



## **Another Newberry-Stehno adventure or As far away as possible**

It's been a rough two years since we returned home and I only now come with a story about it ... about what ? About another fantastic adventure that we spent together with our very good American friends Susie and Dan Newberry in April and May 2007. And it was more exciting time for us than our last two vacations with them, because for that time our meeting point was on the other side of the ocean in the town of Miami in Florida in the USA ! Our friends had prepared for us more than two weeks of sightseeing around Florida Keys, Panama City Beach, New Orleans, Saint Louis and Omaha of course. It was supposed to be more laid back vacation with a lot of interesting experiences and fun, with many wonderful Gulf sunsets, some kayaking, many alligators, much sipping cold and yummy drinks and much talking and joking with our friends Zuzanka and Dan.

But one by one ... and please do not expect a novel. It will be my another beatnic talking. It will be a medley of dates, events and feelings.

So ... where was the start of that our vacation ? There was already a first note about a trip down to the South of the States during the first visit of Susie and Dan to the Czech Republic in 2004. From that time Zuzanka had been scheduling and planning it. And already before their second vacation in our country was negotiated that our mutual ,Good Bye !' in the summer of 2006 would not be for long time and we would continue our common vacation story at the beginning of 2007 in Florida, U.S.A. And it was in more detail agreed during our friendly talkings while we were together in our mutual ,Newberry-Stehno Czech Holiday 2006' when we spent wonderful 13 days wandering around the Czech Republic, sightseeing Czech castles and old towns.



Yes, for this reason, to know that it would be only for short time, our ,Good Bye !' was not so sad. It was almost ,See you tomorrow At Miami International Airport, Florida !'.

Then there were many fine-tuning emails where we specified dates of our flight to Miami on April 22<sup>nd</sup> of 2007 and our departure from Omaha on May 9<sup>th</sup> 2007. That way Zuzanka was able to book all apartments and condos ahead of schedule enough to get good prices. Our friends got us to try to add some days off but it was enough time for us to be out off of our jobs.

*„I can't repeat what Dan said when he saw the date you were leaving, but you know Dan, he thinks money grows on trees and that everyone controls when they work and when they don't, like he does. He doesn't understand the '9 to 5' type of job or the responsibilities of people's jobs. Oh those artists. But what can be done? If Dan had his way he would spend his life traveling without a worry as to how he was going to pay for it.”*, Susie wrote.

What can be done. Anyway ... we had many beautiful days together before us.

On August 8<sup>th</sup> we bought flight tickets from our flight provider Czech Airlines for our flights to our skyways Prague Ruzyně Airport – Paris Charles DeGaulle Airport, Paris CDG – Miami International Airport, Omaha Eppley Airfield Airport - Cincinnati Northern Kentucky International Airport, Cincinnati CVG – New York JFK Airport and NY JFK – Prague Ruzyně Airport.



And then we had only been looking forward to that vacation and kept lettering about it. And then months had passed, weeks had passed, our emails were flying over the ocean almost every day and all at once ... there were just a few days left to our arrival to the States ! And here you are, on Wednesday before our big Sunday jump on the other side of the ocean Susie sent us the letter :

*„Hello friends, Well we've done it again. First Bekky, then Hana's mom, then Michal and Sunka - and now Dan!! He nearly cut off two of his fingers this morning! But don't worry . . . it won't affect the trip, except that Dan won't be able to swim and in ten days we'll either have to find a clinic to remove the stitches or do it ourselves.*

*He was doing last minute work at the shop, this morning at 5 a.m. I was working, at home, furiously removing his tools from the house so I could finally complete the cleaning. He called me and said that I must come right away. He'd cut himself and could not stop the bleeding. He thought he might need A stitch! Dan is one of those people that could cut his hand off and say it was only minor, so I was really concerned. He was drilling a hole through a round, flat metal piece that goes flat against the wall behind our dog tie-outs. The spinning drill caught the metal piece and spun it like a circular saw blade and it went through two of his fingers, all the way to the bone, and past in some areas. It's directly behind the finger nails. Because he takes aspirin every day for his heart, he bleeds more than a person who doesn't take aspirin. He could not get it to stop.*

*But after I got to the shop and he got into the car, I turned the ignition and nothing happened. The car was totally dead. The door locks would not even work. The day before we leave!!!! So I took him to the emergency room in his truck and while they were stitching him up, I had to call the car dealer to find out what to do with it. I'm sure he thought he was dealing with a mad woman when I was explaining to him that my husband was in the emergency room after trying to cut off his hand, we were leaving at 4:00 tomorrow morning (3:00 if Dan has his way) on a very long car trip, that I'd bought this car specifically for that purpose so a loaner car would not do--period. The car had better be fixed and ready to go by this evening. I told him I was sorry but I had a very short fuse, at this time, and I could not deal with the car not being fixed TONIGHT!*

*So, now Dan is resting, with 10-12 stitches in his fingers, but will still be able to drive - but not swim- The car, as it turned out, was very minor, just a loose battery cable. So we are being thankful right now. Dan could have had a worse cut and could be in surgery right now and delayed our end of the trip for a day (or two) and the car could have refused to start tomorrow, after we were on the road and at a rest stop in the middle of nowhere, instead of right in town before we left.*

*So, all is basically well. A few things will not get done now because Dan has limited use of his hand for a couple of days, but I'm sure our friends will understand.*

*So now, in a few hours WE ARE ON VACATION! and in four days we will be ecstatically waiting for you at Miami airport. All our downs will make our ups for the vacation even better and we will laugh at all of this (at some point) in the future.*

*So, bye for now friends, I will try to write one more before I turn everything off in the office tonight. I don't know if we'll get into our rooms on the first two nights in time for an internet connection or not. It will be a 28 hour drive to Long Key from Omaha, and Dan is Hell-bent to make it as early as possible. So bye bye until later.”*

We got almost heart attack , when we read it. We wished them ‚Good Luck’ to their Thursday start of the vacation and we kept our fingers for all the best for our common Sunday meeting in Miami.

On Friday and Saturday we packed our baggages, several times we checked on all our things and on Saturday evening we went to Prague to overnight at my Prague cousin George’s house.



## Sunday, April 22<sup>nd</sup> – Day 1<sup>st</sup>

Our Prague friends gave us a lift to the airport and we reached there shortly after 5 a.m. We thanked them very much for their care and arranged with them for May 10<sup>th</sup>. Then they went home and we entered an arrival lounge in the terminal of North 2 at Prague Ruzyně Airport. Our another big adventure began.

It was too early, check-in counters had been closed yet but we didn't mind it. We love this special atmosphere of airports, when you can clearly feel all future experiences in the air, this special mixture of expectations and worries. We also once again checked our passports, flight tickets, a map of Paris CDG Airport ...

In the meantime they opened the check-in counter for our flight. We checked in, said 'Good Bye !' to our baggages and then spent another free time sipping coffee and looking around ... in the same place where we set with Susie and Dan in the 2007 summer.

Afterward we passed through strict customs, came in a gate and in a moment we were looking out of a window of our Airbus A320. And in another moment, at 7:15 a.m., we could see like our Czech ground is running backward and fading down somewhere. We finally realized that it was not a dream, we waved at our country and we gave ourselves to agreeable sensation of the flight toward a wonderful, exciting adventure. We left our everyday lives behind. „Let's go !”.

But soon stewardesses interrupt our dreaming because there was a time for breakfast. A pleasureable interruption ! Coffee, baked goods, butter, muffins ... yum ! The pleasant beginning of our vacation ...

To be approaching close to Paris, we became a bit nervous because of a change of planes and a transfer to a different terminal. After all we had never been there and Charles de Gaulle Airport is large enough for us occasional travelers. But we believed in ourselves, we were the two.

09:00 a.m. – our plane landed on the ground, we deplaned in the 2B terminal and inquired an airport hostess about our way to the 2E terminal, used a bus, found the terminal, visited restrooms, bought some bottled water, calmed ourselves down and went to the customs. There was a very strict inspection, I had to take my suspenders off and took my cell and billfold out of pockets. However we finally managed it (*Hana was O.K.*) and we head for a gate of our flight. Our next plane was 'Jumbo' Boeing 747. It is true that there was a delay of about one hour but eventually we boarded our metal bird.

12:00 a.m. – we took off and left Paris for Miami.

Ah, to travel by 'Jumbo' is a dream. There was a full servis and comfort, including a screen with both videos and actual flight information in every seat as well as a music. Shortly after takeoff they served scrumptious lunch, pasta with chicken, wine, coffee and muffins. And one hour before landing they served the second meal. For a different time zone again lunch ☺. Yum again.

In the meantime we filled out immigration forms I 94 and 6059 B, listened to music or watched TV about the last James Bond and those eight hours of flight were over almost in no time. We enjoy flying. It is still something magic, it is something like a magic ring from fairy tales. You give the magic ring a turn and you are on the other side of the world.

And our delay ? French boys did a great job and it was only about thirty minutes behind schedule.

02:40 p.m. – (our 08:40 p.m.) we landed safely on Miami



International Airport, entered airport coridor and head for an immigrational inspection, the last barrier among us and our friends. We were nervous, it is unpleasant thing everytime. Fortunately we were pleasantly surprised. A clerk was a very kind, smiling, young man





who welcomed us to the States. Yes, there were some formalities like taking our pictures by camera and scanning our forefingers, but we were already used to it and it was nothing. The clerk wished us a nice stay in the States „*Good bye and the happy stay in the States!*” and we were allowed to enter American ground ! We went to a



baggage claim for our baggages (*they arrived !*), took an airport cart and continue our way to our friends, who were waiting for us in an airport hall (*we hoped for it because we were without any news from them from Thursday when they left Omaha for Miami*). We found an exit from our

gate and „*Here you are !*” we could see Zuzanka and Dan just behind a glass wall ! Zuzanka was waving an Czech flag at us and Dan was taking pictures. A few more steps and : „*Zuzanka, Dan ... Hana, Mirek ! Hello friends ! Nice to meet you again ! It's like we saw you yesterday !*”. We all were happy and smiling. There was kissing and hugging. „*We are already together again ! What a dream ! And what a warm air all around, really tropical sensation ! Ah, friends we are with you again, that's amazing !*”. And so on, and so on ...

While talking we got to their new red Toyota RAV4, loaded our baggages and sat at rear seats. Our driver Dan skillfully waved his way out of an airport parking area and turn on a CD player with Jimmy Buffet songs and our vacation journey get started by a ride along the town of Miami. A traffic was really heavy but we don't mind it, this slow way of ride was fine for us two. It was a great sightseeing tour and we could



better relish and enjoy all that summer tropical atmosphere here down in the South. Only a few hours ago we left the very beginning of Spring in our country and all of sudden we could breathe that salty ocean hot air with deep blue sky above and palm trees all around ! What a dream ! And on top of that we were together and could talking to our friends. You know it, that first time together after a long time. Euphoria, smiles, jokes ... yes, we enjoyed a company of one another so much and took everything easy. We were vacationists ! There was a good mood and joy inside the red car that was led by experinced

driver through afternoon Miami rush hour for our next destination. And for us to know where, Susie gave us her perfect made itinerary of our common dream days off.

Yes, that heavy traffic caused a little problem to Susie and Dan, they wished to take us

to South Beach for a drink and then to the edge of the surf for dipping our feet in the Atlantic Ocean and also do sightseeing the Miami Beach Holocaust Museum. But for that delay we had to give up that program and continued our journey. But we don't care it, we were satisfied. It was enough for us to look out of car windows at a scenery. The blue ocean, a green foliage, blue sky. Really a fairy



tale for us who were coming from a colder area ...



We went along beaches and coastal canals down to the South. Afterward Dan took a way out of the town toward the Overseas Highway. After a while the road passed from wide six-lane freeway to the two-lane road. It was the Overseas Highway, that had only one lane for traffic in each direction. Basically it is a long concrete belt built on concrete pillars that connects all islands named Florida Keys. Some of them are big some ones are small. On the map it seems like a wonderful necklace with the most beautiful pearl of Key West on its end. The island of Key West is the southernmost point of the U.S.A.

Thus we zoomed down that dreamland with the Atlantic Ocean on our left hand and with the Gulf of Mexico on our right hand. It was almost like we were shipping. In the middle of deep blue nowhere. An incredible experience.

And then there was the first of islands, Key Largo and then the concret bridge strip again ... and other island, Islamorada, with a tropical foliage and laid-back feeling. „*There is laid-back time in the Keys.*” said Zuzanka.

Yes, we enjoyed that about 100 miles long ride our best. It was a marvelous sightseeing tour and our friends could only hear from us : „*Aaaah, ooooh. It is something out of a movie !*”. So exotic sightseeing ! The vast ocean field rotated with the tropical islands with wooden houses and high palm trees. It was amazing and headily leisure beggining of our vacation. Only us two and our great guides Susie and Dan. Only at that time we realized that our excellent driver was injured and we asked him about it : „*No problem, I’m fine.*” answered Dan and showed us fingertips of his left hand plastered with Band-Aids and he continued driving Toyota down Overseas Highway toward our first destination, the island of Long Key where we would stay in Lime Tree Bay Resort in Treehouse Suite.

(<http://www.limetreebayresort.com/ontest/treehouse%20suite.html>).

07:00 p.m – we reached Lime Tree Bay Resort and pulled in Treehouse Suite. It was a nice wooden house on pillars, surrounded by palm trees and situated about 200 feet



far from a seashore. It was so beautiful and so, so romantic !

Our friends made the great choice. An airy lodging with bedrooms, a living room with kitchen, a clean restroom. But what was the best, it was a cool porch around two walls, with a tree growing through the floor, chairs and table and a fantastic hammock. And wonderful prospect of the Gulf of Mexico. A fairy tale ! The fairy tale about the Tropics, about the Caribbean ...

Well. Us two got settled in (*our friends had lived there from Saturday already*) and changed clothes from Czech cold wearings into light Florida summer clothes. Meanwhile Susie made something to eat on the porch and me and Dan had our first common Coronas with limes. Then we tried the sky chair and relish views of a scenery. We all were on cloud nine ...



There was a lot of casual talking about everything, but mainly how we all could hardly wait for that our vacation and how high we would enjoy out our time together.

Among others, after my „*journalistic*’ questions, we gathered from Dan that he had got three siblings : „*Vera is the oldest, followed quickly by Arthur. I’m twenty two years younger than Vera. You know, my Mom basically had two families of children. Vera and Arthur then me and then three years later David. Me and Vera are by far the most stable of the four.*”

And we talked and talked and joyed in our reunion. It was the real laid back ! The ocean, the sun ... and that air ! The air full of salt and humidity, full of distant areas and full of promises of next experiences. And the first of those breathtaking



experiences came at that next moment ... our first sunset into waves of Gulf of Mexico. We were laying on beach chairs, sipping Coronas and relishing that special moment. The golden orange sun falling down into dark waters, a net of palm-tree leaves above our heads. Ah ! „Come and look !”.



Then there was some walking along the seashore and then we returned in our bungalow on pillars and went to the beds. Yes, we were tired. Anyway ... it was the long day with a lot of excitement. And next day we wanted to be fresh and full of energy for new experiences. What would it be ? Nice times in the Key West !

## Monday, April 23<sup>rd</sup> – Day 2<sup>nd</sup>

We slept like babies until 7:30 a.m., did our morning things and joined our friends who had already been up. Our girls fixed breakfast. Dan meantime went on the beach for some nice pictures.



The morning was beautiful with the full sun and the blue sky, about 86 F ... a fairytale in the Florida Keys. And on top of that ... we didn't feel any jetlag. Experienced travelers ...

When Dan returned back Susie and Hana set the table with cheese, boiled eggs, olives, bananas, kiwis, ham, croissants, juice and coffee on the porch and we all enjoyed our first breakfast together on that vacation. When we finished, we surprised our friends with gifts that we brought along from our country. A necklace made of gemstones and a book about Chotebor for Zuzanka, a Pilsner Urquell cap and knife for Dan and Pilsner Urquell pensils, a paper game about Czech castles and a small ceramic bell for both of them. They loved all of those gifts ! Donees of gifts and givers of donatory's pleasure ... the great experience. Then we went walking along a shore among palm trees, we swung in hammocks, fed sea gulls on a wooden pier and relished wonderful views of incredible sceneries. The beach with the palm trees and deep blue sky, together with colorful fishing houses and boats ... „Amazing !”

11:00 a.m. – we checked-out, said our good bye to Long Key, loaded up Toyota and „Let's go !”.

At first we did a short detour to the island of Islamorada to Robbie's for tarpons (<http://www.robbies.com/default.htm>).

Wow ! The tarpon is the really big fish. It can be 8 feet long and it can be 200 pounds in weight ! And it is a predator of course so Zuzanka bought a bucket of small fish and we threw it to the tarpons for our and their joy. But it wasn't so easy as you can think. There were a lot of sea gulls all over that flew at a high speed and they stole much fish from the tarpons. We had to kneeled on a wooden pier and threw the fish close to a surface, close to the tarpon's maw. Then there was a quick boiling of water and the small fish was over ... and other and other. There was also a curious audience. Two pelicans that hoped for some of our small fish too. But not from both of us ! We could read a sign above on a column „Do not feed the pelicans !”. But warm hearted Zuzanka did not notice it and gave both of them some fish ... and more. Only when she got our pantomime toward the sign, she made a guilty grimace and we burst out laughing what was an impuls for Dan fotographing the tarpons turn toward us. When we told him a point of that joke, he laughed at it





with us too ☺. Then we took a short stroll around ,traps for tourists' in shops. There were things made from coconuts, shells and other souvenirs in them and there I was admiring nice hats made palm tree leaves for the first time.

After a while we returned back to our car, jumped in, went back on the Overseas Highway and continued our way down the South.

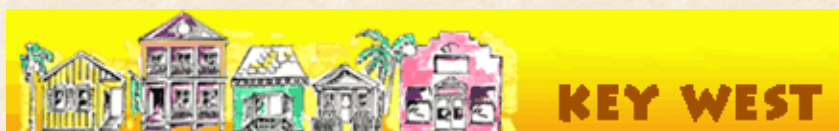
A merriment stayed in Toyota with us. Susie made jokes about the tarpons, asked Dan for something and then she pretended to be angry at him because he didn't listen to her. She complained about woman's fate, when men do not listen to their women and they have to repeat and repeat their opinions and views. And I played her teasing back and told her that it is the similar situation to that one when you had turned on a radio. It plays and plays but you almost do not perceive it. In at one ear and out at the other. Wow ! It was something for Dan. He erupted into laughter. „*You got it, Mirek ! Exactly ! You're right ! Susie is like a radio ! She is my radio !*” and during joking and laughing we took a break for a short walk along the nice Anne's Beach with marvelous sceneries.

(<http://floridakeystreasures.com/Beaches/annesbeach.shtml>)

We took off sandals and paddled in a shallow, limpid water and went along a seashore, lastly we went on the coast and continued along a raised wooden sidewalk among a tropical vegetation, above pools of salt water left there by a high tide. And Dan from time to time burst out laughing again : „*Like a radio ! Mirek, you got it !*”.

The sun beat down by power of Caribbean, by power of the afternoon ... and we breathed in that heady ocean air, relished that feeling of freedom and liberty. We all were happy.

Then we took the same way back, cleaned our feet from a sand, jumped in Toyota again and zoomed along that elevated concrete band in the middle of blue waters. The Atlantic Ocean on the left side and the Gulf of Mexico on the right side. We went over Seven Mile Bridge, throught a juicy greenery of the islands of Marathon, Big Pine Key and others all the way to our thatday's destination, the island of Key West what is the southernmost point of that Florida islands necklace as well as the States.



Dan slowly rode down streets of that town that was full of tourists and heavy traffic. Zuzanka

navigated and at length we came to an check-in office, then we drove in one side, quiet lane and parked the car in front of our temporary home, a wooden house with two storys and high palm tree nearby the entrance.

*,The Sailor House in Zero Whalton Lane in Key West, Florida '*

(<http://www.andrewsinn.com/sailor.html>).

Yes, we had that whole dreamy and shi shi house only for ourselves ! There were a big living room with a TV set, a dining room, both perfectly equipped with everything what you can imagine. There were comfortable rattan-upholstery seating group in the living room. Chairs and table in the dining room were the same. And then there was an outside porch with rattan chairs and table, with a grill place and with ... Holly cow ! ... jacuzzi !

On the second story were two bedrooms with balconies and also a bathroom. I forgot to mention a kitchen on the first story with all things that you can need in that room and maybe more. And of course ... there was a

wonderful tropical vegetation all around ! Juicy green palm trees of all kinds, unbelievably beautiful flowers of all colors. Hibiscuses, oleanders and others and others. We keep staying on cloud nine ...

After we settled in and after we familiarized ourselves with our dreamy house we set out to

explore beauties of Key West. At first we satisfied our stomachs in the Crabby Dicks'







restaurant (<http://www.crabbydickskeywest.com>), on its second floor, at a nice veranda with an interesting view of Duval Street. In a good mood we sat at the table, full of vacation atmosphere this laid back town. From a menu we chose genuine sea fish specialities, I think it was Buffalo Shrimps for me and Fried Shrimps for Hana. And Coronas and for us guys and Cuba Libre for our sweet honeys. It was a nice and casual lunch with a lot of smiling, friendly joking and talking. Laid-back time again.

After that pleasant lunch we left Crabby Dicks and went seeing the town, at first all those small, neat shops with everything what we, tourists, can need. And more, there we could see things that we never did know about them. In shops there were beach skirts, T-shirts, Bermudas, sun glasses, hammocks, swing chairs, sunshades, sandals, bath towels (*Zuzanka took advantage of the opportunity when they offered three towels for price of two, bought them and gave two of them to us for memory, as well as a beautiful beach shoulder bag for Hana with her monogram on it*). And there were also a lot of places that they sold nice hats of palm tree leaves. It was my choice! They got me ! But you don't think I bought the first that I saw. No, no. I did browsing in shops with others, chose T-shirts and so on but my eyes belonged to hats ... yes, of course, finally I bought one. It was in the fourth shop that we visited where they caught me. That one was simply perfect ! And jump ! The hat was on my head ! And there it stayed for almost all our vacation ...

Walking we returned to our cute house, had coffee, enjoyed beauty of the vegetation and wonderful weather.

About 6 p.m. we went out, took direction to the sea and strolled among old wooden residences, beautiful bushes with blooms of all colors, high palm trees to a seafront in Mallory Square for our first sunset in Key West. There were so many people in the seafront ! So we joined them and relished that special and calm early-evening atmosphere of that place. Susie went ahead to gain good sitting places for nice views of sunset scenery, us two kept slow walking with Dan taking pictures. And there were a lot of objects to photograph ! Luxurious hotels, yachts, palm trees, blooms ... multicolored palette. The sun was still burning, even if it was already on its way down to bath into waters of Gulf of Mexico. But it was nice because there was a pleasant fresh wind but time to time too much ... One bigger squall took Pilsner Urquell cap away from Dan's head and blew it about 100 feet far from him toward the ocean. Dan started running to the cap, me too. But the wind, that teaser, blew once again and carried the cap into the water. The Czech cap floated in the American harbor. It was not so far just about 60 feet from a quay but it was enough to be beyond our arms reach. There was a hope when a sailboat with a young couple slowly came to quay and they tried to catch the cap by a bargepole. Dan lay on the quay, I sat and keep the boat away from a wall by my legs ... but nothing worked. An ocean current were slowly carrying the cap under the seashore. In a moment the cap was over. Dan stood



there like sad sack. „*What a bad luck, Mirek. I'm so sad !*”. I tried to comfort him and told him that it will be good again (*it was easy for me when I knew ...*) but I was not much successful. We fast got to one of many outside sittings where Zuzanka occupied a sunshade with wicker chairs a Dan immediately told her that sad news. „*Oh, Dan, Dan !!!*” and she had a gentle reproof in her eyes. „*What a shame !*”.

