



# Ja i Polska

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## Christmas at the hospital

It is **Christmas time in 2017**. We look much more forward to this Christmas Eve than usually because this year Babcia and Dziadek are coming. Or so we think until...

Babcia calls us. Very seriously she says that they unfortunately cannot come. Dziadek is admitted to the hospital in Poland. The doctor has found out that he has cancer. We quickly leave.

Dziadek is laying weak in his bed. I have never seen him like this before. He always had a lot of energy. When I take his hand, he opens his eyes – two bright diamonds shine with joy. A smile is growing on his lips – a smile I never forget, and which makes even the sun jealous. The doctor does not know how long time my granddad has left. They are planning an operation as soon as possible.

Christmas Eve we sit in the hospital and put our arms round each other while looking at Dziadek with tears in our eyes. We hope the very best.

Then I know I need to do something. I have to learn Polish – which is the only language my granddad speaks – so I can enjoy the last time with him even more.



## We are red, we are white. We stand together side by side

Poland is one of few countries in which I have met so many kind people, got delicious food and been completely infatuated with so many interesting cultural experiences. I am very happy and proud of my Polish family.

My mother moved, as strong and courageous she is, to Denmark more than 25 years ago. As many others, she hoped to get a better life on the other side of the Polish borders. My grandparents stayed in Łódź, a very different, but interesting city and my “second home”.

Suddenly they were left alone while their only child and their grandchildren were over a thousand kilometres away. When they realised it, it felt like they have swallowed the entire Sahara Desert. No matter how much they worked, they missed something. They missed us. My and my brother’s birthday 21 years ago was a big event that brought our multicultural family together. My family flaked with red and white colours. Denmark and Poland were united.



### **Letter from granddad**

*June 2018. A busy morning the doorbell rings. Outside there is a postman with a huge package. We are very happy and excited. We get even happier when we open it. Our dogs are also getting very close, because they can smell something very good – Polskie kiełbasy! There is also a letter in the package. A letter from granddad. It says that he has just returned home from another stay at the hospital. He writes that he loves us, and that he has a lot he wants to tell us the next time we visit them.*



### **A present from heaven**

My father had a wish that we should only speak Danish at home. Unfortunately, this meant that my brother and I did not learn Polish sufficiently. We only met our grandparents rarely, and we managed with just learning a few Polish words. Even though, I not always understood what they said to me, it felt warm and pleasant. Therefore, Polish has become a “language of love” for me.

I thought it was pretty cool that Babcia could say all sorts of things to me in the queue in the supermarket, without anyone reacting on it. Only she and I had our own completely secret language. We had a lot of fun with that...

Until that day, the children in school started laughing at my brother and me.

They had seen when Babcia picked us up from school, and they had noticed the different language. They began to tease us. They thought we were strange. One day I was so sad that I hide myself in one of the bathrooms at school. I cried until my whole t-shirt was drenched with tears.

Fortunately, a lot has happened since then, when my brother and I were teased in school, and I – shy as I was – started to feel it embarrassing talking Polish. Now I am cleverer, and I can better defend myself, even if some people still have prejudices about Poland and Poles. I have realized how great a gift I am born with. Without Poland I would never have become the person I am today. I would probably – like

many Danes – even have cheated myself from exploring this incredibly beautiful country.

Every summer my grandparents have shown my brother and I a part of who they are by travelling around in Poland. Exactly as I showed my friends a part of me last summer...

*In **August 2018** we were travelling to the amber paradise Gdańsk. I had plucked up courage and practised for weeks to get ready.*

*We had a wonderful week. I was confirmed in two things. First of all, my travel partners were good and true friends - and secondly, it was an advantage to be able to speak another foreign language. I was surprised: my friends did not tease me. On the contrary, they thought it was cool that I tried to speak Polish with all those I met – the waiter, as well as the taxi driver, receptionist and a curious old woman, I helped with carrying a heavy shopping bag to her car outside a shopping mall.*

*This means that I am more impassioned about improving my Polish language, so I hopefully soon can have a natural and interesting conversation with my grandfather.*



### **"Dziękuję bardzo"**

**Christmas 2018.** Dziadek cannot drive so far by car anymore. For that reason, we visit them in Poland. We are greeted with smiles, hugs and a big box of Prince Polo. Dziadek looks nice. Fortunately, he is no longer so thin.

*During this Christmas Dziadek tells us a lot about his life and family. For instance, he tells us about his childhood during the 2<sup>nd</sup> World War, and how the family hid and stuck together so the Germans could not find them. He also tells us about growing up with 7 other siblings and how to handle the harsh conditions and the inadequate resources.*

*Although my brother and I understand most of it, we have troubles with answering and asking about what Dziadek says. I am limited by my Polish speaking skills. It irritates me. I want to show him that the things he tells means a lot to me. I want to better understand his jokes and the meaning of the folk music he is singing.*

Wherever we have been in Poland: whether we have been hiking in the impressive and beautiful Tatra-mountains or have mushrooming in the big wild forests in Białowieża, local Poles have always been very kind and helpful. I really appreciate that. These people have shown me how important it is to be curious and brave and help each other. They have also given me good advice, tips and tricks – and fun jokes – that have made my everyday life even better. For instance, my mother has taught me, how to fight for justice and how to cook the very best bigos.

When I think back on all those nice memories, I wish that I could have shown them my gratitude more than just saying "dziękuje bardzo!"



## **My dream**

**January 2019.** *I jump down from the couch and into the new year. As I jump, I promise myself, that during the next year I want to improve my fluency in Polish. I know that time is short when you are just as old as my grandparents. Therefore, I make assignments on the website and watch videos in Polish, whenever I get the chance for it. Now and then I am so much into it that the librarian hushes me. Then I realise that I sing along to some Polish songs I am listening to on my phone.*

Sometimes when I cannot sleep, I even try to hum the Polish lullabies such as "Aaa, Kotki Dwa" my mom tended to sing when I was a baby. Those nights I have fantastic dreams about all the lovely experiences I have had in the amazing country and my loving grandparents. However, the best dream is about me sitting next to Dziadek talking to him about his life stories and making him (including myself) proud. That is why I now try to let my dream come true.

The warmth I am feeling when I think about Poland turns on a light inside me. A light that I will protect from wind, rain and thunder and pass on to the children, I someday will have.

My Polish adventures are not finished yet. Inside me a heart beats filled with love. Love for Poland.

