

SPUSA Writing Contest 2014

22. ročník Literární soutěže SPUSA

The 22nd annual SPUSA Writing Contest

MY HERO

Awards Ceremony

At the Residence of the U.S.Ambassador

June 13th, 2014

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On behalf of SPUSA, We would like to thank all the contestants and sponsors for making our 22nd Annual Writing Contest another success.

We would like to express our thanks to the judges, both the Education Center staff and the outside members of the SPUSA family. Their work guarantees the quality of this event.

Further, we would like to express our gratitude and thanks to the Embassy of the United States for its dedicated support and coordination of this event, which makes this all happen.

Thank you all so much,

Štěpánka Maňhalová
Head Director
&
SPUSA Education Center

2nd round judges:

Jiří Stránský, former President of the Czech PEN Club

Mgr. Marek Vít, English Teacher

Mgr. Barbora Klárová, Teacher and Singer

PhDr. Eva Škarková, Czech Academy of Science

PhDr. Karel Vala, English Teacher, Telč

Jan Vodňanský, Czech Writer

PhDr. Miroslav Jindra, Translator

Senior Category

1st. Place

Iveta Jakubčiková

Šakvice

I've always believed in God, although my faith has been put to the test several times. It's said that (s)he who's in Lord's good graces is often pursued by hardships, but I never quite saw eye to eye with whoever may have come up with that. "Why the hell would He want to punish those who look up to Him?" I would reason. I simply couldn't put my finger on certain things about faith. Yet, I tried to bear my cross with as much meekness as I could possibly muster.

To be honest, whenever push came to shove in my life, it was never God's abode I resorted to in the first place. My sacred haven has always been the humble living-room of my granny. In my eyes, she's always been the true embodiment of what's good in this rotten world, and whenever I found myself at my wits' end, I would come to her and let her make everything feel right again.

One day, when I was sitting on granny's sofa, sipping cocoa, she turned to me and said: "I wish you would go to church again." The thing is that although I did try to do as a good Christian does, innerly I just couldn't come to terms with God's erratic ways, and at one point, when I felt particularly low, I decided I wouldn't go to church until all that was happening to me started to add up. When granny implored me to go, I first began objecting, but in the end I gave up and promised her to go.

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And I did.

When I opened the church door, a strange sensation engulfed me. I hadn't been to church for weeks, maybe months, and I suddenly felt as if I no longer belonged there. However, I did give my word, and I was going to go through with it, so I timidly stepped over the doorsill and shut the door behind me. Then I looked around. The church was half-empty, but people were still trickling in, so I approached the nearest pew and sat down. A couple of minutes later, the mass began.

I could still, if a bit hazily, remember all the chants and prayers, so I didn't look out of place, but my mind was somewhat stray. Suddenly, however, something unusual attracted my attention. I noticed a small dot hovering and fluttering before my eyes, and when it landed on the pew in front of me, I found out it was a ladybird. I stopped paying attention to the sermon altogether and began to examine the tiny insect. It was casually crawling upon the pew, apparently without noticing me, so I blew on it, to make my presence known. When the torrent of air reached the minuscule creature, it retracted all of its legs and assumed a dead bug position. I stopped blowing, but kept my eyes fixed on the bug. For a while it didn't move, but when it decided the coast was clear, it slowly spread its legs and then took wing.

And that's when it hit me.

There always comes a point in our lives when we get tested. There's no avoiding it. The most important thing, however, is to believe that we will emerge all the better for it. The Lord may cast us in the middle of a storm, but He does so in order for us to learn a lesson and become stronger.

My granny knows that. She's lived most of her life in deprivation and has had to tackle many a problem herself, some of which I

can hardly imagine. There was no way she could have foreseen my epiphany, but she knew why she was asking me to go to church despite myself. She is the most important person in my life and, without a doubt, the greatest hero I've ever had.

2nd place

Michal Voráček

Klatovy

When my English teacher told me the topic of the competition, I immediately knew who I would write about. My hero and the biggest inspiration of my life is my friend Preston who I really admire for everything he went through during the last year.

