

Making a significant life change is pretty scary. But, know what's even more frightening? Regret. Something Elzbieta Winiarska explained during her interview February 25th, 2018. The amount of honor and excitement to participate gave everyone in the room a massive smile on their faces. Something Mrs. Winiarska is known to do, make everyone smile.

Born April 18th, 1952 in the small village of Rokietnica, Poland, becoming the youngest of 4 and the only daughter. Like any other young child, the dream of going across seas and living the American Dream seemed too far to reach, nearly impossible. That is until years later, the impossible became possible. Being obsessed with trying his odds with the lottery, Mr. Winiarski convinced his chance will come once it was in God's plan. With the advice and guidance of a family member already overseas, Mr. Winiarski tried his luck and applied for a family green card. In 1993, now with a husband and three beautiful children they packed up their bags and traveled across seas into the land of the unknown to start their version of the American Dream and to provide the future generations a better future.

Life wasn't always easy for this new Polish Texan and her family. As a teacher back home, education is where it came from occupation to keep her family afloat. This is where Mrs. Winiarska found the Polish church in Houston, Texas and offered her services at the Polish School in the name of Mikołaja Kopernika right next door. Fast forward about 20 years where this Polish Texan shared her talents as a teacher and then director of the whole school while guiding the future generation with everything from the Polish culture to the song and dance of their ancestors.

Another barrier that was difficult to overcome was the language barrier. Mrs. Winiarska didn't have the opportunity to learn English because she wanted to keep the Polish language as alive as possible. It was up to her to keep the Polish language and culture in her family and

generations later; she remains passionate about this goal. "America is a country of immigrants; there wasn't a problem when it came to acceptance, even though I didn't know the language." Those words put into perspective of what it honestly would feel like to come into the unknown world while having an optimist view.

Polish traditions and culture is Mrs. Winiarska's expertise, ask anyone who has the pleasure of knowing her. Being a part of the bi-annual Houston Polish Festivals since the very start, she took charge of the entertainment category which proudly filled with educating the public about her homeland. Through the Polish School, and the adult traditional dance troop, the performances provided lots of smiles to Texans who came to see what Mrs. Winiarska had to offer. She would parade around in a traditional costume not only during the festival weekends but also during all major holidays, right along with her family doing the same thing.

Recognition is something Mrs. Winiarska beamed about during her interview. In 2001, she received recognition from the Houston Chapter of the Polish American Congress for her contributions to the Polish School. In 2004, an award received for her extraordinary contribution and dedication to the enrichment of the Slavic Heritage in Texas. Another recognition was received in 2008 from the Consul General of the Republic of Poland for the remarkable devotion to promoting rich Polish heritage, culture, and history as well as dedication to the Polish Community in Texas. The most critical reward received in 2009, from the Republic of Poland, which honored her contributions to Polish education abroad. What a proud moment not only for Mrs. Winiarska but for the state of Texas since she is the only Texan who received such an honor.

It's was an honor to sit along and interview Mrs. Winiarska and hear all about her accomplishments. If I can achieve half of what Mrs. Winiarska has done for the Polish

community in Texas, I would feel very successful. It's people like her that make me feel inspired and thankful that I'm part of a beautiful Polish community.