Anyway ... our vacation, early evening atmosphere, pinacoladas, coronas and splashing waves did well their job and in a minute transformed that cheerless experience into funnier one when we were describing Susie our effort to rescue the cap. But it is true that Dan's eyes remained a bit sad.

In the meantime the sun came really close to the ocean surface, we paid for our drinks, stood up and went to the same cap of the seashore for better view of the sunset. Along our way we could see one of many street acrobats there who were



performing his jugglery with torches, knives and play with two dogs. He was really good at it so he deserved some bucks from us.

07:45 p.m. – we were fascinated by the sunset show. First a red-hot sun disk was slowly going down but in a second it changed into the really fast move and the next moment the sun made „SPLASH !” and was over. The evening started. Susie and Dan set direction and fourth of us were casually walking back to ‚Sailor House’ through evening tourist bustle in downtown. We passed by bars, dance halls and returned ‚home’.

And Coronas and wine and ... *„I have something for your pleasure !”,* I was handing another brand-new cap of Pilsner Urquell to Dan. *„Wow !!! Mirek, how do you do it ?? You must be a magician !!! Wow !!! Big thanks to you !”.* And he gave me a warm hug. Yes, yes I had a lucky idea to buy two caps back in the Czech Republic, not only one and brought both of them along. Really the lucky idea. Thus ... we spent a rest of the evening in peace of minds and smiles. We had a black and black sky with many silver stars above, balmy summer’s feeling all around...

We asked our friends whether there had ever been winter in Key West and how could we recognize it. Susie answered : *„Yes, they get cold times over here too and you can recognize it by that fact that residents have socks put on. ☺ ”.* Lucky people over there !

About 10 p.m. we climbed upstairs, said *„Sleep well !”* together, had a shower and went to sleep. We switched an air-conditioner on for a while but it was quite noisy so we rather turned it off and opened a door of our balcony. This way we could be one part of nocturnal atmosphere of that magic place on the Earth and in a moment we fell asleep into the sleep of the just.

## Tuesday, April 24<sup>th</sup> – Day 3<sup>rd</sup>

Even though there was *„We’ll get up at our leisure”* written in Susie’s itinerary for that day, we weren’t any morning lazy people and got up early and already at 7:30 a.m. we were walking down toward Mallory Square with a giant cruise ship by the quay and many hens and roosters ☺. And of course with a tropical greenery all around. It was like a fairy tale again. The sun, the blue sky, the marvelous white ship ... And much, much water of Gulf of Mexico with some islands in them. Unbelievable for us Middle Europeans. After a while we reached our morning destination that we headed for, the restaurant of *„Two Friends Patio”*.

(<http://www.twofriendskeywest.com>)

And coffee and eggs in all manner. It was *„Crab Benedict’* for me and *„One or Two Eggs Any Style’* for Hana.

During breakfast we were talking about our that day’s program. Susie and Dan prepared for us a sail by kayaks around a shallow ocean nearby Overseas Highway, in the north end of Key West.

Even before we left the restaurant, Susie’s cellphone rang. Dan’s sister Vera called Dan and told him a very sad message that her husband Jack died. Really the sad event. Well. Life has both ups and downs ...

On our way to the kayaks Dan told us that Vera and Jack Whitaker meant a lot for him.

*„As I said before, my sister’s name is Vera. Vera Laverne Whitaker. Jack and Vera are for me like my second parents. Especially Vera is like my Mom. When I was ‚teen’ I started having troubles. I got in a bad bunch. My mates were quite rogue and wild and we were making monkeyshine. And my parents were too old to tame me. So I was sent to live in Omaha to my sister and her family. They have two sons, Mike and Mark. Mike is slightly younger than me and Mark a little younger still. When I moved up here from Mississippi, when I was in*



No Greater Love  
than the Enduring,  
Tender Love...  
of One Drunken  
Friend for Another

**TWO FRIENDS  
BAR**  
KEY WEST



high school, I stayed with Jack and Vera and was in the same class in school as Mike. (I lost a year in school when I was hit by the car). I was really lucky to have possibility to stay with them, faraway from Pascagoula troubles. Now Vera lives in Mesa, Arizona. "

09:30 a.m.– a stop for a short walk around a beach, paddling and frolicking.

09:45 a.m. – our arrival to the place of a meeting with an kayaking guide. She came on a motor scooter, had some words with Susie, we jumped in Toyota and started chasing the nimble scooter down the streets of Key West to a bay of a shallow ocean where there was a headquarters of a tourist agency ,Blue Planet Kayak'. (<http://www.blue-planet-kayak.com/refugetour.html>).

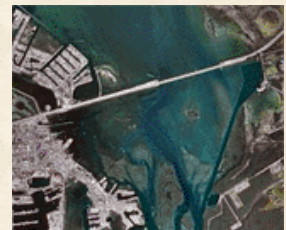


We bought ,Wildlife Refuge Tour' and shortly after 10 a.m. : „Let's go for it !", the four of us sat down into kayaks, me with Hana and Dan with Susie, and were paddling from a dock together with other about five kayaks and our guide under the deep blue sky, on the shallow, clearly blue water toward wonderful adventure.

First we took a direction around the first small mangrove island. Left-hand we could see slender pillars of the Overseas Highway, ahead of us a beautiful white catamaran and in the distance a stretch of the mangrove islands, our destination.

Our voyage was great and went without any troubles by a permanent English talking of our guide girl. Here she pointed at a small Lemon Shark, there she explained us about mangrove trees that are very important for a formation of the mangrove islands. They are able to live in a salt shallow water and catch a sand among their high roots and this way to form new islands. They are also home for a lot of birds and other creatures.

And in a half an hour we could see that natural phenomenon with our own eyes from near. We were there at time between high and low tide, which meant that a tangle of mangrove roots was semi-bare and we could marvel at its solidity. And above the roots there was an line network of trunks with a juicy greenery of leathern leaves, that all twisting together with other blooming plants and bushes. The luxuriant life ! „It's amazing, Zuzanka ! We love this cruise !", we were smiling at our friends.



And our guide continued her talks about those islands and an animal kingdom there. Here she fished out Sea Cucumber, there Shellfish, here Starfish and there she pointed at a shoal of Jellyfish close to the seabed.

For explanation ... if I talk about the shallow ocean, it means something between one foot to seven feet in depth and somewhere there are sandy tongues where ocean currents unload their sandy load in front of the mangrove islands.

And then we continued our cruise, around the green island and then through it about in the middle. We sailed in and squirmed our way through a labyrinth of canals in the shade of a canopy of the mangroves. We noticed a small snake slithering above our heads as well as a beautiful white heron sitting on top of the trees. We sailed through the island and pulled out on ,our' side under the beating down sun. We headed back toward a dockland, our two kayaks side by side : „Zuzanka and Dan, it was the great trip ! We thank you for that idea, our friends !".

We pull up a pier, our three hour wonderful sail ended. We thanked the girl and left ,Blue Planet Kayak'. We returned along a crab company with many wooden crab traps to our Toyota and went out. On the way back we stopped at a supermarket to replenish our supply and came back to our base. There we had a short break with coffee and beer and some munchies in the porch and take our time easy but it lasted just an hour and then : „Let's go !", we set out for sightseeing that lazy Caribbean town and headed toward the docks, for looking at boats of various size and for feeling of scent of the ocean and fish and for sitting in an old sailor bar with the unmistakeable laid-back atmosphere. We had friendly talks, there was also a phone



from Stacie and Dan's joking with Cassidy. Drinking Corona I remembered Susie's problems with FEMA. „FEMA ? No problem. Everything came out well. O.K.“ When we enjoyed our break enough we continued our exploring. Yes, we visited a shop with souvenirs of course ... Then we took a walk around Hemingway's house to the Zero Mile point and then to the southernmost point of Key West, of the States too, just about 90 miles far from Cuba. And another walking back to ,our' house, that time down the streets with mostly wooden houses in the colonial tradition with large gardens full of a luxuriant vegetations. And full of the greenery and colors. There were also many colorful cars and motorbikes in the streets and we also could see one for us strange, mighty tree. It was the Kapok tree with almost horizontal, thick arms. The real stunner among other trees for us ...

And our dinner ? For that evening Susie put a gas grill into operation and fixed a perfect barbecue for us. Steak Kebabs were her masterwork, delicious ! Yum, yum !!! And red wine and Coronas and joking and talking. We also looked through a program of Wednesday, the program a bit misterious for us since Susie had written in her itinerary for that day that :

*„6:30 a.m. – A quick cup of coffee and then we're off. Today we've rented an entire island and a boat to take us to that island of Dry Tortugas for both of your 50<sup>th</sup> birthdays. Mirek's past and Hana's future. Today, if anyone asks about your birthday we will tell them you are both celebrating 50<sup>th</sup> birthdays, Mirek's was yeasterday and Hana's is tomorrow. This day is our 50<sup>th</sup> birthday present to both of you.*

*There will be lots of other people on the boat and island, because what would a party be without people, but they've been instructed to act like they don't know us. It will be more private that way. So when you go home, you can say you had a party on an island and there were 150 people there. What popular people the two of you are !*



*We will have breakfast on the boat, fruit and pastries. There is also a bar where we can buy drinks on the way back and snacks if we choose.*

*On the island we'll take a tour of the fort. After the tour, we'll have lunch of sandwiches and salads.*

*After lunch, we can snorkel with the provided equipment (they will give instructions) or we can swim, sit on the beach or explore the island.*

*In the afternoon, the boat will bring us back. We'll arrive in Key West about 5:30 p.m. The rest of the evening is ours to do as we please.“*

Reading that we started looking forward to Wednesday. It sounded to be a wonderful trip by a boat to a Caribbean island ...

There was also an dramatic event during that evening. Susie's ,homesitter' Marcia phoned that there was a cloudburst in Omaha and the pump suddenly stopped working and she worried about downstairs to be flooded. Zuzanka didn't lose her head, put her the right questions and according to Marcia's answers she determined the cause. A circuit breaker ! And Zuzanka by phone gave instructions to Marcia and led her to a fuse box. Marcia put the circuit breaker up and a breakdown was repaired. What a pleasure ! We had another glass of wine to toast to that happy end. And I added a Czech folk song too ... And we had a good time again.

About 10 p.m. we went to bed. „We already look forward to morning !“.

## **Wednesday, April 25<sup>th</sup> – Day 4<sup>th</sup>**

We got up early, about 6 a.m., and finally we did not even manage coffee that Susie had written in her itinerary ☺. At 6:45 a.m. we left our base for the dock. But we didn't care about early getting up, the morning was amazing ! The sun was already well on its way up but the temperature was still down enough to feel that delicious Caribbean morning scent. Everything was great !



We zigzagged down the lanes to the still almost unpeopled harbor, Susie bought tickets for the boat, the jet catamaran ,The Yankee Freedom II' (<http://www.yankeefreedom.com>), in the office and we used our free time that left to our departure for a short tour of the dock, to enjoy that marvelous vacation atmosphere with boats, ships and yachts as well as with pelicans. Frankly speaking, Susie, Hana and me were relishing that special morning harbor feeling. Dan immediately disappeared somewhere to take pictures and still kept disappearing even when we were becoming nervous because of a quickly approaching time to board on the ship. Only a second before boarding Dan came back.



*„Dan, Dan ! It is Dan ... ! The passionate photographer who doesn't care about others! Irresponsible Dan ! It's time to go to get good places by window ... Dan, Dan ! You Dan, you! “*, Zuzanka complained.

Fortunately we managed to fall in a line of people that was organized by peculiar ,Sea Dog' Jack in time. At 7:30 we already occupied fourth seats with a table by ship window and we right away joined the line for breakfast. And we had muffins and butter

and apricot jam and milk and coffee ... yum !

**08:00 a.m.** - during our breakfast the boat maneuvered out of the harbor and headed along Mallory Square for the open space of the Gulf of Mexico, toward south-west. And even before we had our meal eaten, the captain stepped on the accelerator, the catamaran reared a bit and zoomed at about 35 miles per hour with us all about 150 passengers on the waves of the Gulf.

In a short time we left Key West behind and it was quickly disappearing close to the horizon. Our vessel with a good appetite nibbled away at a portion of 70 miles that was before us to our that day's destination, a small island with the huge building of Fort Jefferson, which island is the only one of other ones that constitute the National Park Dry Tortugas. So we speeded and jumped on the waves, seagulls were our companions for a while and in about half an hour there was nothing but only our boat and the wide open ocean. We left alone in the middle of the deep blue and under the golden south sun. It was a miracle !!!

We went outside of a cabin onto a front board, that was split into two foredecks, either with a long slim keel. I stood at the very front of that right one, holding fast a metallic rail and relished speed and force of the boat with the wind running through my hairs ... You say you have seen it in a movie ? Whatever ! I had my first hand experience of it, I was going through that !

To that I also was watching for dolphins, that were supposed to be frequent companions of fast going vessels, but unfortunately they were lazy that day. But even without them it was the marvelous cruise !

Frankly speaking, when I wrote ,*We went outside of a cabin'*, I was not quite right. From the fourth of us only us three, Zuzanka, Dan and me took heart to leave the shelter of cabin. That boat jumping over waves was not so good for my sweet Hana. So ... when Dan saw that I was drunk with jumping on the waves and with that feeling of freedom, he returned to his seat to make a fellow and guard to Hana. (*Thanks to you, Dan, again !*) Susie and me shouted the roar of wind and engines down and took pictures by cameras : *„Mirek, wasn't it wonderful ?! Yes, yes, it is like a fairytale ! It's something out of movie ! No ! It's better than the movie !“*. After some time even I had enough that experience and came back in the cabin to support my honey Hana in



her mild mal de mer. Not, she did not feel sick. She only did not enjoy the cruise as we did. What a shame, it was so great !

Sometimes we could see small sandy islands that poked only a few feet out of water, with a rear vegetation. Anyway ... we could mainly see nothing but the blue waters, the beating down sun and the deep blue sky. Only our vessel and us and a vast water space. Dan and Susie remained with Hana and I set out again exploring. I climbed on the upper board where I had a beautiful look from above at a white churning wake formed by screws of the two powerful engines.

After about an hour and a half a more and more visible dot started coming into view on the south-west horizon. It was bigger and bigger until the dot became an a small island and in a next while it became the island with a huge building of the Fort Jefferson. The captain sailed around the island so we were able to get an idea how large the fortress was and then he guided the boat to a berth.

*Shortly after 10 a.m.* we already were getting out of 'Yankee Cat' and went ashore. „Finally the firm land !”, Hana shouted with joy.



*,Located on one of those islands, Garden Key, is historic Fort Jefferson. Built in the mid-1800's, with over 16 million bricks, this is America's largest coastal fort. Originally constructed to protect the important Gulf of Mexico shipping lanes, Fort Jefferson was used as a military prison during the Civil War.*

*The Islands were first discovered by Spaniard Ponce De Leon in 1513. First named Las Tortugas (The Turtles) due to the abundance of sea turtles. The word 'Dry' was soon added to mariners' charts to warn of the lack of fresh water. Since the days of Spanish exploration, the reefs and shoals of the Dry Tortugas have been a serious hazard to navigation and the site of hundreds of shipwrecks. U.S. military attention was drawn to the keys in the early 1800's due to their strategic location in the Florida Straits. The first construction on Garden Key, in 1825, was a lighthouse to warn sailors of rocky shoals. Construction of Fort Jefferson began in 1846 but the fort was never completed. The United States knew it could control navigation to the Gulf of Mexico and protect Atlantic bound Mississippi River trade by fortifying the Tortugas. Construction continued for over 30 years but the Fort, which covers 11 of the key's 16 acres, was never finished. During the Civil War the fort was a military prison for captured deserters. It also held the 4 men convicted of complicity in President Abraham Lincoln's assassination in 1865, the most famous being Dr. Samuel Mudd. The Fort was plagued with construction problems and Yellow Fever epidemics. The invention of the rifled cannon made the Fort obsolete, as it's thick walls could now be penetrated. The Army finally abandoned Fort Jefferson in 1874. In 1908 the area became a wildlife refuge to protect nesting birds from egg collectors. In 1935 Fort Jefferson was proclaimed as a National Monument but it was not until 1992 that Dry Tortugas reached it's current status as a National Park to protect both the historical and natural features.*, we could read on a board with information.

Then we took a tour of the fort. We went along inner, from bricks vaulted corridors with embrasures for heavy cast iron cannons. We also could see down into huge, built of bricks water tanks for drinking water. Actually they never served their purpose because they did not manage to be leakproof to a salt water. And we continued our tour along big arched open windows from which we could see the open wide space as well as unbelievably thick walls supported with iron beams. Somewhere they were weakened from hits by cannon balls. In those places there were deep and big bowl like holes and we realized that we stood on only thin, not very stable floor. „Zuzanka, look down !” ☺



On the opposite side, across the corridor, we could see an immense courtyard, that time with a poor tropical vegetation even with palm trees and cacti. It was a really strange look at that large number of red bricks, at the tropical greenery and the deep blue sky. We almost could not believe that and it seemed to us almost like a dream as well as that whole trip beyond bounds of our imagination. We had never been so far to the South before ...

We climbed up a stairway in the one corner on the very top of the fort, where there was a wide sidewalk that ran around the whole its pentagonal perimeter, and we relished views of *'The Yankee Cat'*, two yellow hydroplanes, a small island with thousands of birds and of beautiful white beaches all around the island with palm trees and bushes. And we have again the wind running through our hairs and that feeling of freedom and happiness. *"That's amazing !"*. Yes, for that time even Hana enjoyed that feeling ...

Then we used another staircase descend down, said farewell to the old fort and came back to the boat for lunch. It means sandwiches, melons, strawberry, ice cream and Cola, had a not long rest and headed for the most beautiful beach. *"Wow ! Finally swimming !"*, Hana and me were enthusiastic and shortly after coming to the beach



we dipped our bodies into shallow, sky-blue water. We frolicked and splashed like children and Susie looked at us from her bath towel in the shore like a mom. She remained on the sea bank with her favorite activity, reading book. Dan jumped into the water with us but he was limited by his injured fingers and he had to be careful. But Hana and me took advantage of the opportunity! I put my swim glasses on and without any snorkel just with my lungs I was diving and relishing the undersea colorful world with huge shoals of incredibly colored fish. They were yellow-black, zebra like, another were neon like with carmine dots and other and other varieties of colors. It was so spectacular ! And I was diving and diving deep and deep until to nine feet. Hana also tried it but only in not so deep water as well as Dan with his hand wrapped into a polyethylene bag.

Ah, those two hours that we had for our water whoopee was over almost in no time ... We took the last look around and then back on the board of *'The Yankee Cat'*.

**Shortly after 3 p.m.** we headed back to Key West.

For that time we stationed ourselves in seats in one of the front rows with a nice view, but also with big ascents and descents, because our fast going boat was jumping over more than six feet high waves. Nothing for Hana ! So Dan went to the middle of the cabin to ask two fellows for exchanging seats because there was a relatively calm area in the middle of the vessel. But they refused that, they were satisfied with their seats however they offered to Dan that Hana and I could go to them and have free seats by them. So we left our friends and set out toward our new fellows. But that movement, it was something ! I moved holding on with my left hand to an overhead rail, with my right hand holding Hana and we both tried to do not fall down during crazy boat's jumps. Yes, we were an interesting performance for other passengers. ☺ However we managed it to the new seats safe and sound, said hello to our new companions and settled in to continue our voyage. And it was the true, there was really not so much swings there and Hana was all right in a short time.

Then the initial polite conversation between us two and both of the oldish Americans followed. They told us they had been old friends, schoolmates and Key West residents: *"We graduated 50 years ago !"* and Hana : *"And I'm fifty this year ! ... No, we don't believe, you can not be fifty, you look fifteen like !"* They were good jokers. We learned that the one had the Bavarian-Native Americans ancestral origin and the other the Dutch-Irish-Welsh ancestral origin. The jolly good fellows in their seventies... Then *'Sea Dog'* Jack, that great guy of a crew that took care of an entertainment on the ship and told jokes through a vessel radio, appeared in the cabin and hand around questionnaires to all people on a board to fill it out. There were question that description : *"How do you like the cruise ? How have you learned about that ? Where*



are you from ?" and so on and so on. We completed them and I wrote into my one, that it was the excellent trip, that I enjoyed everything including the voyage, sightseeing, food and swimming my best and I had never been on a trip like that before. Afterward we gave them back to Jack and got it out of our heads. But here you are ! In a while I could hear my name from speakers !!! „*Miroslav Stehno from the Czech Republic !*" I uncomprehendingly turned my head to Zuzanka and Dan. They smiled and waved at me to come. „*Mirek, you won the first prize ! You can go to Fort Jefferson with this company once again !*".

Thus I headed upstairs to a captain bridge. I went among other passengers who were smiling at me and applauding me like a movie star ! And I played my play well, smiling and waving at them back. In the captain cabin I enthusiastically thanked to Jack and took from him the prize, the voucher of the same trip by „*The Yankee Cat*” for two persons that we could take until April 25<sup>th</sup> 2008. Then I came back with applause and ovation again.

Susie was right in her itinerary, we really were very popular people on the boat ! I had even a dim suspicion that she and Dan could be the stage directors of that first-prize show. ☺

Yes, of course there was another explanation for my good fortune ... „*Sea Dog*” Jack knew how far was our homeland and that there is a low probability we could take advantage of the voucher. ☺

However the voucher was a very nice souvenir and Susie and Dan were in ecstasy about it too ... so maybe I was wrong on their managing that play ...

The back journey thanks to that event was over in a short time and **shortly after 4 p.m.** our vessel passed by Mallory Square and **before half past 5 p.m.** we were waving to the boat from the pier. „*Farewell Dry Tortugas, farewell „The Yankee Cat” !*".

We warmly and warmly thanked our friends for that fantastic and exotic gift. It was so, so, so special to us. „*Thanks once again, our dear buddies !*".

From the dock we took our way home along shop streets. After getting back we had an siesta and coffee in our porch.

And there was another experience in the porch. Dan and me uncovered a hot tub, Dan set it up and at about **half past 6 p.m.** us two men were lounging in Jacuzzi, inside bubbles that were massaging our purring bodies. Wouldn't be a great look at us, girls, would be ? ☺ The two satisfied boys with Coronas in their hands ! „*Hurray to our vacation ! That's great !*". And we also were a bit philosophizing about the world, why some people were so mean, why they needed to fight and so on and we agreed that it was always only a small group of people who wanted that. We normal people would like to live in peace and to make friends with others. And we agreed on a basic rule : „*Do not do to others as you would not have done to you*".

