



Stanisław Zak's story

by Jim Gratton (son-in-law) Tina Gratton (daughter)
as read by Adrian O'dell and Jane O'dell (NPHG) February 2018

Jim Gratton's memories:

This is what I can remember of Stan Zak's escape across Europe to England. I think it started in early 1940 with his brother's murder by the Gestapo. He and about twenty other young Poles decided to escape to England to carry on the struggle against the Nazis. I remember him telling me that when they set off, they were strafed by a German plane but managed to escape into a wood. The vague plan was to get to England (or anywhere else) where they could fight back against the Nazis.

I gather that in those days the frontiers of countries like Romania and Czechoslovakia were quite different to how they are today. The group walked through these and other countries, mostly moving by night and living off the land as best they could. The part of the story that I cannot remember is how they got into Switzerland, which was entirely surrounded by Hitler's army. From Switzerland it was fairly straightforward to get into France, and the group went to Lyons; they stayed there for nearly six months, while the Germans were mopping-up after Dunkirk and occupying Paris.

I understand that by the autumn of 1940, the Germans started to move south, so Stan and the rest of them headed down to Marseilles. From there they were able to get on a ship (or ships) to Casablanca, with Free French, White Russians, escapees from Dunkirk and anyone else who was against Hitler. The British sent two ships to collect these escapees and bring them to England. One was torpedoed and sunk in the Bay of Biscay, and Stan arrived in Liverpool in December 1940. He was still wearing the same clothes he had escaped in, had not a bean in his pocket and spoke not a word of English.

He joined one of the Polish squadrons but to his disgust was deemed unfit* for flying duties, so he spent the war servicing aircraft. He met your mother who made a fairly poor job of teaching him English!!!! Because his first contact with English soil was Liverpool, he became a lifelong supporter of Liverpool FC.

It makes you wonder about the so-called medical that turned down someone of Stan's constitution and he lived until his 99th year.

Jim Gratton

May 2017

Tina Gratton's memories:

My Dad had his stall as you know in the 1960's. It was a double stall on Norwich Market, half Polish foods the other Poultry. To begin with the concentration was on Polish foods. There were no supermarkets to supply the Norwich Polish community. Later on 'Just John' at the back of the Inns set up a very large Polish food shop. This was huge competition for Dad so he then made his money with his poultry and bought in a small amount of Polish foods.

My father was quite a showman and dressed in his striped apron and straw hat. He was always able to draw a crowd in, reducing prices at the end of the day. Dad always liked a bargain, wheeling, dealing and a lot of bartering went on! I remember stopping at pubs and fish and chip shops, selling the last few chickens we could not get rid of on the stall. That meant Dad and I always had a free drink and fish and chips for our supper!

The stall was situated opposite the chip stall, and next door to Baker the butcher. It was bought by Pickering the sausage maker. We used to source our bread and baked cheesecake from a bakery in London, near to Hoxton. The sausages and other delicacies came from a Polish importer. I really wish I could remember their name. I remember the wholesale warehouse was enormous, such a selection of wonderful foods. Dad and I used to buy the ones we thought would be popular. The sausages were very fresh and absolutely delicious; mysliveska and krakowska, Polish hunting sausage. There also a liverwurst, a fine pate in the form of a sausage. PEK was quite a big manufacturer. We had a lot of their products. My favourite was the sausage wrapped in cabbage leaves in a tomato-like sauce. We all bought Polish halva and katajinki ginger bread wrapped in chocolate.

We gave free fudge with our chickens, which always bought our customers back. We travelled to London once a week to buy our supplies, sometimes the order came by train, and Dad and I collected from Norwich railway station. The stall on the market was a social place for Poles to meet, talk Polish and really share their friendship. We used to go to the Polish club, which was great fun for me.

In the Summer Polish students visited our stall. They brought with them vodka: 100 percent alcohol..... I remember smelling it but I wasn't able to drink it! Also beautiful Polish vases. Dad would buy them from the students and sell them on the market. I think they hid them in their suitcases, all very black market! Dad gave some of them work, we had a transport cafe at Hethersett, a butchers shop at West Earlham and a large market garden in Spixworth, so there was always work to be done. I'm not sure how well they got paid, but Mum was always there to provide a meal for them!

Tina Gratton

May 2017

From: <https://joemasonspage.wordpress.com/2013/05/22/norwich-market/> (accessed May 2017)

The mix of trades has varied over the years; there are for example fewer fruit and vegetable stores than there used to be. The range of second-hand books is much reduced. There used not to be a specialist cheese seller and Mr Zak had a sort of delicatessen with a range of foods from his native Poland. The Polish jam was particularly good.

This was long before the entry of Poland into the EU, what was the called the Common Market. Mr Zak had been in Norfolk since the end of the Second World War. Stan Zak (who has only recently passed away) must have retired getting on for 30 years ago, and Mr Pickering's sausage stall has taken his place. That is the one remaining outlet for Bryan Pickering's sausages. Once there was his main shop in the Street, Costessey, and another branch in Dereham.

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