

Man hopes to ride all the way to Oprah

Polish activist Krzysztof Dzienniak has an unusual but noble cause that will carry him across a strange land and separate him from his wife and daughter for the next several months.

And, if everything goes as planned, Mr. Dzienniak will have some serious face time with no other than internationally syndicated talk show host, media mogul and celebrity philanthropist Oprah Winfrey.

"I hope to meet Oprah and talk to her," Mr. Dzienniak said. But Mr. Dzienniak doesn't want to meet the most influential woman in the world for idle chitchat or mere hero worship. Nor does he want to jump up and down on her couch like a lovesick Tom Cruise or be chosen as author of an up-and-coming Oprah's Book Club selection.

What Mr. Dzienniak wants to do is bring to her attention "20,000 Miles of Street Sailing," a solitary project he has spearheaded in an effort to raise money for testing potential bone marrow donor matches for people suffering from leukemia back in Poland.

"This project here is about traveling across 48 states in America in order to get to Oprah Winfrey and ask her for help with collecting money," Mr. Dzienniak said. "And I'm going to be traveling on a motor scooter."

Sitting inside the Dunkin' Donuts on Route 131, the 28-year-old farmer from the city of Opole in the Polish region of Silesia is not specific on how much money he hopes to raise. "The more money I collect, the more donors might be tested," he said.

"Getting Oprah's attention is not enough," Mr. Dzienniak said. "It's all about money because money is needed for testing potential bone marrow donors."

Mr. Dzienniak said he was inspired by American movies about "the hero" and "doing something for other people," including the Academy Award-winning "Forrest Gump" and especially the Oscar-nominated "The Straight Story," the true story of a man who rides a lawn mower from Laurens, Iowa, to Mount Zion, Wis., to see his ailing brother.

Mr. Dzienniak started his Oprah odyssey behind the wheel of a golf cart on Sept. 15 in Portland, Maine, with hopes of meeting up with Oprah in January in Chicago. When he was stopped by police in Dover, N.H., and found that a golf cart wasn't street-legal, he changed wheels and continued his travels on a motor scooter. His mission and updates are available at www.20000miles.net.

Four years ago, Mr. Dzienniak trekked across 11 states and persuaded Microsoft Chairman Bill Gates, whom Mr. Dzienniak described as "a regular, simple man," to donate an estimated \$20,000 toward a spine operation for a 7-year-old girl and an artificial limb for an 11-year-old girl. Today, both young girls are doing well, he said.

"I'm never asking for more money, just enough money," Mr. Dzienniak said. "Everybody thinks that Bill Gates gave me \$2 million but there was no need to get \$2 million."

And it was during his first trek across the U.S. four years ago that Mr. Dzienniak learned of the beloved personality and financial juggernaut known simply as Oprah.

"Oprah is a beautiful woman," Mr. Dzienniak said. "She's unpredictable. I think she's a good person. I hope she can do something to help."

AS with his cause of four years ago, Mr. Dzienniak does not have a personal stake in "20,000 miles of street sailing," other than sacrificing his time to help those who are suffering back in his native country.

"It is very difficult. It is very hard work. It is a challenge. I believe that Oprah will see that this is hard work and it's a

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Poland – a Pol-Am retirement haven?

By: **Robert Strybel**,

Our Warsaw Correspondent

WARSAW—Americans with ties to their cultural heritage have long been known to spend their retirement years in their ancestral homeland when they retire. Ireland, Israel, the United Kingdom, Germany and Italy have been among the favorites, but Poland is no exception. The iron curtain did serve as a deterrent to many, but since Poland regained its independence in 1989, things began changing. Now that the land of our forefathers is a member of NATO and the European Union and is able to offer much the same modern amenities as America, its role as a retirement haven has definitely increased. That is indicated by the number of retirement-related inquiries landing in my e-mail bag these days.

