



Iwona recommended that we attend an evening Mass at the Mariacki Church (Główny Rynek) at 6PM and stay afterwards for an organ concert at the same church. With no other plan in mind it sounded good to us. We cleaned up at the hotel, rested for an hour or so and walked the ten-minute walk to the Church. The crowd preparing to enter the church was getting larger and Iwona was still not there. No sooner did I think that, there she was, walking briskly but on time. We entered the Church and had a difficult time finding a seat. This was 6PM Sunday and the Church was packed ... and not by tourists. Just goes to show that the resurgence of church attendance is obvious in a country that is nearly 95% Roman Catholic. We eventually find empty pew seats on a side chapel and listen to the Mass. We cannot see the main altar but the glory and the awe of this majestic church is overpowering (left), to say nothing of the singing voice of the priest who delivered the homily. What a singing voice, strong and clear with an indication that he had professional training. To listen to him praise the Lord was worth the effort to come here. The Mass finished by 7PM with only one plate collection (as opposed to numerous ones in our NM parish). The Church mostly cleared out but the remainder of attendees was treated to new and modern church compositions on an organ that was at least three-stories high. The organ pipes were at their loudest as the pieces were performed by two different artists. Although the compositions were "flavored modern" they were spiritually moving. As the concert was nearing the end we moved to the front of the church, near the main altar to admire that

most famous of altars in all of Krakow ... the "Dormition of the Virgin with the Apostles" and the "Assumption" (right). It was created by Weir Stoss of Nuremberg. Commissioned in 1477 by the city's merchants, this monumental wooden polyptych is considered the finest piece of European late-gothic sculpture. Carved in limewood it is made up of a central section with four moveable wings that fold up to a closed position covering the central panel. The relief's are larger than life-size, indeed the figure of St. Peter supporting the body of the Virgin is 280 cm high (9.2 feet high). After exiting the church Iwona parts company with us as we set out in search of a different place to eat. Finding another interesting restaurant I am disappointed in the slow service and high price. But, the food was tasty and the beer was ice-cold. By 9PM we are at the hotel getting ready for our last full day in Krakow before heading home.



At 8AM we are waiting for Wielsaw to drive up ... we are going to Zakopane today. The air is cool and the forecast is for an overcast day. Not the best of days to visit the mountains but we are pleased to go there anyway. Before long we are on the road into the mountains ... it is a 100+ kilometer drive. Being a workday the traffic is moderate, unlike a weekend when this road is packed with tourists and locals heading for the high country. The drive takes all of one hour plus as we pass many small villages along the way. The elevation increases the closer we get to the mountains till at last, from a ridge we see the faint outline of the Tatra Mountains in the distance (left). Nestled at the foot of the spectacular Tatra Mountains, Zakopane is the winter sports capital of Poland and its most famous resort. During the winter, plentiful snow and challenging runs make for excellent skiing while the summer months offer hikers mountain lakes, glacial valleys and waterfalls. We drive through the center of town, down side streets and find ourselves parking near the funicular railway. This particular day it is crowded, must be a school holiday. We purchase tickets to ride up, get in line and within 10 minutes are ensconced in a car moving up the mountain. The ride up is short and sweet as we exit at the top and see what there is to do up here. Immediately we are confronted by the usual array of tourist shops and attractions. Those we ignore. We walk along the top ridge, past all the tourist traps and find ourselves on



a country road dotted by old cottages blackened by the sun and surrounded by ash trees. We enter a forest glen and sample the clean crisp mountain air. We move leisurely along other side roads admiring the many vistas open to us. We scan the valleys below us and admire the size of the city, which is large from this vantage point. The mountain peaks and crags on the other side of the valley are

inviting but we do not have the time or the inclination. As we walk along the ridge to the chair lift we are confronted by horse drawn carts manned by 'gorale's" (above) (mountain men). It is a sad sight to see those men in traditional dress, in a modern world, reduced to tourist attractions. I expected better but such is progress. We spend 90 minutes walking the ridge, stopping by a "gorale chapel", admiring the majestic views and sampling the clean mountain air. Seeing all there is to see at this time of year we head down using the funicular railway and exit at the bazaar of shops lining the street. If you want trinkets, sheep's fur, carvings, sandals, belts or goat cheese this is the place to shop. Everything that one does not need is offered here. I did spot a music stall and purchased a CD of Gorale Wedding Songs. We crossed under the main road and onto the road leading to Krupowski mall, a central mall lined with restaurants, cafes, boutiques and souvenir shops, sort of a Polish Aspen. The only thing that appealed to me was when Dolores spotted a "potato pancake" shop. We queued up and ordered a potato pancake (left) for each of us (I ordered two) with fresh sour cream. Almost as good as mine, except they do not use grated onions in the mix. We continued our exploration of this central mall but quite frankly nothing interested us. We left almost as soon as we got there and drove south to see the



Zakopane Jumping Hill (right). This is a training and exhibition area for ski jumpers in the 90m and 120m jumps. Lacking anything resembling snow, we simply sat at the base, ate the sandwiches that Wieslaw provided (thank you). Our lunch consumed we bid adieu to Zakopane as we headed out of town back to Krakow. To me Zakopane was an illusion ... I thought I was visiting an authentic mountain village but instead visited a modern Polish equivalent of Aspen. Still, it was a delightful break away from the hectic pace of a city like Krakow. We arrived back at the hotel by 5PM,

extended our heart-felt thanks to Wieslaw for his time, energy, driving skills (and sandwiches) and paid him for his efforts.



