

## MUSICAL ANCESTRIES – POLAND

Cast:

Nancy Kowalczyk	Nancy Kowalczyk (mother)
Jodie Hellm	Zofia Kowalczyk (daughter) (14)
Patrycja Darek	Patrycja Darek (cousin mother)
Andrzej Darek	Andrzej Darek (cousin father)
Adam Darek	Adam Darek (cousin son) (16)
Kathy Lawton Brown	Narrator

**NARR:** Zofia (14) and her cousin Adam (16) were the closest of friends, even though Zofia lived in St. Louis, MO and Adam in Warsaw, Poland.

One day they were chatting about their upcoming fall semesters and the holiday break schedules, when a brilliant idea hit Adam.

**ADAM:** You know, Zofia? Remember when I visited you a couple years ago? How about you two come see us in Poland over your winter break? Why don't you ask your Mom?

**ZOFIA:** She's right here - hang on Adam.

Mom! We've been talking about visiting Poland...how cool would it be that we go during winter break? Is that good with you?

**NANCY:** As a matter of fact, I just talked to Adam's mom yesterday, and we were thinking the same thing.

**ZOFIA:** Great minds, right?! (*BACK TO PHONE*) Adam - our moms have been reading our minds! Looks like they've already discussed it! How much FUN would that be? I can't wait!

**ADAM:** Awesome! I'll talk with my mom and dad and we can get a plan together.

**ZOFIA:** I'm super excited!

**ADAM:** Talk to you soon!

**ZOFIA:** See you soon! Bye!

**NARR:** As the weeks went by, the two families came up with a terrific plan for their holiday trip. They would start in Warsaw and see some sights and then visit Kraków. Many of their ancestors came from Kraków and a few cousins still lived there. They would stay with them while visiting....then back to Warsaw to celebrate Christmas together.

Finally the big day arrived when Nancy and Zofia boarded the plane to Warsaw.

Adam and his mother, Patrycja, were waiting at the airport for them.

**PATRYCJA:** Welcome to Warsaw, my dear cousins! Nancy, you look wonderful - and Zofia what a beautiful young woman you are! I can't believe it's been two years since we've seen you.

**ADAM:** I've got to have a proper hug from both of you!

*(All laugh)*

**NANCY:** Oh my word, it's great to see you both!

**ZOFIA:** We felt like the plane couldn't get here fast enough! What fun is this gonna be!

**PATRYCJA:** You both must be too tired - it's a long flight. Let's go home and see your cousin Andrzej, refresh, relax, and get some sleep. We have a big day tomorrow.

**NARR:** They arrived and enjoyed a lovely mid-afternoon dinner (called an **obiad**) with **barszcz** (a beet-based soup, often served with sour cream), **bigos** (a Hunter's Stew), cabbage rolls (**gołąbki**), **surówka** (a raw vegetable salad), and a traditional Polish cheesecake topped with jam for dessert called **sernik**. The **obiad** is traditionally the largest meal of the day in Poland.

After **obiad**, they spent the rest of the evening talking and laughing. Patrycja played her accordion and taught her cousins a few **kolędy** (Polish Christmas Carols), to prepare them for the holidays. To her surprise, Nancy and Zofia knew quite a few of them from Nancy's parents and grandparents.

The following morning, Adam was their alarm clock...

**ADAM:** *POBUDKA! POBUDKA!* WAKE UP! WAKE UP! All Polish Americans! We have a lot of stuff to see today in Warsaw! I'm talking about you, cousin Nancy and Zofia!

**NARR:** Nancy and Zofia awoke to the delicious fragrance of a hearty **Śniadanie**. Patrycja and Andrzej had prepared a traditional Polish breakfast that included **kielbasa** (Polish sausage), ham, rye and sourdough bread, a healthy serving of cabbage, scrambled eggs, along with a side of **twarorzek**, a soft farmer's cheese served with radishes.

**NANCY:** Oh, Patrycja and Andrzej, you're going through so much trouble! Yesterday's delicious **obiad** and now this! Thank you so much. Everything looks delicious!

