

Preface of Plagues and Miracles

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My life's journey has been marked by numerous severe obstacles—what I call plagues throughout this book—balanced by an almost continuous stream of unexpected miracles. I still vividly recall one such moment near the end of the 1980s. With my family's future uncertain and nowhere to go during Poland's political collapse, a surprise invitation to interview at an American university arrived in my mailbox in Cambridge just as we struggled to stay afloat in the UK amid a severe recession. We had to leave—my physician wife was not allowed to practice medicine in Britain, and my modest academic salary at Cambridge could no longer sustain our family with two young children.

These convergences of adversity and deliverance have defined my journey from communist Eastern Europe to the Pacific coast of Oregon. Throughout this journey, I have held fast to a principle rooted in the genuine communist ideals I embraced early in life, centered on fairness, equality, and shared responsibility: that my scientific, economic, and other accomplishments should never outpace my social engagement. These values were instilled in me during my first thirty years in Poland.

My sincere Christian convictions, nurtured in my Catholic family home, have deeply reinforced these ideals, advocating for the harmonious coexistence of humanity across all political and cultural boundaries. From around age four, I felt the tension between Christianity and communism—a struggle I now see reflected in the ideological battles of modern America. This unique combination of Christian values and egalitarian principles has carried me through seventy years of life.

Born in communist Poland, I grew up surrounded by what today might be called identity politics, equity, diversity, and social justice—implemented by the system, but only for the benefit of specific groups. As the son of a physician in a tiny town in central Poland, I belonged to the Polish

intelligentsia, positioned near the bottom of the political hierarchy. My mother repeatedly warned me, “You’re not allowed to get grades below an A, because the system is waiting for you to fail.” My school friends, mostly from farming or factory families, were permitted to lead more ordinary lives, free from the enormous stress imposed on me from the beginning.

That negative pressure had an unexpected upside: it created within me a powerful drive and an enormous desire to succeed, regardless of the hostile environment, whether in communist Poland, the United Kingdom, or later, the United States.

After thirty years in Poland, I reached what once seemed impossible: a pinnacle of Western science at Cambridge University, where I befriended some of the greatest British and American scientists. Later, I moved to the United States to build a third life with my family of four. Despite the political and economic turmoil following the collapse of communism—and the challenges of immigrating twice through three vastly different systems—we succeeded far beyond our expectations.

The provincial boy from rural Poland became a professor of engineering in the United States, with internationally recognized research accomplishments. My ex-wife established herself as a prominent physician in Denver. My daughter rose to become a chief executive at REI’s headquarters in Seattle. My son is now conducting groundbreaking research on Alzheimer’s and Parkinson’s at the University of Lund, holding fourteen international patents and publishing across multiple scientific fields.

Reading my autobiography offers a nuanced understanding of political extremes. It also provides a realistic perspective on the strengths and flaws of different systems. These memoirs offer pivotal life lessons and practical skills developed while navigating the major political systems of the world with my family. These same skills helped me endure when plagues arose—only to be met by a miracle.

This book celebrates love and friendship, advocates for tolerance and forgiveness, and champions personal integrity, ethics, and accountability. It explores wildly different political and academic systems while sharing authentic experiences from my quest to succeed across continents and ideologies. Above all, its essence lies in resilience and in an unwavering determination to withstand both physical and mental tribulations.

In today's increasingly polarized world, perhaps my unique perspective—shaped by a lifetime lived under both communist and capitalist regimes—offers the kind of bridge we so urgently need. I invite you to walk beside me through ruins and triumphs, betrayals and breakthroughs, and to rediscover, through my story, the quiet miracle of human resilience.