

Nothing special, just a great week

Memories of Carefree Days in Poland Veiled By A Feeling of Melancholy

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Night of 19th March 2011. Anxiety, fear and a strong desire to leave. A quick sequence of text messages with my schoolmates to calm down each other. I felt like I didn't have any thoughts in my mind because of the confusion that there was in it.

This is the way you feel the night before you go to another country where you'll be staying at the house of a girl you don't know yet and you'll be able to speak only in English. You're just as excited in the morning. You know everything is going to be all right, or rather you hope so. You're not alone. Your teachers and your schoolmates are going to be with you. Their presence, apparently not too important, is crucial for you to keep calm; and keeping calm is crucial to do your best.

Ready for departure

I left on Sunday morning with all my mixed feelings. I came back equally full of lots of memories and emotions seven days later. I left my family with no sadness. I'd phone my relatives and I'd come back soon.



Here you can see the view out of the window of the airplane when we were flying over the Alps.

We flew twice: the first flight was from Linate (Italy) to Frankfurt (Germany); the second one was from Frankfurt to Gdansk (Poland). We left Italy at half past one p.m. and we

arrived in Gdansk at almost six o'clock in the evening. Our hosts were waiting for us there at the airport.



Here you can see Giulia, Erika and Amar. We're playing cards at the airport.

My host family

The Polish girl who hosted me during our stay in Gdansk was Aleksandra. She's fifteen years old. She's got light blue eyes and smooth blond hair and she's very tall. Her friends call her Ola. She's a really nice girl and she was my host. She's pretty, kind and a little bit shy; but you can discover she's sociable and she's got an outgoing character. Her mum took us home. I met her sister and her father there. They have a dog, too. He's quite small but really lovely. He's the mascot of Ola's house. Her sister was hosting a boy from Sweden while I was there. I didn't see them very often but when I did, it was good practice talking to them because they were better at English than me.

Polish school

We met the other students from other countries on Monday morning in a room at the Polish school. It's quite small but it's really nice. I liked it because it has an old style and a lot of elements are made of wood. The school is organized differently from ours in Italy. They start school at eight o'clock and they finish at four o'clock in the afternoon. Lessons last forty-five minutes. They have a fifteen-minute break after each lesson. They usually eat at school. They have a sandwich or they can go to the school bar to buy something different. They usually have lunch at midday and dinner at half past four p.m. when they finish school. They have supper at nine o'clock at night, too.

There is nursery school, elementary school (from the age of 6 to the age of 12). Then they go to middle school (from the age of 13 to the age of 15) and then they choose a school specializing in a particular subject that's like high school (from the age of 16 to the age of 19). There are different kinds of university, too.

Welcome

There were Swedish, Greek, German and Romanian students besides Polish and Italian ones. Some of the Polish teachers and students performed as singers or musicians playing typical Polish music. The welcome became even warmer when we played a game called "Human knot". We were divided into groups and we had to stand in a circle. Then we had to put our hands in the middle of the circle and take and keep someone else's hands. The purpose of the activity was to move anyway, also passing under or over someone's arm, to be able to return in the circle position. It was very funny and it helped us to get to know each other better.



We did lots of integration activities in the following days, drawing and painting to realize something that represented ourselves, our country and, of course, our project and the meeting between different cultures.



Let's go sightseeing

Gdansk is a very nice city. We visited the old Town in the afternoon. We entered the old town through the magnificent Renaissance Golden Gate. It was built in 1612 – 1614. The city's vivid emblem placed on both sides of the gate over the main passage greets the passer-bys. The accompanying Latin maxim reads: "Concord makes minor states grow, discord makes major ones collapse".



The Golden Gate

The Neptune Fountain symbolizes the bond between Gdansk and the sea. It's in front of the Artus Court. A local legend says that Neptune contributed to the development of the recipe for the famous Gdansk liquor called Goldwasser. He crushed coins tossed into the fountain in the herbal liquor.



Neptune Fountain

There is the most important port crane in Medieval Europe on the river Motlawa. It was used for the unloading of goods. It's a door to the city, too.

There are a lot of typical houses. They are tall and narrow and pastel colored. The weather is cold in winter and it's often cloudy or rainy until the end of March. Luckily it was sunny when we were there.

Here you can see the Old Town



We visited some interesting museums like the Archeological museum and the museum of the movement "Solidarnosc". The museum is built in the shipyard near the monument of the Fallen Shipyard Workers. It's about the struggle for freedom and solidarity in the 80's. We also visited a science museum.



The Monument of the Fallen Shipyard Workers

On Thursday we went to the seaside. It was really windy, even though it was fantastic. The sea was calm and there were a lot of seagulls. That evening we all sang together at the Karaoke at school, too. We didn't all sing in tune but it was amusing.



This is a strange house near the sea. There are some bars in this building.



Return to Italy

Friday 25th March 2011. It was the last day and I was sick. I preferred to stay at home in the morning while my friends went shopping in the city. We met at the airport, ready to leave again. I left my host, telling her that I would wait for the next meeting in Italy.

We had to wait, and wait. There was a delay. We arrived in Frankfurt at half past ten and we missed the flight to Linate. We stayed at a hotel and even though I didn't feel well it was a fantastic adventure.

We finally arrived in Italy and we were pleased to hear the Italian language again. I love English but I missed my language, my friends and my family, too. I really liked this experience also because it has taught me the importance of loving one's nation and one's heritage. It has made me more independent and practical. It was important for my education, too. I've learnt about the customs of other countries. I've improved my English and I've met very nice people: my travel mates. It was a unique experience that I will never forget.