



Remembrance day pg. 1



RegioJet in Czech Republic pg. 9



The Book Scream of Silence by Alena Martinu pg. 9



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CZECH AND SLOVAK BI-WEEKLY NEWSPAPER www.novydomov.com



Remembering the Czechoslovak Airmen who died in World War 2:

- 510 serving in the Royal Air Force who died 1940/45;
- 6 serving in the Polish Air Force who died in Poland in September 1939;
- 29 serving in l'Armée de l'Air who died in France 1939/40;
- 1 serving in Forces Aériennes Françaises Libres who died in North Africa 1945;
- 8 serving on the Russian Front 1944/45 in the 1st Czechoslovak Independent Fighter Air Regiment and 1st Czechoslovak Mixed Air Division of the Allied Air Forces.

Source <http://fca.wordpress.com/2011/11/07/remembrance-day-11-ovember-2011/>

CZECH SOLDIERS PROMOTED ON VETERANS DAY

Prague - Some Czech troops were promoted and decorated during a ceremony, attended by soldiers, politicians and participants in World Senate deputy chairman Premysl Sobotka said in a speech the country did not show due respect to its heroes at the time of the Communist dictatorship.

Sobotka warned of repeating the mistake from the past.

Czechs should be able to honour their recent veterans who served in foreign missions, Sobotka said.

Six soldiers were promoted on the occasion of the celebrations. One of them is Robert Chudy who was seriously wounded in Afghanistan. Despite the injury, he still serves in the Czech military.

Chudy was promoted to the rank of major. "Though I meet the criteria, I do not feel like a veteran at all," Chudy told CTK.

Some soldiers received the Cross of Merit of the defense minister. The Veterans Day (also Armistice Day or Remembrance Day) honors war participants. In the Czech Republic, it was introduced ten years ago, in November 2001.

At present, the Czech military has 1800 World War Two veterans. Another 17,000 soldiers have taken part in present-day conflicts with in foreign missions, in Afghanistan in particular. Two and recent foreign missions, that honoured the Veterans Day today

Source: clk.cz War, November 11, 2011

Czech Christmas Traditions



Czech Christmas Eve and Christmas are celebrated on December 24th and 25th, respectively. While this special holiday is celebrated with family, visitors to the Czech Republic can also enjoy public Christmas festivities, like the the Christmas tree in Old Town Prague and the famous Prague Christmas Market.

Visitors to Prague can enjoy live nativity scenes, ice skating, and other Czech Christmas traditions if they visit prior to or during this holiday.

Before Christmas, live carp are available for purchase. This Czech Christmas tradition is one that the visitor will certainly notice, even if he or she can't take one of the fish home and cook it!

Czech Christmas Eve - December 24 (Christmas Eve)

Christmas Eve in the Czech Republic is celebrated with a feast. The carp, which was purchased prior to this day and which may have been kept alive in the bathtub until ready for cooking, is the featured dish.

For many, December 24 (Štědrý den) is the most enjoyable day of Christmas holidays. Its Czech name literally means "Generous Day", probably for the wealth of food that has traditionally been served for Christmas dinner. Even poor families would make sure that their plates were full on this one day of the year.

Christmas Dinner

Dinner is served after sunset (traditionally, it should not be served until after the first star has come out) and consists of carp and potato salad, sometimes preceded by mushroom, sauerkraut or fish soup. Did you know that carp can supposedly be prepared a hundred different ways? Christmas carp is specially raised in manmade ponds and then sold from large tubs placed on the streets and town squares a few days before Christmas. You will not see this sight at any other time of the year. Some families keep their carp in the bathtub for several days as a temporary pet for their children... Dinner can be finished with dessert, such as apple strudel. A traditional Christmas bread called vánočka Czech Christmas bread (similar to the Jewish challa) used to be a part of the Christmas dinner is available year-round.

The Christmas tree is decorated on Christmas Eve

Traditionally, the tree was decorated with apples and sweets, as well as traditional ornaments. Today, commercially purchased Christmas ornaments may be used to decorate the Czech Christmas tree.

December 24 is Adam and Eva's name day. The Christmas tree is decorated with traditional Czech

Christmas ornaments in many households and preparations are made for the most festive dinner of the year. Christmas Eve is associated with many superstitions that usually relate to life, love, and destiny that awaits one in the year to come. According to one Czech Christmas custom, one is supposed to fast all day to see the "golden piglet" (zlaté prasátko) in the evening.

