

## A VISIT TO CZECHOSLOVAKIA

(Some scanning errors uncorrected)

September 14th, 1978 BRATISLAVA

smerzlina - ice-cream  
C'est a slavakatu? - where?  
cesta - way  
podniknustveta - journey, trip

September 15<sup>th</sup>, 1978 BRATISLAVA – BRNO 12:15 p.m

Finally navigated out of Bratislava and three bookstores, one ice cream store, and heading toward Pezinok, Malacky, and Brno.

Bratislava was alive with many people; but dingy with buildings, clothes, all colours grey, dull greens, yellows, and frequent red signs with white letters snapping from buildings, signs, shop windows; also the common 'handshake' in red with a rainbow of pale pinks and blues shafting out from the hands.

- beginning autumn colours in the lower Tatra hills
- hotels: Zlaty Kriz (reasonable) 26 rooms, some with bath
  - Slavia Hotel Restaurant: Gottwaldova 4
  - Moravian cooking, good choice of drinks
  - Fodor's

September 16th, 1978

BRNO-TREBIC

"Ten miles (15km) due south of Trebic is Jaromerice nad lokytnou, where there is a really magnificent Baroque chateau built between 1684 and 175&"

-Fodor's

Awoke from disquieting dreams, roused self. We all dressed, Jim in his denim suit, Marilla in Khaki outfit and Cordelia in her usual beloved blue long dress with white flowers, blue ribbon, beige tights, and shiny black shoes. Breakfast in the Metropole was eggs and ham, a Viennese coffee, (41 coffee with milk), and the usual "continental\* rolls with butter and jam. When we prepared to leave the hotel, we were told 'gently' that our passports had been picked up by the police, that this was "normale" and they would be returned to us within "eine stunde", one hour. They were returned three hours later. During the wait I wanted to remain at the hotel and write postcards. Jim wanted me to accompany him, caring for Cordelia, to Cedok so that he could research **Bohusice** mentioned by Sister Simeon in her letter to us. At Cedok he departed with some woman - without letting us know - to some other nearby office, so that when looking up and not seeing him, I assumed he had looked about and not seen us and returned to the hotel. After straightening this all out, we met at the hotel, where our passports had in fact been returned, and we were off to the Cathedral, the Cabbage Market, a lunch at a cafe near the market where I sketched two faces and we ate delicious Moravian food; one special meat with sauce, white sauce, and Jim had dumplings.

(continued)

People everywhere seem very contained, not extroverted or overtly interested, though it is obvious they are extremely curious about us. Usually not until we leave a restaurant, for instance, are there smiles and farewells. Cordelia often grins at folks initiating contact between us and other couples and those with children, especially warming them to us and her. Generally, however, there is a strong social reserve and sombreness in the people we see and are in any brief contact with, understandable from the recent history.

**September 16th, 1978**                      Brno, Trebic

Eclipse of the Moon, about 8:00 P.M.

From the Cathedral whilst driving from the city, we were stopped near the Spielberg Castle by a police car; we never discovered the reason for the stop. Our passports were inspected and returned to us and we went on up into the castle. Autumn, even a chilly wind, hustled us along through the dungeons and toward the most provocative and sobering collection of Beartfields graphics, photographs, actually prescient visuals of what was to come through the Nazi regime and Hitler's craze.

Then, nourished with some apples and chocolate on our return to our neat red rented Renault, we drove from Brno with Cordelia finally falling asleep in the back seat. We took photographs along the road of the lovely landscape from Brno en route to Rosice. We drove through country reminiscent of "the best of the East coast" said Jim - lovely with pine trees tall and strong against the white autumnal sky. Jim wondered at how much of this landscape his Grandfather had absorbed in his lifestyle and preferences; perhaps from his own father, since Jim's Grandfather was only two years old when they left for North America.

We arrived in Trebic at 4:30 p.m. and Cordelia immediately awoke. The hotel mentioned in Fodor's in the old square was filled and they recommended the Alpha to us. After settling in some, we went out to have some dinner, finally locating a new place where we ate again delicious Moravian food, (about \$5.00 for all of us) with dessert and coffee with milk (kava mi mleko}»

Coming out of the restaurant, walking toward the car, we smelled the coal burning from all the chimneys, and could see the smoke in the atmosphere — strong enough to burn our eyes; then suddenly we noticed the strange state of the moon. . . eclipsing and could see the light shafting off the light side of the eclipse.

