



Polish Profiles

They Call Me Babcia

By: **Kaya Mirecka Ploss**, Ph.D., Executive Director
Jan Karski Institute, Baltimore, MD

Every month I write about some distinguished Polish people, scholars, artists or writers. Today, I would like to write about three future "Polish Profiles," three youngsters from Poland, each one twenty one years old.

I established "Summer of Dreams Vacation," program at the American Center of Polish Culture and now conduct that children's program at The Jan Karski Institute for Tolerance and Dialogue.

In the nine years that the program existed we brought 211 youngsters from Poland for a Summer of Dreams Vacation to the United States. Every year I chose from each group a youngster to prepare him or her for a Jan Karski Scholarship to study in the United States.

The first that I chose was Magda Lechowska. The year was 2000. Magda was 13 and had spent all her life in an orphanage in Łódź. The following year Kasia Frączek, from the mountain region of Poland, was chosen. The third was Maciej Frączek (no relation to Kasia). Maciej is from Jedwabne.

Once I chose the three future recipients for a four year scholarship I took it upon myself to prepare them for the studies here. We sent each one of them every year money to pay for English lessons and I personally invited each one of them every year to spend a month with me, here in the United States. This September they will start their third year.

It was a gamble but it paid off beautifully. Maciej and Magda are studying business and Kasia is going to be a nurse. Each one of them is an excellent student and we are all very proud of them. We are absolutely sure that each one, one day will be worthy to write about them as "Polish Profiles."

Of course I have responsibilities towards them. Summer vacation Kasia and Maciej go home to Poland to be with their parents. Magda, however, is an orphan, and has no one to travel to, so she spends the summers with me in Washington, DC. I also signed an agreement with the College where they study that during Easter, Thanksgiving and any other vacation I will take care of them. They usually spend time at my home or I take them to Florida.

Except for Magda, who is not sure if she will return to Poland. having no family there, Kasia and Maciej are definitely returning to Poland after they finish their studies here. That makes me very happy - that they will take back with them the knowledge that they acquired here.

When they asked me how they should call me, Pani Kaya or Mrs. Ploss I suggested that they call me Babcia. And they do. Each time they call me Babcia I have a lump in my throat and I thank God that he has sent me those three wonderful young people who have become like my grandchildren.

The next three youngsters that I am preparing for a four year scholarship to study here will arrive in two years time. I have already chosen them and spoke about scholarships for them at the University of Chicago with the Lieutenant Governor of Illinois Mr. Pat Quinn. It looks promising. Now you might ask why would the Lieutenant Governor of Illinois be interested in helping Polish youngster. Because Mr. Quinn was for four years a student of Professor Karski's at Georgetown University in Washington, DC and remembers him very fondly.

Many former students of Professor Karski, who are now in very high positions, are helping us with that scholarship - which bears the name of their beloved professor *The Jan Karski Scholarship*. It makes me happy that Jan Karski's former students are honoring him in this way by helping Polish youngsters.

Let us be proud that a great man like Jan Karski is remembered in such a lovely way. I hope that each one of those students chosen by me, who call me Babcia, will make us proud.

For Jan Karski, the future of the young generation of Poles was always of great concern. I'm sure that wherever he is, he looks down upon us approvingly that we remember him in such a beautiful way by helping Polish youngsters. □



Mind Reset

By: **Justyna Ball**

Our neighbor, Brenda, is selling her house and wants us to buy it and turn into "slum lords." She suggested we should bring our parents from Poland too. What Brenda does not know that the times when it was so difficult in Poland that everybody wanted to get out and come to the US are long over. Now it's them targeting us with questions like "what are we still doing here?" But it's not Brenda's fault as no TV stations reported times changing for Central Europeans. She's average meaning she knows more about Amy Winehouse's last collapse, Kirsten Dunst going to rehab or Britney's quarrels with her mom over her mom's "tell all" book. Brenda does not know that the dollar is worth 2.02 zł (and in many places in Poland it even went down to 1.97 zł.).

Brenda, like many others, lives in a world created for her by the media. How ridiculous has that world become? Several days ago, a major US news channel broadcasted pictures of Sarah Jessica Parker with and without her birthmark (If you don't know who she is, you must have heard about "Sex In the City", the show she was in). They called "it" (her birthmark, that is)... famous. I feel terrible as I did not know she had one, and I did not know it was famous. Darn it! I missed it again... I better start looking for others with birthmarks or... I will die not knowing!

Brenda breathes the media's propaganda with the air. She absorbs it, because in the US, there are no other alternatives. Whether she has a TV or shops at supermarkets, she's exposed. Even if she claims not to be bothered with some tampered news, she believes in other news. So do people have switches to the true information and another switch blocking the news created for us from the propagandist's list? You know, the way we block viruses in our computers? What makes her think that the time in other countries, while walls tumbled down, gas prices rocketed and wars were induced, stood still?

