

letters from cambridge

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July 18, 1990
Toronto, Ontario

Dearest Lady,

How lovely to get your letter, just arrived today! I was too overcome with culture shock and then bronchitis to write sooner, but I thought of you setting off for Salzburg, rattling across the countryside in various buses and cars and clutching two days' worth of sandwiches. I hoped your meeting at the horse's tail worked out all right - I always liked bizarre assignations like that, under the clock at Victoria Station, on the third level of the Eiffel Tower etc. I hope you had a lovely time, but I was annoyed that I couldn't crack the system to get some dollars to you to make your trip even more wonderful. Did Irene tell you I did try at Prague airport but it could not be done. My fault of course. I'm very glad that your friend is coming and the house is full and all will be action and adventure again, just what a lively lady such as yourself needs! I only hope your friends aren't as disgustingly lazy as your last guests. Nice too that you won't have so many children to worry about and spoil the action and adventure, though perhaps you will worry away about Michael Jr at a distance?

A GOOD TIME WAS HAD BY ALL

Well now, about it all. I was very disappointed to leave so soon and also not to be able to go to England, but mostly to leave Cz and Uh Hr and most of all you. We certainly did have fun! What a whirlwind of adventures and excitements and laughs, I shall never forget it! It was so liberating, I feel quite resurrected. The photographs are just being developed now and when I have got them all I'll send you the better ones - as I suspected, my camera

proved to be quite awful, but Paul **took some** nice **ones** at Buchlovice and of **you and I leaping** around the Baroque cemetery and other places. I am still waiting for **the ones** in wild Slovakia. Most of the **ones** I have **already** were **of** headless cathedrals and **blurred** gravestones, rather **uninspiring**.

Anyway, I **hadn't had such a good time in years** and can't **properly** express in a dry little letter my **appreciation** for all the **delights**, indeed the joy - of your **companionship** and **hospitality** - every day **packed with talk** and **laughs** and cultural feasts and music and DRINK and new things of all kinds to **tempt the eye and mind**. There was just so much of everything to **delight** and **interest** one - the **charms** of Cz and Uh Hr and the Moravian **countryside**, beautiful **enough to** bring tears to the eyes-and full of history; **friends made, trips taken** and pleasant glasses raised in memorable circumstances. There were our (**constant**) conversations. There was the extreme interestingness **of being in** that place **at that most interesting** time and **being** a part of it, **in a very small way**. And **seeing** Czechoslovakia, **not yet gone down the drain** like North America, land of the barbarians where all is buying and **greed** and emptiness, quite **restored one's faith in life**. I was **amazed to** feel so completely **at home** there, more than I **ever did** anywhere else in any of my **travels** (**despite** the impossible language and the coffee grounds and dumplings). I **felt** that I could **happily** stay there for a very long time. **Oddly enough**, Paul felt the same, **though** he was **only** there for a couple of days. We **keep talking about when and how** we **might** come back, serious and semi-serious conversations **about buying** or renting a house in Cz (**in addition** of course **to** our house in France and our meeting **at Niagara!**)

TREMBLING ON THE BRINK

Then there was the fascinating irresponsibility of **being away from** Canada and feeling so free and unfettered (when you come **over** here you should come alone and **feel yourself soar!**) Then there was the incentive of **trying** to do something **one hadn't done before** (ie. teaching English), **not that one distinguished oneself**, but it was exciting to try, and interesting to have such a curious assortment of students - the doctors, the aircraft men and Class 3 at SUPS and the stodgy girls at SES. With the Russian teachers **at the end**, I **felt as if** I was **only just** beginning to understand what one **was supposed to be doing** - really, two months was **too short to be** at all **useful, other than for people to realize** that they could, to their surprise, speak and understand English. **The same goes for** learning Czech. **Having finally learnt** to say 'Chci', I felt that I was trembling on the brink of **beginning** to be almost able to say SOMETHING in the near future. Paul asked if I **would** continue my **struggles** with Czech and I thought I **would, when** my Cz book arrives. **Might even take** a little course in the autumn. **At the moment** we are both doing a little **brush-up on** German, to **keep the mind supple** and **remind us of** Europe in this wilderness.

