



A special holiday edition newsletter about students and alumni with a focus on travel, family and small-town sentiments.

A Special Edition Newsletter for the Holiday Season

Whether near or far, whether a student of yesterday or today...in the spirit of family holidays, we share with you how some students have taken the feeling of "home" from the Poland community with them during their travels and careers.

1969 graduate takes Poland values with him for career dedicated to transportation, environment

Poland Central School District 1969 graduate Gary McVoy continues to focus on the future.

After almost 32 years working in high-level roles for the New York State Department of Transportation and more than four years working for an international consulting firm, McVoy opened his own consulting firm four years ago. He does environmental transportation research with a focus on sustainability and the importance of government taking such factors into account.

McVoy attempts to address issues ranging from climate change to whether we should be building more highways or focusing on public transit such as buses and trains.

"If we don't consider environmental, social and economic factors in public decision making, we're not going to be around for many more generations," he said. "If we let the roads and bridges fall into disrepair because we're building new ones, we won't be able to get groceries. There are questions to be answered. They aren't easy."



Poland Central School District
1969 graduate Gary McVoy.

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Alexis Darrow at Syracuse University becomes 1st Poland graduate to make a Division I soccer team

Poland Central School District Class of 2016 graduate Alexis Darrow never scored a goal playing soccer in high school – or during her two years at Herkimer College.

That didn't stop her – especially as a defender – from accomplishing something no Poland soccer player ever has before: making a Division I soccer team.

Darrow is now a member of the Syracuse University women's soccer team. When she first found out she would be on the team and got off the phone with the Syracuse soccer coaches, she felt emotional to realize she reached her goal.

"I actually cried so hard," she said. "I couldn't even get it out to tell my mom. The feeling was insane. It was surreal to know I was going to the D-1 level."

Darrow, 20, plays defense – usually at the outside back position – and wears No. 21 for Syracuse. Making a Division I team as a defender who wasn't a star player in high school shows the importance of hard work and what it can help you accomplish, she said.

Just as previous Poland soccer players – such as Alyssa Lepper, Elise Hazard and Kara Morrison – inspired Darrow, she would like to do the same for others.

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1969 graduate

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Poland 2016 graduate Alexis Darrow.

1972 Poland graduate co-founds holiday program to help children in need

A more than 30 year career as a special education teacher isn't the only way 1972 Poland Central School District graduate Sherry Powers Alberta has helped her community in Ithaca.

She and her husband also created the Elves program 29 years ago to collect warm clothing items and more to give to children in need for the holidays. It started with one school and 14 children and has grown to 40 schools and 1,200 children.

"I guess it's just nice going to bed on Dec. 24 knowing that 1,200 kids have a lot of new clothes, pajamas, socks, coats, toys and blankets," she said.

Alberta, who lives in Ithaca with her husband Bill Alberta, retired in 2010. She lives next door to her daughter, Amber Alberta, and her grandson, Ben Riehlmann.

"I spend a lot of time with him," she said.

Her other hobbies include collecting antiques and tending to a big, organic garden – and, of course, the Elves program.

'Even then'

The Poland 1972 senior directory suggests that Alberta has successfully managed activities for a long time. Senior class president, junior class secretary and member of the Girls Athletic Association from freshman year to senior year are just a few of the items noted on her personal vitae.

After graduating from Poland, Alberta earned her bachelor's degree from the State University of New York at Geneseo and her master's degree at the College of St. Rose in Albany.

She started her special education teaching career at Herkimer-Fulton-Hamilton-Otsego BOCES for a few years, before moving to Ithaca, where she spent the rest of her career teaching at Ithaca High School.



Sharon Elizabeth Powers



"No man is happy that does not think himself so."

Poland 1972 graduate Sherry Powers Alberta is pictured here in the 1972 Poland yearbook with her senior photos and quote.

She taught middle school for one year, but preferred high school, she said.

