MY STORY

For a while now, I've been pressured by my children and grandchildren. to write my life story, as they often heard of the hard times we, as older generation, went through. I am sure that most of the time they regarded it just as a story. There always will be a slight doubt from those that never experienced rigors of life in a real sense of it, like hunger starvation, loss of freedom and personal possessions.

My grandson tells me that he was hungry too (right on, just few hours or at most half a day). Could he comprehend what it is to have it day after day, month after month?

I have to start from my earliest recollections, as far as I can remember. On February 1st l924 (which I do not remember), I was born in some God forsaken little place called Wierzchnie, in the north east Poland, close to Russo-Latvian border. I've never been back there since. It so happens that my father, a police sergeant was posted there at the time, and soon after he was transferred to another station in the area. This part of Poland, few years back, was wrestled from the Soviets after First World War, prior to which Poland was under the forceful occupation by three neighbours: Germany, Hungary and Russia for one hundred and thirty years. After the end of World War One, Poland regained her independence, and by the grace of allies (France and England) her borders were shrunk. They establish our eastern borders on so called Curzon Line, which gave Soviets vast territory, including old historic Polish towns of Wilno and Lwow. This didn't go well with Poles so in 1920, Marshal Pilsudski went to war with Soviets, and after almost a disastrous retreat right to the Vistula river, Polish troops took better hand over Soviets, and regained her territory. This event went to history books as "Miracle On Vistula".
After World War Two Churchill and Roosevelt again gave it to Soviets.

You see, my father, Stanislaw, was a native of western Poland. He was born in Myszkow, south of Czestochowa (half way to Katowice). His parents were Klemens and Jozefa. He was one of twelve children, which only some of them I ever met. Two of his sisters, Klara and Ludwika, were teachers in Warsaw and were frequent visitors on summer vacations. Another sister Jadwiga also in Warsaw worked in some office, her daughter Zofia came with aunts Klara

and Ludwika every summer. For city dwellers our place was like a resort. Another of his sister, Bronislawa lived in Warsaw too, but I met her only once when I went to Warsaw at the age of twelve. One of his brothers, Jozef, after his stint in Canada (he was in Toronto) bought some land not far from where we lived, but in those days was far enough to allow only infrequent visits. Another of his brothers visited us once. I only remember that he was in an army uniform.

Prior to all these events, my father has met my mother Emilia Sniedze (who was Latvian from Vitebsk). When Soviet army was pushing down on Poland, people were escaping from advancing hordes, so did my parents. When they came to Warsaw, my mother felt as an outcast, as she spoke no Polish, only Latvian and Russian.

After a peace treaty was signed with Soviets, Poland had to establish its presence in newly acquired territories. This prompted my father to join the Police Force and move to the north east parts of Poland. First he was in Glebokie, small town of 10,000 inhabitants. There my older brother Jerzy was born in 1921. Then he was moved to Wirzchnie where I was born on the 1st of February 1924.

Then we moved to Zalesie. There were three villages of the same name: one Zalesie municipality where we lived and police station was, then Zalesie village with the post office and Zalesie Cerkiew. (Cerkiew is a name for an orthodox church), and there was a small palace of German noble Mohl.

In Zalesie our family increased by brother Tytus who later died of accidental death. It started as a very playful thing. My father was chasing him playfully around the coffee table, everyone was laughing. Suddenly he tripped and fell striking his head on the edge of the table. Right away he was taken on a 10 kilometre trip to Glebokie, where there was a hospital. He couldn't be helped there so he was sent to the hospital in Wilno, some 275 km. away. Father was with him all the time. Few days later he phoned us with the news that he died.

In 1927 sister Krystyna was born and three years later, in 1930 another sister Barbara was born. Somewhere in between baby Celina was born but soon died (it was a crib death). So there were four of us growing up together.

We lived in a semi detached building. Police Station occupied one half and we the other. Father, being in charge of the Station had to live on premises. In Poland policemen were in uniform at all times. As they suppose to be rendering assistance at all times. Even, when we went on a picnic, father wore his uniform, gun and all.

It was like living in paradise. Fields, forests, rivers and lakes were my back yards. This was an agricultural area. People in the village were all farmers. They spoke White Russian (Belaruss). It is a dialect of Russian.
I chummed up with boys my age and soon spoke their language like a pro.

At home I was forbidden to use it. We spoke only Polish. By then my mother mastered her Polish and only occasionally sang us lullaby in Latvian and read us poetry by Russian poets. I remember only that it was a big format book and one of the poems was about an angel flying

over the city and softly singing about resurrection of peoples souls. We were all huddled in bed listening, after reading we usually had a pillow fight till we heard father's steps on the veranda. By the time father entered the house everything was quiet. My father was very strict with no ifs or buts. If you erred you faced the consequences.

My brother always managed to get in to a trouble, dragging me along with him. Over our back yard fence was a cherry orchard. At one time he persuaded me to go along and pick them up. It ended up with both of us getting good thrashing. I mean thrashing, with a willow switch on the bare bottom. He had kind of crooked mind. Before I started school, we used to go to see a teacher, who gave us note books and pencils from school's shop.

He managed to find out where she kept a key to the cabinet and when she wasn't around, he managed to steal some of the supplies. He didn't need them, but he did steal them. We chummed with a son of the Forest Rangers manager and frequently went to his house. They had a piggy bank full of coins. My brother figured out that by inserting a knife blade in to a slot he could pull out some coins. It would never enter my mind, but his worked on overtime.

At one time, when I was in grade one; I had a headache, so my mother applied a compress to my forehead. After a while I took it off and put it on the night table on which I previously laid my primer reader. In the morning I found its two pages damaged, so my brother suggested we replace them with hand drawn replicas, which turned out to be very amateurish. When I showed up at school my teacher suspended me from school, till my father had a talk with her. I still can't understand her reasoning us school books were our own property. We had to buy them ourselves. One thing I have to give my brother credit for is that he read a lot of books and every time he got across a word he did not know, he asked my father for its meaning. He was asking questions all the time.

Later on, when we moved to town, he even learned book binding all by himself and repaired books in the local library. Watching him I picked up few tricks too.

Under the eaves of our house swallows were building mud nests, causing a lot of nuisance. By the time summer vacation came, they had young ones; this prompted the authority (my father) to order their destruction. Hired men knocked them down, nest, chicks and all. This particular summer my two aunts came for vacation, and seeing those little birds on the ground, made us pick them up and get them inside. We made them nice soft carton for a nest and for weeks were catching flies and feeding them and teaching haw to fly. When we were satisfied they were good enough to fare for themselves, we released them.

At one time, in the nearby forest, woodsmen cut some tall trees that held ravens nests with young chicks inside. Most of them died but I managed to get two of them alive. One of them died soon after, but the other one lived and I raised him feeding worms dug out in the garden. He got attached to me and followed me around.

I thought him how to fly and he had a freedom of outdoors but preferred to spend nights indoors. One evening, when it was getting dark I went inside. As I was getting through the door he tried to sneak behind me and I closed the door on him. He wasn't dead but seriously hurt so I

had to destroy him by shooting with .22 rifles, which, incidentally we were handling pretty well.

Winters were cold with plenty of snow, but it didn't bother anyone, as there were no cars only horses and sleds that went everywhere. As a matter of fact, in winter roads were made across the fields and over the lakes to cut down on distance. Every so often we had to go to the town of Glebokie for major food supplies, we had to rent horse and sled. It was only 10 km. away but for me it was at the other end of the world. Usually my parents went, but on occasions one of the children went too. In local store we bought only day to day needs.

Village people were self sufficient. Heating was provided by wood stoves. Actually it was sort of a brick structure in the center of the house, usually striding two or three rooms. When it was stocked and fired the heat was absorbed by bricks and kept radiating warmth for 24 hours. In the fall we got supply of firewood that lasted for whole winter. All our wood was brought in all at once in long logs. Usually two men were hired to cut, split and stack it in the shed. Of course we needed it in summer too for cooking. In the yard we had a well with clean cold water which was brought up by pail by sort of a crane structure with long pole and pail on one end and weighted down on the other end. Toilet was outside which was normal for the area and we were used to it.

I remember one day we went on the frozen lake to play, as we often did. Previous day fishermen cut large holes in the ice to set their nets under the ice. In the commotion of the play my brother fell in, but one of the older boys managed to pull him out. In the struggle he lost one of his felt boots, so we had to run to the nearby village to have him dried out before going home. For long time afterwards boys made fun of him, telling that crayfish has good home for the winter inside his boot. In the spring, when thaw came we went on the lake ice full of surface water, by the time we finished playing our boots were soaking wet. Mother had to dry them up in the stove to have them ready for the morning. We had only one pair of shoes at one time. When they were done we had shoemaker make a new pair. When we were still young mother sew all our clothing and linen. She also did a lot of embroidery. With her guidance I learned how to sew, darn socks and even did embroidery.

I did not have my own skates, as I didn't know how to skate, so one early spring, when ice and snow were melting, I borrowed friends skates and in few hours, on the back yard ice full of water, managed to learn , though I was soaking wet. Here I have to explain that those skates came loose, without shoes. We had to attach certain bracket to the heels of regular shoes and clamp them up at the toes. They were very practical and used by all.

