Me and the War — Full English Translation (Complete)

Part 1

Me and the War — Full English Translation (Part 1)

ME AND THE WAR — FULL ENGLISH TRANSLATION (PART 1)

Perhaps the title sounds odd: “Me and the War,” but when I set about writing these memories, I wanted to present my personal feelings and the story of my closest family during the war and after it ended.

My immediate family consisted of: myself— in 1939 I was 32 years old. Tulu (my husband)—36 years old. My husband’s mother (Grandmother)—70 years old. Our eldest daughter, Lila—6 years old. Our son, Otu■—2 years old. Ania was born on 11 October 1939. There was also a girl—our maid—Hela.

We lived then in Krzemieniec, on Objazdowa Street. Tulu was a teacher at the T. Czacki Lyceum in Krzemieniec and head of the natural sciences department in the Museum of the Land of Krzemieniec. I was not teaching then.

In May 1939 the children came down with scarlet fever—seemingly it had nothing to do with the war, and yet it did. They were very ill, especially little Olek, and I made a vow that if they recovered I would give the church the most precious thing we had: our wedding rings. Then the war broke out—the government appealed to citizens to support the national treasury, so we offered those rings as a gift. Many times we wondered whether someone had simply taken them and fled abroad (thousands were fleeing), but deep down I did not regret—and do not regret—that step. My children and Poland were one and the same for me.

I remember how we never left the radio, listening when the Germans seized Czechoslovakia, when the announcer said farewell to his listeners, when the Czechoslovak anthem was played for the last time. I cried then, realizing that the horror was drawing near to us too—to Poland.

On 1 September 1939 mobilization was announced. I will not give exact dates here, only the facts, the experiences that etched themselves into my memory like images on a lasting, precise plate. In the first days of September (or perhaps at the end of August) Tadzik’s mother (today he is my son■in■law), passing through on her way from Teremne for some medical treatment, came for advice about whether to continue or return home. I advised her to return, and she did.

Tulu received a double salary for two months, with which I bought some food: flour, sugar, fat, cocoa (with that cocoa I long enriched my little Ania’s meals). I put these stores into Grandmother’s big chest, added a fair amount of preserves and juices I had made that summer, and we waited for war—war in Krzemieniec, war in our own home. Events rolled down upon us like an avalanche; people flowed through our house and yard like in a kaleidoscope.

The yard was full of cars. Refugees from western and central Poland fled in crowds through Krzemieniec and Zaleszczyki into Romania. At night the road through the Dubno Gate (a suburb of Krzemieniec) looked like a shining snake—lights of vehicles, an unbroken stream. The sound of

engines reached our flat. No one expected, on a beautiful sunny day (probably around 11 September 1939), that there would be a bombing. The refugees had dispersed to buy food—still plentiful in the market then (peasants had already heard that Soviet troops were approaching and suspected their farms would be collectivized, so they were selling off their goods). With that stream of refugees a girl about twelve years old ended up in Krzemieniec; she had no family at all. We took her in—her name was Janka.

That lovely morning, after consulting with Grandmother, we sent Janka to the market to buy plums for preserves. Tulu went to the police station to register the radio (to hand it in). And then the bombing began. German planes descended over the market packed with people and directly strafed the crowd with machine guns. At the same time the entire main street was bombed; even the cemetery was badly hit. Many people died.

The girl Janka leapt into the nearest entryway, where she sat petrified until evening. Tulu, in the abandoned police building, lay down under a window and returned unharmed. I was pregnant with Ania (she was born on 11 October 1939). I grabbed two■year■old Otu■ in my arm, held Lila by the hand, and shouting for Grandmother I ran to hide in the so■called “Virgin Rocks” (Ska■ki Dziewicze). There were many people there from nearby houses. Grandmother turned round and round in panic, ran back into the flat, and stayed at home.

