

# A Train from Poland

By Delaney Zeidman

The train was leaving the station just as he arrived. My eyes with a window of tears fixated on him through a blurry lens. Yet my memories allow me to see the man clearly. His face had cinder covering the olive skin, gray hair outweighing the brunette, and faint spots of dirt and blood stained his clothes. It was the first time I saw him in six months and deep down I knew that would be the last. Going back in my mind those five seconds have stuck with me, feeling like an eternity.

The year was 1939. I was 11 years old when Mama put me and my little brothers on a train from Poland to France. We sat in silence the whole ride. I looked out the window trying to ignore the sound of painful cries from a young girl in the booth behind us. After an eternity we arrived in Gare Du Nord. Malkiel, my 6 year old brother, grasped my hand tightly. Benjamin, who was 9, led us to a bench where we sat. Malkiel laid his head on my lap and I began to stroke his thick brown hair. Benjamin was swinging his legs back and forth, staring at the trains coming and going. We didn't say a word. We were too tired, hungry, and heartbroken to speak.

About 45 minutes later a woman by the name of Elyna Monet asked in broken Polish if we were the Anielewicz Children. Once confirmed she led us to a car, helped put our stuff in the trunk and then sat the three of us in the back of her Cadillac which took us to a nice sized house. We were only to stay with Pani Monet for a few days until the boat to England was able to take us to our new host family. She was a very beautiful woman, very tall with the body of a ballerina, long arms, red lips, soft eyes, and a narrow nose. Pani Monet was very kind to us. She tried her best to converse with us, but her Polish was limited to an old book that looked as though it was borrowed from a library. My fondest and really only memory of staying with Pani Monet was when she tried to teach me piano forte. I was sitting at the bench pressing down on the keys. The random notes being played sporadically must have caught her attention. I remember her softly placing her hand on my shoulder and then sitting next to me on the bench. Pani Monet then began to point to the notes on the sheet music and would place my hand on the key at the same time. It felt like we spent the whole day playing that sweet music of Mozart together.

Three days after arriving in France Pani Monet walked us to the docks. She made sure we got on the boat safely and had all of our stuff before waving goodbye to us for the first and last time ever. The boat ride felt short. Grabbing the luggage and Malkiel's hand, My brothers and I walked on to the dock of Kent, England where we were immediately greeted by Pan and Pani Halsey. Unlike Elyna Monet, Benjamin and I could talk to the Halsy's cause Papa instead we learned English after the war began. Malkiel knew only a few words but we were sure to help him understand. The two were an older couple, around their late 40s. Pani Halsey was a stout woman, she had a decent belly, cheerful face, and joyful green eyes. Her hair was a faint chestnut color and she walked as though it was a skip. Pan Halsey was a tall lanky man. His eyes were shielded with a pair of brown, rounded glasses. A clean face and bald spot on his head, but a very

bright demeanor and kind smile. We walked through a nice little town that was full of children playing on the streets and shops of all different kinds. It was so much brighter then back home. It reminded me of being Malkiel's age when my father was home, and everyone around us was happy.

The Halsey's house stood at the corner of a small neighborhood. The yard was fenced in and the house was quite tiny, but I liked it for it reminded me of home. Pan Hasley opened the door and we walked into a pois living room, where a cocker spaniel laid on the salmon colored couch. On the right was a little yellow kitchen with a round wood table and five chairs. The table was covered by a feast of chicken, roasted potatoes, bread and some greens. The smell made my eyes look with yearn as my mouth watered for satisfaction. The two invited us to sit down and we awkwardly walked over to the table. Pani Halsey began to serve food onto the plates as we all sat in complete silence. I went to take a bite of the delicious smelling chicken until Pan Halsey cleared his throat, grabbed my hand and began to say a christian prayer. He then told us to please dig in and enjoy while they explained some rules to us. Honestly the rules were not that bad:

Number 1-we must go to church on Sundays.

Number 2-we have to do our chores.

Number 3-Take academics seriously.

Number 4-mind your manners and show Halsey's respect.

Number 5-Don't talk about where we are from or why we moved in.

Pan Halsey reminded us that rule number five was the most important. The Halsey's told us that to everyone else we are orphans that were adopted. That was the truth, it had to be the truth or else my brothers and I wouldn't be safe. Pani Halsey then mentioned that even with this cover up we didn't have to call them mother or father. She reintroduced themselves as Aunty Alice and Uncle Edwin.

