

## Who We Are

The Janusz Korczak Association of the USA founded by Mariola Strahlberg of Shining Mountain, is a member of the International Korczak Association (IKA), whose roots date back to the Polish Korczak Committee, founded in 1947. Dr. Korczak, a pediatrician, children's author, educator and humanitarian, was well-known in Poland and Europe for his innovative work at his Orphans' Home and Our Home in Warsaw. Dr. Korczak, his assistant Stefania Wilczynska, and approximately 196 children and nine staff members were taken to the Treblinka death camp on August 5-6, 1942, and disappeared into its bowels, never to be seen again. After WWII, Korczak's legacy as an educator and hero grew in Poland as well as abroad. In April 2013, here in the United States we officially formed Janusz Korczak Association of the USA. Thank you all for your support last year and **please renew your membership dues** to help us continue our work. For more information, please visit us at [www.facebook.com/korczakUSA](http://www.facebook.com/korczakUSA) or at [www.shiningmtnforkids.com](http://www.shiningmtnforkids.com).

## Ongoing Events

**East Ramapo Enrichment Program** - October 2015—June 2015. We are currently considering participating in an after school program at Kakiak Elementary School or East Ramapo Junior High School. We plan to use our Five Star Program™ and bring activities such as knitting, painting, music and educational games.

**Viola Elementary School Five Star Program™, Ramapo Central, NY-** We expect that the principal will add additional classes to the already three grades that are using the Five Star Program™.

## Upcoming Events

**International Korczak Association** This year, the meeting will take place in Munich, Germany on November 20-22. If you are interested in attending, please let us know as soon as possible so we may send you the registration information.



## CATS Conference, Caux, Switzerland, July 27-August 2, 2015 by Erin Schirm, Presenter

The CATS conference was a magical experience. The Castle of Caux is set about half way up the side of the mountain overlooking Lake Geneva. It is a space dedicated towards supporting impulses for change. At the conference there where people from around the world, Asia, the Middle East, Africa, Europe, North America, and everyone had a story. For example, Kesz Valdez, a 15 year old, who at 8 years of age started a program of giving toothbrushes, toothpaste and toys, and educating children living on the streets in the Philippines; a village in India where the children kept track of the adult alcoholism problem and were able to make changes to the cleanliness of the village and a safer social space for everyone; Serbs and Bosnian youth working together to build a more peaceful future together; and a struggle with gender issues in Africa and possible solutions for social systems where everyone pulls equal weight. All of this was woven together through collaboration, dialogue, sharing, and a well thought out daily schedule and progressive programs.

Each person in attendance participated in making the week flow, from helping prepare the meals, to playing with the youngest children, to bringing activities and ideas to test and discussion. It was a true collaboration of everyone. There is often talk of collaboration and working together of many people and groups. What touched me deeply was the reality of this at CATS. It is possible for people with varying mindsets and interests to come together to share and create a new future

together. Everyone had something to offer, everyone had something to learn and the group of 400 people was able to listen and discuss how to move forward.

I can't wait to incorporate and share the spirit of this experience with the people I know. I plan to incorporate the principals of listening by inviting young people into the conversation in the orienteering work I am doing. I have renewed hope that the time to come together, the time to put differences aside, the time to listen, the time to move forward as a human community is now. Each of us can play a part by inviting all generations to the conversation, orienting ourselves towards a future where each individual life path can be woven together in a tapestry of human connections.

**Thank you for all your support in helping me attend this conference and I look forward to sharing more down the road.**



*Erin is a Junior Program Coordinator, with Orienteering USA  
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## Marcia in the News

Our member Marcia Talmage Schneider continues to give talks on her recently published book, *Janusz Korczak, Sculptor of Children's Souls*. It is a beautiful book with interviews of ten orphans who lived before the war in the Korczak orphanages. If you have not read the book yet, you can order it by emailing Marcia at [mahryuma@verizon.net](mailto:mahryuma@verizon.net). If you know of an organization that would like to invite her to speak, please contact her directly at the above email address.

## Efrat in the News

Professor Sara Efrat Efron, our newest board member was invited to write an essay about Korczak for the PRISM Journal. PRISM is an interdisciplinary peer reviewed journal for Holocaust educators. Her essay titled *Janusz Korczak Educator: Teaching Humanity in the Face of Evil* with illustrations from Tomek Bogacki's book and Daniel Berek's private collection will appear in the spring 2016 publication.

