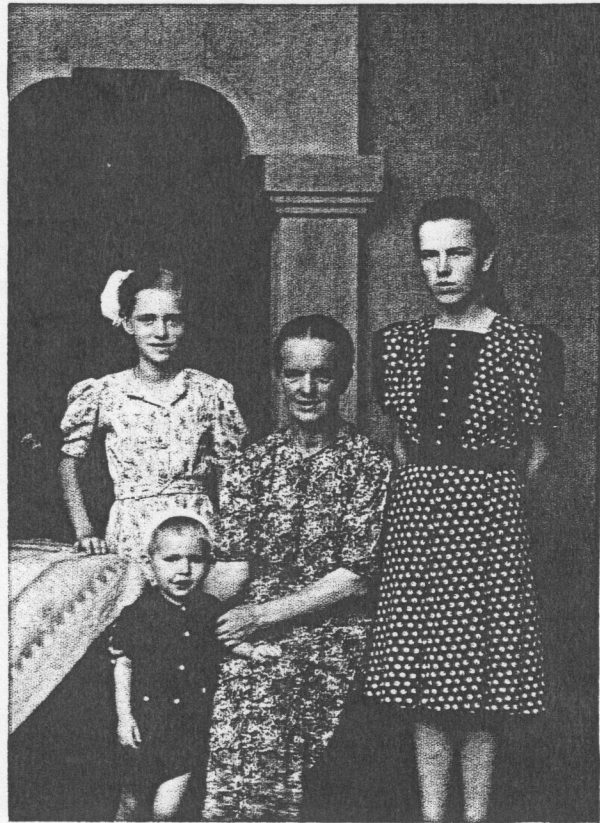


defeating an army and is clearly an attempt on both aggressors to attempt to destroy the Polish nation itself.

Ironically, the country which arguably has had the most destruction and suffering during World War II, seems to have the least written about its experiences. The tragic holocaust of the Jewish populations is almost treated exclusively as a simple religious persecution phenomena, with the world seemingly ignorant that an equivalent number of Polish gentiles suffered - and died - at the expense of German and Russian genocidal policies.

Czeslaw Milosz, a Nobel Laureate and survivor of the occupations of Poland, even wrote: "when the meaning of the word 'holocaust' undergoes gradual modifications, the word begins to belong to the history of Jews exclusively, as if there were not also millions of Poles, Ukrainians, Czechs, and prisoners of other nationalities."

In Eastern Europe - Ukraine, Poland and Czechoslovakia - approximately nine million gentiles (three million Polish) perished in the animosities and inhumane treatment of the Russian and German governments.



Russia Exiles Polish Citizens

1942 - The populace has heard the recent desperate orations of the optimistic Polish priest in the pulpit of the small church in Planta. The Russians have infiltrated Baronowicze and laid claim to the village of Planta.

But despite the propaganda of the Communist Soviets, claiming brotherhood and a fraternity with the Poles, the Russians did not come to the village of Planta (nor any other) to liberate the Polish. Immediately the Russian forces have immobilized the local Polish authority figure heads - removing the inflammatory Polish minister of the village and the councils of the county, while also confiscating grain, crops, livestock, and basic resources.

Russian 'settlers' began trickling in, displacing some of the existing Polish families off their own farms and ordering them to relocate to the less arable lands surrounding Planta. The Russians were allowed to tend the more productive fertile fields.

Shortly after, Russian military patrols became common sights.

Then on the cold night of February 10th, 1942, Russian soldiers burst into the homes of the locals and gave them an hour to gather up any belongings they thought necessary - and could carry - and to be ready to leave that very night.

A case in point, is the Borek family. Pat (Polek) Borek a child of 10 at the time, recalled that night, with stern military men harboring pistols and yet espousing promises that the family would soon be 'given everything free' after their relocation.

