

Reflections, rewards and prospects for the future: Interviews with six "Poland in the Rockies" participants

Karoline Czernski
(participant)



Intensity abounds, ideas fly, and energy resonates when 37 young members of North American

Polonia gather in a small Rocky Mountain resort to learn about their cultural roots. Whilst in this enriching atmosphere, each participant's experience is unique, allowing for a diversity of thoughts, opinions, insights and reflections on the conference itself.

Three simple questions, and a plethora of differing answers, offer a taste of what resonated within the mountain air.

First: conference atmosphere. What describes the essence of the days in Canmore?

Second: highlight. What single piece of knowledge permeates through the sea of information absorbed?

Third: practical application. How are you going to use the knowledge gained at the conference in the real world?



Agnieszka Polakowska, 27 PhD candidate in Polish Literature Toronto

Confusion, that's what I feel. On one hand, it was really academic while, on the other, it was like camp. It was a really strange combination of the social and professional, all of it done at a really great speed.

For me, the highlight wasn't so much the content, but the way how people related to each other. It was interesting to see non-Poles give presentations, and the social dynamic of various groups trying to come to a consensus, and to interact with each other.

To be perfectly honest, the most important thing that I'm taking back from the conference is the e-mail addresses of vari-

ous people and speakers. I feel I'm leaving with a network of people.



Agnieszka Kielian, 21 Computer Sciences Chicago

We are all young people, basically from the same age group, and on that basis we have something in common. We also have a sense of unity, having emigrated from Poland or being born first or second generation immigrants. Also, the lack of exposure of Polish matter in American society is uniting us, we have a common goal.

The highlight? The importance of knowledge itself, of our culture, history, and that of other nations. Knowledge dispels generalizations, unfair and inaccurate pictures that can be dangerous to a nation's identity. Knowledge allows for respect towards our culture and other cultures.

What will I remember? Persistence-it pays off. I want to engage in awareness of multiculturalism, and try to unify my values with the values of others. And definitely contacts. The networks we made will be useful in the future.



Maciej Redlinski, 120. Finances Marketing, Int'l Business Chicago

We are very united-the group has become the best of friends. The majority of us aren't history majors, but it is important that everyone brings something different to the table. I think there are many people here with high potential, intellectuals that I'm amazed by.

One thing that I learned? Multiculturalism-that being Polish-Americans, Polish-Canadians, Polish-Jewish, are not the same things. It's up to the person to decide how they identify themselves, and how many layers they add to enrich their identity.

I gained a lot of confidence that I'm able to take back with me. Let's do something with culture, let's introduce the rich culture we have, out there. There are a lot of ideas stirring in my head, being among those wonderful people and how they've accomplished the things they did.



James F. Clark, 30 I PhD candidate Pittsburgh

The atmosphere had a great deal of camaraderie. When you have whole bunch of extremely active people together, they enjoy being active around each other, they have common interests. We have the intention now of going out and getting stuff done.

Information? I discovered the difference between Ukrainian Orthodox and Greek Catholic. Also, the explanation of the Ruthenians. Also, what was said about networking, and getting (the attention of) people.

What it's going to be, is the issue of visa applications. We shouldn't limit it just to Polish applications, however. We got to get all these other groups and involve them in this. If we want to do something like involving the media, we should mobilize the people, and let them know what's going on.

Nicholas Albertin, 23 BA in International Relations Calgary

It wasn't just a passive conference, it was very interactive and the participants had drive. There was intensity-the discussions did not end here, in the sessions. (Indeed, discussions permeated the dinner table; they lingered after sessions and, of course, into the night).

The highlight was definitely the importance of networking, but not just limited to our inner Polish circle. We need to go outside of these circles to promote Polish culture, language and traditions to the outside community. We need to create links between the diverse ethnic communities.



Bartek Bonikowski, 26 PhD student in Sociology at Duke University in Durham, N.C. I Toronto

There is a real intellectual energy here, in the sessions, and outside. People were passionate about these issues, and while there were differing opinions, what surprised me was the level of maturity in dealing with them. It's not about a Hind, nationalistic following but, rather, a critical, constructive, nuanced approach to what it means to be Polish.

The shortcomings of Polish culture have always frustrated me. I've never been able to understand it, bothered by Polish xenophobia, homogeneity. Having now learned the historical background has made me understand why Poland is the way it is. The history we've learned has been much more nuanced and complex. It has really given me interest in it, it has come alive. Every culture has its own myths. What I appreciated is that we dispelled a lot of those myths.

First of all, in daily interactions, if you hear things that you sense are wrong, if you don't have the knowledge, you can't do anything to counteract them. Now, I have enough knowledge to challenge some of those misconceptions. Secondly, I've become really interested in cross-cultural dialogue, to engage in conversation, to share facts about our history and to incorporate their history into my own. Lastly, on a level of academia, our appetite has only been whetted. We need to learn more, read more. This conference was a great start.

Karoline Czernski