

2011 - POLAND

22 - 25 April 2011

LEG 4
4 NIGHTS IN MAKOW
STAYING WITH
RELATIVES

Makow - my father's birthplace

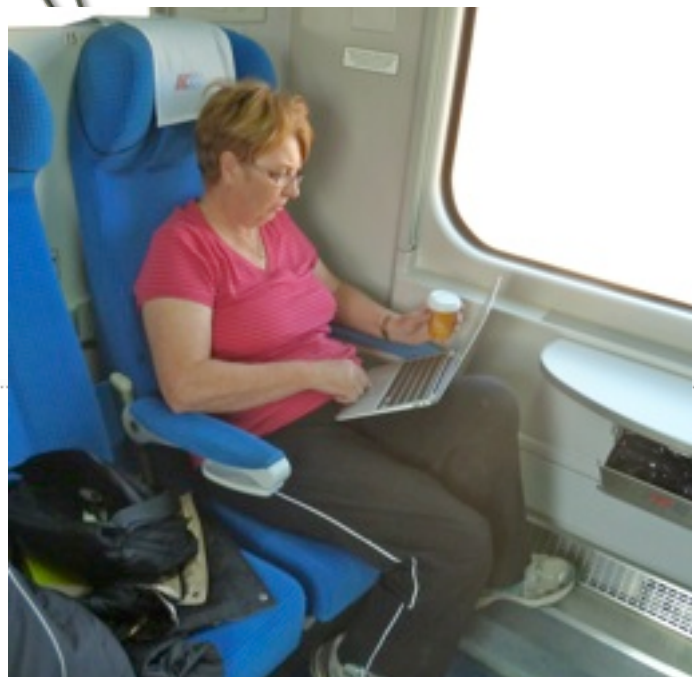
It's good to be back in the land of my father - relatives greeting us with warm hearts and open arms.

KRAKOW TO MAKOW

After sorting out a little hiccup with our tickets at the central rail station the day before (I was under the impression that I had booked the express train to Warsaw but instead was sent tickets for the slower train) we left our lovely apartment after a hearty breakfast (only \$6 each). Eventually, after a nervous few minutes searching we found the correct platform for the train to Warsaw. It was luxurious to travel first class as we had the compartment to ourselves. There was free hand-delivered tea/coffee to our seats and we even had 240v connections for computers next to the seats. The comfortable 3 hour trip was very relaxing and we traveled through familiar countryside. One seldom sees fences in Poland and there is a clear division between farm land and the villages, where the farmers live. We even saw two wild deer scampering across open paddocks. Most people were either walking or riding bikes.

WARSAW

Warsaw is undergoing a major transformation due to the influx of EU money and infrastructure preparations for the 2012 Soccer (Football) European Cup (which Poland will host with Ukraine). The main railway station is being totally reconstructed and the car parking was in total chaos. Sig's cousin and wife plus second cousin's son greeted us as the station.



Heather wishing everyone a happy Easter



How time flies!!
We can't believe it's been two years since we were in Poland and this is the third time we have seen our family.



Saturday morning food blessing



Riding around Makow metropolis with church in background

MAKOW

It's so good to be home once more. Makow has grown since we last visited 2 years ago. New buildings, a lick of paint on old buildings and newly made roads. We rode around the town and quickly felt at home. Then the celebrations started in earnest. Poles like to eat, drink and be merry. And the drink of choice is vodka (which we are assured is for the digestion). Each time we questioned this another glass was poured for us to down. After the 7th glass or thereabouts I believed anything they told me. As for the food, it was absolutely wonderful - raw herrings in brine, polish sausage, sour cucumber, and fermented cabbage - in fact so much to choose from.