The Boreks were shipped by train to Camp Kamika in Siberia, near the port city of Archangel'sk, 250 miles from the Finnish border. The trip in itself was a torture upon itself - lasting some three months in a boxcar designed for cattle, tightly crowded, with nothing but a hole in the floor and no privacy for toilet calls, and saturated with disease and malnutrition.

And the train trip was not of constant movement nor of much freedom. One interval spanned a month in which the inhabitants of the cart were unable to leave the boxcar, enclosed in the small space and unsure of the future.

It was perhaps tolerable because of the small intrusions on the perpetual gloom and universal twilight of the train cart, small periods of abysmal joy and hope pulsating into the denizens of the train cart and giving them

strength to continue the journey. The most joyful Christmas, according to Chester, was his Christmas on the train as he was transported to Siberia, not even knowing it was Christmas day. Unexpectedly, the heavy door of the cart slowly opened, breaking the twilight of the cart and flooding it with light, and a small Russian woman appeared with a loaf of bread. Abruptly she said "Merry Christmas" in broken Polish and handed them a small loaf of dried bread, then ran off to the next cart. This small token of giving, a scent of humanity in the face of the inhumane, was enough to substantiate the will to go on, to endure the terrible in the optimistic hope that beyond the inhumane, the terrible, was something worthy of the suffering.

Family Endures Horrors of Siberia

1944 - The Siberian weather is one of the most intolerable, inhospitable forces on the planet. It is a condition of extremes — a scathing hot, abrupt summer and the intense cold of the Siberian winter.

A life in pictures:

Octogenarian Reaches 80!!

In Southern Ontario, in the small village of Hampton just outside Oshawa, Czeslaw Borek has lived more than a half-century now, marrying Maria Lachowicz, raising a family of three - Teresa, Richard, Barbara, making new friends, carving out a new life for himself.

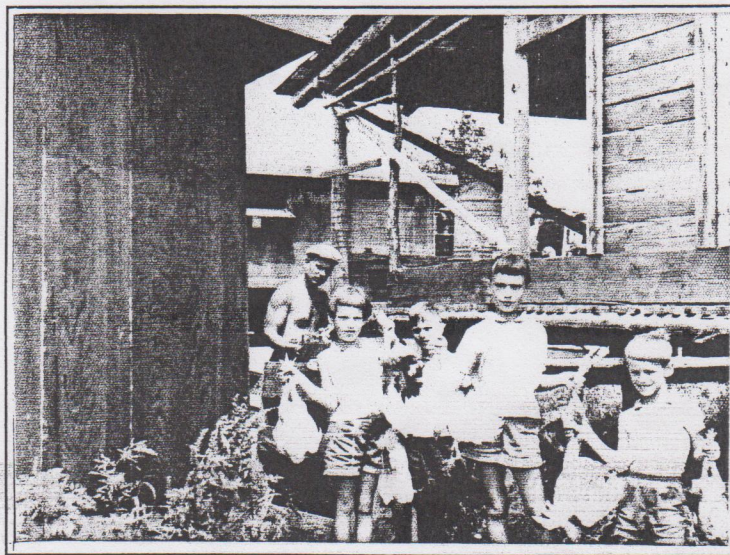
Unfortunately, it is inevitable that this history may die out with my father's generation unless it becomes re-told and written. It is unfortunate that in the half-century of the Boreks life has been skimmed over by history books : the experiences of an unimaginably arduous past for present

It is also unfortunate that there are so few artifacts remaining that survived the life of Czeslaw, most lost or thrown away in the inevitable tides of time. The ones that remain though, endure with the importance to family of being the final testament to his hard life. They are simple objects, a cup my grandfather's family carried through Russia and Siberia and kept by Czeslaw during his combat in the Second World War, a few maps of his homeland, some tattered clothing, they all are memorabilia of the past, all that remain to us of his great and poignant life.

However, here are a few highlights.



New life in Ontario: Hampton , Ontario



Work Crew: Czeslaw, Basia, Richard, Teresa, and cousin Andrew



A new life in a new land: Czeslaw and his new bride Maria on their farm in Saskatchewan circa 1951 with daughter Teresa, born August 16.

