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JANINA CZARNOTA

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WOJ. PODKARPACIE

TO: JEWISH HISTORICAL INSTITUTE

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WARSAW, POLAND

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FILE # YV-170/99-2468/T

I HAVE BEEN LIVING WITH MY DAUGHTER MARIA RIGHT NOW BECAUSE MY OLD LOG HOUSE WAS DEMOLISHED DUE TO OLD AGE. I AM JANINA 76 YRS OLD NOW AND I RECEIVE OLD AGE SECURITY PENSION. THIS HAPPENED 58 YEARS AGO WHEN THE RIESENBACHS CAME TO MY PARENTS JOSEPH AND JULIA BAR (DECEASED) AND BEGGED FOR HELP. THEY ASKED IF MY FATHER WAS WILLING TO HIDE THEM. MY FATHER DID NOT LIKE THIS IDEA AT THE BEGINNING. HE SAID: "HOW I CAN HIDE YOU WHEN GERMANS ARE LOOKING FOR YOU ALL THE TIME AND IF THEY FIND YOU HERE EVERYBODY WILL BE KILLED. TELL ME IF YOU WOULD RISK LIVES OF YOUR FAMILY FOR US? PLEASE GO ELSEWHERE BECAUSE I CAN'T HELP YOU."

SUDDENLY RIESENBACH AND HIS WIFE ITA GOT ON THEIR KNEES AND STARTED CRYING UNCONTROLLABLY. THEY ASKED GOD FOR FORGIVENESS AND PROMISED TO DO GOOD DEEDS IF THEY SURVIVE, THEIR EYES WERE FULL OF TEARS AND THEY WERE PRYING PASSIONATELY. THEY WERE HOPING THAT GOD WAS LISTENING TO THEM.

WE TOLD THEM THAT THEY CAN STAY ONE WEEK WITH US. MY FATHER MADE THIS DECISION RISKING LIVES HIS FAMILY.

AFTER ONE WEEK ITA SAID TO MY FATHER JOSEPH ABOUT NIGHTMARE WHICH SHE HAD LAST NIGHT ABOUT HER KIDS

WHO FELL INTO HOLE IN THE GROUND AND GOT BURIED ALIVE  
SHE WAS WORRYING ABOUT THEM ALL THE TIME.

MEANTIME WE FOUND THEM PLACE IN THE ATTIC WHERE USUALLY  
WE KEPT A HAY FOR ANIMALS AND OLD USELESS JUNK.

I WAS 16 YRS OLD AT THAT TIME.

I HAD TO CLIMB THE LADDER LEADING TO THIS ATTIC EVERY DAY AND  
TAKE CARE OF THE RIESENBACHS BY BRINGING THEM FOOD, CLEAN  
CLOTHES, WASH THE BUCKET WITH HUMAN WASTE.

AFTER ONE WEEK PASSED ITA ASKED MY FATHER IF SHE CAN BRING  
HER KIDS TO US. SHE SAID THAT THEY HAVE TO BE IN A DANGER  
BECAUSE SHE HAD BAD DREAM ABOUT THEM.

ITA AND HER HUSBAND STARTED TO CRY AND WE WERE CRYING  
TOGETHER WITH THEM. THIS WAS A ABSOLUTE DESPAIR.

THERE WAS A BIG PROBLEM WITH FOOD BECAUSE GERMANS IMPOSED  
MANDATORY QUOTES ON GRAIN, MILK AND MEAT. EVERY PEASANT (VILLAGER)  
WAS FORCED TO PROVIDE CERTAIN AMOUNT OF FOOD FOR FEEDING  
GERMANS. STARVATION WAS WIDELY SPREAD IN THE VILLAGE.

WE TOLD THEM THAT WE WILL NOT SURVIVE ON A LITTLE FOOD WHAT  
WAS LEFT FOR US.

MY FATHER SAID: "HOW WE ARE GOING LIVE FIVE OF YOU AND THREE  
OF US. TOGETHER EIGHT PERSONS?"