When at last we all reunited safely—I with the children, and Tulu—we began to worry about Janka. Tulu went to the market, somehow found her, and brought her back. From that day on, alarm followed alarm. At first we sheltered in the cellar, but eventually we stopped reacting to sirens and sat at home; only little Lila, green with fear, spent whole days in the cellar and dragged us all down there with her.

At last the alarms ceased. People began saying that Soviet troops were approaching. The end of Poland—as the Ukrainians said, “Polska ■opn■ta” (Poland has burst). A new partition of Poland had taken place—divided between the Russians and the Germans. I cried terribly, but kept bustling around the house, cleaning, scrubbing, and weeping. One of the refugees, Marek—a miner— tried to comfort me, saying he was in a worse situation, cut off from his family already under the Germans, and that surely the world would not leave us abandoned. We learned that England had declared war as well. From the very first of September there were already predictions and rumors: in a month, in sixty days, in three months it will be over; that somewhere the Polish army was resisting the Germans…

LIFE UNDER SOVIET OCCUPATION (1939–1941)

Little by little, life in Krzemieniec began to take on a kind of routine. Some Polish refugees returned to their homes; others—especially men—fled abroad, mostly to Romania. Some were deported to Siberia, and remnants of the Polish Army fell into Russian captivity. Still others were murdered immediately by Ukrainians.

One of those trying to cross the border was Witold Duda—Lolek. He visited us in Krzemieniec around 15 October 1939, said goodbye (before the war he had been postmaster in Stalowa Wola and a reserve lieutenant), and set out towards Zaleszczyki. At the border he was captured by the Soviets and deported to a penal camp in the Komi Republic. Only after a year did we receive from him a brief card from the camp saying he was alive—that was all we knew of him during the war. Later, after the war, we re■established contact and learned how he survived. After that card, we put together a parcel—hardtack made with eggs and milk, garlic, linden blossom, and a little bacon—and with great difficulty managed to send it. I carried it as far as Smyga near Krzemieniec,

because the Soviets kept changing the collection points. The package could weigh no more than two kilograms— they deliberately made it difficult. That package, he later told us, saved his life, because he was already starving to death. When the Sikorski–Stalin agreement was signed, Lolek joined Anders' Army. Along the way he married Danka Musia■ówna, who had also been deported to Siberia. He fought in Italy near Ancona, left the army after the war as a captain, stayed in England for a time, then emigrated to Bariloche in Argentina. He has a son, Andrzej (already married), and an adopted daughter. Now he would gladly return to Poland.

Meanwhile my own time was drawing near to give birth. The yard had emptied of refugees, the girl we had sheltered went back to her parents. On 9 October an unexpected snow fell. Fearing the vegetables would freeze in the garden, I dug them out from under the snow—heavy and wet—and carried them to the cellar; that may have hastened the birth. Around midnight I sent Tulu to fetch the midwife. Grandmother felt unwell, so I lit the fire in the stove, put on water, prepared the swaddling and shirts. Before the midwife had even washed her hands, little Anusia was born— a brave, clever girl, bold even to the point of risk. At first Grandmother was disappointed it was not a boy, but after a few days she became very fond of Anusia. I lay abed for only three days, and even then only briefly, for I had to bathe and change the baby myself—the midwife did not return, and Grandmother was afraid to handle the infant.

After Anusia's birth, the weather turned beautiful. Just then Tulu's brother Lotek came to visit. By then Tulu was teaching in two Ukrainian schools, as the Polish schools had been abolished. I was the "householder," tasked with keeping the family alive—which was no small thing.

Food was desperately scarce. For everything one had to queue, and the queues were enormous, for many Jews had fled from the General Government to Krzemieniec. Sometimes I stood from midnight onward just to obtain 25 dekagrams of sugar, at most half a kilo—and often I returned empty■handed. Occasionally I managed to get some very poor candies, and then there was a feast: even the adults could sweeten their tea. Bread, flour, salt—all were available only after endless waiting. Polish textile goods vanished like camphor—some had been bought out in September, the rest were confiscated by the Soviet authorities and dispersed. From time to time transports came from Russia, but the materials were worthless— flimsy printed cottons. I queued half a day for a few meters; Grandmother made pajamas for the children, and I sewed myself a dress. The pajamas fell apart after the first wash, and my dress looked like a rag after its first wearing.

