

the messenger

CZK 20

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editorial

Dear readers,

I hope you will enjoy this issue. We are happy to see that the amount of our students contributing to The Messenger is still high. If you feel inspired by any of our articles, or whatever else, or if you would like to get involved in any other way, please feel free to contact us at gabriela.oaklandova@gmail.com.

You might like to send us your comments or suggestions for articles, or, indeed, the articles themselves. We also have a high number of students sending us their poetry. You could be one of them!

With thanks

*Your editor
Gabriela Oaklandová*

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interview

Interview with Anne Johnson Rita Collins

This interview is with Anne Johnson, an American who has been living in Brno for the last 18 years. We were forced to conduct the interview via emails as I am currently living in Montana. Anne and I met in 2005, the first year I taught at Masaryk University, and we immediately established a bond through scrabble, long conversations, and reading. This interview was the ideal opportunity to explore Anne's ideas on reading and particular books.

RC: I imagine that you came to Brno as an avid reader in English. Was there a moment when you started reading books in Czech? Do you remember the first Czech book that you read?

AJ: I almost never read books in Czech. I speak Czech fairly well and I sometimes read newspapers and magazines, but I feel like I miss too much in a novel, so I'd rather read a translation. That said, I read several Czech children's books when my son was growing up, including *Mach a Sebestova*, which I loved, and I read *Saturnin* in Czech because there wasn't a good translation available at the time.

RC: How do you decide what to read? It sounds like you enjoy reading novels but even within that realm there are millions to chose from.

AJ: I'm kind of a completionist, so if I like a book I'll try to find other things by that writer and read them all. I recently realized I'd missed

some Kurt Vonnegut and it felt like a tremendous gift. I set myself a goal in 2010 to read a Pulitzer Prize winner every month, and that was educational and rewarding, plus it was fun to see the times so well reflected in the writing. I stalled out in the 1970s, though; really not to my taste. I'm planning to resume next year, just skipping around more. I trust my friends' opinions, and I'll generally read whatever somebody suggests. And then finally, some books come to me randomly - I have been living out of the US for 21 years, so I have relied a lot on books passed to me by other English speakers.

RC: I follow your book list on Goodreads.com. It seems that recently you've been into Margaret Atwood's books. Is there a favorite you have among her works? Any that you would suggest to someone who has never experienced one of her novels or short stories?

AJ: I've read every book by Atwood as soon as I could get my hands on it; she's one of my favorite writers. I met a young woman this summer who was just reading her for the first time, and I thought it would be lovely to be in that position. So I've been doing the next best thing, going back and re-reading the ones I hadn't read recently, and I added my goodreads reviews for the rest while I was at it. *Cat's Eye* is my favorite, because it concerns the particular nature of long-term female friendships, which is interesting to me personally, and because I think it is beautifully constructed. If I were going to recommend a book, though, I'd probably recommend *The Handmaid's Tale* because it is a fascinating story, so it will appeal even to people who are less

captivated by writerly elegance than I am.

RC: Can you describe what you mean by “writerly elegance”?

AJ: I think that some writers are mainly trying to tell a good story, and are less interested in how they tell it (Dan Brown is a good example of this). Some writers are trying to tell a good story in a witty way (Terry Pratchett, Sue Grafton). And some writers are trying to tell a good story in a more literary way, where the sentences, paragraphs, chapters - the whole book - is constructed with an eye on something, whether that's attention to details (Virginia Woolf, Raymond Chandler) or a stripped-down, pugilistic prose (Hemingway). When you read a really good writer, you might be almost unaware of their literary approach, but if it's there, it makes the piece feel richer (and this can apply to fiction and non-fiction). For me, as an editor, there's a part of my brain that's always working in the background: “Could this sentence be better? What word choice might be stronger here? Does this fit well with the rest of this paragraph?” When I read a good author, that part hums quietly with happiness.

RC: Do you think the expansion of electronic communication (social media, blogs, texting) has had an impact on how people read? I realize we have always read various things from advertisements to encyclopedias to romance novels, but has the advent of the internet and mobile phones changed our approach to reading good fiction in your opinion? Or perhaps the impact would be seen more in the writing?

AJ: I can say that I don't think it's changed how I read very much, other than that I get all my news online instead of in print. I do feel impatient when something I'm reading online goes over a certain length, but I felt that with newspapers, too: I don't want to have to turn several pages to get to the point. I don't feel the same impatience with books or even longer magazine articles in print. It may change how some people choose what to read - I think “bestseller” lists are fed by internet communications more than before (a current non-fiction bestseller is by a popular blogger, and the top fiction started out as online “fan-fic” for the *Twilight* series) - but I don't think this is as much of a game changer as television was, and television probably didn't change our reading habits as much as electricity in the home did (I know I do most of my reading by electric light in the evenings, anyway).

RC: If you don't see any major changes in your own reading habits, what about the habits of children? We often hear that children and teenagers aren't reading as much as they used to. What are your thoughts on this?

AJ: I'd be interested in knowing some statistics on that. What I've read is that they read fewer newspapers and magazines than they used to, but that book reading in the home is about the same. Again, I think television made a more dramatic change here than the internet or cell phones, so this isn't a change I can talk about from my own experience, but I think that television had a more dramatic effect on keeping kids inside vs. playing outside than it did on

reading. That said, I want to mention that when I was a kid, we had a lot of “free reading” time in school. If the teachers were catching up on grading or anything like that, we were expected to be reading a book - any book, any level, any topic, but a book. It's my impression that this sort of regulated “free” reading doesn't happen much in schools any more, anywhere - it would be considered a waste of time when teachers are expected to be “teaching to the test”, even though every study I've seen indicates that reading, more than any other factor, contributes to higher test scores.

Speaking about the Czech Republic, I've been surprised by how few people seem to read here. My teenage son has consistently read more than any of his classmates, even though he reads less than I wish he would. But it's not just kids; it's adults, too. I used to see people reading on the trams a lot, but I don't anymore (although I don't ride the trams during commuter hours, so maybe that's the change). Even among my friends here, I'm the most voracious reader, and I don't feel like I read as much as I'd like to.

RC: Oh my goodness, Anne! I think of you as such an avid reader. In your ideal schedule, how much time would you spend reading?

AJ: Well, I'm hardly in your league, though! I probably read about an hour a day, which means about two books a month. I'd rather read one a week, but since I don't want to read on a schedule, I can't seem to read more. Honestly, the biggest cut into my novel completion is that I also read the *New Yorker*, but I don't think that's so bad.

RC: The New Yorker seems a delicious way to spend reading time. That and a novel per week on top of work, family and friends - you've set a goal for me! Before we finish this interview, I wonder if you could offer some literary suggestions for university students. The primary readers of this magazine are students who are studying English and there are quite a range of English language skills between the various programs. The two writers you mentioned so far - Kurt Vonnegut and Margaret Atwood - might be challenging for someone whose English language is growing from the intermediate level. Can you suggest some authors who exhibit “writerly elegance” and could be enjoyed by someone developing their English skills?

