



Pictured above are my parents: Robert and Lucyna Zajac

Being raised in a loving and supportive family with the luxury of being an American citizen is not something that everyone gets to experience; in fact, the lives of the people who raised me started very differently.

My parents were born and raised in a communist country and experienced a childhood unlike anyone else's. Poland was in a time of darkness, and the socialist party had taken over the country; hours were spent waiting in lines to buy bread and miles were walked to get to a scarce school house. The only hope for the future came from movies and magazines, which were snuck in from neighboring Germany. They lived in conditions unlike any that I can imagine. After getting married, they took one of the biggest risks that any couple can take during their lifetime: they left all of their family, belongings, and memories behind in Gorzów and moved to America.

After settling in Houston and giving birth to me, my parents started a new chapter in their lives that was mainly centered on their child; they wanted me to avoid the horrors they went through. I never realized how important my life was to them growing up. Although times have vastly changed, traveling to Poland has allowed me to see how different my life could have been. My other family members that

stayed behind live together in a one bedroomed apartment and barely have enough money to get by with daily necessities. Experiencing this for myself has changed my outlook on life and allowed me to realize how fortunate my life in America is. My travels have helped me to see the true bravery within my parents who made the bold choice of moving. Since realizing this, I have become inspired by all the support and care that my parents have provided me with.

Throughout the years I have seen examples of my parents struggling to adjust to the new language, such as saying “veggie-table” instead of vegetable or “purpur” instead of purple. Little things like that have given me a laugh or two, but have also shown me how they have grown. For example, acquiring a new education to meet their jobs’ needs or even purchasing a home. Their growth shows me the gratitude and care they have for me.

As I myself have grown in this loving and tightly-knit community, I have been taught important family values that I now hold close to my heart. Being active at church every Sunday refreshes my faith and weaves me tighter within my community. Obtaining a high school education has given me a sense of success for the future. Exploring different countries every year has taught me the importance of working hard to have fun. Keeping up with the Polish language and traditions has allowed me to stay connected with my roots and be proud of who I am. Being the first in my family to go to college in America reminds me of how far we have come together.

Nearing the end of my high school education, I have noticed that my parents’ dream has come true. All the risks they took towards raising their child in a better environment have paid off. Being active in my community, participating in church activities, becoming a profound member in many clubs, and obtaining numerous academic awards has made me discover one thing about myself: I wasn’t raised to survive, I was raised to change the world.