

CULTURE



PEOPLE

HISTORY

64TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE LIBERATION  
OF AUSCHWITZ-BIRKENAU



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
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# EDITORIAL

It is not easy to explain what “Oś” really is. The literal translation should be “axis,” but it does not show the obvious connection with the name of the town “Oświęcim.” That is we decided to keep the Polish word. The rest is although clear: Oświęcim, people, history and culture. Generally speaking it is a project intended to present the activities undertaken to protect the Auschwitz Memorial – the real axis of cooperation. The monthly newspaper has been published in Polish language since May 2008. Now it is time for the English version.

The Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum is the publisher of “Oś” but this is in fact a joint project with the International Youth Meeting House, the Jewish Center, and the Center

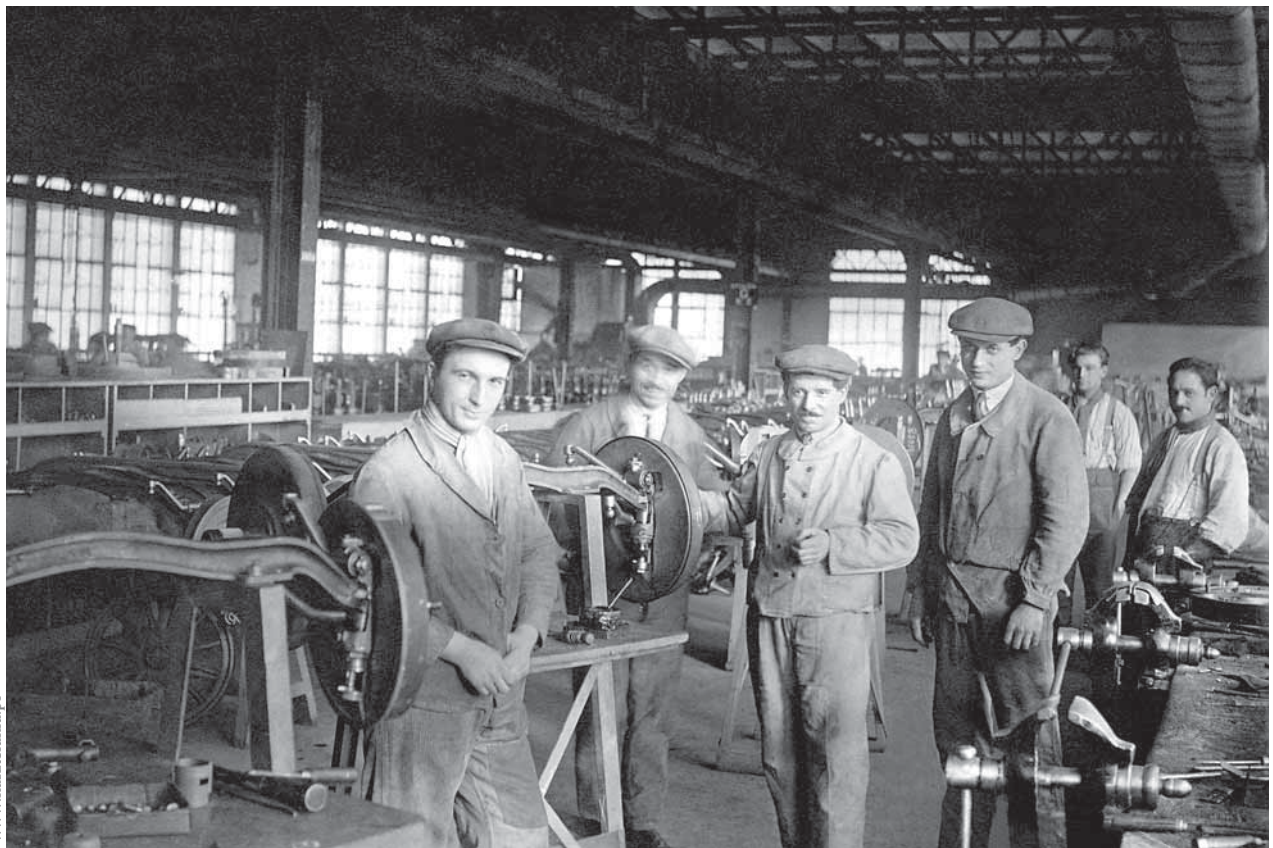
for Dialogue and Prayer. Each of the institutions sees the Auschwitz Memorial in a different way, but these perspectives are mutually complementary. The Museum protects the sites of the former camp, the IYMH promotes the idea of international dialogue between young people through various activities; the Jewish Center look after the heritage of Jewish citizens of Oświęcim that created its history and the Center of Dialogue and Prayer concentrates on the sphere of sacrum and spirituality in history. “Axis” is the symbol of collective co-operation that must be present at such place to fully use this difference of perspectives.

Auschwitz is a global symbol and it remains the most eloquent place for

forming the consciences of people who take responsibility for the future. That is why we decided to create the English edition of the magazine. After more than sixty years, people from all over the world continue to visit the sites of the former concentration camp and extermination center. In 2008 the Memorial was visited by more than one million people from around the globe. The message of this place still has its strong meaning and importance and we believe that memory is crucial both to commemorate the victims and to learn our lesson for the future. ■

Paweł Sawicki  
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# A GALLERY OF THE 20TH CENTURY



Factory workers. Photograph from the collections of Miroslaw Ganobis, *Gallery of the 20th Century*

This photograph of machine-factory workers in Brzezinka reflects the worldwide trend from the beginning of the 20th century for “social documentation.” Its main goal was to present human living conditions. The influence of such internationally renowned photographers as Timothy O’Sullivan, George Bretz, or Gustav Marrissaux can be seen. While they showed people “at work,” the anonymous photograph of the Brzezinka workers depicts its subjects posing

for the camera. The dynamism of labor is absent; the figures in the foreground are static while the impressive factory interior and the outlines of the figures of other workers are in the background.

The present Machinery and Equipment Factory in Brzezinka is the former Oświęcim United Machinery and Automobile Joint Stock company, which produced the Oświęcim-Praga cars advertised before the war

by such stars as Jan Kiepusa. After the war, the OMAG Mining Machinery Spare Parts Factory operated here, expanding from spare parts to making cranes and drilling equipment. In 1993, the company assumed its present name. Aside from mining equipment, it also manufactures car parts. ■

More details at  
www.kasztelania.pl/galeria20.php



## A CARICATURIST IN CAMP

The Museum art collection has been enhanced by a work by Auschwitz prisoner Tadeusz Myszkowski. It is a caricature of another prisoner, Jan Kowalski, camp number 99. Like Myszkowski, Kowalski, known in the camp as “Grandfather,” came from Zakopane, and the two were related. The Germans arrested him in 1939 for displaying political cartoons by Myszkowski, featuring Hitler and Mussolini, in the Empire café in Zakopane.

For drawing the caricature, Myszkowski was arrested and sent to Auschwitz. He was one of the deportees in the first transport of Polish political prisoners on June 14, 1940, and obtained camp number 593.

His fellow prisoners valued the painter and sculptor from Zakopane for his sense of humor above all, and also for his psychological resilience and resourcefulness. Myszkowski helped set up the camp sculpture studio, a haven for such artists as Bronisław Czech, Xawery Dunikowski, the Kupiec brothers, Wincenty Gawron, and other persons including the famous Captain Witold Pilecki (in Auschwitz under the name Tomasz Serafiński). Additionally, he worked in the carpentry shop and the photographic studio. His status as an artisan and employee of the SS photography office gave him relatively free access to artists’ supplies. In all the labor details where he worked, he covertly drew portraits of his fellow prisoners. He also made works, mostly paintings, engravings, and carvings, on orders from the SS.

Myszkowski joined the resistance movement inside the camp. He belonged to the Military Organizations Union, set up by Captain Witold Pilecki for the purpose of preparing an armed mutiny.

