

FINDING MY ABSENT FATHER

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CERTIFICATE OF ORIGINAL AUTHORSHIP

I certify that the work in this thesis has not previously been submitted for a degree nor has it been submitted as part of requirements for a degree except as fully acknowledged within the text.

I also certify that the thesis has been written by me. Any help that I have received in my research work and the preparation of the thesis itself has been acknowledged. In addition, I certify that all information sources and literature used are indicated in the thesis.

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to the next generations: my children Tom and Georgie and my grandson, Kyden. May you know peace.

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FORMAT OF THE THESIS

This thesis is comprised of two parts: an exegesis which examines three areas - the genre and form of life writing, the context of Cold War Australia and the memory work process of research in an unusual archive; and the larger creative non-fiction component, a hybrid memoir-biography-history, *Finding My Absent Father*.

Referencing used is The Harvard (UTS) Referencing Style based on the Australian Government's Style Guide for Authors, Editors and Publishers (6th edition, 2002).

LIST OF PUBLICATIONS

1. A version of Chapter 1 Life Writing and Public Memory - why so popular? has been published as ‘Genre is a minimum security prison’: Writing a life’ in P. Ashton, A. Clark, & R. Crawford, *Once Upon a Time: Australian Writers on Using the Past*, 2016, Australian Scholarly Publishing, Melbourne.
2. A version of Chapter 2 Cold War Exile and a Search for Justice will be published in April, 2018 as ‘A Father’s Cold War Exile and a Daughter’s Search for Reconciliation’ in J. Keene & E. Rechiniewski (eds.) *Seeking Meaning, Seeking Justice In A Post Cold War World*, Brill Publishing, Leiden, Netherlands.
3. A version of Chapter 3 I Can’t Call Australia Home: Memory Work in the Archives has been published with the same title in the journal *Life Writing*, October, 2017.
4. Forthcoming chapter ‘The Reluctant Migrant: A Polish Father’ in K. Darian-Smith & P. Hamilton (eds) *Remembering Migration: Oral Histories and Heritage in Australia*, Palgrave MacMillan.
5. A longer version of the creative component is currently under consideration by a publisher after being judged runner-up in the New South Wales Writers Centre Varuna prize in October, 2017.

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ABSTRACT

This thesis explores aspects of post-war Polish migration that have largely been ignored to date through a hybrid memoir-biography-history and exegesis to tell the story of the reconstruction of the life of my absent father, Antoni Jagielski - a Roman Catholic, Polish resistance fighter and World War II concentration camp survivor. From documents, letters and photographs found in an unexpectedly inherited family flat on a research trip to Poland and additional information about my father's life gathered from archives in Auschwitz, Gusen, Mauthausen, the Polish Underground Movement Study Trust and the Polish Institute in London, I developed a chronology of his secret life and concluded that he was a reluctant migrant to Australia in 1955. My father's story provides a counter balance to the existing weight of migration memory in mainstream Australian culture and highlights facets of Polish immigration and the often-forgotten stories of migrants who were to leave Australia and return 'home'. This memory work of constructing and documenting the life of my father, brings together intergenerational memory and transnational historical discourse within a broader narrative of war, exile and migration. It is the story of one family amongst millions whose lives were fractured by World War II.

EXEGESIS

Finding My Absent Father

INTRODUCTION - The Framework of Memory

In the collective memory of Australia's post-war migration, the Poles have not figured in any meaningful way until recently. Traditionally they have jostled for public space between Displaced Persons (DPs) and the much larger migrations of Italians and Greeks to Australia. This thesis makes a further contribution to an understanding of the particular place and role of Polish migrants by bringing my father, as a traumatised post-war Polish migrant to Australia, into memory and history in two parts. The larger component, is a creative non-fiction literary project, *Finding My Absent Father*, producing a site of memory, as outlined in Pierre Nora's (1996) *lieux de memoire* which uses memoir as a memory methodology. The second part is this exegesis which examines the genre and form of life writing, the context of Cold War Australia and the memory work process of research in an unusual archive. The exegesis explores three questions: Why has life writing, and memoir in particular, become so popular with readers, writers and publishers? What factors led to a migrant's inability to assimilate into Cold War Australia and prompt his return to Poland? and How can archival memory processes in a private domestic space contribute to historical research?

In addressing these questions in the chapters that follow, my central aim is to explicate, substantiate and contextualise my creative work. My research methodologies include the ethnographic immersion of two field visits to Poland and a third to the concentration camps and archives of Auschwitz and Mauthausen-Gusen during my candidature, including spending three months in my father's Lublin flat. They also include archival and genealogical research and oral histories.

In responding to the questions posed, the thesis makes a contribution to several aspects of migration history in and between Australia and Poland. It strengthens the growing historiography concerning Cold War Poland and Australia, and Polish political refugees. It also addresses wider themes of exile and displacement, and the impact of war, trauma and separation on families. I have focused on life writing as the literary genre to explore these themes and combined a range of memory and other historical sources to reconstruct and document a life.

Chapter 1 of the exegesis explores the recent popularity of memoir and other forms of life writing, including biography and autobiography, which demonstrate an increased fascination with the past and an interest by the wider public in how individual lives contribute to history. This interest has resulted in a proliferation of sites and

practices of memory. Large numbers of individuals and families are researching, making meaning and making public their personal pasts, strengthening the links between history and memory. As these personal and private pasts enter the public arena through traditional and non-traditional publications and acts of public remembrance, they add to and enhance our historical understanding and our appreciation of the collective past.

The life writing genre has found a broad audience, widening the scope of venues in which particular voices, often those disempowered and omitted from the historical record such as Indigenous peoples, women, migrants and the working class, can be heard. Such narratives counterbalance the existing weight of memory in mainstream culture, often challenging accepted paradigms and stereotypes, noting excesses and absences of memory with the potential to reshape history and collective memory. The sharing of private experiences, recording of happenings and emotions can offer disruptive and complex readings of events and people, evoking empathy and understanding, bringing attention to a wide range of issues and experiences, and inscribing them in public memory. The contemporary boom in memoir and biography links what is known publicly with the lived experiences of individuals in times past. As Annette Kuhn (2002, p.10) states, ‘Memory work bridges the divide between inner and outer worlds... for the stories they tell about a particular life, stories which... elicit recognition of a shared history; as a contribution towards understanding how memory works culturally...’

Memoir also has an important role to play in the act of witnessing for both writer and reader, by transforming memories and testimony of others and the self, into public documents that serve collective memory and historical knowledge. Memoir provides the public with a way to engage with testimony and to bear witness.

Drawing on Erll and Rigney (2006) these literary forms contribute to history and to cultural memory - the ways in which societies remember their pasts - as both a **medium** of remembrance, across genres using stories, photography and drawings and as an **object** of remembrance in canon and texts of commemoration. Literature also makes the **process** of remembering observable through imaginative acts of representation and recollection, helping us to understand how cultural memory works.

Chapter 2 uses the lens of my father’s experience as a post-war Polish migrant to examine how personal memory and history are juxtaposed, to provide a better

understanding of the context of Cold War Europe, England and Australia. Although that geo-political context has been radically transformed, this project sheds valuable light on experiences of contemporary refugees and migrants who are deeply affected by trauma, exile and separation from their families and homelands, history and culture. The continued lack of understanding of and provision for aspects of the migrant experience, the constant yearning for home and the ultimate return to it by some like my father, explains to some extent the inability of government immigration policy to successfully settle and retain migrants. In 1965, according to political scientist James Jupp (1966, p.180), one settler left Australia for every eight who arrived and in 1965-1966, 'Australia's migrant intake was 144,061... [and] for the first five months of 1966, 204,637 people left Australia.' (Forward 1968, pp.110-111).

In the late 1940s, those displaced by the destruction of war were joined by political refugees defined by the redrawing of the borders of Eastern European countries. These two phenomena resulted in millions of people without a home or homeland and a mammoth task of resettlement for the International Refugee Organisation and the governments of the Allied countries.

The majority of these DPs and political refugees were Poles. So began the Polish diaspora. Many responded to the Australian government's marketing campaign and found themselves on the other side of the globe. Whilst expected to wipe the slate clean and leave their pasts behind them, not only were many post-war migrants involuntary exiles but they had also been traumatised by violence and war. As the Cold War took shape, many migrants - like my father - came to realise it would be impossible and dangerous to return to their now-communist countries. Some were able to adapt, others continued to struggle and remained unsettled in the Australia of the Cold War period. My father's story is a case-study of the enormous challenges facing migrants from war-torn countries and refugees both then and now. Governments and policy makers are still struggling with this.

Chapter 3 describes the discovery of evidence about the difficulties experienced by my father. The bulk of it was found in an unusual and unexpectedly inherited archive - the flat where my father returned to live in Lublin, Poland in 1974 which contained letters to his Polish family from his twenty years in Australia, certificates and records of his war experiences, photographs and material artefacts attesting to the story and to the circumstances of his life. The process of collecting, categorising, contextualising and

considering these primary sources inevitably involves subjectivity and selectivity, paying more or less attention to some things over others, as Erll (2011, p.67) describes ‘as memoirists have to... turn them - through the use of narrative structures - into coherent, meaningful life stories.’ The ensuing narrative, bears witness to the life of one among many men and women who suffered the ravages of war for the rest of his life, who collected documents and sought recognition and compensation for his suffering in the Nazi concentration camps of World War II. This evidence provides an explanation of many of the choices and decisions my father, and many like him, made about country, home and family. In using my father’s home as an archival site of memory, I have drawn on a domestic space to construct and record a history. This constituted and unintended archive provided access to the lived experience of the past and the intersections of the private and the public, personal and political, national and transnational. In reading this site ethnographically, its contents can be seen as carriers of memory, now fashioned into a history.

Through what author Annette Kuhn (2002, p.3) describes as ‘an active and directed work of memory’ I was able to evoke an image of my father and his life, to conjure up the man using photographs, documents and material artefacts - his clothes, shaving brush, hats, radio and rosary beads. I followed the trail of documents uncovering that which had been kept secret, both private documents found in his flat and public records in the official archives of Auschwitz, Gusen and other places, leading to revelations and insights about him. These archives provided information that expanded and disrupted my view of my father.

The final section is my creative work, *Finding My Absent Father*. Positioning my creative work in the field of hybrid memoir-biography-history is an intervention to bring diverse memory sources into a coherent whole, make them public and by this means, to transmit memories across generations and continents as an enduring site of historical evidence. Literary models I have drawn on, amongst others, include Lily Brett (2001, 2006 & 2012), G. Thomas Couser (2017), Edmund de Waal (2010), Helen Epstein (1997), Susan Faludi (2016), Kate Grenville (2015), Hisham Matar (2016), Magda Szubanski (2015), Amy Tan (2017) Jeanette Winterson (2011) and Beth Yahp (2015). My story uncovers and elucidates the ways in which an individual life contributes to the drawing of a variety of broader histories. Like many others it reminds

us of the significance of family background, and the impacts and long-term consequences of war.

Although my father's experiences occurred more than sixty years ago, it is an experience which resonates in Australia today as we find ourselves grappling with what it means to be a migrant or political refugee from a homeland to which it is impossible to return. This story is one of family lives fractured by war, migration and exile; a story of almost lost intergenerational and transnational memory. It engages with questions of the inter-relationships between family history and the wider forces in society and their operation as a vehicle for intergenerational memory.

The Background Story

Through my research I came to realise that my father had lived an extraordinary life. From his birth into a Roman Catholic family in Poland in 1909, he lived through World War I and World War II, after which he became a displaced political refugee and a migrant to Australia in 1955. When I began this research in 2013, I had two photos of my father, Antoni Jagielski: a passport photo taken in 1974, and one taken of him and my mother, Nora O'Neill, on their wedding day in London in 1953 (see Figure 1). She was twenty-two and he was forty-four. She told me she was captivated by his charm, intelligence and his foreign accent. He was a well-mannered gentleman and she had fallen in love with him very quickly.



Figure 1. Wedding photo of Nora O'Neill and Antoni Jagielski

She had arrived in London in May the previous year. She'd come on her own on the *Mooltan*, a P&O ship, from Australia on a working holiday - an unusually adventurous undertaking at that time for a twenty-one-year-old who had grown up on a farm at Karangi, near Coffs Harbour. She had finished her schooling at St Mary's College in Grafton, where she and her younger sister, Betty, after whom I was named, had boarded. She then worked to save for her passage to England. Her younger brother Paul pointed out to her that at the time (1952) most people were coming *to* Australia, not leaving.

My father's journey to London was longer. The maps below show his path from Lublin in Poland to London and then to Australia.

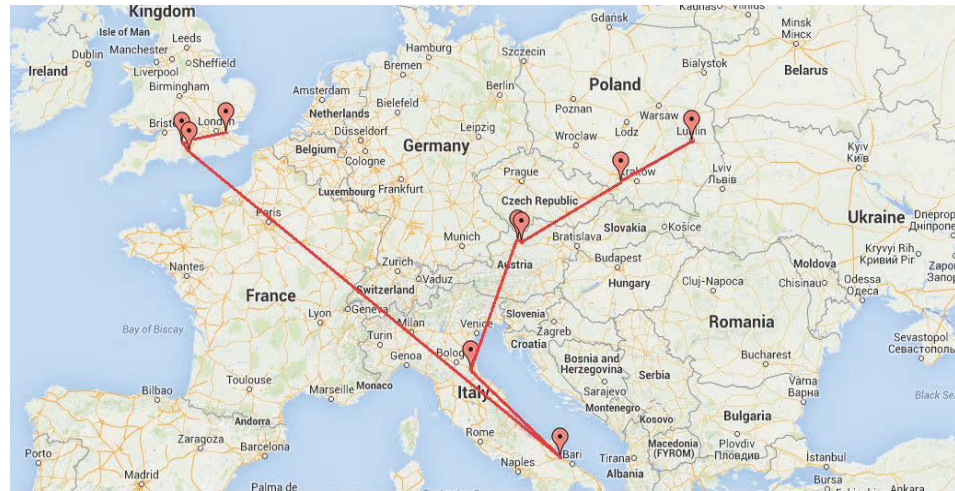


Figure 2. Map showing Antoni Jagielski's journey from Lublin in 1941 to London in 1946.

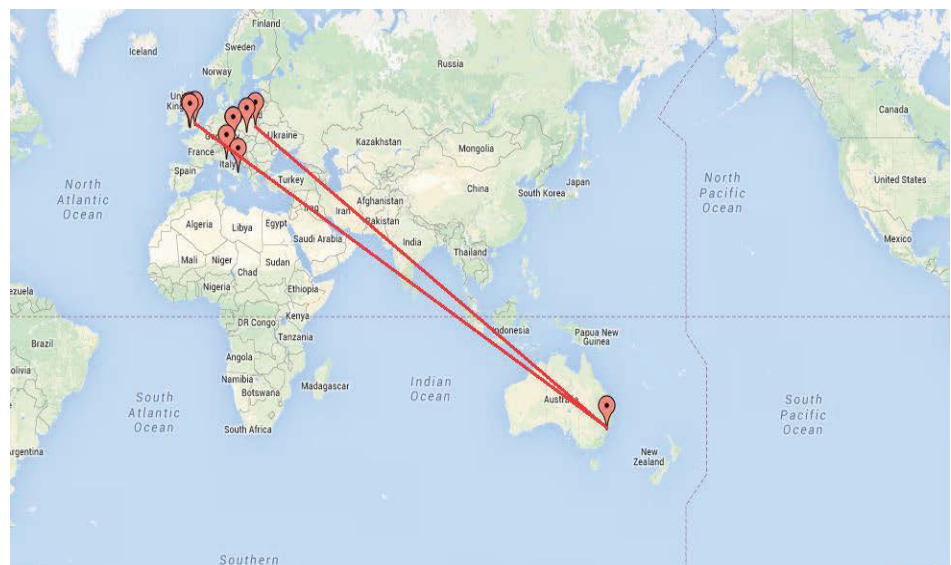


Figure 3. Map showing Antoni Jagielski's journey from Lublin to London and Sydney.

He had joined the Polish Resistance in Lublin, Poland, at the beginning of World War II, was arrested as a political prisoner in 1941, transported to Auschwitz concentration camp for six months and then Gusen, a satellite of the Mauthausen camp, near Linz in Austria, where he remained until the Americans liberated the camp on 5th May, 1945. One can only imagine the feelings of confusion, elation, shock and disbelief as the gates of the concentration camps were opened and millions of starving, traumatised people were released - and then what? Many had no homes and no families to return to and, like my father, many could not return to their home country. Poland was now occupied by the Russians and many of the resistance fighters returning to Poland were imprisoned and/or executed.

From Linz in Austria, he made his way to Italy, joined what remained of the Polish forces under the British command and was shipped to England on the *Andes* in September 1946.

In 1953 he met my mother, they were married and I was born in May 1954. Mum and I came to Australia on the *Strathnaver* in November that year and my grandmother sponsored my father to follow us. He arrived in July 1955 but disappeared shortly afterwards, without explanation. My mother didn't see him again until she filed for divorce in 1961 on the grounds of desertion, only to discover through the legal processes involved that he was a bigamist, with a wife still living in Poland. My parents' marriage was annulled.

My father remained in Australia until 1974. That year, aged nineteen, I met him for the first time. The nine months between that meeting and his departure for Poland were extremely difficult for me. He had been physically and psychologically damaged by the war and by his time in the concentration camps. His behaviour towards me was symptomatic of the paranoia and disturbances of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder. When we met, he was on the verge of returning to Poland. He was willing to risk the communist regime because he thought he was dying and was determined to be buried in his homeland. He left Australia in October, 1974. I never heard from him again.

The impetus for my research came from a desire to find out who *was* this man who was my father and what had happened in his life to shape his character and influence the decisions he had made - things I had wondered about my whole life. Although, I did feel like author Ruth Wajnryb, (2001, p.xii) 'The yearning to understand has vied uncomfortably with the urge not to know. A love-hate relationship with memory and truth...what has won is the imperative to understand.' Troubled by an unfinished story and curious about his secret life, I began searching for information about him. Initially I had just four documents and two photos. I was unsure about the likelihood of finding anything else but felt compelled to look. Like many survivors of trauma, my father never spoke to my mother or me about his war experiences or about his life before World War II. I knew very little about him. Researching and writing about one's family history is common but the drive to know and understand an absent or an elusive parent is a particular urge, a core issue in relation to identity and a sense of wanting to know one's father. Couser (2014) describes writing the father, which he terms 'patriography', as constructing who his father was. My mission was also one of

construction. There was a large piece missing in my family history puzzle. The compulsion to reconstruct my father's life took me to Poland early in my research and by pure chance and unexpected connections, I inherited the flat where my father had returned to live with his first family. I was able to rescue its contents from oblivion. Through serendipity I came into possession of pieces of the puzzle that had almost slipped away. The result is this exegesis and a hybrid memoir-biography-historiography titled *'Finding my Absent Father'*.

Chapter 1 Life Writing and Public Memory

'Our relationship to the past is not based only on knowledge, but involves imagination and empathy.' (Mitroiu, S. 2015, *Life Writing and the Politics of Memory in Eastern Europe*, p.1)

This chapter will examine life writing genres as a form of memory writing, their ubiquity in public memory and explore the reasons for this popularity. For readers, some of the reasons postulated include an interest in 'real people, real stories' and an authenticity of experience; a desire to bear witness; a search for representativeness, role models, inspiration and education; for identity, a sense of belonging, connection, community and even citizenship. For writers, the driving forces include a wish to mark one's place and personalise history, to memorialise, bear witness, to explore and construct the self, shape a past, share a perspective or experience. For publishers, in order to remain competitive and profitable, changes in the industry have required new approaches to the marketing and selling of books resulting in the commodification of both celebrity and 'ordinary' authors through the genre of life writing. These themes are investigated in light of the current literature.

Definitions

'Genre is a minimum-security prison.' Shields (2011, p.70)

Life writing encompasses a range of writing genre including memoir, autobiography, biography and history but in recent times these classifications have become less meaningful as authors interweave aspects of each through their writing. These genres are all classified as non-fiction but can have some fictional elements. Memoir and autobiography are usually written in the first person, biography in the third person and history traditionally in the third person passive voice but now may be either one. The subject is predominantly the self in memoir and autobiography but can include family and others, place and events and in biography, an account of a person's life is presented by someone else. The idea that in writing someone else's life it is impossible to completely exclude writing one's own, has led to the composite term auto/biography, a further indication and acknowledgement of the blurring of classifications.

Hampl and May (2009, p.3) describe history and memoir as ‘goalposts marking the extremes of non-fiction’ and what separates and connects them is ‘the vast playing field of memory’. They go on to suggest that ‘they reverse each other - memoir being personal history, while history offers a kind of public memoir.’ Thus one could imagine a continuum between these goal posts from history through biography and autobiography to memoir. Authors slide backwards and forwards along this continuum without the imperative or perhaps even the ability to name the location of their writing. As a consequence, booksellers struggle to decide where various titles should sit on their genre-categorised shelves. However, there are distinguishing characteristics that can be teased out in order to consider some of the strands of each genre and the ways in which they may or may not be braided together.

In terms of the history and biography strands, critics suggest that biography is too personal for the historian as it can ‘lead the scholar, who is supposed to be detached, to over-identify with the subject.’ (Brown 2009, p.599) and also that it cannot tell us much about the larger world. I disagree, as does American historian Kessler-Harris (2009, p.626) who writes that ‘an individual life might help us to see not only into particular events but into the larger cultural and social and even political processes of a moment in time.’ Russell (2009, p.154) offers this distinction between biography and history: ‘In biography, the context is important where it illuminates the life. In history, the life is important where it illuminates the context.’ The foregrounding and backgrounding of the private and the public, the person and the event(s), is a point of differentiation, with the best biographers contextualising their subjects by including the economic, political and social circumstances and the events and ideologies of the times and the best historians populating their writing with people. A model for this is Ian Buruma (2013) in *Year Zero: A History of 1945*. In this work, clearly designated as history, he begins with a prologue of the personal - his Dutch father’s involvement in WWII, a very public event, and continues, in the beginning of chapter 1, to adeptly weave public and private, national and international, large scale with small scale, each one providing various registers and a different lens on the time. He describes the confusion over the exact time and date of the end of WWII and then the wide-ranging responses to this announcement. He moves from the responses of the liberators to the prisoners of the concentration camps of Europe, to the people in the major capital cities of the Alliance and from the leaders of these countries to his eighteen-year-old mother,

given time off from boarding school, caught up in the ‘excited, drunken crowd’ (Buruma 2013, p.19) in London to his grandmother pining for her husband, still serving in India. There are vignettes of a plane flying through the gap under the Eiffel Tower, the playing of Glen Miller’s ‘In the Mood’ and the collection of lipstick kisses on the cheeks of ‘an enormous American sailor and a splendid negro’ (2013, p. 19). A significant moment in history is captured through rich and detailed descriptions of worldwide events; the political, cultural, social and economic milieu for public figures, private family members and intimate moments of ordinary people. This method has also been used by other imaginative historians such as Simon Schama.

The example from Buruma shows how the writing of history has changed significantly over recent decades. It was once considered that history writing should be detached and objective, grounded in public life, recording the chronology of important events, trends, institutions or people (e.g. great leaders). We now have approaches that are rich and diverse with the boundaries blurred. In terms of classification, Barbara Caine (2010, p.84) describes the impossibility of separating history from either biography or autobiography in the ways that were so important to positivist historians across much of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and Buruma is testament to this.

Autobiography and memoir are terms that are often used interchangeably. Cohen (2012, p.176) differentiates the two by describing them as ‘essentially different projects in this respect, one privileging thematics, the other chronology.’ They are both usually first-person accounts of the life of the author, with autobiography being about one’s own life usually from birth to the present time and memoir typically writing about a part of one’s own life.

Poet and novelist, Stephen Spender (in Smith & Watson, 2010, p.6) uses the metaphor of a car and its driver to help separate the strands of memoir/autobiography from biography:

the biographer can circle the car with the driver in it to record the history, character, and motivations of the driver, the traffic, the vehicle, and the facts of transportation. But only the life narrator knows the experience of the traffic rushing toward her and composes an interpretation of that situation, that is, writes her subjectivity.

These various forms, from life writing to history, have both similarities and differences. All can be viewed as interpretive arts as they use selected artefacts, testimonies, documents and photographs as sources of memory to build a narrative, but

memoir uses a personal lens to view these selections from the past. This focus of the memoir and autobiography on the personal, reiterates its importance not just as source material for historians as it once was, but as history itself. Fass (2008, p.5) adds ‘Whereas histories try to reconstruct large views of the lived experience of the past, memoirs can only contribute small splinters to that reconstruction. These splinters provide each of us with a personal past and allow our memories to become part of what constitutes the history we pass forward.’ This highlights the productive tension between the individual and the social, public and collective.

It is not a recent phenomenon for writers to use mixed modes. Rak (2013, p.5) gives the example of Jean Jacques Rousseau’s *The Confession* (1782 & 1789), which includes ‘the genre of religious confession, the story of the growth of the artist, the road narrative, and the polemic.’ Shields (2011, p.17) quotes a writer in the *New York Globe* in 1851 who criticised the writing of *Moby-Dick* by saying that the author had not ‘given his effort here the benefit of knowing whether it is history, autobiography, gazetteer, or fantasy.’ And more recently, Susan Wyndham, (*Sydney Morning Herald*, July 10, 2014) Literary Editor of the *Sydney Morning Herald* reported Jacqueline Kent, Chair of the judging panel for the National Biography Award as saying that ‘an extraordinary range of history, biography, diaries and memoir comes under the heading ‘biography’ and Australian authors are making good use of the hybrids...’ There are many literary works today for which the same statement could apply, writing that complicates rigid definitions through hybrid versions and mixed genres. At one end of the field we have history and Ian Buruma’s current model; at the other end is memoir and a model provided by Saskia Beudel’s (2013) *A Country in Mind: Memoir with Landscape* which interweaves aspects of memory, landscape and history including indigenous and settler accounts. Wedde (2014) questions whether Beudel’s work is family narrative, a meditation, an account of personal explorations with an underlying theme of anthropology, ecology, history; an advocacy essay; a collection of exquisitely observed landscapes; an aesthetic map of country; or a participant history. Beudel’s book illustrates the changes in form and focus of memoir.

However, one constant in all memoir writing is the focus on the personal experience of the author’s life. Some memoirists clearly state this, as demonstrated by Victor Frankl in the opening two sentences of *Man’s Search for Meaning* (2011, p.3) ‘This book does not claim to be an account of facts and events but of personal

experiences, experiences which millions of prisoners have suffered time and time again. It is the inside story of a concentration camp, told by one of its survivors.'

Yagoda (2009, p.1) begins his history of the memoir with the definition, 'a book understood by its author, publisher and readers to be a factual account of the author's life.' This definition from Yagoda raises two current issues, one about 'factual account' and how this might be determined and by whom, and the other, with which this next section is concerned, is 'form'.

Form and subgenres

Traditionally the form of memoir has been narrative prose utilizing many of the fiction writer's techniques to create an engaging story i.e. plot, character development, narrative arc - but need it be prose, or in a printed book? What of poetry (Priest 2014, para 7) or six word memoirs on Twitter (Poletti May 31, 2014), or cartoons (Spiegelman 2003, 2011; Eisner 2007) or collage (Shields 2011) or 'cyberlebrities' and 'autobiographical avatars' blogging an online diary (Whitlock 2010) or digital storytelling which is 'the production of life narrative [into] audio-visual vignettes which present a first-person voiceover in conjunction with visual material sourced from the personal archive of its author' (Poletti 2011, p.73)? Some have even suggested that the ubiquitous 'selfie' is a form of life writing. The internet and digitisation of storytelling have prompted changes in forms of expression and their dissemination. Clearly there are many forms currently available that could be considered memoir, challenging the purist view of it as narrative prose in published book form. Smith & Watson's (2010, p.4) distinctions are useful here: 'We employ the term *life writing* for written forms of the autobiographical and *life narrative* to refer to autobiographical acts of any sort.' For the purposes of this chapter, life writing will be used as an umbrella term to include memoir, autobiography, biography and some types of history with the key focus on memoir, limited to written form, of which there are now hundreds of subgenres.

Many have emphasised the rise of the derisively labelled subgenre 'misery memoir' which had some dominance in the memoir burst of the 1990s. Gilmore (2001) and Caine (2010) have pointed to a global boom in stories of trauma and survival at this time, paradoxically with the optimism of burgeoning economies in some parts of the world and an increase in political and social change and mass violence in others. Caine (2010, p.77) says the latter has prompted a 'culture of confession and testimony to

inform others' with the Holocaust as the catalyst for the largest group of autobiographies and memoirs in the twentieth century. Others (Hamilton, 2003) say it's a symptom not a cause. In the twenty-first century there has been a shift to what Luca and Kurvet-Käosaar (2013, p.3) describe as 'star culture (actors, musicians, CEOs, politicians, media gurus and the like, etc.) or what can be seen as global forms of life writing - successful autobiographical practices emerging elsewhere but easily circulated and appropriated in any national context.' More recently Kofman (2017, n.p.) points to a shift of focus in memoir from 'one person's 'redemptive narrative', a didactic telling of 'the lessons I learned' to a preparedness 'to sit with existential uncertainty instead of opting for neat resolutions. The best memoirs are not 'lessons', but rather quests.'

Whilst form and classification of life writing are influenced by national contexts and literary traditions, two American authors, Phil Cohen (2012) and William Grimes (2005) have provided substantial lists of memoir subgenres.

Phil Cohen's list (2012, p.177-186) includes memoirs that he classifies as: Confessional; Inspirational/ Survivor stories - 'I did it, you can too'/triumph over adversity/'loser-wins'; Self-published 'vanity press' often by older writers; Do-it-yourself psychoanalysis 'author playing analyst to narrator's patient' resulting in a 'narcissistic licking of psychic wounds that does nothing to heal them'; Victimology - those seeking recognition, reparation, revenge or to change or correct official histories; Life-as-a-vale-of-tears lament detailing regrets; Dislocation - diasporic stories of refugees and economic migrants with themes of rites of passage, lost in translation, alienation, 'othering'; Social transvestism - by journalists or social investigators, experiencing and then reporting on the lives of others; Politicians and other public figures settling old accounts and Political activism. Illness memoirs or 'sick-lit' are also becoming popular.

William Grimes in the New York Times in 2005 listed the following types of memoir: retired statesman, military, traumatic-childhood, substance-abuse, spiritual journey, show-biz, spirit-of-place or vanished era, ethnic-identity, food, 'nostalgia for vanishing small-town America', illness, sexual-exploit, bad-job and travel/anti-travel memoirs. A notable omission from both of these lists is the memoirs of children writing parents; the matremoir/matriography and patremoir/patriography. Yagoda acknowledges the breadth of the genre, 'The American memoir is so capacious that it cannot be contained in just one category; this is the time of a million little subgenres.'

(Yagoda 2009, p.10) Here Yagoda is referring to James Frey's (2003) 'memoir' *A Million Little Pieces*, an example of a widely publicised memoir fraud in that it was not a completely factual account of the author's life. This is explored further as an example of this debate.

The 'factual account' (Yagoda 2009, p.1) or the 'truthful exploration of an actual life' (Miller 2007, p.12) criterion for memoir has been tested by a number of authors raising significant issues about the relationships between memoir, memory and history, the integrity of the author and publisher and the contract between writer and reader. Couser (in Mansfield 2014, p.5) argues that memoir has

a kind of traction, leverage or force that purely imaginative writing, like the novel, may not have. And that's an ethical concern. While the notion of a contract (or pact, per Lejeune) may overstate the scenario, I think writers of memoirs are in a different relation with readers. There are opportunities, as well as obligations, implicit in that generic relationship.

This contract with the reader is based on a range of expectations and in memoir these include a truthful exploration of the author's life. Phillip Lejeune (2017, p.160), reflecting on an earlier analysis, clearly reinforces his criteria '[the] one determining factor (the commitment of a real person to tell the truth about oneself) and to show that this factor, crucial for admittance of any text to the genre (this factor sets us up for questions of credibility, the desire to verify, the type of relationship with the author, the involvement of the reader, and so forth), was truly the only necessary one.'

Once it was discovered that many of the purported facts detailed in Frey's story of drug addiction and recovery were exaggerated or untrue, there was a highly publicised furore, largely because it was Oprah Winfrey and her audience of millions who protested they had been misled into thinking the story, classified as 'memoir', was a factual account of Frey's experiences. What brought him undone was the marketing and sale of his book as a true story when clearly it was not, thus breaking the contract with the reader. The second round of publicity ensuing from the uncovering of this fraud did Frey's book sales no harm. Gilmore (2010, p.658) calls this second round the 'American neoconfessional' where the author, famous from a redemption story in the published memoir, falls from grace a second time through the public scandal as the fraud is revealed and gets to rise again. It also provides a framework through which to view the exposed writers and the betrayed readers, the 'two newly wounded protagonists.... who overcome their pain as they perform anew the redemption

narrative.’ Frey attempted to justify the ‘memoir’ classification to Larry King on *Larry King Live* on January 11, 2006:

Frey: My side is I wrote a memoir. I never expected the book to come under the type of scrutiny that it has. A memoir literally means my story, a memoir is a subjective retelling of events.

King: But it is supposed to be factual events. The memoir is a form of biography.

Frey: Yes. Memoir is within the genre of non-fiction. I don’t think it’s necessarily appropriate to say I’ve conned anyone. (Rak 2013, p. 193)

There was clearly a difference in the understanding of the term ‘memoir’. Two weeks later, Winfrey challenged Frey on national television for lying about the events of his life but it was the publisher who bore the brunt of the attack:

If you’re publishing [a book] as a memoir, I think the publisher has a responsibility because as the consumer, the reader, I am trusting you... the publisher, to categorize this book whether as fiction or autobiographical or memoir.’ - Oprah Winfrey, interview with Nan Talese (publisher) and James Frey, January 26, 2006.

For Winfrey, the ‘rules’ that govern memoir are clear and absolute. A memoir is an accurate picture of events that really happened. (Rak 2013, p.43)

This raises a broader issue of genre being classified for political and economic reasons in addition to the fact/fiction definition. In terms of fact or fiction, do readers really care what is true and what is fact? The above example would suggest that they do but Malcolm Knox (2005, p.55) declares that ‘readers cease to care about the distinction between non-fiction and fiction, or about other ethical or literary nuances... people want to be entertained and diverted and to keep up with the crowd.’ This is an issue of far more complexity than Knox claims, with readers drawn to memoir by the attraction of a ‘true story’. Whitlock (2010, p.12) agrees: ‘Life narrative... signals to the reader an intended fidelity to history and memory.’ The facts do matter to readers and they have an expectation that life writing is a truthful portrayal by the author. This expectation of well-researched facts has also shifted to historical fiction where the reader requires history and background material to be authentic.

Fidelity applies not only to the story, but also to the identity of the author. There have been many cases of writers pretending to be someone they were not, a number in Australia. Yagoda (2009, p.257) cites the following examples: in the 1980s, B. Wongar, the supposedly Aboriginal author of the novels *Walga* and *Karan*, was found to be a

Serbian immigrant named Sreten Bozic; in 1992 an Aborigine, Wanda Koolmatrie who wrote an autobiographical novel, was really Leon Carman, a forty-seven year old white former cab driver from Sydney; and in 1995 Helen Demidenko, the author of *The Hand that Signed the Paper* set in World War II Ukraine, rather than being the daughter of a poor Irish mother and an illiterate Ukrainian taxi driver as claimed, had wealthy British parents. These misrepresentations betray the reading public's trust in a factual account of the author's life. Phillippe Lejeune (in Rak 2013, p.22) makes a clear distinction: 'If the protagonist in the text, the proper name of the author on the flyleaf and the existence of a real person in the world match, then the work is autobiography. If any of these elements do not match, the work is fictional.'

Questions have been raised as to why writers misrepresent fiction as fact and pose as someone other than themselves. It has been suggested that whilst these writers had good stories, their writing either was (as in Frey's case) or would have been rejected for publication as a novel, a work of fiction, because they were not written well enough (Yagoda 2009, Shields 2011) but as memoir, as a personal story, they were accepted. Yagoda (2009, p.24) controversially contends that 'Only a master can create a convincing and compelling fictional world. Anyone with a moderate level of discipline, insight, intelligence, and editorial skill - plus a more than moderately interesting life - can write a decent memoir.' There are others who support this view. Rak (2013, pp.13-14) quotes Jonathan Yardley in *The Washington Post*, who dismisses the memoir trend as 'narcissistic, not literary' and she notes that 'some of these commentators assume that non-professional or just plain bad writers turn to memoir because it is easier to write than a novel.' However, given the literary quality of much of the writing and an increase in memoir sales of four hundred percent in the United States between 2004 and 2008 (Yagoda 2009, p.7) these claims cannot be substantiated. Fass (2006, p.110) agrees: 'These books are just too full of good writing, sharp insight, and important reflection to be mere contracts with an exaggerated sensationalism.'

Memory and fictional elements of life writing

While it is accepted that some 'memoirs' are fraudulent - written with the intent to deceive - there is still a debate about whether writers of memoir can or should include any fictional material at all in their stories. This is necessarily related to the issue of memory. Shields (2011, p.25) asks: 'How can we enjoy memoirs, believing

them to be true, when nothing, as everyone knows, is so unreliable as memory?... Memories, we know, can be buried, lost, blocked, repressed, even recovered.’ Many memoirists admit to the fallibility of memory, including Amy Tan who, in her recent memoir (2017, p.3), writes: ‘much of what I think I remember is inaccurate, guessed at or biased by experiences that came later’. Most of us could not remember word for word a conversation that took place last week, let alone some years ago. Therefore, unless they have been recorded in some way, dialogue and other detailed elements of a memoir can only be the writer’s reconstructions. And it is the case that literal transcriptions often do not make the most riveting reading.

Referring to this aspect of dialogue in memoir, Yagoda (2009, p.265) explains it as ‘the author’s best-faith representation of what the people who were present could have/would have/might have said,’ and Shields (2011, p.9) quotes Thucydides in his preface to the *History of the Peloponnesian War*, acknowledging that he ‘found it impossible to remember the exact wording of speeches. Hence I have made each orator speak, as in my opinion, he would have done in the circumstances, but keeping as close as I could to the train of thought that guided his actual speech.’

To be absorbed in and accepting of a memoir, a certain suspension of disbelief is required of the reader, based on a level of trust that the writer is remembering and has provided this ‘best-faith representation’. And this does not apply only to dialogue. We know that memory is selective and influenced by many factors such as the focus of attention at the time, the level of trauma associated with the memory, the social mores of the era and those of the time from which the past is viewed. As Abrams (2014, p.89) explains, ‘Memories are formed by means of a neurological process in the brain but thereafter, as memories are accessed and narrated, they are subject to social influences.’ Steedman (2008, pp. 20-21) goes further, describing the historical account as ‘indeterminate and speculative’ and stating, ‘Nothing ever, ever can possibly have happened as we tell it.’ Where it is the intention of the writer to provide a ‘truthful exploration of an actual life’ (Miller 2007, p.3) or ‘an honest desire to bring back a real experience’ (Fass 2006, p.121), it is acceptable and in fact necessary to include details in addition to those remembered. Writers of memoir must re-imagine past situations to fill the gaps in accurate recall, and the use of source material related to those past events will assist with this process.

These controversies over fact and fiction, truth and memory help to keep memoir in the limelight of literary discussion, as do the debates over definitions, genres, subgenres and the merging of genres. But why has memoir become so popular with both readers and writers? There are six arguments put forward in the literature.

The demand for authentic stories

For many writers, the desire to tell authentic stories through life writing marks a shift for some in recent years from other genres, often from fiction, stepping out from under the subterfuge of the novel as a thinly veiled autobiography (Fass 2006; Atlas 1996) or from other forms of non-fiction, for example the historian Sheila Fitzpatrick's shift from writing history to memoir. In personal terms, the writing of a memoir can be the means for an individual to question themselves, to negotiate and construct a sense of self and identity, and satisfy a person's desire to authenticate their own life. The writing of a memoir may also serve as a political democratisation of history (Cohen 2012); as a form of 'doing history' (Ashton & Hamilton 2010) for oneself; as a way of capturing a transient present (Fass 2006); and as a way of bearing witness or memorialising the past (Fass 2006). Miller (2000, p.424) sees a joint memorialisation being enacted by both writers and readers of memoir as an 'important part of collective memorialisation, providing building blocks to a more fully shared national narrative.' Memoir is an important site of witnessing as testimonies and memories of the self and others are published contributing to public memory and history. The sharing of traumatic memories in particular, in a narrative form, facilitates understanding and recognition for victims of war, violence and discrimination. Their voices deserve to be heard and included in the collective memory.

More cynically, the writing of memoir can be seen as a response to the market. 'Writing about the self, takes whatever form is commercially viable' (Fass 2006, p.120). One could argue this was Frey's publisher's motivation for classifying his work as memoir. But why is there such increased demand from readers for authentic stories, whether from celebrities or 'ordinary' people?

Whatever the reason, it is clear that there are some welcome political and cultural effects of the increasing popularity of memoir. While white, male writers continue to dominate the field, a broader range of stories is being written, published and read by minority and disadvantaged groups, for example working class, women and

indigenous writers. Barbara Caine (2010, p.2) explains that this popularity is ‘because of their capacity to illustrate in detail how others who share their class, gender, ethnicity, interests or problems understood or were affected by particular historical developments.’ Memoirs written by ordinary people also appeal to readers as they lift the veil on the lived experience of other worlds and times, as well as current times, revealing aspects and allowing intimacies that are not available elsewhere. This turn to experience in scholarship and life writing is centrally about a search for closer connection; history has traditionally kept a scientific distance, for example by using the passive voice.

There has also been a surge in the publishing of unknown writers. An example given by Rak (2013, p.9) - although again a middle class, white male - is Mitch Albom’s *Tuesdays with Morrie* (1997), a story of the author’s Tuesday visits to one of his college professors who was dying. It details their discussions on death, fear, aging, greed, family, society and a meaningful life. The book sold 14 million copies, was on the *New York Times* bestseller list for four years and in 1999 was made into a movie. The success of such memoirs by previously unknown writers is a major reason why memoir is one of the most highly visible and popular non-fiction genres today. Rak (2013, p.4) explains, ‘memoirs, particularly those of non-celebrities, have the potential to change the imagined relations their readers have with the lives of others: this is the source of their power and fascination at the present time, and the reason publishers continue to produce them.’

Morrison (2010) suggests a further reason for the shift by readers to ‘real’ stories, coining the term ‘fiction fatigue’ with readers tired of novels with made-up characters, plots and scenes. Author and memoirist Lee Kofman (2017, n.p.) believes the attraction is in part the ‘relative youth of this genre... open to experimentation, surprise and subversion’ and also because ‘this genre reflects the zeitgeist of our blogging and reality show era.’ This links to Shields’ (2011) book *Reality Hunger* in which he contends that part of the reason for the increase in memoir sales is our current ‘obsession with reality’ in a range of media. This ‘obsession’ is evident in the growing social media readerships of personally oriented blogs and networking sites such as Facebook, Snapchat, Instagram, Viber, Whatsapp and Twitter and in the increased demand for reality television such as, *Master Chef*, *The Block* (and other house renovation shows), *The Bachelor/Bachelorette* and the American, U.K. and Australian

versions of the music shows *X Factor*, *The Voice* and *American and Australian Idol*. In 2008, more votes were cast for *American Idol*, 97 million, than were cast for Barack Obama for President on election day, 70 million (Shields 2011, p.109). Not only has there been a shift in television viewing from drama to these reality programs, mirroring the shift from novels to life writing, but also to chat or ‘confessional’ television. Daytime television shows, such as *Dr Phil*, *Judge Judy* and *Oprah* have fuelled this culture of confession. In relation to this, Rak (2013, p.16) reflects the view that memoir is ‘based on unhealthy desires for gossip and salacious details. It is popular because it responds to widely circulating ideas in popular culture about confession, therapy, self-help, celebrity discourse, and trauma.’

These confessional and reality television shows draw large audiences, suggesting this intrigue with representations of reality is a well-founded notion. These programs are also relevant to some forms of memoir, because of the platforms they provide for the promotion of authors’ stories and from there, their books. To commemorate the end of the *Oprah Winfrey Show* after 25 years, the Nielsen Company compiled a list of the top ten branded edition bestselling books from Oprah Winfrey’s book club over the last ten years in the U.S.A. Two of the top three were memoirs: James Frey’s *A Million Little Pieces* selling 2.7 million and Elie Wiesel’s *Night* selling 2 million copies (Nielsen Company in Boog 2011, para. 3). But what is it that readers are looking for in authentic stories?

Education and role models

A second reason put forward for the increase in the popularity of life writing is the interest by readers in other lives, both ordinary and celebrity, as vehicles for learning. The Oprah Book Club’s target market is predominantly Americans looking for self-improvement books from authors who exemplify the ‘I-did-it, so-can-you’ subgenre of memoir. Oprah Winfrey embodied this transformative experience by revealing her own personal story of abuse and rise from a poor background to one of the wealthiest and most influential women in the world. On her program she interviewed others, encouraging them to tell their stories. Audiences grew as interest in others’ lives grew, motivated to some extent by what Rak (2013) describes as a ‘lack in the self’. ‘Like hunger, a desire to understand the lives of others is often explained as the desire to consume the other because there is some lack in the self... This is an interpretation of

reading through the private sphere as one self ‘supplies’ a lack felt by another’. (Rak 2013, p.31) Whitlock (2010, p.11) supports this view: ‘We consume life narratives voraciously from pages and screens because they tap into dreams and desires; into newly imagined possibilities of life for ourselves and for others, both individually and collectively; and into our own autobiographical narrative in the process of everyday life.’ In this searching for ‘new possibilities of life’ and belonging, readers have turned to memoir where they can read of the lives and experiences of others and consider what it might mean for themselves.

Some authors go further in suggesting that these books provide readers with a sought-after moral compass, a source of ethical guidance and role model behaviours. Atlas (1996) states that ‘...in our diverse and volatile society, literary narratives offer a substitute for the institutions - school, church, family - that once furnished us with a sense of personal identity’ (para 9). With declining numbers and the merging and closing of many churches, the influence of religion in providing this guidance is diminishing. Brown (2009, p.599), although referring to biography, supports the view that, in part, readers are seeking guidance as they ‘like to read about the exploits of great personalities as models for leading their own lives.’ However, as previously noted, it is not just great personalities whose memoirs are popular. Through the life of the author, readers are able to connect to personal and public events, provoking reflection and consideration of the self and its relationship with others, society and culture. This examination of where one sits and how one relates to ever-expanding circles of connection is often what attracts memoir readers. Rak (2013, p.189) supports this educational agenda of memoir as ‘they faithfully report experiences from which others can learn.’

Based on this identified demand by readers to ‘learn’ from memoirs, publishers have invested heavily in mass marketing of memoirs and their authors. To understand the success of this marketing strategy we need to examine changes in the publishing industry.

The publishing industry and author commodification

As competition increased and family-owned publishing businesses merged, closed or were taken over by multinationals in the 1970s, 80s and 90s, the subsidy business model of book publishing, where more literary publications were subsidised by

best-sellers, changed to the profit model where all were expected to make a profit. This change in expectations required new forms of marketing and promotion.

Acknowledging the power and influence of talk shows on television, Rak (2013) and others discuss their use as a major marketing tool for the changing publishing industry, increasing both the visibility and the number of memoirs available. Publishing businesses became part of entertainment companies and entertainment, in the form of talk shows, was used to promote the personal stories of the memoir. Television talk shows provided commercial exposure for memoirists as Jennifer Schuessler (in Rak 2013, p.14) concludes: 'The first-person confessional approach is an easy way for writers to add drama and voice to the most improbable subjects, while increasing their odds of getting booked on talk shows that shun the average novelist.' Julie Grau, editor of *Girl, Interrupted* explained to Vanity Fair in 1997 why memoir trumped fiction in the marketplace: 'You can send the 'I' out on tour' (Yagoda 2009, p. 239). This personal promotion by memoirists of their books to large audience television programs, in addition to traditional radio and magazine interviews and bookstore talks and signings, has provided a prominent showcase for memoir.

In addition to the visibility gained by television, current marketing strategies also rely on authors having a strong online presence in the form of websites, blogs and twitter accounts. An established online profile is almost a requirement for any author who wants a publishing house to print, market and distribute their books, but there is no doubting the increased exposure gained by any author on television. Rak (2013, p.70) argues it is the increased visibility of authors that has been responsible for the rise in popularity of the memoir. 'Promotion was seen as the key to commercial success; the key to promotion was getting on talk shows; and the best way to get on a talk show was with a dramatic or unusual personal story.' In this way authors, as well as their memoirs, became marketable commodities. The link between the marketing and promotion of memoir and identity is further explored by Rak (2013, p.7) 'Memoir ... remains a way to construct, package and market identity so that others will want to buy it...' and later (p.212), 'memoir promises to remain an important way of understanding identity as a commodity'.

Whilst this form of promotion has clearly contributed to increased sales of memoir, it still privileges dominant groups and media executives' agendas. The political aspect, in addition to the economic, is evident in that those who choose *who* to package

and market exert substantial power and influence. As Gilmore (2010, pp.661-662) says: 'unspoken norms and explicit market formulae shape the dynamics of reading, and limit whose lives may claim attention, for how long, and with what capacity to challenge and shift the norms of reception.' Publishers, media owners and editors choose and exclude according to their own political, social and economic agendas. A 'soft weapon' is how Whitlock (2010, p.3) describes autobiography 'because it is easily co-opted into propaganda.' The influence of the personal stories of memoir can be profound and either entrench or change readers' perspectives. Authors of memoir chosen to appear on television chat shows are given great power; they often become celebrities and their books sell to a large readership that is looking for a better understanding of self, identity and a sense of belonging.

Belonging, identity and representativeness

As previously discussed, Oprah Winfrey has had a significant impact on sales of memoir and the Oprah phenomenon has received much attention and academic research in recent times in the United States and elsewhere. One of the key factors put forward for the attraction of her television show, which ran from 1986 to 2011, was that she created a sense of connection and community, albeit a virtual community, for her viewers; they felt that they belonged. Oprah Winfrey created what Lauren Berlant (2008 in Rak 2013, p.211) calls 'an intimate public... a grouping of individuals that is held together by the need of the individuals to belong to something greater.' Some would claim this interest in chat-show guests was purely voyeuristic and the writers narcissistic but the public voicing of private and intimate lives extended from television to books and other media with great ease, building a community of women and men who supported and subscribed to this public expression of the personal; a community interested in their own and others' development, interested in exposing issues of injustice and hardship and promoting support and action through the telling of personal stories. Reading others' stories can engender a feeling of belonging to something bigger, something outside one's own realm of experience; Berlant's being part of an 'intimate public'. Barack Obama illustrated this point when, after briefly telling his life story 'he said 'I stand here knowing that my story is part of the larger American story'...because in autobiography it is possible to 'represent' the self and have it stand in for the selves of others.' (Gilmore in Rak 2013, p.32)

This takes the sense of belonging to a national level and aims to depict a national identity but there are difficulties and contradictions in this construction. Poletti (2011, p.74) quotes Smith and Watson's reference to the Australian context: 'the role of life narrative in the construction of national identity as an imagined community... is underscored by the struggle for inclusion and recognition of genocide by the original inhabitants of the land.'

The complexities of creating a national identity are many, not only in Australia as Smith and Watson describe, but in many countries with displaced minority indigenous populations. Indigenous communities have strong traditions of oral history and storytelling, and there is no doubting the power of the sharing of stories as autobiography and as history for those marginalised by Western traditions and conventions. Lejeune (2017, p.160) points to two factors that are helping to break down these barriers - globalisation and the internet - as they make 'the existence of other models of the subject visible, not just the Western one.' The writing of these stories can be problematic but these other forms of life narrative, those explored earlier in this chapter and as described by Gilmore (2001, p.135), can capture these threads of identity and the notion of 'representativeness' as one person identifies with another's experience. 'Autobiographical performances draw on and produce an assembly of theories of the self and self-representation; of personal identity and one's relation to a family, a region, a nation; and of citizenship and a politics of representativeness (and exclusion).' Gilmore (p.129) goes on to cite the controversial example of 1992 Nobel Peace Prize winner, Rigoberta Menchú whose autobiography *I, Rigoberta Menchú: An Indian Woman in Guatemala* was found to contain events that happened, but not to her as portrayed in her book. It has been argued that she achieved a larger symbolic truth through her condensation of several events into one and in presenting herself as a representative subject. Some criticise her for lying and others praise her for capturing the truth of the situation in this representative form and these different points of view remain an ongoing debate.

The question of identity, our own and others, where we fit with others, and how and to what we belong has encouraged many to interrogate these relationships, connections and disconnections through an exploration of their own family histories. This will be discussed in more detail later. The motivation of family historians uncovered in the research conducted by historian Tanya Evans (2015, p.9) is significant:

‘I discovered that family historians have always used their research to try to ‘know themselves’, to search for their personal identity. Family history has allowed people to craft stories about their past in order to understand their lives in the present.’

Citizenship in the twenty-first century

A fifth reason put forward for the increased popularity of the memoir, which builds on the issues of belonging and identity, relates to questions of citizenship. It has been suggested that writing and reading memoir is a way of exploring the political and ethical questions of what it means to be a citizen of the twenty-first century. Rak (2013, p.162) discusses the impact of 9/11 in America and the use of personal stories to ‘work out what citizenship means in the new world order.’ A similar questioning is part of the current debate in this country about civilian citizens of Australia fighting alongside militant groups in Syria and Iraq prompting the proposal of the Foreign Fighters Bill in the Senate. What does it mean to fight in a foreign country not under the auspices of your own country’s government? What issues does this raise when you return to Australia? What are the rights and responsibilities of citizenship? The wars in Syria, Iraq, Iran, and Afghanistan and many other world events have been catalysts for questioning the role of the state and its citizens and for people to write about these questions. Rak (2013, p.41) asks us to consider ‘Gillian Whitlock’s invitation to think of autobiography as a political and ethical act that is intimately connected to what it means, in the twenty-first century, to be a person among others.’

Technology and social media have brought this exploration to the fore in a way that is immediate and sometimes confronting. An example of a powerful dialogue across cultures and regimes comes from a twenty-nine-year-old Iraqi blogger using the pseudonym Salam Pax, who in late September 2002 wrote daily of his experience of living in Baghdad during the bombing raids, recording history from behind enemy lines. Whitlock (2010, p.2) describes Pax as ‘a stunning example of synchronic connections between the virtual and material worlds that can be wired through online life writing’ and goes on to quote the impact such writing can have: ‘those of us who read the blog in places where the B52 bombers come from can feel ‘he is just like us’’ (Katz 2003, p.ix in Whitlock 2010). His first blog *Where is Raed?* was published in hard copy a year later as the memoir *Baghdad Blog*. This is a clear example of the connections memoir can make between the personal and the public across cultures and warring nations and

whilst ‘he is just like us’ and we may feel some connection, there is also the disorientation that comes with the realisation that he is a citizen of what is regarded as an enemy state. At once we can feel connected and disconnected. These feelings of wanting to be connected are explored by Rak (2013, p.33) who links memoir to citizenship as a felt experience, viewing

... memoir as a form of what Lauren Berlant and others have called the affective domain of citizenship, or the feeling that someone experiences through sets of connections to a larger entity, such as a community or nation. Memoir makes many people *feel* connected, and it connects individual feelings to group ideas. Therefore citizenship - and not narcissism - should be a key way to understand the popularity of memoirs with many American readers at the present time.

Gilmore criticises the lack of political analysis in memoir and suggests that ‘...narrative acts are caught up in forms of consumption and judgment that make voyeuristic desire feel just like a deeply ethical and even civic form of witnessing’ (Gilmore 2010, p.675). Given the breadth of subgenres of memoir, this is an accurate analysis of some but not all. Nonetheless, Gilmore acknowledges the impact on the affective domain of readers if not the intellectual or political. As we are discovering, people read for many different reasons but emotional engagement makes for good storytelling and compelling reading; readers are drawn to it. Whether they think more deeply or take action as a result of the way memoir makes them feel is another matter.

For many individuals and groups, particularly migrants and refugees, feeling connected to a new culture or nation can be difficult. Cohen’s (2102) diasporic and ‘lost-in-translation’ memoir classifications attest to this. With the displacement of millions of people after WWII and subsequent wars, the sweep of famines and other disasters, mass migration has become a feature of the second half of the twentieth and the beginning of the twenty-first centuries. With people of various cultures and ethnic backgrounds making up the population of many countries, citizens don’t necessarily share a common history of place or events. The desire for a greater engagement with history and each other has prompted an attempt to create a sense of belonging by sharing personal stories and finding common ground in themes rather than events. Poletti (2011, p.81) argues ‘the universality of themes such as ‘life, loss, belonging, hope for the future, friendship and love’ (Burgess 2006, p.212)... are presented as the common historical experience shared by the participants. However, it also offers something much more affecting than this, an experience of inclusion and community

building... This promise occurs at the level of defining the site of life storytelling as authentic, powerful and dealing with universal themes that unite the community.’ Memoir is one obvious vehicle for the recording of such stories and an avenue for understanding and connection for multicultural communities and nations interested in interrogating the meaning of citizenship.

Family history and genealogy

Historian Tanya Evans (2016, p.1) asserts that ‘Family history has become one of the most widely practised forms of public history over the last thirty years. It links the past to the present in powerful ways.’ The interest in genealogy and the stories around our ancestors is the final reason suggested for the rise of the memoir. This emerging field of family history and genealogy reportedly accounts for the largest use of the internet after online shopping and pornography, making use of increased access to digital records and advanced software for tracking and recording family trees and stories. Some of the reasons for writing family history have been explored in an earlier section on authentic stories and identity but British historian Jerome De Groot adds that ‘the increasing desire to delve into origins possibly betrays a contemporary anxiety about social atomisation and the fracturing of family structures’ and he argues that family history provides practitioners with a sense of security and identity, an ‘insight into self-hood’ (2009, p.79 in Evans 2016, p.4).

The increased interest in the researching and writing of family histories, and aspects of family histories in memoir, in the last thirty years or more is clear but if there was no interest in reading these, if there was no market outside family members and polite friends, then these manuscripts would remain in bottom drawers and family archives. Instead, it is a burgeoning subgenre of life writing, reflecting personal and public interest in the past; a desire for connection across time and space.

Fascination with genealogy and family history has spread from books, to films (*Philomena*, *Everything is Illuminated*, *Lion*) and television. The high ratings obtained by the Australian and U.K. television program ‘*Who Do You Think You Are?*’, a series of popular documentaries of the family histories of celebrities, is testament to this interest in family trees and ancestral traits. Although it provides a truncated history of each family, with predominantly the sensational and interesting factors revealed and portrayed, it still draws in large viewing audiences. In a recent article, referring to the

program, sociologist Anne-Marie Kramer (2011, p.248) asks ‘what is the role of genealogy in facilitating the relationship between identity and memory, both for celebrity participants and viewers?’ We could ask the same of memoir. Nancy Miller (2000, p.423) agrees: ‘What seems to be going on between memoir writers and their readers is a relational act that creates identifications (which include disidentifications and cross-identifications).’ This need to establish and provide biological recognition and identity and to understand where we fit, through an examination of the past, explains a general interest in history for some and a particular interest in one’s family history for others. Advisor to the Australian *Who Do You Think You Are?* program, Tanya Evans (2016, p.3), has ‘no doubt that the program, now broadcast globally, has encouraged many more individuals to research their family’s history across the globe and to engage with the practice.’

Fass (2006, p.108) argues that memoir’s ‘contemporary popularity is in the deepest sense an expression of the widespread engagement with history in the contemporary world.’ And this from Nancy Miller (2000, p.430) ‘however hellish the lives, told in memoirs they give you just what your unrecorded history lacks and that the novel used to offer: a narrative through which to make sense of your own past.’ This making sense applies both to writers and readers of memoir and other forms of life writing, as lives are thrown up onto the screen and the page for analysis and consideration, making family stories public and contributing to collective memory. At times these stories provide a counter narrative where silenced and alternative memories emerge from oral histories and private documents and records of the past to challenge public memory and in some cases rewrite history. Tanya Evans (2016, p.9) claims ‘Australian history has been transformed by the contributions of family historians.’ Such stories pique the interest and fascination of readers boosting the ever-increasing popularity of memoir as a non-fiction genre.

This chapter has explored the definitions and various forms of life writing including history, biography, autobiography and memoir and looked at some of the current issues with regard to ‘facts’, memory and form. The increased popularity of the memoir provides an opportunity, taken by millions, for engagement with key elements of memory work processes, media and objects of remembrance, the formation of history and collective and cultural memory.

The creative component of this thesis is a hybrid memoir-biography-history which draws on various memory sources. It is an authentic story which explores the themes of family, belonging, identity and representativeness and the notion of citizenship, especially for political refugees and exiles traumatised by war and violence as they came to settle in Australia after WWII. The next chapter of this exegesis views the broad context of the Cold War and the experience of migrants to Australia through the personal lens of my father's life.