Preston lives in Virginia Beach, USA and he studies Francophone Studies at university in Williamsburg. We first met in spring 2012 on a website which is intended for meeting people from all places in the world. I joined that site in 2011 especially to improve my English. I bumped into Preston there and we started to chat. Initially we just mailed on that site but later we started talking on Skype. I must say his patience was admirable – I couldn't express myself very well and my pronunciation was terrible! However, my progress was more and more noticeable later. We became really good friends. But then one of the blackest days came...

It was a normal winter day in the middle of January. When I got home, I did my homework and then I decided to watch a movie. While watching the movie, Preston got online on Skype and called me. We were normally talking as usual but all the time I

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saw something in his face what I hadn't seen ever before. I asked him if he was okay. "Michal, I gotta tell you something", he said. I got scared. "Today I was at the doctor and...", he gulped "I have a cancer".

I can't describe how I was feeling that moment. I wished it was a joke. Just a bad joke. I wished it so much. But it wasn't. I didn't know what to say. I was so shocked that a cat got my tongue. He told me the doctor had said him the chance to survive was about 25%. I got scared even more. 'So there is a 75% possibility he will pass away!?' I told to myself.

Two weeks later he began with his treatment. That time we talked almost every day, I had promised him I would be there for him anytime. In spite of the fear, which was fretting me from the inside, I tried to act as much positively as I could because he needed a lot of support. He stayed cheerful and positive throughout, although the chemotherapy and other treatments must have been rough.

Weeks went by and November came. Preston had already been at home from the hospital. On the 23rd of November, when he called me again, he sparkled with happiness. "Mike, I'm healthy, that bitch is gone!" If the day in January was one of the blackest days, that day has been definitely one of the happiest days in my life. So happy was I that I almost started crying. I admire him so much for how brave and strong he is. As a pessimist, I don't think I would have enough strength and energy to beat cancer. That's why Preston is my hero.

3th place

Daniela Schmitzová
Teplice

„My hero?“ I call in the vast expanse of my mind. No one replies.

If not in my mind, where else could a hero be hiding? A lot of people have hero from television, from poster or from magazines – am I the only one that refuses to search there?

I may as well be, I muse as I turn away with the decision to delve into books in the hope of finding my very own hero there. Turning the pages of all the books I’ve read, I call again, “My hero?”

And my calling is yet again left unanswered.

Wondering whether there is a hero I can call my own, I turn to my memories. Those of my parents ask for attention first and I oblige, observing how my mother and father circle each other in my memories. Their hazy figures seem too strange to emerge as heroes, but I still call, “My hero?”

Neither of them notices me.

Friends, then, I decide. I will surely find my hero among my friends. They have helped me immeasurably and countless times and I’m determined to see all of them once again, hoping one of them might answer my calls.

None does, and my memories leave me feeling uneasy.

“Is it necessary to even have a hero?“ I ask myself, looking at my reflection in a mirror. I don’t know where else to look, having forsaken magazines and television.

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With a sigh, I decide to call out one last time, defeated, “My hero?”

“Yes?” a familiar voice answers. Surprised, I look in the direction from which it came – and I find myself looking in my own eyes, my reflection smiling at me from behind the mirror. “Is there something you need?”

“You... *I* am my hero?” I ask, bewildered, but this time, my reflection only copies what I do instead of moving on its own.

And slowly, I begin to understand. A lot of heroes roam this universe – they may be heroes to many or heroes to few, but the most important part is that they had to start small. They even may have started the same way I did, looking through books, memories, or even magazines and television.

Finding nothing, they must have turned to the mirror, doubting the very existence of heroes. Just like me.

However, they recognized a hero as they questioned their reflection with their gaze. Only one person has lived through all the perils with them, only one in the whole universe has never, not even for a split second, left them in the dark, only that one person has the right to call themselves their hero.

They and they alone.

We each are our own heroes, yet few ever get to realise that. Few can look in the mirror and smile, knowing their hero will never abandon them.

I am proud to call myself my own hero.

Intermediate Category

1st place

Sara Zeithammerová

Dolní Břežany

THE CROWD

I was staring; my eyes hurt, at the large red rectangle plastered to the wall, with such a thick layer of glue; the surface of the page was still wet and crinkled. Shoulders were pressing into mine, the excited yet terrified breaths of many mouths washed over my face, as we elbowed forward to take a look at the uncompromising list of those who had been sentenced to die tonight. Black names, on a red page. No one could even bring themselves to think that these names meant lives; people, who would no longer be among us tomorrow.