AT THIS MOMENT WITH TEARS IN THEIR EYES THEY BEGGED US FOR  
MERCY AND PERMISSION TO STAY WITH US.

WE ALLOWED THEM TO STAY WITH US AGAIN FOR A FEW WEEKS BUT  
WE WERE HOPING THAT THEY WILL LEAVE US SOON.

NEXT DAY ITA WENT TO SEE HER KIDS DURING NIGHT WHO WERE HIDDEN  
IN DIFFERENT HOUSE (BY J. KILAR?). AND SHE RETURNED TO US WITH THEM:

(JÓZEF) JOE, MARIA (MARYA) AND GENIA (GEATYE).

SOON AFTER GESTAPO RAIDED THIS HOUSE WHICH WAS COMPLETELY  
DESTROYED AND RANSACKED. AND POLISH OWNER WAS TAKEN AWAY.  
NOBODY HEARD ANYTHING FROM HIM AGAIN. BUT THEY DID NOT FIND THEM.  
ONE MONTH PASSED AND THEY ARE STILL LIVING WITH US. AND I WAS  
DOING MY DAILY ROUTINE.

ONE DAY MY FATHER SAID: "WHAT ARE WE GOING TO DO NOW?"

WE HAVE NO BREAD, ALL GRAINS WERE TAKEN BY GERMANS, AND



WHAT LEFT I HAVE TO USE AS SEEDS NEXT SPRING. ALL MILK WE HAVE TO GIVE TO GERMANS AS WELL OTHERWISE THEY WILL CONFISCATE OUR COW. PLEASE TELL ME WHAT WOULD YOU DO IF YOU WERE IN MY SITUATION ?,, WE ALL STARTED TO CRY TOGETHER, IT WAS A REAL DESPAIR AND HOPELESSNESS. THE RIESENBACHS OFFERED TO GIVE US EVERYTHING THEY HAD AND PROMISED TO EAT ONLY ONE PER DAY IF WE WILL ALLOWE THEIR KIDS STAY. MY FATHER RELUCTANTLY AGREED TO THIS. WE SHARED EVERY PIECE OF BREAD WITH THEM BUT WHEN BREAD WAS GONE WE ATE ONLY POTATOES AND BEAN. THEIR TOILET WAS A BUCKET WHICH I HAD TO CLEAN EVERY DAY.

THIS WAS MY LIFE AND I WAS ONLY 17 YEARS OLD AT THAT TIME. THERE WERE FIVE PEOPLE LIVING IN THE ATTIC AND WE HAD TO TAKE CARE OF THEM. I WAS HELPING MY PARENTS HOW MUCH I COULD. EVERY DAY I WAS BRINGING THEM FOOD, WATER, CLOTHS AND CLEAN BUCKET FOR HUMAN WASTE.

MY MEMORY ABOUT THIS HORRIBLE TIME IS VERY CLEAR.

I REMEMBER THAT WAS SUNDAY. (SUMMER - AFTER HARVEST 1942).

I WAS ON THE WAY HOME FROM CHURCH WHEN I SAW TRONG OF PEOPLE SURROUNDING OUR HOUSE. MY HEART STOPPED AND I KNEW I FACED THE DEATH NOW.

I NOTICED GESTAPO (SS) WITH THEIR HENCHMEN AND GERMAN FIREMEN READY TO BURN MY HOUSE. ALL OF THEM WERE FULLY ARMED. I THOUGHT THAT WAS OUR LAST MINUTE AND WE ARE GOING TO DIE NOW.

DESPITE THIS GRAVE SITUATION MY MIND WAS STILL SHARP. I WAS FAST AS WELL. I CLIMBED THE LADDER LEADING TO THE ATTIC AND BROUGHT ALL OF THEM DOWN TO CELLAR. I HIDE THEM IN THE SECRET PLACE (HOLE) MADE BY MY FATHER J. BAR.

