

Sylvain Kluska was born on 17 April 1911 in Paris, France. His father was Polish born Charles Kluska and mother Anna Lotta Weintraub who was born in Romania. He emigrated with his parents in 1914 to England and the family settled in East End of London. His younger sister Ethel was born in 1920 in Hackney. Charles also known as Szyja became a naturalised British citizen on 15 November 1929.

Sylvain grew up in London living at 19 Little Turner Street (today Rampart Street) and attended the Davenant Foundation Grammar School, while his father made a modest living as a ladies' tailor. He was a member of the Boy Scouts and an outstanding art student. He studied art at St. Martin's School of Art on a scholarship and then won a scholarship to further his studies at the Royal College of Art. In 1938 the Kluska family moved from the East End to 166 Castellain Mansions, Castellain Road, Maida Vale, London.

He first garnered national and local East End recognition at an exhibit of local children's art at the Whitechapel Art Gallery in 1926, when he was 15. While at St. Martin's, as a teenager, he attained greater national publicity for his artwork. Two watercolours he had painted when he was 17 were selected for the Royal Academy of Art's Summer Exhibition in 1929. His achievement made the national press, landing him on the front page of the Daily Mirror, and awarding him prominent recognition in newspapers such as the Daily (London) Chronicle and the Manchester Guardian. The story of his selection was also prominently featured in the United States through an article that was distributed by the Associated Press, and internationally through the Jewish Telegraphic Agency. His artwork was twice more selected by the Royal Academy for exhibit during their Summer Exhibitions in the 1930s, and he also was exhibited again at the Whitechapel Art Gallery in 1932 during their first exhibit of local Jewish artists known as the "East End Academy."

In the 1931 Summer Exhibition he sold his watercolour entitled "A Back-Room View" to the Marchioness of Bute, and his family later found out that it was re-sold in an auction of the Marchioness' family artifacts in March 1996 through Christie's of Scotland.

He was a freelance artist for several years during the 1930s, selling artwork to advertisers, and cartoon sketches to newspapers. He took an interest in airplanes, and some of his sketches, for instance, appeared in the aviation journal Flight during this time (per the 1934 edition of Who's Who In Art of England).

Shortly before the war he joined the Process Department of the London News-Chronicle, where he worked as an artist/illustrator for this major London daily. He was a member of the Home Guard before joining the Royal Air Force in 1941. At one point in the late 1930s, per a record in a London directory, he was partnered with someone named Coleman (Kluska & Coleman) at 215 Upper Thames Street in London and they were listed as commercial artists. To date his family have been unable to determine the identity of "Coleman," but his may hold the key to more detail on an unknown aspect of Sylvain's career.

In 1935 Sylvain established a pen pal correspondence with his mother's first cousin in the United States, though the correspondence was soon passed along to another relative as he and Kluska were close in age. Several of these letters, a few of which survive, Sylvain described the Jewish East London in the 1930s, his family, the rise of Hitler and Fascism in Europe, and his growing sense of alarm at these developments. *'The Nazis are the dirtiest liars in the world'*, he said in a 1936 letter, explaining that *'my being a Jew provides me with a key which unlocks the secrets of many problems as to the future which to ordinary English eyes are hardly guessed at.'*

The 1939 Register states that the family were living at 166 Castellain Mansions where Charles is a Master Tailor and Sylvain is listed as working as a newspaper, publicity and map artist.

Family recollections of Sylvain are: *'I met Sylvain once, at my grandparents' flat. I have a distinct recollection of a young man in RAF uniform whom I knew to be an artist and who drew a picture of, I think, an aeroplane for me and my brother Paul. I know that it was not long afterwards that my mother told us that Sylvain had been killed. I was 4 years old at the time. I certainly remember very clearly the night that our parents learned of the death of Sylvain in 1944. We were in London, before we left there to go back to Deanshanger because of the second lot of flying bomb raids (V2s). We were in our beds, and someone phoned and told Mum that Sylvain had been killed in a flying accident in Scotland. I vividly recall Mum saying "Oh, my God" in the phone conversation and after that Dad and Mum (crying) came up to tell us.'*

A childhood friend of Sylvain who also attended Davenport Foundation Grammar School was David Langdon another talented artist. He was mentioned in one of the press reports saying, *'at the Whitechapel Foundation young Kluska has a friend who is a bit of a wag — D. Langdon — who has done a little coloured sketch of the "Westminster Follies," depicting "Stanley and Ramsay as the world's greatest back-chat comedians.'* David became a well-known RAF cartoonist. [War Culture – David Langdon – Military History Matters \(military-history.org\)](http://www.military-history.org)

Courtesy of Andrew Almanza