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**Symbolic and Ethnic Identity in Wilber,
Nebraska; America's Czech Capital**

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Abstract

This thesis examines the Czech ethnic community of Wilber, Nebraska, which is named the Czech Capital of the US through the application of H.J. Gans' theory of symbolic ethnicity. It will focus on how the Czech community in Wilber keeps its Czech ethnicity alive as a community of late generation ethnics as well as examine whether or not this ethnicity is sustainable. This thesis will also deal with the authenticity of the late generation Czech ethnics identity and seek to prove whether it is completely symbolic or something else entirely.

Abstrakt

Tato diplomová práce se zabývá českou etnickou skupinou žijící ve městě Wilber, které se nachází v americkém státě Nebraska. Díky teorii H.J. Ganse o symbolické etnicitě je Wilber často nazýván hlavním městem Čechů ve Spojených státech. Práce dále zkoumá jak poslední generace příslušníků české komunity ve Wilberu udržuje svoji národní etnicitu živou, a zda je přežití této národnostní menšiny dlouhodobě udržitelné. V neposlední řadě se tato práce také zabývá tím, do jaké míry je česká etnicita ve Wilbru autentická, a zda-li má spíše symbolický charakter, či je kompletně něčím jiným.

Klíčová slova

Symbolická etnika, Etnická komunita, Česká komunita, Poslední generace příslušníky, Čecho-američany

Key Words

Symbolic Ethnicity, Ethnic Community, Late Generation Ethnics, Czech-Americans, Czech Community

Declaration of Authorship

1. The author hereby declares that he compiled this thesis independently, using only the listed resources and literature.
2. The author hereby declares that all the sources and literature used have been properly cited.
3. The author hereby declares that the thesis has not been used to obtain a different or the same degree.

Prague ... **16.05.2014**

Brianna Tichý

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Institute of International Studies Master Thesis Proposal
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Key Research Questions (20 words)	Is the Czech Identity expressed in Wilber, Nebraska purely symbolic ethnicity, or is it something else? Is this ethnicity sustainable?
Brief Description of Theory (50 words)	Gans' theory of symbolic ethnicity states that it is a nostalgic, ethnicity that uses symbols and icons to create ethnic identity and a sense of belonging in the US. Wilber is a town full of late generation ethnics attempting to create a sense of Czech identity and differentness with their activities.
Brief Description of Methodology (50 words)	In this thesis, I chose the path of participant observation coupled with informal interviews with community members who are active in promoting and preserving their Czech ethnic identity.
Conclusions (50 words)	The Czech ethnicity expressed in Wilber is a hybrid of symbolic ethnicity and inherent vestiges of authentic behavior. Wilber is a community of late generation ethnics, but unlike Gans' theory that these groups will disappear in the coming years, the technology and globalization is actually making their Czech ethnicity stronger. It is sustainable .

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Introduction:

It is no secret that the United States of America is made up of citizens who can trace their ethnicities to various different groups and countries throughout the world. In fact, it is that idea that anyone in the world could become an American simply by moving and saying an oath (and let's face it, in today's world filling out a lot of forms) if they so wanted that makes the American psyche unique. They are not the descendants of a few specific national groups, but rather the conglomeration of many different nations who had all at one point decided to look for a better life in a new location, with the only notable exception being the Native Americans. Growing up in the United States, most people are taught the idea that modern America is a so-called melting pot, combining all of these different cultures and nations to create something new and distinctively American. This idea, as with many other ideas in the world when looked at through an academic perspective, is hardly as simple as it sounds. In fact, the idea of American-ness and ethnic groups in America has been a popular topic seemingly since the thirteen original British colonies declared their independence in 1776 and non-British immigrants began to arrive.

I have always grown up very aware of ethnic identity in America, as the member of two different ethnic communities. While it was never an argument of whether the respective sides of my family were American or not, there was always a degree of "otherness" when compared to other families from other communities. Thanks to this, I am fascinated with identities and the various ones that people either inherently express or choose to adopt as a symbol of themselves. This thesis is of a slightly personal nature as it will examine the status of the ethnically Czech community in Wilber, Nebraska, of which I am an honorary member. In this thesis, I seek to answer the question of exactly what kind of ethnic Czech identity do the people of Wilber express? Is it a remnant of the sentiments of the Czech National Awakening, or is it something else caused by their immigrant experience on the Great Plains? Overall, is it authentic and deeply felt, or is it something that is mainly a show for the sake of tourism?

In order to answer these questions, I will rely heavily on the symbolic ethnicity theory of Herbert J. Gans, a German-born sociologist who specializes in ethnicity in America. In the 1970s, Mr. Gans originated the theory of symbolic ethnicity, or "ethnicity of last resort" is defined as the employment of a nostalgic

feeling for the ethnicity of one's ancestors, commonly employed through use of symbols rather than belonging to a certain group or organization. (Gans, *Symbolic Ethnicity: the future of ethnic groups and cultures in America*, 1979) It is the use of ethnicity as an identifier in society, where the ethnic identity does not necessarily have to be practiced in everyday life, but can be used to show a difference from others when needed and is generally seen in the descendants of immigrants of European origin. (Gans, *Symbolic Ethnicity: the future of ethnic groups and cultures in America*, 1979) The descendants of these immigrants, usually in the first or second generations can choose to become American or live their lives as a member of the ethnic groups of their parents or grandparents, using them as a sort of badge of "otherness". (Waters, 1990)

While these two things most likely did affect the lives of European immigrants and their immediate descendants, it is a simple fact that the golden age of European immigration to the Americas has all but ended and that now, most of the descendants of these immigrants are at least four or five generations removed from their ancestors who had experience in the many "Old Countries" they claim. For this reason, Gans provided yet another theory—this time, stating that the descendants of these immigrants who practice symbolic ethnicity are in danger of losing it and succumbing, at last, to the melting pot theory, or the more academically named straight-line theory, once and for all. (Gans, *The coming darkness of late-generation European American ethnicity*, 2014) Gans names these fourth and fifth generation descendants of immigrants to the US "late generation ethnics", or LGEs and claimed that in the near future, even their adapted symbolic versions of ethnicity would disappear. (Gans, *The coming darkness of late-generation European American ethnicity*, 2014)

This thesis will take the ideas of Gans and apply them to one certain ethnic community in America—the small farming community of Wilber, Nebraska. Wilber is unique in a lot of ways and has been proclaimed by the American government as "the Czech Capital of the United States." (Nebraska Czechs of Wilber) It is home to less than 2,000 people, most of whom fit the description of late-generation ethnics perfectly, having almost all descended from immigrants born in Bohemia and Moravia in the late 1800s and early 1900s. This small town hosts one of the largest ethnic Czech festivals in the country, referred to as Czech Days, every August and

Cather's novel *My Ántonia*, about a Czech family immigrating to the Great Plains. (Cather, 1918) Nebraska in fact, was a major hub for immigrating Czechs throughout the late nineteenth century, drawing them with the promise of free land through the Homestead Act of 1862. (Korytová-Magstadt, 1993) To this day, Nebraska has one of the highest percentages of residents descended from Czech immigrants in the United States. Wilber also has personal meaning to me, as it is the place where my own ancestors settled after leaving the Czech lands and the hometown of my father. Because of this, I have had to opportunity to get closer to people and speak with them openly and candidly as an equal, whereas other researchers may have been regarded as an outsider. In this thesis, it is my intention to explore the application of symbolic ethnicity in late-generation ethnics in America, and also to show certain aspects or factors of this community that fail to match up perfectly with Gans' theories.

1. Methodology

Throughout this project, my research has mainly taken on a qualitative aspect and relies heavily on Gans' theory of symbolic ethnicity, as previously defined. What is generally unacknowledged outside of America is that the idea of ethnicity can be a legitimately strong identifying factory. While many in Europe tend to think that Americans only cling to their ethnicities for a sense of otherness, the fact remains that there are large portions of the United States which still contain ethnic communities due to the nature of settlement.

It is perhaps worth explaining that most Americans celebrate ethnicity without feeling that it makes them any less American in today's world—ethnicity and nationality can describe a person's ethnic origin, whereas American can merely describe citizenship and statehood in some cases. Many scholars of ethnicity in America have attempted to explain it via the straight-line theory, which proclaims that while different nationalities exist in America thanks to immigration, but in time they will mostly disappear, leading to a truly American culture, generally taking after the White Anglo-Saxon Protestant (or WASP) majority. (Gans, *Symbolic Ethnicity: the future of ethnic groups and cultures in America*, 1979) While this has happened in some cases, the existence of certain communities like Wilber, Nebraska prove to be the exceptions. Instead of this popular melting pot theory, I believe it is more prudent to describe America as a salad bowl, or as the Canadians are found of saying, a cultural mosaic. It is a mix of various different ethnicities living side by side, and

those that mix and melt together form the dressing that is the blended, fully American culture.

While the goal of this study is not to prove that the straight-line theory does not work in any case or that every community in the United States maintains a high level of ethnic flair, I will be exploring exactly how the residents of Wilber practice their identity as Czech-Americans through the lens of Gans' theories, according to which there are four different categories which symbolic ethnicity fits into; commodification, promotion, promoting, and preserving—all of which residents of Wilber do both consciously and unconsciously in acts that set them apart from the standard WASP culture of the America portrayed in sitcoms, and become signifiers or icons of Czechness. This study will take the results of my interviews and questionnaires with active members of Wilber's ethnic community, as well as information learned through participant-observation within the community to show how the Czech culture is being perpetuated in this Czech-American town. This thesis is not concerned with proving that Wilber perpetuates a pure and authentic version of Czech culture, but is instead focused on showing how the members of this community are perpetuating their own version of Czech culture that has been the result of the customs their ancestors have passed down combined with the American immigrant experience to create something unique.

During my research, I spoke with several members of the community who are active in various aspects of keeping the town's Czech identity alive. I met with all of them in comfortable locations within their respective communities and asked them a number of questions pertaining to their Czech ethnic identity, and in one case sent out an emailed questionnaire to a community member that I had previously met. My aim was to explore the different facets of their identities as Czech-Americans and find out if there was an overwhelming consensus of actions or traditions that they keep that they believe make them Czech, rather than purely American. While meant to gather information for research, I chose to conduct these interviews in as relaxed an environment as possible in order to get the most candid, honest responses. With the exception of one case, all of these interviews took the form of conversations that were merely guided by my predetermined questionnaires, and therefore led to slightly different topics covered with each person.

I chose this method because in my experience with the community, a relaxed,

is seen as an outsider, residents might be hesitant to admit any feelings that deviate from the town's "Czech Capital USA" tourist image. As an honorary member of the Wilber community, many of the people I interviewed were either acquaintances or family friends—a fact that is inescapable in such a small community—although this status did allow me to speak with the people behind the scenes who do the most for ethnic identity in the community rather than just those who appear in the media. While the relaxed atmosphere may lead to informal results, I firmly believe that in following with the method of participant-observation as a member of the community, one can find the most authentic results. At the end of the process, I spoke with people aged from fifteen to seventy-nine, all of whom perform slightly different roles in the community.

Subjects interviewed:

Julia Ouřecký- age 15, Julia is a high school student living in Omaha, Nebraska, but with family and a second home in Wilber. She's been involved with Czech organizations throughout Nebraska and has been active in the Czech-Slovak royalty program in the state. Julia also volunteers many of her weekends to helping out at the Wilber Czech Historical Museum.

Bryon Dvořák- age 26, Bryon is a member of the Czech Komenský Club at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln and has taken Czech language classes at the same school.

Olivia Johnson-age 22, Olivia is a student at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln and former member of the Czech Komenský Club. She has completed a Czech language minor at the same school and was a former Nebraska Chapter Czech-Slovak Queen.

Carolyn "Carrie" Brown-age 25, Carrie is a former Nebraska Czech-Slovak Queen, Miss Czech-Slovak US second runner-up, and member of the Omaha Czech Cultural Club. She has studied the Czech language privately and through the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. She currently lives in Prague and works as a teacher.

Jennifer Kroft-age 42, Jennifer is a student at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln and has been member of the Czech Komenský Club there, as well as completing a minor in Czech language. She is currently working on a dissertation on Czech immigration to Nebraska.

Sue Prochazka-Underwood-age 56, Sue is a member of a local polka and folk music band and hosts a radio show dedicated to Czech music in neighboring Crete, Nebraska. She is also a member of the Wilber Czechs.

Steve Ouřecký-age 48, Steve is Julia's father and a Wilber native. He's a member of both the Omaha Czech Cultural Club, the treasurer of the Nebraska Czechs, Inc., and the Wilber Czechs, where he helps to run the Czech Historical Museum. He also serves as a member of the University of Nebraska-Lincoln Czech Language Foundation board and has just taken over the Czech-American newspaper the "Czech Slavnosti."

Dr. Mila Šašková-Pierce-age 66, Dr. Šašková-Pierce runs both the Czech and Russian language programs at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln where she is the advisor to the Czech Komenský Club. She emigrated from Czechoslovakia following the Prague Spring. She also serves as a member of the Lincoln Czech Club, the Czechoslovak Society of Arts and Sciences, and the Czech Language Foundation at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln.

Doris Ouřecký-age 79, Doris is a member of the Wilber Czechs and Nebraska Czechs, Inc. She was an instrumental member in helping to revive the Wilber Czech Festival, or Czech Days, and also helped to found the Nebraska Czech-Slovak Queen pageant as well as the Miss Czech-Slovak United States pageant. She is aunt to Steve and great aunt to Julia Ouřecký and also helps to run the Czech Historical Museum.

II. The Czech-American Immigrant Experience

The main focus of this piece is not to become mired in history, but it is imperative to provide some background information on Czech-American community of Wilber to understand why it both does and does not make a perfect fit to Gans'

symbolic ethnicity theory. Though they are generally considered to have come to the United States during the second wave of immigration and are therefore considered to be latter immigrants, the Czechs who came to Nebraska were often an exceptional case in this group, which led to clinging on to their culture longer than other ethnic groups to the United States might have done. In examining the reasons why they left the Czech lands as well as how they lived on the plains once they arrived, it can be concluded that they found ways to apply their own values from “the old country” with the American idea of Manifest Destiny in order to create an identity that was at its very core, both Czech and American.

One of the important things to remember about the Czech immigrants to the United States is that typically, they were not the poorest of their countrymen—unlike cases like the Irish immigrants to America, who had to move because of famine, the Czechs who moved to Nebraska were often part of the “cottager class” back in their homelands. (Korytová-Magstadt, 1993) Because of this, they were often poor when they got to the US, and they were by no means the richest in the Austrian Empire that they left, but they also were not the poorest, as the truly poor could not afford the cost of tickets to come to the United States. (Korytová-Magstadt, 1993)

An interesting fact to note is that while most of these immigrants came from smaller towns or villages around Southern, Southeastern, and Northern Bohemia, very few had had experience as farmers before embarking on their lives on the Great Plains. Only 36% of immigrants from the Czech lands could claim prior farming experience—one of the lowest percentages of any other group immigrating to America. (Korytová-Magstadt, 1993) Due to their humble beginnings, the culture that they brought with them was often the folk culture that had been prevalent in their villages back home, leading them to glorify the hard-working peasant, or now farmer lifestyle on the plains. (Filipová, 2011)

It's in the folk culture origins that one can see the most prevalent contribution of these far-off ancestors to the Wilber community, as this is still the ethnic identity that they perpetuate today. For the Czech immigrants, folk culture, especially that which had been perpetuated by the Czech National Awakening fit in surprisingly well with their new lives in America. What seemed to work so well was that the folk culture of the National Awakening promoted the idea that it was the peasants and common people living in the countryside of the Czech lands who were the vanguard

Austrian-ization that had taken place in the cities. (Filipová, 2011) The Bohemians and Moravians that left the Czech lands for the US took this idea to heart, as most were not a part of the educated, elite culture of the cities beforehand and because it helped them to fit in so well with the new, American idea that even the smallest person can, through hard work and persistence, rise up and become great. There has been a popular discussion in Czech historiography on whether or not the Czech nation belongs to the group of “small peoples” as Kundera coined often defined as a nation which lacks, “a sense of an eternal past or future,” (Abulof, 2009), yet this didn’t matter to the immigrants. Their folk culture provided them with a sense of belonging and a concrete past, which was the old country and the different customs they brought to America with them, whereas the future belonged to what they could make of themselves as Czechs in America, striving for the idealistic “American Dream.”

Even though the Czech immigrants’ folk culture allowed them to fit in with certain American ideas, they were still very much foreign, even among other immigrant groups. In the US, the first wave of immigration was primarily done by those who were White, Anglo-Saxons, or WASPs, and while the predominant religion of the country was not Catholic, which was seen as a relief by some of the Czechs who had regarded the Catholic church as an instrument of Austrian oppression, citing the defeat at White Mountain as proof, the Czech immigrants still weren’t American enough and often found themselves misunderstood in their new land. (Korytová-Magstadt, 1993) Even today, America is known as being a country filled with religious people, which was something that caused friction between the Czech immigrant community and the already established WASP majority. There were Catholic Czechs who had immigrated, most of them came from Moravia and settled in the Northern sections of Nebraska, while Wilber became known as a region filled with Czech freethinkers who rejected organized religions and rejected most attempts by the WASP majority to convert them. (Zeitler, 2009) This, coupled with the vehemence which most Czech immigrants opposed prohibition led to the perception that Wilber and the surrounding Saline County was a hotbed of partying and godlessness which existed until modern times, perpetuated by the Czech cultural affinity for beer. (Zeitler, 2009) Even today, among my participants both Doris and Sue expressed concern over how much the Czech-American culture in Wilber promotes the consumption of alcohol to almost dangerous levels and explains it away

as to explain that in a recent study, Saline County in Nebraska had ranked among the top for underage binge drinking in the state, becoming a cause for alarm.

It was not just the differences in religious beliefs and penchant for liking a nice cold beer that separated the Czech immigrants in Nebraska from other groups living in the same region. Czechs were often considered educated for Slavs, but the backhanded nature of this statement is that most people in the Midwest did not find Slavs to be that educated at all. (Prchal, 2004) The reality of the situation is that the Czechs who came to Midwestern America in droves following the Homestead Act of 1862, which carried the promise of free land were the only major group of Slavs to immigrate to this area, as many others either came at different times or tended to stay in the familiar urban landscape of the cities. (Korytová-Magstadt, 1993) This led to further isolation for the Czechs in Nebraska as no other immigrant group spoke a language similar to their own, as well as having the added detraction that Czech was very different than English and many had no prior experience with the language, as seen portrayed by Mr. Shimerda in Cather's *My Ántonia*. (Cather, 1918) It all created conditions in which the Czechs were considered uneducated outsiders and often undesirable immigrants in the popular WASP opinion of the times—one of the few people who raised her voice in disagreement was noted author Willa Cather in her characterization of the Czech Shimerda family's move to the plains of Nebraska, yet even she noted that Czech immigrants had both good and bad qualities. (Prchal, 2004)

All of this resulted in a hodge-podge of stereotypes of the Czech immigrants, calling them violent and impulsive, but also musically talented and educated. (Prchal, 2004) The American slur for a person of Czech origin was invented amidst these ideas, drawing from the fact that these immigrants spoke what at the time was called the Bohemian language and mostly hailed from Bohemia, the Czech immigrants began to be referred to as *bohunks* as an insult. The term still persists in Nebraska to this day, but has been repurposed by the Czech-American community and used with a certain sort of pride these days. In my conversations with Jennifer, however, she claims that during her childhood in a Czech community in Northern Nebraska, the term *bohunk* was still used as a mild insult.¹

The rejection from mainstream society paired with linguistic difficulties only made it easier for a lot of the Czech immigrants to Nebraska to make the choice to

live in ethnically Czech communities within the United States. While many Czech community in the Midwest are situated near ethnically German ones for the reason that at least some of the immigrants could speak German after living in the Austro-Hungarian Empire, many still harbored bad feelings towards German-speakers after the injustices they had experienced in their homeland. (Korytová-Magstadt, 1993) Throughout the years, this feeling tended to simmer beneath the surface in towns like Wilber due to events in modern history regarding the homelands of both immigrant groups. Wilber, for example, is situated right next to a tiny town named Clatonia, which for all of my life I have been told was where the German immigrants had settled. Even though both towns are close and both are tiny, they retained separate school systems until the mid-1960s. In family lore, my grandmother who came from an ethnically German community in the US experienced anxiety when marrying my grandfather for fear that the Czech community in Wilber would not accept her. She used to recall fondly that she was “the first German wife in Wilber” despite there being a large population neighboring the town and took pride in the fact that many people in the community did not know that she was not ethnically Czech after all the years.

The Czechs practiced a policy of selectively integrating or assimilating in America, thanks in part to the prevalent idea that the old, peasant ways are the good ways, as they have served the community so far—even if it was on the other side of the ocean. (Pirkova-Jakobson, 1956) An example of this mentality can be seen with the predominance of Czech-speaking older people in Wilber whose parents insisted on communicating in Czech within the home. This served to further isolate them from the WASPs and other immigrants in Nebraska, yet in many cases this was not considered a problem and was even sought out to a certain extent as some Czech immigrants took a certain sort of pride in the fact that they had driven off Americans or other immigrants of different backgrounds by slowly taking over certain areas and turning them into Czech settlements. (Korytová-Magstadt, 1993) This isolation led to the Czech community in Nebraska to feel a sense of continuity with the so-called “Old country” and only intensified with the Czechoslovak movement for independence around the First World War. The fact that Masaryk even came to Omaha, Nebraska to speak with the Czech community during his time in America only served to strengthen this feeling of being inexplicably linked to the Czech

1993) The First Republic's promotion of ideas from the National Awakening was almost viewed as a legitimization of the Czech-American brand of folk culture. (Filipová, 2011)

As Štěpánka Korytová-Magstadt points out in her book *To Reap a Bountiful Harvest*, though, the severance of relations between the American Czechs and their kin in Czechoslovakia beginning in 1948 did result in a slight backlash for the Czech community in Wilber, though. For the first time, they could not equivocate Czech values with American values as the Czech values were now associated with communism, which American society virulently opposed. Perhaps this split had even started happening earlier, as the last Czech-centric celebration in Wilber, an annual commemoration of Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk's birthday ended in 1937, just one year before the Munich Agreement would begin the fragmentation of Czechoslovakia. (Zeitler, 2009) While nothing can be proven in this instance, one can read two different reasons for this discontinuation—either the community in Wilber felt uncertain about expressing ethnic solidarity with a region that had been annexed by the Third Reich in pre-war America, or they were somehow lamenting the lack of sovereignty in their ethnic homeland. Either way, the events of World War II and following sounded the death knell for Czech ethnicity in Wilber. It was then that one could see for one of the first times, a collective sense of being ashamed of being different from the predominant American culture. Doris recalled that during her childhood and before, children were made fun of for speaking Czech on the streets and it became something one might even be bullied for, even within the predominantly Czech community, interestingly enough. As a girl, I can even recall my grandfather talking about it, claiming, “We didn't want to be Czech anymore.” It was only when I was an adolescent that I learned that he not only spoke Czech, but that it was his first language.

This split would forever alter the nature of Czech identity in Wilber, though it is not now accompanied by the stigmas of the past. It would not be until celebrated again until August 1962, when the first ever Wilber Czech Days Festival paved the way for Wilber's revival of Czech culture, though now resembling something very different from the culture of Czechoslovakia, indeed. (Nebraska Czechs of Wilber) Czech Days led to a major revival in Czech folk culture to take place in Wilber, popularizing folk music, traditional costumes, and even the Czech language once

mainly American, but with Czech roots. It is interesting to note, though, that certain members of the younger generation feel slightly differently, as I witnessed when speaking with Olivia, who has spent her time studying the Czech language and has travelled to the Czech Republic. Olivia, for example, says that it depends on who she's talking to, stating, *"If I was in...the Czech Republic introducing myself, I'd say that I'm American, but my family's Czech, so I guess more Czech-American in that context, but to people I meet here, I would just say American. If I met a new foreign exchange student I would just say, 'Oh, I'm an American.' But I always trying to bring up, if we...start talking about heritages, I always try to bring up that I'm Czech because that always starts an interesting conversation."*² Today, Czech-Americans in the Wilber area no longer feel separate from other Americans enough to consider themselves outsiders, indicating that a certain extent of assimilation had taken place, however, they retain their ethnicity at will. (Waters, 1990) Certain aspects of this ethnic identity such as mannerisms and food are contested, though, as they are mostly inherent and would still be practiced even without the Czech festival there to perpetuate a sort of performed ethnicity. (Dutkova-Cope, 2003)

The reinstatement of an ethnically Czech festival was not unique to Wilber at this time, either, as many other communities began to host ethnically based celebrations, for which Gans explains as the third and fourth generation ethnics, already here belonging to the LGE group, attempting to hold onto their ethnicities tighter to prevent them from fading, which in the process creates an alternative identity for themselves besides the everyday American one which they were heading more fully towards than their ancestors. (Gans, *Symbolic Ethnicity: the future of ethnic groups and cultures in America*, 1979) For people in Wilber and other Czech-American communities in the US today, ethnicity is more something that someone does rather than something someone is; a constructed identity. (Zeitler, 2009) Rather, one is inherently Czech by virtue of where one's ancestors came from, yet this only really matters so long as one celebrates and actively perpetuates the Czech-American ethnicity, regardless of whether or not it is merely symbolic. In applying these theories to the celebration of Czech identity in Wilber, Nebraska, one can see that some aspects support it, while others serve as exceptions to the rule. Though Wilber is a few generations removed from Gans' initial examples, the fact remains that the

Czech-American identity of the community has not faded with time, but has and continues to go through a certain revival. In the following sections of this thesis, I will map out exactly how the community continues to celebrate their ethnic heritage according to Gans' four categories of commodification, promotion, performance, and lastly, preservation.

III Commodification of Ethnicity

For many ethnic communities in the United States, the idea of commodification of an ethnicity is one of the driving factors in deciding whether or not to continue to expend the effort to keep ethnic culture alive. It would be idealistic to say that the revival of ethnic festivals and interest in America in the 1960s was driven mainly by altruistic folklorists. The truth of the matter is that any community that has gone through the undertaking of setting up an entire festival, especially in a town as small as Wilber, is hoping that there will be some sort of economic gain or boost in tourism for the city. The commodification of culture and packaging it as something to be sold to tourists and visitors is not an isolated practice and often leads to some of the more distorted versions of culture that one can come across. Bryon Dvorak explains his take on the commodification of culture in America, stating that, *"I feel like it is more commercialized, when ever I go to a Czech festival they only have goulash and one or two Czech beers, also they only have kolache, but when I was in the Czech Republic I learned of numerous alternatives to these main ones and all were great,"*³ showing the slightly damaging side of commodifying ethnic culture—the fact that to some people, this makes it seem as if it is inauthentic and ingenuous. This, however, works in contrast when Gans' symbolic ethnicity theory is applied. In this case, the food serves as an icon for Czechness. While it may not encompass all of the traditionally enjoyed foods in the Czech Republic, they represent the Czech identity in the food sphere as symbols, although this does not mean that a symbol cannot be enjoyed or thought of as authentic. Not all people within the community that those who profit off of selling culture are cheapening it in anyway as it, like most things, purely depends on the situation at hand. Wilber is no exception to this commodification of ethnicity, however it is not as lucrative as one might initially believe.