The fact that political caricatures led to his arrest did not deter Myszkowski from continuing to draw them in the camp. He drew numerous caricatures of his fellow prisoners, prisoner functionaries, and SS men. The cards connected with various occasions that he drew

for fellow prisoners reveal him as an outstanding caricaturist with a knack for picking out individual traits and presenting them in an amusing way. Caricatures had a special function in the camp. They had a therapeutic role. They warded off depression, soothing the aching for freedom, and also expressing self-defense and defiance of the cruel realities of Auschwitz.

The reverse of the drawing acquired by the Museum is an interesting scene, which also has a connection to Zakopane. Myszkowski painted a portrait of Auguste Piccard ascending into the skies like a balloon, but the accompanying symbols—a Polish flag, the Zygmunt’s Column, and numerous stars—suggest that this is not a depiction of Piccard’s famous 1931 stratospheric ascent. It is a metaphor of the pioneering attempt at a stratospheric ascent by *The Polish Star*. After an unsuccessful attempt in 1938 (a great event in Zakopane), a renewed attempt was scheduled for September 1939. The outbreak of World War II ruled out this much anticipated launch.

After the war, Myszkowski helped set up the future Museum. He was one of the founders of the Collections Department, tracking down art works made in the camp by prisoners. In the first years after the war, he also drew numerous caricatures of the SS men and his fellow prisoners, which today represent an important form of historical documentation, supplementing the written accounts and memoirs. ■

Agnieszka Sieradzka,  
 art historian,  
 Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum  
 Collections Department



Caricature by Tadeusz Myszkowski

The Nazis put a great deal of effort into destroying every trace of Auschwitz—the crematoria, the records, and anything that bore witness to the crimes they committed here. However, they did not manage to destroy everything. Fewer and fewer eyewitnesses to this tragedy remain, but they have left their memories behind, on paper or on canvas. Every object or drawing is a history unto itself, a narrative about a specific individual. We cannot allow them to be forgotten.

Each object associated with the history of this place is evidence of and testimony about unimaginable suffering. If you have anything in your home connected with the tragic history of Auschwitz, we urge you to contact us. We are grateful for each donation to the Museum; you may be

in possession of an item that could help save the victims of Nazi atrocities from being forgotten. Such items may find a place in the new permanent main exhibition that we are creating, or in the planned exhibition of camp art. They can help warn the entire world: “Never again!”

Remember: all of us, throughout Europe and around the world, bear the responsibility for preserving the memory of Auschwitz. Each of these items contains authentic, individual emotions and experiences. We can bring them back to life and permit them to testify to the crimes that the Nazis committed, here in the place with which they are inseparably connected. ■



photo: A-BSM

Reverse of the drawing





# THE IMPORTANT THING ISN'T WHERE YOU COME FROM, BUT WHO YOU ARE

A first-ever biographical video workshop, part of a Polish-German seminar for young people and young adults, titled *History in Biography—Józef Paczyński*, was held at the International Youth Meeting House in Oświęcim from November 28 to December 4, 2008. It was devoted to the life and experiences of Józef Paczyński.

For 6 days, 12 young people from Poland and Germany worked together on Paczyński's life story in the *History in Biography—Józef Paczyński* program. Conversations with the eponymous eyewitness formed the core of the project. Paczyński spent 2 days at the Meeting House, and then invited the young people to Cracow, where he showed them around his hometown.

Polish-German seminars cannot, and should not be limited exclusively to historical knowledge, but rather raise consciousness and build consensus in the context of the stereotypes that are arising.

Working in small groups and drawing on their own interests, motivation, and biographies, the participants worked in small, mixed Polish-German groups to develop a scenario. They compared their own lives to Paczyński's. This helped them identify and ponder the connections between their own lives and the former prisoner's past,

more than 60 years after the end of World War II.

Using film to approach the biography was a conscious choice. Video production offers broad scope for artistic creativity, and visual work fosters communication in multicultural groups, since the image is foremost.

At first, we tried to write down and sketch our expectations regarding our stay at

the documentary film scenario.

The sketches were very expressive of the life stories of the participants and their families, showing that the victim-perpetrator relationship did not flow in a conformist way from German or Polish nationality; the borders were fluid. During the seminar, for instance, M., from Poland, whose parents fought in the Warsaw Uprising and were deported to Auschwitz, met T. from Germany. T.'s grandfather, whom he never met, was an SS guard in Auschwitz. J.'s grandfather belonged to the German resistance movement and was imprisoned in Buchenwald. Today, J. works with young people. In K.'s family in Germany, there was silence about the subject. Only K. and her mother asked questions, trying to get to the truth. For B. and B. from Oświęcim, history was a part of their lives from the very beginning, and they could not identify a specific moment when they first encountered the subject.

The most important part of the seminar was the visit to the Meeting House by Józef Paczyński and the three-hour discussion with him, which was translated into German. The discussion continued, of course, during meals and informal evening conversations, which made the seminar an unforgettable experience. The next day, the participants developed the themes from the discussion in three mixed groups. The work centered on three main subjects, which would be used as the framework for discussions with Paczyński the following day. The main points were: positive and negative emotions, life before the camp, in the camp, and after the camp, and everyday life in the camp. As a supplement to the interview, they also shot footage with Paczyński in Cracow. They also shot their own scenes on the basis of the scenario, and edited them together with the interview into a 30-minute film. German subtitles were added and the first showing was held in early 2009.



Józef Paczyński

The *History in Biography—Józef Paczyński* seminar showed once again that even sixty years after the end of the war, or perhaps precisely sixty years after the end of the war, the Polish-German meetings at the International Youth Meeting House continue to be held at a high level and are necessary, especially at the present time when there are representa-

our next-door-neighbor, the Polish-German seminars cannot, and should not, be limited exclusively to historical knowledge, but rather to raising consciousness and building consensus in the context of the stereotypes that are arising.

Young Poles and Germans have a shared responsibility to pass on the account by

The seminar and meetings with Paczyński showed that, the more the Polish and German outlooks on the past and the present seem to differ, the greater the importance of mutual exchanges, learning about and respecting other points of view, and removing obstacles to building a shared future and friendship.

tives of Poland and Germany on the political scene who strike young people as irritating. Especially because they have to do with Józef Paczyński, who told them his story. Paczyński confided to the young people that he found the German language unbearable



Young people meet with Józef Paczyński



Józef Paczyński's university degree

## JÓZEF PACZYŃSKI

Born on January 29, 1920 in Łekawica. Deported to Auschwitz in the first transport of Polish political prisoners on June 14, 1940, he obtained camp number 121 and was assigned to forced labor in the camp barbershop. From 1942, he was forced to act as camp commandant Rudolf Höss's personal barber, and had to go to Höss's villa each day. He was in Auschwitz until January 1945, when he was evacuated to Mauthausen concentration camp by way of Wodzisław Śląski in the "death march." He worked in quarries near Melk. From there, he was transported to Ebensee concentration camp, where he was liberated. Like other ex-prisoners, Paczyński has extensive knowledge of Auschwitz and other concentration camps where he was incarcerated for 5 years of his youth. ■



after the war. Members of the staff of the Maximilian Kolbe Work (Maximilian Kolbe Werk) of Freiburg and a group of friends associated with the Lagergemeinschaft Auschwitz organization contacted Paczyński, and he remains in touch with them to this day. It is always individuals who determine the image of a nation, in either the positive or the negative sense. Each person makes a contribution of their own. In the end, individuals are the

important thing, and not the nations to which they happen to belong.

That idea is the final contribution of Józef Paczyński, and it is a leitmotif in his accounts and stories. There were also SS men who reached out a helping hand to him in the camp, and he owes them a lot: his life. It is necessary to believe in this. There is no other way, even if "the world" is tormented today by countless wars and

crimes against humanity, even if "the world" seems to have learned nothing from Auschwitz. Everything depends on young people, and Paczyński would like to leave a message for them, just as he has already done many times in conversation with young people. He has done this many times in meetings with them, especially in Germany. He has only one wish—for understanding between Poles and Germans.