Back in our hotel room, we watched a color cartoon KRONEC? and some serial; finally a warm 'badas' for Cordelia and beloved doll, and the chance to record some of the day, which I've missed having the chance to do.

Sunday, September 17th, 1978

## JAROMERICE

We awoke, bathed, had confused breakfast (in terms of communicating that we wanted eggs without onions for Cordelia) and drove to Jaromerice and right to the church where, wonderfully, a mass was just beginning. The Mass was in Czech and closer to a real Mass than anything either Jim or I have experienced in ten years. The church was not full; my first visual along with the rich gilded baroque ornamentation was of the colourful wool scarves on all the very old women, who represented about a third of the congregation. The younger folk were bare headed.

As the organ and voices of the people surged around us, we were both, and Jim particularly, most profoundly moved with chills, a sense of awe and sentiment for the occasion and its great beauty. I have never seen Jim more deeply moved by anything before.

From Sister Simeon's description of the "parish church" in which great grandparents, grandfather and children were baptized and the grandparents married, we were not prepared for the incredible richness, color, decor (paintings and sculpture) of the architecture or the interior.

Outside and below the church were large lovely, beautifully maintained gardens.

(Note: Between Trebic and Jaromerice we saw the first crucifix by the roadside and took a photograph of it.)

While Cordelia and I walked slowly toward the square outside the church to have Smrzlina Jim located the Padre and had a conversation about his relatives in 'slow' German.

The church Mass was the beginning in a series of incredible events. In the ice-cream store, while Jim was asking directions to Ohrozenice and Bohusice, a man (no doubt akin to Sherlock Holmes) offered to lead us - on his motor scooter, and donned in hat, raincoat, and conspicuous nose - on an adventure to discover what Sister Simeon referred to in her letter as "the missing link"!

He led us to Ohrozenice where we conversed with some local folk in an attempt to find someone who remembered Jacob Method Pivonka. He then led us to Bohusice, where we found the Dvorak family who welcomed us into their home, gave us beer and homemade bread with jam (not bread...those special KOLACHE!) and coffee, as we tried with diagrams and hand language and drawings to communicate with them in a combination of German, the Czech-English dictionary and wild gesticulations.

JAROMERICE  
(continued)

Stepanka sent her young daughter and boyfriend off to get an 'interpreter'. They returned without success; somehow off went Stepanka in some car and we wandered about with Franto, her husband, until her return with two couples, one of whom spoke some English and German. The husband of the second woman (who was the sister of the first), spoke some Italian.

Soon we were with the Dvorak family en masse, with the two couples and finally Stepanka's sister and husband all conversing in everything possible attempting to discover their links with one another and our link with them, piecing the puzzle of the family history together.

Stepanka and the children fixed food and shared their Sunday dinner with us, after which Franta, their young son brought out his accordion, Jim got my guitar, and frivolity and song singing ensued with great fun and frolic. Cordelia played with the dog, an amorous old thing, and the grey kitten, wandering about the flowers in the courtyard and scooting the chickens about. We all sang, "You are my Sunshine", "Working on the Railroad", "Swanee River", "Chevaliers de la Table Ronde" and Franto's very favorite "Caissons Go Rolling Along" ... it was wonderful.

We were invited to spend the night with \_\_\_\_\_ at a nearby Seminary type building which they oversee. The entire family walked us to the car amidst the flashing of Franto's camera and many "Ahoys", and we drove off following \_\_\_\_\_ to the converted monastery.

After putting Cordelia to bed, we all stayed up late figuring more and more about the family...they all shared a wonderful interest and curiosity about it all. The photographs were brought out and stories shared, (legends?), the most horrible of which recounted the tragic death of Antonia's husband, father of 5 children (the sixth yet unborn) (elsewhere reported as 7) when he jumped from a hayloft in an attempt to playfully beat his wife down (she was descending by ladder) to be speared by a rake handle (or hayfork). One of the six children was the mother of the two sisters, and, as a young woman, was reportedly unsuccessfully wooed by a Pivonka who returned from America to find himself a Czech wife. The mother of the wooed said "No". We later discovered - at the 1981 Pivonka family reunion - that this history is well known by Pivonka's in the U.S., as well.

