

Alice Rekucki Sails Next *October 1936*

Week for Warsaw Study

Wins Nine Month Scholarship
of Kosciuszko Foun-
dation.

By JANET SALISBURY.

Tribune Society Staff Writer.

THE "ONCE - IN - A - LIFE - TIME" thrill has come to a Minneapolis young woman, Miss Alice Rekucki, daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Bartlomieji Rekucki, 1425 Jefferson street northeast. Of Polish descent, Miss Rekucki has won a chance to go back to her parents' native country through a scholarship awarded by the Kosciuszko Foundation for nine months of study at the University of Warsaw in Warsaw, Poland.

Miss Rekucki is one of 16 Polish young people in this country who will be sent abroad this year by the Kosciuszko foundation, an organization which fosters Polish-American cultural and educational relations, with headquarters in New York city.

The scholarship winners will be given a course in Polish history, literature, music and the arts during their residence at the University of Warsaw and upon their return to this country next year will carry out the foundation's program in their own communities.

A graduate of Edison high school and St. Cloud State Teachers' college, Miss Rekucki won the scholarship on a basis of her academic record and on an essay in Polish on the topic, "Why I want to go to Poland."

Miss Rekucki will leave Monday, October 21, for New York, from where she will sail October 24. She will not be lonesome during her



Alice Rekucki.

year's stay, as she has many close relatives in Krakow and Nowy Targ, the community where her parents lived, and she plans to spend Christmas, Easter, and much of next summer with her aunts, uncles, cousins and grandmother.

Although she was just notified of the award and has considerable "readying" to do in one week, Miss Rekucki is finding time for several farewell parties planned in her honor. A family party has been planned for this evening at her home and friends will entertain at affairs Monday and Friday evenings.



LEADING EDUCATOR VISITS—Braulio Alonso (center), president of the National Education Association, signs the guest book at the Berlin-American High School during a recent visit. The signing took place in the office of school principal Paul F. LeBrun (left), with Miss Mary Rekucki, head of the school's National Honor Society as an interested witness.
—U. S. Army Photo by Specialist 4 D

November 17, 1967

Education Association President Visits U.S. High School in Berlin

The president of the National Education Association (NEA), Braulio Alonso, visited the Berlin American High School November 8.

Mr. Alonso is a member of a ten-man delegation of leading educators from the United States, currently visiting Germany at the invitation of the federal government to see the

advances made by the Marshal Plan on its 20th anniversary.

After touring the school, Mr. Alonso admiringly stated that it was "a fine institution that is comparable to any similar school in the United States."

The National Education Association is a professional teachers' organization, roughly comparable to such professional organizations as the National Bar Association and the American Medical Association. The NEA helps to foster American education through researching the problems confronting teachers in the United States. It also acts as an advisory council in assisting state and federal agencies with problems and sets standards and teaching codes for educators in the United States.

Mr. Alonso, who is also the high school principal at King High School, Tampa, Fla., was named president-elect of the NEA in 1966. He has attended the University of Tampa, University of Florida and the University of Florence, in Italy.

Retired teacher recalls battles to

By LINDA KOZARYN
Bremerhaven bureau chief

BERLIN — Mary Rekucki painfully recalls the grievances filed, the battles fought. Names, dates and places are permanently etched in her memory. She remembers those who opposed and those who supported her 34-year fight for quality overseas education and teachers' rights.

"They tried to get rid of me several times," she said, chuckling. "But they never did. I was no pushover."

Rekucki, a Berlin American High School teacher, recently retired at age 70. Her classroom days are over, but, as she has done throughout her career, she plans to continue lobbying for better working conditions.

"I hate to leave my friends, my work," she said, fighting to control her voice as tears ran from beneath her wire-rimmed glasses.

"I love teaching — despite the poor administrators, despite the parents who listen to their children's complaints and blame the teacher without getting all the facts."

Strict, outspoken and critical, Rekucki was at times ostracized by her peers for her tough stand on school issues. But, when it came time to organize a teachers' union in 1956, she was asked to help lead the way.