At times my father went hunting for hares, which on our latitude changed summer brown to winter white, like snowshoe rabbit here, but they were true hares. At times, when there was a need, he went on wolf hunt, as they were plentiful. We had moose and deer population, but they weren't hunted. Probably by poachers only. Most of the area forests were owned by government and forest rangers took good care of them. Right next to our place was forest rangers headquarters for this district. We were allowed to pick mushrooms and berries in the forest.

When the spring came it came fast. Before we knew it the snows were gone, grass started to grow followed by flowers. On our property we had a garden which my father took care of, so we had own vegetables. If we needed something else, we could buy them from gardener at German

noble palace. His gardener ran a hothouse there and sold surplus to whoever needed them.

Milk and eggs were bought locally and delivered to the house. We bought our bread in the bakery, but the village people baked their own, black rye. I always changed my white rye for their black. Both sides were satisfied. Living in the farming community brought me close to their way of life. I've seen them ploughing and sowing and tending to their crops.

I experienced bareback horse riding, with sore results to my back side, pasture of horses and cattle. Cattle from whole village was tended by hired man on public land and in the evening brought back to individual owners. As the cows were moved through the village they knew their barns and went there by themselves. Horses were put out at night with shackles on front feet so they wouldn't stray too far.

Meadows were full of different flowers. Marshes full of nesting ducks, which we foolishly raided. One day I remember we were swimming in the lake in the forest when some boys came running and telling as of big fire. After dressing up in a hurry we run through the woods to the edge of the forest in time to see big ball of fire sailing from one building to another setting it on fire. By the time we got there one farmer's house and barn were burned to the ground. Another building across the road was on fire. By the time firemen from nearby town of Glebokie came, it too burned to the ground. We were taking all our possessions out of the house, afraid it will catch fire too. Fortunately our house had tiled roof. All houses in the village had thatched roofs. At one time in the distant village one house caught fire and whole village burned out. When I have seen it, only chimneys were standing along the road. In our instance, farmer who's house burned out, had fire insurance, and not only managed to rebuild his house, but build it bigger out of clay and tin covered roof. It had space for store and some offices. Not many farmers could afford insurance.

My mother had a maid to help her out in the daily chores, especially on wash days, as everything was done by hand, including bringing water from the well. When I was about nine, my father was forced to retire as he lost sight of one eye. It was very painful experience for him. We moved to town of Glebokie and rented small place to live. Pension he was getting was nowhere near to his previous salary so he tried to supplement it by becoming sales agent, and also by writing all sorts of applications and requests for people dealing with government institutions and unable to do it themselves. Then came a chance to get concession at the railway station and he opened a buffet (snack bar) of a sort. It was a good move.

At this time my brother found out that neighbour had made some sausages and hung them in the attic to dry and cure. From the outside was only a small window way up near the roof. He figured out that tying a wire loop to the long pole he could reach it and pull down. He needed those sausages to smear Jewish boy's faces, as they were not kosher. His wicked mind at work again. At the edge of town was Jewish cemetery with old pine trees. It was one big crow rookery. In the spring we used to gather crows eggs so we could toss them at unsuspecting Jews. Another of his great ideas.

In those days I didn't get allowance so I tried to earn on my own, but without my father's knowledge, as it was unthinkable to him that his son could go and sell newspapers or something

like that. Another way of earning money was on Wednesdays, when farmers came to the market. Horses had to be watered, so I got a pail of water selling it to needy farmers. It wasn't much but I could buy ice cream or candy. Another way of earning money was more pleasant. In town was a flour mill operated by water wheel, this required to have series of ponds for sufficient supply of water. There were four large ponds with trees on its edges. Their roots were in the water, and in the holes between the roots - crayfish. I mean crayfish! Size of lobsters you buy here in the store. This was my favourite pastime. I had plenty for sale and for own dinner. One day my mother sent me to buy some meat for dinner. After buying it I had to go home pass those ponds. I could not resist stopping there and trying my luck. In the heat of passion I forgot about meat and dinner till father came looking for me. Fortunately I had enough crayfish to calm his temper.

We had few lakes in and around the town, so we could do some fishing. Fishing gear was all self made. For a rod we had to go to the forest to a hazel-nut tree and look for straight shoot three or four meters long. Then we had to mingle with farmers at the market and when they were busy, pull some hairs from horse's tails, which were long. Then we had to braid them to certain thickness, tie together and we had a fishing line. For a float we used cork from the bottle of something, shaft from goose feather, and only thing we had to buy was a hook.

On one of the lakes was a marina belonging to the police association. I was entitled to use it. This marina had number of kayaks which I used every time I had a chance. At this time I was swimming like a fish, so we had a lot of fun paddling around the lake or down narrow river to another lake.

Right in the middle of the town was small lake, favourite place for swimming. This lake was joined with another by a river meandering through the marshes, and spanned by a bridge made out of two large beams covered by boards nailed at both ends. One early spring, at Easter time, I was dressed in my new suit and happen to cross it with my friends, when we decided to check out the spring runoff. I came close to the edge of the boards and stepped on one that somehow wasn't nailed and went for unscheduled swim. It was rather refreshing swim.

It was nothing unusual, as regularly, every 3rd of May (which was national holiday celebrating Polish constitution), after the parade we used to go for a quick dip, as then days were nice and warm. Here I have to stress importance of being able to swim. One day there was a commotion on the beach. Young lad had drowned. Despite artificial respiration he couldn't be revived. Then at another time on the other lake, (where marina was located), older boys and girls went for the ride on the kayaks. One of the kayaks tipped over, guy swam to shore and girl drowned. In another incident on nearby lake family went for a boat ride: father, mother and three boys. No one knows how the boat overturned. Father swam to shore, mother stayed afloat held by air trapped in clothing, three young boys drowned.

Meanwhile we moved to another part of town, right across the school I attended. It was very convenient as I could stay home till the bell rung and be in school on time.

At one time, when I was 12, on summer vacations, I went to the railway station to help my father, where I met a lady, friend of ours, who was going to Warsaw with her children. My father suggested that I could go to my aunts if I wanted to. Certainly I would, but I came

barefoot, as I always run barefoot when I had a chance. I was told that if I manage to get home and back in time, before train leaves, I could go. Well, it was about two km. one way. I managed. We had a stopover in Wilno so we took a short tour of it making sure to visit shrine of Madonna at "Ostra Brama".

In Warsaw I stayed with Aunt Jadwiga. She had nice apartment in the center of the city. She liked to fish in Vistula River, where she used to rent a boat. She gave me a job of taking caught fish (perch) back home where the maid cleaned it and fried it, and then I took it back to the river so she had her lunch.

I was elated going by street car, in a big city, all by myself. Other aunts used to take me on the tour of Warsaw showing me all the historic sites, zoo, parks and cemetery with magnificent monuments. At this time I met aunt Czeslawa. I spent whole two weeks in Warsaw, admiring big city living.

Few years after my trip to Warsaw, owner of the house we lived in, came back from military service, got married and needed it for himself. We moved closer to the station but further from school.

Soon after came year 1939. Morning of September 1st we learned that Germans invaded Poland. General mobilization. Troops moving to the west. Confusing news from the front. Two weeks of grief. We lived far enough to feel immediate effects of war. But on September 15 worse news of them all - Russians hit us from the back, and are moving in. We were only 30 km. away from the border. Soon came two Russian planes and dropped bombs on the station, burning one of the buildings and killing one railway employee. In another part of the town, Russian tank shot dead one of my school mates. Knowing the way of Soviet operation, all endangered people like police, military and such decided to leave in a hurry. This included my father. On the first available train they left for Wilno. Next day Wilno was taken and there was nowhere to run. Father returned home. Just managed to show mother the ropes of running the concession, and moved us to another house, right at the station and cheaper, when he was arrested by dreaded N.K.W.D. (later called K.G.B.). He was kept in the prison car on the station and then moved to Krolewszczyzna still in the prison car on railway station, fifteen kilometres away. We had to travel there with clean clothing and food. There were no visitations. Soon after he was taken to Siberia, and wrote to us from there. Meanwhile mother tried to run the concession but there was unofficial pressure to get us out of there. Finally someone broke in (which we believed was staged) stealing what was left, leaving us no choice but to abandon it. It was then run by Soviet government.

My brother decided to go over the border, to Warsaw on the German side. It was quite easy if you knew the ropes. Eventually he was taken by Germans to the labour camp, and the last my aunts heard from him was from Essen, which was heavily bombed in later years of the war.

At the same time my uncle Jozef was arrested too and imprisoned in nearby Berezwecze - old monastery and later army barracks, now a prison. We visited him often bringing clean clothing and food. He too, eventually was send to Siberia.

