

WILD SHARKAH

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This time dealing with only one topic:

OUR GREAT AMERICAN TRAVEL

Our holiday plans were great. Or, more exactly, megalomaniac. In September, I was slowly recovering from all of this, and I was not able to produce this report earlier than in October.

I was in USA for the first time 4 years ago; under the communist regime, it would be almost impossible to travel there, but we are lucky as my husband has relatives in Washington and Boston - uncles and aunts who escaped from Czechoslovakia or Austria in 1938 (because of the Nazi threat) when they were in their teens.

My husband's parents had been afraid to write letters to these relatives but in the years of perestroika they felt that it was not so very dangerous any more. So we arranged our visit and in 1987 we spent three weeks on the East coast of the USA.

I was fascinated, excited, I loved the relaxed and happy atmosphere, I admired the vast supermarkets filled with goods, elegant shop windows in the shopping malls, and I was fascinated with the abundance of all the resources and energy (cars! air-condition! lot of colourful wrappings on everything! exciting advertisements!) - but I also thought that it is certainly pleasant but not necessary, that people don't really need it - such wasting! And I was astonished by the pop-culture, by the happy simplicity of the films, songs, TV ads, by the naivety of the ideals of these people... What a pleasant, euphoric life, I thought. What a hedonic way of life.

AITOS!
DĚKUJI MNOHOKRÁT
ZA OBE KNIŽKY!
(CHARNAS, FOWLER)
TENHLE FANZIN POPI-
VÁM TAKY DO BBR.
EVA.

This time, after 4 years, things seemed to me slightly different. Perhaps my own country has changed a lot, especially Prague - every day I can meet lots of happy, relaxed people, I can enjoy lots of nice small shops, restaurants, caffés, street performances, buskers, musicians, and also the services (craftsmen etc.) are better.

This time I could observe more things under the "shiny surface of capitalism", the practical aspects of everyday life, for example the family budgets dealing with expenses on the education of children or the health care - especially interesting for us because these payments will be probably introduced in Czechoslovakia, which is quite new for us.

After our arrival, we spent two days in New York as we wanted to show the city to our son Honza, who is eleven and had learned English at school for two years. He wasn't far so much fascinated by the skyscrapers than by the shops with computers and cameras. For me, the architecture of the skyscrapers is still fascinating - I noticed a lot of views and buildings that I didn't remember from the last visit.

Our relatives rented a house on the shore of Squam Lake in New Hampshire. It is a beautiful country, very peaceful and quiet, and it remains England. Lakes, forests, loons, wooden summer houses, barbecuing on the backyards, tennis, swimming... We

went to see the Lost River, which is a beautiful rocky valley with a lot of caves. It is nice that people are permitted to go inside the caves; Honza especially liked the *Lemon Squeezer*, because it's necessary to crawl there through the narrow holes. I liked it too but I was afraid that I should stay in one of the holes like Winnie the Pooh - and I should wait several days without food to lose some weight and get away.

I noticed that in America people try to encourage you and please you if you try almost any activity. Honza played tennis for the first time in his life, and our aunts told him that he is very talented, gifted, very good tennis player! When he swam or sang our national songs, he was told the same. It's a real difference in comparison with Czechoslovakia where people never say you anything nice or encouraging.

Aunt Marie had a tibetian terrier and Honza (who missed our dog very much) loved to go by car with the terrier, on the same seat and in the same safety belt as the dog. In Czechoslovakia, children are not allowed to sit on the front seat, so Honza used every opportunity to sit there.

After that, we spent two days in Boston. Honza liked very much the *U.S. Constitution* (the old ship) and also the ship *Beaver*, with the *Tea Party Museum*. People can cast some parcels of "tea" to the sea there, and Honza casted it four times.

Honza and Franta (my husband) were extremely excited by the time in the Computer museum; it seemed nice to me, but after 3 or 4 hours I thought that could be enough, while Franta and Honza wanted to continue in exploring all the computers. The robot before the museum could measure the height of persons. "You are five feet seven inches high," he said to me. So finally I know my height in feet and inches! I enjoyed the beautiful Market place and a nice ride in a shuttle boat along the harbor.



