VICTOR ZORZA:
A LIFE AMID LOSS
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I first met Victor Zorza at Sir Michael Sobell House in Oxford in June 1977. His only daughter Jane, aged 25, was dying of disseminated malignant melanoma – an all too common form of skin cancer in Caucasians. He was accompanied by his son, Jane’s brother Richard, freshly arrived from the USA. Jane was terminally ill and in great pain. In the circumstances, home care was increasingly difficult. I was grilled by the journalist, an analytical columnist for The Guardian, and possibly by Richard too.

In desperate situations people clutch at straws, and, on this occasion, Sobell House passed muster as a good enough straw. So, a day or two later, Jane was admitted as an in-patient under my care. With my nursing and other colleagues, we worked hard to bring her pain under control. Although time was short, Jane died peacefully some eight days later. Subsequently, the story of Jane’s illness and death was movingly recounted by her parents, Victor and Rosemary, in their book A Way to Die. Perhaps inevitably, the book provoked widely different reactions, from high praise to outright hostility.

Meanwhile, the Zorzas and the Twycrosses had become family friends. Visits to Dairy Cottage in Burnham were a special treat for my five children, as well as for me and my wife Deirdre. Both Victor and Rosemary were such welcoming and hospitable people, and the cottage and its surroundings idyllic. But despite such get-togethers, and my meeting Victor and Rosemary on hospice business in Washington DC and elsewhere, I never plumbed the depth of Victor’s complicated character. Yes, he told the children stories of his war-time experiences, presumably moderated because of their tender years. And we continued to be in touch until his death in 1996. We valued his friendship – a friendship of the present but never of the past. There was so much we never knew, so much we never learned. So, for me, Victor Zorza: A life amid loss is a much appreciated gift, and truly an eye-opener.

I congratulate Michael Wright on creating such a readable account of so complicated a life as that of Victor Zorza. Michael’s extensive use of verbatim quotations from taped interviews or from archives is typical of a publication emanating from the International Observatory on End of Life Care. Even for those who recall Victor Zorza the journalist, their knowledge of him as a person is probably limited to the few biographical lines on the dust cover of A Way to Die:

Victor Zorza was born in Poland in 1925 and came to England during World War Two. After service with the RAF he joined the BBC, and then became The Guardian’s correspondent on Communist affairs and on East-West relations, writing a syndicated column which appeared in leading
newspapers around the world. He received the Journalist of the Year Award for ‘predicting with astonishing accuracy and against the flow of informed opinion’ the invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968.

But now, for the first time, we have the opportunity to peer beneath the dust cover, and learn much more about this obsessive, compelling man who remained haunted with a nagging sense of guilt until just months before he died.

In this masterly account, we learn about Victor at War, Victor the Kremlinologist, Victor the Hospice Champion, and Victor the Voice of the Indian Voiceless. Sadly, each Victor is accompanied by Victor and Fractured Relationships. But, as the story unfolds, readers may be forgiven for thinking that they will never get to the heart of the man. Victor of the Dawn speaks of youthful idealism and hope; but what about Salek (Izrael) Wermuth? Why was he so completely discarded? What is Victor hiding from? Given the profundity of such questions, it is not surprising that the book has the feel of a thriller about it.

But Victor’s childhood – certainly his teenage years – were no ordinary years. They were lived during a period of almost unparalleled human-to-human cruelty, of both Nazi and Stalinistic varieties. Survival was the paramount concern, with the inevitable overtones of ‘me-first, me-second, and also me-last’. As Michael Wright states, ‘relationships were optional, survival mandatory’. Does this explain his announcement to his bride on their wedding day in 1949 that, regardless of the circumstances, his work would always come first? Does it explain an identically chilling statement to his long-lost sister Rut? How can anyone say to his sister, whom he hasn’t seen for 50 years, and has long thought dead:

‘Work for me is my first priority: before my family, before my wife, before my children and now even before you.’

Yet, eventually, someone manages to rupture this girdle of steel and engage with him at a deeper and more reciprocal level. Someone manages to melt the icy cold self-centredness. So much so that, as he is wheeled into the operating theatre for the last time, in answer to the question, ‘Is your heart at peace?’ he is able to reply, ‘Yes. [pause] And loving.’

I hope you enjoy reading this book as much as I have – I am sure you will – perhaps even more.

Robert Twycross
Emeritus Clinical Reader in Palliative Medicine
Oxford University
March 2006
Acknowledgements

This book is the result of interviews and research carried out over a five-year period from the beginning of 2001. The central character, Victor Zorza, was a man of many parts – BBC monitor, analytic journalist, radio scriptwriter, university lecturer and hospice advocate – and these were invariably played out on the big stage, in the international setting. So the trail he left behind took me to four continents as his story unfolded in the countries of Poland, Russia, Sweden, Germany, the Netherlands, the United States, Canada, India and South Africa, as well as in the United Kingdom and on the island of Jersey. I am indebted, therefore, to a large number of people without whose help this book would not have been written.

First of all, I am grateful to my colleague, David Clark, who has given unstinting support throughout the various stages of the book’s production: from concept, to research, to data collection and finally, to the finished manuscript. I am also appreciative that, despite a busy schedule at the International Observatory on End of Life Care, a block of writing time was available to me so the work could be brought to fruition.

Before moving to Lancaster University in 2003, I was based in Sheffield and, at that time, numerous colleagues at the Trent Palliative Care Centre and the University of Sheffield were willing to provide a listening ear and give sound advice. Sheila Payne and Jayne Seymour were particularly helpful, and Pauline Hutchinson’s administrative support and willingness to be involved was much appreciated. Anthony Greenwood, the International Observatory’s Information Officer, has also assisted, both in Sheffield and since our move to Lancaster.

Once the project began, it became apparent that alongside what was known about Zorza in the public domain, there was a rich seam of valuable information held in computer files, recorded cassettes, videotapes, photographic records and personal diaries – in addition to Victor’s letters, notes, memos and health records. I am grateful to everyone who made this information available to me, especially: Richard Zorza, Eileen Lerche-Thomsen, Rut Wermuth-Burak, Wendy Jones, Robert Twycross, Paul Rossi, Ruth Bradby, Avril Jackson, Anne Brown and Ann Dent.

From time to time during the preparation of this book it has been necessary to travel and I am thankful for the generous hospitality of all who made me welcome, sometimes at short notice. These include: Richard and Joan Zorza in Washington; Andrei Gnezdilov in St Petersburg; and Lesley van Zyl, Karen Hinton and Greta Schoeman in Durban. I also recognise the support of those who helped to organise my
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Special thanks must also go to Tomasz Dangel and his family who were so hospitable during my visits to Warsaw. When I first arranged to meet Victor’s sister, Rut Wermuth-Burak, after the Children of the Holocaust meeting in Poland during 2002, Tomasz offered both of us accommodation at the hospice; a gesture that ensured our visit was successful and memorable.

Stefan Heitzmann fulfilled a similar role in Germany during 2005. As the biography neared completion, several points emerged that would be better clarified face-to-face. It was then I learned that Rut was due to be in Mainz during October for the launch of the German language version of her autobiography and to speak to students about her experience of the Holocaust. Richard Zorza was travelling from America so the three of us could spend the weekend together. Despite the lateness of my approach, Stefan made all the local arrangements, included me in the group’s activities, and made sure we had the time and facilities we required.

In total, more than 50 interviews were conducted specifically for this volume and I am indebted to all who participated. In cases where Russian colleagues spoke little English, I was grateful for the interpretation skills of Ekaterina Petrova, Caroline Leveaux and Wendy Jones. With this number of interviews, there was a considerable amount of transcription to be done and I am thankful to all involved: Margaret Jane, Tracey Sillito, Julie Buttrick, and staff at the Pat Hedges Secretarial Agency, among whom Frances Underwood was particularly helpful. At BBR, Chris Reed and Amanda Thompson have been available for consultation throughout the length of the project; their guidance and attention to detail have been invaluable to me.

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Finally, it is important to mention the overwhelming support I received from those closest to Victor: Richard Zorza, Eileen Lerche-Thomsen and Rut Wermuth-Burak. At every
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juncture, they went to great lengths to inform, advise and gently critique. All along I was greatly encouraged by their openness and generosity of spirit. Access was granted to every part of Victor’s life, yet the freedom to tell his story as I saw it was never questioned: a privilege from people I have come to count as friends.

I have enjoyed every aspect of the preparation of this book and the relationships that have developed along the way. My hope is that the following pages give an accurate yet critical account of Victor Zorza’s life and work, and acknowledges his place in the history of the twentieth century. Any inaccuracies are entirely my own.

Michael Wright
February 2006
Introduction

This biography of Victor Zorza was first mooted by Wendy Jones, the then director of the British Russian Hospice Society, as we drank coffee at her home on the Essex-Suffolk border in the Spring of 2001. I had recently left my post as a hospital chaplain and moved to the University of Sheffield to undertake a review of hospice care in 28 countries of Eastern Europe and Central Asia funded by the Open Society Institute (New York) and led by David Clark. A feature of the research methods was the collection of oral histories from influential figures and Wendy Jones was among the first to be interviewed. For a decade, she had run training courses in countries of the former Soviet Union and had an extensive knowledge of the current developments. Once the interview began, it became evident that Victor Zorza, who had died in 1996, occupied a ground-breaking role in the Russian hospice movement. We continued to talk after the interview ended and by the time I left, Wendy Jones was seriously suggesting a biography and I was keen to write one.

The story of Victor Zorza’s life

As my interest in Zorza’s life grew, a bigger – rather daunting – picture emerged. The ‘Victor Zorza story’ was far more complex than I had imagined.

First, Zorza was properly noted for his work in the hospice movement, but this had begun long before he went to Russia and co-founded Lakhta Hospice (St Petersburg) in 1990. The truth is that he advocated tirelessly for hospice care – in England and the United States – in the years following the death of Jane, his 25-year-old daughter, in an Oxford hospice during 1977. Yet this earlier involvement had mostly been overlooked by hospice commentators, sandwiched as it was between journalistic work in the US and India.

Second, Zorza’s war record shows he was born in Kolomyja, a small town in eastern Poland, in 1925. When the war in Europe began in 1939, he lived for two years under Soviet occupation. To his parents’ distress, he flirted with Marxist-Leninist ideology and joined the Pioneers, a Communist youth organisation. Then, when the Nazis invaded Soviet-held Poland in 1941, he left home and fled east with the retreating Russians, leaving his family to be engulfed by the Holocaust. During this period he was interrogated by Ukrainian nationals, almost killed in an air raid near the Polish border, and incarcerated in a Gulag camp in
Russia. These experiences affected him deeply and changed forever his attitude towards death. When Stalin declared an ‘amnesty’ towards Polish citizens in Soviet exile in 1941, Zorza took his chance and travelled to Toskoie (Siberia) to join a Wing of the Polish Air Force attached to the Anders Army – a force being raised from Polish prisoners of war. The Wing evacuated Soviet territory in 1942 and Zorza eventually came under British command in Iran. He arrived in England later that year.

Third, Zorza remained in Britain after eastern Poland was ceded to the Soviets at Yalta in 1945. Like thousands of his compatriots, he had anticipated returning to a free, secure Poland and refused to go back to Kolomyja once it had been incorporated into Ukraine. As he began his life anew, he read extensively and mastered the English language well enough to become a staff writer on The Guardian newspaper during the mid-1950s. Unlike other Kremlinologists, he developed an analytic system that enabled him to understand more of the detail and context of Soviet reports. After he accurately predicted the Soviet intervention in Czechoslovakia, he was named Journalist of the Year for 1968 in the International Publishing Corporation’s National Press Awards.

Fourth, Zorza never returned to Poland and for 50 years believed his family had perished in the Holocaust. It became difficult for him to mention his background, especially after a memory loss sapped his confidence and left him unsure of his past. Painfully, he carried a sense of guilt after leaving his family to their fate and refused everyone entry to this episode of his life, even his wife, Rosemary. Instead, he constructed a biography for the public domain that was readily accessible: part fact but with a large smattering of fiction. He did not find it difficult – as a journalist he earned his living by shaping interesting stories.

Zorza’s silence about his past, coupled with an inner loneliness, dislocated him from family and friends. In this scenario, work – in the form of his ‘four missions’ – became his raison d’être, the main focus of his life, and a convenient way of keeping secrets hidden. But this approach hindered his relationships and his inability to operate in the emotional sphere intermittently saddened and angered those closest to him, but to no avail. As Jane’s condition deteriorated, he remained in Washington and left his daughter and wife to fend for themselves in England. After Rosemary developed breast cancer during the 1980s, he briefly returned from India but quickly went back; and when his son, Richard, censured him for his thoughtlessness, they became estranged. Finally, at almost 68 years of age, Rosemary left Victor and found happiness with another man, Peter Varney, whom she married in 1992. Zorza was devastated at the disintegration of this, his second family.

Shortly afterwards, there was a life-changing surprise for Victor: his sister, Rut, had survived the war. She had always hoped she might find him and eventually traced him through her membership of a Jewish organisation, the Children of the Holocaust. Eagerly, she travelled to England from her home in Poland and they were reunited at Dairy Cottage, Zorza’s home in Buckinghamshire. For the first time, he could face his suffering with a family member who had also suffered. With Rut, he could speak in Polish, revisit his childhood, laugh at his former antics and explain why he left home all those years ago. And at last, he could begin to face those parts of his memory that he feared, supported by a sister who understood everything.

Significantly, this catharsis took place in the 1990s when he, too, had found another partner. Zorza met Eileen Lerche-Thomsen on the steps of a library in London and they were
soon sharing each other’s lives. Victor’s work was still important to him, but Eileen understood this and saw to a hundred and one details of his daily routine. Most importantly, she also demanded a reciprocal relationship, and Victor agreed. As they walked, talked, listened to music and enjoyed the gardens at Dairy Cottage, Victor’s attitudes softened and friends noticed a new warmth in him; but as he mellowed, there were other, less welcome changes. He was plagued by angina and as his health deteriorated, he underwent two heart operations in just a few months. Yet he bore his troubles with good grace. By the time he was taken to theatre for a third operation, from which he would not recover, he had made his peace with all who were close to him.

How was the biography approached?

These diverse and little-known threads woven into the tapestry of Zorza’s life presented problems for the biography. In particular: how could the book do justice to Victor’s achievements and at the same time deal with his long-term emotional issues? And how could it acknowledge the different interpretations of his complex persona, variously described as ‘driven’, ‘innovative’, ‘impossible’, ‘saintly’ and ‘thoughtless’. A one-dimensional, chronological approach seemed inhibiting. What was needed was a way of acknowledging the contradictory, sometimes messy, nature of human life. In short: a recognition that there are different perceptions of the same truth.

At this point a multidimensional approach was considered, based on what Laurel Richardson calls crystallisation. According to Richardson the crystal is mysterious; it combines symmetry and substance with an infinite variety of shapes. Crystals grow and change. They are prisms that reflect externalities and refract within themselves, creating different colours and patterns. Most important, what we see depends upon our angle of repose. This proved to be a helpful model. As a result, Zorza’s life was viewed from various angles which, as far as possible, illuminate the range of its constituent, sometimes paradoxical facets.

In consequence, the book is divided into three parts, each of which represents different themes in Zorza’s life. Part One, The hospice activist, examines Zorza’s work in the hospice movement precipitated by the death of his daughter Jane. The second part, The analytic journalist, examines the 40-year period during which Zorza was active in that field and Part Three, The dislocated idealist, focuses on his personal life. At the beginning of each part, an overview introduces the reader to this aspect of Zorza’s life. Then, in the chapters that follow, sub-themes are introduced that relate to Zorza’s work and relationships and, in keeping with the concept of the crystal, different perspectives are presented on each particular sub-theme.

Where the information came from

During the writing of this biography I have accessed rich sources of information. Over 700 of Zorza’s articles can be found on the Internet, in the archives of The Washington Post, spanning a 30-year period from 1956. In addition, Zorza writings have been placed on the Internet by The Guardian – including his ground-breaking piece on the death of Stalin. Together, these articles highlight Zorza’s worldwide interest in Communism and, over three decades,
the changing issues of the day. Also important have been the articles and book about the death of Jane which Zorza co-authored with his wife, Rosemary.

In addition, I have been able to consult a number of illuminating reports, documents and academic papers. These include newsletters and information bulletins from Hospice Information, the British Russian Hospice Society and the St Petersburg Healthcare Trust. These documents comment on the development of hospice care in St Petersburg and Moscow and focus on specific issues such as the training needs of staff. A personal diary kept by a British nurse who trained the first hospice staff at Lakhta, comments on the Russian health system and records how Zorza and his team attempted to change attitudes and develop skills. A large number of letters address every aspect of Zorza’s life, including: fund-raising schemes; the recruitment of public figures to the hospice movement; deals and spats with publishers; contracts and job applications; and, very interestingly, papers released by the CIA under the US freedom of information legislation.

Particularly valuable was the audio-visual material that gave a snapshot of Zorza’s life at key moments. Twice he was interviewed on the US television programme The McNeil Lehrer Report: once, with Rosemary after the death of Jane and then, four years later, when he spoke about life in his Indian village. A decade afterwards, Zorza recorded a conversation that took place at his bedside in the Hammersmith Hospital (1994). He was becoming frail and hoped to recruit Stephen Marder, an expert on Russia, to the hospice cause. To provide an overview of his work, Zorza told Marder details of his life and missions, his vision of hospice work, and overarching philosophy. A few weeks later, in January 1995, Zorza embarked on wide-ranging discussions with Richard, his son. In typical fashion, he recorded them for future reference.

I supplemented this documentary, audio-visual and photographic material by interviews with people who knew Zorza as a family member, friend or colleague. In total, I conducted 53 project interviews with 33 participants and, with permission, used extracts from four other interviews previously conducted by colleagues under the auspices of the Hospice History Programme, an initiative that is lodged within the International Observatory on End of Life Care at Lancaster University.

People of different nationalities contributed to this book and the interviews were conducted according to a rigorous protocol which stresses informed consent. When the draft biography was finished, participants were given the opportunity to view their extracts and see their place within the broader context of the book.

This procedure is particularly important when working in the former Communist countries of Central and Eastern Europe. In these countries, a new interest has developed in oral history, prompted by the transition from socialism to post-socialist societies. In effect, a ‘biographical turn’ has emerged reflecting the individual search for identity and continuity. People have become willing to tell their stories and are doing so in a variety of contexts.

A note of caution is important here. Historically, the Soviet system routinely blocked biographical work in order to influence individual and collective memories. As a consequence, many preferred to keep silent as stories were concealed and withheld from younger generations. Quite simply, it was safer to live in anonymity. On the other hand, Soviet citizens had constantly to complete biographical forms that asked wide-ranging questions relating to themselves
and their families. These questions enquired into the individual’s education and work histories; ancestors, relatives and descendents; service in the armed forces; and public and private life. Soviet citizens, therefore, became familiar with these ‘imposed life histories’ and did their best to produce a readily available construction to fit the demands of the Party-State ideology.

This Soviet legacy has implications for biographical research as informants in countries of the former Soviet Union probably have at least two narratives available – one for official purposes and one for people they regard as trustworthy. Consequently, Miller and colleagues stress: ‘it is extremely important in the current research situation to create basic trust as the ground of interaction between the researcher and the informant.’

During the production of this book, the creation of a climate of trust with all of the contributors has been a top priority. This is partly because it is ethically sound; but also because, in this case, it was the only way to operationalise the concept of crystallisation. So the contribution of the interviewees cannot be overestimated. Through the multi-dimensional revelations of those who knew Zorza best, an image appears of a gifted yet haunted man, supremely confident yet fundamentally insecure, striving for peace and democracy, yet forged in the conflict and totalitarianism of the twentieth century. Seen in this context – and against the backdrop of his many losses – Victor Zorza’s achievements are astonishing.

Notes

2. See: www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/searches/mainsrch.htm
3. See: century.guardian.co.uk/1950-1959/Story/0,6051,105154,00. html
9. This diary was kept by Ann Dent, a Macmillan nurse specialist who went to Lakhta to train nurses in hospice care, 1990.
10. The origins of the Hospice History Programme date from 1995 and a series of interviews with Cicely Saunders, founder of the modern hospice movement, and Eric Wilkes, founder of St Luke’s Hospice, Sheffield. Since then, we have interviewed hundreds of people involved in the worldwide hospice movement and routinely include oral history in our regional reviews of hospice development (see: D. Clark, M. Wright, Transitions in End of Life Care: Hospice and Related Developments in Eastern Europe and Central Asia Buckingham: Open University Press, 2003 and also M. Wright, D. Clark, Hospice and Palliative Care in Africa: A Review of Developments and Challenges Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006). Demonstrating our interest in this field, we have recently published an oral history of the modern hospice movement in the United Kingdom (D. Clark, N. Small, M. Wright, M. Winslow, N. Hughes, A Bit of Heaven for the Few? Lancaster: Observatory Publications, 2005), and a volume marking the centenary of St Joseph’s Hospice in the East End of London (M. Winslow, D. Clark, St Joseph’s Hospice, Hackney Lancaster: Observatory Publications, 2005).
Part 1 The hospice activist

‘After Jane, I certainly got into the hospice thing, which I did see in missionary terms; and then back to Russia with the hospice. And to what extent I was conditioned for all that by my wartime experience, or whether I’m using those words for the Holocaust, for the influence that had on me, is difficult to tell ... I needed to establish a framework, and having established it, maybe I became a prisoner of it.’ Victor Zorza

Outliving one’s child is a parental nightmare that for Victor Zorza shaped the rest of his life. The death of his daughter, Jane, in an English hospice during the summer of 1977 at just 25 years old, resonated with the time he narrowly escaped death during the Second World War. At that time, quick thinking and good fortune saved his life. He could do nothing to save Jane and a feeling of helplessness stayed with him for ever.

When news broke that his daughter’s cancer had returned, Zorza stayed in the family’s Washington home. He was convinced that a journey to England would confirm in Jane’s mind the seriousness of her condition, causing needless worry. So, as Jane grew weaker, Victor pursued his career in America while her mother, Rosemary, tried to cope. It was an uphill struggle. Eventually, as Jane’s life drew to a close, Rosemary insisted that Victor return to England. Shortly afterwards, Jane was admitted to Sir Michael Sobell House (Oxford) where she spent the last eight days of her life. Victor was alongside Rosemary when their daughter died.

To the Zorzas’ surprise, the care at Sobell House had been more supportive than they anticipated, and contrasted sharply with the family’s experience of the hospital setting. Opened during the previous year, it was among the first group of hospices to be founded in the wake of St Christopher’s Hospice (London), which first admitted patients in 1967. The medical director at Sobell House was Robert Twycross, who had worked at St Christopher’s as a research fellow and would become highly regarded in the hospice world for his teaching, research and clinical expertise. When she entered the hospice, Jane – the youngest patient to have been admitted at that time – was cared for by Twycross. This chance occurrence marked the beginning of an association between Twycross and Zorza that for two decades influenced the international development of hospice care.

Although Jane died just eight days after her admission, she too was struck by the contrast between the hospice and hospital. She hated what she described as the indignities of hospital care: endless tests, meaningless communication and the absence of common courtesies – all in the context of increasing pain. As the disease advanced, so did Jane’s
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suffering. Her ambulance journey to the hospice was particularly painful, requiring endurance on her part and comfort from her parents; a distressing experience for them all.

Yet the hospice itself was a revelation. Death, the scourge of curative treatment, was simply seen as the inevitability of life; a life that could be fulfilling, imbued with hope and meaning right to the end. Pain was relieved. A non-judgemental acceptance showed respect for autonomy. Communication was open; dialogue, direct and truthful. No-one skirted the issues and time for talk was unlimited.

Jane’s spirits lifted in this environment. As her pain eased, she picked up the threads of her life and wove them into a final tapestry; a unique proclamation of persona and self. Friends were invited to reminisce and say goodbye. She listened to Mozart, uplifted and at ease and when the time came, she died happy and at peace, a flower in her hair.

Victor was changed irrevocably by his daughter’s death. For him, the event was inscribed with the indelible dimension of hospice care. The association was inseparable. He was sure that had Jane not been admitted to Sobell House, her life would have ended in pain and suffering. But in the week before she died, Zorza witnessed a remarkable transformation in Jane, and, in the moment of her death, he moved from bereaved parent to hospice advocate.

Within a fortnight, Victor was giving interviews to a production team making a documentary about life at Sobell House; it marked the beginning of his new mission. From then on, he sought constantly to raise the profile of hospice care. A syndicated article, Death of a daughter, was published in 1978, then expanded into a book – A Way to Die. Both were co-authored with Rosemary. The UK royalties from Death of a daughter were donated to the National Society for Cancer Relief – the company that built Sobell House – and facilities at the hospice were extended. Victor was buoyant.

At the end of the 1970s the Zorzas’ publications enthused and shocked in equal measure. To those who found death unmentionable, it was surprising to see such an intimate account of loss in the daily press. But despite the criticism, Jane’s story resonated with primal notions of parenthood, as death was pulled from the shadows of taboo into the light of day. For many this exposure was welcome, even affirming. Among thousands of letters received by the Zorzas were countless stories of loss, fear at the mention of ‘cancer’, and isolation in the absence of a cure. These publications also touched a nerve among health professionals and helped motivate a new generation towards better care for the dying.

Following A Way to Die, Zorza raised public awareness through a punishing schedule of interviews on both sides of the Atlantic. In America, high-profile figures like Senator Edward Kennedy – whose son had cancer around the same time as Jane – endorsed Zorza’s work and gave public support. Victor and Rosemary became board members of the newly formed National Advisory Council of the National Hospice Organisation, and recruited other high-profile figures to further the cause. This complemented the work of the hospice pioneers and according to one of them, Zachary Morfogan, gave a visibility to the US movement that would have happened more slowly without them.

Despite this success, the lasting testimony to Zorza’s hospice work lies not in Britain, nor the US, but in Russia. As Communism declined during the 1980s, Zorza stopped in Moscow on his way home from India. It was then that he saw the agony of Russian patients. In the midst of endemic corruption and the collapse of health services he decided to
help. With customary brio, he launched an appeal centred on Moscow. It failed. Depressed after two years of frustration, he turned his attention to St Petersburg, at that time known as Leningrad. There, he found a kindred spirit in the form of Andrei Gnezdilov, a psychiatrist who was using role-play to explore issues of mortality with his patients. Together they lobbied the city’s board of health. Eventually, Mayor Anatoly Sobchak became convinced of the value of hospice and promised to found a service in each of St Petersburg’s 19 districts: a vision that has since come to fruition.

The first step was to acquire a building. Faced by a stream of requests, the council offered a small, overcrowded hospital at Lakhta on the outskirts of St Petersburg. Zorza was elated. As the hospital was refurbished and prepared for hospice use, in-patient numbers were reduced. Then, three British Macmillan nurses agreed to visit and train the nursing staff. When everything was in place, Russia’s first hospice opened in the autumn of 1990. The following year, Robert Twycross led a course for physicians assisted by Dr Andrew Hoy and Dr David Frampton. By the time the hospice celebrated its first anniversary, Zorza had procured the importation of oral morphine and gained recognition for Lakhta as a World Health Organisation demonstration project.

In view of the social and political upheavals brought about by the demise of the Soviet Union, these achievements are immense. They point to a struggle of mammoth proportions, often against the odds, as systems reorganised, policy shifted and personnel changed. Without Zorza’s single-mindedness – an attribute that bordered on the obsessive – and his punishing motivation which refused to be denied, his dream of a hospice movement in Russia could never have come to fruition. Today, Zorza’s legacy can be seen in the growing number of hospice and palliative care units that exist throughout the Russian Federation.

Questions arise as to why Zorza continued in the face of disappointment, particularly in the early days. And why choose Russia with its forbidding, if crumbling, Soviet structure? Was it solely because Jane told him to tell others she was happy, as he frequently claimed?

We can only speculate on whether other thoughts came to mind: of redemption – for his abandonment of Jane during the long days of her illness; of irony – about his negligible effect on Jane’s death, yet his influence on the deaths of others; of transcendence – from his long-standing opposition to totalitarianism, to a contemporary statement of human value in a reconstituted Russia.

Zorza’s papers give an intriguing glimpse of his multifarious approach to life: a family man who chose a life apart; an atheist who attended religious services; a necrophobe who lived among the dying. These images are reflected in the following pages. They depict a driven yet vulnerable Zorza, whose towering achievements are grounded in loss and the unpredictable messiness of human life.

These paradoxes are neatly drawn in a touching postscript to a lecture given at The Hague in 2003 by Andrei Gnezdilov, co-founder with Zorza of the Russian hospice movement. After outlining Zorza’s achievements, Gnezdilov commented that the grounds of Lakhta, the spiritual home of the Russian hospice movement, had become a resting place for some of Zorza’s ashes and as a result, the place had been rendered holy.

Chances are that Zorza would have loved the sentiment, hated the interpretation, and argued vociferously about the consequences.
1  The death of a Zorza

‘It was a hard thing to do, to open the small box and to touch the pale, grey powder. We kept putting it off. But one morning as the sun broke through the heavy rain, with the grass glistening and the water lily opening its petals in the warm light, we both knew the moment was right.’ Rosemary and Victor Zorza
Interrupted lives

As Victor and Rosemary Zorza sprinkled their daughter’s ashes around the pond of their Buckinghamshire home they remembered a life that had ended too soon. Heavy in heart, they missed Jane’s exuberance and her youthful passions, her love of life and laughter among friends. Nothing had prepared them for her death: not the close relationship between Jane and her mother; not the willingness of elder brother Richard to speak openly about her condition; nor Victor’s brush with death in war-torn Russia. It was the worst of times.

Jane’s illness had become evident two years earlier on a July morning in 1975. She was 23 years old. At first, there was a swelling on her foot, insignificant though irritating. But tests discovered something more sinister: malignant melanoma. The diagnosis was devastating and Rosemary remembered vividly how the word cancer ‘smashed the pattern of our lives into little pieces’.¹

It was hard to comprehend because at the time, Jane’s life was full of promise. Bright and determined, her ambition was to work with children so she studied hard and won a place at Sussex University to read sociology. It was no surprise when she subsequently qualified as a teacher; she had gained her just reward. But beneath her thoughtful persona was a feisty, rebellious spirit that resonated with the zeitgeist of the 1960s and early 1970s, a time of upheaval both at home and abroad.

This upheaval took many forms. In Britain, a wind of change had swept Harold Wilson’s Labour Party to power in 1964 ending 13 years of Conservative government. The high profile Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND) pressed hard for the UK’s unilateral abandonment of nuclear weapons. Supporters were drawn from a cross-section of society and the annual march from Aldermaston to London included such disparate groups as students, clerics and Members of Parliament. The Cold War was at its height and when Russia placed atomic missiles on Cuban soil in 1962, the US adopted a hard line.² For days, the world held its breath at the prospect of nuclear war. Finally, Russia backed down and agreed to remove its weapons. Tension eased. But the incident heightened concerns about a nuclear threat which for more than a decade became emblematic of a postwar generation seeking an elusive dream of harmony and peace.

In Eastern Europe, dissent within the Communist bloc was routinely challenged by an implacable Kremlin prepared to enforce its control by military intervention: a policy...
demonstrated in Czechoslovakia when Alexander Dubček’s liberalising reforms disappeared overnight in 1968. Despite popular support, the ‘Prague Spring’ was brushed aside after the invasion of half a million troops drawn from Warsaw Pact countries but headed by the Soviet Union. Observers drew parallels with the brutal invasion of Hungary in 1956.

In China, the rise of Mao Tse-tung led to a form of Marxism-Leninism that focused on peasants as the source of revolution rather than the urban workers favoured by the Bolsheviks. During the 1960s, amid deteriorating relationships with his leadership colleagues, Mao launched the Cultural Revolution (1966) to secure his position: an episode that resulted in anarchy and affected the development of China for a decade. Radical students joined the Red Guard and Mao’s ideology was violently imposed on all levels of society. Age-old customs were challenged and discarded. The thoughts of Mao, encapsulated in the Little Red Book, symbolised a new order as education, commerce, industry and agriculture were routinely dismantled and restructured.

As the decade drew to a close, attention focused on South-East Asia and the protracted war in Vietnam. Contrary to White House briefings, the Tet Offensive (1968) demonstrated the resilience of an enemy supposedly on the verge of collapse. Opposition to the war increased. In 1969, when news broke of the massacre of civilians by US troops at My Lai, public opinion was outraged. Iconic pictures appeared in the media and became a clarion call for the anti-war lobby. Eventually, troop strength decreased amid dwindling support, rising protests and a groundswell of opposition. In October 1969 anti-war demonstrators took to the streets across the US and a month later, more than 250,000 protesters marched on Washington DC. The war dragged on wearily until a peace was brokered in 1973 and the last US troops left Vietnam in 1975.

None of these developments were lost on the Zorza household. As a journalist who specialised in the Communist world, Victor had a passion for foreign affairs. His home became a hive of international activity, of breaking news and detailed analysis, and the centre of a worldwide network of sources. Michael, Jane’s boyfriend from her days at Sussex University, recalls:

Jane’s parents were people who were intellectual; they were people who were interested in ideas. Victor wrote in The Guardian, which was a newspaper one read avidly in those days. It all seemed exciting; and he was on television occasionally. He had a kind of aura about him which was completely missing in anything I’d come from. He had a whole wing of the house, basically to himself, and it was stuffed full of papers and files and old copies of Pravda; and he also had something which was a huge novelty, a Reuters-type teleprinter – which in those days was one of the only ways you could get news coming through ‘instantaneously’. I used to watch, fascinated, as all this stuff came clattering out of the wire – you know, ‘ch-ch-ch-ch-ch’ all the time. So again he had this sense of somebody who was wired into what was going on.

Michael guessed, correctly, that Zorza’s quest for information was relentless. Assisted by his fluent Russian, Soviet press releases and Cominform briefings were valuable sources; but Zorza also logged the comings and goings of ministers and other personnel. Seemingly unimportant snippets from recently returned visitors could possibly reveal a shift in policy or the development of a new strategy. Some were unaware of Zorza’s interest so his sudden appearance could be quite a surprise. Fellow journalist Sheila Partington recalls her first, unexpected, meeting with Victor:
I went to a World Youth Festival in Moscow in the summer of 1957, which of course was only eight months after Hungary, and when I came back he was on the railway station asking me my impressions about Moscow.\textsuperscript{7}

For Zorza, such behaviour was commonplace, essential even, if he was to detect the undisclosed shifts in Soviet policy. Those who could illuminate the topic of the day were invited to dinner: an occasion where debate was intense. Invariably, Victor had a view. Sheila Partington:

I think he was very intent on making sure that you understood every step of the way in which he’d arrived at conclusions. There were no shortcuts. He was job-obsessed, you know; job was everything.\textsuperscript{8}

Raised in this climate, Jane responded in her inimitable
way by questioning, challenging and, inevitably, clashing with her father. Their discussions were fraught. Try as she may, Jane rarely scored against Victor, her spirited chutzpah being no match for his greater experience and measured argument. Tears flowed. Sometimes, their relationship was strained to the limit as common ground disappeared in a sea of acrimony. Richard Zorza:

There’s some hints in A Way to Die about how difficult Jane’s relationship with my father was, and of how unhappy she was. They’re very understated. It was much worse than that. There were periods when they weren’t talking.¹⁰

Jane felt very deeply the distance from her father, and his coolness towards her. Sometimes though, she was overwhelmed by him: no space to breathe, no room to grow. But however her argument fared she would never give way. Her academic studies had bolstered her belief in justice and equity, values she treasured. Combined with her teacher’s confidence, she became more rather than less inclined to press her views. Famously, she berated her father for what she termed his ‘innate liberalism’ and protested strongly against the war in Vietnam. Once, gleefully anticipating Victor’s discomfort, Jane came back from an anti-war demonstration with a delight she found hard to conceal: she had registered her opposition and been trampled by a police horse in the process.¹¹

It should not have surprised her parents that Jane would stand her ground:

Signs of her strength of mind were apparent in early life. The baby, who cried so loudly and so often, grew into the child who questioned authority, who insisted on doing things her own way, preferring to make her own mistakes.¹²

Yet Jane’s plucky exterior offered scant protection when she felt vulnerable, and none at all when she felt unloved. It was then that raw courage and her sense of righteousness were simply not enough to sustain her. Ultimately, she slipped into depression. On one occasion, after thinking long and hard about her cancer, she confided in her diary, ‘despite all this [support] I feel totally alone’. She eventually considered suicide.

The polarised views of father and daughter had come to a head during a visit to India when Jane was 16. Traumatised by the poverty, Jane rounded on her father and challenged the essence of his work, his ultimate raison d’être. She charged Victor that, instead of concentrating on the macro level of international relations, he should publicise the daily struggle of the poor living in the Third World. For once, Zorza was speechless. Jane’s request, unreasonable as it then seemed, was confined to a corner of his mind – distant, irrelevant and safe; and there it stayed until after Jane’s death. It would then reappear with devastating effects on his health and relationships.

At the time of Jane’s death, the Zorzas were a transatlantic family with homes near Reading (UK) and in Dairy Cottage, the Zorzas’ home in England.
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Washington (US). As an acknowledged Sovietologist and correspondent for *The Guardian*, Victor's syndicated column appeared in leading newspapers worldwide. It was a job that suited him, his keen interest rooted in personal experience.

Born in eastern Poland in 1925, Victor's home town of Kolomyja was annexed by the Soviets in 1939. Two years later, Germany declared war on Russia, whereupon the young Zorza left his family and headed east. It was a decision he came to regret. On Russian soil, he was constantly worried about the well-being of his family – of Pawel his brother and younger sister Rutka – and he turned back towards the border and home.

As he approached the front line, he was taken by Russian troops and put to work alongside women and the elderly, digging trenches to slow the German advance. It was a dangerous task. Caught in an air raid, he experienced the panic of war and the unpredictability of death as those around him lost their lives. From that instant the young Zorza was left with a deeply ingrained fear in the face of death, and his instinct for survival became paramount. Turning back into Russia, he left the place of his horrors and lost himself among the flotsam of war, those transient populations wandering aimlessly in a desperate search for refuge. As he train-hopped along the trans-Siberian railway he was grateful to the peasants who offered him food and shelter: acts of kindness that he never forgot.

Victor was haunted by other memories of Russia: the crushing loneliness and fragile hope, but, most of all, his imprisonment in a Gulag camp at the onset of winter. Amidst harsh conditions and a typhus epidemic, he counted himself lucky to be moved to less secure accommodation – due, he thought, to his tender years. It was then that his fortunes changed. He escaped.

Having almost died at the border, Zorza had no intention of repeating the experience; but where to go now that he was free? Wartime Russia was an inhospitable place and there were those around who would take advantage of a young refugee. Yet times were changing for Polish citizens in Soviet exile. Since Germany's invasion of Russia, Poland had become an ally. Stalin agreed, therefore, to release Polish prisoners of war, held since 1939, to fight alongside the Allies. Once Zorza heard that a force was being mobilised, he made his way to the assembly point at Buzuluk and once there, joined a squadron of the Polish Air Force. Four months later, in the spring of 1942, he crossed into Persia with other military and civilian personnel. In the Middle East, the Squadron came under British command and Zorza eventually arrived in England in the summer of 1942. Never again would he see his parents, his brother, or the place of his birth. Nor would he ever return to Poland.

Jane’s mother was a couple of years older than Victor. Born Rosemary Wilson in 1923, she became an accomplished potter and author. Some thought she had inherited her artistic flair from her father, an interior decorator who was seriously wounded during the First World War. Though Victor regarded himself as the ‘professional’ writer, he duly acknowledged her literary skills:

Rosemary is getting so much more praise for her writing style than I am I for mine that I am going to make her pay for it – by beginning to plan my retirement forthwith, and arranging to live on her immoral earnings.

In 1939, on the outbreak of war, Rosemary had joined the Auxiliary Territorial Service (ATS) having misrepresented her age (she was 16 years old at the time). Despite her youth, her qualities quickly became apparent. She led the first ATS corps to Bari (Italy) and rose eventually to the rank
of Sergeant Major. When the war ended, she obtained a secretarial position at the BBC Monitoring Service in Caversham. It was here that she met Victor and, after becoming pregnant with Richard, accepted his proposal of marriage. They married in May 1949. Richard was born in October of that same year, Jane in March 1952.

Rosemary’s gentleness contrasted sharply with Victor’s driven restlessness – an attribute she expressed through her pottery. To Rosemary, the world was inhabited by two sorts of people: those who make pots and those who use them. In this scenario, pottery was a simple means of communicating; a way in which human beings could connect with each other across borders and boundaries. As an introduction to her book, she wrote:

We take from clay what we need and give what we can. The incoherent can express themselves vividly through the medium of clay, the voluble learning something of silence and the tense relax. It’s all very therapeutic and fulfilling.¹⁷

Pottery was an integral part of Rosemary’s life, something she was born to do. No matter what life demanded, pottery was in the blood, a creative energy to be nurtured and released. Richard recalls:
[She] had a studio at their cottage, and she had a studio in the basement of the 44th Street house here [in Washington]. She did a lot of potting. My mother worked very, very hard because she sort of held the family together. Life around Dad was very demanding.18

Indeed, it was. In February 1977, when Jane’s illness progressed to a swelling in her groin, Rosemary returned to England while Victor stubbornly remained in Washington. Jane was in Greece but flew home immediately and met her mother at Heathrow Airport. Together, they went to the family physician. It was bad news. The swelling was a malignant tumour resulting from a reoccurrence of Jane’s previously diagnosed melanoma. In the uncertainty that followed, Victor suggested that Jane should travel to America to be treated as a research patient, something she was unwilling – and patently unable – to do.

As Jane became weaker, she grew increasingly disheartened. But Victor stayed in Washington having convinced himself she would recover:

He had become optimistic. Even if Jane’s chance of survival was only one in five – as he gathered from one set of statistics – he persisted in believing she would be lucky. He had always been lucky himself, especially during World War Two when his life had been in danger several times. On the ‘phone, Rosemary urged him to lose no more time in flying over. Victor repeated his old argument: if he came now, Jane might jump to the conclusion he had returned because she was dying.

‘Do we want her to think that?’ Victor protested. Rosemary persisted: ‘I need you and Jane needs you. You must come now.’ He seemed not to have heard. ‘Of course,’ he said soothingly. ‘When you want me, just tell me. I’ll get on the next plane.’

Rosemary’s patience snapped: ‘I’m telling you to come now …’ Her voice was high and strained with insulting clarity. There was a short silence, then Victor said quietly: ‘I’ll come on Wednesday.’19

It would be the first time he had seen Jane for six months.

Throughout this period, Richard20 lived in Boston (USA). Having won a scholarship to study in America, he stayed on to make a home with his future wife, Joan, and stepsons, Derin and Arloc. They live in Washington DC:

I came across in early 1968, actually on an English Speaking Union21 exchange programme to a private school here, and decided to go to college here rather than back in England. I came over here first, and Jane was here, one or a couple of summers. So there was a lot of bouncing back and forth, but basically Jane was based over there, I was based over here, and [my parents] bounced. [Dad] came originally to the Georgetown Centre for Strategic and International Studies – which was quite a right-wing organisation – and did this study on whether or not the Russians would be able to use computers to really build a controlled society. Then he started back writing the column, selling it to The Guardian, selling it to The Washington Post, and syndicating around the world; and what they did was: they commuted. They spent about four months a year in England and they spent about eight months here.22

Like many siblings, Richard and Jane’s early relationship fell into the ‘confrontational’ rather than ‘harmonious’ category – so much so that the family felt strained at times, but a turning point came with the acquisition of a new interest in boating. Victor:

Our lives were transformed. Every voyage became an adventure. Arguments continued, but were more often concerned with the processes of learning new skills: sailing, rowing, lighting camp-fires and mastering the problems of outdoor cooking. Their relationship, trusting on her part, protective on his, became basically restored.23
It was a happy time for the whole family. Since her youth, Rosemary had yearned to engage in the typically British pastime of ‘messing about in boats’ and the hot summer of 1959 persuaded Victor to hire a cabin cruiser on the Thames. The venture was a complete success. A similar experience the following year left the Zorzas wanting more, whereupon Victor purchased a 17-foot sail-boat and joined the Hurlingham Yacht Club, an organisation which at that time had a distinctly proletarian flavour.

Situated on the south bank of the river, it was far removed from the exclusive Hurlingham Club, located on the north bank, and attracted a wide range of enthusiasts who loved the no-nonsense, ‘hands-on’ approach. To Victor’s great pride, the family was warmly received and life took on a new dimension. Richard Zorza:

Later we moved the boat upriver and we used to camp, basically every weekend, by the river at Maidenhead. We sort

of appropriated this National Trust island – and it’s a place of very, very happy memories for me; a time of emerging competence into the world, of being able to manage boats and motors; for Jane, too, it was a place where friends came, and that continued until 1966 when we moved to Dairy Cottage. And for my mother it was hugely important. She loved it because she loved being on boats and she worked incredibly hard. My father may have been the captain – and it was the one time that he got away and relaxed – but my mother was all the other ranks.25

During Jane’s illness, Richard crossed the Atlantic to visit her twice. In the style of an older brother, he encouraged her to develop her own lifestyle and become independent, as he himself had done. Now she was confronting mortality, he thought his sister should be told the truth – a view which neither parent shared:
It was very difficult because I wanted to tell her and they didn’t. I mean I really did want to tell, but they really couldn’t face it, and, you know, they had all these rationalisations. But when you tell somebody else, like loads of other things in life, it’s not about telling them, it’s about facing it yourself.\(^{26}\)

The question of truth-telling became a crucial issue around Jane’s dying but there were others too: Victor’s ever-present fear of death; the nature of parental authority; the distance, both emotional and physical, between family members; life-stage issues around autonomy, sexuality and infantilisation; and deeply held, though ultimately contrasting, world-views. All arose in the context of this most painful scenario, the death of a child, albeit in early adulthood.

The story of Jane’s death

The story of Jane’s death was told in two groundbreaking publications. First came the Zorzas’ syndicated article, *Death of a daughter*, which appeared initially in the *Outlook* section of *The Washington Post* (1978). Two years later, their book *A Way to Die*\(^{27}\) was published and also serialised in the *Sunday Times*.

*Death of a daughter*\(^{28}\) was a complete surprise and made a huge impact on a global readership unaccustomed to such a detailed account of death in a daily newspaper. Some welcomed the article; others were repelled. A *Way to Die* also gave rise to strong, contrasting emotions. The Zorzas were unrepentant. Moreover, Victor reported the experience of Jane’s death as a turning point, of intimacy and heartbreak, which changed his life irrevocably. Her story simply...
had to be told. In the intervening years, the Zorzas’ article about Jane’s death has lost none of its poignancy.

Sometimes, the things that we dread the most turn out to be altogether different than we anticipated. The particularly painful way in which our daughter Jane’s cancer developed seemed to presage a period of suffering and torment so great that we quailed at the prospect. As things worked out, the time of greatest suffering was when the doctors were refusing to tell her what her chances of survival were. Once she was told, after several months of uncertainty, that she had less rather than more time to live, she cried a little, and then smiled through her tears. ‘Now that I know,’ she said, ‘I want to enjoy every day I have left. I want to be happy – and I want you to help me be happy.’

In such circumstances, becoming happy was a challenge and the Zorzas recognised it would not be easy. During the past two years, Jane had experienced many disappointments; the interruption to her teaching career was a constant frustration, the recurrence of her cancer dragged her unwillingly into depression. She hated her disease. ‘I don’t think of it as Big C’ she said, ‘I think of it as lots of little Cs, nibbling away inside like rats in a sack of grain. Or like life growing the wrong way – inward instead of outward.’ This inverted flow of life caused her untold agonies that prompted occasional outbursts. Never premeditated, they were just beyond her control: ‘When I act like a bitch towards people, it’s instead of screaming,’ she confessed.

There were, however, some good times; rays of hope that shone through the wreckage of her life. The ‘Brighton Project’ was one of them. It was an idea she developed with Victor’s support and for a while it gave her a new purpose in life. The concept was simple: she would open a craft shop in Brighton, a place she loved and where, in her student days, she had been happy. With her parents support, she researched the practicalities of shopkeeping and at the same time, assessed the level of disruption that would be caused by her regular chemotherapy.

As she dabbled in the market, Jane’s appreciation of beauty was heightened. Line and form came into sharper focus. The smallest success caused her spirits to soar. She was thrilled when a retailer offered stock from his recently closed business and delighted when they agreed on a price. Victor recognised, however, that for the former shopkeeper, it was more than a business deal: ‘His heart went out to Jane, to a fellow human being facing the pain of cancer and the mystery of existence, and he offered help and friendship at a time when she needed it.’ But reality was never far off. She called her shop Close to Infinity. ‘That’s where I am,’ she said prophetically, ‘and that’s where I’ll remain, from now on.’ Perhaps she knew more than she revealed, for the shop never opened and plans for the business were quietly set aside.

Then, suddenly, a surprising thing happened: Michael, Jane’s former boyfriend, returned to England after travelling in America and their relationship gently rekindled. It was as warm as it was unexpected. Almost 30 years later, Michael remembers Jane’s distinctive personality and approach to life:

I found her quite attractive in a funny old way. She had all kinds of knowledge about things which I didn’t know a great deal about. We’re talking 1970s – a long time ago, the world has moved on considerably since then – but she’d been doing all kinds of, I thought, bravely radical things. I think she’d walked out of St Paul’s Girls School and managed to get some halfway decent ‘A’ levels as well. And I found myself being sucked into her world; it was very different from where I was coming from, so it was kind of interesting being with her.
It was in the context of this shared, rather rebellious, approach to the world that their rediscovered intimacy became emblematic of easier, more carefree times:

I’d had a relationship with her, and then not had a relationship with her, and now I was sort of having a relationship with her again – and trying to activate all those old buttons if you like, all those old things that you do when you know somebody very well, to try and convince her that somehow it was worth struggling on, trying to keep a grip on life; and I thought of myself as being one part of that grip on life, something that took her back to happier times. There were other people there from Sussex University as well, and we all got drawn into going to see her, trying to jolly her along – she tended to be inclined towards depressions – and trying to keep her from sliding into a stage of helplessness.35

Sadly for Jane, the relationship stalled, leading her first to disappointment and then anger. Defiantly, she resolved never to see Michael again; a decision she readily overturned when he presented himself at the hospice shortly before her death. It was an important time for them both. Michael:

There was something a bit unsaid between me and Jane and I really felt I had to see her one last time – I hadn’t kind of got whatever it was I needed to say off my chest, which I know went down like a ton of bricks, with Zorza not wanting histrionics at this juncture. I remember jumping on a train at Paddington – one of those fast trains – so whizzing past all sorts of weird and wonderful things and the reflections in the glass, and I’m thinking: ‘This is absolutely weird, what am I doing here? I’ve to get a taxi to get out to the hospice’ and all the rest of it. But that was the moment when I could basically say my goodbyes. I think night and day for Jane at this point had become rather academic and I wouldn’t really like to say how much of the conversation she would have remembered; but it made me feel better, you know. And that was my sign-off, at that point. Because she was very important to me – and still is actually.36

It was not surprising that Jane changed her mind and agreed to see Michael. The model of care at Sobell House was all-embracing and typical of the hospice ideal. Though control of physical symptoms was very important, the social and spiritual needs of patients were also addressed. Importantly, patients and their families were encouraged to talk, raise questions, and resolve outstanding issues. This approach contrasted sharply with the Zorzas’ experience of hospitals. It was not that hospital doctors were less committed; it was simply that when hopes of a cure faded, death was seen as a failure and dealing with it in an open, collaborative way was not part of the culture. The Zorzas:

Hospitals are built to restore the sick to health and life and are not concerned with death. True, the fear of death is always below the surface, but the doctors and nurses do their best to keep it there – down below the surface, that’s where all the thoughts of death belong, not in the open where such thoughts could even retard recovery or frighten the patients. Hope is part of getting cured, faith in life is part of the struggle to conquer death. Many doctors and nurses had worked hard to help Jane. They had insisted we all keep hoping. ‘There is always a chance’ they said, even after the point had been reached when it seemed obvious the cancer was winning.37

Although her parents had promised to nurse Jane at home, her pain was such that she craved relief. It overrode all other considerations. Eventually, in the absence of any viable alternative, Jane was offered a hospice bed – and she agreed. Nevertheless, the decision to seek hospice care took a long time coming despite the fact that Joan Zorza, Richard’s wife, had attempted to raise the issue previously.
Joan Zorza had heard Elisabeth Kubler-Ross and a hospice worker from England speak about death and dying at Harvard Medical School during 1971. She recalls:

The presentation discussed pain management as well as hospice, another new topic at the Harvard Medical School. I was absolutely impressed and became an immediate convert. I had already been a strong believer in telling patients that they were going to die, in part so they could better come to terms with their lives and make whatever plans that needed making or that would give them and their loved ones more peace.\textsuperscript{38}

When Jane’s cancer returned, Joan considered she should, if she wished to know, be told the truth about her condition and what options were available to her. Jane’s parents disagreed:

For quite a long time her parents did not want to even think about the possibility that Jane might die, also believing that even thinking this might make it more likely to happen. They also forbade us to answer Jane’s questions about the likely course of her illness and whether she was dying, something that became more and more evident (and which we discussed openly with doctors several months before her death). This was one of the most difficult dilemmas I ever felt in my life, as Jane asked repeatedly, seemed to know that I had some medical knowledge and knew what was going on.\textsuperscript{39}

Eventually, Joan’s discussions with Jane’s parents prepared the way for Jane’s doctor to seek a hospice bed. The significance of the moment was not lost on the Zorzas:

What does a father think when his 25-year-old daughter is being carried off to a home for the dying? This father thought, with a shudder, that she would never see her home again – and that she would be much better off at the hospice than at home. What does a mother think?

This mother thought that the most terrible moment of all had come, and she was overcome by a sense of failure – a feeling that she had failed to preserve a child to whom she had given life and had nurtured so many years.\textsuperscript{40}

Once admitted to Sir Michael Sobell House, Jane’s pain was addressed immediately. To keep her pain-free, drugs were administered whenever necessary, a contrast to Jane’s hospital experience where the pain frequently returned before the time-scale for medication had elapsed. As she became more comfortable, she became more peaceful and accepting:

She was able to give her mind to music. One morning, I had put on a Mozart tape for her, just as she was waking up. She slowly opened her eyes, listened with obvious enjoyment for a few minutes and glanced at me. What can she be thinking of, I wondered, when she is listening to Mozart – that she will have to leave all this loveliness behind her, to go into nothingness? She was not thinking that at all. ‘How beautiful you are making it for me to die,’ she said slowly. The tape was still on when the doctor\textsuperscript{41} came in. ‘Ah,’ he said with the air of a connoisseur, ‘Mozart.’ When he left the room, Jane turned her head towards me. ‘He’s to have my Mozart tapes.’\textsuperscript{42}

As Jane’s life moved inexorably to its end, family relationships, pressured by the imminence of death, came to the fore. During her life, Jane had been wounded by her father’s barbed comments. It was time to find peace. Nervous and hesitant, they tried to salve the hurt in a new spirit of reconciliation; in reality it was difficult for them both.

Moreover, Victor was tense. Richard’s proposed return to America during the last days of Jane’s life gnawed away at him. Disapproval turned to anger as his son stood firm. In these circumstances, Jane and Richard’s farewell was likely to
be painful. And it was, both of them aware of the finality of their separation.

Rosemary was also distressed as she clearly recognised that her world was changing forever. Jane’s illness had been an emotional roller-coaster, twisting and turning between hope and despair, maternal instincts in disarray and shredded by her sense of powerlessness. Isolated from Victor and Richard, she had turned for support to Nan Rothwell— a friend and former pottery student who had crossed the Atlantic to be with her. But now, with Nan gone and Richard to follow, there would shortly be just the three of them: Victor, herself and Jane. And Jane would soon be dead. What then?

For the time being, these thoughts were pushed from her mind as she joined her husband and supported Jane in her last few hours. They recall:

She had been in the hospice for eight days. As she sank into unconsciousness, her breathing became more and more shallow; she was still being turned over by the nurses every few hours to make sure she was comfortable. As the rose in her hair faded and withered, so did Jane’s body. Then, as we sat by her bedside, each of us holding one of Jane’s hands, she breathed her last, quietly, easily, deep in sleep, as the nurse had promised her. We sat with her for a little while, kissed her lips, and touched the red rose. As we walked out of the hospice, we knew that one day we would tell others how Jane had died – hoping that it would help them too. We cried a little – but we were able to smile, all at the same time.

**Reaction to the story**

As *A Way to Die* took shape, the Zorzas were apprehensive. How would a book about the death of their daughter be received? Would the public understand why they wrote it, appreciate their grief and emptiness? Sheila Partington was asked to comment:

I went to stay with them; I suppose it would be about a year after Jane died. They were immersed in the book and they were about to leave for America a week later, and they’d got stuck and, sounds awful, they sort of put the manuscript on my lap early one morning and asked me to read it and say what I thought; and I read it. Eventually, I said that I thought there were three different books there: Rosemary was trying to write an account of what had happened; Victor was trying to write a book about coming to terms with his experiences of death; and both of them thought they were writing a book about hospices! I suggested that they take the whole lot back to America and let their American editor edit, which was the editor’s job not Victor’s; because Victor thought that he could edit, write – I think if he could have set up the typeface he would have done the proof. And I think that is eventually what they did. I know they got a great deal of help from another person who was on The Guardian in Manchester and who is now dead.

Even in its revised form, *A Way to Die* received mixed reviews as previously happened with *Death of a daughter*. Ashbel Green of Knopf publishers told Victor plainly: ‘I have collected a good deal of news about *A Way to Die*; some good, some not so good.’

An excoriating review in the *Spectator* epitomised the ‘not so good’:

The motives for the book are excellent, and its effects will also be excellent, but the book itself is terrible, in every
A writer who had cancer expressed anger at what she considered to be a clear case of exploitation:

I was angry, very angry to read your Death of a daughter feature. It is very irresponsible of the parents of this girl to exploit her story for profit and personal gratification in this way. I am also a cancer sufferer. Since I was 21, I have experienced all the feelings portrayed, in greater depth than presented by ‘the parents’. I have learnt how to adapt mentally and physically to the disease, to tolerate pain of the repetitive major surgery and mental agony of recurrences. Give comfort and faith to your readership. An account of death presented in this way is so final, so destructive to the living.52
While these letters are indicative of the many concerns, thousands more expressed support. A doctor wrote:

I assure you that in my 70 years I have never read such a brilliantly written, unashamedly frank, utterly honest, and shatteringly heart-rending book as *A Way to Die*. Dare I suggest that you collect some really big names, send them your book and ask them, in memory of Jane, to launch a nationwide campaign for funds for more hospices? Many people, having read the book will (or at least may) contribute ‘in memory of Jane’ or because they themselves have had the bitter hospital – or the grateful hospice – experience.\(^{53}\)

Among the writers living with a life-limiting condition, many identified with the book’s sentiments. It was treasured; a source of comfort and hope:

I am writing to thank you for writing *A Way to Die*. I am 29. At 16 I was told (after exhaustive tests) that I have a kidney condition. Then they gave me, at most, 10 years to live. It was at such a young age that I learnt that most valuable lesson of living each day, one at a time, and to the fullest possible amount. I have no loving, caring parents or family to care for me as you did Jane. I live alone and, before reading your book, assumed I would die alone, lonely, with no-one to care. Your book has shown me that it need not be so. I was absolutely unaware of the type of work hospices did, and for this knowledge I have you both, and everyone else in your book, to thank. Now I know that the excruciating pain can indeed be helped in order that I, too, may die at peace. How can I ever thank you? You see, death itself does not frighten me, but the pain does.\(^{54}\)

In sharp contrast to the critical comments, the following extract was written by a parent whose son had died about the same time as Jane:

I have just finished *A Way to Die*; it is a profoundly moving story. I admire your unselfconscious honesty, lack of sentimentality and of course the dedication and love you gave to Jane. My wife and I had a very similar experience. Our son developed a melanoma in the same year as Jane, at much the same age, and I wrote a book about it that came out about the same time as yours. I would like to send you a copy, because although the stories are different, there are many echoes.\(^{55}\)

These letters provide a valuable insight into the issues surrounding the story of Jane’s death at the end of the 1970s. Their contrasting views are expressed in a forthright, passionate manner, with little room for negotiation. Yet these reactions have a broader significance. They not only relate to Jane’s death, but to the wide-ranging debate around care for the dying during the latter part of the twentieth century. It was a conflicted area, where hospice physicians were seen to be challenging the principles of mainstream medicine: that curative treatment continued until death, despite its futility. In this scenario, ‘death is seen as the ultimate disaster and terminal care a kind of macabre play in which the patient is jollied along until the final curtain falls.’\(^{56}\) It was these attitudes which prompted Cicely Saunders, widely regarded as the founder of the modern hospice movement, to challenge the practice: ‘I think that both doctors and nurses have to reorientate their thinking and realise that they are not aiming at cure, but at comfort of all kinds.’\(^{57}\)

Against the background of this debate, to proceed with a dramatic production of *A Way to Die* that was accessible to young people was both daring and fraught. Capturing the Zorza family’s experience in the form of a play – appropriately named *Taboo* – would have been a daunting task for many an author. Not so for Nigel Townsend, assistant director of London’s Young Vic Theatre Company. When, in 1981, he was commissioned to write an adaptation of *A Way to Die*
for secondary phase pupils (aged 11–18), he was energised by the challenge and worked closely with Rosemary. Donald Sartain, the company’s general manager, was also upbeat:

It is very rewarding for us to be involved in communicating the story and its lessons to schoolchildren, and to help them understand the deep experience you and your family have had and which the children themselves could easily have to face within their own immediate circle.\(^{58}\)

The concept was clear. The event would encompass a whole school day. A performance to selected groups would be given in the morning followed by a workshop in the afternoon. Members of staff were informed:

The play will tell the story of the Zorza family coming to terms with and facing the death of their daughter, Jane, a young school teacher, through a terminal illness. The play examines the problems which the whole family face and Jane’s realisation and acceptance that her illness is terminal. The play will look at the differences between a hospital and a hospice. We should emphasise that the theme and the story are presented in a positive way. This will be followed by a short break and then a discussion for you to monitor your students’ immediate responses and allow the students to explore more deeply some of the issues raised in the presentation.\(^{59}\)

In view of the topic and the vulnerability of the audience, teachers were invited to preview the play and discuss with the company, fellow teachers and ‘leading experts’ ways in which the emerging issues might be handled.\(^{60}\) These ‘leading experts’ included members of the Macmillan home care service at St Joseph’s Hospice, Hackney – and Colin Murray Parkes, at that time consultant psychiatrist to St Christopher’s Hospice, Sydenham.

A teachers’ guide gave advice on preparation and how to deal with student responses. Suggestions were made about extending work across the curriculum. Fact-sheets raised questions around malignant disease,\(^{61}\) caring for patients with cancer,\(^{62}\) management of pain\(^{63}\) and care of the dying.\(^{64}\) An article by Cicely Saunders\(^{65}\) explained the history and philosophy of the hospice movement, and identified the settings in which hospice care is given.

Supported by the National Society for Cancer Relief, Taboo embarked on a four-week tour of Scottish schools (June 1981). During the school performances, a reprint of Death of a daughter was given to each member of the audience. By July 1981 the play had toured in Scotland and England and student audiences totalled over 6,000. It had

Flyer for Taboo: ‘The play examines the problems which the whole family face.’
also appeared for a two-week run at the Theatre Workshop and ran for 10 performances at the Edinburgh Festival.

Reviews were favourable. Recognising the innovative nature of the production, the Glasgow Herald noted that 200 pupils packed into the gymnasium of Broughton High School. ‘For almost one-and-a-half hours, they watched, and listened, in uncanny silence as the five-person cast enacted this real drama.’ One pupil said: ‘Yes, I was a bit frightened, but it was very, very good.’ The public performances were also acclaimed. The Evening News reported that: ‘… Claire Vousden as Jane is exceptional, sharing her innermost thoughts and fears … the issues raised and the courage displayed will not be forgotten in a hurry.’

Meanwhile, on the global stage, the story of Jane’s death was reaching a worldwide audience. When a paperback version of A Way to Die was published in 1981, sales in Britain soared to 28,000 in three months. In April that year, a representative of Knopf publishers told the Zorzas:

We have sold the Japanese [rights] to Ieno Hikari, which means a fairly clean sweep of the publishing nations. And an Italian publisher, Pia Societa San Paolo, of Rome, has agreed to publish the book. So I think we have just about covered the major foreign markets.

The Zorzas always aimed for such worldwide coverage. Yet there were risks. By revealing their daughter’s dying process and offering the family’s emotions for public scrutiny, the Zorzas became globally known. To some, they were seen as ground-breaking pioneers, courageously shedding light on the darkest corner of human existence; to others, they were intrusive profiteers with scant regard for human dignity.

Against the background of these contrasting views, two questions arise. First, were the events recorded accurately; and second, were the Zorzas and their family dynamics authentically portrayed? On the first issue, Christine Webb, the Zorzas’ friend and next-door neighbour, sounds a note of caution. Having moved into the property next to Dairy Cottage with her partner, Jackie, in 1985 she got to know the Zorzas well – particularly Rosemary, who spent long months alone when Victor was pursuing his missions overseas. She says:

What strikes one as so bizarre about it is that Victor apparently had this enormous, lengthy, emotional, revelatory conversation with Jane only about two days before she died, in which for the first time he revealed all that’s happened to him in the past and where they become completely reconciled. At some point Rosemary said to me that this is part of the book she didn’t like – wouldn’t have put in – but Victor had insisted that it should be there. She didn’t really think it was about Jane or the hospice movement – it was about Victor – but he’d insisted that it should be there. When I said, somewhat mildly, that I found it quite difficult to grasp how they could have had such a conversation when Jane had been so near death, she said that she didn’t believe they had; that she didn’t believe in this conversation and that she hadn’t right from the start – you know, when he’d come out of the room sort of radiant and claiming all kinds of connections with Jane, she does not believe that that was so.

This casts serious doubt on the factual basis of the event as described by Zorza. It should be remembered, however, that when the book was written, Victor was not only a grieving parent but a renowned journalist with more than 25 years’ experience. Imaginative storytelling was part of his craft; the stock-in-trade by which he captured and held a global audience. In his working life, an interesting angle was essential and the success of his column depended on it.

On the second point, the book’s portrayal of family dynamics, Richard Zorza has no doubts:
I must say my reaction when I last read the book, I guess shortly after my mother died [in 2000], was the sense of hysteria there is in the family during this whole time, and how accurate that was. I mean, of course, the worst thing that could happen to anybody is to lose a child. But as [Richard’s wife] Joan has pointed out, the other was the infantilisation of Jane. She was actually a functioning adult, 25 years old with a work life – and of course, sickness infantilises you anyway. But for both my parents in different ways, there’s just the sense that she couldn’t cope, or that they were on the edge of hysteria – not hysteria in a sense that everybody started to scream, but in the sense that this is just unbearable, which of course it was.

Acknowledging the different, though genuinely held, interpretations of the Zorzas’ story, it nevertheless remains a powerful account of loss – of relationships and a career, independence and a young life – and it highlights the meaning of these losses to family members. But the story also has a capacity to move and inspire and, as we shall see, contributed to the development of hospice care worldwide.

Influence upon hospice pioneers

The story of Jane’s death influenced many people who eventually performed key roles in the hospice movement in Britain and elsewhere.

In Britain, Marilyn Relf – the first full-time volunteer co-ordinator at Sir Michael Sobell House – recalls the personal significance of A Way to Die:

I arrived in Oxford wanting to develop a career, thought about ‘Personnel’ quite carefully, but as things happened in my life I just sort of followed my nose. I saw a job was advertised for the Churchill Hospital as a volunteer co-ordinator and I thought it would be interesting to get some experience of actually running rather than supporting a project. When I came to meet the personnel officer, I was told that it was in a hospice, that it was Sobell House, and I began to read a little bit about Sobell House. I read the Zorzas’ book, which was one of the few books around at the time, and realised that I’d been an exact contemporary of Jane at Sussex [University]. I must have known her, because we were both doing sociology, we were both in the same year, and she had a room in the hall of residence opposite mine. So that, of course, sort of stimulated me.

In Australia, Ian Maddocks became the world’s first professor of palliative care and remembers how he was motivated by Death of a daughter.

[My] interest in palliative care came about first, I think, through the article that Victor Zorza wrote. I think it was in The Guardian round about 1980; and it was beautifully written, with great feeling. It described how this young woman, dying – I think of melanoma – how she had helped her parents through the terrible distress of losing her. How she, given the comfort and support of that hospice situation,
had really looked after them; and I found that very moving. I went to the chief of the hospital and said: ‘Read this. Why don’t we do something about it?’

Elsewhere, in South Africa, hospice care was being influenced by Greta Schoeman, an early pioneer who had previously nursed her father after he was diagnosed with cancer. She eventually founded Highway Hospice and describes here how the Zorzas encouraged her interest in end of life care:

All through my nursing career I’ve had this tremendous fear of cancer. I think it was from my early childhood days; but in those days you had no pain control, no symptom control and it really was, for most people, a death sentence. I continued with my nursing career and then I met my husband, a South African orthopaedic surgeon. We got married, and I came here to South Africa. One day, at the book club, it was my turn to choose a book. So there was this book, A Way to Die and so I bought it – and they all looked at me as if I was mad. I read it and became incredibly interested in the hospice movement.

We’d now got two small children, but I was absolutely adamant that I was going to do something about this hospice. So I had to go to England to find out more about it. So when I got to England, I rang up Cancer Relief and said I wanted to visit a hospice and why. Now my mother lives in a little village called Burnham Beeches, so I went hotfooting into Sobell House. And I spent the whole day over in Sobell House and learned that this is where Jane had died. And we’re talking and they said: ‘Where are you staying?’ I said: ‘Burnham Beeches.’ And they said: ‘The Zorzas live just down the road!’ Well, in actual fact, the Zorzas lived half a mile from my mother! So I rang them up and then we became great buddies. I used to go and visit them, and corresponded for a long time.

Peter Buckland, chief executive of North Shore Hospice, Auckland (New Zealand) first became involved in hospice care in South Africa, his homeland, in 1985. He recalls how he became associated with St Luke’s, Cape Town, and of the influence of the Zorzas’ book:
My father died of cancer at a time when there was no hospice service in Cape Town. At that time, St Luke’s Hospice was really just starting and people spoke of ‘well if only there was a hospice …’ And then I saw an advertisement for an administrator for St Luke’s and I thought ‘I’d like to do that for a couple of years,’ and applied and got the job.

I read *A Way to Die* after applying for the job at St Luke’s but before starting work there. And I guess what that book has done is help to establish for me some of the ideals that the early hospice pioneers started out with, and that is: providing a place of care for people who are dying where the staff and volunteers have time to support and care for the person and their family; where – if I can put it this way – where the whole service is patient focused, and that involves everyone. So I started out a little bit with that idealistic view and that has stayed with me all these years, right until today. And I look at the challenges facing us in the hospice movement today around things like maintaining or achieving quality standards, implementing self-audit, professional standards etc, and constantly I’m aware of the fact that we’ve got to find this balance between providing the professional care, but still providing the informality of allowing our staff to sit and be with patients – in the moment, and in their time – and not to be driven entirely by everybody rushing around and being driven by patient numbers and volumes, which is often what our funders want from us. So it’s that philosophical view which I felt was presented in the book which has actually helped to guide me through my years and to keep me focused on things.

In Russia, Patricia Cockrell followed Zorza’s lead by embarking on a hospice project at Kurba (near Yaroslavl) during 1992. One of the first hospices to open outside of St Petersburg, the 12-bed in-patient unit and home care service opened in 1993. A day centre – possibly the first of its kind in Russia – followed later, with on-site facilities for concerts, massage and hairdressing, in addition to symptom control. Patricia Cockrell:

> When I had the idea of trying to start a hospice in Russia after my mother had died in a hospice near us in 1991, I remembered reading a small article in *The Guardian* to the effect that Victor Zorza, whose column I had read and admired for some years, had opened a hospice in Leningrad in memory of his daughter, Jane. I thought, ‘Well, if he can do it, so can I,’ but I had no idea where to start. I wrote to him asking for advice. Megan Bick, his assistant at the time, replied saying that Victor was not available at that moment; he would contact me in due course. A few weeks later he sent me a very short fax which said simply, ‘I will ring Tuesday,’ and he did – from Moscow. He asked me a bit about myself: my background, experience of Russia and why I thought it was necessary to start a hospice. His message to me was simply: go for it, keep at it, and don’t let anyone put you off. So this is what I did.
The early ‘90s were a time of great challenge in Russia: there was anxiety, uncertainty and a shortage of everything including food. It seemed crazy to try to establish something like a hospice while the post-Communist structures – the ministries and local authorities – were trying to reinvent themselves, and yet, perhaps because of this, there was little official interference in individual effort, and much was accomplished in all sorts of fields. There was also a thirst for new ideas and a recognition of the need for change.