Last evening in Krakow and we had one last important visit to make ... to Francis and Maria Zembala's house for a "last supper". Taking a taxi from our hotel we were there in 15 minutes (fare \$4.75 US). Francis was waiting for us as the taxi pulled up to his building. He implored us to take a short walk down the street to a park that houses an important monument. Being agreeable, we detoured to the park. It was called "Fort 49" but what Francis wanted us to see was a monument by its side entrance. It was somber memorial (right) ... dedicated to the 440 Polish patriots who were shot by the Nazis during the period 1939-1941. The monument was of a simple design yet invoked strong emotions to anyone who remembers the

events in Poland during the war years. Francis explains and describes the nature of this memorial, its importance to Poles and why it should not be desecrated. Taking leave of this place of honor, we walk a short distance to the entrance of Fort 49 and enter the grounds. This fort, built in 1878, was an artillery fort, part of a national defense. Long abandoned, it has over the years been renovated and turned into a youth sports facility to keep the young of Krakow off the streets. Our tour was brief as there is little to see other than the underground fortifications. We return the way we came and go in to see Maria. Iwona joins us that evening as we continue our discussions of family matters, history, politics and religion. Francis does most of the talking (in Polish) and Dolores and I do our best to keep up in understanding what he is saying. The evening, to me, is enjoyable and pleasant, spend with people I consider family. After Iwona leaves for home, the four of us spend the rest of the night just reminiscing. Assurances are made that we will continue of contacts and perhaps in the near future we would return to Krakow. Saying our last farewells we leave Maria while Francis walks with us to fetch our taxi. It has been a good visitation ... one unexpected ... if not for Adam Zembala's chance of finding the Ochab-Trytek name on our web site and our tracing his family to ours. That chance encounter is what brought us here. Thanks Adam. We left Nova Huta and the Zembalas and arrived at the hotel by 11PM. Tonight is our last night in Krakow. Tomorrow our activities will be limited before we have to catch our plane to the States.



After a late breakfast and packing away all of our dirty clothes, gifts and tokens of remembrances we set off again for Główny Rynek and our last walk-about Krakow. We discovered some new side streets, new monuments, historic buildings and some churches. They were all beginning to look alike and blend into our consciousness. Having this last chance we returned to Wawel castle and having unused tickets from the previous visit here decided to visit the Zygmund Bell Tower and the collection of historic bells. With not one tourist near, we climbed up the steep and narrow wooden stairs and saw, touched, and admired each and every HUGE bell. There must have been at least 8 to 10 enormous historic bells on display. None of them were functional (clappers were inactive). There is the tradition that if one touches "the heart of a bell" (the clapper) one will return to Krakow. We touched every "heart" (right) when we found one. From the top of the tower the view of Główny Rynek was impressive. The climb down the narrow and tight wooden steps was intriguing and novel. When we left the Bell Tower we went next to the Gallery housing the Tombs of the Kings.



These underground chambers (left) in the Wawel Cathedral hold the mortal remains of all the important Polish kings plus a number of renowned Polish patriots and military marshals, including Marshall Pilsudski. This tour is somewhat somber (not macabre) and reminds us that at one time in world history Poland was a major powerhouse, both politically and militarily. We promised to meet Iwona about 11AM to see the daily opening of the Mariacki Church High Altar (the one we discussed earlier). Our timing was off a little for by the time we got there the church was packed and the ticket line was long. We entered long after the altar was opened but still had the opportunity to get "up close and personal" to the altar. The grandeur of the carvings may only be appreciated when seen from a few meters away.

We lingered only a short time before we headed across the plaza to the Sukiennice where we would visit the Gallery of Polish Paintings (right), part of the national Museum. Purchasing our tickets plus a photography permit we explored the two exhibition halls. Many of the paintings on display were of enormous proportions ... room high and 25-30 feet in length. Highly detailed and painted by renowned Polish artists of their day they are considered among some of the finest works of Polish art. Both modern and 19th century paintings were exhibited plus a large number of interpretive sculptures. Within an hour our tour ended and we headed out. As this was our last opportunity to say goodbye to Iwona we extended our heartfelt thanks for her time, effort and, most of all interest, in our Krakow stay. We parted company in Sukiennice, appropriately, and went our separate ways.



We retrieved our luggage at the hotel, hailed a taxi and by 2PM were at the departure gates of Krakow's airport. Lo and behold who was there to send us off ... Francis and Maria Zembala. What a touching gesture ... deeply appreciated by Dolores who had this last opportunity to chat with her first cousin. After we jumped through various "hoops" going through airport security and getting our seat assignments we returned to Francis and Maria and held our last 30-minute conversation. But, time was slowly ticking by and we had to one more time say our goodbyes as the Zembalas' left for the new apartment and Dolores and I jumped some more "hoops" through security.

At 4:15PM the LOT flight to Chicago left the ground and our European 2002 Odyssey ended. It was an unforgettable trip, as best remembered by this vision of Wawel Castle at night (right).

A CD that includes 28 slide shows that capture all the magic, wonders and family connections that we have touched upon in this newsletter will be sent to immediate family members when it is finally produced. However, this CD is available to anyone who received this newsletter and wishes to obtain one. Call, write or send us an e-mail with the request.

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