

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

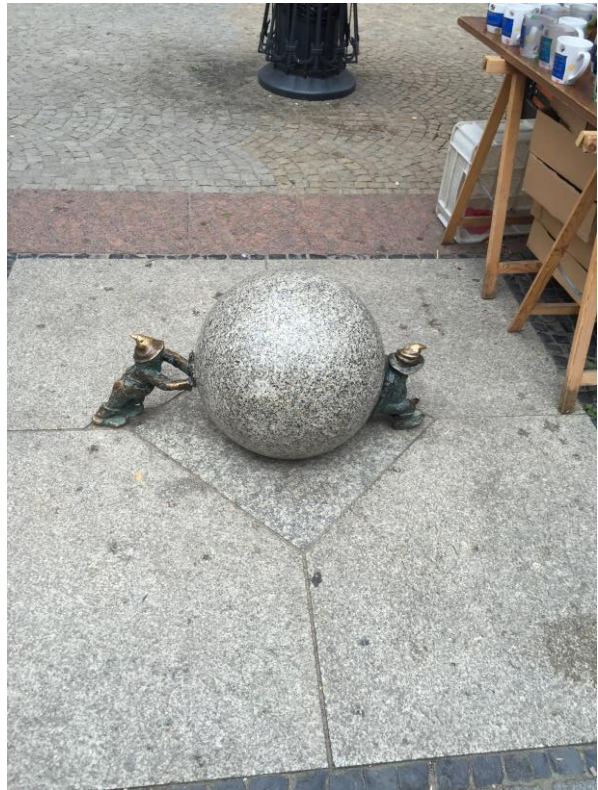
seeing the country and experiencing everything that anyone my age would want to! I've tried a ton of good beers, eaten a ton of good food, and met some very nice people. I'm lucky to have been put with a family like this that wants me to have the best Poland experience possible.

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.



Poland History and Culture by John Derry

With a rich culture centered on its long and peculiar history, Poland has many things to offer whether you're a seasoned traveler or a first time novice. I have had the pleasure of staying in the small town of Kowroz just outside one of the oldest cities in Poland: Torun. Torun's roots date back to the 13th century when its founders were focused on defending their territory, taking care of their families and making their famous gingerbread. Because Torun has such a rich history, many have done all they can to maintain it and teach it to new generations. This sounds much like any town that you would encounter anywhere in the world. However, what sets Torun apart from other cities is that they strive to have a living history. Instead of countless museums filled with halls of artifacts and long paragraphs, Torun itself strives to be a living museum. I had the privilege of visiting one of their living museums where a very eccentric group of people taught me the proper method of making gingerbread. After taking an oath to never reveal the "secret recipe" for making gingerbread, I was taught about the ingredients that comprise their famous treats and was even able to feel and smell of them. Then and only then was I able to help in combining the ingredients to form the special dough. I was then guided to the large table filled with rolling pins and molds seen below. At this point I rolled out my dough, pressed it into a mold and baked it to its final product.



Although Torun is famous for their gingerbread, not all of Poland could survive solely on gingerbread. For this reason, the people of Poland have a long history of being skilled hunters. Featured on the dinner table is



everything from wild boar to venison; both of which are often times homemade. It is a long time tradition here to hold what we would commonly call a BBQ. Just as in the United States, they grill meat, invite friends over, and talk about the good times for long periods of time. I have been fortunate enough to experience this twice since I have been staying with my family. Below is a picture of the wonderful food that my family shared with their friends and me.

Although Poland's history is very interesting, there are parts of it that are not so bright. Perhaps the darkest part of Poland's history is during its time under Nazi control. Although Poland is a free country now, remnants of the German communistic leader, Adolf Hitler, still remain. The



most obvious sign of his control are the many concentration camps that still stand to this day. I have had the honor of seeing one of these concentration camps and am amazed by everything that I have seen. The most peculiar aspect of the German concentration camps is that the Polish people are not afraid to talk about them or even take you there to show them to you. I believe that the reason for this is that they are trying to show the world what happened in order to prevent an atrocity like the Holocaust from every occurring again. In order to respect the victims of the Holocaust it is not permitted to take pictures inside the buildings, however it is permissible to take pictures of the outside and thus I snapped this picture of a guard tower.

Many people and groups have influenced Poland and its people. However, not all of it has been negative. One example of that is the influence of western culture, particularly the influence of American culture upon the culture of Poland. As I walk around cities such as Warsaw I am constantly reminded of America's influence on Poland, as it is not uncommon to see a statue of Ronald Reagan in its many parks. Having been in Poland for almost a month now, I have begun to see more subtle signs of western culture such as dress and hairstyles. Just recently, my host father wore his cowboy hat, that he got from his trip to Texas in 2011, while standing next to the BBQ pit.



Torun- A Medieval Town by Mara Seigler

Being a student from Texas A & M University – Commerce travelling to Poland has been one of the greatest cultural experiences of my life. I have been soaking up the history, beauty, and traditions while living with my host family. Torun has been one of my favorite places, as there seems to be a never-ending array of learning and fun.

