

Marta Madejska

Nusia at the Crossroads

Text: Marta Madejska Sound: Marta Madejska and Vojislav Radojičić

The story goes like this:

During the first phase of Memory Project in Łódź, Poland, in August 2012, I recorded Anne Skorecki Levy recalling her earliest memories of the street where her family lived before World War II. I used that recording in my project "Listen and Recount".

The recording was also used during the second phase of Memory Project in New Orleans, USA, in November 2013.

My plan was to use the recording in 2022 for the third phase of Memory Project in Israel, but I discovered that over time computer errors damaged the precious file. You can still hear Anne's voice, but it's distant, distorted, with strange echoes around it.

I decided to keep it this way.

I thought: this is how memory works.

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Anne's parents called her Nusia. I know this diminutive name – my great grandmother Anastazja was called the same. She survived World War I and World War II, but died suddenly due to heart failure in 1949, only four years after the second war. My mother has the same heart defect as grandma. I think about this a lot.

During the past ten years, between the first and the third phase of Memory Project, I discovered (many times) how hard it is to escape both genetic heritage and family trauma. Both related, intertwined, interconnected. And I discovered that we shall keep trying, keeping in mind that things which destroy us, create us as well.

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Do cities heal their wounds? I ask myself everyday, watching the immense urban changes that Łódź is undergoing. The city was destroyed by historical injustices and discrimination, more than warfare alone. The damage is still visible.

Anne Skorecki Levy remembered walking on Spacerowa Street, which was changed during the 1970s of the 20th century into Kościuszki Avenue – a wide street with two traffic lanes. At the crossroad of it and Zielona Street there is a big, decorative building, called Pinkus House, where the Skorecki family once lived.

Today this crossroad is filled with fences and construction machines, building, rebuilding, changing. A cross-city railway tunnel is being drilled underground. That part of the city as I knew it, living in Łódź since 2006, doesn't exist anymore. Huge poplar trees were cut down, and the little booth with tasty local bread called "żulik" (dark, with raisins) disappeared. Recently construction workers uncovered the foundations of the Great Synagogue that once anchored the street directly across from Pinkus House. The Great Synagogue was destroyed by the Nazis in 1939, as were all synagogues in Łódź.

This crossroad is on my way to my therapist. I was recording a few sounds for this project each time I went to see him, to talk with him about post-war traumas of my grandmothers and grandfathers. Our discussions made me wonder – how can we keep the palimpsests of past events in our minds, but not carry them as an emotional burden?

What you can now hear through the earphones is Anne's recollection from 2012, mixed by Vojislav Radojičić with my field recordings from the crossroad she used to live nearby.

The Skorecki family doesn't live in Łódź anymore. I do. And thanks to the ongoing work with Memory Project, I feel like I have become part of their family, a living connection to their lost land of their shattered past. I am forever grateful for this experience which has truly and deeply changed my life.

Maybe this is the way people should heal. We should adapt, but also adopt each other.

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This is where this text was supposed to end.

I made the last recordings for this project at the end of March 2022. It was the 35th day of the Russian invasion of Ukraine. Hundreds of thousands of war refugees were fleeing to and through Poland. With friends from Topografie Association I became mildly engaged in organizing help. On one of the evenings in our office – which is very close to Pinkus House – while we were reorganizing clothes and supplies people had donated for refugees, Anne Skorecki Levy – a Holocaust survivor – wrote to me directly with a short but wholehearted note of support. I cried for a half an hour after I read her message. It turned out that many things had to be cried out that evening.

We keep going. The past experienced by our ancestors is returning in our nighttime dreams.

The future is – as always – unknown.

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