THE HOUSE IN NEW HAMPSHIRE...

Then we flew to Washington.

We wrote to our relatives that we would be very happy if Honza could stay with their grandchildren but we didn't expect that the situation will develop so quickly. Uncle and Aunt picked us up on the airport and they said to us: "Well, first we shall drop off Honza."

Honza kept silence - very surprised, almost paralyzed.

He stayed in a family with three children (younger than himself) and (two) very patient and nice parents. They told us that the children had kept asking questions about Honza - how does he look like? What does he eat? How does he dress? - Very exotic person! First, Honza didn't communicate with them much, but gradually he started to play with them.

He went with the other children to the swimming pool, to the McDonald lunches and to their art lessons. Of course he was told that he is very artistic, and so he was very proud and brought with him to Czechoslovakia a two meters long tube with his artwork (normally at school he hates drawing!).

Of course we visited the Smithsonian museums, and one day we took Honza with us to the *Space museum*.

In the *Portrait gallery* there was a beautiful exhibition of

... AND THE TIBETIAN TERRIER



portraits by Marisol - so funny and full of nice, playful ideas. I liked her work extremely, as much as Andy Warhol's pictures and books which are my favourite.

In the *Museum of Natural History*, our deepest impression was the *Insect ZOO*. There was a lot of big millipeda, twenty centimeters large spiders, cockroaches, ants and other interesting animals. My husband is especially sensitive to the views of such creatures, and he was really deeply impressed! His reaction is a mixture of horror, disgust and fascination - while my own feelings towards them are rather positive but far not so intensive.

I like also the exhibits of the American Indians.

We went to various art galleries (the exhibitions were slightly different from the ones we saw 4 years ago) and to Kennedy's Center of Performing Arts. I didn't know how Watergate looks like - I am surprised that it's essentially a block of offices.

Friends of our relatives came to see us; the lady asked us whether our native tongue is German or Ukrainian, which seemed quite funny to us. (Our native tongue is Czech).

Our relatives drove with us to the Shenandoah National Park. They seemed to be a little scared that we planned to rent a car in California and to go to various national parks of Arizona, Utah and Colorado - and we plan not to sleep in motels! We planned to sleep in the car, on the road, perhaps in the rest areas on the highways... It sounded bad and we were advised to stay at least in the campgrounds.