When I began to talk about hospice in Yaroslavl in 1992 (we were awarded the first Charity Know How grant in Russia), I found that people were keen to know more and enthusiastic to start work. We had no difficulty in identifying a suitable building and staff. A delegation went from Yaroslavl to visit the Lakhta hospice, and using that as a model, we started work on the building straightaway in spite of the fact that the local authority had not given permission. We were then awarded another grant for staff training and a
specialist came out from St Christopher’s Hospice. We established and registered two charities – one in Russia and one in England and Wales. We are now well supported by the local authority.\textsuperscript{84}

It is remarkable that these ground-breaking innovations were influenced by the death of a vulnerable young woman in a British hospice. But Jane’s father, a skilled communicator, was so moved by his daughter’s care at the end of her life that he drew aside the veil and took an international readership into the heart of the Zorza family, then to the bedside of his dying daughter. As the lives of family members were disrupted, emotions lay bare and relationships became fragile, the impact of Jane’s death became plain. Some readers were discomfited, others were inspired and many found hope. Whatever the response, what is not at issue is the impetus this gave to the hospice movement worldwide.

\section*{Notes}

2. This became known as the Cuban Missile Crisis.
3. The name ‘Mao Tse-tung’ is formed using the Wade-Giles system of transliteration. Developed in the nineteenth century by Thomas Wade, it remained in vogue until pinyin (‘Mao Zedong’) was adopted by the People’s Republic of China in 1979. Zorza uses the Wade-Giles system in his articles and this is reproduced here to avoid confusion (the pinyin alternative is recorded in the endnotes).
4. Some estimates put the figure as high as 500,000 people.
5. This extract is from an interview conducted with ‘Michael’ under the auspices of the International Observatory on End of life Care (IOELC), 11 November 2005. ‘Michael’ is a pseudonym for Jane’s boyfriend, first used by the Zorzas in their book, A Way to Die. While Michael was willing to be interviewed for this project, he wished to retain his anonymity and is therefore referred to throughout by this name.
6. Cominform was established after the Second World War to exchange information and co-ordinate activities between the Communist Parties of countries such as Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, France, Hungary, Italy, Poland and the USSR.
The death of a Zorza

13. Kolomyja is the Polish spelling; it is also known as Kolomea (German) and Kolumyya (Ukrainian).
20. Richard Zorza went on to work as a consultant advising courts and non-profit-making organisations on access-to-justice issues. He is an expert in the field and the author of several papers and a monograph: The right to say ‘We’: Adventures of a Young Englishman at Harvard and in the Youth Movement New York: Praeger 1970. See: www.zorza.net
21. The website of the English Speaking Union (ESU) states that: ‘The mission of the ESU is to promote international understanding and human achievement through the English language. We achieve our aims through scholarships, awards, debating and public speaking events and a variety of educational programmes for young people from all over the world. School children, students and young professionals are targeted because the future of international relations will be in their hands. They share a common language in English through which they are able to share thoughts and feelings, to transmit information, to explain, discuss, argue and persuade. The young people who take part in our programmes emerge better equipped to contribute to their society and with a better understanding of the world they live in.’ See: www.esu.org/index.html
24. The Hurlingham Yacht Club has some 3,000 feet of river moorings on the Thames in Putney. Founded before the First World War, it took its current name in 1922 and moved to its present location in 1929. It should not be confused with the very different Hurlingham Club, which is just across the river, and was, at least then, seen to be catering for members from a higher social class. The irony delighted the Zorzas.
27. A Way to Die was published in the US by Knopf and in Britain by Deutsch (1980); both publications were in hardback.
41. Robert Twycross.
43. Referred to as ‘Teresa’ in A Way to Die, Nan Rothwell has waived anonymity in this publication.
45. Sheila Partington is referring to William J. ‘Bill’ Weatherby who originated from Stockport (UK), wrote for The Guardian for many years and became deeply involved in the American Civil Rights movement. Weatherby wrote many novels that were published in the US and the UK. See: W.J. Weatherby, One of our Priests is Missing New York: Doubleday, 1968; and W.J. Weatherby, The Kremlin Watcher London: Robert Hale, 1978. The latter, published a year after Jane’s death, features a Kremlinologist loosely based on Victor. A strong-minded daughter also makes a brief appearance.
47. Letter from Ashbel Green of Alfred A. Knopf (publishers) to Victor Zorza, 29 April 1981.
49. All unpublished letters to the editor have been anonymised.
55. Letter to Victor and Rosemary Zorza, c/o Andre Deutsch, 28 December 1980. The book referred to is: A. Gunn, The World belongs to Charlie Bognor Regis: New Horizon Books, 1980. Written by his father, the book tells the moving story of Charlie, a talented drummer with a love of the theatre and how his promising career was cut short when he died of cancer (melanoma) at the age of 29. There are clear parallels with the Zorzas’ book about Jane.
58. Letter from Donald Sartain to the Zorzas, 26 January 1981.
59. Teachers’ information sheet, ‘Taboo’.
60. In the UK, around two per cent of children are bereaved of a parent before the age of 18. The number of children who are bereaved of a sibling or a friend further inflates this figure. In schools, teachers are faced with children who are bereaved, children living with a life-limiting illness and children whose parents have a life-limiting illness. Consequently, it is a sensitive subject which some teachers feel ill-equipped to handle. See: K. Lowton, I. Higginson, ‘Bereavement in the classroom’, European Journal of Palliative Care 11 (1): 28–31, 2004.
68. Letter from Louise Canning of Sphere Books to Victor Zorza, 22 December 1981.
71. For an exploration of family dynamics where a young adult has cancer, see A. Grinyer, Cancer in Young Adults Buckingham: Open University Press, 2002.
73. Marilyn Relf was born in Kendal, Cumbria, and gained a degree in sociology from Sussex University in 1973. Her first job was as a development worker for Community Service Volunteers, and this led to a special interest in the training and support of volunteers. After getting married, she lived in Holland for three years before returning to Oxford where she became the first full-time Volunteer Co-ordinator at Sir Michael Sobell House in 1982. Involving volunteers in bereavement care was part of the job description and Marilyn went on to develop a bereavement service together with Ann Couldrick, a Macmillan nurse.
75. Born in 1931 in Victoria in Australia, Ian Maddocks studied medicine with the original idea of a career on the mission field. His early career was spent abroad in Papua New Guinea, where he became dean of a medical school. On his return to Australia, he was appointed consultant on a child health project at the Department of Public Health in Adelaide. From here, he subsequently went on to become the world’s first Professor of Palliative Care in 1984, working at the Flinders Medical Centre and helping to set up Daw House Hospice.
76. Ian Maddocks, IOELC interview, 8 December 1995.
77. Greta Schoeman (b. 1935) has a lifelong interest in nursing. After training at St George’s and Westminster Hospitals (London) she married an orthopaedic surgeon and returned with him to South Africa. Her father accompanied them before dying of cancer, a condition he had lived with for 20 years. She determined to found a hospice and, after training at Sir Michael Sobell House,
formed the Highway Hospice Association (Durban) and cared for the first in-patient in her own home (1982); a decision which angered the neighbours. Today, Highway Hospice has extensive premises: an eight-bed in-patient unit, home care services and community day centres provide palliative care for a population of 2.7 million people across nearly 1,400 square kilometres.

79. Peter Buckland, chief executive of North Shore Hospice in Auckland (New Zealand) is an experienced hospice administrator. He joined St Luke’s, Cape Town, in its infancy (1985) and left seven years later to help establish Hospice South Africa, a national development organisation. During this time, St Luke’s had grown from a small NGO with six staff to a 20-bed in-patient unit with community and day care services. In 1996 he moved to Johannesburg as chief executive of South Africa’s largest hospice, Witwatersrand, and from there to New Zealand (1999) and North Shore Hospice (Auckland).

80. Peter Buckland, IOELC interview, 2 September 2004.
81. Patricia Cockrell (b. 1943) developed a love of Russian literature from the age of 15. Thereafter, she relinquished her ambition to read Classics in favour of Russian, graduating from the London School of Slavonic and East European Studies. She made her first visit to the Soviet Union in 1961 and has since travelled widely from the Arctic Circle to the Caucasus. She lived in Russia as a postgraduate from 1964–65 and lived in Moscow as Quaker representative from 1994–96.

82. Another unit has since opened at Dievo Gorodishche (22 kilometres east of Yaroslavl) that has two-thirds of its costs met by the local authority and is widely regarded as an effective partnership model.
83. Patricia Cockrell’s mother died in a hospice in Exeter.
84. Patricia Cockrell, personal communication, 3 May 2003.
85. Avril Jackson, IOELC interview, 1 September 2002.
2 Joining the movement

‘Victor brought an awareness of a new movement in America to the Washington powerhouse scene.’ Zachary Morfogen

Missions and missionaries

Throughout his life, Zorza felt a constant need for purpose and structure; some project he could identify with for its importance, not just to him but to the wider community, the world even. ‘I think it was important for me to have a mission,’ he told his son, ‘it always has been.’ As time passed, he came to regard his life as a series of missions, a view he warmed to which became disseminated in a Reader's Digest article, The Four Missions of Victor Zorza.

According to Victor, these four missions were grounded in his painful experience of the world, a sequential series of episodes that gave meaning to his life. The first mission related to his wartime experience: to understand how Stalin had come to power and the underlying essence of dictatorship. He sought to discover how a revolution that had brought such hope to Russia could ultimately destroy so many innocents; and to find out how he had become caught up in a catastrophic war that ripped apart so many lives. He recalls:

I had this great preoccupation trying to understand what had really happened to me. I was shattered, and to put myself together again and to really make up for the loss of my family [I tried to] understand what it was that brought about this terrible tragedy – because I did see it not only as my own tragedy, but a tragedy of all the people living in that part of the world.

This mission was first addressed in 1941, through the people Zorza met in the Soviet Union when he travelled as a refugee seeking shelter from the Nazis. At the time, however, it was dangerous to enquire too deeply:

I started talking to people and asking them questions; but of course that was soon after the great purges and people didn’t talk at all willingly, and if you asked questions you were very suspect. But also there are ways of talking – and getting information and passing information – without saying things that would get people into trouble. So you
learn that language, and you learn how to read between the lines of that spoken language.\footnote{5}

Once he understood how Stalin had achieved supremacy, Zorza, now living in the Britain, embarked on what he described as his second mission – to sound the alarm bells in the West. He would alert the world to the threat presented by Stalin – a danger that was mostly unrecognised – and the urgent need to contain him. This mission was undertaken through his journalistic work. It became an important vehicle for him and guaranteed that his voice would be heard. In his youth Zorza had recognised the futility of unbridled anger, and now worked hard to develop his analytical skills:

I started writing for The Guardian, and I had this mission to show up Stalin and to warn the West against Stalin and so on. In fact, when I started writing I was trying to become a really detached analyst. My writing was not anti-Stalinist, but that was more because I knew that I must make my mark as an analyst; it would have done no good to rant and rave against Stalin because in a way that’s what I’d been trying to do in those conversations [with colleagues], and I found myself ignored, because I realise that one made one’s point by establishing oneself as an authority.\footnote{6}

The third mission had its roots in a visit to India that Victor made with Jane. Shocked at the sight of the destitute, Jane had challenged her father to leave the world of international relations and instead tell the story of the poor and their daily struggle to survive. Victor embarked on this mission during the 1980s when he lived as a recluse in a remote Indian village and launched a new column, Village Voice, to alert the world to the pressing issues of the poor. This work assumed a special significance for Victor because he believed it was commissioned by his daughter.

What [India] meant to me was the fact that Jane was interested in the Third World – and had in fact asked us to adopt a child – and somehow to continue to express her interest. There was also this very powerful memory of her trip with me and the fight we had in India. And there was also, professionally, the realisation that the Third World was now more important than East-West.\footnote{7}

Zorza’s last mission was to respond to the suffering that he saw in Russia when he briefly visited during the late 1980s. Moved by the plight of the dying, Victor recalled his promise to Jane: that he would tell others about the value of hospice care. So, as Communism crumbled, he used the opportunities afforded by the new openness introduced by Gorbachev to bring a sharper focus to end of life care. After a frustrating time in Moscow, this mission came to fruition in 1990 with the opening of Lakhta\textsuperscript{8} Hospice (St Petersburg)\textsuperscript{9} and the founding of the Russian hospice movement; it was a long-standing commitment:

‘I had this mission to show up Stalin and to warn the West against Stalin.’ Victor Zorza.
I suppose there was this element of relationship to Jane to which I then returned to in Russia, and that's lasted until quite recently. And it's probably still there because, although I've made the rational decision to do more in Russia than my health allows me – which isn't much just now – nevertheless, I very much want to retain my health, regain my health, in order to complete the job I had started. And on the one hand it's a professional striving in the sense that there is a job of work that I'd identified, and was doing it, and started and want to complete: on the other hand, again, it's Jane's mission.10

Zorza's construction of this series of 'missions', spanning more than 50 years, highlights his desire to compartmentalise his life, and, as we shall see, keep some parts completely separate. In a sense, the missionary concept not only imperialises his achievements, but also places him centre stage, as both hero and orchestrator of key events. The first two missions were prompted by Zorza's experience of war whereas the last two relate to Jane. Yet underpinning all four is the issue of mortality; a sense of unexpected loss in the midst of life. As Victor's story unfolds, this will be seen as a recurring theme. Also, for a man who claimed to lack religious conviction, it is extraordinary, in the autumn of his life, that he should come to define it in missionary terms. In the context of hospice care, this is significant, and religious connotations are unavoidable.

From the outset the spiritual domain was one of four integrated dimensions of care – the physical, psychological, social and spiritual – on which the hospice approach was founded. Inevitably, in the Britain of the 1960s and 1970s, the ‘spiritual’ had Christian overtones. It was a time when daily prayers were said for patients and staff on hospital wards. Church-type services were commonplace, either on the wards or in specially constructed hospital chapels,11 and clergy were recruited by the NHS to routinely minister to patients.12 When links between the physical and spiritual were further strengthened in hospices, it is unsurprising that certain staff were attracted by the integrated approach and motivated, at least in part, by their religious beliefs. By taking such an unequivocal stance, Zorza became associated, however unwittingly, with an influential tradition in the early hospice movement: the Christian call to mission.

The focus on mission reaches back to Cicely Saunders. Zorza and Saunders knew each other and she held him in high regard, acknowledging the international role that he played. She also liked A Way to Die – ‘a beautiful and real record’ – and sent him a complimentary letter after reading it in 1980.13 In later life, she recalled his contribution to the hospice movement and, in her inimitable way, referred to him as ‘a good egg’.14 Yet the endorsement was two-way since the Zorza publications brought the hospice movement – and
Cicely Saunders – to the attention of a popular audience worldwide:

[Cicely Saunders] became almost a folk hero after the journalist Victor Zorza and his wife wrote A Way to Die: Living to the End (1980), a moving, persuasive book about their daughter’s death in a hospice.\(^{15}\)

As Saunders developed the hospice ideal, it was impossible, in those early days, to mistake her sense of calling and mission; they were woven into her life. After a religious conversion in 1945 she graphically described the change that had come about: ‘It was for all the world like suddenly finding the wind at your back.’\(^{16}\) From that moment, she looked enthusiastically towards the mission field:

I remember saying ‘perhaps I would be able to go and nurse abroad, on a mission field or something,’ because when I became a Christian, my immediate reaction was, ‘What do I have to do now to say thank you and serve?’\(^{17}\)

Chronic back pain dispelled such thoughts and caused Saunders to focus on events nearer home. Her work as a volunteer at two homes for the dying in London,\(^{18}\) combined with a gift of £500 from David Tasma, often referred to as St Christopher’s founding patient,\(^{19}\) helped establish the hospice as her new – and different – ‘home’ for the dying. The first patient was admitted in 1967 and at this time, Saunders’ evangelical zeal was probably at its highest. In a letter to the Reverend Bruce Reed, she tellingly wrote: ‘I long to bring patients to know the Lord.’\(^{20}\)

This evangelical declaration reflects the biblical essence of mission: making disciples,\(^{21}\) witnessing\(^{22}\) and proclaiming.\(^{23}\) Other features could be added: a sense of calling; loving and obedient service; the acceptance of a distinctive community; all underpinned by a sustaining pattern of prayer and

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St Christopher’s Hospice in Sydenham (London) admitted its first patient in 1967. From the outset, the sense of purpose was encapsulated in its name: St Christopher’s. Little is known about Christopher except that he supposedly lived in the third century and, for part of his life, helped travellers to cross a river. The story goes that one night he carried a child who, surprisingly, demanded every ounce of his strength. Having traversed the torrent with difficulty, he came to believe that he carried Jesus, the child of God, who took the burden of the world on his shoulders. This three-fold element of a) a journey b) carrying the burden of the world and c) walking with God was part of the founding purpose of St Christopher’s, and is symbolically portrayed in the sculpture of Christopher – with a child on his shoulders – positioned above the main door.
commitment to growth. These were important principles for Saunders and, when she founded St Christopher’s, it was no surprise that they were incorporated into her overarching vision: a modern-day refuge which encapsulated the spirit of the former Christian ‘hospes’. These were institutions that welcomed the sick and performed the works of mercy found in Chapter 25 of Matthew’s gospel. The hospice in twentieth-century Britain, therefore, had its roots in a wider tradition that ran through the medieval monasteries to the twelfth-century homes that offered pilgrims ‘hospitality’ along the routes to the Holy Land – and thereafter to the fourth-century hospitals of Gregory in Asia Minor and Fabiola in Rome.

It was the modern version of this long-established tradition which Zorza found compelling. And as he engaged with hospice pioneers he became increasingly exposed to people of faith. Robert Twycross was one of them; Prue Clench (later Dufour), the inspiration behind the Dorothy House Foundation and a good friend of the Zorzas, was another. As Victor became more involved in the hospice movement, the question arises as to how he dealt with the spiritual domain and those to whom it meant so much.

A glimpse of his attitude towards spirituality came in 1986 when he was contacted by a woman who had read an article he wrote for the Calcutta-based Telegraph newspaper. She told him:

I felt a great kinship towards you. It was a feeling of two souls who perhaps have some bond beyond this incarnation … I’m looking out of an ashram window wondering if you will respond to a sister cut from the same cloth. I think Divine Mother (Kali) has that in her plans – that someday we will meet and talk.

Two months later, Zorza replied:

Alas, I don’t have it in me to respond in the way you have hoped for. I am an atheist, do not believe in reincarnation or anything else that is mystical or metaphysical, and I am not a letter-writer – indeed, one reason for the delay in writing this was that I could see how much of yourself you had put in your letter, and I didn’t know how to reply without causing you deep hurt and disappointment. Another reason is that, as a professional writer, I write myself out in the course of my work and find any other writing a burden. I am afraid I am not your kind of person at all and would be doing you a disservice if I let you think that we might have a meeting of minds if we ever encountered each other.

This rejection of theistic philosophies had no effect on Zorza’s desire to relieve suffering. David Frampton, recruited by Victor in 1991 to train Russian doctors in palliative medicine, comments:

Victor never let his atheism get in the way of wanting to do good. I mean, atheism is a funny thing because you still have your sets of values; and his sets of values in many respects were very Christian – his care and love for people and all that sort of thing. He didn’t do the worshipping bit, and church bit, and he wouldn’t have theologically believed in God, but he sort of believed that you’ve got a responsibility to do good things while you’re here – I suppose on a ‘help-your-fellow-man’ basis: we’re all in this together, we might as well make it as good as we can for each other, type of thing. I have a strong Christian faith, too, but I didn’t find working with Victor at all difficult because a) he wasn’t promoting atheism and b) I wasn’t promoting Christianity. We had a common aim which was to help the Russians in love and care. And when you’ve got a common, outside aim, theological differences are sort of marginalised.

Ruth and Hugh Bradby came to know Victor well during the 1980s. Christian in faith and outlook, they taught at an international school located near the village in India where
Zorza gained inspiration for his *Village Voice* articles. They recall:

[Ruth] We found Victor very respectful of our Christian faith, as it was practised in the family. He was very comfortable with our prayers at the dining table, and appreciative of it. I never felt anything else than that.

[Hugh] That’s right, and once or twice if we had forgotten to read a short passage from the bible, which we usually did in the evening, he would be very insistent that we should do so. And he would comment on the passage in a very respectful way, never in any sense belittling or, you know, poking fun at what he perceived to be a simple faith, but trying to see the passage perhaps from our perspective and to see how he could get a handle on it.\(^{33}\)

In addition to Prue Clench’s\(^{34}\) role at Dorothy House Foundation and later, as director of Thames Valley Hospice, she was closely associated with St Columba’s Fellowship, an organisation that catered for the needs of Christians working within the hospice movement. A friend of the Zorzas, she thought that Victor possessed a broad and deepening interest in the spiritual domain:

We had a St Columba’s Fellowship\(^{35}\) conference near Chester. And I really spelt out to him that this was a gathering for Christians who feel that they can’t think of their lives without the Christian part of it. And, he was quite happy. He could cope with that, he said. By this time he was completely wheelchair-bound and so it was a major effort to get out there.

Now the chapel is not very accessible for anybody in a wheelchair; it’s down the hill, by a sort of arboretum in a beautiful stately home, but it’s quite difficult to actually get to. And everybody was gathered for the service; a service of communion and anointing. I wasn’t able to be there, and I got the account of it all, both from Victor and from other people. But the person who took it for me, the Chaplain, told me that the most moving thing for everybody was at the service in the chapel.

And just as they were about to worry about what had happened to the Chaplain, the Chaplain appeared down the garden path round the outside, wheeling Victor in his wheelchair, got him in through a French window – and he took part in the service. And people were really moved by it. And I said to him afterwards: ‘Well, how about the words and everything?’ And he said: ‘Oh, that was easy. I just said what I did feel I could say, and I left out what I didn’t.’ He seemed deeply hungry for finding his spiritual roots.\(^{36}\)

This search by Zorza for his spiritual roots has been underlined by Dov Noy, Professor of Folklore at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem and a fellow citizen of Zorza’s home town of Kolomyja. Writing in 1996 after Zorza’s death, he gives an insight into Victor’s growing engagement with his past – his wartime horrors, his struggle for survival and his
grand ideas; and how, in later life, he revisited his Jewish identity:

Our conversations started to touch on topics connected with Judaic issues and knowing that Jewish folklore is my main academic field, Victor’s questioning about Jewish customs and beliefs started to play an important role. Somehow, they replaced our first talks dominated by his universal plans and ideas of one world.37

Zorza’s spiritual quest and his subsequent reconnection with his Judaic roots did not happen in a vacuum. Brought up in the Jewish tradition, he was aware of the demands of his faith. From the age of 13, all boys are expected to keep the mitzvot – the Jewish commandments.38 These mitzvot are emblematic of a special relationship with the world, a responsibility for good works in a social context. Many Jews select a special mitzvah through which this obligation to their fellow humans is channelled.

In Zorza’s case, the concept of mitzvah sits easily with his hospice mission: reducing suffering for the weak and vulnerable on the road to death. Seen in this light, his attitude towards humanitarian support resonates with his Jewish antecedents, those moral values which framed his life as a young man. So perhaps it is not surprising that the hospice in Russia most closely associated with Zorza at Lakhta has become known for its spiritual ethos. For Zorza never resisted an emphasis on the spiritual and in some cases, positively encouraged it. As a result, the religious associations at Lakhta are very strong.

Orthodox Patriarch Alexei II became a founder of the hospice and a chapel was created in the Russian Orthodox tradition with the inclusion of relics. Close links were established with Lakhta’s Fr Georgy and his local congregation. Then, a religious order, the Sisterhood of St Elizabeth,39 extended the hospice’s remit to include the care of orphans. These sisters, all volunteers, raise funds to provide food, clothing and education for the children. When asked where the sisters come from, Elena Kabakova, the head sister, replied simply: ‘God sends them to us; they are all believing people.’40 Andrei Gnezdilov, Zorza’s associate and co-founder of the hospice movement in Russia, maintains that: ‘The spiritual basis of hospice is the most important part; everything has united around this.’41

This is also recognised by Michael Siggs, chairperson of the St Petersburg Healthcare Trust, who acknowledges the numinous atmosphere at Lakhta:

I don’t know whether I’d call Victor a religious man at all – I’m not sure I would – but what got Lakhta going was, I think, the religious feeling of the place. Something which I always felt was almost tactile; the feeling of something holy going on there.’
always felt was almost tactile; the feeling of something holy going on there. It was a most extraordinary thing.\textsuperscript{42}

Clearly, there was more to Victor’s spirituality than his atheistic stance would suggest. Is it coincidence that these perceptions occurred during the latter part of Zorza’s life, a time when he was inextricably linked to the hospice movement? Did the spiritual dimension of hospice stir his memory and cause the gradual reawakening that prompted him to revisit the faith of his childhood? And what explains his latter-day thirst for mission – or perhaps his desire to construct himself in such a light?

Significantly, Victor’s self-styled life of missions is challenged by Richard, his son. In conversation with Victor a year before his death, Richard comments:

That whole missions theme in that Reader’s Digest article didn’t ring right to me. I mean, I just didn’t think of you as driven by such clear agendas at any point. It was sort of putting a kind of sheen on it that looks good in the Reader’s Digest that didn’t reflect reality and at the time you were saying you sort of knew it didn’t reflect reality, but it sounded good. It provided a false coherence I guess. False coherence is always tempting to anybody of an analytic bent … I think you superimposed it much later.\textsuperscript{43}

It is a good point. Coherent and tidy, Victor’s life was not. And the Four Missions sequence – understanding totalitarianism, warning the West about Stalin, telling the story of the poor, and becoming a hospice activist – has a ring of Victor’s journalism about it rather than his lived experience. It is also historically flawed. As we shall see, Victor’s hospice activities began immediately after Jane’s death, not 10 years later on his way home from India. Yet if anything, this deepens the mystery.

In the end, we can only speculate about Victor’s spirituality and what it meant to him as he devoted his life to the care of the dying. Many questions inevitably remain unanswered. What is intriguing is the evidence of a complex, contradictory man: an atheist, who promoted a spiritually inclusive form of care; who sought the company of the religious; who placed himself in the midst of worship; who re-examined his spiritual roots and revisited the faith of his family; and who finally defined himself as a missionary.

Advocacy in Britain

Zorza’s shift to hospice advocate is signalled by an interview he gave two weeks after Jane’s death, at the invitation of Robert Twycross. Though unusual for newly bereaved relatives to be drawn so quickly into hospice activity, Twycross judged that being an articulate journalist, Victor would relish the opportunity to be interviewed on camera. He was not mistaken. Twycross:

We got to know each other a bit, and after [Jane] died, I was the one who first approached Victor and Rosemary to do me a favour. Someone was wanting to make a film about hospice care – I think it may have been submitted for the BMA film award; it may well have got a bronze medal round about 1979; and this crew wanted to make a film about Sobell House and hospice care, and of course, Victor was a journalist and so on. So even though it was probably only two or three weeks after Jane had died, I approached them and said: ‘Would it be possible to come to Dairy Cottage and be interviewed?’ So that took things a stage further. I, as a doctor, was asking them a favour when fairly newly bereaved, so, you know – tricky stuff.\textsuperscript{44}

Despite these reservations, the venture was a complete
success. The Zorzas rose to the occasion and Twycross wrote appreciatively:

Thank you very, very much for your help last Monday afternoon. [The producer] was very impressed and delighted by your contribution. Indeed, he said to me as he drove me back to Oxford that he had really no need to interview any other relatives because of the comprehensive nature of your comments.45

This joint venture was the beginning of a productive association that lasted until Zorza’s death in 1996. Despite differences in background and training: Zorza, a Polish Jew with a self-taught grasp of East-West relations; Twycross, the son of a cleric steeped in the traditions of Oxford and medicine – they had much in common. Both were strong-willed and resolute, passionate about the development of hospice and eager to make progress. In this respect, Zorza’s persistence is legendary. Wendy Jones, who worked with him during the 1990s writes:

The thing you need to know about Victor is that he was a man who wanted things done yesterday: I rather suspect this is characteristic of anybody who gets anything done in their lives – they have tunnel vision; they know where they want to go; and nothing, but nothing, will get in the way.46

Twycross was aware of Victor’s single-mindedness, and of his capacity to pressurise in his desire to get things done:

I somewhere read that Victor was charismatic; I’m not sure what the word means – but certainly I think being a professional journalist by background, he knew how to manipulate, and I was young enough 10 or 12 years ago to feel that this was a certain pressure on me …47

Twycross also liked to meet his objectives. In a letter to Zorza in 1978, he asks whether Death of a daughter could be reproduced in pamphlet form, and closes as follows:

I am the sort of person who likes to get on with something once I have decided to do it! Perhaps you could let me know what you think of my requests as soon as possible.48

As time passed, a friendship developed that came to include the two men’s families: ‘You will be pleased to know,’ writes Twycross, ‘that on 24th July [1979], the Twycross’s are going to set off for France for a three-week camping holiday making use of the tent you kindly gave us last year.’49 In 1980, Zorza writes in similar vein: ‘I hope you’ve all had a good time in Kent. It occurred to me too late that we should have offered to lend you our boat. Please remember the next time you take a holiday near water.’50

Recalling this friendship over 20 years later, Twycross comments:
I guess it’s relatively unusual for the parents of a deceased patient to become family friends, but, you know, that is what happened; and the children had a great regard for Victor and Rosemary. Possibly my third daughter, Fiona, was the closest to them. Let’s say they were probably closer to Rosemary as a very motherly figure – and a very affirming figure for children. But certainly, there was this ongoing family friendship.\footnote{I}

Both men gained. Zorza needed Twycross – for his international profile, his carefully weighed advice, his willingness to teach and his wide-ranging contacts – as he grappled with the international dimensions of hospice growth and spread. But as we shall see, the worldwide interest aroused by the Zorzas’ publications – together with the accruing royalties which were donated to Sir Michael Sobell House – also served the purposes of Twycross.

The 1970s were a formative time for the British hospice movement. Alongside newly opened hospices that were founded and run on charitable donations, the National Society for Cancer Relief (NSCR)\footnote{52} developed an innovative approach based on partnership with local health authorities, in which the premises were provided by NSCR and the health authority assumed the running costs.

This concept of partnership has been attributed to Major Henry Garnett,\footnote{53} an ex-Guards officer who joined the charity in 1973 as deputy chairman and chief executive. In his younger days, Garnett was regarded as a spendthrift; but during his time as chief executive, he was a prudent administrator and safeguarded the charity’s assets. He may have been influenced by a changed political climate that resulted in a series of cutbacks to the NHS, measures which were implemented in 1975.\footnote{54} There were some worrying implications for Sir Michael Sobell House: despite the premises being well advanced, there were doubts as to whether the unit would open. According to Twycross:

NSCR worked hand-in-glove with the Oxfordshire Health Authority, as it had been since 1974. The idea was that NSCR would see that the building was built and equipped, largely due to the benefaction of Sir Michael Sobell, but with a local appeal for the equipment. They were going to build it and it would be handed over as a complete entity for the NHS to run in perpetuity with an agreed operational policy. There was never any difficulty between the Health Authority and NSCR except that the first round of the cuts, which we are still experiencing,\footnote{55} happened to come in the latter part of 1975. So in November/December 1975, there was quite a strong voice within the consultant body in Oxford that Sobell House should not be opened. And of course this threw people into turmoil … But with a large amount of diplomacy and so on, the compromise was made that it would open in April 1976 but it would only open with 12 as against the full complement of 25 beds. Now of course that left a bit of a hurt …\footnote{56}

Once Zorza involved himself in the hospice movement he soon became aware of the funding situation at Sobell House. Grateful for the care that Jane had received, he wished to secure the future of the hospice and decided to...
contribute to the Reserve and Endowment Fund proposed by Robert Twycross. Initially, the Zorzas vested the UK copyright of *Death of a daughter* with the NSCR,\(^57\) allowing its reproduction for teaching and other worthy causes. This was then followed by a series of donations which, combined with a growing interest in the work of NSCR, persuaded the Society to bring Sir Michael Sobell House into full use.\(^58\)

Henry Garnett:

I feel that I must write on behalf of this Society to tell you of the magnificent response to your very touching article in *The Guardian* about your daughter Jane’s last stay at Sir Michael Sobell House. Not only have we received more than £4,600 in the last two weeks, directly attributed to your article, but many of the letters we have received have said how much support and consolation it has given them.

I know that you will realise that it has been a matter of great concern to us that the Area Health Authority has so far been unable to open more beds at Sir Michael Sobell House. However, encouraged by the nationwide interest in the Society’s work evoked by your article and the very considerable follow up in the Press, our Finance Committee has authorised me to offer such financial support as would enable the Authority to bring the Unit gradually into full use from 1st April 1978.\(^59\)

Evidence of these donations refutes any criticism that the Zorzas exploited their daughter’s death for personal gain. In extended correspondence during 1978, the Zorzas explore the legality of donating to the hospice via the US-based National Hospice Organisation. At the time, they wondered whether this would render the donation tax-exempt in Britain, whereas a donation from their personal sources would be liable to tax. They write to Twycross:

‘We are still looking for ways to turn a portion of the book over to you … In the meantime, we’ll try to channel to

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**TV and Radio interviews (UK and Ireland) in connection with the publication of *A Way to Die***

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**Features/reviews: *A Way to Die* (UK), Autumn 1980 – Spring 1981**

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you some of the fees still due from foreign newspapers for our original article. Many of these fees found their way to Sir Michael Sobell House. In 1979, Twycross writes: ‘I have received via the Birmingham Midland International Bank the equivalent of $2,500. This I gather represents the royalties on an article being published shortly in Holland.’ Two months later, Zorza sends a further DM 2000 for the republication of *Death of a daughter* in Germany.

Alongside these activities, the Zorzas’ strategy for hospice awareness-raising should not be underestimated. When *A Way to Die* was published, Victor employed his broad knowledge of the media to place Jane’s story – and the value of the hospice approach – firmly in the public domain.

An initial programme of interviews and reviews in Britain and Ireland during autumn 1980 was followed by an extensive sequence in the US during 1981. As always, the Zorzas’ media appearances touched members of the public in a profound way. Some wrote about their concerns for family members, others shared fears for their own well-being, a few wrote about their impending death. Rosemary felt a burden of responsibility arising from the letters and, in spite of the large numbers, those from the most needy were always answered.

Notwithstanding the synergy between Zorza and Twycross, a contentious issue arose that was difficult to resolve: the founding of a chair of hospice studies. From the outset, Twycross was sceptical and Garnett thought the association with Jane was inappropriate. As *A Way to Die* neared completion, Zorza worked tirelessly to resolve the issue, since he wished to include the proposal in the appendix. Eventually, a form of words was agreed with Garnett and Zorza wrote to Twycross:

I’m glad to be able to tell you that after one or two exchanges with Major Garnett, we agreed on a mutually acceptable formula to go into the book. I told him that I understood he thought that the use of Jane’s name would not be altogether appropriate. He confirmed that this was so. I therefore suggested an alternative formula, omitting Jane’s name, but referring to a university chair. He thought that a university chair might be too ambitious, and suggested that the note should refer to a readership only. My counter-proposal was that it should refer to both, as in the final text below:

A great deal still remains to be done to extend the scope of care for the dying and to enhance its standards. Jane’s parents believe that an important role in accomplishing this could be played by the establishment of readerships and chairs in hospice studies. They are making an initial contribution from the royalties on this book for the endowment of such a chair, and any readers who wish to associate themselves with this effort may do so by sending their own contributions earmarked “for the university chair” to the National Society for Cancer Relief, 30 Dorset Square, London NW1 6QL.

Twycross remained unconvinced:

I still find a considerable reluctance to produce a ‘cast iron’ case in favour of a Professorship or Readership in Hospice Studies. I am sure one has to argue by analogy, moreover. I think the point about having one or two key centres for training future consultants in hospice care should not be underestimated. However, as I said to you last Friday, ultimately it is a matter of faith whether or not one believes that such posts are necessary. As with all such matters, it is not provable to the unbeliever.

Though this lack of support was a setback, Zorza had made enormous gains. In just 30 months, he had transcended the role of bereaved parent to advocate effectively for hospice care. In addition to their publications, he and Rosemary had
come to prominence through a variety of media activities, and the NSCR had been so overwhelmed by the groundswell of support that it had released precious resources to fully open Sir Michael Sobell House. All this located in Britain and supported by the developing friendship with Robert Twycross. Meanwhile, another story was unfolding in America.

A role in the United States

Given the Zorzas’ cyclical residence in Britain and the United States, it is unsurprising that Victor came to advocate for hospice on both sides of the Atlantic. In some respects he was on familiar ground since, when Jane died in 1977, hospice care in the US was in its infancy. Issues of reimbursement, legislation, public awareness and national dialogue were coming to the fore and, in this context, Victor created a role for himself which ran parallel to his activities in Britain.

In the United States, care of the dying had attracted interest since the 1960s, although it was not until 1974 that the first service, Connecticut Hospice, began to provide home care. The following year, a project was launched at St Luke’s Hospital Centre, New York, which became the first hospice to be incorporated into an existing medical centre. The first children’s hospice – Edmarc in Chesapeake – would not appear until 1978.

When the hospice in Connecticut came to fruition, Sylvia Lack, who had worked at St Joseph’s and also at St Christopher’s, became medical director and thereafter kept in close touch with Robert Twycross. Together, they devised a palliative care course for physicians and produced a number of text books during the 1980s. Twycross:

Sylvia Lack had been the Senior House Officer at St Joseph’s during ‘71 to ‘73 and I was her sort-of mentor. She’d then been seduced to go to the States to help set up the first home care hospice programme in Connecticut and eventually become medical director of the in-patient service there. And we’d obviously met up again; and we decided that we would start running a five-day course for physicians, one year in Oxford and one year in Connecticut, in New Haven. And that started in ’79. About the same time we decided to work towards the books we eventually produced in the mid ‘80s.

Transatlantic links had also been established with St Luke’s Hospital Centre, New York, where the Reverend Carleton Sweetser chaired the hospice project. Sweetser had met Saunders in London and their acquaintance was renewed when she spoke at the Sloane Kettering Cancer Centre during her tour of 1963. They became good friends and, when Sweetser visited London in the early 1970s, he took the opportunity to bring some colleagues to St Christopher’s; key people who eventually formed the nucleus of St Luke’s Hospice team.

It was in this context that Zorza began his American-based activities (1978), buoyed by a network of colleagues with hospice experience on both sides of the Atlantic. And for Zorza, at the heart of this network was the steadying figure of Twycross: listening, commenting and guiding. After visiting America in 1978, Twycross writes to Zorza:

I did enjoy meeting you again in your Washington home. In many ways, the fortnight began and ended with Jane with The Washington Post publication on the day I arrived and the Panorama programme the night before I returned to England. May I say how well you both came across on the television programme; I am sure it was helpful to a lot of people. I watched it with Dr Lack and also the Reverend
Carleton Sweetser. They were both very impressed and their immediate reaction was to express hope that they would be able to obtain videotape copies.69

Building on the impact of Death of a daughter, Zorza lost no time in raising the profile of hospice and making preparations for the next step: the establishment of a national organisation. The story of Jane’s death had touched Americans across the country and people responded in their thousands. For Victor, a sense of role and occasion were confirmed: the hospice ‘mission’ would be a fitting context for his energy and the time was right, he thought, for his input.

Importantly, the Zorzas’ article coincided with social changes in the US that prompted a new appreciation of patient care in the family. Attitudes were changing. The concept of ‘death as failure’ – predominant among the medical profession – was being challenged. The idea of a team approach was attracting widespread support; and the patient rights movement was gaining ground.

Against this background, Zorza’s intervention provided a new impetus and focused attention on the hospices – about a hundred of them – that were already established. He wrote in The Washington Post:

How glad Jane would have been to see these letters, and thousands of others – yes, literally thousands – that we have received. She had a very clear purpose in asking us to write about her dying, for she wanted to bring the subject out of the closet, to remove the taboo, so that others might be better prepared for it than she was at first. Her other purpose was to promote the establishment of hospices, and that too is being fulfilled. Some of those who have laboured for years to promote the hospice concept in this country tell us that those who have refused to listen to them in the past are now very interested.70

A feature of Zorza’s media campaign was his firm resolve in the face of punishing schedules. When A Way to Die was published, he made little of distance and time zones in his desire to achieve maximum coverage and reach the widest audience. A 10-day schedule in October 1980 saw Victor and Rosemary give up to six interviews per day in New York (6, 7 October), Boston (8 October), Cleveland (9 October), Washington (10 October), Chicago (11, 12 October), Washington (13, 14 October), Los Angeles (15 October) and San Francisco (16 October).

Sustaining this resolve came from an overt intensity that was deeply rooted in his grief. Stephen Connor, of the [US] National Hospice and Palliative Care Organisation:71

Victor of course was a prominent person, publicly, in the whole effort to begin hospice in the United States and … he spoke at one of our earliest meetings of the National Hospice Organisation.72 I was at that meeting; it was the first big meeting we had. I guess my impression of him was that he was a very passionate man and he certainly had profoundly been affected by the death of his daughter, and it was sort of his single passion to do something to change the world, so that things could be better for those dying, particularly children.73

It was Zorza’s growing presence on the hospice stage that brought him to the attention of Dennis Rezendes and Zachary Morfogen. Rezendes had worked for the City of New Haven before becoming administrator at Connecticut Hospice. Skilled in financial affairs, he was to play a seminal role in the activities which in 1983 led Congress to enact the Medicare Hospice Benefit. Morfogen – an author and playwright – became promotion manager of Life Magazine and European manager of Time-Life Books. Sharing his wife’s interest in health care, he was a trustee of Riverside
Hospital, New Jersey and became convinced of the value of hospice after a visit to St Christopher’s during a business trip to London. On his return, he persuaded the board to found a hospice at Riverside. Zach Morfogen and Dennis Rezendes were to become key figures in the National Hospice Organization. Morfogen:

Dennis and I became a team: I, really, symbolising the volunteer and Dennis being the hospice or the health care professional. And we decided to hold a conference in my local community, to invite people from round the country who were interested in this new idea of hospice. And we held this conference in 1975 in Boonton; and at that conference it was decided that we needed to form a national organisation. And Dennis and I then teamed together to do this. I was to be the chairman of the committee and Dennis was to be the chief executive or chief operating officer.74

Given this movement towards a national organisation, Zorza’s sudden appearance caused some concern, not least because of the prominent figures in politics and the media who were supporting him. It was also worrying that Victor seemed in favour of a parallel organisation founded and administered by himself.75 A meeting was essential:

Dennis said to me: ‘We have to meet Victor Zorza.’ And he explained to me the story: that Victor had written this article for The Washington Post, and he said: ‘Victor wants to form a national organisation and of course we’re doing the exact same thing.

So we had dinner in Georgetown. I don’t remember the name of the restaurant, but it wasn’t lunch, it was dinner. And I had instant rapport with Victor and I think he felt comfortable with me. I could speak to him because, you know, he was in journalism and I was in publishing. And it was clear that Victor had rallied not only Kay Graham76 but Ted Kennedy77 and Robert Dole78 and others to this vision of forming a national organisation. And when we described what we were planning to do, Victor said: ‘Well I don’t want this national organisation to only address the interests and needs of the people who are the professionals of health care, but also we have to have represented people from the media, volunteers, people from government.’ So, of course, he was speaking to me as a volunteer and we came up with the idea – and I don’t know if it was together or who said: ‘Well let’s have a national board which is primarily made up of health care volunteers; but on the board there will be a seat for the chairman of the National Advisory Council; and the National Advisory Council would be made up of people like Victor, Zach, and Bob Dole – people who are interested in advancing hospice in America.’ And so that’s exactly what happened, and I was enormously grateful that he agreed; and Dennis was grateful. And we proceeded to organise the National Hospice Organisation and Victor had the board seat.’79

Zach Morfogen: ‘Victor brought an awareness of a new movement in America to the Washington powerhouse scene.’
Such an accommodation suited Zorza and he could now deploy his energies where his interests lay: encouraging high-profile figures to give their support. He wrote to Twycross:

Rosemary and I have been appointed co-chairmen of the National Advisory Board of NHO and I imagine our main job will be to recruit prominent public figures to the board, and to help with fund-raising.

National Advisory Council letterheads produced during 1978 give an insight into his achievements in this respect. Supporters include Betty Ford, a First Lady and cancer survivor who advocated for early detection; and Lauren Bacall, the actress wife of screen icon Humphrey Bogart who died of throat cancer in 1957. There are politicians – Joe Califano, Edward Kennedy and Henry Kissinger; journalists – Art Buchwald, John Chancellor, Barbara Walters; musicians – Vladimir Ashkenazy, Leonard Bernstein, Yehudi Menuhin, Itzhak Perlman, Mstislav Rostropovich, Rudolph Serkin; and the actress, Elizabeth Taylor.

While the needs of this growing movement were many during the 1970s, Victor made an important contribution. First, by recounting his experience of Jane’s death, thereby gaining widespread coverage and raising public awareness; then by recruiting some well-known personalities who remained committed to the cause. For example, Joe Califano was instrumental in the funding of 15 hospice demonstration projects; and Ted Kennedy was actively involved in the movement from the day that Death of a daughter was published.

Kennedy’s response – followed by his subsequent association with Zorza – was remarkable. Within days of the appearance of Death of a daughter, two events signalled his interest. The first was in a letter sent by Zorza to The Washington Post.

We are forming a Hospice Action Committee, of which Senator Kennedy is one of the founder members, and we are already beginning to deal with the thousands of letters that ask for information about hospices and how to go about forming them.

Next, was a statement made by Kennedy in the Senate. Introducing the Zorza’s ‘touching and inspirational article about their beloved daughter,’ he says:

This article has already given so much hope to so many people – including myself – that I believe it ought to be read by everybody who has lost or is afraid of losing one of their loved ones from cancer or any similar affliction. It will give comfort, not only to those who fear physical suffering, but it will also provide moral sustenance and a special kind of strength to those – and that surely means all of us – who find it difficult to come to terms with the idea of dying – with the death of someone close to them, and indeed, with their own mortality.
Why did Kennedy throw his political weight behind Zorza so quickly? A clue may lie in Kennedy’s private life – the experience of supporting his son, Ted Junior, who had a leg amputated due to cancer at the age of 12. It was a touching bond. Two fathers, each with a child who had cancer during the 1970s; two families, each living with uncertainty, both facing the unthinkable. Ted survived, Jane died; both families suffered a loss. Kennedy’s biographer writes:

Finally, on Friday, Kennedy told his son that he had cancer. Teddy asked if that meant he would die. His parents assured him it would not, but then he asked what was going to happen. They told him his leg would have to come off. Everyone cried.96

As an adult, Ted Jr has advocated for people living with disabilities and has become closely associated with the Wellness Community.97 He recalls his experience of illness:

I was 12 years old and noticed a pain in my leg and insisted that I have it looked at. The first doctor that I saw told me to soak my leg in Epsom salt and come back in a month. Obviously the pain didn’t go away, and I came back and they did a quick biopsy and determined it was cancer. I lost my leg the very next day and went through two years of chemotherapy. I remember the emotional isolation I experienced along with losing my hair, mouth sores, feeling sick most of the time, and having to deal with these as a seventh grader. No one ever asked me how I was doing, or thought that my mental attitude would have an impact on how I approached the challenges I faced. Even though my parents found the best doctors available at the time to treat my cancer, no one really ever addressed how I was doing emotionally.98

Health issues had featured prominently in the Kennedy family. Rosemary, the third eldest of nine Kennedy children had learning difficulties and a failed lobotomy in 1941 had left her in a worse condition, seriously incapacitated. Unable to cope with the routine demands of life, she was admitted to a Wisconsin nursing home where she lived until her death in 2005.99 In the 1970s, as Ted and his family cared for their son, Ted’s sister Eunice was drawing the world’s attention towards people with disabilities: a lifelong campaign during which she founded the Special Olympics in 1968. According to Ted’s mother, the experience with Rosemary had deeply affected her children and prompted ‘much of their concern and desire to help the less fortunate.’ Kennedy confirmed this view and acknowledged that Rosemary’s condition was the ‘first influence’ on his political concerns around health care.100

Consequently, at the dawn of the 1980s, both Zorza and Kennedy had personal reasons to advocate for a comprehensive type of care that focused on more than just physical symptoms. The affinity was palpable. Zorza’s passion for the
Joining the movement 53
dying, a marginalised group of the socially and medically isolated, resonated with Kennedy’s background and concern for human rights – and added weight to his interest in health care. Moreover, as a long-standing member of the Senate, he was in an ideal position to set a lead and exert influence: factors that were never lost on Zorza.

Kennedy first became a Senator in 1962, where he aimed to finish the term of his brother, John F. Kennedy, who had become President of the United States (1961). Steeped in the liberal traditions of the Democratic Party, with its vision of universal health care and civil rights, Kennedy was drawn to the hospice ideal. He also warmed to Zorza’s world-view, a perception grounded in his deep-seated opposition to totalitarianism. But Zorza had more to offer: as his insight into the Communist world was of the highest order, he provided a valuable source for a US Senator with a keen interest in foreign policy. As a result, both men developed a pragmatic edge to their relationship, clearly seen in the two letters which refer to a dinner party held at the Kennedy’s home. Zorza’s letter – to his editor – shows how he used the occasion to promote his wife’s book; Kennedy’s letter provides a glimpse of how Zorza’s column penetrated the world of politics – and highlights the value of a contact who could tell the story behind an article. Zorza writes:

When we spoke on the ‘phone some weeks ago, you asked me to suggest names of people other than reviewers to whom copies of the book might be sent to get it talked about, but all I’ve been able to come up with so far is Ted Kennedy and Sargent Shriver. I was at dinner at the Kennedy place the other night and, inveterate name-dropper that I am, I dropped Rosemary’s, and her book, and I dropped it so hard that they could not but express polite interest – whereupon I said: ‘Oh well, if you’re really interested, I must send you a copy, pass it on to your wives/kids,’ (it was a stag dinner). So they had to say: ‘Please do.’ I did.

Graciously, Kennedy sent a letter of thanks:

I was delighted you were able to join us at dinner recently, and I just wanted to write to tell you how much Ted Jr and Kara are enjoying your wife’s book, *Creating with Clay*. The children join me in expressing their thanks to both you and your wife for your thoughtfulness.

He then adds an intriguing, handwritten postscript: ‘I tried to reach you last week. A lot of comments on your *Post* article.’

As Zorza’s articles were based on detailed research it is hardly surprising they were greatly valued. But he brought another dimension to his writing that was linked to the time he spent in Russia during the winter of 1941 – his personal experience of the Gulag. He would never forget the cold, the dehumanisation, and the uncertainty of survival. Overcrowded and brutal, life in the camps was a relentless struggle for privacy, for food and sleep – played out in the context of sudden death. A prisoner describes the conditions:
Víctor Zorza and Ted Kennedy, 1975: Both men developed a pragmatic edge to their relationship …
The whole process of the disintegration of personality took place before the eyes of everyone in the cell. A man could not hide himself here for an instant; even his bowels had to be moved on the open toilet, situated right in the room. He who wanted to weep, wept before everyone, and the feeling of shame increased his torment. He who wanted to kill himself – in the night, beneath the blanket, trying to cut the veins in his arm with his teeth – would be quickly discovered by one of the cell’s insomniacs, and prevented from finishing the job. 105

If Zorza’s concern for human rights was articulated in his column, Kennedy’s was played out through the political process. As his interest in dissidents became known, Kennedy became associated with high profile cases, many involving citizens of the Soviet Union.

In the late 1960s, Mstislav and Galina Rostropovich had allowed the banned novelist Alexandr Solzhenitsyn 106 to live in their dacha 107 outside of Moscow, and later wrote to General Secretary Leonid Brezhnev 108 protesting against Soviet restrictions on cultural freedom. As a result, the couple became invisible. Their engagements were cancelled; foreign tours were forbidden, and their names disappeared from their recordings. Eventually, they were allowed to leave Russia in 1974 following the intervention of Ted Kennedy, who was asked by the musician, Leonard Bernstein, to discuss their release with Brezhnev during his visit to Moscow that year. 109

In 1975, Galina Nizhnikov and her family – at that time living in Moscow – applied for an exit visa due to discrimination at work and concern for the future of her children. They were refused, whereupon Galina joined the Jewish women’s movement and became involved in the first refusenik demonstration, held against the Kremlin wall. Three years later, after unsuccessful applications and a period of persecution, exit visas were finally granted due to the efforts of Ted Kennedy. She writes:

My own family’s ‘release from bondage’ came about through an incredible stroke of luck. Senator Edward Kennedy came to Moscow in the summer of 1978 with a long list of refuseniks on whose behalf he planned to intercede with the Soviet authorities. Through his efforts, 18 families on that list received permission to emigrate. Ours was among them. 111

Emblematic of Zorza’s roots and Kennedy’s empathy with the marginalised was the group of Ashkenazy 112 Jews recruited to serve on the National Advisory Council of the National Hospice Organisation. These include: Art Buchwald – born in New York to parents who in 1910 had emigrated from Galicia, an area that reaches from south-east Poland to western Ukraine; Henry Kissinger, whose family fled Nazi Germany in 1938; Leonard Bernstein and Yehudi Menuhin – both born in New York to Russian-Jewish parents; Rudolph Serkin, whose family escaped the pogroms by moving from Russia to Bohemia; and Vladimir Ashkenazy – born in Russia to a Jewish father and Orthodox mother in 1937.

The recruitment of these individuals to the hospice
cause is important, not only because of their high public profile but because of their willingness to lend their name to a form of care which, in origin, was strongly Christian. And yet, perhaps unwittingly, their presence demonstrates the essence of hospice as ‘inclusive hospitality’, personified in the relationship between Cicely Saunders and the hospice movement’s founding patient, David Tasma, a Polish Jew who was dislocated from his homeland and living in London. She writes:

His real name was Eli Mayer, but David was his nickname and the name he chose to use when I knew him. He was working as a waiter in London and I think he left Poland before the war and had been working in Paris but I do not know when he came to England, nor how long he had been here. What he told me about his family was that they had certainly lived in the Ghetto and that he was one of four sons. His mother died young and he was very involved with his grandfather, who was a rabbi. The old man used to discuss the faith with him and I remember him telling me he used to go upstairs and wake him up after he had gone to bed to continue their discussions. I believe that one or two of his brothers had also left Poland and I seem to remember that at least one went to South America … I only knew David for some two months and we were occupied in talking about where he was in his thinking and living rather than where he had come from. It was his need to find meaning in his life that led us on to talk about founding a special place for people like himself facing the end of their lives …

In Britain, Cicely Saunders’ affinity with Jewish colleagues continued once St Christopher’s became operational. Sam Klagsbrun, a psychiatrist who had met Saunders during her visit to America in 1963, performed the role of management consultant to the hospice and made annual visits to St Christopher’s to teach and support staff. Across the Atlantic, Zorza was given unstinting support by Vladimir Ashkenazy, whose interest in hospice care never dwindled. More than a decade later he played for patients and guests at the opening of Russia’s first hospice in St Petersburg.

Not for the first time, Zorza’s drive had become a catalyst for change and his knowledge of the media, and people within it, proved helpful. But it was his capacity to penetrate the highest echelons of politics, television, journalism and the arts – and recruit figures of international repute – that was extraordinary. Zach Morfogen:

‘It was [David Tasma’s] need to find meaning in his life that led us on to talk about founding a special place for people like himself facing the end of their lives.’ Cicely Saunders.

Teddy [Kennedy] was the key speaker at the first national meeting and I have the privilege of introducing him. I think he really came into the picture because of Victor. Victor brought an awareness of a new movement in America to the Washington powerhouse scene. When I say Washington powerhouse scene it was the national media, it was people,
leaders in government, these were all people who he knew, or who respected him as a journalist at the Washington Post. He gave a visibility that was crucial; and I think the movement probably without him would have found expression — but it would have taken much longer.114

As in Britain, Zorza’s involvement in the American movement was relatively short, lasting only four years around the end of the 1970s. Yet his contribution is noteworthy. Despite his unfamiliarity with the world of health care, Zorza refused to be diverted from his goal; and notwithstanding the Morfogen-Rezendes consensus, he maintained a conspicuous air of independence. He disregarded the conservatism of the medical profession, with its nervousness towards publicity and, with characteristic single-mindedness, identified his objectives and embarked on an ambitious strategy to raise public awareness of hospice care. In so doing, with the crucial support of Twycross and Kennedy, he brought an added urgency to the hospice movement, on both sides of the Atlantic, at a formative time in its history. A decade later, he would do the same in Russia.

Notes
3. Josif Vissarionovich Dzhugashvili (1878–1953) was born in Georgia. He became a member of the Bolshevik party and took the name ‘Stalin’ meaning ‘man of steel’. After the revolution, he worked his way up the Communist Party hierarchy by systematically eliminating his rivals. Once in control, he transformed Russia into an industrial power through five-year plans, collectivised farming and a system of forced labour that caused millions of peasant casualties. Hard-won victories during the Second World War helped bring about peace and his intransigence at the Conference of Yalta (1945) paved the way for Communist regimes in Central and Eastern Europe.
7. Victor Zorza talking to Richard Zorza, 4 February 1995
8. The Russian word may be more correctly translated as ‘Lachta’ but in his letters and papers, Zorza refers to it exclusively as ‘Lakhta’ and this version is used here.
9. Russia’s first hospice opened on the outskirts of St Petersburg in 1990. From 1924 until 1991 St Petersburg was known as Leningrad and, for consistency, the city is referred to as St Petersburg throughout except in interview extracts or quotations from letters or publications when the contemporaneous name of Leningrad is left in place.
11. At the inception of the National Health Service in 1948 the Ministry of Health issued guidance advising hospital authorities to set aside a room for use as a chapel (see: National Health Service. Appointment of Chaplains. HMC (48) 62 HMSO, 1948). An indication of the changing nature of British society was provided by a survey published in 2001. During the 1990s, 73 hospital chapels and 86 multi-faith rooms were opened in England and Wales. This represents 29 percent of all chapels but 91 per cent of all multi-faith rooms — which were virtually unknown before 1990. See: M. Wright, ‘Spiritual care in hospice and hospital: findings from a survey in England and Wales’, Palliative Medicine 15 (3): 229–42, 2001.
12. Provision for hospital chaplains was established under the guidance issued by the Ministry of Health in 1948 and has continued since then. See: National Health Service. Appointment of Chaplains.


18. These were St Luke’s, Bayswater and St Joseph’s Hospice, Hackney.


26. Matthew 25:35–56 states: ‘I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me.’ *The Bible (Revised Standard Version).*


28. The Dorothy House Foundation was the first home care service to open in Britain (1977) that was not attached to an in-patient facility.


31. David Frampton was medical director of Farleigh (Mid Essex) Hospice, Chelmsford, at the time.

32. David Frampton, IOELC interview, 11 April 2003.


34. Prue Clench (Dufour) (1942–2004) died at St Margaret’s Hospice, Taunton, during the production of this book.

35. St Columba’s Fellowship (motto: *A Christian presence in the hospice movement*) was founded in 1986. With around 700 members worldwide, its aims are to sustain and promote the Christian foundation of hospice through courses, retreats and the ecumenical sharing of faith.


37. Letter from Dov Noy to the Zorza family, 14 July 1996.


39. St Elizabeth (1864–1918) was the elder sister of Alexandra, wife of Czar Nicholas II. After the death of her husband, she founded a religious community and built hospitals to care for the sick. The day after the Czar and his family were executed, she was thrown down a mine shaft and left to die.


44. Robert Twycross, IOELC interview, 18 December 2002.


49. Letter from Robert Twycross to Vior and Rosemary Zorza, 15 June 1979


52. Douglas Macmillan founded the Society for the Prevention and Relief of Cancer in 1911. In 1924, the name changed to the National Society for Cancer Relief and in 1989 to Cancer Relief Macmillan Fund. It is now known as Macmillan Cancer Relief.
53. Henry Garnett (1913–90) was educated at Eton and Sandhurst and commissioned in the Royal Horseguards. He served in the Second World War as leader of the Household Cavalry armoured car troop of the Royal Family’s immediate protection mission. After the war, he joined Gillette Industries, and worked in America and Australia before returning to Britain as chairman of Gillette Europe. After leading the Cancer Relief Society as deputy chairman and then chief executive (1973–87), he maintained an interest despite failing health until his death in 1990.


55. Robert Twycross is speaking in 1996.

56. Robert Twycross, IOELC interview, 4 January 1996.


58. ‘Full use’ of Sir Michael Sobell House became 20 beds and a day unit.


64. Letter from Robert Twycross to Victor Zorza, 30 December 1980.

65. The Hospice at St Luke’s Committee was formed in 1973 and launched St Luke’s Hospice as a pilot project in 1975 – the second in the United States after Connecticut (1974). The hospice team at St Luke’s was the first to be incorporated into an existing medical centre and sought to augment the care given to terminally ill patients by focusing on pain control and symptom management. In 1986, the hospice changed its name to the St Luke’s Palliative Care Program, to reflect the wide variety of services provided and to comply with changing state regulations. The program was forced to close in 1990 due to funding difficulties. See: mssa.library.yale.edu/findaids/stream.php?xmlfile=mssa.ms.1730.xml


68. Reverend Carleton Sweetser (1921–96) was chaplain of St Luke’s Medical Centre, New York and chair of the Hospice at St Luke’s Committee.


70. The Zorzas’ Reply: a response from the Zorzas to a selection of letters published under the title The Death of a daughter in the Letters to the Editor section of the Washington Post January 1978.

71. Stephen Connor: Vice President for Offices of Research, International Development, and Children/Adolescents – National Hospice and Palliative Care Organization, USA.

72. Later known as the National Hospice and Palliative Care Organization.

73. Stephen Connor, IOELC interview, 1 April 2002.


77. Born in Brookline, Massachusetts in 1932 to Rose and Joseph Kennedy, Edward ‘Ted’ Kennedy was the youngest of nine children. As part of a leading American family well known for its political liberalism, he followed his older brothers into public service: John F. Kennedy became President of the United States (assassinated 1963) and Robert Kennedy became a Senator (assassinated 1968). First elected to the Senate as a Democrat in 1962, Ted Kennedy is a champion of ‘liberal’ issues ranging from health care reform to civil rights.
78. Robert ‘Bob’ Dole became a Republican Senator in 1968 and maintained a career-long interest in health care. In 1996, he resigned from the Senate when he became the Republican Presidential Nominee, losing eventually to Bill Clinton.


81. Elizabeth ‘Betty’ Ford is the wife of former US President Gerald Ford. After becoming First Lady in 1974, she had a mastectomy due to breast cancer and thereafter advocated for early detection. She is also known for founding the Betty Ford Clinic, a treatment centre for people with chemical dependency.

82. Lauren Bacall and her husband, Humphrey Bogart, embody 1940s Hollywood in films such as The Big Sleep (1946) and Key Largo (1948).

83. Joseph Califano is an expert on health delivery in America. He was a special assistant to President Johnson during the 1960s and served as Secretary for Health, Education and Welfare in the 1970s.

84. Henry Kissinger was the US Secretary of State (1973–77). In 1969, he helped initiate the Strategic Arms Limitation Talks (SALT) with the Soviet Union and arranged President Nixon’s 1972 visit to China. In 1973, he won the Nobel Peace Prize for negotiating the US cease-fire with North Vietnam.

85. Art Buchwald is an author and journalist who won a Pulitzer Prize for outstanding commentary.

86. John Chancellor (1927–96), the journalist and TV presenter, was known for his coverage of the 1957 desegregation of Central High School in Little Rock, and for his role as anchor for the National Broadcasting Company’s (NBC) Nightly News.

87. Barbara Walters is a TV commentator, well known for her role as anchor for the morning news programme, Today.

88. Vladimir Ashkenazy was born in Russia in 1937. He studied piano at the Moscow Conservatory and in 1962 was joint winner of the Tchaikovsky Piano Competition, Moscow. He left the Soviet Union in 1963 to perform with and conduct the leading orchestras of the world.

89. Leonard Bernstein (1918–90) was born in Massachusetts. He was a versatile pianist and composer and became well known as the musical director of the New York Philharmonic Orchestra and for writing the music for West Side Story.

90. Yehudi Menuhin (1916–99) was born in New York. His performance of Mendelssohn’s violin concerto at the age of seven brought him instant fame. He was fluent in German and became influenced by German composers and, in 1963, he founded a school for musically gifted children.

91. Itzhak Perlman was born in Israel in 1945. He studied violin at the Shulamit Academy in Tel Aviv and performed with the Israel Broadcasting Orchestra. He emigrated to the US in 1958.

92. Mstislav Rostropovich was born in Azerbaijan in 1927. He was taught to play the cello by his father and made his concert debut to great acclaim in 1942 at the age of 15. His marriage to Galina Vishnevskaya, lead soprano at the Bolshoi Opera (Moscow), heralded one of the outstanding musical partnerships of the twentieth century.

93. Rudolph Serkin (1903–91) was born in Bohemia. A child prodigy, he could play the piano and read music by the time he was four years old. He moved to the US during the 1930s and made his home in Philadelphia.

94. Elizabeth Taylor won Academy Awards for her work in Butterfield 8 (1960) and Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf? (1966). She was a leading advocate for AIDS research during the 1990s.


97. The Wellness Community is a US-based non-profit organisation dedicated to providing free emotional support, education and hope for people with cancer and their families and friends. Around 20 centres have been established throughout the US; centres are also found in Tel Aviv and Tokyo. The Virtual Wellness Community is located on the internet at www.thewellnesscommunity.org.

98. From the keynote lecture given by Ted Kennedy Jr at the 6th Congress of Psycho-Oncology, Banff, Canada, 23 April 2003.

99. Rosemary Kennedy (1918–2005) was the least known of the Kennedy family. Though she had mild learning difficulties, her father was anxious about the family’s reputation and decided she should undergo a lobotomy – a procedure that was highly regarded at the time but still in its infancy. When it failed and Rosemary became worse, she was admitted to a series of institutions until she arrived at the St Coletta Home (Wisconsin) in the late 1940s where she lived until her death in 2005. Though her father never again acknowledged her, other members of the family visited her and kept in touch. See: R. Cornwell, ‘Rosemary Kennedy’, The Independent 10 January 2005.


101. The Democratic Party is one of the two major political parties in the United States, the other being the Republican Party. The Democratic Party traces its history to 1793, when its major opposition was the Whig Party. During the second half of the twentieth

102. Sargent Shriver married Eunice Kennedy, Ted Kennedy’s sister, in 1953. He was US Ambassador to France from 1968–70 and the Democratic vice-presidential candidate in 1972, running with George McGovern. The second of their five children, Maria, is the wife of California’s Republican Governor, Arnold Schwarzenegger.


107. A dacha is a Russian country house.
108. Leonid Brezhnev (1906–82) was General Secretary of the Communist Party Central Committee (1964–82). His term in office was defined by the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia (1968) and Afghanistan (1977), economic stagnation and the persecution of dissidents.

110. The Jackson-Vanik Amendment to the Trade Reform Act was sponsored by Henry Jackson of Washington and Charles Vanik of Ohio, both Democrats. The amendment is considered to have been successful in securing freedom of emigration in the Soviet Union and its successor states: ‘Since 1975, 573,000 refugees – many of them Jews, evangelical Christians and Catholics – from areas of the former Soviet Union have been resettled in the United States … An estimated one million more Jews have immigrated to Israel during that time.’ The Jackson-Vanik and Russia Fact Sheet, White House Press Office, 13 November 2001.

111. From the English translation of Galina Nizhnikov’s Russian memoir, The Courage of Despair (English title Against the Kremlin Wall) at: www.istolerman.pwp.blueyonder.co.uk/Galina/00kremlincontents.html Following her arrival in America, Galina Nizhnikov Veremkroit moved to Peabody, Massachusetts. See: www.jwa.org/exhibits/wwd/jsp/bio.jsp?personID=pgveremkroit

112. Ashkenazi Jews (the Ashkenazim) are the descendants of the people who migrated from Israel to Central and Eastern Europe; their culture includes the Yiddish language, which combines a German dialect with Hebrew characters. Those who found their way to Spain and Portugal via North Africa are known as Sephardic Jews (the Sephardim).


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‘We were being given the run-around because some people didn’t like the idea of a hospice, while others were trying to get their hands on a project which they saw as a way to wheedle money and goods out of the West.’ Victor Zorza

Changing times

Zorza was astonished. To be allowed into Russia beggared belief. For years the Party hierarchy had been irritated by his analysis of East-West relations, published worldwide in his newspaper column, Communist World. For all that, his visa application had been granted.

As his plane touched down in Moscow en route from India to England, he wondered what he would find. His last memory of Russia was of crossing into Persia (Iran) in the spring of 1942, more than 46 years earlier. Then, he was with his compatriots, Polish civilians and military personnel, released from Soviet labour camps after Stalin’s amnesty the previous year. They were difficult times for an impressionable teenager. But what now, in 1988?

In fact Zorza found a country in decline. New forces had been unleashed that would soon lead to the collapse of the Soviet Union. This massive upheaval, both political and social, was on a scale unprecedented since the 1920s and owed much to the unintended legacy of Leonid Brezhnev. After Nikita Khrushchev fell from power in 1964, Brezhnev had invested heavily in defence, allowing the country to stagnate economically. Freedom of expression was limited, religion was suppressed and dissenting voices were silenced. And outside of Russia, the ‘Brezhnev doctrine’ legitimised the use of force to prevent its allies turning away from Communism.

When Mikhail Gorbachev became general secretary in 1985, he inherited a daunting range of problems. Priorities at home centred on the waste of resources, widespread poverty and endemic corruption. Abroad, the war in Afghanistan had become exhausting. He writes:

By the mid-1980s our society resembled a steam boiler. There was only one alternative – either the Party itself would lead a process of change that would gradually embrace other strata of society, or it would preserve and protect the former system. In that case, an explosion of colossal force would be inevitable.

In an attempt to loosen the social constraints, measures
which became known as glasnost (originally ‘freedom of speech’ but later associated with ‘openness’) and perestroika (‘restructuring’) were designed to invigorate the economy by increasing the flow of goods and information. As these measures were introduced, oppressive practices declined and debate was encouraged. Dissidents were released and emigration restrictions eased; Jews left the country in their thousands bound for Israel or the US. By 1989, Soviet troops had withdrawn from Afghanistan. The following year, in a ground-breaking series of events, Russia declared its independence and Boris Yeltsin became the country’s first democratically elected president. In this new climate of openness, previously classified papers were placed in the public domain. As a result, Stalin and his policies were seen in a new light by a different generation, his criminality exposed to public scrutiny. In a speech to the conference of Russian Communists in 1990 – repeated at the 28th Party Congress two weeks later – Gorbachev criticised the years of political impotence and the absence of much-needed reforms:

At the 20th Party Congress we heard truths that shook our country, the socialist community and the world Communist movement. What we learned then about Stalinism was an insult to the ideals that inspired generations of our people, that aroused them to revolution, to great construction projects, to the defence of our homeland, and to the rebuilding of our destroyed nation. The shock was enormous. One would think that a natural result would have been profound social and political changes. And although we cannot say that nothing has changed since then, unfortunately, the hopes for radical transformation were not realised. Even worse, crimes gradually began to be called mistakes, instead of reforms, there was tinkering with that very same bureaucracy instead of striving for new ideas: we merely updated the old Stalinist textbooks. All this caused festering wounds both in our society as a whole and in people’s hearts; it poisoned ideological life, and aggravated international relations. Eventually, the logic of political struggle led from half-truths to the hushing up of the past, from condemnation of Stalin to backsliding – to the rehabilitation of Stalin in various forms. The inevitable result of all this was political impotence and stagnancy in all areas.

