

POLAND

THIS DIARY BELONGS TO SOPHIE TREADWELL

4/3/03

Joanna met us at the airport with sweet eyes and an open heart. My Polish is not going to be good enough. All of my endless listening to language tapes didn't prepare me for having to ask and understand many things.

4/4/03

Our first meeting in the OSKa Library with the fierce OSKA staff members was lovely. This Library! What a plethora of multi-lingual books and literature on various women's movements. I am feeling so excited about getting to know these women, Gosha, Agnieszka, Anna, Ewa, Joanna, Dada. I love their instant warmth and camaraderie, their caring. We have an instant uniformity of purpose already. Coming together with these huge-hearted women makes me even more certain of how important making this journey is.

4/5/03

Our first meeting with our companion Polish Actresses. Incredible! What amazing faces and quirky personalities. Each has chosen a Guerrilla Girl On Tour name of a dead Polish writer, journalist, artist or other powerful women. The list is impressive. We did some theatre exercises together and I must admit Aphra leads a warm-up which explodes into a wild fever pitch of chanting. The women seem to be expressing things that have gone silent for years. I think we are all explosive from the enormity of this experience. I feel overwhelmed at times by the power of our all coming together and even shy. The core GGOT group members are so intimately familiar with one another's work. My stomach is all butterflies and I must fight the urge to hide--- the excitement coming from the women is palpable, their warmth moves me.

4/6/03

Day off. We visit Auschwitz. An awesome experience which I admit left me rather numb and speechless. I walk around in the freezing snowy cold with a deathly flu, imagining what it would have been like for the prisoners, who were probably themselves sick with more than the flu, and with only pajamas on their or perhaps nothing at all. The room that interests me most is one depicting individuals who resisted, or found ways to get subversive material out, or outwitted the captors. I am inspired by this activity and am reminded again of the purpose of my trip to Poland. I have revised my Guerilla Girl mission today: I am fighting for human dignity. I am feeling a resurgence of anger about the sexism and unfairness in my field - about how dominated it is by white men. This anger and this inspiration will be my fuel.

I think of this stupid war that the US is conducting in Iraq and it reminds me of a sick chess game. A country waits to see what some others will do--- if one does this, another will do this. It's so hard for me to trust anyone in this foolish war. No one's motives seem clean to me. All very self centered.

Krakow - the most stunning medieval city I have ever seen. Cobble streets, ancient churches, sweet faces everywhere. We have only 1 & ½ hours to walk around at this point but it is charming. We eat Pierogis and cabbage in a place called The Cave. Delightful.

4/7/03

Monday rehearsal today with ample "kava and herbata" (coffee & tea) breaks, in a funky space with the coolest women in Poland! Today we did a read-through of the play for the Polish Actresses. I hear them giggling and commenting with enjoyment during it and I am relieved. Afterwards we begin to discuss ways to integrate these performers into the stories of some Polish Women writers into our piece. Stanislawa Pzybysewska is a definite. I adore her writing and am so happy we will present the piece in its original language. Additionally, the women decide to write rap songs which will introduce every woman writer, actress, artist who is being covered in our production. I love this idea.

4/8/03

The women bring in the portion of the script in Polish about Stanislawa and we begin the integration processes. It's amazing to hear it read in Polish and gives me a truer glimpse into the horrors of Pzybysewska's dark world. Also we get to hear some of the Polish rap that they wrote to introduce the sections of our play. Today our production takes on a new proportion because of its inclusion now of whole sections in Polish. I love the language. It truly feels like a cultural exchange. Also I'm completely amazed at the rap they've come up with. I guess I

don't always know what they're saying but rap does sound incredible in Polish! They each have such a unique way of moving, and are each so different energetically with their funky body movements and their varied vocal types. All the American GG's are completely delighted to hear this. There seems to be a feeling of mutual support for what we are all bringing to the table.

4/9/03

Today we worked on dances with the whole group and proceeded to piece the play together and then have 2 run-throughs. It is very fun and we are all exhausted and rehearsed from 1 am until about 9pm. Everyone has gotten this terrible cold (from me I think) and we are all taking Sudafed, vitamin c, echinecea, and drinking massive quantities of herbata (tea) from the throat and me---Kava (coffee) to stay awake. There are funny lights in this, our rehearsal room, which we discover today is our performance space. This space is also used I discover for rock concerts and there is also a bar downstairs. There are flashing and moving funny lights which make our show feel even more vaudevillian and like a carnivale.

4/10/03

Tech. A long day. I am a crank today. Just tired and we are working hard and though my cold is better, it has still continued to snow and rain non-stop.

However this morning I did visit Stare Miasto (old town, the reconstructed portion) in Warsaw. So, so beautiful and vibrant and lively. It is hard to imagine that this was once completely destroyed during WWII. The rebuilding of it, and the beauty that stands today is evidence to me that the spirit of the people of Warsaw refused to be crushed. There was a collective persevering heart that fought to rebuild, and to defy the oppressors of that time. Again, I inspired for my own mission here.

During our short break between day and evening rehearsal I search for soup to eat for dinner. Our performance space seems to be on the edge of nowhere and I can't imagine where the hell I'm going to get soup. I ask the group and no one knows. I go walking down a deserted industrial street, determined to scope out some soup, enter into a building with scaffolding which I now realize is a hotel, and ask for soup. They bring me a taste of some hot, delicious nectar. I nod and they bring me a huge jar of it with a big metal spoon and send me on my way. I am delighted.

4/11/03

One of the most rewarding performing experiences of my life, performing live to an audience of Warsaw's open minded cutting edge, saavy art folks at the Centrum Kultury . We play to a packed house with people stuffed behind columns and on floor pillows, all leaning forward with eager and appreciative faces. They seemed to hear and support our work and our message. But the ultimate pleasure, was getting to perform with these juicy group of Polish Guerilla Girls! What a joy for me!!! Each one so beautiful vibrant and intelligent. In a matter of 3 days they whipped up the "Polish section" of our show that had panache, spirit and became an integral part of what we had created.

4/12/03

6:45 am bus to Poznan – our performance will be in an amazing castle now a culture center. This is one of the most beautiful buildings I have ever seen; long shadowy hallways, beautiful arches. We are part of a feminist conference on domestic violence and self defense. The hallways are buzzing with people viewing and participating in the conference as we hide out doing a final tech rehearsal. We are in a tiny dressing room with 4 American GGOT and 7 from Poland—squish! After our performance the night before there is a certain amount of familiarity and excitement about getting to do it all again; we are getting a rhythm together as a group. I love that. The performance went extremely well. We are in a different setting however, and the audience makeup is also different and 3 times the size, at least! Our reception is wonderful.

4/13/03

It is finally sunny! A man plays the accordion in old town serenading us as we tool around the sunny Poznan getting our last minute taste of the very sweet city. We eat brunch at a gorgeous restaurant in the center, finishing the best espresso. It is Palm Sunday and there are little children running around the streets everywhere holding bouquets of dried flowers to be blessed. I try to photograph them, but they shyly run from me.

Our final pierogi party at Oska in Warsaw with all our fellow performers and Oska hosts, is bittersweet after our long bus ride from Poznan. I finally realize that I will never see some of these exquisite women again. I am sad, but deeply satisfied that I came. Joanna and Dada call to Aphra and I as we descend a long spiral stairway from OSKa - they look down at us from the top floor and say a line from Hamlet, Zegnam i pamientay ominie, pamientay ominie, pamientay ominie....Adieu, and remember me, remember me, remember me

Sophie Treadwell, April 13, 2003