



**THE NEWSLETTER OF THE  
JANUSZ KORCZAK  
ASSOCIATION OF CANADA**

NUMBER 5 • SEPTEMBER 2007

## Our Goals

The objectives of the Janusz Korczak Association of Canada are as follows:

- \* To foster the recognition of Janusz Korczak's life and work
- \* To familiarize Canadians with his heroism during World War II, and his staunch defense of children's rights.
- \* To disseminate Korczak's pedagogical ideas and their effect on children's education.

## Our Tasks

Projects developed in 2006/2007

- A talk *How I Remember Janusz Korczak* by Dr. Ludovic (Ludwik) Mirabel.
- Participation in hosting a Montreal author, Irene Tomaszewski.
- Participation in organizing a concert of a Polish singer Slawa Przybylska (Warsaw).
- Exhibit of the Holocaust and Janusz Korczak medals and coins, and a talk *How I Built My Collection* by an American collector Severin Szperling.
- The International Exhibition of Children's Art *My World and I* at the Consulate General of the Republic of Poland in Vancouver.
- Further support of Polish orphanages.

Projects to be developed in 2007/2008

- Further promotion of Korczak's legacy in Canada through talks, workshops and publications.
- A public discussion *How to Love a Child*.
- An event *Honouring Irena Sendlerowa*.

## Membership Fee

The membership fee of the Janusz Korczak Association of Canada is \$10 per year, payable by cheque. Please mail to:

Mrs. Gina Dimant  
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**New members are very welcome!**

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## Thank-you

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St. Georges School of Vancouver  
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## On the Front Cover

The Holocaust memorial at the Schara Tzedek cemetery in Vancouver where Janusz Korczak's name was placed.

*Photo by J. Nussbaum.*

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## The Promised Land of *Maly Przegląd*

A talk delivered by Dr. Ludwik Mirabel to members and sympathizers of our Association  
Vancouver Holocaust Education Centre

May 21, 2006

By Chris Szafnicki



The Janusz Korczak Monument at Yad Vashem, Jerusalem (Fragment).

Photo by C. Szafnicki

This unusual meeting was dedicated to personal memories of Janusz Korczak. The major speaker for the evening was Mr. Ludwik Mirabel, a medical doctor who belongs to an ever shrinking group of people who knew Janusz Korczak personally. In the pre-WWII days Dr. Mirabel was one of the young contributors to *Maly Przegląd* (*The Little Review*), a unique newspaper established by Korczak and written by children. On Dr. Mirabel's accomplishments and reminiscences of the times past see the section "Korczak's Traces in Canada" of the current issue of the Newsletter, p. 32-47

Other presenters were: a Holocaust survivor Lilian Boraks-Nemetz who shared with us her Warsaw Ghetto memories of the days when Janusz Korczak took care of Jewish orphaned children. This was followed by Iwona Haskins, who worked in the 1980's at one of the Warsaw's orphanages *Our Home* where Korczak was vice-principal for education. Later on Dr. Chris Szafnicki gave an account of his highly emotional experiences at the Yad Vashem Children Memorial in Jerusalem featuring an impressive out-door sculpture of Janusz Korczak and his children. The meeting ended with a charming reading from Korczak's book *King Matt the First* by the youngest member of our Association eleven year old Natasha Haskins. When asked to contribute to the current issue of the Newsletter about the meeting Natasha said: "Dear read-

ers, if you were at this fascinating meeting, then thank you for coming. If you were not, we hope this short report will help you to catch up on the event."



Ludwik Mirabel makes his presentation for korczakians in Vancouver. Photo by M. Burczycka

# JANUSZ KORCZAK IN CANADA

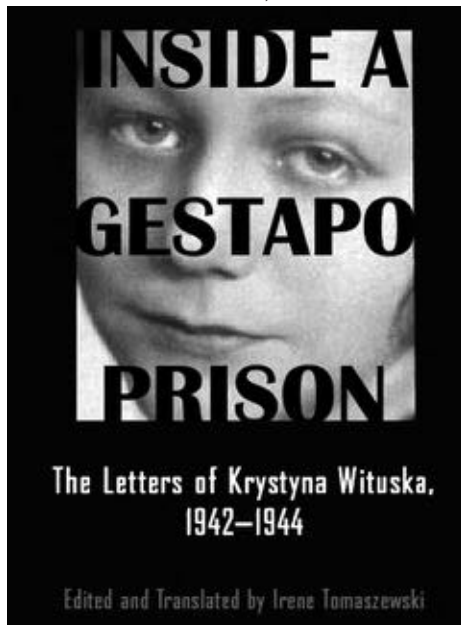
## A Choice to Fight

The Irene Tomaszewski night in Vancouver  
Vancouver Public Library, August 1, 2006

By Olga Medvedeva-Nathoo

Our Association, together with the *Episode Group* and its indefatigable leader Mrs. Irena Gostomska hosted Irene Tomaszewski, a Quebec author and translator, and a founder of the Canadian Foundation for Polish Study in Montreal.

Mrs. Tomaszewski presented two of her books *Inside a Gestapo Prison: The Letters of Krystyna Wituska, 1942-1944* (which Irene translated and edited; English edition 2006) and *Zegota. The Council for Aid to Jews in Occupied Poland 1942-45* which she wrote in cooperation with Tecia Werbowski; 1999 revised edition), and a documentary *Land of My Mother*.



*"Inside a Gestapo Prison" is a collection of 96 letters written by a twenty year old Polish girl Krystyna Wituska. Krystyna, a member of the resistance underground movement in Warsaw in the times of the Nazi occupation, was assigned to collect information on German troops' movement at Warsaw's airport. In 1942, she was arrested by the Gestapo. The letters had been written during her 18 months confinement in the Gestapo Prison first in Warsaw and later at Moabit in Berlin before she was executed. The letters were preserved by Krystyna's family.*

*The letters, along with an introduction, provide historical background to Krystyna's arrest; constitute a little-known and authentic record of the treatment of ethnic Poles under German occupation, and the experience of Polish prisoners in German custody. They also reflect Krystyna's own courage, idealism, faith, and a sense of humor.*

What makes this small book about WWII, one out of thousands written on this topic, outstanding? Perhaps that is the drama that penetrates every page of Krystyna's letters. This is not only the drama of choice: to risk her life and to fight for the rights of her people and for the sake of justice or just to survive. This is also the drama of the relationships between Krystyna and her German female guard at Moabit: those who were supposed to be a victim and an executor became friends. A female guard supported Polish girls-prisoners putting her own life at stake. Dramatic were also relations between Krystyna and her mother. The daughter knew that she was going to die soon and was strong enough to comfort her mother in her letters: "My little one..." – their roles were switched. Krystyna was going through a tragic



Irene Tomaszewski in Vancouver.

Photo by T. Szymanska

loss of her cellmates who were executed one after another. And Eros and Thanatos contended with each other in her passionate letters: her heart was being broken by love and death...

There are no random words in Krystyna's letters. They are simple but precise. As is a clover flower that she used to draw at the end of her letters. Interesting enough this flower was a favourite of Korczak's, the one used as a logo of his Orphanage. Just a small sign of the values they shared.

An introduction to the book written by Irene Tomaszewski, creates an excellent context for Krystyna's letters. It contains many figures and numbers in regards to the Nazi occupation of Poland 1939-1945: destroyed buildings, books burnt, people killed... But even these statistics make readers cry – isn't it the best introduction that an author could produce?

Highlights of the evening were the presentation of the book excerpts by a young Montreal actress, Alexi Marchel and the discussion between the author and the audience.

## Songs of Her Childhood

The Slawa Przybylska Concert

Norman Rothstein Theatre

January 29, 2007



Slawa Przybylska with her husband Jan Krzyzanowski and a Vancouver composer and pianist Ryszard Wrzaskala (left)

On the International Holocaust Remembrance Day, our Association, together with the Consulate General of the Republic of Poland in Vancouver and the Vancouver Holocaust Education Centre organized a concert with a famous Polish singer Slawa Przybylska (Warsaw).

Why especially this singer? Slawa Przybylska, in her long artistic career, performed extensively all over Poland, across Europe, the United States, Canada and Israel. She has made a tremendous contribution to the promotion of Polish-Jewish culture, as she is devoted to performing Polish Jewish songs. For the concert at the Jewish Community Centre she chose a selection of songs in Hebrew and Yiddish, some of which were written in the ghetto. These songs are the stories of real people,

and she sang them in honour of her shtetl Jewish neighbours who perished in the Holocaust. Slawa conquered the audience with her deep and emotional voice and her talent

for drama.

I went to the concert for a few reasons. My grandfather had survived four years in Auschwitz only to be killed in Flossenburg-Leitmeritz Camp, just weeks before Auschwitz was liberated. I attended this concert in his memory and in the memory of many other people senselessly killed by the Nazis. I also wanted to hear Slawa performing songs in Hebrew and Yiddish which emulate a true and tragic beauty. Her performance was so touching, that you did not have to know the words in order to understand emotions that every song conveyed. It takes a great artist to achieve that as only great art can evoke feelings of sorrow and hope in the same moment.

*We would like to acknowledge our gratitude to Gina Dimant and Jerry Nussbaum whose efforts made Slawa's concert in Vancouver possible.*



The Episode Group leader Irena Gostomska (left), Slawa Przybylska, a Vancouver poet Piotr Siedlanowski and artist Tamara Szymanska. Photos by M. Radoszewski.

# JANUSZ KORCZAK IN CANADA

Exhibition The Severin Szperling Collection of  
Holocaust Medals & Coins  
Talk "How I Built My Collection" by Severin Szperling

Vancouver Holocaust Education Centre  
April 22, 2007

*By Olga Medvedeva-Nathoo and Marta Burczycka*

An annual meeting of our Association featured a renowned medals collector from Arizona, USA, Severin Szperling.

The chairman of the Janusz Korczak Association of Canada, Jerry Nussbaum, presented the current situation in the Korczak movement, in Canada and internationally, to the members and supporters of the organization.

Olga Medvedeva-Nathoo introduced the audience to a particular aspect of the Korczak related heritage: Korczak in music, movies, theater, and fine arts - his enigmatic personality and his legendary life was very attractive to the artists.

Some of the artists depicted him as a real person of flesh and blood, while others as a personification of Good. Jan Twardowski, a Catholic priest and a poet, who died last year at the age of 91, and who admired Korczak since his childhood, once said: "I consider Korczak a 'saint' because he "allowed God to act through him"<sup>1</sup> .

The symbolic significance of the Korczak phenomenon is even more exposed in the medals than in the other arts because a medal - this small sized, miniature piece of art - can be an award, for someone's contribution in doing Good.

There are artists who are inspired by Korczak and there are people who are inspired by the Korczak art. Those are collectors, very special, passionate people.

One of them,

Mr. Severin Szperling, has been a friend of our Association since 2003. Our readers might have read about his collection in our Newsletter #2, p. 18-19. Below you will find more information about his life.



**President of the Janusz Korczak Association of Canada Jerry Nussbaum took the floor.**

*Photo by Z. Polubinski*

<sup>1</sup> For more information about Jan Twardowski see our Newsletter #4, p.20-21 and the current issue p.38.

### I am a Son to Four Parents

By Severin Szperling

I started collecting commemorative medals and coins about the Holocaust in memory of my parents. It sounds so natural to say “in memory of my parents” but I should be more precise in saying: in memory of my biological



**Severin Szperling**

*Photo by Z. Polubinski*

parents, because history wanted me to have two mothers and two fathers.

This is my story:

I was born March, 1940 in the city of Czestochowa, Poland, which had already been under the Nazi occupation for seven months. I lived with my birth mother Nechuma Prybulska and my birth father Michal Szperling for lit-

tle over two years in the Czestochowa Ghetto. Sometime in July or August of 1942, I was safely smuggled from the ghetto to the "Aryan" side where a Christian couple, Anna and Stanislaw Pociepny, hid me in a hole under their house. They put in a pipe that let me breathe. During the summer they hid me in a barrel that was placed in a concave in between the raspberry bushes. This is how my childhood went by until the liberation of the city on January 17, 1945. And this is how I became an only child to my perished Jewish parents and an only child to my Polish ones who saved my life and brought me up.

After the war I was raised as a Catholic, but later on I returned to Judaism.

In 1968, when an infamous anti-Semitic campaign took place in Poland, I worked as a draftsman in an architectural office. I made the decision to pursue emigration from the country with which, I believed, I was inextricably tied. In 1970, with the help of the HIAS [Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society], I traveled from Poland to Vienna and Rome and landed in the USA a few months later.

In the United States, I graduated from a technical construction school in Chicago and worked in the construction business.

In 1996, I moved to Tucson, Arizona where I worked in the hotel industry for a few years and then retired.

I live in Tucson with my wife Alfreda from Czestochowa and two daughters Julie (30) and Michelle (27).

Whenever I have a chance I visit Poland. Now when I return to my hometown, I visit the Jewish cemetery where, people assumed my parents were executed along with other Jews in July 1943, and the tombs of my Polish parents at the Catholic cemetery. My parents, all of them, are in my heart and in my prayers.

# JANUSZ KORCZAK IN CANADA



The earliest medal commemorated the Holocaust.

*Photo by Z. Polubinski*

## About the Collection

Severin Szperling is a widely known collector of Holocaust medals and coins. He is a member of the ANA, American Numismatic Association; the AINA, American-Israel Numismatic Association; and the PANA, Polish-American Numismatic Association.

Medals and coins from his collection were produced both by mint companies and private entities between 1945-2005. He has collected more than 300 medals from over a 30 year period. They originate from 14 countries (the USA, Israel, Poland, Czech Republic, France, the Netherlands, Belgium, Italy, Greece, the United Kingdom, Germany, Hungary, Denmark and Russia). The subjects of the medals in the collection are: the Nazi Concentration Camps, the Deportation, the Anniversary of the Liberation of the Camps, the Ghetto Uprising, Museums and Memorials dedicated to WWII, and historical figures such as Anne Frank,

Raoul Wallenberg, Simon Wiesenthal, Oscar Schindler and Janusz Korczak. The Janusz Korczak portion of the collection represents 40 medals and coins from Poland and Israel. They were produced in metals such as cast bronze, bronze-tombay, silver plated, gold plated and silver. To the best of the collector's knowledge, only three countries issued numismatic items related to Janusz Korczak: Poland, Israel and Russia. The officially circulated and un-circulated coins of Janusz Korczak were issued only by the Polish Government in 1978 commemorating Korczak's centennial anniversary. A few commemorative medals which are registered in the catalogue of the Polish State Mint were issued as well. Some of these medals are rare, and cannot even be found in famous Jewish museums.

Currently, Severin Szperling is preparing a catalogue which contains photos and descriptions of commemorative Holocaust medals. The catalogue is going to be published in the USA in 2008.



# JANUSZ KORCZAK IN CANADA

## List of Displayed Medals & Coins

Number of medals/coins.	Theme	Issued by Country	Year	Author
1	Janusz Korczak 100 zloty circulated silver	Poland	1978	unknown
2	Janusz Korczak 100 zloty un-circulated silver and nickel	Poland	1978	unknown
3	The Ship Yard named "Janusz Korczak"	Poland	2000	unknown
1	Janusz Korczak	Poland	1979	L. Wielunski
1	Janusz Korczak The International Congress of Poets "Arcadia"	Poland	1996	Z. Kotylo
3	Janusz Korczak The National Youth Philatelic Exhibition	Poland	1983	Stanley Watrobka
1	Janusz Korczak's 100th Birthday, The Polish State Mint, cast bronze	Poland	1978	K. Pikorska
1	Janusz Korczak's 100th Birthday, The Polish State Mint, struck	Poland	1978	K. Pikorska
1	Janusz Korczak's 100th Birthday The Polish State Mint	Poland	1979	P. Gawron
1	Janusz Korczak The Museum of Auschwitz, cast bronze	Poland	1994	M. Stobierski
1	Janusz Korczak The Museum of Auschwitz, cast bronze	Poland	1994	M. Stobierski
1	Dr. Janusz Korczak The Polish State Mint	Poland	1990	A. Nowakowski
1	25th Anniversary of the Union of the Trade Schools named "Janusz Korczak"	Poland	2000	unknown
2	Troop of Scouts XXV named "Janusz Korczak"	Poland	1979	unknown
1	Troop of Scouts XXV named "Janusz Korczak"	Poland	1978	unknown
3	In Memory of Janusz Korczak The Ghetto Fighter's Museum	Israel	1978	unknown
5	In Memory of Janusz Korczak The Polish State Mint	Poland	2005	unknown
1	Terezin Concentration Camp	Czech Republic	1991	unknown
1	In Memory of the Polish Jewry	Israel	1989	unknown
1	In Memory of My Parents	Israel	2000	unknown
1	40th Anniversary of the Deportation Hungarian Jews	Hungary	1984	unknown

# JANUSZ KORCZAK IN CANADA

cont'd...

3	60th Anniversary of the Liberation Auschwitz-Birkenau Nazi Concentration Camp	Poland	2005	unknown
2	40th Anniversary of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising	Poland	1983	unknown
2	40th Anniversary of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising	Poland	1983	unknown
1	50th Anniversary of the Liberation Concentration Camps	France	1995	unknown
1	In Memory of Anne Frank	France	1964	unknown

**Total Number - 40**

Dear readers:

If you have any Holocaust medals or coins and are ready to share them or information on them with Mr. Szperling please contact him at

Mr. Severin Szperling

431 S. Via De Los Rosale

Tucson, Arizona 85711

United States of America

E-mail: Jam1442@aol.com

## What Did I Learn from Mr. Szperling?

*By Yakov Medvedev, 12 years old*

Recently I participated in an engaging meeting and exhibition organized by the Janusz Korczak Association in Vancouver. That has been my first experience at a Medal and Coin Exhibition. I understood that in the single tiny piece of metal one could inscribe memories and history, if the sculptor put into it his knowledge, his skills, his creativity, and talent. All of the medals were related to the Holocaust. I was also amazed to see with my own eyes, for the first time in my life, a person who survived the Holocaust when he was a child - Mr. Severin Szperling.

