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Poland Study Abroad
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Family Life and Farming in Poland

When I learned that I had been accepted into the study abroad program to go to Poland I was beyond excited. I was grateful to be receiving the opportunity to expand my knowledge in farming and be able to compare farm life in Texas to farm life in Poland. I wasn't sure what to expect from my host family, I was quite nervous that I would be living with a family I had never met before for 5 weeks, but as soon as they met and greeted me so kindly in Warsaw, Poland I knew that my stay here in Poland would be one I didn't forget.



One of the first things I did when I arrived on the farm was go visit their dairy production farm. The family has 35 cows total. Dairy production has been very interesting to learn about since neither my family nor neighbors own milk cows it has been nice to learn about the production and lifestyle of owning a dairy farm. I soon learned that they milk their cows twice a day, one time in the morning and another late at night, they use robotic milk pumps to milk cows twice a day. They also clean the cows milking area and living space twice a day as well. The younger cows are kept separate until they reach an age of 3 years old; once they turn three they are moved in with the older milk cows and bulls. They produce an average of 700 liters a day. They sell their milk to a company called CEKO

for 1.30 zloty per liter. The milk company sends a truck daily to pick up the milk that is produced per day; younger calves are dehorned at 3 months. The family dehornes them on their own no vet is necessary to be called and no other regulations are in tact. Cows are fed twice a day; their feed consists of corn, alfalfa, soybean meal, grain and powdered vitamins. Baby cows are separated from their mothers at around 2 weeks old and are placed in cubicle like areas where they are fed powdered milk twice a day along with 1 and a half to 2 cups of grain. Calves are taken off powdered milk at the age of 3 months and begin to receive water instead.



Along with having milk cows they also produce 25 hectors of corn, 10 hectors of alfalfa, 5 hectors of rye and 20 hectors of corn on a rented field. Based on Polish standards they have a relatively small or average farm compared to the big companies we visited earlier on when we first arrived to Poland for our trip. Yet the fact that they do have a small farm has given me ideas on how I could possibly make my farm back home more productive as well. I was surprised to see they used robotic machines to milk the cows, before I arrived I thought they would be milking cows by hand. I have realized that Poland is far more advanced in agricultural technology and machinery that I had originally imagined.



Family in Polish culture seems to be very important. The Lazniak family has three sons, the eldest Sebastian is a doctor and lives in the city of Kalisz the second eldest son is Grzegorz he is the son that works on the farm the most he helps with the cows, the hay production, and the corn production as well. Lukasz is the youngest of the three brothers and he works as a truck driver for the farm and outside of the farm as well doing more trips for other companies. Something I have noticed in Polish culture is that many families have up to 4 generations living in their house. This is something we don't see back home in the US; typically as soon as you're old enough to leave the house whether it be for school or for work you leave your parents house and move into an apartment or buy a house. This isn't the case in Poland; I have noticed that families have a strong bond since they spend so much time together working on the farm day in and day out. They eat breakfast, lunch and dinner together; they go to church more than once a week as a family and most of all work together to be as productive as they can.

My everyday job on the farm was to feed the younger calf's powdered milk and grain twice a day. I would also feed and give water to an injured cow who had been separated from the rest of the dairy cows due to inflamed joints which then sadly turned into a joint infection and she had to be put down. Other than my everyday farm work I would try to accommodate in anyway that I could whether it was to help on the tractor to move hay, help fix machinery or water the flowers for the mother Ania.



One can tell how much love families have for one another by the way they treat each other and respect each other. I am grateful to have had this wonderful experience with an amazing family who treated me as a daughter while I was here; they gave me everything I needed and more. I will forever be grateful for the opportunity to learn and grow as an individual and as a farmer here in Poland.

Polish Farmland Acreage and History



A satellite image showing the dimensions of the local farms in and around the town of Piaski

Any Texan visiting Poland's farmlands would arrive at the same conclusion: everything truly is bigger in Texas. Although the lack of lifted pickup trucks and giant chicken fried steaks would prove this statement to be true enough, the difference in farming techniques between these two places is much more astonishing. A ban on Genetically Modified Organisms along with a long list of other regulations set by the European Union make working as a farmer in Poland far less efficient. The biggest contrast, however, would have to be the size of the crop fields found throughout Poland, appearing miniscule when likened to typical Texas farmlands.

