

For nearly 5 years, this Polish Catholic had a Jewish sister



Edward Pieniak (center) tells Rabbi Jacques Cukierkorn (r.) of Kansas City, Missouri the story of the Jewish sister he had during the German occupation of Poland in World War II.

Rabbi Cukierkorn is in the process of writing a book about Polish Christians who helped Jews during the Holocaust and came to New York City to interview individuals like Pieniak and record their experiences. Co-author of the proposed book is Bill Tammeus (l.), faith columnist with the Kansas City Star.

With only boys in the family, Pieniak's farmer parents jumped at the chance to add a girl when they were asked to take in an 8-year old Jewish girl and hide her from the Germans. They lived in a little village near Lublin, Poland known at the time as Wlasność.

Her physical appearance gave none of the Nazis occupying Poland any reason to believe her to be anything else but a typical little Polish girl who helped and even went to church with her mother. Pieniak was just a toddler when she came into the family but told Rabbi Cukierkorn and Mr. Tammeus how he never forgot the fond memories he always held about his "older sister."

Sheltering or helping Jews in German-occupied Poland posed a serious danger to anyone doing it. Poland was the only country where the Nazis ordered a death penalty not only for the persons directly aiding them but even for the neighbors living nearby. Despite the grave risk, the Pieniaks' neighbors were supportive of them and their new addition.

In recognition of the risks Christians took to help Jews, the State of Israel honors such rescuers as "Righteous" at the Yad Vashem Memorial in Jerusalem. There are more persons acknowledged as "Righteous" from Poland than from any other country.

Unfortunately, the Pieniak family has not been honored this way and apparently will never be. One of the requirements for qualifying for the "Righteous" designation is the testimony of the Jewish person who was saved verifying that the rescuer actually did it.

Soon after the war ended and the Germans left, Edward Pieniak's "sister" was returned to her relatives and never heard from since. His subsequent attempts to locate her were unsuccessful.

Before coming to New York to gather material for his book, Rabbi Cukierkorn asked the Polish American Congress for its assistance in meeting Polish rescuers like Mr. Pieniak. The Congress also helped to arrange interviews with Michael Madejski and Wanda Lorenc of Sea Cliff, N.Y. Mr. Madejski is honored at Yad Vashem as part of the Polish Scouting Troop Zośka. During the Warsaw Uprising of August, 1944, the Zośka scouts liberated 350 Jews from the Nazi concentration camp in the city known as Gęsiówka. Wanda Lorenc is a member of the Wós family which also is among the "Righteous" at Yad Vashem. Her parents and her brother, Paul Zenon Wós, rescued and hid twelve Jews they helped escape from the Warsaw Ghetto as the Germans were liquidating it in April, 1943.

Regardless where they live, anyone who was, or knows Polish persons involved in rescuing Jews during the Holocaust and feels their story could be of interest to Rabbi Cukierkorn and Mr. Tammeus should contact:

Holocaust Documentation Committee
Polish American Congress
177 Kent Street
Brooklyn, N.Y. 11222
Contact Frank Milewski - (718) 263-2700 -
Ext. 105 □

POLISH AMERICAN CONGRESS

A Tribute to U.S. Air Ace Francis S. Gabreski



New York's Long Island community will commemorate the fifth anniversary of the death of Col. Francis S. "Gabby" Gabreski, America's top air ace in Europe in World War II, according to the Downstate New York Division of the Polish American Congress.

As the umbrella organization of America's Polish ethnics, the Congress announced a wreath-laying ceremony will be conducted at Col. Gabreski's gravesite on Saturday, May 19th, Armed Forces Day, at 11:30 a.m. Joining the Congress in the observance will be the American Polish Council of Long Island.

Gabreski's remarkable record of shooting down 28 German aircraft and destroying another three on the ground was achieved within a period of less than eleven months. After going into private industry when WW II ended, Gabreski rejoined the military a few years later when the Korean War broke out. Over Korea he shot down six Soviet-built MIG-15 fighters and shared credit for the downing of another.

Gabreski took great pride in his Polish heritage. He spoke Polish and felt strongly "about what the Nazis had done to Poland" after they invaded and started WW II in 1939. He requested assignment to a Polish fighter unit attached to the Royal Air Force.

He then flew some two dozen missions over Europe alongside the Polish pilots prior to joining the United States 56th Fighter Group in Britain with which he amassed his amazing feats in air combat.

After he retired from the Air Force in 1967, Gabreski held an executive position with Grumman Aerospace and then was named president of the Long Island Rail Road. In tribute to him, the Suffolk County Air Force Base in Westhampton Beach was renamed the Francis S. Gabreski Airport, now a general-aviation airport.

The Polish American Congress honored "Gabby" at a special banquet in Brooklyn, N.Y. in 1998. A year later, the Congress celebrated his 80th birthday at its annual Christmas party, the traditional Polish "Oplatek."

He was brought close to tears when the gathered children of the Maria Konopnicka Supplementary School sang their "Happy Birthday" and the traditional Polish "Sto Lat" to him. Gabreski kept in close contact with the Polish American Congress until his death in 2002.

"He was a great American and a proud American but an American who never forgot his Polish roots and always remembered his Catholic origin," said Richard Brzożowski, secretary of the Congress and chairman of the Col. Francis S. Gabreski Memorial Committee.

The public is invited to participate in the commemorative observance at Calverton National Cemetery, 210 Princeton Blvd., Route 25, Calverton, N.Y., exit 68N on the L.I. Expressway.