A charter member of the Overseas Education Association, Rekucki became the first editor of the association's journal, teaching days and writing nights.

She served as association vice president, faculty representative and area chairman, and she was on numerous budget, legislative and constitutional committees. Aided by the National Education Association, the fledgling overseas teachers' union fought for higher pay.

"When I started teaching in 1950, we were GS-7s, making about \$4,000 a year," Rekucki recalled. "We didn't get paid for Thanksgiving, Christmas or Easter holidays. We had to put in compensatory time."

Overseas teachers were eventually taken out of the Civil Service ranks and put in a separate pay category, she said. But it still wasn't enough.

"We were given ten-twelfths of our pay, since we only worked that much of the year. We lost money. But then DOD gave us a \$100 across-the-board raise. The teachers were so angry we decided to divide the \$100 by 52, and each week send a check for that amount to the secretary of defense and the president."

In 1966 a public law set overseas teachers' pay at levels comparable to those in stateside school districts. The DOD began paying the new wage scale a year later, Rekucki said.

In 1975 a suit for back pay was decided in the teachers' favor. A U.S. district court ruled that, since 1966, the DOD had been paying its teachers based on a scale a year out of date. Eligible teachers were awarded up to \$10,000 back pay.

Rekucki grins as she recounts the past victories. She said her only reward for spending hours lobbying, organizing and



Retired Berlin American High School teacher Mary Rekucki . . . started with the overseas schools system

driving to association meetings was to see conditions improve.

"Any teacher who accepts a leadership position with the association has to accept the job for the sake of serving other teachers, not for any kind of reward. It's a very difficult job because not all teachers feel you should take a strong stand on a particular issue."

Understanding the school administrators is also important, she said. "You hope you're working with a person who is reasonable, fair, honest, whom you can respect. That doesn't always happen."

Rekucki believes teachers should be instrumental in making educational decisions. She believes the weakest link in overseas education is at the administrative level.

"The success or failure of a high school depends upon the principal and his leadership. If he has the respect of the faculty, they'll work with him. If he has the respect of the student body, they'll be disciplined. If he hasn't, there'll be problems in the school."

Along with better working conditions and higher pay, the veteran teacher has

seen considerable changes within the school system itself.

"The supply system has improved. It was very bad for a period of years. Often we didn't have the textbooks we needed. Yet I would venture to say that the students I had in the early 1950s didn't suffer. It was a challenge to teach them."

Rekucki had nearly five years' teaching experience in her home state of Minnesota before she took her first position in Germany.

The overseas school system wanted "mature teachers who could adjust to the adverse conditions and use their initiative and resourcefulness to make a success of their classroom," she said.

"You didn't hear teachers complaining about a lack of materials. Everybody was using their American ingenuity, developing their own ways to present materials."

Rekucki said some changes she's witnessed during her years teaching English, geography, social studies and history have not been for the better.

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Teacher recalls battles for rights



S&S photo by Linda Kozarvn

Retired Berlin American High School teacher Mary Rekucki

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"Within the last seven years, the student body has changed progressively to-

ward a group with less ability. We're not sure if it's less ability or less inclination.

"I've been working harder in recent years to get students to understand that learning is wonderful. Somehow, students today don't have an appreciation for learning, particularly about their past. If it dates back more than three years, they're not interested."

Rekucki said too many teachers use the lecture system, which develops listening skills but doesn't improve reading skills. Teachers need to stress reading for understanding, so students are capable of reading and interpreting an author's writing, she said.

Throughout her career, teaching in Frankfurt, Kaiserslautern, Mannheim and Berlin, Rekucki served the overseas school system in her own distinctive way. She felt the schools needed teachers "who were strong leaders, who had ideas, who were willing to stand up and criticize in order to make improvements."

"I always felt I was a very important person in that school, and that I had work to do."

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A birthday is a
special day...



This is a copy of a birthday card she received
for her 94th birthday from a student of her first class
via 1937.

Nov. 11, 2007

Dear Mary Alice.