A good example of a well-planned and executed retirement project is the case of David Piekarczyk and his wife of 33 years, Joan, who is not of Polish descent. Both had been employed at the same Illinois company and had been contemplating the move for quite some time. A blog they set up (<http://david-polanddavid.blogspot.com>) gives a blow-by-blow account of their thoughts and activities, starting long before they actually made the plunge. One 2006 entry said: "239 days until our last day of work at our company. We will end our employment on June 28th, 2007. July will be spent packing and shipping what we want to take to Poland. We are taking no furniture, only clothing, our music collection and personal belongings. August 3rd we board the LOT flight to Poland and began our new adventure."

"Joan made the comment this week that she's looking forward to this move because it affords the possibility of visiting so many other countries once we are in Poland. A 4 or 5 hour drive from Poznań and we can be in Germany, Lithuania, Belarus, Ukraine, Slovakia or the Czech Republic."

As planned, the Piekarczyks moved into an apartment in the western city of Poznań in the summer of 2007 and three months later made the following blog entry: "We woke up early today, 7:30AM. We talked about our first three months here, what we accomplished and what we didn't. Mostly about the way we feel living in Poland now, foreigners in the land of my ancestors. I've learned a good deal in my studies and research but I want to know more about the 'heart' of Poland. At times it makes me angry that I and all my cousins in the United States were told so little about Poland after my grandparents died. I feel robbed of my ancestry. My own mother did not even know for sure where her mother came from. I spent hours in America looking at microfiche films to find birth records in Poland and, if not for cousin Kazia Juszcak, who answered my first letter to Poland, even today I would know nothing."

Daily entries tell of the Piekarczyks' visits with long-lost relations, touring old castles, taking excursions, daily shopping trips and formalities like applying for temporary residence cards. One entry states: "On Wednesday, Joan will go to the International Ladies Club of Poznań and meet some new women. I think it will be good for her to have some women friends to talk with and not just me. I am wonderful, to be sure (!), but it is good to have friends other than your husband."

The Piekarczyks have explored many interesting places in Poland and done a variety of different things, but what struck me most was their report of one day's main project: dealing with an ice-caked fridge. They hadn't had an appliance that required defrosting for quite some time, but to a loving married couple, even defrosting a fridge can be an interesting adventure.

At about the same time, Jim Presenkowski (jimpres1@mac.com), a retired computer expert from San Diego, had been planning a similar move. He traveled on ahead to Poland to lay the groundwork and prepared to build a dream home for his non-Pol-Am wife and himself on family-owned land in a rural area of the country. This, according to him, is how things developed: "One never knows how a spouse will react no matter how convincing they are about being by your side and retiring in Poland."

"There was not just one problem," Jim explained. "First it was no doctor who could speak English. Then it was the Polish language itself. Then she could not buy the same items available in the US. Then it was that I went native and spoke Polish. Then it was someone eating her food. And on and on. She just could not deal with the big change from San Diego to Poland. She tried suicide three times in Poland. My 14 months in Poland were pure hell most of the time dealing with a very crazy wife who, by the way, I divorced over this and other matters."

In view of today's privacy-protection concerns, I asked Presenkowski if I could share his comments with the general Pol-Am readership, and he replied: "By all means, if it can save someone a lot of grief and money. Feel free to give my e-mail address to anyone interested. In general, I would say: first bring your spouse over for a trial period before making any firm commitment." □

The Brit-Polonian Connection

Compiled by **Robert Strybel**,

Polish/Polonian Affairs Writer

Mixed signals continue to come in from the world's newest Polish community abroad, whose individual clusters are sprinkled across the British Isles. On the one hand, an impressive network of Pole-targeted organizations and facilities has emerged over the past four years since Poland joined the European Union and the United Kingdom threw open its doors to workers from the EU newcomer countries. New firms catering for Polish migrants continue to crop up. On the other hand, the declining value of Britain's currency has made working there less profitable and slowed the overall influx. Will it grind to a halt in the foreseeable future? That remains to be seen.