I can easily reflect on this subject, for I have just finished a class study, on the Holocaust novel by Karren Levine *Hanna's Suitcase*. I have seen a documentary about the Holocaust on TV as well. I was also very much impressed by the movie *Everything is Illuminated* that related to the extermination of Jews in the Ukraine during WWII.

Listening to Mr. Szperling I realized how innocent people suffer during wars, even little children and babies who have not been aware that the war is going on.

His story told us what happened in that dark period with his family, but most importantly – how determined we should be in trying to prevent all kinds of racial, religious, and cultural discrimination today and in the future.

I found Mr. Szperling's talk important because it showed how we passed on information on crucial historical events and moral issues from generation to generation.

## A Talk "Janusz Korczak: His Life and Legacy"

Russian-Jewish Community

March 25, 2007

By Ekaterina Cherniavski

A talk on Janusz Korczak's life and legacy was given by Dr. Olga Medvedeva-Nathoo to members of the *Most-Bridge Society* of Greater Vancouver. Olga covered Korczak's educational principles and their implementation in his Orphanage in a historical context, but she showed us as well which of Korczak's ideas can be used in contemporary upbringing of children.

Mrs. Gina Dimant presented a history of the Janusz Korczak Association of Canada and its most recent activities.

A poem *Kaddish* by Alexander Galich dedicated to Janusz Korczak, was presented by Raisa Volkonitski.

Presentations were followed by a long and fruitful discussion on how to love and raise children. As one of the participants summed up after the event, it was an educational afternoon but also a kind and a warm one.

As a result the Korczak Association has acquired a few new members.

### **Media coverage of the events**

Gazeta Informacyjna N 634, August 19, 2006. In Polish.

Gazeta Informacyjna N 655, January 20, 2007. In Polish.

Most-Bridge Newsletter N 38, May 2007. In Russian.

### **Support for Korczak Friends**

In 2006-2007 seven parcels, with substantial amount of cloth items were sent to the Janusz Korczak Educational Centre for Children with Special Needs in Szerzawa/ Mogilno; the Institution for Children Support in Ilawa; a Daycare N 217 of Sisters of Mary's Family in Warsaw, and the Education Centre in Skierniewice - all of them in Poland.

Thank you, Gina Dimant for your tireless efforts in collecting the items.

### **A Traveling Exhibit**

Exhibit *Janusz Korczak and the Children of the Ghetto* prepared in 2002 by the Vancouver Holocaust Education Centre with the help of our Association has been traveling through different countries. Recently it has been on display at the Holocaust Museum and Study Centre in Spring Valley, New York (in February – April 2007) and is traveling now back home, to Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada (on display in June-August 2007.)

## KORCZAK'S TRACES IN CANADA

When I started working on the topic "Korczak's Traces in Canada", I had in my mind mainly the bonds that tie the Old Doctor with the people who used to know him and who, as fate willed it, found themselves in Canada. Some of them arrived before WWII and during or after the war. However, during my research I

realized that not only these links but also the private stories of those who had met Korczak revealed a world history of which they have been a part. More over, their personal stories in the context of global history brought to light the modern history of Canada, a country of immigrants who have come here with their own culture.

O.M-N

### In Memoriam to Ryszard (Richard) Mirabel



Ryszard Mirabel was born in 1920 in Warsaw, Poland. He served as a reporter and a secretary on the editorial staff of *Maly Przegląd* (*The Little Review*), the Janusz Korczak children's weekly paper, in 1935-1937. He came to Montreal, Quebec in 1937 and later moved to Vancouver BC. He died on Tuesday, June 5, 2007 in White Rock, BC.

Ryszard Mirabel wrote poetry all his life. He was a philosopher, a man of ideas, and he had a strong vision for a better world and a better mankind. Even in death he offers us his gift of poetry.

The poet's feelings for people's vulnerability in time of war and the loss of life, poignantly reflect in his poems.

*" You stand among the sleeping dead  
a hollow shell cleansed by the falling rain  
with your outstretched arm  
protecting a child  
on a journey to the end "*

In this stanza one detects a child's need for safety and caring. The outstretched hand refers to that of Dr. Korczak, to whom this poem is dedicated.

In the following lines the poet offers hope, that love can be salvaged through memory.

*" Open your eyes wide  
and you may find him again  
in the forgotten love  
of your fellow Man "*

Ryszard Mirabel will be greatly missed by all who knew and loved him.

### Ryszard Mirabel: "Glancing Back in Time through the Lenses of My Looking Glass"

Hard talks between Ryszard Mirabel and Olga Medvedeva-Nathoo 2006-2007<sup>2</sup>



The page of the Polish-Jewish newspaper *Nasz Przegląd Ilustrowany* dedicated to the 10th anniversary of its supplement *Maly Przegląd*. January 3, 1937. Seventeen year old Ryszard Mirabel is on the photo on the right side at the top.

Ryszard, whom we have lost and whom we miss hugely was not an easy person to interview. His very well thought out and therefore very well articulated opinions were not common. While discussing matters, he liked to provoke and to be provoked. His views were sometimes radical as if he were still a youth who boldly, with a visor and shield, was ready to fight – and overcome? – Evil. It is not an accident that I put a question mark here: in spite of Ryszard's readiness to struggle for Good, there was a bit of bitterness and sadness in his stories, his reasoning, and his verdicts about the society we live in; and the people we are surrounded by. Defending his views he sometimes sounded aggres-

sive. But as he usually wrote – seriously and at the same time playfully - at the end of his numerous e-mails to me: "Forgive me being mean but I mean well."

For many years he carried with him a light that was ignited by Janusz Korczak and Jerzy Abramow.

I met him and his wife Petronella at their home in White Rock, a nice cozy town, one hour drive from Downtown Vancouver. It was February, and on the West Coast it rains a lot at this season. But surprisingly the day was sunny, tiny streets streaming down from the hills to the ocean looked tidy and... white-rocky.



Ryszard Mirabel (in the top row, the second from the right) among the *Maly Przegląd* team.

This view made me feel I was on an island, in the middle of the Mediterranean, in "velvet" season; maybe on Cyprus? The same sense of warmth radiated in Ryszard's home with a wonderful view to the Pacific. A bit of imagination – and you take a boat and sail across the massive waters, and then take a train across the vast land, and then after this long journey you arrive in

<sup>2</sup> I greatly appreciate help received from Petronella Aders-Mirabel after Ryszard's decease.

## KORCZAK'S TRACES IN CANADA

Warsaw, Poland, the country which young Rysiek (diminutive for Ryszard in Polish) left for Canada in 1937...

Our meeting was followed by other ones, e-mails, and of course countless phone calls: "Madame Olga, do you have time to talk to me now?" I asked Ryszard to call me just Olga saying that ultimately we were in one of the most casual countries in the world. But he kept using this weird "Madame". He said: "It sounds more like Polish Pani to me..." [Pani in Polish means Mrs.]. Our long talks were mixed, both in Polish and English. He was perfect in both (and at French as well). I tried my best...

We both took an advantage of our high tech era: actually our first contact was by voice-mail. I found a message: "My name is Richard Mirabel. I worked at *Maly Przegląd* (*The Little Review*; later referred as *Maly Przegląd*)<sup>3</sup>.

I called Ryszard back straight away. It turned out that when browsing on the Internet he came across the website of the Association Francaise Janusz Korczak. Through that he came to know that Lena Granowska-Lecalot (1917-2005), who was a founder of the French Association and a friend of Ryszard's from the prewar time in Warsaw, passed away. He wrote a letter to Bernard Lathuillere, a co-President of the Association. Bernard is known in the International Korczak movement as an excellent "matchmaker" of the Korczak friends, and he gave Ryszard a clue that I currently live in Vancouver...

Lena Granowska as well as Ryszard belonged to a group of young people who were involved in *Maly Przegląd* in the 1930's. Ryszard said: "Lena was a very beautiful girl. She was a 'gorgeous decorative piece' of the newspaper in the direct meaning of this word." Boys one after another would lose their hearts for her. I don't know if Ryszard had better chances than the others. Anyway he remembered her dearly: they both attended the Open University in prewar Warsaw. They met in Paris after the war in 1946. Then they met a number of times in France and in Canada. They talked about the war, losses, children and jobs, but most of all – about

their youth – about *Maly Przegląd*.

"Korczak and Abramow – those were two pillars of *Maly Przegląd*," said Ryszard.

He continued:

"Very few outlive the accomplishments of their lives, and become immortal in the consciousness of the people. Such a man was Henryk Goldszmit a.k.a. Janusz Korczak [Ryszard insisted that his real name and not his literary pseudonym should go first] whose absolute commitment to the cause of children lasted till the day he and the children under his care were deported from the Warsaw Ghetto to Treblinka concentration camp, and murdered by the Nazis.

Henryk Goldszmit, while still a young man, turned away from practicing his medical profession and successful career to take full time position as a doctor, a guardian and an educator of the neglected children in Warsaw - the capital city of the resurrected land of his birth – Poland.<sup>4</sup>

Korczak is known as an innovative educator and popular author, however I believe that the full essence of his efforts did not reside in his educational theories or in his literary works but rather in his stand for equal social rights of the young and old irrespective of their religious or cultural differences, and especially for those whose welfare was being ignored by the 'profit first' governments solely for the benefit of the chosen few. Thus he became a lifelong spokesman for the rights of poor and abandoned children.

To-day, I see Korczak as a liberal, rebelling against the morality and the social system of his day by giving up all the comforts of the life he could acquire. I think that this was the only type of rebellion his cultural upbringing would permit him to take. Although, I believe, he had been fully aware that this type of a charitable stand, could never solve the existing problems and the prevailing social ills.

<sup>3</sup> A newspaper established by Korczak as a paper of children and youngsters - *of* children not *for* children - in 1926. The paper was published until 1939 when the Nazis occupied Poland. It was a weekly supplement to *Nasz Przegląd* (*Our Review*), an influential Jewish newspaper in Polish issued 1923-1939.

<sup>4</sup> Poland regained its independence in 1918; Korczak's Orphanage was established in 1912.

Korczak managed to run his Orphanage with the help of a few of his equally devoted co-workers, on the meager donations solicited by him from some of the 'do gooders' who grabbed a bigger piece of the common national pie. His daily struggle for the well being of his children made him a person of iron determination. This iron clad dedication to his commitments should always stand in front of our eyes as an example of his nobility, but not necessarily of his social wisdom. I presume Korczak inherited from his cultural ancestors, the so called Polish positivists, a belief that 'building from the foundations' through 'small steps' done for the cause of social justice would slowly but surely improve a life of the nation and enable society to function as a fully integrated social organism.

At the same time, another side of Korczak was that that he was a dreamer. His *King's Matt's the First* idealistic Empire is one of a few proofs of this.

Being young and extreme I neither accepted that way of doing things nor had I share those ideas. They sounded too humble to me and not on a scale for the changes needed.

It is obvious that Korczak was a charismatic and hypnotic person. But he was also a man with quite a few psychological problems of his own. He was a confused loner who spent his life teaching others the art of collective living. I would say he was a man who tried to mute his own doubts by concentrating his mind and energy on a single aspect of unresolved social problems.

I don't want to underscore the significance of his life's work, but I think we have to keep in mind that along with his accomplishments were his failures, his noble

efforts and yet ineffective position as an individual in the continuous struggle for the preservation of the dignity of human life.

In the postwar years Janusz Korczak's life became transformed into a 'larger than life' legend. Films were made, books were written about him and streets and schools named after him. I am afraid he got white washed of any human wrinkles to become a sort of a modern day saint, more precisely, he became a symbol which purified our guilty conscience. A real man, as he was, with all of his strengths and weaknesses, full of contradictions, he got lost in the weight of his legendary structure. I remember when I visited Warsaw in the 1980's, and my friend Andrzej Klimowicz took me to the orphanage Our Home where Korczak used to work as a vice principal for education (there is still an orphanage in this building) to attend a play about Korczak performed by children. I was frustrated seeing kids staging Korczak's tragedy. I felt that was wrong. In Polish slang there is a word 'tynkowanie' for making up a myth out of human beings. I can't find any word close to it in English. May be, idolizing? This is what I believe happened to Korczak who as a real person still lives in the minds of those who got to know him. I would sum up my thoughts in this regard by Berthold Brecht's maxim: 'It is an unhappy land that is in need of heroes.'

I always think that we have to remember others who were like Korczak but have never become as known as Korczak, for example French teachers Miron and Sabine Zlatin and Suzanne Reifman<sup>5</sup>...

<sup>5</sup> Sabine Zlatin (1907 - 1996) hid Jewish children during the World War II. At the Herault prefecture in the French-occupied zone, she contacted the Jewish Children Aid Association OSE. She helped to have released children that had been interned in the camps of Agde and Rivesaltes. When the Germans occupied the rest of the France in 1943, Zlatin took seventeen children with her to the Italian occupation zone. Via the recommendation of sub-prefect of Belley they received permission to use a house in Izieu and founded the Herault refugee children's home *La Maison d'Izieu (Children's Home of Izieu)* where Jewish children hid. However, on April 6, 1944, the Lyon Gestapo, led by Klaus Barbie, raided the house and took away all forty-four of the children and the seven adults who took care of them. Sabine Zlatin herself was elsewhere at the time. Forty-two of the children and five of the adults, among them Suzanne Reifman, were gassed at the Auschwitz concentration camp, while two of the teenage children and the home superintendent, Miron Zlatin, were executed by firing squad at Reval in Estonia.

## KORCZAK'S TRACES IN CANADA

I assume, no, I am sure we have to acknowledge that what happened to Jews imprisoned in the Ghettos and concentration camps, systematically murdered by the Nazis is in good part due to the free world's selfish indifference to their fate," - Ryszard concluded.

On Ryszard's desk I saw an invitation to the Janusz Korczak Conference in Warsaw in 1983. I didn't ask him whether he had accepted it.

Ryszard met Korczak a few times. Most of them were coincidental. He remembered that he had seen Korczak at *Dom Sierot* [Korczak's Orphanage]. Once – he said – he came to the Orphanage to pick up his then girlfriend Halinka Halpern whose father participated in fundraising for *Dom Sierot* and saw Korczak talking to the children. Halinka tried to convince him to volunteer for the Orphanage, but his heart belonged to *Maly Przegląd* (by that time Korczak's successor Jerzy Abramow was an editor<sup>6</sup>).

Ryszard recollected:

"I was for Korczak just another boy. Only once I met him face to face.

But let's go back to the very beginning.

My contact with *Maly Przegląd* started in 1935. I was a fifteen year old student. One day looking through a daily newspaper *Nasz Przegląd*, I found, on the back page, a small notice reporting that the night before a seven year old boy was mortally shot by a guard while he was trying to steal a few lumps of black coal.

The notice shook me to the core. Was a boy's life worth less than a few pounds of coal in the middle of a severe winter?

Indignant I wrote a letter to the editor of *Maly Przegląd* protesting this inhuman crime.

A few days later I received a reply asking me if I could visit the editorial room of *Maly Przegląd*.

I did.

There I met the editor Jerzy Abramow who suggested to me that I investigate the matter more closely. 'But first ask your parents,' he said. I accepted the challenge. I did not attend my school for several days and spent time interviewing the father of the boy, an unemployed labourer who as many others could not find any work, the mother of the boy in her cleanly kept kitchen but with a strong stink of old cooked cabbage, and a director in charge of the municipal shelters for people without a place to live.

The mother appeared to be interested in a possible monetary compensation for the crime committed, the silent father only flexed in anger his powerful arms, and the director of the shelter shrugged his shoulders.

Back in my little room I wrote a full page report on the present value of human life being well below the commercial value of a few pounds of black coal.

*Maly Przegląd* printed the report as it was written without any changes and corrections.

I served as a correspondent for some time when Jerzy Abramow asked me routinely: 'Come to the editorial room and work'. He elevated me to the position of his helper, with an impressive title of the secretary of the paper, and I worked there until 1937."

Abramow liked his young helper and strongly supported him. He called Ryszard 'a young Ferdurdurke'<sup>7</sup>. Ryszard said: "I guess he did not refer to me being in the future as great a writer as Gombrowicz was, but rather resembling a main character in a novel who had undergone a transformation from an adult to a teenage boy."

Much later in his book *Living Bonds*<sup>8</sup> Abramow mentioned the reporters of *Maly Przegląd*: "...Almost everybody were about to graduate (...): Aleri [Irena Librader-Smigielska<sup>9</sup>], Tadeusz B-ski [Kazik Debnicki], Wlad. Berg, Ludwik Dal, Leon Glatenberg [later known as Leon Harari], Ryszard..." This Ryszard who was mentioned there without his last name was Ryszard Mirabel.

<sup>6</sup> From 1930; Abramow was known after WWII as a writer Igor Newerly.

<sup>7</sup> *Ferdurdurke* – a novel by Polish writer Witold Gombrowicz published in 1937.

<sup>8</sup> *Zywe Wiazanie*. Warszawa, 1966, s. 339.

<sup>9</sup> See the current issue of the Newsletter, p.39.



## KORCZAK'S TRACES IN CANADA

Ryszard kept a bookmark on this page for years...

Leon attended the same school as Ryszard. They used to visit each other frequently (Ryszard remembered Leon's home in the Old City of Warsaw as if he had seen it yesterday). They became friends in spite of their different backgrounds: Ryszard was from a wealthy and assimilated Jewish family, Leon – from the orthodox one. The friendship lasted very long. The last time Ryszard hosted Leon in Vancouver was in the late 1970's.



**Leon Glatenberg [Harari] who left Poland for Palestine before WWII. The picture was taken in 1944.**

Ryszard recalled:

“One day Jerzy Abramow introduced me to Dr. Korczak as a boy with a possible future in journalism. The conversation was short. Salvos of questions, a hard look over the subject in front of him. And after a while, a big smile in his eyes and a warm touch of his hand on my burning head. That was all.