The seminar and meetings with Paczyński showed that, the more the Polish and German outlooks on the past and the present seem to differ, the greater the importance of mutual exchanges, learning about and respecting other points of view, and removing obstacles to building a shared future and friendship. Admitting the existence of multiple perspectives for the perception of history is the basis for healthy democracy and democratic action, which can be learned about only

The idea for the *History in Biography—Józef Paczyński* seminar was developed by Anna Meier, deputy director of the Pedagogical Department at the International Youth Meeting House in Oświęcim, and she worked on developing it with the artist Thorsten Streichardt from Berlin, who was responsible for creative work with video during the seminar. Mirko Wetzel, a colleague in the *Art, Space, Memory* model program, was responsible for the evaluation and documentation of the project.

The seminar was part of the *Art, Space, Memory* model program. The goal of the model program is opening up and describing activities that have previously been regarded as marginal in the educational work at memorial sites, and integrating these fields: historical education, cultural and pedagogical activity, and contemporary artistic strategies. The *Art, Space, Memory* model program develops formats that open up to a greater degree than heretofore the space of thought and action, making it possible for the addressees to express their emotions and ideas, personal experiences, and visual habits in conference with the history and present-day reality of memorial sites, as well as to develop reflection upon ineffable impressions in an active and visible way. The starting point for this kind of participation-based artistic activity is the assumption that art is regarded as a form of action and as a special kind of communication where the process itself, rather than the effect only, is visible and understood.

in exchanges with others, similarities can only be experienced during encounters. Cultural differences, but even more so cultural

Anna Meier



photo: IYMH

Workshops

## PRO PUBLICO BONO PRIZE FOR THE IYMH

The list of winners of the tenth annual Pro Publico Bono Contest was revealed during the gala finale of the Pro Publico Bono Civic Independence Festival at the Słowacki Theater in Cracow. Among the winners was the Foundation for the International Youth Meeting House in Oświęcim, which won first prize in the category Civic Diplomacy (International, Interethnic, and Interreligious Cooperation) category.

"The Karta Center in Warsaw won the grand prize. We knew that the competition was intense. We could have entered any of the categories, since the House puts on so many events that it was hard to decide on one of them. However, it seemed appropriate to put forward the *Another Side of the World* exhibition, which has made a name for itself internationally, in the civic diplomacy category of the Pro Publico Bono Contest," said Leszek Szuster, director of the IYMH. The *Another Side of the World* exhibition was organized in late 2006 to mark the 20th anniversary of the founding and opening of the IYMH. "Its title alludes to a statement by a former Auschwitz prisoner, Baron Maurice Goldstein, who used those words to define the House at the opening ceremony in December 1986," Szuster added. The IYMH is an institution that uses its work with young people to break down prevailing stereotypes and schematic thinking in intercultural relations. Sharing a roof, the young people talk about the past and the future.

Issues like human rights, tolerance, and stereotypes are constants in IYMH programs. The House offers a broad spectrum of educational opportunities: field trips, thematic international seminars, professional development seminars for teachers, and workshops and programs as components of international youth exchanges. Civic and cultural-educational work in the interest of the town and region is an important part of this work. The Open House, *Encounters with Philosophy*, Festival of Cultures, International Biennale of Social-Political Posters, and the Cracow Poetry Salon are only a few of the permanent fixtures in the Oświęcim cultural calendar.

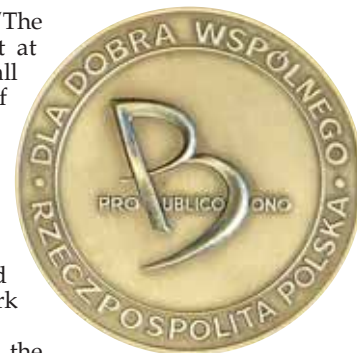
The meeting is one of the most important categories in the IYMH educational concept, *Oświęcim as a Place of Study*. Direct contact between young people and the last eyewitnesses to history is a chance to learn about the history of Auschwitz through the individual experiences of the participants. The trilingual *Another Side of the World* exhibition is an assemblage of impressions

and reflections derived on both sides from participation in these projects, by both the young people and the former prisoners who are the main protagonists of the exhibition. Kazimierz Smoleń, Prof. Władysław Bartoszewski, Henryk Mandelbaum, August Kowalczyk, Zofia Pohorecka, and Hans Frankenthal are only a few of the many people who contributed to the founding of the IYMH, or who have been closely connected with its work over the last twenty years. The former prisoners are accompanied by young people from Poland and abroad who cooperate with the IYMH: volunteers, seminar participants, and young people from Oświęcim. "Their life plans often change after a visit to the IYMH. Many of them have enrolled for studies at universities abroad, or work in international institutions and organizations," says Szuster. The exhibition won many admirers among the members of the jury. "It was not known who would win the award until the very last moment. 25 institutions were in the semi-finals, and 12 in the

finals," Szuster recalls. "The exhibition was an effort at condensing into a small package a certain part of our work—an important part, which is how we regard the meetings between young people and former Auschwitz prisoners. It seems that this prize can be treated as a prize for all the work of the House."

Over the past year, the IYMH has realized dozens of programs involving young people from Poland and other countries. Its main goal is the education of the younger generation on the foundation of the Auschwitz-Birkenau Memorial, out of the conviction that Auschwitz was too painful an experience for mankind to allow it to fade into oblivion, together with the belief that lessons can be learned from history for the future, and that learning about and working together with history makes it possible to overcome fears, prejudices, and hostilities among people.

The goal of the Pro Publico Bono contest is to "identify and honor the best work by civil society installations.



The jury evaluates them from the point of view of both social ethics and their usefulness for the country, region, and local community." Its history reaches back to 1999, when Jerzy Buzek, then prime minister of the Polish Republic, organized a Pro Publico Bono Contest for the best civic initiative during the first decade of independence from 1989 to 1999. Later, Jan Nowak Jeziorański and Professor Andrzej Zoll founded the Pro Publico Bono Contest Foundation. This foundation was the first recipient of the Totus award for propagating the teaching of Holy Father John Paul II.

Agnieszka Juszkowiak

# WE WILL NOT FORGET!

"You are the last generation that will have the chance to compare your knowledge about Auschwitz-Birkenau and the Holocaust with the eyewitness testimony by survivors, the living participants in the history that altered their lives during the war and, in the case of the Jewish people, doomed them to the status of orphans," former Auschwitz prisoner August Kowalczyk told the students. "The intention of today's anniversary ceremonies, with the theme 'Listen to Every Word, Remember Every Word,' is, on our part, a plea, and, on your part, a promise and a vow." Former Auschwitz prisoners conveyed their message to the young people. Ceremonies held on January 27 marked the anniversary of the liberation of the Auschwitz camp.



photo: Tomasz Pielasz

Zofia Posmysz



photo: Paweł Sawicki

Former prisoners

The anniversary commemorations began on January 26, when Museum staff placed floral tributes at places commemorating the Death March, which left the corpses of thousands of prisoners, who had been shot or died of exhaustion or exposure, strewn along the roads and railroad tracks. January 27 saw flowers placed at the Monument to the Victims of Auschwitz III-Monowitz, the Monument to the Destruction of the Roma at Auschwitz II-Birkenau, the grave of the Soviet soldiers at the Oświęcim parish cemetery, the Death Wall and Crematorium I at

the Auschwitz I site, and the Monument to the Liberated and the Liberators—the grave of the final Auschwitz victims. Mass was said at Divine Mercy Church for the intention of the camp victims and the living ex-prisoners. In his sermon, the Rev. Robert Bieleń of the Salesian order quoted the words spoken by John Paul II during his pilgrimage to Auschwitz in 1979: "I come here today as a pilgrim. As is known, I have been here more than once... a great many times! I have gone down many times to Maximilian Kolbe's death cell, knelt many times

at the Wall of Death and walked among the demolished crematoria of Birkenau. I could not fail to come here as pope." Father Bieleń noted in his homily that Auschwitz is a place where people said "no" to the divine law and denied the love of their neighbors. "Whoever begins to create his own commandments will sooner or later trample on the rights of man, as we have witnessed here, at the site of the Auschwitz camp," he said. The main ceremony took place at the Konarski Secondary School No. 1. Former

