

VIGNETTES OF THE VELVET REVOLUTION

by Embassy staff, Prague

Vicky Burnison, Mary Lou Finlan, Louella Haslip, Marthe Rabble, Lyn Sheward

- The wonderful aroma of bouillon wafting from thermos flasks and plastic containers in knapsacks, as people came prepared, fortifying themselves against the bitter cold and the long hours ahead.
- I recall being transfixed at the sight of a woman, in the midst of the pressing crowds, carrying a live duck in her knapsack, and wondering about the significance of it.
- Flags flying everywhere, including one pegged to a clothesline, like a towel blowing in the breeze.
- It was becoming part of the daily routine for Embassy staff, at the end of the working day, to don warm clothes against the increasing cold and damp, grab cameras and film, and head down the hill across the bridge to the Square.
- A wonderful feeling of solidarity prevailed at Christmas-time, as the Czechs, in the midst of their own crisis, rallied together to provide medical aid for their Romanian neighbours. Convoys of trucks, with crude Red Cross signs taped to them, assembled in the Square beside the Embassy.
- Monday, 27th November, the day of the general strike when Prague came to a standstill from 12:00 noon until two o'clock. The bells rang; trams, taxis, metro and cars came to a halt, as young and old, holding flags and banners, marched towards the centre of town or marched in their own districts. An impressive and moving demonstration which was a triumph.
- Standing in Letna Park, on a Saturday, in a blizzard, with hundreds of thousands of others, listening to speeches. Fortunately, I was standing next to someone who spoke English and kindly translated for me.
- Then the human chain, dancing and singing, weaving its way in and out of traffic along the old cobbled streets and bridges.
- Standing by the National Theatre and watching the crowds walk past, chanting and singing - holding candles. So many people and yet no pushing or shoving - just a peaceful demonstration. There was a special atmosphere - a feeling of excitement that is difficult to put into words.
- The Czech national flag, big and small, flying on nearly every building, glued to the windows of nearly every bus, tram, taxi and metro train, overwhelmingly everywhere.
- The never-ending burning of candles at Wenceslas Square, Narodni Street, outside the Romanian Embassy to mourn their horrific revolution, and in the windows of Czechoslovak homes at 10 p.m. on Christmas Eve ... and at the start of the momentous week, rows of candles burning on window ledges and in doorways of homes.
- Midnight Mass on Christmas Eve, in St. Ignatius Church, built in the 17th Century, singing "Silent Night" in Czechoslovakian.
- Hearing Christmas carols in English on the local radio station.
- Watching the news from CSSR on TV, and realizing we were actually living there was quite overwhelming. It is quite stirring to know your children will be studying what went on here in their history class, and saying, "I was there".

