

A healer, a scientist, a fighter, an artist

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Andrzej was such an exceptional person that, paradoxically, it is almost impossible to write about him in a way that would not be banal. For years he had been a constant element of Krakow's life, a role model for many doctors, scientists, educators, and social workers. The candlestick on which he was placed is precarious, and a living person does not always feel comfortable in limelight. Andrzej, however, managed to keep his position, though certainly at the expense of great stress from time to time.

Andrzej's exceptionality had been formed in a common way. He was a son of an eminent Polish cardiologist and internist, Edward Szczeklik. In Krakow it is easy to see how being a part of a "dynasty" pays off. In Krakow, a town relatively spared from war atrocities, families pass from generation to generation not just the genes, but also the whole family tradition. In this town we can meet exceptional people who were born in their family's home, lived a long life, and died without changing the address. Growing in such a family, Andrzej – a very bright child, was from

the beginning coached by his parents, particularly by mother, to be a successor of his great father, a role that he played later on with success. He was not a crammer or a model pupil – he was simply a young, especially gifted man, with a very wide scope of interest – science, arts, humanities, medicine, backpacking in mountains and so on.

I believe that it was the home environment and the genes which formed some particular feature of his personality, which, with some embarrassment, I would call sweetness of character. Andrzej was physically and spiritually constructed in such a way that almost every one of his acquaintances felt to be his friend. He had a captivating smile and an exquisite way of talking. Later on it became very important in his medical practice. He inspired confidence, rose hopes, cured by touch and words.

When in my mid-thirties, at a time of great stresses, I developed very strong cardiac pains when walking. At the moment in which I was not able to reach a nearby tram stop without rest (particularly when the tram was approaching) I visited

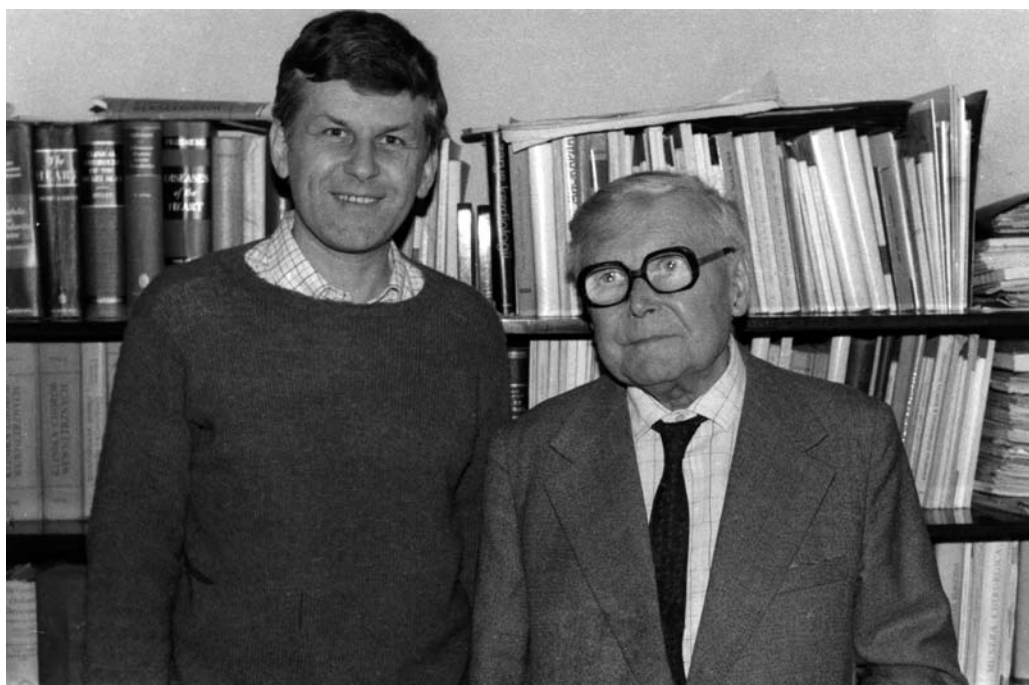


FIGURE 33 Professor Szczeklik with his father, Professor Edward Szczeklik, in their apartment in Krakow, Easter 1984

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Andrzej in his clinic. He auscultated me, interviewed, and said: "I think there is no organic cause for the pain". "Does it mean that I am going hysterical?" I asked. "You can call this this way, if you like" he answered and smiled one his healing smiles. The pains started to diminish rapidly. Within two days, I could kick the ball with my kids, within the week I could run for a tram. Andrzej healed me without any additional tests, even without ECG, I believe even without measuring blood pressure. I knew since then that he was a great doctor and not the evidence-based-medicine-man.

