

From the wisdom book

Submitted by: *Jacek Majewski*

International Women's Day, in Polish: (Międzynarodowy Dzień Kobiet), was celebrated as long as I remember. I always thought that women have their day everywhere around the world - at least once a year, on the 8th of March! Later, I realized that this was not the case, in many countries this day is not observed. Either women there have their feast the whole year or no day at all! Rather this second is true!

International Women's Day became celebrated in Poland after War World II. It was arbitrarily imposed by the Soviet Union's tradition. It was first implemented in 1948 replacing the saint's day of blessed Wincenty Kadłubek in the Polish calendar. The Women's Day in Soviet Union is a day free from work for everybody, not just the women. Although initially this feast was enforced by the government, it became accepted by the Polish society and it became a part of Polish culture.

The history of Women's Day:

Since 1948 until 1956 when the Soviet Union officially abolished Stalin's policies this day was a ? final day of communistic competition for women (to learn more about communistic competition you can read the article entitled The Work Ethics in Poland [II]; Work Heroes and Party Actions). Polish women were undertaking the resolutions to exceed their working norms. They were expected to show a record of excellent work and superb production results to their communist supervisors. Polish newspapers were praising women for excellent work efficiency. The portraits of women as work champions were hung on the walls of the factories through the months of February and March.

With the fall of the Stalinism, the government and the mass media started noticing that women are mothers, housewives and that they are also beautiful. Although the government and newspapers tried to convince Polish women that most importantly is their role to build a socialistic future. The mass media and political communistic figures also wished women personal happiness.

Women's Day was commonly accepted in Polish society in the 1970s. There were two aspects in the celebration of Women's Day - the official one and the unofficial - private. Sometimes these two aspects were intertwined. For instance, at work and at schools, official ceremonies took place and men were celebrating the day with their women coworkers and children were bringing flowers to their women teachers. Schoolboys often were giving flowers to schoolgirls from their class. This was the easy day at schools, no exams and homework was checked. The most popular gift given to women - was a flower - usually a carnation, sometimes a rose. This day was really paradise for the florists! (Read about Polish flowers for different occasions.)

The late eighties marked the dawn of the Women's Day celebrations. The reason being - Polish society wanted to abolish all the remnants of communism. Women's Day - though it was not connected with communism, but because it was introduced to Poles by the communists - Poles felt Women's Day should be no longer celebrated. Besides, there was a strong tendency to adopt Western culture. Valentine's Day become popular - although it was completely unknown in Poland until the mid eighties. Valentine's Day (Walentynki in Polish) to a large degree replaced Women's Day.

You can read about Valentine's Day vs. Women's Day in Poland. Many people also realized that the simple fact that women have this one day in the year - puts them in the position of "the underprivileged" and should be changed since a woman's role in society needs to be changed. □

After a Draining Immigration Struggle, Local Polish Cellist Earns Rare "Extraordinary Ability Artist" Green Card

By: *Keiko Mori* kmori@usc.edu

LOS ANGELES, CA. March 13, 2008: It is an exceptional story of determination and triumph to emerge from the onslaught of cynical reports on America's immigration crisis. Polish-born cellist and University of Southern California instructor Marek Szpakiewicz has won his fight to stay and perform in the United States, after a longstruggle to prove himself to a faceless bureaucracy.

On March 6, rallied on by his Japanese-born wife and such luminaries as cellist Yo-Yo Ma, legendary vocalist Bobby McFerrin, Pulitzer Prize-winning composer John Corigliano, and Oscar-winning film composer Jan A.P. Kaczmarek, the cellist finally earned permanent residency from the U.S. government as an "Extraordinary Ability Artist." The title means he has "sustained national or international acclaim and [his] achievements have been recognized" in his field, according to the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS).

Twelve lawyers had refused to take his complex case, believing the cellist had little to no chance of winning. Szpakiewicz applied for a petition to become a U.S. permanent resident in September 2005, compiling a 4-inch-thick portfolio of supporting documents and 32 letters of recommendation from renowned musicians. His wife Keiko Mori carefully prepared the petition with assistance from an immigration lawyer.