Soap was unavailable. I made lye from ash, scrubbing the dirtiest parts of the laundry with tiny remnants of toilet soap. Sheets were worn on both sides. Tulu's light■colored shirts were a torment to wash—always by hand, in the tub. Milk could be obtained only by barter. I gave away coats, shoes, curtains, because the children needed milk. Fuel disappeared too. From the beginning of the war until we fled Krzemieniec, we burned whatever I dragged from the forest or tore from nearby fences. I carried heavy branches home until my shoulder was swollen and sore. Once I even worked cutting peat near Sapanów—literally for bread and water. I slept on hay in a peasant's house, but it was dangerous: peasants were already readying themselves to murder Poles. In the evenings my back was so bent I could not straighten it, and blood oozed from my fingertips. Still I endured a fortnight, bringing home precious cartloads of peat. That was a treasure, for winter was coming and I no longer had the strength to drag wood from the forest.

We constantly feared deportation to Siberia. At first the Soviets deported families of officers, policemen, foresters, officials, anyone "suspect"—and that included us, since Tulu's brother Witold had already been in a labor camp. All Poles were "suspect," even refugees. In that fear I always kept dried bread and pasta on hand, and I nursed Ania until she was a year and a half, so she

would be safe if we were deported.

We delayed her baptism for the same reason—we waited for the end of the war, hoping for a proper family celebration. But the war dragged on, and when Ania was a year and a half, she went with Grandmother and me to the church on foot. Our friends Mr. Werner and Balcia “stood up” for her, though in fact she stood by herself in the sacristy, in a long cream■colored gown sewn from my pre■war ball dress. She already walked and talked well by then. Grandmother was proud to be her godmother, and Ania received the name Joanna, after my mother.

Part 2

Me and the War — Full English Translation (Part 2)

ME AND THE WAR — FULL ENGLISH TRANSLATION (PART 2)

[Continuation from Part 1: after Ania's baptism and the first months under Soviet occupation.]

After Anusia's baptism the weather turned beautiful. Around that time Lotek—Tulu's brother—came to see us. By then Polish schools had been abolished and Tulu taught in two Ukrainian schools. I ran the household, which in practice meant: keep everyone alive.

Food was desperately scarce. For everything one had to stand in a queue, and the queues were enormous— especially after many Jews fled from the General Government to Krzemieniec. Sometimes I stood from midnight just to obtain 25 dekagrams of sugar, at most half a kilo; often I returned empty■handed. Now and then I managed to buy some miserable candies, and then it was a great feast: even the adults could sweeten their tea. Bread, flour, salt—everything required hours of waiting. Polish textiles vanished like camphor: in September people bought up what they could, and the rest the new authorities confiscated and redistributed. Occasionally transports arrived from Russia, but the cloth was worthless—thin printed cotton that came apart at once. I once queued half a day to get a few meters; Grandmother sewed pajamas for the children, and I stitched myself a dress. The pajamas fell to pieces after the first wash, and my dress looked like a rag after a single wearing.

Soap could not be had at all. I made lye from ash and scrubbed the dirtiest bits with tiny remnants of toilet soap. We turned sheets to wear both sides. Tulu's light■colored shirts were the worst—always washed by hand in a tub. Milk could be had only by barter. I gave away coats, shoes, curtains, because the children had to have milk.

Fuel disappeared as well. From the very beginning of the war until our ultimate flight from Krzemieniec we burned whatever I could drag from the forest or tear from nearby fences. I carried home branches until my left shoulder swelled and throbbed. Once I even worked cutting peat near Sapanów—literally for bread and water. I slept on straw in a peasant's cottage, and even that was dangerous: the peasants were already preparing to murder Poles. In the evenings my back was so bent I could not straighten up, and blood oozed from my fingertips. I endured it a fortnight and brought home precious loads of peat. That was treasure, for winter was coming and I no longer had the strength to fetch wood from the forest.