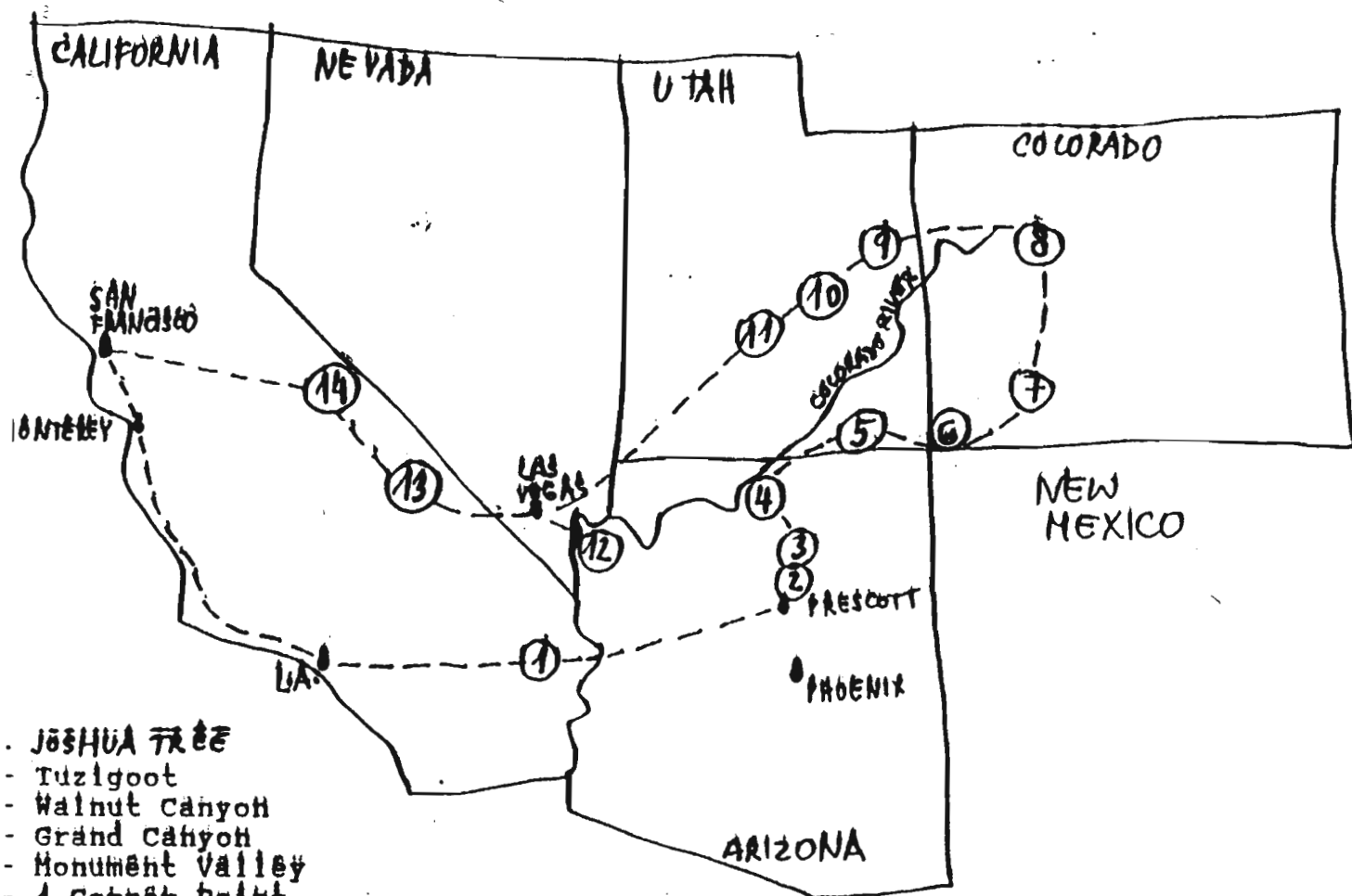
We said *good bye* to Honza by the phone and tried to give him some good advices but he hang the receiver. He was absolutely happy among the children.

When people ask us what are our impressions from Washington we usually say that the city reminds us Moscow. It sounds a bit absurd but I mean these big, very respectable buildings, streets without shops, this government center of the city. Center of the Stalinist Moscow was built in a very simillar way - the aim is to impress the observers and to express some sort of solemn majesty of the State.

Franta wrote his last will.
Finally we flew from Washington to San Francisco.

We came there late in the evening. We had an adress of a science fiction fan, a member of the club of Japanese Animation, who said that they would let us stay overnight. So we hurried, as we didn't want to be very late. We arranged everything in the Hertz office. They sent us to a dark parkground; a man said to us: "B 3, the keys are inside the car." And that was all. We expected to be instructed how to drive the car with the authomatic shift - but nothing like that!

So we sat in a Ford Escort LX and stared desperately at the button switches, indicator lights and other devices, completely unfamiliar to us. We had never tried the automatic gear before. Then we ignited a flashlight and started to study the booklets



and instructions which we had found inside the car. We found out that the car is very tutoring: when we didn't fix the safety belt or didn't close the door it started to peep very angrily. Later we found the automatic shift very pleasant, easy and safe, uncomparable with the hand shift. But the first moments were quite strenuous. With much jerking and twicking we went out from the parkground to the freeway. Franta was driving; after a while he accelerated and suddenly we were rushing ahead very quickly among six lanes of hurrying cars; we saw some signs with numbers of roads and names of the places but they were different on each board. So we losed the way very soon. We left the freeway and returned to Alameda. We finally found the house of Lea Hernandez who is an artist involved in the Japanese animation; she has never met us before but she was very nice and kind. It was already midnight when we came. She led us to a completely empty new house built in Japanese style; there were only soft carpets and piles of Japanese comic paperbacks inside. We stayed there for two nights and it was a very comfortable and nice accomodation.

