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PART TWO

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Preface

I am a survivor of the Lodz-Ghetto, Auschwitz, Bad-Kudova, Graeben, and Bergen-Belsen concentration camps.

Although many years have passed, time has not diminished my memory.

These stories are echoes of my childhood, wartime and postwar experiences. They could not have been written without the encouragement and advice of Judith Breier, my instructor in the short story class at the Jewish Community Center in Saint Paul, Minnesota.

Thank you (Dziekuje) to Mira Grondowska of blessed memory, my high school teacher of Polish, who instilled in me a love of language.

How to Read This Book

You'll notice that this book has two parts. Part One, which is more poetic and tugs at our emotions, features the short stories and poems of Felicia's experiences. Part Two rounds out Felicia's experiences with more facts and details. Both parts of the book follow the same timeline, broken down into different sections: Prewar Poland; the Ghetto; Auschwitz, Poland; Wartime Germany; and Postwar.

Originally the book contained only Part One. Since we felt many readers would be interested in the historical context for each of these sections in Part One, we added Part Two.

In terms of how you read the book, each part stands on its own. Some readers may find it more meaningful to read the book from front to back, just as it is. Other readers may find it more helpful to skip back and forth between the two parts, reading a section from Part One (for example, "Prewar Poland" on page 19) followed up by reading the corresponding section in Part Two (for example, "Prewar Poland" on page 132).

How to Read This Book

However you decide to read the book, we hope you will be touched deeply, as we were, by Felicia's experiences in the past and her courage to remember these events for the sake of the future.

Richard DeForest Erickson
Publisher

The Ring

Once upon a time there was a mother, father and three children who lived in a smoky industrial city. When the weather turned hot and sticky, they left for the whole summer.

Mother, children and the maid, a young country girl, stayed in a rented cottage in a lovely village not too far from the city.

The father came by train every weekend. The children played in the meadows, splashed in the lake and went to the forest with the maid to pick berries and mushrooms.

Time went by serenely and pleasantly in the lush, green countryside.

One day disaster struck. Mother's diamond engagement ring disappeared suddenly. No one could find it! Since no strangers or visitors had come to the cottage, suspicion fell on the maid.

She protested her innocence; nevertheless, she was dismissed.

The ring had lain in a brown leather box containing a silver cake server. A child's fingers had accidentally slipped it under the blue satin lining while playing.

It lay there silently, unable to tell where it was; neither could the little girl, who had not yet learned to speak.

Years later the Occupation Authorities forced the family to leave their apartment. In the chaos the child, now a big girl, accidentally stepped on the box, crushing the lid.

Out slid the ring from under its silky hiding place and lay silently gleaming on the floor.

In Memory of Josef 1922-1930

The doors of the apartment were opening to let in a steady stream of people. Men and women gave their coats and hats silently to Wanda, the maid.

In the far corner of the room, a dark haired, green-eyed small girl looked on with mute interest.

Her mother wore a pretty blue gown with gold buttons, but she looked distraught. Her father, his face pale and drawn, was leaning protectively toward his wife.

Why are there so many people here? Why are the mirrors covered? the small girl wondered.

The father noticed his youngest child. He took her hand and brought her to the neighbors across the

landing. Herr Kelle, a short, rotund and friendly man smiled at the four-year-old, who sometimes played with his daughters. Frau Kelle, a nice looking, tall woman, led her to the bedroom. She bade her sit in one of the small chairs surrounding a wicker table, and left.

The child hoped that Anita and Vera Kelle would come to keep her company but the girls were not at home. She sat for a long time feeling lonely and scared, as it got dark and no one came to turn the light on. She wanted to go to the bathroom, but she was too bashful to cross the dining room where she heard several adult voices. She held out as long as she could. Finally she wet her panties and the cushion she had been sitting on.

Ashamed, she went into the brightly lit room, blinking her eyes against the chandelier's glare, and she asked permission to leave.

She was happy to be back in her parent's home, and relieved her mother didn't scold her for the accident at the neighbor's house.

The apartment was quiet. All the visitors were gone.

The little girl searched everywhere for the blond boy she used to follow like a puppy, but he too was gone.