AJ: When people ask me for recommendations, I usually try to find out what sorts of stories they like and go from there, because no book, no matter how perfect the level, is going to be good if the story isn't compelling for that reader. Hmm... I had a policy for a long time of reading the Newbery winners as soon as they were announced (this is the prize for the best fiction for children (ages about 8-12, although most are probably more honestly 10-15), and those are usually a safe bet for a good story, well told. From that list, I especially liked Neil Gaiman's *The Graveyard Book*, Sharon Creech's *Walk Two Moons*, and Katherine Paterson's *Bridge to Terebithia*. Students might also like Newbery-winning authors like Avi, Kate diCamillo (I loved *The Tale of*

Despereaux and Because of Winn-Dixie), and Lloyd Alexander (I re-read his Chronicles of Prydain every few years).

RC: Ah, great suggestions because some of the titles you mentioned are in the mini-library in Nada Vojtkova's office and can be borrowed easily from her. Thank you very much for your time, Anne. It is always a pleasure to be in touch with you. And of course, a delight to talk books! Can I mention to readers that they can follow your current reads and past favorites on Goodreads.com?

AJ: This was fun, honestly. And of course people can check the goodreads account - my internet name is "tuckova" - the link is <http://www.goodreads.com/user/show/781918-tuckova>.

"Love blurs your vision; but after it recedes, you can see more clearly than ever. It's like the tide going out, revealing whatever's been thrown away and sunk: broken bottles, old gloves, rusting pop cans, nibbled fishbodies, bones. This is the kind of thing you see if you sit in the darkness with open eyes, not knowing the future."

Margaret Atwood, Cat's Eye

linguistics pages

The Language That Is Used But Never Spoken

Helena Havlíčková

If we accept the idea that speaking means using our voice to express an idea, then there are languages in the world that are not spoken: sign languages of course and ... body languages! In spite of the fact that they are hardly ever taught at schools, they are omnipresent. Whenever we talk face to face we use both spoken and body language. Well, how variable body language is! How colourful and flexible! Though usually we use the singular when we mention body language, there are many of them all over the world. And they are so different! Their variety is determined by nation, by geographical region, by time, by individual speaker ... They provide clues as to the state of mind, mood and attitude of a person. Thanks to body language we can read aggression, boredom, pleasure, attentiveness, amusement, happiness etc.

Most of us have experienced misunderstanding caused by body language when communicating with a foreign speaker. Those who travel a lot may give you extensive examples. In Bulgaria people who agree typically shake their heads, while those who disagree nod their heads. It is obvious that body languages are worth studying and researching. Let's call on those scientists who take delight in body language, the Non-Verbalists.

The Wikipedia entry for James Borg gives his statement that "human communication consists of 93 percent body language and paralinguistic cues, while only 7% of communication consists

of words themselves."¹ We might be surprised by this. Anyway, some experts do not agree and say that only between 60 and 70 percent of all meaning is derived from non-verbal behaviour. Now we are beginning to be assailed by doubt. Is the time spent learning spoken languages at schools adequate? Shouldn't we learn more about gestures? What you say with your head and hands at home can be something completely different in another country. Read the following experience gained by travelling and reading.

Greece is close to Bulgaria and therefore some common features can be noticed. In Greece people also nod their head to say 'no'. The thumbs-up gesture used by Greek speakers mainly means 'get stuffed'.

On the other hand in Britain, New Zealand and Australia the thumbs-up gesture has three meanings. It is commonly used as an OK symbol but also hitchhikers thumb a lift this way. If you jerk the thumb sharply upwards it becomes an insult symbol, meaning 'up yours'.

Another gesture that seems to be innocent can be very rude in some areas. The ring gesture in some Mediterranean countries is an orifice signal. In Anglo-Saxon countries the same gesture means 'OK' or 'all correct'. In Japan it can mean 'money' and in France it means 'nothing' or 'zero'.

The 'V' sign is popular in many countries but it can be rather tricky. It depends whether your palm faces towards the speaker or not. Winston Churchill popularized this sign during World War II to demonstrate 'victory'. His two-fingered version was done with the palm facing out. When the palm does not face the speaker it can be an obscene insult. Fortunately, in most

¹ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Body_language (29.9.2012)

parts of Europe these two versions are not differentiated and the meaning of 'victory' has prevailed.

The world of gestures can be very strange and confusing. A harmless gesture in one area can be a disastrous insult in another. For instance, when sitting with the soles of your shoes visible, be careful in Thailand. This is insulting.

Japanese people are very polite and tolerant in a way, but kissing and hugging in public is unacceptable. They also may smile when they are angry or confused, which may embarrass Europeans.

A clenched fist almost always suggests anger. In China this gesture is a polite way to greet someone. When you are introduced to a person standing opposite you who is holding one hand in a fist against his palm and nodding slightly, do not feel nervous. Everything is OK.

Body language doesn't cover only gestures made by the hands and the head. There is also a vast area of communication realized through the eyes. Undoubtedly the Arab world is the best at eye-reading thanks to its clothing and centuries of practice.

The examples given above show that cultural misinterpretation of gestures can produce embarrassing situations. Therefore we should always consider a person's cultural background before we jump to conclusions about his/her gestures. Communicating efficiently across cultures is thus about far more than just mastery of language, grammar and syntax. Bridging the communication gap with people of other nations and cultures requires both rational and emotional understanding of who we are dealing with and where people come from. Their behaviours and attitudes should be put into the context of their cultural value systems. The development in the EU in years to come means that Europeans will see the

importance of effective communication across cultures.

Are you going on holiday or are you going to study or work abroad? If so, be aware of what you say with your body!

linguistics pages

Looking back at the 5th Brno Conference on Linguistics Studies in English

Radek Vogel

Every two years in September, the Department of English Language and Literature organises an international linguistics conference. This year we hosted the Fifth Brno Conference on Linguistics Studies in English, which was held on 17th and 18th September 2012 under the title *English as the Lingua Franca of the Modern World: New Challenges for Academia*. Compared with the previous conference held two years ago, 4th BCLSE 2010 entitled *Interpretation of Meaning in Spoken and Written Discourse*, which was attended by over six dozen participants, this year's conference was considerably bigger, with almost ninety participants, most of whom presented their own papers. Apart from the Czech Republic, conference participants arrived from Slovakia, Poland, the Ukraine, Spain, Serbia, Austria, Hungary, Germany, Britain, the USA, Norway, Finland, Russia and even Japan.

The conference was privileged to have two distinguished linguists as keynote speakers, namely Prof. Anna Mauranen from the University of Helsinki in Finland and Prof. Peter Grundy from the University of Durham, United Kingdom. The main focus of the papers presented at the conference was on the role of English as the lingua franca of international communication in the modern globalised world, particularly on its use in the academic community as the language of science, research and education. However, the range of topics was really wide, as the contributions

dealt with issues such as cohesion and coherence, pragmatics, semantics, discourse analysis, genre, and stylistic variation in spoken and written discourse. The conference also included two workshops focused specifically on English as a lingua franca and academic English.

