1988 was the 50th anniversary of the Warsaw Ghetto uprising. I traveled with my father that spring to Warsaw and to the town of his birth, Nowy Dwor by Modlin, just outside the city. He was imprisoned for 3 years entering Auschwitz Birkenau on December 14th, 1941, and was liberated from Mauthausen on May 5, 1945. Our trip was a catharsis for him for he never spoke of his Polish youth or the Holocaust as I and my brothers grew up. Like many other survivors, it was more than two decades before he could verbalize his experiences. When he did, when they all did, the horror of the Holocaust was finally memorialized for all time by the only people capable of making an accurate history, the witnesses.

Nowy Dwor is a small farming village. When we arrived it looked just as I imagine it must have looked in the late 1930s before the end of normalcy. One passes by the Town of Modlin over a small bridge and enters Nowy Dwor up narrow streets lined by wood and stucco houses. Many have hand water pumps in the front yards. People still till fields walking behind horse-pulled plows. A large grassy square is the focal point of the village. Trains pass regularly through the center of town connecting it and other villages to Warsaw. There are bicycles everywhere. Very few cars. Our Mercedes taxi draws attention. Women in babushkas sweep the streets with straw brooms.

We get out and walk around. Dim memories of people and places come back as we visit a bakery that once belonged to a cousin who emigrated to Israel and avoided the Holocaust. We find my Grandfather’s blacksmith shop turned into an auto repair yard. The owner treats us with great suspicion until my father assures him that we’re there just to visit and not to stake any claims for the return of the property.
As we walk down the street, we come upon a man who stops in his tracks, stares at my father and begins crying, "Icek, Icek." They had last seen each other more than 50 years before. School chums. As they hug and babble on in Polish, my Father finally turns and explains to me that they were friends from kindergarten. When the Germans built the ghetto and concentrated the Jews in Nowy Dwor, Stephan would come at night and throw vegetables and fruit over the wall. This went on for months until he came no more. My Father thought that Stephan, like the other Polish Gentiles in the village, had abandoned him. What happened was that Stephan got caught by the Germans and spent six months in a labor camp for aiding the Jews in the ghetto.

Stephan, a retired public works superintendent brought us to his home where we met his brother and their wives. We ate and drank. They and my Father told stories about their youth, sang school songs and chanted a haunting poem about Stalin. My father asked to visit the Jewish cemetery where his father was buried. His mother, my grandmother, died in the Warsaw ghetto. Stephan told us that we really didn't want to go to the cemetery, that there was nothing to see. His shame and discomfort was clear. My Father insisted, and so we went. We passed by a lovely cemetery, beautifully groomed. It was the Gentile cemetery. Next to it was a barren field full of holes.

Stephan told us that after the war, there were no more Jews and the property became a no-mans land. In the 50's, the government began using the cemetery for construction materials. Headstones and markers were crushed and used as road base. The land itself was excavated as a gravel pit. It would be hard to understand such desecration unless one saw it. As we walked around a corner of a hill, there was an open excavated face where sand and gravel was being mined. We saw caskets sticking out of the side of the hill! This was not 1943, it was 1988. We climbed the hill to the flat of the cemetery and looked around. It was a moonscape. At the far end of the property, along the street, we saw two houses going up. We asked who was building homes on the cemetery grounds.
Stephan told us that Gypsies simply squatted and took over the land. No one said anything. No one was responsible. No one cared.

As we walked among the open graves, my father was totally disoriented. He had no way of knowing where his father's grave was. We came upon a small grave, obviously of a child. There were still bones in it. Just lying around "Who was this child?" my father cried, "Who could do such a thing?" We gathered around the grave and said Kaddush for the remains of this child and the others who were interred in this sacred, desecrated ground.

And then my father did a strange thing. He picked up the bones from the grave and said, "I'm going to give this child a decent burial in a safe place. I'm going to take him home." And so we did. He placed the bones in a brown bag. We packed them deep in his suitcase, taking the chance that Customs would not find them.

At the Polish exit station at the airport, bags were checked regularly. We were wearing our name tags and the young customs agent asked my father if he was among those survivors here for the Warsaw Ghetto commemoration. My father began crying. The agent waived us through. Back in Boston, the US Customs agent said, "Welcome home" and also waived us through without opening our bags.

Soon after we arrived home that child, together with bones and ashes we recovered from a pit next to a bombed out crematory at Auschwitz, was buried in a grave donated by Sharon Memorial Park. The headstone reads in part, "Here lay a child's bones found in an open grave in Nowy Dwor, Poland in 1988, brought here lovingly by Icek Wluka to at long last rest in peace." Over the years, my father tended that grave regularly, planting flowers and keeping little Jewish flags around it.
Today, my father too rests in peace just down the street from that child's grave. He died on January 23, 2001.

In July, 2011 David returned to Nowy Dwor to attend the dedication of a memorial to the Jewish community. Thanks to the work of David and other descendants and the cooperation of the local government the era of neglect is over. Learn more at [http://www.nowydworjewishmemorial.com/July_Dedication.html](http://www.nowydworjewishmemorial.com/July_Dedication.html). Among those attending was the U.S. Chargé d'Affaires Bill Heidt who said, "While we cannot restore the vibrant Jewish community that existed here on the eve of World War II, we can honor the memory of those who built that community. Projects like this, supported by local communities, highlight the true richness and diversity of Poland's heritage. They also underscore the extent of Poland's democratic transformation. Poland today is a stable and thriving democracy, based on mutual understanding, respect, and tolerance – all essential elements of Poland's centuries-old multicultural heritage."