



Wednesday morning and the cupboard is bare ... only coffee and yogurt for breakfast. We pack our bags, catch a cab and drop off our luggage at Mary's, the agency from which we rented our apartment. They will watch our luggage until we depart that evening. With 12 hours to spare before the train leaves we try to decide what to do. We have seen practically everything one can see within walking distance of City Center. We decide to do nothing but stroll leisurely this way and that way. We retrace our steps to by-now familiar landmarks, take more pictures, and head back to Wenceslas Square. We window shop, browse some more stores, buy Czech folk-music CDs, some crystal and some books. We stop at an outdoor cafe for drinks, at a snack shop for some authentic Czech dessert and before you know it, it is 5PM and time for an early supper. We dine casually because it is too early for most people to eat. This has been a most casual day so far and the slowed down pace was easy to take. By 7PM we have retraced our steps to Mary's, retrieved our luggage, took the pre-arranged taxi the few blocks to the Havni Nadrazi train depot and waited for the train to depart at 9:10PM. As is my usual habit, I checked and re-checked the train and track schedule to make sure we would get on the right train. Our particular train was final-bound for Moscow ... that was a scary thought if we overslept. Since no one spoke English and all depot signage was in Czech I was stumped but finally managed to deduce which was our platform and track number. At 9:00PM we stepped on the sleeper car, found our cabin and

hoped we were in the right place. Even the sleeper car was misidentified. By 9:05PM the train porter assured me we were headed for Krakow and, although sweating like a stuffed pig, I managed a sigh of relief and settled in for the night.

The adjacent cabin was occupied by two ladies from Indianapolis, IN who shared their horror tales about traveling from Krakow to Prague (they were returning to Krakow). Before long, the train was moving; our tired bodies were laid on in this tiny sleeper compartment (all of 5 feet wide by 8 feet long, with berth bunks) (right) and hotter than Hades. Sleep eluded us both as first we were accosted at 1:00AM by Passport Control for the Czech Republic and ½ hour later by Passport Control for Poland. With the noises emanating from the sleeper car swaying side-to-side and the periodic stops at the various small towns sleep was impossible. Tired, groggy and hungry we managed to survive the night to see the first light of dawn as we were rolling through the Polish countryside on our way to Krakow. By 6:00AM we knew we were getting close so we rolled out of our bunks, freshened up a bit, pre-arranged our luggage, and simply stared out the window waiting for our destination to come into view. At 7:00AM, 20 minutes late, we pulled into Krakow's Główny Stacja (Main Station) and disembarked. Welcome to Poland.



No sooner did our luggage hit the platform than two ladies who asked, "Dolores and Ed", approached us. It was Maria, Dolores's first cousin and Iwona, her daughter. In our last e-mail we told Iwona when we would be arriving in Krakow but advised her that the hour would be too early for them to meet us at the train station. Needless to say they disregarded our cautionary advice and decided to meet us anyway. This means they had to get up way before 5AM to trek out. This two-person welcoming committee was bent on making certain that our arrival was

appreciated and that our first introduction to Krakow was pleasant. Embraces and warm greetings were exchanged as we headed for the "winda" (elevator) and out into the Krakow air. After calling for a taxi, we headed out to our hotel. The taxi driver was real polite ... he just stood there with the trunk open as we loaded our heavy luggage ourselves. Driving through Krakow's Wawel Hill district we were treated to new sights and sounds that would entertain us over the following 8 days. At the hotel the driver repeated his casualness and we unloaded our own luggage. I hope Iwona did not tip him. Although check-in time is a normal 2PM our room was ready and we were allowed to check-in ... 2nd floor with a view of the Wisla River and Wawel Hill (left). Our hostesses recognized that we had a sleepless night and looked rather grungy excused themselves but not before we all made arrangements to meet again just after noon.