San Francisco is a beautiful city, and I can understand people who call it the most beautiful city in the world. It's so colourful and fancy; lots of people in the streets, but they do not hurry as much as in New York; and everybody is somehow exhilarated or euphoric. There is really a sort of magic in California - something like an euphoric drug in the air? - the streets are full of nice, funny, fancy ideas and things, colours, flowers, songs; people behave more freely and sometimes it seems even crazy - like people demonstrating individually, with one transparent, against spreading of AIDS, against abortions, against American intervention in Latin America etc.

We went by the old tram (very picturesque but we had quite similar trams here in Prague a few years ago, and it was considered quite a normal sort of transportation...), then took the shuttle boat and went around the bay, to see *Alcatraz* and the *Golden Gate Bridge*. I like especially the sea lions who lay on the piers in the harbor, grunting comfortably.

Later in the afternoon we went to the Chinatown, staring into its picturesque and colourful shop windows.

We planned to continue along the Californian coast to the south next day.

First of all, we found a huge supermarket and bought some cheap food (as we of course wanted to economize as much as possible). Our basic food was: the dark bread *Bohemian hearth* (but nobody in Bohemia had ever seen such a bread), the *Dannon plain yoghurt* (the largest can), *Kellog's raisin flakes*, the *Monterey Jack* cheese (which was the special offer), bananas, ant peanut butter (for me, as I liked it very much; I had never eaten it before, and it was my favourite food). Franta's favourite was the *Miracle Whip* mayonnaise, which was very tasty spread on the slice of the *Bohemian Hearth* and covered with slices of tometoes.

Then we went to Monterey.

I liked the old houses in the center of Monterey, as the first Spanish mission (an old church with a monastery), the first

theatre, old custom house, the old store, and the colourful harbor. We went along the *Seventeen Miles Drive* with the views of the sea (and the small islands with sea birds and sea lions), golf courses, and beautiful old cypresses.

We were surprised by the coast south from Monterey; we expected shining sun, and there was a lot of fog and clouds. We saw many *vista points* but it was not possible to see anything than the fog from them. And the dark, deserted, very grim rocks emerged from the fog... that's exactly my idea of Scandinavia, North Scotland or some still more grim sea shore in the cold north...

Suddenly it was dark, and so we started to look for a camp in a redwood forest. We finally found a campground which had some vacant places. It was placed in a deep valley, all covered by the high and old trees. We tried to adapt our car for sleeping; the car wasn't constructed for this purpose, it was possible to lean back the rear seats, but we slept partially in the boot and partially on a bump formed by the seats, which wasn't very comfortable.

In the night, one of the old trees felt down quite close to our place, across the road. Fortunately we found another way out from the campground, so we could continue in our travel.



THE CYPRESSES IN MONTEREY

Next day we saw the old Danish village *Solvang*. It started to be sunny and quite warm. Later we went through an area of beaches, so we tried to swim in the Pacific ocean. It was terribly cold! Now I could understand why the prisoners didn't escape from the Alcatraz. I went out from the water after two seconds, and I shivered from cold for several minutes. Huh!

Very early (in fact earlier than we expected, as the agglomeration is so unbelievably large) we were in Los Angeles. We went along the *Sunset Boulevard* straight to the *Mann's Chinese Theatre*: the pavement in front of the theatre was crowded by very happy Japanese tourists who stepped into the steps of the famous actors, touched them and of course photographed themselves. We noticed lots of film posters and ads everywhere (so that you don't see the houses but just the posters), and we admired a bus whose nose was a golden head of Cleopatra. Then we continued to the downtown. On the old market I saw for the first time the Mexicans and Indians, offering the clothes, jewellery, skeletons, sombreros, Indian rugs and other souvenirs. There were also people with guitars, playing and singing, and Indians in costumes, with drums and sounding shells, preparing themselves for a dance... I was sorry we can't manage to go also to Mexico, or at least to San Diego.

We found out that the L.A. is in fact a group of several hundreds of small towns connected by monstrous network of huge and very busy freeways; it's quite differently organized than all the other cities I had ever seen. Very strange!