RUSHING ABOUT PRAGUE

On my return, everything was **quite as** awful I as I **had expected**, perhaps **somewhat** worse. The **journey** wasn't bad **though**. Mr. Tichy's plans all **worked out** beautifully in Prague (I am looking for a beautiful book about Canada for him), the (very handsome) pilot **looked after** me and I **was driven** first to the main airport to **get rid of** my luggage and then back downtown to Lufthansa. Lufthansa were **helpful** and nice and said of course I **could** change

my ticket, but England would cost \$500 and I **wouldn't be able to get** a plane back to Toronto until September. I thought about my **poor** suffering children and how cruel and **neglectful** I **had been** to them and that the Lord **had** clearly decided it **was** time **for me to go** back. **After all**, it WAS MY FAULT, it really was. I **should have tried** to change my ticket months ago or in Vienna or Prague with Paul. So my fault and **served me right**.

I then **rushed about** Prague trying **hard** (but unsuccessfully) to spend the **Russian teachers'** money. Remember, you told me it was my duty to do **so**, so I **did** try. Prague was dirtier and **busier** than **ever**, and **in addition to** the Mafia and money-changing mobsters, there were at least one **zillion** American tourists **swarming** everywhere, **trying** to get Real Value for their Tourist Dollar. It was horrible. I suddenly got the most violent migraine **I'd had in years** and had to go and sit in a church with my eyes closed. Then they threw me out and I **staggered along** to meet Irene, who **had** just **sorted out** the paint **factory's** little difficulty with Ostmarks. She took me away to her **sister's** house, which was very quiet and **far away** and I lay down there for a long time with my eyes **tightly closed** until it all stopped beating and jumping and **dazzling** in front of them. I felt that I **was being properly** punished for all my bad behaviour. **Earlier that morning** I went up the six floors to the **broken-down** offices of Education for Democracy, which was in **even** greater chaos than before, **with** nobody **in charge** and too many people **running round in circles** or trying to **make free phone calls** to Toronto when nobody **was looking**. The organizer there **asked after** Bob - 'He **seems to have dropped out of sight**' and asked if I **knew** his address. (**I didn't**). They said they are expecting another 600 more Canadians any day, so if you think UH could **stand** another **set**, **there's plenty available!**

VILE TRAHNO

Anyway, so after too many hours **on** the plane **over** the Atlantic, I returned home. Toronto was all burning concrete. The air was vile. The noise of cars **was enough to** kill you. The house was awful, the furniture **shabby**, the garden a wilderness. No-one **had** planted a flower or watered the lawn. The house was **reasonably** clean, I must admit, **though in** a rather strained **sort of way**. It was too hot. The children were fat and **unappealing**. Barbara **hadn't been able to** find a job this summer and this, **together with having to** look after the house **had** seriously **lowered her morale**. She likes to get a job with lots of responsibility (and money) which **makes her feel** competent and magnificent (which she is). However, in the absence of a job, she **looked as if she had been eating** thick pieces of bread and jam every two hours and ice creams in between and **was about to give up on life**. She **even** had a **major** asthmatic crisis, the first **in** many years. This was quite clearly all my fault, **though** she didn't **reproach** me. **On the other hand**, she **had** learnt to cook and was **even** able to wash dishes, a **significant achievement**. It **may also have increased** her **resolve to** work **hard** at university to **avoid having to** spend her life **washing** dishes. **Not**, as we both know, **that having a degree** protects you **against having to** do housework, if one is foolish enough **to get married** (or anything similar). Patrick was large too, but **actually** less fat as he **had been doing** more exercise and was **in better health**. He too **had mastered** the **complex skill** of washing dishes.

EACH SILVER LINING HAS A BLACK CLOUD

The only **bright spot on** my return was Paul. He was still in shock **himself, having just come** back from Europe and he **too** was looking at it all with

horror and **disbelief**. We clung together in hope of survival. **Amazingly enough** the life **seems to have come** back into our relationship, **just as** before many years ago. **Lots of laughs**, conversation and **good times, though** we are horribly poor and **can't afford** anything. It was **odd** to change so quickly **from feeling** so rich in Cz, to here, where one **seems to spend** horrifying amounts of money on **just keeping going from day to day**. The number of large, **unpaid bills waiting** was **truly horrible**, and I am now looking **glumly** in the newspaper to **see about** A JOB. No alternative, I'm afraid.

