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Weekend Read: Maps and Shadows – Soviet deportation of 1.5 million Polish civilians during WW2

Posted by Steve McGough on November 19, 2011 at 12:07 pm | Share via e-mail

A small bit of promotion for a friend. Krysia Jopek grew up in Windsor, Connecticut and her father was one of 1.5 million Polish civilians who were taken from their homes by the Soviets in the winter of 1940 and transported to Siberia to work in labor camps. World War II had started with the invasion of Poland in the fall of 1939.

The short novel tells the story of Krysia's father Henry along with her aunt and uncle and their parents as they were moved from place to place during and after World War II. They were just children when they were forcibly taken from their home, and Krysia mixes history with poetry to tell their story.

You can head over to [Krysia's website](#) to read more, and you can order the book on [Amazon.com](#) or [Barnes & Noble](#) for as little as \$12.

I'm not much for writing book reviews, and it's been more than a year since I've read my copy, so here's the Amazon publisher's description, along with portions of a review from a reader that I thought was pretty good. After reading a pre-release copy, I ended up ordering a few books as Christmas gifts last year and everyone reported back they really liked the story and the creative writing.

This stunning new novel is drawn from a little known chapter of World War II history — the brutal Soviet deportations of 1.5 million Polish civilians to forced labor camps in Siberia shortly after the Soviets occupied eastern Poland at the beginning of the war.

Beautifully written, lyrical and poetic, the author explores the impacts of this shattering experience on a family from four points of view. The adolescent son and daughter, and the mother and father, each take turns chapter by chapter in telling their story.

Slowly, delicately, the threads are woven together — the father Andrzej's secret shame at not being able to protect his family; the son Henryk's need to grow up quickly; the daughter Helcia's descent into nightmares, seeking comfort in broken bits of poetry consigned to scraps torn from a precious salvaged dictionary; the mother Zofia's instant aging, her hidden fears and worry.

Their odyssey spans the map from Poland to Siberia, on divergent paths to Persia, Palestine and Italy, to Uzbekistan and Africa, before finally converge in England amidst shadows that will never vanish.



One review...

This is the thought that Henryk carries in his mind as his family is being transported to Siberia from their rural home in Poland. Despite his youth, he can sense the turmoil that is uprooting them and the violence that will come, and can only hope that Helcia and her poetry will help make sense of it all. In *Maps and Shadows*, the novel released this month by Krycia Jopek, we see how this small family of five is transported on a journey far more distant than Siberia. The story is tightly based on the actual events in Poland and Russia, and beyond, from 1939 to 1955.

Unique in many ways, Jopek's novel combines a fast-paced narrative with poetry created by the character of Helcia. Her poems are placed throughout the chapters that explore the events through the separate viewpoints of the four oldest family members: Andrzej and Zofia (the parents), and Helcia and Henryk (the two oldest children). While each experiences their deportation differently, they are united in the hope that "some of us, at least, would survive."

While much of the events of the Polish being sent to Siberia were familiar, the aftermath was not. Stalin had "freed" the Poles to fight alongside Russia against Germany, in a move that pleased the US and Britain. However, this left thousands of Polish families stranded in Siberia with no means of return while the Polish men went off to fight. Thus, a displacement of these Poles, mostly women and small children to parts of Africa and the Middle East (22 convalescent camps with 19,000 Poles in Africa alone) was completely new to me. In some cases, the British helped the Poles to reunite with their families and also provided camps and education in the interim. Yet, when WWII ended, despite their the many Polish soldiers who supported the Allied efforts, "the Polish military were asked not to march in the celebratory Victory Parade in London. those in power in England and the United States did not want to alienate Stalin."

It was painful yet fascinating to read about the resilience of the people whose lives were uprooted so viciously and repeatedly. Only their family ties remained valuable to them as material items were so transient. They had to endure the frigid cold of Siberia and then relatively quickly try to acclimatize to the heat of Africa, and their health was forever compromised by the years of malnourishment and mental anguish. Jopek's tactic of letting each character explain their own interpretation is revealing as it shows the more personal suffering of each: a father tormented by his inability to protect his family, a mother desperate to see that her toddler have milk, and the two older children trying to put on a brave face to alleviate the worry of their parents as they themselves are forced to grow up far too soon.

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