I must say most people around *Maly Przegląd*, both young and adult, looked at Korczak as at the guiding spirit, looked blindly, trustingly but not fully understood.

I enjoyed working at *Maly Przegląd* very much. I also liked to be paid for the articles, not much but still something. I liked trips to different cities where I was sent to get stories for the paper. Once Abramow asked me to write about gliders, precisely a flight by a glider. Glider piloting courses were getting into fashion, and famous pilots personally invited youngsters to participate in the campaign. That was a kind of promotion for aviation, and I felt proud to be a part of the most modern thing possible.”

Ryszard did not visualize then that he himself would become a pilot.

He continued his recollections:



**Leon Glatenberg [Harari] while visiting Ryszard in Vancouver in 1966.**

“I took all my projects very seriously. When I had got an assignment to write about homeless people I slept with them for a few days in the street.

## KORCZAK'S TRACES IN CANADA

I was getting acknowledged and I was impressed by the developments of my literary abilities which had been recognized by Dr. Korczak and my teacher Jerzy Abramow. But one becomes sum total of the things life permits him or her to do and the ones which he or she fails to do. In my case Dr. Korczak's and Abramow's judgment of my future proved to be erroneous.

Abramow was the real heart and soul of *Maly Przegląd*. He knew how to delegate work and responsibility to others and how to get the proper results. He was a good judge of people and the underdeveloped potential of each of his correspondents. He himself had not only first class editor skills, but was also blessed with the gift of a first class fiction writer, with the imagination of a poet.

His personal friendship with young Kazik Debnicki [who wrote under the pen name of Tadeusz Brzeski] which I was told lasted till the end of Abramow's life, was unique. What bounded them was their love of outdoors, kayaking, and that certain type of social panache, which they both possessed.

However Abramow's fascination with 'Marysia from Czestochowa' (the *Maly Przegląd* correspondent from the city of Czestochova) as described in his book *Zywe Wiazanie* was a peculiar one but perhaps only of a literary nature.

I met Marysia, being her guest for a day while on a business trip for *Maly Przegląd* in her city. I found her, without doubt, to be a very proper person, good looking and very polite, but shy, closed in herself and with a disturbing deep haze over her pretty eyes. I thought she was a young emotionally mixed up pony struggling with her personal demons. Looking back I suspect that Abramow was a bit attracted to her and other young girls but if so, only romantically.

He carried in himself that Russian 'hundra' [spleen or melancholy in Russian] for the ocean of old trees which his grandfather, an old White Army officer, was in charge of, and where the young Jerzy grew up (he was born in 1903).

I guess all his life Abramow had a deep longing for the sounds of the talking trees, the disturbing cries of silence of snow covered 'Puszcza Bialowieska' [Belovezha Primeval Forest] where he had spent his childhood and

where – as he used to say - plants, trees, and animals live as they want and herds of aurochs wandered freely. He confessed this later on in his beautiful book *Zostalo z Uczty Bogow* (*Remnants of Gods' Feast*).

This deep undertone of poetic freedom was the motto of the personal and the professional life of Jerzy Abramow; a Pole with a deep Russian soul, a lover of liberty who, unfortunately, spent most of his mature life deprived of any sort of freedom."

In the newspaper Ryszard got to know Isaac Deutscher who had been employed by *Nasz Przegląd* as a proof reader for fourteen years. Deutscher was about thirty then but the young journalists considered him a much older man. Where Abramow was Ryszard's teacher in "how to write", Isaac was one in "how to think". He featured an extraordinary deep mind, and his knowledge was unbelievably broad and extensive. Fortunately in the spring of 1939 he was sent by *Nasz Przegląd* to London as a correspondent. That saved Isaac's life. For the public it salvaged an author of great books such as political biography of Stalin and the Trotsky Trilogy and a highly recognized worldwide expert on Soviet affairs and socialism. Isaac Deutscher died in Rome in 1967. "I learned from him a lot", said Ryszard.

Israel Stycki did lay out, and was called in *Nasz Przegląd* maitre-en-page. He was a Korczak admirer and a personal friend of Jerzy Abramow. Stycki and Abramow spent much time making certain that *Maly Przegląd* had the aesthetic balance and a look of a well composed picture. Israel was a lovely and kind man, and he taught me a lot as well <sup>10</sup>.

Ryszard related:

"I remember a day in 1936 when *Maly Przegląd* shrunk from its regular six pages to four.

The previous week Jerzy Abramow suggested to us that due to the uncertain political situation in Europe, we should consider writing something about brutality of past wars for the next issue of the paper.

Lejzor Czarnobroda (who wrote under the pen name of Lejzor) and I took up the challenge.

<sup>10</sup> See Stycki's photo in the centre on the front page of *Nasz Przegląd*, January 3, 1937, p. 13.

## KORCZAK'S TRACES IN CANADA

I decided to write about the antiwar book of Henri Barbusse *Under Fire* (1916). I took my assignment enthusiastically, as I was asked to express my pacifist feelings just before I had finished reading the book, and I was still full of the burning fires oozing from its pages.

Lejzor felt more comfortable choosing to write about the less fiery and much more popular novel by the famous French author, Romain Rolland – *Jean-Christophe* (1904-1912) in which the protagonist was depicted as a fighter for social justice. Rolland was also known as an author of antiwar writings *Above the Battle* (1913) and a prominent figure in the pacifist movement during WWI.

Lejzor and I belonged to a group of correspondents who disagreed with the politically correct voice of *Nasz Przegląd* and *Maly Przegląd* in the context of the direction Poland and Europe in general were heading. Both of us, as well as some others, felt that closing ourselves in the 'ivory tower' pretending not to see what lies ahead was not right. We firmly believed that not to partake in the opposition was irresponsible, and the acute situation demanded from us active political involvements.

The nationalistic and fascist like parties were high in popularity. The left wing tried to consolidate in spite of the differences within, under the banner of a 'Front Populaire' movement and to speak in one voice against the dangers of the oncoming war<sup>11</sup>.

I wrote an enthusiastic revue of the Barbusse's book and ended it with strong antiwar slogans at the same time referring to colonel's Beck present foreign policy that could lead towards mortal military conflict<sup>12</sup>.

Lejzor, on the other hand, wrote what I thought to be a much more tempered essay on Rolland's book.

The following week there was a commotion in the offices of *Nasz Przegląd* and *Maly Przegląd*.

As the Friday paper was ready to go to the presses to be printed, the Government censors requested basic changes in Lejzor's and my articles. There was not sufficient time for the paper to comply with the demands which, without any doubt, were presented to them at the last moment in order to cause financial losses, loss of reputation and thus to 'teach them [editors] a lesson'.

After a short conference the Chief Editor of *Nasz*

*Przegląd* and Jerzy Abramow decided that they had no choice but to pull the two inside pages of *Maly Przegląd* out of the printing presses. Only in this fashion could Friday's paper be in time for circulation.

This is how both Romaine Rolland and Henri Barbusse got silenced by the red pencil of Polish Government censors...

Lejzor and my names ended up on the political police list of the dangerous characters to be closely watched. We were both at that time sixteen years of age."

Ryszard sought equality and justice, achievements of a "grand scale", that would make a difference. He joined the *Spartacus*, a half-legal high school student socialist organization under the umbrella of the Polish Socialist Party (PPS). He seriously considered a possibility of joining the International Brigades in Spain to fight fascism. For his political inclinations he was expelled from school, and his parents, rather scared, sent him "away from the sin" – in a literal sense – away, far away, to the other end of the world, to Canada, where Ryszard's uncle lived.

**These pictures Ryszard took with him leaving Poland for unknown Canada.**



**Ryszard's mother Ewa Fejgin-Mirabel. She died when Ryszard was a baby.**

<sup>11</sup> An alliance of left-wing movements during the interwar period.

<sup>12</sup> Jozef Beck was a Minister of Foreign Affairs in Polish Government from 1932 till the breakout of WWII.

## KORCZAK'S TRACES IN CANADA



Ryszard's father Felix Mirabel, a prominent Warsaw lawyer.

Ryszard recalled:

"I left Poland in 1937.

Lejzor Czarnobroda stayed on assisting the editor in his work till the very end of the existence of the paper [1939].

I still tried hard to be active..."

Ryszard did get active but a little later.

In 1938 he had just decided to take Arts at McGill University. He also started to take flying lessons in Nova Scotia.

When WWII broke out Ryszard was nineteen years old. He volunteered for the Canadian Air Force. When the Polish Army and within it the Polish Air Force under the command of the British Royal Air Force had formed in the United Kingdom, Polish airmen started to arrive here in large numbers. Lynne Olson and Stanley Cloud wrote in their highly popular book *A Question of Honour* (New York, 2003): in 1939, after the Nazi occupation of Poland, "in a remarkable Odyssey scores of thousands of Polish pilots, soldiers and sailors escaped Poland, some on foot, some in cars, trucks and buses, some in airplanes – some in ships and submarines. They made their various ways first to France then to Britain to continue their fight." About 17 thousands Polish pilots were fighting in the RAF during WWII. At least one of them, a resident of Canada but a citizen of Poland, managed to get to England from Montreal. That was Ryszard Mirabel. He was enlisted in the Polish army, and from July 1940 served as a navigator (although he had a pilot's license as well), a warrant officer of the No. 301 Polish Bomber Squadron (Land of Pomerania or Ziemi Pomorskiej, in accordance with Polish naming traditions) and later on in the Special Operations Squadron (No.1586). There were training flights – days and nights spent in the sky.

The most known fact is that the Polish pilots gave assistance to the United Kingdom in the Battle of Britain. (One of them recollected that the Polish airmen were so popular in England that anyone in Polish Air Force uniform could use the public transit for free.) Yes, they defended British skies but they were also flying over France, Italy, Norway, Holland, Yugoslavia, Bulgaria and other occupied European countries. Ryszard's unit mostly operated from airbases in the United Kingdom (the last stations were in North Weald and Chedburgh) and Italy (with a station at Campo Cassale near Brindizi), but he also flew with missions in the skies of North Africa. Ryszard's crew participated in a mission that supported the Polish resistance. Ryszard remembered very clearly their flights by Liberators and Halifaxes over burning Warsaw in the days of the Uprising. They had to fly pretty close to the ground, literally in smoke and heat, to drop arms and ammunition, medicine and food using special parachutes. German air defense was still effective.

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There was incredible tension. Many times the airplanes were damaged by German anti-air artillery or crashed on landing because of bad weather. Many fellow-pilots did not return to the station after their raids.

Ryszard took part in bombing raids against Germany as well. In one of the accidents with a plane fully loaded with bombs he had both legs and an arm broken. But at that time too he made it back to his station.

Ryszard was within a hairbreadth of death not just once.

He did not talk much about his war experience, and I did not feel it was right to insist. I remember that my own father, who had been fighting as an officer of the Soviet army, was not inclined to tell his children anything about the war times either.

Polish airmen under the RAF contributed a lot. There were big losses too. But Ryszard survived.

He had fought against fascism. He had fought for his country – Poland. He had fought for his family that he believed was still in Warsaw.

But by that time there was nobody left.



Ryszard Mirabel as a warrant officer of the 301 Polish squadron of the British Royal Air Force in the years of WWII. The badge - an eagle in flight holding a wreath in its beak, suspended by a small chain and hook over the left breast pocket, unique amongst the world's aircrew "wings" and seen on the photo - was always hanging, along with the miniatures of his orders and medals, on the wall of his study room.



Ryszard Mirabel (far left) among his fellow-pilots in England during WWII.



Ryszard Mirabel (far right) with his squadron



Ryszard Mirabel in the years of WWII.

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Some of Ryszard Mirabel's awards received during WWII (miniatures).



Polish Air Force medal to recognize extra ordinary act for Air Force and exceptionally conscientious service during WWII, with a famous Polish Air Force chess-board logo and an inscription *Polska swemu obroncy (Poland for his defender)* on the reverse side.

Cross *Na polu chwaly (On the field of Glory)* 1944 with an inscription *Walcznym* on the reverse side. The cross to recognize an act of heroism during WWII.

Star *The 1939-1945 War, of the British Commonwealth*

Campaign, with GRI VI (George Rex Imperator) monogram, surmounted by the Royal crown in recognition of service in WWII. It was awarded for six months service in specified operational areas.

The Atlantic Star with GRI VI monogram, surmounted by the Royal crown was a campaign medal of the British Commonwealth, awarded for service in WWII. The star was awarded for six months service afloat, in the

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Atlantic or in Home Waters, within the period September 3, 1939 to May 8, 1945. Also awarded to aircrew who took part in operations against the enemy at sea.

The Air Crew Europe Star was a campaign medal of the British Commonwealth, awarded for service in WWII. Specifically, the medal was awarded to Commonwealth aircrew who participated in operational flights over Europe, from UK bases; with GRI VI monogram surmounted by the Royal crown.

The Italy Star was a campaign medal of the British Commonwealth, awarded for service in WWII. The medal was awarded for in aircrew service within the Mediterranean theatre, including sorties from the Mediterranean area over Europe; with GRI VI monogram surmounted by the Royal crown.

1939-1945 Canada Voluntary Service. The Canadian Volunteer Service Medal is granted to persons of any rank in the Naval, Military or Air Forces of Canada who voluntarily served on Active Service and have honourably completed eighteen months (540 days) total voluntary service from September 3, 1939 to March 1, 1947.



Ryszard's uncle Jozef Mirabel who was a lung specialist in prewar Warsaw. He worked at the resort in the vicinity of Warsaw. He was known as the excellent physician who used the most modern means of treatment and the most contemporary equipment. He committed suicide when the Nazis came to force him into the ghetto.



The Mirabels grave at the Jewish cemetery in Warsaw. Only his mother Ewa was buried there well before the war. For the others: Ryszard's grandparents, his father, and two of his uncles murdered in 1942, it is only a symbolic grave.

The whole of Ryszard's family perished – he did not know where.

Korczak with his children perished in Treblinka.

Ryszard's best friend Lejzor Czarnobroda perished. He escaped from a train to Treblinka. For a while he found shelter at Jerzy Abramow's place. Later on, with the help from Abramow he was hiding somewhere in the countryside of Poland, but was arrested and never heard from again.

So many others perished.

Abramow, a gentile, lived on the "Aryan" side of the city, however later on he was arrested by the Gestapo and went through Pawiak (a notoriously harsh prison in Warsaw), Majdanek, Auschwitz and Oranienburg concentration camps. Miraculously he survived the ordeal to become one of the leading writers of the post-war Poland known as Igor Newerly.

Ryszard maintained friendly relations with Abramow after the war. Any time he visited Warsaw he met his teacher from *Maly Przegląd*.

In his library he kept Abramow's (Newerly's) books with dedications from the author. One of those dedications in the book *Chłopiec z Salskich Stepow* proves how warm and trustful was Abramow's

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attitude to Ryszard. It reads: «Te moja pierwsza, dwadziescia lat temu napisana ksiazke, dla mlodziezy prosze Cie, Rysku, przyjac w zwiazku z dzisiejsza nasza rozmowa. Znajdziesz tu sporo nieporadnosci pisarskiej, niekiedy nawet irytujacej nieporadnosci, ktorej nie uratowalby i zwywy tok opowiesci ujetej jak gdyby w filmowo mknace kadry. Ale jest klimat. Ow klimat goracego autentyzmu i pelnej intymnosci autorskiej, co razem nadaja rzeczywistosci barwe basni. Chcialbym w tej tonacji utrzymac ostatnia moja ksiazke, ale czy potrafie, czy jeszcze potrafie? Zdobywajac rutynę, styl stracilem byc moze niewinnosc pisania, pierwotna naiwnosc artysty. Warszawa 16.09.67 r. Igor Newerly.»

“Rysiek this is a book that was written by me for young readers twenty years ago. I hope it will remind you of our today’s talk. You will find in it quite a few weak points. Failures in my writing sometimes are annoying. Lively narration in the form that could resemble movie like sequences following one after another could not really help. But there is a certain atmosphere in it: passionate and authentic, and intimate, and sincere – all that adds to a realistic story the colours of a fairy tale. I would like to keep the same atmosphere in the book that I am currently writing, but would I be able to, would I still be able to? I have gained writing skills and the style but perhaps I have lost the innocence of writing and the primeval artist’s naivety. Warsaw 16.09.67 Igor Newerly.”

Ryszard told me that in Warsaw in 1968 he invited Abramow to the hotel “Bristol” where he was staying. But Abramow did not want to talk in the hotel. He was afraid of the overhearing devices. They walked to the Saxon Park where they could talk freely. It was there when Abramow said to Ryszard what bothered him so much – he said: “I am tired of the bacchanalia around Korczak”<sup>13</sup>.

Last time Ryszard met his teacher in Warsaw in early 1980’s. Jerzy Abramow-Igor Newerly died in 1987.

“With the murders of my whole family, Dr. Korczak, my friend Leizor Czarnobroda and all those who helped to formulate me to be whatever I am to-day, the world of my youth perished in flames,” said Ryszard.

In our conversations Ryszard mentioned some other names of the people from the circle of *Maly Przegląd*. Those are Ludwik Mirabel, his distant cousin who used to be a reporter<sup>14</sup>, Marysia Kunowska who later on became a medical doctor in Rio de Janeiro, another Marysia - from Koszykowa Street, and Kuba (Hersztejn?) from Nowolipki Street, who was fascinated by the art and glamour of moviemaking. Ryszard promised me to recall more names of his friends but our talks were interrupted by him leaving us...



**Burial of Jerzy Abramow-Igor Newerly at Warsaw graveyard Powazki, October 27, 1987. Ryszard kept these photos in his family album.**



<sup>13</sup> See the Newsletter #3, 2005, p. 13-14. More details in the book by Jaroslav Abramow-Newerly *Lions Liberated (Lwy Wyzwolone)* in Polish.

<sup>14</sup> See p. 32 - 47 of this issue.





