

Thoughts on Poland, July 2011

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Caveat: This is a report on our trip to Poland. Alas, I can't seem to get out of professor mode, using my vacations to prepare my next lecture. To be honest, I did not expect much of Poland as a vacation site. After fifty years of oppressive rule by two alien regimes, I assumed it would be a dismal place. To my surprise, it was wonderful. I cannot say enough about Poland as a vacation site. We had a fantastic time, strolling the streets, sitting in sidewalk cafes, looking in windows, watching people walk by, seeing old-world towns, visiting beautiful churches, having long conversations, eating great meals, being in awe of the beauty of this land. Consider Poland.

Preparation: When we decided to go to Poland, I did some pre-reading in Polish history, about which I knew little. I asked my colleague Ted Radzilowski and my former student Dominik Stecula for suggestions. Both mentioned John Radzilowski's *History of Poland* (John is Ted's son), and Norman Davies. John's book is a scholarly briefing book for people like me, and Davies' *Heart of Europe* has a unique feature of being organized in reverse chronology. It starts with Communist Poland, then goes back to World War II, then the interwar Republic, etc. Amazingly, this works! Ted sent an excerpt from *The Secret City* by Gunnar Paulsson (on the 28,000 Jews hidden in Warsaw), Moshe's Arens article on the Jewish Military Organization's role in the Ghetto Uprising of 1943, John's evaluation of the new Museum of the Warsaw Uprising of 1944, and Ted's own excellent paper on non-Jewish victims of the Nazis (written before Snyder's definitive *Bloodlands* was published). Dominik also suggested a biography of Kosciuszko, the hero who fought in the American Revolution and led an uprising in his homeland. I bought a Michelin map of Poland and circled every major city encountered in my reading. They say that an expert is someone who has been in a country more than two years or less than two weeks, so I qualify. All commentaries and interpretations should be taken as what they are.

Jane and I traveled with our German friend Sibylle Laurischk whose family had ties with what is now Poland. We were in Poland nine days, driving a new Opel. We came away impressed. This is a vibrant country. The streets are clean and largely free of litter. People who do not litter show respect for themselves and for their country. The food was consistently excellent even when we ate in a small cafe. There were always varieties of fish, vegetarian, pasta, chicken, sausage. The cost was about the US price (but we make more). People looked positive about life.

There are certain things everyone says about that Poland that turn out to be true. One is that it is a land without natural borders. John Radzilowski starts his discussion of Polish history by noting that it "begins and ends with geography." It is a flat land (except for the area south of Krakow) and he calls it "a natural highway." We saw this as soon as we entered the country from the West. Except for being covered with trees (suggesting that the area was not suitable for farming) it looked like Central Illinois. There is a historic distinction between the core Polish areas in the middle of the country and the border regions (Kresy to the Poles), which were ethnically mixed and disputed. Those core regions were in every permutation of Poland over the centuries. The border areas were sometimes Polish, sometimes not. John Radzilowski notes four regional categories, which I think of as Heartland Poland in the center, East Prussia/Danzig in the north, the German border areas to the West, and the Slavic and Lithuanian border areas to the east. The central regions were created as a nation state after the Napoleonic wars at the Congress of Vienna (1815) and was sometime called Congress Poland. It did not survive long. The border regions had Lithuanians, Ukrainians, Byelorussians, Germans, and others. Whatever foreign powers did to Poland and its provinces, they could say they were just restoring what had been true in the past. Some of the great Poles came from these border regions including national poet Adam Mickiewicz, military hero Tadeusz Kosciuszko, interwar leader Marshal Jozef Pilsudski, and Nobel laureate poet Czeslaw Milosz. There was a historic debate (peaking after World War

I) over whether the Polish nation was all of its people or those of Catholic Polish ethnicity. Davies notes that in 1773 when Poland was first partitioned, 50% of the population were Polish Catholic. Perhaps a third were Protestants, including Calvinists and Lutherans; from 1921-39 Polish Catholics were 2/3 of the population. After WWII, with the targeted killing of the Jews, the expulsion of the Germans and Lithuanians, and the restructuring of Poland by reassignment Polish provinces to Russia/Ukraine, Polish Catholics rose to 96% of the total.

The second observation is that Poland is a land insecure in its existence. Stories of conquest, partition, occupation, oppression, and martyrdom are pervasive in its history and its culture. The Poles remind me of the Irish, where each generation was raised on stories of how previous generations had risen up and an expectation that they themselves would have their day. An uprising would not necessarily succeed but it was a step towards an ultimate outcome. I remember my Iraqi Kurdish student who said, "I did not support the uprising but they were my people so I joined them." He pulled aside the cap he always wore to show me that his ear had been cut off by the regime, with a warning that if he engaged in another uprising they would know and he would be killed. Some peoples just live with the reality of what is expected of them.

Connected to this is the fact that this is a land of heroes. These heroes are military leaders who resisted foreign invasion; religious leaders who urged the people to resist; poets who wrote of resistance; and musicians who composed martial and nostalgic music. Monuments to these heroes and martyrs (all in black iron, which gives a feel of seriousness) are everywhere: statues in the streets, plaques in the churches, streets named after them. It is not surprising that after the Warsaw uprising of 1944 the Nazis destroyed all the monuments in Warsaw. It was what they called "an insubordinate city."¹

The third observation is that the Poles are far more religious than other Europeans. The Italians have a strong anti-clericalism (distrust of priests and bishops) and the French are post-Catholic. (Joke: The French Psychiatric association has a new symptom of delusion, the belief when you are at church that someone is in the pew behind you). To the Poles, the Church was not just a place to pray. It was their flag above Fort McHenry, still flying in the midst of flames.



When everything else was lost, the church would be there and would help them reconstruct their national identity. As John Paul II said in 1979 during his visit to Poland, "Without Christ it is impossible to understand the history of Poland." The image of Christ with his cross is common. He is struggling, about to fall under the burden, but in his physical weakness raising his right hand upwards to encourage those left behind not to surrender [picture]. These are powerful images, charged with political and national significance. Davies described the church leaders under Communism as "formidable." Cardinal Wyszynski, who lived in internal exile in the American



Embassy was one, but the greatest was Cardinal Wojtyla, who became Pope John Paul II. Everywhere you see monuments and sites in their honor but the

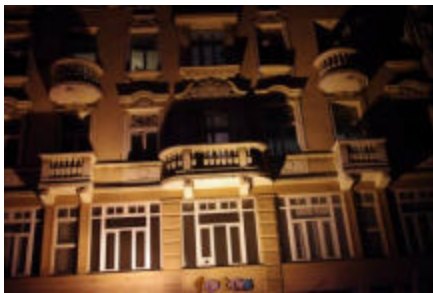
¹ A widely-mentioned incident of heroism involves the Battle of Monte Cassino in Italy in 1944. The Germans were entrenched on that mountain and the Allies had to dig them out, with 2-1 losses. The Poles did the heavy lifting. Many were from Lvov and believed if they achieved this victory, their city would be included in Poland after the war. When Stalin insisted that Lvov go to Ukraine, Churchill and Roosevelt acquiesced. The Poles felt betrayed.

eneration of John Paul II is ubiquitous [picture]. Every church seems to have a chapel in his honor, a large photograph of him, a statue, an altar, an exhibit, a poster. Many people (even scholars) feel that his moral example and courageous support of Solidarity empowered the Poles and brought the Soviet Union crashing down without a shot being fired. In spite of his flaws (which we political scientists are quick to point out) he may well be the greatest Pole. In Poland, Catholicism is more than a religion.

