

Were Jews Excluded from the Jagiellonian University?

Rosalie Silberman Abella, a former Supreme Court of Canada judge, has gone out of her way to publicize her father's plight at Kraków's Jagiellonian University. Allegedly, he was "one of only four" or "one of the very few" or "one of just a handful of" Jews admitted into the law faculty in 1930, due to the existence of a stringent, discriminatory quota ("numerus clausus") on the admission of Jews. Moreover, he was allegedly subjected to segregated seating that was imposed on Jewish students at the time. Nonetheless, he was a "brilliant" student. These claims – exposed as hoaxes – were publicized and nurtured for decades.

The relentless nature of the charges

The following are some of the publications where these claims has been advanced repeatedly over the course of several decades.

- Opening Address at the Law Society of Upper Canada's Benchers' Retreat, October 14, 1999, Internet: <http://www.ontariocourts.on.ca/coa/en/ps/speeches/professionalism.htm>
 - "he was one of only 4 admitted to the law school in a class of over 100. The Jewish students were assigned special seats in the lecture rooms."
- Donna Bailey Nurse, "Just 'Rosie'," *University of Toronto Magazine*, Winter 2006, Internet: <http://www.magazine.utoronto.ca/winter-2006/rosalie-abella-supreme-court-of-canada-women-judges/>
 - "he was one of only four Jews permitted entry under quotas"
- 350th Commencement, Yale University – Honorary Degrees, May 23, 2016, Internet: <http://news.yale.edu/sites/default/files/imce/HDProgram-5-20-16.pdf>
 - "one of only four Jewish students in his law school class at the Jagiellonian University in Kraków"
- Rosalie Abella, "Justice and Peace," *The Walrus*, June 1, 2016, Internet: <https://thewalrus.ca/justice-and-peace/>
 - "Because there was a quota on the number of Jews, he was one of very few admitted. There were special seats assigned to Jewish students."
- Catherine Porter, "Revisiting Hate: 'The world has not changed,'" *Toronto Star*, July 10, 2016, Internet: <https://www.thestar.com/news/insight/2016/07/10/revisiting-europes-heart-of-darkness.html>
 - "He stood during first-year lectures, refusing to sit in the seats reserved for the few Jews permitted by a university quota system."
- Sean Fine, "Doing Justice to His Dream," *The Globe and Mail*, July 30, 2016, Internet: <http://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/national/doing-justice-to-her-fathersdream/article31207151/>
 - "he was one of just a handful of Jews accepted into the program in 1930. He also told her its classrooms had segregated seating, known as the bench ghetto, but

that he stood, stubbornly, for most of his first year, rather than submit to being set apart.”

- “The Nuremberg Symposium: An International Legal Symposium on The Nuremberg Laws & The Nuremberg Trials,” *Loyola of Los Angeles International and Comparative Law Review*, vol. 39 (2017) at p. 450, Internet: <http://digitalcommons.lmu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1742&context=ilr>
 - “My father came to the Jagiellonian University in Krakow to study law in 1930, because there was a *numerus clausus*, a quota on the number of Jews admitted to the law school; he was one of very few Jews admitted in a class of over 100. Rather than sit in the seats reserved for Jewish students in the lectures, he told me he stood through most of his first year in the University. He graduated in 1934.

These claims have been exposed as demonstrably false (see below). Yet they were renewed in a 2023 documentary film about Justice Abella.

- Sheldon Kershner, “Without Precedent: The Supreme Life of Rosalie Abella,” *The Times of Israel* (Blogs) & Sheldon Kirshner Journal, May 2, 2023, Internet: <https://blogs.timesofisrael.com/the-supreme-life-of-rosalie-abella/> <https://sheldonkirshner.com/without-precedent-the-supreme-life-of-rosalie-abella/>
 - “Jacob Silberman attended the university at a time when the number of Jews in its law faculty was governed by a numerous [sic] clausus, or Jewish quota. Silberman also learned that its classrooms were segregated on the basis of religion, and that he had to sit on a so-called ghetto bench. Refusing to abide by this blatant form of racism, he stood for most of his first year rather than submit to this antisemitic humiliation.”

Why is this invented narrative being pushed with such persistence? What is the motivation behind this?