We lived in constant fear of deportation to Siberia. At first they deported families of officers, policemen, foresters, officials—anyone "suspect," which included us (Tulu's brother Witold had already been sent to a labor camp). Every Pole was suspect, even the refugees. In that fear I always kept dried bread and pasta, and I nursed Ania until she was a year and a half so that, if we were deported, she would be safe.

We postponed her baptism for the same reason—we waited for the end of the war, hoping for a proper family celebration. But the war dragged on. When Ania was a year and a half, Grandmother and I walked with her to the church. Our friends Mr. Werner and Balcia "stood up" for her, although the truth is she stood on her own in the sacristy, in a long cream gown which I had sewn out of my pre■war ball dress. She already walked and spoke well by then. Grandmother was proud to be her godmother; Ania received the name Joanna, after my mother.

Hunger was the great burden that fell on me day after day. Grandmother suffered from it terribly. She had always liked meat and fat, and suddenly there was none; she weakened badly. Once Julek Unold (aunt Hela's husband) came to Krzemieniec with a consignment of tobacco. He stopped in and persuaded me to go with him to Chodaki (40 km away), where I could bring back some food. I dug out what clothing I still had to trade and was just about to leave when Grandmother scolded me bitterly for leaving them alone. I tried to explain that I would come back with lard, flour, butter, but she stayed upset. I had already gone downstairs and was about to climb onto the cart when "something struck me." I turned back and said a warm farewell to Grandmother. To this day I regret that journey—for if I had stayed, perhaps she would have lived longer.

In Chodaki I traded clothes mostly for fat. Every day I went to the hand■mill to grind wheat, because Julek told me that whatever I managed to grind I could take home to Krzemieniec. I went with Hela (she was pregnant with Alek then), for they too were grinding for themselves. I was terribly impatient, but our neighbor—who also had a tobacco consignment—kept delaying departure; the Germans were not allowing people to leave Chodaki. Only after about ten days did I finally set out, but on the way, in Szumsko, I received a telegram: Grandmother was dead.

It was late winter. The flat was cold. To reach the kitchen one had to pass through the hall, and the kitchen itself was perched above the stairwell. Grandmother had been warming herself by the stove in the room, but went to the kitchen to cook something for the children. She must have caught pneumonia. By the time Tulu realized and called the doctor, it was too late. If I had been there perhaps she would not have been chilled, or I would have applied cupping glasses at once and she might have been saved. I cried terribly—and to this day I grieve for her.

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One day Tulu came back from a conference and said that "something was afoot"—the Russian inspector had been calming the teachers and advised them to go for a walk up Bona's Hill (where the ruins of Queen Bona's castle still stand and one can see Krzemieniec and the surrounding area). The next day there was a stir in town. There was nothing to eat in the house. I took Ania in my arms and stood in the bread line on Szeroka Street. Suddenly there was shooting. Two Germans appeared on motorcycles.

By chance Tulu had stepped out of the house; he found me, snatched Ania in his arms, and we ran together. We jumped down into the stream behind the houses. The streets emptied in an instant. We waded up the watercourse, crossed Szeroka, darted into our lane, and reached home—but without bread. From that moment on, bread was constantly lacking, and hunger settled in for good.

One enemy had fled—another had seized us. Just before the Germans entered, the Soviets murdered all the prisoners. People came back from the prison in tears; some recognized among the brutally slaughtered their own relatives and acquaintances.

Under the Germans Tulu worked at the Museum—an institution they pretended to tolerate while doing their best to destroy it. They issued absurd orders, such as vacating the premises within a single day. The staff hunted desperately for another building and carried the collections on their own backs. I remember that Tulu earned so little that his entire month's pay could buy no more than a kilogram of butter on the black market. It was sacrificial work, but the museum survived—and it stands to this day, with Tulu's insect cases and huge botanical collections.