Finally, it is ironic that the greatest disasters in Polish history (World War II and the Holocaust) happened within living memory, and two of the greatest Poles lived in the current age, (Lech Walesa and John Paul II, although Walesa's star faded after he formed a government. There are surprisingly few monuments to Solidarity). During World War II, 18-20% plus of all Poles died, a total of six million souls, half being Jewish. John Radzilowski says Poland lost 45% of its doctors and dentists, 57% of its lawyers, 30% of its engineers, 40% of its professors, 15% of its teachers, and 20% of its clergy. Warsaw alone lost more than the US and UK combined.

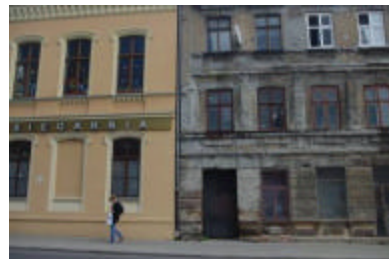
Lodz

Lodz was a real eye-opener. (Note that the L is not an L. It represents a Polish sound closer to *wu* so the city is Wudj. To borrow from Mark Twain on the French, the Poles are excellent at spelling but terrible at pronunciation). This was an ancient town of about 1,000 population. 200 years ago, industrialists from Germany decided to make it a textile center. They created a city with modern boulevards and organized streets. They built weaving mills with top notch technology. These were enormous complexes and by the 1890s this was a thriving city. They built houses for the workers, schools, hospitals, churches, and enormous mansions for themselves. Brick worker flats were in blocks of perhaps ten, each with a storage place out back. They looked nice, well above anything American miners would have at that time. Most mansions were in the center of



town, not on the outskirts the way our jillionaires do [picture]. Some of the looms were still operating in 1987 when John Paul II visited. This very impressive city was called The Promised Land. Not to sugar-coat the industrial age, but everyone got rich. Jews poured into the place, many from Lithuanian. The key industrialists were Grohman, Scheibler, Rinderman, Kinderman. Today Lodz is struggling to overcome fifty years of occupation. Some

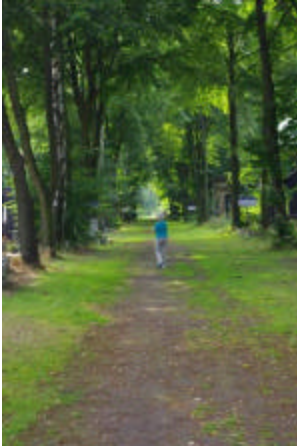
buildings are dreary, drab and broken but others are restored and sparkingly fresh [picture of old and new, side by side]. We saw one bloc of worker's houses being restored. Of course, there is the Stalinist architecture, the large apartment buildings which have not been painted since they were built. To tourists, just driving by, they look dreary but for workers who had nowhere else to live, these were surely godsend. There are also the large outdoor pipes that take heat to the city from a central heating facility. We have seen such things in east Germany. One can only speculate on the percentage of total energy lost in those pipes.



The Jewish cemetery of Lodz had 160,000 graves. It was opened in 1892. As someone who studies graveyards, I cannot figure out how they had so many Jewish graves in such a short time. Some were mass graves from the "ghetto" created by the Nazis, and the graveyard may have served a wide region around the city, but still, this is almost as large as Woodmere in Detroit which is a giant urban cemetery. Walking inside was



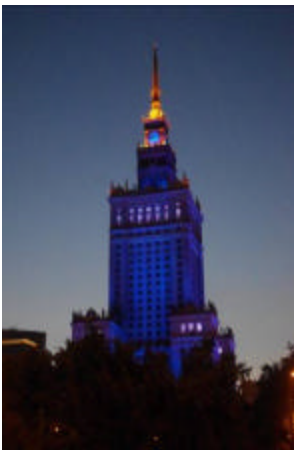
an experience. These were Haskalah (Enlightenment) Jews living next to Enlightenment Germans. There are a few candles (religious) and stars of David (Jewish nationalist) and a few tombs of the super rich [picture: Poznanski], but most are just average stones. The cemetery has the feel of an overgrown town. Stones are very close together and cluttered [picture]. There are trees inside so there is a cover over the whole area [picture]. There are lanes where wagons could carry caskets, and benches near graves so people could sit. One stone showed a dove mourning its mate. Note that a dove symbolizes marital love. [picture]. The area is humid so there are very colorful cemetery snails everywhere. In the entrance, a plaque put up after World War II: “In memory of ferocious, cruel Nazis and their collaborators. Lord, Remember these martyrs and revenge the spilled blood of your people.” Chilling, but understandable.



Warsaw

We had been prepared not to like Warsaw. Many tour groups skip it and go directly to Krakow. Partially this is because the whole city had been destroyed by the Nazis as punishment for the Warsaw uprising in 1944. All the buildings have been reconstructed. But they look good. The city is vibrant, exciting. The feel of the street is friendly. In the evening, there are young people everywhere, pretty girls, adults, young families with strollers. The monuments are nice. There are the unavoidable remnants of Communism: the dreary buildings, the plaster breaking, no paint. But these are side-by-side with the new Poland of modern buildings and reconstructed places.

The Church of the Dominicans tells what happened to Warsaw. This church served as a hospital throughout the Warsaw Uprising of 1944. In August it was bombed, and 1,000 people were killed. Somehow, it continued to function as a hospital until the Germans captured the neighborhood. On September 2, they executed all the medical staff and blew up the building, killing 500 people. The church has been reconstructed in its old style, but it is obviously new. It was impossible to extract the corpses so the current marble floor was put in over the remaining bodies. Inside are many plaques to honor military heroes. Clearly faith and arms are linked. This is a shiny new building, beautiful inside and out.



As I looked at this revived city, I had a thought. It surprised me because I knew the damage done to this land by Communism. I wondered, could Warsaw have been rebuilt from the bottom up, with traditional architecture, vast housing projects for the workers, etc. with a democratic government? This reconstruction involved an element of serious coercion, sucking away all surplus for decades. A free election might have cut taxes and shifted priorities. After 9/11, with wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, we refused to raise taxes to pay for those things, driving ourselves deep into debt. The political system was simply unable to do what needed to be done to pay for these things (and to repair our own deteriorating

cities, roads, bridges, etc). I want to think the democratic system could have worked in this case (it seemed to work in Germany), but that is not clear.

