

Banana

September

Volume 1
Issue 1

SUN TIMES

The Chronicles of Hannah in the Czech Republic

Dear readers,

I wanted to start by thanking you all for supporting me and my family. I literally wouldn't be able to do this without you. Thank you.

I am writing to you from my new home in Strážnice, Czech Republic. Though it has taken some adventures to get here, I have finally arrived and have begun to settle in as part of the family. I have had some difficulties adjusting to the Czech life style; most obvious of which is the language barrier. Yet, with each passing day, I find myself slowly understanding more and becoming less homesick.

I started my journey in Washington D.C. where I stayed with my uncles David and Kraig. It was wonderful to be able to see and learn more about my own country before experiencing another. I even got to see the musical *Hair Spray* for my birthday! After departing from New York, I am afraid I got off to quite a rocky start. In fact, my first day in the Czech Republic, I walked off a dark bus, exhausted from hours of flying and traveling, and left behind my precious camera bag. It contained my passport, visa, credit card, money etc. Due to this, I was, for the first five days,

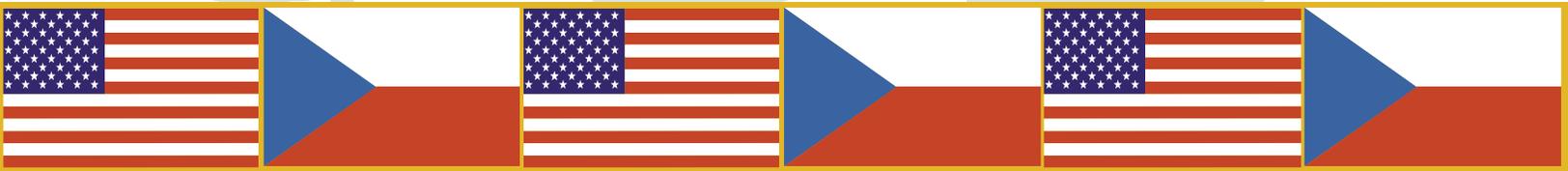
a nervous wreck. Thankfully, with the help and comfort of the AFS staff and my natural family, I have been able to replace all, as well as ...learn from the experience.

Besides this "incident", the eight day orientation camp was very fun. I met the other AFSers from various parts of the world who were all staying here in the Czech Republic. At the camp, we learned some basics of the Czech language, played lots of bonding games, and experienced Czech food. Fried meat and cheese, anyone? We all had fun leaning about each other's cultures, dancing and going to an ice hockey game among other things.

At the end of the week, our families came, picked us up, and took us home. For me, home looks like your quintessential old European town. It is a small pleasant place with brightly colored houses, red roofs, and some cobble stone streets. There are two beautiful churches, and castle which is surrounded by a nice park. I often ride my bike around town, watching the people, and soaking in all that is around me. I think it has finally set in that I will be staying here for a

year (or eleven months as Dad fondly reminds me)!

My family has been great so far. They are very good at helping me understand by using English and





Hannah and another AFSer at the end of the eight day orientation.

or elaborate hand gestures. Its not uncommon for two or more of us to be holding a dictionary in hand while speaking to one another. My mother is taking English at a university, and my sister, Veronika, takes it in school. My father also speaks fairly good English; at least enough to help me with my computer troubles! Petr, my little brother, is six years old, and speaks no English, but lots of Czech. Sometimes it is really hard for him to comprehend that I simply do not understand. He is so cute, and always wanting to play board games with me. He doesn't know it, but he really is a good teacher. Sharing a room with my sister has taken a bit of adjustment for both of us. This and all of the other changes have been hard for her to get used to, but I know, time will bring better understanding.

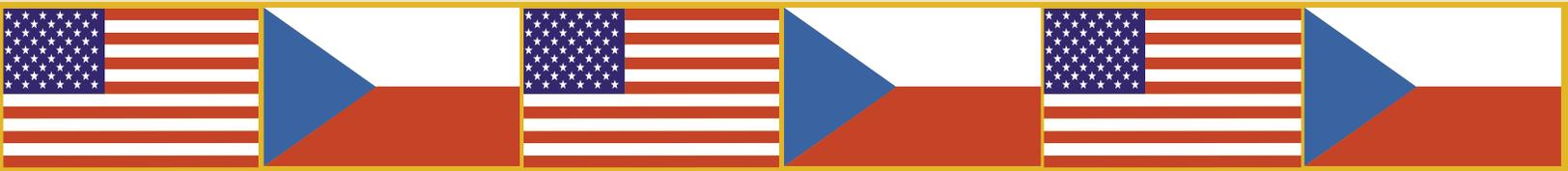
All of the family members, in fact, have done their best to make me feel welcome. My grandparents are always ready to give me a hug and a mouth full of sweets. One must beware of grand-

mothers terribly delicious cakes! Though they know I don't speak Czech, they are constantly rapidly talking to me in either Czech or German. I have found that the panacea for this is to simply smile, nod, and say "Dobøe" (Good)!

