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To me, being Polish and living in America is extremely interesting. I've lived in Chicago all my life and only visited Poland 4 times. My family migrated here in 1992, in search of a better life to fulfill their American dreams. To this day I still hear stories about how hard it was in Poland. Apparently everyday before school they would wake up at 5 am to feed the animals and milk the cows and then even after all that they had to walk 5 miles to get to school. (They use these stories against me every time I complain about something). But in all honesty they were one of the lucky ones at that time. Along with their luggage and suitcases they brought over their own traditions, culture and language. My parents both had to finish school in America, not knowing any English. They struggled through school and were expected to work at the same time. My mom worked at a local grocery store making minimum wage, just enough to keep my grandma happy. They knew that their hard work would eventually pay off and provide their kids with an easier life. So they persevered and did that they had to do.

When I was little I only spoke Polish, it was my first language. I started picking up English by watching TV more and more and then it was taught to me in pre school. Even though I was born in the United States I never truly felt American. I grew up like every kid playing in the backyard, fighting with my brother and kneeling beside my bed at night to pray right before sleeping. Being Polish in middle school, I stood out. No one else's skin was as pale as mine, no one was as tall as me and no one had an accent quite like mine. During that time all any kid wants to do is fit in, so I did everything I could to be a normal American kid. When I started growing up I started realizing that my differences shouldn't be hidden, instead they should be appreciated and shown off. I started appreciating things about me, I knew a language and celebrated holidays most of my friends didn't. I get to celebrate Wigilia, Boże narodzenie, Wielkanoc, śmigus dyngus and more. My religion and ethnicity is such a big part of me now.

Two years ago I visited Poland with my mom, dad and brother. It was our first time visiting Poland in 10 years. I barely remembered it but some things were still surprisingly familiar. I met family I didn't even know existed, turns out I have a lot more family than I thought. My aunts and uncles all looked at us like we were the famous American family. It's ironic how they think America is a much better place to live while I think Poland is a way better place to live. I guess we all wish for things we lack or don't have. Were from a little town so everything was within walking distance, the grocery stores, churches, family's houses. It was almost like they all lived on the same block. I remember pulling up to my grandmas house in Poland and staring at it in disbelief. Her house was huge! That wasn't even the most surprising part, right after I saw the house I turned around and saw three big cows eating and chomping away at the grass they walked on. I thought woah real, actual cows? Even more surprisingly in my grandmother's backyard?? How was this even possible I thought. The next morning my grandma woke me up at 5 am, which was fine because I was still jet lagged. She took me with her to feed the chickens in the stable. I bet you could imagine my shock. I fell in love with Poland

A couple months ago I got the chance to go to Poland for a week, let me tell you, this was the best week of my life. It was only me and my country. At night I would go out on the town in Krakow and see horses, shops, tourists, churches with friends I met on this trip who were my age and spoke Polish too. We would spend hours there just sipping some tea and looking at the landscape. In all honestly everything is better in Poland, the food, the people, even the air! I remember smelling the air and thinking about how much I'd miss it when I'd come back to America. On my way back to the hotel one day I started tearing up. I didn't want to go back to Chicago, I felt like Poland is where I belong and where I needed to stay. It was so cool to see that there are people just like me and my friends who speak Polish and whose parents were born and raised in Poland but now they live in other countries. I felt like we all had a connection, like all of our roots were from Poland and that's where we belong. I learned so much about other countries school systems and lifestyles. Aside from all the learning we also had fun when we had free time we would all get together and hang out in our hotel rooms or go out at night to this big plaza called a "rynek" and shop for cute souvenirs or take pictures. At the end of the trip I was devastated I had to leave my new friends and we all had to go our separate ways. I was glad I took this opportunity and went to Poland because I got to make many new memories and learn way more than I could have ever learned from a textbook at school.

In the future I'd love to go to college in Poland and take English courses. Ever since I've been little I've dreamed about living where the rest of my family lives in Poland. They all call us lucky for living in the US because they think it's so great and amazing here. While I agree there is a lot of job opportunities, life isn't just about work. I think life in Poland is a hundred times better than life here. The fresh air, the disconnect from technology and cows in your backyard. Overall I feel very connected to Poland.

I have a cultural bond with Poland, with my family and with other Polish people and I definitely wouldn't trade my culture and language for anything.