Warsaw Uprising Museum: We had been told that this museum was not essential, but decided to go anyway. It was opened in 2004 by the President of Poland and Chancellor Gerhard Schroder of Germany. Everything was in Polish and English but the earphone narrative was in eighteen languages. John Radzilowski's article said it was meant to function as a "temple of memory." He said it's educational approach was "problematic" because it felt like an oral history collection without a chronological narrative. I found it very effective. The uprising started on August 1, 1944.² The attempt to kill Hitler was on July 20, and the Russians were on the outskirts of Warsaw. The resistance had been functioning since September, 1939 when Germany and Russia invaded Poland and partitioned it. There was an "ever-present determination to prepare for retaliation," i.e., an armed uprising. A Code of Civilian Behavior called for resistance. People were told to submit bad grain for the grain confiscation quotas and to burn empty warehouses. There was an information system with leaflets and broadcasts. The Code called for executing collaborators, and the Museum emphasized that not all Poles resisted. But, "the nation resisted, not just an organization." Poles also wrote as graffiti the traditional symbol of defiance, which looks like the letter P sitting on a round anchor (picture). Operation Burza (Tempest) started August 1 against a retreating German army. One old woman told of the euphoria as they heard shots and knew the long-awaited uprising had begun. As soon as one neighborhood was liberated, they began to print postage stamps. Few people had the stamps so they delivered the letters without them. Polish flags appeared, a President emerged and a city council began to issue regulations. Within that small zone, Poland "existed" for the first time since 1939. A nearby memorial honors the combatants [picture].



The resistance was preparing to act as hosts to the incoming Russian army. Alas, the Russians did not enter the city but left the Poles to their fate. A few weapons were airlifted in by the Soviets (they would not allow the Americans or British to use their bases for drops) but there



was no general attack to support the Poles. Stalin had a greater goal. He wanted the Polish elite to be crushed so he could reconstruct Poland in his own image. To everyone's surprise, the uprising held out until October 5. Polish soldiers from all over poured into the city. The Germans pounded it with artillery and aerial bombardment. Many thousands were killed and many executed in the aftermath. The Germans decided to destroy the city as punishment. The Museum has a video exhibit that shows what happened: a picture of a

beautiful building, an explosion, then the building after its destruction. Another building, another explosion, another ruin. It just goes on, building after building. It was a soul-crushing image. A group of German high school students stood in silence as they watched. Two girls held

² The Warsaw Uprising is often confused with the earlier Ghetto Uprising, the Ghetto referring to a walled-off area created by the Nazis to imprison Jews waiting death. That event was in April, 1943 when all Jews had been killed but 70,000. When German tanks entered the Ghetto in a final liquidation effort they were met with resistance from Jewish forces who had received weapons from the Polish resistance. Most of the fighting was over in four days, but skirmishes lasted into May. Unlike the later Warsaw Uprising, this uprising had no chance of success but was an effort by Jews to say, "We will not go peacefully and no one can say we did not fight back." In the end, almost all of the Jews in this place died.

onto each other for comfort. It was almost too much for them to bear. As you go out of the museum, you realize that all the beautiful buildings in Warsaw were reconstructed after the war ended. They look like the originals in terms of style, but it is obviously new construction.

Throughout the Museum, a heart beat penetrates the air. It is very chilling, even ominous. The Museum is dark, without windows, and with little light. Many of the exhibits are individual stories. An old man describes how he told his parents he was joining the uprising. The mother said no. "You are only 15. You are *not* going." The father said ("and this surprised me," said the old man) that "this is his time and he should be allowed to do what he wants to do." The old man paused. "Then my father said the wisest words I have ever heard. 'Don't get yourself killed in a stupid way. Don't hide. You cannot escape being killed, but don't get killed in a stupid way.'" How amazing to send your son off to certain death, but it was "his time." An old man tells of how they were led through the sewers to escape when the uprising failed. He was about 17. They were led by a younger girl. The sewers (which have been reconstructed for the exhibit) were small and had a V shape in the bottom. Walking was hard. The girl had a stick to balance herself. She had led many groups out. There was sewage everywhere and the boy kept falling. Finally, he told her he was giving up. She should go on with the others. She turned and berated him: "You are *NOT* giving up. When the war is over we will need to reconstitute the Boy Scouts and that will be your task. You may *not* die." I can only imagine this girl child, perhaps 13, standing defiantly in the face of an older boy, giving him unequivocal orders. He obviously had respect in his voice as he told this story. An old woman tells how children would lie on the ground with flashlights, providing a visual landing strip for incoming airplanes with supplies.

There are no precise numbers of fatalities but there is a general agreement on ranges. 15,000 Polish combatants were killed, 5,660 being from the Home Army. 150-200,000 civilians died. 16,000 Germans died, a mix of soldiers and police and SS. 200,000 civilians were evacuated by agreement at the end of the uprising, although many were sent to work camps in Germany or to death camps. One person said, "we walked in total silence." 700,000 people were expelled from the city. 923 historical buildings were destroyed (94% of the total), 25 churches, 14 libraries, Warsaw University and most monuments. 35% of the city was destroyed after the surrender. By the end of the war 85% of the city had been destroyed. It had no population.

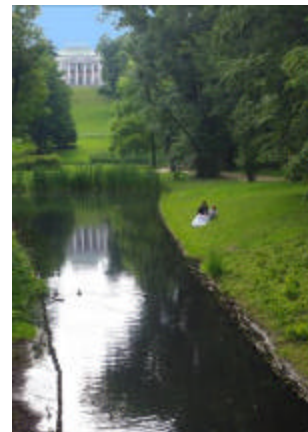
This museum tells a story of conquest, determination, resistance, uprising, defeat, betrayal, euphoria, despair, sacrifice, determination, martyrdom, and a subsequent betrayal at the war conferences by the Big Three. It was very effective.

Willy Brandt Memorial. There is a memorial in honor of the time Willy Brandt, then the Foreign Minister of Germany, came to Poland and fell on his knees in repentance for what Germany had done. This event was electrifying and the photograph of Brandt on his knees was on the front page of every major paper in the world the next day. It transformed Germany's role in the world. I discovered at this memorial that names on streets end in a vowel, i.e., Brandt street was called Brandta (because they are genitive and modify street). Elsewhere we saw Franklina Delano Roosevelta Street, and even Adam Mickiewicz Street became Adama Mickiewiczza Street.

Summer Residence: Warsaw was destroyed in the war but Lazienki Palace outside the city was



spared. It is just two stories, straddling the water, but the grounds are delightful. We walked back and forth and around for over



an hour. There were flowers everywhere, many of explosive red color, benches about, peacocks, a statue of a reflective Chopin (who lived here until he was 21 when he moved to Paris, met George Sand, and died at 39). There were lovers strolling about, people in small rental gondolas, and newlyweds in gown and tuxedo lounging on the bank of the river [two pictures].

