



Polish Profiles

Life in a Jar

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

On Monday May 12 at 8:30 in the morning. Irena Sendler died. Two and a half hours later, a school in Warsaw was to be named after her. The principle of the school read the announcement of Irena Sendler's death to the gathered students. A hush fell over the room where they had gathered. Here and there, someone was crying, mourning the loss of this outstanding woman.

During the Communist Regime in Poland, Irena Sendler's name was never mentioned. Now, there are many who claim to have discovered Irena Sendler. To all of those who claim to have done so, I will say, "what poppy cock."

Irena Sendler was discovered in the year 2000 by Norm Conard, an American history teacher from Kansas. In 1992, he was selected as Kansas' teacher of the year. One of his great sources of pride is having seen sixty of his students achieve national recognition in the National History Day Competition.

It was Mr. Conard who asked four of his students, Sabrina Coons, Megan Stewart, Elizabeth Cambers and Kathleen Meara, to research the life of Irena Sendler, for a National History Day project. Out of this project, grew the play, "Life In A Jar." But before they did all this they decided that with their teacher, the four girls would visit Irena Sendler in Poland, and they did. And that is how it all started.

In 2002, I read about them and their visit in Poland in an American magazine. I immediately contacted the teacher, Mr. Conard. And that was how I learned about Irena Sendler. I was then the Executive Director of the American Center of Polish Culture, who among other programs initiated, the well known children's program, Summer of Dreams Vacation, and the Jan Karski Award and Scholarship program. It was established by me with the help of Professor Zbigniew Brzeziński, Ambassador Jean Kirkpatrick and Radek Sikorski, then a member of the Enterprise Institute and now Poland's Foreign Minister.

I decided to fly to Poland and visit Irena Sendler, to learn more about her. She looked to me like a perfect candidate for the Jan Karski Award for Valor and Compassion. While I visited her, I met in her room Mr. Roman Kent, who lives in the United States. He was just delivering to Mrs. Sendler a gift - a very much needed wheelchair. I have met Roman Kent before; he was a school friend of Jan Karski, also from Łódź. Mr. Kent gave me then and there a copy of a petition that he sent to the Nobel Peace Prize Committee to award the Prize to Irena Sendler. It happened six years before the Polish and the Israeli Governments and many others sent in their petition on behalf of Sendler.

Upon returning from Warsaw, I nominated Irena Sendler for the Jan Karski Award and the Committee agreed with me. In 2003, Irena Sendler received the award. It was a splendid occasion. The ceremony took place at Georgetown University, where Professor Jan Karski taught for 40 years. The guests of honor I invited was the teacher from Kansas and the four young girls.

Ms. Sendler was at that time 93 years old and could not travel, I asked the First Lady of Poland, Mrs. Jolanta Kwaśniewska to receive the award on behalf of Ms. Sendler here in Washington. Together with the First Lady, came Mrs. Elżbieta Ficowska, she was one of the children rescued by Irena Sendler 61 years ago.

From then on I visited Irena Sendler twice yearly. The last time I saw her was in September of last year and the last time I spoke with her was Christmas of that same year. I regret very much that Irena Sendler did not receive the Nobel Peace Prize, she truly deserved it.

The name of the play, "A Life In A Jar," came from the jar Irena Sendler kept. In it she kept written on a piece of paper, the name of every child she rescued. Later on she buried the jar in her father's garden outside of Warsaw. After the war, Irena Sendler dug up the jars and there were many. She then tried to get in touch with the children that she rescued. To her regret, as she told me, she was not very successful. But those that Irena was able to get in touch with, became her friends for life. Among them is Elżbieta Ficowska, who together with Jolanta Kwaśniewska accepted the Jan Karski Award on behalf of Irena Sendler.

Polish Profiles - Sendler to page 16

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Overspenders .com

By: **Justyna Ball**

I hate walk-in closets. I think they are ridiculous. The idea of having a separate room for your wardrobe seems odd to me. Yes, you may say, but what do you do with all those clothes as they need to be organized. Sure, but in my eyes, if you get to a point when you're asking that question, it probably means that you have too many clothes already so get rid of some of them!

My (old, by all means) friend, when designing her house (her retirement home to be exact) made sure that she was fulfilling her lifelong dream of having her own walk in closet. Her husband got just a regular one, although he did not live long after that... hmm. She couldn't care less what shape her new kitchen was or the size of the living room, or what side of the world the deck was facing. What preoccupied her mind was a room to worship her clothes in with shoe racks for her shoe collection. How big was it? You could probably fit 50 illegal immigrants into it although they would all be in a pretzel position. And some go to the extreme... To have another closet, besides the one that you already keep your clothes in, just for shoes and shoes only, you really should have your head examined.

We condemn Imelda Marcos (ex-first lady of Philippines) for her weakness for shoes, but some of us women would love to copy her and others like her, why?

