

# *The* **American** *Experience*

## **God Bless America And Poland Too**

A Film by MARIAN MARZYNSKI

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## God Bless America And Poland Too

**DAVID McCULLOUGH:** Good evening. I'm David McCullough. In 1911, a tiny, lone 15-year-old who was too poor to own a pair of socks came to America, like 650,000 others that year. Frank Popiolek did not go on to found an industrial empire or to write songs or star in the movies or measure the speed of light, as did other immigrant boys of the kind who usually figure in the history books. He became a barber and his story is our film, *God Bless America And Poland Too*. Frank, the barber — Uncle Frank — is a man of a disappearing generation who fulfilled the old dream of becoming a free citizen in a free land. But he is one the melting pot didn't melt, couldn't melt.

This is a very personal, often heart-wrenching portrait by film maker Marian Marzynski who sees Frank Popiolek as a founding father of a kind too often forgotten in the hurry and self-centeredness of the present day. This is an American success story unlike the usual.

**MARIAN MARZYNSKI, Film Maker:** *[voice-over]* Frank and I are first-generation Americans born in Poland. He crossed the Atlantic on a steamship in 1911. I came on a jet a half-century later. In the kitchen of his Chicago home, Frank cuts my hair.

**FRANK POPIOLEK, Retired Barber:** That's a tough hair to cut.

**MARZYNSKI:** *[voice-over]* Since his retirement 27 years ago, he does it only for his best friends. He was a starving farm hand who became a barber. I was a film maker searching for freedom.

**Mr. POPIOLEK:** See, I'm the boss now. *[laughs]*

**MARZYNSKI:** *[voice-over]* What we had in common was the start of a new life.

**Mr. POPIOLEK:** Oh-oh, don't move. Don't move.

**MARZYNSKI:** *[voice-over]* We paid a price in solitude and sacrifices. His were much greater than mine.

**Mr. POPIOLEK:** I got to fix him up some brown for that. How many kids you got? Two? Boys?

**MARZYNSKI:** And girl.

**Mr. POPIOLEK:** Big?

**MARZYNSKI:** Sixteen and twenty-one.

**Mr. POPIOLEK:** Oh. Both at home, eh? That's nice.

**MARZYNSKI:** "I would like to make a film about you, Frank," I told him. "Why me?" he asked. "Because of those few who remember Ellis Island, hardly anybody is more alive than you." "I understand you are Polish," he said, "Come over."

These houses are called Chicago bungalows. On this street, every owner is Polish. His family lives on the first floor, his relatives in the attic. New-coming Poles often rent the basement.

Frank Popiolek bought his house some 40 years ago and paid it off a few years later, the Polish way. He is 94 today. At 15, he landed alone on New York's Ellis Island. A stranger he met on the steamship brought him to Chicago. Of his 79 years in America, he

was a poor man for almost 30. Striving to become a successful barber, he cut the hair of his fellow immigrants in Chicago, which fancies itself as the largest Polish city abroad.

This 1916 photograph of Polish workers standing in front of a lumber mill, Frank is the shortest. In 1919, he had his portrait taken and sent it to Poland as proof that he was doing well, but he wasn't. First, he was no longer Frank Popiolek, son of Joachim and Maria, from the village of Jaslany. He became "the Polack," one of the hundreds of thousands of illiterate, unskilled farm workers flooding the industrial world.

The year was 1930. A Polish pope would not be elected for another 50 years. The Poles were still struggling with their bad image.

**Mr. POPIOLEK:** *[showing photograph]* That's me. See?

**MARZYNSKI:** Who are the others?

**Mr. POPIOLEK:** Old friends. Yeah. Old friends. All die.

**MARY POPIOLEK, Wife:** Oh, yeah.

**Mr. POPIOLEK:** That's her brother.

**MARZYNSKI:** *[voice-over]* Frank joined a fraternity club modeled on the Western European tradition.

**Mrs. POPIOLEK:** You know, the old European people.

**Mr. POPIOLEK:** European, yeah. Every one.

**Mrs. POPIOLEK:** Yeah.

**MARZYNSKI:** Polish?

**Mrs. POPIOLEK:** Polish, yeah. Mostly, yeah.

**Mr. POPIOLEK:** Yeah, I come here. Boy, that was tough, that time. A buck a day.

**Mrs. POPIOLEK:** Yeah.

**Mr. POPIOLEK:** A buck a day. Up to wartime, I don't have nothing. Depression come, we lost everything we got. Two thousand dollars we lost. Then, later on, I work in the depot, you know, for two years. I make \$22,000. Eighty hours a week I worked, you know. Then, I opened my own shop, 19-1/2, and I got everything. Boy, that's the life, you know.

