

Poland and me

By Jacqueline M. Cisneros Beker

If some years ago they had asked me what I know about Poland, I would have said that it is a "buffer state", that from there is John Paul II and that they are all blond.

And nothing more. I knew nothing else and nothing else interested me to know.

Poland for me was nothing more than a "buffer state" always suffering in its land the consequences of being geographically in the middle of opposing countries. That's what he had learned in high school.

Poland was the homeland of John Paul II, which was far from the known world (for me). Not for nothing to be elected Pope said he came "from a distant country."

And if in Argentina someone was blond, they automatically received the nickname "Polish", therefore, in Poland they were all blond. Pure logic.

"We want you to be the godmother of our first baby" my friend told me with her husband. She was from Bolivia, I had met her in Argentina, and then she had emigrated to Spain, where she met her Polish husband, with whom after they married they lived in Norway. A mixture of countries!

That's how I traveled to Norway in November 2014, with all the excitement and expectation of traveling alone by plane, around 30 hours, with stops and delays to lower the cost of the ticket. I was sure it would be the last time for several, several years.

I was at my friend's house about 15 days. And on Monday, November 20, at the beginning of my second week there, the family arrived from Poland!

I remember until today when he, the godfather, went through the door, dressed in a suit and tie (too formal to be just a plane ride, I thought), with his golden beard, his big blue eyes, his clear and clean look, and her sweet smile, that only seeing her conveyed joy.

I had the goddaughter in my arms, the granddaughter. The first. And I was the "stranger" in the place, that's how I felt, because I was not from the family. For what I felt a little strange when everyone came to greet me with such sympathy and admire the beauty of that baby. Of course it was very exciting.

Thus began my knowledge, more closely, of the Poles. As always, one knows a couple of people and already believes that they are all like that in their country. "For example, one button is enough," we say in Argentina.

The in-laws of my friend arrived with many bags, loaded with food brought from Poland: sausages, sausages, flour, bread, meat, noodles for soup, hams, sweets ... They also brought gifts, but for everyone! Even for me. Yes, for me, the stranger of the house; a scarf, a hat, chocolates, cosmetics And also with gifts for the family of Spain! for the brothers and brothers-in-law of my friend. I thought "but if it's not Christmas, it's not my birthday, why gifts?" So I began to see that "the Poles" were rare, and too much too.

With the family had also come a priest friend ... a priest who dressed as a priest! Something less and less common in my country, unfortunately.

And the coexistence began.

Every day breakfasts plentiful, with the super decorated table, and things like salchicas, eggs, tomatoes, hams for breakfast! I was used to my milk and toast with cheese and jam, I saw before me a banquet rather than lunch time.

After spending a lot of time having breakfast, we raised the table and "Do we make coffee?" asked a Polish "But we just finished breakfast ... and already coffee?" I thought.

Then came lunch, which was prepared together by my friend's mother-in-law. Together! The man and the woman cooking together! These Poles were very rare.

And very strange lunches for me there was no beef! And the salads were not of lettuce and tomato. There was also no bread on the table to accompany the meals. But there was never a lack of a plate of potatoes. And of course, always a starter soup soup? Yes, soup, the soup so feared by Argentine children, which is more a punishment than a meal. Well, the Poles took soup (after which I was already satisfied, since I was used to eating only one dish, even if it was soup) ... and they drank tea! Tea with food? What was that? You are right. Tea with food, with everything, always, and at any temperature.

And then dinner would come, which was not what I understood as dinner, if not again, cold meats, sausages, cheeses ...

Everything prepared in detail every day.

In the middle of the meals, which governed the order of the day, we prayed the rosary, we had Mass. Mass? Yes, because Poles are very religious, I learned. Walks And fun attempts to communicate and talk. The Poles said something in their language, the husband of my friend or his brother translated it into English, and then my friend translated it into Spanish, so, with a little delay, jokes and comments came to us. And the same process on the other side. It was the first time I tasted alcohol, given the unwavering insistence of the Polish tata! Because alcohol could not miss either.

There they were all older, except my friend and her husband, and his brother, who was the godfather of the baby. It was with him that I shared most of the time. Every day we took care of washing and drying the dishes, which, as there were many, gave us space to hold long conversations. We would sit together, we would walk together, we would even cook together ... and that is how a feeling and a desire began to appear, which we both felt from the first moment, but which none of us had dared to express, for fear of not being reciprocated! We both felt "little" for each other, both were afraid of rejection, and to seem crazy for pretending to start something serious, after only a week, just one, of having met us. Besides, Argentina was so far away! We were both studying, beginning our working life. What could we build together? But also, inside of us, we were both sure.

Finally came the day of returning to reality, the Buenos Aires summer. It seemed like a dream all that I had lived, and I was convinced I wanted a family like that!

Thanks to the technology, we had daily contact with the sponsor ... and a month after I returned, a package arrived for me from Poland! Again a lot of gifts, this time on the occasion of Christmas and imminent. And also, a letter ... a letter that died to read, but also did not encourage me

to do so. A letter that I was sure would end up defining our friendship, the godfather had declared to me! And I, who was less formal, corresponded to his feelings through an electronic message.

So I could say that there was a new beginning in my knowledge of the Poles, this time, in a more personal way.

I traveled to Poland 7 months later, it was summer there. This time I had to stay at the home of who since then, was my boyfriend. I knew what a "normal" Polish breakfast was like. I learned what it was like to be sitting around the table for hours, talking and talking (well, they translated to me), and that Poland also has summer, and hot, and that despite that, they never take off their socks and walk barefoot. The respected traditions, such as going to bless the car for San Cristof, or abstinence from alcohol, or cleaning the windows, or hot soup even if it is very hot, or changing your shoes when entering the house. I met Krakow, Wadowice, the sanctuary of mercy, Zakopane.

I returned later in January. I learned that the Polish New Year is not necessarily in family, as for Argentines, it's okay to leave your parents alone at home and go to a party, that Reyes is precept, but they are not allowed the shoe, the grass and the water, that the Poles don't drink any alcohol if they have to drive, that they are passionate about winter sports, that there is a fatty Thursday, that never comes out outside without a hat on his head. I discovered that in Poland there are churches everywhere, nuns everywhere and green spaces everywhere. They have a variety of cheeses, milks, hams, yogurts. I confirmed that they find it hard to see all the benefits and wonders of their country.

And I returned to return in April of the following year, 2017, this time already to get married and to take root in these lands. My husband wanted to live in Norway too, but I convinced him that Poland is better for have a family. Since then I have not stopped discovering, confirming and admiring that the Polish culture, tradition and history are admirable and that they defend and preserve it, because they know what it is to be under control Foreign!

Today we are waiting, with my Polish husband, our first baby, Ignacio Paweł. It was not difficult for me to integrate into Polish society. I can say that I have friends. Even though my Pole is very poor, I manage to communicate, because they are very open to it. And thank God, we've been running into wonderful people, who make my husband tell me "you're always lucky".

Of course I love my Argentine land, I miss her, I love my culture, my traditions. But I am also very grateful for the grace of living here, and for my family to be half Argentinian and half Polish, nurturing the best of both nations.

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