In the evening we went to the house of Bruce Pelz (one of the leaders of the Los Angeles sci-fi club) and his wife. They were so kind that they let us to stay with them for two nights though they never met us before. Their house itself was fascinating for us: about fifteen rooms full of various collections - sci-fi books, fanzines, posters, pictures, but also non sci-fi stuff, toys, music records and many others. Also their backyard was highly fascinating for us: a big

swimming pool and the other smaller massage pool with hot water, a sauna, and several refrigerators containing hundreds of beverage cans, icecream etc. We were lucky - the second evening of our stay in L.A. there was an ice cream party in Pelzs' house. About fifty people came there, which had sounded incredible to me but I saw that the house and the yard could take all of them very easily. I was surprised and pleased by the loose, relaxed way of the organization of the party - people divided themselves to smaller groups according to their interests, some of them were conversating, some played computer games or cards or read for themselves something interesting. Very pleasant!

We met there Craig Miller who works in the film business and had visited Czechoslovakia, the Bratislava film studios, in January.

We also went to see David Schlosser and Kay McCutcheon; we saw their house, two dogs and - most important of all - their new baby. It's a six week old boy, Random. He is very good indeed.

The last place which we visited in Los Angeles were the *Universal Studios*. (We didn't want to go to the Disneyland, though many people said us that they liked it. I think the *Universal Studios* were enough.)

We visited several shows, but most of all we liked the *Riots*, with a really skillful group of actors. Also the *Star Trek* show was funny; the E.T. pavillon seemed to me technically perfect but who created this empty, boring scenario? The show of film tricks from *Back to the Future* and other films was good.

But best of all was of course the tram going around the studios. *Waterfalls*, *Jaws*, *King Kong*, *Battlestar Galactica*, earthquake in San Francisco, an avalanche - people yelling around me - really funny.

And then we went from LA to the east, to Palm Springs.

I was amazed by the low prices of the gas in USA, especially in L.A. - one dollar for one gallon! In Czechoslovakia, even with the horrible exchange rate when we earn 100 \$ per month and so all the goods are relatively much cheaper, the petrol is twice as expensive! No wonder that the Americans don't use the public transportation more frequently.

Palm Springs is a beautiful town, surprisingly green in the middle of the dry desert, encircled by the rocky, deserted mountains like from the western films. Nice!

We went quickly through the town and continued to the *Joshua Tree National Park*. Gorgeous! Not only the Yucca trees (Joshua tree is *Yucca brachyfolia*) but also the cactuses, rocks, landscape. American landscape in these areas was fascinating for us: you can see so far, you see mountains before you and it turns out that they are 200 km distant, and when you finally reach them, you see again very similar mountains on the horizon, and this repeats again and again... I really must admire the first pioneers who went across these vast plains and all the mountain chains and deserts. I can't imagine how they could manage it.

And then we entered Arizona.

Soon the landscape changed: we went up to the mountains with

green conifer forests around Prescott. We visited an Indian pueblo from the 14th century, called *Tuzigoot*. The Indians departed from this area in the 14th century, nobody knows why or where. *Oak Creek Canyon* - white sheer rocks and conifer trees. *Walnut Canyon* - Indian shelters in the rocks, facing the deep valley of the creek. *Sedona*, with red rocks changing their shades from the deep purple and red to white in a beautiful gradient.

We stayed in various camps, and during the nights we had only one ill-functioning flashlight; usually we had our dinner in the dark, we washed ourselves in the dark, and in some of the campgrounds there were no showers, which was surprising for me and made me uncomfortable.

Franta stuck to the instructions of the German itinerary of the *Münich Automobil Club* and followed them very punctually. According to this itinerary, it was necessary to come to the *Grand Canyon* in the time of the sunset (which was at 7,30) and observe it from the *Hopi point*. We went there from Flagstaff in the afternoon and Franta showed marks of growing nervousity: we shall not manage it in time! But we must be there! Tomorrow, we must continue to some other places, and we would never in our lives see the sunset from the *Hopi point*! He was quite panicking and I wished that the heavy clouds would come and spoil all the sunset and everything, as I felt like an exhausted slave of the German itinerary.

went very slowly along the canyon ridge. It was very thrilling, especially when I imagined how unpleasantly frustrated Franta would be if we were late. At the end we came in time: we saw the rocks of the Canyon in the orange shine of the sunset. But another dinner in darkness and searching for a campsite in darkness awaited us.