The in-committee of organisers comprised Renata Povolná, Olga Dontcheva-Navratilova, Renata Jančaříková, Martina Malášková and Radek Vogel, but virtually every member of the linguistics section (and other department members) contributed to the successful realisation of the event. Also a few students deserve appreciation for their help in organising the conference. Three members of the department presented their papers, namely Radek Vogel (*On some syntactic properties of non-native formal written English*), Martina Malášková (*Hedging and reader-writer interaction in research articles*) and Martin Adam (*"The potatoes are boiling": Thetic sentences as a means of presentation on the scene*).

As the programme of the conference was really demanding, visitors from other academic institutions in particular enjoyed the conference dinner on Monday evening, which gave colleagues an opportunity to get to know one another better and to discuss issues of common interest more informally. The conference has proven how varied, challenging and constantly evolving research areas and topics in linguistics are and at the same time that identical issues are relevant for linguists from different countries.

methodology pages

Our New Murphy's laws

Written by 1st year Master's students as a task in Didactics

The activity aimed at demonstrating how things are integrated when teaching. The golden rule of PPP (presentation - practice - production) was applied. Firstly the students were asked to read a set of well-known Murphy's laws (presentation, reading). Afterwards they discovered the typical structure of the sentences and imitated several examples (practice, grammar). Lastly they created their own original laws (production, writing). Do you like them?

Technologies

- If you desperately need to call someone on your mobile phone, it runs out of credit. If there is credit, the battery is flat.
- Whenever you need to send a private message to your boyfriend, it is sent by chance to your boss.
- Commercials always appear at the most exciting moment of the movie.
- As soon as you buy a new mobile phone, the new version that you have been looking for will come out.
- When you are waiting for an important text message, somebody else will text you.
- The Internet always works well when you don't need it. If you need it urgently, there will be no wi-fi anywhere.
- Even if you don't have enough time to do so, you have to check Facebook.
- The urgent text message you are waiting for always comes at the worst possible moment.

- Every time you get used to Facebook's look, it changes.
- Whenever you text your friend about somebody else, when you send the message you click on that somebody else's number instead.

Private life

- When you get dressed up for an important interview, a bird will leave something on your shoulder and you will not realize it.
- Whenever you decide to wear spring shoes, snow will fall.
- The smaller the handbag is, the more difficult it is to find your keys.
- As soon as you start unlocking the front door you urgently need to go to the restroom.
- Once you forget your umbrella, it rains all day.
- Whenever you talk about someone behind his/her back, he/she is standing next to you.
- Whenever you look disgusting, without make-up, you always meet someone important to you.
- Coffee, ketchup, soup always fall over when you are dressed in white.
- Nice dreams make the alarm clock ring.
- If you really need to get up early, your alarm clock won't work.

School

- If you need to register a seminar group at an exact time, the Internet stops working.
- The stairs are always longer when you are in a hurry.
- Whenever you are sitting on the toilet at school, there is no toilet paper (unless you are on the Dean's floor).
- Any time you need to go to the Study Department, they don't have their office hours.

- If once you don't study for the next lesson, there is a test. Whenever you are well prepared there is no test.
- Whenever you are in an exceptional hurry, the photocopier runs out of paper.

Travelling to school

- The more crowded the tram is, the higher the probability that the ticket inspector will check you.
- Travelling without a valid ticket makes the ticket inspector come.
- If you are on time the bus leaves late. If the bus leaves on time, you are late.
- The ticket inspector always appears on the day your travel card expires.
- The traffic lights are always on red when you are in a hurry.
- Whenever you are in a hurry, there is a traffic jam. If there is no traffic jam, there is nowhere to park.

Health and luck

- If you buy a ticket for a raffle, you never win. If you win in a raffle, the prize is always useless.
- You are seldom ill. If you get ill, your doctor is on holiday.

My Feelings from the Teaching Practice

Adéla Branná

Teaching practice is essential for the development of future teachers. It is a compulsory part of studies at the Faculty of Education. Being a fifth-year student, I have already fulfilled all the teaching practices that are required for my study program. In this article, I would like to share some of my feelings with other students, especially those

who are about to start their own practices.

It is not easy to describe the very first emotions that students usually feel. It is like stepping into a totally different universe. Commonly students have mixed emotions when they are standing in front of the main door to a primary school. First of all, there are memories of their childhood - all those hopes and fears, moments of happiness and despair that they had to go through. Then there are the educational principles and theories that our professors have tried to instill in us. Finally, there are the contradictory feelings of great excitement and alarming fear. Above all, there is the urgent wish to succeed. The hope that we are going to be adored by our pupils and that our lessons will be creative and enjoyable is mingled with the constant threat of failure. All of this runs through the head of a trainee. After you have spent several hours observing, planning and teaching, you get a more realistic picture of what goes on in primary schools. You realize how demanding it is to thoroughly prepare one ordinary forty-five-minute lesson. You find out how much administration and paperwork you have to do as a teacher.

Probably the worst thing is that even if you work really hard, it does not mean that you are going to succeed. You have to face many difficulties, such as badly-behaved or passive students. After teaching five noisy groups in a row, you have a terrible headache, you cannot speak and you only wish to leave this terrible place and never come back. However, there are moments when you see a spark of interest in your students' eyes. You may experience days when everything goes smoothly and according to plan. You may find out that some of the students really enjoyed the activity you prepared for them. I think that those moments are worth the hard work of being a teacher.

I would like to give all future trainees one small piece of advice.

Try to enjoy what you are doing and try to be yourselves. Whatever you do, don't take yourself too seriously. Some of your lessons will be perfect and some of them will not. Just don't give up. If you try to learn from your mistakes and are open-minded, you can become wonderful teachers. I will keep my fingers crossed for you. Good luck!



English Language at Secondary Schools in France

Kateřina Pernicová

Based on Kateřina Pernicová's diploma thesis and updated by the author

Getting experience in another country is always useful. Let's have a look at the French system of education with respect to teaching English language.

Number of lessons

Time is a crucial issue. The problem of acquisition of a language is that it takes a long time. Even though students

start studying English earlier than in the past, they study it about three hours a week on average, for about thirty weeks a year. It is not much time when compared to the mother language!

In France the amount of English lessons at a *college* goes from four hours a week (a lesson lasts one hour) for pupils aged 11 to three hours a week for those aged 14. At a *lycée* it depends on the year. In 'seconde' all students have 3 hours of English per week. In 'première' and 'terminale' students in the Sciences stream have 2 hours/week, while in the Economic and Social Studies stream this is 2.5 hours/week and in the Literature stream 3.5 hours/week.

There is another possibility. Students can choose to attend a "European class". These classes are selective entry - only students with good school results are accepted. For these students the amount of English lessons is greater because in addition to their lessons of English (and the headmaster can decide to offer them a little more English - half an hour or an hour) they have a second subject partly taught in English. They can choose Maths and Biology or History at the *lycée* Barthou, where Isabelle Kherbouche, who provided me with this information, teaches. Other schools offer different subjects.

