

# \*The Skye Is the Limit

by Janet Sandford

If you've ever thought about upping sticks and living abroad but don't know what to expect, English Matters interview, with Polish expat, Magda Healey will put you in the picture. She's been there, done that and got the T-shirt, so read on and find out if it's for you.

## What is your background?

I grew up and lived, until my late twenties in the Tri-City conurbation of Gdańsk, Sopot and Gdynia. I have a psychology degree but worked for many years in market and opinion research. I also do a bit of freelance translation and interpreting.

## When did you leave Poland and Why?

I left Poland in the late 1990s, for love. I met a British guy and we went to the UK as he couldn't stay in Poland. It was possibly the hardest decision I have ever made in my life, as I had never had a desire to emigrate. I had a decent career and social life; all those things that make one connected to a place and there I was, leaving it all for the unknown. We had no money, no jobs arranged, no place to live; and as this was before Poland joined the EU, the practicalities were also more complex then. At the

same time, I'd always wanted to travel and had a latent wanderlust, so I think that was part of it, to get me out of my comfort zone.

## What were your first experiences of the UK?

My very first experiences in the UK go back to the early 1990s when I took a year's sabbatical from the uni and spent time living in London, working in menial jobs. I left a year later with less money than I'd taken, at a time when some Poles had saved enough to buy a flat back in Poland but I gained what felt like the experience of several years and my English improved massively.

I joined up with my partner again a few years later with the idea of settling and eventually acquired the right to work legally; it took a lot of on-spec applications to get a professional job. I worked for a market research agency in the North West of England for

a while and then took a different role for a multinational in London for a couple of years.

## What difficulties did you experience?

The hardest thing was the need to start again close to the bottom of the pile and be the person to whom boring tasks are delegated rather than the one that delegates them.

The differences between the UK and Poland are not great with both countries being in the European sphere, however the notable lack of the stifling influence of reli-

1 to up sticks | *pot.* przenieść się, przeprowadzić się

expat = expatriate | osoba mieszkająca na obczyźnie

to put sb in the picture | *pot.* poinformować kogoś o czymś; wprowadzić kogoś w temat

