

FOREWORD

In his preface to *Echoes of Tattered Tongues: Memory Unfolded*, John Guzowski tells us that his immigrant survivor parents “couldn’t spend a night without arguing with each other in Polish, the language of misery, poverty, and alienation.” He explains that he ran from all this, ran for years, until his love for them—and his need to make sense of their anger at life and their frustration with each other—eventually pulled him back to their Polish language and the dark, brutal, impoverished world they had emerged from: the world that had almost killed them.

As a poet and witness, it was imperative that Guzowski learn as much as possible about his parents’ experiences during the war—what they saw, what they felt, and why those terrible things still held sway over them so many years later—concerns that have driven him, wounded him, and remained central to his work and to his life. And yet his search has not been for revenge for what his parents suffered in the slave labor camps, or even for what Poland suffered, but for the vein of gold in the broken, one-eyed man, his father, the gold in the unforgiving woman, his mother, and their rock-bottom goodness and courage.

Clearly, it was this need to know intimately what his parents lived through in the German camps, to be true to their experiences, that taught him how to write such unwaveringly lucid and luminous poems—poems that, line by line and syllable by syllable, leave his readers with no safe perches yet show them how to mourn and praise. Indeed, John Guzowski has served as the chronicler of his parents’ exploited bodies and the smashed bones of their martyred birth country. He set out to encounter that devastation and to understand it, and in this extraordinary book he has achieved that goal.

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