



## POLAND - THEN AND NOW

*Poland's communist government was overthrown in 1989.*

*In this article, Lolita Hershberger reflects on life before and after communism.*

Imagine standing in line for hours to buy one bag of sugar. Imagine being able to buy oranges only once a year, at Christmastime. Imagine needing ration cards to buy anything or going to the grocery store and seeing mostly empty shelves, or not being able to find chocolate anywhere, but only a "chocolate-type" product. Of course most of us have no idea what it would be like to live this way, but for a lot of our friends, their memories of times like these are vivid and fresh because a mere 25 years ago, this was reality in Poland.

Recently I have been asking a number of friends about their memories of communist times, and the things they have to say are fascinating. So here you have it: a history lesson about life in Poland under communism and how things have changed since then. After you read the article, ask yourself if all the changes have been for the better and what you can learn from this period of history.

After World War 2, Russia took over the country of Poland and turned it into a socialist state. Privately-owned

farms and businesses were seized by the government and turned into collectivized businesses. Ration cards were distributed for everything from milk to sugar, meat to chocolate. Standing in line for hours and hours to buy anything became a way of life. A friend recalled childhood memories of waking up at four to stand in line for meat while her mother went to work at the collective farm. Other friends have told us how fortunate anyone was who had friends or family living in the states or Canada. Those fortunate few would receive boxes of goodies and would be envied by all their friends.

Under communism, religion was frowned on. However, my friend Ela said she felt a need to go to church every morning before school and pray even though she wasn't supposed to and she could have gotten into trouble. Another friend Jan talks about being at the home of a Christian leader for Bible study, and while there, being placed under house arrest for 10 days. The forty years under communism were difficult years, full of unrest, suspicion and hardships like food shortage, imposition of Martial Law

in 1981, and extreme governmental control. There were very few of the luxuries and comforts we take for granted. Often there were arguments and fights in the lines of people waiting to use their ration cards. There was no possibility of getting ahead financially; of taking a second job to make any



*The Palace of Culture in Warsaw is an enduring and unmistakable symbol of Poland's communist heritage.*

extra money. Any new house that was built had to be a block house built in the one approved architectural style. Everyone's fence was painted the same yellowish mustard color.

It all sounds rather unpleasant to our modern ears, doesn't it? But to my surprise, the positive responses to my questions outweighed the negative. Even young people speak of those times with fond nostalgia. And even though they probably wouldn't go back to those times if they could, their responses are worth listening to and thinking about.

Ela says, "Oh, I will never forget the smell of that orange! We would all get one orange for Christmas, and first we all looked at our oranges for a long time. We held them and smelled them and the fragrance filled the whole house!" Agnieszka agreed, and added to that, "And bananas! Mmmm! They were so rare too!" Agnieszka also talked about the excitement of

taking the ration card for one bag of sugar to the store every Monday and even though there often wasn't any sugar there, it was so special to imagine getting one bag of sugar.

"Everything was worth so much more to you when there wasn't much of it," Jacek told me. "And along with fewer possibilities came more simplicity and contentment."

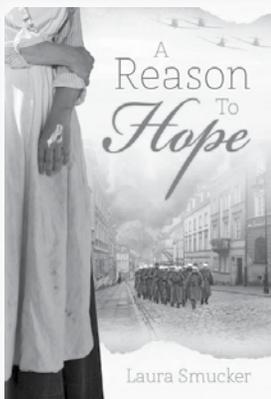
Everyone agreed that the spirit of community, helpfulness, and loyalty was stronger when they didn't have so many distractions. There was a lot more time spent with family and friends. Life was about much more than simply filling bank accounts and laying up for the future. Only a few high-ranking officials had that option, so there wasn't much temptation to be jealous.

"Now there is so much individualism and competition. We have many more possibilities but much loneliness," Jacek concluded. "Yes, I really miss

the way we would spend so much time with our neighbors and family, talking and helping each other. We have gained a lot, of course, but we have lost some very important things," Agnieszka added.

As I listened to these people, I was struck with the many parallels to our lives. It felt like a wake-up call. There is a lot to learn from these stories. Our world is changing too, perhaps not so drastically, but the things that can so easily slip away from us are much the same as the things they lost here even as they gained so much materially. Technology and modernism are not evil things in themselves, but it is absolutely vital to stay close to our unchanging God, to love Him with all our hearts and to love our neighbor as ourselves.

So the next time you eat an orange, hold it for awhile first. Feel the texture. Smell it. Thank God for it, and then enjoy it.



