



Polish Profiles

The Magic Lamp

By: **Kaya Mirecka Ploss**, Ph.D., Executive Director
Jan Karski Institute, Baltimore, MD

Waltzes were in fashion, especially the waltzes of Johann Strauss. His music filled homes, theatres and coffee houses. Women wore dresses fitted tightly at the waist that flared out into a flat front and very elaborate back. The mustache was in, as was gallantry.

Lwów, a southern city in Poland, enjoyed all those fashion trends, especially the waltzes. However, on a particular day it was not the fashions, the exceptionally mild winter, nor the waltzes that made people flock into the streets, their faces lit up with smiles.

The year was 1853 and the city of Lwów was experiencing a great sensation.

All that the citizens thought about and talked about was an unbelievable miracle on display in the window of Mikołaj's Pharmacy. Everyone in Lwów wanted to see the display with his or her own eyes, all were making their way to Mikołaj's.

Crowds grew dense in front of the pharmacy. People held children in their arms, lifting them high so that they too could see and remember the sight for the rest of their lives. The police could barely keep order. Even the fire brigade was called to stand by, just in case.

There in the window of Mikołaj's Pharmacy a great discovery was on display. The citizens of Lwów did not notice the size of this wonder or what it was made of. They only saw the light, brilliantly bright and clear. A wonder to behold!

Those who stood right against the window sometimes closed their eyes. "Was it some mirage?" they asked. "Is this some kind of magic?" others whispered. Some of them even crossed themselves in fear. "It must be Satan's work," somebody claimed. "No, only heaven could be involved in such bright light. Where did it come from? What is it made of?" People were heard to ask.

Crude oil was the answer. People had heard of crude oil. It was used for lubrication and sometimes to treat burns and wounds. Some used it for tanning. People also know that the fatty liquid, as crude oil was called, was dangerous. It burned easily and sent out black soot and smoke. It also smelled bad. But what they saw before them was pure clear light.

That man who invented that marvelous light appeared in the doorway of the pharmacy. "Łukasiewicz, Łukasiewicz" people shouted and soon lifted him and held him on their shoulders for everyone to see the "Miracle Man", Ignacy Łukasiewicz, who invented the brilliant light, later known to the world as the first kerosene lamp.

Ignacy Łukasiewicz, the Polish inventor of the kerosene lamp, was born into a very poor family in 1822 in a small village called Zaduszniki. He was too poor to afford formal study. However, as chemistry was the subject he was most interested in, he chose the next best thing and became an apprentice to a pharmacist in Rzeszów. He remained an apprentice for four years.

Łukasiewicz then moved from Rzeszów to Lwów, where he found employment at Mikołaj's Pharmacy. Eventually, this self-made chemist became interested in crude oil. For years he filtered and strained oil, then mixed it with various liquids.

When Łukasiewicz was almost thirty, he had saved enough money to enroll at the Jagiellonian University, where he obtained a bachelor's degree in chemistry. He returned to Mikołaj's Pharmacy in Lwów and continued his experiments with crude oil.

So intense was his work that he aroused the curiosity of his neighbors. It seemed as though there was always smoke coming from his room and quite a few minor explosions. Some actually accused him of practicing black magic.

Finally Łukasiewicz produced a transparent liquid which burned in a steady, bright flame. He still had another difficulty to overcome. He needed a container, a suitable lamp in which to burn the inflammable liquid. Łukasiewicz explained his dilemma to a tinsmith named Bratkowski, and together they invented a small fuel tank. It was a burner that was protected by a transparent globe.

At last the day of the great trial came. With beating hearts, shielding their eyes, they lit the burner. It began to burn with a bright, smokeless and soot-free flame. Łukasiewicz placed the clear shining light in the window of Mikołaj's Pharmacy. It was that lamp that people flocked to see.

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East meets West (and who on)

Justyna Ball

So what we missed the bonfire! For twenty years we had enjoyed the 4th of July small New England town extravaganza. Created on our common, a pile of wood, two stories high, plus hot dog and popcorn stands, adorable little children wearing glow in the dark jewelry, dog poop and lots of mosquitoes.

The other option was to take a road trip to the West Coast in a brand new car sponsored by our daughter who was temporarily relocating there. We were to pay for the gas and split the cost of hotels.

After a long thoughtful discussion, the bonfire lost to El Estado Dorado (The Golden State) or the Sunny state of "Calyfornia" to mimic the Austrian born governor.

Oh well, there will be others...

The plan was to make it there in less than a week and fly back on July 4th. The rules: no driving after dark, we eat one meal at a restaurant per day, cat stays in Boston.

We surprised our friends by choosing the Southern route instead of driving through Colorado, but the desert in July seemed so much more attractive to us. I think "challenging" is the right word.

So, on June 24th we packed Karolina's TV, desk top computer, laptop, load of summer clothes, string of shoes and two pounds of makeup.

The crew: dad, mom and one un-domestic diva that also goes by the name "Precious Polish Princess." Means of transportation: a Honda Fit ...in orange. The crew is also known as the Fantastic Four, minus one; the youngest Francis stayed behind to represent Poland at the Heifer International Annual Fair and opted for the U-20 Soccer World Cup in Montreal, Canada. That way his sister could pack more shoes.