Food rations were not enough to nourish even one person, and we had three children and three adults. Once a week I brought home three■quarters of a barley loaf. We ate it at once (on the second day it turned bitter and crumbled like sawdust). Sometimes there was a smear of vile

marmalade, once in a while a few dekagrams of meat. I exchanged everything in the house for food: coats, curtains, leather briefcases (people made shoes from them), even paintings. For Grandmother's black coat with a sealskin collar I received nearly a meter of wheat. That was a treasure. We ground that golden grain on secret hand■mills, hidden from the Germans.

At times relatives from the countryside helped: Julek brought cabbage and a little groats. These trips were dangerous, for Ukrainians were already preparing attacks on Poles. Once Tulu traded his winter coat to a peasant in exchange for a goose and a bit of honey—the feast lasted us several days. Unolds—Jan from Szumsko or Apolinary from Chodaki— would occasionally bring meat from clandestine slaughter. I distributed it among friends, though it was a dangerous affair; the Germans punished such things even with death. For ourselves I kept only scraps—and paid for those as well. The truth is that we need not have gone hungry had we lived in the countryside like they did. But as the saying goes, "the full do not believe the hungry." They too perished in the end.

For drinks we brewed tea from scorched apple peelings, from linden blossom, or from strawberry leaves (perhaps the strawberry■leaf tea was best). I even tried roasting halved acorns to make coffee, but it was hopeless—I could not grind them fine, nor even crush them properly in a mortar.

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We ended up living on the upper floor in a small flat; after the Germans entered, Jews moved into the rooms below. It was a very wealthy, childless family. They wanted to store some of their things with us. Tulu absolutely refused. Once, when we had both gone out, they pleaded with Grandmother and more or less forced their way in with suitcases and those soft, beautiful blankets. When I came back I scolded Grandmother. Tulu returned and ordered me to take everything back at once. He was convinced that keeping—or worse, using— the property of Jews so cruelly persecuted would bring misfortune upon us as well. Perhaps he was right. I returned the things—and I do not regret it.

The Jews were driven into the ghetto—surely they perished. It was a monstrous, terrible disgrace for the Germans, and for the Ukrainians who with all their hearts helped in persecuting and liquidating the Jews. I remember how the ghetto burned, how shooting broke out because the Jews defended themselves. I wandered about like a madwoman; my head ached endlessly. And still, one had to live, to get by. I collected a whole sack of old shoes, so that we could salvage two or three usable pairs.

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In the General Government it was Germans against Poles; here in Volhynia there was another dreadful enemy as well: the Ukrainians. We were a minority. The Ukrainians kept pace with the Germans. It was they who handed us over, first to the Bolsheviks and later to the Germans. They betrayed truly valuable people to death— Professor Opolski, Professor M■czak, Sawojcówna, Torgo■ski, Szynajowiecz, and many, many others. The same surely awaited us—above all Tulu—had the Eastern Front not begun to move toward us, forcing us to flee. (Professor M■czak was the founder of the Museum; Dr. Opolski wrote a treatise on Hitlerism just before the war.)

When Ania had severe stomach pains and cried at times it was no wonder—there were days when we had nothing but rye flour (perhaps that is why I never liked rye bread). I took her in my arms and went to the Gebietskommissar to ask for semolina. I waited nearly two hours to be admitted. I presented my request to the Ukrainian interpreter; they muttered among themselves and did not give me even 25 dekagrams of semolina. From the very start of the war the Ukrainians betrayed us and denounced us to the Bolsheviks—we would never have been deported to Siberia in such

numbers, never imprisoned or shot, if not for them. As soon as the war began they contacted the Germans by radio, murdered people coming in from western Poland, and so on.

