

Life and Survival Joanna Milko-Grzanka & Zofia Milko-Wiącek

(Please see map on page 10)

The year was 1939 in Eastern Poland. We were a middle class family, Father, expectant Mother, and two daughters, Joanna (10) and Sophia (8) living in a big beautiful house in Hoza, a suburb of Grodno where our parents owned a restaurant.

September 1939, the Red Army entered our city and we were under Russian occupation. Shortly after their arrival, the Communist system was instituted and became the law of the land. All Military Officers, Doctors, Lawyers, College Students and Business Owners were arrested as they were deemed a threat to the Communist Government.

On January 5, 1940, our father received an order to report to the city for questioning. That was the last time we saw him. Shortly after, 200 Red Army soldiers commandeered our home and ordered us to move into a single small room. They covered the floors with hay and used our home as sleeping quarters for their troops.

Our baby brother was born on March 2nd. While he was named after our Father, he would never have the opportunity to know him. Inquiries within the city regarding our Father's whereabouts were fruitless.

We lived each day in fear, not knowing what would happen next. Midnight, April 13th, four soldiers knocked on the door of our room and told our Mother to get ready as they were taking us to be with our Father. She knew right away that it was a lie. Within two hours, we were corralled into an uncovered Army truck and were headed to the city. It was a very cold, rainy night and our Mother's loud cry was heard the entire way.

After the 17-kilometer trip, we arrived at the train station where hundreds of similar trucks were loading people into the freight cars. Loud religious chants of "Under your protection, Oh God, we your children, hand down our destiny" were heard throughout the station. Not even the squealing from the wheels of the train could drown-out the cry for mercy heard from all around.

We were herded into a cattle car together with about 40 others, mostly women and children. Inside, there were rows of plank beds and two windows covered by heavy bars. A hole in the floor served as a toilet. Little did we know that we were being transported to Siberia!

We were given water and cold diluted soup once a day. Once in a while, when we were outside of a city, the train would stop and we were ordered to relieve ourselves under the car while under the watchful eye of the armed guards. Our mother experienced the worst suffering of all of our family. Although weak and hungry, she held our five-week old baby brother in her arms the entire time trying to nurse him and protect him from the elements. We had a limited number of cloth diapers for the baby and with the little water we had, we sparingly rinsed the diapers while our Mother wrapped them around her body so they could dry.

Some people in the car became ill and would have to be shielded from the guard's view. If a guard noticed someone was seriously sick, he or she could have been literally thrown off the moving train.

After four weeks, our tormented trip had concluded and the train stopped in the city of Shartanda. We were all transferred onto Military trucks and 60 km later; we arrived at our destination – a Siberian Work Camp (Kazakhstan).

People were distributed among several camps. We were placed in Work Camp #5 and although it was spring, it was very cold with several inches of snow on the ground. Three families were assigned to a two-room barrack equipped only with a small "wood-burning" type stove and plank-beds.

There was a large diversity of people in the camp who came from different areas of Russia or other countries. They were sent here for crimes they committed or for being considered middle class, "Rich" as they were often called, and a threat to the communist government.

The area was a flat, dry, empty desert that was used to grow wheat. There was no water source in the camp so it was brought in barrels by tractor from the surrounding areas. We were given a rationed amount and it was to be used for drinking and cooking only.

A lake formed in the camp from the melted snow. While the water in this lake was very muddy with giant water rats swimming around, we had to utilize it to bathe and wash our clothes.

*Graznka and Wiącek to page 14***NEWS OF POLONIA - home delivery****Annual Subscription Rate - \$25.00****Date:** ___/___/___**Name** _____**Address** _____**City/State** _____**Zip** _____ **Tel ()** _____

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**Justyna Ball****Here we go again...**

<http://justyna-polishdelight.blogspot.com>

After the report about the plane crash carrying Poland's First Couple and Poland's many dignitaries, sank into my head, I wondered what kind of news (international or domestic) may actually beat this in making the cover story in our local Telegram & Gazette.

"Shutting down Westboro State Hospital" did that... Nice...

Described as "the end of an era," I bet it left many Massachusetts residents in a deep state of shock... and that explains why Poland's national tragedy received third page coverage. It tells you a lot about the editor's judgment, doesn't it? Originally named Westborough Insane Hospital was ... where they all should have been admitted after it relocated.

When a "close ally's" tragedy is played out in front of our eyes, a tragedy of such caliber that does not occur very often in history, and when in this moment at least, like the US president said, "We are all Poles," I guess the only news that could top it is... yeah, what news??