With the average Polish farmer making use of 10.3 hectares, or about 25.5 acres, this country's crop production merely compares to the Lone Star state, which obtains an average farm size of 568 acres. Most of the crop fields in Poland are short and slender sections of land, shoved together with no room in between two neighbors' portions. These small segments of land are the result of this country's history that dates back to when the Americas were only being discovered.

In the 16th and 17th centuries only the extremely wealthy gentries and the royalty owned enormous pieces of land on which they allowed people to tend to in exchange for food and places to live. At the turn of the 18th century, private ownership of available land began to emerge due to the previous owners gifting small fields to loyal citizens or losing these parts of their land while gambling, battling enemies, deserting land to relocate, etc. Farmers would then settle down and claim the small bits of land that they could manage and most importantly use to provide for their families. Private ownership grew more popular in the 1860s. From this time period on, these farms were passed down from generation to generation, rarely growing in size.

Once the communist social organization solidified its presence in Poland, the government strictly limited any opportunity for farmers to purchase more land, and placed heavy regulations on these farmers' rights. This held true until the end of communism in Poland in 1990, where private ownership once again flourished. Unfortunately, Polish farmers were still left with these thin fields from several generations before, acting stubborn towards any potential buyers and trying to maintain ownership of every square meter of land they possibly could. Today all farm land is either owned or rented by farmers or the government.

Often times large Western companies will rent out thousands of hectares of government farm land for business, residing right next door to a Polish farmer's eight hectare sugar beet field he tends to mostly by hand. The government must rent out these massive sections of land to frequently foreign companies to ensure a constant source of income, as Poland is not such a wealthy country on its own. This occurrence bothers Polish farmers, who would absolutely love to be able to use parts of the gigantic fields to expand their farming practices.



The father of my host family, Rafal Andrzejewski, spraying his 6 hectare sugar beet field

Alpine air mixed in the back of my throat with the alkaline taste of gassed water, as I stared upon the stairs that beckoned me to keep moving. In ill irony these steps were not made of supple ash or comforting hickory, no they seemed to be built with the same materials that sucked the souls from doe eyed freshman climbing to lab in Heldenfels. But they only took pieces of my sole, maybe it was idiotic to take ropers this far up, leaving blisters to tell the tale to me as I laid awake that night. For now I had to forget my misfortune and carrier on like a mule that had been over packed for war. Akin to the mule I too had a pack that carried life's creator and started to feel his loftiness and hear the wish-wash as my joints cranked to life. They had responded to a cracking below that faintly resembled my romantic French name and reminded my muscles that the peak was only a handful of clicks away.



The tepid gust lead me to the next marker and then turned to their true nature. Quick with a few swift jerks I dropped my creator and ripped from the canvas cover a faux fur lined garment that resembled a under stimulated cone and responsive rod. It embraced me with a shivering core, and the canvas now felt padded upon my shoulders. Like a man with stiff drink and canary voice, the colorless garment became good company as a few more draining stones rolled by. One, two, stepped the beat as both my feet and eyes kept pace and began to numb. In what could only be called an epiphany, my mind leaned over to my eyes and spoke words of crystal clarity. "There's a world to see, that doesn't just consist of tortured leather, motion blurred rock, and the tip-tap of heels. So, you must elevate."

Nude birch looks back at me, their soft vegetation missing from daintily arms, and in an odd way they seem to still be able to dance with the wind. A polish joke skated across my ears, as I reminisced the soft voice that spoke it only a few nights ago. In that moment my lips curled, brow

soften, and face glowed gay from the thought. But like a obtusely placed speck on white linen, the clamoring backdrop flooded into view. The earth itself seemed to, in triumphant gusto, reach for the heaven, yet was left to converse with the clouds. My heart spoke for the rock, that was macerated into the endeavor that proves erroneous. Envious moss and ivy, looking to prove their oats, scurried along the depressed rock and held true with their intentions. Pulled together the dull decaying rock provided the stage to emerald encrusted limbs, that brought incandescent life to hollow ground. Fellow mounds of bluegrass and sapphire petals laced around the birch, yet they sang no melancholy hem, nor sat in drab quarter. Butchered french rang my temples and the timpo began once again.



