
The Origin Of Polish Names & Surnames

The majority of people are able to identify a Polish last name, as they are very distinguishable. Truth be told, if it looks unpronounceable, it is most likely Polish. In America, there are about 9.5 million Polish Americans, equating to 3% of the U.S. population (Jones, 2018). Many of these are Poles with last names ending in "ski." The "ski" names are one of the oldest and undoubtedly the most recognizable type of Polish last name in the world (Surnames, 2017). They are also the most common last name in Poland today (Surnames, 2017). It has always been a question of mine where this type of name came from and what can it tell me about my Polish heritage.

The Polish "ski" suffix was initially used to specify a person's geographic location (Surnames, 2017). Therefore, around the 13th century many of the oldest names that began to spread around Poland were names that indicated where their owners came from (Surnames, 2017). For example, the name Tarnowski would have come from Tarnów (Surnames, 2017). Significantly, Polish nobility also used these names (Surnames, 2017). Noblemen were people who owned large amounts of land and would use their name as a way of setting themselves apart from other landowners (Surnames, 2017). "Ski" names very soon grew to be regarded as noble names and demonstrated the high status of a family.

Having a Polish heritage means that I am fortunate enough to get to experience many unique traditions that have been passed down from generation to generation. For instance, our family's holidays are always filled with the scent of my great grandfather's Golabki and Polish sausage with sauerkraut. My Polish heritage and our traditions have helped shape who I am, and influenced my identity. For instance, eight years ago I moved away for nursing school, and was many miles away from home out of my comfort zone. This made me think about my great grandparents who were born in Poland and lived during World War I. They came to America when they were just teenagers. I thought about how much bravery they had, to arrive in a foreign place, without knowing any familiar faces or speaking the language. They eventually met in Pittsburgh where they married, built amazing careers, and grew a beautiful family. I am able to appreciate the fact that I come from a family filled with such strong and hardworking people in which I have inherited these traits as well.

My Polish heritage has been always been rooted in love and support. My family, whether big or small, has always celebrated all of my accomplishments. I owe my achievements to my strong Polish work ethic and hope to raise my family in the same fashion. Family is very important in the Polish culture. Our Polish foods, holidays, weddings and traditions all revolve around family. Even our extended relatives are considered close family. Another value of great importance to my family is religion. Religion also plays a significant role in the Polish culture (A Guide, 2017). In Poland, the majority people are identify as Roman Catholic, as does my family. I have grown up going to church and attended Catholic school all the way until high school. My religion has set the foundation to which I have acquired all my morals and values.

I believe being brought up around the Polish culture has established the way that I communicate with other people. I have been told countless times that I am a very direct person, and that I get to the point. Polish people in general are very direct communicators; they consider

expressing thoughts or opinions directly is much better than “beating around the bush” (Warburton, 2017). To some, the straightforwardness may seem abrasive. Especially to those who think it is better to be more subtle to prevent hurting people’s feelings. It may seem that Poles are very upfront in their questions especially about someone’s personal life, this is merely a way for them to learn more about the person and establish a trusting relationship (Warburton, 2017). The Polish are very open when it comes to their communication, body language and gestures. My family has always taught me that the more direct someone is, the more respect they are showing. Nevertheless, I must be watchful how I approach people, because not everyone communicates the same way as I.

Since working in healthcare, I have learned that people from different cultures have very distinct ways of behaving and communicating (Ferwerda, 2016). I have taken care of many people from diverse backgrounds, and have begun to notice this more and more as time has gone on. For example, individuals from some cultures talk so loud they may seem rude or aggressive, whereas other cultures seem hesitant to speak up or make eye contact. When I am initiating care of a patient, I always ask if there are any religious or cultural beliefs I should know about in order to respect their needs. I must remain culturally sensitive to everyone I come in contact with, and figure out the communication style that would be most effective for that individual.

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