

## Frank Guzzardo- Polish American

My name is Frank Guzzardo and I was born in Ruda Slaska, Poland. My father is Italian American and my mother is Polish (now Polish American). My parents met in Poland and after my father finished medical school, together with my older sister and our parents we emigrated to the United States and lived in Queens, New York. I remember this was a very difficult time for my mother as she did not speak English at the time and had difficulty making friends. My sister and I learned how to speak English quickly and we helped my mother with everyday chores. After a couple of years we moved to Florida where I began kindergarten. Florida was great; always sunny and the beach was always near. When we were teenagers the beach was my favorite place to “hangout”.

I remember that it was sometimes difficult not being a “real” American. I was always worried when my mom had to come to school for a conference or event because my fellow classmates would make fun of the fact that my mom didn’t speak English well. Most people I knew didn’t know where Poland was and Polish stereotypes were used all the time- i.e. dumb, lazy, etc. My friends were reluctant to come over for dinner because our food was strange to them. I also remember how I had to explain to my friends that they had to take their shoes off when they came over (Americans don’t always take their shoes off in their homes).

I always gravitated towards other immigrants because I felt we understood each other better. Even though I had difficulties growing up because I was an immigrant it wasn’t as difficult for me as it was for my friends who were from other countries and were of different races. My friend Julio Hernandez was from the Dominican Republic and my other good friend, Jerry Pierre Gillis was from Haiti. I realized that their families were treated worse than my family was by society. I was sensitive to racism early because I noticed that different immigrants were hard on other immigrants and were always looking for people who were “worse” off than they were, I guess to feel better about themselves. I had it easier because I was white.

I didn’t know many Polish people in Florida as it’s not as popular with Polish immigrants as Chicago, Illinois. We did go to Poland often to visit my mother’s large family. My mother would take loans out to make sure that my sister and I could go to Poland almost every summer. This was very important to my mother; she wanted us to keep in touch with our Polish roots. This is most likely why I speak Polish today and feel comfortable here. I know Polish Americans who haven’t been back to Poland in 30 years. I’m sure this had a lot to do with me coming back here as an adult to live and work. I currently live in Krakow, spend time with family and friends and visit my mother and father once a year for Christmas. My mother also comes for her vacation here in the summer and we all go to Zawoja.