III.I Ethnic Entrepreneurs

One of the first things that one notices when attending Czech Days in Wilber is that the main streets of the town are lined with vendors along the parade routes. While at first glance this might seem like a perfect example of Czech ethnicity being used to turn a profit, at further inspection it becomes apparent that most of the vendors are selling international fast food or are simply small businesses from elsewhere making this festival yet another stop on their summer schedule, traipsing from town to town to sell their goods. Oddly enough, the majority of goods for sale at the Wilber Czech Festival are not related to the Czech culture in anyway—but this does not mean that those goods do not exist. In fact, there exists an entire side business of selling things that serve to make people “more Czech”—or at least to help them express their sense of belonging to the ethnically Czech groups in America. One can purchase t-shirts extolling the virtues of those descended from Czech stock, fine, imported Bohemian crystal, pins and buttons emblazoned with the Czech flag or phrases like *Jak se máš*, and even garnets being sold on the street corner during the festival or year round at Wilber’s own Barnas Drug Store. It should be noted that this is not an especially high-earning industry, but more a labor of love for the people who run these businesses, most of whom spend the summer months doing a circuit of all of the ethnically Czech festivals in the Midwest to reach each Czech and Slovak community while having stores in one small community or another.

Perhaps the biggest example of commodified ethnicity in Wilber can be seen at the Wilber Czech Craft Shop, which has a permanent storefront in the town and sells what can generally be called “Czech goods.” The Czech Craft Shop in Wilber is run by a committee of the Nebraska Czechs of Wilber, which is to say volunteers from the community. (Czech Craft Shop) These volunteers make no profit themselves and most of the money goes to support the cost of the festival and other community endeavors. The shop is one of the best-known places in Wilber for buying a folk costumes, floral head wreaths for women and hats for men, or even various pot holders or tea towels decorated in the fashion of Czech folk culture that those who run the shop spend their free time sewing and hand embroidering.

III.II The Food Aspect

Various other businesses in Wilber capitalize on selling things unique to the town. At the bakery, one can surely sample *koláče* or the Wilber version of *vánočka*

year-round, which the locals refer to simply as *houska*, though it bears little resemblance to the Czech rolls except for the fact that it is braided. Wilber boasts two butchers who are known for having a wide variety of Central European-style sausages along with other local favorites such as *jitrnice*, *jelita*, and even *tlačěnka*. In addition to these year-round offerings, the community in Wilber often turns up in force to sell things that have a local flavor, quite literally. Every Czech Days, almost every Church in town serves up Czech meals or duck, roast pork, potato dumplings, sauerkraut (which has taken over as the Americanized version of Czech *zeli*), sausages, Czech-style rye bread with caraway seeds (which is also sold at the Wilber Bakery), strudel, and last but not least, *koláče*.

One of the interesting things about looking at commodified ethnicity in Wilber, though, is that it brings up the argument of whether or not these things are truly being commodified or not. While it is hard to argue this for selling folk costumes, it becomes a complex question when applied to the food. While the community is making money off of selling these Czech meals, the fact of the matter is that these types of meals are often eaten whenever there is any occasion in Wilber, where it is not uncommon for cabbage to be a part of almost every family gathering or celebration. Is it truly commodification of ethnicity if the community would eat this food regardless? While they may be icons, the fact that almost the entire Czech identity in Wilber is made up of these symbols may legitimize them as true components of the Wilber Czech culture. Unlike in the Czech Republic, these foods began to be enjoyed while it was still a hindrance to be Czech in American society, and therefore not something that one could flaunt or make money off of. Perhaps it began as an authentic, humble cultural practice and has now shifted into something more? But does that devalue any of the original authenticity these foods had? It is a question that has no easy answer, and a variation of one that will be posed more times before the end of this examination.

IV Promotion

Though Wilber might not have yielded a plethora of instances of commodified ethnicity, the community does handle the promotional aspect of festival organizing and cultural awareness like a well-oiled machine. Most of this is due to the various different umbrella committees of the Nebraska Czechs of Wilber organization, itself a member of Nebraska Czechs, Inc., which handles almost all of the Czech-related

events and activities in Nebraska. The Nebraska Czechs of Wilber organization started out in 1962 as an exploratory committee, which was started to determine whether or not reviving an ethnic Czech festival in Wilber would be beneficial to the community as well as making Wilber officially the “Czech Capital of Nebraska.” (Nebraska Czechs of Wilber) Needless to say, they were successful on both fronts. Wilber is not the only ethnically Czech town in Nebraska, though and the title of capital did not come uncontested, as documented in the Wilber Czech Museum’s selection of documents and newspaper articles regarding that very topic. Originally, the town of Clarkson also wanted the title, yet with the largest Czech festival in the state (and some might argue throughout the entire country), Wilber came out victorious in the long run.

IV.1 An Organization for Everything

Out of the formation of the Wilber Czech Festival and the various committees that make up what is now the Nebraska Czechs of Wilber, other Czech communities in Nebraska begun to either form their own clubs like the Wilber Czechs to promote events in their own communities or if they already existed, had a chance to elevate the promotion of their own events by travelling to other local Czech festivals and activities. This prompted the birth of Nebraska Czechs, Incorporated—another non-profit organization like the Nebraska Czechs of Wilber which was founded in 1963 and oversees and organizes the Czech events in Nebraska at the state level. (Nebraska Czechs, Inc., 2014) It acts as a parent organization for all of the different town committees all over Nebraska, which are set up in a chapter system, all reporting to Nebraska Czechs, Inc. to help organize and promote the different Czech events going on in different towns, spreading the word of every polka dance, Czech meal, and festival.

The different parades and festivals throughout the year all over the state not only serve their own communities, but allow residents of other ethnically Czech towns the opportunity to promote their own events by attending and even volunteering at various events. All of the Czech clubs are branches of Nebraska Czechs, Inc., which means that many people, such as Steve Ouřecký end up doing doubly duty and serving on the committees in both his hometown Czech club as well as the Nebraska Czechs board. He and his daughter Julia are well known for travelling from event to event, not just in Nebraska, but all over the country and promoting their own local

festivals. So much so, that they actually had to cancel their first trip to the Czech Republic because they were needed at another Nebraska Czechs chapter—the aforementioned town of Clarkson.

It falls right on Clarkson [the Clarkson Czech Days Festival] and I'm the treasurer for the Nebraska Czechs.” Steve explained, “*And really, for the Nebraska Czechs, the big festival is Clarkson. We don't do anything in Wilber, but we run the queen pageant and the silent raffle and the auction. Of course, being treasurer, those are all money things. I have to—I've actually bought a motor home so I can actually camp up there.*”⁴ While going to the Czech Republic and experiencing authentic Czech life and culture is important to both him and Julia, they feel more obligated to perform their duties of promoting the American Czech festivities than heading to the Czech Republic themselves. That is not to say that they will never travel to the Czech Republic, as both confided to me that it is one of their top places to travel, but merely that it is not essential to their understanding of their own Czech-American identity—or at least not as much as promoting the Czech identity in America.

Doing the work of promoting their festivals and making sure these organizations run smoothly trumps personal whims almost every time—and not without reason. With festivals such as Wilber Czech Days and the Clarkson Czech Festival, everything is put on by members of these clubs, which is to say most of the residents of the town. Wilber, Nebraska is a town of only 1,855 people and putting on a festival the size of Czech Days requires almost every resident to do their part and pitch in to help. (Suburban Stats, 2014) They rely on the Nebraska Czechs to do most of their promotion and the rest generally comes from within the community. There are no companies behind the festival to sponsor it and the only real publicity they get besides word of mouth and the Nebraska Czechs organization is from annual news stories that report of them as a sort of “small Czech town that could” when the crowds arrive. The work is often so grueling that immediately following the festival on a Monday, most of the businesses are shut down and the people are nowhere to be seen, busy recuperating from a weekend of nonstop volunteering and obligations. Doris, who was a key player in helping the Czech heritage in Wilber come back to the forefront of the town's identity when the festival first started in the 1960's, joked to

me that the Wilber Czech will never fall apart as there are too many committees and that are much to organized.

IV.II Alcohol in America; an Uneasy Identifier

While traditionally the Wilber Czech Festival has not included corporate sponsors, there is one notable, and somewhat controversial exception to this rule. In 2011, when Czech Days was celebrating its 50th anniversary, the town boasted of a stunning accomplishment—the Budweiser Clydesdale horses would be attending! It was something that Charlie Keller, a prominent spokesperson of the Wilber Czech Festival so enthusiastic he became known as “Czech Days Charlie,” had been campaigning for years, and in recent times the Czech Festival began predominantly selling Budweiser brands of beer in its beer gardens and had gotten new banners to hang from the streetlights on the main street reading *Vítáme Vás, We Welcome You to Wilber* or *Wilber Czech Days*. The difference between these new banners and the ones that had always hung before was that these new ones had the Budweiser logo on the bottom as a sponsor of the festival.

Now, to most people in America this is not odd at all, especially if one considers that Budweiser is named for the Czech town České Budějovice. It was a point of pride for some in the community to welcome the Budweiser brand and famous horses and it also served to promote the festival on a slightly larger scale—something imperative for such a special year as the 50th anniversary. The situation was not without irony, however, as the American company who owns Budweiser has for years been in a bitter naming dispute with the Czech Budvar, known as the original Budweiser, resulting in the fact that neither beer is allowed to be sold in the other’s country under the same name. (Cunningham, 2014) Budvar, as a smaller brewery is constantly threatened by the giant company which runs the American Budweiser brand, an almost too-perfect metaphor for the Czech immigrant minority surrounded by the majority of American WASP culture when they first arrived in America. Whether it was simply done out of lack of knowledge or being too good of an opportunity to pass up, the Czech Capital of America ended up promoting the rivals to what some might call a Czech cultural institution. One might argue that the fact that Budweiser, a large international company, was willing to promote the small town festival and with it Czech ethnicity in America was simply too good to pass up.

As touched upon earlier, the Czech-Americans in Wilber have throughout history had a reputation as heavy drinkers or partiers, mostly due in part to the prevalence of beer in the Czech culture, which followed the immigrants across the ocean. The Czechs in America were often stereotyped as drunks because of the fact that their attitude toward alcohol was generally relaxed, while the prevailing Anglo-Saxon culture of the early United States was distinctly Puritan and against alcohol (and some would argue, fun), campaigning even so far as to get it banned for a period in American history called the Prohibition. (Prchal, 2004) The fact that anti-prohibition was the first and sometimes only cause that many Czech communities to enter the political sphere of America did not help this much, though most Czechs viewed the banning of alcohol to be even more strict than the ban on free speech in Austria-Hungary. (Korytová-Magstadt, 1993) To this day, the Czechs in America are still wrestling with this stereotype, as well as the results it has caused in the community.

Wilber and Saline County are said to have some of the highest instances of binge drinking in the state, according to Doris, and she is not the only person from the community to think that its reliance on using alcohol to promote the Czech culture is a problem. While Czech-Americans will usually boast of the beers produced in the Czech Republic and express a love for drinking it, many are worried that other Americans will get the wrong idea from the festival if all they are exposed to is the alcoholic aspect of culture, which remains surprisingly more well-known than the German penchant for beer in America. In speaking with Sue, she explained to me that the amount of young people justifying drinking large amounts of alcohol because they see it as a part of their ethnic heritage concerns her, especially after travelling to the Czech Republic and witnessing in person the more relaxed attitude Czechs have towards alcohol. *“It’s not made a big party thing in Czech Republic. It’s part of your daily life. It’s not, ‘Hey, how many can we drink tonight?’ Okay, there might be a few like that, but it really isn’t a lot of binge drinking, that’s what you’d say and that’s what you’d see in the Czech festivals [here] is binge drinking.”*⁵

When asked if she thought that the younger generation was getting to be as involved in their Czech heritage as the older ones had, she responded by saying, *“Some people want to do it because of the beer. It’s an excuse to drink for some*

people, which is really sad because that's not... You know, beer, it's relative to the Czech culture but that's not what it's all about. It really isn't. There are so many other things besides the alcohol.”⁶ The trend towards promoting the Czech identity in America is especially worrying because compared to other countries, America still remains slightly conservative when it comes to alcohol and even has more restrictions on it than in most European countries. The response from the Czechs in Wilber is that they enjoy the beer, yet they are fighting a constant battle on promoting that aspect of the Czech culture while attempting to show that celebrating Czech ethnicity fits in with the wholesome ideas of American identity; finding the middle ground is tough.

IV.III Royalty in America

While self-promotion and partnerships with famous beer companies certainly help to spread the word about Wilber's Czech identity, by far the most successful strategy in promoting the Czech ethnicity comes from one of the Czech festival's biggest attractions and most original events—the election of Czech-Slovak Queens. It may seem a strange concept outside of small town America, but it is quite common for town celebrations to include a beauty pageant or the election of royalty. It is deeply embedding in American culture, contributing to stereotypical institutions such as Prom Kings and Queens and even the national Miss America pageant, which got its start in the 1920s. (Miss America Organization, 2014) The difference about the royalty competitions within the Czech community in the American Midwest, though, is that these competitions are most certainly not beauty pageants, but billed as ethnic heritage pageants, made to get the younger generation interested in Czech and Slovak culture, as well as celebrate young women who serves as role models and in a way icons to the communities by showing just how exciting genealogy and enthusiasm for one's ethnic heritage can be. Most importantly, the history of the Czech-Slovak Queens is deeply entwined with the history of Wilber's ethnic identity, contributing directly to the popularity of the festival and creating other events all year round for residents to celebrate their Czech identities.

Though it was mentioned that the Nebraska Queen competition takes place at the Clarkson Czech Festival, its original birthplace as well as the epicenter for all of the Czech-Slovak Queen activities is at the Wilber Czech Festival, which plays host to the annual Miss Czech-Slovak US competition over the festival weekend. These

pageants were started by a man by the name of John Fiala, his wife Lois, and Doris Oreck and started out as a small Wilber Czech Queen competition during the first festivals, which evolved into the Nebraska Czech Queen competition when the need presented itself.

According to Doris, the early victors of the pageant were sent on to the Miss Nebraska pageant or similar competitions where their talents and knowledge of the Czech culture and history went unappreciated. *“After seeing our girls get beaten every time, we knew we had to do something. These just weren’t the kinds of pageants that appreciated the girls and it was hard on them. All of the other girls would show up in evening gowns and here our girls were in their folk costumes. Something had to change,”* she tells. From this frustration, she and John had the idea to start their own kind of pageant that celebrated Czech and Slovak-American culture. Eventually, when Czech communities from neighboring states began to send their own queens to represent them in the pageant, it turned into a national pageant, originally titled Miss Czech-Slovak USA until a legal battle involving Donald Trump caused the pageant to drop the “A” in 2008.

The first official national pageant was held in 1986 in Wilber. Today, there are nine state pageants that send their own state Czech-Slovak Queens to Wilber annually in hopes of a title while women from other states without pageants have the ability to compete as an “at-large” candidate and is open to any young women between the ages of 18 to 26 who have never been married and are of Czech, Slovak, Moravian, Silesian, or even in some cases Ruthenian descent. (Miss Czech-Slovak US Pageant, 2014) The contest maintains its status as an ethnic heritage pageant based on the categories of which the women are judged. While there is no evening gown or swim suit competition, contestants are judged on a private interview with three judges to demonstrate how well they know their Czech or Slovak history and culture, a similar on-stage interview held in Wilber’s outdoor theater in front of a large audience, a talent portion, and *kroje* modeling, where the contestant must show off the folk costume she has been wearing throughout the entire competition accompanied by her own description of said costume. The pageant is a non-profit organization and gives out over \$10,000 worth of prizes and scholarships, including a trip to either the Czech or Slovak Republics to the victor. (Miss Czech-Slovak US Pageant, 2014) It is worth noting that the biggest sponsor of the national pageant is the insurance company,

česká bratřská jednota, which started out as an insurance company and fraternal order for Bohemian and Moravian immigrants to the US and to this day still actively promotes Czech ethnicity in America. (Korytová-Magstadt, 1993)

The Nebraska Czechs, with all of their different Czech communities and chapters latched on to the idea of having an ethnic heritage pageant and today boast different chapter Czech-Slovak Queens from nine different chapters of the Nebraska Czechs organization, a unique feat as most states with Czech and Slovak communities, with the exception of Texas, only have one fully Czech or Slovak town and therefore, only one Czech-Slovak Queen. (Nebraska Czechs, Inc., 2014) Though these pageants do bring people to the festivals during which they take place, the main benefits of these queens is that they are in fact walking and talking promotions for one's festival or community. Once a girl is crowned queen of a small Czech town or of the entire county's Czech and Slovak communities, her job is to travel around the state and country and spread the word about the importance of practicing Czech and Slovak ethnicity, Czech and Slovak culture, and, of course, to tell people about the ethnic events and festivals going on in the community. The queens become mini-celebrities within a very small group and the faces of their respective communities for the year they serve as queen. In Nebraska, the queens are often busy from early spring until the fall going to different small town events regardless of whether they are ethnically-centered or not and riding through parades at festivals to gain visibility for their communities. At every event and festival they are introduced to a crowd, given a microphone, and give remarks to promote their own festivals and ethnic side-projects, which at times can be almost like having a job. As Charlie Keller was fond of saying, "*these girls are the best promotion we've got!*" and they are treated as such. The queen pageants seem to be a very traditionally American way of promoting and showing of Czech ethnicity.

Out of the six females that I interviewed, three have been involved in these pageants or affiliated royalty programs and just about every person that I spoke with mentioned the actions of the Czech-Slovak Queens when speaking about their Czech identities. For Julia, being a queen is something she aspires to do one day and most of the things she knows about the Czech Republic and her Czech identity come from hanging around the older queens when she attends festivals. She knows so many of the girls that she has become the queen correspondent for her father's recently

Slovak communities in America. Olivia, however, has a slightly different perspective after serving as the South-Central Czech Club's chapter queen and going to the Czech Republic.

She clarifies her point of view by confessing, "Yeah, I have super mixed feelings about that. I obviously did it...and I really enjoyed it, but now after going there [to the Czech Republic] and actually getting some insight from people who are from there...they just think that's ridiculous. But it is! Even though I'm glad I did it, it is kind if ridiculous. That's not something they do there, and what does being a queen have to do with being Czech? I see it from both sides. I completely accept and see why they think it's ridiculous and even agree a bit, but I also think it's a really cool thing that we have and that we've done for so many decades and a way to get people excited, because that's what people like to watch—the pageant. If we didn't have that, I feel like we would lose a lot of people who are interested in coming to the festivals. That was probably one of the main ways that I got into my culture, too."⁷

V Performance of Ethnicity

In all the ways in which the residents of Wilber celebrate their Czech ethnicity, performing this ethnicity is perhaps one of the most widespread practices. It is the reason that the industry involved with commodifying Czech ethnicity cropped up in American—there was a need for products that have allowed members of towns such as Wilber to practice and perform their Czech identities. While beforehand many of the things used in this practice were either produced at home or done without, in today's modern global economy, people have begun to rely on these businesses to bring the goods, such as folk costumes and Czech garnets, to them. The commodification of ethnicity is an interesting facet, but for this study the main concern is how the people choose to use these "Czech items", which frequently fits into Gans' category of performing ethnicity. One of the interesting aspects of Wilber, though, is that while parts of this category are in fact scheduled and purposeful "performances of Czechness" that are put on during events like Czech Days, others are completely unplanned and while still performances of identity at a certain level, cannot be considered an affectation. They are merely things that signal the Czech community in Wilber out from other Americans and are done almost instinctually. In the following sections, I will explore the way Wilber performs its "Czech-ness"

through the categories of musical, dramatic, and sartorial performances. As with much of the other aspects of the festival, these instances are almost entirely genuine to the residents of Wilber.

V.I Musical Performance

When one thinks of performances in general, music is one of the first things that come to mind. It is no different for the Czech-American in Wilber, where music is one of the most important Czech customs that they perpetuate. The music, like most of the ethnic celebrations in Wilber is based in Czech folk culture and what their great grandparents may have listened to when they came to America for the first time. It can be perfectly described as a sort of, “things remembered from home” aspect. (Pirkova-Jakobson, 1956) As Svatava Pirkova-Jakobson discovered in her study of Czech and Slovak Festivals in America in the 1950s, these things were originally brought by the immigrants when they first arrived, yet in this case, the Czech-Americans have latched onto it even though they have no sense of home with the music, but instead feel as if they are experiencing a bit of the home of their ancestors—something that they feel inexplicably drawn to as if it was their own home. (Pirkova-Jakobson, 1956)

When asked about celebrating older customs, Olivia responds that, “*the biggest difference that I noticed is that some of the things we do in Nebraska and probably in the United States and just in general in some of the communities is really outdated, as far as what they do in the actual Czech Republic—like, wearing garnets and polkaing. Nobody does that in the Czech Republic anymore. It’s what the really old people do there. When the immigrants came here, that was what they did, and now that’s still what we do. It’s like we’re frozen in past Czech customs, which is interesting and nobody here realizes that.*”⁸

Carrie Brown agrees, and used almost the same rhetoric when speaking about the difference between actual Czech culture and Czech-American culture, contending that, “*Our picture of Czech culture in the states is a little but frozen in that time that people came over.*” This all fits in well with the idea of symbolic ethnicity as being a yearning for the nostalgia of their ancestor’s realities, making Wilber an interesting case of study as far as late generation ethnics go, as within the community they face no sense of there being an identity of “the other” as the entire community is seeped in

Czech culture and ethnicity. (Gans, *Symbolic Ethnicity: the future of ethnic groups and cultures in America*, 1979)

Interestingly enough, though the community does have a taste for things popularized by the Czech National Awakening, their music tastes remain rather humble. While one may find that Wilber residents have heard of Dvořák and may boast of the Czech affinity for music, they generally prefer to listen to polka and waltz music rather than anything classical during their events. On the main street of Wilber, polka music is even played year round through speakers to give it a Czech feeling even when the festival is not taking place. (Wilber Chamber of Commerce, 2014) This is probably one of the most “performing” aspect in this category as it is generally done for no reason other than it creates a pleasant atmosphere and informs tourists that yes, Wilber is a Czech town. Paired with the Czech business names on the buildings on the main street, it really helps to establish a difference between Wilber and every other small town in Middle America.

Wilber is also home to the Wilber-Clatonia Czech Alumni Band—one of the biggest draws for their Czech festival. Every year during Czech Days, the Alumni Band gets together and rehearses, drinks, and plays in all of the bars and all of the parades. The Alumni Band is not only a crowd favorite, but a favorite event for the many members who play with them every year. All of the members were members of the Wilber-Clatonia High School Marching Band and upon graduating, are then eligible to come and play with the Alumni Band every festival. The band promotes itself as “the only marching band in the US that wears Czech folk costumes” and plays polka music and waltzes almost exclusively. It is so popular within the community that children in the high school try to join the band just for the opportunity to play with them in the future and people come from all over the state just to hear them play. They even sell CDs and cassettes during Czech events in the community and in Wilber’s shops so that people may experience their music year round.

The Wilber-Clatonia Czech Alumni band is not just enjoyable music to listen to, but also a testament to how the understanding of what is Czech and how to celebrate Czech-ness has evolved in the community. Whereas most high school marching bands in America have a stereotype for being a place for geeks and nerds and all other groups who do not fit in during adolescence, in Wilber the marching band has transformed into something not only trendy, but genuinely respected and

music, which they view as a very Czech trait. Upon arrival to the US, the Czechs were thought of as slightly barbaric, uneducated, and in most ways inferior to the Anglo-Americans and even other immigrants, yet were often highly regarded for their musicality. (Prchal, 2004) Willa Cather illustrates this point perfectly in the novel *My Ántonia*, in which the patriarch of Czech immigrant family, Mr. Shimerda, is seen by the Anglo-American protagonist as being clueless and dumb to how to navigate life and farming on the isolated plains of Nebraska, but is also portrayed as curiously wise, possibly educated, and a genius when it came to playing the violin. (Cather, 1918; Martin, 1996) The Czech immigrants to Nebraska were perceived no differently, and their awareness of this fact has metamorphosed into an town-wide appreciation for music.

When talking to a member of the Czech community in Wilber or even all around the state of Nebraska, music is one of the most common achievements of the Czech nation that they will bring up, and if you imply that a member of the town is musically talented, it is a fact that is accepted with pride, but not surprise. Often, you will be met with another member of the community explaining this talent away by saying, “*Co Čech, to muzikant.*” For them, music is so engrained in their idea of inherent Czech traits that it was not at all uncommon in the past generations for every child to learn an instrument for a period of time in their schooling—for my father is was being forced to learn how to play the accordion by his parents. Today, this instruction depends on the family in question, but music is still a large part of celebrating and performing Czech-ness in the community.

Another aspect of the community’s music that is of some importance is *what* they play. As mentioned earlier, the residents of Wilber have a predisposition to liking mainly old Czech polkas and waltzes as opposed to any other music originating in the Czech lands. This is a great example of the prevalence of folk culture in Wilber, which is the predominant aspect of the Czech ethnicity that is celebrated in Nebraska. This not only shows off an affinity for folklore, but also betrays the community’s origins as coming from the lower classes in the Czech lands before immigration, which is almost a sense of pride when paired with the idea that all of the true Czech culture originates from what the peasants and lower classes do which was perpetuated around the National Awakening. (Filipová, 2011) Though the Czech-Americans in Wilber take a sort of pride in preserving these aspects, they do not

this variation of Czech music in their own community simply because it is what their ancestors did, so they feel compelled to do the same. (Pirkova-Jakobson, 1956)

The Wilber-Clatonia Czech Alumni Band is not the only music that gets played during the Wilber Czech Festival and it is certainly not the only way that Czech identity gets performed. Sue Prochazka-Underwood frequently performs her own Czech identity as a member of her band Sue and the Blue River Czechs who perform in folk costume and call Wilber their home. When I spoke with Sue about music, she said that it was the most important aspect of the Czech culture, for her, and makes her feel the most connected to both the past and present of the Czech lands. When asked how she celebrates her own Czech culture, she responded, *“I think it’s my button accordion. I love my button accordion the most. I can do the most romance on an accordion. But the bagpipe, if I could get new reeds for it, it would be a lot nicer for me to go out and to go push that. My music and now that I can enunciate, I love to sing in Czech. It’s all my music, that’s how I celebrate my Czech heritage. It’s not just the polka. I hear so many people say, “Oh, it’s just the polka! They all sound the same!” Well, there’s a lot of beauty in the Czech music. You know, of course if you listen to Dvořák and Smetana, you’ve got a completely different type of music than what you’d hear with the polka. There are a lot of beautiful waltzes and ballads.”*⁹ For her, the music is not just a performance, but a personal experience drawing her closer to her ethnic roots, regardless of whether she is playing the locally popular polkas or waltzes or not.

