

26 November 2012

Grandfather's deportation from Poland inspires SACE Research Project

The story of her grandfather's deportation from eastern Poland during World War II has inspired a Tatachilla Lutheran College student's Research Project.

The Research Project is a compulsory subject of the South Australian Certificate of Education (SACE) that enables students to develop vital research, analysis, evaluation and project management skills.

Seventeen-year-old Isadora Aldam was not only motivated to learn more about her grandfather's story, but also the experiences of other Kresy Siberian refugees who were forced from their homeland.

The McLaren Value student developed her interview skills through questioning her grandfather Karol Matwiejczyk on three occasions, each time learning new information.

"I found it a very emotional experience," said Isadora. "I also explored the historical and political context and other factors, and was really affected by it.

"My great grandfather was an officer in the Polish army. During the war my grandfather, his mother and seven siblings were arrested in Poland and taken by cattle train to a slave labour camp in Siberia.

"They escaped and ultimately went to England. But my grandfather never saw his father again – he was killed four days before the end of the war; and two of his younger siblings died during the 17-day journey to Siberia on the cattle train."

Isadora also carried out email interviews with Kresy Siberian refugees overseas, and gathered survivor testimonies and other information from a variety of websites.

She then needed to analyse, authenticate and evaluate the relevance of the material she gathered – key information skills acquired through the Research Project.

The end result of Isadora's research was a self-published book titled *A Story of Survival 1939 – 1948*.

"Many of the Kresy Siberian refugee survivors are not keen to talk about their experiences – a lot of them have suppressed their memories.

"I felt my research was really important as time is running out to talk to the survivors and hear their eye-witness accounts.

“The Research Project really challenged me and I believe students should research a topic they are passionate about. My project has certainly made me grateful for what I have.”

Isadora has just completed her SACE, and is interested in studying languages and International Studies at university.

In the meantime she is planning a gap year next year to travel to Poland and Germany to learn more about her family background.