

Thursday, April 26th – Day 5th

06:30 a.m. – „Rise and shine !” We did our morning things, then finished packing our



baggage. The last look from our balcony, the last stroll along the porch. Then we said good bye to Sailor House, loaded all our stuff into the nice red car and about 7:30 a.m. we left our dreamland for another adventure. It was sunny, tropical morning, about 78 F.

We headed for the National Park of Everglades.

Of course we had to take a drive along the Overseas Highway and we were again enjoying those nice prospects of the Atlantic Ocean and Gulf of Mexico, as well as of the greenery and colors of islands that was connected by that concrete strip.

09:00 a.m. – a break for yummy breakfast in the Manatee Bay restaurant on the island of Marathon. Scrambeled eggs with mushrooms, bread and coffee. There was also friendly talking during breakfast and I also kept questioning Dan. Also a topic of drugs came up for discussion :



„I did not do any drugs until I got to Omaha at the secondary school and even then it was only Marijuana. I didn't get into harder drugs

until I went into the service. I was really lucky that I had my adult sister, who lived out of Pascagoula and away from the trouble makers back home, who I could go to and live with.”

We also remembered Frank and Anne and their planned journey to the Czech Republic. Zuzanka questioned it and she told that she didn't believe that Frank could ever leave the States. „Ah, these siblings !”

09:35 a.m. – „On the road again, just can't wait to get on the road again, the life I love is makin' music with my friends and I can't wait to get on the road again ...” I sang to the others being back on Overseas Highway. There was a small sorrow when we passed by Lime Tree Bay Resort, our first place of stay in Keys. Anyway ... on the road again !

10:15 a.m. – a short break to pose by a big lobster in Islamorada for Dan's camera. And we again jumped in the car and zoomed on. The four hour drive was before us. Fortunately there still was something interesting to look at and something to talk about along all our journey. Our eyes were relishing the Overseas Highway, the Atlantic Ocean, the Gulf of Mexico. Then a harbor with a lot of giant cabin cruisers, a lift bridge and then we already entered coastal marshes, a herald of Everglades.

There was a jump in scenery in that area. A Caribbean greenery was replaced by a kingdom of high grass, bush like trees and all kinds of vegetation that likes to live in marshy areas. However we also could see palm trees. Even the weather was different. There still was the warm, but clouds supplanted the blue sky and the sun was over. But we didn't mind it, it was quite nice thing for our Czech eyes to have a break from the beating down high sun.

We nibbled at the last portion of the milage, for a while we were lost because of a low numbers of signposts and that high grass all over, but finally we managed it.

12:00 a.m. – we entered Everglades, in its part called the Ernest F.Coe Visitor Park.

(<http://www.nps.gov/ever/planyourvisit/coedirections.htm>),

We bought tickets and : „Let's go !” we went down „Anhinga Trail' for alligators.

(<http://www.nps.gov/ever/planyourvisit/anhinga-trail.htm>)

Susie told us that there is an area full of them there. We passed by a sign *„Do not feed alligators !”* and stroll down an asphalt sidewalk.

Left-hand there was a shallow, about 18 feet wide water canal, with its elevation about four feet bellow the sidewalk and that was bounded by thick vegetation on its further side.

Right-hand we could see a thick, impenetrable greenery of plants, bushes and willow like trees. And here you are ! We saw him ! An alligator lounged in the water of the canal, just by the trail. Only its head was above the water and we almost missed it. And not so far from that one we could see another



one. And there other and other ! They were lazy lying in the water or in the bushes and they seemed to do not care about any audience. And here was a heron ! And there a turtle ! And the alligators again ! It was like an animal heaven ...

„And here ... be careful !” one gator lay close to the sidewalk, even its head sat on the asphalt on the right side. Where should we go ?! It was a bit scary look and we were slowly approaching the prehistoric monster with giant teeth sticking out of its maw. It was quite risky and we hesitated for a moment ... however when we saw other Americans even with children passed by the gator safe and sound, we took heart and walked past it. All of the four of us together, on the left hand side, as far from the gator as was possible. Of course we checked the left side also because of another possible ones there.

Wow ! It was something again ! That guy was the really special size ! Yes, the special size for taking memory pictures. *„No, Dan, no ! ... Yes, it will be the great memory!”*, Dan was persuading us. *„Mirek, Hana go back a bit, closer to the gator. More ... more!”* . Holy cow ! Finally we stood just less than nine feet from the creature. Fortunately we survived, but that our feeling ... nothing to shout about, you believe. But it is true we have got the excellent picture ☺.

And we continued along that touristic highway, that in a while changed into a raised wooden sidewalk with rails that led us over marshes and canals. And there were alligators all around ...