1 until | aż do

conurbation | zespół miejski, konurbacja

degree | stopień naukowy

research | badania

desire | chęć, pragnienie

decent | przyzwoity

the unknown | nieznanne

to join sth | wstąpić do czegoś

practicalities | strona praktyczna

2 latent | ukryty, utajony

wanderlust | zamiłowanie do podróży

sabbatical | urlop naukowy

uni = university | uniwersytet

menial | niewdzięczny, podrzędny

to gain sth | zyskiwać coś, zdobywać coś

several | kilka

to join up with sb | spotkać się z kimś, przyłączyć się do kogoś

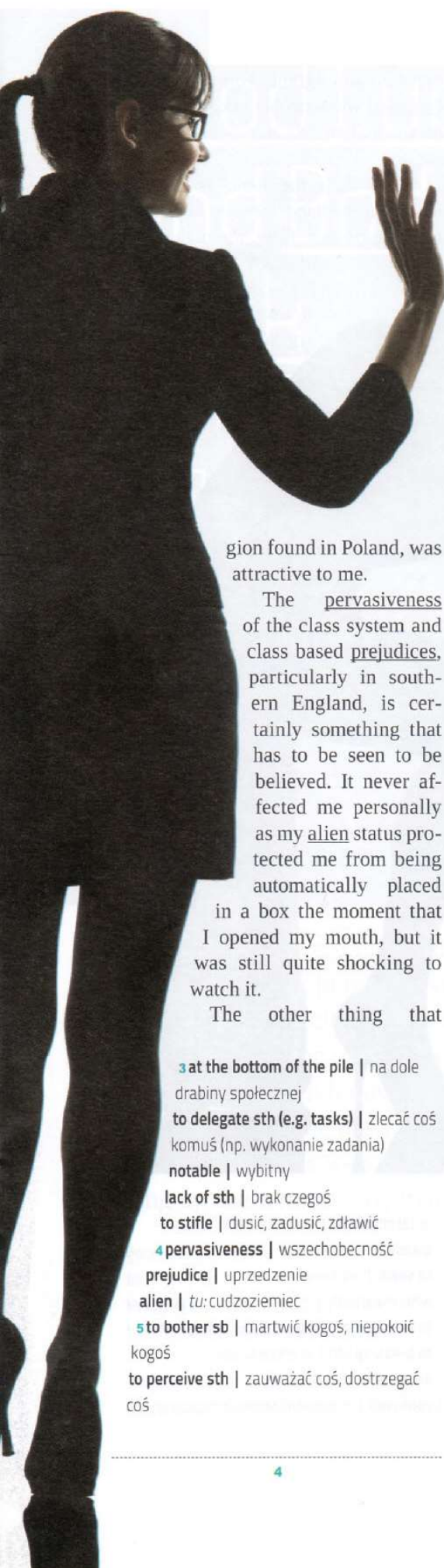
eventually | w końcu, ostatecznie

to acquire sth | zdobywać coś, uzyskać coś

on-spec | *pot.* w ciemno







gion found in Poland, was attractive to me.

The pervasiveness of the class system and class based prejudices, particularly in southern England, is certainly something that has to be seen to be believed. It never affected me personally as my alien status protected me from being automatically placed in a box the moment that I opened my mouth, but it was still quite shocking to watch it.

The other thing that

perhaps has always bothered me is what I perceive as an almost pathological avoidance of disagreement and any controversial or remotely intellectual subjects.

### What did you gain from the experience?

I think immersing yourself in another culture is always advantageous because it makes you question the assumptions of your own social conditioning. It broadens your repertoire and increases freedom. On a practical level, I developed near-native proficiency in English, which opened up a whole world of communication with billions of people around the world.

### Why and when did you move to Scotland?

From the initial move to England in the late 1990s, we went back and forth between Poland and the UK a couple of times, but mostly lived in various places in Great Britain. We moved to Scotland seven years ago when I was eight months' pregnant with my second child, mostly for family reasons.

We lived in the countryside near Perth for four years then were lucky enough to be able to go travelling for two years before eventually deciding to settle where we are now.

### Tell us about where you live and your current lifestyle

We live in a small village on the mainland on the north-west coast of Scotland, close to Kintail, Lochalsh

and the Isle of Skye. We are a few minutes' drive from the Isle of Skye Bridge. It's a sparsely populated area and fairly remote, but also quite touristy in season. The nearest shopping centre and cinema are two hours' drive away in Inverness. Skye is a staggeringly beautiful place, possibly the most stunning that I have ever been to, and certainly top of all the places I have lived in. This somewhat makes up for the bleak winters, the lack of 'civilisation' and the midges. Actually, I am not entirely sure about the midges.

We are currently renovating the old, stone house we bought, while trying to deal with the day-to-day family stuff and attempting to earn some money to cover daily expenses. I do a bit of freelance writing on the web as well as occasional pieces of translation work, although that isn't that easy to get remotely.

### Why have you chosen a lifestyle that is not 'normal'?

I am not quite sure if there was ever a conscious decision to lead a non-mainstream lifestyle but to some extent, I chose it because I could. I have some regrets about the less tangible aspects, particularly in the academic sense, but I am not interested in collecting material tokens of status and achievement, so as long as we can survive in circumstances approaching semi-comfort, that's all I care about. I might regret it if I were to find myself in desperate

