

“The only people who can say they did enough to save Jews were those who died for them.”
– Senator Wladyslaw Bartoszewski



Tuesday, October 19, 1999

Congregation Habonim presents a lecture
by Senator Wladyslaw Bartoszewski:

Code Name: Zegota, The Heroic Story of One Polish Organization’s Clandestine Efforts to Save Jewish Lives During the Holocaust



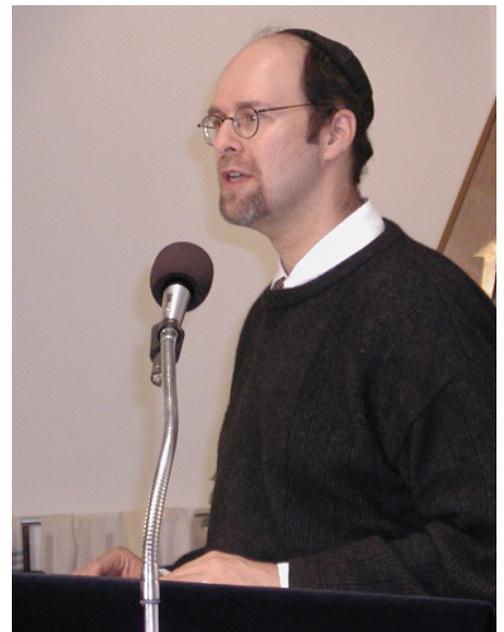
Elisa Goldman, Singer

Es Brent

Eli Rubenstein, Religious Leader, Congregation Habonim, National Director, March of the Living

Es Brent was written in 1938 by Mordechai Gebirtig following a pogrom in the Polish town of Prztyk in 1936. The much loved Yiddish songwriter’s life came to an end when he was shot by the Nazis on June 4, 1942. Anti-Semitism was what destroyed the life of Mordechai Gebirtig and the lives of so many other Jews during the Holocaust. This evening, however, we are here to honor the other side of the story, the no less important saga of the Righteous Among the Nations in Poland and other countries that rallied to the side of the Jews, often at grave risk to their own lives, during the Holocaust.

One of the basic lessons Judaism teaches us is never to give up hope in ourselves, in our people, or in humanity. However, had it not been for the Righteous Among the Nations, Jews would have had every right to give up hope in humanity. Thus the Righteous Among the Nations



not only saved the lives of individual Jews during the Holocaust, but through their actions they saved the very reputation of humanity.

The idea of not giving up hope – no matter how adverse the circumstances – was most eloquently expressed by Shaul Tchernichovsky (20 August 1875 – 14 October 1943) in his poem...‘Ani Maamin’ – ‘I Believe’ written amid the horrors of the pogroms in eastern Europe.

*Laugh at all my dreams my dears, laugh and I repeat anew
That I still believe in man as I still believe in you.
For my soul is yet unsold to the golden calf of scorn
And I still believe in man and the spirit in him born.
Let the time be dark with hatred – I believe in years beyond
Love at last shall bind the peoples in an everlasting bond
In that day shall my own people rooted in its soil arise
Shake the yoke from off its shoulders and the darkness from its eyes*

*Life and love and strength and action in their heart and blood shall beat
And their hopes shall be both heaven and the earth beneath their feet
Then a new song shall be lifted to the young, the free, the brave
And the wreath to crown the singer shall be gathered from my grave.*

I'd now like to call upon the President of Habonim, David Goldfarb, to introduce the rest of the evening.



David Goldfarb, President, Congregation Habonim

This evening is not one to figure out or debate anti-Semitism in Eastern Europe or in Poland. There was significant anti-Semitism throughout Europe in the first half of this century, and in many other parts of the world as well. But, tonight we are here to honor what in Hebrew is called “Hasidei Umot Haolom’ the Righteous among the Nations, also referred as Righteous Gentiles. In the spirit of this evening’s theme, I’d like to ask all those present to refrain from some of the often bitter criticism expressed when the subject of the history of Polish-Jewish relations become a topic of public discussion. We are here to express “hacarat hatov,” Hebrew for recognition of the good that was done for us, and let us frame our remarks with this in mind.

One last note: Tonight’s lecture will be in German with simultaneous English translation. The reason for this is that many of the founding members of Habonim are native German speakers, and given the spirit of reconciliation of this evening, we thought that this would be an appropriate format for Senator Bartoszewski’s lecture.