**ZOFIA:** Thank you. It smells wonderful! Do I smell cabbage? For breakfast?

**ANDRZEJ:** We have an old saying here in our family: "Bez kapusty nie ma obiadu."

**ADAM:** It means "No cabbage equals an empty stomach."

*(All laugh)*

**NARR:** After they finished breakfast, they left for a full day of sightseeing starting with The Royal Castle and Old Town. The Royal Castle in Warsaw is a symbol of Poland's resilience and rich history. Located in the heart of the city, it was originally the residence of the Polish monarchs. The castle, along with the historic Old Town, had been destroyed in World War II. It was completely reconstructed using pictures, drawings, paintings, and even by memory. The meticulous rebuilding was so historically accurate that UNESCO placed it on the World Heritage List. The palace is now a museum.

**ZOFIA:** This palace is incredible! How old is it?

**ANDRZEJ:** The Royal Castle and Old Town trace back to the 14th century.

**NANCY:** It's fascinating how these structures have been brought back to life.

**ANDRZEJ:** And it continues to stand as a testament to Poland's perseverance.

**NARR:** They spent almost three hours touring the palace - there was so much to see! Afterwards, they got a quick coffee at a café, then went outside to hear the street musicians.

**ZOFIA:** I can't believe they're out here in the wintertime! They must be SO COLD!

**PATRYCJA:** Oh, you haven't experienced "cold" yet, Zofia! Polish winters can be brutal, but today actually it's not too bad. We are lucky.

**ADAM:** (*chuckling*) And street musicians will play in any weather!

**ZOFIA:** I've been seeing a lot of accordions. And cousin Patrycja plays the accordion, too. That must be a popular instrument here in Poland.

**PATRYCJA:** Yes. Accordion is one of the most popular instruments here.

**ZOFIA:** We sure have a lot of musicians in our family! Grandpa plays the accordion, mom plays the guitar, Uncle David plays the piano, and cousin Patrycja plays the accordion.

**ANDRZEJ:** And now Adam wants to be a concert pianist! Our family is full of musicians!

**ADAM:** (*chuckling*) It *does* run in the family! Alright, time to head to the Palace of Culture and Science!

**NARR:** The Palace of Culture and Science is a huge structure, standing 757 feet tall. The Palace remains one of Warsaw's most recognizable landmarks and includes over 3,000 rooms! The building was designed to be visible from every part of the city, making it a dominant feature of Warsaw's skyline for more than six decades. The family went up to the Viewing Terrace on the 30th floor to get a breathtaking view of Warsaw.

**NANCY:** Even though I'm terrified of heights, I am really glad I got to see this incredible view! Anyone up for getting some souvenirs before lunch? I really want to visit a pottery store!

**PATRYCJA:** There are *plenty* of places to buy souvenirs around here.

**NARR:** Off they went to explore more of the city and to purchase some mementos. Nancy bought a piece of **Bolesławiec** pottery, which is a significant part of Polish ceramic tradition. Named for the town it comes from, this distinctive pottery-making tradition dates back to the 14th century. The pottery is known for its unique indigo blue polka dot patterns on white backgrounds.

Zofia bought a gorgeous amber bracelet. Poland is renowned for its amber, and Warsaw is famous for its vast selection of amber jewelry...a must-see for all jewelry enthusiasts.

After souvenir shopping, they found a nearby street vendor, where they ordered the **Zapiekanka**, a famous Polish street food. The crispy baguette, traditionally topped with mushrooms and cheese, was the perfect lunch for the chilly day.

**ADAM:** I love *Zapiekanka*, don't you, Zofia?

**ZOFIA:** Uh, yes! Who doesn't love bread, mushrooms, and cheese?

*(Adam and Zofia laugh)*

**ANDRZEJ:** Let's head home and relax a bit, have a light dinner, get some sleep. Tomorrow we are going to Łazienki Park, and then we will take a high speed train to Kraków.

