

Life After Pahiatua

On 1 November 1944 a total of 733 Polish children and their 105 guardians landed in Wellington Harbour. Together they had shared the fate of 1.7 million Poles who had been ethnically cleansed from their homes in eastern Poland under Stalin's orders at the start of World War II and deported to forced-labour camps throughout the Soviet Union. Of those 1.7 million, 1 million died and 200,000 are still unaccounted for in Stalin's genocide.

This group of children, mostly orphaned or having lost family members, were the lucky ones and found eventual refuge in the Polish Children's Camp in Pahiatua and a permanent home in New Zealand.

These are the stories of their lives after the camp of how they successfully integrated and contributed to New Zealand society, more than repaying their debt to the country that offered them refuge and care in their time of need.

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Marian Adamski

b. c. 1935 – d. 2014, Taranaki

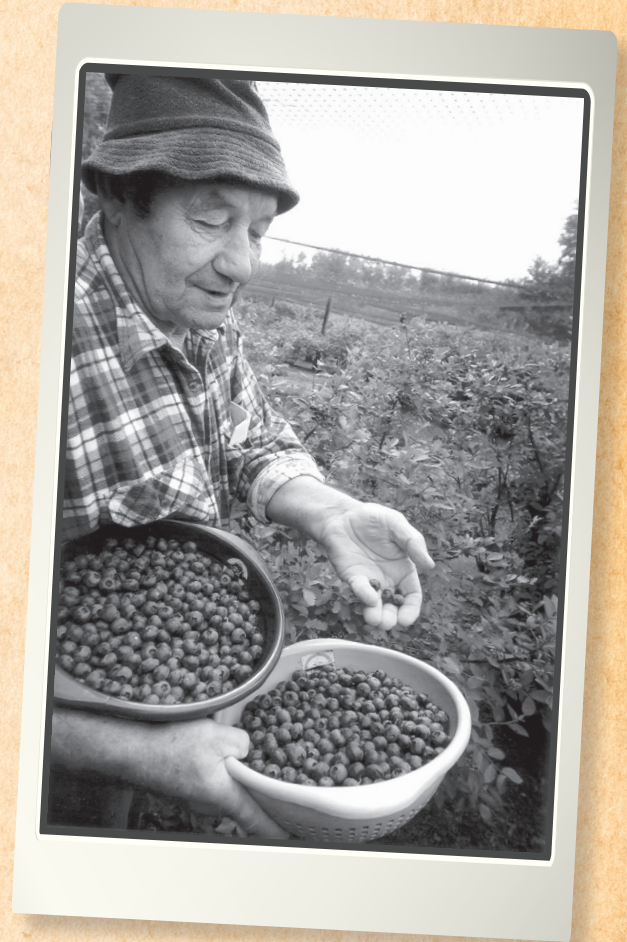
Marian Adamski came to Taranaki in 1954 to work as a carpenter but couldn't resist his inner call to work on the land. He began working in dairying, first for wages and then share milking.

Marian's ambition was to have his own land to diversify. In 1979 he leased a property bordering the Mount Taranaki National Park and continued with dairy farming, but also experimented with growing hazelnuts and chestnuts.

Then he found out about blueberries and his enthusiasm knew no bounds. "If my wife Priscilla hadn't stopped me, I would have put the whole farm in blueberries." The area's climate, with its cold frosty winters, was ideal for growing bumper crops. He soaked up all the information he could find about the fruit, including its medicinal properties.

Unbeknown to himself he was getting a reputation for being an expert blueberry grower. In the mid-1990s he employed eight workers in the berry-picking season and his six children helped out during their school and university holidays.

"In my retirement I live on my memories of hard work and achievement and of the many people I met who came to pick their own year after year. I was a Polish orphan child refugee without even a distant relation that I could say I belonged to but now I feel I have earned the right to belong here in New Zealand."



Anna Aitken (nee Zazulak)

b. 1931, Wilawcze – d. 2004, Auckland

While staying at the Polish Children's Camp in Pahiatua, Anna attended St Mary's convent, which was mostly to help her learn English. As caring as her guardians were, when Anna told them she wanted to learn hairdressing, they sent her back to the camp where she worked in the kitchen.

When Anna left the camp she got her first job at the Farmers department store in Auckland city as a clerical worker. From there she became a seamstress and worked many different jobs in this trade. She then worked for the Cambridge Clothing factory in New Lynn, Auckland, which she stayed until her retirement. She attended night school to continue her education.

Anna married Reginald on 6 February 1954 at Church of All Souls in Devonport, Auckland. She became a mother and raised three children – James, Julie and Andrew. The family home was purchased in Henderson, Auckland.

Anna acquired her New Zealand citizenship in 1964 now making her a proud Kiwi.

Anna was an active member at the Polish Association in Auckland and was hugely involved with her Polish community. She attended her local churches regularly – Holy Cross Catholic Church, Henderson, and St Paul's Catholic Church, Massey.



She had a devoted love for art and oil painting. She enjoyed gardening, baking, playing bowls, sewing, creating fashionable outfits for herself and family. Anna was always immaculately presented. Anna's last family home was purchased in Massey, Auckland, where she could be close to her daughter and grandchildren.

Anna passed away on 6 April 2004 at the age of 72. Her funeral took place at St Paul's Catholic church in Massey, which was followed by a burial at Waikumete Cemetery.

Her daughter Julie and granddaughters Kelly and Emma posthumously applied for Anna to receive the Siberia Cross medal. It was awarded to her on 3 March 2013 and presented on Anna's behalf by Honorary Consul to the Republic of Poland John Roy Wojciechowski at Polish Heritage Trust Museum in Howick.

Anna never returned to Poland after arriving in New Zealand, however her grave proudly writes:

“W Rekach Boga I Zawsze W Sercach Naszych”
“In God's Hands and Always in our Hearts”



Maria Augustowicz (nee Zazulak)

b. 1926, Bóbrka, Lwów (now Ukraine) – d. 2020, Auckland

Maria left the camp in 1946, as did most of her brothers and sisters. She went to Wellington with other girls from the camp, stayed in a boarding hostel in Oriental Bay and went to work in a clothing factory as a machinist. Even though she was working in Wellington she would return to the camp for the school holidays, as would her sisters. "To us that was our real home." The last time she was at the camp was the 1946 Christmas holidays.

In August 1945, while still in camp, she began corresponding with a Polish soldier Bolesław Augustowicz (Bolek), who was in Italy at the time. At the end of the war most of the Polish army went to England – Poland did not regain independence so the soldiers did not want to return to Poland and many emigrated to various countries. Bolek wanted to come to New Zealand, so he and Maria continued corresponding.

In 1947 Maria moved to New Plymouth and that year Bolek proposed and sent an engagement ring in the post. Maria was happy in New Plymouth and found the people were very friendly. Though she was engaged to Bolek, it wasn't easy for him to gain entry to New Zealand because New Zealand Immigration was only accepting family members. Bolek eventually did get a visa and after they were married Bolek was granted permanent residency.



Maria and Bolek had two sons – Zbyszek was born in 1950 and Stasek in 1953. They bought a section with a one-room building in Tainui Rd, Titirangi, Auckland, and moved there in December 1956. The first year was difficult but circumstances improved and Bolek extended the house soon after. In 1968 Maria resumed work as a seamstress/machinist at a sewing factory in New Lynn, Auckland. Bolek extended the house again soon after. Maria continued working in sewing factories in New Lynn until her retirement in 1987. One of the last places she worked at was Dowd Associates, which made women's lingerie.

Maria and Bolek were among the founding members of the Polish Association in Auckland and attended many of its functions and activities. She was a member of the Women's League at the Glen Eden Catholic Church and enjoyed outings with the group. She had many fond memories of her time living in Titirangi, made especially enjoyable because her youngest sister Stasia lived close by. Maria's brothers and sisters were all very dear to her.

In her later years she was awarded the Siberia Cross to acknowledge the hardship she and her family had to endure in the Siberian forced-labour camps. Maria passed away on 16 March 2020 and is buried with Bolek at Waikumete Cemetery.

Józefa Berry (nee Węgrzyn)

b. 1927 Poland

Józefa's family of six orphan children was ,lucky to be selected to travel to New Zealand, as we were initially on the list for Mexico'. Their mother and father had died of typhoid fever in Uzbekistan in 1942 within a few days of each other. Józefa was the second-eldest child and placed in the senior class for one year at the Polish Children's Camp in Pahiatua. Her class was a ,lively and close-knit group'.

Józefa has happy memories from the camp life, performing in little plays and nativity scenes and leading a Girl Guides group. ,Once we had a Girl Guides meeting on a beautiful fine day by the river but when cows came to visit we all ran away scared and never went back. Though I was reluctant to go to Sacred Heart College in Christchurch, I spent a year there with three other Polish girls, including Władysława Nawalaniec (later Sister Casimir). I left there to start my nursing training'.

Józefa considers selecting nursing as her career the right decision. It gave her many opportunities to make a lot of friends and work in various hospitals around the country. She did her general training at Masterton Public Hospital so she could be near the Pahiatua camp where her younger brother and sister were cared for until 1949. There were many long, sometimes lonely months of study in English, which was time consuming and difficult.

The social dances and nurses' balls were the highlights of Józefa's training. They gave her some ,light-hearted fun and excitement'. It was at one of these balls that she met and danced with Peter, her future husband. His letters to her were long and always something she looked forward to during her study. Józefa did maternity training at Hastings Memorial Hospital and graduated with an award. Living in the Nurses' Home was enjoyable with the friendliness of the other girls and the community spirit. Some of the hospitable families



she befriended invited her to stay during her days off. But she still missed her Polish community.

Józefa married Peter in 1952 and during there marriage they moved several times. She worked at Wellington and Christchurch public hospitals, Princess Margaret, St George's Surgical Hospital, St Nicholas' Geriatric Hospital, and nursed many private cases for the Nursing Bureau in Christchurch and Lower Hutt. She also worked in Pahiatua Hospital for three months in 1950. Józefa and Peter moved to Lower Hutt in 1975 where she was glad to be ,closer to my family and the Polish community'. She worked for 12 years as a staff nurse for the fracture clinic in Lower Hutt Hospital.

Józefa tried four months of psychiatric training at Sunnyside Hospital, Christchurch, but ,this was not my cup of tea. I remember many long night shifts, and coming home to be mum to my family of five children during the day meant plenty of tiring times'. She reluctantly retired at 60, which was the compulsory retirement age in those days. Józefa nursed in a private geriatric hospital in Taita for a few months, then ,hung up my nursing uniform for gardening and my grandmother role.'

Ryszard Janusz Białostocki

b. 1935, Kołędziany, Poland (now Ukraine)

Following the first few years spent at the Pahiatua camp, young Ryszard moved to Wellington and in 1948 he went to a boarding College (St Patrick's) in Silverstream, learning rugby and playing in the First XV team, becoming a prefect and receiving a gold medal for diligence in his final year. He left with very special memories and lifelong friendships.

He went on to attend Victoria University in 1953 for his intermediate Engineering year. Following a successful application, Ryszard was awarded a Ministry of Works bursary for the remainder of his degree. He moved to Canterbury University and graduated with a Bachelor of Engineering degree as a Civil Engineer.

Ryszard started his career in land development work for the Ministry of Works in Wellington. And then projects such as building dams at the hydro-electric schemes on the Waikato River. This then led onto designing bridges for the Wellington Urban Motorway, supervising bridge and tunnel construction and later being appointed in charge of the Motorway Design Office. One of the most significant projects of the time was the massive Thorndon over-bridge - crossing over the top of the railway yards, it was then the longest six lane bridge in New Zealand! In 1978 Ryszard won a New Zealand Road Federation study Award and spent three months touring the World studying bridges. It also enabled him to return to Poland for the first time in 38 years.

Due to the world oil crisis in the late 70's, he joined a special unit to advise the Government on alternative fuel options. New Zealand was low on oil but had a good supply of natural gas. The Ministry of Energy appointed Ryszard to San



Francisco for 2 years to oversee the scope and design of the world's first synthetic fuels plant to be built in New Zealand - a plant that could turn natural gas into petrol. The Białostocki family transferred to San Francisco and while in the USA, amongst many wonderful experiences, Ryszard gave a lecture at Stanford University on how fuel issues had been solved in New Zealand. The plant built in Motonui Taranaki was opened by HRH Duke of Edinburgh in February 1986. Coming back to New Zealand Ryszard was appointed Assistant District Commissioner of Works in Wellington and then 2 years later Assistant Chief Civil Engineer for NZ.

After 30 years of working in the public sector, Ryszard took the opportunity to move into the private sector. Initially joining Telecom then moving to Norseman Pacific Ltd - a Commercial Property firm. During his time as Managing Director they constructed and managed the build of the \$180M, 21 story Parkroyal (now Intercontinental) hotel/office tower in Wellington CBD, Midland on the Park project and many others. Following the completion of these projects, in 2004 Ryszard joined the Department of Building and Housing and advised all Local Authorities in New Zealand on the new Earthquake Prone Buildings law.

