

Polish Journal  
by Jeffrey Wintersteen

*June 3, 1995, Near Polish border*

The Czech countryside rushed by under the fading pink light of evening. The thick, humid air hung over the lush green fields and pastures. The night air was cool on my face as I leaned out of the eastbound train, taking in the smells of freshly cut hay and enjoying the last remnants of the day. As the train marched towards the Polish border, I felt a surge of excitement in what lay ahead. To the east in the darkness lay the famous stud farms of Poland, the destination of my journey. I withdrew from the window and settled back onto the seat of the compartment and began reading again from my worn copy of Michener's *Poland*.

I was to meet my parents in Warsaw, and from there we were going to visit all four of the Polish studs. Though my family is new to the Arabian horse business, but my parents are not new to their love of Polish Arabians. For years before they acquired their first mares, they had dreamed of their own breeding program and a taking trip such as this. As for me, my love of the Arabians is more recent, due in large part to some dear family friends, the Sheehans. My knowledge of Polish pedigrees comes in large part from the wisdom they have shared. On one of my first visits to their farm, Nan Sheehan gave me a book by the Korona listing all sire and dam lines. A copy of this was tucked in my knapsack along with endless conversations with Nan and her daughter Sandy in my head.

*June 5, 1995, Warsaw*

Spent most of yesterday lying around some friends' apartment in the outskirts of Warsaw that we were lucky enough to know. Went downtown and rented a shiny red Citroen from the Orbis travel agent. I was a bit nervous about having a such a nice car in eastern Europe, but consoled myself that we would be in the out of the way places and the car did have an alarm. My parents were all smiles when they emerged form customs. They had bought a video camera to

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record the trip. After a few hugs, we jumped in the car and where headed to Janów Podlaski for our first stop.

We left from the city heading east; I was driving and dad acting as navigator after only being in Poland a couple of hours. It was actually quite easy once we made it out of the city. Just head towards Moscow on N2. Along the way we saw numerous families cutting hay the way they have for years, by hand. It was an amazing demonstration of hard work. The little children that were too young to being of any help lounged in the back of the horse drawn carts on the piles of hay.

*Janów Podlaski*

We arrived at Janów around six in the evening. The small town was a buzz with activity. Most of the residents were dressed in their finest for a local wedding. A smiling old gentleman was kind enough to respond to our request for directions. He asked if we were Russians in Polish, pointing east. I answered in German that we were Americans, looking for the stud. He broke into a toothless grin and answered in broken German, "straight down this road, very big."

The old man was right, it was larger than any of us expected. They were a few workers returning home on bicycles as we approached. The massive pastures sat empty, the horses turned in for the night. Before us was a large sign announcing our arrival, a trip that really began in my parents dreams many years before. It read: *Stadnina Koni Janów Podlaski*.

We slowly rolled the car through the front gate; the farm was quite large with many white barns seen through the trees that adorned the grounds. We pulled off into the guest apartments and ventured inside. A couple of cleaning ladies were confused by our arrival, but then threw their hands up, walking upstairs saying "Americans" over and over, finally nodding in under-

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standing. It seemed that there had been some confusion with our arrival dates, they were expecting us yesterday and were relieved that we had finally made it.

We followed the ladies upstairs to our rooms. In the foyer stood a sculpted gray stallion in painted bronze. We didn't need to read the inscription on the base to know it was the likeness of Bandos. On the wall was a painting of the bombing of Dresden and the grooms pulling the horses out of barns consumed in fire. I knew the dark bay, rearing in front of the terrified groom was Witraz with his brother Wielki Szlem was on the other lead. If you understood the Polish love of this breed, the significance of these grounds we now stood was very clear.



Greeting Polish horses for the first time.

That evening we met Director Trela and his assistant Anna. Anna invited us along with a French group to view the mares in their stalls. We readily agreed and trotted off behind them after dinner. Though I don't remember her name, I remember the face clearly. Anna slid back the door to the first barn and we stepped in cautiously. A bay mare in the first stall swung out her sculpted head in greeting. Her large eyes were soft and friendly in the fading light, truly beautiful. The familiar smell of horses filled my nostrils half a world away.

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Anna showed us how to read the stall nameplates, the sire and dam, and who the mare was in foal to. It was easy enough and we quickly fell into meandering down the long barn, looking at mares whose pedigrees till now we had only read about. The French were the main focus of her attention, but we listened in to their conversation. When we neared the end of the building, one of the gentlemen of the group turned to my father and said, "in the world of Arab breeding, Janów stands as a church", gesturing a steeple with his hands.

