

## Speech on Presentation of Medals

Losice May 20, 2008

Dear Friends, I am deeply honored and moved by your presentation of this medal. People who know me know that I have never sought rewards, recognition or monetary gain for the work which I consider a mitzvah-good deed. Mitzvahs are best done without seeking thanks. And, certainly the dead cannot thank me. But I am happy to accept this medal on behalf of so many who have participated with Poland Jewish Cemeteries Restoration Project-our team including, my wife Hannah, Andrzej Omasta, Rabbi Michael Schudrich, Wojtek Brochwicz-Lewinski, and the hundreds of volunteers and generous donors in many countries-many of them Holocaust survivors and children of Holocaust survivors. This has been a labor of love for us and for those today who have received medals. We thank you.

There is a saying that one good deed leads to another. I know this is true when I see the enthusiasm and participation of Polish people in every town we have had the privilege to work in, participation of Polish schools in Holocaust education and thousands of students writing wonderful essays, poetry, doing artwork and photography about the Jews of their town, about Polish-Jewish relations before the war, about the heroic deeds of their town's venerable citizens who risked their lives and their family's by helping Jews-seeing each project as a teaching experience and as away to bring people together in friendship and mutual respect, these are rewards enough for me. When I see so many young people involved like wonderful Kamila Klauzinska and her students, I am deeply moved and gladdened by their efforts and that is reward enough for me.

Yes, our organization is about the dead, rebuilding the cemeteries, and memorializing the mass graves, but it is also very much about the living and what we teach our children.

We have participated so far in restoration of 17 cemeteries. Sadly, less than a hundred have been restored so far. But there are more than 1200 devastated cemeteries and thousands of mass graves without fencing or memorials.

The funds for these burial sites so far comes mostly from Holocaust survivors and their children. In 2003, we asked the German Government to take responsibility and to pay their fair share of the costs for the destruction to the cemeteries caused by German forces, and for the thousands of mass graves they created located all over Poland. So far they have not helped. So we started a Petition to the German Government asking publicly for their help. Many organizations and individuals both Jewish and Polish have sent letters of support to me. Most recently the Polish American Congress, representing 10 million Poles, voted to support the Petition and the mayor of Lodz, representing a population of 800,000 Poles has stated his support. In all, these organizations now represent about 15 million people worldwide. At this time, I ask every city, town and village in Poland where there is a devastated Jewish cemetery or mass grave to support the Petition to the German Government on moral grounds. I also ask the Polish Government for their help.

Thank you again for honoring what we do! SHALOM!