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Polish resister, sister reunited here

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It was October, 1949, and Witold Kasprzyk realized the Communist government of his native Poland was closing in on him.

He was a pilot, aircraft engineer and one-time underground resistance member who had fed intelligence to the Allied military forces in World War II.

Most of his resistance colleagues had been captured and executed, but Kasprzyk had escaped. By October, 1949, however, too many people had become suspicious of him, and he learned he was to be arrested.

Quickly, an escape was plotted. On October 11, his last day in Poland, Kasprzyk met his sister, 23-year-old Wanda, to say goodbye and entrust to her his engineering and flying records and what he refers to as "diplomatic materials."

Today, 71 years old and with his name shortened to Kasper, he lives in retirement in a small home in Bellevue.

And last week, almost 30 years exactly since he and a friend stole a Polish coast-guard boat in Danzig and navigated it across the Baltic Sea to freedom in Sweden, Kasper and his sister were reunited.

Brother and sister both had been successful in the intervening years.

Wanda Majcher, now 53, had gone to medical school, become a physician in Cracow specializing in diseases of industrial workers, and reared a family.

Kasper, after working in Sweden, England and Canada, was hired as an engineer in 1958 by The Boeing Co. He also had invented and patented an aircraft-wing system which he still expects someday will revolutionize the industry.

Kasper and his sister kept in touch through letters. In 1958 the materials he had entrusted to her before he escaped were smuggled from Poland to France, then brought to Kasper in the United States.

Three years ago, Kasper said, "I decided that before I pass away I wanted to see my little sister."

It hadn't happened earlier because Dr. Majcher was busy with her medical career and rearing a family, and because Kasper, since leaving Boeing in 1970, has lived on $400 a month from social security and a pension.

It took three years for him to save the $800 for her to travel to Seattle.

With expenses taken care of and with an invitation from a relative in America, Dr. Majcher said there was no difficulty in leaving Poland. A Polish passport permits her to travel for a year, and she has a six-month United States visa.

Speaking in Polish, with her brother interpreting, Dr. Majcher said she has not decided how long she will stay in the United States, but expects to spend most of the time with her brother. They may travel to Hawaii at the invitation of an engineer friend who lives there.

"This has been a shock to her," Kasper said, gesturing toward his tiny, cluttered house off Richards Road, on an overgrown lot he shares with chickens and two dogs. "So dirty. She has to teach me housekeeping."

Kasper views his humble surroundings with a kind of mild, amused chagrin. If he could count on living another 15 years, and if his patents on aircraft design could be extended, he believes he might become a wealthy man.

Kasper has built small versions of the invention he refers to simply as a "flying wing" aircraft, a plane without conventional fuselage or tail structure which he says solves the aerodynamic problems that produce stalling out and prohibit low-speed flying.

He has demonstrated gliders built from his designs at numerous air shows over the years. Models have been tested by Boeing and by Saab-Scania of Sweden, he said.

Kasper said his design has been found to be 600 per cent more efficient than conventional ones, capable of doubling today's payloads with one third the fuel consumption.

"In Sweden they found that a DC-9 could land at 35 miles an hour with my wing," he said.

Although he lives very modestly now, Kasper believes he has planted the seeds of an aeronautics revolution.

He has "successfully contaminated" other engineers with his ideas, he said, and construction of larger operating versions of his flying wing is under way in San Francisco and Sweden.

"I think it will be built commercially by 1990 to 1995," he says.

He does not expect to live to see it. So, for today, he lives with a lifetime's worth of vivid memories, and, for a few months with his sister, a reminder of the family he left behind 30 years ago.

"In the two days she has been here, I feel like a new man," he said.