Jewish Cemetery: There was an old, established Jewish community in Warsaw, but this graveyard was founded in 1806. There are 150,000 people buried here, making it an exceptionally large cemetery. It is surrounded by ten foot walls, as with other Jewish cemeteries. They were probably worried about vandals. The place felt like a crowded neighborhood, with stones very close to each other. It is well maintained but had the feel of an abandoned city. Trees canopy everything so light does not penetrate. There are priestly hands offering blessings, books indicating the Torah, Lion of Judah [picture], stars of David (indicating a sense of Jewish nationalism), communist hammers, and indications of professions (such as snakes representing medicine). Many inscriptions were in Hebrew, not Polish. In Berlin, most inscriptions were in German. There are occasional references to “died in Hitler’s massacre.” In the 1900s, signs of art deco crept in [picture], creating a definite contrast with the more traditional stones. There were colorful graveyard snails which we saw in other Jewish cemeteries (but not Christian ones, since the layout was more open). A protective vulture struck me [picture]. This was new.



Sandomierz

There is an odd inconsistency that some Polish cities were virtually destroyed during the war but others were largely untouched. The Germans and Russians marched along a route, taking key positions. Anything in the way was destroyed or damaged, but other cities were spared. This means there are places that are very much the way they were before the war. They have an old-world feel that is pleasant and gentle. One of those is Sandomierz, a small town of about 15,000 southeast of Warsaw. The city hall in the town square was built in 1349. Even for Poles, it is a place for tourists to come, and they were much in attendance when we were there. They come to be photographed with the chain that stands erect into the sky as chains never do.

For me, the local cathedral was the prize of the day. It has several large paintings of a massacre. These are maybe 10x10 feet, perhaps a dozen of them. Everyone is being killed, priests and citizens alike. This commemorates an event that took place in 1260 when the Tatars attacked. The Dominicans were praying their *matins* (evening prayers), with a novice (young priest) reading the martyrology story for the next day. The priests suddenly realized this was a warning of their fate. To prepare, they prayed all night. When the enemy came, they found the Dominicans at peace, receiving death as a gift. Today every Dominican death is accompanied with the song *Salve Regina* (Blessed Mary, Queen), which the priests sang as they died.³ The

³ “Hail Holy Queen, Mother of Mercy/ Our life, our sweetness, our hope/ To thee do we cry poor/Banished children of Eve/Crying and Weeping on this Valley of Tears. Turn then, most gracious advocate/ Thine

paintings show people being tortured in every imaginable way. Some are beheaded. One holds his head with blood spurting out. People are hanging by their arms from a scaffold; many images show a soldier swinging a sword at the neck of a victim from behind, receiving no resistance. Victims have small numbers on them, probably so the church can keep track of who they are and how they died. A priest stands among the civilian victims with a cross and Bible, not fleeing but being faithful unto death, symbolically blessing and reassuring the dead and dying. Angels overhead wait to take away the souls. A priest gives water to an anguished man in the midst of chaos. A man is split open neck to groin. Some are hanging upside down from a cross with weights on their hands to make the anguish worse. Bodies are scorched with flames and brands. Guts are ripped out. Dogs tear people apart. Eyes are gouged out. People are dragged by horses. There is every imaginable torture or means of death. This was a very memorable visit.

Polish Catholic Cemetery: We visited some Catholic cemeteries along the way but the one in Sandomierzu named in honor of the 1792 Uprising was special. Outside the gate was a memorial to the victims of the Katyn massacre of 1940. At Katyn forest, in the east near Smolensk, Stalin killed 20,000 Polish officers and other leaders in 1940 in an effort to destroy the Polish leadership. 8,000 were officers, 6,000 were police, and the rest were intellectuals and other educated people. 1,000 were Jewish officers and officials, including the Chief Rabbi of the Polish army⁴ There was a monument with many crosses aligned in orderly rows, like ranks of soldiers. Inside, the cemetery was distinctive in a Polish Catholic way. They were



very heavy on religious symbols, crosses, statues of suffering Christ, images of a protective mother [picture]. Stones were close together and looked neat and orderly. A young girl about 20 was painting a scene. This was a



peaceful place where people could just sit. I also had a memorable experience. I saw a gravestone with that wonderful symbol of Polish resistance (P in an anchor). The grave had a flat stone above what appeared to be a sarcophagus with a marker stone standing up with names on it and the symbol off to the side. A man with a bucket of water was washing the stone as his wife sat there peacefully watching. I was reluctant to take a photo even though it was a beautiful representation of the symbol. After a while I asked if I could take a photo. To my surprise, the man spoke some English. He told me about the people buried there. His great grandfather was in the Polish army during World War I, his grand father was in the Polish Army during the Second World War, and his uncle was in Solidarity. He was obviously proud of his family's contributions to Polish history. This week was the anniversary of his mother's death so he was cleaning the stone. He proudly stood in the photograph [picture].

Krakow

eyes of mercy toward us/ And lead us home at last/ And Show us the blessed fruit of thy womb, Jesus,/ O clement, O loving, O sweet Virgin Mary.

⁴ Beria was the inspiration for this, but Stalin and the politburo signed off on the massacre. Most were shot in the back of the head. There was an organized Soviet effort to blame the Germans, complete with fabricated documents and letters. Even in the 1960s the debate continued. Not until 1990 did the fading USSR acknowledged what had happened, followed in 1991 by the new Russian Republic.

Krakow is the most Catholic city in the most Catholic country in the world. It is a city that was largely untouched by the war so everything is in place. It was also a rich city, even the capital of Poland at one time. The city is dramatic, and could afford to be dramatic. Tourists love the market place with its small shops [photo]. There is a church walk around the center of the city which is dazzling. In England, a cathedral means there are no distinguished churches anywhere nearby. The Cathedral sucked up all the money for centuries. But in Krakow in that short walk, you can pass eight or ten churches, any of which would be more spectacular than anything in the U.S. When you go into one of these churches, you think, “this has to be the most beautiful place in the city.” And then you go into another church. You don’t want to leave these places. They have so many small pieces of art or corners or altars or ceilings that each one pulls you to stay.

In Wawel, the royal palace, the great Poles are buried. Of particular interest to me were the tombs of Kosciusko and Jan III Sobieski. Sobieski was the king whose cavalry broke the Ottoman siege of Vienna in 1683 and saved central Europe from Turkish conquest. Next to the tomb of Kosciusko was a plaque in English and Polish quoting a Congressional Resolution: “On the bicentennial of the victory at Saratoga, October 17, 1777, A Grateful America Remembers T. Kosciusko, Fighter for our Freedom, and Yours.” Kosciusko was a military engineer who served with Washington and helped set up the defensive structure around Saratoga. His colleague Pulaski also served with Washington, creating the first American cavalry unit.