## KORNELIA MOZGAŁA – Student of class 3e

*In our school we are experiencing an extraordinary lesson in history, in memory.*

*The texts you have given to us, similar in their permanent and solemn form to the baton in a relay race, are an obligation upon us.*

*Yes! We are the next runners in the relay of memory, the memory of Auschwitz and the Holocaust, and for us people of Oświęcim, the memory of our grandparents, the People of Good Will who rescued the health and lives of the prisoners of Auschwitz-Birkenau and Monowitz.*

*Hail to their memory. Hail to memory and respect to your suffering. That this memory and suffering may never fall into oblivion, we pass them on to the next runners in the relay race of memory.*



photo: Tomasz Pielasz

March of memory



## ZOFIA POSMYSZ

"You were saved not in order to live, you have little time, you must give testimony." So wrote Zbigniew Herbert in "The Envoy of Mr. Cogito." For the fact that I, and all of us who survived the slaughter, can follow his advice, we are thankful for the existence and work of such institutions as the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum, the International Youth Meeting House, and the Center for Dialogue and Prayer. All praise to them. On January 27, 64 years ago, Auschwitz-Birkenau—a completely unparalleled product of human history—ceased to exist. According to a camp song, and I am quoting here, this was a place where "one degenerate brother torments another brother." When the memories of this place come over me, I think of the people whose actions helped others to endure and survive [...] On this special day, when we return in our thoughts to those times and the world of criminality, I have permitted myself to tell you this story, as personal as it is, in order to pay tribute to those who stood up to those crimes. Thanks to them, the word "humanity" is not an empty phrase, but rather, to paraphrase Juliusz Słowacki, it will live for generations in its deepest sense. ■

## TADEUSZ SMRECZYŃSKI

We had avoided death in Auschwitz-Birkenau; we did not know our future. The prisoners who survived the concentration camps owe their fates to the victory by the Allies over the Third Reich, which needed us until the end to work in the factories and coal mines, and to repair the damaged rail lines and clear the rubble from the bombed cities. The hope is that knowledge about the tragic events of the 20th century can help to check the dramatic rise in hatred and violence spreading through the countries of our world, and lead to positive changes. Interrupting the series of atrocities requires actions aimed at preventing the violation of elementary rights and respecting the international principles of coexistence. ■

## BRONISŁAWA HOROWITZ-KARAKULSKA

I have come to today's observances at the request of the directorate of the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum in Oświęcim. Unfortunately, all such meetings and discussions about the Holocaust have been a traumatic experience for me for many years, and this also applies to you. Each of us knows how dramatic it was, with the uncertainty about living to see the following day. I was a little girl then, and perhaps not everything got through to me, but I know how it affected my parents and the rest of the family, most of whom are gone now. I think that this handful of people who have lived to see today's ceremonies are making their descendants aware that this should never happen again. Each stage of life has its problems and needs, and I used to think that I was fortunate to be spared this. Alas, I was wrong. We keep returning to the past, and should talk about it with the young. As for results, we shall see. ■

## TADEUSZ SOBOLEWICZ

I conclude these anniversary reflections with a plea to you—to you young people with the future ahead of you. Value freedom, safeguard peace, and try, through dialogue, to search for mutual understanding. The great shame of the 20th century left its mark within the boundaries of Oświęcim, where you live. When the last eyewitness to the crimes committed here is gone, for life must end, let it be your moral obligation to convey the truth about this place. Remember the words of our Polish pope, John Paul II, who said that the only path to coexistence and peace is through the skill of forgiving. It will be easier for you to live. In Poland, our homeland, life will perhaps be even better. This is my wish for you. ■



The main ceremony took place at the Konarski Secondary School No. 1

Auschwitz prisoners attended, along with Polish parliamentarians and government officials, a representative of the Polish president, members of the European parliament and the Knesset, diplomats, officials and residents of Oświęcim, invited guests, and all those desirous of paying tribute to the victims of the Nazi Germans.

Participants in the tragic events, including Zofia Posmysz, Jacob Silberstein, Tadeusz Smreczyński, Bronisława Horowitz-Karakulska, and Tadeusz Sobolewicz, shared their recollections. Roman Kwiatkowski, the president of the Association of Roma in Poland, read out an account by Roma prisoner Edward Paczkowski. The survivors left copies of their accounts with the students as a testimony to the younger generation. Deputy Minister of Culture and National Heritage Tomasz Merta also spoke about finances and the need to support the Museum: "We support, and will continue to support the efforts of the people we have entrusted with the mission of protecting this place. An example of this support is the creation of the International Center for Education about Auschwitz and the Holocaust. We hope

that, in the nearest future, it will be able to move into its headquarters in the Old Theater." Minister Merta said that other examples of this included "the purchase of the bus garages adjacent to the Memorial as the site of new service facilities for the many visitors who arrive from all over the world, and our deliberate and focused involvement in the creation of a new main exhibition that will make the Memorial more comprehensible for, above all, the young people who visit the site. Finally, there is the support for the foundation inaugurated by Professor Władysław Bartoszewski, which will make it possible for the countries of Europe and the rest of the world to contribute to preserving the authenticity of this place, in awareness of the fragility of peace and the political order."

In a letter that she sent to those attending the ceremony, Ewa Junczyk-Ziomecka, Secretary of State in the Chancellery of the President of the Polish Republic, wrote: "I think with enormous respect and admiration of all those who work every day at the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum in Oświęcim. All of you residents of Oświęcim who live

here in the immediate vicinity of the Museum are, more than anyone else, the custodians of memory. It is in no small part thanks to you that the reflection that Auschwitz-Birkenau was possible—a lesson of horror about the dimensions of the crime, a lesson of tears about the fate of the blameless victims—can be taught every day, and not only once a year on January 27."

In the second part of the observances, the participants walked from the Gate of Death at Birkenau to the Monument to the Victims of the Camp, where they placed wreaths commemorating the victims while a rabbi and clergy from various Christian denominations joined in reciting the 42nd Psalm. About 2,000 people took part in the March of Memory, including the president of Malta Dr. Edward Fenech-Adami.

In 2005, in view of the significance of the place and the importance of the Auschwitz-Birkenau site as a symbol for all humanity, the General Assembly of the United Nations designated January 27, the anniversary of the liberation of the camp, as International Holocaust Remembrance Day. ■

Paweł Sawicki



The observances at the site of former Auschwitz II-Birkenau

## LIBERATION

January 27, 2009 marked the 64th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz-Birkenau. About 7 thousand prisoners from the Auschwitz I, Auschwitz II-Birkenau, and Monowitz camps were freed. In a historical paradox, soldiers formally representing Stalinist totalitarianism brought freedom to the prisoners of Nazi totalitarianism. In the Main Camp and Birkenau, Soviet soldiers found the bodies of about 600 prisoners who were shot by the SS as they withdrew from Auschwitz, or who died of exhaustion.\*

**Garnier (first name unknown), camp number 47571, Archives of the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum, Accounts, vol. 31, p. 135**

On the night of January 26 the artillery fire drew nearer and became continuous, and then it stopped after a moment. We heard the German trucks on the road to Bielsko. The Wehrmacht was withdrawing. The sound of artillery gave way to machine-gun fire. The artillery began firing again, very close, and we heard shots, explosions, and the machine-gun fire was closer and closer. Suddenly, it stopped. Finally, at 3:30, all hell broke loose in the camp: "The Russians are here!"

**Zofia Jankowska-Palińska, camp number 68992, Archives of the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum, Accounts, vol. 85, p. 29**

It was almost midnight. I was so tired that I decided to lie down, even though the SS men had announced that our lives were about to end. I said my farewells to my best friends and asked them not to wake me up,

because I preferred to die in my sleep. I pulled the blanket over my head and dozed off. I woke up at the sound of people shouting and calling. When I angrily asked the Austrian prisoner lying above me why they had woken me up, she cried, "Zofia, Zofia, the Russians, the Russians." The block was going crazy, and even the dying people regained their strength for a moment.

