

Witold Stankowski

Józef Bogusz (1904–1993)

Józef Bogusz was born on the 11th of September 1904 in Tarnopol, and died on the 21st of March 1993 in Siegen (in the Federal Republic of Germany). His parents were Karol and Gustawa née Goldberg.

Józef Bogusz belonged to the circle of eminent Polish surgeons. Besides his professional career in medicine he was also interested in ethics and the history of medicine. Józef Bogusz started his schooling in the years 1910–1914 at the Elementary School in Tarnopol, where he reached the 4th form. The following years 1914–1919 he studied at the Polish Secondary School in Vienna. The final three forms of secondary school he was to complete at the 3rd King Jan Sobieski Secondary School in Cracow. He passed his school leaving certificate in June 1922 and, in 1928, he completed his degree in medicine at the Jagiellonian University's Faculty of Medicine. On the 2nd of May 1928 he was presented with the title of doctor in all the medical sciences.

His work as a junior doctor started at the Surgical Clinic of the Jagiellonian University's Faculty of Medicine; initially under Prof. Maksymilian Rutkowski, and later Prof. Jan Glatzel. He served in the Polish Army at the Officer Cadet School for Sanitary Reserves in Warsaw and at the Surgical Ward of the 5th District Hospital in Cracow. On the 1st of July 1933 he was appointed senior assistant at the 1st Jagiellonian University Surgical Clinic. Just before the outbreak of World War Two – on the 31st of August 1939 – he was

drafted as a lieutenant surgeon. He played an active part in the September Campaign of 1939 and was to find himself in Lvov. Following the taking of the city by the Soviet Army he worked at the Military Hospital No. 604 where he was in charge of the Hospital Surgical Ward on Kurkowa Street. After the German invasion of the Soviet Union he made it to Warsaw, where he stayed until the collapse of the Uprising in 1944. He worked on the Neurosurgical Ward of the Infant Jesus Hospital where he also ran a surgical outpatient clinic. During the occupation he also worked as a lecturer on underground sanitary courses and the Warsaw Uprising saw him working as a surgeon: he was the head of a number of Home Army field hospitals in the Ochota district of Warsaw. Following the collapse of the Uprising he made it to Ursus near Warsaw where he worked in the surgical ward of the makeshift hospital there. His professional work was connected with the 1st Surgical Department and Clinic of the Jagiellonian University's Medical College (the so-called White Surgery). From the 1st of February 1945 until November 11th 1948 he was a senior assistant at the 1st Surgery Clinic. Then, from the 11th of November 1948 to the 30th of September 1974, he held the position of head of the 1st Surgical Department and Clinic. He obtained his post-doctoral degree in 1948 for the work *Zagadnienia złamań kręgosłupa powstałych w następstwie wypadków w zatrudnieniu* [Problems of spinal breakages resulting from accidents at work]. In 1953 he was given the title of associate professor and, on the basis of his academic achievements, applications were made by the Medical Faculty Council for him to receive a full professorship. However, for political reasons this was never to happen.

Professor J. Bogusz belonged to the Cracow school of thyroid surgeons. Besides thyroid diseases he also performed stomach surgery and operated on the intestines, bile ducts, and the surgical problems of old age. He perfected an operational technique which resulted in a reduction in fatalities in operations on the goitre from a level of 5.3% in the 1950s to a level of 0.8% in the 1960s. He was a pioneer in Poland in the surgical treatment of cancers of the oesophagus and cardia, and the achalasia of the cardia. He took an active interest in the most appropriate means of anaesthetic as well as the techniques of inserting an artificial anus along with the psychological problems associated with its presence.

Professor J. Bogusz actively worked for the Society of Polish Surgeons. He was the Society's vice-president, while from 1966–1968: president. He was associated with the Cracow Medical Association: being its president for over 30 years (1959–1993). He was also a member of many other Polish and foreign scientific associations, including the Chief Commission for the Study of Nazi Crimes in Poland, the Janusz Korczak International Association, the New York Academy of Sciences, the International College of Surgeons,

the World Academy of Art and Science, Société Internationale de Chirurgie, the Union of Polish Doctors in America, Société Européenne de Culture. He retired in 1974.

He was to leave behind many significant publications: close on 200 academic works of national and international ranking on questions of Polish surgery, deontology and the history of medicine. These included: *Lekarz i jego chorzy* [The doctor and his patients], *W służbie zdrowia i życia ludzkiego* [In the service of health and human life], *Zarys dziejów chirurgii polskiej* [An outline of the history of Polish surgery], *Sylwetki chirurgów polskich* [Profiles of Polish surgeons], *Profesorowie Wydziału Lekarskiego UJ jako uczeni i żołnierze ruchu oporu* [Professors of the Medical Faculty of the Jagiellonian University as pupils and soldiers of the resistance]. He was the author of several academic textbooks for doctors and ordinary nursing medical personnel: *Chirurgia dla pielęgniarek* [Surgery for nurses] (1964), *Encyklopedia dla pielęgniarek* [An encyclopaedia for nurses] (1990).

