



Summary Evelina Wachnicka's life story

Interview and recording of Evelina Wachnicka
by Adrian O'dell (NPHG) – May 11th 2019

Ewelina Wachnicka was born in Lipno, Poland in 1984. Both her parents were from generations of farming families but they also ran a small corner-shop business. Her father was Paweł Wachnicka and her mother was called Elżbieta and she had an older and younger sister. As a seven year old youngster, Ewelina loved working on the farm and those were her best childhood memories. She played in the fields with her friends and looked after chickens and helped on the strawberry plantation. She went to primary school in Dobrzyna Nad Wisła where her parents still live and following that she moved to high school, some 24 kilometres away.

Music was always an important presence in her life; her father played the accordion and Ewelina and her sisters danced to his music. She had piano lessons at primary school and played until she was 16 years old when she joined the local fire brigade band and played the saxophone. The band played publicly at national and religious celebrations. At high school she had initially wanted to study psychology but when she was unsuccessful applying for a psychology course at Warsaw University she realised that her destiny lay in another direction. Fortunately she had a back-up plan and applied to the of university Warmia and Mazury at Olsztyn to study Food Science, which led to a career in that discipline.

When the opportunity came to take part in an EU student exchange programme she spent six months in Greece and trained at the National State Laboratory in Athens. She was excited by the wide range of practical applications for food science available to her. Upon her return to Poland she decided to take a gap year and headed for England. She spent one year here practising English and doing a variety of jobs, starting in the Post Office sorting letters. However, she really wanted to work in a lab but when she was unable to find something suitable she chose to work in a factory which did have a laboratory as part of its operations. She joined a pharmaceutical company in the Liverpool area, working on the packing-line and later in the production area. She found the Scouse dialect a real challenge as all her schoolday English studies had used "Oxford English"

One day she approached the Quality Control manager in the company canteen, introduced herself and gave him a copy of her cv and asked if there were any vacancies in the laboratory. After some weeks she was asked to come upstairs to the offices and was offered a position in the microbiological department. Once she had finished her time with the pharmaceutical company, she picked up her backpack and travelled around Australia, returning to Poland to finish her university studies but she also found time so spend another six months in Finland on a small microbiological project there. She was awarded an MSc in 2009.

She had really been bitten by the scientific bug but knew that, although she had already achieved a high level of education combined with practical work experience, working for a PhD was the next logical step for her. She found a position at the Institute of Food Research in Norwich. After a very rainy experience in Liverpool she was delighted to discover that Norfolk was the driest county in England! She also loved the UEA and found it a most cosmopolitan environment with Norwich a beautiful and cultured city. She felt safe and very much at home and had great support from her colleagues.

The PhD course lasted three and one half years and she graduated in 2013 after which she took up a position as a food safety scientist in a global company in Bedford where she worked until the time of this interview. During her period in Norwich she developed the *Polacy w Norwich* Facebook Group and started the Polish Society for students at the UEA. Ewelina is always on the lookout for a different opportunity and in June 2019 she will be moving to France to take up a new position with an international French food company in Paris. When asked if she spoke French, she replied "Of course not" but that doesn't seem to daunt her.

In 2018, the Embassy of the Republic of Poland in London organised a campaign to find Polish women in the UK who had made an inspirational contribution within the Polish diaspora and Ewelina was honoured to be chosen as one of the finalists.

When asked about the Brexit situation she replied that she had been really upset by the anti-immigrant sentiment in some parts of British society. She had always thought this country to be welcoming to foreigners but after the referendum result she felt uneasy and that some of those around her were thinking, "You are not welcome here". Although still deeply upset by the turn of events, she hopes that the UK will find the right way to come to terms with the difficult and unsettling times ahead. She is clearly a very adaptable person and will still regard England as her second home.

May 2019