



John Guzlowski: Four Poems

Her First Winter in Germany – a sonnet

My mother never thought she'd survive
that first winter in the slave labor camps.
She had no coat, no hat, no gloves,
just what she was wearing when the Germans
came to her home and killed my grandma
and took my mother to the labor camps.

A German guard saved her life there.
He saw her struggling with her hands
to dig beets out of the frozen earth,
and he asked her if she could milk a cow.

She said, "Yes," and he took her to the barn
where the cows were kept and raped her.

Later, the cows kept her from freezing
and gave my mother warm milk to drink.

Lessons of War

Some have to die, give up,
allow their bodies at last
to tumble to the ground,
and die

So that others,
struggling by, can think,
can say, I'm not dead,
I won't give up

God will stumble and die
before I fall.

Silence of the Empty Rooms

There is no silence in the empty rooms
no emptiness either.

My sister Donna hides under the bed
where our mother chased her.

Earlier Donna said something
about the coffee or the wash

And my mom heard something else
and slapped her across the face.

My sister screamed and ran away.
My mother grabbed a broom

And followed her into the bedroom
swinging for her as she ran.

Under the bed, my sister couldn't hide
And my mom hit her again, and again.

Now, no one is here. My sister
hides weeping under the bed.

My mom hides at the kitchen table
not knowing how to weep.

What My Mom Taught Me About Life

Life is shit,
people are worthless.
You can't rely on anyone
to help you or save you.
You're fucked up
no matter what.

There's no heaven either
and the only hell you'll see
is the hell here in your life.

But give me your hand.
and I will stand with you
on the corner and wait
for the boat to heaven

even though it will never come.

Copyright 2024 John Guzowski

John Guzowski was born the son of parents who met in a Nazi labor camp in Germany. His poems about his parents' experiences as slave laborers appear in his memoir Echoes of Tattered Tongues. His most recent books of poems are Mad Monk Ikkyu, True Confessions, and Small Talk: Writing about God and Writing and Me.



This entry was posted on February 22, 2024 by Vox Populi in Health and Nutrition, Poetry, Social Justice, War and Peace.