A COLLECTION OF TIGER TALES

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The White Mary

Kira Salak, PhD '04

Protagonist Marika Vecera is a young war reporter writing the posthumous biography of her hero, the famous war correspondent Robert Lewis. When she hears Lewis has been seen alive in Papua New Guinea, she travels the swamps and jungles to discover the truth.

The black waters of Elobi Creek show no sign of a current. It is another dead waterway, Marika tells herself, one that will breed only mosquitoes and crocodiles. Another waterway that somehow reflects — in the darkness of the water, in its stillness — all of her failings. These waters, this breathless heat, seem to be waiting for a response from her, a call to action. But she has no answers. And if she's to be honest with herself, she never had any. Things will unravel. They will fall apart.

If she is to be honest with herself — and the pain from self-honesty, but the duty of it, too — she must admit that this time she seems to have started something that is beyond her ability to stop. It is as if the dominoes of her life have begun to fall, and she can only watch each moment disappearing in the futile fractions of a second. She is still looking for her ghost. Nearly three months spent in Papua New Guinea and no sign of him. Does Robert Lewis know she has given up everything to find him? More to the point, would he care? She ought to go home. Go back. Call this for what it is: a failure.

Beauty intrudes upon her. Flocks of red and green parrots. Butterflies of blue and gold dancing over the black waters. Crowned pigeons with their regal headdresses of gray plumage. She would like to know this beauty, not just see it. In the same way, walking down a city street, she might gaze at the featureless crowds and catch sight of a face that awakens something vital in her. A longing, perhaps. A burst of compassion. She looks at the thick, ripe jungle around her: squat sago palms nesting beside the riverbanks; ancient trees rising toward darkening clouds. It should not be so hard, she tells herself, to know this beauty.

Thomas, the lanky young man driving their dugout canoe, stops the outboard motor. The intense heat never seems to bother him, his green T-shirt saturated, his exposed black skin glistening from sweat. He picks up a bow and a bamboo arrow ending in four prongs, and aims at a crowned pigeon. Releasing the arrow, he watches it cascade into the rain forest, just missing the bird. As the pigeon flees for the sky, Thomas speaks sharply in a tribal language, putting down the bow and starting up the outboard motor. The jungle didn't seem to notice. The butterflies continue whirling. The parrots chatter. A white cockatoo fluffs out its feathers and relaxes them. As the sun disappears behind a large gray cloud, Marika yanks down her hat's brim, staring into the tangled greenery around her. She wants a sign. She would like to know that all the events of her life have conspired to bring her to this exact instant in time, with nothing—none of it—being a mistake.

But this world of Papua New Guinea won't tell her anything. It will just burn her white skin a deeper red. It will suck all the remaining moisture from her, stinging her, biting her, keeping her from sound sleep. The jungle rises thick on either side of the narrowing waterway, interconnecting overhead as if she were entering the bowels of a giant green serpent. Miraculously—or so it seems to her—she actually arrives somewhere at the end of each day, alive.

And the closer, she hopes, to Robert Lewis.

They Were Just People: Stories of Rescue in Poland During the Holocaust

Bill Tammeus, BJ '67, and Jacques Cukierkorn

Authors traveled the United States and Poland collecting tales of Polish non-Jews who sheltered fellow Jewish citizens during World War II.

When the German soldiers came that day, the teenage brothers Zygie and Sol Allweiss were in their usual hiding place — in the Dudzik family barn behind bales of hay. But this time the Germans had come to find hay, not necessarily to search for hidden Jews. Hearing the demand for hay, Zygie and Sol steadied their racing hearts and felt for the triggers on the guns they had acquired while on the run — Zygie had a German Mauser, and Sol a French weapon.

The soldiers hauled out bale after bale, getting closer and closer to the boys, who had found refuge with non-Jewish family friends in Czajkowa, not far from their native village of Jaslany. Zofia Dudzik, wife of Maciej and mother of the eight Dudzik children, recognized what was about to happen and quickly came into the barn to divert the soldiers: "She was like a fireball" is how Zygie later described her.

"What are you taking that stuff for?" Zygie heard her say to the soldiers. "It's wet. Why don't you come and I'll give you some good, dry stuff."

So the soldier who was about to remove the last of the hay bales hiding Zygie and Sol, ready to shoot, simply turned around and followed her.

"We most likely would have finished off the German because we had the drop on him," Zygie said. But by the narrowest of margins they avoided not only killing that soldier but also what almost certainly would have been their own deaths—and the death of the whole Dudzik family.

Even if the Germans had simply found Sol and Zygie hiding, unarmed, everyone, including the Dudziks, would have been killed. And the Dudziks knew this of course. In fact, given the close call that day, Zygie and Sol expected the Dudziks to ask them to leave and move to some other location. But Zofia and Maciej would not hear of the boys taking their chances elsewhere. They told the boys, "Leave our safety up to the Lord in heaven. Stay with us." And so Zygie and Sol did.

Why did the Dudziks do it? The simple answer, Zygie and the two Dudzik sisters said decades later, is because they saw Jews as fellow human beings, and that they had been friends before the war. So Zygie survived to tell this story in an interview at a hotel near his Detroit home more than sixty years later. After World War II, Zygie and Sol both moved to Detroit, where Sol also lived until his death in 2004 and where Zygie, who turned eighty in 2007, still lives.

The boys' experience behind the hay bales in the barn that day was far from the only time they almost died in the Holocaust.