Historical Torun

- One of the first places I visited while staying with my host family was the city of Torun. I am located in a small village called Slawkowo, which is about 25 minutes away from the city. Being a typical tourist, I rely on a tour guide to help me navigate throughout the city. I have learned all about the history of the buildings, which is the most fascinating to me by far. In my opinion, the atmosphere of the city would be popular for anyone with a love of music.



- The Old City Market Square is a well known area in the center of Torun. Many of the buildings are built in Gothic style. The first floor of the Old City Town Hall used to be the seat of the Torun town council, but now it serves as a museum, and the ground floor was used for merchants. It is one of the most fascinating buildings in Europe. The oldest part of the building is the tower, which is full of Gothic decoration. In front of the building is a statue of Nicholas Copernicus, who is a well-known astronomer and mathematician. Listening to the people of the area, many believe that Copernicus theorized that earth and other planets surround the sun, which is exactly what we have learned in our studies in the U.S. about our solar system. He is praised highly for his discovery in the town of Torun. The

statue of Copernicus is also a well-known symbol of Torun, and is included on almost every postcard and souvenir photograph. The Old City Market Square serves as the heart of the city and is a quaint meeting spot for locals and tourists.



- Torun was originally fortified with defensive walls, which surrounded the Old as well as the New Town. The walls also surround the castle of the Teutonic Order, which today can only be seen as ruins and is a major tourist attraction. The Vistula River served to protect the town from the south, and was also an important trade route. Legends say that the Teutonic Knights crossed the Vistula River and built a fortress. Some of the towers have survived, and the most well-known is the Leaning Tower that guards a corner of the Old Town. The legend goes on to say that one of the Knights fell in love with the daughter of a merchant and because they violated chastity laws, his punishment was to build a leaning tower, which is to be said to be “as distorted as his deeds”.



- In the Old Town there is the Church of the Holy Virgin Mary. The interior appears well-preserved, which is what caught my attention when I visited the church. During the Napoleonic wars, the church was closed temporarily. Since then it has opened for worship and has continued until today. On the inside, the original interior is one of the first observations that I admired. The narrow church has high slender windows with nineteenth-century stained glass designed in the Gothic style.



- Many monuments and sculptures can be seen throughout the city of Torun. My favorite is the bronze dog, Filus. I was told that the people rub his head in hopes of a good day since the adorable dog brings happiness.



Fun Things To Do

- Torun is known for its gingerbread. The secret is its high quality ingredients: rye flour, honey, ginger, cloves, cinnamon, nutmeg and cardamom. The most popular place to buy gingerbread is Katarzynka. The whole place smells like a freshly baked cookie. According to one of the legends, the gingerbread shape represents the union of two hearts and two wedding rings. It is the most popular souvenir of Torun, and I for one am not going home empty handed. Visitors not only buy the gingerbread, but also are able to make it themselves. This can be done in two different museums. I visited the Piernika museum and got to make my own. I was the lucky tourist that got picked from the audience during the demonstration to mix the dough. My piece was not edible, but I will have a keepsake that will always remind me of my time in Torun.



Food and Entertainment

- Another well-known and favorite place in Torun is Lenkewicz, which sells the best ice cream, or “lody”. People can always be seen walking around with ice cream when in town.



- I actually got the chance to spend two days at the Kujawsko-Pomorski Music Theatre located in Torun. It is a smaller theatre and only has been established there since 2014. It not only produces its own musicals, but there are also puppet shows for children. The theatre is also a place for concerts, recitals, and art exhibitions or workshops for the youth. While I was there, I was able to watch rehearsal for a concert, which was very educational because I cannot sing a tune. I also was able to watch the rehearsal for one of the musicals and later was invited to go watch the show. Even though I could not understand what was being said, I was so excited to listen to the wonderful singers and the music. If only I was that talented!



As I reflect on my time in Torun, I will always remember the beauty and vivid colors of the town, the kind people, wonderful food, and fascinating history. I would definitely visit again and encourage anyone that I meet to go there for a memorable experience.

Spencer Wilder
6-24-2016

Many of the farmers in the witóldow area that I am in have all said how much they would love to have GMO crops because of how versatile they are and how much better they are compared to conventional crops that they plant. There main reasons are because the corn borer causes so many problems for them that they have to spray a lot to keep them corn borers down and that is a big hassle for them. There other big reason is so they can make more tons per hectare they already make a lot per hectare but this way they could be able to make more so they would have more money at the end of the year and not have to rely on EU subsidies as much.

This is a picture of non gmo corn as you can see it is suffering a little because of the lack of rain and if they had Gmo corn available it would not be suffering like this because of the way they enhanced thegenes of the corn to be more drought resistant.



As you can see here I am comparing the corn of



Poland to the corn from home. Now, they might be in different stages of the growing season, but it still proves my point that GMO corn is better than conventional corn because of all the improvements that we have made to the genetics and how they have made the plant more tolerable to disease and drought while making them have better yields.