I smiled, reflecting in his words. A Europejczyk foal, a bay colt, stretched his muzzle out, and I rubbed his ears, looking into the soft darkness of his eyes. A church indeed, with much of the next generation already under this hallowed roof.

The French left for some singing, wine and a campfire the staff was hosting. We lingered a while longer, relishing our time in this special place. Anna seemed to sense our desire to see more and offered to take us to the stallion barn for a quick look. We couldn't hide our eagerness and soon we were following her through the summer evening.

Though we were each trying to guess the building that was for the stallions when we arrived, it should have been readily apparent. The building was large and freshly painted white, with the Janów insignia of the crown was fashioned out of rod iron and hung above the entrance. The corridors were very wide with oversized stalls, and thick walls of concrete. There was not a sound and we ducked under the pole across the double doorway announcing the barn was closed. I could just make out the heads turning to the visitors in the dim light.

Fawor (Probat x Fatma/ Anarchista) was lying down and we didn't wish to disturb him. Eldon (Penitent x Erotyka/ Eufkrat), however, was up and curious about our late arrival. It will always be etched in my memory, stepping into the stall knee deep in straw the first time. Eldon was alert, regarding me curiously, Anna was cooing softly, and the magnificent animal stepped

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up to us. His eyes were pure black, yet gentle. He stood patiently as we stroked his sleek neck and rubbed the tight ears. It was just wonderful to be finally there, in this barn with the stallions of Janów.

*June 6, 1995 Janów Podlaski*

The next morning there was knocking of the door of my apartment in the guest quarters at just after six. I cracked the door open to see my father full of boyish enthusiasm, dressed with the video camera hanging around his neck. The director had said the horses would be let out at 6:30 for water and then turned out to the pastures at 7:00. We needed to go now if we wanted to see it. I quickly tugged on some jeans and ran after him down the corridor.



Mares and foals being turned out to pasture.

The farm was quiet in the cool softness of the early morning, though it was already showing signs of warming up. The sky was a beautiful azure blue. Men on bicycles pedaled by without a sound, part of the staff on their way to work. We reached the mare barn by the west pastures without a word between us, intent on what was transpiring all around as the farm was com-

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ing to life. As we approached, the first mares were being let out with their foals. Dad raised the camera and began to narrate the scene for a later time. I smiled and watched what unfolded.

There is no water in the barns and so the horses are watered three times a day. The stalls were let open and the mares would trot out into the large paddock, raising the dust into the still air. The grooms would sit on the short fences surrounding them and enjoy the morning sun. Everyone watched the horses intently as they stretched, kicked, and galloped themselves awake.

After every mare had been given ample time to water, they were let out to the pasture, charging out into the waist high grass. My father and I watched the grooms repeat this to several groups of mares, marveling at the condition of both the horses and the pastures. Janów had 170 purebred Arabians, all of them without rubbed tails or manes. Their hooves were each in good condition. The pastures were not over grazed, but incredibly lush and full.



Pepton

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The director had arranged for a private showing of the stallions and the Prestige Sale horses at 10:30. By 10:00, my parents were already seated at the showing area, not wishing to miss any of what was to transpire. Some local children were gathering at the fence behind us as the first horse marched out, the incomparable stallion Pepton (Bandos x Pemba/ Czort). His elegant movement and neck was breathtaking. He represents the last of the Ibrahim sire line from Bandos in Poland, the only other Bandos son being Eukaliptus, who is of course older. Mom really liked Alegro by Probat and out the famous Janów mare Algeria by Celebes. He was home from Holland and was looking extremely fit. The another that we enjoyed were Arbil, one of the last of his sire Banat out of Arba by Comet. Though Arbil was not extremely typey, he was handsome and his power and attitude was easily appreciated. Another was the Probat son Fawor out of Fatma by Anarchista. His black bay coloring and soft eye was extremely appealing, but when he moved and showed his floating trot with extremely flat croup, his charm was only enhanced.

In truth, the morning was a bit overwhelming; we were struggling to learn the new sires and dams, since our only information was a bit antiquated at what was currently standing at the stud. We left for the pastures with Anna, trying to understand what we had seen. It only really came to light in when we reviewed the video that we had taken later.