## Working Together with Children

by Nick VanSant, Correspondent

As a former teacher, I have long seen the creativity, curiosity, insight, and enthusiasm of children as they navigate the world around them. The organization Children as Actors in Transforming Society (CATS) is working to bring children and their particular qualities onto the stage of "real life" and to participate in the activity and decision-making that affects their lives.

This past July, I was privileged to accompany Shining Mountain's founder Mariola Strahlberg and Erin Schirm to the Third Annual International Conference of CATS held in Caux, Switzerland. Several hundred people of all ages gathered to teach, learn, and share about issues facing the movement to give children their rightful voice in their world.

As a newcomer to this event I was amazed at the diversity of attendees from 41 countries and the number of participants from ages 4-18. All took part in the intimate "community groups", workshops and presentations, and the larger plenary sessions. My eyes were opened to the issues surrounding the UN Convention on the Rights of Children and I was impressed on how much has been accomplished in so many countries.



Part of my task was to research the issues of legal rights, corporal punishment, child labor, child welfare, and military service for children in the United States. First of all I was surprised to find that although the US was among the first to sign this treaty in 1989, we are the sole country not to have subsequently ratified it, out of 192 nations. The status of child rights in the US is determined by a varied patchwork of local, state, and national laws and customs. This makes a national response very difficult to establish. I was shocked to find that corporal punishment is permitted in 19 states!

Probably the best part of the conference for me was making friends with people from so many countries. It was so much fun to talk and work with kids from Kosovo, Uganda, Malta, Israel, and many more nations. Their chaperones were so excited to be at the event and a real spirit of international oneness prevailed. There were so many compelling things to do and learn, but the biggest for me was to be a part of this global effort to raise the status of children that so many people are working to bring about.

As a result of attending the conference, I have realized that I can foster change right here in my former school. We have a representational Student Council that meets weekly and sponsors social and fund-raising events. Why shouldn't they become aware of the issues of child rights in the US and abroad? How can they be encouraged to bring a greater awareness to the student body? What can this group do to participate in the pedagogical and administrative issues that are discussed and decided every year? I have proposed to the Council Advisors a program of education and discussion of these issues for this year. I hope to work with the students to generate participation in many aspects of the life of the school. It is an exciting prospect.

*Nick retired this year from teaching Social Studies at the Great Barrington Middle School in Massachusetts. He also spent many years as a Waldorf classroom teacher. He can be reached at [nick.vansant@gmail.com](mailto:nick.vansant@gmail.com).*



**Pictured on left, young people Bollywood dancing. Pictured on right, youngest attendees explaining their CATS activities.**



## Why I went back to CATS?

### Report from Mariola

It has been two years since my experience in Caux when I brought 3 teenagers to participate in the Initiative for Change program. This year Erin and I were invited to speak at Empowering Youth for Active Leadership workshop and we accepted the invitation. There were approximately 150 young people and 250 adults participating in the 7 days international conference. Since past youth participants were instrumental in determining this year's format, I was amazed how much better the conference was organized. Instead of sitting at many long plenary sessions and listening to long speeches or workshop only for adults and only for young people, we were divided into community groups and workshops with 20-40 participants of mix groups. To meet with youth from all over the world, to hear about their struggles, their views on their own lives and their views on the political, social, economic situation of their countries and the world at large, was such an enlightening experience.

Spending 5 days in the same group with Kesz Valdez from Philippines, 2012 International Children's Peace Prize winner confirmed my belief in the resilience of children's spirit and their ability to do good in the world no matter where life circumstances place them. I will carry in my heart his quote:

*"The fire that burned my skin and flesh is the same fire that started a flame in my soul. A flame that would warm cold hearts, a flame that would shed light to the path of the lost, a flame that would spark hope, lighting an entire sea of darkness and desperation."*

Of course the focus for me was the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and how could we bring some of the ideas to US. As you heard from Erin and Nick, they will be involving children in the conversation to learn what young people need, think and where they want to lead us. As for me, the Five Star Program™ allows young people to learn about their own learning capacities, how to capitalize on them and how to make it easier to retain and use the information they learn. These are important tools that are needed for everybody in today's world. I also plan to bring ideas of children's rights to some local after school programs and see if we can create a group in New York/ New Jersey area which could work with the UN and Unicef to promote these ideas in the US.

Thank you all for supporting our trip and keep your donations coming! We were not able to raise enough money to cover expenses for this year's trip and yet, we know that we will need to do it again in a year or two.