Chapter 2 The Context - Cold War Exile and a Search for Justice

Exile is strangely compelling to think about but terrible to experience. It is the unhealable rift forced between a human being and a native place, between the self and its true home: its essential sadness can never be surmounted. (Said, 2003, p.137)

In their collection of memoirs of the Cold War written by the second generation of Australian Cold War activists, Ann Curthoys and Joy Damousi (2014) have argued: ‘As a form of life writing, memoir brings history close, makes it immediate, connecting us in the present to those who preceded us in a particularly interesting way. While the two forms - history and memoir - are distinct, they interact and illuminate each other’ (p.13). As discussed in the previous chapter, the memoirs of individuals - even when focused on the individual and family - can provide valuable insights into complex national and global contexts of a political, cultural and behavioural nature. Analysis can broaden and deepen our understanding of the big picture and the small scene, the individual, the family and the collective. Memoir is an interaction between personal memory and history, making personal memory public. In this case it is my father’s life story under consideration but the narrative inevitably involves my mother and myself, as well as the members of his first family in Poland. The narrative is set in, and therefore informs an understanding of the tumultuous historical context of post-war Europe and England and Cold War Australia. Researching this Cold War period has illuminated and informed the story of my father’s life in ways I could never have imagined, adding historical knowledge and understanding that changed my perception of him and his life.

This chapter explores the context of my father, Antoni Jagielski’s experience of Cold War exile from Poland, emigration to Australia and eventual return to Poland during which time, I came to discover, he carried out a long and difficult struggle for justice and compensation for his war service. Equally, this chapter recounts my own search, as his daughter, for a meaningful understanding of his life and the choices he made.

The Family Story (continued)

Like a great many other liberated Polish prisoners who had fought under Allied, predominantly British, command and subsequently feared reprisal from the post-war communist regime, Antoni Jagielski chose repatriation to the United Kingdom rather than return to Poland, becoming part of a group who, after 1948, were often referred to as the Cold War refugees.

After his demobilisation in England, Tony, as he was called by then, found employment with the Bata Shoe Company in East Tilbury. In 1953 he met the 23-year-old Australian, Nora O'Neill. They married, took up residence on the Bata Estate and I was born in the following year.

When my mother married Tony, she was in love and had expected they would build a life together in Australia. But what were his motivations for marriage and what were his expectations of this new life? Would it be no more than his passport to Australia? Did he indeed love my mother and think he could establish a new start in a new land with a new family, only to find that it was too far removed from what he knew? Or, did he always have in the back of his mind, like so many exiles and displaced migrants far from home, that he would return if he could, whenever and however that might be? These questions remain unanswered.

In November 1954 Nora, baby in arms, sailed home to Australia on the *Strathnaver*, using the return passage that she had booked before she left her home country. Tony's application for immigration took a further eight months. He arrived in Sydney in July 1955. Nora's mother had guaranteed his accommodation and a job, without which his age (forty-six) and his ill health – amongst other things he suffered pneumoconiosis, a lung disease, caused by three years of forced labour in the granite quarries of Gusen camp - would probably have precluded him from meeting the rigid criteria for Australian immigration. Although he didn't enter Australia on a DP visa, and wasn't legally a DP, he certainly was displaced and his experiences were often similar to those of DPs.

His departure for Australia was reported in the British Bata Shoe Company weekly newspaper, the *Bata Record*, on 20 May 1955 (see Figure 4):

Tony Jagielski ... met an attractive Australian girl when she came to England for the Coronation of Elizabeth II. In due course he married her ... Now after eight years' service here, he is going to join her at a town in New South Wales.

In his native Poland, Tony was a waterworks engineer ... "I shall be sorry to leave," he said, "but I am lonely without my wife." (Bata Record, May 20, 1955)



Figure 4. Bata Record Newspaper, May 20, 1955.

After 'joining' us for less than one month, my father disappeared one night without explanation. When I met him in 1974, I discovered that, fearing what might happen to him in Cold War Poland, he had remained in Australia. But nine months after this meeting with him, as he was ill, fearing he was dying and wanting to be buried in his homeland, he returned to Poland. I never heard from him again. Many years later I developed a powerful urge to find out more about my father in order to understand what might have led him to the decisions he had made. For me, it was as the Argentinean writer Patricio Pron (2013, p.12) suggests:

One day, I suppose, at a certain moment, the children feel the necessity to know who their parents were, and they throw themselves into finding out the truth. The children are the detectives of their parents.

In 2013, starting with two photos and four documents, I became 'the detective' of my father's life. At the end of that year, I went to Poland, Austria and England to unearth what I could via the archives. Before leaving for Poland, I discovered that in

1974 my father, Antoni as his Polish family knew him, had returned to Poland to rejoin his first wife, Helena, and his other daughter, Janina. The three of them had lived together, Janina's husband having died the previous year, in a small flat on Lipowa Street in Lublin. After returning to his native land, Antoni had lived for another twenty-two years, dying in 1996. Helena died in 2003 and Janina in 2011, two years before I uncovered any information about them. Janina had no children, there was no will, and with no known living relatives, the family's flat had been locked up and had remained empty since her death. As the only living heir, I inherited the flat within one week of my arriving in Lublin and thereby gained access to a treasure trove - in effect a time capsule - comprised of many of my father's photographs, letters, private and official documents from which I was able to reconstruct his life. This family archive provided information and the missing pieces to the puzzle of his life lived in England and Australia during the Cold War. My father had created the archive over the years as part of the record of his struggle to obtain compensation, official recognition and justice, in what was ultimately a successful thirty-year quest. I also gathered evidence from the archives of Auschwitz and Mauthausen-Gusen concentration camps, the Polish Underground Movement Study Trust and Polish Institute in London. But the most significant finds were in the flat in Lublin. There, after weeks of sorting through cupboards and drawers, I found one brown paper packet and then another and another full of letters from Antoni to Helena and to Janina and her husband, Ludwik Lorek. The earliest one I found was sent from London and dated 1948, which meant that he knew that Helena and Janina had survived the war and, when he married my mother, that Helena was alive. He continued to write regularly to his Polish family until his return to them in 1974. For their part they had carefully kept his letters suggesting that they wanted the family to be reunited.

My search had been propelled by the desire to understand my father's life choices. Once I had the letters and other documents translated - I don't speak Polish - I came to realise that his experience of the Cold War was one of prolonged suffering as an exile from Poland. The long-term physical and psychological damage he suffered as a result of four years in Auschwitz and Mauthausen-Gusen concentration camps and from the effects of the Cold War resulted in him living a difficult life plagued by post traumatic distress, physical illness, loneliness and a yearning for Poland and his family throughout his twenty years in Australia. He also persisted in a thirty-year quest for recognition and justice as he gathered evidence to claim compensation for his wartime

injuries and to be recognised as a war veteran who had valiantly served his country. These discoveries led me to reassess my responses to what I had previously perceived as a heartless abandonment of my mother and me.

Post War and Cold War Displacement

The scale of destruction and displacement at the end of World War II posed a mammoth task for the International Refugee Organisation and the governments of the Allied countries. The historian Jayne Persian (2012, p.483) has identified twelve million DPs in Europe at the end of 1945 who were all ‘the responsibility of the Allied authorities.’ The scholar Egon Kunz (1988, p.78) argues that not only were the Poles the largest number of refugees, but ‘the Poles suffered the longest.’ Over eight million Poles were killed or displaced between the outbreak of World War II and the nation’s defeat.

Although the Poles fought on the side of the Allies in many theatres of World War II, the 1945 Yalta conference placed Poland behind the Iron Curtain, thereby denying her people the democracy for which most of them had fought. Like many other Eastern European nationals, Polish refugees became a source of controversy and debate between the Soviet Union and the other Allied countries. The Soviet Union insisted that DPs were not in fact stateless, but were nationals who were required at all costs to return to their countries of origin. (Cohen, 2012, p.23) Those who refused repatriation were ‘enemies and traitors, not only of their own countries, but of all the United Nations.’ (Persian, 2012, p.489) By contrast, the Western Allies argued that as a basic human right, DPs and refugees should not be forced to return to their home countries and if they so desired were entitled to resettlement in the West.

The Soviet Union tried to encourage people to return to Poland to help rebuild the nation. According to historian Mark Wyman (1998, p.64) ‘There were promises of food, jobs and a friendly reception. Within the ‘carrot approach’ they offered each returning Pole a sixty-day ration of food.’ The dilemma for many Polish DPs was that the desire to return home conflicted with the fear of communist oppression and reprisals, especially for those who, like my father, had been members of the underground, Polish Army Krajowa (A.K.) since the incoming Communist regime labelled A.K. members as undesirable ‘fascists’. They saw its ex-members as a threat to the new government and therefore most of those they captured were imprisoned,

executed or sent to the gulags in order to eliminate the chance of insurgent activities that could undermine the new regime. Hearing such reports, my father like many other A.K. members, chose repatriation to Britain. In Persian's (2012, p.481) assessment, after 1948, these repatriates became Cold War political refugees.

After the liberation of the Gusen concentration camp in 1945, Antoni Jagielski spent some months recovering in a hospital in Linz and then made his way to Italy where he joined the Polish II Corps, led by General Władysław Anders, under the command of the British Eighth Army. In 1946, there were 100,000 Polish troops in Italy. Whilst the British policy at this time was to encourage Poles to return to their homeland, for the reasons already stated, few took up this option. Historian Halik Kochanski (2012, p.555) notes: 'Of the 85,000 men who had accompanied Anders out of Soviet captivity, only 310 opted to return to Poland.' Those remaining in Italy, including my father, were shipped to England for army demobilisation and resettlement.

Although Churchill offered citizenship and the freedom of the British Empire to Poles who felt they could not return home, not all British citizens welcomed them as warmly after the war as they had previously. Hostility towards them grew, often fostered by Trade Union officials fearing for British jobs. As the Polish plight became clearer, many in resettlement and DP camps became despondent. Wyman (1998, p.107) describes the state of the Polish camps as one of 'apathy, people were in a daze and listless, men sat around drinking, smoking and playing cards, everyone talked endlessly about the hopelessness of their situation.' Life in exile left many Poles traumatised and struggling to come to terms with their fate. They suffered physical and psychological damage but also what the psychiatrist Maurice Eisenbruch (1991, p.673), although referring to Southeast Asian refugees, has termed 'cultural bereavement' in which there is the pain of the permanent loss of homeland, familiar social structures, cultural values and self-identity. There were also often feelings of anxiety, anger and guilt over having abandoned their families and the resentment at having been forced into resettlement. As Edward Said (2003, p.137) describes it: 'Exile is strangely compelling to think about but terrible to experience. It is the unhealable rift forced between a human being and a native place, between the self and its true home: its essential sadness can never be surmounted.' These feelings and the long-lasting effects of what today would be called Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) were not part of the immigration recruiters' lexicon. Instead new post-war European migrants were expected to 'leave behind their

experiences of suffering, and their allegiances to their native countries’. (Neumann, 2015, p.1)

The experience of DPs and other immigrants in Cold War Australia

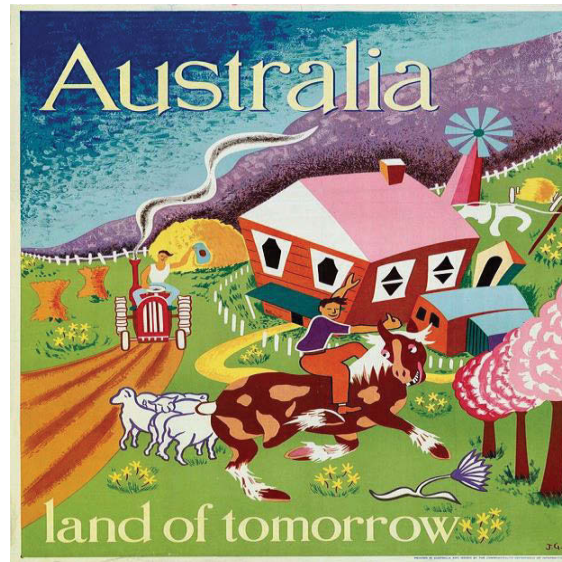


Figure 5. Australian government post-war poster.

During the Cold War, the Australian government implemented an aggressive marketing campaign to attract young, fit and healthy migrants to meet the post-war demand for labour and national development. Posters promising a ‘land of opportunity, a land of tomorrow’ (see Figure 5) attracted many individuals keen to distance themselves from a recovering United Kingdom and Europe and who wanted to start afresh in a country that was far from the horrors of World War II and the austerity and disillusionment of the growing Cold War. One-third of all DPs migrating to Australia were Poles and this national group accounted for 160,000 migrants between 1949 and 1954. Australia’s overall immigration program was targeted at white, healthy, single males between 15 and 35. Jayne Persian (2015), among others, has pointed out the racial discrimination that underlay the preference for the blonde and the blue-eyed. In exchange for their passage and a chance to settle in Australia, men and some women were offered a two-year contract as labourers and domestics. The Soviets labelled these schemes as slave trade, providing cheap labour for capitalist democracies.

The Australian authorities and successful applicants were filled with optimism. Australia’s Immigration Minister, Arthur Calwell, wrote to each DP saying, in part, ‘I

am sure you will soon settle down happily in our midst and become thoroughly Australian in your outlook.’ (Neumann, 2015, p.109) Calwell and others’ hopes for fast and easy integration proved to be unrealistic as they failed to account for the extent and depth of the affects of trauma and displacement. Deacon et al, (2008, p.xiv) point to the ‘inherently homogenising impulse: it is a quest for sameness, not diversity. Seeking what is held in common, it is tempting to smooth over the chequered world of difference, held by fragile bonds, that inevitably defines a society built primarily on migration.’ Many immigrants experienced the continuing reality of longing for their families, culture and the homelands for which they had fought and to which they could not return. This reality was compounded for many by the feeling they did not belong in their new country. There is a further distinction to be made between those immigrants who voluntarily chose to come to Australia in search of a better life and the involuntary, political refugees fleeing oppression for whom the likelihood of return was almost negligible. Their stories reveal the extent to which exile, due to the Cold War in this case, changes the way in which people experience migration and resettlement. For refugees like my father who were already damaged, exile exacerbated their condition, leading many to eventually leave Australia, contrary to the intention of the government of the day.

In the 1950s few Australians had any knowledge of the histories, cultures or languages of the waves of new arrivals who were most often seen as outsiders. The extent of the adjustments expected by new migrants was often misunderstood and vastly underestimated. Certainly too, few new immigrants from Eastern Europe knew much about Australia. For Poles who had grown up in pre-war Poland, if they knew about Australia at all, it would probably have been no more than that it was a large land mass located at the other end of the earth. Martin Krygier, whose father migrated to Australia in 1941, has described his Polish father’s inability to change or adapt saying ‘He had already been formed elsewhere.’ (Curthoys and Damousi, 2014, p.57) Similarly, Joy Damousi cites a male interviewee, who described his father’s experience in Australia as ‘tragic [and] traumatic’ because he had been ‘so deeply formed [by the war]; it was the foundation of his way of being in the world, that that couldn’t be changed... He could relax himself here... but he couldn’t become another person.’ (Damousi, 2015).

In her recent memoir, Australian actress, comedian and writer, Magda Szubanski, has described growing up in the outer suburbs of Melbourne with her Polish

father, Scottish mother and two siblings. They migrated to Australia in 1965 and stayed together as a close family, with no apparent desire to return to Poland on her father's part. It was clear that her father 'needed to get as far away from blood-stained Europe as possible. Once [in Australia] he refused to look back.' (Szubanski, 2016, p.15)

Szubanski's story is one of coming to terms with her family and with herself. There are important resonances with my own experience except that she lived with her father whereas mine disappeared. Each of us has been affected, albeit in different ways, by our father's experiences in a world that neither of us could truly imagine.

Szubanski describes her Polish father's silence as his way of dealing with the trauma of his experiences during World War II. Among many others, author Ruth Wajnryb, whose Polish refugee parents came to Australia, also experienced this response, 'These people were literally silenced by the Holocaust... Tragedy so devastating sweeps away everything in its path - and more, even the capacity to represent it. The home I grew up in was bathed in a silence wrought by trauma.' (Wajnryb 2001, p.xi)

Survival and family coping strategies can range from silence at one end of the spectrum, my father's position with my mother and me, to voice, testimony and recognition at the other, his position with his Polish family. Szubanski tells us that her father broke this silence for a single, six-hour session when he recounted his experiences to his daughter, never to speak of them again. Her memoir begins 'If you had met my father you would never, not for an instant, have thought he was an assassin... you would never have guessed he was capable of killing in cold blood. But he was. Poor bastard.' (Szubanski, 2016, p.1)

Szubanski points here to the fact that many Cold War immigrants and refugees were victims, and some were perpetrators, of prolonged violence and trauma, as were many Australian soldiers returning from the war, and they were deeply changed by these experiences. Incidents of alcoholism, abuse and unpredictable fits of anger were common in returning soldiers. Damousi (2001, p.195) concludes that 'the shadows of war remain psychologically embedded and played out in post-war Australia. These accounts challenge the representations of the 1950s and 1960s as a tranquil and harmonious period, with the rise of suburbia offering a quiet retreat.' The prevalent narrative of the time did not acknowledge or openly discuss the damaging effects of war on returned men and women, nor on their families. As historian Stephen Garton (1996,

p.20) affirms, 'for many Australians the 'glories' of war rather than the 'disillusions' of return, were the focus of memory and narration.'

The psychological effects on families is explicated in the field of post memory, where traumatic memories are transmitted to children of those victimised even though they were not present to witness what was perpetrated, as documented by authors such as Marianne Hirsch, Leo Spitzer, Eva Hoffman, Art Spiegelman and others. Survivors of mass violence continue to suffer well after the atrocities, as do their families, now traced through to the third generation. As Wajnryb (2001, p.55) attests 'Trauma has great depth of reach, with little respect, it would seem for generational boundaries... trauma in one generation infiltrates and permeates the world and psyche of the next.' Long-term research in the fields of biology, psychiatry and psychology into epigenetics, the intergenerational transmission of trauma through genes affected by environment and events which influence changes in behaviour, cognition, personality and mental health, adds to the debate on the physiological and psychological impact of war and violence on subsequent generations.

Szubanski discusses the impact of her father's life on hers through this transmission of trauma. My father, a middle-aged man in a new environment, suffering from the physical injuries and psychological trauma of war, unlike Szubanski's, was unable to sustain a new family, having been unwillingly separated from his Polish family and homeland.

Hiding or completely shutting off from one's emotions had been a fundamental mechanism for survival for many during life in the concentration camps. For many survivors, the ensuing inability to form and maintain relationships or show any emotional responses or connection with people, was profound and enduring as experienced directly by my father:

'I have my deep sentiment but foolishness of feelings is very dangerous to me. My way out is to coldly calculate on paper. It keeps me alive. If I am too emotional and sentimental it is very dangerous for me. I don't have any company since I lost trust in people and in the order of this world.' (Jagielski letter, 24 July, 1971)

My father describes his physical condition in 1964, almost twenty years after his release from the concentration camp, '*... one needs to be in good health, and I'm not. I've got difficulty breathing and I get tired quickly. The camp has taken its toll.*' (Jagielski letter, 11 October, 1964)

On the 30th September, 1970, psychiatrist Dr I.A. Listwan and a number of other medical practitioners, in a twenty-page report about my father, certified that:

The patient suffers from nightmares, sobbing, recurring depressive states and fear states, coughing and difficulties in breathing. His condition is diagnosed as a chronic state of fear and depression compounded by difficulties in hearing in the left ear, tinnitus, loss of his sense of smell, painful scars on the right chest and on the right thigh as well as pneumoconiosis [a lung disease caused by the inhalation of dust, often in mines]. (Dr Ignacy A. Listwan, medical report & neurological-psychiatric assessment, 30 September, 1970)

Additionally, incapacitating survivor syndrome, the guilt felt when a person survives a traumatic event when others didn't, is a well-documented mental condition. Relating to a different theatre of World War II, journalist John Hersey's (1946, p.3) account of his interviews with six survivors out of a hundred thousand people affected by the dropping of the first atomic bomb on Hiroshima is moving. 'They still wonder why they lived when so many others died. Each of them counts many small acts of chance or volition... that saved them. And now each knows that in the act of survival he lived a dozen lives and saw more death than he ever thought he would see.' Survivor syndrome, in addition to the physical and psychological impact of trauma and torture, was debilitating for many immigrants, especially as they were often single males with no family or support in Australia. My father's experience demonstrates this point. '*I don't have anyone to take care of me when I'm sick. Following doctor's recommendation, I'm going to a sanatorium for a couple of weeks.*' (Jagielski letter, August, 1971).

After two decades he had not recovered his health nor did he ever feel properly at home in Australia. His life here offered opportunities but on balance there were more difficulties in facing his solitary existence as was the case with many other new immigrants to Australia.

On the positive side there was the relative safety and security of Australia; improved standards of living - 'People eat here every day as if it is Sunday or a holiday,' one immigrant reported to sociologist Jean Martin (Martin, 1965, p.50); better working conditions; a democratic form of government; and freedom of speech, association and movement. My father took advantage of the Australian right to free speech and association, as he disclosed to his family in Poland, '*I enclose an amateur photo of me from the Freedom of Speech Park where I often make speeches.*' (Jagielski

letter, 25 April, 1965). His speeches were most likely about the communist regime that prevented him from returning to his homeland and family. He was also able to move freely around his adopted country in search of work and wealth: *'I'm going back to the area where I have a registered opal mine.'* (Jagielski letter, 6 December, 1964) and he reported coming back from the islands, from north Queensland and going to Melbourne and the Northern Territory to look for work.

Antoni regularly sent his family money, medicines and other supplies. On the 13 October 1963, for example, he sent 32 balls of knitting wool, dark ashen colour, 24 balls of 30% wool and 70% angora light ashen colour, 1 box of Nestle Coffee ½ kg, 1 package of tea ¼ kg.

Contact with his first family was clearly of great importance to him. *'I really want to exchange letters with you. I'm very lonely!'* (Jagielski letter, 28 March, 1970) and *'To give up on everything would be to commit suicide and I'm far from this. I'm always saying that I have Family.'* (Jagielski letter, 24 July, 1971).

For migrants to Australia who had relatives 'back home', the act of sending letters and gifts would clearly have helped reduce feelings of isolation and the loss of identity. For many Poles, it also fed a feeling of nostalgia or *'tesknota'* and a desire to return home. (Evert, 2007, p.77) For some, particularly the post-war second wave of migrants from Europe, immigration to Australia had never been intended as a permanent move but rather a way to recover both physical health and financial security before returning home. As political scientist James Jupp (1991, p.76) explains, it consisted of *'those seeking better conditions and full employment. They were not necessarily seeking permanent residence in Australia, as official policy desired.'* Thus, there was a significant mismatch of expectations between government policy and migrants' intentions. Kunz (1988, p.218) concluded that ten per cent, some 17,000, were what he termed 'leavers', with reports of *'much dissatisfaction and some despair.'*

My father was clearly determined to return to Poland and his family as these next excerpts show: *'My Dearest, I've asked you to write to me a lot about everything. After all, I'm going to come back. I want to know what the situation is and what I should be prepared for.'* (Jagielski letter, 28 April, 1962) At this time he was fifty-three years old, his marriage to my mother had been annulled the previous year, he had been in Australia for seven years and Poland was still a communist country. Antoni's return to Poland was repeatedly delayed but he persevered and was determined to succeed.

‘Faithful to God and my homeland, at all costs and irrespective of the consequences and the number of years I have left to live, I’m coming back to be entombed and to rest forever by my people.’ (Jagielski letter, undated but with 1972 letters) However, in a separate letter to his wife, Helena, he admits, *‘It is very difficult for me to come back in such circumstances. Speaking openly, I have stayed in the West in order to make money and to completely recover my health after KL [Konzentrations Lager/concentration camp]. Neither the former nor the latter have I achieved.’* (Jagielski letter, 4 December, 1972)

The Quest for Justice

My father’s quest for justice started upon his arrival in England towards the end of 1946. He began writing letters and gathering documents to provide evidence of his pre-war army service, of his activities in the resistance, his imprisonment in the concentration camps and of joining the Polish army in Italy. He was demobilised in Britain in 1947 and started working for the Bata Shoe Company at East Tilbury in that same year. After migrating to Australia in 1955, letters to his family in Poland describe some of the key steps of his process of gaining compensation and recognition over the next 20 years through M.K. Chmielewski, Consultant in International Law, London, who represented him and others in the courts in Geneva and Cologne. From the end of WWII numerous German Federal Compensation Acts were legislated to provide payments to victims of National Socialist persecution. Whilst the Luxembourg agreement of 1952 provided reparation payment to Israel for the resettlement of Jewish refugees after the war, and other countries including Greece and The Netherlands received reparation payments, individuals were required to make their own claims, providing evidence of their experiences and the impact of war on them and their families.

With Poland under communist rule and limited correspondence permitted, gathering the required documentation was not easy. There were few witnesses to his activities with nearly all of those who fought with him in the resistance or interred in the camps having been killed or missing. Nevertheless, he succeeded and in 1962 a decision was handed down.

‘This week I received a decision from Geneva that I have won the case and now I’m waiting for my part of money. The amount is not known yet, since 45 million German Marks will be divided between us KL, who have proved that they have lost their health and need help. It takes time to settle such cases, but I already have the verdict.’ (Jagielski letter, 28 April, 1962)

In 1965, further evidence was required as stated in a letter to him from M.K. Chmielewski, Consultant in International Law, London.

12 June 1965

Dear Sir,

The Compensation Office has delivered a document to me in which they require the following:

- a) proof of income for the last 3 years before the persecution*
- b) an income statement for the period between 1st November 1962 and the end of April 1965*
- c) your wife's proof of income for the period between 1st November 1953 and the end of April 1965*
- d) a marriage certificate*
- ...and a certificate that as of 1st October 1953 you were still a refugee.*

(Chmielewski letter to A Jagielski, 12 June, 1965)

Requirement a) proved particularly difficult as most of the records of this time had been destroyed.

In 1970, he was required to provide a medical report of conditions and injuries attributable to his four years of concentration camp imprisonment. In September, 1970, Dr Ignacy A. Listwan, certified that in addition to his physical conditions (described earlier) he found the following:

Significant traumas have led to major and permanent personality change and to the development of a haunted personality. The impact of torture is indisputable. The patient's conditions are chronic. It is not possible to make warm personal contact with him. He is lonely and has no family support. He is not able to adapt to the situation. (Dr Ignacy A. Listwan, medical report & neurological-psychiatric assessment, 30 September, 1970)

In 1971, having provided the medical reports, compensation was agreed, but there were delays in payment. *'I expect that I'll soon receive a large sum of money. I won my appeal. I make a promise to support you. It's a matter of three months.'*

(Jagielski letter, 14 March, 1971) Later that year he gained a partial ruling and a letter stating that more evidence was required.

My case will be settled on 3rd February 1972; I enclose a photocopy of the letter. The Germans are currently defending themselves and appealing. I'm not. They haven't added anything new to the appeal. The lawyer assures me that he won the case last year and the District Court's decision cannot be invalidated.

I took the wrong action when I left work two years ago. I thought that my case would finish quickly, but those Fritzes are prolonging on purpose. However, according to the news received, everything is excellent and I gather

that by Christmas you will receive your 50 000 PLN. (Jagielski letter, 7 January and 6 August, 1972)

Later in 1972, he wrote to his family stating '*again the Germans are appealing*' and there were further delays. Finally, in 1974, he received a payout of 50,000DM and in October that year, after thirty-three years, he returned to his family in Poland.

The Return

For him, it was the archetypal hero's journey of separation and return. He was born in Poland in 1909, lived through two world wars, was imprisoned and tortured for his resistance activities. His exile, due to communist persecutions during the Cold War, made him a reluctant immigrant to Australia. As a political refugee already damaged by his war experiences, exile exacerbated his psychological condition and explains some of the difficulties he endured and decisions he made. The events of the time gave him little control over his life as he struggled for agency but he persevered, was legally and financially recognised, enabling him to regain some control and to return to Poland while it was still under communist rule. He was prepared to take this risk so he could be reunited with his family and buried in his homeland. He lived long enough to see Poland return to being a democratic republic. His quest for justice over thirty years was, in his eyes, ultimately successful with recognition, financial compensation and the return to his beloved homeland. Like many, his was a long wait for the conditions that would allow him to start life afresh. From his letters, files and the archival materials I collected, it is clear that between his arrest in 1941 and his return to Poland and his family in 1974, my father's life was predominantly one of physical and psychological torment, with long periods of waiting and longing to return home. But return home he did, thanks to his persistence in writing letters, filing applications, providing evidence, waiting out delays, continuing with his claims for compensation from the German government. On his return home he was recognised as a war hero and was reunited with his wife, daughter and other family members. He made himself and his story known to a range of organisations and institutions, providing evidence of his experiences. He was recognised with the Auschwitz Cross (see Figure 6) and membership of various returned veterans' associations. Financially he was relatively wealthy with his compensation from Germany, his Australian pension and a Polish disability pension. As he wrote in 1971, '*I'm totally pleased with the success of the settlement of this case.*

Soon I'll be drawing two life annuities. My old-age is completely secured, to spite my enemies and to my Dearest's delight.' (Jagielski letter, August, 1971).



Figure 6. Antoni Jagielski's Krzyżem Oświęcimskim - Auschwitz Cross, Polish People's Republic, 4 June, 1986.

Judging from the reports of people I met in Poland who knew him after his return, he lived a comfortable and happy life with his family for the final twenty-two years in Lublin. The facts I have gathered about Antoni Jagielski's Cold War exile, the events that led to it and his subsequent dogged pursuit of justice, reveal a context, circumstance and conditions that made a happy new life in Cold War Australia an impossibility for my father. While he was not a hero to my mother or to me, he was certainly seen as a returning hero by the Polish state and his Polish family and friends. His life is an example of one man's successful attempt at redress through the Cold War period in England, Australia and Poland. Through the lens of personal experience, my father's story provides the intimacy and detail that can lead us to a better understanding of the Cold War period. As Neumann (2015, p.10) says, 'Readers are likely to be overwhelmed by the dimensions and complexity of the refugee issue and it is therefore necessary to write about 'one refugee'.' My father's story speaks of the impact of exile on an extended family, and of an individual life fractured by war, trauma and separation. And his story provides us with invaluable insights into the enormity of the challenges facing contemporary refugees, asylum seekers and migrants as they too search for peace and stability.

Chapter 3 Archival research process - I Can't Call Australia Home: Finding my Father in the Archives

'The past is like the scene of a crime: if the deed itself is irrecoverable, its traces may still remain.' (Kuhn 2002, p.4.)

'The stories people tell about their lives and the lives of those around them leave footprints across history.' (Brockmeier 2015, p.234).

Antoni Jagielski left footprints in both time and space - across history and across the nations of the world.

Typical of many scholars and family historians in the Asia-Pacific region writing migrant and refugee life stories, my research took me to archives overseas. But the bulk of the evidence was obtained, not from standard archival sources, but from an unusual and unexpectedly inherited archive.

It was in Poland that I uncovered evidence of my father's unsettled twenty years in Australia, his constant longing for his homeland and a secret plan to return. In using the lens of my father's experience as a post-war Polish migrant, personal memory and history are juxtaposed to unsettle the conventional view of the migrant experience of this era in Australia which is over-determined by migrant success stories.

Inheriting and rescuing an archive

In November 2013 I inherited flat 33 and all its contents at 12 Lipowa Street, Lublin, Poland. It was the flat that belonged to my father, Antoni Jagielski, his first wife, Helena, and his other daughter Janina, my half-sister. I never met these two women. I knew nothing of their existence until I was nineteen.

My father was born in 1909, so I knew he would have died by 2013 when I began my search, but I found he lived for another twenty-two years after returning to Poland in 1974. He died in 1996, his wife Helena in 2003, my half-sister Janina in 2011 and Janina's husband, Ludwik Lorek, had died in 1973, the year before my father returned to Poland. I traced a man, Zdzisław Zabielski, whose name was on my father's death certificate, who lived in Lublin and knew my father and his family. At the end of 2013 I went to Poland to meet him and his daughter, Anna who was also Janina's god-daughter, planning to spend a few weeks in Lublin and then follow my father's path

through Auschwitz, Mauthausen-Gusen in Austria and then London. As Janina left no will, no children or other family, the flat in which she, her mother and our father had lived, had been locked up since her death. After I arrived in Lublin, Zdzisław's daughter Anna, a lawyer, informed me that I was entitled to inherit the flat and one week later, I was handed a Certificate of Inheritance and the keys to a most unusual family archive.

In their book *Beyond the Archives*, Kirsch and Rohan (2008, p.1) describe three research methodologies that I used on my field trip to Poland from November, 2013 to February, 2014. The first is to 'follow in the footsteps' by visiting locations in order to 'understand the sites where a historical subject lived'. The second is to carry out oral histories with local people or relatives so that one can begin to see the context of the times and the factors shaping people's lives. The third is to be 'attentive to unexpected leads or chance encounters that can enrich a research project as well as change its direction and scope'.

During my time in Poland, Austria and England, I followed many 'unexpected leads' which resulted in surprising revelations about my father. I also listened to oral histories of survivors of the camps in which my father had been and, in Lublin spoke to people who knew him. However, it was the first of these methodologies described by Kirsch and Rohan, in the shape of the inherited flat, that revealed the most valuable evidence about my father's life. It was the most unexpected and remarkable archive, stilled in time, in a contained space.

Immersed in a culture where I didn't speak the language, visiting the flat and trying to make sense of what I found was a great challenge on many levels. I tried to give shape and meaning to the life of my father from an array of inchoate material artefacts, photos and documents. In this chapter, I will discuss three significant items found in the flat as well as one corroborating document found in the Auschwitz archives.

The inherited flat was a family archive of photos, documents, letters, medical and other official files and reports as well as household and personal items belonging to my father, Helena and Janina. It was a rich resource for intergenerational and transnational historical research by an Australian daughter trying to make meaning of the life of her absent father. From materials found in the flat and discoveries made in other archives, piece by piece, I was able to reconstruct the life of a man who never spoke to his Australian wife or daughter about his life before or during World War II,

nor ever gave them any reliable information about the life decisions and choices he made. At the beginning of this search, I related to Ashton & Hamilton's (2010, p.27) assertion that 'there is a strong sense of discovery or being on the hunt for a missing piece of the puzzle in the research process... An important part is about storytelling, passing on familial heritage and locating one's identity in space and time.' And likewise, to Humphrey (2002, p.113): 'The past is not recovered as pre-figured pieces of a jigsaw, but as fragments which may never be able to be assembled as a whole.'

My primary sources, uncovered in archives in Poland, Austria and England, have provided the fragments to make meaning of an unsettled life in Australia and the difficulties of Cold War exile and post-war migration.

The nature of this archival research - range of methods and strategies

Historian Carolyn Steedman (1998, p.76) describes the archive as 'a place to do with longing and appropriation; a place where a whole world may be imagined... a place in which people can be alone with the past.' The weeks I spent in flat 33 led me to imagine all sorts of pasts as I sifted and sorted through the leftover remnants of my father's and his other family's lives and memories.

Opening the front door of flat 33 was like stepping into a time capsule, the fusty smell escaping as the seal was broken. I felt like an intruder entering this intimate space into which I had never been invited. Timidly, I explored the tiny, 36.52 square metre three room space, in which three adults had lived - a kitchen, a bathroom and a multi-purpose bedroom, dining-room, lounge/TV room. It was tidy and relatively clean. There were no lights, no power but luckily the whole building was centrally heated so on that cold Thursday 21st November day, it was warm inside, in fact too warm.

Author Edmund de Waal, (2010, p.346) in the *Hare with the Amber Eyes*, describes a 'clammy feeling of biography, being on the edge of other people's lives.' I certainly felt this, the uncomfortable voyeur, as I looked through wardrobes of clothes and shoes, drawers of underwear, linen, cutlery and paperwork, cupboards of photo albums and shelves of books. Certain items led to a feeling of 'one glorious moment of finding' (Steedman 2008, p.28) and another and another as I discovered documents, letters, newspapers, photos, ID cards, Janina's school books, Helena's tailoring tools and materials, the suitcase my father had used to travel from Sydney to Warsaw in 1974 with a flying red kangaroo Qantas sticker on it, a vase of plastic flowers with a brass

plaque celebrating fifty years of marriage between Antoni and Helena, my father's Australian passport, a small slip of white paper with my name and where I lived in 1974 and the Sydney bus numbers that went there - the only reference in the whole flat to me - a piece of flotsam, in the bottom of an old suitcase. There was no evidence of my mother. The pieces began to come together in a way described by others such as the scholar Gold (2008, p.15) who says of archival research:

It's like putting together a jigsaw puzzle, except that you don't have a picture on the box for reference, there's more than one puzzle in the box, the picture keeps changing depending on how you fit the pieces together, and the pieces themselves change shape when your back is turned. Only slowly do the pieces begin to form a pattern.



Figure 7. Betty in the archive, November, 2013.

I cleared the floor and began to lay out the pieces, grouping them in categories, trying to assemble a sequence of events but sorely hampered by my lack of Polish language. But there were some items that needed no translation. When I entered the flat for the first time, I walked towards the corner window of the main room. Sitting on the dressing table under the window was this photo (see Figure 8):



Figure 8. Antoni Jagielski, Auschwitz concentration camp identification photos November 1941

The white label on the left-hand side says - Pole - 23522 - KL (Konzentration Lager/camp) Auschwitz. 23522 was the number he was given. I didn't recognise him but it was my father. I met him when he was sixty-five years old and the only earlier photo I had seen of him was the wedding photo with my mother in 1953, when he was forty-four. This photo was taken in November, 1941. He was thirty-two.

I picked up the photo. He looked defiant but scared. There were three copies. This identification photo would have been taken when he first arrived in Auschwitz. He wouldn't have had any belongings, just his clothes, which were replaced with the striped uniform he is wearing in the photo. Each strip of the three photos had Antoni Jagielski handwritten on the back and the stamp of the Auschwitz archives. Probably these photos were sent to him after he arrived back in Poland, evidence of his incarceration and probably used in addition to other documentation to successfully gain him the recognition of the Auschwitz Cross and membership of various Polish veterans' associations. But why, after all these years were they sitting there on the dressing table? He died in 1996, Helena in 2003 but when Janina died in December 2011, they were still out in full view on the dressing table but not in a frame or any covering. British historian Peter Burke (2001, p.14) says, 'Images are mute witnesses and it is difficult to translate their testimony into words. They may have been intended to communicate a message of their own...' The photographer's intention was to identify and record details of each Auschwitz prisoner. Did the subject intend to communicate a message to his captors? We can only guess. What was Janina saying by leaving these photos out on display? I looked into those eyes, willing some sort of story, some explanation, some

understanding. This was day one of your four years in a concentration camp. How did you survive?

The second discovery of particular note were a series of brown paper packets, in various places in the flat, containing sixty-two letters in total, mostly from my father in Australia and some from him in England. The letters were a mix of the ubiquitous blue aerogrammes and single page letters in white envelopes. I had to patiently wait for them to be translated. (Figure 9.)



Figure 9. Letters from Antoni Jagielski in Australia to his family in Poland.

These letters and others to Helena, Janina and Janina's husband, Ludwik, provided proof that my father always wanted to return to Poland, as the 1962 excerpt, previously quoted, from him to Helena shows:

'Faithful to God and my homeland, at all costs and irrespective of the consequences and the number of years I have left to live, I'm coming back to be entombed and to rest forever by my people.' (Jagielski letters, 1962.)

At this time, he was 53 years old, his marriage to my mother had been annulled the previous year, he had been in Australia for seven years and Poland was still a communist country.

In the flat, I found only six letters written by anyone in the Polish family. One was a July 1947 letter written by Helena to Janina or Jasia, a diminutive form of her name, which reveals how Antoni felt he was regarded in England and Helena's desire for him to return to Poland.

'Dear Jasia, I ask of you once again write to your Father nicely and tenderly please. You see after four years of Hitler's camp and now in a strange and, as he puts it, an indifferent country... anyhow we are not indifferent to him. There is strong propaganda on the other side, maybe he is afraid to come back I don't

know. He will come back my child, it is better to have a father than to be an orphan or abandoned you know. ' (Jagielski letters July, 1947).

This and other letters reveal that Antoni was in constant contact with his family in Poland from 1947, and shipping receipts show he sent them money, coffee, tea, knitting wool and medicines. In his letters he asks always for information about Lublin, about what he can expect when he returns, trying to reconcile the faraway present with his memory. Historian Paul Arthur (2011, p.110) describes memories without place in the following way:

If you have your memories transported to another country, where they are utterly displaced from your community and your language, then they grow in a vacuum... memories become detached, and they can't really survive - except in distorted ways... Eventually without the place, memory becomes myth - closed and unchangeable or alternatively, a kind of madness - unanchored, untethered, crazed.'

My father's state of mind while he was in Australia was indeed 'a kind of madness' as the medical report previously quoted certified.

The impacts on him of trauma were exacerbated by the lack of support for him in Australia and a life lived in exile. Edward Said (2003, p.149) eloquently explains this life: 'Exile is nomadic, decentred, contrapuntal; but no sooner does one get accustomed to it than its unsettling force erupts anew.' This is the experience of many migrants who are living in exile, trying to put down roots, assimilate and build new feelings of home. However, in spite of these attempts, like the waves of grief that come unexpectedly and unpredictably after a great loss, feelings arise to disrupt and trouble this process. My father was unsettled in Australia. Letters from him have return addresses from many places in Australia as he travelled around to find work. He was also constantly gathering information that would facilitate his return to Poland, expecting at any time to be able to do so. I found this information in the flat. It contained all the evidence I had planned to search for in the public archives. There were folders of documents and testimonials he had gathered after the end of the war, while he was in England, from his twenty years in Australia, and after his return to Poland in 1974, collected in an effort to put forward a case to gain compensation and recognition for his suffering and loss.

My father sent many letters to his Polish family requesting documents to support his claims, made through lawyers in London to the courts in Cologne. The contents of

these letters, like the detailed medical report, attest to the fact that he was unwell, both physically and psychologically, as a result of his wartime experiences.

While dozens of letters from my father to his Polish family had been kept, they constituted only one side of the correspondence. There were no letters to Antoni. I could only make assumptions from some of the information in the letters *to* Poland about what the letters *from* Poland might have said.

The letters filled in many of the gaps in my knowledge of my father's twenty years in Australia, but I had the feeling once again of being an intruder, a voyeur into the lives of a man I barely knew and two women I had never met. I was, after all, an 'unintended reader' of personal letters found in a space to which I had never been invited. Again, historian Paul Arthur's (2016, p.103) question resonates: 'How can the biographer enter the world of the dead without trespassing?' There were many times in the flat when I would stop what I was doing, take a breath and remind myself of the significance of where I was and why. It was ironic that from a man who had given me life and little else, I had inherited all that he left behind, his unplanned and sole beneficiary. According to neighbours and friends, neither Helena nor Janina had any knowledge of Nora and Betty O'Neill and when Janina died, there was no reason to look to Australia for anyone who might make a claim on the estate.

I spent weeks sorting out taxes, debts, bank accounts as well as throwing out dozens of bags of rubbish and bundling up clothes and other items for the charity shop. All the while I felt, on the one hand, excitement at the prospect of finding an interesting item and, on the other, resentment that I had been left to clean up and dispose of what was left of my father and his other family's lives. I was moving between the living and the dead, the present and the past, trying to reconcile the two. At the same time, I was also considering how I would write up this experience, aware of the ethics of entering this private domestic space and the unavailability of permission to explore and expose these private artefacts, photos and letters to a wider audience. I was facing what Paul Arthur and Lena Kurvet-Kaosaar (2015, p.119) describe as:

an inescapable ethical dilemma that relates to entering intensely private areas of experience and presenting intimate subject matter for the world to see. How much intimate material should be revealed? For what purpose? To whose benefit? At what risk? How?

I felt the need to be respectful and a responsibility to represent this intergenerational transmission of memory as accurately as possible using as much

authentic, verifiable information as I could find; to tell my father's story, and mine, for the purpose of adding to the collective memory of the Polish diaspora, of post-war migrant survival and of families, in both Poland and Australia, fractured by war.

There were a few items that neighbours and friends were able to identify as belonging to my father - his hats, shaving brush and cut-throat razor, rosary beads, binoculars and radio. (Figure 10) These objects were both concrete and evocative. Author Penelope Lively (2013, p.234) points to the impact of such objects: 'The past is irretrievable, but it lurks. It sends out tantalizing messages, coded signals ... And all because fragments of detritus survive, and I can consider them.'



Figure 10. Some of Antoni Jagielski's belongings found in the flat in Lublin.

The hats, and photos of my father wearing them, gave me a sense of his physicality, his masculine dimensions and how he moved through the world, as well as the customs of a former time when all men wore hats. I was less sure about the rosary beads. In spite of his bigamy, did they indicate a strong Catholicism? I could imagine him lathering up his face with the brush and shaving with the cut-throat razor, but it was the radio that caught my attention and imagination.

I found the radio next to my father's bed. I picked it up. It was a little smaller than A5 size and encased in a heavy, milk-chocolate coloured, leather case. Its seams were machine stitched, the front panel perforated with round holes. Two silver metal press studs the size of a thumbnail held the case closed at either end on the top. There was a leather strap attached on both sides and a knot tied half way, leaving a loop of

leather at the top. The loop was big enough for me to put my hand through and as I did, holding the radio below, I wondered if my father did this so he could carry it safely. If it dropped he would still have the wrist strap. Did this mean he walked around with a radio? *MADE IN POLAND* it said on the back in large capital letters. I took it out of its leather case. The brand on the front of the radio was *DOMINIKA*. The silver needle moved as I turned the ridged dial under my forefinger. My father's forefinger would have done the same thing.

The neighbour told me that with the radio connected to an outside aerial, my father would illegally listen to the BBC and also to Australian radio to keep up with what was going on in the rest of the world. I imagined him lying in bed at night, radio on, being transported to countries he knew, had lived in and of which his Lublin family had no knowledge or experience. Anna had told me that Helena had never travelled out of Poland. Her daughter Janina had only been to Bulgaria and Russia where her husband, Ludwik, had work connections.

‘Objects, artefacts, things. They are three-dimensional, visual, tactile and sometimes odorous and auditory manifestations of the past’ says the historian Adrienne Hood (2009, p.176). These items and stories gathered from people who knew my father added to my understanding of this now elderly man living in his beloved but communist-restricted Poland.

I looked at my father's bed. Had he lay there, listening to his radio, feeling safe at last, content to be home in his own country, with his family, his culture, his language? How liberated he must have felt being able to walk the streets of Lublin unfettered and with the excitement of the possibility of freedom from communism brewing in his city. Not long after his return to Poland in 1974, more overt stirrings of the anti-communist revolution began, with protests, strikes and civil resistance evident into the 1980s. In spite of the imposition of martial law and Soviet repression, Poland held the first free elections in any Soviet bloc country, electing the Solidarity leader Lech Wałęsa as President in 1989. My father had endured fifteen years of communism after his return, with restrictions on listening to overseas broadcasts and travel or connections outside Poland, before the freedoms of *Solidarność*, the freedoms for which he had fought and been imprisoned.

On 3rd January, 2014 I went to the archives in Auschwitz.

Before I left Australia, I had booked a two-day Auschwitz study tour. I was the only person booked on the tour, so I had a personal guide, a young Polish woman called Marta. We walked towards the infamous *Arbeit Macht Frei* (Work Brings Freedom) sign overarching the entrance to the camp. The dirt and gravel path had been compacted hard but not smooth by the feet of millions - six years of prisoners and persecutors and then visitors and museum staff. The first visitors to the site, limited to organised groups, came in 1945, the year the war ended and when the 7,000 remaining prisoners were freed by the Soviet army. In 1946 there were 100,000 visitors and pilgrims; the following year 170,000. At the official opening of the site as a museum in 1947, the program began with religious services - Catholic in the courtyard of Block 11, the Death Block, Jewish in Block 4, and Eastern Orthodox and Lutheran inside Block 11. Wreaths were placed at the Death Wall in the courtyard of Block 11. There was an address by Józef Sak, representing the Central Committee of Jews in Poland and Polish Premier Józef Cyrankiewicz declared *'the grounds of the former Nazi concentration camp in Oświęcim, together with all the buildings and equipment found there, shall be preserved for all time as a Monument to the Martyrdom of the Polish People and other Peoples.'* (Auschwitz-Birkenau Museum website). In 2014, the year I visited, there were 1.5 million visitors.

The morning was still, the temperature below freezing and the sky clear blue as Marta and I walked to Block 24 which was now an administration block containing the archives. The Auschwitz camp is an orderly layout of wide paths and rows of identical two-storey redbrick buildings, each with a pitched tiled roof. Marta spoke in Polish through the intercom explaining who I was and what I wanted. A buzzer sounded, the door clicked open. I had emailed the archives from Australia and let them know I was coming. My file was on the counter with details they had sent me in response to my enquiries in 2012 - Antoni's date and place of birth, the dates of imprisonment, the reason for his arrest, his Auschwitz number and his transport to Mauthausen, which I later discovered was incorrect as he had been transferred directly to Gusen.

'No, we can't show you the actual Personal Record Card of your father,' said the archivist.

'What? Why not?'

'Well if we showed everybody, the cards would get damaged and deteriorate. We have rules about these archives.'

‘But I am his daughter. There are no other known relatives still alive. I am most likely to be the only person in the whole world who will ever, ever ask to see this card. If I can’t see it, who are you saving it for?’

She looked at me for a long time with an expressionless face. I thought of all the soldiers, prison guards and officials I had read about, not moved to empathy, just following the rules. She walked to the telephone, spoke to someone, hung up and left the office. Marta and I looked at each other, puzzled.

‘I guess we wait,’ I said. Marta nodded.

She must have been gone for ten or fifteen minutes but returned with white gloves and my father’s card between two pieces of white paper. She motioned me and Marta to chairs at a small wooden table, gave me the gloves and placed the card on the table. The morning sun shone through the new white bars on the wooden windows, casting a shadow on the table in front of me.

Here was Antoni Jagielski’s *Häftlings-Personal-Karte*, Prisoner-Personal-Card (Figures 11 and 12). His name, date and place of birth, address, religion, marital status (married), children (none - perhaps he didn’t want to put Janina at risk), date of arrest, height, hair and eye colour and other physical features. It was him. Definitely him. I looked and looked before I picked it up. It was a yellowed A5 card, a standardised form with various categories to be filled in. I’d seen his Auschwitz ID photo on the dressing table in the flat but this tangible, physical card was concrete evidence that he had really been here in Auschwitz and then in Gusen. Because he had told so many lies, I had some doubt that this part of his story was true. This card was tangible proof. Someone, seventy years ago, had written down pieces of information about Antoni’s physical appearance, his imprisonment and his movements during a three-and-a-half-year period. Someone in Gusen had hand written specific information about Antoni onto this card, in black and blue pen. *Widerstandskämpfer* ‘Resistance fighter’ was underlined with a sweep of bright red pencil.

‘Here is something else you may not have seen,’ the archivist said.

It was a form with some writing on the top half and a table at the bottom. In one of these boxes was a simple line under the month of December.

‘What does this mean?’ I asked.

‘It means that your father sent a letter out of Auschwitz in December and,’ turning over the page, ‘received a letter in January.’

‘He must have written to Helena, his wife and she wrote back. That means she knew he was still alive in December 1941 and where he was.’

Helena would not have seen her husband since the night he was arrested, five months before the letter was written, and would have had no news of him. It must have been a relief to know that he was alive but terrifying to think of him in Auschwitz. I wonder how much they knew about this place at that time. What would she have told eleven-year-old Janina?

KL: *43.457* *P. 22. 3*
Häftl.-Nr.: *15290*

Häftlings-Personal-Karte

Fam.-Name: *Jagielski* am: _____ an KL: _____
 Vorname: *Antoni* am: _____ an KL: _____
 Geb. am: *22. 7. 09* in *Poznań* am: _____ an KL: _____
 Stand: *Kind* am: _____ an KL: _____
 Wohnort: *Gdynia 78* am: _____ an KL: _____
 Strasse: *Gdynia 78* am: _____ an KL: _____
 Religion: *Poln. Staatsangeh.* am: _____ an KL: _____
 Wohnort d. Angehörigen: *Helena 78* am: _____ an KL: _____
Helena 78 am: _____ an KL: _____
Helena 78 am: _____ an KL: _____
 Eingewiesen am: *1. 7. 44* am: _____ an KL: _____
 durch: *Dr. Mehl* am: _____ an KL: _____
 in KL: *1. 7. 44* am: _____ an KL: _____
 Grund: *Polen* am: _____ an KL: _____
 Vorstrafen: *keine* am: _____ an KL: _____

Überstellt am: _____ an KL: _____
 Entlassung: _____ durch KL: _____
 mit Verfügung v.: _____

Personen-Beschreibung:
 Grösse: *1,85* cm
 Gestalt: *mittelgroß*
 Gesicht: *hell*
 Augen: *blau*
 Nase: *normal*
 Mund: *normal*
 Ohren: *normal*
 Zähne: *2 fehlen*
 Haare: *hell*
 Sprache: *poln.*
 Bes. Kennzeichen: _____
 Charak.-Eigenschaften: _____
 Sicherheit b. Einsatz: _____
 Körperliche Verfassung: _____

Strafen im Lager:
 Grund: _____ Am: _____ Bemerkung: _____
HOLLERIT - ERFASST
16909

Figure 11. Antoni Jagielski's personal prisoner record card, Auschwitz archives, front.

Erhobter Beruf: *Entwässerungsarbeiten* zuletzt ausg. Beruf: _____ Arbeitsbuch Nr.: *✓*
 Ausgebildet in der Zeit: *13. 7. 42* Berufsgruppe: _____
 als *Feinmechaniker* im KL: *Gusen* (Ausbildungsort): _____

Eingesetzt:

Nr.	von	bis	als	bei
1.	<i>13. 7. 42</i>	<i>5. 1. 45</i>	<i>Hausmehl</i>	<i>H. Gusen</i>
2.	<i>5. 1. 45</i>	<i>20. 1. 45</i>	<i>Kornmehl</i>	<i>H. Gusen</i>
3.	<i>20. 1. 45</i>	<i>6. 2. 45</i>	<i>H. A.</i>	<i>H. Gusen</i>
4.	<i>6. 2. 45</i>			<i>H. Gusen</i>
5.				<i>H. Gusen</i>
6.				<i>H. Gusen</i>
7.				<i>H. Gusen</i>
8.				<i>H. Gusen</i>
9.				<i>H. Gusen</i>
10.				<i>H. Gusen</i>
11.				<i>H. Gusen</i>
12.				<i>H. Gusen</i>
13.				<i>H. Gusen</i>
14.				<i>H. Gusen</i>
15.				<i>H. Gusen</i>
16.				<i>H. Gusen</i>
17.				<i>H. Gusen</i>
18.				<i>H. Gusen</i>
19.				<i>H. Gusen</i>
20.				<i>H. Gusen</i>

54251
549. D. Hau-29/8271
Entwässerungsarbeiten
16910

Figure 12. Antoni Jagielski's personal prisoner record card, Auschwitz archives, back.

These records and other sources in the Auschwitz and Mauthausen-Gusen archives in Vienna partially answered one of the significant questions I had about my father. How did he survive?

The Prisoner Record Card shows that in Gusen, my father was fortunate enough to be trained as a stonemason and worked in the granite quarry for three years. In this job, he would have been working under shelter from the snow in winter and the sun in summer and avoided having to carry the quarried stones up the 186 'Death Steps' of Mauthausen quarry or in Gusen. Like so many others, his survival was no doubt a mixture of good luck, cunning, physical strength, resilience, good contacts and networks. One documented example of him escaping certain death after being discovered sabotaging equipment in Gusen is described by a fellow prisoner:

Dr. Zbigniew Wlazlowski: *Several times he was beaten and tortured, a victim of violence by the SS man Kluge and Kapos. Kidney rupture was suspected but due to lack of facilities he could not be operated on. He was treated in the camp hospital where I worked as an X-ray assistant. In the camp he lost his strength and health. He suffered from pulmonary tuberculosis but could not report his illness due to the threat of execution squad or gassing. He was then terrified because during his stay at Auschwitz he was responsible for removing gassed corpses. All this time until the present he has required treatment.* (Signed Witness Statement of Zbigniew Wlazlowski dated 21.10.75, a copy provided by ZBoWiD, Związek Bojowników o Wolność i Demokrację, the Society of Fighters for Freedom and Democracy Archive, 12th February, 2014).

My father survived, but he had to endure the symptoms of what is now known as Post Traumatic Stress Disorder for the rest of his life. When author Nadia Wheatley learned of her English father's experiences just after the war as a doctor in Bergen-Belsen she, like me, began to understand the impact of those camps on the psyche of men and women and the long-term consequences for their ability to form close and meaningful relationships. Information and understanding can lead to empathy and compassion. Wheatley (2015, n.p.) says:

I was astonished to be feeling an unaccustomed benevolence towards my father, even a sense of dawning comprehension. Ah, so this was why the man was so difficult, so cold!... And indeed, did whatever my father had experienced at Belsen explain, if not excuse, his treatment of me, and of my mother?

I too was beginning to gather an understanding of the decisions my father had made, including the abandonment of me and my mother.

In the archives I found evidence of a man who survived but was deeply damaged by his war experiences, a man who, as an exile, could not settle contentedly in Australia and a man who determinedly gathered the documentation to earn the compensation that would allow him to return to his family and country of birth. His is a story of a life of constant dislocation and relocation through circumstances outside his control. He could never call Australia 'home'. A diversity of overseas sources has provided the fragments to make meaning of a life and the difficulties of post-war immigration to Australia at a time when migrants were still expected to leave their pasts behind. This individual story points to the ongoing ties of many Australian lives to the wider world, attached by family, transnational loyalty and affinity within the broader narratives of war, trauma, migration and the fracturing of families, ever-present themes for life writers in our region today. The story also points to the broadening of the notion of archives from the official publicly accessible institutional records and files to domestic and private spaces where the process of memory work is intimate and personal.

Conclusion

As I argue in the introduction the Polish diaspora has received little attention in Australian scholarship until the last few years. This thesis provides an individual Polish story, informed by the three areas presented here that examine the form of memory writing, the context of the Cold War for the study, and the role of memory and personal discovery in archival research.

Through this research, I discovered that, unlike the standard narrative of many post-war migrants, my father's ambition was not to come to Australia, to work hard and build a new life in this country. His story provides a counter balance to the existing weight of migration memory in mainstream culture with the potential to add a different nuance to collective memory, bringing attention to an alternate experience of migration. This story adds to the understanding of migrants to Australia who return to their countries of origin and bears witness to the impact of war and the lifelong trauma it causes to individuals and families. Antoni Jagielski's story demonstrates how, within a framework of memory, an individual life story can illuminate, illustrate and expand our understanding of particular times in history.

I set out on a journey through my own family history with just two photographs and four documents. The way was then illuminated by information from a range of historical sources and sites of memory. But the main direction and ultimate destination were set by a serendipitous find of material artefacts, photos and documents in a private home in Poland.

This memory work of constructing and documenting the life of my absent father, bringing together intergenerational memory and transnational historical discourse, has taken place within a broader narrative of war, exile and migration. This story is of one family amongst millions whose lives were fractured by World War II. It is unique, but similar to those of a whole generation of children of Eastern European and other nations who have migrated to Australia.

The creative component of the doctorate in the next section follows the traditional Three Act structure (Seeger 2010, Yorke 2014, McKee 1998), commonly used in literature and script writing for theatre and film, underpinned by a double narrative arc of Joseph Campbell's (1990) *Hero's Journey* stages, my father's story being one of them and mine the other. Vogler (2007, p.4) describes Campbell's identified stages as 'the most pertinent theme in oral tradition and recorded literature: the myth of the

hero... All storytelling, consciously or not, follows the ancient patterns of myths... they well up from a universal source in the shared unconscious and reflect universal concerns.' The quest trope is common in many memoirs and appropriate for this story. I also considered Maureen Murdock's (1990) *Heroine's Journey* but mapped my father's story and mine against Campbell's model.

Small sections of the exegesis are repeated in the creative component as neither the exegesis chapters nor the creative work would have made sense without these.

After the introductory chapters, the narrative has a chronological structure, following the timeline of events and experiences I encountered between 2013 and 2015 in the search for the story of my father's life. Towards the end of the search I came to understand the truth of author Hisham Matar's (2016, p.118) assertion, '*But it turns out when you are looking for your father you are also looking for other things,*' and Annette Kuhn's (2002, p. 2) observation that '*Telling stories about the past, our past, is a key moment in the making of our selves.*' I began my search with many questions about my father but as I progressed, questions of my own sense of self, identity and belonging arose as I considered the effects of his decisions and actions, his lies and secrets. '*A family without secrets is rare indeed... From the involuntary amnesias of repression to the wilful forgetting of matters it might be less than convenient to recall, secrets inhabit the borderlands of memory.*' (Kuhn, 2002, p. 2)

What follows is how, through the framework of memory, I unearthed family secrets and 'saved a life' for the future as Grace Paley (1983) calls it - the life of one Polish man - and by so doing, helped his daughter finally to understand.

It is possible that I did owe something to my own family and the families of my friends. That is, to tell their stories as simply as possible. In order, you might say, to save a few lives. (Paley 1983, p.10)

FINDING MY ABSENT FATHER

'One day, I suppose, at a certain moment, the children feel the necessity to know who their parents were, and they throw themselves into finding out the truth. The children are the detectives of their parents.'

