

MY AUNT, OLGA NANYNIEC NOWAK

A speech given at The Sydney Jewish Museum, Sydney, Australia 6th December, 2016 by Marika [Nadel] Biber. Olga was recognized as Righteous Among the Nations in April, 2003.

OLGA NANYNIEC MARRIED MY MATERNAL UNCLE LESZEK NADLER [NOWAK] WHEN WWII ENDED.

WHEN THE WAR FRONT REACHED BORYSLAW, A PROVINCIAL TOWN IN GALICIA, WHICH WAS THEN EASTERN POLAND, SHE WAS 21 YEARS OLD.

SHE WAS THE YOUNGER DAUGHTER OF A UKRANIAN GRECO-CATHOLIC FAMILY. HER MOTHER WAS STEFANIJA AND HER FATHER VASILI.

AT THE TIME, OLGA WAS EMPLOYED IN THE OFFICE OF THE LOCAL TOWN HALL, THE MAGISTRAT.

HER FATHER OWNED FORESTS AND WAS THUS A FORESTER, HER MOTHER WAS A HIGH SCHOOL TEACHER BUT BECAUSE SHE WAS UKRANIAN, SHE WAS NOT PERMITTED TO WORK IN HER PROFESSION; INSTEAD SHE WORKED AS AN OFFICE WORKER.

THE PARENTS LIVED ON THEIR RURAL PROPERTY.

OLGA LIVED IN BORYSLAW AND HER WORK SITUATION PROVIDED SOME PRIVILEGES.

HER DAILY FOOD RATIONS CONSISTED OF 1LT OF MILK AND A LOAF OF BREAD.

THE MONTHLY RATIONS GAVE HER ACCESS TO BUCKWHEAT, SOME MEAT AND CIGARETTES.

TOWN PEOPLE EXCHANGED RATIONS WITH RURAL DWELLERS AND WHAT OLGA RECEIVED SEEMED TO BE ENOUGH FOR HER.

OLGA'S FIRST CONTACT WITH NAZI TERROR CAME IN 1941 WHEN GERMAN SOLDIERS RE-ENTERED THE CITY AND BEGAN A SYSTEMATIC KILLING OF JEWS.

JEWISH STORES WERE LOOTED; JEWS WERE RESTRICTED FROM ENTERING PUBLIC BUILDINGS, FROM USING PUBLIC TRANSPORT OR FROM MOVING FREELY ABOUT THE CITY.

ONE DAY WHILST AT WORK, OLGA NOTICED AN ELDERLY JEWISH WOMAN BEING IGNORED BY THE STAFF AND MADE TO STAND AND WAIT.

OLGA FELT SORRY FOR THE LADY AND BROUGHT HER A CHAIR TO SIT ON. THAT SAME AFTERNOON THE POLICE CAME TO ARREST OLGA. SHE WAS DENOUNCED BY HER COLLEAGUES AND IMPRISONED IN THE POLICE CELL FOR 4 DAYS.

OLGA'S EXAMPLES OF DECENCY AND COURAGE ARE NUMEROUS. SHE WAS THE KIND OF PERSON WHO ALWAYS HELPED THOSE IN NEED. IT WAS IN HER CHARACTER TO BE LIKE THIS. SHE ALWAYS KNEW WHAT TO DO WHEN SHE WAS INJUSTICE EVEN IF IT MEANT PUTTING HERSELF AND HER FAMILY IN DANGER.

AT THAT TIME SHE SHARED A FLAT WITH A COLLEAGUE WHO KNEW LESZEK AND WHO OFFERED TO HIDE HIM.

WHEN LESZEK AND MY MOTHER, ALKA NADLER SCHUSS, WENT TO SEE THIS PERSON, OLGA WAS PRESENT IN THE FLAT.

AFTER DISCUSSING POSSIBILITIES, PLANS, OPTIONS MY MOTHER AND MY UNCLE LEFT THE FLAT. MY MOTHER, BEING ALWAYS RATIONAL AND REALISTIC TOLD LESZEK - I THINK YOU WILL DO BETTER WITH OLGA.

THIS IS HOW THE TIES BETWEEN OLGA AND MY FAMILY BEGAN.

