

Art admirer finds humor in Poland

By GREG TAVALLIRE

A good sense of humor has long been a characteristic of Polish people, but in Poland, "Polish jokes," are different from what we're familiar with.

"The Polish counteract bad situations with jokes, many of which are very subtle," said Danuta Boczar of Troy, who has just spent two years researching 18th-20th century Polish art in the eastern European country.

"They tell jokes about segments of society that they don't particularly like," she said, "such as the police and members of the socialist government."

"When I was there, I told some of those real rusty Polish jokes. Although I'd explode when I heard some of them, they thought many were funny. They'd say some parts of the joke were true. They laugh at the fact that they don't have the technical ability to do many things, but they wouldn't laugh at jokes that insult their intelligence."

An art history graduate from George Washington University in Washington, D.C., Ms. Boczar was in Poland on a Fulbright Hays grant from the State Department.

Her parents immigrated to the U.S. from Poland after World War II. Her first visit to Poland in 1971 led her to apply for the grant to independently study Polish art for two years. As part of the grant, Ms. Boczar received transportation costs and money to cover living expenses.

Ms. Boczar went through lengthy interviews by U.S. government officials before she was granted the Fulbright scholarship.



Danuta Boczar said the visit to Poland whet her appetite, and she later applied for and received a grant to study Polish art. (Staff photo by Charlie Kidd)

"They wanted to know things like what I would do if a revolution broke out and if I'd take anything out of the country. Of course, I had to say no."

"Poland is one eastern European country that accepts a large number of American students," she said. "They are determined to build strong social and economic ties with the West. They need western dollars in the economy."

Ms. Boczar, 26, described the Polish political climate as "tense."

"The food situation is bad," she said. "And if consumerism is bad, the politics are bad. My impression of the political climate is that it is very tense. Something's going to break."

She said there is a black market for meats, and the only abundant foods are fresh fruits and vegetables grown in the country.

"People demand a voice. They are very aware of what's going on in other countries," she said. "They are bolder and not afraid to voice their disappointments."

"The meat shortage is the worst. People have to stand in lines for hours, and it's almost impossible to get meat."

But the tense situation, Ms. Boczar said, is not as bad as that represented by the Western press.

"I challenge anyone who says it is a police state," she said. "It is no more a police state than many of the Western countries we condone."

"While I was there, if one of my Polish friends would say anything about politics, I would tell them to be quiet."

"But they told me that I was overdoing it. I never felt followed, although I know my phone was tapped one time."

While in Poland from September 1975 to August 1977, Ms. Boczar interviewed many Polish artists, visited art schools and museums and researched books at Jagiellonian University. She also sent home more than 800 Polish books and posters.

"The posters are hung on fences and walls and are very simple. They tell you only what is happening, you have to get details from the newspapers."

"They're also very colorful and artistic. They make colorful wall posters."

The posters are a form of street art, she said and their virtues are often a discussion topic among Poles.

"My poster collection is everything to me," she said. "In Poland they don't have advertising the way we do here. There are no billboards. Magazines are not full of advertisements, and the newspapers don't allow it."

Reflecting on her stay in Poland, Ms. Boczar said one of the most surprising things she encountered was how easy it was to adopt the Polish system.

"You learn to do things like they do there. You learn not to talk politics too much. You become used to waiting in long lines for food, and you walk an awful lot."

"It's amazing what you can put up with."



Sign of spring

Thawing water pipes are also a sign of warmer weather. But the thaw causes damage to the pipes such as the ones near 33335 Shiawassee, Farmington. DPW crews were recently working on the problem. (Staff photo by Harry Mauthe)

Green enlists

Donald Wade Green, 19, son of Mr. and Mrs. Donald W. Green, 23097 Cora, Farmington Hills has entered the U.S. Air Force's delayed enlistment program.

Green, a 1976 graduate of Farmington High School will receive Security Specialist training.

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