

Speech in receiving Gold Cross of Merit

Today, I, the son of Jewish-Polish born parents and a New Zealander by choice, feel extremely privileged to be standing here in the Embassy of the Republic of Poland after receiving from His Excellency Ambassador Zbigniew Gniatkowski this great honour, the Gold Cross of Merit...

Sir Ambassador, our collaboration has brought together Polish, Jewish and Jewish-Polish people, to recount moving testimonies of the past, to acknowledge our shared history to all, so to build bridges of positive narratives now and into the future. It has been an honour in itself to work alongside you Sir Ambassador, I hold you in the highest regard.

I am glad to see people here, several of whom I have either worked or volunteered alongside, from organisations I value, to share this very special occasion with me. I hope each of you find new contacts here that lead to inspired collaborations together.

I accept this award because I value and identify with my Polish heritage. Poland was a haven, a refuge for the Jewish people since 1264 when Polish Prince Boleslaus the Pious issued the Statute of Kalisz – The General Charter of Jewish Liberties in Poland, an unprecedented document in medieval history of Europe that allowed Jewish people personal freedom, legal autonomy and safeguards against forced baptism and blood libel. The Charter was ratified again by subsequent Polish Rulers through to 1539 and held in place until Poland was conquered and lost its independence. Then after 123 years, in 1918, Jews were again granted equal rights in independent Poland.

Had WW2 not happened, perhaps my parents would have stayed living in their birth country and not have suffered through Nazi concentration camps? They were not betrayed by their own home country in the way other governments of the time chose to address the “Jewish Question” by colluding with the Nazis and agreeing to exterminate the Jews.

Thank you Sir Ambassador, I am proud to receive this award and dedicate it to the memory of my parents, Ella and Samuel Hornung, zichronam l’bracha, whose Holocaust survival was possible only through the courage and kindness of others. I hope my grandchildren may one day also feel inspired by this special occasion and affirm their own Polish heritage as their awareness grows of the wide world around them.