

OUT OF THE ASHES

This absorbing and intimate TV special is the story of the accomplished Polish architect Zbigniew 'Bill' Krawczynski. His story is told by his son Mark – who also became a talented architect – and centres on the aftermath of the ruthless destruction of Warsaw at the end of 1944. This is the remarkable story of how the Old Town was meticulously rebuilt largely from Zbigniew's memory, his subsequent flight from communist Poland to Australia and then, 25 years later, a triumphant return to his beloved homeland... with an unexpected and tragic twist. It's a very Polish story of gritty determination and patriotic dedication, but with a distinctly Australian element that creates a unique link between two vastly different nations. It's also a story which includes the latest tragedy to befall Poland – the loss of the country's president and many senior officials in an air disaster – and which has become yet another example of the enduring and indomitable Polish spirit

"Out Of The Ashes" embraces this spirit on a very personal level as the driving force behind Zbigniew Krawczynski, the rebuilding of an historic icon and a very special set of hand-drawn plans.



THE STORY...

At the close of 1944 Warsaw lay in ruins, its entire population banished and its historic Old Town almost entirely destroyed. Hitler's retribution for the Warsaw Uprising of a few months earlier was brutal and merciless. Within a short time, though, the Nazis themselves were in retreat and the Poles wasted no time reclaiming their capital, restoring its services and commencing the dauntingly huge task of rebuilding.

"Out Of The Ashes" tells the story of a young Polish architect who had been training throughout the war years in fear of his life, but who emerged as one of a group of patriotic professionals committed to the reconstruction of Warsaw's Old Town. In fact, they wanted to do more than just rebuild, they wanted a completely faithful rendering of the original and its 700 years of history! Zbigniew Krawczynski began working, by hand, on a giant drawing of the Warsaw Old Town that would serve as an important reference for its rebuilding programme. As very few images, paintings or original plans had survived, the team relied on the collective memories of survivors to prepare thousands of design documents, which would guide the reconstruction.

The Old Town had been systematically bombed and burned by the Nazis, including the famous old Zamek – the King's Castle – so the task of rebuilding was of epic proportions. Remarkably, just 12 years after the end of the war, much of the work was completed and to such a high standard that the project has been given a Class 0 rating (the highest) as a World Heritage listed site by UNESCO. Today, the rebuilt Old Town is one of Poland's leading tourist attractions, renowned for its great beauty, character and charm. This film showcases the Old Town as it is today with all its culture and splendor, set against a soundtrack of music from Poland's greatest classical composer, Frederick Chopin. Appropriately, Poland and the world recently celebrated the 200th anniversary of Chopin's birth.

Despite his great commitment to his country and ensuring it had a brighter future, in 1959 Zbigniew Krawczynski fell foul of the communist authorities. It was the height of the Cold War and paranoia pervaded the Soviet bloc countries. Krawczynski was asked to spy on his friends and colleagues. Fearing the repercussions of refusal, he fled with his wife and young son, leaving behind his beloved Poland and the project in which he had invested so much time and effort. Eventually, the Krawczynski family ended up in Australia, settled and began a new life. Zbigniew Krawczynski's son, Mark, even followed his father into architecture, working on many important Australian projects, including as Construction Manager on the huge upgrade to the iconic Sydney Opera House. Mark's work created two new floors underwater and over 500 other renovations. In his new home of Australia, Mark originally established himself in music and the arts at Sydney's respected Conservatorium of Music and later at the University of New South Wales.





Although happy in Australia, Zbigniew yearned to return to Poland with a particular desire to be reunited with the giant hand-drawn perspective of the Warsaw Old Town that he'd created all those years ago. He wanted to bring the precious document back to his new home where it would be displayed in a Polish cultural centre and museum that he had planned to set up. Having obtained all the necessary permissions, Zbigniew Krawczynski returned to Poland for the first time since fleeing the country 25 years earlier. Now, fate's next twist would be particularly cruel. At the end of the flight back to Australia – and with the drawing in his possession – Zbigniew suffered a heart attack. He never recovered and, for 20 years after his death, the drawing remained in storage. The museum was never built and, more tragically, Zbigniew's widow suffered a nervous breakdown – the dramatic events of the family's colourful life had taken their ultimate toll.

There this story might have ended, but instead there's a new chapter which is full of life and hope, and also brings the saga of Zbigniew Krawczynski and his historic plan full circle. Just before she died in 2000, Mark Krawczynski's mother requested that he take the drawing back to Poland so it could once again honour the post-war achievements of Warsaw's architects and patriots who had been inspired by her husband. In 2004, Mark fulfilled his mother's dying wish, embarking on a highly symbolic journey back to the country he had only visited briefly since he had to emigrate as a small boy 47 years earlier. Mark was immediately impressed with how Poland was facing up to the challenges and changes associated with being a modern European democracy. In fact, he was so impressed he decided to stay and apply his Australian training as an architect, pianist and businessman to help promote Polish culture and development around the world. He has since started a new life in Warsaw, combining the sensibilities of the country of his birth with the practicalities for which Australians are well known in order to build cultural bridges and, just like his father before him, a brighter future for Poland.

Just as Warsaw's Old Town defiantly rose out of the ashes of WWII, out of the tragedy, which befell the Krawczynski family 25 years ago, has emerged an uplifting and inspiring story of restoration and renewal.

TITLE: Out Of The Ashes – English
Jak Feniks z Popiołów – Polish

NARRATOR: Simon Callow

MARKETS: History, Architecture, Travel – Documentary

FORMAT: HD

DURATION: 50 Min TV Special

AUDIO: Stereo & 5.1 options

LANGUAGES: English & Polish

SOUNDTRACK: The musical colour and emotion of Chopin; once more an inspiration for the Polish nation in 2010 as the 200th anniversary of the great composer's birth was celebrated. All recordings from Naxos.

COMPANION:

DVD/CD: An extended DVD to the TV program with a bonus CD of the soundtrack of music from the world of Chopin.

PRODUCED BY: Destinations Media Ltd. / **DIRECTED & PRODUCED BY:** Peter Beveridge

NARRATED BY: Simon Callow / **SCRIPTING BY:** Paul Burrows

HD VISION & STORY EDITED BY: Michael Neil-Smith. The production team that created the TV series Classical Destinations

Mark Krawczynski at the
Młoty Powstaniec (Little Insurgent)
statue located at the ramparts
of the Old Town