**If you would like to be involved in CATS 2016 or 2017, let us know and help us to promote this activity more effectively next time.**



**Mariola with Avi Tsur (from Israeli Korczak Association) next to a collage of logos from Korczak Associations around the world.**

## News from Korczakowo Poland

Thank you Mariola for the box of beautiful greeting cards. We used the cards with our younger campers for the art workshops with discussions. We gratefully appreciate your package with all the wonderful handwork projects. The little projects with wool animals were given out to campers as prizes and they enjoyed creating them from scratch.

Since your group was here, we still do many of the activities Erin introduced us to. For example, we walk blindfolded around the camp and all of our staff and campers love this activity.

This year, we had 9 young people from Israel visiting with us. We hope that you consider visiting with us next year.

Peace, Michal Kozlen  
(Head of Korczak Camp)



**The International Children's Peace Prize – The statuette 'Nkosi', which shows how a child moves the world.**

**To learn more about Children's Peace Prize, you can visit [www.kidsrights.org](http://www.kidsrights.org).**

Janusz Korczak Association of the USA is now on [www.benevity.com](http://www.benevity.com)!

Many companies use this service to accept and match donations from their employees (e.g. you donate a dollar and the company adds a dollar, so the charity gets two dollars). Check if your company has a program like this and look for "ShiningMtnCPC" in your list of causes.

## “Love at first sight - Meeting Korczak”

by Tatyana V. Tsyrlina-Spady

A long time ago in the city of Kursk, Russia, there happened to live a young successful woman, a former schoolteacher and a university professor, an organizer of creative extracurricular activities for college students, a daughter of a doctor, a wife and a mother, who... never heard the name of Korczak. Yes, that was me a few decades ago, and I confess I was a complete Korczak dummy. But fortunately, the situation radically changed in early 1992 when I received a phone call from my senior Moscow colleague Irina Demakova with the offer to participate in the International Korczak conference in Suzdal, a historic Russian city, close to the national capital. I agreed wholeheartedly, not knowing what fate would bring me. This is how I first heard of and met Korczak and Korczakians, and the memories of that meeting will remain with me forever. The conference was more than just a cultural and intellectual shock and an eye-opener; it was an opportunity for me to get acquainted with a number of outstanding educators, psychologists, social workers, and public activists from all over the world.

Since I could speak and translate from foreign languages, Olga Medvedeva, a prominent researcher of Korczak's literary heritage and a founder of the Russian Korczak association, approached me with the request to interpret a few presentations. It introduced me to Vladimir Halperin, the late legendary leader of Swiss Korczakians, a few Dutch representatives including their current Korczak president Theo Cappon, Frank and Rose Schmidt from France, to name just a few. The conference granted me with long-term friendships with such Russian researchers as Professors Demakova, Klarina, Valeeva, the latter being President of the Russian Korczak Society today.

Since that time Korczak has remained a big part of my professional and private life. His ideas have become a basis for many of my presentations, lectures, and seminars, and his books still occupy a central place on my desk and bookshelves. Korczak also allowed me to see the world while participating in international conferences in Austria,

Israel, Poland, Switzerland, etc. But most importantly, Korczak became a genuine magnet for my students – future teachers from Kursk State University who carefully studied his ideas and translated them into numerous educational activities in children's hospitals, summer camps, orphanages, boarding schools, etc. Of course, our charitable work at the hematological hospital department that treated young patients with blood cancer was most important. Although some of the children were terminally ill, my students helped them (as Korczak would), to fully enjoy life regardless of their grave diagnosis. Laughter, songs, guitar playing, dances, jokes, story telling, and the overall festive atmosphere which the students would create once or twice a week produced a great positive impact on hundreds of sick children over twenty years. This we heard from their grateful parents and could read in the eyes of the children themselves. Every national holiday, especially such important ones as the New Year's Eve, Women's Day, and May Day students would not only perform short plays but also bring gifts to the children. For over a decade the Swiss Association of Friends of Dr. Korczak helped us with funds to provide weekly music classes and fresh fruit.

Truly, there is plenty to remember and be grateful. For example, in the mid-1990s together with teenage groups from two Dutch high schools for students with disabilities in Haarlem and Hilversum we fulfilled another incredible project, which was again inspired by Korczak's ideas. Thus, Dutch young people volunteered their time and efforts, raised enough funds for traveling and purchasing all the necessary tools, paints, and other materials, visited Kursk, and in a short period of time fully remodeled fourteen children's hospital rooms. The cultural shock was strong on both sides. Another shock experienced by my students-activists happened when they received an opportunity to participate in international conferences in other countries during the early Perestroika time when visits abroad were still rare.

