

# Polanki, Inc.

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## Polanki Meeting April 8

The April general meeting of Polanki, Inc., will be held on Friday, April 8, in the dining room of Villa St. Francis at 7:30 p.m. As the Annual Pierogi Dinner is on the tenth, final instructions will be given. **Judy is in need of volunteers. If you haven't volunteered for the Pierogi dinner, we need you!!**

**SPEAKER:** Denna Flemming's topic is *Adventures of a Young Adult in Poland*.

### HOSTESSES:

Ewa Barczyk  
Denna Flemming  
Devon Flemming  
Nadine Flemming  
Wanda Kosmalski  
Heddy Moskaluk  
Barbara Rutkowski

### *From the President's Pen*

Happy Easter to the Polanki Family! I wish you and your families a Blessed Easter season. On March 13, a group of members met for a workshop facilitated by Dana Michaels to discuss the Polanki website redesign. It was a fruitful day. We discussed audiences who visit the website as well as the information we would like on the website. This subcommittee will continue to meet as this is an ongoing project. It will be exciting once the new website is unveiled. Thanks to the volunteers who helped out at Syrena's Świącone on March 20. It was apparent that the attendees enjoyed the Polanki sales booth. It was an excellent event, and I know Syrena appreciated the Bolesławiec bowl Polanki donated as a raffle item. April is definitely a busy month for Polanki. We have many events and the need for many volunteers. April 3 is the Spring Bazaar at the Polish Center. April 10 is the Pierogi Dinner at the Polish Center. April 24 is the Scholarship Awards Tea. Polanki would not be successful

without your commitment. Thank you for your ongoing dedication. It is appreciated. As always, please feel free to contact me at 414-897-7336, 414-430-1482, or [daflemming@msn.com](mailto:daflemming@msn.com) with any questions, concerns, or suggestions.



# Sophia Bruskiewitz 1927-2016



Life member Sophie Bruskiewitz passed away March 12, 2016. Sophie and her twin sister and best friend Casmira (Katie), came into this world on March 4, 1927, born in Milwaukee. A graduate of Bay View High School, she worked in her parent's bakery where she perfected the art of baking and cake decorating. She won over her husband Len with a cheesecake. Plotting a match without her knowledge, her sisters called Len and told him to stop by because Sophie had baked a cheesecake. That was the start of a beautiful relationship that lasted 61 years.

Sophie was proud of her Polish heritage, having traveled to Poland several times. The Poles asked her what part of Poland she was from. Her Polish was excellent but they couldn't place her accent.

She worked alongside Len at the Bruskiewitz Funeral Home while raising seven children. She spent hours baking apple pies, prune-filled Pączki, and cheese babkas. She shared her baked goods with friends and relatives and delivered them to homebound individuals. Helping others in the community was a life long passion for Sophie.

An avid sports fan, Sophie loved the Green Bay Packers—win or lose, Marquette (nee Warriors) Golden Eagles basketball and Boston College football. Later in life she became a Milwaukee Brewers fan, but we think she enjoyed the games because she liked Miller Park Stadium.

She loved to travel and go shopping for a bargain; knitting for every new baby in the family; and hosting fabulous parties, often with only a few hours' notice. She will be remembered for her decorated cakes, infectious smile and expressive, sparkly green eyes. She wouldn't go anywhere without wearing lipstick or L'Air du Temps perfume.

Sophie joined Polanki in April, 1997. For Polanki Sophie baked, worked in all three booths at Folk Fair—food, sales, and cultural; and she worked Polish Fest with her good buddy Rita Michalak.



- 4/10 Kathy Wiczorek
- 4/11 Sue Zblewski
- 4/18 Barbara Januchowski
- 4/27 Joe Shaw
- 4/28 Margie Hess

## Get Well Wishes to

Sustaining member Joyce Hryniewicki who fell recently;

Active member Carol Powers will be having surgery on her leg; and

Active member Halina Sosnowski who had eye surgery.

## Our Deepest Sympathy to

the family and friends of Life member Sophia Bruskiwicz who passed away March 12;

Sustaining member Angela Glowacki whose husband Leon passed away March 11; and

Active member Ewa Melenchuk whose mother-in-law passed away March 7.

## Coming Events

April 10 Pierogi Dinner, Polish Center

April 24 Awards Tea, Polish Center

June 17-19 Polish Fest—35th anniversary

October 16 Soup Festival, Norway House

Jan. 29, '17 Christmas Party at PCW

## Community Corner

**Torsk suppers at Norway House:** \$13 adults; 4-7 p.m., 4/23/16

**April 3, Spring Bazaar,** 10 a.m. to 3 p.m.

An afternoon of art, crafts, food and fun

New this year! Celebrate the end of winter with the Drowning of Marzanna, performed by the Syrenka Polish Children's Folk Dance Ensemble and Polish School of Wisconsin at noon.