As one would expect, the Palace had a wonderful collection of historical artifacts. The sword of Jan III Sobieski was there, a long elegant looking weapon with a Russian eagle added when Nicholas I of Russia was crowned king of Poland. (It has been removed, no surprise). There was a collection of armor, one breast piece having an image of Mary over the heart. (When my cousin went to Korea, he was given a New Testament with a metal plate over it. He was told that if he wore it over his heart, it would protect him. I guess the Poles thought the same way). There was a piece of armor for the Hussars, the famous cavalry who had wings. I had seen a drawing of those wings as made of wood, which seemed to me like an invitation to suicide on the battlefield. Here I saw that the ‘wings’ were made of feathers, a bit like some Hollywood Indian chief would wear. Our intelligent and elegant guide (visitors had to be guided) told us great details about every piece of art and furniture, but I was more interested in the politics and images represented. For example, I was intrigued by the fact that in September, 1939, the whole art collection was evacuated to Canada for safekeeping. (The Nazi Governor Hans Frank lived here during the war so it was kept safe by the Germans. He was hanged later). I was also intrigued by an image I had seen in Polish graveyards but did not understand. It was called the “cloak Madonna.” It showed Mary (or a Mary-image female) spreading her cloak and protecting groups of people, sometimes children, huddled beneath. We also saw a painting of Mary with blond hair, logical for Poles but something I had never seen before.

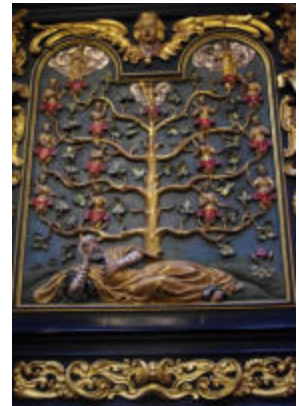
I noticed that many of the drawings and carvings were of ancient times, and thought about why this might be. Of course, early Americans admired the Greeks and often had Greek-style architecture, but there was something else at work here, if I am correct. In the early centuries, Poland was governed by whichever person got elected king. There was little connection to the people, who had no input and probably didn’t know or care who was ruling them. As Davies said, only the rulers thought of themselves as Poles. Also, Poland had not yet developed a high culture. They did not have what is called a “prestige language,” meaning a language with a recognized world literature. That came later. In those early centuries they had an ill-defined, mixed culture. To legitimize themselves, rulers had to attach themselves to Greeks, Romans, the Bible, and the Church. The church provided legitimacy for the regime in the form of public opinion. This linkage with the church was essential. It reminds me of Saudi Arabia in that essential point (although the histories are quite different). In Wawel palace, these

themes are constant: This Greek god, that Trojan or Roman hero, this Biblical story. There was a bust of Augustus and a painting of Troy burning. In our favorite room, there were vast paintings of the creation story. We see Adam and Eve walking with God (God was clothed); the first altar, with flames shooting up and a lamb waiting to be sacrificed; and my favorite, Adam and Eve at home. Adam is toiling in the garden, bent over a hoe, looking exhausted. A child is nearby, and a snake. Eve is standing there, a definite babe, with braids and long curly blond hair, hanging down provocatively, a seductive smile on her face, looking irresistible. It is obvious who is in charge.

A Krakow masterpiece is the 14th century wooden altar carved by Veit Stoss of Nuremburg from 1477-1489 found in St. Mary's Basilica. This is an incredible piece of religious art, even spectacular. It is an enormous altar piece that tells the story of Mary in three parts: Her stress (on the back), her joy on the front, and her triumph as Queen of Heaven on top, presiding over everything else. From a distance it looks overwhelming [picture], but up close you realize each small component is a masterpiece. Many paintings along the side walls frame the altar with scenes from the life of Jesus, including his circumcision [picture] and a Tree of Life [picture]. The Poles dismantled it in 1939, put the parts in crates and hid them around the country. The Nazis set up a special unit to find them. They took the altar to Nuremberg castle for permanent ownership. They figured that since the carver was a German, the piece belonged to Germany (not that they needed an excuse to steal art works). The Poles found the crates and sent out messages but the castle was bombed anyway. Fortunately, the monument was spared and restored after the war. It opened in the mid-1950s. A church in Chicago has a half-size replica of it.



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Black Madonna. Poland is famous for its Black Madonnas. Czestochowa has the most famous but we saw them in different places, one in the Basilica [picture]. No one is sure why this style was so popular. Perhaps it was just a style, but they are distinctive and memorable.



Jewish Sites: We missed the Jewish cemeteries (old and modern) which closed Friday afternoon until Sunday. We did get to visit the old "High Synagogue" which has an exhibit on early rabbis. The Jewish community started in 1304 and by 1550 they had a yeshiva (school). The synagogue had a quote from Genesis 28:17 ("How full of awe is this place. This is

none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven.” Unfortunately, the translation on site began with “how dreadful is this place.” Dreadful and awesome mean the same thing but it does not work in contemporary English. This was a large building with a nice bookstore on the ground floor and the worship area on the second floor, with no windows. The Jews lived near the Christians and they were concerned (probably with good reason) about security. The exhibit is of eight or ten famous rabbis who stood out for their excellence. These are an impressive lot, scholarly and even brilliant. Several were contentious in that they had strong positions on what constituted correct Judaism. Some were of the Hasidic or cabalistic tradition, not at all friendly to the progressive (*Haskala*/Enlightenment) movement so popular in Berlin. One rabbi wrote 1,000 essays on the meaning of the first word of a Jewish text. His tomb says “Elijah the prophet spoke to him face to face.” He also wrote 252 commentaries on Moses pleading with God to let him enter the Land of Israel. Another worked out a way whereby a divorced woman could remarry under Jewish law; one made cabbalistic science compulsory and tried to excommunicate those who studied secular sciences or philosophy; one was expelled from the community because his style of prayer was so loud and ardent that it disrupted everyone else; several reported miracle stories. Rabbi Eliezar Ashkenazi (b. 1521) had his whole family lifted up during a seder and taken by angels from Cairo to Venice where he finished his meal; another was covered under a collapsed building but God helped him find the way out; one resisted accepting the “crown of Torah” as a leading rabbi but when his rabbinical papers arrive the same day his soap factory burned down he saw this as a sign; one was covered with his family in an earthquake and promised if God let them escape he would write a book on the Torah. God did, and he did. Finally, one so strongly opposed assimilation of Jews into mainstream culture that he became a passionate Jewish nationalist (Zionist). We think of Zionism as linked to secular, educated, even socialist classes, but the religious wing is powerful as well, and very opposed to that other wing.

Auschwitz

Auschwitz is truly the heart of darkness. It is the place where the most evil deeds of the century occurred, perhaps the most evil deeds of all time. It is an hour or so from Krakow, near a small town of Oświęcim which had an old Austrian military base. The Nazis took over the base, changed its name into a German word, and turned it into a detention camp. Even today, that quiet little town is still there, bearing the burden of what happened nearby. As you drive along the Auschwitz exterior wall with the barbed wire showing on one side of the road and the Sala River on the other, you are entering the town. The Poles emphasize that this was done by an occupying army and not the Polish government. They protest constantly against any reference to “Polish camps.” There were no Polish camps, and the Jewish community was thriving before this happened. I remember an elderly Jewish woman who once told me that as a girl they would go to Warsaw to shop because it was the most wonderful place in the world.

