

--- Policka Press ---

Information and thoughts from the Czech Republic

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Jeremy and I on our trip to Budapest. To see more pictures and to read about our trip and everything happening in Policka, please visit our blog at:
www.czechtheline.blogspot.com

How we got to Policka

Reflecting back on this past year has made me realize that Jamie and I have been involved with this Czech mission for exactly one year. No, we haven't actually been in the country for that long, but it was around New Years of 2008 that we found out that the church chose us to carry on this ministry after Kati Salmons. In that vein, I feel that it is appropriate to retell our story about how we actually arrived here. After all, we are from Pennsylvania, and many of you are from Oklahoma.

The story really starts in the middle of the Allegheny Mountains at a camp called Pine Springs. For three summers, from 2005 until 2007, I worked at the camp as a counselor. It was there, in my first year, that I met Pastor Jan Dus. Jan got to Pennsylvania through the generosity of Pine Spring's former Camp Director, Matt Pallotto. Matt has since left the camp and is now working as a manager for the

Omni William Penn in downtown Pittsburgh, (nice plug, huh?). Matt agreed to help Jan with the expense of traveling, so Jan took up the offer, which is no surprise to any of you; considering, you know how much Jan loves to go on "adventures." I remember meeting him for the first time and thinking that his hair was pretty kickin', but his accent struck me as a little strange. I told him about my love of traveling and that I would be in Europe that winter. Upon hearing this, he handed me his business card and told me to give him a call if I was ever in the Czech Republic. Little did I know that three years later that is exactly what would happen— sort of.

Jamie and I met in college and became really close friends. We ran cross country together, we study together in the library (nerds, I know), we cooked rice together and discussed the problems of Africa, together. To make a long story short, by the time senior year rolled around, one could say we "liked" each other. After some drama, some hurt feelings and a random bout of jealous stemming from a few comments made by me dear friend Kenson, I knew that I needed Jamie in my life; she was perfect. However, there was still one problem.

I remember my whole senior year of college as an application process. Maybe many people have the same experience, but for me, the essays and interviews were not for a University, but for the American Peace Corps. The Peace Corps is an international development group that was founded by J.F.K. It consists, mainly, of idealistic, recent graduates who want to learn a new language, live in a foreign land and change the world— right up my alley. Yet, there was one major negative with the Peace Corps: many served alone. What did this mean for Jamie and me?

seemed as if we had both chosen a future path without the other.

Graduation came and summer hit. Jamie chose to work at Pine Springs, as it afforded her some time to “detox” from the whole college experience. I, on the other hand, was unable to work at the camp, because I was in preparations to leave for Kingston, Jamaica, which is where the Peace Corps was sending me. It wasn’t for sure, but all I had to pass was a health screening, which I would have no problem doing. Consequently, both of us had to make a decision: get serious about “us,” or pursue our new lives separately. This might seem too dramatic, but let me tell you, it really was a lot of pressure for the both of us. I mean, we knew that life after college would require huge decisions, but this seemed too much too early.

Jamie and I agreed that we had to get together to talk, so I decided to head up to Pine Springs in the last week of June. We had a great week together, and yes, Jan was there. He gave a presentation after church about his ministry in the Czech Republic and told us that he needs excited, young Christians who are willing to live and work over seas. Needless to say, Jamie and I felt

that Jan’s offer was a blessing and a break. We both approached Jan and told him that we were interested. His reaction was one of expectation, as he said he knew that we were both heading to the Peace Corps and that he was hoping we could talk.: I guess Greg Davis, the new Camp Director at Pine Springs had mentioned us in conversation before the presentation. So, thank you too, Greg!

Four months later, Jan gave me a phone call while I was at work and told me to send in my application, because the deadline was approaching. I informed him that Jamie and I were getting married in a month, which Jan, contrary to my expectation, was happy about. The Peace Corps had made it clear to Jamie and me that married couples were harder to place and that they were unsure of our decision to get married. We both felt like our time with them was over, so and when Jan called, it was what we were hoping for.

I guess the rest is a little bit of history; we applied, we prayed, we got hired and we left for the Czech Republic on July 17th. We were greeted by a whole bunch of “sooners” and Czechs.

Riding the bus out of Prague and into the countryside, Jamie noticed that some of the trees were different than home. Excitedly, Jamie exclaimed that she would have two years to figure them out. Yep, two years.

That is the abbreviated version!

