

A PLATE OF POLISH DELICACIES

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Lindsay usually returned to the home she shared with her husband, Richard, in Abbeville by driving along Route 73. Her business was about 16 miles north in Alder. She often thought about stopping into a roadside stand she passed just outside of Alder. It was a small, square building with a garden tent on the front, sheltering a picnic table. The sign next to the stand read “Pierogies Stuffed Cabbage”.

Most roadside stands stocked perennial favorites like fresh produce in summer or homemade ice cream. The word “pierogies” was Polish. She googled the words one morning and her suspicions were supported. But how did Polish cuisine come to semi-rural Route 73? Lindsay resolved to satisfy her curiosity and visit.

She parked on the gravel driveway next to the stand one Tuesday afternoon. The stand had a half-glass door. Inside was a table with the promised menu and a smaller round table with two chairs. Lindsay inspected the pierogies; one taste had her hooked! They were so full of flavor her mouth sang. The stuffed cabbage was not a casserole but rows of logs. The rolls were delicious. She sat with a plate at the small table. It was comfy; she soon became lost in thought.

Abruptly she returned to sentience as a small upright woman wearing a colorful apron entered. “I do not often get a visitor. I saw your car. I had to come and see who you are.” Her English was accented, but Lindsay could not place it.

“My name is Lindsay Hoff. I drive by here twice a day coming to and from my business in Alder. There is no counting the times in three plus years I have wondered about pierogies. Polish cuisine across from a cow pasture seemed a little out of place to me. Today, I just resolved to do something different and stop. Your pierogies are a great reward. It is a flavor I cannot place.”

“These are recipes from the Old Country. Do you know of where I speak?”

Lindsay thought back to her morning’s search. It was important to be observant and pick things up because the old woman was like an opaque pane of glass. “Poland”, she said slowly. The woman brightened right up with that. “My name is Marta.” She offered Lindsay a cup of tea. But Lindsay felt she had built enough bridges for one day; she suggested next week at the same day and time would be very pleasant. She had this impulse to curtsy, but her gut yelled out “NO!” and Lindsay took her leave of the old woman.

Lindsay and the old woman had several cups of tea together on successive Tuesdays. One afternoon, the old woman brought a tray of different kinds of cookies to tea. Lindsay sampled each type and found each flavored delicately with cinnamon and other spices. The old woman intoned, “My mother taught me her recipes. I suppose she learned them from her mother. My name is Marta Czartoryska. I am the eldest of four girls; one of my earliest memories is removing cookies from a sheet. We lived in the city of Poznan.” Marta queried Lindsay as to where Poznan was located. She volunteered ‘halfway between Warsaw and the German border.’ Marta broke into a wide smile.

Marta continued. “My parents kept a butcher shop on Podgorna St. I was born in 1936; the Germans invaded Poland when I was three. My father no longer took me to the Zoo in Poznan on Sundays; I missed the tigers terribly. There were German soldiers everywhere; but they left toddlers like me alone. First, my father complained about the meats he could get. Then, there was just occasional pieces of meat he kept for his best customers. Our family never ate meat. The rationing lasted long after the War ended. My mother was able to get flour and butter

from customers. She kept the shop stocked with her breads and cookies. She kept up on news and gossip in the neighborhood and city when customers dropped by hoping to find some meat in the shop.

One of my parents' best customers was a doctor. He was tall and good looking. His name was Witold Czartoryski. He started coming to me with his purchases when I was about 17. He complimented my clothes and my diction and vocabulary. He gave me tips that were always more than what he spent. After six months or so, he asked my father if I could accompany him to a play. I had never been to a play. It was wonderful! Many times, he took me to a fancy restaurant. We could never hope to eat that way at home.

My parents began inviting him for coffee after he returned me home. Finally, one evening he asked my father for permission to marry me. They were thrilled; they had three more girls to marry off. I was not sure what marriage would mean. A connection with a Czartoryski, a revered Polish family whose history stretched back hundreds of years, could only help me. He was so good to me! So, I became Marta Czartoryska.

