

# He Called Poland Home As Service

by Bonnie Szymanski  
 "I was paid 3,000 zlotys a month," said John K. Fraybill, Jr., a Manheim R1 resident who spoke recently to the congregation of the Mititz Church of the Brethren, 300 W. Orange St.,

about his two years in Poland as a Brethren Volunteer in Service.

He explained that an attempt to equate his 3,000 zlotys to a monthly salary in this country would be almost futile because of the difference in exchange rates for tourists as compared to resident rates and black market rates, used by almost everyone at one time or another.

A graduate of Lehigh University, Bethlehem, with a degree in chemical engineering, John's main area of concern during his alternative service work in Poland was in agriculture and related fields. According to John, the Polish-American agricultural exchange program was initiated 20 years ago by Professor Pieniazek, a man universally renowned in the field of horticulture.

During his two-year stay, John worked in three different agricultural institutes. He remained in the first city, Skierniewice, for a year. Here, he participated in research which dealt with analyzing food for storage, concentrating mainly on vegetable crops.

#### Onto Warsaw

After the year at Skierniewice, he moved to Warsaw where he spent six months working on preparations for the then impending International Horticultural Congress,

which would be attended by 1800 scientists from all over the world.

As English was one of the official languages of the congress, John was responsible for correspondence with English speaking persons planning to attend or otherwise connected with the program.

He explained that every day of the six months was needed to prepare for the international gathering; not only is preparation for such an event always complicated and time-consuming, but in a country like Poland, said John, even the most insignificant request gets tied up in miles of red tape.

In Poland, bureaucracy has been developed to a fine art. John was never so aware of the truth of this statement as when he attempted to procure travel visas for visiting surrounding countries. According to John, "They like to make you wait . . . just because."

Although he had few problems obtaining a visa when he wanted to travel to Yugoslavia, as it is one of the

Iron Curtain countries, when he applied for a visa to visit West Germany, he told us, authorities questioned him vigorously, wanting to know where he was going, where he was staying, why he was going there and who he was going to see.

His final six months were spent in research devoted to the study of soils and plant cultivation techniques. Specifically, John spent most of his time working on a bio-chemical and nutritional project. Using rabbits, he attempted to analyze the amount of proteins in different strains of wheat by studying the affect each strain had on the animals' protein content.

#### Polish Vs. English

Unlike most Western European countries whose citizens usually understand some English even if they don't speak the language, most Poles do not speak or understand English. Consequently, John found himself in a situation where he either had to learn the native language or spend two years talking to himself.

Actually, the people who worked with John were able to speak some English, educated as they were. In fact, they wanted John to speak to them in English so they could improve their command of the language. Of course, at the same time, John wanted to converse with them in Polish so he could become more at ease with the soft-sounding Polish words. Diplomacy reigned supreme: they took turns practicing on each other.

"I took a course in Warsaw that was designed to teach Polish to Americans," said John. "But it was so far away from where I was staying," he continued, "that I often got there after the class had started; so I learned mostly from talking to the people around me. After I learned some Polish, it wasn't hard to converse."

#### Americans Well-liked

What are they really like, these Polish people? Do they think we're "ugly Americans" like so many other Europeans do?

On the contrary, said John. Americans are particularly

well-liked in Poland because so many of the Poles have relatives in the States. Very often people he met would say to him, "Oh, I have an uncle in Chicago," or, "I have an aunt in Detroit."

But, like so many others throughout the world, Poles also think we are a nation of millionaires. According to John, even those Poles who have had the opportunity to visit the United States see only the abundance of material goods and the wealth.

In fact, the Polish people regard American-made products as the highest kind of manufactured goods. John told us, "Some Poles think it's good just because its been made in America."

Justly proud of their own country, they never tire of telling visitors that Copernicus, Madame Curie and Chopin were Polish. Said John, "They have statues of Copernicus and signs with his picture all over. They even have his picture on a 10 zloty piece."

John attended a few operas while he was in

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