

THE LAST WORD

Meis Mitzvah in Myslenice

“I asked a *sh’eilah* if I could donate the large amount of funds needed to do this. The answer I received was yes, I could — this is a *meis mitzvah*”

— Yisroel Minzer



The tombstone of Mr. Minzer’s grandfather that his mother placed after World War II

The Nazis took no prisoners on this day in Poland in 1942. Some 1,300 Jews were transported from Myslenice to concentration camps. An additional 30 people whom they initially missed were rounded up, brought to the city’s Jewish cemetery, and were shot and buried in a common grave.

Afterward, the Nazis destroyed the cemetery itself, tearing down its fence and smashing tombstones and monuments, which were then used to repair the streets in the center of town. Only five graves remained untouched in this Jewish cemetery that had been established in 1874.

Today, Myslenice has no Jews. Initial restorations on the cemetery were undertaken by the Krakow Jewish community after World War II. Subsequent restoration work is almost complete, including placement of a plaque on a wall of broken tombstones to memorialize the unknown people buried in the mass grave. The cemetery will be rededicated in a ceremony scheduled shortly after Pesach.

“My mother was the only one of seven children to survive the war,” says Yisroel Minzer, a Brooklyn resident and medical supply store owner. “After the war, she went back to the cemetery and placed a new stone next to the tree that marked the spot where her father had been buried before the war.”

That new stone was eventually stolen, and his mother returned in 1978 to replace it. Some 15 years ago, Mr. Minzer paid a visit to the cemetery and found it badly in need of upkeep. “*Kibud av v’eim* motivated me to get it fixed up.”

After seeing an article about Monika Krawczyk, CEO of the Foundation for the Preservation of Jewish Heritage in Poland, Mr. Minzer contacted her. “We received an e-mail asking for our help, and we didn’t waste time,” said Mrs. Krawczyk. “We met the Minzer family in Krakow, and started work shortly afterwards.”

This cemetery, which once held an estimated 200



It is not known if these tombstones — the only ones still standing upright at the Myslenice Jewish cemetery — are even in their rightful locations

to 400 Jewish graves, is located off the main highway on the road to Krakow. “When we started work, it was impossible to walk more than a few meters into the cemetery, but four months later the project was finished,” says Mrs. Krawczyk.

There are more than 2,000 Jewish cemeteries in Poland. The resting places of millions of our ancestors were slowly being wiped off the map. The foundation has been working for the past decade to restore cemeteries, synagogues, and other Jewish historical sites destroyed during the Holocaust and the postwar Communist era. The Polish government has extended its cooperation by providing the necessary permits, and all work is supervised by Poland’s Chief Rabbi Mordechai Schudrich. “This is great for the Polish-Jewish relationship, and we are happy to be the ambassadors,” added Mrs. Krawczyk.

Members of the Minzer family will be among the more than 20 people expected to attend the cemetery’s rededication after Pesach. “There were no public funds for this project and so I asked a *sh’eilah* if I could donate the large amount of funds needed to do this. The answer I received was yes, I could — this is a *meis mitzvah*.”

— Shifra Bamberger