

May their lot be lighter ... Of Janusz Korczak and his pupil,
by Olga Medvedeva-Nathoo

I immensely enjoyed reading this book. It gives valuable insights into the life of one of the hundreds and hundreds of children that once lived in Janusz Korczak's orphanage in Warsaw: Leon Gluzman. Exactly 100 years ago, in October 1912 the orphanage Dom Sierot opened its doors in the Krochmalna 92 in Warsaw, and Leon entered it at the age of nine in 1923. In 1930 he left the orphanage, and in these seven years he was a close observer of and participant in the life in the orphanage. Reading this book brings one back to a vanished world, but also to the essence of democratic, humane living, and the unconditional respect for children.

Throughout the book Olga Medvedeva presents the pedagogical ideas and ideals of Janusz Korczak, and how they were 'received' by his pupils. Korczak stood for respect, righteousness, justice and peaceful solution of conflicts. He was realist enough to acknowledge the fact that often life is tougher. The pupils were no angels ... Wherever he could Korczak stressed the positive and good in the pupil's behavior, and in this respect the book is unique in the literature on Korczak. For reproduced we may now look at a great number of so called commemoration cards that Korczak personally signed and gave to the children, whenever they had done something nice or had persevered in their tasks. Leon received a card for having risen early in autumn – 90 times no less. The same in summer – 91 times. But also a card for his work as a 'postman' - he delivered 150 letters. A beautiful memento for his First Chanukah. He worked in the kitchen, and was rewarded. The book shows a representative part of what must probably be thousands of cards that Korczak gave to his children. On the cards are pictures of Warsaw, flowers, animals, children etc. A delight in a time without television or the internet.

After leaving the orphanage Leon emigrated to Canada where he went to live at his uncle's home. On the boat he taught himself the basics of English, and further study helped him to develop into a successful businessman, and philanthropist. The final chapter of the book shows how topical Korczak's ideas are: in 2009 Ottawa saw the staging of the play *The children's republic*. Leon was consulted and met the actors and director. Pictures show him, the distinguished older gentleman, who although his memory is now fading, will never forget his "roots": the love and respect he experienced in the real children's republic of Janusz Korczak, three-quarters of century ago. I highly recommend this book for both newcomers and those already acquainted with the remarkable world of Korczak.

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