"I liked working with teenagers – they kept me young," she said. "They were fun. They were challenging. They all had special needs. But they kept me young. They made me laugh."

Award for Outstanding Resource Teacher in 2007.

She isn't sure what inspired her to become a teacher; it's just part of who she is.

"Even when I was in high school, I worked with some elementary kids who had reading problems," she said. "It was always something I was interested in."

Looking back, Alberta said her time at Poland was helpful in preparing her for college and her career.

"I had some very good teachers," she said.

In school, she had already developed an eye for those who could use the type of assistance she now provides through the Elves program.

"It was a great place to grow up," she said.

"It was a good school.

But even then, I saw the people who had so little."



Sherry Powers Alberta co-founded the Elves program, which collects gifts for children in need. More info: elves.cornell.edu.

Alberta received multiple community awards for teaching including the Tompkins Trust Co. Raymond Van Houtte Teacher

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1972 POLAND GRADUATE CO-FOUNDERS PROGRAM FOR CHILDREN WITH NEEDS ... CONTINUED FROM PAGE 2

'Such a need'

Sherry and Bill Alberta married in 1980, and in 1989, they co-founded the Elves program.

Bill Alberta, who has adopted the nickname CEO for "chief elf organizer," worked at Cornell University at the time, so the program started at Cornell, but it has spread throughout the Ithaca community with many volunteers, Sherry Alberta said.

A rural elementary school in the Ithaca area was the first to have the Elves program. Now it's at 40 public schools in five counties, she said.

"It's great to see," she said. "It's wonderful that there are so many volunteers, but it's sad there are so many kids with such a need."

The Elves program works with school nurses and school social workers to find the children in each school who need the support the most.

"They're the ones who really know where the need is," she said.

The recipients, who have ranged from newborn to high school, remain anonymous. Volunteers buy them new clothing items such as coats, hats, pajamas, underwear, socks and boots. If the necessities are covered, then toys are a nice bonus, but warm clothes are the focus, Alberta said.

In addition to the main Elves program, there are two connected programs: Blanket Bee, which involves having blankets made for Elves recipients, and the Backpack Program, which provides students with backpacks and supplies at the beginning of the school year.

When you see the results in the community, it's a great feeling, Alberta said.

"I've seen people pushing strollers with the blankets we've made," she said.

'Value of giving'

New schools are joining the Elves program all the time – with two new ones coming aboard this year, Alberta said. It would be her "dream" to see the Elves program expand even farther outside the Ithaca community, she said.

To start the Elves program, a school needs a volunteer leader who will find people who want to sponsor a child and donate items.



Elves program Blanket Bee volunteers create blankets to donate to children. More info: elves.cornell.edu.

"That's kind of why we started it – to teach our children," she said. "I wanted to teach my children the value of giving."

Another reason for starting the program was from reflecting on what she saw growing up and during her career.

"I remember elementary school and kids that didn't have anything," she said. "I still remember incidents from elementary school."

As a teacher, she saw and heard stories of children coming to school without socks or with holes in their shoes. She noted many students went without basic items like undergarments or sleepwear.

It's important that the clothes donated through the program are of high quality for the children, Alberta said.

"Because the kids wear them a lot," she said. "They wear them over and over again."

She has heard so many stories of the happiness children experience from having new clothes. The Elves program not only brings joy to the recipient students; the program brings the same to the donors.



Sharon Powers Alberta (looking at camera) is pictured here among friends in high school at Poland.

Some volunteers like to take their own children with them to shop for the Elves recipients, and Alberta did the same with her children, Amber and Ian, as they were growing up, she said.

1982 Poland graduate felt welcomed as new student before successful career

Poland Central School District Class of 1982 graduate Hanni Echtermann Kmetz has helped open malls across the northeast, supported families through the March of Dimes and now has a management role at one of the oldest jewelry box companies in the United States.

Along the way, she has always remembered the way she was treated by the Poland school community when she moved from New Jersey to Barneveld as a high school freshman.