Patricio Pron, *My Father's Ghost is Climbing in the Rain*, 2014.

PART I

Chapter 1 Lublin, Lismore & London

21st November, 2013

Seventy years after my father's arrest by the Gestapo, 15,000 kilometres away from my home in Sydney, in a place where I knew no-one and didn't speak the language, I was looking for the truth about my father, poised to peel back the skin of his mysterious life, examine his heart and look for his spine.

He was long dead by the time I walked through the front door of his flat and reached for the light switch. No lights came on. The electricity had been disconnected when the bills weren't paid, two years before my arrival. The whole building was centrally heated and on that cold November day, it was warm inside, too warm. I recalled Edmund de Waal's description of the 'clammy feeling of biography, being on the edge of other people's lives'. I knew what he meant. I felt feverish. I left the front door open to let in some light, but even so, being in that forsaken flat in Poland made me uneasy, an uninvited intruder into my father's other life. I wanted to be bold but part of me was already turning towards the door. Why disturb my peace of mind any further?

It had started three years before, with the writing course.

"Complete the sentence: 'The day I met...' and write for twenty minutes" the teacher said on day one of a two week writing workshop. My mind was blank. I wrote the phrase in my notebook and what followed surprised me.

The day I met... my father, I was nineteen.

I hadn't thought about him for years. I continued writing, recounting the details of where we met, his short, heavy build, his strong Polish accent, how I'd felt. I'd expected some jolt of connection like an electrical lead plugged back in to its source, alive with knowing, but it wasn't like that at all.

In class, we were asked to add more each day. But, I knew little about him. Long-buried questions wriggled to the surface like worms out of a canker. Who *was* this Polish man, Antoni Jagielski (yah-GIL-ski) who was my father? Had he really been in Auschwitz? Why did he come to Australia? Why did he desert Mum and me, turn up when I was nineteen and then disappear again?

For my writing class homework, I imagined my way back to 1955, to Lismore, a small country town in northern New South Wales, to what I *did* know, and a letter to my mother Nora, that I think was the catalyst for his leaving us.

Writing class piece: Lonely in London

“All the way from London,” said the postman looking at the blue airmail envelope. He handed it to Nora. She read the back and smiled. It was from Olga, the tall, blonde Russian godmother to her fourteen-month-old daughter, Betty. Nora knew from their time together in England that her husband and his friend Olga had escaped to London at the end of World War II. They had both survived Hitler’s concentration camps but neither ever spoke of those times. Betty was never to know her godmother as Olga and Nora gradually lost touch.

Nora stood at the gate with the warmth of the midday sun on her back and read to the end of the letter. The last line was still tumbling over in her mind as she slipped it into the pocket of her skirt.

I’m so glad that now you know everything about him.

Love,

Olga.

Know what? The letter gave no details. What else was there to know about her husband, Antoni Jagielski, or Tony, as she called him?

Sitting on the front verandah in the cool of the evening, after putting Betty to bed, Nora looked at her husband. He was perched on the edge of his chair, looking into the distance. She redid her hair into a tighter French roll, firmly pushing in the tortoiseshell comb.

Nora knew from Tony’s Polish friends in London that they felt betrayed by the Allies, on whose side they had fought, when Poland was given to the Soviet Union at the end of World War II. As a member of the resistance, who had fought against the totalitarianism of both the Germans and the Russians, Tony couldn’t return to a now-communist Poland. Most of the resistance fighters who had, were imprisoned, sent to Stalin’s concentration camps or executed. They were seen as a threat to the new regime. In 1955, this was all largely unknown in country Lismore.

Nora and Tony sat quietly for a while. She twisted the corner of her cotton handkerchief, around and around, until she ventured “Tony, we’re about to start our new life in Australia. Is there something we need to talk about...? Something I should know?”

He turned to her, jaw set, face blank. He looked into her face for a long time. He hesitated. Was he tempted to tell her the truth? But then, he answered definitively “No, no, nothing.”

She felt the letter in her pocket. Should she show it to him? She decided not to.

He shook his head and stood. He told her he was going for a walk. This had been his practice since they had met and married in London two years previously. He walked for hours. Every night. In London, and now in Lismore. She never asked where he went or if he saw anyone or why he was gone for so long. She never did ask many questions. It wasn’t in her nature or common for women in those days to question their husbands. She went to bed still pondering Olga’s words “*I’m so glad that now you know everything about him.*”

In 1952, Nora had sailed to England from Australia on the P&O ‘*Mooltan*’, for a working holiday - an adventurous undertaking for a twenty-one-year-old who had grown up on a farm at Karangi in northern New South Wales. Tony had been shipped to England as a political refugee after surviving four years in the Nazi concentration camps and joining what was left of the Polish army under British command in Italy at the end of the war.

When they met, Nora was working as a waitress in a London hotel and Tony was a charming veteran with a good job at the Bata Shoe Company in East Tilbury. She was twenty-two. He was forty-four. They were both homesick and lonely in London. He was well dressed, well mannered - raised his hat, opened doors and pulled out chairs. “A real gentleman with that European flair,” said Nora. They both loved to dance and listen to music. Before she knew it, Nora was in love and happily pregnant. He proposed, and they were married in December 1953 and lived on the Bata Estate in East Tilbury. As a Catholic, he might have married her because it was the right thing to do; he might have been in love and ready for a new life. Their daughter, Betty, was born in May the following year.

The morning after the arrival of Olga’s letter and their conversation on the verandah in Lismore, Nora awoke to kookaburras laughing outside her window. She rolled over to look at her husband, but Tony was not in their bed. She called out, looked

through the house. He was nowhere to be seen. There was no note. She went back into the bedroom and looked at the top of the wardrobe. His suitcase was gone.

Nora didn't see Tony again for six years so she filed for divorce on the grounds of desertion. The next time they met, they were both waiting for the lift to the courtroom in the Supreme Court of New South Wales in Sydney. The two detectives who had been assigned to Nora told her to walk to the back of the lift. They formed a human shield between her and Tony. She didn't know why this was necessary. She held onto the smooth timber rail to steady herself. Her best grey suit felt tight and uncomfortable. Her mouth was dry. She closed her eyes for a moment rather than look at the back of Tony's head, his broad neck and shoulders. When the lift stopped, the detectives waited until Tony was walking towards the courtroom before they escorted her to sit with Mr Dovey, her legal counsel.

By the end of the court proceedings, Nora knew that Tony was a bigamist, with a wife in Poland. Perhaps this was what Olga knew and was referring to in her letter? Perhaps Tony had lied to Olga that he had told Nora about his Polish family. Or was there something else? Nora and Betty would never know what Olga meant but Nora's mild questioning had been enough to prompt Tony to flee.

Nora's marriage was annulled. She never married again. She was a single mother in country New South Wales throughout the 1960s and '70s and Betty grew up without her father as an only child.

Until Tony wrote a letter to her when she was nineteen. He'd been in Australia all that time but was about to return to his homeland and Polish family. He believed he was dying. It was 1974, he was sixty-five and he wanted to be buried in Poland. He had decided to risk the communist regime.

The writing class exercise stirred all sorts of childhood memories and also a recognition of how little I knew about my father. It prompted a thirst for an understanding of Antoni Jagielski's life and his decisions.

Chapter 2 Packing Up a Life

In late September 2011, Mum was at home in Gosford when she had a brain haemorrhage. No warning. No illness leading up to it. My namesake Aunty Betty was with her and called an ambulance. They'd just come back from visiting relatives in Gunnedah. I was staying with friends in the Blue Mountains and my children, Tom, twenty-three, and Georgie, twenty, were in Sydney. We were told she was in a critical condition and to come straight away.

On the two-hour drive, memories of her life came, strangely, sometimes like a resume and sometimes as flashes of times we'd shared.

When I was three, Mum took a permanent job as the live-in manageress of the Plantation Hotel in Coffs Harbour. I couldn't live there with her. For my birthday that year, she gave me a brush and comb and said 'Part your own hair. Make your own decisions.' It was a story she proudly told many times over the years with no understanding of how alone those eight words made me feel.

By the time I went to boarding school at nine, I'd lived with almost a dozen different families. They weren't all as nice as they seemed when Mum was there. She'd visit when she could and took me out on Sundays sometimes. Hotel life looks glamorous but it's hard work with long, unsociable hours. Being a young single mother wasn't easy. Being a foster child wasn't easy either.

I drove as fast as I dared. An image of her dressing me in a hula skirt on a rare holiday in Surfers Paradise came to me and then I saw her sitting on the back step of my house in Sydney, mango dripping down her chin and arms, after a day's gardening. I recalled our long conversations on the first nights of holidays from boarding school, sitting in a borrowed car at the lookout after she'd picked me up from the airport - such special time alone with her before she went back to work. Like video clips I saw us setting up her camper-trailer at Noosa, South West Rocks and Kiama for camping holidays with Tom and Georgie and our campervan drive across the Nullarbor one Christmas holiday - Georgie's tenth birthday at Wave Rock. I fought tears as I remembered biting her on the arm one time when she left me with a new family. And there was the night I paraded in my first pair of heels at the Australia Hotel dining room as she smiled approvingly - the pianist at the white grand piano playing *Que Sera Sera* as she sang along. She taught my kids to fish in the river and laughed with them when

they were little as they were shooing the skittering and squawking chooks and ducks into their pens to keep them safe from dingos and foxes at night - she had started life on a farm and went back to a farm when she retired. *You can't die. I'm not ready for you to die. Who's my family if you aren't here?*

A nurse showed me to a room in Emergency. Mum was lying on her side, her silver hair softly framing her face, Auntie Betty stroking her hand. The doctor showed me the brain scan and the extent of the bleed. She was in a coma and there was nothing they could do for her. She was floating between life and death, holding on, about to let go. Tom and Georgie arrived. I sensed she'd waited for them. We each took some time with her to say goodbye.

"We've been through hard times and fabulous times Mum - and great adventures too. I don't know what I would've done without you to help me look after Tom and Georgie. What a great Nanna you have been. I'm really going to miss you."

She passed away gently with us all around her.

It took six months to sell Mum's house. Gradually, I sorted through what to keep and what to let go, sifting through a life. Tom and Georgie came to help on moving day.

"Look at this Mum," called Georgie as she emerged from the second bedroom. She had an envelope in one hand and a small brown suitcase with rusty fold down catches balanced on her hip. I noticed how tall she was, with her long willowy limbs and her dancer's posture. I felt short and round beside her.

She handed me a faded brown envelope. I recognised my mother's distinctive big-loop, flowing handwriting on the outside. 'This is the property of Betty Maria O'Neill.' It was signed *Nora O'Neill* and dated 24/9/64.

I slid out an A5 sized photo, wrapped in a yellowed sheet of stationery. It was a black and white photo of my parents on their wedding day. In it my mother's eyes are soft. She has a dark-lipstick, gentle smile. She's wearing a light-coloured suit, lace handkerchief in the breast pocket, white lace blouse buttoned to the neck, pearl earrings and a small, head-hugging white faux-fur hat. Her arm is hooked through my father's. They are the same height: five feet four inches. His eyes are bright, sharp and clear. A wide smile causes crescent creases from nose to chin on both sides of his square face. His double-breasted dark suit also has a white handkerchief in the breast pocket. His perfectly knotted tie sits neatly on his crisp white shirt. Everything about him looks balanced and deliberate.

“For their honeymoon they went to the ballet to see Swan Lake,” I said.

Georgie lifted a shoe box out of the suitcase, its lid held on with a red elastic band. Inside were a dozen or so letters. I recognised my father’s handwriting.

“My God! Nanna kept the letters from the time I met my father, when I was nineteen.”

“Why Poste Restante?” Georgie asked looking at the address on an envelope.

“It was a precaution. We didn’t know what he’d be like.”

I opened the earliest letter. It was written on tissue-fine white Basildon airmail paper.

31. 1. 1974

My Dear Betty!

Thanks very much for accepted my offer
not much but somewhat.

Very importance for me
I have with your this way contact
I very happy

Remember, if. your are same trouble
anythink please writing too me!...
your know my adress.

Please give too Mum (Dora) my best
regard I very gratefully for her

Your Father Terry.

I didn’t want to think about my father, but churning feelings and images of him persisted - the small, dingy Sydney flat he had lived in; the hat and coat he hid his body under; his silent, unwanted, hovering presence wherever I went. I shook off a shiver and shut down the images, annoyed by his intrusion into my grief. It was Mum who deserved

my thoughts, but he kept pushing his way in over the months that followed until I found myself sitting at my dining room table with the shoebox of his letters in front of me.

I removed the red elastic band, lifted the lid and smelt the waft of camphor. My thumb fanned the tops of the neatly lined up letters. I shifted in my chair. I could easily put the lid back on the box and that would be that. But I didn't. I skipped the first letter - I'd read it the day we were packing up Mum's house. On the front and back of the next white envelope was a red crayon cross, dividing the envelope into four quadrants - the post office's way of marking a registered letter. It said:

Sydney 13.2.74

Dear Betty!

After 18 years, very long times, your Mother allow mee (permission) see your!

I very happy and proud, your are very nice, lovely and beauty -

I have no position, no condition change any thing, and ask for Justice -

End July 1974 I must left Australia's for good. I know and understand, I going to blind, and must die - in my country where I born - Poland.

Write to me few lines please. What your thinking about mee? I like to see your every 4 week?

Father

Tony

Anger had me sitting back in my chair, arms folded, foot tapping on the carpet. Yes, Mum's fault you disappeared never to be seen for eighteen years and then you waltz back in and want Justice. For what? You want to know what I think of you - do you really? And would deign to see me every four weeks before you disappear again? I was hurt, full of rage, and nineteen again, all in a flash.

Chapter 3 Meeting My Father

December, 1973

Mum and I were in her back garden in Coffs Harbour, planting lettuce, when the phone rang. My first year as a student at university had finished and I'd driven up from Sydney to spend a few days with her in the lead up to Christmas. It was Auntie Betty on the phone. She'd called to say a letter had arrived at her house for me. "This might be a shock for you Betty, but it's from Tony, your father," she said.

"After all these years," said Mum when I told her. She brushed a brown curl from her forehead with the back of her gloved hand and stood with her hand on her hip. "Is it from Poland or is he still here in Australia?"

He was still in Australia, in Marrickville, Sydney. He wanted to meet me and I was curious to meet him. Mum had tried to find him for me when I was fourteen but with no luck. I'd assumed then that I'd probably never meet him.

Mum agreed to come with me and suggested we meet him in a public place and not tell him where I lived, worked or went to university. Given his past, this seemed sensible. Her last encounter with him had been twelve years ago, in the divorce court, where detectives had been assigned to escort her for protection. We still didn't know what they'd found out about Tony that made them think that was necessary. Wanting to get through the ordeal as quickly as possible and not being one to question things, Mum had never asked.

Tony chose Sydney Airport as our meeting place. It seemed a strange suggestion. Maybe he was leaving again. We were there on time and as we studied the faces, I began to wonder if either Mum or I would recognise him. I'd only seen him in the wedding photo taken twenty years ago. We waited forty-five minutes. He didn't show up.

"His home address is on the back of the letter, Mum. We've come this far. Let's drive over there."

He was living in a granny flat at the back of a bungalow in Marrickville. We followed the owner, a Russian woman, as she waddled down a narrow side-path and then there he was. Short, square and solid. He had the same shaped face as me, the same blue eyes.

So this was Antoni Jagielski. This was my father. I felt numb.

We'd mixed up the international and domestic airport terminals as the meeting place. With a small gesture of his hand and a slight nod, he invited us inside. A stale smell of boiled cabbage and disinfectant greeted us. We sat at a round pine kitchen table that was pushed against the wall, covered with a red and white checked plastic cloth. He talked about the airport and the traffic. We nodded and smiled. He made us International Roast Caterers' Blend. Mine was in a large navy-blue mug, cracked and crazed on the inside. He fussed about and although it was only 11.00am, he produced a few slices of cold sausage, a jar of pickled herrings, gherkins, cheese and some leftover boiled potatoes from the fridge. We politely put a little of each onto the mismatched plates he placed in front of us. Then there was a long pause. Mum filled the silence, which took his gaze off me. I speared a gherkin with my fork and bit into it. I wanted to leave. I was curious to stay. I sat very still, listening and watching. I felt like a little girl again, arriving at the home of another new family, alert for signals of how to behave. The tension was palpable. It was not at all how I had dreamed or hoped it would be. All the years of wanting a father who would give me a big hug, tell me I was safe and loved and important and that he'd look after me; all the years of hoping for a Disney, heart-connected, happy ending evaporated on that hot Sydney Saturday.

I noticed my short, shallow breathing and the bite of the vinegar from the gherkin at the back of my throat. He asked me if I had a job, in his thick heavy accent. Even after all these years in Australia his English wasn't fluent.

"Yes, I'm working part-time at the Carlton Rex Hotel in the city." Mum poked me under the table. I'd told him where I worked.

He asked me about university.

"I'm studying History and Psychology at the University of New South Wales." I'd done it again. Where was my brain?

He nodded. His movements were slow and deliberate as his short fingers, nails clean and neatly cut, picked up the salt for his cold boiled potato. He looked to Mum and me and back again. His mouth smiled but there was no warmth in his eyes.

"Betty's done so well at her studies," Mum said.

My father nodded again and then said something about the weather.

Really? The weather? I wanted to scream at him. How about an explanation for where you've been for the last eighteen years? Or why you disappeared one night? Or why are you contacting us now? Why don't you ask Mum, *How have you managed all*

these years on your own Nora? I'm so sorry I haven't supported you or Betty - here's a million dollars and my right hand to make up for it.

I could sit still no longer. Politeness had formed a stopper in my throat but questions continued to push against it. It was like trying to hold a beach ball under water. I asked to use the bathroom. In the mirror there was no sign of the abandoned baby-toddler-little girl-teenager-young-woman. I looked surprisingly normal.

It was time to leave. My father protested but I had had enough. He said he'd write to me and send it to the G.P.O. I looked at him and let go of any remnant of the idea of a father-daughter bond developing.

Mum and I wound down the windows of my little white Datsun to let in some fresh air. I turned the key in the ignition and looked at across at her. "Well," I said, "I won't be doing that again."

Weeks later, during a break at work at the hotel, I walked down Castlereagh Street to the G.P.O. and the Poste Restante window and signed for a registered letter from my father. I'm not sure why I went that day. Maybe I wanted to know if he would write like he said he would. What would he say if he did? Was it possible that something might change in the way I felt about him or the way he was? I put the letter in my bag and read it when I got home. I rang Mum.

"It's up to you Betty. As you say, he won't be here for long. If you want to see him again, go ahead. A public place, remember." She paused. "And try not to tell him too much."

"I do feel a bit sorry for him. I wonder why he's going blind."

I rattled the packet of cigarettes sitting on the coffee table. Three left. I lit one and sat thinking.

I met him at the G.P.O. in the city the following Saturday afternoon before my early evening shift at the hotel. He was standing on the top step when I arrived. Grey suit, white shirt, navy tie and charcoal grey fedora. I noticed his lip twitch when he saw me walking towards him. This small movement unnerved me, but it was a habit of his with which I would become familiar. We said hello, awkwardly shook hands and sat on a bench in Martin Place. The conversation was stilted and awkward. What do you say to a sixty-five-year-old man you've just met who is your father? I asked about his letter, saying he was going blind. He had glaucoma. I didn't know what that was and he had difficulty explaining. There was an urgency in his tone that I didn't understand. He was

becoming agitated, clearing his throat so often he could barely speak. I decided to leave. I made my apologies and said I had to go to work. He offered to send me some pocket money. I wanted to get away, and because I couldn't think of a valid reason to give him for not doing so, when he asked, I gave him my address.

The next letter I received had no stamp and no postmark. It hadn't come through the post office. Had he come to my block of units and put it in the letterbox? Surely not. Why didn't he post it like a normal person?

Monday 4.3.1974

My Dear Betty!

According to my promise, enclose \$100 -

With my great pleasure -

Thanks very much, for lovely Saturday

You Father:

AJagielski xxxxxxxxxxxx.....

He also offered to buy me a desk and a bed, which I accepted. I figured it was fair enough. Mum had worked three jobs at times to afford to send me to a good school as a boarder and now I was a student supporting myself.

I was sharing a unit down the road from the university in Kingsford with a girlfriend from school. Next door were the Tan brothers, Arthur, Peter and Charlie, from Malaysia. Their parents had sent them to Sydney to do their business degrees. Charlie and I became good friends. He taught me to make Malay curries and cook rice properly. My only offering was a meatloaf. He played guitar and I played piano. Mum had bought this precious instrument for me so I could practice for my exams when I came home from boarding school on holidays. The piano now had pride of place in the unit.

A week after the first letter was put in our letterbox, I found another and some papers pushed under our front door.

Sydney 10.3.74

My Dear Betty!

According to delivery this bed, please precede this nex dor frends (Chinese Boys) that delivery men's bee ask for my name Mr. Antoni Jagielski.

Please keep safe all this doc. For bed and for desk, what I place under dor, desk is on you name.

I am hope everything be O/K.

Good luck my Betty

You Father

AJagielski xxxx

The bed and desk were duly delivered with a box full of obligation to continue to see my father, although my instinct was to say thank you and goodbye. *Come for lunch my place. Saturday 12 o'clock.* He said he had important and urgent things to tell me and show me. I was like a hungry fish, a little wary but lured by each dangled morsel.

I went to his flat the following Saturday but regretted it almost as soon as I arrived. During lunch he showed me a black and white passport photo of a woman in her forties. It was his daughter, my half-sister, Janina (Yah-NEEN-a). She looked like an older version of me. Her face was square, her hair brown and wavy. I wondered if she tried to straighten it like I did.

“She live in Poland. She have two boy childs.”

I didn't feel any great urge to know more about them but I did want to leave. I stood, saying, “I have to go. I have to get to work.”

He pushed his chair from the table and grabbed my shoulders, his fingers digging into my flesh. He pulled me to him, tried to kiss me on the lips. Confused, I turned my head and pushed away. He grabbed me again. What was going on? What was he doing? I found my handbag, rummaged for my car keys and ran out the door. My head was hurting, stomach queasy. I would never go back.

After that Saturday lunch, Tony wrote me letters every few days, signed *Your Father*. He asked me to ‘*Forget this Misunderstanding ---- - - -I remember now Reliationship like father an child -----This is my fault.*’

Fathers don't try to kiss their daughters like that. I couldn't ‘*forget this misunderstanding*’. I didn't reply. Five days later another letter arrived. Again, slid under my door. ‘*This performance is over! Who is perfect? No One I am verify myself I am make mistakes - I am very sorry. I am prepare to leave this country in July. I have not much times - No one like me, no one want me?*’

I was not surprised no-one liked him or wanted him. I felt the same way. I hoped that if I ignored him, he'd go away again but four days later, another letter appeared

under my door. *'I am lost my balance - - and my system nervous weakness every day. only one my recovery I must see you sometimes, if not coming too me tragic end....'*

I stared at the letter. Who is coming to '*tragic end*'? Is he talking about himself or threatening me? Either way, I didn't know what to do. I jumped as the phone rang. It was Mum.

"Betty, I received a telegram from Tony yesterday."

This must be serious. It arrived yesterday and she had waited until this morning to call. Mum never rang with upsetting news at night. Why disturb your sleep?

"I know this isn't true and it goes to show that he's not all there. He says that you are prostituting yourself and the Chinese boys next door are selling drugs."

"Me? Prostituting myself - where? Who with? And Charlie and Peter selling drugs - who to? What's his problem?"

We decided to ignore him but a week later Mum received a letter, posted to her home in Coffs Harbour. *'Nora!!! All this family affairs - Like; Party to 2 am. - drug - pills - morality. Many many frends, special china boys -- I verify all this myself. this is true.*

He finished the letter with *'Please pay in times for bed - this is agriment you and mee - I am brok. Tony'*

Mum paid for the bed and the desk.

Tony became more and more desperate to see me. He constantly rang me. I didn't answer his letters or calls but I developed an uneasy feeling that he was always there, somewhere in the shadows, watching me. Within weeks, I began to see him. I would open the curtains to the balcony of our flat and there he would be, standing on the grassy rise between our block and the next. I would walk down the path to the letter boxes and he would be across the road by the telegraph pole. He always stood straight and still in his suit, his hat and coat. When I caught sight of him, there was never any sign of recognition on his face. There was no expression at all. I didn't say much to anyone about this though my flatmate and I talked about it a couple of times. She'd seen him lurking about too.

"Betty, your father's a nutcase. Call the police. Have him arrested!"

That seemed extreme. I was afraid they'd talk to him but not arrest him and then the situation would get worse. I didn't call the police. I said very little to Mum. I didn't want her to worry. She was in Coffs Harbour, what could she do?

A few weeks later there was a postcard in the letter box for me. On the front was a 3D photo of a red rose on a black background, a glistening drop of water on one of its dark green leaves. On the back was a Polish stamp, a blue *Lotnicza Par Avion* sticker and my name and address. It said:

Poland - Lublin 8.V.1974

Wishing

all the good things

for a sister Betty

It's good to have You!

Janina.

A birthday card from my half-sister? No return address. Didn't she want me to write back to her? How strange. I was later to see the same rose postcard in my father's flat in Poland.

Mum came to stay for a few days for my birthday. It didn't take long for all that had been happening to come spilling out: the stalking, the peeping, the incessant phone calls, the waiting for me until I finished work and following me. I didn't realise how scared I was until I started talking.

"How about I come and stay with you for a while - until he leaves for Poland?"

"Could you? Really?"

By Friday Mum had resigned from her job in Coffs Harbour and would start working at Barker Lodge, the motel around the corner from our unit, on Monday. She organised to meet with Tony and tell him not to contact me or come anywhere near the unit. By the time I went to bed that night, I felt safe for the first time in months. But Tony persisted.

Sydney 19.5.1974

My Dear Betty!

Times run for me, I have not much times for fun, be angry (game) I like to cleare myself.

*A.) I am right to know all about my Daughter after 18 yrs but I going too far
my guilt = -100%*

But: I am you father I have good intentions

My plus= 30%

I try help you = 30% +100%

I am lonely and despairing = 40%

According to my calculation I am clear

I call Nora, you mother for justice, about this my right, and good intentions -

He went on to part B) - *your guilt* - but concluded I was 'O/K' and he was wrong, very wrong and proposed Mum, he and I have lunch every two weeks but ending with '*If you refuse I coming every week to Hotel see you, I have no chose, I must see you.*'

A couple of days later, two separate letters arrived in an envelope addressed to Mum. The one to me said his departure was 'very close' and more apologies about the misunderstanding and his good intentions. He even suggested we '*Makes little party for last times, for goodboy.*'

And to Mum, '*all times I bee gentlemen from 1953 in England, and now, for last times 1974. I say goodboy Australia you and my little Betty. I never forget Nora-Betty and this country.*'

Two weeks later, another letter sought reconciliation '*I try discover solution for this affairs and return relationships --- I try not to flirting with yours. I am you Father. I have very serious problem I need you for security my life in comunist country - I must have a conference, with you and mother, in you place, next week? Please!*'

"So, finally the truth comes out. Look at this Mum. The only reason he contacted us at all was to protect himself against the communists back in Poland. He must have thought that if he got into trouble we'd help him out."

Mum was in the kitchen peeling potatoes for dinner. I showed her the letter.

"He can't stand the communists," Mum said, "but he wants to go back to Poland before he dies. I think he's scared."

Another letter with \$20 asked for a colour photo of me before 20th July when he was leaving. July came and went, on rolled August. His departure date was continually delayed. He said he was waiting for a payout from the German government for his war

injuries. He had lost his sense of smell, had tinnitus, a lung disease and other injuries from the war that he didn't want to talk about and I didn't want to know.

"Do you believe him, Mum?"

"Betty, I have no idea when he's telling the truth and when he's lying. Sometimes, I don't think he knows either."

"How did you come to marry him?"

She sat down, took off her shoes and circled her feet.

"He wasn't like this twenty years ago. He was charming and considerate and a real gentleman and I fell in love with him. He'd been a water engineer in Poland and invented a machine for the Bata shoe company. He was popular and interesting and I was... I was very lonely and homesick at the time."

"What about when you came back to Australia?"

"Well, you know, you and I lived with Nanna in Lismore. It was six months or more until Tony arrived and then, after a couple of weeks, he disappeared. By that stage I was used to being without him. And I had you. I was home and happy."

"I can't imagine him fitting into country life in Lismore."

It was hard to reconcile the man Mum had married with the man I had been getting to know. I also calculated that when he arrived in Lisomore, Mum would have been 25 and he, 46.

Finally, Tony received his money and booked his ticket to Poland. We didn't have the '*goodboy little party*' but we did take him to the airport. After all his lies, I wanted to make sure he really left.

Sydney International Airport

17th October 1974

My father nudged me with his elbow. I pulled back from the physical contact. He directed my gaze, quickly lifting and then dropping his grey trouser leg back to the top of his highly polished black leather lace-up shoes. A wad of money was strapped to the inside of his calf.

"For safety," he said, "Don't want Communist pigs take my money."

It seemed an obvious place to look if you were searching someone but I said nothing. I looked up to see if anyone else had noticed.

His flight was due to leave in forty-five minutes. I prayed it wouldn't be delayed. I folded my arms around my handbag, re-crossed my legs and stared down at my pin-striped flares. My foot jiggled. Surely they would call for passengers soon. Mum ran a commentary on people passing by: '*She's* dressed up to the nines! Poor thing, he looks so upset; love the shade of that green coat.'

Voices announced flights departing, flights delayed, last calls and then,

"Flight QF1 to London is now boarding at Gate 3. All passengers please make your way to the gate for departure."

He was to fly to London, get a connecting flight to Warsaw and then on to Lublin, his home town.

Tony looked at me, raising his eyebrows for verification that this was his flight. I nodded. He picked up his leather briefcase and removed his passport and boarding pass from the inside pocket of his suit jacket.

Mum and I walked with him as far as we could go. He shook my hand and then Mum's, said "Good-boy," and walked away. He didn't look back.

Mum put her arm around my shoulders with a squeeze, sharing the relief that he had actually gone.

"We can forget about him now Betty, and get on with our lives."

We would never see him or hear from him again.

Chapter 4

The Search for Antoni Jagielski Begins

When I was seven, on Anzac Day I lied that my father had been killed in the war. It explained why I didn't have a daddy like everyone else at the Coffs Harbour Infants' School. At fourteen, I'd asked Mum some questions she couldn't answer. She'd buried what she did know about my father years before. She tried to find him but couldn't. At nineteen I was relieved when he returned to Poland to die. But in my late fifties my appetite for an explanation returned.

Maybe it was the grief of my mother's passing, the aloneness of an adult only-child orphan, or the need to feel into my roots, to stabilise, to know the other half of my gene pool, to know the end of the story. Whatever it was, I knew I had to find out what had happened to Tony Jagielski for him to make the choices he made and I also wanted to know what had happened to him when he returned to Poland. Born in 1909, I wouldn't find the man, but I wanted to understand his story and try to find my half-sister Janina and her sons.

I began with two photos, one of my parents' wedding and the other a passport sized photo of my father from 1974. There was also my father's identification card from the Polish resistance movement and four documents - his demobilisation certificate from 1948, my parents' marriage certificate from 1953, my birth certificate from 1954 and the transcript of their divorce in 1961. Would this be enough? Where to start and how? Who could help me?



Nora and Antoni Jagielski on their wedding day December, 1953.

September, 2012

I'd never been to the Sydney Jewish Museum which documents the Holocaust and the history of the Jewish people in Australia. I thought I might learn something from their records and stories of how people traced families lost in the war, missing relatives in Poland, Jewish and even Roman Catholic, like my father.

The amount of material available was overwhelming. The museum has more than 6,000 volumes, audio and video recordings, journals, and 2,500 testimonies from Holocaust survivors interviewed in Australia. These testimonies are part of a collection of more than 53,000 testimonies gathered worldwide by the Shoah Foundation, spearheaded by Steven Spielberg, digitised and housed at the University of Southern California. I felt as if I was standing on the edge of the ocean for the first time contemplating the vastness of an ocean of the worst type of human experience.

I read some of the comments left by visitors to the museum. A school student had written:

*Those who say it never happened
Wouldn't be able to say that again
If they visited the Sydney Jewish Holocaust Museum
They would never feel the same.*

Already I didn't feel the same. I knew at that moment that whatever I discovered in this search would change me. Who would I be at the end of it?

On the mezzanine level of the museum, a scrolling memorial screen displayed faces and names of victims of the Holocaust provided by relatives in Australia. If all victims were to be shown, it would take 25,000 hours, or nearly three years, to see them all. Six million Poles were killed in WWII. This was equivalent to the total population of Australia at the beginning of the war. The stories of resistance to the German invasion and occupation of various countries began to make me see my father differently. I knew he was arrested as a political prisoner for his role in the Polish underground but I didn't know what he did or where he was. So many had died. His survival was nothing short of miraculous.

In the Camps exhibition, I traced what I knew of my father's journey on an interactive map. I pressed a button and green lights showed death camps, red lights the concentration camps, and orange lights the paths of the *Einsatzgruppen*, special units of

the SS operating as mobile killing units. Once a town was occupied, they marched people to pits or the river, lined them up and shot them.

I went through the information in my father's army demobilisation papers that Mum had kept.



Map showing the three places my father was imprisoned - Lublin, Auschwitz and Mauthausen-Gusen

My summary notes read:

11th July, 1941- arrested and jailed in Lublin Castle jail, Poland - resistance fighter.

27th November, 1941 - deported to Auschwitz, political prisoner, number 23522.

9th May, 1942 - transferred to KL Mauthausen (pronounced Mutt-howz-en), sub-camp Gusen, Austria - new numbers: 15290 and 43457.

8th May, 1945 - freed by the Americans.

8th May, 1954 - I was born in Tilbury, London.

I had a few facts and a lot of questions: What was his life like in Poland before his arrest in 1941? How did he survive four years as a prisoner in the concentration camps? Why was he moved from Auschwitz to Mauthausen? Why was he given new numbers? How did he get to London? What happened to him in the nine years between

those two May dates? He never spoke about any of this to Mum or me. I understood this silence was true of many survivors of the trauma of war and those camps.

Picking up a coffee the next morning I spotted a poster on the wall of the cafe.
‘Hill of Content Bookshop and 3 Weeds Hotel present, Lily Brett in conversation.’

When I’d read Australian author, Lily Brett’s *‘Too Many Men’* back in 1997, I’d thought that could have been me, taking my father back to Poland to discover what had happened to his home, his family in the aftermath of WWII and the Communist takeover. Brett’s parents were Polish Holocaust survivors who had come to Australia in 1948. But I hadn’t had the close relationship that she had with her father. My family was fractured by deceit and disappearance. Was it even ‘my’ family? If I ever met any of my father’s relatives, would I feel a sense of belonging, a sense of family? And what would they think of me? I was reminded of all those television shows where family trees were traced, separated families reunited, birth parents found. Did they all feel that jolt of knowing? I suspected only the happy-ever-afters were shown.

That evening, Lily Brett spoke about how history is something we carry within us; it’s present in all we do. “My parents’ history shaped me, shaped my writing,” she said.

How had my father’s history shaped me? I didn’t know enough about him at that stage to be able to say, but I wanted to find out.

The librarian at the Jewish Museum had suggested I contact the Red Cross International Tracing Service. I emailed their website and got a response the following day. Their mandate was to help *restore lost contact between family members due to war or disaster*. I wasn’t sure I qualified, but I filled out a four-page tracing form application and after several weeks was notified that *your case has been opened in NSW, number 95629*. A case number. That sounded promising.

A couple of weeks later, a letter from the Red Cross arrived. I turned it over in my hands a few times. What would it say? “So sorry, you don’t fit the criteria.

Rejected.” Or, “We can accept your case but there are five hundred thousand other people in front of you and it could take years.”

I placed the letter on the kitchen bench and looked at it as I unpacked the groceries. There were so many war-torn countries. Countless numbers of people must have lost their families. There would be so many cases far more urgent than mine. I picked up the envelope. I put it down.

Even if I found my Polish relatives, perhaps they wouldn’t know about Mum and me. If they did, perhaps they wouldn’t want to acknowledge us as family; we may be an irritation, a hiccup in time that served a purpose for my father. Perhaps there was no-one left, no family to find. Perhaps, perhaps, perhaps...

I read the front of the envelope. Australian Red Cross. The Power of Humanity. I opened it carefully, not wanting to tear or damage it in any way. I unfolded the single page. My pulse was loud through my body.

I am writing to confirm that your tracing case has been accepted by the Australian Red Cross.

Your case will now be forwarded to the Polish Red Cross for processing.

Should there be any developments in your case you will be notified immediately.

We will also contact you should we receive any progress reports or updates.

I realised I’d been holding my breath. I let go and did a little dance around the kitchen.

Sharing this discovery later with a friend, her response opened the door to a search of proportions I had never considered, “You do know you’ll have to go to Poland, Betty.”

I hadn’t thought of going to Poland. But when I heard it said so matter-of-factly, it was obvious. I wasn’t sure when or how I would afford it but in that moment, it became a fact that I would go. I would go to each of the places my father had been. I would follow his trail. From Lublin to London. All the way.

Chapter 5 The Society of Australian Genealogists

2nd March, 2013

Twenty-eight Polish books and six pamphlets came up on the Society of Australian Genealogists' (SAG) catalogue. I looked through the list. '*Polish and Proud: Tracing Your Polish Ancestry*' sounded useful. The other books were mostly to do with particular families, but no Jagielskis.

I'd come to the SAG centre in Kent Street to get some help and use their library and other resources. I started my internet search with Ancestry.com aware of a fluttering in my stomach. Dozens of entries came up but they were predominantly American. Nothing matched my father's details. I then clicked on to Familysearch.org, the site run by The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, typed in my father's details and up came:

Search results from Historical Records

1-20 of 25 results for > Name: Antoni Jagielski, Country: Poland

And there at the top of the list

Antoni Jagielski	birth: 1909	parents: Jozef Jagielski, Marjanna Cichalewska
Poland, Roman Catholic Church Books, 1600-1950	marriage: 29 Sep 1929 Lublin, Sw. Jakub Ap Lublin, Poland	spouse: Helena Porzadna

It was him. It was my father. I'd found him! 1909 was his birth year and Helena Porzadna was his first wife's name.

There was an expand button for each entry. I learned my father was twenty when he married, and his wife was nineteen. Her parents' names were Wojciech Porzadny and Teresa Małek. My father's parents' names were Jozef Jagielski and Marjanna Cichalewska. I had known that his father's name was Jozef but thought his mother was Maria, my second name. Maybe it had been anglicised? Jozef and Maria were the names written on Tony's Certificate of Demobilisation from the Polish Armed Forces. Joseph and Mary. Really? I wrote the new information in my notebook.

The documents that Mum kept stated that once Tony was freed from Mauthausen, the concentration camp in Austria, he worked in a Displaced Persons Camp in Linz, and then enlisted in the Polish Armed Forces abroad. In May, 1948, he was demobilised in England, transferred to the Army Reserve and discharged from military service. The Certificate of Demobilisation had provided most of these details, the only ones I had had about my father until then.

Back on the Familysearch website, I was about to find out something else I didn't know.

Antoni Jagielski

spouse: Helena Porzadna

Poland, Roman Catholic Church Books, 1600-1950

child: Lechosław Jan Jagielski

Child: Lechosław? Who is Lechosław? This is a boy's name. My father had told me he had a daughter, Janina. Her name is on the Demobilisation papers as the only child. Did I have a half-brother as well?

I sat there, aware of my loud, fast heartbeat, and scrolled down through the list. Janina, Janina, where *are* you, Janina? There was no record of her. I refined the search; still no Janina. But I'd received that rose postcard from her and seen a photo of her. She looked like me. Where was she? When and where was she born? Was it before my father was arrested in 1941? During his time in the concentration camps? Or afterwards in a Displaced Persons' camp?

I was getting hungry. I looked at my watch. It was 1.00pm but I didn't want to leave. I went back to the screen and clicked on the 'expand' button for the record relating to Lechosław.

"Oh no," I said out loud, "He died." It was the record of Lechosław's death on March 9, 1934 in Lublin, Poland at age 0. What did this mean? Was he stillborn? Did he live a few months? There was no record of his birth, only his death. I began to cry for someone born nearly eighty years ago; someone I'd never known, and until recently, never known about.

Back at the computer I encountered more revelations. My father was one of six children. I'd never considered him having brothers and sisters, or thought about my grandparents and their lives. I had never imagined my father's childhood; what he might have looked like in his school uniform, sitting in class, handing in his homework, playing in the playground. He would have been five at the beginning of World War I and

nine at the end of it when, after centuries of invasions and occupations, Poland became an independent democracy once more, and he was thirty when Poland was invaded and went to war again. The Nobel Prize winner for Literature in 2015, Svetlana Alexievich wrote about people of war - '*always preparing for it, fighting it, recovering from it*'. She was referring to the Belarusian and Soviet peoples but it equally applied to the Poles of my father's generation.

I hadn't thought about much in my father's life at all except what I'd made up from time to time. Perhaps this is what happens when people are absent. Who was he before the trauma of invasion and occupation, before the imprisonment and likely torture and starvation? In what ways were we alike? How does the DNA show itself? When he did reappear, he never spoke of any family, except Janina and her sons. Now I was eager for the facts.

I drew a family tree on my notepad with the six siblings I'd found and their spouses. Did they have children? Were any of them, my cousins, alive? The records showed my good Catholic grandmother's first pregnancy was in 1901 and her last in 1918. Three children died at an early age. I couldn't find a record of her death, but her husband, my grandfather, died in 1923. According to my parent's marriage certificate, my grandfather was a banker. He died a year before the death of their oldest son Jan. If my grandmother lived on after her husband, what a lot of death, loss and grief she had to bear.

I made a list of people and institutions to follow up and tried to plan a sequence in my project. Not much of a list. I wasn't getting very far. Hopefully something substantial would materialise soon.

I emailed the Red Cross again, case number 95629. They had nothing to report. Cases were updated six-monthly and mine wasn't due for review for another six weeks.

As I wasn't making a lot of progress with my father's life story, I wondered if Mum's life might provide some clues. Someone who might be able to help came to mind. She'd been friends with Mum since they worked together at the Federal Hotel in Melbourne in 1949. Mum had ended up there after completing her Leaving Certificate at St Mary's boarding school in Grafton and picking apples with friends at Batlow on her way south. I recognised Mum's friend's distinctive Yorkshire accent as soon as she answered.

"Hello Judy. It's Betty, Nora's daughter."

I pushed my laptop out of the way on my desk to make space for my notepad and my list of questions.

“Betty! How did you know I wasn’t dead? You know I’ll be ninety next year.”

I hadn’t spoken to Judy since September, 2011 when I rang to tell her Mum had died. “I’ve been wondering about your time with Mum, could I ask you...”

“It was January, 1949,” she interrupted. “when I got off the ship from England and I knew no-one...”

I didn’t need my list of questions. I didn’t ask or say much at all for over an hour as Judy talked, and I was transported back to life in 1949 at the Federal Hotel, 547 Collins Street Melbourne.

“When I was offered the job,” said Judy, “Miss Wilson, the Dining Room Manageress called out, ‘Nora, this is Judy. She can have room six, next to you. Take her upstairs and see she’s properly dressed for dinner service. You *do* have a black dress don’t you?’ ...And that’s how I met your mother. I was twenty-six and she was nineteen. We were best friends, like sisters, for the rest of our lives.”

The Federal Hotel, built in 1888, was the most lavish hotel of its time. Its advertising declared:

The Federal Hotel for Comfort, Dignity & Service.
500 Rooms, Hot and Cold Water, Bedside Reading Lamps, Telephones, etc.



1950s advertisements for the Federal Hotel

Dinner was an elegant affair with Mum, Judy and the other waitresses dressed in black, long hair pinned up in a chignon at the back, waves and pin curls at the front. An orchestra played the girls' favourite songs from The Andrews Sisters, Bing Crosby and Ella Fitzgerald.

One night, at the beginning of 1952, Nora announced to her brother Paul, who was visiting, "I'm going to England with my little pommy mate here! We've booked our passage at the P&O office and we're saving every penny we can."

"England? The King's England? Seriously Nora? They're all coming out *here*!"

"It's just for a holiday... a working holiday. And I want to go to Ireland and see where we came from."

Chapter 6 Two Wedding Photos

May, 2013

On the Friday before Mother's Day, 2013, I was on the plane to the Gold Coast to visit Judy and her husband John who lived at Nerang. Out of ideas for where else I could source information, I'd rung Judy a few times hoping for something; anything. In the latest call, she said she had photos for me and told me she'd seen Mum, but not my father, when she and John returned to England in 1954. Mum had married Tony the previous Christmas.

"It wasn't a happy situation. He wasn't a very nice man," Judy continued, "Nora didn't like to talk about it, but it started off very early in the piece."

"What started off early in the piece?"

There was a pause.

"She wasn't happy. He wasn't an honourable man. That's all I can say."

What did this mean? Did he have affairs, beat her, steal from her, lie to her? I couldn't push for more information at that stage. Maybe when I met her face-to-face. And then the revelation.

"John met him in London, you know."

No, I didn't know. At that time, John was the only living person I knew of who had met my father, even if only once. He had visited Mum and Tony at the Bata Hotel. What would he remember? What did he know?

Judy's blond-brick sixties house with its drive-in garage was on a large block with lawns like green carpet leading down the bank to the Nerang River. Three magpies warbled from the grevillea by the front door.

"You know Betty, your mother... she was a very, very honest and kind person. You couldn't wish for a better friend. I loved her, more than I loved my sisters. She was always happy, she never worried about things, she was never very serious and always ready for an adventure, any adventure."

I listened to stories of the 'six o'clock swill' when pubs closed at 6.00pm and men (mostly) would drink as much as they could in the last moments up until closing, ending up drunk in the gutters; of the parties and dances that Mum and Judy frequented, doing the bebop and jitterbug; shopping on their days off at specialty nylon stocking shops; and day trips from Melbourne on the train to Mornington. Most of these

reminiscences I had heard previously but sitting opposite Judy they gained colour, life and detail.

I kept looking out the window and up the drive for John who had gone to visit a friend in hospital.

Judy passed me a photo. "This is my wedding day." It was a photo of her with Mum as bridesmaid. They had left the Federal Hotel and Melbourne and gone to Queensland to see more of Australia before they got on the ship for England. But Judy met John there, and after a whirlwind four-week romance in August 1952, she married him and stayed in Australia. And here they were, sixty-one years later, still together and living in Nerang. I looked at the photo noticing Mum's smiling eyes, full face, curvy figure, standing tall and confident in her lace dress.

I passed Judy the brown envelope that held the photo of Mum and my father on their wedding day. "I also have a wedding photo."

She stared at the photo for some time.

"Ah Nora," Judy shook her head and paused. "She looks so sad. That's not her; not her usual happy self. Look at those sad eyes."

I hadn't seen them as sad eyes, just soft, but comparing Mum in the two wedding photos, I could see what Judy meant.

"You don't think she was happy?" I asked.

"Not when she talked about him. She didn't say much. I think she was too sad. He was a disappointment to her. I think... oh," she looked across at me, "I shouldn't say that. He was your father."

"It's okay Judy, I barely knew him." But Judy had informed me that he wasn't an honourable man and that Mum was unhappy.

"Fancy leaving her with a new baby. And she struggled on. She was a wonderful person, your mother, and I'll back that up with anybody."

I walked to the window, wishing John would arrive and noticed photos of their three daughters on the sideboard.

"They're all psychologists you know... my girls. That's how we got the three diagnoses of John's dementia."

I attempted to steady my voice and said, "Dementia? John has dementia?"

"It started about three years ago. He forgets things, loses things, you can't reason with him."

I understood dementia only affected short-term memory. Maybe he would still remember Tony. His condition couldn't be too bad if he was still able to drive on his own. We heard the garage door opening. At last. John was home. He walked through the kitchen, tall and lanky, with a black moustache and big white smile. He gave me a hug hello.

"Look what we've got here John." Judy showed him the photo of my parents. "Who do you think that is?"

With a smile John recognised Mum but not my father. He had no recall of the details of their Bata Hotel meeting. What on earth was I thinking, that John would remember one meeting almost sixty years ago? As I drove away, I smiled and waved goodbye. I pulled up around the corner, out of sight, then leant my forehead on the steering wheel and sobbed in disappointment and frustration. Would I ever find anyone or anything? Were they all dead, or demented?

Dead ends, brick walls and 'can't-help-yous'. No news from the Red Cross or the Polish Consulate; no replies from emails I'd sent to a range of Polish institutions. I wanted to know where my father had lived, where he was imprisoned, when he'd died and where he'd been buried. Who had buried him, what did they know? I hadn't even been able to get a death certificate. It would have been easier if I'd known where he had died and when, rather than sometime after 1974.

"Forty years! That's forty years you want us to look at!" said the young woman at the Polish Consulate in Woollahra. She glared at me through the thick glass partition that divided us. It was more like a secure bank teller's box than an embassy.

I'd filled in a form requesting my father's death certificate. As I slid it under the glass, the young woman looked at me with contempt. "You have to complete it in Polish," she said. I explained I didn't know Polish and as there was no-one else in the Consulate, I asked if she would help me. Sighing, shaking her head and frowning she put a thick black line through each English word and wrote in Polish above it.

"Forty years! We can only look at a five-year period," she said.

"Okay. Let's start from 1974 and if that turns up nothing, then I fill in another form for the next five years, is that right?"

“I suppose so.”

At \$50 a search, and the possibility of eight searches, that was \$400.

“How long does it usually take to do this search and get a Death Certificate?”

“Oh, two or three months. It depends.”

For eight searches, that would be two years. As I left, closing the heavy security gate, the wind blew cold. I buttoned up my coat and looked up through the plane trees to a clear sky the colour of cornflowers. Maybe I should have filled in eight forms, paid the \$400 and been done with it. It may have been quicker. Time was becoming an important factor for me. I was teaching at the University of Technology, Sydney, and planned to go to Lublin, Auschwitz, Mauthausen and the Bata Estate over the three-month semester break starting in early November. I had some savings that should last if I was frugal. November was only five months ahead and at this stage I had little information and no Polish leads.

One rainy morning, a few weeks later, the postman arrived with a registered letter from the Polish Consulate in Sydney. Standing in the shelter of the front verandah, I opened the envelope. There was a short letter and a certificate, both written in Polish. I tried to make sense of it.

Konsulat Generalny Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej w Sydney przesyła w załączeniu odpis skrócony międzynarodowego aktu zgonu na nazwisko:

Antoni Jagielski

Data i miejsce zgonu: 24.08.1996r.

Numer aktu: 2990/1996

Did this mean Tony died in 1996? But he went back to Poland to die in 1974 and my form was supposed to only cover a five-year search period. He lived until he was 87? Twenty-two years after he left Australia, after Mum and I put him on that plane to Poland?

On the back of the second page, there was a key to the numbered boxes of the certificate with translations into other languages, including English. The certificate was a Death Registration extract. The date and place of death was 24/08/1996 Lublin. It gave Tony's date and place of birth, his parent's names and then, *Name of last spouse: Helena*

Jagielska. This was his first wife, with the feminine version of his surname. The woman he married when he was twenty, in 1929. Did this mean she was still alive when he returned to Poland in 1974? Did he go back to live with her? Did she outlive him? Was this why her name was on his death certificate?

I was still standing on the front verandah, unable to move. From this certificate, I had proof he was dead. There was a time I would have noted this fact and added it to my chronology of events and that would have been that. But for some reason, this information inveigled its way into my being. I suddenly felt alone. Both my parents were dead. I read the back and front of the death certificate many times, searching for more information. Nothing about Janina. I'd hoped there'd be mention of her. I went back inside and sat at the dining room table, looking at the letter and certificate, looking out the windows to the rain and the wind thrashing through the Moreton Bay Fig trees.

If Tony died in 1996, he would have witnessed the revolution against communism which started in Poland with the Solidarity movement in the 1980s and the fall of the Berlin wall that signalled the collapse of communist regimes all across Europe. He would have seen democracy restored to Poland. Would he have felt vindicated? I recalled all the displays at the Jewish museum. Had he realised then that all he, and millions of others, had endured, had ultimately been a successful resistance against both fascism and communism? Had he been treated as a hero when he returned and recognised for his contribution to his country? Would I ever find out?

And if Helena was alive in 1996, when did she die? Were Janina and her boys still alive? There was no trace of them yet.

Chapter 7 2013 discoveries

By the end of June, I'd made a little more progress, discovering the name of the ship and date of my father's arrival in Sydney; information about Mum's life before she went to England and her unhappy marriage with my father; a copy of my father's death certificate and some additional members for the Jagielski family tree. But I still had nothing about Janina and her sons.

Scanning the internet for things Polish in Australia, I found a Polish Archive and Museum in Melbourne and made contact. After explaining my situation, a woman offered, "I have a friend that might be able to help you. Her name is Krystyna Duszniak. She has a business called Lost Histories. She helps people find their Polish families. She's used to dealing with officials and getting information. Of course, speaking Polish helps." And so began a much more productive Polish search: four months of emails, application forms and letters to Poland, asking for information, ordering copies of certificates and residential records. The phone calls Krystyna made to Poland sometimes got information immediately. Sometimes not. The process took time and patience but Krystyna's experience opened up new avenues of information. When she saw the death certificate I'd received from the consulate, she said, "We can get more than that, but if you don't ask, they don't disclose it." We could get information such as my father's marital status at his time of death, his address, and who had reported his death. We could also apply to the International Tracing Service (ITS) in Bad Arolsen, Germany, for information. Their website was impressive:

The International Tracing Service (ITS) in Bad Arolsen is an internationally governed centre for documentation, information and research on Nazi persecution, incarceration in concentration camps, ghettos and Gestapo prisons, forced labour and displaced persons.

From 1946, they had responded to 11.8 million requests for information on victims of Nazi persecution. They were currently receiving 1,000 requests every month, from around 70 countries. I found the numbers difficult to make tangible in any way. So many people still trying to find relatives or information about them, was a glimpse into the enormity of the impact of WWII on families down through the generations and

across space and time. 11.8 million was half the total population of Australia. No wonder responses took three to four months.

They needed my father's last residential address. This would be in the death certificate records. That enquiry was the priority. Krystyna had also had other clients who had been to the ITS in Germany. Almost impenetrable by email, the ITS were willing to look up all sorts of materials for personal visitors. I added it to my itinerary. Perhaps I should start there in November.

Krystyna made enquiries at Lublin's four cemeteries to find where my father was buried. She also contacted the Lublin archives to check residential records for his address before the war. And she found that Lechisław, my father's son, born in 1934, had died at the age of one month. Now I was getting somewhere. What a difference when you know where to look, what to ask, and speak Polish. But Krystyna still could find no evidence of my half-sister Janina. I was beginning to wonder if she existed at all.

During these months, Krystyna and her assistant Monika would often work late into the night - to coincide with Polish daytime. Each morning as I woke, I reached for my phone to see what news had been emailed overnight.

9th July

Hi Betty,

I called the registry in Lublin. They told me that the original death record has your father's last residential address and also the name of the informant but they will not give it over the phone because of privacy law. You need to send them a letter in Polish requesting a full version of his death certificate (letter attached). I also added a request for Janina's birth certificate. Please print, sign and post. We can request all the documents you would like, but I'm not sure if they'll issue them, though when we write the story of your father's life and your quest to discover more, I think they will sympathise! Krystyna.

I posted the letters to Lublin. No wonder I'd had no response to my emails and letters in English. Having to fill out the form at the Polish Consulate in Sydney in Polish should have given me a clue. Some basic Polish would be useful. Sydney University ran a series of introductory classes on Wednesday evenings. Our teacher Agnieszka, or Aga as she offered us for ease, bounced into class, blonde and bubbly. Among the eight students were Sophia, a tattoo artist who was going to live in Kraków, apparently the

current tattoo capital of the world and Steven, a handsome man in his fifties, who'd fallen in love with a Polish woman and wanted to learn Polish to propose. We all went misty-eyed and sighed as one. I bought a dictionary and did my *praca domowa* (homework) but it wasn't easy. Hopefully I would master some basic phrases before I left in November.

The next exciting piece of news greeted me one Saturday morning.

28th July

They've found the birth certificate of your half-sister in the Lublin Civil Records Office. We can purchase it and have it sent to you from Poland in hard copy. This and your father's full death certificate will provide us with lots more information for continuing the research. Krystyna.

So, Janina did exist. We had proof. I bounced out of bed grinning. I imagined meeting Janina. What would I say to her? How would she react to me? What would her boys be like? I wondered if she knew anything about me or Mum. Was it possible that I could feel a connection with a woman I had never met, just because we had the same father? I didn't even know how old she was.

The next email from Krystyna had information from my father's death certificate. The informant of my father's death was a man called Zdzisław Zabielski. Maybe he was Janina's husband or one of her sons. Krystyna would see if there was a marriage record of Janina and Zdzisław. Whoever he was, there was an address for him, although it was from 1996. The certificate also had my father's last address, Lublin, ul. Lipowa (Lip-o-va) 12/33. Polish addresses are written in sequence from big picture to small: City/town - Lublin; then Street (ulica or ul.) name - Lipowa; then street number - 12 and finally apartment number - 33 in my father's case. All quite logical. With this address, we could now make an application to the ITS for information, ticking the box *I wish to find out about the Nazi persecution suffered by my relative during the war-time and about his/ her fate in the immediate post-war time.*

8th August

Each morning as I checked my emails, I had my eye out for the translation of Janina's birth certificate. It took eleven days for the certificate to arrive by post from Poland, be translated and land in my inbox. It said Janina Irena Jagielska was born in

Lublin at 9.00am on the 3rd of September, 1930. Her father (*Ojciec*) was Antoni Jagielski, age 21 and her mother (*Matka*) was Helena Jagielska, nee Porzadna, age 20. Her birth was registered by her father.

These few sentences said so much. We had the same father, different mothers; her parents were only 20 and 21 when she was born; they lived in Lublin in 1930 but the greatest shock was my calculation that Janina was born only three weeks before my mother. She would now be eighty-three, if she was still alive. I still held the memory of the photo of her shown to me by my father forty years ago. There was always the possibility that she would be that old, but I'd never registered that she could be the same age as Mum.

I stood up from my desk, walked out onto the balcony overlooking our garden and leant on the railing. What was my father thinking when he married a woman his daughter's age? What did my mother find attractive about a man old enough to be her father?

A screeching flock of rainbow lorikeets swooped in to roost in the Norfolk pine tree across the lane. Blue heads, green wings and orange breasts hung like Christmas decorations scattered through the branches. Their bright red beaks calmed to chatter, the odd call and then silence.

12th August

Betty,

The priest from Lublin replied to my email. Your father is buried at the Roman-Catholic cemetery, Lipowa Street, section 15C, row XXII, plot 11 This street is where Antoni lived according to the last address on his death certificate (Lipowa 12 flat 33). Krystyna.

I began to imagine myself in Lublin. I'd be able to see the street and building where he lived. I'd be able to stand at the foot of his grave. What would the headstone say? How would I feel? I might not yet know all the details but his final resting place was the end of his story, a bookend to his life.

Krystyna had also found a file on my father at the Polish Historical Disclosures 5 section, part of the Army Personnel Centre (APC) in Glasgow which indicated he served under the British. They would only release information to family members so I emailed Krystyna's contact, Mrs Goddard, relieved that I could do something in English.

Clutching a plastic sleeve with the certificates and documents requested by Mrs Goddard, under my arm on my way to the post office, I pictured her fossicking through the dusty record cards that had been there for almost seventy years. In Sydney, it was a warm almost-spring day and I felt a burst of energy as I thought about the pieces of the puzzle coming together. The ITS and APC records would likely tell me of Tony's experiences during the war. He was a physically and psychologically sick man when I had met him. When did this psychological sickness descend? Would there be an obvious tipping point? What was he like before the trauma of war?

The next interesting piece of information came from the Lublin cemetery regarding Helena.

Mrs Betty Maria O'Neill,

Helena Jagielska, died in 2003, aged 93, is buried together with Antoni Jagielski, section 15C, row XXII, plot 11

Wishing you God's blessing,

Cemetery Office.

Helena had been alive when Antoni returned to Poland in 1974. She outlived him by seven years. She was buried with him. As far as I knew, Antoni was arrested in 1941 and taken away. He didn't return to Poland until 1974. I assumed his wife had neither seen him nor heard from him during those thirty-three years. I had no address for Helena, but if the record showed they were buried together, it seemed likely they had lived together up until his death.

Helena was still named 'Jagielska'. Did Tony return to live with his first wife after all those years? How did they pick up the threads of their marriage?

Helena's life can't have been easy as a single mother in German occupied Lublin, or in Cold War communist Poland. On my side of the world, without the pressures of communism and the privations of poverty, my mother's single-parent life had not been easy either. My mother never married again. Did Helena? I was sure I had seen somewhere in my father's papers that he stated he was divorced. But they were Roman Catholic with divorce forbidden, and Helena's surname remained Jagielska, so could that be true?

I was hoping my half-sister was still alive - her parents had lived to 93 and 87 respectively - and that I would get to meet her. I imagined us comparing our lives, hers

in communist Poland, mine in Australia, sharing our experiences of our father, finding out what he had been like with her and her mother, the changes she had seen him from before the war to after. Perhaps I was naïve to think that might happen. There was also the possibility that she might not want anything to do with me; refuse to meet me.