**MARZYNSKI:** *[voice-over]* One of the men in this photograph was his best friend. "I have a sister living in Canada," he told him. She would make a perfect wife for you. They were married three months later. "Did I look good?" he asks Mary, his wife of 60 years. "I had a clean life. I stayed away from bad things. I dressed nicely, not like today."

Frank was a divorced man and not every priest approved it. They had a quiet wedding. This is the last time I will see Mary. She has been gravely ill for several years. In four short days, Frank will find his wife dead in her sleep.

**Mrs. POPIOLEK:** Well, you forget everything already. Time go fast, yeah. *[whispering]* You forget everything. Time go fast.

**MARY, Frank Popiolek's Daughter:** He found her about five o'clock in the morning and *[Polish phrase]*. You know, he called her Mania. So I came—

**MARZYNSKI:** *[voice-over]* Frank's daughter, Mary.

**MARY:** She had a beautiful peace around her, the peace of, you

know, Christ. The peace of God was around her. She looked like she saw something beautiful. [Polish phrase]. She died in peace.

**Mr. POPIOLEK:** Me, my mistake. — says Frank weepin

[weeping] Good woman. We lived 60 years together. ~~But they had these~~ Look at the God damn walls. I don't know where I'm going to go. I don't want to go to family because family is different living, you know. So, I don't know. I don't know what I gonna do.

[to Marzynski] So how's going? You look healthy. Smile. Yeah. Yeah.

**MARZYNSKI:** But life goes on. I lost my mother, I thought it was end of the world. I just loved her so much. I couldn't believe I can live without her. And you know, a month later, life is back.

**Mr. POPIOLEK:** [weeping]—Look at the walls here. Nobody here. Before I took care of her, now nobody. Yeah. No good, no good, no good. [Polish phrase].

**MARZYNSKI:** [voice-over] Polish and English have no boundaries in Frank's head. In this time of grief, his bilingual thoughts go back to the worst moments of his life. In Poland, he worked for a farmer and took care of the horses. "I was sleeping on straw mixed with urine. My entire body was covered in sores," he tells me. His family was hungry. He was forced to steal.

**Mr. POPIOLEK:** So, I take the dirty bag and I fill them up and I take it about two blocks to my mother. Then, she start crying. "Don't do that, honey, don't do that. You're stealing." She come and said, "Well, what are you doing?" [Polish phrase]

**MARZYNSKI:** [voice-over] But his beginnings in America were not much better. A 78-year-old story still haunts him. He was in Chicago, 16 years old, making a dollar a day. He went to an alley to look for food in the garbage. A Polish woman who owned a grocery store nearby saw him. They both cried. She took him home, gave him a bath, new clothes and sent him to a hairdresser.

For the next four years, each weekend, he washed her dishes, did the laundry, cleaned the store. Each Sunday night, the woman slipped \$5 into his pocket. Every month, he put \$20 in the bank toward the \$220 he owed the wealthy farmer who had paid for his trip to America.

**Mr. POPIOLEK:** I come one Saturday night and she [he] said, "My wife die of heart attack." Oh, gosh. So I went to bank, I draw \$25 and I bought the roses— you know, for \$25, it's like \$100 today or more. I bought that roses to put on the casket and everybody ask him, "Who did that? What did that? Who did that?" you know. And I missed her. I cried for weeks. And he was there for about two, three days. He suddenly disappeared. I never see him. He was a nice fellow, too.

All the people, you know. Ah, a tough life.

**MARZYNSKI:** [voice-over] We went out, looking for the alley where the Polish woman had rescued him. Today, there is a Polish restaurant here called The Busy Bee. Zosia Madej, the owner, can trace the history of this area, but only back 40 years.

**ZOSIA MADEJ, Owner, The Busy Bee:** —between

[unintelligible] and the cleaners?

