

Jim and Emmy's Travel Journal

The Country of Czechoslovakia

1985, 1991 and 1995

1985

We arrived in West Germany on May 30. After a few days with Emmy's cousins we visited The Netherlands, Belgium, and France. Back to the cousins, then across France, Switzerland and Italy, from Venice to Rome, with a stop in the country of San Marino. We crossed the Adriatic Sea to spend a week in Yugoslavia, including Dubrovnik, Split, and Zagreb, then crossed the border into Austria. After a few days in Vienna getting Visa's, we crossed the border for our first visit in Czechoslovakia.

Over the years we've talked to a half dozen people who have driven into Czechoslovakia, and every single one of them, without fail, told about the problems, the bad treatment, and the long delay they faced at the border. Most people said they would never do it again! We took that into consideration when we looked at the map to see where we would cross the border.

We decided not to use the heavily traveled border crossing near Vienna, and selected the crossing point between Gmund, Austria, and Ceské-Velenice, Czechoslovakia, small towns in the middle of nowhere. We decided to cross early on a Sunday morning when there would be little traffic. As we left Gmund, Austria we asked those border guards if we should expect any problems with the Czechoslovakian border people today, and they said no. As we moved toward the border, two gun-toting uniformed men opened a steel gate, then closed it after us.

That sounds worse than it is, there are "gun-toting uniformed men" and "steel gates" at most borders, especially at the US border. As a matter of fact, the US border is usually the worst! But since we are entering a Communist country, this comment seemed to be an editorial requirement!

(By the way, the Macintosh computer has the ability to put some little marks (è é ü î) above letters, as required in both German and French, it just doesn't speak Czechoslovakian. Some letters in town names are missing the necessary marks, but it's only important to someone who knows the Czechoslovakian language, the rest of us can't pronounce them anyway.)

Ahead, maybe a block away, we saw two more uniformed men guarding another steel gate we hoped would open soon, when we are ready to leave the border station. A tall young man who spoke English, came out to greet us, and there was a pleasant older man who seemed to be in charge. Jim went into the building, presented our papers, and asked to buy gasoline coupons. He used a \$100 American Express Traveler's check (good everywhere) and received

coupons for 50 Liters of gasoline (he thought), and 880 Czechoslovakian Crowns in change.

The young man was very pleasant and asked Jim about the camper, and continued to chat while the older man entered the camper and looked around for a couple of minutes. When we were ready to leave, the girl taking care of the coupons said she had made a mistake and would have to redo some paperwork.

In a few more minutes they opened the next gate and after only 20 minutes at the border point, we were on our way. We had seen no other vehicle or person at the border, so the Czechoslovakian guards had no excuse, if they needed one, to delay us. When we have crossed the East German and Hungary borders in other years, there has been up to an hour delay, just for aggravation purposes.

The first thing we did was drive straight ahead into the town of Ceské Velenice and end up where we did not want to be. Who would have guessed the first thing we were supposed to do in leftist Czechoslovakia, was to turn right.

When we approached the first railroad crossing we saw a man come out of the small house and manually crank down the gates, then we sat there for 10 minutes or so before the train arrived. The man in front of us got out of his car, and we managed to communicate a little in German. We showed him the map, and he pointed to some places we should visit.

There are very few cars on the road this morning, but we do see many that have parked, and we assume they are wandering through the woods. Saw a few people carrying sacks, perhaps they were picking mushrooms.

When the road came to a dead end we debated which way to turn, and as might be expected, we turned the wrong direction, then turned around and came back. We saw some Army men had stopped a big truck and were talking to the driver. They just looked at us as we passed. Drove through Trebon and saw many arcaded buildings in the market area, a fountain, a couple of churches that did not look recently used, a town gate with houses, (or houses that were the town gate) and a school with a lot of flower boxes and "child art" in the windows.

The little towns have loud speakers installed high on the electric poles, but they are quiet now. Czechoslovakia has many small houses, used as a weekend home or a tool shed, in areas with acres of small gardens. Some have a small room or two, and some rooms appear to have a bed. These buildings were small but well built, certainly not shanties. We stopped at a rest area for breakfast.

As we arrived in Ceské Bادهjovice, we were on a hill overlooking the town, and could see many, many apartment buildings. We just passed a church. Along the street in Ceské Bادهjovice, and especially in the windows of a school, there are many red and green flags, and some red, white, and blue. We see the hammer and sickle on posters and signs.

We passed a small park with the grass trimmed nicely, and with many more flags. We now see a great crowd of people and soldiers in uniform, and we think there is some kind of an Agricultural Exposition in town. Thousands of people are walking, after parking what seems to be a long distance from the Exposition. We drove past the area, made a few turns, and were told we could not park near

here. After a few more tries even further away, we gave up and drove past the Exposition again.

We looked down into the city from the hillside, and could see people walking through Ceské Budejovice's fairground and standing in lines to buy things to eat, but we can see no reason to stop and walk for an hour, so off we go. By hindsight we wish we had tried harder to find a parking place. Who knows what interesting things we might have discovered at the fair.

There is a large square in the center of town, and a church with many people going in. One man on a street corner said "change," he wanted to buy US dollars, but we don't need his type of money.

We see a lot of signs saying "SNP" with a picture of a person with a gun. Other signs show a "40" and "1945—1985," indicating some kind of anniversary in Czechoslovakia. We have seen several campsites along the way this morning.

Now we drove into Tabor. At the town square there is a church, a fountain, and the old city hall, which is now a museum. There was a young man at the entrance who spoke English and wanted to be our guide.

We went down into the tunnels that criss-cross under the town. There are 27 miles of tunnels, on three levels, dug maybe in the 1400's. A religious group called Taborites lived in Tabor. One story is they lived and hid in these tunnels, and another story said it was for storage of food, etc. It's possibly both, but in any case the tunnels go for miles and are in very good condition, and hundreds of years old.

Our guide spoke several languages, and was studying more, as he knew that is the way to get a good job, and improve his way of life. The young man is interested in changing money and he often goes to Prague to spend the day buying US dollars. He wants to leave this country, but it's difficult to do that.

The last part of the drive into Prague was on a good highway. We drove past the National Museum and down a very wide street. We turned right and drove past the Powder Tower. Now we made a U-turn and drove along the river until we found a parking place near the Charles Bridge. Prague's Karluv Most, or Charles Bridge, is for pedestrians only, and is acclaimed for the several statues and statue groups that line the bridge. We were parked on the old town side, and we see the palace and St. Vitus Cathedral (Prague) across the river and high on a hill.

