

My Dad, Boleslaw Pietocha. - what I know of his life.

Date of Birth 1/1/1911

My Dad did not talk to me about his life in Poland before the war (not unusual I think - though sad he did not tell me about this). As I remember, when I asked he would change the subject.

Most of what I know is what mum told me.

Dad came to Great Britain from Poland during the war. He arrived with a small suitcase, but this dropped into the ocean when it was being unloaded from the boat, so he arrived with nothing.

He came from a large family, (the youngest of 11 brothers and sisters, and his mother was quite old (55?) when she had him). He qualified as a doctor in Poland. He did not do well practicing there as he struggled with charging people fees for his services, and would sometimes end up giving them money if they needed help. (I imagine this is true as I remember when I was a child people would come to the door & mum said he would give them money to help them). She said he also sent money to his family in Poland, although he never talked to us about them. Mum knew he had an older brother in Poland but knew little else of his family.

The national health service in England was much better for him as he was paid a salary by them.

He served in the Polish branch of the Air Force, as a medical officer. While he was serving he was stationed around the country, but then he met my mother, fell in love, and settled in Norwich, Norfolk.

He was given a medal, an M.B.E. (Military), (for military?) for pulling someone out of a burning plane, although I heard he did not tell mum he was going to London for this award, and he threw it into a drawer when he got home. She found out later from a friend. The person he pulled out did not survive.

My mother and father lived together, with my father becoming a second father to my half brother and sister, who lost their father when they were young.

My mother told me that when he left Poland he said he was married so that if anything happened to him the woman he said was his wife would get his pension. She told me he was not actually married but she was a friend & he wanted her and her child to benefit as his widow should anything happen to him during the war. This complicated matters when my parents eventually decided to get married, as he was married on paper but not in reality. My father wanted to marry mum when he retired so she would be entitled to his pension should she survive him (he was 11 years older than her).

They married when I was in my 20s I think. They didn't tell anyone except me and my uncle who were witnesses.

I was born in 1955. My brother & sister were teenagers and left home when I was little.

After the war my father worked as a Psychiatrist at St Andrew's Psychiatric Hospital, and was able to offer support to several Polish patients who were there, some of them did not speak English and were there because they had nowhere else to go, becoming institutionalised over the years. He worked there for several years, then as the health service was restructured he worked in other psychiatric units in Norwich.

I've been told by people I've met who knew him that he was thought of very highly by both patients and staff. Unlike some of the other doctors he took time to talk to his patients. He was not ambitious and remained at the level of senior houseman as he was happy to just be there for his patients, often working long hours. He didn't drive and mum would go to collect him from work, often waiting for ages, sometimes hours, for him to leave work & come out.

Because he did not want to talk about his life in Poland (I think it was too painful for him?) both my mother and I knew very little about his life before he came to England. He kept in touch with family I think, but sadly never spoke of them to me. My mum went to Poland twice, the 2nd time she drove after getting her driving licence. She went with my Aunt, and they visited his older brother and his wife when there. My father never wanted to return.

I remember him as a quiet man, he had a very strong Polish accent when he spoke and was not always easy to understand. He was a homebody, although he enjoyed entertaining at home. When he came home from long shifts at the hospital he would sit and play the card game, patience, for hours. I was also quiet and painfully shy, which he told me he was too when younger.

Both my parents were members of the AngloPolish Club in Norwich, possibly being founder members, and my mum served on the committee for several years. The club met regularly for Polish people and their families to socialise. They organised talks and events, with outings and dances which we enjoyed going to. My mum told me about one of the talks where members recounted their journeys escaping Poland and coming to England, which moved her to find her friends had experienced such terrible things. I remember the outings including a midsummer celebration every year where we went to one of the members homes, and there were games, and we floated little boats with candles in down the stream at dusk, then we all sat round a bonfire, ate bigos and songs were sung. I also remember the dances, especially the New Year's Eve dance, preparing a large buffet of Polish food, and danced the cotillion, with a member dressed in black with a scythe as the Old Year going out at midnight and a young girl bursting in as the New Year to come.

We had several Polish friends who had also come to England during the war and had settled and had families in Norwich & a good friend in Bradford.

He remained a Polish citizen and I remember him having to get visas when they went on holiday.

I saw an interesting programme on television about the many refugees who arrived in England and who were eventually allowed to stay in the U.K.

I was also told by a Polish Doctor working as a locum at my GP's surgery that a lot of Polish ex-servicemen were executed when they returned to Poland.

I've since found this from the website swoopingeagle.com

May I quote a Polish soldier himself over the matter of Yalta and how it affected him? The following quote is from Franek Rymaszewski on his amazing website [here](#) :

"But after the war we could not return to Poland which we loved and for which we have fought. At a conference with Stalin in Yalta on the Crimea in February 1945, when the war was nearing its end, my homeland was handed over to the brutal and barbarous Soviet occupant by the President of the United States, Roosevelt and the Prime Minister of Britain, Churchill

— *the very* Post 1945, the Soviets still suppressed Polish nationalism. A soldier (but particularly an officer), being part of the Polish army meant being anti-soviet.

The Soviets were still keen to extinguish these anti-soviet people and many executions post world war 2 occurred. So any Polish soldier returning to Poland could be quite literally committing suicide by returning.

Out of 260,000 Polish who fought on the western front about 100,000 went back to communist Poland. In my own family, my grandfather decided not to return (leaving a wife and 2 children there all of whom survived the horrors of Kazakhstan hard labour camps).

You can imagine when my uncle returned to Poland how weak my grandfathers argument not to return would have seemed. Such were the difficult decisions made at the time.