School has been an experience to say the least. I am very limited due to the fact that the majority of the time, I haven't a clue what is going on. Usually by the second or third hour of Czech ramblings, I am exhausted and begging for art class! Despite this, I am attempting Chemistry and History which should both be a challenge. The student are nice, and all like to try their English out on me. I am very lucky to have two other AFS boys going to my same school. Its really helpful to have a familiar face and to have others that are going through the same things you are. In class, I often feel the odd man out. Being with my sister's friends is fun, as we like to ride bikes, roller blade, or go to pubs. The only thing is, this time includes much silence and confusion on my part. One thing I can say, not being able to understand makes having a social life a heck of a lot harder. I'm not



"Group shot." End of orientation. Off to new towns & families. Glen, center tan shirt & Diego, center stripped shirt, are in Strážnice with Hannah.



worried though. I know this is what is supposed to happen, and that I shouldn't be too hasty. A good thing is, I have started folk dance lessons with my sister and soon we will also be taking an aerobics class. This will help me to make friends and enjoy others without necessarily having to talk.



Hannah with host sister Veronika in the room they will share together.

My family spends a lot of time together cooking, cleaning, gardening, watching TV, and going places. Just Tuesday, we all met after school in their garden, which is on the outskirts of town and dug up potatoes. It was some good old fashioned farm work! My mother has been great with trying to incorporate more veggies into

meals, but unfortunately they are much more expensive here than in the states. The longer I stay here, the more I notice both big and small differences about their way of life and mine. One of the most prominent of these differences is the rule that everyone must

change shoes upon entering the home or school. This means we all walk around in the same little sandal slippers. It's not weird, it's just different!

I feel I am adjusting, not quickly, but at my own pace. I try not to get too frustrated with myself when I



Hannah tries out the pool table at her host Grandparents home.

lack the words to speak. Really, it's only been two or so weeks that I've been here. I know it will take a lot of time, and a lot more patience. Right now, I just like to observe and notice things. I do miss my family and home where things were simpler, but each day I am filled with the excitement of what I might discover. I know it will be over in the blink of an eye, but I don't want it to go by too fast. This is all part of the experience, and I only experience this once.

Nashledanou,

~Hannah~

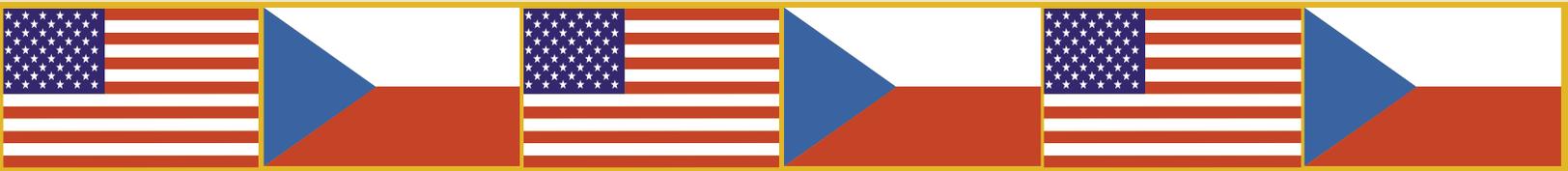


Hannah with host siblings, Veronika, and Petr

P.S—This weekend is the late summer wine festival in Strážnice. There will be song, dance, and wine of course! I will send word. Ahoj.

Some basic Czech that I have used, who knows how many times:

*Ahoj	Hello
*Jsem Hannah	I am Hannah
*Jsem z Ameriky	I am from America
*Je mi šestnáct let	am sixteen years old
*Díkuji	Thank you
*Co to je?	What is that?
*Co???	What???



