



## continuous conversion

### **My mother-in-law's legacies**

**by Sara Tusek**

For 65 years my mother-in-law Vera Tuskova lived with her family in a one-bedroom flat in Zizkov, a neighborhood in Prague. Her father had owned a little shoe business and had given her a childhood of economic security and educational advantages abroad in the 1930's, when Czechoslovakia was a burgeoning democracy.

law, Mr. Bursik, helped to build a new church called Betlemska Kaple (Bethlehem Chapel) in Zizkov (while he served as Deputy Mayor of Zizkov) for the local Evangelical congregation.

Betlemska Kaple is an outstanding example of Secessionist architecture. It has housed a functioning church through the regime changes of nearly a century, and has received a substantial restoration in 2006. This church, which has provided a home for Christians and a ministry to the changing neighborhood, is part of the Christian legacy of Vera Tuskova and her family.

### **Family legacy**

Vera spent her entire adult life living in the flat in Zizkov. Here her sons grew up, as her husband Jaroslav worked as an attorney in downtown Prague. He was a graduate of Charles University Law School, a distinctly prestigious university founded in 1348 by Charles IV during Prague's Golden Age. Although Jaroslav's career was distorted, as was every part of life, by communism's inequalities and everyday illegalities, he nevertheless continued to serve justice and speak against the regime which he considered criminal.

Vera's sons benefited from the truthfulness and courage modeled to them by their parents, aunts, uncles and grandparents. Their family was not exempt from the depredations of communism. In fact, their previous wealth and social standing put them in the category of the bourgeoisie, the class most despised by the largely uneducated and uncultured people running the communist government.

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*Vera Tuskova in her last years of earthly life*

Photo courtesy Dr. Z. A. Tusek

After the Nazi occupation of 1938–1945, peace and freedom returned to Czechoslovakia, but three years later the communist takeover once again entrapped the lives of Czech citizens in a totalitarian regime. Vera's father's property, so recently restored, was nationalized.

Vera, her husband Jaroslav, and her two sons, Jarda and Zdenek, were "allowed" to live in a small apartment her father had bought for her in a solid First Republic (the period between WWI and WW II) apartment house in Zizkov.

### **Christian legacy**

Vera's father, Antonin Vendr, was a member of the Evangelical Church of the Brethren, a Protestant church with a heritage dating back to Jan Hus, a priest who was burned as a heretic in 1415. During the era of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, Mr. Vendr's father-in-

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Both sons knew that their future in Czechoslovakia would be decreed for them by the communist regime. Communism was not based on individual freedom and did not allow for the full development of a person's talents, gifts and goals. Service to the state meant serving in whatever capacity the state decreed. This kind of tyranny was unacceptable to Vera's sons, raised in a church that emphasizes truth ("the truth will prevail" is a bedrock Hussite belief) and a family that sacrificed comfort each day in order to live with integrity in a criminal system. Both left the country for the U.S.A.

### Personal legacy

Vera was a Christian. She was not a typical American-style Christian, with a belief that outward appearance is the best indication of the beliefs of the heart. Her faith was private; she followed Jesus' injunction to his disciples to pray in the closet, not making a public spectacle of their faith like the scribes and Pharisees.

Vera was charitable, both in material giving and in forgiveness. Her family suffered under two murderous political regimes; within her extended family, the deception and disloyalty upon which communism was built caused personal suffering and threatened the strength and unity of the family as a whole, weakening the bonds between its members.

These kinds of personal and familial suffering were common, and almost inevitable, under both Nazism and communism. When the

government maintains authority by pitting citizen against citizen (paying people to inform against their own families and friends), many will take the route of least resistance. They will exchange their personal morals and decency for a small and fleeting political or material advantage. This is how such governments survive; their understanding of the weaknesses and jealousies of humans is used to create discord, mistrust and, in the end, hatred between people (even family members) who should, by any definition of kindness, love each other.

### Legacies endure

Vera died in October 7, 2003, but her legacies live on in her sons, their wives, and their four children (David, Martina, Noah, and Melissa). The story of one family can be seen as the story of a country in miniature. The legacies of living in truth, forgiveness and justice that Vera's life embodied can be honored by her fellow Czechs as they continue to build, in former President Vaclav Havel's words, a "civil society." Such a society respects law, freedom, and a democratic way of life, while creating avenues for trust between various segments of society.

Yet as the country casts off the stifling snakeskin of communism and joins the rest of Europe (and the world) as a free-market economy operation in a democratic political system, the legacy of people like Vera Tuskova will certainly be honored at least within the family. Her example of willingness to love, in spite of disappointments and duplicity, shines like a beacon into a dark room of sadness, despair and anger. This is her true legacy.

*"continuous conversion" refers to the on-going sanctification of a Christian. When you accept Christ, you immediately gain all the benefits of a new life in Him, including salvation, forgiveness and the counsel of the Holy Spirit.*

*What you don't receive is immediate freedom from past sinful habits and thoughts, or freedom from the possibility of falling into temptation. Becoming a new creation in Christ is a process of growth and development. Your will has to be actively engaged in resisting patterns of sin; your mind has to be brought into alignment with the mind of Christ; your heart has to be softened so that you can forgive people who offend and harm you, as Christ forgave them.*

*This monthly publication will offer anecdotes, insights resulting from experience, and practical advice on becoming Christ-like. I am no expert, but I can offer what I've learned and observed since I became a serious "Christ-follower" in 1975. Sara Tusek, editor*

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