

# My Journey From Poland Through Siberia To the US



To Heaven

By Alexander T. Reckie

*With comments from Stephan Reckie*

My name is Alexander T. Reckie, and I was born on July 18, 1926, in Baranawicze, Poland, at 36 Kolejowa Street (Railroad Street) opposite the railway station.



*Baranawicze, d. 19. VII. 1927*  
36 Kolejowa Street July 19, 1927

In the early 1920s, Poland had borders between Russia and Germany. Because of this, it was very often occupied throughout history by Russia, Germany, and even Sweden in the fifteenth century. The last occupation was by the Russian Communists after World War II. Poland remained under the rule of the Russian Communists for almost fifty years.

My father, Kim, was an architect. He worked at the City Hall in Baranowicze, and he also built houses and buildings.



My mother Maria was a housewife, and she was educated in Russia as a school teacher. She was very active with charities and helping the poor. She belonged to the Association Against Cruelty to Animals. She was very loved and respected by her neighbors. She was a beautiful blond woman, a good mother, and a good wife to my father.

Our religion was Russian Orthodox and my mother took me to church every Sunday. She taught me about God and to believe in God, and to help people in need.



My mother and father met in St. Petersburg in Russia in 1917, where they were attending St. Petersburg University. My mother was studying to become a teacher and my father to become an architect. They were married in 1918 and my brother Anatole was born on September 1920 in the South of Russia.

During the Russian Revolution, my father served in the Russian White Army under General Anton Ivanovich Denikin. He was wounded in a battle and was awarded the St. George's Cross of bravery. He lost two fingers on his left hand and most of his fingers on that hand were left paralyzed. He could not use them and received a pension for his

injuries. He was moved from the Caspian Sea area to a hospital in Baranowicze Poland. Leaving my mother and brother behind. He eventually managed to get them to Poland by bribing communist officials with gold, and they came to Baranowicze Poland with Polish passports.



My early life in Baranowicze, as I remember it, was happy and enjoyable. I had lots of friends and we played volleyball, tennis, stickball, and cricket. We had great times together.

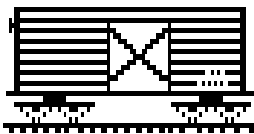
Every Christmas and Easter, my father had an open house and everyone was invited to come to eat and drink at the holiday party. He killed a pig and made kielbasa and smoked ham, and well. They killed chickens and geese for the party. There was always plenty of food and drinks for the guests at his parties.

About 15 miles from Baranowicze, there was a beautiful lake called Switez. Adam Mickiewicz, the Polish poet wrote in “Pan Tadeusz” of this lake, which at that time belonged to Latvia. General Pilsutski took the lake back from Russia in 1920. The City Wilno, and this land was Polish again. My brother taught me how to swim in this lake.



The Russian Communists occupied Poland in 1941, and my home became known as Bialorus. They arrested my mother and placed her in the Baranowicze jail. I did not see her for 13 years after that. They returned and took my father, brother and me to Siberia to a family work camp (Posiolki) in Aczynska Krasnojarski Kraj (Krasnoyarsk Krai is a federal subject of Siberia Russia, with its administrative center in the city of Krasnoyarsk)

We traveled in ordinary animal box cars used to transport animals and the Communist treated us like animals too. We traveled two weeks to Siberia because the war had started between Germany and Russia. We were often stopped at stations to let the military trains pass on their way to the Russian front, with Russian soldiers and their equipment, tanks, artillery, and spare parts for their tanks.



We had a little food with us, which had to last us until we got to Siberia, because the Communists gave us no food at all, only hot water from the locomotive engine. We finally arrived in Siberia Kasahstan in Central Siberia. We could not escape because the Communists would see us and shoot us down like dogs. If we did travel without papers and permits we would get killed.

We walked 10 miles from the station to Kolhor (government operated farm). At the farm, our pay was only bread and water, no money, no meat, and no fruit. Our only entertainment was Russian movies run by the power from a tractor, and they were silent films and only a narrator explained the films.

We once worked at a mill, repairing it, and were given a little fish soup for our hard labor. There were berries during the summer and we could eat them, but at that time there were brown bears near and it was frightening to have a 500 pound neighbor next to us. They do not attack people, but they only defend themselves. If you shot a bear and did not kill it, he would take you apart with its strong paws.

In the winter, it was very cold, -20 to -30 F. We had no real shoes and the snow was 2 to 3 feet deep. We made our shoes from paper and if they got wet we made another pair from paper. We had no beds and slept on concrete floors under only a blanket.

Once, one of the women went in delivery labor and we asked the Commissar to get a doctor. He answered that people did not need a doctor to deliver baby, and that only animals needed a veterinarian to deliver their young. People's lives did not mean too much, as people died of starvation and sickness and no one helped. They just buried the dead under the trees like animals, without any prayers. Stalin either killed or imprisoned priests during his regime and closed the churches. He killed 20 million Russians, and his wife killed herself. Stalin arrested his sister-in-law and put her in a Siberian Prison Camp.

My father, brother, and I were sentenced to 20 years in the labor camps. I was only 15 years old and needed food to grow, but only bread and water was allowed. I was very thin. In the summer we picked wheat at the farm and put in on a conveyor belt into sacks to ship to Moscow and other cities. Very little was left to be given by the government to us.

In 1942, General Sikorski, after meeting with Stalin, asked him to free the Polish people from the slave camps. We were freed. We got some old clothes by selling our belongings, and bought some food for traveling to join the Polish Army in the South of Russia. My friend and I started the trip south, and it took us three weeks to get there. Alma Alta, the "City of Bread" (called that by a Russian Czar) but by then was the "City of Dead". People were laying dead at the stations for weeks and they buried them anywhere they could find space. They died like flies from hunger and sickness.

I traveled with my friend. We had no extra clothing and we got infected with lice, because we did not bathe for a week traveling on the filthy trains. I became sick and was taken to the hospital. I do not know how long I stayed there. When I got well I crawled on my knees to the chapel to pray and thank God that I was alive. All the churches were closed by the Communists.

I went to the Polish authorities and they gave me bread and some money. We left by a Russian boat on the Caspian Sea to Iran. I had money, so I bought a lot of food, which I had missed so much for 1 1/2 years. I ate too much and got sick with dysentery and was taken to a military hospital in Iraq. I stayed in the hospital a week and then returned to my unit. I had watch duty with my rifle, when the Arabs came and stole everything at night. Once they stole a piece of artillery by pulling it with a camel. No one saw them when they did it. They dressed in black at night and we could not see them coming into camp.



I traveled to Egypt. The nights were cold, 30 degrees F and we had to wear warm clothes at night. The day time temperature was 100F and we laid in the tents doing nothing. We trained at night and slept during the day.

