



# Alliance News

Toledo-Poznań Alliance quarterly newsletter – Christmas 2018

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## Christmas traditions with Board members

### Christmas with Jackie's family

For many Christmas Eves, Santa Claus visited my parents' home. Santa (Uncle John Stachowiak) always asked us to recite our prayers, and then he and Mrs. Claus (Aunt Toni Koralewski Stachowiak) gave us our gifts. Mr. and Mrs. Claus had many nieces and nephews to visit on that special night, and to help them get through the cold and snow, some aunts and uncles offered a drink of whiskey or vodka.

My family went to Mass on Christmas morning at Saint Hyacinth Church. After Mass and trying to sing koledy, we joined many families at the beautiful Nativity creche in the front of the church. It was such a beautiful and inspiring scene that many people cried. My dad always gave us change to put in the little dish for Jesus.

*Jackie Konwinski*

### Christmas Traditions in Marja's Family

As a child, my father had fond Christmas memories spent in the mountains of Zakopane. Later as a young man, he spent part of his Christmases singing with the Poznań choir. When he came to the US he tried to recreate some of those special Polish memories here. For him Christmas Eve was more significant and more celebrated than Christmas Day. The key thing I remember was attending Midnight Mass, usually at Nativity Parish on Nebraska Ave. Dad preferred the smaller church as it was a more intimate setting and reminded him of his Christmases in Poland. The celebrant was Father

Zygmunt J. Pitula who had become a close personal family friend of our family. For me as well Christmas Eve is a bigger deal than Christmas Day.

Another Polish tradition is the exchange of Oplatek at the Eve Christmas meal. Unusually, my father's family in Poland would send him Oplatek with Christmas scenes. For us it was shared twice at Christmas, the traditional Christmas Eve supper and at dinner on Christmas Day.

Usually, hay straws were placed under a colorful Polish table cloth given to us by our family in Poland. The idea was to take a piece of straw by people sitting at the table. A long and straight straw bodes a good year represented a year without problems or complications.

Our house was decorated with traditional colorful Polish straw Christmas ornaments and several wooden Polish creches. All of which we have treasured throughout the years.

*Marja Lasek-Martin*

### From Pat's Corner...

#### WHAT DOES CHRISTMAS MEAN TO ME

Thinking about past Christmas' and what they meant to me - have to be honest mostly parties, gifts, music and of course family get togethers and great meals. Now being a tad older and hopefully a little wiser it means more spiritually - Love of my Polish heritage and family and friends and being grateful for all that I have.

We do still celebrate some of the traditions like the baking of some of the Christmas favorite cookies and other goodies and the sharing of



Oplatek. Being fortunate to be able to celebrate some of the Polish group functions like Wigilia, going to hear the Polish Band. How lucky I am that the Polish community is still striving to keep our customs alive.

Gifts are important but, why do we give gifts? To me, its a means of remembering how the Three Wise Men brought gifts to Baby Jesus and of course, its not what we give but that we give that counts.

## MERRY CHRISTMAS TO EVERYONE

*Pat Konwinski*

### Christmas in Poland

Growing up in Poland meant a lot more stringent church rules. Christmas Eve, or Wigilia, is a day of fast and abstinence for Polish Catholics. Earlier that day is when we could go to get our Christmas tree. Once the tree was home and placed in a stand, we decorated it with small bulbs, apples and walnuts that were hung with nails and a string. Colorful paper chains that we made in school were also hung on the tree. And the last thing was small candles that had a clip on them and the clip held the candles in place on the tree. Amazingly we never had a problem with fire from those candles, the potential was certainly there. Also, adults were the only ones that could light the candles. The supper on Christmas Eve was always around 6 o'clock when the first star appeared in the evening sky. It was our job to look out the window and spot the first star. We could hardly wait for that first star, since we were fasting all day long. The dinner table looked so festive with a white tablecloth and a thin layer of hay or straw placed in the middle under the tablecloth, which commemorated Christ's birth in the manger, and where a dish with Oplatek (also known as holy bread), would be placed. Once the first star was confirmed, our parents started with sharing the Oplatek with each other, then with each of us children wishing us health, love, peace, doing

