



# I saw her become **resilience**

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Pictures — [ethnomuseum.pl](http://ethnomuseum.pl), Lila Bednarska

To my best friend Julia,  
you're the most resilient person I know, you're just like your mom.

## ***Resilience is a She. I know, wytrzymałość doesn't have the -a ending usual for feminine Polish nouns, but it is definitely a She.***

[W.]

It was August, fifth month of pregnancy. We finished building our house a few months ago. And then August turned into September, the sixth month of pregnancy started and at 4:48 the lightning struck. *Blitzkrieg* – the German *r* sounds so angry.

My dear B. was drafted.

He's left and I'm alone. The baby's healthy, I guess.

He got injured and is in the hospital. Maybe they will let him come home.

Now we're under occupation and B. will have to fight in Wehrmacht. They're sending him off to France.

24th of December 1939 our baby girl was born.

He says, it's peaceful where he is.

He's being transferred to Africa.  
God, please let him come back home alive.

\*

I have not heard from him for so long. He deserted the German army and found the Allied camp. They needed to check if he's not a spy so they sent

him to America. Can you believe, my dear B. in America? But now, he's in Italy. He works as a cook in the army. Yes, his cooking is so delicious, I miss it.

Our baby girl is 5 now.

Before the war ended, they sent him off to the UK. He told me that many of the boys decided to stay there when they heard that Stalin got Poland but he came back. He's my dear B. but he's not the same man. The security services keeps him under close surveillance. Yesterday in the evening, he told me that he'll have to destroy the uniform and all the documents from the war. He said that I will also have to burn this diary too.

*W. was my great-grandmother and her dear B. my great-grandfather. I grew up in the house they built together in 1939. The war story of B. was told to me by my grandfather, B.'s son-in-law. My grandfather heard this story only once, it was a day before his wedding night when B. sat down with my grandfather's father and a little (or a lot) of wódka forced the story out of his mouth.*

*When hearing it for the first time, I couldn't stop thinking about W. A young, pregnant girl who has to say goodbye to her love, then lives under the German occupation while having to fend for herself and her daughter. She did not know if B. was ever going to see their daughter. If she was ever going to see him. Nobody has ever told me her story. Unlike B., she did not cross any borders or fought in any battles. She just waited.*

[mama]

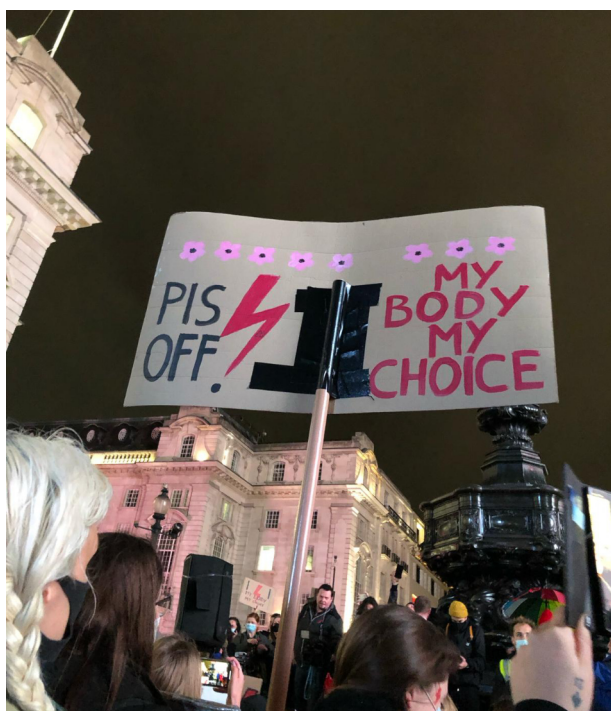
A few days ago, you got a call. “There’s a mom two daughters and a dog”, you texted me in your usual style, without any punctuation marks. Your texts are like your thoughts, chaotic. Then, another message rolled in. “Będzie im trochę ciasno ale mam nadzieję że może się jakoś ułożyć.” (It’s going to be a bit tight for them but I hope that maybe it will work out somehow). Again, no comas.

They are arriving today and you’re standing on the platform, waiting for the late train and a million thoughts are galloping through your mind. For the past month, you’ve been seeing pictures of Ukrainian refugees on the TV. Men saying goodbye to their families, women with stuffed travel bags and children... their faces break your heart, mine too. But now you’re wondering who will be those three women. What is their story? Where are they coming from? You don’t even dare to think what they

went through. And I know that you’re also scared. Will I manage? Will I be able to help them?

After a few hours you text me “nice girls” and I smile because I know that they already became your friends and that you became theirs. It’s so easy to like you, mom.

Normally, you’re so hot-headed and temperamental, lady. I have never seen you so grounded and focused. The girls feel more and more comfortable, you tell me, one even got a job. But dad breaks a leg, and now you have to take care of him too and you have to work and Easter is coming. You always have a lot on your plate but this time, it’s a three-course meal on a salad plate and yet you don’t lose sight. You just take another shot of espresso and call grandma as you do every morning.



Women’s strike protest in Poland 2020



[Iza]

On 22nd of October 2020, the “Constitutional Tribunal” published a ruling that tightened the abortion law in Poland, which meant that from that point it was basically illegal in most cases to have one. In the midst of the pandemic thousands of people, mostly women, took to the streets to protest the ruling and the government. Protests were organized in the country and abroad, in cities, towns and villages. I had never experienced this kind of collective fury before.

On 30th of October, 100,000 people attended the Great March in Warsaw. People were marching every day for about a month. It was the largest demonstrations in Poland since the 1989 political transformation.

On 22nd of September 2021, a 30-year-old woman called Izabela died in a hospital in Pszczyna because, despite her deteriorating state, the doctors decided not to terminate the pregnancy.

“The baby weighs 485 grams. For now, thanks to the abortion law, I have to lie down. And there is nothing they can do.”

They will wait until it [the fetus] dies or something starts, and if not I can expect sepsis. They can't do anything now. The heart has to stop beating or something has to start.” – that was one of her last messages.

I was crying the whole journey back home from the protest. Everyone who that day gathered there, in front of the Polish embassy in London to shout “ani jednej więcej” (not a single one more) was crying furiously. Why did she have to die? What if it was me?

I'm a bit jealous of countries where the change just happens. There's no protests, no victims. My country is not one of them. There's always protests and unfortunately, there's often victims too. But I refuse to be defined or ashamed by it. You know why? Because every time I go to a protest or a march, I see thousands of people who care. Indifference is far more scary to me than far-right populist old men will ever be. Also how can I be ashamed of the people who are not afraid to let their voice be heard, people who are hungry for change and people who just elected a new democratic government?