After 49 years of his Engineering career Ryszard retired in 2007 and in 2012, together with his wife Zofia, they moved to Tauranga to be closer to family. Life is still busy and full spending time with their 3 children, 8 grandchildren and one great grand-daughter.



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Henryka Blackler (nee Aulich)

b. 1930 Łomża, Poland

Henryka Blackler left the Pahiatua camp to attend St Mary's Convent School in Christchurch and later boarded at Villa Maria College for a year.

When she was unable to travel home to the camp for the school holidays, a New Zealand friend invited her to stay at her home. From that time she boarded with them.

At 18 she started work, first as a junior office girl and later as an operator of a Burroughs bookkeeping machine. One day her machine broke down and "this handsome mechanic came to repair it – my future husband George". A week later she met him at a dance and some time later they were married at the Catholic Cathedral in Christchurch.

"I had married a fine, hardworking and fun-loving man, only he was the poorest Kiwi I could have found", so they worked hard to pay for the wedding, deposit on a house and raising their children.

Three years later George was transferred to Timaru where they stayed for 16 years but returned to Christchurch after he was made redundant from that job.

Together they belonged to an operatic group and a church choir. After he passed away Henryka belonged to a small group of singers who entertained rest-home patients and elderly citizens.

Henryka also attend Polish gatherings in Christchurch where she re-engaged with her Polish language and identity.



Irena Coates (nee Ogonowska)

b. 1932, Nowogrodek (now Belarus) – d. 2019, Wellington

Following the period at the Pahiatua Camp, Irena was dispatched to a girls boarding school in Timaru and became one of 100 boarders. She loved learning English and French, and found French much easier as she already had a foundation of the language while in Iran. After four years at boarding school Irena passed School Certificate and it was time for another transition. She was accepted for Christchurch Teachers' College to train as a primary teacher.

Being a student was an interesting experience for Irena as she became one of 300 students and met many friendly young people. Life was full of adventure. This was an exciting experience and the beginning of a lifelong interest in how people learn.

After graduating Irena taught in many schools. Her first permanent posting was to a Māori school in Gisborne where her work was fascinating. In that school, mothers came to school with their children every day and stayed in the classroom, taking part in all learning activities. It was only later that she discovered this was the road to literacy for many adults.



Early in her teaching career, Irena met and married a New Zealand journalist, Ken Coates. They had four children, who have all become professional people – in law, management and the arts.

In 1979, Ken was posted to London to represent the four main newspapers in New Zealand and so Irena accompanied him there and taught in special education in central London. Living there enabled Irena to visit her homeland for the first time since arriving in New Zealand.

While working in England Irena had the opportunity to study at London University. Following her interest in how people learn, she gained a Diploma in Teaching based on her work in teaching children with learning disabilities, particularly in language acquisition. Later, she became interested in teaching English as a second language and this led her to teach English in China for two years. Irena also taught English at the University of Canterbury English Language School. She found language learning a fascinating experience that also enables dealing with students from many different countries. She sees her background to be helpful in understanding the needs of foreign students, and therefore in facilitating their English language learning with perception and understanding based on her own experience as a learner and teacher.



Witold Domański

b. 1930 Poniatowka Settlement near
Lwów (now Ukraine) – d.2018 Masterton

Witold married Anna Kozłowska (born in 1934 in Białystok) in 1957. Anna was also from the Polish Children's Camp in Pahiatua. They built a house in Island Bay on the same street as his brother Leon and sister Stasia. He kept the family tradition of beekeeping by having a few hives on the hill behind the house. They had three children – Robert, Helena and Peter.

Witold worked in the insurance industry, working his way up from the "Mail Boy" to office manager. He was subsequently transferred to Invercargill, Wanganui and finally back to Wellington.

He was a active member of the Polish community and Polish House in Wellington and was on the committee that organised the 50th anniversary of the Polish children's arrival in Pahiatua.

After retirement, Witold and Anna moved to a hobby farm (which they named Gospoda) just outside of Masterton. He planted 600 olive trees and once more had beehives, getting up to 400kg of honey per year. He also made very acceptable home brew with the honey.

Witold was a keen golfer and only stopped playing in his early 80s. He was very proud of his hole in one award.

Anna and Witold returned to Poland in 2007 to visit Peter and his family.

After Gospoda they moved into Masterton and finally to a retirement village, where he passed away on 24 September 2018.



Krystyna Downey (nee Kołodyńska)

b. 1931 Krzemieniec, Poland (now Ukraine)
– d. 2020 Wellington

Krystyna stayed at the camp in Pahiatua just over two months. As a 13-year-old, in January 1945 she went to Auckland and for the next four years she was a boarder at the Convent of the Sacred Heart (now Baradene).

Krystyna learnt English (and French), passed her School Certificate, then University Entrance. She left school when she was 17, enrolled at Auckland University and three years later graduated with a BA in languages majoring in French. While at the University Krystyna met Pat Downey whom she married many years later.

On graduation, Krystyna joined the Public Service and in 1956 came to Wellington for one year. However she so loved the city she remained and is still living in Wellington. She subsequently applied and was appointed to the staff of the National Commission for UNESCO. In 1961 she did her big Overseas Experience and travelled throughout



Europe visiting places she had always wanted to visit. Then for 6 months she worked at UNESCO Headquarters in Paris. On returning to New Zealand, Krystyna held the position of the Secretary of the National Commission for UNESCO for 12 years and worked closely with the Department of Foreign Affairs.

She confirms that whatever she has achieved in life, she owes to her parents. They nurtured any abilities and interests she had and supported her in every way. Krystyna owes it to her mother that she survived Siberia and Persia and that she came to New Zealand. She taught Krystyna at home when there was no school to go to and ensured that she continued with education when they came to New Zealand.

“And so eventually we all became Polish-Kiwis, grateful to the New Zealand government of the day for allowing us to come here and to all New Zealanders who made us welcome.”



Janina Duynhoven (nee Kornobis)

Janina Duynhoven was one of the first girls to leave the camp in 1945 and went to work with other Polish girls in Lewisham Hospital in Newtown, Wellington, now known as Wakefield Hospital.

At first they lived in a small room by the kitchen but were then shifted to a small house just by the hospital, where they felt free to speak in Polish and sing their favourite Polish songs. They were allowed to go to the pictures in the evening but had to be back by a certain hour. "That was enough to give us a feeling of freedom."

Janina's first pay was £1 4 shillings. They used their money wisely. If, for example, one of them needed a pair of shoes, they put their spare shillings together and one of them was able to buy shoes. Then the rest of the group attained her shoes in the same manner.

As Janina's English improved she began to more enjoy her work as a nurse aide. At one time she had to serve meals to Prime Minister Peter Fraser. On the day he was leaving the hospital, she collected his tray in the usual way and took it to the kitchen. There she noticed an envelope on the tray and quickly I went back to return it to him. He smiled and said: "This is for you Polish girls." In the envelope was a £10 note.



It was while working in the hospital that Janina met her future husband, Mr Biesiek, who came from a family of early Polish settlers who had already integrated completely into the New Zealand society. They married in 1946 and lived in Inglewood. However, she was not ready to live among New Zealanders all her myself. And unfortunately for her, in 1949 her four sisters left New Zealand to join their father in France.

In the early days not all New Zealanders were tolerant. Janina remembers one time when she was employed in a clothing factory. Herself and another Polish woman spoke in Polish to each other during morning-tea time. The manager called Janina into his office and told her not to speak Polish because he'd had complaints from the staff that they were talking about them.

Janina had four children and life in New Zealand improved. She also visited her family in France and the US.

Henryk Dziura

b. c.1937, Zarogów, Poland – d. c. 2004, Poland

Henryk Dziura's mother Michalina died in 1939 in Krzywice near Borszczów, which is now in the Ukraine. His father Stefan was called up by the Polish army in 1938 and later taken to the front. He survived the war and imprisonment. After the war he returned to his native village near Miechów in the Kraków province, traced Henryk to Pahiatua and decided to bring him home. On 17 April 1948 with other returning children, he boarded the Rangitata.

In London, they boarded the Polish liner MS Batory and reached Gdynia (north Poland) and Henryk travelled to Kraków with Mrs Sygierycz, a teacher from the Pahiatua camp, where he was met by his father and travelled to the village of Zarogów near Miechów. "For many days and weeks afterwards the local people would come visiting, curious about me and how I looked and behaved. I was asked to speak and sing in English." He felt like a foreigner among his own people. Life in post-war Poland was difficult as the country rebuilt itself.

In September 1948 he enrolled back at school and made slow but steady progress. After a time his father found a piece of no-man's land from a former aristocrat's landholding and converted it to farmland. As a result Henryk's workload and responsibilities increased.

In 1951, age 14, Henryk applied to the maritime school in Gdynia but because he had spent time in a foreign country and a capitalist one at that, he was rejected. So he then successfully applied to a technical school of building in Kraków, this time omitting details about his time away from Poland. He stayed there for a year but was forced to leave from lack of funds and returned home to help his father on the farm. Life gradually improved as the country rebuilt itself, including electricity, improved roading, renovated and new buildings, home appliances and the mechanisation of farm equipment and the installation of water pipes.



In 1953 Henryk was called-up to the State Youth Movement for compulsory and unpaid work in rebuilding Poland. While working there he passed his Driver Licence. After a year he moved to Będzin to work as a driver's assistant and later as a driver. The pay was poor so he moved to Sosnowiec and worked in the railways stores loading and unloading wagons.

At age 20 in 1956 Henryk got married and lived in his wife's small apartment. They had two sons – Mieczysław and Andrzej. To avoid military service, he took a job in a coal mine and worked below ground at the coal face, loading coal onto a conveyer. The work was hard and dangerous but he enjoyed it.

After three years he returned to the railroad stores. Working and gaining experience, Henryk was promoted to storeman and later to store manager. His wages were less and it was difficult to keep a family of four, so to improve his financial situation he went to Mysłowice and worked as store manager in the coal industry. He attended evening classes and obtained the essential qualifications which he had lacked up until now. Henryk worked there until his retirement in 1992.

Wanda Ellis (nee Pelc)

b. 1928, Eastern Poland (now Ukraine) – d. 2017, Auckland

Wanda Ellis has been involved in the propagation and promotion of the Polish language, education and culture and in helping Polish immigrants to settle in New Zealand for more than 60 years.

From the Polish Children's Camp in Pahiatua she moved to Auckland in 1945 to continue her education at Baradene College. She attended the Auckland Business College before marrying and adopting four children. For many years she worked in the office of St Peter's College - as a secretary, nurse, mother to the boys and helper to the teaching staff - before finally retiring in 1988. In 1996, Wanda Ellis was the first recipient of the Petrus Award from St Peter's in recognition of her many years of dedicated service.

Wanda was a devoted Polish patriot and a Catholic. In the late 1950s Wanda was a founding member of the Auckland Polish Association and its first President, and played a pivotal role in fundraising for and securing land in Sandringham upon which to build the Polish Community House. She taught



Polish language and dance to local school groups for many years, organised numerous functions and reunions and successfully petitioned for the Catholic Church in Poland to send priests to New Zealand to serve the Polish community. She helped immigrants with translation of documents, finding work and settling into homes and schools, often providing interim homestay for families. She was for 24 years a Court and Document translator and interpreter for the Justice Department.

The deprivation suffered in her early life meant that she could not have children of her own. So she and her first husband Frank Power adopted four children. Frank would later die in the aftermath of a motor accident. Two of her adopted children would pre-decease Wanda, as would her second husband Tom Ellis.

In 2004, for her extraordinary involvement in activities promoting Poland, the Polish President awarded Wanda Ellis with the Knight's Cross of the Order of Merit of the Republic of Poland. She was also the recipient of the Queen's Service Medal in 2015.

In 2017 Wanda Ellis published her memoirs "My Colourful Life".



Katarzyna Zofia Fahey (nee Piesocka)

b. 1925, Brodnica, Poland – d.2020, Palmerston North

Katarzyna (Kasia) was the eldest of her three siblings who arrived at the Polish Children's Camp in Pahiatua, after experiencing the loss of both her parents and three brothers during the war. In 1946, after completing her schooling in the camp, Kasia moved to Masterton to waitress in a private hotel. From there she moved to Dannevirke to be closer to her friends from the camp. She began to work as a seamstress and after a year met a local man at the Oddfellows Dance Hall.

Kasia married Eric Fahey at St Joseph's Catholic Church in Dannevirke on 28 December 1949. Their first home was a tiny cottage in Thyra Street in Dannevirke where their only child, Susan, was born. In 1955 they moved to Palmerston North for better job opportunities for Eric who was a bricklayer/plasterer. After a few years of renting they saved enough money for a deposit on their own home and would buy once more before downsizing in retirement years.

When Susan started school, Kasia sought employment and worked as a sewing machinist in various places. Her final job was at Ralta making electric blankets. When her first grandchild, Kiri, was born in 1978, Kasia decided she would retire to enjoy and devote her time to a new occupation, that of "being a grandmother".