My life was the lap of luxury. We had a cook. My husband encouraged me to read and talk with his friend, the bookseller, whenever Witold was too busy for lunch. I had only to mention a book and he brought it to me. Witold loved to hear about my studies and walks over lunch or dinner, Polish history, and literature. My husband loved radio; he listened each night. We learned the latest dance steps in our living room. My husband had two brothers, Tadeusz, and Tomasz; both were doctors like Witold. Neither was married. They came to dinner once or twice each week. Over cocktails they discussed their patients; over cigars after dinner, they discussed politics and events in Poznan and Warsaw. Tomasz was terribly funny; we always said Good Night chuckling as they left.

We attended Mass twice during the week and on Sundays. Once a week on Thursday afternoons, I held a *faify*, a tea for neighbors, Witold's friends; people from church. I made all of Mama's delicacies myself. Witold stopped seeing patients early on Thursdays so he could be home to greet guests. Often, some of the guests were invited to stay for dinner. They discussed events at factories and shops and how the labor reform movement was catching fire in Poznan.

Life had become this agreeable round of visiting when Witold started to leave the house after dinner. Rarely did he return before midnight. Of course, I was awake waiting for him. He started to have trouble sleeping.

Lindsay arrived the next Tuesday for tea and found the stand empty. Marta was nowhere to be seen. There were no cars parked in the driveway. Marta could not be at home. "Does anyone know that I make these visits to Marta?" she asked herself. She thought of Richard, her husband. "But he doesn't have anything to do with this." Lindsay talked with Richard about her visit and asked what, if anything, he would do in her situation. Richard reminded Lindsay how they had gotten bulletins on a good friend who had an accident by calling their rector at St. Bartholomew's.

Richard pointed out that someone from Poland is very likely to be Catholic and probably attends the nearest Catholic parish. "That would be St. Michael's in Alder." She knew the priest there as her business had done some work for the parish. The next morning, she called Father Reuther and explained the reason for her call.

Was he in a position to tell her anything about Marta Czartoryska? "Oh yes, she collapsed this morning during Mass. We called the Rescue Squad and they double-timed it to

the hospital. Many problems that are not dangerous become that way when a person of Marta's age is involved. I have just come from the hospital. Someone had to see she was in good hands. She is at the Holy Cross Frederick Hospital. They have admitted her. Are you a friend of Marta's?" Lindsay nodded and spoke about their weekly teas.

She mentioned Marta's complaints about the flu several days ago. Father Reuther said she seemed asleep during Masses of the past few days. That was not like Marta. Lindsay thanked him profusely for the information. She would go to the hospital after work and try to visit Marta.

Finally, all her employees were gone for the day. Lindsay gratefully locked the front door and headed off to the hospital. In the main pavilion, a Volunteer found Marta's room number. She cautioned Lindsay that Visiting Hours would only continue for another 45 minutes because of Marta's condition. Lindsay asked if there was a Doctor's name connected with Marta. The Volunteer found it, one of the ER physicians. Lindsay thanked her and set off for Pavilion E. Marta's room was easy to find; the Doctor was making a PM check.

Lindsay explained who she was and asked if there was a diagnosis. "Pneumonia. There are a lot of things in modern life that can be a culprit. I would like to stay and noodle it; but I have seven more patients to visit." Lindsay thanked him and looked in on Marta. She was sleeping. Lindsay sat in the visitor's chair; she would stay the half hour until Visiting Hours ended.

Marta awakened about 10 minutes later. She was not sure where she was. Lindsay explained the events of the day. Dinner arrived. She made sure Marta was aware of the diagnosis and what might have brought it on. . Marta asked how she could thank Lindsay for

her help. Marta began to whine about the problems of getting old. She spoke wistfully about her husband, Witold. To distract her, Lindsay asked her to tell her more about her husband.

“Witold’s behavior changed radically that spring of 1956. One evening, I worked up my courage to ask him what he was doing that was so troubling. He said I must never repeat this conversation. Witold said he was one of the leaders of the Polish United Workers Party. They were fighting for better working conditions in factories, mills, etc. He treated so many injuries from working in the mills; he was tired of the lives wasted. The Soviets insisted this kind of political activity could not be tolerated; the Polish Government in Warsaw was told to suppress it at the highest levels, whatever the cost. Witold was certain our house was under surveillance. If the police came to me, I was to say I know nothing.