"When we moved up here, all the students were so friendly and so embracing," she said. "You felt like you have lived there all your life."

Kmetz and her husband, Michael, live in Cazenovia. They have three children: Benjamin, William and Margaret. Kmetz is now general manager of Mele Co., which is in Utica and is the jewelry box division of Mele Companies.

College and career

After graduating from Poland, Kmetz went to Utica College and earned a bachelor's degree in business administration and marketing. While at Utica College, she started an internship with Pyramid Management Group, which has developed and managed malls throughout the northeast.

Following her graduation from Utica College in 1985, she was hired by Pyramid as the marketing director for Riverside Mall in Utica. She moved in with some other Poland graduates in her first apartment in South Utica.

Over the next several years, she became the marketing director for Crossgates Mall in Albany and then marketing director/assistant general manager for Carousel Center (now Destiny USA) in Syracuse. She was involved with the opening of both malls and was also on a grand opening team that traveled to help open malls all over the northeast – including from Buffalo to Massachusetts.

In 1990, she decided to leave her job and get a master's degree in public communication from Syracuse University's S.I. Newhouse School of Public Communications.

"I loved it there, but I had worked almost every day for years, and I was exhausted," she said.



The senior photo for 1982 Poland graduate Hanni Echtermann Kmetz.

while at Syracuse, and they decided to stay in Upstate New York.

After completing her master's degree, she started working for Pyramid again. She became general manager of Salmon Run Mall in

Watertown and then Sangertown Square in New Hartford. She then worked in the corporate office doing marketing and human resources for all of the Pyramid malls.

'Where I am now'

Another major career change took place in 1997: she and her husband had their first baby, and she decided to stay home for a while. They had three children in total, and she ended up being home for about 10 years.

She did a lot of volunteering as her kids were growing up, and at one point, someone asked her if she ever wanted to get paid for all the work she was doing for nonprofits.

"I had never thought about that, but I pursued it," she said.

Kmetz then became executive director of the March of Dimes of Central New York. Later into her time there, she became March of Dimes executive director of Upstate New York from Albany to Buffalo.



Poland 1982 graduate Hanni Echtermann Kmetz (right) poses with her daughter, Margaret Kmetz.

So she decided to go for a change by going back to college. She thought she would be off to New York City after that to join her sister there, but she met her husband

1982 POLAND GRADUATE FELT WELCOMED AS NEW STUDENT

... CONTINUED FROM PAGE 4

"It was wonderful working with so many fantastic families," she said, noting that the families were dealing with the challenges of pre-term birth. "I got to know the families. It was a very rewarding position."

In 2017, she went back to working in the private sector, and she has since become general manager of Mele Co. She said she is proud to work for the company because it has been around since 1912 and is one of the oldest jewelry box companies in the country.

"It's a staple of our community," she said. "I feel so fortunate to be part of this company. It brings me home again."

When going to high school at Poland, she also lived close to the Mele family, she said. At the time, she certainly didn't know that her career path would wind back around to working at Mele Co.

"I think I always knew I wanted to be in business of some sort," she said. "Everything leads to the next step in your life. All my experiences have helped me get to where I am now."

'A lot of love'

Before the Echtermann family moved to Barneveld, the school Kmetz was going to in New Jersey had hundreds of students per graduating class, so it was an adjustment going to Poland with about 60 students in her graduating class, she said.

"That's a big difference," Kmetz said.

The Poland school community was very welcoming, she said.

She has fond memories of students who were in a band coming to her house and playing music, while she would listen.

Students also would come over to go swimming in the pool, and she would ride horses at her neighbor's house.

"It's just such a wonderful experience," she said. "It's a small town where the people really have a lot of love for one another. I just always remember that."

Going to high school at Poland prepared her well for college and her career.

"It certainly did," she said. "We had wonderful teachers. It was such a great experience going to Poland."

Tragedy struck the Echtermann family when Kmetz's sister Margaret Echtermann died in the terrorist attacks on Sept. 11, 2001, in New York City.

