

THE IVANSK PROJECT e-NEWSLETTER

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In Memoriam

Zvi Weissdorf, z"l (1916 - 2009)
Ben Teichman, z"l (1921 - 2010)

It is with great sadness that I convey the news of the death of two Ivanskers who have contributed to our community's collective heritage. Zvi and Ben were only 5 years apart in age, and both grew to manhood during the 1930s. But their lives were as different as night and day. Their interesting stories were published in earlier editions of the e-Newsletter and are worth reading/rereading .

In "Memories of My Youth" (Ivansk Project e-Newsletter, Number 13, July-August 2005) Zvi Weissdorf gives us a glimpse of what Jewish life was like in Ivansk during the interwar years. Poverty was endemic and opportunity was limited. Nevertheless, Zvi was able to see beyond the stark realities to capture the essence of the town's people and their culture. In every face he saw an interesting story. For him the pious and the profane, the poor and the wealthy, the naïve and the scheming formed a tapestry of never-to-be-forgotten characters. He delighted in recalling humorous events and circumstances that impacted their lives. But he also wept when disaster struck individuals or the community. For him the greatest tragedy was the mass extermination of his family and the Jewish population of Ivansk by the Germans and their allies. Zvi managed to stay alive despite the odds, and after the war he met and married a fellow survivor, Soshanah Aronson in a French refugee camp. They reached Israel in 1949, raised their family and contributed to the emergence and growth of a new nation. At Zvi's funeral Jacob (Koby) Silberstein bade farewell to his good friend and landsman (see below).



The son of Ivansker immigrants, Ben Teichman was born in Canada, a land of unlimited horizons. With humor and with passion Ben recalls many of the triumphs and the heartbreaks of his closely knit family. In "The House at 211 Beverly Street" (Ivansk Project e-Newsletter, Number 38, September-October 2009) he chronicled the story of the Teichman Family in Toronto, and in many ways The Teichmans were representative of what happened to other transplanted Ivanskers who left Poland. In Canada tensions surfaced between the secular society that lured Ben and his siblings and his parent's traditional religious culture. Compromises had to be made on both sides, but core ethical values were never in doubt. Ben's parents supported and encouraged him at every turn and endowed him with a deep sense of purpose and responsibility. He lived up to their highest expectations, working tirelessly to attain academic excellence. He became

an ophthalmologist who earned the respect and admiration of his patients, his students and his peers. Ben and his wife Queenie raised four sons, all of whom have gone on to do significant things ... "the apples did not fall far from the tree". Ben's granddaughter, Jennifer Teichman (who was in Viet Nam at the time of his death) wrote a memorial to her grandfather, which was delivered at the funeral by another member of the family (see below).

Ivanskers owe Zvi Weissdorf and Ben Teichman a debt of gratitude for sharing their recollections. Their stories have illuminated the past and will enrich the lives of future generations. We were fortunate that they walked among us. May their memory be as a blessing.

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Parting Words at the Funeral of Zvi Weissdorf, z"l

by Jacob (Kobi) Silberstein (Kibbutz Magal, Israel)

November 16th 2009, כ"ט חשוון תש"ע

It is with deep regret that I heard this morning about the death of Zvi Weissdorf (1916 – 2009).

I met Zvi for the first time about five years ago when I started searching for my family roots. My father, of blessed memory, and Zvi were good friends during their boyhoods in Iwaniska, Poland.

The first time I came to visit Zvi he welcomed me warmly, and I could already feel the fluency of memories waiting to be told. After offering me some refreshments Zvi started telling me about the experiences he endured during the Second World War. He was the only survivor of his family; his parents and 8 siblings were slaughtered. Zvi told me about his wanderings in different parts of Poland during the early years of the war and after that about the hardships he suffered in Nazi concentration camps.

After the war Zvi immigrated to Israel with his wife Shoshana, blessed be her memory; they were married in Paris. Their first years in Israel were very difficult but there was a lot of joy as well.

During a short break we discussed daily matters after which Zvi started telling me about Ivansk. He described the town, its houses and its streets, the market square, the Shul and the Bet Midrash where he used to study. His descriptions were very detailed: for example, he described the synagogue, its entrance, the Bima, the decorated ceiling, the Aron Kodesh (the Holy Ark) with its parochet (the velvet drape that hangs in front of the Aron Kodesh) and the Torah Scrolls.

Zvi's memory was phenomenal; he remembered almost all the members of the Jewish community, their families and their occupations. I showed him a few of my father's photographs taken in the shtetl; he recognized and named almost everyone in the photos, including my three aunts. From Zvi I learned a lot about my own family of which I knew so little till then.