Opening reception for new art exhibit—Poland Beautiful: Polish scenes in the work of Milwaukee and Chicago area artists.

**April 23, Concert:** Polish Music with Kamil Tokarski and Elżbieta Tokarska, 7 p.m.

The dynamic young pianist Kamil Tokarski dazzled the Polish Center audience last October with his solo recital of works by Fryderyk Chopin.

Now he reappears with his sister, violinist Elżbieta Tokarska, to perform a program of Polish music by two of Poland's greatest composers: Fryderyk Chopin and Henryk Wieniawski.

Adults: \$15; seniors & PHA members: \$12.



## Katyn: More than a Massacre

By Martin J. Kozon  
winner of the Stanley F. and Helen Balcerzak Award

In the spring of 1943, the German army came across a discovery when they occupied the western territories of the Soviet Union. Near the city of Smolensk and deep in the Katyń forest, thousands of tied up and shot bodies were unearthed. Upon further examination, the Nazis concluded the victims were part of the Polish army, with overwhelming evidence pointing to the Soviet Union as the perpetrators.(1) International Red Cross investigators and even American POWs had confirmed this, and the United States and Great Britain concurred. But their wartime ally, the Soviet Union, vehemently denied these findings and the subsequent accusations. The Katyń massacre would be censored by the Allied powers for the remainder of the war, and even decades after its conclusion. It was not until 1990 when the Soviet Union admitted its guilt and handed

over previously classified documents to Poland. Katyń was not just a grisly war crime; it was an attempt to destroy the Polish nation. A moral crime had been committed by the world in preventing its truth from coming out.

Thousands of Polish POWs who fought against the Soviet Union in September 1939 were interned in three camps, later systematically executed and buried a few months later in April 1940. (2) What is largely unknown is that their families were victims too. Thousands were uprooted and deported to Siberia, while some hundreds were less fortunate and killed.(3) Orphaned children were forced into Russian homes and schools where they underwent Russification.(4) What links all these actions together is that these individuals were targeted because they were Polish, an obstacle in the Soviet Union's attempt to not just erase Poland's borders but its national and cultural existence as well.

The other side to Katyń was the failure of Poland's allies to address and rectify this crime. Engaged in a struggle against fascism, both the U.S. and Great Britain decided that the war effort was more important than upsetting and alienating their Soviet ally. Military politics had taken a priority over justice. But the chilling story lies in the postwar developments over Katyń. It was purposely censored, as with the case of the Pentagon losing the "Van Vliet file" or its own Ambassador to Poland Arthur Bliss Lane's accounts being dismissed.(5) Although the Madden Commission reopened the investigation in 1952 during the Cold War, it wasn't until 2012 when the U.S. released its files that pointed to a cover up.(6) Great Britain also turned away from the matter, delaying its declassification of documents thirty years after the event. To this day, neither country has apologized for its actions in suppressing the truth.

To acknowledge an event that one had direct or indirect ties to would mean acknowledging guilt for it. Perhaps this is why the United States and Great Britain refuse to apologize for ignoring this infamous event in Polish history. It may be that they do not want to be grouped with the crimes of Stalinism, something present-day Russians attempt to cope with while separating it from their country's achievements throughout history.(7) But Poland is still left in the crossroads, searching for the whole truth while preventing the past from affecting its present day relations with Russia. The 2011 Smolensk catastrophe is linked with Katyń: another tragedy seventy years later and Poland's national life and unity damaged by the loss of a portion of its leadership. It raised new questions about Katyń but also strained relations with Russia, which had improved since 1992.

But what can Katyń teach us about history or even politics? It deserves an explanation so that future generations can prevent such a crime from being forgotten or reoccurring. Its case for being labeled a "genocide" is obscured by too much litigation and politics.(8) And while genocide still occurs, a step towards preventing crimes against humanity may just be a greater understanding of the past and not obstructing the truth from coming out. It is imperative to set aside political differences, and fully declassify all documents on Katyń. A joint commission with historians from both countries could help eliminate discrepancies and create a uniform understanding and acknowledgment of it. Until then, ill will and open wounds will prevail over peace and coexistence between Poland and Russia.