Background

In the interwar period, universities in many countries – including Canada and the U.S.A. – imposed restrictions on the admission of Jews, Blacks and other groups. It was practically impossible for a Jewish woman to be admitted to the study of law in Canada. That did not mean, however, that Jews were underrepresented at the time, or subsequently. That hardship was borne by other groups, notably Blacks, and has been addressed in recent years by way of “affirmative action” programmes. However, inequities have not vanished everywhere. Today, in Israel, Palestinians (Arabs) continue to be significantly underrepresented at institutions of higher learning. (See “More Israeli Arabs earning degrees, but inequalities still wide,” *Globes*, March 17, 2022; Statistical Report on Arab Society in Israel: 2021, The Israel Democracy Institute, Internet: <https://en.idi.org.il/articles/38540>.)

The so-called *numerus clausus* or quota on Jews admitted to universities was pioneered in a number of European countries – outside of Poland – before and after World War I. There was a longstanding tradition of restricting Jewish admission to universities in Czarist Russia, Imperial Germany, and even the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Similar policies (or practices) were put in place from the early 1920s in Norway, Finland, Scotland, Hungary, Austria, the Baltic countries (Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania), Germany, Romania, and Yugoslavia. Jewish enrolment

plummeted. In the Soviet Socialist Republic of Belorussia (Belarus), the number of Jewish students was drastically cut to make room for Belorussians. One seldom hears about those matters. The focus is usually on Poland.

In Poland, throughout the entire interwar period, the number of Jewish students remained high – well over the Jewish share of the country’s population (a little less than 10 percent). Jewish students comprised 24.6 percent of the university population in the 1921–22 academic year, and 20 percent in 1928–29. In 1932–33, their number fell to 18.7 percent, and in 1935–36, to 13.3 percent. By 1936–37, they comprised 11.8 percent of all students, and in 1937–38, 10 percent. (See Raphael Mahler, “Jews in Public Service and the Liberal Professions in Poland, 1918–39,” *Jewish Social Studies*, vol. 6, no. 4 (October 1944), p. 341.)

How did conditions fare at the Jagiellonian University?

The facts are readily verifiable and crystal clear.

Rather than a draconian quota that virtually shut out Jews, as alleged by Justice Abella, there was in fact a pattern of significant overrepresentation of Jews at the university, especially in the field of law. In 1930–31, the year of her father’s enrolment, Jews – almost 16 percent of them women – made up more than 40 percent of the total number of law students. A total of 310 new Jewish students were accepted that year. Nor were there separate seats for Jews at the time, as Justice Abella has claimed.

The topic of Jewish students at the Jagiellonian University in the interwar period is the subject matter of an authoritative monograph published in 2004 by the Polish Academy of Learning under the title of *Żydzi – studenci Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego w Drugiej Rzeczypospolitej (1919–1939)* [Jewish Students at the Jagiellonian University during the Second Republic (1919–1939)] (Kraków: Polska Akademia Umiejętności, 2004). Based on extensive archival research, Professor Mariusz Kulczykowski’s study shows that there was no *numerus clausus* in existence before or during the period that Justice Abella’s father was enrolled at the Jagiellonian University (1930–1934), and that Jews were not segregated from non-Jews.

According to Kulczykowski’s study, **the number of self-declared Jews enrolled at the Faculty of Law of the Jagiellonian University** is as follows (at p. 66, Table 9):

- In 1926/27, of 2,144 students, 770 were Jews (including 76 females), or 35.91%;
- in 1927/28, of 2,495 students, 972 were Jews (including 117 females), or 38.96%;
- in 1928/29, of 2,525 students, 1,074 were Jews (including 121 females), or 42.54%;
- in 1929/30, of 2,565 students, 994 were Jews (119 females), or 38.75%;
- **in 1930/31, of 2,660 students, 1,084 were Jews (169 females), or 40.75%;**
- in 1931/32, of 3,096 students, 1,182 were Jews (230 females), or 38.18%;
- in 1932/33, of 3,049 students, 1,167 were Jews (246 females), or 38.28%;
- in 1933/34, of 2,970 students, 910 were Jews (191 females), or 30.64%.

Kulczykowski’s study (at pp. 501–702) lists by name **310 (new) Jewish students, among them Justice Abella’s father, accepted into the study of law in 1930**. In fact, 1930 was one of two bumper years for the admission of Jews, as the spike in the percentage of Jews over other years shows.