In the 1960s Zvi recorded his memories of his boyhood in Ivansk and shared them with us in "Memories of My Youth", which was published in The Ivansk Project e-Newsletter (Number 13, July – August, 2005). In many ways, his style reminded me of Shalom Aleichem, filled with warmth, charm, mischievousness, loveliness and humor. Zvi did not have a computer, and I used to print out each issue of the e-newsletter and send it to him by post. After receiving his copy he always

phoned me to comment on the content and to add detail or correct what he thought was not accurate. He was an incredible source of information of that little shtetl so far from today's world.

Dear family, may it be of comfort to you in your deep sorrow to know that Zvi's recollections are a precious contribution to the collective memory of the Ivansker community in particular and to Polish-Jewish history in general.

My feelings of sympathy go out to you on behalf of the entire Ivansker fellowship.

Dear Zvi, may you rest in peace.

Your legacy will be remembered.

May your soul be bound up in the bond of everlasting life. ת.נ.צ.ב.ה

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Grandpa, I Love You! A Tribute to Ben Teichman from Viet Nam.

by Jennifer Teichman (Toronto, Canada)

February 16, 2010

There are so many ways in which I will remember grandpa. Emily* has already spoken of the enormous role he played in our lives growing up. So, I would like to say just a few words on the role he will play in my life from now on.

Grandpa was, and still is, my role model. He was the person whom I aspire to be: a dedicated student, a respected member of the community, a leader, and most importantly, a mensch. His modesty and self sacrifice have served as a moral compass for me in my 21 years, and will continue to steer my course for the rest of my life. I don't know if I could ever be as selfless as he was, but I hold it as my highest goal and deepest value.

Grandpa's modesty is not the only part of his life that I wish to emulate. His academic achievements and success as a medical doctor have always, and will continue to inspire and motivate me in my own academic and medical pursuits. I spent a long time deciding whether I wanted to apply to law school or medical school. My decision was made when I began contemplating what type of a person I want to be, and what type of people I want to surround myself with as an adult. The answer came to me without hesitation. I want to be like grandpa. I want to be self-sacrificing; I want to be a mensch. I want to be part of a community that is dedicated to the health and happiness of others. I want to be a leader, but one that lets others take the reins just as often as I do. I want to be like grandpa.

Grandpa, you are in my thoughts daily. When faced with challenging situations, I often ask myself what you would do, how composed and diplomatic you would be. I hope that I will make you proud through graduation, medical school, and whatever lies beyond that.

Grandpa, you will always be my role model. I love you!

* Emily Teichman is Ben's granddaughter and Jennifer's cousin.

Seeing the Good in People

by Audrey Taichman, Philadelphia, USA

I have met people I just don't like, and in every case I can tell you why.

But what about an entire nation? Is it rational to harbor resentment against every single German because of the madness of the Nazis years? Do we despise all Russians because of the former Soviet Union's anti-Jewish policies? The answer is obviously, "No". Most of us do not condemn every person living in a country whose policies give rise to concern.

But for me the exception was Poland.

I grew up seeing every Pole as a committed anti-Semite. As a young girl I became aware of the prejudice and the violence perpetrated against Jews on Polish soil. I heard about pogroms, anti-Jewish legislation and finally the betrayal of many Jews during the Second World War. In my mind this was enough to plant the seed that all Poles were guilty of shameful acts against my people.

In recent years my perceptions of Poland and the Polish people have changed. No, I am not a "revisionist", whose eyes and mind are closed or who ignores ugly events of the past. But I no longer see every Pole as crazed by Judeophobia. Quite the opposite. I now judge Poles as individuals, especially the younger generations. And I have discovered more good than bad people. Let me explain how and why my attitude changed.

My Father

When I began thinking of writing this essay I discussed the subject with my father. He tried to dissuade me from including him in the account because he was uncomfortable being singled out for praise for his role in the story. However, it was my dad who showed me that even in the darkest corners of the Holocaust courageous people defied evil because it was the right thing to do.

My dad taught me that history almost always tends to focus on the wicked rather than the righteous. Far too many people in every Nazi-occupied country looked the other way, profited from or even assisted the Germans in the "War Against the Jews". But just as important many tried to help Jews at great peril to themselves and their families. In fact, more than any other nationality, Polish people have been honored by Yad Vashem as "The Righteous Among the Nations". And countless others remain unsung and anonymous. It has been said that just about every Polish Jew who survived the war received help from a Polish Christian.