The sun had reach its peak, but I was unaware of such effects, as clouds swirled around both on rocks below and ocean above. The rich air had given way to light wisps which snapped when contacted by famined lungs. Wind sung in spite of this and kept in mind to remind my soul a drop was still a possibility. Mangled French drew me back for a moment of soft but forewarning words. The path lay head is not one to belittle and its better advice to enjoy the sights around me and let it remain unpaved. Blissful ignorance and youthful moxy caused a vexed recoil from polite conversation. The exchange from then was like dull knife to flesh, in that both men's words failed to make a mark, but still gave the impression of intent. Yet I did not leave the bout unscaved, for cryptic Indigo now lay with skin.

Spinless chain ran with sharp cuts to a mist filled sky, and the path spoken of now turned to mirage. Aged smooth rock jettisoned from the comforting gravel I stood on and that limp chain was the only friend in sight. Fingers cracked, tissue tightened, breath shortened, and quads wailed from forceful forward momentum that called upon every fiber to proceed. Cautious thought had been left to the wind, for SASI drill made NCO snap actions go red. The next few moments passed like Sunday afternoons as a child. Mild memories ran in delightment across my soften glazed eyes, and the rock rolled by with every snap of the chain. A handful of cherry red faces peered at me,

but my vision rose sharply to a cast iron webbed cross. Two more steps lead to control collapse on frigid stone.

My eyes veered toward a life changing moment, but not one for my soul. A suitor had turned to his court and proclaimed with endearing heart that he must plead guilty to his vicious love and wish to be sentenced to that cliché ball and chain. Another soul had the mind to capture the moment as the court agreed. I'm not sure if cribbing exhaustion or vile greed kept me from taking a few memories for keepsake, but I felt passed welcomed and looked for a message sender.



After a few quick bounces off a tower and some polite conversation, I began my lesson in controlled falling. The ropers had no more grip to assist my feet and again the zigzagging chain became my one true friend. I soon fell back on a technique that my mother had taught me at the lone age of three to slid down the steps in our two-story house. Again, my mind turned to drill and the memory turned to same condition as a

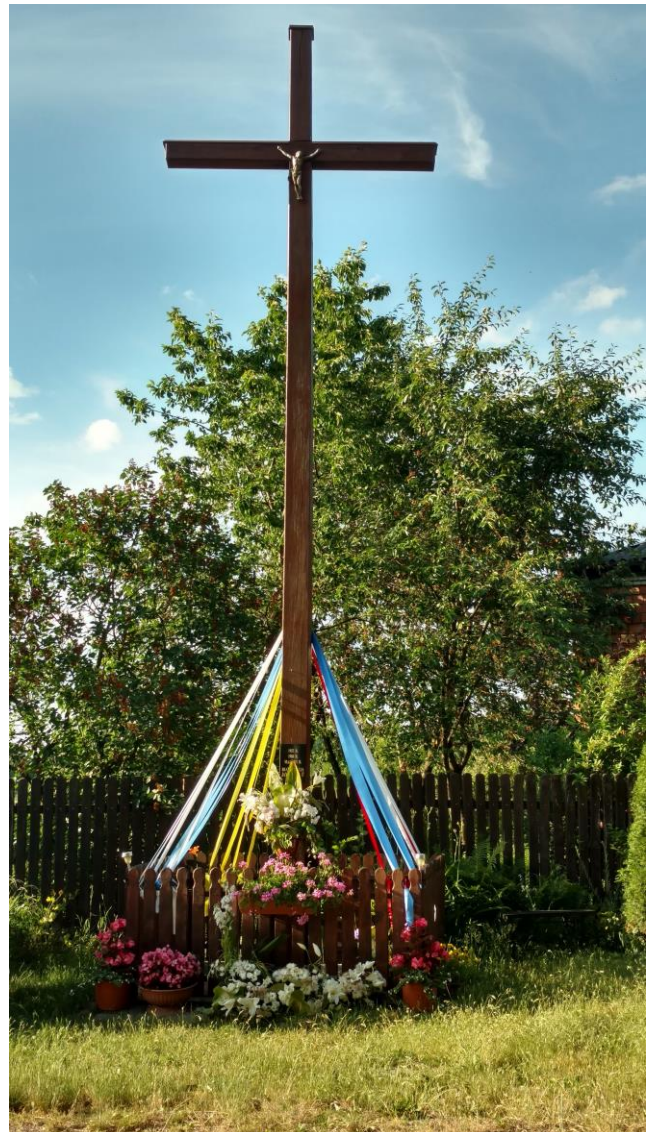
dream you had two nights ago.

