the press, or in the contentious debates at local elections, or even if contradicted by adults afraid (or ashamed) of looking honestly at the past - at least some of those schoolchildren heard it. No, we did not change the minds of some of their elders – we never will. But several of those school children wrote essays about how things once were in their town. And most of them asked why the Jews are not there anymore. And at least some of them will know the answer, and maybe one will become the leader of Poland. Maybe one of them will become the Pope.

I am a very fortunate person. I grew up extremely proud of being my parents' son. Of being a member of a proud and upright family. Oh yes, my siblings and I have joked about how our Dad's antics have once again meant yet another trip to Ivansk! Which one of us has to go this time? But how like Jewish grandparents we brag to our friends about what our Dad has done in his retirement!

My son spent a week with his grandfather in Poland. Watching and helping as his Zaida reached out to access the world of his ancestors. Learning what commitment, love, responsibility and identity can mean. What more do I need The Ivansk Project to have accomplished?

* * * * *

For me the significance of The Ivansk Project is best embodied in the following poem, "**The Amen Stone**" (from the collection, *Open Closed Open*, by Israeli poet, Yehuda Amichai (1924 – 2000). I believe that those who have made The Ivansk Project a success are the "sad good people (man)" Amichai describes.

The poem was translated from Hebrew by Chana Bloch and I extend thanks to my friend, Chuck Rossi, who after listening to my stories about my Dad and other Ivanskers, brought this to my attention.

The Amen Stone

*On my desk there is a stone with the word "Amen" on it,
a triangular fragment of stone from a Jewish graveyard destroyed
many generations ago.
The other fragments, hundreds upon hundreds,
were scattered helter-skelter, and a great yearning,
a longing without end, fills them all:
first name in search of family name, date of death seeks
dead man's birthplace, son's name wishes to locate
name of father, date of birth seeks reunion with soul
that wishes to rest in peace. And until they have found
one another, they will not find perfect rest.
Only this stone lies calmly on my desk and says "Amen."
But now the fragments are gathered up in loving-kindness
by a sad good man. He cleanses them of every blemish,
photographs them one by one, arranges them on the floor
in the great hall, makes each gravestone whole again,
one again: fragment to fragment,
like the resurrection of the dead, a mosaic,
a jigsaw puzzle. Child's play.*

From: Susan Taichman-Robins (USA)

It is hard to believe that Polish officials took such an unyielding stand over "collaborators", refusing to accept the immutable fact that some of their people assisted the Germans in the extermination

of our people. Personally, I would rather see the whole cemetery restoration come down then to roll over and give them what they want.

While I feel this way within (and suspect that others share my defiance), it is another matter to sit back and watch this happen.

So, what do we do now?

We move forward without apology to anyone and resolve the outstanding issues with PJCRP and create a "safe environment" for our cemetery and monument.

The "best" outcome would be achieved if the PJCRP does the right thing and attends to the damage it has caused, but nothing thus far leads me to believe that this will occur without involvement of the legal system--and this may take ages.

It may even become necessary for us alone to replace the monument, not only because of the "word" but also to repair all the other blunders wrought by the PJCRP. Yes, funds will be needed to accomplish this, but if necessary we can and should do it!

I sense that the collaborator issue forces us to shift our perspective from one of, "*we went, we did, we achieved*" to "*we went, we did, and now we must...*" Because of what we did, we discovered many Polish people in Iwaniska who are good, decent human beings; we needed to meet with them, talk with them and share tea in their homes to realize that things are not "black and white" and that most people are inherently decent and caring. The bridges that we built to them need not be abandoned. We must not allow negativism to overshadow all that has been and remains to be accomplished. Poland's obsession with the word "collaborators" is their problem, not ours. They must find the solution.