My First Trip to Poland and Iwaniska



These discussions with my dad began around 2002 when the Ivansk Project got underway. To honor our ancestors and increase awareness of our heritage, he and his colleagues committed themselves to reclaiming the Ivansk Jewish Cemetery and to documenting the history of the shtetl. At that time my mind-set towards Poland was still very raw, and I was not able to move beyond these feelings.

But things began to change in November 2004 when my dad, **David Blumenfeld** (Israel) and I flew to Poland to start work on the cemetery.

Our purpose was to meet with officials and the people of Iwaniska. We needed to win their trust and their cooperation in rescuing the graveyard. As a professional photojournalist David intended to document the process on film. My dad looked forward to the encounter with great anticipation and insisted that we load up with gifts for the locals — our suitcases were stuffed with bottles of scotch, t-shirts (advertising my restaurant), heavy

books and other souvenirs from America ... there was little room for our own belongings.

When we landed in Warsaw **Grzegorz (Greg) Gregorczyk** was there to greet us. He is a member of The Ivansk Project's Action Committee. Without Greg nothing would have happened. In fact, he was the one who first promoted the idea of rescuing the cemetery and did everything that was necessary to get the project off the ground. He made all the local arrangements for our visit and served as our translator/interpreter and chauffeur

As we headed south from Warsaw all of us wondered what kind of reception we'd receive in Iwaniska.



Our first meeting was with **Kazimierz Zoltek**, a former school teacher, at that time the mayor of Iwaniska. He greeted us warmly with a toast and listened intently to our ideas. It soon became apparent that he was willing to help us. This set the tone for what happened on subsequent encounters. He became a close ally of the project and his door was always open to us. For instance, he offered to assist us in clearing the site of overgrown vegetation; he provided us with a place to store recovered matzevot until they could be returned to the cemetery; he introduced us to key members of the community. He even hosted a reception for our people when they turned up for the rededication ceremony in 2006. He did all that he could to make sure the project was a success.

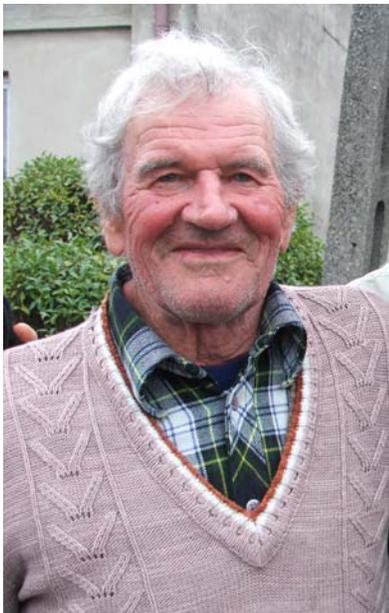
At one point my dad asked Mr. Zoltek why he decided to help us; he replied, "If my ancestors were buried in a foreign country I too

would hope that someone would assist me to find and restore their cemetery.” This was not a self-serving politician but a man with a conscience, a real mensch. He and my dad have continued to communicate with each other via e-mail and Skype.



After leaving Mr. Zoltek, we explored the town on foot hoping to meet up with some of the locals. In the shadow of the church an older woman was standing in the doorway of her small cottage. **Maria Barwinska** stared at me as though I was a ghost. “Rifcha!” (Rivka), she exclaimed, and her eyes welled with tears. I looked like one her Jewish girlfriends. They went to school together.

Mrs. Barwinksa invited us into her home where she recalled the names of several Jewish families and filled in some of the blank spaces in the “K-B map” (see the map on The Ivansk Project web site). She also helped construct a drawing of the so-called “*Roodhaus*” that once stood in the town square (see the “K-B Map”). She wondered why the Jews never moved back to Iwanska after the war. Their disappearance had deeply affected her. The Jews were not faceless statistics — they were people she knew and saw every day. We encountered similar reactions when we met other townsfolk. Most were young teenagers during the German occupation and certainly could not fully fathom the cruel and unimaginable fate that awaited the Jews. Their parents must have understood, and no doubt some of them shed no tears when the town was made “*Judenrein*”. But I suspect that many adults looked on in horror and in sympathy while their neighbors were marched out of town on the road to Treblinka. My thoughts are supported by the comments of Yitzhak Goldstein (see The Ivansk Project e-Newsletter, Number 3, 2004) who pointed out that the priest and the police chief were helpful to the Jews and warned them of the calamity that awaited them.



As we circled the market square we were aware of a man who was intently studying our movements. He turned out to be the town’s most engaging character. **Stephan Viktor** knew everything there was to know about everything and acted as our local guide and raconteur. Viktor’s mischievous smile and his gregarious personality made him an instant favorite.

