

United States Military Section

A quiet and enigmatic man, Rita Cosby knew little about her father's past: just that he had left Poland after World War II and had always refused to answer questions about it. When Rita was still a teenager her father suddenly divorced her mother and left the family, which caused a divide in their relationship that would continue most of Rita's life. But years later, after her mother's death, Rita discovered a worn suitcase tucked away full of mementos, including a worn Polish Resistance armband, rusted tags bearing a prisoner number, and an identity card for a POW named Ryszard Kossobudski. These artifacts and her journalistic instinct would be the tools for Rita to open a new dialogue with her distant father, and ultimately to forge a new, stronger relationship between them.

After years of estrangement, Rita has finally persuaded her father to tell his story (in her new book, *Quiet Hero: Secrets From My Father's Past*). With each new day came revelations about her father's past in the Polish Resistance and an understanding of why Richard had always kept his emotions and true feelings hidden. The hard exterior he showed to his family was honed during those difficult years fighting for his life and country during the war. As Richard shares details of his secret past with his daughter, Rita finally comes to understand the man that has mystified her for so long... and Richard discovers the daughter he never really knew. *Quiet Hero* culminates with Richard's emotional return to Poland for the first time in 65 years with his daughter by his side—this visit brings them closer than ever before. A remarkable and gripping chronicle of individual heroism, *Quiet Hero* is at its heart a story of discovery for both a father and daughter. *EP* is proud to have conducted the first interview with Rita Cosby about *Quiet Hero: Secrets from My Father's Past*, which was released on May 18, 2010.

Rita Cosby never understood her father, Richard.

Excerpt from *Quiet Hero*:

I am often asked who is the most important person you've ever interviewed. I've been blessed to interview many world



“Quiet Hero”

The Unseen Wounds of War

An interview with Anchor and Author, Rita Cosby

Conducted by Lorraine Cancro, MSW

leaders, celebrities, and other notables; however, the most important person I've ever sat down with is not one of them, but rather my own dad.

This is that story. It is a story of war, the story of courage, and a story of a daughter finally getting to know her father.

I should also say that this journey has proved to be the most difficult challenge and "get" of my career. Even though I've wondered about my dad's past and had many questions about it since I was a young girl, it took a lifetime to obtain the answers. It came down to intensive months of asking, searching, and reasking my dad in order to get him to sit down with me and share this story.

EP: How were you inspired to share the story of your father's experiences as a resistance fighter in Poland told in *Quiet Hero: Secrets From My Father's Past*?

Rita: This story is the most important one that I've ever written in my life. Several years after my mother passed away, we finally nerved ourselves and went through some of her things in storage and we found an old, tattered suitcase that opened the floodgates to my father's past and my own past.

EXCERPT FROM QUIET HERO: "Inside were artifacts from another time, pieces of a life I'd never known. The case was full of my father's memories—particularly, remnants from the war. A worn Polish Resistance armband. Rusted tags, with a prisoner number and the word "Stalag IV B." And, an ex-POW identity card with the name Ryszard Kossobudzki. I had lost my mother and now was finding pieces of my father. ...I've spoken with and investigated some of the most notable and notorious people on the planet, from Pope John Paul II to the Son of Sam, but standing there in the storage unit, confounded by these relics of my father's life, I realized I had never really focused my

investigative skills on my own past. What had happened to my father on his way to America? What kind of horrors had he endured? Why was he still a mystery to me? Who was Ryszard Kossobudzki?"

While doing this book, I spent more time with my father in those intense months writing (in less than a year) than I had in my entire life. It was really liberating—cathartic for me, and for him. It was an amazing, and at times, gut-wrenching experience that was truly healing for us and our relationship.



Rita, as a baby, with her father.

My father struggled with so many profound emotions that were pent-up for decades—shame and survivors' guilt after having lost hundreds of comrades when he was just a teenager thrust into WWII. Within days, during the famous 1944 Uprising in Warsaw, Poland—his own commander collapsed in his arms. He was 18 when he had to assume command. My father left his own family to fight on the frontlines. He never saw his parents again.

In my own history, when I was around the same age, my father came home on Christmas saying that he didn't feel connected anymore—to my mother or our family—and he was going to leave. He was divorcing my mother suddenly, but really divorced all of us. Needless to say, my mother, brother and I were devastated by his detached behavior. It was so easy

for him to just move on and start a new life. Now I understand why he was able to emotionally separate from us so quickly.

EP: You must have had a conflicted relationship with your father after he left the family so abruptly. How did writing this impact your relationship with your father?

Rita: Yes, I was angry at him for quite a long time. Working on this book however healed our relationship and brought us much closer together. Now, I finally feel like I have a father. When we worked on his story we returned to visit Warsaw where he had not been since the war. At first, he was very uncomfortable about the idea. When we got there he showed me the place where the German tank had exploded. 500 people died in that explosion, including many of my father's friends. He told me how he'd waded through a river of blood when he went back to try and find his comrades. He said to me while we stood there, "This is where I lost all of my emotions."