My students at *gymnázium* have 4 lessons of English of 45 minutes a week in the first three years of their study. For the remaining year it is only 3 lessons a week, but there is a seminar that prepares students for the *Maturita* school-leaving exam, which has another 3 lessons per week. Consequently, the number of lessons is very similar.

Conditions in class

Time is not the only crucial issue. Conditions in class are important as well and the number of students is especially important. Teaching small groups of highly motivated students in

comfortable, well-equipped rooms is the ideal.

Now let us compare and contrast these conditions in the two countries. In *college* lessons of English in France, according to Fanny Cassou, a *college* teacher, there are 20-29 pupils whereas in lower secondary Czech classes the number is never so high. Czech classes of a maximum size of thirty students are usually divided into two groups for teaching languages. Moreover, we have the rule that languages should be taught in groups of 9-23 students. Teachers in France have a more difficult task to speak to each student in lessons and support conversation. Let us see what Isabelle Kherbouche says about figures: *The headmaster is trying to reduce the number of students in 'seconde' to 25-26 but not in the European classes. There are 35-36 students and even though most of them like English and are good at this subject, it is a nonsense number if a teacher wants to highlight the oral side of English. In 'première' there are usually 30-35 students but the number is reduced in European classes to 23-24. It is the opposite situation to the first year of lycée.*

In 'terminale' the number of students cannot be higher than 20; this is an official rule. All these figures might not be correct next year because the *lycée* is losing students (the population index is similar to the Czech one). If we have fewer students, Isabelle Kherbouche says, state rules determine that we will have fewer teachers and therefore the number of students in classes might even increase!

Not only in terms of class size do we in the Czech Republic have it better. In France I saw plastic "garden" chairs where we have furniture that can be adjusted to the needs of students of different heights. Nor do students in France have their own places; they go into the classroom only with a teacher. The atmosphere in Czech schools is much more familiar and personal.

Books and dictionaries

Schools in the Czech Republic provide pupils and students with books for their schoolwork. These books are handed over at the end of school year. Language books and workbooks are an exception; students usually buy their own copies.

Many students in my lessons bring a pocket bilingual dictionary to class and more and more of them have a similar electronic version in their mobile phones. At our school we have a few dictionaries - including monolingual ones - because we want students to be able to work with them.

Teaching methods are up to me; nobody tells me what to do and how to do it.

In France each pupil has a book which has been approved by the English teachers and the school. So teachers do not really have a choice when they arrive at a new school. The books are not changed very often (the aim is every four years) because this means changing a lot of books, thus spending a lot of money. A school has a certain amount of money every year, which allows teachers to buy new videos or dictionaries (but dictionaries are not used very often) and a new set of books for a specific age group if they decide the book is too old and its teaching methods not up-to-date. It is like this in *colleges*, where books are provided by the *college* and paid for by the state. The situation is different in *lycees* where the books are bought by parents' associations and parents rent them for the year, which means the *lycée* doesn't buy any books for students.

In the school where Fanny Cassou teaches they finally decided to change the book for the oldest pupils (14 years old) last year. She says it was about time, as it dated back to 1999.

As far as the books at *lycée* are concerned, according to Isabelle Kherbouche the English teachers meet

and try to decide together which book will be used. The rule is usually to keep the same book for 4-5 years.

Jean Cassou, an expert on European educational systems, summarises that all books are free for pupils. A team of school teachers of a given subject choose the book from 7 or maybe 10 different ones proposed by publishers according to a programme established by the Ministry of Education. Generally they are changed after 4-5 years of use, either because they are no longer in good condition or there have been changes in the teaching programme. As for teaching methods, teachers are free to choose, although every five years an inspector watches a lesson and gives the teacher feedback on this point. The inspector also gives a mark to the teacher for his/her professional evaluation; teachers' salaries depend on the mark awarded by the inspector.

Testing and assessment

We can test students in many ways. Is students' progress tested in both countries? Are there proficiency tests that judge general levels of English without any reference to school work? Are all the skills tested?

In my lessons I use various ways of testing. My students are tested in vocabulary and grammar and all the four competences in English (reading, writing, listening and speaking); I also test translation abilities. These tend to be progress tests (written by myself or photocopiable tests), but in addition to these internal tests I train my students to take external tests, too. State or international exams are proficiency tests, so I check abilities from time to time using sample KET (Key English Test), PET (Preliminary English Test) or FCE (First Certificate in English) international Cambridge exams. I consider this to be good feedback for the students. In many cases I try to use self-evaluation because they pay much more

attention to their mistakes than if they only look at the mark obtained.

Czech teachers use a 5-point scale (in contrast to the 20-point scale in France, where 20 is the best) and some of them - as at our school - also use verbal assessment. The results are summarized in a school report at the end of each semester.

As mentioned above, in the Czech Republic there are no exams at the end of each year nor any nationwide testing of pupils' performance except for the state exam, called the *Maturita*.

France has a big tradition of evaluation of writing, much more than oral skills. It is true to say that the number of pupils in a class does not allow teachers to include more speaking. It is difficult for English teachers to make a lot of conversation and thus evaluate the oral side. But things are changing, little by little. An important new change this year is that all students will be tested at the Baccalaureat (leaving exams) in both writing and speaking. This will, of course, change the way of teaching in preparation for the oral exam.

Teachers in France are supposed to test these five skills: oral and written comprehension, written production, oral expression in interaction and on one's own. At the moment there is only one proficiency test - Cambridge's PET (level B1) but it is only for students who have been accepted in a European 'seconde' class. Nobody knows if the experience will continue with the FCE at B2 level at the end of their studies at *lycée*.

As far as the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) is concerned, I asked my French colleagues if every teacher knows what it is. They answered they had lots of papers to explain it. However, it is not yet much in use. They understand the concept and try to apply it but it is difficult because there are too many pupils in a class to make it efficient. Both my beloved colleagues were sincere

and admitted the fact that they were supposed to use the CEFR and European Language Portfolio but did not work with it properly. The situation in the Czech Republic is the same. We take a look at it once in a while but that is about all. I suppose nearly all teachers of English know roughly what it is but very few of them use it in detail.

At upper-secondary level in both countries the leaving exam is a guide to many teachers. Thus ways of teaching are changing in the Czech Republic as well as in France. Nevertheless, for many teachers it is demanding to change the way they have always taught English.

Leaving exams

All final exams in the Czech Republic are currently undergoing revision. As mentioned above in this text, the first part of a new *Maturita* exam was introduced in the 2010/2011 school year. The *Maturita* is a big topic of current debate. The aim is to promote the quality of education.

In France the *baccalaureat* has not changed yet; although change is on its way for English (only), my colleagues think it will not occur before 2013-2014.

Present circumstances are: The *Maturita* exam consists of a few subjects which are chosen by students. I want to contrast this with the fact that each student in France is examined in all subjects of lycée study at the *baccalaureat*, which consists of mostly written tests. For those students who do not pass the written tests, oral examination can improve results in two subjects. And oral exams are becoming a part of English nowadays.

