

Returning to my Slovak Heritage and Meeting Lost Family

by Carol Dignon

Ever since I can remember, I've wanted to go to Slovakia to see how the people live there, what the countryside is like, and learn about the history and culture of the place my grandparents left so long ago. When I visited Prague and learned about the history of the region, I decided to return to my homeland. I couldn't believe that my grandmother had lived in a small village during the Habsburg Empire. A visit to Ellis Island in New York City further sparked my interest as I pictured my grandmother arriving alone with her young son in the Great Hall, engulfed by all these other immigrants speaking different languages.

I was very close to my grandmother (Babka), who lived two blocks away from us in the house my grandparents lived in when they first came to Natrona, PA, near Pittsburgh, so my grandfather could work in the Allegheny Ludlum Steel Factory. My grandfather, Michael, came first, followed by my grandmother, Catherine, in 1905, who traveled with their 5-year-old son, my uncle Anthony.

I grew up surrounded by Slovak families in a community of predominantly Slovak and Polish immigrants. We went to St. Matthias Church, the church that my grandparents helped build, the Polish people had their own churches. My father died when

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Carol with Aunt Viera

CALENDAR OF EVENTS



REGULARLY SCHEDULED ACTIVITIES

CHILDREN'S LANGUAGE SCHOOL

Children's Language School Spring 2025 semester concluded in the week of June 19. Fall 2025 semester classes will resume in the second week of September. The Czech beginner's class will meet on Mondays at 5 PM. Advanced speakers will meet on Tuesdays at 6:00 PM. Slovak Language children's classes continue to meet on Sundays. Beginners will meet at 9 AM, advanced speakers at 10 AM. For more information or to register a student, please visit our website at <https://cshamaryland.org/>

ADULT LANGUAGE SCHOOL

CSHA is one of the few organizations in the USA that offers Czech and Slovak language instruction for adults. Online classes are offered on Saturday mornings. Beginning Czech, Intermediate Czech, and Intermediate Slovak classes meet at 9:00 AM. Beginning Slovak meets at 11 AM. Czech 102 and Czech Conversation meet at 11:15 AM. The Fall 2025 semester will start on September 6 and will end on December 6, 2025. For more information, contact Lois Hybl at 410-428-6012 or e-mail: LHybl@verizon.net or info@cshamaryland.org.

HERITAGE SINGERS:

We welcome singers of all voice parts. Contact Margaret Supik (443-739-2025) for more information or if you want to join. Future events will be announced on the CSHA website <https://cshamaryland.org> and our Facebook page.

CSHA ONLINE - For more information about any of these activities, joining Heritage Singers or to register for classes, you can contact CSHA at: info@cshamaryland.org.

The CSHA Board of Directors will respond to answer your questions and provide information, and we are eager to hear your ideas and suggestions. Also, please check our website www.cshamaryland.org and follow us on Facebook at Czech and Slovak Heritage Association of Baltimore.

JANUARY 2025

The CSHA General Meeting was held virtually on Sunday, January 26, 2025. We encourage all our members to follow our website for details about future meetings, upcoming events, and how to get involved with CSHA activities.

FEBRUARY 2025

The CSHA Event Committee virtual meeting was held on Sunday, February 23, 2025, at 7 PM.

APRIL 2025

The 4th CSHA Spring Festival took place on Sunday, April 6, 2025, at the MD State Game & Fish Protective Association at Perry Hall.

MAY 2025

CSHA Heritage Singers performed at the Memorial Day Celebration on May 26 at the Bohemian National Cemetery.

JUNE 2025

CSHA Board and the Czech and Slovak Language school teachers and students gathered at the Education Committee Supper & Meeting on June 14 to discuss the learning curriculum and classes structure.

OCTOBER 2025

The 37th Annual CSHA Festival will take place at the Legacy Hall in Sykesville on Sunday, October 26, 2025, from 12-6 PM. Visit the CSHA website <https://cshamaryland.org> and our Facebook page for additional details.

DECEMBER 2025

The traditional Christmas Carol singing is tentatively scheduled on Sunday, December 7, 2025, at 2 PM. Mikuláš and Anděl will bring children traditional goodies, and a small reception will follow the celebration. Location TBD.

CSHA BOARD OF DIRECTORS:

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If you have any suggestions or comments or want to contribute to the Hlas by writing an article, email us at info@cshamaryland.org.

