



EVS MEMORY

ELENA (Austria)

"And what did you do all year?" When this question comes up I usually sum it up with: "I volunteered in Poland in a school and organized creative activities for instance in German and English language." Technically this is the core of a very big experience but there are a lot of things to be added to understand how wonderful and changing this experience was.

I did not only work in a school, but later as well in a kindergarten and not to forget in schools where other volunteers were working: On occasions like the European Day or simply big school parties where we would make animals out of balloons and paint faces.

But here are some more key facts about my whereabouts: For nine months (starting in October 2015 until June 2016) I lived in a small town called Łapy in the North-East of Poland. The next city was a 30 min train ride away and the only person that wasn't Polish except for me was a Spanish volunteer called Francisco. We were both working in High Schools of Łapy, to help the English teachers as a practical speaking adventure for the students. Actually it was a challenge to make our students participate and use their skills. We worked separately but he was always a great support when I was out of ideas. With his (and actually a lot of other people's) help as well as the internet I learned to create games and group activities to gain trust and motivation from my students to try some spoken German or English. I was never alone in the classroom, there was always a teacher with me - guiding or helping with translation when I was out of words in any language.

Of course I did not only help teaching I learned a lot, especially from local Polish people and my fellow volunteers: How to make traditional Polish Soup or Pierogi, how to pack your backpack right when you're going for a trip, how to juggle, how to play a wonderful game called Jungle Speed, how to communicate with a person that barely speaks English while you barely speak Polish - I could continue this list for another three pages. Speaking about learning: I attended Polish lessons the whole time and could speak about my future and my past at the end - even though Polish grammar is a labyrinth of exceptions. What matters is that you want to communicate.

During nine months a lot of great things happen, but life has its ups and downs. There were moments when I felt down and lonely, surrounded by a culture and language spoken by people I didn't really understand. But I think without those moments I would have never realised some very important things and it's still a big, great, adventurous thing: Going abroad alone where you don't know anybody.

Some borders break more easily than others and I am really thankful for the friends I made, especially among the other volunteers from my hosting organisation ANAWOJ. Even though most of them were working in Bialystok (the city I mentioned 30 min away by train) we could manage to spend a lot of time together. Without them, my mentor Adam and other friends I made through ANAWOJ I wouldn't have stayed so long and in such a great mood.



If you are in the same situation as I was one year ago (not sure about what I want to study what to do in life) and you have a spark of bravery follow this spark and go to some place you didn't spend the last eighteen years of your life. I will promise you, seeing and experiencing something you haven't been surrounded with yet opens your mind for the inside as well for the outside. There's always something to learn, you can always find a way and the only safe thing is to take a chance.

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