



Polish Profiles

The best years of my life

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

We all have good years and sometimes bad ones. But how many people can say that the last ten years of their life were the best. How many people can say it at my age? Yes, I have received many awards in my life, yet somehow this award from the Polish American Historical Association touched me deeply. I feel greatly honored and proud and I asked myself, why do I feel so strongly about this award? Because it came from POLONIA. Because I find in you all the attributes that my parents taught me. Let me explain.

From my father I learned how to get along, how to lead and how to get things done. But most of all I learned respect for other people. From my mother, that quiet sweet person, I learned how to cook, to sew and how to clean a house. All those lessons served me well throughout my entire life. I think of them whenever I find the courage to stand up for my rights or the rights of other people. I think of them when I find the strength to tackle a problem that looks impossible and overwhelming and I stick with it.

And I think of my mother when I make people laugh, or better yet laugh at myself. When I do something creative, it did not come to me out of the blue. I developed that trait from my father. When my friends come to me for help and take the time to be supportive, I know that I learned that most valuable lesson from my gentle mother, who supported us children as well as my father with her quiet strength. I am undeniable the product of my upbringing. People from my generations learned life from our parents.

Reflecting on my younger years I found all those attributes that my parents taught me in members of the OLD POLONIA. Stara Polonia as we call them. But I did not always feel that way. Like almost all of us born in Poland, we arrive here with a certain attribute towards the OLD POLONIA.

We believe that only we know how to love Poland and only we know what is best for Poland. Only we born in Poland know how to uphold Polish traditions and culture. I was no different from them who thought that way. But I had my eyes and most importantly my heart open. I observed carefully and with every year my admiration grew for the Stara Polonia. It was your parents, your grandparents and sometimes your great-grandparents, who arrived in this country with just a bundle of clothes and a prayer book. It was them who uphold those Polish traditions and handed them down to you. You do not need these born in Poland to teach you about Polish traditions, you know them. And I think that all of us born in Poland have changed our minds about "Stara Polonia". Frankly with time, we have become just POLONIA; not divided between the NEW and STARA POLONIA.

But I have some questions. Here I am standing before you, the CREM DE LA CREM OF POLONIAS SOCIETY and ask you why, why are no more people of Polish descent in high Government positions or in the business world, or more writers, producers, film makers, and more professionals in Medicine and Law. Yes, there are some, but not enough to make a difference and not enough to reflect the millions of Polish Americans. Are we perhaps too modest to blow our own horn, or maybe we do not believe enough in ourselves? When was the last time that you thought of a fellow Polish American worthy to submit his or her name to the WHITE HOUSE with a petition to honor him or her? There are many of us who deserve the highest honors and awards. Think about it next time that you have a meeting. Go on blow your horn. We are good enough for it.

You, who are the most educated, successful and distinguished members of Polonia, should be natural leaders for the rest of us.

How presumptuous of me, you may think, to say those words to you. And I will answer. Because you are the leaders of Polonia that is one reason and the other is because I am old.

My dear friend and companion in the last years of his life, Professor Jan Karski, used to say to me. "When one is old one can say the most outrageous things. The most that people will say about you is that you are old and already GAGA." So think of me as GAGA but also think about the words that I said.

Thank you for listening to me and thank you for the award. □



Post-Christmas chitchat

By: **Justyna Ball**

Admit it; are you one of those who throw out your tree a day after Christmas? If the answer is yes you probably use Christmas as an excuse for extensive shopping, to hide your weakness for spending. That's right. Shop, shop, shop, wrap, wrap, wrap, open all the presents, ta dah ...and you don't need Christmas anymore. Now quick, get rid of your Christmas stuff and start looking for another excuse to shop. Oh look, stores are attracting with Valentine's Day displays already. There you go...

Am I causing a little argument between spouses? You have a whole year to answer it.

The popularity contest finally resolved. The votes are counted. Nativity scene? Such a relic of the past... Even Santa is making way for the new official symbol of Christmas, a snowman also known as Frosty. Both play well against a Christmas tree or decorated palm tree, where it applies. The second runner up is a feisty gingerbread man and the first runner up ...the star. No, not the Bethlehem Star...but the Macy's star! It's red and it's everywhere.

I see two things going on here. One is the Sovietisation of Christmas, stripping it from its religious symbols. A kind of atheist Christmas.

Last year's tactic that it may make non-Christians feel left out or even offended (!), did not work well with the public. Some of us boycotted stores that were dominated by Holiday and not Christmas spirit ...this year the strategy was different. My local paper debated on whether the preparations to Christmas (notice "Christmas" not holidays) are too depressing. Suggesting that they are, the message was, forget the tradition, go casual (leave your sweat pants and baseball cap on) and go dine on ...Chinese. I'm serious. The traditional Christmas was presented as either boring, depressing, or at least commercialized. The question of Santa being too fat (could be a bad role model for our precious and fit children!) even popped up. I'm dead serious.

The second thing going on is that, the anti-Christmas activists cannot completely erase it from the holiday map. Look at all the money they make on the merchandise. But making it appear less attractive than usual, in the press is now a norm.

I mean, there are enough products related to winter and Christmas, fuzzy reindeer, glitter covered snowflakes to decorate your presents, florescent colored wire mini Christmas trees, lacy Angel ornaments, poinsettias, you name it... It is the traditions that we cherished, which are marginalized. Like gathering with the family, cooking

special foods, Midnight Mass, you know, the religious aspect, all that stuff that is supposed to make Christmas special, the stuff that you cannot buy (stuff that they cannot sell.) And of course traditionally the presence of Jesus is ignored, the main reason why we celebrate Christmas at all.

Dear atheist, he may not be your favorite dude but because of him and his fans you get a day off and you get to eat all those goodies at different functions.

