

CZECH ROOTS IN VANCOUVER

Czech Roots in Vancouver is the title of a documentary that is being produced by The International Czech Club in Prague. For the past two decades the club has been publishing a magazine dealing with the theme of Czech exiles and organizing activities introducing prominent Czechs living abroad. The club's most visible project is the production of documentaries entitled Czech Roots. Three parts of this series have already been presented by Czech Television such as Czech Roots in Sweden ©2010, Czech Roots in Switzerland ©2011, and Czech Roots in Vienna ©2013. Czech Roots in Vancouver shall be the fourth.

These documentaries are about people who had the courage to leave the country where they had been born and were forced into exile by the

Communist regime before 1989. The regime was wilfully destroying their lives, confiscating their property, spying on them and imposing all kinds of bans and restrictions. They left to search for freedom and find a new home. But is a home abroad a true home? What are these people doing today? Where did they find a new purpose in their lives? How do they see their decision to leave Czechoslovakia when looking back now? What are their views of the present developments in their native country? Those are questions that are answered into the camera of Tomáš Kubák by members of several families and several generations in Vancouver and Victoria.

Why Vancouver?

Filming in Canada had already been planned in 2011 but did not take place

due to a lack of financing. Then a happy coincidence helped us. Mr. Erik Sova, President of a company named PGI, heard in faraway Vancouver a Czech Radio interview with violin virtuoso Jaroslav Šonský, a Swede with Czech roots whose recordings are part of our three previous documentaries. Mr. Sova, excited by what he heard, wrote to Czech Radio to find out more and expressed his desire to help with the recording of the next Czech Roots in Canada. After a few months of planning with the help of other sponsors, we were able to go ahead.

Each country influences "its Czechs" not only by its economic and political climate but also by its nature and environment. In the case of Vancouver, the geographical traits have played a significant role, and the

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documentary shows that. The viewers are able to look not only into Czech households but also to admire the charm of Vancouver's coast. They are taken on a ride on a coastal ferry to find themselves soon in Victoria, the charming capital of British Columbia on Vancouver Island. And they are bound to be enchanted by the airy, modern, elegant and welcoming city of Vancouver as it is portrayed by the poetic camera.

Difficult Choices

Choosing the personages to be introduced in the film from among



the several hundred Vancouver and Victoria Czechs was a most difficult decision. The final choice was influenced by previously received information and contacts established, economic and time factors, but consideration for the colourful life stories and the advice of an "inner voice" were essential in the decision-making.

Eventually, nine personalities were interviewed: Czech and English writer Jan Drábek; valued doctor and theatre enthusiast Josef Skála; outstanding piano virtuoso and pedagogue Eva Solar-Kindermann; Olympic champion Milena Duchková-Neveklovská with her husband Petr; or Milan Matějček, a writer and a versatile personality. Also Květoslav Janda, a recently honoured member of the Anti-Communist Resistance and his wife Milena, who works with the University of British Columbia and the local opera association in their presentation of Czech operas. There was also Lenka Storzer, owner of a Czech bookstore operating via the internet; Professor Emeritus Markéta Goetz-Stankiewicz, who is largely responsible for Václav Havel's fame in Canada and who was the link between Czech dissidents and Czechs in Canada. Not to be forgotten is Miloš Zach, until recently an active leader of the Czech minority in Canada,

who had achieved prominence in the scientific field prior to his retirement.

Unforgettable Moments

We experienced many unforgettable moments during the shooting. We were allowed to hold in our hands the Olympic Medals of Milena Duchková-Neveklovská, who had brought the medals home from a bank vault for us



to see. Mr. Drábek let us leaf through a photo album containing amusing commentaries by his father Jaroslav Drábek, a noted Czech journalist and lawyer who survived Auschwitz. Mrs. Jandová interrupted her on-camera interview to call out: "Look, a hummingbird!" And then her modest husband told us how he guided people across the Iron Curtain during the most critical times after February 1948, when all participants were threatened with death. A few days after our visit, Květoslav Janda died.



We were amazed by stories told by Lenka Storzer about her late husband who became a Canadian sailor - a lowly deckhand - as an 18-year-old Czech refugee and after a few years

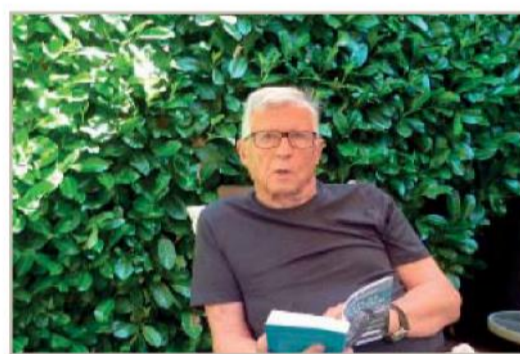


reached a most prestigious position as the first Czech marine pilot, guiding oceangoing ships along the British Columbia coast. We sat on his bench on the Victoria seashore, placed there by his colleagues. Was this the Canadian Dream, we asked ourselves?



In the home of Josef Skála we saw a picture of a sad clown - something of a symbol for those who were forced to leave without knowing whether they would ever be able to return. Such decisions, made for the benefit of one's children but often at a terrible spiritual cost, are aptly described in the books by Milan Matějček.

After eighteen days of intensive work we left Vancouver with a clear awareness of our responsibility to do something meaningful with such valuable material.



While the documentary is being completed we are looking for help with English subtitles, the manufacture of DVDs and publicity, as well as further financing possibilities.

Czech Roots are created under very modest financial conditions, all the work is done by a two- or three-member team financed by individual sponsors with the help of Czech organizations and foundations abroad.

We are most grateful to the sponsors of the Czech Roots in Vancouver project: PGI Vancouver; Ekofluid - Vancouver; Banar - Kobylnice; ÚJOP UK - Praha; Tomáš Říha - Praha; Jaroslav Šonský - Norrköping. We would also like to thank the Canadian Embassy and the Canadian Chamber of Commerce in Prague for their moral and organisational help. In particular, we highly value the letter of support from Ambassador Otto Jelinek, an outstanding Czech-Canadian himself.

Contact us if you would like to know more, or if you can help.

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