I was not yet a soldier because I was only 16 years old. I fought in the Polish Army as a Boy Scout with the Scout Cross on my shirt. Most of the boys and girls who served in the Polish Army were 14 to 16 years old. Most had no parents. Some were sent to Africa, to Tanganyika, where the English had open camps for the Polish children, and even opened churches and Polish schools. I received training as a male nurse and we were sent to Palestine. One day some Polish soldiers of Russian Orthodox descent took a trip to Jerusalem and together with some Russian nuns we went to the Jordan River where Christ was christened by John the Baptist. A Russian priest dropped a cross into the river and one of our soldiers dove in to recover the cross. From Palestine we were sent back to Egypt for more training.



Egypt was the “Land of the Pharaohs” who made their slaves build the pyramids. They built the pyramids with straw and clay bricks and the buildings lasted forever. When the Pharaohs died, they were buried with all their belongings including food in the pyramids, for they believed they would eat after death. If they had wives, they were also placed in the tombs and died there. Sometimes they had many wives.

From Egypt we moved to Italy. We arrived in Sicily and were then moved to Monte Casino. There, we began our fight for the freedom of the world and we hoped to free Poland as well.



The battle of Monte Casino was hell. The Germans held the high ground in the Monastery, they could easily see us and we could not see them. It took three assaults to take the hill. On the first attempt we came back down with many casualties. On the second attempt we failed again and we lost many young soldiers,

men and women alike. On the third attempt we were supported by planes dropping bombs on the Monastery. It was hell. The night was bright as day. The bombs and artillery shells lit up the sky. We were afraid, but we fought for Poland. The day we took Monte Casino, we put the Polish flag on the hill.

20,000 young men and women died in the Battle Of Monte Casino. There was a song written about Monte Casino that went “Red poppies drink Polish blood, soldiers walked through hell and died for Poland”. They buried General Anders in Monte Casino cemetery. The Polish people visit the cemetery at Monte Casino and bring flowers for the dead.



After world War II, I went to England where I worked in the Swinden Wilshire Hospital for a year. I met a girl in Swinden and I liked her a lot. I dated her for one year.

In February 1951, I left with my father for New York City. My brother was still in London and my mother was in Wilno, Latvia. In New York, the economy was depressed and I worked several jobs in factories. I enrolled in college in 1958 in Brooklyn to study construction. I worked as an construction inspector for 28 years.



In 1957, I joined the U.S. Navy and after boot camp in Bainbridge MD, I was stationed in Pensacola Florida at the Naval Base. I worked a year and a half as an aircraft mechanic, fixing planes. I made the rank of a Third-Class Metal Smith. I fell and injured my back and was taken to the Philadelphia Naval Hospital. I was discharged and received a pension. At first it was 30%, then 50% disability. I wanted to spend 20 years in the Navy.

In 1961, I met Sophie and dated her for a year.



We were married in 1962, in New York. In August of 1963, our son Stephan was born. It was the same year President John F. Kennedy was assassinated in Dallas,

Texas. I could not believe that it happened. He was a good man and a good President.

As I was attending college, I started work as a Construction Inspector inspecting highways, buildings, bridges, pre-cast concrete, and steel and concrete structures. I became a member of the Teamsters Local 282 Union and started earning a lot more per hour. Before I joined the union I made only \$70 per week, working 6 day a week with no overtime or holiday pay. Sophie joined the Local 1199 Hospital Workers Union and her salary went up too.



We were living at 671 West 162nd Street in the Upper West Side of Manhattan when our son Stephan was born. At that time everything was inexpensive, rent, clothing, gasoline etc. When we began to make more money it seemed the prices increased 3 times over.

Stephan went to Kindergarten and then to a private Episcopal school, St. Hilda's and St. Hughs, until the 8th grade when we moved him to the Bronx High School of Science.



He graduated from High school and moved to Boston, Massachusetts to study at Tufts University School of Engineering for 4 years. After he graduated he worked at Digital Equipment Corporation, Ready Systems, Continuous Software, and other companies, starting as a hardware Engineer, and then moving to sales.

He bought a house in Medford in 1994 and I moved into his home because he wanted someone there to watch the house when he traveled. We are living in a very nice area of Medford and I have made many new friends.



We have wonderful neighbors, with whom we are close friends.



Stephan also purchased a power boat in 1994, and we often went boating together.

I joined the American Legion Post 45 in Medford, and have made many new friends there too. I have had many good times at their functions along with Sophie.



I had been involved in Scouting for 15 years as a Scout Master Assistant in Troop 718 in Upper Manhattan. When I moved to the Boston area, I only went to Summer Camp with Troop 718 at the Ten Mile River Scout Camp near the Poconos in Lower New York State, every July for 2 weeks. I also joined the Order Of The Arrow in 1994. This organization takes care of camping and helps the Troops to

grow. They also provide help to the Scout Masters if needed. In Dorchester Boston, I also had a group of Polish Scouts for 3 years.

I am still a member of the Polish Scouts. I attended a Scout Jamboree in 1994 for two weeks, near London, England. It was an international camp, but all the members were Polish. They came from Australia, Russia, Poland, Holland, England, Latvia, Belarus, Norway, New Zealand, the United States, and other countries. It was very interesting with 1500 boys and girls attending. After camp, we stayed in London for one week, and visited different parts of the city: Piccadilly Circus, Hyde Park and other areas. We also travelled around England by bus during a second week. I really enjoyed that trip and the company.





During World War II, my brother Anatole was in England. In London, he attended London University and graduated after four years with a degree in Electrical Engineering. While he was there, I visited him in London and he came to visit me when I lived in Swinden near Bristol. After he graduated, he had moved to Australia where he met and married Alice. His first son, Peter, was born in Australia. After our mother came to the United States from Russia in 1957, he too came to the U.S. We had been separated from our mother for 13 years. She had been arrested when we were sent to Siberia by the Communists.

Tol (Anatole) lived with my father, mother, and me in Yonkers for a few months. He moved to Cherry Hill in New Jersey and worked for RCA as a Computer Engineer. His second son, John, was born in this Philadelphia area.



They moved to North Palm Beach, Florida and bought a home. When he retired from the Electronics industry, he taught math at Palm Beach Junior College. During one of his classes, he had a stroke, and became sick for over five years. My brother Anatole died in December 1998 and Stephan and I went to Florida for his funeral.



Palm Beach is a very beautiful town with many beaches. I visited my brother and his family almost every year.

When growing up, every summer Stephan went to Europe to stay with Victoria, Sophie's sister. In 1976, he went to visit and stay with Sophie's brother Nicholas in Tehran, Iran.



In 1996, I adopted a dog “Dingo”, an Australian Cattle Dog.