Scene One

On the tour of our small New England town during the annual White Christmas, one of our stops was at the Senior Center where yours truly had a Polish display, strategically in the very center of the room. The place was decorated with stockings, elves, Santas, reindeers, although no crèche in sight. And the Christmas tree was placed between the men's room and ladies' room. To me, a traditionalist, it seemed odd. When there is no crèche and the tree is supposed to represent the birth of Jesus (I guess), would you place it there? Well, I understand that other people may see it differently. We are, after all, a controversial Polish couple.

Scene Two

A friend invites me over to chat and while waiting for my cup of tea, I compliment her on a beautifully decorated house. Is there such a thing as a too perfect Christmas tree? Too many decorations? Neeh...Several years ago, in the local contest, my friend's house was picked as the one most beautifully decorated.

The knocking at the door interrupts our conversation. Two young men shyly introduce themselves. "Good afternoon, my name is Peter this is my friend Eric, it is this time of the year when we think about Jesus more than usual." Slaaaaaam, goes the door. "Those rude Jehovah! What were we talking about? Ah, my Christmas tree!"

Scene Three

Borders bookstore's poster boy, singer Josh Groban gets such a promotion boost, his multiplied copy of "Noel" CD covered 50% of the cardboard display. James Taylor, Tony Bennett, Peanuts and a whole Trans-Siberian Orchestra, all with Christmas theme music, had to squeeze into the other 50%.

As do many other stores, Borders offers gift-wrapping services. There are several papers to choose from: menorah, red abstract, nutcracker, menorah and gingerbread man.

I make sure that the cards I pick have "Merry Christmas" not some unspecified Happy Holidays on them. Well, later I realized that there is an extra charge for shipping of square shaped cards. They're not going to make it easy for me this season, are they?

Same Borders store, Friday night is "open

Justyna Ball to page 10

NEWS OF POLONIA

A MONTHLY PUBLICATION

2245 E. Colorado Blvd. #104/177 - Pasadena, CA 91107

Tel: (626) 577-9797 Fax: (626) 449-3331

E-MAIL - polishnews@earthlink.net

Editor in Chief: Betsy Cepielik

Polish Section, Editor-in-Chief: Zbyslaw (Bish) Petryka (323) 766-0026

Contributing writers

Justyna Ball

Zbyslaw Petryka, Ph.D

Fr. Lucjan Kamieński, SDB

Iwo Cyprian Pogonowski

Columnists:

Kaya Mirecka Ploss - Profiles

Joanna Brost - Investments

Chris Kerosky, Esq. - Legal matters

Edmund Lewandowski - Northern Cal.

Marek Zebrowski and Krysta Close - Polish Music Center @USC

Lila Cieccek - Orange Co.

Prof. Jerzy Przystawa - Poland Politics

Richard P. Król - Taxes

Jan Szczepański - Poland - Student

NEWS OF POLONIA - home delivery

Annual Subscription Rate - \$25.00

Date: ___/___/___

Name _____

Address _____

City/State _____

Zip _____ Tel () _____

Make your check payable to:

News of Polonia

2245 E. Colorado Blvd. #104/177
Pasadena, CA 91107

Disclaimer Notice:

The Views of our columnists and letter writers do not necessarily reflect the views of the staff of the News of Polonia.

Calendar of Events

23, 11:00 a.m., Wed., Laguna Woods "Your Story - Personal History", at Clubhouse Six, The Polish Club of Laguna Woods, Info: (949) 206-9122.

26, Sat, Santa Monica Polish Happy Hour at Warszawa Restaurant.

Feb 2, Sat., Carnival Ball organized by the Polish School in Yorba Linda Information: Ela Rudzińska (310)831-0708.

2, Sat, 7 p.m. Los Angeles - Zabawa Serduszkowa organized by the Polish School - parish hall - 3424 W. Adams Blvd.

10, Sun - Laguna Woods 3:00 p.m., "Pan Tadeusz" Polish film directed by Andrzej Wajda, at The Polish Club of Laguna Woods, Clubhouse Three - Auditorium. Info: (949)206-9122.

23, Sat 8:00 p.m., Los Angeles Kabaret Mru Mru - concert, parish hall of Our Lady of the Bright Mount Church at 3424 W. Adams Blvd. Information and reservations at (310) 396-2165.

24, Sun 2:00 p.m. - Los Angeles Polish Scouting Organization in Los Angeles. Recital and exhibit "To w nas kwi" (What we hold within) . Classical performances and a showcase of photography and art by the talented youth of the Polish Scouts in Los Angeles. Special guest: Ryszard Urbaniak, Scoutmaster and poet from Northern California. Our Lady of the Bright Mount church hall 3424 W. Adams Blvd. Admission - \$10.00 adults, \$5.00 children.

Apr. 1 - 4, International Championship in Alpine Skiing of Polonia I Winter Park, CO, Information: <http://www.tatrskiiclub.com>.

Apr 12 - 19, 7-Day Mexican Riviera, The Polish Club of Laguna Woods, information: (949)206-9122.

Apr 24 - May 4, 2008, The Ninth Polish Film Festival Los Angeles, information: ajanda@earthlink.net

May 27 - June 8, Magical China and the Yangtze River, 13 days. Info: (949) 206-9122.

May 31 Sat. Pasadena Elks Lodge - Commemorating the Anniversary of the Polish Constitution of Mary 3 - "Poland Forever" - Depictions of famous Poles in history presentation followed by a dinner and dancing. 400 W. Colorado Blvd. \$55.00 per person donation to the Polish American Congress - Southern California Division. □

Please send information for the calendar to Bish Petryka - e-mail: zbyskoopet@aol.com ★