

Reconnecting to Her Roots

Do you know your ethnicity and culture? Could you be a descendant of people from many countries and areas? Do you know all of them? Jeanette Marie Tropp is Polish, Native American Cherokee, Welsh, German, and English.

Tropp mostly follows her Polish culture, which has many historical traditions, but incorporates modern customs along with them. She has many ways in which she identifies and celebrates as Polish.

Some ways she identifies as Polish include: taking her shoes off before walking through the house, eating open-faced sandwiches called Kanapki, studying the native language and exchanging gifts whenever visiting someone (even if she is only stopping by for five minutes!). Also, Tropp will make homemade traditional Polish foods, such as pierogi, halupki (stuffed cabbage), and halushki (thick, soft noodles or dumplings).

“Polish culture has always stood out amongst the rest as being one steeped in historical traditions while simultaneously embracing the modern world with open arms,” said Tropp.

In the Polish culture, Tropp will host huge celebrations for any occasion, such as birthdays, weddings, job promotions and you bet they are celebrating with plenty of vodka (responsibly, of course) and halupki. She will also celebrate Wigilia, which is Christmas Eve, instead of Christmas Day. This is when the Oplatek (a sweet, thin cracker) is passed around the table, symbolizing good luck and best wishes.

Other traditions and day-to-day practices Tropp does are dancing traditional Polish folk dances in her cultural regalia and practicing tight etiquette rules. The regalia varies from region to region, but she wears the style from western Krakow. A couple etiquette rules she must abide by are not chewing with her mouth open or practicing other poor table manners as they are extremely taboo.

As for her native Cherokee roots, she tries to celebrate these customs, too, but she does not get the opportunity because of the small population in Pennsylvania in the United States.

She enjoys participating in her culture’s traditions because it makes her feel close to her family living across the Atlantic Ocean in Poland. She said, “Polish culture is all about sharing and caring, so it is an incredible opportunity for me to also teach others about the centuries-old customs.”

Tropp has been through some hardships by exclusively identifying as Polish. She has had many assumptions made against her in regard to her intellect due to stereotypes associated with the Polish Demographic and has had people mock her for openly speaking Polish. Concerning her Cherokee culture, she has had backlash for trying to participate because she looks primarily white causing many Cherokee groups to not accept her despite her desire to reconnect with her roots.

Some cool, interesting aspects of Polish culture you might be interested in:

- They sing “Sto Lat” (100 Years) at nearly every celebration as a toast
- They are one of the few European cultures that have been stubborn in modifying their last names in the states (if you ever come across a Polish surname, don’t worry about pronouncing it incorrectly, we all will, unless we’re all Polish too!)
- Always remove your shoes when entering a home! (True for most homes in many countries all around the world)
- They tend to speak a mix of English and Polish around the house... that sounds confusing!
- Poland invented vodka, not Russia
- They love to Polka
- Polish people tend to be very Democratic
- The Polish flag colors represent the people’s history and their focus on the future: the red is for the blood shed during their struggle for independence and the white symbolizes continued peace