

*A childhood so bizarre it almost sounds made up.*

For as long as I can remember, we have gone and stayed with my grandmother in Poland. A brittle little lady. She lived in a small village in the north whose only amenities were a single shop and community hall. Population 390. Although she does not live there now, when I think back to my childhood, the memories which I most vividly remember are the ones I had created there.

She lived on the first floor of a small apartment block. This was the very place where her and my grandfather raised all 14 of their children, my mam being one of them. I remember every brick of that building for as far back as my memory goes. How I loved the wooden door with their family name engraved into it. As soon as my hand touched that door handle, I knew I was finally home. Her house was like a holy place, you couldn't wear your shoes and religious pictures were hung in every room, showing nothing but love for the man upstairs. Staying here always brought me a feeling of comfort. I remember every room, but her bedroom sticks out to me most, its orange walls, and the metallic nursing bed which you met as soon as you walked through the door, along with the permanent scent of baby wipes.

A lot of my aunties and uncles lived in the village too or else nearby. Simply put, there was always at least one cousin around to play with. With the lack of amenities, came a lack of things for a child to do. All we had was a small sandbox out the front of the building. It could only hold about four people at once, and there's only so much 'throwing sand balls at one another and getting given out to when you get it in the other persons eyes' that you can do before it got boring. There was also a row of tires half dug into the ground whose primarily function was marking out the area for parking. However, we used them as more of an obstacle course, jumping from tire to tire and trying not to fall off. This was always a dangerous game, and it had nothing to do with the possibility of getting hit by a car. The danger was the bitter lady, as old as the hills, who lived in the apartment building before us. More often than not she would stick her head out of her window when she saw us jumping on them and scold us for it. Even so, we continued to do it.

Despite the fact that those activities were simply thrilling, nothing compares to the fun we had in the old boiler house which stood abandoned just around the back of the apartments. It was one of many abandoned buildings which we had ventured in as children. It must have been abandoned for some time, a building waiting for a reason to remain standing. I remember jumping around among the obsolete objects and exploring the remains with my older cousins. It was like venturing onto a set of old train tracks and following them as far as they'd take you, without a care in the world. It quickly became our new hangout spot, which was a definite upgrade from the sandbox. I still remember the wave of sadness which hit me the summer I came back to Poland and discovered that it had been demolished, but that didn't mean our fun stopped there.

Although I joke about how little there was to do in this village, it is located in what is in my opinion, the most beautiful part of Poland. It is surrounded by lakes and woodland. Only a small part of Poland reaches out into the Baltic Sea, therefore lakes are equivalent to beaches. And we had a lot of them up the north. In the summer we'd spend almost every day up at the lake, loading the car with blow up mattresses and balls before we'd head off. It consisted of a small patch of sand and a large pier. Its water was entirely without motion, no tide brought it up the man-made beach. In the brilliant summer sunshine, the lake was a perfect mirror of the trees which surrounded it almost entirely. No matter how beautiful it may have been, I can't help but laugh when thinking about the amount of 'near death experiences' which I've had here.

In the summer, the evenings become stretched before us like a road. Making more time for adventure and more time for making memories before I had to pack up again and head back to Ireland. I remember staying outside until mad hours every night, every sunset representing a different day. Rich hues of red blended with oranges, purples, crimsons, the promise of the rising sun that comes after the velvety night has had its say and the land has rested once more. A different story to tell. My favorite parts of these summer nights were times when we'd all come together at my aunties house and have a barbeque. Although it might sound cheesy, it was a time when everyone was together and just enjoyed themselves. Those moments in life are important. Moments where you don't have a care in the world and just live.

My grandparents owned a plot of land behind the apartment which was used for growing all kinds of fruit and vegetables. Once my grandmother couldn't move around so easily anymore, my uncle took over caring for the garden. It became his prized possession. My cousins and I grew up helping him out, we would sometimes pick berries or pull out weeds for him, other times we'd simply run around the apple trees, which year on year were getting taller. The effort of it brought us closer together, working as a team. Every stunted cabbage, caterpillar eaten leaf and flower bed, grown with love.

However now, nothing could be the same. With no reason to go back, the only place this little village remains in is my memories. My grandmother's house stands abandoned, just like the old boiler house which we explored as children. Except, this building won't be demolished like the others. It will have a new family living in it soon, a family with kids. These children will be reliving my childhood in this place as their own. A modern version. Meanwhile I will be visiting my grandmother elsewhere, the place she now lays with her loving husband. Their names etched into the marble tombstone beautifully, the same way they were engraved into their door. Signifying the strength of their everlasting love. This is her home now, and I will be visiting her here instead.