As we can see, there are things that could be adapted successfully for our Czech system. But maybe we should be happy that some of the features are not in our schools yet.

A Student's Impressions from Teaching Practice

Marie Stodolová

First of all, I would like to introduce myself since this is the first time I have contributed to *The Messenger*. My name is Marie Stodolová and I study English Language and Literature and History at the Faculty of Education. I would like to share with you the experience, impressions, feelings and ideas that I gained during my last teaching practice in September 2012 at a primary school in Brno. I would like to present my personal feelings, observations and both positive and problematic experience. I will not describe the whole teaching practice, preferring to focus on interesting moments and situations and insights I have gained.

My teaching practice started with observations of four different teachers at the beginning of September, when school life was a bit chaotic, hectic and stressful for most teachers because they had so many duties and administrative tasks to fulfil at the very beginning of the school year. What I experienced during my observations pleased me very much, encouraged me to try some new methods and activities and really convinced me that English lessons can be taught only in English. This finding was really important for me because until that time, I had experienced completely different lessons based mainly on traditional approaches and the grammar-translation method. Teachers at this school were enthusiastic, creative and optimistic about their job and their pupils and they really devoted time to their professional development and using English outside the classroom, which is crucial for every teacher who wants to avoid burn-out syndrome, I think. Their approach was very positive and inspiring and I found cooperation with them very useful. These teachers used a lot of communicative activities, game-like

activities, songs, board-games and movements, which I liked very much.

The warm welcome and friendly atmosphere was the first positive experience. Secondly, I really liked the pupils. It was very important for me to get to know them during the first lesson I taught them. That is why I always included some activities to help me get to know them and I also gave them space to ask me questions because they are very curious when they have a new teacher. I really believe that the relationship between a teacher and his/her students should be based on partnership and respect. I always tried to create a nice and friendly atmosphere in the classroom, I responded to students' jokes and comments in a positive way and I focused more on their achievements than their failures and disruptions. I think these are important tactics that can help teachers to manage their class better and motivate students to learn and participate actively. From my experience of all teaching practices and observations I dare say that the relationship between a teacher and his/her students plays an essential role in students' attitudes towards school and learning.

My personal interest is in modern ways of teaching and student-centred approaches, where students are given more freedom and responsibility for their learning. I have tried to use certain elements of these approaches when teaching and I have noticed that although students are not used to them, they are willing to participate more actively in the learning process when given more responsibility. In the 8th grade I tried creative writing in groups and I wanted my pupils to make a lot of decisions for themselves. First, I asked some lead-in questions about reading books and storytelling so that the pupils became more interested. Then I shifted the topic and introduced my "bag" (in the 8th grade I did not dare say it was a magic one, as I would do with younger

learners). It was a great surprise to see these teenagers so excited about what was inside the bag. I really did not expect such a reaction. They wanted to touch the content of the bag and guess what it was. Then the pupils wrote the names of the objects on the board and in groups chose which words they would use when writing their story. Before the story-writing I produced a large piece of paper with some rules written on it (e.g. respect your classmates' ideas, do not shout, cooperate, use English). I invited the pupils to come up with some other rules that they thought were useful, which we could add and follow if we agreed with them. Actually, the pupils did not add their own rules, but I think it gave them the feeling that their voices could be heard and made them more genuinely engaged. Even though some pupils were a little disruptive or did not participate equally, I think the activity was successful and that the students learned something new and felt interested and motivated. We finished the writing next lesson and the pupils presented their work. These presentations were not so successful, probably due to the fact that the pupils were not used to this kind of task and need to improve their presentational and listening skills. On the whole, this particular experience demonstrated that if teachers implement innovative trends and student-centred approaches slowly, pupils will gradually change their roles and attitudes and their autonomous learning will develop.

It is necessary to say that as a teacher trainee I still have to improve so many things. So far, I have mentioned only my positive experience. As there are two sides to every coin, my teaching practice also had some drawbacks or problematic situations that every teacher, even an experienced one, has to face and deal with. Very often I have noticed that pupils do not concentrate, are confused and do not know what they are supposed to do. I had to give them the instructions

several times or even individually, which was quite demanding. I tried to demonstrate what their task was so that they not only heard it but saw it as well. This increased the possibility that most pupils would do what they were asked to. Secondly, it is very important to know your pupils properly so that you can predict their behaviour and meet their needs and individual differences. In the 7th grade, I tried the activity Running Dictation. The pupils did not know it but they liked it. The activity went well and I think most pupils worked really hard, but when the time came to correct the writing of other groups, it was a disaster, really. As an inexperienced teacher, I did not expect such a reaction. The pupils started to quarrel and argue and shout at each other. When correcting the work of other groups, the pupils focused just on handwriting, shape of letters, capitals and punctuation and did not pay any attention to an evaluation of the work as a whole. I had serious problems calming the class down. Fortunately, it was the end of the lesson, but next time I returned to their ugly behaviour and told them what I thought about it and what they should improve. I corrected their writing myself and we discussed their mistakes in a more polite way. This was probably my most shocking experience from the whole teaching practice. Otherwise I faced common problems, such as pupils talking with their neighbours, not listening or shouting at somebody. I always tried to deal with these situations in a calm manner; I was not angry, rather friendly but firm. Sometimes it was not necessary to admonish them: just eye contact or a gesture can do a lot.

To conclude my article about my impressions of teaching, I would like to present the most important information I learned during my teaching practice. Teaching is not about transmission of knowledge; it includes a wide range of activities or duties that a teacher has to

maintain; when approached positively and enthusiastically, it can produce some wonderful outcomes. Teachers have great power and it is really crucial for them to realize this and use it for the benefit of their pupils. In order to become a good teacher, it is essential to get to know your students so that you can respond to their needs and have a good relationship with them and are able to organise the class and manage all activities without problems. In my view, a good teacher should not only bring knowledge and understanding of new subject matter, he/she should also work on values, respect, cooperation, creativity, politeness and kindness; he/she should share the decision-making process with the students and give them the chance to show their potential and the right to choose. Such an attitude is still not a firm part of Czech education and I would like to encourage other young teachers to try it.

Turning Points in a Teacher's Career

Markéta Hložková

Experience, endurance and patience, typical characteristics of a good teacher, are intrinsic to Miluše Hlaváčková, who has been teaching English for 36 years and currently works at Řehořova elementary school in Brno-Černovice. After launching her career in Břeclav, Mrs. Hlaváčková moved to Tábor, where she became an English teacher trainer. From 1989 to 2011 Mrs. Hlaváčková cooperated with the language school *Jazyková příprava, s. r. o.*

Do you consider novice teachers who have just graduated from the Faculty of Education to be well prepared for their careers as English teachers at elementary school?

Well, as regards theoretical bases, graduates are armed with knowledge. From the point of view of theoretical training, these novice teachers could go and teach at upper secondary school. Unfortunately, when they come to an elementary school and see the pupils' level of English, novice teachers soon realize that if they want to survive they have to drop in their requirements. In my opinion, students preparing for their future occupation should spend much more time on their teaching practice in order to see how the elementary school works in reality.