**Mr. POPIOLEK:** Yeah, yeah.

**Ms. MADEJ:** They used to put— and later on they made a little hamburger stand out of it. I believe that they had—

**Mr. POPIOLEK:** Yeah. Before was grocery store like this.

**Ms. MADEJ:** Oh, the [unintelligible].

**Mr. POPIOLEK:** Yeah.

**Ms. MADEJ:** Oh, oh, oh. That was before I came, then.

**MARZYNSKI:** [voice-over] "Wait a minute, How old are you?" "Ninety-four." "You don't look it at all," she says, as Frank tells her how, right outside her restaurant, he found a piece of bread in the trash and how he and the woman cried about the plight of a Pole in America. "What year did you come from Poland?" "Nineteen eleven," he says. "One dollar a day. One dollar day. But a coffee like yours was only two cents."

In spite of himself, life goes. His grandson George marries a Mexican girl. "Between me and you," Frank tells me, "I would prefer a Polish one." But they are wealthy people. Her father owns a lot of land. They have lawyers and doctors in the family. The steps of St. Ladislaw Church in Chicago. It all happened here: Frank and Mary's wedding, the baptism and the wedding of his daughter, his wife's funeral. For most of this ceremony, Frank has been crying.

"You need to break your solitude," I tell Frank. "How about a trip to Poland?" He loves the idea. He knows a cheap place to take passports photos. The place was once a barbershop when Frank's life turned around. There was this customer who loved Frank's close shave and who put Frank on the road to capitalism.

**Mr. POPIOLEK:** It was a Jewish fellow who was a customer of mine here. And here, it was 1942 and you know, I— he asked me how much I make. "I make nine dollars a week," you know. There was no pay like today. So he said, "No, I gonna give you better job."

So he went down depot Illinois Central and asked boss— because of how to get men to barber, you know, at that time. Everybody go in war— war, you know. So he— three days later, I went up there on a bus. He only say, "Come on, see who you know— what you know." So I went one Sunday, I make fifteen and a half dollars and here, I make, whole week, nine dollars a week. Three Sundays I work, I make about \$45. Then later on, later on I quit and I went up there and I work two years in depot. Eighty hours a week, so figure it out. And I make \$22,000.

**MARZYNSKI:** But this an original old chair.

**MARZYNSKI:** [voice-over] We find Frank's old barber chair in the basement.

**Mr. POPIOLEK:** It was chair, but no more.

**MARZYNSKI:** [voice-over] "Who were your other customers?" I asked Frank. "They all died," he says. "Wait a minute. There is one."

**Mr. HAGEN, Owner, Hagen's Fish Market:** Frank. Long

time no see. How are ya, huh?

