

# What It Means to be Polish-American

By Kasia Ann Schemanski

To be Polish-American means that you are involved in activities that reflect both cultures. It is a great opportunity to learn about your cultural heritage and respect it in every way possible.

As a Polish American, I am involved in three different dance groups. On Monday nights, I attend the Lowicz Dance group and the Polish Alliance Dancers on Saturday afternoons. The Dunajec Polish Song and Dance Ensemble meets Tuesday nights and Saturday mornings. Also during the week on Tuesdays I attend the Henryk Sienkiewicz Polish Language School. On Thursday nights I am a Drużynowa, which is a leader of the Harcerki. I teach the younger scouts the things they need to be good scouts.

All of these activities have allowed me to learn about the culture, history, language, and geography of Poland. I have been able to meet other young people who speak the same language, share the same culture and have many of the same interests. Polish Scouting and Polish Dance have introduced me to many people and helped me make friends and contacts that will serve me well throughout my future.

As a Polish-American, I belong to the Polish National Alliance and the Polish Women's Alliance. I attended the summer camp sponsored by Polish National Alliance where I met other students from all over the United States. To this day I still correspond with them. Through my parents' membership in the Polish American Congress and the Central Citizens' Committee I have had the opportunity to attend functions and perform volunteer work. Through the Piast Institute, I had the honor of meeting Dr. Zbigniew Brzezinski and presenting him with flowers at the "Third Annual Dekaban Lecture". Along with attending the luncheon for President Kwasniewski those are two events that I will remember forever. Through these organizations and their activities I was able to meet Senators, Congressmen, leaders of Polonia and scholars.

For me, being Polish-American is an amazing thing because of the opportunities I have had to travel to Poland and actually see the things I read about in books. I have had the chance to meet family, attend weddings and establish relationships with the younger generation because I was able to speak Polish.

I take pride in my daily work and try to speak Polish in my every day life because it is a tribute to my heritage especially since I was born in Poland and raised in the United States. Family is another important part of being Polish-American. Keeping alive the traditions and history is important to my family and to me. Many times when I was younger and did not want to go to Polish School or Polish Dance my parents would say "you are Polish you are going." I am glad that they did because it helped me become the proud Polish-American I am today.

Sometimes being Polish-American can be difficult but you learn to get through it all and have fun. People ask me about my name and what does it mean and where is it from. Some people even ask me "What is your real name?" At those times I remember Dr. Zbigniew Brzezinski's speech at the Dekaban Lecture and how he said that we should always be proud of our names and not change them. He told us the story of how President Carter told his staff to learn how to spell and pronounce Dr. Brzezinski's name. So when I am asked I tell people that "Kasia" is a Polish name. When they mispronounce my name I correct them. I am proud of my Polish name and proud to be Polish-American.

Being Polish-American can mean many things to many people. Most important of all it means having pride in the fact that you are Polish and American and showing that pride in all you do and all you say. It means being an active part of the Polish-American Community and giving back so that others can be proud too. It means never being ashamed of who you are and where you came from. ♦



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