There is, alas, also the **housework** and the dishes and **nagging** the children, the most difficult part of **having** children, I think. **You constantly worry about whether** you are nagging them too much and then when you see how **dreadful** their behaviour is, you realize you are not nagging them enough. **What** civilized children you have, they really aren't too bad at all. I **was amused to hear** that Michael Jr is finally showing **interest in** girls; **with his being** such a **slow starter**, I wouldn't think there is much danger of **your becoming** a grandmother **for a while**. **Still**, it is a new thing **to worry about**. **Whether** children need **Information these days**, I don't know. They told Patrick all about Everything in school when he was about six and he **seems to know** all about AIDS and other unpleasant things.

Paul and I have continuing conversations about What We Should Do. We are not and it seems, will never be, Good North Americans. The heat, noise, smell and excessive activity round our house is killing in high summer (**settles down** alright in September) and we **endlessly discuss**, as we do every summer, how to escape - holiday **in the country** should we sell the house/**rent** it and move to an apartment, move immediately or next year to England, Czechoslovakia,

France, Austria, Italy etc. How would we live, how would it **affect** the children etc etc. We are **considering** all possibilities, **though** probably wouldn't do anything irrevocable until next year. **Wherever** we are, whether here or England or France, you must come and stay.

ABOUT LANGUAGE SCHOOL

About your language school, you **must have been** disappointed **to discover** that the government **would** want 55%. However, don't give up. Paul says I must tell you all about Income Tax, which is one of the things we capitalists live with, **like** unemployment. I know 55% **sounds a lot**, but it **actually** can't be **that** bad **or** no-one would **bother** to own **businesses** and of course **they do** and they **prosper**. It's 55% **AFTER** you **have paid** all the **expenses** of the business and, as any good capitalist will tell you, you merely have to **make sure** that your expenses are so high that **there isn't much left over to pay 55% of** (If I may end inelegantly with a preposition). For example, in your case, there would be the **VERY** large capital expenditure of **either buying** or renting a **place in which to conduct** the school (I'm sure that **could be arranged** with its present owner) all the expense of **furnishing** and **decorating** it, the cost of equipment, copiers, books, tapes, tape recorders, etc. secretarial help, the cost of trips to England and America to **search out appropriate** teaching material and **consult with** appropriate authorities. There would be the high cost of **paying** expensive foreign teachers **to come** and teach in summer school etc etc. **I'm sure** your friend from America can tell you more **about how** a Creative Accountant can help a **struggling** business with its Income Tax problems. Don't give up **without going into** it all very **carefully**.

I think I must stop now **to get** the post, as I was so slow in writing and it **takes** so long to wing over to MittelEurope I couldn't write before, as I was too sad and then **got cold** and chest, **along with** the dear children; then it **took** a while **getting to grips with** the Magic Typewriter again – I decided typing **would** be better than handwriting **in case** my writing **was** impossible to understand. Then it's just TOO HOT **to do** anything. Too hot for a white man.

ON A TASTELESS NOTE

To conclude on a truly tasteless note, ie. money, we are investigating the possibilities **of sending** dollars to **build up** your Holiday and Adventure Fund, but **so far** (as you **had** said) it seems that anything we sent they would just **make** you **change into** crowns. **What about** an International Money Order, do you know? Would that be the same? And **what about opening** an account in a **nearby** friendly country - would Mr. Havel **object to** that? I also want to send you a five hundred crown note which came to Canada with me **by mistake** but my researches **on whether** it would **cause trouble** for you are a bit inconclusive **at the moment** - nobody **seems to know** exactly, **though** the Czech Credit Union here says it would not be good - **if it's ok with you, let me know** and I will send it next letter. Wouldn't **want you to go** to prison or **be given** fifty lashes.

Tell Michael that **as soon as it is** cool enough **to live** we will **get to work on taping** his dialogues and also I will see which of the books are available. And other things. At the moment we just **hope to survive** the heat.

January 12, 1991
Toronto, Ontario

Ahoj dearest lady,

IF ONLY THERE WAS NO SADDAM. WAIT...

Happy New Year! **May** everything be better for everyone in 1991, **although** it doesn't seem very probable. Three days to the Big Bang for Saddam Hussein, and **what a stupid waste**, what a megalomaniac -- why **hasn't** the Israeli secret service cut his throat? I thought we **had grown out of** all that ridiculous macho **stuff**, the biggest boy with the biggest bomb, but **not so. Not that** I think that Kuwait is so **terrific**, but Saddam is a bad bad man, and if they don't get him now, he will just **go on and on** and we all know where that leads, **do we not?** You **particularly**.