Then came the worst news of all: at Easter, word arrived from Chodaki that Julek Unold had been murdered. Denunciations of Poles, arrests by the Germans, and executions—this lasted the entire time. Later the Ukrainians themselves began to murder Poles: at first individuals, then entire villages and settlements. After Julek, others followed— familiar names, neighbors—and then an avalanche: whole families with children and old people, whole villages wiped out. Poles defended themselves, fled to larger clusters, organized resistance. Many from the surrounding villages poured into Krzemieniec, entire columns of refugees moving under German guard toward the town. Day after day I went out to the Wi■niowiecka Gate and waited in tears for Hela with the children. I saw those poor people—some on carts, others on foot with bundles and babies. They slept on planks in the lycée church and then dispersed among Polish homes. Even from the Germans danger awaited them—deportation to forced labor in Germany.

We inhabitants of Krzemieniec did what we could. I, together with Mrs. Doroszukiewa, cooked soup by the bucketful several times; we pooled what we had. Most often they were potato soups with dumplings, with a little fat. I went to Ukrainian neighbors and demanded fat outright. Some gave—like the Skibiniecki family; others, like the spiteful Ukrainian woman Turkowa, would not give so much as a slice.

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The children… Little Ania often cried up to a year and a half—she must have had stomach pains. No wonder, considering our diet. She had no toys. When she was three or four I told her how, before the war, Otu■ and Lila used to throw bananas and oranges under the bed—and Ania asked what such fruit looked and tasted like. I remember once when I managed to get sifted flour and made dumplings; Ania refused to eat them, saying she did not want such sticky dumplings.

In ■migród near Jas■o she was about four. Although she was exceptionally clever, she could not pronounce “r.” Mr. Kahl from the dairy was delighted and paid her for reciting a little verse with that childish lisp. I tried to send her to the nuns who ran a sort of kindergarten. I gave her a bottle of milk and a slice of bread with butter, but she would not play with the other children and soon stopped going. The children played best together in a foursome: Ania, Otu■, Bogna, and Kazek Unold (I had taken him in from Hela, who at the time was teaching near Borz■cin). Lila did not join. Sometimes the children romped wildly and Ania led them—she was always the bravest. Once Mrs. Kruczkowska (who had also fled from Krzemieniec and lived near Jas■o) came to visit. Nusia, she, and I talked without end. The younger children played, but Lila disappeared. After a while I found her behind a curtain in the corner—we used the niche as a wardrobe—sitting hunched and crying… She could not bear the bustle and loud conversation. Our children were rather peculiar. I must return to Otu■—again he fell ill with pneumonia, and as always, he survived.

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■migród and the Eastern Front. The Home Army was strong there—almost the entire intelligentsia belonged. By day they worked, by night they went on missions. A betrayal exposed them and the Gestapo launched a raid. One sultry night we slept with the window open. Suddenly I heard, “Das Fenster zumachen, aber schnell!” (“Close the window, quickly!”). They burst in, searched the house, and took Tulu away to Bro■yn’s. I stayed alone with the children and the little Halinka Bro■ynówna. The Germans said they would kill her mother if her father did not report by morning. That night they ordered me to leave the light on and burst into the house over and over,

accompanied by an “actress” billeted nearby. Halinka’s cradle was fixed to the floor; I had to sit beside her and rock her. After a time I heard Bro■yna’s voice from the hiding place in the kitchen floor: he asked me to pass him clothes, for he was in only a shirt. His suit lay in the kitchen, but I handed him another from the wardrobe. Toward morning Tulu returned—what a relief! When the guard finally moved off, I slipped Bro■yna breakfast and a few cigarettes under the table and he escaped through the gardens to the forest. His wife and the other women sent as hostages to the front kitchens later came home as well.