With my father imprisoned, with my older brother gone, I was the oldest left and felt my duty to look after the rest of the family. At first I have done odd jobs like digging holes for telephone poles for new telephone line to Russia, or dig the peat-bog used for heating. We had to walk three kilometres to the site. There was an elderly gentleman walking with me, who at better times had his dry cleaning business, and now had to work manually to keep himself alive. When winter came we had to line up at the bakery in the middle of the night to buy a loaf of bread. To keep us going, we were selling all valuables to buy food.

At this time we were approached by someone requesting us to sublet one room to a militia man (their version of a policeman). We were afraid to refuse, so this guy moved in. We found out that he was a Pole with long standing communist affiliation and even spent some time in prison for his beliefs. After a while he got disillusioned with communism, managed to resign from the force and went back to his family.

On February 10, 1940, first deportation to Russia occurred. Families of policemen, military, forest rangers, high civil servants and political prisoners, were deported. Their destination turned out to be Archangelsk in the northern Russia. For some unknown reason we and few more families were left out. At this time I got to know few guys who worked at the bakery and managed to get a job there. It was a real good luck. No more line ups in the middle of the night, and I had a steady income. I had already quit school. In May came another deportation. This time to Kazakhstan. We were spared again. Knowing that our turn will come, my mother dried every bit of spare bread and packed it in the sacks. By the time our turn came we had two sacks full of dried bread.

Anyway I worked in the bakery for over a year. It was a heavy work for sixteen years old. There were seven bakeries in town working three shifts seven days a week and there was shortage of bread. Before the occupation, same bakeries, worked only one shift each and there was plenty of bread, buns, bagels and cakes. I worked on the relive shift meaning that master baker and I worked the shifts of crews on their day off. It required us to go every time to different bakery which allowed me to learn all aspects of the trade, bread, bagels, cakes. All work was done by hand. In huge vats I had to mixed flour and water, knead the dough, form it into loves and bake in the big oven which had to be fired first with wood. This has to be done twice in eight hour shift.

About this time, family of my school friend was returned back from Russia. Though he was my good friend, he would not discuss their stay in Russia. Knowing all the personnel at the railway station I got informed on June 19.1941 that at the station arrived special box cars that are used to deport people in. They had boarded small windows and bolted doors one of which had five inch opening with wooden chute for primitive toilet.

This was a sure sign of oncoming deportation. We were next on the list, no doubt. I didn't let my family know as not to cause panic. In the evening I went out with my friends and made sure I stay out till two in the morning. It was June 20.1941. Sure enough, when I got back, there was a horse cart in the yard, light in the house and soviet soldier at the door. I had to convince him that I live here before he let me in. Inside two N.K.W.D. men rooting through everything. Then they ordered us to pack what we could carry, put it on the wagon, and drove us whole three hundred

meters to the station.

There were already wagons with people and more coming in. They put us inside the box car, which had been converted to two levels on both sides of the door. Center was left open right to the ceiling. At the opposite door was narrow opening with chute and sort of a seat on top. This was a toilet for 52 people for 15 days of travel. We sat on the station all day as they loaded constantly arriving wagons from distant parts. While waiting at the station we could go to the outside toilet under the guard of armed soldier.

Meanwhile people gathered at the station seeing friends off. At one time I got mixed up with those people and soldier wouldn't let me in to the box car. I had to convince him that I belonged inside. I had plenty opportunities to stay behind, but it never entered my mind to leave my family alone. I felt great responsibility to look after them. In the morning came along secretary from the bakeries and I asked her to arrange my pay to be brought in.

In the afternoon she came with my pay. Oddly enough, man in charge of the deportation was a director of the bakeries. When I addressed him as director, he curtly said "I am not a director now; I am a colonel "(of the N.K.W.D.). It meant that all positions were staffed by N.K.W.D.

When they deported people, they made no exceptions, newborn baby or 90 year old granny, they all had to go. There was a family (Gebicki), with one of the daughters married and living away from her family. She was arrested and taken for deportation, allowing her husband to stay behind, but he went with her voluntarily.

June 21 we spent on the station in Krolewszczyzna, one station to the south. This was a connecting station with the main line to the north. Next day we crossed old Polish border and in Plock, when we were allowed to get some water, under armed guard, we learned of German attack on the Soviets, and managed to get newspaper from the Russian people, bringing it to the box car. When it was read aloud so everybody could hear it, so did the Russians. Immediately they entered the box car and after searching for it, confiscated the newspaper. But it was too late. We knew the war had started; besides all oncoming trains were carrying troops and war equipment.

If not for dried bread, we had, we would have starved on the way. First meal, which was plane noodle soup, we got after a week of travel, in Jaroslaw. There was no other meal for the rest of the journey which lasted for fifteen days. Only thing we could get was water at irregular intervals.

Occasionally they let us out so we could relieve ourselves as everyone tried to hold on as not to foul the box car. It was pathetic to see people squatting under the box cars, women on one side of the wheels, men on the other. There was no alternative. Now we were curious to know where we are being taken to. Box car was made of wood so I managed to cut a hole with the aid of a pen knife, near the boarded window, so we were able to see the stations we went through. Our train was heading north to Wielikije, Luki, Jaroslaw north of Moscow, then Kirow, Perm, Swierdlowsk, Omsk and to Nowosibirsk, from there south to Barnaul. From the hole I cut in the wall of the box car, on the long bend of the railway line, I could see whole length of the train. I

counted over fifty box cars. Our car contained fifty two persons.

From the station they brought us, by horse and wagon, to brick works. When all transport arrived, they (meaning N.K.W.D.) assembled all of us for a meeting. They just said it plainly that we were brought here to work and we should forget that we ever were in Poland as this is the place that we will die in. Plain and simple.

Row of newly erected long huts awaited us. Inside those huts were two level stalls on both sides of long corridor. Those stalls were three or four meters wide. Into each stall they put one family regardless of the size. Four of us were in the lower stall. Water tap was outside so was a toilet serving all huts. As soon as we settled down we wrote to our father giving him our new address. This way we managed to stay in touch.

We were issued papers in place of the passports. I have saved my, in spite of stern orders at the time of departure from Russia, that if any documents not surrendered to the authorities upon leaving Soviet Union will be sufficient reason to cancel exit privileges. On the opposite page I made a copy of the original. In translation it says:

CERTIFICATE (In lieu of passport) Issued to forcefully deported Wilski Zbigniew Stanislawowicz born 1924 year, residing at Kirzawod No.2 (Brickworks No 2) and is limited by law and cannot leave town of Barnaul to another place without permission of organ of the N.K.W.D. Forceful deportee Wilski Z. S. remains under the supervision of organs of N.K.W.D. and has to register each month at 2nd municipal department of R.K.M. N.K.W.D. (Onsowa St. house No 3). Manager, 1st department of U.N.K.S.D. A.K. (Morpachew)
"3" August 1941 Year. Town of Barnaul.

On the brickworks property was sort of a dining hall where we could buy some noodle soup. Having some money we promptly bought it. Next day we had to go to work, where they assigned us to different areas. I was sent down to the pit head to load clay on to tram car. We had to undercut the sheer wall of the pit face and let the whole lot drop down making sure no one will get caught in the avalanche of clay, and then the back breaking job began. Shovel by shovel we had to load it on to a tram car, then hitch a horse to it and wheel it to a steel line, hook it up and electric motor pulled it up the ramp to a hopper where it was mixed to certain consistency and extruded in a long mass of clay which was cut in to bricks, from there it was put on wheelbarrows and carted to drying sheds. My mother had to wheel those wheelbarrows full of raw bricks. We were being paid by the amount of work performed. In my mother's case she was paid for the number of bricks she brought to the drying shed.

I don't remember how they paid for my work. But I remember that after few weeks my fingers were square with hardened skin from working the shovel. We worked five days and the sixth day was free, then five more days and sixth free. This was Russian five day working week. Summer was hot, so when we had a chance we walked to the river Ob, some two kilometres away, for a swim. At this point, at Barnaul, river was wide and slow flowing with murky water, but it was refreshing. Pay was low, the dried bread had ended, and we had to scrounge every bit of food. Close by was a field from which potatoes were already harvested, so we had to sneak in to salvage some that was left in the ground and would normally freeze in the winter. No such luck

in the Soviet system. Police on horseback chased us out and dumped them back on the ground.

We used to go on the railway line in search of some potatoes or carrots that fell of the train. We also managed to pick up some lumps of coal dropped by engine. At this time even one potato could make a soup. Carrot was a bonus. When we had some money to spare we went to cafeteria to buy some soup. Usually it was noodle soup. When they served soup called "shchy z gruzdziami", meaning cabbage soup with mushrooms, it was a challenge in itself to eat it as each circle of fat floating on top of soup had nice fat worm, which probably came from mushrooms. You had a choice, eat it or leave it. We ate it.

Friend of mine, fellow deportee, Antoni Borejko, from village of Dzierkowszczyzna, his family were farmers. Being more prosperous than rest of the villagers, they were classed as "kulaks", Russian name for richer population, and thereby slated for deportation. He worked in the sunflower oil mill, so sometimes he brought some refuse from squashed out seeds, normally given to cattle. It was good for us too. At another time he managed to steal (we call it "borrow") few bars of soap and gave me some. With this bar of soap I traveled on the train to some village and traded it for potatoes as even locals could not get soap. This will bring us to the subject of cleanliness. Everybody had lice. You could not buy a railway ticket without certificate that your clothing had been fumigated (deloused). When you went to the barber shop you could see a big fat louse being cut in half by barber scissors. This was the norm.