*Do not go where the path may lead—
go instead where there is no path—
and leave a trail.*

Ralph Waldo Emerson

Dear Family & Friends,

It is our sincere pleasure to share with you this first edition of Hannah's newsletter, the "Banana Sun Times"!

As much as we had felt prepared to let her go, the emotional adaptation of life without her has been a true challenge to say the least! The overall feeling in our home is that a piece of our family puzzle is definitely missing.

Despite all of this, each time we communicate with her, we are reassured that she is adjusting just fine to her new surroundings. We've all learned so much already!—like—How to replace a passport. How expensive it is to ship a 20 pound box overseas—Ugh. E-mail is a God send, and vegetables are a good and precious gift we should all appreciate very much!

Hannah has shared with us how her relationship is growing with her host family. That means so much to us. It is wonderful to know that "family ties" are being built half way around the world.

We hope this newsletter will be enlightening, as well as enjoyable to all of you in the months ahead.

Thank you again for keeping Hannah in your thoughts & prayers.

Dobre den!

Scott & Caren



Open House



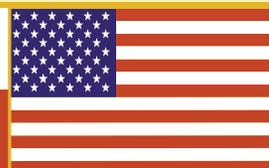
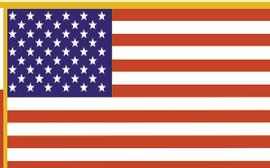
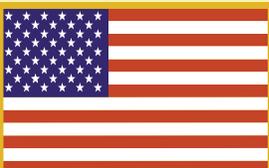
The “Open House, held in June, was a great success. Approximately sixty guest stopped in to say hello and give their support to Hannah. Everyone had a great time eating and enjoying each others company.

We also held the drawing for the “Round Trip Airline Ticket”. The win-ner is Marsha S. Congratulations! Thanks to all of those who participated in the drawing, with special thanks to all of those who bought multiple tickets!

Special Thanks

A special thank you goes to Hannah’s Uncles for their donation of the “Round Trip Airline Ticket” as well as Hannah’s tickets to Washington D.C. & New York. Hannah had a great time with them in D.C.. Their generosity got Hannah’s trip off to a great start.

Thank You!



Welcome to Strážnice



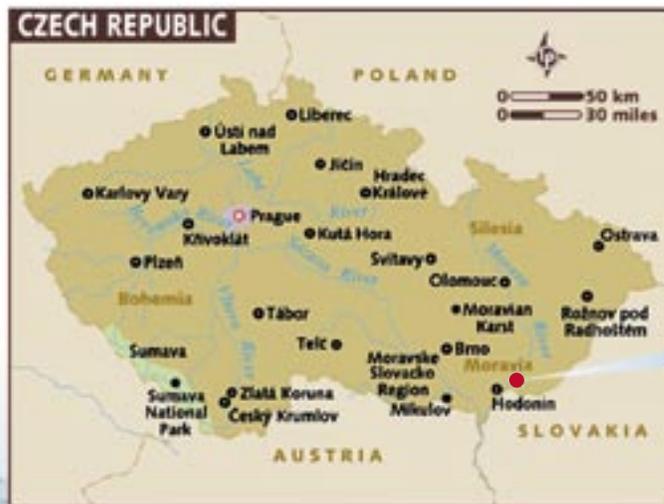
Strážnice coat of arms

Although the first written report about the town of Strážnice dates to the beginning of the 14th century, numerous archaeological findings document the existence of habitation at this territory even before this date. The beginnings of the town were connected with the effort to strengthen the frontiers of the Czech state under Přemysl Otakar II, at the middle of the 13th century. At that time, the region of Strážnice was permanently incorporated into Moravia. There were built several castles to guard the frontier. Among them, the castle in Strážnice built after 1260 was founded. The town's name (Strážnice - the Guard Post) relates to the guard function of the castle located close to the Moravian frontier.

The Strážnice region is surrounded by the

White Carpathians on one side and by the river Morava on the other side. In the hilly terrain of the region, vine has been planted since long ago. Wine-growing was intended for use of the local nobility first but later it has become an important part of local agriculture.

Today Strážnice is the center of the International Festival of Folklore, the greatest and oldest festival in the Czech Republic. It has been taking place here every year since 1946.



Strážnice

To learn more about Strážnice, go to the town web-site: <http://www.straznice-mesto.cz/enstraznice/index.htm> Be sure to click on the British flag in the upper right hand corner. This will translate the page into English.