Sue and the Blue River Czechs not only play at Czech Days in Wilber, but also travel around and play at various Czech events throughout the state. She credits the music for stirring a curiosity about the Czech language in her, citing one comedic instance that prompted her to try and learn more about it. *A bad story,*” she said, happened once when she was performing Czech folk music at a wedding *“...there was a song that had something about God in the title and it was with the bagpipe and they had requested the bagpipe at their wedding, so we picked four songs. Three of them, I kind of know what they were, but the fourth one (and I didn’t have Google translate back then) so I sent it to a lady in North Bend to find out what the words meant. It was about a man and his lover and he took a pistol and shot her because she was unfaithful! And I thought, “Oh, my God!” So, they came that night and I said, ‘Oh, we*

can't do this song...I just can't get it on the bagpipe. ' I didn't want to admit that I had, picked a wrong song for their wedding!'"¹⁰ While English translations of a lot of Czech songs exist, Sue disparages them, as most musicians do with amateur language translations and claim that they fail to capture the original moods and feelings of the music. "There are some people who are translating songs, but if you do the Beer Barrel [Polka], it has a whole different meaning from the original way it was written to what it was translated to in English," she expounds. "The Blue Skirt Waltz is the Red Skirt Waltz. They changed the words to make them rhyme, but I don't think the meaning is the same and so, you're losing the Czech meaning of the song in the translation. We have one song that we did get translated and we do it with the Milligan Czech Brass Band...and the translation is pretty good on that one, but on a lot of them they're not good. They're not right. Somebody will just throw something together and they're not grasping what they should be when they translate them."

Sue also credits her love of Czech music with compelling her to learn some of the more relatively uncommon instruments used in Czech music, all of which fit in the genre of folk music. While she first stated out in the fifth grade on the alto saxophone in her father's polka band, she can now list the accordion and Bohemian bagpipes, or *dudy* as her favorite instruments to play, as well as having a large collection of all sorts of instruments with which to play folk songs, such as the horse hair jug. She explains it all, saying that being Czech is vital to her personal identity, saying, "It's important for me, well, because part of my business is Czech. I have a polka band and I entertain with the bagpipes, or the *dudy*. It's important to me to be identified as Czech because of that." Interestingly enough, Sue, while following in the footsteps of her father and other various immigrants who formed bands to play in the community before her, has also managed to commodify her identity while performing. This in no way detracts from the authenticity or passion she has for the Czech music, as it is clear to anyone speaking to her that she does this all not to make a profit, but because she loves the music.

V.II The Parade Passes By

Musical performances are not the only way that Wilber performs its Czech ethnicity. While this next example music is involved, yet it is not the main focus. Every year during the Wilber Czech Festival, one of the main draws for tourists as

well as locals is the daily parades, which take place over the course of the weekend. The festival is generally three days long, and within those three days that town plays host to a regular parade during Saturday and Sunday afternoon as well as a children's parade on Friday evening. Though parades are often standard fare at festivals and other American small town celebrations, these parades have a distinct ethnic flair as they always correspond with a theme promoting perceived Czech values or values of the Czech immigrants to Nebraska. This coming year's theme is "Education—A Czech Value", drawing inspiration from the achievements of Jan Amos Komenský and Charles IV. (Nebraska Czechs of Wilber) Past themes have been things such as "Czech Culture—A Labor of Love" and things such as celebrating the contributions of Czech immigrants to agriculture on the Great Plains, as well as commemorating anniversary years for the festival and Miss Czech-Slovak US organization.

The parades not only provide entertainment, but also serve as a showcase for featuring the accomplishments of the Czechs or the Czech-American community. It is true that many non-Czech organizations are also featured in the parades, but most of the time all of the entries and floats tie in to the theme in some way. The finished product is usually the incorporation of folk costumes as well as information into the floats, creating a system in which the spectators, without even realizing it, are the recipients of short snippets of information and even history regarding Czech identity in America. In the past, the parade has helped to showcase the University of Nebraska-Lincoln's Czech Language Program and Foundation during one of its anniversaries. This served to not only show that there are still people in the community who are actively learning Czech—a sense of pride for the community—but to also advertise the classes offered to potential new students from the different communities.

Dr. Sašková-Peirce was in charge of the Czech Language Program at the University of Nebraska at that time and has even spoken of this parlaying into booths set up by the Czech Language Program during the festival where they taught impromptu Czech lessons to the community. When asked if she thought people in Wilber and the surrounding areas were interested in learning the language of their ancestors and about the modern culture, she responded by saying that it really depends on the people and the students—some are and some aren't. There are a lot of people who like to celebrate the Czech-American culture, but then there are still some

depends. Though she believes that the Czech-American version of folk culture is stronger in Nebraska, she has also explained that programs like the Czech Language Program at the University of Nebraska receive no lack of support in the community. It is things like making the Czech language or education that subject of performances such as parades that educate the community on the Czech accomplishments and culture through the years.

V.III History as Performance

Though the parades during the Czech Festival help to educate the crowds, they are by far not the most educational aspect of Czech Days. While the Miss Czech-Slovak US Pageant is the most well-known and well-attended attraction headquartered at Wilber's Outdoor Theater, the venue hosts another pageant just after the queen contestants vacate the stage—the Wilber Czech Historical Pageant, officially titled *The Tales of the Czechs*. *The Tales of the Czechs* is so held in esteem by the community that it has even spawned a collection of stories by the same title on Czech and Slovak history written by Joe and Kathy Vosoba, who were a part of the original exploratory committee that first sought to start the Wilber Czech Festival in the 1960s as well as patrons of the University of Nebraska-Lincoln's Czech Language Department. The book is sold for a small amount of money at the performances and by the Nebraska Czechs of Wilber in various locations around town all year round. In an author's not found at the end of the book, the Vosobas write that it is not meant to be an academic account of the history of the Czech and Slovak lands, but instead to “pass on history as a means of entertainment” to the community and attendees of the Wilber Czech Festival. (Vosoba & Vosoba, 1983) Indeed, it is from this source that many members of the community credit their own understanding of Czech history.

The Czech Historical pageant is a unique performance that bills itself on the 2010 brochure as “Not a play, by a unique cultural presentation.” In reality, it can be best described as a series of narrated tableaux of events in Czech history and legends. It generally consists of twelve different scenes in which a group of dedicated community members pose in absolute stillness for the few minutes it takes for the narrator to describe the story to the crowd. It traditionally starts with a scene of Great Father Čech leading his tribe into Bohemia, progresses on to the story of the knights sleeping inside of Mount Blaník, the founding of Charles University, and famously ends with a scene of Czech immigrants on ships next to the Statue of Liberty while

Neil Diamond's "Coming to America" plays in the background, underscoring the American element of their celebration of the Czech past. One of the best received scenes is one in which the story of Jan Hus is told, accompanying a mock burning at the stake onstage, complete with real fire. For a time, one of the local Protestant pastors was cast to play Jan Hus in this scene, adding an extra touch or realism. So dedicated is the production to telling the tales of important events in the Czech psyche that follow the death of Václav Havel, Mr. Vosoba wrote a new scene detailing his accomplishments where the former president was played by Steve Ouřecký.

While it is not the most accurate version of history and is often slightly dramatized, the *Tales of the Czechs* performances bring a sense of history and a connection to the festival, as most of the other events that take place are mostly centered on Czech-American ethnic identity and is seen through the immigrant perspective rather than culture and history coming directly from the Czech lands. In this performance, the Wilber Czech Festival connects with actual Czech history at times, regardless of the fact that it also promotes old Czech legends. The inclusion of legends into this performance, once again, brings up the ideas from the Czech National Awakening that the Czech-Americans in Wilber cling to. For them, it does not matter if these legends are true or not, but instead that they use them to feel a part of something—in this the Czech culture of their ancestors. This longing for a sense of belonging is summed up by Gans, who claims that practicing symbolic ethnicity is a way for the descendants of immigrants to feel as if they are a part of a certain community. (Gans, *Symbolic Ethnicity: the future of ethnic groups and cultures in America*, 1979)

For residents of Wilber, that sense of commonality is already built into the town's very infrastructure due to the fact that it is mostly homogenous. Instead of contributing to a heightened sense of connectedness within Wilber, the historical pageant creates a sense of connectedness with the Czech Republic because of the shared history. The Wilber residents also focus more on the older history of the Czech lands because of this sense of connectedness they have with it—it is these events that their ancestors witnessed in their homeland for generations before they left for America. In this way, it also serves to justify the Czech-American identity that most of them express.

V.IV Interpreting Dance

Yet another instance of performing ethnicity that occurs in Wilber's Outdoor Theater is the performances of the Wilber Czech Dancers. The group is made up of children under the age of eighteen from Wilber and the surrounding areas who are taught by former group member. The dancers meet for a few weeks before every festival and practice their dances, all of which are done to traditional polka or folk songs and are performed in folk costumes. The pinnacle of their set list is the performance of the Czech Beseda, which is billed as the national dance of the Czech Republic. The Wilber Czech Dancers were an integral part of the first Wilber Czech Days celebration and remain one of the most popular ways in which the youth are involved with their Czech culture. It is almost expected of the young people of the community to be involved in the Czech Dancers and they perform multiple times a day throughout the whole festival. The group is so popular that it has even led to the creation of an older group called the Alumni Dancers, comprised of adults in the community who enjoy performing the dance, which has become a Wilber tradition.

When speaking to family members who have grown up in Wilber, they describe mixed emotions about their time as part of the Wilber Czech Dancers group. Being a part of the first generation of children to have grown up with Czech Days festival in the 1960s and '70s, performing in this group was not an optional activity—they, like most of their peers were made to dance with the group by their parents, who wanted them to keep their Czech culture alive for another generation. It is interesting to note that the generation before them was often comprised of those who had been born the Czech-speaking parents and were criticized for sounding un-American if they spoke Czech outside of the home, as Doris explained. It is possible that this generation was subjected to a more rigorous involvement in the Czech culture in Wilber with the ethnic revival of the Czech festival in the 1960s because their parents were attempting to make up for the fact that their parents had been ashamed to be perceived as Czech. It is almost a delayed backlash to discrimination, which Gans claims will always bind communities of late generation ethnics together. In this case, it has bound the community of Wilber together in celebration of their ethnicity an entire generation later when it was socially acceptable to be Czech again.

During the early days of the Wilber Czech Festival, the United States was in the throes of a spate of ethnic revivals and was just again starting to take pride in its unique ethnic make-up, leading to more highly publicized ethnicity. This only served

perform at events all over the country. One of the shining moments of the group, according to family lore, was when they were featured on a special episode of the Midwestern cultural institution The Lawrence Welk Show, which featured polka and other ethnic musical performances. My aunt considers performing on the show as one of her fondest childhood memories. Much like with language, at the time immediately following immigration, these sorts of dances were considered barbaric and backwards by the Anglo-American population, who believed that the type of exertion resulting from performing these dances was uncouth. (Prchal, 2004) This example serves to prove as an instance where ethnic culture was once again acceptable in America, as this group of descendants of immigrants was able to perform a their own culture's folk dance on the national stage in a country where they are not a part of the cultural majority as non-Anglo-Americans.

V.V Sartorial Performances—You're Never Fully Dressed Without...

Throughout history, clothing has been an integral way in which people performed their own identities and with ethnic communities in America, especially Wilber, this is no different. The people in Wilber profess their sartorial ethnicity in a couple of ways, the first being completely subtle, whereas the second practically sings with ethnic identity different from that of the usual American fashions. The first instance of sartorial difference practiced by the Wilber Czechs is their use of jewelry as an identifier. In the case of Wilber, it is the possession of Czech garnets, worn mostly by females in the community.

The use of garnets is an interesting topic because this identification instrument is used subconsciously by the community and is not just limited to Wilber or even the state of Nebraska. Czech-Americans throughout the United States purchase and wear pieces of garnet jewelry originating in the Czech Republic mainly to have something precious from “the old country” that their ancestors might have coveted as well. People do not generally wear the garnets so that other Czechs might see the jewelry and recognize them as a part of the same ethnic group, yet it has become that way over time. When strolling through the town of Wilber and meeting with residents, one will notice that almost every woman in the community of a certain age is adorned with garnets and they are seen as practically a requirement for the young women competing in the Miss Czech-Slovak Queen competitions. One Queen from

Wisconsin even confided in me once that she was criticized by her pageant sponsors for not having garnets and told that she should go and buy a piece of jewelry incorporating them. So prevalent are garnets in the Wilber community that they are sold not only at the festival, but in a special jewelry section of Barnas Drug, the town drug store on the main street, along with Czech crystal.

Perhaps the more recognizable instance of sartorial ethnic performance, though, can be more readily recognized with the use of folk costumes, or *kroje*, as most people refer to them, within the community of Wilber. While it is different in some of the other ethnically Czech communities within the United States depending on what time people immigrated and which regions in the Czech lands they came from, most of the families who immigrated to Wilber do not bring folk costumes with them, much to the chagrin of their descendants, who would have liked to have original family heirlooms to wear to events such as Czech days. Sue laments this attitude, saying, *“I think a lot of the people who I’ve talked to, like an older woman that told me her grandmother told her they got rid of their “zoot suits” or clown suits the minute they hit American soil. They dropped them in New York. They just dropped them and left them on the dock just to get rid of them because they didn’t want to wear them. I think that that attitude has kind of come forwards somewhat but now it’s turning around and people are realizing that it would be nice to have some connection to that history.”*¹¹

Most of the residents of Wilber feel the same way, and almost all of them wear their *kroje* for the festival, whether it be for the entire weekend or just for certain events. This is truly an accomplishment as the average summer temperatures in Nebraska in August can reach over 100° F, or 43° C and the costumes are rather hot. Olivia considers it an identifier that you are a part of the community, rather than just a spectator who has come to see the Czech-Americans of Wilber practice their ethnicity, stating, *“In Wilber there’s the people who are Czech and then there’s just the people who are there for entertainment, who maybe are not connected to the Czech part. It’s such a big deal, and I feel like if you’re wearing Czech clothing like a *kroj* or a vest that’s how you kind of set yourself apart, to show that you’re serious about your culture—you’re proud of it.”* Olivia then went on to say that that was actually one of the few things about her trip to the Czech Republic that she was

disappointed in—that there wasn't as much folk culture as is promoted in Nebraska. She expounded on the point, saying, *“I was a little disappointed that there wasn't more of it, but I also—I liked having the insight that this isn't what they do. It made me feel a lot more intelligent, knowing what life is really like there [Czech Republic] because a lot of people from here who have never been there, especially our parents generation or our grandparents generation who maybe haven't been there or haven't been there for a long time have this kind of romanticized view of what it's like, so it made me feel a little bit...I don't know if empowered is the right word? Just to know what things are really like there, but to still appreciate and enjoy celebrating in that romanticized way here. Kind of like, the best of both worlds.”*¹²

Olivia is a rarity in feeling this way though, as most of the Czech-Americans in Wilber see wearing *kroje* to the Czech festivals around the state as something intrinsic to their understanding of being Czech. The town of Wilber even promotes the wearing of *kroje* officially, by setting up a special booth run by the town on the main street of the festival and handing out commemorative pins or badges to each and every person who stops by and is dressed in folk costume. *Kroje* are not just used in festivals in Wilber either, but instead are considered the appropriate attire to wear to any Czech-related occasion throughout the year. Any time that there is a dance at the local Sokol hall or concert of Czech music, one can see at least a few people dressed up in the folk costumes. I even recall a time in 2010 when the University of Nebraska was hosting a symposium on Czech and Slovak settlers to the Great Plains where amongst all of the academics, members of the local Czech community attended lectures and presentations, their bright costumes mixing with the comparatively drab and conservative apparel of other attendees.

Sue has a similar anecdote that she heard from a friend who had visited the Czech Republic, telling me when I brought the subject of *kroje* up, *“I was talking to Yvonne Masopust in Santa Barbra, she told me the last time she went back to Prague was for a graduation, and she said, ‘In that sea of black and blue suits in the audience,’ she said, ‘there were two babičky in their kroje and they just stood out. They wore it out of respect for a grandchild or great-grandchild.’”* Sue went on to tell me how much she agrees with that custom, explaining, *“I really like the tradition of showing respect to another family, like Charlie and Mary Jean who always wore*

their kroje to a funeral, to a wedding, you name it. I was there for a graduation, and that's what it's for...a kroj is supposed to worn out of respect for somebody when they got married or when they passed."¹³

Charlie and Mary Jean Keller are prominent members of the Wilber community who have spent most of their lives promoting Wilber's Czech Festival and Czech heritage in Nebraska. Charlie passed away two years ago, as mentioned earlier, and had one of the most Czech-American funerals that has possibly ever been held, incidentally full of performances of Czech-American ethnicity. The funeral was held not in a church, but in Wilber's Sokol Hall where many members of the community came wearing their folk costumes as a sign of respect and gratitude at Charlie's devotion to promoting the Czech-American cause. Doris, who herself attended, recounted the funeral saying that instead of funeral dirges polka music was played. While this is not common for all funerals within the community, it was a fitting tribute to Charlie, who was for so many years the face of Wilber's festival and Czech events. The entire community paid tribute to his constant wearing of folk dress by showing him the same respect as he afforded all of their deceased relations.

Kroje not only serve as an identifier of who belongs to the community and who does not, but they are also one of the main draws for getting young girls involved in practicing their Czech ethnicity in Wilber and all over the US. Carrie Brown cites them as a major contributing factor to getting young women involved with the community, saying, "*When you go to these festivals and you see these queens dressed in these pretty dresses and it's something that you're ancestors might have had and did, I think that's something very cool to think that you could wear something that meant something to your ancestors.*" Julia agrees with this sentiment, too, and says that when she talks to the local Czech-Slovak Queens, she learns a lot about history and customs—but mostly *kroje*. "*I'm trying to do the royalty side of things so I keep learning a lot about the different costumes—the different kroje and where they come from. I just hang out with the queens a lot and then end up learning a lot from them,*" she claims.¹⁴ Her interest in folk costumes have also allowed her to become an invaluable volunteer at the Wilber Czech Museum, where she spends many weekends helping to maintain and put together the folk costume displays.

¹³ Appendix 3, p. 93-109

The folk costumes are actually so prevalent in the Czech-American idea of preserving and performing their culture that wearing them is actually required for the Czech-Slovak Queens at the national level as well as throughout Nebraska. While some of the chapters may allow a queen or contestant to make an appearance sans *kroje*, it is generally frowned upon. The folk costumes not only make up one-fourth of the score for contestants in the Miss Czech-Slovak US competition, but are also seen as adding legitimacy to the pageant and separating it from the beauty pageants that are popular in certain places in the United States.

In conversations that I have had with Miss Czech-Slovak US pageant director MaryElizabeth Lackey, she explained the situation by saying that she believes the *kroje* underscore the fact that this is an ethnic heritage competition and not a beauty pageant. Anytime the queens want to wear their crown and sash that comes with the title, they either have to be wearing an official pageant shirt or their folk costumes. It is a rule that has the support of the community, who in past situations when a queen was shown as not wearing costume to an official Czech event has been openly critical. For them, it is imperative that their representatives dress the part and while not wearing the costumes might be more comfortable, it can also pass along the connotations that one is mildly ashamed or dismissive of her heritage. It is almost a feeling of wanting to right the wrongs of their ancestors, who, as Sue has mentioned, felt the need to get rid of their folk costumes either upon arrival to America or even earlier back in the homeland.

Folk costumes are not only used as an identifier as to which community you belong to, but can also serve to show the members of the community exactly what sort of ethnic Czech identity one possesses. It should also be noted that the performance of Czech identity while wearing *kroje* is dominated by the female residents of Wilber. Though the males in the community also wear a version of the folk costumes, there's are generally always an Americanized version and are significantly less ornate than the women's costumes. While in the Czech lands, one can generally discern which region a person is from depending on their costume, in Wilber, this idea has almost taken on a life of its own. The wearing of *kroje* can be broken into two main categories—which is incidentally the way that the Miss Czech-Slovak US pageant separates things for judging, too—Americanized and authentic folk costumes.

For the purpose of this thesis, the Americanized category of folk costumes is

Czech-American community in order to act out their ethnicity. Because they did not have the means to get authentic folk costumes or their families had not preserved them as heirlooms, the people of Wilber were resourceful enough to develop their own version of *kroje*. Another contributing factor to this necessity is that when the Wilber Czech Festival began in the 1960s, Czechoslovakia was under communism and therefore the American Czechs of Wilber did not maintain as much contact with them as their ancestors once had. Doris, for one, maintains that it was communism that led to the lack of folk costumes in the Czech Republic today. While this claim cannot be substantiated, it was a large factor in why the residents of Wilber resorted to making their own costumes.

When asked to describe what an Americanized *kroje* looks like, Carrie Brown offered the cursory, “*It’s a white blouse, red skirt, and black vest,*” explanation.¹⁵ This is essentially true, although much more detail goes into making the costumes than this may lead one to believe. Most Americanized *kroje* are based off of either a very basic version of *kroje* found in the Kyjov region of Moravia or the *kroje* from the Southern Bohemian regions in the Czech Republic. It can not be narrowed down further as these costumes have often taken on their own character, and while they can be recognized as folk costumes, bear no striking features that determine which region’s folk dress they are trying to emulate. It is probably safe to say that they are modeled on the Bohemian variant in Wilber, though, as many of its residents’ ancestors immigrated to Nebraska from that region. (Korytová-Magstadt, 1993)

For men, the Americanized folk costume is made up of black slacks, a vest, and a white button-down shirt. The shirt is traditionally long-sleeved but the heat during the festival has also led to the creation of a short-sleeved variant and trimmed with red or blue braid imported from the Czech Republic. Before that was possible, one can only assume that the residents of Wilber found the most ethnically Czech-looking trim as a replacement. Occasionally, the slacks are decorated with the same braid. All of this is accompanied by the most important element in a men’s costume in Wilber, which is the vest. Vests, as sold at the Czech Craft Shop in Wilber are either red or black and open in the front. They are completed with either gold or red cord, forming the form of a heart on the back. In many families, however, these vests are personalized to a person’s or a family’s interests. For example, a saxophone

player might have music notes on the back of the vests and symbols like the Czech lion or the Czech flag are not uncommon to see adorning the vests. It is also interesting to note that the men only refer to their clothing as Czech costumes or folk costumes, whereas the women use the terms Czech costumes and *kroje* interchangeably.

Women's costumes, in contrast, are much more elaborate and full of meaning. The traditional Wilber Czech costume is usually made with skirts in one of three colors; red, blue, or maroon, but as the years go by, many women coordinate their costumes with their favorite colors. This is more common among the women competing to be Czech-Slovak Queens, though, where the community in general maintains a sense of uniformity. The skirts are adorned with the same type of imported braid along the bottom of the skirts and are covered with a white apron that has been embroidered either by himself or herself or an elder member of the community. The women also wear a black, front-laced vests much like the male version, which can also be personalized as well as a billowy white blouse with embroidered sleeves. Because embroidery is so prevalent in the community, it is often regarded as a "Czech activity" which people may try to master in order to identify more with their heritage. Over time, these costumes have become synonymous with being from a Czech-American community even outside of Wilber.

It would be a discredit to the people of Wilber to say that they do not realize that these costumes are not authentic or what is traditionally worn as folk dress in the Czech Republic. These days, that is an acknowledged and accepted fact, although there are still some detractors, who believe that people should try and wear as much of the authentic versions of the regional *kroje* as possible, especially in today's global world where you can connect with anyone seemingly anywhere in the world just as easily as talking to a person in the same city thanks to the internet. In fact, people in Wilber and other ethnically Czech communities in the US have even begun to import their folk costumes directly from vendors in the Czech Republic. Steve believes that the advancement in technology has led for people to get more involved in their Czech ethnicity these days, stating, *"I think that there's a lot more awareness of your roots right now than when I was that age. When I was 15, really... No, people really didn't do much with their stuff, particularly, I think, the girls with their kroje. I think everybody back then just had your black vest and your red skirt and that was about it."*

Now I'm buying stuff from overseas for her! [referring to Julia]''¹⁶ When I spoke with Sue, she agreed with this theory, saying, "I think that they [the Czech community in Wilber] celebrate their culture more now probably than what they've done in the past ten to fifteen years. They're starting to realize that things that made up a lot of their culture—the kroje—they're now starting to realize that that is important."

Just the fact that people are starting to buy authentic *kroje* from overseas does not completely silence the critics though. In Sue's opinion, mixing up the pieces of authentic costumes is just as bad, if not worse than just wearing an Americanized one, exclaiming, "*Oh, that just irritates me! You'll have somebody just throw a bunch of pieces together that don't belong together and you have people judging [in the Miss Czech-Slovak US pageant] that don't understand what that's all about. That's kind of a thorn in my side—that's, that kroj meant something to those different regions!*"¹⁷ Carrie takes a similar stance, and even goes so far to disagree with the idea of Americanized *kroje*.

People who are fans of the Americanized version, however, defend their opinion by explaining that this was what their ancestors who were immigrants or those descended from immigrants wore, rather than what they had in their homelands. As MaryElizabeth Lackey claims, these Americanized versions might not be authentic, but they are a representation of the Czech-American culture that people's ancestors have developed after arriving in the US, thus making them a valid expression of ethnic identity as well. While it may matter more for the women who strive to be the next Miss Czech-Slovak US to have intricate and as authentic as possible costumes, for the majority of people in Wilber there is a more "anything goes" attitude applied to the costumes so long as one wears them with pride. For people in Wilber, what was good enough for the town's founding members is good enough for them, too. It does not matter if they are preserving an impure form of the folk costumes, so long as they are keeping the tradition of wearing them alive and that they function as a way of performing their ethnicity during events like the Wilber Czech Festival.

