

At nine-thirty in the morning, the hallways of Charles University were quiet. Students in the Prague Summer Program like Jason Venner from Akron, Ohio or Layla James from Austin, Texas were inside their respective classrooms. I sat at a table in poetry workshop every Monday, Wednesday, and Friday, with a gorgeous view of the Prague Castle and Vltava River. I can say that I don't know too many people who have been given the same chance as me to do this: to live and write in Prague.

The lectures I attended every Tuesday morning were phenomenal. My favorite of all the lectures was given by Arnost Lustig. Arnost recounted his life at fifteen, just before Nazi occupation. His lecture came after a visit I had to the former concentration camp at Terezín. Arnost spoke about how a young friend of his, among others, was killed and how after liberation he would meet with the boy's family. He said that his mom believed her son was still alive and she would wait for hours each day, by the door. As I listened to him speak I got goose bumps. He was an amazing storyteller and a charming man, holding a captive audience for an hour and fifteen minutes. He smiled and told jokes at times throughout his lecture. It blew my mind that he could be so light hearted today after having lived through such horrible experiences.

The workshop itself was split into two halves. The first half was taught by Jack Myers who is the author/editor of seventeen books of and about poetry. He has taught at Southern Methodist University for over thirty years and his work has been widely anthologized. Jack gave us detailed writing exercises for homework. The writing exercises required that we be honest and open ourselves to each other. We had to dig deep inside ourselves to complete, for example, the task of writing a letter home, telling someone something that we would not be able to in person, or to write about the meeting

that would take place between a current and a younger version of ourselves. These exercises were designed simply to get us thinking and in the mode of writing. What they contributed further were the connections and extentions we made within our writing that later produced some great poems. I took a writing sample about being bullied in third grade, for example, from a memory narrative that Jack assigned us and turned into a poem, which I later workshopped and shared at one of the student readings, which were held every Monday evening.

Jack was a great mentor and a funny man. He joked about poetry, recalling a friend of his who once said of a poem he read that it would do well to be in two parts, and then proceeded to rip it in half. He met me for a drink on our last day and I was excited to discover that his mentor while he was an MFA student at Iowa was Marvin Bell. Jack held a wealth of information and was more than willing to impart his knowledge to us, gifting me with his book, The Portable Poetry Workshop, from which he drew most of his examples.

The second half of the workshop was with Roger Weingarten, who has written several books of poetry and who founded and teaches in the MFA in Writing and the Postgraduate Summer Writers' Conference at Vermont College of the Union Institute and University. Roger was a bit more unorganized and spontaneous, requiring that we meet him one day outside of class to scour the streets like mad detectives. Our task was to write everything we saw and in a free flowing thought pattern, construct a poem of the city. He said that our poems would be our greatest souvenirs.

It was a busy month, and yet I still had time to sit in the beautiful cafés to write, or attend walking tours of the city. My time spent in Prague was well balanced between

hard work and dedicated reflection. I met some wonderful writers and made some great connections with people that I will also carry with me well into my life ahead. And in one heart beat, I would do it all again.