

May: The Month of Flowers and Freedom

By: *Joanne Winetzki*

May is my favorite month for visiting Poland, especially Wielkopolska. Leaving Zielona Góra around midmorning with our two dearest friends, we head east. Jean sits in the front passenger seat urging Zygmunt to slow down, backup a bit, and slowly creep forward a tad as she photographs the blazing yellow fields of rzepa ("flax"). In the back seat Grażyna and I try to suppress our chichoty ("giggles") as we listen to the two of them sparring like siblings. Zygmunt drives the car onto a picturesque country lane so Jean can hop out and try to capture the landscape with her camera. Grażyna and I step out and silently focus on absorbing the scene with our other senses as well. We breathe in the scent of freshly cultivated soil, catch the barely audible sounds of birds, feel the caress of sun-warmed foliage on our cheeks and taste the fresh moist air on our lips. Firmly rooted in Polish soil, enveloped by the beauty of blooming flowers everywhere, an inexpressible feeling of freedom overwhelms me. How appropriate that Poland's first constitution was passed on the third of May!

Recently I came across a startling poster of three soldiers aiming rifles in the same direction. A single flower protruded from each rifle barrel. Did the targets of their aim put the flowers in the rifle barrels? Or, were they simply shooting flowers into a crowd of merry-makers? What accounts for some people standing up for freedom with flowers while others sign up to shoot them down with bullets? This astonishing connection between flowers and freedom began to make sense. Could it be that freedom like flowers needs good receptive ziemia ("soil") in which to flourish? Perhaps that is the reason Poland is the homeland for the world's second written constitution.

As early as 1288 various dukes abandoned the idea of a hereditary monarch and elected Henryk Probus of Silesia to rule in Kraków. Upon the death in 1573 of Zygmunt II Augustus, last ruler of the Jagiellonian dynasty, the precedent for the king's election by the szlachta ("the nobility") was firmly established and lasted for nearly two hundred years. The Polish nobility comprised some ten percent of the population and included every economic, religious and cultural group. In *The Polish Way*, historian Adam Zamoyski explains, "They represented a wider cross-section as well as a greater percentage of the

population than any enfranchised class in any European country until the nineteenth century." At the same time Poland's neighbors assented to the absolute monarchies busily establishing themselves across the continent. Regarding the matter of "Divine Right," no candidate for Poland's throne could harbor any illusions in that respect. Each one had to swear an oath of loyalty to his perspective subjects and to a host of conditions delineated in two documents, the Acta Henriciana and the Pacta Conventa. As Zamoyski succinctly states, "— in other words, he could forfeit his throne if he did not abide by the terms of his employment."

Polish fine arts afford abundant examples of our homeland's preoccupation with freedom. San Francisco Chronicle music critic Joshua Kosman lauds pianist Garrick Ohlsson's exploration of Chopin's "formal clarity born of his love of Bach and the unpredictable improvisatory freedom of his (Chopin's) writing." German composer Robert Schumann (1810-1856) famously described Fryderyk Chopin's repertoire as "cannons buried in flowers." Author Stefan Zeromski's (1864-1925) *Wierna Rzeka* ("The Faithful River") is considered a major achievement in European literature. The novel is also a heartbreaking and compelling polemic for political, class, gender and economic freedom of choice. Few readers will forget the scene in Józef Ignacy Kraszewski's (1812-1887) novel *Dziecię Starego Miasta* ("Child of the Old Town") where the mortally wounded youth, one hand grasping at his heart and the other raising his Polish cap, weakly cries out, "Long live Poland" and falls to the ground, dead.

Perusing the Gallery of Polish Painting at the National Museum in Warsaw last summer, I came across three favorites that depict the universal yearning for freedom. Not one is a battle scene or paean to glorious war and victory. My favorite is Maksymilian Gierymski's (1846-1874) *Insurgent Patrol*, described in the museum Guide as "tinted with the bitter awareness of defeat and frustrated hopes for the restoration of independent statehood." Stanisław Witkiewicz's (1851-1915) *Wounded Insurgent*, also dealing with the January Uprising (1863), was painted in Munich in 1881 but because of censorship not shown for public viewing in Warsaw until 1919. I cannot count how many Polish homes I've visited in the past thirty years that display a reproduction of Josef

Winetzki - May to page 16



RUNNERS' NATION

By: *Justyna Ball*

<http://justyna-polishdelight.blogspot.com/>



Francis and his proud Mom

On April 20th, I drove my car to the nearest train station which is still ...22 miles from my home. I live in Central Massachusetts but in that case "central" means that I'm 22 miles away from the nearest station either way, east or west.

The commuter train took me to the downtown of Boston so for the first time I could experience the excitement of being at the finish line of the Boston Marathon. Until now my "reserved spot" was on the 21st mile near BC (Boston College) close to Cleveland Circle.

This time I knew that some friends would be cheering at several places along the route (26.2 miles total), but none would wait at the end, so I decided to wait there and see how it looked from the other side. I had traveled to watch the marathon many times before, each time cheering my husband Jacek, and other friends from our town. This time was different. Our son Francis decided to run as well. Jacek has done seven marathons so far, five in Boston, two in NYC.