What other leads could I follow? My November departure was getting closer.

My father's death certificate had provided useful information as did his birth certificate. Because it was more than one hundred years old it had been kept in the archives, not the registry and was in Cyrillic as Lublin was under Russian partition at the time. After the failed but valiant 1863 uprising, the Czarist rulers decreed that Russian would be the official state language. Luckily, Krystyna had a colleague in Warsaw who was expert at translating these old records and Tony's birth certificate duly arrived. It told quite a story.

Antoni Jagielski Birth certificate translation

Tuczapy. Act number 105. This occurred in the village of Nabróz on 2nd/15th August, in the year 1909 at 1 in the afternoon when Józef Jagielski, a farm labourer, residing in Tuczapy, 52 years old, personally came forward in the presence of Aleksander Sitarski, 53 years old and Józef Skubiszewski, 24 years old, both labourers residing in Tuczapy and presented a male baby born in the village of Tuczapy on 7th/20th July in the current year, at midnight from his lawful wife Marianna nee Cichalewska, 35 years old. The baby was baptised today and was named Antoni. The godparents were the above-mentioned Aleksander Sitarski and Julianna Matusik. This certificate was read to the father and the witnesses and signed by me only, because the father and witnesses cannot write. /-/ (illegible sign), the civil clerk.

I was astounded. My grandfather couldn't write? and yet somewhere in my father's documents, I was sure he'd reported his father was a banker. How would it have been for my father to go to school - which he must have done to become a water engineer - with a father who couldn't write? And look at the age difference between Tony's parents - Jozef, a father at fifty-two and his wife Marianna, thirty-five years old. Jozef would have been seventeen when his wife was born. I wondered if my grandmother, Marianna, was also illiterate. This was hard to comprehend.

In comparison, I recalled what I'd been told about Mum's birth in Coffs Harbour, on the 10th August, 1930. When my grandmother went into labour, she and my

grandfather rode in their horse drawn sulky from their farm at Karangi to the Coramba post office and then borrowed a car to travel the six miles to Coffs Harbour hospital down through the slopes and gullies of the rainforests of the Great Dividing Range. I knew that road and could see the blackbutts and other eucalypts, the koalas and pygmy possums, the black cockatoos and lorikeets. Mum was the first born of four.

Nora and Antoni, born on opposite sides of the globe, twenty years apart, with only a farming background in common. Their parents could not possibly have imagined the lives their children would lead or how they would one day come together in London to marry and have a child of their own.

Later that day, Krystyna clarified the ‘couldn’t write’ statement on my father’s birth certificate.

Betty,

I’m always wary about the ‘couldn’t write’ part. It might mean he couldn’t write in Russian, or (in the case of Jewish people) that they couldn’t write in anything but Yiddish. There’s no way, if he was a banker, that your g-father wouldn’t have been able to write in Russian. Are you certain about him being a banker? Your father’s BC describes him as a labourer. Maybe he made his way up in the world by the time Poland became free again ... but then again, he was already 52 when your father was born. Krystyna.

I checked the documents I had. There it was. On my parents’ marriage certificate it said: *Father’s name and surname: Joseph Jagielski (deceased); Profession of father: Banker.*

It wouldn’t be the first time my father wrote something that wasn’t true. Clearly, my grandfather was not a banker. What story had he told Mum about his family and his life in Poland before the war? Had he stayed with us, what family stories would I have grown up with?

On this certificate too, under the heading ‘Condition’ (in which my mother was entered as a ‘Spinster’) my father’s entry read ‘Previous marriage dissolved’. For a Catholic, what did that mean? If he thought Helena had died during the war, he would have entered ‘Widower’. In her divorce transcript from 1961 my mother stated “he told me he had been married and divorced.” That was what she believed until information to the contrary was presented during the court proceedings.

The evidence was mounting against Tony. It seemed he had been a fabricator as well as a vanisher.

Krystyna later found a record of my grandfather's death. Joseph was listed as a guard/watchman and was born in Czestochowa, 320 kilometres from Lublin on current roads, a great distance for a family to travel in those times. His wife, Marjanna was still alive when he died in 1923. Magda, Krystyna's assistant in Poland, would begin to make phone calls to try to find any living relatives. Krystyna said there could be hundreds with the children and grandchildren of Tony's siblings. As an only child, with a handful of Australian cousins, I hadn't considered the possibility of hundreds of relatives.

There remained a little over two months before I was to leave. I needed to finalise my itinerary. My daughter, Georgie and her partner, Toby, had been saving for a trip to Europe at the end of the year as well. After a Sunday lunch at home, we got out a map and a calendar to see where we would each be and when we might meet up. Georgie wanted to go to Kraków and Toby was interested in the history of WWII and visiting Auschwitz. We planned to meet in Kraków on 4th January, the day after Georgie's twenty-third birthday. I would have been in Poland for two months by then and glad to see familiar faces I was sure.

After Georgie and Toby had gone, I checked my emails. There was another one from Krystyna.

1st September

Subject: sad news from Lublin

Hi Betty,

Brace yourself.

Magda found Zdzisław Zabielski - she called a few places on his street and one woman was kind enough to go around and find him and call Magda back with his number!

Zdzisław is an old friend of Janina; she and his wife had been school friends and Janina was the godmother of their daughter. But, unfortunately Janina is no longer alive. She died 1.5 years ago and she had no children. She was married, and her surname was Lorek (but her husband has passed away). No-one from her family was interested in Janina when she needed care in the last years of her life; only Zdzisław cared for her and arranged her funeral. Only he, his wife and a few neighbours were at her funeral. After her death about 20 people came forward about her estate (some sort

of relatives, in Zdzisław's words) because she left behind an apartment. He doesn't know anyone in the family; the only contact he had was with Janina's carer who came from the council and knows quite a bit about Janina's family, mainly from her mother's side. Antoni never talked about his family and no-one knew them.

Zdzisław promised Magda that he would try to find the phone number of the carer and ask her if she'd be willing to talk about what Janina told her about the family - of course, she may not talk because of her duty of privacy towards her patient (and who knows if this applies after death...)

So, Betty, what can one say about this? That it's very sad of course - not only because you didn't get to meet your half-sister before she died (less than 2 years ago!), not only because she left no family behind, but also because for one reason or another, she had no family to care for her when she was ill.

Krystyna went on to say that she didn't know what had happened when Antoni returned to Poland with regard to the rest of his family or if he had any contact with them. What was clear was that whoever was left did not care for Janina or even come to her funeral.

I am sorry to be the bearer of this news - sometimes the ending isn't happy at all, and life is simply unjust, alas. Regards, Krystyna

I sat at my desk reading and re-reading this email. I couldn't find a place in my brain to register what it said. 'She died 1.5 years ago and had no children.' She had no children? I looked at those words on the screen, willing them to make sense. She had no children. Why did my father say she had two sons? Why would he have lied about this? I stood and walked around the room, hands on my hips. I kicked the rubbish bin. The contents went flying. Was he trying to generate some sense of connection between me and his other daughter? The 1974 rose postcard, supposedly from Janina for my birthday, came to mind. Was it at that time a desperate attempt to build a bridge for an escape from communist Poland if he needed it? I felt used and discarded.

I looked out the window, angry and teary. An emptiness pressed against my ribs from the inside. Janina was dead. She had no children. No-one was left. The end of the line. I'd been deceived and not known for decades. All my imaginings of meeting a sister, my nephews, forming connections and understandings, evaporated like a splash of milk on a hot stove.

I closed my computer. There would be no family meeting. No swapping of life

stories. No sisterly sharing.

I put on a coat and left the house, slamming the door behind me. I scowled and muttered my way down the hill to the sea. It was dark and turbulent. I wanted to smash something against the rocks, feel the force of explosion. Instead I sat on a wooden bench, the surging wash of surf crashing against the sea wall in front of me. Anger with my father turned to sadness for my half-sister. Poor Janina. She died alone. No family or friends to look after her. A paid council carer. No family at her funeral. Why had this been so? Tony had five siblings that I knew of, surely some of them had children. Had there been a falling out? Whatever the reason, it was a grim ending to a life.

With no living family to meet, was this my story's dismal conclusion? Was I too late? Would I find no-one and nothing? In my unhappy state, I questioned the point of going to Poland.

As I walked home, my skilful and trusted helpers came to mind. Detective Magda and the kind woman who went knocking on doors looking for Zdzisław. He, Janina's friend, was the key, the important link. It was worth going to Poland to meet and talk with him. Maybe there were some photos or documents that might help me understand my father's life.

Did I care anymore? I did. Maybe Janina's carer would talk with me too. I climbed up the hill, the angry sea behind me in the fading light. I still had to go to Poland.

My Polish classes were a challenge but Aga was always so positive and encouraging. "Tak, tak, tak! Yes, yes, yes!" she'd say in a sing-song tone.

One evening, as I arrived outside the Mechanical Engineering building where our classes were held, she rode up on her bicycle, wicker basket at the front with plastic roses, pink and red, woven around the edges.

"Dobry wieczór (good evening)," she called.

"Cześć," I replied.

"Oh, very informal Betty," she said smiling. "Nazywam się Aga. (My name's Aga). A ty?"

"Jestem Betty. Miło mi. (Pleased to meet you)."

“Miło mi.”

Well, that would be a good conversation beginning if everyone followed the formula. Pronunciation was a particular challenge. It was hard work finding the vowels amongst all the sz,cz, prz letters. At least if I could say hello ‘*cześć*’ (chesh), please ‘*proszę*’ (prosh-e) and thank you ‘*Dziękuję*’ (jen-KOO-yeh), I would be seen to be making an effort. At home, with Polish dictionary at hand, I went back to some of the original documents I had received. I was beginning to be able to make some sense of them.

In Poland, Magda had spoken to Zdzisław again and reported that Janina had married Ludwik in 1953, the same year as our father had married my mother. I had always wondered when Tony found out that Janina had married. Ludwik had died in the early 1970s and Janina then lived with her parents. Tony had told his family he was unable to return to Poland right after the war because of the political situation and then later because he wanted to earn some money and have enough for retirement. He’d been in touch with his first wife and child from Australia. When Tony returned to Poland he spoke to Zdzisław a great deal about Australia but never told him about me and Mum. Apparently Helena had said something about him having a family in Australia, but she was not certain about it. Krystyna’s email concluded:

Zdzisław doesn’t know why Antoni told you Janina had children; maybe it was in order to justify his return. Janina’s lack of children was a major lifelong tragedy for her; she was pregnant once but miscarried and from then on could not have children.

Zdzisław is 83 years old, his wife died 4 years ago. He has lots of photos of Janina and can tell you a lot about her. Zdzisław says to give you his regards, and to tell you he will gladly meet with you while he is still alive. What a great man he sounds! Krystyna.

Zdzisław, a great man indeed. It seemed he was the last link to my Polish family. And to think that he had photos and that he knew my father - it was likely that he was the only person in the world who remembered him, and who knew Janina well. What a very sad life she seems to have had. Her father had been taken away when she was eleven, she lived through a war with the German and then Soviet occupation of her home city, she wanted children but miscarried and couldn’t have any, and her husband died.

I wanted to get on a plane that minute but had to wait until teaching was finished. I'd been thinking of bringing forward my departure date by ten days, and going straight to Lublin. That was now a definite. I looked up Zdzisław's address on Google satellite maps and saw his sage green, two-storey house. I pictured myself walking up his front path and shaking his hand. Please stay alive and well, Zdzisław.

I read it all again. Zdzisław said that my father was in touch with his family from the time he arrived in Australia. Maybe it took him that long after the war to re-establish contact. Maybe once he found they were alive, he then left Mum and me. Maybe from that point on he was always planning to return to them in Poland once he had earned some money, and never tell his Polish family about us. That's a lot of maybes, I realised. I hoped Zdzisław would know much more.

My next news of Zdzisław was that he was in hospital, and although he said it was nothing serious, he remained there for four weeks. His daughter Anna had been in touch during this time saying she was happy to meet with me. She also asked that I contact her directly as she spoke some English, had some photos to send and things to discuss.

With less than a month until I left for Poland, there were still a number of things I was waiting on - a date and time to visit Zdzisław; documents from various archives, finding accommodation in Lublin and an interpreter as Zdzisław spoke no English. The initial conversations with him would be very important. I didn't want to risk any misunderstanding or miss any subtle nuances. There were no guarantees with this of course - it's hard enough in the same language let alone through an interpreter.

Over the next week, Krystyna found me a *young, well-travelled and flexible* interpreter and also accommodation at the Villa Ostoja - a room with ensuite, a shared kitchen and free wifi - and it was in Zdzisław's street. His daughter Anna emailed me two weeks before I was due to leave Sydney.

Today my husband found in the computer the pictures had been taken during Mrs. Helena Jagielski's funeral. This was a sad event, but photos can be interesting for you because there are pictures yours sister Mrs Lorek (this lady in black fur) and the board on your father grave. So I am sending this to you immediately. Best regards, Anna.

Anna had attached eleven photos of Helena's funeral and burial. How bizarre to take photos at a funeral. I learnt it was a common practice, in fact, part of Polish tradition. I was shocked to see Janina. I was not sure what I was expecting. There was no resemblance to the photo I'd seen of the smart, well-dressed younger woman. She was sitting in the front pew of the church next to a woman in an orange felt hat. There were about ten people in the congregation. Janina's black fur coat and head-hugging hat, black gloves and black pants tucked into calf length black boots, covered her large body. Only her face was exposed. Her heavy-set jaw was clenched, bottom lip pushed hard up against the top one; chin up, jowls hanging. Clear-framed large square glasses sat tightly on the bridge of her nose. Rheumy eyes, maybe they were blue. Her grey hair was pushed under her hat, tucked behind her ears on the side and fell straight to her fur collar. She wore no makeup and no jewellery. She wasn't an attractive woman. She was holding a blue plastic supermarket bag but the contents were indiscernible.

There were also photos taken at the cemetery. With no leaves on the trees or the ground, and no snow, I assumed it was late autumn, early winter. It was a clear sunny day. The grave was open. The priest was standing to one side. Helena's light timber casket had a white lace overhang with a floral arrangement of red anthurium, greenery and white baby's breath fanned across the lid. The casket was balanced on timber beams over the open grave.

I looked carefully at the headstone. It was divided in half. On the right was inscribed

HELENA JAGIELSKA, PORZADNA (her maiden name) and an incomplete date.

Underneath this it said, ANTONI JAGIELSKI but I couldn't make out what else it said other than he died at 87 years in 1996. On the left it said LUDWIK LOREK, died at 51 in 1973 and underneath this JANINA-IRENA LOREK, no dates. But under this was LESZEK JAGIELSKI but I couldn't make out the dates. Who was this?

There they were; all to be buried together. Helena with her husband Antoni, and Janina with her husband, Ludwik. I now knew that Ludwik died the year before my father returned to Poland. They would never have met. I felt sorry for Janina. There she was at the graveside of her mother, father and husband - and at the grave that would be her own. She had no children and no family to comfort her in the remaining years of her life. Where were her friends?

29th October

Anna, a lawyer, sent an email to Krystyna in Polish, asking her to translate it for me.

From what I know there were many members of Mrs Jagielska's family who came forward when Janina died, wanting to see what they could inherit. If they've already agreed on the conditions of her Will/ shared everything between them, it's possible that they've already taken everything from the apartment. But if the matter is not yet resolved, then maybe Mrs Betty will have the right to some of it, documents/ photos etc, if she can present the appropriate legal documents.

What a miserable state of affairs. It seemed from Anna's summary that Janina had family members appear after she died, but not when she was alive. Since they showed so little interest when she was alive, they probably wouldn't be interested in any surviving photos or documents. I asked Krystyna to email Anna for the contact details of the lawyer who dealt with Janina's estate. I hoped Krystyna could make contact with him or her, explain the situation in Polish and arrange a meeting. I was to leave on the 9th November. Eleven days to go.

And then news of great significance arrived from Krystyna and Anna.

8th November

Betty, It seems that Janina's house is still intact and you may be able to make a claim for mementos or other, as the closest living relative. Janina's apartment is still closed up after her death! Ie. nothing has been taken out of it! It is lucky indeed that you chose this time to look into all this - any later and it may have been too late to even find anything about Janina (ie. Zdzisław). This is great news below. To think the rightful person (you) may come forward and at least get something of her father so long after his death - what a story!! Krystyna.

From Anna:

Father has been in touch with the lady who cared for Janina and she says that the apartment is still closed and the keys are in the hands of the caretakers. In the court there was no case for verifying the rights to inheritance, Janina left no will, and the court dismissed the claim.

The claimants who came forward after Janina's death, resigned from further action (there was no lawyer to represent them), therefore Mrs Betty can seek claim to it. It's very important that she's able to prove her relationship - her birth certificate, as well as Janina's and her father's birth certificate.

I was astounded and thrilled at the prospect of gaining access to the apartment where my father and his family had lived. I was grateful for Anna's expertise in the local legalities and in tracking down court records. What would this apartment be like? Who knew what photos and documents might be there.

9th November, 2013

At 7.15pm, I boarded flight QF8419 to Warsaw.

PART II

Chapter 8 Poland

Monday 11th November

“Is okay I smoke?” Hanna slid a packet of long slim cigarettes and a blue Bic lighter onto the small glass-top table between us. I nodded, pulling my coat around me. I realised why Hanna had chosen to sit outside. There were ashtrays on every table. She put her handbag on the cafe chair, removed her woolly hat and glasses and fluffed up her short wispy hair. Hanna was the friend of an acquaintance in Sydney who had offered to show me around Warsaw. I had two days there to acclimatise before I caught the bus to Lublin.

I stretched my neck from side to side, still stiff after the thirty-hour trip from Sydney. As we ordered our coffees, a cool breeze fluttered the red and white Polish flags flying above us. Our wicker chairs faced across to the red brick walls of the fourteenth-century Royal Castle in Warsaw’s Old Town. The Germans had set fire to it in 1939 at the outbreak of WWII. Museum workers and conservators had risked their lives to save art works and decorative pieces. Keen to see the city and to relieve my jet-lag, I’d been for a long walk the previous day, my boots loud on the cobblestones. Families and tourists had queued half the length of the castle wall. Entry was free on Sundays.

“What is temperature in Sid-in-ey when you leaving?” asked Hanna.

“A lot hotter than this,” I smiled. “It was 33°C when I left.” Warsaw’s forecast maximum that day was 9°C.

“Ah, my son Piotr love the weather for Sid-in-ey. Is why he live there now - and money of course.”

In the square in front of us, families, couples and an array of uniformed soldiers, many with Polish flags and red balloons, strolled in the gentle morning sun. A grey-bearded man played an accordion and a young man waved a large bubble wand above the upturned faces of wide-eyed laughing children. It was National Independence Day, November 11th, a public holiday commemorating Poland’s re-establishment as a sovereign nation at the end of WWI. Democracy was restored after more than 120 years of partitions and occupation by Russia, Austria-Hungary and Germany. Lublin, where I was headed, had played a significant role. The Provisional Government of the People's

Republic of Poland was initially formed there on 6th November, 1918. The capital of the Republic was later moved to Warsaw.

Hanna and I walked along the streets of *Krakowskie Przedmieście* and *Nowy Świat*, past elegant rows of three story terrace houses, neo-classical churches, monuments to poets, stone lions guarding the Presidential Palace, the famous Bristol Hotel, the statue of Nicolas Copernicus and the Church of the Holy Cross holding Frederick Chopin's heart. Chopin had been living in Paris and suffered from taphephobia, the fear of being buried alive, so decreed his heart to be sent to Warsaw after his death. This wish was carried out by his sister, Ludwika in 1849 when he died at the age of thirty-nine from tuberculosis. During WWII, knowing the rallying power of the composer as a symbol of Polish nationalism, the Nazis stole Chopin's heart but it was returned after the war.

We ended up at *Pilsudski* Square to watch the parade of soldiers, marching bands, red and white floral wreaths laid, prayers said and speeches made. At one end of this square was a nine-metre-high, simple, white granite cross where Polish Pope John Paul II held mass in 1979. As the first Pope to ever visit a communist country, his visit had been controversial. The Soviet regime didn't feel they could refuse his visit but were concerned he'd be seen as a Catholic crusader rather than the pilgrim he professed to be. The Poles interpreted the Pope's sermons as a bold challenge to a communist government that actively promoted atheism and discriminated against the church.

"In 1979 he told to us, '*Don't be afraid. The fate of Poland depends on you*'. He gave support of *Solidarność*," said Hanna. "But peaceful."

She told me that when the Pope died in 2005, people said Poland wouldn't have been free without him. His support for *Solidarność* underpinned and encouraged the end of communism, first in Poland, and then like dominoes falling throughout other countries in Europe.

At the other end of the square was the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, housed under the arches of the remnants of the seventeenth century Saxon Palace arcades, another landmark destroyed during WWII. The Nazis razed eighty-five percent of the city in retaliation for the 1944 Warsaw Uprising against them. Poland staunchly fought the Germans and the Russians to the very end of the war with both the regular armed forces and the largest resistance movement in Europe. It also maintained a government in exile in London, never ceding to any invader, strongly supporting the Allies. This

exacerbated the devastating betrayal by the Allies when, at the end of the war, Poland was given to the Soviets.

That night, as part of the Independence Day celebrations, a crowd gathered in the square below my bedroom window. I watched a flowing sea of red and white Polish national flags. A man dragged a wooden cross, bigger than him, across the square on his shoulders. There were banners listing wars and battles, the Katyn massacre and anti-fascist and anti-communist regime placards.

When I stayed with Hanna a couple of weeks later, her view on communism surprised me. We were squeezed around her small table in the kitchen having dinner when she said “You know I like the communism time for better. My son, Piotr, not agree to me but in real world and real worth, I think better.”

She lit a cigarette and gave me her reasons. Everybody had jobs, they were all equal, everyone had two weeks holiday every year paid for by the government, and education was free. With capitalism, she saw the rich getting richer and the poor getting poorer.

Hanna put out her cigarette, picked up her glass of wine and said, “Come. I show you something.”

I followed her into her living room. She pointed to a framed photo of a man in military uniform on her wall. It was her grandfather. He had been shot in the Katyn massacre. The blame for this 1940 execution of 22,000 Poles in the Katyn forest had shifted a number of times. In 1943 the Nazis found the graves and blamed the Soviets. In 1944, the Soviets retook the area, exhumed the Polish dead and blamed the Nazis. It wasn't until the collapse of the Soviets in 1989 that Premier Gorbachov finally admitted that the NKVD, or Soviet Secret Police, had shot 25,700 Poles in April and May, 1940. These were officers, prisoners-of-war, intelligentsia and other civilians. Hanna's grandfather had been an officer in the Polish army. She was proud of her grandfather and angry at the manner of his death.

Hanna was not alone in her anger as was clear from the number of signs at the National Independence Day gathering under my hotel window, listing the Katyn massacre and also the controversial Smolensk plane crash of 2010. Ninety-six people, on their way to a Katyn commemoration ceremony, were killed in this plane ‘accident’. It included the Polish President and his wife, chief of the Polish General Staff, President of the National Bank of Poland, eighteen members of parliament, clergy, military and

government officials and relatives of victims of the Katyn massacre. Conspiracy theories claiming political assassination were widely supported in Poland.

The crowd stood facing the main stage where priests in two-pointed jewel-encrusted hats led the mass. The singing from the square touched a chord in my heart. I leant out my window and watched until it got too cold and I was too tired. I dozed off to the call and response of *Kyrie Eleison (Lord have Mercy) Christe Eleison (Christ have Mercy)*.

I woke at 2.30am, floating in the liminal space of jetlag, a different time zone, night moving into day. Everything in transition. At 5.30am, with a cup of tea in hand, I looked across the foggy square to King Zygmunt's Column, a meeting place for lovers, friends and the free walking tours of the city. Old fashioned lamp posts cast a yellow light over the street sweepers and cobblestones to the buses at the other end of the square.

Writing in my journal I felt equally anxious and excited. I planned to write every morning. That morning, I wondered how honest Zdzisław would be, how much he would tell me. He might be uncomfortable talking about my father who clearly had been mentally ill in 1974 when I last saw him and when Zdzisław first met him.

At 10.30am I settled into my comfortable seat on the big red PolskiBus, switching between watching the flat landscape, bare trees of the forests and occasional houses, to taking notes in my journal, and daydreaming. Each time I looked out it didn't take long to spot a roadside crucifix or statue of Jesus or Mother Mary, often under a wooden roof with candles and flowers. November 1 is All Saints Day or the Day of the Dead. Traditionally, flowers and candles in coloured transparent lanterns, usually red, are taken to cemeteries and memorials to help the departed find their way through the darkness. I often lit candles at home. I decided to light a candle each day during this trip, for the living as well as the dead, to light the way to peace, understanding and tolerance, to support me on my way.

I thought of my father's arrival back in Poland in 1974, travelling from Warsaw to Lublin and also of travelling about during the war as part of the resistance; on foot, in cars. He would likely have been on a train to Auschwitz and Mauthausen-Gusen.

Rips and currents pulled and pushed people all around Europe during the war, putting people in cars, on buses, boats, ferries and trains, on foot, carrying what precious possessions they could manage, hoping to find some safe haven. In Poland,

they fled from the Germans advancing from the west and the Russians from the east.
Where to go?

At the Lublin bus station, I asked a taxi driver,

“*Nie mówię po polsku.* (Sorry, I don’t speak Polish) *Czy mówisz po angielsku*
(Do you speak any English)?”

“*Trochę.* A little,” he replied.

“Can you take me here please?” I showed him my piece of paper with the address written on it. Even with my Polish teacher Aga’s encouragement to speak Polish nudging me, I wasn’t game to try to pronounce *ul. Powstania Styczniowego* and I couldn’t remember how to say the number 79.

The taxi took me past rows of tall blocks of featureless concrete apartments painted pastel blue, yellow, green and apricot. We seemed to be skirting the city itself, passing through new developments, both commercial and residential. In twenty minutes, we drove onto the concrete parking area in front of the newly built cream, four-storeyed Villa Ostoja. I rang the doorbell. No-one answered. I phoned the number on my email confirmation as I watched the taxi disappear down the street. Mr Wojciech (Voy-check) who owned the building with his son Rafal, would come immediately. It would take him ten minutes. I sat on the top step to wait and looked up and down the street. Not a café in sight, just houses, all with neat front gardens, some with shrubs already wrapped in white plastic for the winter. It had probably been farmland when my father lived in Lublin.

Well, here I am in Poland, in Lublin. This is the city where my father and his family lived. I’m actually here.

Mr Wojciech arrived waving, smiling and apologising. He opened up, got the key to my room and carried my bags upstairs to room number six on the second floor. His English wasn’t much better than my Polish but we sorted it out. I was booked in for my two weeks in Lublin.

My room was long, narrow and spartan - a bed, bathroom, desk and chair. Wooden floors, no rugs. Two windows, blinds but no curtains. At \$AU17 a night, it suited my budget perfectly. There was a shared kitchen on the ground floor. I needed some supplies. Mr Wojciech drove me to a barn-like Tescos, the size of a football field, and pushed my trolley around while I shopped. I had a hankering for homemade chicken soup. Maybe my Polish genes were awakening. I knew of a chicken soup called

Rosół, clear broth, usually with noodles but I would substitute vegetables. Who knew, maybe I'd feel like pickling cucumbers or bottling plums next. With lots of laughing and gesturing, Mr Wojciech and I tracked down most items.

After carrying my groceries to the kitchen, Mr Wojciech waved goodbye. I had an hour before Kris, the interpreter, was to arrive. There didn't seem to be anyone else in the Villa Ostoja. But there was cheese, sausage, eggs and milk in the fridge. Maybe there were other guests. I found a chopping board and knife and chopped garlic, onions, carrots, celery and parsley while the chicken was cooking. I left it simmering on the stove top while I unpacked and set up my desk in my room.

Kris was right on time and phoned to say he was out the front. On the way downstairs, I noticed it was 3°C, 4.00pm and already dark. Kris pushed back his hood and his brown hair from his broad forehead. He had a long narrow face, a stubbly beard and dark-rimmed glasses. He wiped his boots on the door mat before coming inside.

"Is this okay, to sit in the kitchen? There's no real sitting room here." I said showing him down the corridor. He hung his coat on the back of the kitchen chair opposite me, sat down and took out his notepad from his backpack.

"I know you have some background from Krystyna," I said, "but from here on, we'll be like detectives, looking for clues and information. I'm not sure what Zdzisław's health or memory will be like. Do you think it's okay to call him Zdzisław?"

"No, not really. I think it would be better to call him Pan Zabielski, Mr Zabielski. It is not polite to use an older person's Christian name." His eyes smiled at me and he made a slight tilt of his head to the left and back again.

"Okay, Pan Zabielski it is. But Mr Z between you and me. And please call me Betty not Ms O'Neill even though I'm old enough to be your mother!"

Kris's big smile lit up his face as he looked down and pushed his glasses back onto the bridge of his nose. We discussed recording Mr Z with his permission, me taking notes, confidentiality of information and Kris's fees. He handed me a typed contract with spaces to fill in the time and cost. We agreed on four hours for the next day and again on Friday with Mr Z, and the possibility of two hours on Saturday with Anna.

I handed Kris my phone. "Can you call Mr Z, explain who you are and check that he's feeling well and that it is still okay for us to meet with him tomorrow at 1.00pm?"

I listened to him speaking to Mr Z in a soft, gentle tone. I understood only a few of the Polish words.

“He looks forward to meeting you.”

“Excellent! I’ve made chicken soup. Would you like some before you go?”

“Thank you, but no. I have a test in the morning.”

Kris was at one of the seven universities in Lublin, studying Mandarin now that he had his Masters in English. He lived in campus accommodation. I liked his quiet, considered manner. I had a feeling we would work well together.

Not long after Kris left five or six men arrived. They had keys so were obviously guests. They spoke no English. I said “*Dobry wieczór*, good evening” and took a large bowl of chicken soup to my room, leaving the pot on the kitchen bench to cool. Mr Wojciech’s son Rafal called to see if I was okay. I asked about the other guests. They were builders from south-west Poland, working in Lublin. They returned home on weekends.

That evening I had an email from Krystyna who’d had a response to our request for residential records, looking for where my father had lived prior to his arrest. The 1939 records showed Antoni and Janina (no mention of Helena) living at Rynek 6/5 and his brother Stanisław and his wife living nearby. But in 1941, Stanisław’s wife Anna was on her own. What had happened to Stanisław? I looked up Rynek 6/5. It was in the Old Town Square.

At 4.45am I heard showers running, toilets flushing, banging in the kitchen - it reminded me that I forgot to put the chicken soup in the fridge. I wondered if it would still be there. By 6.00am all was quiet. They’d all gone it seemed. If this happened every morning, maybe I’d write from 5.00am. Each place has its own rhythm.

Chapter 9

Mr Z

13th November, 2013

The breeze was cool on my cheeks and sharp in my nostrils as Kris and I walked down *Ulica Powstania Styczniowego* toward Mr Z's. There had been a light frost that morning but the pavement was dry and the sun was now shining. I'd spent some of the morning on a Skype call with a friend who had reminded me of my visit to Mum's friend Judy in Nerang, her husband John's dementia and my disappointment.

"No expectations Betty," he'd said.

That was impossible. I was hoping for images and stories about my father and Janina that would help me know more about them both. I reminded myself of the facts - Mr Z was 84; the last time he saw my father was before Tony died in 1996, seventeen years ago. Janina was Mr Z's wife's friend. Mr Z's name was on my father's death certificate. He did have photos. Deep breath, I thought, smiling at Kris, take it as it comes.

Mr Z's house looked exactly as it had on Google maps. A box of red apples sat near the door mat next to muddy boots, a broken umbrella and a stack of empty garden pots. And then, there he was, Mr Z. Slim, slightly bent, soft grey hair, powder blue eyes that looked right into mine, smooth papery skin with a few fine lines on his forehead and a gentle but firm handshake.

"*Dzień dobry Pan Zabielski*?" I said. "*Jestem Betty*." Even though I had practiced 'I'm so pleased to meet you. Thank you for agreeing to talk with me,' in my excitement, this went straight out of my head.

Mr Z smiled and nodded. He showed us into the living room, offering us each a dining-room chair. He sat on a black office chair beside a lace-cloth covered table pushed under the window. I noticed a small sofa made up as a bed; maybe Mr Z slept here. A small crucifix hung above each doorway. I asked for permission to record our conversation and to take some notes while we were talking. Kris explained how he would work as the interpreter.

"Shall I start by telling you how we all met each other?" Mr Z prompted.

Janina and Mr Z's wife, also Janina, met while working together in the city at the Bank Polski before either of them were married. Mr Z met Janina in 1951 and my father in 1974.

“We would take Mr Antoni with us to see friends and to parties. We knew each other well. We had both worked as water technicians, so we had things in common to talk about, although he was twenty years older than me.”

I asked about what a water technician did.

“Your father worked with underground pipes for irrigation. That was in a village one hundred kilometres north of Lublin. He would work and live there in the summer months and in the winter, they would do the planning and documentation back in Lublin.”

Kris listened to each of us, took brief notes during longer questions or answers and then translated. I had worked with interpreters facilitating training programs in Indonesia and was used to this process. Mr Z seemed to take it in his stride, answering a question, waiting for Kris to tell me in English, waiting for my response or the next question, waiting for Kris to tell him in Polish. The time delays gave me the opportunity to digest answers and decide on which of my many questions to ask next, without making it seem like an interrogation.

“What was it like for people who came back after the war?” I asked.

“Plenty of them were killed, especially those who were in the higher levels of the resistance. The A.K. (Armia Krajowa - the underground Home Army) was the biggest resistance organisation. Between 1944 and 1950 about 5,000 of them were killed.”

“My father was a member of the A.K.”

I took Tony’s A.K. identification badge out of my folder of documents and photos. It was a palm sized card, red on the back, cream on the front, with his name and his pseudonym ‘Koziak’ which means goat - the animal of Lublin. Mr Z took his glasses from the table. He balanced them on his nose as one arm was missing.

“People in the A.K. sacrificed their lives. Here in Lublin there is still an association of people who were in the A.K. - ZBoWiD (the Society of Fighters for Freedom and Democracy). Your father was in this organisation, meeting with others who had been in the A.K. Also the money he got from the German government was because of this organisation.”

Mr Z told us about his own involvement in the ‘People’s Movement’ during the war, risking his life to print newspapers in the village where he lived. He still had some of them. He unzipped his grey fleece jacket and leant back, turning towards me with his

elbow over the back of his chair. As he talked I noticed he only had one bottom tooth, I wondered how he managed eating all those apples.

My father had talked to Mr Z about conditions in different concentration camps.

“He said that only people who didn’t smoke survived. Those who smoked would give even their last bite of bread to get a cigarette. You know packages were sent to people in jails but mostly the guards took what was in them. Even here in Lublin Castle Jail, often people who took food to the castle for their relatives, were shot. So no-one visited anymore.”

When my father came back to Lublin, Mr Z continued, “He wasn’t working then, on a pension, so his life was centred on home. He always did the shopping but it wasn’t like now when you can go to the shop and take things off the shelves. Under communism, you had to line up in queues or make arrangements to get things. It was difficult. Mr Jagielski was a very entrepreneurial person. Every time something was lacking he would organise to get it,” Mr Z said, “He lived in Lipowa Street with Helena and with your sister too. The ladies got this house when Janina married Mr Ludwik who worked in the City council.”

He went on to tell me that they lived in Rynek 6 before the war and that after Antoni was arrested Helena and Janina lived a poor life but some of Antoni’s friends helped them. Helena earnt some money as a tailor.

I asked about Janina.

“I remember her very well. She was a very optimistic and happy person. Always singing. In Lublin at that time, it was common that pictures of beautiful women would be hung in the windows through the city. A photo of Janina was taken and hung on *Ulicy Povost*. She was one of the beautiful ladies in Lublin.”

I recalled the photos that Mr Z’s daughter Anna had emailed me of Janina at her mother’s funeral. It was hard to imagine her as a Lublin beauty.

Mr Z explained that he received a call at home to say that Mr Antoni had died. It was a brain haemorrhage. The same as Mum. Mr Z and his wife organised Antoni’s funeral. Some of Antoni’s family had come to the funeral but many had died during the occupation and he didn’t have much contact with the others when he returned. Mr Z had also gone to somewhere near Tuczapy, 130 kilometres from Lublin, to collect my father’s birth certificate and was told my father hadn’t lived there for very long.

“Mr Antoni’s father worked in agriculture.”

“His father was a farmer?”

“The place was not owned by him. He worked for other people to look after the land.”

So, as suspected, my grandfather was not a banker. He was a farm labourer. On the weekend that followed, Anna would take me to Nabróž, the village where my father’s birth was registered and where he was baptised. We found nothing in the records at the Nabróž church. We went looking for the village of Tuczapy, where Antoni was born, but it no longer existed - just rich chocolate cake soil, ploughed fields and piles of sugar beet.

I asked Mr Z if my father talked much about his time in Australia.

“A lot. Mostly about his work with water systems. He was up to date with all the latest. He must have still been doing that work in Australia. We liked each other and spent a lot of time together. It was a long time ago. I can’t remember a lot.”

I was relieved Mr Z could remember as much as he did. No sign of dementia in him. But he didn’t think my father was mad. Or even strange. He liked him. How could this be?

So far I had no evidence of Antoni working as a water engineer in Australia.

“He was an optimistic person and very nice. He liked to go dancing and have some fun as well. When I look at you I can see some resemblance. I’m not sure if it’s him or Janina but especially when you talk I can see it. When I met Mr Jagielski, from all his experiences of the past, he had one characteristic remaining - he would save things; never throw away a thing. He would take bread and put it aside until it was stale. In some ways he was still in the concentration camp.”

Mum and I had left food on our plates the first time I met him. He must have considered that such a waste.

“My father told me he lost his sense of smell in the concentration camp. Do you know if it came back?”

I’d read an extraordinary story of a fourteen-year-old Czech girl who was a prisoner in Auschwitz. She continually vomited because of the smell of decaying dead bodies and the smoke from the gas chambers. She was losing weight - something you couldn’t afford to do in such a place. And then, one day the vomiting stopped. She didn’t realise until after she left the camp that she’d lost her sense of smell. The truly

remarkable part of that story was that when she revisited Auschwitz, in her seventies, her sense of smell returned.

“Yes, your father’s sense of smell came back,” said Mr Z. “Every time he would come to my garden he would smell my roses. He loved roses, especially the yellow ones.”

He paused and looked at me.

“I’m really happy that I could meet you and talk to you. Your appearance and some characteristics when you speak remind me of your sister. Though Janina was bigger because later in her life she did not walk very much and because of all her experience she was a sad person and she put on weight. Earlier, with her husband she led a very happy life, even though he was ten years older than her. It was a very good marriage. I introduced them.”

He told me how Janina and Ludwik had danced all night when they met. They wanted a family but she miscarried once, maybe twice and was very sick and then was devastated by his early death. After her parents’ deaths, she was alone.

“We might have been half-sisters, but what very different lives we had. I’m so disappointed I didn’t get to meet her.”

“She would have been extremely happy to meet you.”

“It would’ve been a shock I think. Do you know what caused her death?”

“Diabetes, heart condition, maybe the sad experience of her life took its toll.”

He had many questions to ask me, about my mother, where she was born, was she Catholic, her heritage. I told him of her Irish background, her life before she came to England and showed him some photos of her and my family.

Mr Z rubbed his eyes and wiped his face with his hand. I looked at the clock on the table. It was almost 4.00pm.

“Would it be alright to come back tomorrow?” I asked.

“Yes, I am at home in the afternoons and if health allows,” he paused, “I felt a little bit sick when you came but now I feel much better.”

“*Do jutro* (until tomorrow) and *dziękuję* (thank you).”

Mr Z took my hand in both of his and kissed it, bowing to do so.

The next day I asked Mr Z about living in Lublin after the war. He'd left his small village to come to university in Lublin in 1950.

"Before the war we couldn't even imagine going to university. And afterwards, it was free. So even if one was poor, one could get a degree. I think it was the biggest achievement of that time."

"How did people find places to live?" I asked.

"Lublin was not as badly damaged as places like Warsaw. Here, people would see an empty house and take it. Where Janina was living in the old part of the city, it was eighty percent Jewish. There were about 30-40,000 people living there who were taken to Majdanek or other concentration camps and didn't return. Then the government took anything that was empty and they'd also give places to different people. The flat on Lipowa Street was given to Mr Ludwik because of his position in the Council. It was a new flat."

I heard someone come in the front door. It was Anna. She'd left work a little early that Friday afternoon to meet me. She kissed her father and shook my hand. She was tall and slim, wearing glasses, her straight dark hair cut in a bob. Her black suit and cream silk blouse fitted with her role as a lawyer with a bank.

"What you like to do tomorrow?" Anna asked me.

"Be a tourist, maybe see where my father and his family lived before the war, if possible, the area where he was born?"

Anna and her father talked, looked at me and talked some more. Then Anna said,

"We talk about who you are like. You look like your father."

She had brought some of her wedding photos that had Janina and my father in them. Antoni stood in a back corner in the shadows, wearing a dark overcoat, buttoned up, the same set jaw and expressionless face I remembered.

I asked Anna about the chances of getting access to any photos or documents in the apartment.

"I don't know but I have the phone number where you can ask. It is the municipal *Opiekun* organisation, they are like custodians," she replied. Kris took a note of the phone number and I asked her about the court case she had mentioned in her emails to me.

“Some people who believed they had rights went to the court to claim the inheritance but the court said it could not be done. This is the case number.”

The following week, Kris and I went to the court and requested the records from the archives. I was looking for relatives. The claimant was a Mrs Małek but she was unable to substantiate her relationship with Janina. The case was dismissed and the apartment locked up. I decided not to try to find this Mrs Małek. There were no other claims, so no other relatives I concluded. Krystyna’s prediction of possibly hundreds of relatives had come to nothing.

“So Mrs Betty, you could apply.” Anna continued, “It might be possible for you to receive this inheritance, to inherit the flat.”

“Really?” I was stunned. I shook my head and looked at her and then Kris. It was inconceivable that from knowing next to nothing about my father and his other family, there was now a possibility of inheriting a flat from a sister I never knew.

“You would need all the documentation to prove who you are,” she said.

Anna gave Kris the address of the court and the case number. She explained through him my next steps: First, I should go to *Opiekun* and ask for the keys; if they wouldn’t give them to me, then take all my documents that proved I was related to Janina and was in line for the inheritance plus all birth and death certificates to a public notary (solicitor). I could then get an ‘act’ of inheritance. If not, step three was to go to court which could take three months.

“You have Australian citizenship?” I nodded. “Because you are not Polish, the question is if you are allowed to inherit. I think that I go out now because we have all day tomorrow for speaking and now you have meeting with Father.”

While she was saying goodbye to her father, I checked with Kris to be sure that Anna was saying that I might not just get access to the flat but I might inherit it. Correct. If I had all the necessary documentation. I did. How astounding would it be for me to inherit my father’s other family home. The irony was not lost.

Mr Z returned to talk some more. His voice was steady and strong. He’d spoken with confidence from the start of our first meeting. He was focussed and clear, sharing his experiences, only saying what he knew.

“My father and Helena were very young when they married and then didn’t see each other for thirty-three years. I wonder what it was like for them when he came back.”

“I think that it was a great love. I believe it was so,” he answered.

I looked at Kris.

“A what?” I asked.

“A great love,” Kris confirmed.

I let this sink in while Mr Z continued and I waited for Kris to translate.

“Mr Jagielski was very handsome although I only knew him in his later years.

After he was taken, Mrs Helena focussed her attention on bringing up their daughter but she would talk about Mr Jagielski all the time. Mrs Helena and Janina were always crying, crying tears.”

When he came back from Australia, Mr Z believed they had a close loving relationship. “Helena would call him Tolek - a shortened version of the name Antoni. Shortened names are not that common. You know he was one person out of one thousand who survived.”

“One in a thousand. I hadn’t realised.”

“Of course. It is the tragedy of the Polish people.”

Mr Z looked tired, so I suggested we leave, but it took another forty minutes of conversation.

“Could you show me the family tree that you showed me yesterday?” Mr Z asked.

I got out the page with my family tree on it and handed it to him.

“I was interested in what people are on there and how it is joined together. My daughter is interested in this but I don’t have any male grandchild so it’s not so worth it.”

Mr Z had a son as well as Anna and his son had a daughter, Martha.

“What? We girls aren’t worth it Mr Z?” I said laughingly. He didn’t reply.

“Do you know that in Polish history there was a Prime Minister named Jagielski?”

“Ah, my claim to fame. We must go. *Djenkuje*.”

“So, it was a great love between Antoni and Helena,” I said to Kris as I walked with him to the bus stop. “Maybe that explains the decisions he made. And even to Mr Z, the female line in a family is not that significant. Maybe if I had been a boy, things would have been different.”

I waved goodbye to Kris. Anna and I would be okay without him over the weekend.

I walked home thinking of Mum. She had told me that my father had not come to the hospital for three days after I was born because he was disappointed I was not a boy. In the transcript of their divorce, I'd read his statement. He'd said that I was not his child but he'd refused to have a blood test.

I'd been a disappointment, deserted and denied - was it me, was it him or was it the 'great love'?

The next morning I was rugged up in layers of thermals, street clothes, coat, gloves, a big red woollen scarf and a hat and boots. It was nudging 0°C on the temperature gauge attached to the wall outside the window. The early morning mist cleared to a blue sky with one or two puffy white clouds.

Anna drove us to the Old Town in Lublin and parked in front of Lublin Castle.

"This was Jewish area before the war but it all..."

Anna hesitated, trying to remember the word in English.

"... erased. Now you can see, is all car park. Many people complain it was not kept. As memorial."

We walked up the steps, past the castle and along a wide cobblestone pathway, through the arched tunnel of the Grodzka Gate, also called the Jewish Gate, and up the hill to the Old Town Square. The town hall is a three-story building in the middle of beautifully restored four-story terraces forming the square around it. There are mostly restaurants and cafes at street level.

"There, that is Rynek 6," she said pointing to the corner building. It was painted a soft grey and white, with a cafe to the left at street level and an arched entrance to the building on the right. An intercom buzzer was on the far-right wall. I was tempted to press number five.

"It's rather beautiful" I said "and such a great position."

"Yes, it would be worth much money now."

"I wonder why Helena and Janina moved."

“It was a crowded ghetto then. The conditions were not very good - no plumbing, no toilets. A bad environment for a single woman and daughter.”

I looked up at the windows, trying to picture my father, Helena and Janina living there. I imagined the Gestapo boots loud on the steps up to number five, bursting in the door and arresting Antoni Jagielski, resistance fighter. Was he hiding? Did he struggle? Did he call out “Don’t worry. I’ll be back,” without knowing it would take three decades?

As far as I knew, Tony was initially taken to the castle jail and was imprisoned there from July to November, 1941. Anna and I saw the prison cells, names scratched into the brick walls. The larger cells were being used as museum exhibition rooms with photos of WWII Lublin and the castle. One of the circular room’s walls was covered with black board, the names of prisoners written in white. Jagielskis were on the list, but I saw no first names I recognised.

Dinner was at 4pm at Anna’s house. Her artist husband Piotr was as animated and boisterous as Anna was calm and contained. Their two German pointer dogs, Lili and Mamisia, were as big as me and had Piotr’s personality. Piotr spoke no English at all but kept trying to explain deep concepts of his art work and a book he was writing about Bruno Schulz, a famous Polish writer, artist and teacher. He was warm and funny using Italian, French, big gestures, hand movements, mimes and drawings to try to explain. He kept asking Anna to translate but she seemed annoyed with him and wanted to focus on making dinner. Spotting their computer, I had a brainwave and for an hour or so, Piotr and I typed a conversation using Google translate. He was writing and painting about the nature of evil. I’m not sure I ever would have understood that without some translation.

We also talked about my father. Piotr had known him for about six years, much longer than me, and was keen to tell me more. I would arrange to meet him with Kris to interpret for us. Piotr stayed home with the dogs after dinner while we went off to a concert at a Catholic Church. I went back to my little room that night still feeling the exuberance of the male choir and the purity of a boy soprano’s high notes.

Brushing my teeth, I looked at myself in the mirror and reminded myself, “You’re in Lublin, Poland. You’re making great progress.”

The next morning, I stepped off the bus at the top of Lipowa Street with a plan to see where my father had lived and where he was buried. Number 12, where he had returned to live with Helena and Janina, was opposite Lublin Plaza and diagonally across from the cemetery. The salmon pink, five-story building with white aluminium framed windows was flat-fronted and flat-roofed like a long box. I couldn't see the entrance to the apartments. Which one was number 33? Would I get any closer than this?

On a map of the cemetery near the ornate white entrance arch I found section 15C. The next step was to get my bearings for the back left-hand corner to find row XXII and plot 11. The gravel crunched under each step. Most graves were covered in flowers and candles, remnants of All Saints' Day, overlooked by stone statues of cherubs, winged angels, weeping Marys, crosses of all descriptions and family vaults the size of garden sheds. In this vast cemetery, a dozen or so elderly women were removing dead leaves, putting water in vases of flowers from taps nearby or sweeping the graves.

The rows and plots were not labelled and the graves were crammed in next to each other with barely space to walk between them. After picking my way through a couple of rows, I found GRÓB RODZINY LORKÓW - JAGIELSKICH (Grave of the families Lorek - Jagielski). The grey marble gravestone was spotlessly clean. A vase of fresh yellow chrysanthemums obscured the headstone. Someone cared. I moved the flowers and two of the six lanterns to read on the left:

Ludwik Lorek

Engineer

He lived 51 years Died 11 July, 1973

Janina Lorek nee Jagielska

She lived 81 years Died 19 December, 2011

Leszek Jagielski Died 11 March 1934

On the right:

Helena Jagielska nee Porzadna

She lived 94 years Died 5 December, 2003

Antoni Jagielski

Prisoner for a long time in Auschwitz, a Hitler camp and in Mauthausen

He lived 87 years Died 24 August, 1996

May their souls rest in peace.

I went out to a cart to buy candles and matches and lit four candles, one for each of them - but there was also Leszek, or Lechosław as I had seen him referred to in the records at the Society of Australian Genealogists. I should have bought five.

Standing at the bottom of the grave I watched the candles burn strong in their holders. 'Look at you all there together. One big happy family. Reunited, whole. No place for me or Mum. I have the same blood, but no-one would have thought of me as this grave was being organised.'

Most graves had a little seat at their side. I sat on the Jagielski bench. Many widows and others came to their loved ones' gravesides daily to clean, to pray, to chat, to be. Mum had a saying 'Sometimes I sit and think. Sometimes I just sit.' I sat for a while, then found myself in tears, sad for what might have been and that I didn't get to meet Janina; sad for myself and the gaps in my life; sad for my mother.

On Monday morning Kris and I caught the bus out to meet Piotr. He came running to the gate to greet us, brushed his shoulder-length greying hair out of his eyes and welcomed me with a big hug. I loved his unbridled enthusiasm and passion. The dogs were going crazy, jumping up to say hello and almost knocking Kris off his feet.

I wanted to know how Piotr saw my father.

"He was a cold man who rarely smiled."

A completely different view of my father to Mr Z's.

"At home, he would talk about himself, his past, his favourite food, his health and his wife and daughter would sit and listen. Your sister and her mother adored him. It was a typical patriarchal family. They waited on him hand and foot. Your sister would refer to her parents as Mummy & Pappy. It sounded like she was seven. All decisions were made for her by her parents so she didn't have to take care of herself."

Mr Z had said she had a job in the bank. Surely some decision-making would have been required.

“Your sister smiled all the time and hardly ever talked about herself. She was not an outgoing person. She would stay at home all the time. In fact, your father, Mrs Helena and Mrs Lorek didn’t go out much. They were all happy to be together in their little flat. They only had a few friends. They were also afraid of someone getting into the house, so every time they wanted to go out, someone would stay at home. Even when Janina came here she was afraid someone would break into the flat.”

“What about Helena,” I asked.

“When your father was arrested she was working as a tailor and in that way, she was a very heroic person.”

I wasn’t sure why this made her heroic but Piotr was in full swing and not to be interrupted. He continued, “People say she was always waiting for Mr Jagielski to return. The way she talked about the time they first met, his curly hair at that time, it was as if it was yesterday - she was very much in love with him.” Piotr continued, “There was a time when I was painting their flat. They wouldn’t let me move any furniture or change anything. I think this reflects how it was in their lives.”

“You mean you had to paint around the furniture?” He nodded and we all laughed.

Janina, Ludwik and Helena had lived in this flat until Ludwik died in 1973. Then Antoni joined them when he returned in 1974. There were only three rooms.

Piotr made us coffee. His dogs barked and played together, ran around our legs, paws on the table, full of energy, wanting attention.

“Did my father talk with you about his experiences during the war?”

“Yes. He was a pragmatic person and to survive was a feat. So, every time the Germans needed a specialist, he would say he could do it, whatever it was, as a way of surviving. He would adapt to any situation and it shows his intelligence. One of the ways we can measure intelligence is how quickly someone can adapt to a situation. He had to be very calm as well because from the block he was in, in the camp, he was the only one who survived. Everyone else died.”

“No-one else survived?” I was astounded. Not only that the others had all died, but mostly at how incredible it was that Antoni had managed to stay alive.

“That’s right. He was a very clever person. He would weigh up if it was better to go and work, or to give someone a piece of bread or a cigarette and take the time to rest. It shows his will to survive. He would be nice to a guard in order to survive.”

Piotr leant back in his chair, lit a cigarette, stroked his moustache and goatee beard and then the head of one of the dogs.

“Do you think Helena or Janina knew about my mother or me?”

“When I was painting the flat they talked about that. They knew.”

“They knew?” This was more definite than Mr Z’s reply.

“When your father was with them, they wouldn’t talk about it but they suspected something. They knew this from other sources. They knew he had some kind of family either formal or informal, and may have a child. Mrs Helena and Mrs Janina thought that when he came back he could support them. And he did. The Australian pension that he was on was very high for Poland so he was a wealthy person. They may not have been able to keep their home without him.”

“To think that even with his wealth, the three of them continued to live in that small space. Anna told me he slept in the kitchen.”

“Yes. He did. They would also hoard things like toilet paper or other things because of their experiences, even when there were plenty of supplies in the shops.”

It was time for Kris and I to leave. I hoped I’d be able to talk with Piotr again sometime. As he hugged me goodbye, Piotr said,

“When you compare someone who has a bad day, in comparison to four years in the concentration camps, you can then say Mr Jagielski was a successful man. He survived so much.”

Chapter 10

The Possibility of Inheritance

That afternoon Kris and I puffed our way up four flights of stairs and found the *Opiekun* office at the end of a linoleum tiled beige corridor. We knocked and were invited in by a smiling middle-aged woman. I stepped forward and offered my hand,

“I am Betty O’Neill. I am Janina Lorek’s sister. Kris called you about the keys to her flat.”

Kris translated.

“I have these documents to show I am her sister. I would like the keys to see if there are any photos or documents I could look at - I wouldn’t take anything.”

I handed Mrs Dubanowski my parents’ marriage certificate, my birth certificate, pointing to my father’s name and my name change certificate.

It was lucky that a couple of years earlier I had changed my name back to my maiden name, O’Neill, after seventeen years of being divorced, and was given a certificate clearly showing each change.

“You have come from Australia?” she asked through Kris, smiling.

“Yes.” I smiled back.

“My cousin lives in Melbourne!”

She spoke animatedly to the other woman in the office. Together they looked at my certificates, talked with Kris, raised their eyebrows, raised their shoulders and lowered my hopes. Mrs Dubanowski made a phone call. I felt how I imagined a deaf person who couldn’t lip-read might feel, watching events without comprehension, fearful of an unfavourable outcome. It was a lesson in patience and self-control.

“No, we are so very sorry. We would like to help you but we cannot give you the keys. We are responsible and if anything happened to the contents, it would be blamed on us.”

“What do you need?” I asked.

She needed an official certificate from a Public Notary.

“Right. We’ll be back.”

Anna recommended a friend of hers who was a notary, Mrs Grazyna Lewicka.

Mrs Lewicka’s assistant was a young, slim, blonde woman, immaculately groomed and dressed in a well cut, black pin-striped pant suit. She simultaneously dealt with several matters, including mine. Kris remained calm and steady. The list of

required documents grew: translated and certified copies of my birth and name change certificates; copies of Antoni and Helena's death certificates; Janina's death certificate and her ID. The building manager needed to verify that Janina owned the flat and confirm it wasn't in Helena's name.

"When you have all this documentation, the notary will take two days to confirm the documents and prepare an Inheritance Certificate," the assistant told me through Kris.

"An Inheritance Certificate?" I asked. "You mean I'll inherit the flat? Is she serious?"

Kris nodded.

I stood and walked around, the buzz of energy needing some outlet. I stared at Kris as he interpreted the steps that would follow. Once the documents were prepared, I would need a certified translator to translate the Inheritance Certificate for me in front of the notary. I'd sign and the flat would be mine. That simple. Mrs Dubanowski could then give me the keys.

On the street, a cold gust of wind almost bowled me over. I asked Kris the same questions I had asked inside. He laughingly continued to answer, 'Yes'.

To inherit the flat would not only mean I would see where my father and his other family had lived - furniture, photographs, documents and all - but I would also have unlimited access and plenty of time to imagine their lives and gather additional pieces for the family history mystery. Maybe I could stay there. I dismissed that idea as soon as it arrived. I cringed at the thought of sleeping in my father's bed.

"Okay then. Let's get started with all the documentation we need. Where do we go to get Janina's birth certificate and ID? Is there an office for Births, Deaths and Marriages?"

Kris found the address. Excellent. Was Kris certified as a translator? No. Did he know someone who was? Yes. Great.

"Can you call Mrs Dubanowski and ask her where we can find the building manager?"

We walked to the Births, Deaths and Marriages office and were given a copy of Janina's death certificate without difficulty. Our next step was to leave all my certificates that were in English, at a certified translator's office. I could pick them up at 2.00pm the next day. At the building manager's office at *Ulicy Głęboka 17*, we found

that Janina did own the flat and there were two years' worth of outstanding bills. Inherit the flat, inherit the bills. The manager asked when I would pay up. I told him I wasn't sure.

I caught the bus home musing on my unexpected inheritance, still shaking my head that it was possible. It had been locked up for two years. What it would be like? Janina died on the 19th December, 2011, and the keys were handed in ten days later to the *Opiekun* office and had been there ever since. I hoped someone had emptied the fridge.

The next morning at the Births, Deaths and Marriages building, we picked up a copy of Janina's ID and then went to the Death Certificate section. I was also looking for information about my grandmother, Maria, the woman whose name my father had given me as my middle name. In that section, we met the colourful red-haired, heavily made-up and bejewelled Renee. From behind a glassed-in high counter, for an hour and a half, she tried to understand who was connected to whom as, through Kris, I gave her names and dates and drew a simplified family tree. We watched her look through ancient leather-bound registers and huge books of handwritten Births, Deaths and Marriage registrations with no luck. She often smiled, shook her head and looked up sideways at the heavens for inspiration. All the while, her brown eyes alert and smiling.

"Maybe she married again after your grandfather died. She was 18 years younger than him. She'd have a different surname and maybe that's why we can't find her," Renee suggested.

"Can you come back tomorrow?"

"Of course. *Do jutra*."

Like a boomerang, we went back to the translator's office and picked up the other documents. Kris was surprised at how quickly everything was happening, especially at all the official administrative offices. Usually you would fill out a form, wait two weeks and then be told you had another form to fill in or that you needed more information - delay after delay would happen.

We had completed our tasks and with a folder full of the requested documents, we made our way to the notary, hoping everything would be correct. Each document was checked. We passed. We had met the challenge. The notary's assistant was impressed we had done it all in such a short time.

“Come back tomorrow at 2.30pm with a certified translator to read you the documents and then you can sign and the flat will be yours,” said the assistant with an expressionless face. She appeared to have no idea of the significance of this decision to me. I was grinning and shaking my head.

“Now that is what I call two good day’s work Kris,” I said, patting him on the shoulder as we walked out of the office.

Renee was on the phone when we returned the next morning but noticed us, raised her dark-pencilled eyebrows, nodded and smiled. When she finished, she picked up a small piece of paper, shimmied over to the window in her tight-fitting long brown skirt and with a smirk on her face, slammed down my grandmother’s death certificate, with a “*Voilà!! S’il vous plait!!*” take-that-announcement. We clapped and called out ‘*bravo!*’, ‘*formidable!*’ for her.

My grandmother died on the 9th May, 1954, the day after I was born. She lived on for thirty-one years after her husband. I wondered when my father had found out his mother had died. He was in London at the time. Did someone contact him to let him know and if so, how? Had he told my mother?

I gave Renee a felt kangaroo, a handmade Christmas tree decoration, as an Australian thankyou gift and said “*Dziękuję bardzo.*” She blushed from her forehead to her ample cleavage. “No need, shouldn’t have, it’s my job,” but she was delighted.

Knowing this date would later provide a crucial step in adding a significant branch to our family tree.

I had a very important meeting next at the notary’s office. It seemed today could be the day to inherit a flat in Poland. An unintended gift from my father, Helena and Janina.