I now have turned into a snake that must eat his own tail and fellow down a trail my feet once touched. Those steps now turned to slick oil and my pace quicken. This was not by my own effect and in many ways, I was lucky to not have toppled over. Shedding the faux fur my eyes turned to familiar trees and rocketing rocks, yet I paid no mind to their beauty. My creator was all but gone and the last few drops swished between cheeks. Time was short, yet the walk back to civilization was even shorter. With no embellishment, the path was a hard one to take, but the memories made will last a lifetime.

Catholicism: The Universal Church in Poland

During my previous travels, I found that those native to Western European countries, especially the young to middle aged, were only catholic by name. That is, the catholic faith was not being practiced. It was truly a tragedy or *masakra* to find churches abandoned, pews caked with dust and blocked off with cobwebs. Contrary to the secular society of Western Europe, Poland is full of people who have welcomed and have been sustained by their faith.

Such fidelity to the Catholic Church is most evident while driving around Poland itself. Within the very structures of some homes, there are carved pedestals above the front doors that enthrone a statue of the Virgin Mary. While passing through towns and along countryside, one finds roadside chapels. However, if the chapel is especially for Jesus or the Virgin Mary, it is referred to as a *figurka*. There are numerous crosses, statues (especially of Jesus and the Virgin Mary), and saintly figurines dotting the landscape, usually surrounded by a small fence and adorned with flowers, colorful ribbons, and candles. The local people all pitch in to take care of the religious figures. Such roadside chapels are often found where accidents had occurred or strategically placed at crossroads to prevent a tragedy or to bring good fortune or to commemorate a special event. The women of some villages may group together to sing hymns to the Virgin Mary at the roadside chapels especially on the feast of her Assumption. Moreover, when passing the roadside chapels, Catholics often make the sign of the cross.



I was surprised that Polish families generally do not say grace or a traditional catholic meal prayer before eating. Instead, the head of the household or an elder will tell those gathered “*smacznego.*” It is a signal to begin eating as well as a wish for those gathered to have a good meal, much like saying “*Bon Appetit,*” a common French phrase.

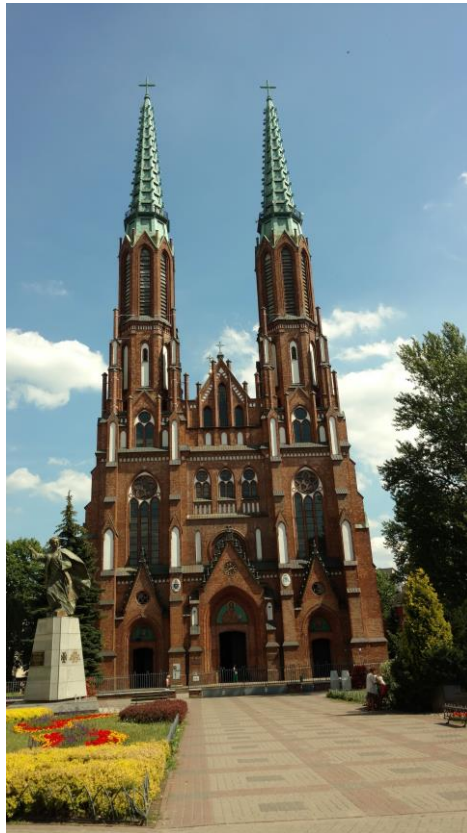
Ironically, Europe has centuries of history, but its people value modern decor in everything. On the other hand, the United States, a relatively young country, values that which is antique. Luckily, the same cannot be said for Polish Churches. The ones that I saw were old and grand on both the inside and the outside in a way that time has not yet allowed for in the United States.



