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Highland Park Couple Witnesses History On 'Names Not Numbers®' Trip to Poland

By Harry Glazer

An unparalleled view of the destruction of Polish Jewry during the Holocaust and the remarkable revival of Jewish life in that country started, as many meaningful experiences do, with an ad in The Jewish Link that caught their eye.

Florence and Joel Zevin of Highland Park told The Jewish Link that when they saw the ad for a "Names Not Numbers"[®]-coordinated mission to sites in Poland, from July 28 to August 5, and noted how affordable it was, they knew they had to go. From what they heard from other participants in the 30-person group, the ad resonated with many other families as well.

The tour was organized and led by Tova Rosenberg, the founder and director of the "Names Not Numbers"[®] national initiative, and her husband, Dov. Rabbi Michael Taubes and his wife, Bessie, served as spiritual leaders on the trip.

The trip took participants on a whirlwind of visits to locations and meetings in Warsaw, Lublin and Krakow, as well as a few smaller towns nearby such as Kazimierz Dolny. The group visited the concentration camps at Majdanek and Auschwitz, the extermination camp at Belzec, the Jewish Museum in Warsaw, the remaining wall of the Warsaw Ghetto and a monument there, memorial walls made of Jewish tombstones used by the Nazis to pave roads, the JCC of Krakow and a room there devoted to helping Ukrainian Jews, a towering memorial at Belzec, the three operating shuls in Krakow and "The Old Synagogue" that functions now as a museum, Jewish-style restaurants with non-kosher menus that inspire mixed feelings, and more.

The group also met with the descendants of righteous gentiles, non-Jewish Polish citizens who have assisted with the rediscovery of Polish Jewish history and the revival of Jewish life, and leaders of the JCC at



Group photo in Krakow.

Krakow. Rabbi Avi Baumol, an Israeli who served as the spiritual leader of the Jewish community in Krakow for 11 years, spent his last Shabbat there with the group,

Florence Zevin remarked on the diversity of the group, which included two other observant couples from Highland Park/Edison, a Lubavitcher couple from Monsey, a non-Jewish couple (the principal of Great Neck North High School and his wife, the vice principal of the Brentwood, Long Island High School), two women who work as Hebrew teachers in public schools, and



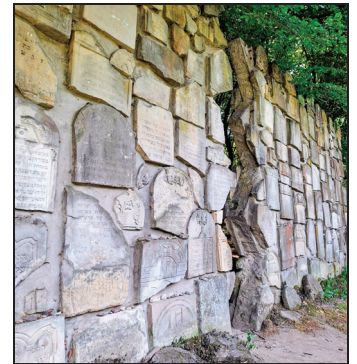
View of crematorium at Auschwitz.

several adult children of Holocaust survivors. Florence was struck by the incongruity of the local Polish families, with children in strollers, visiting the concentration camps, as if they were touring just another historical site. She was also deeply impressed with seeing Jews in Poland who were rediscovering their heritage and the many non-Jews who were assisting in conducting Jewish festivals and supporting the JCC.

Joel Zevin commented on the museum of The Old Synagogue in Krakow, which has "everyday" Jewish ritual items on display such as a Torah and



Joel and Florence Zevin in Lublin.



Memorial of Jewish tombstones in Kazimierz Dolny.

a tallit and treats them "like relics," which he found jarring. He also spoke of the experience of seeing the entry to Auschwitz: "It's a familiar picture I've seen in books, movies and documentaries. To actually be there, to walk on the tracks, it's surreal. Then to walk in the buildings and see the crematoria ... it's very, very moving."

Rosenberg said that she advertised the "Names Not Numbers"[®] mission to Poland only in The Jewish Link, and nowhere else, and that the trip was designed to be affordable, thanks to the generosity of a few donors who wish to be anonymous. She said that this trip is the ninth one she has organized and run. It started as a trip for students who participated in the program to interview Holocaust survivors. At one point, the parents of students who went on the trip asked her: "If they can go, why can't we?" So Rosenberg created a trip for adults and has been delighted with the response; she is often told that the trips are "life-changing." She added that community members anticipate the mission and will start asking her in October for the dates of the next trip.

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