

INTERVIEW: SIMILARITIES AND DIFFERENCES (SCRIPT)

Why did you come to the Netherlands? Can you tell us a little bit about that?

I had finished my studies, worked in PL for two years during my studies (also at school) and thought that before I really fully furnish my place somewhere, I first had to go out into the world a bit. I love to travel, so the opportunity to come to Amsterdam, after invitation from my friend, I grabbed with both hands.

How old were you when you went to the Netherlands? 24

Did you like to go to another country, or not? Why or why not?

I found it very exciting, but never expected that I would live here. The intention was that in a few months/a year I would get an international diploma (a kind of upgrade of my Polish studies) and then go back to PL. Again, visiting other countries, discovering and getting to know people has always been my hobby.

Did you find it difficult to integrate into Dutch society? If so, what problems have you encountered?

Yes, mainly in connection with traditions and language. I was also alone here for a long time. You couldn't reach anyone quickly (friends, family). Calling was very expensive, or you had to order a call by mail, so I suffered from homesickness for quite a long time. Also, I had no books, newspapers, TV, radio in my own language, so all the info about what happened "there" came later, with quite a lot of delay. And since I am always interested in the world, but also in my own country (politics, culture), I found that super annoying. It wasn't until I got to know a lot of Polish immigrants via the internet (discussion groups online/1996), that I found a bit more peace in the fact that it doesn't matter where you live, if you can communicate often enough with people who understand you in terms of language and culture.

So that was more the emotional side of integrating. But it didn't always go smoothly practically: you had to learn everything again: from filling in taxes to picking up cycling again and participating in what is "normal" in the Netherlands.

Wasn't it difficult to master the Dutch language? How long does something like this take?

I never had so many problems with the language, as I could easily communicate in the EN. I came to the NL in August 1990, but in September I already started learning the language on the Joke Smit (20 hours a week). I wanted to be independent and understand if people are gossiping about me, or laughing at me. Moreover, I wanted to study and that was not possible without the entrance exams for NT-2. So after 9 months I passed the exams at the UvA and only then was I allowed to make my diploma valid in the Netherlands by repeating a part of my English Language and Literature education.

Do you ever feel homesick for Poland? If so, what do you miss most about Poland?

Yes, in the past very sometimes, now less so, especially when I can talk to my mother every day and follow and speak to many friends via social media. I miss the smells, the landscapes, a lot of people and the language.

What is the biggest difference between the Netherlands and Poland?

Apart from the landscapes, the mentality of the people. Poles are, were very open, talk a lot, hang out a lot with family, friends, are warm and welcoming. I couldn't imagine that to visit someone you first have to make an appointment. People also raise the children differently: in the Netherlands, women work faster after birth, have to do more, work longer. In Poland, this was not necessary in the past. Women did work, but have always had more space for the children. Also, family was always there for you (I was raised by my grandmother when I was little).

We also eat differently, spend more time cooking and eating. Many religious and holidays are also associated with food and with food.

Poles also start working earlier in the day (sometimes as early as 7 a.m.), so the whole economy is also organized differently (e.g. you can buy your bread at the bakery at 7 a.m., or even at 6 a.m.). In the evening we no longer eat hot, but at noon we do. As a result, I have had a lot of trouble in the Netherlands to get used to eating differently not only in terms of tastes, but also in terms of times.

Are there problems in Poland that are not relevant in the Netherlands? If so, what kind of problems?

Poles are (have been) very patriotic. They have always had many problems with each other and the neighbours from historical backgrounds. Poland did not exist for 123 years (was divided between Prussia, Russia and Austria-Hungary; only after 1918 did Poland become independent again). This has caused many mutual problems and still does (cultural distribution, other languages, different economic functioning; eg, the eastern side used to be more connected to Ukraine, Russia, was less economically developed, had different traditions, etc.)

With which nationality do you feel more connected, the Dutch or the Polish?

I have always remained Polish in my heart but think I have embraced a lot of Dutch habits and that is fine with me.