Katyń is just one example where history can influence the outcome of nations and their respected states. It cannot be subordinated to politics or ethnic/cultural cleavages that already divide people. Its place should not just reside in Polish history, but in world history. The harrowing tale needs to be remembered and serve as a lesson that silence and the suppression of truth are the most dangerous weapons. If continued, they only serve to create a vicious cycle where crimes continue to be carried out, left unpunished, and morally bankrupting humanity. But the sliver of bright light that Katyń and even the Smolensk catastrophe shed

upon the world, is that a nation like Poland can persevere and overcome the many obstacles it faces when tragedy strikes.

#### NOTES

1. J.K. Zawodny's *Death in the Forest* (New York: Hippocrene, 1962) and Louis FitzGibbon's *Unpitied and Unknown* (London: Bachman & Turner, 1975) go into great detail on the exhumation and examination of the corpses. For details, consult Zawodny, 18, 83-93. FitzGibbon, 30.
2. Anna Cienciala, Natalia Lebedeva, and Wojciech Materski's *Katyń: A Crime Without Punishment* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007) in my opinion is the best monograph on the event. Each chapter contains a well-written summary of the events, followed by reprints of important declassified Soviet government documents. The book covers the complete story line from arrests and internment all the way to state commemorations held in the 1990s.
3. Estimates range on the number of deportees, with ones as high as about one million individuals (mostly women and children). Chapter 10 of Allen Paul's *Katyń: The Untold Story of Stalin's Polish Massacre* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1991) contains primary sources that retell the deportations from the eyes of Polish survivors.
4. The Polish language was not just targeted. History was censored, and cultural symbols were destroyed. Maria Binienda-Szonert, "Was Katyń a Genocide?" *Case Western Reserve Journal of International Law* 44, (2012), 664-665, 702, 705.
5. Lane once remarked, "Why was it that persons who wished to bring out the truth, including myself, were urged by people in the State Department to forget the matter, because of the impact it might have on our relations with the Soviet Union?" Robert Szymczak, "Cold War Crusader: Arthur Bliss Lane and the Private Committee to Investigate the Katyń Massacre, 1949-1952," *Polish American Studies* 67, (2010), 26, 28.
6. Tomasz Zalewski, "USA odsłaniają tajemnice Katynia," *Nowy Dziennik*, September 10, 2012; "US 'hushed up' Soviet guilt over Katyń," *BBC News Europe*, 11 September, 2012.
7. "Perpetrators hope to keep their nation from acquiring an indelible moral stain." John Connelly, "The Ultimate Crime: Katyń & the Invention of Genocide," *Commonweal* 137, (2010), 19. Benjamin Fischer concludes, "Russians cannot look at Katyń without seeing themselves in the mirror of their own history." Benjamin Fischer, "The Katyń Controversy: Stalin's Killing Fields," *Central Intelligence Agency Center for the Study of Intelligence* 11, (2000), 68.
8. The Polish government has been looking into the legal process of having Katyń recognized as genocide. "Apel do prezydenta: nazywajmy Katyń ludobojstwem," *Nowy Dziennik*, April 19, 2011, pgs. 1,4. Binienda-Szonert's article centers around the question of whether Katyń can be considered genocide. Although convincing, she concedes that litigation and politics truly stand in the way of the event ever being recognized as genocide.

***Volunteers are needed for the Pierogi Dinner! Please sign up!***

# Wojtek, the Polish Soldier-Bear at Monte Cassino!

By Robert Strybel

All Poles and many Pol-Ams know about General Anders' Second Corps that left the "Inhuman Land" (USSR), traveled through Persia (Iran) Iraq, Palestine and Egypt, captured the Nazi fortress at Monte Cassino, helped liberate Bologna and Ancona in Italy and finally ended up in the British Isles. But not too many know in Poland and fewer yet in Polonia have ever heard about Wojtek the Bear who accompanied them along the entire route. He was even said to have supplied Polish troops with ammunition during the Battle of Monte Cassino.

It all began in the hills around the town of Hamadan, Persia, where Polish soldiers encountered a scrawny, famished little Persian boy holding a sack with something moving inside. He eagerly sold the little bear cub for two tins of SPAM like meat, and the Second Corps's 22<sup>nd</sup> Artillery Supply Company had itself a mascot which it called Wojtek (VOY-tek).

The boy said the cub's mother had been shot, when he was still blind, so Wojtek probably had not ever seen another bear and was to go through life thinking he was human. The soldiers stuck a rag nipple onto a vodka bottle and fed Wojtek diluted canned condensed milk. But bears grow up fast. Within a year he was the size of a St. Bernard dog, and eventually he would be six feet tall and weigh in at 550 pounds.

Wojtek hated to sleep alone in his crate and often bunked down in one of the soldiers' tents. He loved sweets and beer and even an occasional cigarette, although by today's standards the anti-cruelty types would surely rant and rave. And he was crazy about the shower room, often pulling the cord and emptying the company's entire water supply on himself. He also enjoyed good natured wrestling but never hurt anyone. After easily flooring a rival, he would lick his face.