Later we did the worst thing with Nusia. As the front drew near and houses shook from the explosions, we took our most precious things, the ailing Julek and the children, and went to K■ty, nearer the Dukla Pass, right on the Wis■oka, hoping the front would pass us by. It was the opposite. We arrived on a beautiful September day. Sun, fruit on the trees. We set up our “camp” in a new house belonging to the farmer Wokurka at the foot of the hill. Nusia took us there and returned to ■migród to save what could be saved. Suddenly the front enveloped K■ty. We spread rugs on the floor and lay flat upon them: the sick Julek, his six■year■old Bogna, Tulu, I, Lila, Otu■, and Ania. Our hosts fled to the forest. The house shook from explosions; plaster fell from the ceiling and covered us in white dust. Out of nowhere the first Soviet soldier burst in, opened a window, set up a machine gun in it, and fired. I begged him to leave—there were small children and a gravely ill man. He advised us to get out, but how? Julek walked on crutches; the children were small, and outside the bullets whistled like hail. Where could we go? The forest was too far; the dugouts we did not know how to find. With aching hearts we left Julek (on his urgent request). The children put on their coats; we grabbed only a suitcase with documents and, literally between bullets, crept and ran, trying to reach a dugout. No one would take us in. Under the eave of one, a peasant magnanimously advised us to hide by the uprooted trees along the Wis■oka. We slid down the steep bank and pressed ourselves into a hollow under the exposed roots. Above us the Bolsheviks; on the far bank the Germans. A firefight. Bullets splashed at our very feet as they hit the water. At one point a German soldier stepped from behind the remains of a house across the river, rifle raised to fire. I went numb—he was aiming in our direction. Perhaps he realized we were civilians with children; we were spared. We stayed under that uprooted tree almost until dusk. In the meantime Tulu twice “visited” Julek. Though the windows had been blown out, Julek survived. Toward evening we reached the cellar of acquaintances.

[End of Part 2]

Part 3

Me and the War — Full English Translation (Part 3)

ME AND THE WAR — FULL ENGLISH TRANSLATION (PART 3)

[Continuation from Part 2.]

After the fire and thunder of the front, there were still years of wandering, hunger, and fear. Later—after the war— we had to begin life anew.

FLOODS ON THE DUNAJEC; LIFE IN NOWY S■CZ

The boys used to ride down the street in a bathtub and a wash■tub. When the water receded, tons of silt had to be carried out of the cellars. With us, it still was not the worst of it. From the railway line I saw houses on the Dunajec flooded by the roaring, muddy water up to the very roofs. Soldiers ferried people away on pontoon boats. They waited to return to their homes in the commune whose building stood on the main road (now there are private flats there). A whole Lup family installed themselves with us. When it poured for several days in a row, that was already an alarm. One carried up from downstairs a reserve of coal, brought all the firewood upstairs. One hauled up from the well water for drinking, bought bread and sugar, potatoes, and waited for the flood. We would go out in our raincoats to look how the water in the Dunajec was rising. At home it was damp and "atmospheric." Iwonka was terribly afraid and the whole night kept asking how many centimeters the water had gone down; it was exactly the opposite—there was more and more water. Here there is no flood, but there is almost every day a flood of smoke.

PEOPLE OF S■CZ

There is a saying that in olden times when the S■cz folk turned to the people of Stary S■cz (a little town 7 km away) to borrow their gallows, they refused, saying they needed it for themselves and their children. Such, in general, is the mentality of the local people. Right after the war I went to the inspectorate to ask for work in Nowy S■cz. They refused me and sent me to the countryside. Tulu taught at the lycée, the children went to the lycée, there was no transport, the roads were terrible. To live in a village with the younger children and run two households?! I had to give up, and we had to live on Tulu's single meager salary. In S■cz, only "their own" were employed. Tulu, too, would probably not have got a position, had he not already begun in January 1946, when there was a shortage of people with higher education.

