

# *Son's Tribute to His Father*



Mayor of Losice, James Kobylinski and Viktor Lewin at right

Viktor Lewin is honouring the memory of his father Jakob Lewin in a different way. He is part of a small group of children of former Jewish residents of Losice in eastern Poland who are working to restore the former Jewish cemetery in Losice and erect a memorial on the site to the victims of the Holocaust from Losice.

“Although my father died three years ago, perhaps his brother and sister will live to see the completion of this memorial,” says Viktor Lewin.

Lewin, a retired Winnipeg Transit bus driver, and his wife, Cheryl, acquired a copy of the Losice Yizkor book which they proceeded to translate. They also helped establish a Losice Memorial website ([www.zchor.org/losice/losice.html](http://www.zchor.org/losice/losice.html)) which has the first four chapters, as well as the table of contents, of the Yizkor Book translated into English. Lewin notes that the Losice Yizkor Book is also available for viewing on the New York Public Library website ([www.nypl.org](http://www.nypl.org)) and that a network of Losice survivors and their descendants spanning six countries has been established.

The centuries-old Jewish community in Losice numbered about 3000 (half the town's population) in 1939, a number that swelled to just over 6000 by August, 1942, when the Nazis deported everyone in the ghetto. The Nazis also destroyed the town's major synagogue and uprooted the tombstones in the Jewish cemetery. The gravestones, Lewin reports, were taken by Jewish slave labourers to the Gestapo headquarters in town - a former dentist's home - where some were used to pave the yard and stacked to make walls. Others were used to fortify a Nazi bunker on the property which still exists. The cemetery ground, he adds, was later turned into a park with a bandstand.

Lewin first travelled to Losice in August, 2002, with his daughter, Brianne, to see for himself the conditions there. “I have been back several times since to promote the dedication of our memorial,” he says.



This gravestone, the oldest that we have been able to date, is of Rabbi Benrat (Nov. 20, 1860).



Future Losice Jewish Cemetery Memorial Gate

“Our major goal through the Losice Cemetery Restoration Project is to reclaim and restore the Jewish cemetery, thereby honouring the memory of our ancestors and the Losicers who were murdered in the Holocaust. We also want to bring attention to the integral role that Jews played in the life of Losice.”

In September, 2003 Lewin reports, the gravestones were excavated and the process of restoration began. To date, he says, about 1500 gravestones

have been recovered. Many of them have beautiful carvings and others are painted in several colours. A sampling of the gravestones recovered may be viewed at [www.zchor.org/losice/matzevot.html](http://www.zchor.org/losice/matzevot.html)

Lewin also says that the cemetery restoration project co-ordinators have also established the Lewin Grynberg Scholarship program in an effort to encourage research and understanding among students of Losice's Jewish history.

Thanks go to all those who have donated in the past and, we look forward to your continued support in the future. Information regarding the making of donations can be obtained by contacting me at - [viklewin@shaw.ca](mailto:viklewin@shaw.ca)