Meanwhile our girls fixed dinner and it was delicious again ! Croquettes of crab, Susie's baked-in small sandwiches, salad, olives and white wine. Yum, yum !!! And of course there was a lot of friendly talking and joking. And Hana and me surprised our friends with another gift : „*Zuzanka can you remember the roosters on the roofs during our common 2006 Czech Republic vacation ? And then your Christmas gift to us ? That shaking rooster ? So ... here you are ! We brought this wooden rooster along to both of you to guard your house against the fire !*" and we gave them a small, from wood carved rooster on wheels. Wow ! There was so much pleasure and joy ! And smiles !



And then ! Our girls in Jacuzzi !!! Of course they also enjoyed it immensely as Dan and me did ...

Well. It was really the great, successful day with ten stars ! We all were sorry that that fantastic day was quickly running to its end and that next day we would have to leave that unforgettable Caribbean heaven. But what can be done, another nice destinations were waiting for us, so there was not any reason to cry. Just to look



ahead and look forward to another days and to another places. Talking that we chased away our mild sorrow, went upstairs to our rooms and did preparations for our next day departure.

Then us two took showers, **about half past 9 p.m.** we went to bed and before long we were asleep dreaming of the day's adventures and the vacation ahead.

## Thursday, April 26<sup>th</sup> – Day 5<sup>th</sup>

**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 childern 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.

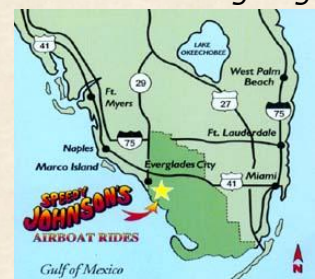
(<http://www.florida-everglades.com/speedy/homed.htm>).

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. Yeeeeees ! 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 !”.

## Friday, April 27<sup>th</sup> – Day 6<sup>th</sup>

06:45 a.m. – „Rise and shine ! Today is the long drive before us !”.

07:00 a.m. – „Good morning, friends !”, Zuzanka welcomed us sleepers and served us coffee and muffins in a balcony overlooking palm trees in a hotel. Dan and I talked about parents, about that fact to have the parents is normal thing for us all when they live, we take it something like air or sun and we do not realize that the time they are







time I would be driving SUV and with an automatic drive ! Yes, I was nervous a bit. I sat behind the wheel and Dan gave me instructions about the four-speed automatic. There was no clutch pedal, only brake and accelerator pedals. And no gearshift. Only a mode shift for a few ahead modes and one reverse mode. It should be easy, I thought. I turned the ignition on and ... nothing ! Zuzanka, my co-driver, advised me but it did not work ... Dan and me again took turns at the wheel, Dan turned the ignition on ... and an engine kicked over ! We took turns back, I turned ignition on and nothing happened again ! I felt like a regular fool ... ☺

„Mirek, do you step on the brake during starting up ?”, Dan asked me a question from a rear seat. Wow ! The right question ! I forgot to step on the brake and it blocked the starting action. Then it was already a child's play. I started up, backed up a bit, then slowly drove along a slip lane and then I stepped on the gas. Toyota gathered fresh way and joined other cars.

„Speed limit 70 miles’ a traffic sign showed me and I respected it as well as most of other drivers. The car worked great and I enjoyed my driving pleasure. Dan was napping on the back seat by Hana, who watched my driving. Susie went through pictures in her notebook. I was a captain ...

Those two hours when I was driving passed so quickly ... and those about 100 passed miles topped our first half of that day's travel. I pulled the car in a resting place, we had a fast restrooms, Dan sat back behind the wheel and we went on. By Lake City he changed direction toward north, along the 10 Interstate and then the 90 Highway.

Well. I forgot to write, that there was not any GPS in the car, so Zuzanka, our navigator read our route from a before all the key intersections she on a small paper square that she Good idea. Dan had all necessary



paper itinerary (,AAA' company) and put down all important information glued to a dashboard before Dan.

data before his eyes and he could

ride without any distraction. And we could drive and drive ...

03:30 p.m. – a short break for early dinner in Madison in ,Denny's'.



(<http://www.dennys.com/en/>).

The meal was delicious ! Hana had ,Super Bird Sandwich', which meant thin slices of turkey, melted cheese and slices of bacon, I had ,Nachos de Denny's', which meant crispy tortillas and ,chilli con carne' (mixture of beef, beans, pepper, cheese, bell pepper, onion, salsa and sour cream). It was the miraculous food ! And the portion was so huge. My heart was bleeding because I could not manage to clear the plate ... what a shame ! So we can recommend that restaurant chain indeed. And again on the road.



05:45 p.m. – we entered a suburb of Panama City Beach. Dan led according to Susie's commands Toyota along a seashore, along a line of modern hotel complexes and at

06:30 p.m. – we stopped in front of an entrance to one of them, **Moonspinner** ,Moonspinner Condominiums' (<http://www.moonspinner.com/>).

An older, pleasant man in an uniform came out of a gatehouse and led us to a reception. Zuzanka went in, ordered everything necessary, then we parked in a parking place, came to elevators in the outside one of three eight-storeyed buildings and drove up with all our baggage on hotel carts onto six floor.

And again, it was something like in Naples. We settled in a wonderful three-bedroom, three-bathroom condominium overlooking an amazing beach in the shore of the Gulf. Fairytale !

There was only one blemish – both doors to balconies were blocked and we could not them open ...

Because we wanted to manage another our sunset we drove down, went to the beach and were dipping our feet in a surf and enjoying the sunset as well as the early evening in Panama City Beach. Beauty ! Amazing ! It was another experience from that beyond imagination category. The warm sea wind and the sun, slowly hiding its orange ball into the Gulf ...



Then we took a short drive to a shop to replenish our supplies – food, bottled water, wine. Coming to the apartment Susie had a stop at the reception and complained them about the blocked up doors. She got to know, that at that time the whole hotel complex is under reconstruction because of the main season period was over (!) and that there is a slight oversight and they would rectify it in the morning.

Well. We should see and we hoped for it.

After our return into the apartment we ended up unpacking our baggage, had a short talk about next day and went to bed. Tomorrow the white beaches of Panama City Beach would be expecting us !

## Saturday, April 28<sup>th</sup> – Day 7<sup>th</sup>

07:30 a.m. – we took our time getting up into a beautiful Panama City Beach morning. Through a glass in a balcony door we could see the fabulous jade green ocean and the deep blue sky without even one cloud.



08:20 a.m. – even before breakfast Susie went to the reception to ask them about a solution of those blocked balcony doors and they assured her that it would be all right before we came back from our morning meal.

So we set off for breakfast to „Capt. Jack’s Family Buffet’ (<http://www.captjackspcb.com>). It was the self-service restaurant, you paid an amount of money and then you could load what you wanted. So we had scrambled eggs, bacon, muffins, juice, mango. It was great. And your cup of coffee was still full because one waitress took care of it.

Appropos the waitress ... she looked like to be old and she had such a strange, parched like and brown skin on her face and body but Susie told us that she was probably younger than we thought, her look came from that Florida beating down sun that is very inconsiderate especially to women.

We also had a stop at a shop with electronics to buy a card reader and an one-giga card for my camera because I was not able to put my databank into operation. It was a bit problem as it turned out later ...

09:40 a.m. – our return to our condominium, the balcony doors still did not work. It was too much for Zuzanka and it made her angry. She had promised us sipping wine, hanging out in the balcony and overlooking sunsets ... and it should not come true ?? NO !!! She with Dan left our apartment determined do not come back without any solution. We did not learn what happened in the reception but when they returned after half an hour, they



had a key of a new condominium. In the same floor but in next door building. So we again load our baggage on the hotel carts, descended by the elevator, came to the middle house, drove up and move to another condominium. After we entered our new apartment, Susie immediately came to the balcony doors ... whoopee !!! ... both doors were working ! The four of us piled into the balcony and were relishing that wonderfull look at an unbelievable scenery of beaches, water and sky ... the Gulf of Mexico in full rig.

And we also were enjoying the fantastic luxury of a huge living room, with bedrooms along both its sides. And those bedrooms overlooked the beach and ocean through French windows ...

Third bedroom was nearby the entrance, opposite to a kitchen and a technical background. There was everything in that apartment what you need for everyday vacation life and more. And of course every bedroom had its own bathroom and toilet. Shortly speaking our friends really spoiled us ... ☺

10:30 a.m. – our meeting trip to the near beach with almost unreal white sand that was glittering from the beforenoon sun. And Susie told us : „Panama City Beach’s legendary pure white sand resulted from quarz crystals washing down from the



*Appalachian Mountains centuries ago and being bleached, ground, smoothed and polished until the surf of the Gulf of Mexico deposited the millions of grains of sand on the shoreline. Development on Panama City Beach didn't start until the 1920's, and the official opening of the beach was in 1936. Panama City Beach has more than 27 miles of sugary white sand. The average water temperature is 70 degrees and the average temperature of the air is 74 degrees."*

We climbed up onto a high wooden pier, feasted our eyes on a view of the ocean and the beaches with tall outline of hotels and observed a fisherman who fished out a small shark ... yes, exotica and a casual relaxation.

Then we drove to a smallish bird and alligator sanctuary. We got to see a high number of birds of many species but the gators were hidden somewhere in the reed. Afterward we took jump in the car again for moving to a wide open bay, lined in our side with high trees and in the opposite, far away side with hotels. But what was the most interesting attraction there, it was the opportunity to see a big flock of pelicans. Twenty, thirty ... They were nice and they seemed to be tamed and without any fear of people. We watched their plays for a while, we also could see big and nice motorboats of fishermen that were sailing in for fastening to docks even for loading on trailers and moving for another areas ...

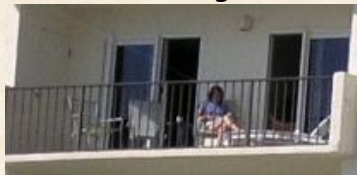
After about half an hour we came back to the town, we lost some time looking for the post office and the inquiry office, so we got back to the condominium only at **half past 2 p.m.** Us two quickly packed our beach stuff, Zuzanka lent us her sunshade and ...

**03:00 p.m.** ... „Let's go for swimming !". Next moment we already were lying on our new beautiful beach bath towels on the sugary white, fine grained sand. It was so fine grained that it was quite squeaking under our feet. And jump in the ocean ! Into waves ! What more could we wish ? A pleasantly cooling water, the beating down sun, a warmly moist salty air ... it was like heaven ...



By the way, before we entered the beach we again read information on dangerous rip currents of the Gulf. Yes, we were wary swimmers indeed ☺.

So we were swimming and playing in the waves and also were sunbathing and again into water ... again and again like children.



We love the Ocean, we love laid back time in the South ... Dan came to us to take pictures and we all waved back at Zuzanka who remained on the hotel balcony to enjoy her lazy time with reading, sipping wine and overlooking that wonderfull sceneries. Then Dan returned

to Susie and they both, Zuzanka with a glass of wine and Dan with Corona waved to us down on the beach from the height of six floor. It was similar to that case when parents are waving to children ☺.



Yes, we all were relishing that beautiful afternoon our way ...

**05:15 p.m.** – dinner in the ‚Boatyard‘ restaurant (<http://www.boatyardclub.com>), in a covered but to a harbor open hall with tall chairs. It was a nice place but dinner was even better ☺. ‚Penne Pasta‘ for Hana, ‚Buffalo Shrimps and French Fries‘ for me. And Coronas for drink.

After dinner we wander around the restaurant for a moment and then we headed again for our luxurious staying to catch the sunset on the balcony with glass of wine in our hands. We sat in chairs and watched the going down sun, sipping wine and talking. We remembered our stories from a childhood and some our roguish tricks. I began : „When I was about nine years, I got a stupid idea ... My father had prepared a roll of a tar paper to cover a roof of a garage that he was building at that time. The roll stood in a basement. Those days I had been playing with my new knife to learn throwing it onto a target, it means onto a wooden board. When I saw the roll, I got that idea to throw my knife onto the roll because it was so soft and so good for digging in it. So I did it ... maybe ten times ! So you can imagine how it looked like ...



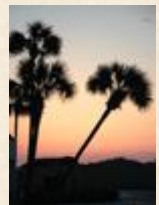
Then I left it for another play outside in our yard and I forgot about it. But when I heard father's loud curses I immediately knew what happened. My Dad ran out of the basement and ran at me. I also started running like a rabbit around our house. Fortunately I was a better runner and I was still at the same distance. When Dad stopped running for his rest and stayed round the house corner, I rushed into the cellar and I hid myself behind bags of potatoes in a dark and narrow small room under stairs. My father tried to find me some time but then he gave it up. I stayed in my hiding place more than three hours and I left my shelter only when I heard my mother to assure me that Dad calmed down and I could go home. You know, my father was a nice and kind man and he liked me but we didn't have any money to waste so he flared up when he saw my monkey business ... However I learned the hard way and I didn't do anything like that no more. And that story became gradually very popular in our family ☺".

And Zuzanka continued our narration telling her event of dishes :

„When I was about ten years old, I thought I had the greatest invention. It seemed so great that I couldn't believe someone hadn't thought of it before. Because there were seven of us at the dinner table each night, there were always at least seven glasses to wash after dinner. One night, I washed and rinsed the glasses and set them along the edge of the counter. Then I took seven towels out of the drawer. I'm sure they'd been freshly washed and put away ... but that couldn't get in the way of my great invention. Into the top of each glass, I put a towel and pushed it all the way down into the glass so there was only a piece of towel sticking out. Then I proceeded to turn the towels in each glass down the line. I'm sure I thought it was going to be some really great time-saving invention, but it all went up in smoke when my mother walked into the room. As soon as I saw her face and heard her say, 'What in the world are you doing!!!!', my great invention no longer looked like a great invention, it looked just as my mother saw it, a row of wet glasses with her freshly washed towels sticking out of the top. To this day, I don't remember why I thought it was such a great idea."

Then I reminded Susie a dry humor of her father, what she had mentioned during one of our casual talking during their visit in the Czech Republic in 2004. It was that Dad used to give them rail screws and nuts wrapped into glittering paper as Christmas gifts ... Zuzanka was surprised we had remembered that and she added another example of jokes of the old man. The title role in this play belonged to an old metal lamp that was given by him to all children, one by one, to birthdays. It was fun but only for father and others not for the birthday boy or girl ... „Yes, it's our Dad. A big joker and teaser!"

And Dan kept his talking about his 'teens' : „As I said before, I was born when my Mom was about forty, so at my teens I was too wild for my parents to control me. I was a bad boy, Mirek, really the bad boy. And my buddies were wild too. There were alcohol, car stealing, changing girls. New Orleans was so close and everything was so easy. Once during the night my friend woke me up knocking on the window : 'Do you want to give a lift in my car ?'. I knew, he hadn't had any of his own car. But it was so exciting ... The day after a town sheriff came to my father at his work and told him if I would stay in Pascagoula and if I would keep meeting my tomboyish friends I would be arrested very soon. So my sister Vera saved me to take me to Omaha."



09:40 p.m. – „Good night, friends, sleep well !".

## **Sunday, April 29<sup>th</sup> – Day 8<sup>th</sup>**

07:30 a.m. – we jumped out of the bed and still sleepy we hurried to the balcony. Wow ! What a spectacular view of a white stretch of the seashore, lit up by a low morning sun we got ! Wonderful ! And already 83 F !



Susie was already up and in full work in the kitchenette : „Good morning, friends ! Time to have breakfast ! Come here and help yourselves !”,

So we took our seats at the table, richly set with boiled eggs, yogurts, cheeses, baked goods and coffee and started eating. But without Zuzanka. She with words : : „Ah, Dan, Dan where are you again ?!” left us alone and went out to search for Dan, who had still been on his morning roam.

After while we tried to have a look down at the seashore and ... here we are ... we could see both of them ! They were coming from the beach to the hotel. Susie was ahead, still turning to Dan to talk something. She was visibly excited, using upward gesticulation to our balcony, then again to Dan, she flailed her hands, continued her way, then again turned to Dan and she probably repeated her reproach. And Dan without any word, lowered his head, went behind Susie ...

Because of a big distance and because of sounds of waves we were not able to understand anything of their conversation. But we did not care, we were able to get the sense from their body language. A pantomime on the beach ! We had a good time ☺. After few minutes they appeared in the door, Susie still a bit angry and Dan with apologetic words : „I’m so sorry, friends. But you know me, I’m a passionate photographer ...”. And we answered that nothing happened, we had still had our coffee and everything was okay. But Susie was quite more strict to Dan and she again reprehended him, that he was irresponsible like a little child and he did not think about others, who had to be waiting for him. So me and Hana, to ease the atmosphere, told them about our watching them from the balcony, what a perfect pantomimic scene it was and I played it back to them. And we were succesful, Zuzanka started smiling and Dan burst into laughter : „Ah, Mirek you got it again ! You’re a perfect pantomimist !”.

So everything was all right again and in a good mood. And what can be better start to the new day than a casual time with friends in so neat apartment and with sounds of the ocean going in through the open balcony door ? I do not know better thing !

09:00 a.m. – jump in Toyota again ! We set out for a trip to the Falling Waters State Park. (<http://www.floridastateparks.org/fallingwaters/default.cfm>)

After about an hour long drive along ,77 Hwy’ , what represented about 110 miles, we reached the state park. It was a pleasant wooded area. We took a short track to the biggest waterfall with the deepest chasm



there. Yes, it was a nice change to walk under all those tall trees that provided such a welcome shade and fresh forest air. On our way to the waterfall Hana and me had noticed an ash under the trees. Dan answered that it was man-made. Rangers regularly make controlled fires to burn all low vegetation, that is the often cause of fires in that dry region, as a prevention of the big and wild fires.



We casually walked down the trail along smaller even bigger depressions of the ground, what was a consequence of a carst phenomenon there. And we continued walking to the biggest depression, Falling Waters Sink. But when we came to the waterfall,

there was nothing to see. The long running dry weather did the trick and the water was almost over. We could see not falling water but only weeping rocks ☺. But we did not mind it. The scenery was nice and interesting and we did enjoy our longer walking after all lazy time we had spent over the last few days.

After our return to the parking place we could read some information about the park on a board :



*„Falling Waters State Park continues to be a destination point for nature lovers from around the United States. If you are in search of a place to relax and enjoy the great outdoors, this is the place for you. Come stroll along one of the parks scenic trails, reminisce with friends as you camp in one of Florida's highest elevated campgrounds, or plan a quiet picnic*



*lunch under one of our covered pavilions. The staff and volunteers at Falling Waters strive to make your visit a pleasant one.*

*The waterfall is fed by a series of seepage springs which are highly seasonal rain dependent. Under drought conditions, there will likely be little to no water over the falls. However, the geological features of this park are still quite spectacular.*

*Huge trees and fern-covered sinkholes line Sink Hole Trail, the boardwalk that leads visitors to Florida's highest waterfall. Falling Waters Sink is a 100-foot deep, 20-foot wide cylindrical pit into which flows a small stream that drops 73 feet to the bottom of the sink. The water's final destination remains unknown. Only a few miles south of I-10, the park provides travelers with a quiet, serene stop on their journey. Visitors can see beautiful native and migrating butterflies in the butterfly garden, take a dip in the lake, or have a family picnic. Hikers can experience the verdant, gently sloping landscape of North Florida.'*

Afterward Zuzanka consulted her itinerary and a map and set direction to the Torreya State Park, another natural place of interest of the State of Florida. And again we took about one hour ride down the narrow roads through a Florida back country, with both poorer looking and evidently richer farms. First the road was lined with only sporadic trees but how we went far and far, they were replaced by the regular forest and we entered the state park.



From information on the table we learned, that the park is actually a huge recreation area that is intended mainly for hikers with many tracks and trails and overlooks. And to reach such an overlook represents about one hour walking. Nothing for us. So we had some looks around and hit our road again, back to PCB.

Just for your interest some information on the park :

*,High bluffs overlooking the Apalachicola River make Torreya State Park a one of Florida's most scenic places. The park is named for an extremely rare species of Torreya tree that only grows on the bluffs along the Apalachicola River. Developed by the Civilian Conservation Corps in the 1930s, Torreya is popular for camping, hiking, and picnicking. Bird-watching is also a popular activity. Over 100 species of birds have been spotted in the park. Forests of hardwood trees provide the finest display of fall color found in Florida. The main campground offers full-facility campsites and a YURT (Year-round Universal Recreational Tent).'*

02:00 a.m. – back in Panama City Beach, in the ,Scampy's Seafood & Steaks' restaurant for lunch. It was the stylish seafish tavern, pretty crowded and full of a buzz. And what would it be being in the fish restaurant without having any seafish food ? So I had ,*Stuffed Crab with onions rings and green potatoes'* and Hana ,*Grope Fish'*, what was grilled sea fish with broccoli and beans. Again new tastes and yumming. The ones who broke the rule were Susie with her beloved steak and Dan with a veggie meal ☺.



And without any long sitting around, back to our condominium.

There was a funny event during our return to the hotel. When we were driving through the gatehouse, that nice man in the uniform came out of the gatehouse with a beautiful yellow parrot sitting on his shoulder ! We were amazed and fascinated by that bird so the man handed him to Dan into the car and Dan gave it to Hana ! The yellow parrot was so sweet but afterwhile he seemed a bit confused by our Czech speech and became nervous so we gave him back to the porter. He gave us salute and we ended our ride ,home'.



And then every our couple did separately according to our hobbies.

Susie and Dan went out shopping and we ... ??? Yes, of course, to the beach for swimming in waters of the Gulf and lazy time there. Whoopee !!! Jump into waves, let the ocean swing us up and down in its strong armful and than again on the beach to lie down on the snowy white warm sand and to fall into daydreaming ... to listen to a symphony of rolling waves and sounds of wind. And all that we could relished in very private atmosphere, because of pretty small amount of people on the beach ... the



peak season was over ... it was perfect ! All those natural miracles were just for the both of us ... the fantastic feeling.

On the beach we spent about two hours until 05.30 p.m. then we slowly returned to the hotel.

06:30 p.m. – dinner in the living room. Eggs, tomatoes, ananas and Susie's yummy salad with beans. Coronas and Pilsner Urquells. Dan's watching TV (*Open Range movie*).

And then our last sitting on the balcony, sipping wine and friendly talking during watching our last sunset into the Gulf. For that once there was Hana's turn talking story from her childhood : *„When I was a small girl, about ten, my grandmother came to us every day to do morning supervising me and my younger sister Zdena because our parents were already gone for their jobs. One day, before my grandmother coming, I got, what I thought at that time, a great invention. I stood just inside the door and when my grandma opened the door and entered I jumped out and shouted : ‚Boo !‘. I thought that my grandma would be shocked and that it would be a great fun. But what a surprise ! She did not take any fright of it. Instead of it she gave me a solid slap in my face. Slap ! Wow ! It was no fun at all ! I got hot and cold all over ! Well. It is my child story. And it is true that it was a hard lesson for me and I never did it again ☺“.*

08:00 p.m. – we left that spectacular overlook and went to our rooms to pack our stuff for a next day departure.

09:30 p.m. – *„Good night, friends ! Enjoy your last night in the Beach !“*

## Monday, April 30<sup>th</sup> – Day 9<sup>th</sup>

04:30 a.m. – there was a gentle knock knock on our door. We woke up and we could see Zuzanka in the doorway. We took small fright, there was the memory of London hotel night alarm in our minds, but she calmed us immediately and her words made us almost to waking way : *„Don't be afraid, friends. I just have an interesting show for you. There is a wonderful moonset outside, so I would like to share it with you ...“.* We went out in a balcony and yes, Zuzanka was right ! It was wonderful ! We could see a beautiful silver moon going its way down to the skyline. It was something fairytale, magic ... amazing.