Other talented immigrants have not been so lucky. In December 2005 and February 2006, Washington Post reporter Bob Thompson wrote about celebrated Chinese writer Yiyun Li, a Random House author and alum of New Yorker magazine and Paris Review, who lost her immigration case because her submission did not prove she was "one of that small percentage who have risen to the very top of the field of endeavor." In the Szpakiewicz case, the USCIS approved his petition in only five months in February 2006, after almost two years of preparation.

After the approval of the petition, however, the couple had to wait more than two years for his permanent resident status because of an FBI background check strengthened after the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, 2001. Although 99 percent of FBI background checks are completed within six months, nearly 320,000 people were waiting for theirs as of August 2007. That number included more than 61,000 who had been waiting for more than two years -- the group Szpakiewicz fell into.

Szpakiewicz and his wife sued USCIS, Homeland Security, and other government agencies in July 2007, joining more than

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Polish writer wins honor Templeton Prize awarded

A March 14 Associated Press article printed in the Pasadena Star News reports the Rev. Michael Heller, a prolific Polish scientist. Author, and Roman Catholic priest who bridges disciplines to explore the origins of the universe, was named Wednesday as winner of a religion award billed as the world's richest annual prize given to an individual.

Heller, 72, a philosophy professor at the Pontifical Academy of Theology in Krakow, Poland, won the 2008 Templeton Prize.

Heller said - in a statement that he intends to spend his winnings - worth more than \$1.6 million - on developing an academic center in Krakow devoted to research and education in science and theology.

Karol Musioł, rector of the Jagiellonian University in Krakow, wrote in nominating Heller that he "has brought to science a sense of transcendent mystery, and to religion a view of universe through the broadly open eyes of Science."

Heller in his statement criticized adherents of intelligent design - which holds that aspects of the universe and living beings are best explained by a higher power - as committing a "grave theological error."

Heller will receive the prize May at a private ceremony at London's Buckingham Palace.

Based in West Conshohocken, the Templeton Foundation sponsors various projects on science and religion and was founded by mutual funds entrepreneur Sir John M. Templeton. □

Letter to Editor - sent to the Worcester (Massachusetts) Telegram & Gazette.

Letter to the Editor:

February 2nd officially ended the Christmas Season when according to ancient Jewish law, 40 days after Jesus was born, his parents dedicated him to God and Mary attended a ritual of purification. For a foreigner it is interesting to observe how Christmas evolves over the years in America.

I noticed that the previous years' tactics that it may make non-Christians feel left out or offended failed.

Last year, the traditional Christmas was showed as either depressing, boring, or quite comically... commercialized.

Two things happen here. One is the Sovietisation of Christmas, stripping it from its religious symbols, making an atheist Christmas as imposed in Poland when under Soviet occupation. The media can promote the ideas of going casual with your sweat pants and baseball cap on, suggesting Chinese instead of a traditional family dinner. Even the question of Santa being too fat popped up.

But you cannot erase it completely; it brings too much profit to retailers. What the media can do is make it appear less attractive, giving a boost to other holidays.

Second, ignoring or ridiculing things that cannot be bought, things that cannot be sold, like traditions, customs, and symbolic aspects. We've seen this before; this new trend here is nothing but a communist style Christmas. It did not work in Poland, communism and its theories eventually fell. It may work here because so many people are unaware and are influenced by the media.

If Christmas is such a nuisance, give up those extra days off.

Justyna Ball - West Brookfield □

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American Council for Polish Culture

The American Council for Polish Culture, together with all its Affiliate organizations across the United States extend their hearty wishes for a Joyous Easter to all of Polonia - Wesołego Alleluja!

For information about our dynamic partnership role with U.S. school teachers at the Annual National Conferences for the Social Studies; our several scholarship and grants programs; the ACPC Youth Leadership Conference in DC, June 2008; ACPC membership, and the 60th Annual ACPC Convention, Aug. 6-10, in Williamsburg, VA where we will commemorate the 400th anniversary of the first Poles at the Jamestown Settlement, please visit our website www.polishcultureacpc.org.

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