Grand Canyon was fascinating. We went along the south ridge next morning and we admired all the layers of the white, yellow, orange and black rocks. The huge space, the dimensions of the canyon are really impressive. But most of all I remember the Japanese tourists in groups on each view point, smiling, putting themselves in front of the cameras and clicking with their switches.

We continued to the district which belongs to the Navajo Indians. There were stands with their craft at the rest areas along the road. Silver jewellery, colourful stones, necklaces, earrings, bracelets, but also the painted plates of sandstone or the talismans and special devices from feathers - *dream catchers*. Sounds very useful - if the purpose is to be able to remember your dreams.

I forgot the name of the next pueblo which we visited there; it was our first pueblo situated in a large, 100 (or more) meters wide alcove. Later we saw more of these pueblos inside the alcoves, but the first was really surprising and very gorgeous. The same structure of the rocks makes the alcoves and also the arches, so in this area there are the national parks presenting the alcove-like and arches-like rocks.

In the *Monument Valley* there are different rocks - mostly they are chimney - like. According to the German itinerary, it was necessary to go to see the rocks in your own car, though the road is dirt and unpaved; but it is manageable.

So we went to the road. It was terrible! There were no signs, so you never knew where you are and which rock you see. There was a lot of dust and big deep holes on the road, and a lot of other cars endangering you by collision when you tried to avoid the holes. Finally, there was a biggest hole with a bulldozer, and some cars gave it up and returned back, but some continued around the bulldozer, crossing the places where there was no road at all.

I started to yell hysterically that I don't want to continue, and Franta finally, after much hesitation, returned back, but he kept saying that we should have continued and that I spoiled this all. In short, the German itinerary was always right.

It was especially wonderful to drive the car on the empty roads through the deserts, on the absolutely straight roads where you don't meet almost any other cars. I loved it dearly! It wasn't boring for me at all, I enjoyed this feeling of free, very fast motion.

We came to the *4 Corner Point* - four states in right angles meet in this point: Arizona, Colorado, New Mexico, Utah. Again the stands with Indian crafts, and also several Indians in colourful traditional costumes, horses, feather caps. The pay for a slide was 4 dollars, so Franta, who tried to economize all the time, used the teleobjective, but the Indians saw him and asked him for the money. He went very quickly away. I tried to explain him that the Indians must also invest money to the horses, feathers and other equipment, but it had no effect at all.

We continued to the state Colorado, to the *Mesa Verde National Park*. In this campground I saw for the first time the deers which are not shy at all - they went very close to the tents, cars and people. I never saw so tame animals in Europe. I tried to sleep outside the car, just in my sleeping bag on the grass, and it was much more pleasant than to slepp inside the car: fresh air, even ground without bumps, moon and stars. Wonderful.

Mesa Verde is perhaps the most marvellous national park with the Indian pueblos; there are several very well preserved pueblos, very beautifully built, large, with towers and several floors, remaining rather the medieval castles than the Indian villages. Really wonderful.

In the *Arches national park*, the German itinerary prescribed to go to several trails, but it stressed that you should start early in the morning. I was happy that we can also walk a little, but gradually, as the noon approached, I started to understand why it was necessary to manage it all quite early in the day. On the rocks in the strong sunshine, it was unbearably hot. On the last trail I almost collapsed and I started to think that the German itinerary is perhaps really always right.

The next was the *Capitol Reef National Park*. The campground was full and there was no other campground nearby and it was late, but we found out that 2 vehicles are allowed at one place. So we asked people with one vehicle to allow us to join them. We were very lucky, they were very nice and friendly and it turned out that the grandmother of the lady came from Russia. They showed us the newspapers and told us about the coup that happened in the USSR. It was already all over, but we didn't know anything during the three tense days when Gorbachev was arrested! We tried to imagine the alternative that the conservatives had won and they would have occupied also our country; would we return home? No, never, was the clear answer.

We went to a lecture and slide show by the rangers, but when we returned to our place, we saw that our neighbours are scared and irritated by a skunk going around. It bite holes into the tents and tried to get to the food. People made noise and used flashlights to drive it off, but it wasn't afraid of them at all. Only slowly and hesitantly it went away. It is quite a beautiful animal, after all: black with two white strips on its sides.