well in school, etc. The meal consisted of meatless items, such as marinated herring, which was a must. Then baked carp, then red beet soup with dumplings, mushroom soup, bread, pierogi, poppy seed cake, dried fruit compote and other side dishes. Babka (coffee cake) was a must as were other sweets. After dinner we would sing some Christmas Carols, and we could hardly wait for that special moment when Santa Claus would come. He always came on Christmas Eve. I remember when my younger sister squealed with excitement when she got a black doll, which was a sensation in the early 60's. My younger brother got a bicycle, and I got mittens, a scarf and a hat that all matched. I was more interested in my sister's black doll than anything else. At midnight we all walked to church for the Pasterka, or Midnight Mass (also known as Shepard's Mass). When we returned, we all got a cup of hot chocolate, which was a treat for us. The next day, Christmas Day, we had a goose for dinner with many other sides. We all just enjoyed the day with the family and with the newly acquired things. The day after Christmas was always a day of more food and visiting with other family members who lived upstairs, we lived downstairs. When we immigrated to Toledo, we preserved the same traditions every year, except we just couldn't find Santa Claus to come on Christmas Eve, it had to be Christmas morning. **Wesołych Świąt !**

*Kathy Grabel*

### Christmas traditions in Tom Sorosiak's family

We continue in our home to send a Christmas card to family members in Poland and/or Europe, along with family members a distance from our home, that we know that we will not see on Christmas, with the Oplatek inside the Christmas cards. It was a tradition that my mother and grandmother always did. So we sent at least 10 Christmas cards each year to family members in Poland, Germany and France, along with my daughter's family in Colorado. Of course we



celebrate all the other Polish traditions of Christmas in our home from seeing the first star on Christmas Eve, to the Singing of Koledy.

### Polish Culture Center update

On November 17th, 170 people, representing all the Polish organizations, attended the first Polish Cultural Center Hall of Fame induction. The 8 inductees were John Augustyniak, Marty Blaszczyk, Sr. Ann Francis Klimkowski, Lorraine Kwiatkowski, Paulina Ortyl, Mr. and Mrs. Anthony Smigielski, Joe Szenderski, and the Richard Walinski Family. Each recipient received a beautiful engraved remembrance artifact. The reception was well received and donations to the event created a profit of almost \$6,000 towards the construction of the Polish Cultural Center. Please consider making donations to the PCC by mailing your donation to PCC, P.O. Box 291, Waterville, Ohio 43566.

### Membership Renewal

We are approaching TPA membership renewal time. One renewal reminder will be mailed to members in late January or early February. Some members have renewed for two or more years. Renewal reminders will be sent to those who need to renew for 2019. Thank you for your support in 2018 and renew to continue receiving the Alliance Newsletter and other news and events in 2019.

**Membership information:** To be directly involved, we invite you to become a member by sending in the information requested below with your membership contribution.

### TPA and PACT

TPA and PACT will work together to present Wigilia, the Christmas Eve supper, on Sunday, December 16, 2018 at 5:30 pm at the Christian Life Center of Olivet Lutheran Church in Sylvania. If you would like to help, call Stan Machosky at 419-882-6625.

### Christmas Traditions as remembered by David Chelminski

My Mother's oldest sister and my godfather, Virginia and Edmund **Sankowski**, hosted our family gatherings on Christmas Eve once they got their house on Mulberry Street in 1953. Our **Dziadzia, Franciszek Zachwieja**, would begin the supper by breaking and sharing the traditional **opłatek** with each person present, from the oldest to the youngest, exchanging wishes—always with a lot of hugging and kissing, as well as tears. Our **Busia** was born in the U.S. in Buffalo, New York and our **Dziadzia** had come to America in 1912, so by the post-WWII period there may have been some Polish used, but it would be mixed with English, and likewise the meal was already not strictly meatless—there certainly was ham and cooked fresh **kielbasa** from Stanley's Market.

