



**Magiczny
Kraków**

Who is Małgorzata Kędzior?

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She is a teacher assistant at [Hoover Math & Science Academy in Schaumburg](#), one of Chicago's suburbs, who successfully runs the Polish Club there. Kraków the Open City introduces a woman with a passion and purpose who is promoting her native city of Kraków in the US.

Kraków the Open City: How long have you lived away from Kraków and what prompted you to leave?

Małgorzata Kędzior: December 2023 will mark 26 years since we left Kraków. What prompted us to leave? Life. My husband and I are both graduates of Kraków universities, me: Jagiellonian University, my husband: Jagiellonian University and Pedagogical University of Kraków. Back then, finding a good job in my profession nothing short of a miracle. I will never forget how in one year I was employed as many as six times! New companies were springing up like mushrooms, but they were failing even faster. And we wanted a better life for our child. Julia was one and a half years old at the time. My husband's parents were U.S. citizens which and this is why had this opportunity. However, the decision to emigrate was not easy, especially for me. I couldn't imagine life without family, friends and my beloved Kraków. The plan we had was very optimistic: we would return after 5 years. It's been a bit longer... We became US citizens, started new careers, our second daughter, Emilia, was born, and so 25 years flew by.

Can you tell us where you live now and what you do for a living?

MK: I currently live in the northwestern suburbs of Chicago, in the city of Arlington Heights. Like most expats, we took our first steps in Chicago. However, when our older daughter reached school age, we made the decision to move to the suburbs. We wanted our daughter to receive a good education. It was the best decision. Julia started her education in a very good public school in Arlington Heights, and I started working in one of the best school districts in nearby Schaumburg.

What does your day-to-day work with children look like?

MK: Since 2001, I have been working in Schaumburg School District 54, at Hoover Math and Science Academy. It is an elementary school for children from 5 to 12. We have over 700 students of different nationalities. A representation of the whole world. I am a teacher assistant, this year in 3rd grade. Every year I may be assigned to a different age group, depending on the needs of the students. Every school in the States is an inclusive school, which means that in every class there are children with special needs, children of immigrants who are just learning English, as well as children of native-born Americans. My work is my passion. Working with children is a source of tremendous satisfaction for me. And working in such a diverse environment provides fantastic opportunities for growth and learning about other cultures. Now, for example, I am learning Ukrainian and refreshing my Russian. Due to the war in Ukraine, more and more children are arriving not only from there, but also from Russia and other Russian-speaking countries. The smiles on the faces of these newly arrived children when I start a conversation with them in their language reaffirms my belief that what I am doing makes sense.



What accomplishments are you particularly proud of?

MK: Many. Only those who have emigrated really know how many obstacles there are to overcome along the way. Our goal was to find a job in line with our education. And we succeeded. But first we had to break the language barrier. I started by learning the language (I knew German and Russian from Poland) and by doing a simple job of entering data into a computer. However, it was not the job of my dreams. It wore me down. And it was only with the support and persuasion of my husband that I applied for a job with several school districts. I was very surprised by the immediate response. My studies from Poland were recognized here and I received a teacher's license with teaching privileges from kindergarten to 12th grade. After passing the relevant exam, I also obtained a license to teach bilingual children. However, I felt like there was something still missing. I was longing for my homeland (I grew up in a patriotic family, my father was a Home Army soldier, a political prisoner, my grandfather was sentenced to death under Stalin), I missed the beautiful Kraków, where I was born, raised, educated and worked as a guide (the Polish Tourist and Sightseeing Society badge is here with me), and all this longing had to find an outlet somewhere.

And it has. First, by raising my children in love for their homeland, and especially for Kraków, its history, art and mystery. Our daughters not only learned all the legends of Kraków and its surroundings, but also, during their frequent vacations in Poland, all the places worth visiting. Mom the guide did not let go! Many times they had the opportunity to participate in various festivals, concerts or celebrations such as the [Jewish Culture Festival](#) in Kazimierz, Wianki, Kraków Days, [Great Dragon Parade](#), [Street Theater Festival](#) and many others. Of course, we have the Kraków folk costume at home as well. It is our precious family heirloom, especially since it was sewn and embroidered by my late mother. I can safely say that I have passed on to them the love of my Kraków, and I am very proud of that too.

