

Written by his son Adam, June 2008

My father, known as Julek, was born Israel Djament in Tarnow, a town in south eastern Poland on the 17th of May, 1911. He followed Abraham and Joseph as the third son of Itzhak Djament, a timber merchant and Chave Lind. The family was further expanded by the addition of twin boys, Jacob and Samuel in 1913. The entire family of 5 boys and parents moved to Krakow soon after the conclusion of the First World War.

The family rented a one bedroom apartment at 45 Starowislna St in Kazimierz, the Jewish quarter of town. When Julek was about 6 his father came home and announced that the government fearing a Russian invasion ordered all families with young children to evacuate.

They packed up their belongings and traveled to a small village in Czechoslovakia. Together with a housekeeper they lived in the village for a few months before returning to their flat in Krakow where they found that someone had moved into their one room apartment and for 2 years they were forced to share accommodation. When a larger, 3-room apartment across the hallway in the same building became available they paid over a substantial amount in key money and lived in comparative luxury until the outbreak of WW2. His father suffered a heart attack and died in 1932.

After graduating from the local school he attended the King Jan Sobieski the 3rd “gymnasium” and graduated in 1930. He went on to study civil engineering. He really wanted to study medicine however places in the faculty were restricted to non-Jews.

At the outbreak of WWII he was employed by a building company in Warsaw as a resident engineer. The work stopped as soon as the war broke out and he decided to seek refuge closer to the Russian controlled south east.

He wandered from town to town looking for odd jobs. With the help of work here and there he led a comparatively safe existence until Germany declared war on Russia. The ensuing bombings left many small towns in ruins. He obtained a job with the German civil authorities involved in restoration and rebuilding of Brzezany, a health resort in



*The apartment in Krakow
Picture taken in 2006*



*He attended this local
school in Krakow*

southern Poland. Although the Germans knew that he was a Jew, he was spared deportation because he was useful to them.

Gradually, as stories of German atrocities began to spread, he decided to flee the town where his Jewish origins were known. He obtained a false birth certificate and changed his name to Stanislaw Rutkowski.

He eventually made his way to a small country town of Milanowek some 30km from Warsaw. There he stayed with family friends who were hiding as Catholics with false identities. The head of the family was to become his mother-in-law and it was there that he married his first wife, Irena, in the spring of 1944. In order to maintain their Catholic cover, they were married in a local Catholic church. With all of his work and qualification documents now under the assumed identity, he found work in Warsaw, traveling to Milanowek at the end of each week.



*House in Milanowek
Picture taken in 1975*

His two elder brothers, together with his mother and twin nieces were victims of the holocaust. He vividly remembered receiving a postcard from his mother in which she wrote only a few words: *"We are going to an unknown destination. The girls were told that we were going for a picnic. May God help us and keep in his mercy."* He believes she perished in Sobibor, one of many concentration camps in Poland. The postcard was his cherished possession until one day, traveling on a train in occupied Poland, Gestapo boarded the train. Petrified that the postcard would identify him as a Jew, he tore it up and flushed the remains down the toilet. His exploits during the war are detailed in his [memoirs](#) written in 1994.

Just as the war was coming to the end, he became a father. Irena gave birth to his son Adam in March 1945.

Immediately after the conclusion on WW2, he found a job in the town of Gliwice, in the south of Poland. He worked there for over a year and moved to Warsaw in early 1947 where he was involved in the rebuilding of a totally devastated city. Somehow he managed to obtain a two room with a separate kitchen in an apartment in Mokotow, a suburb of Warsaw. He also managed to obtain an apartment for his in-laws in the same building.



*In Gliwice with Irena
Picture taken in 1946*



*The apartment block at no 6 Boboli St
in Mokotow.
Picture taken in 2006*

In 1952 he became a father for the second time, with the birth of his daughter Alice. The family was now settled in Warsaw, well off by Polish standards thanks to his relatively well paid and secure job and a comfortable apartment. The family could even afford to have a live-in housekeeper, who occupied a small alcove off the kitchen. He spent at least some part of each winter in the winter resort of Zakopane, where he introduced his children to skiing and winter sports. In summer the family regularly spent holidays at seaside resorts.



*On holidays with his
first wife, Irena in
Ustka*

*Picture taken in
1956*



*Skiing in Zakopane
with son Adam and
daughter Alice*

*Picture taken in
1955*

He was an avid cinematographer delighting in taking movies at every opportunity, birthdays, family holidays and other happy occasions. He boasted ownership of one of the first 8mm cameras in Poland and many of the films he took in the late 1940's have survived to be enjoyed by his children and grandchildren. Thanks to him, a visual record of our journey to Australia is recorded for posterity.