Singing of Christmas songs, which everyone participated in, was also mixed—Polish **Koledy** such as **Bóg się rodzi** and **Dzisiaj w Betlejem** followed by English hymns such as *O Come, All Ye Faithful* and *Joy to the World* as well as popular songs such as *Winter Wonderland*, *Jingle Bells*, and *Santa Claus Is Coming to Town*. Presents would already be exchanged on Christmas Eve, but in the early 'Fifties the children had to wait for the appearance of Santa Claus who demanded to hear a prayer recited in Polish by the kneeling child. As midnight approached, those who wanted to would slip away to attend Midnight Mass at St. Adalbert's several blocks away.

My Father's father, stepmother and sister had been killed at the beginning of World War II, so I had "adopted" **Teodor** and **Wanda Brodecki**, who had a clothing shop on Lagrange Street, as my "other **Dziadzia** and **Busi**," so my parents and I would always have a second (more Polish) Christmas celebration either at our home or theirs—sometimes with their daughters **Adela**, **Maryla** and **Olga** visiting from Chicago. My mother put on a play in Polish about a family's



**Wigilia** for St. Hedwig's PTA to involve the more recent Polish emigres in the parish in the "clubrooms" in the basement at St. Hedwig's School on December 11, 1957, and learned more about our Polish heritage through the Polish Arts Club. She introduced more Polish customs into our lives, most significantly by making a true traditional meatless **Wigilia** with home-prepared **śledzie**, mushrooms fried with onions, home-made **pierogi**, home-baked **placek**, Polish butter cookies and what my Mom called her "Hungarian" cookies, **kolaczki**. Already by the 1960s, our live balsam fir in our home on Bronson would have handmade glass ornaments from Poland, and of course we had phonograph records of the **Mazowsze** folk ensemble singing **Kolędy**.

After my Dad got a car and started driving to Detroit and Hamtramck by 1976, there would also be **krupnik** and candies imported from Poland from the Pol-Art Center. By 1974, I became a lector at St. Hedwig's and would attend our parish's beautiful **Pasterka** with my former classmates. Pastor Rev. George M. **Rinkowski** would place the figure of Baby Jesus in the life-sized crib at the side altar of the magnificent church lit only by candles held by each person in the crowded nave. After the election in 1978 of the Polish-born Pope, Saint John Paul II, I stayed home to watch the pre-recorded Midnight Mass from the Vatican on television. When my Mom died in 1994, I persuaded my Dad that he should fly to Poland to celebrate Christmas with his two surviving brothers and their families. I of course had to go with him. Thanks to John Henry Fullen's arrangements we were able to deliver the Christmas presents which the Toledo-**Poznań** Alliance had collected for the **Dom Dziecka** orphanage in our Sister City reroute to our relatives. One of the most beautiful Christmas Masses I have ever attended was in the 700-year-old parish church in my Dad's hometown of **Koronowo**, just north of **Bydgoszcz**.

**Wesołych Świąt Bożego Narodzenia i  
Szczęśliwego Nowego Roku 2019! Happy**

Holidays of God's Birth and a Lucky New Year 2019! *This remembrance was condensed due to space limitations.*

## **Wigilia**

**WHO - TPA and PACT members, family and friends**

**WHAT - Traditional meatless Christmas Eve supper and koledy/carols**

**WHEN - Sunday, December 16 at 5 p.m.**

**WHERE - Olivet Lutheran Church Christian Life Center, 5840 Monroe Street in Sylvania**

**WHY - Celebrate the birth of Jesus and renew Polish traditions**

**COST - \$15 for members and pre-registered non-members**

**RESERVATIONS - Rozanne at 419.944.5312**

## **Cicha Noc, Swieta Noc (Silent Night in Polish)**

Cicha Noc, Swieta Noc,  
Pokuj niesie ludziom wszem,  
A u zlobka Matka Swieta,  
Czuwa sama usmiechnieta,  
Nad Dieciatka snem,  
Nad Dzieciatka snem.

Cicha Noc, Swieta Noc,  
Pastuszkowie od swych trzod,  
Biegna wielce zadziwieni,  
Za anielskim glosem pieni,  
Gdzie sie spelnil cud,  
Gdzie sie spelnil cud.

Cicha Noc, Swieta Noc,  
Narodzony Bozy Syn,  
Pan wielkiego majestatu,  
Niesie dzis calemu swiatu,  
Odkupienie win,  
Odkupienie win.