We meandered through the surrounding pastures, waste deep in grass, as Anna rattled on bloodlines and show results. The day was hot with not a breeze. The horses were so friendly and completely surrounded us. It was difficult to stand far enough away to see them. Dad found a bay filly by Fawor out of the famous Algeria by Celebes that he really liked. After seeing the show results from the Polish Nationals this year, I realized that dad had picked a winner. Her name was Albula and she was Junior Champion female and named Best-In-Show.

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We left that afternoon for Białka, after the director gave us directions on our map. When we had been planning our trip at home, we did not realize that there are quite a few towns with the same name. Poland, as it happens, has more than one of both Białka and Michałów, and coincidentally enough, we had chosen the wrong for both. In any event, armed with the correct location we set off eager to see what the next farm had in store. We couldn't leave, however, without one more stop at the stallion barn and shoot a bit more video, even if it is through the stall doors. The grooms let us step inside with Eldon again to say our good-byes.

*Białka*

We had telephoned Białka from Janów, and had made a appointment for 6:00 PM. We made several wrong turns, but eventually found it. My only Polish at this point was "Dziękuję" (thank you) and "Stadnina Koni" (stud farm), however, it was sufficient.

We were thirty minutes late when we finally pulled into the tree-covered drive of the Białka Stud. The history of the farm was self-evident in the buildings and the aged cobblestone drive. The staff and Assistant Director Urbanski were waiting for us, dressed for the occasion. We wasted no time, wanting to see the horses before the light completely faded. The highlight was the first stallion Balon, the last of the Gwarny sons out of Ballada by Partner. His flarey trot through the freshly cut lawn in the golden light of evening became yet another treasured memory.

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Balon

The barns had a different character than that of Janów, though the newest of the state studs in Arabian breeding, Białka has a long history of horse breeding dating back to the 1400's. After seeing the Prestige Sale mares, we walked the aisles of the ancient barn. Director Urbanski waited patiently, understanding our desire to relish the moment.

We left that evening for Lublin since there were no accommodations for us at Białka. On the drive we marveled at the different character between the two farms, Białka and Janów, and reminisced at what we had seen. Tomorrow would bring Kurozweki and I was eager to see Europejczyk who currently standing there.

*June 7, 1995 Lublin*

Though the demise of the Soviet bloc is now five years old, it is easy enough to stumble across places in Eastern Europe that seems never to have heard that bit of news. Our hotel was such an establishment, and though it did not bother me, it had the opposite effect on mom who was anxious to check out.

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We were to arrive at Kurozweki at three that afternoon, so there was plenty of time in the morning to do a bit of sight seeing. This we did and saw Castle Lublin in the near center of town. The seven hundred year old building showed none of the scars of the Nazi atrocities that occurred there during the war. Hundreds of Poles were tried and subsequently shot on those infamous grounds. On a lighter note, there is a splash of western capitalism when you look hard enough. We found a Burger King for lunch as we were leaving town.

*Kurozweki*

Director Guziuk's directions to the farm were simple enough, "drive to the town and ask for me". We stopped in the small town and did just that. The elderly gentleman spoke no English but pointed further down the road, where we found a navy blue 4-wheel drive pulled along side the road with a Kurozweki bumper sticker. The Director smiled and waved for us to follow him.

We were again surprised at the entirely different character of this farm compared to the others. In many respects it had a western European character that was absent from the previous two, the main house having the look of an alpine chalet. Director Guziuk was anxious to show us the horses so we followed him to the first barn. I was looking forward to seeing Europejczyk (El Paso x Europa/ Bandos) and wasn't disappointed as he stood in the first stall when we entered the barn. In my humble opinion he was truly a legend of Poland, having never lost a race on the track, including 6 stake races and then equaling that in his show ring performances. He looked impressive standing in his stall, which if a horse can look good in the stall, odds on he will look better out of the stall.

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Europejczyk

The director ushered us along saying we could have some time with him later. He really wanted us to see some of the horses that we would see later in the show garden. The fact is that we saw most of the horses on the farm, the grooms had them all tied up and brushed. My father asked if they always keep them tied up, the director replied with a smile, "no, this is for you!."

The significant sire Banat (El Azrak x Bandola) stood at Kurozweki for some time and his influence remains in some significant daughters. The first we saw in the paddock was Egipjanka (Banat x Estyna/ Algomej). The director was quite proud of her and referred back to her often as we made our way through the barns. We also saw the influence of Banat through his son Gabaryt out of Gambia who was currently on lease to Great Britain, but had several get on the ground. Gabaryt was named British National Champion 1995 equally his father's feat of the same title. We also saw the influence of Agierczyk (Engano x Algeria) and Algomej (Celebes x Algonkina), one of the best Celebes sons.

