

Freestyle Blog #1
Daniel Smith

Some Stuff About Poland

When I first e-mailed back and forth with Sławek (my host), I wasn't exactly sure what to expect with Poland. His English from the messages was okay – but I knew he also had access to translation websites, dictionaries, etc. and was kind of worried about how it might be talking to him face to face. No serious concerns, but I was pretty well prepared for a month of only speaking English on the phone, Skype, in texts, etc.

I was wrong. He doesn't speak perfect English, but we haven't had any trouble communicating every day. He and his brother Marcin both speak English well enough to carry on conversations. Maybe a little difficult or frustrating at times for both parties, but between their English education and Google translate all has been well so far.

Another thing I was worried about was getting into a routine. I didn't come all the way to Poland to wake up at 5 every morning and harvest potatoes for 6 hours. This worry only came to me about my 2nd day with the host family. I was pretty concerned initially, but that quickly came to pass. Sławek and his family haven't let me get bored. While life on the farm is far from a sprint, they keep me company and love trying to learn English and teaching me Polish. The food enough could keep me satisfied with sitting around all day. Sławek's mother is an excellent cook and mostly creates traditional popular Polish masterpieces for every meal. Also, we have made sure to visit as many places as possible. The previous picture is of Sławek and myself at the ruins of a castle in Olsztyn, a small piece of ancient Polish history. We also visited Auschwitz, which unfortunately needs no introduction. Sławek and his fiancée Paulina took me to Wrocław, a city full of famous little gnomes and the famous Spiz mini-brewery and pub.



On Sunday, July 3 we are planning on going back to Wrocław to see Iron Maiden at a big concert!

Sławek is 29 years old and Marcin is 22. This is great, for me. They both are relatively close to my age and understand that I am in Europe for the first time, and am excited about

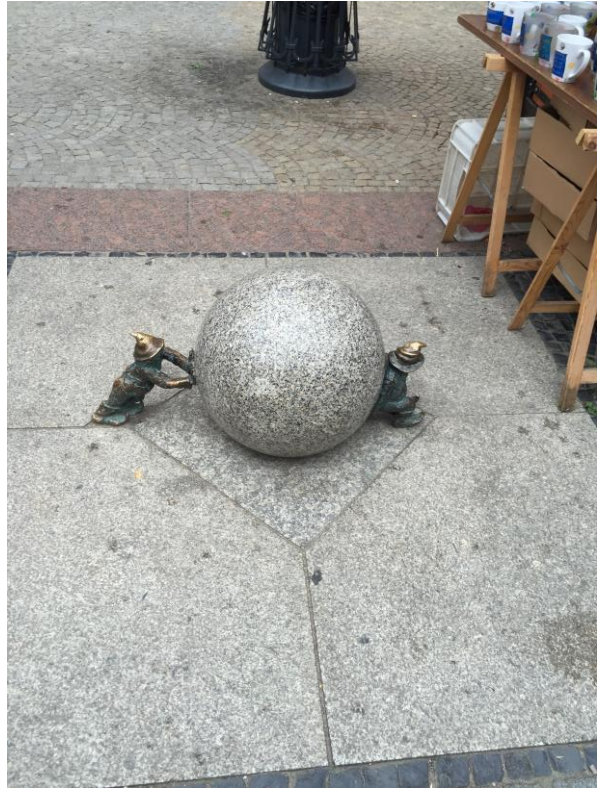
seeing the country and experiencing everything that anyone my age would want to! I've tried a ton of good beers, eaten a ton of good food, and met some very nice people. I'm lucky to have been put with a family like this that wants me to have the best Poland experience possible.

During one of the last weeks before I leave Poland (June 22-24), Will Alders and I decided to take a little adventure during our time in Poland. We both booked trains from our respective Polish towns and headed to Gdynia in Tri-City (3 cities, Gdynia, Gdansk, and Sopot are in close proximity, all along the Baltic Sea, and usually the combination of the 3 is just referred to as Tri-City, or Trójmiasto). This would not be just a little trip for me. The closest train station to Miedzno, the village where I am staying, is in Czestochowa. From Czestochowa to Gdynia is an 8.5 hour train ride. I have only ever been on a train to go from Fort Worth to Dallas for a Mavericks game. This full day's trip was to get me to one of Poland's biggest music festivals, called Open'er. Open'er has bands from all over the world, including the United States (no, no country music). Several of the festival's headlining bands were from the US, and during the one day we were present for the music, Red Hot Chili Peppers was performing.



Long story short – the trip was awesome. I was lucky enough to sit next to an

English speaker on the train (who was actually born in Chicago, moved to Poland when she was less than 1) and we ended up becoming friends during the train ride to Gdynia, and she introduced me to all of her friends at the festival, and we had an awesome time.



Poland has surprised me more than once. In my last week in this beautiful country, I can't wait to see what else is in store for me.