I would now like to introduce Dr. Frank Bialystok of the University of Toronto and Dr. Piotr Wrobel, Chair of Polish History, University of Toronto, to give a brief overview of the history of Jewish life in Poland as well as to introduce the film Zegota.

Barbara Bank, National Chair, March of the Living

My name is Barbara Bank, National Chair of the March of the Living, which is co-sponsoring tonight's events. For those of you who are not familiar with the March of the Living, it is an educational event that gathers thousands of Jewish youth from around world in Poland and Israel to mark two of the most significant dates in the modern Jewish calendar.

The program in Poland culminates with the "March of the Living" on Yom Hashoah, when students march together the three kilometre distance separating Auschwitz from Birkenau in memory of Jewish victims of the Nazi "death marches."

In Israel, participants celebrate the creation of the State of Israel on Yom Ha'atsmaut along with thousands of teenagers from around the world.

The Canadian program has several unique features: Holocaust survivors accompany each contingent, Israeli educators are with the group in both Poland and Israel, and encounters with Jewish and Christian youth in Poland are encouraged, which is something that I know Senator Wladyslaw Bartoszewski is also very interested in. But before I introduce our guest of honor, I would like to ask two young students from Beth Habonim – Beth Cole and Miram Zittell – who have gone on the March of the Living to read three short pieces written by past participants in the March of the Living.

The last piece you heard talks about a student's encounter with a Righteous Gentile that restored her sense of compassion for people that she had lost. Well tonight we are also privileged to being the presence of one such individual, someone who restores our faith in humanity.

Senator Wladyslaw Bartoszewski was born in Poland in 1922. He was imprisoned in Auschwitz from September 1940 to April 1941 and was a member of the Polish Home Army from 1942 to 1945. During that time Mr. Bartoszewski helped found Zegota, the underground organization which provided clandestine aid to thousands of Polish Jews. Of all of the underground organizations in Europe, Zegota was the only one that was run jointly by Jews and non-Jews, and, despite the arrests of many of its members, was the most successful in providing aid to the embattled Jewish population.

In addition to his activities with Zegota, Senator Bartoszewski was active in the Polish underground and helped transmit reports on the Nazi terror against the Poles and the Jews to the Polish Government in Exile. After the war, Senator Bartoszewski was jailed again during the Soviet Stalinist period, and yet again during the period of martial law in Poland in the 1980s. A key figure in the Solidarity movement, Mr. Bartoszewski served as the Foreign Minister of the Government of Poland from 1994 to 1995. Senator Bartoszewski has also served as President of the PEN club in Poland, and as a Professor at the Catholic University in Lublin

Senator Bartoszewski is a prolific writer and historian and has written many books dealing with the history of Poland during the war, Polish Jews, and the rescue of Jews by Polish Gentiles. Over the years, Senator Bartoszewski has also dedicated his life to to building understanding between Poles and Jews and to bettering relations between Poland and Germany.

In 1963, Senator Bartoszewski was recognized as a Righteous Gentile by Yad Vashem, the National Holocaust Museum in Jerusalem, Israel. At that time, Senator Bartoszewski was given a certificate that reads:

Today, on the 10th of Heshavn, 5723, at our invitation, a tree was planted on the Avenue of the Righteous at the Memorial Mountain in Jerusalem by Maria Kann and Wladyslaw

Bartoszewski of the Zegota Executive, whose members risked their lives to save Jews during the period of Nazi persecution. Israel will never forget their nobility and their courage.

Ladies and Gentleman it is my great privilege to introduce to you Senator Wladyslaw Bartoszewski.

Senator Wladyslaw Bartoszewski

“Code Name: Zegota, The Heroic Story of One Polish Organization’s Clandestine Efforts to Save Jewish Lives During the Holocaust.”

Elisa Goldman

Concluding Songs

This evening has been about hope. And with this in mind, we are will now conclude our program with two songs of hope. The first song is called: “When You Believe,” which is taken from the film the Prince of Egypt. The second song “Lay Down Your Arms” was written by an Israeli soldier in memory of friends who perished in battle in various Arab-Israel conflicts in the 1970s. Its lyrics express a yearning for a time when all humanity will set aside their differences, lay down their arms, and let love set them free.

