

Nowadays the word Poland occupies a special place in my heart. Poland has changed my destiny having entered it without prior notice when I was quite a mature person.

I was surrounded by Polish words and phrases in abundance from the early childhood when my grandmother was alive. Kamiezelka, pasek, rower, rajstopy. When grandparents argued I often could hear “nie masz głowę na karku”. Being a child I never filtered their language. Years later the three languages got separated in my head – Russian, Belarussian and Polish. At the age of 5-6 I found some old prewar polish textbooks on Maths in the attic. At that moment those letters and words looked alien to me. But I was too small to ask questions. Now I would have asked them thousands of questions, but I don't have the possibility, they passed away too early, because lived their life “jak dzikie osły”.

I never asked my mum questions, she never told me anything about her parents' families. In my soviet childhood, school and country we were all soviet people with no way to have different, not soviet past.

In 2013 at the age of 15 my older daughter Jana entered gymnasia in Minsk where along with English she started studying Polish language. I have a very vivid memory of the moment I took her ‘Krok po kroku’ in my hands for the first time. Lekcja “Za małe, za duże, w sam raz”. Kozaki, stanik, szalik... I was reading all these words from my childhood and felt the smell of granny's hands, her pies...

A year before finishing school Jana made a decision to enter a polish university. Her polish tutor advised me to find confirmation of my polish origin to get ‘Karta Polaka’ for my daughter and my son. I spent the whole year writing letters to historical, national, regional archives, to Warsaw military archive. But in vain.

Three months before Jana's 18<sup>th</sup> birthday I found two envelopes in my post-box from two different archives with the

necessary confirmation. I wept. I was the happiest and unhappiest person at that moment. There was too little time for me to learn Polish and pass the exam to get 'Karta Polaka' before my daughter's adulthood. As a teacher of English I had no idea how to learn Polish to speak it fluently with the polish Consul in two months.

I spent a sleepless night. Next morning at 7 a.m. I was sitting at the desk with the headphones on, listening to my first audio track from 'Krok po kroku' with the alphabet. There was a calendar on the wall opposite me with highlighted dates and notes of 26 units on them. Unbelievable, but I did it. I stopped working for two months, my mother moved to my apartment, helped with the housework, cooked for the whole family. And I spent these two months somewhere in the Space between the past and the future, from morning till night learning Polish, studying polish history, dates, kings and legends. Two days before my daughter's 18<sup>th</sup> birthday I received my 'Karta Polaka' and that was the last opportunity for my daughter to apply for it.

Three years have passed. But time doesn't make all these things seem less incredible. That was the moment when a lot changed in our lives. I took my family and my mum to the place my grandparents lived, we made a 300 km journey. My children visited their grand grandparents' graves for the first time.

At the end of this April Jana is applying for polish citizenship, we have all the necessary documents and hope that will become true.

My son is 13, in two years we're planning to enter Lyceum Kostki in Warsaw, after that a medical university. He dreams of becoming a surgeon.

That's life in all its manifestations – unbelievable, incredible and unpredictable. Eventually Poland became for me the second motherland. My daughter spends the best years of her youth in a wonderful city called Warsaw. She adores this green city with the mixture of polish and global culture. We take every smallest

opportunity to visit her and spend another two days visiting exhibitions, museums, walking down the streets in old town, along Vistula. The last exhibition I visited with my daughter this March was at Narodowa Galeria Sztuki Zachęta "Dzikość serca", quite difficult to digest, sometimes wild and arguable, but very interesting. I always start reading information about the exhibits in Polish language, but as it is not so good, every time come back to the English variant to get the details. Warsaw is rich in places of interest. We've visited plenty of them.

One of the first things we bought in Poland was a polish guidebook. Every year we choose a new destination on Poland's map. We can afford such trips only once a year. For these three years we visited Krakow, Polskie Tatry and Trojmiasto. Still we don't have common opinion what place we like most in Poland. Wawelski smok, Sopot swans in the Baltic, king's castle in Krakow, winter fairytale in Zakopane – all these are threads of a colourful carpet made by unique people, nature and time.

With this inborn love to Poland I infected not only my family but also my husband's family, The Voloviches. Long before my 'discoveries' they told me they had polish ancestors. My story helped them raise the issue. After numerous repressions in their family in 1937 they made themselves deaf about who they were. Fear, anguish and despair made this topic a tabu for more than half a century. Actually that's not an exaggeration. At the beginning my father-in-law was afraid to discuss things about 'Karta Polaka' with me on the phone. By the moment they've done a genealogical research in the State Historical Archive, found their relatives they had never known. They all say to everybody they are Polish. My husband and his sister are learning Polish. We gave 'Krok po kroku' to her as a birthday present.

Do I think all that mentioned above is a miracle? To some extent - yes. These two magic envelopes that I found simultaneously

in my post-box at the very last possible moment may prove miracles happen.

Was it easy for me to kick the anthill, break peace and silence in my and my husband's family? Not at all. But that was worth it.

My ancestors dwelled outside the boundaries of Poland not by their own choice. I'm happy that in this life I was given the possibility to turn time back, to restore the roots and history of my family and give my children choice to choose where to live, what language to speak. And Polish language is a bridge for us all to fill in the generation gap, to go deep insight into the history and culture of Poland. Three years ago during my first visit to Poland I bought a couple of wonderful books for children 'Polska moja ojczyzna' and 'Polska. To lubie!', with their help page by page me and my family opened Poland from various angles.

I can read books, watch movies and series, listen to the radio in Polish. And I do. We all do. I always try to speak it when I'm in Poland. But I start my speech with a small remark "Przepraszam, nie mówię po Polsku świetnie, ale spróbuję..."