We then walked down the wide street on the east side of the river, and came to a wall with some openings we could look through. We had heard of the Jewish Cemetery and were going to make sure we found it, but had no idea we would stumble on it right in the heart of town. Prague's Jewish Cemetery is one of the most unusual old curiosities we have ever seen. In just a very few acres 100,000 people were buried between the late 1400's and the late 1700's. No one has been buried in this cemetery for two hundred years, but it's still kept as a memorial and is now a tourist attraction. There are only 12,000 graves, but people were buried six and eight deep over the years. The headstones in this Prague cemetery are various sizes, some are six inches thick, two and a half feet wide and five feet high, and have inscriptions in Hebrew. They are close together, and lean in all directions.

It's amazing this cemetery remains at all, after the many different governments (including the Germans during WW II) during the past 200 years. There's an old Synagogue at the entrance, now used as a Museum, and there were crowds of visitors. Prague's cemetery is a one-of-a-kind, and is as unique in its way, as are the catacombs outside Rome.

The map shows there's a campsite on the west side of Prague. We drove in that direction, and were on a very, very wide street when we saw tents in a field off to the right.

We drove through a nice neighborhood to the parking lot, then found it was a camping place for tents only. We were assured by a couple of people that they have already been turned away from the other campsite, so there is no reason for us to go there. We had nothing better to do, so drove west, well past the airport, then drove into a small town. We asked some young people walking on the street, but they didn't know where a campsite is located.

Near the airport we had seen a small police station, so Jim stopped and went in with the map. They knew there was one someplace around here, and told us to turn at a sign with a picture of a little camping hut. We had seen that sign as we drove west, but we couldn't make a left turn at that point. We found the sign again, drove back and forth a time or two, and finally found the Hotel Transit.

Behind the hotel they have some very tiny huts, just big enough for a couple of bunks, that could be rented for the night. But there is no room to park our camper. They also had heard the regular campsite is filled, so we just booked a room in the hotel for the night, the first time on this trip.

At the Hotel Transit we paid \$20 for room and no breakfast, and a hot bath. Since the water was not hot, they refunded a small amount of money. We parked on the street and turned on the gas for the refrigerator and left it on all night. When Jim asked if the camper might be broken into on the street in Prague, they were amazed we would even ask such a question, and said there was no chance of such a problem.

As we were getting the camper settled and Emmy was preparing supper for us, a German family in a very large camper stopped to see what we knew. They had followed the same sign, but they decided to find the main campsite anyhow.

We took a walk around the community before settling in for the night. In this neighborhood there are very nice small houses, with green yards, fruit trees, and cars parked in the driveways. We took a lot of the small gift items we had in the camper into the room with us, just in case. The Hotel Transit beds are hard and narrow, the water barely warm in the little sink in the room, but the Budapest Hilton would have been no better, more expensive, and noisier.

CS, Prague, Aug 19, Mon - Hotel - 202 - 7,207

We left at 7:00 AM and after a try or two, we ignored the directions they gave us, and found the campsite anyway.

As Jim was talking to the man at the gate, indicating we wanted to sign in and pay for tonight, he heard someone call to him. It was the German man in the big camper we had seen last night.

He had not been able to park inside the campsite, but had parked next to the gate and spent the night (so had several other people). We could have done the same, but last night we were tired of looking for the campsite. Staying in a Czechoslovakian hotel was a different experience anyway. (The only hotel we used in the six month trip in 1985.) We now checked into the campsite in Prague, and paid for tonight's lodging. We have not reserved a space, but we are assured we can get inside the gate, at least.

On the way downtown we stopped and bought 50 liters of gasoline. When Jim tried to pay with the coupons, we found what the paperwork problem at the border had been. We had asked for gasoline coupons, and the girl at the Czechoslovakia border had prepared diesel coupons.

The man refused to accept the coupons, so we had to pay with money, which made the gas more expensive, 450 crowns for 50 liters, over three dollars a gallon. The man who cleaned the windows asked to be paid in dollars, but Jim gave him crowns instead.

We found a nice shady place to park near the Charles Bridge, then strolled across the bridge, enjoying the statues and the view, and looking around here and there. We walked to the US Embassy in Prague, located in what had at one time been someone's palace. While visiting countries where there is less than complete friendliness with the US, the State Department advises tourists to let the Embassy know they are in the country, just in case there are any problems. The lady we talked to was a citizen of Czechoslovakia, and had worked in the US Embassy in Prague for 23 years. She had even been permitted a visit to the US a few years ago.

She was so happy to hear we had no problems crossing the border. She must get tired hearing about all the problems, real and imagined, tourists have in her country. She gave the impression we were the first Americans to have nothing but good things to say about how we had been treated at the border, and elsewhere else while in Czechoslovakia. Perhaps most people do not visit her US Embassy office unless there has already been a problem!

She said they hear of all kinds of problems. Recently an American travel office booked 20 young people to stay at a Spa in Czechoslovakia. They expected a Palm Springs Spa, with tennis courts and many good things. A Czechoslovakian Spa is a place with generally old, sick people, with very smelly water and mud for them to soak in. The travel agent not only didn't bother to tell the Spa they were coming, he didn't bother to pay for the hotel rooms either.

The front of the US Embassy in Prague is rather nondescript as palaces go, but inside we could see a nice garden in back, terraced up the hill. As usual, the US Marine guarding the US Embassy in Prague, was young, dressed immaculately, smiling, and very helpful.

From here we walked up the hill to see the Prague Castle and the St. Vitus Cathedral (Prague). Since this is Monday, they are both closed, as were some stores in the city. In the rear of Prague's Cathedral we found a group of young people making an archaeological dig. They were finding both small items of interest, and items of small interest. A little further along the street, we found

workmen carving stone to repair some broken stone parts of a building. The stone masons used electric tools, in addition to hand tools.

We walked down the hill and through a garden and into an area with some small stores. We noticed customers standing in line outside one Prague grocery store, and discovered each customer had to have a shopping basket before they were allowed inside. As each person came out, they passed their basket to the next one in line. Guess the store would have been too crowded if they had no control of the crowds of people wanting to shop. Most people coming out of the store were carrying only a small bag of food.

We stood in line to buy some bread and butter at another store. This loaf of Czechoslovakian bread was as tasty as any in Europe, according to Jim. It was white and soft, not crusty, but very, very heavy. It cost 20 cents. Butter was also very good.

We visited the Church of our Lady Victorious where there is a doll figure, called The Prague Child Jesus. It has been here many years, and is greatly honored by the people. There is usually a long inspiring story about items like this that we see in Europe, but we can't remember all (many! any!) of them. We walked back across the Charles Bridge, and to the camper for lunch and a nap.

