

FOUR POLISH RUNNERS WHO FOUND EACH OTHER, THE MANCHESTER ROAD RACE, AND A LOCAL HOST (submitted by Member, Janit Romayko)

With the collapse of Communism in 1989, and in fear for their future, three young gentlemen – Tomasz Gnabel, Michael Bartoszyk, and Zbigniew Nadolsky -- found their “way” from Łódz, Poland to a Catholic refugee camp in Austria where they stayed for 16 months. The three knew each other as soccer players in secondary school and as casual friends around town.

Fast forward . . . the running coach at Alamosa State College (now University) in Alamosa, Colorado learned of several Polish people who were eager to come to the United States. These included Tomasz, Michael, and Zbigniew (ZB), and they were subsequently invited to try out for the cross country (fall sport), indoor track and field (indoor winter sport), and road racing (spring sport) at Alamosa.

All three Polish “lads” made the teams and the coach was impressed with their stamina, drive, and determination. Alamosa State was now a player on the national running scene mainly due to the success of these three Polish athletes. Other schools started to take notice of “little” Alamosa, as did the Race Director for the Manchester Road Race (MRR) in Connecticut. The MRR is the second oldest road race in New England (after the Boston Marathon which was at that time around 90 years old with history accompanying its tradition). In 1992, the MRR Director invited the three Poles to race in the Thanksgiving Day 4.78 mile race. Tradition holds that invited runners are paired up with families in Manchester so that they feel comfortable in the community. The Race Director knew of my aunt, Elizabeth Bucior Dziadus as someone who had lived in Manchester since the 1920s. Originally from Łancut, Poland, the family lived on Maple Street which was conveniently located less than one mile from the start of the race on Main Street. The Race Director called me to ask if my aunt would be interested in “hosting” the three Polish runners. She gladly accepted looking forward both to sharing her three bedroom home with guests of Polish descent and to practicing her conversational Polish.

Race morning was a shock to the three Polish runners. The MRR is a traditional race with a crowd of over 10,000 (2017 saw over 15,000 participants). They had never witnessed, nor participated in, such a huge race. All of the activities preceding and following the race were very memorable. The Race Committee and runners were welcoming, hospitable, and friendly to the guys, and they were overwhelmed with the spirit of the race and the fact that they finished in the top 5 and won money. At that time, every dollar counted, and they appreciated receiving financial support for their endeavors.

Tomasz, Michael, and Zbigniew stayed for a week but returned to Manchester the following summer to stay with my aunt, whom they came to love very much. They trained in the early mornings and late evenings and during the day they helped my aunt with her garden, painted and wallpapered her upstairs rooms, did minor repairs on the house and garage, mowed the lawn,

trimmed the hedges, and overall, had a carefree and fun time for themselves. They did this for three summers much to the delight of my aunt and my family. When they finished their studies at Alamosa State, they returned to Łodz just as the politics of the EU had embraced Poland, convincing them that the country was in a better financial place.

Michael Bartoszyk bought a franchise for an Adidas shoe store, as he had been sponsored by Adidas and he was a natural for a business venture. Tomasz Gnabel started up an Italian restaurant in Warsaw since he had always been interested in culinary pursuits. His older sister was a trained chef, and he oversaw the purchases and management. Zbigniew (ZB) Nadolsky settled back in Łodz and became the Race Director for the Łodz Marathon typically held in the fall of each year. All three kept in touch with my aunt and with me.

Fast forward again . . . ZB met a blonde marathon runner, named Karolina Jarzynska who was interested in running ZB's race. She had her sights set on the Olympic Marathon but had no specific date in mind. Eventually she would get to China or Japan but before she became part of the international running circles, she "put her time" into marathons and races in Spain, Paris, London, Berlin and Chicago. Running in the international scene is at another level for which she was prepared. Many times she was an "invited runner," which meant that her expenses were covered and her appearance was publicized. Karolina was beginning to build quite an impressive resumé for herself, and eventually she, too, appeared on the "radar screen" of the Race Director of the Manchester Road Race. Of course luck would have it that Tomasz Gnabel become her Agent, arranged her transportation to the US, and knew exactly where she was going to stay!!

Karolina has been coming to the Manchester Road Race since 2016. In 2016 she finished in 5th place only ONE second behind the 4th place finisher who in turn was only ONE second behind the 3rd place finisher!! She is a delight to have every year, and I hope she will be able to join us for the 82nd running of the MRR on Thursday, November 28th 2019. She is also looking forward to representing Poland in the 2020 Olympics as a marathon runner. She is already in the range of 2:24 for the 26.2 mile distance and is now training in Alamosa, Colorado since the altitude is conducive to oxygen buildup for endurance. She and ZB are now married and they have a 3 year old little bundle of energy who is the exact image of her mother. How amazing is this story of four Polish runners and how they LOVE Manchester, CT!!



EDITOR'S NOTE: **Janit Romayko** herself is an avid athlete and runner. She is a loyal and dedicated participant in the annual Manchester Road Race and is usually a top winner in her age group – a true inspiration.



Manchester Road Race



Łodz Marathon, Łodz, Poland