Well. Now we could leave Florida and its Caribbean atmosphere. We had tasted and seen so much. Almost everything. Almost ... but there had still been left so much for some time in the future ... we could dream about it when we returned to our bed.

07:30 a.m. – getting up, breakfast in the living room, packing.

08:30 a.m. – our last walk around the beach, along the shoreline. It was another sunny blue sky morning, about 80 F. Barefoot we were paddling in waves and said our farewell to the Gulf of Mexico. My S+D+H+M inscription into the white sand ... Our mild nostalgia was blown away by Dan's looking for sandals. Who in the world could



put them under a beach stairway ?☺?

The last drive up by the elevator, the last overlook from the balcony ... then we took our way down with all our stuff and loaded it into a trunk of our red car.

*„Hello Toyota, you good guy, we are here again for another ride !“*

09:00 a.m. – we went out of the ‚Moonspinner‘ hotel complex and took our direction toward New Orleans.



For a second we had companions, nine pelicans flying along our car. It seemed that Panama City Beach was waving us its goodbye by their wings ...

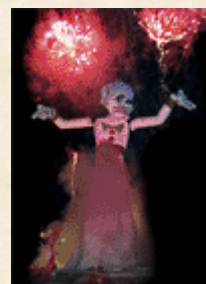
On the road again ... our RAV continued *'swallowing'* concrete miles on our way to the northwest that followed more or less a shore of the Gulf.

10:30 a.m. – behind Dustin we took a short break to stretch our bodies by a brief stroll along white beach nearby an interstate bridging. We got to see a nice gray crane and we let our eyes for a while feast on a great panorama of the snowy white beach and the blue horizon. For the last time ...

And again we got in the car.

11:00 a.m. – still on the road ... Zuzanka and Dan talked us about New Orleans, about its incredibly casual atmosphere, about nightlife there with a lot of music all kinds, mainly jazz of course but also with its specialities, zydeco and cajun music. New Orleans started to live only during evening and it is well known as the town with a lot of festivals and carnivals. The best known is *'Mardi Grass'* in February with mask parades, music, dancing and fireworks.

*„Ah, the beautiful fireworks ! We could see some similar ones only on the Bastille Day in Paris or on Zozobra Day in Santa Fe. Wow ! The Zozobra firework is fantastic. Scary but fantastic. Zozobra is a five-story tall puppet, built to burn down in ablaze of fireworks each year in Santa Fe's Fort Marcy Park. He is designed to swing, and moan, and groan as he burns. At last, he is gone, taking with all troubles for another whole year from all participants. This is an important, and eye-popping part of the annual Santa Fe Fiesta."*



And they also told us that there is a typical coastal microclimate in New Orleans. It means hot, sultry weather with often sudden downfalls. But the downfalls easy come and easy go and after a while there is blue sky and high sun again. This is New Orleans.

And we drove and drove. One moment there was a bunch of women on motorbikes who overtook us full drive. *„Dykes on bikes !"*, Dan was smiling. Yes, we got it, lesbians on bikes. ☺

12:00 a.m. – we got in the area that was hit by Katrina in 2005. From Mobile to New Orleans ...

12:30 p.m. – the Alabama border line.

13:15 p.m. – lunch in the Arby's fastfood.

14:30 p.m. – we turned off the 10 Interstate toward Pascagoula, Dan's hometown.

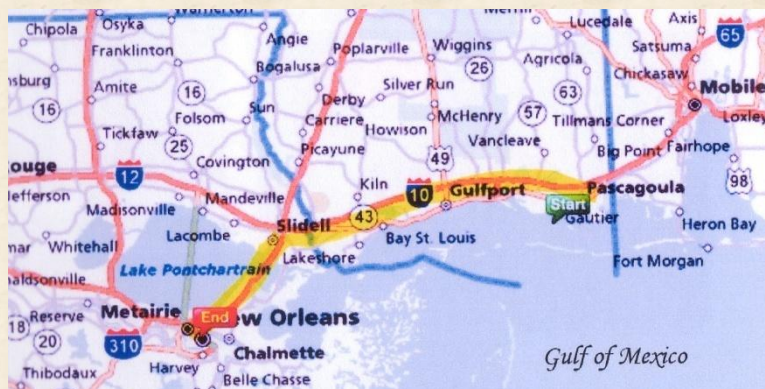


We went through the town and Dan showed us places, which were so beloved to him, places from his childhood. His school, playgrounds ...

We were slowly approaching a shore, when we could hear Susie and Dan's : *„Ah, my God !!!"*. We stopped at a parcel with slight marks of a

fence and with some debries on the place where a house was supposed to be. Dan's natal house *„Ouch ! It was completely destroyed ! What a pity ! We hadn't known it until now ! We had read Katrina hit Pascagoula but we thought it was not so horrible."* The really sad moment ...

Hereupon we continued further to the seashore, had a short stop at a coastal dockage, still without any life and further along the shore where we could see a wooden pier totally destroyed by the hurricane. There were only some pillars left. It had to be a hell there in 2005 when Katrina hit from the Gulf. And Dan's natal house was





less than half an mile from the shore ...

Then we drove back on the interstate. There was a quiet in the car, we all were with our own thoughts, memories and images. And there were seen many consequences of that 2005 disaster all along our drive. Of course time and people had done their jobs to remove the biggest symptoms. Yes, time is a greater healer ... but sometimes even time does not manage to heal something.

We went along a coastal flat, down the road lined with a low and high vegetation even with trees. Some of them were really nice. So tall, patulous, juicy green and with many beautiful white blooms. *„They are Magnolia trees. They are very often trees in Mississippi and Louisiana and it is the State Louisiana tree“*. It was an interesting but strange spectacle. We could see that plant in the Czech Republic also but only like a large bush not the tree.



By force of a visit Dan's hometown, Zuzanka remembered an interesting information : *„Did we ever tell you that one of the guys that Dan got into trouble with claims he was picked up and taken into an UFO ? And it was a pretty convincing claim. There were two brothers, the Parker boys, that Dan would hang out with and they were always in trouble. In fact it was the Parker boys that would steal the cars and then come by and pick up Dan. Well, the one closer in age to Dan was David Parker and his brother was Calvin Parker. Calvin was with an older guy one evening, I think they were fishing, and an UFO came down and took them. This happened after Dan was already in Omaha ([www.ufocasebook.com/pascagoula](http://www.ufocasebook.com/pascagoula))“*.

After about more than two hour drive the panorama of New Orleans appeared in front of us and after a moment we already speed down concrete ribbons, winding by overpasses and underpasses in suburbs of that heart of Louisiana.

*„Look ! This is the Superdome ! It is a symbol of that horrible disaster from 2005 when it was the only one shelter in the whole town for thousands of desperate people. It has become the new symbol of New Orleans.“*, reported Zuzanka when we passed that huge building. And then Dan drove us deep and deep into the suburb, along older houses, mainly with black population where we could pass the whole blocks of houses with an apparent flood line on them, without any sign of life. People left their homes for the flood and never came back ...

And we went on, Susie led Dan down narrow lanes of French Quarter.

05:15 p.m – we reached our that day's New Orleans destination, Hotel St. Marie in Toulouse Street. (<http://www.hotelstmarie.com>)

Our residence was the old time hotel in the old French tradition with a line of balconies over both sides looking down at streets, with metal handrails and with wooden shutters fixed outside windows.

Dan left Toyota in an underground garage, we passed through an impressive entrance hall and drove up by lift on the second floor to our hotel rooms. Susie and Dan chose that one with a balcony overlooking the street, we got a beautiful room with the balcony above the hotel atrium with palm trees and a swimming pool. (*Thanks, friends.*) And of course, our hotel room had a big bathroom with a toilet and there was also a coffeemaker even with coffee. Looking from outside the hotel was history but inside it was luxury ! We were satisfied. Again. ☺



05:30 p.m. – we had coffee at Newberrys' as well as Pilsner Urquell on their balcony, tasting first sights and impressions of those breathtaking old streets, the oldest built up area of New Orleans. Susie also called attention to a strange smell of French Quarter, caused by a bit outdated sewer system and a lively nightlife ☺.

We also went through our program of stay there. It means in the town even in surroundings. We probably would miss a visit to the most well known tourist attraction, the cemeteries of New Orleans because they had still been a bit dangerous



for bunches of young robbers in them. They come to you, steal cameras or something other from you and disappear among graves ...

So we would take a tour around French Quarter, a stroll along the Mississippi riverside, a ferry over the River, a visit to the sculpture garden, a trip to a bayou and a sail there as well as a visit to the Barataria Preserve in the Delta of Old Man River.

Sipping coffee and beer we had a good time with jokes and smiles. I also made my faces ☺. „Mirek, you're Mango Boy!“. Even I exactly did not know what it means, I supposed, according to their roguish smiles, that it would be something funny.

(in the „Urban Dictionary“ I found :

- Mango meaning gangster. Originated from the italian mafia, mango, mango'd getting mashed up.
- Funny and handsome guy from saturday night live!) ☺

Then we returned to our room for a break.

06:30 p.m. – knocking on the door. We opened and : „Boo !!!“, Susie and Dan jumped out ! Yes, we took a big fright ! We did not expect it ! Our friends visibly found inspiration from Hana's narration ☺. „Whatever ! We are in New Orleans, the town of Mardi Grass !“.



Let's go to a taste tour ! We walked down the streets, across Bourbon Street toward the Mississippi riverside where we were amazed at the Mississippi river ... And then further along streets and lanes, over squares until to the golden sculpture of Joan of Arc where we stopped at a restaurant for dinner. We had tasty shrimps and cool Coronas. And what kind of music we could hear there ! The authentic New Orleans jazz and zydeco music. Musicians were fantastic and a singer was perfect, atmosphere was unforgettable.

Lastly we moved along our way, down the fairytale streets of that dreamy town that were full of music going out of restaurants and bars. There were colorful signboard all over as well as juicy greenery in every corner. Palm trees, blooming bushes, flowers everywhere on balconies, on windows. The magic world. And of course ... crowds of tourists and incredible clamor and noise. Yes, New Orleans woke up into the nightlife.



But that day it was quite enough for us. We were the whole day on the road and it was true that we were beginning to feel tired. Our steps found their direction and headed to our hotel for a sweet rest.

09:00 p.m. – back in Hotel St. Marie and : „Good night friends and see you tomorrow morning at 9 a.m.“ .

10:00 p.m. – we fell asleep into the sleep of the just again.

## Tuesday, May 1<sup>st</sup> – Day 10<sup>th</sup>

07:30 a.m. – casual getting up, coffee from a coffeemaker, enjoying looks down at the hotel atrium. It was a beautiful, warm morning, about 79 F.

09:00 a.m. – „Knock, knock ! ... Boo !!!“ Ah, we fools ! We took the bait ! Yes, we got scared again ! „Zuzanka, Zuzanka !“ ☺.

We went to the Petunias restaurant for „eggy“ breakfast. When we came, there was a short line in front of the restaurant so we had to wait for some minutes. But it was worth waiting for. It was another really shi shi old time place. And what delicious breakfast we had ! „Eggs Benedict“ for me and „Cream Eggs and Broccoli“ for Hana. Yum, yum ! I cleared even Hana's plate ... „Mirek, you are really the good eater ! You remind us of one of our friends who is also the very good eater. He is a slender man but he can eat really big portions ! When he was at us last time he had problems with his wisdom tooth ...“.

From the restaurant we took an overlooking tour around French Quarter, we peeked in all corners and were relishing that special morning casual atmosphere. We had also a stop at a souvenir shop. „Traps for tourists !“ We bought T-shirts and postcards,



Dan was making funny faces with Mardi Grass glasses ☺. Then we turned our steps back toward the hotel, had a brief break in rooms and prepared for our that day's trip.  
11:00 a.m. – we set out of the town, passed by Superdome and headed for bayous and swamps of Mississippi.

01:15 p.m. – we reached a place of our adventure, a sail by boat down the bayous of the Mississippi river.

"Ah, no, no Hana ! Don't worry about the sail. It won't be so wild jumping as on the Dry Tortugas trip. It will be a quiet sail.", Zuzanka calmed Hana.

We bought tickets and made our waiting for the start of the cruise shorter by talking with captain Ron "Black" Guidry, an older charming and peculiar man.  
(<http://www.cajunman.com>)

From Susie and Dan we learnt that Guidry is the right Cajun, it means descendant of the French Acadians who fled Canada in the mid-1800's and settled in the Louisiana bayous. So he could speak French as good as English. Our friends also told us he was a former member of Green Berets and in his old age he lived in the bohemian life style as a captain of a bayou vessel, a guide and a performer.

While talking we were swinging on a wide porch swing and the captain in his swing chair : „Swinging on the chair, it's what I've been doing almost my whole life !". Yes, our captain was a good guy and a joker with a roguish smile. To Dan's question where his dog Gatorbait is, he only shrugged : „His time came ...".

We also visited a shop with souvenirs, where we spotted a head of a boar hanging on a wall and Dan remembered my story that I told him during their time in Chotebor : „Bekky and the boar ! But bigger one !".

Even before the time to sail came, our passanger group expanded for a bunch of french speaking Canadian students, trainees for cooks.

02:00 p.m. – we boarded an about 50 feet long motorboat with a flat bottom, a laminate roof and a metal railing around its perimetr. In the next moment we sailed out down the bayou.



Those water canals are lined with a special kind of cypress trees that are able to live in water and swamps. They are called Bald Cypresses. They are tall, deciduous conifers with a thick trunk at the bottom but very quickly narrowing in its middle and high parts. The impression of their majesty is increased by leafy plants climbing the trunk even by veils of spanish moss hanging down from their branches. Yes, those trees together with the water canals, swamps and other swampy greenery formes the really strange landscape, something what we had never seen before ... again.

The captain expertly led the vessel along the bayou, over a muddy, brown water and he called attention here to a turtle, there to a heron and there to bald eagles ... But his number one performance was calling for alligators here and there. He used a special shout and every gator had its own name ! And when they swam to the boat, he fed them with raw chicken meat fasten onto a long wooden pole with a metal hook at its end. Nice creatures ! Only at those moments when we could see them during feeding we realized how agile and lively they could be ! And those their teeth !

Guidry explained us that only he was allowed to feed alligators, because bayous are unapproachable over a dry land in that area so gators did not connect food with people, only with his boat. Wow ! The really good performance with alligators he did !

So we cruised from stop to stop and the captain had always something to show us and we were savoring that odd, mystery beauty of that special area. In the hindmost point of our sail Guidry stopped the engine, showed us his last play with the gator and then he took his guitar and accordion and played and sang songs in English and French for our fun. Wow ! What a singer and player he was ! AMAZING ! Dan with glittering eyes sang along as well as many other passengers. It was really the very pleasant event. I



especially liked the *'Jambalaya'* song. It constantly echoed in my ears long time after we started our back, much more faster sail because without any stop.

Then we thanked Ron Guidry for the great experience and said our farewells to that charismatic man. The trip was a success ...

04:00 p.m. – we got in Toyota and hit our back journey toward New Orleans, still full of atmosphere of bayous and melodies of songs. We felt casually and easy. I asked Dan for words of Jambalaya and after a short time we already were singing together :

*„Good-bye Joe, me gotta go, me oh my oh  
Me gotta go pole the pirogue down the bayou  
My Yvonne, the sweetest one, me oh my oh  
Son of a gun, we'll have big fun on the bayou“.*

Afterward I asked Dan who learnt him all that old songs which he sang with Guidry and Dan answered that his Grandfather did the main job and of course his Mom. Once, when he was a boy and he was in a hospital, he had Mom sing him his favorite song *'Danny Boy'* over and over. And Susie rushed to explain it :

*„About Dan's car accident: There was a wooded area by their house where they would play normal children's games. Dan ran out of the woods right into the street that runs along the beach along the Gulf of Mexico (the same street that we drove along when we were in Pascagoula). A young woman, in her teens was unable to stop and hit him. Dan was taken by ambulance to the hospital and had surgery to put pins in his leg. He was in the hospital at least a month and had to have therapy for some time after that. He got an infection in his leg and at one point they thought they would have to amputate it. His mother sat up with him and he asked her to sing the song 'Danny Boy'. She said that was the hardest song she ever had to sing. But, as you know, all came out well. It was while Dan was in the hospital and a short period after that, that he was first introduced to racism and the wrongness of it. But that's another story. Dan still has some nasty scars from the surgery.“*

06:00 p.m. – finally back in the hotel. The ride through the suburb and then through the center of New Orleans in the afternoon rush hours was really nothing to shout about. Dan had hard times ...

We all took a brief break to freshen up in our rooms.

06:30 p.m. – we left the hotel for dinner in Jimmy Buffet's Margaritaville Cafe.



(<http://www.margaritaville.com>)

We casually walked down early evening French Quarter, relishing that magic atmosphere of New Orleans ...

Margaritaville Cafe sits in Decatur street, in an old, two storey building with an outside terrace above a sidewalk.

And just right on that terrace we chose our table and chairs. It was so romantic ! There we could enjoy not only delicious sea food but we could also overlooking that special scenery all around. Those old houses that had all their years written on their nice and interesting faces that were liven up by plants growing in balconies. It was almost like in a picture gallery with pictures of old masters. Soften and weathered colors of wood and metal ... brown, black ... and also bright colors of palm trees, climbing up plants and flowers. Yes, it was another special experience. Laid back time again ...

Sipping Coronas and Margaritas we went through that day's events ... *„Good-bye Joe, me gotta go ...“*. We also talked about Jimmy Buffet, the owner of Margaritaville Cafe, that singer, whose songs also belonged to our vacation, especially our favorite one about New Orleans 2005 : *'Breathe In, Breathe Out, Move On'*. Our friends kept talking about Buffet family : *„Jimmy Buffet is a singer and he also run the whole chain of Margaritaville Cafes. And yes, there is a relation with Warren Buffet from Omaha. Jimmy is his nephew. Yes, he is the nephew of this Warren Buffet who is now the world's richest man (Bill Gates is now #3). And more about ,our' Omaha Buffet ... even though Warren Buffet is the richest man in the world, he lives a middle class*



*lifestyle. He and his family live in a regular house in a regular neighborhood. He doesn't put on any airs. His joy is finding ways to make money, but does not have the same joy spending it (I'd get joy helping him spend it). His three children each have foundations for helping people in different ways. Warren gives them 1 billion dollars each year for their foundations. He gives them ideas on how they should spend it, but doesn't tell them how they must spend it. They have charities around the world for various causes, all of them great. So he is a good man with good, well, balanced children that will continue to help others long after their father is gone."*

07:30 p.m. – we ended up our dinner, took a short sightseeing tour around the cafe and slowly walking we set out toward our hotel. Walking back we savored intoxicating magic of that very old town, full of an evening bustle, full of scents and sounds ...

08:15 p.m. – back in our room. We found out that there was a wedding feast and celebration with music down at the hotel atrium. For a while we watched and listened to it with Hana from our balcony then I went for Susie and Dan to share that event with them. It was something out of movie. The brightened up atrium and swimming pool, a bride and a groom and other wedding guests dancing among palm trees and other greenery ... so we found inspiration from that event below us and start dancing in our room too. What a joy and fun we took from it ! It was the great conclusion of that splendid day.

When our friends left us alone, we were reading books for a while in bed, because there still was a lot of noise of wedding party in our room.

10:15 p.m. – Hana was already sleeping, me is going do the same, wedding feast was over ... ☺

## Wednesday, May 2<sup>nd</sup> – Day 11<sup>th</sup>

08:15 a.m. – we slightly overslept : „Hurry, hurry !”. Fast coffee from a coffeemaker. We got up into a hot and sultry, cloudy day, 84 F.

08:30 a.m. – we went for breakfast in (<http://www.cafebeignet.com/index.html>) Cafe Beignet, the interesting restaurant by New Orleans Police Department. We ordered our meals, got their numbers and then were waiting for them to call our number. Pretty exciting for our Czech ears ☺.



What in the world did we have ? Aaaaa ! I got it ! Cafe Latte, Breakfast Sandwich and Baklava. We sat at a table in the outside sitting. The table and chairs were made of a cast iron, really the good job. But it was not so quiet place for breakfast, because of many clerks hurrying to their job stopped there for their morning meals. It was rather a bustling crossroad, without any long sitting. Have breakfast and go away again ! Only some cats strolling among tables slowed down that hurry human morning and just they had their laid back time from the very morning. The cats and the four of us ☺.

After our morning meal we head back to our ,Mary'.

On our way back we had a quick stop at wonderful Magnolia trees where I reminded our friends an old Czech custom, kissing women under blooming trees at the beginning of May. Can you remember ? Women who were kissed under the blooming tree will be fresh and healthy over the whole year ...

Yes, Dan was a man of action, he took Hana under one really beautiful bloom of magnolia and kissed her. I did not manage to do the same with Susie, maybe next ☺.

Coming back we visited a souvenir shop for T-shirts and postcards too.

In the hotel we spent only a short time to prepare for that day's program.



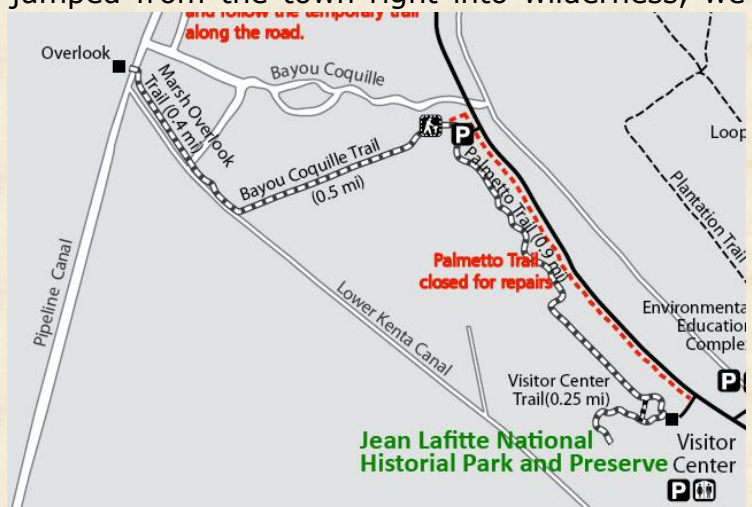
10:15 a.m. – we set out for our first item on agenda, for a visit to an outside exposition of New Orleans Museum of Art that was sat in a beautiful parkland. When we entered the exposition, Dan showed us a mark of how high it was flooded in 2005 there ...



The exhibits were fantastic and the whole exposition was the really good prepared, all sculptures went together with landscaping. We were overwhelmed by their diversity and inventions. Yes, indeed, some we liked more, some we liked less. It still depends on a taste of each of us. Anyway we were not bored. In no way ! We spent there a very pleasant hour walking around.

12:00 a.m. – we moved away and jumped from the town right into wilderness, we visited the Brataria Preserve in the Jeanne Lafitte National Park. The Park was stretched in a swampy area with many lakes and bayous that were all fed by an unlimited source, the Mississippi river (<http://www.nps.gov/jela/>).