At the time of the deportation Viktor was about 16 years old. He told us that the Germans ordered his father to bring horse and wagon to the market square and transport about 20 Jewish children to the railroad station in Cmielow. However, his father wanted to stay behind to capitalize on the opportunity to acquire abandoned Jewish property. So, Viktor was forced to take his father’s place on the wagon. Somewhere on the road to Cmielow the wagon overturned. Many of the children escaped but Viktor did not know what happened to them. We sensed that he was ashamed of his father’s behavior and that the memory of the children in the wagon continued to haunt him.

Viktor guided us through the thick undergrowth in the Jewish cemetery pointing to the site of a mass grave where approximately 10 Jews had been murdered by the Nazis. Nearby, he located a cache of broken glass vases used as vessels for memorial candles. Over the years Polish people

had visited the site to light candles as a way to remember the Jews who are buried there. (After the rededication of the cemetery in 2006 we found that a framed picture of a Catholic Saint had been placed at the foot of the monument that we erected in the cemetery. Polish friends assured us that this was another heartfelt expression of respect.) On subsequent visits to Iwaniska we looked forward to meeting up with Viktor who always provided useful information about the past.



While exploring the burial ground **Jadwiga Pawlik** appeared out of nowhere. All her life she has lived on the family farm that abuts the cemetery. Before the war her father had many friendly contacts with Jewish people in town and he maintained and held the keys to the cemetery. Today, Mrs. Pawlik still works in the fields and is the unofficial guardian of the cemetery. Whenever strangers appear they are likely to encounter Mrs. Pawlik. She makes it her business to find out who they are and why they are there. As a 12 year old she remembered the day when Germans executed the Jews buried in the mass grave. She relates this and other stories about the cemetery to anyone who visits the site.



Back in town we spent about an hour with **Father Stanislaw Kolasa** who had recently joined the community as its parish priest. He offered us tea and freshly baked refreshments. We showed him a copy of the K-B Map of Ivansk, which prompted many questions about the town's Jewish past. Father Kolasa offered to ask his parishioners to help find and return any matzevot that had been taken from the cemetery. He was as good as his word and many of the tombstone fragments that are now embedded in the cemetery wall were given to us by local people.

Our visit to Iwaniska coincided with *Dzien Niepodleglosci*, an annual national holiday held on 11th of November to mark the end of the First World War and the re-emergence of Poland as an independent nation in 1918 (after 123 years of foreign rule). In the evening Mayor Zoltek invited us to join the festivities in the community hall (on the site of the former shul). We were introduced to the community and Mr. Zoltek outlined what we wanted to accomplish. We were greeted with warm applause. Then, the assembly marched to the church to celebrate mass. Father Kolasa reinforced the mayor's message and asked his people to support our quest to honor our ancestors.

To summarize thus far, I think you can understand why my thinking about Poland and Poles was beginning to change. The people I have described are representative of many other young and older individuals I met during this and subsequent visits to Iwaniska. Many of them are identified in articles previously published in The Ivansk Project e-Newsletter. They had three things in common: they supported what we were doing; they accepted us as Jews and they needed to tell us about the past. We had the feeling that they wanted to tell someone about what they had witnessed ... it was a catharsis for them.

IMAGES OF IWANISKA, NOVEMBER 2004



1. The Town Hall: Mr. Zoltek prepares a toast to welcome us to Iwaniska.
2. The Junior High School: dad and some of the students gather for a photo.
3. Mrs. Barwinka drawing an image of the "Roodhaus" that once stood in the market square.
4. With Mrs. Marianna Kijandka who told me about her childhood growing up with Jewish kids.
5. The Community Hall: girl's chorus singing national songs to mark *Dzien Niepodleglosci*.
6. The Community Hall: dad and two teenagers. Dad wears the cap of the town's brass band.
7. The Community Hall: Greg, Dad, Audrey and David.
8. Two beautiful elderly ladies (unidentified) greeted and spoke to us as we strolled around the town.

Irena Sendler



My inner transformation was also a consequence of knowing about honorable Polish people like Irena Sendler (*Sendlerowa*, 1910-2008) who was responsible for rescuing 2,500 Jewish children from certain death. Between 1942 and 1943 this courageous woman smuggled children out of the Warsaw Ghetto to safe hiding places with non-Jewish families. At that time Irena was a Senior Administrator in the *Warsaw Social Welfare Department* and a member of *Zegota*, the *Council for Aid to Jews*, which was organized by the Polish resistance. She received help from Sisters of the church and apparently, "No one ever refused to take a child from me." Irena buried the names of those she saved so that she could locate them after the war. Her intent was to reveal their identities and if possible reunite them with their families. The Germans imprisoned and tortured Irena but she never revealed the names of the children nor betrayed those who helped her. Irena's story is well known, and in addition to receiving numerous national and international honors, she was nominated for the Noble Prize.