VI Preserving Ethnicity

¹⁶Appendix 2, p.76-93, p. 74-91

The performance of identity through folk costumes brings up an interesting facet in classifying just how the Czech-Americans of Wilber fulfill Gans' symbolic ethnicity theory. Though wearing them while bands perform or as part of a dance group does indicate that these clothes are being used as a performance piece, as does the absence of wearing them in everyday life, the fact that there are authentic pieces of clothing involved in this practice does indicate that they are preserving them in a way. This is especially true when one considers the fact that people in Wilber most likely wear their folk costumes more often than people living in most areas of the Czech Republic, with a few exceptions.

Even in instances where Wilber residents are wearing Americanized versions of *kroje*, they still believe that they are continuing in something that their ancestors did and therefore are preserving this aspect. The statement rings especially true when paired with their belief that this is an appropriate preservation of Czech-ness. It was what their ancestors who first came to Nebraska practiced and in some cases picked up when the fervor for the Czech National Awakening peaked in America before and during the First World War and Masaryk's campaign trail through most of Czech and Slovak America for support for the formation of Czechoslovakia. It is imperative to the people of Wilber not just to promote and preserve the ethnicity of their ancestors who lived in the Czech lands, but to extend that preservation to the distinctly Czech-American ethnicity that their forefathers created during the first few generations of living on American soil. This sentiment is especially interesting when paired with the commonly held belief in Wilber that in their small town, they are actively preserving a part of the Czech culture that people in the Czech Republic have either forgotten or do not care enough to preserve.

VI.1 Keeping the Music Alive

In very much the same way that the people of Wilber feel the need to preserve the custom of wearing *kroje*, they feel the same about preserving the Czech music in Nebraska. In this case, it is not even just limited to the polka music that is so prevalent and popular within the community, although that must be preserved as well along those lines. One example of this preservation is the work was the Lincoln Symphony Orchestra's concert in the Lied Center for the Performing Arts in March, titled Czech Landscapes. The concert was focused on a selection Dvořák and

Smetana's work—most of which draws inspiration from Bohemian folk music and melodies. (Lied Center of the Performing Arts, 2014) Though this concert was not part of the usual music celebrated by the community, it was fully supported by the local Lincoln chapter of the Nebraska Czechs, who sold refreshments such as koláče during the intermission. This demonstrates that even though more classical fare is not generally part of the music that those in the Czech community around Wilber listen to for enjoyment, they are no less supportive or proud of it as a representation of their Czech ethnicity and celebration of the accomplishments of the Czech nation.

While polka bands are the most well known purveyors of Czech music around Wilber, even residents such as Sue, who has her own polka band, branch out and help to preserve other aspects of Czech folk music. She plays the button accordion, which is prevalent in polka music, but also has spent the time to learn the *dudy* and has acquired a horsehair jug to use in her folk music. Sue serves as a connection to folk music for the community as she introduces them to different instruments and music that they may not have heard of before as well as the history of it. When we met, she even educated me a bit, telling me about music from the Chodsko region, "*Originally, the music was that you'd have a vocalist and a dudy was basically all that accompanied the vocalist and then they brought in a violin and a clarinet, so then you had your 3 musicians with your vocalist. They brought in a b flat clarinet later on and your double bass. That's kind of how that all kind of evolved,*" she explained. "*Then they brought in the stop fiddle and the horse-hair jug and the fernak.*"¹⁸ She underscores the fact that not all folk music from every single region in the Czech Republic relies on the accordion.

Due to the fact that so many families from Nebraska can trace their roots to the Chodsko region of the Czech Republic (Korytová-Magstadt, 1993), the Bohemian bagpipes or *dudy* are actually experiencing a flutter of popularity in certain circles around Wilber. Sue not only cites them as one of her most-prized instruments, but Julia has even begun to learn how to play them in hopes of tackling a new instrument. Carrie Brown also plays the *dudy* and has attended the folk festival *Chodské Slavnosti* for the past few years where she has performed on them along with members of her surrogate family in the Czech Republic. When asked why she chose to learn the *dudy*, she always responds with a laugh, questioning why anyone wouldn't want to

learn to play a dead goat. She becomes serious though and explains, “*When I was living in Nebraska, I saw a concert with the dudy and I immediately fell in love with it and knew I wanted to learn them. First of all, they were from Chodsko, where I found out that my family was from and second of all, they play such an important part in Czech folk music. Everyone plays the accordion in Nebraska and that’s just not exciting!*” Carrie elaborates on the point further, saying, “*I wish that more people here in Czech would know about it and at least know about what the Czech bagpipes are.*” For her, they are such an important aspect of Czech music that she is genuinely saddened when someone does not know about them. Playing the bagpipes for her is not just something she does for pleasure, but also her own personal crusade to preserve the instrument and give it more exposure in the Nebraska Czech communities.

VI.II Preservation for the Tone-deaf

Although music is one of the most well known ways to preserve Czech ethnic identity in Wilber, it does not come without its problems, particularly for those in the community who believe they are the exceptions to the saying *co Čech, to muzikant* that people within the community are found of parroting. For the tone-deaf or non-musically talented, there are other ways in which the community helps to preserve their non-WASP identity, including preserving the Czech language. This issue in the community is an interesting one, as for years, people were ashamed of using their Czech language skills in the push to be American after the country Bohemian Schools closed down, as Doris witnessed earlier. Many people who spoke Czech at home faced difficulties in the American schooling system, too, as they were in the minority with the Anglo-American population who had already mastered English. As Dr. Šašková-Pierce points out, many Czech-speakers found themselves behind in school in the first few generations to arrive in the US, as they had to be taught English before they could progress—a situation that was remedied in part by hiring native Czech speakers from the community to serve as teachers in country schools. (Šašková-Pierce, 2003) In latter generations, the children who had grown up being behind because of not speaking English as a native language, often attempted to make up for this through assimilation—that is, purposefully not teaching their children Czech and insisting that they learn English like other “American” children. The fact that most of the early Czech immigrants to Nebraska had a hard time mastering English, which

was only supported by their isolation into almost completely homogenous Czech communities such as Wilber, only added to the perception in Anglo-American society that the Czechs were uneducated and an intellectually inferior ethnic group. (Prchal, 2004)

The people of Wilber ultimately support the revival of teaching Czech in the community, which is just starting to appear with this generation,, although the subject does bring about an interesting set of opinions. Many people who did not get a chance to learn it when they were younger feel, like Sue, feel as if by learning it, they will feel closer to their ancestors and therefore better understand their own identities as late generation Czech ethnics. In the community today, only a handful of people speak Czech with any fluency and a slightly larger number of people know a smattering of words and phrases employed around town. In the face of this linguistic decline, though, many of Wilber's residents refuse to accept the idea that the Czech language may vanish completely from their vernacular. People have a nostalgic attachment to the language that is not altogether constructed as a large number of middle-aged and older residents of Wilber can recall a time when people spoke Czech on the streets rather than English. It would be unthinkable in their opinions to consider removing the Czech business names from the storefronts in town and as Doris has informed me, there was even a push within the last year for bilingual street names in order the further employ the Czech language in town.

What is interesting about Wilber is that while the use of Czech has declined over the years since the immigrants first arrived in the 1860s, the community still employs a selective use of Czech words and phrases. All over the town, one can see signs in front of businesses and homes alike reading *Vítáme Vás* and especially during the Czech festival, people greet each other by saying *Dobrý den* and *Jak se máš?* One of the favorites of old men who know a bit more of the language is to say *hezká holka, dej mi hubičku*, although they are usually flabbergasted to find that anyone younger than the age of 35 could possibly understand them. There is also a growing nostalgia among members of the community who learned Czech as their first language for other people to converse with. In pre-ethnic revival America, it was deemed as better to only teach their children English and in some cases, keep a "secret language" of sorts between the adults of the community, but now the older residents are reaping the rewards of this practice and, as more of their peers pass away, are left increasingly

themselves. Doris explains how this had affected people such as her own husband, Lloyd, saying, *“No, you were careful [to not speak Czech outside of the home] and that’s why the language started to [die] ...people started forgetting it. I know Lloyd thought that he had forgotten all of it and then when we got over in the Czech Republic—or, it was Czechoslovakia when we went over—and then he all of the sudden started picking things up, hearing it more.”*¹⁹

For people active in preserving their Czech ethnicity in Wilber now, language has been an important topic when it comes to preserving their Czech customs in today’s modern world. While neither Steve nor Doris speak Czech fluently, both have expressed the desire to learn and be able to converse in it. Julia says that for her, it is not necessarily important to be fluent in the language, but to learn a few phrases and words for herself and for the sake of courtesy when meeting people from the Czech Republic. For many people in the community, this idea seems to be the most effective for their own lives, as many feel discouraged by the difficulty of learning a Slavic language. Doris points out the flaws in this rationale that appear at times during her volunteer work at the Wilber Czech Museum. *“The only thing—if you say something when they [Czech speakers] come in the museum, then they think you can speak it and then they start rattling [in Czech] and it’s like, whoa! Wait a minute!”* she warns with a laugh. *“So you have to be kind of careful if you’d like to do it, just as a friendly thing so that you make them feel comfortable—but you can get in trouble.”*²⁰

Carrie Brown, who has studied the Czech language both in Nebraska and in the Czech Republic has a slightly different opinion and provides a counterpoint to this argument, frequently saying she does not see how Czech could be useful to use in Nebraska. This is contrasted, though, when she talks about her own decision to study that language. *“My grandmother spoke Czech, so I saw that she could help people from that and she had a lot of great memories from her early childhood speaking Czech,”* she says. *“We had family stories of people who used to speak Czech. I guess I just wanted to keep that in the family and so, I just nominated myself to be that one who could do it.”*²¹ In this case, the language is difficult, but the need for nostalgia

¹⁹Appendix 2, p.76-93

²⁰Appendix 2, p.76-93

and a symbol of where her family came from trumps her reticence at learning a Slavic language.

Despite the difficulty in learning the language, a number of people from the Czech-American community in Nebraska cite learning the Czech language as something that has strengthened their feeling of connection to their Czech ethnic identity and had encouraged them to do more with it. Olivia, who completed a minor in the Czech language at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln is a prime example of this and claims, *“I don’t think I really got into my culture until I really started learning the language, because it just, it, I don’t know, for some reason it just made it a lot more important to me. And it gave me the confidence to study abroad and to go alone. It just, it made me a lot more proud of my heritage. It made me feel a lot more, like, worthy of telling people I’m Czech, if that makes sense? Like, I’m Czech, I’ve studied the language...I’m not that good at it, but, I’ve tried.”*²² Bryon Dvorak, who also took a year of language classes at the university agrees with this sense that the language is important to his Czech-American identity as well as helps him to connect with his extended family, saying, *“I am not that great at it, I only took one year but my sister-in-law is Czech so I speak it with her whenever I can. I do feel like it is important because it helps me identify with my heritage.”*

Others say that learning the Czech language has helped them to preserve family memories that had been rooted in the past a long with more modern connections to the Czech Republic. Carrie, for one, claims that learning the Czech language has helped her to understand more about her family and childhood, claiming, *“When I was a kid, I never knew that some words we say in my family weren’t English. Before I started learning Czech and came here to the Czech Republic. Now I know that they were actually nursery rhymes and words in Czech.”*²³

While Carrie’s family cherished the remnants of the Czech language in their own family life, not all cases and Czech-American communities within Nebraska are as supporting. Jennifer Kroft was born in an area of Nebraska referred to as the “Bohemian Alps” because of its rolling hills and the large amounts of Bohemian-speaking immigrants who settled there. This area is more north in the state than Wilber and contains a different make-up of people who immigrated—rather than the majority of freethinkers from Southern Bohemians who settled in Saline County and

²² Appendix 4, p. 109-122

Wilber, the Czech-Americans of this region are descended from a more predominantly Moravian and Catholic group. (Korytová-Magstadt, 1993)

Looking back on her childhood, Jennifer also expresses a sense of not knowing of her linguistic heritage, stating, *“I didn’t realize that my grandparents were speaking with a Czech accent. I always just assumed that they were a bit simple or something and talked funny—I hated it. I never knew that English wasn’t their native language until I was a teenager and I had a friend over. After she met my grandparents, I was so embarrassed that she met my weird family, but she told me she thought it was cool that my grandparents had a Czech accent!”*²⁴ Jennifer goes on to further shed light on this sense of embarrassment by explaining that when she was growing up, being a “dumb *bohunk*” was still something to be ashamed of and that her mother just wanted to be American. *“She didn’t want anything to do with Czech culture or the old country, so I didn’t really know about it. It was only when I started studying about Czech immigrants and found out about the freethinkers and Wilber that I started to think that being Czech was something cool.”* For Jennifer, her family was so stigmatized by the beliefs of other immigrant groups and the Anglo-American culture that permeates American society that their sense of Czech ethnic identity was almost completely lost until she took it upon herself to study her genealogy.

Despite the mixed feelings some people harbor about learning the Czech language, almost everyone is in agreement that the language should continue to be taught and used in Nebraska, regardless of the fact that they may not learn the language themselves. Right now, there are two main ways to learn the language for the community of Wilber. The first, and more informal option of the two is within the community through another resident who still speaks the language. Both Steve and Carrie started learning Czech like this, albeit in Omaha, in the basement of a woman who taught other community members. Sue claims that this idea has caught on in Wilber, telling me that Wilber resident Nancy Lenhardt has taken it upon herself to offer similar classes, called “chat with Czech” which take place every two weeks. According to Sue, the classes focus more on teaching people words and phrases rather than the intricacies of Czech grammar, which elude many native English-speakers.

This approach, while popular for its relaxed atmosphere, is not without problems when it comes to actually learning the language. Firstly, these classes are

based mainly on phrasing and vocabulary, and while it does educate people as a great basic guide to the Czech language, it is uncertain whether this sort of language maintenance will result in anyone from the community actually becoming fluent, or at least conversational in the Czech language. Because of this, though, it is rather perfect for the maintenance and passing down of the Czech language as the community selectively uses it today.

Another issue with teaching Czech in this form stems from the historical roots of the community. While there is a population of older people who learned Czech as either a native language in Wilber or picked it up after hearing their parents and grandparents converse in it, this approach is not only notoriously lax in grammar, but also promotes the use of an outdated version of Czech. Though English has transformed over the years and is noticeably different from its earlier intonations, it, by virtue, has not gone through the comparatively rapid changes that Czech does, being a constantly evolving language. Many of the older residents in Wilber have had no formal education in the Czech language themselves aside from speaking it at home.

One must also remember the fact that most of the native speakers in Wilber also speak the Czech that was spoken when their family last had direct contact with relatives or friends in the old country, which, at best was pre-1948, yet could be much earlier. When all of these factors are added together, it could lead to the phenomena of sorts where people who have learned Czech in the past 50 years are speaking colloquially and in a turn of the century version of the Czech language. In this case the people of Wilber would be truly preserving the Czech language, unintentionally in the very way that their ancestors spoke it.

Yet another venue at which the residents of Wilber and the surrounding communities can preserve their Czech language skills is the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, which offers a more official and rigorous set of courses for those able to attend either on its campus or online. The University of Nebraska-Lincoln has actually been instrumental in not only in preserving Czech language, but also for creating a common place for the Czech community in Nebraska to come together and work to gain recognition from the rest of the state. It should be noted, though, that while the University of Nebraska-Lincoln (or UNL hereafter) does offer Czech language instruction open to students and members of the community, it is not

be too demanding for a language that they are learning in their free time. In this case, ethnicity, or the practice of Czech-American ethnicity through learning to speak the Czech language is relegated to a leisure time activity regardless of whether or not the instruction is through an accredited university or in a community member's living room. It fits in perfectly with Gans' assertion that in late generation ethnics, ethnicity is only practiced to create a sense of belonging in a large society, especially if one has moved away from their home community. (Gans, *The coming darkness of late-generation European American ethnicity*, 2014) Gans claims that it does not matter whether they practice an actual accurate version of the ethnicity, but just that it creates a sense of belonging—much like the camaraderie students feel after moving away from home and finding a group in which feel familiarity, such as a class full of other people who have a similar Czech-American identity. (Gans, *The coming darkness of late-generation European American ethnicity*, 2014) Interestingly enough for the purpose of this thesis, these were exactly the circumstances, much like the earlier immigrant desire for isolated Czech-speaking communities, that led to the founding of the University of Nebraska's Czech language program. (Korytová-Magstadt, 1993)

Though many Czechs flocked to Nebraska starting in the 1860s and formed a number of very visible Czech-speaking communities, adding Czech to the list of languages taught at Nebraska's most prestigious state university was not an easy task. In fact, the Czechs of Nebraska faced many struggles having their language recognized in their new home state. For one thing, the facts that their communities isolated themselves and took longer to learn English than many other immigrant groups to the plains kept them out of institutions of higher education at the very beginning of their move to America. (Korytová-Magstadt, 1993) The fact that they clung to their own language and ways did nothing to convince the Anglo-American society that the Czech culture was one of education was not especially successful either, as the Czech nation by nature is a small one, whereas other immigrant groups such as the ethnic Germans came from a more well-known great nation of recognized cultural accomplishments. (Tucker, 1996) In comparison to the Germans, who generally had less trouble learning English because of it being a Germanic language, the Czechs were seen as being an undesirable immigrant group full of uneducated and simple people in the thinking of the times. (Prchal, 2004)

The Czech language only began to be taught at the University of Nebraska-

who was at that time sending their children to become educated at the university to fulfill positions like those of teachers that were needed in their own communities. (Šašková-Pierce, 2003) As Dr. Šašková-Pierce is fond of saying when speaking about the Czech language offerings at the university, *“They had to fight for the Czech language at UNL. It was no easy task.”*²⁵ The local Czech community had to campaign for their language and prove that it was one of culture and education. It was almost as if they were going through their own personal struggle like the Czech National Awakening, made even more poignant when one considers the fact that it was mainly the German immigrant group that they were competing against. Jennifer, who is working on a project of digitizing and preserving all of the records of the early ethnic Czechs who studied at UNL, once confided to me, *“During the first World War, the Czech language department had a lot of problems. They were struggling for survival because people at the university didn’t want there to be Czech offered. It got really political because a lot of the chancellors who opposed Czech were descendants of German immigrants and were supporting the Austrian side of the war.”*²⁶

With the help of the community and the many descendants of Czech immigrants who attended the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, the Czech Language department was finally founded in 1907. (Šašková-Pierce, 2003) It was not, however, a deeply entrenched institution and was frequently under attack from members of the Anglo-American community. As Jennifer attested to, the Czech language program was almost shut down before it had even begun to make an impact on the community. While the program was originally popular with the Czech-American ethnics who were attending the university, it was successfully shut down by the board of regents in the 1920s, through, what Dr. Šašková-Pierce describes as, “a political program of xenophobia,” at the university, determined to make sure that no ethnic factions survived the Great War which tore American public society apart through diversity. (Šašková-Pierce, 2003) The University of Nebraska heritage project supports these claims through Jennifer’s research, unearthing letters and documents from this period involving the firing of the entire Slavonic department’s lecturers following World War I. It is thought that this had a lot to do with the program’s leader, Šárka Hrbková’s involvement in wartime Women’s Committee, which passed on intelligence for the US government during the war to figures such as Masaryk.

²⁵ Appendix 8, p. 138

Hrbková also had the unpleasant task of sitting on the university's "loyalty tribunals" which were put in place to make sure that no one was on the wrong side of the war—a tricky task when one of the biggest ethnicities at the university was German. Once the war was over, the board of regents decided the time had come for her and the program to end as possible punishment for questioning her peers. (Kroft) It was also a perfect excuse to finally do away with the Czech language program of which they were not overtly fond.

Thanks once again to community protests and petitions, the Czech language was re-established at the university, although this time it was still not safe from facing termination due to low enrollment numbers. In the 1970s, the university finally came to the decision to cut the program once again thanks to a low number of students enrolled in the courses. (Šašková-Pierce, 2003) My father was taking Czech at UNL around this time and a newspaper clipping I once unearthed in his old notes attested to the fact that the Czech-American community from all over Nebraska came out in force to picket proposal and show support for the program. Today, the Czech language program at UNL is very firmly in place thanks to help from the community. The entire program is now funded by the Czech Language Foundation, of which Steve is a board member. The program takes donations from the community to ensure that the Czech language program at the university can never be shut down in order to cut costs. The foundation successfully provides scholarships as well as free textbooks for every student enrolled in the Czech classes on the University of Nebraska-Lincoln campus. (UNL Czech Komensky Club, 2014) The program is also supported by the Czech Ministry of Education, who sends a lecturer to Nebraska every year to fulfill the need for quality Czech language instruction outside of the Czech Republic. (UNL Czech Komensky Club, 2014) This provides incentives for those of Czech descent as well as those students who are independently interested in the Czech culture to fulfill their language requirements through taking Czech classes.

VI.III University Clubs

While the Czech language courses at the university are instrumental for preserving the interest and education, they would not exist without the involvement of the University of Nebraska-Lincoln Czech Komenský or Comenius Club. The club was founded at the university in 1903 and was once a part of many organizations around the nation that promoted Czech culture and values at American universities

which had large populations of students who then considered themselves “foreign-born Czechs” rather than Americans. (Kroft) The club was named after the famous Czech educator Jan Amos Komenský, who fittingly in the American-Czech way of looking at things, promoted the education of children in their own language—something that his namesake club fought for in its early days at the University of Nebraska. (Šašková-Pierce, 2003) Much like the Czech language courses at UNL, the Komenský Club was officially shut down during World War I and for a period of time shortly following, although it still met and remained on the university bulletin during that time. (Kroft) Since then, it has been reinstated and flourishes at the university even today.

The original purpose of the Komenský Club at UNL was to give the Czech-speaking students a group in which they could meet and freely speak Czech while they were studying away from home, as well as addressing a number of issues that plagued the Czech community in Nebraska at that time. (Šašková-Pierce, 2003) In this way, they fulfilled the requirement of creating a group of belonging while away from their normal communities in the symbolic ethnicity theory. (Gans, *The coming darkness of late-generation European American ethnicity*, 2014; Abulof, 2009; Dutkova-Cope, 2003) What is interesting, though, is that this group would not fit the rest of Gans’ theory, though, as at this point, they did not qualify as late generation ethnics. Instead, as first generation Americans who still in most senses considered themselves more Bohemian than American, this is merely a trait of the original, undiluted ethnic group rather than an attempt at nostalgia.

Today, however, the situation has evolved, as has the Komenský Club. While its first intonation was as a safe place for Czechs attending the university to be Czech, it has shifted to a less ethnically exclusive organization that supports and supplements the Czech language instruction at UNL. Bryon, who serves as the secretary of the club this academic year described the club’s goals to me simply as, “*to bring Czech culture to the UNL campus.*” According to the club’s webpage which provides a less concise mission statement, they are a club dedicated to welcoming *all* people interested in Czech language and culture, preserving the Czech culture in Nebraska, and contributing to a diverse university community through representing the Czech culture at the University of Nebraska. (UNL Czech Komensky Club, 2014) While many of the members of the club are the descendants of Czech immigrants to

Czech culture and language, promoted by the Modern Languages Department—most notably those who study Russian or Eastern European Studies and choose to learn another, comparatively similar language. (Šašková-Pierce, 2003)

As a former member of the club, I was invited to observe one of their meetings during my time in Nebraska this past year. The club today is run by three students and their advisor, Dr. Šašková-Pierce, however consists of more members from the Czech language classes who attend the events that they plan. During the meeting, they planned the latest Czech movie night, their helping out with the Lincoln Symphony Orchestra's upcoming Czech Landscapes concert, as well as which stories they would put in their newsletter, *Náš svět*, which is published a few times each semester and distributed to subscribers around the country including the Embassy of the Czech Republic in Washington, D.C. The newsletter covers stories from current events in the Czech Republic to events to accomplishments of the students of Czech language at UNL, as well as serving as a notice for the community of all of the events the Komenský Club plans for the community around Lincoln. Usually, they host a once a month showing of a Czech movie in addition to having fundraiser Czech meals, hosting dances, and even planning an entire "Czech Week" which serves as the pinnacle of the club's scholastic year. All of the events are open to the public and generally free as a way to promote Czech culture and language.

An interesting shift has occurred in the club today, though, in the form of a shift with the Czech language program at the university. Even though the Komenský Club began as a way of garnering support for Czech language instruction, these days it almost seems as if the Czech language classes are supporting the Komenský Club through providing more members and event attendees. The club even benefits from the Czech Language Foundation due to the fact that so long as there is the Czech Language at UNL, the Komenský Club will continue to exist as well. It is a sort of reverse symbiosis in the maintenance of these two organizations. Even so, many of the non-student attendees of the Komenský Club's events come from the Czech Language Foundation or the Nebraska Czechs, Inc. organization. When questioned as to whether he felt supported by the local Czech community, Bryon responded by saying that they were very supportive of all of their endeavors. Though the club has changed through the years from mainly promoting the Czech language to mainly promoting Czech culture in accompaniment with the university's language courses, it

ethnicity in Nebraska for numerous generations since its founding, making the students who contribute to and maintain the club now the perfect example of late generation ethnics. The organization has metamorphosed with the community, making the transition from recently immigrated ethnics to late generation ones with only minimal changes to its own structure.

VI.IV Preserving Memory through History

The next version of preserving Czech ethnicity in the Wilber area that takes place occurs all year round on main street, right next to the Wilber Bakery where one can get Czech-style pastries all year round—the Wilber Czech Museum. The Wilber Czech Museum is unsurprisingly the historical backbone of the community, providing inspiration as well as a haven for all of those who wish to spend their free time researching their family's story in dusty tomes or to see which folk costumes are traditionally from their ancestral villages. In truth, the Wilber Czech Museum is the headquarters for all of those in the community who are actively interested in preserving and promoting their Czech heritage. Most of the ideas and volunteers for all of the large projects during the Czech festival seem to originate there from a small group who is especially dedicated to the town's ethnic heritage. It is there where older ladies gather to hand-make rugs and everyone brings any type of historical document or photo that they've unearthed. It is also there that Doris, Steve, and even Julia spend many of their spare weekends volunteering and making the exhibits more dynamic.

