

## **Ja a Polska – Morgane Chiocchia**

Growing up in France, thinking I had no particular link to Poland, I never thought I would get to be close to that country. That changed however when I met my boyfriend, Michał.

If I had to go to Poland at some point, I always thought it would be in one of the big cities. Warsaw, or Krakow probably... well I visited Gryfino, Brzyskorzystewko, and Bydgoszcz. Meaning on top of having to learn how to pronounce the names of cities in which I could barely find the vowels, I was an attraction everywhere I would go. Not that many foreigners there.

I did not think I would ever have to learn Polish because well, it would be a lot of effort for someone who is already learning four other languages, right? And probably people in Poland would know English, or maybe some German and we could easily communicate. That changed too after my first visit to Poland. Quoting the grand-mother « I am too old to learn another language, she has to learn Polish » (nicely translated by my luby). Quoting the mother, « (something I could not understand because it was in Polish and I was alone with her) ».

I never thought it could be an issue for me not to be religious. France is a very secular country where religion is expected to really stay in the private sphere. But in Poland I learned that Jean Paul II was THE Pope – his picture being in all the houses I have been to. And when I asked a friend about Polish literature to get the spirit of it, I learned I should read the Pope's letters. Also, even if it is not a big deal with Michał nor among most of his friends, the grand-mother should never (ever) know I was not specifically religious.

I always thought what people said about the bad weather in Poland were legends. I changed my mind however when I went to the North of the country last Easter... as everyday was a season carousel. Even in April, I lived through snow, thunderstorms and hail.

After a little while hanging out with a Polish crowd, I made some friend (hurray). And learned their names. Nothing tremendously amazing about that. However, it is only after a few months that I was made aware of an important fact: the names I learned were not people's real names. That would be too easy. They were

nicknames. But not nicknames like Pete for Peter, Barb for Barbara, or so.. No. My friend Gosia was actually called Małgorzata. And Ola was Aleksandra.

Also, once you get the name (real or nick), you have to know that it declines depending on its function in the sentence. Let's take Michał for example. Well in the nominative case it stays the same. That's the only case it does. Then it can become Michała (genitive and accusative), Michałowi (dative), Michałem (instrumental), or Michale (locative and vocative). Of course, it also changes if you talk about several Michał(s).

After 3 months, I was able to 'explain' (in five words) why I wanted to learn Polish: "bo moj chłopak jest Polakiem". That does not change, but now there is also more: I want to learn Polish because I like the sound of it. I want to learn Polish because Poland is our neighbour and there is no better way to know each other than to speak each other's languages. And I want to learn Polish because it allows me to communicate with some amazing people. As for those less amazing, I would rather know what they have to say anyways.

Polish language is rich. And so is the culture. I love that I can begin to say a few words and steal some smiles. I love that it has surprised me and proved me I was sometimes (often) wrong. Yes it is true, it isn't easy, and not that many people learn it. But that I find is also an advantage: like knowing a secret language and code. And being just a few that are able to speak it. Like a treasure language.