

Grandma's childhood from 4

two levels. Layers of people were piled onto these two shelves in a mound of disarray. Every two or three days the passengers were fed like livestock when the car doors swung open and cabbage soup was hastily thrown in. The dreadful concoction consisted of a scarce amount of hot water with a few cabbage leaves and it was just enough to survive. There was no bathroom. The only means for a toilet was a large hole cut into the bottom center of the train car.

Imprisoned travelers journeyed for long weeks in these horrifying conditions. As the cold persistently pierced through the slats of the train's sidings they huddled close to their loved ones and gripped onto the few belongings that they carried with them. The freighter rumbled and bumped along the Trans Siberian tracks in a devilish manner, hauling the terrified passengers further north every day. Little did they know that the harsh, lifeless climate of Siberia lie ahead waiting anxiously for their arrival. This is where thousands of Polish deportees would be scattered across the land for the next two years of their lives.

Zosia Cybulska (Adamowicz) remembers July 1940

The night wind brashly whirled against the small structure noisily, awakening Zosia from her childish slumber. Her back ached as she cautiously lifted her head to peer around the undersized barrack. No one had stirred. The hundreds of sleeping bodies surrounding her lay in a lifeless pile of arms and legs, continuing the harmonious symphony of their collective snore. As Zosia turned over, she felt a soft thud upon her head. She instantly lifted her palm and swatted the crawling debris out of her hair. Large beetles and cockroaches rained from the ceiling nightly and it was not unusual for her to wake up with several swollen bug bites protruding from her skin.

Zosia tilted her head slightly to gaze at her sleeping mother. Her wide eyes had adjusted to the darkness by now, so she could easily recognize the distinctive characteristics of her mother's face. The beauty that once exuded from this cheerful woman had solemnly faded deep beneath a tired and sunken mask. Her face embodied a heartbreaking storybook of discouraging tragedies and long days, endless suffering and dangerous times. Although she appeared fragile, Zosia knew that her mother was resilient. Beneath her illusive exterior lay a relentlessly beating heart and an indestructible soul. She was a woman who firmly believed in God and her unshakable faith is what enabled her to wake up every morning to survive. She would not be deterred from saving what was left of her family in this godless ice country.

Zosia lay awake with that very dark thought. What was left of her family? How could that be a logical consideration upon her young mind? She wrestled with this reflection for a moment, but the cruel reality ensued. They had no communication with her father, who had been imprisoned over eight months ago. No one knew if he was alive or dead. Worst of all, her innocent fourteen-year old sister had tragically passed away in May.

The very concept of Helena's death sent a sharp stabbing pain through Zosia's chest. Her eyes welled up as she remembered her beautiful sister.

When the family first arrived at Camp Pima, the Russian soldiers forced any able-bodied prisoners to go to work in the bitter forest. Despite her young age, Helena was selected to complete strenuous labor and demanding tasks daily. She carried heavy tree logs for building and cleared vast amounts of brush from the arctic land. One unfortunate day as she was walking across the frozen river the ice broke beneath her

small feet and she fell into the sub-zero waters. She was soaked to the bone, but the Russian guards mercilessly denied her request to return to the barracks to change into dry clothes. She had no choice but to endure the freezing conditions and her undernourished body could not fight off infection. Inevitably, she instantly fell ill with a terrible case of pneumonia. She died one week later, her small body too feeble to withstand the pain.

The dark night persisted and Zosia could not sleep now. Her tear-filled eyes would not close, even though her exhausted body desperately pleaded with her for sleep. They had been confined to this dreadful place for over five months now and there was no going back to the careless times of happiness. She had witnessed too much at the young age of ten. Heartbreak, fear, tragedy, confusion, and hopelessness were common feelings that ran through her soul on a daily basis. The nightmares came often now and the starvation pained her tiny body.

She wiped the tears from her face and hopelessly attempted to cling to the few blessings that surrounded her. With her mother on one side and her older brother Kazik on the other, she began to calm her anxious mind.