Parish in Białogrzegi



Interior- Jasna Góra Monastery, Częstochowa



St. Florian's Cathedral, Warsaw

One Sunday evening I went to mass alone. At that time, I was grateful to be a catholic. Grateful to be part of the universal church. Grateful that the universal church's order of mass is the same everywhere. Although I do not speak polish, I could participate. I had no idea what they were saying. I was blind in that way, but on another, my senses were heightened. It was not that I was in a beautiful church with stained glass windows, hand painted biblical scenes, and an altar with gold flourishes. Rather, I came to realize that the faith within this church was old, long standing, and permanently instilled. That is a feeling that I have never experienced at home. The imprint allowed me to be together with strangers, praying in peace, and reflecting in sacred silence.

Although Catholic masses have the same order everywhere, I do notice some differences between a Texas/US catholic mass and a Polish mass. Making the sign of the cross with holy water upon entering and exiting the church seems optional; some do it, and some do not. In the US, it seems that Catholics are trained to make the sign of the cross immediately upon entering and exiting the church. Genuflecting before the altar before sitting in the pew is also not a big deal here like it is in the United States. Perhaps it is specific to the town I am residing in, but there is no procession leading up to the altar at the beginning of mass. Instead, the priests and altar boys come out of a door at the side of the altar, and mass is convened by a quick ringing of a specific side bell. I have not seen any deacons participating at the altar in mass. However, no less than 5 priests are present for high mass while 2 to 3 are present for an evening mass. Additionally, there are no altar girls, only boys. Unlike in the US where one has the option to receive the Eucharist directly by mouth or by way of the hands, here the Church only allows communion to be given on the tongue.

Actually receiving the Eucharist here is unlike that in the United States where there is much order: each pew goes row by row from front to back and nearly everyone receives communion. I was quite confused observing the people randomly rising from pews everywhere in the church in order to get in line and noticed that so many people did not receive the Body of Christ. I later discussed this with my host mother, Ela. You see, in America communion is stressed and here confession is stressed. Ela reflected that receiving the Eucharist is a very serious matter for Poles. One must sincerely reflect on what they have done to others and themselves.

For instance, a reason that someone might not receive communion would be because he or she had sworn during week and thus felt unworthy of Christ. The reason is different for everyone. To Polish Catholics, they must personally feel worthy to receive the Eucharist. To not receive is a penance of sorts.

Additionally, many people want to receive the communion but cannot. There is a canon law stating that if one divorces and the marriage is not annulled by the Catholic Church, one cannot receive the Body of Christ. It appears that people in Poland adhere to this law much better than Americans.

For the celebration of the solemnity of Corpus Christi on June 17, 2017, the whole town of Białogrzegi joined together in a procession around the town with everyone moving to different, elaborate altars personally made by the townspeople. Additionally, miniature altars could be seen on the porches and windowsills of the townsfolk, each with flowers beside either a cross or a small replica of the Black Madonna. Altar boys lead the procession with incense followed by *bachie* (grandmothers) carrying a large wooden rosary and plaques of the Virgin Mary and the Sacred Heart of Jesus adorned with colorful ribbons. Lay people carried different liturgical banners, and a marching band played hymns.



Bringing up the rear were little girls all dressed in white gowns dropping flower petals before the priest who held the monstrance possessing the Eucharist. As the priest passed, everyone fell to their knees. After each altar a reading was recited, the townspeople sang hymns, and the priests gave mini homilies. There was much sacred silence and kneeling by both young and old alike. The procession continued until we reached the church which was over flowing with people ready to finally receive the Holy Eucharist. The solemnity of Corpus Christi is considered a national holiday. There is no work for any business or on anyone's farm. Such a momentous and religious undertaking is improbable in America: an entire catholic town together and in sync to celebrate a catholic holiday.