**ADAM:** *(excited)* And we'll see the statue of Chopin!

**ZOFIA:** Finally! You've talked about Chopin since we were little, Adam.

**NANCY:** Maybe tonight if you're not too tired, you can play a Chopin piece for us, Adam. Your mother has told me that you have really grown into a magnificent pianist.

**ADAM:** Aw, thanks. I'd be happy to!

**NARR:** After dinner, Adam did play a Chopin Nocturne for them. It was the perfect ending to a perfect day.

Morning came; the family headed to **Royal Łazienki Park**. With a history dating back to the 17th century, the Park, called Łazienki - is a treasure trove of culture and beauty. Created by Poland's final king, Stanisław Poniatowski, this park is filled with stunning landscapes and holds many architectural gems, such as the enchanting Palace on the Isle. The family also discovered treasures like the Japanese Garden and historic theaters, as they strolled past stately architecture, serene ponds and chirping birds. A perfect walk to get to the Chopin statue.

**ZOFIA:** The Palace on the Isle was incredible! I can't believe we were so lucky to be there for the Chopin concert! I bet that was your favorite part, Adam.

**ADAM:** Absolutely! I hope to perform there someday. And...here we are! The magnificent Chopin statue!

**NARR:** Adam shared his knowledge of the famous Polish composer, Frederic Chopin, with his family.

**ANDRZEJ:** Alright, my friends, time to catch a train!

ZOFIA, ADAM, NANCY: (*same time*) I've never been on a train! Yessss! So exciting!

NARR: The high speed train ride to Kraków was so much fun. The scenery was beautiful farmland, with rolling hills, a few forests and some gorgeous historic buildings in the cities. They arrived at Kraków's railway station, close to the Market Square.

NANCY: I just love holiday markets! So many things to buy!

ZOFIA: (*laughs*) Be careful on the spending spree, mom. We may have to buy another suitcase!

(*All laugh*)

NARR: Kraków excels when it comes to Christmas markets. It's believed that a festive market has been held in the main square and surrounding **Sukiennice** (the Kraków Cloth Hall) since the early 1300s. Kraków is an impressive place to visit any time of the year, but it really shines during the winter holidays. The Old Town transforms with a giant Christmas tree, and the market comes alive with warmth and holiday spirit. It's perfect for finding gifts, whether at the market or in local shops. Plus, there's plenty of delicious food and warm drinks to enjoy.

The family explored every inch of the market and purchased holiday gifts. They also bought some **pierogi** - Polish dumplings, filled with cheese and onion - and listened to more street performers.

ZOFIA: What *is* that instrument with the crank on it?

PATRYCJA: That's called a hurdy gurdy.

ANDRZEJ: It's a string instrument that makes music when you turn a hand crank.

NARR: They walked a little further and came across a few more unusual instruments, the first being the **suka**. Its body is similar to the modern violin, but has a very wide neck. Played vertically, on the knee or hanging from a strap, the strings are stopped at the side with the fingernails. Its sound is haunting.

PATRYCJA: Do you see that instrument over there that looks like an organ? It's a *Katarynka*. It was used by street performers a long time ago and still brings a special, old-fashioned sound.

**NARR:** Popular in Poland during the 19th and early 20th centuries, the **Katarynka** played a significant role in Polish street music, especially during festivals and public events. It's a small, organ-like instrument that makes music by turning a barrel with pins that hit metal pipes.

**ANDRZEJ:** Our next stop here in the Market Square is St. Mary's Basilica and then the Royal Wawel Castle.

**NARR:** St. Mary's Basilica has foundations that go back to the early 13th century, making it a great example of Polish Gothic architecture. They took a fascinating guided tour.

**ADAM:** Zofia! Zofia! Come quickly, you have got to hear this!

**NARR:** As Adam and Zofia left the Basilica into the main square, they heard the **Hejnał Mariacki** that is played every hour. The **Hejnał Mariacki** is played by a trumpet player known as the **hejnalista**. The melody is played from the top floor of the tower of St. Mary's every hour, 24 hours a day. A key part of Kraków's cultural heritage, this musical tradition is very carefully maintained.