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In the show garden we were treated to the Director Guziuk's foundation mare Euforia (Bandos x Eufonia/ Doktyner) and her two daughters Ejnia by Algomej, and Eutrofia by Palas. Following her was the gorgeous Eukaliptus daughter Calabria out of the Pepton daughter Castylia. She was lot number one for the Polish Prestige Sale. The treat of the day, though, was the high stepping and sleek Europejczyk. He was breathtaking, the epitome of Polish breeding and what we had traveled so far to see. As a side note, it was especially exciting this year at the US Nationals to be on hand when his son Europa out of Enaria by Aloes went top ten futurity colt -- the circle of life continues.



Myself, Dad, Director Guziak, Breeding Manager Teresa Dobrowolska and Mom.

After the show garden we went inside for salad, coffee and blueberry cheesecake. The director was kind enough to trace one of our mares that originated in part with this farm. We wanted to stay, but knew we needed to press on to Michałów where we would be spending the evening. We couldn't help but be extremely impressed by our gracious and polite guests on all the farms. We passed by a castle on the outskirts of town and stopped briefly for some pictures.

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*Michałów*

We arrived at Michałów around 9:00 PM. In the twilight we could see the large farm sprawled out with the stonework barns and deep pastures. We waited by the guesthouse for the director. Director Jaworowski appeared in short order dressed in a blazer and military cap. He graciously kissed my mother's hand and showed us to our rooms. He spoke mostly German to me that I translated for my parents – this seemed a bit more comfortable for him than English. He told us the mares would be let out at 7:00 the next morning and let us retire to our simple, but elegant rooms. The floors and cabinets were all of hardwood, making for a distinctly Michałów charm.

*June 8, 1995 Michałów*

We started the day seeing the mares turned out. It was probably the single most significant event of our trip, if there could be only one! The mares were truly gorgeous, very Saklawi in there appearance. It was the culmination of generations of breeding that Dir. Jaworowski was directly responsible for in his 42 years with Michałów. We searched in vain for an average mare as the herds would charge by, but found none. All were extreme both in type and confirmation.

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Author and Eukaliptus

After breakfast with the director, we headed off to the show garden for viewing of the stallions. My personal highlight was Eukaliptus (Bandos x Eunice/ Comet) who was 1980 Polish Champion and sire of numerous Polish and European champion mares. After several pictures, the groom let me hold him and I stood him up for a few pictures. For 21 years old, he still looked great! We also saw the Pepton son Ecaho (Etruria by Palas) who went on to win the Polish Nationals in August.

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Ekstern

We then made our way around the pastures and saw the beautiful Esklawa (Eukaliptus x Ekstaza/ Celebes), the 1994 European Champion mare and winner of the 1995 Polish Nationals. In the waist high grass of the yearling stud colt's pasture, we saw the product of the recent Monogramm lease by the way of Ekstern (Monogramm x Ernestyna/ Piechur) and Ganges (Monogramm x Galomna/ Fanatyk). We were quite proud of ourselves for having picked out Ekstern from the field of 60 yearlings and two year olds not knowing his pedigree or even his name. Only on coming back to the barn did we learn that he was Junior Champion of Poland in the recent spring show.

That evening we watched the mares being brought in to water and then returned to their places in the large open barn. The mares ran loose into the barn and then the groom would yell the equivalent "to your places" in Polish and they would line up on their own under the name-tags, waiting to be haltered in. I didn't scribble down pedigrees, but just sit back and took it all in, the smell of the horses and silage, and watch the foals frolicking in the open area of the barn.

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It was how evenings had played out for decades, Esklawa being tied up between here sisters, no different than the rest. She was only a part of the greater whole, how it was meant to be.

*June 8, Michałów*



The Wintersteen's with Director Jaworowski and Roma Skrzydlewska

We had breakfast and pictures with the director this morning. It was somewhat sad knowing that our trip was coming to an end. I think in retrospect it was the friendship and intense love of their horses that impressed us the most of the Poles. For any horse lover, a trip to Poland becomes an unforgettable experience. Though the departure was sad, we were confident that we would be back, the next time returning home with a Polish treasure of our own!