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Blog 1: Childhood memories

After spending a couple of days with my host family I quickly noticed some little things that reminded me of my grandparent's house when I was a child growing up. One of the first things that took me back was using a towel that had been dried outside on a clothesline instead of a dryer. If you are familiar with this, then you know that a towel dried outdoors can feel hard and rough and not as soft as those dried in a dryer. While using this towel I laughed to myself as my mind began to flood with memories of how much I hated using a towel at my grandparent's house as a child because of the rough feeling of the towel.

Something else that I found to bring back childhood memories was the kitchen. Not the kitchen itself but a certain smell that came from the kitchen. When visiting my grandparent's house, I would always smell a certain smell. The only way to explain it is a faint or light hint of dough but it wasn't dough as I always caught a hint of the smell when the kitchen had been cleaned. Here in Poland, I have smelled the same exact smell as I did when visiting my grandparents. I told my host family about this smell and asked them what it was and they weren't sure about the smell, so they brought out different cleaners and foods to see if that was it and nothing they brought out could match it. I am still curious about what the smell is and am determined to figure out what it might be.

Since being here in Poland I have been reminded of my childhood through various things around the house and I find that very interesting as how two different places in different times can make a person feel and experience something that they haven't felt or experienced in a long time. With this I can truly say that I feel at home here and am looking forward to a return trip as soon as possible.

A Comparison and Contrast of Poland and Texas (Free write)

My trip to Poland has been something I will never forget. I have learned much more about culture and agriculture in other countries than I ever anticipated, and I truly believe it has helped me grow as an individual. Here in Poland, I knew there would be many things different from Texas, but I did not expect all of the similarities. Upon observation, I have noticed numerous aspects of Poland that are direct parallels to Texas amidst the stark differences that separate the two.

First of all, I noticed that both Texas and Poland have a strong sense of religion. Back home, most everyone recognizes God as their ruler and creator, and it seems to

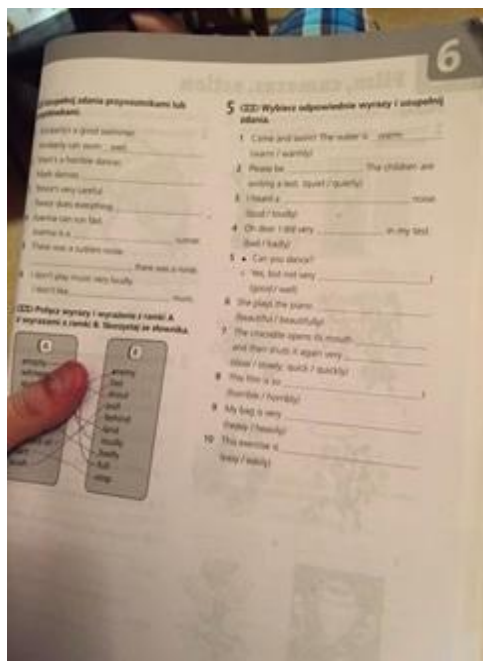


be the same here in Poland and especially in the family I am living with. The Krasnodebski family lives life in a manner that reflects their religion by service toward others, and they have a high code of morals. In their town of Jablonna Lacka, you can see all kinds of relics that represent their faith, which is predominately Roman Catholic.

Next, all the kids I have come in contact with work very hard along with their mother and father, no matter how young they may be. In America, not all the kids are taught how to work, but here in Poland, they start learning how to use tractors, plant crops, and do other tasks at a very young age. This is something that we can improve on here in the states. Kids are becoming lazier due to the trap of television and video games, and lose sight of what it means to put in a hard day's work. Not everyone in Texas is this way, but it is something that we can improve on nonetheless.

Both Texas and Poland look for ways to improve on their farming techniques. While in my stay at Jablonna Lacka, I attended a seminar in which a company by the name of KWS came and presented information to local farmers about which types of crops will grow the best in the current conditions, and the types of fertilizers that are most effective. We do the same in Texas. You don't have to look very far to find a group of people coming together to brainstorm about different ways to make their farms better than they were originally.

I also observed other things in terms of farming. For example, just as it is in Texas, the overall number of farms are decreasing but the size of farms is increasing. Not only is that the case in Poland and Texas, but also in a large majority of the world. Also, both places have people who are afraid of Genetically Modified Organisms, or GMOs. In Texas, people have the technology to use this technique despite the opposition of some, but in Poland, they are not even produced. They have many different oppositions



to it, and do not see the need for modification when “things are already fine”. While this is an issue that is going to divide more and more people in the future, Poland is united in the fact that their economy is booming. Ever since joining the European Union, their condition has drastically improved in all aspects of the word.

