

# A **Baroness** in Our *Midst*

**Clara Romiszewski** is a survivor—first of a German concentration camp and, most recently, of a stroke—who has once again regained her freedom.



Photo by Kevin Fritz

Clara Romiszewski has retired to Central Florida and recently made a full recovery from a potentially devastating stroke.

By Kevin Fritz

a true member of Polish royalty. She is an accomplished pianist and speaks six languages. She worked for the United States Mint into her late 70s. And most recently, she completed her rehabilitation from the stroke that had left her speech deprived and virtually immobile.

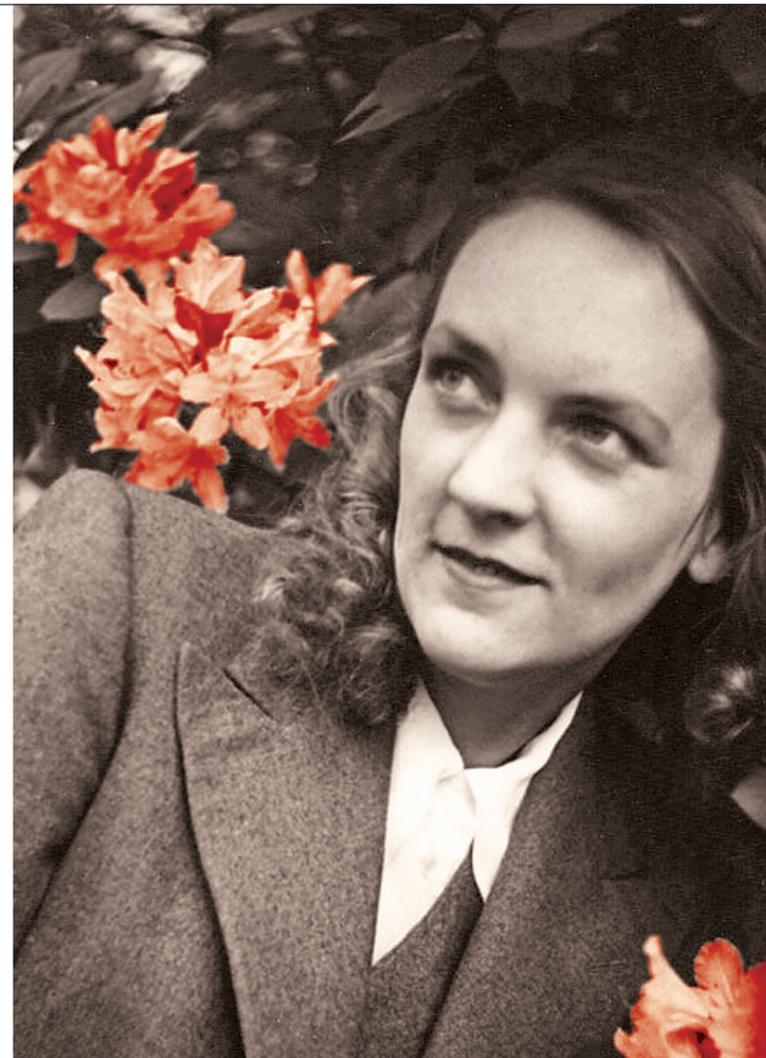
### Dramatic, Historic Change

She was born Clara Grzywaczyk in 1922, in the town of Gdansk, Poland, a free city at the time. Life as she knew it changed dramatically before she even turned 18, when Germany invaded Poland in 1939. She lived conspicuously under German occupation with her parents, a sister and two brothers until one day she was “deported by the Gestapo.” She remembers her mother trying to hand her a loaf of bread out of the window as she was being taken away, but she never got the bread. No one else was taken.

It’s a memory she has worked hard to suppress over time. Even so, it’s not that easy. “Too well,” Romiszewski answers about her recollection of her incarceration at Torpedo Waffenzplatz.

Rescued by the French after being detained for some time (to this day, she does not recall how much time passed), she was taken to England where she decided to enlist in the Polish Navy under British command. She enrolled in college and was making ends meet as an ankle model for “Vogue” in London when she met Baron Jerzy Romiszewski, a member of the Polish army.

The Romiszewski family had been dubbed royalty dating back to the 13th century; however, the war had taken all that away, including his wealth and the family castle. Clara and Jerzy married just two months later and decided to start another new chapter in their lives by immigrating to Argentina. While living in Buenos Aires, she gave birth to her only child, a daughter named Jo, who now lives in Longwood with her husband Henry. Today, **Jo Maldonado** runs a self-named public relations firm.



Historical photos courtesy of Jo Maldonado

After surviving a German concentration camp, a young Clara Grzywaczyk (soon to be Romiszewski) was relocated to England, where she enlisted in the Polish Navy (at right, circa 1949).



### Life in the United States

In 1957, another journey led the family to Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Romiszewski was 35 years old and already living on her third continent. Her first job in America was for Sheraton Hotels before she decided to apply for a position at the United States Mint in 1968. She started as a translator, greeting tour groups in German, Polish, English, Spanish and, at times, Russian and Ukrainian. “Some people thought we made candy,” she laughs.

Romiszewski had found her calling at the Mint, eventually becoming a transportation officer, which meant supplying coins to Federal Reserve banks. In 1992, at age 68, she became the oldest American to represent the U.S. Mint at the International Expo in Seville, Spain, where she spent three months working during the 500th anniversary celebration of Christopher Columbus’s famous voyage.

In 1986, she lost her husband Jerzy (pronounced Yeh-zhay), who had changed his name to George when coming to the United States for

fear everyone would call him “Jersey.” George overcame great odds himself, battling language barriers to become a veterinarian in America.

After 33 years of service, at age 77, Romiszewski decided to retire and move to Orlando to be close to her daughter and her family. But, of course, she still didn’t slow down—for one thing, she became a graduate of Buddy Dyer’s Mayor’s Academy—until the stroke that left her speech slurred, no movement in her left arm and a walker as her only means of getting around.

Through extensive therapy, the miracles of modern medicine and her tenacity to overcome great odds, Romiszewski’s freedom has returned yet again. The former Baroness has put her condo up for sale and is living in a mixed assisted and independent living facility in Sanford and has already re-embraced the world. Without the curlers, of course. ■



Do you know a survivor in your neighborhood? Tell us about that individual’s Milestone at [www.CentralFlorida-Lifestyle.com](http://www.CentralFlorida-Lifestyle.com).