

Czech Republic
March 11—23, 2009
Wednesday and Thursday

Joanne Nash and I left my house about 8:45 Wednesday morning March 11th to go to Susan Becker's home. She was driving us to the airport in Orlando. Joanne drove up to Winter Haven from Sebring the night before to break up the trip.

My favorite part of the mission trips is definitely not the prolonged airport experiences. There are lines and checks and long hours of waiting. I appreciate security and know it is necessary, but I don't have to like it.

From Orlando, we flew to Atlanta where we had a layover. By then we were hungry and found a food court near our gate where we could eat. By the time we had finished we were among the last to board the plane to Paris, France.

In Paris the layover was much longer. My great nephew, Jacob, had a school project to do. They knew I was going to Czech Republic so Genifer e-mailed me a copy of Flat Stanley's picture to take with me. The book is about an imaginary little boy who got flattened and pinned to a bulletin board. He wanted to travel so his mom and dad folded him up and put him in an envelope and mailed him to California. Since then he has been many place and had many experiences. Throughout this story, I will mention him so you will know who he is. I took his picture in Paris at the airport.



We were met at the airport in Prague by Andrea Morrison, the wife of Jason, who are missionaries in the Czech Republic. They are the only Assemblies of God missionaries there. Another couple from North Carolina are raising funds to go. Stefan, who worked for the church in Kolin, was the driver. The flight was good except for some periodic turbulence.

We stayed in a very modern and comfortable apartment furnished by the Bible School. The conference was across town at the church and dormitory location for the Bible School students. We walked to and from the conference. Andrea showed us around the

facilities and then went to the store to get breakfast and lunch foods while we sorted and arranged our things and organized our teaching materials. After she returned, we went for a tour of Kolin, a small picturesque city with beautiful old buildings and small shops that were more like boutiques. It was cold and we were tired so we stopped on the way back at Harmonia, the very nice restaurant across the street from the Bible School, for dinner before getting to bed for some much needed sleep.

Friday

Joanne and I were invited to the Conference for church teachers in Kolin, Czech Republic. The theme of the conference was "Let's Go Change the World". It began on Friday night so we had a time to rest before the thirteen day whirlwind began. I taught the adults while Joanne taught the children. My interpreter was Rodka, the wife of the pastor in Kolin and Frank, her husband, interpreted for Joanne. The conference was Friday night and most of Saturday. I taught on Developing a Sunday school lesson and put the people into groups to choose themes and Bible stories for various age groups. We had time for one group to share that session and two others the next session. This helps me know if they have grasped the concepts I have taught.

Saturday

Lunch was catered to the conference so we didn't have to go out to get food. All the topics were interesting and done in a very academic way. The speakers were informed and well prepared. We always had someone near who interpreted for us. One speaker went over time and so I told Donna, the president, to just skip my third presentation because the people had to catch buses or trains to get home. Some lived as much as 2 ½ hours away. The other topics were Teaching Downs Syndrome Children and Bullying. There were two different displays so the attendees could purchase materials. Child Evangelism Fellowship was one of them and a bookstore the other one. We got home about 5:30 and were so exhausted that Andrea went out to a restaurant and brought dinner back to the apartment for all of us. Bedtime was a welcome event.

Flat Stanley visited the children in Kolin conference and gave him several new outfits (colored his clothing the way they liked him to look). He was introduced to the adults as well.

Sunday

I had been asked to preach on Sunday morning at the Kolin church. When Frank, the pastor, told me about the church, he said that parents in Czech Republic do not feel any responsibility to teach their children about Christianity and asked me to emphasize it's importance in the morning service. I was able to do this very effectively because God knew ahead of time the need and had given me just what to do. It was already prepared and I incorporated it in the message I had prepared for the Sunday morning service. God is so

faithful.

The presence of God was very evident as the people prayed orally after the message. God's presence came with that sweet, still small voice. The pastors are 32 years old. He was saved out of atheism through the witness of a roommate and through reading the Bible. His family has never reconciled with him for going into the ministry though they visit them when they can. She came from a family with a very dominating father and decided to go to Bible School in Kolin. Later while they were both working in Kolin, they began dating and got married. They have two very intelligent children—a boy and a girl. Her family was not happy with her decision either but Frank and Rodka followed the Lord wholeheartedly.

A very good friend of Radka's whom I met on my first trip to Czech Republic had to be flown from Tajikistan to Du bi for medical treatment. She and her husband are missionaries from Czech Republic. A German girl who visited me last year gave me 50 Euro to give to someone who needed it so I gave it to Radka to send to her friend.

The people were very friendly and, as is the case in most of Europe, many of them could understand and even speak some English. We enjoyed visiting with them and taking pictures with them.