Then one September day they picked some men, me included, and send us to the farm owned by the brickworks and called "sowchoz", to help in harvesting crops. Regular farming communities were called "Kolchoz". It was a few hours trip by train to a place called Oziorki. When we arrived there, they already harvested field of oats and stacked the sheaves in a huge heap. Next day there was a big commotion. What happened? The oats just harvested were stacked while still damp, and everything rotted inside the stack. We spent a couple of weeks there. At one time I had a chance to steal whole water melon from the field, and ate it all on the spot, it almost made me sick. I remember them feeding us boiled potatoes with skin and sand on. You could not peel them as it would be nothing left. They were the size of large pea. We just ate them whole.

Their machinery was constantly breaking down, and they had two horses. One was a huge monster and the other little pony. I was placed in charge of them working the field. Imagine my frustration trying to control them. Big one was lazy and had to be prompted with the whip. As soon as I raised the whip he took off and as suddenly as he took off he stopped. It went on like that all day.

One day some people were coming in from the station, few kilometres away, and told me that my father was coming. I could not believe them till he really showed up. You see, we were never told about amnesty for Polish people. My father already was released from prison and found his way to us but I didn't know about it. My father came to take me away from this farm. When we returned back to the barracks, my fathers treated us to a water melon. I could not look at one for a while, let alone eat it.

We weren't slaves anymore, but still could not change the jobs without permission. But after

returning to the brickworks I didn't go back to work there. At this time they build new houses few kilometres away. They were solid wood, two stores quadruplets. In our present standard it would be comfortable apartments for four families. But they put one family to a small room and two to a bigger one. We were put up in a common kitchen. Big enough to put a bunk bed so five of us could fit on it, leaving small area for strangers coming in to cook. In a way it was a blessing as in winter we didn't have to heat it all the time, only when there was no cooking done by other dwellers.

There was problem with wood supply. Of course you could buy it but with no money for food we could not afford to buy wood. We had to resort to stealing it any where we could.
It was done always at night, even in the snow storm we went out scrounging. Actually we bought wood once because we had to have some kind of a proof that we indeed are buying it.

Any ways, I found myself a job in newly repatriated from the European Russia, cigarette factory. At this time Russians were moving out everything to save it from advancing German troops. Times were hard for us. Despite two earners now, money was still in short supply. Our mainstay was daily ration of bread. My mother found work sorting out potatoes in huge cold storage cellars. She always tried to hide potato or two in her pocket. Sometimes it was possible to buy extra bread in the city. They called it commercial bread. Any time I had a chance and money I bought it and on the way home tried to restrain myself from nibbling at it. When we had some money to spare I would buy some milk, which in winter was sold in a frozen lump and without container. This milk, by the way, was of bitter taste due to the fact that cows ate weed called wormwood, which grew in abundance. This weed was used in treatment of stomach ulcers and tasted terrible. By the way, ice cream was sold only in winter.

At this time I didn’t work, as I injured my finger at work and have been off work (without pay). Finger was slow to heal due to malnutrition. It didn’t heal till I reached Palestine many months later. Meanwhile I tried to earn some money by doing odd jobs. chummed up with young Jewish man (fellow deportee) and usually cut and split firewood for Russian people, getting paid with money or food.

At the end of February I met a Polish soldier, who came looking for his family somewhere on the farm outside of Barnaul. He needed a team of horses and sled to get there. Knowing my way around town I helped him to find it. From him I found out about formation of Polish army down south near Alma-Ata. He had a railway ticket for twenty people who would like to join the army. He promised to take me with him on his way back
.
Next two weeks all of us were saving bread from our rations so I have something to eat on my trip down south. My mother sewed a knapsack and I was ready to go. Time was just right, as I had two summonses to court for leaving brickwork’s without permission, and now I received a third one. This meant that now, if I didn't show up in court I will be arrested. On March 19 soldier got back, and I had my clothing fumigated, ready for the railway trip. You could not buy railway ticket without proof of having your clothing steamed. Next day I said goodbye to my family and my father saw me to the station. The day was the 20th of March 1942, the last time I saw both my mother and father.

This was a passenger train but still trip lasted five days and nights. Train stopped at every station, where we could get "Kipiatok" (hot water). Every station had it but you had to have your own container. Usually it was a tin can from some kind of preserve. On this trip, one early morning, I experienced a very impressing sun rise. Multitude of soft colors kept changing in the cloudless sky. Later on I was treated to another nature spectacle. Looking east from the train you could see no end of the horizon, but rising up in front of your eyes you could see a towering mountain covered in snow. It was a part of Tien-Shan Mountains of the Himalayas.

We shared our compartment with a Jewish lady and her daughter, who kept us entertained by singing nice songs. She had beautiful voice. Their name was Dworkin, and they were traveling to Tashkent. When we reached Alma-Ata we disembarked and right on the platform met Antoni Borejko, who came here day before and found out that army enrolment center was moved to Lugowaja, another day's journey.

When we wanted to board the train again we had hard time convincing conductor that our ticket holder was still on the train. After some arguments we had our way cleared and went to Lugowaja. Next day we signed in to the army. On the second day we had to cast our entire civilian clothing, shave all hair on entire body, take a bath and upon emerging from bathhouse receive (English) army uniform. Civilian clothing was piled up and burned, louse and all. On the third day we were loaded on the train and left for Krasnowodsk, port on Caspian Sea. Prior to that we were told that if someone has families in the radius of fifty kilometres could go and bring them over for departure to Persia. My family was hundreds kilometres away.

We spent few days on the train. At Tashkent we were fed noodle soup. At Krasnovodsk we were told to surrender all Russian documents, failing to do so will result in denying departure. Every one complied. I took a chance and kept one previously mentioned. We were also told that we should leave all Russian money, as it will be of no use to us in Persia, but could be used helping people staying behind. In Persia we found out that Russian money in 10 rubbles denomination (called "cherwieniec") was readily accepted. The ship I went on was very small, and packed like proverbial sardines in a tin can. I found a place on the deck where I spent the night. At the end of the trip I had been smeared with tar. When we reached Pahlevi, in Persia, smaller boats ferried us to the dock.

Our camp was on the sandy beach on the shores of Caspian Sea. First thing we have done, we went for a swim. Then we went to see the town and its market. It was an unbelievable sight for hungry eyes. Markets full of all kinds of food, and fruits. Big, hungry eyes and no money to buy anything. People that ignored the warnings and kept the money had a ball. From all my possessions I had only leather belt left over, which I managed to sell and buy some food. It was a heaping plate of rice with pat of butter on top. It was a sheer delight.

Now we were getting regular meals, but our bodies still called for more. I remember at the meal time getting to the line first, eating my food as fast as I could and get back to the line again for seconds, which we were not allowed.

This was early April. Easter was on the 7th of April. We spent it in the tents on the beach of Caspian Sea. There I have been assigned to the medical company, so did Tony Borejko. From

then on we have been in the same unit. After a week of rest we were loaded on old Persian buses and driven over the beautiful mountains to Iraq. At Hamadan was a transfer camp. There we were transferred in to the army trucks driven by Indian soldiers, and through Baghdad to Habbaniya and then trough Amman in Jordan, we went to Palestine, and made our camp in Izdut. In Palestine we were joined by Third Karpathian Brigade, freshly returned from Tobruk in Libia, and formed Third Karpathian Division. All this time we were going through rigorous army training. At this time we were using old equipment brought by brigade from Tobruk. English build Austins and Morris Commercials. Motorcycles were Triumphs and Northons. At this time they opened driver's school. Our army needed a lot of drivers. I joined the course. On July 23 1942 I got my driving license.

While training we managed to see Holy Land and visit all biblical places like Jerusalem, Bethlehem, Nazareth, Sea of Galilee, Mt. Tabor. We also swam in the Dead Sea, took trips to Tell-Aviv, Gaza, Jericho and other places.

At this time, higher command realized that army was formed largely with teenagers who had no chance or time to finish schooling that was cut short by war and deportation. This army had necessary cadre of teachers and professors and also willing students. It was arranged that during the free time from training, and later from combat actions, all students and teachers would attend classes and when needed, disperse to own units. There I met fellow deportee from Barnaul, Edward Kondratowicz, who also went back to school.

Soon after we moved our camp to Zabadan, Syria, half way between Damascus and Beirut in Lebanon. In Damascus we had an army hospital that was completely buried underground in an old marble mine. Damascus market was unbelievably crowded. It was a real challenge to drive through it. You practically have to push Arabs aside with your truck. We had to buy our vegetables there.

At this time some units were getting new trucks made in U.S.A. Those trucks had very strong headlight beams. I drove an old Austin ambulance, which had very poor lights. One night I had emergency call to drive sick to Damascus hospital. On the way, one of those new trucks approached from opposite direction with light at high beam. It could be due to ignorance or poor judgment driver made no reaction to my flickering lights forcing me to slow down and move to the soft shoulders. Well, I moved too far to the side and drove to the ditch, breaking both front springs. We had to stop private truck and medic took him to the hospital, while I had to wait for our tow truck to arrive.