He was a co-founder and editor of the *Oświęcim Journals*, a supplement to *Przegląd Lekarski* [The Doctor's Review]. He was awarded many honours for his academic and social work. For his contribution in the building of Polish-German relations he was awarded, in 1988 by the President of Germany Richard von Weizsäcker, the Grand Cross of the Order of Merit of the Federal Republic of Germany. In addition he was made a knight of the Commander's Cross with Star of the Order of *Polonia Restituta*, of the Officer's Cross of the Order of *Polonia Restituta*, of the Knight's Cross of the Order of *Polonia Restituta*. He held the honorary title of Meritorious Teacher of the Polish People's Republic, Meritorious Doctor of the Polish People's Republic. For his participation in the Warsaw Uprising he obtained the Warsaw Uprising Cross, which he himself particularly valued.

J. Bogusz's real name was Birkenfeld. The terrible mark of the Holocaust was to brand the Birkenfeld family as it did so many other Jewish families. Józef's parents, along with all the rest of the family, were killed and Józef himself was saved thanks to his wife's brother's Catholic birth certificate. He took the surname Bogusz and, a year after the war on the 29th of March 1946, he formally adopted the surname. He was never to return to the surname Birkenfeld.

The Birkenfeld-Bogusz family represented four generations of Polish-Jewish doctors from Tarnopol. Józef's father, Karol (1873–1942), completed his medical degree at the Jagiellonian University, obtaining the title of Doctor of Medicine. Józef was to follow in his father's footsteps. The medical profession was to be continued by Józef's children: his son Maciej, a toxicologist, as a doctor who was chiefly connected with the Department of Court medicine of the Institute of Court Evaluation and the Toxicology Clinic, a specialist

who worked both in Germany and Saudi Arabia, as well as his daughter, Elżbieta Bogusz-Kahl, a doctor of medicine. Professor Bogusz's grandson, his daughter's son: Bartłomiej, was also to become a doctor, specialising in medical computer studies as an academic at the University of Bochum (FRG).

Professor Bogusz, besides his professional work, involved himself in documenting work on questions of health during the Second World War. In association with Professor Antoni Kępiński and Dr. Stanisław Kłodziński within the framework of the reputable journal *Przegląd Lekarski* he published the *Oświęcim Journals*. Here works were published devoted to the experiences of prisoners of the concentration camp Auschwitz-Birkenau, their state of health, their experiences of survival, shocks and traumas. Works published as part of research into the Auschwitz syndrome were also published in German, in a two-volume anthology as well as seeing the production of an English edition. Professor J. Bogusz played a great part in the assembling of materials on Nazi crimes and atrocities. The *Oświęcim Journals* were to be published under Prof. Bogusz's auspices for 31 years. Thanks to the editor's involvement in ensuring the academic integrity of the *Oświęcim Journals* they were to rank amongst the best known publications in the history of post-war European and world medicine. The *Oświęcim Journals* were to become an exceptionally important Polish and international academic forum on the crimes committed by German Nazism during World War II. At the same time, they constituted a warning to future generations not to allow a repeat of any tragedy which could broadly equate with that of Auschwitz. Józef Bogusz, in involving himself in work on this monumental undertaking, considered that a settling of the scores of the past was also a condition and the basis for building Polish-German reconciliation. Hence the *Oświęcim Journals* were twice nominated by the Polish Senate for the Nobel Peace Prize.

He remains in the reminiscences of doctors, colleagues, and pupils a great humanist and a doctor devoted to his profession. One of the professor's sayings has entered the canon of those under Hippocratic oath: 'I do not practice medicine and I do not treat and cure people in order to live, I live in order to practice medicine and to treat and cure people.' Most apt is one of the opinions expressed about Prof. J. Bogusz:

[...] through his academic and organisational activities he was hugely responsible for the development of surgery in our country and well served Polish science and the entire medical community. His experience, great sense of duty and responsibility, patient care, manners, tact, personal charm were to win him immense respect. His life – one exceptionally rich, creative and full of passion – one of which was music which he loved and appreciated; for he himself played the piano – is indeed a beautiful page in the history of Polish medicine. (R. Pagacz-Moczarska, *Życie pełne...* [A life full...], the recollections of Prof. M. Barczyński)

Profesor J. Bogusz was a keen follower of piano music. He played himself, finally donating his piano to the Cracow Medical Society. On the 100th anniversary of his birth an academic session was held under the patronage of the then rector of the Jagiellonian University, Prof. Franciszek Ziejka, devoted to the life and work of this most excellent doctor. The participants were able, among other things, to listen to Johann Sebastian Bach's choral prelude, performed on the piano which had earlier belonged to J. Bogusz. Professor Józef Bogusz was buried at the Rakowicki Cemetery in Cracow.

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