I am sending you a few articles **on** Eastern Europe from the New York Times that I **have been collecting** for you, **so you can** see what the rest of the world is **thinking** about Czechoslovakia. **As** you will see, **NOBODY ever** says anything bad about Cz, it is **everyone's** favourite country and everyone would like to have Mr Havel **for** President (I'm sure the Iraqis would be a lot happier with a **different** President). **While that's nice to know**, I'm sure it would be **even** nicer if they helped more. **However**, the **appalling** Saddam **has made** everything **so much more** difficult.

OBLIGATORY WEATHER REFERENCES

And how are you, **at this time of year?** Is it very cold, with lots of snow? We begin to have Serious Canadian winter **around** now, November and December are just a little **practice** and **the Big Stuff** comes now and continues until May. In England

winter is November, December and a little bit of January, but **already** in England the spring flowers are **coming out**. Canada doesn't have spring flowers, **but then** it doesn't have any spring. (Canadian joke: **there** are 2 seasons in Canada winter and July). We **have had** several Winter Storms, with lots of snow and temperatures of 20 degr. **below freezing**. Boots and **woolen stockings** or trousers to work and lots of digging out the front path. But I quite like the snow, and don't **mind** the digging.

PICTURE PERFECT PICTURES

Last week we **went cross-country skiing** in a very beautiful area which in the summer is a golf club; **it has** little hills and forest paths and is lovely for skiing. I made a great pot of soup before we went out and when we came back very tired and with red noses, we had soup and red wine and **collapsed**. I thought of **you all skiing** on that **slope that you took me to see** but I never **succeeded in seeing** because **it was too foggy**. **Do** send me some pictures **some time**, if you **ever take** any. **Perhaps** you could tell me what sort of film your camera takes and I could send you some colour film, you could **take** some pictures and send the film to me undeveloped and I could **have it developed** here. It probably wouldn't **take as long as** in Cz (Michael told me **you have to** send the film away somewhere for X weeks) and would be **much less** expensive here. **What a** good idea, let's do it . **Do you suppose the Customs** steals film? **Has** the first parcel arrived yet? **Yours has** not yet appeared. Did you get my letter? I will send another part of the Christmas parcel this week and will let you know what is in it as I **post** it.

LITHUANIA AT CROSSROADS

How are **things** going in Cz? How is the economy and the money and prices? **Apart from** frivolous parcels, are there things which **are very difficult to buy**? If you have problems with anything important (not food because it wouldn't travel) please let me know and I would **be very pleased to send** you something from here - anything unobtainable in the shops? From the newspapers it seems **as if** everything is very difficult, but **not half as bad as** in Russia, which is looking very very **depressing** at the moment. Are the Cz people still **keeping the faith**, or **have** they started **getting angry** (the New York Times thinks they are **fairly accepting**, as you will see in the article)?

Two days **later** (Jan 14th) Jesus, it's very hard to be optimistic, as Mr Perez de Cuellar said (the **poor** man always looks **as if** he has a **mouthful of** shit, don't you think?) News from Lithuania just terrible, absolutely awful. Looks like the end for Russian reform. Or do you think that it was just the local army men? They look so terrible, **frightful** heavy faces, **just like** Breznev. **Looks as if** Gorbachev **has** completely **lost control of things**. **Hopeless**, stupid, **thinking you can go on keeping** an empire **like that**. All the **sensible** countries **got out of** empires **years and years ago**. **Hopeless** and stupid also, **thinking** you can **keep on** with Communism. **Dead as a dodo**, and a **good thing too**. The Lithuanians **must be sick at heart**. And the **timing** of this, it reminds me so **of** the Hungarian uprising, which **occurred** at the same time **as Suez**. **Once again**, **everyone** is very **busy with** the Middle East. How Saddam can so **calmly consider** all that killing and destruction and **turning** his country and the whole area into so much ash, I can't imagine. Only a man could do it, women couldn't be so stupid.