Dingo takes me for a walk about 4 times a day. Walking is good exercise for both of us. He is a great watch dog, he won't let anyone into my room and barks when someone is at the door. I took him to the Polish Boy Scout Camp in Vermont and we had a good time there.

I have belonged to a health club for the last twenty years and I swim and exercise there every day I can.

In 1994, I retired from construction and Sophie retired from her job in 1995. We travel a lot. We went to California and Las Vegas a couple of times and made many trips to Canada. When we went to California,



Stephan and I drove a car from New York City to Los Angeles, and the trip took 10 days. We also took a cruise from California to Mexico during Christmas. We have traveled to Los Angeles, Santa Barbara and other California cities. We had fun in California. Sophie and I flew back to New York and Stephan stayed for several months with his friends in California.



## **My Philosophy**

When I retired in 1995, I promised myself to help young people, especially to stay away from drugs, and to continue as a Boy Scout leader. My Scouts, when they grow up and get married, will continue to be good and live by the “Scouts Law”.

When I was young, my mother taught me to pray and believe in God. I have tried throughout my life to be a good Christian, to help people in need, and to follow the “Ten Commandments”.

People are killed for money, and many other reasons that make no sense. Animals only kill for food when they are hungry.

Wars are bad and kill many people. I pray to God that people can live without wars following God’s Laws and loving their neighbors.

Loving God and following his laws, makes people love each other regardless of: race, color or creed.

Governments, instead of building military planes, missiles, submarines and other thing that kill people, should use their time and money in other ways. They should build homes, churches, schools and parks for the people in need. If that happens it will be “Heaven on Earth” and life will be happy and peaceful without wars.

**GOD BLESS AMERICA AND ALL OTHER COUNTRIES IN THE WORLD !!!**



**LOVE WILL KEEP PEACE IN THE WORLD WITH GOD’S HELP!!!**

LOVE TO ALL - Alexander T. Reckie, 1998

## **An afterword from his son Stephan (written 2002):**

It is with great sadness that I need to inform you that my father left this world after being hit by a pickup truck in front of his home while crossing in a crosswalk to mail some letters to his beloved friends in need in Poland. I am certain that he is in Heaven.

After the impact, he maintained a firm grip on his dog's leash until he knew that Dingo would be safely on his way home. My father was so selfless and kind hearted that he maintained a firm grip on his bodily life throughout the resulting coma, prolonging his departure to heaven, until he was certain that all his loved ones, including a stuffed dog, to represent his Dingo, were in a spiritual position to accept his death. During those three days, his loved ones were able to arrive from various cities to be by his Neurological Intensive Care bedside at the Massachusetts General Hospital in Boston, Massachusetts. After peace was made with everyone, and Alex realized that he had no chance in surviving the accident without a major quality of life change, he very gracefully took his last breath in front of his loved ones and the surround of prayers from all over the world at 7.00 PM on 11/16/02.

He is GREATLY missed by EVERYONE!!! He has touched many heart with his love, and it is amazing that I endlessly discover more hearts that have been touched by my papa. He has reinforced my belief that life should be lived daily, and that no time is ever wasted if it is spent well and most importantly shared with love.

You will never know when you will be run over by a truck.

Please don't forget to live !!!

Even in death, my daddy lives !!!

In Peace and Much Love,  
Stephan Reckie, 11/18/02

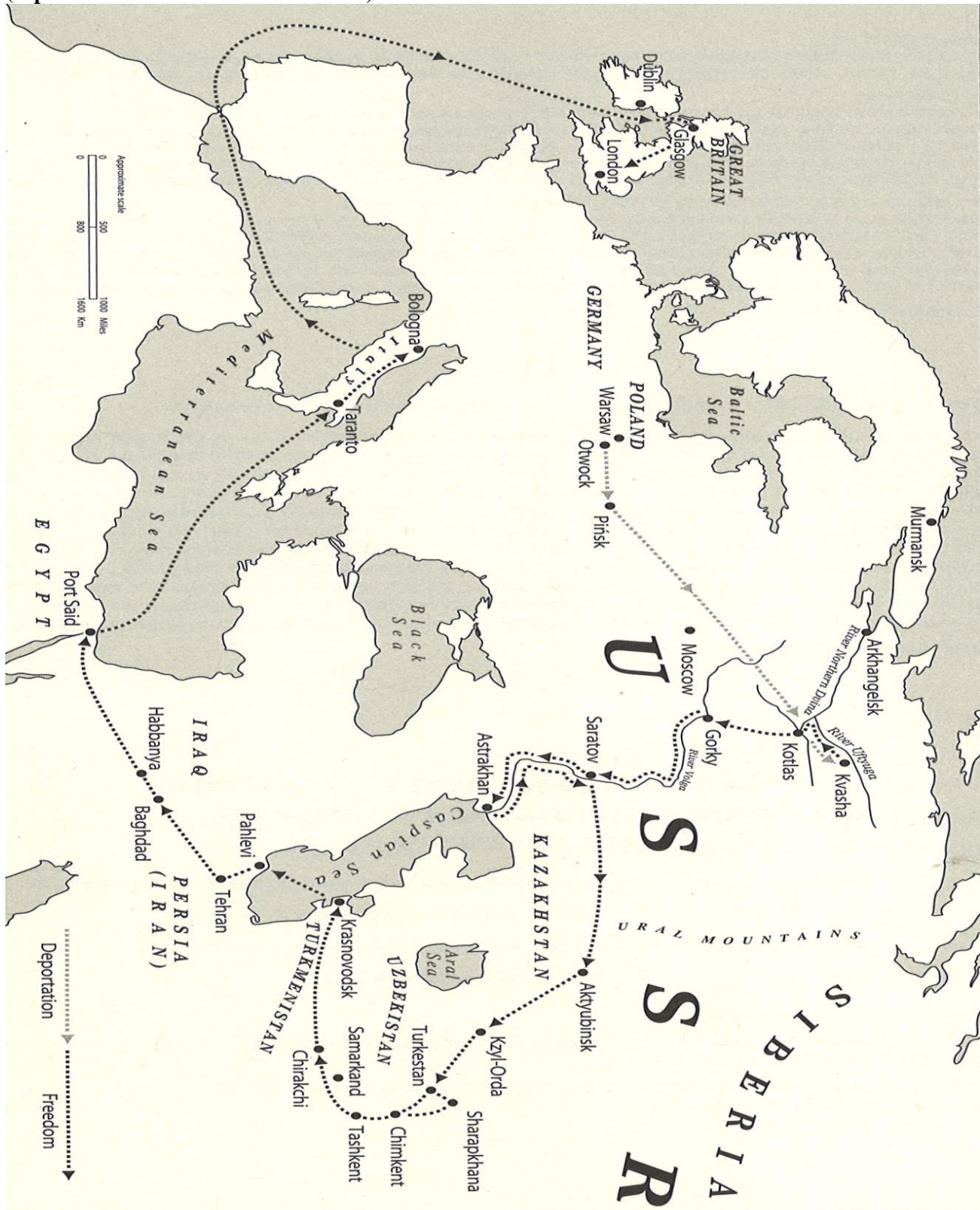
(Please visit <http://reckie.info/html/alexander.html> often for inspiration and updates)