Unlike Everglades there were many full-grown trees, well known to us Bald Cypresses with spanish moss as a decoration. But ,ground floor' belonged to a thick tropical vegetation. It was everywhere. In swampy areas, on lakes, in banks



of bayous with a lazy flowing water that was full of a water grass. It was a jungle ! And among other plants we especially liked those particularly exotic, as tall as an adult ones with large like a palm with fingers looked leafs. They called Palmettos.

And the four of us came through all that beauty down the wooden sidewalks and admired those views. But we admired the views also very carefully and watchfully because other than turtles, herons, small snakes and frogs there were some other creatures hidden somewhere ... yes ... „Look at the water ! Alligators !”, we shouted during our touristic walk almost every moment. We could see the small, bigger and really the big gators. And that one the biggest we spotted in the hindmost point of our stroll when we came across a high wooden bridge over the bayou and went down to its bank. We let him swim to us just at the distance of about ten feet so we could take an eye contact with that big lizard. But just for a second. Then we rather left the field ... quickly ... as quickly as we could !

Otherwise we had a good time there, in peace and quiet without almost any people only with singing and chattering of birds.

Anyway ... almost with no people. On our way back, right on the bridge over the bayou we came across a bunch of strange dressed, also twittering people. They looked like from the 18th century and so ... rustic. They were Amish people.

*The Amish people are members of a very strict church fellowship. The history of the Amish church began with a schism in Switzerland within a group of Swiss and Southern German Brethren, in 1693. Nowadays they are best known for their simple living, plain dress and their resistance to the adoption of many modern conveniences.*

*The Amish church seeks to maintain a degree of separation from the non-Amish world. There is generally a heavy emphasis on church and family relationships. They typically operate their own one-room schools, and discontinue formal education at grade eight. They value a rural life, where a large family provides an abundance of manual labor. The rules of the church — the Ordnung — must be observed by every member. These rules cover most aspects of day-to-day living, and include prohibitions or limitations on the use of power-line electricity, telephones, and automobiles (they use horse-drawn wagons) and , as well as on clothing. Many Amish church members may not buy insurance or accept government assistance, such as Social Security. Today, the most traditional descendants of these Amish Mennonites continue to speak Pennsylvania German (more often referred to as Pennsylvania Dutch), the language spoken by the descendants of Pennsylvania's late 17th and 18th century immigrants.*



*There are also Old Order Amish communities, especially in Indiana, where a dialect of Swiss German predominates. They live in closed hamlets and towns mainly in Pennsylvania, Ohio and Indiana. Their church has a population of about quarter a million.*

The really strange people for us ...

We continued our walk back on the same track as we used before. In the parking place we found our Toyota, jumped in again and set out for our return to civilization.

03:45 p.m. – on our way back we spotted Starbucks Coffee and us three immediately got coffee withdrawal, so Dan did not have the option and had to pull the car off and stopped there. We entered, absorbed that beloved characteristic scent and first we viewed souvenirs of that worldwide wellknown chain of coffees. Yes, of course we succumbed temptation and bought two cups for us and a thermo cup for Michal. And of course we mainly bought coffee and peach mango pies. And of course Pepsi for Dan as usual. Yum, yum, yum !



04:10 p.m. – again in the car, the New Orleans direction. Talking about the South. We learned from our friends that 'Dixie' is not a name of a town and 'Dixieland' is not only a style of jazz but that 'Dixieland' or 'Dixie' is a name for the southeastern portion of the USA, which arose during the Civil War. Dixie derives from the Mason-Dixon line which defined the border between Maryland and Pennsylvania, and, for the most part, free and slave states (a small portion of Delaware, a Union border state, and slave state up to the ratification of the Thirteenth Amendment, lay north of the boundary.) The states of Dixie include Virginia, North & South Carolina, Georgia, Florida, Alabama, Tennessee, Mississippi, Arkansas, Texas, West Virginia, Louisiana, and Kentucky.



*„O, I wish I was in Dixie! Hooray ! Hooray! In Dixie Land I'll take my stand. To live and die in Dixie. Away, away ! Away down south in Dixie !”.*

05:00 p.m. – back in the hotel.

17:30 p.m. – „BAF !!!”. For that time it was genuine and double Czech ‚Baf !’ not American ‚Boo !’ and we surprised Dan and Susie by that our shouts when they left their 214 number for our evening joint walk. And it was not any normal ‚Baf = Boo !’ , Hana and me wore boffoonish red noses ! 😊 Wow ! What a fright and surprise it was for our friends ! And what a joy as well ! A lot of smiles and laughs ! „Did you buy these red noses in New Orleans ? ”... „No, no, friends. We brought them along from the Czech Republic. To make you smiling in New Orleans. And it works. The Czech red noses in New Orleans.” 😊 And on top of that we handed them another two red noses! Only now it was a mirth ! Four clowns in the hotel corridor ... with red noses we came through a hotel hall among laughing guests. Let's go to Mississippi ! And still with the red noses on our faces we went down Toulouse Street, over Bourbon Street right to the River Walk. Yes, still with the red noses. „Whatever ! We are in the town of Mardi Grass !”. We were living our easy time up and we only smiled at surprised faces of people we met ...



In the riverside we admired the Mississippi river. It was so huge ! We had never seen such a mighty watercourse before ! So much flowing water that headed to the Gulf. And we also be amazed at sounds of a giant steam organ built on a historical paddle boat. And there was also an interesting heavy traffic on the river. So many big ships we could see there ! And what a majestic arches of a bridge over the river in the distance ! And what high towers of modern skyscrapers of concrete, metal and glass, the current symbols of nowadays New Orleans we got to see on the left side of the



river ! Yes, it was something unusual for us again, that connection of the old French Quarter with that modern world ...

So we were strolling along the river, relished all those spectacles ... and just now we could see that Dan entered into conversation with one corpulent woman wore a yellow T-shirt with a clown face on it. And they were both smiling and hugging as well as other companions of the woman. Then Dan said them good bye, came to us still laughing and he explained something unbelievable to us.



*„You won't believe that. That woman asked me why we have worn the red noses, whether we are clowns because ... THEY ARE*

*THE GENUINE CLOWNS !!!*”. It was a double joke !!! We met the genuine clowns ! Wow ! It was another unforgettable event ! What a joy and laughters the four red noses from the Czech Republic brought to the four of us ! 😊

Meanwhile we were laughing we reached a destination of that evening exploring, a departure station of a ferry across Mississippi, to the Algiers Quarter on the opposite side. It runs every hour and it is for pedestrians (*for free*) as well as for cars (*for \$1*). We boarded the ferry and in a next moment we flowed across the River. We did not want to get off on the other side, we were only going to have a ride there and back again and relished the cruise and views of New Orleans of the opposite side. And it was a good plan. We really liked that sail. The River, bridges in the distance, imposing scyscrapers with a sunset as a background. We took shots and shots and shots. Satisfaction ...



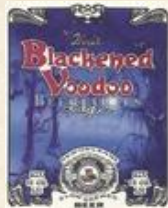
**06:00 p.m.** – we said our farewells to the cruise, got out of the ferry in *our* side and walking toward the French Quarter we looked for a nice restaurant for dinner.

**07:15 p.m.** – we explored the Chartres House Cafe restaurant and went through into outside sitting by a fountain. First I went to a restroom. *„Bloody hell !*”. I did not noticed they had newly concreted a small part of the ground, they did not mark it and I stepped onto it ... Well. At least they will have a memory of my visit there for long times. ☺ Tell the truth, I was not the only one who did it. Even if I told my companions about that danger, there was at the minimum another one who left his message in the concrete. Yes, I think it was Dan ☺.

*„Grilled Chicken Sandwich, Jambalaya, Coronas’.*

*„And Dan, how about after high school ?”, I questioned Dan after dinner during our sipping drinks. „After graduating from high school, my sister Vera told me that it was time to stand on my own. I didn't know what I wanted to do and there was a silly bet with my friend about military service ... so I went into the Marines. I enlisted because the U.S. had instituted the draft and I had a low draft number. I decided to take a dare and joined the Marines. I requested to go to Viet Nam because, at the time, if you went to Viet Nam, you would get out sooner. But, as it turned out, they changed mid stream and I did not get out any sooner. I was in the Marines for three years. That's a normal tour of duty in the States. I was in Viet Nam 13 months. I should mention that it's a more honor to be in the Marines as opposed to being in the Army”.*

**08:15 p.m.** – going *home* Dan had a fancy for dancing somewhere in New Orleans but we others talked him out of doing that. We were tired a bit, we had enough of events that day, so we took direction back to the hotel. Dan was disappointed a bit and came forward with other idea, to taste a local beer, *Blackened Voodoo Beer* somewhere in bars. But however much he tried to find a restaurant or bar with that brand of beer, he could not find anything. So at least he got for us another one beer to taste, *Horrible Dog Beer* in one bar. It was another brand of special local beer. And it was good !



Thanks, Dan !

**10:00 p.m.** – we went to bed, our stay in New Orleans was almost over, the next day there was already a ride to Saint Louis in Susie's itinerary. Yes, the last night with dreams about New Orleans ... we turned in for the night.



## Thursday, May 3<sup>rd</sup> – Day 12<sup>th</sup>



06:00 a.m. – and again : „Rise and shine ! Today is our longest driving day !”.

Packing, coffee ...

07:15 a.m. – we checked out of the hotel, paid for that, then loaded Toyota and : „Good Bye, New Orleans ! It was nice to meet you ! Maybe next in the future !”.

07:30 a.m. – „Let’s go for Saint Louis !”. We headed north, first across Lake Pontchartrain, along the longest bridge in the world : „The Lake Pontchartrain Causeway, or the Causeway, consists of

two parallel bridges crossing Lake Pontchartrain in southern Louisiana. The longer of the two bridges is the longest in the world over water, measuring at 23.87 miles (38.42 km) long. The bridges are supported by over 9,000 concrete pilings. The two bridges feature bascule spans over the navigation channel 8 miles (13 km) south of the north shore. The southern terminus of the Causeway is in Metairie, Louisiana, a suburb of New Orleans. The northern terminus is at Mandeville, Louisiana”.

It was great ! We drove and drove down the bridge and it reminded us a bit of the Overseas Highway ... only concrete ribbons and us ...

In the middle of the bridge we stopped at a resting place, got out of the car and enjoyed views around. There was water and water, as far as our eyes could see and the both south even north ends of causeway were dipped on the both horizons into the lake’s dark blue ...



09:00 a.m. – a stop for breakfast in Hammond, in a cafeteria of the „Iron Skillet” chain. Yes, it was a self-service restaurant, so we had a pile of scrambled eggs, roasted bacon, cheese, toasted breads, muffins, juice, coffee ... we love American breakfasts ! And to all of that there was an typical American waitress, like from a movie, with blond hairs and a sharp voice : „Sweet honeys, are you satisfied ? Would you like more coffee ?”.



And on the road again ... Interstate 55.

11:30 a.m. – we passed by Jackson in Mississippi.

02:00 p.m. – Hana got a chance to drive Toyota and go down American freeway. And she immediately fell in love with an automatic shift. „Heigh-ho, good bye sport style of driving, our next car will have certainly automatic shift !”, I thought ... ☺

02:45 p.m. – we went by Memphis in Tennessee and Dan returned again behind the wheel.

03:00 p.m. – we had a stop in West Memphis for lunch and coffee in the favorite „Perkins” restaurant. Chicken salad with roasted bacon, coffee, Coronas.



04:00 p.m. – and again on the flat American road, on that concrete ribbon passing towns and cities in the distance and safely transporting a stream of cars and trucks to their destinations ...

05:15 p.m. – from dark clouds fell the first raindrops that changed into a downfall in a moment. Temperature had dropped from 85 F to 69 F.

06:00 p.m. – 125 miles to Saint Louis, it’s raining, 68 F.

08:15 p.m. – we reached the „Residence Inn Marriott” hotel, a complex of row of two story houses with a lodge nearby the entrance





that contained a reception desk and a self service canteen. Breakfast buffet came with rooms.

(<http://www.marriott.com/hotels/travel/stlhr-residence-inn-st-louis-galleria>)

08:30 p.m. – after we checked in and familiarized ourselves with our *Executive Penthouse Suite* we set out again to replenish our food supplies in a shopping center and some wine in a special wine store. There was fun in the store because Hana had to sign a statement that we will not give any party and drink wine that evening. Wow! Those Americans ! ☺ Hana had promised ...

09:00 p.m. – we came back to our hotel rooms and finally now we were able to properly look around our dwelling. And we were satisfied again. There was a large room just behind a doorway that was split among kitchenette with a dinning table, a living room with the TV and a comfortable sofa and our bedroom with bathroom and other facilities. Susie and Dan had their bedroom upstairs, on the second floor, just above ours, but unlike ours, theirs was opened into other space and it was separated only by wooden handrail. Even there was also bathroom and so on. And of course, under stairs there was a central air conditioning as usual in America.

09:30 p.m. – in spite of Hana's proclamation ☺ we gave a party with wine and cheese. Zuzanka was nicely merry and was narrating about her Dad. He had been looking forward to us and also he was a bit disappointed when we skipped Omaha in our 2004 U.S. vacation, that Frank stole us from them Omahan's. Hana and me explained that it was difficult to include a visit to them in 2004 because our itinerary was full enough and Frank did his best to show us as much as was possible of North-South U.S. beauties. And we could not disappoint Frank, he was our guide and he was the first who answered to my FIRST e-mail in 2002, he was the first link of the American Stehno chain.

So we drank wine, ate chees and munchies and were talking about cheerful even serious topics. Yes, there was lots of food, lots wine and we all had a nice time.

Meantime Susie also downloaded lyrics of Jambalaya from the Internet so we could sing together a bit ... And Susie continued her pretty talkative mood ☺ (we love her) :

*„I left my parents, my natal home when I was seventeen. You know ... I went steady with one boy who was a waiter in a hotel. My parents didn't agree with that my relationship and they forbade me to go around with him. But I ignored their prohibition and I kept company with him. So once, when we were with my boyfriend together in the hotel, my parents went by car by the hotel and got to see my car in a hotel parking. When I returned home there was a strict speach to me from my parents, mainly from my father. I had to choose. Either to stay home and gave up my fellow or to leave home. I chose to leave. I was a hard dog. Still I am ☺.”*

Yes, a relationship between parents and their teenagers is difficult very often. Children are not children any more but their parents still do not notice it ... a generation gap.

And Susie added : *„Frank also left home early. Our father didn't agree with Frank's choice of studying. But also Frank was a hard dog and didn't let the father interfere in his study. So he had to go away too. Yes, our father is the hard dog too ☺.”*

And also there were some words about Ginny during sipping : *„She's been married for the first time. Her husband is ex-policeman (her the second policeman in a raw). Nowadays he is retired. They are fine. They have got very nice and expensive house. Yes, they live on the high standard.*

*And Stacie ? Ah, Stacie and Kendel ... yes, they are fine too. They are happy and they are at peace with the world. They have the two sweet and pretty girls, a neat house with a small garden. And they live their lives. Sometimes we don't agree with something what they do ... for example how they raise Cassidy because they spoil her too much and they let her be awake until 2 a.m. very often. But what are we gonna do ? It's their deal ... ”.*

And Susie talked and talked ... no, she was not drunk, no way. She was just merry and in a good mood as we other were too. Happy times ... *„My silly Susie.”*, Dan was



smiling ☺. And us two remembered a story with Michal as a protagonist. He was about four, we grilled sausages and made a fire and he stayed up with us as long as we did, to 11 p.m. and he looked like drunk. He laughed and his eyes were glittering like stars and he talked and talked for our fun. As Zuzanka at that time ☺. Our sweet cousin.  
11:00 p.m. – we drank up the big bottle of Chardonnay and went to bed. Next day would be at our leisure.

## Friday, May 4<sup>th</sup> – Day 13<sup>th</sup>

07:30 a.m. – „We'll get up at our leisure and we'll take our time because a breakfast buffet comes with our room" Susie had written in the itinerary. And what is written that's the deal !

It was raining but we did not care because there was pleasant 68 F and we were on vacation ... whatever ! And then ... raindrops left bubbles on puddles ... and my father always said that it is a mark for short raining. In the afternoon should be nice weather according to his rule ...

08:40 a.m. – breakfast buffet in the dinning room of the hotel. You could load on your plate whatever you wanted ! And we loaded ... ☺ Scrambled eggs, boiled eggs, bacon, muffins, waffles warmed up in a jumping up toaster. And juice and coffe. And Pepsi for Dan of course. Good breakfast is the best start to the new day ...

Sipping coffee Susie specified that day's program : „First we will visit the Missouri Botanical Garden. It is a nice place with a lot of beautiful parklands and features. Then we will go to the Anheuser-Busch Brewery to take a tour around this plant. Maybe there would be some taste ☺. And from the brewery we will visit the Gateway Arch, the dominant feature of Saint Louis. In conclusion of the day we will have dinner in a shi-shi restaurant in the Little Italy quarter."

09:45 a.m. – „Let's go to the botanical garden !"



After about a quarter of an hour ride by Toyota we reached our destination. Missouri Botanical Garden.

(<http://www.mobot.org/> ;  
<http://www.mobot.org/hort/tours/tourintro.shtml>)

Susie bought tickets and we came through the entry hall to the gardens. It was a bit cloudy, sprinkling, about 77 F. The air was

humid and there was a pleasure to breathe, we liked it ! It was sort of magic to walk there. The gardens were fairytale ! They were so neat, really shi-shi, improving by many sculptures. Ah what amount of flowers, bushes, trees, pretty cut lawns, pools, fountains and creeks we could see there !!! It was something special for our eyes, noses and ears ...

We started our tour visiting a parkland in the tradition of English. We could see there a lot of flower beds of all kinds of pansies and irises and many and many feet of perfectly trim hedges. And then we strolled through garden in the American tradition of a similar look.

Afterward we set our feet in the heaven, we entered the Japanese garden ... It was unbelievable ! It was almost unreal world ! Beautiful, wonderful ! There were flowers, bushes, conifer trees of different heights even unknown for us trees with strange blooms ... And all those plants were so sensitively put in a magically shaped landscape with small hills, pools, gurgling creeks, small falls and also with a big lake with bays and islands. We walked down nice sidewalks winding through all those beauties and around typical Japanese wooden constructions too. There were wooden bridges spanning the streams, small wooden arbors to sit and rest, the special pier along a



bank of the lake. And all those items fit perfectly together and created the genuine dreamland ...

And in addition to that we could see and hear songbirds and admired a family of Canadian geese floating across the lake. We could stay there forever ... in peace and quiet. Only sitting in the arbor, listening to burbling springs and singing birds and overlooking that everything ...

Even the rain had stopped and also the sun decided to show us its face and peeped out of clouds to make our sense of satisfaction perfect.

But what could be done we had to continue our sightseeing tour. And what could we see then ? The Chinese garden ! And again we enjoyed that Asian harmony between the Nature and man-made landscaping. Tastefully built wooden shelters, over stones running creeks, water lilies, bonsai. Beauty and peace. The place for rest and meditation ...

But we did not have a lot time to meditate ... a tropical dome was awaiting us, another miracle of nature. A damp and sultry air inside ... and creeks, small lakes, palm trees, bananas, orchids, reeds and every other tropical vegetation all sorts, colors, shapes and heights. So we delighted in it and enjoyed it our best. With all our senses. Really all including a taste. For explanation ... about in the middle of our sightseeing tour of the tropical world we spotted an old man, a member of a maintenance crew, who picked such blue-black berries, they looked like gooseberries, from a trunk of one tree and ate them ! And of course ... our curious boy Dan immediately went up to him and questioned him about those berries and whether they were actually edible. That good man without any word reached out for a few other ones and gave them to Dan and told him that they were really edible and that tree is the only one in the world which had its fruit right on its trunk. And Dan, my good friend, turned to me : „Mirek, try it also. It's good !". What could I do ? I have to be brave and tasted one also ... and hoped I would survive it ☺. Fortunately it was really good, yes something like gooseberry. „Yes, it is good, Dan, but thanks that one is enough for me !".

Dan revealed our Czech origin to the old fellow who surprised us by his words that he had had the Czech roots also. The world is too small for Czechs ☺.

Yes, then he added his another roots came from Irish.

01:15 p.m. – coffee and Pepsi in the garden restaurant, then we had a short tour of African sculptures and ... good bye the botanical garden !

02:00 p.m. – we got to another Saint Louis sight ... and it was the biggest American brewery Anheuser Bush, no less.



The brewery was consisted of beautiful old edifices, built from millions of red bricks.

One part of that brick imperium is used for an informational office and mainly for the brewery museum with all the trimmings including

brewery horses, old brewery wagons and trucks and of course the all products of the Anheuser Bush brewery. In the second section they still work using the most modern technologies sensitively put in those old buildings and product their world-famous beer.



And all that what we could see during about two hour tour was ended by sitting with glasses of Budweiser. And it was great ! (*I am a good boy ☺*) Even some souvenirs for our friends back in the Czech Republic were bought there.

03:30 p.m. – from the brewery we headed for the mentioned dominant feature of that town of jazz, the Gateway Arch.



You can see this miracle of the building industry from a big distance already because it is a giant ferroconcrete arch. Its body has a trilateral section and it is hollow inside where they operate lifts in either its ‚legs‘ and on the top of that arch, which is 580 feet high and the same number a span of its legs at the bottom is, so on the top they run a lookout and a restaurant. On the underground of



that structure is situated a museum of history of the United States from the first settlement up to the present. And the link between past times and nowadays ... it is the main thought of this construction, this Arch. Without past times would not be the present time even the future ...

What we could add to that sight. It was the very interesting and very impressive experience and it was worth visiting it. Even we were only ground and underground visitors (*there were long lines to both of the lifts*) we liked it immensely and we would have that imposing arch in our minds forever.

Then we took a short walk to Mississippi and allowed our eyes to feast on looks on the Arch from the riverside.

06:15 p.m. – dinner in a restaurant with Italian cuisine. Yes, it was the genuine Italian **MAGGIANO'S** ,ristorante' ! It was something cool ! Even in a restroom they had paper towels with their logo ...

We say nobby, Zuzanka says shi shi. ☺

We had never eaten in such restaurant like that before. Really. And food ? Delicious, scrumpcious, fantastic ! And what huge portions they gave ! We had Fettucine Alfredo, Broccoli (*traditional fettucine noodles tossed with broccoli and garlic in a creamy alfredo sauce*) and even if we had that portion split in two plates for me and Hana it was enough for both of us and we had eaten our fill. It was great !

(<http://www.maggianos.com/default.asp>)

08:00 p.m. – back in our apartment. Dan tapped cans with ,XX' beer, and we had a rest watching TV. Yes, we were chatting too and then we went to beds.

## Saturday, May 5<sup>th</sup> – Day 14<sup>th</sup>

06:00 a.m. – and again : „Rise and shine ! Another long driving day is ahead !”. Packing and loading.



07:00 a.m. – to great breakfast in hotel buffet.

07:30 a.m. – „Good Bye, Saint Louis, we leave you for Omaha !”.

Cloudy, foggy, 67 F.

The Interstate 70.

09:30 a.m. – we went by Jefferson City, then headed across Missouri.

Flat, flat, flat ...