What do you think about non-certified English teachers at elementary schools? Could they be a source of deterioration in pupils' school performance?

I do not think there are a lot of non-certified teachers at elementary schools any more. Sure, the situation may be different at provincial elementary schools, which lack sufficient numbers of certified teachers. But in my

experience non-certified teachers usually do their best to keep up with certified ones. Moreover, they consult teaching methods with experienced colleagues. So non-certified teachers should not be blamed for the worsening situation at Czech elementary schools.

Have you ever had burn-out syndrome? What is your advice on overcoming depression and stress?

All young colleagues are excited about their work, and they are energetic. Sometimes, after a hard day at school, I am sure I have burn-out syndrome [laughing]. If you want to avoid stress and depression it is important to get out of a rut. Teachers should get involved in a different useful activity somewhere else, away from the school they are teaching in. In 1989 I felt I needed a change, so I started as an English teacher trainer for *Jazyková příprava, s.r.o.* Mrs. Cempírková and I helped to start preparatory English courses at various elementary schools in the Czech Republic. We also cooperated with the Faculty of Education. I believe that change, commitment and personal development play a crucial role in keeping optimism.

What motivates you in your career as an English teacher?

I like the fact that although I have been teaching the same topics and working with the same pupil's books for several years, each lesson can be different. The work is not monotonous, because the situation in the classroom changes all the time. Working with children is very challenging; young learners are pleased to be involved in extraordinary activities, while teenagers are willing to discuss stimulating issues.

Students Realise the Necessity of Learning Languages, Says a Young English Teacher

Kateřina Martínková

Andrea (29), a young teacher from Brno, has been teaching English for four years. She studied English at the Faculty of Arts of Masaryk University Brno and started teaching at the grammar school Vejrostova 2 right after her studies. She always planned to be a teacher and, as she says, the reality of being a teacher didn't surprise her. She is quite optimistic about the language teaching nowadays, though she would appreciate more native speakers in schools.

What do you think about the way English is taught in schools nowadays?

I think it's getting better and better. The books available nowadays provide us teachers with a wide variety of activities, including extra activities for stronger classes and many interesting topics for discussion. English lessons are also not as grammar-oriented as they used to be when I was learning the language. The main emphasis is on communication and everyday situations in which students may find themselves in the future, which I find very useful.

What do you see as a positive thing?

Definitely one positive aspect is that students realise the necessity of learning languages, especially English. That makes our work a lot easier as we don't have to face the question of "Why do we have to learn that?"

According to you, what is problematic?

The questionable part is vocabulary teaching. The ideal way would be to explain the words in English and the students would memorise them by using them. But there is no time in a lesson to do this. Therefore students still learn lists of words by heart, forgetting most of them after the test. But we teachers

hope that at least some of them will stay in their heads.

And something really negative?

Maybe that there are still some teachers who are not really willing to be creative.

What were your expectations when you started teaching?

I pretty much expected what I experience every day. At a certain age it's difficult to persuade students to do anything. The young ones are very active and willing to participate in any activity you prepare. The older ones get more and more serious as they prepare for their school-leaving exams or more and more bored by learning and school generally. And then the only "activity" they would like to do is watching movies. This is also connected with the part of day the lesson is in. The last lesson on Friday is a waste of energy, so I only prepare fun activities. But none of this surprised me much: I remember my own school days well.

If you had a magic wand, what would you change about lessons of English?

No matter how hard you try, you will never sound like a native speaker. Also some aspects of grammar and vocabulary that I have learnt are somehow difficult and unnatural for me to use, for example phrasal verbs and idioms. Therefore I would provide every school with at least one proper native speaker.

Advice to Future Teachers: Be Modest but Confident

Eva Mezulianíková

Petra Zvolská is a student at the Faculty of Education in Brno. Her field of study at the university is Lower Secondary School Teacher Training in Czech and English Language and Literature. Besides her university studies, she does a lot of post-school teaching activities; she teaches mothers with children and lower secondary school pupils. Moreover, she also teaches two Americans Czech. She is an experienced teacher who is interested in new ways of teaching and she always tries to make her lessons interesting and imaginative.

What do you think about the Czech educational system? If you could change anything in it, what it would be?

Well, the Czech educational system has been criticized a lot recently. Nevertheless, I think it is not in such bad condition. In the past the Czech system was based on drilling and memorizing, but that has already changed. New ways of teaching are being promoted and we can also use alternative teaching methods and provide our lessons with modern technology. I would say that the best thing we can do now is to combine new ways of teaching with old ones that have proved themselves over the years. My ideal school system would be allocated more money. I would like to have smaller classes with more teaching assistants in them, which is crucial for me.

You mentioned modern technology in teaching. Do you use it to enrich your lessons?

I try to use technology a lot, especially with kids because modern technology is part of our everyday lives and kids are used to using it. I try to use videos from

YouTube when I work with small children because they love music; although they do not understand the lyrics they are able to identify some words or phrases. An interactive whiteboard is also a great tool for an English-language teacher, but I have not had an opportunity to include it in my lessons so far. The main online sources that I use a lot are from YouTube, BBC Learning English and British Council LearnEnglish.

What was the biggest problem for you when you started teaching?

The hardest point for me was to stop being nervous. When the teacher looks worried and nervous, the whole class becomes restless. My nervousness is getting better and I am sure the more experienced I become, the more I will gain in confidence. I also have to learn not to be disappointed when activities and lessons do not flow as I expected.

What would you recommend to students going into the teaching profession?

Be modest but confident. Do not think that you know everything best. Although school teaches us a lot, still it is nothing in comparison with real experience. You should always be ready to change the way you teach. What is also important is that you should be prepared to be criticized and to think the criticism over. It may be worth a whole semester of theory.

An Interview with an English Teacher

Martina Řehůřková

I interviewed an English teacher who comes from Bristol in Great Britain. He wishes to stay in anonymity, so let's call him Jim. Jim moved to the Czech Republic eight years ago and he has been teaching at a grammar school since that time. His students enjoy his lessons and their results are very good. Although I was at first quite sceptical that secondary school students would understand everything in English, I realised during my observations that the students were able to absorb all the classroom English and the lessons went very well.

Jim, you used to be a businessman in Great Britain. Why did you choose to become a teacher in the Czech Republic?

I left the UK to start a new life after losing someone I loved. Thinking about what to do for a living, I was introduced to the management of the grammar school. I have worked with young people through scouting, very successfully I might say. I offered my services on a trial basis. I loved the job and the school "loved" me so I carried on and have never looked back. I think you have to have either a vocation or a talent for acting to be a good teacher.

How do you keep classroom discipline?

This is a difficult question. I use surprise and shock. I change my tone. If I have a difficult student I stop the class and have a one-to-one for a few moments. The class is too embarrassed to interfere and the student is too intimidated to make my life difficult. I rarely have problems twice.