Only through heavy "pull" (our neighbor Janas was an inspector) did I, in '58, get a job in Biczyce—on contract. Buses already ran; besides, whenever I could I rode a bicycle. My zeal knew no bounds; I had yearned for this work for years. I also studied on my own, for during the years of "unemployment" I had forgotten many things through sheer drudgery. In Biczyce I organized plays and excursions, I had good results, and perhaps that helped me to get a position in Che■miec—this time a permanent post. In Che■miec it was hard labor! Every year I painted benches, doors, windows, set up little gardens, bought teaching aids with my own money—especially for history. I staged performances (for one of them the decorations and costume designs were made by Lila, who happened to be visiting from England then). The performance even found its way into the press. During the performance—really an "arrangement" of M. Konopnicka's poetry— the old people cried, even the teachers. I read to the children, "from cover to cover," Pan Tadeusz and Sienkiewicz. Finally, I set about building a school. There would have had to be a school there sooner or later, but my persistent efforts sped up the construction by a good

few years. The conditions there were dreadful. Children were crammed into a former Austrian C.K. building at a road junction. When cars passed, the ceilings shook—until one day there was a failure, and a total collapse of one ceiling threatened. They cut off the large classrooms on the upper floor and two on the ground floor.

I argued with the County National Council, I was the instigator. Party people “flew in” and in the end gave us the keys to an old three■room granary. One classroom had only one window. The children’s eyesight was failing. I took photographs of those “premises” and, after describing the conditions faithfully (the meeting with the authorities was in the evening at the Fire Station, so no one would have bothered to come to the school), I backed up my words with those photographs, which I handed to the authorities. It is a pity I did not keep copies as a memento. After that meeting a School Building Committee was formed, and I myself put forward my candidacy as secretary. The whole family helped me to compose various letters and petitions. Otu■ helped me a great deal—because, as a planning■department officer, he knew the spatial■development plans for Che■miec, and so on. There were many opponents of building a new school; intrigues and obstacles of such number that they could not be written even on an oxhide. But at last the building was approved, and in that same year the foundations were laid. Within a year a fine twelve■class school was built. Yet such disgust for those people came over me that I transferred to Nowy S■cz. I got work at Primary School No. 13—“■wicze■.” It was a promotion, but also an enormous amount of work and very difficult space conditions.

RETIREMENT AND REFLECTIONS

Since I am already on this subject, let me add my transition to retirement. It was not, despite my being 64, voluntary. They pushed me out by force, though I felt well and the teaching profession was the passion of my life. Foreseeing dismissal, I submitted an application to the inspectorate and the board of education asking to keep me in employment. It did no good. I began to copy my appeal here and gave up. Nothing doing! They dismissed me—end of story, period. One more word on this. When I defended myself like a lion against going into retirement, one of the teachers said to me, “It’s hard—old age comes and one must go. For railwaymen, as soon as they turn sixty, they must go without exception.” I was outraged at such a comparison and said that when a writer turns sixty—is he forbidden to write? When a poet turns sixty— is he forbidden to compose? When a painter turns sixty—is he forbidden to paint?

At least I won this much: though my period of service was relatively short—only twenty■one years—I received a pension not much lower than Tulu’s. Tulu had 2,420 z■oty—I had 2,379 z■oty. Perhaps I will still manage now to devote time not so much to the children as at least to the grandchildren! Children and I! Lila was six years old, Otu■ barely two when the war began. Ania was born at the start of the war, Iwonka a short time after the war, and my whole effort was directed not so much to upbringing as to keeping the children alive. By the time the situation began to improve, the children had, in principle, already grown up and began, one after another, to leave home. I had no opportunity to raise them in an organized, considered way. Besides, the children seemed to me like a part of myself, simply my entirety, and I often caught myself as if they had been with me from my earliest years, that they felt and thought as I did.

My father wrote into my little album—my “remembrance book”—for example: “Who rises early, to him God gives good,” “By truthfulness you will pass through the world,” “Love of country and honor are the highest goods,” and the like. I read Rodziewiczówna, Kraszewski, Sienkiewicz, Mickiewicz, S■owacki, Konopnicka. The ideals of those writers became my ideals. I was foolish and am foolish—though what they call an honest sort. I have written down many things that happened already after the war—but those too are the consequences of the war.

I would still like to write much about the children, about their youth, about their studies, and about their lives as adults. One thing cannot be changed: their cares, their life, constantly arouse anxiety in me; often they drive sleep from my eyes.