Ryszard Mirabel and Olga Medvedeva-Nathoo in 2007.

Ryszard did not become a journalist. Neither did he become a professional writer. But he always was a man of letters; he knew how much strength a written word possessed. Thus, *Maly Przegląd* had never been just an ephemeral episode of his youth. The *Maly Przegląd* adventure was moving away from him further and further, both in space and in time, but till the very end it was an important and perhaps the most beautiful part of his life <sup>15</sup>.

### Poems by Richard Mirabel

#### **In memoriam of Dr. Janusz Korczak and his children, murdered by the Nazis in 1942**

Before the spark splits apart  
space  
was just a joyful sound,  
an oak was not yet a seed  
and nothing, but nothing  
reigned supreme.

Silence did not exist...

<sup>15</sup> Photocopies of the articles written by Ryszard Mirabel for *Maly Przegląd* in the 1930's are available in our library

Only when you came  
to kill, to slaughter,  
to maim silence fell...

Until a tree from a tree,  
trees among the trees  
became  
stone to stone,  
stones among the stones,  
forever.

Oh, do not grant us  
time to sleep,  
forbid any rest,  
make us wait  
for the coming  
of Just Men

Now is the time  
to beat our foreheads  
against the Ghettos' walls,  
till stone under stone  
turns to oak.

Oh...Hear me,  
hear me in the deadly silence  
of your long sleep!

1.

You stand among the sleeping dead  
as a hollow shell cleansed  
by the falling rain \*  
with your outstretched arm  
protecting a child  
on a journey to the end.

## KORCZAK'S TRACES IN CANADA

You stand varnished  
with our guilt  
of lack of strength  
and misplaced faith.

You tower over all  
whom blind fate  
unjustly spared  
and condemned  
to not sharing your love  
for all others to the very end.

We let you down,  
made you a new saint -  
a sterile textbook  
without a proper name.

We drained all blood  
from your veins  
and wrapped you up  
in a blanket of guilt  
and sorrow...

You were a man of many faces,  
who had the strength to give  
all he had  
and extended his hand  
to protect and guide  
to the very end of his life  
the abandoned child.

2.

A man,  
unlike a golden coin,  
has more than two faces...

This man was once  
a drummer boy  
in love with Graces.

This man was a lover once  
who gave up one love  
for another.

This man  
erased his given name  
to become: The Brother

This Man  
unlike all others  
- short or tall -  
stood at all times  
ready to answer  
a child's call...

3.

Forbid us rest  
among the dead.

Do not let us to touch the stones.  
Open the gates  
and take me away!

No eternal sleep should be disturbed  
by the sounds of my feet!

Let this place be a silent lake  
and make the silence scream,  
so no one could ever  
get a restful sleep!

4.

He is not gone,  
believe me!  
I have seen him outside those iron gates  
guiding his brood to an open market place  
full of ripe fruits and fragrant flowers.

I have found him in the smile  
of one, who beaten down,  
got lifted up by the friendly hand  
of a nameless passer-by.

I have seen him  
In *The Children's Home*\*\*,  
in deep thoughts,  
lost, confused  
and all alone...

Open your eyes wide  
and you may find him again  
in the forgotten love  
of your fellow Man,  
that Every Man!

*Warsaw 1967*

\* Reference to the temporary statue erected at the Jewish cemetery in Warsaw.

\*\* The Janusz Korczak Orphanage

### I was borne on the river

*" Nuestras vidas son los rios que van a dar en mar, que es el morir."*

*" Our lives are the rivers that flow down to the sea which is death"*

*Jorge Manrique*

I was borne on a river.  
and she heard my first cry  
and the cries of my mother  
when she learned she must die.

Aye!

I was borne on the river  
while the moon was high  
and a gust of a wind  
swept me aside.

Aye!

I grew up on this river  
when my mother died  
and she rocked me  
to my sleep  
with this sweet lullaby:

*Tear drops . . . rain drops  
The river never stops  
and is always there . . .*

I grew up on this river  
when she was young  
and as swift as an arrow  
cutting through land.

I worked on this river  
all my working days  
fished on her shores  
drenched and scooped her bed.

I worked on this river  
till time cut me down  
and I could no longer  
lift my fists above ground.

## KORCZAK'S TRACES IN CANADA

*Rain drops . . . tear drops  
Mist hangs in mid air  
Will the river ever stop  
carrying me away?*

*Will she ever take me down  
to the open sea  
where my mother  
patiently waits for me...*

*Rain drops . . . tear drops  
Will the river ever stop?!*

### **My mother's kitchen**

My mother's kitchen fell apart.  
Crumbled.  
Crushed.

The kitchen once so much alive,  
kicked around, died.

My mother's kitchen is all gone  
and so are her daughters and her son.

Aye!

Is there time left to rebuild her stove,  
a stove as warm as the sound of her voice,  
to rekindle the flame, to work, work and slave  
for a new set of pots and pans all cleaned  
and painted red?

Will I try to rebuild her place

or will my fate demand  
a search of a heavy loop of twine  
hanging down from a branch of a tree.  
Aye!  
An arrow strikes my cry...

### **Friend...**

Friend,

I am only a poor man  
and yet so rich.

I do not wish to possess  
all the things: water, air,  
blue of the skies  
or even  
my beloved wife.

Should you need them  
more than I do,  
take them,  
they will be yours.

Friend,  
do not hesitate,  
take my shirt, I have two.  
Should this be of comfort to you,  
I beg you:  
take it.

I am only a poor gypsy type  
resting here at this river's bank  
and heavenly drunk  
on the stars of the night

## KORCZAK'S TRACES IN CANADA

Rest and put your knife away!

One cannot drink all from a well,  
inhale all of air,  
possess all of space.

There is enough for all  
to equally share  
and when the right time arrives  
to enjoy a rest

So, let us sit down and count  
the number of grains

in a handful of sand.

### **Weave Weaver of the Waves...**

Weave Weaver of the Waves  
This humble song of praise  
To your patience of my anger...

Weave the days of my life,  
Braid the truth with my lies  
Into a tale sublime

Cleanse my days and nights  
Of all the things  
Which were not right

Plait my remaining days  
With your patience and care  
To my very end

And when the time arrives

Open wide your arms  
To my powerless anger...

### **In the sty of contentment**

*Those who sit in the sty of contentment, meaning  
Death*

*Are become insubstantial, reduced by a wind...*

*T. S. Eliot*

Time's carpeted with Turkish delights,  
cut flowers deprived of the smell of earth,  
contentment's contained in the vessel of glass,  
Bonnard's colours on the lashes of my eyes...

I suffocate, hunger wide open space,  
a dog's lick on the side of my face,  
a tornados fist on my other cheek.  
I revolt against lack of the proper speed...

As the fully contended summer sun  
collapses of boredom  
at the end of its daily run...

### **On a bank of the river Seine**

In memoriam to Lena Granowska-Lecalot\*

You began as a tear drop  
on an icy hill.  
The southern wind  
made you a stream  
and you found your rest  
in the river's bed  
cutting through the land  
and thus your journey began.  
Years went down in avalanche,  
friends and foes became the same,

# KORCZAK'S TRACES IN CANADA

all that stood was swept away  
yet I pray, that you still might be  
somewhere there.

Cruel is life  
which made us all pay  
for what was not right!

On this cold winter night,  
lost and without a name,  
I wander around  
on the frozen bank of the river Seine  
warming myself up by repeating  
over and over again

Lena, Lena, Lena ...

the warmth giving sound  
of your loving name!

\*Lena Granowska-Lecalot, Ryszard's friend in Warsaw in  
the 1930-s. She was also one of the founders of the Janusz  
Korczak Association of France.

## Remembrance Day

Parched are the days of the cruel years,  
boulders of dried out rocks.  
On a hollow hour of a summer day  
a coffee cup with the bitter taste  
of those arid times.  
Time passes by  
beaten, defeated.

Well past the zenith of our lives  
a Croat, a Pole, the Cripple and I  
are playing poker with the fleeing time

as we share away our salt bitter tastes  
on this windy terrace of a seaside place.  
Perhaps only a slight chance now  
to turn around and while looking hard  
be able to find in the far away dark  
thus few,  
who somehow managed to survive.

A blind man on a tight leash  
is being led by a seeing dog  
towards the very edge  
of a steep rocky beach

Beyond the edge only  
a scorching anger of the sea.

The air gets tied as a string,  
sun dust keeps falling over the fields  
and the blood red begonias  
under my tired feet.

I will not shave,  
what is the use,  
neither will I answer  
the Croat's abuse:

- 'We killed only Gypsies' -  
is his false claim,  
'all of the rest  
is just a nasty fairy tale'.

Under the blinding sun  
albino like children  
skip and run.  
A scarlet beach ball  
tossed high into air

splits with a thunder  
stroked by a wayward ray.

Oh, the futility of the rule of a chance!  
Should a blinding sun  
turn to be colour blind  
and mistake the albino's head  
for a ball of red,  
and should a sudden gust of wind  
prevent him from turning  
and missing the razor sharp edge  
of the blade,  
then.

All those children will be adults  
and soon will claim their right to our chairs  
and to the soiled deck of playing cards  
with all the Kings and Queens of our hearts.

Time creeps by us  
haggard and defeated.

### **Sleep...**

...Sleep,  
sweet sleep  
embodies my veins  
soothing the rapid flow of blood  
as a thick layer of haze  
covers my tired eyes.

The tattered necklace of time  
seeps slowly its pearls

into a bottomless pit of time  
and the time, as I know it,  
stops to exist.

Sleep, sweet sleep,  
blessed when it comes  
takes me back to the lost time  
when you and I  
with unfulfilled dreams  
in our hungry eyes  
to come close to the sun,  
to carve a piece of it out  
to build open glass houses  
for all people of dignity and peace.

Sleep, sweet sleep  
blessed, when it comes.  
I am so tired.  
I was informed that you rest now  
between two hills of a faraway land  
where all alone  
you will sleep forever  
stripped of all your dreams.

Oh,  
the sweet taste of the sleep  
when time as we know it  
stops to exist  
but unwinds to the time  
when you and I  
holding hands,  
dreamed of our piece of the sun...

## KORCZAK'S TRACES IN CANADA

It so happened that at the time of my meeting with Ryszard Mirabel my Warsaw friend Marta Ciesielska of Korczakianum<sup>16</sup> was working on the edition of the *Maly Przegląd* volume of Korczak's Collected Works.

I asked her for more information on Ryszard's publications in the newspaper. She was as always very helpful. Moreover she told me that one more Mirabel by

the name of Ludwik used to write for *Maly Przegląd*. Marta wrote: "That was the one who as a teenager ... interviewed Korczak and published the interview under the title *45 minutes with Korczak* in 1933." The very next day I found out that Ludwik Mirabel lives just around the corner, in Burnaby of Greater Vancouver.

O.M-N

### Ludwik Mirabel: "You see what you're doing to me - you make me dig in the ashes"

Conversations between Ludwik Mirabel and Olga Medvedeva-Nathoo 2006 and 2007

*I wish to thank Olga Medvedeva-Nathoo who made me write down some of my past history that I had never before thought merited writing down. Putting up with my untidy ways she helped to arrange memories chronologically and in the order of their relative importance not only for me but hopefully for the reader as well.*

*This text was carefully reviewed for accuracy by Marta Ciesielska in Warsaw to whom I am truly indebted.*

L.M

Ludwik Mirabel long-retired consultant cardiologist in Surrey, British Columbia was born in Warsaw on the 10th of August 1917. It is 2007 now, but to call this man with such a well-preserved sense of humour, an elderly gent, would be a put-down.

In keeping with the Latin root of his name (mira-bel) he seeks beauty everywhere but especially in literature. His interests range widely: in one hour we skimmed over Marivaux, Mickiewicz, Derrida, Foucault, Russian formalists and American academics-apostles of "close reading".

Like many of his predecessors in the profession doctor Mirabel doesn't just read, he was writing long before he strayed into medicine. "Strayed" is the operative word. He told me that when he returned to Warsaw for the first time since the war the best friend of his adolescence Irka Ginsburg, who morphed in his absence from a school-girl into a neurology professor Irena Hausman-Petrusewicz, asked him at the airport: "What

have you been writing lately?" When he said: "Nothing much" she commented: "You mean, you've become just another doctor?"



This photo of Ludwik Mirabel (right), his father and younger brother Zbyszek is the only object that remained from his and his family's life in Warsaw before WWII.

<sup>16</sup> Centre for the Janusz Korczak Archives and Studies.



From time to time Ludwik contributed to the Canadian newspapers *Globe and Mail* and *The Vancouver Sun*. He was also a contributor to the medical profession's pop-mag *The Medical Post*. He loves controversy and does not mind attacking the sacred cows and provoking the reader even if the reader is he himself. He wrote a series of articles about his diagnostic and treatment errors. He wrote about psychoanalysis, its gains and losses. He wrote about psychiatrists as "experts" divining the future behaviour of the criminal mind and about "stressology" dressed up as science.

Currently he is working on a book devoted to what he calls "psychoepidemics" - the fashions in "disease of the month" and fads about wellness and disease.

Ludwik considers himself fortunate to have met and talked with Doctor Korczak. Korczak was one of many writer-physicians who tackled the controversial topics of his day which remain obstinately controversial: for example euthanasia. Ludwik wrote on this topic as well. While he respects the desire to put an end to one's life when it becomes intolerable, he believes that a physician should have no part in the suicidal act. The doctor's job, his contract with the patient is to heal. Once he is seen to take one step beyond healing he is on a slippery slope. But where there is no hope of survival, suffering must be relieved even if an adequate dose of morphine may interfere with respiration.

In his articles Ludwik frequently ventures into frontiers of medicine and ethics. When he wrote about Korczak he emphasized his role as a moral authority<sup>17</sup>.

Ludwik does not know the historic origin of his inherited, so poetic-sounding, family name. He did not look for his family tree. The young look forward and ignore the past. Like most people he took his name for granted and never questioned his father or grandfather about it. After WWII the adult Ludwik no longer found anyone to ask - the ashes do not talk. When in San Francisco he found several Mirabels in the phone book. He phoned the first one and asked if he was Polish. The answer was: "No, I'm a Filipino". Filipino family names were the creation of the Spanish colonizers' which suggests Sephardic ancestry for the Polish-Jewish Mirabels.

The Mirabel airport near Montreal was so called after a village where it was built - simple coincidence which nonetheless resulted in an official invitation for his wife

and children to the opening ceremonies which included a limousine with a full-time chauffeur and a guide (supplied at the taxpayers' expense by the Trudeau government.) It also earned him a warm "Ah, bienvenu Monsieur Mirabel" and a very cursory luggage inspection from the customs agents whenever he landed in Montreal. On the debit side one day he found a newspaper cutting on his desk in the hospital proclaiming in fat majuscules "MIRABEL A FAILURE". It was placed there by the vigilant lab techs. The airport was closing down.

Ludwik does not know much more about his mother's ancestry either .

Felicja Finkelsztajn, his mother, was brought up on a farm which was managed by her father. This land during the partition of Poland went to the Russian Empire. There are thousands of Finkelsteins around, not necessarily related. The name (in its original German version spelt Finkelstein) was the creation of the German fantasy writer E.T.A. Hoffman, who was an official of the Prussian government in the Prussian-occupied Poland in the early 19th century. "He seems to have liked the sound of his invention because he was very generous with it", Ludwik said.

Ludwik remembers a few of episodes from the Finkelsztajns' history.

His mother told him about her favourite brother who made a speech to the villagers in support of the 1905 Russian Revolution and was beaten to death on the spot at the instigation of the village priest.

On the other side of the ledger, one of his uncles told him how he volunteered to defend Poland in 1920 from the advancing Red Army. All the volunteers who were Jews were promptly interned in a camp in Jablonna near Warsaw. Their loyalty was doubted. His uncle missed his chance to take part in the battle later memorized as the "Miracle on the Vistula". The Bolshevik armies were defeated on the outskirts of Warsaw and Poland kept its independence.

Ludwik's father, Mieczyslaw, was an enterprising would-be-businessman who never ceased dreaming of quick ways to make a fortune. One or two had materialized but unfortunately never stretched beyond a few years. He made money bringing drugs to the Civil War Russia and with it started a bank in

<sup>17</sup> *The Children's Champion*. - *The Medical Post*, January 27, 2004.

## KORCZAK'S TRACES IN CANADA

Katowice. The way downhill was much faster than the climb uphill. Ludwik recalls two cars and a Fraulein (a German nursemaid was a status symbol like a Porsche in the carport nowadays, he said) to look after him and his brother - accessories that only the well off could afford in the 1920's of the past century in Warsaw. They lived in a spacious apartment in a "modern" six-story building with an elevator on Polna Street, across from the Polytechnic, a fashionable part of prewar Warsaw.

The slide downhill began in a café. A gang ran in looking for Jews to beat up. Ludwik's father jumped on a table took out a revolver and said: "One more step and I shoot." Someone took one more step and he fired. It seems that he wounded an innocent coffee-drinker at the next table who sued him for the coming few years. The mob wanted to lynch him but... this was Central Europe. Three Polish officers drew their sabers and said "This man behaved like any gentleman would. He is under our protection." They took him out by the back door with the kind advice to leave Katowice fast... like in the next hour or so.

In addition by 1924, Poland in one day went from a catastrophic inflation to currency reform. One day a person needed - literally - a barrowful of paper money to buy the days groceries, the following day one had to exchange it for a few zloty. Mirabels' bad luck took an even worse turn. There was no money.

The next move was to a tannery building in a poor Jewish district of Nowolipie which had a few apartments for rent. From there, years later, they moved to the somewhat upscale surroundings on Orla Street.