For most of the people of Krakow, Andrzej was just a great doctor. People trusted in him. University professors (and their wives) called him instead of an ambulance. Many eminent, and much many more average people, were his patients. And even if their way ended in his clinic, they knew that they are passing away in the best possible manner. So the death of Andrzej is a great blow for his actual and potential patients.

But Szczeklik the healer is only one aspect of Andrzej. The second, more lasting, is Szczeklik the scientist. Like his father, Andrzej was a researcher and innovator. Participation in the development of medicine was an important matter for him. Possibly "scientometrics" is a slightly tainted field (particularly by some scientists), but it may yield some salient information. The Scopus database contains 523 positions coauthored by him. His first three papers were published in 1965 in *Kardiologia Polska*, *Polski Tygodnik Lekarski*, and in this journal, *Polish Archives of Internal Medicine*. In this year, the year of his death, five publications have appeared, and quite a few are in press. His papers were quoted over 8600 times; six of them were cited over 200 times. The somewhat mysterious to laymen Hirsch index, calculated on the data from Scopus, is 54. So, in science argot, Andrzej is a "Scientist with a big h". His scientific activity has been well recognized, and honored with several honorary doctorates and prestigious Polish and international awards. I am not competent to evaluate his achievements, but I would like to remark that, in accord with the ethical principles of the 19th century scientists, Andrzej did not hesitate to start human experiments with new substances on himself. Together with his close friend, also a top-rank scientist, Ryszard Gryglewski, they injected themselves prostacyclin to investigate its cardiovascular effects and safety for humans (both overdosed and became quite ill).

Caring for others, Andrzej did not care much about his own health. He was the first to appear in the clinic in the morning, the last to leave in the evening, visiting sometimes in the night. Rumors have it that if he only spared his strength a little bit in the last months of his life and agreed to take regular medical tests, there would be no need to write this note. But he was too busy with his patients and his clinic.

A healer and a scientist – this is still not a complete picture of Andrzej. He knew that both medical health and science require organizational frame,

and he was actively constructing it. At the level of his clinic we could see its rapid modernization and development into a top cardiologic center. At the level of Polish science we see his great contribution to the Polish Academy of Arts and Science (Polska Akademia Umiejętności – PAU), of which he was the vice-president in the last few years, and in which organized "Paulette" – the Academy of Young Scientist, which till the last moment was the apple of his eye. Personally, I believe that his greatest achievement was the reunification of the Krakow Medical Academy with Jagiellonian University. This great idea, conceived by him and Ryszard Gryglewski, at that time the rector of Academy, and Aleksander Koj, the rector of the University, was possible only because Andrzej, who was going to be the rector of the Academy, decided not to take this prestigious post. The separation of medical studies from universities had detrimental effect on many aspects of education of future medical doctors, and was purposefully enforced during time of communist rule in Poland. Krakow, owing to the efforts of Szczeklik, Gryglewski and Koj, was the only Polish town in which the original unity of medicine, science, and humanities was restored.

The changes in the political system in Poland that permitted to unite the Medical Academy and the Jagiellonian University were not granted, but resulted from a successful fight with the communist regime. And Andrzej took an active part in this fight. Since the emergence of "Solidarity" Andrzej was its high-spirited and faithful member (not common among professors of medicine), and fought hard. Because of that he was deposed from the post of prorector of the Medical Academy for participation in illegal demonstrations. And he did not care much about it. His strong political views – always for freedom, liberty and democracy – he expressed actively, also in recent times.

The last aspect that I will only touch lightly is Andrzej the Philosopher+ and Writer. He was a man of letters, with the vast knowledge of several cultures and philosophies, and a connoisseur of arts, particularly music. It was very important that this knowledge did not pass away with him, as Andrzej shared it with us in his two very successful books – *Catharsis* and *Kore* – which tackle the most important problems of humanity.

Every death rises strong demurral, particularly a premature death. If Andrzej could live at least as long as his father did, he would be with us for another 13 years, which – with his knowledge, diligence and love of life, would be very, very fruitful. We lost him too early, his children lost the opportunity of fine guidance, and the world will be not as good, as it could be. On the other hand – after a moment of reflection – quickly passing away at the top of intellectual capacities and almost full physical strength is – maybe – a better solution than living until deteriorating physiology takes out the joy of life. Those whom the gods love die young, and we remain with a deep feeling of loss.