

# --- Policka Press ---

*Information and thoughts from the Czech Republic*

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## *English Classes*

Wrapping up the English classes has been somewhat of a surreal experience. Since Jamie and I plan most of our own lessons, we found that thinking of a 'last' lesson was quite difficult; I would imagine that this would be much easier if we were following a textbook program or a curriculum. We didn't know if we should play more games, give more serious lessons or just have a basic, unstructured conversation. We both decided to continue on and teach lessons that encompass language that is relevant and useful; however, we decided that our last week would be one long party. And, we have arrived.

For my adult classes, we have planned a series of 'pub visits' with each class meeting as a small group in different places throughout Policka. My adults are really excited about this opportunity, as it affords them time to get to know one another in a less structured setting, and it enables them to see me outside of the Church/class setting. I remember during Christmas, we had a relaxed lesson with wine and cookies and a majority of the hour was spent asking questions about each other; I was very pleased and felt that it was a big step towards developing deeper relationships. So, I'm excited to have one last 'hurra' before the summer.

Many of my high school students are busy this first week of June: graduation exams have come and passed for the seniors, which means that many have left for summer vacation. So, in dealing with the possibility of a small group, I decided to combine my two classes and head to the bowling alley. I have never gone bowling in Policka before, so I jumped at the chance to go with a group: it is much better going with a group of Czech people, so I can see "how it's done" for next year. What!?! It's hard making reservations in a new language!

Jamie spent the weekend baking cookies and cake for the younger classes in our English program. I don't know, but it seemed that she prepared about 1,000,000 cookies. But, I wasn't complaining, because I was able to 'taste test' some of the finish products; take my word for it, they were good! Along with the sweets, she has been scouring the internet for creative/active game ideas, which will be played after the proceeding encouragement of butter, chocolate and sugar! Sounds like a good mix, huh?

In reality, this last week is not just a celebration of 'one year down, and one year to go.' No, it is a time for Jamie and I to show our appreciation for our new Czech community. We hope to leave them with a great taste in their mouth—quite literally—for next year and the upcoming English Camp.

Two weeks ago when I announced that our last classes would be the first week of June, a few of my adult students were concerned that me and Jamie were leaving for good: it seems they didn't get the message that we would be here for two years.

"Are you ready to go home?"

"Did you like Policka?"

"Will you ever be coming back?"

I reassured them that our trip to the U.S. is just for three weeks and that we still have one more full year in Policka. At this answer, a few seemed relieved and a tad bit excited. I took their reactions as encouragement and as a subtle 'job well done.'

What will next year have in store?

## Culture

One of the more fascinating aspects of living in the Czech Republic has been the realization that parts of me are slowly changing. My thoughts and perceptions, my assumptions about what is normal and what is different and even the perspective by which I view world events and the U.S. have been altered.

Sometimes, when watching a news story, I will see a clip of video from the United States and am shocked at how I react. Usually what grabs my attention first, are the really large cars. Most people here drive compact cars, with tiny wheels, minute engines and that leave a relatively shallow ecological 'foot print'. So, when I see gargantuan-size GMC trucks with chrome wheels, fenders and exhaust stacks coming out of the back, I'm shocked.

I continue to watch as the camera pans around the surroundings and I am again struck by another facet of 'Americana', the flag. It is ubiquitous: it is fluttering above schools; it is stuck in the ground on small, 2-foot, wooden sticks; it is draped over porches; hung from window sills; displayed above sports stadiums; embroidered on sweaters, hats, leather jackets, pants and even underwear; worn on lapels; painted on billboards; and hung from every single telephone/electric pole across the nation. For the past year, I have been separated from this kind overt nationalism, because many Czechs don't express patriotic feelings through the flag. In fact, even during Czech national holidays, I am hard-pressed to see more than 5 Czech flags in the whole town of Policka.

Infatuated, I engage with the camera shot further. I see in the background large, straight roads that traverse a country that seems so vast and

It seems as if America is a Place where the sky is as aggressive and as dominant as the mountains, where the sunset can be witnessed for miles around and where all the paths lead toward bustling cities full of towering structures of concrete, glass, pollution, crime and MTV.

I really could go on further describing to you how my own country has become a little bit foreign in my eyes, but I really don't feel that I should. For one, I haven't reflected on this long enough for me to feel comfortable expressing my thoughts in coherent sentences and tangible examples; and secondly, I don't want it to seem as if I am no longer an 'American', because that would be far from the truth. I am simply an American who is being forced and pushed to experience the world through slightly tainted windows.

Consequently, the trip back home will be one of reconnection with family, friends and a life that is comfortable, and at the same time, a solidification of the opinions and experiences that have changed and that will never be the same.

See you in a few weeks!

### *Ministry news and notes*

This weekend there will be a Confirmation class retreat where they will be studying with Pastor Jan and playing games. Jeremy and I were asked to give a talk about dating and the importance of being in a relationship with someone who is also a Christian. Since being here, Jeremy and I have witnessed this importance, especially here. There are couples that we know where one is a Christian and the other is not, and because of this, the family does not attend church and their children will not have an opportunity to see that the church is not a weird or scary place.

The retreat will be the last big event

before the students summer vacation, so please pray that it will be thought-provoking and a time where they can have fun together and learn more about the church. Their confirmation will take place in October.

Saturday evening we will be having an event at the church for the entire community. There will be an "Open Town" kind of event where people can go to different places and there will be activities for the family. We will be showing pictures and video from the things that happened this year in the church, playing games and doing crafts, and one of the youth, Míša, will be having a puppet show. In the past there has been a good turn out of people, so we are hoping to have a good crowd .

The next two weeks will be packed with preparations for the English camp. Jeremy and I will be putting in the final touches on the camp program, organizing the props and materials, and meeting with the Czech volunteers. We are not sure of the final count of students who have applied, but when Pastor Jan picked up the applications two weeks ago, there were more than had applied at that time in years previous, which is incredibly encouraging.

The camp will take place the last week in July, so if you could keep us and the volunteers from Oklahoma in your prayer it would be much appreciated.

There will be no July newsletter because Jeremy and I will be traveling home to PA to visit family and friends for three weeks before the English Camp. However, please feel free to check our blog week of July 27th—31st for updates and pictures from the camp!

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# Upcoming Events in June and July:

**June 2-5** — Last week of class

**June 5** — Confirmation Retreat

**June 6** — Policka “open town”

**June 7** — Family Sunday

**June 12 - 14** — Guests coming from  
sister church in Germany

**July 27-31** — English Camp with  
Oklahoma group

## Our students!