Zosia's imagination wandered back to the happy memories of her hometown, Medyka. She saw herself playing hide-and-seek in the tall-grass meadows and cheerfully swinging from the tangled branches of the apple trees. She remembered the beautiful countryside and the picturesque pastoral settings, the church her father played the organ in, and all of her friends from school. It was in this that she took solace and peacefully drifted off into the dream of one day returning home again.

Wieslaw Adamowicz remembers August 1940

Wieslaw remembers the first time he explored his new home. As he looked around the miniature dwelling he couldn't help but notice that there was no ceiling and the floor beneath his feet was merely the hard, cold ground. The log cabin resembled a child-like fort more than an actual habitat, and he wondered how it was possible to survive in such an unprotected shelter.

Siberia was an unforgiving, torturous climate. Snow blanketed the ground and the sun hid above the dark clouds for nine months out of the year. It was unbearable, but it was here in this lifeless terrain that Wieslaw found himself living with his pregnant mother, father, uncle and three sisters. Here, deep in the Tiga forest they were imprisoned by the Russians in a work camp called Suchy Log.

It was another day of orders and rules, another day of a disturbingly oppressed life. Wieslaw kicked the cold ground in frustration. He didn't want to attend school. As a twelve year old in a scary, unfamiliar place, education was the last thing on his mind. Not only were the classes remedial, simple subjects, but everything was taught in Russian. He could care less about the history and culture of these evil tyrants in this godforsaken country. He would never worship a leader like Joseph Stalin, the man who terrorized his homeland and kidnapped him from his childhood. How dare these teachers try to impose their awful and murderous beliefs on him?

A crow swooped down in mid-flight and sped between the tree trunks of the dark forest. Wieslaw watched as the black bird disappeared into the mangled mesh of branches and leaves. He stared off into the distance and longed to be where that bird flew. The truth was he wanted to be working beside his father and uncle. Their daily jobs consisted of cutting down trees, hauling lumber, and chopping wood. Although the conditions were harsh and the labor was agonizing, he felt like this is where he belonged.

As Wieslaw entered the tiny classroom, his stomach grumbled loudly and pangs of

hunger cramped his side. The only sustenance he and his family had been given weekly was half-baked bread that was always cold. The dough was so under-cooked and lumpy that it looked like a large animal's hooves and the family couldn't help but endearingly refer to the disgusting piece of glop as, "cow's feet." The mere remembrance of the taste curdled Wieslaw's stomach and wrenched his gut. He yearned for a bite of good food like fruits, vegetables, homemade soups, and his mother's warm dinners. He wanted fresh jams and pickled beets, wild currants, and potato dumplings. Wieslaw knew that he and his family would not be able to continue living on such small rations.

As he sat at his desk he unraveled a very important thought in his mind. His head monotonously bobbed up and down when his teacher spoke to him, but his brain was somewhere else entirely. It would be a dangerous task. Could he pull it off? He would have to carefully think through every detail before he attempted anything. It would be a life-threatening risk, but did he have a choice?

As class tediously dragged on, Wieslaw secretly crafted his plan. That night, he would begin stealing vegetables from the Russian compound. It would be highly treacherous and unsafe, but what else could he do. Survival doesn't tend to give you many options. □

Friends of Kościuszko from 1

in that publication will be the address made by Cynthia Bajdek, AAFKWP Treasurer and Secretary, concerning the history of the Association and its plans for the future.

Insofar as it rained, and according to Poles, was unusually cold as well throughout the seven days (four in Kraków and three in Warszawa) that Dean and Mrs. Bajdek spent in Poland, outdoor activities were extremely limited. Coincidentally, the final precise plans laid in advance nearly a year earlier for their time in Kraków assured all concerned that they for the most part would be warm and dry which was very much appreciated indeed.

Later that day, Professor Rokosz and his assistants, Leszek Cierpiałowski (the Director of the Kościuszko Mound Museum), and Marcelina Setkiewicz (Jagiellonian University student and interpreter), took the Bajdeks for an extensive tour of the historic Benedictine Abbey, a fortress-monastery, located in Tyniec, a thirty minute drive from Kraków.