When Ludwik revisited Warsaw in the 1950's for the first time since the war his guide was Artek Starewicz<sup>18</sup>, a prewar companion who at that time was a Secretary of the Workers (i.e. Communist) Party. Starewicz took him on a tour of the unfamiliar post-war Warsaw in his ministerial car driven by a prewar style servile chauffeur. When they got to Orla Street Ludwik looked for the familiar courtyard, but somehow everything looked different. He asked the janitor if he remembered the Mirabels. The puzzled janitor said: "No I don't. Perhaps you lived on Orla 4. This is Orla 6. The one next door is Orla 2. Orla 4 does not exist. It was never rebuilt from the ruins".

He also went to look for his prewar high school on Ksiazeca Street. He could not find it. He asked a passer-by and was told: "Yes I remember the street and your school, from before the war. Neither the school nor the street exist any longer." "The confrontation between my memories and the reality made me experience the alienation one feels in a nightmare," said Ludwik.

Ludwik's parents' marriage was on the rocks, partially but not entirely because of financial problems and partially but not entirely because of his father's uncontrollable temper. But who can (or wants to) list the complete catalogue of the causes of domestic strife?

As a child Ludwik was a terrified witness of violent quarrels, which left an imprint on his memory. He did not grow up a domesticated animal.

In Central Europe politics were not something to read about in the paper. They encroached on daily life. He remembers the bombardment by Pilsudski's mutinous troops of the forces loyal to the contemporary government (1926). He remembers the prewar police kicking the miserable goods for sale in the ad hoc courtyard markets.

As many other Jewish middle-class families, the Mirabels were assimilated. His grandmother who lived in a resort near Warsaw called Otwock with her husband Rotbart (his mother's father, her first husband, died of intestinal obstruction) used to light a candle on Sabbath. But her progeny did not observe religion. Ludwik remembers that as a child he had once asked his father: "Daddy does God exist?" His father said: "Don't bother me now. Can't you see? I'm drinking coffee." In retrospect the observance of a religion in his milieu was partly a class-snobbery issue. Temple was something that the shabby, jargon-speaking (Yiddish) Hassidim attended, chanting and dancing on Saturdays. Of the Christians one knew only the kitchen-maids who went faithfully to mass - sometimes taking him with them with the kind intention of saving his soul from eternal torments.

Polish was the only language spoken at Ludwik's home. He heard Yiddish for the first time in the street after the move to Nowolipie. "I always thought I was a Pole till I heard from the others that I was not." When he first learned to read, being a true

<sup>18</sup> Artur Starewicz (Sztern), born 1917.

little nationalist, he would redraw the maps to represent the glories of historical Poland stretching “from sea to sea” i.e. from the Baltic to the Black Sea. But to some Poles no Jew could ever be accepted as truly Polish. Children, as children will, could behave with the child like frank brutality.

This brings to mind Korczak's recollection in his *Ghetto Diary*. As a child he buried his canary and wanted to put a cross on his grave but a janitor's son said: “Your canary is Jewish like you are [and cannot be buried with a cross]”.

When Ludwik was six he went to private school on Leszno Street whose principal and owner was Finkiel, his aunt's husband. The main attraction was that he did not have to pay for schooling. After classes he would visit either the second hand book stores or second hand philatelic shops. He did homework at school between classes.

Ludwik started identifying with the children in Korczak's stories almost as soon as he learned to read.

Ludwik relates: “I remember reading Korczak's books with the feeling that here was the first and only adult who knew what was going on inside me. He was not writing adventure, thriller or ghost stories, he was writing for children about children, recounting what a child experiences, feels and thinks. He did not set out to amuse. He treated his children-protagonists as serious people facing serious problems.”

No one was a prophet at home. Ludwik's father ridiculed Korczak's first book *A Child of the Drawing-room*. He would caricaturize in a mawkish voice a passage about a gentleman carrying home a package of cakes suspended from one of the buttons by a strap. Korczak's mouthpiece in the book addresses him thus: “You, mister, with cakes hanging from your button” going on to contrast the misery in the street that the fictional bourgeois cake-carrier determinedly ignores. Needless to say Ludwik sided with Korczak against his father's willful lack of imagination and compassion. In theory at least.

Circumstances took Ludwik to meet his hero Korczak live, in person.

After Ludwik's father lost his bank he made a living

<sup>19</sup> See ref. on p. 14

<sup>20</sup> The newspaper had from four to six pages in different periods of time.

writing down the results of the Polish State Lottery for publication but fantasizing about making a new fortune pearl-trading in Zanzibar. By that time Ludwik's parents were separated and his father lived in a small apartment. There were many newspapers in his father's apartment including *Nasz Przegląd (Our Review)*<sup>19</sup>. *Maly Przegląd (The Little Review)* was a Friday enclosure, directed wholly by Korczak and consisting exclusively of children's contributions – called “letters”. An obvious vehicle for a bookish boy thirsting to write and be read.

Ludwik said:

“The magazine for and by children was Korczak's idea which, as far as I know, was never duplicated before or since. It is a mystery how he convinced the owners of a profit newspaper to allow him a free hand with an experimental newspaper within a newspaper. But then he had experience of getting money out of a stone. He had talked people into funding and supporting his orphanages: one in the mainly Jewish part of Warsaw, the other mainly for the ethnic Polish orphans.

The newspaper's four pages<sup>20</sup> were all written by children. ‘Children’ meant just that. There was no editorial content, no ‘Questions and Answers’, no graphics. Korczak made clear from the start that he wanted ‘letters’ from the children about their life from day-to-day, the news from children about children. Korczak did not encourage fiction, discourse, politics, ‘movies I saw’ or ‘books I read’. He wanted simplicity and authenticity. (The computer-age K.I.S.S. logo would have fitted in.) Similarly he ran his orphanage as a kids' self-governing republic - another first and probably never duplicated experiment. As far as I can recall, Korczak did not edit beyond punctuation and syntax errors. At the most he would shorten ‘letters’.”

Ludwik sent his first “letter” to *Maly Przegląd* at the age of twelve. It turned out to be a crucial step in his life.

“This newspaper was like moving from the ordinary to another planet where self-expression was a pleasure, not just a chore”, said Ludwik.

He relates:

“Eventually I attended my first Thursday ‘open house’ at *Maly Przegląd*. There were two parts to the *Maly Przegląd* ‘open house’ on Thursday afternoons

## KORCZAK'S TRACES IN CANADA

First of all Korczak would talk in private with any child that wanted to talk to him.

I am not sure why I responded by following him into a small office adjoining the meeting room.

I told him my parents were about to divorce. Next, to my surprise I burst out crying. I am saying 'surprise' advisedly because up till then I felt pleased, if anything, that the rows will cease and I envisaged my father's departure with equanimity.

I asked myself many times why did I cry when all that I was aware of till then was the satisfaction that the best solution was pending. Obviously there was another side to it that I never allowed myself to voice. It seems to me that women are better than men at tuning in to the contradictory emotions that one can harbour side by side. Males want 'logical' feelings. Another form of emotional poverty, perhaps.

In this tiny room I was no longer a schoolboy, or a 'correspondent', looking for recognition - but just a child more unhappy than he knew.

The only reason I'm recounting this is to convey the 'Korczak-effect' on children. He was so obviously non-judgmental that opening up, even to the feelings that were not formatted to the everyday conscious mind, came naturally. Later I tried to analyze it and in retrospect I think that he knew not only how to listen but also conveyed that what you said mattered and would be heard and answered with respect.

I needed an ear, and Korczak was the only outsider who within minutes made me ready to open up. I did not 'tell tales from home' to anyone before; not to my school friends, not to my cousins, aunts or uncles. I spoke to him because he was that kind of listener: he did not patronize, he did not talk 'down to a child's level'. He did not preach and was never cute. He listened and thought about your problem with you. I would say he was not only a physician, educator, and author - he was a true friend to a child.

I remember also that on another occasion, I informed him I had become a 'pacifist' (I just read Erich Maria Remarque's famous anti-war novel *All Quiet on the Western Front* and was very impressed by it.) Korczak looked at me seriously, thought for a minute and said:

'You know wars begin at home.'

After the 'private' part of the session Korczak held a free for all conversation for the young journalists, tireless young scribes like myself who flooded him with enough 'letters' to earn the distinction - to be 'a reporter'. The meetings were completely unstructured but usually ended with him improvising a story or a fable to a very attentive audience.

The meetings were held in a room, off the printing presses, that retained the smell of printer's ink and oil.

It must have had some romanticized significance for me - like Proust's immortal Madeleine - or else I would not remember it so vividly after all these years.

One day, after I had written countless 'letters', I got a postcard from Korczak, decorated with flowers, inviting me to the *Maly Przegląd* cinema-show (*Maly Przegląd* held periodic movie shows free for the frequent correspondents.) This was meant as recognition of the more deserving i.e. more prolific correspondents. It was a *Maly Przegląd* order of merit. I kept the card for a long time amongst 'dried flowers'- remembrances of times past, but eventually moving from country to country, I lost it.

I continued writing and came to see myself as a future professional. A year or two later Korczak got too busy and handed the editorship to Jerzy Abramow, an ethnic Polish-Russian 'white' émigré, who had been his secretary, and one of the 'helpers' in the Orphanage<sup>21</sup>. Some changes followed. Abramow did some editing of the stuff sent in. He also paid the reporters - modestly but enough to buy a book or a theatre ticket. He encouraged the more talented and guided them past childhood with patience and understanding. He said to me once that he couldn't help printing my 'letters' because 'I find one wherever I look'. I achieved also some kind of recognition as a journalist from my contemporaries. But to keep my feet on the ground my uncle, the school principal, told me repeatedly that I was a child-graphomaniac.

In keeping with the times I was fascinated by the movies till I changed my allegiance from the cinema to the stage. Naturally I announced this in print not quite to the world at large but at least to my public in the *Maly Przegląd*.

<sup>21</sup> Polish 'W' is a phonetic equivalent of the English 'V'; Abramow was an apprentice in both of Korczak's orphanages: Jewish and Polish ones.

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Eventually I was made a 'reporter' and my 'letters' became 'articles' that were paid for by Abramow from his editorial funds.

I don't recall much about my contributions except for one or two. They could be acerbic. I remember one of them exposing the empty headed frivolity of the woman kind. This was based on my afternoons in Ziemianska café drinking something called Grenadine and listening, bored to tears, to my mother and her women-friends discussing endlessly the respective merits of crepe-marocain versus crepe-de-Chine and chiffon. It provoked a miniature flood of indignant letters from girls, which pleased me to no end on the principle that any response is better than silence.

Those afternoons were not my only passport to a juvenile sense of superiority. I despised the adults for concentrating on the mundane necessities of making a living and I identified with Korczak's King Matt whose otherworldliness was fought and eventually defeated by the adult world.

The other wind-mill I spouted about was sourced from the books of the American dissident writer Upton Sinclair and the now forgotten journalist E.E. Kisch, who was promoting, typically for a leftist European, his superiority to the vulgar, materialistic America. I wrote a diatribe, sight unseen, entitled *I hate America* which I suppose was as primitive as you would expect from an obnoxious kid.

After my parents divorced I sought what Tolstoy called 'happy families that are all alike'. I am guessing that I wanted to fill in the gaps in my own life. I loved to visit the Abramows. It looked as though their family ties were strong and they created for themselves a perfect intimacy. Is it invidious to add that their marriage did not survive? But at the time their living in one of the newly built apartment buildings, which passed for the latest in modernity in contemporary Warsaw, was another attraction. (Going from the 'old' Warsaw to the 'new' Zoliborz one had to cross an empty area part of which became a refuge for the homeless, much like 'favelas' in Latin America. Abramow took the reporters there once. What I saw confirmed me in my antipathy to the society as I knew it.) It seems though that I overdid my search for harmony, forfeiting my welcome, because one day Jerzy's wife, Basia Abramow said to

me: 'Do you think that you could visit us less often? Jerzy has to work sometimes'. Naturally from that day on I never was seen there again.

In contemporary Polish literature I had my own Olympus. I admired Julian Tuwim and some of Kazimierz Wierzyński. I kept a warm corner for Boy-Zelenski as a parodist, current issues journalist and indefatigable translator of French literature. I was impressed by the novels of Zofia Rygier-Nalkowska. I still remember the funnier bits that Tuwim wrote in between his 'serious' poems, and various satirical 'Anonymous'.

Conservatively I stopped with the 'Skamander' group of poets. Modernists such as Jozef Czechowicz and the future Nobel Prize winner Czesław Miłosz did not register.

In any case they had to fight for their place in my Pantheon. Poland like I guess, all of Central Europe was culturally at the crosswinds of the East and West. All that mattered in European literature was available in translation as often as not done by the prominent Polish writers and poets. All the Nobel Prize winners, Pirandello and Leopardi, Shelley and Byron, all the French classics (Boy-Zelenski alone translated almost a complete library starting with Francois Villon), Brecht and Proust, and of course all the great Russians.

At the impressionable age of thirteen, seeking an allegiance to believe in, I met a boy sixteen or seventeen years old called Stefan Lamed. After three weeks of arguments held on long walks, he recruited me into an organization called League of School Youth which in fact was an 'addition' to the illegal Polish Communist Party. The innocuous name was a clever-clever attempt not to scare children away. I recall that I kept asking why did the Communist people's government need police and prisons? The answer was that Soviet workers' state was surrounded by ruthless capitalist enemies. After several conversations it seemed convincing.

Stefan Lamed (1914-1987) later became a Trotskyite. Olga told me that he survived the war. This was almost a miracle considering that not only the Nazi SS but also the Russian NKVD<sup>22</sup> would liquidate him if they laid their hands on him.

Eventually I and a few other schoolboys led by Lamed produced a pamphlet that we secretly put in the pockets of the coats hanging in the school cloakroom.

<sup>22</sup> People's Office for Interior; Soviet Secret Service 1937-1946.

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Apparently some were immediately taken to the director's office. If he ignored it and the police found out for themselves, the school would be closed on the spot. Paralyzed with fear he sent the pamphlet to the police and expelled me and a few others.

Thankfully the police-work in Poland was not consistent. I was prepared for the competitive entrance examination to the fee-free state school by home tutoring and entered the classical wing of Tadeusz Reytan High School.

But the move cost me two years of schooling. In my school I no longer was two years younger than my school-mates.

I did five years of Latin and Greek. I will confess to the snobbish pride of being a member of a rather exclusive club of the last generation of schoolboys who read Plato and Homer in the original - sadly a skill that I very soon lost through disuse. When on a visit to Athens I tried the few lines of Sophocles that I still remembered I met with open-mouthed incomprehension from a Greek. I'd guess the Polish pronunciation did not help things either.

In case I seem vainglorious I'll add that my mathematics teacher gave me a passing grade in my leaving certificate on condition that I promise never to have anything to do with mathematics at the University, ever. Promising that was no problem.

There were quite a few talented young poets around. Against the current most of them ranges themselves on the left. My bosom friend Irka Ginsburg found a deluded philanthropist, who offered 300 zloty to start a literary periodical.

Irka and I collected the young *littérateurs*. Being an essayist amongst the poets I did not have much competition. I remember Lucjan Szenwald, Jerzy Kamil Weintraub and Janek Twardowski. Janek survived the war to become a not inconsiderable poet and surprisingly a Catholic priest in one of the biggest Warsaw churches. I say 'surprisingly' at least to me who could hardly imagine Janek whom I knew before the war as a priest. I recall that Weintraub authored a poem entitled *Good evening Mrs. Malinowska*. The poem was serious but the title convulsed Janek Twardowski - benignly, not maliciously because while a lover of the absurd he was without a grain of malice.

When I visited him after the war he told me he wanted William Butler Yeats' collected poetry and I sent it to him on my return to Canada. I shared his admiration for Yeats. We both closed our eyes to his prewar fascist sympathies.

To return to 1936... We held several disordered but in retrospect fun editorial meetings. Sadly reality raised its ugly mug and ruined it all. Irka brought the news that the sponsor decided 'not to support graphomaniacs' and the project folded up. This did not shake my certainty that my future was in essay writing.

Those were the years of the Spanish Civil War and of the French Front Populaire. They were also the years of the Moscow trials, of the GPU<sup>23</sup> killings of the POUM<sup>24</sup>, independent-minded socialists in Spain and of the bloody liquidation of the Polish Communist Party exiles in Moscow. The Comintern before it too was liquidated in its turn was hard at work persuading the world's left that murdering the 'traitors' would straighten the antifascist Popular Front. The bad news just like the news of concentration camps and famine were all 'hostile propaganda'. I wanted to but never managed to become a true believer. I recall a sympathizers' meeting in Grenoble where I spoke in defense of the Moscow trials, 'explaining' how it was possible for the Old Bolsheviks - not a few of them Jews - to go step by step from opposition to Stalin to spying for the Nazis. After the meeting a girl, a daughter of White Russian émigrés who became a communist, thanked me for dispelling her doubts. Heartlessly I said: 'You know I talked to reassure myself.'

A remote cousin of mine Ajzenberg - I don't recall his first name - was imprisoned for 'communism' in a Polish concentration camp called Bereza Kartuska. On discharge he promptly hit the trail to join the International Brigades in the Spanish Civil War and I was told died there. I also considered volunteering for the International Brigades. It seems though that I was not wholehearted about it because in the end I did not take the underground route to Madrid. In retrospect I do not doubt that if I did not enrich the Castilian soil I would have an encounter with the GPU's Spanish branch and they would win hands down. Orwell was saved by his reputation.

I was a nonconformist by nature. To paraphrase Groucho Marx I would not want to join any establishment that would accept me as a member. That makes it difficult but not impossible to live in comfort if one

<sup>23</sup> Central State Political Administration; Secret Police in Soviet Russia 1922 - 1934.

<sup>24</sup> Worker's Party of Marxists Unification.

knows how to be discreet about it. I did not. Both at school and later in the Army I heard from teachers and corporals that they would 'wipe that smile off my face'. I went from political doubt to doubt till it all ended the day Molotov embraced Ribbentrop swearing friendship and alliance in carving up Poland.

When I met Irka after the war I told her I was ashamed of my fellow-traveling past. She answered: 'Don't let it bother you too much. You were not that important.'