**ANDRZEJ:** The short melody, *Hejnał*, is played four times, in each direction (north, east, south, and west). It is meant to honor the city's history and was originally used as a lookout warning for invaders.

**NARR:** The Wawel Royal Castle is the most significant historical and cultural place in Poland. For many years, the castle was home to kings and represented Polish identity. Today, it serves as one of the top art museums in the country.

**ZOFIA:** This history is amazing!

**NANCY:** Of course, you know I loved the ceramics collection in the castle's art museum.

**PATRYCJA:** The furniture collection will always be my favorite.

**ADAM:** Now we're going to see Schindler's Factory, right, *tato*?

**ANDRZEJ:** Yes, that's right.

**PATRYCJA:** We will tell you all about the factory in the taxi. *Idziemy!*

**NARR:** Andrzej and Patrycja explained that Poland was invaded by Nazi Germany in 1939, which began the start of World War Two. Millions of Jews and non-Jews perished, and many were sent to concentration camps.

**PATRYCJA:** The war left deep scars on Poland, which devastated the population.

**ANDRZEJ:** We are now going to visit Schindler's museum to learn about how one man helped to save so many Poles and Jews.

**NARR:** The Schindler museum was a heart-touching experience. Called the Oskar Schindler Enamel Factory, it was formerly a factory which manufactured enameled metal goods during WWII.

**ZOFIA:** Mr. Schindler certainly seemed to be a very kind man.

**PATRYCJA:** Oh, Zofia, he was, indeed. We are here in a place of history that is not pleasant to even talk about.

**NARR:** Less than 50 miles away from the Schindler Factory stands the notorious Auschwitz-Berkenau Concentration Camp. 1.1 million perished there, only part of the six million who died during the Holocaust.

But...there were also millions who lived! And it was due to many people like Oskar Schindler. He personally saved over a thousand people by hiring those who were targeted and put them to work in his factory. He fed them, clothed them and protected them. Sometimes that even led to their being able to escape. The Jews have a beautiful way of expressing their appreciation for the numerous people like Mr. Schindler...they call them 'Righteous People' who were not Jewish, but did whatever they possibly could to help the Jews, even risking their own lives. Many of the Polish people were 'Righteous People' who helped others to safety during the war. The term honors their memory and their countless acts of kindness. The many stories like Oskar Schindler's are deeply inspiring.

After the family absorbed some of the museum's history, they participated in educational activities and events that depicted what life was like during WWII.

**ZOFIA:** Thank you. I really appreciate you bringing us here.

**ADAM:** It's so important to embrace different cultures and learn from one another.

**ANDRZEJ:** It has been a long day, guys, and our cousins Jakub and Anna are waiting for us to meet them for dinner. After that we'll spend the night at their home.

**PATRYCJA:** I hope you're hungry for more traditional Polish food! We are going to *Michalik's* Cave restaurant, and while we are there, we will get to see traditional Polish folk dancing.



**ADAM:** Let's go! I'm starving!

**ZOFIA:** Wait. We're eating in a cave?

**PATRYCJA:** (*chuckles*) No, sweet cousin. When it first started it was a single room with no windows, which is how it got its name.

**NARR:** **Jama Michalika**, established in 1895, is one of the oldest cafes in Kraków. Before WWI, it was a popular spot for artists, bohemians, and scholars who could eat for free in return for their artwork.

The family enjoyed watching a fabulous folk dance performance, and even joined in later. Afterwards they feasted on a three-course meal, complete with Polish favorites.

**NANCY:** What a wonderful evening! Beautiful dancing, excellent food, and spending time with our wonderful cousins. It doesn't get any better than that!

**ZOFIA:** I loved learning a few dances!

**ADAM:** The Polonaise dance was my favorite.

**NARR:** The Polonaise is a lively dance that can be performed by just a few people or a large group of couples moving together in a line. The main step is simple: you bend one leg while stepping forward with the other. This popular folk dance is often passed down through families and local groups to celebrate special occasions.