Kasia loved family and when three more grandchildren were born, Andrea in 1981, Ryan in 1986 and Scott in 1988, she looked forward to the weekly trip to Ashhurst to visit them all, showering the children with treats and gifts. Over the years Kasia and Eric never missed a birthday celebration, and always enjoyed the children's school concerts and sports events.

There were very few Polish people living in Palmerston North so Kasia and Eric often travelled to Wellington to stay with her brothers, Teodor and Nick, and their families. She enjoyed these occasions because she was able to speak in her native language and often they would share



a traditional meal with other Polish people. Sometimes they would attend a special function at the Polish House in Newtown.

Kasia's sister, Olga Turkington, moved from Dannevirke to Palmerston North some years ago and this enabled the two sisters to enjoy a regular catch up over afternoon tea or a meal.

Kasia never returned to her homeland but she and Eric travelled to Australia in 1970 for a six month working holiday. They worked in Brisbane and on the Gold Coast and enjoyed the climate, seeing new places and meeting new people. They also had many holidays, motelling and caravanning around New Zealand in their later years.

Kasia was very proud of her home and loved her flower garden and watching her vegetables grow. Over the years she enjoyed going to concerts, movies, dances and listening to music. She belonged to a Lodge and the RSA Women's Division where she would attend the meetings and social functions. Kasia is a devout Catholic and loved attending the weekly Mass at her local church. She was so proud when the Polish Pope John Paul II was elected.

Eric passed away in 1994. Kasia continued to live in their home until aged 89, when she moved to a retirement village in Palmerston North.

Jan Jarka

b. 1930, Czarnowo, Poland – d. 2008, Auckland

Jan Jarka received his education at St Kevin's College in Oamaru, where he spent two years after leaving the Polish Children's Pahiatua Camp, and then in Auckland, where Catholic Social Services took the children's future wellbeing into their hearts by ensuring that no child entered the workforce without adequate and proper qualifications. He became an accountant and finished his working life with the then Commercial Union Fire and General Insurance Company. He retired in 1989.

During his accounting career he met a lot of nice people whose friendships he treasured for years. One of them was the solicitor David Lange. When he was the Prime Minister of New Zealand, they held a private discussion on the need for a closer approach to the needs of Polish immigrants by appointing Polish-speaking people as Justices of the Peace. Jan Jarka was sworn as a Justice of the Peace in 1990. He enjoyed the busy work in the community at large.

Since 1975 Jan had been a Minister of the Eucharist. He also assisted with the building of the new St Anne's church complex, which used the foundation stone blessed by the Polish Pope John Paul II during his visit to Auckland in 1986. In his church work he served on the Parish Pastoral Council, parent/teacher and finance committees, and parish finance committees.

He had been involved in the affairs of the Polish community since 1949. Auckland's Polish Association was registered in 1960 and it purchased an old house to serve as clubrooms. Later, the new Dom Polski (Polish House) was erected to cater for an increase in Polish migrants. This project was financed by using voluntary labour and each member contributing \$500 (\$100 each year for five years) as a repayable loan.

Jan Jarka served as president and vice-president a number of times and on the committee for almost 30 years. He was a president during the Pope's visit



to Auckland in 1986, and they welcomed John Paul II in the traditional Polish way. Jan advised the Auckland archdiocese on Polish traditions, such as greeting the guest with bread and salt. During the Papal Mass they presented the gifts of a Krakow-style hat with peacock feathers and an old 1880 Polish prayer book of the early Polish settlers in Taranaki. Meeting His Holiness was a thrill for Jan as he had always hoped to meet the Pope.

Jan's interpreting/translating career began as a result of an emergency court session when two Polish citizens were caught travelling in New Zealand on illegal passports in the late 1970s. He then became an accredited interpreter for many institutions and government departments, and became a founding member of the Auckland Ethnic Council in 1985, which looks after about 40 different ethnic groups in Auckland.

In 1993 Jan Jarka received the Queen's Service Medal for voluntary and unpaid community work for the previous 30 years. In his opinion this award was given to all the Pahiatua children who have given much to this country and who grew up to be good citizens. In 2004, the Polish President awarded Jan Jarka with the Knight's Cross of the Order of Merit of the Republic of Poland.

Felicja Juchnowicz (nee Nadolska)

1935 Lublin, Poland

Felicja Juchnowicz left the Polish Children's Pahiatua Camp in Pahiatua in 1949 to board at Sacred Heart College in Wanganui. She found life there difficult, lonely and uncomfortable. Being separated from her friends at the camp and seldom hearing her native language was difficult. "From a confident and a bright student I became withdrawn, shy and reluctant to talk in case I said the wrong words. And of course my accent showed me up immediately."

However, looking back Felicja considered her time and study there were beneficial because it was good preparation for the future. Gaining School Certificate, she left the school and went to live at the Polish Girls' Hostel in Lyall Bay.

Felicja attended Wellington Teachers' College from 1954 to 1955, where she studied hard and was determined to succeed. Her financial situation was difficult as well, earning £22 a month, from which £12 paid for board and the rest had to cover books, tram and bus fares, and clothing.

To supplement her income, Felicja went to work at the Steamship Company laundry in Evans Bay. The work was difficult, steamy and exhausting. She worked fulltime during school holidays and part-time during terms. The work gave her some extra money and even more determination to succeed with her studies "but there was no way I was going to work there for life".

By the end of 1955 Felicja had successfully completed her two-year course and felt a great accomplishment at qualifying as a primary school teacher. Her first position was in Masterton West School, which she thoroughly enjoyed.



Felicja taught at different schools throughout her life. When her own children left school, her ambition returned and she went to Victoria University and graduated with the Diploma of Teaching English as a Second Language. She also obtained an Advanced Diploma in Teaching through Wellington Teachers' College.

"Throughout my life I encouraged my children to study and work hard. I believe that knowledge of the world and its people makes us more tolerant towards each other and thus we become better citizens of this world. I have had a good life and am proud of what I have achieved."

Zygmunt Kępka

b. 1930, Osada Morgi, Poland (now Belarus) – d. 2018, Hastings

A close look at the map of the Milford Track reveals an intriguing Mount Kępka (1781m) amongst the few named peaks in this area of Fiordland National Park. The man who gave the mountain his name was a Polish guide, climber and an accomplished photographer - Zygmunt Kępka, whose association with Fiordland spans over 30 years.

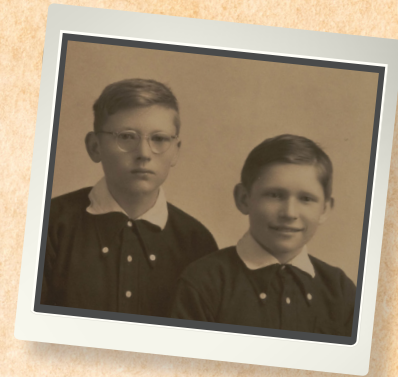
Zygmunt, better known amongst his friends and colleagues as Zyg or Zyggy, first came to Fiordland in 1957 as a carpenter working at Milford Sound renovating and expanding Quintin Huts on the Milford Track. When his building contract was completed, Zygmunt became a Mackinnon Pass guide, a role he played for 10 summer seasons.

Born on 7 July 1930 in Osada Morgi, at the Eastern Borderlands of Poland, Zygmunt was nine when World War 2 started. As part of mass deportations of Polish citizens ordered by Stalin the Kępka family were taken to Karabash in the Ural Mountains where Zygmunt's father and grandfather worked cutting trees in the forest.

Ironically, Zygmunt's love for the mountains started when he climbed Lysaya Gora (the Bold Mountain) in the Ural Range at the age of just 10 in May 1940. The exhilaration of being on top surrounded by beautiful mountain views has left a lasting impression on the boy.

Zygmunt stayed at the Pahiatua camp for two years. At 16 he left to become a carpenter and met Artur Robinson who showed him tramping the Kiwi way. In 1957 the friends were both employed as carpenters in Milford Sound, but when their contracts ran out, Arthur went to Australia and Zygmunt got a job as a Milford Track guide.

While working on the Milford Track Zyggy was captivated by this wild and beautiful land. He climbed, often solo, many of the surrounding mountains and became a bit of a local mountaineering legend. He was the first person to climb Mt Kępka, giving him the naming rights to this peak.



Although he conquered many mountains, Zygmunt saw himself as a photographer rather than a climber. Over the years he amassed a collection of thousands of slides of New Zealand alpine scenery, flora and fauna.

Between his guiding seasons, he worked as a carpenter for the Forest Service and later for the Department of Conservation building back country huts, until he was made redundant in 1990. He stayed in Te Anau for a few more years living alone in a house he built himself. Not being able to find a job in Fiordland he went to Napier, where his brother Marian was running a successful property development firm. Although by that time Zygmunt had reached retirement age, he still did some part-time work for the Department of Conservation in Napier.

Zygmunt never married, he died on 28 November 2018 at the Hawkes Bay Hospital in Hastings, leaving no descendants.

By Alina Suchanski



Józef Kubiak

b. 1930, Poznań, Poland

Józef Kubiak left the Polish Children's Pahiatua Camp in 1946 to attend St Kevin's College in Oamaru. Despite finding English a challenging language to learn he was a committed and focused student. He remembers being a member of the 1st XV rugby and gymnastic team, as well as serving on the altar in the St Kevin's chapel.

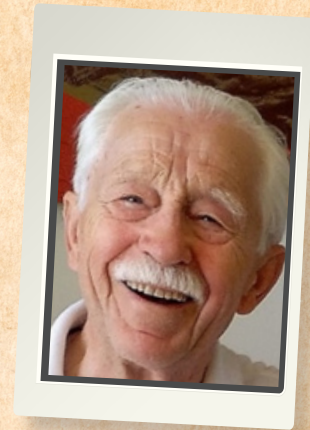
School holidays were happily spent with his siblings, Franciszek and Władysława, at the Ashley family home in Waimate. In 1949 he achieved School Certificate and in 1950 he began his working life at the Bank of New Zealand in Wellington, staying at the Polish Boys Hostel in Island Bay.

When he was 20 he met his future wife Marie Potete and on 22 January 1955 they were married. They were blessed with five children and have 17 grandchildren and 19 great grandchildren.

They purchased their home in Island Bay, Wellington, in 1958 and his brother joined them there for a while before heading overseas. Józef was busy with work and many weekends were spent taking his children to the beaches close by where he would dive for flounder or paua and the kids would explore and play. Catholic schooling and Sunday Mass attendance was part of the family's normal routine. Island Bay was a wonderful cultural mix of Polish, Italians and Dutch – a slice of Europe blended with a Kiwi mix.

Józef spent 16 years with the BNZ city branch until 1966 when he moved to work at the BNZ Electronic Data Processing Centre. In 1968 he was promoted and transferred to Databank in Christchurch and two years later became manager. He enjoyed the challenge of those years as banking systems and practices evolved and remained there until his retirement at 60.

He was a member of the Hornby Rotary Club for more than 40 years and is a former President of the club. Through this involvement Józef participated in many fundraising activities which benefited the



local community and also took part in national and international Rotary meetings.

In the 1980s his involvement with the Polish community grew and he belonged to the Christchurch Polish Association, spending time as President and was also a trustee of the Polish Charitable & Educational Trust New Zealand until 2018.

One of his most treasured experiences was making a presentation to Pope John Paul II when he visited Christchurch in 1986. Another was returning to his homeland. The first time was by invitation to attend the opening of the New Zealand Embassy in Warsaw in 2006, together with his brother, and the second time was with his wife and three of his children in 2008. He was deeply moved on each visit. He received the Cavalier's Cross of the Order of Merit of the Republic of Poland from the Polish Ambassador to New Zealand in 2005. It is bestowed on foreigners and Polish citizens permanently living abroad who have made outstanding contributions to international cooperation and to bonds between the Republic of Poland and other nations and countries.

His travels over the years included visits to Australia several times, the Solomon Islands, Samoa, USA, Europe on a pilgrimage through Italy and France. plus his two trips to Poland.

His faith in God, his love of his family and his pride in being Polish were the driving forces in his life.

Antoni Jan Leparowski

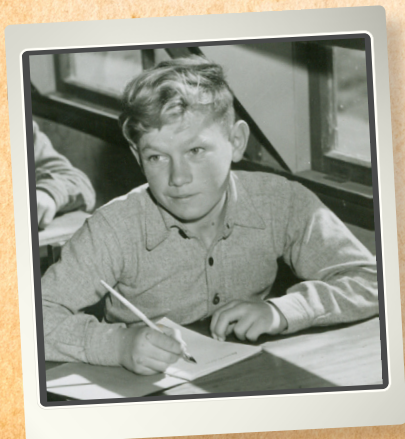
b. Kułaczkowce, Poland (now Ukraine) – d. 2012, Christchurch

Antoni Jan Leparowski (Tony) was born on a farm in Kułaczkowce, a small village in eastern Poland which now belongs to Ukraine. The exact date of his birth is unknown, as no documents recording it survived. He was most likely born in 1936, but in his later life he used the date 12 July 1935 as his birth date. The youngest of four brothers, Tony was just three years old when World War II started.

