

A trip to Poland meant visits with old and new friends

By SALLY BAIR
Staff Writer

On two occasions, The Reverend and Mrs. Jay C. Garber, Lancaster R6, hosted Polish young people who were in this country as part of the Polish Exchange visitor Program for agriculturists, sponsored in cooperation with the Mennonite Central Committee. The Polish men each stayed for a period of six months, and worked on the Garber dairy farm while living with the Garber family.

This Fall, the Garbers had the rare opportunity to travel to Poland and visit the families of the young men they hosted. They traveled with a group of 42 people from the United States, including seven from Lancaster County, all of whom had played host to agriculturists during the course of the eight-year-old program. This was the first time ever that hosts were invited on an exchange visit to Poland. Mrs. Garber said, "We were treated royally. They were so pleased for us to take the time to visit them."

One of the Garbers' visitors, Ludwik Lipowski, is still in this country on a farm in Kansas, but they visited his sister in Poland. Another young man, Remigiusz Slusarski, traveled 250 miles from his home south of Warsaw to meet the Garbers and took them to visit his family farm, about two hours north of Warsaw. This visit, according to Mrs. Garber, "was the best thing that happened."

Remi, as he was called in this country, had visited with the Garber family from the Fall of 1976 to March of 1977. His parents owned a 40 hectare private farm, where they had a few cows, chickens, pigs and horses, typical for small private farms in Poland. They owned pasture land and raised wheat and hay for their animals. They had purchased their first tractor this Summer, a used one from a state farm.

While his parents spoke no English, Remi acted as interpreter and a very pleasant afternoon was passed as the two cultures came together. Their Polish farmhouse, situated in a village, was "typically old, with a thatched roof" and was moss covered, according to Mrs. Garber. They were told, however, that the family hopes to build a more modern home in a grove of birch trees on their property. Remi's parents had been given no advance notice of the visit, but his mother prepared a simple meal

HOMESTEAD NOTES

to share with her American guests, the first she had ever had in her home. "We were welcomed warmly," Mrs. Garber noted.

Both state and private farms were on the official itinerary of the American group. Seventy per cent of the land is in private farms, and the Polish government is encouraging these farms to specialize. Garber described the "unique incentive program" offered by the government. "The government is now attempting to specialize in certain kinds of agricultural production in a given area of the country. If a private farmer wishes to go along with this specialization, he receives certain benefits from the government."

Garber told of a modern beef operation they visited where a private farmer had built a new barn, with barn cleaner and other modern equipment. For cooperating with the government, he received an interest-free loan for two years to help build the buildings; thereafter he needed to pay just two per cent interest on the loan. The farmer is free to market the beef as he wishes, but if he sells beef to the state marketing system, the amount of his pension will be in proportion to the amount of beef he sells. This pension proposal, Garber said, is an incentive to have the marketing done through the state system, although the farmer could make more by selling in the open market. He added, "the young couple we visited seemed pleased with the arrangement."

Freedom is always a question which arises about people living in an Iron Curtain country, but Mrs. Garber said, "They have a lot of freedom, not like Czechoslovakia or East Germany. They are quite free in what they can do." She said they felt their questions about the country were answered sincerely and honestly by their Polish guide, a young woman provided by the Polish travel agency which arranged the tour. They felt they could talk freely and travel easily on their own.

Garber, who has visited other Eastern European countries, said, "The Polish people are lucky about their situation. They feel they have 400 times more freedom than people in the Soviet Union." He said he felt the Poles were sometimes unhappy with the amount of Russian presence in their country. For instance, much of what they raise still goes to Russia to pay off "war debts." Furthermore at the time of their visit there was a shortage of paint caused by a great need in Russia to get ready for the Olympics. Garber said, "They don't get much in return."



Mrs. Jay Garber shows some of the many hand-crafted items that they received from their Polish visitors or purchased during their visit to Poland.

These are among the many mementoes which the Garbers have as a result of their relationship with the Polish agriculturists who visited in their home.

From his other visits, he feels Yugoslavia has much more western presence than Poland, with a "tremendous technology." Bulgaria, on the other hand, has a very "Marxist presence, which is a lot more visible."

Since Poland is ninety percent Catholic, Garber said, "It must be a tremendous embarrassment to an atheist government." He said religion is so powerful that the government must work with them. Garber, who is minister at the New Danville Mennonite Church, has had travel experience in his capacity as chairman of the Eastern Mennonite Board of Missions.

Mrs. Garber explained that at one time there had been many Mennonites in Poland, but many left or became absorbed by the other churches, so there are none there today. Garber said, "The Mennonite church has just started to identify with churches in Eastern European countries." While missionaries in the traditional sense may not be welcome, he said young people with student visas who study languages and literature are able to make contact with people in the churches. This contact, he noted, is appreciated by those church people in Eastern countries.