The Wilber Czech Museum is interesting because it houses not only the history of the Czech community of Wilber, but also the history of the Czech lands which the people of Wilber feel important to be represented in their town, even after their ancestors left. Together on the walls you will see folk costumes, pictures of the early settlers to Wilber, a portrait of Masaryk, as well as an oil painting of Libuše, creating one of the most unique overviews of Czech ethnicity in Nebraska that one could possibly imagine. The people of Wilber feel a need to encourage all of this, because it is all of these things that make up their own identity as Czech-Americans today. The history of the First Republic and the Czechoslovak legionnaires is regarded at the same level as the old Czech legends about Great Father Čech and the knights of Blaník, who, legends say will wake and defend the Czechs in their greatest time of need, as written in the *Tales of the Czechs* book so popular within the Wilber

community. (Vosoba & Vosoba, 1983) It is not as if the people of Wilber actually believe these legends are real—although some children might argue this fact—but mainly that the figures are just as important as those who actually have lived and contributed concretely to the Czech nation. The people of Wilber feel as if they have a part of these traditions as well, despite living across the ocean in America, far away from where all of these myths and stories take place.

Legends have their place in the Wilber Czech Museum as well as in the consciousness of all of the residents of Wilber. If you ask an everyday person on the street, they will be more likely to be able to tell you about Libuše, the knights of Blaník, and the story of a small village of Velvary, which sent Charles IV hard-boiled eggs when he called for shipments to build the Charles Bridge than who Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk or Karel Čapek was. This is due in part to the Czech Historical Pageant, which is put on every Czech Days, but the knowledge of legends predates that coming from tales passed on from grandparent to curious grandchild as a story or response to a question.

So prevalent is the knowledge and adoration of the Czech legends within Wilber that they are actually the names of the most prestigious awards that town gives—the Ladies of Libuše and Knights of Blaník. These two groups are actually orders of citizens, much like gentility, who are recognized because of their works in preserving the Czech ethnic heritage within the community. Each year, community members are nominated in secret and a committee decides on a number of people from that group to induct in these orders during the Czech festival, complete with sashes. While each year queen contestants descend on the town for their own chance to become Czech-American royalty, these members of these groups are the true royals in the eyes of the townspeople. What is interesting is that the idea of Libuše and the knights were so prevalent in the consciousness of the people in the community as defenders of the “real Czech culture” that they decided to name those who had preserved their own ethnic identity from disappearing after these figures. Comparing themselves to these mythical figures and great stories functions like the literature and manuscripts of the National Awakening did and gives the people the sense that the Czech nation is a great and old one—one that they as Czech ethnics living in America have a part.

Another reason why the Wilber Czech Museum is instrumental in preserving

of Libuše and Czech history with the lives and experiences of people who have lived in Wilber since their families immigrated from the Czech lands. In this way, it adds a sense of connectedness between these great Czech legends and histories and the resident's own family histories, making it feel as if they are a part of something timeless and great. It is these individual stories that for Doris make all of her volunteering at the museum worthwhile. *"For me, it's more at the museum,"* she says. *"Getting to know people who came in and bring things about their families and all of the past history. It's a great way to learn things—all of their stories and get to know about each thing."*²⁷ It is these sorts of connections that keep the museum running, as well as sparking a more informed interest within the community in their Czech past aside from just celebrating their identity during the Czech festival.

Julia, whose favorite part about helping out in the museum is arranging the various authentic *kroje* they have on display, has grown up loving the museum and the Czech culture, but she is in the minority as coming from the younger generation. A majority of the adults in Wilber have never been in the museum, according to Doris, including workers at the city hall, which conveniently resides in the next building over. To remedy this, the museum has begun to put on activities aimed at getting the youth of Wilber interested in the museum, such as a Halloween Open House. *"On Sunday afternoons now a couple boys and a couple girls will come up to the door and they're kind of giggling and they'll say, "We have to sign in." And I'll say, "I think you want to go to the basement." They want to scare the little girls with the skeleton. But, in the process, they get to see a lot of things and it is kind of neat and they're getting educated a little bit,"*²⁸ explains Doris.ⁱ

Preserving a Way of Life

Preserving the town's inherent Czech ethnic identity has become a priority for Wilber, especially as with every new generation, the young get further and further away from the feelings of being foreign-born Czechs to now identifying as Americans of Czech descent. Though Wilber is relatively secure in its Czech-American ethnic identity due to its past isolation from other ethnic groups and its modern promotion of its Czech ethnicity too big to disappear anytime soon, the fact still remains that many people move out of smaller towns for college or to start their own lives or even in this day and age, marry people outside of their own ethnic communities. In America,

²⁷Appendix 2, p.76-93

ethnicity now means less than it once did and where once people might have felt apprehension about marrying a non-Czech in Wilber, this notion is dismissed as being ridiculous today. Ethnicity no longer functions as an essential divider in society, but with late generation ethnics, more of an auxiliary source from which one can draw to help create his or her own individual identity.

In Wilber, the idea of ethnic identity as an important part of one's self is so entrenched and celebrated by the town that almost everyone is aware of it and helps in the maintenance of this identity. With the breaking down of barriers, though, it has also led to the celebrations of all different types of ethnic heritage regardless of whether or not they are Czech. Wilber with its festival and Czech-Slovak queens celebrates Czech ethnicity, but also comes along with the message "your ethnicity and background is special too—celebrate what you are!" In fact, the term "celebrate" is apt for the town as it is literally celebrating its ethnic identity every year with a festival. One can also hear this word spoken by residents and queens alike telling people that "it doesn't matter what you are, it's what you celebrate," which has become the Czech-American community's answer to the new generation of multi-ethnic people. In this phrase, one can find echoes of Zeitler, who claims that ethnicity in Wilber (and other ethnic communities in America) has shifted from something that one inherently *is* to something which one *does*. (Zeitler, 2009) This saying though, focuses more on the idea that this new generation of Czech ethnics in American may not only be ethnically Czech, but also a combination of one or more ethnicities as well. Instead of telling these types of people who are slowly becoming a majority in America that they simply do not belong to their group or are too multi-ethnic to join, this phrase not only rationalizes multiple ethnicities but also promotes preservation and cultural activism within one or more of one's expressed ethnic identity.

Modern America is a hodge-podge of various cultures and ethnic groups. While isolation and the formation of ethnic-based communities like Wilber has kept many places in the US homogenous, that has been changing in cities and now across the rural landscape of the US for some time. Today's ethnic Czechs of Wilber face decisions of ethnicity all of the time. At first, it was merely to be Czech or American, yet in today's society they now face this question along with a question of which ethnic identity should they express? It is very much like Owen's theory of "choosing ethnicity," although it does not necessarily have to be one ethnicity over all others.

Czech ethnicity above others. When questioned about this, though, she refutes my claims, explaining, *“I have to say that I probably feel more of an American with Czech roots. I don’t know, maybe just because I didn’t grow up in Wilber, I grew up more [in Omaha]. I’m not completely Czech—my mom’s Polish and Danish, so I have multiple ethnicities that I try to do things with.”*²⁹ It is interesting to note that though Julia, like most other interviewed subjects, feels strongly American, neither this nor her status as being a late generation multi-ethnic diminish her feelings of belonging to any of these groups, something that contradicts Gans’ hypothesis in “The coming darkness of late generation European American ethnicity,” where he argues that multiple ethnicities will ultimately lead to the downfall of late generation ethnics in America.

Another case of multi-ethnic identity can be seen in Olivia, who told me during her interview, *“The funny thing is, I’m actually more German than I am Czech in my heritage, but I don’t celebrate it at all, so I don’t even consider myself any German, other than, that’s why I’m really tall. Czech is the thing that I feel most connected to, but I wouldn’t say [that I feel] European.”*³⁰ For Olivia, even though she is a multi-ethnic late generation ethnic, she still only identifies as a late generation Czech ethnic due to the fact that she does not actively do anything with her German ethnicity other than recognizing that genetically she descends from people who were ethnically German. Rather than identifying as all of her ethnicities, she maintains her personal identity by just choosing one—something Gans and Waters both attribute for. In this case, she is taking advantage of the fact that today’s world provides people with the opportunity to choose their own identity in a process of “shopping at the cultural supermarket.” (Mathews, 2013) The main point that separates her from being a true “shopper of cultural identity”, though, is that she has some claim to the Czech ethnicity, thus she is choosing one of her own inherent identities to practice rather than claiming an identity that is in no way related to her.

Still, the idea that the Czech ethnicity is safely preserved in Nebraska is not popular with everyone. Carrie Brown, for one, believes that the Czech-American ethnic groups in Nebraska will disappear as the generations progress and people will stop volunteering to help run all of the clubs and festivals. She, like Gans, believes that the ethnicity and traditions will become diluted and melt away into growing

²⁹Appendix 2, p.76-93,

American-ness in the communities, though it may take a number of generations before it comes to that. (Gans, *Symbolic Ethnicity: the future of ethnic groups and cultures in America*, 1979)

Though it may be true that generation by generation the Czech ethnics in America are widening the gap between themselves and the Czech culture of modern Czech Republic, it should be argued that for the case of most Czech ethnics in America, they are not bothered by the fact that what they celebrate might be out of date or inaccurate—it matters to them and has meanings for their group and therefore can not be dismissed as having no impact. Steve offers a more optimistic prognosis on the sustainability of Czech ethnicity in Nebraska when I ask if he believes people in Wilber have certain “Czech traits” he offers, *“I won’t say that it’s genetic, but you know, when you’re raised by somebody who was raised by somebody with those characteristics, they just keep coming down the line.”*³¹ At any rate, with the success of Heritage Tourism with the Wilber Czech Festival and the desire of people in the community to practice their Czech ethnicity now that it is no longer controversial, it will take a few generations and drastically different societal changes to get Wilber to relinquish its Czech ethnic identity.

Conclusion

It is an accepted fact that America is a multicultural and multi-ethnic places thanks to the country being characteristically founded by the descendants of immigrants and in some cases even immigrants themselves. Many like to think of it as a melting pot like grade school teachers throughout America claim, yet in my experience as an American this is anything but true. Yes, America is multi-ethnic, yet the straight-line theory that everyone is blending into one vast, generically “American” culture has not fully taken hold at this time. The ethnically Czech town of Wilber in Nebraska, named America’s Czech Capital, serves as an argument against such theories. While the community of Wilber practices symbolic ethnicity and is almost wholly made up of late generation Czech ethnics as per Gans’ theory of symbolic ethnicity, the ways in which the Czech community of Wilber practice their ethnicity refute his later claims that late generation ethnics in America will soon disappear forever.

This unwillingness of the community to let go of its Czech ethnicity is born out of the conditions under which their ancestors emigrated from the Czech lands as well as the conditions that they encountered while in the United States. Contrary to popular American belief, not every ethnic group was welcomed in at the Statue of Liberty with open arms. For a vast majority, fitting into society in America was a struggle that took generations and some ethnic groups cling to that sense of injustice today. When the Czech immigrants first arrived on the Great Plains, they were thought to be uneducated and a lower class of people compared to the dominant Anglo-American groups who were living in the US before them and therefore treated as undesirables. This, combined with the waves of nationalism set off by the Czech National Awakening before and continuing after their resettlement in America, only served to strengthen their desire to resist assimilation and hang on to as much of their ethnic identity as possible. While this was not always prudent for the group at times and waned under certain situations, it was revived in force thanks to the ethnic revivals that swept America in the 1960s. (Zeitler, 2009)

Because of this, the town of Wilber is a great example of the continuation of late generation ethnic identity in the United States. Contrary to Gans' belief that this particular type of ethnic identity is dying along with the older generations, the Internet and modern technology have only served to strengthen younger members of the community's awareness of Czech ethnicity and culture, whether it be the particular brand of folk culture that is prevalent in Nebraska or even the modern culture of the Czech Republic. While at one time the Czech language was slowly dying out in America, it is slowly being preserved by a younger generation unscarred by their parents and grandparents aversions to being seen as ethnic or un-American in public. The town of Wilber is, if anything, growing more ethnic in this increasingly global age, yet this ethnicity is rooted in the sense that it comes organically from the community's actual roots and past. All of this access to information and the narrowing of the distance between peoples not only allows the late-generation ethnics of Wilber to practice a nostalgic version of Czech ethnicity that they inherited from their parents and their grandparents before, members of the community are now able to even "shop" for aspects of their own ancestral culture in the cultural supermarket. (Mathews, 2013)

Though the more modern version of Czech culture is becoming adopted as a

loathe to part with any of the old customs and culture that they grew up practicing, even if they do find out that it is outdated or inaccurate, like the promotion of legends such as Libuše and Great Father Čech. Because their ancestors identified so deeply with the principles of the Czech National Awakening and were even able to apply these ideal to their own experiences in America where they struggled against other ethnic and cultural groups, this is still the version of identity that is predominantly celebrated in Wilber and around other Czech communities in America today. The town and its people have become a bubble of sorts where the culture of the First Czechoslovak Republic and its predecessor ideas are still promoted. This, paired with the prejudice the first immigrants initially experienced led to a backlash—much like Gans’ predicts—although in this case, the backlash against Anglo-American culture was not short lived, and can still be seen to cause the preservation of the particularly Wilber brand of Czech identity today. (Gans, *The coming darkness of late-generation European American ethnicity*, 2014)

The Czechs of Wilber cling strongly to the thought that the Czech nation is a great one and as well as the idea that peasant culture and folk culture are the true ways to practice ethnicity. While they know that in many places in the Czech Republic, folk culture is not that popular culture today, they seem themselves as the protectors of the culture and identity that their ancestors brought to America. They believe in a way that the Czechs are forgetting a piece of their ethnic identity and past, which only makes them hold on to it even more. They adhere to the theory that, to paraphrase George. R.R. Martin, “our way is the old way,”—or more colloquially, if our ancestors did it, then we should as well, which developed from the sentiment that it will be the old, proven, “Czech” ways that will help the ethnic group and community through the hard times—after all, it has so far. (Martin, 1996)

In conclusion, the symbolic ethnicity expressed in Wilber, Nebraska is not inauthentic, but the result of Czech ethnicity of the 1900s being exposed to the American environment of the time, and therefore unique in it’s ideas of what facets of Czech ethnicity are important to preserve. It is not clear if this result is only seen in the Wilber Czech environment, or if further research could find similarities with other late generation ethnic groups in the US. It is because of these beliefs, the support, and the work that the community members of Wilber, Nebraska put in to keeping their Czech ethnicity vibrant and alive—even if it is their own special brand of Czech

generation ethnics in the community will disappear anytime in the near future. Although, ethnicity is something this must be constantly cultivated in America in order to keep it from being absorbed into the vase amoeba of bland American culture. One never knows exactly what the future may bring

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Appendix 1:

Czech Identity in Nebraska Questionnaire

1. Do you feel Czech, Czech-American, or just American?
2. Do you speak Czech? Do you feel like speaking the language is or is not important for your Czech identity?
3. Why do you think it's important to keep Czech identity/the Czech community alive in the US?
4. What do you do to "celebrate" or show your Czech identity or heritage?
 - a. What is the most important part, in your opinion?
5. Have you ever been to the Czech Republic or Czechoslovakia?
6. Do you think Czech citizenship is necessary to be "properly Czech"?
7. Do you follow Czech history or current events? Why or why not?
8. Do you feel "European"?
 - a. Do you ever think about the European Union?/Does the Czech Republic's membership mean anything to you?
9. Do you consider religion an important part of your Czech identity, or is it separate?
10. How far back is your Czech ancestry?
11. Do you have family/friends in the Czech Republic?
 - a. If so, how important is it for you to keep in touch with them?
12. Do you feel any sort of connection to people living in the Czech Republic today?
13. Do you think that Czech-American culture is different from modern Czech culture?
14. What, as a member of the Komenský Club, is your main interest/aim?
15. What is the mission of the Komenský Club?
16. Do you find the surrounding Czech community supportive of your program?
Do they attend all of your events?

Appendix 2:**Ouřecký Transcription****Transcription key:****S- Steve Ouřecký****D- Doris Ouřecký****J- Julia Ouřecký****B- Brianna Tichý**

This interview was conducted on Saturday, February 1, 2014 in the home of Doris Ouřecký in Wilber, Nebraska.

Transcript starts while we are discussing the different settlement patterns of Czechs and Slovaks who immigrated to America.

S: I think that there's some out in Minnesota, too, because somebody had asked my where all of the Slovaks were and I think it's because they wanted to work the mines.

D: There's some out in Pennsylvania, too.

B: Yeah, there was this one book I read... I think we got it at like the genealogical society and (talks to dad) you have it. I don't know if you've read it, but it's called "To Reap a Bountiful Harvest" and it's about Czech and Slovak immigrants. It's written by a Czech professor who now lives in the US and teaches like history and she talks about when the Czechs immigrated and when the Slovaks did and the Slovaks immigrated a little bit later and they lived in more cities where when the Czechs were immigrating, it was during the homestead acts, so they came out here...

D: To get land.

B: Yeah, and farm. The Slovaks didn't want to farm because the Hungarians made them farm for a while. They saw the big cities as places...

S: I had thought that maybe they came from more industrial areas in the Czech Republic and felt more comfortable that way.

B: Well, Slovakia really got industrialized during communism, so it's funny because sometimes they like communism a little bit more than the Czechs do because they were just farms.

D: They actually didn't too much, because we were there right when they split and, in fact, we were in Bruno at the hotel when it happened, when they had their meeting and they were sitting there and I know Miroslav was really concerned because he said Slovakia didn't have the industry and the money to really make money and they were concerned that they were going to be in trouble. I know when the Slovakian ambassador was here recently, I asked him, "How are you doing?" And he said, actually, real well. Now we have the largest car manufacturing in the world and we have really... when we had to do it, we got down and did it.

B: I know they were in trouble the first few years because the government just wasn't helping them build their economy at all and it was kind of this "black hole" and now it's better.

D: That's what he said when we had him down and we knew we had to support yourself as a country and we did it, which is good.

B: That kind of brings me to one of the questions. I just kind of brainstormed here, so we don't really have to go in order of questions. When you talk about Czech heritage—because all of our ancestors came before it was even Czech Republic or Czechoslovakia—do you guys feel more Czech or more, I guess Czechoslovak, or just American who has these roots?

S: I've always just considered, you know, being in Wilber, that we're Czech. We identify with that, so that's the way I would say it. I'm of Czech ancestry but a lot of our customs and everything have been passed through, so.

D: Yeah, the things we do and say sometimes or our language and that type of thing. But then I feel very strongly that I'm an American and that sort of thing. But you need to know that there's your roots.

J: I have to say that I probably feel more of an American with Czech roots. I don't know, maybe just because I didn't grow up in Wilber, I grew up more [in Omaha]. I'm not completely Czech—my mom's Polish and Danish, so I have multiple ethnicities that I try to do things with.

S: Yeah, because in Wilber, if you didn't have a Czech last name, you were odd. Whereas, where you're at, there's your band teacher and that's about it, right?

J: Yeah.

S: Her band teacher's from Wilber, right here with my sister!

B: Oh, yeah. I was the same, growing up I was one of the few kids with a Czech last name and if you ever found someone else, you were so excited. Everyone said, "You have the funny last name!"

J: Yeah, like we talked to the kids in school and they're like, "Yeah, I'm Czech." And I'm like, "Oh cool!" It's not very usual to find Czech people.

B: So if someone asked you, would you say—you would say that you're American with Czech roots. Would you ever say that you're Czech-American or is that more people who have come from [there]?

S: That's definitely first generation...imprint. That's what it feels to be Czech American. That's what you're saying?

B: Yeah.

S: See, I use the term for anybody with Czech roots. I consider myself a Czech American just to say, I'm not Czech.

D: See, when I was growing up you were made fun of if you spoke Czech or anything here in Wilber because you didn't want—they were trying to get away from that. So if you talked that way, you kind of were made fun of.

B: Yeah, my grandfather said the same thing. He said we were tired of being Czech. If you spoke it at home, you didn't speak it outside.

D: No, you were careful and that's why the language started to...people started forgetting it. I know Lloyd thought that he had forgotten all of it and then when we got over in the Czech Republic—or, it was Czechoslovakia when we went over—and then he all of the sudden started picking things up, hearing it more.

B: *chats about Joe Duba speaking Czech*

D: Now, Ray Krivohlavek doesn't have a problem understanding it and Irma O., when we'd be in a cab and going, people would always say, "Oh, where are you from? No, no, where were you born?" And they all thought that she was born there.

B: Do you guys think it's important for people to speak Czech, for your understanding of being Czech-American? Is it important to keep it, or do you think you'd be just as Czech-American if everyone just spoke English.

S: I think that it's important to keep it. We can say only a few words and I would try...

D: I know words I shouldn't know and things like that! *Laughs* But I would like to be able to converse in it.

J: I think probably knowing some words, some phrases and greetings would be good.

S: Yeah, just for courtesy's sake. You know?

D: The only thing—if you say something when they come in the museum, then they think you can speak it and then they start rattling and it's like, whoa! Wait a minute! *Laughs* So you have to be kind of careful. If you'd like to do it, just as a friendly thing so that you make them feel comfortable but you can get in trouble.

B: I think they appreciate it...*chats*... Why do you think it's important to keep this Czech identity? You've said before that everyone feels strongly that they're Americans here, but we still do keep the Czech stuff alive. What is your main reason for that?

D: I just think that there are so many neat things that are from the Old Country. The costuming and the traditions and the things like this—the food and all this is so important to passing on down.

S: Yeah, I was doing genealogy research and that's kind of how I got involved in the history a lot. My mother always kept track of the genealogy and when she passed away, I took it over and started doing the research and was like, "Boy, this is cool!" Over there, that's really neat! So, that's how I rolled into it a little bit and I was taking a Czech class with Carrie and she invited me to the club there and then that's really how I got involved in the club because I can't say no to anybody and then I end up on boards and club offices and so that's.

The conversation gets off topic. We begin to talk about the town's new Czech Cultural Center.

B: I haven't been in that Czech Cultural Center since it was first built.

D: Well, it hasn't changed! We went to the city council to begin with—Twila Wanek and I did a year ago—and we said, "We realize that you probably don't have the money to fix it now, but there's a lot of organizations in town (there's garden club and all that) that will be willing to help financially and physically to help do it. The city fathers sat there and said, "Well, Christine Janda had left money to do all that stuff," and Randy Sasek looked up and he said, "Well, we built it and now we don't want to deal with it." That was the answer to that.

B: Then what's it supposed to be there for, just to look nice?

D: Right!

S: The city has a loss—they don't want to deal with the rest of it.

D: We need to get in there and use it! Mike Hroch, well, he was on the city council by then he passed away, he said, "Well, we don't want to give anymore work to the girls, so they don't have anymore work." And Lori Rezny looked up and said, "Thank you, Mike," and that was it. They absolutely wouldn't do anything and they said, "Well, Christine Janda's, if it wouldn't have been for her \$300,000 or so, we wouldn't have had the building." We felt like her puppets should have been in there and they just sat there and they really weren't interested in doing anything. Thank goodness, Larry Prachiel really stepped up and we nominated him to go the city council and represent the Nebraska Czechs of Wilber on the city council just to see what's going on. And he asked to speak one night and he said, "Okay, if we can come up with a plan will you listen to us and will you do it?" And they said yes, so that's what we're working on right now. We had a meeting and it was very well organized the other night and he had things that we can look for and do. One of the things that I think is going to be really awesome, when Robert Kennedy was here and he dedicated our Czech Village... *chats on about recovering the Robert Kennedy's speech in Wilber and local history in 1968...* We're going to have a man and woman in *kroje* on the display. We talked about putting them up on the wall, but I think that's going to be a little bit hard to do, and then you're going to see underneath them.

J: I keep trying to tell people that! And you wouldn't be able to see the detail up close on them either.

D: That's true. And see, the city people suggested this having some. I told them we have some beautiful things at the museum. None of them had ever been over to the museum! I said, "Well, we have some beautiful *kroje* on mannequins that we can put over here." And they said, "We don't want to be moving any mannequins around!" and that was it. I said we could put them on platforms and rollers if you needed to move them, but...

B: That doesn't sound really hard. Shop clerks do it all the time! I guess they can get kind of heavy, though.

J: Well, it depends what's on them.

D: But, they're not that heavy. So, I said, "Well, if the ceilings are so tall we can put them up high enough where people wouldn't crack their head and they can be up above." Then, about six months later, Randy Sasek called and said, "Can Ken Lenhardt and I come over to this afternoon to the museum?" And I said sure and here they came over, they ended up spending 4 hours over here and they were so shocked, they got to the *kroje* and they were like, "Oh, my gosh! This is beautiful! We didn't realize you had all of this stuff over here!" And the funny part of it was, when they got in the *kroje* room, he says, "Well, how heavy are they?" and I said, "Not very." So he says, "Oh, we were just talking and maybe we can put them up on the wall!" And I just went *brrrrr*, so I just said good idea. But it was so funny, so I think now from them coming over there and at least seeing it, none of the girls had ever been in there!

B: They didn't know what you had. I get to the point where I know the museum so well, I can just pick out the new stuff when I come in.

S: We did something this Halloween now, we had downtown Halloween where every one of the businesses was giving out candy. Something new this year, Danny Klasek set it up. So, the museum, what they did was they made you go all the way down in the basement where the coffin is. They had pasted down pumpkins for you to follow. What did they say, how many kids went through?

J: Oh, I don't know...

D: We had 500 and some people came through the museum that night.

S: In what, 3 hours?

D: Yeah.

S: So then a lot of them had never, ever been in there, they were just taking the kids out.

D: And we didn't even get all of them to sign, there were so many of them. When they were talking, see that skeleton that's down there, the little boys have figured that one out—the young kids in town. On Sunday afternoons now a couple boys and a couple girls will come up to the door and they're kind of giggling and they'll say, "We have to sign in." And I'll say, "I think you want to go to the basement." They want to scare the little girls with the skeleton. But in the process, they get to see a lot

of things and it is kind of neat and they're getting educated a little bit. That way, by having them go clear down—people were lined up around the corner that day!

B: Well, there's some cool stuff down there!

D: Yeah!

B: Do you think that if the kids aren't learning about this stuff and if that families are just like, yeah, we're Czech from a while back, maybe they take it for granted or don't feel it as much as you guys do?

D: I don't know why they don't. I really don't know why, because they should. A lot of people don't until people come and they want to show them something, then they're, oh you have to see what we have here! I'm not sure why, but I bet you 3/4s of the people here in town have never been to that museum and that's where so much of their history is.

B: Do you think they're forgetting what it's like to be Czech-American instead of just American, like forgetting their roots? Or just they don't have time for it.

S: I don't know.

D: I don't know, because after they experience it, now just like Gabby, they're like, "Oh my gosh! I have to come back, I didn't realize that this was here!"

S: You're talking like outside just the museum though, aren't you?

B: Yeah, just all over town.

S: I think that there's a lot more awareness of your roots right now then when I was that age. When I was 15, really...