After church we went to the home of the pastor for lunch. Because all of us had been very busy, Andrea ordered pizza. It is customary to take chocolates. You are supposed to take either chocolate or flowers when you go to eat with a family. Andrea and Jason had lived their first term in Kolin and made many friends. One of the families invited her for dinner Sunday night. She went and we were glad not to go out again. We ate our left overs or made sandwiches.

Monday

Chapel was at 8:00 in the morning and they wanted to pray for us and us for them and asked me to share about twenty minutes of testimony for the students. I shared on how my mission ministry got started, A girl who worked in the office translated. Then we had an hour break and the next two hours were scheduled for me to teach. I taught on The Making of a Leader and Developing Leaders. I left about 30 minutes for questions and answers. Several asked questions and I felt we were well received. A student translated for me. Then we were taken, by the director's wife, to his office and he gave us gifts for our time at the school. We had lunch with the director's wife, in the cafeteria where the Bible School students and an elementary school is served lunch. She spoke a lot of English so we had a good visit.

The rest of the day was used to pack and get ready to go to Ceske Budejovice where our

next workshops would be. It was a 3 ½ hour drive and is the second largest city in Czech Republic, the home of Budweiser Beer. The church there has one of the few paid children's pastors.

Monday night, one of the students, Raja (Rayna) from the Bible School invited all three of us to dinner at her apartment. She fixed pasta with Alfredo sauce and lettuce. We took peppers, cucumbers and dessert. She served hot tea which is normal if not drinking coffee.

After we ate she wanted prayer. She said for years she has been escaping into her world of wild imaginations to avoid emotional pain and becomes depressed. We felt this was a Divine appointment for her deliverance. Her countenance was changed after an extended time of prayer. Her Dad was an alcoholic and her Mother had to work many hours to furnish food so there was basically no relationship with her Mom.

The rest of the day was used to pack and get ready to go to Ceske Budejovice where our next workshops would be. It was a 3 ½ hour drive. The church there has one of the few paid children's pastors. Ceske Budejovice is in the Bohemian area which is famous for Bohemian crystal.

Andrea and Jason are wonderful missionaries. They are hospitable, organized and very involved with the leaders in all the different churches. They have a small poodle named Winfred. He has opened the doors for evangelism for them where they live. He is cute and well trained and people stop them on the streets to talk about their dog and they get opportunities to talk to the the people about Jesus. One couple dog sits for them when they have to travel. Now that elderly couple are asking for prayer for a wayward grandson.

Tuesday

Of course, Flat Stanley went along and was introduced to the workshop participants. The group received him well. I used him as an example in the session on The Value of a Child.

We could sleep a little later since Radka and Stefan were going to meet us at 10:00. She went with us



and took her two children to interpret for me.

It was about 12:30 when we arrived. Everyone was hungry so we left our luggage in the car and walked several blocks to a nice restaurant, Plavia, where Stefan, the children's pastor, had made reservation for us and invited the senior pastor, Peter. To meet us and have lunch with us. He said they are attempting to build the church through small groups. Again he was a young man who was quiet and reserved. He was leaving for the pastor's conference in Kolin the next day and had been very sick with respiratory problems.

The food was exceptional but Stefan is a trained chef so he knew the right places to eat. He was a very good host the whole time were in his church. After we ate we went back to the car and got our luggage. We stayed in the church which had a kitchen, bathroom and beds. It was very comfortable. The enormous five story building that housed the church had been donated to the congregation by Stefan's father who raised up the congregation and now pastors in Prague.

He was saved out of the theater. He was a famous dancer but laid all that down and was estranged from his parents because of giving up the theater career and all the fame attached to that lifestyle. When he gave away the building, that was the last straw with his blood family and they basically disowned him. The stories of family estrangement were a common thread as we listened to the testimonies of even very young people.

Czech Republic is mostly atheistic with very little Christianity or other religions. Although people have freedom to worship, they are persecuted and considered a cult. The price is high to follow Jesus.

We had enough time to organize our things and get our teaching materials together before the service. There was a good group who came and a few children for Joanne's class. One man had alcohol on his breath and he was a little too friendly that night but the next night I didn't smell any alcohol.

The teaching on Preparing a Preschool Lesson was well received and they were able to begin developing a lesson in their group. I put them in groups with people they did not necessarily know well but that didn't seem to affect productiveness.

After the people left, Stefan, Sarka (his wife) their two children, Radka and her two children, and Joanne and I had sandwiches in the kitchen where we got better acquainted with Sarka. They had already stocked the kitchen with food before we came.

As we were getting ready for bed Andrea had a strange sensation in her tongue and her lips were swollen. My first thought was allergic reaction and because it was late and we

did not know where to get medical help we laid hands on her and God took care of the problem by mid morning. I told her to awaken us if she had problems breathing.

