

11/15/97

To: Ceil Kaluza  
From: Pete Gwozdz  
Subject: Poland Trip Report

**Dom Polonii. Pultusk.** Nice Hotel. All around best choice for Americans staying in the area. The words "Dom Polonii" mean "home for Polish people who live in foreign countries". There is an organization that plans Polish folk festivals, music concerts, etc; apparently they use this hotel as a place for planning their events. The building was rebuilt to look like it did when the archbishop of the diocese owned it and used it as his residence. I purchased a book on the history of this castle and the immediate neighborhood, enclosed. The restaurant is excellent; I ate there twice. The plentiful staff is courteous, enthusiastic and very professional. Most of the staff understand only a bit of English; novice travelers may have difficulty being understood, but experienced patient travelers with no Polish should get by OK. My Polish, about the level of a precocious 5 year old boy, is better than the English of most of the staff; I got along fine in Polish.

The building itself is charming. The furnishings and utilities are very well appointed, but the implementation is amateur. For example, my toilet room and wash room, next to each other (seems to be Polish style to keep them separate), have nice light switches, but they are crossed; the one on the right turns on the room on the left; when both lights are on one switch is up and the other down, with no indications; the door opens toward the switches and you cannot tell if the light is on or off until you open the door and block the switches. Lots of other examples that make me think the person in charge of supervising the construction never slept in a modern hotel. It was strange to see all these people in suits and gowns, then see one of them, a drunk Polak, asleep at 3 AM on the floor blocking the hallway on the third floor. In a way, the incongruities added to my enjoyment.

I did not take time for Pultusk itself, but apparently the main square, right in front of the Dom Polonii, has excellent shopping, the old town is right there for walks, and the view of the river is nice from the hill of the hotel-castle (there are no other hills in the area).

Dom Polonii w Pultusku, 06-100 Pultusk-Zamek, centrala 0-23 6925090, 6920031,  
FAX 0-23 6920524, 6923620.

**Car Rental and Warsaw Airport. Maps.** Nice small airport convenience. Reminds me of Albany. Just walk to the counter, get your car, walk across the street to the garage, drive away. No bus ride. No surprises. Here's a new one apparently to cut down on car theft: I had to lock and unlock my Hertz car doors with the button on the key chain. When I started the car after 20 minutes of being unlocked (or opened the door with the key), the engine would run for 10 seconds and die. Of course, the gal at the counter explained it to me in perfect English at the Hertz counter. The Poland map and the Warsaw map are the best I've seen (my atlas has more detail, but not as easy to use); later, she gave me extra copies for you, enclosed.

**Novotel. Warsaw Airport.** Very convenient. Modern. Good restaurant, bar, etc. There is only one main road from the airport to the city, and this hotel has a prominent sign on the left after a 5 minute drive. The neighborhood is bleak; all those metal bars built into the parking rental spaces seem ominous (I just parked in front - plenty of free empty spaces). If you are headed out to the country like I was, this hotel is the ideal place to rest for a night. If you intend to visit Warsaw, I suggest you drive by and stay downtown. Like Dom Polonii, this hotel is well appointed with amateur implementation of detail. Unlike the uniformed Dom Polonii doorman, the staff at Novotel huddle around in parkas and boots, adding to the bleak mood, unless you are immune to this, as I am.

**Plock. Hotel Starex.** Glossy flyer enclosed. Walking distance from the diocese archives. Right in the heart of old town Plock. I found this place when I was lost. Came back for food. Very little English; it took me 10 minutes to explain in broken Polish that they should charge me for the free breakfast, because I just walked in. (Maybe the first gal understood but did not want to bother?) I'll come back in April. Breathtaking view of the river from the nice restaurant. No sign of foreigners; I guess it's a popular place for knowledgeable Polish travelers? I'd recommend it to anyone who speaks a bit of Polish.

**Makow Mazowiecki. "Motel".** Ba(z?)a Szkolenia P(r?)aktyczne(nej?), Motel, Ba(z?)a 15, Makow-Maz. Tel 171(?)029. (Handwriting very hard to read). This is the only hotel in the Sypniewo area. Just SE of town on highway 599. No big sign. That little sign with fine print and long words meant nothing to me. I was told there was a hotel here, but I had to go up to the second floor and look around to find the gal in the office. Looks to me like a converted communist era apartment building. She showed me a room, assured me there are others with a clean rug. Zero English. Polish flop house. Quite frankly, I'd recommend staying with the peasants, since everyone I met insisted that I cancel my hotel room and stay the night with his family (I did not).

**Szelkow Guest House.** Telefon 029-172-400. (wew.132???)

Address: Orzyc 7, woj Ostroleckie. Not bad. I'd stay here, but I doubt Barb would put up with it very long. He showed me a comfortable, clean room; bathroom down the hall. It is a 3-story residence converted into a boarding house. Big neon sign "Hotel" but you cannot see it from the main road. Actually, Orzyc is the name of the river and also the name of this tiny village just a mile south of Szelkow. Heading south on highway 61, cross the river and then take the first left turn. On the other hand, Dom Polonii is only a 30 minute drive south.