While in Syria we went to Beirut. Road lead through the mountains in series of sharp serpentines. Some of them couldn't be taken at one go and trucks had to be backed up first and then proceed. From the top of the mountains you had a beautiful view of Beirut and Mediterranean Sea. Each ship in the port had huge anti aircraft balloon, as a protection from dive bombers. We traveled north to Tripoli in search of Cedars of Lebanon. We did not manage to find them.

From Syria we went back to Palestine, again driving through the desert. At times there were no roads. You just kept on going ahead. When we were on the exercises and training we had to

do with dry rations and biscuits. At one Jewish Kibutz (They spoke Polish and Russian in all Jewish settlements) we managed to get coupons and bought fresh bread which normally was on ration. In army camps all cinemas were run by Palestinian Jews so we could see all Polish movies.

Then again we set off for Iraq over the desert. I drove a motorcycle. During the trip I got detained behind main convoy and tried to catch up with them. It happened that I was traveling fast behind a car of some English officer. This road ended suddenly and car in front of me had to brake to detour in to the desert. I had to brake so fast that I have been tossed over the handlebars on to the pavement. The car kept on going and nothing happened to the motorcycle, but I sprained my left hand and could not depress the clutch. I was stranded in the middle of the desert. Fortunately along came convoy of buses transporting Indian troops.

Those buses were driven by Palestinian Jews who could speak either Polish or Russian. They had spare driver who could ride my motorcycle and I boarded the bus. When my company got to the transit camp in Habbaniya and noticed my absence, they send a jeep to find me. They met bus convoy and I got back to my unit. We traveled trough Baghdad again and along river Tigris north to Kirkuk and then to Mosul. We got there in the fall when rainy season had started. Desert at Mosul was one big mire. Trucks sank in the mud. We had to do something. This was oil producing area and allies, fearing possible German invasion, dug series of anti tank ditches. Excavated stones were piled up along. We had to pick those stones, lay them down as roads and for parking lots we had to lay two tiers of stones to stop trucks from sinking in. Mud, mud, mud everywhere. Nights were cold so we had to make stoves to heat them. We used crude oil and dripping water combusting in used gas cans and it kept us warm.

Two stray Arab dogs adopted our company and stayed with us. They were fully grown and quiet big. They got along fine with all uniformed personnel but for some reason could not tolerate local Arab people. At one time an Arab man showed up at the camp, and before we could react, those dogs attacked him, taking few chunks off his legs. Luckily for him this was a medical unit with doctors on hand. He was promptly taken care of. I still wander what happened to those dogs after we moved out. Did they make truce with local population?

When spring came, desert changed to green field full of red tulips. In the spring, officers from my company, (most of them doctors), have been going on a wild boar hunt on the islands of river Tigris. I used to drive them to the area where boat was rented to ride to the island. Bushes were full of boars as Arabs do not eat or hunt them. They were glad to have them culled, as it meant less damage to their crops. For a while we had plenty of boar meat instead of Australian mutton. It went on for a while till one time one soldier was shot accidentally and killed. That was the end of hunting.

At this time our army was getting equipped with new equipment sent from the States. It was unloaded in the Iraqi port of Basra at the Persian Gulf where rivers Tigris and Euphrates met. To bring new trucks we had to travel on narrow gage railway all the way from Mosul to Basra. On the way back, river crossings were shared with railway line. It was an experience to drive on one way bridge with no side rails and just wide enough for the truck wheels to fit on. I did not hear of any one going over the side.

Summer was hot but dry. Close by was smaller river where we went for swimming. Our swimming hole was shared by two brown bears. They were mascots at some infantry units which picked them up as small cubs, on the way from Persia in the mountains. Now they were fully grown and tame. They loved to swim. Eventually they had to be left in Cairo zoo prior to our departure for Italy. From Iraq we went back to Palestine. I have to say here that Jewish settlements (kibutz) were nicely kept and producing good crops.

Well, they had all farming machinery. Arabs villages, on the other hand were poor and farmed in primitive ways. Crops were sown and harvested by hand, piled in one heap and donkeys or camels were driven in circle to loosen the kernels and then they tossed it in the air for the wind to blow the chaff away. Another curious thing was to watch camels feeding on huge cacti with thorns up to inch and a half long and hard as nails. They just munched on them.

General Sikorski, head of Polish government in exile, paid us a visit. He was greeted with big enthusiasm by all troops, especially those that he managed to bring out of Russia. There were only two large movements of troops and civilians from Russia. First wave was part of 3rd Karpathian Division. Second formed 5th Kresowa Division.

I presume that Stalin realized that we are not coming back to fight on their front, and halted departures. Ones that were left behind formed, so called, Kosciuszko Army, and fought beside Russian troops.

After short visit Gen. Sikorski left for England. He managed to get as far as Gibraltar, where his plane crashed, killing all aboard. Rumours persisted, that it was deliberate removal of highly undesirable person, whose aims were in direct conflict with Churchill's plans and interests. Some newsreels at the time showed one person running along the plane's wing. Reports of the day said that only the pilot survived, and he had broken legs. Who then was running on the wing?

Shortly after this we were getting ready to move to Egypt, where we stayed few weeks at Ismailiya, waiting for assembly of sea convoy for the trip to Italy. In those few weeks we had opportunity to visit pyramids at Giza and tour the city of Cairo where, for the first time I tried to roller skate. I found it quit easy as it was almost same as ice skating.

Walking the streets of Cairo was, at times, very annoying, as shoe shine boys (by the dozen) vied for the chance to clean our shoes and if they were already cleaned, sneak behind and smear them with some dirt.

When time came we embarked on troop ships and big armada sailed from Port Said along northern part of Africa. We sailed on troop ship, so hammocks were strung all over the ship. At first it was a strange feeling curled up in a hammock. By the next night it was very comfortable. Sailing was rather smooth, but frequent roll-calls and assembly on deck caused many, included me, to run to the gunwale with upset stomachs.

After few days we turned north and sailed toward Malta and then along Sicily, with magnificent view of volcano Etna. Then right to the bottom of Italian boot to the port of Taranto. This port had a very narrow entrance, just wide enough for the ships to go through, and then

entrance was closed with nets to prevent German subs to sneak in uninvited. This was the end of December 1943. After disembarking we went on to surrounding hills where we pitched our personal tents (pup tents). The hills were covered with some kind of dry bushy vegetation which we promptly utilized to make soft bedding. This was New Years Eve, and for the first time, we heard thunder and seen lightening at this time of the year. For many of us it was something new and unexpected.

Few days later, after getting our equipment off the ship we set off to the north, toward front line which at this time was bogged down on Hitler line, at Monte Cassino. First sign of war we've seen passing through Foggia, which was just a big heap of rubble.

Our company settled in small town of Bojano, where we stayed for a short time. At one time I got assigned, late at night, with my jeep, to accompany Military Police unit on a surprised raid, in search of arms, at one farmer's house on the top of rocky mountain. It was an experience for me. When we entered the house, we were choked by smoke. Soon we realized this smoke was coming from an open fire. This house had no chimney. The farmer's family was sitting around fire not bothered by smoke. I could not believe that they had no chimney.

At this time infantry was already on the front line, and our company send a small unit consisting of one doctor, few medics and myself as a driver of a jeep equipped with stretchers. We were sent to town called St. Pietro Avellano. We stayed in the only standing house. Rest of the town was in rubble. It was February 1944. At one time we were snowed in for whole week. Supplies came by mules. There we were joined by American ambulance driver. He wasn't a soldier but a volunteer with his own ambulance. There were scores of them in different units. We could not speak English, but somehow managed to communicate.

Down in the valley, there was no snow, an older farmer who was walking through a field with his donkey and walked right into a mine field left by the Germans. He tripped a mine and fell down wounded but the donkey was not harmed. Seeing the farmer laying wounded, we set out to his rescue. When we reached the mine field, medics wouldn't go any further. Fortunately with us came a sapper (Corps of Engineers), who disarmed a path to the farmer and I went in with him and brought him out. He stayed with us for a week as we could not transport him through the snow. Poor guy was thirsty and hungry but we could not help him as he was wounded in the stomach.

At the end of April Polish Corps was assigned to take positions at Monte Cassino and be ready for action and relieve XIII Corps (English). Slowly Polish units were moving in taking positions in surrounding ravines and gullies. Soon all positions were taken over and early in May I have seen only Canadian artillery units still in the ravine trough which I had to drive my jeep and company doctor.