My appointment was for 2.30pm. It was 2.45pm and the interpreter and I were still waiting in the ante-room. I felt for the folder of documents in my bag hoping I had everything I needed. A young woman directed us into the reception area and we sat again. The door to what I assumed was the notary’s office was slightly ajar. Within minutes she was ushering out a nun and a priest, shaking hands, slightly bowed and effusive. She gave me a slight nod before disappearing into her office again. Her

assistant asked me some questions, looked at the documents I had and went in to see Mrs Lewicka. I presumed she was giving her a summary of the situation. As we were shown into the inner sanctum, Mrs Lewicka faked a smile and was polite. Was it because I wasn't well dressed? She was faultlessly groomed, slim in her navy-blue suit, nails painted, pearl earrings and matching brooch. Was it because this was a small matter, small fees? Or that I was a foreigner? Was my chair lower than hers or did I imagine that she was looking over her glasses and down her nose at me?

By 4.30pm every word had been read in Polish and then in English, I had signed the document, copies were made, the bill was paid and the flat was mine.

It was too late to pick up the keys - *Opiekun* closed at 3.30pm, so I would have to wait until the next day. I walked along the main street towards the Old Town. I had the urge to go into the large church opposite the square. I sat on a pew at the back. The smell of incense was heavy in the air, the light was filtered and soft. I needed some time to gather myself; to let the events of these last few days sink in. Who would ever have imagined that this would happen? I had inherited my father's flat. I now owned a flat in Lublin, Poland. I leant back on the wooden pew, closed my eyes, thought of Mum and then stilled my mind. Sometimes, I too just sit.

Chapter 11 Keys, Locks and Ghosts

Thursday 21st November

Flat 33, 12 Lipowa Street, Lublin, Poland. Today was the day. I would open the door to a world that hadn't existed for me until three months ago. I had no idea what to expect.

I felt the two sets of keys, cold in my hand: six keys on each stainless-steel ring. These were the keys I had collected from the *Opiekun* office, after handing over my Inheritance certificate. I sat in the taxi on the way back to Lipowa Street, trying to imagine my father, my half-sister and her mother holding these keys in the palms of their hands, between their thumbs and forefingers, inserting them into locks, opening doors. They had used these same keys day after day. Locking, unlocking; opening and closing parts of their lives; as my father had closed the door on his life in Australia and reopened his Polish life. What they revealed and what they hid, was closely controlled. In the resistance, in Auschwitz and Mauthausen-Gusen, in England and in Australia, keys, locks, secrets, lies and silences had been the strategies for survival and, I assumed, some form of sanity.

Mr Z had said that he and the Jagielskis had gone out to parties and to see friends; that there was a great love between Antoni and Helena but Piotr had said that they stayed at home, too worried to go out in case of a break in. They had kept to themselves. What were they protecting? Or were they frightened of contact with others for some reason? How much can a place tell you about the people who lived there?

I paid the taxi driver and stepped out onto the pavement outside Lublin Plaza, across the road from number 12. Now that I had everything I needed, I didn't feel ready. I had come all this way hoping to find a photograph or a document that would show me something of my father's life and the life of my half-sister, but now I feared there would be too much and I wasn't sure I wanted to know. It was the same tension I had felt for years, wanting to know but uneasy about what I might find.

Instead, I ordered coffee and cake at Coffee Heaven. I had flash-forward snapshots of the grime of a flat closed for two years, of objects I wouldn't know the significance of. I had dozens of questions about the lives of Antoni, Helena, Janina and Ludwik, the four people who had lived in that flat over the last six decades. Should I write them down? No, just sit for a bit. I looked at the keys - one for the door to the

building, the small one for the letterbox, one for the front door and I wasn't sure what the other three were for. I wished Mum was sitting beside me, or Georgie or Tom, or one of my friends.

I layered up with coat, scarf, hat and gloves and crossed the street to the block of flats. Gloves in pocket, I worked my way through the keys on the ring trying to open the door to the building. None of them worked. After all this, was I not meant to even get through the first door? The real estate agent on the ground floor had a backdoor to the stairwell. He let me through.

Up two flights of stairs and I was standing in front of number 33. A tattered striped towel was wrapped around a black rubber door mat like a faded Liquorice Allsort. I straightened it with my foot and looked at the painted and scratched front door. There were four keyholes. Around one, the cream paint was chipped revealing a layer of green paint and metal. Was the whole door solid metal? Another keyhole had a copper surround and door handle. I matched key to lock for three, but the fourth one opened the door five centimetres and then jammed. There was some mechanism on the lock that prevented me from opening it any further. I closed my eyes and took a deep breath. It couldn't be locked from the inside unless someone was still in there. Was someone in there? My father? His ghost? Was he pushing me away again? There must be a way to open it from this side. I closed the door. I looked again at all the keys. None of the others would fit. I opened it the five centimetres again. Could I lift the latch with my fingers? No. In my frustration, I gave it a shove. Nothing. I closed it again and turned the key twice. It opened. I stepped through the doorway.

It smelt like sweet pink musk sticks mixed with wet clay. As my eyes adjusted to the dark, I could see a small hallway to the left and straight ahead a surprisingly tidy room. There was a round dining table with a white lace table cloth and a vase of red plastic poinsettias. I felt for the light switch. No power. Of course. The energy had long gone from this room, its last inhabitant departed two years ago.

Once-white net curtains let in the early afternoon light through the corner windows. There was a dressing table with a tall central mirror. I took slow, small steps towards the window. A black and white photo on the left of the dressing-table caught my eye.

It was a strip of three passport-sized shots of a man in a striped jacket. In one photo, he was wearing a striped cap. In the other two, he had a shaved head. Two were

looking at the camera, the other was a profile shot. Was this my father? I met him when he was sixty-five years old and the only earlier photo I had seen of him was the wedding photo with my mother in 1953. In the corner of this photo it said KL Auschwitz 23522, my father's number in the concentration camp. It was him. It would have been 1941. He was thirty-two. I picked up the photo. There were three copies. He looked scared but defiant with his chin raised. I almost felt admiration for him.



This was his identification photo, taken when he first arrived in Auschwitz. He wouldn't have had any belongings, only his clothes, which they would have taken in exchange for the striped uniform he was wearing. Each strip of the three photos had Antoni Jagielski handwritten on the back and the stamp of the Auschwitz archives. He must have had these photos sent to him after he arrived back in Poland. But why, after so many years, were they still sitting there? I looked into those eyes, willing some sort of story, some explanation, some understanding. This was day one of his four years in a concentration camp. How did he survive? I envisaged the efficient German procedures and the selection processes he would have been through many times, the knife edge of right or left, extermination or life.

A dull brown bird landed on the window sill, pecked at the window and flew away. Outside, there was an open square with a children's playground, a small park with leafless trees and a lane running alongside the building.

I put the photos back on the dressing table and turned to face the entrance door. The room was multifunctional. It was the bedroom - a bed in the alcove behind the door to the left; the dressing-room - dressing table under the windows and wardrobe along one wall; the lounge room - settee, bookcase and television and also the dining room -

round table with four chairs and sideboard with glassware and crockery. Did they all eat, sleep and relax in here? I'd never lived in a space this small on my own, let alone with two other adults. The walls were pink. A red patterned rug on the floor covered water-stained timber parquetry. A small, wooden crucifix similar to Mr Z's was above the doorway into the hall. I looked again at all the locks on the front door. Perhaps Antoni feared people would still come to get him, that he had to keep things secure, hidden, guarded so they wouldn't be taken - a leftover paranoia.

Along the wall to the right of the front door was another dressing table, a wardrobe, a windowless, dark bathroom at the end of the corridor and the kitchen off to the right. The first thing I noticed was a bed along the back wall of the kitchen. My father's bed. Sitting on top of some pillows on the bed was a doll in a blue dress and a brown teddy bear with creepy button brown eyes. I shivered. I felt ghosts all around me. There was a framed photo of my father on the wall, in a light-coloured coat and hat, one hand in his pocket. It was probably taken in London in the 1950s. This photo was beside three small landscape paintings and a picture of Mother Mary attached to a huge dark-patterned carpet tacked onto the wall.

At the foot of the bed was a cupboard, then a stove with enamel pots on the gas burners, a small bar fridge, another cupboard and a large wicker laundry basket. Tentatively, I opened the fridge. It was empty and clean, thank heavens. A narrow table covered with a yellow plastic cloth, formed a divider in front of the bed. At one end, was a pile of supermarket brochures, receipts, and plastic containers full of strips of foil saved from tubs of yoghurt, string and elastic bands. Everything saved, nothing wasted as Mr Z had told me. Under the window was a bench with cupboards. No sink? Maybe they used the bathroom. I looked out the window to row upon row of blocks of flats. There was one last cupboard on my left. I opened the doors and found the kitchen sink. A bowl, two plates, a cup, a spoon and a fork were still on the drainer; an aluminium soup ladle hanging from the end of it; a bar of black-cracked yellow soap and a folded, faded blue dishcloth on the small wire rack on the wall. Everything was neat and tidy but old and worn.

The colour scheme was hideous with yellow walls, pastel green cupboards with dark pink doors. Maybe paint was scarce and they used whatever they could get. I remembered Piotr telling me about painting around everything.

I jumped. Someone was yelling. I came out of the kitchen, almost crashing into a short woman with light brown hair poking out from under her hat, her brown eyes glaring. She was shouting at me in Polish.

“I’m sorry I don’t speak any Polish, only English. Do you speak any English?” My Polish had escaped me once again. I’d left the front door open to let in some light.

The woman blocked my way to the living room. Maybe she thought I had broken in. I showed her the keys. She yelled “*Zadzwoń na policję! Zadzwoń na policję!*” ‘Police’ I understood. I struggled past her and got the Certificate of Inheritance from my bag. I gave it to her. She squinted at it, all the while talking to me in Polish.

“I’m sorry I don’t speak Polish,” I said again.

“Polish! Polish! Polish!” she said angrily, imitating my English, waving her arms about. I found my phone and rang Kris, praying he would pick up. He did. I asked him to explain to this woman who I was and that I had not broken in to the flat. She took the phone, but didn’t take her eyes off me while she listened, asked some questions and nodded. I asked Kris if he could come to the flat.

“I can be there in half an hour,” he said.

While the first woman was on the phone another woman pushed her way into the flat. She was older, in her seventies maybe, with hair dyed nearly black, a square wrinkled face and glasses. She kept smoothing down her floral apron over her checked dress. The two women talked loudly and animatedly. The older woman disappeared into the flat next door and returned with her phone, rang a number, had a brief conversation and handed it to me.

It was her daughter, whose name was Elżbieta, also called Betty. She spoke some English. She was not far away and could come over. I explained that there was no need as my interpreter was on his way. She came anyway and arrived before Kris. Then the older woman’s husband turned up. There were now five people crowded into this tiny flat, all talking at once. The older woman pulled out a chair and sat herself down at the dining room table. She picked up some of my papers and looked at them. I wanted to slap the back of her hand and tell her to put them down immediately. Over the top of the others, I tried to explain who I was to her daughter, Betty. It was chaos until Kris arrived. I wanted to hug him but there were four people between me and him. Instead, arms in the air, I cried “Help!” He made his way to my side.

“Thank God you’re here!”

I nodded towards the dark-haired woman and her husband and explained they were from next door.

“I don’t know who she is,” I said indicating Mrs Shout-a-lot. “And this is Betty, the daughter of the neighbours. Can you ask them all if they can please just speak one person at a time? I’m happy to answer any questions but can we all, please, calm down.” I realised I was shouting.

Mrs Shout-a-lot was Mrs Janina Dusik who lived opposite. She had been my half-sister’s carer for the last six years of her life. The woman Mr Z had tried to contact for me. She was in a hurry to go but we arranged to meet her the following day at 3.00pm. The second woman was Mrs Janina (popular name) Syroka. Would we like to come next door for a cup of tea? I checked with Kris if he could stay.

“Yes, thank you. We’ll join you in a minute.”

I explained my difficulty in getting into the building. The lock had been changed a year ago. Mr Syroka offered to go across to Lublin Plaza and have a new key cut for me. They all left.

Kris and I looked at each other wide-eyed for a moment and then laughed. As we chatted about what had happened I suddenly went from laughing to crying. No-one had shouted at me so vehemently or in such close proximity in a long time and I had already been feeling edgy. I found some tissues in my bag and took a deep breath and smiled at Kris,

“Come on. Let’s see what the Syrokas’ know.”

Their flat was a little larger than number 33 and modern. Kris and I sat on one side of the dining room table and Mrs Syroka on the other. Betty came from the kitchen with tea bags, biscuits and a pot of boiling water and then jumped right in,

“Your father, he has the very good manners. Very polite. My mother was a good friend with him,” she said.

Mrs Syroka continued through Kris, “The moment your father came back from Australia, he left his luggage here with me. ‘*I have to go out and see how Lipowa Street has changed,*’ he said. Mrs Janina and Mrs Helena weren’t here when he arrived. They had gone to buy something. I didn’t see the moment they greeted each other. He came back later for his luggage.”

I would have loved to have seen the moment they greeted each other.

“So, they didn’t go to Warsaw to meet him?” I asked Mrs Syroka.

“No. Mrs Helena and Mrs Janina didn’t trust many people and didn’t have many friends, so they wouldn’t go to the airport. Your father took a taxi from Warsaw because he was afraid of being in Poland. He put his hand in his pocket to pretend he had a gun to be safe. So, he trusted us to leave his luggage here.”

A gun. Was he that scared, perhaps thinking he would be arrested again, imprisoned or killed? He’d taken a taxi the 170 kilometres from Warsaw to Lublin, too frightened to take the bus or train.

Betty interrupted, “How you learn about this inheritance?”

“I didn’t know about the inheritance. I hadn’t heard from my father since he came to Lublin in 1974,” I replied.

“We also didn’t know he had any other child,” said Mrs Syroka, shaking her head.

I asked about people coming back to Lublin after the war. “People were afraid of coming back to communist Poland, especially if they had been in the resistance,” Mr Syroka said. “So many were killed.”

“It must have been difficult for Janina and Helena on their own,” I said.

Mrs Syroka answered, “During the war and after, Mrs Helena earned money as a tailor and she looked after her daughter. She sent Mrs Janina to a good Catholic school. If she had joined her husband in England, the pension would have been more but she stayed here.”

“Would she have been able to go to England?” I asked. If she had gone to England, I may not have been conceived.

Betty answered, “She may have been allowed to go because her husband was there but, difficult with a child, and expensive. Ah, it is all life,” she sighed, smiled, paused for a moment and continued, “Mrs Helena would have had money if she had gone to London. Like Mama says, she would get a pension in England but she stayed here. During that time people in Poland only received a small amount of pension. And later, because Mrs Janina was ill her pension was small, and her husband died early in Warsaw, so the pension was her only source of income.”

I said quietly to Kris, “I don’t know why we are talking about money so obsessively, but there you are.”

Betty must have overheard me, “Because there might be some money left. They were very happy people.”

“Happy people?” I asked. Maybe it was a mistranslation. Perhaps she meant happy to see each other again. From what I’d heard so far, they seemed to be scared, paranoid even.

No response.

“It must have been difficult to have your husband and father away for thirty-three years and all of sudden he comes back and he is part of the family again,” I said.

Another outbreak of chaos with them all talking to me, to each other, in English, mostly Polish. I interrupted, laughing, “I’m paying Kris a lot of money, let’s let him do his job.”

Mrs Syroka continued, “They loved their daughter and during communism it was difficult to get things from the empty shops. But Mr Antoni had dollars and because of his affection for his daughter, he would buy her textiles and beautiful things and a better quality of meat and other food.”

Betty said in English, “It is important I telling you, because of a genetic disease. Janina was diabetic and your father was also.”

“Oh, I didn’t know that. Thank you,” I said, wondering what other revelations there were going to be.

Betty then surprised me, “You have this flat from your father. I can buy this flat if it will be sold. I will buy.”

“You would buy the flat? Well, let’s talk about that another time. I’ve only got the keys today and haven’t decided what I’ll do yet.”

We said our *Dziękuję*s (thank-yous) and *do widzenias* (goodbyes) to the Syrokas and locked up flat number 33. It was dark and with no electricity in the flat, there was nothing more to be done. Kris went off to do a uni assignment. I wasn’t sure what to do with myself. I walked across to Lublin Plaza, picked up some takeaway and a bottle of red wine and splurged \$7.00 on a taxi rather than catch the bus home. I showed the taxi driver the card from Villa Ostoja and was on my way to my quiet little room.

I lit a candle, poured myself a glass of wine and toasted all the people who had helped me get this far. And tomorrow? I needed to think about what questions to ask Mrs Shout-a-lot Dusik. Hopefully she would have settled down and we could have a civilised conversation about Janina.

Chapter 12 The Flat and its Secrets

Friday 22nd November

The next morning, my first stop was the Plaza and the candle shop. I bought 'warm and comforting vanilla'. I would light a candle each morning for myself, for all those who had lived in the flat and for my mother who hadn't. I sensed she was watching down from on high. I was about to work my way through the remnants and detritus of four lives, lives of the people who inhabited that austere and cluttered three-room flat.

I sat my coffee and the candles on the dining room table and looked around. The previous day had been so chaotic there were many things I hadn't noticed. There were dark brown fur coats hanging on hooks behind the front door - the fur felt coarse and looked shiny. The settee was actually another bed. Large ornately framed photos hung high on the walls. Smaller photos leant up against the books on the bookcase, in front of the mirror on the dressing table and the large old radio on the sideboard. There were four dead pot plants. I walked down the hall to the bathroom with its pink tiles and a grimy, rust-stained bathtub.

On the kitchen wall was a calendar from 2011. Mary, Joseph and the three wise men looked lovingly down at baby Jesus in Mary's arms. The bottom half was a pad of square white tear off days. The date was *Poniedziałku 19 Grudzień*, Monday the 19th December, the day Janina died.

My father had slept in the bed along the far wall in the kitchen. Did he feel safe in that tight, small place? I couldn't help thinking how prison-like all the locks were on the front door.

In the living/sleeping/dining-room, I sipped my coffee and found a heart-shaped brass candle holder. I lit the candle.

I wanted to open the cupboards, the drawers, but I felt uneasy, like an intruder. I busied myself looking at the propped-up photos. Some were clearly Janina at a younger age. There were several wedding photos of her and Ludwik, a couple of Antoni at various stages of his life, some of Helena. How did three adults live together in this small space? The cupboard doors and drawers remained closed. I couldn't bring myself to open them. It felt like such an intrusion. I finished my coffee. '*These people are all dead, Betty. Years ago,*' I said to myself. '*You have inherited this flat and all its*

contents. No-one else was interested in Janina until after her death and no-one will be interested in the photos and documents you came to find.' I took a deep breath.

A waft of naphthalene hit me when I opened the wardrobe. It was jammed full of clothes and linen. Folded white sheets tumbled out. Overwhelmed, I closed the doors with a snap and turned the key in the lock to hold in the contents. In the cupboard under the sideboard, the shelves were bowed under the weight of papers, cards, boxes, photo albums, tablecloths, a black patent leather clutch bag, a pencil case, folded used foil, magazines and newspapers. On top of the pile was a large chocolate box, full of ribbons - mauve, red, yellow, pale blue, white and silver, striped and plain. The other side of the sideboard was full to overflowing as was every other cupboard and drawer I opened. I quickly closed each of them fearing an unstoppable avalanche. How was I going to get through all of this? I was due to go to Warsaw on Tuesday - four days away. My plan had been to go on from there to Vienna, Linz and the Mauthausen camp, Auschwitz and to Bad Arolsen and the International Tracing Service (ITS), London and then home. I had to spend more time in this flat. It would take weeks to go through all these cupboards and drawers. It was like a time capsule, seemingly with not a card, letter or piece of ribbon, string or foil thrown out for the last fifty years. I needed to rethink my plans.

On the bookcase was a pile of manila folders, each with a ribbon tying it closed. The one on the top had hand written '*Osobiste*' (Personal) and 'Austr - U.K.' underneath. It was empty but the next one had files from the ITS in Bad Arolsen. And those that followed had documents from various official bodies. I put these folders in a pile until Kris could help me. Where were the bank details? There were bills to be paid. Some *zloty* in an account somewhere would be very useful.

Amongst the papers, I found a large Christmas card with a jolly, red-suited laughing Santa on the front and in gold print it said 'To My Darling Wife, Merry Christmas' in English. The message inside was in Polish. It was dated December 1961. The year my parent's marriage was annulled. Poor Mum. I felt so sorry for her, knowing that Tony still loved, and was in contact with, his first wife Helena at this time. I later found more of these cards to Helena and also to Janina and Ludwik. Snow scenes abounded - how ridiculous it was that we even had such cards in Australia at Christmas. Where were the sunny beaches, seafood platters, salads and chilled Hunter Valley Semillon?

A buzzer went off. That would be Kris.

“*Dzień dobry*,” I called down the stairwell.

“*Dzień dobry*,” he replied and within seconds, Mrs Syroka was on the landing. She followed us and pounced on Kris asking him what I was going to do with the flat.

“I’m not sure yet,” I replied through Kris.

Realising I had no electricity, she offered “Come in anytime you would like a cup of coffee.” She stayed until eventually I asked Kris to tell her that we had some work to do before we met with Mrs Dusik at 3.00pm. She raised her eyebrows, “Ooohhh... *Pani* (Mrs) Dusik. Okay. *Do widzenia* (goodbye).”

Scanning through the letters and some of the documents, Kris was able to tell me that they were applications for information, letters from Antoni providing details of his activities before and during the war and his time in England. I was astonished and thrilled at this exciting find. Kris said it appeared that Antoni was gathering evidence to prove entitlement to a pension. My father had already done a lot of the research I had planned, accumulating documents I would have requested from various archives. It was as if these folders were sitting there waiting for me.

The information was not only personal. It was an historical record of one man and his family’s experiences of WWII and its consequences. From childhood, I had been fascinated by history, and there I was, dropped like a parachutist, into a space not altered since the 1950s, with documents describing experiences leading up to the Cold War and beyond. From the papers, photos and items in the flat, I would create a bricolage of one man’s life in that era.

It was time to go across the landing to Mrs Dusik. I had a long list of questions and, as with Mr Z, I wanted to be careful not to make it feel like an interrogation.

She invited us in to sit at her dining room table, joining a friend of hers. Her flat was the same size as Janina’s but with fresh paint and floor coverings and new furniture.

“Mrs Janina was a very nice person,” Mrs Dusik began. “I spent six years with her, taking care of her good and bad. I had to spend six hours a day with her. Two hours in the morning, the afternoon and the evening and would spend the night there when it was needed. I did everything for her. I was cooking, washing up and I washed her as well.”

“Was she bedridden?” I asked.

“No, she was walking until her last moments. I did her injections for insulin because she was diabetic, and I prepared her drugs for her. On her last day I went to see her at 7.30am. She was sweating and her blood sugar level was 450, very high as if in a coma. I called the hospital and she went there. The doctor said she was in a severe state and she had a heart attack.”

“She died in the hospital?”

“Yes. You know diabetes is a genetic disease. Your father was overweight and had some eye problems and kidney problems as well. They are all related. And your sister as well, she had strong glasses. Nobody would visit her other than Mr Zabielski and he would only come from time to time. Some people would come at Christmas. I was asked by her doctor to look after her. Towards the end she told me ‘*I want you to bury me.*’ One day she put her head on the pillow and said ‘*don’t leave me, don’t leave me.*’”

Mrs Dusik paused and looked at me, “You look like her - same face. She was very pretty all the time until her last moments - she had no wrinkles.”

I laughed. “Maybe I’ll be the same!”

“I have been here for over forty years and I knew all the family from the beginning.” Looking at her friend she said, “We looked after Mrs Helena as well.”

Her friend nodded, so I assumed together they looked after Helena and Janina. Her friend said nothing the entire time we were there but would raise her eyebrows from time to time, or nod in agreement.

“Mr Ludwik died in 1973, the year I moved in here. I didn’t know him. For Mrs Janina, I was on call 24 hours 7 days a week but my employer would only pay six hours a day and for the rest of the time, she paid me directly. I would have to go to the doctor to get the drugs for her and measure her blood pressure. What do you know about this small child in the grave?” she asked me.

She was referring to Antoni and Helena’s son, Leszek, the name on the family grave, who was also known as Lechosław, the name I had found in the database at the Society of Australian Genealogists in Sydney in March.

“I only know that he was born and died in 1934, so he didn’t live very long.”

“Janina used to say he was so small and so nice. He had something wrong with his brain.”

I wondered what sort of brain damage it was but didn't pursue it. Janina would have been four years old when he was born. Maybe she had remembered him.

"Mr Ludwik was an engineer. He graduated in biology and was working on animal farms. Perhaps he got that disease he died from, from cows or pigs. He was taken to a dermatologist in Lublin and then Warsaw. They sent a note and a photo to your father saying he died."

I asked if she remembered my father arriving the following year.

"I remember him very well and that his eyesight was very poor. His wife would guide him to do the shopping. Mrs Janina was around 100kgs. From the moment I started working for her, for 6 years she didn't go out anywhere."

I hadn't known Janina was so overweight.

"She didn't leave the flat?"

"Other than taking a taxi to some office to do some business she didn't go out. She spent all her time watching television even through the night and the neighbours would complain because it was so loud. She watched everything but liked a game show recognising a song from the first few sounds."

I asked what she remembered of my father.

"He was very handsome. Although when I met him..." she paused, "He was popular among women even though he was already married. Mrs Janina would sit at the dining-table, and so often look up at the photo of her parents on the wall and say, '*My father was such a handsome man. He loved women and women loved him.*' Even when he came back to Lublin, women found him very attractive."

When I met him, he wasn't an attractive man, but in his younger photos, I could see the charisma. It seemed he was a philanderer but more perplexing, in all the descriptions of Tony so far, there had been no mention of any bizarre behaviour. I couldn't believe that none of the people I had met so far thought he was mad, or even slightly deranged. Did he suddenly regain his mental balance, as well as his sense of smell, when he touched down in Warsaw? Or did so many people of my father's generation behave like this that no-one commented; this disturbing paranoia a common and accepted legacy of the war.

Mrs Dusik had some questions of her own, mostly about my mother.

I would've loved a cup of tea but nothing was offered. Mrs Dusik and her friend sat very still at the table - upright bodies, expressionless faces. They answered in

monotone voices, occasionally interrupted by smokers' coughs. Neither of them smiled once during our conversation.

"How did you find out about the death of Mrs Janina?"

"Mr Zabielski's name was on my father's death certificate and I traced him. He told me that Janina had died."

"I asked Mr Zabielski to help with Janina's funeral, as he had with your father's, but he was ill so I had to do it by myself. Who is Małek? Do you know anything about Małek?"

At that time I didn't. I would later find she was the woman in the court case. Mrs Dusik explained that a woman called Małek, had asked her for the keys to the flat on the day of Janina's funeral and again afterwards and even went to the police to say she should have the keys. Mrs Małek thought there would be thirty people who could inherit something from Janina. Mrs Dusik took the keys to the *Opiekun* office who asked her to keep an eye on the place and to let them know if she saw anything suspicious. That's why she was going to call the police when she saw the door open and my bags on the ground.

Mrs Małek took her claim to court but lost the case. Mrs Dusik didn't know how or if she was related to Janina but told me about a man who said he was 'Jagielski's brother', who appeared with a stick and threatened to break into the flat. I knew one brother, Stanisław was born in 1905 but I didn't know when he had died, and all the other brothers were dead. It seemed unlikely that this man was any 'brother of Jagielski'.

"Why would he would want to break in?" I asked.

"Sometimes it happens that if someone knows there is a free flat, they try to take it."

"Really? They just move in?"

She nodded and then asked,

"Why didn't you want to come to your father before? Why did you wait so many years when you could have come to Poland?"

I told her the story from my parents meeting in London until Mum filed for a divorce. "My mother found out Antoni was already married and had a wife here in Poland."

“I am not surprised. It was war time and people didn’t know whether their husbands or wives were alive. I think there are many cases of this. I think that Janina would be very shocked if she knew about you and the other family. She didn’t know anything about that. But you are two years too late.”

“How did Janina and her father get along when he returned?” I asked.

“He loved her very much and he would call her Janiescka, Jasia, Janieska. Mrs Helena called him Tolek. They were very close to each other after he came back because Janina lost her husband and was alone. For Janina it was also a shock when Mr Jagielski came back. She was very young when he left so she had spent all her time with her mother.”

Mrs Dusik told me that Janina had gone to university but didn’t graduate. Her leaving certificate was enough to get her a job in the bank with Mr Z’s wife.

“I spent six years with her for good and bad. Every time I go up the stairs I look at her front door. I really miss her.”

I was sorry for Mrs Dusik. It was a long time to look after someone day and night. She would have felt the loss.

“She was very lucky to have you.”

“Later she had some mental problems as well.”

“What sort of problems?”

She looked at her friend, who frowned.

“Well it is normal for old people to forget things - her biggest problem was she would forget but nothing unusual. It’s a pity you didn’t meet her. I did whatever I could. What will you do with the flat?”

“I don’t know yet. I’m more interested in the photos and documents. There are papers and receipts from decades ago. It seems they saved everything, but I can’t find any bank accounts or statements. Do you know anything about them?”

“No, nothing,” she replied.

It seemed so strange. Maybe they were all in a box somewhere that I hadn’t come across as yet, although you would think they would be handy, given that they are a regular administrative task in any household. I asked Mrs Dusik,

“Is there anything in the apartment you would like as a memento, anything that was special to you?”

“What would I want?” She seemed surprised that I should suggest such a thing. Perhaps she had already taken what she wanted.

“I don’t know, but if you think of anything let me know.”

“There are those artificial roses. We can take those and put them on the grave for the wintertime. Every summer if I have some cash, I bring fresh ones but in the winter, they would be good. I go every week. I put flowers and candles on the 1st of November. Nobody else would go there. Even the neighbours who have known her for forty years. Are you happy that someone is taking care of the grave?

“Yes, of course,” I lied.

When I got back to my room, there was an email from Krystyna. I had sent her an update telling her about the piles of documents and photos in the flat. She replied:

It's like you're in the archives Betty, because that's exactly what it's like - sitting there day after day, sifting through all the pages and files, working out what is important and what's not. It sounds like a goldmine of information, one that requires time and patience. K

I rearranged my itinerary. I would go to Warsaw on Tuesday as planned but come back to Lublin for another two weeks before going to Vienna and Linz. There was now no need to go to Bad Arolsen. I would then go to England and could come back again to Lublin if need be before I went home.

I still had to decide what to do with the flat. I’d learned that if I sold it less than five years after Janina’s death, I had to pay 20% tax on top of the 7% inheritance tax and outstanding bills. I needed some money to pay these bills but in my rummaging through cupboards still no bank statements or cheque books had appeared. If I kept the flat for the next three years, I would pay no tax and perhaps get some income from renting it out. To rent, it would need to be renovated - new kitchen, new bathroom, new flooring, paint. Who would I get to do this? How to manage a rental property from Australia?

On Saturday I spent the day with Anna, visiting some beautiful old villages, art galleries and museums. It was a relief to be out of the flat. At her home in the evening, Piotr challenged me to a game of table tennis while Anna prepared dinner. Not unexpectedly, he was a flamboyant player and would shout “*Revenge!*” when he played a good shot. It was good to be silly and laugh with no idea of the scores.

I’d brought some papers with me that looked like they related to the flat. Anna pointed out the property register number LUI1/00032305/9 and I noticed the size, 36.52 square metres. With that number, Anna found that Janina owned the apartment and that there was no mortgage. Janina had bought the flat for the equivalent of \$AU827.00 in 1976, two years after Antoni returned. Anna explained how low the cost of everything was then, but so was the average income.

Over dinner, through Anna, Piotr told me that I had also inherited a basement. The last time he had been there was to get supplies to paint the little seat by the family grave. He had felt a bit itchy as he was crossing the road to the cemetery. He stood up from the table to act out this part of his story. He started to scratch his neck and arms, stomach and legs and then realised there was something crawling all over him. Standing at the gates of the cemetery, he ripped off his clothes down to his underwear to find he had been bitten all over by fleas. I laughed and laughed, picturing him jumping about in his undies, like some madman, in busy Lipowa Street. Maybe I would leave the basement for a while. I also learnt that I had now inherited the family grave and there were some responsibilities attached to this to keep it clean and to pay for it. In Poland, you buy a plot for forty years and then, if you don’t continue to pay, the grave is dug up and they resell the site. I wondered what happened to the bones. Anna shrugged when I asked.

On Sunday, I was back in the flat. That morning, the task seemed mountainous. I was beginning to feel the heaviness of the flat. As I lit the candle I made a small dedication and quietly added “I could do with some help today please.”

I began to sort Christmas cards and name-day cards into a box I had brought from Anna’s. The newspapers, supermarket sales brochures and magazines, which were

piled behind every door, under the television and beside the settee, went straight into a garbage bag; loose photos I started to group together on the floor.

By 3.30pm as it started to get dark, I had several bags of rubbish and various piles of things but it was like I was rearranging the deck chairs on the Titanic. Had I made any progress?

Before I left for the flat the next morning, I skyped my friend, Zaina. 5.30pm Sydney time was a bit chaotic for her with a baby and a toddler but it was good talk through my mixed emotions. I realised I was in the grip of overwhelm, amazement, sadness, confusion and curiosity all at the same time. Everyone except for Piotr seemed so serious and formal.

“Mr Z says there was a great love between my father and his first wife. Does that make it okay? I’m not sure,” I said. “They all seem to think my father was normal Zaina! I don’t get it. I think I’m going a bit crazy myself.”

And then she offered me a lifesaver. A yoga website to log onto anytime, choose your teacher and practice, two clicks and off you go. I’d done yoga on and off for fifteen years. In my little room in Lublin, stretching my body seemed to ring out the wash of the day, loosen my muscles and my mind leaving me relaxed and calm. Yoga saved my sanity on those long dark winter nights.

The next day, Kris was coming to work with me for the afternoon, so I set myself the goal of emptying the sideboard cupboards before he arrived. I would categorise the documents, as much as I could, for him to translate. There was also the real estate agent to talk with and, in the absence of any financial documents, banks to visit to make enquiries.

The sideboard first. There were bundles of cards, held together by elastic bands that disintegrated as soon as I touched them. I found photos of Tony, bare-chested, from the Displaced Persons camp in Linz. There were others of him in his army uniform at Amesbury Abbey in England where he had been sent by the British after the war. He’d sent photos of himself from Australia in 1955. This was not long after he left Mum and me. They were the only photos I ever saw of him laughing. It unnerved me.

I flicked through photo albums but knew I had to come back to them later, once I had sorted everything. It would be too easy to spend hours looking at photos. There were postcards, tins of buttons, an abacus, two stamp albums, folders of Ludwik’s

engineering drawings, playing cards, *Uroda* (Beauty) magazines, *Apteka* (pharmacy) brochures and other advertising material. They were all jumbled in together.

And then, I came to a plain brown paper sleeve the size of an A5 envelope. The contents were tightly packed. I carefully slid out the top paper and recognised flying kangaroos, an aeroplane, AUSTRALIA, a 10d stamp, and my father's unmistakeable handwriting. I stopped breathing as I laid them out on the table. Twenty-two letters. Some were blue aerogrammes, some were on lined, white writing paper, no envelopes, some in envelopes. They were letters addressed to Helena and Janina and Ludwik. Few were longer than one page. Most had my father's familiar large swirling handwriting, loops, underlining and exclamation marks. Some had writing that was small and neat, controlled and contained.



They were all in Polish of course. I would have to wait for Kris. I stood over the table and arranged them in date order. Most were from Australia in 1963, 1964 and 1965. I sighed as I picked up the last envelope. I opened it and unfolded the letter. The date on the top right-hand side was 1953. This letter was years earlier than any other. It was from Tilbury, England. My hand was shaking. A wave of nausea dumped itself in my stomach. I sat down, shocked. Here was evidence that Tony was in touch with his Lublin family the year he married Mum. Evidence that he knew Helena was alive. He knew he had lied to Mum. He knew he was committing bigamy. None of the stories he had told about Helena being missing, divorcing him, marrying someone else or dead were true.

As I looked back at the table, amongst the letters were pink and yellow receipts from the Delta Import and Export Company in Pitt Street, Sydney. He'd sent them medicines, tea and coffee from Australia. He had obviously cared about them and had tried to look after them. Maybe it *had* been a great love story. Where did that leave Mum and me? Had we just been his ticket to Australia? Did he ever love or care about either of us? Was he always planning to return to this family and live happily ever after in this 36.52 square metre flat in communist Poland? If so, it seemed he had used Mum to get to Australia.

I was startled by the buzzer. Kris had arrived. I barely said hello before I shoved the first letter into his hands.

"Can you tell me what this says?"

"Of course."

"It's a letter from my father in March 1953, from Tilbury in England where my parents and I lived. Well, I wasn't actually born until the next year. Sorry Kris. Give me your coat and I'll hang it up while you have a look."

As I put Kris' coat on the hook behind the door, he took a seat at the dining table and angled the letter towards the light coming in from the window. I really did need to find out about getting the electricity re-connected.

"It starts, *'My Beloved Children, I was deeply moved by the news of your...zaślubin... nuptials'*"

"Oh, their wedding! So this letter is to Janina and Ludwik. Keep going."

"*"and big tears fall to the ground because of sorrow'...* the writing is not easy to read here..."

I waited impatiently.

"*"I was not able to embrace you...close to my heart...and give you my blessing."*"

It was a slow process, reading a handwritten letter in poor light and much of the language was 'an old-fashioned style'. It had taken half an hour. We couldn't afford the time to read all the other letters. The letter said,

Beloved Daughter and Son,

I bless you for this new chapter of your life. May God give you happiness, love and joy, and trust and love that last forever.

Please accept many warm embraces from your Father.

Beloved Janeczko, I sent you all the money that I could gather, I was not ready to give you a dowry as I would not have thought that you would walk down the aisle during my absence. It was never my intention to choose a husband for you, I would always leave the choice to you and I believe that your deeds were right. For now, whatever is within my power I swear to help you with, my Beloved Children. I suppose that you understand my physical inability to attend your wedding. Please send me your wedding photo and await my next letter.

*Your Father,
Tolek*

What a sweet, gentle, loving letter. How sad for him not to be able to go to his daughter's wedding. How sad for Janina not to have her father there on that important day.

How betrayed my mother would have felt had she known this.

Kris and I went downstairs to the real estate agent, Olek. Selling a flat was straightforward, once I had my name on the register that Anna had shown me and paid all taxes and debts. The selling price was calculated by an amount per square metre. It seemed number 33 was worth around 4,000 złoty per square metre, 146,000 złoty or \$AU54,000. Rental income would be about \$AU300-400 per month but after Olek looked at the apartment he revised this down to \$AU200. I asked about renovating - \$AU3,500 each for a new bathroom and kitchen and then painting and new rugs and furniture. For me the prospect of retention or a sale became a numbers and logistics exercise.

From the real estate office, we took a taxi to the bank. We'd made a list of possible banks and intended to work through them until we found an account. Bank Pekao was first on the list. Nothing there. Onto the PKO Bank where we took a number and waited forty-five minutes before we had to give up. Kris had a lecture to go to. The search would have to continue when I returned from Warsaw. No-one lives without a bank account. I remained convinced there would be a financial record of Janina's life somewhere. I hoped for sufficient funds to clear the back taxes and bills.

That night I packed up my room. Mr Wojciech said I could leave my larger suitcase in his office. I'd be back in a week. I was off to Warsaw to stay with Hanna and her cat Filutek, and explore a list of museums and archives.

All at once I felt a combination of weariness, excitement, irritation, curiosity, confusion, surprise and shock. Resentment surfaced at having to pack up the lives of these three strangers who had moved out of flat number 33 and into my psyche. It felt like I had only recently finished sorting and deciding what to keep, discard, donate or distribute of Mum's worldly goods. I'd taken my time there, not wanting to let her go. In that moment, on the bus from Lublin, tears of tiredness and grief fell onto my notebook. I missed my Mum.

It was good to be out of Lublin. I hoped that some time and distance might quell my anxiety about sorting through the contents of the flat. Already I had found a number of significant pieces of both historical and personal information. My Warsaw mission was to make enquiries at archives, visit a number of museums and exhibitions and be a tourist for a day or so.

I woke the next morning to rain and dark skies. Hanna was busy so I went on my own to the Warsaw Uprising Museum, the *Muzeum Powstania Warszawskiego*, housed in a former tram power station. Although my father had not been in Warsaw, I hoped the museum might give me an understanding of the resistance movement of which he had been a member.

The Museum commemorates the Warsaw rebellion against the German occupiers on August 1, 1944, of the *Armia Krajowa*, (A.K.), the Polish underground resistance forces that my father had joined in Lublin. The A.K. had been promised Allied support. The Allies never showed up. I remembered Mr Z telling me about the Soviet troops, supposedly allies at this stage of the war, watching from the other side of the Vistula River as the Poles were slaughtered and the city decimated.

In addition to the horrors portrayed through photographs, testimonials and material artefacts, a text-based sign caught my attention. It was the A.K. Soldiers' Oath which my father would have taken:

*Before God Almighty
and Mary the Blessed Virgin,
Queen of the Polish Crown,
I pledge allegiance to my Motherland,
the Republic of Poland.
I pledge to steadfastly guard Her honour,
and to fight for Her liberation
with all my strength,
even to the extent of sacrificing my own life.
I pledge unconditional obedience
To the President of Poland,
To the Commander-in-Chief of the Republic of Poland,
and the Home Army Commander
whom he appointed.
And to resolutely keep secret
whatever may happen to me.
So help me God!*

These Polish citizens were willing to sacrifice their lives and to resolutely keep secret anything that happened to them. Perhaps this was a pledge my father kept his entire life.

During that week in Warsaw I found nothing of relevance in other museums or archives. I thought more about whether I should sell or rent out the Lublin flat. I decided to sell. It wasn't as if I was looking to establish a base in Lublin. I felt no affinity with the place and no Polish genes urging me to become a regular visitor. When my father finally left Australia in 1974, I was relieved to see the back of him and grateful he had disappeared when I was so young. The more I found out, the more I could see that Tony, Mum and I couldn't have been a happy family. Stories I'd read of families living with the unpredictability, the raging outbursts and paranoia of traumatised returned war veterans were heartrending. How would we have coped? And yet, Helena and Janina had.

My mind drifted to the flat and the jars and tins of buttons, clasps, zippers and threads of all colours. The large, medium and small silver scissors, pins, packets of sewing needles, thimbles and a wooden darning mushroom. Helena's tailoring accoutrements. There was a folder of patterns, hand-drawn on yellowed tracing paper and on newspaper. The lines were clear and strong, confidently drawn. Piles of *In Mode* magazines showed the latest fashions of the 1950s and 1960s. Some included patterns.

I had a growing admiration for Helena. Another single mother with a fatherless daughter to raise but in terrifying war times followed by the deprivations and uncertainties of the post-war communist period. Piotr had said she was heroic in the way she had survived and cared for her daughter, Janina. I was beginning to understand how difficult life would have been for her. Perhaps it would have been a little easier once Janina married Ludwik and the three of them moved into flat number 33. The timing of Ludwik's death in 1973 was uncanny. The year before Antoni returned to live with Helena and Janina.

Helena and Janina. Nora and Betty. Who was better off? It was impossible and pointless to compare. Was Antoni a hero or villain, victim or perpetrator?

Regardless, Nora and Helena had become my heroes.

Chapter 13 Back in the Lublin flat

Thursday 5th December, 2013

In Lublin, I was quickly back into the rhythm of the builders' 4.45am ablutions as my alarm each morning. On the first morning Google weather reported the temperature as '*-2°C, feels like -7°C*'. The puddles remained frozen all day, but still no snow.

Back in the flat, that first morning's discoveries included Janina's school books from the 1940s, a 1945 wooden pencil box from Zakopane in the south of Poland, near the Tatras mountains (could she have travelled there at the end of the war?), autograph books with messages and drawings from friends, and a large green plastic folder with pages of Ludwik's engineering drawings. I leafed through it in a cursory manner. As I threw it in the rubbish, a brown paper packet fell out. My eyes widened as I discovered more letters from my father in Australia.

My hasty rejection of Ludwik's drawings reminded me that meticulous attention to the contents of every single folder, envelope and piece of paper was necessary; like an archaeologist on a dig, carefully brushing away time with a small brush. If only I could read Polish. I laid the letters out on the table. There were twelve from the 1960s. Two were from 1970. I sorted them into date order for Kris and sat them next to the other documents to be translated.

I pondered over the timing of my father's writing of those letters to Helena, Janina and Ludwik. He wrote them before and after he married Mum, before and after I was born. Was his relationship with Mum, with me, inconsequential? Was he planning to keep and support two families and if so, for how long? Would it have been any different if I had been a boy?

With everything in Polish, assessing what was important and what was not was proving difficult. Sometimes handwritten notes looked significant but weren't. "Washing machine instructions," Kris had chuckled one time.

And then I found a letter from my father to Janina tucked in the back of one of the photo albums. It was dated 04.07.1948, the earliest I'd found. I recalled the chronology of my father's life that I knew: 1941 and 1942 - Lublin to Auschwitz to Mauthausen-Gusen; May 1945 liberation from the camp but I wasn't sure when or how

he'd got to England. He met Mum in 1953 but what were his movements between 1945 and 1953.

There was no address but Tony was probably in England by 1948. The letter, half a page, was to Janina and signed A. Jagielski, which seemed very formal from father to daughter. I would have to wait until Kris came to tell me what it said. I kept sifting and sorting.

Another little brown paper packet held programs from classical concerts, movies, opera and theatre. There were chocolate boxes galore used for storing ribbons, papers and cards. It looked like Janina and I had three things in common, in addition to the same father - a love of music, theatre and chocolate.

12.15pm and finally, I had the first cupboard emptied. It had only taken six days. Admittedly they were six short days with all the interruptions and limitations of only being able to work in daylight hours, between 9.00am and 3.00pm, without power. Reconnection of the electricity required a new meter box and rewiring of the flat, an expense I chose to forego. Luckily the whole building was centrally heated. The temperature had been dropping and I was hoping for snow, but nothing so far. I'd pictured a white Christmas. With this in mind and wanting to include something fun and interesting, before I left Sydney I had booked a trip to Russia for the Christmas and New Year period. I'd never been to Russia before and never on a bus tour either, but travel through Russia is restricted to guided tours. It would turn out to be just the fillip I needed - a bus full of easy-going Australians and the wonders of St Petersburg and Moscow.

Kris arrived at the flat after his morning lectures. He always greeted me with a big smile and curiosity about what new discoveries I had made. He hung his hat and coat on the hooks inside the front door.

Having decided to sell the flat, I was eager to find out if Mrs Syroka's daughter Betty was serious about buying, but translation of the 1948 letter was the priority. Kris adjusted his glasses and tilted the page toward the light from the window. Tony congratulated Janina on her *matura* (high school final exam) results and would write later with advice about going to university or taking a job. Janina had complained about his rare and slow responses. He explained *it takes 5 days for the post to deliver and I cannot do anything about that. Also, I am happy for the presents you received and I am sorry that mine was the smallest.*

As Kris left to talk with Mrs Syroka about the sale of the flat, I thought about the letter. It meant Tony was in contact with his Lublin family from 1948, sending presents, even if his was the smallest - an ungrateful comment from an eighteen-year-old Janina. Clearly Tony still cared about Janina, was interested in the choices she was making and he was writing to her regularly. Contact with communist Poland was possible and reasonably reliable it seemed. I wondered what had happened between this letter and when he met Mum five years later.

While waiting for Kris, I found some of my father's hats and matched them with photos I had found. It was a different era when it was customary for men and women to wear hats. I went to the kitchen to estimate how long it would take me to go through all the cupboards and drawers. Hopefully this would be an easy and speedy process.

Beside my father's bed a small radio, encased in a heavy, milk-chocolate coloured, leather case caught my attention and imagination. Two silver metal press-studs the size of a thumbnail held the case closed at either end on the top. There was a leather strap attached on both sides and a knot tied half way, leaving a loop of leather at the top. The loop was big enough for me to put my hand through and as I did, holding the radio below, I wondered if my father did this so he could carry it safely. Did this mean he walked around with a radio? *DOMINIKA, MADE IN POLAND* it said in large capital letters. The silver needle moved as I turned the ridged dial under my forefinger. My father's forefinger would have done the same thing.



I looked up to see Mrs Syroka and Betty coming down the dark, narrow hallway to the kitchen. “*Dzień dobry*,” I said, surprised to see them. “*Dzień dobry*” and “*cześć*,” they replied, nodding and smiling at my Polish.

Betty squeezed past me and sat herself on my father’s bed. It felt intrusive, overfamiliar. Mrs Syroka sat on the only chair, leaving Kris and me leaning side by side against the cupboard under the window, exchanging a ‘look-at-them-making-themselves-at-home’ look. The kitchen was so small I could have touched them both on the nose with an outstretched arm. Big bottoms were wiggled into place as they settled in. Mrs Syroka leant on top of the cupboard next to her, looked around and picked up a magnifying glass next to her elbow. Through Kris she asked if she could have it. “Of course,” I said smiling, “You’re welcome.” She put it in the pocket of her apron.

They asked what I planned to do with the flat. I explained I’d sell it as it was. There were debts to be paid, I’d found no bank accounts, so selling seemed to be the best way forward. Betty and her husband had calculated the renovations would be too much but her cousin Anna might be interested in buying it for her daughter, Marta, who was studying law in Lublin. Betty called her.

While we were waiting for her to finish her phone call, I noticed an ornate vase on top of the cupboard in the kitchen. It was full of orange, white and purple plastic flowers and had a brass tag slung around it on a chain. I asked Kris to get it down for me and translate what the tag said.

“Happy Wedding Anniversary Antoni and Helena. Married 50 years. 1929-1979.”

I let out a sigh. Married fifty years. Really. Five years after Antoni had returned to Lublin, after being away for thirty-three years, he and Helena celebrated fifty years of marriage. And thirty-four years later, I had spotted this anniversary memorabilia sitting on their kitchen cupboard. How bizarre. Mr Z’s ‘great love’ theory gained some credibility.

Mrs Syroka seemed to be surveying the kitchen to see what else might be useful to her. I held up the radio, not offering it to her but asking if she knew anything about it. She told me that, connected to an outside aerial, my father would illegally listen to the BBC and also to Australian radio to keep up with what was going on in the rest of the world.

It reminded me of my years at boarding school when I smuggled a small radio back to school and into my dorm to listen to the Bee Gees, Normie Rowe and the Beatles after lights out. I imagined my father lying in bed at night, radio on, being transported to countries he knew, had lived in and of which his Lublin family had no knowledge or experience. Anna had told me that Helena had never travelled out of Poland. Janina had been to Bulgaria and Russia where her husband, Ludwik had work connections. I looked at my father's bed. I wondered if he lay there, listening to his radio, feeling safe at last, content to be home in his own country, with his family, his culture, his language. How liberated he must have felt being able to walk the streets of Lublin unfettered and with the excitement of the possibility of freedom from communism brewing in his city. Not long after his return to Poland in 1974, more overt stirrings of the anti-communist revolution had begun, with protests, shipyard strikes and civil resistance into the 1980s. In spite of the imposition of martial law and Soviet repression, Poland had held the first free elections in any Soviet bloc country, electing the Solidarność leader Lech Wałęsa as President of Poland in 1989. My father had endured fifteen years of communism after his return, with restrictions on listening to overseas broadcasts and travel or connections outside Poland, before the freedoms of Solidarność.

Did he see that he had come full circle from fighting for freedom as part of the Resistance in the 1930s, to witnessing the rise of Solidarność in Poland, the catalyst for the fall of communism in the East in the late 1980s? Did he feel the satisfaction and liberation of democracy and a once-more independent Poland in the years leading up to his death in 1996?

That night the wind howled incessantly. Each time I woke to it, I snuggled under my covers and was grateful for my cosy little room. When the builders got up, I didn't. I dozed and then went back to sleep. There was no rush. I would wait until Mr Wojciech arrived to book myself in for a further week at Villa Ostoja. I wasn't meeting Kris until mid-afternoon to go to the bank. I drifted in and out of snoozing and thinking about the unfolding events.

When I did wake fully and looked out the window, everything was covered with snow, adding white to the palette of various shades of grey. I was excited to see it. I had been waiting for this day, for the experience of living in a snow-covered landscape.

Walking to the bus stop I bowed my head, leaning into the wind, clothes plastered to my body. I could hear the crunch of the snow with each step and looked behind me to see the tread marks of my boots, the only ones, along the footpath. They looked like rubber stamps plunged into thick, white fondant icing.

On the wet-floored, fogged-up bus I set myself a goal to get through the drawers in the dressing table in the flat that day before Kris and I went to the bank. I'd begun to think of my sifting and sorting in the flat as going to work each day. Catch the bus, review my to-do list on the way, pick up a coffee from Coffee Heaven, and continue emptying each cupboard and drawer item by single item, categorising and waiting for translations. The snowfall and strong winds were the only difference that morning.

I kicked my boots against the front door step to get rid of the snow before climbing the stairs to flat 33. With keys in hand, I click-clacked open the one lock I was using. The flat was warm inside and it smelt of vanilla from the candle I lit every day. I put on my disposable gloves, stepped around the piles that were accumulating on the floor and faced the dressing table. "Let's see what you've got in store for me today!"

I opened the drawer in the middle. There was a chocolate box of metal hair rollers and pins, a compact of face powder, some lipsticks, face cream, plastic beads, safety pins, combs, a brush, a brooch, tissues and religious cards with prayers, bible quotes, Jesus and Mother Mary pictures. I opened the cupboard on the right. Two shelves were stacked to overflowing. I had a chat to myself about being methodical, piece by individual piece.

The chocolate box on top was full of more ribbons, lace and some buttons. Then in an envelope, I found Tony's Australian passport.

I went to the window for better light and looked at it carefully. It was issued on the 20th June, 1974, the year he left for Poland. I wondered whether he got his Australian citizenship that year or earlier, in order to stay in Australia. What criteria would he have had to meet? Did being married to Mum entitle him to citizenship or was it enough being a refugee from communist Poland? My grandmother had sponsored him, guaranteeing him a job and accommodation. There had been a delay in getting his papers. Mum never knew why. He departed England for Australia six months after us.

I leant against the windowsill and tried to imagine what my parents' life together in England had been like. Mum had told me she fell in love with Tony almost immediately. Did they dream big? Visualise their lives together in Australia? Have

plans for the next five, ten, twenty years? Or was Mum keen to get home, eat well and be with her family in the light and warmth of Australia. What did Tony think life in Australia would be like? The Australian government's posters of the time painted an idyllic lifestyle. It must have looked colourful and so bright in comparison to the reports of communist Poland and the experience of post-war England.

Mum had a live-in job as a waitress in a hotel in Sloane Square. She loved watching the Queen's horses go by from the Royal stables nearby. Staff at the hotel were mostly from Ireland and Eastern European countries including Poland.

I imagined my parents' meeting.

I knew that Michael, a mutual friend, also Polish, introduced them at a dance one evening. In my mind's eye, I could see Tony, well dressed in a suit, freshly ironed shirt and perfectly knotted tie. He takes Nora's proffered hand and rather than the customary shake, his lips brush the back of her hand. She is surprised and slightly thrilled. "My pleasure in meeting you," he says. He sounds so suave with his foreign accent. It doesn't matter what he says, she can listen to him for hours. He pulls out a chair and offers it to her. She thinks he is such a gentleman. He makes her laugh. She's borrowed a dress from one of the girls at the hotel. It's spring in London and the evenings are becoming warmer, the days longer as the heaviness of winter lifts. They dance, his hand pressing firmly against the small of her back. Confidently he guides her around the dance floor. She feels she is in strong hands, reliable hands, hands that she can trust to support and guide her, whatever the music, whatever the dance.

Sometime later, on a date walking in Hyde Park, she shows him photos of her Mum, Peggy, and of siblings Lawson, Paul and Betty, the farm, a postcard of Surfers Paradise from Judy - images of home. Australia. Can Tony picture the rainforests and cow bails of the farm, himself riding a horse, red cattle dogs barking in the back of utes or panting in the heat, heads out the car window, tongues lolling, or living in Lismore, mowing a suburban lawn every Saturday arvo, mosquito nets, screens on doors and windows, blowflies and humidity, bare bronzed chests, shorts and thongs, skyscraper skies that go on forever, fishing from a tinnie on the river or from the beach with a rod as long as a church pew? Did she ever tell him, "When I get home, I want a cold beer, a feed of prawns, maybe a T-bone steak or half a dozen lamb loin chops or a whole snapper or flathead fillets battered and deep fried, a slice of watermelon or paw-paw or

rockmelon with ice-cream and passionfruit on top and a crème de menthe to finish it off.”

And sixty years later, I was standing in the small, miserable flat in Lublin that my father had eventually chosen.

I looked down at Tony’s passport. The other details, in addition to his name, date and place of birth, described him as ‘Height: 5 feet 4 inches, Eyes: Blue, Hair: brown, Visible peculiarities: -, Children: XXX.’

Neither Janina nor I were listed. It didn’t specify marital status.

I looked again at his photo. He was as I remembered him but there was something soft and sad about his eyes. This look was unfamiliar to me. Maybe, forty years ago I had blocked out anything that might have given rise to any feelings of empathy. Could I have been kinder, more compassionate?

I put the passport on a pile I had begun for significant documents, and went back to the dressing table cupboards full of trash with the odd treasure. There were envelopes of photos of people I didn’t know, a box of long white candles and matches and another packet of letters from my father in Australia.

These letters were from the 1970s. I began to sort through them. What I saw next took my breath away.

There, amongst the letters was the same rose postcard as the one Janina had supposedly sent me for my birthday in May 1974. I stared at it, stupefied. I picked it up, shaking my head, unable to believe what I was seeing. I turned it over. A blue Opera House stamp in the top right corner. It was from Tony, from Australia. It was addressed to Janina Lorek, dated 24.6.1974. It only had six words in addition to the address. I got out my dictionary and sat at the table.

Serdeczne Zyczenia (Heartfelt wishes)

Imieninow (on your name day)

Presyla Ojciec (Sent from your father)

And the familiar flourish of the A. Jagielski signature.

Mine had said, “*Wishing all the good things for a sister Betty. It’s good to have you! Janina.*”

This was proof that he had forged my rose postcard. He must have carefully removed Polish stamps and the airmail sticker from letters from Poland and stuck them

on my card to give the impression it had come from Poland and somehow forged a postmark. Maybe he learned how to do this as part of his training in the resistance. It was exactly the same red rose 3D postcard. One sent to a daughter in Lublin, Poland and one sent to a daughter in Sydney, Australia, supposedly from her half-sister. Maybe he'd bought a job lot of these cards. Maybe there were more of us. Maybe I was angry.

That afternoon Kris and I sorted through a lot of uninteresting documents, notes and cards until we came across two pages of very interesting thick, unlined, discoloured paper. They were folded haphazardly. The writing was large and loose. There were words and phrases crossed out and rewritten. There was no date.

As Kris began to translate, it became apparent that it was part of a draft letter written to Antoni by Helena. The possibilities were tantalising. I was spell-bound. All the letters found thus far had been from Antoni. There had been none from them to him. In the flat I had seen Helena's tailoring tools, photographs of her, her clothes, her rosary beads. This letter was a chance to get a sense of her relationship with her husband, to hear her voice.

Kris' translation was excruciatingly slow as the letter was handwritten, the ink had faded and the paper yellowed. While Kris was giving me a few words or a sentence at a time, I threw questions into the air. Helena's incomplete letter to Antoni began:

By no means, will I excuse myself from things I haven't done.

What had Antoni accused her of?

Only a few years ago I told you about a difficult situation that came upon us, particularly upon your daughter.

Was this Janina's miscarriage?

I sent then a very hurtful letter and what did I receive in exchange? Let me cite this from you: "what would it be like if I came back?"

So, he'd let them know he was thinking of coming back.

"Wouldn't it be only a moment of relief?"

Relief for whom? Janina, Helena, Ludwik and why only momentarily? Had she asked him to come back and was he making excuses not to return? She continued, talking about the pointlessness of some of their exchanges; his innuendos, that caused

unnecessary mutual bitterness. I would say that we will strain our nerves and the nerves of the one that needs peace. Let us be brave and moderate for each other. Let us be the defenders of the truth if its shadow still lurks between us. State what it is that we have in mind clearly.

Next, she wrote a Bridge (card game) analogy saying ‘*if you touch the card, you have to make a move. The card cannot be held forever.*’ It was like being in a Murder Mystery game gathering clues that made no sense as yet. And then she referred to Samuel Beckett’s ‘Waiting for Godot’, and made references to the high drama of the operas of the Polish composer Moniuszko, Bach and Czajkowski (Tchaikovsky) and continued,

I understand you, and I am well aware of the fact that it is difficult for a man to change or get used to a new life and it overwhelms him and he is always more inclined to choose something easier over something harder.

What easy choices did Helena think he had made?

Let’s end this bemoaning. Let’s speak about things that are possible, real, beautiful. Let’s look ahead to...

Kris interrupted his translation with, “The writing has faded here. I can’t make out the next words.”

“Oh no! They’re crucial... Come on Kris... what does she say next? Does she see ahead to a future with him? Is it the ‘great love’ Mr Z spoke of?” I asked. Eventually, Kris continued,

look ahead to love not only ourselves but others. It is tough indeed, especially when we mostly care about ourselves and our own comfort. The whole of humanity suffers from this illness. The life we should lead and the dedication to do the opposite, causes dissonance in a human’s life.