**Warsaw impressions.** I did not spend much time in Warsaw, just a couple hours at the national archives. "Dreary" is the word that comes to my mind. Nevertheless, I had no trouble whistling, since I know several Polish songs in sad, minor keys. Parking is impossible. I parked in a long line of illegally parked cars. I don't know why the authorities picked out my car and one other to put boots on our front wheel. That other Warsaw resident phoned them and we had a nice hour chat while waiting. Since he is moving soon, he gave them his address for a fine by mail; he'll ignore it. They wanted 100 zloty cash from me. I argued, saying 50 is enough (all Polish). Finally, they compromised at 60, then asked me for assurance that 60 is OK. I like the Polish attitude that all rules are negotiable.

**Plock diocese archives.** Wonderful! Almost complete records of most churches in the diocese for the 19th century! Turn of the century and war years are missing, but this is just what I need. I spent 10 hours there in 2 days. Apparently, all this was microfilmed by the Mormons. I do not understand why most of the microfilms are not available. Maybe they are too slow to identify and catalogue them? I'll send a family report on what I found. This Plock archive is not really open to the public. It took me an hour driving right by to realize that it is hidden inside that Jesuit seminary. The old priest in charge is very grouchy although not so bad later, after my 200 zloty donation. Lucky I met the young priest first, who brought me 6 books from the 1840 era no questions asked, and let me make photocopies of everything I wanted until the old grouch stopped me from using the copy machine. (The young priest was impressed with my family history report.) I'm very surprised that the Jesuits do not speak English (or at perhaps pretended, like Babcia, to not understand it?).

**Countryside impressions.** The land is flat. All farms. Lots of very small "villages" that are just clusters of buildings. I drove on secondary roads to get from Pultusk to Plock; twice; 2 hour drive one way. It was worth it. I saw the country at night, in the morning, afternoon, etc. Tell your tourists that they must take a drive in the country between 6 and 8 AM. The roads are dead silent before 6. Then the farmers come out. In 40 minutes I had to slow down to pass about 20 horse and wagon rigs; I could see the solitary milk can on a few of the rickety old wagons. One horse wagon, driving right down the main street of a town with about 100 houses, had a half dozen Holstein cows strapped to the wagon! I also had to slow down for about 20 tractors pulling rigs at about 20 miles per hour. Then, about 7, the farmers disappear and the roads come alive with pedestrians and bicycles. Mostly students, but lots of people walking a mile or two to work. I picked up several student hitchhikers and a couple workers, but I guess you cannot recommend that your tourists practice their Polish that way. One retired gent asked me for a ride to Plock after I asked him where to get a cup of coffee (sorry, no coffee stops in the villages).

Later, when I was driving around to villages that our ancestors lived in, I enjoyed stopping at the village taverns and buying vodka for the good old boys. Again, I guess you cannot recommend this method of practicing Polish and locating your cousins, but it works.

**Nowa Wies.** I had a nice visit with my second cousin Celina and her husband Jan Gutowski. We filled in lots of names for my descendency list.

Our ancestor Jan Iwanowicz was born just outside Nowa Wies. But in 1914, this parish was transferred from the Plock diocese to the Lomza diocese. Next, I need to write letters and visit Lomza.

**Olszewnica.** That's where Babcia Rozalia (Pisiewska) was born. Also her mother. Also all her Parzych uncles and aunts. I now have all their records. Olszewnica is just a ring of about 4 houses and a few barns around a central barn yard. No paved roads, just tractor roads. Sort of like living in the middle of the "Miller lot" in Windsor, except it is perfectly flat. This is the flood plain for the *Narev* river that flooded a couple years ago. I got lost looking for Olszewnica at 10 PM. I asked three farm workers where Olszewnica is. They never heard of Olszewnica, but they were surprised to hear me rattle off the names of all the villages in the area. They were impressed by my 1930's map copies, which were better than any map of the area they ever saw. They asked what I was doing. When I explained, they announced we are distant relatives, and insisted that the three of them join me in my quest to find the birthplace of my ancestors. (It took awhile to explain to them that I was not looking for cousins. The leader, Stanislaw Zabek, made me promise about 20 times that I would find his second cousins in the US.) Wladislaw and Tadeusz could not get much into the conversation because Stan always interrupts. Anyway, after an hour of driving around asking their friends, we drove 5 miles down these tractor roads and pulled up to the gate tied with a string. Stan went in. We were all invited into a farmhouse. The old guy explained that yes, this place is really Olszewnica even though the authorities incorrectly call it part of Dambrowski. They were also impressed with my maps and family tree. The housewife understood immediately and helped to explain what I was doing to everyone else; Stan was clueless. They know of Banasiak families, but they never heard the name Parzych. Piszewski they heard of. (We spell it Pisiewski, but it is the same name.) They called out the 87 year old mother in law, who distinctly remembers a Piszewski family who used to live near by. (By coincidence, Joe Armata, while translating letters for another family, has independently located records and recollections of these cousins of our Babcia. I have email reports from Joe.) The 4 of us ended up at Stan's place, drinking vodka and eating kielbasa sandwiches at 1 AM.

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