The family left Michalik's Cave and spent the night with their cousins Jakub and Anna. They took the morning train back to Warsaw. Christmas Eve was in two days, and the family had much to do. When you live in Poland, there's a lot of work to prepare the house for Christmas.

**PATRYCJA:** It's a tradition to clean everything, and we definitely do!

**ADAM:** Zofia, I saved the spider for you to put on the tree.

**ZOFIA:** Spider? Ewww! Why would you want to put a spider on your tree?

**ANDRZEJ:** (*laughs*) The Christmas Spider is a classic tale about a family that didn't have enough money to decorate their tree. The next morning, they were surprised to see their tree covered in beautiful silver and gold strands that looked like a spider's web.

**ADAM:** So, finding a spider on a Christmas tree is supposed to bring good luck.

**NARR:** In Poland, Christmas is a three-day celebration, starting on December 24th. The family waited to see the first star in the sky on Christmas Eve so that they could begin their special dinner feast called **Wigilia**.

**PATRYCJA:** Did you notice we set an extra chair at the table? We Poles believe that no one should be hungry or alone during *Wigilia*, so we set a spot just in case someone shows up.

**NARR:** Before enjoying the **Wigilia** meal, the family shared a large wafer known as an **Oplatek**. This wafer is a thin rectangle made from flour and water. Each person takes a piece and goes around the table, offering holiday wishes to everyone. After sharing their thoughts, they break off a piece of each other's wafers and eat it.

**Wigilia** usually features 12 different dishes, which can change depending on the region and the family traditions. Everyone tries a bit of each dish, as it's believed to bring good fortune for the upcoming year. Carp is traditionally the main dish, and many believe it brings good luck to those who eat it on Christmas Eve.

**NANCY:** Don't forget that animals are able to speak at midnight on Christmas Eve.

**ANDRZEJ:** Yes, Nancy! An ancient Polish legend says that on Christmas Eve at midnight, animals can talk. The tale explains that they were granted the power to greet the Holy Child when He was born.

**NARR:** The rest of the evening was spent opening presents, sharing stories and singing **kolędy** by the Christmas tree. Carolers visited the house, and Adam and Zofia gave them treats.

Christmas Eve wraps up with **Pasterka**, the Midnight Mass at the local church. This tradition honors the shepherds who visited the stable at Bethlehem.

The next morning, it was Christmas Day.

**ANDRZEJ:** *Wesołych Świąt!*

**ZOFIA:** I know that one. It means "Merry Christmas."

**ANDRZEJ:** Yes it does, Zofia.

**ZOFIA:** Yesterday was such a big deal that I'm kind of exhausted today.

**ADAM:** That's why Christmas Day is much more chill. Friends and family will stop by and visit, we'll sing some more *koledy*, eat some gingerbread cookies, and just hang out here at the house.

**ZOFIA:** Whew! I'm glad!

*[All laugh]*

**NARR:** The family had a lovely day, filled with good friends, family, singing, and food. The next day it was time for Nancy and Zofia to head home.

**NANCY:** The hardest part is saying goodbye. Thank you all for your gracious hospitality. You really were the most amazing hosts.

**PATRYCJA:** You are very welcome, anytime, dear cousin. The pleasure has been all ours.

**ZOFIA:** Adam, I am going to miss seeing you in person. I guess it will be back to Zoom and Facetime for us.

**ADAM:** I'm going to miss you, too. But I'm glad we at least still get to see each other, even if it is through the phone!

**ANDRZEJ:** Family is the best way to celebrate holidays. We are glad we were able to spend them with you both.

**NANCY:** Thank you for everything. OK, Zofia, time to go to the airport. Here's the taxi.

**ADAM:** Hold on! You forgot one important thing!

**ZOFIA:** What's that?

**ADAM:** I've got to have a proper hug from both of you!

*(All laugh)*