What criteria do you take into account when evaluating students?

Not having been to teaching university I

have no formal education in how to evaluate students. I normally only do it at the *maturita* exam. I listen to the flow of the language, the ease of listening to it and the complexity of the sentences. Also the student's ability to understand what I say and/or deal with an unknown. Each element has a plus or a minus effect on my final analysis. So two students with completely different abilities can get the same mark.

How do you encourage creativity and students' autonomy in the classroom?

I encourage creativity by putting students on the spot. They either sink or swim. They have to be creative to reply to my impossible questions. An example would be where I had students who were not listening to me. So I admired a female student's mobile phone soft case, which was pink. I commented that it looked like a condom. I then asked the unlucky student what colour their condoms were. The student failed as he was unable to reply. Another student took up the gauntlet and the lesson continued. This is an extreme example of getting students' attention and encouraging creativity. Autonomy I do not encourage, but I respect it when it appears.

I would like to thank Jim for his interesting answers. He is very charismatic person who finds an answer for any question. Personally, I like his ideas on keeping classroom discipline and encouraging students' creativity, so I will try some of his ideas to see how they work.

translation pages

Translation

Jaroslav Suchý

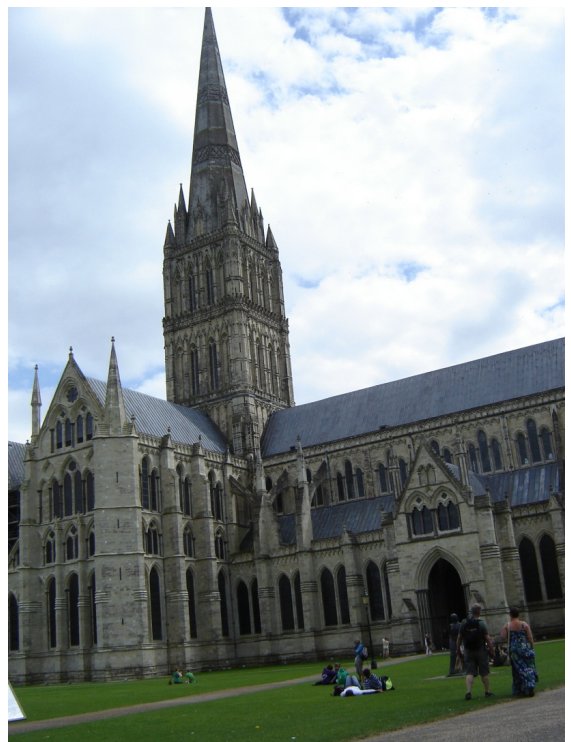
In previous issues of the Messenger I have published songs in translation. But this time I'm presenting a poem written by Marketa Forro, a friend of mine, from her private collection of poems called Ergo Sum. You know I like translating song lyrics, but some poems - like this one - are appealing, too.

Original:

Věže kostelů ční do výše
 A těhotným mrakům
 Provádí interrupci
 Bez umrtvení
 A jejich slzy a děti se mísí ve vzduchu
 V šíleném reji
Rosnička ve sklenici
Prošlápla příčky žebříku
 Je mi jich líto
 A tak zašívám mrakům roztrhaná břicha
 A prosím
 Ať už nepláčou

Translation:

Church spires penetrate the heights
 Performing abortions
 On pregnant clouds
 Without anaesthetic
 A mixture of their tears and kids fills the air
 In a frantic whirl
A weather frog in a jar
Has broken the ladder's rungs
 I'm sorry for them
 So I'm sewing up the clouds' ripped wombs
 Asking them
 Not to cry anymore



travel pages

Three months of Maternity Leave

Anna Ziklová

Culture shock, confusion, doubt and fear. All of these feelings and a variety of other emotions may accompany our first steps on a foreign land. Everyone is aware of cultural differences, but a big surprise awaits when we encounter them by chance. A wide range of unwritten rules exist and these rules are not, unfortunately, obvious from the top of the iceberg. To uncover hidden standards it is necessary to dive beneath the surface, become a member of the society and observe the iceberg from its bottom.

In this article I would like to consider some differences between English and Czech culture in my personal experience. I would also like to share my fear, uncertainty and other emotions I had to face up to during my stay as an au pair in the UK, together with the experience I gained.

I lived for almost three months in a wonderful, enormous house surrounded by forest on one side and corn fields on the other, i.e. in the middle of nowhere. I did not mind because after a hectic exam period in Brno the nature and green were like paradise to me. After landing at around 1 a.m. GMT my steps went confidently towards the right side of the taxi, which made the nice, elderly driver smile. "Everybody does it, you know," he said in a calm, deep, typically English voice. That was my first clash with one of the most obvious differences between the Czech Republic and the UK.

After about seven hours of sleep I was introduced to Alex. My little angel: a five-month-old baby boy with big blue eyes and, as I realised later, the mouth of a carp. I was supposed to take care of him - change his nappies, feed him, make his food, sterilize his bottle etc. Consequently, I became a "mum" in one day. This feeling scared me quite a lot, because you are no longer responsible only for yourself: there is a little human totally dependent on you. Moreover, there is no way to ask him what he needs, whether it is food, drink or just to be cuddled. This fact was a real challenge for me. Of course it is possible to obtain some previous experience, but it is not the same. When you get the opportunity to help with a baby it is for several hours, while I spent most of my time with him. And it was the greatest time of my life. I did the ironing and helped with the housework too. I can imagine exactly how difficult it must be to have a baby, and I admire those who are able to study at the same time .

As well as taking care of Lex, I went for walks to a village called Teffont, which was not far from the house. The journey took just ten



minutes on foot and it was very pleasant to walk there. The road took me past historical country houses with small windows and typical thatched roofs.

I enjoyed the beauty of the countryside and the friendliness and politeness of the villagers. I really like the English when it comes to the question of general behaviour. Everyone in England is positive and tries to do their best for you, which I really miss in the Czech Republic. The English are, at least on the surface, quite nice people who do not complain about anything, and as I mentioned above they are very willing to help you with whatever you need and always exchange a few words with you.

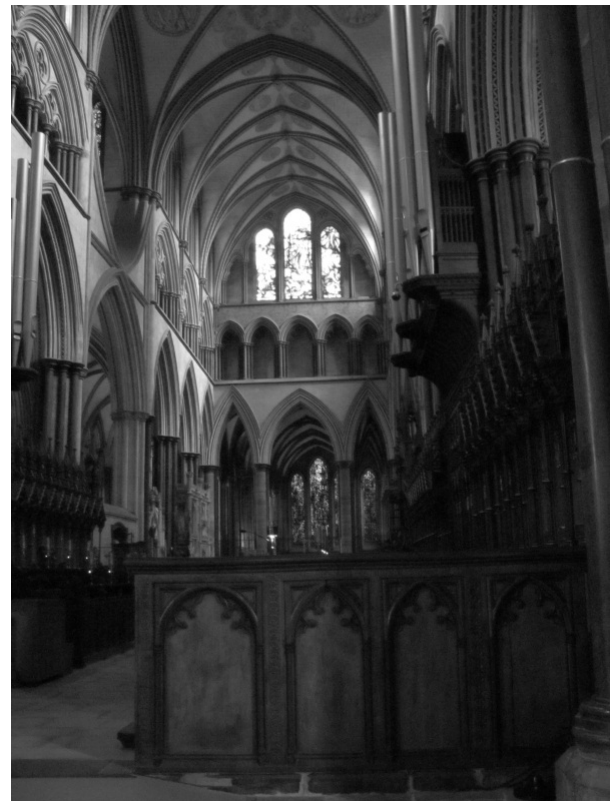
As I wrote at the beginning, I lived in a solitary house. But it was not so far from the historical city of Salisbury, which is very famous for its breathtaking cathedral. When you walk through its streets past the typical English houses you can feel the history and mystery.