But I'm running ahead of the events.

Shamefacedly I have to recall that I left *Maly Przegląd* after leading one of my typical 'mirabelous' 'rebellions without a cause'. I led a strike for better fees for the reporters. I thought I was doing my bit for the oppressed working class. Abramow had to budget within the financial restraints of the moneys the parent paper gave him. He brought this childish coup by seducing the other reporters with small, one time, ex gratia bonuses. They succumbed one by one. Finally I was alone and I left in a huff slamming the door behind me. But before I left I had the satisfaction of having Abramow tell me that my last contribution was one of the very few that he never had to edit or to change one single word so I deserved a double fee. The article was about my problems finding a faith to fight for. The title was *Where to, for what cause, and how*. In the article I talked about the need for a cause to believe in. (It appears that the communist pie in the sky shone intermittently only.) I deplored that being 'intelligent' was not quite enough. The usage of the word 'intelligent' is very much of the time. I think that another English word, also obsolete, comes close. The 'intelligent' people were 'highbrows'. My intellectual life centered around literature. I had no time for novels as light entertainment but I read literary writing walking to school, in the classroom, keeping a book under the desk during lessons. I read during meals, at home lying on the floor and by candle light on a vacation. I discovered classical music and went to concerts to the cheapest seating on the second balcony. Another electrifying experience was the discovery of 'modern' painting when an exhibition of the French impressionists and cubists first found its way to Warsaw.

I admired anyone who devoted his life to intellectual pursuits. Hanka's Rozenberg brother Kazik loved Greek and Latin. I have no doubt that if he survived he would

be a pillar of the classics' study. He felt his sister was a trifle and talked about her 'mea soror vacca' ('my sister, the cow'). He told her this about me 'I don't know what happened to Lutek. He used to be quite intelligent (that word again!) till he took up Marxism. Now he is an idiot.'

My Marxist devotion did not last long. I recall rowing a rented sculling in Warsaw's Park Skaryszewski. Irka Ginsburg was my passenger. I said:

'You know I don't think I'm a Marxist any longer'. She said: 'I don't think I am either'. We were sixteen or seventeen years old.

But let's come back to *Maly Przegląd*.

My strike failed. But I could flatter myself that the newspaper would be the loser.

*Maly Przegląd* was my very accommodating second home for five years of my adolescence. Maybe it was time to break away and look elsewhere.

Later *Maly Przegląd* had a celebration of the 'hundred letters jubilee' reporters. I was one of them but Abramow omitted me from one of the listings. Irena Librader (Aneri) asked him about it. I was told he said to her that I did more harm than good to *Maly Przegląd*.

I should say something about Aneri. This anagram was her writer's cryptonym - her first name in reverse. I was partly responsible for her becoming a 'reporter' because I thought she could write and I encouraged her to start her journalistic career. That was an error in judgment. From then on I had to share such teenage favours as she would grant with my writing partner Maurycy Kottek.

Aneri survived the ghetto and lived in California after the war. I met her in San Francisco in the 1970's. I was almost two hours late for dinner for no reason - I just did not want to leave a swimming pool. I did not impress her husband who was an unforgiving stickler for punctuality. Since that time I have not seen Irka, but I used to receive nice greeting cards from her every year: a New Year, Christmas, and Hanukkah - until they stopped coming..."

A word about Ludwik's love affair with water. Following up on his learning to wave-surf, keenly, but he says, ineptly, he became passionate, at the ripe age of fifty, about an easier sport-windsurfing. At least he did not have to paddle to catch a spot on the wave in competition with Hawaiian kids who

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paddled and wave surfed as soon as they could walk. Naturally he had to write about it. He self-published a tongue-in-cheek 'manual' about his newly acquired advanced windsurfing skills *Water Start for Duffers, Old Age Pensioners and Extra-Terrestrials*. He put it up for sale in a bookshop in the U.S. windsurfing Mecca, Hood River, of all places. His cheek was rewarded – 'fifteen beginners did buy the pamphlet', he said.

Ludwik continues:

"A year or two after my divorce from it the *Maly Przegląd* ran a competition for the best article on a topic that I no longer remember. I submitted one under a name which I borrowed from my old friend Hania Rozenberg. This one got first prize. Abramow thought he uncovered a new talent and invited her for an embarrassing interview. Hania handed the money over to me (she did not claim a cut). She survived the war on the 'Aryan' side of Warsaw, thanks to her connections with the communist underground in particular with Jurek Morawski whom she later married. She had some invaluable survival assets - she looked more Slavic than the Slavs; sky-blue eyes, upturned nose and naturally no circumcision (the last amounted to a death sentence in Nazi-occupied Poland). After the war Hanna Morawska became a member of the Faculty of the Art History at Warsaw University. Her husband Jurek Morawski was delegated to lead the Party youth organization. But in the 1950's he sided with the Party dissidents, went into disfavor, and was 'kicked upstairs' to be an ambassador before being finally shoved out of the leadership. I met him in the London Polish Embassy. During that meeting I asked him why he thought it was necessary to rig the after the war election so that the majority Peasant Party would lose. He said: 'Lutek you know Poland. The Peasant Party in London exile could afford to be progressive and democratic. In Poland it would soon become clerical and reactionary. We could not allow that.'

Still later I visited Jurek in Warsaw – a private person with a job. He was divorced from Hania and married to a woman I remembered from a prewar holiday camp. There, she was one of the forerunners of the Women's Liberation sunning herself bare breasted. Somehow my reminiscences did not seem to please her. But then

women are notoriously hard to please.

Morawski brings to mind another one of my *Maly Przegląd* acquaintances: Henryk (Heniek) Holland.

I remember him as a freckled (like myself) kid and aggressively sarcastic (look who is talking!) reporter of *Maly Przegląd*. A quick mind, highly intelligent. He visited me often but I never felt the 'community of spirits'. He achieved some kind of eminence in the post-war communist Poland's ruling set but in the end either jumped out or was thrown out from a window. The Polish political establishment was undergoing a political upheaval at the time and Holland's funeral brought the Party dissidents behind the bier. When Jurek Morawski that time responsible in Central Committee of the ruling Party for cultural development was asked by the Polish Secret Police why he participated, he said: 'Because he is dead'. Or so the story goes<sup>25</sup>.

My relations with Abramow ended in one of my most unforgivable faux pas. On my visit to Warsaw after the war, I sought out Abramow who survived a stay in Auschwitz and wrote several books under the pseudonym of Igor Newerly<sup>26</sup>. I wanted to apologize for my youthful idiocy. He invited me for dinner in Warsaw's prime hotel-restaurant. Genuine Caspian caviar was on the menu. I never tasted it and the price translated into dollars seemed reasonable. But I was not in a dollar economy. I saw Jerzy blanch but did not understand why till later in bed. The price probably equaled a good portion of his monthly income. The caviar was a disappointment, like the genuine Perigord truffles tasted once in Bordeaux. Serendipitously now that I can no longer afford them I do not miss either.

In 1936 I sent some of my new work to a literary magazine of university students called *Kuznia Młodych* (*The Smithy of the Young*). It was supposed to be the voice of the pro-government students but was soon infiltrated by the left nonconformists. I was short and looked younger than my age (I was nineteen years old). I went for an interview. I took some of my published *Maly Przegląd* stuff with me. The editor, read some of it and looked at me searchingly: 'Who wrote this?' 'I did' 'What does your father do?' I did not feel like saying that he wrote down the winning lottery tickets so I answered that

<sup>25</sup> See p. 49 of the current issue of the Newsletter.

<sup>26</sup> I am told that Jerzy was imprisoned in Warsaw (Pawiak prison) and then went through nearly all that the Nazis had to offer: the camps of Majdanek, Auschwitz, Oranienburg and Bergen-Belsen. I assume that being Russian and not Jewish saved his life.



he worked for a newspaper. The editor said 'Ah, I see.' That was the end of the interview and of my career with *Kuznia Młodych*".

In 1937 Ludwik signed up for the Warsaw University. Pilsudski who believed in supranational Poland was dead. In 1938 the Germans took over Sudeten part of Czechoslovakia and Poland in its turn took over Cieszyn which was a bone of contention for many years. The winds from the West blew hard, and Polish native fascists and fellow-travelers were gaining ground in the street and in the ruling Army Junta. Ludwik no longer remembers what the official pretext for putting green stamps on the Jewish students' University cards was but the result was an identification kit for the use of roaming student gangs looking for the Jews to beat up. He could not always count on meeting his school friends in time for body-guarding. He felt smothered and decided he had to get away.

France seemed the best choice. He would have liked to study literature but his father said that he will only support him on condition that he worked for a sensible profession that promised a decent income and self-sufficiency. "Getting an exit visa was a problem till during the umpteenth trip to the passport office my father handed over some banknotes to the man behind the window 'for the Red Cross'. I was sure he would get arrested on the spot for trying to bribe a civil servant but the guy calmly put the money in his pocket, reached for an impressive stamping pad and stamped my passport", recalls Ludwik.

Ludwik ended up as a medical student in Grenoble - the mountaineering and ski capital of France. To pay for the ski weekends he supplemented his father's cheque working as a waiter in a student coop. His last visit to his people in Poland was in the summer of 1938. He wanted to go back in the summer of 1939 but his father refused to finance the railway trip through Germany. Ludwik calls it "one of the unpredictable life-preserving accidents."

At a loose end in Grenoble he seized the opportunity to learn English. His Danish girl-friend, Niels Bohr's niece, who left for a „learn-to-speak English" stay in England found him a holiday job at a children summer camp in the village of Whitstable (Whitstable figures in Somerset Maugham's *Cakes and Ale* as Blackstable), where she herself had worked. That was where he was at the outbreak

<sup>27</sup> To Ludwik's surprise Marta [Ciesielska] tells that Zbyszek also wrote for the *Maly Przegląd* in 1931-1932 r. He does not recall this at all.

of the war. "More undeserved gifts of fate" Ludwik says.

No one in his family survived. His father and his younger brother Zbigniew (Zbyszek; in 1939 he was twenty) escaped the Germans to the Russian occupied Eastern part of Poland<sup>27</sup>. His brother who at Warsaw University was favoured by the pioneer semanticist Tadeusz Kotarbinski could have changed, like the other refugee Warsaw students to the Lwow University. Instead he volunteered to teach primary school in the most isolated, marshy part of Byelorussia, famous as the last habitat of the European bison.

When the Germans overran Byelorussia he was either still in his village or one of the millions young recruits that Stalin's ineptitude handed over to the Nazis. The last Ludwik heard was a Red Cross message from his mother that Zbyszek was a prisoner in Germany. Hundreds of thousands of Russian prisoners of war died of starvation in German camps. Ludwik never tried to find out exactly where and how Zbyszek died.

Shortly before the German invasion Zbyszek wrote in answer to Ludwik's question: "I don't know where father is and please don't ask." The informed guess is this. One day all the Polish fugitives in Russia were told that they are free to go back to the German occupied part of Poland if they so wished. All those who so chose were rounded up the next day and deported to the gulag-land. The Polish-speaking inhabitants of Russian occupied part of Poland were all classed as exploiters of the working class and included for good measure. There, only some of the very fit survived.

Ludwik was told after the war that his mother who stayed in Warsaw said that rather than starve she would volunteer to go 'resettlement'. That was the Gestapo dodge to collect people for the gas chambers with the least possible fuss.

Ludwik said: "One cannot help feeling guilty for surviving but somewhere the self preservation instinct intervenes and says: Stop - unless you really want to join the dead."

One day after the Germans invaded Poland Ludwik filled his suitcase and took a train for London and for the Polish Consulate. In the train a friendly Brit assured him: "Don't worry. We'll soon get the Jerries out of your country."

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For some reason Ludwik remembers that the consulate was on Portland Street. He arrived twenty minutes after four. The door was closed. He rang the bell. Finally the janitor showed up and barked: "Can't you see the hours? We close at four" "But I wanted to ...come... register... the war." "War or no war we close at four." The door was slammed. Welcome to old Poland. Welcome to Central Europe.

As it turned out the Polish Army in exile was not ready to enlist him. Neither were the Brits, nor the Czechs, nor the French nor anyone else he contacted out of eagerness to fight fascism and also because he was surviving on the hospitality of the parents of an English girl he had met in Grenoble, charity which showed all the signs of growing strain. He even went to the Soviet Consulate and asked if he could join his brother. He was made welcome by a beefy gentleman who was interested only in the addresses of anyone Ludwik knew within the Russian occupied Poland. He got out of there feeling that he had just managed to escape the trapdoor before the snapping shut and never went near the building again.

Finally a doctor in the nearby village, a member of the Quaker Fry family made him an employee of the Civil Defense on his own responsibility because the British Government was slow to make up its mind on foreigners being allowed to serve in the Civil Defense. Allied foreigners like the Poles were still foreigners to the English Government but Quakers were actively engaged in helping German refugees and other strays. The population shared the Governmental „can't trust them" attitude. One night during the bombing of London the good citizens of Waltham Abbey came looking for him because of a rumor that someone was signaling to German bombers. Who else but a foreigner? He was saved by the hospital head nurse who said he never went outside. She was lying because like everyone else he would go out from time to time to look at the fireworks.

Thus it came about that he went through the bombing of London in the suburb in the local hospital with an anti-aircraft battery right across the street and a large explosive factory, an obvious target, nearby. The Germans flew over every night for six weeks on their way towards the centre of London, occasionally jettisoning a bomb or two close by. German bombers had a distinctive whine so one knew when they flew overhead. The AA battery kept firing

incessantly but never shot down anything. The German leaflets dropped from the bombers were eagerly sought as keepsakes and were sold for charity the next day. If a bomb exploded nearby he would ask his partner in the next bed "Did you hear this one?". The answer would be: "Oh, lemme sleep!" The Brits were a balm for the Central European shattered nerves. The bombing, night after night, sirens wailing to announce it, pedaling the bicycle faster to get under a roof, had a cumulative effect. One was not getting "used to it" - on the contrary...

Ludwik continues:

„One day, not long after Goering started his Blitzkrieg I found myself entertaining in the Epping Forest a recently married English girl. Suddenly all hell broke loose. One of the air battles that saved England from invasion, a fight between the English fighter-squadrons and the German Stukas, was in progress. The girl burst out crying: 'God is punishing us.' The idea that God had nothing better to do than arrange an air-battle to punish my insignificant person seemed hilarious, inappropriate as the occasion was for looking at the funny side of life.

Finally still helped by my Quaker boss, still waiting for a call-up, I went to continue medicine at my dream land University - Cambridge. I promptly failed my entrance exams. The Cambridge syllabus was quite unlike the French and I had no access to laboratory to get prepared. It did not matter though. A week later I got word from the Polish Army in Scotland that it finally was ready for me. I became a private in a former cavalry regiment that was due to come an armoured unit once the British factories produced enough tanks to equip even the Polish cavalry. In the meantime there were seven or eight horses for the officers to keep up the proud cavalry traditions.

I spent the next two years of Sitzkrieg peeling potatoes, digging beach defenses that the sand and wind would bury overnight and harvesting in Scotland. I was hopeless at parading but a good marksman and good at feats of endurance like long marches with a heavy Vickers machine gun on my shoulder, a WWI memento - that was all that the British Army had left after Dunkirk. I spent two days in jail for mouthing off. The jail was the place to meet the rankers' creme-de-la-creme. Out of boredom I volunteered for everything that would take me away from peeling potatoes:

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air-force, paratroops, anything, but potatoes would not let go. I spent two weeks, as a Polish-English translator in an army driving school but was soon sent back for not drawing straight enough lines on the endless forms. I remember 'lecturing' puzzled Canadian girls, Army Auxiliaries, attached to the Polish Army about automatic squeegees which stood for windshield – wipers in the British Drivers' textbook that I was told to follow. My bonus was motorbike rides on the empty roads (no gas to spare for civilian traffic). I would 'borrow' the bike when no one was looking.

The officers and many of the rankers in my regiment were escapees from Poland who one way or the other after stays in the Hungarian and Romanian internment camps managed to get to France and rejoin. One third was the progeny of the prewar Polish workers from the farms, factories and mines in France and Belgium. The remainder was released under the Sikorski – Majska agreement from the sites of 'free' deportation in Soviet Russia or were the survivors of the gulags. On landing in England all of them went through a quaintly called 'Patriotic School' where they were instructed to keep quiet about their experience of communism so as not to upset the Anglo-American-Russian alliance. Other times, other politics. Not a few of them, my barrack comrades, were reluctant to open up about their gulag experiences months later. I suppose that being sentenced for unknown sins to half-starve cutting trees in the taiga makes you cautious about whom you talk to for the rest of your life."

One day Ludwik was called to the regimental office and told that the Polish Medical Faculty opened under the wing of Edinburgh University and that all the former medical students were eligible. That seemed much preferable to potato peeling. Missing heavy machine gun practice was a pity, but...

Thus it came about that he spent the rest of the war in Edinburgh still theoretically a soldier in the Polish Army but a student in fact. Not just an ordinary soldier. All the medical students were upgraded to Cadet-Officer rank. After the first year they were told to quit wearing the Army uniforms because the locals started asking why these Polish soldiers were not in Normandy rather than on University benches.

In the spring of 1945 the liberation of Europe was in progress. Ludwik asked the sergeant, who, somewhat

unbelievably, was the officially appointed commander-in-chief over the medical students, if he could join the Army in Normandy for the summer holidays. The sergeant looked at him for the idiot that he seemed and told him that the Normandy front was not a holiday camp.

„At the end of the war we could elect to stay in the U.K. or to return to Poland”, says Ludwik. “That was a no-brainer for me. I no longer had any illusions about the 'workers' state and I knew that I would not last long in its Polish version. Besides I came to love England. Another survival promoting decision.