President's Message

Dear friends,

Welcome to our quarterly newsletter. Please take a few minutes to review the attachments to this issue: the October Festival poster and a form for those who would be interested in volunteering at the event, advertising in the special festival brochure, or being recognized as a festival sponsor. As always, we appreciate your support.

Today, I would like to take the opportunity to express my appreciation of one exceptional person who played a key role in the success of our community over the past six years: Jan Woska. Next month, Jan will be leaving his position as the First Secretary and the Cultural Attaché at the Embassy of the Czech Republic in Washington, DC.



Many of you have met Jan at our events. He supported the Association throughout his tenure at the Embassy, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic. He was instrumental in developing and sustaining the Association's relationship with the Embassy. I will always fondly remember Jan's dedication to the Czech community in Maryland. I wish him all the best in his future endeavors as he continues to drive positive change by empowering individuals and organizations through sports diplomacy.

Dekujeme za všechno, Honzo.

The summer season is an opportunity to relax and travel. My family and I are planning a few interesting trips this year. We also often invite our family and friends to come and visit the United States. We would like them to discover the unparalleled beauty of this country, its nature, and the friendliness of its people. This year, the invitation comes with a warning that the United States are not as welcoming as they used to be and that they could encounter anti-immigrant sentiments at the border. It is painful to listen to the stories of tourists being denied entry and deported and the stories of students and scientists whose visas are being abruptly cancelled for no good reason. It is even more painful to hear people say that they will not set foot in this country unless things change. As an immigrant myself, I have never thought that I will see such things happening in the U.S. As we have turned our back on the world, it is now reciprocating, which is truly our loss. I also worry for Americans abroad, as these developments make us all less safe. My hope is that this is a temporary situation and that foreign visitors will be able to enjoy major events that will take place in the U.S., like the 2026 FIFA World Cup and the 2028 Olympic Games.

Despite the current state of things, I will always be the first one telling everyone back home how much this beautiful country has to offer and that most Americans are generous and kind. I still believe that.

Have a beautiful and safe summer.

Se srdečným pozdravem,



Petr Justin - CSHA president

P.S.: No thrones. No crowns. No kings.

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I was 8 years-old. As I was the youngest, I spent a lot of time with my grandmother, who babysat me. My three siblings were much older and less often with me and Babka. Since she spoke Slovak with her children and the neighborhood, the grandchildren had to use a little Slovak to communicate with her limited English.

Memories of my grandmother were with me as I traveled through Slovakia.

Everyone on the trip enjoyed sharing their childhood stories with each other. The outdoor village museums (skanzens) showed how people lived in the early 20th century when our families were leaving for new lives in America. When I looked in the houses, I saw the objects and designs that my grandmother had in her house--a picture of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, an old-fashioned, treadle sewing machine, and periny (down comforters) on the beds. The food and bakery goods were just like home. My mother, and my aunts and uncles always made extra when they cooked or baked and sent it to each other's homes.

My husband Al and I enjoyed the whole 10-day trip as we traveled from Bratislava to Vychodna (in Eastern Slovakia),

making stops in Kosice, Bardejov, the Tatra Mountains, Orava, and Banska Bystrica and more. We spent a morning learning about the history of mining in Slovakia and walking in the old mountain copper mining town of Spania Dolina, an interesting history for those in our group whose families came to work in the mines of Pennsylvania.

I thought the whole tour was awesome. I loved sitting in the small bus watching the lovely countryside go by while Peter, our guide, talked about the history and culture of each region. The Slovak people were so friendly that the whole country seemed like family. At a craft fair, a young man walking by offered to help me purchase wire-sculpted gifts for my sisters from a tinker. He stayed for quite a while translating the tinker's craft and life story that I could share with my sisters. I kept asking myself why did my grandparents leave this beautiful country. Because I know that families and community are so important to Slovaks, I think that things must have been very bad for them to leave their home and families.

One of the reasons I picked this small-group Slovakia Heritage Tour is that Judy and Peter help you find your family and family villages. My family had lost contact with our Slovak relatives in the 1960s when my grandmother died.

I remember my mother and grandmother sending packages and letters to Slovakia but we had lost those names and addresses. Our first round of research confirmed the births of my grandparents and their wedding, but it didn't turn up any living relatives. But then we got lucky. We heard from the researcher in August, about a week before the tour, that a cousin on my mother's side, Richard Krizan, invited us to visit and meet his family on the Sunday after the tour.