We now wanted to exchange our diesel coupons for gasoline coupons. We had asked the lady at the Embassy, and she didn't know what to do, but suggested we go to a big hotel. We walked past the Jewish cemetery again (looked through the hole in the gate), and went to the Hotel Intercontinental. That man knew nothing about the gasoline problem, but suggested Jim visit the office of the gasoline company, and located their office on Jim's map.

We now walked through the old town and when we got to Prague's big department store, Kotva, we decided Emmy would stay there, and Jim would return in an hour with the gasoline ticket problem solved. She looked around in the store awhile, then Emmy decided there was nothing she wanted to buy, and didn't really want to stand in line to buy it, if there was. Inside the store there was a small lunch counter where people could buy a snack, and plenty of bottled liquor, but it was generally a dark gloomy place. Many light bulbs were either burned out, or not in use. So she spent most of her time standing on the street corner, watching the crowds go by.

In the meantime Jim was having all kinds of fun with the coupons. The first thing he found was the downtown street system all torn up, so Jim couldn't cross some streets as needed to get where he was going. Finally arrived at the gasoline company office, and they said the only place to solve this problem was a large bank. On Jim's map they marked the locations of a couple of banks.

He now ran down the street to one of the banks. Jim ran up a wide marble staircase into a magnificent room with a very high ceiling. It's a beautiful room with statues, a stained-glass ceiling, marble everywhere, and this Prague bank office would be an improvement over most banks in the US. Although it was dark and could stand renovation and cleaning, Jim can't remember seeing a more elegant bank office. Hundreds of people in this Prague bank were standing in several lines, and others sitting in line waiting to stand in line.

Jim finally was able to talk to a man who told him they could do nothing about the coupon problem, but when Jim insisted they must be able to do something, he was told which line to get in. One thing led to another and the time just passed and passed. Jim finally offered to take a refund, then offered to take fewer coupons, then offered to leave the Czechoslovakian Diesel coupons he already gave them, or do anything else they could suggest, in order to get his passport back so he get out of there. Can you “feel” his frustration? (The better you know Jim, the more you “feel” his frustration!)

Anytime we must do something official in Europe (like get money, sign into a campsite, or cross a border), most of the time, they first take the passport. Then we can't leave until they complete everything and the passport is returned. Can't use an “expired” passport here, like we do in a campsite in France.

Finally, the transaction was complete. Jim ran through and over and around the street construction and found Emmy standing in front of Kotva, Prague's department store, not the least concerned for anything but Jim's health. She had guessed what the problem was, but then what do we do and when do we do it, if someone can't keep a meeting time and place? Thank goodness we have never had a problem, but we usually forget to make alternative plans!

The street repair was a major operation, and extended for blocks in all directions. They had dug about 5 feet deep, and after laying a thick covering of asphalt, they were installing thick slabs of concrete with a molded channel created for streetcar tracks. Jim thinks the streetcar track construction in Prague looks a lot like what he saw in Vienna, and Vienna has the smoothest streetcar tracks we have experienced anywhere.

As we walked further, Jim was now even more convinced that just yesterday we drove on one of these streets, and now it's five feet deep. Can't be, but when he looks on the Prague map, he can't find any other street we could have been on.

Today Prague is overflowing with people, but as far as we know, it's not a holiday. Sidewalks are jammed, and stores are filled with people. The people are nicely dressed, do not seem to be hungry, and no police or anyone else, seem to be making anyone do anything they don't want to do. We are sure this will continue as long as they don't want to do much of anything! (1991—But four years later, they overthrew their government, with not much problem at all! It's been said that the Polish Revolution took 10 years, the East German's took 10 days, and the Czechoslovakian Revolution took 10 hours!)

There are long lines for everything, at news stands to buy newspapers or postcards, at tobacco stores, cafes, department stores, food stores, everything is crowded, and there are long lines everywhere.

We had been told Czechoslovakia is a good place to buy jewelry. Emmy saw something interesting in a jewelry store window, but inside were crowds of people and only two clerks. We have decided a lot of stores in Prague don't have, or don't want, enough clerks, and the clerks they have don't want to take care of the customers. We see stacks of bread in the stores, but only one clerk and a long line of people.

We just walked past the big wide street we drove on Sunday. There we can see the National Museum, and there we can see the Powder Tower, but here the streets are now five feet below the sidewalks—wow! What happened! When we arrived in Prague the other day, this Travel Journal says, “We drove past the National Museum and down a very wide street. We turned right and drove past the Powder Tower,” and there is no way we could do that today!

We walked to the Bethlehem Chapel, a rather plain building where John Huss preached, years ago. He was martyred in the 1500’s for heresy. The church was rebuilt in the 1950’s, but some pieces are original.

The architecture of Prague is very nice. Some people say it's the most beautiful city in Europe. We don't quite agree, but it's a very worthwhile city to visit. The buildings along the street next to the river have interesting roof lines.

From the hill where the Castle and the Cathedral is located, we looked over the city of Prague and could see dozens of towers and spires of all sizes and shapes. The Charles Bridge and the statues are excellent, and the old cemetery is exceptionally intriguing. After our long walk, and the difficult afternoon, we went to the camper and had an ice cold Coke. That helped get over the culture shock, as well as the “gasoline coupon” predicament.

The Caravan Campsite is nice and is in a handy location, inside city limits, just west of downtown Prague. BUT, the facilities are a stinking mess. Emmy was done with her shower before she realized how bad the rest of the facilities were. When Jim saw that the woman cleaning the restroom had a mask over her face, he expected to find problems, and the smell and mess in the restroom is terrible. Funny thing is, the building is very nice, and just down the hall a few yards from the door to the smelly restrooms and shower, there is a very nicely decorated bar with a fireplace. Jim visited the facilities in another part of the camp, and they were just as bad. Amazing how they will take care of the bar area, and let the other facilities get so filthy.

As we were parking the camper in our spot for the night, the lady next door came and watched carefully as we backed into the space. Later Emmy spent some time talking with her (in German). The lady was from the DDR (East Germany) and carefully looked around to see if anyone could hear before she said very much. Their name had been on a list for twelve years before they could buy their car, so they wanted to make sure the Americans didn't bump into it. They often have to go to another country to get parts for auto repairs.

CS, Prague, Aug 20, Tue - 62 - 12 - 7,219

Drove again to the old Jewish Cemetery hoping to be able to buy picture postcards of the place, but nothing will be open for hours. We took some more photographs, but it's not sunny today.

