

## Poland and Me: A Bicycle Trip in Siedlce

“Where do you want to go?” I asked.

“Up to you. I have no idea,” she replied.

“Neither do I,” I said and then we both laughed. We had no more talk, for both of us were enjoying the peace and quiet of the city.

Claudia and I were roommates. For four weeks, we had spent time together in Siedlce, a small city in the east of Poland. One evening, we felt guilty for eating too much chocolate and were afraid of getting fat. So, we decided to bike around the town. I was in the front and followed by Claudia because she wanted me to be the navigator.

We biked randomly to another side of the town where we had never gone before. It was calmer and more unfamiliar. Thanks to the glittering midsummer sunshine, everything in the town seemed to be more lively and cheerful. There were gold beetles and rainbow butterflies fluttering over tiny blooming daisies. Everywhere along the single-lane road were many houses and apartments, painted with colorful wallpaper, such as pistachio green, salmon pink, hazelnut brown, and lemon yellow. Blueberry bushes and pretty buttercups adorned the tiny garden of almost every house. The terraces of some rooms in the buildings were decorated with lovely lilacs and red roses planted in small pots. As we were biking past the park, the evening wind carried the faint smell of dog pee. It was turned into a meeting point for dog lovers that evening. A pocket-sized Yorkshire terrier with a purplish pink gingham bandana around her neck was sitting on an old lady’s lap, staring at a dachshund. His silky dark brown furs made him look more like a grilled sausage. There might be an ongoing conversation between them that no man could ever hear or understand.

“Do you want to turn right here?” I asked Claudia when we were crossing the intersection.

“I don’t know. Are you sure we can find our way back?” she fretted.

“Yes, I saw the railroad at the end of the street,” I assured her.

The railroad was located near our dormitory. So, I was quite sure that we could take this way to go back. We turned right and biked into an alley where the street was narrower and lower. We stopped by a grey and white two-storey house. A chubby white cat with an orange tail was sitting in the garden, watching birds.

“Dobry wieczór” we greeted it in Polish and cycled to the railroad, hoping to find a bench to sit on because we were very tired.

It must have been around 7 p.m. when we reached the railway. Neither of us had a watch or a telephone, but we could tell from the color of the sky. The sun had just gone, leaving the fluffy cotton candy clouds swirling in the moonlight. We sat on the roadside near the railway. In front of us were fields of blooming yellow flowers stretching out as far as the eye could see. Whether by accident or design, they were there, free and beautiful.

“I miss home,” Claudia said. I could feel the sadness in her voice.

“Me, too. We will be home soon,” I told her.

We sat there at dusk on the roadside a while longer, watching the unforgotten image of the endless sky. It reminded me of the moment when I applied for this exchange program in Poland. I’d never dreamed I’d have the courage to do this before. How could I dare to be far away from home for that long with strangers from all around the world? I might have been in a trance. Anyway, I did it and one of those strangers finally became my best buddy. The sky silently turned dark blue as we cycled back to our dorm, guided by the lights from the lampposts alongside the railway.