

A Tale of Two Doctors **by Sabina Skopińska & Monika Blackwell**

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Monika Blackwell's Polish father survived wartime Warsaw and kept a diary of his life there and the Resistance. His son translated it and published it as *Warsaw 1944: An Insurgent's Journal of the Uprising*. Now, Dr. Blackwell has translated her grandmother's, Sabina, diary of life as a GP in rural and urban Poland in the 1930s. Sabina was herself a Polish heroine, killed by the Gestapo in 1943. She trained in St Petersburg and Warsaw and started practice in 1925 in the deprived rural community of Starołęka, near Poznań, working for the Polish national health service: the Social Insurance and Healthcare Fund. After ten years, she moved back to Warsaw where she spent the war until her death.

The book is an essay, well broken down into sections. It is a fascinating read – first as a description of medical practice in Poland - Sabina describes her training and the nightmare of starting a rural practice with no transport. She talks of what treatments she used at a time when few effective ones existed. Secondly, the account of her patients makes them come alive. She talks as much of the living conditions as their health and the book is full of anger and compassion. A countryside where 90% of the children have rickets and TB is ubiquitous. What is it like to become ill in winter in a cottage where you have no food and no heating? She describes what she found and how she reacted.

This is an account of practice in Poland in the 1930s that feels searingly honest. It is complemented by her granddaughter's account of her training and her reflections on the differences between her grandmother's experiences and her own.

The book reads well and can be read quickly if you do not stop to consider the wider implications. I recommend it for any medical person who wants to think about their own practice and for anyone interested in medical practice between the world wars.

Peter Carpenter
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