Such rhetoric combined with Gorbachev’s innovations to produce a vision of the future unfettered by the shackles of the past; signals that were quickly recognised in Eastern Europe and the Soviet republics. As Communist governments were pressured to reform another view emerged: of a future free from Russian domination. Alarmed by Russia’s weakened position, conservative elements in the military forged an alliance with disaffected Party members to stage what became known as the August Coup (1991).
days the coup had failed and a new star had arisen – that of Boris Yeltsin. When Gorbachev was ‘rescued’ from his dacha by Yeltsin, his political impotence was assured; from that moment, he became the highest profile casualty of Yeltsin’s success. For many, the choice was clear cut:

Yeltsin surrounds himself with democratic forces and people tired of Communism. Gorbachev promotes the scoundrels to the highest posts in the land. Yeltsin issues decrees to loosen the deadly grip of the Party. Gorbachev issues undemocratic decrees that are simply unconstitutional. The smartest people take Yeltsin’s side; Gorbachev’s team consists of fools and knaves. Gorbachev falls victim to his own intrigue, casts the country into danger and nearly perishes himself. Yeltsin, in unequal battle with no weapons, wins the day, and saves the life of Gorbachev and his family.¹⁰

On a tide of popular support, Yeltsin seized the assets of the Communist Party and recognised the independence of the Baltic States – previously part of the Soviet Union – whereupon Ukraine declared itself independent. By the end of 1991, Gorbachev had resigned as president, the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics had been dissolved and the Commonwealth of Independent States had come into being.

Against the backdrop of these changes, Zorza sought to establish the Russian hospice movement – a complex task exacerbated by the effects of soaring inflation and economic collapse. While the scale of the crisis is difficult to measure – due partly to a national tendency to overstate production during the Soviet days of subsidies, and understate production after the move to tax liability – one commentator gives a glimpse of its meaning for the Russian people. In a report aimed at the voluntary sector (1993), Lena Young writes:

In 1985, annual inflation stood at 4.6 per cent in the Soviet Union, in 1990 at 19 per cent, by 1991 at 200 per cent. Recently it passed the 2,000 per cent mark … The wholesale price index rose by a factor of 34 in 1992, the retail price index by a factor of 26. If in December 1991 an average salary bought you a refrigerator, in December 1992, you needed six salaries to do so.¹¹

This economic decline continued with devastating effects on living standards during the 1990s, leading to devaluation of the rouble in 1998. Alongside this decline was a fall in wages: in 1992, the minimum wage stood at 22 per cent of the minimum subsistence level and by 1998 it had fallen to 8 per cent. As a result, 60 per cent of the workers in health care and agriculture received wages below the minimum subsistence level.¹²

These developing trends convinced Zorza that if hospice care was to gain ground in Russia, funding must be both local and embedded in the state system. Though funds would be difficult to access, transitional support from the West could
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only lead to temporary provision that would disappear when the funding stream dried up. The task he faced, therefore, was how to establish a form of care, previously unknown in the country, which would focus upon the needs of the dying and become sufficiently accepted to be grafted onto the state system of health care; a daunting prospect.

Zorza knew it would not be easy. No-one had heard of hospice; the word did not exist in the Russian language. So how would he convince an impoverished society in a country entering free fall to divert precious resources to the most unproductive of groups: the dying? Was Soviet medicine not focused exclusively on the living and based on a single criterion of success – the preservation of the workforce? In such circumstances, it would take a monumental change in attitudes for hospice care to become valued.

Despite the difficulties, Zorza felt compelled to embark on his fourth and last mission. It was something of an obligation. He recalled the shelter he had received from Russian peasants as he train-hopped along the trans-Siberian railway in 1941. As war waged all around him, he gratefully accepted the meagre portions of food, hastily prepared for him, as he headed deeper into Russia. Alone and afraid – and desperate to avoid a return to the labour camp – he knew that his presence spelt danger for his benefactors.

Now, after 40 years in the West, he was moved by the unrelieved suffering of the Russian people, especially the sick for whom medicine ‘could do no more’. Once their disease passed the point of cure, patients were fortunate to receive anything but the most basic care. Pain went untreated, and ‘a patient’s sense of hopelessness, isolation, guilt, frustration, fear, depression, and a hundred other social, psychological and spiritual problems were also ignored.’ When Zorza entered a housing block, he recognised the cries of the sick, overwhelmed by their pain: cancer a terror, suicide the all-too-frequent response. In his book, Cancer Ward, Solzhenitsyn describes the state of those without hope:

The last month I hadn’t been able to lie, sit down or stand without it hurting, and I was only sleeping a few minutes a day. So I must have done plenty of thinking. This autumn I learned from experience that a man can cross the threshold of death even when his body is still not dead. Your blood still circulates and your stomach digests, while you yourself have gone through the whole psychological preparation for death – and lived through death itself. Everything around you, you see as if from the grave.

Among the many changes in this country of 144 million, life expectancy for males declined by six years to 57.6 between 1990 and 1994; during the same period, mortality for males in the 40–49 age group increased by 87 per cent. Between 1995 and 2001, the Russian population fell by 5.5 million. Currently around 60 per cent more are dying than are being born – a rise in the rates of mortality unprecedented in a twentieth-century industrialised nation.

It had not always been thus, especially during the heyday of Soviet Socialised Medicine. SSM emerged from the revolution of 1917 which itself followed three years of bloody war in Europe. Epidemics had taken a heavy toll and a population weakened by hunger – and lacking in fuel and basic disinfectants – faced an uphill struggle against typhus, causing Lenin to declare: ‘Either the louse [carrier of typhus] conquers socialism or socialism conquers the louse.’ Driven by a determined leadership, the Soviet Union became the first country in the world to provide health care to the entire population as a public service funded from the state treasury. From the establishment of the centralised Shemasko model in 1918, health initiatives were driven by the ideas of the social
hygienists. The focus, therefore, became preventive and social rather than clinical or remedial. Success was dramatic and huge gains were made in the control of infectious diseases such as tuberculosis, typhus, malaria and cholera.

Yet these achievements were not reflected in the health status of the population. The focus on infectious diseases overlooked the impact of cancer, cardiovascular and other non-communicable diseases.\textsuperscript{19} The development of a pharmaceutical industry was given low priority and ineffective treatments remained routine despite contrary evidence. Importantly, the Soviet philosophy of paternalism encouraged attitudes of dependency rather than responsibility and lifestyle issues connected with diet, smoking and alcohol use were neglected – a situation exacerbated by reliance on alcohol sales as a means of boosting the economy. Moreover, despite the rhetoric that every citizen had access to a medical facility, the quality was variable and poor in many rural areas. In this culture, cancer became unmentionable and death unapproachable. In 2001, Irene Salmon, a British nurse who worked in Russia from 1996–98 commented:

There is a very strong death/dying taboo in Russia, and an even stronger cancer taboo ... In Soviet times it was illegal for a doctor to tell a patient of a diagnosis of cancer. This law was only recently repealed, so doctors remain reluctant to communicate this information to patients.\textsuperscript{20}

A key consideration for Zorza was where to locate the hospice service in the Soviet health care system. This decision was crucial since two schemes of care operated in tandem, one accessed on the criterion of \textit{residence}, the other by \textit{rank}. The Residential Network served the majority of the population and each person knew the polyclinic assigned to their address. The Closed Network was reserved for the \textit{nomenklatura}\textsuperscript{21} or other citizens of rank who had access to an altogether different type of care. These closed facilities were:

\ldots reserved for the members of the different elites, culminating in the hospitals, clinics and rest homes of the Kremlin (called the \textit{Kremlinovka}) where the highest officials (and their families) had access to the best medical care, equipment and buildings available in the country. In some instances patients could also be sent abroad for treatment. These palatial facilities, the equivalent of private hospitals and clinics in the West, were considered as perquisites of rank.\textsuperscript{22}

Providing a gold-standard hospice service to cater for the elite was abhorrent to Zorza, so he quickly adopted the residential model rather than that of rank. In his view, the principle was non-negotiable and fundamental to the integrity of the service. Yet tensions arose when St Petersburg’s second hospice opened at Kolpino\textsuperscript{23} and the management took a different view. From that moment, admission criteria became a contested area. Zorza:

While continuing to work and spend a lot of time in Leningrad to make sure that hospice developed in the right way, I shifted my focus back to Moscow and divided my time between the two cities. In the meantime a Russian doctor, without any support or knowledge on my part, set up a hospice of her own [at Kolpino], without funding from the state, and without observing the principle of admission only from the district where the hospice was situated, and of course \textit{immediately} there were stories about paying in order to get in.\textsuperscript{24}

Defiance was intolerable. As the self-appointed guardian of the hospice ideal, Victor was anxious to ensure that his principles were followed by all who were drawn to this new approach. After all, these fundamentals had become encapsulated in the memory of Jane’s death and were thus
rendered inviolable. ‘He treated us like his children,’ recalls Nina Khmeleva, one of the first doctors to work in a Russian hospice, ‘and he told us what we must do.’ This was no exaggeration; Victor demanded unquestioning commitment. Speaking of a doctor who had both clinical and managerial responsibilities, he declared: ‘I did not want bureaucrats. I asked her: “Could she guarantee that when she goes back she will become a hospice doctor and resign from her administrative position?” And she um’d and she aah’d.’

If Victor was chagrined by the events at Kolpino he reached a compromise over Tula. It was here, in a region contaminated by the explosion at a nuclear plant in Chernobyl (Ukraine) during 1986, that Russia’s second hospice opened in 1991. Influenced by the independence of British hospices, and fearful that in Russia a service offering upgraded care could be appropriated by the bureaucratic remains of SSM, Zorza counselled against integration with the current health system. Yet he supported the developments at Lomintsevsky Hospital (Tula) where a second-floor ward was converted into a hospice unit.

A key factor at Lomintsevsky was that funding came from the central health budget of the Tula region, 2.8 million roubles in 1993, and Zorza was impressed by the high level of capital investment. Refurbishments had given the ward a homely atmosphere. A new heating system had been installed. A kitchen and sitting room – fully furnished, decorated and equipped – provided welcome facilities for patients and relatives. A chapel was established. Bathrooms and toilets were upgraded and a new sterilisation unit installed. Importantly, the inspiration behind the service, Dr Elmire Karajaeva, had attended Victor’s training course and he became convinced of her probity:

She was running a small clinic there and we checked her out very thoroughly. We made sure that she was, in fact, getting funding from the local health authority. We watched her during the course and she was good; and she went back to Tula after the course and converted her small clinic into a hospice. Because she was a good person, we made an exception to another rule that I’d established, which was that we did not want hospices to be directly associated with a pre-existing medical establishment, either on the premises of one, or subordinate to one, or directly associated with one, because we feared the contagion that we felt would inevitably spread – which certainly existed in almost every medical establishment – and which would inevitable spread to the hospice if the hospice was part of one. But she obeyed our rules, even though she was running this other clinic, a general clinic, and so far it seems to have worked alright.

Whether or not Elmire Karajaeva followed the detail of Victor’s rules, the point is that the first two hospices in Russia – Lakhta and Tula, represented different models of...
care: the free-standing hospice and the hospital-based unit. One independent from existing health facilities, the other totally embedded. In typical fashion, once he had decided to support Tula, Zorza looked for benefits. Could a comparison be made between the two models which would inform future strategy? Wendy Jones tells how his plans developed:

His idea was that two [hospices] should be free-standing, that is, hospices separated from the hospitals but deriving their incomes directly from the health committees of the Soviet cities – and that two should be incorporated within the bounds of an established hospital, and therefore deriving their income via the hospital budget (although ultimately it still comes from the health committee) so that the difference would be two free-standing hospices operating independently of a hospital and the others within a hospital. And as far as I understand it he wanted those two models set up in order to be able to compare which form and which structure would be the better for Russia.29

The review never took place because Victor died in 1996 before it could happen. Yet both models gained support. Around 60 free-standing hospices (including hospice projects) and 30 hospital-based units were identified throughout...
Russia in 2004. As the debate around the merits of each type continues, the World Health Organisation has taken the view that in resource-poor areas, hospice and palliative care provision can be maximised by utilising health care systems already in place. In the largest geographical country of the world, this suggests that if the hospice approach is to reach the dying poor throughout Russia, such opportunities should not be overlooked – a point that Victor, despite his reservations, had already noted.

Yet his caution was justified. Among the structural problems faced by hospices were the effects of chronic under-funding. After independence, the Russian health system still bore the hallmarks of Soviet medicine and sat uncomfortably with decentralisation and the introduction of insurance-based models of reimbursement. An overall lack of direction had combined with political instability to produce a guarded inertia among the workforce which convinced Zorza that the best way forward was to maintain a protective distance between hospices and formal health systems. Cocooned in the ethos of the hospice, this would encourage activists to adhere more closely to the collaborative approach that placed the patient centre stage.

Ever astute, Victor realised that this goal would need special attention. The concept of the multidisciplinary team was foreign to the paternalistic structures that supported a physician-led model of care that generally lacked input from allied professions. Andrei Gnezdilov:

In the hospital at that time there was a very strict hierarchy: you had the head doctor, then his vice, then doctors, then nurses, then care assistants and only then the patient.

Breaking down these structures would require health professionals to see beyond their status and recognise the value of other contributors. Education would ease the nervousness of those who felt vulnerable after abandoning the certainty of their position – and Victor had already made plans for both Russian-based and British-based courses. More difficult to achieve would be the hearts-and-minds acceptance of patient autonomy, since this struck at the core of the doctor’s ethical code. During Soviet times this code emphasised the doctor’s relationship to the state and remnants of these duty-focused ethics have left a detrimental legacy to palliative care development:

Most of Russia’s bioethical standards and behaviour stem from two important features of deontology. One is the physician’s oath. In the former Soviet Union, that oath required physicians to protect first the interests of the State, not the interests of the patient. This conflict between responsibility to State and patient often worked to the patient’s...
detrimenr, and it is diametrically opposed to principals of physician responsibility in other countries.

The second influential feature is the fundamental deontologic principle that obliged Russian doctors to protect patients from knowledge of potentially fatal diagnoses. This rule required that physicians not reveal diagnoses such as cancer, and it had the further effect of quelling communication with patients generally.\(^{33}\)

Pain relief was a special concern. If pain was to be effectively managed, medical practitioners and drug controllers would need to reassess their attitudes towards opioids. Strict regulations and fear of addiction inhibited the use of morphine which, at the beginning of the 1990s, was only available in injectable form. Speaking of Russia's isolation from palliative care developments in the West, Wendy Jones comments:

Knowledge of pain relief [in Russia] was scanty in the extreme, and coupled with that was the non-availability of analgesics. So there was huge resistance to any use of opiates and very, very strict legislation against it, and minimal doses allowed; that's beginning now to be somewhat easier. The Russians are now much more aware of what's needed, and the doctors, in places, are fighting to get the right sort of doses for their patients; so there's been a move forward in that respect. But in the initial stages the non-availability of analgesia and the poor understanding of how it should be used was a big problem, added to which the management of all the symptoms compounded the whole sorry state for patients.\(^{34,35}\)

Zorza would campaign vigorously for the easing of restrictions so that palliation could be achieved within the hospice context. Remarkably, morphine consumption between 1994 and 1998 rose from 344 kilos to 1,377 kilos and, during the same period, the average defined daily dose\(^{36}\) per million inhabitants stood at 160. Despite this figure being the highest, at that time, among the Commonwealth of Independent States, it compares unfavourably with other countries in Eastern Europe such as Slovakia (583), Hungary (509), Poland (486) and the Czech Republic (388).\(^{37}\)

As Victor embarked on his Russian venture, he was acutely aware of the effort that lay ahead and the pitfalls along the way. More than most, he also knew the personal price he would have to pay to combat the effects of practitioner-led resistance and government intransigence. Hospice care would not fit seamlessly into existing health systems – nor would he want it to – and he rightly anticipated that his advocacy for the dying would in many cases fall on deaf ears. But he was convinced that, like him, relatives who had stoically cared for family members and fretted over their suffering with a heavy heart, wanted something better and that, given the opportunity, there were health professionals waiting to become involved. There would be no going back.

Avoiding corruption

Zorza's initial plan was to open a hospice in Moscow. In late Soviet Russia this would require two things: a ‘sympathetic ear’ within local government and a decision by the health authorities to allocate premises. Victor was aware that such commodities came at a price, but he was keen from the outset to keep hospices untarnished. It would take some doing, since Zorza believed corruption to be endemic at every level from government to service delivery. Eileen Lerche-Thomsen, Victor's partner during the 1990s, recalls his stance:
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[Victor was] very concerned to mark out the hospices as something completely different from the general run of medical care in Russia, which in his view was riddled with corruption; where you had to grease palms to get things done. If you had money and influence, you could get the best kind of treatment that was available, but for the vast majority of the population you might even have to pay a bribe to get a bedpan. So he was utterly determined that hospice, which he saw as the purest kind of genuine, compassionate caring for individuals – regardless of money, or rank or anything, would be free of it.

In this respect, Zorza’s rectitude and tenacious spirit stood him in good stead. Wendy Jones:

Victor did a lot of what he could do by virtue of his personality and his huge knowledge of Russia. From his journalistic days, he knew Russia and he knew the culture and, of course, he knew the language perfectly. He knew how to get things done. He knew when to stamp his foot and all sorts of things.

He needed, though, someone in situ that he could trust: a person who understood his approach and who could help him gain access to the political machinery. There were two problems here: first, where to find such a person; and second, whether he could allow himself to trust someone else. Paul Rossi, treasurer of the British Russian Hospice Society:

I think because of his background, Victor wasn’t a terribly trusting person and there were very few of us, I think, he trusted to do anything properly. And I think saw a bit of dishonesty in everyone. And I remember there were a number of opportunities where we could have worked with others, but he didn’t want to because something in the other person’s background made him suspicious; and it could have been something absolutely without much significance.

Victor’s answer was to seek help from the world he knew – the media. Reviewing his networks, he fixed on the chief editor of Izvestia and made an approach. It was a shrewd move. The paper was the government’s official publication and had its roots in the earliest days of the revolution, when it appeared as a daily of the Petrograd Soviet of Workers’ and Soldiers’ Deputies (1917). The editor responded by asking a reporter, Inessa Slavutinskaya, to do what she could to help Zorza. She agreed, but on meeting him, had serious misgivings:

The first thing I told Victor was that I thought it would be very difficult for us to work together, especially for him, because I also have a very strong personality.

They clashed many times; but they also established a close working relationship and Inessa invited Victor to move into the flat she shared with her husband Felix and their son Anton. It was small and cramped, but they could talk at length and Inessa was on hand to help Victor fine-tune the details of his strategy. She recalls:

He stayed at my house because I have two rooms for my husband, me and our son. Victor told me ‘it is so expensive to live in the hotel’ and it was the first month, maybe, after we met. And I told my son, ‘OK, Anton, please, let Victor live with us,’ and me, my husband and my son lived in one big room and we gave Victor the other, the room of our son.

When meetings were arranged with local dignitaries, Inessa invariably attended. Not only was she on hand as interpreter, if required, but she monitored the tone of the meetings and gave Victor cues on how to proceed. Sometimes, his passion would get the better of him and when this happened, his uncompromising approach became even more assertive. Inessa:
He was very strong-willed and sometimes – sometimes it wasn’t good. I tried to explain to him the Russian mentality because Victor was very aggressive to our authorities. I told him: ‘OK, Victor, you will sit beside me and if I feel that you become angry, I will kick your leg.’ It was a very good idea. But after each meeting he told me: ‘Oh, Inessa, my legs are black and blue!’ But he had to be polite. For instance, with the minister of health, Victor said: ‘I know what you have to do.’ And the minister answered him: ‘I live in this country and I’m the minister. I know what to do.’ ‘You know nothing!’ said Victor. So the minister said: ‘Goodbye, Mr Zorza!’

In such circumstances, progress was impossible. After strenuous efforts to succeed in Moscow, Zorza accepted defeat and turned his attention to St Petersburg. He was bitterly disappointed. It would be 1994 before Moscow’s home care service began and another three years before the in-patient unit opened. He would not live to see it. As he considered the barriers to success in Moscow, corruption figured prominently:

We started in the late ‘80s in Moscow and found that the corruption was so overwhelming and the bureaucracy was so absolutely – not just corrupt, but at odds with each other – that again and again we failed. Over the years we were on the point of having a hospice in Moscow and four times it collapsed because of those nefarious influences.

Such influences continue to date. Commenting on Moscow’s commercial and property development, Georgy Bovt, deputy editor of Izvestia writes:

Moscow’s construction boom is also a bribe-taking boom. The treatment of historical buildings by the Moscow authorities is completely focused on finding ways to exploit them commercially. There is no rule that won’t be bent, or forgotten entirely, with the amounts of money at stake.

Victor’s experiences confirmed his worst fears and fired his determination to found a ‘pure’ service. As plans were made, the potential for corruption became a central issue; an obligatory consideration at all levels of development and policy. At the same time, aid and investment was flowing east. As Communism collapsed, companies in the West were dazzled by the array of new opportunities and scrambled to establish a foothold in developing markets. Professionals offered wide-ranging support to bring their Eastern European counterparts up to speed with Western skills and technology. In the euphoria surrounding new-found freedoms, Zorza’s warning seemed at best to be overcautious.

His concerns, though, were well founded. As aid poured into Russia, stories arose about misappropriation on a grand scale. Figures from Goskomstat, the state statistics committee, show that in 1992 the Russian government received 510,000 tons of humanitarian aid – of which ‘the needy’ received 89,000 tons; the rest was sold. Similar activities were discovered among charitable organisations. Lena Young, in her 1993 report about the operation of charities in Russia writes:

No sooner had post-totalitarian charity been born than there were revelations about instances of gross mismanagement and dishonesty in certain voluntary groups. These reports negatively affected public opinion about the voluntary sector as a whole and gave rise to persistent suspicions about ‘yet another mafia’ disguised as a charity. Doubts about charity are confirmed when stories appear about nasty thefts of humanitarian aid. For example, the head of Children’s Hospital No 4 in St Petersburg diverted virtually trainloads of German humanitarian aid into her own commercial outlets. She did not let one aspirin reach the children for whom the aid was intended, an action that smacks of more than
simple dishonesty. As a result of this exceptional greed she was caught and imprisoned for five years.\textsuperscript{48}

Within health care, Victor had seen for himself the invidious practices facing patients and families. In typical fashion, he had researched the field by immersing himself in the system, thereby distinguishing the reality from the rhetoric. His unobtrusive presence took him to the bedside of patients and opened his eyes to the daily routine of Russian health care:

My first attempt to gain familiarity with the system consisted actually in going into hospitals, into the homes of terminally ill people and sitting around and helping, just as an ordinary volunteer, to see what goes on. And many were the times when I saw a patient peeing into a vessel and putting it under his bed and asking the orderly to carry it off and to empty it because he had more coming – and the orderly would ignore him unless he’d been given a bribe. So it penetrated the whole system; and that of course is something that you must not, cannot possibly have in a hospice: it wouldn’t be a hospice if you had it.\textsuperscript{49}

Whatever name is ascribed to this practice, direct payments of one sort or another have become deeply embedded in Russian health care culture. They originated in the early years of Communism when the salaries of doctors’ were fixed at an artificially low level.\textsuperscript{50} At the close of the twentieth century, medical practitioners and other health workers still had low incomes – and the practice of direct payments had been established over decades. Yet these sorts of payments are not only found in Russia; they are commonplace throughout the countries of Central and Eastern Europe.\textsuperscript{51} Described as a ‘gratitude for service’ – and supposedly unrelated to a fee – the ethical implications of the practice are obvious:

It discriminates between rich and poor … and divides physicians beyond the possibility of reconciliation. Thus, the medical profession is divided, the patients are uncertain whom to pay, when and how much, and are exposed to the mercy of the system.\textsuperscript{52}

To Zorza, hospice care symbolised the highest form of human endeavour so it was worthy of the strictest measures to guard against exploitation. Bribery and corruption had no place, and the way to keep such elements at bay was to control the flow of funds. Five areas were identified wherein the organisation could be vulnerable: capital expenditure and running costs; patient admissions; charitable donations; ‘gratitudes for service’; and staff training.

Victor’s first principle was that Russian money was essential; he intended, after all, to establish a \textit{movement} not a \textit{building}. This required not one but a network of hospices which operated collaboratively throughout the region. Although foreign funds may be raised for one hospice, the running costs of a network would be impossible to sustain, even if the capital costs were forthcoming. But there was another consideration. ‘If we started with foreign money we would never live it down, because people would get used to this idea and they would always expect it.’\textsuperscript{53} Funding from the state, therefore, was essential. And this ruled out any unregulated flow of funds from abroad.

As we have seen, Zorza shunned the idea of providing a facility for the \textit{nomenklatura} on egalitarian grounds, though this decision also provided a safeguard against bribery:

Because the propaganda we had built up about the excellence, the uniqueness, of a hospice was so powerful, the danger was that people would pay \textit{anything} to get their loved ones into a hospice, which would of course subvert our staff, and pervert our concept. The device I developed
with the health authority [was] that it would serve only the administrative district of the city in which it was situated. We laid down the rule that the hospice would take anybody, but anybody, living in that district who in the judgement of the hospice’s doctors needed hospice care, without any payment, without anything. There would be no need to bribe, so long as you lived in the district. Anyone who lived outside the district – be it the prime minister’s mother, or the wife of the first party secretary of Leningrad (who as you can imagine was more important there than the prime minister) or the son of the richest man in the city (and by that time people were beginning to make fortunes) – if he did not live in the Primorski district there was absolutely no possibility of admitting him. So again: no bribes because there was no point in offering it; there was no physical possibility because you couldn’t hide. I mean, we looked after patients as soon as they were discharged from hospital. We knew where they lived, we looked after them at home, and when the time and the need arose we would take them to the hospice; so nobody could kid us about where they lived. So that way, we prevented the pressure of bribes for admission which worked in other medical establishments.

For all the widespread poverty some individuals were making fortunes. In the failing economy, empty shops and long queues were circumvented by hard cash. Everything had its price and health care was no exception. Where hospice had become established, better care for the dying was greatly valued and there was frequent competition for places. A policy was needed to nullify any advantage of wealth. Zorza continues:

We laid down another rule to prevent the temptation of – and the possibility of – pressure from the new rich. We said that we will not accept charitable donations from individuals – and especially from organisations, establishments, enterprises – unless they are entirely anonymous. We do not want to know who these people are because we do not want them then to come to us and say: ‘Look, we gave you this money, can you take my mother? Or my sister?’ Nor, also, because we knew how corrupt the business establishment was; how deeply it was penetrated by the mafia; how likely it was that within two or three years any of those businesses might find itself in court accused of all sorts of things. We did not want them to say: ‘Ah, well, we gave our money to the hospice,’ or to seek acceptance by the public on a plea that they gave their money to the hospice. So we said, ‘only anonymous donations.’ And it worked.

So what of the ‘gratitudes for service’? In this instance, Zorza distinguishes between an unsolicited donation after the death of a patient and that iniquitous practice whereby the strong elicit payments from the weak for routine care:

We laid down the rule to prevent it happening once the patient was within the hospice. We laid down the rule that no offerings in money or kind could be made to the staff, or accepted by the staff, until the patient was dead. Then we would, of course, accept it if the family wanted to give us something; but we didn’t ask for it.

Victor also paid attention to staff training, an area that was prone to abuse. While the trainee’s skill and adaptability were important, motivation also played a part. These were changing times and opportunities for funded travel – especially to the West – opened new doors for the student. Rigorous vetting was essential:

I got Dr Twycross to organise a course in Leningrad, not only for the additional Leningrad doctors who work in that hospice, but also for doctors from all over the country who might establish hospices of their own. We tried to check them very thoroughly. We took a very, very long time in checking them out because, unless we get the right people for the jobs, they could be the very people who would undermine
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the hospice in the ways that other medical establishments were undermined from within by doctors who were 'on the make, on the take'. There were about 35 doctors on the course. We rejected a great many before they came to the course because we found out things about them. I mean, even then we sifted them again when they arrived, and still sent several away. And during the course itself we still found that about a dozen were quite unsuitable, people not to be trusted for various reasons.57

In many respects, Zorza's stance was a lone fight against institutional corruption in the face of overwhelming odds. Faced with this struggle, few would have had the tenacity or inner resources to persevere, comfortable in their isolation. Yet Zorza continued relentlessly, inching slowly towards his goal. Disappointment was brushed aside and his uncompromising stance ensured that this new initiative was not consumed by predacious forces, to disappear from view like so many other projects. Instead, hospice care retained its core, a recognisable essence that patients and health professionals alike began to warm to. Crucially, in the space that Zorza created between hospice and other health systems, the central ideal could breathe and grow.

A familiar strategy

The experience of promoting hospice in the US proved invaluable to Zorza in his work in Russia. Having successfully linked the story of Jane’s death to an extended hospice campaign, endorsed by influential luminaries, he adapted the model to suit the Russian context.

The first task was to publish Death of a daughter in Russian and for help with this, Zorza turned to his old friend, Nikolai Yefimov, the editor of Izvestia. Yefimov had already provided accommodation for Victor and allocated Inessa Slavutinskaya to assist with the project. To Victor’s surprise, Yefimov now made a bigger commitment: overall patronage of growing hospice developments. Twycross noted in a letter of 1990:

Zorza is now going ‘national’ with the publication by Izvestia – thought of as the best Soviet newspaper – of a series of articles on hospice by two of its star reporters in the second half of this month. The editor of Izvestia has promised that his newspaper will see it as its task to lead a national hospice campaign, to do it with tact and delicacy, and to stick with it at least five years.58

Though pleased with Yefimov's offer, Zorza was quick to see the possibilities of wider support if the press could somehow be linked with the Church. So he contacted Patriarch Alexei to secure his agreement. The Patriarch concurred and Zorza wrote triumphantly:

Patriarch Alexei has accepted my suggestion that the Church should assume joint patronage with Izvestia – a partnership unique in Soviet history.59

Aleksandr Vasinsky and Aleksandr Krivopalov were Izvestia’s special correspondents assigned to the hospice story. ‘Dying the human way’ and ‘Living to the end’ are two of several articles published in 1990 which tell the story of Victor’s early life, the death of Jane, and the founding of the St Petersburg hospice. The reporters’ research had taken them to England to visit hospices in Oxford and Windsor. As a result, Victor’s advocacy was supplemented by thoughtful voices from the English movement and informed commentary from Vasinsky and Krivopalov. In their ground-breaking article ‘Say goodbye and depart’ the journalists state:
In England’s hospices, the fundamental rule is that the patient is the main person; his every need is met in an attempt to forestall his slightest desire. The outward appearance of the patients – the terminal patients – is astonishing; their hairdo, their clothing so unlike hospital clothing; their smiles; their neatness; a confiding sort of club atmosphere – friends among friends. In the article, Yvonne Johnston, the administrator of Thames Valley Hospice, Windsor, stressed the importance of keeping the patients within the community:

We didn’t want the hospice to be in an out-of-the-way place. It was important for it to be part of the town community, but nevertheless, that there should be plenty of open space so that people’s eyes should not be staring at walls, should have no obstacles in front of them – only space and sky.

Robert Twycross stressed the need for patients to feel safe:

The main thing our patients feel immediately is that they are under protection, that they are amongst their own people. As soon as they arrive, we as it were make it our duty to think about them always, for whole days and nights, both while they are alive and after they die. We think about them and their close ones. This immediately removes from the heart of a dying person a great weight of fear, of anxiety about the unknown.

The combined effect of these articles – made all the more emotive by reports from Lakhta and interviews with patients and staff – was to send shock waves through the Izvestia readership. Contentious issues were not overlooked. The hospice practice of truth-telling contrasted sharply with established practice; yet the issue was met head on:

The novelty of the hospices and the multitude of false rumours linked with it are included in the following rule: if a patient asks a doctor for his diagnosis, the truth will not be withheld from him. This is contrary to our medical ethic, to the concept about the humanity of ‘a lie to save’, about the practice of distracting a patient from the traumatic thoughts of inevitable death. In English hospices, there is complete openness between the doctor and the patient and his relatives; questions of dying are not only allowed, they are even encouraged. We’re not used to this, it is something – well, harsh.

Gnezdilov says we have lost the dignity of dying. Soviets have always been taught that everything’s going to be alright – aimed at life without end and a bright future. Modern science already knows how to make the last stage of a person’s life full of value. People come to the hospice not to die, but to live to the end. But for this we’ve got to abolish many of our stereotypes linked with the ideology of false optimism.

Such open rejection of Soviet ideology drew a group of influential thinkers and rising politicians towards the nascent hospice movement. Alongside new democratic principles, the hospice philosophy became emblematic of a moral perestroika and an overt expression of the more profound values of Russian life. It was a welcome volte-face that attracted national and international support.

In the West, Peter Ustinov was intrigued by the possibilities of this ideological shift which centred on the hospice movement. An interested observer of events in Russia, he linked the new movement to the emerging reforms and was pleased to appear alongside the distinguished academic Dmitri Likhachev in a written plea for hospice support. Little known outside of Russia, Likhachev was an eminent historian who had a strong affinity with Russia’s cultural and Christian heritage. His opposition to Stalin resulted in a four-year internment in a prison camp; on release he returned to
St Petersburg and the Institute of Russian Literature and eventually became chairman of the Soviet Cultural Fund. After Sakharov died, he was widely regarded as the conscience of Russia and an influential member of the Duma. The joint appeal by Ustinov and Likhachev was a substantial triumph for Zorza. Ustinov begins:

Soviet supporters of the hospice approach see it as part of the process of renewal.

Soviet Hospice Society (BSHS). He sees the article about Jane Zorza’s hospice experience as a signal contribution to Russia’s moral perestroika. He says: ‘I hope very much that it will impart to our society the moral shock which will help to lift the taboo and to stretch out a helping hand to our fellow citizens, sometimes condemned to an agonising death, and to their relatives and friends. In two generations, there were few families in our country which had not suffered from the evils of Stalinism. Today there are few families who do not suffer from the evil of cancer. In our society, the level of pain has exceeded all conceivable limits. Such is our nation’s tragic fate. We need a hospice movement — of that I am deeply convinced. We cannot rid ourselves at once of all the suffering which has become our accustomed, inevitable lot. To make each citizen a little happier, a little more protected, we need to take one small step after another; we need the efforts of thousands upon thousands of people. Hospice is one such step.’

Both Likhachev and Ustinov became key figures in the organisations established by Zorza to support the hospice movement. Likhachev became chairman of the Russian Hospice Society and president of the Leningrad Hospice Society. Ustinov was a founder member of the Leningrad Hospice Society and the British Soviet Hospice Society (later renamed British Russian Hospice Society). Anatoly Sobchak, a rising star of perestroika and the first democratically elected mayor of St Petersburg, was a founder member of all three societies. Orthodox leader Patriarch Alexei and Edvard Shevardnadze, Gorbachev’s minister for foreign affairs were members of the all-Russia society. Sobchak’s wife, Ludmila Narusova, agreed to chair the Leningrad Hospice Society. An academic with a background in history, she was an astute politician who became highly regarded as a deputy of the State Duma. Other members of the Leningrad Hospice Society
included Sharon Miles, wife of the US Consul General. The generic principles of each organisation replicated those of the all-Russia society: ‘The Russian Hospice Society is a not-for-profit organisation which provides care completely free of charge to all patients, regardless of creed, politics, race, or any other characteristic, particularly without regard to position in Society.’

Zorza’s recruitment to the British Soviet Hospice Society shows his now familiar attention to profile and balance. Led by the Duchess of Kent, presidents included The Archbishop of Canterbury (leader of the Anglican Church) the Cardinal Archbishop of Westminster (the most senior Roman Catholic in England) and the Chief Rabbi of the United Congregations of the British Commonwealth of Nations: an impressive trio to serve alongside Patriarch Alexei. Politicians included Margaret Thatcher (at that time prime minister) and Denis Healey – an elder statesman of the Labour Party. Founder members included the concert pianist Vladimir Ashkenazy, British TV presenter Martyn Lewis and Lady Braithwaite, wife of the British ambassador to Moscow.

Despite there being three hospice organisations founded by Zorza, he planned a fourth: the American Soviet Hospice Society. By 1991, Senator George Mitchell, Henry Kissinger and Sharon Miles had agreed to become founder members as had Yuli Vorontsov, a distinguished Russian diplomat with long-standing links with the United Nations. Moves were also afoot to recruit former members of the US-based Hospice Action Committee established by Zorza in the late 1970s.

In the summer of 1991 Victor found a new urgency when news broke of a forthcoming Russian-American summit to be held in Moscow during July that year – and the American President, George Bush, would be accompanied by his wife, Barbara. By this time plans were well advanced...
for a government building in Moscow to be redesigned as a hospice. There was no time to lose and Zorza, in typical fashion, wrote directly to the First Lady at the White House:

Could you help a fledgling hospice movement during your coming visit to Moscow? The first Russian hospice opened last year in Leningrad and six more are planned for other cities. A course for nurses will be held in July-September in Moscow, where a ruin of a building is to be converted into a hospice. Could you lay the foundation stone and visit the course?69

When Susan Porter Rose, chief of staff to Mrs Bush, sent an encouraging reply: ‘Your invitation to Mrs Bush to lay the foundation stone at the dedication of your newest hospice is under consideration,’70 Victor realised the opportunities immediately. As a media attraction designed to publicise the hospice movement the occasion would be invaluable.

Never afraid to build a story around himself, Zorza had also written to Bernard Gertzman, editor of the New York Times. Gertzman had a strong interest in Russian affairs having served in Moscow as the paper’s bureau chief, and in New York as foreign editor, where he supervised the paper’s coverage of the fall of Communism. Zorza:

[The visit] could yield a strong Sunday Magazine piece for the New York Times. At its simplest, it could be a story about a journalist who used his daughter’s death to help others. But it could be much more than that, about life and death, a father and daughter, about the Soviet Union and the West, about Russia then and now, and about the Himalayas, whither I’ll be going back as soon as my Russian mission is accomplished.71

In addition to the publicity value there was a unique opportunity for fund-raising. Yet herein lay a weakness – he lacked an American society through which to channel the monies. It was a serious problem. In view of the imminence of the visit, Zorza made a special case to his financial advisers:

The White House is giving favourable consideration to my invitation to Mrs Bush and will let me have a final decision soon. The US media publicity arising from the Bush visit is an unrepeatable opportunity to appeal to the public for donations, but we have yet to set up the American Soviet Hospice Society through which to collect such funds. Could we set up the Society now, before the Summit, pending the grant of a 501c3 number, acquire an accommodation address and ask for contributions to be sent there?

We will be appealing for donations to pay for medicines and equipment, for the training of staff by Western hospice doctors and nurses, and for the building of several hospices as centres of excellence from which the concept and practice may spread throughout the Soviet Union.72

Victor’s letter was dated 17 July 1991. The summit took place at the end of that month and on 31 July, the historic Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START) was signed in Moscow: George Bush for the USA and Mikhail Gorbachev for Russia. The laying of the Moscow hospice’s foundation stone, however, did not appear on Barbara Bush’s itinerary. A month later, the August Coup stalled further progress and the designated building never materialised. The project was abandoned amid great disappointment.

Despite some acknowledged benefits, Victor’s fondness for recruiting dignitaries was sometimes seen to be peripheral to the main thrust of hospice development, and, in some circumstances, counter-productive. Publicity material for a proposed auction of art works included a letter signed by Likhachev, Ashkenazy, Brodsky, Patriarch Alexei and Shevardnadze. Still not satisfied, Zorza wrote to Sotheby’s, the proposed auctioneers: ‘I’ve been told by some Russians who think they know about such things that it would help if the
letter was signed by Mrs Thatcher and Anne Getty ... Any
views?’73 ‘Overdoing things!’ came the reply.

Stephen Connor echoes this sentiment in relation to the US movement:

I think our efforts were to try and create a national organisation pretty much from the ground up. In some ways it helps to come at it from both directions and Victor knew a lot of prominent people. I think his preference might have been to create a higher level board, whereas we wanted to get all the hospices that were involved in the United States at the time together, and let them create an organisation, develop standards. In fact the governance of NHO – which is now the National Hospice and Palliative Care Organisation – the majority of the board are elected from the provider membership.74

Negotiating the Russian bureaucracy, however, was a painstaking process that was greatly eased by the sponsorship of key players. While this angered some lower ranking officials, Zorza knew the system and was prepared to use it to his advantage. Gnezdilov:

Victor realised that you couldn’t get anything done in the bureaucratic system and so he went to the important people, and became very well known. Everybody knew him; people like Sobchak and Shevardnadze, our foreign minister. But Victor made enemies because he wasn’t prepared to be passed from one person to another at the lower levels; and sometimes people only did what he asked, or accepted him, because of who he knew at the higher levels.75

Meeting people was an important part of this process and here, Zorza turned for assistance to the wives of diplomats: Sharon Miles (wife of the US consul general), Rebecca Matlock (wife of the American ambassador), Mary-Lee Katzka (wife of the head of Cultural Section and personal assistant to Rebecca Matlock) and Lady Braithwaite (wife of the British ambassador). He had a carefully considered approach, as shown in this letter to Mary-Lee Katzka:

I have just arrived in Moscow from Leningrad where we recently opened Russia’s first hospice, with the active participation of Sharon Miles, who became a pillar of the Leningrad Hospice Society. Sharon helped me by putting me on the invitation list so I should be able to make at the Consulate functions the acquaintances of her guests, Russians and visiting Americans, who might be willing to help us. Mrs Matlock suggested that I should ask you and your husband, in his capacity as Head of Cultural Section responsible for compiling the relevant invitation lists, to help me in the same way.76

It was at one such function given by Lady Braithwaite at the Embassy that Zorza met Lord Gowrie, Chairman of Sotheby’s auctioneers, and discussed with him the possibility of an auction to raise money for the hospices. He explains:

We have made tentative plans to ask Russian painters to donate their work. We will also try to obtain gifts of antiques. We are hoping that the support the hospice cause enjoys in high places in Moscow will enable us to make a breakthrough in securing export licences.77

Lord Gowrie responded favourably to Zorza’s overtures and offered the advice of staff with experience in the Soviet Union. In the uncertain days of 1991, it was an ambitious project. Gnezdilov comments: ‘Victor had big ideas and very big plans; there was always something exciting happening around Victor.’78 In the end, it was one of Victor’s schemes in which ambition outweighed possibility and he was left disappointed.

Despite these setbacks, there were outstanding successes. Death of a daughter resonated with those who
A challenge in Russia

wanted better care for their relatives during the last weeks of life. The influential articles of Vasinsky and Krivopalov gave a much-needed Russian perspective on the benefits of hospice care. Respected figures, many of whom had withstood tyranny and oppression, anointed the movement with integrity, and the hospice societies provided a protective shield against the predatory forces of vested interests.

Moscow

From the day he returned to Russia, Zorza was convinced that Moscow was the ideal place – the only place – to open his first hospice. With a reputation gained in the capital, the hospice approach would spread easily throughout the regions. The support of leading Muscovites and endorsement by the Ministry of Health would add kudos and prepare the way for further developments. Centres of excellence would quickly be established and as homecare began to supplement the in-patient units, the beneficiaries of this country-wide movement would be the Russian people. Such was the dream.

The reality was different. There was no shortage of effort as Zorza tirelessly pursued his goal. Yet despite the advocacy, the networking, the applications and the promises, there was no closure. One year dragged into the next. As the Soviet system crumbled, government officials were constantly replaced and each new bureaucrat required a fresh submission. Weary and frustrated, Zorza writes to BSHS trustee Martyn Lewis:

We were having a very difficult time of it before the Coup [1991] because the Party bureaucrats were being obstructive in the best Communist tradition. We had originally planned to open the Moscow hospice in mid-October, and had been promised a building by then, but in the middle of the nurses’ course we were told that the accommodation would not now be available until a year after that, if at all. We were being given the run-around because some people didn’t like the idea of a hospice, while others were trying to get their hands on a project which they saw as a way to wheedle money and goods out of the West. All my three years seemed wasted, there was no way to get round the obstacles, my attempts to tackle them head on were little better than banging my head against a brick wall. The whole thing seemed to be crashing round my ears. 79

These reasons, combined with Zorza’s deep-seated belief in a systemically corrupt bureaucracy, persuaded him that the answer lay in resolute perseverance and the discovery of flawless individuals who could take his ideas forward. He had a point. But tellingly, Inessa Slavutinskaya sheds a different light on the problem and suggests that the cause lay elsewhere:

The main problem was that our authorities in the Ministry of Health thought they could do everything by themselves and they didn’t need a person from England to teach them. They didn’t want to learn, you see. The second problem was that in any case the Soviet Union just didn’t have money for these patients. 80

In this complex scenario, Zorza was certain that education and training were crucial if hospice care was to gain ground and become accepted. Ever the optimist, he prepared for that day by training a nucleus of doctors and nurses in palliative care. He needed help, however, and in this instance turned to the Hospice Information Service, based then at St Christopher’s. Avril Jackson recalls:
I encouraged him to apply to attend St Christopher’s 1991 Building Bridges International Conference and, although I’d had quite a lot of telephone exchanges with Victor, it wasn’t really until May ’91 that I actually met him in the flesh at the conference. It was at that meeting that he stood up and encouraged people to sign up to go out to Russia and of course, as you probably know, the woman who was then Head of Nursing Education at St Christopher’s, Virginia Gumley, was I think first in line to go out and sign up and to go out to Russia.\footnote{81}

In fact, Virginia Gumley was one of several nurse tutors who offered to teach in Russia. The training need was quickly assessed and a course in palliative nursing – Compassion with Competence – was planned to run in Moscow from July to September that year.\footnote{82}

During this time, three teams of nurse tutors taught consecutively for one month each. The first team was led by Jean Roch,\footnote{83} the second by Virginia Gumley\footnote{84} and the third by Wendy Jones.\footnote{85} Russian nurses travelled long distances to attend. Virginia Gumley:

Thirty-two nurses from seven different towns attended, from Kaliningrad near the Polish border, to Omsk in Siberia. I found the nurses highly motivated, hard working and very keen to develop their skills. Many a teacher in the United Kingdom would have been delighted to have such a hard-working group.\footnote{86}

Two problems arose, however, one practical the other political. Wendy Jones:

One of the difficulties we had was finding patients to look after. We had a group of students drawn from seven different cities and we wanted to include some practical aspects of nursing care for those students; but first we had to find our patients because they were not gathered together in one place. And it was Jean Roch who bore the
brunt of those problems because she was the first of the three of us to take that course. And I know Jean won’t mind me telling you: one of the most incredible problems she had was where to find the patients. She approached the oncologists who discharged these people from their care and got lists of addresses and what-have-you, but the oncologists themselves never followed them up. Once they’d discharged them, having decided that they couldn’t do any more, they never knew what became of them after that. And so poor Jean would find herself standing on the doorstep or whatever, knocking at the door of a flat asking after somebody who might since have died. And you can imagine how traumatic that would have been for her and for everybody involved.\textsuperscript{87}

The second, very different problem, related to the August Coup, the attempt to seize power by a group of Communist hard-liners who thought Gorbachev’s reforms had gone too far. It was a worrying time for a group of Russian and British nurses dislocated from their homes and living in Moscow. The Soviet Union was in its last days. Tanks were on the streets of the capital. Confusion was rife and the situation changed by the hour. Wendy Jones recalls the impact:

During the time that I was in charge, the August Coup took place. This called for different management of the whole group and alterations to the timetable if any significant learning was to take place. The age range of the group was very wide (ranging from about 17 years to 50 plus). Consequently, there was hardly a member who had not some sort of emotional attachment to the soldiers or militia involved, either as boyfriend, fiancé, husband, brother or political activist. With the daily and nightly activities at the barricades and on the streets of Moscow, the anxiety of the group by nine o’clock each morning was high. As an educationalist, I recognised that nothing of any value would take place until this anxiety was, at least in part, relieved. It happened that one of the interpreters was also something of a political animal and I realised I would not get much out of him until he too knew what was going on. I therefore agreed that he should go to the centre of the action each morning – but carefully! – in order to gather the most recent news. None of this was reported in the press at the time, and in fact the newspapers were not published for a day or two. He would report to the group of students between nine and 10 o’clock each day and then there was some chance of getting on with the day’s \textit{modified} programme.

It was also at this time that the British Embassy was advising British nationals to leave the country. I therefore had to give my team members the opportunity, if they wished, to follow the advice given and leave Moscow. I am happy to report that neither of them did, though there was a moment when I thought they might.\textsuperscript{88}

Happily for Victor, when the Coup had run its course, the swing towards democracy and the elevation of supportive

\textit{Virginia Gumley: ‘I found the nurses highly motivated.’}
politicians foreshadowed a change in fortune for the hospice movement. Zorza writes:

[After] the counter-coup, our friends in the democratic leadership, who had earlier tried to help us but couldn’t prevail against the bureaucrats, were now in a position to give orders. Among our supporters are Edvard Shevardnadze, Anatoly Sobchak, and the Deputy Mayor of Moscow, Luzhkov, who was elevated by the counter-coup to deputy prime minister. He intervened personally to sweep away the obstacles which the party apparatchiks had been putting in our way. Work on the building we have been given by the Moscow Soviet is now going full speed ahead; we have been promised that the conversion will be completed by the New Year [1992].89

Energised by these developments, Victor embarked on a wave of activity. The Duchess of Kent was identified as a suitable person to lay the foundation stone of the Moscow Hospice. The following letter to her secretary – written one month after the Coup – gives an insight into Victor’s activity at this time:

The Leningrad hospice, which we opened last year as a pilot project, is now working at full stretch and has more than fulfilled its promise. We brought over to Russia five
teams of British Hospice doctors and nurse tutors to train Soviet physicians and nurses. They will form the nuclei of the Moscow hospice and of the six others we plan to start after we have opened the Moscow one. The health authorities of the six regions we chose have agreed to designate locations, provide buildings and the staff (to be picked and trained by us). We selected these regions with a view to providing focal points from which the concept and practice of hospice might radiate.

The doctor we have picked as the medical director-designate of the Moscow Hospice, a gifted young oncologist has just left this country after completing his training at Sobell House in Oxford. We have obtained a gift of Western medicines which will provide pain relief for all the patients of the Leningrad and Moscow hospices for one year, British nurse tutors will hold a second course in Moscow from mid-January to mid-March, after which we will be ready to open the Moscow hospice.90

As time passed, Zorza’s plans again became frustrated, on two fronts. First, the medical director-designate had a change of heart and decided that palliative medicine was not for him. At a stroke, the costly investment in education and training was lost and a new physician, sympathetic to the hospice ideal had to be found – urgently! Compounding this disappointment, progress with the building remained achingly slow. The time had come for decisive action or the stalled initiative would be lost.

Victor considered his options. In the end, after a painful reappraisal of the whole Moscow project, he adopted a new approach: a home care service based in the designated – yet incomplete – hospice building, coupled with the appointment of an experienced doctor who could bring leadership and stability to the service. Though running against the grain of his previous strategy, this fresh thinking was an outstanding success on both fronts. And the key to this success lay in the appointment of the new medical director.

Vera Millionshchikova was a radiotherapist who, over the years, developed an interest in caring for those abandoned by the medics. By the early 1990s she was looking towards retirement but then heard of Zorza and decided to attend his seminar on hospice care. When they met, she was captivated by his commitment, his strength of character, and the way hospice care seemed uncannily in tune with her interests and practice. She recalls:

Victor told me: ‘Although you don’t know it, what you’re doing is part of the work of a hospice.’ And that’s when I started to work with him. At this time in Moscow, it was very
difficult to organise a hospice, but by 1994 we had begun a home care service organised from two or three rooms in a government building. Then, little by little, we grabbed the lot and opened an in-patient hospice in 1997.\(^{91}\)

In conditions that were less than ideal, the home care service made important contributions to the relief of suffering and the growing awareness of hospice during the time that the in-patient unit was being prepared. Serving a population of 350,000 in the centre of Moscow, around 500 patients had been cared for by the spring of 1997. A day hospice opened in 1995.\(^{92}\)

It took eight years for the in-patient hospice to come into being. Unsurprisingly, feelings of excitement were tinged with relief on the day of the opening. Guests of honour included Eileen, Victor’s partner, and the indefatigable Wendy Jones. As the ceremony was performed by Naina Yeltsin – wife of the Russian President – thoughts turned to Victor and his unremitting battle to complete his task. And of the sadness that he never lived to see this day. Although Victor died during the previous year, he became aware before his death that the home care service was thriving and the premises were being adapted for hospice use. A stream of photographs,
warmly received by Victor, recorded each phase of development, and he was pleased to receive news from friends and BRHS trustees after their visits to the capital.

Though Russia’s first hospice opened in St Petersburg, Moscow always had a special place in Zorza’s heart. It was here that he made his first, enthusiastic, attempts to introduce the hospice ideal to the Russian people; and here, where he exhausted himself before turning his attention to St Petersburg. For all that, it was not in his nature to give up. Despite his acute sense of failure, his persistence was rewarded when hospice care was finally adopted by people with influence. Success in Moscow would take longer than in St Petersburg, but before he died, Victor knew that the outcome was not in doubt.

Zorza’s death was keenly felt in Moscow. To Vera Millionshchikova, and many others in Russia, he had become a friend, an ally, a mentor and a strategist – and his clarity of approach would be missed, especially in the changing times of the 1990s. For her part, Dr Millionshchikova had no intention of letting Zorza’s role become overlooked, and regularly
Victor Zorza: A life amid loss

Under her leadership, the hospice continued to expand. By 2001 around 80 staff at First Hospice, Moscow, cared for 200 cancer patients per month. The workforce included: five doctors; 23 nurses; 30 junior nurses; six social workers; three psychologists; a lawyer; a volunteer chaplain; and about 200 other volunteers. Millionshchikova:

We have a volunteer co-ordinator and each day we decide how many people we need to bring in. For example, on the in-patient unit they might need volunteers to help feed the patients and volunteers to help take patients outside – so there’s probably only five or six patients on the ward – but the volunteers are chosen and called in.

Significantly, Millionshchikova continued to maintain Zorza’s vision of the hospice ideal:

‘In our poor country, with such poor people, we simply can’t ask patients for money to die. Everything is free.’

Zorza would have been pleased to hear it.
Notes

2. Nikita Sergeyevich Khrushchev (1894–1971) became first secretary of the Communist Party after a power struggle following Stalin’s death in 1953, a position he held until 1964. He famously denounced Stalin at the 20th Party Congress in 1956, accusing him of mass murder. He lost credibility after the Cuban missile crisis of 1962 and was deposed by Party members in 1964, after which when Leonid Brezhnev came to power.
3. Mikhail Sergeyevich Gorbachev (b. 1931) led the Soviet Union between 1985 and 1991, when his attempts at reform brought an end to the Cold War (1945–91) but caused the collapse of the Soviet Union.
6. Boris Nikolayevich Yeltsin (b. 1931) was President of Russia from 1990 until December 1999. He is known for his rush to the White House in Moscow to defy the August Coup of 1991 and for his speech from the turret of a tank.
7. For example, the truth concerning the massacre of Polish officers during the Second World War as authorised by Stalin.
8. The 20th Party Conference was held in 1956.
21. The nomenklatura were people in positions that needed Party approval; they were the political and Party elite.
36. ‘The defined daily dose is the assumed average maintenance dose per day … Drug consumption figures are presented as numbers of DDDs per population per day for comparative purposes in drug utilization studies. In the INCB technical publications, DDD
figures were calculated as the annual average dose of drug consumed, computed over five years, per million inhabitants in a given country.’ World Health Organisation, *Achieving Balance in National Opioids Control Policy* Geneva: WHO, 2000: 30.


41. A ‘sovet’ is one of the legislative assemblies that existed at local, regional, and national levels in the former Soviet Union.

42. Inessa Slavutinskaya, IOELC interview, 24 February 2003.


44. Inessa Slavutinskaya, IOELC interview, 24 February 2003.


50. In 2002, the salaries of physicians were still around 70 per cent of the average wage in Russia.


58. Letter from Robert Twycross to Kurt Wuest, director of Mundipharma, 3 September 1990.

59. Letter from Victor Zorza to Earl of Gowrie, chairman of Sotherby’s, 28 November 1990.


64. Dmitri Likhachev, an intellectual and author of more than 1,000 scholarly works, devoted his life to defending his country’s Christian and cultural heritage. He resisted Stalin and survived four years (1928–32) in Soviet forced-labour camps. Likhachev was appointed to the staff of the Institute of Russian Literature in St Petersburg and eventually became a member of the Duma.

65. Andrei Dmitrievich Sakharov (1921–89). Born in Moscow, Andrei Sakharov studied physics at the University of Moscow and became associated with the development of the Soviet hydrogen bomb. He later became critical of Soviet totalitarianism and a strong advocate of human rights, winning the Nobel Peace Prize in 1975. When he opposed the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan (1979), he was exiled in Gorky without trial (1980). In 1986, Gorbachev brought him back to Moscow where he supported the move towards democracy.


67. Anatoly Alexandrovich Sobchak (1937–2000) was a St Petersburg lawyer who played an important role in the collapse of Communism in Russia. A leading statesman, he represented the city in the Supreme Council of the Soviet Union and was a friend of Boris Yeltsin, the first President of independent Russia.

68. From the proposed constitution of the American Soviet Hospice Society, July 3 1991.


70. Letter from Susan Porter Rose to Victor Zorza, 8 July 1991.


74. Stephen Connor, IOELC interview, 1 April 2002.

75. Andrei Gnezdilov, IOELC interview 2, 4 April 2003.


78. Andrei Gnezdilov, IOELC interview 2, 4 April 2003.


81. Avril Jackson, IOELC interview, 1 September 2002.

82. Training courses were held during the 1990s at various venues in Russia, including Ivanovo, Tula, Kemerovo and Yaroslavl. See:

83. Jean Roch worked at St Luke’s Hospice, Sheffield.
84. At this time Virginia Gumley worked at St Christopher’s Hospice; she was later to work for the charity Health Prom.
85. Wendy Jones was working at St Francis Hospice, Romford; she later became director of the British Russian Hospice Society.
87. Wendy Jones, personal communication, 7 May 2003.
4 A hospice for St Petersburg

Dr Andrei Gnezdilov, a man of impeccable honesty, a psychotherapist …
When I found him I realised that there would be a hospice. Victor Zorza

Zorza and Gnezdilov: kindred spirits

As Zorza turned his attention from Moscow to St Petersburg at the close of the 1980s, he was acutely aware of the magnitude of his task. At that time, the Moscow project could only be seen as a failure. Drive, awareness-raising and the endorsement of dignitaries had simply not been enough. In his heart of hearts, Zorza knew he needed a well respected Russian to co-lead the project. And he was to find such a person in the psychiatrist Dr Andrei Vladimirovich Gnezdilov.

Gnezdilov was born in St Petersburg in 1940. His mother, a sculptor, was part Russian and part Polish, with roots in the country now known as Lithuania. Her family name of Slobodinskaya is mentioned in the ‘blue book’ of Polish gentry. Gnezdilov’s father was an academic who graduated from the prestigious Military Medical Academy of St Petersburg. After serving in the navy as a medical officer, he returned to the Academy to take the chair of Biology and Parasitology, whereupon he undertook research into the causes of encephalitis.

By contrast, Andrei was interested in children and studied at St Petersburg’s Paediatric Institute. A superb storyteller, he communicated easily with the young and earned himself the sobriquet of ‘Baloo’, the affable bear of Kipling’s Jungle Book. The name stuck, characterising his gentleness and approachability; even his mother used it!

When the focus of Gnezdilov’s work moved away from the sick, he felt less fulfilled and, as a result, he began to expand his interest in psychiatry. This interest intensified when he worked with patients at the Petrov Cancer Institute. At first hand, he witnessed their fears as physicians told them they were improving, but they knew otherwise: no chance to prepare for death in a conspiracy of silence.

As he developed a new career in psychotherapy, Gnezdilov addressed the forbidden area of death by turning to his storytelling. Existential issues were confronted through innovative role play. In this scenario, the sick discovered a language to express their emotions while the bereaved found
an outlet for their grief. He recalls how he first approached this area and the effect it had – on both patients and himself:

I was telling the relatives that your loved one isn’t here any more, but your love has stayed and your memory has stayed. And when they started speaking to me they started to show such feelings that I was – not distressed – but shaken. And they grabbed me by the hands and cried. This let them show their feelings and relieved them of the weight they were carrying.3

Gnezdilov’s ground-breaking work was recognised by the Second Medical Institute when he was appointed Assistant Professor in the Department of Psychiatry. Though the pressure of work increased, he maintained his links with the Oncological Institute and his commitment to terminally ill patients and their families. At this time, few resources were available for the dying:

After I began working in the Oncological Institute in 1973, I started writing to the Ministry of Health for support for patients with no prospect of life. The answer came back, ‘we don’t have enough resources for the living,’ but I still continued my work. I had hopes that I could open a unit for such patients, but this didn’t happen.4

It was at this point that Zorza, frustrated by his failures in Moscow, turned his attention to St Petersburg and determined to seek out this visionary psychiatrist who had come to his attention. In an interview with the Izvestia reporter, Aleksandr Vasinsky, Zorza comments:

In general, I didn’t start talking about hospices in the USSR until I found someone – you might say someone specially created for this undertaking. I succeeded in finding him in Leningrad: Dr Andrei Gnezdilov, a man of impeccable honesty, a psychotherapist. For 15 years he’d been knocking on every door with his method of alleviating the suffering of dying cancer patients. But he got no response. When I found him I realised that there would be a hospice.5

Gnezdilov remembers his first meeting with Zorza:

I met Victor in 1989. I was working with dying people and I heard that a journalist had been looking for me. It was Victor; he had come from Moscow and wanted to set up a hospice in St Petersburg and wanted to meet me. I remember that his standards were very high and he had a clear honesty. He spoke what he felt and if he didn’t agree with something, he would say so straight away. But he was very demanding. His time counted for nothing and so he thought other people’s counted for nothing as well.6

Zorza’s acknowledgement of Gnezdilov is important. In view of Victor’s high profile, his well-known association with public figures and his many publications, Andrei’s role might easily be overlooked. Yet it was Gnezdilov, the local
man, who ensured that hospice philosophy became firmly embedded in Russian culture. Michael Siggs:

Andrei really was the pioneer. He was the pioneer because the Russians had no medicines at all to treat the pain of death; and Andrei was using his psychoanalytical powers, using his knowledge gained over a lifetime, using alternative methods of holistic treatment, to ease their death.⁷

It was through these alternative methods – which included what Gnezdilov called *psychodrama* – that patients would begin to articulate their story of life, focusing eventually on the relationship with their illness and what it meant to them. Consultations frequently took place in Andrei’s apartment, where an array of items supported his approach: dolls, keys, bells, sculptures for creating evocative shadows and a wardrobe of historical costumes. Ann Dent, a Macmillan nurse who undertook the training of Russian staff in 1990 wrote in her journal:

Went to Andrei’s for our picnic lunch. Up seven flights to find an amazing flat. Bells everywhere, very dark. His mother was a sculptress – many statues on shelves covering one wall. More bells in a tiny room up a twisting staircase leading to views over the city. Wonderful, dusty, aged atmosphere, almost as if time stood still.⁸

Dinner guests would occasionally get an unexpected insight into Gnezdilov’s methods. It was something Andrei loved to do: invite friends to his apartment and add to the occasion by asking them to select a costume and dress in it for the entire evening. Andrew Hoy, now the medical director of Princess Alice Hospice, Esher, accompanied Robert Twycross and David Frampton to St Petersburg in 1991 and recalls:

Andrei had set up a form of psychotherapy, which he called psychodrama. This involves Andrei getting his patients to act out particular problems and difficulties, including symptom control difficulties, by wearing eighteenth-century clothing. And it may well include quite a bit of banging of cymbals and drums and so on. And he invited us to his apartment and so there was a slightly bizarre scene of Robert Twycross, David Frampton and myself and indeed Victor getting dressed up in bits of eighteenth-century clothing, banging percussion instruments of some sort, and having supper: that’s a slightly surrealist memory.⁹

Gnezdilov and Zorza had much in common. Not least was their deep-seated empathy for the suffering poor; their acquaintance with the end of life; and their need for each other to fulfil their individual dreams. Likewise, both men would willingly share their thoughts with anyone who would listen, in some cases with surprising results. Gnezdilov:
Victor always wanted to talk about death. He would talk to taxi drivers even as they were driving. And one day he told a taxi driver all about his views on death, and when he arrived at his destination the taxi driver wouldn’t take any money from Victor. Victor was very proud of that!

Gnezdilov was no less passionate. Prior to the opening of Lakhta, Izvestia’s Aleksandr Vasinsky spent time at the hospice where he joined the training courses and traced the development of this new approach to the sick. Gnezdilov played a leading role and fearlessly addressed the issue of truth-telling. Vasinsky:

I’ve seen him at work with the medical sisters of the future hospice. I was impressed by Gnezdilov’s analysis of Tolstoy’s story The Death of Ivan Illych. He demonstrated that Ivan Illych was a cancer patient, although there’s not a word about that in Tolstoy. And he gave a marvellous commentary on the atmosphere of falseness which came from the theory of living optimism, of cheering people up, hiding from the sick man the bitter truth about the outcome of his illness – the falseness which links the relations of the sick man with his relatives, of the relatives with the sick man, of the doctor with both. ‘We all have to die, master’ – the servant Gerasim told the truth and opened for Ivan Illych the way...
to reflecting about life and death – and this made Tolstoy’s
story a revelation for many generations of readers.¹¹

As their relationship developed, Gnezdilov detected
another side to Zorza’s personality; more vulnerable and
fragile than his public persona. Eventually, Gnezdilov began
to feel responsible for him:

Victor lived very simply. He was quite frail and he didn’t
care for himself very well. He would go out without a coat
when it was very cold and you often had to take care of him
– remind him to put his coat on or to eat. He would just
forget about himself.¹²

The development of this remarkable relationship signalled
the turning point in Zorza’s fortunes. All the politicking and all
the hard work had little impact on his two major obstacles:
first, he was not a medic; worse, he was not a Russian.

By the time he met Gnezdilov, Zorza’s energy was all but
exhausted, his morale low and his dream fading. Yet lifted by
Andrei’s integrity, his steadfast commitment and his knowl-
dge of the city’s health system, they generated a dynamism
that became unstoppable. Not for the first time, Zorza owed
much to the support of another and, as we shall see, to the
favourable social and political climate of St Petersburg.

Gnezdilov was also indebted to Zorza for he, too, could
not have succeeded alone. Without Zorza’s networks and flair
for publicity, his dream of a home for the dying would have
remained just that. Instead, it was brought to fruition, first
in a service and then in a social movement which defined his
life. The measure of what this meant to Gnezdilov is summed
up in the speech he gave in 2001, when he received an
honorary doctorate at Essex University, UK:

More than 10 years working in the hospice has meant a
great deal for me personally. Above all it has made me
aware of the importance of spirituality in the world. It has
provided an understanding of the sense and purpose of my
life, which remain constant whatever systemic or psycho-
logical changes there may have been. It is in the delight
expressed, not in the literary way, but in the at times unob-
trusive heroism of simple people in the face of death. It has
revealed the existence of an inner life in which suffering may
be transformed into a positive experience for the individual
and into a treasure of the human spirit … Sooner or later
death reveals to us more than does life itself. For many it
reveals the existence of one’s own soul, order in the chaos
of human life, beauty in the thick of ugliness and finally,
and above all, the smile of God in the midst of endlessly
changing life.¹³
Establishing the hospice

When Zorza and Gnezdilov outlined their hospice plans to St Petersburg’s politicians in the winter of 1989, they were prepared for a long struggle. Yet despite the conflicts – and Victor’s unshakable demands – they prevailed. No coincidence, perhaps, that these new ideas gained ground in Russia’s ‘window on the West’, a city that claims 13 Nobel prize-winners and a long association with creativity and innovation.

It was in St Petersburg that Mikhail Glinka composed *Ruslan and Lyudmila*, an opera based on Pushkin’s poem of 1820; where Dostoevsky attended the Army Engineering College before developing his interest in religion; and where Anna Akhmatova’s poetry was first acclaimed by the intelligentsia of twentieth-century Russia. It was here where Kandinsky reflected on the meaning of spirituality and where Pavel Filonov explored the nature of humanity through his unique artistic style. Likewise, Stravinsky developed his love of music in St Petersburg, and both Tchaikovsky (in the nineteenth century) and Shostakovich (during the twentieth century) studied at the city’s Conservatory.

From a Russian perspective, St Petersburg has long been regarded as a city rather different from the rest. Helpfully for Zorza, Western influences had combined with a strong cultural tradition that focused on issues around justice, equity, and the condition of the people – fertile ground for a new philosophy of care. So, unlike in Moscow, Zorza gained the support of leading politicians. As Mayor Sobchak became persuaded of the benefits of hospice care, doors began to open. Decisions were both taken and actioned. Crucially, a building was found which met with Zorza’s approval, although it was very dilapidated.

**Finally** – we got the building; a broken-down, terribly neglected, long, wooden hut, which had been a dumping ground – a hospital it was – but in effect a dumping ground for those sick whom no other hospital in the city wanted. Some terminal cases, by no means all, just people that for various reasons the other hospitals didn’t want. It was not just a shambles; it had been looking after these hopeless cases for years without adequate resources, without adequate staff. And one sort of example of what it meant in physical terms was that the patients who couldn’t often be moved and taken to the toilet would pee in their beds; and this would just seep down on to the floor; and into the floor; and into the walls, for years and years. When I first came to that place, the stench outside, before I even got within kicking distance of the door was so overwhelming that I sort of had to take a terrific grip on myself to actually go into the hut, into the building. And my first few times there I was sick repeatedly. I had to keep going off to the toilet and retching. That’s what we started with. Now I had also had other offers of the best, a wing of the best hospital in Leningrad, but I finally picked this one because this was exactly the kind of establishment that we would have to

*Lakhta Hospice, St Petersburg.*
work with in the rest of Russia if we wanted to establish hospices. This was the worst of the worst; the poorest of the poor, which is about what Russian resources were available. And we needed to show that we could make a hospice out of a place like this.\textsuperscript{23}

As arrangements for the transfer proceeded, Zorza looked to Britain for support and was overjoyed when Cancer Relief Macmillan Fund agreed to send a team of nurses for a period of six weeks in the summer of 1990: their brief was to prepare Russian nurses for the introduction of hospice care. These Macmillan nurses, Anne Brown, Ann Nash and Ann Dent,\textsuperscript{24} famously known as ‘the three Anns’, played an invaluable role communicating the concept of hospice to Russian nurses, then translating that concept into nursing practice. Ann Nash:

Before we left for the Soviet Union, we didn’t know whether the Hospice building had been allocated, so we aimed to start a home care service and teach as many nurses as possible about the principles of palliative care. However, when we arrived, our objectives changed from day to day to reflect the changing situation.\textsuperscript{25}

Anne Brown:

Part of our task was to give advice on the existing building that was to become the first hospice, and so we gave time when the nurses were busy doing other things to make notes. The first thing, obviously, was to have far smaller bed occupation, so from 60 it went down to 30. And it was a nurse who said, ‘Make it more like home.’ If anybody rang the bell in the night, all of the strip lights go on and the whole ward would have to wake up. We suggested that if it was more like home they might have an individual light. And we said something about privacy – because if anybody needed anything done, however sensitive the situation, there were no curtains, no screen. So could we have some screens that could be used, because that’s the sort of thing that Russian people have in their homes. And we needed to have a day room where the ambulant ones in the winter could get up and get out of the ward environment. So one of the four-bedded – well it was probably an eight-bedded ward – was ‘sacrificed’ to become a day room.\textsuperscript{26}

Gradually, the environment changed. Flowers appeared. Pictures were hung on the wall. An icon was strategically placed until a chapel could be constructed. And as the changes gave rise to a different ethos, signs of support came from unexpected quarters. Ann Dent:

In the middle of the afternoon, we were interrupted in our teaching by the arrival of two chaplains. They had come to bless us all by sprinkling holy water from a rusty old bucket carried by two nurses. The chief chaplain dipped an aged
brush into the bucket and sprayed the water around. This was followed by a sermon on the wickedness of the world and how we should be an example.27

This was not the only surprise. Victor had been so anxious to recruit personnel who would be fully committed to his cause that he had drawn on his media network to call for nurses from across Russia, and beyond. Anne Brown:

It was quite astonishing. Nurses came from as far as the Ukraine and gave up their holidays; they came when they’d been on duty for two days, which included the night shift; and they came because of Victor. He had laid the seeds and talked on the radio and people knew what was going on – and we had far, far, far too many nurses than we could possibly cope with on one course. So there was a sense of sorting out and trying to assess who we could actually
include. But there was huge enthusiasm and I remember one thing that really, really struck me. This boy – must have been about 12 or 13 – came. His grandmother brought him because his father was dying of cancer at home, in his grandparents’ home because his marriage had broken up; and this child had said: ‘I want to go and learn how to look after my father.’ And very sensitively we had to say: ‘Look, this isn’t the right moment, but we’ll come and see you at home and we’ll help to give you some thoughts about how you might be able to deal with this.’