I ripped through the crowd. If I found his name there...no, I must not think about that, I refuse to! He simply *cannot* be there, not *him*. And if *he* was there, *I* should be there, a few names below him. It had been his idea, after all, but I had agreed to be by his side, no matter what he decided. It was a risky business, oh God, I knew that! But he was so determined, he was so sure about everything that it seemed foolish to refuse, to tell him that it was wrong, suicidal. There were times when he was afraid though he never showed it in front of me. Fear came to visit him at night,

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when he was sure I was asleep and couldn't hear him. He was exhausted, yet I could hear him crying softly, then I heard him strike a match and light himself a cigarette. That calmed him down somehow. In the morning, despite his distress, he was back in the basement with me, typing up the leaflets, printing them, his fingers blackened with ink, his brow creased with impatience. When would we get the leaflets out into the streets, stuff them at night into the postboxes? When would the people of the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia know what we were up to? Some nights, he didn't return at all, because he was busy distributing the treacherous papers and slept outside, because he was afraid that someone would follow him home. He was always afraid, I saw that every day but he never gave up, for reasons that I can't understand. I knew why I didn't; I didn't give up because of him. I wanted him to know that I wasn't a coward, so unlike him, yet I was, because I let them take him.

"It wasn't me," I said, dabbing my wet eyes with a handkerchief, pointing at him. "I did nothing! I had no idea..." And I burst into tears and they got nothing out of me, for they had gotten what they came for. He threw me one sympathetic yet scorching look before they stuffed him, handcuffed, never to be seen again, into the black car.

I pushed the people away and my eyes ran up and down the list, reading every name individually, he could be anywhere, it was like searching through a crowd.

He was there.

2nd place

Lucie Penkalová

Třinec-Lybžice

Sweet life

The bloody sun was rising and shone mercilessly on a neverending sugar cane field. It hadn't rained for a long time. Just the tears and the sweat of slaves irrigated the dry soil. In the crowd of tall ragged black slaves cutting off the plants was a small black boy with curly hair. Suddenly he screamed painfully. He couldn't slash one scape with the heavy machete so the white man whipped him and then he snarled:

"Work, stinking black dog!"

The boy lifted the machete and tried it again. A hot tear sparkled on his cheek. When he was six, his mother died and he was captured. His home, Africa, was far away and he became a part of horrible reality - every day when British nobleman enjoyed the sweet taste of a tea with sugar at least one slave died on plantations.

He was too weak to work. Finally the lunch break came and everyone received a cup of water and a corn pancake. The white man didn't allow slaves to sit so they walked around the field. As the boy was eating, he heard a noise so he turned and saw an old exhausted man lying under a tree begging for water. He looked quickly at the whip and felt burning wounds on his back. Then he decided. He escaped from the crowd, ran to the man and gave the cup of water into his shaking hands covered with wrinkled skin. While the man drank greedily, his tired grey eyes observed the face of his benefactor with

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a sparkle of interest. When the cup was empty he gave it back. Their eyes met and the old man said wobbly,

"Thank you."

The wind rustled in the branches quietly and wafted dry leaves. The man continued whispering,

"Listen, forgive them."

The boy frowned and clenched his little fists. The sun hid behind clouds so the shades were fading.

"You'll be better than they are. Keep the only freedom you have and don't be a slave of hatred."

"But it's too hard! I just..." answered the boy with a brittle voice, "I just can't..."

"If you won't, it will suck your life. I know, it's harder to forgive than to hate. But revenge tastes sweetly just in the beginning, my son. Promise me that you'll forgive."

For one moment there was silence. Then it started to rain. The last thing the boy remembered except the raindrops falling on his head and shouting of the white was his quiet answer:

"I do."

3th place

Tereza Penkalová
Třinec

My Hero

He is a swarthy small one with chocolate eyes and dark hair. His slightly raspberry lips are ajar. He's concentrated. If he stood, he would have his head between my elbow and shoulder, but he's sitting in a dining room, his left palm is open, tightly pushing on a table. He awkwardly holds a pencil in the right palm. As he moves the pencil across a paper he's moving his whole head with his shoulders and he's following the pencil. Suddenly Mom comes. She grasps his head with her hands and says he should move his eyes, not his whole body. It works when she holds him but then he's not able to do it on his own. Yes, Chris is my brother.