Margaret Echtermann was in the second tower of the World Trade Center during the attacks.



Poland French Club officers including President Hanni Echtermann Kmetz (right) in 1982.

The community rallied around the Echtermann family in the aftermath, Kmetz said.

The Echtermann family now gives out the Margaret Echtermann

9/11 Memorial Award as a scholarship for a Poland student at each year's graduation as a way to give back for the support the family received from the Poland school community, Kmetz said.

"It'll always mean so much to me and my family," she said. "I'll never forget that outpouring of kindness that came from everyone."



1982 Poland graduate Hanni Echtermann Kmetz (second from the right in the front row) sits with other students by a sign in front of Poland Central School.

ALEXIS DARROW 1ST POLAND GRADUATE TO MAKE DIVISION I SOCCER TEAM

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Perhaps some current Poland students – including players who don't feel like they stand out on the soccer field – will see her as a source of motivation, she said.

"I like to think that I am in a way because it definitely took a lot of hard work to get here, and it takes a lot of hard work to stay here," Darrow said. "I hope I can inspire some younger girls."

'Big dreams'

Darrow first started playing soccer in eighth grade on the Poland modified team – at the suggestion of a friend.

"I tried it, and I loved it," she said.

One thing she enjoys about soccer is that you get a group of 20-plus friends every year on your team, and you never lose them as friends. Before playing soccer, she didn't have as many friends, so soccer gave her "girls to talk to" and a team to be a part of, she said.

"With your soccer team, you sort of become a soccer family," she said.

Eighth grade is very late to start for someone who wants to continue playing in college, Darrow said. She then played two years on the junior varsity team and two years on the varsity team. On varsity, she was able to experience success in sectionals including a trip to the state finals.

Poland girls soccer coach Tom Basel said Darrow's late start to soccer showed at times, as she worked at fully grasping the game.

"But she was an eager learner and soaked it all in and played with a lot of passion," Basel said.

Darrow was a "platooning starter" in high school – often starting every other game in the back on defense – so her becoming the first Poland player to make a Division I college soccer team wouldn't have been expected, Basel said.



Poland 2016 graduate Alexis Darrow poses in official Syracuse University women's soccer photos (above, below and on opposite page).

"It came as a surprise to me, but a pleasant one," he said. "Lexi was always among the hardest working players on the teams she played for, for me. She had big dreams. She had very big dreams.

It's heartwarming to see those dreams realized."

'Keep playing'

Throughout high school, Darrow enjoyed participating in Poland's soccer tradition.

"I think being at Poland made me want to play college soccer," she said. "I finished my last game as a Tornado, and I realized I wanted to keep playing."

Basel helped put her in touch with Herkimer College,

and she ended up playing soccer at Herkimer College for two years. She said she can't thank Basel enough.

Basel also helped her get ready for college – especially her junior and senior years at Poland, when she was taking college courses through Herkimer College.

"That prepared me," she said. "That helped a lot."

Having some college courses taken care of also assisted her with the challenge of balancing education and soccer during college, she said.

Herkimer College had postseason success during both of Darrow's years there. In her second year, she and another Poland Class of 2016 graduate, Mikayla Blumenstock, were captains of the Herkimer College team.

"We made program history and made it all the way to the national finals," Darrow said.

Herkimer College lost the national championship game in overtime.

"That was a tough one," she said.

Darrow, however, felt energized by the atmosphere of that game in overtime – tired out from a whole season and regulation and still having to push yourself through the pressure.

"I love it," she said. "Those moments are so fun because you really find out what your team is made of."



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ALEXIS DARROW 1ST POLAND GRADUATE TO MAKE DIVISION I SOCCER TEAM

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Following that season, she graduated from Herkimer College with an associate degree in general sciences, but she knew she wasn't done playing soccer.

"I didn't feel like I could stop," she said. "It's just so fun."