... Two years ago I was presenting a paper about Korczak at the international symposium organized by Seattle Pacific University and held at the university library. Imagine my surprise when during the break I noticed several participants asking librarians about

Korczak's books, and then having Korczak figuratively among us during the rest of the event. In that particular presentation I made an attempt to answer the question: “Why do we need to return to Korczak's ideas today?”

It is because he was:

- A symbol of humanism and sacrifice who managed to provide joy and sustain the lives of 200 Jewish children in the Warsaw ghetto until they eventually perished together in Treblinka gas chambers.
- An incredible example of a search for one's national identity and spiritual insight.
- A bright writer whose books for children are full of wisdom and wit.
- A thoughtful and forgiving person open to find the best in everyone.
- A natural psychologist and a talented educator.
- An originator of the first constitution of children's rights.
- A creator of different ways to involve children into participation in school life.
- A master of dialogue and a reflective practitioner able to learn from children.
- A powerful teacher of teachers and parents.

Just to conclude, on Mother's Day, I presented a small book of Korczak's ideas to my friend, an experienced university professor. Here is a quote from her message the next day (and I have nothing else to add):

“I've been reading the Janusz Korczak book this morning and can't thank you enough for introducing me to this amazing man and his work. I totally agree with Sandra Joseph, the editor, who noted in the preface that his “insights and simple truths concerning children are as fresh and valuable today as they were then.” His words capture so well my own philosophy reflected in much of my work with young people. I plan to share this book and some of his other works with friends and colleagues.” (From personal correspondence with M.C.).

*Professor Tatyana Tsyrlina-Spady is a founder and Editor-in-Chief of the Russian-American Education Forum: an electronic journal ([www.rus-ameedyforum.com](http://www.rus-ameedyforum.com)). She is also Adjunct Professor at the School of Education, Seattle Pacific University, Seattle, WA, teaching Comparative Education. She is a member of the Janusz Korczak Association of the USA and can be reached at: [tsyrlina@aol.com](mailto:tsyrlina@aol.com).*

# BECOME A MEMBER OF THE JANUSZ KORCZAK ASSOCIATION OF THE USA

The mission of the Janusz Korczak Association of the USA is to disseminate information about his life and work, his humanism and his sacrifice. Through our practical work with children at the Shining Mountain, we strive to follow the Fundamental Rights of the Child. For example:

- 1. The Right to One's Own Life** – we help educators and parents to create a safe environment for children to discover things on their own while allowing them sufficient space and time.
- 2. The Right to Live in the Present** – We want to prepare children for the future but children yearn to live in the here and now – therefore we support their need for play and relaxation.
- 3. The Right to Be Himself or Herself** – We ask to accept children the way they are, with their talents and shortcomings.

With your help, we plan to translate Korczak's most important pedagogical writings, promote advanced courses for teachers on his educational philosophy, establish Korczak's camp in the US and strive for the US ratification of the 1989 United Nations "Convention on the Rights of the Child". Please let us know if you would like to receive information on how you can help with the following activities:

- Children's Project based on Korczak's books and his legacy
- Korczak Institute in New York for Exhibits, workshops and lectures
- Korczak's Summer Camp in US and Poland
- Workshops and lectures for parents and educators on Korczak's pedagogy
- Five Star Program™ training for your school or organization

## MEMBERSHIP ENROLLMENT

Membership includes quarterly newsletters that focuses on putting Korczak's philosophy into action along with suggestions and strategies for creating a harmonious childhood for children in our lives. You will be kept abreast of latest US and international Korczak activities with a possibility to join in those activities with various groups and organizations.

**Please write your check to: Shining Mountain CPC (Korczak Association)  
and send it to: 11 Beckett Ct, Monsey, NY 10952**

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Your Name \_\_\_\_\_  
Address \_\_\_\_\_  
City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip Code \_\_\_\_\_  
Phone \_\_\_\_\_ Cell phone \_\_\_\_\_  
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I am:      () a student      () an educator      () a parent  
          () other (please describe) \_\_\_\_\_

**I would like to support the Janusz Korczak Association of the USA. Enclosed is my contribution:**

### Basic Membership (annual):

- \$15 (student/senior)
- \$20 (individual)
- \$40 (Family)
- \$75 (organization/corporation)

### Benefactor Membership:

- \$100 - \$249 Friend
- \$250 - \$499 Associate
- \$500 - \$999 Patron
- \$1000+ Founder Circle

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