THE ENTRY TO THIS PLACE I COVERED WITH BEETS LEAVES AND SOME BRANCHES.

NEXT I RAN TO THE ATTIC QUICKLY TO COVER ANY SIGN OF HUMAN PRESENCE.

MEANTIME GERMANS WENT INTO HOUSE WITH ORDER TO SEARCH THE PREMISES BECAUSE THERE WAS SUSPICION THAT WE WERE HIDING JEWS. THEY RANSACKED HOUSE TERRIBLY. THEY WERE LOOKING FOR THEM IN EVERY POSSIBLE PLACE LIKE: OWEN, CLOSETS, PANTRY. LATER THEY WENT TO BARN WHERE EVEN TROUGHS FOR COWS WERE CHECKED. EVERY SHEAF OF WHEAT WAS OPEN. THANK'S GOD THEY DID NOT FIND ANYBODY AND ALL OF THEM LEFT VERY LATE EVENING. THESE RAIDS HAPPENED A FEW TIMES AND WE FACED DEATHS EVERY TIME. I WILL NEVER FORGET THOSE MOMENTS OF MY LIFE. WHEN I WAS SO TERRIFIED.

AFTER THIS FIRST RAID WHICH WAS THE WORST WE LIVED IN CONSTANT FEAR. THE RIESENBACHS RETURNED TO THE ATTIC WHERE THEY STAYED UNTIL WINTER 1942.

WHEN THE WINTER ARRIVED WE BROUGHT THEM TO THE CELLAR. IT WAS VERY COLD WINTER AND THEY SLEPT ON BED MADE BY MY FATHER FROM POTATOS STALKS. THIS WAS A SUCH UNSPEAKABLE MISERY.

SUDDENLY ITA GOT VERY SICK AND WE CURED HER WITH HOME MADE REMEDIES. SHE WANTED TO DIE AND BE BURIED IN WOOD<sup>EN</sup> COFFIN ON THE CEMETERY CLOSE TO LANUT LIKE A HUMANBEING.

THIS WAS OUR LIFE FOR TWO YEARS FROM SUMMER '42 - SUMMER '44. WHEN SOVIET ARMY ENTERED POLAND AGAIN THE RIESENBACHS RETURNED TO THEIR HOME. SOON THEY LEFT MARKOWA.

WE DID NOT HAVE ANY NEWS WHAT HAPPENED TO THEM FOR LONG TIME. ONE DAY WE GOT A LETTER FROM THEM IN WHICH THEY INFORMED US THAT THEY ARE SAFE ABROAD. THEY WERE VERY GRATEFUL TO US FOR SAVING THEIR LIVES. THEY PROMISED US A SOME FORM OF PAYING BACK IN THE FUTURE. SOON WE GOT A PARCELS WITH CANDIES AND COOKIES A LATER WITH USED CLOTHS. EVERY LETTER FROM THEM CONTAINED \$1 OR \$2 DOLLARS. AND LATER. \$10 OR \$20 WITH TANK YOU CARD.

I AM VERY HAPPY THAT THEY DID NOT FORGET ABOUT US AND WHAT WE DID FOR THEM. THE RIESENBACHS BECAME PART OF OUR LIFE AND THIS IS IMPOSSIBLE TO FORGET.



MY PARENTS HELPED THE RIESENBACHS TO SURVIVE THAT HORRIBLE AND UNHUMAN TIME WITHOUT ANY EXPECTATIONS OF FINANCIAL GAIN. WE LIVED THROUGH THIS BRUTAL WAR TOGETHER AND THIS TIME IS HARD TO FORGET.

JANINA CZARNOTA

MY MOTHER DIED IN 2005 AT 80 YRS OF AGE.

THIS LETTER WAS WRITTEN BY HER 3 YEARS BEFORE HER DEATH. IF I HAVE SOME SPARE MONEY I ORDER PRAYERS FOR HER SOUL. THIS WAS HER LAST WISH AND I RESPECT IT.