

## How life's traumas affect the generations at this year's Edinburgh Fringe

Karola Gajda presents

### My Mother's Shoes

**A show that walks the tightrope of painful and funny**

Debuting at the Edinburgh Festival Fringe 2019 is a brand-new, one-woman, theatre show about how the traumas of life – migration, war and illness – impact a family, from generation to generation.

**My Mother's Shoes** is a highly personal show about the relationship writer and performer Karola Gajda had with her late mum Boleslawa who, aged 3, was deported by Stalin from Poland to a Siberian gulag during World War II. As an adult, Boleslawa underwent an unnecessary amputation in the UK because the wonder drug cortisone she needed was mistakenly taken away. This led to unresolved trauma, and ultimately, a personality disorder that would impact Karola's life and that of her family until she died in 2012.

Karola reveals why the medical shoes her mother wore often terrified her and talks directly to the audience 'as herself' while also playing different key characters. She re-enacts formative moments from her mother's life, such as her deportation to Siberia on a cattle train. The men were sent to different camps from their wives and children. Boleslawa lost her mother and sister in Siberia between 1940-46 and with her father's whereabouts unknown, she was ostensibly an orphan. However, seventeen years later, the Red Cross reunited her, then 20, with her father in the UK!

It was during this visit to the UK that Boleslawa fell critically ill with Addison's adrenal disease and was misdiagnosed. It was tragic on the one hand but miraculous on the other – as had she fallen ill in Poland she would have died, as the cortisone she needed was not available there. She got it in time to save her life, but because it was withdrawn, her life would never be the same again.

Director Emily Feltham says, 'The truth is powerful and this is an amazing true story. It tells of deep pain but also of hope and humour and endurance. Karola wants to show the complexity and depth of a mother/daughter's love. Karola asks, can she ever walk in her mother's shoes?'

### About Karola Gajda

Yorkshire-born British Pole Karola Gajda likes to write from her own life and is interested in tragedy and comedy. She has worked as a radio journalist and has a background in stand-up comedy and theatre, having trained at Jacques Lecoq in Paris.

### Previous reviews

Theatre show 2006, **My Polish Roots and Other Vegetables**

'This show is unmissable... how theatre should be'. Agnieszka Ogonska, Polish National Daily (Dziennik Polski) 2006

Karola's comic migration novel **Are My Roots Showing?**

'A hugely entertaining, funny, heart-warming and often very moving read' Yvette Huddleston, Yorkshire Post 2016

## Relevant facts

- 1.7 million Poles were deported by Stalin to Siberia on cattle trains from 1940-41.
- Mass migration is still happening. Since 2011, around 5.6 million Syrians have fled as refugees (worldvision.org, May 2019). Another 6.2 million are displaced within Syria and half of those affected are children.
- The Kings Fund estimates health tourism costs the UK between £60 million and £80 million per year. However, the Nuffield Trust says additional cost pressures are largely driven by our ageing population and rising wages. Channel 4 news, Jan 2018.
- On motherhood: 'Children are the anchors that hold a mother to life' - Sophocles. 'The influence of a mother upon the lives of her children cannot be measured. They know and absorb her example and attitudes when it comes to questions of honesty, temperance, kindness, and industry' Billy Graham.

## Directed by Emily Feltham; Siberian soundscape by Tim Brown

Venue 151: Bar 50 (Upstairs room), within the Safestay Hostel, 50 Blackfriars St, EH1 1NE

Tickets: Free: part of the Laughing Horse [FreeFestival.co.uk](http://FreeFestival.co.uk)

Dates: 3-25 Aug 2019 (not 12 or 19)

Time: 12:15 (1hr)

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