Death

- Maria Helena Borek (nee Lachowicz) on February 28, 1989 after a long bout of cancer. Wife of Czeslaw Piotrek and mother of Teresa, Richard and Barabara. Born in Poland on March 2, 1929,



Whole clan at Richard and Mary Ellen Borek's wedding.

The Second World War for many Polish civilians, such as the Borek family, was not a war fought on the battlefield, nor was it against any nation; it was a war against the Siberian weather, to stay alive and endure the harsh penalties of winter in Siberia.

The years in one of the Soviet labour camps in Siberia were a division between the arduous labor enforced by Soviet officers, and battling the extremities of the Siberian weather. Siberia became a frozen coffin for many Poles, Ukrainians, and Czechs relocated there. A third of Poles who were forced into the Soviet Labor Camps in Siberia during 1939 to 1942 perished, a number comparable to any Concentration Camp in Nazi Germany during the Holocaust.

In 1944, suffering two caustic years of labor and the ever impending promise of death, the Borek family was discharged from the Soviet Labor Camps in Siberia, the Second World War essentially over in Russia.

It would be bittersweet, for they had their freedom, but they were unable to return to their homeland in Poland to try to mend any semblance of their old life back together. Poland, the nation, no longer existed; it was to become a part of Russia, swallowed up in Russian nationalism and hatred.

Thus, this moment would become the start of a new, harrowing journey by the Borek family, displaced by history and without a nation or nationality. With no nation to return to, the Borek family became, in essence, nomadic, wandering and meandering through China and Asia, sometimes by train often by foot, and through India into the Middle East.

It is an ambiguous chronology, fraught with holes in geography and lapses in time, with few certain dates or locations: a history revealed in glimpses of time, peering through a keyhole of their guided tour of the memories selected to reveal and memories selected to hide, unrevealed and eventually to be lost in the drifts of history.

People would do what they could to survive, and two of the Borek boys - Chester and Polek - offered to become goat herds in the summer months, tending to meager flocks on their own.

Polek remembers the hard times, with little to eat but a porridge type gruel, and occasional treat of hard boiled water strained through a sugar cube. A baby brother, Felix, died of the Siberian epic. This tragedy was too often repeated in other families, some losing many.

Three Brothers All Survive War Service

1944 - After Hitler declared war on its former ally, Russia, the Soviets granted amnesty to Polish people trapped in the archipelago - those who could afford it. One family, the Boreks, bought their family's

Polish army unit re-forming in the Russian territory.

In a rushed decision, the family took passage on a boat and sailed the Caspian Sea to an English base in Iran. Here many men, including three Borek brothers, left the rest of their family behind in to join the 8th English Army under Field Marshall Montgomery. This allowed them to receive new clothes and for their families to become taken care of by the International Red Cross.



Borek brothers, Stasiak and Czeslaw: brothers in arms

freedom with some gold jewelry they had hidden throughout their ordeal.

Again a meandering and uncertain trek saw the family hop trains and walk throughout the northern expanse of Siberia, a three month journey on which a three year old brother, Kris, died from the dysentery or similar disease.

And such a journey was not without its harrowing terrors. On one occasion, the families were simply asked to leave the train and march to the next station, some 140 kilometers away, as the train was needed for some other military purpose.

Another incident saw the train stopped for refueling and a young Czeslaw wander away from it to gather some ripened grapes near by. In the interim, the train had left and Czeslaw was now separated from the only security in his world, his family. Only luck intervened, when two weeks later, as he found his way to Iran, he had managed to actually find his family!

