

2009 GLOSSA Scholarship Awards

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Yony Ricardo Florez Mendoza (Peru)

Any day or maybe anytime, something can change your mind about your dreams and make them come true. This is my story regarding something that I would like to share with you. My name is Ricardo Florez, I am 28 years old and originally from Peru in South America.

When I was at secondary school I hadn't been interested in the history of Europe or even to know about the culture of people from outside my country. It maybe was because I was so young or because I haven't had a chance to know anyone from abroad.

In 2002 my aunt had an opportunity to travel to England and do some volunteer work. One day she called me at home in Peru and said to me that she was spending Christmas in Poland with her best Polish friend called Johanna. She told me that the weather was cold but it was nice to see the snow, and there was lots of snow! I never had a chance to see snow, I had just seen it on the mountains and in some movies but I had never ever touched it or even played with it.

In August 2004 I had the opportunity to go to England and to be part of a project of volunteer work in a college called RNC. When I arrived in England a Polish fellow was waiting for me outside the Airport to welcome me and he took me to meet the others volunteers. His name was Jakub, but he likes to be known as "Kuba". I won't forget that day. He introduced me to various other Polish people and they invited me to a party and gave me a drink of polish vodka called "Krupnik". It tasted nice and it was the first time I had drunk that vodka. It was very strong!

In Peru I just drank beer. The next day I met all the volunteers, 2 people from Germany and 7 people from Poland. I was the only Spanish speaker there. I lived in a big house with 5 Polish friends and it was there that I started to learn about Poland. The first word that I learned was "na zdrowie". I found it easy to pronounce Polish words.

One day my Polish friends started to talk in Polish and I couldn't understand at all what they were taking about so I decided to learn and to talk with them in Polish. I asked them how I could say some words and phrases in Polish that I could use to communicate with Polish people.

Jak cie masz? Co robisz? or dziekuje bardzo! Were the first words I learnt.

My good friend called Kuba always smiled and laughed when I spoke Polish. Then the rest of my friends liked the way that I talked to them, it was so funny for them. I started to like them and vice versa.

When we had parties I used to improve my Polish and started to remember all the Polish words and also I learned how to construct new sentences.

Once I met a beautiful Polish girl and I told her "jestes bardzo piekna". She was surprised that I talked to her in Polish, she couldn't believe it.

So a little by little my Polish improved. Many friends told me that my Polish was better than my English.

That summer a Polish friend called Kriz invited me to go to a Polish wedding in Poznan. We booked the tickets and flew to Poland.

We arrived in Warsaw, it was a sunny day and very hot. I couldn't believe that the weather was like the temperature of my country. I thought it would be cold so I had taken lots of jumpers and also I thought that I would see some snow but I was wrong.

The first place that I went in Poland was a city called *Starachowice*. A friend called Karol took me to his home. I met his family and they invited me for dinner I ate a lot *mielone* and too many Polish sausages called "kielbasa". I really liked that, but something was missing in my dinner, so the next day I when shopping and I bought a hot chilli. I love chilli. I was born in a city where people cook many different types of *spicy-hot foods*. All my Polish friends know that I like chilli, and some of them like it too. They like my food, I cooked for them many times and they said that I'm a very good chef. This comment made me happy.

Starachowice is a nice place, it's very peaceful and pretty. I haven't seen in my life such beautiful countryside. People were very kind to me. I like Poland and people over there treated me as one of them, like a family member.

I asked my friend the next day, can we go to Wadowice, the place where the Pope John Paul II was born. My friend said that it was no problem.

I was very excited about going there. It is something that I won't forget. In 1985 and 1988 the Pope John Paul II was in Peru. He was in my city but at that time I was 4 years old but I knew about it when I was in the school. In Peru we celebrate the day of Pope in 30th of June.

It was night when we arrived at Wadowice I visited the church and the house where he grew up. I took a lot of pictures with my friends, it was nice to be there.

Next day we went to Krakow, a very interesting city. I saw a lot people and my friend told me that most of them were students. We stopped at some pub in the city centre and my friend bought me a Polish beer called "zywiec". We talked for a while, he explained to me, many things that had happened in Poland. A very interesting thing for me was about the "*Heynal mariacki*" a traditional note about the history of the city of Krakow. It is played by a trumpeter four times consecutively from the highest tower of Mary,s Church in the city centre.

Next morning I went to visit another Polish friend called Pawel in a town called "Pleszew". I met his family who were very kind to me. They invited me for lunch and I ate a nice Polish soup with Polish bread and them some potatoes with *mileone* and mushrooms it tasted so delicious. Later I ate a nice Polish cake as a desert. In Pleszew there is a small lake called "*Goluchow*". We decided to spend the afternoon over there. The weather was great and the water was warm. We had some fun.

Next day I met another friend called Kriz, he is from a small town call "Chocz". He took me to Poznan in his small car, a nice car called "*Cinquecento*", but we went first to the graduation of his younger sister called

Monika. I saw a lot of students wearing long dresses and a special hat for the occasion. I took a lot pictures and he took pictures of me and his family.

Then we when to church for the wedding I saw the bride (Kriz's sister call Ania), she was very beautiful and still she is. She was wearing a nice white dress like an Angel. After the blessing, the couple came out and all the people threw a lot of coins and the couple started to collect them. My friend told me that is for good fortune for the future.

After that we went to the party. I ate a lot delicious polish food and I drank a lot of vodka. People in Poland celebrate parties with vodka. We danced a lot and I was very sweaty but then my Polish friend required a DJ for some salsa music and people started to follow my movements, some of them took some pictures and another had a recording of me on a video. I won't forget that moment in my life I really enjoyed my journey to Poland. I learned and improved my Polish. I started to like Poland so much, but unfortunately I couldn't see the snow maybe it was not the right season but I said to myself that I will come back again to touch and play with snow.

It was time to come back to England and then to my country. In August 2005 my trip finished. Finally after several complications on March 2006 I applied for another visa to England. I went back one more time to see my friends.

That year I decided to save some money and go to Poland for Christmas time and to touch some snow.

I had an invitation from my friend Kuba and I decided to go to Poland for two weeks from 15th of December to 4th of January 2007 so I had also the chance to spend New Year in Poland.

This time it was different than my previous trip in 2005 because I arrived in Poland in the winter season. I was so excited to see a lot of snow. I had two days in Krakow visiting many tourist places with my friend Kuba and his brother Tomek. They took me to a nice restaurant, to some discos and to many nice shops. My friend Kuba told me that if I would like to go to the mountains to a place called Zakopane we could go, so we decided to visit there. We took the bus and made our trip to the famous place in Poland where I can see, touch and play with a lot snow.

We arrived to Zakopane in the afternoon it was almost dark and I couldn't see at all but the next morning it was the big day I definitely saw it. I woke up and it was too bright outside. There was a lot of snow. My friends and I went outside the house and started to play in the snow. I made some snow balls and threw them at my friend then he fell over me and covered me with snow. It was so much fun. Then we took a cabine to go to the top of the mountains, on the way up I saw very beautiful countryside. I saw a lots of trees and these where covered with snow, such an amazing panoramic view ! I have still in my mind that imagine of beautiful day.

When I was on the top of the mountains I wrote my name on it and my friends took me a picture so I can show my family some great moments from my journey to Poland.

Finally I had made my dream come true. Now I have just nice memories, some music and some gifts from my friends and of course something that I can't forget in my entire life all my good Polish friends and my basic Polish language.

This is my true story of Poland and I.

Thank you.