After the tour, we arranged for Peter Blazicek, the tour operator and guide to be our private driver/guide/translator. He organized the trip to meet our newly-discovered family in my grandparents' village of Slopna in the Northwest corner of Slovakia, about 2 hours north of Bratislava.

When the day arrived, I was nervous. I was finally returning to our family village. I thought about how much this would have meant to my mother and grandmother. But all my concerns went away when I entered the modest house with chickens and gardens out back, and we were warmly greeted by Richard, his father Josef, his wife, his younger brother Josef, and their Aunt Viera. We sat around their kitchen table just as I used to do with my Slovak relatives in Pennsylvania as they brought out sandwiches, other treats, and homemade slivovic and beer. The toasting began. My husband had a challenge as they continued toast after toast, to fill his glass with slivovic despite his politely



Carol Dignon with her Slovak relatives

saying no. They brought out photos of relatives, and I showed them photos of our American family. One of the photos of a Slovak cousin resembled my sister Marlene. With Peter's help translating we were able to piece together the family tree. We figured out that my grandmother had a brother who never left Slovakia, and Richard and his family were the direct descendants of that great-uncle. FaceTime also made it possible for my sisters, Marlene and Joyce, to join the visit and meet their newly-found cousins.

We finished our visit with a walk through the town and the cemetery to see the ancestral graves. While we were in the cemetery, we met some people, the Vnuks, who said they were also related to us. We were beginning to feel a part of this lovely village.

We had a nice surprise when Peter heard from Viera that evening that she wanted us to visit her on Monday to see her house and meet her husband. So, we returned to Viera's delicious poppyseed and nut rolls, another round of slivovic toasting, and a happy family visit. Again, I was taken back to my childhood and my family greeting visitors with traditional pastries. Viera had just lost a sister so she wanted me and my sister Marlene to each have one of her scarves (that I call babushkas) that her sister wore. And, of course, they insisted we take a large bottle of slivovic and homemade beer.

We were so sad to leave, thinking we would not see them again, but we exchanged emails and addresses, and we have

continued to keep in touch, sharing news and stories about our lives. And just as important, I shared my tour experiences, and the family information with all my Slovak American cousins at our annual traditional Christmas Eve dinner so they can keep in touch and not lose contact with our new-found cousins. We shared Slovak oplatky and toasted our new-found cousins with the homemade slivovic in handmade pottery shot glasses that I brought from Slovakia. (The ones that were made so that you couldn't set them down.)

Now that I'm home, I treasure the memories of the trip, thinking more about my childhood and happy that we now know some of our family in Slovakia. I have the "babushka" gift, which vividly reminds me of all the Sundays spent picking up my grandmother for church. I was the one who helped her put on her "babushka" meeting her requirement to precisely fold it and line it up in a certain way. I see her sitting in her favorite chair, praying the rosary with the 8 pm religious radio program. I have the trunk that she packed in Slopna to bring her customs and culture to America. And now, I finally have the memories and the connection to this beautiful land, Slovakia, and the family that my grandparents left so long ago.

(If you're interested in traveling to Slovakia, contact Judy Northup-Bennett at Slovakia Heritage Tours, 978-544-5144, text 978-894-6622, or email slovakiaheritagetours@gmail.com. You can find more information about the 2025 Slovakia Heritage Tours at www.slovakiaheritage.com)



Carol Dignon with her grandmother's trunk

The 4th Spring Festival

by Dana Havlik

The Spring Festival has become our seasonal tradition at the Maryland State Game and Fish Protective Association in Perry Hall. This year, it was scheduled before Easter on April 6th to include the popular activities associated with this holiday.

This year was also special because we wanted to celebrate the life of our dear friend, longtime member, and former CSHA Board member – Alex Vanicky, who passed earlier in February. Alex would have celebrated his 85th birthday that weekend. Many members of Alex's family, including his wife Jana, daughter Karolina, son Martin, grandson Dominik, and others, came to the event. The CSHA Heritage Singers, with keyboard accompaniment by Greg Satorie, performed a few of Alex's favorite songs for others to sing along and remember our dear friend. Dominik, a talented young musician, captured the audience by performing one of his grandfather's favorite pieces on the piano.



Celebrating Easter time with traditional "pomlázka"

The event was well attended as we welcomed over 100 attendees, including many of our members and their friends. The guests enjoyed a wide spread of appetizers provided by CSHA, hot dogs and sausages with homemade sauerkraut crafted by Kate Wychgram and delicious tradition meals including Hungarian Goulash (Madarský guláš) and Szegedin Goulash (Segedínský guláš) creamy sauerkraut pork stew, with dumplings, catered by Ondřej Hricina's company Ondřej's Baked Goods from Levittown, PA. They also provide some of their favorite sweets, such as laskonky poppy seed rolls, and other delicious desserts.