Kulczykowski's book is available in major libraries around the world, including the University of Toronto. There is no excuse for not accessing it, especially for someone who, like Justice Abella, purports to attach tremendous concern for the facts and is well connected to historians. Furthermore, why would a producer of a documentary not carry out basic research (verification) of this kind?

The so-called ghetto benches – separate seating for Jews – were implemented in 1937 in order to prevent disturbances that would break out at universities from time to time. They were introduced in some faculties of the Jagiellonian University in November 1938. (It is not clear whether the Faculty of Law was one of them. In any event, Justice Abella's father was long gone, having graduated several years earlier.) One does not even need to consult Kulczykowski's study for that information. News of this measure was widely publicized at the time and elicited protests worldwide. This can be readily "Googled". See, for example, "Polish 'ghetto Benches' Protested at Columbia Rally," Jewish Telegraphic Agency, October 31, 1937. What, one has to ask, is the purpose of claiming that "ghetto benches" existed at the Jagiellonian University already in 1930? Moreover, who fabricated that story, and why such relentlessness in disseminating it?

Derision instead of a quest for truth

What is particularly disturbing about the 2016 *Globe and Mail* article authored by Sean Fine (a "justice writer" at that paper) is the derision that is heaped on the Jagiellonian University official who took issue with Justice Abella's claim. He is portrayed as a "denier," that is, essentially a liar. The ugly passage, with its highly suggestive heading, reads as follows:

Facing, even now, a denial of discrimination

The morning after the Nuremberg symposium, the Abellas are in an archival room at Jagiellonian. A school official brings down a large, bound book containing records of every law student in 1930, including her father's. [...] But when she mentions the numerus clausus, the school official denies it existed, becomes agitated, can barely catch his breath as he pours out his views in Polish to Katarzyna du Vall, a young lawyer serving as interpreter. [...] Afterward, outside the building, Justice Abella is not happy.

Why this animus?

The discrepancy in the two accounts is critical: were Jews virtually excluded from the university and forced to take specially assigned seats, as Justice Abella and the article alleges, or were they not? This fundamental divergence carries with it important implications for a proper and objective assessment of the narrative and historical record.

Accounts, especially second-hand ones (passing on information one heard), can be very unreliable. In some cases, false memory could be at play. Rather than approaching Justice Abella's father's account with caution and examining the evidence carefully, the article promotes an uncritical acceptance of its accuracy and denigrates a reputable official who takes issue with it. The high-profile provenance of the claim (a Supreme Court justice who is married to a prominent historian) supposedly enhances its reliability. This approach strikes us as lacking in objectivity.

The Globe and Mail refused to publish a letter from the Canadian Polish Congress or a correction – supported by documentary evidence – regarding this matter. If a media outlet provides a broad forum to one community to air its grievances against another, then surely even-handedness would require that the aggrieved community be given an opportunity to respond. In this case, the veracity of the information submitted to counter Justice Abella’s account is beyond any doubt whatsoever. One is, therefore, left wondering – quite legitimately – why the *Globe and Mail* is so intent on keeping this information from its readers. Rather than respect the outcome of a reality check, the *Globe and Mail* champions an ethno-nationalist narrative.

Some reports – doubtless based on information provided by Justice Abella – refer to Justice Abella’s father as “a brilliant law student.” (Brandeis University, Commencement 2017, Rosalie Silberman Abella, Honorary Degree Recipient, Internet: <https://www.brandeis.edu/commencement/2017/honorees/abella.html>). In fact, as his 1934 diploma for his Master of Law degree indicates, his grades over four consecutive years (1930–1934) were as follows: good, good, good, satisfactory (“dostateczny”). Unlike many Jewish students who excelled, he was rather an average student. Thankfully, the 2023 documentary “Without Precedent: The Supreme Life of Rosalie Abella,” did not repeat the bogus claims about the stringent quotas and ghetto benches he was allegedly subjected to.

Other matters

The 2016 *Globe and Mail* article also claimed – falsely – that Emanuel Ringelblum was “shut out of medicine because of Jagiellonian’s numerus clausus.” Ringelblum never applied to study medicine at the Jagiellonian University. He applied to the University of Warsaw in 1920. Moreover, it is not at all clear that the reason for his rejection was his ethnicity or religion. There were 120 first-year places in medicine in total, with more than 300 Jewish candidates vying for a spot. Even if all the places had gone to Jews, 2/3 of them would have still faced rejection. For some, that too would have constituted ample evidence of Polish anti-Semitism. Kulczykowski’s monograph states categorically (at p. 471) that the Faculty of Medicine at the University of Warsaw rejected quotas when they were first proposed in 1923. At the time, Jews constituted 31.4 percent of the students at the University of Warsaw. Ringelblum was accepted into another field of studies (history).

