

--- Policka Press ---

Information and thoughts from the Czech Republic

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Greetings from Policka! A lot has happened since our last newsletter: we are into our third week of classes, we have moved into our apartment, and we have already had our first visitor, our friend Dave from Waynesburg University who is studying a semester at Oxford. We

have been working hard not only on our classes, but on trying to build relationships with people in the community, which we feel is just as important, if not more so.

This month we have a lot of things planned within the church: a game night for the kids, an adult movie night featuring *This is England*, a sleepover for the youth group, a talk show with the band, and a Halloween party.

Classes

Our first two week of classes have ended and now Jamie and I are in the midst of preparations for week three. It is challenging thinking of fresh ideas and innovative ways to teach English when this program has been developing for two years: we never know what the students have done and what they do not like. Kati left us with a good foundation, which often serves as a double-edged sword: her class activities were so diverse that we often feel that many times our ideas are not exciting or new. Jan tells us to plan “our way” and to not get caught up with what has already been done, and in that vein, we will add fresh perspectives to all of our lessons.

In my adult and high school conversation classes, we focused on introductions. I had each student interview and introduce the person to the left of them. I thought that this was a great way to get all the students speaking, hoping that the activity would create a sense of camaraderie in a group where there is a wide array of proficiency and personality types. I assigned the classes homework, which was to write sentences using the new vocabulary words that I introduced at the

beginning of class. It was a change for the adult students who have had Kati for two years, but I heard all positive feedback.

Being in front of a classroom where the students are 20 years my elder, is quite a daunting task. Consequently, the teenagers are a nice change-of-pace. The high school students are a fun group and I am most comfortable teaching them.

The University preparations class is the most popular for the students and it is the one class where I can challenge them to think critically. Normally, when teaching English as a second language, it is difficult to incorporate meaningful topical conversation, as students are shy to give their honest opinions in a foreign language, because of the fear of sounding “stupid.” Yet, many of these students have a high-level of proficiency in speaking English. I want to use this fact to create some discussion and mix in some ‘controversial’ material, which excites me greatly!

Business English went very well, even though I had only half as many students as I expected. The adults that are in this class are eager to improve their resume for upward mobility, so I find this class to be rewarding in that I can help the students better themselves in their job and with their own self-confidence. I explained to them my expectations for the class and that I am not going to teach them on economics, finances and business ethics, as I am only 23 years old! They seemed happy with that.

Two weeks out of each month will find me teaching a special lesson to a group of local business men and women from the Medesa Company: a local company run by a man named Otakar Kleparnik. Otakar asked if I would be able to give English lessons for his colleagues at Medesa; however, Jan and I were firm that we wanted the classes to take place in the church. Otakar was happy to oblige and has agreed to meet us at the church on Friday mornings. This is a small victory for us, as it provides an avenue for Jan to introduce himself and form a relationship with the business. Plus, it doesn’t hurt that many of the people coming with the Medesa group rarely step into a church building, yet, now, they will be doing

just that two times a month!

Jamie continues to amaze me with her creativity. She has had a rough time communicating with the younger students, because they don't understand much English and our Czech is still basic, so it leads to some frustration. However, she has managed to organize the kids for games and for crafts, which are now beginning to fill up the walls of the youth- group room. I often here loud crashes and lots of laughing cascading down from upstairs, which means that the children are being engaged and having a good time.

Jamie has students as young as four and as old as 16. It is a very wide range of ages, but she is doing an excellent job adjusting the lessons for each specific age group: for the first week, the youngest students learned about colors and repeated the words; the elementary-aged kids introduced themselves through an interactive game of musical chairs and the middle school students made collages out of magazine pictures and introduced themselves through their art. Jamie's ideas are always so inventive!

Her art class is going strong, even if there are only four students. Their first project is weaving; the students weave their yarn through a cardboard loom. It will take some time, but the kids are doing a wonderful job mixing colors.

Aside from the classes , we also have many activities going on around the church; here are just a few that are coming up: Pokec with Cerne Ovce, game night, an adult movie night and a Halloween party.

As you can see, Jamie and I are busy planning. We are excited that the ministry is picking up right where it left off, and we thank you for prayer and support.