PLANNING & REPLANNING

Anyway, enough of **this** frightful world news. How are you, dear friend? You sounded **so** lonely in your last letter, **with hardly** a civilized soul **to talk to**. (The American girl **sounds rather crazy** and the mormons **not much better**. **Have** they made many converts, do you know?) I think of you very often and **wonder** how you are **managing** and what you are doing. I would **so love** to see you again soon, and **have been thinking** how we **might** manage this. Our plans to return to England are the same, but we do not have a **fixed date in mind**, we **were just going to** wait until Patrick **had** finished at his school, which will **like yours** be at the end of June. But we **don't have to** go immediately **then**. I **assume** you would come **over** for your US trip at the beginning of July? Have you **got it fixed** yet? Could you **perhaps** come and **stay with** us first, **before we leave** Canada, and then **go on** to your friend in the US? If you **are coming** later e.g. end July or August, you could perhaps stay with us in England, but that is a bit more **difficult to consider**, **as** we don't know yet where we will be (sleeping in cardboard boxes **outside** Kings Cross station perhaps...). However, it wouldn't be impossible. **Just another** adventure, and I know you are a girl who likes adventure!

Anyway, write and tell me **what you think**, and **what your plans are**. You don't have a ticket yet, I hope? Try to **keep things as flexible as possible for a bit longer**. (That is maybe a rather difficult phrase - **what I mean is, if possible**, don't make any final **cast-iron plans just yet**). I **don't know that** I could **possibly** wait until next year **to see** you and if we can't **work something out for you to come over** this summer, we would perhaps come over to Cz **later in the summer** or in the autumn, I don't know. But **do** come, we will show you all the **sights**.

ENGLAND U.S.'ED

We **have had** a friend **staying with** us who **has** recently come back from England. **Like** us, he is English but **has** lived in Canada a long time and often **thinks of going** back to England. He said that England **had** very much changed and that the people, who were always so **civil** and **kindly** and **reasonable**, **have become rude** and **violent** and **uncivilized**, the streets are **filthy** and full of **garbage** and that England **is becoming** completely Americanized. I felt quite **frightened** and **wondered** whether we will go back and it will be awful and we will feel as **alienated** as we do in Canada. **What then?** UH, **perhaps?** Maybe we will **think of Canada as peaceful** and calm and wonderful.

Looking again at your last letter, there was a lot of interesting news. Perhaps I should write to Ed for Democracy and tell them that not everybody **was cheated** and **badly used** while they were in Czechoslovakia, and that some people **hold on to** the most wonderful memories of their **stay**. I **have been playing** the Hradiste music that you and the chimney men gave me, **how lovely to** hear it. And then, **what is this about** Michael Junior **looking after** children in the US? **Whatever makes him think** he could look after children, **for God's sake?** And American children are awful, terrible, **monsters**. He **must be mad**. Is he really going to do this? **If so**, when? He **does seem to have moved** very quickly from single innocence to **heavy romance**. He isn't really thinking of marriage, **surely** -- that's just **you being mischievous**, isn't it? And how awful **for you to have to** teach Elisa at your private school! How is the school **coming along?** Are you almost dead with **boredom** and **fatigue?** Are you **making** lots of money? I **was glad to hear** you have a **copier**, but it **doesn't seem much good** if it is **too expensive to use**. Can I copy some texts for you?

SILLY TRADITIONS, E.G. CHRISTMAS

Oh, yes, I remember what I wanted to ask you, **though** perhaps it is **out of date** now. **About** Christmas, how is it in Cz and what did you do? Did everyone go to church, **just because** it was now possible? We always go to a **performance** of Handel's 'Messiah', which is a great English tradition, but **mostly** here Christmas is an orgy of spending money and eating and drinking. We didn't go to church, **though some years** we go to a carol (singing) service. Usually we have a huge Christmas dinner with turkey and Christmas pudding, **just like** in Dickens, and invite **about** twenty people, but this year I **was tired of doing** all the work. Barbara was away in England, Deirdre (Paul's **former** wife who, **interestingly enough**, always comes to our Christmas dinner) was also in England and we didn't want to invite the Pole downstairs, who is **such a bitch** and never speaks to anyone. So we **got ourselves invited to a friend's house instead**, and it was very nice.