'The challenge'

Darrow was in contact with Syracuse University women's soccer assistant coach Benjamin Boehner, and she went to a camp with other girls who were interested in joining the program. Boehner told her if she applied to Syracuse and was accepted, she could contact him about potentially making the team, and it all went according to plan.

She didn't initially know she was the first Division I soccer player from Poland.

"I was surprised," she said. "We have a ton of talent coming out of Poland, so to be the first one is shocking to me."

Being a part of a Division I program also comes with plenty of challenges.

The team went 3-15 in the 2018 season, and Darrow didn't get playing time in the games.

"It's been hard here at times, but I love the challenge, and I'm looking forward to improving in the offseason and getting more time on the field," she said.

Being around all the talent on the team and how hard everyone works is inspiring, she said. It's nice to have the whole team behind her – helping to encourage her and motivate her.

"We haven't had the best season, but everyone pushes each other every day," she said.

Playing on the Division I level is a major adjustment – including the players' skill level and soccer IQ, as well as the high intensity atmosphere and how everyone is always pushing, Darrow said.

"When I first got here, it was a little challenging because of the speed of play and everything," she said. "It is extremely fast-paced. You have to know where you're going with the ball before you even get the ball."

Basel said he has mentioned to current students that Darrow made the Syracuse team. It can be something that motivates

students – it's just a matter of balancing what your goals are, he said.

"I think Lexi's experience shows it's important to dream, but at the same time, acknowledge the sacrifices to reach that level – and the rarity of the opportunity," Basel said.

Many Poland players aim to play Division III soccer at a junior college, he said.

"To play at Division I requires so much more time and sacrifice that not everyone is cut out for," he said. "You have to be truly dedicated to soccer full-time."

**'An unsung position'**

Darrow has enjoyed her time playing soccer with her Orange teammates.

"Being at Syracuse, I feel like I have a second family here," she said.

The Syracuse Orange women's soccer team plays in a stadium by Manley Field House in Syracuse. Darrow had watched a game there before as a fan, so as she stood on the sidelines as part of the team and looked at all the fans, it was a crazy feeling, she said.

After games, fans wait for the players to sign autographs, Darrow said.

"It's just shocking to me that someone wants my name on a poster," she said.

As her former coach, Basel enjoys knowing Darrow accomplished something she set out to do.

"I'm just proud of her – proud of her effort and achievement," Basel said. "She's a great person."

Darrow's ability to make the Syracuse team also could be something that helps Poland students who play defense realize the importance of their roles, Basel said.

"In particular, this is good for defenders in the community – the many players that don't have that nose for the goal that so few do," he said. "It's an important position for any soccer team, but it's an unsung position."

'Gained confidence'

In high school, Darrow was a solid, honor roll student, who was very quiet and started to come out of her shell – including during her time at Herkimer College when she started helping Basel coach a club soccer team.

"I think she gained confidence from that," Basel said.

While assisting with coaching, Darrow drinks in as much as she can about soccer, and she learned a lot about the game and effective tactics, Basel said.

Darrow enjoyed the experience helping coach with Basel. She said coaching helps you see the game from a different perspective.

Darrow wants to coach soccer at the high-school or collegiate level someday.

"Coach Basel inspired me to do that," she said.

Darrow would still love to keep playing soccer throughout her life, whenever she has the opportunity, she said, but she has another strong interest: forensics.

She is currently a junior at Syracuse University and majors in psychology and forensic science. She wants to go into forensics for her career – such as doing crime scene investigation, forensic analysis or working for the Federal Bureau of Investigation.

Perhaps finding a way to work in forensics and coach soccer would be considered against the odds, but Darrow already knows what that's like.

Poland student takes transformative trip to Finland as an exchange student

When Poland Central School District senior Madison Muller returned home over the summer of 2018 after 11 months as an exchange student in Finland, trying to go back to being the person she used to be didn't feel real.

She realized that she started trying to act the way she would have before the trip, and that didn't align with how much she had changed while she was abroad.