## **ADDENDUM (added by Stephan Reckie)**



# Similar Journey of Stefan Waydenfeld

(copied from his book "The Ice Road")



Written by Alexander Reckie  
 First Printed November 18, 2002 | From Russia with Love

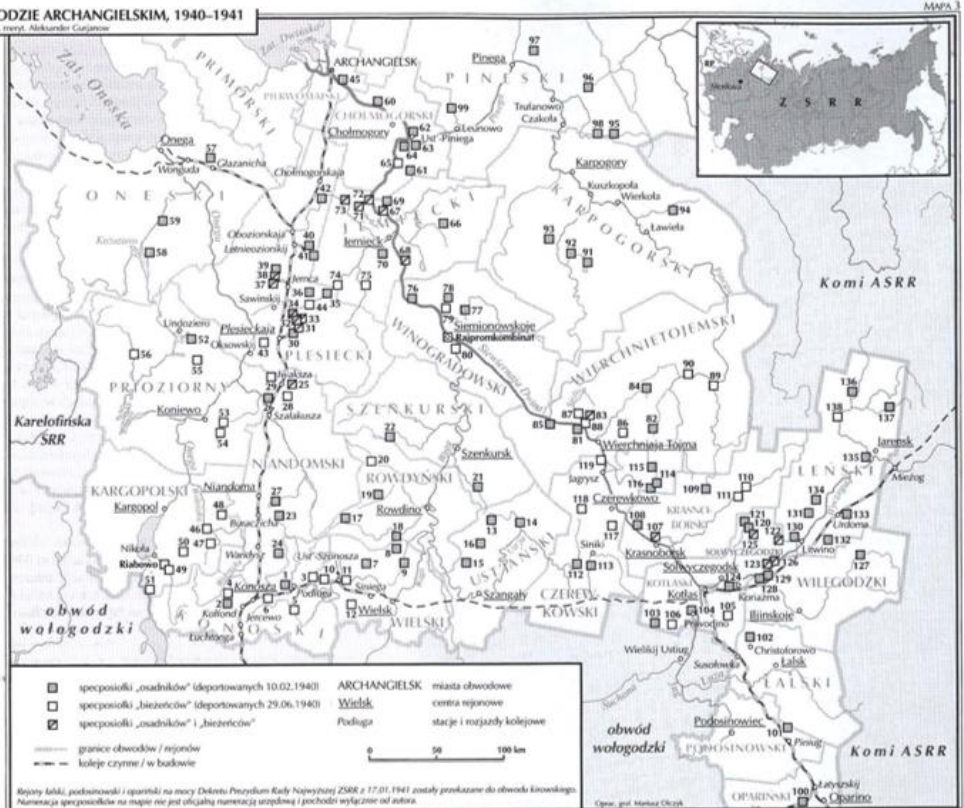
# Map of the Gulags



## SPECIOSIŁKI W OBWODZIE ARCHANGIELSKIM, 1940-1941

Oprac.: młt. Aleksander Gurganow

- |                 |                        |
|-----------------|------------------------|
| 1 Sierozuga     | 72 Bin-Nawelsk         |
| 2 Samczyłno     | 73 Iria                |
| 3 Pukaczewo     | 74 Kozłyz              |
| 4 Dolejce       | 75 Narewa              |
| 5 Piesuryński   | 76 Kargowino           |
| 6 Wosnesenski   | 77 Szabarna            |
| 7 Jakobin       | 78 Szandakowo          |
| 8 Saksza        | 79 Szandakowo          |
| 9 Czuga         | 80 Szandakowo          |
| 10 Iara         | 81 Kriły               |
| 11 Logowski     | 82 Muzniewa            |
| 12 Biesowicki   | 83 Korgowa             |
| 13 Woznowski    | 84 Wierchajewski       |
| 14 Kaban        | 85 Niuchaj             |
| 15 Rżawki       | 86 Okulowicki          |
| 16 Anders       | 87 Zaowaja             |
| 17 Krasnoj      | 88 Głazko              |
| 18 Suroje       | 89 Łar-Łosozj          |
| 19 Iglic        | 90 Kuzkino             |
| 20 Muznowski    | 91 Krasny Ołar         |
| 21 Rosowki      | 92 Sierbi              |
| 22 Ułowa        | 93 Puzicha             |
| 23 Solaja       | 94 Sierbia             |
| 24 Kulkowo      | 95 Wierchajewski       |
| 25 Sachowa      | 96 Kolumbija           |
| 26 Puziczejce   | 97 Sierbia             |
| 27 Ika          | 98 Głabokajce          |
| 28 Lepuz        | 99 Trisno              |
| 29 Tarta        | 100 Narewa             |
| 30 Iuska        | 101 Kamienka           |
| 31 Pieski       | 102 Nowy Był / Sierbia |
| 32 Lotosowka    | 103 Niuchaj Sierbia    |
| 33 Głabokajce   | 104 Muznowski          |
| 34 Głabokajce   | 105 Sierbia            |
| 35 Sierbia      | 106 Kuzkino            |
| 36 Tiegza       | 107 Głabokajce         |
| 37 10 kwartal   | 108 Piernogorje        |
| 38 Orowicki     | 109 Muznowski          |
| 39 Naucz Czerny | 110 Sierbia            |
| 40 Malyje Uby   | 111 Niuchaj            |
| 41 Wokzarnica   | 112 Głabokajce         |
| 42 Wokzard      | 113 Kuzkino            |
| 43 Malyje       | 114 Ruzka              |
| 44 Nowostrojka  | 115 Łar-Zaruda         |
| 45 Lipna        | 116 Ruzkino            |
| 46 Wokzarka     | 117 Kuzkino            |
| 47 Lefuz        | 118 Sierbia            |
| 48 Ruzkino      | 119 Muznowski          |
| 49 Kuzkino      | 120 Wokzarny           |
| 50 Puziczejce   | 121 Sierbia            |
| 51 Sierbia      | 122 Sierbia            |
| 52 Zauzorie     | 123 Czarnowos          |
| 53 Kuzkino      | 124 Sierbia            |
| 54 Czarnogajki  | 125 Zapadny            |
| 55 Sierbia      | 126 Puziczejce         |
| 56 Tama-Czarny  | 127 Sierbia            |
| 57 Sierbia      | 128 Łar-Wilozj         |
| 58 Tuzkino      | 129 Niuchaj Sierbia    |
| 59 Puziczejce   | 130 Sierbia            |
| 60 Kuzkino      | 131 Sierbia            |
| 61 Ułajce       | 132 Sierbia            |
| 62 Wanda        | 133 Niuchaj            |
| 63 Kuzkino      | 134 Iria               |
| 64 Zaria        | 135 Sierbia            |
| 65 Orkny        | 136 Iria               |
| 66 Kuzkino      | 137 Iria               |
| 67 Głabokajce   | 138 Iria               |
| 68 Lipowki      | 139 Iria               |
| 69 Czarnowos    | 140 Iria               |
| 70 Muznowski    | 141 Iria               |
| 71 Sierbia      | 142 Iria               |



