

We are the Neff's: Rick, Lisa and Belinda.



A GO student convinced our daughter Belinda. Father Larry and Barbara worked their magic on Lisa and I, the rest is history. Here we are, five years later. Rick, Lisa, Belinda, Markéta, Marta, Anička, Kača and Ania, five GO daughters and three GO family members, Miriam, Aneta and Eliška.

From the beginning we were scared - "what can we offer?" Lisa and Belinda and I prayed, we talked and then we prayed some more. We started by offering love and faith to the students, from there it has grown to include nothing less than a combining of our lives. They are no longer students, we are family!

We had heard about the GO Summer Camp, the unique opportunity for one GO class to mentor the next class and for alumni to keep in touch with the program. When our daughter Belinda reached the age where she could attend the summer camp, it was a dream come true for her. What happened next is amazing. Each of her sisters wanted Belinda to visit their families - so the week long camp became a summer of mind-blowing adventure. At the end of her European trip, her European family gathered for a dinner and an afternoon in the park in Brno, Czech Republic. Here is what it looked and felt like:

Markéta: Belinda's visit in our family wasn't just beneficial for her (I hope it was), but also for our family. Things which are normal and usual for us were strange and different for Belinda. She wasn't embarrassed to tell us or ask us, that's how she found out, that not all things are usual in US. We are really thankful to her and also for her.

From left to right: Aneta , Kača, Markéta, Miriam, Marta, Belinda and Anička.



Marta: This summer finally all my siblings were together. I wished that for a long time - my brother, sister and my American sister. It was awesome to have Belinda in our house; it felt as if it was just yesterday when we parted and Chippewa Falls was just a bus stop away. My Czech and American world finally met. I was glad I can show her things and explain everything and be for once the one who understands. I hope all the museums, castles, hikes and monuments didn't scare her and she'll be willing to come again, because there was just so many things we didn't have time for. At least because I found one really cool book in that little bookshop, you know. I believe it will feel like yesterday when we meet again.



Anička: I was very glad to see Belinda at our house. One of the reasons was the following:

In the US there was a lot for me to discover. The nature, language, my new family, school system, ... And when I thought about it I was very curious how an American would perceive my country. Well, Belinda, my little sister (she is very mature though and higher than me) had just a month to discover my home, the Czech Republic. I admire her very much for how she did it - she kept her eyes opened the whole time, she discussed a lot of things with us, which was very interesting for us as well. I hope that I will be able to share some of the beauties of our country with Belinda again, but with some other Americans too!

And this is from my parents.

Belinda visited us in Mnichovice. It was sweet! How about the outcomes?

Well, Belinda could have learned:

- what a train looks like, even from the inside
- that the air is breathable even in 1500 ft above the sea level
- that she is a smart young lady able to use her Czech language knowledge she had picked up from her guest sisters
- what a nettle and an ant house look like



We, Klimesovi, have learned:

- Belinda is a natural fit into our family
- that the quite common European preconception of young Americans as not interested in the rest of the world is just not true
- that our kids and friends are far less concerned about using their English than we used to be at their age; especially when there is such a talking partner

We would like to express our gratitude to the Neff's family for providing us with such a great opportunity to learn new stuff

Kača: I got to see Beli a month after I left the US, but our meeting was completely different experience. Having her here, in Europe, in Brno, was something incredible. She finally experienced how it is to be a



foreigner, even though completely different foreigner than we were in the US. The biggest problem we had (and I guess she had as well) was the language. So many people – my family, or just random people we met- were afraid to talk to her in English, which meant a lot of translating for us.

I am super glad I got to see her experiencing the city, by taking baby steps, ending with a bus ride by herself or seeing her enjoying visiting my grandma in the countryside, picking fruit from the field.

Ania: I didn't have opportunity to be at the family meeting at Czech Republic because I was preparing for my exchange year in America at this time but I have opportunity to meet Belinda and Kača at summer camp. Before my first time to meet my host sister I was really stressed. What if she will not like me? But after this I knew it that my thoughts were wrong. That was really helpful that I had two mentors at summer camp. Kača gave me very good advice and I will never forget my performance with Belinda at Summer Camp Talent Show. After camp I wasn't afraid about going to the United States. Okay maybe a little. But that was definitely less stressful because I knew it that I will be in the best host family. Now I'm at Neff family from almost two month and I'm not changing my mind.