On Tuesday morning, Bajdek delivered a scheduled short speech for the wreath-laying at Kościuszko's sarcophagus in Saint Leonard's Crypt in Wawel Cathedral. In recognition of the fact of the location – being the stunning burial site of Poland's greatest leaders -- Bajdek titled his oration, "Memory" (Pamięć), in which he included Adam Mickiewicz's work, "The Pilgrim's Prayer" (Modlitwa Pielgrzyma), two lines of which are "God of the Jagiellos! God of the Sobieskis! God of the Kościuszkos! Have mercy on our Fatherland and on us" (Boże Jagiełłonów! Boże Sobieskich! Boże Kościuszków! Zlituj się nad Ojczyzną naszą i nad nami.).

Following a tour of Wawel Cathedral that includes, among others, the tombs of Kings Casimir the Great, Jan Sobieski, and Władysław Jagiełło (the husband of Queen Jadwiga who is also buried in the Cathedral) and those of other highly notable Poles such as the poets Adam Mickiewicz and Juliusz Słowacki; and the founder of post-World War I independent Poland, Marshal Józef Piłsudski, Professor Rokosz and his party walked with the Bajdeks to nearby Wawel Castle for a tour of that historical, breathtaking site and its magnificent collection.

Finally, at noon the entire party drove in a heavy rain to the site of the Kościuszko Mound and its related Museum on Washington Avenue (aleja Waszyngtona) for an early afternoon banquet and dedication of the 40 by 20 inch bronze plaque – the gift of the Association to the Committee – that was designed in Massachusetts by Dean Bajdek, cast by a foundry in Minnesota, and delivered to Poland from Massachusetts by UPS.

Because of the rain the dedication was very brief during a fleeting window of opportunity between the cold downpours. Of necessity, therefore, Bajdek's dedication speech had been re-scheduled to precede the Banquet that was held in the Museum, in a warm, comfortable, and well-appointed dining room, large enough to seat some thirty-five Committee members and guests.

Bajdek began his speech with the words, "One man, two continents, two nations, two democracies, two rivers and two organizations.

Such are the considerations that bring us together on this beautiful September day in Kraków." (He decided to keep the word 'beautiful' in the opening lines, for despite the rain, it was a truly beautiful day, made so because of the genuine warmth and hospitality of the Cracovians, all being loyal "friends of Kościuszko," who had gathered for the occasion).

At the Banquet, Professor Rokosz presented Dean Bajdek with a bronze medal, stating that it was "prepared by a notable member of (our) Committee, a great artist and sculptor, Professor Czesław Dzwigaj.... (It) bears the image of Kościuszko, and is an exact replica of the medal designed by Canoi and (carved) by Durand in 1818 in Paris immediately after the Hero's Death. The reverse (side) ..., much like the plaque funded by (your Association), is meant to commemorate our meeting on September 16, 2008, during which two flags, Polish and American, flew over Kościuszko's Mound, and which established an arch of a transatlantic bridge of (common) goals and ideals between the Committee and the Association.... This community of goals and ideals rises in turn from the humanistic strands of the Greco-Roman and Judeo-Christian traditions, which are the common source of the euroatlantic culture, from which emanates the spirit of Kościuszko, who belongs to the whole world, and whose virtues are the virtues of all Mankind."

The day ended privately with a meeting in which Professor Rokosz, Dean Bajdek, Mrs. Bajdek, Mr. Cierpiałowski, and Ms. Setkiewicz participated. Among the several matters discussed, the agreement that Professor Rokosz would be a participant in the 2010 Kościuszko Conference and Observance at West Point was a major achievement for both organizations. As part of that agreement, Dean Bajdek agreed to participate in a Kościuszko Symposium arranged by Professor Rokosz on behalf of the Committee that will be held in Kraków in 2011. The second major agreement was that the leaders of both organizations would henceforth cross-participate in Kościuszko Conferences/Symposiums in West Point and Kraków every five years. In effect, therefore, Rokosz and Bajdek agreed to participate in West Point and in Kraków respectively in 2015 and 2016 and so on, as would their successors.

The Association looks forward to welcoming Professor Rokosz to West Point in 2010. □

**Distribution of the
News of Polonia
in the Phoenix area is
through the generosity of
Stan Żarkowski
Century 21 - All Star Realtors**