11:00 a.m. – we passed by Kansas City and turn up north by the Interstate 29. We all were in a nostalgic mood a bit ... we were

approaching the last destination of our common vacation.

Yes, of course me and Hana were all excited to visit Susie and Dan's home, to meet old Frank, Ginny, all McDonalds', to play with Sunka and Joey, to see many sights of Omaha ... but we also knew that the days in Omaha would be our last in the States for that time. A bit sad feeling. But what were we gonna do ? Just to throw that feeling away and relish everything what we could. And we did it ...

Our friends seemed to be also a bit more silent than usual. They went home, so it had to be even stronger sense of the end of vacation for them. And more ... they were concerned about the weather forecast that we could hear from radio. Yes, our friends were slowly coming back to reality. Sooner than us. However they tried to keep vacation mood as much as they could and they did it really well. Yes, whatever, our vacation time continued ! ☺

11:20 a.m. – Dan turned off of the freeway for the gas, stretching legs and snack. We bought some drinks, nuts and jerky meat (<http://www.JackLinksJerky.com>). Walking



back to the car I appreciated safety of American roads. There is common to build gas stations and restaurants far away enough from roads so you have to depart from freeways and interstates to reach them. There are not any dangerous situations during returns to roads because there are pretty wide slip roads everywhere in the States.

01:50 p.m. – we got the Omaha suburb.

02:10 p.m. – we reached Cole Creek Drive, we were given the warm welcome from Stacie, Cassidy and Joey still in a car. Then Susie got off Toyota to prepare house for guests ☺ and Dan with us two continued a drive to a shopping center for supplies. Ah, Dan was a bit lost without Susie ☺ but we relished all that choice of food there. Wow ! Us three together managed to fill up the whole big shopping cart.

03:00 p.m. – the official welcome in the 1706 house. It was the very nice and cute building, that we could see only on pictures until that time. And we were here ... Our friends acommodated us in her basement rooms for guests. There was everything what we needed and more ... a water bed ! Shortly speaking, our friends spoiled us with all comfort. We had a quick shower to refresh our tired bodies and returned up to a dinning room to join our friends. Dan was playing with Cassidy, Stacie showed us her photo album and Joey and Sunka did carfully their first touches with us.



03:30 p.m. – us four stayed alone. Peace, coffee, Coronas and home exploring.

Zuzanka and Dan have really nice home. Their house is tastefully decorated inside and it is a pleasure to be there. Dan's art feeling is possibly to see everywhere. And there is not only many sculptures and plastic arts but also special plasters on the walls and many other interesting architectonic and beautifying features. And all those shi-shis make together very neat and cute home where is dreamy to live in ...

We peeked in Susie's office room, said our hello to parrot Shoe, looked around a living room and admired for the first time live (*until that time we had known it only from pictures in letters*) their back yard with a japanese touch. Wooden boards, metal summerhouses with sittings, a small ponds with a waterfall and rocks around it. And a lot of ceramic flowerpots all sizes with many flowers and plants. The fairytale yard. A perfect place for leisure and lazy time ... and chatting and sipping coffee and wine.

04:10 p.m. – back in Toyota and toward a favorite Mexican restaurant of our friends - Señor Matías ([http://www.neofill-dining.com/restaurant\\_26098.html](http://www.neofill-dining.com/restaurant_26098.html)) for lunch-dinner.



Yes, their favorite restaurant became ours immediately we got in. It was pretty decorated, with a family feeling. And what scents we could feel there ! Wow ! You could only breath and you were eaten up ! ☺

From a menu Hana and me chose Fajitas and because we already were experienced about American portions, we ordered one meal and two

plates. Waiting for the meal we made time shorter by friendly talking. I was interesting in a Corona decoration everywhere in the restaurant. When us three, it means Dan, Hana and me (*Susie got her Margarita*) were served with that beer, Dan questioned the owner about that and she answered that we hit the nail on the head, we came across when they gave Corona days ☺. Yes, our Coronas were dressed in nice ponchos ... and we got two bottles at price of one ! And even we were given by a blinking lavalier of Corona beer !



And then they brought our meals. Wow ! It was not any usual meal, it was miraculous food ! They served it right in a pan with tortillas hidden in a wooden container. What a scent ! What a taste !

When we finished eating, we said our hello to the owner and we left that neat place. Maybe some time in the future ...



05:20 p.m. – we moved to Susie's Professional Pet Grooming (<http://www.insiderpages.com/b/3717724311>), Zuzanka's beauty salon for dogs.

We had never been in such a shop like that, so we had not be able to compare, but we thought that Susie's salon had to be the best grade, premium quality. The shop was so clean, cute and well equipped with a lot of devices and machines and also well furnished indeed. And again there was possible to recognize Dan's work in the shop. Plasters, art decorations ... the skillful man. Of course ... the boss Zuzanka knows her own mind and can to pull the strings. ☺

There was a small entrance hall just behind a doorway for customers, then five working tables, a room with dryers and other technologies, a section with 'rooms' for finished dogs, a day room for employees and restrooms ...

Susie explained us, how it was going there, that she had about 7 employees and they groomed about 50 dogs every day, one dog for about 50\$. They have a stable clientele of about 3,000 furry bow-wows. Every that dog has its turn once two months.

By way of illustration of customer's satisfaction, I quote here some words of an owner of one four-footed friend, Mrs. Ashley P. that I found on the Internet : *„Susie's Pet Grooming is one of the best groomers in Omaha. The only problem is, they are so*



*good there is usually about a month wait to get in but it is well worth it! They take very good care of all the dogs they see as well as making them look as cute as they can be. They are also very reasonably priced and do not use sedatives or tranquilizers with the dogs which is a big plus on my chart !”.*

Shortly speaking ... Zuzanka is Number One ! But we have known it already long time ...

05:40 p.m. – on our way to Cole Creek Drive we dropped in Zuzanka's Dad house to say hello to that old man who we had known up to that time from his and Susie's letters only. We all were quite moved by that meeting. Omaha Frank, as we call him in our letters, was really nice, pleasant and charming man with flames of jokes in his eyes ☺. We had a quick look around his back yard, had a short talk and we headed for home : *„See you tomorrow !”.*



06:05 p.m. – Toyota drove us back to the Newberry's, we spent a while admiring the landscaping of the front yard including wooden sidewalk with pabbles and a front porch. *„The good job, Dan ! The good job, Zuzanka !”.*

Susie told us they gave up their origin program to take us to Jackson Artworks where there was given a celebratory opening in that evening. They changed that plan because we all were tired after that long driving day and it would be better to stay home and enjoy our common company in peace and quiet. So we did that.

06:30 p.m. – sipping wine and talking on a front porch. We relished our casual time after that exhausting day and were happy together again. We also gave Zuzanka and Dan our another gift, small carved wooden figures of domestic animals, to fill in a set with the rooster.

*„Ah, friends, how do you do that ? How many gifts have you brought along ?”* and Hana and me were just smiling ... ☺



Then we moved from the front yard to the back yard under a metal shelter where we continued our easy conversation. About all imaginable. Even about American movie stars (*our friends did not know any Czech actors*), when we cataloged our favorite American actors. We mentioned Julia Roberts, Sandra Bullock, Meryl Streep, Helen Hunt, Andie McDowell, Barbra Streisand, Meg Ryan, Susan Sarandon, Michelle Pfeiffer ... and Jack

Nicolson, Dustin Hoffman, Paul Newman, Robert Redford, Steve McQueen, Harrison Ford, Richard Gere, Kevin Costner, Bruce Willis and others and others.



About seven we returned inside, in a living room to watch TV news. Our friends were mainly interested in the weather forecast. We did not so comprehend their concerns about that. It was almost like they guessed something bad ...



As I said up, we Czechs were not so interested in that topic but for all that we got that there would be going strong storms over Nebraska and that it would seem to be not so quiet night. Maybe some tornados ... Whatever ! It could not to be so horrible indeed. The storms came, the storms went again, we said ourselves according to our Czech experiences, yet we became a

bit uneasy for Susie and Dan's question whether we would not mind a noise of sump pumps in the next door room in our basement apartment if they would started working because of heavy rains. And we non-experts answered that it would be easy for us and we would stand it ...

09:45 p.m. – „Good night, friends ! And enjoy your sleeping on a water bed ! You will be the first sleepers on it.“, told us our friends and we left them for our sleep.

Well. The water bed, we had never slept on anything like that before. It was interesting and fun. You know, when me or Hana changed a position, the other of us was really swaying like on waves. ☺ But it was nice and we were contented with it.

Yes, we were pleased with lying but it was worse about our sleep. Before we were able to fall asleep, the strong wind started blowing and it started to rain. But it was not only normal rain, it was the downfall, downpour ... the flood from the sky it was !

Thus ... first the roar of the rain, then sump pumps began working ... well ... it was not so quiet night. ☺ However in spite of it we finally fell asleep in the deep sleep ... we used our earplugs. ☺

## Sunday, May 6<sup>th</sup> – Day 15<sup>th</sup>

08:30 a.m. – „We got up at our leisure“. In spite of that a bit unquiet night we woke up fresh and rested. We got used to the water bed and we finally found pleasure in it. Yes, we liked it. And we also liked the glass sliding door overlooking back yard. We could see through it Joey and Sunka looking at strangers in their lower rooms ☺.



We opened the door and could see that the morning was rainy but pleasantly warm (70 F). After a while we climbed upstairs where Susie had prepared breakfast for us. She was alone, Dan had gone and when we asked about him, we got the answer that changed our vacation feeling a bit ...

That night storm with the downpours brought a disaster to Jackson Artworks (<http://www.jacksonartworks.com>) where Dan had got his gallery and workroom.



That huge amount of water that rained down during the night made a big pool of water on the roof of the Jackson Artworks building. And old wooden beams of the roof did not manage that terrible weight and caved in. All that water fell down into galleries and created about two feet high wave of water that flooded everything with unimaginable devastating effect on all things inside

the gallery. All inner partitions were moved away and almost every exhibited artworks were damaged or destroyed as well as almost all devices, facilities and furnitures. And computers, machines ... the horrible tragedy.

Dan learned that sad news from their friend Marcia, a gallery worker, on early Sunday morning and he immediately went to the gallery. The catastrophe happened probably at about 1 a.m. when Marcia was woken up by an alarm from the gallery but when she came to the gallery to checked it up she found locked and undamaged doors and she returned home again.

The terrible reality she got only when she walked in Jackson Artworks on Sunday morning when she came to work.



We were shocked by that news and we did not know what to do. We did not want to be ball and chain for our friends because it was clear that at that time they would have different thoughts in their minds than our vacation. It seemed that the vacation had ended for them ...

So we told Susie, that we would hate to be the cause of even bigger financial loss keeping them from rescue their property in the gallery. So we would understand if they spent their time saving odd, still usable things there instead to guide us around Omaha. We suggested we could help them too. And we also could take care of ourselves for the remaining days.

But Zuzanka, our beloved hard dog, answered that it was out of the question, that they anyway did not do anything more than Dan was doing right at that moment in the gallery, it meant organizing and saving their property. There could not anything more to do. And also she told us that the gallery owner had already arranged a building company that would provide a clear-out of destroyed things and all mess as well as a complete reconstruction of the collapsed roof. So it is not necessary to change our Omaha program only to add a few visits to gallery to check work there.

Well ... even then ... that sad event had still been with us from that time ...

Sipping coffee with Susie we learned from her, that it was really the stormy night, and actually we were lucky people in all that bad luck, because there were more than eighty tornados raging around Omaha that last night, even some people were killed in Kansas and the road that we went by on Saturday afternoon was flooded about four hours after we came through by the flood water that created a lake of size 20 miles by 2 miles. Nothing to shout about.

**Omaha World-Herald** : *,The May 2007 Tornado Outbreak was an extended tornado outbreak that started on May 4, 2007, affecting portions of the Central United States. The most destructive tornado in the outbreak occurred on the evening of May 4 in central Kansas, where about 95% of the city of Greensburg in Kiowa County was destroyed by an EF5 tornado. The supercell killed at least 13 people including 11 in Greensburg and two in Pratt County by a separate tornado. At least 60 people were injured in Greensburg alone. It was the strongest tornado of an outbreak which included several other tornadoes reported across Oklahoma, Colorado, Kansas, Nebraska and South Dakota that occurred on the same night. 25 tornadoes were confirmed that night.*

*The outbreak did not end there; a total of 84 tornadoes were confirmed reported on May 5 in the same area. Most were in open country but one fatality was reported in Ottawa County, Kansas near a county line. Fourteen more tornadoes were confirmed on May 6 in the same general area before the activity subsided.'*

Then Dan returned from the gallery. He was also brave and tried to act as usual and did not show a sign of his feeling but it was written all over his face. His thoughts were elsewhere.

**11:00 a.m.** – we got out of Toyota in the Old Market quarter, in a quiet street with brick houses and a row of trees in the edge of a sidewalk. Yes, there was Jackson Artworks in front of us, Dan's kingdom. From outside there was not any sign of disaster. But then we entered the gallery ... Good heavens ! There was a layer of a



slimy mud all over the ground, everything one foot high was soaking wet, inner partitions were broken or dislocated, all equipment including artworks were damaged. And right above Dan's part of the gallery there was a big hole in the roof ...

Susie looked around, faces in palms and she shook her head in disbelief. Dan in pensive mood stand aside and visibly tried to visualize all that work that would be



awaiting him there.

After about one half an hour checking and searching caused damages all of us the four went out of the gallery into cloudy but warm enough day (72 F). Our friends wanted us to show around that town quarter.

The Old Market (<http://www.oldmarket.com>) is actually an old industrial area with dozens of old multistory brick buildings, former factories and storages, that were, over the years, gradually changed into an interesting historical center of that modern city of Omaha with a lot of art galleries and exclusive shops of jewellery, branded clothes, perfumes etc. Also many old buildings were rebuilt into very exclusive and expensive apartments and that almost forgotten area had began to live its new age.

The sightseeing tour of the luxury factory quarter included also a walk along watercourses and parklands that were situated between the old and the new Omaha. It was the nice area to walk and relax.

Then we took once again a short stop to the gallery where we met Marcia, that gallery worker and Newberry's friend.



Afterward our friends took us for a car tour around neighborhood of the Old Market. We walked down the Riverfront in a bank of the Missouri river, what is the huge area where varied culture events were given as well as the good place for casual strolls and sitting by the river. There also was a big bronze sculpture sits in the bank of the river to talk about the steel-industry history of Omaha.

We also could notice how much water was flowing down the Missouri, with a lot of mess in it that was a consequence of those heavy rains during last night. The mighty stream was

full of tree trunks, branches even remainders of wooden buildings ...

Then we went through a modern part of Omaha, we headed for the Qwest Omaha Center, the giant cultural complex (<http://www.qwestcenter.com>). Seeing that only boosted our knowledge, that Omaha representatives and businessmen really did a good job and they made of Omaha really the biggest center of culture of the Midwest.

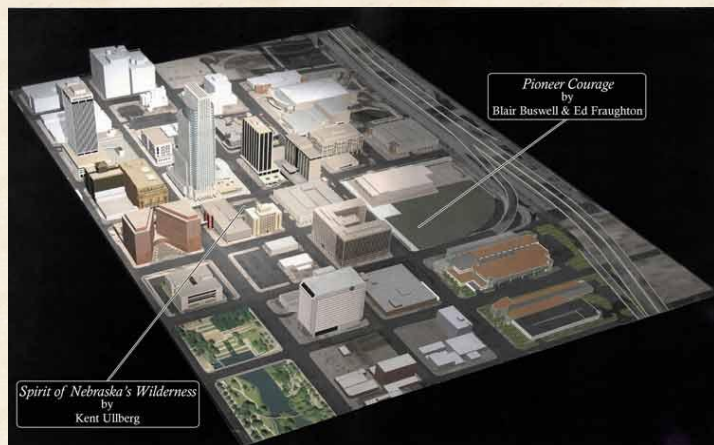
We posed for Dan in front of high sculptures of a ballerina and an acrobat before the Center and then we moved a bit farther by car to the



First National Bank.

(<http://www.boodyfinearts.com/firstnational.html>)

First we slowly rode down the streets around and could admire many bronze above life-size sculptures of bison and geese which all were so tastefully and sensitively situated among or into modern buildings and parklands. That *'Spirit of Nebraska's Wilderness'* was reminder of typical wildlife of the Midwest and



connected last times and nowadays together. The *'Pioneer Courage'* sculptural group that we visited a bit later paid tribute to the first pioneers, settlers who came to the Nebraska area. There we could see again accurate bronze sculptures of men, women, children, horses and wagons of above life-size again. Very interesting, very big, very impressive. And again ... all those exhibits created the one unit with modern buildings all around.



01:00 p.m. – we stopped at the Susie's Pet Grooming to feed and pet the cats.



During a drive home Susie showed us a town quarter where they lived with Dan after their wedding. At that time they were quite poor, Dan was sick (*meningitis* ?) and he had to be hospitalized and Susie stayed alone with small Stacie almost without any money. She recalled that she had only a few dimes when she went to buy muffins ... „We were poor people, Mirek, really poor people. So from that time we think about every expense and we are very careful about money”, Dan added.

01:45 p.m. – Dan had a nap for a while and us of the tree had a nice time sipping coffee and talking. We also gifted Zuzanka with our last present, we gave her two ceramic cups for coffee. We hoped we brought a bit pleasure in that her exhausting day ...

Of course we went through all events of the day, Susie showed us the afternoon Omaha World-Herald that had already contained an article about the catastrophe in Jackson Artworks.

**Omaha World-Herald**

May 6, 2007

### **Art gallery roof collapses just hours after reception**

About 150 people attended Saturday night's showing of about 100 pieces of art at Jackson Artworks. Fortunately, they had left the opening- night reception hours before the collapse of the roof at 1108 Jackson St. in the Old Market of downtown Omaha.

"It was like a mini-tsunami in here," gallery director Marcia Manzo said as she provided a quick tour while workers removed debris Sunday evening.

Manzo and owners Jim and Kat Moser, who live next door in one of the two side-by-side buildings they own, were the hosts of the reception from 6 to 9 p.m. Saturday. The roof may have been struck by lightning and, weakened by the weight of the water



from Omaha's record rainfall Saturday, collapsed between midnight and 2 a.m.

"It could have been devastating if it had happened last night," said Manzo, who received a phone call informing her of the collapse.

Nobody was in the building after 10:30 p.m. Saturday. None of the pieces in the show were damaged. However, damage totaling thousands of dollars was done to other pieces, including many that were being held for buyers.

**Possible lightning strike and the weight of water is being blamed for the roof collapse at Jackson Artworks on early Sunday. Paul Davis Restoration employees work atop the building at 1108 Jackson St.**

"We were blessed," Manzo said, referring to the fact that there were no injuries and the 100 pieces that were shown were intact. "But we also sold a lot of art last night." Unfortunately, the studio and artwork of Omaha artist/sculptor Dan Newberry were destroyed. Some books in his studio ended up more than 35 feet away in the building's kitchen.

Paintings in a front storage room were destroyed; others were damaged by the humidity in the aftermath.

Other artwork hadn't been accounted for, and some works in storage weren't reachable because of their proximity to the collapsed roof. The building's office, including its computer, was destroyed, as were the contents in another room rented by an Omaha musician.

"He was pouring water out of guitars," Manzo said. Workers estimated the hole in the roof to be 22 feet by 20 feet. Despite the mess, there's a possibility of reopening soon. "We're hoping for a reopening of this show, with any luck, this weekend," Manzo said. Meanwhile, there is no way of estimating the damage. "We're not anywhere near that yet," Manzo said.

In the newspaper we could see that the hole in the roof was already repairing by workers. However Zuzanka was a bit more skeptical according to early reopening ...



Then I started taking memory shots of inner arranging and decorating of the house, as well as of the back yard with all its beautifying. On that occasion I probably saved a water pump in the small pond. I could hear it was ticking over so I called Dan, Dan filled up the water level in the pond and everything was all right again. Meantime our girls spent an pleasant half an hour going through American accounting and bookkeeping. ☺

04:00 p.m. – we moved to the Old Country Buffet restaurant for family lunch and meeting. Originally Susie wanted to give it at home in the back yard, but then because of the uncertain weather and also because of the Jackson Artworks event she changed the plan and invited others to the restaurant.



Hana and me were quite nervous. After all, it was our first meeting the Omaha Stehno family ... but everything was okay. Before the restaurant we shook hands with Joe Stehno, who was waiting for us outside. Then we all entered the restaurant, passed by a cash desk where Susie paid something (*\$10 per person for us the four ?*) and we went on to a private meeting-dining room where other family members already sat at the table. There were Dad Frank Stehno, Ginny with her daughter Carrie, Stacie McDonald with her husband Kendell and daughters Cassidy and Danica. There was a lot of welcoming and shaking hands and much and much English words for our Czech ears. We gave them small presents that we brought along ... Omaha Frank got playing cards of the Czech castles, a ceramic bell and a CD of Czech Brass Music, Ginny was given with a neckless of gemstones and playing cards of the Czech castles, Joe got a pensil of Pilsner Urquell as well as Kendell, there was the playing cards of the castles for Stacie and the small girls were given with little cushions with a picture of the Mole (*a very popular character from one Czech fairytale*). They all were surprised and liked their gifts (*we hoped for it*).

Then we all went for our meals. The restaurant was, according to the name, of the buffet style, it means self-service style and we could load on our plates what we wanted.

Yes, you pay some money when you come and you can eat what you manage ... but without hesitation, the owners of that chain of buffets are experienced and they have it counted, they know what they do ...

So we had some meat, sauce, vegetable, potatoes ... and coffe and something sweet. Delicious !

And then there was much casual talking and chatting, the pleasant atmosphere. They all our new relatives were so nice, polite and friendly and we did feel like home during our own family party. It was like we had already known each other for long time ... Only that much English was a bit exhausting for us. We were able to talk to the one, or to the two of our friends but when they started to talk all together and across the table, it was very difficult for our ears to catch it and we were almost lost in all that ocean of foreign words. Yes, of course we were able to understand here and there quite enough but we got to know that our English still needed to improve ☺.

Anyway ... the meeting was so warm, spontaneous and so, so friendly ! Me and Ginny took some pictures to keep that memorable meeting in memory. Then me and Hana thanked to our new family companions for their warm words and for having us like family members, we invited them to the Czech Republic. Afterward we all left that pleasant restaurant. Outside we took another pictures, said them all our good bye, our special one belonged to Dad who was visibly touched by our company ... and got in Toyota.

„Good Bye for next, dears !”.

Just for Ginny it was not so long farewell, because she knew we would meet the next day in the Omaha's Henry Doorly Zoo.





06:00 p.m. – we stopped to check a situation in Jackson Artworks. The roof was under reconstruction and almost all debris were over. Yes, the restoration company was doing really the good job.

Dan and Susie again looked over damaged things, they picked another usable ones up and they discussed that sad event with the gallery owners, Mr. and Mrs. Moser. And they all were immensely happy that the horrible disaster did not happen last evening when there were about 150 people so that catastrophe was without any one injured or killed human being.



They all seemed to be in a balanced way, almost without any mark of sadness or depression of that havoc all around. The strong people.

But for us two, Hana and me, it was the really sad spectacle. To see Zuzanka how she picked up a computer full of dirt from debris and Dan how he stand in front of his damaged sculpture

...

