

In April 2011, I had the fortune to travel to Riga, Latvia for The Teaching Excellence and Achievement exchange sponsored by the US Department of State. As a History and Government educator, I wanted to travel to Latvia and learn more about its Holocaust and Independence and Democracy History. My partner, Inga Lande ensured that I was able to explore Latvia's Holocaust and Independence History while we co-taught her students and I provided teacher trainings. My experience in Latvia was outstanding, and the valuable insights gained into Latvia's Holocaust and Independence History will inform my teaching for the rest of my career.

Riga in WWII History and the Holocaust



Friday, we toured the old Riga Ghetto with Tamara Zitcere who taught with Inga. Tamara has researched and shared her findings with the Riga City and with Yad Vashem.



Her work has revealed much about the men, women and children who lived in Riga and who were sent to the Ghetto and to Rumbula, Biernieki Forest or to Salspils, and those sent to other camps...





We ended the day of history with a visit to the recently opened Riga Ghetto Museum.



Tamara Zitcere shares her passionate quest to research Riga's Holocaust history - copy and paste the link into your browser to hear what she has to say:
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EEP1d_U4Mfo

Rumbula, Salaspils and Bikerneki Forest – Killing fields

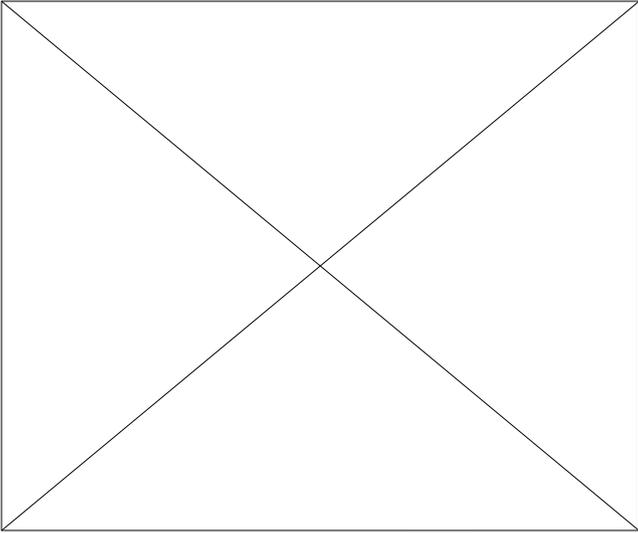


I traveled to visit the Riga area Holocaust Memorials of Salaspils, Rumbula, and Bikerneki Forest... A mournful way to spend a sunny afternoon, but important for me to accomplish.

I appreciated having Inga's son Ivo with me to help translate the markings in Russian and Latvia, and we visited locations that he had never seen. I found Salaspils to be an impressive and sad...especially the children's memorial with all the stuffed animals and flowers honoring the lost lives of so many young girls and boys.



The monumental statue of the Mother protecting her children made me weep, and the statues of the defiant and supportive individuals were moving.



We then visited Rumbula, and I found the memorial's design to be simple and intense...



It was odd to hear the noises of the street traffic and of the nearby concrete factory and the rail lines in the middle of the wooded memorial site.



As you can see from the photos, the memorial stones are effective and moving...



After a while, we traveled to the Bikernieki Forest memorials which are on both sides of a major roadway. This memorial was also in the wooded area of Riga, surrounded by trees moving in the wind, pine needles rustling a murmur of remembrance.



The stones marking the memorial, and the markers for the too many mass graves were solemn reminders of so many men, women and children lost, their lives full of potential and gift deprived of reaching their fullness.



I was disturbed to find evidence of individuals who have no respect for the solemnity of the Memorial; many empty bottles and other trash were left in the stones of the memorial and its environs...



Upon our return to Riga, we visited the cemetery to view the tomb of Latvia's first President, and to see the monuments to the victims of the Soviet oppression.



We arrived in Riga center and drove past the Cheka secret police Corner House, the site of interrogation and persecution of Latvians. We stopped to witness the monument in the form of a door with a small viewing window...such abuse of power.



A day filled with more Latvian history, time spent with Latvia's future, its students, and an evening filled with clear skies and sunshine...also a day of so many thoughts and feelings...

More photos, video and observations on my visit to Latvia can be found on the blog I kept while in Riga: <http://www.mccullaghinlatvia2011.blogspot.com/search?updated-max=2011-04-21T10:25:00-07:00&max-results=7>

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