I waited for the rest, looking expectantly at Kris. He turned the page over, “That’s all there is Betty,” he said.

“Oh...,” I sighed.

“Let’s have a break Kris. Would you get us both another coffee?”

As Kris got up to put on his coat, I thought about Helena. It was impossible to understand what she meant about not taking responsibility for his return; did she not want him to return, not want him to come back and live with them? Was it not a ‘great love’ after all? Hopefully further pages would turn up with a fuller explanation.

Before Kris could get out the door, Betty, Mrs Syroka and two others arrived and, uninvited, came into the flat.

“*Dzień dobry*, hello,” they chorused as they crowded into the living room.

I was getting used to them coming in without asking and whilst I noticed myself feeling somewhat territorial, they always had something interesting to offer.

That morning they had brought Anna, Mrs Syroka’s niece, and Anna’s daughter Marta, the one who was studying law in Lublin. They wanted to discuss buying the flat. There was nowhere for everyone to sit but I offered Mrs Syroka my chair, covering up letters and documents from her prying eyes and wandering hands. Anna was a thin, dark-haired, tense woman in her fifties. Marta was shy and cautious with her faltering English. They suggested two options - one, they could rent the flat until 2016, when I wouldn’t have to pay any tax, and then buy it, with a contract in place to secure this arrangement, or two, they could buy it outright now. My preference was for the latter option and I gave them a starting price of five thousand złoty per square metre. We agreed to meet again on Tuesday morning to discuss. “*Dziękuję. Do widzenia.*” (Thank you. Goodbye) “*Do widzenia,*” we echoed.

The next handwritten note we found was another draft letter, this time from Ludwik to Antoni, dated 21st September, 1961. The letter began,

Dear Father!

A lot of time has passed since our last exchange of thoughts. I do not intend now to ponder over who was right and who was not. It is about a more important situation. It is about the full recovery of Jasia. As you probably know from Mother, Jasia, for the second time, has had a nervous breakdown and stays at the Abramowice clinic [a psychiatric hospital in Lublin] at the moment.

A second nervous breakdown? This was in 1961. Was this caused by her miscarriages or was there an underlying mental illness that resurfaced at this time and again later as she aged as described by Mrs Syroka. Given my father's mental instability in Australia, I began to wonder if there was a genetic disposition to mental illness in our family. Tony's paranoia and strange behaviour could have been caused by the war, a form of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, or was there something there before the war, something in the genes? This notion continued to nag at me.

From Ludwik's letter, it seemed Janina had some shock treatment after which she began to talk about '*the moment her father was taken into custody*' and her memories of his arrest in the middle of the night by the Gestapo. Unfortunately, Ludwik didn't detail what followed. What Janina then asked Ludwik to write to her father on her behalf, shocked me.

"Twenty years have passed since I saw my father, I've forgiven him everything. I'd like him just to come back and when he comes he is to kneel before me and apologise for everything."

"Kneel before me? Apologise?" I said. I pushed my chair back from the table and stood, saying to Kris, "That's ridiculous. The poor man was arrested in the middle of the night, imprisoned in Lublin Castle jail, then Auschwitz and Mauthausen-Gusen concentration camps for four years and then unable to return to Poland for fear of persecution and/or execution. Apologise? For what? Is there more?"

There was. Ludwik seemed to support this demand from Janina. Kris continued,

What I can add from my perspective is that if anything turns for the worse for Jasia, the whole responsibility falls on You Father.

Please do not treat this as blackmail. These are just honest reasonable words that state only your moral duties towards the one you gave life to, especially valid in times of crisis.

Kind regards and wishes of taking responsible steps,

Ludwik

Maybe my words are too harsh and sound offensive to you, in that case, forgive me, but I couldn't behave differently.

I was confused. Why was Janina's condition Antoni's responsibility? They seemed to be blaming him for something but I had no idea what that could be.

We also found another snippet of a draft letter from Helena to Antoni saying he "*showed no kindness to others.*" What was she talking about? Did he do something heinous? Did she know about his marriage to Mum, or my birth? Was she referring to this betrayal or was there something else? So many questions which could remain forever unanswered.

We found six letters in all that day. They took five hours to decipher and translate. I was keen to get through them but it was like trying to run waist deep in snow. Both Kris and I were exhausted by the time the light faded and we left the flat. On the way to the bus we agreed we couldn't continue this way. We had to be more efficient otherwise we'd both have aged significantly before we finished the task.

Kris said, "Maybe it's like arriving at an accident scene. You have to decide who needs immediate help, who goes to hospital, who is dead, who needs a quick shot of something and who can go home."

On Sunday morning, even without the builders, I was awake early. The temperature was '*-1°C, feels like -9°C*' and snowing. There was no point in going anywhere until I had to. I took my time over breakfast, trying to piece together the dynamics and intricacies of the relationships between the people in this fractured family. Resistance to an invading army had resulted in my father's arrest, imprisonment and exile from Poland. He'd been able to communicate with the family from which he was forcibly separated when in England and Australia but sustaining a relationship with his wife and daughter through half to one-page letters didn't seem fit for the task. I couldn't see how either side could maintain a close connection or have any understanding of life in countries so far apart in so many ways over such a long period of time. As I collated information, a picture was taking shape. I was cautious, aware that every piece I gathered altered the picture slightly, like turning a kaleidoscope.

Kris arrived at the flat a little late that morning saying, "I feel like I just got down off the cross." I chuckled at this seemingly sacrilegious idiom knowing he was a practising Catholic.

While we were prioritising what to do with our day, our trusty Mrs Syroka arrived with some papers in her hand. Through Kris she said,

“I have something important I need to tell you and give you.”

As she pushed past us, I noticed she’d had her hair re-dyed and set in curls. She sat down and continued,

“One day in 2005, I came home and found Pani Lorek unconscious on the floor at the door to her flat. It was a diabetic attack.” Mrs Syroka pushed her glasses up on her nose and poked out her jaw. She had a habit of moving her bottom denture backwards and forwards in her mouth when she was not speaking. She continued,

“I called an ambulance to take Pani Lorek to the hospital and I contacted Mr Zabielski. He and some relatives went to see her but when she was discharged and needed care, they wouldn’t help. This was when Mrs Dusik was organised to care for Pani Lorek.”

“Janina was lucky you found her in time.” I said. “Do you know which relatives visited her?”

“*Nie*, but I do have the medical report from that time.”

Mrs Syroka was a continuous source of pieces for my puzzle. She handed me the report which included the family doctor’s name and contact details. Without a further word, she left. As I looked at the document, I wondered how the doctor would view patient confidentiality. Now that they were all dead, maybe he/she would be happy to give me the family medical history. Throughout my life, every time I’d been asked for my father’s medical details I had written ‘Unknown’.

I handed Kris the report. He scanned it and picked up that as well as type 2 diabetes, Janina had high blood pressure, heart and circulation problems and there was also a statement about a form of delayed intellectual development. This raised questions for me about differentiating between Janina’s mental health and her intellectual development. Did she have developmental delays as a child, or did her intellect or emotional balance deteriorate over time as a result of miscarriages, other losses or something else? Mr Z and Piotr reported she had a happy marriage with Ludwik, who was an intelligent and well-educated man, with a job as an engineer. Surely Janina must have been mentally stable and intellectually capable during those years. Plus, she had been to university, although she hadn’t completed her degree, and she had a job in a bank. However, the 1961 letter from Ludwik quoted a melodramatic Janina, a bit like

our father. Who knew what she had been through or was experiencing at the time. She'd been married eight years, was thirty-one and in a psychiatric hospital for the second time. Something wasn't right.

Kris and I continued to work through the endless pile of documents using his accident scene criteria. We diagnosed which were dead - straight in the bin; which needed to go to hospital - for translation; which were minor injuries - short notes that could be translated, categorised and stored, and which could go home - things I would take back to Australia. A final category were things which needed specialist attention - take to Anna, the tax office or the building manager.

During a stretch break, I leafed through one of Janina's school books and there in the back, I found something special - a letter to Janina from Helena in 1947, the earliest letter yet. It seemed Janina was away on holiday, perhaps in Zakopane where the pencil case had come from. Helena had received a letter from Antoni for Janina and asked her to write him a nice letter.

Dear child let's not make him sad. Maybe he has some point in that sweetheart, maybe his nerves are wrecked. Write to your Father nicely and tenderly please. You see after four years of Hitler's camp and now in a strange and, as he puts it, an indifferent country... let's not be the cause of any resentments that he might have towards us. Maybe he loves us all, maybe just you, anyhow we are not indifferent to him. There is strong propaganda on the other side, maybe he is afraid to come back I don't know. He will come back my child, it is better to have a father than to be an orphan or abandoned you know.

So, July 1947 and Antoni knew Helena and Janina were alive and he was in contact with them. I balked at Helena's statement ...*better to have a father than being an orphan or being abandoned*. As the latter, I was forming a different opinion.

I spent the rest of the day clearing out the cupboards in the hallway full of shoes, stockings, hats, scarves and handbags. It struck me that I hadn't come across anything beautiful in the whole flat. Not a pretty piece of jewellery or clothing, not a lovely plate, bowl or vase, a wonderful painting or cushion cover or anything you would consider

even interesting, except for its historical significance. Perhaps such items would have been considered a waste of money by the Jagielskis.

The next morning Kris and I met with Mrs Syroka's niece, Anna. In a whirlwind negotiation, I sold the flat to her for 135,000 złoty, about \$AU40,000. She agreed to pay me a 30% deposit the next morning so I could pay the Inheritance Tax and outstanding bills. Unfortunately, at my appointment that afternoon to discuss payment of the Inheritance Tax based on the value of the flat, the Tax Office staff were not happy with the selling price I had agreed with Anna. They were not convinced by my arguments that the flat was currently unliveable and would require major renovations and they requested a professional valuation - a further expense. In addition to the Inheritance tax I would also have to pay 20% of the sale price in Income Tax. Financially it had been a big stretch for me to come to Poland for three months without any income. The mounting cost of interpreting and translation fees had not been included in my budget and the inheritance of the flat had become a double-edged sword with all the bills and taxes. I began to worry that I would have to dip further into my limited savings at home.

That afternoon I planned to get started on the kitchen. Walking along the hallway, I looked up and was discouraged to see yet another cupboard above the kitchen door - and I'd thought I had only one room to go. I felt like pretending I hadn't seen it but I knew I had to look. I was in for a big surprise.

I found a ladder in the bathroom and a torch. I climbed up and tugged at the stiff cupboard door. Holding my balance as it came free, I was covered in a shower of dust but right at the front was a large lime green suitcase. On the corner of the case were two old fashioned triangular *Qantas* stickers and on the handle, a brown leather tag with A. Jagielski and his Lublin address on it. It was the suitcase he'd used to come back to Poland in 1974. I climbed down the ladder, took the suitcase into the living room and opened it carefully. Inside the case, was a brown leather brief case. As I lifted it out, a little piece of white paper fluttered in the corner. It was no bigger than a small post-it note. Lucky I even noticed it. I picked it up. On one side in blue biro was written *bus 372 and 395, and Anzac Parade*. On the other side, was my name, *Betty O'Neill*, and the address where I lived in 1974 in Sydney. I stopped breathing as I stared at my father's writing on the paper. My name. My old address. The bus numbers to get there.

It was the only thing I'd found in the whole flat that indicated I existed. I felt a flush of acknowledgement but then, looking at his handwriting and my address

reminded me of all the demanding letters he'd written to me and of the months of stalking.

Since I'd arrived in Poland, my thoughts and emotions had continued to change with each new piece of information. One minute I was outraged and defending Tony against Janina's demands for him to get on his knees and beg her forgiveness and feeling sorry for him, and the next I was angry with the way he treated Mum and me in comparison to the love and care he showed towards Janina and Helena. 'What about us?' I was screaming. It was the weirdest thing. I was getting to know these people through the letters and other things in the flat and saying goodbye to them all at the same time. There were moments where I felt like a dispassionate historian and others, an outraged abandoned daughter.

I came back to my father's green suitcase: what had he packed in that suitcase to come back to Poland? What represented twenty years of living in Australia? What did he want to remember about Australia? He was on his way to a Polish winter; he had sent coffee, tea, wool and medicines before - did he pack more of these? It was hard to imagine his transition from one country to another, from one era to another, a further iteration of his life. The contents of that suitcase would have said a lot.

Chapter 14

The Mystery of the Missing Money

In all the detritus of the flat, including fifty-five years of receipts from rent, pension payments, gas and electricity bills - there was noticeably one significant absence. There was not one document from a bank. No records of a bank account, no letters from a bank, no statements, no cheque books or butts, no deposit slips. Nothing suggested there was ever a bank account of any kind. I could think of no explanation for this and I needed some money.

The day after I returned from Warsaw to Lublin, Kris and I were in the kitchen when Mrs Syroka and her daughter Betty bustled in.

“Mama has somewhat to say with you about some bank account,” said Betty nodding her head and looking over the rim of her glasses at me. Expectantly, I looked at Mrs Syroka as she took a seat, and then the levee banks burst with both women gushing Polish at the same time. Kris tried to simultaneously interpret for me but Betty intermittently switched to English and talked over the top of Kris and her mother. Eventually, Kris wrested control, asking each woman to wait, firstly until the other had finished, and secondly for him to interpret for me. Their effort at restraint was palpable.

Mrs Syroka began, “Your father trusted me from the time he came back from Australia. He confided in me that he put some U.S. dollars in a bank account.”

“And the gold, say about the gold!” interrupted Betty.

Mrs Syroka said slowly and emphatically “He told me, he hid *gold* in this flat.”

“Gold? He hid gold? Or does she mean money?” I looked to Kris for clarification.

“No, gold,” Mrs Syroka answered.

“Really?” I asked.

Mrs Syroka nodded her head, “Oh yes. To provide for Janina after he died.”

I was envious of his care and support for Janina.

Betty chimed in, “He had gold in case the currency collapsed.”

Mrs Syroka continued, “I never saw it and I don’t know where it might be.”

Betty asked, “Have you found anything?”

“No, I haven’t,” I said shaking my head.

Mrs Syroka went on to explain in detail how she had looked after Janina for one year with no pay, making her soup and other meals. Janina had become like a child and

had some mental illness problems so Mrs Syroka cashed cheques and looked after her bank account for her. This was before Mrs Dusik, the third resident on this floor, was paid as Janina's carer. I asked if she could tell me which bank, but Mrs Syroka would not be diverted from her stories of all she did for Janina.

And then she said, "I might still have a bank statement..."

"That would be very helpful," I said.

Mrs Syroka returned from her flat with a big smile on her face and a piece of paper in hand. She flopped back into the kitchen chair and talked more about the help she had given Janina. Then, waving the paper at me she said "You owe me a bottle of wine," and put the paper back on her lap.

"Gladly," I said. She kept talking, patting the piece of paper. I shifted my weight from one foot to the other, and back again. I was ready to poke her in the eye, snatch the paper and run down the hallway. I put my hand out, "Can I please see the paper Pani Syroka?"

Smiling, she handed it over. There was a balance of PLN33,000 in the account. That was about \$AU10,000. The account was with the PKO bank where we had waited for forty-five minutes the previous week before giving up. Then I noticed the statement date was 2003. Ten years ago. I wondered what was left.

Mrs Syroka and Betty hadn't been sure whether to tell me about the money and the gold when we'd first met. And then when I went to Warsaw, they thought I had returned to Australia. They were now keen to tell me what they knew. Much of their conversation, from the day I met them, had been about money and pensions and now secret bank accounts and hidden gold.

"And you know this Pani Dusik," said Betty nodding towards the door and lowering her voice to a loud whisper, "she be stealing all money from Pani Lorek."

I frowned. "You think she took money from Janina?"

"*Tak, tak*," said Betty. "When she look after her, she take *all* the time," she rolled her eyes and then spoke to her mother at length in Polish.

Mrs Syroka called for Kris to interpret, "Pani Dusik only had the keys to the flat for a couple of days after Janina's death so she probably wouldn't have found the gold, if she knew about it."

I smiled, somewhat sceptical about a hoard of gold hidden somewhere in the flat. Was it gold pieces in a pirate chest somewhere or gold bars wrapped in chocolate-wrapper foil for disguise?

Mrs Syroka bent over and picked up a power board from the floor. She looked at me with raised eyebrows.

“All yours. You’re welcome to it.” I replied.

With nothing else on offer, Mrs Syroka and Betty left with a nod of their heads towards Mrs Dusik who was coming up the stairs. I sensed an air of polite animosity and distrust between the neighbours.

Mrs Dusik was home early. We invited her in. I didn’t mention the bank statement from Mrs Syroka. I asked what she knew about Janina’s bank accounts.

“Nothing,” she replied.

“No statements, no cheque book?” I asked.

“*Nie, nie.*”

She’d seen nothing. She had nothing. She knew nothing but said she thought all the money had gone.

I looked at my watch. It was 2. 45pm. There was time to go to the bank.

We took ticket number 470 from the ‘wait-your-turn’ machine at the bank and in no time, our number was flashing. Kris explained the situation to the young woman behind the counter. I showed her my inheritance certificate and the bank statement from 2003. I said something about PLN33,000 and she corrected me. It was \$US33,000. I tried not to get too excited, reminding myself this statement was ten years old. We waited while she discussed the matter with various people. They each looked at the paperwork and then at me and then back to the paperwork. Eventually, we were taken into the office of Miss Agata who, after some time, explained through Kris that she couldn’t give us any information and there was currently no account with the PKO bank in Janina Lorek’s name.

“So how do I find out where the \$US33,000 has gone?” I asked.

She shrugged her shoulders. I persisted.

“Can you tell me if the money was withdrawn in cash, by cheque or transferred to another bank?” I asked.

“I can’t say. I can only tell you the situation after Mrs Lorek’s death, not anything about previous transactions and after her death, there was no account here.”

“But Janina must have had a cheque or savings account up to the moment she died. Her carer withdrew money to do her shopping. It should still exist after Janina’s death,” I said.

“What was this carer’s name?” Miss Agata asked,

“Janina Dusik.”

Miss Agata raised her eyebrows, looked at her computer screen and nodded vigorously but repeated “I cannot say anything about this.”

“So how do I trace this money?”

She asked us to wait while she sought advice from the bank’s lawyer.

I looked at Kris and said quietly, “We also know a lawyer at this bank. Mr Z’s daughter, Anna.”

Miss Agata returned. “There are three options for you - a lawyer can pursue the matter for you, you can take it to court or go to the Public Prosecutor.”

I asked Kris to ring Anna. She offered to prepare a letter in my name to take back to the bank.

Had Mrs Dusik taken all the money? I had no idea, but something had happened to \$US33,000 over ten years. In her condition and with costs of living in Poland so low, I couldn’t see how Janina could have spent all that money. Good on her if she did, but seeing the flat, I doubted it.

So, we were on the trail of a large amount of missing money with the chief suspect being Mrs Dusik. I would certainly take some wine to our key informant, Mrs Syroka. Kris and I laughed about being lucky amateur detectives.

The next day, with Anna’s letter in hand, we waited at the PKO bank. If things went as planned, Miss Agata would provide me with Janina’s statements and access to whatever was left. It was a long wait until she called us into her office.

I handed her the letter and said through Kris, “As you suggested, I have been to a lawyer for advice. I’ve been told that everything you need, to give me information about my sister’s account is in this letter.”

She read the letter, looked at her colleague who sat facing opposite her, and shook her head.

I sighed and asked, “What else do you need?”

She paused for a moment and then, “What statements do you want? From which years?”

What? Had she changed her mind? I was confused but answered her question.

“I’d like a copy of all the statements from this one in 2003 but if that’s too much, the year leading up to Janina’s death or when the account was closed.”

She consulted with her colleague who pursed her lips and shook her head. Miss Agata was wavering.

I said, “Yesterday you gave me three options - a lawyer, court or the Public Prosecutor. I went to a lawyer and have this letter based on her advice. I was assured that this would be all that was needed.”

Miss Agata looked at her colleague again and without any further explanation said, “You’ll have to go to court.”

I was even more confused. Kris and I regrouped in the foyer area. “She wants to tell us something but she can’t - that’s my impression.”

Kris agreed. I handed him my phone and asked him to call Anna for advice.

Anna explained the necessary steps to go to court and told us to leave a copy of the letter I had already written with Miss Agata so the bank would have to respond. This would show the court that we needed an order from them to get the statements.

We went back to Miss Agata and explained my lawyer’s advice. Her colleague had gone home for the weekend and her demeanour seemed to change as a result of this. She told us to add Janina’s date of death to the letter and also suggested that we ask about *all* accounts and handed Kris paper and pen to rewrite the letter, dictating changes. I was still not sure what was going on but I signed the letter, she took copies of my Inheritance Certificate, the bank statement, the letter I had just signed and my passport. I paid PLN20 (\$AU7.00).

“Come back on Monday or Tuesday. You can pick up the statements then,” she said, without any sign that she had contradicted all that had been said before.

Really? Fantastic! She also implied that money had been taken illegally from the account - by whom, how much, where it went and how, were still questions. Kris and I headed to the pub for a drink to celebrate our confusing success and confer about this unfolding mystery.

Friday 13th December

The bank statements were finally ready and showed that on the day Janina died there was \$US21,000 in her account. It was withdrawn by Mrs Dusik that very same

day. How could she do this? Miss Agata wasn't at the bank but a young man Rafal, who spoke a little English, explained that Mrs Dusik had been made a joint owner of the account and legally, had the right to withdraw money. There was nothing to be done.

I rang Kris and asked him if he could come to the bank. While I was waiting Miss Agata arrived and when Kris was able to interpret for me, she explained more of the details. She stated I had a strong case against Mrs Dusik and should definitely go to the Public Prosecutor or the Courts. What Miss Agata said next surprised me,

“Or, you could just ask her to give the money back.”

I laughed, thinking she was joking, “Oh sure, she'll say of course Betty, here it is. I have it in my handbag for you.”

“It's worth a try,” insisted Miss Agata.

I arranged for Kris and I to see Mrs Dusik the next day.

That morning, I was awake and up at 4.00am worrying about talking with Mrs Dusik. Maybe she was entitled to the money. Maybe there was an agreement between her and Janina. If this was the case why did she lie and why did she go to the bank the day Janina died and withdraw all the money? Maybe she'd thought that without a will and nothing in writing she'd better grab whatever she could before others started making claims. There was no way of knowing other than asking her. But how truthful would she be? She might refuse to talk with me and tell me to leave.

The search for the money had hooked the detective-problem-solver in me and I was also aware of being hyper-sensitive to being lied to, taken advantage of and manipulated, all actions that reminded me of my father and my relationship with him. Maybe it was the wronged daughter in me wanting to make corrections and adjustments to the balance sheet. Would I bother with a court case? I wasn't sure. Was I being greedy now? What was the right thing to do? Maybe Janina had wanted Mrs Dusik to have the money. Kris thought that if her employers found out she had taken money from someone she was caring for she would lose her current carer's job and if she was charged with theft, her pension as well. If I was in the same situation, I'd like the opportunity to give the money back. After all, up until a month ago, Mrs Dusik didn't know I existed and there had been no other family or friends in Janina's life for many years. I would tell her what I knew, statements of fact and see what she said.

We met Mrs Dusik in her flat as arranged. After some initial conversation about photos, letters and objects, I showed her the bank statements.

“I have some statements from the bank relating to Janina’s accounts. The first one shows that in 2003 there was \$US33,000 in the bank.”

Mrs Dusik interrupted. “I will explain everything carefully.”

At last.

“In 2009 Mrs Janina and I signed an agreement that we were co-owners of the bank account. Her pension was very low and she wouldn’t spend much money but she liked food, so, with this agreement, I could take money from the account for this. She said when she died she wanted me to organise her funeral. All the documentation is in the bank.”

“I’ve been to the bank and have a document from them. In 2003 there was \$US33,000. The day Janina died there was \$US21,000.”

Mrs Dusik shifted in her chair.

“It was 2009 when we signed this agreement so I don’t know what happened to the money. Helena was still alive. Perhaps she spent some money or gave it away.”

“No, Helena died in 2003 when there was \$US33,000 in the bank.”

“I have no idea what happened until 2005 when I started.”

“There’s also a doctor’s report from 2005 which says Janina wasn’t mentally capable of making these sorts of decisions with an adaption disturbance and developmental delays.”

“If her mental health was bad she’d be sent to a psychiatric hospital but there were no requests to do this. It was because of her nervous breakdown and her husband’s death and because she couldn’t have a child. But I didn’t notice any strange behaviour in her. She was the same person as always.”

I paused a moment. Mrs Dusik’s face was pale and mask-like. I went on.

“I understand the account was in both your names and as you said, you were given access to withdraw money to buy things for Janina.”

“If you had come earlier *you* would have access to the account and you would take care of her.”

Her voice sounded defensive, but tone of voice can be deceptive when you don’t speak the language. It wasn’t easy for either Mrs Dusik or me, especially through an interpreter.

“What do you mean?” I asked.

“Should you come earlier...” she trailed off and then started again, “Given the time from her death until today, the money had to be spent to renovate her grave and take care of it every single week. Also, I had to pay for the funeral as well.”

“But we are talking about \$US21,000 Mrs Dusik and you told me you had no bank statements and knew nothing and that isn’t true.”

“Well, I was worried that the neighbour would spread some gossip about the account once you told her.”

“The bank gave me this statement and we can see that you took the money out of the account the day Janina died.”

“It was taken for the funeral.”

“\$21,000?”

“Only part of the money was transferred.”

Kris read her the statement to show this was not correct. We waited in silence for what seemed like a very long time.

“So, what shall I do? Would you like this money back?”

I was shocked. “Yes,” I said, sitting up straight. “Yes, I would.”

“I will do my best to return this money. It’s okay, I will give it back.”

Mrs Dusik’s face remained expressionless as it had throughout the whole conversation.

“Thank you. Deduct the money for Janina’s funeral and the grave, and there would have been some interest earned in the two years since the money was transferred but you are welcome to keep that and the gold if you found it.”

She didn’t respond except for a small tilt of her head and slight shrug of her shoulders.

“Thank you for that. This isn’t an easy situation. It was a difficult conversation to have.”

“It’s okay,” She pushed her chair away from the table and showed us out.

Wednesday 29th January - six weeks later

Kris spoke with Mrs Dusik about the repayment of the money a number of times after I left Lublin. There were many delays. Time was running out for everything that

needed to be done to finalise the sale of the flat before I left for Sydney. Everything was too uncertain. I delayed my flight home to the 12th February.

On Friday 31st January, Kris and I met with Mrs Dusik's daughter, counting out the money in cash on the kitchen table, like a shifty drug deal. I was a little nervous walking along the street with so much money in my large handbag. Kris and I went to the Tax Office to pay the Inheritance tax, paid the outstanding building fees and received the necessary documents for the sale of the flat. And that was all the money gone with the income tax still to pay once the flat was sold. We were done. It had taken most of December and all of January. Our sleuthing, patient waiting and chasing up with Mrs Dusik had been successful.

Chapter 15 Letters from Australia

Sunday 15th December- before the resolution of the money mystery.

Too curious to wait for the written translations of my father's letters to his Polish family, I asked Kris to work with me in the flat for the last two days before I left for Vienna. I planned to multi-task, bundling up blankets and linen for the Brotherhood of St Albert while I listened to Kris translate. I was desperate for details directly from my father about his life in Australia and his relationship with Helena - her draft letter suggested conflict between them.

Kris sat upright and focused. The letters were lined up in date order in front of him on the small dining table. He opened the first one. 28th April, 1962. Antoni was fifty-three, he'd been in Australia for seven years and the previous year, his marriage to Mum was annulled, declared invalid, as he was still married. I was seven.

Antoni began this first letter to his Polish family complaining of no replies to his letters, no responses to his questions or suggestions.

*And you, Helen, have uselessly written to me about your garden!
...you can't do it this way. After all, I'm going to come back. I want to know
what the situation is and what I should be prepared for.
...are you now becoming indifferent? What is wrong with you? I hope you
understand that when one saves up for the journey, one cannot send money.*

I joined Kris at the table, packing abandoned. I was shocked and enthralled.

*Your each and every letter throws me off balance. Such a question for
instance: Have you by any chance got married again?"*

Helena must have known something. But Antoni evaded the question.

*...and before, some rumour said that I led a debauched life - totally
untrue and can't be proved. I could remind you of your excesses. Woman, go
and have your head examined, use your brains and not stupidity. Write to me
something thoughtful.*

P.S. Don't you have someone who could address the envelope right? T.

Kris' face looked as taken aback as I felt. This wasn't the loving relationship Mr Z had led me to imagine.

Kris also commented, "Antoni's Polish is written at the level of language a child would use."

In a later letter Antoni apologised to Janina for his incorrect use of Polish saying it had caused her to misunderstand him. It seemed he was caught between two languages, not proficient in either Polish or English. In 1974, I had assumed that his English was so poor, after almost twenty years in Australia, because he had mostly mixed with people who spoke Polish. There was a large Polish community in Sydney at the time. From 1949, the Poles were the largest national group of migrants to Australia. They accounted for one-third of all Displaced Persons admitted under the Australian and International Refugee Organisation scheme. Between 1947 and 1954 the Polish migrant population in Australia increased from 6,000 to 56,000 and many associations and clubs were formed to foster Polish language, community and traditions. So far, there was no mention from Antoni of this community or of any friends, of any nationality. Did he lead a solitary life?

"This one is almost a year later," said Kris. "22 February 1963. He's had advice from a psychiatrist that his return to Poland might be too much of a shock for Janina."

This doctor of mine will write to Janeczka's doctors on my behalf, and to the unit of nervous illnesses. I need to have the situation clear and know where I stand!...

In March he wrote:

Janeczka's illness is a great tragedy, but it isn't an excuse to use the Child's suffering and start to offend me and write stupid things.

... You are writing asking me not to tell you that I'm ill, unemployed, or that I don't have money. Well, it's understandable that I am not to be given any consideration...

... I ordered the drugs today. I've sent a big amount of injections.

On the back of the letter he wrote, *I didn't write much since what I usually write is not interesting to anyone. T.*

I felt a mix of sympathy for him but also uncomfortable with his attacks on Helena. A picture of a difficult and unhappy life in Australia was beginning to form. Feeling hot and claustrophobic in the over-heated flat, I walked to the window, looking out to a grey and cloudy sky. In the park below, a small boy, dressed for the cold with only his little face exposed, ran to a swing. He squealed with delight as his father pushed him high in the air a few times and was inconsolable when they had to leave.

Three months later, on June 16, Antoni wrote,

The lack of news from you worries me!

.... Don't push me away with your behaviour.

And a further six months later, his letter to Ludwik and Janina said he had sent Janina knitting wool but complained that they wrote little to him and had misinterpreted him - *this must be the reason for your indifference.*

Here the summer has just started, and it's sweltering. 120° F, sunstrokes are on a mass scale. I sit sometimes in a pub, drinking an iced beer and my thoughts are with you. I'm not allowed to drink since I weigh 107 kg and my heart is weak, but I'm not addicted to anything and I drink little, but one needs to have some fun.

I turned back from the window.

“That’s a huge amount of weight to be carrying for someone who is only 163cms. He’s gone from gaunt and frail at the end of the concentration camp years to solidly obese,” I said. “And 120°F must be almost 50°C. I doubt Sydney has ever been that hot.” I consulted Google. The hottest temperature ever recorded in Sydney was 45°C. Antoni continued to exaggerate and fabricate making it difficult to know what was true.

In October, he described some of the effects of the concentration camps after admonishing Janina:

... Janeczka, it's unacceptable. You're an adult woman and you've got a house and a husband. I require that you treat your father seriously!

... Back there you all think that money grows on trees here. It does not. There's enough work, but one needs to be in good health, and I'm not. In this climate, where it's 40° C during the day and water freezes at night, I'm not always fine.

I've got difficulty breathing and I get tired quickly. The camp has taken its toll. If there are periods that I don't write anything, it means that I'm in a worse condition. I never write about my illness since no one ever cares about it and it's totally unimportant to anyone.

Sympathy welled in me for him and for Helena and Janina too, and for all the families fractured by war. Their lives had been irreparably damaged, brutally disrupted. And here they were trying to put themselves and their relationships back together across the divide of geography, time and cultures. So many misunderstandings and decades of trauma, anger and resentment bubbling up through the attempts to reconcile.

Sitting down opposite Kris, I realised what a lifeline he was. Calm, steady, doing his job, for the most part neutral in his delivery of information. I was also trying to remain neutral as I gathered the puzzle pieces, figuring out where they might fit and conscious of the ever-changing picture being formed. It was so much more difficult without the lid to the puzzle box showing the completed picture and stating how many pieces there were.

The next letter had a surprise. Although he hadn't had any positive results to date, in mid-November, Antoni was returning to his *registered opal mine*. No location was given. I admired his tenacity in trying different avenues to improve his situation.

"And he says he's sent Janina a large amount of nerve pills and 2,000 zloty - that would have been a lot of money in 1964," said Kris.

Antoni was back in Sydney by December:

Due to a huge flood I came back from the far and hot North. I spent a quiet Christmas in Sydney.

My Dearest, since my businesses here in Australia aren't going very well and since I'm not sure that in the future I'll be able to become richer, I'm considering a return to the country.

I'm still healthy and strong and I can work.

I understand that I may create you problems with the flat, but no worries, I'll find an apartment for myself.

I'm waiting for your opinion.

There was a longing for home in his letters. Being lonely and isolated with not much going for him in Australia, I could see why he was seeking refuge in his family and home country.

“There’s a P.S. here,” said Kris. “*“I could arrive in April.”*”

Immersed in this other dark winter world for the previous four weeks, I had identified with my father’s isolation in a strange country, Helena’s hard work as a single mother to support herself and her daughter and my own resentments and exclusions. I was trying not to let it affect me. I attempted not to judge anyone, particularly not my father, but my knuckles were white holding onto the see-saw of emotions, trying not to fall off. I was to take a tumble two months later when I got home.

It was getting dark, so I bundled up the last six letters from 1965 to take over to Coffee Heaven. There was a five-year gap after 1965 and then nineteen letters from 1970 -1972. They’d have to wait.

Stepping outside, I took a gulp of fresh air. My eyes watered from the icy wind. Hands deep in pockets and shoulders hunched against the cold, Kris and I waited for the traffic lights to change. Lublin Plaza was buzzing with Sunday afternoon shoppers. Silver, red and green Christmas decorations reflected the bright fluorescent lights. Christmas carols were blaring out of every outlet. The same was probably happening in Sydney. I missed my family.

As we settled into comfy chairs in a quiet spot at the rear of the coffee shop, I was struck by a wave of discomfort, realising how personal these letters were. My father could never have imagined that one day I would read them. I was an unintended reader. I felt slightly guilty but also compelled to continue.

Kris began with a letter to Helena on February 1, 1965,

In December last year I wrote you about my intention of returning to the country for good. It turned out I caught you by an unpleasant surprise. Your response was silence.

I don’t feel offended because I don’t have the right to. I just wanted to keep certain conventions.

Three weeks later, he wrote,

I totally agree that my return is a bit too late, as you put it.

I asked you to find out about work. You write foolishness... the fault is the way you were brought up.

I will come back when it is time for me to do so and I won't need your shabby pension, so I won't ask for your opinion because it looks as if I'm looking for a place on my own for my old age.

Two months later, he'd realised his plan to return had caused *panic and confusion*, and announced he would live in Kraków so as not to disturb their peace. *You never wanted my return. Just us two know it*, he wrote to Helena. Still, he *wanted to keep up appearances for the children*. He added, *don't bother writing, it doesn't matter anymore*.

I turned the page of my notebook feeling the heartbreak of the situation. There could be so many reasons for Helena not to want his return. They were both now in their fifties and very different people. Even men and women returning home to their families straight after the war were changed. Having fought, been imprisoned and then exiled, it seemed Antoni only had one goal - to get well and financially secure enough to return to his family. But how to re-establish a relationship and find your place again when met with silence and *it's too late*? This letter stirred a deep sadness for Antoni from within me. How devastating to realise his family didn't want him.

I knew that crush of feeling unwanted. I had felt it when each of my parents left me. I had felt it every time I was moved from one family to another as a child. It never leaves when it is repeatedly imprinted at such an early age and painfully breaks through from time to time. I could easily recognise it in others.

I took a break in the bathroom, splashed my face with water, wiped my eyes and put on a fresh layer of lipstick.

I knew that Antoni didn't go to Kraków but returned to live with Helena and Janina. He and Helena had celebrated their fiftieth wedding anniversary - perhaps to keep up appearances and for the sake of the '*children*'? Janina was hardly a child although, from Piotr's description and the medical report, it appeared she behaved like one. Perhaps Helena and Antoni's happy reunion was a sham for Janina's sake. His bed *was* in the kitchen.

I returned to the coffee shop and Kris.
"There's a p.s. to that last letter," he said.

I send an amateur photo of me from the Freedom of Speech Park where I often make speeches.

I hadn't found the photo. I assumed he meant the Domain in Sydney where crowds used to gather on a Sunday afternoon to listen to speakers on their soap boxes. I didn't know what had prompted Antoni to make speeches in the Domain, or even if he had, especially given that his English was so poor. In that Cold War era, maybe he spoke against the communists who were still influential in the Australian Trade Union movement or against the current Polish regime.

As a teenager, I loved going to the Domain with my girlfriends on a Sunday afternoon, when I was allowed out from boarding school. To us, it was an exciting hot-bed of dissidents and contentious thinking. Even if I had seen Antoni there, and we would have been there in the same years, I wouldn't have recognised him as my father nor he, me.

In the next letter 23rd June, 1965, Antoni sent another PLN2,000 and directions:

You will urgently obtain and send by air mail the required documents which I've marked with arrows, if you want Janeczka to receive 50, 000 PLN from this.

Other documents I'll get here in Australia - it's the settling of my case that was up for 14 years.

Unless you're willing to obtain those documents it will be my last letter. Tolek.

He was desperately attempting bribery, orders and harassment to get Helena to co-operate and send documents he needed for his claim for compensation for his war injuries from the German government through M.K. Chmielewski, Consultant in International Law, London, who represented him and others in the courts in Geneva and Cologne. From the end of the WWII numerous German Federal Compensation Acts were legislated to provide payments to victims of National Socialist persecution. Whilst the Luxembourg agreement of 1952 provided reparation payment to various countries, individuals, like my father, were required to make their own claims, providing evidence of their experiences and the impact of war on them and their families. According to the folders of documents in the flat, Antoni had been gathering evidence since his 1946 arrival in England to provide proof of his pre-war army service, of his activities in the

resistance, his imprisonment in the concentration camps and of joining the Polish army in Italy. The letters I found in the flat described some of the key steps of this process. I came to discover, he persisted in a difficult thirty-year quest for justice and compensation for his war service.

It seemed Helena was not always responsive to his demands for help. Without the motivation of a 'great love' Antoni didn't have the means to ensure Helena would do things for him. It seemed he had no friends to ask and so the only tactic left was manipulation and bullying. Helena chose not to reply to the previous letter.

Helena!

I've written about sending me those documents and you should have written me back yes or no!

I have a deadline and I need to know what I should do...

Write to me immediately.

It didn't seem that Helena had responded well to intimidation or admonishments in the past. I wondered how this letter would have been received. He persisted and wrote again in August.

Helena!

I keep waiting for those few documents.

At least send me the marriage certificate immediately.

There were no more letters until 1970.

It was getting late and both Kris and I were tired. The fluorescent lights and repetitive Christmas carols began to irritate me. We agreed we'd do three of the 1970s letters to get an idea if the situation had changed and then sign off for the day. The tone of the next letter was very different.

Sydney, 28th March 1970

My Dearest!

Time has taken its toll. Human life is much shorter than one expected, but who doesn't make life mistakes, everyone.

I really want to exchange letters with you. I'm very lonely!

I've come back to Sydney from the islands for good and I'm getting ready for retirement.

He gave a Poste Restante address in Croydon, Sydney saying he didn't have a permanent address. He was sixty-one years old, with no family or friends it seemed, no home and no work. I admired his sense of agency and perseverance in the face of so little success. The next 1970 letter was to Janina on 21st June, trying to re-establish contact and still lamenting that they didn't care if he was ill, or unemployed or had no money. He hadn't been able to resist a barb at the end. *Please address the letters decently.*

There were also updates on his ongoing court case for compensation for his war injuries. He requested information from Helena to support his claims and it seemed he had been through a series of wins and then appeals and delays. He cajoled with promises of money for Janina and threats of cutting them off from everything if they didn't comply with his demands. And there were large gaps. Either there were letters I hadn't found or this estranged family on opposite sides of the globe, health and sanity undermined, had chosen not to write.

Letters from Antoni addressed separately to only Ludwik were all very strongly worded and challenging. Part of one such letter to Ludwik on 25 April, 1965 said:

It is four months since I wrote and I have no word from you regarding such an important topic in my letter. You have discussed this matter but do not have enough courage to write to me about it. I have been treated like an old fool. The topic of my return is exhausted. I will not write about it again.

But one month later he did,

*... you have mentioned many disputable issues from the past years.
I consider the topic of my return to be exhausted.*

His Polish family must also have been exhausted by the topic of his return by this stage. I was. And to think it continued for another nine years before he eventually arrived in Lublin. Ludwik would be dead by that time.

Kris looked tired and so was I as we made our way out of a still busy Lublin Plaza. On the bus home, I rubbed my temples to ease my tight scalp. I was beginning to understand how difficult life had been for Antoni in Cold War Australia and how desperate he had been to get his compensation and return to his family, if they would have him, and to his homeland, even if it was still under communist rule. My brain was

full and my heart was disappointed in the disintegration of the ‘great love’ story. It would have provided me with some justification for the abandonment of Mum and me.

The next day was my last in Lublin for a while and I was keen to get through the last of the 1970s letters. It was hard going reading all those letters together but the hope that some interesting fact, a different nuance would provide new light on the lives of Antoni, Helena and Janina kept me focused as did my tenacity to finish a task. We also had a celebration, farewell and early Christmas dinner to look forward to that night at Kris’s favourite restaurant in the Old Town Square.

Seated once again at the dining table in the flat, we began with a letter to Janina in March of 1971 in which Antoni started by professing his strong faith in God. I’d noticed crucifixes hung above every door in the flat and bibles, prayer books, rosary beads and religious cards proliferated. Mrs Dusik had said that Janina went to mass regularly until she was unable to manage the stairs and had then watched church services on television, but I had no evidence of my father’s faith or lack thereof. On every legal document, he stated his religion as Roman Catholic. How could a good Catholic commit bigamy? My parents, both Catholics, had married in a registry office but I was baptised in a Catholic church and had god-parents, my father’s friend Olga and Michael, the Pole who introduced my parents. Maybe that was for keeping up appearances as well. I wondered if he prayed, and if so, what for.

The next few letters described Antoni’s continuing connections with compatriots in both Australia and Poland, from the concentration camps, people whose lives he had saved and would be willing to help Janina with work in Poland *from Oświęcim* [Auschwitz], *we have hundreds of friends in Poland holding important positions*. He also reported his success in the courts *I’ll soon receive a large sum of money. I won my appeal. I make a promise to support You. It’s a matter of three months. Soon I’ll be drawing two life annuities. My old-age is completely secured, to spite my enemies and to my Dearest’s delight*. This was the result of submission of his medical report including testimonies of eight medical consultants. He enclosed a copy of this medical report, issued by Mr Listwan, Director of the Clinic for Nervously Ill. Did that mean the Mentally Insane? I was feeling a bit snarky and tired that morning, both over the

Jagielskis and deeply curious. I only had to get through this last day and eight short letters.

I wondered if Mr Listwan was the doctor whose life Antoni had saved in the concentration camp or was it someone else. Later, I learned that Ignacy Listwan had been a psychiatrist and prolific writer on disorders in Displaced Persons. There was a copy of this medical report, in Polish, in a folder in the flat.

From the start I had wanted to understand how Tony had survived so many years in the concentration camps and then his time in Australia. What followed in the next letters provided some explanation.

To give up everything would be to commit suicide and I'm far from this, I'm always saying that I have Family.

This flower is your edelweiss, which you sent to me in England 25 years ago when you had been on a school trip in our mountains. I send it to you as a proof that I'm always thinking about you and I always was.

My eight-year-old self was saying “What about me?”

And then our father described his ability to detach from his emotions:

I've got used to going through life on my own. I've lost trust in people; I experienced it very hard, but a percentage of mistrust has always saved me, in the past and today.

Even though your mother said that I didn't have a heart. Still, I have my deep sentiment but foolishness of feelings is very dangerous to me. My way out is to coldly calculate on paper. It keeps me alive.

I paced all of three steps to the door and back feeling agitated and confined in the small space. Antoni continued to describe his life in Australia, living on a pension of \$20 a week, in part of a house in Marrickville, where Mum and I had visited, cooking and cleaning for himself. He enclosed a picture of his TV. He watched films, the news from all over the world and alarmingly, *I drink a 0.5 L of whisky and I sleep, like a new born child*. He also reported reading the Times every day and *a Polish paper, the reading of which is a waste of time. I don't know if it's worth reading Polish books. I've lost track of which of our writers are worthy and I don't have anyone to discuss this*

topic with. I don't have any company since I lost trust in people and in the order of this world.

It was sad, but understandable. On his doctor's recommendation, he went to a 'sanitorium' for a couple of weeks but it was not clear if it was a psychiatric hospital or more like a health retreat.

Five letters from 1972 remained to be translated. I was tired but pushed on, the end of the marathon in sight. Antoni then admitted to illegally buying Haloperidol, an anti-psychotic medicine, used to treat schizophrenia, but the post office would not send it to Poland. He said, '*I take it now when in distress.*' And six weeks later he reported that,

I've increased the dosage of Haloperidol and I'm patiently waiting [for the once again delayed court case ruling]. My health condition is currently good. I've made grand plans for my visit, as soon as I receive money.

Perhaps he was also suffering from schizophrenia if the Haloperidol helped him. The medical report would tell me more. Drinking half a litre of whiskey and taking this drug in increased dosages didn't seem like a healthy or safe combination. No surprise he was making grand plans. Perhaps he had been self-medicating in this way when I met him in 1974. That would explain some of his strange behaviour.

The final letter was an undated fragment addressed to Helena:

Faithful to God and my homeland, at all costs and irrespective of the consequences and the number of years I have left to live, I'm coming back to entomb and to rest forever by my people.

I've sent a couple of chaotic letters, but that was a picture of my fear and terrible truth. I'm asking God not to try me severely. Me, the one who has suffered for others' faults.

I want to thank you once more for the guarantee you give me. I promise, I won't bring you any troubles.

Helena must have given in and agreed to take him back to live in the flat with them. Perhaps he had told her, as he told me, that he didn't have long to live. If that was the case, she was in for a twenty-two-year long shock.

Chapter 16

Mauthausen and Gusen Concentration Camps

On the train to Vienna to visit the Mauthausen-Gusen archives, there was only one other person in the compartment, an aloof middle-aged man in a dark suit sitting by the door. The landscape changed as high-rise buildings gave way to low rise, to sparse groups of dwellings, then single farmhouses and open spaces. Not the vast, arid, open spaces I'd seen travelling across Australia. This land was closely populated and chilled by ice and snow. Autumn fruits and vegetables had recently been harvested, preserved, pickled and stored for the winter. Now it was bleak and cold but no more snow.

The last two days in the flat in Lublin had been both arduous and fascinating. Reading my father's letters to his Lublin family had overtaken the need to do anything else. The tension was prolonged by slow verbal translation from Polish to English as Kris struggled to read handwriting and make sense of what had been written. By the end of them, I had a lot of questions and some answers. Having mostly only one side of the correspondence left many gaps in the story. Oh for the letters from Janina, Ludwik and Helena to my father over all those years. I imagined Tony, in a fit of paranoia, burning them all before he left Australia so there was no trace, no evidence.

Tony's letters to his Lublin family had dramatically swung from threats, to admonishment about the proper way to write a letter, to bribery and then there were years of no correspondence at all. I saw no beauty, joy or humour in any of them. Before coming to Poland, I hadn't been able to find out much about his life in Australia but the letters told of periods of illness, of no income and nowhere permanent to live; he was always planning to return to his beloved Poland and his family, hoping to be welcomed by them. How had Helena survived, what did she think of her husband and his disappearance after his arrest, did she have any other relationships, when did she learn that he had survived the camps? And why had Janina thought her father needed to beg for forgiveness? On his knees. For marrying my mother, perhaps? Helena eventually agreed to allow her husband to come home. Janina had most likely been her key consideration or was it because Ludwik had been so ill? The timing of Ludwik's death and Antoni's compensation payout and return was uncanny.

Getting to know these people as I uncovered information and then packed up their lives, was a mix of emotions. Especially my feelings about my father, ranging

through indignation on his behalf, admiration and empathy for him, my own anger, hurt and rejection.

When I arrived at my hotel in Vienna, I sat in the rooftop bar, ordered olives, cheese and a glass of Austrian Gewürztraminer, and took a long, slow deep breath. As I exhaled, weeks of tension left my body.

After a sound sleep, the next morning I set off for the Ministry of the Interior which houses the Mauthausen archives and exhibition. I hoped to find out how my father had survived three and a half years in these category three concentration camps, whose purpose was *Vernichtung durch arbeit* (extermination by work). The prisoners' records were marked *Rückkehr unerwünscht* (return not desired). Precise numbers of the prisoners who died or were killed in Mauthausen and Gusen camps are difficult to ascertain. The catalogue to the Mauthausen camp exhibition, verifies this difficulty ... *the numbers given to the dead... were repeatedly given to other prisoners, so that registered under one number could be 2, 3 or even more prisoners.*

Estimated deaths range from 120,000 to 320,000. But my father wasn't one of them. How had he continued to escape being shot, beaten, starved or worked to death when so many others did not?

Behind the glass at the Mauthausen archives, a security guard leant back in his leather chair, buttonholes on his shirt stretched to bursting over his big belly. Perhaps a little too much schnitzel, strudel and sacher torte. He told me I needed security clearance and an appointment to access the archives and that there was no exhibition there, it was at Mauthausen.

"But I have come all the way from Australia. My father was a prisoner in Mauthausen. How can I organise clearance and access?" I pleaded.

We sorted it out and I was to come back on Friday when someone would help me through the database of records that were in German.

The next morning, I was up at 6.00am to catch the train from Vienna to Linz, planning to visit the archives in Linz, then Mauthausen and Gusen concentration camps that day. In every place my father had been there was the possibility of clues to his personality, his character; experiences that had made him who he was; of picking up threads from which to weave the man.

I'd made an appointment to see Dr Cornelia Daurer, the archivist in the Linz municipal library. A wry sign on her office door said "Be nice to archivists. They can

erase you from history.” That was worth remembering. She was reserved but helpful. She showed me a photo of the area in 1954/55 before the Displaced Person camp and associated buildings were demolished. She pointed out the hospital where my father had been a patient. I asked her about what life would have been like in Linz in 1945 with so many inmates released from the concentration camp. They’d had no clothes, no food, no shelter and would have been in need of medical attention. She didn’t know a lot about that era but answered as best she could. Her parting gift was a small book in English about Linz after the war. While I was leafing through this, a man who had been in the library since I arrived walked towards me. He was tall and wiry, wearing blue jeans and a white collared shirt with a jauntily tied red neckerchief.

“I couldn’t help overhearing about your father. You know if he went to Italy in 1946, the only way he could have got there would be with the Bricha Operation,” he said to me.

“I’ve never heard of them,” I replied.

“It was an illegal organisation that transported mainly Jews from Salzburg over the Alps into Italy.”

“Why do you think my father would have gone with them? He wasn’t Jewish. And why was it illegal?”

“Movement from Eastern Europe across the Occupied Zones was restricted, particularly by the British who didn’t want Jews going to Israel through Italy or anywhere else. He might have paid his way or convinced them by some other means to take him. It was the only way at that time.”

Later that night I googled “Bricha”, which in Hebrew means ‘escape’ or ‘flight’, and the names this man had given me. I found a remarkable black and white, silent archival film of a Bricha group traversing the Alps in the snow. They went as far as they could by truck and then completed this gruelling journey on foot. There were men and a few women, rugged up in coats with their lives in a small backpack or a bundle. They walked in single file, sinking knee deep in snow, jumping or helping each other across small streams with walking poles, and climbing steep slopes. They often stumbled and fell. In addition to the physical exertion required, I imagined every moment was filled with the fear of being caught.

From Linz to Salzburg, over the Alps and down to Barletta in the south of Italy, where Antoni ended up, is over a thousand kilometres. I later found out from the Polish

Institute, London files, that once in Barletta, he joined the Polish Army under the British command and was posted to Staff Company, HQ5 Kresowa Infantry Division, 2nd Polish Corps, 8 British Army and was sent to Forli in the north of Italy.

Mauthausen

Mauthausen and Gusen concentration camp museums and memorials were too far apart to visit in one day, so I chose Mauthausen, near a small town of the same name on the Danube in northern Austria. It was picture-postcard-perfect with the river, forests and mountain under a clear blue sky on the day I arrived.

In March, 1938 after the ‘*Anschluss*’ (annexation) of Austria, SS Chief Heinrich Himmler chose a hill on the outskirts of the town as the site for a concentration camp. Prisoners were to be used as slave labour to build the camp and then to mine the nearby white granite quarries. Stone from the Gusen quarry had been used for monumental buildings since the late eighteenth century. In April 1938, DEST, (*Deutsche Erd- und Steinwerke GmbH* or "German Earth & Stone Works Company") was established to run these quarries. Hitler and his architect Albert Speer had grand designs for the Third Reich and, in particular for this area, the ‘Führer City’ Linz, the city of Hitler’s youth. Speer would go on to become Minister of Armaments and War Production in February, 1942 and visit Mauthausen-Gusen a number of times.

In August 1938 three hundred, mostly German and Austrian prisoners from Dachau were transported to Mauthausen to begin construction of the camp. These prisoners were convicted criminals, religious conscientious objectors, such as Jehovah’s Witnesses, and ‘asocials’ - vagrants, homosexuals, Romani and others. By the end of 1939, the number of prisoners had increased to 3,000. They had built a large gatehouse with two watch towers, walls and double rows of barbed wire fences, and erected twenty mass produced wooden barracks in four rows of five with a roll call area, the *Appelplatz*, in the centre of the camp which would be covered with crushed granite from the quarries.

On my visit, transport from Linz to Mauthausen was more complicated and time consuming than I had expected - two trains and a taxi. The driver let me off at the entrance to a massive grey gravelled car park which led to the imposing granite monolith on the hill that was the camp. I took the driver’s number so I could call him to come back for me. There was not one other person in sight.

“Are you sure it’s open today?” I asked.

“Yes, yes,” he assured me “Every day but Christmas and New Year.” And off he drove.

It took a good five minutes to walk the expanse of the car park. They must have had busloads of visitors in the warmer months. The bookshop and ticket office were closed but there was a sign directing visitors to the entrance gates to the camp.

Before the entrance, wide stone steps to the left, led me down the side of the hill and along terraces with dozens of memorials to those who had died, those who had survived and those who had liberated them and ‘*provided humanitarian service. Their deeds will never be forgotten*’. Amongst these were many traditionally styled rectangular stone-block engraved memorials, “*To the memory of the Polish patriots murdered by the Nazis 1939-1945. The Republic of Poland*”. There were also striking but disturbing statues - a circle of malnourished, liberated prisoners holding hands, arms aloft; a single skeleton, arms raised to the skies; three-metre-tall man in prison uniform, bald head, bulging, staring eyes, elbows at right angles to his shoulders, forearms up, fingers bent at the knuckles as if grasping an invisible ledge and two white cylindrical chimneys. I sat on the stone steps and waited for the nausea to pass. Past the perimeter wall I could see a series of gentle hills, a winding road, houses, forests of evergreen trees. It was misty, soft, picturesque.

During the war, Mauthausen was promoted as a tourist destination, a summer resort on the Danube. You could attend football matches played by SS guards, cheered on by the locals even though the crowd complained about the stench of the smoke from the crematorium. I’d never given much thought to the local people and their experiences.

“Excuse me. I’d like to go into the camp please,” I called through the glass to the young man sitting at a desk in the back of the room behind the counter. He got up and came over.

“My father was a prisoner here. I don’t think I have to pay do I?”

“Oh no. Of course not. Definitely not,” he said looking uncomfortable. “Here is a map, the door is there. Can I get the English audio guide for you?”

The camp was smaller than I expected - one row of barracks each side of a wide grey-gravelled assembly and roll call area, the *Appelplatz*. The prisoners came through the one and only gate in the massive walls and were herded to the right, into a small

high-walled area that came to be known as the Wailing Wall. There were many memorials on these walls, among them a wooden cross, made of rough planks, placed there to commemorate Pope John Paul II's visit in 1988. From this walled area, many prisoners were taken directly down the stairs of the first building to the undressing room and then the gas chamber with its three-inch-thick, heavy metal door.

The only other building that was open the day I visited was the Infirmary at the far end which housed the museum. Glass cases displayed striped uniforms, a baby's layette, a prisoner's chess set, a silver and glass syringe used by SS doctors for lethal injections and experiments; a bicycle given to the Polish survivor, Stanisław Kudlinski, by nuns in Linz. After liberation, he and two others used it to cycle the seven hundred kilometres home to Poznan. There was a chart of the symbols and codes used to classify prisoners. The colour of the fabric triangles denoted the reason for arrest. My father's triangle was red as he was a political prisoner. The letter printed on the triangle showed the country of origin. For my father, 'P' for Poland. Once a month prisoners were allowed to send a letter to their relatives consisting of a few lines in German, written on a form, heavily censored and allowing for hardly any personal messages. I wondered if my father had written to his family and if they received any mail. At least they would have known he was alive and where he was.

I read of the Poles being regarded as 'racially inferior' by the National Socialists. Between 1940 and 1942 10,000 Polish men, my father one of them, arrived in Mauthausen and Gusen. More than 7,000 of them died in this period. In 1942, my father's first year in the camp, more than 3,300 prisoners worked in the quarries where stone was split from the bedrock by hand or with explosives and then broken into smaller pieces. In addition to accidents in the quarry, violence, torture and killings were commonplace.

In 1941 there was an outbreak of typhus. Affected prisoners were isolated and killed by lethal injections to the heart. In June that year, all prisoners were stripped, disinfected and their clothes fumigated. There are photos of thousands of naked men crammed into the *Appelplatz*, waiting to be disinfected. With mass overcrowding and no sanitary facilities, it was impossible to maintain any personal hygiene, their one set of clothes ingrained with urine, faeces and sweat. Disease and infections were rife.

The exhibition described the liberation of the camp by the Americans on 5th May, 1945. There was a mix of emotions and responses. Some gave the liberators a

jubilant welcome; many were too weak to do so. Revenge and anger were vented at the torturers, joy expressed at still being alive, relief was overshadowed by uncertainty about the future and for many, grief took over, realising that their homes and families were gone. My father would have expected to be returning to Poland and his family unaware that his homeland had been given to the Soviets at the Yalta Conference in February that year. As a member of the resistance, to return to communist Poland would be to risk further imprisonment or execution.

I called the taxi driver and in a daze walked back through the empty car park. What a cold, soulless place it was. A site of so much deliberate cruelty and suffering. A gust of wind blew across the open space chilling me, through my coat and other layers, to my core. Imagine having only one layer of clothing, or none. Imagine weeks, months, years of cold, constant hunger and torture. Imagine trying to hold on to hope. I wiped away my tears and swallowed hard as the taxi arrived.

On the train back to Vienna I was surrounded by a group of German-speaking teenage students. They played a word game I had played with my own children whilst travelling. Whatever the topic, in turns you have to come up with a word that starts with the last letter of the word before. I could have easily joined in on this game. “Russell Crowe - Emma Watson - Neil Armstrong - G... G... Ryan Gosling? Nein! Nein!” We were all laughing.

Mauthausen Archives in the Ministry of the Interior, Vienna.

Back at the Mauthausen Archives in Vienna, I was shown a scan of my father’s prisoner record card. The original cards were kept in the Auschwitz archives. Dr Christian Durr, the head archivist, took time with me to explain the meaning of the details. The records showed that my father was trained as a stonemason which meant he would have been working under cover, a factor significant for his survival. He spent two weeks in the hospital, no information as to why, and was then moved to the potato kitchen, a privileged place as it was warm and there was food. He was still there when the war ended. An entry on the card said he went straight to Gusen and was never in Mauthausen. I needed to go to Gusen. I’d barely heard of the place.

There were no other specific details relating to my father but Christian gave me some background of what life was like in the Gusen camp and I imagined my father in every scene.

Conditions for these forced-labour Gusen prisoners were appalling. Only those who quickly developed strategies to get extra food and avoid the persecution of the guards remained strong enough to survive. Their average weight was only 40kgs. Most were given the concentration camp striped uniforms to wear until supplies ran out. The tools they used were limited. Many were forced to dig with their bare hands.

There was no shelter from the heat of the summer or the well below zero degree ice, snow and whipping winds of winter. Hours of daylight governed the working day. Prisoners who could no longer work were either left to die in the barracks or ‘hospital’, killed in Gusen or sent to Mauthausen for extermination.

