

KONRAD ZUKOWSKI

HEARTWOOD

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The Breeder / Ewa Opałka Gallery / Razem Pamoja Foundation

ISBN 978-83-948053-8-8

Athens / Warsaw 2022

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CONVERSATION RECORDING: BARTOSZ PRZYBYŁ-OŁOWSKI – KONRAD ŻUKOWSKI

translation /
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Bartosz Przybył-Ołowski / What could you see from your room's window when you were living in Korsze?

Konrad Żukowski / From my window, I could see a Neo-Gothic church next to a cemetery, and trees – very tall ashes. These ash trees never had any leaves...

B / Did you approach the windowsill, or could you see it from your bed?

K / I also saw it from my bed, but probably more from the windowsill. Because further down – the cemetery and the ash trees were in the foreground – in the background there was such a horizon, very far away, perhaps fifteen kilometres, and a perspective of air. Everything was blurred and dissolved into a kind of blue.

B / Was it a big window?

K / Yes, about three meters long and a meter and a half high.

B / Did you open it sometimes?

K / The window was open all the time – not wide open, but ajar.

B / You slept with the window open?

K / Yes, all the time, just not in winter. You know, my mom was crazy about fresh air.

B / Did you sleep naked or in pyjamas?

K / Always in pyjamas.

B / You never slept naked? Why?

K / It was too cold – my window was open all the time, really.

B / What colour were your bedsheets?

K / Always green. And the room's walls were green. Everything was green. The sheet could be bright blue or bright green, but the duvet cover was always bright green.

B / And your pyjamas?

K / The pyjamas would vary: some funny boxers and a T-shirt.

B / Did you sleep in your socks?

K / In autumn and in winter I did sleep in my socks. At that time, I had a classic set, a long flannel shirt for icy cold weather. It was warm at home, but still, being aware of the icy cold outside made me wear warmer clothes to bed.

B / Did you wash yourself in the morning or in the evening?

K / I took baths at different times of the day because I love bathing. If I had time, I also bathed in the morning, and in the evening I couldn't fall asleep without a bath.

B / So rather in the evening?

K / I always bathed in the evening. First, Kubuś – my brother – took a bath, then I did, then mom, then dad – everybody bathed in the evening. It's a marvelous thing, because these baths took four hours, really.

B / In one bathtub?

K / Yes, from 7 PM until 11 PM we would take baths. It was the best thing in the world. You can submerge yourself in water, close your eyes, just lie there and reset your brain completely. Then you go out of the bathroom into a cold apartment.

B / Your room was green, and what colour was the bathroom?

K / I don't really remember the first one, the second one was... coloured nude and brown. There was a lot of vapour all the time – you could hardly breathe.

B / Was the bathroom large?

K / No, it was tiny, two by two meters.

B / And you had a bathtub?

K / Yes, a large, white bathtub.

B / And after the bath, did you go to your room or was there still supper?

K / No, we didn't eat afterwards. After bathing, I went to the living room to see if mom or dad were watching TV. If I didn't like what they were watching, I would go to my parents' bedroom to watch something else. I also often watched something together with my mom. I would lie in my boxers, and mom in her pyjamas or still in normal clothes, and she would watch something, and I watched it together with her.

B / Do you remember the sounds of that apartment, of the world you lived in? What age were you then, was it between 7 and 16?

K / From 1 year to 19 years of age. But I'm glad that you started with questions about my room, about sleeping and bathing, because these were the only things I did there. I spent very little time in my parents' apartment, basically I only came there to wash and to sleep. Sometimes, I didn't even eat anything – I spent my entire time at the grandparents' house, in Podlesie.

B / We will get there soon, but let's remain back there for a moment: after bath – when you came to your green room – do you remember any sounds?

K / The room was small and there were barely any sounds.

B / Did you live in a block of flats?

K / Yes, a block of flats. I don't remember any particular sounds characteristic for that apartment. Of course, I heard different sounds, but they came from the outside, because the acoustics in my room were rather weak. In June, I listened to nightingales and some swamp birds. Tawny owls could be heard in January, February and March. I could also hear cranes.

B / Did you fly paper planes?

K / Yes, outside and from the apartment's window, it was the second floor.

B / Did you paint those planes?

K / No, the planes were technical, they just had to fly, they needed ingenious aerodynamics and perfect paper folds, to make them fly straight and far.

B / In the block of flats where you lived, was there a cellar?

K / Yes, it was huge.

B / Did you go there on your own?

K / Yes, I wasn't scared of that one.

B / What did you fetch? Cucumbers or potatoes?

K / No, I went to fetch books – my mom has a copious amount of books. Really, really a lot – especially books about biology. There were atlases with dinosaurs, with plants – very specialised, with cross-sections...

B / So you took them upstairs, to the second floor?

K / Yes, I would bring them to the apartment, although they couldn't fit inside anymore – we had an unbelievable amount of books upstairs as well.

B / So you slept at home, you went to school in the morning, and then you went to another house, a much older one, built before the war. Is this where your grandpa lived?

K / Yes, my grandfather, my great grandfather, and my uncle.

B / What does your grandfather look like?

K / He's shorter than me – he was born in 1940, food was much harder to get, so he didn't grow very tall. He looks very much like me, he's just older and shorter. He has green eyes, slightly wavy hair – beautiful, very dense hair, even

now; and his hands have fingers with thickened joints. He is a very calm man and has a very wise gaze. He walks very slowly, gently, and he always looks straight ahead, never at the ground. He observes everything with a very specific look on his face – as if he still was a director – he watches, checks and supervises.

B / He was the director of a net production plant, correct?

K / Yes, that plant used to produce chocolate before, but after 1945 it was transformed into the Fishing Net Production Plant. Korsze was an important communication hub, we had railway – the factory was connected with over a dozen railway tracks. In the past, they would dispatch huge amounts of chocolate, and then huge amounts of fishing nets.

B / Have you visited that factory?

K / Yes, I remember going there towards the end of its operation, I was perhaps 3 or 4 years old? So it must have been 1998 or 99. I remember those huge halls, really humongous, I couldn't even imagine they would be that large. Grandpa took me there, he was wearing a suit, and somebody was giving us a tour. I remember loud noise and rumble, machine parts banging loudly against each other. I think that almost all women from the town worked there, manufacturing fishing nets.

B / The scene you have just described, does it have any links with the present? Have you ever painted it or written something about it – does it appear in any of your works?

K / No, to be honest, I discovered this memory not so long ago, when I was talking to you about your past and my past – that look so similar, although one story is 15 or 20 years older.









