

Danny Kahan

Title: *Memories From a Foreign Country: Growing up in Poland 1936-58*

Author: Danny Kahan

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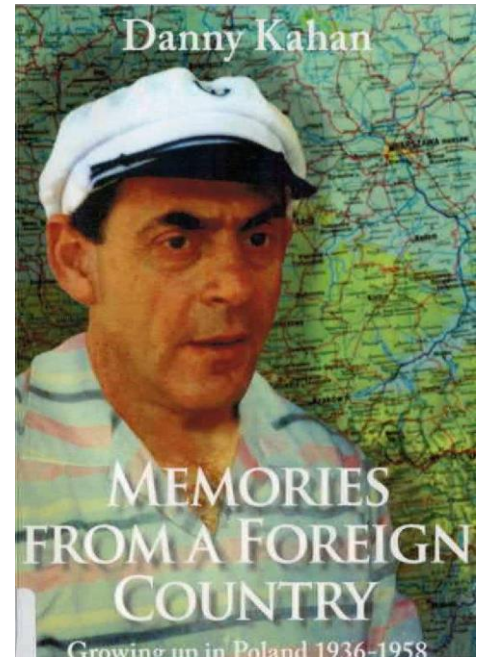
Location of Book: Monash University, Lamm Jewish Library, Melbourne Holocaust Museum, Sydney Jewish Museum and other public libraries.

Cities/towns/camps: Poland: Krakow; Warsaw, Zakopane, Gluszyca; England: London; Australia: Melbourne.

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

Genre: Memoir

Key events/experiences: child survivor; in-hiding; Jewish orphanage.



Memories From a Foreign Country is the 103-page memoir of child survivor, Danny Kahan, who survived the Holocaust in hiding in Warsaw.

Pages 1-23 briefly describe the life and death of the author's parents and his return travels to Krakow. Pages 24-44 recount his time in hiding in Warsaw, evacuation to Krakow and liberation by the Russian army. Pages 45- 68 reflect on his postwar childhood in Zakopane, Gluszyca and Warsaw. Pages 69-103 describe life under communist rule in Poland and emigration to Australia in 1958.

Daniel (Danny) Kahan was born in Krakow in 1936 to parents Helen Perlberger and Moses Kahan. His birth-date is unknown. His mother was a highly educated woman who spoke multiple languages.

In the summer of 1940, Danny's father was arrested and was never seen again. After Danny's mother secured forged papers, the pair went into hiding in Warsaw at an unspecified date. Assuming the identity of Bogdan Hamielec, Danny was sheltered by middle-aged Polish sisters, Jadzia and Stefa in an apartment left to them by their aunt – the renowned actress and socialist activist Antonina Sokolicz – following her internment and death in Auschwitz.

Often hiding in the roof space, Danny spent his days reading and waiting anxiously for his mother's infrequent visits. Close to the Warsaw ghetto, Danny witnessed the April 1943 Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, recalling the sights and smells of the burning city.

In August 1944, he endured the chaos of the Warsaw Uprising, often hiding in the bomb shelter as fierce fighting raged through the city. On one occasion, the shelter was

buried under a pile of rubble. After what seemed like several days and nights of digging through the rubble with their hands, the occupants finally emerged to a devastated Warsaw. Shortly after, the German army evacuated civilians from the city and Danny left with Jadzia and Stefa for Krakow, witnessing carts of corpses and columns of downcast Polish Home Army fighters.

After losing contact with his mother, Jadzia and Stefa brought Danny by train to a contact in Krakow – an Austrian woman by the name of Greta. A few days later, Danny was reunited with his mother. With the Red Army rapidly approaching and fearing the Germans might destroy Krakow like they did Warsaw, Danny and his mother journeyed by horse and cart to a convent but their passage was barred by a convoy of German soldiers. As fighting broke out between the Russian and German army, the pair sought refuge in a nearby farmhouse cellar where they remained until the victory of the Russians.

Danny recalls that with a group of youngsters he walked to a nearby field where fighting had taken place and he saw the bodies of German soldiers killed in battle. Danny and his mother returned to Krakow, journeying for days amidst the post-liberation chaos.

Through contacts with the Jewish Committee in Krakow, Danny's mother obtained work as a teacher in a Jewish orphanage in Zakopane and the pair relocated. After facing antisemitic attacks from the locals, the orphanage was evacuated in March 1946. As Danny was suffering from measles at the time, he did not join the children who were smuggled into Czechoslovakia and ultimately to France, but returned to Krakow with his mother.

The Jewish Committee in Krakow relocated Danny's mother to a preventorium for sick child survivors in Gluszyca. The family planned to emigrate to America to reunite with his two maternal aunts, but tightening communist restrictions in 1948 thwarted their efforts. Danny's mother was offered a job at the State Publishing House, translating English and German texts and the pair moved to Warsaw. There, Danny attended a Polish state school and eventually completed a degree in English literature from Warsaw University. After graduation he obtained work at Radio Warsaw, broadcasting communist propaganda to North America.

In 1957, Danny was sponsored by the British National Union of Students to travel to England. Experiencing the freedoms of non-communist society and becoming severely disillusioned with communism, he became determined to emigrate. With the help of friends who had emigrated to Melbourne, and the HIAS, Danny finally secured the necessary papers and arrived in Melbourne in 1958. In Melbourne, Danny became a librarian. His mother joined him at the age of sixty and became a librarian at Monash University.

Memories From a Foreign Country is a work of creative non-fiction that recounts the author's wartime experiences through vignettes. The narrative is written in third-person, present tense, creating a sense of immediacy and emotional distance which vividly recaptures the perspective of a child confronted with the incomprehensible horrors of

war. The memoir ends with arrival in Australia. It was written and published as part of the Makor Jewish Community Library's "Write Your Story" Program.