**Danuta Drzazga, camp number 26275, Archives of the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum, Accounts, vol. 33, p. 76**

The first Russian scouts entered the camp on January 27, 1945. They were dressed in white. From a distance, they looked like big, white splotches that were moving.

**Wanda Dramińska, camp number 85374, Archives of the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum, Accounts, vol. 83, p. 182**

We weren't sure who they were. We were afraid that they were Germans who would want to liquidate us. The ap-

proaching men were the vanguard of a reconnaissance patrol. Immediately there were shouts of "Zdrastvuyte tovarishchi" [Greetings, comrades]. The Russians assured us that we had nothing to fear, since "Germantsov nyet" [The Germans are gone].

**Anna Chomicz, camp number 44174, Archives of the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum, Accounts, vol. 75, p. 9**

On January 27, we heard the detonation of a grenade in the vicinity of the camp gate. We immediately looked outside and saw several Soviet scouts coming our way from the direction of the gate, with their rifles at the ready. We waved a stick out the window with a sheet that had red stripes sewn on it (from the block supervisor's pillowcase), in the shape of a red cross. At the sight of us, the scouts lowered their rifles. Since I knew Russian, I called out to them "Zdrastvuyte, pobediteli i osvoboditeli!" [Greetings, victors and liberators!]. In response we heard, "Uzhe vy svoboniye!" [You are free!].

**Irena Konieczna, camp number 55037, Archives of the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum, Accounts, vol. 113, p. 130**

Several Soviet soldiers—scouts—entered the grounds of the women's camp hospital with their rifles at the ready. The women rushed joyfully toward them. Some time later, a horse-drawn army cart arrived outside the block. When the Soviet soldiers realized the situation we were in, they supplied us with food of the highest quality (excellent pan-baked army bread, melba toast, and natural fats).

**Edward Czempiel, camp number 79254, Archives of the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum, Accounts, vol. 33, p. 40**

I saw the first Soviet soldiers in the Auschwitz Main Camp on January 27. Skirmishing could be heard nearby. They came through the camp and began firing in the direction of Rajsko from risers placed against the wall. Outside the wall on the Monopoly building side, the Soviet artillery set up and opened fire in the same direction, break-

ing the windows in the nearby blocks. Several German grenades landed in the camp, in the vicinity of Block 11. The pile of coal and briquettes next to the TWL warehouses began burning. At night, it cast a bright glow.

**Andrzej Kozłowski, camp number 192805, Archives of the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum, Accounts, vol. 22, p. 103**

Russians on horseback rode towards the camp at night-fall. There was a lot of snow, but sick and enfeebled prisoners emerged from every corner to see the "Ruskies." The cavalry rode on. That was a night full of joy, but also worry, because the first Russian patrols might have withdrawn and the Germans might come back to finish their work. Soviet tanks appeared in the morning.

**Anna Chomicz, camp number 44174, Archives of the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum, Accounts, vol. 75, p. 9**

On January 28 or 29, the Soviet military authorities delivered the first shipment of food to



photo: A-BSM

Prisoners of the Auschwitz camp after the liberation

\* [www.auschwitz.org.pl](http://www.auschwitz.org.pl)





photo: A-BSM

After the liberation

the men and women prisoners in the Birkenau camp. A field kitchen drove into the grounds of the women's infirmary. Horses pulled the kettles. The kettles contained very rich, meaty soup. Despite my warnings, the men and women prisoners made a dash for the kettles. I tried unsuccessfully to hold them back. Soon, as a result of eating soup

in excessive quantities when their organisms were badly weakened, the men and women had all the symptoms of secondary durchfall, which led to additional deaths. Together with Drs. Konieczna and Łaniewska, and the orderlies, I was busy afterwards trying to bring the situation under control. We explained to the prisoners that ex-

cessive quantities of food could be fatal. We screamed, "Did you survive the camp to die now in such a senseless way?" However, our intervention was a failure. Famine was stronger than reason.

**Zofia Jankowska-Palińska,**  
camp number 68992,  
Archives of the Auschwitz-

**-Birkenau State Museum, Accounts, vol. 85**  
They all looked at us from a distance, and somehow strangely. The soldiers began giving us their food rations, mostly dry bread and canned meat. On orders from their commanding officer, the soldiers slaughtered a horse and began cooking it in kettles. The prisoners ripped at

the tough, half-raw meat, still red, and gulped it down. . . . Over the following days, there was great chaos in the camp. . . . After a week, a team of doctors and nurses arrived with the necessary equipment. The doctors began weighing and examining the patients. I was 18 years old and weighed 19 kilograms. ■



photo: A-BSM

Liberated children





# AN INTERVIEW WITH KAMILA NOWAK AND NATALIA GRZESIAK, PARTICIPANTS IN THE *OSZPICIN: SAVE IT FROM OBLIVION* PROJECT

□ The finale of the *Listen and Remember* project was held at the Jewish Center on December 9, 2008. What were your impressions?

A lot of people came. They needed more chairs. We didn't expect so many people. We didn't think there would be so much interest. The whole room was full. It was very nice, because we realized that what we were doing means something not only to our class, but also to other people.

□ How long have you been involved in this project by the Świderskis?

Since we enrolled at the Konarski School. We were in fact required to take part in the class project *Oświęcim Land, Our Place of Residence—A Curse or a Stroke of Luck?* Under the direction of our teachers, Halina Świdorska and Wiesław Świdorski, we've been involved since our first year. In the second semester there was a suggestion to take part in the *I'll Show You* project, where young people from Nowy Sącz, Cracow, and Oświęcim looked for traces of Jewish culture in their towns. That was completely optional. The Małopolska Education Society only planned for five places, but we managed to get our whole class involved, because everyone applied at first. Later, some of them backed out. The *Listen and Remember* project is a continuation of that program. Now we've reached the end of it.

□ The final product of the *Listen and Remember* project is a film that has been shown on TV in Oświęcim and at a meeting at the Jewish Center. Who's in it?

People from Oświęcim who remember the times before the war, emigrants to Israel. Some of them live in Israel today.

We had to make a selection of the recordings. Some of our material is in the introduction.

□ Who interviewed the former Oświęcim residents?

The material comes from the Jewish Center. Tomasz Kuncewicz and Artur Szyndler conducted about 40 hours of interviews.

□ Was your experience and knowledge from the earlier projects useful in your work on the *Listen and Remember* project?

Sure. It's a film about the history of prewar Oświęcim. About cultural diversity and the Oświęcim residents who lived in harmony despite the fact that they were different. Today, few people know that Oświęcim was a lively place. It's incredible that we didn't know until recently what went on here before the war. Aside from that, we're sensitive to confusion of the town with the camp, to people who call the town "Auschwitz" instead of "Oświęcim," and vice-versa. We are very self-aware residents of Oświęcim.

□ Were there any surprises when you were working on the film?

Above all, the work showed us how little we know about the history of the town. One Jewish lady talked about how most of her friends were Polish girls, and that in her traditional Jewish home, they put up a Christmas tree for the holidays every year. Another thing was a different Jewish woman talking about how she was attracted to the church because of the beautiful stained-glass windows there. Tovah from Israel said that she would come back to Oświęcim if she were younger, because she always felt at home here. Many people also talked



Participants during the meeting

about their happy childhoods, and their friends from before the war. Everybody sees Oświęcim as a place of killing. It's a shame that everybody associates Oświęcim with the camp today.

□ Do you think that's unfair?

It's a result of certain coincidences. If not for the location and conditions, it would have certainly been somewhere else. The camp could have been anywhere.

□ What do you get out of these projects?

