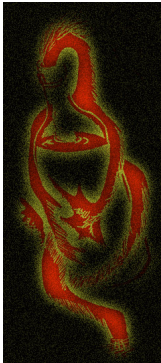


Dear Pal!

Written by Jaroslav Bednárík

Monday, 26 October 2009 18:27 - Last Updated Sunday, 17 October 2010 10:32

Peter Gašpar, Jaroslav Bednárík



I've been planning to write to you for quite some time now, unfortunately, it hasn't come to my mind until now. I used to live on the Frederick Street, in Rockdale. But two days ago I moved into a new apartment on the Rawson Street, which is only hundred meters away, actually around the corner where noise of the Frederick Street does not reach.

Rockdale is a very busy town, especially the lower part of the Frederick Street from the intersection with the Railway Pole to the Watkins Street intersection, where in addition to the Boeings flying low above the roofs of Rockdale, Bexley and North Bexley, there is noise of giant trucks rolling up towards the Watkins Street, incessant buzzing of light vehicles to which I have already got used to, night cannonade of Harley-Davidsons with teenagers deep in their saddles and my kitchen vibrant with no less interesting sounds of a game called squash. All over my flat I often heard an ear splitting yelling of children in a young Lebanese family living across in No. 1. I don't like noise, and that's why I've moved into the quiet apartment on the Rawson Street where, I am sure different horrible things await me – I don't know what kind yet – but I'm looking forward to them already.

There's a railway station in Rockdale, on the tracks leading from the City to southern suburbs and to the Royal National Park that burnt down to cinders during big fires. It takes me two to three minutes to get to the station. I cross the railroad and take a narrow street to the Princess

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Highway, behind which there's a school where I should study, but I seldom go there thanks to laziness and half-heartedness in which I am an expert. Laziness and half-heartedness together with tremendous cumbersomeness essentially form my striking image. While my cumbersomeness is inborn and I've never had to move a finger to get to a high level, laziness and half-heartedness have cost me a lot of effort, and it took me years of arduous struggle. I did a shoddy work in everything and raised myself onto a prestigious level. I think that no one in particular has been helping me in it.

There are many abnormal people around here. We've banded here together from different parts of the world. Also Miso and I are perhaps abnormal. Miso even thinks we're crazy when he sighs: "We're crazy. Why did we come here?" He is my long-time friend and an outstanding former drinking buddy, who not long ago, out of the blue slipped into a complete abstinence thus plunging me into a situation no one would vie for. Formerly, we used to fittingly drink together, and although he didn't drink often, at times he would nevertheless end up kneeling in a small toilet with his head down over the porcelain bowl just puking after drinking a multitude of wine, beer and vodka (sometimes we would even drink an orange blossom). Next morning, when he was tossing half-naked and half-dead in his bed, we used to tease him: "Why were you in the toilet yesterday so long? And what, for God's sake, were you doing there so long?" But he would swiftly cut us off with a suitable euphemism: "Ah ..., I had a mouthful of work!"

There is one Pole here, a subdean of a small town university somewhere between Warsaw and Odra, who earned a doctorate at the University of Warsaw, and then he studied in Moscow for a long time, where he learned to drink vodka. I'm learning Polish from him. Learning English is hard for me, but I'm quite good at Polish by now. There's also a shrewd adventurer here, who in his time used to smuggle refrigerators and second hand cars from Togo to Ghana, and after a year, when a minor common upheaval took place, he was smuggling the same cars and refrigerators back to Togo. In short, things weren't going too well for him there, so he left for Moscow, then Rangun, Bangkok, Manila, Rio de Janeiro, and the first two weeks of October last year he spent with us until he got attracted to the underworld of the King's Cross like a magnet, where he has disappeared. We looked him up there at Christmas. We got drunk in a dingy J&J bar, and I ended up having a headache for three days afterwards.

There is also a talented surgeon from Prague here, who wouldn't care to go back home. Lately he's been making living by cleaning ashtrays in some office, making sure that office waste baskets are empty each morning and restrooms always have paper towels and toilet paper, which may not be the beginning of a dazzling career. He is a kind friendly guy, who often floods us with stories and memoirs like for example: "I got a two-hundred-twenty-pound man on the table, who had been stabbed twenty six times. He worked in a crematory, where the employees were actually celebrating the ten-thousandth setting of fire. He got into a disagreement with someone, and the latter stabbed him. I sewed up the guy, and then he

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wouldn't say who stabbed him, even though he had to know it 'cause he had wounds in the front too." The doctor says about his job: "When you cut it open, you can do there whatever you like! When you sew it up, then nobody will know what you'd been doing there." There are lots of people here of different nationalities, and all are looking for a good job making 450 dollars a week. When they finally land a spot like that, they're praying that no sleuths from the Immigration Office catch them.

Every Sunday we go to pray at St. Joseph's Church that is only a few yards away from our house. The church is located under a route of landing airplanes. Whenever an airplane approaches, the priest pauses during his sermon and waits until the rumbling noise passes away. At the end of the Mass, the priest tells a joke and the congregation laughs, but Miso and I don't because we don't get the joke. (One day I understood all his words, but I missed the point.) The priest keeps running fast in front of the altar with his hands piously folded, and slightly crouched down, he skillfully runs up the three steps diagonally towards his armchair at the side of the altar. Once he almost tripped and I almost started laughing. I got that one really well. I am praying for a better future, and I am mostly concerned about having lots of dollars and not to have to think about them every morning – another day, another dollar. It's quite clear to me though that if God doesn't exist, then my praying is more or less good for nothing.

After some time I got tired of living in Sydney and fled to Tasmania. I bought a one-way ticket to Melbourne for 35 dollars at McCarthy's, and I arrived in Melbourne in great spirits. I was aimlessly wandering through the streets until I wound up at the port, but when I found out that the ship "Spirit of Tasmania" was leaving for Davenport in two days, I went back to Spencer Street by tram. From there I went to an airport southwest of Melbourne in a taxi for nine dollars. I flew to Davenport with Kendell Airlines for 85 dollars and spent the next eight days roaming throughout Tasmania. On the Overland Track in the Cradle Mountains my body was attacked by a virus, and then I was tossing and turning in fever on Mt. Ossa in rainy jungles around St. Clair's Lake. On the fourth day I crawled into the shade in Cynthia Bay, and half the day I couldn't move while only thinking about what will happen to me next.

I returned to Sydney and kept drinking for a week. I didn't do anything else. Here they call it a "full-time job."

Gaspar

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