We now stumbled our way across Prague trying to find our way to Poland. There were plenty of signs (light blue with light gold letters, old, rusty, and faded), and many were almost hidden by trees. We made no mistakes, and followed all the signs, but we have never had such a time finding our way out of a city.

This part of the city is filled with houses, stores, factories, steel mills, and no street that goes in any direction for more than a block or two. We followed

trucks we hoped were headed east out of Prague. At times they had built a "rough" street across a vacant lot to connect with a continuing street, but it was a big, time-consuming, tiresome job. But oh so fascinating!

As we left Prague we saw more and more apartment buildings being built on the edge of the city. We are headed toward Hradec Kralove and on toward the Polish border. We are on a new "almost" freeway, a good road but on both sides there are 20 foot high mounds of dirt, as if to make sure no one can see anything in the area. Once in a while there is a break in the dirt and we can see nothing but flat land.

We had to drive slowly past a group of Czechoslovakians working on the road, and when they saw our US flag bumper-sticker they smiled, waved and one man hollered, "American!" Some people are going to break their neck looking out of streetcar windows at our camper. They don't have to see the US flag to know we are from somewhere else, since there aren't many dark brown Dodge Vans in this part of the world.

We still see loud speakers on poles in the small towns. They are harvesting wheat in this area, and a few days ago further south of here, the wheat was past due for harvesting.

The mower being used on the side of the road is new and appears to be modern and up-to-date. Lots of flowers near some of the private homes in the countryside. We are seeing the first direction signs for Wroclaw, Poland which is our destination for today.

We now visited Poland, then across East Germany to the West. We then boarded a ferry to Denmark, another to Sweden, then back to Denmark. We crossed West Germany to the cousins in Mettlach. Later we drove to Rotterdam to board the SS Stefan Batory on October 22. Spent a day in London, 10 days on the Atlantic Ocean to Montreal, then drove home to California.

1991

Our plane landed in Frankfurt, West Germany on August 9. A few days later we rented an RV and picked it up on the exact day that Gorbachev was thrown out of office (the first time). Since we were concerned that the Soviet Army in Eastern Germany might be called to Moscow, we took it easy for a couple of days, until things seemed to get settled in Russia.

We spent the next five weeks or so, visiting throughout former East Germany, including five nights in Berlin (no more East or West!). We drove to Poland and visited friends in Poznan and Gdansk, on to Warsaw and Kraków, then into Czechoslovakia and magnificent Prague.

We crossed the border into Czechoslovakia at 9:15, after 1,037.5 miles (plus 40 miles the day we were in Szczecin) in Poland. The border crossing buildings were quite new and nice, and we only spent a minute passing the border into Czechoslovakia.

Jim decided to get some Czechoslovakian money at the bank at the border. In line in front of him, an elderly lady from Poland was trying to change an old US

\$50 bill. The manager looked at it, then decided not to change it, because it was so old they didn't know if it was still any good. It was dated 1928 (an excellent year, Jim thought!), and redeemable in Gold, it said (but he didn't believe).

Just for fun Jim gave the lady a new \$50 bill he had received in Gdansk, much to her delight, and put the old one in his wallet, wondering what he had bought. To end that story, when we got home it was worth exactly \$50. The president of our bank wanted the bill (perhaps he's a collector, but then who wouldn't want to collect \$50 bills), and gave Jim the \$50. Wow! Another good deed! Will this never end!

On the Polish side of the border there were no lines, but on the Czechoslovakian side, headed towards Poland, there was a mile or two of buses (not fancy tour buses, just plain 'ol buses) filled with people. It appeared they had been there for hours, and there was no sign they were going anywhere in the near future. At times like this we have mixed emotions. We would love to know what is going on, but we don't know who to ask, and then we are still paranoid enough to think it's maybe best not to get too nose-y.

The first thing we see are the very difficult-to-read road signs that we remember from the last trip. The background is a light, faded-blue, and the lettering is a faded-yellow, just about the most difficult to read, that we have (almost) seen anywhere.

We think perhaps the Czechoslovakian roads are as good as they are because there is little traffic to wear them out. We drove around the row-house-walled city of Lipnik, but no trucks are allowed, and we found no convenient place to park and walk. This part of Czechoslovakia is lovely with rolling hills and low mountains in the distance. We just saw an old lady pushing a huge cart filled with vegetables, but we saw no place that appeared to be either the origin or the destination of her journey. We see something like that quite often in the poorer countries. People out in nowhere, for no visible reason. For a while the road was cobblestone, but we didn't find much of that in this country, except in the larger cities.

Every once in a while we pass what appear to be huge factories, but the only product we could identify was cement. A couple of towns remind us of a French village, due to the particular way the row-houses line the streets. Not that we don't see other row-houses, but these, and the ones in France, are different from the others.

It's nice to see that rather than shade trees, the trees along this road are apple trees. People are making use of the fruit, even though they appear small (the apples, not the people!). The farming in this area must be collective farming, as the fields are enormous, and are miles long. We have mentioned in other years about the beautifully designed church steeples in Austria. This part of Czechoslovakia has dozens of steeples that are of a beautiful and varied design, but not so well maintained or painted nearly so well as in Austria. We also see many little churches that, while of a pleasant design, appear to look very much alike.

We looked for a campground as we neared Brno, but found none, so decided to drive a little further. We first drove around in Brno awhile, then found

ourselves driving right down the pedestrian shopping street. We could find no way to leave, so continued for several blocks. The people acted as if they expect to see American Tourists in a German RV driving down that street, just no problem! (Not everyone is this lucky, Linda and Dan got a ticket for doing the same thing in San Gimignano, Italy, one time.)

As we left Brno, we found there was a four-lane Freeway that led to Prague, 140 miles away. We looked for campsites as we drove, and after getting off the freeway and following signs two different times, decided to forget it, and head for Prague. As we neared Prague, we stopped at a large station for fuel and information. Turns out they would take only special Diesel coupons (don't know where we were supposed to buy them) or a Visa card. Now that was an unexpected option!

The station man followed the directions on a sign in the office and multiplied the 63.5 liters on the pump by .8, and wrote down 50.8. The exchange rate was 28 Crowns for \$1, Jim wondered for two months, how much that cost. We finally saw on the Visa bill that we were charged \$50.40. Don't quite figure that out, but for a while, Jim hoped we had paid 50.8 Crowns, or less than \$2 for the tank of fuel, but that seemed too good to be true. A similar thing happened a couple of days later when we got some spending money. They wrote the dollar amount on the Visa receipt, not the number of Czechoslovakian Crowns. That has happened no where else. Elsewhere they have always written the amount in their "money" and we paid some exchange rate when the bill was sent to the US.