At one point we got under German artillery fire and had to stop to attend to some wounded soldiers. It was rather difficult task as missiles were coming and whistling over our heads. One of the wounded needed some shots and was still bleeding, so I took over dressing his open wound which doctor started to apply, so he could get the shots ready. Every so often we had to hug the ground as missiles were falling all around. I have to point out here that I haven't been trained in

first aid, but being with the medical unit I had a chance to pick up few tricks, which came handy now. After dressing up his wounds we put him in the front seat as the doctor took over driving and I sat in the back holding on to the wounded. As we were driving in the ravine (that's where roads were made), toward the first aid point, mortar shell burst in front of our jeep. Most of the shrapnel was stopped by engine, but a small one hit my face. It felt like whole bomb hit me. When I looked up, our wounded was hanging over the side of the jeep, and I managed to pull him up. He was hit in the head but was only grazed and stunned. The Jeeps radiator was gone but the motor still worked. After shutting it off the doctor bandaged my face along with the wounded guys head. I decided to drive the jeep till it heated up and had to be cooled off. As we were waiting for engine to cool off another ambulance jeep came along and picked up our wounded and doctor insisted that I should go too as my face was bleeding. Unwillingly I went with them.

That was the end of my fighting at Monte Cassino. At the first aid point they just packed us up on the trucks and sent down the evacuation road through various medical units at Venafro, Campobasso, Termoli, right to the bottom of Italian boot, Taranto to the main hospital at Mottola. There I went through series of test to find out if there was any damage. Being only lightly wounded and able to walk I soon got bored and wanted to go back to my unit but they wouldn't sign me out, so I volunteered to help out in hospital duties.

After a week they were happy with my work and released my uniform, so now I shed my hospital duds and could move freely as the hospital was filled to capacity.

New arrivals brought news from front line and they were not very good, one soldier I met came from the front line with a small truck and was ready to go back so I managed to get a ride. They had whole barrel of wine in the back. Few hours down the road the driver ran in to the back of another truck, got his feet tangled up in the metal and could not get out. We had to pry metal apart to free him. Fortunately he wasn't hurt, but the truck was out of service and the wine was leaking out. I could not stay with them so I hitched a ride on an English army truck. The English officer demanded I show him my pass, which I didn't have, but I pretended that I don't understand him. After few more tries and my blank stare he gave up and let me ride. But they went only a short distance and dropped me off near American unit. By this time I was hungry and went to the Americans , who right away found a G.I. who spoke Polish. When I told them I was hungry they fed me and loaded me with canned food for the road. This was a surprise to me as in the Polish army you had to have transfer papers to get food in another unit. This type of bureaucracy was strange to the English too. They said that if a soldier ate in this unit or the other made no difference, he could not eat twice which made sense, but not to the Polish administration

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Later on I managed to get lift from Polish drivers and soon reached my unit reporting my arrival. My jeep was fixed and ready. By this time Monte Cassino was taken and battle at Piedimonte was coming to an end. I had a chance to go to the Monastery and see its total destruction.

Soon after Piedimonte was taken, and again I went there right away and viewed those tanks that were disabled on serpentines, with mines still on the road in plain view. Then I’d seen a tank in the ravine laying on its turret with caterpillars up in the air underneath the tank, from the open flap were protruding legs of the crushed crew members.

Soon after capture of Piedimonte our troops were moved out for a well deserved but short rest. More battles awaited us. Germans were retreating fast .On many occasions my jeep, doctor and I were first entering villages, well ahead of infantry. It was quiet a sight, streets lined up with people greeting us with flowers and best wines. On one occasion I was offered small shot of best wine I ever tasted. Never since this have I ever tasted anything like it. Flowers were thrown at us in such abundance that the jeep was almost buried under them.

The Campaign was moving along Adriatic coast. When we had some reprieve from action I managed to go to Rome on two occasions for a week at a time, driving some doctors for their (and mine) well deserved holiday. I had a great time, having my hotel bill paid by them. So twice I have seen the Pope, visited most of old ruins, and attended two operas - Tosca and Aida in all it's splendor.

Then came actions at Loretto, Ancona, Rimini, Forli. At Loretto I had a chance to witness artillery in action. Town of Loretto is on hill, as are most of the Italian towns in the Appenines. From one of the streets of the town was a perfect view on the valley below and opposite hills that were still in German hands. Artillery observer was on that street to direct the fire, but not wanting to be detected by the enemy, passed his directions to one soldier, he in turn to another, and eventually to a radio operator who transmitted them to artillery positions. After few minutes their missiles passed over our heads hitting the slopes of the hill on the other side of the valley, missing the target by several feet. The observers sent his corrections in the same manner as before. Next salvo hit the target right on. In the evening we were trying to warm our canned rations right in the town square. Before we manage to do it, Italians invited us to have supper with them. Next day we visited towns cathedral where we met a priest, who happened to be from Poland. He showed us around the church pointing to the huge painting of Polish king riding on a white stallion. We were surprised to see this painting in the Italian cathedral.

Soon school opened up on more permanent basis and we were lodged at Bagno di Romagna (name means Roman Baths). It was small town with thermal baths, which we used frequently. We stayed there over the winter of 1944 - 1945 and in April moved to Terra del Sole not far from Forli. One kilometre down the road was another town Dovadola, where my unit stationed during the action. At that time, I recall, we had an army gasoline dump, right beside our quarters. Gasoline came in 20 litres cans (popularly known as "Gerry cans"), which when empty were used as water containers. They were stacked on top of each other in few layers. One night Germans moved their self propelled (SP) guns closer to the front line and shelled this small town. They managed to hit this gasoline dump and set it afire at one end. We were trying to move some cans at the other end till it became too dangerous as those cans, when ignited, exploded and shot in the air like rockets and resembled fireworks spinning in the air spewing fire in all directions.

By then war has ended and we had a chance to stay in school without interruption. Terra del Sole is a small mediaeval town surrounded by thick walls, which protected it for centuries before. I recall one incident from this town - it was a spring time and cherries were in abundance. Group of us, which we always stuck together, as we were originally from the same unit: 3rd Medical Company. They were Edward Latosinski, Jan Bednarczyk, Piotr Sakowicz and myself.

So this sunny afternoon we purchased bag of cherries and walking on the street ate them with delight. When the bag was half empty, someone from the group split the cherry open and found a nice juicy worm. Worriedly we split open other cherries and found worms in every one of them. What to do now? We ate half of the bag already! There was only one solution: If we ate one half of the cherries we may as well eat the other half too. And that was the end of our worries. They were delicious.

From Terra del Sole scouts were sent out in search of more suitable place to accommodate so many willing to continue their education. They found a small town called Amandola, in the mountains close to Adriatic coast west from Porto St. Giorgio. They told us that whole town was painted with communist slogans, but when we arrived all signs were gone, walls were scrubbed clean. They must have found out how Polish soldiers could react to red slogans of communism. We never had any problem with local commies throughout our stay, which lasted over a year.

Our group was billeted with family of Carabiniere (policeman). We were treated by them like part of the family. When, after some time, he resigned from police force, all family moved out to his home village of Campocavallo at Quazano, we were invited to visit them. We took advantage of it, as we wanted to climb Monte Vettore which was a part of Sibilini Mountains. We enjoyed the trip and the mountains. On the way up we were joined by stray sheep dog, which got to like us as we shared our food with him. Before setting on the trek we filled our canteens (foolishly) with wine. We ended up melting snow for drinking water. Going up was hard, but on the way back we managed to slide, on the soles of our boots, on soft snow like on the skis, and in no time we reached the bottom. That was on 16 of September l945.

The school year was coming to an end with exams and graduation on February 27 1946. All this time I kept in touch with my family in Siberia, though the war ended they were still slaving in Soviet "Paradise". Most of Polish people were sent back to Poland, but my family was left behind as there was no one to speak up for them. I found out that my father left for the army too, in a hurry, as at his place of work someone opened the valve on the railway tanker and drained it dry of turpentine. My father, being in charge of it, got the blame. I tried to find him through advertisement in the army paper and found out that he went as far as Jal-al-abad in the southern Russia. At that time there was a plague of typhoid fever and he succumbed to it. That was the last thing I've learned of him.

At the beginning of August we were told that we are going to leave Amandola and sail for England. So we said goodbye to our Italian friends, boarded the train and set for Naples.
At Naples we stayed in transit camp for few days waiting for a ship to board. We had a grand view of smoking Mount Vesuvius. To pass the time we had a good use of Olympic size swimming pool, which had a very high diving board. I did not use the highest one but Edward Latosinski did for few jumps till at one time he went too deep and hit his shoulder on the bottom of the pool. We had to help him with his gear for the rest of the trip.

On the 9th of August we embarked on "Princess of Australia" and set off for England.
This was still a troop ship packed to the utmost with soldiers sleeping in hammocks strung at the ceiling. Trip was rather uneventful till we passed the Straits of Gibraltar and entered Biscay Bay, which was quiet rough. I was told by a sailor that if I start to feel dizzy and uncomfortable I

should go on deck and walk. I did so and haven't been seasick since.

On 16th of August we entered English port of Liverpool. From there, by train we went to Bodney Airfield Camp in Norfolk. For some reason or other, we did not receive any food rations for two days. We suffered from hunger and two of the guys picked some mushrooms, cooked them and ate. One of them died shortly in hospital, the other survived.