I was charmed by the *Bryce National Park* with the wonderful rock towers in rows, in all the shades of the white, yellow, orange and purple.

In *Zion National Park* we went to the valley of the *Virgin River*. They celebrated 75 years of the foundation of the Park, so we get a cake and wrote them our greetings in Czech, which obviously surprised and pleased the rangers.

We smelled incense in the air and Franta thought that some very religious people are around; later we found out that it was the incense cedar.

We went to Las Vegas in a big and colourful storm (a scenery like in a sci-fi film - two rainbows, bizzare orange clouds, bizzare mountains on the skyline...), and we experienced a rain which remained a sort of waterfall.

Finally we were in Las Vegas. The rain stopped as quickly as it started. We went through the shining streets and observed the casinos and hotels covered with chains of lightbulbs of all colors, changing their patterns. I couldn't almost believe my eyes. I had never seen something so crazy! What a wasting of energy!, was of course my first thought.

But in the middle of the Strip boulevard our tire was flat. So we spent most of the evening by changing the tire, but our reserve tire was only a small emergency one, so we had to go to the *Hertz* workshop the next morning. But the repair was quick and didn't cause any delay in our itinerary.

With the changed tire, we saw the rest of all the shining casinos - *Tropicana*, *Flamengo*, *Circus Circus*, *Sahara Inn*... so strange, this city in the middle of the desert, living just from the games, gambling, entertainment and fun. The food was cheap there, but the motels were the same price as in the other places, so we tried to find a campground. There was a parking for recreation vehicles besides the *Circus Circus*, but our "RV" didn't have any hook to the water, electricity etc., so they could not let us there. They told us to park at the

neighbouring parkground, but they didn't tell us the number code of the restrooms and showers. So staying there was free but very unpleasant as it was necessary to wait in front of the restrooms till the moment when somebody will go in or out, and then quickly join him...

Next morning we saw the *Hoover Dam* and bathed in the Lake Mead, which was admirably warm. We observed that some people spend all the day in the water; one lady was even knitting in the water.

In the afternoon, we came to the *Death Valley*. In this national park I really didn't regret that we didn't walk on the trails more: the hot, extremely dry wind remained me the interior of the running drier. The hiking trails didn't seem appealing to me at all!

I wondered what is the white spot at the bottom of the valley; when we came close to it, it turned out that it is partially the evaporated salt and partially the water, containing the same ratio of salt as the sea water. We tasted it and returned quickly to our air-conditioned car.

We had a dinner in the *Death Valley* and we observed that the slice of bread turns into a toast in one minute, when exposed on a table to the wind. It was clear that it is absolutely impossible to sleep in the valley, so we went out and fortunately the road climbed very high in a short time, and there was much cooler. This night we stayed just at a parkground, not in the camp, as there were no camps in this area.

Then we went to *Sequoia National Park* and saw *General Grant* and *General Sherman*, and continued to the *King's Canyon National Park*, which is in the heart of Sierra Nevada. Beautiful deep forests, rocks, clean rivers, canyons, bears. In the campground there were lots of warnings that the bears go after the food, and that it's necessary to put all the food to the bear-proof boxes. We did it, and we didn't see any bear, which was a pity.

During the last day of our travelling in the rented car, we saw the *Yosemite National Park*, or rather only crossed this park in a hurry, keeping in mind that we have to be at the San Francisco airport in the evening. The German itinerary said that it's possible to visit the *Yosemite* and *King's Canyon* in one day, which I think is completely stupid. You see only the curves on the road and a few mountains and rocks from the view points on the road, but you can't breathe the air of the park, go to its trails, and so it's perhaps better to see a nice film about it.

From San Francisco we flew overnight to Chicago. We changed the plane two times, so we didn't sleep at all, and when I came to the worldcon, I was completely exhausted by this several weeks lasting discomfort, hurrying and nonsufficient sleeping.

So my impressions from the worldcon (a yearly world meeting of science fiction fans) are a bit misty.