For \$20 a month extra, I have access to Polish channels and an additional \$2 buys me Euro news.

In it, Palestinians are humans and Jewish people are like every other people, no privileges there.

Poles can be young and intelligent and not necessarily old and conservative or "traditionally" nationalistic.

Although the Euro news too may slip up. In a segment about living in a world without cash but cards only, they showed a single mother in Great Britain who does all her business using plastic and already had several accounts. In contrast, there was this old farmer couple in Poland who lived without setting up a single account. What the commentator suggested was that in the future, the old couple has to have an account because they will not survive as all transactions will be done through it. But I saw it differently. The girl in Britain, it was said, had great debt and one of the banks had helped her to set up a payment plan to get rid of it. That was the point the TV crew was making, banks helping deal with debt, while the Polish couple lived debt free and I believe, I bet my pinky on it, that the table they invited the reporter to sit at, was in the kitchen that was in the house that was built on land that belonged to them. They owned it. It was theirs. Not the bank's. Not anybody else's.

I'll take the assets of that old couple over the payment book of that British girl any day.

Before I knew all that, my first days as an immigrant in America were preoccupied by the ambition to learn English as quickly as possible. That was why we did not move into a Polish community. I set up dictionaries in every room, and I searched for the right sentence in my collection of The Beatles songs that I memorized at 15 but did not understand the meaning. I realize now that those texts are now ready to use for me courtesy of Lennon and McCartney.

That's right...the famous duo's lyrics came in handy. "Help" or "We Can Work It Out" has a different and more serious meaning now, just as much as "With a Little Help From Your Friends" and "Carry That Weight" became reality.

While I did everything in my power not to call myself "I'm a Loser."

After all these years, "I Should Have Known Better," but at the end "I Feel Fine."

I couldn't avoid little misunderstandings like arguing with my friend, Betty about having my door closed or locked up. Before I got my driver's license, she picked me up for a doctor's appointment and while halfway there, she asked if I had locked up the apartment door for which I replayed (having only some understanding of what

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Calendar of Events

Jul 27, Sun, 2:00 to 5:00 pm., Warsaw Uprising of 1944; Unknown History, film/discussion presented by PAC, PAHA and the Consulate General of the Republic of Poland in Los Angeles at Loyola Marymount University, University Hall 1000, Auditorium, LMU Drive. Admission \$5.00 (Please see page 1 for more details.)

Aug 10, Sun, Polish Day at Alpine Village sponsored by PNA Orange County Centennial Lodge, Information Tony Nowak (951) 808-9580.

16, Sat, Steak Fry sponsored by Fr. Jerzy Popieluszko Council Knights of Columbus, Information: Tony (714) 671-6892.

24, Sun, 10:30 am - Polish Patriotic Anniversaries of 20th Century in Yorba Linda

Sep 7, Sun, Forgotten Odyssey film to commemorate the 69th Anniversary of the beginning of WWII. Information: (949)206-9122.

14, Sun, 12:30 pm. Polish American Congress meeting in Yorba Linda - Nominations for Polonia Award. Information: (626) 577-9797.

20 and 21- Sat and Sun, Dożynki at Pope John Paul II Polish Center, 3999 Rose Dr., Yorba Linda.

24, Wed, 11:00 am. Board of Directors meetings at Clubhouse Six, Polish Club of Laguna Woods, Free lunch. Information: 949-206-9122.

28, Sun, Bazaar at Our Lady of Bright Mount Parish, 3424 W. Adams Blvd., Los Angeles.

Oct 1, Wed, Jamestown, (Virginia) - Celebration of 400th Anniversary of Arrival of First Poles to Jamestown

11 and 12, Sat and Sun, Polish Festival at Fr. Maximilian Maria Kolbe Polish Mission in San Diego.

12, Sun, 2:30 pm. Life and Music of Jan Ignacy Paderewski, Auditorium Concert, Clubhouse Three, organized by The Polish Club of Laguna Woods, Information: 949-206-9122.

19, Sun, Banquet after the Holly Mass at noon organized by the Friends of John Paul II Foundation at the Parrish Hall of Our Lady of the Bright Mount Church at 3424 W. Adams Blvd., Los Angeles, Information: (626)281-0516. Guest from Rome will attend "bishop Wyleżek.

19, Sun, 10:30 am "30th Anniversary of John Paul II Election & 24th Anniversary of Fr. J. Popieluszko Martyrdom in Yorba Linda. Information: ((760) 863-5302.

Nov 8, Sat, 5:00 pm. Polka Night organized by The Polish Club of Laguna Woods in Clubhouse Two, Information: (949)206-9122.

Dec 7, Sun, 1:30 pm. Polish American Congress "Oplatek" luncheon and Polonia Awards presentation at the Our Lady of the Bright Mount church hall - Los Angeles.

13, Sat, Christmas Celebration, Clubhouse 7 - The Polish Club of Laguna Woods, Information: (949)206-9122

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