Imagine, a German tank explodes and then he finds out how many of his friends and even his girlfriend were killed. He told me how he felt the ground shake—and then returned to find a pool of blood where so many people were dead.

On the one hand, it was a relief, as well as revealing, for me to know what had happened to my father throughout the war and yet so sad to finally know and understand the depth of his pain. My father wept. He lived through 63 days of hell when he had fought on the frontlines. He was a brave man. It made me proud to know how much courage he had. His unit was made up of 40 men. There were only 2 guns in his unit. They used Molotov Cocktails made out of gasoline/broken glass and cloth. This was their main weapon against one of the most advanced war machines in the world. The depth of loss that he experienced before the age of 20 is incomprehensible. The book shows my father's pain.

The Unseen Wounds of War

EP: You also experienced pain, since your father was detached due to suffering from PTSD.

Rita: They had no name for the condition back then. He was remote, emotionally detached. It was also hard dealing with my mother's pain as she felt so rejected by my father. My mother didn't understand. I think I now know more about my father than my mother ever did. I had to comfort my mother through all of her difficult emotions after he left. This experience made me grow up quickly.

Excerpt: *"In a way the war punched a hole in his heart. He wasn't able to bury his friends or his family. Instead, he buried his emotions. It was a heavy burden to keep his emotions secret, locked away tightly, but not forgotten. I hope in opening this suitcase of his emotions those painful chapters are now behind him, and for the rest of his life he can live more fully and deeply with those who love and admire him. We now have a deeper relationship than I ever thought possible. I know he regrets not being there more for my brother and me when we were growing up and is saddened by all the missed opportunities, but I believe he finally understands the loss he gave us...because he bravely undertook the challenge to understand and mourn his own. Whatever time is left for us, we will embrace our present. We no longer need to run from the past."*

EP: You experienced the effects of war on an individual and his/her family. How stress, better yet, strain, impacts family throughout the generations. Tell us about that.

Rita: I feel blessed to have helped my father sort through his past and now look back with pride. My father is a retired civil engineer and he is so excited about the book. As is my brother, who has learned a lot about his father from this journey. It has helped them get closer too.

EP: What do you hope your readers will come away with from having read *Quiet Hero*?

Rita: I pray others will be inspired to look at heroism in their own backyard and capture their hero's story before it is too late and encourage people to show a loving hand to those who have endured the unimaginable. We need people to be more sympathetic and show greater respect for our military. They are the best of America. Americans saved my father, who escaped from a POW camp—at 90 pounds. Imagine, he was 6 feet tall and just skin and bones. He was saved by US forces after he escaped from the prison camp. He saw a plane above and that plane dropped a message saying they were essentially 15 miles from freedom. My father was truly a hero, although he would never admit it.

Excerpt: *"Keep in mind that in 'the discovery' of family, most often there will be both good and bad. That is, after all, what being family is all about. Yet, perhaps you too might be inspired to earnestly attempt to know those you love. Since beginning this journey, I have overcome my feelings of abandonment, developed wonderfully meaningful feelings for my dad, and refused to let past negative feelings retain a place in my life. I see what the missing piece in my life has always been and now understand why that had to be. I have forgiven him and I hope he has forgiven me for not understanding all those years what he really went through."*

Excerpt: *"When my dad told me he wasn't a hero, I asked him what then he considered a hero? 'I would consider a hero a person who, number one, was willing to sacrifice himself for the benefit of somebody else, like saving*

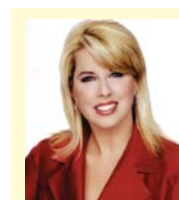


his buddies. Number two, never expected a reward for it. And, number three, never boasted about it.' How could he not realize that he had just told me his resume?"

This book should be a reminder of how amazing our military is and how deep America's values are—including freedom and democracy. This book reminds us who we are as a people—Americans—and what our military represents throughout the world.

Excerpt: *"Having grown up in Europe, my parents knew a lot about the war. My dad always discussed how the US had saved the world from a great evil, how, if it weren't for the Americans stepping in, Europe and the world would have been a different place. I remember cooking hot dogs over a camp fire one July 4th and Dad saying, 'The world owes America a debt of gratitude. I am lucky to now be an American.' Little did I know that America had in fact saved his life." •*

Cosby is a renowned TV host and veteran correspondent who anchored highly rated prime-time shows on fox news channel and MSNBC. She is currently a special correspondent for the top-rated CBS syndicated newsmagazine *Inside Edition*. Honors for the three-time Emmy winner include the Matrix award and the Jack Anderson award. She was also selected by *Cosmopolitan* as a "Fun and Fearless Female." A recipient of the Ellis Island Medal of Honor and the Lech Walesa Freedom award, she hosts the National Memorial Day Parade broadcast to all US military installations around the world. Her first book, *Blonde Ambition*, was a *New York Times* bestseller. Visit www.ritacosby.com.



Rita Cosby is donating

proceeds from her book to a new \$100 million USO campaign called Operation Enduring Care designed to raise money for wounded

warriors and their families.