A warm shower and a shave followed unpacking. Train travel is not all that glamorous. As we had not eaten anything since 5PM the day before, we headed out to the dining room for a late breakfast. Still open, we settled in and ate heartily ... juice, eggs, cheeses, cold cuts, rolls with jams, fresh fruits and breakfast pastry all washed down with ample coffee. Since this breakfast was not part of our "first day" at the hotel, the cost of 54 zlotys (\$14) was added to our stay. Rooms cost \$115 a night so this place was not exactly a Motel 6 (inexpensive). Sated and refreshed, by 11AM we were out the door and heading towards Wawel Hill and Główny Rynek ... a short 30-minute walk across the river. It was Thursday, a normal work day, but with the pending May 3 (Constitution Day) celebration coming up not too much vehicular or foot traffic was visible. Seems that Krakow was getting ready for a long weekend of celebrations. We wound our way to the Castle, met the "Fire-Breathing Dragon" and floated briefly through the Castle grounds. As Iwona was waiting to meet us near the Jagiellonian University (she teaches German there) we hurried along to make sure we would be on time. By the Bagatela Theater, our pre-arranged meeting point, we all arrived simultaneously. Our first adventure would be to visit the oldest University building in the world, the Collegium Maius, now the Historic Museum of the Jagiellonian University. The University grew out of the Cracow Academy, founded in 1364 by King Casimir the Great; it was, after Prague, the most important University in central Europe. With the death of Casimir in 1370 the University failed to develop successfully under his successor, Louis d'Anjou. The Academy however did receive valuable support from Louis' daughter, Jadwiga, who left all her jewels to its modernization. The University's greatest patron then became King Wladyslaw Jagiello, whose Lithuanian name has been given to it ever since. This Museum has been founded to preserve documents relating to the history of the University as well as works of art, for the most part produced by local artists. The most precious pieces in the collection are the medieval insignia of the University rector, togas, and other ceremonial robes together with alchemical and astronomical instruments. Among these is the "mappamundi" of 1510, the first to indicate America. The "Stuba Communis" (hall) was where the university masters ate their meals until the end of the 18th century; now used for special occasions such as the election of the rector. The Jagiellonian Hall (right), the largest room in the University, is in itself a wonderful illustration of the University's history. The walls are decorated with portraits of benefactors and patrons of the Athenaeum. Honorary degrees are conferred here. Photography is strictly limited in the chambers of this museum; security reasons, as all relics are priceless.



As the Jagiellonian University Museum is virtually a part of Główny Rynek after our tour we make our way to the heart and soul of Krakow. We admire the Sukiennice, the old "Cloth Hall" (left). Built in 1358 as a covered brick market, the neo-gothic ogival arches give rhythm and focus to the lower part of the building. Today inside the building there is a marked contrast between the arrangement of the upper and lower floors. The ground floor is full of wooden stalls and shops selling local crafts, gifts and souvenirs from the Krakow region. The upper floor houses part of the National Museum's collection of painting and sculpture (which we will visit on another day). Next to the Sukiennice is the Town Hall Tower (right) the most recognizable edifice in all of Krakow. This tower is all that remains of Krakow's old town hall,



demolished in the first quarter of the 19th century. The surviving tower was built in 1383 in brick with stone facing and mouldings. It is built on a square plan, over 215 feet high with a slight inclination (lean), some 22 inches out of true. In the 18th century, as a result of fire, the gothic spire was replaced with a small baroque dome. Although the tower's original architecture is fairly well preserved, the decorative rich detail, recorded in contemporary documents, is all but lost.