DREAD AND PERKS AT WORK

I still **haven't** told you about my job. I am working in a Community Health Centre as a Health Promoter. It is a very innovative and revolutionary idea **which I am too tired to describe at length tonight**, but **will** later. It is a new centre, so **at the moment** we don't have a doctor or patients or anything and **all I do is go and see** people and **make plans**. I **am also supposed to** learn about three different computer programs, which fills me full of **dread**. **Up to now**, I **have only** succeeded **in turning** the machine on. I am also attending some university lectures **to make sure that** I know as much about the **subject as I think I do**. **At first** it was quite horrible, **working full-time** again (I **have been** a **freelance** writer **since** 1982), and **having to** sit there all day, but now I am quite

enjoying it, **as** my boss is very **flexible** and **lets me work at peculiar times**, **as long as** I **have** done the necessary work and it is wonderful, which of course **it always is**. In Canada **you** also get **the most** wonderful 'perks' when you work, i.e., little advantages like **dental care paid for you** and **all sorts of expenses** and conferences and trips, and it is so wonderful to get a **paycheque every two weeks**. It's not an **enormous amount**, but **compared to** before (\$0.00) it is paradise.

Too Poor To Worry

As you **may have heard**, we are **having** a recession and everyone is **worrying** terribly **about having to** sell the Mercedes, everyone, **that is, except** Paul and myself, who are **much too poor to have such worries**. Paul's business **has dried up completely**, so he **is busy trying to turn himself into a computer wizard**, while also **being** the most wonderful househusband, **washing** the dishes and cleaning up and cooking while I am out **earning** the money. We are very friendly and happy at the moment and talk often about you. It was a clever idea that you gave me the blue plates **for a goodbye present**, because I see them every day and **am reminded of** you. (And when the Russian tanks went into Vilnius, I thought of the school in your village, where they shot the plaster **off** the wall.) **Next time I come**, I will bring my bicycle and will cycle **over** to your house to see you....

Must stop now. All best wishes and love, **keep smiling**,

Susan

Love from Paul too.

May 22 1991
Toronto, Ontario

Ahoj,

THE DISTINGUISHED MRS SKVRDLETOVA

You will **find** it **hard to believe**, I am sure, that you are always in my thoughts and **hardly** an hour or so goes by **without my having** vivid recollections of **my time in** Uh. Hradiste. **Indeed**, it was **just** this time of year, **with** all the little birds singing and the sun shining so sweetly but **not yet** too hot, when one begins to feel **there may** perhaps (**after all**) **be** some possibilities **left in life** and perhaps it is not yet **all over**. **How** I long to **jump onto a plane** again and **whizz off to** Eastern Europe.

As you said, you **surely** must **find** it very strange that all these bizarre foreigners **become** so fascinated **with** your poor beleaguered country - the reason why I am still so **haunted** by my trip there **was because** for me everything was so **intensely** interesting, **in all respects** - socially, culturally, politically, historically, the lovely **countryside** (the towns and architecture etc., the friendliness and **warmth** of everybody and particularly my wonderful **native guide** and friend, the **distinguished** Dr Skvrdletova, who can **speak perfect English** and Czech simultaneously **at** 3,000 km a minute, **while also smoking** a cigarette and drinking **muddy** Czech coffee. Then of course **there** was the wonderful freedom. NO housework, NO children, no responsibilities (my teaching responsibilities were really very small); **altogether**, it was **like being** young and free again, everything was **delightful**, all the Time - **which**, I am sure you will agree, **is not the way** life usually is.

SLIPPING AWAY TO AMERICA

Anyway, you know all this, I've said it a hundred times. **About** your American trip, I **have** not yet **given up** hope that we **may** see you here. **Is there any possibility** at all, do you think, or is it quite **hopeless**? How is your **friend's** health and her husband's **temper**? If **there is** an improvement in **either** and there is a little possibility, let me know immediately - if he is very 'careful' **about** money, perhaps we could pay half the **fare**? Would that **make** it more possible? Our main problem is time, as we plan to leave here early in July -- maybe second week **or so**. If you could **abandon** your responsibilities and come in June, that would be **splendid**, but if your **sense of duty** would not allow that, you could come **the minute** school **finished** (or maybe **slip away** during the last week of **term**, when nothing serious **ever** happens?) you could come to us for two weeks and then go on to your friend. Maybe you **have entirely** given up the idea and so I should just **shut up** and not **get** you all **disturbed about** it again. Just **give it another little quick think**, perhaps, and let me know soon. (You have to **move fast on getting** a visa as it **takes** several weeks) If **no good**, then England, **later on**. I appreciate that you can **hardly** slip away from Ipswich all the time and leave your poor **dopey** unilingual headmaster opening and closing his mouth **with nothing coming** out of it, but I'm sure we will be able to **get** a bit of radost **going somehow**! And perhaps when your week in Ipswich **is** finished you can send him home and you **stay on** with us - **either** that or you come **early, though** that **might not do**, because the poor man will never **find his way around** in England without you.