Christmas Presents

After dinner, everyone around the table may sing Christmas carols before moving to the Christmas tree, which is all lit up and beautiful. By then, presents have been placed under the tree. Czech children believe that Christmas gifts are brought by Baby Jesus (Ježíšek) who comes into the room through the window to leave the presents. Baby Jesus is said to reside high in the mountains, in the town of Boží Dar, where a post office accepts and stamps letters addressed to him.

On Christmas Eve, children leave the room where the Christmas tree has been put up until they hear the tinkle of a bell (rung by parents) indicating that Baby Jesus has come with gifts.

Unlike Santa Claus, Baby Jesus is a rather abstract figure with no particular physical image attached to him, and no one knows where he lives. Just



Christmas Market on the Old Town Square

like Santa though, he receives wish-list letters from Czech children a few weeks before Christmas Eve. Midnight Mass

Some people end Christmas Eve by attending the midnight mass (půlnoční mše) at a local church.

Svatý Mikuláš, or St. Nicholas, also brings gifts, but in the beginning (a night before 6th of December) on St. Mikulas Day. St. Mikulas is dressed like a bishop in white clothing, rather than in the red Santa suit we are familiar with.

Prague Christmas Markets...

Prague is filled with beauty and can be enjoyed and explored for days, months, or a lifetime. The city has its charm at any time of the year. The average visitor will only have a few days to discover Prague's many faces, so let's not get carried away... What about Christmas time...?

November 20, 2011 - Jan. 8, 2012: Visitors come from all over to experience and enjoy the Christmas markets in Prague (*vánoční trhy*). The markets usually start four Saturdays before Christmas Eve and run until the beginning of January. They are open every day of the week.

Prague Christmas markets are always busy despite the cold. Holiday items, crafts, traditional Christmas decorations and gifts are sold along with hot wine (*svažené víno* or *svařák*), grog, warm honey liquor (*medovina*) and traditional foods. Czech Christmas carols add to the festive atmosphere. After dark, the markets are lit up beautifully.

The most popular markets are those on the **Old Town Square** and Wenceslas Square where Christmas items and Czech souvenirs are sold in 70 - 80 stands. Other, smaller markets in the same general area are located at the Havelské tržiště and Republic Square.

A little outside of the center and easily accessible by the tram and metro is the Christmas market on **Náměstí Míru and others on Náměstí Jiřího z Poděbrad and Palackého náměstí**. A special Christmas market is also held at the **Prague Exhibition Grounds** in Prague 7, usually accompanied by weekend events.

Lots of the items that are sold at Prague's Christmas markets, such as Czech wooden toys, scarves, scented candles and soaps can be found in regular Prague stores year round. But you will also find some unique products that are only available at Christmas time, such as Christmas ornaments, traditional Czech Christmas cookies, tablecloths, Frankincense or the Czech Christmas potpourri called *purpur*. You may want to taste some

of the traditional foods that are made fresh right in front of you and which are harder to find outside of the markets.

November 26, 2011 - Jan. 1, 2012: Old Town Square (Staroměstské náměstí): This is the prettiest and busiest Prague Christmas market. Little stalls are nestled around the Jan Hus statue and surrounded by centuries old Gothic, Renaissance and Baroque architecture. The market is dominated by a Christmas tree, which is adorned with hundreds of lights and is lit every evening at dusk (usually around 5 p.m.). A stage is erected every year where Christmas concerts and short plays are performed in the open air Wenceslas Square (*Václavské náměstí*)

November 26, 2011 - Jan. 8, 2012: This is another large Christmas market in the city center. It is located in the lower part of Wenceslas Square and is usually dominated by an artificial Christmas tree. **Havel Market (Havelské tržiště)**

This market is held in one of Prague's oldest marketplaces, established in 1232. The Havel Market is on the way from the Old Town Square to Wenceslas Square.

November 25 - Dec. 24, 2011: Republic Square (Náměstí Republiky) A Christmas market near the Kotva department store within a short walking distance from the Old Town Square.