Christmas

A Czech Christmas is different for many reasons. To begin, they celebrate on Christmas Eve and they open presents after dinner. This was quite hard for Jamie and I to adjust to. At home, Christmas has a certain feel, but it also contains an internal flow. Here, however, the holiday season came on very slowly. I am sure that some of the tardiness had to do with the fact that Czechs aren’t quite as showy in their decorations; the Christmas tree is only decorated the day before Christmas Eve. Consequently, most of the homes around us lacked lights and trees for a majority of December.

The holiday is not gushing with consumerism, like our American version, but is rooted around dinner and family, even though the younger generations are embracing the materialist version of the celebration. Many Czechs are not religious at all, so the religious undertones are often left out, except for one leftover from when the Czech lands were dominated by the Catholic church: Jezisek (baby Jesus).

Jezisek is the traditional “Santa” in the Czech Republic. He originated in the Catholic church to remind all Christians that baby Jesus is the reason for all blessings in life, even the gifts on Christmas Eve. However, Jezisek has turned into a fairy tale. Many Czechs do not take Christianity seriously, because they honestly believe it to be a fairy tale and one who orients one’s life around belief in Jesus has taken it too far. This leads to very interesting social discussions, where most atheistic Czechs are animate about keeping Jezisek in the holiday as they claim it is part of Czech tradition, not Santa. Christians view Santa Clause as a saving grace; they hope that he can take the fairytale talk away from Jesus.

For five months Jamie and I have heard that we must experience a real Czech Christmas dinner. ‘It is so different!’ Everyone would say. So, when Anna Dus invited us to have dinner with them, Jamie and I knew we were in for authenticity.

The meal was kicked off by a warm bowl of fish soup. I must admit, that upon hearing this, I was horrified at the thought of eating creamy, fishy-tasting broth. But, much to my surprise, the soup had a soft taste and was very enjoyable with little bread croutons. Then came the main course: fried carp and potato salad. Now in the United States, we rarely eat carp-type fish, because they are dirty and bottom-feeding, but I can tell you, that Carp meat isn’t bad. Again, it was very light in flavor and the meat was very white and tender. I was surprised. The Potato salad was in “Anna” style, as she added more pickles: Anna really likes sour.

Who Knew!? Potato salad and carp, it was quite a good match. After dinner we all gathered as a family and sang seven hymns around the tree, which was culminated with the opening of gifts. It was a great introduction to the Czech-style Christmas

During the holiday, the church was busy getting into the holiday celebration. It was great to see all the activity: the band played for a service, the choir sang, we had a live nativity scene and the kids put on a play (Jamie and I were trees!).

And, while the Church was active, so were we: lunch and dinner invitations, movies and a trip to Budapest.

There is much more to say, so if you want pictures and the real “scoop,” visit our blog!

Ministry news and notes

The other day in class, a couple announced that they were having a baby. I didn't really know what to say, but I felt that it was a big moment. It has been difficult here, because I struggle to relate to many of my adult students; I often find myself thinking about how to make this ministry relevant. I can't say that I have figured it out, but I do believe that the Lord is showing me the correct path.

The significance of the announcement about the pregnancy, isn't that they said it IN the church, but that they said it at all. Czechs by culture and by nature are a very self-guarded people; rarely do they speak about personal issues or their past. Thus, I took their telling as an invitation to enter into their life.

This came as a mini shock to me, because it challenged my initial notion as to how the adults would view me. I guess I expected many of them to respect me as their teacher, but would struggle to accept me as an equal: I am young and American. It's not that they are bad people, it is just we are from different generations, continents and cultures. So, when their faces lit up as they told me their good news, I began to realize that they want friendship and a deeper relationship. And this is where we start.

Our ministry is growing and I am seeing that many of our students are beginning to accept us as part of their community. Recently, I have been receiving many invitations to have lunch and dinner at the homes of my students, which is great, because many of them are not part of the church; however, they are inviting Jamie and me into their house and into their story. We pray that this will continue to happen as we spend our two years. After all, discipleship does take time and patience, which are two necessities when living amongst the Czechs.

Jamie and I have planned so many things for this ministry, but we are in need of some supplies. Our most urgent are Mardi Gras materials. If you have any purple, green, gold, feather boas, face paint, anything, please send it to us!



Pokec with church band, newspaper pageant with youth group, Christmas play, and caroling on the steps