



Polish Heritage Festival 2012 A Great Success!

NEW JERSEY - The 40th Annual Polish Heritage Festival, sponsored by the Polish American Heritage League, was held on Sunday, June 3rd at the PNC Bank Arts Center in Holmdel, New Jersey. The festival began with a Polish/English Mass. After Mass, Mrs. Dorothy (Dottie) Sowchuk, the long-serving President of the Polish American Heritage League (PAHL), welcomed festival goers and introduced the Chair of this year's festival, Mrs. Jadzia (Heidi) Kopala. President Sowchuk, who delivered her welcoming remarks in Polish and English, observed that preparations for the annual festival require much hard and time consuming work by volunteers, and described in detail how Mrs. Kopala did an outstanding job as Chair by coordinating and motivating the efforts of the volunteers. President Sowchuk underlined the fact that a strong sense of patriotism, that is love of country, and devotion to the Roman Catholic Church, inform Mrs. Kopala's commitment to volunteer her services to Polonia. Moreover, President Sowchuk emphasized the point that the continuing success of the annual festival depends on this spirit of volunteerism on behalf of America and Poland.

The Secretary of the PAHL and this year's Chair of the PAHL's Scholarship Committee, Mrs. Izabella G. Szutkowski, announced the winners of this year's PAHL Scholarship Competition. Mrs. Szutkowski delivered, in both Polish and English, a first-rate speech, which describes the benefactors of the Lubomir and Irene Zabilski Scholarship and introduces this year's awardees. Her speech is as follows:

"Dear Ladies and Gentlemen,

Welcome to this year's Lubomir and Irene Zabilski Scholarship as administered by the officers, trustees and members of the Polish American Heritage League. Each one of the students will receive a scholarship check in the amount of \$1000.00. But before I introduce to you this year's winners and their individual accomplishments, I would like to take this opportunity to say a word to you about the benefactors of this scholarship. This will be an abbreviated version of what is written in each of the certificates that will be presented to the scholarship winners.

Lubomir Zabilski was born in Poland in 1915. He immigrated to the United States after World War II and lived in New York City before eventually moving to Cranford, New Jersey.

He was a graduate of the Polish Naval Academy at Gdynia and served as a cadet on the tall ship Dar Pomorza, during her voyage from August 16, 1934 to September 4, 1935 when she became the first Polish sailing vessel to circumnavigate the globe. Later, he became Master of the Dar Pomorza and eventually sailed her to Britain in 1939 to evade the Nazis.

During the War he served as a Captain in the Merchant Marine and commanded vessels carrying



Left to Right: Dorothy Sowchuk, Isabella Szutkowski, Sara Pelka, Natalie Trochimiuk, Patrick Ozarek and Jadzia (Heidi) Kopala. Missing from photo is Matthew Stefanski.

war supplies between Canada and Britain. He survived three sinkings before the war finally ended. After the war he was ordered to return to Poland with his ship but fearing imminent arrest by the government in Poland, he refused and chose to immigrate to the United States. In 1992, however, Zabilski and his wife, Irene traveled to his birthplace where the Polish Government awarded him the prestigious cross of service at the Naval School that he attended in Gdynia.

After immigrating to the United States, he entered Cooper Union in New York City and in 1960 graduated with a degree in electrical engineering. He was an electrical engineer with Ebasco of New York City for twenty-five years before retiring in 1980.

His wife of thirty years was Irene (Rozanski) Zabilski. She was born in South Plainfield, New Jersey and was a graduate of Rutgers University where she majored in business. She was employed as a secretary by the Muhlenberg Hospital in Plainfield. In 1994 Irene Zabilski predeceased her husband who died on June 18, 1997. Both are interred in our Lady of Czestochowa Cemetery, Doylestown, Pennsylvania.

And now a few words about our students and the amazing goals they have achieved. I will first introduce you and your accomplishments and then I will ask you to come up to get your certificate. When I read your name please step forward, when I finish reading your bio, Mrs. Sowchuk will hand you the scholarship and certificate.

In alphabetical order

Mr. Patrick Ozarek is currently studying Biomedical Engineering at the College of New Jersey with a desire to pursue graduate study in the field of neural engineering. This past semester he actively contributed to the design of an infant respiratory rate monitor. He is also an executive board member of the TCNJ Polish Club organizing Polish themed events attended by over 500 attendees and hosting various fundraisers. He also has been active in the Engineers Without Borders chapter at his school, working on a water treatment system for poorer communities. *Patrick, Congratulations!*

Miss Sara Pelka is currently studying at Rutgers University with concentrations in Physics and

Chemistry with a desire to become a physicist at Brookhaven National Laboratory. In addition to her rigorous studies in the sciences and math, Ms. Pelka assists teachers in the Polish School in South Amboy under ZPA patronage, assists in the Little Miss Talent Contest at our Festival and also teaches children self defense through Karate. *Sara, Congratulations.*

Ms. Natalie Trochimiuk is currently studying systems engineering at the George Washington University with the intent to pursue a master's degree in Systems Engineering and Operations Research. In addition to pursuing this area of engineering, Ms. Trochimiuk is also taking courses in the area of Patent Law in the hopes of combining her engineering expertise with her interests in how to safeguard engineering inventions. Ms. Trochimiuk's ultimate goal is to strive for PHD degree. To keep her Polish heritage alive, she participates in her College's Polish Club. *Natalie, Congratulations.*