November 20 - Dec. 24, 2011: Peace Square (Náměstí Míru) This is a local Christmas market in front of the imposing Church of St. Ludmila on the pleasant Náměstí Míru in Prague

It is traditionally the first Christmas market to open in Prague every year. The market is a lot less busy than those in the center and is visited mostly by Czechs.

December 9 - 18, 2011: Holešovice Exhibition Grounds (Výstaviště Holešovice) The 'Christmas at the Exhibition Grounds' market in Prague 7 is typically accompanied by a weekend entertainment program.

Source: <http://www.myczechrepublic.com/prague/sightseeing/>



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Jeff Shanberg and I tried the new Czech train service called RegioJet. It is operated by Student Agency, a company that started back in 1996 as an au-pair agency, became a successful national and international bus operator and is now the largest travel agency in the Czech Republic. It has distinguished itself on the Czech market by providing a high quality of service at affordable prices. The company's first staple, introduced in 2004, was its "yellow bus" service operating between Prague and Brno and quickly spreading to other Czech and European cities. Student Agency set a new level of bus travel experience in the Czech Republic, combining low prices with unprecedented service on board.

The introduction of the RegioJet train service on September 26, 2011 ended the monopoly of Czech Railways. Without even realizing it, Jeff and I had been waiting for something like this for years. We like train travel and the type of train we have used most frequently is the good old rychlík (express). We find a peculiar sort of comfort in the tired, squeaky *rychlíky* with their sagging seats, overheated compartments, non-working windows (and sometimes doors) and emergency-use lavatories. Czech Railways also operate newer, good quality trains, such as the IC and Pendolino. For comparison purposes, there is not much added service on the IC, and the Pendolino is not an option for us because it does not cover the route we need. We don't take the train often enough to benefit from any of Czech Railways' customer discount options, so we've either paid full fare or, if we thought we'd use up 2,000 kilometers in six months, bought the prepaid kilometrická banka.

We were curious to try the new RegioJet service. I read through the website at regiojet.cz and called the help line with additional questions, which were answered politely and with patience. I set up an online account and put some credit in it. Then I booked our trip. My ticket was emailed to me but I knew I didn't need to print it out. All I needed for the trip was my 10-digit account number for the stewardess to look up on the train and see the details of my reservation.

Our first trip with RegioJet was almost delightful. The fresh looking yellow train was clean and quiet. The young staff was pleasant and smiley. There was no mad rush getting onto the train because every passenger had a seat reservation, which is compulsory, but free. Hence, no scrambling for seats and no crowded aisles.

Another Monopoly Ends: RegioJet Raises Standard of Train Travel in the Czech Republic

by Dana Shanberg

The seats were firm, spacious, and comfortable. Our stewardess gave us each a small complimentary bottle of water and offered free newspapers and magazines for the trip. We flipped through a rather extensive menu containing, in my opinion, ridiculously low priced refreshments that included free coffee and tea.



We ordered some croissant sandwiches and enjoyed them. There were electrical outlets and free WiFi in the compartment. The lavatory was clean, softly scented, with music playing and a flower in a little vase sitting on the sink. The trip was smooth and fast. The fastest I've ever experienced it, also owing to the fact that the train barely stopped along the way. We were helped with our luggage upon arrival. Our tickets cost 152 CZK each, compared to 206 CZK we used to pay for a 2nd class trip with *České dráhy*. Actually, we usually paid 309 CZK per ticket

to enjoy a little more space and privacy in a 1st class compartment.

Now on to the two cons of RegioJet I can think of. There were only three trains a day running at the time of our trip, so we were not able to get tickets for our preferred date because the train was fully booked a week in advance. This should improve once more trains are put into service. Nine trains a day should be running starting in December. My other complaint has to do with a little glitch when boarding in Prague. Since Jeff and I are not used to having to remember or write down seat numbers before a train trip, we forgot to do that and only realized at the platform that we had no idea which car to board and what our seats were. Contrary to what is stated on the RegioJet website, we did not get any assistance from the staff when boarding the train in Prague. Not even when we were finally able to catch a stewardess

lives.

We run two websites on the Czech Republic. *Local Lingo* was started in 1998 and is now a site that tries to help those interested in learning Czech. My Czech Republic branched out from *Local Lingo* in 2003 as a resource covering first-hand information about various aspects of Czech life and travel.

