

Ms. Krystyna Balut



Mrs. Krystyna Balut, a long time active Polish Home member died surrounded by her family on Good Friday, April 19, 2019. She was 88.

Her small figure behind a history table was a familiar site to anybody attending Polish Festivals or Bazaars, where she tirelessly shared the story of the Polish survivors of the Soviet WWII deportations to Siberia that so few lived through. Ms. Balut's personal story and those of other local survivors were subject of the award winning documentary film "*A Trip To Nowhere*" and its book companion, both created by Shannon Hart-Reed.

Krystyna was born in Pińsk, eastern Poland, November 23, 1930. Her Father was a train conductor. When WWII broke out he went into hiding to fight in the Polish underground, and she, her Mother and Grandmother moved further east to get away from the Nazi threat. However, in 1941 the NKVD arrested all three of them in the middle of the night, shoved them into a cattle car with 60 other people, and they were deported to Siberia. Krystyna was only 10 years old. About year later they escaped to Persia with Gen. Anders' Army, then spent six years in displaced persons camps in India and a year in Africa.

Her Father spent the war fighting in the Polish underground. He fought in the 1944 Warsaw uprising. When Warsaw capitulated to the Nazis, all inhabitants were taken to a train station to be sent to different concentration camps. Of the few possessions in his bag was his train conductor's hat. He put it on, acted like he was working there, and escaped deportation.

When Krystyna was 18, the British DP camp in Uganda was being closed. They could go back to Poland but Krystyna's Mother refused to return to a Soviet controlled country. Krystyna's Grandmother did not want to learn another language, so she chose to return to Poland. Krystyna's Father did not want to leave Poland, so her parents divorced. Krystyna was able to see his Father on her first trip to Poland in 1966; it was a very heart-warming reunion after 27 years!

Krystyna and her Mother immigrated to Montreal, Canada. There was a large Polish community there, and that's where she met her husband, Przemyslaw Janusz Balut. He escaped from Poland in 1950 with his brother on a stolen plane. They were married in 1956 and had their first daughter Grazyna in 1958. Przemyslaw got a job at Boeing and they moved to Seattle in 1959 where Tomir was born in 1959 and Halina in 1962.

Krystyna's professional career in Seattle included working for Virginia Mason hospital, Sundstrand, and Fiserv.

For refugees like them, friends from the closely knit Polish community became an extended family. The Polish Home was like a family home to them. Krystyna was very involved at the Polish Home. She was an active member of the Ladies Auxiliary Club. She got her daughters involved in the Polish dance groups, and sewed costumes. She worked hard at the bazaars, and was most notably known for the handmade purses. She has been a member of the Polish Home for 60 years!

In her later years, Krystyna's passion was to share the story of the Poles who were deported to Siberia, a little known part of WWII history. She was a key instigator and hero in the project "A Trip to Nowhere", and would attend each bazaar and festival to share this story and to sell books and DVDs about it. She was also featured in Monika Melen's Polish documentary "*Kawalek Polski w Seattle (A Piece of Poland in Seattle)*".

Krystyna loved her Polish Home family. Thank you all for being such an important part of our lives.

Przemyslaw Balut passed away February 2009, after 52 years of marriage. Krystyna is survived by her daughter Grazyna (son-in-law Larry, grandchildren Nick and Kaysy), son Tom (daughter-in-law Celeste, granddaughter Paige) and daughter Halina (grandson Dustin, granddaughter Amanda (grand son-in-law Jaime, great granddaughter Savannah Krystyna), and grandson Colton (great grandson Matthew Janusz).