“What are you drawing?” I ask, looking at an unclear doodle.

“I'm drawing Ninja Turtles with weapons and Transformers! They will fight the ninjas and hurt them and kill them at the end.”

“That's not very nice... Wait, how can you know Ninja Turtles and Transformers? You don't watch them at home,” I'm confused.

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“We saw it at school. And Liam watches Transformers every day. They are good! They’re strong and they kill many people.”

“What are you drawing?” Mom’s voice sounds concerned.

“Why can’t I draw them? Aren’t they good?”

“They hurt and kill each other and that’s ugly. You also hurt your classmates in school. Don’t think your teacher didn’t tell me. I don’t want you to do ugly things. Let’s draw a dog instead.”

Chris’ school is for handicapped children. He doesn’t look handicapped, but spend time with him and you realize that although he is nine, he moves and behaves like he’s four. He’s different. He expresses emotions distinctly and he can’t control them very well. He’s often aggressive because he can’t keep up with his peers, he doesn’t understand their games. Suddenly conflicts arise and he hits someone in affection or shouts vulgar words he hears in school. He learns to behave that way more easily than to be kind and polite like he watches us behaving at home. Now we know we should protect him very carefully from as many bad influences as possible.

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“Hey, Chris, do you wanna know my favourite hero?”

“Yes!”

“His name is Dogman Helpmate.”

“Really? I don’t know this one…”

“You don’t know him? You’re kidding, this is the best hero ever with the biggest muscles in the world! But he doesn’t kill anybody and he helps people. For example he extinguishes fire or rescues scared passengers from a falling plane.”

“Draw him for me, please! I wanna color him.”

“OK,” I’m quickly sketching a head of a dog and a human body with massive shoulders.

“And where does he have the lines on his belly?”

“Which lines do you mean?”

“The lines between muscles on his belly.”

“Oh yes, right, here they are.”

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“Oooh, he’s so cool, so many muscles! Mom, look, I have Dogman! One day I will rescue people like he does!”

This looks like a good idea.

4th place

Tereza Zapotilová

Ohrobec – Károv

The hero of an ordinary day

Who is your hero? Character from your favourite book?

Famous sportsman or singer? I didn't know it – before I met

Patrick, volunteer at the Helpline for seniors.

I'm walking upstairs through the grey corridor in an easily overlooked tenement. Only special thing here is a small label on a mailbox with a name of a charity which operates the Helpline for seniors. A young man around twenty opening the door for me and I'm entering to a bright attic room with two desks with notebooks and lots of papers everywhere.

“Hello, my name is Patrick and this is my colleague Jack,” saying the boy and offering me a seat. Jack is going somewhere and Patrick and me starting talking.

“How long are you doing this job?” I want to know. “I think around two years. I started during the last year of high school.” “Aren’t you a little bit young for this kind of work? It must be very emotional.” Patrick shrugs and answering: “Yes, sometimes it’s hard to spend all the afternoon dealing with others problems. But I don’t think it depends on your age, it’s only about who you are.”

I’m thinking about his reply and agree with him. You have to be mentally strong to helping all those lonely old people with so many everyday worries.

“But how did you start working here? Someone talked you about this organisation?” I’m really curious to his answer. “It was just a coincidence. I was looking for some part time job, but nothing looked interesting for me. I wanted to do something meaningful and helpful, so when I saw an advertisement to the Helpline, I decided to try it.” “You are looking satisfied with your job, aren’t you?” “Oh yes, I like what am I doing. I feel that my life has some purpose.”

“But what about money? I think that this is the voluntary job.” He’s only nod his head and then continuing. “You are right, we are not paid, but my parents helping me and I have one more part time job to saving for the future. Volunteering is great but you need money for life.”

I’m amazed. “You are a very brave man, Patrick,” I’m saying him. “Me? Why?” Patrick is shocked. “You are spending your free time with talking and helping unknown people, even you have nothing from this. You can go to the parties and enjoying life, but you refusing it. I admire you.” He’s completely red in his face. “I don’t think it’s something special. It’s just job like many others. And it’s not true that I have nothing from this, I

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have a good feeling and that's all I want" Patrick rejecting my words. But I know that Patrick and people like him are the real heroes. People who helping others without desire for fame or wealth. They are the heroes of the ordinary days.

