

Plagues and Miracles

Introduction

Maciej Stefan Kumosa

September 3, 2026

Most of my life has been a combination of various disasters and numerous recoveries. I call them “plagues” and “miracles” — not as borrowed metaphors, but as the actual vocabulary of my lived experience. The plagues are the severe, often inexplicable obstacles that arrived without warning and threatened to end everything. They included political persecution, severe illness, financial disasters, professional and private betrayals, and many others. The miracles are mysterious reversals that followed — the unexpected letter, the unlikely friendship, rapid health recovery, unexpected family and professional triumphs, the door that opened just as another slammed shut. The letter that arrived when everything else had collapsed, and that reshaped my family's future almost overnight, is only the most recent of these — this book is full of others. Together, plagues and miracles are the architecture of this life, and of this book.

I began writing my autobiography about four years ago, initially struggling to find something to say on the opening pages of my life story. Slowly, however, past experiences began to resurface. I was pleased to finally have content to start my long-awaited memoirs. Yet, this joy was soon interrupted by the painful memories that emerged forcefully, sometimes overwhelming me. Consequently, my writing was frequently paused by these painful intermissions. Over time, I learned to subdue the pain caused by these negative memories and replace them with a focus on the positive aspects. I started noting the miracles I had previously overlooked. These miracles helped me explain past events that had been mysteries in my youth, my middle adulthood, and even quite recently.

The fact that I am still alive is most likely my greatest miracle, granted by my Creator. Survival, I have come to understand, is only the beginning of the story. I have learned, often painfully, about different political systems, survived a surgery that split me in two, and failed my first banana test at Cambridge — and somehow, I still have things to say. As we age, the pages of our life story become richer, offering ample material to construct a meaningful narrative. However, the same passage of time makes life increasingly intricate and occasionally tragic.

The prospect of criticism — arrogance, disparagement, cancel culture — can be daunting, especially now. In the face of such potential backlash, I’ve waited this long before embarking on my writing journey. I’ve also realized that further delay is a significant risk — another COVID-like crisis could extinguish my opportunity before a vaccine arrives. Without this book, the only reference to my intended memoir might end up on my gravestone:

“Here lies an unlucky individual who harbored aspirations of writing a book about his challenging life but missed his literary boat.”

To avoid that fate, I resolved to write my story.

When one embarks on writing a book about oneself, one audacious question must be asked up front: Will my book make any meaningful contribution to our shared civilization? After more than seventy years on this planet, having already lived on both sides of the divide I described a moment ago — communist and capitalist, unelected and elected — I believe I can offer some insights to enrich our understanding of the modern era.

This book is a testament to resilience. It is also, I confess, preparation for my eventual conversation with my Creator — and I would prefer to arrive with a truthful account. Nevertheless, the truth becomes relative as I age. What I once knew and remembered during my teenage years might not correspond precisely to what I can now retrieve from the memory drawers of my mind. As men, we possess numerous mental drawers, and one of them is the “Drawer of Nothing,” a term coined by comedian Mark Gungor in his well-known routine on the differences between men’s and women’s brains. We, men, retreat there while fishing, or aimlessly flicking through TV channels, unaware of what we’re watching — a kind of procrastination, an escape from the complexity of life and the plagues waiting just outside, ready to crush us. I have not been free from this state. Amazingly, however, some of my greatest ideas surfaced just as I was leaving my Drawer of Nothing. Some of them you will find on these pages.

And so, to the dedication of my book.

It’s customary for writers to dedicate their works to cherished individuals. It would be appropriate to dedicate this first book to my parents, who furnished me with the most resilient fabric of my life, endowing me with the impetus to cross diverse systems globally. Yet perhaps a broader

dedication is warranted — one that extends to all those who have been moving around the world, across epochs and territories, often involuntarily.

Throughout our lifetimes, people make what one might call “jumps,” characterized by swift shifts in their life trajectories. I realize that the word “leap” instead of “jump” sounds much better, more graceful, and less colloquial. However, to my knowledge, I have not been leaping or limping through life; I have certainly been jumping high and long. My own jumping began long before I chose it — and its roots, I now understand, were planted in watching someone else’s life be slowly extinguished by the impossibility of escape.

At five years old, I was uprooted from Warsaw, Poland, and transported to a small provincial town in the middle of the country, where my father practiced medicine — a move that lasted fifteen years. My mother never recovered from it — the same mother whose insistence that I never fall below an A shaped everything that came after. She was a woman of formidable talent and ambition, compelled by the system to live in a place she had spent her whole life trying to escape. Instead of staying and most likely succeeding in Warsaw, she was forced to move back to the middle of provincial Poland and then passed away there, in a town she never wished to be in. Watching her and listening to her constant complaints, I made a private vow: the same fate would not befall me. That vow was the first jump — made silently, before I had anywhere to go. At eighteen, a reckless jump nearly broke my neck when diving headfirst into two feet of deep water and almost ended my career as a jumper before it truly began. But it did not end. And everything that followed — Wrocław, Liverpool, Cambridge, Oregon, Denver — was in some way the fulfillment of that boyhood promise made in the middle of nowhere in central Poland, which I now cherish with my entire heart.

My mother's fate became my compass. For all of us, our jumps could result from relocation, rapid changes in political or educational affiliations, significant professional advancements, and other shifts. Some live and die near their birthplace, their jumps modest and contained. Others make leaps so substantial — unpredictable or predetermined, shallow or profound, effortless or perilous — that they alter not only their own trajectories but those of their children and generations to follow.

Throughout history, the “jumping” individuals have relinquished possessions accumulated over generations, sometimes even their families, their fabric of life shredded, cracked, and occasionally obliterated — a desperate flight from one calamity only to be trapped by another. Despite enduring significant setbacks and numerous disasters as my plagues, I consider myself among the fortunate who succeeded, these trials balanced by unexpected moments of personal and professional triumphs, as if miracles had descended.

This, then, is the only dedication I can tender, as my homage to the generations of jumpers before and after me — my mother among them — to those who did not triumph in their jumps or leaps across systems. Their aspirations were not lacking in vigor, but their fabrics of life, gifted to them by the Creator, were most likely not endowed with the durability and tenacity required to bolster their unyielding desire to leap, jump, and flourish.

This is the intricate tapestry of life, where we attribute both blame and love to our Creator, for it is through these threads of challenge and triumph that our shared human story is woven.