In 2007 my father and I were fortunate to meet this remarkable woman. We had come to Poland to address the problem concerning the wording on the monument that was erected in the Ivansk Cemetery (see Ivansk Project e-Newsletters, No. 28 & 29, 2008). In Warsaw we met up with a fellow Ivansker, **Henriette Kretz** (see Ivansk Project e-Newsletter No. 31, 2008) who had flown in from Belgium to be with us. She knew Irena and took us to her small apartment in a Catholic retirement home. The room was filled with mementos and awards, including many of Jewish significance. Irena was now a frail old woman and looked so tiny sitting in a large arm chair. But she was alert and inquisitive, and her smile lit up the room and my soul. While conversing with Irena, one of the children that she had rescued came to visit carrying a bouquet of flowers and a box of chocolates (I don't remember this person's name but she is now an obstetrician and gynecologist). As they embraced, it was hard to hold back my tears. I will never forget that experience. I may be an atheist but in the company of this angelic woman I felt the presence of holiness.



L-R: Irena Sendler; A woman who was rescued by Irena; Henriette Kretz

Margaret (Malgosia) Daniel

Closer to home I would like to say something about Margaret (*Malgosia Dorocinska*) Daniel. Born and raised in Warsaw Margaret is the daughter of Stefan and Maria Dorocinski. Margaret has 3 grown children and lives outside Philadelphia. She is a dear friend of our family.

In 1995 Margaret's grandfather and her father (Stefan) were designated as "Righteous Among the Nations". They owned a tailor shop, and during the occupation Jewish tailors were forced to work in the shop to speed up production of military uniforms. The Germans banned any personal contact with the prisoners but father and son secretly found ways to provide them with food. One day the prisoners did not appear for work; they had been put on a train destined for death. One man escaped and made his way to Margaret's grandparent's home where he was given shelter and protection.



Margaret has boundless energy and an unquenchable zest for life. She has wide-ranging interests including the culture and history of Jews. Together with Dr. David Lederman (Israel) and my dad she prepared the story of "The YIVO Postcards. Letters from Residents of Ivansk to Relatives in South America, 1940-1941 (see The Ivansk Project e-Newsletter, No 27, 2007). This was her introduction to the Ivansker community and has been followed up by two visits to Israel where she has met the Blumenfeld, Naiman and Silberstein families. On her first trip she was a guest at Charlotte and Morry Blumenfeld's family seder where she surprised everyone by reading from the Haggadah ... in Hebrew! (Margaret has been studying Hebrew for the last 2 years.)

Grzegorz (Greg) Gregorczyk



Besides my father, Greg has had the greatest influence in changing my feelings about Poland and has contributed to The Ivansk Project in so many ways. Before I actually met Greg I read his essay, "The Memory" (see Ivansk Project e-Newsletter, No 4, 2004) in which he describes his journey that led to a greater understanding of what happened during the Holocaust. In his early teens he read a poem called, "Pigtail" and it was a transformative moment in his life. "Pigtail" refers to a clump of hair of one of the victims murdered in Auschwitz. Greg imagines that the "Pigtail" belonged to a Jewish girl named Chavah or Rivka. I'd like to quote several passages taken from his essay:

.... As a child I was imbued with a coarse anti-Semitism. People spoke about Jews either badly or did not speak at all. "Poland for the Poles." "It's all the Jews' fault." - this is what I heard.... It did not stop even although those against whom it was aimed were already gone. This is the atmosphere in which I was brought up. I still have no clear idea why I did not imitate that environment...

... I read the Pigtail at school for the first time. At that point I did not realize that it was mainly Jews that perished in Auschwitz. ... The Pigtail was like a thunderbolt. ... It was simply beyond my comprehension that this Jewish girl with the pigtail murdered in Auschwitz had to be killed only because she was born a Jew. ... Till that moment I didn't realize that it was possible to murder the whole world.

... I remember walking through the Warsaw Jewish graveyard on a rainy day and reading my first book by Isaac Bashevis Singer. I was discovering the Jewish music for myself; I experienced the fascination of the Hebrew alphabet; I

even took a couple of language classes! It became clear to me that letting that world be forgotten would mean letting the Jewish girl with the Pigtail sink into oblivion.