Despite their apparent enthusiasm, not all the nurses had come willingly. Some had been sent by government officials; others were just curious. Though the selection process had been rigorous, tensions arose, putting a strain on both teachers and students. Ann Dent writes:

Today was very hard. I could feel that I was tired at the beginning of the day and was completely exhausted by the end. It has felt like pushing a very heavy load uphill and making little progress. I learnt that none of this group wants to work in the new hospice but have come to find out what we were up to! I am increasingly aware that we have very few nurses to run a 25-bedded in-patient hospice and certainly not enough to run a home care team. We will need to recruit more nurses and run another course before we leave. Victor has informed the press to advertise for more applicants.

This unforeseen turn of events displeased Victor and in his frustration he became irritated by the smallest occurrence. He was aware of the project’s fragility and the effect that a lack of trained staff might have on the opening of the hospice. Delays were unthinkable. In an attempt to maintain progress and meet his preconceived targets he drew deeply from his personal resources. As his efforts intensified, those around him sought respite from his growing impatience and tactfully avoided his company. Gnezdilov’s response was to resort to the Russian tradition of giving flowers, a human touch that lifted the spirits.

Meanwhile, the commitment of the students and the changing composition of the groups began to cause concern. Recruits were essential, but so was a willingness to embrace new ideas and adapt to change. Effecting this transition could be disconcerting. Alongside the challenges posed by unfamiliar concepts and the vagaries of translation were ingrained barriers to truth-telling and deeply held fears about communicating with patients. A moment of inspiration brought an unexpected, though very welcome, breakthrough. Anne Brown:

The role-play arose from a question: ‘So what do you say to your patients when they ask you what’s happening to them?’ And the answer back from all of them, crossfire round the room: ‘Oh, but we’ve been taught to lie.’ And that’s when, totally spontaneously, two of us decided: let’s do a role-play. And one of us was the patient and one of us was the nurse. And it’s extraordinary what you can do with words and actions; it was almost as if you could hear
a pin drop. So that role-play, nothing special – but the fact that they were so absorbed in it, broke through the attitude, ‘well we’ve been taught to lie and there’s no point in talking to us about psychological or emotional care’. And it was so spontaneous.30

As the number of nurses grew and confidence became widespread, a home care service began to emerge. It was a new experience for both patients and nurses. In 1990s St Petersburg, each person was allocated a living space of about six to nine square metres. So it was not uncommon for two or more families to share a small flat, sofas doubling as beds, and one toilet for everyone. Those without relatives to care for them at home were afraid of hospitalisation in case they lost their flat, thereby becoming homeless as well as sick. With such few resources and little pain relief, patients frequently became depressed. It was to these people, so often forgotten, that the new service brought comfort.

These new methods of caring attracted great interest and Zorza ensured that his colleagues from Izvestia were around to publicise the benefits. Aleksandr Vasinsky:

The present staff at Lakhta, picked by competition, is highly praised by Ann Nash. No question of them upsetting a patient, or forgetting about one. To work here, people of a ‘special frame of heart’ are needed. I wasn’t in the least bit surprised when I saw in the hands of one sister, a prayer-book; her life completely changed when she heard a sermon and the words of St Augustine entered her mind: ‘We are restless until we find rest in God.’31

Recruiting staff with a ‘special frame of heart’ was difficult. Alongside the demands of the dying were long hours and a very poor wage. Victor’s strategy of awareness raising was successful in part, but more staff were needed. Gnezdilov had the answer: personal contacts and word of mouth:

It was very important to find a kindly person, and then he found somebody else or he had somebody among his friends he could recommend. And so it came in a chain.32

Dr Galina Moskalenko, later to become medical director, recalls how she came to work at the hospice:

The beginning of the ’90s was a very hard time for St Petersburg and its citizens because a lot of people lost their well-being. It was the start of our economic reforms and many people couldn’t get adequate medical treatment and couldn’t afford it, and also couldn’t even get food. So it was a natural choice [for me] to go and work in a social clinic. After also working some shifts at Lakhta hospice, Andrei Gnezdilov said: ‘You’re a hospice person, you should be working here.’ I have been here ever since.33

Some staff answered a religious vocation and arrived at Lakhta with a desire to become involved in social work; a public testimony that contrasted sharply with Soviet ideology.
Since the first days of the revolution, religion in Russia had been under pressure. A decree issued in 1918 confiscated church buildings and lands. In 1925, the League of Militant Godless was formed to eradicate religion throughout the country. Four years later, Stalin’s Law of Religious Associations banned churches from all work with children and involvement in health care. During the twentieth century, Communist repression resulted not only in dwindling congregations but also in the denial of the Church’s role in social care and its support for the poor and the sick.\(^{34}\)

Yet as Communism declined, a religious awakening occurred which in St Petersburg saw the establishment of the Christian Inter-church Diaconal Council (CIDC), a new NGO which rearticulated the concept of *diakonia* – a form of loving service.\(^{35}\) This service focuses on the marginalised members of society: groups which during the 1990s included alcoholics, the homeless, drug addicts, the elderly and the dying.

The opening of Lakhta hospice coincided with the founding of the CIDC organisation and the emergence of a spiritually and socially aware group of people, ready to become aligned with a more holistic form of care that affirmed the uniqueness of the patient. Zorza was aware of this religious ground-swell and was careful not to underestimate its potential. During his days in Moscow, he had sought the advice of Metropolitan Anthony,\(^{36}\) leader of the Russian Orthodox Church in Europe. Now, he was careful to nurture links between the Lakhta hospice and its adjoining church. He writes:

> The training is going well. Most of our trainees are believers and we have made contact with a local church in the area where the hospital we are converting into a hospice is located.\(^{38}\)

Tatiana Kotova, executive director of CIDC:

> I got baptised when I was about 20 years old and I simply think it was a natural reaction for a new Christian to start some activities to help somebody. So I got involved in social work, and I worked in Lakhta hospice for two years as a nurse.\(^{39}\)

Once training for the hospice was under way, Zorza turned his attention to the opening ceremony, planned for 28 September 1990. In reality, the event would mark the reallocation of a small, partly refurbished social hospital for use as a newly designated hospice; a word which few Russians had heard and only a handful understood. Symbolically, however, it was of huge importance; the harbinger of a new approach to the dying that was grounded in alternative values and a different ethical perspective. There was a need, therefore,
for a high-profile event that would appeal to the public and interest the media. Vladimir Ashkenazy held the key.

During the 1970s Ashkenazy had been a supporter of Zorza’s hospice activities in the US. Now, he was asked for help in Mother Russia. A performance for hospice patients by the internationally acclaimed pianist would send an incontrovertible message about the importance of this neglected group of people. It would also demonstrate that beauty and passion were unrestricted, accessible to all, and – importantly – located outside the exclusive confines of the healthy. The opportunity was too good to miss.

There were problems, however. Ashkenazy’s visit was linked to a whole-orchestra tour arranged by the London-based company Harrison Parrott. Despite the best efforts of their Russian collaborators, Goskoncert, only 27 single rooms could be provided in St Petersburg when the requirement was nearer 100. As August drew to a close, the orchestra prepared to vote on whether the tour should be cancelled. It was at this point that Zorza approached Sobchak:

Sobchak called me on his return from America last night, was distressed at the foul-up, and said he would act immediately. The director of the Leningrad Philharmonia has allocated 90 single rooms this morning.

In the event, Ashkenazy travelled alone. But, true to his word, he fulfilled his promise to perform in Lakhta Hospice. He recalls:

There was a tiny upright piano and I played for a few minutes. It was a very tiny hospice, miserable really. I was very impressed that there was one because it was very difficult to arrange; but it was so primitive, so miserable. It’s impossible to describe it; to say how sad it was to see those dying people in very dismal conditions. But the personnel were wonderful; they really took great care of them. They were wonderful; they really took great care of them. They
were devoted people. I was very impressed by that just as much as by the misery of the accommodation.\(^{42}\)

Ashkenazy's performance in such surroundings drew great acclaim and the occasion was widely publicised, just as planned. Vasinsky wrote:

Lakhta is a Leningrad suburb with lots of green places clothed in purple and gold in autumn. At the side of the main road is Hospital Number 11, a one-storey building – the wards, the corridor where Zorza's friend the pianist Ashkenazy performed, his piano was bought specially. On the porch and on benches sat the patients who were able to walk, in overcoats and wraps on top of dressing-gowns. On the day before the opening of the hospice, quite a bit of re-equipping was going on and there were still quite a few of the old patients of the former hospital. To tell the truth, I rather liked this incompleteness, because in view of the occasion – the first hospice! And the man behind it a foreigner! And television invited! – they might have wanted to push out of the way the 'unsuitable' patients 'spoil[ing] the picture'. But this wouldn't have been allowed either by Zorza or the head of the hospice, Andrei Gnezdilov.\(^{43}\)

As the hospice became established, Victor next considered the training needs of doctors and in the spring of 1991, turned once more to Twycross for help. A course was devised under the aegis of the International School for Cancer Care and Sir Michael Sobell House (Oxford) WHO Collaborating Centre for Palliative Care, sponsored by BRHS and the Russian Hospice Society. Twycross invited Drs Andrew Hoy and David Frampton to join him and in June of that year, the three of them led a two-week course, based at the Training Centre for Trade Union Holiday Resort Staff in Lakhta. Twenty-nine doctors attended from Russian cities that included Ivanovo,
A hospice for St Petersburg

Course for doctors (Leningrad) June 3–14, 1991

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<th>Week 1</th>
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<td>0900</td>
<td>Welcome Hospice care (DF)</td>
<td>Psychological reactions to terminal</td>
<td>Morphine by mouth: fact versus fiction</td>
<td>Neuropathic pain (RT)</td>
<td>Dysphagia, dyspepsia, hiccup</td>
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<td>1100</td>
<td>Lakhta Hospice (AG)</td>
<td>WHO method for relief of cancer pain</td>
<td>Anxiety and depression (DF)</td>
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<td>Non-drug treatment of pain</td>
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<td>Patient assessment (AH)</td>
<td>Discussion</td>
<td>Constipation and diarrhoea (AH)</td>
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<td>1600</td>
<td>Pain and cancer: evaluation</td>
<td>Nausea and vomiting (AH)</td>
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<td>Gastro-intestinal obstruction (DF)</td>
<td>Palliative Oncology (AH)</td>
<td>Dyspnoea and cough (AH)</td>
<td>The needs of carers (DF)</td>
<td>Pain relief: review (RT)</td>
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<td>1100</td>
<td>Hypercaemia Delirium/confusion (AH)</td>
<td>The last 24 hours (RT)</td>
<td>Spiritual care (DF)</td>
<td>Corticosteroids in palliative care (AH)</td>
<td>Psychosocial aspects of care: review (DF)</td>
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<td>14.00</td>
<td>Discussion</td>
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<td>Discussion</td>
<td>Care of the family (DF)</td>
<td>Where do we go from here? (AG)</td>
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<td>1600</td>
<td>Lymphoedema</td>
<td>Ethics of hospice care (RT)</td>
<td>Genito-urinary symptoms (AH)</td>
<td>Discussion</td>
<td>Concluding remarks</td>
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AG = Andrei Gnezdilov; AH = Andrew Hoy; DF = David Frampton; RT = Robert Twycross

Moscow and Omsk, as well as St Petersburg. Bilingual transparencies were prepared in Oxford, together with a number of lecture notes in Russian. Twycross recalls:

Clearly, we were starting from scratch, and that’s true of any country where you have to introduce palliative care; you start off with nothing. But, of course, we go in for two weeks. We really don’t know all the problems. I mean, it always amazes me that something eventually does come of it when everything is stacked against you.⁴⁴

That something should come of the course was mandatory for Zorza and in the event, was achieved by careful planning and wide-ranging course content. The aim was to broaden the perspective of care and move from the physicians’ familiar focus on symptom control to encompass the ethics of hospice care, spirituality, and care of the family, dimensions not previously associated with Soviet medicine. Nina Khmeleva⁴⁵ was one of the doctors on the course.
I was involved in hospice care at the very beginning, when the first hospice opened in Lakhta. Before this, I was a surgeon – but the work wasn’t interesting for me and I was seeking a new place of work. And the doctor at Lakhta invited me to work at the hospice. So I asked: ‘What is this?’ and she said there were English nurses showing their practice with oncology patients in the hospice, and that we’ll have more time to spend with the patients than we had before. All this interested me because I thought a lot about communication with patients. So, if one part of my work became psychotherapy and psychology, it was very interesting to me. Naturally I couldn’t imagine what the work really was, or where it was going to go.

I was invited to the first course at Lakhta in 1991, when Robert Twycross, Andrew Hoy and David Frampton were the lecturers. I became aware, step by step, what hospice work means, and there were lots of ideas about how to develop this work. Later I was invited to the course at Michael Sobell House [Oxford], and visited Princess Alice Hospice [Esher] and Farleigh Hospice [Chelmsford].

Such a response was exactly what Zorza had hoped for. His self-appointed task, therefore, was to vet applicants prior to the conference to ensure that resources were not being wasted on uncommitted physicians. Considering the sensitivity of this process, he was surprisingly successful. David Frampton:

The one I never really worked out was how Victor found doctors who were amenable to the idea and keen to put themselves on the line at almost no pay. I mean that was an extraordinary challenge – how to pick the difference between a Russian who would work with you and a Russian who would make life difficult.

Despite his achievements, Zorza revealed a haunted, overzealous engagement with the issue that seemed grounded in his past. Andrew Hoy:

One of the thoughts that certainly David Frampton and I had was that Victor’s attitudes were also rooted in the bad times of the Second World War, and the Cold War, and he really had a very jaundiced view of the Russian ability to be open-minded, open-handed. He was very suspicious and cynical – almost bordering on paranoia – about what the emerging new Russian state would actually do with palliative care and hospice care, and I think one of his preoccupations was to make sure that the new Russian state didn’t pervert what he saw to be the absolute values of the hospice movement. And that was really quite clear – he worried a lot about that and he tried very hard to make certain that the message that was being conveyed and discussed by us was the true hospice word and not likely to be perverted by what was emerging in Russia, which was clearly very new and uncertain for both them and for us.
Relieving pain and suffering

In 2002, Professor Andrei Novik and his team, working from his base at the National Cancer Research and Treatment Centre (NCRTC) in St Petersburg, suggested that the prevalence and severity of cancer was greater among Russian patients than among patients in other European countries, due largely to Russia’s sparse health resources. They noted too, that opioid consumption was significantly lower than in other European countries and that the WHO analgesic ladder was not the standard approach to pain management in Russia. Two years later, Dr Georgy Novikov (Moscow Centre for Palliative Care) gave an astonishing insight into the care of the dying in Russia: ‘Oncologists lack the time, polyclinic staff lack the skills, relatives lack the training, and the patient suffers.’

Had Zorza lived, these findings would have come as no surprise to him; he had been saying as much since 1989. Although medical use of narcotic drugs was fraught with difficulties, relief from suffering was integral to the hospice ideal and somehow, the issues had to be addressed. Only then could Russian hospice patients experience the sense of peace that Jane had found in Michael Sobell House.

Suffering and pain are complex phenomena. Suffering is thought to confront the whole person, threatening destruction and causing strong feelings of disintegration. It occurs in many forms. A study of suffering during the 1990s identified 24 different types among patients. These ranged from meaningful suffering to hopeless suffering. In some instances, patients held on to their suffering in an attempt to manipulate their circumstances. This resonates with the idea of suffering as battle; a resistance to the flow of life, or factors within it such as political power – a view that became embodied in the experience of the Holocaust survivor, Victor Frankl. For Frankl, holding on to life in a Second World War concentration camp, his suffering became encapsulated in a search for meaning and a reaffirmation of the potential to be human. This search was actualised through his continuing capacity to give and receive love, activities which gave rise to seminal ideas that would later influence the philosophy of hospice care.

Pain is widely regarded as a contributor to suffering. As part of the human condition, both its origins and significance have been problematic. Notions of punishment imposed by an angry God are not uncommon, submerged under the surface of everyday life. For a long time, acute pain and chronic pain were thought to be interlinked, separated only by a timescale of discomfort. Yet chronic pain is now regarded as a different phenomenon, imbued with an elusive mystery. Unlike acute pain, it is not a universal experience and in the absence of physiological causes, attention has come to focus on the role played by psychosocial factors. For those living with chronic pain, the effects have been described as an ‘ontological assault’ that ultimately strikes at the very concept of self. To study the pain of patients, therefore, requires entry into the patient’s world, thereby setting pain within the wider context of family, the workplace and the community.

It was this understanding of pain in its wider context that contributed to Cicely Saunders’ view of ‘total pain’: a theoretical, overarching response to patient experience, a feeling that ‘it was all pain’. While acknowledging physical symptoms, total pain gave credence to other factors located in the social, psychological and spiritual domains, ‘even in the soul itself’.

In St Petersburg, this concept of pain was readily received by Lakhta’s trainee nurses. Within a short time, the
Participants on the course for doctors held in Lakhta, 1991. Zorza is front row centre with Gnezdilov’s daughter. On Zorza’s right is Inessa Slavutinskaya; behind her and Zorza is Robert Twycross. Andrew Hoy is to Zorza’s left, next to him is Nina Khmeleva. David Frampton is front row extreme right, Gnezdilov back row extreme right.
benefits of this approach were plain, a situation which the three Anns found gratifying:

The patients were asking for more than just pain relief. Photographs we took show the response to the care and love these first hospice nurses were offering, to meet needs that so often included inner loneliness, perhaps the greatest pain. They were recognising new areas of deprivation and emotional distress and their attention was to the unique needs of each individual. One old lady said after her first visit for many months to a patch of wasteland that would become the garden. ‘Today I tasted the leaves, I smelt the grass.’

Despite these advances, the gains would never be maximised without a new approach to the use and availability of opioids, morphine in particular. The three Anns reported on this issue and drew attention to wide-ranging problems: a fear of addiction and worries about the potential for crime; prescribing restricted to oncologists who rarely see patients not undergoing curative treatment; a ceiling of 50 mg per day – insufficient for patients with advanced cancer; a twice-daily routine of morphine by injection (when available) that established a regime of pain – partial relief – followed by recurring pain for the patient; and the unavailability of oral morphine, in either tablet or powder form.

From his experiences in 1991, Andrew Hoy describes the impact of this regime on patients:

What seemed to have been happening was a total nightmare in terms of hospice symptom control. It would seem that particularly patients at home would be allowed a minimal amount of morphine – morphine was available but only by injection – and that had to be delivered by what they called the ‘ambulance’. So one of the many doctors, and there was no shortage of doctors there, would have to get in the ambulance, go to the patient’s home and give them an injection of morphine. And if they were lucky that happened perhaps once or twice a day, but as we all know an injection of immediate-release morphine will only last for three or four, possibly five hours, so that was almost worse than no pain relief at all: it was a glimmer of pain relief and then the return of the pain for the remainder of the 24-hour period. So we had to try and say to them: ‘Well, look, if you’ve got slow-release morphine, you’ve got a far, far better tool to use for pain control.’

Zorza knew that if hospice care was to relieve suffering, there had to be changes: to policy, certainly; but a change in attitudes was also necessary. Some success was being achieved through education but it was not happening quickly enough, nor was it reaching the influential Soviet committees where policy decisions were made. Consequently, in a win-or-lose-all strategy, Zorza embarked on an audacious plan to impact simultaneously on policy-makers and clinicians: he would import a consignment of slow-release morphine tablets (MST) and secure the recognition of Lakhta Hospice as a World Health Organisation demonstration project – a first in Russia on both counts.

Remarkably, by September 1990, Zorza had achieved his first objective – a donation of 14,000 MST tablets from Kurt Wuest, director of the pharmaceutical company, Mundipharma. The story unfolds in correspondence between Twycross and Wuest:

Victor Zorza returned yesterday from Russia where he had several long meetings with health minister Denisov and former minister Chazov, both of whom have been most helpful in furthering his plans for launching a hospice movement in the Soviet Union. Denisov has agreed that the 14,000 MST tablets you kindly donated to Mr Zorza may be sent immediately to the hospice he established at Leningrad Hospital Number 11. They are needed urgently, and Zorza
would be most grateful if you could despatch them by air and inform him when this is being done so he can arrange customs clearance in Leningrad.\textsuperscript{62}

Such clearance proved difficult to get. Twycross continues:

The head of the Soviet Pharmacology Committee, deputy minister academician Lipakhin [the Soviet deputy minister of health] was far less responsive than the others, if not downright hostile to Zorza’s request that the present ceiling of 50 mg per patient per day be lifted. Zorza was told that Lipakhin will be arriving at WHO offices in Geneva (Monday) to enquire, among others, whether the hospice use of morphine is at least as widespread, harmless and generally accepted in the West as Zorza argued. He is supposed to be seeing the head of the narcotics department of the WHO. The information he will take back with him will be considered in Moscow on September 5 by the Pharmacology Committee, which will have before it both positive and negative recommendations … Zorza has lobbied some other members of the committee including the author of the standard Soviet textbook on medical drugs used in Russia, Moshkovsky, and thinks that their cautious but on the whole favourable response may help to overcome academician Lipakhin’s scepticism if the information is presented forcefully and convincingly by WHO.\textsuperscript{63}

Lipakhin did not in fact visit the WHO offices in early September (1990) but, two weeks later, the WHO director from USSR was in Moscow and delivered some literature to him. Noreen Teoh (WHO) writes: ‘[the director] tells me that the deputy is a personal good friend.’\textsuperscript{64}

Finally, Zorza achieved his second objective when Lakhta Hospice was designated a WHO demonstration project. Jan Stjernswärd writes from Geneva:

We hereby designate the Leningrad Hospital No 11 – Lakhta Hospice, as a WHO Demonstration Project in the USSR for the purpose of applying in practice the principles of pain control set out in the WHO guidelines \textit{Cancer Pain Relief} and in \textit{Cancer Pain Relief and Palliative Care: Report of a WHO Expert Committee} (Geneva 1990). The Lakhta Hospice is to submit a report to WHO on its experiences during 1991 in applying these guidelines. We trust that the appropriate health authorities will assist Hospital No 11 in its endeavours to improve patients’ quality of life.\textsuperscript{65}

A month later, after Zorza had been granted permits to import morphine into Russia in the form of MST and to store, prescribe and dispense the drug at Lakhta, he received the following telegram:

\begin{verbatim}
To: Chief Department of Health, USSR
From: Napp Laboratories Cambridge
Attn Mr Victor Zorza
Re: Your order MST Continus Tablets
Goods are on board BA Flight No BA 878 Departed Heathrow
27.1.91 ETA Leningrad 15.05 local time
Regards
Donna Bloodworth
Export Dept, Napp
\end{verbatim}

His perseverance had been rewarded.

In the autumn of 1991, as the first anniversary of Lakhta hospice approached, it was a different Victor Zorza who reflected upon events in St Petersburg. Energised and optimistic, the frustrations of Moscow faded into the background, seen now in the light of tangible achievements, of which there were many. Andrei Gnezdilov had committed himself irrevocably to the hospice ideal. The city council had donated premises, now adapted for specialist use. British nurses had trained their counterparts at the hospice. A course for doctors had created widespread interest. The
World Health Organisation was providing valuable support. Amid all else, doctors had access to slow-release morphine, previously unknown in Russia, and this was having a positive impact on the suffering of patients.

There was, of course, much to follow as hospices became established throughout the Russian Federation. Yet this moment bears witness to Zorza’s perseverance and indomitable spirit. By translating the hospice ideal into the reality of Lakhta, with all its struggles and challenges, he demonstrated a heartening example of what was achievable in Russia. It is remarkable, too, that these successes came in the suboptimal climate of social, political and economic unrest. It is no surprise, therefore, that the beacon which burnt brightly at Lakhta was seen from afar and quickly became a source of hope to others.

Notes

1. St Petersburg is Russia’s second largest city, encompassing 4.7 million inhabitants. It was founded by Peter the Great on a group of islands in the Neva delta in 1703. Named after St Peter, the city became the capital of Russia until 1918 when the proximity of the invading German army caused the government to relocate to Moscow. Four years earlier, on the outbreak of hostilities between the two countries, the city’s Germanic-sounding name of St Petersburg was changed to the more favoured Petrograd. After the death of Lenin in 1924, Petrograd became Leningrad until the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, when the city’s original name of St Petersburg was restored after a city-wide ballot.

10. Andrei Gnezdilov, IOELC interview 2, 4 April 2003.
16. Anna Akhmatova (pseudonym) Gorenko (1889–1966) began writing as a child and became a cult figure in pre-revolutionary St Petersburg. Her former husband was executed for anti-Soviet activities (1921) and no work of hers was published between 1923 and 1940. Her lucid, carefully crafted poetry exemplified the Acmeist style and despite suffering artistic repression, was much loved by the Russian intelligentsia. Works include: *Requiem* London: Elek, 1976; *You Will Hear Thunder* trans. D.M. Thomas, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1990.
17. Wassily Kandinsky (1866–1944) spent a formative time in St Petersburg which impacted upon the development of his abstract art. Works include: *Colourful Life*; *The Singer*, *Picture with White Border*, *Composition*; and *Around the Circle*.
18. Pavel Filonov (1883–1941) developed a personal artistic style that sought to explore the nature of human existence; it led to his analytical painting and the establishment of the Filonov School. Filonov died during the siege of Leningrad in 1941. Works include: *The Holy Family*, *The Collective Farm Worker*, and *Formula of the Cosmos*.
19. Igor Stravinsky (1882–1971) grew up in St Petersburg and
developed a love of music from an early age. *The Firebird* and *Petrushka* – his commissioned works for the Russian Ballet – achieved great acclaim and secured his reputation. His third ballet, the controversial *Rite of Spring*, caused outrage in Paris (1913) with its pagan overtones and dissonant percussion. A prolific and innovative composer, he was to exert a heavy influence on music in the twentieth century.

20. Pyotr Tchaikovsky (1840–93) studied at the St Petersburg Conservatory and, after briefly holding a teaching post in Moscow, returned to St Petersburg where he wrote many of his famous compositions. Among his works are well-known ballets (*Swan Lake*, *Sleeping Beauty*), symphonies (No 2 in C minor, *The Little Russian*, No 6 in B minor, the *Pathétique*), orchestral pieces (*1812 Overture*) and concertos (*Violin Concerto* in D major).

21. Dmitri Shostakovich (1906–75) was born in St Petersburg and studied at the Conservatory. His graduation piece, *The First Symphony*, was seen as a major achievement. In 1941 Shostakovich wrote his Eighth Symphony: inspired by the siege of Leningrad, it came to symbolise the wartime resistance of the Russian people. Shostakovich was denounced in 1936 and again in 1948, when he and his family suffered considerable hardships. Today, the political elements of his life and work are the subject of debate.


24. Anne Brown was based in the Macmillan Education Centre, Basingstoke District Hospital; Ann Dent and Ann Nash were based at the Dorothy House Foundation, Bath.


26. Anne Brown, IOELC interview, 10 June 2003


35. Pavel Gistichtchev, the executive director of CIDC (in 2001) explains the meaning of *diakonia* as follows: ‘diakonia refers to charitable activities carried out for socially excluded groups and both methodologically and financially supported by the Church. The Church’s role in the broad sense is to admonish and require a humane attitude to needy people from both state and society.’ Annual report: Christian Inter-Church Diaconal Council of St Petersburg, 2001: 3.

36. Anthony Bloom – Metropolitan Anthony of Sourozh (1914–2003). Born in Lausanne, Switzerland, where his father was a member of the Russian Imperial Diplomatic Corps, André Borisovich Bloom grew up in France after the 1917 Revolution changed the social structure in Russia. Drawn to the Orthodox priesthood, he studied theology, practised medicine, embraced monastic vows, and in 1949 moved to London after his appointment as chaplain to the Fellowship of St Alban and St Sergius – an ecumenical society which sought to further relations between Anglicans and the Orthodox. In 1957 he was consecrated bishop of the Diocese of Sergiev, becoming elevated to Archbishop in 1962, and given oversight of all patriarchal parishes in Western Europe in 1963. These were difficult times for the Orthodox Church and Metropolitan Anthony responded by focusing on the Eastern tradition of prayer and spirituality. Over the years, he became regarded as a spiritual leader of great stature, particularly among intellectuals, and came to play a leading role in the life of the Orthodox Church in Britain.

37. David Frampton taught on the doctors’ course at Lakhta in 1991 and recalls that at that time, the church ‘had only just been reopened; it had been a cinema for a while. There was an iconostasis [which separated the altar from the nave] but you couldn’t get beyond it. No music and little old ladies who did the singing. It was quite, quite moving actually, if you go to a service there.’ David Frampton, IOELC interview, 11 April 2003.

38. Fax from Victor Zorza to George Vasilenko c/o Annie McKenzie Young/Vova Ashkenazy at Harrison Parrott, 13 August 1990.


40. Harrison Parrott provide artist and project management for classical music.

41. Fax from Victor Zorza to Jasper Parrott, (undated) late August 1990.

42. Vladimir Ashkenazy, IOELC interview, 16 September 2004.


44. Robert Twycross, IOELC interview, 18 December 2002.

45. Nina Khmeleva has worked in hospice care since the opening of Lakhta Hospice in 1990. She then moved to Kolpino Hospice,
St Petersburg, before becoming Chief Doctor at St Olga’s Hospice – a converted ward at the city’s Hospital Number 14.

47. David Frampton, IOELC interview, 1 April 2003.
62. Letter from Robert Twycross to Kurt Wuest, director of Mundipharma, 3 September 1990.
63. Letter from Robert Twycross to Kurt Wuest, director of Mundipharma, 3 September 1990.
64. Letter from Noreen Teoh (WHO Cancer and Palliative Care Unit) to Robert Twycross, 11 September 1990.
‘After I had retired from the paper and Victor had retired as well, I had a letter from him saying he must have led me a terrible dance with his insistence, and doing things because he wanted them done; and he wished to apologise for all the trouble that he caused me, which I thought was very magnanimous of him.’ Geoffrey Taylor
this period that Zorza was sheltered by Ilya Ehrenburg, the celebrated novelist and journalist, who encouraged young Victor to fulfill his own desire to write.

In 1942, after leaving Russia with the Anders’ evacuees, Zorza’s Air Force Wing came under British command and he was transferred to England. When the war ended, despite his hopes of returning to Kolomyja, Zorza found himself in exile, a Pole without a home. Once Churchill and Roosevelt agreed to the ceding of eastern Poland to Stalin (Yalta, 1945), Zorza found himself among other compatriots, many of them military personnel, who would not return to a region that had become part of the Soviet Union. Deeply affected by his wartime experiences, and eager to track developments in Eastern Europe at the beginning of the Cold War, Zorza successfully applied for a position with the BBC as a monitor.

This was a formative period in his life. During the next five years he would hone his analytical skills, develop his writing style, find the woman he would marry, become the father of two children and move from a hostel into a home of his own. It was here at the BBC that he began to develop his analytic approach that would later lead him to the Journalist of the Year award in Britain (1968) and in the US – to a Pulitzer nomination in the ‘distinguished commentary’ category (1977).

In essence, the monitor’s role was to record and transcribe broadcast information that governments were disseminating to their populations. It suited Zorza perfectly. His fluency in Polish, Russian and Ukrainian was a great asset. Gradually, he extended his brief by introducing an analytic element into his work and checking the accuracy of his findings against reports published in the Russian Press. By collating snippets of information from a variety of sources, Zorza found that, amidst the confusion, a picture gradually emerged. Then, by a process of informed deduction, he could ‘get that bit of the jigsaw puzzle which wasn’t visible otherwise’.

As he carefully honed these skills, Zorza believed he had developed a new way of understanding the complex reports which emanated from the Soviet Union. While still at the BBC, he attempted to get a succession of articles published in *The Guardian* but was constantly unsuccessful. Finally, he hit upon a ruse to deceive the copy-takers by claiming he was sending a piece commissioned by *Guardian* editor Richard Scott – at a time when he knew that Scott was out of the office. It worked. Zorza’s first article, on nationalism in Ukraine, tracked the rise of a young Ukrainian who had been made secretary of the Moscow Communist Party, a certain Nikita Khrushchev (1950). From then on, his articles appeared regularly.

In 1953, when the BBC discovered Zorza was freelancing with *The Guardian* he was summarily dismissed. Undaunted, he moved to Munich and joined the newly established station, Radio Liberty. Funded by the US government, the station was created to combat Bolshevism by transmitting open discussion on current affairs to the Soviet Union in a way that was common in the West. Importantly, the station managers were relaxed about Zorza’s work for *The Guardian* and he found the time spent in Germany both personally and financially rewarding. At Radio Liberty he became an invaluable member of the team due to his firsthand knowledge of the Soviet Union and his ‘extraordinary ability for putting himself in the shoes of the Soviet listener’. Although managers at the station hoped to extend his contract, Zorza’s wife, Rosemary, wanted to take their two children back to England. Moreover, Victor was concerned that a further stay in Germany could adversely affect his application for British
citizenship. Consequently, he returned to England and a job with The Guardian in 1955.

The 40 years during which Zorza was involved in radio and newspaper journalism can be divided into four distinct periods. First, the latter years of Stalin's life 1950–53; second, the Khrushchev years 1953–64; third, the Brezhnev years 1964–82; and finally, a time during the 1980s when he focused on India. With the exception of this latter period, when Zorza publicised the problems of the poor through the life of an Indian village, he concentrated almost exclusively on Communism and the state of East-West relations. In every respect he considered himself professional, and whatever he wrote was governed by one essential consideration: ‘Journalism has got to be interesting, otherwise it won’t get into the papers.’

During the latter days of Stalin and the ascendancy of Khrushchev, Zorza penned his articles while working at the BBC and Radio Liberty. Once he joined The Guardian, he was published regularly and eventually produced his own syndicated column, Communist World. For almost 25 years, Zorza nurtured his sources, collected a mountain of clippings and painstakingly weighed the evidence in his inimitable fashion.

There was much to be done. During the Khrushchev years, Zorza assessed the impact of de-Stalinisation, the new emphasis on farming, the erection of cheap accommodation, and the emphasis on consumer goods. He noted the investment in research and the successes of the Soviet Union in the space race with the US. He was in Budapest in 1956 and saw at first hand the Soviet intervention that cost thousands of Hungarian lives. And he acknowledged how Khrushchev agreed to a test ban treaty but installed Soviet missiles in Cuba: a time when the world held its breath at the prospect of war. When Khrushchev backed down, Zorza was unsurprised that Mao Tse-tung was incensed at the perceived humiliation, and thereafter, he tracked the deepening of the Sino-Soviet split.

During the Brezhnev years, Zorza monitored the anti-reformist swing and the reappearance of Stalinist ideology. The Soviet leader proved very different from the transitional figure everyone expected. During his leadership, Zorza noted the stagnation that occurred as Brezhnev’s position grew stronger and the economy declined. Unlike Khrushchev, Brezhnev was reluctant to engage with the West. In his dealings with the US, he displayed the full rhetoric of a typical cold warrior; surprisingly, however, he acceded to the Strategic Arms Limitation Talks Agreement (SALT 1) of 1972.

Zorza was never afraid to stand alone. He correctly predicted the Soviet intervention in Czechoslovakia (1968) and the succession of Hua after Mao’s death (1976). Yet his methods were not infallible. When he declared the Khrushchev memoirs a CIA forgery, he was famously proved wrong; an error he subsequently acknowledged with good grace. Nevertheless, many regarded him as the leading Kremlinologist of his day. As such, he was invited to develop a new course at the Johns Hopkins University (Washington), based on his analytic approach, which could be rolled out across America.

It should not be forgotten that during the 1970s, the body of work produced by Zorza was set against the background of his daughter’s illness and death. Also, that much of his energy – both physical and emotional – was expended writing his co-authored book and hospice articles. It was partly due to Jane’s death, but also to Eastern Europe’s changing political climate, that he turned away from the Communist world towards an Indian village in the Himalayas.
It was in the context of this remote place, cut off from the outside world by a river, that Zorza placed the problems of the world’s poor before an international readership. He believed that in the daily life of one small village, the big issues faced by humanity would become evident. In turn, he hoped this might lead to a new appreciation of the struggle to survive, faced daily by the disadvantaged. It was a high-risk venture. Zorza never claimed to be an expert on India; but by immersing himself in the life of the community, he considered himself an expert on his village.

Zorza’s articles from India introduced his readers to the social impact of life within the caste system. They highlight the gulf between the wealthy and the poor, seen in the parallel practices of polygamy and polyandry. For the richest villager, his two wives bore unspoken testimony to his status; among the poor, three brothers shared one wife or four brothers, two. Also revealed is the iniquitous practice of bonded labour, where a debtor may be subjected to years of work to repay the most trifling amount; a practice widely condemned as contemporary slavery.

Zorza’s articles give a valuable insight into his thought, values and journalistic approach. Jonathan Steele, Victor’s colleague at The Guardian, accurately described his writing as ‘spare’. This was due, perhaps, to his (lifelong) feelings of apprehension when faced by the intricacies of the English language; it was also influenced by his admiration for Ernest Hemingway, whose books he carried with him and style he tried to replicate.

At the preparation stage, Zorza spent long hours assembling his data. He then wrestled interminably to find just the right word to convey precisely the right meaning. That done, his articles were defended against subeditors’ cuts with the utmost ferocity to preserve the balance, the very exactitude, of the piece he had striven so hard to perfect. At such times, when his last-ditch resistance produced the inevitable offer of resignation, his beleaguered editors found his intransigence infuriating, if completely predictable. On Zorza’s part, there was no intended offence; his uncompromising nature would allow nothing less.
5 From refugee to émigré

‘I got a job at the BBC as a Russian monitor... and for me the job was a further opportunity to learn.’ Victor Zorza

Occupation

In the New Year of 1945, as the last weeks of the war in Europe approached, the thoughts of the Polish Diaspora turned longingly towards home. Those who, since 1939, had survived the invasion of the Nazis from the west and Soviets from the east, followed by a cruel and bitter war, dreamed of returning to a free land with secure borders internationally guaranteed. Victor Zorza was no exception.

Back in August 1939, Zorza was just 13 years old when news of the ‘friendship pact’ brokered between the German foreign minister Joachim von Ribbentrop and his Soviet counterpart Vyacheslav Molotov stunned the world. Ideologically opposed, the Nazis and Soviets had nevertheless contrived an agreement which secured large parts of Eastern Europe for the Soviets whereas Germany had a free hand in Central and what remained of Eastern Europe. The result of this accord was that Germany invaded Poland on 1 September 1939 and annexed 75,000 square miles (population 21 million) while the Soviets invaded on 17 September and took 77,000 square miles (population 13 million).

The aims of these two totalitarian regimes were strikingly different. The Nazis sought the destruction of a defeated nation, leaving only a remnant to be used for slave labour. Stalin’s intention was to liberate the oppressed masses and then create a new society built on Soviet lines. Yet initially, both strategies had the same purpose: to destroy the social order which had existed in Poland before 1939. Alan Bullock writes:

The imperfections of pre-war Poland were undeniable, but it had represented an ordered society. Defeat and occupation had gone a long way to shake its foundations. Instead of allowing it to recover, the activities of both the occupying powers were directed to replacing it with disorder, insecurity, disorientation, turning upside down the normal world in which the population had existed. A vacuum was deliberately created in which everything familiar disintegrated, and millions of people found themselves at risk, naked, without protection from the law or authority, many separated from
their families, deprived of their place in society, unsure any longer of their identity.²

In the west, the Nazis divided Poland into two territories of roughly equal proportions. The first region, which included the western provinces of Poznania, Polish Pomernania and Silesia, became incorporated into the Reich; the second – known as the Government General – consisted mainly of central Poland and included the cities of Warsaw and Cracow. In his report to Pope Pius XII in 1941, Cardinal Hlond gives a chilling view of life in the incorporated lands:

We have to do with people drunk with hatred of all that is Catholic and Polish ... The Poles are being systematically exterminated. They are capriciously shot, or condemned to die of hunger. Only Germans get any butter, which is rationed. The expulsion of the population from the province of Poznania continues ... Executions continue every day throughout the occupied territory. At least 40 per cent of the clergy of the archdiocese of Gniezo and Poznan are in prison.³

Meanwhile, life in the Soviet zone was no less harsh. The ‘racial enemies’ of the Nazis were replaced by the ‘class
enemies’ of the Soviets: the intelligentsia, professionals and government officers. The NKVD had a long history of political terror that was grounded in the first days of the Revolution and the formation of the Cheka, a political police force specifically designed to suppress counter-revolutionary activities. Since inception, this variously named organisation (it later became the KGB) was characterised by deception, executions and deportations to the Gulag – all in the name of national security.

In Poland, little time was lost before the Soviets arrested and deported political and other leaders from across the region. In all, around 1.8 million Poles – civilians and military personnel – were deported from eastern Poland to Soviet camps, some of which were located in Central Asia; others were in the hostile climate of Arctic Siberia. Within a year, half the deportees were dead, victims of the effects of deprivation and human brutality. Many did not survive the journey:

Farmers, bankers, students, railway workers, professors – people from all walks of life – were taken with their entire families in four vast railway convoys that left in February, April and June 1940, and in June 1941. Communities were rounded up at night by the NKVD and taken to rail depots. When enough people had been gathered, they were packed into unheated and windowless cattle-wagons for rail journeys of up to 6,000 miles, sometimes lasting for over a month. Food supplies were meagre and starvation, frostbite, disease, derangement and infanticide claimed a huge toll. Corpses had to be pushed through a hole in the floor or the wall which also served as a toilet. Once unloaded from the trains, many faced further journeys in the hold of river-boats or on the backs of lorries, as they were dispersed to the most remote recesses of the Soviet Union. Once at their
destination, large numbers continued to die through lack of food, disease, or exhaustion. They worked in appalling conditions as slave labourers in mines, cutting timber, building roads or digging canals. Regimes at the camps were controlled by the NKVD and were often brutal, designed to extract the maximum amount of work from each person. Those unable to work due to infancy, old age, illness or infirmity were often denied food rations.  

Alongside this ‘decapitation’ of Polish society, rigged elections saw the elevation of Communist sympathisers to leading positions. General Władysław Anders, captured in 1939 and later held in the Lubyanka prison (Moscow), writes:

On October 22, 1939, the Russians held ‘elections’. They were an illegal farce since they were carried out in territory occupied by force and held in subjection by the bayonet. Votes could only be given to officially designated candidates, almost all of whom were Soviet citizens and brought into the country specially for the occasion. The ballot-boxes were in the care of Communist committees and NKVD officials. An old Jewish acquaintance of mine (I had often stayed at his inn during manoeuvres) visited me in hospital and said: ‘We were told in our borough to vote for two Communists whom nobody had known before. We decided, my family and many friends, to give in blank votes. It might be that they were afraid to do it, but I know I gave a blank vote myself. In spite of this, both candidates were unanimously elected. There was not one blank vote in the ballot-box.’

On 22 June 1941, more suffering was unleashed when Hitler launched Operation Barbarossa, advancing eastwards along a thousand mile front using his favoured blitzkrieg (‘lightning war’) strategy that involved fast-moving armies. Within weeks, more than 100 divisions of ground troops – around three million men – had pushed deep into Soviet

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Władysław Anders (1892–1970)

Born near Warsaw in November 1892, Anders was one of many Poles who served in Tsarist forces during the First World War. He later joined the newly formed Polish army and fought against the Red Army in the Polish-Soviet War (1919-20). In 1939 he was captured by the Soviets and joined the 1.8 million Poles deported to Soviet prisons and labour camps during the next two years. After the ‘amnesty’ of 1941, he was freed from prison to form a new army to fight alongside the Allies. He subsequently led his troops out of Russia and into Persia, where they formed the Second Polish Corps (the Anders Army) and combined with the Eighth Army in the Middle East. In January 1945, the Second Polish Corps was despatched to Italy and fought with distinction at Monte Cassino, Ancona and Metaura. When the Allies’ leaders adopted the ‘Curzon Line’ as the Polish-Soviet Frontier (Yalta, 1945), lands in eastern Poland became part of the Soviet Union. As a consequence, Anders and most of his troops (especially those deported from eastern Poland to Russia in 1939) reconciled themselves to life in exile and never returned home. When the war ended, Anders continued his struggle for a free Poland and became a political activist with the London-based Polish Government-in-Exile. After his death, Anders was buried alongside his men in the Polish military cemetery at Monte Cassino.
From refugee to émigré

territory. Minsk fell within days; the siege of Leningrad began in September; and Moscow was attacked in November. As autumn turned to winter, there appeared to be no weakness in the German war machine.

In the wake of this advance, advocates of Hitler’s genocidal racial policy mounted a propaganda campaign that dehumanised large sections of the population. On the ground, this policy was savagely implemented by the Einsatzgruppen: rampaging death squads that routinely followed the troops. An estimated 1.5 million deaths – particularly in Ukraine and the Baltic States – have been attributed to these units. Yet the forerunners of the Einsatzgruppen were first introduced in western Poland, where targets included religious leaders and local politicians. And it was in Poland that Heinrich Himmler, charged with the removal of racial ‘undesirables’ from all German territories, established a network of specially constructed killing centres: Chelmno, Auschwitz-Birkenau, Treblinka, Sobibor, Majdanek and Belzec. It was the fear of such barbarity that in 1941 caused Zorza to seek safety within the boundaries of Russia.

To leave home under such conditions was very difficult but, unlike his parents, Zorza had little faith in the family’s ability to survive the German occupation. He implored them to be bold and leave Poland until the danger had passed:

I’d be trying to persuade them to come [east] because the German threat was very real and they were saying: ‘Well, we’ll manage, we’ve always managed,’ and so on; and this characteristic syndrome of ‘we’ll make out one way or another’ and ‘the security of your home is better than going off into the unknown, with the war raging all around you and becoming refugees’ and ‘the Germans are not as bad as they are painted’ and ‘we know the Germans’.

Halfway through the Russian occupation, the Russians announced ‘anybody who is a refugee from the German-occupied part of Poland is entitled to go back and we will let you out’. You know it was very difficult to get out of Russia, and here they suddenly announced [people could go]. And lots and lots of Jews volunteered, registered themselves to go back. What the Russians had in fact done: they’d used that in order to identify people who were potentially hostile to the regime, so much so that they wanted to leave. But the fact is that many, many Jews did volunteer to go back to German-occupied territories when there’d already been a lot of talk – but talk, you see, no proof – of what the Germans were doing. So you can see the situation when the question arises: ‘Do we go with the Russians or do we stay here?’

When his pleas fell on deaf ears, Zorza followed his instincts and headed east, joining the flotsam of refugees dislocated from home by the Nazi advance. For a boy of 15, entering unknown territory in a savage war was perilous, and he soon learnt the enormity of his decision. Living from hand to mouth, and in constant danger, he came to fear everyone and trust no-one. Yet despite capture by the NKVD...
and imprisonment in a Gulag camp, he survived and, as we shall see, eventually found a way out of Russia.

Now, nearly four years later and a member of the Polish Air Force based in Britain, Zorza looked forward to victory in Europe. It was imminent; everyone sensed it. Beyond that, his highest priority was to be reunited with his family. Since leaving Kolomyja, he had feared almost daily for their safety; and losing all contact had only increased his worries. As the war drew to a close, a new life in liberated Poland finally beckoned.

Poland betrayed

Though the last days of the war approached, Zorza, like many of his compatriots, harboured grave concerns about the future of his country once the conflict with Germany ceased. These were deepened by the establishment, in Lublin, of the Soviet-backed Committee of National Liberation (PKWN), which quickly claimed powers of administration. Rapid promotion of Communists followed, coupled with a strong denunciation of the Polish Government-in-Exile. With the Red Army on the streets of Poland and claims of legitimacy coming from Lublin, an ideological and patriotic fissure opened within and outside of Poland. Apprehension increased and feelings ran high. Churchill conceded that ‘Poland, though liberated from the Germans, had merely exchanged one conqueror for another’. Amid growing fears, anti-Soviet hopes rested on a just postwar settlement and the influence of Britain, who, after all, had gone to war with Germany to defend her First Ally.

In February 1945 the Allies’ ‘Big Three’ comprising Winston Churchill, Franklin D. Roosevelt and Josif Stalin arranged a meeting at Yalta to address issues of the war and construct a plan for the future of Europe. High on the agenda were questions of Soviet support for the war against Japan, the Allies’ treatment of Germany after surrender, and the destiny of postwar Poland. Regarding the latter, matters relating to the formation of a single government, the organisation of free elections, and the settlement of Polish frontiers were crucial.

For many Poles, in country and in exile, alarm bells were ringing. How could Stalin be trusted? It was no secret that Russian anger persisted over Polish gains at the treaty of Riga (1921) following the two-year war, still fresh in the memory, between Poland and Bolshevik Russia (1919–20). And those who experienced the excesses of Soviet occupation in 1939 were left in no doubt as to the Communist view of Polish
communities and culture. But it was the actions of the Soviet ally in the face of the common – that is, German – enemy during the Warsaw Rising of 1944 that revealed the extent of Stalin’s desire for Poland and the lengths to which he would go to drain all possible resistance.

On 1 August 1944, as the Red Army pushed towards the Vistula, the Home Army rose and engaged the German forces in Warsaw. Fighting was fierce and with the advantage of surprise, the Polish forces quickly took large sections of the city. Messages were sent to the Allies for support. Little was forthcoming. Stalin prevaricated in the face of allied frustration and the support of his troops was withheld. He wrote to Churchill:

In the situation that has arisen the Soviet command has come to the conclusion that it must disassociate itself from the Warsaw adventure, as it cannot take either direct or indirect responsibility for the Warsaw action.\(^{13}\)

In fact, both the Soviet stand off and Polish uprising were underpinned by the same aim: ultimate control of Poland. By choosing to rise before the Soviet forces crossed the Vistula,
The Big Three at Yalta, 1945. ‘No Englishman or American can read this record without a sense not only of sympathy, but of something like shame.’ Harold Macmillan.
Home Army leaders sought to establish an administration that was loyal to the Government-in-Exile. Victory would also attract popular support. These factors would be crucial in the battle to prevent Polish Communists seizing power in Warsaw – albeit with Russian help – and claiming to be the new leaders of a resurgent Poland. Ideologically, the Poles also subscribed to the ‘two enemies’ theory – the belief that while the war against Germany must continue, opposition to the Russians and the Polish Communists must be strengthened. So Stalin waited.14

The weeks wore on. Outgunned, and with dwindling supplies, the Home Army’s resistance – courageous to the last – began to fade. By contrast, the Germans reinforced, regrouped and cruelly subdued the Poles. Remarkably, the Home Army resisted the might of the German war machine for 63 days without any help from the Red Army that camped by the Vistula in the Praga district of Warsaw. In a final act of vengeance, the Nazis stripped the city of its population and systematically destroyed it: street by street, building by building. Norman Davies:

‘The capitulation of Warsaw was a vast and terrible event performed in a surreal setting. In the western half of the city, largely ruined, a residual community of half a million people were being forced to surrender themselves to Nazi captivity, whilst in the eastern half, the largest army in the world pretended not to be there. In all other sectors on the Eastern Front, the Germans and the Soviets were engaged in a savage war, where the Soviets held the distinct advantage. But here, on the Vistula, the two armies were acting in silent, unwritten connivance. They were divided by a broad but shallow and eminently fordable river, low in water in the summer heat, more of a demarcation line than a major obstacle.15

So it was that after weeks of inaction camped within the sound of Polish guns, Marshal Konstantin Rokosovsky, veteran of the battle of Kursk, crossed the Vistula on 17 January 1945 and led his troops through the rubble of a silent and empty Warsaw. It was a military betrayal on a grand scale: not only the abandonment of one ally by another, but a moment of callous opportunism that signalled Stalin’s disregard for the so-called Grand Alliance and his aim in postwar Europe.

Against the background of an increasing Soviet presence in Central and Eastern Europe, the Big Three gathered at Yalta on 4 February 1945. The war would last for another three months but the outcome was no longer in doubt. As the Allies advanced on Berlin, the Soviet drive from the east, buoyed by events at Stalingrad16 and German losses at Kursk,17 had become unstoppable. Victory was within the Allies’ grasp.

Seven days later, agreements had been reached that defined the nature of postwar Europe. Unconditional surrender was required from Germany; Soviet citizens were to be repatriated; and – after promises from Stalin of free elections in Poland – support was given to the Communist-oriented Provisional Government of National Unity. In the event, Soviet citizens were repatriated to near-certain death and, in Poland, the ‘unfettered’ elections never materialised.

Although the Polish question was part of a broad range of issues, no topic was discussed at greater length. In his memoirs, Churchill notes that the British record contains an interchange on this topic – between Stalin, Roosevelt and himself – of nearly 18,000 words spread across seven of the eight plenary sessions. Despite the rhetoric, Stalin’s position never changed for he brought to the table a world-view that rendered concessions unthinkable. Holecki comments:
[For the Russians] the annexation of eastern Poland was the final implementation of the historical process of ‘collecting’ all what they considered ‘Russian lands’, a process which had started in the Middle Ages. And making Poland in its restricted boundaries a Russian satellite was a basic objective of Russian policy from the days of Peter the Great. In achieving this, Stalin was more successful than Catherine II had been, whose policy of partitioning Poland with the Germans he had been obliged to follow in 1939.18

Consequently, a new Polish-Soviet frontier was fashioned in keeping with the Curzon Line,19 a notional boundary proposed after the First World War and actioned by the Ribbentrop-Molotov pact that divided Europe in 1939. After such apprehension before the conference, it is not surprising that the redrawing of this border became Yalta’s most controversial outcome – and questions arise as to why Roosevelt and Churchill resisted so weakly. Perhaps it was Stalin’s implacable stance, consistently adopted since the Big Three met in Tehran during 1943. Roosevelt’s illness20 and impending death may have weakened his resolve. But Churchill was in rude health and altogether stronger in spirit. His memoirs suggest, however, that Churchill quietly consented to Stalin’s demands:

Stalin claimed to understand our attitude. For the British, he said, Poland was a question of honour, but for the Russians it was a question both of honour and security; of honour, because they had had many conflicts with the Poles and they wished to eliminate the causes of such conflicts; of security because Poland was on the frontiers of Russia, and throughout history, Poland had been a corridor through which Russia’s enemies had passed to attack her. The Germans had done this twice during the last 30 years and they had been able to do it because Poland was weak. Russia wanted her to be strong and powerful so that she could shut this corridor of her own strength. Russia could not keep it shut from the outside. It could only be shut from the inside by Poland herself. This was a matter of life and death for the Soviet state.21

Thus, Poland was left to her fate; a political betrayal of great magnitude. The consequences were severe. Outside of this frontier was Polish territory ceded to the Soviet Union; within it, a Communist government sympathetic to Moscow. In London, the Polish Government-in-Exile was outraged and a public protest bitterly resented ‘the partition of Poland by her allies’.22 The impact on Poles at home and abroad was devastating. Amid the acrimony, Jan Ciechanowski, the Polish ambassador to the US during the war years, offered his resignation, stating prophetically:

The fate of Poland will be better understood when it is realised that even defeated Nazi Germany loses less of her territory through this war than allied Poland has been forced to give up as a result of victory. Moreover, Poland has been left under the continued, uncontrolled occupation of a foreign power which is imposing upon her a government and a political, social and economic system alien to her.23

Anders is more specific:

It meant that the eastern half of Poland, including Lwów and Vilno, territory which had been closely connected with Poland for over 600 years, and which had never had any Russian population, was to be seized by the Soviet Union; Polish constitutional law was to be violated and the lawful government, which had co-operated with the Allies throughout the war, was to be thrust aside, to make way for one organised by Moscow. These decisions made a mockery of the Atlantic Charter, so cynically referred to in the Yalta declaration, which said that Britain and the United States ‘desire to see no territorial changes that do not accord with the freely expressed wishes of the peoples concerned’ and
‘respect the right of all peoples to choose the government under which they will live...’²⁴

For the Polish forces, supposedly fighting their way home to a free Poland, it was a bitter blow, deeply resented. Around 250,000 Poles had joined the Allied forces and the sense of betrayal was intense. About 112,000 Poles were members of the Second Polish Corps and Anders considered their immediate withdrawal from Allied battle sectors. In a poignant letter to General McCreery, then Commander of the Eighth Army, Anders writes:

We left along our path, which we regarded as our battle route to Poland, thousands of graves of our comrades in arms. The soldier of the II Polish Corps, therefore, feels this last decision of the Three Power Conference to be the gravest injustice and in complete contradiction to his sense of what is honourable. This soldier now asks me what is the object of his struggle? Today I am unable to answer this question. What has come about is more than grave; we find ourselves in a situation from which, so far, I can see no way out ...
I can see little but the necessity of relieving those of my troops now in the line, owing to a) the feelings of my men as I have described them above, and b) the fact that neither I nor my subordinate commanders feel, in our consciences, the right to demand new sacrifices from my men.²⁶

In the end, Anders and his army fought on, motivated by a sense of honour rather than loyalty once that bond had been broken. Harold Macmillan, in his introduction to Anders’ book _An Army in Exile_, acknowledged the abandonment of Poland and the impact of Yalta, ‘No Englishman or American can read this record without a sense not only of sympathy, but of something like shame.’²⁷

In a reflective piece, his first to be published, Zorza addresses this issue in an article written while he was in Brindisi (1945). Under the pseudonym ‘Victor Dawn’ (in Polish, _Zorza_ means ‘dawn’). And describing himself as ‘“Wings” Correspondent in Italy,’ he writes:

Of the great mass of soldiers speaking half a dozen different tongues that took part in this crusade [at Monte Cassino], the Polish divisions alone fought with a sense of despondency in their hearts. The same feeling prevailed in the hearts of their countrymen flying the heavy four-engined bombers, engaged in carrying arms to the underground fighters at home. The ambiguous nature of some politicians’ speeches, the frankness of others, and the cunning hypocrisy of those who were decidedly unfriendly but dubbed themselves friends – all the things that combined to produce the feeling of gloom and foreboding did not succeed in stopping the

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The postwar frontiers of Poland showing the lands in the east ceded to the Soviet Union at Yalta and the Recovered Territories in the west gained from Germany at Potsdam.²⁵
fighters on the ground and in the air. The battle went on. Cassino was taken and the Polish banner fluttered on the summit, stirred by the same breeze that blew away the heavy odour of rotting corpses. Warsaw, that unhappiest of cities, had been taken. But there it was the hateful red flag with the black swastika that hung ominously over the shattered ruins. Allied airmen, including Poles, had done all that lay in their power to help the patriots. It had proved insufficient. Other help was needed, but this had not come in time. Warsaw fell.  

Turning to the Polish forces now on ships waiting to leave Italy, Zorza writes:

The ship, quiet and motionless, lay at anchor in the blue transparent waters of the Bay of Naples … Here they were, taking leave of the country from whose soil they had helped to drive the invader, their numbers reduced, their hopes of a speedy return to their own land more slender than ever … Now that from their own land the German invader had been driven away, their labours were needed there no longer. They had done their share of fighting, and suffered their share of losses – rather large if one considers how few of them there were. One may well wonder why their faces are so gloomy – their expressions so forlorn. But they will not volunteer an explanation. They expect you to know.

As the Red Army drove westwards, what remained of a pre-war Polish society was destroyed by the NKGB: an organisation that grew out of the NKVD. The task of these Special Forces was to impose Soviet order on occupied territories. Thus, on ‘liberation’ the Poles were subject to the type of treatment they had experienced in 1939. Property was confiscated. Local officials were removed. Executions and deportations were commonplace. Attacks were launched on all non-Communist resistance groups. An ironic act of moral betrayal saw members of the Home Army – now classed as ‘bandits’ – detained by the Soviets in the Nazi death camp at Majdanek (1944). The following year, 16 resistance leaders were subjected to staged trials in Moscow, a message to the world that Stalin could behave with impunity. Once the liberation was complete, Stalin pursued his next goal – to defend his lines of communication in Europe: an activity that kept Soviet troops in Poland for the next 50 years!

Zorza was horrified at the turn of events, at once angry and confused. How could such things happen? What now? Would he find his family again or were they lost to him forever? Were they dead? Would he come to know their fate? Of one thing he was certain. If he returned to postwar Poland he would submit himself to the totalitarian ideology that fuelled his suffering in the Gulag; whereas a return to his home town of Kolomyja would place him in the Soviet Union. Neither option appealed to him. Furthermore, the Communist press in Poland was becoming hostile to Polish nationals who did not return at the end of the war. As a portent of what was to follow, Polish citizenship was withdrawn from Władysław Anders by the Warsaw government for activities ‘against the Polish State’. Gradually, the picture of life in postwar Poland became clearer and, as a result, a large number of Poles decided they could not return. Of 112,000 men in the Second Polish Corps at the end of 1946, only seven officers and 14,200 men applied for repatriation. Those who did return were promptly arrested for non-patriotic behaviour and many were sent back to Siberia. Weighing the dangers, Zorza came to the painful conclusion that his future lay outside of Poland. Sadly, amid feelings of powerlessness, he could only contemplate the extent of his loss.
The journey to Britain

At the end of the war, Zorza was in limbo. He was a Pole without a country, a reluctant émigré stranded in Britain with no prospect of returning home. Alone and disillusioned, his feelings reached beyond disappointment to the realms of despair. But there was no alternative. His experience of life under the Communists – in Poland and Russia – had convinced him that Stalinism could not accommodate people like him, freethinkers who challenged the precepts of totalitarian systems. Down that road lay conflict, suppression and an early death.

He had also been traumatised by his experience in Russia; the combination of insecurity and deprivation, the constant presence and fear of death. Even after his release from the labour camp he was still not safe. At every turn there was danger from the German advance and Soviet troops, marauding gangs and thousands of evacuees – all of them desperate. Having abandoned his attempt to return home, he fled away from the front lines, living as best he could and relying on false identity papers provided by a friend. It was then, in the railway station in Kuibyshev, that he came across an article by the Soviet writer Ilya Ehrenburg and realised he was living in the city. Zorza was familiar with his work and, as autumn turned to winter in 1941, he determined to find him.

Initially, Ehrenburg was taken aback by the gaunt young Pole who, at considerable risk, had tracked him down. Cautious and reticent, he questioned Victor about his background, how he came to be in Russia, and which, if any, of his books he had read. Zorza responded with Julio Jurenito, a work that not only parodies the Christian gospels and satirises the capitalist West, but which also ridicules the Communist system. Though popular, it was regarded as controversial having earned the disapproval of Stalin for its nihilist undertones. In effect, Zorza was laying down a marker and declaring himself a kindred spirit.

Ehrenburg completely understood the coded message and did more than take pity on Zorza. He provided clean clothes, a place to live and found him an apprenticeship at the railway engineering works. As time passed, they developed
an affinity and Zorza, rather nervously, told Ehrenburg of his ambition to become a writer. Ehrenburg approved, but counselled Zorza to leave Russia first.

When his young friend had regained his strength, Ehrenburg knew the time had come for decision-making. It was then that he spoke of the war and told Zorza of a Polish force being raised on Soviet soil. Polish prisoners of war and Polish civilians were being released from the Gulag and making their way to designated assembly points. Recruits were needed for air crew as well as ground troops. Everyone who could travel was encouraged to muster. Zorza listened intently. This was his best, perhaps only, chance of returning home; and he took it. He would join the Polish Air Force.

The Polish-Soviet agreement was signed on 30 July 1941, an initiative which controversially granted the Poles ‘amnesty’. Despite the misnomer, it sanctioned the release of Polish citizens and the raising of an army in Soviet lands. Anders, freed from the NKVD headquarters in Moscow, was commissioned to lead the operation, whereupon he campaigned vigorously for the early release of all Poles in Soviet exile. During the next few months, gradually – and hindered by camp officials who resented the loss of their slave labour – Polish nationals emerged from the far-flung prison camps of Siberia, a trickle of emaciated humanity that headed slowly towards the assembly points. The journey often took weeks. In poor health and with the onset of winter, thousands died.

Zorza was lucky. Buzuluk, the rallying point for military personnel, was less than 200 miles from Kuibyshev. The journey was hazardous. Yet with Ehrenburg’s help, Victor had rested, gained weight and improved his physical condition. He felt refreshed and his spirits had lifted. In fact, he owed much to Ehrenburg – more than he realised at the time – for when he arrived at the assembly point he would need all the strength he could muster. Amenities were basic and supplies, to say the least, were sparse. Władysław Anders:

The depot at Buzuluk will find a place in Polish history, for there all the new arrivals were received into the army. Many were in a dreadful state when they got there. Our problems were enormous, and the difficulties seemed almost insurmountable for there was a shortage of everything: even obtaining a board or a nail was nearly impossible. On September 14 [1941] I paid my first visit to the camp at Toskoie, which consisted of small tents pitched in a forest, where the Sixth Infantry Division was being formed. There, for the first time I saw 17,000 soldiers paraded for my arrival. I shall not forget the sight as long as I live, nor the mingled pity and pride with which I reviewed them. Most of them had no boots or shirts, and all were in rags, often the tattered relics of old Polish Uniforms. There was not a man who was not an emaciated skeleton and most of them were covered with ulcers, resulting from semi-starvation, but to the great astonishment of the Russians, including General Zhukov, who accompanied me, they were all well shaved and showed a fine, soldierly bearing. I asked myself whether I could ever make an army of them, and whether they would ever stand the strain of a campaign. But I found an immediate answer: it was sufficient to note their shining eyes, to see the strong will and faith there. I passed slowly along the front line, we looked enquiringly into each other’s eyes, and the first ties were formed for the soldierly journey we had to undertake together. Old soldiers cried like children during Mass, the first they had attended for so many months, and when the hymn Our free country give us back, O Lord was sung, it seemed as if the surrounding forest echoed a hundredfold. For the first time in my life, and I hope the last, I took the salute of a march past of soldiers without boots. They had insisted upon it. They wanted to show the Bolsheviks that even in their bare feet, and ill and wounded as
many of them were, they could bear themselves like soldiers on their first march towards Poland.\footnote{36}

Zorza rubbed shoulders with these men, for it was here, in Toskoie, that a Wing of the Polish Air Force was being constituted. By the time he arrived at the rallying point, more than 44,000 personnel had enlisted in the army; but Zorza had set his sights on the Polish Air Force and presented himself for service. Although he was uncertain as to whether he would be accepted, two factors were in his favour. First, he was interested in gliding and after researching the history of aviation while he stayed in Kuibyshev with Ehrenburg, he appeared familiar with the subject. Second, his physical condition was better than that of his contemporaries, some of whom had endured the labour camps for the best part of two years.\footnote{37} Amid feelings of relief – tinged with apprehension – he was duly recruited to the Wing’s Second Squadron\footnote{38,39} on 20 December 1941.\footnote{40,41} The Wing numbered 19 officers and 480 men. Chroniclers Górski and Szapiro comment on the state of the men at this time:

The men were exhausted and excited. A great change had taken place. First of all, and most importantly, there was no barbed wire. Next, there was food – and in addition to that you could buy in extra supplies. Then each man received 500 roubles as compensation. Now orders were given in Polish – the ominous foreign language was heard no more. The authorities were Polish. Excitement grew as rumour spread that airmen and seamen were going to England; that once and for all they were going to leave this country that had starved and ill-used them, and where – it was said – people fell into three categories: those who had been imprisoned; those who were imprisoned; and those who would be imprisoned.\footnote{42}

Despite the spirit of the men, the assembling of troops
and civilians was taking longer than expected, due mainly to lack of co-operation on the part of the Russians. And slowly, as the camps disgorged, the scale of Polish losses became apparent. It was then that fears deepened concerning 26,000 prisoners of war, most of them Polish officers, who were imprisoned in the camps of Kozielsk, Oshtakovo and Starobielsk. No word had been heard of them since soon after deportation and Anders had raised the issue several times with Soviet officials and the Polish Government-in-Exile.

Anders’ suspicions were proved correct when, in 1943, Germany released a film showing the discovery of around 5,000 bodies in the Katyn forest near Smolensk. Each body had tied hands and a bullet hole in the head. According to the Nazis, the shootings dated from the Soviet occupation of Eastern Europe. Though the charge was denied by Russia, the Nazis had stumbled across the remains of prisoners from the camp at Kozielsk. Those from the other camps met similar fates. The issue was laid to rest 50 years later when Gorbachev was shown a memorandum from Beria (1940) which recommended that all Poles interned in these camps should be executed. In his memoirs, Gorbachev describes the moment he saw proof of the crime.
This last part [of the memo] was marked off and above it was written in Stalin’s blue pencil, ‘Resolution of the Politburo’. And the signatures: ‘In favour – Stalin, Molotov, Voroshilov’.44

Although Anders’ fears were unconfirmed in 1942, it was against a backdrop of hostility and distrust that the Polish force was raised. When detainees were released they were often given no food for the journey or deserted in the middle of wastelands. Finally, when the Russians reneged on their promise to supply food, uniforms and medicines, Anders’ patience snapped. He objected strongly and demanded permission to move everyone south to a new assembly point near Tashkent (Uzbekistan). Thereafter, he would lead his troops out of Russia to fight alongside the British in what became the Second Polish Corps, also known as the Anders Army.

From his new headquarters at Yangi-Yul,45 Anders moved the first wave of evacuees to Krasnovodsk on the shore of the Caspian Sea. Zorza was among them. First travelling overland and then by boat to Pahlevi46 (Persia) the young Pole exited Soviet territory with the first transportation between March and April 1942. From there, he travelled with the able-bodied to Palestine via India and eventually transferred to the UK as a member of the Polish Air Force in June 1942.

In August of that year, Zorza found himself at the Polish Air Force Depot in Blackpool. It was here that he requested pilot training, hoping to fulfil his dream, but his application was refused. Instead, he undertook ground staff roles including that of interpreter gathering intelligence. In August 1944, Zorza left for Italy and took part in the operations of the 301 Polish Special Squadron,47 based in Brindisi, which supported the Home Army in Poland. After he returned to England the following February, he remained in Britain for the duration of the war.

Before leaving for Italy, Zorza fell ill and suffered a memory loss that caused him acute distress; the effects would be lifelong. He was admitted to hospital in St Athan
(Wales) and though he became fit enough to resume his Air Force duties, he experienced a void that, despite all attempts to reconstruct his memory, was never completely filled. It impacted his life in that emotions around his traumas were retained, while the events that caused them were forgotten. This heightened his apprehension about returning to Poland and, at the same time, fuelled his need to understand what had happened to him. Significantly, he was medically discharged from the RAF after a long period of support:

I certainly remember when I was on indefinite leave from the Air Force after the war and I was staying with a family in Canvey Island, whilst still in uniform, but it was just because they didn’t know what to do with the Poles; it was kind of indefinite sick leave, sick leave being due to my problems. I was attending a psychiatric out-patients clinic in Southend with some problems – but I don’t remember the problems. I remember going there and the terrible waiting room. If I remember it was a hugely crowded room and, since it was a psychiatric one, it wasn’t a pleasant medium to be in.49

Understanding what had happened to him within the broader context of conflict became an important mission and one that Zorza pursued constantly both before and after his memory loss. His single-mindedness was evident:

I was doing that sort of reading, completely undirected, because on an Air Force station, what sort of reading can you do? I was picking on books and reading one booklet then another, and the same with literature – because I’d had no chance to educate myself properly in any understanding or appreciation of literature; it was just the books which I picked up that then led me to other books. And I realised that I needed first of all a knowledge of more history than just the history of the Russian Revolution and of Germany, if I was to understand what it was that hit me. So I made a study of all the revolutions going way back to Spartacus. But of course this was stupid because if you just read about the revolutions and not about the things in between you don’t get the context. But I was a man in a hurry; I just wanted to understand about revolutions. Then I realised that I need to really read more history, which I did; then I realised that history was not enough, you need to understand economics; so started reading economics. I read all the 11 volumes of Stalin which by then had been published, I think, or maybe it was nine; 33 volumes of Lenin; Marx, Engels; all those things, looking for the answer.50

Notwithstanding his thirst for knowledge, it was a confused – and vulnerable – Victor Zorza who, in 1945, sought to stay in Britain. There were difficulties. The end of the war signalled a lengthy period of austerity. There was food rationing, a shortage of houses and widespread unemployment. In 1946, when the Anders Army arrived in the UK from Italy, fears were raised as to how the troops and their families would be absorbed into British life. At the time, the government was largely unsympathetic and favoured repatriation. Ernest Bevin, the foreign minister issued a circular,
written in Polish, urging all Polish citizens to go home. Had that been possible, it would have been the preferred option of many Poles, who in the main were unwilling settlers, unlike other immigrant groups in the postwar years. Keith Sword comments:

The Poles came for the most part in organised, disciplined groups (including schools and hospitals as well as military units). They were part of a structured, social grouping with its own political and military leadership and a sizable cultural and literary elite. They arrived within a relatively short space of time – the largest number coming to Britain in the course of a three to four-year period (1946–49). Being in the main a military settlement, it was predominantly a population of young, single males … many [of whom] harboured a strong sense of resentment towards the British for having ‘sold them out’ to the Soviets at Yalta.\(^{51}\)

In Poland, the Warsaw government hoped that members of the Polish military would be sent home en bloc, but the government refused to contemplate anything other than voluntary repatriation.\(^{52}\) Finally, in view of the small numbers wishing to be repatriated, the Polish Armed Forces in Britain were disbanded and all of its members were required to choose between voluntary repatriation or admission to the Polish Resettlement Corps: a special body designed to prepare its members for absorption into British civilian life. On 4 December 1946, Zorza was commissioned to a two-year contract with the Polish Resettlement Corps and joined some 200,000 fellow Poles seeking to begin a new life in Britain.