3 at the bottom of the pile | na dole drabiny społecznej

to delegate sth (e.g. tasks) | zlecać coś komuś (np. wykonanie zadania)

notable | wybitny

lack of sth | brak czegoś

to stifle | dusić, zadusić, zdławić

4 pervasiveness | wszechobecność

prejudice | uprzedzenie

alien | tu: cudzoziemiec

5 to bother sb | martwić kogoś, niepokoić kogoś

to perceive sth | zauważać coś, dostrzegać coś

remotely | tu: choć trochę; w najmniejszym stopniu

to immerse oneself in sth | pograżać się w czymś

advantageous | korzystny

assumption | założenie, hipoteza, przypuszczenie

to broaden sth | poszerzać coś

back and forth | tam i z powrotem

pregnant | w ciąży

to settle | osiedlić się

6 sparsely populated | słabo zaludniony, wyludniony

fairly | dość, dosyć

staggeringly | zdumiewająco

stunning | olśniewający

to make up for sth | zrekompensować coś

bleak | ponury, smętny, przygnębiający

midge | muszka

to attempt to do sth | próbować coś zrobić

to earn | zarabiać (pieniądze)

expense | wydatek

to some extent | do pewnego stopnia

tangible | namacalny, konkretny, materialny

token | symbol, dowód

circumstance | okoliczność, fakt

to approach sth | zbliżać się do czegoś



poverty and decrepitude in old age, but I am not worrying too much about it just now.

**Do you feel integrated into the local community?**

We have only been here for about a year at so it's too soon to say. We were certainly made to feel welcome by more established people here, particularly other 'incomers' that have been in the area for longer who also lead slightly non-mainstream lifestyles. Having children at local schools always opens up links, and due to the area being remote there is a lot of community activity which you get involved in by default.

**Do you ever get homesick?**

I don't get homesick because my home is here, although I used to feel homesick for many years. Having two definitely British children changed my feelings and made a deeper link to the place. Overall, I have gone more and more native with the passing years.

**Can you tell us something about your travels?**

I have been to the majority of countries in Europe, however the 'Big One' was definitely the over-six-month trip to Canada, Australia and New Zealand that we took in 2010. We used a hospitality exchange network called Couch-Surfing to save money and enhance the cultural experience and it worked out amazingly. For example, in three months in Canada, we spent just one week in hotels or hostels! It was the people that we stayed with that made the whole experience so special. They not only let us use their spare rooms and took us places, shared local knowledge and points of interest, but told their

stories and opened their lives to us.

**Do you think you will stay in Scotland?**

I can't see myself going back to Poland any time soon. The children are going through the UK education system and we will most likely stay here, for that is their major tether, in terms of the language and familiarity. Later on, maybe we will. In a way, once you start being more of a transient person, moving doesn't seem such a big deal. Where to? No idea, yet.

**Would you recommend other people to follow in your footsteps?**

I would wholeheartedly recommend travelling extensively and long term if you can manage it practically and financially. There are many cheap(ish) ways of doing it and anything you lose by breaking up a career progression, you gain in experience; and travelling with children is much easier than you might think. However, at some point, you need to claim a place as a longer-term home and stop thinking of home as being elsewhere. Then, as you change from

expat to immigrant, you start to get confused when people ask, 'How often do you go home?' ■

*\*'The sky's the limit' is a popular idiom meaning there is no limit to what is possible. Here, the author substitutes 'sky' with 'Skye' to refer to the area in which Magda Healey lives – such word play is typical of headlines in British journalism.*



- 1 **decrepitude** | zniechęcenie  
**to open up sth** | otwierać coś  
**due to sth** | z powodu czegoś  
**to get involved in sth** | angażować się w coś  
**by default** | z powodu braku innych kandydatów  
**to get homesick** | tęsknić za domem

- overall** | w sumie, ogólnie  
**majority** | większość  
**to enhance sth** | zwiększyć coś, spolegować na czymś  
**to work out** | powieść się, udać się  
**hostel** | schronisko  
**spare room** | wolny pokój  
2 **tether** | łańcuch, uwięź, pęto

- in terms of sth** | pod względem czegoś  
**transient** | przejezdny  
**to seem** | wydawać się  
**wholeheartedly** | gorąco, całym sercem  
**to manage sth** | dawać sobie radę z czymś  
**to break up sth** | przerywać coś  
**elsewhere** | gdzie indziej  
3 **confused** | zdezorientowany, zmieszany