It was striking for me how very different was this American worldcon, held in a Hyatt Regency hotel in Chicago, from the last year's worldcon in Hague, Holland - the European one. I saw that some of the American fans said that the European worldcon is not really the genuine nice worldcon, that the really good worldcon can be held only in America. What were the differences?

The American fans, first of all! Much more relaxed, euphoric and crazy than the European ones. Quire costumes. So friendly and sociable. The masquerade and the parties are much more important than on the European cons. The dealer's room and the art show was much, much bigger in Chicago than it was in Hague. The whole atmosphere differs a lot.

My husband never saw the American fans before, and for the first hour or two he just sit in the hotel lobby and stared without a word to the people walking around him, completely paralyzed.

I saw a few American fans in Hague, but not ten thousands at one place. It was a great impression also for me.

Then Franta went out for some sightseeing. He went to the galleries and was impressed by the amount and quality of the arts that are concentrated in this city.

We came on Thursday at noon; first of all, I got my press ribbon, as in Hague it was very important to have all the proper ribbons, otherwise you were not allowed everywhere. Then we tried to find somebody who would like to share a room, which was quite time-consuming, but finally we succeeded.

Then I went to some pannels, mainly to see such famous people as Hal Clement, Lois McMaster Bujold, Gene Wolfe, Larry Niven (he was at the ice-cream party in LA, but he had a nap and so I missed him there),

I met Neil Rest, a fan from Chicago who was last year in Czechoslovakia, and Amy Thomson, an American writer who I met last year in Hague and who also organizes a women's APA which I had joined.

We went for a dinner to the Thai restaurant; the food was very tasty, just excellent. My husband was enthusiastic with it. At the way to the restaurant and back, it was the only opportunity for me to see something of the Chicago streets. They are built on several levels, because the level of the city was elevated because of the floods. Some skyscrapers are beautiful and there is a lot of building in progress.

The amount of various parties was simply unbelievable. We went around them and at all places people are very friendly and spoke to us like to old acquaintances.

I tried to "chase" some writers, to get their stories published in the *Ikarie* magazine. I went to the SFWA (Sci-fi Writers of America) suite and then (thanks to Amy) to the room party of the *Ace Books*. And there was really everybody: Silverberg, Pohl, Charlie Brown, Ellen Datlow; Martha Soukup has a Czech grandfather, which was identifyable because of her surname. I

didn't have time enough to ask Mike Resnick about his grandfather - his name sounds very Czech as well.

I visited several panels on feminist topics (like *Women and technology in SF*, *Images of motherhood in SF*); the discussions were really interesting, though I feel some things differently than the American feminists - for example the idea of a technology institute or university for women seems to me essentially backward (no segregation!). Perhaps the socialism forced us women to do any work (including the highly qualified jobs) but made us terribly overburdened. For me, the question of fathers staying at home on paternal leave seems to be the very crucial one.

Saturday evening I didn't go to the masquerade as I wanted to see the performance of Karel Capek's *R.U.R.*, a theatre play from the twenties where was for the first time used the world robot. The performance was very different from our Czechoslovak ones - very vivid, people in the audience smiled often, which they don't in Prague - it's no fun! - our performances are directed differently, they look like the old films from the twenties, very quiet and elegant, lyric and serious. But I quite liked it - especially I liked the robots which were stylized in a punk way.

The Saturday night I all slept, which was stupid, but I couldn't help myself - I felt really sick, and I think you don't wonder.

And it was the end of worldcon for me as Sunday morning I departed to N.Y. and Prague. So I didn't see the Hugo award ceremoniel! But the problem was that the Americans have a feast - the *Labor Day* - on the 2nd September, while in Czechoslovakia children have to go to school (and we have the *Labor Day* - I don't know why - on the 1st May). So we had to return.

But anyway, it was a good experience for me, and I would like more parties, more bidding for the cons, and more fancy costumes on the cons here in Czechoslovakia! And more friendly and more happy people, I think.

Perhaps we need a bit of the Californian air with the euphoric drug.

Please, could somebody send me some very old and cheap second-hand book on "HOW TO WRITE SCIENCE FICTION"? Or "HOW TO WRITE STORIES?" I would need it badly for our workshops for new authors; as far I made it all only by intuition but it certainly is not enough. Would somebody help us???