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Skype Assignment

Earlier this evening I had the pleasure of speaking with Martin Vldar, a student at Masaryk University Faculty of Law in Brno, Czech Republic. Martin and I tried to get to know one another a little bit before we really began conversation. He told me that he is from Ostrava, which is about a two hour train ride from Brno. He has an apartment in Brno but he spends a lot of time at home where his parents live in Ostrava; which is also where his girlfriend resides and where he works and plays floorball. We discussed the differences between the school systems in the Czech Republic versus here and it was very interesting to learn that “university” is free for students there!

As per your suggestion, we decided to engage in conversation about the floods that occurred in Czech Republic back in 1997, and 2002. Martin had witnessed parts of the 1997 flood, and had just left Prague before things got really bad in 2002. Our conversation mostly revolved around the 2002 flood of the Vltava River (the second largest in the country), which submerged the beautiful city of Prague. Fortunately, there were only fifteen deaths as a result. Martin emphasized that this number was very small compared to the amount of people that live in Prague. (over one million). He said that the city was not prepared for the flood at all, as their “prevention” efforts were poor. However, he said that since then, the city has

become much more prepared and has erected “anti-flood barriers,” which I am assuming are dams or “levees” of some sort. He referred to the flood as a “one-hundred year” event – and said that the new barriers they have erected are going to be “one hundred years waterproof.” But despite the lack of preparedness, he said that the authorities responded very well; that there were plenty of volunteers, and that the army helped out a lot. He said that their plan was to “evacuate and then accommodate.” He mentioned that there was a whole lot of physical destruction to homes and buildings, and in that respect the recovery method was to “destroy the destroyed, clean it, and then repair it.”

What was extremely significant was that Martin was using the Skype Chat feature to send me links to photographs and even some videos of the flood. He sent me some pictures of South Bohemia, a large city, that was submerged. I think that the pictures say a lot; and they also show the basic relief efforts that were undertaken after the flood. From the way Martin was speaking, it seemed as though the authorities did the best job that they could and that the public took notice of that.

Some of the pictures looked exactly like New Orleans after Katrina. I spoke to Martin about Katrina and how the city was similarly, unprepared. However, I let him know that our version of the “evacuate and accommodate” plan did not go so well. Martin had heard things about Katrina and mentioned that he remembered hearing about all the crime that occurred in the region during and after the storm. I was sure to let him know that that unfortunate situation did not begin with the

hurricane, as New Orleans has always had horrific poverty and crime statistics. I was surprised at how much he knew – and laughed when he blamed it on Bush. Martin told me about how after the flood in 1997, they had trucks come in with drinking water because all the actual drinking water was dirty. I said that was something a lot of people could have used in the week following Katrina. He also sent me a story about zoo animals that had escaped and ended up in the river but I could not read the story because it was in Czech. I sent some right back to him – of some dolphins that ended up in the Mississippi River after Katrina. Of course, that is not where they originated.

Then we were going to talk about the flu, and so I casually asked Martin if he had received a flu shot. He replied that he “wasn’t sure but thinks he did.” I explained to him that he would probably know it if he did since it is something you do once a year. Then he realized that no, he did not get a flu shot. Neither did I! But that led us into a conversation about a vaccine that Martin did get recently – which is one that protects against Lyme disease and then another disease spread by ticks. He said that there are many more ticks there than there used to be – and that they are mostly in the more “wooded” and mountainous regions but that people in cities are still urged to be vaccinated. I was not aware there was such a vaccine. I asked him if everyone got the vaccine – and he said a lot of people do but that you have to pay for it. I asked if it was expensive and he said it was not too bad and that insurance companies cover a lot of it. I asked him if this was the case just for him – or generally. In other words, I wanted to know whether a large portion of

their population had health insurance or not. He said that most people do have insurance – including the less wealthy people. But he also said that there is currently a large dispute about payments for health care; and that he pays thirty crowns every time he attends a doctor, which I am guessing is a lot. Overall, I enjoyed the experience, and I think we were both very intrigued at what the other had to say.





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