Wednesday

Everyone got up about 7:30 to get dressed, ate and got down to the Mother's meeting at 9:00. Stefan wanted to train these mothers to help with teaching. One of their satellite churches was represented by a mother and two teenage daughters. She spoke good English and we enjoyed her fellowship.

I did the Heart House teaching as a devotional on the balance and discipline God wants in our lives. After a short break I taught a session on how to vary teaching memory verses and stories to small children. I also stressed the necessity of learning centers.

Then we went for lunch to Stefan and Sarka's apartment. He made rice and pork with a special sauce. It was delicious. The drink was a fruit drink with orange slices in it. The table was nicely decorated and the dishes were beautiful. They lived in a small but nice apartment. It was evident that he was into technical gadgets. He had a Dictaphone device, a GPS, CD player, DVD player and television as well as a computer with Internet connections.

After lunch he took us to see a famous 16th century castle on a high hill just outside the city. There are two kinds of castles—one where wealthy influential people lived and one that was a fortress for protecting the city. This one was the kind people of means lived in. It was closed until April 1 so all we could see was the grounds. One wonders how such massive buildings could have been constructed without the heavy equipment of today. Not only was there a building where the royalty lived, there were stables and servant quarters that were both massive. You could imagine the lords and ladies and the carriages and horses with footmen and butlers at the entrance. The gardens were magnificent.

On the way back to the church, we stopped at a mall that was ultra modern and massive for refreshments. Some of the group had the Czech version of hot chocolate which is more like chocolate pudding. This caused us to get back to the church just in time to begin the night sessions. We straightened our hair, brushed our teeth and went downstairs.

I continued teaching on Preparing a Lesson for Preschool Children and they shared their creations with the group. It was productive time as I could see evidence of their comprehending the ideas I shared in the presentations. They asked questions and we shared answers with good participation from the larger group.

Many stayed around and had fellowship with each other and those who spoke English shared with us. Some were still there but I was exhausted so I went upstairs to get a bite to eat and get ready for bed..

Thursday

Our day began at 7:30 again. It took time to eat and get dressed and pack up everything to leave at 1:00. I taught the morning group on Overcoming Temptation as the devotional and then we covered the Difference Between Discipline and Punishment. There was a good question and answer session afterward where moms asked what to do with child misbehavior even in the teen years. I felt God gave me wisdom and others shared in ideas. We stopped about 11:30 because it had begun to snow and was gathering on the branches of the spruce trees. The sight was breathtakingly beautiful. I always get excited when I see snow. Some had to go to work and others caught public transportation to get home.

We decided to go upstairs instead of to a restaurant for lunch since there was plenty of bread, sandwich meat and drinks. I was glad because I was tired and didn't want to walk in the snow.

Before we left the snowing stopped, it melted from the ground and a light rain followed.

Stefan drove us back to Brno and the highways led through all kinds of terrain. Much of the South area was farm lands for various grains, sugar beets and strawberries. Then when we came to the Highlands, which were rolling hills and some mountains. It began snowing in different spots again since the altitude was higher and it was colder. We saw snow covered fields and trees covered with snow. We stopped and took a picture. At the bathroom stop there were three small cars painted with Coca Cola logo. The service stations are modern and all the area well kept.

Stefan's wife called and Stefan had taken the house keys with him. She had to stay at the church with the kids until he returned home 2 ½ hours later. We got to Brno about 6:30 and he helped us get the luggage inside and left immediately.

Instead of cooking we met Jason at an authentic Indian restaurant called the Tjaz. The food was very good and filling. It made me think of India and my trip there. We took half of it back to the apartment and ate it later in the week.

Back at the apartment (flat as they are called there though we were on the 5th floor) we got ready for bed and a new day.

Friday

Friday was a free day. There were no workshops and we slept a little later. Andrea served what we call Christmas bread (it contains fruit and nuts). Jason made expresso coffee. We also had cereal, yogurt and fruit.

When everyone was ready we took a tram to downtown (about 5 minutes) and went to an old Cathedral. It was on a hill and we walked up stairs to the top to look out over the city of Brno. I took pictures from both sides. On one side there are steeples of three other old Cathedrals. It was a very cold day but worth the outing. Before the old Soviet union took control of the country, there were lots of churches and a consciousness of God and religion but now the country's religion is atheism.