Rejonny labki, podzielniki i opariki na mocy Dekretu Prezidium Rady Najwyższej ZSRR z 17.01.1941 zostały przekazane do obwodu kirowskiego. Numeracja speciosiolki na mapie nie jest oficjalną numeracją urzędową i pochodzi wyłącznie od autora.

## Voice of a Gulag

ON JANUARY 15, 2014 / JANUARY 15, 2014 / BY ESE' S  
VOICE / IN HAIKU / 9 COMMENTS



([https://esengasvoice.wordpress.com/2014/01/15/carpe-diema-haiku-krasnoyarsk/gulag\\_winter\\_photo/](https://esengasvoice.wordpress.com/2014/01/15/carpe-diema-haiku-krasnoyarsk/gulag_winter_photo/))

Krasnoyarsk (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Krasnoyarsk>) (Красноярск) was a major center of the Gulag (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gulag>) (government agency that administered the main Soviet forced labor camp systems from the 1930s through the 1950s) system during the Stalin era. The most important labor camp was the Kraslag or Krasnoyarsky IITL (1938-

<https://esengasvoice.wordpress.com/tag/gulag/>

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1/22/2021

Gulag – Ese' s Voice

1960) with two units located in Kansk and Reshyoty but there was also the Yeniseylag or Yeniseysky IITL labor camp in the city of Krasnoyarsk.

About 14 million people were deported to the Gulag labor camps from 1929 to 1953. Some estimates for total number of deaths there go beyond 10 million.

\* \* \*

dead silence of taiga  
pine resin drop frozen in palm  
glimpsing memories

\* \* \*

*Carpe Diem Haiku Kai*

(<http://chevrefeuillescarpediem.blogspot.fi/2014/01/carpe-diem-375-krasnoyarsk.html>).

Written by Alexander Reckie  
First Printed November 18, 2002 | From Russia with Love

# Alex's Testimonial of the Gulag

Letter from Siberia by Aleksander Turecki

Translated for his son Stephan Reckie

*Kwazdynarjusz*<sup>1</sup>-

b) Free mail in USSR<sup>2</sup>

Turecki Alexander, student, 18 years old.

I was taken away on 20 June 1941 year  
from m.<sup>3</sup> Baranowicz city in Nowogrodzki province

At the same time my brother and dad were  
deported with me. My Mom was arrested by soviets

as counterrevolutionary, she was left in  
Poland. They drove us

in bared wagons (for pigs) in conditions  
that even dogs would barely survive.

With no food and bread for

3 days. We came after 3 weeks

to m. "Aczynska Krasnojarsk kraj"

to barracks in which we lived for 2 weeks

in worse condition than pigs. Information from outside words

were rarely received to us. Next

7.  
Kwazdynarjusz.  
Dziwolna wysyłka w Z.S.S.R.  
Turecki Aleksander, uczeń, lat 18.  
Wziętymy byliem 20 czerwca 1941 roku  
z m. Baranowicz pow. Nowogrodzkiego.  
W tym samym czasie wzięli też moją siostrę  
z żoną ojca i brat. Mamusia sowieci uważali  
za wroga. Konkretnie w łagowach i ona została  
w Polsce. Wzięli nas w zakam. Kwa-  
zdynarjusz (żwirskich) w warunkach za-  
krytych nawet psy ledwo mogły przetrzy-  
wać. Bez jedzenia i bez chleba przez  
tę dni. Przejchaliśmy po trzech tygodniach  
do m. Aczynska Krasnojarski kraj  
w barakach, w których mieszkali dwa tygod-  
nie gorzej od świn. Wiadomości ze świata  
przez całą historię nie otrzymywaliśmy. Nastę-  
pnie nas woźnicy odwieźli do Kalszan me

<sup>1</sup> Many words in the letter were hard to read so names of cities and villages may be incorrect, the same can be said about some words. Each line of the letter starts of translation corresponds to each line of the letter that you have sent.

<sup>2</sup> Quite surprising, there was a high level of censorship in USSR

<sup>3</sup> m.- probably is a shorter way to write "miasto" which translates into city.

we were driven to the kolkhoz in  
"Aleksandrowka" village im<sup>4</sup> "Wspierad Komunizmu"  
35 km away from "Arczynski, Ankwarasti".  
They told us that if we won't  
work in collective farms we would be working  
at gunpoint. At the same time  
representative of the collective farm said that,  
work, but bread and flour till  
new won't be given to you. In September  
I was released, in February 1942  
year I've joined school "Junakow"  
In "Wrensk"  
Turecki Alexander

№ 7538  
wsi Aleksandrowka im. „Wspierad Komunizmu” 35 km. od Arczynska, Ankwarasti  
mówili nam, jeżeli nie będziemy  
pracowali w kolkhozie, to będziemy pra-  
cować pod karabinem. Jednocześnie  
przedstawiciel kolkhoza powiedział, że  
pracujcie, lecz chleba i mąki do  
nowego nie dostaniemy. We wrześniu  
byłem wolnym, w lutym 1942  
roku wstąpiłem do szkoły „Junaków”  
we Wrensku.  
Aleksander Turecki

Translated by Kamil Ługowski, supported by Maciej Ługowski  
Jan 23, 2021, Warsaw Poland

<sup>4</sup> im. - imenia - named after (something).

## **15 years later, an afterword from his son Stephan (written 2017)**

My father, Alexander T. Reckie, was born in Baranovichi, Poland, and when he was in his teens, his whole family was arrested and sent to Siberia to work at a forest labor camp. His mom was sent to Moscow to teach, separated from the family for twenty years, and reunited later in the US in the 60s with the help of Eleanor Roosevelt. In the labor camp, my dad lost all his teeth from hunger and almost died from dysentery. Stalin liberated the camps when Russia entered the war, and that was my dad's lifesaver. He joined and traveled all over with the Polish 2nd Corps under General Anders, ultimately fighting in World War II's bloodiest battle of Monte Cassino, Italy, all before his 18th birthday. He came to New York with his father in the mid-'50s and met my mom in NYC several years later.