There was a wide spectrum of technology, in Poland, Garber said. In the course of the trip, he said, "I saw people using the cradle and the thresher and binder, balers and self-propelled combines." Most of the state farms had modern, large equipment to farm their vast amounts of land.

Garber said when they visited in September the Poles were harvesting wheat, which was two weeks later than usual because of rainy weather. Corn is raised, but for silage and not for grain production except in the extreme southern part of the country. He said they were told that corn is an "experimental thing. We got it from you and now we need to learn how to use it." The corn did not grow as tall as varieties grown here. Silage was stored in bunker silos, with concrete floors and concrete slabs dividing them. "They were covered with black plastic held in place by tires, just like here," he said.

A dairy farm was of particular interest to the Garbers. One state farm they visited had a dairy, a swine operation and bulls for stud service. The cows were Friesian, black and white, but with "short legs and stockier," Mrs. Garber said.

Garber noted that the "sanitary requirements were different from ours." The cows were housed in free stalls on one side of the barn and turned around and tied in stanchions to be milked on the other side of the barn. There was a pipeline with risers to pump the milk back to the milkhouse.

Mrs. Garber was impressed with the abundance of flowers everywhere in Poland, and especially with the fresh cut flowers presented to them by their Polish visitors as they eagerly greeted them in their home country. "This was a nice gesture—flowers mean a lot to them," she said.

"The food we were served was very artistically prepared," Mrs. Garber noted. "I think they served us typically Polish foods. We seldom had dessert, but had a lot of tea and coffee. All the foods were beautifully arranged."

She said, "The visit was a learning experience for both of us."

The Mennonite Central Committee in Akron is again looking for people who wish to host Polish agriculturists in their homes. The young men are employed by their hosts, either farmers or agribusinessmen, and spend six months with two different families. Mrs. Garber said they are all very well educated, and are closely screened before being accepted into the program, which is coordinated in Poland by the Scientific Association of Agricultural Technicians in Poland. She said their two visitors spoke English "quite well."

Garber summed up the feelings of the Americans when he described what he called the "most touching thing about the visit."

"After all the warm, candid displays of friendships, and embraces, we traveled by train and arrived at the Austrian-Czechoslovakian border at dawn. We were stopped so that an Austrian crew could board. We were in a no man's land and there were dual twelve foot high barbed wire fences, soldiers and machine guns and a guard tower. We waited there an hour to be cleared. All of us reflected on how much our visit might help to bring down those fences. The two feelings just cannot exist side by side."

It wasn't. A sheep sale is one of those situations where neither one of us can be trusted.

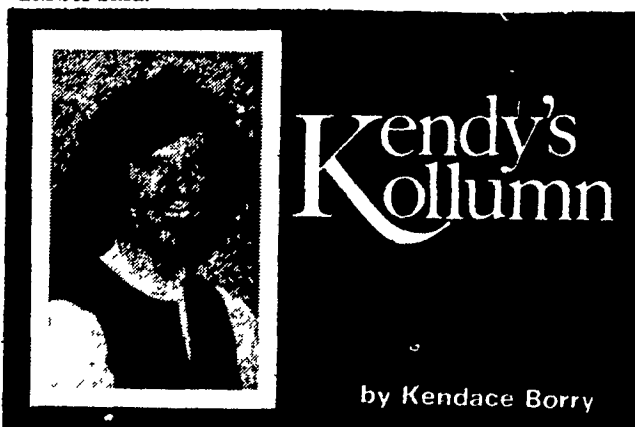
I wanted to bid on everything. He didn't want to bid on anything. The ones I liked, he didn't. The ones he liked, I didn't. The ones we both thought were okay cost too much.

As the evening continued, and everything continued out of my financial reach, I grew a little excited. I wanted a sheep. I was beginning to think I'd settle for one with three legs that walked backwards. Unfortunately, those weren't offered.

I made the mistake of agreeing before the sale to let him do all the bidding. I mainly sat on my chair, chewing my fingernails, tersely telling him to bid on that one, no, not that high, do you like that one, why isn't your hand up, bid that one up, pulleese, how much money did you bring with you?

The truck came home empty, sad to say. But now we both understand each other better.

Next Saturday I think we'll just try to have a normal, ordinary Saturday night date for a change. Maybe by then he will talk to me.



"We're going to a sheep auction," I announced to the boyfriend.

He just grunted. By now he's used to a wide variety of odd Saturday night dates. We've been chaperones on a hay ride, represented the paper at banquets, and even chased sheep through cornfields. And he's taken it all very gracefully.

So I felt it was safe to take him along to the sheep sale.