

Steven D. Reece

From: Glenn Kurtz <glennkurtz@gmail.com>
Sent: Monday, July 18, 2016 11:51
To: Steven D. Reece (sdreece@matzevah.org)
Cc: Charlie Shan; Marla Raucher Osborn; Jay Osborn; Michael Valihora
Subject: Re: A Paragraph about Your Experience

Dear Steven:

I apologize for being so slow to respond. I returned home from Warsaw on July 8, and then almost immediately turned around and headed out to my summer writing retreat in Utah (of all places). I've been on the move for almost 6 weeks, and it's taken a few days for me to find my footing since arriving here. I'll offer my thoughts about our project for the newsletter at the bottom of this note. But first, a few addenda:

On Thursday, 7 July, I returned to Nasielsk with two of Mr. Chandler's children and two of their children. We viewed the cemetery (thanks for the additional work!). We met Stanisław Tyc at the library, and then all proceeded to visit with the priest. The meeting was very cordial. I explained the goals of the project and requested his assistance with outreach to the community. He promised all possible help, in particular with locating Matzevot.

I wrote to Krzysztof Miller to thank him and the mayor's office for their help. Is there any additional follow-up that you think would be appropriate?

In response to my email detailing the work for the Nasielsk descendants' community, I have received numerous pledges of support--both for additional donations and for participation next year. We'll see. However, I believe that the work accomplished was impressive to both the local community in Nasielsk, as well as to the descendants, and next year could potentially attract a much larger crew. I hope so!

When you're back in the States, let's you, me, and Michael have a conversation to discuss this year's work and begin planning the next round.

Finally, my thoughts:

Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. It was a privilege to work beside you and with the Matzevah Foundation. I am profoundly grateful for your expertise, your diplomacy, your good humor, and of course your very hard work. Perhaps for me especially, who has spent so much time delving into the history of this town and seeking the identities of the individuals who lived there, to begin caring for this ground again after a lapse of 77 years is overwhelmingly meaningful. It may not make a difference to those who rest there. But it makes a difference in the lives of their descendants around the world and, I hope, in the lives of the town's current residents.

The Jewish community of Nasielsk lived in the town for at least 350 years until it was violently destroyed in 1939. The memory of this violence has left an inheritance of bitterness for all those who trace their ancestry to the town. The few survivors and numerous descendants who re-visited the town in the postwar years almost all reported an indifferent when not outright hostile reception from

the local population. Together, this war-time violence and post-war bitterness froze the town in the minds of those who remembered it, and severed all connection for those whose ancestors had lived there.

The work I have done for the past five years was not originally intended to establish a bridge between Nasielsk's current population and the descendants of its destroyed Jewish community. I intended only to learn enough of the history to decipher my grandfather's 1938 home movie. But to my astonishment, the process of deciphering the film opened a series of opportunities to engage the local community, first with a visit by descendants. Now, through the Cemetery Restoration Project.

My goal has always been to preserve the memory of Nasielsk's Jewish community. I quickly learned that this was not something I could do alone. But the great discovery of this process, and the great joy, if I can call it that, has been how the community of those dedicated to preserving this memory continues to expand. Beginning with the survivors and their families, the "community of memory" has grown to include members of Nasielsk's administration, concerned local residents, the wonderful people of FODŹ and The Matzevah Foundation, and many others who have volunteer time, information, and resources. Restoring the cemetery is, for me, a symbol of the effort to remember the Jewish community. But the teamwork, camaraderie, shared effort, and satisfaction of the Cemetery Restoration Project show the living spirit essential to holding that memory. Perhaps through this work, the descendants and the local population can begin a dialogue that will unfreeze relations and create a productive, collaborative partnership. Truly preserving the memory of this Jewish community can only be accomplished together.

Thanks again for all your work.

warmly,
Glenn

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On Thu, Jul 7, 2016 at 2:07 PM, Steven D. Reece <sdreece@matzevah.org> wrote:

Greetings to All of You,

I want to personally thank each one of you for your presence, participation and assistance during our work this week in the Nasielsk Jewish cemetery. It was a joy and a pleasure to work with you and I greatly appreciate each and every one of you!

I have one kind request from Elaine Brown, who writes our newsletters. When you get time, could you write a couple of short statements from your perspective as a volunteer regarding our work this week and what it means to you.

Sincerely,

Steven

Steven D. Reece

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