AH, KIDS

Enough of trips, **what of** news? You **seem to think** that if Michael Jnr has **pimples**, he has no **sex life**. I hope you are right. **Anyway, even if** he starts having a sex life that doesn't mean you have to **become** a grandmother, you know dear. **There** are ways... Michael Snr should **have a word** with him. Also, you should tell him if he is going to **be so rude about** British English, he **may not** get an invitation to visit us. How is he progressing with his exercises in American? Does he sound terrible? Is it **all** 'garbage'? You **might** also tell him that if he wants to become truly American, he should '**get out there**' and **get a job in the vacation, like** all good American teenagers, **most of whom** use their education frying hamburgers at MacDonald's. What did Elisa **think of** her trip **across** Europe? It sounded rather **exciting, though extremely** expensive.

We **have had** some good and bad things **relating to** the children. **First**, Patrick, who **has been running** and training with Paul and trying **hard to get his fat off has actually** begun to **succeed**. He **used to** have great rolls of pink rubber **going** all around him like tyres (are you **familiar with** Michelin Man, in the French tyre advertisement?) **These** have **miraculously** begun to melt away or **turn into** muscle and he is **tremendously** pleased. He is also **much less** dead and static and television-watching, seems **much better in every way**, more **helpful, brighter** and looks so much better. **By the time** you meet him, he **may look reasonably** human.

Barbara has unfortunately not **made progress** but **rather slipped back**. She went in November to England first to her mother's **relatives** in Bristol, **had difficulty finding** a job and **a place to live**, then **moved** to London and couldn't do that **either, got** sad

and lonely, went back to Bristol, cried and cried and phoned **to say** she **absolutely had to** come back to her lovely family, because she is so sad, **even though** her loving family are **themselves** going to England **in** only two months and she will of course come back with us. **Silly** girl. Very expensive. After all the **arguments** and about six **one-hour** phone calls between here and England, we had to **give way** and **here she is again**. We said she **could** come back **under certain conditions** - got a job or **did voluntary work**, **did** a computer course, started attacking her rolls of pink rubber, which are **considerably** larger than Patrick's, and **various** other things. She **agreed to** everything, of course. **Still**, it **does** seem a problem **getting** them out of the nest. This was Barbara's third **attempt** and she **keeps coming back** (is now 22). When are they going to start **looking after** us?

GETTING THE HOUSE IN SHAPE

Paul and I are **on reasonably friendly terms** and are working terribly **hard** on the house, which was a **crumbling** ruin (**like** some of those **mansions** in Slovakia that I wanted to buy, **though** perhaps **not quite so bad**). We want to **get it 'in shape'** as the Americans say **so that** when we go we can **either rent** it (Brit. English 'let' it) to **high-paying tenants** or when we **get ourselves established** over in England, can sell it to an **even** higher-paying purchaser. We are **fixing** window-sills, **digging out** drains, painting everything, **waterproofing** the basement etc etc. Paul hates and loathes **doing** renovation (**which is why** these things **were not done** five or ten years ago, but we just sat and **watched the house fall to pieces** around us). **Anyway**, he has an illegal immigrant Polish man **working** with him, who **is eager to** earn **hard currency before being deported** back to Poland and so works like a beaver, very very hard and Paul

gets very encouraged and the house begins to look like a palace. **Also** we are learning some Polish.

Did I tell you in the last letter that Albert, Paul's brother who lives downstairs in our basement and has terrible **fight**s with his Polish lady **actually** married her (**at** the wedding she **wore** a black velvet dress that **hardly** covered her **arse**)? I must say she is behaving **much** better since she **became** a **married lady**. When we **go**, they plan **to** move upstairs from the basement to the ground floor, which is a stupid idea **really** because they can never **afford** the rent for the basement and **are** usually three weeks **late with** it and the upstairs is **quite a bit more** money. However, the Polish lady is **tired of living** like a troglodyte (I'm sure you know that word) and is **determined to** come upstairs and look out of the windows. (I should say, in fact our basement is very nice as, **although** part of it is **below ground**, it has a large glass roof section, **so that** the light comes in and it's **not at all** like a cellar or a dungeon, but **rather like** a solarium)

So it's work work work at the moment. Fortunately, **since** my job **finished** I can help too - **mainly by cooking huge** meals for the workers (lots of sausage and meat for the Pole, **who I am sure** is disgusted **by** all the salads and vegetables **we seem to live on**), **also** I paint and do **various** things that don't need technical **skills** (like **running** up and downstairs **fetching things**, holding things that **are being hammered** or sawn, **tidying up** and putting all the pieces of wood and empty paint tins and other rubbish into bags and carrying it away. You know, dear, all the **stuff** that ladies have to do ...)