... I do realize that changing the past is beyond my human capabilities. However, I mustn't forget it. ...That is why I remember. But the memory is not enough. The reason of remembering is to avoid the same tragic horror of the past to be repeated one day in the future. Well, the history of the human kind does not allow such an optimistic view of the events: we all know how many atrocities mankind has committed. But I believe it can all turn out differently if only we remember. If we only remember the Pigtail.

After reading his essay I realized that Greg was a very special human being. I got to meet him a few months later when I went to Poland in 2004. Since then Greg and I have become great friends, and he and his two children are now members of our family. Greg has visited us on numerous occasions and has celebrated two Bat Mitzvahs with us. (He is currently planning to attend another one in May).

Back home in Warsaw, Greg's son, Adam and daughter, Basia attend the Lauder-Morasha School, a Jewish day school founded by Ronald S. Lauder Foundation. Lauder-Morasha is rated in the top echelon of primary schools. Almost half the students are Christians, not Jews. Greg wants his kids to be aware of and celebrate other cultures. In this specific instance he wants them to learn Hebrew and Jewish history. He hopes they'll grow up to be decent, moral human beings ... to be real *menschen*.

There are lots of Grzegorz Gregorczyks, Malgossia Dorocinskas, Irena Sendlerowas, Stanislaw Kolasas, Jadwiga Pawliks, Stephan Viktors, Maria Barwinkas, and Kazimierz Zolteks in Poland. You'll discover them if you're willing to see them!

I'm a very lucky woman. My parents have taught me to be proud of my heritage. My dad has helped me see the world in a different way and his philosophy of looking for the good in others has taken hold. I am grateful that this has happened to me. Our world is sometimes a cruel place, but it will get better if we learn to see the possibilities in caring for rather than hurting each other.



Righteous Among The Nations

Awarded to

**Stefan Dorocinski
and his son
Stefan ***

1995

If one is to build a future in a world where Auschwitz had become a possibility, it is essential to emphasize that Mankind is also capable of defending and maintaining human values.

Quotation adapted from Yad Vashem

*[Grandfather and Father to Malgosia Daniel]

I Miss You, Jew! (*Tęsknię za Tobą Żydzie!*)

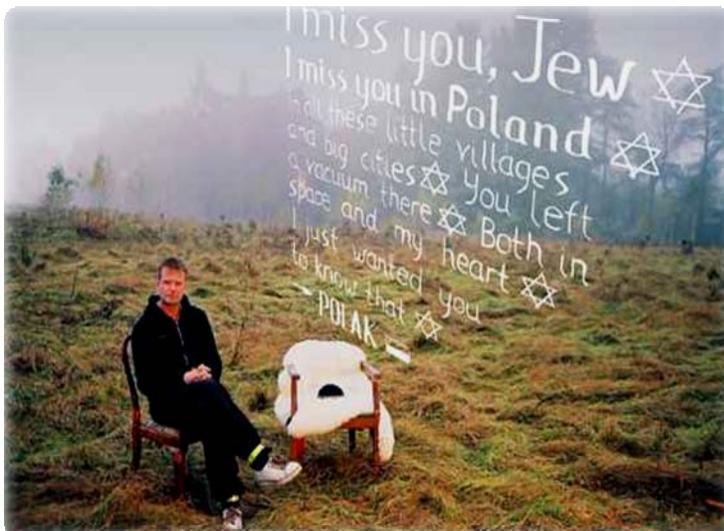
by Greg Gregorczyk, Warsaw, Poland

Graffiti is one of the most common forms of anti-Semitic expression. Throughout the world countless walls are defaced with a variety of anti-Semitic and anti-Zionist motifs including threats, slogans and swastikas. However, recent events in Poland prove that graffiti can also convey messages other than those based on hatred and bigotry. Quite surprisingly, large murals boldly proclaiming, “I Miss You, Jew” have begun to appear all across Poland. The message is hard to ignore. Who and what is behind this phenomenon?

“I Miss You, Jew!” is the brain child of **Rafał Betlejewski**, a Polish artist in his late thirties/early forties. A few weeks ago I met with him over a hot cup of coffee to find out what this was all about. Quite simply he told me that he initiated this nationwide project because *“I want to express my longing for the Polish Jews, who I want to remember name by name. They were here but they are no more ...”*



The “*Tęsknię za Tobą Żydzi*” (“I Miss You, Jew”) campaign was launched on January 27, 2010; the date was not chosen at random but coincided with International Holocaust Memorial Day. The idea quickly moved beyond graffiti when Rafał opened a web site < www.tesknie.com > and invited fellow citizens to express their emotions and feelings about missing the Jews. Hundreds and hundreds of comments have already been posted by individuals from all over the country (and beyond!). The scale of the response speaks volumes about how important and needed the project has become.



