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# JEWISH EXPONENT

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## Locals Team Up to Preserve Jewish Cemetery in Poland

JESSE BERNSTEIN | JE STAFF

WHAT SEEMS, at first blush, to be the story of one man and the salvation of a crumbling Jewish cemetery is actually the story of much more.

It is the story of Edward Janes and the Jewish cemetery in Przasnysz, Poland, but it's also a story of three Polish sisters named Goralczyk, a Facebook group, Polish middle schoolers, genealogy, and a web of Jewish organizations, one of which has an acronym that sounds like "fudge."

More than anything, it's a story about preservation and a collective rebuke to the Final Solution.

"This is really a key motivator for me, over the years," Janes said.

Janes, 61, lives in Moorestown, New Jersey. His father died in 1978, leaving Janes with many unanswered questions about his family tree. Over the years, he researched his family's history when he could, but it wasn't until 2005, the year after his mother died, that he decided to pursue

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▲ Suffragists protest outside the White House in 1917.

Courtesy of Temple University Libraries

## Philadelphia's Jewish Women Fought Hard for the Right to Vote

SOPHIE PANZER | JE STAFF

CAROLINE KATZENSTEIN knew something had to change.

In 1915, the Philadelphia-based insurance agent and suffragist (American women did not use the term "suffragette") witnessed women's enfranchisement fail to pass statewide referenda in Pennsylvania,

New York, New Jersey and Massachusetts. The campaign for a federal amendment seemed to be going nowhere.

"That's when she decided, 'OK, we have to do more. What we've been doing is not working. We need to be more militant,'" said Melissa Klapper, professor of history and director of gender studies at Rowan University and author of "Ballots, Babies, and Banners of

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# JEWISH EXPONENT

In the mailbox, online, on social media —  
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## Poland

Continued from Page 1

a long-mysterious branch of the family tree — that of his paternal grandmother. His research into his father's side of the family eventually led him to a Polish branch that seemed impossible to fill out; it took some time, but he was finally able to trace his father's family to Przasnysz, a town about 75 miles north of Warsaw.

In 2014, Janes connected with Mariusz Bondarczuk, a Catholic Pole in Przasnysz with a deep interest in Jewish life. Bondarczuk had a vast library of Jewish genealogical records that he was happy to share with his new friend, enabling Janes to fill in names on his tree that had long eluded him.

When Bondarczuk died in 2017, he asked Janes for one thing: to reinvigorate the effort to restore and maintain



▲ From left: Agata Goralczyk, Edward Janes, Barry Mesch (a friend of Mariusz Bondarczuk who assisted the project) and Piotr Pucha, CEO of FODZ. Courtesy of Edward Janes

Przasnysz's dilapidated Jewish cemetery. Janes had started a Facebook group in 2014 to drum up interest in the project, but after Bondarczuk died, the group went cold.

That is, until the Goralczyk sisters of Przasnysz — Maggie, Magda and Agata — got involved. Maggie Goralczyk asked to join the Facebook group; it turned out she lived in Philadelphia, not far from

Janes. She and Janes had dinner to discuss how Americans with jobs and lives to attend to might protect a decaying cemetery across the world from them.

"After the end of our meal, she said, 'We will do this, we will do it,'" Janes recalls. "I looked at her like, 'You've got to be kidding me.' 'No, no we will do this.'"

All three sisters were soon driven to "do this," to Janes'



▲ Magda, Agata and Maggie Goralczyk worked with Edward Janes to push the cemetery restoration project forward. Courtesy of Magda Goralczyk

surprise. They connected Janes with Friends of Jewish Heritage in Poland (FJHP), an organization that maintains and restores Jewish cultural sites in Poland.

FJHP President Dan Oren remembers clearly the day that Janes reached out: Sept. 24, 2018.

"I quickly saw that he was someone of genuine care and concern for our organization, and he had something which is wonderful, unusual: He had a determination to succeed," Oren said. "So I wanted to do everything that we could to help."

FJHP's Polish counterpart is The Foundation for Jewish Heritage in Poland — often shortened to FODZ, and pronounced "fudge." Soon, both organizations, along with the World Jewish Restitution Organization and the Union of Jewish Communities in Poland, were working with Janes to raise money. They quickly collected \$5,000.

In March of 2019, Janes traveled to Poland and met with Chief Rabbi Michael Shudrich. They discussed plans for restoring the cemetery, and it quickly became clear that there was much more fundraising to be done. It wasn't just that the cemetery would need more care; how could they not address the preservation of the Jewish heritage of Przasnysz more broadly?

That summer, Janes' project was bolstered with additional funds and ideas from FODZ

and the mayor of Przasnysz, Łukasz Chrostowski, the result of a meeting between the mayor, Agata Goralczyk, FODZ CEO Piotr Pucha, and Shudrich.

Not only would steps be taken to clean the cemetery and ensure its care, but Forum for Dialogue, a Polish NGO that teaches students about Polish-Jewish heritage, would be contracted to provide an eight-week outreach program to middle school students in the city. For that project, the school was recognized with a national award.

"This was just an incredibly powerful experience for the town, for all of us," Janes said.

For their preservation efforts, the Goralczyk sisters were recognized in June by the Galicia Jewish Museum in Krakow with an online ceremony.

Thus far, just under \$20,000 has been raised for restoration of the cemetery and continuing education, with a goal of twice that — perpetual care, street rerouting and grass cutting don't come cheap. Janes, the Goralczyk sisters and the other organizations are still chugging along.

"The synagogues have rolled on. The shtetls are wiped out. The teaching centers are all gone. All that's left are these cemeteries," Janes said. "And we have an obligation as Jews to preserve memory." •

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