Another difference in Poland that I didn't anticipate was the massive contrast in the education system. In Texas, education past the high school level is extremely expensive, and people spend years trying to pay off their student loan debt. However, here in Poland, much of their education is free from primary school all the way up to the collegiate level. This is a great privilege they enjoy, and they only pay for education if they choose to seek it from

an exclusive institution. Another aspect of education different from Texas is that in their first 12 years, they learn a foreign language. The language they almost always learn is English, and the teachers do a great job at it. This is evident in the exceptional fluency of Ewa and Dorota, who are sisters of Adam Krasnodebski. It has made my stay here much easier in terms of communication, due to the fact that they can help translate any conversation and understand anything I say to them. In my opinion, Texas should make it mandatory to teach a foreign language to students all the way from primary school to the end of high school. With Texas having a large population of Spanish speaking individuals, it would benefit us greatly to have the knowledge to communicate more effectively with them.

Next, I have observed the nature of Polish parties and dinners. With many dinners in Texas, people eat, talk for a little while, then go home once it gets dark outside. Here in Poland, it is sometimes an all day and night affair. On many occasions, I attended a gathering where a massive number of people sat down at a table garnished with all types of bread, meat, fruits, and vegetables. They would eat whatever was on the table, then servers would come by and deliver even more food. They would stop eating for a while and talk, but then after an hour or so, even more food would come by and the process would start all over again. They love one another's company, and cherish every chance they get to spend time with friends and family. The way they conduct big meals in Poland is different from Texas, but in both places, the people will have fun when it's time to have fun and work when it is time to work. We all celebrate life and the fact that we can live and work and enjoy the fruits of our labor.

Many things separate Texas from Poland in terms of culture and traditions, but all in all, we are united by the fact that we have a strong desire to do our best in whatever



Ross Hargrove

we do, and try our absolute hardest to make this world a better place. My trip to Poland has helped me understand this concept, and it is something that I will take with me wherever I go in life.

Howdy everybody,

It's been a whirlwind of a rollercoaster since day one when I arrived here in Poland; there is so much to tell y'all between all of the heavenly food that I've eaten, interacting with some of the nicest people that I have ever met, and some of the most fascinating sights that I have ever witnessed. So to start off with, everybody needs to come and visit Poland at least once during their lifetime if they ever get the wonderful



opportunity like I did. The food is in so many words delicious, amazing, and you will miss it when you leave! The people remind you so much of the wonderful and amazing people from Texas! They are very caring, loving, kind, and giving. They have the mindset of working hard till the job gets done and they will go out of their way to help you out in any way that they can. Finally, all of the majestic

and beauty that Poland has to offer between stunning churches, breathtaking castles, the memorial Auschwitz concentration camps, and so on are in themselves worth coming and experiencing.

At the beginning of this trip I had no idea what to expect but I had several students going with me that I knew felt the exact same way I did. I know for sure that we were all nervous, a little bit scared, but more than anything we were all so excited because of the fact that we were traveling overseas to Europe! Also, because we were going on a journey of a lifetime that was going to be filled with unforgettable memories that were going to last forever! Unfortunately things got started off on the wrong foot because our flight had been delayed by two hours but we eventually made it to Warsaw, Poland. We all were very sleep deprived, a little bit hungry, but willingly ready to explore and see what Poland had to offer us! Over the next few days we were ridiculously busy between visiting an agriculture high school,



several farms, a big fertilizer plant, a nice agricultural research institute, and the amazing Polish Parliament! We learned quite a bit in those first few days about how agriculture plays a huge part in contributing to the Polish economy; we gained a better comprehension of the culture of Poland, and we learned how Poland is number one in grain production in all of Europe. After the first few days together, the time had eventually come for all of us as a group to part ways and head off to our host families. We were all a little bit sad to say goodbye to each other because we had grown really close to each other in a few short days that we were together, but we were ready to meet our families and see what the remainder of this adventure had in store for us. Everybody's families were located relatively close to each other except for me I was the one that was the furthest away from everyone else. I was only about an hour away from



the Ukrainian border! My family and I hit it off right from the start and they have made me feel at home ever since I got here. When I first arrived at the families' house I was blown away at how beautiful the landscaping had been done, how big the house was, and how nice the inside of the house turned out to be! Whenever I met the Sapilo's they instantly made me feel very welcomed, and

even though they only know a few words in English their son does a great job of helping us communicate with one another. They have one son (Jaroslaw) who helps manage



the family business, they have one daughter (Ascha) who runs her own restaurant, they have had their farm for 28 years, and they mainly grow corn but they also grow wheat, barley, and soy beans.



One thing that I have come to absolutely love about Poland is their food! Public safety announcement, this is a great thing and a very bad thing all at the same time. It's a fabulous thing because they have so many diverse



types of foods to relish in and consume between main course meals and their delightful dessert's, and yet it is a very bad situation because when you are trying all of these wonderful foods you have to tell yourself at some point to ultimately stop eating. If you don't stop eating you can wind up gaining ten pounds of weight in one meal! I have had some luck with preventing myself from

getting to that point and there have been other times where I think "I'm in Poland and I may never get to eat this magnificent food ever again, so I might as well go all out and indulge myself"!!! So it's probably safe to say that when I get back to Texas, I will have



to hit the treadmill and weights very hard for several

weeks to come.

