



News of Polonia

Serving the Polish Community since 1995

Wiadomości Polonijne

Volume 14, No. 08

January 2009

Free or Home Delivery

Happy Birthday Wanda!



One of the icons of the Polish American community in Los Angeles, Wanda Wilk, recently celebrated her 88th birthday with a party at her Studio City home with a small group of family and close friends. Janice Foy, cellist provided music.

Wanda, founder of the Polish Music Center at USC and longtime contributor on music news to News of Polonia, was honored with several speeches commemorating her many accomplishments and contributions to her community. She was also fondly remembered by family members who spoke of her generosity, kindness and grace. She was moved to tears by the words of gratitude and it certainly was a befitting tribute to her. Excerpts from one of the speeches given by her nephew Dr. Ken Harris follow:

"My Aunt Wanda is a great person. Raised from humble beginnings, in an immigrant Polish town of Hamtramck, Michigan, she was born to two Polish immigrants on January 13, 1921. Her mother was just 21 years old at the time, her father 25. It was the time of the

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Wikipedia website: *Defiance* is a Golden Globe-nominated 2008 war film directed by Edward Zwick. Set in the eastern regions of German Nazi-occupied Poland (now western Belarus) during World War II, the film is an adaptation of Nechama Tec's *Defiance: The Bielski Partisans*, which is based on the true story of the Bielski partisans. Tec's book told how Polish Jews came together for common protection and to oppose the German occupation of their homeland.

Defiance is about four brothers from Poland who escaped the Nazi persecution and fought back to rescue fellow Jews. Production began in early September 2007. The film had a limited release in the United States on December 31, 2008,^[1] and went on full release in January 2009.

The mixed record of the Bielski Partisans: The Untold Story

Polish Educational Foundation in North America – January 2009

The release of the film *Defiance* has resulted in an outpouring of idealization of the Bielski brothers – Tuvia, Zus and Asael, who established a survival camp for Jews in German-occupied north-eastern Poland (now western Belarus). The three brothers, who hail from the village of Stankiewiczze near the town of Wsielub (north of the city of Nowogródek), on their own initiative, started to gather around them Jews who escaped from the ghettos established by the Germans after invading the area in June 1941. Eventually, the so-called family camp and partisan base, popularly known as “Jerusalem,” moved eastward into the Naliboki forest, in the summer of 1943. The camp, which belatedly came under the “protection” of the Soviet partisan movement, grew to house some 1,200 Jews. A very small part of this large group of Jewish fugitives consisted of armed partisans, who were called on by the Soviet commanders to perform various tasks. The vast majority of the Bielski group, however, were simply civilians, who survived the war in the forest, hiding from the Germans and fending for themselves. The record of the Bielski brothers and their group is mixed. The controversies, addressed below, include the role played by Jewish partisans in the Soviet massacre of the civilian population of Naliboki, the Soviet-initiated assault on the Polish partisans, and the conflict with the local population, who were subjected to robberies and violence.

This outline is based on the book *A Tangled Web: Polish-Jewish Relations in Wartime Northeastern Poland and the Aftermath* by Mark Paul. It is a thoroughly researched and documented study that is posted on the Internet at http://www.kpk-toronto.org/2008-fundusz_obrony.html in three parts. Its author is the premier historian on Polish-Jewish-Soviet relations in this area. An independent scholar, Mark Paul has pioneered research on such topics as the alleged pogrom in Ejszyszki (Eishyshok) and the massacre of the civilian population of Koniuchy (near Wilno, now Vilnius). Unlike other authors, who rely almost exclusively on Jewish anecdotal material, which is often inaccurate, unreliable and highly

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Ambassador Nicholas † Rey fondly remembered

By Robert Strybel,
Our Warsaw Correspondent



WARSAW— Former US ambassador to Poland, Nicholas Rey, who died recently in Washington at the age of 70, is being mourned in the land of his birth as a “great friend of Poland”. Grateful for his friendship and support, Poles filed through the lobby of Warsaw’s US Embassy to pay their respects to the deceased by signing a book of condolence.