One night soldiers heard a ghastly outcry and sprang from their bunks to find a terrified howling Wojtek who had come across an unexpected Arab trying to get close to the company's weapons. In Italy, when two soldiers had a hard time lifting an ammunition crate at Monte Cassino, Wojtek easily picked it up and carried it to where it was needed. The cartoon-style logo of a bear carrying an artillery shell henceforth became 22<sup>nd</sup> Company's trademark.



The logo of Wojtek the Soldier-Bear graced the sides of 22<sup>nd</sup> Artillery Supply Company vehicles.

Wojtek traveled with his comrades aboard the Polish troop ship *Batory* and ended up in Scotland. After the war, when the unit was dissolved, the question arose: What about Wojtek? The loveable bruin was too much to handle for any single family. It was finally decided to entrust him for safekeeping to the Glasgow Zoo until he could be moved to free Poland. Some of the veterans would visit Wojtek at the zoo, and he always livened up at the sound of familiar Polish speech. They threw him treats and occasionally a lit cigarette which he puffed with enjoyment. But he died there in 1963 of natural causes more than a quarter-century before Poland would throw off the Soviet yoke.

There have been occasional articles about Wojtek in different countries, but his most complete story was "Wojtek spod Monte Cassino" written by Polish war veteran Wieslaw Lasocki and published in London by the emigre Polish Veterans Association. The book was later translated into English as "Soldier Bear."

When Britain's Prince Charles was visiting Imperial War Museum with his sons, a guide mentioned the Wojtek story, but he only replied: "There's no need to tell me about it. I've already read the book to my boys."

Polish American Journal, August 2010, Page 14.

## 'Pawn Stars' Pays Off Big Time!

The History Channel series about a 24-hour, family-run Sin City business sees bargain-savvy Rick Harrison and his relatives taking huge risks on what are often tiny tokens—and raking in buckets of cash to support their Gold and Silver Pawn Shop!

In one episode, Rick stumbles across a Polish Order of the White Eagle medal. The owner, who bought it at a garage sale for a measly 75 cents, sells it to Rick for \$6000—but the pawn star proves how he earned his title. He has the medal appraised by an expert.

"This is a piece that was awarded during Russia's rule of that portion of Poland," explains military memorabilia aficionado Craig Gottlieb. "This is 800 years of history here!"

And the garage sale "trinket" turns out to be worth a whopping \$40,000!

But Rick, who himself has an estimated net worth of \$8 million eventually sells the White Eagle medal for a quick 30 grand!

In every episode there's a new find. "It's truly different every week," says Rick.

And truly rewarding—so if you're digging around in the family attic or sifting through treasures at the local flea market, "Pawn Stars" offers hope for a windfall!

Globe Magazine

## Poland's Most Beloved Cartoon Character—Koziołek Matołek



American children have Mickey Mouse, British children have Winnie the Pooh, and Polish children have Koziołek Matołek, the Billy Goat. Matołek is a fictional character created by Kornel Makuszyński and illustrated by Marian Walentowicz. The comic book, first published in 1933, quickly became a cult classic, and has remained very popular since its creation until today. Makuszyński and Walentowicz created four Matołek books which are available from Amazon.com as a DVD set.

Pacanów, the quest in this comic, is a real town in Poland. Once when Makuszyński and Walentowicz were sitting in a café in Kraków, they spotted a sad-looking man at a nearby table. They asked him why he looked so glum, and he told them that he came from the small town of Pacanów and was wondering how to help the town prosper. Makuszyński and Walentowicz decided to help him by popularizing the small town in their Matołek books.

The four comic books center around the quest Matołek undertakes to find Pacanów. The Billy Goat's adventures are funny, if sometimes surreal; the hero is sweet, naive, clumsy, amusing—but not very bright. In many ways he is similar to Winnie the Pooh, who also has a heart of gold but a pea-sized brain, as he himself admits. Matołek's search for Pacanów takes him to the four corners of the Earth, from Africa to the Wild West in America, before he finally makes it back to Poland.

The story has patriotic undertones, and Matołek is often homesick for Poland during the many adventures that take him all over the world and even to the moon. Matołek is a beloved character of many generations of Polish children.



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Polanki, Inc.  
P. O. Box 341458  
Milwaukee, WI 53234  
[www.polanki.org](http://www.polanki.org)  
414-858-9357

*Editor*

*Geraldine Reszel*  
[greszel@wi.rr.com](mailto:greszel@wi.rr.com)

*President*

*Denna Flemming*