**Mr. POPIOLEK:** Oh, I'm not so good.

**Mr. HAGEN:** Well, you're looking good.

**Mr. POPIOLEK:** Yeah, I'm fine.

**Mr. HAGEN:** I don't think we've seen you over here at Hagen's Fishmarket for about ten years.

**Mr. POPIOLEK:** Yeah, well my daughter drop in here all the time.

**Mr. HAGEN:** Oh, she does? Your daughter comes in all the time?

**Mr. POPIOLEK:** Now, she is sick, very badly.

**Mr. HAGEN:** Oh, yeah?

**Mr. POPIOLEK:** Oh, yeah.

**Mr. HAGEN:** Sorry to hear, Frank, that you lost your wife this spring.

**Mr. POPIOLEK:** Yeah, yeah, I lost wife.

**Mr. HAGEN:** Yeah. Sorry to hear that.

**Mr. POPIOLEK:** I go to Europe on Thursday for see my sister.

**Mr. HAGEN:** You're going to Poland?

**Mr. POPIOLEK:** Yeah.

**Mr. HAGEN:** Oh, you are? How long since you've seen her?

**Mr. POPIOLEK:** Oh, about 30 years.

**Mr. HAGEN:** How many?

**Mr. POPIOLEK:** About 30.

**Mr. HAGEN:** Thirty years? Oh, that's going to be a great reunion.

**Mr. POPIOLEK:** She's 86—

**Mr. HAGEN:** Oh, I see.

**Mr. POPIOLEK:** —88.

**Mr. HAGEN:** Oh. Remember when you used to come in here and walk around the counter and get your perch fillets?

**Mr. POPIOLEK:** I'm 94.

**Mr. HAGEN:** Ninety-four?

**Mr. POPIOLEK:** Yeah.

**Mr. HAGEN:** Oh. Boy, you're looking good, though.

**Mr. POPIOLEK:** But you have not changed much.

**Mr. HAGEN:** You know, we started the store in 1946—

**Mr. POPIOLEK:** Yeah.

**Mr. HAGEN:** —and that's when we used to come to your barbershop all the time. Remember that?

**Mr. POPIOLEK:** Yeah.

**Mr. HAGEN:** You know, when we started the store here, my brother and I didn't have any money—

**Mr. POPIOLEK:** No, no.

**Mr. HAGEN:** —so my dad mortgaged his house on Washington Island to give us enough money to put up this building.

**Mr. POPIOLEK:** I know. I remember.

**Mr. HAGEN:** So he must have had some confidence in us.

**Mr. POPIOLEK:** I remember.

**Mr. HAGEN:** Yeah.

**Mr. POPIOLEK:** Pretty tough for beginning, right?

**Mr. HAGEN:** It sure was.

**Mr. POPIOLEK:** Everything turned good, yeah?

**Mr. HAGEN:** But we worked every day from eight o'clock in the morning to midnight.

**Mr. POPIOLEK:** Oh, yeah. How old are you?

**Mr. ANGELO:** Seventy-four.

**Mr. POPIOLEK:** I'm 94.

**Mr. ANGELO:** Yeah? Good.

**Mr. POPIOLEK:** Your hands are cold now, huh?

**Mr. ANGELO:** Hand is cold.

**MARZYNSKI:** *[voice-over]* Mr. Angelo was Frank's supplier for three decades.

**Mr. POPIOLEK:** You know, I was— *[gestures at his heart]* chest.

**Mr. ANGELO:** Yeah, I had the heart operation.

**Mr. POPIOLEK:** Oh, yeah? Got to be careful. I go to Europe. I want that— you know. You know what I mean. How do you call that? The— shaving cream.

**Mr. ANGELO:** Shaving cream in a can?

**Mr. POPIOLEK:** Yeah, yeah. You got it?

**Mr. ANGELO:** Yeah, we got it.

**Mr. POPIOLEK:** So that's what— I go to Europe on the 5th, so I want it, you know, because it's better than soap, you know. I shave yet with straight razor.

**Mr. ANGELO:** Straight razor?

**Mr. POPIOLEK:** Eight years without sharp. I now have sharp razor. On the depot, I was the best.

**STORE CLERK:** There you go.

**Mr. ANGELO:** It's alright.

**Mr. POPIOLEK:** How much is it?

**Mr. ANGELO:** Leave it go this time.

**Mr. POPIOLEK:** Huh?

**Mr. ANGELO:** Leave it go this time. Forget it.

**Mr. POPIOLEK:** Oh. Thanks.

**MARZYNSKI:** *[voice-over]* An American goes to Poland. He cashes his \$560 Social Security check, most of it in five- and one-dollar bills.

**BANK TELLER:** —seven, eight, nine, ten. That's twenty.

**Mr. POPIOLEK:** You got \$560?

**BANK TELLER:** Yes. Just the way you wanted it.

**Mr. POPIOLEK:** OK.

**BANK TELLER:** You want envelope for this?

**Mr. POPIOLEK:** Yeah.

**MARZYNSKI:** *[voice-over]* An immigrant returns to his old home. He wants again to feel the despair that made him leave in the first place. He needs reassurance that his choice was right. "Frank is one of the oldest first-generation Polish immigrants living in Amer-

ica," I told the captain of this brand-new American jet the Polish Airline just acquired. They listen to Frank's story: one dollar day, food from the garbage can in Chicago, the generous Polish woman who rescued him.

This is Frank's sixth trip to Poland in 79 years. The first one was in 1929, when he saw his parents for the last time. The other trips were in the '60's, when Communist Poland first opened its door to so-called "American imperialists" such as Frank and Mary.

By then, Frank was an American success story. His goal became the well-being of his family in Poland. He invited his relatives, one after another, and got them jobs for a year or two. Some of them returned with enough money to build houses in Poland. Others stayed and started families in America. "Dear Uncle Frank," they wrote him from Poland, "you were so nice to my Cousin Joe. Why don't you now help me?"

