



Summary of Iwona Paciorkowska's life story

Interview and recording of Iwona Paciorkowska
by Adrian O'dell (NPHG) – November 22nd 2018

Iwona Paciorkowska was born in the town of Sułwalki in north-east Poland in 1985. She had three older brothers and a younger sister and her mother was an accountant. Her father was not well but spent his time as a handyman and was able to do all sorts of repair and building work. She attended primary school in the town and enjoyed reading and was good at languages, studying German, Russian and English. At High School she admits to having a more relaxed attitude and was not concerned about her grades as she liked to party but nevertheless she had good results in Maths, Polish and English. She also represented her school at shooting and belonged to local club which was growing in popularity.

At the age of 19 and in 2004 Iwona decided to change her life. That was the year that Poland joined the European Union and, because its economy was slow, membership of the EU was a great opportunity. She signed up with an Au Pair recruitment agency and, after completing all the application details and passing the vetting procedure, she was delighted to receive a position from an English family in Brancaster, North Norfolk. Although she had been one of the top students in her year in English, she found the Norfolk accent very hard to understand. She looked after an 8-month-old baby but in addition to that responsibility she had to continue with her English studies at King's Lynn College and completed exams there.

She then looked for alternative work and took up a position as a housekeeper at the Host Hotel in Burnham Market where she stayed for two years. It was there that she met her Polish partner who was working on a nearby farm. Their first son, Kacper, was born in 2006 and together the couple shared the child-raising responsibilities so that Iwona was able to take a full-time job in an recruiting agency. She helped find employment for many Poles, Lithuanians and Latvian.

In 2008 the family decided to move to Thetford. They has been renting a house previously but, as they wanted to own their own property, the best option was to move to south Norfolk where house prices were considerably lower. With her good command of the English language and her strong background in administration, Iwona was able to obtain new work easily and she found that the British were generally welcoming to her as a Pole. After 6 years in a variety of positions, she found she wanted to improve her education at the University of Suffolk, based in Bury St Edmunds and began studies for a BA in Business Management and Psychology. She found the style and quantity of essay-writing to be quite a challenge. She qualified in 2017 but then applied to read for a Masters in Consumer Psychology at Anglia-Ruskin University. Those more advanced studies have now been completed and she has just been awarded that degree.

In the meantime she became managing director of the 'Teaching Polish in Thetford School' (Nauczanie Języka Polskiego w Thetford) with responsibility for the finances and fundraising activity. Its aim is to encourage Polish children born in England to maintain Polish language knowledge and skills and also to keep them in touch with and to be proud of their Polish cultural roots. Iwona also works part-time as a freelance interpreter (in association with the NHS) and part-time in a local physiotherapy practice.

Since the Brexit process was initiated in 2016, Iwona believes that attitudes to her and other immigrant nationalities have changed. Although she plans to stay in Britain, the thought of having to return to Poland is always in the back of her mind. She knows that there are a lot of Poles considering a return to their homeland and many have done so already. She sometimes feels a sense of "not belonging here" although she regards Thetford as her home as her children were born here.

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