Earlier in 1944 I took a summer student-temporary house physician job in a hospital in Epping just North of London. Nearby was a North Weald airport hosting a Polish Bomber squadron (from which the Hurricanes and the Spitfires swarmed in the 'Battle of Britain'). I was asked several times to mediate between the Polish airmen-patients and the Epping doctors. Poles obeyed no rules. When they felt like it they would leave their bed and disappear for hours. On one occasion I phoned the Polish bomber unit about one such a.w.o.l. [absent without leave] airman. I introduced myself in Polish: 'Mowi Mirabel' [Mirabel speaking]. - Ah, Mirabel I'll find him.' My third, or maybe fourth cousin, Ryszard<sup>28</sup> was the navigator in this bomber squadron. He volunteered from Montreal where he was 'emigrated' by his parents in 1937 for undisclosed 'sins'. Before that he became a prominent *Maly Przegląd* writer who started writing soon after I left. His squadron after the end of the war was flying shuttle service to Oslo. For the next two or three years cigarettes were currency in the countries that had been under German occupation. A dollar for a cigarette (1945 dollar!) was the market price. The allied airmen flying shuttles were getting rich painlessly. Ryszard finally decided to join them and took a few packs on his next flight. He sold his cigarettes for millions of inflated Norwegian krone. In the evening he got involved with a blonde and put off exchanging his paper treasure for dollars. The next day he woke up to find out that a currency reform was in train. The old inflated kroners were being withdrawn for new ones at a Government set low rate. The Mirabel business acumen ruled again.

When I got to Vancouver I found the listing for Ryszard Mirabel in the phone book. After demobilization he returned to Montreal and from there moved to Vancouver.

<sup>28</sup> See p. 12 - 31.

## KORCZAK'S TRACES IN CANADA

I did five postgraduate years in England. One year in research and four specializing in internal medicine. Under the British system in order to be appointed a consultant with hospital beds in your care you had to succeed to the post held by a retiring or dead predecessor. The competition was fierce. A foreign-born physician who did not train as a resident in one of the teaching hospitals did not have a chance of the proverbial snowball in hell. Canada seemed like a good alternative and I met several people who praised Vancouver climate and situation. I got used to the rain in London and had no particular desire to return to Warsaw kind of winters in Ontario or Quebec. On my way to Canada I spent one year in a hospital in Brooklyn. I did not care for New York - at least as I knew it in the 1950's and left it without regrets.

I passed a competitive specialty exam in Edinburgh and repeated it in Canada. In Vancouver I became a consultant in internal medicine in the suburb of Surrey and later narrowed down to cardiology.

Specialized medicine is a jealous mistress. Still sleepy after a middle of the night call to the Coronary Care Unit I had to read medical journals to keep up to date. Being a bit of a perfectionist at one's job does not leave much time for writing.

I visited Poland several times after the war.

But my first serious attachment Wanda Szmielew I met in San Francisco. In Warsaw Wanda used to live on Orla Street 4, in the same building that I but one floor down<sup>29</sup>. Wanda who had tried – unsuccessfully alas - to teach me algebra, gave me up one day for a more mature contender. She went on to become a favourite pupil of Alfred Tarski (Teitelbaum)<sup>30</sup>. Tarski who reached the exalted grade of a high school math teacher in Warsaw became an icon after publication of his treatise about the concept of truth in formalized languages and was invited to the mathematics chair at the University of Berkeley. After the war Wanda was his visiting assistant professor at Berkeley every six months of a year on leave from Warsaw University. When I met her in San Francisco and incautiously said that I was heartbroken for three days after she left me. On the fourth day, I confessed, I congratulated myself on being free at last. You could feel the air freezing.

I shall end up on this ridiculous reminiscence. Life may be tragic at times but it is not consistently serious.”

<sup>29</sup> Wanda Szmielew, 1918-1976.

<sup>30</sup> Alfred Tarski, 1901-1983.

<sup>31</sup> I would like to thank Marta Ciesielska for providing the text of *45 Minutes with Korczak* (in Polish). – O. Medvedeva-Nathoo.

### 45 Minutes with Korczak<sup>31</sup>

*Written and translated from the Polish by Ludwik Mirabel*

**From the author and translator**

**One should never be subjected to one's juvenilia. I would have dearly loved to expunge the cute adolescent funny bits in this writing, signed by my fifteen year old namesake, but that might interfere with authenticity of restitution of the times past - mine and Korczak's. If any of it jars bear in mind that mercifully I had no inkling of what was lying ahead.**

**I inserted my present day annotations between brackets; thus [...]**

**A few words about my problems updating this. Korczak was known as "Pan Doctor". In Polish "Pan" means "Mister", Mr. Doctor is the normal polite Polish usage but in English "Mr. Doctor" sounds like an unintended joke. I retained "Pan Doctor" once or twice for authenticity sake but mostly replaced it with "The Doctor", plain "Doctor" or "Korczak".**

**The other minor translation problem was the name of the weekly children magazine, originally edited by Korczak, and published by the Polish language Jewish daily, called *Our Review (Nasz Przegląd)*. The name of the children supplement was *Maly Przegląd* which literally means *The Little Review*. It rings phony in English. I am told though that *Maly Przegląd* in its Polish wording is known in English Korczak literature.**

Interviewing Korczak for *The Little Review* sounds funny.

We have known him for so long and so well that we should be able to ask him a few questions without calling it "An interview".

The Doctor used to come to the Editorial room on Thursdays. Any child-contributor or visitor who wanted to speak to him was welcome. To confide in him was easy. No one would ever know what was said

behind the closed door of his room. One went outside feeling that a burden was lifted. Doctor knew that we did not turn to him for preaching. We were told what we should be doing everywhere: at home, in the school, even by a more conventional or more exemplary friend. Korczak though would respond with a grin and a few well-chosen words.

Afterwards a meeting was held, intended for correspondents but open to anyone. The air was thick in the little room. There were children, adolescents and from time to time a member of the "old guard" [i.e. those, who had been writing for the *Maly Przegląd* from the inception a few years back.] The exchanges were lively, unconstrained, and spontaneous.

The Doctor spoke sitting down, facing the attentive group. To surrender to the words was easy. Usually he improvised always a new fable.

After the meeting a few of us would accompany him to the bus-stop. I remember seeing myself as an editorial writer (like every self-respecting junior school kid). The Chinese-Soviet warfare came up. I, of course, voiced my newly acquired [pacifist] convictions.

Doctor said "You see, before you can get rid of major quarrels you have to ban the small ones. When brother stops fighting sister, the owner his roomer and the neighbors no longer quarrel the wars will cease as well."

From time to time we would accompany Korczak to a movie. Afterwards he would not waste words giving his opinion: "Round and round the mulberry bush", "Clever but just a fib".

And now an interview! I felt as though I was about to interview one of my uncles about his preferred brand of smokes and does he believe that sorrel tastes better than parsnip. What was the point?

The editor told me that Doctor wrote a theater play for children. Luba and Cesia [I have no idea who "Luba and Cesia" were.] liked it. And being actresses they should know. The public want to hear what the author has to say before the play opens – afterwards the critics speak up.

"Wonderful" I scowled. "The mysterious M. will be

happy reviewing the play." [Probably a reference to someone signing his "letters" with an "M".]

"You're just jealous. About turn...march." [Although I don't remember the circumstances the context shows that it was Jerzy Abramow who gave me the assignment to interview Korczak.]

I found myself in the corridor. I knew enough to close the door.

On my way to the orphanage I was trying to foresee my reception. I knew that Doctor hated interviews. Interviewing the boxer was much easier. [I was referring to my recent interview with a Polish Olympic boxer. Name?]<sup>32</sup> What questions shall I ask? In the end I quit worrying and bought a little halvah [My favourite treat at that time.]

Doctor was eating lunch surrounded by children. Trying not to stand out I slid between the dining tables and stopped by the window, pretending to scan a handy movie magazine. Doctor had finished his meal and had more and more children around him.

I decided to charge. Doctor stretched his hand out and smiled: "How are you my boy?"

"I'm here... to interview you, Sir."

The friendly smile was gone. In turn I tried to look harmless because it seemed to me that Doctor was about to grab a fork. I puffed up my chest that recently withstood gouges from the sharpened girlish nibs [I wrote a 'letter' a few weeks earlier about the girls' frivolous minds that predictably provoked a furious response.] I saw the obituaries that said: "He died a reporter's death".

Instead Doctor smiled again and we stood there smiling and looking adoringly at each other.

I steered my "windows of the soul" to the world outside and, terminally embarrassed, tried to convey that but for my sense of duty I would never dare to upset him so.

And he said: "Well, follow me."

We enter a room that measures two steps by one. It serves as a savings- and loans- bank. The children can lay bets: "Within the next week I will lie only once and fight three times at the most."

<sup>32</sup> The name of the boxer was Edward Ran (Fishmajster); 1909-1968. The interview was signed by Spolka Ludwik I Emkott: U mistrza boksu [Edwarda/Eddiego Rana], June 10, 1932.

## KORCZAK'S TRACES IN CANADA

Before I chance my first question the Doctor fires several: "What do I do? Do I do much reading? Am I still a pacifist?" I answer at length, secretly overjoyed, that an interviewer as famous as the Doctor chooses to interview me. But then I realize that the play is going into reverse and I ask my first few questions.

"Forget it. Write whatever you like."

"I can't. I have to give a faithful account. You know journalistic duty."

"OK. Just to keep you quiet. Mrs. Tacjana Wysocka [choreographer who participated in theatrical productions] persuaded me to write this play. [The title was *Children of the Courtyard*. I understand the text is lost.] There are three acts. The first one is about children playing, conversing, and planning to open a circus. I left a blank page here for the artists to fill in with their ideas about what the circus will look like. In the second act a nice lady spins a fable that the children visualize scene by scene. The third act has the yard children in a summer holiday camp. Mrs. Wysocka can add the circus acts that come to her mind. I shan't be jealous."

"Why did you start writing plays?"

"Because I felt like it. But perhaps you're right. One has to answer" - Doctor looks at me unkindly. "Several things concurred. If nothing else; I love theatre. I'd like it even better if one did not have to make a special trip for it, get the tickets in advance, sit there for hours and afterwards pay for the cloakroom and for a tip to the night-janitor to open the housing gate. Going to cinema is much easier. If I happen to see children's faces on the publicity photos outside I go in. Of the recent movies I liked best *The Champ II* [If memory serves it was a movie with Wallace Berry as a boxer and Jackie Cooper as his son and his confidant cum benevolent guardian angel. An ideal movie for a child. And for Korczak - to identify with. Later: checked in Wikipedia. All correct. What quirk of memory makes one remember the names of the actors of a forgettable movie when one forgets whole months and years of one's life?]

"I went through a moviephile period seeing all on offer with that little Basia. [Korczak is referring to Basia Szejnbaum - one of the pupils of the Orphanage - who at the time of the interview was already the wife of his successor as editor of the *Maly Przegląd Jerzy Abramow.*]<sup>33</sup>

<sup>33</sup> Barbara Szejnbaum; 1908-1973.

<sup>34</sup> Maurycy Kottek was a student of Stefan Zeromski School in Warsaw. He published his articles in by-weekly *Kuznia Młodych* (1931-1934). Most likely he perished in 1942-1943 in the Warsaw Ghetto.

„You mean Mrs. Basia?”

„No matter. For me that brat will be forever just Basia. Anyway we went from movie to movie dreaming of starting our own cheap movie-house.”

„What else do you want to know? O. K., O.K. I turned to education because I felt best with and amongst children. Same as a schoolboy, same as a university student. As a student I got summer jobs as a helper in the children's summer camps. Later, in the fall the kids I met in the camps began visiting me and eventually my apartment became sort of a children's club. As a physician I worked in children's hospital.

I identified more and more with kids. I was learning to understand them better till finally I moved here to the Orphanage.

With time I wanted to reach into my memories and so I came to write a book: *When I am Little Again*.

"I love this book."

"I don't bother with the adolescents because you are less open. You lack trust."

"I'm an exception. I do trust."

"Don't interrupt. As a student I was home-tutoring suspicious characters that were just like you. For the greatest part they specialized in being the bottom of their class but decent kids otherwise. But they were a problem. Such a kid thought all day about the problems of metaphysics and literature but could not solve the most elementary equations [This is autobiographical enough to throw a shadow on the authenticity of this passage.] I saved one of them from failing geography.

In the end I liked them and they liked me but the relations were never as open and trustful as they were with children".

The conversation continued but it became personal and none of anyone's business.

*Signed by: "Ludwik and... Co."*

*(Emkott. Emkott is ill and did not take part.)*

["Emkott" was Maurycy Kottek, my partner as a reporter. I was told after the war that he became a ghetto policeman but did not survive Holocaust.]<sup>34</sup>

*Mały Przegląd 1933, # 41, February, 10, p. 2-3.*

It was my good fortune to know a man who came as close to saintliness as a human can. Let's say that he was the only person I knew who came close to my idea of sainthood. I am sure, though, that if someone had called him a saint to his face he would have burst out laughing.

Like other saints he was not perfect. Saints are human beings. He loved children but he seemed to love no one else quite as much. There was never any hint of sexual interest in children – or anyone else. As far as I know he never had a love affair or anything beyond a friendship with any woman. Korczak said once, perhaps tongue in cheek but revealingly that he lost interest once the kids reached fifteen. “They get too old for me”, he said.

He did not just “suffer little children to come to him”. When he played with them stretched on the carpet in the Orphanage he was not trying to be - he was - one of them living up to the title of his book: *When I am Little Again*. There was not a shade of artifice or condescension.

To hear that he marched with them to the gas chamber holding the youngest one by hand was not unexpected – it was a culmination of the way he chose to live his life. He was always by the side of an unhappy child ready to share and relieve. Their fate was his.



Ludwik Mirabel at his home. Burnaby 2007.



Ludwik Mirabel's portrait published in *Maly Przegląd* in 1933.

The interview-conversation had taken place when Ludwik was fifteen years old. He saw it again for the first time in 75 years and summed up what Korczak meant to him:

“Korczak did not invite intimacy. I do not know if he allowed anyone to ‘really’ know him. I could say I knew him but it would be more correct to say he knew me. He invited the confidences of others but never reciprocated. I think that I was not alone feeling that - I heard and read the same impressions coming from others. I do not know how to convey both the distance he kept and the feeling that here was someone truly concerned for others.

Korczak was a person but he never became a ‘personality’. Through all his participation in public life and in spite of his prominence as a writer, radio broadcaster (he had his own program about children problems) and an educator he sheltered his privacy.

He seemed to have no time or desire to share introspection. A recurrent refrain in a book of reminiscences about him published after the war in Poland was: “I wish I could find the power in me to write about him as he was.” And so do I.

There is a telling anecdote recounted by an Orphanage survivor. When in the Warsaw Ghetto someone who did not want to share his meager crust cursed Dr. Korczak for being a nuisance he said: “Well, curses are for me, but now, what will you give for my children?”<sup>35</sup>

<sup>35</sup> That was a story on a Catholic priest Gabriel Pierre Baudouin (1698-1768), a French monk, who established and managed in Warsaw a Home for Abandoned Children that later became the first children hospital; Korczak as a young man was fascinated by that story and in one of his latest texts written for children described and explained this situation. - Janusz Korczak w Getcie. Warszawa 1992, s. 174-175.

## KORCZAK IN VANCOUVER

Agnieszka Holland, a screenplay writer of the movie *Korczak*, in Vancouver

### **Korczak - movie plot (1990)**

The film represents an account of the last years of life of the legendary Polish-Jewish doctor and educator Janusz Korczak (Henryk Goldszmit) and his heroic dedication to protecting Jewish orphans in the Warsaw Ghetto during WWII, providing shelter to 200 children.

He continues his experimental educational methods from before the war in the ghetto (for example children's self-government), whose justice is in a big contrast to what is happening in the outside world: right in front of the Orphanage, dozens of children are dying from starvation and diseases or being murdered every day.

In the final roundup Korczak refuses an offer to escape to the "Arian side" and is loaded into a cattle car for Treblinka with his orphans.

**Agnieszka Holland** ranks as one of Poland's most prominent filmmakers.

Born in 1948 in Warsaw, Poland to a Jewish father and a Catholic mother, both journalists, she lost her father when she was thirteen.

Agnieszka Holland graduated from the Prague Film and TV Academy in 1971 (Czechoslovakia). In 1968, because of her political activism during liberalization movement known as the Prague Spring, she was arrested and sentenced to solitary confinement for several weeks. After returning to Poland she became a protégé of director Andrzej Wajda who served as her mentor. She wrote her first screenplay for Wajda's *Without Anesthesia*, in 1978. In later years the two collaborated on number of scripts including *Danton* (1982) and *Korczak* (1990).

In 1993 Holland collaborated with Krzysztof Kieslowski on a screenplay to his *Trois Couleurs* series, *Blue* (1993). Holland's first feature film *The Provincial Actors* (1978) won the International Critics' Prize at the 1980 Cannes Film Festival. After the imposition of martial law in Poland on the 13th of December 1981 Holland stayed in France, where she still lives.

Holland received an Academy Award nomination for Best Foreign Language Film for her movie *Angry Harvest* (1985), a German production about the relationship between a gentile farmer and the Jewish woman he conceals during WWII. Six years later, Holland earned even greater international acclaim and a score of awards, includ-

ing a Golden Globe, for her *Europa, Europa* (1991). Based on the biography of Salomon Perel, the powerful story of a young Jewish man who assumes the identity of a Nazi in order to survive the Holocaust, it provided an unforgettable look at human atrocities and the nature of identity. The film received a lukewarm reception in Germany and the German Oscar selection committee did not include it as a submission for the 1991 Best Foreign Language Film. However, it became one of the most successful German films released in the US, winning an Oscar nomination for Best Adapted Screenplay.

Holland followed it up with another tract on the nature of assumed identity with *Oliver, Oliver* (1992), an intriguing story of a boy who claims to be a child who disappeared six years earlier. Holland again explored the world of youth with her first mainstream Hollywood film, an adaptation of the children's classic *The Secret Garden* (1993), followed with another period drama, *Washington Square* (1997) based on the Henry James novel.