The three of us wander about Główny Rynek popping into shops here and there. We walk on over to Florian's Gate (right), part of the old defense of the city, take in the park-like settings and get more information at the nearby tourist center. We stop to admire the Juliusz Slowacki Theatre, built in 1890 as the new city theatre and was considered to have one of the most technically advanced stages in the world. Krakow in the 19th century was, and indeed modern Krakow still is, a city in which artists were particularly favored. The theatre façade is extraordinary in the richness of its sculptural decorations. The use of large masks, like those on the Sukiennice, run all along the base of the theatre dome, which is itself a remarkable feature. By now the activity of the day has stirred a new for some nourishment and we seek out a "Kuchnia Polska" (Polish kitchen synonymous with home cooking). After a short but frantic search we locate one such storefront. We order "pierogis" and some cold drinks and enjoy our first of many Polish cuisines. Finishing our small meal, we venture out again and explore the other side streets. Before we knew it the day has ended. We made arrangements to meet again the following morning by the "Dragon". Iwona returned to her family and we further explored Główny Rynek by ourselves. By now we were comfortable with the layout of City Center and managed quite well on our own. As night started to fall we started back to the hotel ... streets being semi-deserted. Our first day in Krakow gave us a taste of what is additionally in store for us.

Thursday welcomed us with a bright sun and a hunger that needed to be satisfied. After the usual Polish breakfast, this time with an omelet made to order, we returned to Główny Rynek on our own ... before the throng of people descended upon it. Early in the morning the Rynek is peaceful. We could walk among the various streets and not be hammered by others. We pop in to the Church of the Virgin Mary (Kosciol Mariacki) (right) on the Rynek for a brief visitation and meditation. In time we shuffle along to the Wawel castle area by the "Dragon" ... a sculpture that breathes "fire" (propane flame) every minute or so. The crowds are beginning to form as 11AM approaches. In time Iwona arrives with her daughter and tells us that the plan for the day is to visit the Cathedral at Wawel and the Royal Apartments at the Castle. We make our way to the Wawel courtyard walking through the gate by the Thieves' Tower (left) The sight that we encountered was disappointing ... wall-to-wall people. We forgot, it was May 3rd; Constitution Day and the Cathedral would host the traditional High Mass. We did our best to survive the crowds, entering the Cathedral after the Mass ended but the throng was just too much. We decided to leave Wawel and return another day. Before leaving we thought we would try to tour the Royal Palace apartments. The crowds were thin and we managed to get in for a 45-minute self-guided tour. Again, photography was prohibited so I was left disappointed. But the tour was fascinating and unique. By now it was nearly 1PM and we finally decided to leave the Castle and walk to the Rynek. Leaving the Castle grounds we headed for "ulica (street) Kanonicza", part of the old Royal Route. This street is probably the most picturesque and characteristic street in the Old City and is supposedly the oldest street in Krakow. Here we find the 600-year old



house of Dlugosz. This house originally housed the Jagiellonian baths but was later purchased by Jan di Niedzisk, a survivor of the Grunwald campaign. He was the father of 12 children who all bore the father's Christian name of Jan (John). One of these, Jan Dlugosz (known as Longinus, 1415-80), was the author in clear Latin of the monumental "Historia Polonia" (History of Poland). Stanislaw Wyspianski (1869 - 1907), the most Krakowian of all Polish artists, also lived here as a child. On the adjacent "ulica Grodzka" the May 3rd parade (right) was winding its way to the Główny Rynek. We stopped and admired the long line of paraders in their traditional costumes or uniforms. Banners of all manner floated in the breeze and it reminded me of my participations in May 3rd parades when I was a Polish Boy Scout in Chicago (IL) in the early 1950s. Of course, the last parade participant was the "pooper-scooper" for all the "horse-apples" left behind by the Cavalry. The parade was a pleasant surprise. After the crowds thinned out we then managed to continue our exploration of the nearby Church of Sts. Peter and Paul. We returned to the Sukiennice, explored its many gift shops and selected some items we wish to purchase. Avoiding emotional buys we left and eventually found our way back on the "ulica Kanonicza". The hour was getting late and we had an invitation to dinner at Maria's house. While Dolores, Iwona and her daughter settled in a café for some cold drinks, I returned to the Sukiennice and made my own purchases – a chess set (\$18), Krakowian dolls (\$6) and some color lithographs (\$15). On the way back I bought a bouquet of flowers for the hostess of our evening meal. Finding the group again, we called for a taxi and headed for "na Stoku #24" in the Nova Huta area, Maria's house.



