

Обмін 2008 Saskatoon – Chernivtsi

Written by Janelle Dobrowney, Rhianna Kaminski, John Lozinsky,
Hafon Pshebylo and Jordan Welbourn
Submitted by Laurianne Gabruch, Teacher

Beginning in 1992, the Bilingual Ukrainian Program at E. D. Feehan Catholic High School has been involved with student exchange trips with Saskatoon's sister city of Chernivtsi. The last four exchange trips were made with students from Lyceum No. 2 - a School of Law & Philosophy, Mr. Andriy Sigitov, Principal. Saskatoon students were partnered with Chernivtsi students of similar age and stayed at their exchange partner's homes. This year the group included students from Bethlehem Catholic High school as well. The group of 5 students had the opportunity to travel to Ukraine from March 13 to April 3, 2008.

The preparations for the trip were fairly hectic. There were various fundraisers, such as working bingos, a varenyky night, a magazine fundraiser, and concessions for both E. D. Feehan Catholic High School and Bethlehem Catholic High School dances. As the date came closer, the exchange students began to feel more anxious, and more nervous. With the preparation we had gone through we didn't really know what to expect, although we expected it to be exciting and much different from our life in Canada.

When the day arrived for us to leave Saskatoon, it didn't really hit us that we were leaving to Ukraine. After twelve hours of flying, several hours of wait time, and yet another twelve hours of driving from Kyiv to our destination city of Chernivtsi, we arrived thoroughly exhausted. We went through introductions of our exchange students, went with them to their homes and of course the first thing offered to us was a full course meal. After sampling delicious Ukrainian food, briefly becoming acquainted with our exchange partners - a shower and a bed were most definitely welcomed. We had arrived.

Over the next few days, we went to the lyceum to attend classes with our partners and we also made a lot of new friends and renewed acquaintances with former exchange students we met while they were in Saskatoon. At the lyceum, we attended classes to experience a school day, but of course, most often the class attention was turned on the Canadian guest and question and answer time took over. One interesting class presentation we attended was a geometry class

instructed by 2 teachers in both Ukrainian and English!

At the end of our first full day in Chernivtsi, we went to a discotheque. It was the grand opening, so you can imagine that there were many people. We discovered that techno music is really popular in Ukraine. It was an interesting experience.

In Chernivtsi we met with the city administration as well as the Deputy Head of State. During the visits we were told a bit of the history of the city and region and some of the developmental plans for the city.

One fun weekend was when we stayed at a bed and breakfast type resort in the *Karpaty* (Carpathian Mountains). We managed a 10-kilometer hike, some horseback riding, walking along the Cheremosh and exploring the *Karpaty*. We were truly amazed by the beauty of the area and with the hospitality of our hosts. It is now clear to us why there are so many songs written about how people long for the *Karpaty*.



A day trip from Chernivtsi was to visit the fortresses at Kamyanetsk-Podilsk and Khotyn. The feeling of history led our imaginations to run wild with the events that may have occurred at the fortresses. It was a great day.

We were also able to visit the apartment/museum of songwriter Volodymyr Ivasiuk. To be able to see the table at which he sat and to listen to *Chervona Ruta* in the living room he once occupied, one could not help but sing along and feel the emotion of the song.

Shopping was one of our highlights. Not only did we experience shopping in the many boutiques of Chernivtsi, but we were also able to visit the bazaar. Bartering for what we wanted to purchase was fun!

We said our tearful goodbyes to our host families in Chernivtsi and went with our exchange students to Lviv, by train. Trains were another experience not soon to be forgotten. Each coupe had 4 beds, and we fell asleep with the rocking sound of the train wheels.

In Lviv, we saw actual street cars (trams), not just the trolley buses of Chernivtsi. We stayed at the Anton 3-star Hotel. The suites were really nice and the food was amazing. Another neat feature of the hotel was their Spa. It had a hot tub, VERY cold pool, sauna, infrared sauna and a steam room. We were shocked to see these amenities and very much enjoyed the time we spent there. We also spent our time walking to museums, restaurants, stores, and churches.

An interesting visit was to St. George's Cathedral during a celebration of the Divine Liturgy. In the church, we were packed together like sardines in a can and standing. We were surprised at the fact that so many people were there, and how beautiful the singing of the choir sounded. Need we say more – it was a moment that touched us.

May we just mention that we had McDonald's in Lviv for the first time since



Canada? It was like a taste of home.

After three days in Lviv, we traveled by train to Kyiv. The train to Kyiv was a smoother ride and not as hot as the train to Lviv. In Kyiv, we visited many of the churches along the riverbank of the Dnipro River. We visited Pecherska Lavra, and Sofiskyj Sobor, among other churches. In Pecherska Lavra, the ladies found it old-fashioned that their hair had to be covered and skirts had to be worn. (We had to rent them!). We saw the Holodomor memorial where the previous day President George Bush had laid flowers. In the Museum of Historical Treasures of Ukraine we saw historic artifacts that we had previously only seen pictures of, and it was very intriguing to see what was worn as jewelry. We also saw the most decorated McDonald's. We stayed at a "resort" on the outskirts of Kyiv. There, we met members of the Berkhut, the equivalent of the FBI. They were young men, who were assigned to guard American President George Bush, who visited Kyiv the day before we were there. Kyiv was a great historic city to visit.