On 1994 she directed *Red Wind*, a thriller for television produced by Sydney Pollack, which was aired in the series *Fallen Angels*. A year later she made *Total Eclipse*, and *The Third Miracle*, a drama about religious faith and the



**Agnieszka Holland and Malgorzata Burczykca.**  
Vancouver, 2006.

nature of miracles. Her latest movies includes *Golden Dreams* for Disney Studios, *Shot in the Heart* for HBO, and a TV movie *A Girl Like Me: the Gwen Araujo Story* as well as two episodes of the CBS drama, *Cold Case*. In 2006 she directed *Copying Beethoven* with Ed Harris as Ludwig van Beethoven.



### Agnieszka Holland: "Korczak was a Part of My Family's Legend..."

**M.B.** You have written a screenplay for the movie *Korczak*, directed by Andrzej Wajda. Since I am a co-founder and active member of The Janusz Korczak Association of Canada this movie is very close to me and this person is very dear to me. Could you tell me why you decided to write this screenplay?

**A.H.** As it happened, Korczak was always very special person in my life too. My father was Jewish, and all of his family except for one sister perished during WWII. He never talked about his family but he often talked about Korczak.

My father met Korczak as a young boy, working as a child reporter for *Maly Przegląd* which was written by children for children.

When my father joined the newspaper it was under editorship of Jerzy Abramow (later Igor Newerly), but Korczak still was involved in the newspaper.

If you read memoirs of Igor Newerly and as well of his son Jaroslaw Abramow-Newerly<sup>36</sup> you will find important parts about my father, little Henio, who came to the Editorial room with a pistol and manifesto by Jacques Duclos<sup>37</sup> demanding the place for young revolutionists in the society.

That is why Korczak was a part of my family's legend<sup>38</sup>. But independently of that I was fascinated by his books for kids: *King Matt the First* and its sequel *King Matt on the Desert Island*; and then *Kajtus The Wizard* and *Bankruptcy of Little Jack*. Later I got to know his peda-

gogical writings, as well as his reportages; for example, the ones from a summer camp for poor Jewish and Polish boys where young Korczak worked as a camp counselor. They are more than reportages, they are excellent pieces of writing, where some of Korczak's educational ideas, those very significant ones are present, not in obvious way, but woven rather subtly... So this person was growing on me, and when Andrzej Wajda got an offer from an American producer to make a movie about Korczak, he asked me to write a screenplay...

I was very excited but my problem was that I knew so much about Korczak and I've learned even more about him during my research for that movie that my first screenplay was 300 pages long. I did not want to depict this great man only in last months of his life, those last heroic times in the Warsaw Ghetto, him going with his children to meet their death in Treblinka. This was only the top of an iceberg, but how his life was before, what he had accomplished and created is as important if not more important than the way he died.

But at some point while working on this screenplay I've reached the conclusion that there is no way to tell such an epic story and that I would somehow have to put all those motifs of his life or at least the most crucial ones, in this last few months.

And that how it happened...

<sup>36</sup> *Zywe Wiazanie; Rozmowa w Sadzie 5 Aierpnia; Lwy Mojego Podworka; Lwy Wyzwolone, respectively.*

<sup>37</sup> Jacques Duclos was a French communist who for years played a key role in French politics and International Communist Movement.

<sup>38</sup> Henryk Holland (1920 - 1961) was a journalist and sociologist, and an active member of the Communist Party in pre- and postwar Poland. But in the late 1950's he became a disillusion of the ruling system and turned to its critic. Polish Secret Police performed revision at his apartment and found proofs that he was in touch with Polish political émigrés. It was considered as an espionage and he was facing the criminal prosecution and long imprisonment. During that search he broke down and jumped out from the window of his apartment on the 6th floor. It was believed that time that Holland did not commit suicide but was killed by Secret Police. Therefore his funeral became a manifestation of great number of people, many of them former communists, who realized that their ideals did not correspond with reality.

## KORCZAK IN VANCOUVER

**Sandy Cameron** has been a logger, prospector and teacher. He is a member of our Association. As a senior citizen he does some writing. His books of poetry, *Sparks from the Fire* and *Being True to Ourselves*, were published in the year 2000 and 2004 respectively. Sandy wrote the poem about Korczak because he believes in justice. He is also a volunteer at the Carnegie Community Centre in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside. His volunteer work is about reducing the amount of poverty and homelessness in Canada, one of the richest countries in the world.

### The Children's March to Treblinka

by Sandy Cameron

Janusz Korczak's father  
saw the horror  
of the twentieth century,  
and collapsed under the pain of his insight.  
"We are forever under siege," he said,  
"We are forever under siege."  
In response, his son became  
a physician and educator,  
and fought for the rights of children.  
"The world's oldest oppressed group," he said.  
He ran an orphanage in Warsaw  
where children governed themselves.  
His Children's Home became famous,  
and then the Nazis came to Poland.  
Korczak's orphanage was moved  
to the Warsaw Ghetto.

In 1942 the Nazis planned  
a liquidation program  
for the Warsaw Ghetto.  
They called it resettlement -  
to somewhere in the east.  
But the Jews in the ghetto knew that  
resettlement meant Treblinka,  
the death camp  
where one million people died  
during the war.

The children in the orphanage,  
both boys and girls,  
kept diaries.  
Abrasha, an orphan boy  
who spoke like an adult,  
wrote in his diary  
that the children should have been taught  
to shoot guns.

"Then we could die with dignity," he said.  
But there were no guns  
in the Warsaw Ghetto in 1942.

"How does one die without weapons?" Korczak asked,  
and answered his own question by saying,

"We will march to the train singing,  
all two hundred of us.

We will strike back by singing,  
singing as though on a journey.  
Abrasha will carry the flag."

The flag of the Children's Home  
was meadow green on one side,  
with chestnut blossoms.

On the other side, a Star of David  
the colour of the sea  
on a white background.

Before the Nazis came,  
the children put on a play  
by Tagore of India.

The play, called *The Post Office*,  
teaches us not to be afraid of death,  
and the words of the Indian sage came alive  
in the mouths of Jewish children  
in the Warsaw Ghetto.

Korczak chose the play,  
although it was forbidden  
for Jews to perform plays written by Aryans.  
Abrasha played the part of Amal,  
an orphan boy who was about to die.

And what will Amal ask the King  
whom he is yet to meet?  
"I shall ask him to make me  
one of his postmen  
that I may wander far and wide,  
delivering his message  
from door to door," Amal said.

The deportation of Jews  
from the Warsaw Ghetto  
began in July, 1942,  
and stopped in October  
of that year.

The children from the orphanage  
were taken in August,  
and the night before the Nazis came,  
Korczak noticed a German soldier  
standing on guard outside his window.  
He made a last entry in his diary  
on August 4th, 1942:  
"The soldier has a rifle.  
Why is he standing  
and looking on calmly?  
He has no orders to shoot.  
And perhaps he was a village teacher  
in civilian life, or a lawyer,  
a street sweeper in Leipzig,  
a waiter in Cologne.  
What would he do if I nodded to him,  
or waved my hand in a friendly gesture?  
Perhaps he doesn't even know  
that things are - as they are.  
He may have arrived only yesterday,  
from far away."

The Nazis came early on August 5th.  
"Everyone out, hurry," they shouted,  
and the children came out.  
They lined up, five abreast,

and marched to the train.  
Janusz Korczak led them, and  
Abrasha followed, carrying the flag.  
The children sang hiking songs,  
and threw them, like missiles,  
into the teeth of the barbarians.  
At first the Nazis  
tried to stop the children  
from singing, and they hit the children  
with whips.  
But the children would not be stopped,  
and their eyes cried out  
for someone to avenge  
their tragedy, for someone to remember.  
Then the Nazis stopped hitting the children  
and let them sing,  
and the ghetto police  
stood at attention and saluted as they passed.  
"There's a special quality  
in the air today,"  
Abrasha whispered to Korczak,  
quoting a line from Tagore's play -  
Abrasha, the warrior, like his Sioux  
brothers who before a battle would say,  
"It is a good day to die."  
They reached the train  
and marched up the gangplank,  
one hundred children  
in one chlorinated  
box car,  
one hundred children in another.  
Then the cars were sealed.

In Tagore's play  
the dying orphan boy  
speaks to a girl selling flowers.  
"You won't forget me?" he asks,  
and she replies,  
"I won't forget you."

# JANUSZ KORCZAK'S LEGACY

## One Should Remember <sup>39</sup>

*Translated from the Polish*

[I]

There is a truth which is so obvious that there is no need to look for it. But in people's busy and hectic lives, with so many things and so many important events that happen every day this truth is not in use. In rush of work and struggle for living this truth might seem not so important, not so noticeable, of little value, and out of date.

In Palestine, on this unique patch, live and collide only a few hundred thousand Jews, Arabs, a handful of Britons, and some others out of two billion people who inhabited the globe.

Behind the walls of the Old City of Jerusalem there are concentrated memories and ages- long controversies, quarrels and protests. There is an Elias' cave in mount Carmel, which is a place of pilgrimage; local police have a lot of trouble when devotees of Elias Prophet of different faith who don't recognize each other are streaming to the cave...

This land where people are working so hard, the land that feeds them – who has the right to this land? A lord - effendi to whom it was given as a favor or a whim of a Sultan - just a paper with a stamp on it, almost unreadable? A peasant - fellah who ploughs here? A wanderer who brought this land back out of negligence and adversity?

Shots are fired and then - red warm blood, salty tears, bodies in pain, extinguished eyes, hearts that are dying away, lungs that don't breathe any more – of Arabs, Jews, and Britons.

[II]

And at this point, one should be reminded of this so obvious truth: an injured body sheds blood that colors stones and soaks into the sand; an Arab, a Jew, a Briton suffer the same and only express their pain in a different way. Everyone feels the same when dying. And everyone who dies leaves an orphaned mother, wife, and children...

Shalom could mean peace: peace for you and me; peace only for us. But it could mean peace for the whole world - for everybody – for us and you, even for those with whom we have very little in common...

<sup>39</sup> We greatly appreciate cooperation with Marta Ciesielska who sent us this recently discovered text; J. Korczak. *Należy Pamiętać. Młody Czyn*, Warszawa, 1938, No 2, s. 4.

### The Janusz Korczak Monument in Warsaw

In May 2006 we received a beautifully designed and printed invitation to the inauguration of the Janusz Korczak monument in Warsaw. The unveiling under the Patronage of President of the Republic of Poland Lech Kaczynski, President of the City of Warsaw Mirosław Kochalski, President of the Janusz Korczak Association of Poland Jadwiga Binczycka, and President of the Shalom Foundation Golda Tencer took place on June 1st, 2006, on the International Children's Day.

As a motto on the invitation the organizers chose Korczak's words: "I am not here to be loved and admired, I am here to act and love. It is not the duty of others to help me, it is my duty to take care of the world and of the human being".

Very true, Doctor Korczak!

Our colleagues from Warsaw have informed us that the bronze plaques with names of the individuals and organizations who had contributed to the monument's construction that had been installed to the base were... stolen in the fall of 2006.

Some of the plaques were the ones donated by our Association and the Association members. In the construction of the monument, the bronze plaques initially known as "bricks" were to symbolize the participation of Korczak friends from all over the world.

We hope that this act of vandalism was not motivated by any ideological reasons but was rather an ordinary theft: most likely the bronze plaques have been sold as a colored metal scrap.

The pictures to the right and on the following page were taken by our members M. Burczycka and C. Szafnicki who visited Warsaw last summer before the act of vandalism happened and have now become historical documents.



*Photos by M. Burczycka and K. Szafnicki.*



# JANUSZ KORCZAK WORLDWIDE

## A Few Words about the Monument through the Eyes of Our Members

A new Korczak monument in Warsaw is rather eclectic. It combined a naturalist group of figures (Korczak and the children) and a symbolic tree with loped off branches. The two parts were made from different materials. The materials look like they were put together by chance. On the back side of the monument a basin was placed which most of the time has no water. If there is any water that is only because of rain. What was the need for this basin if there is a big fountain next to the monument in the park? There is a path which leads to the basin, but there are no bricks, neither cobbles on it. Have they not been installed yet? Have they been removed already?

More importantly, who is responsible for the maintenance of the Korczak Monument? Is it insured against such acts of vandalism? Are those bronze plaques going to be replaced? If so, who is responsible for replacing them? The plaques were placed behind the monument, out of the general sight. This probably contributed to the theft. Is there a way to place them in the future so they are more readily viewed and monitored?

Doctor Korczak does not have the answers to these questions. As he said once: “We have lost the keys to many difficult matters.”

But we have to find the answers.



# JANUSZ KORCZAK WORLDWIDE

## The International Janusz Korczak Association 2006-2007

The new International Korczak Website was introduced by the editors of the International Janusz Korczak Newsletter on line from Holland and the Janusz Korczak Association of France.

<http://korczak.info>

The website gives possibilities for interactive contacts, forum for discussions, and links with other national Korczak websites.

The Annual Meeting of the Board of the International Janusz Korczak Association was held on November the 25th, 2006 in Slubice (on the Polish-German border).

The President for twenty eight years of the International Janusz Korczak Association Mr. Jerzy Kuberski (Poland) has retired. Mrs. Batia Gilad (Israel) has been elected.

## Poland & Germany 2006

Collegium Polonicum in Slubice which is an affiliated institution of both the Adam Mickiewicz University, Poznan (Poland) and of the European University in Frankfurt/Oder (Germany) hosted the conference and the opening of a permanent exhibition devoted to the memory of Professor Erich Dauzenroth. Prof. Dauzenroth was a prominent researcher of Korczak's heritage, organizer of initiatives directed to better understanding between Poles, Germans and Jews. His exhibited collection includes Korczak related artifacts, Korczak's books and books on Korczak written in all major world languages. The opening took place on November 24, 2006.

## France 2007

### Attention to our friends in Quebec

The Janusz Korczak Association of France announces the publication of a new translation of Janusz Korczak *Educative moments (Momenty Wychowawcze, 1919)*. The publication was initiated by Professor Remi Hess; translated by Anna Royon-Weigelt.

More information on Korczak in France in French on <http://korczak.fr>

## Japan

The article on Yasuko Kondo's book *Dr. Korczak* was published in the *Yomiuri*, one of the biggest newspapers in Japan March 29, 2006. A play *Dr. Korczak* by Jiro Kondo was staged in November, 2006.

## Russia 2007

The Janusz Korczak Association of Russia held an International Workshop *The Happiness of a Child as the Goal of Up-bringing* in Kazan, Tatarstan, April 17-19, 2007. University professors and stu-

dents, school and orphanage principals, teachers, and educators took part in the workshop.

## The United Kingdom 2007

The exhibition was prepared by the museum in association with the Polish Cultural Institute and accompanied by talks, discussions, and creative workshops for children.

On February 13, 2007, Charles, The Prince of Wales and The Duchess of Cornwall visited the exhibition.

An exhibition *Champion of the Child - Janusz Korczak* was opened at the Jewish Museum in London on December 5, 2006. The Exhibition was on display until April 8, 2007.

## The Netherlands 2007

The Janusz Korczak Association of the Netherlands are going to celebrate its 25th anniversary holding an International Meeting for young participants (18-35 years old) who work with children or teenagers as professionals or volunteers (educators, teachers, psychologists, social workers) September, 22-28 2007.

Those who are older than 35 y. o. are welcome, but are encouraged to bring one or more young people with them.

The theme of the meeting is *When I was Little Again* (based on the title of Korczak's book). The main topics to be discussed are: how to understand children, how to communicate with children, and what we can learn from them.

The meeting will take place at *Het Zeehuis* (The Seehouse), a house for nature lovers; 300 m from the beach (North Sea) on the edge of a big forest, 50 km North of Amsterdam.

Conference fee: 225 Euros, (incl. meals and overnight stays). Contacts: [info@korczak.nl](mailto:info@korczak.nl)

phone + 31.20.644.70.18; fax + 31.20.644.81.54

Mailing address: Janusz Korczak Stichting, P.O. Box: 70048, 1007 KA

## Israel - 2008

The Janusz Korczak Association of Israel is going to host the International Janusz Korczak Conference in fall of 2008 dedicated to the 30th anniversary of the Israeli Korczak Association, the 60th anniversary of the State of Israel, and the 130th anniversary of Korczak's birth.

### An Interesting Finding



Mr. Benjamin Anolik of Museum Beit Lohamei Haghettaot (Israel), a former Secretary General of the Israeli Janusz Korczak Association sent us a letter: "...A girl on the right side of Korczak on the famous photo of Korczak (circled) with the children [reproduced on the cover of our Newsletter #1, 2003] who remained unknown for decades has been identified. Her name is Hana Mandel. She was born in 1926 in Warsaw and spent at Korczak's orphanage a few years. Her mother took her out of the Orphanage in 1942. She survived the war on the "Aryan" side. She is currently living in Haifa"

### New Books in Our Library

**Igor Newerly.** Rozmowy w sadzie 5 sierpnia. O chłopcu z bardzo starej fotografii. [Conversations in the Garden on the 5th of August] Warszawa, 1984. In Polish.

**Joseph Arnon.** Quem Foi Janusz Korczak? [Who was Janusz Korczak?]. Ed. By Janusz Korczak Association of Brasil, 2005. In Portuguese. A gift of Dr Anita Novinsky, President of the Laboratorio de Estudos Sobre a Intolerancia, University Sao Paulo, Brasil.

We regularly receive the issues of Korczak-Bulletin published twice a year by German, Austrian and Swiss korczakians in German (Deutsche Korczak-Gesellschaft, Osterreichische Janusz-Korczak-Gesellschaft, Schweizerische Korczak-Gesellschaft) and La Lettre of the Association Suisse des Amis du Docteur Janusz Korczak published in French in Geneva.

The books and Newsletters are available in our library.

Dear Friends from Germany, Austria, Brazil and Switzerland, thank you very much for your contributions to make Korczak better known in the Western hemisphere.