In 1956, despite the apparent luxuries, he decided that life in Poland was not going to be of great benefit to the family, especially his children. He felt threatened by the growing amount of anti-semitism and when the government opened a rare window of opportunity to apply for emigration to the capitalist world he applied for an exit visa. He had the opportunity to take his family to Israel, however chose to go to Australia. The family was

sponsored by his wife's relatives in Sydney and after a 2 year wait exit visas and passports were finally granted.

And so in late 1958 he and the family packed up their belongings and boarded a train for Vienna. After a couple of days there, another train took us to Genoa, where we boarded the migrant ship "SS. Roma" for the long journey to Australia. In December 1958, six weeks later, he arrived in Sydney with the princely sum of 5 pound sterling, no job and no knowledge of the English language. After initial help from our cousins, he was hired as a draughtsman in a small construction firm in North Sydney. He could not get a job as an engineer because of his lack of the English language. With the downturn in the building industry, he lost his job two years later. As his command of English improved he eventually found employment in the NSW public service, with the Maritime Services Board as a structural engineer. He worked on a number of projects, mostly port facilities until his retirement in 1976.



Tools of trade:

Slide rule, a mechanical analogue computer used primarily for multiplication and division prior to days of electronic pocket calculators.



Precision set of drawing instruments kept in original container and in pristine condition for over 50 years

In the late 1960s things were looking up. His prudent and careful approach to all things in life soon saw the family own their own house and settled to a new life. His house in Bondi was nearly paid off and he was looking forward to a holiday with his wife in North Queensland.



The house in Curlewis St, Bondi

Tragedy struck when in 1968 his adored wife passed away suddenly at the young age of 52. He was devastated and could not understand why destiny dealt him such a cruel blow. It was 2 years by the time he came to accept the loss. Whilst in England on holiday with Alice he met up with a female friend from his days in Krakow and the rest, as they say, is

history. He persuaded her to join him in Australia and they were married in 1971. By coincidence, her name was the same as his first wife, Irena. He sold his house in Bondi and moved to an apartment in Vaucluse.

The first of his grandchildren arrived in 1975 to be followed by another three during the next decade. These were the happy times. He and Irena travelled the world extensively, and took many happy holidays together. He continued with his love of skiing and was a founding member of a ski lodge in Perisher Valley where we spent many wonderful winter holidays. He was very proud that after the age of 65 he was entitled to a free ski lift ticket. In his later years he especially enjoyed travelling to North Queensland to escape the Sydney winters. He took an active interest in all of his children's activities and was never shy of giving advice but always listening and respecting their opinions. He was a dotting grandfather and spent many hours tutoring his grandchildren in mathematics.



His best times were probably during his retirement. He loved to bake cakes, a skill which he inherited from his first wife, and always made sure that a special cake was on the table for family birthdays and other happy occasions.

With Irena in front of the Vaucluse apartment.

He firmly believed in exercise and frequently walked from Vaucluse to Bondi Junction to do some shopping. We always thought that he wanted to save the bus fare. He kept his mind active by doing crosswords. He was a lover of classical music, and whenever we telephoned him we knew that everything was alright when we could hear the radio in the background. He kept up to date with current affairs by watching TV and reading newspapers even though his eyesight was failing rapidly.

In 2003, when he and Irena were no longer able to look after themselves in Vaucluse, they moved to a retirement village in St Ives. The move was difficult after being in the Eastern suburbs for over 40 years but his wish was to be closer to us so that it would be easier for us to help him and with the additional help at the hostel he would not be a burden on his children. He knew and respected that we had our own lives.

In time he came to view this as his home. When in hospital, his last wish was that he would die in at home in his own bed, with his wife by his side. His wish was granted, and we think that in his last days he was aware of familiar surroundings.

He was not a religious man. He could not understand how, if there is a God, He could permit the murder of 6 million Jews, let alone allow the other atrocities he witnessed to take place. Nevertheless he was proud of his Jewish heritage and loved to maintain the

traditions of Jewish life. He was however a great believer in destiny. In his [memoirs](#) he writes

“There is an old Latin saying: - Fortes adjuvat ipse deus – God himself helps courageous people. - It proves not to be always right. A bit of luck decides every case. There were 1½ million Poles and Jews deported by the Soviets to Russia. There were people who went there voluntarily. Many of these people did not survive. Illnesses, hunger, labour camps, hard work and climate decimated the strongest. Even those that survived the war and returned from Russia or concentration camps to their home towns died murdered by bandits and religious fanatics who believed that the only way to save Poland was to get rid of the Jews.

There were people with various illnesses, who would normally not be able to survive without the help of medication and doctors. Yet these people survived and finally succumbed to old age or unrelated illnesses. There were Jews whose appearance did not show their origin but they perished by denunciations to Gestapo by Polish, Ukrainian or even Jewish individuals.

All of them lived or died because such was their destiny.”