Above all, we can now imagine what life was like before the war, what the local community was like. And we know that things are happening here. Walking down the

street, we know what was here before the war. Today, lots of information strikes us as obvious. We wonder how it was possible not to know so many things before. We have become more tolerant. Above all, we learned how to work as a team, and our whole class can work together. Aside from this, we saw that something is happening here, that we don't have to be passive, that we can be actively involved in something every day.

□ Were there any moments of crisis?

There were. Sometimes the subject was exhausting, but the good things about moments of crisis is that they pass quickly.

□ Did you choose your school because it has

specializations in history and languages?

K.N.: In part. I considered three different schools, but I picked Konarski in the end. The specializations probably influenced my choice.

□ What will you do with what you learned in the project?

We make use of it every day. We cooperate with the IYMH, guiding groups of young Germans around town, making use of the program that resulted from working on the project. We went to workshops in Waren, in a Polish-German exchange. We plan to become volunteers at the IYMH, but only after graduation.

Agnieszka Juskowiak



Participants of the project together with their tutors



## NEW LIFE IN ISRAEL

Photography concluded in Israel in December 2008 for the *New Life* exhibition, which the Jewish Center in Oświęcim plans to open this April as a part of its commemoration of the deportation of Jews from the town during the Holocaust. The exhibition is the culmination of a two-year Polish-Israeli project conceived and organized by the Jewish Center in Oświęcim.



photo: JC

Bat Yam. (From left) Hamutal Davidi and Ester Lahat (Kohane)

Stills and video were shot in Israel in late November and early December. Next came several weeks of working on the material. The main part of the exhibition includes photographs of Jewish residents of Oświęcim who survived the Holocaust, emigrated from Poland, and began building new lives in

Israel. The exhibition will feature both survivors and their children who were born in Israel. "We want to show the reborn Jewish life after the Holocaust, the new life in a new state, and, in several cases, the initial efforts to rebuild life in Oświęcim after the war," said Artur Szyndler of the Jewish Center.

"Aside from this, there will be several text panels with historical information on such subjects as why Jewish survivors emigrated from Poland, the number of survivors, and so on." The personal stories will be rooted in the context of Poland and Israel. Visitors to the exhibition will also be able to watch a

film consisting of brief statements by prewar residents of Oświęcim and their children, on such subjects as their relations to Oświęcim, Poland, and Israel. Visitors will hear about the degree to which these personal stories remain vital and important to their families and the succeeding generations. The issue of language is an interesting one. The émigrés from Oświęcim speak in Polish, and their children and grandchildren in Hebrew. "It was a big problem to coordinate the meetings of all these people and the members of their families," said Szyndler. "They all have plans and commitments. It was hard to arrange the dates. We photographed the protagonists in their natural settings, at home or in their gardens."

or she survived the war and got to Israel.

"Every session took an exceptionally long time. The oldest of the 18 subjects was 97. For most of them, it was no small physical and emotional effort, but everything turned out well, thanks in large part to the support from the Israelis." Hamutal Davidi, a photographer who has taken part in photography workshops at the YMH, coordinated the Israeli photographers and filmmakers—Vladimir Margulis, Guy Yitzhaki, Zoltan Soli Fordi, and Omer Polak—who were responsible for the images. "Without her help in organizing everything, it would have been next to impossible," added Szyndler. The project has been supported so far by the Task Force for International Cooperation on Holocaust Education, Remembrance, and Research, the Embassy of Israel in Poland, the Consulates General of the USA and Germany in Cracow, and the Nicromet company. The Jewish Center is seeking additional funding to complete the project. ■

Agnieszka Juskowiak



photo: JC

Bat Yam. (From left) Tomasz Kunczewicz, Vova (camera), Gita Weisler (Lowi), Artur Szyndler, Hamutal Davidi



## ON HUMAN RIGHTS IN OŚWIĘCIM

It was no accident that Oświęcim was chosen as the site of a seminar marking the 60th anniversary of the proclamation by the United Nations of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and International Human Rights Day. "The intention was to show the total absence of human rights in the places symbolized by the Auschwitz-Birkenau camp," said Polish Human Rights Spokesman (Ombudsman) Janusz Kochanowski.



photo: Paweł Sawicki

Press conference

Ombudsmen from all over the world gathered at the Center for Dialogue and Prayer on December 4, along with government officials from Poland and the European Union, clergy, and figures from the worlds of learning and culture. Also present was Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum Director Dr. Piotr M. A. Cywiński, who stressed at a press conference that World War II was entirely different from other wars, and that this fact could best be understood precisely here, in Auschwitz. "Paradoxically, the roots of new postwar legal and political concepts, like the Declaration of Human Rights, the definitions of crimes against humanity and genocide, or the vision of a united Europe, reach back to the tragic experience of Auschwitz," said Cywiński.

The International Human Rights Day program consisted of speeches, a lecture, and the awarding by the Polish Human Rights Spokesman of his Paulus Vladimiri award to US Supreme Court Justice Antonin Scalia. US Ambassador Victor Ashe accepted the award on behalf of Justice Scalia.

After the ceremony at the Center for Dialogue and Prayer, the guests visited the Auschwitz Museum, beginning at the Auschwitz II-Birkenau site. They placed roses on the ramp where transports doomed for the gas chambers disembarked. They also toured prisoner barracks and climbed the main guard tower at the Gate of Death. Next, they visited

the main Museum exhibition at the Auschwitz I-Main Camp site: Block 4, devoted to the Holocaust, and Block 5, with its collection of evidence of Nazi crimes including human hair, prostheses, shoes, and suitcases with names on them. The Ombudsmen also toured the building containing the gas chamber and crematorium, and placed a wreath at the Death Wall in the courtyard of Block 11. The day ended with a concert at the church of St. Joseph the Worker in Oświęcim, where the National Symphony Orchestra of Polish Radio in Katowice played Krzysztof Penderecki's *Seven Gates of Jerusalem*, with the composer conducting.

The Oświęcim session was organized by the Polish Ombudsman, the Ombudsman of Israel, the Polish ministries of Foreign Affairs and Culture and National Heritage, and the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum. The honorary patrons were the President of the Polish Republic, Lech Kaczyński, and the President of the European Commission, Manuel Barroso.

One of the most important speakers during the observances of International Human Rights Day was Professor Aharon Barak, former chief justice of the supreme court of Israel. His absorbing lecture alluded to personal and tragic experiences during the war. Oświęcim is a place where such words are particularly significant. This is why we are publishing extensive excerpts from his remarks.

### The Universal Declaration and the War on Terror from a Judge's Point of View

1. This is a difficult moment. It is hard for all of us gathered here today in this accursed place. This moment is especially trying for me when I cast my thoughts back 67 years, to 1941. I was 5, and all of us, the Jews from Kaunas in Lithuania and the vicinity, were confined in the Kovno ghetto. About 5 thousand of us were children under the age of 14. When the Jews in the Kovno ghetto were being slaughtered, particular pains were taken to murder all the children. Among the 5 thousand children forced to live in the ghetto, only 150, or 3%, survived the war. I am one of them. I pay tribute to two families of Lithuanian farmers who risked their own lives to save mine.

Among those 150 children from the Kovno ghetto who survived the war, 29 of them survived here, in the Auschwitz camp. They were brought to Auschwitz on August 1, 1944 in a transport of 131 children from the Kovno ghetto. Today, I stand here as the 132nd child. Apart from me, Micha Lindenstrauss, whose whole family was murdered here, is also present.

This is a difficult place. It is the embodiment of the most brutal kind of human evil. It is a synonym for the ethical nadir represented by the planned murder of humanity, regardless of sex, race, age, or nationality. It constitutes the most extreme expression of the mass murder of the Jewish People. It is a symbol of the unparalleled evil of the Holocaust.

From this horrifying place—from its gas chambers, from the Death Wall, from the crematoria, from the barriers, from the piles of hair, glasses, and suitcases in the Museum, from the ashes of the people cremated here—voices reach us, saying: never forget, never forgive! Together with these voices, other cries reach us: never permit another Auschwitz; never, ever permit another Holocaust.