The family eventually traveled south to the prairie town near Kierkestan, then by truck rides to the Baku oil fields where there was a

While some families went to various African destinations, the Borek family joined others in India, landing in Bombay, without brothers Stasiak, Wladek and Czeslaw. As many patriotic youths, Czeslaw was underage at 17 but lied so that he could become part of the effort. For training, the brothers were eventually sent to Egypt as part of the English forces. Of course, naturally the first thing the three brothers did was visit the Great Pyramids at Giza, and etch their names atop the Great Pyramids. The second thing they did though was compelled by their experiences at the hands of the Russians and Germans; the brothers felt it was necessary to enlist in the allied forces and fight to regain their homeland somehow, and perhaps to try to regain the sense of a national identity.

It was not only the Training which was harsh, but also the climate - extremes of heat in the day and contrasting chill of the nights. This too was compounded by the ever presence of mosquitoes, which carried malaria. Czeslaw was one who caught it and endured the chills and sweats of the affliction.

Enlisting in a Polish Corp of the

British Army, the three brothers joined the Italian Campaign of 1944-45.

As with many experiences of survivors of the combat in the Second World War, Czeslaw's experience was not necessarily a good one. But unlike most individuals, he had two brothers to support him, and even more fortunately, two brothers that miraculously survived with him.

Still, another near tragedy occurred when a bomb exploded near Czeslaw in a battle, and a piece of shrapnel tore into his chest and missed his heart by centimeters. It was later that Czeslaw found out that his own father may have died in the same hospital that he was in convalescing from the wound.

Czeslaw's military experiences, like his experiences in Asia and Siberia, may be obscured by the pain of a half-century of concealment. These end up as simply in the form of places and dates.

One of the few stories is his raucous period on leave in Rome, where Czeslaw, after some encouragement from drinking, was bet to run through the nearby quarries in bare feet, through the loose gravel and sharp rocks left strewn after a day of miner's blasts. The bored soldiers had a competition to see who could run the furthest and the longest. None of the participants was able to walk for a week after.

Another recollection is of the three brothers and a few companions climbing over the fences of the Vatican to get a glimpse of the Pope at prayer.

Beyond this, though, the war runs its course, with too little deviancy from the few humorous or trivial recollections and too much of the harsh reality that war has.

Yet war can bring out the noble and heroic in people as well. The story of the medals of these brothers is interesting as it is revealing of the character of the Borek brothers. At some point, the Borek brothers had been drinking in a canteen or bar. One of them had become embroiled in an argument with one of the soldiers - ally forces but from a Greek unit - which ended in a brawl of sorts. However, in their drunken logic, the three brothers decided to make their point with their fists. The logic was obviously as skewed as the numbers against them - some ten to three - and the rebuttal was that the brothers had been beaten up, and thrown out of the bar. The enraged brothers deciding that further points were to be made, limped back to their camp and sought their revenge. They wheeled some of the artillery gunnery and repositioned it so that it now faced the Greek unit, again their own allies, as it was camped out beside them. They began firing, which roused their camp,

and brought out their commanding officers. Fortunately, their aim was affected with the same influence as their logic and they managed to miss, while bombarding the zone towards the enemy. The next day, the commander had to make a decision, court martial for the brothers for an attempt to bomb their own allies or come up with an excuse to spare their lives. They decided to award commendation for anticipating an enemy advance and somewhere, when the high officers heard the circuitous story, they were awarded medals!

Life in Limbo?

War has displaced huge populations with many civilians of a nation finding no country to return to or little recognition of an old life. The difficulty in finding new roots may best be illustrated in the lives of one family - the Boreks of Poland.

After a Siberian odyssey, the family found themselves in a Russian prairie city of Tashkent - minus the brothers old enough to enlist in the British forces. In 1944, the Boreks landed in Bombay, India, where they arrived by way of Tehran to Karachi, Pakistan.

Pat Borek remembered his stay in Karachi particularly, with many other refugees frightened by the rains of a monsoon, "People were scared. We were standing there with our suitcases - swimming!" The people, deeply religious in some cases, thought they were in another world-wide flood such as that in the story of Noah's ark, until someone assured them that it was a seasonal monsoon, and quite common for that period of the year.