Every Wednesday and Saturday there was a big event in Salisbury - a street market. Several tents were put up and a variety of goods were sold there. There was the chance to get whatever came to your mind - veg, fruit, meat, bread, cheese, books, clothes etc. I was amazed because you could choose fresh vegetables for even lower prices than you would pay in Tesco, and the quality was higher. This fact made me think again about the Czech Republic. There is no chance in the Czech Republic of getting as wide a range of goods as in the UK, and also the quality is much lower than in Britain. Where does the problem come from? Is it because of an inability to grow and produce at least some of our own food? Is it the mentality? Or eating habits and customs? Each of the sentences has

some truth in it, unfortunately. It is up to us to change it.

The last point I would like to make concerns the fact that the English never take off their shoes before they enter a house. This drives me mad, especially when even a family with a little baby does it. Luckily, my family was different and didn't want to have mess inside the house. But it was really awkward for me to ask everyone who came in to take their shoes off. Most people stared at me and could not understand why they were supposed to do it. One of the responses has stuck in my mind: "Why should I take my shoes off when it is dry outside..." Culture is us. We make it. We shape it as we wish it to be.

I hope you have enjoyed reading. And if you are contemplating going to the UK, you really must visit Salisbury.



poetry pages

Poetry

Petra Garay

Butterfly

This morning we walked by a tiny yellow butterfly

At once, it fell in love with my little girl
It sat on her back, in her hair
perhaps it was wishing she was able to fly

And my sweet little girl was surely wishing that too
She waved her arms up and down
and hopped around the park
squealing with joy and playing peek-a-boo

Some people stopped walking and observed with a smile
the beautiful scene
of the sun spilling its golden rays
on the adorable girl dancing with her butterfly

when it tired them both
and it was time to say goodbye
I held her hand and together we
watched this charming little butterfly
slowly flicker away, towards the bright summer sky.

Epilogue

I'm thinking of words which I could add
I wanted to live my life so that

there would be no regret

One day I will look back and smile
and feel my life was worth the while

lived through with naught but style

I want to enjoy my being with its glory
behind to leave its timeless allegory

when comes the end of a story

the essence of spirit is poetry and rhyme
the bells of my heart, they tirelessly chime

the lyrics to me louder every time

my words those peaks so high can reach
celebrating the gift of freedom of speech

Life

THRUST INTO THE LIGHT AND NOISE
 THEY CUT THE CORD AND SEVERED OUR
 CHOICE
 WE´VE BEEN GIVEN LIFE AND THE WAY I
 SEE IT
 WE BETTER GO AND TRY TO LIVE IT
 NO CHOICE, NO OPTIONS AND LET IT BE
 SAID
 WE RELY SOLELY ON THE VOICE IN OUR
 HEAD
 SO WE LEARN:
 TO SIT, CRAWL AND STAND AND AFTER
 THAT WALK
 TO MAKE SOUNDS, HIGH AND LOW AND
 CHATTER AND TALK
 TO HEAR AND SEE, TOUCH AND ALSO TO
 SMELL
 TO LOVE AND FEEL AND TO HATE - OH,
 WE DO THAT SO WELL!
 AND THAT LOVE, FEELINGS AND OUR
 HATRED, WE LEARN TO HIDE
 AND AS WE COVER UP WE GRASP THE
 CONCEPT OF THE TERM PRIDE
 AND WE DISCOVER HAPPINESS, JOY, DEEP
 SORROW TOO
 IT JUST MIGHT BE TIME FOR OUR FIRST: I
 LOVE YOU...
 AND WE HAVE UPS AND DOWNS, WE
 STRUGGLE AND THRIVE
 AND TRY OUR HARDEST TO LIVE, NOT
 ONLY SURVIVE
 AND WE OVERCOME BARRIERS,
 MISFORTUNES AND FRIGHT
 AND FEELING A TAD TIRED
 WE PASS THE RELAY BUTTON
 AND THRUST ANOTHER BLESSED SOUL
 INTO THE LIGHT
 AND AFTER THE MILES AND MILES
 GALLOPED IN HAMSTER WHEELS
 WE SAY GOODBYE, CLOSE OUR EYES AND
 AT LAST, REST IN PEACE.

Longing Heart

How much yearning can an aching heart
 bear?
 Given the moment to unburden,
 would you tell all, would you dare?
 Would you catch the moment and hold it
 dearly and tight
 or would you once more let it slip
 through your fingers
 and bury your hunger in the silence of
 night?
 There it stays unheard, unseen and
 weeping,
 sorrow following you until your heart
 stops beating.

Set me free

I´m body and I´m soul
 one without the other just cannot make
 me whole
 I guess I´m like you
 although I can never be
 there are hundreds of miles between you
 and me.

I´m bitter and I´m sweet
 often the opposite of what you really
 need
 I guess I´m like you
 although I can never be
 blue eyes wide open and still you cannot
 see.

Sometimes I´m an open letter and other
 times I´m a riddle
 nothing makes sense anymore but the
 heart in the middle
 I guess I´m like you
 although I can never be
 you wish to keep me captive and I´m
 desperate to break free.

When I close my eyes

The day is pleasant and warm like a
cherry pie
I look up and see a white dot above in
the sky
When it's nearer I recognize a feather,
carried by the breeze
I'm happy to be around on days like
these
It's slowly gliding into the unknown,
feeling free
As free as one can ever be
It's being careless and having fun
Dancing the 'feather dance' and
sparkling in the sun
I feel like dancing too, even though
there is no reason
Maybe it's the feather or just the magic
of this season.

Suddenly the sky is dark and the sea
underneath is raging,
The feather is blown away, the idyllic
picture is changing
The waves are leaping and hunting for
the feather, trying to snatch the little
fool
The euphoria is lost and by dark powers
the world is ruled
The feather is resisting with all its
fragile might
Is blown up and down, left to right
The poor thing is really trying.
I feel I'm always trying too.
Oh God, have I been crying?

It's over, the sea is calm, the music
softens in my ears
The feather is safe and I wipe away my
tears
This experience has tired us out and now
it's time to rest
For soon our emotions are heading for
yet another test.