"Everything felt fake for a while because that's not who I am anymore," she said. "I definitely grew up a lot in my mindset."

Muller, now 17, left for Finland on Aug. 6, 2017, through the Kuyahoor Valley Rotary Club and returned on July 1, 2018.

Through the changes she experienced from being an exchange student, she created a new image of herself. She learned to be more independent and deal with things as they come. She became more outgoing, but also got used to the generally shy and reserved way of people in Finland.

She now can sit quietly by herself and be fine with it.

"There's no such thing as awkward silence for me anymore – which some people don't understand," she said.

'Start over'

One thing about being an exchange student that nobody prepares you for is how hard it is to leave everything behind to come back home, Muller said.

Leaving home to start the trip is difficult too, and you think you have a lot of time to get ready before you go, Muller said.

"And all of a sudden, you're on an airplane," she said. "You're really never prepared to leave even though you think you are."

Muller has three sisters: Samantha, a Poland graduate; Elizabeth, a Poland seventh-grader, and Amber, a Poland fifth-grader. It was challenging not being there for her younger sisters on their birthdays, she said.

"I missed my sisters a lot on their birthdays," she said. "I've always tried to be a good older sister to them."

But when leaving home, you know you'll be back. You take it for granted, and you know home will be there waiting for you, Muller said.

In Finland, she had to find new friends and essentially create a new family.

That's why when she had to start getting ready to leave Finland, it was difficult to fully come to terms with the fact that she wouldn't be staying there forever.

"You really have to start over all by yourself there," she said. "It's a lot harder leaving something that you worked so hard to build, not knowing if you'll ever come back to it."

'Far away'

Muller first started considering being an exchange student after talking to Marius Mussinger, an exchange student from Germany who attended Poland Central School District during the 2016-17 school year. Mussinger talked about how the exchange student experience helped him learn so much, meet new people and find out more about the world, Muller said.

"It always seemed interesting to know more," she said.

Muller completed an online application, had a primary interview with the local Rotary and a secondary interview with the regional Rotary. She initially wanted to visit a country such as Brazil or Mexico, but she was first assigned to Denmark, before it was changed to Finland. She was based just



Poland student Madison Muller (left) with two of her friends visiting Helsinki while she was an exchange student in Finland.

outside of the city of Helsinki.

At first, she felt a little frustrated at how it turned out, but she was still excited about the opportunity. She would later realize that Finland was the better choice for her, and she is happy that's where she went.

"They definitely knew me a lot better than I know myself," she said.

Her voyage to Finland included three flights over the course of almost 24 hours. She couldn't sleep because she was so excited, so she arrived feeling exhausted.

She attended a one-week language camp with other exchange students, and then she met her first host family.

"It didn't feel real at all," she said. "It took a long time to realize that I was really so far away from home."

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POLAND STUDENT TAKES TRANSFORMATIVE TRIP TO FINLAND

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'Making friends'

Early in the trip, Muller came down with bronchitis, so she was tired all the time for a while, and that made it harder to find opportunities to meet people. Also, most people in Finland aren't very social and take a while to come up to talk to you, she said.

"Making friends was very difficult," she said. "It took time to get people out of their shells to come and hangout."

Things got a little easier when she started feeling better. She became close with two other exchange students. With the second host family, her host brother introduced her to her biggest group of friends, and she shared a room with her second host sister, Henna Poikola.

"So we got really, really close," Muller said.

Muller considers Poikola to be her "absolute best friend." They enjoyed doing things outside such as going for walks and visiting Helsinki, where Poikola was attending vocational school and was able to show Muller around.

The second host family also owns two cafes, and Muller and Poikola worked together at a café – receiving free food for their efforts. Muller would practice speaking Finnish with guests at the café because she knew she wouldn't see them again.

"It was interesting," she said. "It was definitely an experience."

Muller learned some Finnish, but considers herself not very good at it. People knew English, and where she was, they were excited to speak it.