The man's directions to a nearby campsite (not the dirty one we used in '85), was as good as his arithmetic, and we were soon set for the night. Jim bought bar-b-que'd chicken and French Fries (just fine) at the restaurant, to eat at "home" and all was well with the trip!

CS, Prague, Sep 19, Thu - 30 - 217 CR

The campsite is located about eight miles directly south of downtown Prague, on the east bank of the Vltava River, right at the streetcar terminal for line 3 and 17, a 12¢ ticket from downtown. The RV remained at the campsite, and we got off the tram near downtown and walked along the river, enjoying the special view. The Karluv Most, or Charles Bridge, is for pedestrians only, and is famous for the several statues, and statue groups that line the bridge.

Prague was occupied by the Germans before WW II started, and was little damaged during that war, so what we see is original, not a reconstruction as in so many places. The encyclopedia says it was bombarded by someone in 1848, but we saw no sign of that stupidity.

As we travel from here to there in Europe, special views appear. In Prague, in Paris, in Athens, in London, in Heidelberg, in Venice, they each have special scenery, and as you move from one spot to another in each city, there is one remarkable sight after another.

While we wouldn't say Prague is our favorite city overall, it's very hard to describe a "one view" that can match the scene in Prague, near the Charles Bridge. The bridge has a special tower at each end, statue groups border the roadway. Buildings of Marla Strana (lesser town) line the hillside and riverbank below the Hradcany Castle and the St. Vitus Cathedral on the hill beyond. If you

are lucky, and our Video camera was, there will be passenger boats on the river below.

(We know, we know, ask us next week while we are in a different location and we'll tell you about another favorite "one view," or city, or building. But how many people do you know who have had the opportunity to personally compare all those views!)

As we started across the bridge towards the Lesser Town it appeared the weather was clearing, and we think it will be even clearer in a few hours. Rather than climb the hill now, we turned around and went to visit the old Jewish Cemetery, a sight not much affected by the weather.

We are amazed that this cemetery, situated right in the heart of downtown Prague, would continue to exist in spite of all the wars and government changes (including the Nazi's in WW II) that have occurred over the centuries. At the entrance, the Klausen Synagogue, built in the 1600s, acts both as the entrance to the cemetery, and as a museum.

At the time of our visit, the exhibit in Prague's Klausen Synagogue consisted of artwork created by children in the Terezin concentration camp, during WW II. It's sad to see pictures of ordinary life, drawn by children who most likely never had a chance to experience that way of life. Terezin is the concentration camp the Nazi's used for propaganda purposes. They built nice buildings, prepared a classical orchestra, a choir, and art work, then used this as a sham, as they brought people from other countries and from the Red Cross, to make them think this is just a normal camp, and that other camps were just like Terezin.

The oldest tombstone in the Jewish Cemetery is dated 1573, and the last funeral took place in 1787 -- not one grave has been added in the last two hundred years! Those 100,000 graves are eight or ten deep, and the 12,000 tombstones tilt in all directions and lean here and there, some against the next. We don't know how the multiple grave business was handled in Prague's Jewish Cemetery, but in the catacombs in Rome, they first dug a tunnel and buried people in niches on each side, then dug the floor down to expose more wall for more burials, but this is not done that way.

Trying to describe a cemetery as a tourist sight doesn't make a lot of sense, but, as we remember from the other visit, this one is mesmerizing, and is certainly well worth a visit.

As we walked to the nearby Intercontinental Hotel we talked to a lady who now lives in San Francisco. She was born in Prague, spent time in Auschwitz when she was 14, and is now revisiting her home, and that place of horror. Her husband is German, and they operate a Bed & Breakfast in the US. They charge \$68 per night at the B&B in their home near San Francisco, and are paying \$30 for a night in a Prague B&B. We paid \$7.75 at the Prague campsite, but the cost of the camper was extra! (Wouldn't trade for anything.)

We used the "facilities" at the Intercontinental Hotel, then went to the rooftop restaurant on the ninth floor to take pictures and to look over the city. Just across the Vltava River is a huge metronome, with a red pointer perhaps 50 feet high, that oscillates 10 times a minute. The best we could determine, it's on the spot where a statue of Stalin stood for some years. There's an international fair

under way just beyond, but this week they were exhibiting beer and wine, and you can imagine our enthusiasm for such a presentation.

Next we walked and walked through the streets of Prague, meandered around the Staromestske (Old Town) Square, past the Powder Tower, then into Wenceslas Square, the location of the huge demonstrations that helped overthrow the Communist Government in 1989. The Wenceslas Square really isn't, but is a very, very wide street that extends for perhaps a third of a mile, down the hill from the National Museum. If you watched TV during the Prague uprising, you saw this street and this building. That is one of the joys of travel, "name and picture catching" (a familiar sight on TV, or in a newspaper or magazine, that spark memories from trips in the past), and Jim likes that even more than name dropping.

We ate lunch in the Prague "cafeteria!" For us that meant a hot dog that had been placed in a heated hole in a bun, a Coke to drink as we walk, an order of French Fries in Staromestske Square, and we watched them make crepes at a street-stand for a continuous line of hungry customers. The best place to eat, except in our RV!

Linda is lucky again. We looked for a copy of "Gone With the Wind" in Czechoslovakian, and would you believe, found a two-volume hard cover edition, in the first bookstore we shopped!

As we strolled through the street market we asked a lady for streetcar directions to Hradcany Castle and St. Vitus Cathedral. She not only spoke English but was happy to walk a few blocks with us, get on the streetcar for a while, then give perfect instructions for the rest of our journey.

This castle still is the home of the Czechoslovakian Government. We understand that President Havel ordered attractive uniforms for the Palace Guard, as a change from the military uniforms they have worn for many years. The Cathedral (Prague) is situated inside the Castle walls, and is truly beautiful. It was started ten centuries ago, and wasn't completed until 1929. The stained windows and the beauty of the columns and pillars, make Prague's St. Vitus Cathedral an outstanding example of Gothic architecture.

A long, long flight of stairs extends down this hill to the riverside, but what a walk this is. At one place there is a panoramic spot for viewing and picture taking of Prague and its rooftops and the hundreds of steeples laid out below. At level after level we were serenaded by musical entertainers. A violinist, a flutist, and would you believe two young ladies in costume, one playing a small harpsichord the other a flute. Was it coincidence that the instrument fit exactly on a step -- one must have been built for the other.

By now we were more than tired and were very happy the walk was downhill. We were looking for a place to buy a loaf of bread, and at a store near the Mala Strana end of the Charles Bridge (must have been within 100 feet of where we bought a delicious loaf of bread in '85), we bought one that was worthless!

