

Living Traces of the Dead

When I first heard about a group of Poles from Lublin who are working to preserve the city's Jewish heritage, and particularly that of the city's Jewish population on the threshold of World War II, this information evoked the same emotions that surface whenever the events that took place in Poland during the Holocaust come to mind.

I came across these efforts when I read the MA dissertation of Tomasz Czajkowski one of the activists involved in these efforts. He described the small community conducted by the tenants of 41 Kraviecka Street, Lublin, during the turbulent days that plagued the city during the 20th century.

In his paper, Mr. Czajkowski describes Lublin's Jewish life, based, among other things, on material collected during his visit to Israel, as a volunteer in Kibbutz Baram and Kibbutz Yakum. The paper ends with a list of the Jewish tenants who were taken out of their homes in this specific building, to be murdered.

Further on, I also learned about the Project which is underway at the Grodzka Gate Theatre NN, under the direction of Mr. Tomasz Pietrasiewicz Activities in this Center are undertaken by a group of artists, who were all born after the war. Their aim is to explore the city's history, with an emphasis on Lublin's Jewish past. The group's method of working is definitely compelling.

The Grodzka Gayt Teatr NN Center, which started as a theater staging original Polish plays, has by and by initiated other enterprises as well, for the public at large as well as for educational purposes, in addition to the group's artistic work.

At this point, I decided to publicize these developments in Israel, in connection with the efforts made in Israel for commemorating the victims of the Holocaust.

A member of the association of Jews whose origins are in Lublin, Neta Zytomirska-Avidar was fortunate to be born in Israel; her parents came here as pioneers two years before the outbreak of the war, while the rest of their family stayed behind and were killed in the Holocaust. Neta visited the Center in Lublin, and learned about its activities. Back in Israel, she sent the Center a photo album of her cousin, Henio, who was murdered in Maidanek in 1942, with supplementary information about her family, which her parents passed down to her.

Neta's cousin, Henio, was nine when he was ushered into the gas chambers in Maidanek. The photos she keeps witness Henio's childhood, from the time he was one year old through age six. In the latest picture taken of him, he is seen elegantly dressed, just before going to school for the first time, when he was six

years old.

The Project, initiated by the Center, as envisaged by Thomas Pietrasiewicz, is part of the program for the annual International Holocaust Memorial Day. The events that took place take on a concrete shape when learned through the whereabouts of a real person, such as Henio. This little boy has thus become a symbol of the fate that befell him and so many other children. When the Project started, school children began writing letters to Henio, and actually mailed them to his address in Lublin. As expected, the letters were returned bearing the stamp "Unknown Addressee". However, this provided the present tenants with the opportunity of learning about their predecessors. Now children write letters to Henio on the Holocaust Memorial Day. They gather in locations in which he was photographed, and in their letters they write about their own life, their sympathy with Henio's fate, and their fears.

Youth groups from various European countries visit the Grodzka Center, where they participate in workshops that teach them about the Holocaust through Henio, the boy who became a symbol. The Project has been incorporated into school curricula, and the Center runs special study sessions for teachers on the subject.

The Center, together with other organizations, stages a permanent exhibition named Alphon, dedicated to the children who were murdered in that camp. A visit to the exhibition is gradually becoming part of the Holocaust curriculum in a number of schools.

Born in Lublin, I personally have not yet been able to trace any sign of my beloved family, murdered in that city. The Project provides some comfort by showing that significant efforts are being made to commemorate them.

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