He was gone forever.

The Kilogram of Butter

In the summer of 1944 there were only seventy thousand of us left alive. Many had died of disease or hunger, others were forcibly sent away, never to be seen again. Food rations dwindled constantly. We no longer received a few grams of flower, sugar, margarine or smelly oil, just turnips or cabbage. One large, round loaf of bread per person had to last for seven days. Death came quickly to the starving who devoured more than a day's portion at once.

The year was 1944, the place was the Lodz Ghetto, where 164,000 Jews were forced in by the German authorities. Everybody worked because it was only for our skilled labor that the Ghetto still existed. In

The Kilogram of Butter

the factories, plants and offices, a bowl of soup was distributed. However thin and inadequate, it was life-saving nourishment to the workers. Children ages nine to fifteen worked five hours daily, those aged fifteen to sixty-five worked ten hours day or night.

The little ones trudged to work where nurseries and kindergartens were organized, their eyes huge in emaciated faces, their thin bodies bundled in layers of worn clothing against the cold outside and the unheated rooms inside.

Not many children were left in the Ghetto. In the fall of 1942 most of the young children, along with the aged, the sick, the insane, had all been loaded up on trucks. The Germans said they were going to be “resettled” in a better place. The words “resettlement” sent chills down the spine. Every time hundreds or thousands were “resettled” they were never heard of again. Only



A Jewish policeman and a German soldier (on left) direct pedestrian traffic across the main street dividing the two parts of the Lodz ghetto.

The German sign at the entrance to the ghetto reads, “Jewish residential area, entrance is forbidden.”

later, much later, did we the survivors learn the true meaning of that word. The Ghetto was surrounded by barbed wire with armed sentries who didn't hesitate to shoot. Communication with the outside world was completely cut off, but there were rumors and bits of information carried by word of mouth.

Suddenly a proclamation informed us that the Eldest of the Jews, a man chosen by the German authorities to represent us, would organize a special program for the two hundred children. They would be housed for a few weeks in the part of the Ghetto that was previously farmland, where they would receive better food, spend time playing outdoors and be cared for by professionals. Two of the Ghetto's school department supervisors and a small staff were to handle the registration.

On the day of the registration long lines formed at the crack of dawn. Pushing, shoving, desperate parents tried to be first in line, some even trying to climb to the windows of the second story office.

A well-dressed, robust man identified himself as Mr. G, supervisor of the Dairy Department. A man of importance, he was admitted by the doorman. Mr. G approached my father, whom he knew, and asked that two little girls, children of a widowed relative, be placed on the list. The request was granted and the children, weakened by hunger and illness, were among the lucky ones.

A few weeks later a messenger knocked on the door of our room delivering a package from Mr. G, the dairy supervisor, for my father.

Mother and I opened the package. There under a protective wrapper lay a kilogram of yellow, fresh

The Kilogram of Butter

butter! We had not seen butter since 1939 when the war began and could hardly believe our eyes.

“Mama, Mama” I said, dancing around the room. “We’ll keep a little for you because you are not well. We’ll barter most for lots of potatoes and cook thick soup.”

Shortly afterwards Father came home. Excitedly I told him of the wonderful gift. He wouldn’t even look at it, just said quietly, “I can’t accept it, please return it.”

Astonished I stammered, “Daddy, Tatusiu, why can’t we keep it? It is a present!”

He answered, “I do not accept presents for my work.”

Tears of frustration and anger rolled down my face as I shouted, “I don’t care if it is right or wrong, I am hungry! We are all hungry!”

Father turned towards the window then turned back to face me, his eyes full of sadness and pain. “The butter isn’t Mr. G’s to give as a present, it is for the sick and the children. Please take it back.”

The Dairy Department was located a few miles away in a small building because few dairy products ever arrived in the Ghetto. I walked carrying the precious package, my fingers stroking the wrapping containing the yellow treasure.

I walked into the office and handed the package to the astonished clerk saying, “Please tell Mr. G that Mr. Karo can’t accept his gift.”

On my way home I became aware of something happening inside me. My disappointment was receding. I was no longer angry; I was proud of my father.