New website for Polish expats in UK. Polish expatriates Karol Chojnowski and Albert Fret have created a website (www.Emito.net) designed to provide their fellow countrymen living in the United Kingdom with access to news, noticeboards and social networking opportunities. Four years ago it was a purely Edinburgh operation, but after requests began pouring in for sites in other Scottish cities they expanded the operation to take in the whole of Scotland. Now they plan to make it a UK-wide site. "What we're trying to do is deliver a web site that offers something for Poles at every stage in the process of migrating to and living in the UK," Chojnowski explained. "So those looking to move here can find accommodation, or get in touch with others who already live in the country, while people who have been living here for years can keep up with the news from Poland, buy or sell goods or just network with other migrants." So far Emito has 650,000 unique users, but the site-owners are not stopping there. "We have built a good model that we can easily replicate in other countries when we decide to expand further. For the moment though we are focused on increasing the number of users in the UK," Chojnowski added.

Study refutes anti-Polish stereotypes. New research among Polish people

working in Grays contradicts popular prejudices about migrants coming to Britain. The interview results were presented by Essex European Parliament member Richard Howitt at a conference of businesses about managing migrant workers. The interviews of local Polish workers were undertaken as part of a three-year research project funded by the East of England Development Agency (EEDA). Interviews with Polish workers show that it is wrong to suggest migrants refuse to learn English. Howitt told the conference: "The biggest reason Polish migrants in Grays give for coming to Britain is to learn English. Businesses should not see migrants as suitable only for low skilled jobs. Don't underestimate them, when over half of those we found actually had university degrees. It is time to get rid of the myths and misconceptions and recognize (that) the migrants give a lot to our prosperity and want to be part of the community."

Leader of Thurrock Council, Terry Hipsey, added: "I think the Polish play a very valuable role in the community. It must also not be forgotten that they represented our armed forces in the Second World War. They are here legally to work so therefore they can't be criticised if they want to take a career working in England."

British libraries introduce Polish books. Immigrant nostalgia for the homeland seems to be behind the growth of Polish book readership in the British Isles. The library in Harrogate in northeast England's North Yorkshire county now has 1,200 Polish books in its collection, but the demand is far from satisfied, and additional volumes will soon be ordered. Novels, murder mysteries, cookbooks and books on historical themes are among the most popular in this town which now has a 5,000-strong Polish minority. Libraries, bookshops and bookstalls across the Untied Kingdom now sport signs [proclaiming "Books in Polish". A company calling itself Polish Books, which supplies dozens of libraries in the Isles, reports that up to 40 percent of the works being ordered all children's books. That suggests that a great many Polish migrants want their youngsters to retain their knowledge of the Polish language and culture.

Welsh police shut down anti-Polish Web page. A hate-peddling Web page targeting the Polish people of the Welsh city of Llanelli has been closed down by police. The anti-Polish page was set up on social networking site Facebook in May by a some 200-strong group. They have complained that the nearly 10,000 Poles in this city of 60,000 "do not respect our town and are taking our jobs." Some visitors to the Web site had found the message to be racist, but the Facebook operator initially refused to shut it down citing "freedom of expression."

London – the UK's most Polish city. Estimates vary as to how many Poles are in the Untied Kingdom at any once given time, but one thing is certain: London has the country's largest single Polish population. There are an estimated 120,000 Poles living in the British capital. The most Polish populated districts are Hammersmith, Ealing, Enfield and Haringey. Other cities with sizable Polish populations are: Leicester - 30,000, Southampton - 20,000, Peterborough - 10,000 and Slough - 10,000.

12-year-old Polish girl scores high. Polish-born Sabina Kołodziejaska, who came to England three years ago not knowing a word of English, received top grades in GCSE (General Certificate of Secondary Education) exams, normally taken by 16-year-olds. She is also studying German and wants to learn French and Spanish as well. Sabina is enrolled at Brooke Weston City Technology College in Corby, England. At home she speaks English with her mother and Polish with her father.

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