Grandnephew Wulodek, who, after his last stay in Chicago, bought himself a new car, drives us to the village of Jaslany, 200 miles South of Warsaw. Frank was born and lived there until his emigration. Frank's 88-year-old sister Maria is his closest relative in Jaslany.

"Your hands are cold," Frank tells his sister. "You need a shot of vodka to calm you down." "My darling little brother, what a surprise. He's so old, my poor thing," says Frank's sister. "All his life, he cared about his family," his niece Stasia tells me, "Parcels, money, letters. He brought over my mother, my husband, my son-in-law, myself. We all went to Chicago. All his life, everything for the family. To us, he was like a walking Holy Father. Poor darling. And God has rewarded him with good health."

"Remember how you would put a dollar or two into each letter to me or five or ten? Remember?" asked his sister. "Five, ten? That's what you call big money? It's nothing. It didn't make me poor, it didn't make you rich," he tells his sister. "Oh, I sure did get rich, I sure did, my dear brother," says Frank's sister. "I had nothing when my husband died. He was a good man. You don't find many people like him. He respected his family. His children never heard a bad word from him. He would never spank them, even raise his voice. When my daughter in America learned about his death, her hair turned gray in two days. That's how good he was." "It was same with my wife," says Frank, "What can you do?"

She now recalls her visit to America some 25 years ago. She was 60 and Frank wanted her to remarry. He found her a Polish widower with a nice house in Chicago. "My dear brother," she told him, "I don't want to marry him, no matter how rich he is. My husband still lives in my heart. Every day and night, I'm still with him."

Even as a poor farm hand, Frank had a reputation for being generous. His sister remembers him sharing everything with his friends. Now, with a stack of dollars in his pocket, Frank goes to say hello to his fellow villagers. "I'm 94," says Frank, instead of "Hello." He know he will impress these villagers with his American longevity. "My God, I don't believe your age," reacts the woman. He tells her he lost his wife and now he came to visit his sister. "How



nice of you. It may be the last time before you die," she says.

"How are you doing? Is everything still working?" Frank asks his old neighbor. "As long as your head is up, everything is up," he says. "Does that include the other thing?" probes Frank.

**Mr. POPIOLEK:** Oh, that's a good one.

**MARZYNSKI:** *[voice-over]* "I lost my wife," says Frank. "That's what life is about," says his old neighbor.

This is the son of the wealthy farmer Frank had worked for before he left for America. It was his father who gave Frank \$220 for the trip and later, when Frank returned with a payment, refused to take the money. "He was a very proud man," says Frank. "Take us to American with you. I am sure we would like it over there," says the granddaughter as they walk toward the barn where Frank took care of the horses. "I recognize you," says the farmer's grandson. "You look a little older."

"Horses were farting in my face." Frank recalls his experience as a ten-year-old hand here. In Frank's time, this was one big pasture. Like other poor kids, Frank and his sister, at the age of five, were already tending cows here.

"What do I need all this for?" asks Frank's sister as they unpack presents from America. "If I was 60, maybe, but I'm almost 90. What do I need it for? Tell me."

Another Frank, whose last name is Giela, is the oldest man in the village. But first, they figure out which one is older. The local Frank wins by one year. Then, they compare their health. Everything is fine except some loss of hearing. "What's good about money without good health?" Frank introduces his philosophy. "But can you feel good without money?" they ask him. "That's also true."

Some 80 years ago, both Franks worked at a lumber mill owned by a man known for his rough treatment of the workers. One day, the 15-year-old Frank Popiolek was slapped in the face by the owner. That night, an angry Frank and his friend jumped the fence and cut one of the machines' drive belts. When the police came the next day, Frank was hiding in a horse barn. Three days later, he was on a ship to New York. "You have no idea how lucky you are to live in America. Go back there and stay away from our misery. I would rather die over there than live here." Frank checks the local prices of milk and bread and gives the Polish economy failing grades. It is still the same old Poland, full of bitterness. He had no choice but leave it.

