



Polish Profiles

The Peacemaker

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

In January of this year, my dear friend Miles Lerman died at the age of 88. Condolences were sent to his wife and family by the President of Poland, Lech Kaczynski. I have known Miles and his wife Chris for the last 20 years. Miles and his wife were Polish born Jews, who spoke Polish beautifully. I met him through Jan Karski who was his great friend and called him lovingly, "Miluś," while others called him the Peacemaker, myself included.

There were many people who were involved in the establishment of the United States Memorial Holocaust Museum in Washington DC. One man however, stood out among them. This was Miles Lerman who became the first Chairman of the Holocaust Museum. Three consecutive presidents appointed him to that position, Ronald Reagan, George W. Bush and Bill Clinton. After many years of distinguished service, Lerman retired in 2000 at the age of eighty.

Miles Lerman combined his Jewish and Polish roots beautifully throughout his life. It was not surprising that on many occasions he was called upon to settle disputes between Catholics and Jews regarding Poland. Thanks to him each of those disagreements was successfully resolved. He soon became known as the Peacemaker, respected by his fellow Jews and by the Polish people.

Several years ago, the Felician College in Lodi New Jersey bestowed upon Miles Lerman an honorary doctorate for all of his peacemaking efforts. In his acceptance speech, Lerman said that he had received nine honorary doctorates from various Universities, yet none touched him like the one from the Felician College. He felt humbled that this Catholic College thought him worthy of an honorary doctorate.

He also said that he had one more wish, to meet the Holy Father, Pope John Paul the II. I never forgot those words. The Chairman of the American Center of Polish Culture, where I was the Executive Director, asked me to arrange a visit for Lerman with the Holy Father. Albin Obal also very generously said that he would finance that journey. It took many months of work by me and a lot of letter writing, even a telephone call to the then Bishop Dziwisz at the Vatican, but finally I was able to arrange it.

In November 2002, Miles Lerman's wish came true. It was quite a delegation that accompanied Miles and his wife to Rome. Albin Obal and his wife came along. Also the Minister Counselor of the Polish Embassy, Mr. Dariusz Jadowski and his wife Dorota traveled with the Lermans. And I of course I went along as well to make sure that everything happened exactly the way I planned it.

The audience took place November 13, 2002. I introduced each one of the participants to the Holy Father. When the turn came to introduce Miles Lerman, the Holy Father smiled and then listened attentively while Lerman told Him about his work in Belzec, Poland with the help of Polish people in that town. Suddenly, the Holy Father lifted his hand and lovingly stroked Miles Lerman's face. With tears in his eyes, Lerman bowed his head. All of us, seeing that beautiful gesture, cried along with him. It was an enormously touching moment.

Later that day the Polish Ambassador to the Vatican, the former Prime Minister during Lech Walesa's Presidency, Madame Hanna Suchocka hosted a luncheon for us at the Polish Embassy in Rome. Ambassador Suchocka was also gracious enough to arrange for us a private visit to the Vatican Museum and the newly renovated Sistine Chapel.

Those four days in Rome were unforgettable for each of us and the audience with the Holy Father was highly emotional. I had had the privilege of seeing the Holy Father before on five occasions, yet somehow that last visit was the most moving. It was heartbreaking and yet at the same time uplifting to see how gallantly the Holy Father lived with his illness. That moment when the Holy Father lifted his hand to touch Miles

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And the Oscar does not go to...

By: **Justyna Ball**

Most of the time, Oscar night is just a night like many others to me. I truly can say that I do not care for it except for when there is some Polish accent to cheer for. Checking out the price tags on the women's gowns, their necks and ears dripping with valuable stones (on lease, of course, not their own!) and their well-groomed males (a. k. a accessories) is just not my thing. Nobody ever asks the men what THEY are wearing! Posing and flirting with photographers on the red carpet seems to be the worst display of human shallowness. But everyone seems to want to know about it, to watch it, as if an average viewer after hearing what designer's dress Nicole Kidman wore, will rush to the store to purchase it. No, but it's a free advertisement for the designer, so smile for the camera, and you may keep the gown. And the actresses, whether they realize it or not, are used as live mannequins.

The writers' strike gave me some hope that maybe and that is maybe some new writing talents will surface, and we won't be forced to hear the same unchallenging material in today's movies, TV shows, etc., over and over.

The films that circuit our cinemas lately are nothing but a combination ranging from deep teenage intellect to toilet humor under the pretext of entertainment. Women are lured to light (romantic) comedy while men are lured stereotypically to the kind with less dialogue and lots of action. Sound effects are everything.