Things reach a top in June 1956. There were riots; the Polish United Workers Party was blamed. Soviet troops helped the Polish government by clubbing and shooting people demonstrating in the streets. Witold left the house one morning after hugging me tightly several days after the riots began. I never saw him again. I felt like there was an enormous hole in me. Could not people see how I was ripped apart? Two days after Witold disappeared, my brother-in-law Tomasz came to the house with a letter for me. Witold had written it a week earlier.

It told me how terribly he loved me. But we would have to find a safe place like America to go on. There were instructions for me.

1. Find the vault hidden in the house; give 1000 marks each to my brothers-in-law.
2. Cut my hair short, put a false bottom in a valise for the valuables, pack warm clothes and a favorite book.
3. Live at my parents’ house until a message to leave Poznan comes.

4. Have Mama fit mourning clothes and go to Mass each morning?
5. You will know person to help you leave Poznan.

One day not long after, my father attended Mass with me. He told me the time had come to leave. I was to walk to the Hotel Europa and look for a taxi displaying a sign with 'CZ' in the window. The taxi would take me to the town of Wielkopolski. He put an old zloty coin in my hand; "give this to the person who brings you to West Germany".

The next morning Mama said her good-byes on the way from Mass; I walked to the Hotel and found Tomasz waiting to accompany me. We found the taxi; the trip to Wielkopolski was uneventful. He left us at a slaughterhouse on the outskirts. The abattoir explained he would hide us under pig carcasses that would withstand even bayonet thrusts to get across the East German border crossings into West Germany. His wife served us a good meal of pierogis and stuffed cabbage to fortify us for the day ahead. I had plenty of valuables and cash if we needed to bribe someone to successfully manage the border crossings to West Germany.

The pig truck brought us to the small town of Wittstock. We smelled terrible; Tomasz found an inexpensive pension where we could clean up and clean our clothes to get the horrible odor of dead pig OUT. Tomasz said he would visit the Ratskeller and see if anyone knew how to leave for America. Later on, he came back to say he had a plan to get us to America.

It took us a month or more to get to Baltimore. But one day we found ourselves in front of St. Casimir's Church on O'Donnell St. The parish priest was overjoyed to hear Tomasz was a doctor. We were guests at a huge celebration the next day with Polish food; dancing; music and introductions to members. They gave us a hat full of money and showed us a place for Tomasz to open a clinic next to the grocer. Several people were already at work painting.

Several years later Tadeusz came from Poland and joined the clinic. The political climate had thawed since I had left, and it was easier to emigrate. I was Tomasz' nurse in the beginning, but I began doing the administrating after a few years. In 1980, Tadeusz left the clinic and moved to Pittsburgh because his wife's family was from Pittsburgh. He has a son, Tomasz, who visits me often. He is a little bit like my child; the pierogies are for him and his friends that work in this area. His father is so stern and demanding of him that I try to make it up to him. He was by recently for pierogies and stuffed cabbage."

Marta stopped while the loudspeaker advised that Visiting Hours had ended. Lindsay said her good-byes and promised to return the next day.

Lindsay found a message from Father Reuther saying he would pick up Marta from the hospital later that day and bring her home. She needed several days of bedrest to be sure the pneumonia was gone. But he advised that someone needed to fetch Marta's car from the Church and drive it home. Lindsay said she would take care of that.

Father Reuther called. He reported Marta had been speaking with her brother-in-law, Tadeusz, for over an hour. It sounded like a very troubling, emotional call. Marta had come halfway around the world under very dangerous circumstances, and the fact of getting old is a challenge he was sure Marta could master. Father Reuther suggested they take Marta out to dinner at a local diner for some comfort food.

A short while after the three sat down, a middle-aged man approached the table and began speaking with Father Reuther in Polish. After a few minutes, Father Reuther turned to Marta to say, “ this gentleman has a very interesting story you will want to hear.”

“My name is Witold Dombrowski. I was named after Dr. Witold Czartoryski of Poznan, Poland. My mother had a very difficult pregnancy after two miscarriages, but she followed Dr. Czartoryski’s instructions, and my parents felt terribly blessed at my birth. During the riots and unrest in 1956, my father found Dr. Czartoryski on a street with bullet wounds and he brought the doctor to our house to nurse him to health. We buried him in our garden. Before he died, the doctor gave me this pocket watch and asked us to find his wife and give the watch to her.

