LUBLIN, Poland Adam Frydman shut his heavy-lidded eyes and vividly recalled his first glimpse of
this unplowed field 62 years ago. He was 20 and had just arrived from the Warsaw ghetto with his
father and brother. He imagined hundreds of Polish Jews huddled behind barbed wire fences. He
heard barking dogs. He inhaled the smell of death. When he got his bearings, he pointed
unambiguously.

"There," he said. So there is where they dug. Barely beating the season's first frost and oblivious to a
punishing wind, a team of archaeologists transformed the former Maidanek death camp into a crime
scene, complete with victims, witnesses and evidence.

After carving only a fraction of the 335-by-50-meter, or 1,100-by-160-foot, field into checkerboard
plots that resembled shallow graves, they found about 20 women's rings, a heavy gold bracelet, two
watches, gold-framed eyeglasses, a miniature Roman Catholic religious medallion and 15 valuable
American Eagle gold coins. Even after the very first find, a tiny cut stone - maybe glass or a garnet -
they declared their mission a success.

Once, it was written that there could be no news after the fact from a former death camp. But this
week there was news from Maidanek.

The dead bared their buried prayers.

"To me this was an act of defiance," Frydman said. "People who expected to die said, 'Why give it to
the Germans, why help their war effort?'"

David Prince, a pharmacist and Holocaust survivor who accompanied his wife, Ella, a former
Maidanek inmate, said, "It was priceless to whoever put it there," and he added, "They said, 'Let it rot
in the ground - the bastards won't get it.'"

"It was meant to be found by people exactly like us," he concluded.

Four Maidanek survivors who live in Australia came here with Israeli archaeologists, Israeli and
European amateur investigators and British and American documentarians. They found what they
were looking for: evidence validating indelible memories that, for whatever motivation, desperate
people facing imminent death had scratched burrows inches into the earth and secreted objects
largely of sentimental value.

The participants also learned a great deal about each other and even something about themselves.

Tessie Jacob was 19 when she arrived at Maidanek with her doting parents. When she emerged
naked from the disinfecting showers, they were gone. Last Saturday, for the first time, she stepped
inside a small room, its concrete walls still splotched with the cobalt blue stains of Zyklon-B gas. A
dead rosebud was tucked behind a pipe. This was the gas chamber where her parents died.

"Forgive me," she wept. "I was the baby. You had to pay the price. I came to apologize for being
alive."

Grzegorz Plewik, a 35-year-old historian at the Maidanek State Museum, gently grasped her arm. "I
try to understand what you went through," he said. "You're not guilty."

The expedition was conceived by Yaron Svoray, an Israeli journalist and former police investigator
best known for infiltrating neo-Nazi groups. He recruited the survivors - who speak English with a
Polish accent and an Australian inflection - and teamed up with an American entertainment industry executive, Matt Mazer, to form Historical Media Associates.

Their goal was to research Frydman's recollection, return to Maidanek with him and other survivors, memorialize their visit in a documentary film and transform the camp into an enduring archaeological dig, perhaps conducted jointly by Israeli, German and Polish students.

"Holocaust stories are about misery, but this is a story of redemption," Svoray said. "This story is not only about what we find. It's about a bunch of people working together to find something."

The first ring was discovered by Shlomi Avni, a captain in an elite Israeli Navy reserve unit, and Andreas Vokti, a German bricklayer whose grandfather was in the Wehrmacht.

Maidanek is not as infamous as Auschwitz, but according to the Holocaust Encyclopedia, 170,000 inmates died here. John Demjanjuk and Hermine Braunsteiner Ryan were guards (they later emigrated to America, where they were prosecuted). Art Spiegelman recounted his father's ordeal here in "Maus."

"I have just seen the most terrible place on the face of the earth," W.H. Lawrence wrote in The New York Times after the Russians reached Maidanek in July 1944.

Built in plain sight in suburban Lublin in southeastern Poland to accommodate about 20,000 Soviet prisoners of war, Polish dissidents and Jews, the camp suddenly was flooded with as many as 18,000 Polish Jews deported from Warsaw in April and May of 1943 after the ghetto uprising was quashed.

Hundreds of the unchosen - not yet selected for work or for death - waited on a grassy purgatory, the sloping middle field between Barracks 4 and 5 for hours or even days within sight of a smoky pyre.

The camp's original crematory was either not working or could not handle the capacity. Unlike most other deportees to the camps, they had yet to be stripped of all their belongings.

"These people realized help was not coming, that they were the last Jews in the world," said Svoray, a barrel-chested man who was joined here by his wife, Mikhal, and their two teenage children.

He and Mazer took pains to explain that they were not treasure hunters, not in the conventional sense.

"We've spent a million dollars so far to find rings worth maybe $100 retail," said Mazer, who organized the expedition and won the museum's cooperation. "But the objects tell a powerful story. There is no way that a modern person can understand the experience, but looking at an object, understanding the circumstances of how it got here and being involved in its rescue gives us all an opportunity to connect with the people here and their sacrifice."