From the end of 1939 to May 1945, an estimated 80,000 men passed through Gusen. At least 37,000 died. Mass graves throughout Austria bear testament to the additional thousands who died on the marches to the camp. Many who made it, only lasted a day or a couple of weeks. Average life expectancy reduced from six months in the years 1940-1942, to three months in 1945.

The inmates of Gusen were predominantly Polish but also included prisoners from the Soviet Union, Spain (the Spanish Civil War refugees and POWs), Italy after 1943 and France, Yugoslavia, Czechoslovakia, Netherlands, Belgium, Greece and other countries.

Prisoner ‘functionaries’ were used to supplement the numbers of SS guards. Chief and subordinate “*kapos*” oversaw the various prisoner work units, lured by better food and conditions.

The daily routine varied little. Prisoners were up between 4.00am and 6.00am for morning roll call, breakfast of ‘coffee’ and a piece of bread. If there were no complications, work columns, in rows of five, were formed and marched to the quarry, right beside the camp. At noon there was a half hour break with soup and bread and then work recommenced until either 4.00pm or 7.00pm depending on the amount of light. Back at the barracks, if you had the resources, there was time to repair shoes or uniforms, barter, talk and depending on your hierarchical position, play chess or draw. Evening roll call took place followed by soup, a slice of bread and occasionally a slice of sausage - there was never enough for everyone. Up to four prisoners slept in each bunk, there was no heating and maybe one blanket to share per bunk. The glass was often spitefully knocked out of the windows by the guards. Mattresses were filled with

rotting wood shavings, a breeding ground for lice and fleas. Lights were out at 10.00pm. Prisoners barely slept.

Nights were frequently interrupted by violent and sometimes drunken SS rampages, taking prisoners to the *Appelplatz*, washrooms, shooting wall and other places to torture and murder them. Drowning prisoners in barrels of water became too time-consuming and many were axed to death. One prison commandant allowed his eleven-year-old son to shoot prisoners from a nearby balcony for target practice. Acts of violence were constant and unpredictable.

There were various forms of resistance in Gusen. Highly organised networks of prisoners provided support and information to each other. They tampered with materials and attempted sabotage wherever they could. This was as much for their sanity as it was to seek revenge on those who wished them exterminated.

The support of others, personal resilience and wiliness, determination to see family and home again and sheer good luck kept many of them alive until liberation.

The next day, I visited Gusen for the first time.

GUSEN CONCENTRATION CAMP

Saturday 21st December, 2013



Himmler visiting the quarry



Prisoners in Gusen I

I'd been on the bus from Linz to Gusen for an hour when a young woman called out to the bus driver to stop and spoke with him in German. He kept driving but pulled into the next bus stop.

"Gusen is back there," she said to me. "Maybe eight hundred metres. On the other side of the road."

“Oh, thank you. I can walk back.”

She had overheard my earlier conversation in English with the bus driver and understood better than him that I wanted to go to Gusen, where my father had been imprisoned.

Through the bus window and the thick fog I hadn't seen anything resembling a concentration camp and when I arrived at the Visitor's Centre I saw why. The centre is ice-grey and white, a modern square block building, flat roof and the size of a single-story small house with a discrete sign out the front at waist level. Easy to miss on the bus. The floor to ceiling glass entrance doors were open but no-one was there, neither visitors nor staff. I found a sign on the door with a number to call.

“I'm at the Gusen Memorial Visitor's Centre and I'd like to do the audio-guided walk.”

“There's no-one on duty there today. It is not possible to do the walk.”

“Oh no! Where are you?”

“Mauthausen.”

“I've come all the way from Australia to do this tour and I only have today to do it. My father was a prisoner here for three years. Is there something you can do to help me?”

She took my number and called back a few minutes later.

“Marianne will come and give you the audio machine and headphones. She'll be there in fifteen minutes.”

It was warm inside the centre as I took in the one room exhibition and waited for Marianne. I imagined the walking tour would take me to the camp. I had seen no sign of it so far.

On the wall there were photographs of Gusen taken by US reconnaissance planes for Allied military intelligence. I didn't realise how big it was. There were more photos along the walls and a model of the camp made in the 1990s by prisoner Elia Mondelli. The proportions were not completely accurate however the signage explained that it “*represents a different aspect of historical truth: the traces which the camp left behind in the memory of a former prisoner.*”

There was extensive information about the largest group of inmates, the Poles. It said that the persecution of the Polish population was based on political as well as racist considerations. The first group of 480 Polish inmates were sent to Gusen in March,

1940. After the invasion of Poland, Polish intellectuals and political elite were sent by the Gestapo to the quarries of Gusen for extermination. The signage described the quarries as *'pits of terror. Work in the stone quarries was especially arduous, particularly for those prisoners who were not assigned to perform skilled tasks. The hardest work was the transport column... carrying stones weighing 50 kilos on their shoulders... The prisoners lasted one to two weeks.'*

Any Polish national suspected of contact with the Polish resistance was persecuted mercilessly. That would have been true of my father. He not only had contact but was an active member of the resistance, it was the reason for his arrest.

In 1941 Gusen and Mauthausen became the only Category III, *Rückkehr unerwünscht* (return undesirable) camps in the Third Reich. These were for prisoners who *'cannot be re-educated'* and so were to be exterminated through work. Three groups of inmates, those categorised as politically dangerous, racially inferior or too weak to work were murdered en masse. In addition to being worked to death, prisoners were beaten, drowned, hanged and shot; forced to throw themselves on the electric wire fences or over the quarry cliffs (the SS called them parachutists); starved, frozen to death, infected with diseases such as typhoid, tuberculosis and dysentery, subjected to medical experiments, killed by lethal injections of phenol to the heart or gassed. In the post-war trials some sixty-two different ways of killing prisoners were reported, exemplifying the barbaric behaviours of the camp guards and doctors.

As far as the camp commandant was concerned, deaths in the quarries were as much a service to the state as any stone production achieved for DEST.

As in all concentration camps, up until close to the end of the war, a detailed register was kept of the fate of inmates in the Mauthausen camps and letters were written to relatives on the death of an inmate. In these letters there were sentences like: *"Your son (husband, brother) reported sick and was admitted for treatment to the infirmary. He was given the best possible medication and nursing. In spite of these efforts it was not possible to overcome the illness"* or *"The deceased was a hard worker and was very popular and could have expected to be released soon."*

The cold whistled around my legs as the door of the Visitor's Centre opened. I looked around expecting Marianne but it was the young woman from the bus. Catrin introduced herself. She too wanted to do the audio tour but had to first go further down the road to her accommodation. I explained what had happened and soon after,

Marianne arrived. She didn't even work for the museum but her friend asked her pick up the keys and to come to the Memorial Centre as a favour.

Catrin and I agreed to do the walk together. We put head-phones on to listen to the guide so we didn't talk to each other but there was a great comfort in having company as we made our way through the fog.

After some initial orienting directions on the audio guide, a woman began to tell her story of growing up in the town of Gusen during the war and the things she saw. I later read that in 1941 a local woman wrote a letter of complaint to the local constabulary about the frequent shootings of prisoners. *"I am often an unwilling witness to such crimes. Besides this I am in poor health and such a sight causes such strain to my nerves that I cannot endure it permanently. I ask for it to be arranged that these kinds of inhuman practices cease, or be carried out where they cannot be seen."*

Local farmers 'leased' prisoners for farm labour. When asked by the SS if anyone knew how to mow hay, prisoner Joe C. volunteered with several others and was escorted under guard to a farm. To his great surprise, the farmer's wife brought ham on a tray, with a white napkin, as if she were serving guests. He learned from this experience to volunteer for other such jobs and credits the extra food he received on these occasions with saving his life. I was sure Antoni would have done the same given the chance. There were risks to local people in giving prisoners food or even water. Stonemason Johann Steinmuller was fired for giving prisoners water and then sent to Buchenwald for publicly expressing pity for them.

Contact between locals and the camp ranged from observation, to work interactions, to socialising and even marriage. On the audio-guide, a German soldier who married a village girl talked about his duties at the camp. He said he did what he was told to do. They never questioned their superiors or even each other off-duty.

I discovered on the audio walk that unlike Auschwitz and Mauthausen, physically, there was very little left of the Gusen camp. Almost all the buildings were burnt down shortly after liberation to prevent the spread of infectious diseases. I was astounded to hear that a residential estate had been built over the area that was once Gusen I and II.

Our walk took us through this estate with instructions to stop in front of various buildings. The first was the original *Jourhaus* (gatehouse to the camp) which had been converted to a house. It had a high security wall, ornate iron gates, cameras and red and

yellow DO NOT ENTER, Private Property, Entry Forbidden signs around the perimeter. The archway, through which prisoners entered the camp on arrival, had been glassed in.

The daily routine for quarry workers was to leave the camp through the *Jourhaus*, march to the quarry, pick up large stone blocks and carry them on their shoulders back to the camp entering through a back gate, leave the stones in what was to become the *Appelplatz* and repeat this circuit, from sun-up until sun-down. The *Jourhaus* was also the site of the underground bunker, a place of incarceration and torture.

The audio-guide led us around the corner to number fourteen, a pastel green painted house that had been the brothel. People now lived in it. In June of 1943, Himmler visited Gusen and gave the order for the construction of a brothel for selected inmates, the first ever to be provided in a concentration camp. Bonus vouchers for the brothel and camp canteen were given for increased productivity. The regulation stated:

Prisoners who distinguish themselves by diligence, attention, good conduct and special achievements at work will henceforth receive privileges. These consist of granting: relaxation of confinement conditions, additional food, monetary bonuses, permission to purchase tobacco products and brothel visits.

Only the most valued prisoners were allowed these privileges, for example those working in the armaments factories who were given reward notes from the SS, or stonemasons who were paid a small amount “*enough to buy 15 cigarettes per month from the canteen*” former prisoner Victor Keilich recalled. This was an attempt to increase productivity and the number of workers. With rising conscription, Germany began to experience a growing shortage of skilled labour. As a result, from 1943, camp inmates were to supplement the labour supply rather than be exterminated. They were considered “*essential to the war effort and crucial for victory.*”

Catrin and I passed barracks, now converted to housing, and the *Appelplatz*, now a carpark. We followed the directions to continue along a single lane tarmac road between the houses. One had a Santa hanging from the balcony and Christmas decorations wrapped around the handrail. We came to the area that was once the hospital, the ‘*Revier*’. My father spent two weeks in this hospital and through a series of interventions by others, survived. Later I was astonished to find three detailed

eyewitness accounts by fellow prisoners of the experience that resulted in Antoni Jagielski being in this hospital:

Marian Tkaczuk: *He was suspected of carrying out sabotage in the storehouse in 1943 and was severely beaten and in a bad condition and was taken to the hospital. Friends employed in the hospital also belonged to the camp resistance and looked after him especially Kol. Wlazlowski.*

Wladyslaw Latkiewicz: *I remember his tragic experience in Autumn of 1943 during dinner time he was grabbed by Arbeitsdienstfuhrer Helmut Kluge in the storage area by the railway tracks and suspected by the SS bastard to be sabotaging. He was terribly and mercilessly beaten and kicked until he lost consciousness. He stayed in the hospital for several weeks where only a member of our resistance saved his life. After leaving the hospital he got in touch with Captain Wysocki's group. He was the connection. During all this time he maintained a great attitude. He was brave in spirit and a great model of a prisoner and Pole.*

Dr. Zbigniew Wlazlowski: *Several times he was beaten and tortured, a victim of violence by the SS man Kluge and Kapos. Kidney rupture was suspected but due to lack of facilities he could not be operated on. He was treated in the camp hospital where I worked as an X-ray assistant. In the camp he lost his strength and health. He suffered from pulmonary tuberculosis but could not report his illness due to a threat of execution squad or gassing. He was then terrified because during his time at Auschwitz he was responsible for removing gassed corpses.*

The seriously ill in this *Revier* often received no food, were not given any medical treatment and many were killed through injections, 'death baths' - drowning in barrels of water - or forced to stand under cold showers until they froze to death, or were taken to Hartheim, a converted castle 40 kilometres away, to be gassed, their bodies mostly brought back to the crematorium at Gusen for burning. The doctors regarded patients as guinea pigs for surgery training and testing of new drugs and procedures. Where the *Revier* stood, there is now a block of twelve apartments.

Catrin and I walked on down the track where the railway line used to be. It carried the stone from the quarry and transported prisoners to and from the camp. My father would have arrived there in 1942. With the shortage of labour in the DEST quarries, exacerbated by the enormous death rates, prisoners were transported to Gusen

from other European concentration camps. The first transport of 1,200 prisoners from Auschwitz in February 1942 was 800 short of the requested number. DESt requested 2,000 more Poles be sent from Auschwitz and that second transport, arriving in June of that year, included my father.

We left the railway path and crossed over the Gusen River, the fog so thick we couldn't see the other side of the bridge. We walked over a train line and past granite outcrops to the entrance of one of the tunnels to what were once underground arms factories. Albert Speer, Minister of Armaments and War Production revisited Mauthausen in 1943 ordering the deployment of prisoners to armaments production. Kilometres of tunnels were dug north of Gusen, code named '*Kellerbau*' and '*Bergkristall*', to bomb-proof one of the most complete and modern underground plants for the production of Messerschmitt Me 262 jet planes. By 1945 they were producing some twenty fuselages and pairs of wings per day.

The entrance to this tunnel was closed for safety. The audio walk was at an end. It had been an intense walk with attention focussed by the headphones and the fog. I was still trying to fathom how my father had survived. At the end of the tour there was a twenty-five-minute walk back to the start at the Visitor's Centre. Catrin and I walked together silently to begin with and then gradually exchanged our own stories. She was an artist and a film-maker, putting together a proposal for a competition to make a film about Gusen.

A further look around the exhibition and I came across a sign that related to the stonemasons. Prisoners had built *extensive infrastructure including stonemason halls*. I had imagined Tony under cover of a tarpaulin from one of the images at the Mauthausen Museum but a hall would have provided much better protection from the weather. He was so fortunate to be trained as a stonemason. Why he was chosen no-one will ever know but he avoided the carrying of stones up the 186 'Death Steps' in the Mauthausen quarry or in Gusen. Perhaps as Piotr had reported, he had lied he could do whatever was required.

The reports of the lead up to and the actual American liberation of Mauthausen-Gusen on May 5th, 1945 are chilling as the expectations of liberation and tension built. Testimonies by some of the prisoners recount the final moments.

Knowing the Allies were getting closer, in April 1945, the SS attempted to exterminate as many prisoners as possible including the gassing of 700 sick people from

the camp hospital. Himmler had ordered the extermination of all inmates to *prevent the enemy making use of our workforce (100,000 slaves) and to eliminate all witnesses of the events within the camps.*

The Mauthausen-Gusen inmates heard of Himmler's orders for extermination from fellow prisoners who worked in the offices of the SS. Believing they would all be killed, Albert Todros, an Italian survivor, told of the plan made by the International Committee of prisoners:

We didn't know whether it would take place in the tunnels at Gusen or whether they would shoot all the prisoners with a submachine gun on the roll call area.

At the first sign of impending elimination, every nationality was responsible for a section of the camp fence. A certain number of people would die there. But some would manage to escape, to climb over the camp fence.

Inside Gusen I, prisoner Victor Keilich also heard rumours that Commandant Seidler had been ordered to blow-up the prisoners in the Kellerbau tunnels. He recalls:

Now my friends Stefan, Joseph, Kazik, Tony, Stan and Edek and I waited, watched, listened and whispered, careful not to disturb the night's stillness. What luck, what a miracle that after so many years we seven might come out of this hell in one piece? In Barracks 3, everyone whose bed faced Roll Call Square sat on the floor to avoid being shot through the wall by machine guns if the SS should try and make a last stand and enter the camp shooting.

As I read this, my stomach turned. My father was in that exact same Barracks 3. Was he Keilich's listed friend Tony?

On the day of liberation, at about 5.00pm in Gusen, the assembly bell tolled. This raised fears on the part of the prisoners. Years later, W. Gebik recollected:

The minutes of anxiety are passing... Over the camp gate of the Jourhaus, on the guard house balcony, the guards are watching. A machine gun... is pointing directly at us, but standing near them today are rather friendly looking grandpas

clad in the Vienna police uniforms... The change of guard is taking place. A friend standing at the camp gate and looking through the slit starts giving us some mysterious signs with his hands... An American tank!!! On it next to an American soldier is a prisoner in striped clothes... The soldier raises his hands up and, addressing a dozen of thousands of the condemned standing lifeless and without movement on the assembly yard, he announces: "You are free!!!"

Keilich recalls this moment: *I still see Albert J. Kosiek standing on the tank saying: "Bracia jestescie wolni - BROTHERS YOU ARE FREE."* Kosiek, a Polish-American, was a Staff Sergeant and platoon leader of the First Platoon of Troop D, 41st Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron, Mechanized (of 11th Armoured Division, 3rd US Army).

Those who liberated Mauthausen and Gusen, were completely under-prepared for what they would find, both in terms of numbers and conditions. Intelligence provided to the Allies led them to expect 3,000 inmates at Mauthausen. The actual number was 80,000 in Mauthausen and 20,000 in Gusen.

Many official photographs and some film were taken of Gusen I by the Signal Corps. All prisoners were malnourished. Many were suffering from dysentery, tuberculosis and typhus. The photographs were predominantly of skeletal men in rags or naked, clothes destroyed. They show their deplorable physical state and haunted faces. Some of these photos were on display in the exhibition. I would never forget them.

Outside the Gusen Memorial Centre, Catrin and I walked along a path leading to the crematorium memorial. There were many plaques to individuals and groups around the walls. A sign on the crematorium said:

Crematory of Gusen I and II.

From 1939 - 1945 more than 37,000 patriots of all nationalities were incinerated here after having known the most cruel physical and moral suffering. They died for the independence of their countries, for liberty, for the salvation of man. May the memory of their sacrifice forever remain in the thoughts of the living.

I talked to Catrin about her project and how worthwhile it would be as so little is known about Gusen, unlike Auschwitz, which was the next place I was to visit.

I walked back to the bus stop and sat on the cold metal seat. Although it was only 4.00pm, it was dark. There was still no-one anywhere to be seen. It was silent and still. The fog was an eerie dampener on sound and visibility but nothing would ever erase the horrors to which I had borne witness that day.



My father, second from the right in Linz 1945



My father in Linz, 1946



My father in Linz, 1946



5th May, 1946. My father (middle) revisits Gusen quarry where he worked as a prisoner stonemason for 3 years. (Photo from private family collection)

Chapter 17 Auschwitz

Friday 3rd January, 2014

'In Auschwitz you can learn about life inside the world's most feared concentration camp during the days of the Third Reich. While the genocide that took place inside Auschwitz-Birkenau is undoubtedly chilling, your guide will explain the site's history with sensitivity, explaining the key events in its history while showing you places like the gas chambers, crematoriums and exhibition halls inside the old prison blocks.' The brochure in my hotel room in Oświęcim, the small Polish town nearest the Auschwitz concentration camp, went on to describe a '2-in-1 pack' - Auschwitz in the morning and Wieliczka Salt Mine in the afternoon. Somehow, packaging Auschwitz didn't feel right. I hid the brochure in the dressing table drawer.

It was January 3 - my daughter Georgie's twenty-third birthday. I called and sang a rousing *'Happy Birthday to you.'* She was on holiday in Italy with her partner Toby and they were to meet me in Kraków on Monday for five days. In addition to Georgie's birthday, after two months without family or friends, a celebration was in order. Although I'd picked up a cold and was feeling miserable, the anticipation of hugging my daughter lifted my spirits.

I'd booked a lovely two-bedroom apartment in the *Stare Miasto* (old town) of Kraków for us. Unlike most Polish cities, Kraków remained almost untouched through the destruction of WWII. In 1939 the Nazis made the city the capital of their General Government in Poland, defiantly announcing that Kraków was an *urdeutsche Stadt*, an ancient German city. It was known as the city of myths, and also one of legendary dragons.

From my reading, I thought I knew what to expect at Auschwitz but ten minutes in the taxi and all the years before were not enough to prepare me for what was to come that day. The taxi pulled up at the entrance to the museum. My father had arrived at this place in November, 1941, the beginning of winter, probably by train from Lublin. I wondered if it was day or night when he arrived. Who was he with and how was he treated? Did he go through the selection process of those moved to the left sent straight to the gas chamber and those to the right considered strong enough to work? I wondered how many times he escaped death because of his physical strength and good health, by sheer luck or some other means.

Before I left Australia, I'd booked a two-day study tour of Auschwitz. My guide was Marta, a late-twenties Polish woman with long brown wavy hair, sharp blue eyes and a soft nature. Lucky for me, I was the only one booked. I had my own private guide, someone with a history degree and further research and training on Auschwitz. As I sneezed and snuffled over coffee in the cafeteria, I gave Marta a summarised version of my father's story and explained that on this visit I hoped to get a better understanding of what his particular experience might have been like and how he could have survived in such a place. I also wanted to see his prisoner card.

We walked towards the infamous *Arbeit Macht Frei* (Work Brings Freedom) sign overarching the entrance to the camp. The dirt and gravel path had been compacted hard but not smooth by the feet of millions - six years of prisoners and persecutors and then visitors and museum staff. The first visitors to the site came in 1945, the year the war ended and the 7,000 remaining prisoners were freed by the Soviet army. In 1946 there were 100,000 visitors and pilgrims; the following year 170,000. At the official opening of the site as a museum in 1947, the program began with religious services - Catholic in the courtyard of Block 11 - the Death Block, Jewish in Block 4, and Eastern Orthodox and Lutheran inside Block 11. Wreaths were placed at the Death Wall in the courtyard of Block 11. There was an address by Józef Sak, representing the Central Committee of Jews in Poland and the Polish Premier Józef Cyrankiewicz declared "*the grounds of the former Nazi concentration camp in Oświęcim, together with all the buildings and equipment found there, shall be preserved for all time as a Monument to the Martyrdom of the Polish People and other Peoples.*" In 2014, the year I visited, there were 1.5 million visitors.

The morning was still, the temperature below freezing and the sky, clear blue as Marta and I walked to Block 24 which was now an administration block containing the archives. The Auschwitz camp is an orderly layout of wide paths and rows of identical two-storey redbrick buildings, each with a pitched tiled roof. Marta spoke in Polish through the intercom explaining who I was and what I wanted. A buzzer sounded, the door clicked open. I had emailed the archives from Australia and let them know I was coming. My file was on the counter with details they had sent me in response to my enquiries in 2012.

"No, we can't show you the actual Personal Record Card of your father," said the archivist.

“What? Why not?”

“Well if we showed everybody, the cards would get damaged and deteriorate. We have rules about these archives.”

“But I am his daughter. There are no other known relatives still alive. I am most likely to be the only person in the whole world who will ever, ever ask to see this card. If I can’t see it, who are you saving it for?”

She looked at me with an expressionless face for a long time. She reminded me of all the soldiers, prison guards and officials I had read about, not moved to empathy, just following the rules. She walked to the telephone, spoke to someone, hung up and left the office. Marta and I looked at each other, puzzled.

“I guess we wait,” I said. Marta nodded.

After ten or fifteen minutes the archivist returned with white gloves and my father’s card between two pieces of white paper. She motioned me and Marta to chairs at a small wooden table, gave me the gloves and placed the card on the table. The morning sun shone through the new white bars on the wooden windows, casting a shadow on the table in front of me.

Here was Antoni Jagielski’s *Häftlings-Personal-Karte*, Personal- Prisoner-Card. His name, date and place of birth, address, religion, marital status (married), children (none - perhaps he didn’t want to put Janina at risk), date of arrest, height, hair and eye colour and other physical features. It was him. Definitely him. I looked and looked before I picked it up. It was a standardised yellowed A5 card, with various categories to be filled in. I’d seen a scan of this card on the screen at the archives in Vienna and I’d seen his Auschwitz ID photo on the dressing table in the flat, but this physical card, was concrete evidence that he had really been here in Auschwitz and then in Gusen. Because he had told so many lies, I had some doubt that this part of his story was true. This card was tangible proof. Someone, seventy years ago, had written down pieces of information about the imprisonment of my father and his movements during a three-and-a-half-year period. Someone in Gusen had hand written specific information about Antoni onto this card, in black and blue pen. *Widerstandskämpfer* ‘Resistance fighter’ was underlined with a sweep of bright red pencil.

KL: Gyrfar 43.457 P. 52. 43
HBL-Nr.: 15290

Häftlings-Personal-Karte

Fam.-Name: <u>Jagorok</u>	Überstellt	Personen-Beschreibung:
Vorname: <u>Gyrfar</u>	am: _____ an KL.	Größe: <u>1.80</u> cm
Geb. am: <u>20.7.09</u> in <u>Antaspy</u>	am: _____ an KL.	Gestalt: <u>mittelgroß</u>
Stand: <u>in Kinder</u>	am: _____ an KL.	Gesicht: <u>hell</u>
Wohnort: <u>Gyrfar 95</u>	am: _____ an KL.	Augen: <u>blau</u>
Strasse: <u>Gyrfar 95</u>	am: _____ an KL.	Nase: <u>normal</u>
Religion: <u>orth. Staatsangeh.</u>	am: _____ an KL.	Mund: <u>normal</u>
Wohnort d. Angehörigen: <u>Helena 70</u>	am: _____ an KL.	Ohren: <u>normal</u>
Eingewiesen am: <u>1.12.44</u>	am: _____ an KL.	Zähne: <u>2 fehlen</u>
durch: <u>in KL: 9.1.45</u>	am: _____ an KL.	Haare: <u>schwarz</u>
Grund: <u>Arbeitseinsatz</u>	Entlassung:	Sprache: <u>poln.</u>
Vorstrafen: <u>keine</u>	am: _____ durch KL:	Bes. Kennzeichen:
	mit Verfügung v.:	Charak.-Eigenschaften:
		Sicherheit b. Einsatz:
Strafen im Lager:		Körperliche Verfassung:
Grund: <u>Asst.</u>	Bemerkung:	

HOI LERIT - ERFASST

16909

Erstbes. Beruf: Entwässerungsbediensteter zuletzt ausg. Beruf: _____ Arbeitsbuch Nr.: _____
Ausgebildet in der Zeit: 19.7.42 im KL: Gyrfar Berufsgruppe: ✓
als Heinrich (Ausschlagungsang.)

Eingesetzt	1. vom	2. bis	3. als	4. bei
1.	13.7.42	5.1.45	Heinrich	bei
2.	5.1.45	20.1.45	Heinrich	bei
3.	20.1.45	6.2.45	Heinrich	bei
4.	6.2.45		Heinrich	bei
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Ne. 54251
PARTIC. ALLER. BEWILLIGT
Sgg. D. Han-29/8271

Entwässerungsbediensteter

16910

“Here is something else you may not have seen,” the archivist said.

It was a form with some writing on the top half and a table at the bottom. In one of these boxes was a simple line under the month of December.

“What does this mean?” I asked.

“It means that your father sent a letter out of Auschwitz in December and,” turning over the page, “received a letter in January.”

“He must have written to Helena, his wife and she wrote back. That means she knew he was still alive in December 1941 and where he was.”

I’d never heard of a postal service in and out of Auschwitz.

When I'd asked Mr Z about people visiting those arrested in Lublin, he told me that visitors were not allowed and that people who had attempted to do so were often shot. Helena therefore wouldn't have seen her husband since the night he was arrested, five months before the letter was written, and would have had no news of him. It must have been a relief to know that he was alive but terrifying to think of him in Auschwitz. I wonder how much they knew about the place at that time. What would Helena have told eleven-year-old Janina?

There was no record of any further correspondence. This document also showed that the letter was sent from Block 9, bed 3. I wanted to see this space. It was not open for visitors but Marta arranged for me to see it. I was surprised at the specificity of bed 3 and wondered how many prisoners were allocated to bed 3. Was it like Gusen and other camps where there were four to a bed, or actually no beds at all? Beds or no beds, they were crammed in together, impossible to sleep, putrid body against putrid body - unimaginable not to have a wash of any kind for years; not to brush your teeth, your hair or wear more than the increasingly filthy clothes you were in.

We walked past Block 10, the block used by Dr Josef Mengele and other German doctors for medical experiments on the prisoners. A man walked towards us, keys in hand. He and Marta greeted each other. He shook my hand and we followed him up the steps to the front door. I was a little nervous. On the ground floor were the bathrooms. I was surprised there were any. There were six toilets along one wall and two rows of long white troughs with an exposed pipe and taps above them for washing. Climbing the wide concrete stairs, I ran my hand along the wooden railing and wondered if my father had done the same thing. The room was clean and light with big windows at either end. All the furniture was unpainted wood. The bunks each had three levels and were pushed together and lined up in groups of four, sleeping 12 people, if there was one person to each bunk. This pattern was replicated ten times from one end of the room to the other. It was neat and orderly. There was no telling which bunk was designated as bed 3. The block was far better than I had imagined and certainly absolute luxury in comparison to the conditions in which prisoners lived in Auschwitz II-Birkenau and many other camps or in Gusen where my father ended up. Although 6 toilets for 240-plus men and two rows of basins was hardly adequate.

Marta told me that the typical day's ration of food was ½ litre of 'coffee' for breakfast, vegetable soup often made from rotten vegetables or you might be lucky to

get a piece of potato peel or turnip for lunch and in the evening 300g of black bread with perhaps some margarine, 20g of sausage and more 'coffee'. The tap water was contaminated and undrinkable.

At the end of this first day my cold had worsened. I was feeling miserable. I treated myself to a hot bath, room service and was in bed by 7.00pm feeling very grateful for cleanliness, food, and a warm bed.

Feeling slightly better after a twelve-hour sleep, I was picked up by Marta at 9.30am for day two of my personal tour. We went through the regular exhibits of the museum. I read of the beginnings of Auschwitz in 1940 when the SS took over what was the Polish garrison near Oświęcim, 66kms from Kraków. Auschwitz expanded to become the largest Nazi concentration and death camp. From 1940 - 1945 more than 1.3 million people were transported to Auschwitz - 1.1m Jews, 140-150,000 Poles, 23,000 Roma, 15,000 Soviet POWs, 25,000 prisoners from other ethnic groups and in 1942 17,000 women, later moved to Sector B1 of Auschwitz II - Birkenau.¹ One million of these people died in Auschwitz. 90% of the victims were Jews. The SS murdered the majority of them in the gas chambers.

Numbers. There were lists and lists of numbers. Inconceivable numbers. Each one a person, a human being. Prisoners were humiliated, beaten, starved, tortured in horrifying ways and killed by exterminators who were ordered to systematically rid the earth of these people who were considered vermin, and they put their full effort into doing so.

Marta and I came to a book with the list of '*Poles in KL Auschwitz*' based on the '*preserved camp documents*'. I turned the laminated pages until I reached Jagielski and found Antoni 23522 and Stanisław 13937. My father arrived almost ten thousand people after his older brother. I didn't know when Stanisław was arrested, what for or what had happened to him at that stage but it explained why his wife Anna was alone on the 1941 residential records. With the thousands of people in the camp, did each brother know the other was alive and there? Would they have met? How would they have looked for each other?

As we walked through the exhibition, I read the quotes that stated the intention of the German Reich was to eliminate all Polish people, culture and language.

"I am keeping ready my Death's Head Units, to kill men, women and children of Polish birth and Polish tongue, without pity or mercy. Poland will be depopulated and

Germans will settle there.” Adolph Hitler, *Obersalzburg*, 22.8.1939. This statement was made nine days before the German invasion of Poland that began WWII.

Poles were treated as ‘*untermenschen*’ - subhumans. Another quote posted on the wall of the museum from a Third Reich memorandum on November 25, 1939 read: *“In order to eliminate every cultural and economic peculiarity, no Polish corporation, union or association can exist. Polish restaurants and cafes are not permitted. There shall be no Polish newspaper, no production of Polish books, nor publication of Polish journals. For the same reasons, Poles shall have no right to own radio receivers or phonographs.”* And from Otto Thierack, Minister of Justice of the Third Reich, *“We must free the German nation of Poles, Russians, Jews and Gypsies.”*

I methodically took notes and photos as we moved through the museum until we reached the mountain of brown and black leather suitcases with names, dates of birth, addresses written boldly on their lids, tangible markers of the deception of the promise of a new life. There were thousands of spectacles, mounds of shoes and piles of crutches and prosthetic limbs, reminding us that many Germans who were considered ‘less than’ because of a physical or mental disability were also killed. I saw a baby’s cream wool knitted cardigan, a broken doll in a tartan skirt, a little boy’s pair of red shorts and blue long socks. I turned away from the signs. I didn’t want to think about what had happened to the children. It had been like research as I systematically collected data, but then the enormity of this brutality struck me again. The terror and pain was palpable. Unbearable. I wanted to leave the building but I also wanted to stay and honour the victims and bear witness. Marta watched me rummaging for tissues in my bag and wandered off to give me some time. She must have been used to seeing visitors visibly shaken by these displays.

The next building was Block 11, the Death Block with its three types of torture cells for those judged to have committed serious crimes. There were the regular cells with wooden floors, wooden bunks and small windows; the dark cells with blocked windows and no bunks - prisoners condemned to death by starvation were held in these cells until they died; and lastly the four standing cells - completely bricked up enclosures measuring less than one square metre each with no windows, no light. Entry to these cells was gained by crawling through a small opening at floor level that was then closed with bars and covered with a wooden hatch.

Dark cell number 18 is where Father Maximilian Kolbe, a Polish Catholic priest, originally arrested for hiding 2,000 Jews, was left to die of starvation. He had volunteered to take the place of a condemned Polish political prisoner. Father Kolbe was canonized by the Catholic Church on October 10, 1982 in a ceremony held at the Auschwitz camp.

Between the 3rd and 5th of September, 1941, the Nazis conducted the first mass killing of people using the cyanide gas Zyklon-B in prison cell number 27 in Block 11. The victims were 600 Soviet POWs and 250 Polish patients from the hospital. This was the gas that would be used throughout the war to kill millions.

It seemed Block 11 was the worst of the worst. No-one survived this block, did they? Marta suggested we go to the bookshop. She knew the owner, introduced me and explained who I was. The books that were relevant were all in Polish so she asked if we could borrow rather than buy them and take them to the cafeteria to look for information on my father. The bookshop owner seemed pleased for us to do so.

On the way to the cafeteria, with books in hand, I asked Marta, “How do you do this job year after year?”

She looked at me and smiled. “I work part-time, so not every day of the week,” she said. “And I always go away for three months holiday each year with friends. Travelling for the first two months and lying on a beach somewhere relaxing for the last month.”

Apart from an older couple sitting at a table in the corner, there was no-one else in the cafeteria. I went to the counter to get tea for us as Marta began skimming through the books.

“Betty! Betty! Here! Look!” she called to me.

In one of the books there were details of the train transport from Lublin to Auschwitz on the 27th November, 1941 - my father’s transport. There were seventy people, numbers 23521 - 23590, Antoni was number 23522, from Lublin Castle Jail, described as a ‘*Gestapo prison, place of torture for hundreds of Poles*’. Each of these prisoners was named, their number in brackets and then a description provided of their profession. Their ages ranged from 15 to 62. There were intellectuals, farmers, a driver, a postman, six musicians, students and eight prisoners recorded as high-ranking officers designated ‘*for the gas chambers*’. My father’s entry read ‘*Immediately on arrival,*

Antoni Jagielski, (nr 23522) for his conspiracy activities was sent directly to the Penal Company. Block 11.'

Block 11, the Death Block where we had just been. Sweat prickled my body. Block 11, the worst of the worst and he had survived. The Penal Company, which was the camp jail in Block 11 was described as *'an instrument of terror for direct extermination of prisoners. Following brutal interrogation, prisoners here were in most cases sentenced to death by shooting. Between this block and Block 10 was the Execution Wall where it is estimated several thousand people were shot between 1941 and 1943. Most were Polish political prisoners, above all leaders and members of the resistance.'*

In the same book that detailed the transport of 1941, Marta found two eye witness accounts of the arrival of these seventy people at Auschwitz. These would give me some idea of what Antoni's particular experience had been although I wasn't sure I wanted to know. Marta translated both men's testimonies from Polish to English as described by the author:

Testimony 1:

Stefan Lukasz said that they were taken to the camp in a locked prison train wagon and the journey was almost three days. Everyone was very thirsty, so they began to bang at the door and ask for water. After some time, the door opened and an SS guard appeared with a pistol and asked who was demanding water. A Polish Colonel, Jan Korcz stepped forward and in fluent German asked for water and water was delivered.

There was a bucket that was used for a toilet. It filled up very quickly. When they asked for the bucket to be emptied nothing was done. There was excrement all over the floor.

The train arrived at Auschwitz on the 27th November at around 8pm but they were not taken off the train for another 2 hours.

It was dark in the wagon and they were blinded by a bright light pointed at the wagon as they got out. They were disoriented and didn't know what was going on. The SS men tried to kick them and push them out of the wagon. There were functionary prisoners who shouted at them, punching and pushing them into marching columns and they made them run through the gate. They were

counted and directed to Block 26. Later they were placed into toilet rooms on the ground floor of the block and kept there until morning.

Testimony 2: Jan Eugeniusz Plewa.

There was a special wagon - "wiezniarka" [a prison wagon used by police]. It was attached to a cargo train and at the beginning it was alright but after 2 hours it got very hot because there were a lot of people inside and the window had bars and was closed. The escorts were Gestapo. The train stopped for a long time in Kraków and they realized they were going to Oświęcim. At about 10pm, the train stopped for a short moment and their wagon was detached from the rest of the train. The door opened and the prisoners were unloaded. The Gestapo had left and then they heard the shouting of an SS man with an aggressive dog. They were afraid of the dog and didn't want to leave the prison wagon. Two SS men went inside and beat them and forced them to leave. They were hit with thick sticks and with the butt of rifles and kicked as well. The horrifying moans of prisoners got mixed with swearing of angry SS men and barking dogs. The bright lights of hand torches made the unloading even more frightening and horrifying.

They were arranged into a marching column and then counted and rushed into the camp. The weak and those falling behind were beaten and kicked.

When they reached the camp, they stood in front of the gate for a long time. They were then taken to Block 26 and kept in the washroom and toilets until morning.

In the morning, the registration procedures began. Civilian clothing and personal effects were taken away. Once naked, in a hurry and with blunt razors, they were shaved. All hair from the body was removed. Then the showers. After this they were given their uniforms. They started to swap clothes to find clothes that would fit. They were given a piece of cloth with their number printed on it to be sewn on to their shirts, left hand side on the chest and also on the trousers on the right side above the knee. Numbers were to replace their family names. Pictures were then taken and they had to wait in front of the building for orders.

It was frosty and many of them standing barefoot on the snow got cold and died within a week.

After 3 hours of waiting, one of the functionary prisoners forced them to perform 'musztra', military drills. It was murderous and then they were taken to Block 9 and it continued. They had to react to commands very quickly. They were given no food all day until after the evening 'appell' when they were given warm coffee.

Among the 70 deported from Lublin to Auschwitz on that day, 56 died in Auschwitz, 10 prisoners were deported to other camps - 4 to Mauthausen (my father one of these), 1 to Buchenwald, 1 to Dachau, 1 to Neuengamme, 3 to Sachsenhausen and 1 was released. The fate of 3 is unknown. 8 survived the camps.

The second book we'd borrowed was the *Daily Chronicle: Calendar of Events in Auschwitz* by Danuta Czech. There was an entry for the 27th November, 1941 which verified the transport:

27.11 70 prisoners from Lublin plus 2 other transports of 42 and 124 people. 57 Soviet deaths.

On arrival at the end of November, 1941 my father was sent to Block 11 but by sometime in December of that same year he was in Block 9, bed 3, sending a letter to Helena. I'll never know how he survived Block 11, or a further five months in Auschwitz before being transferred to Gusen. A museum label explains one possible reason for his transfer: *'Another punishment for prisoners was to send them to other camps where they were forced to perform the toughest work, for example the Stone Quarries.'* I also learned that in 1942 political prisoners were removed from Auschwitz to make way for the arrival of tens of thousands of Jews for extermination.

Marta and I returned the books to the shop and feeling I had exhausted both of us, I thanked her and took a taxi back to my hotel. For all I had read and discussed I still could not fathom how humans either individually or collectively could commit such abhorrent crimes. I asked myself how would I have behaved as a German, as a Pole? How would I behave if I had to make life and death choices for myself or if my family or others' lives were at stake?

The images from the camp haunted me in my sleep. Panting and sweat-soaked, I was bombarded with flashing lights, gunshots, barking dogs, a decaying stench, freezing air as the heavy door slid open. We stood, stinking bodies tight against other stinking

bodies, no room to sit. Those in the front fell out of the cattle truck onto the ground. “*Schnell! Schnell!*” men outside shouted, shoving rifle butts into arms and backs. I slid on the shit running across the floor, scrambled to my feet, was pushed into line, marched to a building, stripped naked, shoved through a door where expressionless prisoners cut my hair to the scalp with rusty, blunt scissors and shaved my underarms and pubic hair, leaving bleeding nicks as they were ordered to go faster. A scratchy striped dress, half my size was thrown at me. It wouldn’t do up. I had no shoes. Men in Nazi uniforms sniggered from the floor above. One spat on me. Then I was pushed outside and marched to Block 11, the Death block. “But what about my photo? You have to take my photo and give me my number? What’s my number?” I screeched. “How will my family know where I am if you don’t make my record card? I want to write to my children. I’m allowed to write a letter!” I was hysterical. Nobody took any notice. Were they all deaf? Men were lined up against a wall. Shots were fired. I covered my ears and closed my eyes. I couldn’t look. They pushed me against that blood-spattered wall. I was standing on dead bodies. I was falling, falling.

Chapter 18 From Poland to England

Friday 17th January, 2014

A leisurely walk through Kraków's medieval streets, including the famous *Ulica Floriańska* with its elegant terrace buildings and cobbled streets led me to the *Floriańska Gate*, which dates back to 1307 and stands thirty-five metres tall. It was once the city's main entrance and the start of the Royal Route to Wawel Castle, a fairy-tale structure overlooking the river. There are many famous houses in this street but one building that attracted my attention was the hotel *Pod Różą* (Under the Rose), the oldest hotel in Kraków. The translated Latin proverb engraved above the arched sandstone portal reads: "*May this house stay here until the ant drinks all of the sea water and the turtle ends its route around the world*".

At the airport the next morning, where I'd arrived way too early, I spotted Georgie's blond hair and familiar face and then Toby, tall and smiling.

"Mum, Mum," Georgie called as she ran towards me and almost knocked me off my feet. We hugged for a long time, Toby patiently standing by.

Under a clear blue sky, Georgie, Toby and I walked from the apartment to the *Rynek Główny*, the medieval main square. Dating back to 1257, the square is one of the largest in Europe and it was buzzing with people, many wearing gold crowns decorated with stars and jewels glinting in the sunshine. It was *Trzech Króli*, the Three King's Festival, honouring the three wise men who visited Jesus. Performers were costumed in red velvet cloaks, purple gowns, oversized pointed hats, many looking like small heavily decorated Christmas trees. Children chased each other through the square or stood wide-eyed watching the re-enactment of tales from history.

We found Georgie's favourite *pierogi* and Toby headed for the stall where they were barbecuing *Kielbasa*, Polish smoked sausages, and kebabs, frying onions and roasting potatoes. The kebab skewers were as long as my arm; the sausages hung in big loops from the rafters of the stalls. We stood at the beer-barrel tables eating hot food and drinking mulled red wine as we caught up on months of news. Strolling around the markets, Toby and Georgie shopped for presents from stalls with sheepskin slippers, woollen scarves and fur lined leather hats, and from the colonnades of the *Sukiennice* or Cloth Hall, reputedly the first shopping mall in the world. The stalls there were

crammed with Kraków tourist tat as well as woodwork, lace and amber, Poland's national gemstone.

That night I talked about the Lublin flat, and a heaviness descended as I described my weeks there. I poured another round of *Polska Wiśniowa* (cherry vodka).

"Would you like us to come to Lublin with you Mum?" Georgie asked, "We can change our itinerary."

Surprised and thankful for her offer, I said yes.

There was no train or PolskiBus from Kraków to Lublin, so it was an early start and a five-hour journey in a beat up old minibus that stopped randomly to drop off and pick up people. No toilet stops, no food stops, no English.

Before I'd left Lublin, I'd moved from the Villa Ostoja to a small apartment within walking distance of the flat. We arrived early afternoon and headed off to Lipowa Street. I gave Toby the keys to see how he would manage all the locks on the front door of the flat. His experience was the same as mine.

Georgie walked straight over to the window as I had done but I'd removed the Auschwitz ID photo of Antoni from the dressing table. There were piles of documents and photos everywhere. And then I remembered, there was one last place that I hadn't ventured to investigate, having been put off by Piotr's description of the fleas. The basement. I had the key and Toby was keen. Georgie reluctant after I told her Piotr's story.

The entry was through a locked door near the front entrance to the building. The key fitted and down the stairs we went, leaving the door open. The narrow underground tunnel smelled of damp bricks. As we searched for number 33, someone started shouting from the top of the stairs. I recognised the voice. By the time I made my way back to the entrance, Toby was standing face to face with a finger-pointing enraged Mrs Dusik. She lowered her voice when she saw me but continued in an angry tone.

"I *still* don't speak any Polish Mrs Dusik," I said to her shrugging my shoulders.

Over dinner in the old Town that night, we laughed about Mrs Shout-a-lot and I was glad Georgie and Toby had experienced the full force of her glare and her suspicion of open doors and strangers. Georgie looked tired and tense. She too was fighting off a cold and the dense energy of the flat had affected her. Even so, I was glad that as the next generation, she had experienced this connection and would better understand the Polish history and genes that coursed through her veins. I was grateful that she and

Toby had seen the flat where my father had lived with his other family; that they had some idea of what I had experienced in the months I'd been in Lublin; that a member of my Australian family had been able to bear witness with me.

I was somewhat bereft when they left. I had a few despondent days. But I had London to look forward to, catching up with good friends and digging further into my father's history with visits to the Bata Estate in East Tilbury where he'd worked for the Bata Shoe Company and where we'd lived, and then on to the Polish Underground Movement Study Trust and the Polish Institute to see what they knew of Antoni. The pieces of the puzzle were coming together, forming a more solid image of him than I had ever expected to find.

In the United Kingdom, whilst the Poles were feted during WWII, especially those in the army and air force, after the war feelings turned against them. They had been part of the Allied forces in many theatres of WWII, but the outcome of the 1945 Yalta conference placed Poland behind the Iron Curtain, denying them the democracy for which they had fought. As Polish hero General Anders said, "*All those ideals for which Polish soldiers had shed their blood on foreign soil were proved vain dreams.*" They, and many other Eastern European nationals, became a source of controversy and debate between the Soviets and the other Allied countries. The Soviet Union insisted that Displaced Persons were not stateless, but nationals required to return to their countries at all costs. The Western Allies formed a different view. They argued that as a basic human right, all Displaced Persons and refugees should not be forced to return to their home countries but were entitled to resettlement in the West. Churchill offered the citizenship and freedom of the British Empire to Poles who couldn't go home. Polish war hero General Anders had led 85,000 men out of Soviet captivity to Italy in 1945. Of these, only 310 opted to return to a Soviet-controlled Poland. Polish soldiers remaining in Italy, including my father, were shipped to England for army demobilisation and resettlement.

Hearing reports of resistance fighters returning to Poland being imprisoned and executed, my father, and many other A.K. members, believed it was too dangerous to return and as a result they were exiled from their country and separated from their homes and families, becoming political refugees and became involuntary and unwilling migrants. Over 8 million Poles were killed or displaced between the invasion of Poland,

which sparked the outbreak of WWII, and their defeat. They were the largest number of all known refugees.

Tony was so close to home and family in England, but so far away. His letters told of his distress at not being able to return, not even for his daughter's wedding.

On the taxi ride from Stansted airport, the driver was inquisitive when he heard I'd come to visit the Bata Estate. "Oh, that communist set-up with their gardens and vegies and fruit trees. Bit like a commune - you didn't need to leave it for nothin'." I didn't understand what he meant at the time but local people held strong views about the Bata Estate describing it either as a communist commune, a holiday camp and even a concentration camp. Given where I had been recently, the latter was offensive.

The founder, Tomas Bata started his first shoe company in Zlin, Czechoslovakia in 1894 and in 1933, the first factories were opened in East Tilbury. The company expanded and became '*Shoemakers to the World*'. The factories had standardised procedures, quality and productivity measures well before their time, leading the locals to see it as highly regimented.

The Estate was created to provide workers with good quality housing at a reasonable cost. Families waiting for a house were accommodated in the Bata Hotel, a five-storey building at the centre of the estate. It was where Mum, Tony and I had lived in 1954. To support families and foster a sense of community there were many social facilities - a cinema, one of the first Espresso bars in England, various clubs and classes, dinners, fashion shows and dances in the hotel ballroom - and sporting facilities including a swimming pool. There was a Post Office, grocers, butchery and hairdresser and the Bata farm provided milk, fruit and vegetables. Medical services, a mobile library, a primary school and a technical college were also available.

The taxi driver was right - you didn't need to leave the estate.

I checked into the Old English Bell Inn, pulled open the drapes and looked through bay windows across the green fields and woodlands of Essex. In the restaurant, I sat back and sipped my glass of wine, hearing conversations in English all around me. I felt a sense of relief when I arrived in England. After months of being in Poland, it was wonderful to hear English spoken, understand the signs and realise my simplified sentences were unnecessary. In contrast, for my father it would have been a strange

country, different language and an ‘*indifferent population*’, as he’d said in one of his letters.

I was keen to find out what life was like for my parents at that time. I’d been in touch with Mike Tabard, Chairman of the Resource and Reminiscence Centre at the Bata Estate, who had offered to take me there for a day in the archives. Mike had found my father’s employment record. Tony had worked there from 1947 to 1955. I wondered what it was like for Mum. She moved to the estate when they married in 1953. Would the hotel where they lived still be there?

Bata records showed my father had worked in Section 465 as a clicker, so called because of the clicking noise made by the cutters as they hit the metal template used to cut out the leather for the shoes. I was later to find this cutting knife in a kitchen drawer in the Lublin flat.

The sections Tony had worked in had won annual Quality Awards and there were group photos, with him in them, of two of those occasions. At the time, there were 3,000 Bata employees but not everyone lived on the 650-acre estate.

“There were about 600 houses and the hotel,” said Mike “and here, look at this Lunch menu from the hotel. The whole of the first floor was a canteen for 1,000 people with a three-course hot meal every day.” The menu for the week I was born was:

Seasonal good wishes to all in the retail department.

Both girls are now at home and are making good progress.

you for the C

What's Cooking....?

MONDAY:
Celery soup, 4d.
Beef stew and dumplings, creamed potatoes, peas; grilled collar bacon, creamed potatoes, peas; meat pudding, creamed potatoes, peas; fried fish fingers, peas, and chips, 1s. 10d.
Fried egg, peas, and chips, 1s. 5d.
Gooseberries and custard; rice pudding and custard, 4d.

TUESDAY:
Tomato soup, 4d.
Roast lamb and mint sauce, roast and creamed potatoes, cabbage; spaghetti Bolognese, creamed potatoes, cabbage; meat pudding, creamed potatoes, cabbage; grilled or fried cod and chips, 1s. 10d.
Fried egg, baked beans, and chips, 1s. 5d.
Steamed suet roll with jam or syrup; sago pudding and custard, 4d.

WEDNESDAY:
Oxtail soup, 4d.
Minced beef and barley, creamed potatoes, carrots; cheese and potato pie and bacon, creamed potatoes, carrots;

meat pudding, creamed potatoes, currants; grilled or fried cod and chips, 1s. 10d.
Fried egg, spaghetti and chips, 1s. 5d.
Baked jam roll and custard; macaroni pudding and custard, 4d.

THURSDAY:
Mock turtle soup, 4d.
Liver and bacon, creamed potatoes, cabbage; cottage pie and bacon, creamed potatoes, cabbage; meat pudding, creamed potatoes, cabbage; fried fish cakes, peas, and chips, 1s. 10d.
Fried egg, bacon, and chips, 1s. 5d.
Plums and custard; semolina pudding and custard, 4d.

FRIDAY:
Mulligatawny soup, 4d.
Grilled sausages and onions, creamed potatoes, butter beans; luncheon meat fritter, creamed potatoes, butter beans; meat pudding, creamed potatoes, butter beans; grilled or fried cod and chips, 1s. 10d.
Fried egg, butter beans, and chips, 1s. 5d.
Jam sponge and custard; tapioca pudding and custard, 4d.

Hilda Lav is a very kind appreciate it
Fred Palin Many thanks voucher.
Josephine the voucher memories of at her work.
At the times of the been receive 164; Len Ba Ford, engine tory; Henry Mrs. E. Sc leather fact factory; H. Bryn Jones Primary Sch ator in lea Medcalf, lea gate, Dept Mrs. E. W Roffey, Dep of Dept 230; Bragg, engi factory; Do engineers; factory; Jo making dep merly of th

The best find of the day was made by Barbara, one of the volunteers. After wading through red leather-bound volumes of Bata Record newspapers, she found an article about my father in the May 20, 1955 edition. “*To Join His Wife In New South Wales*” the headline said and went on to say that *he was leaving to manage a farm* - not true. That *he was lonely without his wife* - I wondered which one, *who came to England* - oh, it was Mum, *to see the Coronation of the Queen* - also not true. There was no mention of me. I would have turned one that month. Had he sent anything to Australia for me? I didn’t know if he and Mum had been writing to each other after we left England on the *Strathnaver* in November 1954.

Walking around the estate on my own on a very quiet Saturday afternoon listening to stories of people who lived there on an audio recording, I paused and closed my eyes and tried to imagine what it must have been like for Mum. She hadn’t told me much about her time on the estate. Perhaps as Mum’s friend Judy had said, she hadn’t been happy and preferred not to recall. No post-mortems had always been her mantra. She and I stood back to back, her looking forward, me drawn to look back.

I found the Bata Hotel where we had lived. Another flat-topped, long box-shaped building. The top four floors had been converted into flats and the ground floor had some shops. Mum had told me they were not allowed to cook in the rooms and were supposed to eat all their meals in the dining room but they would sneak in food. The manager would comment on ‘*smelling dirty socks*’ as a warning to them.

The whole place looked rather rundown and the factory area was deserted and dilapidated. I walked from the front door of the hotel to the factory gate as my father would have done each morning. Everyone went home for lunch at 12.30pm and back to the factory again at 1.30pm for the afternoon shift. Apparently, they played military music for the workers as they came and went through the factory gates. They did the same at the entrance gates of Auschwitz. Given Tony’s concentration camp experiences, I wondered if the Bata company and Estate’s almost compound life offered a strange sense of comfort. It was an odd choice to make.

Although I was born there, and it was the place where my parents had lived together for the longest period of time, I felt no real connection to the place. I was only six months old when we left.

My next stop was the Polish Institute at Prince's Gate on Kensington Road in London, set up after WWII to preserve Polish historical records, military guns and uniforms, art and books of literature.

I'd made an appointment and was greeted by a woman at the top of the stairs who took my details, gave me a security and permission form to complete and sign, and then took me to the library. I waited a short while and she brought a manila folder with JAGIELSKI ANTONI 3/390 handwritten in black on the front. I was not sure why, but I was shocked to see his name on this file kept under such high security. Inside were many documents, letters and two photos of my father which looked like they were taken in England. The documents were all in Polish. I tried to make sense of them but I was mostly guessing. There was no-one who could help me with translation. I would have to take copies and wait until I returned to Poland. Yet another opportunity to practice patience.

My second port of call in London was the Polish Underground Movement Study Trust in Ealing. The two-storey red brick house had been the home of thousands of documents collected from when the Trust was established in 1946.

"Here you are," said Heather, a volunteer at the Trust, handing me a bulky yellow On His Majesty's Service envelope. On the front was JAGIELSKI, Antoni and 'Kozioł' his underground pseudonym meaning 'goat', his date and place of birth; 1939 and 1935 - Lublin KOP, *Korpus Ochrony Pogranicza* (the Border Protection Corps). This was a Polish military unit created in 1924 to defend the eastern border against armed Soviet raids and local bandits. I would realise the significance of these records and all Tony's letters in these files when I received the translations months later back in Sydney.

Heather brought me a book in English from the library, written by General Anders with quotes from Churchill and Atlee arguing in parliament about what to do with the Polish soldiers. Demobilise them and they've lost their jobs and pay. What to do with all the displaced people? What a huge problem to deal with millions of refugees and those seeking political asylum.

I came to the end of my research in London and was keen to get back to Lublin to have all that I had collected translated. I checked the Lublin forecast, *-12°C, feels like -20°C*. That would be a new experience.

In my journal for that day I wrote two quotes, not sourced:

“When your life is a deception... Trust no-one.”

“If you find the truth, will you believe it?”

Chapter 19 Last Weeks in Lublin

Tuesday 28th January

Back in Lublin, I spent some of the day in the flat deciding what to take home to Australia with me. I could have let the lot go, but one day I might regret having nothing but some photographs of the flat and its contents. I'd take the letters and documents, some of the photos and something representative of Helena and Janina. As far as I knew, Helena had been an innocent and heroic party in this story and there was much I had come to admire about her.

I was more ambivalent about Janina; even glad I hadn't met her in her declining years. Had she known about me, she might have written a will that denied me access to the information that had been so revealing for me. My search could have come to nothing. I couldn't imagine her welcoming me with open arms but I'd never know. She had clearly suffered from a range of mental illnesses and conditions. I didn't know when these had started - had life events precipitated them or were they genetic? The family doctor had refused me access to my family medical history.

Wednesday 29th January

Sitting in my apartment with the snow falling, I tried to decide when to return to Sydney. Financial matters were not settled or certain but I did need to get back and prepare for the year ahead with teaching starting at the end of February. I had an inkling to go to Italy before I left. It was the only part of my father's journey I hadn't covered, but perhaps this was a folly as I had no contacts and no information about his time there. I called historian and author, Andrzej Suchcitz, who I'd met at the Polish Institute in London, to ask if there was a chance of any archives, photos or documents or buildings left from my father's time in Barletta and/or Forli in Italy.

"It's unlikely," he said "all the papers were taken by the Polish Army. You might find something in the local papers of the time."

Given that I didn't speak Italian, there seemed little point in travelling to either of these places.

Friday 31st January

The last day of January and the last day before Kris was off to China on an exchange program. I knew I would miss him, he had become a trusted friend in addition to his interpreting role with me. We had a big day planned and then would meet later in the evening for a drink and dinner with Agnieszka, his friend who was going to step into his rather large shoes.

For our final adventure, we made our way to the cemetery. Thanks to Renee's determination, we had the details of my grandmother's date of death. At the office they told us where she was buried and also that money was owed for her grave and Antoni's family grave. I paid for the next twenty years and felt my duty was done. We were given a map and across the road at the caretaker's office, I said to Kris, "Can you ask if we can borrow a shovel please?"

He looked a little perturbed, but the snow was a good thirty centimetres deep and I didn't fancy scraping snow with my hands. The caretaker looked uncertain, but Kris persuaded him and off we went, map and shovel in hand, like two prospectors looking for gold.

The map was hard to follow, we were ankle deep in snow, the paths were hard to find, the gravestones were not well marked and the light was fading. It was also windy and snowing lightly. Kris stood on the main path with the map as I called back to him the names I could read. In places, I sank up to my knees in the snow while Kris shivered trying to make sense of the map. The dark and the cold beat us that day. We returned the shovel and I asked Kris to tell the man I would be back another day.

That evening, standing next to the Józef Piłsudski statue in Litewski Square, I spotted Kris hurrying towards me. We had barely said hello, before he reached into his inside coat pocket and handed me a piece of paper.

"I googled your father this afternoon, and I found this," he said. "It's a column in the local Teatr NN newsletter where they reprint stories from the past, sometimes like this one from the *Głos Lubelski* (Lublin Voice) newspaper. This is from July, 1930 and it's about your father!"

The Teatr NN is more than a theatre company. It is also a museum and cultural heritage centre housed in the Grodzka Gate, originally the gateway between the Jewish and Christian parts of Lublin.



Kalendarium; Lublina i Lubelszczyzny, Leksykon Lublin wersja beta

Antoni Jagielski

1930-07-09 Kradzieże - 9 lipca

Kris had written the translation underneath the article for me.

1930-07-09 *Thefts - 9 July*

Helena Jagielska (address: Al. Długosza 4) reported a theft of two golden rings, a lady's watch with a bracelet with inscription "K.J.", 6 teaspoons, 3 tablespoons, a piece of silver plated cutlery and a cloth suitcase as well as other things, which were of general value of 170 PLN, by her husband Antoni Jagielski, staying currently in Dzisiąta village, county Głusk, who is about to leave for France.

I was dumbstruck.

“In July, 1930, Helena would have been seven months pregnant with Janina and Antoni steals these things and is about to abscond. Unbelievable,” I said.

“I looked up Dzisiąta where Antoni was staying. It's about 15 kilometres to the south of Lublin.”

I needed some time to let this new information sink in.