The camp was really a complex of camps, classified into three parts. Auschwitz itself was a series of factory-like buildings that seem to extend forever [picture]. It has the feel of a factory complex, very efficient, laid out well, with orderly streets and a specific goal. Efficiency, neatness, and organization were its traits. Camp Two (Auschwitz-Birkenau), is three kilometers away. It is the death camp, where the gas chambers and crematoria were. Birkenau has the train tracks that brought Jews in every day to die. These were the so-called transports. The third part of Auschwitz is called Monowitz. It consisted of forty camps spread around the area. Most were work camps situated near factories, although “work camp” is too benign for the reality of the situation. Workers received 1500-1700 calories a day and worked 11 hours. Many died from malnutrition-related conditions.



There is an exhibit on each country, and what happened to its Jews. The numbers are telling. About 3,577,000 Poles were in death camps of one kind or another. Auschwitz itself held 1.3m of whom 1.1 million died, 90% being Jews. This is a place of Jewish death although to Poles, there was a more general killing process of which Auschwitz is a symbol.

The exhibits emphasized the Polish struggle against the Nazis. Poles served in various armies, were the first to enter Berlin, and helped liberate Warsaw itself. The theme was that Poland was not defeated but continued the struggle in different forms. The first people who died in Auschwitz were ethnic Poles, the leaders of society. The message is clear: Without defeat, this would not have happened, and we were victims too.

Up until the spring of 1943 almost all prisoners were photographed. There were three photographs of each, full face, side, with hat. There were careful records kept, as if they saw it as a conventional prison where there had to be precise records. This photography stopped in early 1943, after which only Germans were photographed. Those from the mass transports were never photographed. They went directly to the gas chambers. When the Soviets liberated the camp on January 27, 1945, there were 7,500 prisoners left. The rest had begun a forced march west. The Nazis destroyed the gas chambers and crematoria as if they were trying to conceal the evidence.

Admission to this facility is free, and there is a free shuttle from Auschwitz to Birkenau. Twelve million people a year visit. If the iconic image of Auschwitz is the sign over the entrance, *Arbeit Macht Frei* (Work makes happiness), the iconic image of Birkenau is the train tracks



coming into the compound [picture]. The Auschwitz sign has become a cliché. People were having their photograph made in front of it. I took a photo, then moved on. But at Birkenau, I just stood and looked at those tracks and the entrance building. My grandfather had worked on a train as a young man, which was considered an honorable job. Here the trains were something quite different, something ominous and evil. The compound of Birkenau today is mostly the shells of buildings,* often with only a chimney surviving. They are organized in nice orderly grids as if

they are waiting for some future construction to occur, or maybe I could say they dot the vast landscape like sullen trees without leaves. The gas chambers and crematoria are no more than piles of stones, destroyed in January 20, 1945 just before the Nazis left. Somehow this destruction seems to make the point. The shells and rubble help you realize that these orderly grids are not signs of future construction but emblems of a nightmare. At the end of the rail line is a barbed wire fence with guard towers dotted along the way. Then a wall. At this point, there is no doubt. We are in a vast prison from which there was no escape. Still, there was a very pleasant cluster of trees just near the collapsed gas chamber. Birds were chirping, cicadas and crickets doing their thing. A young couple walked along holding hands, as if they were out for a Sunday stroll. I noticed that there were no flowers or shrubs within the camp, obviously an intentional decision of the management. There will be no beauty or nature here, just ugly remains. Barracks 13, which survived, housed mothers and children from the Warsaw Uprising of 1944. Some mom had drawn large pictures on the walls to reassure the kids. There was a school, happy children with books, kids skipping and playing, as if everything was normal, just in a different place where we have to stay for a while [picture]. It is unlikely that anyone in that barracks survived, but someone was trying to make it more pleasant for the children.



Thoughts on Auschwitz: Jane found the visit to Auschwitz to be in some way a completion of things she had read and seen in the past. We had visited Dachau and Buchenwald but this was

truly the heart of darkness. She was very moved. I had a different response. Thinking the next day I realized that this visit had less emotional impact on me than I expected. I could see the



scope of the killing, but there was nothing visceral about my reaction. It was intellectual, maybe insightful, but not how you would ordinarily react to seeing a place where a million innocent people were massacred. When I visited Gnaddenhutten in Ohio, where an American militia had massacred 96 native Christians and where there is a covered mound of bodies, I was stunned. Why did the death of 96 produce a greater reaction than the death of a million? Perhaps I had read enough (*The War Against the Jews*,

Night, *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, *Scourge of the Swastika*), or had seen enough movies (*Shoah*, *Schindler's List*, *Sophie's Choice*, *The Pianist*) to process my feelings, or maybe I had dealt with them when I was in Yad Vashem in Jerusalem. (I remember being affected by a sculpture display of shoes, so perhaps seeing a whole wall of shoes [picture] just didn't register the same way). My

colleague Sid Bolkosky, who studies these things, says putting the Holocaust into popular culture transformed it. I could see that here. It was almost like being on a movie set. In one small display case of children's clothes and toys, crowds walked by without slowing down. They were either bored or suffering overload. "Well, we've seen that. Now let's look at the wall case full of glasses." They seemed not to say to themselves, "That little boy was just beginning to walk" [picture] or "a little girl played with that doll." It was not having an impact on them. These were children, with their



first booties, or a doll with its head crushed. They were seeing objects, not human stories. I am not criticizing them, but making an observation. Some scholars say there is an overload phenomenon, that we just can't absorb what we are seeing. Elie Wiesel once said if you want to understand the Holocaust, don't think of six million people killed. It's too abstract. Think of a small child that you love and imagine it dead. That is the Holocaust. There is no way to describe or understand this place. Like God, the Holocaust is beyond human comprehension.

The early terminology was also a surprise. These events were originally called the Hitler Slaughter. This phrase is on early gravestones and memorial plaques, even in Auschwitz itself: "A victim of Hitler's Slaughter." This is descriptive and made the point. The word Holocaust, according to the OED, has a five-hundred-year history of describing mass killing. That word emerged in the 1950s but entered common culture after the TV series of that name in the 1970s. It also came to refer to what happened to the Jews, which certainly makes sense considering the unique nature of those killings. But millions of ethnic Poles died in that war, many in the camps (which first held Poles). This generated a contentious debate over how to use the word. Those who write about the African Holocaust (slavery), the Polish Holocaust, or The Other Holocaust (Ukraine) spark vigorous dissent. Hitler's Slaughter is an awkward term but is inclusive and generates a very different type of discourse. That is both an advantage and a disadvantage in terms of understanding. What happened to the Jews was truly different and that cannot be blurred. But if this were still called Hitler's Slaughter, the discussion might be different. Perhaps the research of Timothy Snyder, who has described this area (including Ukraine and other regions) as *Bloodlands*, a place caught between two terrifying genocidal regimes determined the restructure the world, will reconceptualize this period of history in a way that allows all of the peoples caught up in this tragedy to honor the horror and uniqueness of their experience.