Additionally, the *Globe and Mail* article contains two unwarranted generalizations which are not supported by objective evidence, namely, that Poland promotes “ethno-nationalism” and excludes Jewish suffering. Such generalizations are seldom used by the media with respect to democratic countries. In fact, levelling generalizations of this nature in relation to Israel would be denounced as demonstrating anti-Semitic animus.

The charge of “ethno-nationalism” is bizarre. Every country embraces a national narrative, but that does not necessarily preclude conveying information about the diverse aspects of that country’s past. The *Globe and Mail* article ignores Poland’s enormous efforts to keep the memory of its Jewish past alive.

Warsaw’s Museum of the History of Polish Jews POLIN is not some exception to an alleged “ethno-nationalist” agenda, as the article alleges. In addition to that museum, whose operating budget – including the salary of 120 employees – is borne entirely by Polish taxpayers (something the *Globe and Mail* article neglects to mention), the Polish state fully funds the Jewish Historical Institute in Warsaw, which employs 46 persons.

In March 2017, the Polish government, under the “nationalist” Law and Justice Party, announced plans to establish two new museums devoted to Poland’s Jewish heritage, focusing on the Warsaw Ghetto and Hassidism, and allocated 32 million złoty just to start them up. Ongoing government funding for their upkeep and staff will also have to be provided. Plans for the construction of the Warsaw Ghetto Museum are well underway (Internet: <https://1943.pl/en/>).

Later that year (2017), the Polish Parliament voted near unanimously to allocate 100 million złoty for the restoration of the Jewish cemetery in Warsaw (Internet: <https://dzieje.pl/dziedzictwo-kulturowe/sejm-100-mln-zl-dotacji-na-konserwacje-cmentarza-zydowskiego-w-warszawie>). Jewish cemeteries throughout Poland are restored and maintained by local residents.

The Polish state also finances all sorts of historical and cultural projects as well as countless scholarly publications and events on Jewish-related themes, not to mention the upkeep of Nazi German death camps and other sites of Jewish martyrdom. Various levels of government also operate, fund and subsidize many other Jewish heritage and Holocaust museums, and cultural and educational centres and initiatives such as:

- Jewish History and Culture Museum in Kraków, a branch of the History Museum of the City of Kraków (<http://www.mhk.pl/branches/old-synagogue>)
- Schindler’s Factory in Kraków, another branch of the History Museum of the City of Kraków (<https://www.muzeumkrakowa.pl/branches/oskar-schindlers-factory>)
- Museum of Mazovian Jews in Płock, a branch of the Mazovian Museum (<http://synagogaplocka.pl/en>)
- Grodzka Gate – NN Theatre Centre in Lublin, a local government cultural institution with a heavily Jewish focus (http://teatrnn.pl/node/78/the_grodzka_gate_%E2%80%93_nn_theatre_centre)
- Jewish museums in Tykocin (<http://www.muzeum.bialystok.pl/s,muzeum-w-tykocinie,47.html>), Włodawa (<http://www.muzeumwlodawa.pl>), Leszno (http://www.muzeum.leszno.pl/strona_PL/about)
- “Świętokrzyski Sztetl” Museum and Educational Centre in Chmielnik (<http://www.swietokrzyskisztetl.pl>)
- “Szydłowiec Shtetl” (“Szydłowiecki Sztetl”) Educational Cultural Centre in Szydłowiec (<http://swietokrzyskisztetl.pl>)
- “Shtetl of Tsanz” (“Sądecki Sztetl”) Educational Centre in Nowy Sącz (<http://en.sadeckisztetl.com/>)
- Sztetl Mszana Dolna Educational Centre (<https://www.sztetlmszanadolna.com/en/>)
- Galicia Jewish Museum in Kraków (with a branch in Lesko), a non-governmental institution (<http://www.galiciajewishmuseum.org/en>)
- Jewish Museum in the city of Oświęcim (not at the Auschwitz camp), a non-governmental institution (<http://ajcf.pl/en/museum/>)