## A Reason to Hope

*A Reason to Hope*, by Laura Smucker, is the life-story of Mira, a beautiful woman of faith.

Mira was a child during WWII; the book tells of her family's fight for survival in desperate conditions. The family had to fend for themselves, because

no one could trust their neighbor. Stealing and suspicion, betrayal and desperation bound even children like a chain.

Still, God comforted Mira, miraculously gave her food and friends, and led her to the Bible and Jesus in a most unlikely way. As an adult, she found hope and comfort in Christ when she repeatedly lost everything and everyone she had ever hoped in.

Mira's story is full of loss and disappointment. She often says her story is sad, but it is clear that her hope is strong.

I have sat at her table and listened to her stories of how it was to come back to a pile of charred rubble that used to be their home. The extreme hunger and poverty she felt then is probably partly why she now presses her guests to eat more and more, then she pushes more food into our hands and pockets and backpacks. Her eyes shine when she talks of how much she wants to go to heaven and be with Jesus, her enduring hope.

*A Reason to Hope* is a story of simple faith that is strengthening and encouraging. It gives a face to post-war Poland, and speaks of the dismal reality of a life without hope and the glorious change Jesus brings!

*A Reason to Hope* is available for purchase from Christian Learning Resource.

[www.christianlearning.org](http://www.christianlearning.org)  
(877) 222-4769



*The church met for a special service and breakfast on Easter morning. We enjoyed hearing each family sing!*



*An evening campfire - a great way to connect with church friends.*



*Mira, the subject of the book "A Reason to Hope", is a good friend of Ria's.*

## Personnel Announcement

Jonathan and Heather Miller have begun a five-year term of service in Poland. Jonathan and Heather are members at the Lighthouse congregation in Abbeville, South Carolina. They have three children: Damaris, Johann, and Patrick. Jonathan will be responsible for the financial aspects of the mission and will assist with the Seed of Truth and Gateway to English. We thank God for this answer to our prayers! Please pray for Jonathan and Heather as they adjust to a new culture and begin to learn the language.



## Personnel Need

We are looking for a school teacher for the children of AIM staff. If you know of anyone who might be interested or would like more information, please contact us. A two-year commitment is required.

## Financial Needs

We are still seeking additional financial support for Jonathan and Heather. To date, we have received pledges or donations for \$23,000 of the \$33,500 needed for the first year of Jonathan & Heather's time in Poland. If the Lord leads you to partner with AIM in this way, please communicate your pledge by email at [homeoffice@aimpoland.org](mailto:homeoffice@aimpoland.org) or phone at (814) 789-4394.

## A Field White to Harvest

### *Sharing Christ where He has no voice*

While Poland is a predominantly Catholic country, with some 87% of the population identifying as Catholic,<sup>1</sup> there are many who experience this as only an empty tradition. There is a need for the Gospel of Jesus Christ to be presented. Consider these facts:

- As a percentage of the population, there are 4 times fewer Evangelical Christians living in Poland than there are in Saudi Arabia.<sup>2</sup>
- There are nearly 1 million people per church planting unit in Poland.
- Of the nearly 2500 counties in Poland, 2219 have no evangelical church of any kind within their borders.<sup>3</sup>
- Within these 2219 counties a total of 600 people die each day with little or no exposure to the gospel.

<sup>1</sup>"Poland," *CIA World Factbook*, last modified May 1, 2014, accessed May 19, 2014, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/pl.html>.

<sup>2</sup>*Operation World*; Patrick Johnstone; 2001

<sup>3</sup>GUS (Główny Urząd Statystyczny), *Official government statistical information service of Poland*



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AIM Financial Report  
January 1 — March 31, 2014

Available balance January 1, 2014 ..... \$17,100

**Income**

Unrestricted donations..... \$30,519

Restricted donations ..... \$7,837

English lessons..... \$5,949

Total income ..... \$44,305

**Expenses**

Labor ..... \$15,098

Administrative ..... \$83

Facilities..... \$5,844

Personnel..... \$4,771

Public relations..... \$868

Publications ..... \$2,533

Supplies ..... \$1,489

Utilities ..... \$2,395

Other expenses ..... \$-23

Total expenses..... \$33,058

Net profit (loss)..... \$11,247

Assets released from restriction..... \$7,837

Restricted funds December 31, 2013 ..... \$0

**Available unrestricted funds**

March 31, 2013 ..... \$28,347

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