The Boreks spent the remaining years of World War 2 at the British refugee camp in Kolhapur, not far from Bombay, with some 20,000 fellow refugees and invalids of the war. There life was somewhat more calm, with even schools on site where children could continue some semblance of an education.

Being an 'army family' - three brothers had enlisted with the British forces, they received 68 rupees per month from the British government. They lived a quiet life there, though much was in short supply due to the war consumption. However, they could buy some food at a local market and other items from a black market operation set up on the outskirts of the camp. The Hindu people, whose religion forbade them the eating of pork, would catch wild pigs and sell them to the refugees.

"They made for good Polish sausage," stated Pat Borek.

"The Hindu people were good to us,"

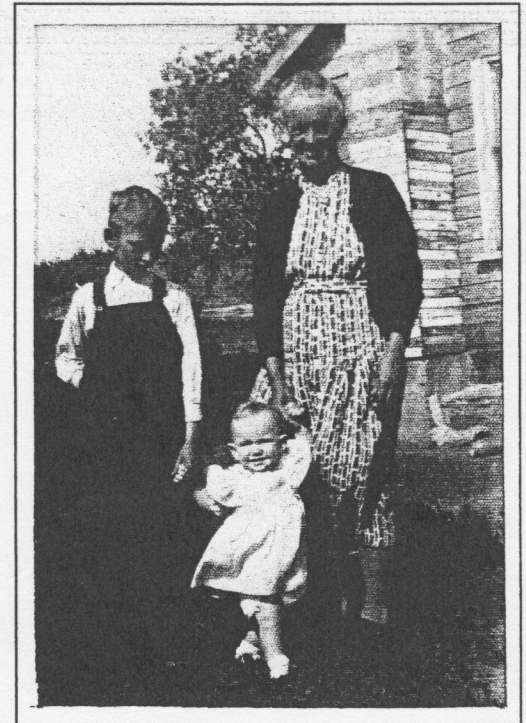
he remarked, demonstrating that the Polish people looked enough unlike the English. This made them relatively safe from the harm that the British needed to be diligent about - even instructed to walk in groups to avoid trouble from the Indians resentful of British colonial treatment.

In 1947, India won its independence from England and the Boreks decided to return to their hosts' native soil, England. They crossed the Indian Ocean and spent 21 days via the Persian Gulf, Suez Canal and Mediterranean, then the channel of Gibraltar and finally through the vicious Biscaye Peninsula.

They arrived in England on September 15, 1946 and spent two and a half years in Liverpool before finding out that two boys, Czeslaw and Stasiak were in Canada. And, having obscure relatives in Canada since 1919 who were willing to sponsor them, they had first access to immigration.

The two brothers had already landed in Canada as part of a recruited group of 500 former farm workers, selected by a commission of agricultural experts from the British Second Corps in Italy in 1946 This was the first large contingent to arrive in Canada after WW2.

The Boreks landed en masse in Montreal on May 29th, 1950, after eight and a half days on the ocean, with Czeslaw waiting for them at the docks. They took a train to Toronto, and then to the farm life of Saskatchewan.



Maria with son Krysek and grand daughter Teresa

Polish Immigration To Canada

In 1752 the first Pole arrived as an immigrant to Canada and since then, Canada has been a beacon of Eastern European citizens escaping the strident conflicts and warfare that has always burdened this region.

Numbers of Polish immigrants to Canada are ambiguous and difficult to determine as Poland was partitioned until 1918 and at various times, the actual nationality of immigrants was attributed to other categories. For example, between 1900 and 1914, 109,613 immigrants were of Polish descent, yet a census record in 1921 census recorded only 53 403 of Polish origin. Polish and Eastern European immigrants, though, were and still remain a large part of our national heritage and play a large role in many lives in Canada today. In Toronto, the Polish community is one of the largest in the World and in Peterborough, even, Polish is the third most spoken language.

In the 1940's a new group, the biggest yet, of Poles and Eastern Europeans arrived in Canada, survivors of the most recent conflict, the Second World War.