Mr. Matthew Stefanik unfortunately could not be with us today. Mr. Stefanik is currently studying International Relations at the American University. He has worked in the Office of Congressman Albio Sires, has volunteered in the Pilsudski Institute of Modern Research of Poland and has worked as an Assistant Counselor in the American Legion Jersey Boy's State. He has worked extensively with various other aspects of the Polish American Community and had the opportunity to meet the Former Polish Deputy Prime Minister and Finance Minister Grzegorz Kolodko. *Matthew, Congratulations.*

Aren't they just amazing! These are the faces of the future of Polish America. I have to tell you, this type of initiative To apply for a scholarship ... to proactively do something to better ones future, is what scholarship and resiliency are all about.

And I can tell you, this type of initiative is not always easy. As children of immigrants, these students are pioneers of their own future. And I, as an American, a Polish American, born to Polish immigrants, and having gone through the school system here know exactly what type of initiative is required of these students to

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By Ewa Bronowicz

POLISH IN AMERICA: A Profile

The Two Lives of Krystyna Zieba

"If you don't like what you do, change it" is advice that Krystyna Zieba likes to offer to people. "Otherwise you will poison your own life and lives of others," she adds. She is certainly one to talk—she has done many things she wanted to do in her life. And she never regrets the biggest change in her life: leaving her native Poland to try out life in the USA—perhaps because she didn't exactly plan it. She came here, liked it, and has decided to stay here indefinitely.



Photo by Patrycja Lesyk

KRYSTYNA ZIEBA

But the change was immense. Zieba, who turned 40 last fall, lives in Ridgefield,

Connecticut, says the little suburban hamlet reminds her of her home town, Rabka, located in southern Poland, one hour south of Krakow. She grew up in Glisne, a nearby village. She remembers that the village had 51 addresses: 50 houses and 1 church. Her family had cows, chickens, dogs, cats, turkeys, horses, pigs, and sheep. During the school year, it went without saying, that school was her biggest priority. But in the summer, she worked on the farm. She would get up at 6am and tend to the sheep with her grandfather. She found it boring, but now says she would love to do it again. "I didn't grow up in poverty, I grew up in simple conditions," she explains to people who tell her how hard it must have been to be poor when they find out she grew up on a farm. In fact, all of Zieba's childhood food was organic since her family's farm was entirely self-sufficient, and all their food (i.e. milk, cheese, eggs) was produced at home or obtained from the farm. Even now, asked about her favorite Polish delicacy, she mentions whole wheat bread with butter (both homemade), and honey from the neighbor's bees. Every time she visits her family in Poland, at least once every two years, her mom prepares what, to Zieba, is now a feast and a 'welcome home' ritual.

Zieba's grandmother was born in Pennsylvania; however her grandparents later returned to Poland. Thanks to that, her father, and then Zieba herself, received the right to live and work in the United States (i.e. a 'green card'). Zieba came here 25 years ago, for six months, to test American waters. She isn't a typical immigrant—with a teaching degree in education? and a fulfilling job in the field under her belt, she had a lot to go back to. "I came here for 6 months. If I liked it, I'd stay. If I didn't, I'd go back," she said explaining her decision. Her cousin, Marysia, who lives in Connecticut and to whom she will be eternally grateful, forced her to go to school right away. Zieba spoke no English. It was Marysia who signed her up for English language classes. Zieba remembers her endless hours spent in a local library, translating cooking recipes. "The most basic thing like buying groceries would take me forever because I had to translate everything," she recalls. She eventually received an associate's degree in computer science from a local community college, later supplemented by a bachelor's degree in management and information systems. She started as an intern in a computer company. **Her journey from a Polish farm to an American firm is a true success story: she is now a supervisor in the IT department of a large, multinational American electronics company.**

Zieba is generous to her friends, with whom she spends a lot of her free time. She is open to the idea of marriage, but is currently not dating, perhaps because she knows exactly what she wants, and is unwilling to compromise. Religion is still a big part of her life. She goes to church every Sunday. "My mom asks me every week if I went to church," she says with a smile, but adds that she would attend mass anyway. She talks with nostalgia about religious traditions and ceremonies from her childhood. The entire village would participate. "It's sad that children here don't have that," she says, but also acknowledges that even in Poland some customs are gradually dying out.

Asked what it means to be Polish, she says it means to have had the experience of growing up in a place that is so drastically different from the United States. Zieba was born under Communism, and remembers life under the regime, as well as the gradual and massive changes that took place after the fall of Communism. She is proud of Poland, of being Polish. She is proud to be her parents' daughter. After all, it is her father's wisdom that helped her arrive at her current destination: *Jak sie działo topi, to go popchnil.* This can be loosely translated as: "sink or swim."

Dear Readers of the Post Eagle: this is a new column especially for you! Every two months, I will present to you a Polish person living in the United States. They may be famous, infamous or virtually unknown—but they must have an interesting story to tell. If you have any comments or suggestions, please feel free to contact me via my website: www.literatka-nyc.com.