Easter Friday is not a holiday in Poland. No meat is eaten until the food is blessed early Saturday - then the feasting begins in earnest and it's slow consumption all day. Each family were rostered on to fete the Australian Nowaks. Eat and drink, be merry and then move on to the next family for more - a festival carousel of food. I marveled as Heather quickly killed all the bugs she still had in her intestines (and her throat) with the magic clear elixir - "for your health". Heather even learned the

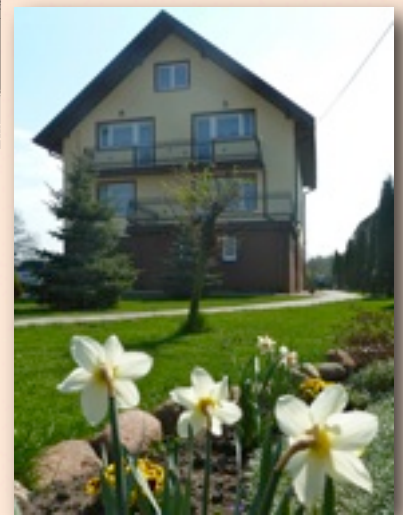
words of that famous Polish song One Hundred Years - a song sung before each drink to celebrate whatever. The words of the song are repeated so they are easy to sing. Sto lat sto lat - whatever.

We visited Dorota's 94 year old grandfather. He has been eagerly awaiting our arrival for many months and, after giving him a diary to write his memoirs in, he confided to us that he would "spill some beans about people in the village who are well known today but collaborated with the enemy during the war." We look forward to his first installment.

SUNDAY MORNING

We expected a crush of people at the first mass at 6am (there are 4), we expected to walk 3 times around the church with the immaculately dressed congregation (of around 1000) with bells clanging constantly (how neighbours sleep through this is beyond me) but we did not expect the explosions (I'm not sure if the neighbours did either)!! The loud bangs, and I mean loud, every second minute scared us to death the first few times. Luckily they ran out of gun powder by the second

Second cousin Slavek's house has been rendered and painted. Its a very big house of 5 stories. The walls are very thick to ensure warmth in winter.





20 celebrating relatives



Marissa, Heather, Siggy and first cousin Waclaw



walk round. I did notice that the fire brigade attended in force to ensure that no person caught fire. The movement of 1000 people in their finery following solemnly behind the priest and his entourage with the loud bells and the explosions was very sobering. Everyone goes to church at Easter, all 3000 of the population of this town and its precinct. Young children, middle aged and the old. It's what makes Poland, Poland. We have realised that the church has kept the Polish people together during times of hardship (wars/communism) and when there was no Poland (between 1871-1917).

SUNDAY GASTRONOMY

It was time to eat again and this time the meal went on for 6 hours!!! From 2pm to 8pm. We had 20 Nowak relatives at my cousin Waclaw's place. There were many courses and between each there was time to check out the garden, the dogs, the birds (pheasants) and to talk about taxes, politics, the economy and life. Poles, like Australians, are very good at solving the problems of the world.

WET MONDAY

It did rain on Sunday night - in fact we had a storm - so on Monday morning there was water lying in puddles. But this is not why the day is called "wet" Monday. Poland has a tradition that everyone gets squirted with water on

this day - and they leave it to the children to ensure that everyone gets a douse. Unlike last time we were ready with raincoats and plastic drink bottles filled with water and a hole in the top of the cap to squirt fluid all over the other person from all angles. No one escapes a dousing and huge fun is had by all, especially the kids.

After a light breakfast we drove to the local cemetery to pay our respects to our ancestors. Waclaw had put up a plaque on his father's grave recently in remembrance to my father. It read "man of Poland who called Australia home". Candles were lit and other family graves were visited. The Poles revere their dead. The cemetery was crowded with people paying their respects and there were flowers and candles everywhere. I balled my eyes out.

Finally it was on to better things - eating again! More courses, more walking in the nearby forest, more politics and the discovery of breathtakingly simple economic solutions.

Our time in Poland has come to an end all too soon. It was not goodbye this time round but "when will we see you again." There will be more visits in the future by other Nowak family members. The Polish Nowaks and the Australian Nowaks will forever be joined as one.





Nowak clan
Christmas, Ormeau 2009