„Mirek, Hana you’re lucky people ! We did not see so many gators together during even one of our previous visit. Only now with you ! Ah, friends, with all that National Parks that you have visited with Frank, with Keys

and with Everglades you have seen more than the most of Americans !”, Zuzanka smiled at us.

There were also birds of various species, a strange marsh vegetation with beautiful flowers hanging from branches and roots of trees and bushes without any soil, living only on air humidity in that area. And something like our sedge running all around and out of sight. Zuzanka told us that they called it the sawgrass and those huge areas with marshes and canals that formed Everglades are actually a very wide, slow moving river and the ground underneath the entire area is a giant aquifer.

After about one hour strolling among swamps we took a looping and we came back down the same way. And again ! Almost in the same place there was the gator, but for that time even bigger one, again on our right side. And again with its head on the sidewalk. Yes, of course we took shots again and then we carefully passed by with our alert looks at the opposite side ...

Walking back we were told by Susie and Dan about the alligators. They really do not care about people, especially at high noon and during the day, when they are full and they digest their food. Those events when the gator attacked people, even in a sidewalk similar to that we walked along, are very rare and they are caused by nondisciplined people, who feed them. In those cases the alligators joined people together with food and troubles came up, they became dangerous to people. And some of them had to be put to sleep or transported to unpeopled areas.

Yes, we understood. The only thing they did not told us was how we can recognize such a broken alligator... ☺

On our way back we also could see a beautiful and elegant white heron hunting in a shallow water ...

Yes, it was another great experience to have an opportunity to see all those creatures, mainly the alligators. We thank you our friends so much again.

01:00 p.m. – we left that part of Everglades, headed a bit north and then we turned toward the west, to Everglades City for another touristic attraction. What ? Be patient ...

First we had to manage about 80 miles along the Tamiami Trail. There were water canals along both of sides of the road and marshes as far as an eye could see. Only somewhere there were small bushy islands as well as palm trees in that sawgrass ocean. The kingdom of gators, water birds and so on. So our shouts „Look, alligator !” was almost normal thing during our drive. The strange land, monotonous at the first sight, but in reality full of life and secrets.

„We call it swamps. It is a very similar area to that one where I grew up. When I was a boy we used to fish and shrimp with my father in the swamps. We took a small motor boat into the swamps and bayous. And we didn't fear gators. It was a normal thing for us.”

03:00 p.m. – we reached Everglades City and turned off of the main street toward a sawgrass marsh and a water grassland, it means to large water areas with water canals among the sawgrass swamps and mangrove trees. Yes, those canals, it was our another destination that day. It was a stage for our another adventurous play ... a wild sail by an airboat, which is the metal boat with a wide, flat bottom, powered by a screw propeller (airplane like), operated by the , Speedy Johnson's ' company.



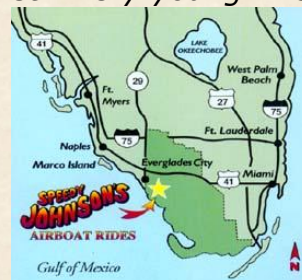
(<http://www.florida-everglades.com/speedy/homed.htm>).

We again bought tickets for that ride and made use of an opportunity of a free time to go to browse in a souvenir shop and look around a dock, mainly we had a look at airboats fastened there.

„My father was really a good and handy mechanic who could fix anything. He and his friend Gilbert built also an airboat, just like these ones, but smaller. They made it from scratch with a wooden propeller. I cannot imagine where they would find a wooden propeller, maybe from an old plane. The driver of the boat sat on a raised seat in front of the fan/propeller also.”, Dan narrated and Zuzanka added : „He did also, for a time, his own shrimp boat. Dan was about 9 or 10 years old when his father had the boat, so he was still very young. His mother told us stories of going down to the docks and buying fresh shrimp right off the boats. On one of our visits, Arthur also took Stacie and I into the swamps. It was a very memorable experience. I have great respect for Dan's father and wish that I had known him better. I know that is where Dan's softer side came from. He is much more like his father than his mother.”

But time for talking was over because a wiry fellow, wore a blue jeans, a shirt and a baseball cap, was already coming near to us. It was clear he was the captain of our wild looking vessel. He checked out our tickets, let us sat on seats in the front of the boat and he sat himself on a raised chair behind us, in front of the propeller. He lent us ear protectors, wished us „Have a nice ride!” and started the engine. The airboat hit the ride out of the harbor with a deafening roar and quite reared and speeded down a wide water canal that was lined with a dense mangrove vegetation on both sides.