As I was growing up, my dad was both my idol and an amazing role model. He was also my playmate as my mom worked seven days a week to afford to pay for my private kindergarten and school education, keeping me out of the local public-school systems in Spanish Harlem in Manhattan. My dad worked in construction, and I remember hoping for rain when I was small because when it did, he was paid for a full day and could pick me up from kindergarten to spend the day with me. We were best and closest friends, enjoying a special bond, and he showed me amazing values. He was the kindest man and volunteered any of his spare time to several causes, including being a Scoutmaster in both the Boy Scouts of America and the Polish Boy Scouts.

When he retired from his job, he became more sedentary and bored. While traveling and living in Boston, I invited him to stay at my Medford home. When I came back from one of my trips, he surprised me with a new driver's license and Massachusetts plates on his car. He wanted to live in the country; for him, Medford was just that over living in Manhattan. He quickly made many friends in the neighborhood, including close friends with my neighbors Joseph and his dad Joe, who was also my closest friend. He was happy and enjoying life after having survived so much in his past. He was my definition of resiliency and honor.

Exactly 15 years ago, he was struck by a pickup truck while crossing the street at the corner intersection near my house. He was crossing in the crosswalk to mail some letters to his beloved friends in Poland, and I still have a copy of those letters that I eventually mailed for him.

After the lethal impact, he maintained a firm grip on his dog Dingo's leash until he heard Dingo was safe and could go home. Our neighbor Linda, first on the scene, told my dad

to release Dingo's leash, and he let his hand open. From what I understand, that was the last physical thing my dad did in his life before he fell into a coma for the next three days. He was rushed to Mass General in Boston, where they tried to save his life with emergency brain surgeries and Neuro Intensive Care Support.

I was on vacation in the Bahamas, and after my cousin Peter tracked me down to tell me, it took almost a full day to get back to Boston. I had an amazing experience flying with a prayer group from a visiting ministry, with whom I stayed in touch for several years. The entire way on that flight, I was surrounded by their love and prayers. It was surreal to be flying closer to God and hoping that he would hear me worry about my dad and save him. As I couldn't make the plane fly any faster, I needed to show restraint.

When I landed in Boston, my "brother" Steve picked us up and rushed us to my dad's room. By then, several of my friends could fly and drive in from all over, making his Neuro ICU room an amazingly warm place full of love. Earlier that day, I convinced my mom, Sophie, to come up from NYC with her older sister, Victoria, to see my dad. My mom was in such shock that when I told her, she was not accepting of the news and insisted that he would be fine and that everything would be ok. That was one of the hardest phone conversations I have ever had with my mother, insisting that she go right away and that it was serious. She took the bus to Boston, and Steve picked her up when they got to the bus station in Boston. My friend Jerry even took the supersonic Concorde from London to support us. It was such a blur, as I can't tell you all the people that were there, but I do remember that at the final moments of my dad's life, his ICU room was shoulder to shoulder, full of love. All of us supported him and my mom in the hospital during those three days, never leaving anyone's side except to bring in food to feed us all and take care of Dingo at home. We were even blessed with a fantastic opportunity to have a Russian Orthodox Priest visit him for last rites, as Father Roman was visiting his sick family member on the same floor. After meeting Father Roman, who turned out to be my dad's priest, I was introduced to his son Nick by our funeral home director. Nick was between careers and started to follow his passion for woodworking and making beautiful ornate orthodox coffins. He only made two and was hours away from finishing the first one when I met him in his workshop, and that one became my dad's. The second one he made was used for his father, who passed away several years later. As you can imagine, Nick and I shared a special and close relationship.

Over three days, my father, being so selfless, maintained a firm grip on his bodily life in a coma, prolonging his departure to heaven, until he was certain that all his loved ones, including a stuffed dog, to represent his Dingo, were in a spiritual position to accept his death.

On his final day, the doctors called me and my mom into a conference about what to do with my dad, who was only surviving on life support. It was held in a room not too far away from his bedside, and my mom really couldn't grasp the idea of deciding to shut off his life support. We talked for a bit amongst ourselves, and then my mom decided that shutting off life support was going to be the plan. When I asked her if she was sure, and she wasn't, a nurse came running into our conference room and told us we needed to go to my dad's room immediately. I know that as soon as he realized that he had no chance of surviving the accident without a major quality of life change, he decided to start the death process surrounded by loved ones and prayers from all over the world at 7.00 PM on November 16, 2002. I vividly remember being in his room, watching my dad breathe slower and slower while all the monitors were reading lower and lower numbers and beeping like crazy. All of us in the room were in disbelief and mesmerized at watching his vitals lower so dramatically and realizing that we were watching numbers instead of my dad, I asked the nurse to shut off all the visual monitoring equipment. I knew that my dad was taking his last breaths, and I needed to make sure that we were with him to share our love. When he finally took his last breath, everyone in the room, including the supporting nurses and people nearby outside of the room, were crying.

After being hit by the truck, his skull was fractured, and his head and face were extremely swollen. Surgeons attempted to relieve the pressure with emergency brain surgery, but ultimately that is what caused his death. When I arrived to see him, he had a monitor and pump drilled into the side of his skull and was extremely swollen. I know that he heard everything in the room and that he could feel my hand hold his for the next 48 hours, but he was never able to respond. I always had to remind my mom to stay positive and talk positively with him. In a quick trip to feed Dingo, I returned home and grabbed a boom box to play his favorite Polish CD on a loop. I also found some pictures of him and his adventures to put up in his room so that anyone entering got to see who he was before being so disfigured. After his last breath, it was amazingly beautiful to see the swelling go down and his face become the face that I will always remember. I then knew and was reassured - no more swelling and no more pain for my beloved dad.

Over the next few days, I had to organize the wake and funeral service quickly. The driver that hit my dad was initially very apologetic, as he lived only several blocks away. As soon as he learned that my father died, he put up a legal moat around himself. He even had the District Attorney's officer request an autopsy on my dad's corpse, putting extra stress on us as we were preparing for his wake and wanted an open casket. In the Russian tradition, the deceased must be buried within three days. It wasn't until the morning of the wake that the coroner proceeded with the autopsy to get whatever evidence they were looking for against my dad. I was upset and very angry with that corrupt legal system.

We had a beautiful wake with the welcomed attendance of the Polish Veteran Color Guard that showed up in full Polish Ceremonial Uniforms in our tiny Russian Church. They prayed in unison, made a short speech, and then we could all say goodbyes to my dad. After the wake, I took everyone to my dad's favorite restaurant, Mount Vernon, for the Mercy Meal.