Culture

I was looking through the archives of Kati's newsletters and I came across the second one she ever wrote. It was dated October of 2006, and in the issue, Kati made an observation about Czech culture that has proven to be nothing but truth. She wrote, "that Czechs do not follow rules."

Americans traditionally follow the stipulations that are given them. Even though we pride ourselves on being the first nation to revolt against the world order of Imperialism when we toppled the British control of the Colonies, I am finding that we are not a rebel-rousing kind. I think that it has something to do with the stability of our Constitution and our Republican form of Government. We are ingrained with the hope that in the end, our Government will do what is best for the people.

However, Czechs do not have this luxury. As I wrote in the previous newsletter and on the blog, the Czechs have rarely been able to govern themselves. Usually, there was a more powerful neighbor imposing their form of governance on the Czech people, which has led to a natural aversion to rules, as rules have come to signify outside control, not protection. This thinking flows over into how Czechs do business and how they "respect" rules in their personal lives: pretty much, they ignore them and find a way around the guideline, a "Czech" way.

Jamie and I were very explicit about when our classes started and what one would have to do if they wished to sign up for our program. We made deadlines, we sent out letters, we posted flyers and we published the information on the internet. Consequently, we were mystified as to why Czech people continually called and asked for the information that had been published four times over! They were wondering if we could give private lessons; they wanted to know if they could have a discount; they were sending in applications two weeks past the deadline; they didn't fill out the applications correctly; they complained about the time of classes, even though many didn't give us their schedules, which we asked for; and, most students didn't even know which week the classes started. Needless to say, it was frustrating.

What this tells me, is that culture is not just music, language, food and dress; it is a mindset, a way of thinking and an understanding of societal obligations. For those who do not travel, the only difference in culture they will REALLY experience is the superficial: the cute, the pretty, the strange. Yet, to understand and feel the cultural divide, one has to experience the people where they are themselves, their home.

It is this experience that forces the ideologue into reality and it is this struggle that makes the missionary and pastor, specifically in the Czech Republic, cunning like foxes.

What will it do to Jamie and I? I do not know, but for now, we can only learn more with a little frustration on the side.

Best of Blog

Hedgehogs, Castles and Tla enka (Sept. 28)
We have finished our first week of classes, and all in all Jeremy and I both feel good about them. There are things we will need to work on or change, but for our first week, it went well. I will need to find helpers for a few of my youngest classes, since we had trouble understanding one another. Jeremy seemed pleased with his classes, and I know he is going to make it fun

and challenging for his students!

Anyway, on Thursday we were riding back to our apartment and we saw this little ball moving around in the grass; naturally, we stopped to check it out. Turns out, it was a hedgehog! Who knew that there were hedgehogs in the Czech Republic?! We also never knew that they were nocturnal...and they play dead. No joke, they do! We got super close to it and I took a picture with a flash and it didn't move a muscle until after we got back on our bikes and started to ride away. Good times.



Today (Sunday) we went to Svojanov (village) with Bartošoví, which is a beautiful little place where P emek's dad grew up. The entire day was great; from lunch at their house, which was amazing; to visiting Svojanov, a castle; to having dinner at a little restaurant and meeting a woman who makes lace. Also, we went and saw the Castle of Svojanov, which was fun. It is an old fortress, which is still in good shape; seeing it was built in the 13th century. We took some fun pictures, drank some Kofola (pop) and then walked back to the house.



I think the most challenging thing about our Sunday adventure was eating at the small-mill restaurant and having tla enka, which you can see below. We had our choice of three different foods, something made out of cheese, grilled chicken, and tla enka. I chose the grilled chicken and Jeremy got tla enka, after agreeing with me that we would split our meals. I am not going to lie, when it came out, I almost backed out on sharing my meal! There were two slices of it with onions and bread, and at first sight, there was nothing that makes a foreigner want to eat it, because you can't help but wonder, "what is it?" The first bite was also a little difficult, because the texture is a mixture of hard and squishy, since it is made of pork meat and natural gelatin. The taste however, is not too bad: it tasted like vinegar and onions. We were told later that homemade tla enka is much better, but I think eating it once was enough for the both of us.



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