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Living in Poland

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Living in Poland was and is not an easy thing to do. Poland was in a war state in 1980 and became democratic in 1981. As a new democratic nation, the citizens thought that life was going to be easy, well it was not. Peter Skobelski, my father, was fortunate enough to win the visa lottery in Poland, earn money with his girlfriend, and leave his home nation to the United States. Backed by their parents, the happy couple bought airplane tickets, and immigrated to the United States.

Peter Skobelski and his wife won the visa lottery in 1992. His parents were very happy because rumors were that America was the land of opportunity and anyone can get money there. Business was slow in Poland, finding work was not so easy. His parents wanted him to be a “somebody.” As they were saying their goodbyes at the airport in Wroclaw, tears were running down his cheeks. He almost never cried, but knowing that he was leaving his family and home country made him very sad. The limit was 2 suitcases, which they brought with them. One suitcase had their clothes and another suitcase had photos and items to never forget their homeland. They boarded the airplane and took off into the unknown area known as the United States of America.

The flight took roughly 10 hours. The couple arrived at O’Hare International Airport at about 9:00 p.m. Before the flight, Peter contacted a friend that lived in Chicago asking for a place to stay because they did not know the language well and had no idea where to live. The couple passed through airline security, and walked through the doors seeing many people waiting. With wide-open eyes, they knew right away that they were lost. So, they decided to sit down and think about what to do. They came to a conclusion that their friend was coming to pick them up so there was no point in walking out of the airport and getting even more lost. After 2 hours of waiting in the airport, their friend finally arrived and they left.

They rode down the streets of Chicago, looking up through the window, they saw the city lights glowing. They had never seen such a big city full of life. They arrived at their first apartment in America, and unpacked. Right away, they both collapsed on the bed. After several hours of sleep, it was time to go on a job hunt. Their friend worked in a maids company and she offered Peter’s wife a job at the company. Peter decided to become a construction worker after his dream of becoming a teacher was over when he found out how much college tuition fees cost. So, he started his own construction business. Day after day the couple would arrive home tired and weary after hours of hard work. The money was worth it. Assimilating into the community was very easy for Peter and his wife because they lived in a heavily Polish populated community. The number one problem for them was trying to learn English. They bought books and even taped recordings to try and learn the language. They could not have gotten rid of their accents. After 3 years of hard work, they decided to move into their own place also in a Polish neighborhood.

Keeping the Polish culture today is still very important for my parents. They made me go to polish school for 10 years and I have one more to go. They find it horrible that some Polish kids do not know Polish. We speak Polish at home daily and even go to polish parades. Living in America was not hard because they had their one friend. They miss Poland a lot, but they know
having a living here is much easier than over there. They want me to have a better life in the future, so living here is a great chance for me to become a “somebody.” This interview opened my eyes on how immigrating was like and how keeping a culture is very important.