

# Turning forests into seas

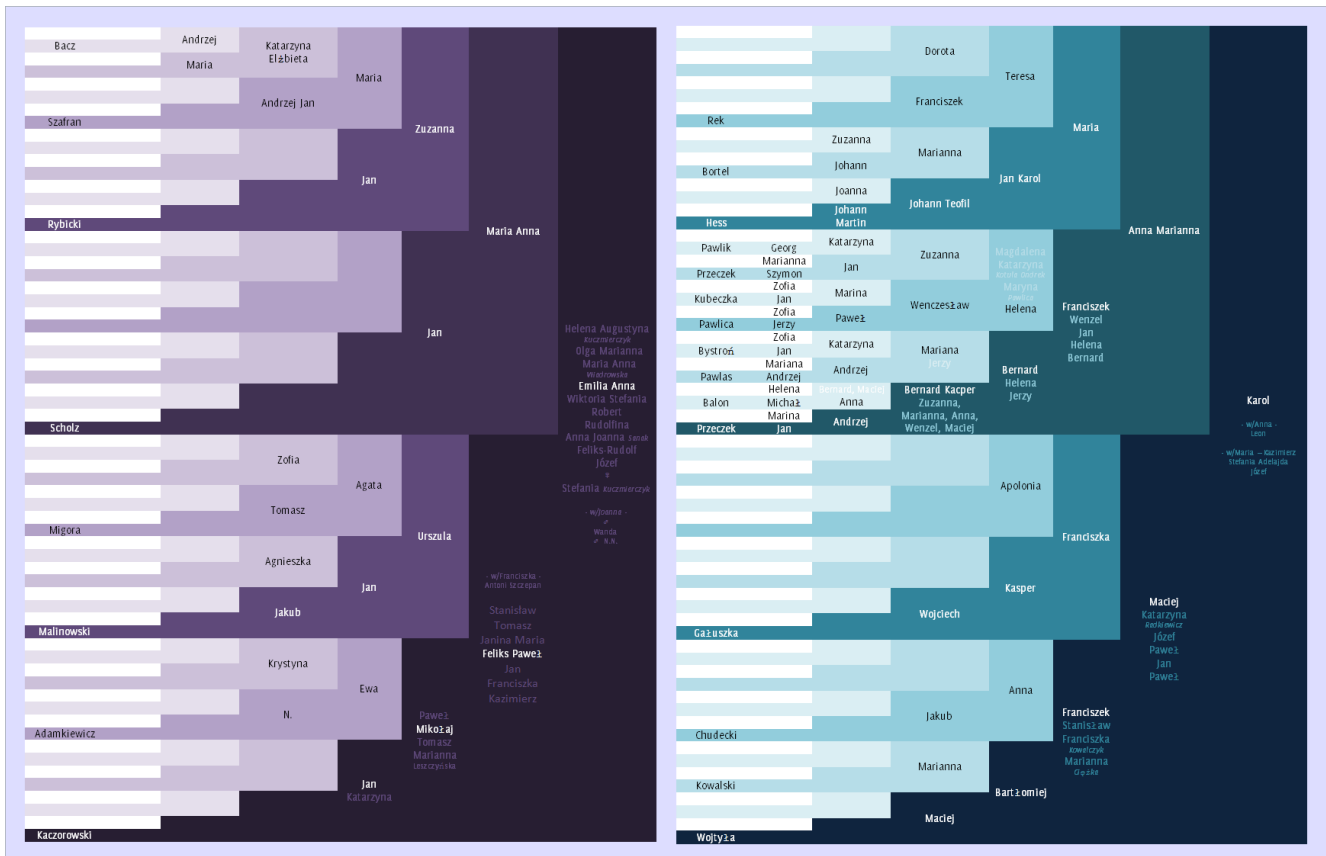
The past decade or so I've gotten into some real deep [identity](#)-, [ethnicity](#)-, and – more recently – [genealogy](#)-diving. I was extremely lucky in my search, the timing of it coinciding with the advent of the Internet as a true publicly accessible technology. I started with Poland but very quickly [found myself in](#) Germany, Israel, Switzerland, Liechtenstein, Serbia, Croatia, Lithuania, and Belarus... so far. In retracing my family's footprints I developed what I think might be a new type of family tree: a "wave chart".



Pope John Paul II's wave chart (just a sample draft; factual errors to be expected)

The original Word file of the above can be downloaded [here](#). At the far right in the tallest aquamarine bar is the focus of our study, Karol Józef Wojtyła... aka [Pope John Paul II](#). Receding leftwards are his ancestors, females touching down and males lapping up. This because families were generally patriarchaly organized Central/Eastern Europe, and surnames were received from and passed on through the male lines. On the extreme left, following the colour gradient, the journey of a surname through individuals can be clearly seen. Siblings of direct ancestors are a separate colour in each box, with sisters' married names entered in italics. Additional marriages follow a similar format but in much smaller font, including any progeny. Additional information like birthdays and locations can be easily added, space-depending.

The biggest drawback I've found so far is the potentially tremendous waste of space as descendants get added, but this can be quickly fixed through chopping up the wave into smaller ripples:



## JP II's parental charts

I find this format tremendously useful in beginning my genealogical research, contextualizing myself in the information I know and firmly understanding what basics are still missing. Interestingly, the same chart can be made in reverse to trace a single individual's progeny moving forward.. for anyone adept at programming, it might be neat to combing the two so selecting any name in a chart would offer the option of popping open forward- or reverse-wave charts. I'm sure there's more to come, just this new organizational tool was too exciting to not share!

The name was inspired by Hokusai's 1833 painting, [The Great Wave off Kanagawa](#). I toyed with going with "pipe charts" because of the shape, but the mention of water swelling up conjured up a much more vivid, fluid, applicable image to the tumultuous way family trees often form. And why JP II? Well, family history suggests he might just be a great-...-great-uncle and I'm trying to get to the bottom of this rumour. This wave is helping.