And they both concordantly were sorry about not having us to the yesterday's opening, we could see the gallery in full feather before that catastrophe. „But what are we gonna do

now ...”.

We also could see some dirty Jackson Gallery T-shirts and we showed our wish to have some for memory ... we got the last ones new and clear. The orange one for Hana and the black one for me. Thanks a lot.

08:00 p.m. – back at the Newberry's. Dan made a fire in a special, bottle like ceramic fireplace in the front sitting. He told us that it was made somewhere about Santa Fe from a special potter's clay.

So ... flames and wine ... and friendly casual talking. Susie questioned us what we liked the best on our joint vacation, what would remained in our minds as the memories number one. Hana remembered unbelievable white pure beaches in Panama City Beach, me recalled the first sunset in Long Key. You know, the sunset among fans of palm tree branches ... and also jacuzzi and canoeing in the bay in Key West ... and the trip to Dry Tortugas ... but everything what we had seen was wonderful ...

„And what about you, Zuzanka ?” ... „Your pantomime, Mirek, when you performed us two discussing on the beach in Panama City Beach ☺”. And we continued our common joking. We remembered their first visit to the Czech Republic in 2004, our family meeting in our kitchen together with Hana's sister Zdena and her husband Karel and their sons Tomas and Jakub. We told our friends that only when we later watched the video of that party, we got that Susie and Dan misunderstood our explanation of the Czech saying : „Chodit po houbách = To pick mushrooms.”

So ... explanation again ... in our country we use this saying when we talk about somebody young when we want to say that some events had happened before he was born ... he still picked mushrooms at that time.

So ... in that meeting we translated Zdena and Karel's talking about their joint life, that something was happened even before Tomas and Jakub were born ... we used that saying ... the boys still picked mushrooms at that time ☺. But from the video when we could see how Susie and Dan after our explanation bursted out laughing we got it that Zuzanka and Dan understood it in their different, more ribald way ... that Zdena and Karel went mushrooming ... and then Tomas was born ... then they two went mushrooming again ... and Jakub was born again ☺ ☺ ☺ ! No, no, it was not right catching, our friends. Anyway ... more funny ! Try to see that video ...

Yes, we spent pleasant evening again with our friends. But there is an end to everything ...

09:30 p.m. – „Good night, friends. See you tomorrow morning.”



## Monday, May 7<sup>th</sup> – Day 16<sup>th</sup>

07:15 a.m. – „We took our time getting up“. Cloudy but 73 F.

08:00 a.m. – Susie served breakfast in the front patio with a fire in the ceramic fireplace ... and coffeeeeeeee ...



09:30 a.m. – the Omaha's Henry Doorly Zoo.  
(<http://www.omahazoo.com>)

Ginny had already been waiting for us among a bunch of child visitors when we came.

Susie bought tickets and we hit the tour of animals. The first ones we saw were bronze ones, perfectly made an above life-size lion family. Their smooth-faced backs invited to sit up ...

First we headed to the Lied Jungle with the world's largest indoor rainforest and various types of jungle. Yes, we had never seen anything like that before (*again*).

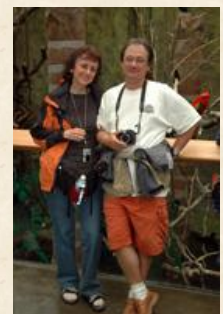
There was the more level configuration with trails leading over the rope bridge ... through short tunnels ... above even behind waterfalls ... above even along a river ... and that all we did in an unbelievable humid and heavy air. There were of course palm trees, liana and all imaginable tropical vegetation all kinds with blooms of various colors. And all of that was situated bellow the giant metal-glass cupola that was supported by the mighty concrete



but accurate nature-like trunk. But there were not only trees and vegetation, we could hear all jungle sounds and noise all around, including bubbling and gurgling of water streams and falls and mainly a lot singing of songbirds and parrots and shrieks and screams of crazy jumping and climbing monkeys.

Another kind of life we could see in the lowest level where there were tapirs strolling along the water and also swimming in it together with the great fish and also waterbirds. And a bit further there was a big aquarium with turtles and fish. The absolute jungle life.

*,The magnificent Lied Jungle is the world's largest indoor rainforest. Inside this 80-foot-tall, 1½-acre conservatory, more than 2,000 plants make the nearly 100 animal species (and human visitors) feel they're in a real jungle, one that is toured from both above and from the jungle floor. The Asian section includes small-clawed otters, gibbons, clouded leopards, and Malayan tapirs, some seen from a slippery swaying suspension bridge behind a waterfall. Africa includes lemurs, blue monkeys, and a pygmy hippo pool. South America has tapirs, otters, vampire bats, enormous Amazonian fish, macaws, and more monkeys'.*



After about one hour we left that magic of the tropicle jungle, withstood traps for tourists and headed for the IMAX cinema. All of us the five. Me and Hana for the first time in our lives.

It was the three-dimensional cinema, where they lend you a big glasses with polarized lenses and where they show stereophotographic movies that you are able to see thanks to glasses in the three-dimensional, life like way. It is so accurate that you feel like you are one part of the movie.

Our movie was about dinosaurs. Yes we were in the ZOO, so it suited. Only those animals were too big after all. ☺

After the IMAX Ginny said her good bye to us, she had to go to work. Us four continued the animal tour.

And what was the next place to visit in line ? *,Scott Aquarium, the best aquarium in any USA zoo, features a glass-fronted penguin habitat with real manmade snow, an impressively-large octopus tank, jellyfish, and a 70-foot- long glass tunnel surrounded by sharks.'* Yes, it was said in the ZOO brochure. And yes, it was the fantastic





spectacle. One of the penguins was really funny when it had a shower under the manmade snow falling down from above ... ☺



Wow ! Right next door we could see another kind of the glassed-in habitat as contrast to that cold, with mangroves, fish and ... alligators ! Our good guys gators.

And what amazing that glass tunnel was ! What an amount of fish of all colors and species we could see there ! Huge shoals of colorful small

fish, ponderous turtles, majestic stingrays and ... wow ! Tigers among fish ... sharks ! It was pretty frightening to see them slowly swimming above our heads in full feather of its 12 feet.

About 1 p.m. – we left that magic water world and we had a short rest in the Durham's Tree Tops restaurant with coffee (*Pepsi*) and some sweets. We sat at the table right by the side of the metal-glass cupola of the Lied Jungle. We were looking down from the height of the tree tops. It was the casual a half hour break.

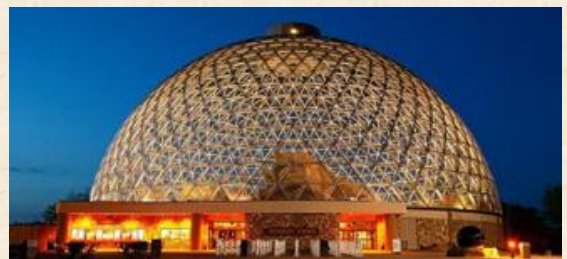
*Adjacent to the Lied Jungle is the Durham's TreeTops Restaurant, with seating capacity of over 300 people. Money to build the \$2.55 million restaurant was donated by Charles and Margre Durham and the Kiewit Foundations. Visitors can view the indoor jungle through 90 feet of floor-to-ceiling windows. The Durham's TreeTops Restaurant features cafeteria-style meals either hot off the grill or a cold deli sandwich, soft drinks, salads, snacks, desserts and more. Open for lunch daily.'*



Again farther ... „Let's go to the biggest dome in the ZOO !", we entered the giant ferroconcrete-glass cupola of the Desert Dome.

*Another great climate-controlled exhibit is the Desert Dome, underneath the world's largest geodesic dome. Deserts of three continents are realistically recreated. Around a big red sand dune, Africa's Namib Desert hosts serval cats, meerkats, rock hyraxes, and many birds. After a cave filled with deadly snakes, visitors encounter a miniature version of Australia's Ayers Rock, with rock wallabies and various Aussie birds exhibited around it. Representing America's Sonoran Desert, a herd of peccary wild pigs with pumas behind them is a stunning sight. Hummingbird Canyon has many fast-flying hummers. A sloping habitat is a children's delight, with many desert cottontails and jackrabbits.*

*Under the deserts, Kingdoms of the Night is the world's largest and best nocturnal exhibit. Clever lighting keeps animals visible, while it's dark enough to feel you're in their nighttime world. In one section, over 2,400 stalactites hang from above, while thousands of fruit bats flutter behind a harp wire barrier. Other fascinating creatures include naked mole-rats, cat- like fossas, aardvarks, armadillos, and Japanese giant salamanders. While on the swamp habitat's boardwalk, visitors see beavers, bullfrogs, and alligators -- including a beautiful white alligator. An interesting glass-fronted exhibit mixes raccoons with small alligators.'*



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Yes, again, it was breathtaking. We were speechless from amazement ...

From the Desert Dome we went out into the sunless but nicely warm Omaha afternoon. We strolled along outside runs of the big cats to the pavilion of gorillas and orangutans. We could see tigers, panthers, leopards but also even polar bears and grizzly bears as well as Malayan sun bears. The wonderful animals in the wonderful landscaping that was faithfully copying their nature habitats. Rocks, waterfalls, trees ... and actually all that was manmade. Incredible. Concrete, metal and the great human inventiveness ... hats off to them who made it. Really amazing !



*,The aging Cat Complex is the largest feline building in North America, with nine types of cats, including white Bengal tigers. Bear Canyon hosts four bear species in rocky grottoes.'*



From cats and bears we moved a bit further, to anthropoids. First we peeked down into the gorilla kingdom from above, from the upper sidewalk. Apes were lazy walking down, under our feet in a lawn.

Yes, it seemed safely, there was a handrail in the edge and there was more than the 30-foot-high and steep concrete wall, yes ... but ... but looking at those silver-black big

muscular bodies, the idea of the mighty gorilla running and climbing up the wall was creeping up on our minds ...

So we better went down the sidewalk to the Gorilla Valley entrance and came in. There we could see the gorillas in their habitat safe and sound through big windows with safety thick glass in them (*but one of them was burst* 😊). And it was really something special to see to the Valley. The gorillas were really imposing and a general affinity between them and human beings was evident. Those their eyes !

Especially one moment stuck in my mind ... I was taking picture of one male during his slow walking around the window, when he stopped moving for a while, turned his head and faced me. There was an eye contact between us two for about ten seconds. He stared straight into my eyes. I could feel thousand years in his look. It was the really strange feeling, it was like our brains were connected for a second. So deep sense. What was it ? His eyes were not eyes of the animal, his look was questioning, searching, estimating ... understanding. Who from us two was behind the glass ... ?

Afterward me and Hana expressed that feeling of our affinity joining a bronze gorilla family in front of the pavilion. We climbed backs of the parents ... Dan took shots. 😊

*,Gorilla Valley and Orangutan Forest bring these popular apes within a few feet of their human visitors, especially from large bubble windows.'*

Yes, the Orangutan Forest was another ape habitat that we visited. There was a visible difference between those two species. The gorillas were slowly moving, they looked like to be quiet and cautious. The orangutans were always playing, jumping and climbing everywhere.

When we had our eyes feasted enough on those lively great apes, we went out again and took a sightseeing tour around outside habitats of antelopes, elks, deers, boars and other even-toed and odd-toed ungulates.

We also could see a lot of waterbirds, mainly beautifully colored flamingos, on our tour.

But at that time we had already leaden feet ... so we turned our steps toward the exit from the ZOO. Our eyes for the last time swept the Desert Dome and also the lion bronze family and in the next moment we already were getting in Toyota. We would never forget that visit to the Omaha's Henry Doorly ZOO, it was the wonderful and memorable experience. Yes, yes, we had never seen anything like that before. It was amazing, fabulous, fairytale. The best ZOO in the world for us. Big thanks to you, Zuzanka and Dan. Big thanks.

04:00 p.m. – finally meal ! 😊 Our friends gave us a lift to their favorite Italian restaurant of Olive Garden.

(<http://www.olivegarden.com/locator/locatorSearchalt.asp>)

Yes, Italian cuisine is our favorite too. Indeed. Anyway ... we do not have it so often back in the Czech Republic, there is no Italian restaurant in our town. Only





when Hana cooked her pizza (*but it was something special then. Delicious, scrumptious ... even if it is a bit different to those original ones*).

Olive Garden was the really neat, quiet and attractive restaurant of upper class. A waiter led us to our table and brought us the menu. Our stomachs called for any meal of the menu but we had to moderate our tastes and to choose only something. So I ordered *'Cheese Pizza with mashrooms'* for Hana and *'Lasagna Classico'* for me. Susie had (*I think*) *'Fettucine with meat balls'* and Dan *'Spaghetti'* with something non meaty.

Something on the Italian cuisine ... I am everytime amazed, especially that goes for pastas ... they bring me a seemingly small portion of something good, what shows to be not only so tasty but also so, so filling that I can hardly manage to eat it up ... a miracle of the Italian cuisine.

So ... we loved our meals ! It was so, so yummy ! We enjoyed it our best. Without hasitation. We spent there really a pleasant one hour in a family ambiance and with the high professional crew. We can recommended it indeed.

06:00 p.m. – back at the Newberrys' base where we had a nice evening with wine, talking and reading. I also gave our friends the 2006 journal: *'It was a dream'* about our common traveling around the Czech Republic. And Zuzanka immediately wrote in our copy her warm epilogue about both, the past 2006 and the present 2007 vacations of our four. It was very warmhearted and nice note.

About 8 p.m. Marcia came around. When she went out Susie talked something about her, about her work for the gallery that she managed to do a big amount of work but : *"Sometimes she drives Dan mad"*. ☺

We continued talking, I remembered not completely answered question of Dan's life : *"And what did you Dan do after you left the army ? I can remember you have mentioned something about hard drugs in the service ?"*... *"Yes, you see ... shortly after I got back from Viet Nam, I married Toni. I still did some drugs after I came out, but got off all drugs completely when me and Toni decided to start a family. Yes, I'm strong man who know what to do ... "*

Zuzanka backed us at that present time again and described the next day program. The last day for vacation time in Omaha : *"It would be relaxing and casual time the whole day when we will relish our time together"*.

09:45 p.m – we went to bed. It is true that after all that ZOO tour we were really dog-tired ☺.

## Tuesday, May 8<sup>th</sup> – Day 17<sup>th</sup>

08:00 – we got up at our leisure. The last vacation morning in Omaha, in the States.



The next day already would be a departure day ...

But why hanging our heads when outside is so wonderful and sunny morning and the whole day is still before us ! Why we should roll up our pant legs when a ford is still a long way ahead of us ! (*a Czech saying*)

When we climbed upstairs, Susie and Dan had already their breakfast eaten and they were lounging in the armchairs in the

backyard with a newspaper.

We joined them when our breakfast was finished.

Ah, yes ... also Joey and Sunka were our companions. Yes, yes they were our good guys during every time at Newberrys and they made an unseperable couple. However everyone of them





was a bit different. Joey, he was a worthy and a bit distant boy. Sunka, she was a curious lady, who liked to be pet and spoiled and whose unmistakeable clatter of her claws made a house more lively.

Thus ... the six of us spent the really casual morning time reading, sipping coffee (*Pepsi*), talking and joking and also exploring every corner of that neat and beautified part of our friends' home. We relished our, coming to its end, time together ...



I was quite surprised by a big amount of wires that were going over the back yard. I had noticed that it was a normal thing during our travel in the States, especially in older parts of towns, uptown. I told Dan that they tried to lead and put all

those wires under ground in our country, in our town. Maybe they only planned it over there ...

During taking pictures I spotted a small snake among rocks of a pond, it seemed like a Czech slowworm but that one was bigger and more colorful. I showed it to Dan and we looked at it for a while, but unfortunately Joey noticed it too, he nimbly jumped at it and grabbed it in his maw. It was a good thing Dan was so fast and managed to take the snake from Joey again. Without it, that situation would had come out fatally. And only a second before that event our friends spoke highly of Joey, that he did pay no attention to other creatures ...

Finally it ended up well, only with a slight wound on the snake's back and when Dan release it from his palm it disappeared quick as a flesh into a hole among rocks and plants by the pond.

Wow ! A squirrel ! It curiously gazed down at us among branches of a tree and it was quiet even if I took shots from about 12 feet. Only when Joey started barking and jumping, it gracefully climbed down the tree on an upper edge of a wooden fence and run across it to neighbors. And there was reproaching Joey again : „Ah, Joey, what are you doing today ?!“

„Zuzanka, and what about your moving ? Do you still insist on a change of a place to live ?“, we were curious about an intent of our friends that they spoke about during their visit to us last year.

„No, Mirek. We have changed our decision and we will stay here. We love this our small cozy house and our neat yards. And then ... there is a low property tax that we have to pay for our house. It is \$400 only a year. For example Stacie and Kendell pay for their house \$6000 ! Yes, we will stay here.“

12:15 p.m. – our lazy time was over and we set off for another tour around Omaha. First we took a stop at Zuzanka and Dan's favorite shop of everything what you need or could need or you even have not known yet you need ☺ for your home. There you can find really anything and more and more to beautify your house and yard. Well, I said a shop ... but it was a huge mall, partly roofed, partly in the open space. Ah, it was so, so extensive ! There we could see a lot and lot of flowers of all imaginable and unimaginable kinds and colors, bushes and palm trees. There you could buy all kinds of tools, a building material, sandstone sculptures, fountains, arbors, garden furnitures and so on and so on. Yes, yes it is easy to think up your landscaping when you can go and find inspiration from all those things, from all that beauty.



01:15 p.m. – we visited a cemetery where Susie's grandparents and Mom have rested. The nice place, so green and full of peace.

It seems that to use graves with headstones in the Czech tradition is not so usual thing in the States. We could see only granite tablets with epitaphs lying in a nicely trimmed lawn over there.



So, no tombstones, just the place to stand and cast your mind back ...



Unfortunately I did not write down a name of the cemetery.

01:45 p.m. – a stop at Jackson Artworks. The building company did a good job. The hole in the roof was over, there were new carrying beams covered with particleboards and a new roofing so the building was already protected from rains again.



02:05 p.m. – a casual walk down the Old Market, we were



browsing shops and boutiques during the sunny afternoon with high blue sky above. Yes, those former factories and storehouses became the really neat and shi shi shops and stores with a special patina and atmosphere. We would like to buy some T-shirts in remembrance of Omaha but it was maybe not the right place to buy something for us. Everything there was much exclusive, much artistic and much ... expensive ☺. So

we went walking and sightseeing only, we peeked here and there in some stores, to buy only by our eyes and put it all in our minds (*it was free* ☺).

Then we took advantage of a car comfort again and moved for another experience ...

02:45 p.m. – ‘Bohemian Cafe’ ! Until that time we had known that restaurant in the tradition of the Czech only from letters of our friends and could hear only much praise for the Bohemian Cafe that was the favorite place for their family meetings. And there we were ... we stood before a colorful and in the Czech folk art tradition decorated front wall of that special restaurant. And when we saw a signboard with the Czech lettering ‘VITAME VAS’, we felt like we were somewhere in an open-air folk museum in the Czech Republic.



And it was just outside, what could we expect inside ? Wow ! More than we supposed to see ! It was amazing ! Yes, it was the genuine Czech old time restaurant. There were decorations in the Czech folk art tradition all around again, pictures with Czech motifs on the walls, waitresses dressed in richly decorated folk costumes and we could also hear a brass music from speakers.

Yes, there were everything with the one intent ... to bring a feeling of the Czech background.

There were many customers, mainly older pensioners in the restaurant. How Susie told us, that formerly Czech part of Omaha was gradually becoming a quarter of poorer Spanish-American people, who had a different tradition and their own restaurants, so the Bohemian Cafe was visited mainly by eyewitnesses of old good times and also by lovers of the Czech cuisine and beer.

*‘The Bohemian Cafe has been serving Omaha's hungry Czechs and non-Czechs since 1924. Louie Marcala was chef-owner until 1947 when he sold it to Josef and Ann (Kapoun) Libor and stayed on as head chef. Our grandparents, Babi and Deda, operated the cafe at 1256 South 13th Street until 1959 when they moved a half block south to our present location. The site was a bank (Bohemian S & L) and a grocery store (Amen's) so there were a lot of changes to be made to get it suitable for a restaurant. Babi and Deda built their reputation through long, hard hours and genuine hospitality. They retired in 1966 and 2 more generations of the Kapoun family has been cooking, serving, cleaning and bussing to bring you Dumplings and Kraut today. With the 4th generation chipping in, we hope to be Omaha's European Connection for years to come.’*



Original owners Josef and Ann Libor

We went through a taproom where they have genuine Pilsner Urquell on a tap, passed by a collection of historic pictures of the Czech owners and their crew and came in one part of the restaurant, again with the old fashioned decoration and with the picture of the Prague Castle and the Charles Bridge on the wall. A small, older but agile waitress



led us to our table and she immediately brought us the menu and usual glasses with water and ice according to the American manner. And shortly after our first order also dark beers for me and Dan and Coca Cola for Hana.

Hana and me were all amazed at all that Czech style decoration. Dan took a shot of us two in front of the picture of the Prague Castle. We really felt as we were in our



homeland. And that look on the menu ! There we could see varied Czech meals even with their Czech names !

We asked our friends if staff speak in Czech and we were dissapointed a bit by her answer that there was a low possibility of it. Maybe the owners, maybe the chef but the normal staff not.

And Dan got immediately devil's flames into his eyes and came out with an idea how we could try it out in practice.

He talked me into doing my order in Czech. Well. I am a good guy and I am ready to every fun ☺. So when the waitress walked to us for our orders, at first Dan made his order, then Susie, Hana and when that good woman came to me, I began :

*„Tak paní, já bych si dal tu knedlíčkovou polívku a potom vepřové s knedlíkem a zelím“.*

That poor woman only opened her mouth in wonder and her eyes behind glasses became a bit bigger. ☺ No way ! She did not get any word ...

The next moment I apologized her for my trick and also Dan rushed to help me and told her that Hana and me came to the States from the Czech Republic and he and his wife showed us the beauties of America. The waitress recovered from my joke right then, I made my order in English and she wished us a good stay. Dan even entered into conversation with her for a moment and we got from their talking that the woman was born already in the States but her ancestors came from Holland. She had been working for the Bohemian Cafe already for ages ... but she never learned in Czech.



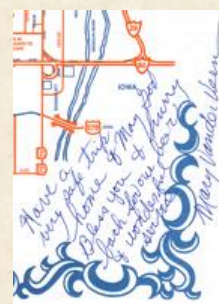
Aaaaaaa ! Food was there ! Liver dumpling soup and Czech dumplings with svickova sauer cream gravy and sauerkraut for Dan, roast loin of pork with Czech dumplings, grave and sauerkraut for Susie and Hana. And me ? Ouch ! I overrated a bit my English and during joking with the waitress I probably made mistake about my order. Yes, liver dumpling soup was right but then I thought I had ordered the same as Susie and Hana – dumplings, pork, gravy and sauerkraut but when that good woman brought me my meal, for that time I opened my mouth in wonder ☺. Breaded pork loin (*schnitzel*) with gravy, Czech dumplings and sauerkraut ! The very odd combination for my finicky Czech tongue. ☺ (*There is a normal way to serve breaded pork loin with boiled potatoes, a little gravy of butter and with a few pickled cucumberes in the Czech Republic*). And what a big portion of meal I got ! Wow ! It was my another mistake because while Hana ordered a ,lunch' portion for her, my eyes were too big and I ordered a ,dinner' size of meal for me. Yes, of course, I finally managed it and cleared my plate but I was full to bursting ... and even if the meal had unusual taste to me, it was so, so, so yummy !!!