After arriving in New Zealand, he spent five years at the Polish Children's Camp in Pahiatua, before the camp was dissolved and its inhabitants sent out to different schools in New Zealand.

Tony was fostered by a Christchurch couple Jack and Elisabeth Houlahan. He went to Xavier College, by the Catholic Cathedral, but later was transferred to St Bede's College at the north end of Christchurch. Young Tony showed a great talent for music and while at Xavier received private piano lessons. Following the transfer to St Bede's he became involved in rugby, which he played for many years into his adult life.

As he grew older Tony became increasingly frustrated with others taking control of his life and shifting from place to place like a leaf blown in the wind. He developed a strong desire for independence. In 1952, before he turned 16, he left school and started an apprenticeship as a barber.



After five years of learning the trade Tony saved up enough money to buy his own business – a barber shop in Wairakei Road. He called it “Tony’s Gents Hairdressers”.

Tony married a Kiwi girl, Sylvia with whom he had two daughters – Marie and Leeann. Unfortunately the marriage did not last and when the girls were teenagers their parents divorced.

A few years later Tony met Jadwiga, who was visiting New Zealand from Poland. They fell in love and in June 1989 got married. In 1990 Jadwiga persuaded Tony to visit Poland and see his brothers. At that time Leon and Tadeusz were still alive, although Eugeniusz had passed away a few years before, in 1979. The three brothers had an emotional reunion, seeing each other for the first time since they were separated 50 years earlier in Kazakhstan.

Tony worked as a barber for 48 years, retiring in 2005. He died on 6 May 2012 in Christchurch.

By Alina Suchanski

(In 2013 Alina Suchanski published a book based on Tony Leparowski's life, titled Alone – an inspiring story of survival and determination. The book follows Tony's journey from Poland to Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Persia, Pahiatua to Christchurch and spans his childhood and youth.)

Zdzisław Lepionka

b. 1936 Lwów, Poland (now Ukraine)

Zdzisław Lepionka remains one of the most active Polish community advocates.

From 1979-82 he was the President of the Polish Association in New Zealand (Wellington). In this time he initiated many important projects for Poland, while creating awareness in New Zealand of the conditions during Martial Law in the early 80s and the Solidarity movement.

In 1980, Zdzisław approached the Prime Minister with a proposal to accept 300 Polish refugees who were in a refugee camp in Austria fleeing Martial Law. In November 1981, the first twenty-five Polish refugees arrived in Mangere, Auckland.

On seeing that the situation in Poland was not improving, he initiated and organised a successful fundraising appeal called the „Food for Poland Appeal”. Other activities included creating and organising a public march (attended by over 12,000 people) in February 1982, from Wellington Civic Square to Parliament in support of the Solidarity Movement in Poland.

For over 20 years of his voluntary work, as well as work for the Polish community and Poland, Zdzisław also contributed significantly to the establishment of the very first Ethnic Affairs Council in New Zealand and was elected Chairperson. In this role, he also helped to set up the Christchurch and Auckland Ethnic Affairs Council, and the New Zealand Federation of Ethnic Councils followed. Soon after this was established, he was able to convince the New Zealand Government to establish the very first Ministry of Ethnic Affairs Department (now called the Office of Ethnic Communities).

From 1990-97, Zdzisław was Chairperson of the Refugees and Migrant Service Commission, the official body to the resettlement of refugees sponsored by the New Zealand Government, churches, and the general public.

In 1981, he was one of the initiators of a new ethnic broadcasting service ‚Radio Access’, which gave an opportunity for ethnic communities to broadcast



programmes in their own language, and Polish Radio was born.

In 1981 Zdzisław Lepionka was instrumental in establishing the Polish National Dance Ensemble „Lublin”, engaging Polish choreographer Jacek Sliwinski to teach Polish dancing to children mostly of Polish descent in Wellington. The Lublin Dance Ensemble was very successful and continues performing around New Zealand as well as in Australia.

Zdzisław is one of the best known promoters of the history of Polish Children from Pahiatua and the importance of the invitation of the Polish children by New Zealand Government in 1944, and promoter of friendly relationship and bilateral Trade between NZ, and Poland.

Throughout Zdzisław’s support of Polish activities in New Zealand, his wife Halina and four children were also involved and gave support in Polish spirit.

In 2018, Zdzisław Lepionka was awarded with the Commander’s Cross of the Order of Merit of the Republic of Poland by the President of the Republic of Poland Andrzej Duda.

Jadwiga Lynch (nee Lutomska)

b. 1928, Tarnopol, Poland (now Ukraine)

After the Polish Children's Camp in Pahiatua, Jadwiga boarded at Sacred Heart College in Hamilton. After leaving college around 1946-47 she stayed with the O'Toole Family in Frankton.

At this time she used to go to Father Gardiner's Not So Olds monthly dances, where she was "presented" to Gerard Lynch. Later Jadwiga lived with Gerard's sister Josie and Leonard Devitt until she married Gerard on 6 October 1951 in St Mary's in Hamilton. They lived in Hamilton ever since.

They had three children – Raymond (1955), Krystyna (1957) and Mark (1959). "I am very proud of them all and love my grandchildren very much. I thank God for a good husband, a hard worker and good provider for our children." Gerard passed away in 2000.

Jadwiga always maintained a close relationship with the Polish community. After her brother Edward was demobbed from the Polish army in England he found his way to New Zealand in 1947 or 1948 through the Red Cross. He married Regina Mackiewicz, a Polish girl from the Pahiatua camp. They lived in Wellington and had one daughter, Krystyna

Jadwiga maintained a strong connection with her relatives in Poland, visiting first with Gerard and later with Krystyna.

Source: "Historia Jadwiga"



Krystyna Łącka (nee Manterys)

b. 1930, Zarogów, Miechów – d. 1982, Wellington

Krystyna Łącka left the Polish Children's Camp in Pahiatua in 1946 when she was sent to Wellington to work as dressmaker. She initially stayed at a hostel for young ladies in Oriental Bay and supported herself by working in small dressmaking workshops.

She then moved to the Polish Girls' Hostel in Lyall Bay, where she met her future husband Piotr Łącki (b. 1917 – d.1979). Piotr had been in the Polish Army in 1939 and was taken as a prisoner of war by the Nazis in September of that year. Piotr spent the war as a POW in Germany and after the war ended he stayed on in Germany, working for the British Forces. He emigrated from Germany to New Zealand in 1950.

Krystyna and Piotr married in 1955, moving to Petone where Piotr worked as a mechanic and metal worker. Krystyna continued to work as a dressmaker. They bought a house and set up home in Jackson Street. Their children Jan (b. 1957) and Maria (b. 1958) lived there until their parents passing. Krystyna was very practical, thrifty and self-sufficient, and she and Piotr worked hard to provide for their family.

Though not the eldest of her brothers and sisters, throughout her life Krystyna maintained her responsibility as the head of the family. Upon her mother's death bed in Uzbekistan her mother directed her, as a 12 year old, to ensure the care and wellbeing of the remaining siblings (three sisters and one brother), which she did with great diligence and ability. As an example of how seriously she took her responsibility, she pressed the authorities and organised for her younger brother to be moved from Wellington to a school in the South Island because she was concerned that his behaviour there was making him stray from the straight and narrow.

Krystyna and her siblings were to leave the Pahiatua camp and return to Poland. They were packed and ready to go when last minute correspondence arrived from her relatives



expressing their doubts that they could look after the five children without splitting them up. Heeding her mother's directive to keep the family together, she made the big decision that they would stay in New Zealand. Krystyna continued to stay in contact with her relatives back in Poland and visited them with her brother Stanisław in 1979.

Krystyna also worked hard for both her Polish and New Zealand communities in her quiet and modest way. She helped out at her children's schools and was active in supporting her fellow parishioners by participating in fundraising and running of the church.

She was a dedicated volunteer teacher and committee member at the Polish School in Petone. If pupils had problems understanding lessons she visited their homes and discussed it with their parents. One of her pupils described her as follows: "I will always hold her dearly in my heart. She encouraged us to learn more about our parents' homeland, such as its geography and history. We read wierszyki (poems) and she would let me write up the day's lessons on the blackboard because I had neat handwriting and could write in straight lines on the board."

Krystyna had health problems throughout her life, stemming from the hardships of child labour in the Siberian forests in the Soviet forced-labour camps. She died aged 51 in Wellington Hospital and is buried near Piotr's grave at Taita Cemetery, Lower Hutt.

Stanisław Manterys

b. 1935, Zarogów, Miechów, Poland

Stanisław Manterys was born in a farming village, which had been his ancestral home for centuries. Soon after his family moved to eastern Poland they were deported in 1940 to forced labour in Russia's Komi region.

He was 12 in early 1948 when he first arrived in Wellington from the Polish Children's Camp in Pahiatua. He boarded in Mt Victoria and attended St Patrick's College. Towards the end of the year he moved into the Polish Boys' Hostel in Island Bay.

Stanisław's elder sister Krystyna, who had been instructed by their dying mother in Uzbekistan to look after her remaining sisters and brother, considered life in the hostel too distracting and that his schooling was suffering. So she prevailed to transfer him to St Kevin's College boarding school in Oamaru.

He later studied bookkeeping and eventually found his career in accounting and business management. In 1963 he married Halina (Polaczuk) and they moved to Auckland. In the 11 years they spent there they built their first house, had three children and were actively involved in the Polish community.

In 1972 they permanently moved to Lower Hutt and remained active in the Polish community, belonging to committees, attending Polish mass in Avalon, sending their children to Polish School and participating in many community activities and festive events.



In 1990 Stanisław visited the mass graves of his parents in Uzbekistan, finally laying some ghosts of the past to rest.

In 1994 he decided to spend his last working years before retirement as a self employed business accountant consultant and moved to a now free Poland to work for seven years.

Since returning to retire in New Zealand in 2001 he remained active in not only the Polish community but also assisted the newer flood of refugee groups coming from eastern Africa.

Stanisław was on the 2004 Pahiatua children's 65th anniversary committee that published the book *New Zealand's First Refugees: Pahiatua's Polish Children*, which was edited and designed by his son Adam. He oversaw its translation into various Polish editions and was numerously invited to speak of his experiences in Poland and New Zealand.

He received two Order of Merit medals from the Polish Government in 2008 and 2016 for "individual contribution and active involvement in the Polish diaspora's matter in New Zealand, continuous promotion of knowledge about Poland and the history of Polish Pahiatua Children".

During all his years in New Zealand Stanisław had considered himself a foreigner. It was not until after returning to New Zealand in 2001 that he truly felt like he belonged there. Though his roots are Polish, he finally considered New Zealand to be his home.

Julian Mazur

b. 1937 Poland – d. 2005, Wellington

Soon after arriving at the Polish Children's Camp in Pahiatua Julian became ill with tuberculosis and was moved to Masterton Hospital where one of his lungs was operated on and his health improved.

During this time a young Māori couple, Mr and Mrs Horn, offered to adopt him. It was a 'pleasant surprise' but at that time the Polish refugee children thought they would still return to Poland so he had to refuse the invitation. After being discharged from the sanatorium, Julian returned to the camp but much had changed. There were now only about 40 boys left, with whom he restarted his schooling at Mangatainoka School.

When the camp closed down, Julian and the remaining boys were moved to Linton Military Camp in Palmerston North where they attended St Peter's Marist School. After a short stay in the military camp they were moved to the Polish Boys' Hostel in Hawera. Julian attended Hawera Technical High School where he first began to mix with Kiwi children. This was an enjoyable time, playing rugby and rugby league. While making some new friends there, Julian still tended to hang around with the other Polish boys from the hostel. At the end of the 5th Form he began a mechanics apprenticeship in Hawera, which lasted for five years.

After the apprenticeship Julian immediately moved to Wellington. Most of the boys he knew from the hostel had moved there and so for him the move was natural. By the end of his time in Hawera, he was 'ready for the big city', where he worked on the trams and buses because he'd 'had enough of being a motor mechanic'.

Julian initially shared a flat in Princess Street with some of the boys from Hawera (including Bronisław Pietkiewicz and Jan Lepionka). He then moved to another place in Constable Street with another group of Poles (including Julian Nowak,



Stanisław Prędko, Mieczysław Markowski, Roman Kraj, Stanisław Brejnakowski and Alfred Sapiński) where they 'lived the high life – going to dances, partying at our house, playing cards until the early hours and rugby on Saturday afternoons. We even formed a Polish social rugby team, which played on Sundays, and we always beat the opposition'.

In 1966 Julian married Patricia Denton and they bought a house in Miramar, Wellington. He bought a taxi cab and was 'happy to work for myself. However, on occasions I experienced some anti-feeling as a "foreigner" in Wellington, but this mellowed over the 15 years on the job and was generally limited to the drunk and uneducated'.

Patricia and Julian became the 'proud parents of six children and, because of my lack of formal education and my wife's profession as a teacher, we both agreed that education was to be of primary importance in raising them. They are all well qualified and successful in their careers. New Zealand has provided me with the chance to bring up a family in a safe environment with many opportunities for them to become educated and realise their potential'.