Marta was speechless. She squeezed the pocket watch and looked at the inscription she had told the jeweler to make on the back. She tried to speak several times but could not. Finally, Marta croaked “could I go to Poznan and find his grave?”

There was one wrinkle. Witold did not know where to find his childhood home. He brought up the connection his mother had with Dr. Czartoryski. He told Marta he did not believe his mother had long to live; would Marta visit her? Witold believed that the knowledge that the pocket watch had been returned would bring a great sense of peace and completion to his Mother. She could tell Marta where the house and the grave was located in Poznan. Would Marta mind a trip to central Pennsylvania for a visit?

Marta asked if one could fly to Poznan. Lindsey Googled it on her phone. Sure enough, flights were no problem. She asked Father Reuther how he knew Witold Dombrowski. “It was a year or more in the making.” Witold’s mother talked to a priest at her church in Dundalk about

her regret at never finding Marta. Somehow the priest had heard about Marta's tea cookies, even though Marta and her brother-in-law had left the area for Alder many years before. Finally, one day the priest from Dundalk realized Marta was a widow and might be the woman in the Dombrowski's story. One day, I went to gathering of Baltimore-area priests and happened to meet the priest from Dundalk. He told me about Witold's mother, and I was sure that Marta was the person in the story. I wanted to bring Witold and Marta together.

Lindsay commented to Marta, "if you go to Poznan, it will not be the place you remember. Even with the right addresses, it may be difficult to find the location of the grave. There will be a lot of walking and not all of it will be fun and fruitful."

Lindsay, Witold and Marta walked slowly down long and antiseptically clean corridor of the nursing home. But there were children's drawings on the walls; collages featuring residents. They stopped at a Nurse's Station and Witold asked about his Mother's day so far. The aide reported she had slept a lot and not finished her usual meals. The threesome continued on to a room marked "Dombrowski" and Witold entered.

A tiny woman sat in an armchair by the window. Witold walked up to her with open arms, saying "Mamaaa". She asked in Polish who the other two visitors were. On cue, Lindsay held out the pocket watch and pointed to Marta. It must have been a bolt from the divine, because Witold's mother suddenly looked skyward, crying, and said "Czartoryski". All three nodded. Marta took a piece of paper with her name printed in Polish and Witold's mother picked it up, hugging it to her chest.

Witold had found a picture of a house where he thought he lived while in primary school in Poznan. He showed it to his mother, then turned it over and pointed to what he thought was the address and asked if she remembered it. He opined they had given his mother enough stimulation just by being there. He thought they should have a drink of juice with her and sit for 10-15 minutes to see how she reacted. Lindsay asked Marta how she was feeling. She said it was joyous to hear Polish spoken again!

Witold's mother drifted off to sleep. The three visitors made ready to leave, but that awakened her. Witold picked up the picture from Poznan. Suddenly, he realized the church he attended with his parents would have a list of members. If his mother could not help, Marta could find and visit the church. "St. Witold", Witold murmured. But he showed the picture to his mother one more time and she nodded and pointed to a window and pointed to Witold and then mimed sleeping. She closed her eyes. Witold received a call that evening that his mother had passed away after they had left the nursing home that afternoon.

Lindsay saw it was too much to ask of Witold, whom they had just met, to discuss a trip to Poznan while he said farewell to his mother. Lindsay called Witold the next day and suggested she help Marta decide to visit Poznan. Not only where should she stay, but were members of Marta's family still living in Poznan? Could they help to find the grave? Would they help exhume the body and reinter it?

Marta had her mind made up when she and Lindsay next talked at a Tuesday tea. The thought of seeing Witold's grave would bring her to that tremendous affection she had for Witold. She could focus on a place where he was!! Lindsay knew when she was beaten. She asked about Marta's family; her nephew Tomasz. Could they go? Marta promised to pay for all

of Lindsay's expenses plus a stipend if she would come to Poznan. Was a lack of knowledge of Polish a problem? Marta said her Polish would get them through. Lindsay promised to have a plan in 10 days for their journey.