I have concluded that if Texas is God's country in the Americas, then Poland is God's country in Europe. I have never met such people of faith and prayer. While many Texans are vocal about their religious beliefs, as a catholic myself, I have found it refreshing to have people whose faith is so deeply rooted in their lives. I suppose this fact could be

attributed to how much Poles have suffered as a people. Through all the trials Polish people have endured, they have trusted God, the Father Almighty to preserve them and their beautiful culture.

Z bogiem, Go with God.

New Experiences

Shelby Power

Never having left the United States, I knew that my trip to Poland was going to be life changing, and just after a few days here, I was right.

Traveling out of the US and even more so to Poland, I have seen some things both new and old that have just amazed me! The first days of our trip were filled with sightseeing and education from all aspects of Polish agriculture.

Old Town

Our first day in Poland we went around Warsaw to see most of Old Town Warsaw and it was pretty amazing to see all the architectural differences from what is in the United States. All



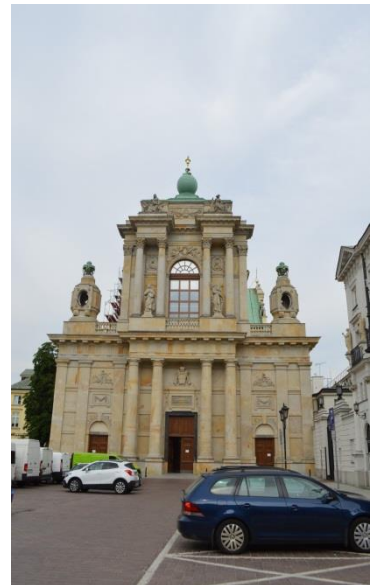
of the vibrant colors and details really make Old Town feel like something out of a story book. It is one thing to hear history about a certain place but to actually witness it, is another.



Agriculture School



We started off our first full day in Poland with a little road trip to an agriculture school and we were able to get a little background in the history and information on agriculture in Poland. We were greeted with a Texas flag flying in front of the school which was pretty cool!

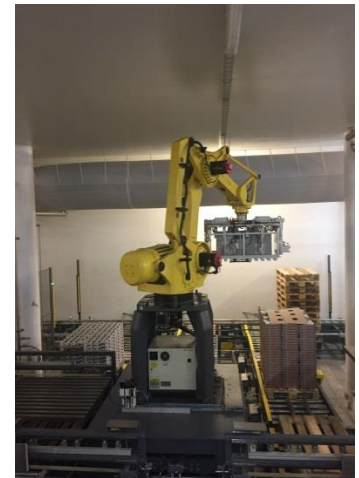


Factory and Farm Visits

After hearing about all the facts and figures of Poland's agriculture we headed off to a few factory and farm visits where we were able to really see how Poland's agriculture industry runs. The most interesting thing about how these factories run in Poland is that they are all automated. While walking through the Piatnica factory there were hardly any people seen, as machines and robots did 90% of the work, if not more. Even though they had about 600



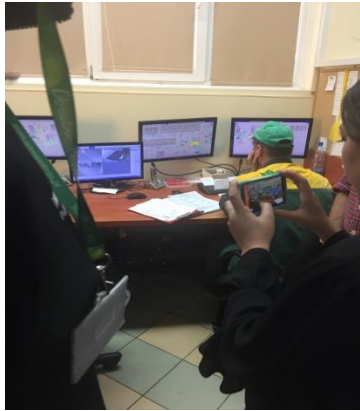
employees at this particular factory we only saw about 20 because this factory runs 24/7/365 and has three different shifts.



The differences I noticed the most in the Polish farms versus American farms was the fact that these farms still operated with a lot of the same machinery and infrastructure that they had been using for years.



Moving on to more factories the usage of machines and robots instead of people was noticed again even in feed mills we visited.



Parliament

Before we headed off to meet our host families we met with the Minister of Agriculture and got to go to Parliament and meet some of the members. It was very interesting to see how the Polish government works as it is very similar to the US but also very different. It was a honor to be able



to get to meet with all of the distinguished members of Polish government, as it was a very special opportunity.

