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**THIS IS THE MONTEREY PENINSULA**



PERSONA



Marta



# Breaking out of Tradition

by Monica Guzman / photo by Bill Janes

In today's society, physical activities such as running are encouraged to promote good health. For Marta Karpziel, who grew up in a strong Catholic-influenced town in Poland, this was not the case. Karpziel had to hide her hobby, as time devoted to personal enjoyment was looked down upon. According to Karpziel everyone was either at work, school or church. Even with such structure, Marta has fond memories playing with her younger sister and two brothers.



For much of her youth, Poland was still a Communist country, which added other restrictions. Coupons were used to purchase basic necessities including clothes and often stores would run out of supplies. Because of this Karpziel remembers there were only black shoes available for her first communion and she had her mother adjust the skirt on her dress to cover her feet. Since candy was rare, during one year Karpziel saved to buy her family a Snickers bar for Christmas. Karpziel's eyes watered as she described carefully cutting the Snickers bar into six even pieces and neatly arranging them on a dish for her and her family who were all sitting on a bench. "Everyone enjoyed it because it was such a luxury," Karpziel says.

Transportation was limited to buses and walking, so Karpziel began running to get to places quickly. When it turned into a hobby, her mother feared their neighbors would think badly of her, and asked Karpziel to run after dark. Karpziel understood her mother's concern and agreed. On many of her runs Karpziel was attacked by wandering dogs and one incident still remains prominently in her memories. Karpziel decided to run the night before her friend's 18th birthday party. On her run two dogs chased her and bit her leg, causing her to fall in a rocky area. She was left very injured and showed up to the party in bandages. "I did not have many pictures growing up and it was sad because everyone was taking pictures that day and I couldn't because I looked like a mummy," she admits.

The village was too traditional for Karpziel and she knew a college education would be her only ticket out. She explains that women had to know how to milk a cow, kill a chicken, pluck it to stuff pillows, and turn the carcass into chicken soup in order to make a proper wife. Karpziel used to say she would never marry if that's what she had to do.

Karpziel worked to support herself through her studies. She attended a university 14 hours away by train on weekends to have the weekdays available for work. Later, Karpziel used her school breaks to work as an au pair in Italy and the United States where she saved enough money not only for herself but for her siblings to pursue higher educations as well. The United States left Karpziel amazed at how much freedom people had. "No one was discriminated for running," she says while laughing.