All this time we had our arms with us, and of course with army tradition we kept the armed sentry at all times till we were told by our English hosts, that there are no armed guards on English soil. At Christmas time we had to take a break from school and were sent to London to help in sorting out Christmas mail. We were camped south of London and ferried every day by train to the main sorting point.

We had plenty of free time which we spent touring London and found it very easy to travel by underground railway (Subway). On one of my trips I located an ice skating rink, where I could rent skates and spent few hours of skating. On the way back to the subway I discovered a short cut along the Thames river to the Hammersmith bridge and up the stairway to the street right at the entrance to the subway. Next night some of my friends wanted to go skating too, so I led the way through the short route from the bridge. This time we went at a different time of the evening, I was running down the stairs and suddenly found myself in, at least three feet of water. I didn't know that Thames river is affected by tide so far inland. The tide was in and I ended up finding it out the hard way. This was December, I was cold and soaking wet. Never the less we went to the rink, where, fortunately we met some Polish airmen who spoke English, and they helped me in securing a drying spot at rinks boiler room. While I was drying out my friends had a good time on ice.

When we returned to Bodney from London we found out that during our absence we were relieved of our arms. This way the English avoided confrontation trying to disarm us by ordering us to surrender our weapons. I assume that at other camps they did it in the similar way.

Soon after that I decided to change the school subject and learn architectural drafting. With me went along Edward Latosinski. This school was in Shandon in Scotland, on the bay of Garlochead, near Dumbarton north of Glasgow. At this time English hosts were trying to persuade Poles to return to Poland, but didn't force anyone to do so. One of our teachers was so distraught than one day we found him hanging in a tree on the grounds of our camp. At this time my mother and two sisters returned from Siberia and I was ready to return to help them, but before I made decision I sent a wire to my mother asking her opinion. She answered simply "finish your schooling". This was enough to understand the situation that prevailed in communist Poland.

In the spring time we moved to Millom in Cumberland , on to a wartime airfield, now abandoned. At Millom there was a concentration of all technical and trade schools. That year was the hottest summer I had seen in all 9 years of my stay in England. Camp was only a short walk from the sea so we were swimming every day. The only problem was the beach had no sand, just pebbles and stones. Millom was a small mining town. Next bigger town was across the tidal flats and a long way around it by train. It was called Barrow-in-Furness. There I bought my

first suit, which I was wearing to the local dances. Of course it wasn't allowed as we were still in the army. Gentle pressure was on for us to leave the army and go to work. At one time, came to our camp, recruiting team from Courtolds (chemical outfit) with some Polish personnel working there. They told us that they manufacture nylon. In our minds nylon was always associated with synthetic clothing. Edward Latosinski and I signed in, got discharged from the army, joined (compulsory) Resettlement Corps (sort of reserve) for two years and went to Urmston, Manchester. We were housed in a hostel with other ex soldiers. When we showed up for work we were shocked to find out the truth. Those Polish rats, as I call them now, never told us it was just a first stage of the production of nylon. Huge furnaces had to be stocked from the top with charcoal and sulphur. This mixture, when cooked at high temperature produced gas, which, when cooled, turned to very heavy liquid. This liquid then was trucked somewhere in the Midlands, where it was processed in to a nylon which we never saw. In order to be able to walk on the top of those furnaces, we had to wear clogs (wooden soled boots). Leather soles would not last half an hour. After eight hours of work we looked worst than miners. On the top of that, when we stocked the furnaces we had to use gas masks, and every few minutes had to open them out to drain the sweat that filled the mask.

Showers were on premises (very unusual for old English factories). At the beginning of our shift we had to wrap our street clothing in paper bags (middle layers of charcoal bags) to keep them clean. At the end of the shift we took showers and went home clean. At one time we made some arrangement with our English coworkers to meet at the dance. Dance halls were the social meeting places just after the war. At the hall, while sitting at the table, drinking beer, one of the English chaps reached over for the pint stretching his arm sleeve pulled up on his outstretched arm. His hand was clean just past his wrist, passed this it was black as it was when he left his work. He left some impression on us. Needless to say we never invited him again.

Living at a hostel was too much like in the army camp so I started to look for private digs and found nice place with Irish-Scottish family in a semi detached, new bungalow. At last it was more like living at home. Working in this place got to me. I had to change jobs. The trouble was my English wasn't good and I had tried to get a job on the busses as a conductor but already twice had been rejected for lack of knowledge of English. I have been told each time to come back when I improve it. Finally, after whole year working at Courtolds and constantly conversing at home, and reading stories to their two children, my English improved enough that they finally hired me. Now I faced another problem as the Depot that I was assigned to as it was quite a distance away and I had to be prepared to work early shifts when buses didn't run yet. I had to buy myself a bicycle but there was nowhere to keep it at home so they let me keep it in the hall, but there wasn't much room and my split shift work put a strain on them. I knew I had to look for new place, closer to work.

At this time Tony Borejko moved to Manchester so we moved together in Brooks Bar, in the house of Polish guy married to a German woman. She kept her linoleum covered floor, spotlessly clean. Every time one of her borders used a washroom, she run inside and spotting one drop of urine on the floor, made a big fuss about it. One Sunday, during the dinner (we had room and board) she had a big pot of soup. After eating one plateful she asked us if we want another. We said no as we were waiting for a second course. When we said we do not want another helping, she picked up the pot, took it to the kitchen and we are still waiting for the

second course. After that we rented just a room with a kitchen, close to Polish Hall, where we were among Polish population. If we didn't feel like cooking, there was a restaurant with Polish food on the menu. At the Polish Hall we had library, dances every Saturday, and on Sundays there was Polish Mass.

At one of the dances I met my wife Apolonia Kozlowska who came from Germany to work in the cotton mill and later worked in the Hope Hospital. After eight months of courtship we got married on 14 of October 1950. Vows were taken at St. Alphonsus R. Catholic church conducted by Polish priest Jan Bass. All wedding party and guests, sixteen in all, attended reception at Polish Hall, and, since it was Saturday and a dance as usual was in progress, we had it made.

We settled down in Brooks Bar close to the Polish Hall, where we were in the midst of Polish activities. At this time Czeslaw Slopek (my classmate) and his new bride Michalina, moved in to the same neighborhood and we met at the hall. He just finished university and worked as a civil engineer. Meanwhile we changed our addresses few times, trying to get better place to live, as we were expecting our first child. In England it was easier to find a place to live if you had a dog than a child. Working on the buses had its drawbacks. Walking in to the bus depot at five in the morning, where hundreds of diesel powered buses were idling, was sheer disaster. My stomach could not take those diesel fumes. Best antidote for it would have been just a glass of milk, but you could not buy it for all the money. Milk was just delivered to the house in bottles. At the depots cafeteria you could get tea or soft drink but no milk. They just did not sell it, period!

I left the buses and got a job as a truck driver with moving and storage company of Frank Hill. He operated some five trucks of different sizes. First thing I was going to do is change the motor oil and asked where they keep it. To my surprise they told me that they do not change oil in their trucks. Just add it up when necessary.

On the 29th of November 1951, our son, Christopher was born. When the time came I happened to be working on afternoon shift and my wife had to call the taxi herself and be driven to Wittington Hospital in Manchester.

At this time Edward Latosinski and his wife Pauline from Millom, purchased a house in suburban Urmston and offered us to rent room and kitchen. With them moved also Pauline's cousin Iris who was married to Marian Bajda, who was at Millom in mechanical school. We were all stationed at Millom prior to moving to Urmaston. So there we were three families with one child each living in one house in perfect harmony. Pauline and Iris did not work and stayed at home, but Pola had to bundle up Chris and take him to nursery and then go to work.

I worked for Frank Hill for a year and didn't like the moving business. It was a hard work. The guys I worked with noticed it and one day showed me an ad in the paper advertising for a driver. It was an upholstery factory of Norman Lister. I was hired on the spot. On this job I had to deliver upholstered goods to shops all over England, Wales and Scotland. Each trip lasted a whole week. I liked this very much as it enabled me to see the country.

One wintery Monday I set off for delivery in Yorkshire towns and it was an usually wet and damp day in Manchester. As I passed Oldham and got on the road to Huddersfield it started to

snow. Climbing up the hills wind picked up and snow intensified. Few more miles up the hill motor conked out and van stopped. There were few more unlucky drivers. Fortunately we just passed a Truck Stop and restaurant. This was my home for whole next week, as snow drifts blocked the road and it took a long time to open it and then to have my van towed to the garage and have it started. Needless to say I had no extra pay for this ordeal.

I got along well with everyone except the owner (old drunk), as he always wanted me to get back sooner than it was possible and when I picked up a speeding ticket he wouldn't cover it saying that I was in a hurry to get back to my family. Eventually I was fired, but got a job right away with Tennex - furniture factory, also delivering goods all over the country. I liked this job even better than my previous one I even agreed to work on my vacation providing I could take my family with me.when Chris was then about three years old then.

We set off for southern parts of England including London and Brighton down to the English Channel. It was a very pleasant trip, enjoyed by all, especially by Chris, who had a very good observation point in the center of a cab on top of the engine cover. This trip took only a week.
and I have to mention another tidal oddity in England while going north from Blackpool on the coastal road toward Fleetwood you will come to a sign that warns you that this road is closed at high tide.

