

Ryszard Kott

Farewell to Maria Kott at the St. Martin Church in Warsaw

May 31, 2022

I want to thank all family members and friends who came to this mass for our beloved Isia. My thanks also go to Rev. Andrzej Szostek, a longtime friend of the Kłoczowski family, the Rector of St. Martin's Rev. Andrzej Gałka and Dominican Fr. Tomasz Dostatni for observing the mass. For the beautiful music thanks go to the schola from the St. Andrew Church in Warsaw, with friends, under the direction of Tomasz Owczarek.

The St. Martin Church is a symbolic return to the beginning for me. This is the place where on June 16, 1979, Isia and I got married at the mass celebrated by Rev. Bronisław Dembowski, the famous defender of dissidents and later a bishop at Włocławek, who was a friend of the Kłoczowski family and "uncle Dembowski" for Isia, and by uncle Andrzej Kłoczowski, a Dominican and later a professor of the Papal Theological Academy in Kraków. I am happy that we can say farewell to Isia here in Warsaw, before her funeral in the family grave in northern Mazovia.

When two years ago, before the pandemic, I was reflecting how to express my pain of Isia's passing, these classic verses of Kochanowski's Laments came immediately to my mind

Your vanishing created a vast emptiness at my home

How true these words are!

*Your vanishing, my dearest Isieńka,
Created a vast emptiness at my home
We are so many, yet no one is here
So much has gone away with one tiny soul.*

I miss Isia on every weekday and on holidays, her always being busy and also her wit, but most of all her smile, joy and encouraging words, her dear presence, radiating with kindness and love to everyone around.

As you know, I am not a very sentimental man, and I skeptically viewed these scenes in movies or novels, where the heroes talk to the dead. And still! And still! Sometimes, when I cannot make a decision and don't know how to proceed, I think what Isia would do and follow her advice. Or when I cannot get a grip on myself, or simply wallow too long reading a book, I hear these energetic words: "Rysiaczku, that will be enough of this! It's time to do something! Chop, chop, chop! Let's go!"

Moving to the United States wasn't a dream of Isia's. I convinced her only with difficulty, and when she arrived in Redmond in 1990, it was for a year or two. Loss of contact with a big family in Poland was very difficult for her in the times of letters and postcards, for intercontinental phone calls were used once in a blue moon. We seriously thought about going back, but we ended up putting the roots for good.

Isia created a little Poland out of our home in Redmond; at the same time she was adapting diligently to the new life away. For Isia, Polish culture and traditions have always been very important and she

quickly got involved in local activities. It all started at the St. Louise Church in Bellevue near Seattle, where Tomek had his first communion. There was an ethnic festival there, and we, as a parish family from Poland, had a Polish stand donning Polish folk costumes; there was a display with basic info about Poland there, and we served typical Polish food, such as cabbage rolls and potato pancakes. After that we got involved in activities at the Polish Home in Seattle. Isia was helping with organization of Polish bazaars and book fairs, she also co-organized exhibitions for the 20th and 25th anniversaries of the Solidarity movement. In 2000, we organized the first Polish poster exhibition in Seattle. Isia provided the artistic concept for it, my role was to take care of efficient organization. Over the years, Isia was co-organizer of several cultural and artistic exhibitions in Seattle.

Isia loved Polish poetry and she opened the world of poetry to me when she offered me Herbert's volume of "Mr. Cogito" as a gift. She appreciated all kinds of arts and culture and loved to visit the great museums in America and the world. Her favorite painters were Jerzy Nowosielski and Józef Czapski.

It was only natural that Isia got involved with the Univ. of Washington Polish Studies Endowment Committee, whose goal was to create a Chair of Polish Studies there. In America, benefactors can fund professorships, chairs or even institutes or schools at universities for causes close to their hearts. Isia was a co-founder and a very active member of the committee; for almost 20 years she was helping gathering the funds and propagating Polish culture at the university. This activity started with a big splash of the exhibition for surrealist Rafał Olbiński; it was such a smashing success that since then the university has always welcome all the cultural proposals from the committee. Isia helped organizing different events, such as exhibitions, film screenings, auctions etc. Her silver jewelry and small pieces of art she was bringing in from Poland for the auctions were famous in the community. She was also a member of the program committee inviting outstanding individuals from Poland and the United States to the Distinguish Speaker Series to have public lectures at the university.

By 2021, the Polish Studies committee collected over \$350,000; however, that wasn't enough to endow the Polish Studies program. Therefore, to fulfil Isia's dream, I decided to add funds to make this happen. Since December 2021, there exists officially the Maria Kott Endowed Professorship of Polish Studies at the Slavic Department of the University. This fall the recruitment will start for this position and in time Seattle will grow into an academic beacon of Polish culture in the United States. As Isia loved culture and arts, in the founding document I stipulated that besides the Polish language and literature, Polish culture and arts should be a focus area of the studies.

Isia was a wonderful person, whose kindness and pure heart was exceptional. I was lucky that she wanted to share her life journey with me; thanks to that I have become a man more open to others and the world. She was very humble all her life and big money has not changed that; she always remembered about less fortunate among us. She didn't even want a bigger house; however, she had the pleasure of helping to rebuild the ruined old nest of the Kłoczowski family's in Bogdany, where her father could return after a half of a century of absence.

I would like to thank again people who were helping us during Isia's over two years bout with cancer. First of all, to Marcin who moved back in with us, was coming to all the treatments and helping running the house. To Tomek and Anne who were flying whenever possible and who were calling Isia on Skype with Jozy all the time to talk. To our dear friend Ania Cholewińska whose frequent visits brought not only delicious dishes and pastries Isia loved, but also a healthy dose of lough and normal gossip life.

Contacts with Isia's sister Ania and brother Janek, as well as my niece Asia Jaworska had a special meaning to her.

The time heals the wounds and allows to look with a warm nostalgia on both the happy and more difficult moments of the past. It also makes us aware how difficult it is to express the inner truth about another person, about this intangible something that make a person like Isia so wonderful.

Let us keep Isia in our memory as long as we can!