After about half an mile, in the end of that water interstate, he chose one of narrow, about 18 feet wide water trails and full drive turned into it.



And now it is time to explain the way how to lead that boat. You know, those airboats do not have any helms because of protection of a water vegetation. The airboats are controlled by an air helm which is triple and it is situated just behind the propeller. This way is formed something like triple jet by that the boat leans on the air and turning it the boat changes direction.

If we thought we drove fast on the wide canal it was nothing in comparison with that drive along that narrow lane. The mangrove trees zoomed by us like hell and the water cowboy was evidently on cloud nine during those fast switchbacks. Us too ☺.

And if the speed was like from hell, the roar of the engine even acoustic vibrations of the propeller were furious ... First we did not use those ear protectors and we held them just in our hands but when we drove among the mangroves, there was only one hero left without the protectors ... Dan (*too many loud rock concerts when he was young* ☺). After about fifteen minutes of wild driving down the mangrove switchbacks we sailed out on a calm water, it was something like a big pond where we stopped in



the middle of it, the engine was just gurgling and the captain Cliff, what was the name of that guy, pointed somewhere into water toward an object that was visibly approaching. Yeeeee ! An alligator ! It was rather small but very lively. Meantime we looked at the gator, we could hear a dull but coming close sound of other airboats and we were surprised that they were able to manage their rides without any crash in those canals. Captain Cliff explained us they have something like an airboat timetable and also our break is one part of that. And yes, in a second another airboat shot out from the sawgrass ocean, it immediately turned down and was quietly gliding over the lake by us. We of course exchanged greetings with the people of the second airboat, we Czechs added our Czech „Ahoj ! ” and Susie and Dan their American „Ahoy ! ”. ☺

Meanwhile the waves of the second vessel were calmed down, we curiously asked captain Cliff about his job. He answered he liked his work, even if „*I have got hurting ears sometimes as well as ringing.*”

He also added that when Hurricane Katrina hit Louisiana he and other water cowboys helped during rescue and supplying works. It was seen he was proud of it. We understood him ...

Then he stepped on the gas again and we continued our cruise. For that time we were speeding along a water ribbon through the sawgrass kingdom. We were lost in it and only now we could appreciate the minimal immersion of our boat. It was something like a hovercraft that time without almost any contact with the surface. And corners and switchbacks and corners and switchbacks. Yes, our captain did a good job for our dollars! He was really the professional and did not work sloppily. ☺

04:45 p.m. – after one hour drive we returned to the „*Speedy Johnson's*’ dock, thanked captain Cliff for safe and sound ride, said „*See you next !*” to him and set out to have something to eat.

05:00 p.m. – we found the „*City Seafood* ’ restaurant that was next door to the Speedy’s. They offered all kinds of sea food. So we bought our meals and brought it along to the table in a restaurant porch. We had fried shrimps, sea food sandwich, fried oyster croquettes and something of veggies for Dan. And of course cola and Coronas. It was the nice, casual sitting. „*Hana, how did you like the airboat ride ? Was it similar to our cruise to Dry Tortugas ?* ☺”, Dan teased Hana. „*Good God ! You and your gifts !*”, I answered instead of Hana ☺ ☺. A big laugh and a lot of smiling came after it when we all remembered Hana’s troubles during our cruise on waves of the Gulf of Mexico ... but that time Hana was smiling too ☺.

05:45 p.m. - „*On the road again !*” to go to meet our final destination for that day, about 35 miles distant town of Naples, the shi shi tourist center by the shore of the Gulf of Mexico. We passed our driving time by talking about experiences of our previous vacations. Zuzanka remembered their honey moon journey around Nebraska, when they used a tent for overnight and some day there was a horrible

storm with downfall, thunderbolts, lightnings and hails in the place where they stayed for night. „Wow ! It was so scary !“. In the morning they learnt from locals that there were three tornados in that area during that night ! And another their experience ... they peep out of the tent one morning and, here you are, buffalo !

Hereupon we added a similar story about our premarital road movie, when we took a drive around Slovakia by motor bike, also with the tent for nights. And one evening we set it up behind a village, on the back road. And some ringing bells woke us up next early morning ... a herd of cows went for their breakfast to meadows !

And Dan kept talking about his siblings : „Arthur, we know very little about him. The last we heard, he still lived in Hawaii, where he retired. When he was in the service he was in the Navy. Most of his naval career was in submarines. His last port of call was Hawaii. David has always, even as an adult, seemed to attract trouble. We assume that David is somewhere in Michigan, but that's only a guess by the last information that we had. Even Vera, who was the closest to him, does not know how to get a hold of him“.

