

Rising From the Ashes  
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The sun was shining. The sky was blue.

But there was always a cloud hanging over the home where I grew up.

A cloud of silence.

A cloud of mystery.

The center of our home was mother's kitchen, with the gefilteh fish, kishkeh, borscht, pirogalakh, and mamaliga.

Jewish life was all around us.

The synagogue yard across the street was our playground.

Celebrating the holidays.

Singing the songs.

But still, there was always this cloud hanging over our home.

In the intermix of languages surrounding us : Yiddish, Hebrew, German, there were a few words that repeatedly echoed :

“Red Yiddish zol the kinder nisht farshtayen”

“Speak in Yiddish so that the kids do not understand”.

So my brother and I, we learned over time to live with this mystery.

Life continued.

We grew up. Built new families. Raised kids.

And all the while, something was missing.

A story. A history. An identity.

Our parents were not getting younger.

Our beloved mother passed away.

And on the last few months of our beloved father, the cloud, at last, had been lifted.

The stories came to light.

A tapestry of stories.

Stories of courage.

Stories of perseverance.

Stories of utter destruction.

Stories of rising from the ashes.

There, was my father. A soldier in the Polish army. On a battlefield in western Poland. Fighting the Nazi Germans as they invaded Poland, wounded by German fire.

There, was my mother. Kicked out of her home in Northern Romania by the Romanian military. Forced to walk with her large family 200 miles to the killing fields of Transnistria.

There, were 3 of my uncles, who left their homes and traveled to join the Soviet army. On battlefields in the Eastern front. Fighting the Nazi Germans as they invaded the Soviet Union. The 3 of them killed in battle.

There, was my father in a Soviet gulag in the arctic circle in Siberia, where he was detained by the Soviets after crossing from Poland when the Nazi Germans were approaching his hometown.

And there, were 2 large beautiful Jewish families that were destroyed.

In Treblinka.

In Majdanek.

In the Miedzyrzec ghetto.

In Transnistria.

And on the battlefields.

The war has ended.

And there they were.

Surrounded by death and destruction.

And they rose.

They rose from the ashes.

It is said in the book of Deuteronomy :

“I have set before you life and death, blessing and curse. Therefore choose life, that you and your offspring may live.”

They chose life.