After we finished eating Aunty Alice took me to my room while Uncle Edwin went with the boys. It was tiny and smelled of old books, peppermint, and sawdust. There was a single window looking out to the neighbors backyard, and a twin bed that was nicely made up with a quilt that looked homemade. A bookshelf in the corner that also had a few dolls and trinkets resting upon it. A small closet was to the left of the bed that was waiting to be filled with dresses and shoes. Next to my bed on the other side was a small nightstand. It had two drawers for clothes and a lamp on the top. In the corner stood a beautiful mirror resting upon the old wood floor. I put my suitcase down and turned to Aunty Alice. I thanked her for dinner and the room. Aunty Alice stared at me, I was tired and sweaty from the heat. My hair was greasy and I knew that I smelled of sea from the boat ride. Aunty Alice let out a smile and asked me to follow her. She grabbed a towel and led me to a little washroom near the top of the stairs. Aunty Alice handed me a bar of soap and a towel before she left me alone for the first time in the house.

After bathing I walked into my new room and began to get ready for bed. I got into a long sleeve, striped, button up gown and then put my hair in a loose braid with a pink ribbon. Before nestling into bed, I went across the hall to my brother's room. Benjamin was still in his clothes and still smelled of sea water. He must have bathed Malkiel while I was getting dressed, because

my youngest brother was already in his pajamas and under the covers. I sat on Malkiel's bed and began to snuggle him. Benjamin walked over and sat down at the edge. Once again it was just the three of us. I pulled my brothers close to me and gave them both a kiss on the forehead. Then in a soft whisper I spoke "Nie martwcie się, moi bracia, bo jesteście bezpieczni."

Benjamin headed towards the shower, and I gave Malkiel another kiss before heading to my room. The Hasley's were downstairs, cleaning up from dinner still from what it sounded like. Benjamin was in the washroom finally able to rid himself of the ocean. I slowly dragged my feet to where my new bed stood, and wrapped myself in the quilt. Before long my eyes became very heavy, and for the first night since Poland I was able to fall asleep without a worry.

I remember my dream that night. I was brought back to that morning only four days ago. Mother walked my brother and I to the train station while Malkiel rested on her shoulder, still half asleep. There were tons of kids here of all ages who were also being sent away due to the war. This war was the same reason my father has been away. He and some other men from our town joined an underground revolution that was helping people who were not of "Aryan race" to escape those of the Nazi party. Yet the war has gotten worse, and my mother knows that Poland is no longer safe for us. I pleaded with Mama to come with us, but she claimed that it was easier for kids to leave because they are able to be put into a host family until it was time to return home. We stood there, the four of us in a little huddle until the train whistled. Mama handed Malkiel over to me and Benjamin grabbed the bags. With tears in all our eyes we kissed our mother goodbye and walked into the line of children heading towards the train. I took my brothers to a booth where two other kids sat across from us. Both girls, one looked as though she was my age but the other little girl was between the ages of Benjamin and Malkiel.

Malkiel still was weeping as we looked at the window trying to find Mama in the storm of crying mothers. I remembered how Mama told me to take care of them, that it was now my job to keep my brothers safe. I felt tears swell up in my eyes again. I was scared, I could barely even do fractions in school, how was I supposed to take care of two young boys? Why did I have to be the oldest? How can I do this without my mother by my side? I continued to stare out the window with tears in my eyes, fixated on Mama who I found in the crowd. The train blew its whistle again signaling that it was ready to go. I still stared at Mama. She was the last person I wanted to see, but then out of the corner of my eye I saw something. A man running into the station, a man running close to my mother, a man that I realized was my father. For the first time in months I had finally gotten to see Papa. I couldn't look away from him, I missed him since the day he left. We would receive letters every few weeks but that was it. Looking at my Papa all my fear, worries, and doubts began to leave me. As the train moved forward, my parents now out of sight I grabbed Benjamin and pulled him close to me. With my arms around my brothers, the two boys who I had to protect, I took a deep breath and worked up the will to speak. "Nie martwcie się, moi bracia, bo jesteście bezpieczni." *Do Not Worry My Brother's, For We Are Safe.*