But that time our Thursday's travel was already coming to its end. We entered the neat and visibly the well maintained town of Naples and Dan with Susie led their Toyota to the Bellasera hotel (<http://www.bellaseranaples.com>).

06:30 p.m. – Dan stopped the car in front of the hotel and Susie went to the desk to check in. In a moment she was back with the key of our apartment. Then we drove to the opposite side of the hotel, unload our baggage and left Toyota in a parking lot in a company of luxurious snobby cars.☺



We climbed up on the second floor and opened a door of our apartment. Good heavens ! Hana and me stood in an apartment hall widemouthed. We had not seen anything like this before. Much less stayed in it ! Three sleeping rooms, three bedrooms, three bathrooms, a huge living room, a kitchen with a bar desk and equipped with everything what you can imagine and more ... including a dishwasher and a big refrigerator with an ice crusher. Yes, the really luxury ! „We have never stayed in any apartment like this before ! It is wonderful ! Yes, really shi shi !“.

We relished it, settled in and went out for our another sunset into the Gulf of Mexico. We parked our car about two streets far from a beach and walked down the street among opulent residences with beautiful yards full of palm trees of all kinds, cypresses, tropical bushes, colorful flowers and juicy lawns. It was almost like an practical lesson for landscape architect. Splendid !

Along the street we reached an entrance to the beach. The sun was already low hanging above the Gulf and we dipped our feet in a salt water in the wonderful beach with so soft, fine grained sand and we were again in seventh heaven ...

Then time to go came, so we climbed upstairs on a wide wooden pier and were slowly walking west toward the sunset.

In the middle of the pier I unwittingly turned to an couple of older people who sat in a wooden bench. They spoke in Czech !

Even before I managed to say my „Dobrý večer !“, their eyes knowingly met mine. My expression betrayed me. And they continued in Czech : „Good evening, welcome in the Czechoslovak club ! Before a moment a woman from Slovakia stopped by !“, they pointed to a going away and waving back woman. „Where are you from ?“, it was my first question. „From here, from Naples !“, they shot me down ☺, even if according to their casual clothes it was clear they are the locals who enjoyed that evening show very often. „I know“, I answered smiling, „I meant, where are you from originally, before you left the Czechoslovakia ? And how did you get here, to the South of the States ?“. „Our motherland we left for the U.S.A. in 1970. First we lived in the north, where our Czech friends, who came to the States earlier, let us stay with them and where we lately purchased our own house after we worked our way up. In 1981 we moved to Naples, to the South. For the Sun, for the Warm, for the Ocean

and for the Caribbean feeling. At that time it was easy and cheap to gain an realty in Naples. Not like today when it is the luxurious and snobby place. And from where we did come exactly in the Czechoslovakia ? We think, you would not know that town. From Žďár nad Sázavou ...”.

So we explained them we lived in Chotěboř, about 20 miles from that town and they certainly drove through our town every time they flew to their motherland. Before saying good bye we wished a lot of health together and : „See you again some time in future in Naples !” ☺.

Then we caught our friends and told them about meeting our countrymen. We reminded them of the Zelena Hora monastery that is situated in the town of Zdar nad Sazavou where we took a tour during their visit in 2006.

07:50 p.m. – the sunset. We stood in the westernmost end of the pier, in the crowd of other tourists and fishermen. It was a strange, noble feeling to see that orange ball disappearing beyond the horizon. And even before it was over we could see an curious pelican and also a small white shark that was caught and given freedom again ...



On the way back our friends had us read a sign of warnings against dangerous ocean currents in the Gulf of Mexico. „Such a rip current is a channel of water flowing away from a shore, like a river through the surf. The rip current can be swift and powerful and will often carry unwary swimmers away from the shore. In a case it catches you, don't

fight against it. You must swim parallel to the shore to get out of it and then swim diagonally to reach the shore. ”

Then we were a bit, really only a bit, lost on our way to the car. Susie wanted to go there and I was persuaded about a different direction. „Two Stehnos arguing !”, Dan was smiling. Finally we found Toyota. It was a short detour. If we took my way, we would had reached it earlier ☺.

Before our return to the apartment we added a tour around a hotel garden and swimming pool, where they gave their regular evening party with a music and dancing. The magic atmosphere ...

So we took an inspiration from that and we also made good time after coming back ‚home’ . Pinacoladas with umbrellas ! „Happy birthday, Hana !” . And there was again a lot of talking, joking and smiling as well as going through plans for next day. The main part of the next day program was driving to our next destination, to the touristic heaven Panama City Beach. 560 miles ! „But it is just a little bump on our vacation way. Some downs on vacation make the ups on vacation so much sweeter.”



10:00 p.m. – „Go to bed !”.