### Becoming established

In May 1948, fortunes changed for Zorza. While still a member of the Polish Resettlement Corps, he approached the BBC about a vacancy that had arisen as a monitor of Soviet broadcasts, based at Caversham Park (Reading). The BBC’s monitoring service was established before the Second World War to gain insights into the information being given by foreign governments (especially Germany) to their populations. The service moved to Caversham Park in 1943.\(^{53,54}\) Zorza was specially suited to the post, having language skills in Russian and Ukrainian; and it satisfied his desire to track political movements in the Soviet Union as the Cold War progressed. It was an important new start for him – and one that conformed to the profile of many Polish émigrés beginning a new life in Britain.

In 1948, most Poles were still in uniform and living in camps or hostels. Self-reliant and fiercely independent, many of them sought their own businesses in the motor trade, retail or service industries.\(^{55}\) Unlike some of his compatriots, Zorza never opened a garage, delicatessen, shoe-making or clock repair company; but he retained his independence just as effectively – by developing a unique way of analysing East-West relations and then marketing his expert view.

It was prior to joining the BBC that Zorza again felt the urge to write. Still suffering the after-effects of his memory loss, he was billeted with a Jewish family who opened their home to him. He shared their home but never felt ‘at home’ and his search for knowledge had become unfulfilling. So he changed tack and decided to familiarise himself with contemporary events and their causes. This meant scouring the Russian newspapers – an activity he undertook with relish – and improving his writing skills:
This chaotic reading had not enabled me to answer the big question. Then I started to take out subscriptions to the Russian papers in _Pravda_ and so on, and really researching, reading them as a researcher does. That began when I was staying with that family, and I was completely [absorbed], you know, from early morning to late at night. I was reading British papers too. That is when I started making clippings of British papers and I clipped everything. I had a huge library of clippings. And then I started trying to write, and write and write and write, and nothing happened for a long time; and it was then only when I went to the BBC that I managed to get something into the paper.56

Moving to the BBC marked Zorza’s first step on the road to his trade mark analytical journalism that later became a feature of his column on East-West relations. At first, there was little scope for analysis, but Zorza recognised the few opportunities that came his way and began to test his theory. It was a significant advance on his monitoring role:

I got a job at the BBC as a Russian monitor; not just Russian, but Polish and Ukrainian and for me the job was a further opportunity to learn. You know what monitoring is: it means listening to broadcasts, recording it and then transcribing it. Well there was a small analytical element in the job – which is you were allowed to decide what you would transcribe. I mean you had to make judgements about what was transcribed at all; whether in a news broadcast – which items; in a talk – an ideological, political, economic or historical talk. You, the monitor, would decide whether to summarise it and what parts to summarise more fully, or parts less so. So there was an analytical element, but a minute one, just mental rather than analytical. But in exercising that judgement you needed to bring to bear on it your knowledge of the subject. And also a fascinating part of the job, as mundane and uninteresting as it might seem on the surface, was that very often the reception was very bad and yet you had to get as much as you could. Very often you would get to a word and you couldn’t for the _world_ figure out what the word was and so finally what you had to do was to listen very carefully to what preceded the word and what followed and then put in your guess of what the word might have been, but always indicating that this is guesswork and that you didn’t actually hear that.

Now this in effect was a far deeper and complex analytical process than any analysis proper – to be sure that you get the right word; and very often these were things that were also appearing in the newspapers, because the Russian radio and the Russian newspapers were almost exact copies of each other. So then you got the newspapers a few days later from Moscow; you could look up and see whether you’d actually got the right word. So it was interesting, it was fun; and sometimes you got the right word and sometimes you didn’t, and you could figure out why you didn’t. So that was part of my analytical training.57

It was this analytic strategy, a technique that combined deduction and informed guesswork, that Zorza began to explore and develop; a process that brought remarkable results, not least in terms of his insights into the minds and motives of Soviet correspondents:

Now because [the broadcast] started every morning at 6 o’clock – and I was on night duty – at 6 o’clock I would record it. I’d listen to the beginning, to the title, and to the first sentence or two, and I would then take off my earphones while the recording went on. At five minutes past I would put on the earphones, again for just a couple of sentences, just get the sense of what they were saying now, midway through, and again take them off, and then listen again to the last couple of sentences. And then, instead of transcribing it from the record I would try to reconstruct the _Pravda_ editorial on the basis of the first few words, the few words in the middle, and the few words at the end. And
of course I never got it. But the reasons why I never got it – I got closer and closer as time went on – but the reasons why I didn’t get what I wanted to: when you are working on transcribing and translating you really have to think quite deeply into what you’re doing; it isn’t a mechanical process by any means. It can be a mechanical process, but it can also be a deeply analytical process. So that way I learned quite a lot too, by getting myself into the mind of the Pravda leader writer, who was certainly privy to a lot of information that he wasn’t putting in his leader, but information which was in his mind when he was writing it. So what you try to do is to deduce what was in his mind and what he was not saying and why was he not saying it. And by comparing it with other writings on the subject, in other newspapers, or other ideological, political magazines, or even professional magazines, there was a lot that by putting all those bits of the jigsaw puzzle together, that you could get that wasn’t visible otherwise. It was great fun too; and every now and again you could see that you hit the bull’s-eye and that was more than fun; it was a very, very satisfying feeling. And this is how I gradually began to write and to publish in The Guardian\textsuperscript{58} and then other things developed from that.\textsuperscript{59}

It was at Caversham that Zorza met Rosemary Wilson. They married at Henley Register Office in the spring of 1949.
Victor was 24, Rosemary two years older. After the years he spent alone and in danger, the prospect of a home and family was something Victor craved, and importantly, a home of his own brought personal space he had never before experienced. It was something he treasured and did not take for granted – the Gulag had taught him that. He says:

I had no other space until we married. There was this period when I was on indefinite leave and living with that family who no longer exist. I kept up with them for a year or two but it wasn’t really a home, it was a lodging and very clearly a temporary one. And then when I joined the BBC I lived in a hostel; that’s when I first met [Rosemary]. I was living in a hostel.60

As he developed his analytical skills, Zorza came to believe he had developed a new, highly effective way of understanding the reports that came from the Soviet Union. Looking round, he considered that other commentators did not have his insights and so, from that moment, he set his heart on a career in journalism using the analytic method he had learned at the BBC. He was convinced of his abilities and determined to get published. In his history of The Guardian newspaper, David Ayerst tells how this happened:

[Zorza] bombarded the Manchester Guardian (MG) with articles. They came back. At last one day in January 1950 he rang the London office and asked for Richard Scott. Zorza was told that he would not be back for a day or so. Zorza then asked to be put through to the copy-takers, and dictated a story which he said had been commissioned by Richard Scott … The story, on nationalism in the Ukraine, duly appeared.61 It mentioned that a young Ukrainian had been made secretary of the Moscow Communist Party. His name was Nikita Khrushchev. From this time Zorza worked regularly for The Guardian without the permission of the BBC though no doubt with his colleagues’ knowledge since he used to carry round a copy of the MG displaying his own anonymous contributions.62

During the next three years, Zorza’s articles featured regularly in The Guardian although the BBC hierarchy was unaware of this extra activity. He was nervous about their reaction and kept a low profile by avoiding The Guardian offices. His cautious approach was justified. In the spring of 1953, when Zorza’s work for the paper came to light, the BBC dismissed him on the spot. Two weeks later, Stalin died.63 In an ironic twist of fate, it was Zorza’s report on his tormentor’s death that enhanced his reputation and helped secure his future.

When news broke of Stalin’s death, Zorza dispensed with past practice and set out for The Guardian offices. He arrived early and worked hard all day. The result How Moscow broke the news of Stalin’s death was an authoritative, characteristic article, full of insight and flavoured by his experience of Stalin’s Russia. It was fascinating for readers, cathartic for Zorza:

There was a spluttering and an odd, incomprehensible noise issuing from the radio receiver which was tuned in to the Moscow home service. The 01.00 hours bulletin had just been broadcast. It was a repeat of the bulletin that went
out at midnight, and that in turn had been a repeat of the evening broadcast.

I waited. The news of Stalin’s death had just been released to the outside world by Moscow’s foreign services. Now, surely, was the moment for the Russians to be told. But they were not told anything – except perhaps by implication.

At 03.00 the bells stopped, suddenly. Again silence. And then the majestic strains of the Soviet national anthem, which replaced the *Internationale* during the war. The broad melody swept the vast expanses of Russia, of which it is intended to be descriptive. It penetrated into the little huts in the mountain settlements of Central Asia. And far in the north, where the snow and ice never thaw, it was heard by the camp guards who had just come back into the warmth of the guardroom, having been relieved by their comrades on the stroke of three. But the camp inmates – of whom I was once one – probably did not know and, if they knew, were hardly in a condition to care. They had just done a twelve-hour stretch of hard, back-breaking work, some in the forests where they had been felling trees, others in the goldmines of the Soviet Far East.

Yuri Levitan, the announcer who during the war brought the Russians the news of victories – but never of defeats – was at the microphone. Slowly, solemnly, with a voice brimming over with emotion, he read:

‘The Central Committee of the Communist Party, the Council of Ministers and the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR announce with deep grief to the party and all workers that on March 5 at 9.50 pm, Josef Vissarionovich Stalin, Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party and Chairman of the Council of Ministers, died after a serious illness. The heart of the collaborator and follower of the genius of Lenin’s work, the wise leader and teacher of the Communist party and of the Soviet people, stopped beating.’

And then came the first intimate note with another, harder note superimposed upon it. ‘Dear friends and comrades,’ Levitan said, ‘the great directing and leading force of the Soviet Union in the struggle for the building of Communism is our Communist Party. Steel-like unity and a monolithic cohesion of the ranks of the party are the main conditions for strength and power.’

The article was a tour de force and acclaim followed. But now, having fulfilled his desire to expose the danger presented by Stalin, his death drew a curtain on Zorza’s main aim. What next? Perhaps a focus on the Communist world as the Cold War gathered momentum would help understanding and serve the cause of peace. It seemed the logical development.

**Notes**

1. The German-Soviet pact was signed on 23 August 1939.
4. The Cheka was led by the son of a Polish landowner, Felix Dzerzhinsky (1877–1926) who was appointed to the post by Lenin in 1917. The NKVD was the acronym for ‘People’s Commissariat for Internal Affairs’ and held responsibility for all aspects of state security including the secret police. See: www.nkvd.org
6. The Lubyanka building also housed the NKVD headquarters.
8. ‘Blitzkrieg’ was based on surprise and implemented by a fast-moving military force that included light, highly mobile tank units, air support and infantry divisions.
11. Winston Churchill (1874–1965) spans the nineteenth and twentieth centuries as a soldier, journalist, politician, wartime leader and writer. After serving in the army, he became a Member of Parliament in 1900 and rose to become Prime Minister on two occasions, most notably during the Second World War. He was a prolific painter and writer and won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1953.
12. Franklin D. Roosevelt (1882–1945) was born into a wealthy and old-established family in the state of New York. He became a popular leader and rose to become the only US President to serve three terms. Against the backdrop of the Great Depression and the Second World War, his administration was defined by relief programmes and measures to aid recovery. He died in office, but his vision influenced the establishment of the United Nations. See: www.americanpresident.org/history/franklindelanoroosevelt
16. The seven-month battle of Stalingrad (August 1942–February 1943) was a turning point in the Second World War. Conducted with great brutality, there were heavy losses on both sides. After resisting the might of the Nazi war machine the Soviet forces, led by Georgy Zhukov eventually prevailed and changed the course of the war.
17. The battle of Kursk (July–August 1943) is thought to be the largest armoured engagement in the history of warfare. Led by Nikolai Vatutin and Konstantin Rokossovsky, the Soviet forces withstood heavy losses to launch a successful counter-attack from which the Nazis never recovered.
19. The frontier that became known as the ‘Curzon Line’ was first proposed in 1919 after the First World War and subsequently by the British Foreign Secretary – Lord Curzon of Kedleston – as the border between Poland and Soviet Russia in 1920. This line was to form the frontier devised by the Ribbentrop-Molotov Pact in 1939, and was later accepted as the Polish-Soviet boundary at the Yalta Conference in February 1945.
20. Roosevelt’s health was failing. Already crippled by polio, in 1944 he was diagnosed with serious heart and circulatory problems from which he never recovered. He died of a cerebral haemorrhage two months after the Yalta Conference on 12 April 1945.
25. In July 1945, Stalin, President Truman and Prime Minister Attlee met in Germany, at Potsdam near Berlin. Among the outcomes was Poland’s acquisition of German lands in the west – the ‘recovered’ territories – as compensation for lost land in the east.
28. The article by Victor Dawn, ‘The sectors of a circle’, was found in a cutting from an unknown magazine (undated) among Victor Zorza’s personal papers.
32. Kuibyshev is 700 miles south-east of Moscow. Since 1991 it has been known as Samara.
33. Ilya Grigoryevich Ehrenburg (1891–1967) was born in Kiev into a middle-class Jewish family that moved to Moscow when he was five years old. He became a prolific writer and novelist who provided a link between the Soviet and Western intelligentsia both before and after the Cold War. He was a war correspondent during the First World War and, in his youth, travelled throughout Western Europe. In middle age, he became a Soviet apologist and avoided the fate of other writers and artists. He famously criticised Pasternak’s *Doctor Zhivago* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1981) for being false. He is remembered for *The Extraordinary Adventures of Julio Jurenito and his Disciples* London: MacGibbon and Kee, 1958; and *The Thaw* Chicago: Henry Regnery, 1955. He won Stalin prizes for *The Fall of Paris* trans. G. Shelley, London: Hutchinson, 1945; and *The Storm* trans. E. Hartley and T. Shebunina, London: Hutchinson, 1949. Some commentators think his anti-German literature helped fuel the brutal behaviour of Soviet troops during the fall of the Third Reich. In the 1960s when he
visited London, Zorza approached him, but he evinced no recollection of having helped Zorza (source, Richard Zorza).


35. Toskoie, often spelt Totskoye, was close to Buzuluk where Polish troops were camped.


38. A contemporary chronicle of this Polish Air Force Wing was written (in Polish) by Lieutenant Colonel Kazimierz Górski and Corporal Marek Szapiro; it is lodged at the Polish Institute and Sikorski Museum, London.

39. Led by Czesław Aleksandrowicz, this Wing was originally formed with three squadrons: the first was commanded by Flying Officer (FO) Edmund Tack; the second by FO E. Bohdanowicz; and the third by FO Jan Czepelanis. A fourth squadron, led by FO Franciszek Baranowski, was formed in October 1941.


41. On a list of Polish Air Force personnel evacuated from Russia to the United Kingdom, the name Wiktor Zorza, date of birth 19.10.1925, appears as entry number 224, service number 703964. Nominal Roll: Third draft of airmen from Russia arrived in England, beginning June 1942.


45. Yangi-Yul is about 40 kms south-west of Tashkent.

46. Today, Pahlevi is known as Bandare Anzali in modern-day Iran.

47. The 301 was formed as a Polish light bomber squadron in July 1940 and operated as such until April 1943. In July 1943 it was reformed as a special duties squadron and for while was also known as 1586 Flight. Duties included the dropping of supplies to underground forces.


53. Today, BBC Monitoring collects news from over 100 countries of the world and redistributes it in many forms across the globe. See: www.monitor.bbc.co.uk

54. The BBC Monitoring AGM for 2000 gives an insight into the history and development of the service. See: www.garatshay.org.uk/caversham.htm


58. The Guardian was first published in Manchester in 1821 and, until 1959, was known as The Manchester Guardian. In his interviews and letters, Zorza refers exclusively to ‘The Guardian’ even when he is referring to his pre-1959 association with the newspaper. In this biography, the newspaper is referred to throughout as The Guardian except in cases where a citation includes the name ‘Manchester Guardian’.


63. Stalin died on 5 March 1953.

Khrushchev’s leadership

As Zorza pondered a fresh start in journalism a power struggle developed in Russia that affected Soviet policy for more than a decade. Among the protagonists was an intelligent – if rude mannered and barely educated – former metal fitter who had previously worked in the mines: Nikita Khrushchev. After the Revolution he became a Party member and joined the Red Army as a political officer, eventually reaching the rank of Lieutenant General. During the Second World War, he rose to become the senior political officer in the south of the Soviet Union.

After Stalin’s death, Khrushchev became first secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party; Georgy Malenkov became prime minister of the Soviet Union. Immediately, Khrushchev began to remove his enemies and consolidate his position. Lavrenti Beria, the brutal head of the NKVD and a fierce supporter of Stalinism, was identified as a threat and promptly executed (1953). Four years later, when opposition gathered momentum among the Anti-Party Group, Khrushchev removed Molotov by appointing him ambassador to Mongolia. Eventually, Malenkov was ousted (1958) and Khrushchev became prime minister while retaining the position of first secretary. With the Party’s reassertion of authority over the military and secret police, Khrushchev’s ascendancy was complete.

For more than 10 years, Khrushchev’s leadership was marked by a programme of internal reform and international confrontation – while claiming all the while to seek peaceful coexistence.

In the Soviet Union, he began a process of ‘de-Stalinisation’, denouncing the former leader’s record at the Twentieth Party Congress in 1956: an attack that focused on Stalin’s authoritarian style and the promotion of his personality cult. The Communist world was shaken to its core, yet more surprises followed. A review of the Gulag showed the system to be poorly organised with a heavy reliance on state subsidies. Essentially, it was unprofitable and change was overdue. In a major shift of policy, existing cases were reviewed, relatives were encouraged to apply for the rehabilitation of
family members, and reliance on forced labour to shore up the economy began to be phased out.¹

Other reforms placed an emphasis on new lands for farming (an issue close to Khrushchev’s heart), the production of consumer goods (at the expense of coal and steel), and the erection of cheap housing blocks – initiatives which further distanced him from Stalin and the former leader’s focus on industrialisation. Moreover, his interest in research and space technology came to fruition when the USSR leapt ahead of the United States in the space race. While the US invested heavily, it was the Soviet Union that launched the first satellite to orbit the earth (Sputnik I, 1957) and put the first human being into space (Yuri Gagarin, 1961). And while Khrushchev never lost his combative approach, his willingness to engage with the West and sign a treaty that prohibited nuclear weapons tests in the atmosphere, in outer space and underwater, were major steps forward.

Despite these successes, Khrushchev was an unpopular man, widely regarded by many as a jumped-up peasant with few social graces. His unpredictable behaviour prompted feelings that ran from disapproval to contempt. He showed little restraint, even when the eyes of the world were focused on him. In 1960, in full view of the world’s media, he interrupted a United Nations’ meeting when he persistently thumped his fist and shouted in Russian; a performance he followed a few days later by taking off his shoe and appearing to bang it on the table.

While these outbursts were not endearing, it was his failed policies that contributed most to his downfall. At home, his Virgin Lands agricultural policy was hindered by his focus on Kazakhstan, a region unsuited to intensive crop production. While some harvests were good, others were disastrous, and ultimately, his reforms led to frustration. Abroad, he was criticised for his handling of the Hungarian Revolution (1956), an intervention that cost the lives of up to 40,000 Hungarians and 7,000 Soviet troops. In the embarrassment that followed, Communist sympathisers in the West simply lost their voice. But significantly, Khrushchev never recovered from his flawed judgement to install Soviet missiles in Cuba (1962). When US President John F. Kennedy stood firm and threatened war, Khrushchev was forced to remove them, a humiliation that reverberated throughout the Communist world. In the context of worsening relationships with China, Khrushchev’s capitulation appeared a spineless submission that incensed Mao, leading to public criticism and strained relations.

When the end came, Khrushchev’s removal was swift. As he holidayed in the Crimea during 1964, his former supporters-turned-rivals finally acted, their patience exhausted. On his return, Khrushchev was presented with a fait accompli. His resignation had been drafted for him – and already accepted. Appeal was impossible. When the
Central Committee Plenum\(^2\) opened on 14 December 1964, Brezhnev declared:

The situation in Presidium\(^3\) had become abnormal, and the fault for this lay above all with Comrade Khrushchev, who had embarked on a path that transgressed the Leninist principles of collective leadership of the life of the Party and the country, highlighting his own personality cult.\(^4\)

And so, amid a standing ovation, power passed to the new first secretary: Leonid Brezhnev.

It was events such as these, and their ramifications in the Communist world, that occupied Victor Zorza’s mind after the death of Stalin; complex proceedings that caused widespread speculation as scraps of information filtered piecemeal across Soviet borders to challenge the skill of Western commentators. Through the haze, Zorza’s brand of analytic journalism became a valuable insight into Communist activity on the global stage: a means whereby the West could gaze on internal power struggles,\(^5,6\) track rising stars,\(^7,8\) keep abreast of international relations,\(^9,10\) become aware of policy shifts,\(^11,12\) and appreciate the roles played by students\(^13,14\) and dissidents.\(^15,16\) It was no surprise that his articles attracted an international readership.

Radio Liberty

After Zorza lost his job with the BBC, his responsibilities weighed heavily on his shoulders. With a family to support he needed an income – and quickly. His freelance work had brought a welcome bonus; but it was unlikely, with his career still developing, that journalism could provide for all of his needs. So he turned to what he knew: monitoring and broadcasting.

In Germany, a new radio station had been launched on 1 March 1953, four days before Stalin’s death. Funded by the US government, the station aimed to provide open discussion on current events, and to broadcast to a Russian audience what Western correspondents were saying about the Soviet Union. Initially named Radio Liberation, the station was seen as a tool to help liberate the Soviet Union from Bolshevism, thereby reflecting the Eisenhower government’s approach to foreign policy. But in the context of broadcasting, the name was unpopular. Francis Ronalds\(^17\) joined the staff in 1952 and became the organisation’s executive director (1973). He recalls:

Before it was set up, they used the term Radio Liberation and said that was the name it was going to have. Then those of us who came to set up the station thought that this was a very bad name; it would imply that we were going to do something within the Soviet Union in order to win the liberation of its people from the Soviet regime – and obviously we didn’t have the capability to do that. It would have given entirely the wrong impression; so the name was changed to Radio Liberty\(^18\) before we went on the air.\(^19\)

Two months after the station began broadcasting from Munich,\(^20\) Zorza’s application for the post of ‘consultant’ was successful. In addition to providing the much-needed funds, it was an environment where his language and analytical skills could be put to good use; and the promotion of democracy was an added attraction. But it meant uprooting his family and moving to Germany.

There were benefits, however. Radio Liberty was more relaxed than the BBC had been about his links with The Guardian so he continued to freelance without any difficulty. As the quality of his work became acknowledged, both organisations sought his services. When his contract expired
in 1954, Radio Liberty offered a year’s extension – and hopes were raised of a longer stay. He had made an impact. Francis Ronalds:

He was the person who organised our very extensive files; he did a magnificent job. He made clippings of a great number of Soviet newspapers and also used snippets from broadcasts – we had a large monitoring operation from Soviet broadcasts – and he had cross-indexed files so we were able to very quickly get together information on persons and places from these files that he put together.²¹

Zorza thrived on the pioneering spirit. Whereas his role at the BBC had developed his analytical skills, his work at Radio Liberty helped propel a democratic view of international affairs into the heart of the Soviet Union – overriding domestic attempts to block the signal.

Within weeks, the station was broadcasting in Armenian, Chechen, Tajik and Uzbek. By 1954, broadcasts appeared in Belarusian and Ukrainian. In 1955, the station marked the second anniversary of the slave labourers’ uprising in Vorkuta – the cluster of Gulag camps in the Arctic Circle – with messages of hope and support. Eventually, Soviet citizens gained access to émigré writers like Andrei Sinyavsky²² and Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, especially when the showcase programme, From Another Shore, was launched during the 1970s.

There were concerns, however. In September 1954, the body of a writer from Belarus, Leonid Karas, was found near Munich in the Isar River. Two months later, the chief of the Azerbaijani desk, Abo Fatalibey, was garrotted in his apartment. In both cases there were suspicions, never proved, of KGB involvement.²³

Though Zorza liked Germany, remaining in Munich for more than two years presented difficulties. After settling in postwar England, Zorza had become accustomed to the British way of life. His home was there; his children had been born there. He now sought British citizenship and feared that a prolonged stay in Germany would jeopardise his chances. A year in England was essential.

Undeterred, Radio Liberty embarked on a remarkable strategy to let him leave and yet still retain his services. A package of duties was assembled that could be performed by Zorza during his stay in England, thereby keeping him on the payroll so that in 1956 he could return to Munich and resume his career with the station. It was a high-risk project and much depended on Zorza’s value to the organisation. The
director of the Radio Programming Division was unequivocal. In a memo to the Deputy President, Europe, he wrote:

Victor Zorza is one of the most valuable members of our staff and one of the most difficult to replace. He has excellent knowledge, and firsthand knowledge, of the Soviet Union. He has an extraordinary ability for putting himself in the shoes of the Soviet listener, and is one of the persons who have contributed most to pioneering the present approach of the Russian desk of Radio Liberation. He is hard-working, has the old ‘fire-horse’ enthusiasm when a good story is breaking, and has a passion for being right on his facts. He has succeeded as coach, inspirer and prodder, in developing several of our best writers … and finally developed his own ‘stable’ of commentary writers to work up the material and hand it to the desks on a platter.

For a proposed half salary, Zorza would undertake several duties on behalf of the station. First, he would send script suggestions and outlines. Then he would contribute to the Democratic Education programme and Life Abroad series. Material would also be provided from critical and academic sources. Finally, he would advocate for the station and seek contributions from writers in London, Oxford and Cambridge. The director writes: ‘We expect to get very good results from this arrangement.’

Part of the arrangement’s appeal was to further the nascent idea, never developed at the time, to have a permanent representative in London and other major capitals. This would be a first step along that road. But notwithstanding these policy implications, the package for Zorza was nothing other than a plan to secure his return to Munich ‘which is where he will be the most use to us, when the citizenship matter is cleared up a year hence’.

Without support from Radio Liberty, the fear was that Zorza would seek employment elsewhere. Although the company had raised no objections to his freelance work, it was recognised that The Guardian was a major consideration. In short: if Radio Liberty failed to recruit Zorza, The Guardian would. It was a worry:

Zorza has to make a living for himself and his family in the year to come, and if we do not keep him on at something better than haphazard freelance rates, he would be obliged to seek more or less permanent employment elsewhere with the possibility that he would not return to Munich. One such possibility he has is joining the staff of the Manchester Guardian, but The Guardian is interested only if he will obligate himself for a period considerably longer than one year. Since we know of no-one who could really replace Zorza, and since he will perform a number of his present functions from London, we feel we have much to gain and comparatively little to lose.

It was a bold move which, in spite of the incentives, ultimately failed. While Victor was stateless and used to change, Rosemary missed England, the familiarity of her home, her family and friends. For her, the year’s extension in Germany had been an unwelcome development. Richard recalls:

Between the first and second year we were all set to come back home. [Dad] came home and told my mother he had changed his mind – to her fury! So she went back anyway to have an appendicitis operation and us kids went back and stayed with our grandmother. We all stayed with our grandmother for a month and then we all came back to Germany.

Rather than incur more displeasure, Zorza returned to England and made his choice. It was The Guardian.
Hungary, 1956

Once Zorza joined The Guardian he began to comment on events in the Communist world with his usual finesse. But in 1956, as spring rolled into summer, he had an uncanny feeling. Something was ‘in the air’. After a decade of Communist domination, discontent over political and intellectual constraints coupled with poor living standards resulted in demonstrations in Central and Eastern Europe. Poland led the way. Faced by a wave of anti-Soviet feeling and a unifying Catholic Church, the government gave way and made concessions. Protesters in neighbouring countries took heart.

In Hungary, Soviet domination had been evident since 1945. Russian troops remained on Hungarian soil, wealth was diverted to Moscow and the country was led by a Stalinist puppet, Mátéás Rákosi. After Stalin’s death, hopes were raised of a new era, fuelled especially by Khrushchev’s attack on Stalin in 1956. In the debate that followed confusion spread among the Hungarian Communist Party as Stalinists lost ground and reformists saw the opportunity for change. In a climate of uncertainty, conflicting visions emerged of Hungary’s future: of a more open Communist society; of a socialist society centred on workers’ councils; of a move towards democracy and, eventually, a capitalist economy.

In this climate, attitudes hardened. Amid the growing unrest, political agendas appeared among disparate groups – peasants to academics – all demanding change. In July, Rákosi fell. Rather than defuse the situation, appetites were whetted. More was possible.

On 23 October 1956, students and workers thronged the streets of Budapest and violence flared when members of the secret police fired on demonstrators, causing fatalities. The protesters armed themselves and drew up a list of demands. Moscow’s response was to mobilise Soviet forces stationed in Hungary and the following two weeks became a patchwork of local conflicts and negotiated cease-fires. At this stage, Zorza made his way to Budapest to report on the unfolding events.

Victor’s first task was to glean information about the government’s position and the demands of the people. In a context of widespread political confusion, Imre Nagy – a Communist leader generally regarded as a liberal – was installed as prime minister as the students took to the streets. Zorza writes:

Although only at noon today, Radio Budapest said that Mr Nagy would try to negotiate a [Soviet] withdrawal by January 1 [1957] the promise was not repeated in the Central Committee’s declaration broadcast in the afternoon. Nor, incidentally, was it mentioned in Moscow radio’s summary of Mr Nagy’s speech or in any other East European reports on the situation in Hungary, except those put out by the official Polish news agency.  

Clearly, Zorza considered the proposal had already been dropped. Turning to the demands of the people, he states:

It would seem that what the Hungarian people desire most, next to moral support, would be a reference of the whole matter to the United Nations.  

This was a recurring theme in his series of articles, but at the critical moment, the United Nations showed little inclination to become involved. As the situation worsened, Zorza, warned of a more serious consequence:

The whole matter is likely to be aggravated, possibly in the near future, by the apparent success of the rebels, which, if it continues, will require the bringing of considerable Soviet reinforcements into the country.
Two days later, Zorza writes a memorable article after coming across a 17-year-old girl who had joined the Hungarian rebels:

Then a girl, the only one in a crowd of rebels, took up the tale. ‘Today is my seventeenth birthday,’ she said, a little bashfully, with just a hint of pride in her voice. Seventeen and she was one of the rebels who were defying the massive might of the Soviet Army. Seventeen and she had just come from the town of Gyor, 60 or so kilometres from the frontier, where, someone else told us, 80 members of the security police had been ‘liquidated’ by the workers; where, she announced proudly, ‘we put up a ladder against the Russian memorial, threw a noose round the Red Star on top of it, and pulled it down.’
She was 17, but the Budapest youths who had attacked Russian tanks with bare hands were younger. Many were now dead. ‘What is your estimate of our casualties?’ she asked … her question had been purely rhetorical. She drew herself up to her full height, a look of steel came into her blue eyes. ‘I must tell you that the dead must be counted not in hundreds but in many, many thousands,’ she said.

‘What is the feeling of the Hungarian people about the sacrifices they are making,’ another journalist asked. ‘They believe that by thus drawing the attention of the world to what is happening they will compel the Russians to get out,’ she said, and without pause, asked: ‘And what is the feeling of the British people?’ We all hesitated. No-one was anxious to reply …

Haltingly, one of the reporters began to frame an answer. ‘First, amazement.’ Then a pause … ‘Second … admiration.’ Then quickly, desperately, as if he wanted to withdraw each word as soon as he had uttered it: ‘And a great feeling of guilt.’ The girl came back like a flash: ‘There is much to feel guilty for.’

By 2 November, despite a lull in the fighting, there were menacing signs coming from the eastern border. Zorza:

The details of Soviet troop movements, as disclosed by sources which are usually best informed on these matters, indicate that the military situation is very serious indeed. It is not only that Soviet troops have been observed pouring across the border at Zahony, at the frontier with Russia, or that large troop concentrations have been observed across the border. Strong Soviet columns were known to have reached at seven o’clock tonight the towns of Kisújszállás and Füzesabony, this side of the river Tisza. Both towns are astride the railway lines to Budapest. And from Miskolc, a stronghold of the revolution in north-east Hungary, came the news that up to 850 Soviet tanks had been sighted at various strategic points in the area.

Against this mailed fist of Soviet military might the Hungarians can now put up only their indomitable spirits. The anguish in their minds takes them into tortuous byways of speculation, which may well cause pain to those in England who have applauded and admired from afar this nation’s courage and, as some might have said, recklessness. For many here believe, wrong as they might be, that in their hour of need, England has betrayed not only her own traditions but also the conscience of mankind by choosing this moment to fish in the troubled waters of Israeli-Egyptian enmity.

As the build-up continued, Zorza reported a last plea from the Hungarian government for international support:

‘Neutrality’ is the word in Budapest. It figures in the notes addressed today by the Hungarians to the Soviet government, in the message to Mr Hammarskjöld, the Secretary-General of the United Nations, and it crops up in almost every political conversation – and there are few others in Budapest these days.

The model is Austria, not Yugoslavia with its lofty but involved concept of active coexistence, nor Switzerland with its centuries of peace. Ravaged by war, torn by revolution, raped by foreign military occupation, Hungary is sighing for the goal that Austria has achieved: first the withdrawal of foreign troops, then neutrality.

Yesterday Mr Nagy said that he had asked the Big Four to recognise Hungary’s neutrality. Hungary is waiting anxiously for their reaction. The people here can understand why Moscow is delaying its reply. But why, it has asked, have the Western governments not replied immediately that they acknowledge Hungary’s neutrality? By delaying its reply, even for a day, the West is making things easier for Moscow. It is, in effect, countenancing the march of Soviet troops on Budapest.

In effect, Hungary’s fate was already sealed. Although
international sympathy ran high, there were overriding factors that prevented intervention. For the US, they concerned the wisdom of supporting a European government against a formidable power that already had troops on the ground; for Britain, the question of the Suez Canal was deemed a higher priority. Importantly, Soviet displeasure with Hungary was not aimed solely at the revolutionaries. Nagy’s reforms allowed the reconstitution of political parties, greater freedom of speech and the release of political prisoners from prison. In this respect, Cardinal Mindszenty, a long-standing opponent of Moscow, had become a cause célèbre. But it was Nagy’s decision to withdraw Hungary from the Warsaw Pact which proved to be the last straw. János Kádár, the Hungarian foreign minister, left the government in disgust. In Russia, Khrushchev succumbed to the hawks and agreed to direct action.

On 4 November, a savage campaign was launched to subjugate Hungary and bring the country back into line. Air strikes, ground troops and tanks were unleashed on Hungarian forces and the civilian population alike which cost tens of thousands of lives. Estimates suggest 200,000 refugees fled west. Once resistance was crushed, a new government was installed under Kádár and, in the reprisals that followed, Nagy and hundreds of others were executed.

Zorza was still in Hungary when fighting broke out and, not for the first time, he found himself in a war zone surrounded by Soviet troops. He needed to get out of the country, and quick. Back home, Rosemary was horrified at the turn of events and feared for Victor’s safety. So she was relieved to receive a call from Richard Fry, London editor of The Guardian concerning Victor’s whereabouts. Richard Zorza continues:

[Richard Fry] called my mother after the Russian troops had come in, and said: ‘Your husband’s in the Embassy.’ Remember my father was stateless so there was no legal obligation for the Brits to take him into the Embassy. ‘They’re going to read the list on the one o’clock news. Don’t worry, everything’s under control.’ And then he hung up. And he called my mother up again. He said: ‘Now remember [Zorza] is the end of the alphabet, so don’t worry when they’re reading the list; it’s going to take a long time to get to your husband.’ And that’s a level of thinking about how someone else experiences something; you know, putting themselves in your shoes. We’ve all been eternally grateful for this one little [kindness].

It was a relief to know where Victor was, but the next step was to get him safely out of the country. Richard Zorza:

What actually happened was that a whole minibus-load of them came out. Most of them were British, but he was the only one that spoke Russian, and of course the border was guarded by Russians. So what happened was, they get to the border and his passport is in the pile near the bottom so it’s not going to draw any attention; and the Russian border guards read only Cyrillic, so they couldn’t read the passports. But then they’re not really border guards, they’re the military. And so they send someone to get the Hungarian border guards who are on duty but lounging in the back because they’re uncooperative. And the Russians wait, and they wait, and they wait – because the Hungarians are presumably not interested in helping. And so finally they just pass through.

It was a close call. Zorza had no wish to see what level of interest his presence might generate among the Russians: a stateless person born in what had become the Soviet Union now seeking exit to the West. He considered whether he should have been there at all. In his view, what was to become known as the Hungarian Revolution was a
landmark in the history of twentieth-century Europe; a Cold War struggle between unequal foes played out in full view of a fascinated but disengaged world. He felt compelled to become involved; to be present at the scene and give authentic, hands-on coverage. With the benefit of hindsight, it had turned out to be a precarious venture that almost back-fired. Painful memories were rekindled: of his experience in Russia and his attempts to return home. In this instance he was lucky and left Hungary safely with the stories he wanted. But in the process he had become a fugitive again, seeking refuge from the ubiquitous Soviet military. He would need to be cautious in future.

The Sino-Soviet split

In January 1962, Chalmers Roberts of The Washington Post drew attention to a split that was thought to be developing between the Soviet Union and Red China. In his review, Chalmers suggested that although the evidence was ‘not yet hard’, there were several indications to this effect, the latest being an article which had appeared in Pravda the previous week. He put forward the views of leading commentators, including Zorza, to support his claim.\(^{36}\)

Zorza’s inclusion was apt, for he had been warning of a split for some time. Writing three years previously, he states:

The current private joke among Poland’s plain-spoken Communists concerns their Russian neighbour. ‘Thank God,’ they say, ‘for that big buffer state between us and Red China.’ In fact, the Polish witicism reflects a new concern among Europe’s Communists about the potential threat of a nation whose population will probably reach one billion by 1980. Friction between Moscow and Peking is just beginning, but it may yet become one of the most significant developments in the long Cold War that lies ahead. That is why we should be paying more attention to the divergences that underlie the seeming unity of the two Communist superstates.\(^{37}\)

The worsening relations between Russia and China began in earnest when Khrushchev came to power and continued, in one form or another, for more than 30 years. There was a whole raft of contentious issues that included home affairs, foreign policy and national boundaries. As philosophical debate intertwined with divergent historical and cultural perspectives, the rift deepened further. Finally, during the late 1960s, relations between the two countries broke down: an international mishap that widened the division in the global Communist movement.

Mao felt aggrieved. After Stalin’s death he regarded himself as the elder statesman, leader even, of the Communist world. It was a position he considered his right; hard-earned through the toil of protest and revolt.

Born in 1893, Mao fought in the Chinese Revolution of 1911, helping to free China from the long-standing Qing dynasty that had governed the country since the seventeenth century. Although he was a member of the victorious Kuomintang (Nationalist Party), Mao had been drawn to Marxism while working in the library at Peking University. After the Russian Revolution, he became attracted to Communism and played a role in adapting the ideas of Lenin to the Chinese context.

There were significant differences between Russia and China: not for Mao the struggle of the urban working class, a group that was virtually unknown in his country. Instead, Mao believed that the Communist ideal would come to fruition through the efforts of his own class, the peasantry, and his thinking came to reflect this view.
Although Mao would wield power over one quarter of the world’s population – and ultimately be responsible for over 70 million deaths in peacetime – he remembered with affection his early life in the Shaoshan valley (Hunan). In their biography of Mao, historians Jung Chang and Jon Halliday write:

Mao was the third son, but the first to survive beyond infancy. His Buddhist mother became even more devout to encourage Buddha to protect him. Mao was given the two part surname Tse-tung. Tse, which means ‘to shine on’, was the name given to all his generation, as preordained when the clan chronicle was first written in the eighteenth century; tung means ‘the East’. So his full given name meant ‘to shine on the East’. When two more boys were born, in 1896 and 1905, they were given the names Tse-min (min means ‘the people’) and Tse-tan (tan possibly referred to the local region, Xiangtan).

These names reflect the inveterate aspiration of Chinese peasants for their sons to do well – and the expectation that they could. High positions were open to all through education, which for centuries meant studying Confucian classics. Excellence would enable young men of any background to pass imperial examinations and become mandarins – all the way up to the prime minister. Officialdom was the definition of achievement, and the names given to Mao and his brothers expressed the hopes placed upon them.38

Despite Mao’s rise within both the Kuomintang and the Chinese Communist Party (CPP), he was regarded by Party members as opportunistic and was eventually deprived of his seat on the Central Committee. Moreover, when Sun Yat-sen died in 1925, Chiang Kai-shek emerged as the new Kuomintang leader and set about purging the organisation of its Communist faction. Mao and other survivors evacuated the area and in October 1934 set off on the long march to safety in north-west China. Of the 80,000 people who joined the exodus, estimates suggest that less than 4,00039 arrived in Shaanxi province, the final destination, a year later. When the Japanese invaded China in 1937, Chiang Kai-shek and Mao Tse-tung set aside their differences to face the common enemy, only to resume their hostilities when Japan surrendered. This time, it was the Communists who prevailed. As Chiang Kai-shek and his Kuomintang supporters were driven from China to the island of Formosa (now Taiwan), Mao established the People’s Republic of China and proclaimed the beginning of a new era.

Once the People’s Republic was founded in 1949, the balance of power shifted. Initially, Stalin had recognised the government of Chiang Kai-shek but was then faced with a Communist government in China opposed by a truncated nationalist party – supported by the United States – on Formosa. Mao visited Russia from December 1949 until February 1950 and during his stay, reached an accommodation with Stalin. Agreements included the publication of Mao’s works in Russian. Soviet advisers would assist the development of the Chinese Communist state and the USSR would become friend and ally to the nascent Chinese republic.

While Mao smiled and agreed to all Stalin’s suggestions, he implemented little. Dmitri Volkogonov writes:

Mao presented Stalin with the difficult problem of trying to understand someone from a completely different civilisation, culture and way of thinking. The philosophical dialogues conducted by the Chinese were enigmatic, obscure and unfamiliar to Stalin. He noted Mao’s tendency to speak in aphorisms and to allude to ancient philosophers, while Stalin was generally content to quote himself as the only required authority on any subject. Mao’s language was literary, vivid and, while more convoluted, much richer than Stalin’s. Mao
referred to the four books of Confucius, and a host of early Chinese poets, while Stalin tried to fathom the meaning of the allegories and historical excursions made by this man, who so patently had already grown accustomed to the role of ‘great leader’.  

Whereas there was an array of differences between Stalin and Mao: personal, cultural, ideological and stylistic – some of great significance – Mao nevertheless recognised Stalin as the global leader of Communism and respected him as such. But when Stalin died, these underlying differences became problematic after Khrushchev came to power: a man who understood little about the East and cared even less. Over the years, his distrust of Mao turned to animosity:

Politics is a game, and Mao Tse-tung has played politics with Asiatic cunning, following his own rules of cajolery, treachery, savage vengeance and deceit. Talleyrand once said that a diplomat is given a tongue in order to conceal his thoughts. The same goes for a politician, and Mao has always been a master at concealing his true thoughts and intentions. Why, I remember after the Twentieth Party Congress, Mao said: ‘Comrade Khrushchev has opened our eyes and given us light that we might see. He has told us the truth at last. We will reform.’ But I was always on my guard with him. I could tell when he was wheedling us.  

With suspicion growing on both sides, Mao became unhappy about Khrushchev’s programme of de-Stalinisation and his inclination towards détente with the West. To Mao, such engagement with capitalist governments was a clear betrayal of Marxist-Leninist principles. As the two leaders became entrenched, the stage was set for dispute and dissent mingled with justification and recrimination. And Zorza was on hand to comment.

It was in 1958 that Zorza brought his readership’s attention to the deteriorating relationships between Khrushchev and Mao. In an article published in August of that year – ‘Peking threat to start a war forced Khrushchev to retreat’ – Zorza states his evidence and then considers its implications in the complex field of foreign affairs:

For two days running last week the Soviet Communist newspaper Pravda, in Moscow, acclaimed in leading articles the ‘unity of Russia and China’. Thus, by protesting too much, Pravda has strengthened the indication that a breach between the two countries has been narrowly avoided.

Remarkably, the activity around this ‘state of unity’ resulted in Khrushchev withdrawing from the Security Council summit. Zorza explores how this could happen:

The answer, which falls into the pattern of previous analyses of Chinese-Soviet relations, seems to be the threat of war.
Not, of course, of war between China and Russia, but between Russia and the West. When Khrushchev agreed to the Western counter-proposal for a summit meeting within the Security Council framework, he must have been aware of the Chinese objections to his sitting down at the same table as Chiang Kai-shek. Khrushchev, therefore, must have hoped to brazen it out, to face Mao with an accomplished fact, and to mollify him later.

When all is said and done, there is only one way in which Mao could make sure that Khrushchev would never betray him by sitting down at the same table as Chiang. Mao could do this only by invading Formosa and putting an end to the Chiang regime. This would bring in the Americans and Russia would have to stand by its commitments to help Mao, bringing a third world war, or at least the very grave risk of it. And the chief sufferers would be the two main protagonists, Russia and the United States.

In view of these machinations, Khrushchev's withdrawal from the Security Council summit becomes easier to understand. From a journalist's perspective, Zorza's achievement was to highlight the broader context of what, to Western eyes, seemed a puzzling decision. This was one of many occasions when his analysis and insight illuminated the darker corners of the Communist world.

During the 1950s and 1960s, border disputes were long-running irritants between China and Russia. In his usual style, Zorza shows how a detailed analysis of seemingly trivial data could point to important, larger issues. In this instance, he focuses on maps, newly released from China:

A comparison of maps of the Soviet-Chinese border, just received from Peking, with similar maps printed in Russia, shows the existence of a frontier dispute between the two countries that may be similar in kind, if not in extent, to the Sino-Indian dispute. The section of the Chinese frontier with India which is marked on Peking maps as ‘undefined’ extends northwards to take in the Chinese-Afghan frontier and over 200 miles of Chinese-Soviet frontier. On all Soviet maps this section at the southern tip of the Russian-Chinese frontier has always been shown as properly defined. There is thus a clear difference between Moscow, which shows by its map markings that it regards this frontier as final, and Peking, which shows by its own ‘undefined’ map markings that it regards this line as needing more precise definition, and probably rectification in China's favour.

Zorza suggests this issue, while important, does not relate solely to the Soviet-Chinese frontier, but to the wider question of Outer Mongolia. After Russian involvement during the 1930s, and a loosening of Chinese ties during Chiang Kai-shek's government of the 1940s, the government of Communist China took a different view. Zorza concludes:

The Chinese seem determined to keep the issue open because they may not wish to perpetuate the status of Mongolia as a Soviet satellite. Mao Tse-tung is on record as saying in 1936, and repeating in 1942, that Outer Mongolia must once again become part of the Chinese ‘Federation’.

Despite this glimpse of China’s intent, such matters appear insignificant against the domestic measures designed to transform China into a Communist state and, at the same time, raise it to the level of more advanced countries. Just nine years after the People's Republic of China was established, the Great Leap Forward was designed to mobilise the peasants and completely reorganise agriculture, industry, education and the social structure. In his article ‘Peking unveils vast plan to mobilize its millions’, Zorza writes:

The most spectacular aspect of this internal revolution … is the adaptation of the agriculture labour force to industrial tasks. The communes are to develop their own local industries, on a small scale but entailing even the manufacture of
iron and steel and their products. These will not be modern industrial units familiar in Russia or the West, but they will be more than cottage industries ... Mao’s own and entirely original contribution to the theory and practice of Communism is that he proposes to turn the peasantry into an industrial proletariat without urbanising it, as both the West and Russia had to do during their own industrial revolution.”

In this new society, a key role would be played by women, freed from their household chores to take their place alongside men. In a pilot scheme already in place, Zorza reports seven million women ‘liberated’ in this way. To assist this liberation, 37,000 ‘mess halls’ had been established in one area and they had become the only place to get a meal; an acclaimed exercise in efficiency!

Yet the programme was destined to fail. Unforeseen occurrences such as bad weather and natural disasters combined with poor planning and reduced agricultural output to create a disastrous situation. Within the communes, the new ‘industrial’ workers were generally unskilled, turning out poorly made goods that were undesirable in the market place. Eventually, famine engulfed a population that had become exhausted. A month after reporting the move towards communisation, Zorza was outlining the difficulties:

The idea that the regimentation of the peasants would provide an inexhaustible resource of labour for the building up of local industries has received a rude shock ... Peking radio revealed that grain is being lost in the fields because of ‘a manpower shortage caused by transfers to iron and steel production’.

The impact on family life and the well-established traditions of China, centuries old, was also proving unpopular:

... the provision of public ‘mess halls’ and the disruption to family life has not passed without protest. The People’s Daily reports peasants as saying that ‘everything is good about the commune except that the sharing of meals together does not suit my taste’.

One reason why the initiative lost ground was that Russia disagreed in principle and, as a consequence, withdrew its technical advisers. Mao pushed ahead with his domestic reforms but the withdrawal of Soviet technicians had an important effect on weaponry and defence. By the end of 1960, all USSR specialists, including those with information on atomic weapons production, had been withdrawn from China – a move which Gorbachev later described as a huge mistake. From then on, Mao could do little but vent his anger on Khrushchev and hope for an eventual change in policy.

Zorza addressed this issue in a pair of articles published in July 1959 – a time when Soviet advisers were still thought to be on Chinese soil. As preparations mounted for the Geneva talks on a test ban treaty, information was published from Communist sources suggesting that ‘the time when China could test a nuclear device is not far off’. While Zorza debates whether the release of such information was a ploy to raise fears about a nuclear stockpile in China – and thus sensitise the Western delegation to the Soviet proposal regarding nuclear free zones – he is persuaded that the USSR in fact disapproved of China’s ambitions:

It is possible that the Russians are just as concerned about such an eventuality as the West. The Chinese press has now provided further evidence in support of the view that Soviet Premier Nikita S. Khrushchev’s proposal in January for the establishment of a zone free of atomic weapons, with the
implied inclusion of China in such a zone, has not been welcome in Peking.53

As Khrushchev approached the final year of his leadership, open hostility flowed between Moscow and Peking. In an unprecedented move, the Chinese Communist Party mounted a direct challenge to Khrushchev’s leadership through a letter sent to the Soviet Central Committee (June 1963). According to Zorza:

The Chinese questioned Khrushchev’s claim that the proletarian dictatorship in Russia had ended and has been replaced by a ‘state of all people’, his claim that the two types of Socialist property, state and collective, are being merged, and his claim that the Soviet Communist Party has been transformed – ‘a party of the proletariat’ into ‘a party of the entire people’.54

Alongside these criticisms the Chinese expressed concerns about the evolution of Russia away from Stalinism and a deep-seated fear that the Soviet Union might degenerate into a bourgeois state. They considered the only solution was to remove Khrushchev and his immediate associates from power. Amid claim and counter-claim – including the suggestion that China should not count on Soviet support in the event of hostilities with another power55 – the position of Khrushchev’s enemies was strengthened.

The fall of Khrushchev

Although Khrushchev regarded Mao’s hostility as irksome rather than problematic it raised the important issue of defence – and it was here that Khrushchev’s policies left him vulnerable. By aiming to raise living standards at the expense of weaponry, the Soviet Premier galvanised right-wing opposition and, as a consequence, found his policies were questioned at home as well as abroad. In a speech outlining his economic plans made in December 1963, he shows a distinct change of direction. Zorza reports:

The belt-tightening lean years have passed, Khrushchev declared. New capital outlays, he said, will be ‘directly related to satisfying the requirements of the people’ and raising the standard of living. Instead of projecting increased production of planes and rockets, Khrushchev promised advances in the output of ‘knitted goods and hosiery’.56

Aware of the growing opposition, Khrushchev appealed for popular support, but found his programme cut in the area of agriculture. Convinced that a target production of 100 million tons of fertilizer by 1970 was an appropriate objective, Khrushchev faced an objection from ‘a group of scientists’ that considered 85 million tons was excessive. The submission was upheld and Khrushchev lost; a clear sign of the conflict that ran beneath the surface of Soviet political life.

The following year, after Khrushchev was forcibly removed, these issues quickly resurfaced. Within two days of his departure on 14 October, Zorza was sifting the information and speculating on the role of ‘rightist’ elements:

Nikita Khrushchev’s removal from the leadership, apparently prepared in his absence on holiday in the Crimea, and the failure to prepare the Soviet public for the announcement suggest a forced retirement. This conclusion would remain valid even if the most fulsome tributes were to be paid to Khrushchev by the other Soviet leaders, and they have not yet appeared.57

Commenting on the changes, Zorza correctly points to
Suslov's role and notes the political leanings of the major players:

Unconfirmed reports from Moscow said that the notion for Mr Khrushchev's retirement was proposed by Mikhail Suslov at a meeting of Party leaders. This would point to an initiative by the conservative wing of the Party, of which Suslov has long been a spokesman. The new Premier Alexei Kosygin is a ‘technocrat’ rather than a politician, and his appointment, if confirmed, is likely to be a temporary one. Party leader Leonid Brezhnev, on the other hand, has been groomed for the succession since he took over last year the post of Second Party Secretary.  

Significantly, it was the imminence of Khrushchev's economic plan which appeared to be the catalyst:

At the beginning of this month, the Soviet press published a communiqué on the joint session of the highest party to discuss the new long-term economic plan. Khrushchev reverted to the argument that ‘now that the defence of the country is on a necessary level’, the emphasis previously placed on heavy industry could be shifted to the consumer goods industries.

The new economic plan was to be drawn up on this basis. This means that decisions were about to be taken which would commit Soviet economic resources, perhaps irreversibly – if Khrushchev were to remain in power – to the fulfilment of his policies. This would have provided the motive for the opposition to remove Khrushchev now.

Alongside Khrushchev's economic plan, defence capability also featured prominently, as predicted:

The new Soviet leaders reaffirmed for the fifth day running their adherence to the principles of peaceful coexistence, but Premier Alexei Kosygin added a new assurance about steps to increase the country's military capacity. This differs from Khrushchev's last recorded pronouncement on the subject, at the beginning of this month, when he assured a Party and government meeting that the country's defences were now so adequate to their task that more money could be spent on consumer goods.

As Khrushchev disappeared from view, secret briefings were given to selected audiences about why he was removed. Zorza adds:

Other Communist sources say he was attacked, at the Central Committee meeting which deposed him, for building himself up as a wartime military leader, for not convening the Party Presidium regularly, for lack of personal dignity, for nepotism in giving his editor son-in-law important diplomatic and Party missions, and for arranging special treatment for the family members who went with him to Scandinavia last June. Another charge was that he went over the heads of his colleagues by announcing decisions on matters still under Presidium debate.

Despite Soviet efforts to ensure that Khrushchev left silently, there was increasing disquiet among the Communist parties in both Western and Eastern Europe:

The National Committee of French Communist students today demanded the publication of the full transcript of the Central Committee's proceedings, including Khrushchev's own remarks. The students said they felt it their duty to declare their disagreement with the methods employed to remove Khrushchev. The students appear to be united on this matter. So are the French and Italian Communist Parties, divided as they have been on some other issues.

Though the Kremlin took steps to salve the discomfort of national Communist parties, there was to be no great debate, no expression of regret and absolutely no way back for Nikita Khrushchev. In the circumstances, his son Sergei thought it fortunate that his father escaped with his life.
Restricted to his home in Moscow, he became a non-person, unacknowledged and invisible in Brezhnev’s Russia. He says:

I now live like a hermit on the outskirts of Moscow. I have practically no communication with other people. I communicate only with those who guard me from others – and who guard others from me. I suppose the people around me spend most of their time guarding others from me.65

Isolated and withdrawn, Khrushchev determined to record his memoirs. As he reflected on his political life, he dictated his thoughts onto 39 reel-to-reel audio tapes. As each tape was completed, Sergei made two copies; the first copy was given to his friend, Igor Shanik, the second to Time magazine. The KGB seized the original tapes in 1970, but the two copies remained.66 However, as the tapes were copied and dispatched, some fragmentation occurred. Thus, when the first volume of Khrushchev’s memoirs appeared in English – Khrushchev Remembers67 – some critics doubted the authenticity of the work.68 Zorza was among them.

In a foreword of the first edition, Edward Crankshaw refrains from mentioning Zorza by name, choosing instead to refer to the ‘well-known journalist’ whose elaborate analysis claimed the work was a CIA forgery. The conspiracy theory was attractive. Writing in 1974, Zorza comments:

The contents of the book seemed calculated to discredit the Soviet regime. They were bound to create difficulties for the Kremlin in ways which would have been of benefit to the United States. The CIA had published anti-Soviet forgeries before, and now the traces again seemed to lead back to its ‘Department of Dirty Tricks’.69

On this occasion, Zorza – though not alone – was wrong; spectacularly wrong. But the subject of his analysis was not a policy statement on the pages of Pravda, nor a summary of events in Izvestia; it was a 650-page book based on transcripts from fragmented and disorganised tapes, rearranged into some sort of order as best as could be done. It also contained any number of omissions, evasions and distortions and displayed some of the messiness of human endeavour. Faced with this text, perhaps Zorza stumbled because he refused to recognise any weakness in an analytical procedure that assumed every work was a cohesive whole, moving sequentially through concepts and events, where every phrase had deeper, cryptic meanings that pointed to an overarching purpose which would eventually be revealed. In this instance, it is tempting to conclude that his system was simply inappropriate – although at the time, it did not help that the tapes had not been released for examination.

When the second volume was published (1974), Zorza was forced to think again. By this time, 180 hours of tapes had been deposited at Columbia University; transcription was well under way; and voice tests had been performed. Every result pointed to the authenticity of the text. Zorza writes of himself:

The journalist in question continues to be regarded as something of an authority on Communist affairs. Difficult as he may find it to make an admission of error which is bound to reflect on the quality of his work, he owes it to his readers to do so. The fact is that journalists do make mistakes, and it is necessary that from time to time, they should admit them, not in passing, not with a coy throw-away phrase, but in a detailed article that would recall the full circumstances of the original error, as this article has done. For the ‘well-known journalist’ whom Edward Crankshaw refused to name was me.70

It was a gracious admission of how his analytic journalism had let him down.
Notes

2. The Plenum is the meeting of all members of the Party Central Committee.
3. The Presidium was formerly called the Politburo. Established in 1919, the Politburo was the Political Bureau of the Central Committee – the decision-making body of the Communist Party. Under Stalin, it was renamed the Presidium in 1952 but, in 1966, reverted to its original name under Brezhnev.
17. Francis Ronalds (b. 1925) was born in Champaign, Illinois. He studied English Literature at Princeton University, French at the Sorbonne and Russian at the Columbia University Russian Institute. During the Second World War, he served as a Russian interpreter with the US Navy and joined Radio Liberty in 1952. He helped prepare for the first broadcast in March 1953 and then held numerous positions before becoming executive director of Radio Liberty in 1973.
18. Today, Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty operates one of the most comprehensive news operations in the region, with 23 bureaux throughout Europe and the Former Soviet Union and 1,400 freelance reporters. See www.rferl.org/about/organization/brief.asp
22. Andrei Donatovich Sinyavsky (1925–97), friend of Yuli Daniel, published under his own name and also as Abram Tertz. He was arrested with Daniel in 1965 and sent to the Gulag in 1966 for anti-Soviet activity. After his release in 1971, he left Russia for France, where he continued to write and became an influential émigré voice through his Radio Liberty broadcasts. Works include: *A Voice from the Chorus* London: Collins, 1976.
23. See: hoorferl.stanford.edu/rlexhibit/timeline.php
24. Despite the name Radio Liberty being used by the station personnel, it was officially known as Radio Liberation for some time.
37. V. Zorza, ‘China’s growing might threatens both the United States and the Soviet Union; could it bring them together in common defense?’, *Look Magazine* 20 January 1959.
63. Sergei Khrushchev (b. 1935) lives in the United States and is a senior fellow at the Watson Institute for International Studies. He has a PhD from Moscow Technical University and between 1958 and 1968 participated in the Soviet missile and space programme. Today, he is interested in the transition of the former Soviet Union from a centralised to a decentralised society, the development of a market economy, and issues of international security during this time.
64. See the CNN interview at: www.cnn.com/SPECIALS/cold.war/guides/debate/chats/khrushchev/
‘Victor Zorza was the arch Kremlinologist. If he did not himself invent the phrase ‘hawks and doves’, he could have, since it was his careful dissection of the shifts in fortune of the various players in the Soviet hierarchy which created a new kind of Cold War science.’ Jonathan Steele

Brezhnev’s leadership

After Khrushchev was ousted the eyes of the world fell on Moscow as attention focused on the question of succession. For Zorza the issue was clear: Leonid Brezhnev had been groomed for high office and the mantle of leadership would naturally fall on his shoulders. The bigger issue was what this would mean for the Soviet Union.

Brezhnev had played a key role in Khrushchev’s removal but he owed much to the former Premier and was generally regarded as Khrushchev’s protégé. His move to Kazakhstan to lead the Virgin Lands project (1954), his return to Moscow as a Central Committee secretary (1956), and his promotion to chairman of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet (1960) were all instigated by Khrushchev. Brezhnev was indebted to Khrushchev and, when the time was right, he made his former leader’s life more comfortable. Volkogonov recalls:

When [Brezhnev] was sure that Khrushchev was quietly out to grass at his dacha, he personally responded to his former leader’s requests for certain favours, scrawling out a list: pension 5,000 (500 in new money); Kremlin dining room; Fourth Main Directorate Clinic; dacha at Petrovo-Dalnee (Istra); a town apartment of his choice; a car. He gave oral instructions that the car should not be a new one, and when Khrushchev asked for his previous supplement of dietary food in the restaurant to be kept at 100 roubles, Brezhnev would only allow him 70.¹

Such actions, extraordinary in the history of the Soviet Union, were in keeping with Brezhnev’s courtesy. Suave and good-natured, he presented an affable figure, less confrontational than Khrushchev and willing to use persuasion rather than coercion. Writing in the 1990s, Gorbachev comments: ‘I have to note here that in the mid-1960s and the early 1970s Brezhnev was nothing like the cartoon figure that is made of him now.’² Whereas Brezhnev’s disposition contrasted sharply with that of Khrushchev, the question arose as to whether there was common ground in their political and ideological perspective. What now, for example, of Khrushchev’s reforms, his programme of de-Stalinisation and attempts at peaceful coexistence?
At the time, it was not apparent that by promoting Brezhnev there would be an anti-reformist swing or that aspects of Stalin’s ideology would reappear. In some quarters, Brezhnev was seen as a transitional figure, lacking in ability and easily manipulated. At best, he would perform a holding role until a stronger leader took the reins; Kosygin and Podgorny both had aspirations in this respect. As time passed this assessment of his abilities turned out to be correct. Yet his durability had been grossly underestimated. Brezhnev disliked change and, without fuss, patiently moved his supporters into key positions. As opponents were marginalised, the goals of his leadership began to emerge: quiet stability behind a strong defensive shield. It was his pursuit of these goals that on one hand kept him in office but on the other, brought about the stagnation which defined his tenure.

Brezhnev was born in Kamensk, a mining town in Ukraine in 1906. His first job was at Kursk oil mill (1921) and thereafter he held numerous positions until he became head of a local technical school (1936–37). About this time he was drawn to the Party and in 1938 became manager of the trade department of the Regional Party Committee. A career beckoned within the Party and when he became noticed by Stalin, he entered the Presidium as a candidate member (1952). When Stalin died, his rise continued under Khrushchev until he finally replaced his mentor as leader.

At home, Brezhnev’s restrained style and sponsorship of bureaucracy prompted a feeling of reassurance after Khrushchev’s unsettling reforms. For cadres and the nomenklatura, the return to familiar ways brought a sigh of relief. It was a sort of stability but bought at a price. Gorbachev:

Brezhnev prided himself that his expertise consisted of keeping the cadres happy. This was fine as long as the Soviet economy was growing but was fatally flawed when things began to go wrong.

As development waned and the economy stalled, Brezhnev’s conservatism was underlined by his attitude towards Stalin. On the ninetieth anniversary of Stalin’s birth (1969), Brezhnev supported a Pravda article which claimed that ‘Stalin had some positive sides which no-one could contest’; no-one could ‘ignore the construction of Socialism under Stalin’. These sympathies underpinned Brezhnev’s anti-reformist stance. Combined with his lethargy and lack of vision, the Soviet Union slipped into a gradual, yet terminal, decline. Centralised systems creaked. Living standards fell. Queues for everything became commonplace. In a scenario
of creeping decay, the health of the population grew worse and life expectancy fell.

For writers, artists and human rights groups, there was an unwelcome return to repressive measures. Joe Brodsky was sent to the Gulag; Yuli Daniel and Andrei Sinyavsky were sentenced to hard labour, after which Sinyavsky left for France (1971); Aleksandr Ginzburg protested at the treatment of Daniel and Sinyavsky and was imprisoned, later to be exiled and deprived of his citizenship; and Andrei Sakharov, seeking more respect for human rights, banished to Gorky. Alongside this increasing repression arose an unchecked wave of anti-Semitism that went hand in hand with prospective Jewish emigrants being denied exit visas.

Abroad, Brezhnev was a committed Cold Warrior, dedicated to the ideological struggle with the United States. Towards the end of his life, however, both countries had tacitly acknowledged the impracticality of nuclear war. The Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty (1972) that froze sections of the Soviet and US weapons systems was viewed as a breakthrough, though Cold War rhetoric hindered further attempts at détente.

The Sino-Soviet split deepened under Brezhnev. As the Cultural Revolution changed the nature of Chinese society, Mao Tse-tung harangued the Soviet leadership. Mischievously, he claimed that a counter-revolution had occurred in the Soviet Union and capitalism had been restored in another guise. Relations strained to breaking point and the Communist world fell in line behind either China or the Soviet Union. Reconciliation would not be achieved until after Mao’s death. Nevertheless, Brezhnev continued to support the leftist regimes in Vietnam, the Middle East and the Third World, though he avoided any commitment to open warfare.

This was not the case in Czechoslovakia (1968) or Afghanistan (1979) where, in both cases, the Soviet Union became militarily involved.

In Czechoslovakia, the Prague Spring was interpreted as an ideological challenge that struck at the heart of Communism. As a result, Brezhnev articulated his doctrine about the right of military intervention to preserve the socialist ideals of a neighbouring state. Although Alexander Dubček intended to reform rather than reject Communism, to establish ‘socialism with a human face’, the possibility of other Eastern bloc countries taking similar action was unacceptable to the Kremlin. Thus, in August 1969, troops and tanks from Warsaw Pact countries (with the exception of a dissenting Romania) invaded Czechoslovakia to restore the status quo. Over 100 people lost their lives. Once the resistance was crushed, Dubček was sent to Moscow to explain himself as 200,000 citizens fled west and intellectuals lost their jobs.

Brezhnev employed similar tactics in Afghanistan where he was drawn into a military option that was initially caused by an internal dispute. Using the familiar rhetoric, the Soviet Union claimed to be responding to a plea for help by a socialist-leaning group. But it quickly became evident that Afghanistan was different from the countries of Europe. Unlike in Hungary and Czechoslovakia, Soviet troops were unable to gain control outside of Kabul, the Afghan capital. And they were unused to guerrilla fighting in mountainous terrain. In the absence of any broadly based support, large sections of the population came to resent the Soviet troops. Relations deteriorated, conflict developed between the troops and the ‘liberated’ communities. In the face of rising civilian casualties, Afghan resistance was aided by Saudi Arabia and the United States.

In the Soviet Union, the conflict became unpopular. Human rights leaders like Sakharov repeatedly criticised the
war as images of Soviet troops killing Muslim civilians caused resentment among the Muslim populations of Central Asia. In the end, the intervention could not be sustained. By the time of the Soviet withdrawal (1989), estimates suggest that around one million Afghans had died, with Soviet losses of 14,000 dead and 50,000 injured.

In an acerbic summary of Brezhnev’s leadership, Volkogonov writes:

Flattery, toadyism and protectionism were the norm under Brezhnev. His ‘stable and peaceful society’ harboured trends which would lead to stagnation and ultimately the disintegration of the totalitarian state. It was not Gorbachev who originated perestroika. The sources of indefinable change were woven into the very fabric of the socialist society. The Brezhnev era in effect created a bridgehead for the social and political convulsions that would lead to the dismemberment of the USSR.\textsuperscript{13}

Zorza monitored these events in his usual way. With painstaking care, no stone was left unturned in his search for truth. Any nuance that hinted at broader policy change was carefully identified and an exposition given. By this time, his technique had been finely tuned and was perfectly suited to his needs. Eventually, he gained his reward when his coverage of the events in Czechoslovakia brought him the coveted International Publishing Corporation Journalist of the Year award (1968). A decade later, his reporting on the power struggle among Mao’s would-be successors caused him to be nominated for the Pulitzer Prize (1977).

**Czechoslovakia, 1968**

The growing disquiet in Czechoslovakia that led to the Prague Spring of 1968 came as no surprise. The economy was in decline, confidence in the Party’s first secretary, Antonin Novotny had waned and disaffection was growing within the Communist Party. As calls for reform grew louder, Novotny was removed and the leadership passed to Alexander Dubček. Zorza writes:

Antonin Novotny, leader of Czechoslovakia’s ruling Communist Party for 15 years, was peaceably voted out of power by the Party Central Committee yesterday in Prague. Alexander Dubček, a 46-year-old champion of economic reform from the minority region of Slovakia, replaced him. The new leadership will not want to do anything to weaken the Communist system either in Czechoslovakia or among its neighbours. But it is already clear that economic and political experiments favoured by the Czechoslovak radicals are of a kind which Communist conservatives everywhere regard as a danger.\textsuperscript{14}

While Dubček was keen to liberalise the country he had no desire to cause a rift in the Communist bloc. He had longstanding links with the Soviet Union and valued the time he spent in Moscow and the friends he had made. Born in the Slovak region of Czechoslovakia in 1921, Dubček moved with his family to Kirghizia (now Kyrgyzstan) as part of a scheme to build socialism in the Soviet Union. The Dubčeks returned in 1938, whereupon Alexander joined the Communist Party and, during the Second World War, fought against the Nazis as a member of the resistance. Marked for high office, he was sent to Moscow Political College for special training and, by 1962, he had become a full member of the Czechoslovak Communist Party’s Central Committee. His socialist principles, however, were intertwined with nationalist fervour. In his view, a relationship with Moscow and commitment
to the Communist bloc did not preclude development for the people of Czechoslovakia. And reform was an internal matter, not the business of Moscow.

Dubček’s views matched the moment. In desperation, Novotny appealed to the workforce hoping to recapture lost ground.\(^{15}\) It was too late. The ground-swell was reaching all sections of society. In an unprecedented move, Czech police apologised for their treatment of student protesters\(^{16}\) and a sense of expectancy filled the air. It was then that two events revived memories surrounding the Hungarian uprising a decade before. The first was in Poland.

Prior to the Hungarian Revolution, protesters had taken heart by the events which unfolded in Poland during the summer of 1956. In Poznan, crowds carried national flags demanding ‘bread and freedom’ prompting a reaction from troops that left 44 dead and 1,000 imprisoned. Then a million pilgrims converged on the shrine of the Black Madonna (Częstochowa) unnerving local Communists and Poland observers in the Kremlin.\(^{17}\) Important concessions were won.

Echoes of these events occurred in March 1968 when riots occurred in eight cities across Poland: from Poznan to Lublin and Cracow to Gdansk. On this occasion the riots flared after two students were expelled from the University of Warsaw because they took part in a protest against the closing by government censors of the play Dziady – a Polish classic which criticises Russian rule in Poland under the Czars. Zorza comments:

In Poznan, a major city in western Poland, thousands of students marched today, chanting – ‘the press lies’ – and burning copies of state controlled newspapers in front of a statue of Mickiewicz. Sources said the police, their rubber truncheons flailing, waded into their ranks and scattered them ... Meanwhile 8,000 students in Warsaw attended a meeting at the Polytechnic Institute. They adopted a resolution supporting socialism in Poland, but demanded that constitutional guarantees of speech and assembly be respected.\(^{18}\)

The demand for freedoms that emanated from the cities of Poland resonated with the disquiet in Czechoslovakia. To those impatient for change it was an encouraging fillip; confirmation that a new future was imminent. And then came the second occurrence: a cautionary note from Hungary. Zorza writes:

The Hungarian Communist Party today said that ‘anti-Socialist right-wing forces’ have made their appearance on the political scene in Czechoslovakia. ‘The Hungarian statement … is clearly intended to warn Prague against allowing ‘liberalisation’ to go too far … (it) makes it clear that Czechoslovakia’s neighbours harbour the gravest misgivings about the likely course of events.\(^{19}\)
As the warning signs became clearer, Zorza became aware of the impending invasion and spelt out his fears in a lengthy article published in July 1968:

In common with other analysts, I have believed for some time that the likelihood of Soviet military intervention in Czechoslovakia was minimal, and I have said so. I no longer believe this analysis to be correct. The evidence now suggests that the Russians have already made one attempt to intervene – that is, to introduce their troops into the country and to keep them there. Although this attempt has partly failed, in that they have begun to withdraw their troops, the danger of interventions remains so long as any Soviet troops, however few in number, remain in Czechoslovakia.

