

Poland and I

I've seen a different view of Poland than most Canadians. Every year that I have travelled to Poland (and this summer will mark my third) I have stayed at an archaeological site. The site is just outside the village of Drawsko, in Gmina Drawsko. Our dig operates out of two schools in town. My bedroom is *Klasa 1B*, which I share with the other foreign staff. The site we are excavating is a cemetery. We are funded primarily by the tuition of students who participate in the International Slavia Field School in Mortuary Archaeology. Our students travel from around the world to learn how to excavate a cemetery, and about Polish history and culture.

Every morning the people working in the field walk two kilometers to the site. The lab I run for the summer is in the *szkoła* across the street from the larger school we live in. The staff and students in the field excavate skeletons, pottery, and other artifacts. They then bring the excavated materials to me in the lab. Along with a team of foreign and Polish staff, I catalogue, clean, label, and store the artifacts. We teach the students how to do the same. Every evening we have *obiad*, which I've learned is important not to confuse with *obiekt*, an archeological feature that often contains a grave.

I feel at home in Drawsko. The countryside reminds me of rural Alberta, the Canadian province I grew up in. It is a small, one-street village. Everyone knows who the foreigners are, and they welcome us to their home every year. I almost never walk down the street without being met by a *dzień dobre*. The shopkeepers kindly put up with our confused pointing. A kind older man who lives a couple houses down from us collects our left over bread to feed his rabbits. On the last day, he invited us over to meet them. He explains how the villagers swap rabbits with one another every year. He points at the lone black rabbit and says, "*jeden jest czarny*". I am ecstatic that I understand him.

I've been lucky to travel around Poland when I wasn't working. A friend and I decided we wanted to go hiking, so we took a train to Jelenia Góra, where we

stayed at a local hostel. We didn't want to carry our entire luggage with us, so with the aid of a Polish phrasebook and a lot of gesturing, we left our luggage behind with the promise we would return in two days. We hopped on a bus to Szklarska Poręba and before long were trekking in the Karkonosze, on our way through the mountains to Karpasz. We spent that evening in a wilderness hostel, which was much less wild than we thought it would be. We had packed enough food for two days and were pleasantly surprised to find a restaurant where we could grab a hot bowl of *zupa* and a refreshing glass of *piwo*. I was also excited to discover an indoor climbing wall in the hostel. I love to rock climb and hadn't been in the two months since I'd left Canada. The other people using the wall were Polish and were more than happy to have a Canadian whose Polish was limited to *cześć* join them. The following morning my friend and I headed out to summit Śnieżka. That evening we returned to Jelenia Góra and were met by the smiles of the hostel owner and his family, who had kept our luggage safe exactly where we left it.

Although the Polish countryside has stolen my heart, I've also really enjoyed my time in Polish cities. From the Warsaw Uprising Museum to the Teutonic Castle Ruins in Toruń, Poland has so many stories to tell. I've been part of the crowd of tourists gathering in Poznań's *stary rynek* to see the goats at noon. They unhurriedly creak outwards to the beat of the trumpeter's horn, slowly butting heads not once but twelve times to mark the hour. My friend, who has lived in Poznań for years, laughs as she tells me this is the first time she's ever seen the goats. The locals, she assures me, only head out to the square at night, when the tourists are less and the drinks are plenty. A few weeks later, we return to Poznań after our jobs have finished for the summer to do just that. We order local brews at a small pub before heading to *Muchos Patatos* to dance salsa. As the night winds down, we stop for *zapiiekanka* as she walks me back to my hostel.

My first trip to Poland I was a vegan. One of the first Polish phrases I learned was *Jestem weganką*. The caterers at our excavation site were very accommodating to us vegetarians. While most of the staff and students were eating *kotlet*, a handful of us had *kotlet sojowy*. When I was travelling, I gravitated towards the local

“Greenway,” where I had even more *kotlet sojowy*. I now eat meat again, and on my most recent trip Poland I enjoyed even more amazing dishes. I really miss Polish food while I’m in Canada, so I’ve taken to trying to recreate some of my favorite Polish dishes at home. I’ve made *pierogi* (my favorite are *pierogi z kapustą i grzybami*), *czzerwony barszcz*, *nalesniki*, and *szarlotka*. I was very excited to discover a nearby European grocery that carries Polish chocolates, and there is a Polish family who sells amazing *kielbasa* at the weekly farmers market in my neighborhood. I still haven’t managed to find *smalec*, though.

I am very excited to be returning to Poland again this summer. I was unsure if I would be able to afford to do so. The foundation I work for provides me with room and board, but no financial compensation. I am also required to pay for my own flights to and from Poland. I am a student in Canada, so it is quite challenging to save up the money while I am in classes. Fortunately, I was able to scrape up just enough money for my flights. This is why I hope for a scholarship from the Summer School of Polish Language and Culture. Because of the expenses of my work in Poland, I am unable to afford the tuition. I would love the opportunity to expand my knowledge of the Polish language, especially while I’m in Poland where I can talk with native speakers. This scholarship would make it possible for me to do so.

I’ve learned a lot from my time spent in Poland. I’ve learned that if you pronounce vodka like a Canadian, you will end up with a bottle of *Warka*. I’ve learned that a smile, *proszę*, and *dziękuję*, will get you far. I’ve learned that, no matter how full the train is, you never want to stand right outside the bathroom. I’ve learned that *wódka* really is the cure for the common cold. But most of all, I’ve learned that Poland is an amazing country I can’t wait to learn even more about.