Miriam: When I was asked to write something about Belinda's stay in the Czech Republic I really didn't know where to start or more so what to say. It took me few days but then I got it - yes, it's interesting to know all the things she was doing and how much fun she had but even more important is to see how this experience have changed her.



Global Outreach is giving us, European students, such an incredible opportunity to stay in the USA, meet new people, learn about American culture, but also and most importantly to find ourselves. GO gives us a chance to fight our biggest fears, to accomplish all the things about which we were unsure. It teaches us to appreciate all the kind, loving and generous people around us.

So yes, I'm glad Belinda had the opportunity to visit Czechia and that all her host sisters could give her back the love they received while their stay in America.

Deciding to be or not to be a host family isn't easy, I would say it's one of the hardest decisions families make but... it's worth it and I hope it's always a blessing for both sides and Belinda with her family is just one beautiful example.

Aneta: I always find meeting someone from a different country fascinating. And in moments like these, I remind myself, that if it wasn't for this or that decision I have made, i never would have known the people I do. Meeting Neff family and their youngest member, Belinda, was enriching. The beauty, I believe, is in seeing all the cultural and language differences but not minding them but overcoming them. It is truly surreal to understand someone from a different family, city, state, even continent and feeling like you are neighbors. The world is full of beautiful people. I am very privileged just to know the negligible fraction of the world.



All I am left to say is thank you.

Belinda: Five years ago, I was convinced to talk to my parents about hosting (which was never going to happen) and this past summer I went to Europe for six weeks to visit my sisters. This was an amazing experience, to see my sisters in their "natural habitat" and see where they come from. It was amazing to actually meet their families and stay in their homes, I felt so welcomed and part of their family. The fact that they invited me into their homes meant so much to me, but the part that really meant the most to me was the fact that they treated me like family and worked on their English so we could talk.

After GO Summer Camp, I went home with Marky, and I met her family. That night, we went for a walk and she showed me the skyline of Brno, which was beautiful and we had a really nice conversation. The next morning, Marky had to leave and she left me with her parents who barely knew any English, and I barely knew any Czech, so we mostly spent the time pointing at objects and asking what they were.

At Aniča's, I went around town, went mushrooming, had jam sessions, and watched a movie with the whole family. They taught me how to make colachis and I even have a recipe for them. They taught me a lot of

Czech and about the Czech culture. One night, even their little cousins spent some time teaching me the names of animals in Czech and I, in turn, read them a little book in English.

When I was at Kačí's, I spent time with her sister and nephew and I learned about the main parts of Brno. It was different because I come from a family of three or four, then going to her house which houses her entire family in this three-floor house. There, I tasted a lot of pure Czech food and learned to use keys and I became an expert on figuring out which key went to which doors.

In Marta's house, or when I was with her family, I learned a lot about Czech social norms. On the day I got there, the whole family went to join other families for a few days and just spent time together. I never really believed it, but Czech just find hugging too touchy-touchy personal. So when we got there, I was so shocked to find these lifelong friends shake hands to say "hello." As an American it looked like they were completing a business transaction, not saying "hello."

In every place I went, I learned more Czech vocabulary and Czech culture, so by the time I got to Kačí's and Marta's, I could have a basic conversation-(ish) with even those who didn't know a word of English. I saw so much love and how family time is used at each of their houses and just their ways of life explained why my sisters had this habit; their homes and families reflected how they acted when they were at my house. I learned to communicate with people who didn't even speak my language and got a chip of understanding of how they feel when they come, a language they don't really know, moved into a house that you don't know and just completely surrounded by nothing familiar.

I saw that music brought us together and in jam sessions with Aniča's family, singing with Marta and her sister, and playing for Marta's grandma who didn't know any English. Connections are so much deeper than words, I laughed and ended up loving so many people that I had only heard of before. Time really didn't matter in the long-run because my sisters whom I haven't seen in years, were more mature (in some cases) but they were still my sisters and we talked and laughed as if it was just yesterday we were sitting in one of our rooms in America.



Over this experience, I learned two very important things: words are just words, actions make connections and no matter what, these are my sisters and families for life - no matter what. I am eternally blessed because of the day I was forced to bring the idea of hosting to my parents because now I have a very extended family that I can't imagine my life without; I love them dearly.

Lisa and I believe that the opportunity to immerse herself in the culture and families of her sisters will impact the rest of Belinda's life.

Rarely does a day go by that I do not have contact with one of the girls or a member of their families. What more can I say than to paraphrase Father Larry: Your life, their life and the world will never be the same. Thank you Global Outreach. In this, as in many ways, God has blessed us!