I didn't want it to let it spoil Kris' farewell, so we headed to the pub as planned. I would miss him and it was hard to think of someone else, who had not been through all the recent experiences and discoveries, taking over, but as soon as Agnieszka walked in all friendly and smiling, I knew we would get along well. We had a great night reminiscing and filling in Agnieszka on our key discoveries - how I'd inherited the flat, we'd tracked down money from Mrs Dusik, discovered there was a 'great love' between Antoni and Helena (or was there?), what a miserable life Antoni had endured in Australia and how he always yearned for his family and Poland. The hot mulled wine

was a good lubricant for conversation and much laughter. But I couldn't help thinking about Antoni the thief.

The next day I stayed in my pyjamas and slippers all day, warm and cosy from the outside whistling wind and snowstorm. It reached the forecast high of -10°C. I did my morning meditation and yoga, and over coffee, looked at the newsletter article Kris had given me. What a parting gift.

I would probably never know the whole story but for Helena to go to the police and report Antoni, and for it to be published in the local paper, what a scandal. How did they repair their relationship and make it look like 'a great love'? Poor Helena. Maybe he was living with some other woman in Dzisiąta.

My phone rang. It was Kris.

"Are you okay after the news of your father?" he asked.

"I'm thinking about him and poor Helena. It's answered the question I started out with about what was he like before all the trauma and suffering of the war. He wasn't an honourable man."

Kris still had to finish packing so we said our *do widzenias* once more. As I hung up, I was already missing him. It was a marker for things in Poland coming to an end.

On Monday, my certified translator and I met Pan Ryszard, father of Marta the law student, who would buy the flat for her, at the notary's office. Mrs Lewicka was consistently cool and disdainful but other than that, it was the strangest experience. Ryszard and I each signed a document which had been read aloud in Polish and then English, I handed him the keys and he handed me a brown paper bag of money.

"Do you want to count the money?" Ryszard asked.

"No, I'd like you to come to the bank with me and they can count the money," I said.

That way I could be sure it wasn't monopoly money and that the amount was correct. The money went straight into the account I had opened to be transferred to my account in Australia. It all went smoothly and the flat was no longer mine.

On Thursday, I went back to the cemetery and borrowed a shovel to see if I could find my grandmother Maria's grave. I was lucky it was a sunny day, as I methodically worked my way through matching headstones to the map. And then, there it was. A metal shield-shaped plaque on a post stood above the grave with my grandmother's name on it. The headstone was piled high with snow, covering all the other details. I hung my handbag on the metal plaque so it wouldn't get wet, removed two lanterns and a vase of yellow and white plastic flowers poking through the snow and started shovelling. What I found under that snow left me flabbergasted. There were fresh flowers, tied with a large pink and gold ribbon. Someone had recently visited here. Someone cared.

The carving on the headstone was faded and it was difficult to make out the names. I scraped away the snow and ice and traced the indentations with my fingers to try to make sense of the words, names and numbers. On the right-hand side at the top was my grandmother, Maria Jagielska née Ciechalewska, died 9 May, 1954, age 84. Below her was Stanisław, died in the Hitler camp Oświęcim, April, 1942, it looked like aged 38 but I couldn't be sure. Antoni was transferred from Auschwitz to Gusen in May, 1942. Perhaps they had seen each other. On the left were two more of Maria's children - at the top was Franciszek Jagielski, died 12 years old in 1920 and below him was Aniela Jagielska but it was impossible to work out any other details.

I called Agnieszka and explained what I had found and asked her if I could leave a note on the grave in Polish with her number and email as contact details. She'd need to do the translation, have it printed and laminated and put it on the grave. I would scan the cemetery map and send it to her with some instructions to make it easy for her to find. Leaving the note on my grandmother's grave was my last bit of detective work; a final attempt to make contact with any unknown relatives.

I had gathered many pieces of the puzzle of my father's life since my arrival in Poland three months earlier. I needed to put them all together and stand back and look at them. I needed time and space to make some sense of it all. Most of all, I needed to go home.

PART III

When I thought of resistance fighters, I pictured women and men in trench coats and French berets smoking Gauloises under lamp posts at midnight. But my romantic notions were soon to be shattered.

I was back in Sydney when Agnieszka sent me the translated files on my father from the Polish Underground Movement Study Trust, the Polish Institute and the Society of Fighters for Freedom and Democracy Office in Warsaw (*ZBoWiD*). Both archive offices in London confirmed my father was in the Polish Resistance movement based in Lublin. There were up to twenty different Polish resistance organisations including the two listed in my father's file - the KOP, *Komenda Obrońców Polski* (Confederation of Defendants of Poland) and ZWZ *Związek Walki Zbrojnej* (Union of Armed Struggle). The largest of all, and in some ways the umbrella organisation, was the A.K., *Armia Krajowa* or Home Army. They were loyal to the exiled Government of the Republic of Poland in London and are said to have been the largest underground resistance unit in wartime Europe. Poland was the only occupied country whose government never surrendered.

I read the translated letters of application from my father for recognition of his membership and activities in the military leading up to the war, in the Underground movement from 1939 until his arrest in 1941 - '*I can prove that I was in the resistance with dates and positions held*' - and his activities after liberation from the concentration camps. The letters were dated between June 1946 when he was recovering and working in Linz, Austria and September 1947, just prior to him starting work at Bata. Many of these details confirmed what I knew but there was new information as well. It seemed he was applying for compensation and a soldier's pay. In order to gain this pay he detailed his pre-war dates, units and roles - Gunner, Bombardier, Corporal, Platoon-leader and Fire Master and also the name of a witness, Franciszek Piechowicz, who knew him for 17 years from 1930 when they worked together in Lublin. Piechowicz could verify his rank.

No evidence was the official response to that letter.

Another series of files intended to provide evidence of his membership of the resistance included a Gestapo document listing the reason for his arrest as *Widerstandsbewegung* (Insurgent - underground movement) and stated that he had been

betrayed to the Gestapo by the Chief of the KOP and was imprisoned on the III Ward of Lublin Castle jail with Colonel Korcz and 200 other members of underground organisations before being transported to Auschwitz on 27/11/1941. In spite of a photocopy of his membership in the underground movement taken from Gestapo records, *No data to confirm* was the decision by the Command of the II Corps Verification Committee.

Antoni sent more information and finally his membership of the resistance was verified.

At the end of WWII there were an estimated twelve million Displaced Persons (DPs) in Europe. ‘DP apathy’ was a commonly used description of those in DP camps which, given the trauma they suffered, was understandable. But reading through the pages of evidence provided by my father, it was clear that he maintained his sense of agency, pursuing and securing a range of jobs in Linz, Italy and England.

The Polish Centre in Linz certifies that he worked both in the DP camp and the hospital in Linz as a warehouse worker, Chief of Protection Personnel and Chief Storeman after his recovery. A reference letter states that *Antoni Jagielski was a good and talented employee, who despite his poor health was a hard worker and liked amongst the Polish community in Linz.*

After illegally crossing the Austrian-Italian border he enlisted in the Polish Army II Corps and worked as an office clerk to the Quartermaster. In England he was a *Leader*, and a *non-commissioned officer at the post office of the family camp 5 KDR Stockbridge, Hants.*

It showed my father’s resilience and his determination to recover and progress and fitted with the pieces I had put together tracing his trail from Lublin to London.

But what jumped out at me on the next page shattered the image I had created of him. It shattered me.

Part C Roles/positions in the underground movement.

1) Names of underground organisations I belonged to:

a) 09/1939-11/07/1941 - Kadra Wojskowa “KW” (Army Staff),

b) from 08/1940: **took over responsibilities of execution** for *Konfederacja Obrońców Polski “KOP” (Confederation of Defendants of Poland)*

c) from 01/1941 **took over responsibilities of execution** for recently merged: *Związek Walki Zbrojnej "ZWZ" (Union of Armed Struggle)*

d) Unit name: *The Army Staff Executive for Lublin Region, posting - Lublin*

e) Nickname of the direct supervisor: *Lieut. Sobczyński (Biały) -Chief of Execution Teams*

Nickname of the higher supervisor: *Colonel Walter - Chief of Lublin Region, the City*

Supervisor's names and nicknames in 1939-1941 were: *Colonel Lelek, Captain Kosior, Lieut. Sobczyński-Biały, Captain Walter, Captain Smoliński and Colonel Karez.*

2) Positions held in the above-mentioned organisations:

a) 09/1939-05/1940 - *Information Department*

b) 05/1940 up until arrest on 11/07/1941 - **Chief of Execution Unit for Lublin City** for organisations KOP, ZWZ and KW.

3) Nickname: *Goat*

Following the orders of the Lublin underground movement headquarters, **some of the executions I carried out** included:

a) *killed Miller from Syndicate on 08/1940 with a knife*

b) *killed Henryk Galiński on 11-12/40 in his flat in Kośminek, shot with a Mauser*

c) *killed the Lublin Gestapo Chief and his driver near Lublin in 1941.*

I read and re-read this section.

I emailed Agnieszka to check that she had translated correctly. She had.

I closed the file and went for a long walk.

My daughter was as horrified I was. My son said "My grandfather (a newly acquired ownership emerged) was a hero" and changed his view of Tony from the bigamist, betrayer of his beloved grandmother to 'hero'. Two other friends, whose fathers were in the Navy during WWII said "It was war time Betty, of course they killed each other."

"But to be so close. To go to someone's home to kill them... with a knife..."

He wasn't just a member of the resistance. He was Head of the Execution Unit in Lublin. Couldn't he have chosen another job? Wasn't there something else he could have done? Did he ever feel reluctance, remorse, guilt or did he lose all empathy for others?

Maybe it wasn't true. But there was no way of checking the veracity of these statements. As Tony said in one section, *I cannot give the names of witnesses who*

would confirm my rank due to the fact that 80% of my colleagues are dead and the army has not been helpful in finding others. He listed witnesses' names that could testify that he participated in ZWZ - engineer Stefan Swirski, Outon Park Camp, Tarporley; that could confirm his military ranks from 1935 - second lieutenant Piekowicz Ranek, Stobs Camp 570.

Antoni was denied a soldier's pay in September 1947. Railing against the decision, he wrote to the Chairman of the General Verification Committee of the Home Army, stating that he was *one of the first who fought against the enemy and laid foundations for future combat organisations*; he went through concentration camps; after his release, he worked voluntarily for a year on the order of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and that is why he joined the army only in 1946.

He described how war had thrown some people to the West - these were *treated like beggars, sick after their Gestapo treatment*, and some to the East - *the heroes from Tobruk, Monte Casino and Bogna* but, he said, the verification process set people against each other. *This is the larger issue.*

He sent his letter to the Chairman, to the daily *Dziennik Polski i Dziennik Żołnierza* (Polish Daily and Soldier Daily) and the weekly *Polska Walcząca* (Poland Fighting) for publication.

Before the dispute was resolved, Tony began working at the Bata shoe factory and withdrew his application, requesting all files be returned.

He had testimonies from people who claimed they were witnesses to these experiences of his but I wondered. Who knew what he may have done for them in the camps, and before or after, that indebted them to him. Perhaps he had saved a life, showed some kindness, shared a piece of bread, a cup of water or a blanket. Did he do any of these things or were they fabrications to pave the way to compensation and a soldier's pay?

During his time in the Gestapo prison he was subjected to physical and psychological torture, began the next document to arrive from Agnieszka. It was the 1970 Medical Report that I'd found in the flat. It went on to say that Antoni *was repeatedly beaten about the head to the extent that he lost consciousness. As a result of*

this beating, his left ear often bled and he had nosebleed. From that time, his hearing was significantly impaired. Simultaneously, tinnitus appeared in this ear. As a further result of that torture he lost his sense of smell. He lost many teeth too. His body was burned with red-hot pokers. In the Auschwitz camp he had to carry out hard physical work - 12 hours, 7 days a week - as well as drills to and from work.

It was a twenty-page document, requested by *the patient's attorney*, written by a Macquarie Street specialist in neurology and psychiatry, Dr I. A. Listwan and submitted to the National Court, Compensation Department 4 in Cologne. The report contained documentation from an additional eight Australian medical doctors confirming diagnoses and treatment in Sydney from 1956, of partially healed pulmonary tuberculosis and pneumoconiosis, a lung disease from working in the quarry; coughing, difficulties in breathing, diarrhoea and constipation; impaired hearing in left ear and loss of sense of smell; angina pectoris; painful scars on the right chest and on the right thigh; nightmares, sobbing, recurring depressive and fear states.

A section headed 'War History' described some of the ways in which these injuries and conditions had been inflicted upon him.

If I had ever not fully understood the brutality and inhumanity of war, the long-term impact of torture, the never-ending anguish and trauma, this section of my father's medical report left no doubt. It was one of millions of women, men and children's stories. The only thing I could do at the time, was bear witness and sit for a short while in the discomfort of his suffering.

Excerpts from the report stated:

In Gusen concentration camp, from 5th May 1942 to 5th May 1945, he worked as a stonemason for 12 hours a day, 7 days a week. During this time, he was beaten by SS-man Kluge until he lost consciousness. As a result of that torture, his urine became blood-stained, he suffered from left kidney injury as well as injuries on his right thigh. Scars are still visible today. He spent many weeks in the hospital. Due to the lack of a surgical theatre he could not be operated on and he developed purulent inflammation throughout his body. During his stay in the Gusen camp he started coughing and he was diagnosed with tuberculosis. This diagnosis was communicated to him unofficially by a Polish doctor Mr. Konieczny. Despite the patient having high temperatures, he could not report his illness due to the threat of execution by firing squad or by gassing. The

patient was then terrified, because during his imprisonment at Auschwitz concentration camp in 1942 he was responsible for removing gassed corpses from the gas chambers which led to nervous hawking [coughing and throat-clearing]. Additionally, the patient, during his time in concentration camps suffered different diseases resulting from malnutrition of tissues, liver inflammation, phlegmon. These diseases lead, as it is known, to severe psycho-reactive disorders and increasing symptoms of fear.

Significant traumas lead to major and permanent personality change. It leads to distorted analysis of sensation (see the link between hawking and removing corpses out of gas chambers) and to the development of a haunted personality.

His 'Current Ailments' in 1970 were listed. Insomnia, fatigue. excitability, depression, all catalogued.

1/ Insomnia due to nightmares

This insomnia is connected with nightmares and should be put down to war oppression. In his dreams, corpses, which he had to carry away from a gas chamber, as well as women and children which he had to throw into ditches for burning, appear. He wakes up screaming and wet from sweating. He is terrified, needs to turn on the light and has difficulties in falling asleep.

He sometimes couldn't work because of exhaustion from lack of sleep.

3/ Excitability

The patient is easily excitable and annoyed even at mere trifles. He is sensitive in relations with people... the patient most often trembles.

He frequently suffered from tension headaches, sometimes several times a week.

5/ Hawking (Hem/Grunting) [a loud throat-clearing noise]

The patient told me that these hem sounds started when he was carrying away the corpses from the gas chambers and continues since that time, particularly when he is irritated or when he is in company.

And then came the results of the psychiatric tests.

Intellectual functions

Thinking process was basically correct, although it was slowed and narrowed. Clearly, thoughts were partially unsystematic. The patient jumped from one thought to another, which led to thought divergence and absent-mindedness.

Emotional responses

The patient was unusually short-tempered and gave the impression of being frightened. He was overwhelmed and in a timid mood. The patient was prone to sombre moods and depression. His ability to self-compose was lower than average. It led to the conclusion, that his tolerance to new situations was lowered. He was languid and seemed tired, sad, and overwhelmed.

He felt worthless and with no initiative. He works in a factory in a corner, because of the ongoing hawking sounds he is making, it disturbs his work and makes his colleagues laugh at him. During the test he tried to smother these sounds. He did not succeed. He felt pushed away from his community and shut himself off from all human relationships.

The patient was inclined to be suspicious, have wrong interpretations and evaluations of observational and restrictive ideas. He had a high level of certainty and there was no possibility of correcting him.

Behaviour and approach

Although the patient was slightly agitated, very polite and willingly answered all questions, it was not possible to make warm personal contact with him.

The diagnosis was “Chronic depression with neurotic traits and vegetative disorder. Prehistory of pulmonary tuberculosis and silicosis [lung disease], reduced hearing in left ear and anosmia.

The impact of torture is indisputable. All of these disorders are the results of wartime oppression and exist from that time on. Therefore, they should be treated as the result of oppression.

The patient's conditions are chronic. He is lonely and has no family support. He is not able to adapt to the situation.

My feelings ricocheted from outrage to sorrow, from indignation to despair. The truth of the writing of Auschwitz survivor, Primo Levi was clear: *Anyone who has been tortured, remains tortured.*

When I began looking for my father's story, I knew there would be gaps, spaces I might imagine my way into. But the imaginings left me sleep-deprived from horrific dreams, panic and anxiety as I awoke short of breath and sweaty for seemingly no reason at all. In comparison to my father's trauma my own situation was trivial but nonetheless, his experiences were having a significant impact on me.

My doctor suggested sleeping tablets to break the cycle. Exhaustion on top of stress was not a good combination. The script lay unfilled at the bottom of my handbag. I came to realise I was anxious and panicky about three things. Firstly, the palpable details of the traumatic experiences my father had suffered. Secondly, the shock of finding out he was head of an execution unit, by choice and thirdly, that my half-sister was in a psychiatric clinic a number of times and died sad and lonely being obese, diabetic, depressed and regressed to a child-like state. Perhaps this would happen to me.

In Poland, I'd had mixed feelings about inheriting the flat. I was thrilled at having access to this family archive of letters, photographs and documents but it had come at the cost of dealing with my father and Janina's deceased estate on my own; sorting out for people I didn't know. Still, they were my family and as the last living relative, I felt some responsibility to tidy things up. A friend had lost her father recently. She was angry at not having parents any more but after her father died, she and her two brothers and their partners agreed not to do anything on their own. What a comfort that must have been.

And what would Mum think of all of this? Tony certainly didn't treat her very well but she said she was happy. She was pragmatic, positive, forward looking - no post-mortems, simple.

But simple is not my way - I think and wonder, question, reflect, analyse. I feel the heaviness of my father, of Poland, in my personality - the seriousness, the depressive nature. Going to Poland for three winter months probably didn't help. I missed my regular exercise routine and the daylight. What did I do with all that time in

the evenings? There was no TV in English. I transcribed my interviews with Mr Z and others, fearful of losing the recordings, read documents, planned the next steps, wrote, emailed, skyped and wondered. I tried to take each new day as an exciting new discovery adventure, and for the most part, it was.

I'd been to all the places where my father had lived, except for Barletta and Forlì in Italy where he'd spent two months before he was shipped to England. I still marvelled at the fact that he survived. He wasn't shot when the Gestapo arrested him, or killed during his torture when being interrogated; he didn't freeze to death in the snow when they arrived at Auschwitz or die in Block 11, he was moved to block 9, not killed in Auschwitz but transported to Gusen, somehow he was chosen to be trained as a stonemason and didn't have to carry those blocks; he survived the experiments in the hospital, landed a job in the potato kitchen, convinced the Bricha organisation to guide him over the Alps into Italy and then travelled to England and Australia. So many others died horrible deaths or were killed in these very circumstances. He survived but the cost was apparent for the rest of his life.

At the Sydney Writers Festival, I heard Richard Flanagan talking about his Booker Prize winning *The Narrow Road to the Deep North*. Commenting on the impact of war he said, *Innocent people commit acts that in other circumstances they would be locked up for and they are expected to come home and lead normal lives... The wounds are passed on to children, families and communities*. Later, I would hear an Italian woman talk about this at the anniversary of the liberation of Gusen. She spoke of the difficulties of living on in the second generation, with a difficult father, who had survived Gusen, and *"who forever spread into us, his children, the offense to his human dignity... he was not aware, no doubt. But how can we interpret his anxiety to 'prepare us for the worst' that life could have in store for us?"*

Australian actress, comedian and writer Magda Szubanski, in her memoir *Reckoning*, described growing up in the outer suburbs of Melbourne with her Polish father, Scottish mother and two siblings. They migrated to Australia in 1965 and stayed together as a close family with no apparent longing on her father's part to return to Poland. It was clear that her father *"needed to get as far away from blood-stained Europe as possible. Once [in Australia] he refused to look back."* Szubanski's story is one of coming to terms with her family and with herself. There are important resonances with my own experience except that she lived with her father. Each of us has

been affected, but in different ways, by our father's experiences in a world that neither of us could truly imagine.

Szubanski describes her Polish father's silence as his way of dealing with the trauma of his experiences during WWII. Survivor and family coping strategies can range from silence at one end of the spectrum, my father's position with my mother and me, to voice, testimony and recognition at the other, his position with his Polish family. Szubanski tells us that her father broke this silence for a single, six-hour session when he recounted his experiences to his daughter, never to speak of them again. Her memoir begins: *If you had met my father you would never, not for an instant, have thought he was an assassin... you would never have guessed he was capable of killing in cold blood. But he was. Poor bastard.*

Szubanski points here to the fact that many Cold War immigrants and refugees were victims, and some were perpetrators, of prolonged violence and trauma, as were many Australian soldiers returning from the war, and they were understandably changed by these experiences. As a middle-aged man in a new environment, suffering from the physical damage and psychological trauma of war, my father, unlike Szubanski's, was unable to sustain a new family, having been unwillingly separated from his Polish family and homeland. And Mum and I lived with the consequences of that.

Hiding or completely shutting off from one's emotions had been a fundamental mechanism for survival for many during life in the concentration camps. The ensuing inability to form and maintain relationships or show any emotional responses or connection with people, for many survivors, was profound and enduring.

I came to the conclusion that absent fathers can be a blessing.

I was not usually one to dream, or remember them if I did have them, but this period of my life was punctuated by many vivid dreams. One night, I dreamt there was a stranger lying beside me in my bed, who got up and put on his trousers that were hanging over the bottom of the bed. He brushed my foot, covered by the sheet, as he steadied himself. I held my breath and lay so very still until I heard him go out of the room and close the door behind him. But then the door opened and he came back into the bedroom, made his side of the bed and left. No words were spoken, it was too dark

to see what he looked like. I could hear my heart pounding in my ears and my short, panicked breathing.

The following day I began unpacking the objects and photographs I had brought back from Lublin. My dreams and sleepless nights had left me anxious and fearful. The listing, documenting and processing helped me feel a little more in control. Having managed my emotions while I was away, now that I was home and safe they were surfacing. I needed some critical distance. I took it until I received an excited email from Agnieszka, my interpreter in Poland.

Someone had replied to the laminated note she'd put on my grandmother's grave.

Chapter 21

Return to Poland - My Polish family

Saturday 5th April

Betty,

I've got some great news for you.

Yesterday evening I had a call from someone in the Ciechalewski family! It seems your father had a brother Adam (he was given his mother's maiden name, Ciechalewski, in order to escape the army). Jan Ciechalewski, who called in response to our note on the grave, is Adam's grandson. I made an appointment with him.

Best,

Agnieszka

It was some weeks before she was able to meet Jan and before I found out that I had at least another fifty-five relatives I didn't know about. Curiosity had me hooked again.

Jan, born in 1947, was a retired physical education teacher who lived in Lublin with his wife Hanna and their daughter Agnieszka and her husband Sasha. His grandfather, Adam Ciechalewski, born in November 1892, was my father's older brother by seventeen years. He had one daughter and six sons including Jan's father Felix. I wasn't sure if this made Jan and I second cousins or if I was his aunt. It didn't matter. We were related and he'd been happy to meet Agnieszka and answer my questions, the essence of which she emailed to me.

Jan had met my father for the first time at his father Felix's funeral in 1977, and then only twice more. Jan's impression of Antoni was that he was calm, not talkative, an introvert, and reserved. Jan was aware of Antoni's war history but didn't recall anything about his childhood, where he lived or of his parents or siblings.

He met Helena at another funeral but it seemed she didn't want to be in touch with the rest of the family, not offering invitations or meeting with them. Adam Ciechalewski, my father's brother, had been a hackney driver, liked drinking and died in a road accident. Jan speculated that Adam's reputation as a drunkard led Helena to think that all his family were like him.

Janina was a lot older than Jan but he met her once when his family returned from Silesia, in south-western Poland, where they had worked in the mines, and she showed him around Lublin.

They knew that Antoni had emigrated to Australia through England. It was also "known" that he had a wife and a child born out of wedlock in Australia.

As for the flat, Jan met Antoni's neighbour from Lipowa Street at the cemetery after Janina's death. He was told that someone could inherit the flat, but Jan was not interested, considering the number of potential inheritors.

Months later I had an academic paper accepted for a conference in Estonia. It was so close to Poland, I could easily meet up with my new relatives. I planned to go back to Lublin for one week.

Lublin, Sunday 9th November

I woke up feeling excited and nervous about meeting Jan and his family. Agnieszka had organised to take me to their flat for Sunday lunch and be my interpreter. None of the family spoke English. I was so warmly welcomed by Jan in his shirt and tie, his wife Hanna, his daughter Agnieszka and her husband, Sasha. They had set the table with a lace cloth, fruit, wine, champagne and vodka and had made a traditional Polish lunch.

Sasha explained that in his retirement, Jan had two jobs - gardening at his summer house in Jabłonna, close to Lublin, and finding relatives. He hadn't ever expected to meet a relative from Australia, despite a rumour of a family there. We shared family trees but Jan didn't remember my father, Helena or Janina that well as he was a lot younger than all of them. Looking for further confirmation of what I already knew and perhaps additional information, I'd hoped that face-to-face and with some prompting, Jan might remember more.

Unbeknownst to me, Jan had organised four other family gatherings for me. I was grateful for Agnieszka's extroverted personality and her help as interpreter and chauffeur as she eased our way through the next few gatherings.

On the Tuesday, Independence Day, I looked out of Agnieszka's car window to see people waving from two different apartment blocks. One was Jan's brother Adam's family and the other, his sister Wiesława's (Ve-shwava's) family. We were to go to one and then to the other as they couldn't all fit in the one apartment. At that stage, I wasn't sure how many of the fifty-five relatives would be there. It was an afternoon of food and drink and feeling a little like an exotic animal at the zoo. A thousand photos were taken, children sat on my lap, questions were asked and big smiles beamed all around. I felt an instant connection with Wiesława. Maybe it was the big hug she gave me when I arrived.

"We are having a mass for your grandmother on Saturday morning," she said. "Will you come?"

"Of course," I replied.

I didn't admit to being a lapsed Catholic, or that my mother had sent me to a Church of England boarding school to anyone but Agnieszka, who told me on the way home the television on in the background at Wiesława's flat was on a very conservative Catholic channel.

My final social engagement that day, making three meals in five hours with three different families, was with Anna and Piotr. I'd hoped to see Mr Z but he was in hospital and not well enough for visitors. He died in May the following year.

I had a couple of days free before the Ciechalewski mass on Saturday. As Agnieszka had to work on Wednesday, Kris came with me to the Interrogation Museum, *Oddział Martyrologii Pod Zegarem*, in the 'Under the Clock' building, to meet with the Director, Barbara Oratowska. The nickname came from the impressive clock tower on top of the 1930s Lands Office building. All arrested resistance fighters were brought to this building for interrogation before either being sent to the concentration camps, returned to Lublin Castle jail or executed. My father would have been brought to this place after his arrest.

I'd been trying to imagine my father's Lublin under the Nazi occupation and the beginnings of the underground resistance movement. Barbara gave me an excellent description.

In 1939, the Wehrmacht established its capital in Kraków with headquarters in Warsaw, Kielce and Lublin. Buildings, homes and infrastructure were taken over by the Germans and ration cards issued to the population which allowed 560 calories per day for an adult and 470 calories for a child. The monthly food allowance included 6kg bread, 400g sugar, 400g flour, 1/2kg of horsemeat, 2 eggs and ½ litre of vodka. A curfew was immediately imposed between 10.00pm and 6.00am each day. Universities, theatres, museums, schools, synagogues and churches were closed and went underground. Poles were told to leave their flats and move to the Old Town which was the Jewish district. Many buildings in this area had no toilets and with overcrowding, makeshift houses sprang up creating a slum area. In 1939 the population of Lublin was 122,000 including 42,830 Jews. In December 1939, a Jewish camp was set up at 7 Lipowa Street. Only 230 Lublin Jews are known to have survived the German occupation, plus a larger group, about 1,000 survived in Russia.

The Polish Underground movement was large and strong in Lublin, surviving on food and shelter provided by the local villages. They ran an underground press, schools and medical centres, hid paintings and buried statues in an effort to preserve their culture in addition to sabotage activities. Those who were caught were treated harshly, many ending up in the Lublin Castle jail before and after interrogation in the ‘Under the Clock’ building.

The Gestapo commandeered the ‘Under the Clock’ building in 1940 for use as offices by the *Geheime Staatspolizei* (Secret State Police) and for interrogation. The cellars were rebuilt as fourteen prison cells including three dark cells, seventy-five centimetres wide, and one corner cell with water and sewerage pipes. The drops of water that continuously fell were more torture for the prisoners. All windows were covered with planks so there was no light. There were two bare light bulbs in the corridor. The floors were concrete and there was no heating. Throughout the German occupation, the cells were crowded with people brought from the castle jail for interrogation. Despite the thick walls they could hear each other being tortured. Gas masks were sometimes put on the prisoners to quieten their screams. The duration of their stay was from a few days to several weeks in the cells ‘Under the Clock’. Many did not survive the torture and their bodies were returned to the Castle jail. Between 1942 and 1944 it is estimated more than two hundred bodies of prisoners were taken back to the Castle. That’s two people tortured to death each week.

Bronisława Szewczyk, a former prisoner, testified about a two-week interrogation:

First, they hit me in the face and broke my front teeth. Next, they put pins under my nails. Every afternoon they tied my hands and legs, hung me on a rifle between two chairs and beat me with a rubber hose. After that, they did so-called washing. One German stood with his shoe on my chest, and the other on my throat. In such a way, they forced me to swallow twelve bottles of water, filth, petrol or paraffin. Then, using a pump, they pumped everything out of me. Once, they used burning hot tongs to grab hold of my breasts.

At the end of the German occupation, the 20th July, 1944, the Soviets took over. Both occupiers destroyed files and documents as they left. My father's brother Stanisław's personal card had survived. It detailed his date of birth, address and the date of his arrest as a political prisoner, his transport to Auschwitz on 6th April, 1941, three months before Antoni was arrested, and his death in Auschwitz on 31st March, 1942. There was no card for Antoni. She confirmed that Henryk Galinski, the man Antoni said he had killed, was a double-agent, working for both the KOP and the Gestapo and that someone from the KOP had killed him. This killing angered the Germans and in February 1941 they retaliated with mass arrests.

Barbara, the Director of the Museum, considered it strange that Antoni was not able to get confirmation during the process of authorisation in England. Perhaps it had been discovered that he too was a collaborator and this may have been why he left for Australia. This was a new twist and a possibility, but there was no way of ever knowing.

Barbara mentioned that 2015 would be the seventieth anniversary of the liberation of the Mauthausen and Gusen camps. There was sure to be an acknowledgement of this. Already I was feeling a pull to attend.

The next day, I went back to have another look at Lublin Castle and its jail and find out more about it. More than 40,000 prisoners, mostly members of the resistance, were detained in the Castle jail between 1939 - 1944. Conditions were overcrowded with sometimes 40 to a cell, and unsanitary. It was also used as a prison from 1944 - 1954 for the political opponents of the communist regime.

Prior to their departure, the Germans, on the 19th July, 1944, took 800 prisoners to Majdanek concentration camp on the outskirts of Lublin, to be killed. Three days

later, between 9am and 11am, 300 Castle prisoners were shot before the Germans left Lublin to the Russians.

The next morning, Jan's daughter Agnieszka and Sasha picked me up at 7.00am from the Castle steps and took me to the seventeenth century Church of St Agnes for the 7.30am mass devoted to my grandmother, Maria Jagielska. The church interior glittered with gold and reflected candlelight, the high vaulted ceilings stretching towards heaven amidst the haze of frankincense. There were twelve of us there. Interpreter Agnieszka met us after the service to accompany me to Jan's summer house, The Ponderosa, for brunch. Another six or so relatives met us at the house.

Jan proudly showed me around the house, which he'd built from rescued materials from all over Lublin. He led us past wooden boxes of walnuts, up the stairs to a timber-lined attic. The angled windows looked out over a small lake with a bridge across it to a swing set and then further across the fields. We could also see a stand of fruit trees he had planted himself.

He had set a bonfire in the back garden earlier in the week and lighting it brought some welcome warmth to the 3°C windy morning. In spite of the cold, tables and chairs were brought out to the garden. Mugs of hot black tea spiced with double shots of vodka were handed around. It was only 9.00am but anything to warm me up was welcome. And then, course by course came cold meats, cheeses, beetroot and horseradish, more shots of vodka, tomato and onion salad, then *bigos*, (the Hunter's stew of various meats cooked with sauerkraut, fresh cabbage and smoked sausage), grilled chicken, *Kielbasa*, more vodka, then more grilled meat and potatoes cooked on the coals. It was a wonderful morning with much laughter and many stories. They were all interested in my mother. How did she meet my father? In London! Really? Why did she come from Australia? She grew up on a farm? How could she afford the trip? After all the focus on Antoni, it was good to talk about my Mum. She would have loved the conviviality of this gathering.

I was still asking questions about why their grandfather Adam's name was Ciechalewski and not Jagielski. The story about him using it to avoid the army didn't gel. That day, I heard that it was rumoured that Adam was born out of wedlock - a

mortal sin and a source of shame in such a good Roman Catholic family. They asked if I could check the genealogical research I had done for marriage dates for Jozef and Maria and the birthdate for Adam. The rumour turned out to be true. Adam was born two years before the marriage of Jozef and Maria. I wondered who his father was but we were still all related by the same grandmother.

Later, I became friends on Facebook with a couple of the younger ones but without a common language it diminished to the odd birthday, Easter and Christmas wish. I couldn't see us ever being close. Blood lines made us related but they didn't make us family.

The next day I made my way to Lublin station for the 10.25am train to Warsaw. It was a grey rainy morning and the train was delayed. I discovered the station was first opened in 1877 when Poland was part of the Russian Empire, and rebuilt in an ornate style in the 1920s. Thousands of people had been taken by bus from the Castle jail to this station to be transported to Auschwitz, 400 kilometres away. My father was one of them. He had also travelled from Auschwitz to Gusen by train. I wanted to know more about Gusen but as the train pulled out of Lublin station, I was very pleased to be on my way home once more.

Over the next six months, back in Australia, author Rudi Haunschmied, who lived near Gusen, welcomed me into a different family. That of the children of survivors of the Gusen concentration camp. I knew I had to go to the commemoration of the liberation of the camp in May, 2015.

Chapter 22

Return to Gusen – The Survivor Family

Vienna, May 2015

A little girl in a sun-flowered summer dress pushed her legs backwards and forwards to make the swing go higher and higher, her flaming red hair flying in the wind. It was Saturday afternoon and families, couples and bare-chested young men were enjoying the Spring sunshine. My table in the hotel cafe overlooked the beds of yellow tulips, pansies, red and orange poppies in the park. There were chestnut trees in full blossom. The last time I came to Vienna, in December 2013, it was winter with all the excitement of the Christmas markets, festive lights, mulled wine and paper twists of hot roasted chestnuts and potatoes. During that trip, I'd found my father's prisoner record card from Auschwitz and Gusen, walked through what is left of Gusen and visited the memorial. This time I had come to do further research in the archives and to meet with Rudi Haunschmied, the author of one of three books I'd found in English on Gusen, and walk through the area again. Most importantly, I had come to attend the commemoration ceremonies for the 70th anniversary of the liberation of the concentration camps. These forty camps in Austria are often rolled into one and stories from the three Gusen camps in particular attributed to Mauthausen. The Gusen Memorial Committee, of which Rudi is a member, staunchly protects what is left of the Gusen camp and supports the survivors and their families by preserving the memory of the camp as an entity separate from Mauthausen.

I walked the familiar path through the *Volksgarten* to the archives in Vienna for my meetings with three of the staff. I was still looking for information about life in Gusen or afterwards to complete as far as possible and as accurately as I could, the reconstruction of my father's life. I'd also become interested in the role of bystanders and the experience of local residents near the camps.

Robert Vorberg, custodian of nine hundred interviews with Mauthausen-Gusen survivors, locals and some perpetrators, found me recordings of three survivors who had similar experiences to my father. These interviews made up part of the ten percent that are in English. I took the recordings away to listen to later. Stephan Matyus, custodian of the photographic collection, pointed to the stark differences in photographs of the camps and their prisoners. Some of the photos were taken during the war by the SS who wanted to portray the camps as efficient hives of German industry. These photos are of

prisoners in neat uniforms, working in clean conditions, looking industrious and smiling. The other group of photos, taken by the American liberators, show the appalling conditions, the emaciated prisoners who were freed and the piles of unburied corpses. I looked through the folders, surprised at how few photos there were and of course I, like so many other family members, hoped to find one of my father. Stephan cautioned against such hopes. With 200,000 plus prisoners, the chances were realistically zero but still I looked closely at every photo. Antoni Jagielski did not make an appearance.

My final meeting was with Gregor Holzinger who had located three boxes of transcripts out of hundreds from the Dachau Trials in 1946/7 that related to Gusen. I sat in the archive library and read about daily routines and experiences as survivors described the conditions under which they lived and the crimes they witnessed, all the while trying to imagine what it was like for my father.

Groups of perpetrators were tried in court together. From 1945 to 1948, the U.S. Army Courts tried 1,672 individuals in 489 proceedings. In March and April of 1946, 61 officials of Mauthausen-Gusen camp were tried by a U.S. military court at Dachau; 3 defendants were sentenced to life imprisonment and 58 were sentenced to death by hanging on 11 May, 1946. The defendants were charged with *violations of the laws and usages of war*, a charge which encompassed among other things murder, torture, beating and starving the inmates.

I wondered how, in the chaos of the end of the war these 61 perpetrators had been identified. Historian Martin Gilbert, in his book *Never Again*, explains this through the testimony of Benjamin Ferencz, a U.S. Army war crimes investigator.

I had entered the concentration camp at Mauthausen/Gusen... Piles of corpses littered the area. Starving 'Musselmänner', the inmates' slang for walking skeletons, stared with vacant eyes at the liberating American troops. An inmate registrar embraced me joyfully. One of his jobs had been to type identification cards for the SS guards; when the guards were reassigned, the card was to be destroyed. The inmate, whose name I shall never know, had, at great risk to his life, failed to burn the cards. Instead, he had buried them carefully in a field.

After he greeted me he left the barracks and, a few minutes later, returned, unwrapped a soiled box, and handed me a complete record and picture of every SS man who had ever been in the camp! It was invaluable evidence for a war crimes prosecutor. I was moved by the blind faith which inspired the unknown prisoner to risk his life in the conviction that there would come a day of reckoning.

Such acts of courage and risk-taking had enabled some to endure and survive, and their hopes for justice were fulfilled through the post-war trials of Dachau and the better-known Nuremburg trials. The charges were based on the violation of the 1929 Geneva Convention as well as the newly introduced categories of conspiracy, crimes against peace, war crimes and crimes against humanity. *Following orders* was deemed an invalid defence.

The descriptions from these trials ran through my head on the train to Linz the next day. Rudi Haunschmied and others had been doing valuable reconciliation work over the last thirty years bringing together survivors, perpetrators and local village people to acknowledge their history and together forge a way forward.

That night I came across a 2012 YouTube clip called *Once Upon A Time in Mauthausen*, part of a longer documentary with people who were current residents of Mauthausen, including some who had lived there during the war, giving their views anonymously on what happened there and how they now felt about it. They echoed many of the points of view debated all over Europe about the past - unfinished or finished, should we remember or forget, and what is the role of commemoration?

Woman A: I find it quite depressing that year after year, we have to look on as tourists visit Mauthausen and see the horrible side of our town's history. In my opinion, no one should be reminded of this. It's in the past, it's tragic, but it's in the past, it's over.

Woman B: No, I disagree, one should be reminded of it. The younger generation should know exactly what happened back then.

Woman A: But do you know why? Because it will only stir up hate.

Woman B: No, I still think people should remember.

Woman A: We should let bygones be bygones.

Man: It was easy for people who had not witnessed all of this to say “you didn’t do anything.” If anyone so much as breathed a word, they would immediately be sent to the concentration camp. I have seen it happen.

Man: I was born right near the concentration camp in Mauthausen and I remember seeing the first prisoners as they were brought in from Dachau... you could see them coming from the train station... Many villagers witnessed this and later simply avoided being in the streets whenever a convoy of prisoners arrived. No-one really talked about this very much.

Man: To this day, I have not been able to get this image out of my head - a young fifteen-year-old Russian, who was told to lie down in a gutter about three metres from where I was standing and was then shot in the head. This picture is still so clear in my mind even though I had nothing to do with it. Whenever I go up this path and in the direction of the concentration camp - the scene is crystal clear and the way he had to lie down in that gutter...

Woman: The Austrian state wanted to tear the camp down, just flatten it, blow it to bits - but Austria probably wouldn’t have been able to afford that back then, still no-one wanted to be reminded of this tragic period in Austrian history. There are a lot of people who now live off tourism and they are glad that the camp is there because it is good for business.

Man: Look, as a poor school kid I got a bowl of soup twice a week and I got tattered books for free from school. And then Hitler came and I wasn’t a poor school kid any more, which of course we were thrilled with. There was no question about it, the possibilities were endless. Hitler appealed to the kids of my generation. (He looks down and shifts in his chair).

People did resist, both covertly and overtly. Franz Jagerstatter, born on 20th May, 1907 in St. Radegund, Upper Austria is an example. Although conscripted by the Nazis he refused to do military service with armed combat because *you should obey God before men*. He volunteered to do medical service but was condemned to death in Berlin for *undermining military morale* and beheaded in Brandenburg an der Havel on 9th August, 1943.

The next day when I enquired at the reception desk at my hotel about the bus to the Gusen memorial, they thought it was the same as Mauthausen. These locals knew nothing of this important historic site that was only twenty kilometres away.

This time, doing the audio walk at Gusen on my own and in the spring sunlight was a different experience. Artist Christoph Mayer, who grew up in St. Georgen, designed and scripted the audio-walk which begins with his testimony,

This is the landscape of my childhood... We can walk together (sounds of footsteps on the audio and directions). I learned to play the piano in the former SS-kitchen barrack...

I listened more carefully to each of the narrators - local people, survivors and perpetrators. I walked around the housing estate built over the site of the camp and knew I couldn't live in number 14, the house that was used as a brothel, where women prisoners were forced into prostitution, or in any of the houses that were built over the remains of thousands of Gusen inmates. I looked at the converted *Jourhaus*, the original entrance to the camp with cells for torture and incarceration underneath, and saw a swimming pool in the back yard. What did the owners come across as they were digging that pool? Were they not bothered by living in a renovated house of torture? Visitors with headphones walked silently through the village, stopping in front of houses, looking over fences and up front paths as they listened to the history and personal stories of this place. For the locals, it must have been like seeing modern-day silent ghosts.

Throughout the ninety-minute walk, unidentified voices of men and women, locals, perpetrators and survivors gave testimony.

Female voice: We were young. St Georgen was full of SS. We were smitten with the Germans. They were sweet. That's why we were surprised when we saw things.

Some say the soil is drenched with blood you know, but I say I don't know anything about that.

I pushed down daily 20 to 30 bodies. I was ordered to smash sacks against the wall - full of children.

They killed them. They were inside the sacks, kicking - children like in my kindergarten.

It is so difficult to describe now. Were we even alive then? Have we lived with a feeling of guilt? No. If the SS want you to beat, so you beat, yes, you will

beat. It was schizophrenic. Here yes, the helping hand, no compromises and here, with the other hand, you participated in abusing people.

Telling today's children how ghastly things have been you should also tell them about how it came about. Hitler promised work.

People in my village told me that trains were stopped with people in them and they were left for days. When the doors were opened, frozen bodies fell out.

The horror we felt in the beginning somehow faded after a while that one human being can treat another like this. You can't take everything to heart or you would not survive.

The next evening Rudi, an engineer by day and Gusen researcher and writer by night, took me to a restaurant overlooking the city of Linz, the hills surrounding it and the Danube river.

"See that path winding from the bottom of the hill up through this field to here?" Rudi asked, "It is well known that as a boy, Hitler would walk up that very same path to stand here and look out over his beloved Linz. And see the Danube? It divided Austria for ten years - Soviets on one side, U.S. on the other - the start of the Cold War."

Over dinner we talked about his childhood in the area in the 1970s. His primary school was in the former SS kitchen barracks but nothing was said about its history. His curiosity developed into a passion and the writing of several books. I learned more about life in the Gusen camp, imagining my father in every situation and heard Rudi's frustration at the appropriation of Gusen stories by Mauthausen historians and academics. It was his motivation for speaking up for the memory of the Gusen prisoners.

"The memory of these 40,000 plus victims has already been erased twice. At first physically by the Nazis and a second time by Austrian post-war political attitudes. It's common practice that Gusen victims are mixed in with the Mauthausen victims and this is wrong. When Austria became a republic, no-one wanted to remember the Nazi era. So they didn't say 'Let's preserve Gusen' they said 'Let's make money' and they sold the land for private houses. Gusen I, II and III were taken out of history and out of consciousness. Gusen is the lost place."

The next day was my birthday and I returned to Vienna for the *Fest der Freude* (Festival of Joy) in the *Heldenplatz* (the Heroes' Square). It celebrates the anniversary

of the end of WWII, the defeat of the National Socialist regime and Fascism in Austria. It was begun in opposition to Far-Right groups (*Burschenschaften*) who had monopolised the *Heldenplatz* each year to mourn the deaths of soldiers and members of Nazi organisations during the war. On the Mauthausen Committee's website I read:

We consider the 8th May to be a day of liberation and joy, a day when not only the liberation from the Nazi regime is celebrated, but also a commemoration of the millions of people persecuted and murdered by the Nazis. Many Austrians also took part in the crimes of National Socialism. Remembered also are all those who refused military service or took part in acts of resistance, and those who fought alongside the Allies to help liberate Austria. This momentous day deserves to be properly celebrated each year, particularly in the context of the historically important Heldenplatz. May 8th is a day of liberation and joy!

Later in the afternoon I walked to the *Heldenplatz* which gradually filled with people standing, sitting, leaning on statues and light posts, picnicking on rugs on the grass in view of the big screens. Photos of resistance fighters, survivors and victims of WWII and their stories were projected onto the screens. I claimed a seat close to the front of the stage.

Speeches framed the celebratory concert: resistance fighter Helga Emperger, the Austrian President and other dignitaries, all in German but I got the gist of them.

Finally, the Vienna Symphony Orchestra and a one hundred voice choir filled the square with Beethoven's Symphony number 9 with the grand finale, the 4th movement - Ode to Joy. I felt the music in every cell of my body and glanced around to see the crowd mesmerised. The camera zoomed in on the conductor and showed his animated face on the big screen. He gradually drew in instruments and the voices rose to a tumultuous climax. The roar from the crowd, clapping, 'bravos' and whistles continued while performers bowed, smiled and glowed with joy. An estimated 12,000 people had gathered in the park for the commemoration concert on that warm spring evening of May 8, 2015. I was moved by the music but more so by the enthusiastic support for the *Fest der Freude* and the ideals of freedom it represented. It was an unforgettable concert.

The next morning, I caught an early train to Linz and walked to the entrance to the Bergkristall tunnels to wait for Rudi's guided English tour.

"It took only thirteen months for the Gusen II inmates to dig these tunnels but at a great cost," Rudi told us. "The average life expectancy was four months. Arms and aircraft fuselages were manufactured in these tunnels away from Allied observation and bombing. There are only two kilometres of the tunnels left now. They were stripped bare by the Russians at the end of the war, some areas dynamited closed and other areas filled in with cement as the stabilising foundations for the housing estate that was built on top of these tunnels."

We put on helmets and as we entered he reminded us that the tunnels are 8.5 kilometres long and that 8,500 men lost their lives building the tunnels, so every step we took represented one life. I swallowed hard as the numbers came to reality. It was cold and damp but well-lit in the tunnels. Then we arrived at a small memorial; an altar with red candle holders and a wooden square with stones and a Star of David on the plaque.

I met a woman whose husband and his brother from Poland had also come to commemorate their father's time in Gusen. Back at the entrance to the tunnel, when the speeches were made as the new Polish memorial was unveiled, Regina whispered the English to me. She also translated for me as we met a number of Polish survivors of the camp. One 94-year-old survivor took both my hands in his and squeezed them; his clear blue eyes fixed on mine for the entire time while Regina translated for us. It was all I could do not to cry. He didn't remember my father but with 200,000 in the camp, the chances were always slim.

Rudi then drove me through the back streets to the Gusen memorial and showed me to a front row seat. Already hundreds of people were gathered. The program had all the speeches translated to English, as well as German, Polish, Italian and Spanish. The local school choir sang, there were Jewish prayers and songs, the grand-daughter of an Italian Gusen survivor played violin, finishing with a song written by a German protestant pastor hanged in Flossenbug Camp, April 1945 as a resistance fighter.

The Mayor of Langenstein, the local village, welcomed us and read a letter from the President of Poland which said in part *Though the memory is still painful, it does not divide us any more, it contains a highly regarded lesson to learn and wisdom for the future... in a common effort for all democratic peoples of our continent.*

The school students from Barcelona spoke the most passionately, asking:

How is it possible that so many people took part without anyone raising their voice against what was going on? By being silent many people became accomplices... Mankind has not learned from its mistakes. The wars in the former Yugoslavia, Rwanda, Iraq, Syria, show us that on all continents human beings are capable of repeating cruelties in the name of a national flag or an ideal... As young civilised people, we can neither allow nor tolerate what happened here to repeat itself... This is the final place of rest for many heroes who fought for a more just, peaceful, democratic and free world. It is therefore our duty never to forget those heroes and to peacefully complete the work they started. This is the best demonstration of honour we can give them.

Four local women carrying large wicker baskets, made their way through the crowd handing out long-stemmed roses - red, yellow, white. Many people took these to the crematorium behind where we had gathered for the ceremony and laid them at the open furnace doors or at other memorials in the walled area around the crematoria. A number of smaller ceremonies were then held at these memorials, some with men in uniform, drummers and buglers playing the 'Last Post', others with a single person with bowed head, murmuring.

People started to disperse and the rain began to fall. Rudi took me to the tent where locals had set up a refreshment station and introduced me to Margarethe Hauser and Christl Leschowitz.

Margarethe made me a coffee and told me, "I like these days in May. When I think of the camp here and when I work on these days, I do it for many people. They come from all over Europe, America and now you from Australia! This is the one good thing from the horror history of my village."

I introduced myself to a woman who was packing things up and offered to help. I recognised her from the ceremony. She was Martha Gammer, the President of the Gusen Memorial Committee. While we were stacking chairs and moving tables I asked her why this was important for her.

"I am one of those crazy people, who don't want to forget the past of these villages, of the cruelties that happened here inside and outside the Gusen Concentration Camps," she replied. "It is part of our local history. The concentration camps cannot be eradicated from our past, even if the Soviets did so by destroying the camps and the tunnels according to the orders of Stalin. During our studies, we have met so many

people, whose personal history moved us deeply, so we decided to do our best to make this cruel history better known. The most horrible cruelties were committed in Gusen, the 'Hell of Hell', as the French called it. Your father was Polish?"

I nodded.

"The Polish intelligentsia were killed in Gusen by the thousands, the number of registered death cases of Polish persons, Jewish or not Jewish, is 27,821, more than half of the Gusen victims. So, we are very close to the Polish survivor group coming here each year since the fall of communism in Poland."

"Rudi told me that on liberation a lot of prisoners walked or crawled to your local Catholic church to give thanks for their survival and that when they returned home to Poland, they were so poverty-stricken they wrote to your parish asking for food and clothes. They had survived the camps and now were starving in Communist Poland." She confirmed that this was true.

A young man came to help us. I missed his name but Martha told me he was an asylum seeker from Syria. She asked us to collect the roses from around the doors of the crematoria and the other memorials and put them in buckets of water so that they would last a little longer.

Martha continued, "We have to face this history and do our best for reconciliation among the nations and work for freedom and peace. That is why we send our students to Italy, where a lot of the Gusen victims were deported from, and we care for the groups that come here to Gusen."

The Syrian asylum seeker and I carried leftover boxes of programs to the car. We didn't share a common language but made do with gestures and smiles. He was one of fifty refugees that Langenstein housed and provided with education and work. The village had a total population of 2,500. I was relieved Martha didn't ask me what we did for refugees in Australia.

My final engagement for the day was held at a large sports hall, converted to a function venue for the night, and decorated with flags and banners. Twenty or so long tables each seating ten or twelve, were covered with white tablecloths and peppered with little pots of pink and yellow roses. A twenty-piece band played typical Austrian music that through the evening turned to Italian and other more popular songs, including a bit of yodelling and by the end of the night we were all singing and dancing to Abba. This was after many a long snake dance through all the tables and chairs and

several performances by the local ‘Schuplattler’ young men in white shirts, knee length leather pants and braces and long white socks that ended up around their ankles. They slapped their thighs and the soles of their shoes in astonishing rhythms and speeds, all with hearty yeehahs, foot stomping and clapping by them and the audience. The accordion music started slowly each time and gradually became faster and faster as did the Schuplattlers’ moves. We laughed and cheered them on.

A man from Afghanistan with good English, joined us at our table. He told me the story of his family’s dangerous escape from his homeland as he fled the Taliban, war, bombings, drought and poverty and his gratitude for being housed by the villagers of Langenstein. He told me of other Afghan refugees who had escaped through Pakistan, Singapore and Indonesia and then by boat to Australia, paying around \$4,000, the equivalent of ten years salary. He’d come from Northern Afghanistan to Tajikistan where he paid smugglers to get him and his family through Russia and Ukraine, into Poland and on to Austria. They had started a new life.

Rudi took me for a spin around the dance floor. I wished I’d paid more attention at ballroom dancing lessons but he expertly navigated us through the other dancers. I met Monica from one of the twin towns in northern Italy, an organic farmer who had organised this trip for a number of years - 270 people this year; then the conductor of the orchestra who is an engineer by day and had visited Sydney for work; the wife of the former mayor and many others, all welcoming and curious about me, my father and Australia. It was a great night of eating and drinking, talking, singing and dancing. It was well after midnight when we left.

On the way to my hotel, I thanked Rudi for such a wonderful day. “I feel so honoured to have taken part in this commemoration.”

“Welcome to the Gusen family!” he replied, “For decades foreign survivors, their relatives or the relatives of victims, came here and the local residents had no idea what they were looking for. Today we know and people of different nationalities meet and commemorate together and nothing of the past is denied or ignored in the region - this is in contrast to the State of Austria that has not undergone such a development yet.”

We pulled up outside my hotel.

“It’s a great model. I won’t see you again Rudi, so thank you for your kindness and generosity and let’s stay in touch.”

“I’m sure you’ll be back!” He waved and disappeared into the dark in his bright yellow little car.

Early on Sunday morning I took the train to Mauthausen. The ceremony and march didn’t start until 11.00am so I walked around the memorials that skirt the hillside of the camp. Since 1947 there had been annual commemoration events, not only there, but also at a number of the other forty camps throughout Austria. The Mauthausen Committee described the purpose of these commemoration ceremonies in the following way:

The events serve as an act of memorial for the victims of Nazi terror and persecution, as well as a rallying call against all kinds of intolerance, dictatorship, xenophobia and anti-Semitism: a moment of solidarity with victims of the past and present.

So many people had been impacted by what had happened in that place and felt drawn to travel there to march, to sing and to commemorate the liberation of the camp. Simultaneously I felt the horror of the camp, the jubilation of its liberation but despair in the impotence of the ‘Never Again’ cry.

By 10.30am people were beginning to gather in the *Appelplatz* where the march would be and from my front row seat near the memorial stone where the wreaths would be laid, I watched the military band, the orchestra and the choir set up and then some survivors of the camp took their seats with family and friends. Some wore their blue and white striped caps, jackets and/or trousers; many family members and friends wore triangular blue and white striped scarves that had been made more recently, each with a red triangle with their country’s letter on it.

The *Appelplatz* filled with those who were marching - sixty countries in alphabetical order. An Austrian woman, who spoke English, sat next to me and translated bits and pieces of the predominantly German ceremony. Her husband was in the choir. She lived twenty minutes away, had never been to the camp before and didn’t know much about it.

Chopin’s Funeral March started to play as the ceremony began. I had mixed feelings - it was so heavy. Was this what we needed today? Perhaps it was. A group of

officials led the march, clergy with scarlet skull caps, men in suits led by the President of Austria, Heinz Fischer and his wife Margit whose Jewish parents were forced to emigrate to Sweden during the Nazi regime. Security guards with tell-tale curly white wires leading up their necks into their earpieces were everywhere.

As I looked past the officials, I spotted an Australian flag with two men holding a wreath and five Australians following. I ducked across and spoke to the woman. She was from a suburb near where I lived. We arranged to meet back in Sydney.

Twenty-two thousand people attended the commemoration including the thousands of Italians, Poles and Spaniards and the single representatives from Cuba and Iceland. The Italians were the largest contingent and as they got close to the memorial, the band struck up with 'Bella Ciao', the anti-fascist partisan resistance song of WWII. There must have been a thousand Italians marching and not only did they sing, but the crowd joined them. It was a joyous moment of defiance.

Towards the end of the parade, after all the other countries had marched came the host country, Austria and then other groups - marchers against fascism:

NIE WIEDER FASCHISMUS (Never again Fascism)

NIE WIEDER KRIEG (Never again war)

FASCHISMUS IST KEINE. MEINUNG SONDERN EIN VERBRECHEN!

(Fascism is not an opinion. It is a crime!)

and groups representing the LGBTI community whose predecessors were persecuted by the Nazi regime being classified with those who were disabled mentally or physically and others considered to be 'asocials'. The final piece of music played to close the ceremony was Ode to Joy, a fitting completion to a moving ceremony.

On my return to Sydney I was in touch with Rudi and the Langenstein community to find out more about their work with refugees and asylum seekers. This was the work of the future. Their practical actions were a vehicle of hope - a model emerging from the WWII atrocities experienced by a small village in Upper Austria.

I'd been welcomed into the Gusen family and felt more affiliated with it than my father's family in Poland. I'd met survivors of Mauthausen and Gusen in their striped

uniforms; I'd met their children who told me how the impact of their parent's brutal experiences continued into the next generation and the next. Trauma changes the DNA, changes the genetics that are passed on in a family. I might have inherited the impact of trauma but I'd not had to suffer the constant reinforcement of it in my environment. Yes, an absent father can be a blessing. What I'd heard and read made me realise how fortunate I was to have grown up in Australia, without my traumatised, violent and psychologically damaged father. Any yearning for a life with Antoni Jagielski was long gone.

To begin with, I saw my father as the villain, the perpetrator of abuse, neglect and abandonment. I was jealous and envious at the graveside where he is buried with his first wife, other daughter and son, and son-in-law.

I came to realise that he belonged to a different culture and another family with whom he was determined to be reunited. It had been impossible for him to move on from his war experiences until he returned to his beloved Poland and was recognised as a hero. I couldn't have understood this without spending three months sifting through papers, photos and documents in the flat where he returned to live with Helena and Janina. I couldn't have understood this without visiting the camps and archives of Auschwitz and Gusen, without reading Rudi Haunschmeid's book, listening to Christoph Mayer's Gusen audio walk narrative, reading the Dachau trial transcripts, hearing Mr Z's memories or without Krystyna and Magda's detective powers and skills in finding Mr Z in 2013 - the starting point for my search in Poland. And there was the help of my interpreter Kris who talked, walked and sat with me through Polish bureaucracy, discoveries, frustrations, surprises, sadness and tears, interpreting the language, translating the words on the pages and leaving me to make sense of the story in the context of my own life and experiences.

I thought back to the writing course that had been the catalyst for my search. Not knowing and wondering had been replaced by understanding and acceptance in ways I could never have predicted. The past no longer haunted my present. I'd come to some appreciation of human complexity: not good or bad but layered by circumstance and context. I'd never know the whole story but I knew enough to let it rest. By reconstructing my father's life, making meaning of it and telling his story, I'd found an equanimity that did not exist when I began.

I thought back to the evening I'd listened to author Lily Brett talking about her parents' history shaping her. I'd come to understand some of the decisions my father had made and how his history had shaped him and in turn had shaped me. I could honour him for his resilience, courage and determination. I could acknowledge the flaws without bitterness or resentment. I'd never fully understand the trauma he and others suffered but I'd given them a voice and been able to bear witness to some of their experiences.

In the tunnels under Gusen, under the buildings where people live today, apparently unmoved by the crimes, the suffering and death of the past, I had stood with Rudi and others at the Christian altar and Jewish memorial at the end of the Bergkristall tunnel. Rudi had asked our group to pause for a minute's silence in remembrance of those who had died. He continued,

"Before we do that, today we have Betty, the daughter of a Gusen survivor who has come from Australia and I would like to ask her to light the candle."

I stepped through the group, carrying a large white candle in the traditional red glass holder. Rudi handed me matches and, trembling, I struck a match and said,

"I light this candle in honour of all those who suffered, all those who died, and also all those, like my father, who survived. As we remember those who have passed and those who are left with the legacy, both relatives and this local community, may we all work towards peace in the world."

I lit that candle and stood in silence for many. My father, my mother, myself, Helena and Janina, the perpetrators, the bystanders, the victims and not only those affected by the atrocities of WWII but also those who continue to suffer the torments of trauma, violence and war today.

I continue to light a candle each day.

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