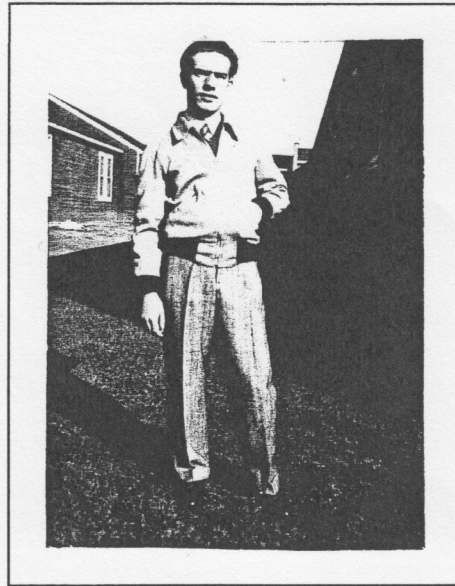
Among the new wave of Polish immigrants following the Second World War was Czeslaw Borek and his two brothers, following their Second World War service in the English chapter of the Allied Forces, serving in the Italian Campaigns of 1944/1945. They had used the army as much as the army had used them, and the three brothers escaped the war with an honorable discharge and a medal each, though perhaps of dubious merit.

With this, the new life of the Boreks began in Canada, and their old life effectively erased: their region of Poland was now officially part of the massive Soviet Union, their small village ravaged by warfare, and the citizenry of the area was now, even after some scant four years, virtually strangers to those of the pre-war populace.

But their old life did not die completely, as it remained a common bond among the many survivors of the horrible experiences of the Second World War. It manifested itself in their behavior and attitudes, some aberration to the 'norm' of a new society with its own set of foreign values.

Czeslaw initially began a nomadic journey through the Canadian frontier. He began his life in his new country with the prerequisite physical, which revealed that he

had tuberculosis. He spent a year and a half in a sanatorium near Brandon, Manitoba, with other



Czeslaw at the barracks which made up the sanatorium for afflicted immigrants.

Polish immigrant soldiers. But with every storm, comes some sunshine - here he formally learned his newest language, English, through lessons, which reflected the keen intelligence of a hungry mind - to date, he had picked up Russian and Italian.

The Borek family, reunited finally again after the entire clan had applied for immigrant status, began in what it knew best - farming in Saskatchewan, raising turkeys and the like.



Czeslaw 'Chester' Borek working on the farm

Meanwhile, three brothers, Wladek, Polek and Stasiak, found this circumstance difficult to sustain such a large number and decided on logging in Northern Canada with his brothers, and fishing in British Columbia.

The survivors of such ordeals as war, unfortunately, found their experiences difficult to deal with and some sought solace in solitary and occasionally reckless lives, pursuing employment and living in the extreme conditions of Northern Canada. The Boreks are a case in point.

Polek Borek, for instance, spent forty years in a hard life of a laborer - initially a miner in BC and Northwest Territories, who ironically in peace time suffering from what war could not inflict - losing a leg in a mining accident. Some years later, this ended his career as a blaster in a mine. He then found work, first as a maintenance man then as a bull cook for Nisku Alberta. He had the leg amputated below the knee -which he freely showed anyone who showed curiosity - in 1987 and retired.

Another brother, Wladek, and also had a fondness for drink which resulted in his early death - he was killed when he was stabbed in a bar in Vancouver.

Eventually, and perhaps inevitably, Czeslaw settled down in another small farming hamlet of Hampton, perhaps to recreate the Polish village of his youth, and began to enjoy the severed life started early in his youth.

The family decided to return to Toronto, where they felt a Polish community and employment opportunities offered more. Eventually sister Jasia married Broniek Borkowski and they had three children: Andrew, Margaret and George. Younger sister Zosia married Wladek Gronkoski and had children: Ted, Danusia, Ron, and Tom. Youngest brother Kris eventually married later in life but died tragically in his mid-forties in 1989.