

Jew Wishes

Book reviews on Jewish-related books and films, news on Jewish community, Judaism and such. Jew Wishes for peace, religious and cultural understanding.



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Jew Wishes Re: Maps and Shadows, by Krysia Jopek

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Maps and Shadows, by Krysia Jopek is a novel, told from a unique perspective, that of Polish deportees to forced labor camps in Siberia.

The novel begins in 1939, and is told through four family members in alternating chapters. Andrzej is the father, Henryk is the older son, Josef is the youngest son, Zofia is the mother, and Helcia is the daughter. It details the family's experiences through the four voices of all but the youngest child, Josef. The story line is based on both family history and historical fact regarding the Soviet deportation of over one million Polish individuals. The four family members lived a decent and good life, on land given to the father, Andrzej, for his status and service in the Polish army. That all came to an end in September 1939, when Russia invaded Poland from

the east.

Their land was seized, as were their belongings, and they were forced at gunpoint onto trains heading to Siberia. It is there that father and son, Henryk, become part of a work crew, a crew that is cutting down trees in order to aid the Russians in the war. After eighteen months the family is "freed", if you can call it that, in order for the Polish individuals to help Russia fight Germany.

Andrzej joins the Polish army, once again, leaving his family behind. A decision he will regret over and over again. The other family members manage to flee to Uzbekistan. It is there that Henryk joins the Young Soldier's Battalion, in a move to find some independence for himself, and he eventually ends up in Palestine. The other three family members flee to Persia. Some family members end up in Italy and Africa at some point during their traumatic separation. Each family member does not know the whereabouts of the others, or if they are even alive.

Andrzej prays each day for the survival and well being of his family. He is wracked with guilt for having left them, but he felt he had no choice. They all are reunited, eventually, in England. From there the emigrate to America and settle in Connecticut. Their history and displacement constantly haunts them.

Maps and Shadows is a story of displacement, inhumanity, severe living conditions, loss and love, assimilation and starting life anew in a foreign country. It is harrowing in detail, vividly depicted, yet beautifully written. The poetry and poetic undertones are strong metaphors, and **Jopek** portrays the plights of the family, both as a unit, and as individuals, with brilliance, in a memoir type of format filled with haunting imagery. Her use of incorporating family members in an alternating chapter style gives authenticity and realization to the characters.

Maps and Shadows depicts the boundaries and borders of humanity that are crossed during World War II, and how the Polish civilians were forced into situations of extreme inhumanity all in the name of war. It is a story that brings to light the civilian Polish deportations by the Soviets, which are not normally explored in the context of World War II.

Krysia Jopek intertwines the tapestry of family history, weaving a novel that strongly imparts the horrors of the deportations, and the physical and emotional struggles of separation that the family is forced to endure in order to survive. That they were able to survive is a testament to their strength, and **Maps and Shadows** is the author's tribute to their survival.

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