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Olkuski Przegląd

They Restore the Dignity of the Forgotten

By Piotr Kubiczek, November 9, 2015

Last week, representatives of foundation "From The Depths," in cooperation with Polish volunteers, dismantled the fence of the former high school on Pilsudski Street, which was made of Jewish tombstones. The recovered tombstones were brought to the cemetery located in the Jana Kantego neighborhood.

Last week's action was carried out under the Matzeva Project, implemented by the From The Depths Foundation which operates mainly in three countries: Poland, Israel and the United States. The overall objective of volunteers is to restore the memory of more than 1,200 Jewish cemeteries and countless tombstones, forgotten in Poland and in the entire world.

Members of the foundation, in consultation with its partners, acquire information about hidden Jewish tombstones. After receiving reliable tips, representatives of "From The Depths" contact the owners of buildings or land to place an official request to the possibility of recovering the tombstones, which after recovery are transferred to the nearby cemeteries.

Also in this case there was an agreement to removed tombstones from the fence. Volunteers with basic tools and a jackhammer removed from the wall gravestones, which were later transported to the local cemetery.

"When someone dies, the only thing left behind is his name. And when the name is taken, then nothing remains," said Jonathan Daniels, president of the foundation "From The Depths". Volunteers treat the restoration of gravestones and their return to cemeteries as restoring the dignity of those who have died. "Unfortunately, because of what happened during the war, there were no Jews who could take care of the Jewish cemetery in Olkusz. And now, 70 years after these events, we come back here. We are students and volunteers from the US and Israel who have come together to restore their memories. This action would not be possible without the help of Polish volunteers," emphasized Mr. Daniels.

Until now, one and a half year into the Matzeva Project, they have managed to move a few thousand tombstones and tombstone fragments back to cemeteries. The campaign to find and carry tombstones also involves local authorities. For Lena Klaudel, the organizer of the program, it's activities help to not only learn more about the history of the Jewish faith, but also it is an opportunity to explore the history of the region.

In Olkusz representatives of From The Depths asked for further information of any forgotten tombstones, often found in walls and to build buildings. The appeal is really important, because today's generation of students is the last one that has a chance to meet with Holocaust survivors and hear their testimony, and to inquire about the difficult past. "Our goal is to preserve the memory of the World War II era, and remember the names of victims of the

Holocaust. We want to constantly speak to succeeding generations," say members of the foundation.

Alongside members of "From The Depths" and volunteers in the action were also locals Dariusz Rozmus, Ireneusz Cieslik, and Olgerd Dziechciarz.