

provided me with a newfound passion for supporting global humanitarian responsibilities. In my current role as a cadet at the United States Military Academy, as well as my future roles as an Army Officer and physician, it is imperative that I carry forward with me the vital lessons that this trip has bestowed upon me. It is not an issue of which religion, nationality, or creed divides us, but that humanity unites all who believe in inherent dignity and rights of all people.

## ***What Went Missing***

**By Adam Sacks, 2010 Jaffa and Larry Feldman Fellow**



AJC Fellow Adam Sacks with Jakob Mueller z"l of Nowy Sacz, who was the only survivor in his family.

Poland lost half of its urban population in a brief period of time. The evidence of this upheaval can be seen during even a brief journey, more so than in hours of films. A project developed under the auspices of the Cukierman Foundation in the Polish city of Będzin, which I visited as a 2010 AJC Fellow,

goes right to the heart of this matter. Europe after the Holocaust dealt not just with the loss of countless families but also with individuals' talents, imaginations, and dreams that provided pluralism and diversity beyond just religious practices. These talents enriched society and created forms of social progress.

Developed by a young Polish couple, the Cukierman Foundation illustrates the pivotal role of Jews in the pre-war landscape by affixing plaques to the walls of buildings and reproducing advertisements of pre-war businesses where they once resided. Middle-sized cities such as Będzin were once home to hotels, cinemas, and restaurants. A visit to these towns, with their dilapidated buildings and general lack of commerce or vitality, provides a stark contrast to the general picture that the plaques conjure in one's mind.

In large cities, department stores or banks were "Aryanized" while provincial hotels and restaurants simply disappeared. More rural locales offer even more dramatic examples, where the absence of Jews who possessed appropriate training and qualifications left entire towns without electricity after the war as no one was left who possessed the necessary skills. The void hinted at by the Cukierman Foundation gives a nagging sense of what went missing with the Jews' absence in such

small towns. This experience and the fellowship as a whole further internalized this understanding and gave me the resolve to redouble my efforts to communicate this absence to the wider world.

## ***Shoah, Storytelling, and a Little Bit of L'Chaim!***

**By Christine Whitehouse, 2011 AJC Fellow**



Fellows with Tibor Kartin in Presov, Slovakia. Photo by Alexandria Fanjoy.

My most meaningful experience during the Auschwitz Jewish Center Fellowship came near the very end of our trip, perhaps somewhat ironically, after visiting Treblinka, Auschwitz I, and Auschwitz-Birkenau. We travelled beyond Poland to visit Jewish heritage sites in Slovakia, where we met with a local Holocaust survivor in the most beautiful synagogue I have ever seen. The survivor seemed shy at first and as he told his story, it became quite obvious to us that it is not something he shares or rehearses on a regular basis, unlike other survivors we encountered in New York where the preservation of memory is a central focus of state-funded institutions and pedagogy.

This unpreparedness was important to me, given my interest in the notion of “memory fatigue”—the idea that there is nothing new left to say about the Holocaust or that it has produced too many memorials, which I grappled with in my MA research essay on the connection between place and memory. The way he told his story with both reservation and emotion made the Holocaust tangible to me as an individual human experience.

After confiding in us the intimacies of the most horrific moments of his life, he invited us all to share a drink with him there in his *shul*. We were so taken aback by the suggestion and the seemingly abrupt shift in his spirit from despair to hope that all of the Fellows exchanged quick glances of hesitation. But the joy of that moment represented what much of the trip was about for me—life, represented by