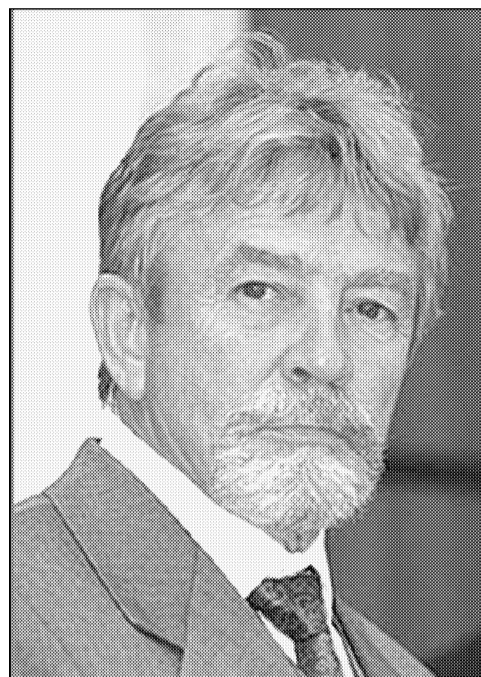
He was a mere 20-month-old toddler when he fled in a diplomatic convoy with his parents to Austria four days after Nazi Germany invaded Poland in 1939. But aside from that accident of birth and the fact that he spoke fluent Polish from home, Nick Rey was your typical Anglo-American high school and college student and later Wall Street banker with few ties to his Polish heritage. He knew he was a direct descendant of Poland’s famous 16th-century poet, his namesake Mikołaj Rej of Nagłowice, but that had no bearing on his life. Some thought he was of Hispanic background because “rey” means king in Spanish.

A graduate of Princeton and John Hopkins University, he gained extensive experience in the field of investment banking and was associated with such financial institutions as Bear, Stearns & Co and Merrill Lynch. Rey’s Polish adventure began after his ancestral homeland threw off the Soviet yoke and for the second time in the 20th century re-declared its independence in 1989. When the US set up the Polish-American Enterprise Fund (PAEF), a \$240 million federal program to stimulate private enterprise in Poland, Rey was approached to help spearhead the initiative. “I was the only gray-haired, Polish-speaking investment banker they could find,” Rey joked in an interview.

From 1990, the PAEF lent its support to nearly 100,000 Polish entrepreneurs and injected more than \$1.2 billion dollars into Poland’s emerging economy through direct equity investments, home mortgages and consumer financing. In recognition of his efforts to promote Poland’s transition from Marxist central planning to free enterprise, President Bill

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Film Honors a Polish Hero



“War Games”, by Dariusz Jabłoński, tells the story of Ryszard Kukliński, once the West’s top spy behind the iron curtain.

War Games is a Polish-made film for an international audience which tells an inspiring story of how one man in the heart of the Soviet empire’s military machine, was able to make a difference and – perhaps - save the world from a nuclear holocaust.

As one of communist Poland’s top military planners, Kukliński had access to the Warsaw Pact’s most sensitive secrets - including plans for a devastating military onslaught on the West. What his colleagues never suspected was that he had become a fervent anti-communist, who photographed thousands of documents and passed them to the CIA.

His disillusion with communism started in the mid-1960s, and was crystallised by his outrage at the Soviet-led invasion of Czechoslovakia, which he helped plan. The film shows his CIA handlers and other American officials giving vivid details of their meetings with Kukliński. These meeting are shown for the first time on camera. One hardened handler weeps as he recalls his prize agent’s courage.

Kukliński and his family were smuggled out of Poland shortly before martial law was imposed in 1981. Like many defectors, they lived a twilight life in the West, physically comfortable but emotionally isolated: making friends was risky. If he hoped for speedy vindication once communism collapsed, he was mistaken.

After the evil empire imploded, attitudes to those who had spied for the other side varied. The then-Czechoslovakia said they were heroes; it invited those western agents who had escaped to return and help set up the new non-communist intelligence service (nobody, it seems, took up the offer). In Estonia, the late Mart Männik, a survivor of the disastrous MI6 post-war operation in the Baltic states, chose not to make himself known to the authorities, fearing retribution from the KGB which he felt still had plenty of power in the post-occupation republic. His story is well told in a book “Tangled Web”, recently published in English by Grenader, an Estonian publisher.

But the post-communist Polish authorities were shockingly slow to

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