What's more, Rafał has asked his audience to submit photos of places where Jews once lived. All the images conform to a stark, down-to-earth format. Two chairs are seen in all the pictures. One is occupied by the “person who misses” while the other remains empty except for a *yarmulke* (also called a *kippah*, the head covering worn by religious Jews), which is placed on the seat. Symbolically the vacant chair is meant to express the emptiness and the loss in those places where Jews were killed or expelled.

"This program is essential" – says Michael Schudrich, the Chief Rabbi of Poland. "It gives a voice to what many of us feel and it empowers others to do something to more fully preserve the memory and contribution of Jews to Polish civilization. Thank you, Rafał. "

Inscriptions of such emotional expressions soon aroused controversy and confusion around the country. Seeing the word "Jew" on a wall, even in such a warm expressive context was – and still is – quite puzzling for many people. But this is precisely where Rafał's project hits the bull's eye. As Rafał recalls:

"I remember the excitement when I first painted a 7-metre-long "I Miss you, Jew!" inscription using huge black letters near the wall of the former Jewish ghetto on Waliców Street in Warsaw.- It was even before I officially started the project. And I also remember the astonishment when a couple of days later the word "Jew" mysteriously disappeared, painted over by someone".



Believe it or not calling someone a Jew in Poland is still treated like an insult. And this linguistic attempt to reclaim the word from its long-held negative Judeophobic perception is by far one of the most essential facets of the Rafał's project. Even the world-class linguist Noam Chomsky could not have come up with a better solution. Mission impossible? Probably in the short term, but Rafał is aware of that. He's convinced that there must be a starting point somewhere, and no one has ever embarked on such an undertaking before him.

Rafał continues to come up with variations of his "declaration". He is too young to remember the people who are no longer there, and the same is true of many of many volunteers who have followed his lead. Murals

continue to multiply across Poland in many former *shtetlach* and in the large cities.

On his web site Rafał writes:

I search for memories about Jews, experiences, conversations and photographs. I want to learn more about this vast and mysterious world. I believe that for a Pole it's like digging into the subconscious, the source of fears, phobias, and on the other hand wonderful dreams. As a Pole I wish to understand what lies in the darkness of my forgetting, and discover the size of what was actively wiped out in the course of political and cultural activity."

Every day Rafał receives dozens of e-mails and testimonies. Many are emotionally charged and express a longing for ...anonymous Jews. Here is an example:

"I miss a Jew in the city of Torun. There are places around where they used to live but the Jews are here no more. Since a very long time. Since such a very long time that I have no single recollection of any particular Jew. I can only see places filled with emptiness. I can see Jewish traces but cannot see any Jews. My town has lost a lot because of you not

being here any longer. My town is poorer without you. I am poorer without you. "I miss you, Jew." (by Monika Chmarzyńska).

Or this example:

"At first I didn't even know they used to live here. Then, from what I have been through at school and school books it looked pretty normal they were not here. But as I began to read more and more and dig deeper and deeper I finally realized that a part of OUR nation has been amputated. Since then I continue reading and missing, even though I haven't met anyone particular I could long for." (by mlenia).

Another example:

"I miss the Jewish friends and neighbors who I never knew, never had and ought to have. I miss them - just as I would miss someone close. I'd wish that this project shows the Jews living in Poland and the Jews abroad that many of us here feel enormous pain and shame that so few of you are here with us. We do remember. (by Ewelina Gruszczyńska)



Still other testimonies refer to ex-friends or people once known or at least slightly familiar:

"I miss the unfulfilled life of 10 year old Sorella Epstein, 8 year old Cella Grunfeld, and little Hana Lamet and thousands of little children over the ground graves in Babi Yar and Lipava, from these cattle cars going only one way, the ones whose last glimpse were falling to the rubble, forest moss, birds under the sky or in the field - or God knows what. I miss their lives so despicably and mindlessly broken, lives which could have brought them happiness of love and fulfillment in all walks of life - and that chance was taken away for some dumb reason. I miss their carelessness, their naive curiosity for the world. I want to believe they had some of it in their short lives. I miss them all.." (by Kalia)

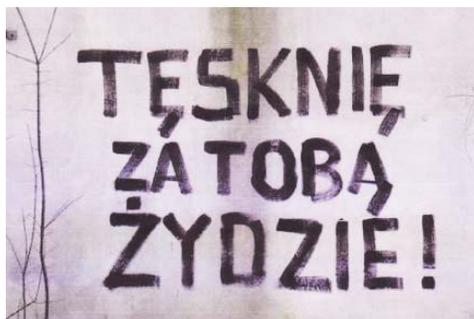
Some respondents have provided black and white photographs of unknown persons accidentally discovered in the old family album: For instance:



