



THE MASONIC HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF NEW SOUTH WALES

PAPER No. 158

PREPARED BY: J.T. Ruxton

DATE: 24 November 2008

**Wor. Bro. Dr. RONALD FRANCIS (ROMAN) ROSSLEIGH
MEDICAL PRACTITIONER
(1919 - 2007)**

From Holocaust to a new home.

Roman Rossleigh said he had two birthdays, one when he was born in Krakow, Poland, on October 13 1919, the other when he was liberated by the US Army from the Manhausen concentration camp, Austria, on May 5 1945. He celebrated the latter more, knowing then how precious life was.

For Rossleigh, who built a large migrant medical practice in Australia, life often hung by a thread during World War 2, largely because he twice insisted on looking after his mother and sister when he might have avoided the horrors of the German and Russian occupations of Poland.

Roman Rossleigh, who died at the age of 87, grew up in Lodz. His father, Ludek, was a cardiologist who had been decorated for bravery while with the Polish Army's Medical Corps during the Russo-Polish War in 1920 and was to rejoin their army in 1939. His mother, Lina, was a dermatologist who treated venereal disease in women. Doctors were poorly paid in Poland then and Roman's parents had to borrow money in winter. In summer they fared better, working in the health resort of Krynica. Russians would visit them, returning with money to pay family debts.

Roman wanted to study medicine but was denied entry to medical school because the number of Jewish students was limited. Instead, he travelled to Pisa learnt Italian and studied first year medicine. He did his second year in Lausanne, Switzerland where he learnt French.

When World War 2 broke out, he could have stayed in safe Switzerland but returned to Llow, Poland, to look after his mother and his younger sister, Janka. Under the Russians, who had occupied Eastern Poland, he spent two more years at medical school, but the Germans swept into Llow in 1941. The family were non-practicing Jews and Rossleigh had not been circumcised, which saved his life more than once when he was stopped at checkpoints.

In 1942 Rossleigh decided to make his way to London but could not bear his mother's distress at the railway station. He got off the train in August and the Gestapo took away his mother and grandmother. He never saw either woman again.

With false papers identifying him as Francis Tchaikovsky, a gentile, Rossleigh fled to Vienna where he worked in a mental hospital. Betrayed by an informer in 1943, he was tortured by the Germans-hung up on a hook like an animal carcass for 24 hours with his hands and feet tied, permanently damaging his arms. He was beaten repeatedly resulting in left sided paralysis which worsened over the years.

Rossleigh was incarcerated in Plaszow and then Mauthausen, where more than 100.000 inmates were murdered. Janka was sent to Auschwitz. Like Roman, she survived.

Rossleigh met his wife, Christine, who had lived precariously on false papers as a housekeeper for an SS Officer in Krakow, in January 1946 while completing his medical studies. They married after knowing each other for three days. The marriage endured for 61 years.

Roman, Christine and Ludek, who was blinded by war injuries, migrated to Australia in 1947.

Rossleigh had to return to medical school at Sydney University before being registered as a medical practitioner in 1952. His large migrant practice in Newtown came from his quality as a doctor and his ability to speak seven languages. He undertook research on issues of migrant mental health and the utilisation of health services.

A tall, imposing figure with an inquiring mind and a generous nature, passionate about history and classical music, he supported many good causes. He became a Christian-his mother's parents, he observed wryly were Mary and Joseph-and a Freemason. He was heavily involved in the Polish community, an elected member of the Federal Council of Polish Associations in Australia, a vice-president of the Polish Cultural and Artistic Club, the president of the football club, Polonia North Side and club doctor for Apia Leichhardt.

When Rossleigh travelled to Poland in 1967 to arrange for Polish soccer players to come to Australia, a Polish official let slip that the Polish Communist Party was happy to send footballers to Australia because they could spy on the Polish community. Back in Sydney Rossleigh called an extraordinary meeting of the Polonia Club. The Polish Consul promptly told him that he would never be allowed into Poland again, Only in 1944, five years after the fall of communism could he return. Travelling with Christine and their Daughter, Monica, he was reunited with surviving family and friends.

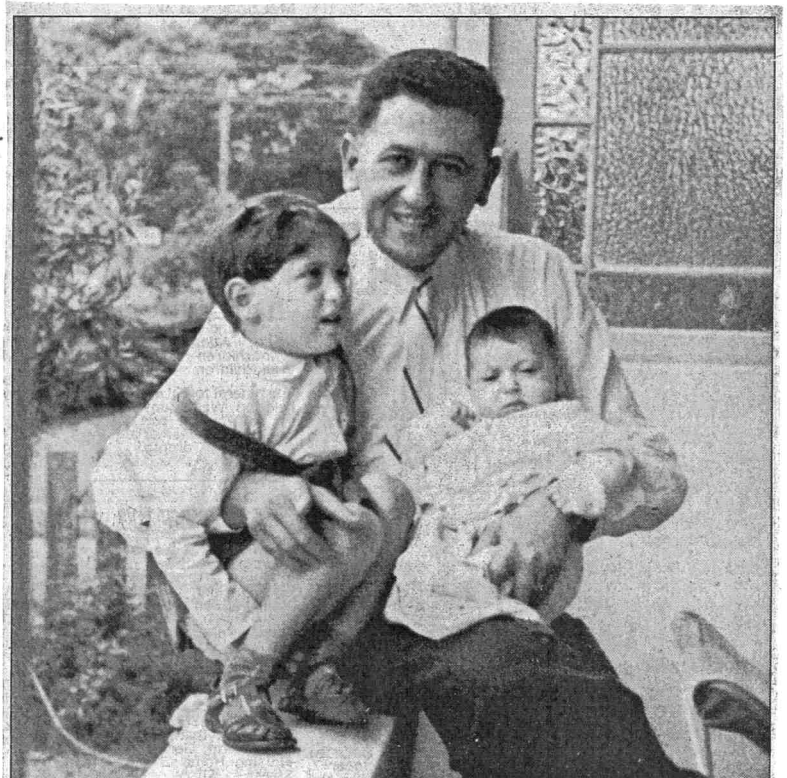
On the fall of communism, Rossleigh became an active member of Solidarity with Poland Fund. The Polish government awarded him the Knight Cross of the Order of Merit and the Auschwitz Cross, which honour inmates of concentration camps. He was twice awarded the Polish Gold National Treasure Medal.

Although a patriotic Pole, he loved his new homeland. Cricket became a passion and he had unbounded faith in the Australian team, for their fighting qualities. Mr Border will save us, he would announce. Or Mr McGrath will bowl them out.

Rossleigh is survived by his wife, Christine, daughter, Monica, son, Martin and four grandchildren.

Ronald Francis (Roman) ROSSLEIGH, a doctor of Rose Bay, was initiated and passed through the first two degrees of Craft Freemasonry on 25 August 1958 and 25 September 1958 in Lodge Antiquity Lewis No 621, UGL of NSW respectively and raised to the third degree in Lodge Wisdom on 17 January 1959. He called off Lodge Antiquity Lewis on 26 June 1961 after affiliating with Lodge University of Sydney, No 544 on 26 May 1961 and later with Lodge Lilyfield No 402 on 4 July 1979. Roman Rossleigh was installed as Worshipful Master of Lodge University of Sydney in October 1977. He called off from Freemasonry on 5 June 1985 and died on 14 September 2007.

Ref; David Jenkins, SMH.
Records of UGL of NSW & ACT.



Proud ... Roman Rossleigh with his daughter, Monica, and son, Martin.