Our final night in Ukraine was full of excitement and sadness. We were excited to be heading home to see our friends and family. We were sad our journey of exploration was coming to an end and that we were leaving our new found friends. We sadly bid farewell to our exchange partners and friends, and we left to the airport early in the morning.

Perhaps the most valuable aspects of the Ukraine Exchange 2008 trip were seeing Ukrainian people in their day-to-day lives and the relationships the Canadian Exchange students built with their exchange partners. 3 students from E. D. Feehan Catholic High School and 2 students from Bethlehem

Catholic High School along with a teacher chaperone and one parent, spent almost two weeks in the city of Chernivtsi and 1 week in other parts of Ukraine. Chernivtsi, being a western Ukrainian City, maintains Ukrainian culture, although there was definite Russian influence. For example, a vast majority of the high school-aged students (our exchange partners included) used the Russian language to converse amongst themselves, and even used Russian words as slang. On the streets, the people tended to keep to themselves in a similar manner to Saskatoon. With the exception of the odd beggar, we were not often confronted by people. However, in stores and restaurants if a conversation was begun, the store worker or waiter would ask us where we were from, recognizing our foreign accents. Upon hearing we were from Canada, most reactions were quite positive and we were treated quite well. One of the greatest reliefs was upon arriving and meeting our exchange families, being welcomed with traditional Ukrainian hospitality. It



was a good feeling to know that both Ukrainian and Ukrainian-Canadian culture carry similar, positive traits. Although lifestyles were different, it was nice to come home to a delicious meal and talk about our day, in a similar manner to which Baba invites you over after church on Sundays.

As we traveled to Chernivtsi, Lviv, and Kyiv, the differences between the people were very evident. Chernivtsi seemed, to us, like an introverted version of Saskatoon, with strong international ties, and a lingering slight Russian influence. Lviv seemed to be the most purely Ukrainian City, and because of its proximity (as well as history), had some remnant Polish cultural aspects. Kyiv was the most beautiful city to see, but the people were brisk, and very Russified in mannerism and culture. Although it is both hard to get a full perspective and improper to base an opinion on such a short time spent in a country, our opinions were already slightly biased from information gathered both in Canada and while we were in Ukraine.

As we were on our journey back to Canada, we came to realize how fast the three weeks went by. In those three weeks, we developed our Ukrainian language and vocabulary, but mainly we developed friendships that will last a lifetime. Being exposed to the language helped us pick up and acquire certain words that we never knew existed. Being able to use the language on a daily basis was most advantageous.

Those of us who have relatives in Ukraine had the unique experience of visiting with them and seeing their lifestyle. Just by talking with them, we were able to tell how we are related. They were always generous and could never seem to give enough – money, food, clothing, souvenirs, and other gifts. One could imagine how we had to pack everything into our already full luggage.

The Ukraine Exchange Program is one that not only encourages students to continue with Ukrainian language and history education, but is also a life changing experience. Having a new perspective and seeing how Ukraine lives and how she is a vibrant country definitely draws one to explore her even further and places her even deeper in our hearts.

The participants in this year's exchange were: John Lozinsky - exchange partner, Pavlo Lehchilkin; Hafon Pshebylo - exchange partner, Maxim Nezboresky; Jordan Welbourne - exchange partner, Oksana Konstantynuk; Janelle Dobrowney - exchange partner, Dianna Kratiuk; and Rhianna Kaminiski - Iryna Senyk. Also on the trip were supervising teacher, Laurianne Gabruch, and parent, Roberta Welbourne.

Now, we are anxiously awaiting the arrival of our exchange partners in the late summer or early fall. We can't wait for them to experience how our two countries are so different, yet so much alike.

В словах учнів про Обмін 2008

Всі роки що ми вивчали українську мову, історію та культуру України завершилися тоді коли наш літак приземлився в Києві.

Яка багата наша батьківщина! Її мова звучить мелодійно, її земля – красива.

Я тепер маю свої особисті думки та враження про Україну. Я бачив Україну своїми очима і це краще ніж читати в книжках або почути від когось про неї.

Сподобалися мені наші екскурсії по Україні а також зустрічі з людьми які там проживають.

Побачити свою родину на Україні – це був дуже важливий момент для мене.

В Україні я відчував себе як вдома.

Тринадцять років навчання української мови... мрії про Україну...чекання на поїздку... я тепер знаю, що все це мені пригодиться в майбутньому.

З нетерпінням я чекаю другої поїздки в Україну!