"I am 70 years old," says the milkman, but I'm ready to go to America anytime and work. "It's not easy to get a job today unless you know a trade. Then you will find something." "I can do any job, any job." "But remember, you must not tell anybody you are 70. Say you are 50." "Why not?" "You need a nice close shave and a good haircut. You could easily pass for 50."

"Look at you. Everybody notices that you are from a different country. Look how clean you are, how elegantly dressed. You have money in your pocket. That's life. I tell you, it's a real pleasure meeting people like you."

"Do you remember me, Mr. Frank? I help you put the shingles on the roof of your house in Chicago." But Frank doesn't remem-

ber. "Tell me, Mr. Frank, how is it possible that the whole world builds new houses, but not Poland? And why, when someone builds here, everybody ask him where the money comes from?" asks Frank and answers his own question. "Because you don't have freedom. In America, we have people from all around the world and they are all free." "That's right, from the whole world. Most of them Japanese and Chinese." "No, no, you've got it wrong." "Well, that's what I read." "There are many Japanese, but not that many, but they are good in business." "Well, the Jews are still the best." "Oh, Jews, they are everywhere." "You've got that right."

"Are you a Pole or an American?" I once asked Frank. "I know how to do things right and that makes me an American," he answered, "but I am Polish at heart." However, he is a little angry at Poland for its backwardness.

Sunday morning. The local priest has learned about Frank's visit. Before Mass, he wants Frank to come over and talk about important matters. "Make sure that the money you will give for collection will be in your pocket, so you don't have to open your wallet in public," the husband of his niece instructs him. One dollar is enough, but if the priest will invite Frank to his house, an additional five dollars will be appropriate, they decide. *the priest ask*

"You see how much lumber I had to buy. Now, let me tell you. If we won't do something, this roof may collapse on the church. This is a slate roof, but we cannot find this type of slate in Poland, so we must cover the roof with something else. Copper is the best and I'm looking for a benefactor like you who would buy the copper and make his name famous for generations in Jaslany." "You need a big collection." Frank pretends he didn't get the message. "It's not such a big deal. You don't need miracles." "How much of a miracle do you need?" asks Frank. "A couple of thousands, that's it," says the priest, who is obviously unfamiliar with the price of copper. "Think about it. What sense does it make to take this money to your grave?" "You are talking big money." "It's a big church and it has a big roof." As a little boy, Frank helped to build this church. With other ten-year-olds, he carried bricks and handed them to the masons. *FR*

"Do you believe in Jesus Christ?" the priest asks the new parents. "Do you want your child to follow the Catholic faith?" He then gives the newborn babies Christian names. "What kind of money is it?" someone asks, as Frank puts two dollars on the forehead of each of the babies. "American," answers Frank and introduces himself. "My name is Frank Popiolek," he says, "I've been living in America for 79 years. I left Jaslany when I was 15 in 1911. I am sure you know my sister. I helped to build this church. I carried the bricks." "God bless you," they say.

"This is your father, Joachim," says the husband of his niece. "I know this is my dear father." "How can I help you? *I can't help you?*" "And your brother is here, too. And this is your mother. She died in 1932."

This is the day Frank says goodbye to Jaslany. "Same old Frank, like a little boy," his sister teases him. His niece thanks him for coming. "We always lived in a small house, straw roof, dirt floor, *at the cemetery*

That's how I grew up. We all ate, washed and slept in the same room. It changed when Frank invited my husband to Chicago. Janek came back with money. We built a house with water, central heating, bathroom, living room. We bought furniture.

Instead of spending the rest on clothes and entertainment, we saved for the children. We educated our two daughters. When one got married, we bought her an apartment and furnished it, all thanks to our American uncle. Without him, we would still be poor. We owe him so much, this darling man. All these things, they're his."

Six trains stop every day at the Jaslany railroad station. Three of them are diesel. The others are still pulled by steam locomotives. From here, Frank escaped the poverty of Poland. The 15-year-old who barely could write his name was going to a paradise called America. For 12 days and nights, he sailed on a German steamship, later declared by congressional investigators as unsuitable even for animal cargo. A dollar-a-day job was his future in Chicago.