It was now late afternoon and in spite of the fact we were almost crawling along, we did enjoy the dozen musical groups, and the many dozens of street vendors that lined Prague's tourist-filled Charles Bridge. Emmy did get a seat on

the Prague tram, but would have given anything not to have to walk that last mile (to her it felt like a "last mile") to the RV, from the last streetcar stop.

Just a few hours later Jim insisted that he had to visit downtown Prague again to see the city in sunset and the streets at night. The ambulances weren't running a regular schedule, so Emmy stayed at home.

Jim visited Prague's main Post Office and was able to use a pay phone to call Linda. All the other pay phones, in the campground and at locations other than the Post Office, would not accept the call.

What sights he saw, and through the marvel of the Video camera, what sights Jim preserved on tape. There's not much use in describing his escapade, he mainly re-visited those places we had explored earlier in the day, except he now saw them in the beauty of the sunset, and later in the glow of street lights. An unforgettable adventure!

The nearby streets were filled with people, even though most stores were closed. It was difficult to see what the people were doing, except walking and mingling here and there. There may have been more horse drawn carriages busy in the dusk, and in the street lights, than during daylight. Perhaps there's something more romantic about a carriage ride at twilight, but Jim felt if he rented one tonight, it would be best that he never mention it to anyone.

As in other remarkable cities, Prague has its own whimsical architecture. At the towers of the Charles Bridge, and at the Powder Tower and several others in the city, roofs are extremely steep, and are topped with unique "bells and whistles." Let's just say that the skyline silhouette of Prague's Staromestske Square (Old Town Square) at sunset, and the Powder Tower is very distinctive. It's fascinating to see that a photograph of buildings (like photos of its citizens) will tell, with great accuracy, if the photo was taken in Stockholm, Paris, Athens, London, Prague, or Rome.

Well now, a certain party will admit to "tired beyond repair" upon return to the campsite, but what a glorious day in a magnificent city. We remember Prague as a terrific, but frustrating city in 1985. It's impossible to say how much of the change in our thinking is a result of less paranoia on our part, as compared with the changes we could "feel" as we met people on the street. There is no doubt we have enjoyed ourselves, and will return, not just tomorrow, but in future years.

CS, Prague, Sep 20, Fri - 31 - 217 CR

We are spoiled by the beautiful weather day after day in the California Desert.

When our weatherman says, "Bright sunshine, and no rain," he isn't talking about this afternoon or tomorrow, that's his weather forecast for the next few months! When we are tourists in other parts of the world, we know to take advantage of picture taking and sightseeing weather when we see it. Yesterday we were careful to be on the hill at the Prague Castle at the right time to get sunny views and pictures of Prague. This morning, while it isn't raining, it's cloudy and overcast -- and what a difference that makes in the panorama of the Prague Castle and St. Vitus Cathedral, and in the pictures we got today.

We again got off the tram near the Charles Bridge, and walked to and through the Lesser Town. Among other things we visited the current home of Shirley Temple, but now she is Madam Shirley Temple Black, United States Ambassador to Czechoslovakia! It's not surprising we couldn't get in to see her, but we were surprised that the Marine Guard would not take our business card with a message for Madam Shirley Temple Black! It happens she was filming a movie or TV program in Prague during what is called "The Prague Spring" when the Soviets invaded this city in 1968. Now what are the odds of something like that.

There is a lot of renovation of buildings on the street where the US Embassy is located, and more is needed. We bought groceries and meat at a couple of stores, then back across the Bridge to see more of the city again. There is always a variety of entertainer groups and vendors on the Charles Bridge. One was selling marionettes that were as nice as we have ever seen. Emmy was interested, then she knew better, then for the next few days, wondered why she hadn't bought one or two. Now she thinks they would look nice hanging from the ceiling in Christiana's bedroom. Also, by hindsight, Emmy wishes she had bought some Czechoslovakian crystal candlesticks.

Back at the campsite Emmy washed her hair, and rested during the rest of our stay. Even Jim was in the mood to take it easy for a couple of hours.

CS, Prague, Sep 21, Sat - 32 - 217 CR - 300 - 3227

We found a large supermarket a mile or so from the campsite and bought a few things, but the quantity and quality of the food was as bad as we have seen in a large store this year. Since this is the only "supermarket" we visited (other shopping was in small stores and street markets) in Czechoslovakia, we can't say more than that this one was not so good.

As we drove across the city, we spotted enough signs to find our way, and thirty or forty minutes later found ourselves beyond city limits on our way to Germany. We stopped at two other shopping areas, one with several outdoor vendors and many customers, but the goods for sale were not inviting, and there was nothing we needed.

Just before we left the City we were as near to being involved in a bad traffic accident as we have ever been. As we left a gasoline station we crossed the empty traffic lanes going to our right, and started to turn left into the first "empty" lane of the multi-lane street going to our left. What we didn't know, and there were no signs to tell us, the lanes nearest the station were closed (not just empty), and there was two way traffic in the other lanes. The empty lane we saw when we looked to our right, was just being filled with traffic coming over the hill from our left! That was scary!

An hour or so later we stopped at a roadside market place. During the past few weeks we have stopped at many market places with nothing we wanted to buy, but we found plenty of fruit and vegetables, and Emmy bought a knitted sweater and twin little stuffed dolls (clowns) for Christiana, and a hand-knitted outfit for Margit's new baby, in Doksany's marketplace. We managed to spend the last of our few Czechoslovakian Crowns and they were happy to take enough German D-Marks to finish the job.

Then we found the market was right in front of the Cloister of Doksany, a large church and a group of beautiful old buildings that have been here for years, and will be delightful when they have the time and the money to renovate.

Here again, in Doksany, we experienced the travelers phenomena of "instant friends." At the campground in Prague, Jim had said hello and talked with three trailer-pulling travelers from the Netherlands. They were parked and shopping at this roadside marketplace, and from the reception we got, you would have thought they were from our home town. We've experienced this at other times over the years!

To reach the border with Germany, we had to climb a small mountain. At a large rest stop when we stopped for lunch, we saw another of the many wrecked and destroyed automobiles we have seen in Eastern Germany, Poland, and here in Czechoslovakia. Most are the remains of old models, but some had to be no more than five to ten years old, which in this part of the world must be considered almost new. We have seen them right at the edge of the Autobahn, abandoned along country roads, at the edge of huge parking lots, and at several road-side rests, such as this. It appears to be a combination of a need for auto parts, and a place to work off aggression.