This blog is our third 'baby'. We think of it as a sort of notebook into which we jot anything and everything from our daily lives here that we think someone out there might find interesting, useful, amusing or even educational in some way.

Dana is a born Moravian who has worked as a translator, web designer, client services coordinator and travel agent. Dana's passion: Her current job

Jeff is from California and is an IT expert, a research guru and a professional photographer. Jeff's passion: Photography

Source: <http://blog.myczechrepublic.com/>, October 31, 2011

(More: <http://www.regiojet.cz/cs/novinky/zilina/index.html>, <http://www.regiojet.cz/cs/>)

RegioJet is a private railway operator in the Czech Republic and Slovakia. It is a subsidiary of Student Agency partnered with Keolis.

In the Czech Republic, RegioJet operates trains between Prague and Havířov. One service daily will be extended to Žilina from December 11th, 2011 with plans to expand route to Košice at later stage. In January 2011, RegioJet won a contract to operate regional trains in Slovakia, on the Bratislava - Dunajská Streda - Komárno route from March 2012, breaking ZSSK's monopoly in Slovakia. There are plans to win more tenders in Slovakia.

Rolling stock

RegioJet will use Bombardier Talent (the Talent is a multiple unit rail-car manufactured by Bombardier) DMUs in Slovakia. It has also bought 9 Škoda Class E630 electric locomotives from Ferrovie Nord Milano. The company purchased passenger cars of classes ABmz 30-70 (12 pcs), Ampz 18-91 (8 pcs) and Bmz 21-70 (6 pcs) from Austrian Federal Railways. They were transported to the Czech Republic in early June 2011 and late July 2011. This allows to create at least 3 trainsets to start service in September 2011. These passenger cars undergo maintenance in METRANS owned service facility METRANS DYKO Rail Repair Shop Kolin and are painted in OLPAS Moravia Krnov.

Photo: Diesel multiple units Siemens Desiro of RegioJet, Skalce nad Svitavou, Czech Republic
More: <http://blog.myczechrepublic.com/>

An open letter to readers of Nový domov

Ernie Zucker

My many years on the Board of the Masaryk Memorial Institute (MMI) enabled me to meet many compatriots during the time I served. This enabled me to get an insight on what multiculturalism meant for our group. There were two periods of Czecho-Slovak immigrants arrival in Canada in large numbers: 1938 - 1949 and 1968 - 1989. No significant influx since. The problem for our organizations becomes even more pronounced as the community ages, and the death toll rises. Most current members of MMI are *dědeček* and *babička*. Our sister organizations, Sokol and Czech and Slovak Association



of Canada, have similar problems. We have worked hard to establish cultural roots and to remember our heritage. The time has come to evaluate our options for a beneficial future, mainly to include our second and third generation young people.

A key option seems to be the establishment of Masaryktown as our National Park for all of Canada. Note that this can be a done with a minimum drain on the financial resources of our organizations.

The current MMI Board is planning the future of the Masaryktown restaurant. In my view, the existing building would be ideal for housing a hall (společenský sál) with catering facilities. Both Sokol and the theater group have expressed an interest in sharing it for some of their activities. It would also serve as shelter for park events disturbed by bad weather. This would be a sensible step for securing a vital facility for the park.



/vk/

Scream of Silence

Scream of Silence, a book of short stories written by Alena Martinu, is just about to appear on the shelves of Chapters and Indigo bookstores. It's her first book, however, for many years she has been publishing short articles in *Nový domov* and other newspapers.

Alena Martinu immigrated to Canada in 1988 from Czechoslovakia. She draws her inspiration from a broad background that ranges from engineering to psychology and comparative religion. She currently lives with her family in Montreal, Quebec, where she is the chief editor of the *Montrealsky vestník*.

From the deep forests of Quebec's Laurentians to intriguing Montreal's race track to flamboyant French music halls, Alena Martinu shares a compelling collection of multi-faceted short stories that focus on the one thing that is important to everyone - relationship.



In her compilation of diverse tales, Martinu weaves an eclectic group of characters within a variety of settings while offering the inspiring message that love, respect, and communication are vital components to any healthy relationship. A wrong start for a young couple brings a catastrophe; a man nearly loses his chance for happiness simply by trying to do the right thing; an innocent flirtation results in a surprising bond for another woman; and an ordinary car accident causes an unexpected physical change for a race car driver.