By way of comparison, while Poles have settled in large numbers in many countries including Canada, none of those countries has established or funds Polish heritage museums or pays the salary of any researcher in that field. Yet various levels of government have, over the years, provided generous grants to Jewish organizations for Holocaust commemoration and education. Some of the Canadian state funding is outlined in Nate Leipciger, *The Weight of Freedom* (Toronto: Azrieli Foundation, 2015), at pp. 237–238.) The amount of funding has increased with time. In 2022, Canada’s federal government set aside more than \$70 million for initiatives

benefiting Canada's Jewish community. This includes \$25 million for a new facility for the Jewish Community Centre of Greater Vancouver, \$20 million for the relocation and expansion of the Montreal Holocaust Museum, and \$2.5 million to support the Sarah and Chaim Neuberger Holocaust Education Centre in Toronto (renamed the Toronto Holocaust Museum). (<https://www.canada.ca/en/canadian-heritage/news/2022/12/government-of-canada-invests-25-million-in-the-new-jewish-community-centre-of-greater-vancouver.html>) The federal government provided additional funding (\$500,000) for the Toronto Holocaust Museum in February 2023. The Province of Ontario made a financial contribution of \$285,000 for the Toronto Holocaust Museum in April 2022, and an additional \$500,000 in June 2023. The Polish Canadian community, on the other hand, has been virtually shut out from any significant government funding.

Poland also hosts renowned Jewish cultural festivals, such as the Jewish Culture Festival in Kraków (<http://www.jewishfestival.pl/en/jewish-culture-festival/>) and Singer's Warsaw Festival (<http://www.festiwalsingera.pl/en/>), which are second to none and attract large audiences. Jewish organizations in Poland received \$250,000 US in grants from the Polish state in 2016 for various community-based activities. The Polish community in Canada receives no comparable assistance from any level of government.

There are hundreds of Holocaust memorials located throughout Poland. Commemorations take place in many localities, as do cultural events – organized and funded by local authorities. See, for example, the annual commemorations in Dębica (<http://archiwum.umdebica.pl/aktualnosci/2018/07/dzien-pamieci-o-zydowskiej-spoleczności-debicy>) and the cultural festival in Bielsk Podlaski (<https://umbielskpodlaski.pl/zapraszamy-na-bielskie-dni-kultury-zydowskiej-2024>).

Holocaust education meets international standards. According to the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance, "Both state and local government institutions, universities, research institutes and schools are extensively involved in Holocaust commemoration." (<https://www.holocaustremembrance.com/member-countries/holocaust-education-remembrance-and-research-poland>)

It appears that a double standard is being employed with regard to Poland when it comes to reporting on Jewish-related matters. Surely it is time for the media to jettison crude stereotypes and advance a more objective picture.

APPENDIX: Holocaust commemoration at the local level

Two schools of reporting on contemporary Polish-Jewish relations have emerged: one is fact-driven, the other ideologically driven.

Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, Chief Curator of the Core Exhibition, POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews, on Opatów, in the Kielce region:

In the 1990s her parents accompanied her to Poland, where she was teaching a seminar on Jewish culture, and together they traveled to Opatów, the town where Mayer was born.

“My father stopped people in the street to get them to tell him what they remembered from before the war,” she says. “One young man invited us to his home, which was similar to my father’s home, just two rooms. His grandmother, relatives and neighbors gathered, and they started to talk. This young man persuaded the municipality to display my father’s painting in the county seat headquarters.”

But the story doesn’t end there. “A short time after the exhibition, the town decided, for the very first time, to commemorate the deportation of the Jews to Treblinka in September 1942,” Kirshenblatt-Gimblett continues.

“The local church organized a mass in memory of the murdered, and the town’s youth read out testimonies of residents who witnessed the deportation. Nearly 6,500 Jews, more than two-thirds of the town’s inhabitants, were sent to their deaths; 500 were marched to Sandomierz to a forced labor camp. ... Since then, at their own initiative, they organize an annual ceremony, which I think is amazing. When you approach people with trust, it can bring out their best.”

(Gilad Meltzer, “Every Cultural Institution Which Isn’t Perceived as 100% ‘pro-Israel’ Is Taking a Serious Risk,” Haaretz Magazine, May 26, 2020)

A report from Tarnów and its vicinity, a Law and Justice stronghold in southeastern Poland:

This blog has been written by Joan Salter, a survivor of the Holocaust who has kindly agreed to be our first guest blogger.