Czesława Mokrzycka

b. c. 1936 – d. 2017, Christchurch

After leaving the Polish Children's Camp in Pahiatua in 1949, Czesława boarded at Catholic Sacred Heart Girls' College in Timaru, which was run by the Sisters of Mercy. She mastered the English language and learned Latin and French. Later in life she learned Māori. She excelled at singing, took piano lessons and was selected to play hockey for South Canterbury.

Czesława finished secondary school in 1953 and entered the Sisters of Mercy convent. She completed her teaching training in 1956 and was fully professed. This meant that she took her final lifetime vows of poverty, chasity and obedience. Her chosen name within the order was Sister Mary Julie.

As Sister Julie she taught for 19 years but her work was not limited to the classroom. She had concerns for the families she met in the parishes and would do what she could to help. In February 1971 she was awarded a Trained Teachers Certificate by the Department of Education.

The Second Vatican Council held between 1962 and 1965 issued documents concerning the renewal and adaptation of religious life. Religious communities such as the Sisters of Mercy were encouraged or directed to return to Gospel as the source of all Christian life. As a consequence of the changes Julie ceased teaching and started pastoral work. She related very well to Māori and for the rest of her life took a great interest in all things Māori, learning some of the language, action songs, culture and events, and teaching it in her classes. The respect she had for Māori was mutual, as was demonstrated by a Māori couple singing a waiata (song) at her burial.

Czesława's life had been one of constant change. In late 1977 she moved out of the convent. In time she purchased a house and car and lived independently. She went on to complete her Certificate in Social Work and worked briefly at Wattie's food processing factory and at the



Department of Social Welfare Boys Home in Stanmore Road. Soon after, she transferred to the Department's Home for Girls at Kingslea where she used her teaching skills in the secure unit. Later she decided to return to what she had always done, teaching, and secured a position in South Westland in 1978. Subsequently she returned to Canterbury and obtained employment at the small Diamond Harbour School (1979-99) and (2000) at St James School in Aranui. This was her final position before retirement.

Czesława was not one to let the grass grow under her feet and in her "retirement" she was very active in helping others. She also loved her garden and enjoyed having social activities with a wide range of people. She had a strong devotion to the Catholic faith and it was an integral part of her life. She maintained a devotion to Our Lady of Częstochowa (the Black Madonna). In the final weeks of her life she had several copies of the icon framed and given to friends.

Czesława never forgot her Polish heritage and felt that it had enriched her as a person. She had many friends and was also active in the Polish community. "I am Polish and always will be Polish."

Source: "A Polish Kiwi. The Life of Czesława (Julie) Mokrzycka c. 1936 – 2017" by MM Brosnan and BW Hempseed (2018)

Halina Morrow (nee Fladrzyńska)

b. 1932 – d. 2005, Gisborne

Halina Morrow attend a high school in Gisborne where, she excelled at geography and arithmetic, though English was at first a challenge. She was also taught typing and represented the school in basketball championships.

She started work in a bookshop's printing department in Gisborne and learnt to print wedding invitations and bind accounts books. Then she worked for State Fire Insurance, attended night school and learned shorthand, which she enjoyed, but language was still a barrier. Her employer transferred her to Wellington, where she lived in the Polish Girls' Hostel in Lyall Bay but didn't enjoy the rigid hostel rules.

With her friend Aniela they made plans to travel overseas. They found a cheap bedsit in the centre of the city and took secondary jobs, including at Wellington Hospital, to save for their boat fare. She left for better pay and hours as a conductor on the trams for nine months and then for an insurance company.

They eventually sailed to England on the Rangitoto and landed in Southampton. She passed a typing test and for three years worked for an insurance company in their typing pool. She was happy in her work and would have been quite content to settle in London with its social life, West End picture theatres, dance halls and various clubs.



In London she met her future husband Ernie, who was a US citizen, and went to Vermont to join him. Later they moved to Fort Worth in Texas, where Ernie worked in a service station and Halina as a waitress in a racially segregated cafeteria. They were unable to have children and tried adopting but without success. In her spare time she took up a hobby of tooling leather.

Halina and Ernie joined the Poverty Bay Archery Club and twice represented New Zealand in the World Field Crossbow Championships in England in 1984 and 1992, where they won many prizes and medals. They were both qualified coaches and Ernie was the New Zealand Archery registrar, judge, selector and coordinator. They also imported archery items and operated the Gisborne Archery Supply business. After Ernie died she stayed busy with voluntary church work and her hobbies.

“In a way, I consider myself lucky. What I experienced during my younger years taught me how to survive and it made me stronger both mentally and spiritually. Sometimes I think about my years as an orphan and how little life meant to me in those days. I felt strong anger at something, the whole world I guess. This led me on occasions to ignore the rules. My regret is that I am unable to apologise to those who were involved in my welfare at the time. Now I understand, admire and respect people that help those who are less fortunate.”



Teresa Noble-Campbell (nee Ogonowska)

b. 1936, Nowogrodek – d. 2020, Wellington

Upon leaving the Polish Children's Camp in Pahiatua at age 14, Teresa and her sister Irena became boarders at Mercy College in Timaru, where she was required to learn in English for the first time. Teresa excelled on the sports field, being a member of the College Senior A Hockey Team which won the coveted South Canterbury Samways Shield in 1953, as well as playing basketball (or netball as it is known today).

While at boarding school in the holidays and every second weekend, Teresa was billeted with a local family, the Doyles, who in many respects became her first New Zealand family. She became firm friends with Shirley, whose four older sisters took Teresa under their wing and made her "one of the family".

Teresa finished her schooling in 1953 and moved to Wellington to attend Teachers' College, where she stayed at the Polish Girls Hostel in Lyall Bay. At the Teacher's College she met her future husband Bernard at a dance arranged by the Teachers' College Social Club.

On obtaining her Teacher's Registration in 1955, "Miss Ogonowska" was posted to Kilbirnie School in Wellington. Bernard (now working at Karori School) proposed. At the time Teresa was not a New Zealand citizen, and with the Cold War heating up, Bernard's father Cedric was concerned that Teresa might be sent back to communist Poland. Using his parliamentary contacts, Cedric fast-tracked Teresa's permanent residency application, which was granted two days before their marriage in 1957. They had four children.

In 1959 Bernard and Teresa purchased land in Paekakariki, where they lived for the next 46 years. It was a place of hospitality where all were welcome. Teresa regularly had the family on their knees after dinner praying the rosary, with the "salvation of Russia" often at the top of the list of intercessions. Over the years Teresa also maintained a connection with her Polish friends.

For the next 40 plus years, Teresa taught



generations of local school children, becoming the Senior Teacher of Junior Classes at St Patrick's School and being heavily involved in the CCD programme which was aimed at providing catechism for the children of non-practising Catholic families. Among the other schools she taught on the Kāpiti Coast were Kāpiti School, Kenakena School, Paraparaumu School, Paekakariki School and Raumati South School. She maintained a focus on teaching new entrants in her career, becoming a widely admired and respected "motherly figure" for all new entrants.

In the late 1970s Teresa renewed her interest in finding out about her past life in Poland and through the Red Cross connected with and visited her brother Felek in England in 1980.

Following her retirement, Teresa took an active interest in the families of her children, with all of her grandchildren receiving grandmotherly advice, with Teresa periodically "on her beads" when one or other of the grandchildren faced an educational, sporting or life challenge, with a gold coin and card in the post recognising every achievement.

In 2006 Teresa received the "Krzyż Zostańców Sybiru" (Siberian Exiles Cross) from the Polish Government, a state decoration awarded by the President of Poland to recognise and commemorate the sufferings of Polish citizens deported to Siberia, Kazakhstan and Northern Russia from 1939 to 1956.

Janina Ościłowska (nee Łabędź)

b. 1937 Krzemieniec, Poland (now Ukraine)

Janina Ościłowska arrived in New Zealand without her parents. Her father and brother, who were in the army, joined her in New Zealand after the war. Janina says her friends in the Pahiatua camp were envious of those who had parents.

But life wasn't easy when they were setting up house together. Daunted by the responsibility of looking after three daughters, her father remarried to try and give them some family life. To help with finances, they took on boarders.

When her stepmother had a stroke after just a few years, the responsibility for looking after the house and boarders fell on Janina and her sisters Helena and Regina. Her brother Zdzisław now helped with the various expenses.

They then bought a house in Hanson Street, Newtown, Wellington, which became a focal point of their extended family life, where friends from the camp would regularly meet for shared meals and social evenings. The neighbourhood children joined their children to play in the backyard and have remained friends ever since.



All her siblings married Poles from the camp. Her sister Helena married Tadeusz Knap, Regina married Tadeusz Reder and Janina married Stanisław Ościłowski.

Stanisław was one of seven children who were separated by the war. He never met his brothers again and all have since died. He had no one to look after him when he left school at 15 but nevertheless became a successful builder. Their five children have also been successful and intermarried with New Zealanders and their children proudly talk of their Polish heritage.

Czesława Panek (nee Wierzbińska)

b. 1933, Chmielów, Poland

By the time the camp closed in 1949, Czesława (also known as Czesia) Panek and her younger sister were studying at St Mary's College in Auckland. Her older sister had a job in Wellington.

Czesława stayed in Auckland and worked at a clothing factory before marrying and having two children. They moved to Oamaru in 1981 because Czesia's sister was living here with her family.

Czesława is a founding member of the Polish Heritage of Otago and Southland Charitable Trust in Dunedin. During the last several decades Czesia very actively contributed to the promotion of historical knowledge about World War II time, not only among the Polish community, but above all around New Zealand, in the form of numerous lectures given in high schools, museums (Dunedin, Oamaru, Christchurch) and in Australia. Her war experiences seen from a child's perspective are the subject of historical publications in Poland and New Zealand.

The historical exhibition about the Polish Pahiatua Children organised at the Otago Settlers Museum in Dunedin a few years ago, which was also exhibited in Poland, was based on Czesia's story. Czesława Panek finds her lost childhood in a series of meetings with children in primary schools, where she teaches them Polish cut-outs and tells them about richness of Polish culture.



Her handmade dolls have been sent to children in countries damaged by natural disasters (e.g. Papua New Guinea, Chile, Samoa) and also to orphanages in Poland. After the earthquake in Christchurch, Czesia accepted into her home a Polish family who lost their house.

For the past 20 years, the Christmas tree that stands in the historic church of Mary Queen of Peace near Dunedin, built by the first Polish settlers who came to New Zealand, is dressed with white doves cutouts symbolizing peace, all hand-made by Czesia. Following Christmas carols everyone takes one Polish cut-out from the Christmas tree and hangs it on their Christmas tree.

Czesia is actively involved in the Waitaki Multicultural Council in Oamaru, where she represents the Polish community with dignity and enjoys undisputed authority.

In 2015, Czesława launched her book "Chmielów: Our Paradise Lost". That same year she was awarded with the Gold Cross of Merit for all her activities advocating Polish history and culture and heritage in New Zealand.

Genowefa Pietkiewicz (nee Knap)

b. 1933, Eleonorowka (now Ukraine) – d. 1991

Genowefa (Genia) remembered her time in Pahiatua very fondly. There was plenty of food and companionship, as well as the Polish language and culture. The Polish teachers took special care of the children and acted as surrogate mothers. The New Zealand families were friendly and welcoming.

Genia did well at her secondary school, Sacred Heart Girls College in Wanganui, and enjoyed learning. After the Red Cross located her father Jan, she lived with him in Patea. Unfortunately, at the completion of the compulsory years of schooling she was unable to stay on so began training as a nurse in Hawera, which was where she met her future husband Ernest Nussbaumer.

The couple married in April 1952 and lived in the small country town of Ohura in the King Country and had two daughters, Wendy and Rose. Sadly, Ernest died in a workplace accident in February 1959, leaving her a widow with two young children.

After some years Genia moved to Wellington to the Eastern Suburbs where her brothers Tadeusz and Władysław and father lived. This remained her family home.

She later married for the second time in March 1965. Her husband Władysław Pietkiewicz was also one of the Pahiatua children. They had two daughters, Stefania and Aniela, but later divorced.



Genia's main interest throughout her life was her family. First and foremost was being a good mother and homemaker, raising her children in her Catholic faith and encouraging their education. She believed that as New Zealand was her home now it was important that her children be fluent English speakers.

Genia worked part-time jobs throughout the years to fit in with the school hours of her two younger children. She had a love of music and dancing and was an accomplished knitter, often creating dresses overnight for her girls. She enjoyed cooking and passed on her love of Polish food to her daughters. The cake tins were always full of homemade treats and preserves in the pantry. She loved animals and often gave many strays a home.

Genia was a beautiful and vibrant woman who enjoyed dressing well and attending dances, Polish and otherwise. She retained a connection and friendship with many of the Polish children from Pahiatua and was forever grateful for the new life New Zealand had offered her.

In spite of her many hardships she was strongly independent and remained a committed Catholic, attending mass daily even during the last years of her life. Genia died in November 1991 after a long battle with cancer.

