



A Polish Doctor in the Nazi Camps: My Mother's Memories of Imprisonment, Immigration, and a Life Remade

Barbara Rylko-Bauer

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2015 IPPY Gold Medal in Biography

Gold Medal in Biography, Foreword Reviews' 2014 IndieFab Book of the Year Awards

2015 Michigan Notable Book

Finalist, 2015 Next Generation Indie Book Awards

Jadwiga Lenartowicz Rylko, known as Jadzia (Yah'-jah), was a young Polish Catholic physician in Łódź at the start of World War II. Suspected of resistance activities, she was arrested in January 1944. For the next fifteen months, she endured three Nazi concentration camps and a forty-two-day death march, spending part of this time working as a prisoner-doctor to Jewish slave laborers. *A Polish Doctor in the Nazi Camps* follows Jadzia from her childhood and medical training, through her wartime experiences, to her struggles to create a new life in the postwar world.

Jadzia's daughter, anthropologist Barbara Rylko-Bauer, constructs an intimate ethnography that weaves a personal family narrative against a twentieth-century historical backdrop. As Rylko-Bauer travels back in time with her mother, we learn of the particular hardships that female concentration camp prisoners faced. The struggle continued after the war as Jadzia attempted to rebuild her life, first as a refugee doctor in Germany and later as an immigrant to the United States. Like many postwar immigrants, Jadzia had high hopes of making new connections and continuing her career. Unable to surmount personal, economic, and social obstacles to medical licensure, however, she had to settle for work as a nurse's aide.

As a contribution to accounts of wartime experiences, Jadzia's story stands out for its sensitivity to the complexities of the Polish memory of war. Built upon both historical research and conversations between mother and daughter, the story combines Jadzia's voice and Rylko-Bauer's own journey of rediscovering her family's past. The result is a powerful narrative about struggle, survival, displacement, and memory, augmenting our understanding of a horrific period in human history and the struggle of Polish immigrants in its aftermath.

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