D: Well, you were made fun of kind of, no?

S: No, people really didn't do much with their stuff, particularly I think, the girls with their kroje. I think everybody back then just had your black vest and your red skirt and that was about it. Now I'm buying stuff from overseas for her! *Laughs*

We talk about kroje sellers

D: When I was there there'd be old ladies who wore them to church and then you'd just follow them home and they'd sell you them from their home. I know Bernie Zajicek took one off a lady, actually. She followed her home from church and she took it off of her and bought it, actually.

B: That sort of brings me to the next question...what do you guys do to celebrate your Czech culture?

D: All year long, being on the boards.

S: Julia and I go to the festivals.

J: Yeah, the festivals around the country.

S: We've gone to the Oklahoma one five years. The Tabor one, probably that too? (Julia confirms) Iowa...about that...Cedar Rapids. Of course, the Nebraska festivals—we do Clarkson, we do...

J: We did Texas the first time last year.

S: Yeah, West was our first time there, last year. And then, of course Lincoln and...because I know so many people, I end up working a lot of them.

B: I think I've seen you at almost all of them! Every time I was queen and travelling, you showed up at them. So what kind of things do you guys do that really celebrates your Czech culture? What do you do?

J: I'm learning to bake koláče...I've tried a few batches. I'm learning to play accordion and bagpipe and then trying to do, just the royalty side of things so I keep learning a lot about the different costumes—the different kroje and where they come from. I just hang out with the queens a lot and then end up learning a lot from them. I end up asking questions about the pageant and then learning a lot about history and stuff.

B: So for you, the folk culture is one of the main things? It's one of the fun things about it.

S: Yup.

D: For me, it's more at the museum. Getting to know people who came in and bring things about their families and all of the past history. It's a great way to learn things—all of their stories and get to know about each thing. And the hotel! We have the original register that people register in that we've had out in front of the hotel and that's interesting.

S: Well, the livery stable was right across the street.

D: They also had the little stand in front of the hotel where they could tie their horses.

S: Yeah, the livery stables were...*chatting about old city layouts*

B: And you do more with some of the modern stuff, don't you Steve? I know you watch a lot of the films.

S: Yeah, I do, I enjoy the Czech films. She likes the newer ones, she doesn't care much for the black and white ones.

J: Yeah.

B: The black and white sometimes gets a bit long.

S: One time I invited her to the Komenský Club for the movie night and she said, “As long as they’re not showing *Closely Watched Trains* again!”

B: I have seen that like 8 times! *Chatting about the movies...* Do you guys follow any Czech history or current events? Or do you just mostly do the folk culture stuff?

S: I try to keep up on what’s going on superficially. I couldn’t tell you who the president is, but I usually know. You see, we had a guy who was a political science major a few years back. He came and gave a talk at the Omaha cultural club and he says, “You know, we just don’t even have a government. I like America, they actually have a government. You may not like it, but in Czech Republic, it’s just such a mess nobody knows what’s going on.

B: There’s just so many parties. It functions way better than Ukraine or Russia, but...

D: It’s sad, it’s that way.

S: But I also am a real history nut, so I would say probably more that way, but I try to...

B: So do you follow more of the history and events you know that went on in Czech history at the same time as American history/ Would you say your knowledge is the same or less so?

S: I probably know a little bit more about American history just from having it in school.

B: Do you think it’s important that people learn the history, or is just a hobby?

S: I’ve always believed history was important. I don’t think that you can understand anything unless you understand where it comes from. That’s just my philosophy on anything.

B: I like history too, so that’s where I’m coming from. But Doris, you probably don’t follow the history or current events so much, but you’ve seen a lot.

D: And we’ve had the Czech ambassadors here and Slovak ambassadors and I’ve gotten to know them and entertained them and so on.

S: We have a cousin who’s actually the Czech ambassador to Poland for the economic side of it. And he was here, what, 3 years ago?

D: Uh-huh

S: Karel. My great, great, grandmother and his great, great, grandmother were sisters.

B: So you guys have family in the Czech Republic?

S: Well that’s the only one that I know of right now. I found him online when I was doing my genealogy research.

D: It's very hard to find that name. Our name is really...hard.

S: Actually, it's more common now that I go online recently.

D: And see, now when grandma had that whole thing and everything, they would find an Anton Ourecky but it wouldn't be the right one because it wasn't married to that right, you know. It wasn't married down the line.

B: We have problems because our last name is really common.

S: Yeah, we have that too. Her grandmother was a Larson and that's hard. There's ten thousand Elmer Larsons born in that year.

D: Yeah, it's hard.

S: But Karel, he's also done a lot of genealogy, so that's where I get most of my stuff from over there. Now I've got the aerial map of the village and everything.

B: What part of the Czech Republic is your family from?

S: It's near...

J: It's near the Pardubice region...Vysoké Mýto

B: Have you ever been there?

D: No, because when we were there we didn't know that that's where it was.

S: Grandma had that information. In that whole thing, it was in there. Grandma gets real single focused—all she'll want to do is meet relatives. In that packet, he had down to where Anton was born, down to the house. You guys could have gone down there.

D: The right Anton? You're kidding. So she said no?

S: No, all grandma wanted was to meet a live relative and the guy didn't find any in that, so this is all...

B: Is it important for you guys to meet live relatives?

S: It's kind of cool and I enjoy Karel, he's fun.

D: I think it could have been neat if we could have gone to village then.

S: Well, grandma wasn't interested in going there. She wanted to meet a live relative there and that was it. It wasn't in all the information there and I got a lot of it. Actually, if I hadn't gotten that and put it online, I wouldn't have gotten to meet Karel because that's how he connected us.

D: So, Denis, you've been there, but have you two been there or no?

S: We were planning on going this summer, but...

B: Uh-oh, is it falling through?

S: It fell through.

J: Yeah.

S: Well, part of it was there's a school trip. It was going to be Germany and one of those deals... It falls right on Clarkson and I'm the treasurer for the Nebraska Czechs. And really, for the Nebraska Czechs, the big festival is Clarkson. We don't do anything in Wilber, but we run the queen pageant and the silent raffle and the auction. Of course, being treasurer, those are all money things. I have to—I've actually bought a motor home so I can actually camp up there.

B: Do you feel like you have a connection to the Czech lands or just being Czech in America?

S: I don't feel like I have a real strong connection there yet because I know a few people over there, but that's my only connection. I've never been over there, I've never seen things. To me, it's where we came from.

D: I love Telč, for instance, our sister city. It's just so neat. They were just excited to see us and they we're all, "Oh, Americans, Americans!" and we got to do all the things that other people didn't. Miroslav said, "Oh, I've never been able to drive across into here," because no cars are allowed in that village, but since he had us, he was able to drive and drove us into that area. He said, "I've never been able to do this all my life!" but because of us being there... it was just neat, it was just an awesome experience.

B: Did you feel a connection with the people there?

D: Um-hmm, um-hmm. It was just kind of... And then grandma, she really had fun with the mayor. They would sit there and jabber back and forth and we took things and back and forth and. Then the mayor, he was 3 years old and he wanted so bad a cowboy shirt, so, I said when we get back, I'll send him one. So, we finally found one at Bell's in Beatrice and then Mary Ourecky and Dale and them, their boy had outgrown some cowboy boots had a cowboy hat and all that, so I fixed up this box and sent it to the mayor and he didn't ever get it. They confiscate stuff.

S: Oh, this was when they were still communist?

D: No, no!

B: customs is tricky sometimes. Occasionally stuff gets sent back. They didn't keep anything of ours, but Carrie's had stuff that just didn't show up.

D: They said that this happens so frequently, when it looks like something someone

B: Yeah, I think it's gotten better. We've had stuff that's gotten lost in the post, but there's way less corruption now. It's getting better. It's more like high-level stuff—less petty. They're really trying to clean it up now, so it's getting better, hopefully.

D: They were afraid to talk out loud from communism, when we were there. We would be in a little jewelry store and it would just be small, about the size of our living room, and there had to be 50 people in there. Lloyd wanted a tie tack that he saw in the window and I said, "Okay, well do you know how to say tie-tack?" And he said, "No, I don't, but I'll just wait and somebody will say something and I'll pick up on it." And they just whispered and whispered to the clerk, they wouldn't talk out loud because they were scared.

B: I think people used to be scared to have nice things too, like the whole culture doesn't boast. I know people my age and they say, "Oh, my parents used to tell us 'don't brag so much! Don't make people envious!' because then you might have something that they want. If your family was well off before communism, you got everything confiscated, even if you just happened to do well for yourself. There are a lot of jokes, too, about Czechs being kind of envious and jealous.

S: I see that in Wilber a little bit. I do! It's not that I want it, it's just that I don't want you to have it!

B: Do you think that people in Wilber have Czech characteristics?

Everyone: Definitely! Oh yeah!

S: I don't know that much about Czech characteristics, but you can see that. I won't say that it's genetic, but you know, when you're raised by somebody who was raised by somebody with those characteristics, they just keep coming down the line.

B: What would you say they are—the humor?

S: Some of that. Pettiness.

D: Jealousy.

S: I'm on the Nebraska Czechs board and I'm a delegate for Wilber and Omaha and I'm a treasurer, so I said, well, Aunt Doris, you're a past president, you're entitled to come to meetings and she says, "Well, all they do is sit there and bicker." I said, "I can't imagine that, a whole room full of Czechs and all they do is sit there and bicker!" *Everyone laughs*

D: I just wanted to scream! The whole meeting was just argue, argue, argue!

S: I don't know if that's a Czech characteristic or not, but they tell me it is.

D: But if you put a whole bunch of them together and I mean, in Bruno [Brno], when they were dividing Slovakia off, I mean, you can see the division. It was the Czechs, the Moravians, and the Slovaks. They walked in and the Slovaks gave their ties

were askew, they were messy—they were sloppy. You know, they had suits on and they all looked messy. They had their little briefcases and they had this U shape like this and they were screaming and yelling at each other the *whole* time. We were eating breakfast across this little way and I said, “Something big is going on. I don’t know what’s happening, but something big is going on.” Lloyd says, “Oh, you’re just imagining!” And I said, “Let me tell you, something is going on”—the tension and you could just feel it and we could hear them hollering and you could hear. Then the next day it came out in the paper that they split.

S: You know, when I watch movies I’ll see things that remind me of people or things that are happening in Wilber. Yeah, I think that there are a lot of cultural characteristics that still survive here, whether they even know they do or not.

B: Julia, do you think you have any Czech characteristic when you hang out with other people? Do you ever think, oh that’s different, my family wouldn’t do it?

J: Yeah, probably a little bit. I mean, I don’t know, I don’t really notice different things that I do than other people just because I’ve always done those things.

S: So, like with me, I don’t think my family did as much, but I started hanging out with Karpiseks, and God, those people would have come off the boat! Accents and actions and what they eat and it was all, just like the people when they first immigrated. And that’s where I learned to swear in Czech, hanging around with them.

D: See, and that’s where I think that Lisa got so involved. See, she got that kroje from Prague that we have at the museum and that’s very rare. You see, the communists destroyed so much in Prague, with the kroje and that and to find one of those. She’s doing a lot. She bought those two beautiful headpieces and they’re valuable with the garnets—they’ve got gems in them. She’s really done a lot.

B: Do you think it’s important to preserve this folk culture? Because in Czech, they’re kind of forgetting about it. They’re doing more modern things.

S: And see now, we’re that’s how it’s going with all of these old things, but then they’ll come back to it.

D: And that’s what you can see with all of these ambassadors now, when they come and visit, they say, “Gosh, this is more Czech than in the old country!” with the festivals and stuff like that. Although that one, Kenny Smisek was there and that is awesome. That’s when you guys need to go when that’s on. He’s got a whole video of it and everything and that’s when they’re all in costume. It was beautiful!

B: Maybe it was Chodské slavnosti...it’s the big on in Domažlice.

D: Yeah. When they’re celebrating and they really, almost bow down to Americans—they’re really excited.

B: Oh, maybe it was in Plzeň then...

S: Oh, that's where they liberated... And that's a big then that's not really Czech, that's...

The conversation gets off topic, but then shifts to Czech signs in the town.

D: We used to have all of the business stuff in Czech and now that needs to be brought back.

S: Well, we're having the chamber meeting that we actually got a hold of Eva. She's my go-to for Czech translation. I had to ask her how to say Laundromat, because Google translate only gave me Laundromat. She says it was a new enough word, but then she went and asked her mom and got back to me with something else.

B: Yeah, her mom is a linguist. She teaches German and Russian. I think I might have been with her that time. I go over to their house for Christmas and they help me with my Czech and she explains everything. She's really good.

S: Yeah, so I stuck that into Google and I came up with "cleaning place" and that's basically what it is, so that's what I'll put on the sign for the Laundromat.

D: When people come over here to from the old country and then they see those Czech words in the town, they get excited then.

B: Do you think the culture is getting revived, then?

D: Oh, yeah, definitely! With putting all that stuff back up.

S: But that was originally done 30 years ago, in the '60s.

D: That first Czech Days we had Liz Zigmunt paint those banners and we stuck them in all of the buildings and all over the downtown. We need to do that again because these buildings have been remodeled and changed and these things and they really need to get put back on. Another thing that Mayor Kranz had and it's his project and the city council will not let him do it, but I think it's awesome! For instance, our street is called High Street out here and he wants high written in Czech underneath it and still have the American written.

S: Like, in Venice they have stuff like that where it was originally named something and then what it was changed to.

D: And we're the Czech Capital, we should have that! It would be so cute! He has that and he even has money for it! And they won't let him do it.

S: The council's just fighting, there...

B: Why do you think?

S: They don't want anything...and I don't know what it is, with these guys.

D: I don't know what it is!

S: Aunt Doris needs to run for city council!

D: Yeah, yeah...you bet ya.

S: Roger wants me to run for mayor, and I'm like, "Well, I probably should live here more..." *laughs* They don't want to do anything.

B: Do you think it's just Czech stuff?

S: No, they don't want to do anything.

D: They're all Czech and I don't understand!

S: They don't want to do anything though, and it just gets voted down.

D: We need to clean house. It's bad and it makes me sick.

The group gets off topic speaking about politics.

B: Do you think all of these Czech activities and culture will last a long time?

D: Sure, sure! From the beginning, it was always, "Oh, this can't last! What are we going to do when little old *Babi* dies?" Well, it lasted...

S: And a lot of that was thanks to grandma, too. Because grandma was the one who always got the younger kids involved. She always said, "Get the young kids in here and get them doing stuff!"

D: And don't make fun of them! People say that all the time and I don't want to hear it. The kids are stepping up and they're learning how to make kolaches and we never did that. And dumplings at the church.

S: Well, we've got people who are willing to teach them. In Prague, they've got people who weren't willing to work with the young kids.

B: That's festivals been slowly dying...

S: Yeah, and Dwight, I don't know how much longer that one's going to keep on going. They just don't want to work with anyone.

D: And see, we have a scholarship at school and the only way they can apply for that is if they do something for the Czechs. They have come and learn and do community service and all that. It encourages them to come and help, so a lot of times they'll come and say, "Can we come and help and put it on our resumes?" And then they come.

B: So, you do a lot at the museum. *(to Julia)* Is that how you got involved in that?

J: Yeah, I guess. At first it was oh, why don't you come here and work and now I help Sue with the *kroje* and I help decorate the front window.

S: She actually does more down there now than I do. They tore everything apart last winter to clean and re-do stuff and Julia would be down there to go help them.

B: I think the *kroje* was what got me into them. I always wanted one.

D: Yeah, and to see them on mannequins, they're so pretty.

B: Yeah, we borrowed one a few times because my parents wouldn't spend the money to buy one for a kid. I was like, "I'll wear it for Halloween! It looks like a princess dress!" And then when I got older, I saw all of them.

S: It's just a consuming hobby, just learning about them.

The conversation gets off topic again about different kroje specific queens have had and whether they have been Americanized or authentic.

B: Carrie tells me that the Omaha Chapter might not last that much longer. She's very worried. She says that no one wants to be in charge of it.

S: With the queens?

B: No, just the whole chapter.

S: Oh, we're doing fine! Tell her not to worry.

B: About the Czech queen pageant—it's had such a role in all of the festivals. Do you think that without the queen pageant, there would be a different feeling? Julia, you said that that's mainly what you do...

J: I think that there would maybe be a lot less people interested in it because it pulls girls in. They go, "Oh, I want to be a queen and have a title and a crown," and something to put on their resume and then they start getting into it and I feel like you probably wouldn't have as many young people without it.

S: It's how you get them interested in it. We've always—Julia's been princess for a few years, and the thing that I always tell her is, you're an advertising thing for the Czech community. That's how we get people interested in the Czech stuff. I don't know if you feel the same way?

B: Yeah, definitely.

S: Too many of them let that go to their head. They're just basically hiring you to represent them for a year, so you're supposed to be out there and working the crowds and that's the point behind it in my eyes.

J: I think that having princesses and stuff gets even younger girls involved because you get them when they're like six or seven and then they take a break for a few years and think, "Oh, maybe I want to be queen...I was a princess," and coming back.

B: And you've done it all. I remember when you were a little sister when I was doing it.

D: And that little sister thing gets them all. It brings a lot. That's just kind of a local area—we have Lincoln and Wilber and stuff. The idea is to kind of help the queens get acclimated to the area and help the queens. If they're from Omaha or Lincoln and their grandparents or something are from around here, then they can do it. But if you have someone from far away then they don't know how to answer the queen and tell her anything. They don't know anything about the town and how to answer them.

B: Do you think it's harder to get the boys and men involved? Because with the queens, it seems mainly geared towards women.

D: What started the boys becoming more active was that they found out that when they got to high school and could do the dancing, they got way more popular. Now, when your dad and aunts and all that, when they did the Beseda—now they were exciting to watch! I loved that because they really put their heart and soul into that. And the kids now do too, But when they found out about that, at first no one wanted to do that. Then when the Altman boys at first started doing it and then they found out they were more popular when they got to high school because they knew how to dance, then it was easier to get the boys to help and to be involved. There are a few more girls, but it's pretty close now.

B: Do you think that the girls stay with it more because they want to be queen?

D: I think that they're probably more involved than the boys are. When you're sitting there in the Craft Shop, it's the boys that want to buy the vests and the hats and stuff and walk around.

S: What age?

D: College...or those that have young kids that they want to deck out. They come in and buy the Czech stuff and they walk around.

B: Do you think wearing the costumes makes it more real for people?

S: Well, we go to so many festivals that nobody is wearing costumes at, and I don't think it's as much of a festival.

J: No, it just doesn't feel right.

B: How do you guys feel if you meet someone from the Czech Republic and they never saw a person in folk costume until they came here?

J: I talk to the Robitschek scholars when they come here and I tell them that I have one and they get really excited because they don't see them very often. I mean, they

just get excited and they say, “Really? You do that? That’s cool!” They’re really the only people that I talk to from there.

D: That’s just like the ambassadors when they come too, they see more here than they do in the old country.

B: Is it important for you to have the ambassadors come?

D: Oh, yeah!

S: Definitely.

D: I was very excited when we had the Slovakian one come and we had his village. I said, “Well, Mr. Ambassador, if we have anything wrong, please, tell us,” and he was walking around and he said, “Oh, my village, my village!” He got so excited. It’s the kind of pink and red one in the back part. The only thing that he could find wrong is that he said we had an s instead of a c on one of the little signs. And I said, “Oh, well we’ll change it for when you come back.” And he said, “Oh, I will probably never come back.” But we want it right anyway. And then at the hotel, he was so excited because he said, “Oh, this tastes jut like my grandmother’s!”...He said, “I was so impressed! I can’t believe what you have in this town, it’s almost more than we have over there!” in the old Czech and Slovak traditions and things. And he went, “And Doris, I know I said that I will never come back again, but I had so much fun, I think I have to!” It was just funny, he was so cute!

B: Not to change the topic, but you brought up religion before. Now, the religion here in the US is stereotypically very different than in the Czech Republic. Do you feel like religion is important for your Czech identity or no?

D: Well, when we were young and in high school and stuff, there were only nine families in the Catholic Church here in town. The Czech people came here and they ran away from religion. It wasn’t here. The Lutheran Church was actually the biggest church and then there were some Methodists, but it really wasn’t here. Now, it’s becoming more religious, but then there were very few families.

S: My understanding it that the Czechs were very Catholic before communism. Well, not as much as Poland, but still. Everyone belonged to the Church and that was where all your vital records were kept—in the Church. They didn’t have city office with your births and your deaths, it was all through the Church. It was the center of the community whether you believed in it or not. In my understanding Anton [his ancestor] came because he just didn’t want to do anything with religion.

D: Well, and they were told that they had to pay so much depending on how many children they had. If they only had one or two, they had to pay a lot to the church, and if they had a lot they didn’t have to pay that much. Those were things that they were against.

B: How many generations back is your ancestor?

S: Anton would be Lloyd’s grandfather, so...

D: He was the one that came because his dad [Lloyd's] was born here.

B: So then I think all of our ancestors came under Austria-Hungary. Do you guys ever think about the Austrian Empire? Do you ever feel weird about it?

D: I know when we were there it was a lot more expensive to get stuff in Austria! Is it still?

B: Well, they're on the Euro over there [in Austria], so it seems like that.

Appendix 3:

Prochazka-Underwood Transcription

Transcription key:

S: Sue Prochazka-Underwood

B- Brianna Tichý

This interview took place on Thursday, February 6, in Sue Prochazka-Underwood's office in Crete, Nebraska.

B: There we go, we're off! Basically, I'm just trying to figure out what people here think is Czech and then I'm going to compare to what Czech people think makes them Czech and see if it's similar. I have a list of questions that I'll ask—English speakers and Czech speakers, but it's basically just going to be more of a relaxed conversation because I don't want it to be like a quiz for you or something.

S: Alright, well, I'm not nervous or anything.

B: Alright! So, the first question is, do you feel—if someone asked you would you identify as American, Czech-American, or Czech?

S: If they're asking my opinion, like who I am?

B: Yeah.

S: Oh, gosh...I would say I'm American, but with Czech ancestry, so I wouldn't call myself a Czech-American because I would consider somebody a Czech-American as somebody who came from the Czech Republic and they got citizenship here. That's how I would consider that, but I do have really strong feelings for my Czech ancestry.

B: Very cool. That one gets a lot of different answers—people are like, well in the Czech community, I'd say I'm Czech but if I was talking to Czech people I'd say I was American, and very similar answers. Do you speak Czech?

S: I *sing* it. I can enunciate it, but $\frac{3}{4}$ of the time, I have no clue what I'm singing, so I'm going to start working on that a little bit harder.

B: And, for you, is it important to speak Czech?

S: Yes, it is. It is because the language is so—it's so different! I would really like to know if because, number one, I would like to know what it is in those songs. A bad

story—Janet and I did a wedding and...there was a song that had something about God in the title and it was with the bagpipe and they had requested the bagpipe at their wedding, so we picked four songs. Three of them, I kind of know what they were, but the fourth one—and I didn't have Google translate back then—so I sent it to a lady in North Bend to find out what the words meant. It was about a man and his lover and he took a pistol and shot her because she was unfaithful! And I thought, "Oh, my God!" So, they came that night and I said, "Oh, we can't do this song...I just can't get it on the bagpipe." I didn't want to admit that I had, you know, picked a wrong song for their wedding, you know.

B: That's very...Czech love song, too! *Laughs* How long have you been playing?

S: How long have I been playing? You know, music all the way around? Czech music?

B: Ah, Czech music.

S: Since fifth grade. My dad had a polka band, so the minute I learned how to play saxophone *snaps fingers* I was in the band.

B: And did your dad speak Czech?

S: No, my grandparents made sure that their kids did not learn how to speak Czech.

B: My grandparents were the same way.

S: Yeah, they wanted them to be American and learn English and, you know, be solidified here in the United States.

B: It's really funny because it was the same for a lot of people's grandparents. I think that maybe it was communism coming, or maybe even just after World War II there was such a big push for everyone to be American, that everyone was learning Czech and they had Czech schools in the country and stuff and then there's a certain point where everyone was like, "Nope, we're going to be American." My grandfather was like, "We were tired of being Czech," at one point, so...

S: I would never get tired of my Czech ancestry. I just... My Czech ancestry is important, but I never get tired of it. There's just so many different things in the Czech culture that you can pull out and, you know, romance, music, say, you know they—the food, the music, the language itself is—I think sounds romantic. It just, it sounds like listening to someone speak French, you know, any foreign language. The tonal Vietnamese or Chinese, though, it just doesn't trip my trigger, but this is important.

B: I think for us, because we have a connection to it. Other people are like, "Oh, that sounds really harsh," or something, Slavic languages. And I'm just like, oh, we like it, it sounds...

S: It's really beautiful. I'd like to pick up because I have some Bosnian clients that come in here and that's Slav based, too. *Delish*

B: Yeah, Carrie and I were in Poland and we spoke Czech very slowly, but we could make ourselves understood and they could understand us. They were trying to have conversations with us and we were like, “Uh, we don’t really understand what’s going on!” But it helps a lot.

S: Bruce Cerny was up the Ukraine and he got a long because he knew his Czech, but he got along up there also.

B: Yeah, Slavic languages. You can get them pretty easily once you get one.

S: Yeah, once you get at least one of them figured out you can pretty much kind of get by.

B: Yeah, it’s cool like that. I know a lot of people who speak tons of Slavic languages, but once you start teaching them a Romance language or something, “Oh, that’s too hard!” It’s just not what you’re used to. Do you think it’s really important to keep your Czech identity in the US?

S: Yes, I do. It’s important for me, well, because part of my business is Czech. I have a polka band and I entertain with the bagpipes, or the *dudy*. Yeah, it’s important to me to be identified as Czech because of that.

B: Do you think—oh, go on!

S: Oh, go ahead!

B: Well, I was going to say, do you think the younger generation feels the same?

S: I—that’s kind of a question that evolves. When you’re young and in high school maybe if you grew up in Wilber and wanted to be a member of the Wilber alumni band, yes. But my son, for an example, my kids weren’t really interested in what mom was doing as far as accordion music and all that, but then my son went to the Czech Republic and I went and, you know, he played the accordion when he was like twelve or thirteen and he quit playing, and picked up an accordion over in Klenčí [pod Čerchovem] and was playing accordion over there, and so, since then has thought how wonderful it is to be Czech and to have that heritage. So not he plays—he was pulled in closer with his grandfather, you know, because of the music. Yeah, he wants to go back again to go. But yeah... children now, the younger generation—yes and no. Some people want to do it because of the beer. It’s an excuse to drink for some people, which is really sad because that’s not... You know, beer, it’s relative to the Czech culture but that’s not what it’s all about. It really isn’t. There are so many other things besides the alcohol. They’re slowly coming... some do, some don’t. It’s going to be like anybody who has German ancestry or Irish or whatever, you know. It comes in time, when you start looking into your genealogy and then it becomes pretty cool.