After a while, her closer friends started purposely speaking Finnish to help her learn the language more, she said.

Adjustments

At Muller's first host family, she was staying there in place of a member of the family who was an exchange student elsewhere, and the sibling who was still there wasn't a big fan of the arrangement. It was a split family, so they rotated weeks between the mother's house and father's house.

She spent three months with the first host family – particularly enjoying the family's two English bulldogs – before moving onto her second host family. She was supposed to have a third host family, but she got along with her second host family so well that she stayed there for the remaining eight months of the trip.

With the second family, she was the seventh child in the house – with the children ranging in ages from 2 to 18.

"So that was a lot," she said.

It was nice to have small children in the house, and the young kids loved her, she said.

The family planned a lot of activities, including spending time together and having traditional family dinners. The house was considered open – with no locks on the doors.

Another adjustment in Finland is the popularity of using saunas with family, friends and others. The sauna experience is something you get used to quick, Muller said.

"It was my favorite part, actually," she said.

The school experience also was different in Finland. It's less structured and more college-like – with more free time between classes, more choices in what classes you take and an ability to schedule your classes.

There also is rarely homework, so family and friends have more time together outside of school. She had



Poland student Madison Muller (right) with other exchange students at her school in Finland at Wanhat, a traditional dance.

homework for her language class that she took for four months, but she otherwise mostly didn't have homework.

She enjoyed experiencing the differences in school between the United States and Finland.

"It was nice, actually," she said.

'Fun for me'

When reflecting about any amusing stories from her trip, Muller labeled the overall experience – such as adjusting to the culture and language – as humorous.

"Everything's kind of funny because nothing makes sense," she said.

There were times when people were talking that she didn't know how she should react and if she should be laughing or not.

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POLAND STUDENT TAKES TRANSFORMATIVE TRIP TO FINLAND

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People would also give her funny looks for crossing the street at the wrong time. There was a while when she kept thinking that people were calling to her by saying "Maddie," when they were really saying "emmatia," which appropriately means "I don't know."

Sometimes, she would walk into a bookstore and pretend she was reading and understanding the books because she enjoyed the idea that other people would think she knew the language.

"It was fun for me for some reason," she said.

Muller's other adventures included many trips into Helsinki.

From where she was staying, it took about an hour on a bus to get into the center of the city.

"I loved Helsinki," she said.

She traveled outside of Finland to visit Astoria with other exchange students and Sweden with students from her school in Finland.

"Astoria was gorgeous, and it was very warm," she said.

She enjoyed seeing her Finnish classmates have a good time in Sweden.

"To see them let loose more was nice," she said.

Muller also experienced the changing daylight in Finland – ranging from darkness all day to light all day.

"The darkness was hard," she said, noting that it was most dark out about halfway through the trip in December.

At that time, she took a lot of vitamins, and it felt like she could physically tell the difference from a lack of sunlight, she said.

The light made up for the darkness.

"The 24 hours of light at the end was wonderful," she said. "I never slept. You really could be doing something all the time, and I definitely was."

Keeping connected

When leaving Finland, Muller's friends wrote her letters to read on the flight home.



Poland student Madison Muller (right) with her host sister Henna Poikola at a Finnish graduation party.

Even though they are now living in time zones that are seven hours apart, she and her Finnish friends keep in contact through Facebook, Snapchat and weekend phone calls.

"My best friends there are still my best friends," she said.

One friend was planning to visit her this school year. She also remains in the second host family's ongoing WhatsApp group chat.

Muller, who wants to go into a career as a licensed master social worker, was considering going to college in Finland, but she didn't think it would work out due to a lack of English-speaking colleges.

Instead, she is planning to visit Finland for a couple months after graduating from Poland.

"I really hope to," she said. "I hope to see everyone again – at least for a little while."



Poland student Madison Muller with Ella, one of her Finnish host sisters, during a family trip to Lapland.