Interlaced with drama, mystery, and fantasy, *Scream of Silence* is an intriguing collection of short stories that inspires reflection on the most beautiful and unexpected moments in life.

The book is published by iUniverse - self-publishing company, providing all the necessary services including editing and distribution - and was awarded the „Editor's Choice“ designation. The book is also available on internet (for example Amazon) in classical hardcover and paperback format, and also as eBook.

„A Gorgeous Guy“ (Excerpt)

When he came to work next morning, she was already there. Curious, he waited for her report, but she just sat at the desk, looking into blank space. „Alice?“

She turned to him as if she didn't see him. „Brian.“ She sighed. „I'm in trouble.“ He took it as a joke. „He tried to rape you, and you've killed him,“ he guessed. „No? Did you rape him and—oh no, it can't be, you're alive. So—“

„Come on, Brian,“ she interrupted him.

She seemed to be more weary than annoyed. He put his jokes aside. „What happened? Something wrong with the drawings?“

„No. They're all right. In fact, everything is all right. We had the most wonderful evening. But—“

„But what?“ he said. „Did you fall in love with him, or what?“

„I—I don't know. When I realize that I have to spend another whole day with him, I feel—sick. What should I do? Brian, won't you take over for me?“

It took him some time to get it. „Wait. Alice, you mean it? I mean—you are in love with him?“

„I'm telling you I don't know! I just feel... I can't look at him; I can't even think about him.“

„But—“

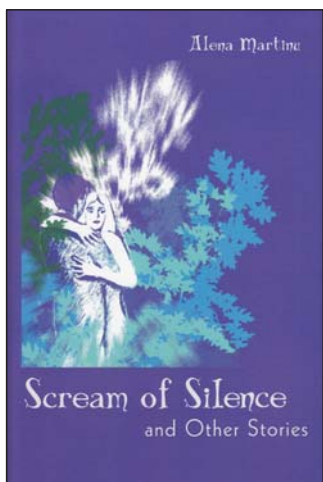
Finally she looked up at him. „Speechless, are you?“

„In fact, yes,“ he admitted. „Al, did you tell him—“

„No. I'm not that crazy.“ She waved her hand, and with this familiar gesture he felt a kind of relief. „I don't understand myself. There is nothing special about him. He isn't too handsome, or funny, or—whatever. But, there is something—something between us. His reactions, his jokes... It was me who invited him for supper yesterday. Can you imagine? I'm silly,“ she shook her head. „He'll finish his work here today, go back to Rimouski, and I won't see him again. And that makes me sick, as well.“

„Is he married?“

„He has a girlfriend over there. Maybe it would be better if—oh gosh, here he comes. Brian,“ she looked up in search of help, „love is only rubbish, isn't it?“



Weekly Völkerwanderung?

For the first month in Slovakia, I had a big wonder to see a number of students carrying backpacks and suitcases to go somewhere every weekend. „Do young people go hiking the mountains every weekend?“ During weekends, trains and buses connecting the major cities in Slovakia are crowded with those students. One day, I asked a friend of mine, „Where are they going?“ He said, „They are going home. During weekend, many of them spend time at home. In the suitcases are laundry and books to read!“ It was fresh fact for me who used to go home once a semester. Some of my working friends in Japan go home only once a year.

Who are harder-working people?

On the contrast to the calm weekends, cars start making noise as early as 5 a.m. in Bratislava during weekdays. From a window at the student dormitory, I was wondering „Why do people work so much here?“ Stereotype about Japanese is such as „tourists with high-quality cameras“ or „hard-working business people in suits“. Some extreme even say Japanese work to die. However, the data from OECD shows that is not always true. The data, average annual hours of work per worker shows Japanese on average work 1,733 hours a year in 2010, while Slovaks work a little more 1,786 hours and Czechs do surprising 1,947 hours a year (equivalent to average 37.4 hours/week). Three big holidays in Japan - Golden week, summer and New Year holidays - give workers up to two weeks off, depending on the workplace. Golden Week is a holiday from the end of April to the beginning of May. April is bitter-sweet time as the business year starts from April 1st unlike other countries. New business year starts with full bloom of cherry blossoms, with much motivations and stress for the fresh environment along with new colleagues and friends. Golden Week eases the stressful start.