Polish food consists of a lot of



meat, vegetables, and is very big into producing fruit such as strawberries and cherries. The food here is a lot healthier than it

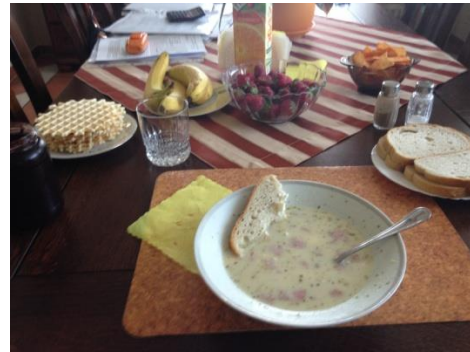
is in Texas; the majority of meals that they eat are handmade and cooked. They don't



or fruit.

have anywhere near close the amount of fast food chains that we have back in Texas, the only chain that I have seen here is of course McDonald's. Out of all of the foods that I have eaten so far, my absolute favorite is something called Pierogi! They are dumplings that are traditionally filled with potato filling but can also be stuffed with various foods such as sauerkraut, ground meat, cheese,

My first two weeks here in Poland has been a wild, crazy, memorable, and very fun filled adventure so far! I've met people that I'm hoping from here on into the future will become lifelong friends and the unforgettable times that we have together don't end here. My family and all of the friends that I have met on this trip have been very loving, overwhelmingly nice, and some of the best people that I have ever had the pleasure of meeting! I'm looking forward to what the rest



of this phenomenal experience has to offer and If anybody has the wonderful opportunity to come to Poland, whether it be through the extraordinary



Young Farmer Exchange Program run by Dr. Jim Mazurkiewicz through the Texas A&M Agrilife

Extension or on a family trip they need to come and see for themselves how marvelous Poland really is! Thanks and Gig'em from the other side of the world!!!

Gabriel Walch

Freestyle Blog

This first week in Poland has been amazing.

It all started off a little slow when we were stuck on the airplane in Houston for about two hours waiting for the weather to clear up. We went to Paris, France, and had to go through a security check point again, though we had already gone through one in Houston. As we flew into Poland I could see the patterns of the fields and how green they were. We landed, and there was a big van waiting for us to take us to our hotel. We dropped our bags there and headed straight to the shopping center where we got to try Polish homemade ice cream.



We exchanged currency there as well and headed back to the hotel, where there was a huge dinner waiting for us. We got to meet the President of the Polish Association of Cereal Producers, and he welcomed all the Young Famers who had attended this five week course.

For the first couple of days all we did was eat. I mean every meeting we went to had abundance of food.



I have never met a nicer group of people than the Polish so far. They greeted us with open arms everywhere we went. I have never been so far from home and welcomed into someone's life as much as these people have done. I have learned so much in the past couple of days about how their agriculture differs from ours here in Texas. One of the biggest things I learned about agriculture in Poland is that everyone prefers quality over quantity. Sure, in Texas we prefer quality over quantity but do we really do it; with some stuff, yes, but not always. In Polish agriculture, it is all about the quality of the product. An example of this would be how they make their apple juice. We learned how the apples are picked, cleaned, cut up into smaller pieces and the juice is squeezed from them. They are vacuum packed but the air is never actually placed into the bag, but is actually completely sucked out of the bag so the 100 percent apple juice will have a longer shelf life. That was just one thing we learned in our first three days of being there.

I am staying with the Szumulewicz family, who are very big into agriculture. They have 100 hectares which is over 200 acres if we want to get technical. They raise wheat, sugar beets, corn and canola. The farm is run by Peter who knows English quite well and has shown me a day in the life of a

farmer here in Poland. The first day I got there, he showed me my bedroom and I got to meet his mother, Margaret. After introductions we loaded up on the tractor and went and sprayed a little over 20 hectors of wheat.



His father Victor is the president of the Chamber of Commerce in all of Poland, which was a pretty big deal to me because he is such an important man.

Peter is getting a new John Deere tractor to replace an older one they have. They took me to a business meeting at the John Deere dealership, where they made a deal on a new tractor. The cool part about the business meeting is that after they came to some agreement we drank a few glasses of scotch in celebration of the deal being made. That has got to be one of the most relaxing business meetings I have ever been a part of!



Peter is engaged to Monica and she speaks English also, but is not fluent.



She made a deal with me that if I help her with English, she will help me learn Polish. She is quite good at English but just enunciates wrong sometimes so I help with that. She gives me two words to learn a day, and by the time I leave I should be able to say a full sentence to her.