CSHA bakers Jarmilka Marney and Ivanka Kenjova baked a variety of traditional Czech and Slovak pastries, Easter cookies, and other desserts. Russ Rezek ensured we have a well-stocked bar with beer and wine.



Fourth CSHA Spring Festival



Vanicky extended family at the Spring Festival

Orchester Praževica provided entertainment, performing Czech and Slovak folk songs. During intermission, Bob Rychlik enriched the musical afternoon with his performance on the fujara, a traditional Slovak flute.

Children enjoyed the Easter egg hunt in the outdoor picnic area, decorating easter eggs, and other easter themed artwork, as well as making pomlázka, in which adults also participated. It was a very lively and enjoyable afternoon and a successful event, bringing the community and friends together.

The CSHA Board of Directors would like to thank all dedicated volunteers who helped with preparations, decorating the hall, providing festivities, children's activities, and the cleanup to make this event possible.



Great Czech pastry by CSHA bakers

Czech and Slovak Recipe Corner:

by Dana Havlik

Birthday Cake (Narozeninový Dort)

Perfect for family celebrations at home or as it was made for the CSHA 4th Spring Festival in April 2025

INGREDIENTS:	Fruit jelly (preferably strawberry, red currant, or sour cherry)
Sheet cake (1) layer:	
6 tablespoons of sugar	1 cup chocolate chips or baking chocolate (optional)
6 tablespoons all-purpose flour	
6 large eggs	Butter Cream:
1/2 teaspoon ground lemon peel	1 lb. (4 sticks) of butter
1 packet vanilla sugar or a 1/2 teaspoon of vanilla extract	1 cup sugar
	2 cups of milk
	Pudding powder

DIRECTIONS:

To prepare the butter cream, first make vanilla pudding by boiling 2 cups of milk with pudding powder and letting it cool until it reaches room temperature. In the electric mixer, whip the softened butter with sugar, and once completely dissolved, start slowly mixing in the pudding, spoon by spoon. The cream or part of it can be flavored with ground coffee or nuts, cocoa powder, almond or rum extract, depending on the desired flavor.

Typically, the cake is made of 2-3 layers. To make one cake layer: mix 6 tablespoons of sugar, vanilla sugar or extract, and 6 eggs. With an electric mixer, beat at high speed for 6 minutes or until the batter is stiff. Slowly mix in 6 tablespoons of flour and the ground lemon peel. Pour the batter onto a greased 18x24-inch baking sheet and bake at 350°F for 15-20 minutes. Remove from the pan and once cooled, spread the surface with jelly and buttercream and cover with the second layer, and potentially the third layer. Ice the cake with chocolate icing prepared by melting chocolate chips with a spoonful of butter. Let the chocolate harden and decorate as desired with the remaining butter cream.



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Memorial Day Celebration at the Bohemian Cemetery

The Czech and Slovak Heritage Singers participated in the traditional Memorial Day ceremony at the Bohemian Cemetery on May 26, 2025, by performing American, Czech, and Slovak national anthems, along with other pieces.

The cemetery, located in Armistead Gardens in East Baltimore, was established in 1884. In 2010, it was added to the National Register of Historic Places. The property is owned and beautifully maintained by the Grand Lodge Czech Slovak Protective Society, Česko-Slovenská Podporující Společnost (Č.S.P.S).

This Czech benevolent society was formed in 1880 to support Czech and Slovak communities and to ensure the continuation of the history, cultural traditions, and language.

The organization has been led by President C. Jeanne Tábor-ský for many years, and supported by dedicated volunteers who have been diligently maintaining the cemetery grounds. They turned a small cottage into the "Bohemians of Baltimore" museum, established an ancestral database, and restored the former storage barn into a nice gathering space, where a small potluck celebration took place after the ceremony.

Č.S.P.S. Secretary Marlene Lockwood informed the audience about membership and opportunities to get involved with the

Lodge. The financial status and related issues were presented by Treasurer David Emil Reamer. President Jeanne Tábor-ský presented the history of the cemetery, and Vice President Eva Slezak reminded us of the Memorial Day history and tradition.



Heritage Singers ready to perform