These cries are the last will and testament of those who were murdered here. Yet, at the same time, they also represent hope for life. Thanks to these voices, we know that, from the ashes

of those people who were murdered here, we can create a better society, a society in which people will not treat each other like wolves—and, even if it is not a society in which people treat each other like angels, let it at least be a society in which people treat each other like human beings.

2. Such is the background of the historic United Nations Charter, the treaty that established the United Nations in 1945. In the Preamble to the Charter, we read:

"We the peoples of the United Nations determined . . . to reaffirm faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person, in the equal rights of men and women and of nations large and small . . ."

Article 55 declares that "the United Nations shall promote . . . universal respect for, and observance of, human rights and fundamental freedoms for all without distinction as to race, sex, language, or religion." These provisions on the fundamental human right to dignity, equality, and freedom are connected to two events. Those events occurred sixty years ago, and their origin was here, in Auschwitz.

The first event was the adoption of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide. The Convention was adopted by a resolution of the United Nations General Assem-



photo: Paweł Sawicki

Session at the Center for Dialogue and Prayer





Speech by Polish Ombudsman

photo: Bogdan Owsiany



Orders of Merit

photo: Bogdan Owsiany

bly on December 9, 1948. The seed of this convention was sown here in this place, in Auschwitz.

The second event was the adoption and proclamation of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights by a resolution of the United Nations General Assembly on December 10, 1948. One of the reasons given in the Preamble as lying at the basis of the Universal Declaration is the fact that "disregard and contempt for human rights have resulted in barbarous acts which have outraged the conscience of mankind."

These "barbarous acts which have outraged the conscience of mankind" are, above all, those committed here in this place, in Auschwitz. There exists a direct connection between the inhuman deeds committed during the Second World War and the proclamation by the United Nations of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which occurred 60 years ago.

3. The Universal Declaration lends substance to the provisions of the United Nations Charter in regard to human rights. The rights that it lists are civil and political, as well as social, cultural, and economic. In view of the obligations of the international community as brought into force by the Universal Declaration, almost all of these rights have become part of international com-

mon law. They are the basis of two United Nations Conventions on human rights. Subsequent international treaties and regional conventions on human rights are based on the Universal Declaration. The rights enumerated in the universal Declaration and in these conventions have also been included in the constitutions and the domestic legal codes of many states. Their influence may also be discerned in the Polish constitution. Auschwitz was the reason for the shedding of many tears. The system of human rights, together with the Universal Declaration that occupies a central position there, is the response to those tears.

4. In recent years, the system of human rights has again faced new challenges. One of the greatest of these challenges is international terrorism. A brutal attack on the United States occurred on September 11. Other countries all over the world experience terrorism every day. In this very week, we have witnessed the attacks in India. Terrorism is the contemporary expression of the barbarism of which Auschwitz was the most outstanding expression. Once again, we witness human life being treated as if it had no value; once again, we see human beings being murdered because of their race, religion, or national allegiance. Once again, evil and hatred have no limits.

Modern democracies, which alone have learned the lesson of Auschwitz, ask themselves: how should we deal with such barbarism? How can we fight against terrorism, while still remaining democratic societies? This question has many answers. The countless experts in the field of combating terrorism present their opinions; executive and legislative groups seek solutions, and find them. However, there is one more element of the state that has a role to play in contending with terrorism: the judicial authorities in the democratic countries.

5. I am presenting the judicial point of view in my remarks today. Judges in the democratic system, the same as the judges of international courts and tribunals, come face to face with this problem every day: what should they do within the framework of the fight against terrorism? In what way can they responsibly fulfill their judicial function? As a member of the Supreme Court of Israel, I had to deal with this problem for 28 years. To my great regret, I have considerable experience grappling with this cruel dilemma. America had a painful experience of international terrorism on September 11. Israel had this experience on October 10 and September 9, as well as September 12 and 13. At no moment since the creation of the state of Israel has it been free of the danger of terrorism.

In fulfilling the role of judges, we inquire particularly into the propriety, from the point of view of the law and the constitution, of the war on terror. What principles should we judges follow? While my remarks concentrate on the judges in national or municipal courts, they also apply to the judges in international courts.

Consciously or not, my remarks reflect the fact that I was the 132nd child. Such is my experience. However, that experience is not the basis for either hatred or a lack of faith in humanity. On the contrary: I believe in the spirit of humanity, which is the essence of each person. Only our faith in the possibility of overcoming difficulties makes it possible for us, the survivors, to function despite the ubiquitous brutality. Only faith in people and their dignity makes it possible for us to live after having passed through a

real hell. The fascists took away our lives. However, they failed to rob us of the essence of our humanity.

### The Role of the Judge in the Defense of Democracy

My starting point is that I feel that my role, as a justice of the supreme court or constitutional tribunal in a democratic society, is to protect the constitution and democracy. We cannot take the continued existence of democracy for granted. This statement refers in an obvious way to newly arisen democratic systems, but it is equally true for democratic systems with an established position and a long history. We can no longer accept the approach according to which "it can't happen to us." After all, anything can happen. If it happened in Auschwitz, it can happen in any other place. If democracy was distorted and obliterated in Germany—the homeland of Kant, Beethoven, and Goethe—then the same thing can occur in any other place. If we do not protect democracy, then democracy will not protect us. I do not know if the judges of the supreme court in Germany were in a position to stop Hitler from coming to power in the 1930s. I do know, however, that one of the lessons to be drawn from the Holocaust and the Second World War is the need to possess a democratic constitution, and to have justices of the supreme court, whose fundamental task is the protection of democracy, to ensure its execution. In the postwar period, this recognition has helped in the promotion of extending judicial review to the constitutionality of legislation and the actions of the executive authority, and in placing human rights in a central position. This is what has shaped my point of view, in which the role of the supreme court justice in the democratic system is to maintain and protect the constitution and democracy.

We should protect democracy both against terrorism and against the measures that the state intends to use in the fight against terrorism. Of course, the way in which justices cope with the protection of democracy is tested on a daily basis, yet the most important test of their work comes in situations in which they must grapple with instances of hostile and terrorist acts. The protection of the human rights that should apply to every person is a far more serious obligation in situations of hostile actions or acts of terrorism than in times of

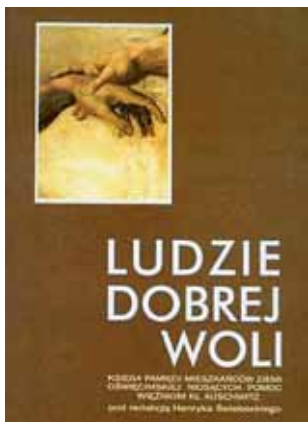
peace and security. If we are not up to the demands of our role in times of military action and terrorism, then we will not be able to meet our obligations in times of peace and security. It is a myth to believe that there exists some possibility of maintaining a clear distinction between the status of human rights in times of hostilities, and the status of human rights in times of peace. We are only fooling ourselves if we believe that we can limit judicial decisions in such a way that they apply only in times of combat, or that we can issue decisions about the changes that occur in times of peace. The boundary between military action and peace is a faint one; what one person calls peace, another person might call war. In any case, there is no chance of maintaining such a distinction in the long term. We should assume that any kind of decision that we undertake at moments when terrorism endangers our security will remain in force even when the danger of terrorism subsides. In reality, justices must act in a consistent, coherent way. Bad decisions taken in times of military and terrorist action lead to a loss of faith in the courts after the end of the crisis.