For over 10 years I have visited Tarnow, a large town near Krakow, every June to take part in the town’s commemoration of its murdered Jews. Many Jews have only negative thoughts about Poland: that anti-Semitism is part of its history and that all Poles happily stood by, if not actually collaborated, as the Nazis exterminated their neighbours. I would not wish to airbrush the past with a rosy glow, however the history of the Jews in Poland is much more nuanced than many appreciate. ...

I write this blog so that those who read it will gain some insight into the past and the work being done in Poland to keep the memory of its Jews alive.

For two decades and more Adam Bartosz has worked tirelessly not only to commemorate the terrible fate of this region’s Jews but to bring alive the lives they lived, their involvement with and their contribution to their local communities. In June 2012 my husband and I joined the commemorations organised each year by Bartosz. As every year, they commenced in the woods. Here, surrounded by local cadets, school children and adults, as well as journalists and reporters, Bartosz spoke of the terrible events which took place here, exactly seventy years ago. Professor Jonathan Webber, an orthodox Jew living in Poland though originally from London sang the traditional prayer for the soul of the departed, El Moleh Rachamim, and the priest from Tarnow cathedral (director of Diocesan Museum) recited prayers in Polish. Together with another survivor, I took part in laying flowers in honour of our families murdered there. A local elderly Pole gave witness to how as a young boy playing with his friends in the woods, he had witnessed the event when 800 children had been marched from the local Jewish orphanage and shot in the woods. This area is now enclosed and a memorial stone dedicated to these unnamed children.

On the Sunday, we travelled with a group organised by Professor Webber to the village of Brzostek. Professor Webber, a social anthropologist, first travelled to Poland many years ago to this town from where his grandfather had emigrated at the turn of the last century. The only apparent evidence that Jews had once lived there was a strip of uncultivated land at the edge of a field which locals identified as

the ancient Jewish Cemetery. Except for the fact that the topography differed to the rest of the cultivated field, there was no evidence of it being a cemetery. It was not walled off, no tombstones remained. Determined to reclaim and rededicate this as Jewish sacred ground, Webber located an old map. He contacted another descendent of Brzostek and together they financed the work. Determined that the local community felt connected with this project, he hired local contractors. The area was not to be walled in but enclosed with railings. When the contractor finished the work, he reported to Jonathan that several grave stones had re-appeared over night. In all 55 grave stones of the estimated 450 Jews buried in this cemetery were returned by the local villagers.

On this summer's day in 2012, we said prayers for the Jews buried in the cemetery as well for the 500 Jews of Brzostek who are not buried there but who were murdered by the Nazis. On this occasion, we were accompanied by two elderly survivors of the massacre in Brzostek. Now in their 80's they recounted their experiences on the terrible day in August 1942 when the Nazis rounded up the Jews in the square, humiliated them before shooting them. The few who survived were hidden by neighbours.

We then travelled to the Catholic cemetery where the son and daughter of Rivka Reiss dedicated a memorial stone to Maria Jalowiec, their mother's neighbour who hid Rivka and another Jewish girl for two years, right under the noses of the Germans camped on their farm. Maria's grandson, Tadeusz, now an elderly man, bore witness to how as an eight year old boy he smuggled food into the barn for the two girls. His grandmother told him the food was for the cows, but he understood the reason for the secrecy and kept it. When the Germans confiscated their house, Maria smuggled the girls out to a local priest who she knew was hiding Jews. He took them in, saying that he might as well be shot for 16 Jews as the 14 already hidden. These Poles deserve to be commemorated as Righteous among the Nations.

After this we travelled to a local school where a magnificent lunch was put on for us and we were welcomed by local dignitaries. Students from the creative arts department put on an entertainment based on their own work created in memory of the Jewish people who had lived and died in the area. We were greeted with Hebrew words and poems and songs about vanished neighbours and a need for tolerance. Professor Webber has initiated an annual prize for the work of the most creative student and last year's winner put on a power-point presentation of his travels to Greece paid for by the prize. This year five students were awarded scholarships, financed by an elderly survivor who had been hidden by a local farmer.