The drive to Maria's house seemed long but in actuality was a short 20 minutes. Arriving when it was still light, Iwona, her daughter, Dolores and I maneuvered our way to the 2nd floor apartment and were welcomed in. Franciszek, Maria's amiable husband, greeted us and led us into an apartment that was as cozy as it was small. "Plenty of room for two", as Franciszek says; although we could imagine how "cozy" it was when Iwona and Adam lived at home. Nonetheless, the welcoming committee did not waste any time making us feel welcomed. Cold drinks were set on the table and before we could sip even one swallow, the table was set for the meal. And then the parade of entrees started ... soup followed by "golabkis" (stuffed cabbage) (right) followed by a variety of desserts. Coffee and vodka and wine were ever present on the table. Mirth and laughter punctuated the evening as the conversation shifted from family to the war years to the



hardships under communist rule. Franciszek did most of the animated talking; his Polish was impeccable. We tried as best as we could to follow the conversation and managed to understand at least 80% of what was said. Not bad for a Pole from New Mexico. Dolores and Maria had no difficulty in their bantering, although Dolores' Polish is not that good, mainly conversational as she learned from her mother. Still, as the evening progressed there no better feeling than knowing you were "among family". The proverbial family photos were brought out and shared. We managed to arrange to take them back to the hotel so that I could photograph them for prosperity's sake. Franciszek did an admirable job in jotting down, on the back of each photo, who was who and when the picture was taken. Very important -- as some of the pictures were of Dolores' grandparents going back to the early years in Bielcza. By 8PM, Iwona's husband Joseph (as I recall his name) arrived to take the family home. Another amiable chap -- with his long hair and dark full beard he looked every part the academian (which he was, at the Jagellonian University). We shared the revelations we uncovered regarding the Trytek lineage going back to the 1750s,

left all of the material with the family and asked that we be apprised of any new additions or corrections to that branch of the family for our genealogy work. By 9PM, Iwona and family (left) left for home and we were left with Maria and Franciszek to continue our discoveries and to try to finish off the near-empty bottle of vodka. The conversation we finished – some vodka was still left in the bottle as we said our goodnights at 10:30PM and waited for our taxi. In 15 minutes, we were in our room and comparing notes on the “new family” we located. Our feelings were high and concluded that the day was a “big-time” success. We plan to re-visit Maria and Franciszek again when we return from the Ukraine and Przemysl in 12 days’s time.

Friday started in the usual manner with breakfast and a plan to do more sightseeing of Krakow’s City Center. At this writing the memories fail me as what we actually did that day. Must have been a busy day however, for the images captured by my camera show us exploring all the major churches and monuments near City Center. I am certain that we met up with Iwona sometime during the day as we agreed to meet that evening at The Bohema Restaurant for an enjoyable “Galician Evening” ... an ethnic dinner accompanied by a group of folk-musicians. After returning to our hotel to freshen up, we again walked back to the Glowny Rynek, found the Bohema Restaurant and waited for Iwona to arrive. By 7:30PM she did and we started our evening in the cellars of this renowned eatery. Wine and the compulsory pork dishes were ordered, together with side dishes of “pierogis”, “ziemniakis” (young baked potatoes) and “mizeria” (sliced cucumbers in sour cream).

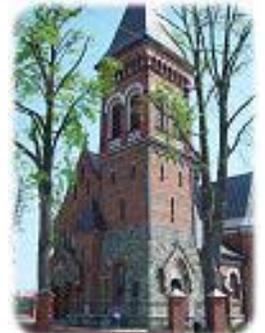
By 8PM the four-piece folk group made their entry and proceeded to entertain us (right) for the next 90 minutes, with one brief break. It was tough concentrating on the meal with fine music being played rather raucously. Between the two the evening was a smashing success. The meal was every bit as enjoyable as it was inexpensive. The Ukrainian / Cossack music was so toe tapping good we even bought their CD (50 zlotys or \$13). With music and meal finished, the Bohema was starting to close shop for the night. We exited by 10PM, bid a good night to Iwona who took a taxi home, and started our long, slow walk back to the hotel. Again, the streets were nearly deserted but we felt at ease in walking the 1½-mile back. “Young lovers” and no one else populate the river walk at that late hour. With the night air still, the moon in its last quarter, we shuffled our way back, always staring at the Wisla River only a few yards off our side. It was an enjoyable hike for we drifted off to sleep in rapid time. Tomorrow – we visit Bielcza.