**Mr. POPIOLEK:** Nothing back.

**CUSTOMS OFFICER:** OK. Did you bring back any kind of food? Cheese, meat, nothing like that? *Frank is asked*

**Mr. POPIOLEK:** No, we got food here. We don't need food from there. *answers Frank*

**CUSTOMS OFFICER:** OK, you're all set. *th office AIRP*

**Mr. POPIOLEK:** Thank you.

**MARZYNSKI:** *[voice-over]* His daughter Mary will meet him at the airport.

**MARY:** Did you have a good trip? Huh? Did you have a good trip?

**Mr. POPIOLEK:** Oh, good trip.

**MARY:** Yeah? Did you see everybody?

**MARZYNSKI:** *[voice-over]* When his daughter got married, she moved to Frank's attic apartment and lived there with her husband and two sons until they were able to buy their own house. Now, Frank, the provider, continues the tradition. His grandson Paul is moving in.

**Mr. POPIOLEK:** Paulie?

**PAUL, Grandson:** What?

**Mr. POPIOLEK:** What are you doing?

**MARZYNSKI:** *[voice-over]* Ever since his two grandsons were born, he saved money for them. By now, they each have \$25,000.

**Mr. POPIOLEK:** What kind of color you put on the upstairs?

**PAUL:** Huh?

**Mr. POPIOLEK:** White? Put on top?

**PAUL:** Yeah, for the ceiling.

**ENGLISH INSTRUCTOR:** Brring, brring. *[with class]* Good morning, Mr. Bascomb's office.

**MARZYNSKI:** *[voice-over]* Frank's grandniece Lucyna, the newest of his guests from Jaslany, has come to Chicago. He signed her up for an English class.

**ENGLISH INSTRUCTOR:** Brring!

**LUCYNA, Grandniece:** Good morning, Mr. Bascomb's office.

STUDENT: May I speak to Mr. Bascomb, please?

LUCYNA: I am sorry. He isn't here yet. May I take a message?

STUDENT: Yes. This is Mr. Smith. My phone number is 746-9300.

LUCYNA: Please repeat that number.

STUDENT: Seven, four, six, nine, three hundred. Tell Mr. Bascomb to call me as soon as possible.

LUCYNA: OK, I will give that number— message.

ZOSIA, Grandniece: The lot alone is probably worth about \$180,000.

MARZYNSKI: *[voice-over]* Another grandniece, Zosia, lives here in a fancy suburban house. She left Jaslany as a little girl. Recently, she married a corporate vice president.

ZOSIA: That used to— the people that owned the house had two kids, so they used to play up there. Oh, see this? There's a guy that owns a farm and he has— oh, he has about 50 acres and he has an airplane.

Mr. POPIOLEK: He got plane, huh?

ZOSIA: Yeah. Helicopter.

Mr. POPIOLEK: Yeah, yeah. Here it's so beautiful. Beautiful. Oh, boy, oh boy. I don't believe it.

ZOSIA: A lot of work. It's not finished yet.

Mr. POPIOLEK: Oh, my God.

ZOSIA: None of the rooms are really finished. And see, it's not just the cabin, yeah?

Mr. POPIOLEK: Oh, my God.

ZOSIA: You like it?

Mr. POPIOLEK: I don't believe it. I— oh, my God. Oh, my God. I never see home like that.

ZOSIA: Oh yes, you have.

Mr. POPIOLEK: No, I do not. I don't believe it. You need half a million dollars for that today.

ZOSIA: Little Zosia from Poland, right?

MARZYNSKI: *[voice-over]* Her sister, Kryisia, is getting married. Zosia has arranged a shower. Frank is a surprise guest.

ZOSIA: This is our Uncle Frank. He's the one who brought us here from Poland. Those are Kryssia's friends.

Mr. POPIOLEK: Wonderful.

ZOSIA: We brought you were here. Surprise.

KRYISIA, Grandniece: I don't believe this. I'm embarrassed.

ZOSIA: *[to Frank]* Oh, don't cry. Don't cry. What would you like to drink? A little wine? Champagne?

Mr. POPIOLEK: I don't know.

ZOSIA: *[in Polish]* Wine or champagne?

Mr. POPIOLEK: No, but that noise—

WEDDING PHOTOGRAPHER: OK, you guys, now I want you to be happy because if you're not happy, I'm not happy. So let's do it. Marvelous. Ooh, let's try it again.

MARZYNSKI: *[voice-over]* Krisia's wedding day.