The next day, we had a beautiful funeral service at the Church. Knowing the situation with the guilty driver, Father Roman said in his sermon, "There are no lawyers that can defend the guilty at Judgement Day".

We had a funeral procession, a high-speed State Police-escorted ride through Boston to the Cemetery in Medford, 10 miles away. My dad would have had a hoot driving with lights and sirens. I was blessed to have my Aunt Alice and Cousins John and Peter join my Mom, my Aunt Vicky, and me in our limousine. On the way to the cemetery, we all stopped in front of our house, and I could hear our dog, Dingo, howling. Dingo became instantly extremely aware and sad when my father was hit, and he was not himself for several weeks after our loss.

That following weekend, we had another graveside Memorial Service with the American Legion Color Guard and a 21-gun salute. It was a very powerful but sad day, and even more people visited and supported us. We had a huge lunch at my dad's American Legion, and I spent most of the time meeting his friends and hearing stories of how my Dad was so proud of me and loved my mom. It was truly amazing!

Over the next few days, I decided to quit my VP of Sales job in Connecticut, as the CEO of that company was shrugging my loss off and wanted me to come back to work to get my head focused. One night, around midnight, my mom drove to the office to help me grab all my stuff from my desk and leave a handwritten resignation letter on the CEO's desk. We drove back together to Boston afterward, and then I dealt with the business aspects of death and the legal suit for the next several months.

My dad had so many charities that he regularly contributed to that I sent a final check in his honor, along with a short note about what happened to my dad to each one. I think there were over 40 charities, and I soon realized they were all going to similar locations. Out of the bunch, I only received one response, wishing us well and blessings. The other charities just cashed the checks and went on. This was very disturbing to me.

I supported my mom over the next few months, informing her of the legal proceedings against the driver. He even maneuvered out of the Mandatory Massachusetts \$100

Crosswalk violation fine, even though my dad was hit in the crosswalk. I had to go to court and bring a witness, Larry, to talk about where my dad's body landed after being hit. It was a crazy day to appear in court to defend my dad's honor and then to get it all dismissed in the driver's favor.

The driver did not pay or get reprimanded for anything, and it challenged my beliefs in the legal system. I had a strong desire to run for political office to make changes, so I started considering becoming a City Councilor, as I was working with the Mayor's office to investigate that intersection. I also worked closely with the Chief of Police and some of his staff in the accident investigation, so I even looked into becoming a police officer. At the age of 35, I was being redirected to a career change to support my dad's honor. I was very passionate about making change and once I learned that many pedestrians die annually, I started a Pedestrian Rights Group (Medford Bi-Peds) and started getting local press and residents' attention to this problem. This year, I learned that Medford now has a strong Walk Medford group and is making changes to street designs to promote a speed reduction in cars going through neighborhoods with traffic calming techniques. Hopefully, my dad was able to save some lives through these efforts.

The first half of the following year was devoted to getting the Estate in order, with barely enough money to pay his huge hospital bills. My mom was back in New York City, and I lived in our house in Medford, MA. Every day, when I left the house, I looked over at the corner where my dad was hit. Eventually, I put up a large metal sign on the corner telephone pole, which is still there, now replaced with a plastic sign that should last forever. Occasionally, as the story has my contact information, I still get a call or an email telling me how touched they were after my dad's story. The corner school crossing guards feared that intersection for a while, as they also had several near misses by speeding cars.

In the second half of the next year, almost a full year after my dad's death, changes in my life started happening. As soon as my dad died, I was dreaming dreams about him, initially telling him that he wasn't around anymore and that he died. He never believed me in those dreams and always argued with me. I even went to a mystic in Mystic, Connecticut, and she connected me with him in a seance. She told me things that only he knew, and there was no way she could get that information from anyone else about me. Through her, he even said, "I still don't know what hit me", and I never told her how he was killed. To this day, I am still connected with him in some manner or another.

By Russian Orthodox tradition, Eastern Orthodox Christians' mourning period lasts forty days. Within those forty days, the third day, the ninth day, and the fortieth day all have special significance. After forty days, memorials are celebrated at three months, six

months, nine months, one year, and on the anniversary of the death for at least the next seven years. For us, the mourning period lasted for one year, during which time my mom only wore black clothing and went to Church for Panikhidas regularly. In the tradition, my mom also told me that I couldn't watch TV and had to avoid social gatherings for a few weeks.

We had a beautiful graveside service and another Mercy Meal with close friends for the one-year memorial. The second-year memorial was even more special, as I had my girlfriend Jill join me, and she was able to learn more about my dad and my friends. Today, days away from the 15-year memorial, I write this note from my hotel room in Saint Petersburg, Russia, with tears of sadness and fond memories.

In dying, he taught me about life and living. Before his death, I was on a very successful career track, selling all types of big-ticket software, working hard and smart, and making lots of money. I worked up and down the entire sales management chain in numerous companies, from individual salesperson to as high as Vice President of Sales and Chief Revenue Officer. I worked and traveled tirelessly and never stopped to think about the big picture. Because of my travels, I asked him to watch my house and, ultimately, my dog Dingo. We got very close in the late stage of his life, as he was my housemate.

I realized after my dad's death that money doesn't mean much to the person who dies. He had very little money in his savings, but his generosity was huge! He was able to fill anyone's coffers with love and great feelings and gave away whatever he had earned, saved, and even worn. During his last year on Earth, when he went to his hometown in Belarus, he returned with an empty suitcase. Not many people do that. As usual, they come back with more stuff than they left with. Not my dad, as he gave away all the clothes he had brought, saving a few to wear back on the plane.

That year, I also had the pleasure of going to Alaska to fish with him, and when we came back, we had a huge fishing party. The wildest thing was that after the funeral, I looked through pictures and saw that we went fishing in Alaska in a special place – Resurrection Bay. I didn't know what that bay was called in Seward, and it was only when I looked at the picture of us posing in front of the sign with all our catch that I saw the wooden post behind us. Also, that year, I sent my parents on a very special Bermuda cruise for their 40th anniversary with a suite upgrade. I cared for Aunt Vicky while they could go on their 40th honeymoon alone.

About two hours before he was hit by the truck (note the saying “you never know when you will get hit by a truck”), he was at our dear friend Steve's Winter Hill Optical

eyeglass shop telling him how he had the best year of his life. Imagine, as that was only two hours before he let go of Dingo's leash for the last time.