5th place

Luboš Plocek

Dobronín

My hero ...

I want to write a few thoughts about my hero. But at first I want to think about who is the hero. For somebody, the hero means his favourite sportmen or television star. For many people the hero means somebody with some special ability or big strength who fight against evil. And they all are right but there are more than these heroes. There are heroes which fight against another evil. Hero is every single man or woman which fight against evil like fires or robbers. Heroes are the soldiers.

Soldiers which keeps us safe every day and not only ours but brave men and women from all around the world. I think that the true is that the hero is for everybody someone different but I think that everybody got a hero. That everybody needs a hero. Young or old, man or woman, black or white. I think that everybody need someone whose they can look up.

But for somebody the hero could be a bad person. For little

children which spend a lot of time with groups of bad people or by listening or watching bad things. They can start think that is normal. That someone who can beat weaker is better. That's not right. I think that who would like to be called hero have to help others, no beat them.

And who are the real heroes for me? For me the hero means that you are good and kind person. The heroes for me are all men and women who help foreigners on the streets. Every man who is lovely to his girlfriend. Every child which love his parents and helps his friends. But the biggest heroes for me are all fathers who care about their children and watch how they growing up, earn money and still have time to play with them. All caring mothers which are alway there for their children.

That may look pretty simply but it is not. It is really hard to be a hero in my eyes. If you wanna be my hero be a good person.

Junior Category

1st place

Eliška Vlková

Zlín

My dream world

“Crrr” my alarm clock was ranging but I was tired, I wanted to sleep! So I switched off it. And I fell asleep.

I had a dream. I was in the beautiful garden. There were many trees, flowers and green grass; there was a small lake, too.

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It was sunny and hot. I wanted to fresh. I jumped into the small lake and I was falling down, down and down. Suddenly I landed on the ground. I stood up. I looked around and I saw only big and stone walls with one wooden door. I went and opened it. But there were only walls with many open doors. I was disappointed. "But where am I?" Suddenly I realized where I was. I was in the labyrinth. "I must find the exit." After few hours I realized a bad thing. I was going in the circles. I was desperate. I wanted to eat and I was tired. At once I saw a butterfly. He was a nice butterfly. He had yellow and orange wings with black patches. He wasn't ordinary butterfly he looked wise. "But when he is there he must know the exit." Then I had a good idea. "I must go with the butterfly, he can help me to find the exit." I went with the butterfly and after thirty minutes and five bends I saw the stairs. I went up the stairs and suddenly I was in the same garden. I was rescued. I saw many trees, flowers, green grass and the small lake. But I didn't want to stay here.

At once I woke up. I looked on the alarm clock and... Oh, no! I was late. I quickly dressed, ate my breakfast but suddenly when I wanted to go out I saw a yellow butterfly. I remembered for my dream and for the butterfly. He has been my hero since he helped me.

2nd place

Petra Toušková

Chomutov

MY HERO

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Hello! Let me introduce myself. I am... No, it would be too easy, you can think over for a while. I was born a few days ago, but I am a big and a strong girl, now.

There are a few hundreds of my siblings in our homy and clear house. Everybody knows, what to do.

We obey our mother and we don't answer back her. She is the biggest of us and she is only one in whole house.

Some sisters care just about her – feed her, warm her and perform every her wish.

How I look like? I'm not a big beauty. I am about 1,5 cm long, I have got yellow and gray body and I have got especial eyes- called complex eyes. I have got wings and 3 couples of legs and on botty I have something, what is burry.

Every day, when I wake up, I fly look for blooms, where is sugary nektar. When I find them, I fly home, to say it to everybody. I give them savour of nektar and I must little dance for them, to they believe me.

During looking for blooms we also looking for pollen. We gather it to especial baskets on rear legs. We fly from flower to flower and we help them with pollination blooms.

It is very difficult to make 100 g of honey. I must visit 1 million blooms, during it I fly 15 000 times from hive. I fly about 46 000 km – that is almost as around all globe. I fly very fast – about 65 km/h.

Do you know, who I am? Sure, I am small and bussy bee. Am I a hero? What whould be without bees?

Remember for me, when you will eat bread with honey!