We also climbed a high hill to take pictures of a very old castle that was much higher up the mountain and far away. We could have gone there but were too tired to walk the steep incline. It was the type of castle that was a fortress of defense for the city. The Brno castle defended the city against the Swedish invasion. That area of the country is called Moravia. It was the Moravians who carried the Gospel of Jesus all over the world by whatever means they could. Some went to India, Africa and the Caribbean. They strongly believed that Jesus would soon return and unless the world heard of Jesus they would be lost. The story is that two men, at a young age, sold themselves to go and preach to the slaves in the Caribbean. In some places it was against the law to share the Gospel with slaves so if they became slaves they could share the Gospel with them. They went to these places with no plan to ever return to their homeland. What dedication!

We had lunch in the coffee shop that is owned by the family of a famous actor. The soup was very good. It felt good too to sit and rest since we Americans are unaccustomed to all the walking Europeans do.

We came back to the apartment (housing there is primarily in massive high rise buildings with multiple apartments or flats). Much of the furniture is made to provide optimum floor space and what looks like a small apartment is actually quite comfortable. Storage space is given to each occupant in the basement. Courtyards provide parking places for those who own cars.

We came home mid afternoon very tired, washed our hair and got ready for Saturday's workshops.

Saturday

We didn't have to get up until 7:30. The train for Olomouc left at 10:45. The station was very busy with people, dogs and pigeons everywhere. It was old and quaint. It reminded me of stories I have read about train travel many years ago here at home. The ticket agent was a young blond lady dressed in uniform. From the window, we could see

farm land on both sides. Occasionally there were what are called summer house where people leave the city and go for two months to live and grow gardens to supplement their food supply. The garden plot is very small and the cottages are close together. I was told many have no bathroom facilities, only a place to sleep and prepare food.

You can travel all over Europe by train at very inexpensive rates. No one takes up your ticket when you get on. That comes later, far down the track. The train is divided into separate compartments and you choose one with enough empty seats. Another young man was in our compartment. Andrea had picked up sandwiches and drinks for us at the station so about half way to Olomouc, we ate our lunch.

When we arrived at the church, no one was there but within minutes Donna, the Children's pastor, arrived and opened the door. She had made sandwiches and gingerbread and had hot water for tea. We were not hungry but I ate some anyway and had some fruit flavored hot tea. All of it was good but I wished I had not eaten on the train. I got my materials organized and the people began coming in. There were about 15 in all. My interpreter was an associate pastor of the church. He had a Doctorate in both English and Spanish and had taught at the Kolin Bible School. He has three children.



I taught on the Value of a Child and Learning and Teaching Styles. Pastor George did an excellent job translating the difficult materials. Those workshops took about three hours and we had planned to go back to Brno by train but Donna's husband who has a car volunteered to drive us back to Brno. That meant we got back about two hours earlier than if we had gone by train.

I was exhausted after three hours of teaching. They didn't want to take breaks. I told them I was doing

what I taught against and they laughed.

Back at the apartment we watched "Facing the Giants". I had wanted to see it but that was my first opportunity. We finally went to bed about 10:30.

Sunday

There was no regular Sunday service at Jason and Andrea's home church because once a

month they have combined services with other regional churches. It was too far away for us to go so we slept late, had a leisurely breakfast, checked e-mail messages and settled financial accounts with the Morrisons. The money is called crowns.

Andrea warmed up left overs and made some delicious cream pudding for lunch.

Jason spent the afternoon making slide shows for the Kid's Quest (which had taken place before we came) and a presentation for us of our ministry. Sunday was a day of rest which we really needed. They had some very old TV shows like Petticoat Junction and the Beverly Hillbillies. Television here is ungodly but there it is worse as well as billboards and behavior in public. That is the result of no fear of God.

At dinner time Andrea and Jason went down to Kentucky Fried Chicken and Mac Donald and picked up food for dinner. We knew we had to soon get to bed because we had to get up at 3:00 AM to get to the airport.

Both Jason and Andrea got up and helped get out things to the curb for the taxi and then Andrea went back home and Jason took us to the airport. When he returned home, they were going to catch a train to go to the Bishop's conference in Prague. When we got to Prague, we had a long layover so we stopped at Mac Donald's for some breakfast. It was not good like here. The coffee was much too strong and the sandwich too dry with no strawberry jelly to help it out. The flight was on a small plane and only about an hour in length.

At the appointed time we were on our way to Atlanta. This flight was much smoother but long and tiring. If it were not for the food and drinks they serve, it would be nearly unbearable. To Atlanta was about 11 hours. Thank God, we didn't have to go back through Paris or it would have been almost 12 hours.

Retrieving baggage and getting it to the transfer belt was a hassle but we managed and then found our gate. I never am content until I am at the final gate and know that it is the correct location because often gates are changed which can mean long walks to the new gate.

The plane was on time and in about two hours we were in Orlando where Susan Becker and Jean Felter met us. We were home in Winter Haven about 10:30 and in bed as fast as we could make it.

Thank God for another wonderful trip and more wonderful international friends. God is faithful.