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LET THE LION DWELL IN YOUR HEARTS

The title of my memoir is borrowed from a book entitled *The Dictionary of Life-Saving Words*, which appeared under my editorship two years ago and was distributed in a free-access to Polish schools, universities and the media (Paluch, 2023, p. 471; Wilczynski, 2022a, 2022b, 2023). The initiative to write a collective monograph was my reaction to Russia's aggression against Ukraine and the need to create such a literary source that can be used immediately for preventive and therapeutic purposes. Testimony to the openness and hope with which this publication was received will also remain alive through the available radio broadcasts (Dąbska-Wieczorkowska, 2023a, 2023b; Łopaciński, 2023; Wieczorkiewicz, 2023). I would like to add something else today.

Towards the end of this essay, there is a key passage from the *Dictionary* about the power of forgiveness and reconciliation as the purpose of the testimony given to a grandchild by his grandfather. This is what my competition article will be about. The story, then, is about testimony, about experience, about identity, which is not done for its own sake - for the wartime factuality, but always for the future, for present and future generations. I am sure that my grandfather, in speaking to me, was speaking to all those who are already here and who will come after us. He passed on to me what I call a 'seedling of thought' and a 'flame of hope'. I thus became a secondary witness to the first witness - an emissary of truth. The former - the 'seedling of thought' - develops patiently in the mind and heart, growing in the cycle of my life into a tree of knowledge of myself and the Other. The latter - the 'flame of hope' - shines regardless of my will, grief or anger. It is - it exists. (cf. Paluch, 2024).

I am 43 years old, an academic lecturer, a tutor of future teachers. I am a grandson of Captain Kazimierz Ziajka¹, a refugee, a volunteer soldier, who fought at Monte Cassino in May 1944, in the ranks of the 4th Battalion of the Carpathian Riflemen of the 2nd Polish Corps, conquering Hill 593 in a fierce combat action. This Corps united tens of thousands of men, but also women, youth and children, who, after internment in the Russian lands (Kazakhstan, Siberia), formed a volunteer Polish Army in the East. In time, under the leadership of General Władysław Anders (1892 - 1970), it became a major fighting force, forming part of the Western

¹ My grandfather wrote down his memoirs of his war time, which have been published in print (Ziajka, 2013). An annotation of the grandfather is also available on Wikipedia: https://pl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kazimierz_Ziajka

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Allied armies (USA and Great Britain). Norman Davis, an English historian of the fate of Poland, will mention years later the beginnings of the formation of this army with the telling words: '[...] it shows emaciated, exhausted, shambling and malnourished men dressed in rags' (Davies, 2020, p. 62). In addition to the murderous training on the training grounds, restoring physical vigour and the ability to fight the regular German army, moral strength was built up by the words of songs, prayers and orders, symbolised by the sonorous phrase recalled in the title of the essay, about the lion that dwelt in the heart. These are the words from the beginning of the order read by the commanders to the corps soldiers just before the attack on the Cassino fortress.

Fighting evil, especially evil using bestiality as a method of extermination, requires dashing, leaping into the abyss, it requires a lion's heart and strength. However, the lion is also a symbol of wisdom, security and good luck. We often see its figure in majestic repose and tranquillity. In the command about the lion inhabiting the heart, there is also a message about being ready to fight against ourselves - against that which can turn us into a bloodthirsty, vengeful beast. I know something about this because, as a representative of the third generation of post-war Poles, I am burdened by the trauma of the war and its consequences - I am unable to voice and name it all.

It is only now that many of us recognise our own hallmarks of war trauma - the unconscious search for sources of stress reduction, addiction to images of war, dreams referring to war scenes, human dead bodies, explosions, limited sensitivity to crying... Only now - thanks to the research of Polish contemporary psychotraumatologists - we learn that we are still carriers of unworked war trauma, and that the rates of post-traumatic traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) in Poland are the highest in the world, reaching 20 per cent of the population (Rzeszutek et al., 2023). Researchers point to the reasons for this state of affairs, enumerating firstly the lack of consent to historical truth during the communist era and the occurrence of numerous psychological repressions among the participants in the war. These manifested themselves in falling silence, avoidance of difficult subjects, denial or distortion of experience. My grandfather did not fit into this model. He talked to me from an early age, allowed me to draw scenes from the war, browsed through war reports that were full of photographs depicting the tragedy of the battles fought. But never - and I must stress here - in the many conversations with me, did he ever say anything dictated by the logic of retaliation. When I 'pressed' him with the force of childish questions about perpetrators and victims, he used to answer me about the Nazarene who prays to his father with the words: 'God forgive them for they know not what

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they do'. I did not understand this message, nor my grandfather's insistence on avoiding explicit stigmatisation of our neighbours. In the end, he taught me a lesson about the salutary power of civil courage, which need not be at all inferior to frontline courage.

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(Excerpt from the Dictionary)

I was a personal witness and addressee of the pedagogy of reconciliation when, as a thirteen-year-old boy, I took part with my grandfather in the 50th anniversary of the victorious Battle of Fortress Cassino. Until then - and I made no secret of this - I had felt an aversion bordering on hatred towards the 'Krauts', and the German language itself made me afraid. On a memorably hot day in May, when, after two days of arduous travel in an old, rusty bus, we reached the top of the mountain where the Polish military cemetery is located, most of our veterans were so exhausted and dehydrated that just leaving the bus required assistance. Half undressed, looking around uncertainly, we stood in loose formation, unsteadily, in front of a group of men clad in impeccably pressed linen shirts, summer tasteful hats and high brand sunglasses. In the background of the imposingly graceful elderly gentlemen stood a modern, two-storey, 'multi-star' bus. In a child like me, who was leaving the borders of his communist-ravaged country for the first time, the sight caused initial awe. However, the chance encounter of a young boy with a group of elderly people somewhere in a car park between hundreds of vehicles descending from all over Europe and the world is remembered for an entirely different reason. For the well-off gentlemen were former German soldiers who had shot at Poles in their youth, and now came to their graves to lay flowers. Their easygoing manner dimmed somewhat as soon as they realised - as did we - that the consternation that had arisen would eventually have to be broken by something. I stood like that for a while - between a victorious Poland and a defeated Germany. Was it really? The whole situation raised a childish doubt as to who was actually winning, and it also overwhelmed me emotionally in many other ways. My grandfather brought me out of the trap. Like a pedagogue and therefore - as the Greek teaches - one who guides and accompanies a child in discovering the world, he grabbed me firmly by the forearm and pulled me towards the first of the Germans. 'Grandson, now watch and learn!' - he brought out with a concentration of mind that was difficult to conceal, and after a brief, determined look in the eyes of his former enemy, he just as determinedly shook hands with him. He looked like a man in whose heart the lion had once again taken up residence - a gentle firmness beat from him....

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I think today, as an educator and parent, that bearing witness from one's own life - especially from the war, but not only - requires thinking the whole thing through and being guided by the intention to build a new pedagogical perspective. Putting into it, a narrower, personal historical perspective is a good starting point for talking about everything and everyone.

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