In addition, democracy guarantees independence for us, as judges. It strengthens our position in view of our political independence, in relation to changes in public opinion. The true test of this independence occurs while military operations and terrorist acts are taking place. The meaning of our independence becomes clear in situations where there is a likelihood that public opinion will be nearly unanimous. Particularly in times when military operations are underway or when acts of terrorism are being carried out, we must take upon ourselves the entire responsibility for the protection of democracy and the constitution. We should always epitomize history, not hysteria. The truth is that the fight against the phenomenon of terrorism changes our democracy into a "defensive democracy," or even into a "fighting or militant democracy." Nevertheless, the defensive and combative stance cannot be allowed to deprive our system of its democratic nature. Justices at the highest level of the judiciary in a contemporary democracy should act in a spirit of defensive combat or militant democracy, as opposed to uncontrolled democracy. ■

Bogdan Owsiany

## PEOPLE OF GOOD WILL

### ANTONI SZLACHCIC (1919-1945)



He was born on March 2, 1919 into a railroad worker's family in Babice near Oświęcim, the son of Jan and Maria née Piotrowska. He attended primary school in Oświęcim and continued his education at the State Commercial School in Biała Krakowska, graduating in 1937. He passed his *matura* examination at the Queen Jadwiga Tenth State *Gymnasium* in Cracow. The Nazi German invasion of Poland in 1939 prevented him from begin-

ning his studies in law. The residents of Babice were expelled in 1949, and Antoni Szlachcic and his parents went to live in Oświęcim. He worked as a photography technician at a drugstore on the Main Square. Having access to amateur films brought by German soldiers for developing, he created a secret archive to document the Nazi crimes. He cooperated in this with the underground movement, which he had joined in the first months

of the occupation. He was a courier and a member of the staff of the Oświęcim District of the Union of Armed Struggle, using the pseudonym "Laura." He supplied material aid to the prisoners in the Auschwitz camp, helped prepare escapes, and furnished fugitives with identity papers and civilian clothing. The Gestapo arrested him in the spring of 1944. He was imprisoned in Block 11 in Auschwitz and held there until early January 1945. Despite the brutal interrogation, he never betrayed his co-conspirators. Inscriptions by him, including the words "Laura," "Maria," and "Babice," can still be seen in cells 19 and

20 in Block 11. The summary court sentenced him to death on January 5, 1945. He was shot in Auschwitz-Birkenau the following day. He was posthumously awarded the Order of the Grunwald Cross Third Class. ■

Biographical sketch from:  
*Ludzie Dobrej Woli. Księga Pamięci mieszkańców ziemi oświęcimskiej niosących pomoc więźniom KL Auschwitz,*  
Henryk Świeboczi, ed.  
Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum and Auschwitz Preservation Society, Oświęcim, 2005

## FROM THE GANOBIS' COLLECTION

Finding mementoes and treasures is often a matter of happenstance. So it was with a silver medallion in my collection. There is an extraordinary story behind it. Someone found it in Birkenau. By whom, no one remembers, but whoever found it took it to a jeweler's and sold it. As it turned out, a friend of mine worked in that jewelry outlet. My friend bought it from the owner of the shop and put it aside. Several years later, he remembered that I collect all sorts of old things, and asked if he could give it to me as a present. I agreed, of course, because, as an exhibit, that medallion has great historical value.

During the war, Jewish children being deported to the camps received such medallions. It was clear that this one had been made using basic techniques. It is shaped like a heart. There is a Jewish inscription on one side, and I learned that it reads, "May He bless you and give you luck." No one knows whom it belonged to, or how it ended up on

the ground at Birkenau. Did someone drop it, or lose it? Perhaps they dropped it deliberately, so that some trace of them would remain. No one knows. Its story is one of happenstance. It could have been melted down long ago, or given to someone else. Somehow, nevertheless, it survived, and thus ended up in my collection. ■

Mirosław Ganobis



The medallion

Fot. Mirosław Ganobis

## HISTORY OF OŚWIĘCIM – JANUARY

- **January 1, 1867**  
17 years after the separation of the duchies of Oświęcim and Zator from the German Union and the granting of broad-ranging autonomy to Galicia in November 1866, the germanization of the Oświęcim lands came to an end. Polish was restored as the official language in Oświęcim town hall.
- **January 1, 2000**  
As a result of the recent regional reorganization, the rump Oświęcim land (without Wilamowice) returned to Małopolska. Oświęcim *Powiat*, with 450 years of history, was restored.
- **January 8, 1441**  
Waclaw, the oldest son of Duke Kazimierz (d. 1434) issued a proclamation in Zator thanking Polish king Władysław III for recovering the town and adjacent demesnes, and expressed his readiness to render fealty.
- **January 12, 1782**  
Habsburg Emperor Joseph II issued a decree ordering the closing of a range of houses belonging to men's and women's mendicant religious orders. This was the basis for ordering the closure of the Dominican monastery in Oświęcim; its property was assigned to a religious foundation.
- **January 19, 1445**  
At the request of Duke Wacław of Oświęcim, Przemysław and Jan, the sons of Duke Kazimierz (d. 1434), issued a document in Oświęcim that served as the basis of the division of the extensive duchy between the three brothers, into the Duchy of Oświęcim for Jan, Toszek

- for Przemysław, and Zator for Wacław. Among the many provisions of the agreement was an obligation placed upon Duke Wacław to recover Barwałd castle, which had passed into Polish hands in 1440.
- **January 19, 1445**  
The last prisoner evacuation transport left Auschwitz - Birkenau Concentration Camp (Death March).
- **January 22, 1915**  
Brigadier Józef Piłsudski, commanding officer of the Polish Legions, entered Kęty.
- **January 25, 1438**  
For services to his father, Duke Kazimierz, Duke Wacław of Oświęcim awarded a *lan* of land in the ducal village of Dwory to Mikołaj Pokrzywka. This locality, under the patronage of St. Urban, was first mentioned in 1429.
- **January 25, 1973**  
The first Olympic-sized indoor swimming pool in Poland was opened in Oświęcim. It was built using funds from the Oświęcim Chemical Plant, with significant contributions from the town's workers and residents.
- **January 25-27, 1985**  
The *Love of Mankind* National Non-Professional Film Festival was organized in Oświęcim for the first time. Since 1996, it has been a biannual international festival.
- **January 26, 1919**  
The Oświęcim *Powiat* commandant of the Polish Army, Capt. Cezary Haller de Hallendurg, was killed in action during the defense of Cieszyn Silesia against the Czechs at the

- Kończyce Małe Fields near Zebrzydowice. He was posthumously promoted to major and buried in the family vault in Dwory.
- **January 26, 1945**  
Soviet soldiers of the 60th Army of the First Ukrainian Front entered Zator, liberating the town and the vicinity from Nazi occupation.
- **January 27, 1782**  
Habsburg Emperor Joseph II granted the coat of arms of the Kingdom of Galicia and Lodomeria with the Duchy of Oświęcim and Zator. It was modeled on the heraldic device found on the reverse of the silver Oświęcim-Zator two-złoty coin minted by the Empress Maria Theresa from 1775 to 1777. The three fields of the escutcheon beneath the crown presented (from right) the coat of arms of Galicia (three golden crowns on a blue field), the coat of arms of Lodomeria (two silver-and-red checkerboard stripes on a blue field), and, in a triangular field at the bottom of the escutcheon, the coat of arms of Oświęcim-Zator (a black eagle on a golden field).
- **January 27, 1945**  
The Soviet Army controlled Oświęcim and liberated Auschwitz-Birkenau Concentration Camp. The following day, the Soviets took Kęty.
- **January 29, 1882**  
Tadeusz Makowski, one of the leading Polish painters of the early 20th century, was born in Oświęcim.



By Leszek Żak,  
guide to the local area  
and the Beskid mountains.



# TO THE EYES OF TOMASZ MÓL



photo: Tomasz Mól



photo: Tomasz Mól

### Snowflakes

by Linda A. Copp

*Snowflakes spill from heaven's hand  
Lovely and chaste like smooth white sand.  
A veil of wonder laced in light  
Falling Gently on a winters night.  
Graceful beauty raining down  
Giving magic to the lifeless ground.  
Each snowflake like a falling star  
Smiling beauty that's spun afar.  
Till earth is dressed in a robe of white  
Unspoken poem the hush of night.*



photo: Tomasz Mól



photo: Tomasz Mól



photo: Tomasz Mól