OLGA REQUIRED A FLAT FOR HERSELF NOW AS SHE WAS HIDING BOTH MY UNCLE AND MY WIDOWED GRANDMOTHER, CECYLIA NADLER [nee FEUERSTEIN]. EACH TIME HER ACCOMMODATION WAS

BOMBED OR WHEN SHE WAS DENOUNCED, SHE HAD TO FIND A NEW PLACE FOR ALL THREE OF THEM.

SOMETIMES, THE TOWN MAYOR, WHO WAS A UKRANIAN AND A FAMILY FRIEND INSISTED SHE COME AND LIVE WITH HIS FAMILY BUT SHE COULD NOT REVEAL THE REAL PURPOSE OF WHY SHE NEEDED TO HAVE A FLAT OF HER OWN.

IT WAS DANGEROUS FOR NEIGHBOURS TO SEE HER CARRY FOOD SUPPLIES AS IT DREW ATTENTION. SHE COULD ONLY CARRY ONE LOAF OF BREAD AS WHY WOULD A SINGLE WOMAN REQUIRE MORE THAN THAT?

AT THE SAME TIME AS SHE WAS HIDING MY GRANDMOTHER AND UNCLE, SHE WAS HELPING OTHERS IN NEED. SHE WAS A GO-BETWEEN MY GRADMOTHER'S SISTERS. SOME HID IN THE FOREST AND OLGA WOULD DELIVER FOOD OR EIDERDOWNS AS THE WINTER APPROACHED. SOMETIMES SHE HAD TO SELL THEIR BELONGINGS IN EXCHANGE FOR A PIECE OF MEAT OR HONEY OR SUCH. SHE OFTEN WALKED FOR KILOMETERS ALONG THE FIELDS SO AS NOT TO DRAW ATTENTION TO WHATEVER IT WAS SHE WAS CARRYING.

ALKA NADLER SCHUSS HAD ARYAN PAPERS BUT SHE WHEN SHE WAS RECOGNIZED SHE HAD TO FIND A HIDING PLACE.

OLGA'S SISTER, VOLODYMIRA KNOWN TO THE FAMILY AS, DZIUNIA, LIVED WITH HER DAUGHTER, GENIA, ON THEIR RURAL PROPETY SOME 120KMS AWAY.

OLGA TRAVELLED BY TRAIN TO SEE HER SISTER AND TO SEEK HER ASSISTANCE. IT WAS ARRANGED THAT ON A DESIGNATED DAY DZIUNIA WILL CATCH A TRAIN, ARRIVE AT THE BORYSLAW TRAIN STATION, LOOK OUT OF THE COMPARTMENT'S WINDOW AND NOTICE THE PERSON WHO WAS STANDING BESIDE OLGA [THAT PERSON BEING ALKA]. DZIUNIA WOULD HAVE BEEN POINTED OUT TO MY MOTHER WHO THEN KNEW WHICH COMPARTMENT TO GO TO AND TO CONNECT WITH DZIUNIA.

THUS TWO TOTAL STANGERS, BOTH YOUNG WOMEN, CONNECTED WITH ONE ANOTHER INSIDE A TRAIN'S COMPARTMENT AND TRAVELLED 120KMS BACK TO DZIUNIA'S PROPERTY TO COMMENCE A LIFE TOGETHER.

ALKA STAYED WITH DZIUNIA FOR ALMOST 2 YEARS UNTIL SHE WAS RECOGNIZED AND DENOUNCED AGAIN.

IN THE MEANTIME, OLGA NEEDED TO FIND ANOTHER PLACE TO LIVE AND AS IT WAS DIFFICULT TO ACHIEVE, SHE SENT LESZEK TO HER PARENTS IN THE COUNTRY.

LESZEK LIVED THERE AS A DISTANT RELATIVE.

OLGA'S MOTHER KNEW HE WAS A JEW BUT NOT HER FATHER. LESZEK WAS NOT A COUNTRY BOY AND WAS NOT CAPABLE OF HELPING OUT ON THE PROPERTY LIKE CHOPPING WOOD ETC. OLGA'S MOTHER, STEFANIJA, ALWAYS RELIEVED HIM OF THESE DUTIES. ONE DAY HE ASKED HER 'WHY ARE YOU LETTING YOUR DAUGHTER DO THIS? TO WHICH SHE REPLIED 'IF THIS IS HER WISH, I WILL SUPPORT HER'.

