



My Grandmother, Janina Cerajewski, is the most courageous person I know. She was only 6 years old when the war broke out, yet she remembers a lot of what had happened during the occupation of her small hometown of Łobżenica in Poland.

Her town had been one of the very first taken over by the Nazis because it was located only 1.5 miles from the German border. At the start of the war, on Sept. 1, 1939, the Polish people in that area including my Grandma's family had to flee their homes on the spur of the moment. My Grandma's mom quickly packed a few things but in all the turmoil, she had forgotten their ID's and money on the kitchen table, as they had rushed out the door. My Grandma's dad had gone back to get their papers, but when he tried to catch up with the family, the bridge which they crossed earlier on, had already been blown up, so he needed to take the longer route. While my Grandma's family didn't know for two weeks if he was still alive, they kept heading East with a Caravan of people. Along the way, enemy airplanes were flying overhead and dropping bombs throughout the area and all the people ran screaming to hide in ditches at the side of the road. After reaching the Eastern front, where the Russian troops had also attacked Poland, my family was forced to return back to their already German-occupied town. In wartime, Polish people were ordered to share living space with strangers while their actual homes were occupied by German families or Nazi soldiers. So, my Grandma's family of five had to share one small room with

another family of five. After my Grandma's dad had finally been able to get reunited with them, he was ordered to register at the City Hall where he immediately got arrested and locked up in jail by the Nazis as a suspect of espionage. My Grandma remembers later on sneaking up near the prison building with her older sister to hand him food through the metal bars of the window to his basement cell. They needed to be careful not to get caught and stay brave while they heard terrifying screams coming from the jail cells. Eventually, their dad was released from jail and since he was big and strong, he got sent out to a labor camp in the German occupied territory. At the same time, my Grandma's mom was forced to work the fields of a Nazi Count nearby each day until sunset, while their three children had to fend for themselves. My Grandma was courageous, helpful, and kind, so many German ladies in town came to know and like her. They would regularly ask her to run errands for them and sometimes in return would give her food to take home.

Three years into the war, one day my Grandma (9) remembers walking with her older sister (12) through a grass field which was appropriated by a Nazi, where they got ambushed by Hitler Youth boys and got beat up for crossing the field. My Grandma got kicked in her head, after which she had lost her hearing in one ear and her older sister got kicked numerous times in her stomach which resulted in serious liver problems. Polish people were forbidden to seek any type of medical attention, so her older sister stayed sickly throughout the war. Sadly, she had died at only 15 years of age, soon after the war had ended. In 1945, as the end of the war was nearing, people in town heard of a transport train

coming into town with loaves of big cheese. My Grandma quickly ran to the train station and brought home a couple of these large cheeses, as well as some bread, but what was camouflaged underneath were hidden machine guns. Then the Nazis had all the prisoners of war marching through the town towards the West. They were US, Canadian, British and other allied soldiers, who were completely starving and utterly exhausted, so my Grandma's mom quickly cut up all the cheese and bread they had and handed it out their window to the appreciative soldiers who were passing through. The following day, the Nazis had burned their own military uniforms at the Town Square. My Grandma sneaked out to check if she could find more food, but what she saw along the way was Nazis in civilian clothes, lining up people (all those who supported Hitler through signing of a Germanization form during WWII), in order to ship them out of town to be executed so as to get rid of witness evidence. When a Nazi saw my Grandma staring, he grabbed her and pushed her into the line up. Thank God an old teacher, Mr. Tempski had been watching from a nearby building and had snatched her back behind the door where he led her to the back exit so she could escape. In the meantime, my Grandma's mom was worried out of her mind and as soon as she noticed her coming, she pulled her swiftly through the window into the house. No sooner did the whole family hide up in the attic of the house than the Nazis came pounding on the doors, but they also realized that they were running out of time to flee and rapidly left.

During the 6 years of war, all elementary school-aged children, including my Grandmother, were forced to attend a German school to learn the German

language. They were banned from speaking Polish and all Polish teachers, doctors, priests and other intellectuals were captured and taken to the nearby monastery called Górką Klasztorna, the oldest Marian Sanctuary in Poland.

Górką Klasztorna is situated about one mile from my Grandma's town and it possesses the most profound miraculous history. It is atop a hill, behind the forested ancient oak trees, where you can find a beautiful Baroque style church built in the very spot that the Virgin Mary holding baby Jesus in her arms had appeared to a shepherd boy in the year 1079. Unfortunately, this beautiful place had also witnessed some of the most grotesque history imaginable during WWII when it had been used by the Nazi SS Men as an Extermination Camp for Polish intellectuals, persons of the cloth, as well as English POW from around the area.



Having lived through a horrific time period in history which was filled with pain and suffering, my Grandma, at such a young age had to be extremely courageous and with God's help was able to survive. But in order to get through it all, she needed to learn how to cope and not feel the sadness she had seen or it would have been unbearable. Through it all, she always believed that God was with her. My Grandmother says it's only through our Lord's Grace that she's still alive and with us today and she's thankful to God for each and every day. And so, we are, too, profoundly grateful to God that my Grandma was able to survive through the horrible hardship of wartime.