So when the news sank in, I could not stop thinking about the symbolism of it all. And that was even before the Black Cloud (of volcanic ash) spread over Europe...

My exact thoughts were ...the Polish president needed to be killed for the world to learn about Katyn!

No, I did not vote for him... I did not agree with his views, nor did I like his personality, but I did like the First Lady although I remember thinking about her at first as the mousy type...not fit to be Poland's "First..."

She did not ask to be First Lady, but when she became one, she carried that honor wonderfully and with a ...little humor at times.

She broke the stiff atmosphere during President Bush's visit to Sopot by bringing her Scottish terrier Tytus along. Of course, Laura went nuts over him since it was a copy of the Bushes' Barney.

In March 2007, when she was helping to organize Women's Day at the Presidential Palace, she invited many Polish women, mostly journalists and businesswomen, and surprised them by serving tea in tacky plastic thermoses, then presented each of the dumbfounded ladies with a pack of cheap pantyhose and a red carnation. When they were asked to confirm the receipt of the gift, only then the ladies



knew that Maria "Muszka" Kaczyńska played a joke on them, since it was exactly the way that government used to commemorate Women's Day in communist Poland.

Ex-First Lady Jolanta Kwaśniewska called her a "liberated woman" and when interviewed by journalist Monika Olejnik on her feelings about Mrs. Kaczyńska and the plane crash, Kwaśniewska with tears in her eyes responded, "They loved each other so much, and they died together. I want that too!"

She had a mind of her own, often differing from her husband's views when it came to women's issues. During the Women's Congress at the Palace of Culture, she signed a petition not to change the Polish Constitution, which already protects the human life, by adding "preserves life from the moment of conception." She also supported in-vitro conception for which she was called a "witch" by Tadeusz Rydzyk.

So now the "witch" is gone and in the several days post-catastrophe, some 180 thousand came to the Presidential Palace to pay their last respects.

Meanwhile in Krakow, the sound of Zygmunt, the 500 year old bell echoed through the walls of the Wawel Cathedral to announce the departure of the Presidential Couple and 94 Polish dignitaries and others who perished with them.

Among them was 91-year-old Ryszard Kaczorowski, the oldest of the passengers who in 1942 joined Anders Army, and as a Commander of the Carpathian Battalion fought in Monte Casino. As the legend says, he was the first to inform about Poles taking over the fortress.

He was officially the last Polish president in exile, in office until 1990 when he returned the presidential insignia to Lech Wałęsa, the first democratically

*Justyna Ball to page 16***Calendar of Events**

APR 24, Sat., Paso Robles 7:00 p.m. – "A Toast To Paderewski" The Paderewski Festival and the Back Roads Wineries of Paso Robles invite lovers of fine wine and music to a reception showcasing the wines of the Back Roads Wineries complemented by Polish-themed appetizers provided by Cass Catering. Pianist Marek Żebrowski, a Steinway artist and director of the Polish Music Center at the University of Southern California Thornton School of Music, will be joined by the Midnight Winds to perform a special concert featuring works by Paderewski, Chopin and Mozart. Location: Pear Valley Winery, 4900 Union Road, Paso Robles. More information: call 1-805-227-2888. SEE PAGE 3

or: www.paderewskifest.com

Apr 20 – May2, The 11th Annual Polish Film Festival in Los Angeles, Information at www.polishfilmla.org

Apr 24, Sat. 6:00 pm, Boxing - Tomasz Adamek Vs Chris Arreola, Heavyweight World Championship at Citizens Business Bank Arena in Ontario, CA. (I-10 Freeway at Haven or Miliken Aves. at 4th Street). Information: andy@picassotravel.com

Apr 28, Wed, 11 am. Film about Crazy Horse Sculptor Korczak Ziolkowski at Clubhouse Six, The Polish Club of Laguna Woods. Reservation till April 24. Information at Irena 949-206-9122.

May 15, Deadline for submission of presentation for the competition on Memories of Solidarity in My Family; Information at: konkurs@wspomnieniesolidarnosci.eu

May 23, Polish American Congress meeting in - Los Angeles - For info - page 5.

May 26 – 29, Wed to Sat, Paderewski Piano Competition, at Thyer Hall, Colburn School Conservatory of Music, Los Angeles

Jun 20, Sun., 10:30 am, Polish National Alliance meeting at the Polish Parish in Los Angeles.

Jun 20, Sun., 1:30 pm, Polish American Congress, General Meeting at the Polish Parish in Los Angeles.

Please send information for the calendar to Bish Petryka - e-mail: zbyskoopet@aol.com ★