We assume it started with an accident, but before the vehicle could be removed someone stripped the chassis for parts, and finally what was left was used as something to bang on, perhaps to work off aggression. It appears that people stop and just pound and pound on the vehicle's skeleton. Fresh bangs would be obvious on old rusty wrecks, but we never actually saw it happen.

As we climbed the mountain and neared the German border, we saw something we had seen as we were leaving Yugoslavia for Austria one year. Young ladies were standing along the side of the road, trying to attract attention, and perhaps a ride to Germany. They were not dressed in the elaborate manner expected of a prostitute, so there was no way to determine what they were "advertising," or what they were doing. Maybe they just wanted a ride out of the country, but why just women, why here, miles from any town of any size, and why just one other place over the years! Well, maybe the first guess was the correct one after all.

The border point seemed to be at the very top of this mountain, and it was downhill from there. We passed through several little villages that looked to be in very nice condition. There was nothing particularly significant about the little towns, but they looked much nicer than others in the East, but not nearly as nice as villages in the West. An interesting change has been made to some of the directional signs. About the most far reaching one-letter change that can be imagined, from "CSSR" (Czechoslovakian Socialist Soviet Republic) to "CSFR" (Czechoslovakian Socialist Federal Republic). (Well, it's something like that, but maybe not exactly those words.)

Back to Eastern Germany, especially remarkable Dresden. After another week in Germany, we drove across Luxembourg and on to Paris. Then back to Mettlach to pickup Cousins Hugo, Maria and Monika for a trip to northern France and Normandy. With Hugo and Maria as passengers, we saw more of France, then into Belgium for two nights. Next day, through Brussels, across Luxembourg, onto

Mettlach, Germany. We returned the rented RV to the dealer, and flew to the US on October 19.

1995

In 1995 we bought airline tickets on Air Canada, and after two hours in the Toronto Airport, we arrived in Frankfurt, on May 17. We rented a Camper in Saarbrücken, traveled to the Alsace, France. After trouble with the video camera, went back to Mettlach, more Germany, then from Dresden we went to Prague, arriving on June 18.

We still haven't figured it all out, but maybe since the Czech Republic is not a member of the European Common Market (or whatever it is called now), there was a 10 minute wait in line at the Czech border. No problem, they glanced at our Passport covers, and waved us on. Off hand, we think this was the only border we had to stop at all year.

Within a couple of miles we saw what appeared to be an outdoor market, or shopping area. We remember seeing something just like this as we crossed from Germany into northern Poland in 1991. That market had little for sale, and nothing of interest, and this one was almost the same.

The funny thing is, every booth or shopping area was manned (and womanned) by people from Southeast Asia. They appeared to be from Vietnam, Thailand, or whatever. Some of them were rather pushy, but we ignored them all, and found nothing of interest.

It is cloudy, but not raining, and in the air we see a lot of white flowers, or seeds, from some kind of tree, at times it seems to be snowing.

We again see what appears to be bean-fields with hundreds of telephone-pole-size bean poles with rope from this one to that one, and to the ground. We have seen this before (remembered from 1970 on the way to Berlin, and many other times), and we wonder how they can harvest the bean crop, that high in the sky. (Want to bet we'll find out something before the trip ends, "Stay tuned, the (partial) answer at page")

We see a large field of 8" high corn being irrigated, and a brick town wall around Terezin. There is a large cemetery nearby, and a moat around part of the city. One field was filled with red poppies, but were they wild, or planted to maybe harvest poppy seeds, we don't know. They must harvest the seed somewhere.

We stopped in Doksany, a few miles further, at the outdoor market where we had purchased a couple of things the last time we were here. We noticed that some work is being done to the monastery, or convent, whichever it is. It's an attractive set of buildings, that are in need of a lot of work.

In an antique store across the street, Jim found a flail (\$12), an unusual addition for the cane collection. If you don't know what a flail is, look it up in the dictionary, ours has a picture, and states that a flail is, "A manual threshing device consisting of a long wooden handle or staff and a shorter, free-swinging stick attached to its end." This flail has a rusty metal hinge-attachment between

the long and the short piece. For thousands of years, flails have been used to thrash grain, so if wheat needs thrashed in La Quinta, this will come in handy.

About 40 miles before we reached Prague, near Roudnice, we could see there was something going on, a mile or so east of the road. Cars were parked along our road, and on all side roads, and people by the hundreds were walking toward whatever it was. There were a lot of police, but were not stopping people from parking. To the east we could see large buildings and tethered balloons, but no sign of what was happening. We didn't want to park the camper and walk all that distance, so again, we'll never know.

At every wide place at the side of the road, people in cars and trucks are selling huge stuffed toys, and two foot high porcelain statues of what might be called a leprechaun, if we were in Ireland.

We drove on to Prague, drove around downtown a while, and this 'ol homing pigeon-driver drove directly to the campsite in Branik, on the east side of the Vltava River, a few miles south of downtown Prague. Even he doesn't understand that. He has driven in how many cities since we were here last? We came to this large ancient city, with a tangled jumble of streets, from a different direction than in either of the other two years, but still, right to the campsite. It often seems a map would be a hindrance!

Jim showed the flail to the elderly people in the campsite office. They recognized it immediately, and said it is called a "Cep" in their language. They insisted it is from 100 to 250 years old (the flail, not the people!). Since it (again the flail, not the people!) is full of termite holes (dead ones we hope) it is most likely well worth the \$12. Jim sure thinks so!

It rained very hard for the next hour or two, so we rested awhile, then at about 7:45 we rode the #3 streetcar to downtown Prague. Since it stays light until very late in the evening, we didn't get nighttime views as nice as the last time.

At one place, in the Old Town (Staré Město), while walking on the main street at Wenceslas Square (where the crowds gathered to overthrow the government in 1989) the sidewalk was narrowed because of construction. As we tried to squeeze by a group of young men, Jim noticed they were "moving in" as if to take his camera bag, Emmy's purse, or whatever. Jim hurried Emmy ahead, jumped over the barricade, and on we went.

Emmy said she watched one man concentrate his eyes on the camera bag. It's just as well we never knew for sure! Well, since the nearby McDonald's had a guard at the door, perhaps it's not hard to guess what might have happened.

We walked past the "Powder Tower," to the Old Town square, then on the narrow streets to the Charles Bridge. This pedestrian bridge is always alive with artists, musicians, street merchants, and tourists by the crowds.

It was bedtime for us, but it still was too light to see Prague at it best. Jim has said that if you must stand in one place, and look in one direction, the city view from the east side of the river, across the Charles Bridge with its statue groups, to Mala Strana (lesser town), then up to the Prague castle and the St Vitus Cathedral, just has to be as great a city view as can be imagined, either day or

night. If there are swans and boats on the river, that adds to the spectacular view.