Władysław Pietkiewicz

b.1931, Doropiewicze, Poland

When Władysław Pietkiewicz left the Polish Children's Camp in Pahiatua he moved to Auckland to study for the final year at St Peter's College. Following this he studied electricity and magnetism at home before moving to Wellington. Around this time he and two friends travelled to the South Island and picked tobacco in Motueka.

While living in Alexandra in Central Otago, Władysław worked on the manual phone lines. However, his boss decided he was too educated for this type of work so he recommended that Władysław be moved into the exchanges as a technician. Władysław then worked as the travelling technician, where he maintained the region's telephone exchanges and looked after the machinery for messaging.

"One place I enjoyed going to was Queenstown and I used to go to Glenorchy Exchange, which at that time meant I had to travel by boat. I remember having to work like mad to make the boat back home. It was such an isolated outpost that the lonely postmaster always wanted to talk. I remember it was always a dash back to the boat to make it on time."

Władysław also worked on the Roxburgh Exchange and then applied for a job as a supervising technician in Wellington, where he spent the rest of his career with the Post Office and also after it was restructured to become Telecom. His focus was on ensuring the exchanges in Central Otago and Wellington were maintained. He also oversaw



the evolution of telecommunications technology, helped to introduce Step by Step exchanges, which were English made, followed by Cross Bar exchanges, which were Japanese. Computer exchanges eventually succeeded these. "At the end of my career I would sometimes oversee the night works – by that stage it was 'push buttons and it's done it for you'. I was based at the Stout Street Exchange in central Wellington."

Władysław married Genowefa Nussbaumer (nee Knap), who was also at the Pahiatua Camp. She had settled in Ohura with her first husband Ernest Nussbaumer, who died tragically. She and their two children, Wendy and Rose, moved to Wellington. Władysław and Genowefa married in 1965 and had two children, Stefania and Aniela. The family home was in Wellington until Władysław and Genowefa divorced. Władysław has since remarried, and he and his second wife Patricia now live in Brisbane, Australia.

Władysław was involved with the Polish community in Wellington and "did a fair bit of electrical and telephone work in exchange for free membership of the Polish Association."

During his career Władysław made many friends and helped them with their work. He met a New Zealander called Louie Doyle, who was a quantity surveyor for the Auckland City Council. Władysław became his staff holder and remembers travelling on Louie's motorbike as he surveyed sites for the Auckland City Council. "We carried all the surveying equipment and I used to hold onto him as pillion on the back!"



Franciszka Quirk (nee Węgrzyn)

b. 1935 Ostrów, Sokal region, Poland

After the Polish Children's Camp in Pahiatua, Franciszka Quirk was sent to St Mary's College in Wellington. She passed with University Entrance and in 1954 commenced her studies at Victoria University of Wellington for a Bachelor of Arts. Though she passed other subjects, Franciszka failed the compulsory 50% pass rate in English. Worried and discouraged, she assumed this was because English was not her first language and that the unfamiliar grammar and idiom were at fault. But later she realised that she did not fully apply herself to all the reading required.

Also, getting by on a meagre 10 shillings pocket money a week made her decide to discontinue university. She considers it would have been helpful if someone had explained her failures and provided advice. But at the time she was not aware that such help existed, though hopes it now exists for foreign students.

Franciszka applied for work in an office, where she met and married Michael Quirk, who was very conscious that working in an office would not give them the best start in their life. So they saved hard, each taking additional part-time jobs.

They then bought a dairy in Khandallah, Wellington. Work in that business was hard and it became even harder as their children were born, but it set them up financially. They then moved to Tauranga to work on a poultry farm and then on a dairy farm.



They eventually returned to Wellington where in the 1980s Franciszka decided to complete her degree because it felt like some unfinished business and still needed a sense of achievement. She found it difficult getting back into studying but being a mature student she was able to commit herself fully to her studies.

Franciszka first studied extramurally and then fulltime. Finally, 31 years later, in 1985, she graduated with a Bachelor of Arts.

“Looking back, I know it is not the result that gives most satisfaction but the process of getting there. We encouraged our children Anthony, Diane and Darren to study. They all gained university degrees, and have happy and stable careers and partnerships. There is only one thing I regret and that is that my children never learnt to speak Polish. But this did not stop them from visiting my homeland and enjoying the company of their many Polish cousins.”

Kazimierz Rajwer

b. 1932, Kraczkowa, Poland – d. 2020, Auckland

After leaving the Polish Children's Camp in Pahiatua Kazimierz Rajwer attended St Peters College in Auckland but was dropped back a class because of the perceived language challenges.

He helped formed the Catholic Youth Movement in Otahuhu and remained a member for 10 years. He belonged to the St Josephs tennis club. He would become a master craftsman and during this time built a pavilion, chair lectern for the priest and vestry cabinetry.

After leaving college Kazimierz became a carpentry and joinery apprenticeship building houses, which he loved. He was driven and worked hard. He lived simply to save money to send parcels to his family in Poland. In 1960 he took an overases trip to visit his long lost family, including stopovers along the way to London, Austria and Czechoslovakia. On the return trip he went to Lourdes and Fatima to strengthen his faith and give thanks, and America for six months where he stayed with his Aunt Rózia. In later years his young children loved to watch the slideshows with a white sheet on the wall of the great overseas adventure.

Kazimierz continued working as a carpenter working on group housing projects, fitouts of Foodtown stores and the offices popping up around Auckland. He collected discarded wood and materials to fitout his future home projects.

He married Kazimiera Hajduk (also from the Pahiatua camp) in 1965. From hard earned savings, a small loan from his father-in-law Leon, help from friends and a lot of hard work, he shifted a house onto a site on Favona Road in Mangere, finishing the house with mostly his collected recycled materials. In older years he would look at the trim doors, cupboards and windows all hand made with pride and with his own hands.

With all the hard work, Kazimierz had his first major heart attack at 33, so had to take on less physical work. His health problems continued and by the end of his life he was on more than 19 daily medications.



Kazimierz brought up eight children and ensured there was security and a future for the family. Rental properties were purchased and his spare time consigned to maintenance and repairs, mowing lawns at lunchtime, cleaning rentals between tenancies and providing affordable social housing to the struggling families, often charging rents at less than 50% of the market price.

Kazimierz worked as as a building inspector at Onehunga Borough Council and Manukau City Council. He was always conscientious, fair and did his inspection work with integrity, often having disputes with builders and developers, who cut corners and rejected his professional and knowledgeable advice, leading to the leaky homes of the future.

Throughout the years he always set aside time to celebrate family, friends, church and Polish heritage and he formed deep lifelong relationships with those in the community.

Kazimierz retired in 1998 and due to his health bought a house in Queensland where the weather was warm in the winter and enjoyed a new house that required no maintenance. He lived there for for six months of the year during the New Zealand winter.

John Roy-Wojciechowski

Born Jan Wojciechowski

b. 1933, Ostrówki, near Drohiczyn, Poland (now Belarus)

After a two-year stay in the Polish Children's Camp in Pahiatua, John Roy-Wojciechowski says he was fortunate to be sent to St Patrick's College in Silverstream where he spent five years. It was a Catholic boarding school that produced many notables in all spheres of life.

John Roy-Wojciechowski attended Victoria University, where he chose an accounting and commerce degree. He worked as an accountant for numerous companies including Bowden, Bass & Cox (where he met his wife Valerie with whom he was to raise six children), W&R Fletcher and then with GH Mooney & Co, where after four years he became the company secretary. Wishing to progress, he joined the General Electric Company as its financial manager and one year later joined the board as financial director. He then became the managing director for Charles Begg & Co – importers of musical instruments. From early eighties he worked as an independent consultant, company doctor and chartered accountant as well as a chief executive of Mainzeal Group and executive chairman of Mair Astley. Having completed a successful career as an executive, industrialist, investor, property developer, he retired in 1994. In 1998, John Roy was appointed an Honorary Consul of the Republic of Poland, the role he held for the next fifteen years.

He is known as one of the strongest propagators of Poland in New Zealand and of importance of New Zealand's invitation of Polish Siberian orphans for strong and friendly bilateral relations. John Roy-Wojciechowski gained respect in New Zealand - both in the Polish community and the local community in Auckland through decades of work and support he offered. He was instrumental in the establishment of the Otago Heritage Trust foundation, creation of a scholarship for talented young people with Polish roots, initiation of Polish language courses at the University of



Auckland and Polish Literary Club in 1997. John Roy formed the Polish Heritage Trust to teach New Zealanders about Polish history and co-wrote a book about his early life "A Strange Outcome. The remarkable survival story of a Polish child." In 2004 he established the Polish Heritage Museum in Auckland - the only institution of this kind in New Zealand. For many years he has been presiding over the Association of Siberian Deportees in New Zealand.

On the occasion of the 60th anniversary of the arrival of Polish Children to New Zealand, he founded and gifted to the city of Wellington a commemorative plaque which was unveiled by the then Mayor of Wellington Kerry Prendergast, in the presence of Prime Minister Helen Clark.

In 2017, for his contributions to the Polish Community and the local community in Auckland, and philanthropic activities, John Roy-Wojciechowski was awarded the New Zealand Order of Merit. A year later, the Polish President Andrzej Duda, in Auckland, decorated him with the Commander's Cross of the Order of Merit of the Republic of Poland for outstanding contributions to the popularisation of Polish history and for his activities in promoting Polish culture.

Malwina Zofia Schwieters (nee Rubisz)

b. 1931, Sokołów, Poland

Malwina, commonly known as Wisia, is one of the co-founders of the Polish Association in Auckland. Since the establishment of the Association, Malwina's purpose was to promote and strengthen its Polish character. She has been organising meetings, performances, and evenings dedicated to commemorating important national anniversaries; arranging papers, articles and presentations, historical materials and exhibitions. Due to her active involvement and dedication she is often called the „guardian of national memory” among Poles in Auckland.

Another of Malwina's prominent activities remains maintaining the memory of the Katyń Massacre. She made a pilgrimage to Katyń, and brought a symbolic clod of soil, sanctified by the blood of the murdered. Today it is kept at a worthy place, along with a plaque commemorating the victims of the Massacre at the Catholic Cathedral of St Patrick in Auckland. It is partly thanks to Wisia that the plaque was originally placed at this prominent downtown Auckland Cathedral.



Malwina Schwieters has been instrumental in creation of the Polish library in Auckland, having gathered about 1,000 items on history, including the history of World War II, fiction as well as materials and archives documenting the life and activities of the Polish community in New Zealand.

From the very beginning Wisia was involved in supporting “Solidarity” (Solidarność) movement. This activity gained special momentum during the martial law in Poland, when Malwina Schwieters actively joined in organising assistance for the interned Solidarity activists and their families, running fundraisers, also among New Zealanders.

Malwina remains very active in the Auckland's Polish Community till this day. In 2016, she published a collection of poems „Głos serca na drogach życia” (The voice of heart on the paths of life).

In 2017, the Polish President awarded Malwina Schwieters with the Officer's Cross of the Order of Merit of the Republic of Poland.



Michał Sidoruk

b. 1935, Kowel, Poland (now Ukraine) – d. 2015 Napier

When Michał left the Polish Children's Camp in Pahiatua he lodged or boarded with various families in Napier and attended St John's College in Hastings.

He started his working life as a mechanic in Napier, which laid the foundation for a man who loved tinkering with cars, motorbikes, radios and electrics. However, he became a carpenter renowned for expert finishing and fine craftsman skills. Initially he worked for Kepka Builders, alongside two former children from the camp – Marian Kęпка and Tadeusz Woś.

After leaving Kepka Builders, Michał spent the next two decades at Napier Port as a crane operator and watersider, before returning to carpentry and working until his mid-late 70s. He built many houses in the Napier and Taradale areas. At the port he was often called upon to interpret Polish or Russian languages and enjoyed talking about Poland with crew members.

Michał lived in Napier all his life. He had a wide range of interests that primarily revolved around his family, friends and helping people. He had a neighbourhood reputation and was called upon to fix anything from lawnmowers and bikes to cars or anything requiring Kiwi No 8 wire mentality. However, his carpentry and woodwork skills were his passion and he was always doing building plans and work or cabinet making for people. In his spare time he enjoyed a beer and game of darts with his mates.



Michał married Gaynor Wilson in Balcutha in 1963 and they had three boys of whom he was very proud of – Peter, Martin and Craig. He built the family home at Puketapu Road in Taradale in 1965.

Michał was survived by his older brother Leon Sidoruk, who had placed him safely aboard the ship in Iran that was bound for New Zealand. His infant sister was left at an orphanage. Leon being seven years older than Michał chose to stay and join the Polish army. They were eventually reunited in 1971. Leon went on to join the US Airforce and had a distinguished career to the rank of Chief Master Sergeant serving in Korea and at various NATO bases in Europe, where he still lives as a retiree in Germany.

The two brothers saw each other four more times and Michał visited Europe but unfortunately not their hometown of Kowel (now in Ukraine and known as Kovel) because of the nature of border restrictions in the late 1980s.