The evidence clearly points to the conclusion that the Kremlin asked Prague to allow the stationing of its troops in Czechoslovakia and that, when Prague refused, it insisted that it was entitled to leave them there under the terms of the Warsaw Treaty. This emerges from the statement made by Gen. Vaclav Prchlik, the head of the Czechoslovak Communist Party’s department which is in charge of military and security affairs. ‘Gen Prchlik said during a press conference: ‘I have inquired into whether there is under the Warsaw Treaty any provision which would give other partners a right to station or deploy arbitrarily their units on the territory of other member states.’ Why would a person in his position have to ‘inquire’ into this problem? Obviously, because someone had claimed the right to do so.

It is already clear that the Russian view of this is quite different from the Czech, and that the Russians have the power to enforce their interpretation. All they need is the will – and they seem well on the way to acquiring it.

Eventually, a compromise was brokered designed to keep Czechoslovakia within the ideological bounds of the Communist bloc. Zorza considered it unworkable:

As the Communist summit meetings recede into the distance, the Czechoslovak leaders begin to sketch out for the nation the vague outlines of the compromise reached after four days of hard bargaining at Cíerna and confirmed at Bratislava. The Czechoslovak press is to refrain from attacks on other Communist countries, the Czechoslovak economy is to refrain from undue contact with Western countries, and Czechoslovak foreign policy is to refrain from pursuing an independent line. In exchange for this, Soviet troops will stay out of Czechoslovakia, which is to be free to develop a democratic system of government providing considerably more freedom for its people than is the case in other Communist countries. This compromise is unworkable. It will
do for the time being, but in the long term a free internal system is bound to lead to an independent foreign policy, and to close economic links with the West.\textsuperscript{21}

Zorza was correct; the compromise was unworkable. Eleven days later his fears were confirmed when half a million troops invaded Czechoslovakia, supported by 7,000 tanks. Compared with Hungary, casualties were light – around 100 deaths – but resentment was intense and prompted further disillusionment among Communist supporters in the West. About 100,000 citizens, many of them highly qualified, left the country. Feelings were still running high when Gorbachev visited the country a year later to discuss prospects for a youth movement. He recalls:

The most difficult mission, I would say, was to Czechoslovakia in 1969 … Countless meetings and heated discussions took place in Prague, Brno, Bratislava, all searching for ways to win the young people over. It was really quite impossible to divorce this problem from the general context of the situation in Czechoslovakia after the 1968 invasion. To say that we felt uneasy and downcast would be an understatement. We felt viscerally, deep down, that this action was indigenously rejected by the people.\textsuperscript{22}

At the time, however, Zorza was upbeat about Czechoslovakia’s prospects:

In spite of the gloom in Prague over the ‘temporary’ stationing of Soviet troops in the country, the Czechoslovak leaders appear to have won on points … Even if the Soviet promise that the troops will be withdrawn eventually is not to be readily credited – and few people would be prepared to believe any Russian promises these days – the important fact is that there is now in Czechoslovakia a government and a Party leadership which will be in a position to demand the withdrawal of these troops at the earliest politically suitable opportunity.\textsuperscript{23}

Recognising the widespread feeling of powerlessness in the face of Soviet aggression, Zorza suggested ways in which the West could support Czechoslovakia. His experience at Radio Liberty provided a ray of hope and he was quick to proclaim the benefits of broadcasting from the West:

The free radio network crushed by the Soviet tanks when they moved into Czechoslovakia can be revived easily and almost immediately with help from the West. Some of the key men who launched Czechoslovakia’s ‘revolution by television’ have managed to get out of the country since the invasion. Others are in hiding, awaiting an opportunity to slip across the border. By setting up a free network to broadcast back into the country the news and views suppressed by the censor, they would be defeating one of the chief objectives of the Soviet invasion.\textsuperscript{24}

On another front, Zorza believed the Kremlin was facing a hard choice. Would the chosen option be isolationism, as propounded by Brezhnev – or internationalism, the preferred choice of Kosygin? Zorza writes:

The two trends in Soviet policy which are now fighting for supremacy cannot remain stalemated much longer. Sooner rather than later, something has to give … Kosygin would like to spend less money on defense – and therefore stands for a more relaxed foreign policy – while Brezhnev’s isolationism might lead to the conversion of the Soviet Union and its satellites into an armed camp, at odds with the world, defensively aggressive, and therefore dangerous. The choice before the Kremlin is truly momentous – but it does have a choice.\textsuperscript{25}

That choice, however, had been compromised by Brezhnev’s promotion of an aggressive policy that endorsed military intervention in the internal affairs of a Socialist country threatened by ‘forces hostile to socialism’. In effect it
threatened not only the dissenting country but ultimately the peace of the world. Zorza:

The Brezhnev doctrine, which asserts Russia’s right to intervene in the affairs of other Communist states, has at long last emerged from the murky shadows of the Kremlin. As now defined by Brezhnev, the doctrine states: When internal and external forces hostile to socialism seek to turn back the development of any socialist country to restore the capitalist order, when a threat emerges to the cause of socialism in that country, a threat to the security of the socialist commonwealth as a whole, this is no longer a matter only for the people of the country in question, but it is also a common problem, which is a matter of concern to all socialist countries ... The danger to the peace of the world arises not so much from the invasion of Czechoslovakia as from Brezhnev’s new definition.26

It was Zorza’s coverage of events in Czechoslovakia during 1968 that led to his prestigious nomination as the International Publishing Corporation’s Journalist of the Year. Judges included: Tom Hopkinson, former editor of Picture Post and Drum magazines – at that time senior fellow
in press studies at the University of Sussex; Michael Foot, Member of Parliament (later to become leader of the Labour Party) and winner of the 1965 Critic of the Year award; David Hopkinson, editor of the Birmingham Post and winner of the 1963 Journalist of the Year award; Charles Jervis, former Editor-in-Chief of the Press Association and past president of the Guild of British Newspaper Editors; and Charles Winter, editor of the London Evening Standard. The Guardian was quick to trumpet the success of its reporter:

Victor Zorza won the top award for his achievement in forecasting ‘with astonishing accuracy and against the flow of informed opinion’ the invasion of Czechoslovakia by the Soviet Union. Victor Zorza achieved his astonishing feat of predicting the invasion of Czechoslovakia – the outstanding news event of 1968 – as a ‘backroom boy’ of the newspaper world. An intensive study of the Russian and Eastern European press, added to his own wide background knowledge, enabled him to bring off a coup which was unmatched during the year.27

Among the first to recognise Zorza’s achievement were colleagues working in the countries of Europe and North America, journalists from a wide range of publications such as the Daily Express, The Guardian, Time Life, New Scientist, The Observer, The Economist – and those working in organisations like Granada TV, the London School of Economics, the Institute of Jewish Affairs and the Foreign Office. But his success was not lost on his readership and individuals wrote to express their support:

I think your work easily merits this and your weekly column the Communist World is the most important part of Wednesday as far as newspapers are concerned … I think it is the most interesting, informative and stimulating work in present-day journalism.28

In typical fashion, Zorza considered the award to be nothing less than his abilities deserved; he did not, however, forget his formative years spent with the BBC monitoring service. In an appreciative gesture to his former colleagues he wrote:

Heartfelt thanks for the congratulations from all my old friends and some new ones at Caversham. I shall be replying to each individually in due course, but in the meantime I want to put it on record that the analysis which has earned this high reward would not have been possible without the raw material that was coming out of Czechoslovakia at the time. The service provided by Caversham was the most comprehensive and the most prompt. My thanks go therefore to Caversham for giving me the monitor’s training which is the basis of my analytical work and for providing so generously and so often the material to be analysed.29

The telegram was warmly received at Caversham.

China: the Cultural Revolution

After Khrushchev fell, hopes were raised in China for a rapprochement with the Soviet Union. For a while, it seemed as if progress was being made.30 But after a brief respite, relationships grew worse and progress became impossible during Mao’s lifetime. Attitudes hardened in both countries and for years the damage was irreparable. Gorbachev comments:

The inertia of confrontation that had accumulated over the decades blocked the possibility of change, which in any case was blocked by the ruling cadres, who had grown up in an atmosphere of profound mutual hostility.31

Zorza watched with interest as the two countries
steadfastly refused to co-operate, causing a deep rift in the Communist world. The scene was set just six months after Brezhnev came to power, a time when Russia vied with China for influence in North Vietnam.\textsuperscript{32,33} Feelings ran high in both countries\textsuperscript{34} and in Peking, anti-Soviet protesters angrily surrounded the Russian embassy.\textsuperscript{35} Animosity would continue for more than 20 years until relationships eventually normalised during Gorbachev’s visit to China to meet Teng Hsiao-ping\textsuperscript{36} in 1989.

If China was in dispute abroad it was nothing compared with the conflict at home. After the ill-advised Great Leap Forward that drained the country’s resources in the 1950s, Mao incited a revolutionary upsurge during the 1960s that attempted to shatter the historic foundations of Chinese society. The Cultural Revolution raged for three years from 1966 and continued to impact the country up to Mao’s death and the subsequent imprisonment of his widow, Chiang Ching,\textsuperscript{37} and her radical Gang of Four group, in 1976.

The Cultural Revolution was specifically designed to integrate Maoist ideology into all levels of society. For the revolution to become effective, long-established structures were to be swept away along with traditional practices and beliefs. Science, education, literature, the arts and religion were all targeted for transformation – their new purpose being solely to support the socialist system. The agents of change would be the Red Guards, young activists who would purge the country of counter-revolutionaries, identified as the intellectuals, religious leaders and bourgeoisie. Jung Chang briefly became a Red Guard, along with other classmates, in the summer of 1966, and tells of the disruption to everyday life as Mao’s radical philosophy was translated into practice:

\begin{quote}
Traffic was in confusion for several days. For red to mean ‘stop’ was considered impossibly counter-revolutionary. It should of course mean ‘go’. And traffic should not keep to the right, as was the practice, it should be on the left. For a few days we ordered the traffic policemen aside and controlled the traffic ourselves. I was stationed on a street corner telling cyclists to ride on the left. In Chengdu there were not many cars or traffic lights, but at the few big crossroads there was chaos.\textsuperscript{38}
\end{quote}

More terrifying was the Red Guards’ aggressive behaviour:

\begin{quote}
A wave of beating and torture swept the country, mainly during house raids. Almost invariably, the family would be ordered to kneel on the floor and kowtow to the Red Guards; they were then beaten with the brass buckles of the Guards’ leather belts. They were kicked around, and one side of their head was shaved, a humiliating style called the ‘yin and yang’ head because it resembled the classic Chinese symbol of a dark side (\textit{yin}) and a light side (\textit{yang}). Most of their possessions were either smashed or taken away.\textsuperscript{39}
\end{quote}
Herein lay Mao’s second aim: to confront his enemies and make his position secure. It was a long struggle. Radicals such as Mao’s wife and Lin Piao, at that time regarded as Mao’s successor, gave enthusiastic support. Moderates such as Chou En-lai, China’s prime minister, were more circumspect and quietly tried to protect China from the worst excesses of the revolutionaries. Prominent politicians were purged. Liu Shao-chi, a veteran of the Long March, died in detention. Teng Hsiao-ping, who rose subsequently to lead China in the 1980s, was demoted to the position of factory worker. Rumours spread of attempts on Mao’s life.

The struggle for supremacy continued – intensified even – until Mao’s death in 1976, when Hua Kuo-feng surprised the world by emerging as Mao’s successor. Throughout this period, Zorza was on hand to record and interpret the key events.

In 1966, as preparations for the Cultural Revolution began, a campaign was launched to alert the people to counter-revolutionary activity. Zorza notes how the nature of the purge changed from dismissal to death when a 19-year-old counter-revolutionary was executed in Peking. The following week, a man named Huang Chi-sheng was
executed near the Sino-Soviet border: ‘Around 3,000 people attended the trial, which bore a remarkable resemblance to the earlier proceedings in Peking … Huang was executed as soon as the sentence was announced,’ writes Zorza.44

In the wake of the purges, Zorza was convinced that China was poised for a new initiative: ‘Recently there have been a number of statements suggesting that the country is ready for another ‘Great Leap’. They were isolated but seemingly authoritative remarks, implying that the idea was being discussed by Party leaders.’45 As he remembered the failure of the previous leap, Zorza revealed his concerns: ‘It must be hoped, for the sake of the Chinese people, that if some of Mao’s associates are now trying to prevent this new act of madness, they will succeed.’46

By the beginning of September 1966 the picture was becoming clearer. Some of Zorza’s worst fears were being realised. As the Red Guards grew in confidence, violence swept the streets of China’s cities while the young perpetrators were urged on by the radical press. Zorza:

The ruffians in the streets may attack traders or people wearing Western-style clothes, but the Peking newspapers paint in the ideological background: ‘We have to clean up thoroughly all the mud, filth, and rubble at the site of the old system … This is a task for the young, who, since ancient times, have always been in the forefront of revolution: As soon as they seize hold of the truth, they despise what is old and declare war on it.’47

Zorza adds poignantly:

The cult of violence and the cult of youth go together. The aged Chairman Mao and some of his comrades, their lives spent in the service of the revolution, find in the evening of their day that all their great ideals, their brave dreams, their tender thoughts for the poor and the oppressed whom they had set out to succour, are as far from reality as they ever were.48

Mao held on to a semblance of power in the face of failing health until his death in September 1976 but in effect, the affairs of state had long since been relinquished. As the Chairman visibly deteriorated, plans were made for the post-Mao era. Rivals considered their options, keen to be ready when the time came.

Then, in January 1976, the issue of succession came into sharper focus with the death of Chou En-lai. Intelligent and moderate, Chou was popular at home and respected abroad due to his personable manner and willingness to engage. His death left a void. Crucially, whoever became the next prime minister would be in pole position to succeed Mao. On the face of it, there seemed two possibilities: Teng Hsiao-ping, restored to the moderate faction as Chou’s deputy; or one of the radicals led by Chiang Ching. Most commentators in the West thought that Chou had done enough to ensure Teng’s succession. Zorza disagreed:
During the illness preceding Chou En-lai’s death several campaigns were launched in Peking against his chosen successor, Teng Hsiao-ping, and there is every reason to assume that the attempts to unseat him will continue. If the left-wing radicals found it possible to attack Teng even while he had the powerful protection of Chou, it would seem on the face of it that they should find it easier to do so with Chou gone.49

Zorza was correct. Teng fell within a month of Chou’s death and Hua Kuo-feng emerged as what seemed to be a compromise leader, acceptable to both left and right-wing factions. Again, Zorza demurred, claiming that the struggle was far from over. When riots broke out following Chou’s funeral, Zorza considered their implications:

The new rioting in Peking is an intimation of the explosive forces welling up below the surface of China’s political life … The formal dismissal of Teng announced Wednesday and the confirmation of Hua’s appointment as prime minister, may seem to make his position more secure – but the realities of Peking politics are more complicated than surface appearances. Hua is now in the direct line of succession to Mao – which means that the rivals for that position will have more reason than ever to seek his undoing. The most dangerous place to be during a succession struggle is that which is closest to the top. So far as personalities are concerned, it is really Hua who has been under attack in the massive Peking propaganda campaign whose ostensible target is Teng Hsiao-ping; prime minister he may be, but the propaganda machine is largely under the control of the radicals.50

As Mao’s death approached, the struggle intensified and a coded debate took place in the press:

The impending death of Mao Tse-tung is beginning to be discussed in the Peking Press – not openly, of course, but between the lines. This, at least, is the impression conveyed by an article in Red Flag, the Party’s ideological journal, which called for a purge of ‘those in power within the Party taking the capitalist road’, and then added that the Party had carried out such purges under Mao and would go on doing so – presumably after Mao. ‘Over the years,’ it says, ‘under the correct leadership of Chairman Mao, our Party has acted in this way and will continue to act in this way.51

Within two weeks of Mao’s death, Zorza saw evidence of an ideological split rising to the surface:

In spite of the words of praise and the tears of grief for Mao evident in Peking, what we are really seeing now are the first moves towards the dethronement of Mao Tse-tung. Although the two main factions in the Peking struggle, the moderates and the radicals, both claim Mao’s mantle, there is no doubt that his true legacy belongs to the radicals. In the struggle that was evident in Peking until the very day of Mao’s death, the moderates wanted to re-establish the orderly ways of government and of economic development,
which had been repeatedly disturbed by Mao’s search for the revolutionary ideal. But while the moderates control the government and the Party machine, the radicals control the information media and the masses, whom they are able to bring out into the streets for an organised show of force.\textsuperscript{52}

In the event, it was Hua Kuo-feng who emerged as Mao’s successor. Once in power, he quickly asserted himself and demonstrated his opposition to the radical faction led by Mao’s widow. Chiang Ching and other members of the Gang of Four were arrested, tried and imprisoned. The world was shocked. Impressions of Hua as a compromise leader who heralded a new era of collective leadership were unfounded. And when Hua added the positions of Party chairman and army supreme commander to his role of prime minister, concerns grew. Not even Mao had held all three posts. Throughout 1976, Zorza had warned constantly of unrest in China. At times, his had been a lone voice against a chorus of alternative views; but his analysis had been correct. He felt vindicated. And in the US, his carefully argued articles had not gone unnoticed. At the beginning of 1977, he was nominated for the Pulitzer Prize for journalism in the ‘distinguished commentary’ category. Sponsored by Philip Greyling (editorial page editor of \textit{The Washington Post}), Ward Just (writer and publisher of the Waukegan \textit{Sun-Times}) and Robert E. Osgood (dean of the Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies), the nomination stated:

The exhibits document Victor Zorza’s repeatedly correct interpretations, contrary to the consensus – of the significance of events in China before and after Mao Tse-tung’s death. The importance of this achievement lies not only in the fact that Zorza, a journalist, was right when the weight of authoritative opinion was overwhelmingly wrong. Its importance lies in this confirmation of the value of a unique method of reporting and analysis in international press coverage.

Though Zorza’s nomination did not bring the prize he desired, the submission, in January 1977, marked a high point in his career.

\textbf{Kremlinology: a Cold War phenomenon}

In the 1950s, when Zorza achieved his ambition and became a journalist, he joined an international group of commentators that took a specific interest in the Communist world. Just about every newspaper had a Sovietologist ready to fillet the breaking news and interpret its significance to a waiting readership. But Zorza was different. The combination of his distinctive approach and unconventional
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methods ensured he would be noticed. Not for him the raw xenophobia located in some parts of the popular press, nor the ideological vitriol found in a section of the broadsheets. Rather, he favoured a cold, analytical approach, a punctilious search ‘for minute bits of evidence, often buried under mountains of Communist propaganda verbiage’.  

Such diligent work demanded hours of preparation for the briefest article. In his desire to scrutinise the tiniest development, he would frequently work 12 hours a day, six and sometimes seven days a week. Pages of closely written notes were cross-referenced with clippings from his archive before the final piece gradually emerged. Significantly, he placed current affairs within a network of interrelated contexts and saw this as an important feature of his technique:

To comment with any degree of insight on the shaping of Communist policies it is necessary to be thoroughly familiar not only with Soviet material but also with Chinese; not only East European, but also Cuban and Vietnamese, as well as with developments inside the Western Communist Parties, especially those of Italy and France. It was the study of the texts from both Russia and China, at the same time and as a matter of routine, that enabled me to perceive the emergence of the Sino-Soviet dispute. The leadership struggles in Moscow, or in Peking, or in Havana, are often mutually related – and to understand one it is necessary to be fully informed about the other.  

It was this single-minded approach that earned Zorza the respect – if not always the popularity – of his peers. Jonathan Steele worked with him at The Guardian:

Victor Zorza was the arch Kremlinologist. If he did not himself invent the phrase ‘hawks and doves’, he could have, since it was his careful dissection of the shifts in fortune of the various players in the Soviet hierarchy which created a new kind of Cold War science.  

Peter Preston joined The Guardian in 1963 and became its editor in 1975, a position he held for 20 years. He writes:

Journalists like to think of themselves as professionals – doctors, lawyers, that sort of thing. Wrong. They’re tradesmen and sometimes the trade is rough. Victor, though, was the nearest thing to a professional man I ever encountered on The Guardian. He was always unique; he was usually impossible.  

Those who worked with Victor – in any capacity – understood what ‘impossible’ meant. He would work on his piece until ‘well after the last minute and the harassed office staff tore off his copy a page at a time’. And when he had finished, the piece was sacrosanct; no part could be touched by a subeditor. To Zorza, the ensuing loss of symmetry or incomplete argument was simply unbearable. Resignation was preferable – and his was offered frequently. Peter Preston:

The analyses emerged from a tight-packed reference and monitoring library on the sunless side of Dairy Cottage. They were not light reading. Nor could they in any way be subedited, let alone shortened. Cutting meant dispensing with the evidence gleaned day by day from Pravda, Tass, Izvestia and the routine outpourings of the Soviet news machine. Victor dealt in significant half sentences of facts or chilly adjectives, building a picture of what was happening inside the Kremlin from what those on the outside were told. How could that be cut? ‘But look,’ I said one difficult night, ‘it fills the whole bloody page and it’s still 20 inches over.’ ‘What else is on the page?’ he asked. ‘Nothing but an ad.’ ‘Right,’ said Zorza, ‘you must drop the advertisement.’ He was infinitely stubborn.  

Zorza’s pedantry was not intended to offend, nor was he stubborn per se. It was because his mission was all-consuming. The readership must see all of the evidence, all
his interpretation. The issues were too important to allow any misunderstanding at the hand of a subeditor. Yet outside this arena, Zorza remained amiable and ingenuous. And he was aware of the difficulties he caused. Geoffrey Taylor, sometime subeditor and long-time friend recalls:

After I had retired from the paper and he had retired as well – he had gone to Georgetown, India and so on – I had a letter from him (as I said we were quite close colleagues and indeed close friends); but I had a letter from him saying he must have led me a terrible dance with his insistence, and doing things because he wanted them done, and he wished to apologise for all the trouble that he caused me, which I thought was very magnanimous of him.  

One other factor influenced his intransigence: a deep-seated belief that he reigned supreme in his understanding of the Communist mind-set. Such confidence was partly due to his painful experience of Soviet inhumanity, but also to his network of sources. Not for him the dreary round of Foreign Office briefings:

Not so scholarly as the New York Times’s Harry Schwartz, not so lucidly literate as the Observer’s Edward Crankshaw, Zorza has notably better Communist sources than either. As a result of his frequent forays along both sides of the Iron Curtain, he now has contacts throughout the Communist world he can reach by lifting a telephone. He never bothers to attend Foreign Office briefings since he finds that he seldom would learn anything he did not already know. ‘I practically live in the same mental context as a Communist,’ says Zorza. ‘In my own way I know a lot more about a Communist’s ideology and motivations than he does.’

Zorza’s knowledge was never in doubt. But as the accuracy of his predictions grew, it became apparent that his technique could be used in a broader setting. As a result, he was recruited to the Johns Hopkins University (Washington) in 1973 where his skills were used to pilot a new type of course. In essence, it aimed to teach graduate students entering professions other than journalism how to analyse and interpret public policy. It was an immediate success and ran again in 1975. Robert Osgood, dean of the School of Advanced International Studies writes:

[Zorza’s] unique combination of the academic approach with journalistic flair made it possible for him to devise a completely new type of course in which students are taught to analyse current public policies with the use of both journalistic and academic tools. His course, which was originally funded by the National Endowment for the Humanities, has proved to be an outstanding success, and a considerable number of other universities have written to us to say that they would like to set up similar courses. We have applied for a further grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities, which would enable us to entrust Mr Zorza with the task of helping the other universities to establish the courses in question.

Building on the success of the pilot, 12 universities across America expressed interest in joining a roll-out programme. During 1976, plans were made to match journalists with universities and their local issues in preparation for a nationwide launch in the autumn of 1977. Writing in Editor and Publisher, Robert Bomboy comments:

Each course will focus on a single subject in which the journalist teaching it has specialised. An example is a course now being developed on the Cuban community in Miami. The political, social and economic problems of the Miami Cubans involve a large number of issues, from education to commerce and from intermarriage to politics. They are local, national and international issues. The details of such a course, taught by a local newsman, are being worked out
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now with a university in Florida. Other workshop-seminars may be based on science policy, economics, space studies, transportation, urban studies – virtually any subject in the graduate school curriculum, Zorza says.62

It was about this time that Zorza wrote to the Central Intelligence Agency requesting a copy of all files retrievable under his name in accordance with the Freedom of Information Act. A lengthy process followed that involved not only the CIA but the Federal Bureau of Investigation, the Immigration and Naturalization Service and the United States Department of State. From Zorza’s first request in February 1977, it took more than six years for his query to be answered. When he finally received the papers, Zorza found them revealing. Some documents had been released in their entirety; others had the names of individuals blocked out. A third group had substantial deletions, all exempt from disclosure under US legislation. But Zorza’s suspicions were confirmed: the CIA had taken an interest in his work since he first joined the BBC in the 1940s.

The records fall into four categories. These include: biographical details of Zorza and his career; perceptions of Zorza’s articles in Communist countries; articles written by Zorza which appertained to US government/CIA interests; and details of Zorza’s contacts with CIA personnel.

The following note, written in July 1953, demonstrates the Agency’s interest in Zorza’s whereabouts and employment:

Subject was born 19 October 1925 at Kolomyja, Poland, now living at the Regina Hotel in Munich. He is stateless, of Polish origin with travel document No 210910/3 issued at London 18 April 1953. He is married to Rosemary Wilson, British citizen by birth, and has a son Richard and daughter Jane. He was deported from eastern Poland to Siberia in 1939 [sic]; served in the RAF from 1942 to 1948, attaining the rank of LAC. He has lived in England since then, during 1948 at the Court, Shiplake, Oxon; 1945–51 at Botany Bay, Play Match, Reading; and since then at Bushey Shaw, Cheshendon, Oxon. From May 1948 to February 1953 he was employed by the BBC, and from March through April 1953 by the Manchester Guardian as Soviet correspondent.63

Central Intelligence reports note that in the Communist world, Zorza’s articles were seen as the work of an anti-Communist provocateur. An Izvestia article (1970) titled ‘Victor Zorza in pay of British Secret Service’ describes Zorza as ‘one of the first fiddles in an anti-Soviet and anti-Communist ensemble.’64 Izvestia reported:

After the failure of imperialist plans with regard to the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic, Zorza with the experience of a professional provocateur, offered Czechoslovak counter-revolutionaries, who fled abroad, to mix unostentatiously with Czechs and Slovaks who, for that reason or other, were outside their country, and return together with them to the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic to continue their counter-revolutionary activities there.

Zorza is, as ever, in the first ranks of instigators with his sensational opuses in the newspaper Guardian which enjoys particular patronage of the British secret intelligence service. Zorza exerted quite an effort, for instance, to drive a wedge into Soviet-Yugoslav relations.65

It was Zorza’s articles on US foreign policy that attracted most interest from the CIA. Some of Zorza’s controversial claims aroused strong feelings, not least because the Agency could not issue a public rebuttal. This was the case in a powerful article regarding the sale of a military computer to China in 1976. According to Zorza, worrying implications of the sale caused discord at the highest level of government:
The National Security Council memorandum which details the administration’s decision to sanction the sale concedes that the terms of the sale do not meet the safeguard requirements which usually apply to East-West trade … In its military mode, Cyber 172 could be used for nuclear weapons calculations, for anti-ballistic missile systems and for radar to track hostile missiles.⁶⁶

On the day the article was published, a memorandum to the CIA director reveals the Agency’s discomfort:

You should be aware of the attached article by Victor Zorza regarding the sale of a computer to the People’s Republic of China. During the course of the article, Zorza discusses the debate within US policy circles regarding the sale of the CDC Cyber 172 computer to Communist China. In discussing the players in this debate Zorza lists, among those who opposed the decision, Charlie Neuhauser, Chief of the China Branch in OCI. We are obviously surprised and distressed at this reportage which would indicate that one of our officers engaged in policy discussions. We have had no knowledge of Neuhauser being involved in the question of the export of the computer. The only intelligence provided was the normal intelligence regarding the possible effects the computer might have on Chinese military/industrial capabilities. This support was provided through officers who had no contact with Charlie Neuhauser on the question. Charlie Neuhauser is in Cambridge Massachusetts for the weekend. We are attempting to reach him to get his reaction to the publication of his name in this context.⁶⁷

This memo raises the question of Zorza’s sources and the authenticity of his data. In this instance Neuhauser wrote a lengthy report in which he denied having any contact with Zorza for the previous six months:

Since my conversation of April 29 [1976] I have had no contact whatsoever with Victor Zorza. My secretary has been instructed to accept no phone calls from him. I was unaware that Zorza was preparing the article which appeared on page A 13 of the October 29 issue of The Washington Post; so far as I know, Zorza made no attempt to contact me to check on the facts. I was on leave on October 29 and I only learned of the story through a phone call …⁶⁸

While Agency staff routinely reported their contacts with the media, the prospect of speaking with Zorza generally created apprehension. During 1971, when Zorza doubted the authenticity of the Khrushchev memoirs, the following memo sought advice on how to deal with Zorza’s request for a meeting:

I received a transatlantic phone call this afternoon from Victor Zorza of the Manchester Guardian at my office here at the Agency. He said that he was planning to come to the USA in a few days time and wanted to get together with various specialists who have read the memoirs. As far as I can gather, he wants to confirm or disconfirm his Guardian uncertainties regarding the authenticity of the Memoirs. I presume he would like to know whether the Agency had anything to do with them.

I do not intend to take any initiative in contacting Zorza when he arrives but I would appreciate receiving guidance as to a) whether I should agree to see him, should he contact me b) what particular arguments, if any, to make to him re the Memoirs or c) whether to avoid seeing him at all.⁶⁹

It was against this background of avoidance that Zorza gleaned whatever he could from the CIA. At times, he found it difficult; but this was largely due to the way Zorza admonished the Agency and criticised the quality of its intelligence. An illuminating memo (1977) gives a fascinating insight into Zorza’s unyielding style, and the discomfort this caused among CIA personnel:
Victor Zorza asserts that he has been asked by Bill Bundy to write an article for *Foreign Affairs* on the quality of intelligence analysis. He has asked me to discuss the subject with him and I have declined. I recommend that the Agency do not get involved in giving Zorza substantive assistance on this project.

My first reason is that his stock-in-trade is to ferret out and present in his column the interpretations of intelligence officers on Communist affairs. He then goes on to hold these interpretations, which are frequently distorted, up to public ridicule. I have told him that I consider this practice unseemly and unfair, in that intelligence analysts have no possibility of public rebuttal.

My second reason is that, since Zorza is a good analyst with an excellent command of the evidence and a strong point of view, he will not be satisfied with general comment. Instead, he will demand the evidence behind any contrary view to his own. He is extraordinarily persistent in this, and over the years, he has wormed a good deal of classified information out of intelligence and policy officials through this technique.

Having known Zorza for 20 years, I think it entirely possible that he has no firm agreement with Bundy for this article and that he is trying to persuade Bundy to commission him to write one. Given Zorza’s lifelong position that he is in competition with the intelligence analysts and consistently beats them, we are unlikely to affect his views except in those cases in which we provide overwhelming classified documentation – and perhaps not even then. I recommend that substantive Agency officers be instructed not to cooperate with him in this scheme.

Perhaps the writer was still smarting over Zorza’s article, published less than four months previously, of the failings of Western intelligence to interpret events in China during 1976. The CIA came in for special criticism:

The issues in the new Peking struggle are as momentous as any in the previous leadership conflicts. But once again intelligence experts in the West, who have come to rely on espionage for their facts, are refusing to give due weight to the analytical evidence in the absence of ‘collateral’ confirmation. At the beginning of the year, they refused to accept the evidence suggesting that Chou En-lai’s chosen successor, Teng Hsiao-ping, was in danger of being unseated by the radicals, and when the worst came to pass, they merely confessed their surprise. When Hua took over the leadership, they disputed the evidence that showed he was being challenged by the radicals. Then they argued that after Mao’s death, the factions in the Politburo would close their ranks, when the analytical evidence again pointed to a showdown between Hua and the radicals.

The CIA has at long last instituted an elaborate enquiry, by a man its officials describe as an impartial outside expert, into these major failings of intelligence. But even as they admit past errors, they are once again failing to perceive a development that in some ways could be more important than all the others – the possible rise in China not of a new Mao – but a new Stalin.

At the beginning of 1977, life was sweet for Zorza. His analytic style of journalism had been widely acclaimed on both sides of the Atlantic. The roll-out programme for his postgraduate course was well advanced and would soon feature in 12 more universities across America. His stock among colleagues had never been higher. And importantly, he was regularly seen to get the better of the CIA. It had all been worthwhile: the long hours poring over the minutiae of Communist information systems; the battles over column space; the antagonism amongst some of his competitors. He was on the cusp; a new era was in view. And then came Jane’s devastating call from Greece that resurrected hidden
fears about her cancer. His moment of triumph was a watershed.

Victor found the next 12 months increasingly miserable. While his column continued there were other, distracting concerns. Should he push on with his work or join Rosemary and Jane in England? Things were going badly for Jane and Rosemary was feeling the pressure. Yet despite this worsening scenario, Victor found it impossible to leave Washington until the very last moment.

By January 1978 Victor Zorza’s life had changed for ever. Jane was dead, Death of a daughter had been published, and Victor’s association with the hospice movement had begun. His Communist World articles would appear – intermittently – until the end of the decade but his interest in hospice was increasingly evident. Then, after A Way to Die appeared, Zorza would soon be off on another mission, this time to India. Kremlinology, for so long the driving force of his life, was finished, rendered irrelevant by his vision of a crumbling Communist monolith.

As Zorza moved on, an article he wrote almost a decade before displayed what many considered a surprisingly optimistic view of the Communist world’s return to ‘the one family of nations’.

I believe that Communism is merely a brief episode which diverted a section of mankind from the mainstream of its history. Ever since the death of Stalin we have been witnessing the powerful pull of social and political forces within the Communist system which are trying to bring it back into the world community. One who, like myself, has been observing this process so closely day by day cannot remain unimpressed by the vast changes in the very fabric of the system, in its very nature, during these past 18 years.

I believe … that the changes which have already taken place are irreversible and that, whatever temporary setbacks might occur, the Communist world will return to the one family of nations within one generation – or within a considerably shorter time, if the West pursues the flexible and imaginative policies which could help to bring this about.

Like so many of his predictions, it proved to be correct. But as Communism declined and the Soviet Union began to disintegrate, Zorza had found another venture to energise him.

Notes

3. Kamensk is now known as Dneprodzerzhinsk.
4. This was the Dneprodzerzhinsk Metallurgical Technical School.
5. This was the Dneprodzerzhinsk Regional Party Committee of the Ukrainian Communist Party.
6. Cadres were Party officials.
10. Yuli Markovich Daniel (1925–88) was born in Moscow, the son of a playwright who took the pseudonym, Daniel. After sustaining an injury in the Second World War, Yuli Daniel became a school teacher and friend of the dissident writer Andrei Sinyavsky. Along with Sinyavsky, Daniel published material outside of Russia, often under the name of Nikolai Arzhak. Daniel was arrested and, with Sinyavsky, subjected to a show trial that resulted in a punitive

11. Aleksandr Ilyich Ginzburg (1937–2002) was a prominent writer and dissident who founded *Syntaxis*, one of the first underground journals to appear in the Soviet Union. He constantly earned the displeasure of the Soviet authorities and was sent to the Gulag on several occasions. In 1979, he was exiled and deprived of his citizenship. After settling in France, Ginzburg continued to promote the thoughts of dissident writers through the émigré weekly *Russian Thought*.

12. Gorky is now known as Nizhny Novgorod.


36. Teng Hsiao-ping (Pinyin: Deng Xiaoping, 1904–97) was a veteran of the Long March and held several leading positions after the founding of the People’s Republic of China in 1949. He was generally regarded as a moderate and fell out of favour during the Cultural Revolution. After Mao’s death, he gradually secured his position until he succeeded Hua Kuo-feng in the 1980s. Thereafter, he led China into an era of modernisation and economic growth.

37. Chiang Ching (Jiang Qing, 1914–91) was married to Mao Tsetung. In her youth, she was an actress known as Lan Ping. After joining the Communist Party, she embarked on a political career which remained low key until the 1960s. A radical, she was an architect of the Cultural Revolution and encouraged the violence of the Red Guards. A member of the Gang of Four, she opposed the moderate influences of Chou En-lai and Teng Hsiao-ping to become one of the most powerful figures during Mao’s later life. After Hua succeeded Mao (1976), she was tried and sentenced to death, later commuted to life imprisonment. She died soon after her release in 1991.


40. Lin Piao (Lin Biao, 1907–71) was an early member of the CCP, a veteran of the Long March and a military strategist who excelled in guerrilla warfare. He helped orchestrate the Cultural Revolution and was responsible for compiling and distributing Mao’s *Little Red Book*. By 1970 he had become recognised as Mao’s successor but as their relationship deteriorated, he disappeared in 1971 amid rumours of a coup.

41. Chou En-lai (Zhou Enlai, 1898–1976) studied at a Japanese university before travelling extensively in Europe. He was an early member of the CCP and a veteran of the Long March. An able diplomat, he was willing to engage with the West and at one
time held the post of both prime minister and foreign minister. He was uneasy about the Cultural Revolution and during the 1970s became a target for the Gang of Four. When he was diagnosed with cancer, he passed an increasing amount of responsibility to Teng Hsiao-ping, his deputy prime minister.

42. Liu Shao-chi (Liu Shaoqi, 1898–1969) attended the same school as Mao Tse-tung, followed by a university course in Moscow. He favoured the Soviet approach with its emphasis on heavy industry and became sceptical about Mao’s Great Leap Forward. As his power increased, Liu opposed Mao and the Cultural Revolution. In 1968, he was secretly incarcerated and subsequently died in the poor conditions. Publications include: How to be a good Communist Peking: Foreign Language Press, 1951; Internationalism and Nationalism Peking: Foreign Language Press, 1952.

43. Hua Kuo-feng (Hua Guofeng, b. 1921) was designated by Mao as future leader of the People’s Republic of China. On Chou En-lai’s death he became prime minister and after Mao died, chairman of the Communist Party of China. His accession to power and denunciation of the Gang of Four marked the end of the Cultural Revolution.

52. V. Zorza, ‘Mao’s name will be dragged in the mud’, The Washington Post 17 September 1976.
62. R. Bomboy, ‘Courses on policymaking to be taught by newsmen’, Editor and Publisher 27 November 1976.
63. Entry in CIA files released to Zorza in 1983.
64. Article reported in a memorandum to the CIA, 19 August 1970.
65. Article reported in a memorandum to the CIA, 19 August 1970.
67. Memorandum (name deleted) to director of Central Intelligence, 29 October 1976.
69. Memorandum (name deleted) to deputy director of Central Intelligence, 4 January 1971.
70. William Putnam ‘Bill’ Bundy (1917–2000) was the foreign affairs advisor to Presidents John F. Kennedy and Lyndon B. Johnson. He edited Foreign Affairs, a leading US journal on international relations, for 12 years.
71. Memorandum (name deleted) to Mr Andrew Falkiewicz, assistant to the director of Central Intelligence, 8 March 1977.
8 An Indian summer

‘I went to the Himalayas after a doctor told me I might not have much time left, and shared the life of the hill people – eating their wholesome food, breathing the pure air of their mountains, staying in a one-room hut, waking to a view that took my breath away.’ Victor Zorza

The Himalayan retreat

Towards the end of the 1970s, Victor’s health went into a rapid decline that resulted in open-heart surgery. He rejected any association between his task-oriented lifestyle and the onset of his condition, but was stunned by the thought that he could be coming towards the end of his life. What to do now? Kremlinology would soon have run its course. Perhaps it was time to break with the past and take on something new. It was then he recalled Jane’s challenge: to forget the big picture of the Communist world and tell the story of the world’s poor. It was a tempting proposition that, if successful, would break new ground. Eileen Lerche-Thomsen, Victor’s partner during the 1990s comments:

He saw it as an opportunity to try and develop a new genre of newspaper reporting. He felt the public needed to be educated about the fact that two-thirds of the world’s population live in appalling conditions. But the only time they heard about the Third World was when there was a major disaster – flood, earthquake, fire, famine – whereas the real problems with the Third World were not enough food, not enough clean water, not enough education, not enough health care. His critics said: ‘What do you know about the Third World?’ And he replied: ‘I know that the Third World problems are the ones I’ve just mentioned, and that they’re present in every village in the Third World. I can’t make myself an expert on the Third World, but I can make myself an expert on a village, I can get to know the people. I can write about their daily lives in a way that readers of the column can get to know these individuals and identify with them – and thence with their problems.’ I think he was hoping that if he could make a success of it, that other journalists might follow and this would get the problems of the Third World pushed to the forefront.¹

And so, in what Zorza considered the autumn of his life, he decided to help Western readers understand the plight of the poor through the daily experiences of village life in one of the poorest regions of India. Writing in 1984, he comments on what the move meant to him:
The shock of the doctor’s verdict made me more open to the wonders of nature. The commonest wild flower was a marvel to me, every blade of grass sublime. I have never noticed such things beforehand, town-bound, achievement-oriented, completely absorbed in my work. Now, the pain which welled up in my chest as I climbed the hills sharpened my senses, spurring me to drink the world’s beauty and to praise it, though sometimes my old self returned to mock these poetic pretensions. ‘Sentimental mush,’ it said. I had not come here for a miracle cure, but to do a job of work.²

This new job of work made serious demands. First priority was an isolated location, free of the bustle of urban life; and yet, the community must be open and welcoming. People should speak freely; discuss their hopes, celebrate their successes and share their disappointments. After months of travel seeking just the right place, Victor happened on a small village in the lower Himalayas. The climate was cooler than on the plains and the village could only be reached by crossing a wide river. Few were aware of its location and contact between the villagers and the outside world was minimal. It was perfect:

Entry to Zorza’s village in the Himalayas:
‘The sight of the perilous crossing … almost made me turn back.’ Victor Zorza.
The bus from town travelled all day through rugged lonely hills whose beauty didn’t quite compensate for the bumpy road. Then came a rough walk down a steep path to the river several hundred feet below. The sight of the perilous crossing – a primitive cable-car which looked like a flimsy apple box dangling from a rope – almost made me turn back. But after I had watched several villagers go over, two at a time, my resolution returned. I crossed, my heart still in my mouth, to the low, green meadow, and began the climb into the hills. My search was at an end.

Zorza was keen to begin his work but first he needed time to recover. Finding the village had taken its toll. He had succumbed to dysentery and was debilitated by the heat and constant travelling. He noticed, too, he had become tetchy and sorry for himself, so he was not surprised when the locals found him unappealing. But once Zorza had decided to make his home in the village, his resolve never weakened. He rented a hut, found an interpreter and hired a cook. Then, as he immersed himself in the daily pattern of village life, he prepared to write his articles.

Initially, things did not go well. In his journalistic style, Zorza opted for formal interviews, conducted through his interpreter, supported by photographs of village life. Neither option was a good idea. The close questioning raised the suspicions of his new neighbours, prompting evasions and lies – something Zorza found hard to deal with. Until, that is, he realised his mistake:

When I understood why [the villagers] had lied to me, I learned the most important lesson of village life. The strangers who had appeared in the village in the past were often conquerors who came to pillage and to rape, or traders who came to cheat and to exploit, or officials who came to extort taxes or bribes. You don’t tell the truth to a stranger, because he will only use it against you. I have heard of

De-husking rice with a mortar and pestle.
killings, blinding and maiming and imprisonment. Villagers can become the prey of mafia-type gangs, corrupt officials, landowners – all trying to hang on to power in the face of government attempts to reform the system ... The villagers did not allow me to take photographs for a long time, but even when they relaxed the prohibition, they insisted that no names should be used. They fear that the truth might bring retribution. 

From that moment, Zorza resisted all attempts to identify his Indian village. Its name and whereabouts were omitted from his articles and removed from all photographic displays. His overriding principle was that nothing should compromise his relationship with the villagers or change their traditional way of life. This was put to the test when Zorza was short-listed again for the Journalist of the Year award. He simply withdrew, incurring the wrath of his editor. Ruth Bradby:

He was on a short list again because of the Village Voice column. But his concern was that if he were to win the award the village might be a place where it would be publicised and village life could be wrecked; and I think he withdrew his name. He had quite a fight with Richard Gott on The Guardian about this, because Richard Gott was saying to him: ‘Look this is a great honour for you, but also for us who believed in you.’ He showed me the letter; it was a very angry letter. 

As Zorza settled into his new home, he was soon
confronted by the rigidity of the social structure and the enslaving practice of ‘bonded labour’. Zorza became aware of bonded labour when he read an article about a 50-year-old man who had been freed from bondage after working for 22 years to repay a loan which in 1981 was worth $110. The point of the story was significant: it was not that the man had been either bonded or released, but that the government had refused him a grant of land and buffaloes to start a new life as a free man. Sensitised to the issue, Zorza writes:

When I got to my first village I was overwhelmed by a sense of outrage at the pitifully slow rate of progress. Ever since then, I have been asking myself, and others, how it was possible that more than two-and-a-half million people should be held captive as ‘debt slaves’.8

Slowly, Zorza came to realise the impact of drought, crop failure and crushing poverty on the Harijan lifestyle. The government was a long way off. To survive, food was essential and loans were inevitable. Bonded labour was the price. The complexities of this ancient tradition became plain when a bonded labourer walked out of his landlord’s house and refused to return:

It was the poor who urged him to go back, not the rich. ‘He gave you money when you needed it, now you let him down.’ If any of them needed a loan again, they said, the

Hindu society is linked to a complex system of stratification where status is ascribed and movement between levels, the castes,9 is theoretically impossible. Essentially, these castes are based on the degree of ritual purity associated with the occupations of their members. Four main groups contain thousands of hierarchcal castes. These four categories include: the Brahmins – priests and teachers; the Ksatryas – warriors and rulers; the Vaisyas – merchants and peasant farmers; and the Sudras – labourers. According to the Rig Veda10 – India’s oldest religious text which dates from the second millennium BC – these four groupings were created by the gods from Purusa, variously interpreted as ‘man’, a ‘cosmic giant’, and a spiritual concept. From Purusa’s head sprang the Brahmins, from his arms the Ksatryas, from his thighs the Vaisyas, and from his feet the Sudras. Some regard the untouchables as a fifth group, while others see them as an ‘unclean’ subdivision of the Sudras. These untouchables include children of mixed-caste relationships and those who perform polluting roles such as leatherworkers. Within a Hindu community, social status is directly related to an individual’s caste.

In Zorza’s village, the population was divided between high-caste Brahmins and Rajputs11 and ‘outcastes’, the lowly untouchables, re-named by Gandhi as Harijans12 – ‘children of God’.13 For years, reforming voices in government had followed Gandhi’s lead in an attempt to change attitudes towards this most disadvantaged of groups. Resistance was strong, especially in rural areas where Harijans provided casual labour for landlords and farmers. Despite a central drive towards emancipation, cultural traditions based on economic necessity died hard. ‘Bonded labour’, was a mechanism that enslaved a person for years while a loan was repaid through work. Although prohibited in India since 1954, the practice remains widespread.
landlord wouldn’t trust them. The rebel’s father also pleaded with him. ‘Your elder brother’s wedding was on the point of being called off, only the landlord’s loan saved it.’ Then the time for his own wedding came, the father assured him, they would send his younger brother to the landlord and release him. ‘But now you must go back.’ He refused. But the father’s concerns for his own creditworthiness, and the villagers’ fear that the farmers would punish them by denying even casual employment, gave the landlord an easy victory: in the end, the father replaced the defaulter with his younger brother.\textsuperscript{14}

Zorza was dismayed that such practices continued. As he became familiar with the culture around him, his articles bristled with stories about government failings and systematic abuse of the poor in rural areas:

In one village the government had given land to the untouchables, then, its own Forestry Department planted it with trees. When the Harijans protested, the Brahmmins burned down their shacks. In another village, high-caste Rajputs let loose their cattle in the fields of about 20 Harijans, and then drove them from their land and huts. In both cases the Patwaris [police and revenue officials] abetted the high-caste farmers.\textsuperscript{15}

The Patwaris were not the only officials who abused the Harijans. Corruption was rife, even among those who were charged with liberalising the system. On one occasion a government officer, known as Mr Jagdish, tried to extort money from the very people he had come to support – and ended up with more than he bargained for. Zorza:

Mr Jagdish had come to the village several times to arrange the distribution of government largesse to the poorest and most deserving of its inhabitants, former serfs who had been freed from bondage only recently. They had little land or other property from which they could have made a living. The Bonded Labour Rehabilitation Department for which Mr Jagdish worked in the district centre had devised a programme to help them. The villagers would be given cows, sell the milk, and live on the proceeds. Vijay [the Harijan leader] admitted that he had insulted Mr Jagdish. The official had demanded a bribe for every cow he had given to a villager, with one exception; after the incident he promised two cows to the men who promised to support his story. As for the depositions, the illiterate villagers had indeed put their thumbprints on the affidavits – but they had been told that these were applications for government aid.\textsuperscript{16}

These economic and inter-caste rivalries were only a few of the issues that Zorza laid before his Western readers. In this part of the Himalayas, marital status was emblematic of the distribution of wealth, so polygamy (among the rich) and polyandry (among the poor) ran side by side. The two wives of the village’s richest man bore visible testimony to his wealth. Among the poor, birth control was assured and corporate land retained through the sharing of wives.
A fascinated Zorza introduced his growing readership to this unfamiliar world by revealing the passion between two brothers who argued over their joint wife;\(^{17}\) and the hierarchical rule among four brothers who shared three wives.\(^{18}\)

**Village life**

One of the first villagers to befriend Zorza was the drummer, possibly because he had more time to talk. While others were in the fields he stayed in the square to beat the drum for temple services six times a day – and to act as the village barber. He was one of the poorest men in the community. Six years previously, the government had confiscated a small field from an absentee landlord, and, as part of its policy to emancipate the poor, given it to the drummer. He and his family worked hard, levelled the ground, terraced it, and built a wall to keep the cattle out. This took time and the drummer’s absence from the square became conspicuous. Although he beat his drum at the right times, he was sometimes unavailable when a barber was needed. Resentment grew. Zorza:

> The routine of village life obscures the tensions. The villagers need his drumming to wake them at half past four every morning so they can get to the fields at first light. And they need it to sound curfew at ten every night. Reveille also wakes the village gods; while curfew warns that anyone venturing abroad risks an encounter with evil spirits – who take over while the gods sleep. The village wouldn’t want to lose its drummer, even if he has his own land now.\(^{19}\)

After the first good harvest, the field was seized by a wealthy farmer who claimed to have bought it from the absentee owner. The drummer protested and the landlord’s mood turned ugly:

> In the village square, the drummer wiped the blood off his face and appealed to the crowd for help. None was forthcoming. The villagers were glad he had been put in his place … With his land gone, the age-old relationship between the drummer and the village was restored. The villagers won’t let him starve. They do their duty by him, as long as he does his. Of course, he will again be utterly dependent on them for his living, but that is as it should be. That’s why the gods ordained that there should be a drummer caste, and that its members should own no land.\(^{20}\)

> On a broader front, inter-village tension arose over the buffalo festival, a traditional, bloody sacrifice that had been held annually for centuries. It was an important event throughout the region and people came from surrounding villages to witness the ritual slaughter.

> Originally, the senior priest would first make obeisance to the buffalo. Then, with a sharp blow, he would send it galloping out of the temple, the crowd in hot pursuit. The frantic beast, beset by a mob wielding sticks, stones and knives, usually made for the fields as it struggled to evade the blows. The chase ended only when one tormentor brought the buffalo down, generally by breaking its leg. The head was carried solemnly back to the temple, once again an object of worship.\(^{21}\)

> The government tried to end this practice during the 1970s claiming it was cruel and unnecessary. The Brahmins objected in the belief that any new ritual would anger the gods and bring punishment in the form of cholera and plagues. The first government officer to suggest a change was ejected from the village; but he persisted and returned each year to continue the debate. Attitudes gradually softened and a new
offering of rice and oil was agreed. More accurately, it was agreed by every village but one; an entire community that was angered by the rejection of its traditional offering to the gods. Then, after years spent boycotting the new festival, the dissenting villagers suddenly appeared. It was a highly charged moment:

The singing and dancing became ragged and died out in confusion. Then something strange happened. The drummer resumed his insistent beat, as if to challenge the intruders. First one, then another of the villagers tapped his foot in time. A young man took a step forward as if to dance and smiled. One or two faces in the watchful crowd smiled back. Hesitantly, the newcomers edged ahead until, encouraged by cheers, they had danced their way into the middle of the square. Laughter mingled with drunken shouts as teams from each village danced in the competition which has now replaced the buffalo chase. That day, the village was not the sad place I sometimes felt it was. Progress had been real – for the buffalo at any rate.22

In Zorza’s village, an internal argument developed when Kedu, an untouchable, wanted to build a house for his family outside of the Harijan settlement but closer to his piece of land. Having previously broken his leg, his clumsy attempt to reset it had left him with a painful limp. Now it was hard just to reach his field, let alone tend it. Moreover, he and his wife Sanki were shunned by other Harijans for setting up home as a couple when Sanki was also the wife of Kedu’s brother. Their unpopularity prompted acts of vengeance and their crops were frequently destroyed:

The goats [deliberately driven into Kedu’s field] had trampled the tomatoes, pulled up the spring onions, and devoured every bit of green stuff that showed above the ground. Some vegetables would grow again, but the produce Sanki had been going to exchange for mandua [millet] was gone.
I was beginning to believe that when Sanki had asked the gods where the next meal was coming from, it might not have been an idle enquiry ... Her children went without food that day.23

Despite his unpopularity, Kedu’s plan was treated with suspicion (by the Brahmins) and resentment (by the Harijans). The Brahmins realised that in future, Kedu could not be summoned quickly if he was required for work; and if others were to follow his lead, it could affect the economic stability of the village. Meanwhile, the Harijans resented the breaking of their corporate identity by what was interpreted as a dangerous move towards individualism. As a consequence, Kedu had no support from the Brahmins and no help from the Harijans. But he continued. Zorza:

Kedu laid the stones himself, slapping down on each layer the clay which Sanki had mixed with dung. He economised using the side of the hill as one wall. He left the corners for the mason, who made sure that the joints would hold fast. The mason also laid the top layer of stones. They had to be level, so that the roof would fit snugly and not let the rain in. The carpenter fixed the beam and the roof supports and made the door. The rain drained from the hillside into a streamlet a few inches wide which passed through Kedu’s field. For most of the year it was dry. The hut was built on top of it, with a hole in the floor and a gutter to the door. Now they had running water and internal drainage all in one, though only after it rained. But at least at those times they wouldn’t have to carry water from the well. The three cows who shared the one-room hut could drink all they wanted.24

When the family moved in it was a time for celebration and Zorza complimented Kedu on his forethought and industry. ‘You will be prosperous,’ said Zorza. ‘I don’t want to be prosperous,’ Kedu replied, ‘I just want to know where our next meal is coming from!’

Later that year, Kedu’s luck changed. A contractor supplying logs found his way to the village and recruited labourers to fell trees and float them downstream. Such work was beyond Kedu but the contractor needed a boy who was a strong swimmer. It would be perilous work in the swift mountain currents but he would be well paid: 10 rupees a day (about $1). A whole family could live on that. By chance, Kedu’s son, Chaddu, was by the river that day:

Chaddu, who was larking about in the river with the other lads, didn’t know the contractor was watching him. He had his own reason for doing well. He had bet a rich farmer’s son that he could swim further underwater than any of them. If he won, the boy would lend him his father’s primer and help him learn to read. Chaddu won the bet – and got the job.25

A two-storey home.
Bright and alert, Chaddu instantly asked if his brother could have a job and to the family’s delight he was engaged as cook. Even better was the 400 rupees ($40) that Kedu collected as an advance on his sons’ wages. Now Kedu could buy clothes as well as food. As things turned out, it was the only payment ever made as the project was discontinued due to bad weather and floods. Zorza:

The contractor was being paid only for those logs that he delivered to town unscathed. The two floods had done so much damage that he stood to lose a lot of money. But the dam and the channel were rebuilt again and the logging resumed. Then a cloudburst caused yet another flood. The dam was shattered for the third time. More logs were smashed. The contractor gave up. There would be no more work, he told the men, and he would owe them their wages. ‘We’ll never see that money,’ an older man said. They returned to the village like a defeated army, strung out in little groups along the mountain trail.

As Chaddu followed behind, his dreams of school vanished and his heart sank. He had, however, received a princely sum as a down payment and, more importantly, escaped with his life.

The road to Mussoorie

Throughout the 1980s, Zorza went back and forth to India with the sole purpose of bringing the village way of life to Western readers. For this to happen he needed two things: a story and a place to write it. As the community came to accept his presence, collecting stories was easy; but writing them, as we shall see, was problematic. So, he sought a haven outside of the village because he was unable to write within it. This led him to Dehra Dun and the home of his interpreter, Veenu Sandal, and to Woodstock School, Mussoorie, where he was befriended by two teachers, Hugh Bradby (then vice principal) and his wife, Ruth, who also taught at the school. By the mid 1980s, the pattern had become well established: two weeks in the village followed by two weeks, sometimes longer, at the school in Mussoorie. It was about this time that a Washington Post staff writer, Elisabeth Bumiller, travelled to the Himalayas to conduct an in-depth interview with Zorza. She describes him thus:

Victor Zorza is a taut, compact man, with a perpetually furrowed brow and a face lined and tanned by the sun. He is almost bald with a full, greying beard. On this afternoon he is encased against the chill in several thick sweaters and a heavy pair of hiking boots. He looks like he might be a serious trekker in town for a little rest and recuperation, but the fact is, he is not a relaxing man to spend time with … He has been described over the years as a perfectionist and an extremist, but a better word might be absolutist. Like many men devoted to a cause he does not often step back and look at life with irony or much humour, preferring to see the world in cataclysmic terms. But then, perhaps only a disciplined believer could live the kind of life he does.

Determined and focused, Zorza’s village life follows a carefully constructed pattern:

… his day usually begins at 4 am when the village drummer sounds the reveille. Soon the coughs and morning noises of Zorza’s neighbours can be heard through the thin mud walls. The villagers head for the fields so they can be there at daybreak, but Zorza heads up the side of a mountain … after breakfast he takes another long walk, through the dry, barren hills to the fields, where he meets up with the villagers as they’re taking their mid-morning break. ‘I sit around and chat,’ Zorza says. His interpreter is an Indian freelance
An Indian summer

journalist, a woman in her thirties who is a daughter in the family he lives with when he's in town. He goes home for lunch – usually rice, boiled cauliflower, carrots or cabbage, and dhal, an Indian lentil stew. He writes down the important points of the morning chat (he finds taking notes in front of the villagers too distracting for them) and then begins work on a column. ‘Sometimes I may work on a particular story for three months before it is ready for the telling,’ he says. ‘At any one time I may have a dozen possible column topics in my mind.’

When he first arrived in the village, Zorza chose a hut in the wealthy, high-caste area and immediately became identified with the Brahmins. It took a long time for the Harijans to accept him – but when they did, he was faced with a difficult choice. Zorza’s Brahmin landlord was charging an excessive rent and the Harijans offered alternative accommodation in the untouchables’ section of the village. It was a difficult decision:

The Harijans offered me a choice of huts – windowless, unbearably hot, stuffy. One had a leaky roof. In front of the other, swarms of flies rose from a pit filled with manure. When I came out, I almost tripped on a 10-year-old boy who was squatting on the path to relieve himself.

My own hut had three small, glassless windows in one wall. There was no through-draught because the opposite wall was built into the hillside, but the heat of the day usually seeped out of it by midnight. It stayed deliciously cool until eight or nine in the morning. From the bottom part of the hut, built of stone, which houses the landlord’s cattle, came grunts, and smells and flies, but I hardly noticed them now. Even with the windows, the darkness crept into the hut quite early, but at least I could work on my notes for part of the day. In the Harijan hut this would be impossible. To work outside would mean being surrounded by curious onlookers all the time.

Throughout his life, Zorza always said his work came first and in this situation, he was utterly consistent. Among the difficulties, hardships even, presented by the Harijan hut, the most important were those that affected his ability to write. After careful consideration he declined the offer, though with some embarrassment. ‘I was ashamed to look my Harijan friends in the eye,’ he says.

It was in the spring of 1982 that Zorza first made contact with the international school at Mussoorie. The school was founded in 1854 when the London Society for Promoting Female Education in the East sent four women to teach in what became known as Woodstock School; it moved to the Woodstock Estate (from which it took its name) in 1856. For more than 100 years, the school was predominantly a mission school for the children of Christian workers in India. In the 1970s the school responded to the changes taking place in India and the mission field and became an independent co-educational residential school welcoming students from more than 40 countries worldwide. Victor loved to visit:

A village family.
I think one reason why Victor felt at home with us was that he found it an interesting place to be. We were a Christian school but we tried to teach the children to respect the religion of others. We had Sikhs and Buddhists and Muslims and Hindus; but it was a happy school where people loved each other. When Mrs Gandhi was assassinated and the Sikh shops in Mussoorie were being burned systematically, in the bazaar closest to the school all the communities – the Sikhs, the Christians, the Hindus and the Muslims – put up a barricade and said to the people that were going through and burning the Sikh shops that they couldn’t go any further. It was at that time that we had what we called Activity Week where all of our young people went out. They went on social projects, some would work with Mother Theresa, some would go hiking back in the mountains, but they were all out of the school. One party had two Sikh boys with them in a bus; and the Muslim, Christian, Hindu and Buddhist boys hid them under the seat so they wouldn’t be dragged off the bus and killed in the anger after Mrs Gandhi’s assassination. So that was the atmosphere we lived in.31

Zorza heard of the school through his network of contacts and realised he would be supported if he ever needed help. At first, he stayed in the guest house but later, when he became ill, he stayed with the Bradbys. Ruth Bradby:

He came down with amoebic dysentery, and someone else – a parent perhaps – had booked the school guest room. So having got to know him a bit we said we’d be delighted if he stayed in our guest room. And I think his illness got worse, so he stayed with us that first time, perhaps for several weeks.32

As time passed, Zorza became a frequent visitor. Hugh Bradby:

I feel that, roughly in a month, he would be two weeks in the village and then two weeks with us, writing up the
material that he had accumulated. But my memory is that the proportion became different as time went on. He spent more time with us and less time in the village, partly because conditions in the village were very rudimentary; and I think he found it was perhaps more conducive to writing to be with us.  

By the time Zorza made contact with the Bradbys he had obtained the use of a car and found a driver known as Mr Thapa. According to the Bradbys, the donation of the car had been facilitated by Robert McNamara, a former president of the Ford Motor Company (1960) and later president of the World Bank (1968–81). The car was huge; a heavy and unwieldy vehicle unsuited to most local roads. Zorza loved it. Away from the village it transported him to the school and other locations in some style, luxury even. But Zorza’s uncompromising manner was not to Mr Thapa’s liking, so he took action. Hugh Bradby:

Victor dealt with Mr Thapa in a way that, in one sense, wanted him to be an equal; but in another sense, he saw him very much as his paid employee. He paid him a generous salary, but he expected him to be at his beck and call, and would not brook any opposition if Mr Thapa’s programme was at all different from Victor’s. He was actually quite loyal to Victor and quite long-suffering; but Victor had a major falling out with Mr Thapa after about six months – after which this vehicle just remained stationary in a street in Dehra Dun for around five years. You would see it as a relic; just left in front of Veenu’s parents’ house, never driven.

Foreshadowing his later association with the Russian journalist, Inessa Slavutinskaya, Victor’s relationship with Veenu was of immense value to him. Veenu Sandal was more than his interpreter and emergency landlady. She was a fluent intuitive writer who, in contrast to Victor’s constrained analytical style, produced flowing poetic prose that chimed with the cultural traditions of contemporary India. As a result, her articles found their way into publications that ranged from The Times of India to glossy magazines. Committed to Indian values and culture, Veenu was enthralled by Victor’s desire to place the folk traditions of India, in their glorious diversity, before a Western audience. For a while, her own work took second place as she became Victor’s collaborator, his confidante, his interpreter and his cook. Her contribution was hugely significant; but as time progressed, differences emerged. Ruth Bradby:

They used to have big, big clashes, sometimes over the wording of articles. I can think of one example: Victor was writing about someone who was praying for something in front of an idol – for rain or something – Veenu wanted the word ‘idol’ in and Victor wanted the word ‘image’. He told her that people in the West will have a negative feeling the moment they see the word idol; but she was adamant that this was an idol, and idols were alright, and she didn’t
want the word changed. And they went back and forth for a couple of hours about this, neither giving way. So in that sense she was more than interpreter. It was important to her how the things were written up and that it was accurate. \[^{36}\]

The relationship became further strained when Veenu found it increasingly difficult to agree with the interpretation that Victor placed on events they had both witnessed. In short: their perceptions of truth were different. And having pledged herself to Zorza’s Indian cause, Veenu became disillusioned when his attention turned to Russia during the decline of Communism. For Victor, Gorbachev’s glasnost cast new light on 30 years of his work that had previously focused on the Communist world; and the possibility of taking a hospice service, and all it meant to him, into the heart of what was the Soviet Union, was irresistible. For Veenu, this new interest signalled a betrayal of mammoth proportions. As a result, their relationship disintegrated and they went their separate ways, each bruised by the experience.

By contrast, Zorza’s friendship with the Bradbys was lifelong and they retain happy memories of him at the school and around their dinner table. Hugh Bradby:

He was just great fun to be with; our whole family felt that way. He was a very, very interesting person. He was widely read. He had been right at the centre of things in America and he knew McNamara and he knew Kissinger and he knew Ashkenazy. It’s very strange to have somebody living in your home whose articles we had read for at least 15 years before we ever met him. We’d read the Cold War articles, and then the articles he wrote about China, and to find that person just sitting across your supper table and giving us the benefit of all his experience – and he showed an interest in everything that we did. I was vice principal and then principal of Woodstock School and he was very interested in all the school politics and asked, you know ‘who did you talk to today, and what classes did you teach, and who reacted how?’ and all this sort of thing: perpetually curious, even in things which weren’t very significant in themselves. \[^{36}\]

Zorza’s fascination with India lasted for almost a decade. By his own criteria, the success of his venture depended on the quality of his articles and, in particular, whether life’s universal issues had been accurately revealed through the lives of the poor in this remote Indian village. He also hoped that *Village Voice* would follow his *Communist World* column and be syndicated worldwide. He failed to realise this latter goal, and accepted that, in total, his India mission was not as successful as he had wished. Regarding his primary goal: the evidence is more contradictory.

The favourable letters received by Zorza bear witness to a sizeable following among the general public. Academics described his articles as ‘exquisite, rich’. \[^{37}\] Media colleagues expressed approval: ‘My company produces television travel programming and since we are all travel enthusiasts, your...
columns are the talk of the office each Monday morning. The BBC asked him to appear on the Gloria Hunniford Show and the New York Times sought a piece for their Magazine. There is much to suggest, therefore, that Zorza had successfully introduced his Western audience to the complex pattern of Indian life, and that his exposition of centuries-old traditions had captivated his readership as much as the detailed accounts of human interaction.

Other commentators are more critical. Richard Gott likened Zorza’s column to ‘water dripping on a stone’. Peter Preston thought Victor’s spare, analytic style was unsuited to his Indian milieu and could only infrequently ‘make the rhythms of peasant life beat with emotion’, and Geoffrey Taylor perceived a basic incongruity at the heart of the project:

I know the general feeling in The Guardian was that it was not successful. It was a very bold thing to do, a very adventurous thing to do, and probably a very important thing to do, to try to bring home to Western audiences the lives of villagers in the [Himalayas]. But it was all a bit artificial because he was living the life of a peasant but sending his material by telex.

Such contrasting views of Zorza’s work and persona did not just relate to the Indian context but, as we shall see, applied to every aspect of his life.

Notes

2. Victor Zorza, a draft article for publication, 1984; found among his personal papers.
5. Richard Gott was features editor of The Guardian. The disagreement with Gott over the Village Voice column became irreconcilable and Zorza moved it from The Guardian to The Times.
9. Caste is often referred to in India by its indigenous name, ‘jati’.
11. The Rajputs were Ksatryas and fall therefore into the second of the five major divisions of the Hindu caste system. They were the traditional rulers in Rajputana, now known as Rajasthan, in north-west India.
12. Today, the Harijans are known as ‘Dalits’.
34. Ruth and Hugh Bradby, IOELC interview, 3 March 2003.
37. Letter from William J. Siffin (Director, International Development Unit, Indiana University) to Victor Zorza, 26 August 1982.
41. Ruth Bradby recalls this phrase was included in Gott’s ‘angry letter’ to Zorza. Ruth and Hugh Bradby, IOELC interview, 3 March 2003.
Part 3 The dislocated idealist

‘One of my problems was the social background of my family. My father and my mother were shopkeepers and that somehow made me feel that with my views and ideas I wasn’t in the right family ... not if I had these ideas of saving the world, which I did already have then.’ Victor Zorza

Although he was universally known as Victor Zorza, the prize-winning journalist who specialised in Kremlinology, few knew the truth about his background and history. In fact, Victor was the second of three children born to Jewish parents, Berl and Susla Wermuth, who kept a delicatessen on the corner of Kolomyja’s main square. They were not very religious, embracing instead a mixture of their Jewish heritage and Polish culture. When Victor was born, he was called Izrael though he was widely known by his Polish name of Salek. His elder brother, Feiwel, was known as Pawel and together they went to the Polish Gymnasium, a highly respected local school. Rutka was the baby of the family and the only girl.

From an early age, the young Salek felt isolated from the rest of his family. He was not the eldest, so he missed the attention shown to first-born sons in the Jewish tradition; nor was he the youngest – that position was held by his sister. So Salek was uncertain about where he belonged and came to believe he featured less prominently in his parents’ affections. He recalls: ‘We kids were really thrown on ourselves ... I remember, yes, there were some incidents when I saw other kids with their mothers and felt I would have liked that, and I did feel deprived.’

To dispel his loneliness, he became engrossed in reading and developed a love of literature. Then, inspired by the Polish classics, he began to write poetry and nervously shared his efforts with Rutka. Little did he guess that both of them would eventually win prestigious awards for their writing: he for his analytic journalism; she for her autobiography.

As the clouds of war gathered over Europe, a preference for the Soviets over the Nazis developed among many Jewish families. When the anticipated invasion eventually happened, a section of the Jewish community felt relieved when the Red Army – rather than the Wehrmacht – appeared on the streets of Kolomyja. Victor was among the Soviet supporters, much to his parents’ distress. He had become enamoured with the egalitarian principles of Marxism and despite the ‘Sovietisation’ of eastern Poland, the executions and the deportations, he joined the Pioneers, a youth organisation widely used as a vehicle for Marxist-Leninist indoctrination. About this
time, he also took the name of ‘Victor Zorza’ symbolising his victory in the new dawn (Zorza means ‘dawn’ in Polish). The beatings which followed from his older brother distanced Salek, now Victor, even further from his family.

When the Nazis invaded eastern Poland in 1941, Victor failed to persuade his parents to retreat with the Russians and left home on his own to secure his survival. It was a decision he came to regret. On Soviet soil he was taken by Ukrainian nationals, imprisoned in a camp of the Gulag and nearly killed in a bombing raid. After a failed attempt to return to Poland he carried a burden of guilt for deserting his family that became lifelong. To survive in Soviet exile, he constructed a new biography – some of it far removed from the truth – that included several versions of how he came to be detached from his parents. When he arrived in England as a member of the Polish Air Force recruited in Russia after Stalin’s ‘amnesty’, he had already become dislocated from the Salek of his youth, his Jewish antecedents and his family history. In future, he would embrace a new vision: to warn the world about Stalin and advocate for democracy over Communism.