MY FAMILY WAS NOT THE ONLY ONE WHICH BENEFITTED FROM OLGA'S DECENCY. SHE HELPED HER NEIGHBOURS, SHE FED A SINGLE MAN ON WEEKLY BASIS WHEN TIMES WERE TOUGH, SHE HELPED A MAN WHO RAN AWAY FROM A PROCESSION BEING LED TO EXTERMINATION AND HID HIM

I ALSO WANT TO TELL YOU ABOUT OLGA AS A PERSON NOT ONLY THE BRAVE HERO.

FIRST AND MOST OF ALL, OLGA LOVED PEOPLE.. SHE HAD A LOVELY SINGING VOICE, SHE LOVED TO DANCE, SHE LOVED TO HAVE GUESTS.. HER CULINARY ACHIEVEMENTS WERE FAMOUS

I HAD THE GOOD FORTUNE TO HAVE KNOWN HER AS A SMALL CHILD WHEN WE LIVED TOGETHER.

ONE DAY I FELL DOWN AND BUMPED MY HEAD. A BIG LUMP WAS EMERGING ON MY FOREHAED AND MY MOTHER TRIED TO STOP IT BY PRESSING A SILVER SPOON TO THE AREA. OLGA, IN THE MEANTIME WAS FEEDING ME LITTLE PIECES OF CHOCOLATE.

I ALSO KNEW HER WHEN I WAS A TEENAGER WHEN WE LIVED WITH THEM AGAIN UPON OUR ARRIVAL IN SYDNEY, AUSTRALIA. NEVER EVER, DID I FEEL UNWANTED OR UNLOVED.

OLGA COOKED AND WASHED AND CLEANED AND PLAYED MUSIC - RICHARD TAUBER, JOSEPH SMIDT, MARIO LANZA, SOUTH PACIFIC - AND SHE WAS ALWAYS HAPPY AND CHEERFUL.

IT DIDN'T MATTER WHO ONE WAS, WHERE THEY CAME FROM, WHAT RELIGION, COLOUR, CREED, ALL THESE PEOPLE WERE OLGA'S FRIENDS AND THEY ALL RESPECTED HER AND CARED ABOUT HER.

SHE ALWAYS HELPED HER HUSBAND IN WHATEVER BUSINESS THEY HAD, BE IT A DELICATESSEN, A COFFEE LOUNGE, OR A SENIORS HOME. HER APPLE SLICES WERE LEGENDARY. AS SOON AS THEY CAME OUT OF THE OVEN, THEY DISAPPEARED.

SHE WAS A MOTHER WHO LOVED HER CHILDREN AND GRANDCHILDREN UNCONDITIONALLY.

WHEN LESZEK WAS DIAGNOSED WITH ALZHEIMER'S SHE TRAVELLED BY PUBLIC TRANSPORT FROM DOUBLE BAY TO HUNTERS HILL EVERY DAY TO BE WITH HIM. SHE WAS DEVASTATED WHEN HE DIED BUT HER CHILDREN, HER ENTIRE FAMILY WOULD VISIT ON DAILY BASIS TO BE WITH HER, NOT BECAUSE THEY FELT SORRY FOR HER BUT BECAUSE THEY WANTED TO BE IN HER COMPANY. SHE ACCEPTED EVERYONE WITHOUT RESERVATIONS.

MY HUSBAND, ALEX, AND I WERE PRIVILEGED TO SPEND EACH EASTER TOGETHER. DURING THE TIME I WANTED TO HEAR HER WAR STORIES SO THAT I COULD USE THEM TO HAVE HER RECOGNIZED AS RIGHTEOUS. SHE HAD AN AMAZING MEMORY. SHE WOULD RECALL 'IT WAS TUESDAY 3RD MAY.....'

ALTHOUGH SHE NEVER SOUGHT RECOGNITION, SHE WAS ABSOLUTELY THRILLED TO HAVE BEEN RECOGNIZED. IT WAS POSSIBLY AROUND THAT TIME THAT SHE REFLECTED ABOUT WHAT IT WAS THAT SHE HAD ACTUALLY DONE AT SUCH A YOUNG AGE AND SHE WOULD SAY 'I DON'T KNOW HOW I DID IT'.

SO MANY OF US TODAY ARE SO GRATEFUL AND FULL OF APPRECIATION THAT SHE DID DO IT.

SHE WAS A TRUE HERO, MODEST, KIND, LOVING AND ACCEPTING .
THANK YOU OLGA NAYNIEC NOWAK.