But even that was not enough. I always wanted my students, as well as my colleagues, to know how beautiful Poland is, how beautiful Kraków is, which few know. Poland is often associated by Americans with Polish pierogi and sausage. Some are familiar with names such as John Paul II, Lech Wałęsa and Robert Lewandowski. And yet we have such a rich heritage, history, culture and art. It's become my mission to promote Polish culture at my school. That's when I came up with the idea of running clubs and activities for children. I started with the Multicultural Club. I taught my students about different cultures of the world. That's when I was able to express my love of Kraków, the Wawel Dragon, Kraków flower market and its unique [obwarzanki](#). I searched further and the result of this search became the Indoor and Outdoor Games Club. This club is immensely popular. With heartfelt regret I have to reject many applicants, because there are only 20 places, and 90 applications! I teach in this club the games and activities that I grew up with. We play Chinese jump rope, hopscotch, bottle cap racing, coin football, scatter jacks and a host of others. New this year was the Polish Club, which I ran with my Mexican-born colleague Maria Meza, and which Lexi Wherle, a student with Polish roots, co-ran with us. Of course, the club was open to all students regardless of their national origin (it is interesting to note that only two students in the club were Polish, the other children came from different countries of the world). The Polish Club was a great success. Children joined all meetings with incredible enthusiasm. This time, in addition to hopscotch, Chinese jump rope and bottle cap racing, there was the hacky sack (footbag). I crocheted balls filled with beans and we bravely



practiced a variety of kicks. Students also got to enjoy Polish folk costumes, Toruń gingerbread, Łowicz cutouts, our historical monuments and beautiful landscapes.

Making pierogi, which we stuffed with marshmallows, turned out to be a big hit. However, the Wawel Dragon beat all other attractions. We ended this year's Polish Club with a dragon parade, held in front of the entire school. The parade was combined with a slide show about the Wawel Dragon and the annual dragon parade in Kraków. Each club participant created their own dragon. The students really put a lot of work into it and, as they themselves said, "each dragon was made with love and imagination." It was a wonderful experience to watch children of different nationalities proudly march with their dragons between rows of hundreds of their classmates. After the show, there crowds of students eager to attend the next Polish Club session. Everyone was in awe. And I feel that I brought a piece of my Kraków, my history and my culture to Schaumburg. And of this I am immensely proud.

The response from parents whose children joined the club was also great. This is one of the emails I received: "I just wanted to let you know that your Polish Club had a huge impact on my daughter. She's never enjoyed a club so much before. The Polish Club was by far the best idea ever. Thank you so much for your hard work and the hacky sacks. The hacky sacks are a big hit with my kids. You did a great job putting those together. We played hacky sack all night last night. I hope the Polish club will come back. It was very heartwarming to see Brinley so excited to learn about her heritage."

Where do you get your ideas from?

MK: Ideas? First of all, from my love and longing for Kraków. From my yearly trips to Poland. And, of course, from my childhood. It was colorful, full of books and sightseeing trips. [Kraków festivals](#), holidays, church fairs, theaters, museums, [Wawel Castle](#), the district of [Kazimierz](#) - all this shaped me and my passions. It may sound corny, but I learnt my love for the country and Kraków at my childhood home. Despite the tough and grim times, my parents tried to make our world more colorful. My childhood memories are of my performances wearing a Kraków costume, peacock feathers in a flower pot, making a dragon out of papier-mâché, trips to the Wawel Castle, [Kościuszko Mound](#), [Skałka monastery](#), Emmaus fair, cruises on the Vistula, [Wianki festival](#), the magic of [Veit Stoss's altar](#), [Lajkonik Parade](#), annual exhibitions of [Kraków nativity scenes](#), fabulous Kraków florists, an enchanted horse-drawn carriage, [St. Mary's bugle call](#) and, of course, feeding the pigeons in the Market Square. While it's hard to list all the highlights and memories here, it did result in me reaching the finals in the Kraków secondary school history competition (I'm a graduate of the [Secondary School No. 6](#)), then a Polish Tourist and Sightseeing Society guide's license for Kraków and the surrounding area, and finally a university major.

How do you most like to spend your free time?

MK: Time is the most valuable commodity, but I always try to find it for my family, as well as for my interests and passions. I read, I travel, I ski, I run a bit, I am active in a charity group that raises funds for medical treatment for sick children in Poland, and I try a bit of arts and crafts. My other passion has become the Cricut Maker cutting machine, which I also use to create



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various games and decorations for my clubs.

And finally, a question about your future plans; is there room in your schedule to make a trip to Kraków?

MK: There is and always will be room in my schedule for a trip to Kraków. In Kraków I recharge my batteries for the next year, soak up the unique atmosphere of the city, look for new ideas, inspiration and stock up on books. I also have big plans for the next session of the Polish Club next year. This time it will be much longer, as we have many projects to complete, including a Kraków knowledge competition. Since the club is so successful, we can't let that go to waste.

It would be a pleasure if we could meet during your next visit to Kraków. We would like to offer a prize for the competition, with complements from Mayor of Kraków Jacek Majchrowski.

Thanking you for your time, we wish you that your enthusiasm, we wish that your enthusiasm, which you share with your students by preserving and promoting Polish culture and traditions in America, lasts as long as possible. See you soon in Kraków!

MK: Thank you very much. I'm sure I'll never run out of enthusiasm, because me and my love for Kraków is a love that lasts forever.