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Echoes of Tattered Tongues

by John Guzowski

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With an unapologetic rawness, John Guzowski gives us his family's memoirs in a mix of poetry and prose in *Echoes of Tattered Tongues*. In *Echoes* we are shown the stark experiences of his family in three different time periods: his parents' retirement, after the war, and during World War II.

In Book I: *Half a Century Later*, Guzowski opens with a short story about a wooden steamer trunk that his family carried with them from the refugee camp to the United States. For decades, that trunk traveled with the family until finally after his mother's death, John decided to let the trunk go, the trunk that his father made with his two hands. In his words, he "wanted that trunk to slip away into memory the way my mother slipped away, become a part of my past, always there but not there." This sets the tone for the rest of the section which is focused on his parents' retirement in Arizona and their deaths.

In Book II, Guzowski examines his and his family members' lives as refugees in America. The following excerpt from the poem, "Lessons" is about their arrival in Ellis Island and typifies his style. "[T]he docked ship / rusting rising / falling as we wait / for my father / lost somewhere / in the crowd of DPs / in cast-off babushkas / black-market khaki / the gray wool / that froze / before Moscow / and cracked / he left to buy / sausage and bread."

The third section of *Echoes*, Guzłowski unflinchingly examines his parents' survival against the odds during the Nazi regime. His mother, Tekla, underwent unspeakable loss when she came home to find her mother, sister, and her sister's baby, brutally murdered by German soldiers. Tekla and Jan, Guzłowski's father, both endured the horrors of concentration camps in Germany, slave labor, starvation, and other abuses at the hands of Nazis. The poem, "The Germans Who Owned Them" speaks of the dehumanization of those imprisoned by the Nazis. "[A]nd the Germans stood watching / their hunger and then their deaths, / watched them as if they were dead trees / in the wind, and waited for them to fall."

Written over the course of thirty years, Guzłowski's collection of around one hundred poems and works of prose is a testament to his dedication to tell his family's story. *Echoes of Tattered Tongues* is now available on Amazon.com and from Barnes and Noble at BN.com.

About the author: John Guzłowski was born in a refugee camp after the end of the Second World War. After moving to the United States, the family settled in Chicago. He has been writing for over forty years and has had his work published in national journals such as *Rattle*, *Chattahoochee Review*, and *Marge*. Guzłowski has been nominated for the Pulitzer Prize and won the Illinois Arts Council's Award for Poetry. John earned his B.A. in English literature from the University of Illinois, Chicago and also holds an M.A. and a Ph.D. in English from Purdue University. The professor emeritus of English literature at Eastern Illinois University now lives in Lynchburg, Virginia.

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