1969 GRADUATE TAKES POLAND VALUES WITH HIM FOR CAREER

... CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

McVoy spends his time split between his home in Slingerlands, which is a suburb of Albany, and his camp on Schroon Lake, more than an hour north of Albany.

Poland, however, maintains a special place in his heart.

"Poland still seems like home," he said. "It's where I came from. I'm still rooted there in my background, thoughts, ethics and world view."

'Positive values'

McVoy's upbringing also inspired his college and career path, he said.

"Poland and the Boys Scouts and living in the village and in the country," he said. "Hunting and fishing. I developed an interest in the environment and the scientific underpinnings of it."

McVoy remembers his classes at Poland and particularly mathematics. He remembers Mr. Hane teaching algebra and Mr. Jones developing his own textbooks to teach matrix algebra because no such thing existed at the time for high school students, he said.

"It prepared me very well for college," McVoy said, of going to school at Poland. "The small class size and the fact that we were all together – 50-60 of us – we were all together every single day for 13 years; it provided a real sense of comfort and community and security that really stood me very well in college and beyond. It provided a sense of grounding in community and positive values."

College life

After graduating from Poland, McVoy attended Albany State University and earned a bachelor's degree in geology. His time in college also included participating in the first Earth Day in 1970 and joining a protest that temporarily shut down the New York State Thruway.

"You had to be there to understand it," he said, with a laugh.

He met his wife, Elaine, at Albany State, and they got married in 1975. They now have two sons in their 30s, Brian and Matthew, and two granddaughters, Elizabeth and Alyssa.

McVoy took all the scientific, mathematic and economic classes that he could at Albany State, and it helped him receive a full scholarship to Yale University.



Poland 1969 graduate Gary McVoy enjoys going hiking near his camp on Schroon Lake.

He earned a master's degree at Yale, did some graduate school work for a consulting firm and then earned a doctorate degree at Yale.

During the consulting work, he realized he needed to learn more about our government.

"I couldn't understand how government worked, and it was pretty clear that anything I was going to do in environmental work was going to be in the government," he said.

So after Yale, McVoy accepted a job with the New York State Department of Transportation, and he initially considered it to be a "post-doc" study to learn more about government operations for a year or so.

"Thirty years later, I figured I learned about as much as I could there," he said, laughing. "I moved onto consulting."

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Gary McVoy and his wife, Elaine, during his senior year at Albany State. They married two years later.

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1969 GRADUATE TAKES POLAND VALUES WITH HIM FOR CAREER ... CONTINUED FROM PAGE 11

'Still trying'

McVoy's DOT career included becoming director of environmental analysis for about 15 years, the director of maintenance for about four years and the director of operations for about four years. As director of operations, he was responsible for improving the day-to-day efforts of about 5,000 people and a multibillion dollar budget.

"I was sort of in charge of everything that's got to happen today for the DOT," he said, noting examples such as plowing roads, maintaining equipment, operating the safety program, repairing bridges and responding to emergencies.

While with the DOT, McVoy led some national research programs,

committees and initiatives, and he retired from the DOT in 2010 because he wanted to further apply his work to bigger picture questions, he said.

McVoy started working for Parsons Brinckerhoff, an international consulting firm that focuses on civil engineering, as a vice president for sustainability and climate. He retired from that firm in 2014 to open his own firm, McVoy Associates.

He now can pick and choose what he works on, he said.

"I can do that from my camp on Schroon Lake," he said.

He also splits his time between his consulting work and helping his wife babysit his two granddaughters, who live about a mile from his house.

"I'm a lot better at the research than I am with the granddaughters," he said, laughing.

McVoy is currently working with the National Association of Science to do research on transportation, the environment and sustainability.

He said he's very thankful for the opportunities he has had, and he considers his work to emphasize the importance of sustainability as a chance to help others. It should be obvious that the government needs to make sustainable decisions that are good for people environmentally, economically and socially, but it seems to be easy to forget that, he said.

"I'm still trying to give back," he said.