Then we had another mug of beer (*light for that time*) and we enjoyed a good time at our table.

In conclusion I asked the waitress for a new small paper ,*Bohemian Cafe*' tablecloth in remembrance of our visit to the Bohemian Cafe. She was so nice, she gave it to me even with her writing on it.

Then Susie paid and thanked her for all of those yummys even for her pleasant service and ,*See you next time !*' we said her our hellos like old friends. Yes, maybe some time in the future ...

04:30 p.m. – our return to the base where we had afternoon coffee ...





we also could see Ginny once again, she came to visit and to share the pictures from the family meeting and from the zoo. In Zuzanka's office room I used her computer to download Ginny's pictures using the card reader that I bought in Panama City Beach. I also wanted to do copies of all my Olympus cards of all my pictures just in case and burn them on CD's . But there a small catastrophe happened during that process ... while my shots of pictures from the South were copying on a hard drive, Susie's computer suddenly collapsed and I lost about 400 files from one my card, unfortunately there were my very favorite pictures and videos from the Overseas Highway, Key West and Dry Tortugas. I was stunned and unhappy about that loss. And it was probably seen on me because Susie was sad of me. But what can be done ... Zuzanka calm me down and promised to send us their pictures and videos of our vacation as soon as possible to fill in our memory bank. Yes, what were we gona do more ?

Then I realized and remembered our friends' dissaster in the gallery and to compare to theirs, my bad luck was almost nothing. That's life. It seems that we all have always to pay for our nice times ... I do not know way it is but it goes that way ... pluses and minuses ... yin and yang ... as Zuzanka says : *„That which does not kill us, makes us stronger.“*

Shortly after 6 p.m. we left our friends and climbed downstairs to our basement apartment to pack our stuff. We wanted to have done that sad part of evening as soon as possible but it was not so easy as we thought. We had to be careful about weight of our baggage because of the airport inspection. But finally we managed it and we were able at about 8 p.m. to come back to our friends and join them in their sipping wine in the front sitting by a fire.

It was our last evening so we enjoyed it our best. We were joking and smiling and we tried to do not think about next day. However there was a bit nostalgic mood by the fire ... we did not know when we would be again able to be together again. Yes, of course we promised it would be as soon as possible but ...



We also went through all our common vacation spring time ... Hana and me again thanked our friends for all your care and hospitality, for all events and experiences. We again remembered all places that we visited. We special thanked them for the trip to Dry Tortugas, mainly me ☺.

There was also talking about Sunday's family meeting, we admitted that we were a bit confused by that flood of English, but we relished that family atmosphere. We also noted that we liked McDonalds, they looked like the really satisfied family.

Susie added : *„Stacie is a good mother and Kendell a good father. Kendell works for a software company, he works home, so they all of them four spend the most time together. Only Stacie miss her own money a bit, she was used to have her own regular monthly income from her eighteen and now she fully depends on her husband when she is home with girls. But she is satisfied, she does not miss work, just money.☺ “.*

And Susie even added she did not understand that, she would miss work, she permanently needed any activity.

Me and Dan also had a talk about a question of belief. Me and Hana said we are not believers, but maybe that people who believe have their lives leighter, with their belief. The God helps them with everything (*they think*) and they rely on Him.

But we think that everything is only our deal and we are the only ones who can help ourselves and others ...

Zuzanka added that they were raised in the catholic religion, that Dad was strong in his belief. Brother Joe believed a sort of normal but his wife was almost fanatical in that. I expressed my opinion that some believing people had the God something like an insurance, they made a business with Him : *„My Lord, I will be praying to you, I'll*



give you presents and please, give me health and property ...", and Dan to it : „Mirek, you're right, you got it ! However you see, sometimes I think that somebody may be up." ... „Who knows ?" , I nodded.

We also once again praised their cozy house and yards even that wooden sidewalk leading from a driveway. It all was really perfect made and everything went so well together. We liked it immensely. I asked Dan if he gained all his knowledges and skills in a school. And Dan's spokeswoman Susie answered : „Dan took a course in the school where they learned about roofing and framing a house, but his main knowledge about carpentry and building came from working as a carpenter. He always loved building things and working by his hands, so it was mainly his natural ability."

And also once again we thanked our friends for all their care in Omaha in spite of all concerns brought them along with that gallery collapse : „Our friends, you know, we feel a bit guiltily when we are over here after that disaster and we keep you from saving things in the gallery ... and you have to take care about us. We see, we see, you are our sweet friends and you like having us at home and enjoy our company (as well as we yours) but ... anyway ... if we wouldn't be with you at this time you could

save more stuff maybe. So we appreciate immensely your care, hospitality and friendship even at this for you hard time. However ... maybe ... on the other hand ... our presence maybe help you got better over that disaster. We hope for it. Our fingers are crossed for you."

At that moment a phone rang. Frank called ! Susie talked to him for a while and then she gave the cell to us. Yes, we could hear Frank ! We recognized his voice immediately and it seemed to us it was just yesterday when we spoke to him the last time, not two years ago ...

Frank asked us what was our vacation like and what places we visited during a vacation with Susie and Dan. We answered that we had a great times with our friends and we got to see another



wonderful sights of the States and experience interesting events. We told him that we also wanted to phone him during our vacation travel but we still were in a whirlwind, so we postponed it and postponed it ... So that it was nice of him to call, he made us really happy, we were really glad to hear him. We also asked him for giving our regards to Anne. Then we said him our good bye and promised him that the next time us two would be ones who would call. Yes, it was a pleasant surprise.

We kept talking even for a while and enjoyed our last times together. But because we all knew that we would get up early the next day, afterward we finally said our last Good night one another and parted our company.

We once again checked our baggage and all things and went to bed, dreamed our last American dreams.

## Wednesday, May 9<sup>th</sup> – Day 18<sup>th</sup>

04:00 a.m. – for the last time : „Rise and shine ! Today is our last day and the back flight is before us !".

We got up, did our usual morning things, for the last time we took advantage of comfort of our downstairs apartment, then said our good bye to Sunka, Joey, Shoe and to the whole Newberry's home, loaded our baggage into the familiar red Toyota and hit with our friends our last 2007 U.S. drive ... to the Omaha Eppley Arfield Airport. We all were quite sad when we shortly before 5 a.m. reached that place. Nothing can be done ...



(<http://www.eppleyairfield.com>)

First we all went to the Delta check-in counter. There was an older man, a worker, who was surprised by our flight



tickets, he looked like he saw them for the first time in his life and was a bit confused. However finally (*we believed it at that moment*) he seemed to manage it and exchanged our flight coupons for boarding passes to Cincinnati and to New York. He also took our baggage to send it along with us.



Then we had a short break in an airport cafe. Our last American muffins, our last American coffee, the last common breakfast in the States ... and the last talk with our American friends face to face. We all tried to pose as cheerful people, but there we were, the sadness was almost tangible.

Ah, it was a difference from our parting in the Ruzyne Prague Airport last summer. At that time we all were quite happy

because we knew, that we would see one another so soon, in the 2007 spring. But that day, May 9th 2007 we did not know when we would be able to have our next common vacation again. Yes, of course we promised one another that it would be soon, as soon as it would be possible but there was not exact date arranged, only *'some time in the future'*.

Dan took the last pictures of us two and then we all hit our last common but very short walk down the airport corridor toward the customs. Zuzanka and Dan kept company with us as far as it was possible but then we had to said them our last good bye, we embraced and kissed them our goodbye.

Then we lost sight of our friends who disappeared in the crowd. Our fantastic 2007 South Midwest U.S. Tour was over and there was just our back flight to the Czech Republic left.



We made pass through the customs without any problems and entered the terminal, where we browsed more than half an hour inside a duty-free zone shops. There we finally purchased wished-for T-shirts. They were really nice with the Omaha lettering and a corn cob on it. Then we spent another while strolling around our gate (*I took pictures of our smallish plane*) and waiting for a departure.



**Shortly after 7 a.m.** we boarded a plane, took off and started our back journey. There was about an hour and half long flight (*615 miles*) to Cincinnati, our first layover and change, ahead of us. The weather was wonderful, it was beautiful sunny morning. Ah, what a large flatland we could see from the plane ! How incredible large and a flat area Nebraska and Iowa are !


And squares and rectangles of farms all around down there ... Illinois was a bit hillier but only a bit. Than we continued across Indiana to Kentucky and about **9.45 a.m.** local time (*one hour more than in Omaha*) we landed on the Cincinnati/Northern Kentucky International Airport (<http://www.cvgairport.com>). We managed to find our gate to New York without problems, spent there more than one hour, then we boarded the plane and took our another flight. That time we flew to New York. And another one hour and half was before us (*590 miles*). The flight passed off in peace and quiet, the weather kept being sunny.

Delta Air Lines DL 4471		Wednesday, May 9, 2007
From	Omaha / Eppley Airfield (OMA), Omaha, Nebraska USA	7:10 AM
To	Cincinnati / Cincinnati/Northern Kentucky (CVG), Cincinnati, Ohio USA	9:58 AM



On the JFK International Airport we landed slightly ahead of schedule at 12.40 a.m. so we had more than four hours of free time to our another, final flight over the ocean. We looked forward to having casual lunch, soft drinks and coffee and some shopping. We wanted to spend and enjoy our last moments in the States in a casual mood.



Delta Air Lines DL 5386		Wednesday, May 9, 2007				
From	Cincinnati / Cincinnati/Northern Kentucky (CVG), Cincinnati, Ohio USA	10:45 AM				
To	New York / <a href="#">John F Kennedy Int'l (JFK), New York, New York USA</a>	12:50 PM				
						
Status	Confirmed					
Cabin	Coach					
Aircraft	Canadair Regional Jet					
Flight duration	2:05					
Mileage	590 miles <a href="#">Disclaimer</a>					
Stop(s)	0					
<div>Monthly Averages</div> <table><tr><td>High: 70°F Low: 54°F</td><td>Rainfall: 3.4 "</td></tr><tr><td colspan="2"><div>Trip tools:</div><a href="#">Subway map</a></td></tr></table>			High: 70°F Low: 54°F	Rainfall: 3.4 "	<div>Trip tools:</div> <a href="#">Subway map</a>	
High: 70°F Low: 54°F	Rainfall: 3.4 "					
<div>Trip tools:</div> <a href="#">Subway map</a>						

But ... when we made a bit confusing wander about terminals (we deplaned our aeroplane right on an airfield, then we entered the terminal 3 on the first floor, we were lost for a while in that ground labyrinth searching the right way, went up an escalator onto the second floor, took a suspension airport train that drove us to the terminal 4 and took another escalator on the third floor) and came to the Czech Airlines check in

counter to exchange our last flight coupons for boarder tickets, the clerk found out that Hana missed the original of the flight coupon for the flight from New York to Prague. We went hot and cold all over ! The Delta clerk in Omaha made mistake and took that flight coupon instead of the coupon from Omaha to Cincinnati and none of us had not notice it ... We tried to persuade the clerk that it was not our mistake and we showed him the copy of the New York-Prague flight coupon in Hana's flight ticket and also our reservation and the payment of our flight tickets but the clerk was unyielding and he insisted on a remedy from the Delta company and he sent us to the Delta office to gain the right boarder coupon for Hana for the oversea flight. We protested against it, we told that we had bought flight tickets and we had booked our



seats in the plane and had paid for them and that coupon is only a formality, only a paper. It was no use. He did not care. Ah those officers and their bureaucratic procedures !

It should had been a casual time and nice farewell to the States but at that one moment it was changed into the nasty nightmare ! If you have ever been to the JFK International Airport you know how large airport it is ! You have to use an airport train to go from one gate to another gate and from one airline company to another airline company and it has several different stories ...

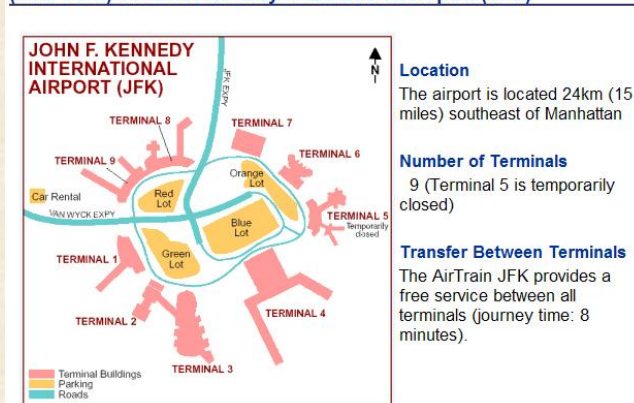
So it was not easy to get to the Delta check in counter at all. And when we finally reached it we were almost desperate. Our faces were white and our hearts were in our mouths. We felt so alone, so lost. So far from home in a foreign country. What a scary time ! ... Yes, we could almost see ourselves to live at the airport like Tom Hanks in the Terminal movie did, because of missing our flight home ... (your words about my similarity to him almost came true ☺).



Fortunately we were the two, fortunately we were able to speak in English and fortunately we could talk about our problem to one young Delta worker.

„Please, excuse us but we need your help. We have a problem. My wife has missed her original coupon of our flight home to the Czech Republic, that is operated by Czech Airlines. A worker of Delta Airlines in Omaha made mistake and took the New York – Prague coupon away from her flight ticket instead of the Omaha – Cincinnati coupon and we did not notice it. Only when she wanted to exchange a coupon for boarding pass at a check in counter of the Czech Airlines here in the JFK International Airport, a clerk of Czech Airlines found she had missed the original coupon and he refused to

(New York) John F. Kennedy International Airport (JFK)





give her a boarding pass to our flight and he said that it is an issue of Delta Airlines and he sent us over here to the Delta check in to deal with it. ", I poured our hassle out. The young man phoned somebody, told us that our thing was started to solve and then he was occupied with a problem of another traveler. We were calmed down a bit but after about an half hour I impatiently questioned him again : „Excuse us again, but what is new on our issue ?" ... „I told about your problem to my boss and he promised to sort it out.", he answered. And really. In a moment came to us a high, good looking man dressed the Delta uniform. He was the crisis manager of Delta. We explained him again our troubles and he began to deal with it. He told one woman to work on a solution of our situation and there were many her calls to everywhere. We spent a lot of time there. Yes, we were lucky we found somebody who was helping us

Czech Airlines CSA OK 51			Wednesday, May 9, 2007
From	New York / John F Kennedy Int'l (JFK), New York, New York USA		4:10 PM
To	Prague / Ruzyně (PRG), Prague Czech Republic		6:20 AM (Thursday)
	Terminal: N1		
Status	Confirmed		
Cabin	Coach		
Aircraft	Airbus Industrie A310		
Flight duration	8:10		
Mileage	4089 miles <a href="#">Disclaimer</a>		
Stop(s)	0		
Meal	Meal		
Seat(s)	12G - Non-smoking 12H - Non-smoking		

Monthly Averages	
High: 63°F	Rainfall: 2.6 "
Low: 45°F	
Currency 1.0 USD = 20.907 CZK	
Dialling codes:	
» From New York To Prague: 011 420	
» From Prague To New York: 00 1	
Trip tools:	
<a href="#">Subway map</a>	

but her calls seemed to be endless.

Ah ... and when we thought of the fact that all unpleasant situation had happened only because of one small piece of paper ! Because of a small but fatal fault of that officer in the Omaha airport when he made his stupid mistake with our flight tickets. Yes, clerk does not care sometimes, it is only his job and he leaves problems behind on you ... it taught us to check everything and everywhere always in the future ...

And the time was running ...









In the meantime I had a talk to the manager (*I tried to keep him dealing our problem with until it was managed*) : „Mister, we are from the Czech Republic and we are going back home from the States where we spent a wonderful common vacation with our American friends. Really, it was going great until now but this bump on the road makes us unhappy." He comforted us that everything would be all right and we could take it easy. I continued my talking : „We spent seventeen beautiful days with our friends traveling around the States. We have visited Florida Keys, Dry Tortugas, Panama City Beach, Naples, New Orleans, Saint Louis and Omaha. It was a marvelous experience.", I raved about our free days in America. He listened attentively to me and then said : „I have never been to the places you have mentioned. I've been living mainly at the airports in New York or Los Angeles. I've still been busy. But ... I've been more times to the Czech Republic ! I've visited to Prague and Karlovy Vary. My wife's parents came from Postupim in East Germany and their roots go to the Czech Republic ... ". Wow ! What a small space our world can be ! Anyway ... talking to that nice man really helped us to feel better. We really needed it, we spent there more than one hour at Delta point ! Finally he gave us a broad smile and handed us the long-wished-for boarding ticket for Hana. We thanked him immensely and a lot and a lot. Yes, he was really the nice man. What a shame we forgot his name because of our stress.

And then ? We hurried back to our terminal 4, to our gate. The Czech Airline check in counter was already closed and we were the last passengers who boarded the plane toward Prague.

We were thirsty, hungry but so happy that we had managed it. We were on the plane home and we enjoyed that great feeling that everything ended well and we stood that shocking test. And all that nerve-racking event was

Czech Airlines OK 51	
	
Aircraft: Airbus Industrie A310-200	
	
From:	edy Int'l (JFK), New York, New York USA
To:	ie (PRG), Prague Czech Republic
Travel Date:	9 MAY, 2007

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 Occupied 
  Available 
  Reserved 
  Exit 
  Smoking 
  Non-smoking 
  Upper Deck Smoking 
  Upper Deck Non-smoking



slowly becoming only the horrible experience, part of our adventure. The story that would be told over and over again, and would not only enlighten our lives in the future, but our story might encourage someone else to double check all their tickets each time to ensure that they had what they needed.

Yes, Zuzanka's favorite saying '*That which does not kill us, makes us stronger.*' goes perfectly for it.

Anyway ... eventually everything came out well, in twenty minutes we took off and could enjoy our flight home and our fresh memories of so wonderful vacation with our sweet American friends ...

Our back flight was fine, shortly after the takeoff they served the first refreshment, it meant meal, dessert, coffee and Czech beer ... and then we flew and flew and flew. About one hour before Prague we got breakfast and about 6.15 a.m. Prague local time our plane touched down the Prague Airport runway. It was Thursday, May 10th when we returned to the Czech reality ...

Well. Our second fantastic American vacation was over. Another vacation of a dreamy and fairytale category. Now we have touched a Caribbean miracle, got to know of Florida beaches and taste a salinity of the Gulf of Mexico. We got to see alligators in Everglades, were given a lift by airboat through mangrove canyons. We became also for some days one part of New Orleans ambience even passengers on a ship of Ron Guidry. We have visited the amazing botanic garden in Saint Louis and got to see the Gateway Arch there. And in conclusion of our tour we spent almost four days in Zuzanka and Dan's homeland in Omaha where we lived with them through sweet even bitter events together and stayed in their cozy home.

The Omaha Henry's Doorly Zoo, the Old Market (*even with destroying Jackson Artworks gallery, ouch !*) and mainly so warm family meeting. We got to see Zuzanka's Dad Frank, Ginny with her daughter, all McDonalds and Joe.

Yes, it was like a dream but the dream that came true. And that all could happen just thanks to you, Zuzanka and Dan. Thanks to your scheduling, care, selflessness and hospitality which all you gave us as a matter of course, our sweet friends.

We thank you for good mood, friendly talking, experiences, joking and smiles, for all that casual vacation atmosphere. For all those more than 2,500 miles, spent safe and sound in your Toyota on the roads.

We never forget those April and May days off in 2007 in the United States of Amerika  
with both of you, our dears,  
**BIG THANKS TO YOU !!!**

And where will be our next common vacation ? Who knows ? Maybe in the States again !!!





CSA CITY SERVICE CENTRE  
V CELNÍČI 5  
110 00 PRAGUE 1  
CZECH REPUBLIC  
TELEPHONE: +420 220104630  
FAX : 420/2/24810426  
EML:CSA.PJM@CSA.CZ

DATE 05APRIL07  
BOOKING REF **2QWR8N**

**STEHNO/MIROSLAVMR**  
**STEHNOVA/HANAMRS**

SERVICE	FROM	TO	DEPART	ARRIVE
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**DELTA AIR LINES - DL 8736**

SUN 22APR	PRAGUE CZ RUZYNE	PARIS FR CHARLES DE GAULLE	<b>0715</b>	<b>0905</b>
NON STOP	<b>TERMINAL N2</b>	<b>TERMINAL 2B</b>	DURATION 1:50 NON SMOKING	

OK 0758  
RESERVATION CONFIRMED - K ECONOMY  
FLIGHT OPERATED BY OK CZECH AIRLINES CSA  
EQUIPMENT: AIRBUS INDUSTRIE A320-100/200

**DELTA AIR LINES - DL 8348**

SUN 22APR	PARIS FR CHARLES DE GAULLE	MIAMI FL MIAMI INTL	<b>1050</b>	<b>1415</b>
NON STOP	<b>TERMINAL 2E</b>		DURATION 9:25 NON SMOKING	

AF 0090  
RESERVATION CONFIRMED - K ECONOMY  
ON BOARD: LUNCH  
FLIGHT OPERATED BY AF AIR FRANCE  
EQUIPMENT: BOEING 747-400  
**SEATS 30A/30B** NO SMOKING CONFIRMED

**DELTA AIR LINES - DL 4471**

WED 09MAY	OMAHA NE EPPLEY AIRFIELD	CINCINNATI OH NTH KENTUCKY	<b>0710</b>	<b>0958</b>
NON STOP		<b>TERMINAL 3</b>	DURATION 1:48 NON SMOKING	

RESERVATION CONFIRMED - Q ECONOMY  
FLIGHT OPERATED BY EV ATLANTIC SOUTHEAST  
EQUIPMENT: CANADAIR REGIONAL JET

**DELTA AIR LINES - DL 5386**

WED 09MAY	CINCINNATI OH NTH KENTUCKY	NEW YORK NY JOHN F KENNEDY	<b>1045</b>	<b>1250</b>
NON STOP	<b>TERMINAL 3</b>	<b>TERMINAL 3</b>	DURATION 2:05 NON SMOKING	

RESERVATION CONFIRMED - Q ECONOMY  
FLIGHT OPERATED BY OH COMAIR INC.  
EQUIPMENT: CANADAIR REGIONAL JET

**CZECH AIRLINES CSA - OK 51**

WED 09MAY	NEW YORK NY JOHN F KENNEDY	PRAGUE CZ RUZYNE	<b>1610</b>	<b>0620</b>
NON STOP	<b>TERMINAL 4</b>	<b>TERMINAL N1</b>	<b>10MAY</b>	DURATION 8:10 NON SMOKING

RESERVATION CONFIRMED - T ECONOMY  
ON BOARD: MEAL  
EQUIPMENT: AIRBUS INDUSTRIE 310  
**SEATS 12G/12H** NO SMOKING CONFIRMED

RESERVATION NUMBER(S) DL/P0WXDR OK/Y0N2C

STEHNO/MIROSLAVMR  
STEHNOVA/HANAMRS

TICKET: 064 4466510029-30  
TICKET: 064 4466510031-32