

Crystals

The pre-war Polish border with Germany in the province of Upper Silesia ran through the city Bytom. For example in the district of Old Bytom it happened that it passed between a house and a barn on same lot. Of course, it was extreme case.

I was 15 years old boy and lived on the Polish side of Bytom. I hated the Germans, same as all Poles hated them. We barely survived the Nazi occupation; it was very sad times for all Poles in Bytom. But finally the Germans left Bytom pushed out by the Red Army. The oldest boys in my neighborhood, in secret from their parents, decided to take loot to the German part of Bytom. It was not safe; one could still hear gunfire in the city. Any one of us could get hit by a stray bullet. But the temptation and desire for money were too great for us. So I, alone with the other, older boys, went looting. I took with me a bag to carry the loot.

We walked through the empty streets; all the houses were locked with a key. We did not see any residents. Worst of all, the retail stores were barred and locked. There was nothing to rob. Then, one of the boys suddenly found open a retail store with crystals. They were displayed on the shelves mounted to the walls and the shelves of glassed segments not attached to the walls.

“What is it? What kinds of glass? What it is used for?”

None of us knew. We had not seen crystals in our life. We were all from poor families, and we did not see before even porcelain tableware, not only crystals. We ate in our homes on aluminum plates because they were practical; you could not break them. We decided, therefore, after a short discussion, that crystals were useless for us. In addition, the crystals were extremely heavy and brittle as glass.

“Guys, let’s break these crazy products of glass. When the Germans return to store, they will cry!”

Everyone loved this idea. We began to drop to the floor the crystals from the shelves. They fell with a roar on the concrete floor, breaking into small pieces. It was a lot of work, and we got tired and sweaty. But we left the store with feeling of a job well done. In general, our trip to the German Bytom was not successful, being that the stores and houses were closed. Suddenly bullets started to fly over our heads, and we ran back to our homes.

I told my mother that, to spite the Germans, we broke their strange glass.

“You are so stupid; after all, this strange glass was crystal!”

“What’s crystal; what is it used for?”

“They are used for nothing, only for decoration.”

“We do not need any decoration in our house!”

“We do not need any, but in wealthy homes they are needed. They cost lot of money!”

I felt not only stupid but guilty too, because really in our home we never had enough money.

“Did you bring a single crystal?”

“Not one. They were fragile and very heavy to carry out. I did not know that they were so expensive.”

My mother almost fainted into a chair and began to wail loudly.

“What fools, to waste such great money!”

I left home; so I did not have to hear her. It wasn't my fault that in our house I never before saw a single crystal.