QUEBECKERS & SLOVAKIANS

What else? I **have** sent a few little parcels to my favorite town in Eastern Europe, so **do** let me know if

they arrive or if the customs have stolen them - I **don't think** customs would **enjoy these** very much, perhaps. If that **is a success**, tell me **so** I can do more (**Even though** I am VERY slow.)

And what news of the great world? Poor Mr Gandhi is now **in pieces** and Saddam is still in only one. The Quebeckers **are hoping to break away from** Canada (they decided **by referendum NOT TO in the early 1980s** but then **got very fed up (tired of/sickened by)** our present government who **is busy selling** us all to the Americans. They want to preserve their culture and **good luck to them. However, like the Slovaks** they are quite fascist and do not **treat** Indians, 'Anglos' and recent immigrants at all well and these people are not very **happy at the thought of being cut off** from Canadian laws and justice and services and **being** subjected only to Quebec. I **think it quite likely** that **the whole of** Canada will **come apart** and **neither I nor** anybody else has any idea what will happen. **Meanwhile**, the Slovaks **do seem determined**. I am sure that is the main factor **preventing** Cz **getting** more Western aid. When is your referendum? I **noted too** that the Slovaks are **quietly** producing arms again. Mr Havel **must be** very **sick of** them. The scandal you described in the Federal Assembly was rather depressing - it is nice to have a revolution in which **no-one's head is cut off** but very **sickening to have the bastards still sitting** there and still **in power**.

One or two **slightly** better **points** in the news - the terrible Marxist torturer in Ethiopia **has gone**, so perhaps the people **will be able to eat now and again. Also** Gorby **seems to be coming back to his senses** and **apparently** the West are going to **take a much more active part in planning** and financing the Soviet market economy. Seems the only possibility as they certainly can't do it **themselves**.

READY TO VOLUNTEER

You said the government has no money **to pay** the teachers. That **sounds** rather unpleasant for you - I hope your private pupils will **continue to pay**. You will have to grow **even** more vegetables, I think and maybe **even keep** a pig! **Seriously**, what will happen? **It seems likely that they will be unable to** continue Ed for Democracy if **there is** no money. If I come again, I would **be happy to work for no money**, if I could just **have somewhere to stay**, some **home-grown** vegetables and some DRINK (**since everyone makes** it, that would not be **a question of** hard currency.) **Actually**, that was a joke, I would be prepared to work **providing** only that I **had** somewhere to live (But the drink would be very nice)

IRENE

I **have heard from** Irene who is in Milwaukee and very **uncertain of** her future. She thinks her factory in UH **is likely to go bust** (bankrupt) and her boss in the US **wants her to work** for him in Prague but she thinks he seems **rather** a **shyster** (ie. **crook**, unreliable, devious) and doesn't know what to do, also doesn't want to move to Prague (big city, crime, **no peace** etc and her boy doesn't like it). **Personally** I think **it might not be too bad an idea** for her, as her **working conditions** (**up the hill** in Uh Hrad) are **fairly awful** and she has no time or opportunity for any **social life** at all - she really should find a nice man, I think, **though** they **are** of course often **more trouble** than pleasure. But Prague would give her a wider world. We are trying to **arrange for her to visit** us here but **it may not be possible as** she doesn't have the right papers and visa and **has very little time left**, **also** the **fare** is quite expensive and the journey about 17 hours, **even** worse than **getting** back to Cz.

BUH-BYE

Well dear I must stop now and go and **stop Barbara watching** television. She **can't think of what to do** with herself, doesn't read and is just **waiting to be saved** and **told how to live**. She is very nice and a good girl but **what are we to do** with her? More later.

Don't forget to **have another little think** about a trip here, but QUICK QUICK and let me know **so** I can stop **holding my breath**.

I really ought to send a nice postcard to your school if I can find the address.