Wieslaw Stasikowski (left) is an sąsiad (a neighbor) of Iwona. He is a retired jack-of-all-trades, bon vivant, an engineer and a world-traveler. He also is willing to be our guide and driver while we are in Krakow. Amiable with a decent command of the English language, he is good-humored and good-natured. By previous arrangement he meets us at the hotel early Saturday morning and we take off for Bielcza, about 75 kilometers due east of Krakow. But let us not forget cousin Maria ... she is picked up near Nova Huta at a pre-arranged corner. The journey has begun down memory lane. Past steel mills and derelict tracts of abandoned building, past new shopping malls and housing tracts we wind our way out of Krakow and into the green fertile countryside. Passing small villages and weaving our way over many roads under construction we made good time. About halfway to Bielcza we spot a familiar looking landmark – a zymek (castle), the Niepolomice Zymek. As we have ample time, we pull off the main road, backtrack a kilometer or two and find the city center of this village. After parking we walk the hundred meters to the complex entrance and enter the old fortress. Wow ... Saturday morning and it’s an open-air market. As much as we try to feign interest in this castle and find a reason to linger, the crowds and lines to the museum are much too much for -- us so we depart. A good idea turned sour as we headed out of the village and back on the main road to Bielcza. Kilometer after

kilometer the scenery is unchanging – it is springtime and the countryside is in verde (green) with people of all ages tending their small and innocuous plots of gardens. We wind our way up and down the hillsides looking for a sign that says, “This way to Bielcza”. But the only sign we encounter on the main road is a small sign that says “Borzecin”.

The village of Borzecin is a stones’ throw north of Bielcza so we turn onto this narrow country road and head north. Passing through more small villages and through heavy forests we pass under a railroad line and are greeted by a church steeple in the distance. It is Bielcza, soon confirmed by another small sign. As we enter this small enclave we immediately turn right and there, ahead, just before the turn in the road is a church – the Church of Bielcza (right). We have arrived. As soon as the car is parked we all make our way to the open front door of the church. No services today. There is a custodian of sorts who answers a few of our questions and a group of men repairing, or building, a stone and iron fence around the perimeter of the church. We enter the church and walk up and down the central aisle looking – just looking. Instantly we see a stained glass window with a familiar phrase at the base -- “Chicago, USA 1949”. The Bielcza Club of Chicago (left), to which Dolores’ mother supposedly belonged to, raised funds in the 1940s to commission this stained glass window. We take in every little detail of this simple church and eventually gather outside at a wall plaque mounted by the side of the church. Commemorating Polish Patriots who lost their lives during the Nazi regime (1939-1945) this plaque lists a “Jozef Trytek L-31” (lat 31, or 31 years of age) who perished during this period. This Trytek was Dolores’ uncle, or Helen Trytek’s brother. Circumstances of this loss are not clear and Dolores and Maria discuss the possibilities.



After lingering at this church (left) we drive up the road to House #108, the house of Helen Biel, another first cousin of Dolores. Behind house #108 is House #107, the supposed house where Dolores’ grandparents lived and where Helen Trytek was born in 1905. Helen Biel and her family (right) greeted these visitors warmly and invited all to come in and sit and relax for a spell. The compulsory cold drinks and sweets were offered and a conversation ensued that lasted for two hours. More heirloom pictures were brought out and an obligatory tour of House #107 was taken.



[Continued in Section 5](#)