

A Visit to Pruski's Service Station

by Dr. Jim Mazurkiewicz

In January of 1990, I was traveling from Robstown, Texas to Bryan, Texas on my way back from judging the beef cattle at the Nueces County Junior Livestock Show. I was traveling north on Hwy 123, and I decided to stop and buy a Dr. Pepper to help keep me awake on my way home. I knew Polish families were living in this area, and I was hoping I would meet some of them. The store I stopped in at was Pruski's Service Station at the crossroads in Kosciusko, Texas on Hwy 123. As I walked into the store, I saw six elderly men playing cards or dominos on a long wooden table, drinking beer, and talking about current events. As I walked by them on my way to get a Dr. Pepper out of the refrigerated glass door case, I heard the gentlemen talking about me in Polish. They were saying in Polish, "who is that young man that just walked in"? He does not look like he is from around here. He must be an outsider because he does not look familiar. He is young and skinny. Then they began to laugh."

About that time, I walked up to the table with my Dr. Pepper and said to them in Polish, "Hello, my name is Jim Mazurkiewicz, and I understood everything you said about me. Yes, I am not from here, I am from Bryan, Texas and I am the county agricultural agent in Brazos County." These gentlemen about fell on the floor, and the beer bottles on the table almost fell when Polish was spoken out from under the cowboy hat I was wearing. I was 34 years old at the time, and these gentlemen were about 75 to 80+ years of age. They could not believe I was speaking Polish to them and we could perfectly understand one another. They wanted to know where I was from, who were my parents, all about my family and the Polish people in Chappell Hill, Texas - Washington County.

The Polish dialect these gentlemen were speaking was the same 19th-century Polish dialect spoken in the Brazos Valley with only a few regional word differences. They were impressed that someone as young as I was at the time could speak and understand Polish very well. They told me the younger Polish people my age from this region were not interested in learning to speak Polish and they were very surprised to meet someone like me.

These gentlemen were very proud to be Polish and were very happy to meet a young man that was interested in preserving his language and culture. They kept me about an hour before I got back on the road, but the visit was a treasured memory that I will never forget.

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