A few days later, I realized that while being in Auschwitz had little emotional or visceral impact, the visits to the Jewish cemeteries left me melancholy. I visit many cemeteries and they usually leave me upbeat, thinking of the beauty and philosophy and the affirmation of life found there. This was different. I also felt melancholy after an earlier visit to the big Jewish cemetery in Berlin. I think I have an insight on these reactions. If you want to see what was lost in the

Holocaust do not go to Auschwitz. Go to a Jewish cemetery. Here you see Jews not in their travail but in their normal lives, having children, burying parents, celebrating success, contributing to the neighborhood, admiring righteous persons and heroes. Here you see the artists, scientists, writers, doctors, industrialists, citizens, teachers, public servants, and medical researchers who had contributed and achieved so much and whose descendents would have contributed more. This normal community was ripped out of the national body and out of history, like a child aborted just before birth. These people with their achievements and their humanity were cut off and swept away. They were confident and secure, respected and influential. As you walk among their graves you realize they did not have the slightest idea what was coming. Our theories about how political systems operate and how influence is deployed cannot explain this.

Finally I was expecting to hear a lot of American accents in Auschwitz given the role of the Holocaust in our curriculum and popular culture. In fact, few visitors were Americans. Most seemed to be Poles, although Sibylle says many were German. Upon reflection, this makes sense. This is not an American pilgrimage site, and should not be. In a sense, what happened here affects Poles and Germans almost as much as it does Jews, although in different ways.

Wroclaw/Breslau

Wroclaw is a unique place (pronounced Vrot-Shwav, or something similar). It was an incredibly rich town, controlling the trade routes from different directions. It is filled with beautiful old buildings, including several basilicas. There is an enormous seminary and other buildings. We stayed in Hotel Tumski, a former student hostel on Tum Island on the Oder/Odre (Tum=Dom=Cathedral) [picture], within easy walking distance of everything. I might have missed this place except for the recommendation of my student Dominik, who said it was essential. He was right. It is in south Silesia, a border area that was long a part of Germany and was previously known as Breslau. This was one of the few areas taken from Germany where Germans were allowed to stay. They are still there, even enjoying a special representative in the Polish parliament.

The German heritage is very obvious. Many Poles expelled from Lvov came here. The Oder river runs through the middle of the city, giving it a wonderful romantic appearance. The old city was spared destruction so there is an old-world feel. There are public statues about [picture]. The



churches are beautiful and the old buildings glisten with their traditional charm. Sunday night the town square was filled with people, young, old, moms with carriages, couples holding hands, beautiful young women with spike heels walking across the cobblestones as if this were the most natural thing in the world. (Jane was astonished at their defiance of gravity. What we do for love!). The street cafes were special. They had a large umbrella out front with tables. Once you bought your cappuccino you could sit as long as you wished, just talking and watching Poland walk by. There is a statue of Alexander Fredro, a Polish Lvov writer, in the town square. This was the center of anti-government demonstrations during Communist times in the 1960s. It was called the Orange

Movement, and activists put an orange scarf around Fredro's neck. They protested by hyper-observing Communist holidays, making their cynicism obvious. There is a *Jahrhunderthalle* built in 1913 to honor the 1813 War of Liberation against Napoleon, also known as the Battle of the Nations. I had seen the memorial in Leipzig, where the battle took place. That memorial has a statement about the statues, that they were used by certain elements to create an exclusivist ideology (i.e., they inspired the Nazis). This was different. The hall was enormous (compared in size to Hagia Sophia in Istanbul) with a pole so high it seemed to touch the sky [picture]. It was the site of a 1948 Peace Congress held by Picasso, Ehrenberg, Orwell, Hemingway, and others to discuss the unification of Europe. The conference failed, but the spirit survived.

There is a memorable statue in Wroclaw to the victims of the Katyn massacre. These memorials are found all over the country but this one was unique. The memorial was created in the 1960s but not put on display until the 1980s out of fear of sparking anti-Russian expressions. (The Poles knew who killed those men). It shows a woman holding a dead man in her arms. He has a bullet hole in the back of his head. (Most Poles were shot in the back of the head. The angel of death hovers above, waiting to take his soul. It is chilling and moving.



The Jewish cemetery was not at all like those in Warsaw and Lodz. It is very German, less crowded, wider boulevards, no benches. It reminds me of the one in Berlin. There are many prominent scientists, bankers, professors, doctors. The most famous grave is of Ferdinand Lassalle who founded the Social Democratic Party. He was an ally of Marx but the two broke when he participated in Bismarck-sponsored elections. He was killed in a duel over a woman at age 34. There was fighting here near the end of the war so there are bullet holes in the walls. Some stones were damaged and had to be repaired. Lassalle's stone was one.

I loved this city and could have stayed much longer.

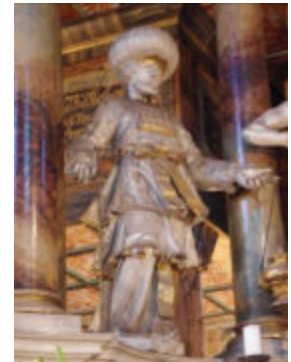
Kreisau

Further west, well into the countryside, was the von Moltke estate where the plot to kill Hitler was hatched. The von Moltke family were Prussians with a strong military tradition. (The commander of Prussian forces in the Franco-Prussian war was a von Moltke). Their participation gave the conspirators a credibility they would not have had otherwise. There was a letter from one of them saying that we must do this even if we fail because it will show future generations that some Germans did not approve of what was happening. Many in the military had become disgusted that the war in the east was turning into a slaughter. They had several meetings to discuss how to get out of the oath they had made to Hitler. Honor counted, and they were torn between two codes. There is a large compound with seven or eight buildings in a rectangle. Young people were playing pick-up volleyball. It is today a conference center, partially supported by the German government. There was an exhibit telling the stories of the various individuals, and of other resistance movements (such as the White Rose society in Munich).

Swidnica Peace Church

One of the most memorable places we visited was the Peace Church in Swidnica, a UNESCO world heritage site. It is a wooden church built from 1656-57 in the aftermath of the Thirty Years War [picture]. The Peace of Westphalia (1648) ended that killing spree by agreeing that each ruler could determine the official religion of his own state. The King of Sweden insisted that the Hapsburg rulers of Austria, who controlled the province, allow the Protestants of Silesia to build three "peace churches." Silesia is just near Germany and Austria. It is one of those provinces that

had been German until 1945 but is now Polish. This is a Protestant church in a Catholic region. Most Protestant church had been destroyed during that disastrous war that killed perhaps 30-40 percent of all Germans. The Hapsburgs did not particularly like the idea of building these churches so they imposed exceptional restrictions on them. They had to be built of wood, loam and straw, not stone. They had to be built outside of the city limits, and could not have a steeple or bell. And they had to be built within a year. There was no expectation that they would be able to comply but indeed they did. This is an amazing place, truly an inspiration. It can seat 7,500 people. It has a spectacular altar [picture] with statues of Moses, Aaron, Jesus, John the Baptist, Peter, and Paul [picture]. (Statues in a Protestant church! Obviously Lutheran, not Calvinist). The interior is dark and totally painted. The organ is quite majestic. (Today a smaller one does the heavy lifting, since the old one tends to break down). There are cherubs everywhere, many paintings, and very nice statues dotted around the church.