"Each time I look at my family album I also see his picture. My grandpa was a photographer in Bychawa and after the war he had moved to the West and all he took with him were the things he needed most. Many photographs were left behind, many on glass negatives, left in Bychawa somewhere, lost... He only took a few dozen prints and among them this one... with a young Jew of Bychawa. Was he someone important? I do not know. Was he a good friend of Uncle George who died in Auschwitz (he looks his age), and maybe the first fiancé of my mom (she used to sing a

Jewish lullaby) or some aunt's fiancé? They are all gone now; I bring them back in my memory when I reach for the family album. He is always there, walking the Bychawa Street on the 2nd of July 1936.” (by Remek)

During the past decade J.T. Gross's books, "Neighbors" (2000) and "The Fear" (2006) have generated considerable debate and introspection in Poland. Rafał Betlejewski's "I Miss You, Jew!" marks another vital milestone in Polish-Jewish dialogue. Pre-WWII Poland was home to millions of Jews who lived side by side with us for centuries. The sudden and profound loss of our neighbors has left scars deep within us. Rafał poses fundamental questions that we as a nation need to address and reconcile. We Poles need this form of nationwide self-analysis or self-therapy.



For all the Ivanskers
We miss you guys here!
Rafał Betlejewski

The Ladies of the Henry Street Shul (Revisited)

Arthur Zimmerman and Saul Glass Confirm Identity of *Mrs. Goldhar* in 1908 Photo and Provide Information About Where She Lived and How She Earned a Living.

(see Ivansk Project e-Newsletter Issue Number 17, March - April 2006, Page 14)

From: Arthur Zimmerman Sent: Monday, March 15, 2010
Subject: Ladies of the Henry Street Shul

Hi Norton!

Saul Glass is a member of the Canadian Antique Phonograph Society, and at yesterday's meeting I asked him if any of his ancestors came from Ivansk. He indicated that they came from Radom and a nearby village, but not from Ivansk. We can't all be Ivanskers. Anyway, I mentioned the "Henry Street Ladies" and he recalled that I had shown the photo. He asked for a copy and I sent him the on-line issue of the e-Newsletter. His reply is below.

From: Saul Glass Sent: Monday, March 15, 2010
Subject: Ladies of the Henry Street Shul

Hello Arthur,

Thank you very much for your e-mail. The attachment came through just fine, and the information is fascinating! In looking at the photograph of the ladies taken in an open lot, **I'm pretty sure that**

No.21, Mrs. Goldhar, is the lady who owned Goldhar's grocery store on the north-east corner of Baldwin and Henry streets (No. 26 Baldwin St.). In 1931-1933 my parents and I lived next door at 24 Baldwin Street in a flat above Caplan's Dry Goods store, and although I was then 5 or 6 years old I think that is the same lady. There is another lady whose face is familiar, but I'll have to examine this with my brother when he returns from Florida. I'll also try to check it with some of my cousins who lived and grew up in that neighbourhood to see if they can recognize any of them.

Thanks again Arthur. The information on the Ivansk Project is also most interesting, and I will show it to my brother and his wife when they return. Incidentally, they were married in the Henry Street Shul. She and her family escaped from Germany to China just before the outbreak of the war.

Welcome to God's Country

a blog by David Blumenfeld, Jerusalem, Israel

Fellow Ivanskers:

I would like to invite you to subscribe to my new blog: "Welcome to God's Country" at:
www.blumenfeld.com/blog.

I decided to begin this blog as a place to showcase my work - films, photographs, and stories from the projects, assignments, and personal work I do here in the Holy Land.



A friend of mine once told me that there are 3 stories that one can tell from this place... *Those wonderful Jews. Those damn Jews. And, those crazy Jews.* After spending a decade in Israel, I find this statement holds true.

To subscribe to my blog this is what you have to do: go to < www.blumenfeld.com/blog > and enter your email address in the "Subscribe" window.

You will be taken to a page where you'll need to copy a security verification word, which helps prevent spam. You will receive an email every time I post something to the blog.

For computer-savy Ivanskers, you can also follow me on Twitter and in Facebook.

Please pass the blog to friends, colleagues and family, and I'd love to hear your comments, too.

This is an image from a recent blog posting. It looks like it could have been taken in Ivansk a century ago, but it's from Mea Shearim, March 2010