Francis grew up watching his father run so there was no surprise. He ran half a marathon in Warsaw and did fine. Twice before in Boston, he jumped in at Woodland (metro station) on the 16th mile, and continued for the last 10 miles. (It's cheating but he had no number and often family members jump in for the last mile or so and continue with the runner to the finish line, just for support.)

People who stood next to me on the 21st mile saw Francis running by, waving, all smiles! So they made comments about how good he looked! Of course he looked good for someone who finished. He had only run about five miles to this point!

Francis did that twice in two years; he was still playing other sports so we did not let him go all the way, afraid that he might get injured. This time he trained with the school team and was fundraising for a good cause--obesity among children. I was

probably more nervous about him running than Jacek. Jacek just did half a marathon in Warsaw (same one as Fran did last year) and his time was 1:57 (for 13 miles) a day before the race, Francis announced that he would be running dressed up as a ...banana.

OK...maybe he lost a bet, I thought...

"At least write your name on your chest so people can scream it along the way." I know that those in costumes of course get more attention. They get interviews and louder cheers.

Some use the situation to propose marriage.

As a preparation, there are things that runners do like use Vaseline between their toes and... crotch., or put band aids over their nipples. You don't want your picture taken wearing a bloody T-shirt. Also they usually wear old ragged clothes so they may toss them as they run. We used to have an "international team" of runners from West Brookfield (all 4 of them!) and you should see them on the morning of the race. They looked like ...homeless in thrift-store clothes.

The race starts in Hopkinton, a small town in the Boston suburbs, by the Charles River. From the early hours, there are tents with runners, some wearing garbage bags over their clothing to keep them warm.

While the runners are waiting...local children set up lemonade stands. Workers at local Bread & Circus cut oranges, fill cups with water for the runners, serve the hungry crowd and count the money after. Toilets, medical tents and cameras are set up. Students from local colleges dust off their drums.

Before his first marathon Jacek was told about how some people urinate in the cemetery. When you need to go, just go.

What are the chances that they are ever going to see each other again, right?

They did that in NYC on the Verrazano Bridge...That was the first marathon after 9/11. Long shooters were under the bridge, watching it, and runners peering from above. Quite a site!

Between Hopkinton and Boston there are no bridges, just greens... When you enter the campus of Wellesley College, that's where girls scream your name the loudest. Men love it! The toughest part is "Heartbreak Hill." It's not as steep as it is long, but after that, it's all down hill where the huge CITGO sign leads you to the finish line...

Don't even try to compete. I believe the last American that won was in 1983. For years Ethiopians and Kenyans have ruled! Some Russians try to "mess it up." Wanda Panfil, from Poland won it in 1991. Funny that the original race (1897) had only 16 participants. This year's race ...27,000.

The start is not fair, since only a few can actually start running right after they hear the gun. The road's width can only fit 100. "The 5000th runner across the starting line is officially allowed to subtract more than five minutes from their finishing time."

BAA (Boston Athletic Association) did not allow women for the first 69 marathons.

The first one that ever ran did so without a number and she was attacked by spectators

Justyna Ball to page 16

NEWS OF POLONIA

A MONTHLY PUBLICATION

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NEWS OF POLONIA - home delivery

Annual Subscription Rate - \$25.00

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News of Polonia

2245 E. Colorado Blvd. #104/177

Pasadena, CA 91107

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Calendar of Events

May 2, Sat., Polish Club, Laguna Woods - Polish Tea Party, Info: Irena 949-206-9122.

2, Sat., 6:00 p.m., Polish-American Association of San Diego's Annual Dinner Dance Ball at St. Therese Parish 6016 Camino Rico. Music for dancing provided by the Polonia Trio. Entertainment by the Polonia Dancers. Door prizes. For information and tickets: (619) 295-9234, (619) 583-5858, (619) 229-9141, (619) 282-0075, (858) 485-9759

3, 2009, Constitution Day, Polish School in Yorba Linda.

4, Polish Constitution Celebration - For additional information see ad on page 4

6 & 7, Modjeska Historic House, Warszawa Restaurant and Ganna Walska Gardens - An Excursion, Reservations deadline: March 27. Info: Irena 949-206-9122

16 & 17 Gone with the Film Festival- Agnieszka (filmed in Lodz) will be shown at the Barnsdall Gallery Theater 4800 Hollywood Blvd. Hollywood Info: (818) 365-0888 (Jody).

30, Commemoration of 218th Anniversary of the Polish Constitution of May 3rd 1791 "Poland Forever", Depictions of famous Poles in history, dinner and dancing at the Pasadena Elks Lodge, Info: Marty 626-577-9797. (AD on page 10 for more info.)

Jun 7, Sun., Day of Brotherhood 20th Anniversary Celebration, Polish Parish hall in Los Angeles - For additional information (323) 857-0208

14, Proud to Be Polish Festival 10:30 am to 500 p.m.- Pope John Paul II Center in Yorba Linda, CA., Information: Mietek Dutkowski tel. 714-608-0511

28, 2009, Sunday, 1:00 pm PAC Annual Election Meeting, Pope John Paul II Polish Center, Yorba Linda.

Please send information for the calendar to Bish Petryka - e-mail: zbyskoopet@aol.com ★