

“I am proud to say I am Polish”

- “What does it mean to be proud of something, or someone?” – asked mom.
- “Come on Mom, I am sure you know” – I answered.
- “Are you proud of yourself?”
- “Yes...I am – when I am happy and satisfied that I accomplished something successfully.”
- “Are you proud of yourself often?” – mom continued asking.
- “Sometimes... it happens... when I help someone, do a good deed, bake a delicious dessert, or when I score a goal during my soccer game...”
- “Are you proud of being Polish and the fact that you can speak Polish?” – mom asked with her usual lovely smile.
- “Yes. Sure.” - I answered quickly so mom can stop asking me all these questions. Afterall, my favorite show “Kally’s Mashup” was starting shortly.

But wait, what does it mean to be proud of something, or someone? Am I proud to be Polish? But of course, I am. It seems so normal to me, and it has been forever. I am a part of my Polish family – here in the USA and overseas in Poland. To be Polish sounds enormously proud to me. It means to cultivate the traditions and language my parents, grandparents and cousins grew up in and use. To be Polish it also means to be a good and sensitive person, have good manners, respect others and yourself and to be proud of your accomplishments and interests.

I am proud to be Polish and have the skills to think, count, write, read, and speak in Polish. The Polish language is a precious gift to me as it allows me to communicate with my family in Poland, with people who do not know English. I often talk to my grandmothers, great-grandmothers and grandfather who all live in Poland. I especially enjoy chatting with my great-grandmother Jasia. She is the biggest example for me to follow as she has an amazing amount of knowledge about Poland and its history. She survived World War II. When the war started great-grandma Jasia was only 13 years old. We also talk a lot about our family and its history. She knows all the details about who was born when and where. I hope to build our family’s genealogy tree some day and use all the information great-grandma shared with me. She always tells me: “Ala, don’t ever stop speaking Polish, because knowing the language can come handy on many occasions”.

I also talk with my cousins on the phone; they lived in Germany for a few years. Kaja and Iga speak Polish and German and I speak Polish and English. We always use the Polish language. We tell stories, jokes and goof around. We live far apart but we like each other a lot. During one of our Facetime chats we were drawing Polish flag and emblem. “Which way does the eagle face on the emblem?”. “To the right of course”. I knew the answer to this question because I learnt about it in my favorite Hartford Polish Saturday School. I am proud to attend this school. I have many Polish friends, my knowledge about Poland is better each class I attend, and my Polish language improves as well. I especially enjoy classes during which I learn about the Polish legends and practice my writing skills.

I am proud to be Polish because I like Polish stories and poems. My dad’s and my favorite author is Jan Brzechwa. “Pali się”, “Leń”, “Kłamczucha”, “Samochawała” are my favorite Brzechwa’s poems. When I read his poems I instantly smile; the world seems happier and it puts me in a good mood. Reading these poems is good reading practice as well. I like poems. I like reading them but also, I enjoy writing my own. Just like this one I wrote recently in both languages.

.... jest północ

... let it be midnight

jest dzień

let it be day

jesteśmy ludźmi

we all are people

inni, ale tacy sami	different but the same
niektórzy ludzie mówią,	some people say
że wszyscy są inni	that all of us are different
i nikt nie jest taki sam	no one is the same
wyglądają i myślą inaczej...	depending on our look and thinking...
ale w naszych sercach	but in our hearts
wszyscy dobrzy ludzie na całym świecie	all of the good people in the whole world
są najlepszymi przyjaciółmi ...	are tremendous friends ...

I am proud to be Polish as we have beautiful Polish holidays and traditions which we must cherish. My favorite Polish holiday is Christmas, Christmas Eve to be exact. I like this day as there is a lot going on. Cooking, cleaning, and preparing for a family gathering at my Aunt's. There are always a lot of guests and the Christmas dinner table looks festive. White tablecloth, hay underneath, candles, help make the moment we break the holy wafer special along with lots of delicious food. Everyone brings their favorite traditional Christmas dishes. My mom always brings kutia (a Christmas cooked wheat pudding) and sour cabbage with mushrooms. It became my family's tradition that my mom continues from her grandmother. I hope to take over this tradition in the future to make sure it is not lost. The singing together Polish carols ends the Christmas Eve dinner. I like to sing, Polish carols as well, but I must admit I am a bit shy. I know however that caroling together as a family is important on that day, especially to my Aunt who always ask me to sing. I am always happy and proud that we can spend such a beautiful Polish holiday together with our family.

I am proud to be Polish and even though I was born far from Poland, the Polish language and traditions are especially important to me. My parents always tell me "the most important thing is what we carry in our head and heart". I know that I have Poland in my heart, and it will stay there forever.

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(grade 4)

Ala Grabarczyk won a matching first place prize from the Wachtel Literary Awards for this essay for her entry for the Anna Mae Maglaty Literary Competition. The essay has been translated from Polish into English by one of her instructors.