



DR. BIALOGUSKI IN THIRROUL

The days that followed my graduation were days of planning and happy expectations. I did some post-graduate work, and then took my first job as assistant to a doctor in the Sydney suburb of Marrickville. A locum at Wellington, a N.S.W. country town, followed.

Then I took a job with the Water Board at the Warragamba Dam, a huge undertaking on the Nepean River to augment the water supply to Sydney, now a city of 2,000,000 people. My work there consisted of looking after some 1,500 workers and their families. They were a healthy lot, but accidents were plentiful. I was kept busy stitching them up.

The camp was situated in a picturesque setting with the Nepean winding its way through rocky outcrops and forest-clad hills. I liked the pioneering atmosphere and the adventurous spirit of the engineers and workers.

I did not, however, accept a permanent position there, as I had other plans. In the early months of 1948, I entered into partnership in a practice at Thirroul on the South Coast, about forty miles from Sydney.

My partner and I were the only doctors in this mining village which was contained between the ocean shore to the east and a steep mountain cliff to the west.

Our practice also embraced Austinmer and Coledale in the north, and a part of Bulli down south.

It was mainly a contract and lodge practice. This is an arrangement where a head of a family pays a certain amount per week (it was 1/- in my time) which entitles him and his dependants to free medical treatment at any time.

One can well imagine what a volume of work there was. Every day was fully occupied, and every second night on duty meant only a few hours' sleep. I was also to learn, as did no doubt my predecessors, that babies for a reason

best known to themselves, chose to be born usually in the early hours of the morning. And the birthrate was heavy, which could have been explained by the fact that there was only one movie theatre in the village and hardly any other entertainment.

I was kept so busy that I had nearly forgotten my intelligence activities, never to be resumed again, I thought.

But a few months after my arrival I began to hear rumours about a "mysterious Russian doctor" who lived in an old mansion. According to the local gossip he was an old man who lived a secluded life with his wife and daughter.

"He's a Russian spy all right," said an old miner to me one day. "A lot of Russians come to his home, and he's got a couple of big dogs. They're savage too. His real name is not James; it's something in Russian you know."

Similar tales, some of them quite fantastic, were circulating freely. When next seeing Galleghan in Sydney, I mentioned James to him. He seemed interested and said it would not do any harm if I could establish contact with James, and see how things were for myself.

Back in Thirroul two or three weeks later, I noticed in the Post Office one day an elderly man filling in forms. Whenever he thought himself unobserved he would give me a scrutinizing glance.

The clerk at the counter lowered his voice to a whisper, "I say, Doc, the old man over there . . . that's Doctor James, the Russian doctor. Would you like to meet him? He's an interesting man, you know, and you'll be able to talk to him in your own language."

Back in 1948, some Australians still believed that all foreigners had more or less one common "foreign" language, and could understand each other regardless of nationality.

In this case, however, the clerk was not far off the mark. While being introduced, Dr. James's English pronunciation left very little doubt that he was of Russian origin, and I changed conversation into Russian, much to the delight of the man behind the counter.

Dr. James did not look more than fifty-five. I was greatly surprised when he told me his age was sixty-seven. He was about 5 ft. 7 in. in height, but his stocky build made him appear even shorter. He was dressed in a light grey suit, open neck shirt and sandals. His broad face with high cheekbones was suntanned, and so were his hands, giving an impression of active outdoor life. Short cropped, greying hair and shrewd grey eyes completed the picture.

He told me his real name was Zhemchoozhny, but he was known as James "because it was much easier."

"We've heard a great deal about you," he said. "I wished I could make your acquaintance. You see, we, that is myself, my wife and my daughter, live in seclusion simply because there are no people here of any intellectual standard. It's hopeless even to try to establish social contacts.

"We have many friends in Sydney who visit us here. It breaks the monotony. Not that I am idle, mind you. We have quite a big house, large garden, tennis court and so on.. I do all the gardening myself. It keeps me fit."

I remarked on his good physique.

"Good stock and plenty of hard work account for it," James replied, obviously pleased with the compliment.

I gave him a lift home, and on the way he told me he was conducting a convalescent home and physiotherapy clinic as he had no right to practise as a doctor in Australia. He cordially invited me to his home, and we parted after I had promised I would call him in the next few days, and make a date.

About a week later, I drove out to visit Dr. James. He lived in a large old two-storey weatherboard house which stood in the higher part of the village overlooking the sea.

My host greeted me effusively, and led me into a large hall which was obviously used as a living and dining room. Unusual features included a concrete floor, and the absence of a ceiling, revealing a series of heavy criss-cross beams.

From the middle of the "room" a wooden staircase ascended to a narrow balcony which encircled the walls. Two doors opened from the balcony.

The austere furniture consisted of a large wooden table, bookshelves, an old lounge and some chairs.

It was a queer looking place.

James introduced me to his wife and daughter. Mrs. James seemed to be in her fifties, plump, short and rather subdued. Nina was young, dark-haired, attractive and gushing. Her gay chatter seemed out of place in these mediaeval surroundings.

"Now you have met all my family. That is all my family in Australia," James said. "I have another daughter in the United States."

We had a bite to eat; I met some of the boarders, and for the rest of the evening, we talked. Most of it was village gossip, but Mrs. James brought the conversation round to the new biological theories in Soviet Russia, and a lively discussion followed.

The hour grew late, and I left after giving repeated promises to visit them again soon. I enjoyed the evening; it had been a break from my daily routine.

I could not place the Jameses exactly. My general impression was that they lived in the past as many other migrants did. But they kept abreast of the scientific and political developments in the Soviet in a way which showed that at least they were not biased against the regime.

(to be continued)

(From the Petrov Story by Michael Bialogushi).

[The editor would be greatly interested in hearing from anyone who knows the location of the house mentioned in this article and would also be interested in hearing from anyone with further information on Dr. James (Zhemchoozhny) . Ed.]