

MALKA, WHERE ARE YOU?

Recently I traveled from New York to my parents' ancestral town, Staszow, in southern Poland, on a poignant mission to dedicate a Holocaust Memorial monument for the town's 5000 Jews. The 400 year-old Jewish community, among whom were many of my relatives, were deported to their death fifty years ago during World War II. No Jews have lived in Staszow since.

Hundreds of townspeople and officials attended the commemorative ceremony on the site of the abandoned Jewish cemetery. I was the only Jew present. I was there because I had been instrumental in creating the monument.

After the speeches, the lighting of candles and the laying of flowers, a handful of elderly people shyly approached me to relate how they had tried to help Jewish neighbors and friends during those tragic times. Some of them spoke nostalgically of the compassionate Jewish doctor, the kind-hearted Jewish shopkeepers, their childhood Jewish schoolmates.

One woman, Mrs. Leokadia Cias, a quiet-spoken middle-aged lady from the nearby town of Kielce, told me she had come especially to seek my aid in trying to find the present whereabouts of a Jewish child her parents had hidden in her home during the War. Her father and mother had taken in the

child, 8 year-old Malka Judkiewicz, born of Jewish parents in the village of Bogoria, adjacent to Staszow, and, giving her the name of "Janina Mazurkiewicz," had her baptised to conceal her true identity. Malka/Janina was cared for as one of the Mazurkiewicz family for two years, from 1943 to 1945.

In late 1945, a woman, accompanied by an armed soldier, knocked on the Mazurkiewicz door. She presented a document authorized by the Jewish Religious Council of the city of Lodz stating that she was the child's aunt (her name was Dwojra Zemel) and that she had the right to reclaim the now 10 year-old Malka Judkiewicz.

The Mazurkiewicz family with heavy heart gave up the girl whom they had grown to love dearly. They waited anxiously for months to hear from her. Eventually a letter came, written by Malka/Janina from an orphanage in France. More correspondence followed occasionally, and then late in 1947 came a letter -- still calling them "My dear parents" (Moje Kochane Rodzice) -- sent from a different French orphanage, Malka/Janina now signing her name "Manya Judkiewicz." After that, nothing was ever heard from her again.

Inquiries sent to France by the family received replies that both orphanages and their archives no longer existed.

The Mazurkiewicz couple have both passed away. Their daughter, Leokadia Cias of Kielce, continues to search for Malka/Janina. She has been told lately that "Manya" who would be 57 years old now, "probably emigrated to Australia."

I have obtained an authentic copy of a birth certificate

which states that a Malka Judkiewicz was born in Bogoria,
District of Tarnow, Poland, on the 14th of March, 1935.
Her father was Rubin Judkiewicz and her mother was
Fajga Messberg Judkiewicz. Malka Judkiewicz, where are you?

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