

The Pacifican

# Prof finishes grandfather's survival story

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Released on September 24, 2019, with Koehler Books, *How Languages Saved Me: A Polish Story of Survival* is co-authored by Polish-American academic Tadeusz "Tad" Haska (1919-2012) and his granddaughter Stefanie Naumann, a professor at the Eberhardt School of Business at the University of the Pacific, and tells the story of Tad, a non-Jewish Pole who, after being orphaned at the age of 12, clung to the study of language. It would end up being a lifesaver.

**Question: A relationship between a grandparent and their grandchildren is so special! What is your favorite memory of Tad Haska and what did you call him?**

**Answer:** I called him *Dziadzia*, which is an affectionate word for grandpa in Polish. My favorite memory was when I went with him to Poland in 1992, and he showed me many of the places that shaped his childhood and young adulthood. I'll never forget his rosy cheeks and the sparkle in his blue eyes when he spoke to me in Polish, giving me the history of a particular place or artifact. Another favorite memory with my grandpa was having a private audience with Polish Pope John Paul II on my grandparents' 50th wedding anniversary.

**Q: Given today's political climate, what do you think we can learn the most from this story**



Photo courtesy of Stephanie Nauman  
Professor Stefanie Nauman signs the book she co-authored with her late grandfather for a School of Business colleague at a signing event at Barnes and Noble in Stockton last month.

**regarding refugees?**

**A:** There are still political refugees in the world, just as there were when my grandfather escaped Poland. As nations around the world struggle with the integration of refugees into their societies, it is important to understand refugees' experiences and cultures. Courageous immigrants like my grandfather have contributed to our nation's values of bravery and freedom. Just as in my grandfather's younger years, there are still people being targeted because of who they are, or what they believe. My grandfather said that nations always begin calling people in opposing nations demeaning names as a first step in dehumanizing them and making them easier to oppress. He would have none of it.

My grandfather fiercely believed in independence and the voice of the people

being heard in government. He said that the single most wonderful thing about America is that you always got a second chance. In so many countries—to whom you are born, whether you grew up in a city or farm, or the bank account of your parents indelibly marked your future. Not so in America. And he embodied that spirit by never holding a grudge against anyone and always giving second chances.

**Q: What was the most rewarding part of writing this book for you?**

**A:** When I was cleaning out the garage a few years after my grandpa's death, I found boxes of his personal diaries, letters, and video recordings of him telling his life story. Getting to see his face and hear his voice again on the recordings, and realizing that I had enough information to fulfill his wish of finishing

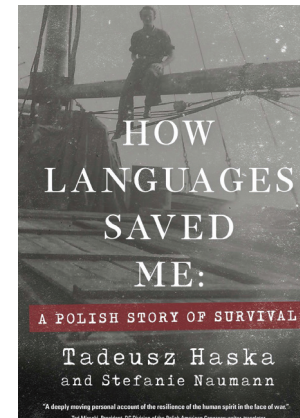
his book was very gratifying. Tracking down the daughter of his high school girlfriend, and the children, now in their 80s, of the family that helped him when he was a refugee was rewarding too.

**Q: What has the reaction been so far?**

**A:** The feedback I've received when sharing my grandfather's story at bookstores and libraries has been very positive. I'm grateful for all the encouragement that I have received. I enjoy connecting with readers, and they often tell me that some aspect of my grandfather's survival story reminds them of one of their older relatives' stories. I encourage everyone that still has older relatives to record their stories while you still can.

**Q: What motivated you to take on this book project?**

**A:** Preserving eyewitness



*How Languages Saved Me*, Koehler Books, is available in hardcover, paperback, and ebook formats wherever books are sold.

ness accounts is critical to learning about World War II and its effects on civilians. Each year there are fewer individuals alive who have firsthand knowledge of this experience. If we don't record and preserve history, we can't learn from it.

**Q: Tell us about something you learned that you did not know before?**

**A:** Once he escaped jail by the Soviet Secret police after the war, I did not realize that he survived attempts on his life at the workplace, both in Sweden and in New York City. In both instances, he was communicating in the language of other immigrant co-workers and offended some Communists with his pro-democracy views. It's funny because the title of the book is "How Languages Saved Me," but his knowledge of nine languages sometimes got him in big trouble!

**Q: What did you know about his past when you**

**were growing up?**

**A:** Growing up I noticed that, at social gatherings, there would always be people asking my grandfather to tell them how he survived World War II Poland, and escaped jail after the war. As a kid I wasn't interested in history, so I didn't pay attention to the details of his story, but I knew that his story must be important because everyone would urge him to write a book, so that the world would know his story.

**A: Did your grandfather know that you were going to finish his story?**

**A:** Yes, we started working on it together. In the 1990s, I was in graduate school, and he would mail me handwritten or typed pages from a manual typewriter, and I would transcribe everything to a computer. It made him happy that I was interested in recording his life story. I think he would be proud that I was able to finish what he started long ago, and fulfill his wish of getting it published.

**Q: What are some examples of how your grandfather's linguistic skills helped him survive?**

He became an orphan at the age of 13, and was able to live alone by tutoring other kids in foreign languages. During the war, he translated German newspapers to farmers, job instructions to French prisoners of war, and impersonated a German soldier on occasion.