Then, the most gruelling event of the day: in temperatures nearing 40 degrees, we climbed up into the Podzamcze forest outside the town of Kolaczyce. Here on another sweltering day on 12th August 1942, 260 Jewish men, women and children were brought to this lonely place from Brzostek, Kolaczyce and the nearby villages to be brutally murdered and then buried here in a mass grave. Then, as in forests all over Poland, the evidence was covered over. An unknown person, at an unknown time had placed a stone there marking the site of this mass grave. Now in cooperation with the Gmina of Kolaczyce, a new memorial has been created by the Brzostek Jewish Heritage Project funded by Professor Webber and other descendents of the Jews of this area. It retains the old memorial stone but now covers the full extent of the mass grave. Although a rough path into the forest had been prepared, in the heat of the afternoon, the climb into the forest almost defeated many of us. It was the need to pay homage to those so cruelly murdered there that drove us on. ...

Throughout these commemorations, we walked openly as a group of Jews. Nowhere did we encounter any evidence of hostility. In every place we were welcomed by the local mayor and local people walked with us. In Tarnow, with only a handful of Jewish visitors, it was local people who filled the seats at a play based on the testimony of the last commander of the Jewish uprising in Warsaw. At a concert in front of the Bimah, the only relic remaining in the town of its many synagogues, again there was a full house of locals who clapped hands enthusiastically in time with the Yiddish music. I sat next to a tiny lady beautifully dressed in Roma costume; another of Tarnow's population decimated by the Nazis. ...

In the woods of Zbylitowska Gora, a Bishop stood alongside an orthodox Jew. In the Jewish and Catholic cemeteries of Brzostek and the forest of Podzamcze the Dean of the Parish, Fr. Dr Jan Cebulak and the Chief Rabbi of Poland, Rabbi Michael Schudrich, stood side by side. Jews recited their prayers, Catholics

theirs. In our tradition we placed stones in remembrance of the dead, Catholics placed flowers. Two communities united in remembrance of the horrific fate of the Jews of that area.

The National Holocaust Centre and Museum, Laxton, Nottinghamshire

<https://www.holocaust.org.uk/blog/70-years-on>

A report from the village of Jaśliska near Krosno, in southeastern Poland:

In September of 1942 the Jews of Jasliska were ordered by the Nazis to assemble in the city square. The young men, women and children were sent to the death camp of Belzec while the old and sick were all shot in the nearby forest of Barwinek. Only five or six Jews from Jasliska survived the war. In the early 1950's the communist authorities constructed a dam and grain mill at the nearby river using the tombstones from Jasliska's Jewish cemetery. The mill proved to be uneconomical and was soon abandoned. For almost 60 years the tombstones lay in the river until Szymon Modrzejewski discovered them. Szymon leads a group of volunteers by the name of Magurycz that for nearly 30 years has been restoring abandoned cemeteries of many different religious and ethnic groups in southeast Poland. Szymon enlisted the help of Magurycz volunteers and recovered the tombstones from the river. The Mayor of Jasliska provided Szymon with storage space for the tombstones. In February of 2013 a group of Orthodox Jews, some with roots in Jasliska, traveled there and thanked Szymon. The priest of Jasliska joined them in prayer at the site of the former Jewish cemetery. In Judaism such acts of respect are called "true kindness" because unlike kindness shown to the living the dead can never reciprocate or show their appreciation.

An act of "true kindness" in Jasliska, Poland [https://www.youtube.com/watch?](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_L4FFDU0xtQ&index=328&list=PL64F812C2C243A063)

[v=_L4FFDU0xtQ&index=328&list=PL64F812C2C243A063](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_L4FFDU0xtQ&index=328&list=PL64F812C2C243A063)

In an ideologically driven article bereft of factual foundation, "scholar" Shelley Salamensky offers an "alternative reality," based on crude, "intuitive" stereotypes, about the allegedly "super-racist" and hateful citizens of southeastern Poland ...

"While Polish national politics may be edging from far-right to right-center, Poland's southeast corner is a stronghold of anti-abortion, anti-feminist, anti-gay, anti-immigrant, and—with burgeoning Roma communities in Slovakia, just a few miles away—anti-Roma sentiment. It is still possible to encounter medieval Catholic notions of Jews as Christ-killers and money-grubbers ..."

Shelley Salamensky, "Poland's Jews: Under a New Roof," *New York Review of Books Daily*, December 6, 2014, <https://www.nybooks.com/daily/2014/12/06/polands-jews-new-roof-polin/>