Demographic challenge and collapsing middle class

It is human dream to live eternally. Life expectancy at birth is 86.39 years for Japanese women (1st in the world) and 79.64 years (4th) for the men. Some say high quality, yet easy-to-access medication and low-calorie diet contribute the long life. However, the previous OECD data suggests another side of ageing society, increasing poverty and demographic challenge. The once proud middle-class society has 16% of poverty rate as of 2009, which is close to 17.1% of that of United States. It is attributed by the increasing number of people over 65 years old (23.1% of the population) and temporary workers. Now one of three workers in Japan, 35.4% of labour force, is contract workers. Since 1990, the

Unique Training Program (3) For ND Kazuhiro Kobayashi

number has nearly doubled amid the movement of labour-intense industries to other Asian countries and deregulation of labour market. Although unemployment rate stays at 4.1% in September 2011, compared with 7.1% of Canada, 6.6% in Czech Republic and thorny 13.5% in Slovakia, it is visible to see how the country as a whole share the pain with as many people to maintain employment. Shirt sleeves in shirt sleeves in three generations? The country faces a task to maintain the wealth for which generations of people broke their back for the once-destroyed nation.

Babies and babies!

I have been staying at Indian Muslim family in the middle of Scarborough District in Toronto since September. It is a part of Adventure Program to experience completely different culture from what I was used to. Here are so



many children and babies especially in this district with many South Asian, Caribbean and African immigrants. As I am from a country where population greys and total fertility rate stays at 1.39% (below 2% level to maintain population), it was rather shocking to see so many babies on the street and transports, especially when I saw a baby carriage for 4 babies! In Japan, it costs \$220,000 on average to raise a child till graduation from university, apart from \$180,000 only for the tuitions at schools (given all schools are public, including non-medical study at university). Low fertility rate is a common social issue for Czech Republic and Slovakia as well (1.49, 1.36 respectively). Mostly for economical reasons, people are reluctant to have family and babies, sacrificing their time and money for... less difficult travels and parties for themselves?

Slavic Singing Workshop

In the late October, accidentally I learnt the existence of cultural activity, „Slavic Singing Workshop“ organized by Kosa Kolektiv, a group of several young ladies with Ukrainian roots who try to foster the sense of community through folklore traditions (<http://kosakolektiv.com/>). Their activi-

ties vary from singing, crafting to sewing and even planting. The singing workshop is one of the activities and it deals with not only Ukrainian songs, but also Polish, Lemko and even Czech and Slovak songs. Through the workshop they try to teach traditional vocal techniques with traditional harmony. On November 20th, the theme of the workshop was Czech and Slovak songs. Nine participants, including the youngest 10 year-old boy, sang „A ja taka dzivočka“ „Nepij Jano, nepij vodu“ and „Chodila dievčina po hore plačúci“ together.

Cingi lingi bom!

There is a special atmosphere to sing folk songs together with others which makes me imagine the scenery of countryside in the relevant regions. Personally, I miss the time singing together like in my earlier school ages. In Japan, where the word 'karaoke' was

created, people rarely sing folk music together. During soccer games, they sing to the melody of „Aida“ by Verdi and hundreds of new 'commercialized' songs are released everyday and folk music has no position. There is even a nationwide controversy

among teachers whether they should sing the national anthem at school events, as the song is about a wish for a thousand-generation reign of the emperor. Not in a small karaoke room, not together with an electronic melody, the workshop experience gives me a vivid perception and impression of the beautiful melody from the Slavic countries to sing a cappella folk music by adjusting the tone together. Kosa Kolektiv tries to share enthusiasms for their background partially through singing folk songs. Passionate people get together in a room of a house every week. I believe if there is a little more support and consciousness towards their activity, more people could get a chance to rediscover the importance of seeking their roots back home through such activities.

These young people are the key players to succeed the cultures of their parents and older generations. „Home“ - that is where they feel relief of life. It might be the origin of our ancestors, or the country which we left long time ago.

In the time of transience, why don't we look back at the priorities in life again? The backpacker Slovak students seemed to imply the precious value of life...

The story continues