Marta and Lindsay finally agreed on a place to stay in Poznan. Lindsay went home and booked the flights; in a few days they walked up the jetway to find themselves in Poznan. Lindsay had practiced some Polish on the plane and said her greeting words to the assembled throng. Marta loved the suite they had reserved and the drinks in the minibar. Later, Lindsay talked with the Business Center about getting a translator to go with them to St. Witold's, the church their friend Witold remembered from childhood.

It took the cab driver some minutes with the map to figure out to which St. Witold's he should take the three women. They arrived to find to find a small church with a steeply pitched roof. An older woman opened the front door, so they knew it was not locked. The translator had been briefed on what to say; so, the threesome went in to look for a priest. Soon, one emerged from the gloom. It took about 20 minutes for the translator to explain their search for the Dombrowski House and the reasons behind the search. Then, she introduced Marta.

Marta's voice quavered a little as she explained who her husband was. The priest's eyes googled as he grasped the hopes and prayers today's visit carried for Marta. He introduced himself as Father Romulski and asked for a few days to do some research in church records and among church members. He took the picture Witold Dombrowski had given them. He hoped to have a guide to take them to Dombrowski House site to find out the condition of the grave area. He urged Marta to see the Poznan June 1956 monument and others celebrating the city's efforts to be free. The translator made an appointment to return. It would be a long three days....

The priest stood in front of the address for the Dombrowski House from the parish records. Eight house lots had been merged to site a four-story building. It was part of the Poznan University School of Medical Science. Wherever Witold was, the building covered it now.

Marta was tremendously saddened; she had built up the moment when she saw Witold's grave in her mind. She realized that moment would never be. Marta soon saw the tremendous effort needed to find Witold. She realized she was too old to be scurrying around the Poznan of 2021 to dig up the world of 1956. She was wise enough to know that once one started digging up history that the repercussions did not stop with the "simple" act of a new burial. That event could have consequences she could not control nor from which Marta could shield herself. Perhaps she could find another way to celebrate Witold's life.

Lindsay was relieved, but she realized this was not a conclusion Marta had come to easily. She asked if they should remember his service to the workers in Poznan; his work as a doctor or his love of Polish culture? Lindsay wondered if the Poznan School of Medical Science might have a way to commemorate a doctor. Marta loved that observation. But how would they meet a person who could help them? Lindsay suggested they do some internet digging and then get some help from their translator and Father Romulski from St. Witold's.

Internet research in Polish was different. Marta was no help. They put a call into the translator and explained the predicament. A few hours later, Lindsay and Marta met up with the translator and Casi, with computer, to navigate the internet. Casi found an office at the School of Medical Sciences which in Polish meant "help" or "gift". Casi helped them understand

addresses, so cabbies were not totally perplexed by Marta's directions. Lindsay asked the translator to make appointment soon and began to plan their visit

Lindsay and Marta were early for their appointment. They needed a place to wait; the two-story entry atrium with its rear wall of glass drew them to find a seat among the multi-colored chairs and contemplate the beauty of the day. Several benches outside sheltered amid boxwood bushes that traced curling footpaths. Later, when they met the people in the office, Marta told them how beautiful the atrium and garden were as she told them her story. The assistant said it would be several days before their chief returned. She urged Marta to write down her vision for a memorial to Witold and send it to her. Having met Marta, she felt she could take that document and cast it in terms of the programs they had.

Marta started to write in Polish after they returned. But the words were labored, and she switched to English. She struggled with "vision", until she closed her eyes to access her "mind's eye". It took time to see Witold walking with her or at a party. Finally, she saw Witold greeting a patient with his bag of instruments. Yes, she felt such pride and joy in this man who was her husband. She knew Witold loved her. She was not alone.

It took many months to turn the vision Marta saw in her mind's eye that day into a living piece of granite. The lettering at the base of the monument said simply:

**WITOLD CZARTORYSKI SERVED THE PEOPLE OF POZNAN AS A DOCTOR
AND AS A LEADER OF THOSE YEARNING TO BE FREE DURING POZNAN JUNE
1956.**

The School of Medical Science sent a beautiful photograph of the statue in the atrium to Marta, wrapped in the Polish flag. That flag would help her finally grieve her loss.....