3th place
Šimon Boldi
Beroun

My Hero Jan Kubiš



I would like to introduce my favourite hero. Since I was about 5 years old I have heard a story from my family about parachutist named Jan Kubiš. He was a member of Czechoslovak foreign army in England. He was born in Dolni

Vilemovice. My grand-grand-grand-grand father...

Jan Kubiš became a member of the group Anthropoid. This group was sent from England during the II. World War to jump down to Czechoslovak republic with a special secret mission. All of parachutist had to keep highest secret. Their aim was to prepare sabotage. During this operation had to be done an attempt on the empire protector Reinhard Heydrich.

27th May 1942 four parachutists were waiting for the car of the protector. One of them was Jan Kubis who threw a grenade. Reinhard Heydrich was hurt by shrapnel and than died. But plan of the sabotage was different. Parachutist Gabcik should used a machine gun, but it broke down.

I can not imagine how they could comunicate without the modern technology. If I close my eyes, I see them waiting for the car, deeply breathing, but calm and quiet. Maybe some of them was praying or counting to ten.

Jan Kubis was really brave and did not worried to risk. He was waiting and in one moment he saw a problem with gun of Gabcik. Without emotion he knew there is no way back. The mission had to be done.

After the attack they were running away. They found secret place in various places in Prague. Some of the brave people helped them to survive. At the end the parachutists moved to the church in Resslova street in Prague. They were suffered of the cold and different injuries, but they decided to fight until the end.

After few days parachutists were hiden in the krypt. One parachutist named Karel Čurda from diffrent unit betried them. There was a fierse fighting of 18th June 1942 between parachutist and German units. Jan Kubiš and the others fall down.

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We should never forget this secret operation and brave the parachutists whose were ready to fight for freedom.

4th place

Dominik Huňka

Prostějov

My Hero

I am going to write about my special friend. He is David and he lives somewhere in the sky.

He was born in the 20th century in a little town. He works as a DJ in a club called Endless Space.

He has got short, dark hair and blue shining eyes. He is tall, handsome and well-built. His personality is cheerful, helpful, hard-working and sympathetic.

He likes hard music, especially drums and bass. He is keen on producing music and doing sports like riding a bike or running. In his free time he sunbathes and spends time with friends.

Maybe you would want to ask me why he is my hero, because he isn't special, he looks the same as other people, but he is different. He became my hero when he died.

I am writing about my brother who had a car accident.

Every day I think about him. He helps me when I need it the most. He stands behind me and when I stumble he catches me. When I do something good I ask myself: "Does he see me?"

I play Basketball, because he loved this game and he was very proud that I do it.

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Sometimes when I sit in the garden I watch clouds. Maybe, he is somewhere above me, watching me.

I wrote that he is different. He made people happy, he gave them hope and when I looked at him I saw something more than common people would.

I miss him and I hope that we will meet as soon as possible. He died, but he is with me in my heart, forever. He flies somewhere in the sky and he protects and keeps an eye on me, my mum and my dad.

This is the reason, why he is my hero!

5th place

Tereza Staňková

Zlín

Meeting

I was there. Again. Yes, on the ice hockey match. By the way, my family was there too, because we all loved ice hockey. Today, the match was our Zlin team against Kladno. I really wanted to go there, because there should play my favourite hockey player. It was unique opportunity too see him, because normally he plays in America (but he's Czech). Everyone knows him very well, because he is the one of best hockey players on the world.

The match started. People were shouting, chanting and

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sometimes even making mexican waves! It was exciting!
Nobody would expect, that we will win.

Then, when the match finished, my uncle came to me (he worked with hockey players). We were laughing and talking, and then he said to me: "Tereza! Come with me to the cloak room for Kladno's hockey players."

I wanted to see my favourite hockey player, but I was shy. My uncle persuaded me, so I went to the cloak room.

My uncle opened the door carefully. He was there. I looked at him and he looked at me too. However, I looked at him with admiration - he looked at me angrily. (You must forgive him it, he was angry, because he didn't win). There was sweat on his forehead. He smelt horribly, I was sure that he didn't have a shower.

Then he signed my joursey. I still have it. By the way, I must say, that he wore only briefs.

He said anything to me. I was surprised, I imagined this visit a bit different, but it doesn't matter.

He's the one of best hockey players on the world, therefore he is my hero. I hope I will meet him in future again.

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