

Hanna Kogosowski

Title: *The Times of My Life*

Author: Hanna (Prager) Kogosowski

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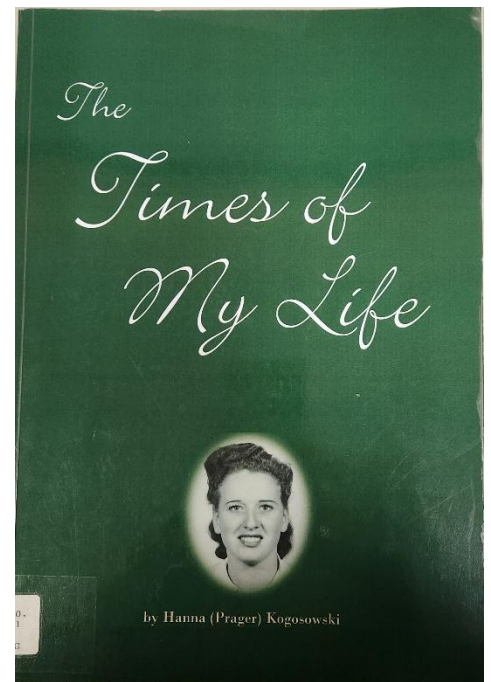
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Cities/towns/camps: Poland: Wyszków, Białystok,
Szczecin; Russia: Kargopol labour camp; Kazakhstan;
Turkistan; Germany: Hessisch-Lichtenau DP camp; France:
Paris; Australia: Melbourne.

Note: those cities/towns/camps underlined are those which
are most central to the narrative

Genre: Memoirs

Key events/experiences: Jewish refugee; Soviet-occupation; Soviet labour camp;
Aliyah Bet movement.



The Times of My Life is the 113-page memoir of Polish-born survivor Hanna Kogosowski who fled Nazi forces to Russian-occupied Białystok, only to be deported with her family to a Soviet labour camp.

Pages 1-17 recount the outbreak of war and the family's flight to Białystok. Pages 18-27 describe their deportation and internment in a Soviet labour camp from June 1940 until October 1941. Pages 28-44 detail their relocation to Kazakhstan and struggles there. Pages 45-75 describe their repatriation to Poland, time in the Hessisch-Lichtenau DP camp and subsequent emigration to Australia. Pages 76-113 cover the author's settlement, marriage and family life in Melbourne. The manuscript also includes 61 family photographs and historical documents.

Hanna Kogosowski (née Prager) was born on 16 April 1926 in Wyszków, a small town near Warsaw. She was the eldest child of Esther Sura Hercberg and Jacob Meier Prager, a devout Orthodox Jew and successful grain merchant. She had two younger sisters, Eva and Ida.

On Sunday 3 September 1939, Nazi Germany invaded Poland. Within days bombs began falling on Wyszków, forcing the Pragers to flee East by horse and cart while much of their town was destroyed by fire. For weeks they moved on foot and by cart, taking cover in ditches as German planes strafed the roads. After nearly two weeks of continuous flight, they reached the town of Polanka, which was under Soviet occupation.

Hearing reports of German brutality against Jews they chose not to return to Wyszaków and instead boarded a train to Białystok, hoping to start anew. Life resumed some normalcy; the children attended school and Jacob resumed trading grain in the local market. However, in June 1940, shortly after Jacob registered to return to Poland, the family was arrested by Soviet soldiers and deported in overcrowded cattle wagons to the Soviet Union. After eight days on the train, the deportees were ferried across a lake to Kargopol in Archangelsk province before being interned in a labour camp in the thick forest.

They remained in the camp for eighteen months, living in overcrowded barracks. Able-bodied men and women were forced into exhausting forestry work, while the children foraged for berries to supplement their meagre rations. Conditions were unsanitary; insects and disease were rampant and winters were bitterly cold. As starvation and exposure took its toll Jacob began losing his eyesight from severe malnutrition, and Hanna's once spritely grandfather died from a treatable infection due to lack of medicine.

Following the Nazi invasion of the USSR in June 1941, amnesties were issued for Polish deportees and in October the Pragers were released. The family made the long and arduous journey to Turkistan in southern Kazakhstan. The journey itself was perilous: securing rations was difficult, they nearly froze, and constant vigilance was required to protect the little food they possessed from thieves.

The family spent the next two-and-a-half years in Turkistan under harsh conditions. Hunger was constant; they sold all their possessions for food and at one time Hanna's mother exchanged her wedding ring for one kilogram of peas. Starvation and disease were so widespread that horse-drawn carts were required to collect the dead from the streets. Authorities frequently rounded up men for forced labour in the coal mines, and the family frequently had to hide Jacob. With no proper clothing, the girls wore dresses sewn from sackcloth. To help the family survive, Hanna and Eva engaged in black-market trading.

With the end of the war in May 1945 the family registered for repatriation. In mid-1946, they began the four-week journey back to Poland. Near the border, they encountered antisemitism from local peasants. They eventually settled in Szczecin, where they learned that most of their extended family had been murdered in Treblinka.

In Szczecin, Hanna met her future husband, Izio (Izzy) Kogosowski. Through him she made contact with Bricha representatives and joined the Bricha-run kibbutz Ichud with plans to emigrate to Israel. After several weeks, the organisation arranged for the Prager family to be smuggled into Germany and taken to the Hessisch-Lichtenau DP camp, where they spent the next two years living in the "Goldcup" barracks under the care of UNRRA and the IRO.

Prolonged delays in securing emigration to Israel forced the family to seek alternatives. A brother-in-law who had migrated to Melbourne in 1939 began arranging landing permits for the entire Prager family, as well as for Izzy.

Australian visas finally arrived in 1948. The family travelled to Paris, where JOINT supported them for six weeks while they awaited passage. They sailed from Marseille and, after a ten-week voyage arrived on 1 May 1949. They settled in Melbourne. Hanna and Izzy married in October 1949 and had two children, Abraham (Alan) and Sara (Sally).

The Times of My Life is a concise and vivid account of displacement, survival, and post-war recovery. Beyond its wartime narrative, it offers valuable insight into the Bricha and Aliyah Bet movements, daily life in the DP camps, Jewish youth activities in the post-war period, and the emotional and practical challenges of rebuilding life in Australia. The memoir also briefly recounts elements of Izzy's story and that of Martin Slomovits, her sister Eva's husband, enriching its portrayal of a family shaped by war, exile, and resilience.