B: I think in the US we have such an interesting situation because everyone’s something else and the things that we celebrate from it maybe aren’t exactly what the culture is in another country. Like, here in Wilber beer is a really big thing at Czech

days and that's what they kind of promote with Budweiser sponsoring and come and come drink with us! And in Czech, beer is just, like a normal thing—it's not...

S: Yeah, yeah it's not made a big party thing in Czech Republic. It's part of your daily life. It's not, "Hey, how many can we drink tonight?" Okay, there might be a few like that, but it really isn't a lot of binge drinking, that's what you'd say and that's what you'd see in the Czech festivals is binge drinking.

B: I was talking to Doris Ourecky and she was telling me that Saline County and Wilber especially has a huge problem with binge drinking and she says she thinks it's because we promote so much alcohol. We're like, "Oh, it's part of our Czech culture, to have all this beer and stuff," but there, it's such a relaxed atmosphere around it. When you go out to a pub, you're just, you know, sitting and talking and your having a beer and yeah, you might have more than one because you're sitting and talking for a while, but it's not the point to get really wasted or something.

S: So, is it in the Czech Republic, are they really strict on their drinking laws like we are here?

B: Well, they're strict on their drinking and driving laws. There's no tolerance, if you're driving you can't have anything to drink. Like here, if you have one beer and you're not at the limit, you're fine. There's no limit, it's just that if you're driving, you are not drinking and if they catch you, you can get in serious trouble. Practically suspending your license for good. But then again with the age of drinking, it's very relaxed and I think it depends on what you're drinking. They say there's the drinking age is 18, but the joke is as soon as you can see over the bar. Carrie has a host family in Klenčí and the son is 16. He's very tall and he looks like he's 18, but Domažlice is a small town and everyone knows how old people are and stuff. He always gets served beer! Especially at Chodské slavnosti, he was buying us beers and stuff! But at the same time, I think when kids get to college they're not drinking so much that they're getting alcohol poisoning and stuff like that, just because they're used to it more. I don't know.

S: I was just curious, you know. That's something that I've never really asked anybody that's stayed over there and I haven't talked to Carrie at all and Mike, I've never really talked to him about anything but the bagpipes and about the *dudy* and the different things that they did, so I just never really asked anybody about it.

B: Yeah, I mean, there are definitely times where people, especially even if you're in Moravia or something, if you're a guest they'll welcome you with a shot and say goodbye to you with a shot. Or even, you know if they bring out the homemade *slivovice* that they really care about you and stuff. They'll share it with everyone, it's like this really friendly thing and there are times when people will get drunk, because you're sitting around and talking but it's not really such a party atmosphere, it's more of like, we're all sitting around together and not doing anything today, so...

S: Yeah, it's a sociable thing. That's...well, you answered my question, I don't know if I've answered yours!

B: It's fine! So, what do you really do to celebrate and show Czech identity and for you, what's the most important part? I know you play a lot of Czech music.

S: I think it's my button accordion. I love my button accordion the most. I can do the most romance on an accordion. But the bagpipe, if I could get new reeds for it, it would be a lot nicer for me to go out and to go push that. I—my music—and now that I can enunciate, I love to sing in Czech. It's all my music, that's how I celebrate my Czech heritage. It's not just the polka. I hear so many people say, "Oh, it's just the polka! They all sound the same!" Well, there's a lot of beauty in the Czech music. You know, of course if you listen to Dvořák and Smetana, you've got a completely different type of music than what you'd hear with the polka. There are a lot of beautiful waltzes and ballads.

B: I think that there's a lot of feeling in it.

S: Yeah it does, it does. I giggle, because sometimes the songs, "*Červené vino, bílé koláče*"...red wine, white *koláč*, we're going to eat and then we're going to dance. It's such a simple little song. It's a song about a little piggy. A lot of the songs were made up by somebody who was just walking down the road and they threw...they did a little rhyme or whatever in Czech and they made it into a song. You know, like the Prague Polka. The guys were going to Prague and they went to the *pivovár* and drank and then went back home. They're very simple songs but some of them have very heartfelt feeling to them—the Meadowlark, the Faded Rose...some of those are very sad. One is about a woman whose man never came back from the service and you know, just sad, very sad.

B: Do you think the people who maybe don't really care about the language, do you think they're missing out on something?

S: Yeah, there are some people who are translating songs, but if you do the Beer Barrel, it has a whole different meaning from the original way it was written to what it was translated to in English. The Blue Skirt Waltz is the Red Skirt Waltz. They changed the words to make them rhyme, but I don't think the meaning is the same and so, you're losing the Czech meaning of the song in the translation. We have one song that we did get translated and we do it with the Milligan Czech Brass Band. It's When Our Paths Meet, and it's talking about the love between two people and it's talking about, when we'll meet again. The translation is pretty good on that one, but on a lot of them they're not good. They're not right. Somebody will just throw something together and they're not grasping what they should be when they translate them.

B: Yeah, translation is kind of hard, especially with works of art because you have to translate the feeling, not just the words. Some people miss out on that and I think when people don't—for me, the language is really important because I've been learning it for a while and can just see it—how much it's enriched my understanding. I wish people here would take it seriously. I think people here are mostly like, "Oh, my grandparents spoke it and I'm Czech-American, but I don't need to speak the language. It's enough to wear kroje and say '*Jak se máš!*'"

S: Oh, and the kroje thing! Oh, that just irritates me! You'll have somebody just throw a bunch of pieces together that don't belong together and you have people judging

that don't understand, you know, what that's all about. That's kind of a thorn in my side with, you know—that's, that *kroj* meant something to those different regions. But, you know, you can ask me something else, I'm getting off subject!

B: You're fine! I mean, most of it is just seeing where the conversation ends up—everything is new information that I can use. So, you've been to the Czech Republic—do you feel a special connection there? Like more than any other, maybe if you've gone to another country that you didn't have ancestry, did you feel like it was as special—that it was like a place for you?

S: Yeah, I felt a connection there. And the connection was with the music. I was fortunate because I knew who Antonín Komrodý was before I went over. He was somebody whose stuff I was kind of studying. Of course, I went on Janet's tour and she said, "Just sit here," when we went to Klenčí. "You and Don just sit here." And I said okay, and I saw him coming through the door, I saw the yellow knickers and I'm like, "Oh my gosh!" and it was Antonín. I looked at her and I said, "Do you know who that is?" and she said, "Do *you* know who that is?!" And I said, "Yeah, I know who that is!" because that's who I'd kind of been studying for the past, for the *dudy* and... So she says, "Well, who is it?" and I told her and it happened to be the day that I wore my dad's bib overalls from the farm, these worn out bibs. They were supposed to go on the trip with us, but because of 9/11 the year before they didn't go, so I told my dad, I said, "Give me your bibs, I'm taking them with me because at least you can say that they were in the Czech Republic." So here I am in this pair of bibs that I'm swimming in. They were my dad's and they said, go get your bagpipe because we'd just picked it up from young bower's the day before, so I went and got it off the bus and came in and started playing with Antonín and it was fun. So, he played a couple of good songs and I played along with him. I played the Monkey Polka, he played Opice with me, and then the Monkey Polka, so we had a really strong connection there. I think I could fit in with the musicians, but I don't know how they feel so much about the women playing music so much. That's something with the culture, I got the feeling of a little bit of chauvinism while I was there.

B: Well, there are not a lot of women who play *dudy*, even in Domažlice. I was talking to Carrie about it when I was there because her host mother had said something. Her host family—the parents—have a band, or, the father does and they were playing us some of their music and it was really good. They mixed folk music and rock together, it was pretty cool.

S: Yeah, that's supposed to be a new thing!

B: Yeah, and they recorded it in the woods and the sound was really cool there in this clearing. At one point, they had a *dudy* playing and it came from far away and it came in the center of this song. It was right there with the rest of the musicians and then it ended and the song ends with the *dudy* being further away and that's one of the last instruments we're listening to and I was like, oh, that's really good! And Martina was like, „Oh, that's me! That's me playing the *dudy*, the first female *dudy* player from Domažlice!" And I asked Carrie, was she the first? Because clearly there have been others. And she was like, "Yeah, well, there are other people that play and there's little girls now that are starting, but really, no one was really good until Martina did it

and she was kind of one of the first ones that actually became really good at it and stuff. She's the only really famous female one, so...

S: I'm trying to think...Martina. Where is she originally from?

B: She's from Domažlice. Right now she's living in Klenčí.

S: Because, see, when I went to Stud...and let's see, I can't think of what Jungbower's daughter's name was... But she was really good. She played it for me when I put it on and she was awesome.

B: What did she look like?

S: She was kind of medium height...she wasn't fat, she was cute, she had dark hair.

B: Okay, I don't know her then. There's maybe just a few.

S: Okay. I have a picture of her, if you want. It came in a newspaper article. Bruce Cerny took a picture of us together and he emailed it back to the Crete news and then that week, it came out in the Crete news and my folks were like, "But they're not home, how did they get this picture?"

B: That's funny!

S: So that was fun. She was very, very good and it was Jungbower's daughter.

B: Yeah, I think with dudy there's not a lot of females. I'm not sure about accordion playing, though. I think...

S: There are a lot of female accordion players, I see them on the Internet. They're not all Czech Republic. People there have a lot of different stylings and it's very interesting stylings and I'm like, "God, I wish I could..." so, you know, it broadens my expectations of myself.

B: I don't know do much about dudy. I mostly just get most of my information from Carrie, but the way I understand it is that it was traditionally a man's instrument and...

S: The woman sang.

B: Yeah.

S: Originally, the music was that you'd have a vocalist and a dudy was basically all that accompanied the vocalist and then they brought in a violin and a clarinet, so then you had your 3 musicians with your vocalist. They brought in a b flat clarinet later on and your double bass, you know. That's kind of how that all kind of evolved, you know. Then they brought in the stop fiddle and the horsehair jug and the fernak...did I say that right?

B: Is it fernak? I don't know, I'd need to see it spelled.

S: Yeah, and then the rake. So, yeah. I really would like to have a bagpipe ensemble here. We got close to it once we had Sarah Freeouff on the violin and Janet played with her guitar behind it and I was on the bagpipe. I think it would be so much fun to get together with Carrie and Julia Ourecky wants to learn so bad!

B: Yeah, she told me she's just starting to learn now.

S: She started—I got her the beginning of the... God, I can't even think of the name of it! Gosh, I'm getting old! It's, I guess, the Domažlice song. She's got the very first part of it, so she was playing it with me in the museum, but you know, when you first learn it's not easy to keep it in tune and so, the poor man in the basement, every time we started playing, he could hear it. He threw his newspaper down over the Czech festival and he'd go waaaay to the other side of the basement so that he wasn't near the stairway that we were using and he wouldn't be hearing us. Julia's going to be a good—good, good kid for Czech things in Wilber. I think that's where she'll probably, eventually end up.

B: Yeah, she's always... I was interviewing and I set up the interview with Doris and Steve and I just figured Julia would be tagging along anyway and then she came and she was like, "I didn't know if you wanted me to come, but I just wanted to come anyway because I hadn't seen you in a while!" And I was just, "Oh, I just assumed you were coming!" I should have asked specifically, but she's at everything, so...

S: Yeah, she is. She's really good at the whole museum and researching and she's going to be a very excellent student of Czech culture.

B: I think so. I was, she was telling me about the queen thing and I was like, "Well, you should wait because it's better if you're older, if you really are serious about it." I think she could be really good. It's just—wait until you're older. But she seems so much older than she is when you talk to her about the culture stuff.

S: She's very mature, very mature.

B: Okay, so, this question is mainly for my Czech people but I'm going to ask the Americans anyway. Do you think it's important to say that you're Czech, to be a Czech citizen? Or do you think that you can be Czech without having a Czech passport?

S: I think that you can be Czech without having a Czech passport. Because Czech comes from your heart, it's not something that's made with boundaries. It's the inside and, like I said, it's to me, it's music. It's, the whole thing is music.

B: Yeah, it's very transcending. Do you follow Czech history or current events that are happening in the Czech Republic?

S: No, and it's not that I don't want to, I just don't have the time because I run two businesses and I do the music on the weekends and, you know, I'm getting married in May.

B: Oh, congratulations!

S: Thank you! He doesn't know it yet, but we're having accordion at the wedding!

B: Does he suspect it, maybe?

S: I think so, I think so! But he's a strong supporter of the music, he said, "I don't want you to quit playing, I want you to keep going with your music."

B: That's great! Especially since you seem so passionate about it, too.

S: Yeah, and it doesn't bother him that I can pull my guitar, my violin, my accordion out...but I haven't gotten my dudy out and played it for him yet. It's still at my other house. Since I had the water pipes break in my house, I've been staying over at his place.

B: Is the dudy okay?

S: Everything's fine. That's one instrument that I didn't have in the bedroom down below the bathroom. Everything else, except for the piano, I had the piano taken out and ready to go for the Czech concert that we're gonna do—the Czech theatre. And, with the Czech theatre being cancelled, the piano was still set up on it's stand in my front room. So, luckily, it wasn't underneath the bed. There was so much water when the pipes broke, but my cases protected pretty much everything. I had three cases that got ruined, but all off my musical instruments were fine. I was really worried about my accordions because I've got some old ones and they're nice, some old Czech four-row accordions. I have a Mikeš and I've never, ever seen another Mikeš. It's neat...its got a whole different sound.

B: You feel bad that the cases are ruined, but they did their job.

S: They did their job, they protected the accordion and they'll be replaced.

B: Good thing you had them.

S: Yeah, and no got ruined, so.

B: Oh, good! Do you feel European? In Europe right now there's a lot of push for EU togetherness stuff...do you think about any of that? Do you feel something with other Europeans?

S: No, I kind of like it that everybody kind of stays in their own little country. You know, they need to have some sort of a bond to be Europe but, that's like that we're America, there's Canada, there's Mexico, you know? It's—I think they should—I don't feel a need for all of them to be together as one. Does that answer your question?

B: Yeah, definitely! Do you consider religion an important part of Czech identity, or, for you, is religion a separate thing that is different from your Czech identity?

S: My religion is different from my Czech identity and I know that the Catholic Church was very strong, but I also know that a lot of Czechs came over here to get

away from them, you know, so. And, I'm not Catholic. My family is Catholic, though, but I'm not Catholic.

B: Okay. There's a lot of people, who—I've heard people say, "Oh, we're good Czech Catholics," or something and then you go to Czech Republic and unless you're in a small village, the Church isn't that big. It's actually one of the most atheist countries, so it's interesting to see if people say that religion's an important part of that, or...

S: My understanding is that a lot of the settlers that came over here came to get away from the Church and the domination.

B: Yeah, I think my family did. We didn't start going to church in Wilber until my grandfather married my grandmother and she was German, so...

S: And see, my grandparents, the Prochazkas and they married Aksamit, you know in Nebraska, the name Aksamit—and I don't know how important the church was. I know the Aksamits were all Catholics. But I think my grandpa was because my grandma was and she wouldn't had it be any other way, you know, very devout. But, no.

B: Oh, another one...how far back is your Czech ancestry? What generation are you or who came over here?

S: Oh, from who came over...I gotta think. On my grandpa's side, I'd be fourth generation and on my grandma's side...I think I'm fourth generation there too.

B: And you know where they're from? And...

S: Jenec, Pavlov. The Pavlov people go down to the Kutná Šimova, that's where Eloisi was from. Her maiden name was Prochasek. She was on that, where the border pipes back and forth.

B: There's a lot of that. I just talked to someone who was on the border with Poland and she was like, "We're part Czech, but also part Polish and also, the town switched countries every other year or something."

S: So do you know where the crescent cookie came from? Or the crescent roll?

B: I don't know about the crescent roll. We made rohlíky, but they're bigger and they're not as buttery, so I almost think that our crescent rolls that we make here kind of came from that. They're rolled kind of the same way, if you look at how they're made and the rohlíky are a lot bigger. A lot of the stuff—I found an old recipe book and stuff of my great grandmother, who didn't speak very much English and she was trying to teach my grandmother how to cook "the Czech way" because she was German. It was just really funny because it was half Czech, half English, or Czech with American spellings, or English with Czech spellings. It was funny. There were some things where I was like, okay, I know how to make this the Czech way because I've done it with my friend's families, but seeing the ingredients they substitute because they couldn't get the ingredients here, like cream cheese koláče—that's

supposed to be tvaroh, but we don't have tvaroh here. Now, they're getting it in farmer's markets and stuff, or the Ukrainian markets, they'll have some of that stuff, but we just used cream cheese, so I think it changed a little bit.

S: So what is tvaroh?

B: Tvaroh is a cheese and you can make it either sweet or savory, so you can make some kind of meat dish with it, to have a little bit of cheese, or you can put sugar in it and it basically becomes like the cream cheese you put in koláče. It's this white, very porous, soft farmer's cheese. They have it all over, in Germany they call it quark and I think sometimes here they sell it under that. They have it all over the rest of Central and Eastern Europe and they use it in desserts a lot.

S: Oh, look at you learning all this!

B: *laughs* Yeah, cooking stuff!

S: *laughs* That's alright!

B: But it's delicious!

S: That's a huge thing in the Czech culture! That's what drew my grandmother and me so close! That's why I was such a heavy little girl.

B: *laughing* Yeah, I was a chubby little girl, too.

S: Yeah, I actually ate over there all the time. Every Sunday we'd get home from church and we'd go to grandma's and she'd make lunch and we'd eat over there and we had steak. Oh, my gosh, she was such a good cook!

B: Yeah, I just remember my grandmother's food and I'll never have it again, but in my mind it was the best food in the world.

S: That's right! And it was always a little bit of this, a little bit of that—nothing was ever measured out. I tried to get her koláč recipe from her and I couldn't.

B: Yeah, my grandmother's koláč recipe was also... My aunt has it, but it's like, "Put in a few handfuls of this and a pinch of that until it looks right," and you're like, okay, well what does right look like? I should have asked her, but I was too little to be making koláče. It's just really funny because that's how Czechs cook, too. They don't really measure anything. Occasionally, they do, but if it's the traditional stuff, its...

S: If it's something I know how to make, I don't usually measure it out, but if it's something that I don't know, then I have to follow somebody's recipe. I've tried koláč five times and I've failed, terribly. Five times! So, I haven't tried for fifteen years.

B: You have to find a good recipe for the dough, is what I think. Some recipes make them a little bit too sweet, where they shouldn't be super sugary. I found a good one for the dough, but I'm not good at making them, so they kind of look like lopsided

doughnuts. They got a little bit too big, but I haven't made them in years. In Prague, I'll just go to the store and buy them because they're better than the ones I make!

S: Yeah, and there's certain people around here that just make them and they're so soft. A lot of the times you go to the bakeries and the bakeries have harder though, it's not just real soft, like wonder bread used to be. That's how my grandmother made it, but, yeah.

B: Do you—are folk traditions important to you?

S: Yes, they are! But I'm learning a lot that I didn't know before about the traditions; we did the walnut ships. But we never followed the actual tradition, we just took walnut shells and made boats out of them. That was one thing we did at Christmas. We didn't do the hide the pickle one on the Christmas tree. There are just things that we've done and some things that we do in my life that I didn't realize they were Czech, you know? Yeah, I really am trying to learn the traditions more so I can pass them on to my grandchildren. My daughter does the hide the pickle and she does—she's digging into her Czech ancestry now too, so.

B: I think once people get a little bit older, they start getting really interested in it. How is wearing the kroje important to you?

S: If it fit me better I would probably wear it a lot more often! But I really like the tradition of showing respect to another family, like Charlie and Mary Jean always wore their kroje to a funeral, to a wedding, you name it. I was there for a graduation, and that's what it's for... a kroj is supposed to worn out of respect for somebody when they got married or when they passed. Talking to Yvonne Masopust in Santa Barbra, she told me the last time she went back to Prague for a graduation, she said, "In that sea of black and blue suits in the audience," she said, "there were too babičky in their kroje and they just stood out. They wore it out of respect for a grandchild or great-grandchild." You know, they kept that tradition.

B: Yeah, a saw a bunch of old ladies crossing the road around Domažlice, or maybe in Klenčí and I was like, "Oh my goodness! I'm so excited!" Carrie's like, "Yeah, all the old ladies pretty much wear it all the time here."

S: And it's not anything that they would be embarrassed by—that's how they were raised. And that would be just like us wearing a suit, which I should have on today but it's ten below this morning and since I'm driving from Swanton now, I'm not going to get stuck in a ditch in polyester! That would be crazy, so I have my jeans and shirt.

B: I think people would understand.

S: I think they do, too, but thank you for dressing up. See, you've got like a suit jacket.

B: Oh, well, it's really warm, which is why I wore it. *Laughs*

S: So, your family goes back to the Aksamit family...

B: Yeah! We're related!

S: Anton and Eloisi. So, did you know that's where they came from?

B: I actually don't know so much. For me, I only really know one side of the family, which is the Tichý side, but my grandfather's mother was a Kobes and I know that they're from Domažlice.

S: Okay, well I have some Kobeses that come in here. (her accounting office)

B: Yeah, I think we're distant cousins. I've met some people and they did a lot of the genealogy themselves, but the reason I know my genealogy is that when I was first getting into it, I was on ancestry.com and I met someone who had a match of mine. It was Gene Aksamit and he was like, "Yeah, we're related," and he had done all of this stuff.

S: Did you get the book?

B: I didn't get the book. He sent me—I don't think he had the book yet, but he sent me all of his research.

S: I had the book and I gave it to one of my cousins and I don't remember which cousin. I gave it to like two or three of them, but it was during tax season and I don't remember who the last one was I gave it to...nobody has it now. It's gone.

B: But you know, I don't know if he—because I guess maybe I got it before because that was like five years ago now and I was in high school...that's really weird to think how many years ago that was. It doesn't feel like it was that long ago. I blinked!

S: Yeah, wait until you get to my age!

B: Some of it he had, the dates were a bit off, at least for the Tichý family—Tichý is such a common last name. We know what village we're from and stuff, but it's hard to find relatives because Tichý is just as common as Jones or Smith there.

S: So is Prochazka! I was really surprised.

B: Yeah, do you know what Prochazka means?

S: Take a walk?

B: Yeah!

S: I didn't really realize the real meaning of it until I went up above, was it Karlovy Vary? There's that tower up above the town. I went up there and there was a trail map and it had "prochaz"—but it wasn't Prochazka, it was a different form, so that stuck.

B: It's funny because sometimes, like if you go there now there are some people... Well, I met a girl with my last name too and that was really strange because in the US I've never met another Tichý that I wasn't related to and there was one. We clearly weren't related, she was from Prague, but it was really cool. I was like "Oh, you're

Alice Tichá, I'm Brianna Tichá, nice to meet you!" She was like, "Oh, that's really strange." ...But, the last names there sometimes will change a little bit and you'll get a lot of people whose last names don't mean anything and here in America in these Czech communities, everyone's last name means something. Theirs probably used to mean something and then it changed pronunciation a little bit or they got a little bit away from it. And sometimes it's really funny because you can tell where the people are from, like Stefanie Vocasek—her last name is in a Prague accent, so her family must be from around Prague because that's the only people who would say it like that.

S: That's interesting.

B: Yeah, the language stuff for me is really cool. It connects me to everything.

S: And I would love to learn! Being so old, it's harder for me to retain. I would have to have somebody to practice on.

B: It's a hard language, but I really respect anyone who learns it or even just tries to learn some phrases and stuff. But yeah, you really need to talk with someone. I know it well because I went to class for it. I studied it at the university, I've been doing it for like five years now and was really like, yes, I am doing this, because that's really what was kind of one of my main focuses. You really—I don't know how you would learn it outside of a class or practicing one on one with someone. Especially for English speakers, it's so hard!

S: You'll have to go see Nancy Lenhardt at her Czech and Czech class. She's got—every two weeks, she's getting a group of people together just to do sayings in Czech. Her next one is the 11th of February at 2:00 in the afternoon. I've been putting it on the radio station. The radio show I'm doing is through Doane College and we have people here in Crete say, "You've got a radio show here in Crete, Nebraska and you don't do any Czech music!" So we started a polka show and Elmer Nemecek and I get to be the disc jockeys for it and so, he told me I can pretty much advertise without a dollar amount on it anything that's going on. I was even able to go as far as to say that they're having duck over at Ben's Iron Grill II on Sunday the 26th, which was last month and go stock up on duck and sauerkraut and dumplings. I could do Nancy's "chat with Czech", they've got those concerts coming up, the appreciation dances—I could do all of those as long as I don't get a dollar amount.

B: Yeah. I think a lot of times there's a lot of stuff going on in the community that people don't know about. Especially, they'll know what's in their one town but not the other neighboring towns that definitely have connections to it to.

S: And this is streaming over the Internet, so we've had people in Oregon and, of course, Lisa Karpisek, you know, she lives in Missouri and I'm trying to think of the other two states... But anyway, we've had people streaming in from different states, so I try to put it on Facebook on Saturday mornings that that's where I'm going to be. I need to get it in the newspapers around here. I haven't done anything with the newspapers, but I don't know if I should do that with a nonprofit or not. I don't see why not.

B: Yeah, I think that it's—well, I don't know anything about the legality of advertising stuff. It's so hard!

S: Yeah, the legality of that with the nonprofit either, I don't want to get Doane in trouble, you know?

B: Does the UNL Czech Club ever give you stuff to promote? Because I know they always have trouble with getting people to come.

S: The Komenský Club?

B: Yeah.

S: No, nobody ever says anything, and I know Sasha Denton.

B: Yeah, I just—I was meeting with Mila the other day and Mila's like, "We have a meeting in five minutes, come with me!" and then, I'm not even a member, I don't even go to UNL anymore and she's giving me work to do. She's like, "Brianna, you'll write this for our newsletter and..." and I was like, "Okay..." It was typical Mila! Nothing's changed! But yeah, I told Sasha I was coming here and she mentioned knowing you—they should really give you stuff to advertise over that! A lot of their stuff is free, too, so it's not like you even have to miss out on saying a dollar amount.

S: Well, I could just give a phone number, like contact this person about this event if there would be anything like the Lied Concert that's coming up—the Czech landscapes concert. The Lincoln Czech Club is going to be entertaining at the intermission and giving koláče away and provide refreshments, basically. And I think someone's going to be there with their accordion...I'm not for sure.