Marriage to Rosemary Wilson, who was already carrying their first child, Richard, changed little. By this time, Victor had suffered a complete memory loss. When he was in hospital in Wales during the 1940s, and throughout a long recuperation period, his past was rebuilt from what was known about him by his physicians: information that was gleaned from his assumed biography, assembled during his days in the Polish Air Force. He was left, therefore, with a reconstructed memory containing several fictitious elements, a partially recovered memory that was grounded in reality, and a series of flashback-type images he could not understand but which filled him with dread. In this confusing scenario, Victor’s past became forbidden territory, while a carefully crafted story was prepared for public consumption.

Meanwhile, Rutka had survived the Holocaust. Despite the dangers and her obvious youth, she had gambled on entering Germany as a forced labourer from Lwów. Aided by good fortune and her strong resilience, she outlived the war. Then, back in her native Poland, she began to look for Salek. But there were difficulties. She too had changed her identity and, at that time, the climate in Poland was not conducive to the truth about her Jewish past; so she revealed little about herself or her family. Ironically, she was also seeking a person who never existed, for she mistakenly thought that Salek was short for Solomon. So, regardless of their individual efforts to find each other, they remained apart for 53 years.

During this time, Victor focused on East-West relations and elevated the importance of his work above the needs of his family. Jane had been born in 1952 and, despite some exceptional times, she, Richard and Rosemary had been largely forsaken by Victor. During the latter part of his career, when reporters probed for answers as to how Zorza could leave Rosemary behind and spend long periods in India, the familiar mantra was propounded, ‘she understands the importance of my work and accepts it’. This may have been Zorza’s view but Rosemary was never happy about the neglect. Yet little headway was made. Even when his wife developed breast cancer and then Parkinson’s disease, Zorza stayed away, just as he had when his daughter was ill during the 1970s. Eventually, in 1991, at nearly 68 years of age, Rosemary left Victor, her spirits lifted and loneliness ended by Peter Varney, a previous beau whose wife had recently died.

Zorza was devastated. To him, though not to others, the breakdown of his marriage was incomprehensible. For all his professional success, the networking, the fêting and the
acclaim, he had lost a long-suffering wife who, despite her unhappiness, had cared for him, supported him, acceded to his missions and shared his ideals. It was the lowest point of his life. He had deserted his first family and left them to the Holocaust; for long periods, he had abandoned his second family. Now, his daughter was dead, his son was estranged and his wife had gone. He was inconsolable.

Two years later, it was a chastened Victor Zorza who met Eileen Lerche-Thomsen on the steps of University College London and embarked on a different kind of relationship with her. Of course, he said the usual things about his work and in some respects he was as driven as ever. For her part, Eileen cared for him, cherished him, became involved in his projects and looked after him as his health deteriorated. She also developed an understanding of his past and, as someone who had experienced the German invasion of Jersey during the Second World War, could perhaps empathise more than most about what occupation meant to him.

Alongside this commitment, however, she expected some sharing of their lives, an indication her love mattered and that it was reciprocated; the subject was non-negotiable. Eileen was successful. Over time, friends saw a noticeable change in Victor. His attitudes softened and he became more careful of the needs of others. Significantly, he took time to enjoy his relationship with Eileen and they talked, walked, watched films and planned a future.

It was at this point that Rut finally traced her brother and after half a century apart, they spoke on the telephone. Soon, Rut was on her way to England and Dairy Cottage where she stayed for a month. It was a cathartic time. Each morning she and Victor spent time in the garden speaking Polish, reminiscing about their past, re-entering the world of their childhood before everything turned upside down. Over the years they had each gone their separate ways but they had much in common, not least their love of literature. After the years of silence, Victor found important similarities: both had concealed their past; both had memory losses; both had denied their Jewishness; and both had felt a deep-seated loneliness. At last, Victor could explain why he left home to a member of his family who, like him, had suffered greatly; a person who understood his dilemma completely and who could help purge his feelings of guilt.

Importantly, Zorza also began to explore his Jewish culture and approached Professor Dov Noy, a fellow citizen of Kolomyja and an expert in Jewish folklore, about the Jewish tradition. These discussions took place by telephone and also face-to-face when Dov Noy visited Dairy Cottage during 1995. By the time he died in 1996, Victor had found a sense of peace with all who cared for him most: Eileen, his partner; Rut, his sister; and Richard, his son. In view of his past, it was a remarkable achievement for one who had been so dislocated – emotionally as well as physically – for such a long time.
9  An Englishman from Kolomyja

‘When the Russians announced that they were coming to liberate us … I remember the enthusiasm with which I greeted them.’  Victor Zorza

Change of name, change of heart

In modern-day Poland, a popular saying has its roots in the nineteenth-century search for oil and minerals in an area stretching from Kolomyja to south-eastern Ukraine. As industry developed, a workers’ settlement was established in Yuzivka – now known as Donetsk – in 1869.

Yuzivka supplied the workforce for an industrial plant founded by an Englishman named ‘Yuz’ – thought to be ‘Hughes’. Along with Hughes, other Englishmen arrived, notably in Nadworna, just a few miles from Kolomyja, where wells were dug and refineries built. Conspicuously dressed in their dark suits and characteristic hats, these successful men made a big impression on the local population – so much so, that aspiring entrepreneurs bought similar clothes to cut a dash with their local contemporaries. It was a front, however; an engaging image that lacked substance. Rut Wermuth, Zorza’s sister, says: ‘everybody wanted to look important. They wanted to be like the English gentlemen, but they were not.’ This lack of veracity was captured by the telling expression ‘an Englishman from Kolomyja’ – a term which Zorza later applied to himself. It suited him perfectly, since he was not what he seemed.

Among the questions surrounding Zorza’s life, some features are clear. First, that he was born in Kolomyja on 19 October 1925. At that time, the town was part of eastern Poland as a result of the Polish-Soviet war of 1919–20. But in the twentieth century, borders often changed in this disputed region and Kolomyja was intermittently part of Austrian, Russian, Polish, German, Soviet and Ukrainian territories.

What is also known is that Zorza was born into a Jewish family and, at birth, was given the name Izrael – Izrael Wermuth – though he was always known by his nickname, Salek.¹ His parents were shopkeepers, and ran the delicatessen in Kolomyja’s main square. Salek was the middle child of three. His older brother, Feiwel was born in 1921 and commonly known by his Polish name: Pawel.² Then there was Rut,³ the baby of the family, born in 1928 and affectionately called Rutka – ‘Ruthie’.

At the dawn of the twentieth century, Kolomyja had
a vibrant Jewish community of around 16,000 – almost half the town’s population. As tensions rose with the onset of the First World War, anti-Semitism raised its head amid accusations that Jews were supporting the enemy. In this environment of distrust, Jewish homes and businesses were destroyed.

At the end of the war, Kolomyja became part of the newly formed Ukraine but was reclaimed by Poland in 1920. For the Jewish community, it was a period of sustained pressure as political control moved back and forth between Ukrainians and Poles. Consequently, economic recovery was slow but, by the late 1920s, Jewish businesses had gained ground. Co-operatives were formed and employment was available in lace and bedding factories; in bakeries, tanneries and printing works. A cultural association threw the arts into sharper focus. Theatre and literature flourished.

It was in this context that Salek’s early life was shaped. Years later, in 1994, he recalled the dynamics between the Poles, Ukrainians and Jews in Kolomyja during the 1930s:

*The main square in Kolomyja, early twentieth century.*
The centre of the town, the trading centre where the shops were, was Jewish, almost entirely I should say – probably 80, maybe even 90 per cent Jewish. The area surrounding the centre, which was not quite the suburbs, but sort of merging into the suburbs, was almost entirely Polish, where the Polish administrative class lived. The Poles were largely the administrators – the rulers, the ruling class – but with a good sprinkling of the wealthier Jews and professional Jewish people, or those who’d done well in their trade, and so on. And outside were the [Ukrainian] helots, the subject nation, treated as such and feeling as such, certainly, by both the Poles and by the Jews as a sort of subject race.

And one was growing up in this situation of suppressed conflict between those three groups, because the Poles were naturally anti-Semitic, they would drink it in with their mother’s milk. The Ukrainians were as anti-Semitic – or more so – than the Poles; and then there was what I must regretfully describe as the utter Jewish contempt for both of those groups. And that’s how one was growing up.4

In the Wermuth household, Salek’s parents worked long hours to provide for their children; ‘they rose with the sun and went to bed late at night’. On special occasions, the family would always spend time together, but by and large, Salek saw little of his parents; it was something he regretted. ‘We kids were really thrown on ourselves ... I remember, yes, there were some incidents when I saw other kids with their mothers and felt I would have liked that, and did feel deprived.’ The situation was not helped by Pawel’s antipathy towards Salek, although with Rutka, Salek’s relationship was stronger due partly to a common love of literature:

I didn’t get on very well with my elder brother who used to beat the daylights out of me for the slightest transgression; but I got on very nicely with my sister, who was about three or four years younger. I sort of took it upon myself to try to teach her to read – much earlier than she was ready for – because I wanted her to read the books that I was reading; and I got her to read quite a lot, actually.6

Despite the family business, times were hard and Salek never regarded himself as well-to-do. During one school holiday, he helped behind the counter and was deeply affected by the experience:

For hours I stood around in the shop, and there were no customers coming in and no money coming in. Yet we had to pay quite a lot for my schooling; it wasn’t free. It was a gymnasium – a state one – but we still had to pay a very high fee. After several days of this, I was so shaken by it that I asked my parents ‘take me out of school’ because there was no money coming in and I knew what that meant, and I couldn’t understand how we were going to manage and survive.7

When Salek entered his teenage years, his awareness of poverty and the meaning of social exclusion was heightened.
by his avid reading and growing sympathy with left-wing politics. When he befriended a Ukrainian boy at school, he was shocked to discover the difference between their ‘second breakfasts’ – snacks brought from home to be eaten mid-morning: ‘He hardly ever brought anything,’ said Salek, ‘and if he did it would be just a piece of dry bread. Well I would exchange my second breakfast with him – you give me yours and I’ll give you mine – done as a kind of lark.’

Gradually, experiences such as this led him away from the relative comfort of his personal situation towards the incessant struggle of the poor. And then, suddenly, he witnessed a violent event that caused his attitudes to harden and changed the course of his life. Out on the street, he happened upon a group of labourers digging up the road. Unhappy at their treatment, the men downed tools and opted to strike rather than accept the meagre pay that failed to meet the basic needs of their families. In a swift response, Salek recalls that the authorities ‘suppressed the strike with the worst brutality’.

Motivated by such experiences, his commitment to the left became unshakable. As he rationalised his approach, Salek came to see himself as an anarchist: not the ‘bomb-throwing’ type of anarchist he saw as being popular in the build-up to the First World War; it was more in terms of a belief, a personal commitment to the notion that governments were oppressive and should be abolished. In this scenario, all forms of coercive control were rejected: ‘Oh yes,’ he said, ‘I was a great anarchist, because that had everything. It had sympathy for the underdog and at the same time the freedom that a boy will see in anarchism.’

It was in Salek’s radical embrace of anarchism and his disenchantment with all forms of authority that the seeds of his dislocation were sown. Consequently, it was not the coming of war that separated him from the family, but his youthful longing for freedom. First and foremost, he resented his parents for the control they exercised over him:

I remember in the summer the war started, in 1939, I wanted to go on a cycling tour of Poland, on my own or with some friends. Of course, my parents wouldn’t let me because already the situation was a difficult one, and I remember feeling terribly resentful towards them because of that – that they wouldn’t let me go and explore the world.

This resentment was later fuelled by Salek’s abandonment of his parents’ values. His left-wing philosophy demanded the rejection of everything deemed ‘bourgeois’. He found it hard, therefore, to belong to a family of shopkeepers and sought, instead, to pursue his vision of the world.
unfettered by his background. And so the stage was set for Salek, still only 14 years old, to embark on his journey into loneliness and guilt; a pilgrimage that would make demands on his energy, his mind and his emotions for the rest of his life. It began in earnest when the Soviet troops arrived.

When the Russians announced that they were coming to liberate us, I really took that as liberation because they were saving us from the Germans, although that was certainly not their objective. And I remember the enthusiasm with which I greeted them. How moved I was and how grateful I was, and what great fun it was; and I swallowed the propaganda which they ladled out in huge quantities – and very cleverly too – hook, line and sinker. You know, this really was the dawn of the new age. This really was justice, equality, everything to me.\(^{12}\)

It was in recognition of this new age that Salek decided to change his name and encapsulate in his persona the image of this victorious new dawn. In his later writing, Salek places this transition – erroneously, but conveniently – in the context of a young refugee trying to enlist in an elite Polish Air Force Squadron on Soviet soil: a process which, if he were to be successful, demanded that his Jewish roots be concealed. In reality, it now appears that when he chose the name Victor Dawn (‘Zorza’), he was still in Kolomyja, contemplating a new beginning. He had the image of Lenin in mind, standing with his arms outstretched, the sun rising behind him; but it was he, Salek, who was going to be the Victor of the Dawn, the triumphant one of the new era.\(^{13}\)

Once the decision was made, there was no holding back. Salek was never afraid of stepping into the limelight and now he now set about making his views known. The fact that he leaned towards the Russian-Marxist world-view mattered little. He was confident, assured, and undeterred by the excesses of Soviet policy:

> On the one hand, I did see and understand and condemn some of the Soviet nonsense. They were arresting people right, left and centre, people that we all knew to be innocent; and deporting people and shooting people; and I knew that surely that must be wrong. But at the same time, Marxism, or least some of the ideas and ideals, were absolutely right for a boy of 14 to 15.\(^{14}\)

Finally, Salek turned his back on everything his family stood for when he joined the Communist youth organisation, the Young Pioneers.\(^{15}\) Among the group activities – the games and the summer camps – the organisation provided a highly valued conduit for indoctrinating the young with Communist ideology. The solemn promise clearly articulates what is expected of its members: ‘I, a young pioneer of the Soviet Union, in the presence of my comrades, solemnly promise: To love my Soviet Motherland passionately. To live, learn and struggle as the great Lenin bade us and as the
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Communist Party teaches us.’ Salek’s show of support for the principles of Communism, as outlined by the Kolomyja branch, caused dismay to his family and anger in the community. Rutka remembers these troubled times:

Salek used to visit the villages and try to persuade people – like the farmers – to establish communes. It was a dangerous thing to do. No-one liked it. But Salek was a hothead and full of his ideas. Every day he went to the Young Pioneers meeting. Our father didn’t like it and Pawel didn’t like it either. There were quarrels when Salek came home and after one such quarrel, father said ‘You are not my son. I don’t like you.’ And it was after this that Salek ran away.¹⁶

There was a period before Salek left home when he felt his Marxist thinking had matured sufficiently to allow him to confront anyone who offended him. In this respect, his confidence knew no bounds. He not only focused his attention on uneducated farmers and other young people, but also on his teachers and community leaders. Matters came to a head when his elder brother, Pawel, was marked down by his Latin teacher. Salek denounced the teacher in a high-profile, public accusation that prompted a formal investigation. The Latin teacher was subjected to an embarrassing trial, held within the school, and suffered damage to his reputation.

One of Salek’s contemporaries was Menek Goldstein, later to become a distinguished researcher and academic based in New York University’s School of Medicine.¹⁷ Richard Zorza remembers how Goldstein spoke of this incident shortly before his death.

Joan and I met Menek in Warsaw – the same trip when we went to Kolomyja, so this is 1997; and he said … ‘the way you should see this is: here was your father standing up for his family’. Menek said to me – he didn’t say this explicitly but this is what I heard: ‘Don’t see your father as a Young Pioneer accuser and Young Pioneer denouncer; see your father as protecting his brother, Pawel’.¹⁸

For all Salek’s display of unity, the wounds he inflicted ran deep. His father felt humiliated; Pawel was incensed. How could a Wermuth be seduced by Soviet ideology? And at a time when neighbours were being made homeless and families deported? As attitudes hardened there were more beatings for Salek and despite his youth, he opted for independence:

There was this conflict within me and it was a very, very disturbing situation. Finally I decided: ‘I’ve got to get away. I can’t go on here. I can’t do the things that I want to do, if I’m to grow up and become the person I want to be.’ And indeed I gathered up a few things and decided to get out. I ran away from home, and I certainly gave no thought as to how my parents would feel to have lost a child, especially in a world at war.¹⁹

Making for Ukraine, Salek masqueraded as a refugee from Warsaw claiming that his family had been scattered
during the German invasion of 1939 and, since then, there had been no-one to rely on but himself. It was a convincing story. Slightly built and childlike in appearance (he was still only 14) Salek was admitted to an orphanage in Tarnopol and placed on the roll of the local school.

It was at this point that he had misgivings about his behaviour. Could it be that his parents were worrying about him? Should he let them know he was still alive? Eventually, he decided to send a postcard, supposedly from Kiev, letting everyone know he was well; but the card was posted in Tarnopol and the stamp betrayed his whereabouts. He recalls:

It took my father a long, long time but he finally tracked me down and when he came I fell into his arms and I was very happy to be taken home, where things had changed considerably. Our shop had been nationalized; the sources of living, of income, had been cut to virtually nothing. Mother, who was the real hard worker of the family, managed to get another shop going but it was nothing compared with the previous one, just a few odd things that came and went; and things were quite hard. It was very difficult to find my feet again, to start going to school after that. I had to adapt myself to home life again, but I helped out in the shop. I went to school, but often played truant – which I’d never done before; and then came the German attack on Russia.

As the Nazi war machine struck deep into the heart of Soviet-occupied territory, the situation changed by the hour. No-one felt safe. Salek was convinced that the best option, the only option, was to go east. But no-one was listening, his family’s patience exhausted by his Marxist excesses and their own harsh treatment at the hands of the Soviets.

So it happened that Salek went alone. Years later, as he struggled to come to terms with the magnitude of his decision, he would express regret that his father allowed him to go. Little did he realise, at the time, the effect that his leaving would have upon his life.

The guilty secret

To both the casual observer and his closest friend, Victor Zorza was a formidable man. Self-assured and eloquent, he mixed with high-ranking individuals from the world of politics and commerce while displaying a natural charm that endeared him to more lowly members of society. Of course, he could be challenging – that was part of his nature – and at times his grasp of current affairs was daunting. So was his insistence, when it suited him, to cover every last detail of an argument. But he could be good company, a pleasing raconteur whose stimulating conversation made him a welcome guest and colleague. Yet beneath his composure, two things troubled him: first, his memory loss; second, his deep-seated belief that he carried a guilty secret.

Less than a year before he died, Zorza was still wrestling with his amnesia as he tried to piece together his wartime experiences in Ukraine and Russia. It was a high-risk activity. On one hand, there were memories he was afraid to revisit, images that terrified him, though he was never sure why. On the other hand, after almost 50 years, he craved understanding and a final opportunity for closure.

Despite his nervousness – and the fact he had kept his amnesia secret, even from his family – the situation had changed. Unbelievable as it seemed, his younger sister, Rut, had survived the Holocaust; and in 1993, against all the odds, she had found him. Suddenly, surprisingly, he was not the
only Wermuth still alive – and now he had a living connection with his past. Here, in Rut, was someone who remembered him as a boy, who sat at the same table, ate the same food, played in the same streets; someone who could reminisce about their parents and Pawel; someone who could help to reconstitute his memory.

It spurred him on. Now, once and for all, he could confront the gaps in his life. True to form, he employed the painstaking methods he had used during his days as a Kremlinologist, working carefully through his biography, putting his recollections on paper and making informed judgements about what had happened at the time. His rational approach only reinforced the enormity of the task. He writes:

How is it that I can remember what I heard from others and about atrocities, but remember nothing of what happened to me between capture [in Ukraine] and [arriving in] Kiev. Since we refugees talked about these things, and I remember what others said, then I would assume that I recounted my own adventures to them as they had recounted theirs to me; and if I remember theirs, then I should remember mine. Yet I don’t.22

To help him piece together the events of his wartime journey to Russia, Zorza wrote to Dov Noy in 1995 requesting the assistance of Jewish historians. Most important, he stated what he could remember about this time:

I left Kolomyja during the week following 22 June [1941] with some people trying to reach Lwów in order to travel further east, but by then marauding Ukrainian bands were attacking the retreating Soviets and Jews. So far as I can recall, we did not go straight to Lwów but travelled in a roundabout way, first going to the east and north in order to avoid the rapidly advancing Germans. But our group found itself behind the German lines; we were caught by the Ukrainians and locked up. I don’t know where that was, but

‘Less than a year before he died, Zorza was still wrestling with his amnesia.’
I do have one or two ‘snapshots’ of the houses and events in my visual memory; and of being caught up in a pogrom. I also remember being led out of the lock-up at dawn. Then there was a lot of shooting, but I only recall the sounds and have no visual memory of it. After that I remember nothing until some weeks later, when I found myself in Soviet territory.  

Zorza continues:

It would help me greatly if I could establish in what localities there were Ukrainian massacres of Jews, during the several weeks following the last days of July, in the area to the east and north of Kolomyja and Lwów, up to the old Soviet border. It’s a long shot, but it is possible that when I am sifting through all this information I may come across a shaft of light that could illumine the darkness.

Frustrated by his inability to recover the key features of these unsettling events, Zorza became more convinced of some personal culpability that hindered his progress: ‘That my loss of memory, still persisting 50 years later, was due to a guilty secret I had no doubt; but guilty of what?’

High on the list of possibilities was Zorza’s belief that he ultimately deserted his family, allowing them to fall into Nazi hands without resistance on his part. This conviction troubled him – though in fact there was little that could have been done by a boy of 15; but there was more. Disillusioned and homesick, he attempted to leave Soviet territory and return home, only to be taken by Russian troops. He was put to work on the front line, digging trenches to slow the German advance, when suddenly they were caught in an air raid:

I saw showers of earth being thrown up into the air, then came the explosions with the debris of carts, trucks, men, horses – and only then came the explosions, punctuated with bursts of machine-gun fire which got closer and closer.

The driver took one look, cut the engine, and was off the tractor and into the ditch by the roadside almost before any of us had managed to get out of the cart. All the others followed him, but I thought I could do better. The ditch led to a culvert just a little way along the road and I figured I was small enough to get right inside it. I stuck my head into the opening, but the rest of me was too big, and I was still struggling to push my way in when I heard more bombs, much louder, and at the same time I felt as if I was being beaten by powerful fists. Stones and clods of earth struck all over my body, but my head was safe. It lasted only a moment. I could hear cries and moaning. The plane had gone. I pulled my head out of the culvert and looked around. There wasn’t much left of the tractor driver and one or two others. I was weak with fear, with a kind of delayed panic.

Terrified by the unexpected bombardment, he turned away from Poland, back into Russia’s heartland. Despite the passage of time, it was an action he found hard to forgive:

I just turned back. I couldn’t face it. So that was much worse than being turned back by the Russians, because here there was also the feeling that I really wasn’t man enough to do the right thing. I knew what the right thing was – and by then it was quite clear what the Germans were doing to the Jews, and I knew that I needed to go back to help the family – but I turned back of my own accord. I didn’t need to; it was quite clearly cowardice however one puts it – and whatever justification there had been and all that, I’m not playing that game. I’m just describing the situation objectively. It was an act of cowardice.

While in 1994 Zorza found the words to speak thus in private, in records and publications about his life he had always concealed the truth about Kolomyja and the reason why he left. Variations on the theme varied from the minimal to the bizarre. For example: his military record states he was
‘deported by the Russian Security Police (NKVD) in 1940 and released on Amnesty’. By contrast, Lawrence Elliott reports: ‘Late that summer [1939] the Red Army stormed across the border, overran his town and launched a massive deportation. He was separated from his mother, father and brother – never to see them again.’ This version was also reported by The Guardian writer, David Ayerst. Elisabeth Bumiller’s account also sets the date at 1939, but here, Zorza ‘was the son of a small-town journalist’. Most extreme was Geoffrey Taylor’s version. When his book about The Guardian and its people was at the manuscript stage, Taylor sent a draft to Zorza outlining his early life and requested confirmation. It read:

The story Victor always told me was that because his father was an active Polish Socialist, his family was held in a concentration camp in Russia following Poland’s occupation and division. Victor used to escape from time to time to seek food for his family. The last time he returned to find them dead from starvation. So he decided to escape for good. While he was queuing in Moscow for food coupons the official concerned was called away just as Victor reached the counter. Inside the guichet he saw a pile of travel warrants signed and completed except for destination. Victor helped himself to a handful and immediately set up a black market in travel documents in Moscow’s central station. The last warrant he reserved for himself – destination Rumanian frontier. And hence England.

During the last weeks of his life, Victor’s attention turned towards his obituary and he determined to set the record straight. In a note written from his hospital bed to his partner, Eileen, he revealed the political climate in which he left Kolomyja (no mention of his family), but ironically, he gets the date wrong: Eileen, I love you. If I pop off, The Guardian may call you for an obit. Until Ruth appeared, the story as published in various places in the past, was that I had been deported to Russia after the Russians occupied eastern Poland in 1939. As you know, that is the story I told the Polish Air Force when I joined and this was fed back to me by the doctors in 1944, although some parts of the true story came back to me in later life. I stuck to the ‘Siberia’ version until Rut’s appearance. In fact, I left home [Kolomyja] in 1942 [sic] when the Germans invaded Russia, was involved in the ditch and shooting incident, then afterwards, made my way deep into Russia, wound up in Siberia, and from there, travelled back to central Russia, where I joined the Air Force and came with them to the UK.

Perhaps another source of guilt – that Zorza found difficult to articulate – was his flirtation with Marxism that led him towards a Soviet world-view. While this seems incongruous in view of his postwar stance, it is true that in 1939 the Soviet invaders received a warm welcome from certain sections of the community. Most notably, these were from Byelorussian and Ukrainian peasants – who hoped for material benefits – but also from members of the Jewish population. Norman Davies comments:

Western readers, who are so used to hearing that Jews were uniquely victimized in wartime Poland (as they certainly were under Nazi rule), need to realise that Jews were not necessarily the most vulnerable group in the Soviet Zone. What is more, one should not mince words about the duties which Soviet sympathisers and Soviet-appointed policemen and militia were required to perform. They were expected to denounce ‘hostile elements’ to the NKVD, to help expel householders from their property and peasants from their farms, to assist in the mass arrests and deportations, and to combat resistance.
Richard Zorza believes that his father experienced a great deal of guilt around the part of his life that included his Young Pioneer activities. If this is correct, it may help to explain why Victor never returned to Kolomyja, even when it became possible for him to do so. Richard Zorza:

It is certainly the case that there was a whole Kolomyja [Jewish] network and he did not connect into it; and it would not have been hard for him to do so, because that’s what happened. People lived far longer in the same place than they do now – and that is how they reconnected after the end of the war. Everybody knew where each other came from, and they only came from one place; so it would have been easy.\(^{35}\)

This may have been one reason why Zorza denied his Jewish origins when he arrived at Toskoie to enlist with the Polish Air Force. When he declared himself a ‘Roman Catholic’ it was not just to join the majority religion of Poland, nor to avoid any generic anti-Semitism; it was because the pockets of collaboration between Jews and Soviets had aroused deep-seated antagonism – so much so, that Anders was forced to address the issue as he constituted his army: He writes:

Considerable problems arose for me while the army was being formed, when members of the racial minorities, especially the Jews, began to arrive. Some Polish Jews had enthusiastically welcomed the Soviet troops when they invaded Poland in 1939 and this created a feeling against them among the other troops which it was difficult to overcome … I took the standpoint that, as we were creating an entity which was the continuation of the former Polish army, all citizens – without distinction of faith or nationality – should find a place in it.\(^{36}\)

This Jewish dimension to the question of guilt had been raised previously in the Zorzas’ book about Jane’s death. In this publication, Victor associated his guilt with a failure to speak out in the presence of racism:

A Polish Jew isn’t a Pole, he’s a Jew, a lower being; and here I was masquerading as a true-blooded Pole, accepted as such, listening to jokes about Jews and downright obscenities, and remaining silent. You asked about my guilty secret, well there it is.\(^{37}\)

This statement is characteristic of Victor’s modus operandi. It has a ring of truth about it and the argument is persuasive. But despite all that, it is a defence mechanism. A clever means of obscuring the salient point: reveal a lesser truth, conceal the critical one.

In a last attempt to address his guilty secret, Victor contemplates the possibility that he had not looked hard enough – or long enough – for his family. The fact that Rut appeared more than 50 years after he left Kolomyja demonstrated that she was there all along, anxious to find him, to become reunited. In view of his sister’s survival, this was a heavy burden for Victor:

Am I guilty of not persisting with my enquiries about possible survivors, for giving up too easily when the early postwar search proved fruitless? If I had persisted, I might have found Rut, brought her to England, and thus established the family. Or we might have gone to Palestine together. I ought to have gone on trying to find out if anyone had survived. Why didn’t I? Rut’s emergence shows that I gave up too early. So is this my guilty secret? The fact that I didn’t try hard enough for long enough; that Rut’s re-emergence shows me up as having failed to do my duty?\(^{38}\)

It is not difficult to understand why – in this complex scenario – Victor found many torments and numerous secrets. Yet in the moment of the lived experience, he had no benefit of hindsight. He believed he was in mortal danger. And in
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brutal conflict and its murky aftermath, life and death turn on chance occurrences. Victor realised this and formed the view that relationships were optional, survival mandatory.

By living as he did, and blessed with a modicum of luck, Zorza found a way to outlive the war. Yet the price he paid was high. He lost his family, his home, his culture, his religion, his language and his friends. In the uncertainty of the day, he questioned, challenged and ultimately responded in the only way he knew how – by following his instincts. He was not alone in this. But in common with many survivors, he came to believe there was a reason, a special purpose that gave meaning to his life. There were quests to embark on, missions to be fulfilled, work to be undertaken – and these purposes gave significance to his continued existence. What he did not appreciate was how these early experiences had affected his ability to make – and sustain – long-term relationships; but he was soon to find out.

The price of fame?

Despite the Zorzas’ status as writers of international repute there was a disarming simplicity – earthiness even – about their outward approach to life. Yet, beneath the surface, Rosemary and Victor were completely different. Christine Webb and her partner, Jackie, witnessed both their similarity and differences within days of moving into premises next door to Dairy Cottage in 1985. Christine Webb:

We hadn’t yet unpacked and Rosemary and Victor arrived at our door – we’d had no idea who they were – holding a bowl with cherries in it. I don’t think Victor said anything at all, he was wearing a baggy Oxfam jumper, and Rosemary handed us these cherries and said: ‘I know what it’s like when you’ve just moved’. And of course later, when we understood their lifestyle, we realised that she knew probably better than anybody else, because she moved house effectively twice a year for years. ‘No, no, we won’t come in, we won’t come in; you can come down and see us when you’re a bit more settled,’ she said. And she turned round and gave Victor this great slap on his bony chest and said: ‘He’s Victor Zorza and I’m Rosemary, and we live down at Dairy Cottage. Goodbye!’ We shut the door and I said to Jackie: ‘Do you realise who they are?’ because we were great Guardian readers, and so we read Victor’s bits over years – though he was a bit above our heads I think … We went down a few days later with a jar of homemade marmalade and walked in just as the nine o’clock news was on, which you shouldn’t do with a journalist. ‘It doesn’t matter,’ said Rosemary, ‘we’ve got to the sport’ (which Victor was not remotely interested in) ‘come in, come in’. We went in and sat down and Jackie sat on Rosemary’s knitting and bent the needles. Rosemary didn’t mind, and we knew that we were going to like her very much indeed. Victor, as was his way, subjected us to investigative journalism immediately: Who were we? What did we do? What was our area of expertise? And subtext: how could he possibly use us?

While Rosemary sought neighbourly friendship, when Victor discovered Ms Webb was a teacher of English, he looked for more. She recalls:

He used to come along with his articles and go through them with me at considerable expense of time, wishing to have every sentence analysed and be told whether, stylistically, it was the best it possibly could be. When we got to stages where I would say: ‘Well you could have a semicolon there or not, it’s purely a matter of taste’, he’d snap, ‘but which is better, Christine?’ He thought I was deliberately not telling him.
This sharp focus on work was a Zorza characteristic and not out of the ordinary; the trait had been lifelong. Rosemary had realised where she came in his priorities when, pregnant with Richard on her wedding day, Victor told her that regardless of the circumstances, his work would always come first. Remarkably, after Rut’s long and agonising, but ultimately successful, search to find her brother, he gave her the same message:

He said to me in one of his talks: ‘Work for me is my first priority; before my family, before my wife, before my children and – you have to know – now before even you.’

After 50 years of separation from his sister, and approaching the twilight of his life, it was an astonishing declaration. But it sheds light on the nature of Zorza’s relationships, what they meant to him, and the investment he made in them. The question arises: after he left home as a 15-year-old boy, did anyone get close to him again? Rosemary found it impossible and Victor seemed oblivious to her sense of isolation. Christine Webb: ‘Victor and I are just so cold with one another,’ she said, and for a long time Rosemary was angry.

The differences in perspective and approach intensified greatly under the strain of Jane’s death. Richard:

I think that the marriage more or less worked, at least by the standards of their generation, till Jane died, but when that happened their needs for coping were just completely inconsistent and instead of being any kind of support, they each acted as blocks to whatever the other had to do to survive.

Paradoxically, Victor’s coldness went hand in hand with high expectations of Rosemary: that she should understand what his work meant to him; that his interests would be a high priority for her whenever the need arose; that he must be away from home for long periods; and that sometimes, she would have to accompany him to Washington – where she never settled and always hated the climate. Victor would also send people from Russia, who frequently spoke little English, to stay with Rosemary during his absence; a practice that annoyed her and seriously disrupted the rhythm of her life, but which Victor justified as providing his wife with companionship. Yet this was nothing compared to the disruption caused by Victor’s homecoming after several months away:

When he was working in India he would come home at points at which the climate in India was not doing well and he would also come home when he was ill. Quite often he would be away for perhaps three quarters of the year, sometimes in one long chunk and sometimes in a couple of chunks, and it didn’t seem to penetrate his view of things that when he wasn’t there, Rosemary had to build a life without him. She was in contact with lots of people; she had lots of friendships with people who were interested in or were practising painting or pottery … The minute Victor would come home he would expect her to drop everything and just look after him, and she was very bitter about that. She had to cook what he required because he couldn’t live on anything except certain sorts of things; you know, there must be lots of lentils – but lentils weren’t awfully good for Rosemary’s insides so she would find herself cooking two sets of meals and she’ll be carrying his upstairs while he lay in bed.

The turning point came, irreversibly for Rosemary, in the mid 1980s. At the time, Victor was in India, Richard in America, Jane had died, and Rosemary was living, increasingly, in the midst of her own circle of friends. Then, in 1985, she was diagnosed with breast cancer. No one needed to explain the seriousness of her condition. Cancer had already
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claimed one Zorza, would it take another? As happened when Jane was ill, Victor resented the interruption to his work, but he did return to England and on one occasion accompanied Rosemary to see her physician. Richard Zorza:

My mother gets breast cancer and my parents go to the doctor together. The doctor turns to my mother and says: ‘Are you frightened of dying?’ Before she can answer, my father interrupts and says: ‘No! We’ve overcome our fear of death.’ My mother said to me later: ‘You know, I think that’s when I realised the marriage had died.’

After the consultation, there was no great fuss. Victor thought little of it. Yet it was clear to Rosemary that what she had brushed aside for years could no longer be ignored and, from that moment, a break became increasingly inevitable. The truth was that even when she felt most vulnerable, when her defences were down and she faced a life-limiting condition, with all the accompanying issues of mortality – only Victor’s needs mattered. And on this occasion, like so many others, he needed to maintain the illusion that he, and by extension his wife, had no fear of death. The whole debate was out of bounds.

Victor’s mantra about conquering his fear of death was rooted in the ‘Jane story’. Along with his revelatory experience at Sir Michael Sobell House, it provided one of the two well-publicised motivators for his hospice mission. But although Zorza referred to it frequently, it was historically suspect, as we have seen. Perhaps, therefore, it was little more than rhetoric, part of a lexicon of calling which gave authenticity to his new-found purpose in life. Rut recalls how Victor’s overt certainty raised doubts in her mind: ‘I’m not afraid to die,’ he said, and he used to say it very often. But he said it so often that I don’t think it was true. I thought: ‘I think you are.’

These suspicions had also surfaced in Russia. Richard Zorza:

One of the Moscow hospice people, I don’t remember whether it was Vera [Millionshchikova] or Njuta [her daughter] told me that [Victor] was over there and had some kind of heart episode – and really thought he was dying. And basically, he admitted to them that he was frightened. Notwithstanding all of this stuff about not being frightened and what’s important in life; in the end, when he actually thought he was going, it came to the surface. And of course he was terrified.

Rosemary’s informal prognosis was not very good: the cancer had already spread to the lymph nodes and it was a worrying time. But with Victor haunted by the fears he could never countenance, there was little chance of Rosemary’s emotional needs being brought into the open and sensitively addressed. Such support, in any case, was beyond Victor’s capabilities. So life continued. Victor remained home for two or three weeks while Rosemary underwent the surgery, then left to pursue his career with even greater absorption: ‘Rosemary understands I have to do this,’ he would always say. Sad and fragile, Rosemary faced the after-effects of surgery amid the first signs of Parkinson’s disease; so she was pleased to see Richard, followed by her friends Nan and Kate, arrive from the US. Kate Rothwell writes about this time:

I spent a week with her when she was at a low point in her life – soon after surgery, while she was finishing up radiation. And my strongest memory of that time is a sort of odd guilt. I was supposed to be taking care of her, but I had a wonderful visit with her. I knew she was in pain, and unhappy. I expected rages or a change of personality. But even then, she was warm and interested in the world. When she felt rotten, she’d announce she felt rotten, lie down for a while and then come back, weak perhaps, but still
completely herself. She didn’t push herself to be civil; it was so much her basic nature that she was honest and there, even at her worst time when her defences were down.\textsuperscript{48}

Then, at the beginning of the 1990s, circumstances changed. Peter Varney, an old friend with whom Rosemary had enjoyed a romantic relationship in her youth, was widowed and renewed his contact with her. Warm and attentive, he was everything Victor was not. Gradually, as Peter and Rosemary delighted in each other’s company, their affection for each other grew and they eventually declared their love. By this time, Rosemary’s Parkinson’s disease had progressed but Peter was adamant: ‘It was love at first sight’ he wrote later of their first meeting, long before, and ‘my greatest reward was being able to marry and live with Rosemary’.\textsuperscript{49} So, after Rosemary’s marriage to Victor, long years characterised by coldness and absence, she left him in 1991 and stepped out into a new future with Peter Varney.

Rosemary’s friends were thrilled. At last, she had found someone to reciprocate her generosity and love of life. There was, however, the pressing matter of informing Victor and dealing with his response. Richard Zorza:

My mother came across to the United States and told me that she was leaving him; and I said: ‘Have you told him yet?’ and she said ‘no’. I said: ‘You’d better tell him’; and basically we sent him a fax on her behalf saying ‘before you go back to England, call me’; and she told him over the phone.\textsuperscript{50}

Zorza was devastated. It was beyond his comprehension. First he was angry, then he looked for someone to blame. In the discussions that followed, it became clear that Victor could have forgiven Rosemary if she had left him for something he had done; but to have left him due to the person he was – just shook him to the core. Richard Zorza:

The next thing we know, we get a pretty desperate call from someone in India that he’s disappeared, disappeared completely. That was for a period of about a week and I was actually getting my credit cards expanded and so on, to go to India and look, you know, because the question was: Had he killed himself?\textsuperscript{51}

The precise details of what happened to Victor during this period are unknown. His own reports suggest that he lived among the street dwellers, occasionally drunk, in the worst parts of either Delhi or Mumbai (Bombay), or both. Around this time (1991), a palliative care conference was held in Mumbai, organised by Dr Lusito de Souza, who had founded the first hospice in India, Shanti Avedna Ashram, in 1986. Dr Jeremy Johnson, medical director of the Severn Hospice, Shrewsbury, was among the delegates:\textsuperscript{52}

The reason I went was because I’d heard there was this big conference in India and it turned out to be quite an inspiring time all round because Geoff Hanks, Robert Twycross, Mary Baines and Richard Lamerton were all over there and it was
confessed to a crushing loneliness in his life. Everyone who mattered most seemed to be leaving him. In Russia, he was bereft when Inessa accepted a position in America. In India, Veenu had already gone, disillusioned by their different perceptions of truth. In the US, Richard was estranged for supporting his mother; and in the UK, neighbours Christine and Jackie were ostracised for their friendship with Rosemary.

In the autumn of 1992, the year in which Rosemary and Peter Varney married, Victor approached his sixty-seventh birthday. Had he taken time to reflect on the events of his life, he might have gained satisfaction from his international reputation, his prize-winning articles, a wide circle of associates, a growing hospice movement in the US and Russia; and a 40-year marriage that produced two spirited children. He might also have asked how he came to lose not just one family, but two; why he remained dislocated from his Polish roots even after the collapse of the Soviet Union; and what caused his continued nervousness about his Jewish culture. He would live for another three-and-a-half years but shortly, two events would change the rest of life: the reappearance of his sister, Rut; and a chance meeting with Eileen Lerche-Thomsen, who subsequently became his partner.

Notes
1. During this part of Zorza’s life, he is referred to by the name he was known at the time, Salek.
2. Feiwel, pronounced ‘Pavel’, was born on 17 September 1921.
3. Rut, pronounced ‘Ruth’.
5. This is one of several photographs supplied by Rut Wermuth. She carried them with her during wartime, hidden in her boots, as mementoes of her family life in Kolomyja.

15. The Young Pioneers were founded in Russia in 1922 and remained active throughout the Soviet Union (and in other Communist countries) until 1990. Uniformed and disciplined, the organisation found parallels in Baden-Powell's Boy Scout movement, but in reality, resembled more closely the Hitler Youth movement of Nazi Germany. In the Soviet Union, it was common for young children to become Pioneers before transferring, at the age of 15, to the more sophisticated 'Komsomol' – effectively the youth wing of the Communist Party.
17. Menek Goldstein (1926–97) was born in Kolomyja and came to prominence in the US, where he became Professor of Neurochemistry and Physiology and Neuroscience in the School of Medicine at New York University. He is remembered for his investigation into dopamine, a neurotransmitter that has been found to be missing in patients with Parkinson's disease.
22. Extracts from Zorza's computer records.
25. Extracts from Zorza's computer records.
33. Note from Victor Zorza to Eileen Lerche-Thomsen, 25 January 1996.
38. Extracts from Zorza's computer records.
41. Rut Wermuth, IOELC interview 6, 9 October 2005.
42. Christine Webb, IOELC interview, 15 November 2005.
44. Christine Webb, IOELC interview, 15 November 2005.
46. Rut Wermuth, IOELC interview 1, 15 September 2002.
47. Richard Zorza, IOELC interview 1, 19 August 2002.
48. Part of a tribute to Rosemary written by Kate Rothwell and posted on the Zorzas' website: www.zorza.net/rosemaryvarney/memories.htm
49. Part of a tribute to Rosemary written by Peter Varney and posted on the Zorzas' website: www.zorza.net/rosemaryvarney/memories.htm
52. In addition to being medical director of the Severn Hospice (formerly Shropshire and Mid-Wales Hospice, Shrewsbury), Jeremy Johnson is consultant in palliative medicine at the Royal Shrewsbury Hospital.
54. Richard Lamerton studied medicine at St Bartholomew's Hospital London and then worked as a junior doctor at St Christopher's Hospice. He moved to a post as physician at St Joseph's Hospice (London) where he and Sr Mary Antonia set up a home care service. From there, he became medical director of the Hospice of the Marches, Hereford and then Hospice of the Valleys, Tredegar. He is author of Care of the Dying Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1980 and East End Doc Cambridge: Lutterworth Press, 1986.
55. A four or five-storey tenement block.
10 Rutka’s story

‘Like Poland, we had very little choice but to accept what was offered. What else could we do? All our belongings fitted into two battered suitcases.’ Rut Wermuth

Life in Kolomyja

When Rutka was born into the Wermuth family in 1928 she was not only the youngest child but the only girl. Pawel, the first-born, was seven years older and always pursued more ‘grown-up’ activities; but only three years separated Rutka and Salek. The two of them had much in common and Rutka remembers being ‘pampered and loved’ by Salek as well as by her parents. Although both parents worked hard, it was Rutka’s mother, Susla, who was the family’s driving force – so much so that Rutka mainly remembers her ‘in the shop, not at home’.

The Wermuth home was an apartment above the shop, located in a large building on Pilsudski Street. Built during the Austro-Hungarian occupation, it stood on a corner plot in the centre of town. It was two storeys high with an attic on top that housed the nursery and kitchen. In the kitchen was the pantry – a windowless room with dark corners and heavy smells, lit only by a skylight. Outside the apartment, on the first floor, a stone balcony overlooked the street and town square. On the inside, another balcony ran the length and breadth of the building around a central courtyard. In later life, Rutka would see similar balconies in the older parts of Vienna, Budapest and Cracow. She recalls:

At one end of the balcony lived a Polish family called Kowalski. The father was a widower with a large number of daughters – possibly up to seven girls. I remember Jozia, the eldest, but best of all I remember Jancia, who, though only four years older than me, was effectively playing the role of mother to her sisters. The father terrified me. A gloomy and bad-tempered looking man, he found it very hard to feed all his little ones. Jozia helped to support the family by doing piece work at home for the Kolomyja curtain factory. She would work on the balcony, embroidering the fabric with flowers or geometric designs before the curtains were finished at the factory. They looked very attractive hanging in the windows of the town. But the work was hard and not very well paid.

Each year, at Christmas time, Rutka’s mother would prepare a hamper for the Kowalskis that contained fruits,
delicacies and clothes for the girls. Rutka would take it round and put it under the tree:

It went without saying that I would spend Christmas Eve with them, sharing the evening’s treats, following the old Polish custom of breaking wafers and exchanging good wishes, and enjoying a hearty meal of traditional Polish Christmas Eve dishes, all cooked in advance by Jancia. Officially, of course, I should not have done that because the food was not kosher, but my parents did not enforce the rules very rigorously.5

Officially, Rutka should not have attended church either, but she remembers a time when she did:

Once, in great secrecy and without telling the grown-ups, Jancia took me with her to her Church. It was an unforgettable experience. I was terribly frightened because I was disobeying not only my God but also that other God whom Jancia worshipped, and I was convinced that I would be severely punished right there on the spot. ‘Don’t be afraid, silly, just do what everyone else does,’ Jancia encouraged me quietly. So I knelt and rose together with everyone else. Jancia had already subjected me to a special course in crossing myself before we came to church! When I realized that I was not about to be struck by a thunderbolt from above, I started to look discreetly around me. I liked it. It was even more beautiful than our Great Synagogue which, in fact, I did not visit very often either. When, during the Assumption, the silver
voice of the little bells was heard, with every head bent low praying, and this was then followed first by dead silence and then by the whole church echoing with the music of the organ and the singing of the congregation, I thought to myself, if there is a heaven, this is what it must be like.⁶

Although Susla and her husband, Berl, had little time for the children, Rutka rarely felt alone with two elder brothers, especially when she discovered the world of books. Salek was an avid reader, and it was he who transported his sister into ‘the magic world of fairy tales’. Eager to read anything she could get her hands on, Rutka progressed very quickly, much to the surprise of her kindergarten teacher. Rutka’s explanation was simple:

Because I was so impatient, I got the knack of reading very early, and indeed nobody knew how I did it. I remember only that the first things I read were the shop signs. At that time, there were very many such signs, and they were all different, not like today. Above every shop was a large painted sign on which you could read in big letters the name of the shopkeeper and the business the shop conducted. Some of the signs carried simple, but colourful illustrations. I would walk along the streets with my head turned upwards, reading them out syllable by syllable. After that I learned very quickly. I started to read everything that I got my hands on, everything that my brothers brought home from the library. Sometimes the books were not at all suitable for a little girl.

Salek tried to guide my hungry, chaotic reading. He made efforts to suggest worthwhile books. In history, Polish patriotic history, he led me through Sienkiewicz⁷ and Kraszewski;⁸ in poetry, through Mickiewicz,⁹ Słowacki¹⁰ and Pawlikowska.¹¹ He himself, passionately and in secret, wrote romantic poems for which I was the first, and perhaps the only, audience. During this time close bonds grew between us, and he became for me an authority who could never be undermined. I admired and loved that elder brother of mine, and tried to be like him. I could always bother him with my childish problems and he would treat them seriously and objectively.¹²

Although literature featured prominently in the Wermuth household, neither Pawel nor Salek could be described as enthusiastic students. At the Gymnasium, they more or less did what was necessary and then spent time on their own interests: Salek in search of new ideas and Pawel contemplating manhood among his teenage friends.

As a means of encouragement, Berl and Susla thought of buying a bicycle for the boys to share. It was a big decision. Bicycles were expensive and money was tight. Salek, as always, saw the bigger picture and came up with a persuasive argument: the bike could be used for home deliveries – and customers could place their orders via the newly installed telephone. It made sense, both practically and economically, and Susla, in particular, was taken with the idea. Rutka:
So finally the decision was made. Dad and the boys went to the shop to complete the memorable transaction. Scratches and bruises apart, it turned out to be much easier than Latin or Greek, so they learned very quickly. It was a man’s bike, with a crossbar on which the little one – in other words, me – was carried by one or other of the boys. But the fact that they had to share became such a bone of contention between them that they came to blows. In the end Dad had to settle the turns. Pawel, as the elder, got to use it more often. Salek, naturally, hated this terrible unfairness and, since I was always his confidante, we discussed this ‘blatant injustice’.  

Because of the demands of the shop, Berl and Susla could rarely take holidays together. Yet holidays were important occasions in the Wermuth household. So, in 1939, Rutka and her father went to the Carpathian mountains; it was their first holiday alone:

Early in the morning we would run along a stream that ran not far from the cottage we rented from a peasant family. Gaping and splashing each other we would wash ourselves in its ice-cold crystal clean water. After breakfasting on dark bread, home-made butter and eggs, we would load our rucksacks for a full day’s hiking … At noon we would make camp, reaching into the rucksacks for our food. Here he was very different from the way he was at home. We would have long deep honest talks, which revealed him in quite another light. I became very close to my father during that time, closer than I had ever been before. It was to be the last chance that we would ever have.  

Next, it was Susla’s turn for a holiday. As respite from the constraints of the business, she pampered herself once a year in the spa town of Krynica. Although there were rumours of war, few believed it would happen. Susla prepared for her holiday as usual, and this particular year, she took Rutka and Salek with her. The journey was long: a cab to the railway station, changes at Lwów and Cracow before eventually arriving at the pension in Krynica where Susla was welcomed as a regular guest. Rutka:

Mama enjoyed a complete contrast from her everyday life: dressing up, visiting the baths, wandering with her friends along the promenade and chatting. In the pump room she would sit down and have a leisurely drink of the local healing waters from a special jug with a spout, which had painted on it a little landscape and the inscription Souvenir from Krynica. Salek would go off with his own crowd of youngsters, but sometimes I would succeed in persuading him to take me with them to Park Mountain or to the mineral spring, Bocianowka. Although the mountain by then boasted an electric railway – quite a technical wonder.
in those days – we preferred to hike up through the wilds, avoiding the beaten path. Salek and his friends had quite an adventurous bent, and I was proud when I was allowed to be in their company.\(^\text{16}\)

Susla had planned to stay till the end of August, but it was not to be. One morning, everyone was woken by the sound of air raid sirens, in this instance just a drill. But the same day, news broke of the so-called Non-Aggression Pact between Germany and Russia. Pandemonium ensued. Everyone wanted to get home, and Susla was no exception:

We packed like lightning. There was a huge crowd at the station. There was clatter, commotion, and long queues for tickets. There were lots of young men who gave off a whiff of alcohol. They had probably been called up. I watched all this with huge eyes and a heart tight with apprehension. Many experiences that day I would come to remember as the ‘first in my life’. Later, they would become routine. Mama managed somehow, with Salek’s help, to get into the train. Then he passed first me, then the luggage, through the window, pulling himself at the last moment onto the steps of the carriage. We reached home two days later. It was August 29, 1939.\(^\text{17}\)

The clouds of war had been gathering over Poland throughout the summer of 1939 and on 1 September the German invasion began. As Polish resistance was swept aside, the country was plunged into chaos. In Kolomyja, the Wermuths witnessed the scramble of refugees from their balcony overlooking the main street. Rutka:

I would stand there with my father and watch the flow of cars, nose-to-tail, on the way to the bridge over the river Prut which was the route of the Polish government into Romania. Overloaded and covered with dust, the cars sped in the direction of the frontier, while horrible rumours of defeat circulated throughout the town. This parade of vehicles lasted two or three days before it began to thin out. Eventually the cloud of dust settled. Only occasionally could we hear the roar of an engine or the honking of a horn until at last the town was again wrapped in silence.\(^\text{18}\)

Everyone knew that the silence would soon be over; but who to expect in Kolomyja? There were rumours about a Soviet advance from the east and speculation was rife. Opinion in the town was divided. A section of Kolomyja’s population thought annexation by the Russians was preferable to Nazi occupation; but in those early days, the outcome was uncertain. Only time would tell. Rutka:

Two days after the last of the cars had gone it was the Russians who entered the town. A section of the population with Communist sympathies turned out to welcome them and their arrival was celebrated beneath our windows. But we were not standing on the balcony any more. We were hiding behind our curtains with the windows closed. The crowd with red flags welcomed the newcomers with bread and salt, according to the old tradition. Among the crowd were Ukrainians and Poles. But most of the crowd were Jews.\(^\text{19}\)

From that moment, everything changed for the Wermuths. In the wake of the military came the ideological restructuring of society: the denunciations, executions, deportations and, for those who remained, the redistribution of assets. As Berl and Susla were shopkeepers, they were deemed members of the bourgeoisie and enemies of the working class. According to the theory, such enemies had to be removed from their exploitative positions – so the delicatessen was taken from the Wermuths and given to their shop assistant, Adolf. It was a hard time:

The Reds took everything. They took our shop, they took our flat, and they left us in the attic with one little room – it
had been the nursery – and a kitchen. So the whole family
lived in just these two rooms. We had very little to eat, no
source of income, no money, nothing. My parents thought
the end of the world had come, but they didn’t know that
it was still very good – because when the Germans came it
was much, much worse.²⁰

In such circumstances, the Wermuths found Salek’s flir-
tation with Marxism hard to bear. Especially painful was his
recruitment to the Young Pioneers, which in the eyes of the
community provided local justification for Soviet ideology.
That Salek could dislocate himself from his family and neigh-
bourst at such a time was beyond comprehension; more so
that he missed the link between the Soviet interpretation of
Marxism and the present suffering of his compatriots. Despite
all he saw around him, Salek was intransigent, buoyed by his
conviction that somehow he was in the wrong family and
had to get away. His opportunity finally came in 1941 when
the Nazis marched into Soviet territory, but the truth was
concealed from Rutka:

Nobody ever said to me that Salek ran away to Russia. My
parents didn’t want me to know, so they told me: ‘He is
in a boarding school in another town’ and I believed it. I
didn’t know he was in Russia. I believed he was in another
city in another school. It is difficult for people to understand
this; but when normal life changes, then such things were
possible.²¹

With the coming of the Nazis, all semblance of normality
changed for ever, and Rutka, along with other members of
her family, embarked upon a desperate fight for life.

A struggle for survival

The Holocaust came quickly to Kolomyja. The day
after the Nazis arrived notices were posted all around
town: ‘Death to Bolsheviks and Jews’. Immediately,
new measures were introduced to separate Jews from the
community. From then on, all Jews were to wear the yellow
star, on penalty of death. Schools, parks and public buildings
were out of bounds to Jews. Businesses were closed; those
which continued were forbidden to employ gentiles. Property
was seized. No Jew could walk on the pavement, only in the
gutter. Then in March 1942 the ghetto was established: an
overcrowded, fenced area where up to 18,000 Jews were
forced into 520 houses. Each person could take only two
bags of belongings into the ghetto; any Jew found outside
the ghetto could be shot. Rutka, around 13 years old at this
time, recalls being moved:

We could take with us only what we could carry in our own
hands; for me, it was a rucksack. I wore not just one blouse,
but a few, whatever I could get on, and we went to this
ghetto. It is very difficult to speak about it because there
was so much sadness in the ghetto. You know how it was,
maybe three families in one room. There was no food, there
was disease, there were lice, there was hunger; people died
of hunger. You were not sure – not one minute in the day,
not one minute in the night – if you would be alive the next; it
was such a life. We cannot explain this to people who didn’t
go through it, and people who didn’t go through it cannot
understand it. People like Spielberg²² and now Polanski²³
and lots of other people tried to show it, but nobody can
show how it really was. It was terrible. There were razzias,²⁴
people were killed in the streets, in their homes. There was
no running water and only one pump in the street. So you
had to stand for hours and hours in a huge queue – just
to get some water – and as you stand in the queue a few
Germans come, point their guns and go tat-tat-tat-tat. And some people stay in this queue for ever.25

Pawel was the first of the Wermuths to die. Young and strong, he was allocated to a work detail that spent 10 hours a day constructing roads. It was hard work, with little food and no shelter from the elements. Each day the workers formed a column at five o’clock in the morning and were marched from the ghetto by their Ukrainian and German guards. In the evening, they were marched back, hungry and exhausted, to prepare for the following morning. Except one day, no-one returned; the whole company had been shot in the nearby forest of Szeparowce.

In April 1942, Jews began to be moved from the Kolomyja ghetto to the newly constructed extermination centre at Belzec,26 situated north of Lwów. In total, four groups were deported, included a group of about 5,000 between 7 and 9 September, 1942. The Wermuths were among them.

The Belzec death camp began its operations in March 1942 and ceased in the spring of 1943, by which time around half a million people had been killed. The camp was
located on a siding off the main Lublin-Lwów railway line and when the passengers were unloaded they were moved immediately to the gas chambers. Few escaped after arriving and there are few eyewitness accounts. When the camp was decommissioned, the premises were razed and the area landscaped. Nothing remained.27

Kolomyja became a staging post in the transportation of Jews to Belzec. Estimates suggest that up to 60,000 Jews were gathered in Kolomyja but by the end of the war, only about 200 were left.28 Rutka remembers the day that she and her family were loaded onto the train:

They said everyone should gather at the administration house so they could record our names. Then a Gestapo man called Leideritz separated us – like Mengele29 – and sent maybe 300 to the right and 5,000 to the left. All my family, my father, my mother and me went to the left.30 And then they took us to the rail station and loaded all the people on to a cattle-train. We went by Stanislowow and Lwów on our way to Belzec. We stood very close together. The wagons were much smaller than the cattle-wagons of today. I don’t know if 100 could stand in there, we had maybe 200. Some were sick straight away; some died. But the train did not go very fast and although most of the people were dead, we were still alive. Then some young people managed to take away the barbed wire from around the ventilation hole and those who were still alive jumped out. I had been unconscious, but in the moments when I was conscious, I remember my mother said: ‘Jump! We will too; first you, then father, then me. Don’t worry, we will find you.’ I was naked. We were all naked. Everyone had stripped off their clothes to breathe. I only wore my shoes. I felt two arms take me and hold me out of the train; then the arms let go and I fell.31

A description of this transportation from Kolomyja was later found in a report of a company commander of Police Battalion 133. It contains the following comments:

The loading of the transport train was completed at 1900 hours. 4767 Jews were sent for resettlement ... the great heat of the day made the whole operation very demanding and the transportation very difficult. Following the nailing fast and sealing of the wagons as ordered, the train, accompanied by an escort detachment, departed for Belzec at about 2100 hours. Under cover of a very dark night, a number of Jews escaped by forcing their way out through the ventilation openings after they had removed the barbed wire. However, the escort detachment managed to shoot some of them immediately while most of the other escaped Jews were done away with during the night or the next day by the railway guard or other police personnel.32

Rutka later discovered that this was how her father died; he was shot when he jumped from the train. Naked and afraid, she looked for anyone else who had escaped. No-one could be found. In desperation, she summoned the courage to knock on the door of a remote house, occupied

Random executions were commonplace under the Nazi regime.
by peasants, and was pleased to be given clothing and some food. It was too dangerous to stay. But as she went on her way, fortune smiled and she encountered some Jews from a nearby stetl who offered her shelter. To Rutka’s surprise, her mother was also there and they greeted each other with joy.

For a while they just took pleasure in each other’s company: both of them alive, together, and out of the ghetto. In the weeks that followed, Susla dared to seek work and, disguised as a Polish peasant, became employed as a maid by the German administrator of a nearby estate. Hiding her Yiddish accent under a Polish-Ukrainian dialect, she claimed to have served a wealthy Jewish doctor in Lwów and knew how to cook, bake, and keep an upper-class home. She got the job and was given a corner of the kitchen to sleep in. She would start next morning – but what of Rutka?

That night, mother and daughter made hasty plans. Susla had left some jewellery with their maid, Frasciszka Raduga (Frania) in Kolomyja. As she was not a Jew, she remained in the apartment when the Wermuths were sent to the ghetto. Perhaps she could help. And so Rutka began the dangerous journey back to Kolomyja.

Fortunately, she avoided detection and after arriving in Kolomyja, made her way to the square. As she stood outside her former home and wondered what to do, she unexpectedly came across Paulina, a Ukrainian, who in former times had helped the Wermuths with their washing. Unknown to Rutka, she was in grave danger. Her former home had become a *Deutsche Haus* for German officers and she could be discovered at any moment. Anxiously, Paulina pulled up Rutka’s scarf to hide her face – then spirited her away to the poorer district of Targowica, and her home on the outskirts of Kolomyja. They would await Frania there.

Frania had joined the Wermuth family in 1934 when Rutka was six years old. A native of Tarnopol, she had left her illegitimate child – the cause of much discrimination – with her parents and sought work in another town. When she arrived in Kolomyja, the Wermuths took her in and treated her well. She was to repay their kindness in full. First, she gathered together the jewellery and sold it quietly over the next few days, bringing the proceeds to Rutka along with some peasant clothes and her ski boots from the apartment. The most precious jewellery – wedding rings and a gold chain – were stitched into the lining of the skirt. Then, she gave Rutka a book of Christian prayers, a rosary, and a crucifix, urging her to learn the prayers by heart and help allay suspicions about her background. Finally, in a moment of profound generosity, she gave Rutka the identity of her daughter, back in Tarnopol: ‘From now on,’ she said, ‘you are Katarzyna Raduga – ‘Kasia’ – born in Tarnopol, the
daughter of Fransciszka Raduga and an unknown father. It was a name she would keep for decades.

Rutka gathered together her belongings and nervously retraced her steps to Stanislowow, then Bukaczowce, and onward to the estate where her mother worked for the treuhander (administrator). Nowhere was safe – and in Kolomyja she could easily be recognised by schoolmates and former neighbours. Susla, too, had taken a new identity, and was now known as ‘Zosia’. Every day, she went down to the road, searching for her daughter. When they finally met, Rutka was quietly placed in one of the estate’s outlying buildings, the home of Pani Maria.34

Such a situation could only be temporary and it was then that Rutka told her mother of Frania’s plan: that she might be better off in Germany as a member of the Eastern European labour force, rather than hide in Poland from those who knew, or suspected, her Jewish antecedents. It seemed a good idea. Rutka explains:

In Poland these modern-day slaves were obtained by levies imposed by the occupiers. Each parish, village or town had to hand over a certain quota. Of course, people defended themselves against this enslavement in various ways. When the Germans realized that the levies were working inadequately, they started to organize razzias, round-ups. They
would set up a cordon surrounding a few busy streets, a railway station, or a market place. Those who were able to work they pushed into waiting trucks and they were shipped to transit camps. From there, after a rough selection, they were taken to forced labour camps in Germany. Older and middle-aged men and women often fell victim to such round-ups, but above all they took the young. If anyone looked strong and healthy, they did not ask how old he was. They even took 14-year-olds.35

Susla disliked Frania's idea and preferred any other option; she did not want Rutka in Germany. But gradually, she was persuaded there was much to be gained and finally conceded defeat. When the time came, she walked along the road with Rutka before the moment to part arrived. It was painful for them both:

Mama was crying noiselessly … We fell into each other’s arms. I tried to keep my face calm. I wanted to let out a great howl of despair. At last I pulled myself from her arms and ran. At the bend in the road I turned back one last time. She was standing in the middle of the road with her hand raised in a gesture. Was it goodbye or was it a blessing? That is the way she remains forever in my memory.36

Forced labour

When Rutka arrived at the administration office in Tłumacz she found it harder to become recruited to the labour force than she imagined. Presenting her false identity of Katarzyna Raduga, she claimed to be an orphan living with her aunt in Tarnopol. Underfed and discriminated against, she considered it better to be looked after in Germany and so had run away to start a new life. When a man from Tarnopol was brought in to question her, she searched her mind for every scrap of information she had gleaned from Frania: ‘Perhaps you know my Aunt? She lives on Mickiewicz Street, you know, near the church? The one which was destroyed by the bomb in 1939 …’ It worked. Best of all, she was given new papers in her assumed identity: a godsend. She was then taken to the assembly point where her cards were shown to the guard. Another girl, with long, blonde hair, was called out and sent back. So it was that Rutka changed places with a person who had been forcibly recruited. It was a good day for them both: Rutka to be taken; the blonde girl to be released. In these troubled times, such were the occurrences that changed people’s lives.

From Tłumacz, Rutka was moved to Lwów where she awaited other arrivals before they were moved en bloc towards Germany. And it was here, when she was confronted by a kindly Polish doctor that the main threat to her plan occurred. After showering at the transit camp, the women were lined up for a medical examination to check they were fit for work: She writes:

We were called up by name from the papers we had had to surrender and which were piled on their desks. I happened to be called to a Polish doctor. He looked critically at my undeveloped body, still without pubic hair, and said: ‘Hmm my child, it says here that you are 17, but you do not look it. I think I could arrange for you to be released and sent home, but a German doctor would have to approve this.’37

From the best of motives, Rutka’s worst fear was about to become reality. She implored the doctor not to release her. A look of understanding finally crossed his face and he agreed to help. Then, in a surge of misplaced friendship, he wrote freiwilling (‘volunteer’) on her papers, hoping it might assure her of better treatment. It was more likely to get her killed. Rutka:
At last I had an idea, a very simple idea, to tear off the corner on which the word was written. On such a long trip, during which papers had been examined many times, it could have happened by accident, and would not arouse suspicion. Secretly, I performed the operation, and breathed a sigh of relief. I was still very frightened all the time, although I could not admit it, even to myself. But behind my plucky mask hid a terrified little girl who had no-one to whom she could turn for safety.\(^{38}\)

Towards the end of November 1942, Rutka arrived at a transit camp in Metz, situated in the Lorraine region of eastern France. From here, she and others in her group travelled on public trains, but in compartments separated from other passengers. Finally, she arrived at her destination – and the first of her forced labour positions. To her surprise, she found herself in a branch of the ‘Rovo Shoe Factory of Speyer’. It could have been worse. Set in a village location there were few guards and the locals passed by without giving her a second glance. Here, she was not so unusual.

The factory was surrounded by a large fence topped with barbed wire. Once inside, the new arrivals were introduced to \textit{Herr Director} and warned of the consequences of sabotage. Everyone had to work willingly, and productively, for the Third Reich.

Life was difficult. There was little food, not enough to live on, too much for us to die quickly from starvation. The work itself was not very hard. I was assigned to the sewing machine room which was above the ground floor. Compared to the large, cold, and very noisy downstairs production room, this was much more pleasant. It was almost warm; indeed it was much warmer than our dormitory. We worked 12 hours a day, with a short break for the main noon meal, the inevitable turnip soup. For breakfast and supper we got bitter black ersatz coffee and a slice of bread.\(^{39}\)

Critical to Rutka’s survival was the concealment of her Jewish background, not only from the Germans but also from her fellow workers. There could be no slips; her life depended on it. To dispel curiosity she adopted the trappings of Christianity and a façade of faith.

In daily life I carefully matched my every action to the gentile world around me. Like everyone else I knelt each evening by my bed of wooden planks and prayed. Like everyone else I told stories about home and about how Christmas had been, about how we used to go to midnight mass and about the carols we would sing. Thanks to Frania and Paulina and our old neighbours I knew a lot about these things. But all the same, sometimes I would make mistakes. Fortunately only I seemed to notice them, but even so, those mistakes caused me a lot of fear and anxiety. I worried that others would notice them, and come to their own conclusions. But it never happened. My camp mates seemed to have enough problems of their own, and probably believed my stories – or so I told myself as I veered between optimism and depression.\(^{40}\)

In March 1943, disaster struck. Just as Rutka was beginning to think she could survive the war in the obscurity of the shoe factory, she panicked during an air raid and left her iron switched on as she ran for the shelter. A hole in her ironing board testified to her carelessness. Without hesitation, \textit{Herr Director} dispatched her to the \textit{arbeitsamt} (forced labour centre) in Speyer for reallocation. For the first time, she found herself in a German city and instantly, her situation became more precarious.

At the \textit{arbeitsamt} Rutka was put on display with other labourers from Eastern Europe. Being young and female, the farmers rejected her as being too weak for manual work and her future began to look bleak. Then, suddenly, a man dashed in asking if anyone spoke German. After months at
the shoe factory, Rutka thought it safe to say yes – but just a little. That did it! She was rushed through the streets of Speyer and promptly delivered to a German household as the new maid. After a bath and clean clothes, Rutka – now to be called Katrin by the German family because they thought Katarzyna was too difficult – was introduced to the lady of the house, Frau Frieda.

Her full name was Alfrieda Grossman and she ran a shop which sold original oil paintings. As a result, there was little time for housework and she needed a maid. The family of five was made up of Frau Frieda; her husband, Paul; Helmut, their 15-year-old son; 11-year-old Hilda; and Hans, a toddler of 15 months. Herr Grossman was an enthusiastic member of the Nazi Party and Helmut had followed his father’s lead by joining Hitler Youth. Rutka needed to be careful, but this aside, there was much to commend her new position. She had new clothes, her own room, and when she went shopping, the locals were kind to her, often slipping sweets or a bread roll into her hand. She needed all the sustenance she could get, for the work was hard:

My day started at 4.30 in the morning and did not end till around midnight. But worst of all was laundry day. Then I had to get up even earlier. I would go down to the laundry where the washing had been put to soak the day before. I would light the fire under the copper to heat the water and then stand for hour after hour by the washtub, rubbing the washing against the tin washboard. Although I used all my strength, and though my knuckles got bloody from the rubbing, the washing seemed never to get any cleaner. Worst of all was wringing out the large items.41

It was while working at the Grossmans that Rutka received news of her mother’s death. The fateful letter had been posted three months earlier and sent to the shoe factory. The front was littered with scribbled notes and crossings-out but it finally found its intended recipient. By coincidence, it was the day she was due to be photographed for her new identity card, a memento she has kept to this day. The coded message read:

Your beloved Aunt Zosia has by now surely written to you about the epidemic that broke out in Pani Maria’s home. Sadly, your aunt who nursed them also got infected. The disease turned out to be fatal and all of them passed away. I know how painful this is for you, but I have to let you know. As for you, please do not write any more. Not to my address, nor to Pani Maria’s. I wish you the strength to bear this blow. May our Lord Jesus Christ have you in his care.42

Rutka was devastated. She understood the letter to mean there had been a Nazi trap. Someone had probably been tortured by the Gestapo and betrayed others. Though
she could only guess the details, it was clear that her mother had been among those who were arrested and had not survived; first Pawel, then her father, now her mother. What of Salek? The chances of him being alive already seemed slim. She began to think that even if she survived the war, there would be no-one to go back to, nor even a grave to cry over.

As the fortunes of war swung towards the Allies, Rutka noticed changes in the Grossman household. Belongings were packed and stored, pictures were dispatched, porcelain boxed and sent away. Eventually, the house was emptied and whispered conversations anxiously considered the family’s future. Finally, the decision was taken to seek refuge, whereupon the Grossmans – and Rutka – travelled to Munich where they were given two rooms in an outlying manor house.

In an effort to supplement their now meagre rations, Herr Grossman bought a goat and assumed that Rutka would know how to milk it. She had no idea. In a bizarre episode that developed into slapstick, Rutka’s unsuccessful attempts resulted in the goat refusing to drink, spillage on the floor, Herr Grossman on his back, and Rutka convulsed in spontaneous laughter. Grossman was furious. As he railed at her, Rutka resented the injustice and softly whispered in German: ‘Kiss my arse.’ Unfortunately, her murmur had not been soft enough, and, further enraged, Grossman beat her into unconsciousness.