Being a young orphan at Pahiatua and then growing up in Napier, Michał had little contact with the Polish community other than with his Polish carpenter workmates and a local Polish family. He made do on his own as a young Kiwi and was hard working and resilient. He had strong St John's College school friends and proudly played rugby for the Marist club in Napier. Michał never gave up thoughts of Poland and often dreamed of visions of his parents and family experiencing happy times.



Jim Siers (Zbigniew Sierpinski)

b. 1936 Łuck, Poland – d. 2013, Fiji

Throughout his life he was known as Bill, Junior, later James and Jim. He became a pioneering landscape and ethnographic photographer, a writer, a publisher, record producer, documentary film-maker and a grand adventurer.

Jim Siers went to school at St Patrick's College Silverstream. Following, he worked as a cadet reporter on The Dominion newspaper. Moving from the daily, he became involved with advertising. He worked in television for a time, and later became a free-lancer. As the sixties continued, he made the decision to focus on writing books and illustrate them with his own photographs.

Soon after they married, together with his wife Judy, Jim Siers established their own publishing company, Millwood Press, which at first they ran from their family home in Ngaio. Some of its first books were Jim Siers' "Hawaii" and "Polynesia", published in 1973. "The New Zealanders", published in 1975, marked a new level of quality for New Zealand market, with design, typography and colour reproduction using the latest technology. Jim's "New Zealand Dramatic Landscape" was published in 1979, then reprinted in 1981 and again in 1983. Together with "New Zealand Incredible Landscape" both books won Tourism Design Awards.

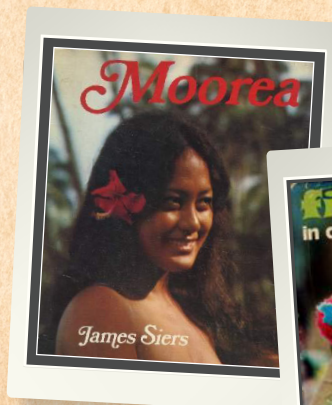
His fascination with the Pacific, and his career as a photographer, began with a trip to Fiji in early sixties to gather material for a travel magazine. For the next decade he moved between Wellington and Polynesia, taking photographs for the 31 books he produced about New Zealand and the Pacific. He later settled in Fiji, where he ran a fishing lodge.

His book "Taratai. A Pacific Adventure" (1977) describes his voyage from Kiribati to Fiji, on a traditional outrigger canoe he built, which meant to re-establish an ancient sea link between the two island groups. His second voyage, in a smaller canoe, ended in near-tragedy when the canoe was wrecked by a big wave, leaving the crew – including



his 10-year-old son Conrad – having to drift for 16 days and nights in an inflatable life-raft before being rescued by a Chilean vessel.

Jim arrived in New Zealand in 1944 together with his brother Ryszard. Their father found them in Pahiataua in 1946. Towards the end of his father's life, Jim acknowledged him as a fishing guide by co-writing a book with him about trout fishing in Taupo. As well as his books and thousands of photos from 30 years of travels through the South Pacific, Jim Siers also left a legacy of recordings of indigenous music and documentary films, including "Vikings of the Sunrise" about his canoe voyages.



Leon Sondej

b. 1929, Lwów, now Ukraine – d. 2019, Lower Hutt

One day in 1946 Leon Sondej was told he was leaving the Polish Children's Camp in Pahiatua to work in Wellington. Tailoring was the profession chosen for him and he was good at it. But as a child in Poland he was used to open spaces, rivers and forests and the sight of his forester father's gun. He was introduced to a tramping club and the New Zealand bush and it became a lifelong passion.

Leon joined the Wellington Defence Rifle Club where he learnt the basics of accurate shooting. Soon he was spending all his weekends tramping and hunting, never missing a Christmas holiday tramp in the Southern Alps.

In those days it was easy to get a job, but when he applied to the Department of Internal Affairs for a deer-culler's job there were 300 names on the waiting list. The idea that you could go hunting and be paid was very attractive, so he decided to take on deer culling for a few months holiday.

Leon was interviewed by the conservator of forests in the Wild Life Branch of the Department of Internal Affairs in Wellington. He asked Leon for his qualifications, looked him over and said: "This is



man's country. If you can handle it and survive in it, OK. If not, out you go down the bloody road!"

Leon hunted deer for four years in the 1950s and worked in very rough terrain. There was always a possibility of injury from slipping or falling rocks, drowning or becoming isolated for a very long time. But he always felt perfectly at home in the bush and never felt lost. "In the Southern Alps I understood what was around me, knew every sound and felt very safe." He was a member of the Brooklyn Rugby Club, Wellington Defence Rifle Club, the Wellington Tramping and Mountaineering Club, The Wellington Deerstalkers Club and the Trentham Rifle Club.

Leon married Stefania Manterys, also from the Pahiatua camp, and they settled in Korokoro in Lower Hutt, where they had two children Adam and Stefan.

In the 1960s he and his siblings Stefania and Emilia organised for their parents, whom they hadn't seen since being released from the Siberian forced-labour camps, to emigrate to New Zealand.

Leon was a good storyteller and would entertain family gatherings with tales of his many escapades in the bush and the colourful characters with whom he came into contact.

Stefania Sondej (nee Manterys)

b. 1933, Zarogów, Miechów

Stefania Sondej was sent from the Polish Children's Camp in Pahiatua to St Dominic's high school in Dunedin with her sister Anna and other girls from the camp to learn English. While there in 1947, Prime Minister Peter Fraser, who had invited the Polish children refugees to New Zealand, visited the city. Among other business he wanted to meet the "little Polish girls" from Catholic schools in Dunedin. They performed for him an English translation of the Polish national hymn *Nie Rzucim Ziemi* (Never We'll Leave The Land Where We Were Born).

After completing high school she attended Teachers' College and then moved to Wellington and stayed at the Polish Girls' Hostel in Lyall Bay. She studied Victoria University of Wellington, gained a Bachelor Arts degree and qualified as a secondary school teacher.

One of her more significant placings was at Mana College in Porirua, where she taught Latin, English and French. She was a popular and well-liked teacher. With her knowledge of different languages, including Polish, she undertook voluntary translation work. She also taught as a relieving teacher during her career.

Stefania was one of the first Pahiatua children to visit Poland, where she went in 1950 to her home village and relatives. While there she attended a wedding of one of her cousins.

Stefania married Leon Sondej, a fellow Pahiatua child, and they settled in Korokoro in Lower Hutt and had two children Adam and Stefan. Like many people of that time who were from different cultures and languages, Stefania was frowned upon for speaking Polish to her children. She says: "A senior Plunket nurse whom I was obliged to see when our five-year-old son was starting school was shocked when she caught me speaking Polish to him: 'Don't you see what harm you are doing to him? How is he going to cope at school?' Fortunately, I was by then a much more self-



assured person and was able to reply that if I, who had very little primary schooling and no knowledge of the English language when I went to secondary school, could not only cope but surpass my classmates, finish university and become a teacher of English in a secondary school, I was confident that our son would cope very well. And he did."

Stefania was very active and committed to the Polish community in Wellington, using her natural talents in public speaking and organising. She was a member of Polish Association committee, the Polish Youth Club, was called upon to represent international visitors to the community and helped organise the reunions of the Polish children's arrival in New Zealand. She was also good at sewing and produced regional costumes for Wellington's Lublin Dance Ensemble.

She was involved in the Polish School in Petone as a teacher on and off from 1957 until the 1980s. She was gifted at writing and organising productions, which she did for the school, including *Kot w Butach* (Puss in Boots), *Jasełka* (Nativity play) and *Tadek Niejadek* (about a boy who wouldn't eat).

Stefania's Catholic faith was very important to her. She regularly attended mass and fundraised for the Polish church committee. She was a keen singer and ran the church choir for many years in the Polish church in Avalon, Lower Hutt, along with organising readings for services. She was also involved in her local church parish.

Krystyna Tomaszuk (nee Skwarko)

b. 1932 Vilnius, Poland (now Lithuania) – d. 2020 Wellington

Krystyna Tomaszuk's contribution to New Zealand has impacted on local communities in Waikato, Rotorua and Wellington, on New Zealand as a whole, and internationally. Through her life, she successfully contributed to building a strong bond between Poland and New Zealand, representing both, Polish culture and heritage and the best values of the New Zealand society.

After leaving Pahiatua, Krystyna was educated at Sacred Heart College, Wanganui, St Mary's College, Wellington and at Victoria University, Wellington where she graduated with a BA. From young age, herself and her family have been greatly involved in promotion of Polish language, education and culture in New Zealand.

She is described as the one who has embraced New Zealand's Māori and Pākehā communities and continued to be a Polish person in New Zealand. This includes her achievements in professional life working as the first Polish person as a Māori Welfare Officer and her other community roles. Krystyna's professional life also included Child Welfare, Social Work, Marriage Guidance, Post Primary Teaching, Community Advice, a ministerial appointment as the first lay representative on the Waikato Medical Disciplinary Committee. She was presented with 'Waikato Woman of the Year' award by the Waikato Plunket Society, and award of a Meritorious Service Certificate by the Fairfield Rotary in Hamilton. While working with families on the margins of society, in environments where poverty, violence and crime flourished, she proved to be a significant pioneer in integrated service delivery at grass roots/ community level.



Krystyna has also been involved in a number of charitable projects, such as organising in her holiday home in Turangi a free-to-parents two week school holiday programme for children attending Polish Saturday School in Wellington, a voluntary work in a children's home in Tamil Nadu, India, and in Kalighat, Kolkata, India, at Mother Teresa's Home for the Dying as well as working as a volunteer at Mary Potter Hospice, Wellington. She has been a member of numerous organisations, such as New Zealand Institute of International Affairs, New Zealand Book Council, New Zealand Graduates Women's Association, National Press Club. Krystyna has also been a very active member of the Polish Association of New Zealand and Polish Women's League.

Krystyna Tomaszuk has made contributions to a number of published books. She is also the author of 'But a fleeting moment, meditations on the reality and the mystery of being', published in 1997 and very personal and emotional memoirs *Essence*, published in English in 2004 and in Polish (translated by the author) in 2009. The latter describes not only the autobiographical story of the Polish Children who made a harrowing journey through Siberia and Persia to finally reach New Zealand, but also paints a picture of an important part of New Zealand history as the invitation of the Polish children was the first time ever that New Zealand accepted so many refugees all at the same time in 1944.

In 2013 Krystyna Tomaszuk received the Queen's Service Medal for services to the community. In 2018, the Polish President Andrzej Duda awarded Krystyna with the Commander's Cross of the Order of Merit of the Republic of Poland.

Anna Urbanowicz (nee Manterys)

b. 1931, Zarogów, Miechów – d. 1961, Auckland

Anna Urbanowicz left the Polish Children's Camp in 1947 and was sent to St Dominic's secondary school in Dunedin with her sister Stefania, along with other girls from the camp. Like other children from the camp, she started secondary school a year late because of time lost in their education during their time in the Siberian forced-labour camps.

She was a studious, diligent and top student who won prizes. She excelled at sport and was often mentioned in local papers for her school sporting achievements, such as running and tennis. She also had a particular talent and excelled at calligraphy. This was apparent as early as her time in Siberia when her siblings praised her artistic skill in handwriting the Russian Cyrillic alphabet in class. But their mother warned them about being happy with learning the language of their captors: "We are Polish, we are here against our will and, contrary to what our captors keep telling us, we expect a return to a free Poland and to our Polish schooling."

Anna passed her University Entrance exam but was ultimately unable to attend university due to the cost. She attended Teachers College in Dunedin then moved to Wellington, where she stayed at the Polish Girls' Hostel in Lyall Bay. She worked as a primary school teacher and was a volunteer teacher at the Wellington Polish School.

Anna was sociable, popular and had an easygoing manner. She was always ready to assist and be helpful to her siblings and friends.



It was at the hostel that she met her future husband Polek Urbanowicz, a cadet from the Polish army who was down from Auckland visiting his brother, who was one of the Pahiatua children. They married and she moved with him to Auckland, where he was working in the railways workshops. They lived in Glen Eden on some land that he had bought cheap and they built a nice house. They were very hospitable and lived off their garden. Anna was also dedicated to her religion and attended church every Sunday.

Soon afterwards they had a son and Anna dedicated herself to staying home as a full-time mother. However, when her son was four Anna died of brain cancer, aged only 29, and is buried at Waikumete Cemetery in Auckland.

Kazimierz Jan Wiśniewski

b. 1933, Brześć, Poland – d. 2010, New Zealand

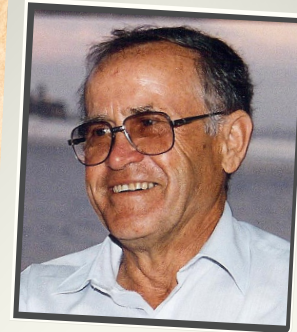
Kazimierz (Kazik, Kaz, Johnny) arrived at Pahiatua with four of his ten siblings. Originally destined for East Africa, their mother's sudden death in Iran brought a change to their documentation and New Zealand became their new home.

Following his stay at the Polish Children's Camp in Pahiatua, Kazik attended Sacred Heart College in Auckland, during which time he lived with the Hodgson family in Otahuhu.