In three days we made it to Santa Rosa, New Mexico, zooming through New York, Pennsylvania, Virginia, Tennessee, Arkansas, Oklahoma, Texas.

First stop in Roanoke, VA, Motel 8, friendly service although no restaurants besides Subway. Next morning, everyone wanted to know if we had a good night, and since we experienced a thunder storm the previous evening, a nice lady at breakfast in the lobby shared her reflections, wasn't that something! It was one of several storms that we encountered; the best was still ahead of us. Tourists with plates from Southern states seem to be more open, friendlier; maybe they just lead simpler lives and have less on their minds. It takes a while to figure out what they are saying, but when you do, what you hear is often something very pleasant.

Somewhere between Springfield, MA and Scranton, PA, we set up another rule: whoever is driving would control the CD player, so, I assumed that all the way, we may listen to more of British Arctic

Monkeys, less of Alaskan Jewel and somewhere between maybe Brazilian Ive Mendes and Simply Red.

It was Karolina's car, but two of us soon realized that it was a stupid rule because it allowed Karolina to play trance music. What were we thinking?

We also learned that people in Knoxville, Tennessee are incredibly nice, I mean old-fashion nice and I mean everybody. Lunch at Macalister's, great sandwiches, coffee and "sweet tea", key lime pie, all for \$26. Did I mention free refills? It was hot but all the ladies looked like they were from a Talbot's catalog.

The next stop was outside of Memphis, since we zoomed through Nashville in the heavy rain. I was the driver but no music made me happy. In Memphis we left the hotel after 20 min when Jacek noticed too many "We are not responsible for any lost belongings left in your car" signs (there must have been a reason for it) and I discovered remains of Chex cereal and some blood stains on my pillow.

We kept driving. Hours later, after settling comfortably in the bed of some motel in Arkansas, I checked the name of the town on Karolina's laptop, just to find out that it does not exist; Heth is a truck stop. We wondered about the hordes of mosquitoes that soon entered our room until I remembered the sign that I saw while checking in, in a hurry. "Due to the fact that we are in the area of rice fields, we have an enormous count of mosquitoes, please keep your door shut while unloading." What rice fields?

I wouldn't have known that if I didn't leave New England. In the bathroom, what we thought was a cockroach turned out to be a dead grasshopper.

There were 5 channels on TV, but as long as it had wi-fi connection, our daughter assured us it was fine.

We watched some show called "Nanny" about a woman with a Polish last name who could not restrain her children after her husband's death so she hired professional help. I looked at my own offspring; she was totally restrained, by... wireless connection.

At night the invasion began. Till the morning I lost quite an amount of blood but I learned that ...there are rice fields in Arkansas, did YOU know that? Ahhh, see... you need to get out more, travels educate.

Smooth sailing through Arkansas and Oklahoma, lots of reading on both sides of highway 40, "Needed: drivers, Jesus and you!" or "You call it abortion, God calls it murder." Both, churches and Adult Centers advertising to lure its adherents. The most popular bumper sticker said, "I 'heart' evangel temple - Fort Smith."

In Clinton 9,000 people are served by 24 churches, on the billboard there is room for... 6 more.

Tranced-up Karolina drove through Little Rock and revealed her theory for buying a small car "Listen, the reason for buying a small car is that I have more room to mess up." Get it?

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Aug. 11, 8:30 a.m. - 5:00 p.m., Polish Genealogical Society of California at Weingart Senior Center in Lakewood, CA, info: www.pgsc.org

12, Polish Day, by PNA Lodge 3193 at Alpine Village, Torrance, Info: 714-998-8222

22 - 23, National PNA Convention, New Jersey.

26, Polish Patriotic anniversaries of the 20th Century, Yorba Linda.

Sep 15 - 16, Dożynki, Yorba Linda. (advertisement on page 16)

22, 9:30 a.m. - 11:30 a.m. "History of Ellis Island and the Immigrant experience", info: www.pgsc.org

28 - 30, The 2007 Paderewski Celebration, in Paso Robles, information: 213-821-356 or polmusic@usc.edu.

29, Sat - 5 p.m. Polish Festival at Clubhouse 2 in Laguna Woods, Information: Irena Lawyer 949 206 9122.

30, Bazaar at Our Lady of Bright Mount Parish in LA, Info: 323 734 5249.

Oct 4, Thu - 4:00 p.m., Dedication of the Paderewski Monument at USC followed by reception and the Annual Paderewski Lecture - Recital. Free admission.

14, Sun - 12:30 p.m. Day at the Races at Santa Anita Park, organized by Children's Medical Care Foundation. Contact Phil Brewster at 800-367-2347 or email: Philip.brewster@wachoviasec.com

Nov 11, Sun - Polish Children's Rainbow Fund has its annual bazaar in Szarotka, 3400 West Adams Blvd., Los Angeles, CA, Information: Natalia Kaminska 626 282 4686.

18, Sun - Friends of John Paul II Foundation Annual Meetings, Polish Parish, Info: 626-281-0516.

24, PGS-CA Meeting, 9:30 a.m.

Dec 2 Sun 11:00 am - Polish Women's Alliance Children's Christmas Party Encino Country Club.

2 Sun, 2:00 pm - Polish American Congress Oplatek luncheon and Awards Banquet. Our Lady of the Bright Mount Church hall.

Please send information for the calendar to Bish Petryka zbyskoopet@aol.com ★