Individual buildings in many country Capitals may be nicer than buildings in Prague, but for a one view, ! We then caught the street car back to the Campsite, maybe a 15 minute ride.

The exchange rate is 26.50 Crowns per Dollar. Diesel was 11.69 per liter, or \$1.66 per gallon, the cheapest anywhere.

CZ, Prague, Jun 18, Sun, 15, 235 CZ

Prague is as beautiful as ever, but boy is it different from the first time we visited, in 1985 while the old government was still in power.

While crime is up these days, the people on the streets and in the stores are obviously much happier.

The people suffered severe hardship, but the city suffered little damage during WW II, so there has been no need to build a lot of new building. The old charm continues. They just don't build cities like they use to, a statement that is both good and bad, depending on who and where and when and

We rode the #17 street car downtown, changed to the #22 and went across the river and up the hill to Hradcany, to again visit the Prague Castle and the St Vitus Cathedral (Prague). The Castle doesn't look like a castle in story books, or in other parts of Europe. It looks more like a very nice, old European style building, with several large courtyards.

The changing of the guard was underway, but was not the big ceremony we have seen elsewhere. As we have noticed other times, in Prague there are more street musician groups than other places, several groups were near the castle.

The Cathedral is beautiful. It is one we haven't heard a lot about, and we don't think it appears in any of our books about cathedrals, but it is exceptional. Just beyond, there is a street of picturesque half-buildings (don't know how else to describe them). Now they are used as jewelry stores, and other tourist items, but we think the area was called Alchemists' or Golden Lane, and the houses are from medieval times.

As we walked down from the Castle level to the river level of Prague, the long staircase behind the Cathedral was again the "home" of several musical groups. There is one place we have stopped for pictures and a view each time, and this time, while not much sun, the view was more clear than other times.

Off to the right we saw the US Embassy with the flag flying, then to the left, a couple of domes, the Charles bridge crossing the river, and on to the left, Old Town, and the rest of the city. Way to the right, higher up the hill than the Castle, there is a replica of the Eiffel Tower. We never have tried to visit, and really have no other information.

We continued to walk, and near the Charles Bridge we found McDonald's and had a sundae. This time the restrooms (next door) were not free, exactly! Approximately 12¢ for a woman, and 8¢ for a man. Something about a difference in the plumbing involved or required – well it was one or the other.

An excellent addition to the cane collection was bought (\$20) at an antique store near the end of the Charles Bridge, across from McDonald's. The Video

camera is working fine (for the moment), so we have a lot of excellent pictures of this trip. Since we took Video of Prague in 1991, we tried not to duplicate, but we kept the camera on, just in case.

We walked to the Old Jewish cemetery, where we have visited the past two trips, but as we found so many times this year, tourist traffic is so high, they now charge \$8 to go in. We have video from last time, slides from the earlier trip, and since no one has been buried here since the 1700s, it sure hasn't changed in these last few years.

We walked on to the Old Town Square, and for the first time, were able to visit the Tyn Cathedral. It sits directly in back of a couple of buildings, so all you can see is the steeples from the distance. Most of the inside was closed for renovation. Very distinctive steeples, unique to Prague.

Back at the Charles Bridge Emmy saw some puppets like she saw in 1991, when she couldn't talk herself into buying any. This time, at a store near the Charles Bridge she bought Pinocchio (\$16), and was upset that she couldn't find Geppetto (his maker).

In 1985 we saw a couple of RVs in Prague, in 1991 a few more, and now maybe half are trailers, and half are RVs. To go with our dinner, Jim bought some French Fries at the restaurant in the campsite.

CZ, Prague, Jun 19, Mon, 16, 105, 1,560, 235 CZ

We left at 8:15, and headed south toward Tabor. There were a couple of big gasoline tanks with huge faces painted on the outside, a nice idea. There is a long, long traffic jam on the freeway, but headed in the other direction, thank goodness.

A couple of miles outside town, we saw a McDonald's building, just out in the countryside, near a road-side rest stop. We found that McDonald's prices for ice-cream and French Fries in Prague, are about what we remember from the US (we don't eat there often enough to remember much). In Germany, the prices are double, at least.

Here the freeway exits are numbered by the kilometer, like they are numbered by the mile in the US. That makes more sense than consecutive numbering, like they do in Germany. Drivers in Europe are unusually dumb much of the time, but here, even more so. Within the first hour, we saw three very stupid, dangerous stunts, by the local drivers. And that's not too unusual. How have we survived 86,000 RV miles, and 10,000 rental car miles in Europe, with only a scratch or two!

The road was good to Tabor, and we arrived about 10:00 AM. Parked in the main square, visited the church, then again visited the tunnels under the city. There are something like 27 miles of tunnels, sometimes three deep.

We have been told they were used by a religious group, were used to store food, were lived in when the town burned down, and most likely all of that is true. We joined a tour-group of school kids, so did not hear a word of English from our guide, but we did read a short English description before we went in.

Walked around the town a while, and found a couple of large cups for someone's Ovaltine. Jim has a large cup he bought in France several years ago,

and needs some spares, in case that one breaks. At first we misunderstood the pricing label, but they cost \$2 each.

Just outside Plzen we stopped to look at an antique store, and guess what, if there is wheat to be threshed, Emmy can help. Jim bought a flail just for her, again \$12. This flail has a bent-wooden hinge-attachment between the long and the short piece.

The lady called the young man from across the street to help with the sale. We then went to his crystal store and talked a while. He is a very nice looking, neat young man who had spent seven years in college in Moscow studying geology, but can find nothing better to do than sell crystal at the side of the road.

We found that to be true with several people we met in Germany, including cousins, and of course it is difficult to find a job in the US, even with a college degree. This man prefers the freedom they have since the Berlin Wall is down, but even though he speaks English and Russian, he says it will be very difficult to find a suitable job.

He gave us directions to a nearby campsite. It was almost empty, but it looked like some people on the other side of the campsite had no clothes on, then we saw a sign that said "Solorium," or something like that. From the distance we could see nothing of interest, so since they stayed far away, we stayed.

We know who would have won, had there been a pageant.

CZ, Plzen, Jun 20, Tue, 17,

This morning we walked around the downtown, visiting stores, churches, and just looking. At one place we saw another flail, but not only did we think two are enough, this one was much more expensive. We didn't see it, but the sign "almost" said, "McDonald's, America street," a couple of blocks away.

We left Czechoslovakia on June 20, back to Germany for a couple of days, then several days in Italy, a week or two in France, back to Germany, then to the US on August 31