The Polish American from Oil City, PA gave Nazi Germany a taste of its own medicine and became a hero of both nations, the United States and Poland. □

Congressional Immigration Dilemmas

Currently, immigration is a hot-button topic for the U.S. Congress, with great pressures to pass a comprehensive immigration reform bill. Wisely, the House Subcommittee on Immigration, Citizenship, Refugees, Borders and International Law has decided to split the issue in to several hearings. Each hearing focuses on a different aspect of immigration reform. Hearings have already occurred on the shortfalls of reform in 1986 and 1996, the problems and possible solutions to employer verification programs, the possibility of a points-based immigration system, the impact of immigration reform on the US economy and on US workers and the role of family-based immigration in the US immigration system. Future hearings will focus on US immigrant integration, the impact of immigration on states and localities, and the future of undocumented immigrant students.

Subcommittee member Zoe Lofgren, Democratic Representative from the 16th District of California, conducts the hearings with Republican Representative Steve King from Iowa serving as the Ranking Minority Party member. House Judiciary Committee Chair John Conyers, Jr. attends many of the hearings as well.

Immigration reform centers on several key questions, some of whose answers easily reach agreement among most members of Congress, while others spark fierce debate. Border security and employment verification are two issues that generally see agreement. Any comprehensive immigration reform passed will almost certainly include heightened security and increased efficiency in maintaining our physical borders as well as stronger enforcement of employer verification in the workplace here in the US. These measures are intended to stem the flow of illegal immigrants, a solution both sides see as necessary.

Other questions are not so easily answered. 58% of immigration to the US is family-based while somewhere between 7-11% of immigration is employment-based. This represents a split between those who see immigration through the lens of what is best for the US economy and those who see immigration as a duty America owes to the rest of the world based on its own history of immigration. Those who would like to see less family-based employment typically favor expanding employment-based immigration through two actions. First, limit family-based immigration to nuclear family members (father, mother, children under 21) and exclude non-nuclear family members. Second, institute a point-based system to objectively judge each immigrant based on a fixed set of criteria including age, education level, skill set, language proficiency and others. Those who see immigration as a mission argue for increased or at minimum maintained family-based immigration and oppose the institution of a point-based system.

The splits vary on this issue. Democrats from Conservative districts may find themselves siding with the Republican Party here and vice versa. Immigrants from industrial countries that would see increases in the numbers of immigrants from their home countries through a point-based system end up on a different side than those from less developed countries whose immigration numbers may be lessened through a point-based system as they would not meet the necessary criteria. Critics of the point-based system argue that it would serve to increase the equality gap between rich and poor countries. Critics of the non-nuclear family-based immigration system argue that if one decides to leave their country and their extended family behind, the US is not responsible for their actions and therefore not responsible for re-unifying the extended family. It involves a choice by the individual. The argument continues that if the immigrant views family as more

important than economic prosperity they might opt to stay in their home country or return there after a certain number of years. Both sides present arguments that the other side can provide no real answers for, making the debate here lively and difficult.

Illegal immigrants, the elephant in the room, have thus far proven to be the most difficult aspect of the debate. What does the US do with parents who come here illegally to have their child born here just to have it gain citizenship? Option 1, deport them all as the child did not choose to be born here and the parents acted illegally, but that option shows no compassion and sparks protests from groups supporting the rights of the child. Option 2, to allow the whole family to stay; this rewards the illegal activity of the parents and sparks strong protests from other groups. Option 3, to allow the child to stay and to deport the parents draws the most protest, as it outrages supporters of family unification by tearing the family apart and outrages others for making the child a ward of the state to be paid for by American tax dollars. In these instances, an elusive fourth option that appeases all sides seems difficult to find.

Further, the 12 million undocumented immigrants estimated to be in the US already present yet another massive stumbling block to reform. Blanket-style amnesty granted to each individual would quickly solve the problem, but would create an administrative nightmare for Citizenship and Immigration Services. Such an option draws critique from those who see such an act as rewarding illegal behavior and seems unlikely to pass in a floor vote. Deportation provides another kind of administrative headache, and draws equally strong criticism from those who say that some of these people have been here for 20 years, raising children, paying taxes and contributing to the U.S. economy. Deportation en masse is seen as cruel and highly infeasible. It re-introduces the argument above of what to do with families who children are citizens but the parents are not.

A final option to this issue is a path to citizenship that allows immigrants here illegally to become citizens through an application process and a series of fines. This has included suggestions of temporary guest worker permits for illegal immigrants to outright citizenship if they can pay the fine. The problem comes in that this is a compromise and the likelihood of the supporters of amnesty will find any solution put forth by the supporters of deportation too harsh while the supporters of deportation will most likely see any option put forth by the supporters of amnesty too lenient. In addition, the administrative nightmare associated with setting up a structure that says what requirements are needed and who meets them has made many Congressmen and women cautious of being too supportive of a path to citizenship. The financial costs would be high, in a time where every budgetary increase is seen as suspect.

Immigration reform presents Congress with a myriad of issues and questions. Finding a solution that pleases all sides while still accomplishing the difficult task of reform will be difficult. The potential of compromise watering the issue to the point of reform sounding good but doing little is a very real threat.

Prepared for the Polish American Congress by **Joshua Holshouser**, intern
Washington, DC office □

Polish American Congress Southern Cal Division

Next meeting will take place on
Sunday, - May 20, 12:30 p.m.

**Pope John Paul Polish Center
3999 Rose Drive - Yorba Linda**

Members and non-members
are invited to attend

Get involved in Polonia - Join the PAC
Rich Wideryński, President
Information: (626) 577-9797