When she came to, Rutka was saved by Frau Frieda, for her husband wished to call the Gestapo. In the absence of a telephone, Grossman was persuaded to exchange Rutka – immediately – for a maid who could milk a goat. Not for the first time, Rutka had a lucky escape, but now, in the last months of the war, she found herself on the way to a forced labour camp between Dachau and Allach.

Situated on the outskirts of Munich, Allach accommodated a branch of the Munich BMW plant that produced aeroplane engines. As allied bombing intensified, the Allach branch was extended and workshops had been sited in a concrete bunker. Production continued round the clock. During air raids, German workers sheltered in the bunker, others had to make do with lightly covered trenches. Rutka describes the conditions in 1945:

People from all over Europe were herded into these barracks, which were built of thin, wooden partitions, with 20 or 30 to a room. These were called Stube and were crammed with wooden double bunks, infested with lice. In each building there were toilets with washrooms, but water was always in short supply, and hot water was only something you could dream about. We worked a 12-hour day with a 15-minute break for breakfast and half an hour for lunch, which was served in a huge, well-organised canteen. They managed to feed about 2,000 people there in four half-hour shifts, though in fact the food was sparse in both quantity and quality.  

One day, during dinner, Rutka became engaged in conversation by a young man she came to know as Stanisław. Like her, he was from eastern Poland and they had long conversations about Kolomyja and his home town of Lwów. They enjoyed each other’s company and discovered a mutual love of books. Their meetings became more frequent and soon, they were taking supper together, after which Stanisław would walk Rutka to her barracks. There was no work on a Sunday, so they were free to spend the day together: walking, talking, and dreaming of home and life after the war. The allied raids increased and when the sirens wailed, Stanisław would look for Rutka and escort her safely to the trench. She remembers the incongruity of the times:
'We would find a corner by ourselves and be almost happy, even though outside the bombs were falling.'

As Easter (1945) approached, the air raids became less frequent and the sound of pounding artillery drifted on the breeze. German managers began to disappear, along with the guards and other personnel. With no-one to coerce the labourers, the machines stopped and an eerie silence hung over the factory. Stanisław searched for food and came back with beer, bread, yeast cake and margarine: a veritable feast. Other expeditions brought back eggs, sugar, meat and milk powder; some returned with weapons and a militia was formed from what had formerly been the multinational labour force. Spirits soared. With the streets of nearby towns empty of Germans, the sounds of singing and dancing – of the joys and relief of freedom – filled the air. Then came the Americans, and Rutka knew she had survived!

After they crossed the new Poland-Germany frontier that had been set at Potsdam, the couple were admitted to a repatriation centre where they were assigned a small town midway between Prague and Wrocław. Again they were loaded into cattle-trucks, this time for the four-week journey to their new home at Lubawka near the Polish-Czech border. To their surprise, it was charming; a small, well-kept town seemingly untouched by the war, and the perfect place for a fresh start. It was here that Rut and Stanisław married (she was now known as Kasia Burak) and where they built a new life for themselves and their two children: Wiesława, born in 1948; and Kristina, born in 1950. For a while, Stanisław worked at the nearby repatriation centre and offered assistance to other returning Poles, after which he trained as an engineer in the power industry. For Rut, her love of books led her in a different direction, assisted by a chance occurrence:

One day I was in the market-place of the little town and I went into the bookshop to order my children's school books. And the woman who sold them was an acquaintance and she asked – ‘Pani Burak, would you know somebody who would like to work here in the book shop?’ because she was ill and leaving. I said: ‘Yes, I know someone – me!’ There was a man standing behind the counter who I didn’t know. He listened to this and he asked me to sit down and write an application. ‘But I don’t have time’ I said, because I had to go home and cook the meal for the children; so I said I
would send it by post. But then I thought: ‘It’s such a good job for me, I have to apply’. So I wrote about my life and education and he read it and said: ‘OK, that’s OK.’ He was the supervisor and he said, ‘You are a bright young woman.’ And I got the job.  

After six years, Rut was asked to go to a bigger shop in a town about 10 kilometres from Lubawka. Her job included the ordering of stock and she tells how, at that time, popular titles were in short supply:

I was reading a lot and I knew how to advise people who were looking for books. But these were difficult times. The books which came were not books people wanted. I would say: ‘This is a good book; I need a hundred of them.’ I got five. Another book, which was about the Communist Party or about Lenin or Stalin – I got hundreds. And no-one wanted them.  

In the years that followed the end of the war, Rut kept her hopes alive that one day she would meet Salek again, face to face and in the flesh, and then she would tell him how Pawel and their parents died, and how, surprisingly, she managed to survive. She wrote to the Red Cross, and similar organisations, requesting snippets of information that might lead to his whereabouts. Had he been seen? Did anyone know his fate? As people returned from Russia, she scoured the newspapers for those seeking lost relatives, hoping for even the smallest lead. Stanisław had been fortunate; not only did he find his sister but the rest of his family as well. Rut had special difficulties.

First, these were still uncertain times. Anti-Semitism remained widespread, barely hidden among the daily routines of everyday life. As for Rut, she was still ‘in hiding’, careful to keep her Jewish roots safely concealed under a heavy cloak of secrecy. Consequently, she could not be as open as she
Rutka’s story

wished, and her search was hindered as a result. Second, she had never heard her brother called anything but Salek, and she assumed, incorrectly, that this was a derivative of Solomon. So she looked for Solomon Wermuth, a Polish Jew from Kolomyja who, in fact, was Izrael Wermuth living in Britain under the assumed name of Victor Zorza. There were other obstacles too. She writes:

Because I had tried so hard during the war to completely forget my own life story, I could no longer remember my brothers’ dates of birth. I had changed my own so often that I was not even really sure which year I had been born. Nor could I remember my mother’s maiden name. It was no wonder that my queries, based on such scanty and mistaken information, did not yield any result.50

As the years passed without any trace of Salek, Rut accepted there was little else she could do. But with the passage of time, the Soviet Union began to ease its entry requirements and during the 1970s, former citizens of eastern Poland were allowed into Ukraine to visit relatives still residing there. Obtaining permission was a complicated process, but Rut and Stanisław were not deterred – even though they had no relatives left in the country. Finally, in 1975, they secured an invitation from a family prepared to assist them, and set off into the unknown. Rut:

The invitation was from Lwów, so that was where we went first. We stayed with the people who had invited us, a family we did not know at all, of course. To repay them for their kindness, we brought them presents of clothes and many other things that were still in short supply in Russia. Then we went to Kolomyja. As we left the train at Kolomyja station, it was unbelievable that I was really back in that town; that I was again seeing the places that I had seen for so many years only in my dreams. As we walked along the familiar streets, and at last reached my old home, I was overflowing with tears.51

Overwhelmed by myriad memories – of home and family, the ghetto, deportation to Belzec – Rut took a moment to recover and then remembered her purpose: to discover if anything was known of Frania or if anyone had returned to the house and asked about her family. She and Stanislaw found Pilsudski Street and Rut nervously knocked on the door of her former home:

The woman who let us in had lived there for a long time. She had come originally from Russia and said that, when she moved in, the house was empty, but that she had learned that during the war there had been a German Officers Club here. That fitted with what Frania had said. The woman also said that when she arrived in the late ’40s there was no Franściszka Raduga living there. And that in all the years she had been there, no-one had come asking about the previous inhabitants of the house.52

It was not so much that the trail had gone cold – there was no trail to be found. And here the matter rested for over 15 years. During this time Stanisław died (1980), Rut’s children married, Solidarity became increasingly powerful and Communist rule went into decline. Against a background of new freedoms, travel became easier and Rut took a momentous decision: to revisit the health resort at Krynica where she had spent her last holiday with her mother and Salek, just before the war. It was to be a turning point:

One day when I was wandering aimlessly along paths still familiar to me from childhood, I came upon a group of tourists who were mainly elderly women of about my age. Something about their appearance and manner caught my attention and intrigued me so much that I decided to approach them. They turned out to be visitors from Israel,
Polish Jews who had come back to Cracow, just like I had once gone back to Kolomyja, to find whatever was left of their old lives.53

It was this chance meeting that led Rut towards a supportive community of Jewish Holocaust survivors, previously unknown to her. It changed her life and, as we shall see in Chapter 11, led her to embrace her Jewish roots in openness and celebration. Importantly, when she returned from Krynica, she sought out the Wrocław Jewish Association and became an enthusiastic member, joining many of the local activities. She subscribed to the Jewish magazine *Słowo Żydoskie*54 and, in the June 1992 issue, saw an advert for a summer camp at Rychwałd, southern Poland. To Rut’s surprise, it was here that she heard the first encouraging news about her brother.

It was a casual remark that opened the floodgates. While at Rychwałd, Rut contributed to a video being made for the Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington. During the filming, she happened to state that, unfortunately, she was the only survivor from her town. It was Dasia, the translator, who corrected her. She knew of others from Kolomyja, some of whom were members of the Kolomyja Jewish Association. A leading figure was Dov Noy, a professor at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem and Dasia put Rut in touch with him. Three weeks later, a letter arrived from Dov Noy. It began:

*Dear Rutka!*

*If the world had not gone crazy 50 years ago, we would maybe have become good friends. I knew your parents, and my brother was in the same class as yours in the Kolomyja Gymnasium. So I am sure you will forgive me for addressing you so personally, even in my first letter.*55

Dov Noy proved helpful to Rut. They embarked upon a warm correspondence and he invited her to call him by his old Jewish name of Bezio. They had much in common. Like Rut, Bezio had lost all of his family in the Holocaust, with the exception of his brother who went to school with Pawel; Bezio had survived by leaving for Palestine in 1938. As an academic, he was widely read and knew about a distinguished journalist with an interest in Communist affairs who originated from Eastern Europe. He gathered together what information he had and then suggested that Rut look for a man named Victor Zorza, a Polish writer in exile who could be living in India. At the time, such information was difficult to find in Poland, but a friend confirmed the existence of Zorza by searching the National Library in Warsaw on Rut’s behalf.

It was Bezio, again, who prompted the next phase of the search when Rut met him at a gathering of Kolomyja survivors in Szeparowce Forest, called to remember those who died there – Pawel among them – 50 years earlier. Despite the political unrest of the early 1990s, Rut was determined to attend. And it was here, in Kolomyja, at the memorial ceremony for one lost brother, that Rut received hopeful news about the other. She recalls:

*The journey was neither safe nor easy. The Soviet Union was just breaking up. The Ukraine had just been created. There were difficulties getting a visa, crossing the border, and making all the other arrangements. The embassies of the countries were in chaos. But I was stubborn, and managed to overcome all the problems. In Kolomyja I met people who had come from all over the world to the memorial gathering, indeed from as far as Australia. But I was the only person who came from Poland, right next door. It was there that I met Bezio face to face for the first time, and he said to me: ‘You know, I don’t want to get your hopes up in vain, but there is some reason to suppose that this man Zorza I*
was asking you about, and your brother Salek, are one and
the same person.’ I stared at him in wordless amazement.56

The Zorzas were finally traced in 1994 and it was Richard,
at that time living in New York, who led Rut to Victor. But it
was Rut’s friend, Rose, who did much of the research. After
hearing Rut’s story at the Children of the Holocaust meeting
in March, 1994, Rose returned home and searched for ‘Zorza’
in the New York telephone book, then searched the books
in print. Richard Zorza appeared in both searches;57 Victor
and Rosemary in the latter. Everything fell into place: A Way
to Die, Jane, Richard, Victor, Poland and Russia. Once the
connection was made, Rose rang Richard on Rut’s behalf to
check whether her findings were correct. They were, and Rut
describes the next step:

Richard rings Victor:

‘It’s pretty amazing. Your sister may be alive!’
‘It is possible,’ he replied, completely calmly.
‘Her name was Rut.’
‘That fits.’ Still completely calm.
‘Your name was Izrael?’
‘That fits.’ Still completely calm.
‘You lived at number two …’ Richard struggled to find
the address.

‘That’s right. Pilsudski Street.’

Victor did not let Richard finish. Still with complete calm
they went through the discussion of all the details, and
whether to telephone or cable to the number Rose had
given them. As Richard said later, ‘it was as if he had been
waiting for that call for 50 years. Maybe every survivor waits
for such a call. But most wait forever in vain.’58

Shortly afterwards, Rut took her brother’s call:
And then comes a voice, Polish, but not quite Polish; Russian,
but not quite Russian; it sounds like Kolomyja but not quite
Kolomyja; and the voice says: ‘Are you Rut Burak?’ ‘Yes,
yes, speaking.’ ‘You know who speaks? I’m calling from
London.’ And in the moment he told me, ‘I am calling from
London’ I knew. I didn’t wait, I’m shouting in the receiver
‘Salek! Salek!’ I cannot explain it, all the feelings I felt in this
split second.59

Fifty-three years of waiting were at an end.

Notes
1. Rut Wermuth, IOELC interview 1, 15 September 2002.
2. Rut Wermuth, IOELC interview 1, 15 September 2002.
4. An unpublished version of Rut Wermuth’s autobiography (in
Polish, spotakalam Ludzi Poznan: Media Radzina, 1998) has been
produced by Rut Wermuth and Richard Zorza under the title
Encounters with the Decent. While this version is in draft form,
the extracts used here have been scrutinised by Rut Wermuth and
checked for accuracy. The text in English has no page numbers
and is referenced by the chapter number only; this extract is
taken from Chapter 6: ‘Peaceful holidays, near disaster’. Rut
Wermuth’s book has also been published in German under the
title Im Malstrom der Zeiten (Berlin: Verlag Pro-Business, 2005).
5. R. Wermuth, Encounters with the Decent (unpublished auto-
6. R. Wermuth, Encounters with the Decent (unpublished auto-
7. Henryk K. Sienkiewicz (1846–1916) was a prolific writer who won
the Nobel Prize for Literature, 1905. His works include the histor-
crene Books, 1997; and his book about peasant life Children of
8. Józef Ignacy Kraszewski (1812–87) wrote over 200 novels and is
best known for his epic series on the history of Poland.
9. Adam Bernard Mickiewicz (1798–1885) is one of the best known
Polish writers and considered to be one of the greatest poets of
Eastern Europe. His works include Treasury of Love Poems trans.
story of Polish gentry Pan Tadeusz trans. K.R. MacKenzie, New
10. Juliusz Słowacki (1809–49) is a romantic poet and playwright.
Among the few of his works that have been translated into English may be found Mary Stuart: A Romantic Drama trans. A.P. Coleman, London: Greenwood Press, 1978; and Anhelli London: Greenwood Press, 1979.

11. Maria Pawlikowska-Jasnorzewska (1891–1945) was born into an artistic family, enjoyed painting, and became known as an outstanding poet of the era, publishing 12 volumes of poems between the two world wars.

15. Krynica-Zdrój is a spa town in southern Poland, known as a centre for tourism and winter sports. It became a town in 1889 and today has a population of around 13,000.
17. R. Wermuth, Encounters with the Decent (unpublished autobiography). Chapter 8: ‘German disaster and private resistance’.
22. She is here referring to Steven Spielberg’s film Schindler’s List which tells how Oskar Schindler recruited Jews to build a factory in Poland, thereby saving their lives. It is based on a book by Thomas Keneally (Schindler’s List New York: Serpentine Publishing, 1982).
24. A razzia was a round-up of people.
26. Belzec was part of the Nazi ‘Aktion Reinhard’ extermination programme. See: www.deathcamps.org/belzec/
29. Josef Mengele (1911–79) was a physician who performed unethical experiments on human beings at Auschwitz concentration camp. He was known for separating the newly arrived prisoners into two groups – one to the left and the other to the right (one group was strong enough to work and went to the camp; the other, much larger group, went to the gas chambers).
30. These figures are authenticated in: Bulletin of the Jewish Historical Institute in Warsaw No 3 (151), which indicates that, among other deportations, 6,000 Jews were deported from Kolomyja to Belzec on 3 April 1942; 2,000 at the end of June; 4,769 on 7 September and 4,000 in October. See www.deathcamps.org/belzec/galiciatransportlist.html
32. Report sent to The Commander, Public Order Police, District of Galicia, Lemberg. It is titled ‘Resettlement of the Jews. Order of 31.8.42 of the commander of the Orpo in district G’. A copy of this document was among the private papers of Victor Zorza.
33. From this moment, Rut became known as Katarzyna Raduga (Kasia) and kept the name, even when she met her future husband and married. It was only in later life, when she began to speak of her Jewish origins, that she told her family about her true background. For the purposes of clarity, she will continued be called Rut in the book.
34. Pani is a Polish title of respect for an adult woman.
35. R. Wermuth, Encounters with the Decent (unpublished autobiography). Chapter 4: ‘Respite with Mama’.
36. R. Wermuth, Encounters with the Decent (unpublished autobiography). Chapter 4: ‘Respite with Mama’.
42. R. Wermuth, Encounters with the Decent (unpublished autobiography). Chapter 7: ‘Domestic service, family loss’.
44. In her book spotkalam Ludzi, Rut changed Stanisław’s name to
Witek as she was apprehensive about local reaction if the truth about her past became general knowledge. Now, she has no such reservations and is comfortable identifying her family and town in this publication.


46. From here, we call Rutka by her adult name of Rut, though she continues to be known to others as Kasia.


57. This was because Rose found a reference to Richard Zorza’s book on the Harvard student strike.


59. Rut Wermuth, IOELC interview 1, 15 September 2002.
11 Reconciliation?

‘I think he was forged in the fire as a young man, so he became much more focused than most of us can imagine … he wasn’t unfeeling, it was just all bottled up.’ Eileen Lerche-Thomsen

Victor and Eileen: reciprocated love

The relationship which developed between Victor Zorza and Eileen Lerche-Thomsen in 1993 was a surprise to them both. Feeling bruised and dejected after Rosemary left him for a new life with Peter Varney, Zorza found solace in his work, the primary focus of his life. One day, while in London researching an article for *The Economist*, Zorza visited one of the libraries at University College London (UCL) and it was here that he and Eileen met on the steps outside, as Zorza asked her the way to another library.

Eileen had left her home in Jersey in 1998 and relocated to London to be nearer her family. In a wide-ranging career, she had held the positions of school secretary, editor of an agricultural magazine, and group development officer for the Jersey Schizophrenia Fellowship. She is best known for the 16 years she spent in television, where she worked as a staff newsreader, children’s programmes presenter and scriptwriter for a series of short films. After being made redundant in the recession of the early 1990s, Eileen considered herself fortunate to gain employment at UCL. It was an environment she found stimulating. Often, she would spend lunch times in a library or attending the midday lecture programme. When she first saw the bearded Zorza in his Oxfam sweater and worn-out jeans, she thought he resembled ‘an old scruff’; but over coffee the two of them began to talk and found each other interesting. At the time, Victor was considering the possibility of a swing to the right in post-Communist Russia, India and China and Eileen was captivated by his enthusiasm. She realized, however:

After hearing some of my background, I think Victor, being Victor, thought I could be quite useful. I ended up doing some of the research for him and it went from there.¹

As the relationship progressed, the two of them decided quite quickly they would like to share each other’s lives:

Victor invited me to spend Christmas with him in Russia where he was to have meetings and inspect progress on the hospice building. The next thing I knew I was helping
him choose a coat to wear and we were off to Moscow. We stayed in a flat one floor down from Vera Millionshchikova, medical director of the First Hospice Moscow, who made us enormously welcome. There was quite a lot of work, but we had time to have the odd walk.\footnote{2}

About two months later, Eileen moved into Dairy Cottage and became fully involved in Zorza’s hospice mission. If she was unsure at the outset what Victor’s work meant to him, she soon found out when he declared to her – as he had to others – that work was his first priority. So they developed a lifestyle that created space for Zorza to busy himself in his preferred way:

Victor made it clear that work was very important and that he tired fairly easily. So he liked to get up early and work in the mornings. I was delegated to do all the things with the house – because Rosemary had done them all – pay the bills, look after the garden and mow all the grass – which was at an angle of about 45 degrees. Everything! And help him with his work, which was typing and sending letters off, all that sort of thing, and listening to his long stories; and then we had to go for a walk every day as well, which I loved, but that was important to him so that’s how the mornings were spent.\footnote{3}

After the disappointments in Victor’s life such commitment was beyond his expectations and he felt invigorated. As a consequence, he renewed his efforts to achieve the goals he had set during 1994. First priority was to get the Moscow hospice operational and increase the pool of trained staff. Wendy Jones agreed to spend a year in Russia and during that time organise a series of courses in key areas; but there was much to be done to secure the funding. When a date was set for First Hospice, Moscow to open in the Spring of 1996, Victor decided that an American Russian hospice...
society could become a rich source of funds and boost the hospice movement in Russia.

In November 1995, Zorza planned a visit to Washington with three main objectives: first, to establish the American Russian Hospice Society and recruit well-known figures to the cause; second, to make contact with influential Russians who were to be in Washington for an international conference; and third, to arrange a headline-grabbing TV hook-up of the US, UK and Russia on the opening day of the Moscow hospice. Eileen’s role was crucial:

We flew to New York and spent a few days with Richard. Whilst there, there was this tremendous amount of faxing and telephoning. I was running round like a – like a fly, trying to contact all these people and send all these pages of faxes that I’d had to type out: all with slightly different angles, all appealing to the people Victor was contacting. Then we went to Washington and we were there for about a week. I can’t remember much about it because it was all so hectic. Victor was in a wheelchair and I was wheeling him on and off trains. I remember going to this reception at the Russian Embassy in Washington, and Victor sitting there in his dinner jacket and tie, looking absolutely wonderful. Anyway, despite a tremendous amount of hard work, we only got one person to sign up and that was James Billington, who was the Librarian of Congress.5

For all Eileen’s support, there were several strings attached. Perhaps for the first time in Victor’s life, demands were also made on him, and made consistently. For Eileen, caring included an essential element of sharing and she would not allow Zorza to abrogate his responsibility. It was laid before him in unequivocal terms:

I made it clear to him, that though I was very willing to help with the work, I did expect we would have some life together; that I needed some closeness and affection.6

At the beginning of their relationship, closeness and affection were not the most noticeable of Zorza’s attributes. But alongside his need to work, Victor began to find time to enjoy life with Eileen. She says:

We did have time to relax together, enjoying the quite idyllic garden at Dairy Cottage with all its trees, pond, moorhens and ducks. We read, listened to music, watched silly programmes on television like The Man from UNCLE and of course, talked a great deal. We enjoyed each other’s company. Victor was keen to tell me everything about his life and genuinely wanted to know what I thought, interested not only in my own philosophy for dealing with life’s pains and pleasures, but even wanting me to sub some of his writing … At one point he came up with the idea that he should take out a small rowing boat on a local lake as the mandatory second person on the water so that I could occasionally enjoy using my neglected windsurfer!7

Eileen would be the first to admit that life with Victor ‘wasn’t all sweetness and light’ but she never compromised her vision of a genuinely shared life. Importantly, she had the self-belief to withstand Victor’s tactics of unspoken expectations coupled with occasional anger, even though her resistance infuriated him:

I managed to upset him on one or two occasions, and really didn’t know quite how I’d done it. But having done it, you then had to analyse it, didn’t you? You know, the notebook came out and it all got analysed, and you had to listen. And even though it was perfectly obvious to you what he was saying, he wanted you to listen to it all, step by step, and I wouldn’t always do that, and that was very, very difficult for Victor … I remember one occasion when I’d no idea what it was about, but I remember standing in the bedroom absolutely petrified by his reaction because I’d said: ‘No way, Victor.’ Now that to Victor was some kind of mortal insult.
I don’t know why, but that was absolutely beyond the pale. He could get very upset over something like that.8

Significantly, Eileen developed a pragmatic understanding of his behaviour that, almost uniquely, allowed her to both support him and challenge him. She formed the opinion that in his professional life he was hugely secure, especially when he felt appreciated and was correct in his predictions. But this contrasted with his private life, where he was less secure and protected himself by not letting anyone – even family members – get too close. She says:

I think he was sort of forged in the fire as a young man, so he became much more focused and determined than most of us can imagine … Think what it must be like to carry this guilt that the family might have survived if he’d only been there; when you can’t do anything about it and they’re all dead. I mean, he’s a very sensitive man; he wasn’t unfeeling, it was just all bottled up.9

According to Eileen, it was this repression of his emotions that caused him to be inconsiderate, even towards those who were closest to him:

I find it very difficult to understand how Victor could have left Rosemary at home when she was going through all [her health problems] and be off in India, but I can see Victor doing it. I don’t think he had any idea of the enormity of the pain that he caused. I think if he had, he wouldn’t have done it. He just wasn’t able to see it; it wasn’t part of his life experience – that people needed each other in that way. As a youngster, he’d always had to make it on his own.10

From this generous perception of Victor’s thoughtlessness, and encouraged by his response to her prompting, Eileen introduced Victor to the feelings of others:

I used to try and talk to him, and explain that people aren’t necessarily like him. They have other needs; they’re weaker.

And he was genuinely listening and wanting to know. And he began to soften up a bit, even before Ruth came.11

Eileen found this softer, more understanding Victor even more endearing. She came to believe these changes helped to prepare him for the monumental task of meeting his sister and revisiting his past; and it did him no harm as his health went into decline and he became more dependent on others.

It was during their visit to Moscow in 1994 that Zorza revealed the extent of his health problems:

We went walking in the snow one evening. There were some trees near these great blocks of flats where we were staying, and somewhere among these trees, he suddenly stopped and told me something I didn’t know – he had told me he had had heart problems, that he had had a triple bypass about 10 years before, that he still had some angina occasionally and he had to be careful. But what he’d never told me was that two years before, his doctors had told him that he had a leaky valve in his heart, and it should be replaced. He’d now decided to go ahead.12

Eileen interpreted this declaration as a seal of approval: that after ignoring medical advice for the past two years, his life was now worth living; also, that he would take more care of himself. By coincidence, when they returned home, a letter was waiting at Dairy Cottage informing him that a bed had become available and he should prepare for admission to hospital. As it happened, the operation was postponed from February 1994 to the following month and this gave Eileen the welcome chance to take him to Jersey to meet some of her family and friends.

The operation took place as planned and everything appeared to go well. Yet six months later he was experiencing angina and this time, he was advised to have a
second bypass. Eileen had been worried for some time and had repeatedly urged Victor to reduce his work-load. She also suggested he handed over more of his responsibilities to a trusted colleague rather than try to progress everything himself. By this time Eileen had become a trustee of the British Russian Hospice Society and Paul Rossi had taken over the accounts. It seemed a good idea and Stephen Marder, an academic who also had experience as a Russian translator-interpreter for commercial and government agencies, was identified as a possible candidate. In due course, Marder was invited to Dairy Cottage to discuss the proposal. The day he arrived from the US was unforgettable for Eileen:

[Stephen] had had a long overnight flight and he was sleeping so Victor and I went for a walk. We were making a round that I thought was going to be rather long for me to get back and prepare lunch, so I made a short-cut home. Victor was going to make a longer round and then come back. Stephen appeared and lunch was ready – but no sign of Victor. I was beginning to get a bit concerned. I thought: ‘What’s happened? He should be back by now.’ And I was getting really worried. Just then a couple turned up on the doorstep, and said: ‘Is this where Victor Zorza lives?’ ‘Yes!’ ‘Well, he’s sitting on a hedge’ – and they described where – ‘he’s not very well and he asked if you’d go and fetch him’. I leapt in the car and went and found him. He’d had a severe angina attack after I’d come back home. Within 24 hours he was back in the Hammersmith, which was the hospital where he had all his operations.’

Although this second bypass was performed in October 1994, Victor’s pain soon recurred. As the episodes were monitored a pattern emerged: the pain began when Victor was in an upright position – sitting, standing or walking. Eileen:

He’d come down in the morning and sit down and have his breakfast. Then the pain would start and the nitro-spray didn’t help at all. He just had to lie flat. I mean, I can see him still, lying flat on the floor at Dairy Cottage, in the kitchen. If he laid down flat it would go. But it got worse and worse, to the point where he had difficulty walking about. He had

He used to go in [to hospital], taking his laptop with him and his notebooks. If he felt any trepidation, he certainly didn’t show it. He was out in 10 days, and then determined to go walking again, very quickly. He used to worry me sick, because he used to overdo it going up hills. He’d even take a stopwatch with him to see how fast he could do certain stretches. This was a man who didn’t do anything by half. If he decided he was going to do it, it got done to the ultimate – and he never believed that anything was impossible.

As ever, despite Victor’s illness, it did not stop him working. All that changed was the location. Instead of conducting the interview process at Dairy Cottage, Eileen took Stephen Marder to Victor’s bedside and ‘the stories and the interviews went on there’. Such was Zorza’s driven nature. Eileen:
to do it bent double – and he had to spend all his other time leaning back in a chair.\textsuperscript{17}

Tests revealed that the cause of Victor’s angina was not exertion and the extra demands this made on his heart but – as he and Eileen had suspected – his upright position. Other interventions would follow. In the meantime, a walking aid was adapted for Victor that allowed him to bend over, put his elbows on the cushion, and exercise by pushing it around. It served him well.

And so, in the last two-and-a-half years of his life, Victor’s new-found relationship with Eileen provided a supportive environment, not only for his work but also for his physical care and emotional growth. As she helped him connect with his innermost feelings, Eileen’s understanding of Victor’s needs, coupled with her down-to-earth, robust practicality, ensured he was both loved and nurtured. It was the ideal position from which to confront the issues of his past in the company of the one person who remembered the family life they shared: his sister, Rutka.

\textbf{Victor and Rut: common threads}

When Victor first telephoned Rut he appeared calm and in control but nothing could have been further from the truth. Richard’s call, early in the morning, had come as an almighty shock. Despite Victor’s quiet manner, Eileen sensed that something strange was happening. She remembers that as the call progressed ‘Victor was looking absolutely rigid and tense’. It was out of character – so she moved towards him, slightly anxious, and sat by his side. Only Victor’s comments were audible but as his mood became more serious, her concerns were raised still further. ‘It must be her!’ he declared. ‘It must be her!’

As he replaced the telephone, he turned to Eileen and told her his sister, whom he believed had been dead for 50 years, was alive and living in Poland. He was shaken to the core.

\begin{quote}
Eileen:

He was not a person to show emotion but there was a sob in his voice; and then he couldn’t make up his mind what he was going to do. First of all, he said: ‘I think I’ll send a telegram.’ I replied: ‘Why don’t you telephone?’ In the end that’s what he did. But the little town of Lubawka wasn’t hitched up to the automatic system and ‘phones were connected by an operator. So there were long delays – clicks and noises – and in the end no-one answered. So of course that was terrible. You’ve had this amazing news and there’s no reply. I can’t remember much about that morning except that later he tried again and he got through; and it was just one of the most moving moments I’ve ever been part of.\textsuperscript{18}

The following week was a whirlwind of activity as flights were booked and preparations made for Rut to visit England. Victor was apprehensive. He wondered what his sister would be like after so many years. Rut, too, knew little of Victor’s life and felt nervous. But these feelings of unease fell away as
they recognised each other by the arrivals gate at Heathrow Airport. It was a scene that Eileen found deeply moving:

Seeing them rush into each other’s arms was unbelievable. It’s impossible to imagine the emotions they must have been feeling. It was just an incredible situation.\(^{19}\)

Rut stayed at Dairy Cottage for a month. Richard and Joan arrived from America to meet in person the cause of the family celebration. Each day followed a similar pattern. Victor and Rut would spend the morning together, deep in conversation, frequently laughing out loud. In the afternoons, they were joined by the others and Victor acted as interpreter. During the next few weeks, details of the Wermuth-Zorza-Burak story slowly emerged, 50 years of life squeezed into short spaces of time. For a while, brother and sister could hold each other’s hand, speak the same language, revisit their early life and recall their relationship; it was a cathartic experience for them both.

There was, however, a particular relevance for Victor. At last he could explain more fully, to a member of his family, why he decided to leave home. He could also admit to the gnawing guilt he had subsequently carried. Rut acknowledged these feelings and the difficulty he had describing them. Rather than be judgemental, she gently placed them in the wider context of their twentieth-century past, touching on the notion of survivor guilt and the ‘pain of the world’ carried by Jews:

There are worries, you know, in us Jewish people. Deep inside, there are always worries – about the past, about what happens to us in the future. I remember I have had them too.\(^{20}\)

As they told their stories to each other, it became evident that, regardless of their years apart, they had much in common. First, the voracious appetite for literature they shared as children had become a feature of their lives and their main source of income. Victor, the journalist, had moved on from his poems, written in Polish and shown only to Rutka, to weekly newspaper articles, written in English and distributed worldwide. Rut, the bookshop manager, had built on Victor’s introduction to the classics and developed a broadly based knowledge in the field. They both knew what was marketable and, when times were hard, each had used their entrepreneurial skills to good effect. This was clearly seen when Victor made himself indispensable to Radio Liberty, and when Rut supplemented her food supply during the hard times of the 1970s by procuring ‘special’ – usually ‘Western’ – books for her clients.

Second, and even more remarkable, is that the two of them would each win prizes for their writing. Victor’s brand of analytic journalism brought him the coveted Journalist of the Year award for 1968; Rut’s autobiography, *spotkalam Ludzi* (*Encounters with the Decent*) was to win the David Ben Gurion Centenary Grand Prize in 1999. This prestigious award was organised by the town of Plonsk, Ben Gurion’s birthplace in Poland. Widely publicised and supported by the President of Poland, the competition attracted more than a hundred entries from over a dozen countries.

Third, regardless of their experience of human brutality, both Victor and Rut maintained an optimistic world-view. In Victor’s case, he always believed that Communism would pass, despite its seemingly unbreakable stranglehold on the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. He thought, too, that individuals could improve the lives of others and tried to demonstrate this through his commitment to hospice care and his Indian village. Eileen Lerche-Thomsen comments: ‘Victor was
a great humanitarian, he saw big pictures … and he wanted to change the world for the better.’

For Rut, alongside the suffering she experienced as a young girl, she has been keen to remember another human dimension: that of irrepressible human decency. She writes:

We should now be witnesses to the truth of Frania’s courage, even if she herself will never know about it. We owe this to her memory. To the memory of her and the others who came into my life and into the lives of so many more like me. In contrast to general opinion, these decent people were a whole army. Without Frania and without Paulina, I would never have survived. And behind them stands the nameless Ukrainian peasant couple on the edge of the forest, who were there for me on the worst day of my life. And in Germany, Ekaterina and the German woman at the shoe factory who defended me against the claim of sabotage. And what about the 1990s? Did I not also meet so many decent people – menschen in Yiddish … These are the people who fill one with optimism that after all these years, after all we have been through, there are still such people.

Victor and Rut survived the war by becoming separated from their parents. In Victor’s case, the choice was his. He was anxious to become independent and had previously run away to Lwów during the Soviet occupation of Kolomyja. Rutka’s instincts were different. With Pawel and Salek gone, there was no-one but her parents to care for her and the world had become a frightening place. Her priorities changed on the death train, however, when only two options presented themselves: possible death by leaping through the vent, or certain death at Belzec. Susla insisted that Rutka opt for life, whatever the risk. Later, when faced with a similar dilemma, she allowed her daughter to be taken as a forced labourer and sent to Germany. In their isolation, the children lived, both parents died.

There was a price to pay for survival that related specifically to memory. Victor was not the only one to forget important details of his life – although his loss was extensive and, at times, recurrent. But Rut, too, in her efforts to avoid detection, constructed biographical stories that suppressed the truth. In her case, lost memory went hand in hand with this suppression. For years, it proved a stumbling-block in her search for Victor and, to this day, Rut is unclear about certain dates.

Then there was the long-term denial of their Jewish roots and for both siblings this was central to their well-being during the war. For Victor, running the gauntlet of Ukrainian nationals and avoiding the movement of Soviet and Nazi troops was dangerous enough, without facing the added dimension of anti-Semitism. But once he left home, Victor also escaped the Holocaust that enveloped his family,
a factor he readily acknowledged: ‘I wasn’t myself in the Holocaust; I was a Jew who survived the Holocaust without being directly involved in it.’\textsuperscript{23}

Rut, however, found herself on the death train simply for being a Jew. Even after her miraculous escape, the smallest slip meant death – for her and anyone who helped her. Yet when the Nazis were overcome, anti-Semitism remained endemic in her own country. She comments:

Even though there were hardly any Jews left in Poland, still there were outbreaks of anti-Semitic incidents. There was the Kielce pogrom\textsuperscript{24} at the end of the 1940s. And we would see slogans on walls and fences. I remembered vividly what I had once heard someone say, that ‘everybody knows who Hitler was and what he did, but he did do one thing right: killing all the Jews’ … At that point I believed it was the right choice to stay as Kasia.\textsuperscript{25}

After spending their formative years in this environment it is unsurprising that neither of them hurried to declare their Jewishness at the end of the war. In both cases, their assumed identities had been assimilated into their daily lives and there
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was little reason to change. Victor hid his Jewishness from his son until 1968; Rut from her daughters until the 1990s. As neither of them could be open about themselves or their past, their searches for each other were inhibited. Ironically, they both consulted the major organisations for traces and both were unsuccessful.

For Victor, these common threads, so clearly interwoven in their lives, provided consolation and a source of hope. Not only did he celebrate his sister’s survival, but he glowed with satisfaction at the influence he had exerted on her reading and the effect this had had on her life. Like him, she was articulate, scholarly and independent. He was proud of her, as she was of him. Unexpectedly, he had found someone who understood the loneliness, the eternal emptiness, of losing everyone who mattered. Both of them had suffered and for the first time, Victor found he need not hold back, for Rut’s tribulation had been as great as his. It was a time to rediscover those parts of his memory that could safely be retrieved, within the ultimate acceptance of the only person who knew about his past. After this first month, they met again for a total of two more months during the last years of Victor’s life: not long, after 53 years apart. It was a joyous time for them both.

Victor and Salek: building bridges

Regardless of the commonality between Victor and Rut, there were issues he could only face alone. Yet with the support of Eileen and his sister, and the warming of his relationship with Richard, he could now explore facets of his life he had previously kept in the shadows. Family life featured prominently.

As a boy growing up in Kolomyja – and the middle child of three – young Salek was uncertain of the affection of his parents. He could see how Pawel, the first-born son and Rutka, the only daughter, occupied unique positions, but somehow, he felt overlooked. Rut recalls:

Salek did envy Pawel because Pawel was handsome, Pawel was big, and Pawel was the eldest son in our [Jewish] family; so in Salek’s mind, Pawel seemed to get more from Father than he did.26

His efforts to draw attention to himself resulted in censure and as he became increasingly estranged, his unhappiness deepened. In essence, Salek felt shunned, Rut felt loved; and the last, contrasting memories that each had of their parents reinforced these feelings. On the death train, Rut recalls how her parents sheltered her:

When I regained consciousness, I became aware that my parents were still near me, that with their strongly intertwined arms they had made with their bodies a tent protecting me from the crush. It was only thanks to them that I was still alive.27

Victor, however, remembers that in the full flush of his teenage rebellion, his parents put up no final struggle to keep him with them. In later life, Richard asked his father:

‘Were you angry that your parents didn’t come with you when you left?’ He said, ‘No.’ Then I said: ‘Well were you angry that they let you go?’ And he said: ‘Maybe.’28

Salek’s feelings of rejection threw him inevitably on to his own resources and this trait became well established by the time he arrived in Britain. Eventually, it became associated with another feeling, brought about by the belief that his family had perished: that of chronic loneliness, unseen but isolating, extreme in its manifestation. This was not
unusual for Holocaust survivors. Lawrence Langer, a Holocaust analyst, reports how, when he first began watching videotaped testimonies, a mother who was surrounded by her children confessed: ‘We are left with loneliness. As long as we live, we are lonely.’ This caused Langer to identify ‘a lexicon of disruption, absence, and irreversible loss among Holocaust survivors’.29

It is here, in dealing with their loss, that we see a striking difference between Rut and Victor: Rut puts her family first, above all else in her life:

Me and my daughters have Stanisław to thank for what our family became, because despite the modest circumstances in which we had to live in postwar Poland, and despite the constant fear that we felt because of the totalitarian regime under which we – with 40 million other Poles – had to live, we survived without too much harm because we existed for our family. And that succeeded wonderfully.30

Victor, as we have seen, put his work first at every juncture. So brother and sister developed along different lines. Rut, grounded within her family, became enveloped in a network of rich and loving relationships; Victor remained distant and aloof, rendered incapable of understanding the depths of human interaction or the nature of reciprocity. In his world, the primacy of work became a barrier that offered protection against the risks associated with the giving or receiving of love – and which remained until the influence of Eileen and the reappearance of Rut during his old age.

Also significant are the contrasting ways in which Victor and Rut addressed their past. Once Salek left home, he became committed to a life in exile. Not for him a return to either the Soviet Union or Communist Poland. As his career developed, England became a safe haven from which to monitor the Communist world. Underpinning his decision to stay in Britain was a residual fear of what might reoccur in continental Europe, especially in a country like Poland, where anti-Semitism lurked ominously beneath the surface.

Such fears were put to one side by Rut. Regardless of the fact that her family’s home had been lost to the Soviet Union, she and Stanislaw made a conscious decision to go back to Poland. If their region was unavailable to them, their country was not, although they recognised it would be a different Poland from the one they had previously known. So they applied to be reassigned to another town and begin again in the country of their birth.

Part of Rut’s new beginning was to tell the truth about her past. Consequently, at the end of the war, she told Stanislaw about her background and early life. As she had hoped, nothing that he heard could sway his commitment to her. They married – Rut using her assumed name – and began their new life together. Then, during the 1950s, the government requested personal details of all of Polish citizens so up-to-date identity cards could be issued. For Rut, this seemed the ideal, probably the last, opportunity to officially regain her identity. She took it:

After a lot of thought, I decided I could not leave things the way they were. I could not completely deny my past. Stanislaw accepted my decision. To change all the misinformation I had given took a formal legal proceeding. So we went through it. Stanislaw was my only witness. He was the only one who knew about my past. So I got a new identity card with my real name and maiden name. We also got our marriage certificate corrected. I felt a huge sense of relief. But for Stanislaw, I remained Kasia until his death.31

For many years, Victor found it hard to address the truth of his past so it was effectively shut out. Not only the antics of the immature Salek, but any reference to home
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and family. Whereas Rut revealed all to Stanislaw, Victor never mentioned his background to his spouse, a factor that incensed Rosemary when she eventually became aware of Rut's existence. Richard Zorza:

[Victor] had absolutely forbidden her to ever ask anything about his background and she had therefore speculated – as you would about someone with whom you've invested the rest of your life … So Rosemary had been forced to bear this burden of ignorance, this burden of speculation and this burden of anxiety.32

Victor, of course, had no regrets – for the truth about his family was too painful to address. As we have seen, some of these details were difficult for him to deal with even towards the end of his life. His silence, however, should not be interpreted as mere obstinacy. With the passage of time, stories similar to Salek's have emerged. Annette Kobak tells one such story: of how her father was growing up in Lwów until the experiences of war changed his life; of how he protected his family from what he had endured by a lifetime of silence; and of how this silence 'was not so much a question of protecting dramatic secrets, though secrets there were, as trying to manage his fear and confusion.'33

Although Victor's feelings were not for public scrutiny, fear and confusion featured prominently in his emotional repertoire, if only in his attitude towards death and his time in Soviet exile. But perhaps they are most clearly seen in his handling of his Jewish roots. Unlike Rut, he could not speak openly to the person he purported to love: so, unlike Stanislaw, Rosemary was not treated to an account of Victor's past prior to their wedding – an omission that reinforced his sense of loneliness. Until Richard was told about his Jewish antecedents in 1968, the family was expected to gather the truth themselves through semi-veiled hints and a process of osmosis. Even when the issue was raised in A Way to Die (1980) the implications were never explored. This differs significantly from Rut's approach and her eventual embrace of the Jewish tradition.

For Rut, the visit to Krynica had introduced her to a group of wartime survivors, the Children of the Holocaust. It was a significant occurrence that enabled her to find Victor, but also to 'find herself'. The empathy she felt with the group helped her confront any residual feelings of loneliness – and the rediscovery of her Jewish culture at Rychwałd was a time of affirmation and healing. Rut:

On this Friday at Rychwałd, all my memories came back to me with great force when I, together with the other women, lit the Sabbath candles in the dining room. Then we greeted each other shabat shalom and sat down at the large table to the traditional meal … We had another Sabbath the next week, but for me, this first Sabbath was the turning point. It brought to the surface so many memories; fulfilled so many dreams; this first Sabbath washed away so many nights of crying alone. But, at the same time, it broke through the barrier of silence which my experiences had forced upon me so many years before. In this circle of great closeness, I felt at last myself, at last free. I felt that suddenly I had the family that I had missed all my life … We had many other gatherings. The rabbis talked to us about the Torah. On the last evening we had a campfire, and by its light, Rabbi Besser and Rabbi Szudrich gave us warm and wise words. They talked of the need for love between people and of the need to be good. The eleven days passed, in some ways much too short a time, in some ways a lifetime. Eleven days in another dimension, in which we could forget about everyday cares. Eleven days in another world, in the world of my childhood. After this I could take the tiny stones of memory, memories about religion, tradition, crumbs of Yiddish, and of Hebrew prayers, stones which had been stored previously in my
unconscious mind through all the years, and could assemble them in a mosaic of memory. I left Rychwałd as another person.\(^{34}\)

It was the new-found confidence of this ‘other’ Rut that enabled her to speak about her Jewish roots to those closest to her. First of all, she chose to tell Agnieszka, her teenage granddaughter, even before her daughters Wiesława and Kristina. Agnieszka’s question: ‘So am I Jewish or am I Polish?’ reveals the extent of her confusion. But things quickly fell into place. Rut:

It just took time. Basia, my youngest granddaughter, came with her mother to the next Lauder Foundation Camp. She was shown on Polish TV dancing the hora\(^ {35} \) and was seen by all her school friends. And she proudly wore the camp T-shirt with its stylized Jewish star around our little town.\(^ {36}\)

Regardless of his previous inhibitions, towards the end of his life Victor overcame many of his fears and confronted the areas of his past he had always found daunting. As he began to piece together his memory using his own analytical skills, he became aware of different approaches to what he had experienced. In particular, he noted the condition that is now called ‘post traumatic stress’. As he researched the field with his usual sense of urgency, he warmed to the idea of psychological support. He also considered hypnosis.\(^ {37}\)

Against this background, Zorza engaged Dov Noy in conversations about Jewish culture both by telephone and face to face when the professor visited Zorza’s home in 1994. He trusted Bezio, a fellow citizen of Kolomyja, who had been instrumental in reuniting him with Rut. Dov Noy comments:

For all those who were active in the process which led to the reunion of Rutka and Victor, this brother-sister reunion has been regarded as a miracle. I think, however, that I witnessed another miraculous reunion which has started to take place: the personal reunion and self-reconciliation of Victor with Salek, his own alter ego, with his past and with his own roots.

Since that first conversation [in 1994] we had many more, before and after our long meeting of just 11 months ago (11–13 August 1995). In all these conversations, I felt (and I shared this feeling with Tamar, my wife) that Victor was trying hard to return to his own roots, even if it meant, for him, limiting himself to his own past, to his childhood friends and classmates and to our eatables (local, Jewish magdeburtschenyk – a kind of potato cake) in our native town of Kolomyja; to his suffering as a Jew in a Ukrainian townlet (he forgot its name) at the outbreak of the German-Soviet war in 1941; to his Jewish (as a Jew, with a Jew) conversation with Ilya Ehrenburg, whom he had always admired as a ‘world embracing’ writer, and whose advice saved his life.\(^ {38}\)

For those who knew Victor, such a change was remarkable. During the last two years of his life, he had embarked on a relationship with Eileen that was clearly different from anything he had attempted previously. He had also been reunited with the sister he thought was dead. Together they re-entered their childhood and tried to make sense of all that had happened when their world turned upside down. As they reminisced together, the bond between them strengthened and they each discovered a new perspective on life. For Victor, it helped him to build bridges with the Salek of his past and the Jewish culture he had left behind. By the time he died, his relationships were intact with all who cared for him most: his son Richard, his sister Rutka, and his partner Eileen. Considering his history, it was a reconciliation of colossal proportions.
Notes

13. Stephen Marder is the nephew of Murrey Marder, a Washington Post reporter who is credited with popularising the term ‘credibility gap’ in relation to President Johnson’s statements about the war in Vietnam and the reality on the ground.
15. It was these conversations, outlining Victor’s work and personal history, which Eileen recorded and later loaned for this biography.
24. The Kielce Pogrom occurred on 4 July 1946 in response to a fabricated kidnapping report. After a father blamed Jews for kidnapping his son, the community became enraged. People of all ages, from young children to adults, participated in burning the synagogue and homes of the Jewish people. Forty Jews were killed with more than 70 reported injured.
30. R. Wermuth, Encounters with the Decent (unpublished autobiography). Chapter 12: ‘Return to a nation betrayed’.
34. R. Wermuth, Encounters with the Decent (unpublished autobiography). Chapter 14: ‘An era ends and a search begins’.
35. The hora is a traditional Jewish round dance.
37. This was at a time when his health was fragile and his physician advised against hypnosis.
38. Letter from Dov Noy to the Zorza family, 14 July 1996.
Epilogue

‘[His treatment was] the absolute opposite of what he had always advocated for, but not the opposite of what he had wanted.’ Richard Zorza

Eileen was in Jersey during the second week in March 1996 when she received a call from Victor to say his angina had recurred and he was seeking medical advice. This came as a shock since a stent had been fitted in his artery only the previous month and he had experienced an improvement. It was not Victor’s way to complain; rather the opposite – he carried on regardless. So Eileen realised immediately that something was wrong:

I came back the next morning, the first flight I could get, and then I discovered he had had absolutely terrifying angina lying in bed. He couldn’t move. It was everywhere, in his face, and he couldn’t even move to call for help or use the ‘phone or anything; and he’d had that, I think, for two consecutive mornings, but he hadn’t told me. Anyway, when I returned, I found him in the Hammersmith Hospital looking much as he always did, but the doctors were very worried about him.

Victor was diagnosed with an ongoing heart attack and efforts were made to stabilise his condition prior to surgery. Another bypass was contemplated but the chances of success were not thought to be high. Despite the severity of his condition, Victor was still concentrating his efforts on the hospice movement rather than trying to preserve his strength. Eileen found him wearing an oxygen mask, his computer on his lap and fully engrossed in his work. He told her:

For once in your life don’t argue with me, do as you’re told. I want to have a last throw for the hospices, and what I’m doing, if I don’t get through this, will perhaps do towards my obituary. Now please go away.

Eileen left for a while and walked around the hospital. When she returned, she was surprised to find him being prepared for surgery:

I went back in in the early afternoon, not thinking that he was going to have the operation until the next day; but in fact they were preparing to take him to the theatre because he was so bad. We hardly had time to say very much. I just said: ‘Is your heart at peace?’ Or something like that, and – and he nodded, and he said ‘Yes’. Then they started wheeling him out, and he pulled the mask off and said, ‘And loving!’ That was the last thing he ever said.
Eileen had rung Richard to tell him the news and he left for England on the sixteenth, arriving in London the following morning. From that time, he and Eileen were in the Hammersmith almost constantly. Victor’s prognosis was poor. Eileen:

I went in and saw the surgeon with Richard, who gave us to understand that it was unlikely he was going to survive, but they were going to do everything they could. They were going to have to keep him totally sedated because of the amount of drugs they were pumping into him to keep his heart going, but they would not be able to continue this regime beyond, I think, two days, because the heart would simply tear itself to bits.5

On the Tuesday, Victor began having kidney function problems and the following day the renal consultant decided to begin dialysis, though she doubted whether the procedure should be done. It was a difficult time. Richard Zorza:

It was at that point that I began to wonder if it was time to intervene and withdraw consent to the measures that were being taken. Then it was discovered that an infection was progressing rapidly in my father’s lungs, and the team made a decision to try to attack that infection … I was actually on the phone trying to get in touch with Robert Twycross, the hospice doctor who handled the death of my sister so appropriately, and who is now a long-time family friend, in order to discuss whether to call a halt, when we were called back. Fluid was building up in my father’s lungs so fast that it was necessary to start dialysis immediately, notwithstanding the earlier decision.6

It was all to no avail. Eileen and Richard were given the cue to say their goodbyes when a doctor told them ‘he is almost dead’. Richard:

It took Dad a little over an hour to die. We watched his heartbeat and blood pressure on the monitor as he slowly ebbed away … We held his hand and talked to him, much more for ourselves and for each other than for him. The nurse was wonderful. I had expected her, with all her high-tech training, to just turn all the switches off and walk away. She held our hands, held us and talked to us. She seemed to be almost in tears herself. At the end, I had been watching the floor, holding Dad’s hand, and she touched me gently on my hand. I looked up at the monitor and the heartbeat line had gone flat.7

Victor died on 20 March 1996 without ever regaining consciousness after a third bypass operation performed a few days earlier. Towards the end of his life he had experienced painful episodes of debilitating angina, undergone two heart operations in the space of six months and been subjected to numerous tests and interventions. Yet he maintained a quiet stoicism and good humour throughout. Ironically, the medical treatment at the end of his life was the antithesis of the hospice approach, but not perhaps out of keeping with his wishes. Richard Zorza:

He ends his life in an intensive care unit with every heroic measure being made, and one last blood transfusion. Looking back I think they were doing this one last thing to demonstrate they were doing this one last thing, without any real belief. But it was just the opposite of what Victor did; the absolute opposite of what he had always advocated for, but not the opposite of what he had wanted. He wanted every last step done, you know, because he had a special mission.8

The cremation of Victor’s body was preceded by a humanist ceremony attended by a small gathering of family and friends. The officiant, a Guardian reader, suggested the proceedings ended with a paragraph from A Way to Die.
It was a fitting conclusion to the poignant reflections and personal goodbyes. Later, there would be a memorial event, held at Dairy Cottage, where a larger group of friends and former colleagues could offer their tributes to Victor’s life and work.

From the moment of his death, the voluminous communications and messages of condolence bore testimony to Victor’s notable achievements. One of them, a letter from Jean Roch – who led the first part of the nurses’ training course in Moscow, 1991 – captured two of Victor’s essential qualities: his ability to inspire the individual while advocating, and bringing about change, for the many. She writes to Eileen:

I give you a copy of *The Prison Courtyard* by Van Gogh, which held me when I saw it in the Pushkin Museum in Moscow. It shows the grey, lumpish, depressed prisoners exercising in a small circle, watched by a group of erect guards and surrounded by towering prison walls. High, high above their heads, two white butterflies dip and flirt in airy freedom; no-one has noticed them. It is a terrible picture, steeped in misery and degradation. The white butterflies – the distilled essence of every white butterfly that has emerged from a chrysalis – are there to remind us of paradise.

I see an analogy from this picture with that of patients who feel themselves to be prisoners of their cancer, going round and round in an ever-deepening, vicious circle of fear and despair. Cancer affects not just the patient but the whole family. The hospice can, by being alongside patients and families and not abandoning them, lift their despair so they notice the light of the butterfly of hope. Hospice care teaches that hope need never be lost even if what is hoped for changes as death approaches. Victor, through his vision, made hospice a reality in 12 towns across the former Soviet Union; he didn’t know all the patients and families he indirectly affected but as one family said to me in 1994: ‘We have never experienced such love as that received from the hospice.’ What greater gift can a person leave to this world than his love?

Although Victor professed no faith, he attracted many people with a faith to share his vision of introducing hospices in the former Soviet Union. I am just one of those people. Victor, through asking of me what appeared to be the impossible, challenged my faith and as a result, it has been strengthened and deepened.9

Had Zorza known the effects he would have on both of these fronts, it is unlikely he would have been disappointed.

**Notes**

1. A stent is a wire mesh tube used to prop open an artery.
7. Richard Zorza, personal communication to family and friends written after Victor’s death.
Appendix 1
Interviewees

The following participants were interviewed by the author:

**Vladimir Ashkenazy**, concert pianist

**Hugh and Ruth Bradby**, friends of Zorza; Ruth Bradby is a trustee of the Victor Zorza Hospice Trust

**Anne Brown**, Macmillan Nurse Specialist

**Peter Buckland**, Chief Executive, North Shore Hospice, Auckland

**Prue Clench (Dufour)**, Founder, Dorothy House Foundation

**Stephen Connor**, National Hospice and Palliative Care Organisation (US)

**David Frampton**, Medical Director, Farleigh Hospice, Chelmsford

**Andrei Gnezdilov**, Lakhta Hospice, St Petersburg

**Virginia Gumley**, Nurse Tutor, St Christopher’s Hospice, London

**Andrew Hoy**, Medical Director, Princess Alice Hospice, Esher

**Avril Jackson**, International Information Manager, Hospice Information; St Christopher’s Hospice/Help the Hospices

**Jeremy Johnson**, Medical Director, Severn Hospice (formerly Shropshire and Mid-Wales Hospice), Shrewsbury

**Wendy Jones**, Director, British Russian Hospice Society

**Elena Kabakova**, Head Sister: Sisterhood of St Elizabeth, Lakhta Hospice, St Petersburg

**Nina Khmeleva**, Medical Director, St Olga’s Hospice, St Petersburg

**Tatiana Kotova**, Executive Director, Christian Inter-church Diaconal Council, St Petersburg

**Richard Lamerton**, Medical Director, Hospice of the Valleys, Tredegar

**Eileen Lerche-Thomsen**, Victor Zorza’s partner

‘Michael’, Jane Zorza’s boyfriend in the 1970s

**Vera Millionshchikova**, Medical Director, First Hospice, Moscow

**Zachary Morfogen**, National Hospice and Palliative Care Organisation (US)

**Galina Moskalenko**, Medical Director, Lakhta Hospice, St Petersburg

**Sheila Partington**, journalist
Francis Ronalds, Radio Liberty

Paul Rossi, British Russian Hospice Society/Macmillan Cancer Relief

Greta Schoeman, Founder, Highway Hospice, Durban

Michael Siggs, St Petersburg Healthcare Trust

Inessa Slavutinskaya, journalist, Izvestia, Moscow

Geoffrey Taylor, journalist, The Guardian

Robert Twycross, Medical Director, Sir Michael Sobell House, Oxford

Christine Webb, friend and neighbour of the Zorzas

Rut Wermuth-Burak, Victor Zorza’s sister

Richard Zorza, son of Victor and Rosemary Zorza

Extracts have also been used from interviews conducted with the following people as part of the Hospice History Programme lodged within the International Observatory on End of Life Care in the Institute for Health Research at Lancaster University:

Ian Maddocks, Professor of Palliative Care, Flinders University, Adelaide (interviewed by David Clark)

Marilyn Relf, Volunteer Co-ordinator, Sir Michael Sobell House, Oxford (interviewed by Neil Small)

Cicely Saunders, Founder, St Christopher’s Hospice, London (interviewed by David Clark)

Robert Twycross, Medical Director, Sir Michael Sobell House, Oxford (interviewed by David Clark)
### Appendix 2

**Timeline**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Event</th>
<th>Year</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Russian revolution begins. Tsar Nicholas II abdicates; Bolsheviks seize power.</td>
<td>1917</td>
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<td>Civil war in Russia. First World War ends.</td>
<td>1918</td>
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<tr>
<td>Treaty of Versailles.</td>
<td>1919</td>
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<tr>
<td>Polish-Soviet War. Władysław Sikorski commanded the northern army and becomes Chief of General Staff.</td>
<td>1919</td>
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<tr>
<td>Treaty of Riga: Kolomyja becomes part of eastern Poland.</td>
<td>1921</td>
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<tr>
<td>Adolf Hitler becomes leader of the National Socialist German Workers (Nazi) Party.</td>
<td>1921</td>
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<tr>
<td>Feiwel (known as Pawel) born to Berl and Susla Wermuth.</td>
<td>1921</td>
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<tr>
<td>Władysław Sikorski becomes Prime Minister of Poland.</td>
<td>1922</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lenin dies, Stalin rises.</td>
<td>1924</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rosemary Wilson born on 2 June.</td>
<td>1923</td>
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<tr>
<td>Victor Zorza born on 19 October; named Izrael (known as Salek) Wermuth.</td>
<td>1925</td>
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<tr>
<td>Stalin becomes supreme Soviet leader and embarks upon a series of five-year plans to establish Russia as an industrial power. Introduces his policy of ‘collectivising’ the peasantry.</td>
<td>1928</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rut Wermuth born.</td>
<td>1928</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ukraine resists collectivisation. Stalin engineers a famine, resulting in the deaths of 5–6 million people in Ukraine.</td>
<td>1932</td>
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<tr>
<td>Stalin begins purge of the Communist Party.</td>
<td>1935</td>
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<tr>
<td>An estimated seven million people interned in Gulag camps.</td>
<td>1938</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year</td>
<td>Events</td>
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</table>
| 1939 | - German-Soviet pact signed by von Ribbentrop and Molotov.  
- Germany invades western Poland. Britain and France declare war on Germany.  
- Red Army invades eastern Poland.  
- In Kolomyja, the Wermuth family is classed as bourgeois and their shop is confiscated.  
- Sikorski leaves Poland for Britain and becomes Prime Minister of the Government-in-Exile.  
- Rosemary Wilson joins Auxiliary Territorial Service (the women’s army corps). |
| 1940 | - In Britain, Winston Churchill leads a coalition government.  
- In Soviet-occupied eastern Poland, around 1.8 million civilians and military personnel are deported to Soviet camps.  
- Zorza embraces Marxist ideology; joins the Pioneers. Runs away, found by father and returned home.  
- Ghettos established in Nazi-occupied Poland, later extended to the rest of Poland post-1941.  
- Oswiecim (Auschwitz-Birkenau) concentration camp established by the Nazis (near Cracow). |
| 1941 | - Germany launches Operation Barbarossa and invades Soviet territory.  
- In Poland, Salek flees into Russia and the Wermuth family is sent to the Kolomyja ghetto.  
- The Nazis build a network of concentration camps and killing centres across the country.  
- In Russia, Stalin grants an ‘amnesty’ to Poles in Soviet exile, prompted by Sikorski. General Anders is freed from the Lubyanka prison (Moscow) to raise a Polish force on Soviet soil.  
- Salek – now known as Victor Zorza – joins the Polish Air Force at Toskoie, east of the Urals. |
| 1942 | - Victor exits Soviet territory with the Anders evacuees and arrives in England via the Middle East and India. He begins his first mission: to understand the nature of dictatorship and the causes of genocide.  
- In Poland, Rutka and her parents are deported to Belzec death camp but escape during the journey. During the escape, Rutka’s father is shot and dies. Rutka becomes separated from her mother but is later reunited with her in a nearby Stetl. Takes a new identity of Katarzyna Raduga (Kasia) and heads for Germany as a forced labourer, considering it a safer option than remaining in Poland. |
| 1943 | - The Germans discover thousands of Polish corpses in the Katyn forest (near Smolensk), each with a bullet wound in the head.  
- General Sikorski dies in a plane accident near Gibraltar after suspecting Stalin had designs on postwar Poland. |
| 1944 | - In Poland, the Home Army rises in Warsaw.  
- In England, Victor has a complete memory loss and is admitted to hospital in St Athan, Glamorgan. After discharge, he joined the No 301 Polish Special Squadron (1586 Flight) in operational flights from Brindisi, Italy, to Poland.  
- In Germany, Rutka is moved to a labour camp situated between Dachau and Allach, where she meets Stanislaw Burak, her future husband. |
- In Poland, the Red Army enters Warsaw.
- In Russia, Stalin, Roosevelt and Churchill meet at Yalta (Crimea). Amongst the agreements were i) that all Soviet citizens be (forcibly) repatriated after the war ii) that the Stalin-supported Lublin government would broaden to include the Polish Government-in-Exile iii) that the ‘Curzon Line’ become substantive – in effect, handing Central Europe to the Soviets.
- The war ends in Europe and the Cold War begins.
- In Britain, Clement Attlee leads a Labour government.
- Rutka and Stanisław begin their journey to Lubawka, where they marry and begin a new life.

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<tr>
<th>Year</th>
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<tr>
<td>1945</td>
<td>Victor commissioned to a two-year contract with the Polish Resettlement Corps.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1945</td>
<td>In Poland, anti-Semitism recurs leading to the Kielce pogrom.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1946</td>
<td>Rosemary Wilson joins BBC monitoring service at Caversham as a secretary.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1949</td>
<td>Victor and Rosemary marry on 30 May. Their son, Richard, is born in October.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1949</td>
<td>In Britain, Zorza’s first article appears in the <em>Manchester Guardian</em>.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1950</td>
<td>In Poland, the government insists on new identity cards. Rut reveals her true identity and formal documents are changed.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1951</td>
<td>In Britain, Winston Churchill leads a Conservative government.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1952</td>
<td>Jane Zorza born on 17 March.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1953</td>
<td>Zorza dismissed by the BBC, whereupon he relocates to Munich and Radio Liberty.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1953</td>
<td>Stalin dies. Khrushchev’s rise to power accelerates.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1955</td>
<td>The Zorzas return to the UK and Victor writes freelance for <em>The Guardian</em>.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1956</td>
<td>Zorza joins <em>The Guardian</em> staff.</td>
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<td>1956</td>
<td>In Hungary, the revolution sparks a Soviet intervention. Victor shelters in the British Embassy in Budapest.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Year</td>
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<tr>
<td>1966</td>
<td>The Zorzas move to Dairy Cottage, Burnham.</td>
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<td>1966</td>
<td>In China, Mao launches Cultural Revolution.</td>
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<td>1967</td>
<td>St Christopher’s Hospice opens in London and the modern hospice movement gathers momentum.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1968</td>
<td>Zorza awarded British citizenship.</td>
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<td>1968</td>
<td>Czechoslovakia is invaded by an estimated 500,000 troops from the armies of five Warsaw pact countries.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1969</td>
<td>Zorza named Journalist of the Year for 1968.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1970</td>
<td>In Britain, Edward Heath leads a Conservative government.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1971</td>
<td>Zorza leaves <em>The Guardian</em> and moves to Washington to undertake a study on the Soviet use of computers.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1971</td>
<td>Robert Twycross joins St Christopher’s Hospice, London as Research Fellow.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1973</td>
<td>In America, Zorza develops a course in analytic journalism at Georgetown School for Advanced International Studies (SAIS), The Johns Hopkins University.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1974</td>
<td>In America, Connecticut Hospice opens.</td>
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<td>1975</td>
<td>In America, Victor embarks upon another six months teaching at SAIS.</td>
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<td>1975</td>
<td>In Ukraine, travel restrictions ease. Rut and Stanisław visit Lwów and Kolomyja.</td>
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<td>1975</td>
<td>Jane Zorza discovers a black lump above her middle toe. A diagnosis of skin cancer leads to surgery.</td>
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<td>1976</td>
<td>Zorza comments on the succession struggles in China after the deaths of Chou En-lai and Mao.</td>
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<td>1976</td>
<td>In Poland, parishioners from the Lord’s Ark Church, Nowa Huta, begin visiting the dying, led by Halina Bortnowska – an initiative widely regarded as Poland’s first informal hospice service.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1976</td>
<td>In England, Jane does not fully recover her strength and moves to Greece to teach privately.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1977</td>
<td>Zorza is put forward for the Pulitzer Prize in the category of ‘distinguished commentary’.</td>
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<td>1977</td>
<td>In America, Zorza makes a request under the Freedom of Information Act to see CIA and FBI files.</td>
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<td>1977</td>
<td>In Greece, Jane discovers a swelling in her groin and returns to England. A malignant melanoma is diagnosed.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1977</td>
<td>Jane is admitted to Sir Michael Sobell House where she dies eight days later, on 15 June.</td>
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</table>
- The Zorzas’ syndicated article *Death of a daughter* published.
- In America, Senator Edward Kennedy addresses Senate; promises support. Zach Morfogen and Dennis Rezendes (NHO) meet Zorza in Washington, ‘Hospice Action’ established.

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<tr>
<td>Zorza has first heart bypass operation.</td>
<td>In Britain, Margaret Thatcher leads a Conservative government.</td>
<td>In Africa, the first hospice developments begin in South Africa and Zimbabwe.</td>
<td>Zorza moves to India to write his new column, <em>Village Voice</em>.</td>
<td>In America, <em>A Way to Die</em> published by Knopf.</td>
<td>In Australia, Ian Maddocks feels moved by <em>Death of a daughter</em> and sets up a working group, later becoming chairman of the Southern Hospice Association.</td>
<td>In Poland, Stanisław Burak has a heart attack and dies.</td>
<td>Congress enacts legislation creating a Medicare hospice benefit for terminally ill patients.</td>
<td>In South Africa, Greta Schoeman is inspired by <em>A Way to Die</em>, travels to England to meet the Zorzas and then founds Highway Hospice, Durban.</td>
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<tr>
<td>In America, 34 Medicare-certified hospices were currently operational.</td>
<td>In Poland, Hospicjum Pallotinum is founded by Fr Eugeniusz Dutkiewicz in Gdansk.</td>
<td>In Britain, the charity Help the Hospices is established.</td>
<td>Rosemary diagnosed with breast cancer and has a mastectomy, then develops Parkinson’s disease.</td>
<td>In Russia, Mikhail Gorbachev becomes General Secretary of the Soviet Communist Party and introduces his policies of glasnost (openness) and perestroika (restructuring).</td>
<td>In India, Shanti Avedna Ashram opens in Bombay.</td>
<td>In Poland, the first palliative care service within the national health structure opens in Poznan, led by Jacek Luczak.</td>
<td>In Britain, Palliative Medicine is recognised as a medical specialty.</td>
<td>In Australia, Ian Maddocks is appointed the world’s first Professor of Palliative Medicine (Flinders University).</td>
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| 1988 | Zorza stops off in Moscow en route to Britain and is moved by the suffering of people with cancer.  
The European Association for Palliative Care is founded in Italy. |
| 1990 | The British Soviet Hospice Society formed.  
In Russia, three Macmillan nurses – Anne Brown, Ann Nash and Ann Dent visit Lakhta to teach and advise.  
Lakhta Hospice opens (27 September), led by Andrei Gnezdilov.  
The Hospice Information Service is established at St Christopher’s Hospice, London.  
In Poland, Lech Walensa is elected President. |
| 1991 | In Britain, Peter Varney’s wife dies and Rosemary leaves Zorza for Varney.  
USSR fragments into 15 republics.  
In India, Zorza attends the First International Hospice Conference, Bombay.  
In Russia, Lakhta Hospice designated a WHO Demonstration Project. Slow-release morphine tablets are imported for the first time and used at Lakhta. David Frampton, Andrew Hoy and Robert Twycross go to Russia and give a training course for doctors, held at the Training Centre for Trade Union Holiday Resort Staff, Lakhta.  
Palliative care course for nurses in Moscow led by Jean Roch, Virginia Gumley and Wendy Jones.  
Tula Hospice opens, a 30-bed in-patient unit. |
| 1992 | In Poland, Rut visits Krynica and unexpectedly meets members of the Association of Polish Jews. She later pursues an interest in her Jewish roots and attends a summer camp at Rychwald run by the Lauder Foundation. On her return, she tells her family about her Jewish background. While at Rychwald, Rut discovers the first links that lead her eventually to Victor. |
| 1993 | Eileen Lerche-Thomsen and Victor meet on the steps of a library at University College London. |
| 1994 | In Russia, First Moscow Hospice establishes a home care service led by Vera Millionshchikova.  
In Poland, Tomasz Dangel establishes Warsaw Hospice for Children, the first paediatric hospice in Eastern Europe.  
In Britain, Victor has a heart valve operation at the Hammersmith (March) and a second bypass operation in October.  
Richard rings Victor with news about Rut. Victor and Rut speak for the first time in 53 years. In June, Rut arrives from Poland and stays at Dairy Cottage for a month. |
| 1995 | Wendy Jones leaves for a one-year appointment in Russia.  
Victor has severe angina whenever upright.  
Rut visits for a two-month stay at Dairy Cottage.  
Victor and Eileen travel to New York and Washington to establish the American Russian Hospice Society, raise funds for the Russian movement and co-ordinate events for the opening of Moscow hospice in March 1996. |
<table>
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<th>Year</th>
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| 1996 | - Irene Salmon (a palliative care nurse from Marie Curie Cancer Centre, Liverpool) spends a year at Ulyanovsk, followed by a further year at First Hospice, Moscow.  
- In January, Victor has a stent fitted; can now stand upright without pain. The following month angina recurs and his health deteriorates. He is readmitted to the Hammersmith and dies on 20 March after a third heart bypass operation. A Memorial Day is held in July. |
| 2000 | - Rosemary Varney (Zorza) dies on 31 January. |
| 2005 | - In Russia, Georgy Novikov (director, Moscow Centre for Palliative Care) identifies 45 hospices (19 projects) and 23 palliative care centres (10 projects). |
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