Awoke to a sunshiny crisp day, washed hair, dressed and joined the families for a most delicious breakfast. The sister came in with information from the church which was that great grandfather was born (Jacob Method Pivonka) in the house which he lived in, in Orazhenice.

Monday, September 18th, 1978

JAROMERICE - TELC

We ate sausage, cheese, homemade jam (strawberry from the garden strawberries). Cordelia was in 7th heaven playing with a doll and stroller in and out of the lovely flowers all around the house, flowers on the steps and in window boxes everywhere.

They taught me a Czech children's song on the upstairs piano and I scribbled down some notes and the English translation so not to forget it.

With bags of sweet pears from the tree outside, kolaches with sweet plum jam, we were royally hugged and waved off on our way to TELC.

TELC

. . . back roads from Moravske-Budovice to Telc (many photographs). There a delicious lunch, shopping, bought books, children's books, cat stickers, and a wonderful yellow book back-pack for Cordelia (all the children had them on their backs to and from school); we walked along the square sides window gating, rose sniffing, wandering. Then to Kutna Hora (big fight with Jim re directions) where we stayed overnight, eating in a restaurant in the hotel - frequented by many officers; we wondered if there is a nearby academy).

Pivo and C and I fell into bed exhausted. Jim pattered about washing clothes, walking around the empty square - by 8:30 p.m. everyone is inside... a self-imposed curfew?

The following day, after breakfast, we left to drive to the Gothic Kutna Hora St. Barbara...lovely flying buttresses (photos); met some other Czech American family returning for the second time and we all wandered through the awesome cathedral's gifts of art, time, and wealth.

September 19th, 20th, 1978

PRAHA

From Kutna Hora, we drove to Praha, having called Marie Grof to expect us that evening-late afternoon. We didn't actually find our map until finding Marie's apartment. Once there we showered her with gifts from her son, Stan, and Mary Garrigues. She offered us a marvelous lunch of soup, cold ham, cheese, salad, and for Jim who still had some appetite, a mushroom omelette, tea, coffee, and astounding homemade desserts. We were attracted to her immediately, all of us, and accepted her invitation to share her small homey apartment one night only, tomorrow, if, we told her, she agrees to let us take her with us to the Laterna Magica and dinner, perhaps earlier to the castle.

## PRAGUE (continued)

We called from her apartment to arrange the hotel, the Paris (300 a night with breakfast) where we shall have a bath and extra small bed made up for Cordelia. Jim and I are both feeling now most intensively the pressure of time and the need to assimilate the awesome discoveries of this journey.

Jim went off on his own in the evening through the cold rain to find Nadja's father; Nadja and Tom Seelich are in Vienna; had we known, we might have had some visit with them during our brief stay over there.

While Jim had time on his own, Cordelia and I had a sweet memorable time together, having dinner, just the two of us in the blue and white dining room of the hotel. She was so delightful to be with, telling me a story about finding a small white box with wings inside folded up; colourful and very large with flowers bought for me, and the box; and describing the outfit she had on in the story from shiny shoes to pink lace panties.

The waiter offered to walk me across the Charles Bridge after Cordelia went to sleep; he spoke very little English, we spoke of music, what is popular here in Praha, what sorts he knows and enjoys; sweet looking chap. I was complimented but declined the invitation of course.

Tomorrow we'll go to the Jewish area of town, try to purchase some gifts, garnets, crystal and perhaps scarves, lovely colours and good wool.

The Jewish Cemetery was certainly for me a profound and powerful experience; perhaps in a way this intensive, all too brief moment in Praha was the most moving and sobering of all our journey. I felt deeply a desire to return, and to remain here for much longer than several days, to learn the language, unfold the art and film and intense expressions of life and thought and soul that undoubtedly continue underground these days. Praha is still a vital, if depressed, important center; a sombre center where genuine reading between the lines is a necessity, where being alive is not taken for granted, where trust is earned and extended with great caution, and where the way one thinks must be often separated from the way one may act, may live.

(Marilla Waesche Pivonka, September 20, 1978)