WEDDING PHOTOGRAPHER: Simply marvelous. Oh, look

at this beautiful picture. Just great. Looking so good. Look at those legs. Look. Come on. Look at those legs. Show them more legs. Ooh. Absolutely marvelous.

*says the photographer*

Flowers up a little. Come on, this is your wedding. Flowers. Closer it up a little more. That's really wonderful. You're looking so good. *[Polish phrase]*, you're looking so good. *[Polish phrase]*, are you happy? You look simply marvelous. Don't go away. Give him a kiss. Give him a kiss.

**Mr. POPIOLEK:** God bless you.

**MARZYNSKI:** *[voice-over]* The groom is one of six Italian brothers from a well-known Chicago roofing clan.

**Mr. POPIOLEK:** How do you do?

*ask Frank the groom take as FRANK*

**WEDDING GUEST:** He was telling me you're 94 years old?

**Mr. POPIOLEK:** Ninety-four.

**WEDDING GUEST:** I want to be like you when I grow up.

**Mr. POPIOLEK:** January, I was 94.

**WEDDING GUEST:** I want to be just like you when I grow up.

**Mr. POPIOLEK:** You know what? You know how to take care of yourself? Keep away from bad things. One a day, drink that. And you know, good looks is the first thing.

**WEDDING GUEST:** I'm going to try the one a day. I can, huh? Right now, I'm into five and six.

**ANNOUNCER:** Mr. and Mrs. George Jacobazzi.

**MARZYNSKI:** *[voice-over]* Lucyna, Frank's grandniece, moved in with him and takes care of the household.

**LUCYNA:** *[reading aloud]* He works for the Speedy Comp—Company.

*Lucyna IN*

**MARZYNSKI:** *[voice-over]* Frank helps her in English.

**Mr. POPIOLEK:** *[reading]* And does he actually buy gas there?

**LUCYNA:** *[reading]* No, he seldom buys any gas there.

**Mr. POPIOLEK:** *[reading]* What Nick going in— in this moment?

**LUCYNA:** *[reading]* Nick is putting water in the radiator.

**Mr. POPIOLEK:** *[reading]* Why does Barney enjoy his work?

*he as he*

**LUCYNA:** *[reading]* He enjoys his work because he meets interesting people.

*answers Lucyna*

**Mr. POPIOLEK:** *[reading]* And what does he tell his passengers?

**LUCYNA:** *[reading]* Sometimes, he tells them amusing stories.

**MARZYNSKI:** *[voice-over]* Days go by on the Northwest side of Chicago in the home of Frank Popiolek, age 94. He once crossed *wielka woda*, the "big water," as Poles called the Atlantic Ocean in his times. America has changed his own life—

**Mr. POPIOLEK:** *[playing Solitaire]* King.

**MARZYNSKI:** —and the lives of two other generations in his family.

**Mr. POPIOLEK:** Now this. Nothing. And nothing there. Son of a gun. That's a good one. Oh, here.

*italic like quot*

**MARZYNSKI:** *[voice-over]* He was the rescued. He became the rescuer.

Mr. POPIOLEK: This is good.

MARZYNSKI: [voice-over] Dear Uncle Frank. An American icon, a Polish legend.

Mr. POPIOLEK: "No good. Good for shit." (italic)

MARZYNSKI: [voice-over] An immigrant.

Mr. POPIOLEK: That's good. Good. Good.

MARZYNSKI: [voice-over] One day, he will leave this scene.

Mr. POPIOLEK: Good. You can tell what they're going to be now.

MARZYNSKI: [voice-over] as quietly as he entered it.

Mr. POPIOLEK: Son of a gun.

McCULLOUGH: Memories are short and getting shorter, unfortunately. It's not just that so many Americans are historically illiterate, but that we've even made family stories disposable. In many families, the years before the second World War are fast fading. The time before the first war, Frank Popiolek's time, is gone, as remote as Caesar. Alone, playing Solitaire, Frank Popiolek is not just a man from another distant place, but from a vastly different time, which counts heavily in his loneliness.

If we stop to think of how much emotion, how much of real and irreplaceable value in our lives comes from the past, then maybe we'll not be so quick to discard it all and those who go with it.

I'm David McCullough. Good night.

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