In 1950 he began an apprenticeship at Reidrubber in Penrose. After working for a few years in different sections of the company, he completed his qualification as a fitter and turner in 1954 and settled in the workshop section as a toolmaker. 20 years later, in 1975, he received recognition for his long service to the company (then known as Feltex Rubber) and went on to serve for 10 more years until the company ceased to operate. For the remainder of his working life, Kazik continued his profession, finally working in an automotive engineering workshop in Pakuranga.

Kazik met his future wife, Barbara Bolger, through his involvement with the Catholic Youth Group in Panmure. They shared a great love of sport, especially tennis – a love they fostered throughout their marriage which began in 1958.

In 1960 the family home was built in Pakuranga. Designed and built with Pahiatua boys, including Kazimierz Zieliński, Kazimierz Rajwer and his brothers-in-law Mieczysław Ptak and Bolesław



Wojtowicz, the home and the family (4 children) that he and Barbara raised together were central to Kazik's life. They welcomed many friends and family over the years and the home space was often shared with short and long-term staying visitors, including a number of newly arriving Polish refugees in the early 1980s, who stayed with the family until they settled into their New Zealand lives.

Kazik retained close bonds with his siblings and their families. From 1974 onwards he returned to Poland several times with his brother Stefan and re-established ties with brothers and their families who still lived there. Such trips were a source of great joy and celebration. In 1995 he and Stefan were also able to revisit the site of the family home in Brześć.

Following his wife's death in 1984, Kazik worked until his retirement and then took up a new sport, bowls. He was a keen member of the Pakuranga Bowling Club, playing all year round, often in the company of another Pahiatua boy, Stanisław Wolk. He was a parishioner at St Mark's Pakuranga and regularly attended Polish mass at St Paul's, as well as numerous gatherings at the Polish House. In 2006 Kazik received his Siberia Cross medal. He was proudly Polish.

With his happy and positive disposition, Kazik continued to take great delight in spending time with his family, especially as Dziadek (granddad) to his 11 grandchildren. He died in the family home in October 2010.



Tadeusz Woś

b. 1933, Nowosielce, Poland – d. 2011, Napier

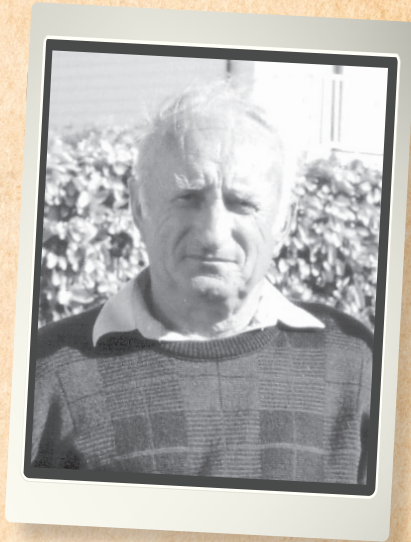
After four years at the Polish Children's Camp in Pahiatua, Tadeusz and his brother became reunited with their father, now a widower, who had come looking for them at the end of World War II. He was given a job as a blacksmith at the Ruakura Research Farm in Hamilton.

Tadeusz attended Marist School in Hamilton. After a couple of years Tadeusz (also known as Ted) was offered a job in a bakery and left school. The early hours were okay and the tasks manageable, but he learnt quickly that he didn't like working indoors and his health was deteriorating in the bakery environment. So, after two years, Tadeusz got a job roofing and then worked on building sites with a bunch of Polish carpenters. He had found his passion.

Ted loved building houses and was comfortable in the company of so many other Polish speakers. He continued with his carpentry job during the week and began to build on the weekends for himself. The first of these weekend projects that he finished was a house for his parents. Tadeusz continued with this extra work and built another three houses.

In 1959 he went to the Hawke's Bay and ended up working with Marian Kepka, an old friend from the camp, and married his sister-in-law Robin Hallgarth in 1961. Ted worked for Kepka Builders for 32 years and during that time they built a range of houses, from small units to large architecturally designed homesteads.

He made his first visit to Poland at the age of 59. Feeling a bit anxious at first, upon the arrival in Poland, he knew for the first time that he belonged to two countries. They had been back there twice after Ted's retirement but he remained a strong believer that New Zealand was the place where he would happily live for the rest of his life. Ted said he had a very good life.



Stanisław Wójcik

b. 1929, Wadowice, Poland – d. 2014, Auckland

When Stanisław Wójcik arrived in New Zealand he could hardly speak any English, so he learnt a little in the Polish Children's Camp in Pahiatua. After leaving the camp he attended St Patrick's College in Wellington.

When he left school, Stanisław got a job working at Department of Scientific and Industrial Research (DSIR) under Professor Dick Mathews in the area of cell biology. He then moved to Auckland on 5 July 1951 and continued working for DSIR and later the Auckland University cell biology department. Stanisław eventually went on to complete a Bachelor of Science from Auckland University, specialising in cell biology, while working in the department. He stayed there until he retired. He also worked as a night cleaner for the Farmers department store.

When Stanisław moved to Auckland in 1951 he lived with the Dougherty family on Aston Road in Mt Eden. The Dougherty's looked after Stan while he adjusted to life outside of the Wellington Polish community. A cousin of the Dougherty's, Patricia Rayson, continued to teach Stanisław English when she would visit from South Australia. After a while they became close, fell in love and were married at St Benedict's Church on 7 May 1955. While Pat finished a contract at Adelaide University, Stanisław saved up and brought a quarter acre section in Glen Eden, where he built the family home, raised four children and lived there for the rest of his life.



Stanisław had many interests. At the top of his list was dancing, especially ballroom, Latin and later "new vogue". He even went for his bronze, silver and gold exams medals in ballroom and Latin. He also played all types of racket sports – tennis, badminton and table tennis. He was involved in the Glen Eden Athletics Club, tennis club, athletics club and harriers club both as a sports person and committee member.

He was also involved in the local Catholic church and one very important part of his life was attending mass every Sunday with his family. Both his belief and family were very important to him.

Stanisław loved to socialise with people of any kind and any time or place. He loved parties! Anything to do with dancing, in terms of social activities, he was there to help set up, take part and clean up at the end of the night.

He was also very much involved in the Polish community, helping organise fundraising in the beginning to establish the Polish House. This community became a big part of his life and was also somewhere he could eat and enjoy Polish food. Naturally, Stanisław also took part in Polish dancing and loved the costumes he got to wear while performing – also wearing the same costumes for Pentecost Sunday while reading a prayer in Polish.

Stanisław kept up his native language, talking Polish whenever he got the opportunity.

Józefa Wrotniak (Sister Stella)

Józefa Wrotniak (Sister Stella) left the Pahiatua camp to live in Wellington on 20 September 1946, where she boarded with four other Polish girls and 76 other nationalities in a girls' hostel in Oriental Bay. She started work three days later as a seamstress with three other Polish girls. Their employer was so pleased with the Polish girls' work that he showed them as an example to the other workers.

During her holidays she spent a week with the Davis family in Te Kuiti and visited the enchanting Waitomo caves, a hydroelectric power station, Hamilton and Auckland.

She lived below St Gerard's Monastery in Mount Victoria and attended Mass there regularly. Some of the local girls, who were indifferent to attending Mass, followed her example and became regular churchgoers.



Sister Stella was always drawn to the religious life and wanted to join an order of nuns among Polish people. She decided to leave New Zealand to study in Rome, closer to her homeland. She spent her last Christmas in the Pahiatua camp with her two sisters. On 7 May 1949 she departed New Zealand on the Rangitiki.



Maria Wypych (nee Węgrzyn)

b. 1925, Ostrów, Poland

Maria was the youngest of the 105 adults that accompanied the 733 Polish children from Iran to the Polish Children's Camp in Pahiatua. When she left the camp she took on a tailoring apprenticeship offered to her by a Wellington tailor.

Maria worked in a small sewing business in Willis Street behind Hotel St George. She became very skilled at sewing and made many beautiful garments, including wedding dresses for friends and family. She sewed all her children's clothes, including school uniforms – her daughter's tunics and lined woollen shorts and trousers for her four sons. Those achievements were her greatest pride, along with embroidery work creating beautifully embroidered tablecloths.

Maria married an ex-Polish serviceman Jan Wypych on 2 February 1950 at St Mary of the Angels Church in Wellington. Their first home was on Queens Drive, in Lyall Bay. 33 years later they moved to High Street in Petone.

Maria loved baking Polish food for events at the Polish House. She sewed many Polish costumes for dancing groups. She strongly encouraged her children to attend the Saturday Polish School and taught her children poems to present at Trzeci Maj (3 May Constitution Day celebrations) and 11 November Independence Day celebrations.

Jan took up positions as President of the Polish Association over several years and President of Polish School. He was instrumental in organising a special "Flowers of Poland" float for the James Smith's Parade and other Wellington Parades in the 1960s. One of the duties as President of the Polish Association of which he was particularly proud was hosting Cardinal Karol Wojtyła (future Pope John Paul II – the first Polish pope) during his visit to meet the Polish people in New Zealand in 1972.

Maria and Jan's involvement in the Polish Community took up a lot of time but they felt it important to maintain a pride of Polish culture in



their new homeland for generations to come. Later, in their retirement, they took part in the Polish Church Choir and the Polish Seniors social group.

Jan started work as a tram driver for the Wellington City Council Transport Department. He then drove the cable car and was a bus driver. He belonged to the Bus Transport Union and also the social committee, where he helped organise family picnics and Christmas presents for the children. In the Petone Working Men's Club he organised and ran the weekly card game 500.

After having worked with family members in other fish and chip businesses, Jan bought a fish and chips business in 1967 in Ghuznee Street, Wellington, which he named The Dolaro (to reflect New Zealand's currency change from the pound to the dollar).

Maria supported the family income by working in manchester factories sewing sheets and pillowcases. Later, together they ran their own little sandwich bar "Mariana" in the Trades Hall Building. After that they worked part time in other Wellington sandwich bars for Polish friends.

Eugieniusz Zajkowski

b. 1932 Łazy, Poland – d. 2019 Wellington

Eugieniusz left the Polish Children's Camp in Pahiatua after his father and older brother travelled to New Zealand after being demobilised in the UK. He attended St Patrick's College in Wellington for 18 months until he was old enough to leave. His family needed everyone to work to support the family, so he left school without any formal qualifications. School was difficult for him (especially in English) but he made the First XV rugby team.

Eugieniusz's brother found him his first job in a factory making ladies stockings. Most of his working life he was a steel storeman for Cable Price but was made redundant in the economic upheaval of Rogernomics and his lack of formal qualifications made it difficult to find another job.

Eugieniusz married Mary Minihane at St Anne's church in Newtown. At first they lived with his father and stepmother but moved to Christchurch to build their own home. Government money was available for new homes but you had to be prepared to move. They settled in Avonhead and their first three children were born in Christchurch. In 1969 they moved back to Wellington, where they bought a house in Petone and had two more



children. As the children grew they moved to Woburn and eventually downsized to a house in Waterloo.

All their children attended the Polish School in Petone and in the 1970s he was Chair of the Parents Committee. The boys all joined the local St Aloysius Sea Scouts and he supported them for years with fundraising efforts, such as building a special shed at home so he could store newspapers and bottles for the annual paper and bottle drive. He always turned out for school working bees.

Eugenio followed international and Polish politics and always voted in the Polish elections. He was also an enthusiastic participant in New Zealand politics. He joined the Labour party, was a branch chairman and stood (unsuccessfully) in the local body elections.

Despite his early difficulties with learning he valued education. He completed a New Zealand Institute of Management Certificate in Supervision, took night classes developing the Russian he had picked up in Siberia and improved his public speaking at IMPS. In retirement he took up bowls and volunteered for bar duties and crowd control at tournaments.



Rozalia Zazulak (nee Manterys)

b.1928, Zarogów, Poland – d.2004, Auckland

Rozalia Zazulak was born in Zarogów in the Miechów region. Upon reaching adulthood in 1946, Rozalia was sent to work as a dressmaker in Wellington, together with her sister Krystyna.

She later moved to Hamilton, to join some of her Polish friends who worked there. There she met Antoni Zazulak, a former soldier from the Polish Army-in-Exile, who worked as a house builder, whom she married in 1954.

Antoni built their first family home in Hamilton. They raised four children – Barbara, Halina and twins Piotr and Franciszek. After Barbara was born, Antoni and Rozalia moved to Auckland, where they purchased a house in Herne Bay.

In between raising the children, Rozalia continued to augment the family income by thrift (learned from the years of deprivation in exile from her homeland), dressmaking, and sewing for her family. Her first priority was the wellbeing of her family.



She and her husband were founding members of the Polish Association in Auckland. Throughout their lives they took an active role in its formation and in the association's activities, including the Polish School, which was held for two hours every Saturday.

Of an equable nature and willingness to help anyone who asked, she was well-liked in the community. She was buried in Waikumete Cemetery in Auckland, close to her sister Anna Urbanowicz (nee Manterys).



**Life
After
Pahiatua**

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