So there is very little to choose from for the Oscars. It is still a prestige, but it is also a business. It opens doors and brings in the money.

So when the film "Katyn" directed by Andrzej Wajda was nominated, I saw a big opportunity for the Poles to tell their story in the West. The movie already made some rounds in Europe. It is expected to be distributed in Russia.

As soon as I heard the news, I wanted to share them with my American friend,

Carol (whose husband has Polish roots, although hers are Canadian). I said that I'm excited that a Polish movie was nominated, but I also said that from what I heard, all of the five (nominated) movies are somehow war related. To which my friend responded, "We have too many of these." Had I said "Holocaust," would she have made the same comment? I doubt it.

I had a chance to watch Katyn in Poland last November. The movie was good, but some scenes were too Hollywood for me, which in the case of an Oscar nomination is actually a very good thing. And if the opinion of the Academy reflects the general anti-Russian sentiment, which may play a role in the final decision, it is only in our favor, or so I thought.

Into the evening, it turned out that the Academy must have found "Katyn" (frankly, the episode in Polish Holocaust history), I guess, too confusing or exotic and went with the sure subject, which is the Jewish holocaust (The Counterfeiters). I'm surprised that after all these years, there is no "Films about the Holocaust" category.

Think about it, each year the Academy will pick "the Holocaust movie of the year." And that's fair. Instead of tossing some forced Holocaust elements into other movies ("Enemy at the Gate," for example), the director would now have to think twice about using those elements out of "fear" of being "cast" in that category. Unless that's what he wants to be famous for.

It will give a chance to (potential) Holocaust directors to race for the golden statue. But those who make regular movies on non-Holocaust subjects will be judged fairly.

Besides Wajda's "Katyn," another Polish film nominated was an animation called "Peter & Wolf" from a studio in Łódź, and Janusz Kamiński (recipient of 2 Oscars already) won an Oscar for cinematography in "Diving Bell and Butterfly."

The animated film was a British idea. The Polish studio Se-Ma-For was picked since this kind of film, known as puppet animation, actually has its origins there.

It's important to mention that Władysław Starewicz (born in Russia, of Polish parents) created the first such film,

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Calendar of Events

Mar 22, Sat, 2:00 pm., Easter Egg Hunt, organized by PNA Lodge 700 at Lawn area behind "Szarotka", 3400 W. Adams Blvd., Los Angeles. PNA members free, Non members \$3.00 each. Information Kasia Akrami (626)836-5889.

22 Sat, 5 p.m. Cellist Marek Szpakiewicz will perform a cello recital on at United University Church at the University of Southern California, located at 817 West 34th Street in Los Angeles.

27, Th 7:30 pm Polish Music Spring Concert at Newman Hall at USC Los Angeles. Works of Chopin, Lutosławski, Paderewski and Penderecki performed by excellent USC faculty, students and guest artists. Information: Krysta Close (213)821-1356.

Apr 1 - 4, X International Polonia Championship in Alpine Skiing, organized by Consulate General of the People Republic in Poland in Los Angeles in Winter Park, CO; information: www.tatrski klub.com

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

13, Sun, 3:30 p.m. Commemoration of the Third Anniversary of the Death of Pope John Paul II, Celebratory Mass with bishop Edward Clark at the Cathedral of Our Lady of the Angels, 555 W. Temple St., Los Angeles, CA. Information: Richard Wideryński, Polish American Congress (562)426-9830.

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

Apr 27, Sat, 25th Anniversary of John Paul II Center in Yorba Linda.

May 27 - Jun 8, Magical China and the Yangtze River, 13 days excursion. 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 dinner and dancing to the music of the Dave Miron Orchestra. Pasadena Elks Lodge - 400 W. Colorado Blvd. \$55.00 per person donation to the Polish American Congress of Southern California.

Jun 8, 10:30 am -5:00pm, 9th Proud to be Polish Festival in Yorba Linda.

Jul 13 - 1:30 p.m. Our Lady of the Bright Mount Parish Hall - Dzień Braterstwa - Helping Poles who live in the former USSR. Information and Reservations (323) 857-0208.

Aug 9 - 23, Summer Camp with Polish Language in Gdańsk, Poland. Information: http://polonica.edu.pl/polski_oboz_jezykowy.html.

24, 10:30 am - Polish Patriotic Anniversaries of 20th Century in Yorba Linda

Oct 1, Celebration of 400th Anniversary of Arrival of First Poles to Jamestown

19, 10:30 am - Pope John II Center in Yorba Linda - 30th Anniversary of John Paul II Election to being Pope & 24th Anniversary of Fr. J. Popieluszko's Martyrdom.

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