Is it because women watch TV sitcoms and are getting those silly ideas like ...excess of shoes will make you happy?

It's one thing to stagger by such behavior and another thing to applaud it.

I don't care much for the New Yorker but I do like their cartoons. I check them weekly, and there was one by Mick Stevens called "Consumer Alert." A couple is watching TV and on their giant screen it reads "Attention: The Wilsons next door just bought a much bigger TV than this one."

That's us, Americanos.

I'd like to announce that I'm proud of the fact that we still have the same TV that we bought 21 years ago. It's a Hitachi from Manny's in Wilbraham, Mass. Manny is deceased now but the TV is still going. Why would I buy a plasma TV or anything else like it, if this one is still working and its in good condition? My friends claim that plasmas take up less space, but the old ones still clutter their space - just a different space in the house.

Some goods we collect to keep up with the rest with the notion of paying for things that we do not really need being secondary.

Frugal Larry? Someone that I know traveled to both Italy and Poland. From Italy, he brought a rather kitschy painting done in some special technique, a piece of luxury that cost him \$3,000. A souvenir from Poland (this trip took place several years later) was rather modest looking - a tiny wooden cottage that said ZAKOPANE on its roof. There was no story behind it like purchasing it from a poor Polish child begging on the street. Nope, it was just a cheap souvenir. There are wonderful artsy

products in Polish galleries, silver jewelry (with or without amber), crystal glass, linen, embroidery, hand painted silk scarves, paintings of the Polish landscape in a variety sizes and prices, even armor, nicely covered photo books in English... items that beautifully represent Poland. But what seems to be the case is that the trip to Italy seemed to be attractive enough to spend an extra few thousand and brag about it while the trip to Poland, a business trip, I found out, was less attractive, is not, in some minds, worthy of spending more than several dollars on souvenirs. Somewhere between the lines, someone had to decide which trip is worth what.

At the gas station, some guy in one of those oversized trucks occupied pump #1 for a good 10 min. At first I was upset, but then I saw that his total was \$167, so now I felt sorry for him. The guy is an addict - a petrol junkie. Petroleum addiction is a terrible thing, but as most addictions, it can be cured. You think the gas prices are too high? I don't. I think we were using too much of it anyways with some of us wasting gas because we thought it was cheap. We drove bigger cars than our neighbors, and we drove across the street to get a gallon of milk. Our youth drove cars to the mall just to window-shop and hang around. We did not carpool when it was the logical thing to do. Carpooling was so un-cool as that's what they do in those socialist countries... yuck. The gas was cheap, and we drove in style.

I know people who clipped coupons, shopped at Shaw's (a local supermarket) then drove 15 miles each way to Big Bunny (another supermarket) to save on meat products. Why? Because in their mind, the price of gas was cheaper than the price difference between meat products minus coupon.

We became addicted to gasoline and now we are trapped, and the oil companies like good dope dealers, or rather dope associates who don't give a damn as long they get people hooked.

When talking about overusing, it is hard not to mention drinking. Excessive drinking sometimes may have reasonable exploitation:

According to Ryszard Kapuściński (famous Polish journalist and author), "In the Soviet Union, vodka had its own moral code. You had to show up at friend's house with a bottle. And once the bottle was opened, you had to finish it. And then, one drank to prove one wasn't a KGB agent." ("The Paris Review") As a result, the headstrong KGB agents become presidents, and the life expectancy among Russian men is 59. The cause? Heart disease, alcohol poisoning and liver failure.

Moreover, either spending or drinking requires common sense and moderation.

We, the customers as simple folks are not the only ones overspending. Our government leads the way with much more moolah (our moolah!) on hand.

With taxpayers' money, Bush & Cheney's comrades built Fortress America for 700 million dollars (and still counting...), which is a massive bunker the size of the Vatican.

The US Embassy on the Tigris River is the largest in the world with egos to match.

Justyna Ball to page 14

Calendar of Events

May 27 - Jun 8, Polish Club of Laguna Woods Magical China and the Yangtze River, 13 day excursion. Info: (949) 206-9122.

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. (See page 5 ad for more information)

To June 30, 2nd Annual LA Polish Poster Festival at Weidman gallery, 7772 Santa Monica Blvd., West Hollywood, CA 90046. Information: www.contemporaryposters.com and www.weidmangallery.com

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

22, Antique Auto Show sponsored by Fr. Jerzy Popieluszko Council 9599 Knights of Columbus. Information: Tony (714) 671-6892.

25, Polish Club of Laguna Woods will celebrate summer with a "Family picnic" in clubhouse 6 at 11 a.m.

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.

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

Sept 20 and 21 Dożynki at Pope John Paul II Polish Center, 3999 Rose Dr., Yorba Linda.

28, Sunday, Bazaar of Our Lady of Bright Mount Parish, 3424 W. Adams Blvd., L. A.

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

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