

LEGACY RECLAIMED

on Simchat Torah

■ By Simcha Lazarus

As the Nazi reign of terror began to close in on the Jews of Poland, Mr. Taub, a successful textile manufacturer, gathered some of his family's valuables and hid them in a false wall within his retail outlet. Soon afterwards, the Taub family was transferred to the Krakow ghetto. By the end of the war, Mr. Taub was left with few remaining relatives. With no reason to stay in Poland he made plans to move to Israel. Before embarking on his journey, he made a stop at his store, which had been taken over by a non-Jewish Polish woman. Before her eyes, he broke down the false wall and removed the valuables that had been hidden inside. With these, he was able to make a new life for himself in the Holy Land. The rest of the Taub's assets, he was forced to leave behind.

The Taub's situation was not unique. Millions of Holocaust survivors lost all of their property and other assets, which were confiscated by the Germans. Most of them did not make provisions for themselves, as did the Taubs, and ended up leaving the land of their birth with little but the clothes on their back.

At the end of WWII, Poland passed a law that gave the government ownership of all the property confiscated by the Germans. By 1949, Poland was controlled by the Soviet Union, whose Communist rulers did not recognize the concept of private property. When Poland's own Communist government collapsed in 1989, Poland passed a law allowing Polish citizens to reclaim what the Communists confiscated, but the government refused to apply that same law to Nazi-era confiscations, placing Poland among the most

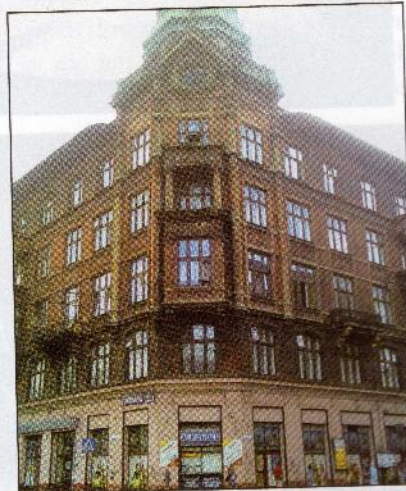
flagrant European violators of Jewish property. Despite this, there have been some Polish Jews, who with the right documents and a lot of perseverance, successfully managed to recoup their family's assets. Shlomo Taub is one such success story.

After settling in Israel, Taub's father began a new business and processed to put the past behind him. Occasionally they gave thought to the properties that they had left behind and the possibility of reclaiming them. "My mother even remembered all of the addresses," Taub recalls. Taub's mother passed away in 1997 at which time he was working as a purchasing manager in

was any chance of anything being done to reclaim these properties.



Shlomo Taub with a menorah that had been saved by his father in Poland.



Dietla Street- A large building on Dietla St. in Poland, that is largely owned by Jews.

a multinational company in Israel's high-tech industry. Communism had collapsed and Poland was in the process of transforming itself into a modern capitalist state. Taub soon found himself in regular contact with his company's Polish counterparts. Once their relationship was established, he began to tell the Polish business men about his family's life in Poland and the property that had been left behind. He then asked them if they thought there

After receiving a promise from one associate to look into it, Taub didn't hear anything for over a year. Finally, one of the Poles got back to Taub with the name of a lawyer in Poland who was interested in helping. Taub contacted the lawyer and began the slow process of regaining his family's assets. Many of the Taub's properties were still listed under his family name, and in one instance, the government had been collecting rent payments from residents living in one of the properties, for more than 50 years; money that should have gone to the Taubs. Finally, in 1999, a Polish judge gave Shlomo Taub permission to start re-registering them in his name.

Encouraged by his own activities, Taub decided to assist other Holocaust survivors and their family members in reclaiming what had been left behind. With the help of his Polish energetic advocate, Legacy was launched. Today, they have their headquarters in Krakow, an office in Raanana operations in the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Germany and Romania.

According to a report presented to the Israeli government in 2005 there is over \$145 billion worth of property that was stolen from the Jews during the Nazi era. More than 25% of this sum is located in Poland. "I am not a dreamer," says Taub "I don't think that we can reclaim all of this, but forget the money issue, it's about bringing justice." A 94 year old Holocaust survivor just recently reclaimed property in Poland which is valued at \$100,000. At this point, she is unlikely to use most of this money, but just the fact that she went to Poland, stood in front of a judge and was ruled in favor of, by the court, made it all worthwhile for her.

The process of reclaiming property begins by contacting the legacy offices and providing the address of the property and the name of the owner. Proof is also needed that the claimant is related by blood to the owner of the property. Taub and his team of lawyers then begin analyzing the value and legal status of the property. "Most



This building, worth millions of dollars, used to be the largest textile factory in Poland and belonged to the Pozmainski family, who are no longer around to claim it.

customers have no idea what the value is today of property that was left in Poland 60 years ago" explains

Taub. This analysis usually takes about six months, after which time the customer is provided with a full report of the findings. "We usually only recommend that a customer continues with the claim if the property is found to be valuable."

The next step, which can take between six months to a year, is to collect all the documents that prove the identity of the claimant. Birth certificates, marriage certificates, death certificates, proof of name changes, are all gathered together, in order to establish inheritance procedures. If any document is missing, a new one has to be issued. Finally, the customer is asked to appear before a judge in Poland, or to have someone sent in his place. All of the documents are presented to the court and the judge determines if they have a right to the property, or not.

The final step that Legacy assists with is the sale. "I usually recommend selling because it is difficult to manage property from so far away. Above all, I prefer to recommend our customers investing the restitution money in Israel."

Legacy has had many successes and millions of dollars have been returned to their rightful owners. Yet, there are still billions of dollars worth of property that, as time goes by, is less likely to be returned to Jewish hands. "Unfortunately, there are less holocaust survivors left each year," Taub sadly points out, "and the second generation is usually not aware of property that has been left behind, or they don't know the exact details. The third generation doesn't really care and for the fourth generation the holocaust



The Taub's house in Krakow

is something so distant that they can't even relate. Now is the time to step forward and reclaim assets that were left behind, otherwise it will be forgotten forever, together with the Great Jewish history which existed in the country until 1939."

Poland's recent entrance to the European Union is an additional incentive for owners of property to step forward. Poland is attempting to be more open which gives Jews a better chance when making their claims. But the main danger right now is of the heirs to the property losing interest.

For Taub, Legacy is a vindication for Holocaust survivors.

"I like to see how each customer reacts after looking straight at the judge and receiving the verdict," he said. "I like to see our customers when they realize that the return of their property is not just a dream. That is my mission. Whoever has a flame in his heart for family assets should at least make a claim. It's not just about monetary compensation, it's about justice." ■



Legacy™

Retrieval of Property in Poland and Eastern Europe

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