Lot of water over the dam since our days at the Orchard Lake School.

The greatest days I

remember were the trip you put together

for us, was to Hibbing, ^{Iron} ^{mines} Moose Lake, Hinkley, etc. ^{LaFayette, Minn}

Great memories.

I hope all is well with you.

I am enjoying another winter here in Apache Junction AZ.

Arrived here Oct. 2, 2007 will leave appr. Apr. 15, 2008.



...especially when it happens

to someone as nice as you!

70

Years

Happy Birthday!

Take care!

Jimmy Jensen

8th grade class 1937!

In Loving Memory

Mary Alice Rekucki

November 20th, 1913 ~ November 23rd, 2007

*"Yea, though I walk through the
valley of the shadow of death,
I will fear no evil; for Thou art
with me; Thy rod and Thy
staff, they comfort me."*



Dear Friends of Mary Alice,

Mary passed away peacefully on Thanksgiving evening of natural causes.

Thank you for your many letters, cards and family pictures. She enjoyed them very much and they always brought out smiles on her face. The staff and I read them over and over again.

Thank you for being a good friend of hers.

Sincerely,

Chet Rekucki

Autobiography by Chet Bekuski

My sister Mary wanted to be a teacher. She graduated from Edison High in 1932. From there she went to St. Cloud Teachers College. While she was there, she applied ~~to~~ to the Kosciusko Foundation for a scholarship. She and 15 other students from around the country were awarded a 9 MO scholarship to study at the U. of Warsaw - Poland. Father Walter Sledge of N.E. Mpls. accompanied them there. Mary returned home in 1936. Father Sledge stayed in Poland to continue his studies. Sometime later he was arrested and put into a concentration camp. By the Germans. He remained there until he was freed by the Americans in 1945.

Mary began her 1st teaching job in 1936 at a small country school at Orchard Lake Mn., a Farm Community. Things were pretty dull there for her. She told her class that if they studied and kept their grades up, she would take them to the cities on a tour. With permission of the school board & help from the Parents she arranged tours to the St. Capital, N.W. Woolen Mills, where they made blankets, the Flour Mills, Foshay Tower, Orpheum theatre etc. I was 10 yrs old when I joined the tour at N.W. Woolen Mill. ~~It~~ It was such a great success she had two or three tours a year. ~~After~~ Later she went to Gaylord. In 1942 Mary & my sister Agnes joined the Navy Wacs, for a 4 yr. term. Mary attained a rank of St J.S. and Agnes ~~German~~ 1st class. They were stationed in Jacksonville, FL. After the noogie in 1944, she went to the U of Mn. and studied International Relations. In 1948 she was off to Germany to teach in the Am. schools built the dependents of the Occupation forces. She was attached to the Berlin Am. High school.

Read card by Jimmy Jensen

Chief Petty Officer

there, she joined a group of teachers and formed the Overseas Teachers Assoc. a few years later ^{they} formed a Teachers Union. Then they lobbied Congress for pay equal to that of teachers in the U.S. Later they lobbied Congress for professional civilian school administrators to replace the low rank Army Officers that were running the schools at that time. A few yrs later the school rating was in the top 20% of schools of that size in the U.S. She was very very proud that she had an active part in that accomplishment.

She spoke of that often. After Mr. Gorbachev took down the Berlin Wall, she spent her summers traveling around Europe, Poland, Italy, Rome etc. She retired after 35 yrs in Germany in 1987. After she got settled into an apartment, she began teaching all over again. This time it was her brothers, sister, niece & nephews. Telling them how to ~~discipline~~ discipline their children, what book ~~to~~ to read, what they should be studying, what schools to go to, etc. After a while she realized we weren't listening to her. She settled down and began to enjoy the family.

In Dec of 2008 she entered a nursing home. There she had a lot of listeners. She talked about her experiences to everyone and corrected the staff when they were not speaking or pronouncing correctly.

Her many friends and former students kept in touch with her. I sent her cards & letters of good wishes. The staff & I read these to her.
Thank you May
With love.

discipline