All this time I praised this company for being good to work for. It must have got through to my previous boss, and he had some relative in high position working at Tennax. He had enough pull that they let me go under the pretext of downsizing. Anyway all this time we were trying to emigrate to the States or Canada we went through all the proceedings and waited for the result. So in the interim I worked in plastic factory where I met an older person who was breading budgerigars - small Australian parrots. I was fascinated with them, and visited him often finding all I could of their habits and breading conditions. I bought some of them with intention of taking them when we move to our new country.

A call to Canada came first and we started to get ready. Peter Sakowicz immigrated to Canada some time ago and settled in Toronto, so that's where we were going too. We managed to save enough to pay for our passage and had two hundred dollars left over to get started. Ex soldiers originally had a free passage to their chosen country, but this offer had expired and we had to pay ourselves.

We booked our passage on maiden voyage of the Cunard Liner "Ivernia", which was scheduled to sail from Liverpool, but due to a dockers strike left from Glasgow so we traveled there by train. Up to now I only sailed on troop ships. This one was a luxury liner, what a comfort, food and great service, it was a holiday in itself. Crew members didn't hide their concern that this was a maiden voyage on the North Atlantic and likened it to "Titanic". Actually we have seen only one iceberg at a distance. On the ship we got to know Veronica Reckless, who with her two daughters were going to Toronto to join her husband, who came there ahead of them.

Crossing Atlantic right to Quebec City took only five days and we reached it on the 30th of June where we spent one day and moved further up the St. Lawrence river to Montreal. From there we boarded a train, and after eight sweltering hours (air conditioning in our car was out of

order), we reached Toronto.

Peter Sakowicz was waiting at the station with his friends and drove us to our new digs that he rented for us at Hickory St. off Dundas at Bathhurst where we had one furnished room and a kitchen for $65.00 per month. Next day I went to employment office looking for work, as I walked in to large room, there were already people sitting all the way around it. I took my place and waited for my turn. One of the clerks walked in and asked if anyone wants to work in a warehouse. Being the last one in I didn't react at first but looking around I could see no one moving so I said that I was willing and was sent to Monarch Belting Company and got my first job right away (at $1.10 an hour).

Close by, on Augusta Ave. were Polish nuns, who ran a daycare center. Chris was placed there and Pola got a job in the factory. So we were set in our new country. Other people weren't so lucky. Veronica, who came to see her husband, a policeman from England, had a very hard time, her husband was out of a job and had no money so we bought them some food and tried to keep them in good spirits. Peter's friend, Marcin Rybaczek had a car and used to drive us around.

The summer of 1955 was a hot one, especially for us, fresh out of England, where sunshine is at a premium. Two weeks after our arrival, Marcin drove us to Wasaga Beach. Its clean sand and water amazed us. In the water one could walk far in to the lake. I was aware of the perils of too much exposure to the sun, and put my shirt on after a short spell, but it turned out to be too long after all. Next day I had to go to the hospital with huge blisters on my back and had it bandaged up for few days.

Shortly afterwards I went for my driving license. Not having own car I had to pay a driving school for the use of their car. The examining person for some reason wanted to fail me as you were allowed one mistake, at two you fail so while driving down Spadina Ave I was instructed to turn left at the next traffic lights. When we reached it on a green, I stopped in the middle of the intersection for the traffic going in the opposite direction and when the light changed to amber I proceeded to make a left turn. That was a failing mark. He gave me a second failure for a right hand turn, citing that I made the turn too wide. Thank you very much. Next week I went for the test again, different examiner, I passed the test with flying colors.

One Sunday, one week later, on 7th of August, we were going to the beach again. This time we took with us the Reckless family and the car was full to the brim. Imagine ten people packed in a car. As soon as we got unpacked we went to the water edge to find a commotion as a girl was drowning. All four men from the car went to her rescue. Marcin Rybaczek, Peter Sakowicz, J. Reckless and myself. At the time we did not realize the dangers of an undertow, as on previous visits the water was shallow and no waves. This time it was a different story as between the waves you could touch the bottom . Realizing the danger I turned toward the shore, but could not make a progress, as undertow was dragging me back. Gradually I inched my way back. Beside me I noticed Peter swimming toward shore with the last strength. I could hardly swim myself. At this time I prayed to God to spare me for the sake of my family as they needed me most. My prayers were heard. With the last of my strength I've reach the shore, where the first person I met was a burly O.P.P. officer (Corp. Wilson) of the Wasaga Beach detachment. Barely standing on my feet I told him that there are my friends and other people needing help. He looked at me and

in the stern voice said: "go and get them, that's an order!" I just looked at him and without a word walked away. How could he, seeing me barely getting out of the lake, order me to go back. No one else got out of the water. Later I learned that girl, who started it all, survived. You can only imagine the commotion and worry that followed. Three men from one car drowned. In all seven people perished in this tragedy. Reckless drowned leaving a widow and two young daughters,
Marcin Rybaczek had common-law wife, Peter Sakowicz was single. No bodies were recovered that day. We were taken to the police station to make statement and then told to come back next day. My newly acquired driver's license proved very useful, as there would be no one to drive us back to Toronto.

Next day, Veronica and I drove back to Wasaga and then to Stayner, to identify the bodies. Barely one month in Canada and three funerals to attend. My best regards go to the management of Monarch Belting Co. for their understanding of the situation I was in. Never once did they question my absence. At the funeral I met old school mate from the army Mietek Krowczyk, who worked as a chef at La Chamie French restaurant.

Shortly after that I heard that Ford Motor Co. in Oakville was hiring people. I took a bus to Oakville and then walked to the plant for an interview. I was hired on the spot and managed to get a ride back to Toronto and future rides to work, from a person I met at the interview, he was a Ukrainian from Poland around my age. Later on, on our way to or from work, he suddenly said: "Here we are friends now, but the time will come for reckoning". This gave me a lot to think about.

Starting pay was $1.34 an hour. Working on two shifts - four weeks on days and four weeks on afternoon. Things were looking up as far as work was concerned. Problem was with accommodation. At this time you had to look for place to live in private homes. We had a hard time as most of the accommodations had a room but you had to share a kitchen, needless to say it was a disaster. We spent a cold and freezing winter on Hickory St. where we had an upstairs room where this landlady, Wrzosek, used to turn off heating pipes leading from the furnace to our rooms. They sat downstairs in their undershirts sweating and we froze wearing sweaters. We moved from place to place. In one year Christopher changed seven schools while in grade one. As a result he failed to pass his grade. Eventually we had to rent a house and started to breath easier. Now we were renting out our rooms.

My first car was a 1949 Mercury Ford, for which I paid $250.00. Next day we went for a ride on the Queensway and the horn started to Honk, if it was a Saturday, it would have been all right, as people would have thought it was a wedding car, but being a Sunday it was too embarrassing. Next day it cost me $90.00 to have it fixed.

All this time I had my birds living with us in one room. I have joined a budgerigar society and have been exhibiting them at shows and winning prizes. There I met Kosinski with whose family we became friendly and she would be amazed as every time she came to visit us we had moved to a new place.

Now we were expecting our second child, and again the big event came when I was on

afternoon shift in Oakville. Again my wife had to take things in her own hands getting to Mount Sinai Hospital by taxi when on March 15th, 1957 Richard was born while we were living on Bathurst and Dundas Street. Mrs. Kosinski (after divorce married Alec Wajdeman) was a Godmother to Richard. We still have fond memories of Alec.

In the summer of this year we went to a Polish picnic in Niagara on the Lake. There I met Edward Kondratowicz, with whom I have been in Barnaul and then in the school in army. Now he and his family were living in Buffalo N.Y. From then on we were in close contact. On the same picnic Pola met her friends from Germany, Kazia and Walek Lys, who came to Canada from Germany in 1948 to work in gold mine in Red Lake in north western Ontario. Now they resided on a farm in Beamsville that they were in for less than a year. They invited us to see them right after the picnic and we visited their farmhouse which was old, even the water had to be carried from the neighbours well and there was an outhouse beside the barn and a wood stove for heating. At this time we learned that Bajdas (from Urmston) came to the States and are in Elyria, Ohio, close to Cleveland. We visited each other quiet often.

That year Ford cut down to one shift and laid off 1200 men, with me included. It was hard but I managed to get few odd jobs first in construction installing gyprock in new houses and then working in a garage pumping gas and doing odd jobs. One day I met a guy from army days (from Millom) who worked as a maintenance man at Cryovac, saran plastic firm, and he told me that there is a chance to be hired so the next day I drove there and got the job because of my previous experience in England. Most of the management and personnel were English. When Ford recalled me I didn't go back as the work here was much easier and it was a friendly atmosphere. Gradually things were changing as one time when I asked for 1 hour off so I could register Richard at school the manager (Moe - I forgot his last name), spend 2 hours trying to tell me why I should not take this time off.

I was hired at Ford Bramalea in 1966 and worked there till my retirement March 1, 1989.