

PIAST INSTITUTE HELPS TO TELL A HOLOCAUST STORY OF POLISH COURAGE & JEWISH SURVIVAL



Piast Institute

Hamtramck, MI – Even the best of stories needs a good ending. Recently the Piast Institute, a National Institute for Polish and Polish American Affairs, saw an opportunity to give a good ending to a Polish story of courage and humanity in the face of evil during the Holocaust. The story was that of Zyga and his brother Salek Allweiss who, thanks to the efforts of Maciej and Zofia Dudzik of Czajkow in southeastern Poland, survived the German extermination that took the lives of the rest of their family.

The Dudziks sheltered the two teenage Jewish boys from the nearby village of Jaslany for 14 months, at the risk of their own lives and the lives of their eight children. The punishment

for aiding Jews in German-occupied Poland was death, not just for the one who assisted but for their entire family. Several thousand Poles paid that price for acts of simple humanity.

Zyga Allweiss, of West Bloomfield, Michigan, 80 years of age, wanted to honor the memory of those who had helped him survive the German campaign of genocide. He wrote about the Dudziks to *Yad Vashem*, the Israeli agency that commemorates the victims of the Holocaust and those Gentiles who tried to resist and help Jews during that darkest of times in World War II. His letter recounted their heroism and selflessness and he recommended them for a medal as “righteous among nations” and for permanent commemoration in Israel for their deeds.

His recommendation was accepted and the Dudziks were scheduled to be honored posthumously in a ceremony in Krakow, Poland, by the Israeli government. Their son was to receive the medal on behalf of his parents. Zyga and his daughter wanted very much to attend but he was retired and living on a modest income. He wasn't sure if he could afford the trip. At the suggestion of attorney Michael Traison, the PIAST Institute agreed to help raise the cost of his airfare. With contributions from both Polish and Jewish donors, including Attorney Traison, PIAST raised the needed \$1,000 in three weeks. Zyga Allweiss was able to attend the ceremony in Krakow on October 21, 2007 to express his gratitude to his Polish friends.

According to Dr. Thaddeus Radzilowski, President of the PIAST Institute, the Institute seeks to tell Poland's history in all of its dimensions and to build bridges to other communities. “How better to do this than to give this story its full dimension. The courage of the Dudzik family – moved by their beliefs and the deepest Christian meaning of Polish hospitality – and their willingness to sacrifice their lives, if need be, to save their neighbors from the Holocaust is an inspirational story that needs to be remembered and honored,” said Dr. Radzilowski.

The story is a simple one. Zyga and his older brother Salek sought refuge with the Dudziks after their escape from Nazi captivity, which had already cost the lives of their mother and sisters. The teenage boys were courageous, resourceful and ready to fight. With a weapon given to them by a Polish neighbor, they disarmed a German soldier, capturing his weapons. They lived by their wits in the forest and fields, but they needed more permanent and more secure shelter. They found it with the Dudzik family.

The Dudziks had been friends and business associates of the boys' father, Jacob, who bought and sold horses. Their father instructed them to seek out Maciej Dudzik if they were in trouble. He told them, “He is an upright and honest man and he will not betray you.” In turn, the Dudziks kept their promise to Jacob, who had asked them to “keep my boys safe.”

For 14 months the two boys found shelter with the family that shared its meager rations with them. The Dudziks' nearest neighbors knew that the Dudziks were sheltering the Allweiss boys but did not betray them. Nevertheless, the danger of discovery and death always loomed over all of them.

Once, when the Germans came to requisition hay, they almost uncovered the boys' hiding place. Zofia Dudzik diverted their attention at the last moment to save the day. After that incident, the boys, fearing that they would continue to endanger their host, offered to leave but the Dudziks refused to hear such a plan. Zyga Allweiss remembers Zofia Dudzik saying, “No. Stay with us. God will protect you.”

This moving story is symbolic of many other such stories that will never be told because records are lost and the people involved have died. More than 6,000 Poles have been honored by *Yad Vashem* as rescuers - almost a third of the international total. Yet, because of the terrible destruction by the war and the subsequent Communist takeover of Poland, more Polish stories of heroism have been lost than those of any other nation.

The historian Gunnar Paullson, whose mother was a Holocaust survivor in Warsaw, wrote in his book *The Secret City* that the city of Warsaw was saturated with Jews sheltered from the Nazis. He estimates that by 1944 about 28,000 Jews were being hidden through the efforts of about 70,000 to 90,000 people in the city.

Many of the rescued, and their rescuers, as well as the records and memories of their heroism, perished during the Warsaw Uprising. This is why the story of the Dudzik family's heroism is so important to preserve. The PRCUA salutes the PIAST Institute for making it possible for Zyga Allweiss to attend the ceremony in Krakow.