Coming back to my career and the introspection that I had after losing my dad, I realized that it wasn't about how much money you earn, but it was about how much you share with others. There is an argument that you can share more as you make more money, but that isn't usually the case. After my dad's death, I took every chance to share what I could. For example, instead of throwing away his clothes, I donated them to the Boston Veterans' Home, where as soon as I dropped them off, the Vets were wearing his stuff. It made me extremely happy to see someone else enjoying his clothes. I made attempts to declutter my life, and now 15 years later, I am finally gaining momentum in that area.

I analyzed giving to charities and chose to act instead of giving money. I joined the volunteer Red Cross, Coast Guard Auxiliary, and other groups locally. Also, the Medford Pedestrian group took a lot of my time, as we had an event with close to 100 attendees. I was dedicating myself to making a change in the world! Over the past few years, I am Blessed to have a close friendship with my friend Paul Polak, who is the ultimate change-maker in the world, putting together market-based solutions to poverty and climate change.

Over the next few years after my dad's passing, I was also Blessed to have an amazing woman and her three children cross paths in my life, and now they are my close family, as Jill and I got married two years ago. Never being married, and only having relationships that lasted a year at the most, meeting Jill was a special course that I am sure my dad put me on 😊

Since my dad's death, I have decided to analyze my choices in life with thought, versus feeling that I should take certain paths. It is a very empowering way to live, given that we have so many choices. I feel strongly that my Angel Alex is guiding me, making things more obvious, with all my best interests in mind. He is also reminding me to take good care of my Mom, as she also brought me into this world. I have chosen to live life to what could be the fullest, knowing that at any moment, my life could end with something as simple as following all the rules and crossing the street at a crosswalk. I also learned that a lot of grief is usually based on guilt. I attended numerous funerals after my dad's and saw that the usual theme was "I wish that ... is still here so that I can do ... with them". I know that I did as much as I could do with my dad while he was on this Earth, and I never hesitate in doing what I can with my Mom while she is still here, and she is 89 years young. That goes for all my loved ones in my life, as I choose my actions to make sure that I don't have any regrets. Even though my high school nickname was "Reckless", I am not suggesting being careless, but to do whatever life

mindfully challenges you. Both my mom and dad went through a lot to get to the United States and freedom, and I will never take freedom for granted!

I appreciate all the paths that I have come across and chosen to live. I love my wife and her kids very much, and that is completely by choice. As an only child, I carefully selected my brothers and sisters and love them dearly, without the usual drama that I have witnessed in many biological families.

Career-wise, I have chosen to share my discretionary savings and make angel investments alongside my good friend and “brother” Jerry. We can positively impact the companies we invest in, not just with money but also with connections and access to trusted people and experience. People are what makes businesses succeed and not just great ideas.

We also have a close group of friends that co-invest with us and another group that analyzes what we look at.

I have also had the pleasure of pursuing dreams and acting on them. Two years ago, I wondered what teaching was like, and I was allowed to teach a high school class in Kazakhstan for a summer program. I taught 90 fourth graders about the solar system through my space company. I also had a chance to teach graduate and undergraduate business students at a local university. Currently, I teach undergraduate entrepreneurship at a local university that my stepdaughter attends, as well. I became a mate in the local Sea Scouting group to teach and share my nautical passions. I love sharing and transferring knowledge!

I am also a big fan of communicating, as I am blessed with a linguistic gene. My grandfather spoke thirteen languages, my mom speaks eight languages, and I speak five. That makes traveling so much fun because I choose to communicate with the local culture in mind versus expecting everyone to speak English. Those are all part of my life choices.

So, what is the point? What is the purpose? (When my friend and “brother” Joseph and I were at the New England Aquarium, we started a joke “What’s the porpoise?”)

I think that my Dad showed me a bunch of things during the time of my life when I was the most impressionable:

- 1) Death is not that bad for the person dying after you remove the pain. It is hardest for the survivors as they typically grieve not being able to be with the person or having missed shared opportunities. The hurt continues in the survivors, but not

the dead. Death is the norm and life is a Blessing. By default, all things are dead until they are given life.

- 2) Wealth is determined by how much you share. My dad died with very little to his name, with lots of money owed to credit cards, but he was so generous that no one knew. He shared and cared and never needed to flaunt how much money he had. He was ultra-reliable and was always there to give out something or lend a hand. He never hoarded nor gloated about wealth.
- 3) You can tell a lot about a person with how they choose to treat their pets. Dingo was my dad's second son, and everyone knew that. He brought Dingo everywhere and fed him everything, and they were mutually loyal to each other. In addition, my dad was very loyal to his parents, army troop, wife, me, and community.
- 4) It is hard to think that you never get to physically hear and see what people say and do at your funeral. Seeing how many people came up to us to tell me stories about my dad was amazing. I even printed this small biography that he wrote and gave out over 250 copies of it. It's a funny part of life not seeing what happens when you die. But I know that my dad came to visit me after he died, both in my dreams and by making some visible signs appear throughout the house. He even appeared as a bird on my dad's walking stick, even though I do not believe in animal life after death. I think the Irish have a cool opportunity to have a wake while you are still alive. It would be interesting to hear what people would say about you before you die, with the possibility of making amends and changes.
- 5) This is a hard one - forgiveness. I decided to resolve my feelings and know that Brian's guilt will be his own. Even if he never regrets manipulating the system against my family in the motor vehicle homicide case, I leave it to be his issue. In writing this note, I forgive him and don't want to have any part of his life and guilt. My dad was tragically removed from this Earth, and I don't need to ask why anymore, nor do I want any revenge. With this written memorial, I turn to a new page of forgiveness. From this day on, I am at Peace with him.
- 6) My feelings about God letting me down changed as well. As my dad was dying, I was resentful to God, thinking that he should cure my dad, as my dad was the victim and didn't deserve this fate. I now realize there is a Path, and it isn't up to us to understand it, which ultimately is not something we can control. For whatever reason, it was my dad's time to leave his human vessel, and I decided to stop questioning why.
- 7) My wife Jill taught me a very important lesson. I always remembered and dreaded the 16th of every month, counting how many months and years my dad was gone. She reminded me that he was a Blessing and that I should remember his birthday

and other events that gave me life, such as my parents' wedding anniversary, bringing me Peace. I can hear my dad tell me to always remember the positives and not dwell on the negatives. He was a very positive person and lived life more simply that way.

Hopefully, I could make you, my loved reader, think about life and death differently. Again, that is what my dad's death has done for me and hope the same for you.

In closing summary, my dad is GREATLY missed by EVERYONE!!! He has touched many hearts with his love, and it is amazing that after 15 years, I discover more hearts that have been touched by my papa. He has reinforced my belief that life should be lived daily, and that no time is ever wasted if it is spent well and most importantly shared with love.

Never forget to live while you can! Even after his death, my daddy lives!!!

In Peace and Much Love,



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