I asked Jane and Sibylle to tell me how to describe this church. They said it was a Norway-style wood church, with dark wood, painted inside with elaborate drawings, three levels of balconies, ceilings are flat, sermons in German and Polish. Sibylle noted that these people were grateful to have survived this deadly war. The Protestants had lost in this region and should not have made it. Their songs were of fear and distress, pride and hope. The orientation sheet for walking around began with a discussion of theology (the Augsburg Confession), not architecture or symbolism. This was not like a rich-town church, where the goal was to point out to people how wealthy you were. This was a church of humility, gratitude, and hope. There were many paintings of pastors from the past, including one of Luther. The church was also very hard to find. There were no signs pointing to the place. It was as if this Polish Catholic city was not exactly happy that the most famous feature of their town was a German Protestant church.

Thoughts on Polish History

I found it significant that a hundred pages of Davies' 400-page book is devoted to the period from 1795-1918 when Poland did not exist. Many of those pages are about religion, culture, poetry, music, spiritual themes and what is generally known as the "romantic" tradition. Poland existed during this time in the imagination and in an indefatigable belief among its intellectuals that if you believed strongly enough it would re-emerge. The vision of Poland was there, waiting for Poles to bring it into existence. People often chuckle at the Poles as they look back on their various uprisings and battles, most of which they lost. They note the hopeless battle against the Germans in 1939, the Warsaw uprising in 1945, the fact that as soon as they became independent in 1918 they raised an army and struck east at Russia. But in a sense all of these actions were "rational" in that they had specific goals. More, one could argue that they were essential. Like the 15-year-old boy who told his parents he was joining the uprising, he was told to do what his time required of him but don't die stupid. There is something frightening about romantic ways of thinking. Sometimes it drives men to deranged quests. The Nazis were caught up in this and

followed it to destruction. The Poles were able to keep their romantic impulses grounded in reality. They bent when they had to bend, and stood strong when they thought that would make a difference. After the Russian treachery of 1939, when Russia joined Germany in partitioning their country, the Polish leadership aligned with the Russians against the Nazis. This alliance broke apart when the Katyn Massacre occurred, but even in 1945 the Warsaw resistance had sent out orders than when the Russian army arrived, they were to greet them as allies and guests. There is nothing about romantic thinking that is necessarily inconsistent with realistic thinking.

I got another insight out of this that might help the next time I teach my class on the Israel-Palestinian Conflict. Jewish Nationalism (Zionism) has many origins, but there is no doubt that Poland is its heartland. This gives me a working hypothesis: that Zionism is a variant of Polish nationalism. It shares many of the same characteristics: romantic thinking, poetry, religious symbols, dwelling on past greatness, and a belief that if you believe and if you act it will come true even if the objective conditions are not in your favor. I need to think more about this.

Europe

Everywhere we go we see signs of “Europe,” i.e., the European Community and its development fund, not to mention international corporations. There are new four-lane highways crossing the country (except south from Warsaw, where there are still two-lane bumpy roads). There are Euro hotels everywhere, not to mention the occasional Macdonalds or Starbucks, if you wish. Everywhere we encounter what I call Euro Girls. These are the lovely young women who work in hotels or better restaurants. They are charming, helpful, elegantly dressed, speak several languages. (All Polish students take English but these are the stars who can switch from one to another without breaking stride. Students have a choice of German or French for their second foreign language. Russian appears to have disappeared, although perhaps it is found in the east, closer to Russia). Sibylle says these young women are very ambitious. She reflected on her own first job 30 years ago and how she was always calculating what she would do next. There are also Euro Guys but somehow the Euro Girls seem more a new phenomenon.

Poles in England

We spent ten days in England before coming to Poland. Whenever I told people we were going to Poland, they had something good to say about the Poles. There were no Polish jokes. The Poles were viewed as heroic allies in the struggle against the Nazis (and the Communists). In Lincolnshire, John and May Greenaway took us to a three-hour folk sing with about 40 people and several local singers. Jane and I knew two of the songs (Four Strong Winds and I’ll See You in my Dreams). One singer had co-written a song about the Polish pilots who joined the RAF during the Battle of Britain. I had read in Davies that 20% of the pilots defending England were from the Polish air force and this was an acknowledgement of respect for them. The song was entitled “For Those Who Will Not Know Me.” One line was, “I flew for my homeland until my country was no more” and another was “I still flew for Poland though my country was no more.” People were very moved. One woman was crying. After the song, people started telling stories. One said her uncle was Polish but she was afraid of him. He had an accent and she thought he was German. She did not know the war was over until she was ten. She would see war films on TV and planes flying overhead (Lincolnshire had bases) and thought he was on the other side. He had been sent east by Stalin, then down to Iraq to fight, then into North Africa with Montgomery as an intelligence officer. He is now 90. He has written his memoir of the war years, and is rushing to complete the second part, about his life in England. One man said they spoke English until they saw a German plane, then they switched to Polish. Another told of an officer whose name no one could pronounce. (Washington wrote Kosciuszko’s name nine different ways). It started with A and ended with Z so they just called him Captain A-to-Zed. I spoke to the singer afterwards and got his address for my Polish friends in the US. He accepted my friendly comment about the song but said he had only written the music: “I wish I had written the words.”

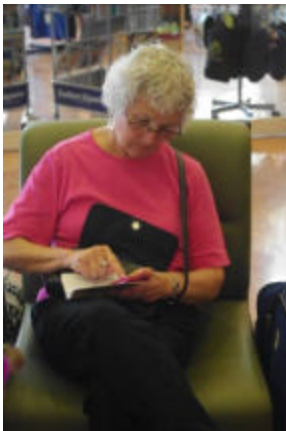
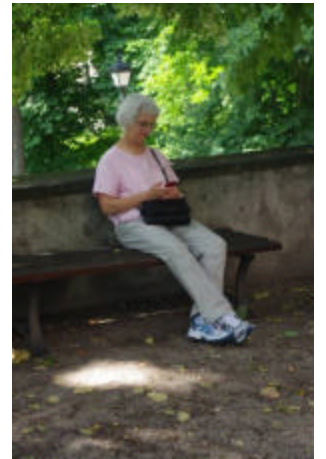
An Unexpected Bonus

Driving back to Germany we took a wrong turn on the autobahn and found ourselves touring the countryside, courtesy of Ms. GPS who said that was the best way to get back on track. Actually, this was a very pleasant 20-mile detour, through farmland and small villages. Much of Poland is rural and we had not seen that side of the country. I was very pleased by the beautiful countryside, the wheat and corn growing, and the pleasant, orderly villages. There is a legitimate critique that the Euro-wealth seen in the cities leaves out a large block of the population. That is surely true, but these villages were clean, even prosperous. The houses looked nice. It is easy for those of us from the privileged classes in America, used to our electronic equipment and fancy homes, to see how normal people live in other countries and think they are wretched. It is also easy for us to be deceived by the parts of the country we tourists visit. These were normal people. They did not look poor and their land looked rich. I was reassured.

Some Photographs, mostly of Jane and Sibylle



Krakow Market



Jewish cemetery wall



Singers in Krakow