

The 2010 Memorial Engine
A Few Highlights in the Life of Eugeneiuz Szymul



Gene, as we came to know him, sailed into port on the Pacific Producer, a World War II light cargo ship modified to a seafood processing facility. It was badly in need of repair and seriously out of money. Most of the crew fled by the time the U.S. Coast Guard came aboard, and when they did they advised Gene the sooner he got off the ship, the better it would be.

And so Gene arrived at our shop pleading that if by any chance could he please stay in the downstairs office. His identification was in order so we rented him an extra room in our upstairs apartment.

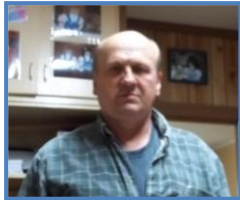
His native language was Polish, but he also spoke Russian, German, and English. His heavy accent that required dedicated listening to understand, unfortunately caused many to consider him nothing more than a dumb Polish fisherman. He was anything *but*. He learned English illegally listening to BBC broadcasts and by the time he was six, the Communist border guards often came to rout him out of bed in the middle of the night to translate for them. In nearby fields he gathered chunks of rocket fuel left from the obsolete German rocket factory and took them home to heat their house.

He listened as his older sister learned her catechism. When he was old enough, his mother took him to him for the priest's approval to begin classes. The concerned mother sat outside and waited...and waited, and worried why he was taking so long. One and a half hours later a smiling priest came out and announced that Gene did not need to take catechism classes because he already knew everything. After school he started spending three hours with the priest in order to read a 400 year old Bible written in ancient Polish. At twelve he was teaching classes for the older students as well as some of the teachers. He read the Russian translation of Chinese books banned in China years ago. He belonged in a university either teaching or in research, but such was not to be.

As he came of working age in the 1980's, he became active in the Polish Solidarity movement led by Lech Wałęsa. Scheduled to study at a university in China, the governing powers assigned him to be a ship's engineer. He sailed the seven seas, visited all the continents, and shipwrecked three times. He read voraciously and learned the local history, geography, and politics everywhere he went.

Typical of Polish thinking, ask him a question and you'd best settle down for an hour's answer. Gene explained that in order to understand his answer, we must first go back one or two thousand years. Poland, he explained, had always been the gateway between east and west. His enlightening perspective was not that of typical western learning, but from one who had been there, of one who had lived and actively participated in the Solidarity movement and modern history.

We learned he had worked on behalf of the Polish secret service, Britain's foreign intelligence, the U.S. CIA and felt privileged to meet Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth who personally thanked him for his service and officially dismissed him from duty. Gene jumped ship in Vancouver, British Columbia and in time was granted Canadian citizenship. Even so, crossing the border into the United States remained a passage fraught with fear for his future, something he did his best to avoid.



Perhaps his favorite assignment was summers on a fish processing vessel filled with international university students there to experience a real world work experience in their pursuit of a degree. The opportunity to interact with the students on board was a perfect fit for him.

Unfortunately Gene died before his time of a brain tumor, most likely the result of the time the Polish government used him as a subject for their experiments as to the effects of radiation on humans. It was he who gave our square cylinder the name of "ceber," an ancient Polish word for a square wooden bucket and so we dedicate this engine with its unique characteristics to Gene. Soft spoken and kind, he was always ready to answer questions of which we had many.

May you rest in peace, Gene. We miss you.

