

Volunteer Testimonials

Listed by year

2018

Steven and Kevin are a joy to work with, both due to their knowledge and experience and due to their dedication and pleasant personalities. Both groups I have brought to Przerosl have really been appreciative of their and of The Matzevah Foundation's support and friendship. I personally have learned a great deal from Steven about interacting with the local authorities.

Hatte Bleijer (Przerosl 2018)

I learned a lot about Jewish culture from reading tombstones and cemetery rules of behavior. All days had their moments (first discovery of the cemetery, meeting with the mayor, (... *not legible*...)... to Agatha's family and using "Fat Boy" with the blade. It means making the link with my ancestors who were buried in the cemetery and (...*not legible*...) to have them resting in a revered cemetery. Thank you for the Matzevah Foundation to have allowed me to live this experience and to initiate a new friendship.

Jean-Francois Abramatic from France (Przerosl 2018)

I'm really proud to work with you. It's important to be here and show that Poles also take care about the Jewish history in Poland. See you next year.

Agata Liszewska from France (Przerosl 2018)

The entire project impacted me in a profound way. I felt great connection to my heritage and respect for the suffering of those Jews who perished here in Poland. At the completion of our work I felt very much at peace.

Tandy R. Ford from New Mexico (Przerosl 2018)

It was a wonderful and meaningful experience. I enjoyed the hard work and sense of community, purpose, and an accomplishment for the greater good of my ancestors and the community. I would love to do it again!

Kim Ford from California (Przerosl 2018)

2017

Working with The Matzevah Foundation has given me the privilege of working with a group of people who were all passionate about the same thing – helping to restore justice and dignity to the victims of the Shoah. I am so thankful to have been a part of this cause and work in Piaski and Wąwolnica as well as make new friends.

Autumn from Colorado (Piaski/ Wąwolnica 2017)

We can never bring full justice to the victims of the Holocaust, but by ensuring that their graves and the graves of their ancestors are treated with respect and cared for, we can help to repair some of the damage done to the Jewish community of Poland.

Rachel from Colorado (piaski/ Wąwolnica 2017)

The most meaningful part for me came at the end of the week. Bernie, a volunteer who is a cantor, read the prayer for the dead at the cemetery. It was very moving and meaningful and powerful. It speaks to the power of what we do in how we connect people of the present to their past.

Kevin Little (Przerosl 2017)

2016

Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. It was a privilege to work beside 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 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 and 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 FODŻ and The Matzevah Foundation, and many others who have volunteered 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.

Glenn Kurtz from New York (Nasielsk 2016)

It is with such grace and love that the TMF does this work. I am moved by the way our team worked – tirelessly – to literally move a small forest. Blessings on you all. Amen.

Sarah Nuland from Connecticut (Markuszow 2016)

The selfless group of TMF volunteers on this summer's Markuszów project: Steven, Elaine, Rachel, Cindy, Bruce, Przemek, and Caylee are simply God's servants to humanity. Their warmth, devotion, dedication, and unstinting determination through two full days and two half days of strenuous yard-work, in essence the complete taming of a jungle to return it to the sacred space of a Jewish cemetery, were a model for the good that is possible in every human being. In encountering such amazing people working to heal the world, I am humbled by the knowledge that I am not yet at their level, and I need to work harder in my own life to reach the heights they quietly achieve year after year. This summer they restored the lost dignity of my ancestors' cemetery and I am always in their debt. And, oh yes, and no less important, they are loads of fun to be around as well.

Dan Oren from Connecticut (Markuszow 2016)

2015

I didn't expect that I would like doing physical work. But as I saw how important our work was and how much we can give back to the Jewish culture, I started to like the work and it was furthermore very satisfying to see the cemetery come back to life.

Sarah from Germany (Oswiecim 2015)

This week was one of the best this summer. All these people I worked with were inspiring me the whole time. They inspired me to help other people more, to love other people more, to learn more about the world. Before I couldn't really understand what this word "inspiration" means. But now I just have this feeling and it moves me to go with the work I want to do. They are great! Moreover, they gave me lots of life knowledge that I will use for sure. They were making me happy. Happiness and inspiration are in me at the moment. And I think this moment (feeling) will last still long.

Kateryna from Ukraine (Oswiecim 2015)

I really enjoyed working with Matzevah group on the Jewish cemetery in Oswiecim during our summer camp. They are all very lovely persons and working together was really fun and moving. It was a pleasure.

Kira from Germany (Oswiecim 2015)

We started with a little workshop with the gravestones. We were given some sheets of paper with some words explaining what we could find on the gravestones. That was the moment

when actually I understood how important our job was. We were cleaning a place where so many forgotten people were buried. And I personally find the idea of being forever forgotten really scary. I know we don't know the exact names or stories of all those people, but still I believe we made it possible for them to be remembered.

Desi from Bulgaria (Oswiecim 2015)

I enjoyed the work on the Jewish cemetery in Oświęcim with the group of Matzevah Foundation a lot. I liked the group spirit and acceptance of everyone's different approach towards the Shoah and the work. I think that we showed mostly one important point with our work: the tried total destruction of the Jewish people in Europe was not successful.

Tobi from Germany (Oswiecim 2015)