



Jerzy "George" Gorzkowski

May 5, 1932 - November 5, 2025

Jerzy (George) Ryszard Gorzkowski, MSc Mechanical Engineering, born in Warsaw, Poland, on May 5, 1932, passed away in San Juan Capistrano, California, on November 5, 2025. He was 93. He was strong-willed to the end and fierce, yet he taught all of us the quiet power of forgiveness.

He is survived by his wife, Anita, of 60 years; his four children, Mariela, Maciek, Margaret, and Mikolaj; his ten grandchildren, Gabriela, Katrina, Lucas, Tomek, Ailbe, Sophia, Eulalia, Charlie, Lola, and Maxi; and his sons- and daughters-in-law, Mark, Anna, Remy, and Meredith. His love for his family—immediate and extended—was constant and ran deep.

George lived a very full life that spanned privilege in Poland, the reality of war, internment in Siberia, communism in Poland after the war, the freedom of Minnesota, and finally the love of California.

Before the war, he had a lot of family all over Poland and even Lithuania, where as a child he spent time that he recalled very fondly, mainly in Paplin and Olona—riding horses, his first being Myszka (“little mouse”), who used to nip at his legs, and then Granat (“grenade”), who was “meek”; French-speaking tutors; and walks by the lake.

When war came to Polish soil on September 1, 1939, George’s father,

Olgierd, went to the army (George wouldn't see him again for seven years—he spent some of that time in a Gulag), while the rest of the family headed north to Olona. In 1941, the Soviets came to Olona and shipped out George, his sister, his aunt, his grandmother, and his mom. Both his grandfathers, it was later confirmed, were shot on the way to the Gulag when they wouldn't walk fast enough once they got off the train.

After a horrific three-week journey, George found himself in Slavogrod, where he spent the next five years (1941–1946). Upon arrival, the guard's welcome message to those coming off the train was, "Here you have arrived, and here is where you will live and die." While it wasn't a Gulag, life was difficult for the family—temperatures of 45°F below, trading fur coats in exchange for liver oil, building walls out of cow dung, and counting out bread in grams based on what you did or whether you went to school. The first year of hunger was the most difficult.

Five years later, George and the family returned to Poland but ended up in Łódź, as Warsaw was leveled and the family arranged some work there. George was small and frail, but luckily another family member worked as a professor on a farm, where George and his sister were able to eat their fill. George gained 15 pounds and grew a foot over the summer.

George had a difficult time adjusting to his new home after five years away, but he found natural talent and enjoyment in swimming. He was immediately promoted to club swimming and competed nationally. Eventually, he became a member of the Polish national swim team. He placed first in the juniors in 1951 and second nationally in 1952 in breaststroke. Being on the national team afforded George many privileges typically reserved for people in the communist party, which he proactively refused to be a part of for his entire life, limiting his options for school and work.

During his time at the pool, George met the beautiful lady from a very good family, Anna (Anita) Dembinska. It was love at first sight for George, but not exactly the same for Anita. Initially, their relationship revolved around spending time in and around the pool and then a Motorcycle Club (Moto Klub), where a group of men and women would organize bike rides, always ending their rides at the prestigious Bristol Hotel for a meal and a coffee.

People in Poland loved giving George nicknames. Some of his favorites were Kubus, Golem, Yurik, and finally George.

George graduated from Politechnika Warszawska in 1955 (1951–1955) with a master's degree in Mechanical Engineering.

His passion for mechanical work shaped his career at the WFM motorcycle factory and the FSO automotive plant, where he tested engines. His fascination with cars and machines stayed with him throughout his life. George spent many hours under the various cars he owned over his lifetime, often accompanied by Mariela and, more reluctantly, by his son, Maciek.

Because he spoke Polish, Russian, and English (by then French had left him), he had the rare opportunity to travel extensively while under communism, including to places like India, Egypt, Lebanon, Ghana, Sudan, and many others.

George and Anita married in 1965 and were married for just over 60 years before George's passing. They had their first child, Mariela, in England in 1967, deliberately traveling there while Anita was pregnant so that Mariela had the right to English citizenship. At that point, a free, post-communist Poland was not considered a reality, so this was a way to give Mariela better options. Soon after, Maciek (1968) and Margaret (Malgorzata, 1973) were

born in Poland.

With his international connections, George, working at Anglo-Dal, was introduced to a company from Minneapolis, MTS Systems, which was trying to do business in Poland. The men who worked for that company—Chuck Carney, Steve Smithson, and John Beal—became fast friends with George. Eventually, a few years later, they organized for the entire family to come to Minnesota with green cards in hand. In December of 1978, the four Gorzkowskis landed in Minneapolis. Soon after, the youngest child, Mikolaj, was born in 1979.

After five years in Minneapolis, George and the family made their final big move to Irvine, California, in 1984. George and Anita would live in California for the next 41 years, seeing all his kids go to college, marry amazing partners, and give life to ten grandchildren. They lived in Irvine, Laguna Hills, and finally in San Juan Capistrano.

With much love,

Anita, Mariela, Maciek, Margaret and Mikolaj.

Spouses Mark, Anna, Remy and Meredith.

Grandchildren Gabriela, Katrina, Lucas, Tomek, Ailbe, Sophia, Eulalia, Charles, Lola and Max

IN LIEU OF FLOWERS, PLEASE CONSIDER MAKING A DONATION TO...

Alzheimer's Orange County

<https://www.alz.org/oc>

OR

Serra's Pantry

<https://www.missionparish.org/groups-ministries/serras-pantry>

There will be a Celebration of Life reception immediately following the mass,
across the street from the Basilica.

La Sala Auditorium

at the

San Juan Capistrano Library

31495 El Camino Real

Entrance is on the right side of the building

Previous Events

Funeral Mass

NOV **26**. 11:00 AM - 12:00 PM (PT)

Mission Basilica San Juan Capistrano
31520 Camino Capistrano
San Juan Capistrano, CA 92675

Tribute Wall



“ *Reflecting on Memories created a Tribute Video in memory of Jerzy "George" Gorzkowski*



Reflecting on Memories - November 16, 2025 at 09:54 PM

PA

“ *2 files added to the album Family Memories Album*



pattinson.mmgkl - November 25, 2025 at 08:47 PM

TF

“ *The Cycon & Kokurewicz Families purchased the Strength & Solace Spray for the family of Jerzy "George" Gorzkowski.*



The Cycon & Kokurewicz Families - November 17, 2025 at 11:56 PM



“ 97 files added to the album *Family Memories Album*



Reflecting on Memories - November 16, 2025 at 10:02 PM



“ 1 file added to the album *Family Memories Album*



Reflecting on Memories - November 16, 2025 at 10:01 PM



“ *Sympathy and love to Anita and all of the lovely family! George was such an amazing, kind, gentleman. A true beloved friend. Love, Mary Carney*

Mary Carney - November 16, 2025 at 08:19 PM



“ 10 files added to the album Memories Album



Reflecting on Memories - November 10, 2025 at 11:32 PM