

Local author pens novel based on her family's odyssey

By [Joan Hunt - Managing Editor](#)
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Krysia Jopek lives within walking distance of those who inspired 'Maps and Shadows.' Courtesy photos.

Windsor author Krysia Jopek has written a novel that is steeped in the experiences of her own family and illuminates the suffering of Polish civilians who were deported to labor camps in Siberia by the Soviets during World War II.

"The Polish deportations to slave labor camps and the aftermath are a piece of history that isn't well known, even though we were allies," said Jopek. "Even in Poland, the people don't know the history because their education was so controlled. My parents didn't learn what really happened until after Solidarity."

Like members of her own family, the

main character in the first chapter of her novel, Henryk, notes Sept. 1, 1939, as the "first pivotal date in my life's chronology." This was the day Germany attacked Poland.

Feb. 10, 1940, was the second date permanently inscribed in the family's chronology. In the middle of the night, Russian soldiers surrounded the house, bound Henryk's father and ordered the family to pack what they could and be ready to leave their home in 45 minutes.

Even at this, Henryk's family was much more fortunate than others who were rounded up and deported during that time, but what follows is a personal story of a family thrust into survival mode written by a woman who has a real feel for the material. It includes the thoughts of those who have been through the ordeal, how each tried to stay strong for the others, the father's struggle with helplessness in not being able to protect his family, and the children, Henryk and his sister Helcia, as they adjusted to the ever-present fear for their parents and each other.

"I knew I had to tell the stories from different points of view, both because they were all split up geographically - Helcia, Jozef and their mother Zofia were sent from Siberia to Africa, Henryk was in Palestine and the father, Anrzej, fights in Uzbekistan, Italy and the Middle East - and because they viewed their experiences differently," said Jopek. "My college thesis topic was William Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury*," she said, referring to his work that also used four points of view. "Writing a story from more than one point of view such as that creates a work that is very layered," she explained.

Jopek has published several works of poetry. A UConn graduate, she studied in London for a year and taught English literature and writing at City College in New York for 20 years. She was adopted at three weeks of age by a survivor of the Soviet labor camps and his Polish-American wife. The book she has written is based on their story.

Jopek's book, "Maps and Shadows," is available from Aquila Polonica Publishers in hardcover or paperback.