B: Yeah, and they do those movie nights and stuff. If you don't have anything going on, it's a free movie.

S: Yeah, and those are all neat things to get out to other people.

B: Well, I think, because I used to do the Komenský Club and I was president for a number of years and it was so hard to get other people to come. And then sometimes they would be like, "Oh, have we tried doing this? No, we've never done that." So we didn't do it, we won't do it now.

S: I would come visit if I didn't have to do it in Lincoln. On the campus, I hate trying to have to find somewhere to park around there. It's terrible!

B: It's awful! I've been up at the campus for the past two days doing interviews and I've... Well, when I lived there I never parked in the parking garage, but now with the snow, I'm just like, it's not worth it to walk around and find places to park. I know the downtown pretty well because I was there for four year, but it's awful. And then trying to find... When I was a student there some days I wouldn't know where anything was. They don't tell you what room things are in until the day of and then you can't find the room and they all have very similar names and you're walking around the union in this maze looking for

S: Yeah, see, I went to the Czech Language Foundation dinner that they had up there and we had a Garmin so we could kind of find our way. If I had to find it myself, I would not be able to find where the union was. It's been years since I've been up there, but can you imagine somebody in their sixties trying to find that? There needs to be some other way or some other location. They'd probably have more people showing up at their activities.

B: *pointless chattering on the same topic...* Do you have family or friends in the Czech Republic?

S: Well, Carrie's there. Mike is there and Jeff is there, so that's three. *Laughs* I have to really think about that! I suppose that I have family there but I just don't know them. I don't have anybody that I connect to, but the man I'm marrying has a cousin that lives in Příbram. It's north of Strakonice about 35, 37 miles...somewhere in there. So we're going to go visit Dana Kučerová.

B: Is it important to you to be in contact with these relatives in Czech Republic who you've never met?

S: I *really* want to be! I would really like to be. I know the Aksamit family that came over, they're home was sold, so it did not go to another family member when they came.

B: So you can't just go. I know Carrie, she showed up at her family's house and there was someone with the same last name. They're still not sure how they're related, but they know that they're cousins somehow.

S: I have—I know people who go over and go visit cousins all the time. When I take Eric over with me when I go to Strakonice I know that Dana will come down and steal him for a day and take him around to the family cemeteries and what have you.

B: That would be really cool!

S: And she said that she's going to start to learn English more...she just speaks some, so I think that that will probably be nice for us.

B: Yeah, definitely! And the last question is, do you think that Czech culture here and in the Czech communities in America is different than Czech culture in Czech Republic?

S: I couldn't answer that definitively because I know when we went to the living history museum in Vlasško, they had a Czech folk band. I never—I didn't see...of course, we didn't go to a lot of the little pubs. I don't know what the people were doing. I know that Matt Sut, he had friends that were over there and played accordions so they'd be playing accordions for his little tour group. I don't know if the culture is much the same. I know that they have their festivals—their bass band festivals, which I have to go to that too! The brass band and then they have their bagpipe, the dudy festivals. I don't know if the culture is really the same but it's similar. I can't say that it's the same but it's similar.

B: It's interesting to see what people think, especially people who have been there...

S: I think that they celebrate their culture more now probably than what they've done in the past ten to fifteen years. They're starting to realize that things that made up a lot of their culture—the kroje—they're now starting to realize that that is important. I think a lot of the people who I've talked to, like an older woman that told me her grandmother told her they got rid of their "zoot suits" or clown suits the minute they hit American soil. They dropped them in New York. They just dropped them and left them on the dock just to get rid of them because they didn't want to wear them. I think that that attitude has kind of come forwards somewhat but now it's turning around and people are realizing that it would be nice to have some connection to that history. I noticed that there are some kroje manufacturers starting up... places that had shut down and are reopening.

B: How do you feel when, for you, a lot of the Czech culture, like wearing kroje and playing accordion and dudy is really important, but if you meet a Czech person who is really, "I haven't seen anyone wear kroj except for in fairy tales and that's music that my grandparents listen to?" Does it make you feel disconnected from them or sad?

S: I feel sad for them because they're missing out. I really feel that they are missing out if they don't understand the music or their family or their ancestors. And it might be a family whose ancestors never ever experienced that...they don't have that musical gene in their system. I would be sad. I would be very sad.

Appendix 4:

Johnson Transcription:

Transcription key:

O- Olivia Johnson

B: Brianna Tichý

This interview took place on Tuesday, February 4, 2014 at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln Student Union in Lincoln, Nebraska.

O: So, this is going to be...what's your goal for your research, here?

B: So, basically I'm doing...I'm going to ask some people from the Czech community here what they think that makes them Czech and what they do that makes their traditions and stuff Czech...

O: Oh, okay...

B: And then I'm going to ask Czech people what they do that makes them Czech and then I'm going to compare it and see if it's similar. So, it's kind of fun because some things are really similar and some things...

O: This will probably be in one of your questions, but like the biggest difference that I noticed is that some of the things we do in Nebraska and probably in the United States and just in general in some of the communities is really outdated, as far as what they do in the actual Czech Republic...like wearing cornets and polkas. Nobody does

that in the Czech Republic anymore. It's like, what the really old people do there. When the immigrants came here, that was what they did, and now that's still what we do. It's like we're frozen in past Czech customs, which is interesting and nobody here realizes that. Like the older people, like in Wilber, they don't realize that that's not what they do anymore over there.

B: Yeah, well, I just went to church in Wilber and like, everyone was wearing garnets—all of the women. And then, in Czech Republic, like maybe someone has a nice pair of garnet earrings or something, but it's not like everyone wearing them all the time.

O: And isn't it more like, the older generation? That's what Katarina told me, like the elderly people...

B: Yeah, like older people and maybe some younger people. Like, they might have nice pair that they wear sometimes.

O: Like, maybe like an heirloom, or something really special?

B: Yeah, I think I, well, my roommate's Carrie Brown, and one of her coworkers has this ring and it's garnets and it's really pretty and she's like our age and she's like, "Oh yeah, it was my great grandmother's, isn't it nice?" And she wears it, to like, remember her great grandmother and we're like, oh year, garnets. Here we were them to, like, show people we're Czech.

O: Yeah, exactly, yeah.

B: I never realized that so much until I came back and was like, oh yeah, *everyone* wears garnets.

O: Oh yeah, everyone wears them here and like, polka especially...nobody polkas in the Czech Republic.

B: Yeah, I think they all learn. They don't do it so much.

O: So it's not like...?

B: I wouldn't... In the villages they do. So, I went like, to a ball.

O: That'd be awesome!

B: So, yeah, it was a ball...but it was more like a community dance, but it was really fun.

O: Aw, that'd be so cool.

B: Uh-huh, but it was the young people, so they played modern music and I don't think they played polka. It was... And then some of the music, that like, Katarina played us in Czech class, from like, just...I don't know, like fairy tales and stuff. They played some of it and it was really funny.

O: Oh, man, cool. So the villages, are like, maybe more?

B: Yeah, this was like, a small village in Moravia, so...

O: Cool, that's cool.

B: Yeah, but it was... So, basically, there are no real right or wrong answers. I just want to hear what everyone's saying, because I think it's going to be different for everyone too. So like, the first question is, do you feel Czech, or Czech-American, or just American?

O: Oooh. Um, I guess it depends on the context. If I was in Prague introducing, like, in the Czech Republic, introducing myself, I'd say that I'm American, but my family's Czech, so I guess more Czech-American in that context, but to people I meet here, I would just say American. You know, if I met a new foreign exchange student I would just say, "Oh, I'm an American." But I always trying to bring up, if we, you know, start talking about heritages, I always try to bring up that I'm Czech because that always starts an interesting conversation.

B: Yeah, I think that it's different...well, especially for foreign exchange students because they're usually from a country where everybody's usually one thing and they don't really think about it. America's really different that way.

O: Yeah.

B: For me, it's cool. So, the next question—I know you speak some Czech, so, it was do you speak Czech and do you think it's important to be Czech American...that you celebrate that—to speak some Czech, or no?

O: Um, I think so. I would say that I always have been Czech, obviously, but I don't think I really got into my culture until I really started learning the language, because it just, it, I don't know, for some reason it just made it a lot more important to me. And it gave me the confidence to study abroad and to go alone. Because as you know, I didn't go through with...I didn't go through UNL or anything. It just, it made me a lot more proud of my heritage. It made me feel a lot more, like, *worthy* of telling people I'm Czech, if that makes sense? Like, I'm Czech, I've studied the language...I'm not that good at it, *but*, I've tried, so...

B: You can say some things, and I think, that makes a little bit of a difference.

O: Um-hm, I guess, if I'm telling somebody who's actually from the Czech Republic that I have a Czech heritage and that I'm, you know, a lot more proud to say that I can speak some of the language, too, so...

B: Yeah...how many years did you study it here? Two or three?

O: Three, I have the minor so...

B: Oh, sweet!

O: Yeah, I haven't spoken since I've been there in a while, so...yeah.

B: Well, I don't know, if you hang around Selleck, you'll probably here the Robitscheks or something.

O: I probably should. (laughs)

B: Just sit there and stalk them out. Actually, that's how I made one of my friends. I like, one of my best friends now...I came home after being in Czech Republic for the first time and I was really, like, missing it, so I was like, oh, let's meet the people in Selleck who are Czech and I like knocked on doors of people who had Czech names and met them. And my one friend was like, 'Oh, yeah, that's cool...I have to run to class, but we should get coffee sometime!'

O: Oh, well, that's what you gotta do!

B: Yeah, it was really creepy, though! Now, like, I introduced myself and I was like, "Hi! I know this is really weird, and I'm like, probably really creepy," and I was like, "if someone did that to me, I don't think I'd be friends with them, but..."

O: Those people are like, since they're foreign they probably hadn't met a whole lot of people anyway, so they were probably like—

B: Well, it was the middle of the...because I, like, studied abroad the first semester, so it was like, second semester.

O: Oh, yeah!

B: But, now we're really good friends, so...I guess it worked out! Umm...okay, yeah... Do you think...or, why do you think it's important to keep your Czech identity alive in the US?

O: I guess, I just have this fear that these customs that we carry out especially in Nebraska are just going to die and I can already see them dying a little bit. All of the really authentic, Czech baking, umm...most people in my generation aren't really interested in that. Like, I know a lot of my friends who are Czech, their moms and all of there grandmothers make *kolaches* and stuff, but none of them really care to know, so I think I can just see it dying, so I just think that it's really important for the younger, like, my generation...I don't know...to realize how cool it is, to learn how to do that stuff. So I don't know if that answered your question.

B: It did! So what do you do to show your Czech identity?

O: Well, back to what I just said, I bake *kolaches*. I try to do it at least once a year. It's so much work.

B: It *is* a lot of work! Mine always end up looking really, like lopsided donuts.

O: They always turn out different. And I kind of taught myself to do that. I guess Kamenek's Club taught me a little too, but that's one way. I always cook this cool

button on my book bag! (*She points to a white badge with the words Jak se maš? In bright red letters*)

B: *laughs* Nice!

O: It's always a conversation starter. People are like, "What does that say? What does that mean?!" I wear the garnets, I love going to the festivals, I usually go to the Lincoln one, Wilber...I usually go to the one in Hastings, because that's where I was a Queen...South Central. Clarkson, I always go to that one. Yeah, I try to go to as many of those as I can. Try to drink Czech beer, when I find it...when I go to YiaYia's.

B: It just tastes better!

O: It just tastes better, always!

B: Which is your favorite part, or, the most important part of the celebration of your identity? That sounds weird...the celebration of your identity that you do?

O: Yeah, that's a good question. I think it's, for me, it's the way my family celebrates, when we do the Christmas dinner and the Easter dinner with all the authentic Czech food, which, all my aunts know how to make—all the traditional stuff, so I think for me that's the most intimate way that I do it still. A strong second would be going to the festivals. I always try to get my friends to come, even though they don't get it.

B: *laughs* It's fun! It's also fun to explain it to other people, they're like, "Wait?!"

O: Yeah, I would say the way my family—the cooking is the main way we do it, so, it kind of just is a way we all get brought together, because I have this really big, extended Czech family and we probably only see each other once on Easter...maybe Christmas. But, it's like everybody's so busy, so we all just kind of get brought together with this Czech food.

B: What do you guys cook for Easter?

O: We do...we've done *chlebičky*...I don't know if I'm pronouncing that right anymore...like, 12 different kinds of meat. Well, not twelve, but...

B: That's very Czech...you know, all the meats!

O: ...you know, the dumplings, the sauerkraut, *kolaches*, *rohlíky*.

B: My dad just made sauerkraut for the Superbowl. I was like, "Dad, it's the Superbowl. Of course we had Sauerkraut, other families make nachos."

O: Aw, I wish I had Sauerkraut! Yeah, we try to do all the authentic baking and cooking and so...

B: It's also the tastiest part of being Czech!

O: Of course! Yes, it is.

B: Yeah, I say we have better food than everyone else.

O: Oh, definitely! Definitely!

B: Okay, so my next question is...it's a question I know the answer to, but it's have you ever been to the Czech Republic?

O: Oh, yes...once. And I can't wait to go again! And I want to bring my family back next time I go, because, as you know, I went alone, so I'd really like to go bring either my mom or both of my parents depending, just to have someone to share it with, it sounds kind of cheesy.

B: I know the feeling.

O: We see all of these cool things and I'm like, "Wow, I wish I had somebody here to see how cool this is!" you know? Or I see something that reminds me of Nebraska and there's nobody around to be like, "Hey isn't that the...?" you know, nobody to relate to, I guess.

B: It's kind of funny when you see...because I have moments when you're walking around and you're like, "Oh my God, this reminds me of my grandpa!" or something that someone in my family does.

O: Yup, exactly. It's like, *déjà vu*, the whole time.

B: So do you think that there are certain things that people in the Czech-American community and Czech people have in common? Like, ways of acting?

O: *laughs* Yes! They're stubborn, they're bossy, and they like to force you to keep eating even though you're full! And all of these probably sound negative, but I admire these qualities because it reminds me of my family.

B: Yeah, I was about to say, I think they're really nice, because it reminds me of my family!

O: Exactly! They just like to be in control, but not in a bad way. They'll, you know...they're decisive and I'd say, very strong personalities. I guess I don't know if I noticed this so much with Czech people as with my family, but, kind of loud. They use a lot of hand gestures. Yeah, I absolutely noticed similarities. I would say frugality, too.

B: Steve said that too! *Laughing*

O: Yeah, frugality, definitely. All of those sound so negative, but I don't mean them...make sure you note that I don't mean those things negatively!

B: Got it! Well, I know. I'll make sure I write it up really nicely, too.

O: You understand.

B: Do you follow Czech history or current events?

O: Not as much as a should. I, for a while, I was really into my twitter account and I follow the Prague Post and some of the Prague and Czech Republic news sites, but I don't use twitter as much as I used to, so unfortunately I'm a little dis-touched from it there...a little lacking. When I was in class we had to do news articles, so that was good. It forced me to...I don't know if you've ever used the news site, it's idnes.cz. That was the one I usually used, so... I do follow a lot of pages about the Czech Republic, so if anything major happened, it would probably be on those pages and I would see it, but as far as regular daily news, I'm totally lacking.

B: Do you think it's important to follow them, to be Czech in America?

O: Yeah, I think so, especially now that I've been there. I'm more familiar with Prague and the Czech Republic, you know, some of the smaller towns I'll actually think, I know where that small town is! Whereas, before, I didn't know...I knew where Bruno was and I knew where Prague was.

B: The geography matters?

O: Yeah, a little bit.

B: Alright, second page! Do you feel European at all? Because, in Europe there's the whole EU stuff and they try to make people feel European and one...do you feel like you're also part European?

O: I would say no. The funny thing is, I'm actually more German than I am Czech in my heritage, but I don't celebrate it at all, so I don't even consider myself any German, other then, that's why I'm really tall. Czech is the thing that I feel most connected to, but I wouldn't say European.

B: Okay, cool. Do you consider religion an important part of Czech identity?

O: You know, that's funny, that's one of the biggest differences I noticed. In our area here, in Wilber, Catholic is, it seems the most prominent thing with Czech people. The part of my family that's Czech has a long line of being Catholic, but there most people are atheists, which I think is very interesting because my family asked me, they said, "Are most people Catholic there?" and I said, "No, not at all." So I think that was the most interesting, strong difference and I personally don't feel that it's a strong part, I just feel that it's one of those things like the garnets and the polkaing. It's very important to the people here because it's the past generation, but in my opinion I don't feel like that's necessarily an important part of being Czech as culturally.

B: Um-hmm, it is funny that people here—and sometimes they're like, "We're good Czechs, we go to church!" and I'm like, "Most Czechs don't!"

O: No, yeah, exactly! They don't get up before...yeah, ten or eleven, I mean!

B: Well, yeah, because you've been in the pub all night! *Laughs*

O: Yeah, when we went to breakfast one morning...first of all, breakfast isn't even a thing there, as you know.

B: Yeah, it's like lunchmeat.

O: Yeah! We were up at maybe nine, it's deserted! Prague looked like a ghost town! It was on a Sunday or a Saturday and I was like, "Where *is* everyone?!?"

B: Yeah, if you're at people's houses, they get up early and eat at their houses and stuff around nine or something but there's no breakfast places. There are a few that you can get pastries from or even a few that have brunches, but I think that the brunches are probably overly expensive. We always get excited when we can find bacon in the store, we're like, "Yes!"

O: We found a place just north of Vyšehrad that had American breakfast and that's where we went that morning, because we were like, "We need some real breakfast, like eggs and sausage."

B: Yeah, we make a lot of eggs in my apartment, like bacon and eggs or omelets and stuff. If it's the weekend, someone's making eggs. It's really funny because we only have two frying pans and sometimes, someone will make eggs and be like, "I'll just wash the dishes later!" Usually, that gets washed by someone else because they really want eggs.

O: Yeah, that's hilarious.

B: You know it's bad, if people wash dishes that aren't their own, at least in my flat.

O: Specifically to make eggs.

B: Yeah, yeah...anyway, back on to topic. So how far back is your Czech ancestry?

O: Oh, well, okay, so...like how many generations?

B: Yeah, or just when your family came, if it's easier to think about.

O: Well, I know my...it was about 1903, give or take a year when my, let's see, my mom's dad's grandmother...it wasn't his mother, it was his grandmother. Or...does that sound right?

B: Yeah.

O: Came here. And she was...or, his grandmother came and his mother was just a little girl...a little, little girl. That's when they came over and they lived—they were from Prague.

B: Oh, okay. Did they come by themselves?

O: That I don't know.

B: That would be so crazy...I mean, everyone who came by themselves, just to come live in random, middle of America that they knew nothing about...that was courageous for them for just a woman and her kids to come!

O: Well, her husband came with them, but as far as other, like, extended brothers and aunts and I don't know if anyone else came.

B: Do you know if you have family in Czech?

O: I don't know. That would be my goal, if I go again, to figure that out. The problem is, my surnames are so common, like Komorek...

B: Mine is so common!

O: Yeah, they're common ones. Everyone I met asked me that and I told them those names and they're like, "Oh, *those* are common."

B: And you know your family is from Prague, too, so that's going to be harder because they're from Prague. So do you feel an extra connection towards Prague because that's where your family is from?

O: Yeah, I did when I got there. Definitely. It would be, I...it's cool they're from Prague but it would also be cool if they came from a smaller village because it would be easier track and if I did more research, I mean, I have, I mean, my stepdad's family is Czech and he's my dad, to me. So you know, even if they're not biologically related, I need to figure out where his family came from too, because it wasn't Prague. I think it was Moravia, somewhere. I mean, I just need to do some research.

B: Do you feel an extra connection to the Czech Republic when you went there? Did you feel, oh, I kind of belong here?

O: I did, I did. Other than being too tall, because they're so short! Everybody's so short! I did.

B: My family's all Czech and they're way taller than me.

O: Oh, really?

B: I can't reach anything in our old farmhouse in Wilber...everything's way higher.

O: Oh, that's funny!

B: So, I think for me, I'm like, Czechs are taller than I am!

O: That's funny! No, I remember, I did. I really felt on the last leg of my flight going there from Brussels, when I could just see all the red, the rooftops. It was one of those

things that I was just like, why isn't my mom there with me, to be able to experience this moment with me? It was so cool.

B: Yeah...I love hearing when people travel what they think, especially people from here who go to Czech Republic because I know the feelings.

O: Yeah, and I mean, that was my first time out of the country...I haven't travelled around the United States very much.

B: Oh, I finally went to the Newark airport—it's crazy!

O: That place—I sprinted from terminal A to terminal C and I don't even remember it because I was just like (*mimes running*) booking it, it was so bad!

B: Yeah, I just went through customs there and stuff. I was like, ah, I don't know where anything is.

O: Yeah, it's a big place.

B: Luckily, my dad was there waiting for me...

O: Yeah, that happened to me when I was there. I was in the same boat. Random Czech words would enter into my conversations, like *nebo*...

B: Yeah

O: ...off and and. People were like, "what?" "Just ignore me!"

B: I just, forget words a lot sometimes. It just, like sometimes, I'll be like, "You know, that thing, it's a dessert...it's like starch and you got icing on it and you put candles in it for birthdays—cake! That's it! But there have been times when people are like, "Really? Are you kidding?!" And I minored in English, so it's not like I don't like it...

O: Yeah, that's my major! What was your major? International...

B: International Studies. Yeah.

The interview gets off topic. We discuss our time spent on Prague.

B: If you ever want to come visit!

O: Can I come now? *Laughs*

B: I think it's snowing there too!

O: Oh, man! Well, I'll be back, I'll definitely be back.

B: Yeah, let me know! I'll probably be there... Someone told me...ahh, we should get back to this, and then we can do this

O: Okay, deal!

B: We'll just work a little bit and then we can chat. Okay, so do you think folk traditions? Ahh! *Folk traditions?! Folk traditions!* ...are more important to you? Or not?

O: Hmm, I'm trying to think if my family does any folk traditions...

B: I would consider wearing kroj and polka dancing and stuff.

O: I would say, yeah, because that's what makes up our festivals and I guess they're so folk-based. That's just how you celebrate it and how you set yourself apart. I mean, in Wilber there's the people who are Czech and then there's just the people who are there for entertainment, who maybe are not connected to the Czech part. It's such a big deal, and I feel like if you're wearing Czech clothing, like, a kroj or a vest that's how you kind of set yourself apart, like you're serious about your culture—you're proud of it. And yeah, I was disappointed that there wasn't more polka when I was there.

B: There's a couple places that you can go, like dance halls and stuff, but they're special, like they put on a show.

O: Yeah, that's what I've heard. I was...I knew it wasn't going to be everywhere because I'd talked to Katarina and Martin Starý, the professor from last year about it. But before that, when I'd talked to people like maybe my freshman year, when I first started taking classes, I figured it was everywhere, you know?

B: Yeah, I think we all did, before we really knew so much about it.

O: Um-hmm, we had this romanticized view of like, oh, everybody's wearing kroje and garnets and polkaing and it's a real country—real people, going to work, you know? It's not like this Czech fantasy!

B: It's not like this, making Easter eggs all day! Strudel! Wearing folk costumes...that would be very funny. You should go, try and make it to a festival though. I went to one last summer, like in August and it was awesome! It was around Domažlice and Carrie Brown has a host family there and she plays the bagpipes from there. It was a bagpipe thing and *everyone* was wearing folk costumes and dancing.

O: See, I would have loved to do more folk-based stuff when I was there. There just wasn't a whole lot.

B: Yeah. Does it make you sad? Do you feel like it's different—that we're so involved in the folk culture and then, when you talk to actual Czechs they're like, "That's silly, I've never seen a kroj in my life before?"

O: Well, it was both. I mean, I was a little disappointed that there wasn't more of it, but I also—I liked having the insight that this isn't what they do. It made me feel a lot more intelligent. Knowing what life is really like there because people... a lot of

people from here who have never been there, especially our parents generation or our grandparents generation who maybe haven't been there or haven't been there for a long time have this kind of romanticized view of what it's like, so it made me feel a little bit... I don't know if empowered is the right word? Just to know what things are really like there but to still appreciate and enjoy celebrating in that romanticized way here. Kind of like, the best of both worlds, if that made sense.

B: Yeah, I think that that's how I felt too, really. Because you're like, "Oh, I'm used to this stuff." When I talked to Steve and Julia they had a lot to say about how we have all of these queen pageants and stuff and I know you've done the queen thing, but you did it once, where a lot of people do it, like Julia's done it—well, not queen—but Julia was a little sister before I was a queen, I think. How do you feel about that? How we have this—

O: Yeah, I have super mixed feelings about that. I obviously did it, what was it two or three summers ago? And I really enjoyed it, but now after going there and actually getting some insight from people who are from there, like Katarina, they just think that's ridiculous. But I—it is! You know! Even though I enjoyed doing it, I'm glad I did it. It is kind of ridiculous. That's not something they do there, and it's like, what does being a queen have to do with being Czech? But, I don't know. I see it from both sides. I completely accept and see why they think it's ridiculous and even agree a bit, but I also think it's a really cool thing that we have and that we've done for so many decades and a way to get people excited, because that's what people like to watch, you know, the pageant. If we didn't have that, I feel like we would lose a lot of people who are interested in coming to the festivals. That was probably one of the main ways that I got into my culture, too. You know, I was taking my language classes first my first year and that's when Alex said, "Oh, South Central needs a queen," and at first I was like, oh no way! And I thought about it and I'm like, yeah, that actually sounds really cool. So, I think it's really good way to keep the younger generation going, which maybe Czech people don't understand why it's important to us, so I can definitely see it from both sides.

B: Yeah, I think... I wasn't really planning on talking about the queen stuff because I don't and when I tell people in Czech Republic it's usually after I know them pretty well.

O: Yeah, because they think it's ridiculous.

B: Yeah, they think that it's really silly and my friends are like, oh that's kind of cool. Some of them have been like, well, it's really silly thing but I think that it's really cool that you did it and stuff.

O: Exactly.

B: Yeah, so I don't like to bring it up because I don't... like, I don't even think my thesis advisor knows because I'm like, academic life is very separate...

O: How do you explain that? It's so difficult to explain, I even attempted to explain it to my teacher when I did the summer course and I was trying to explain it in Czech at the same time and she was like, "What is it, a česká královna?"

B: Um, yeah. I think usually when you say it in Czech, I say “Czech Miss” or something because they have beauty pageants and you call someone “Miss”, but yeah, I remember telling someone from one of my English courses when I studied abroad there because he had been to D.C. and was like, “Yeah, they had these girls in kroje.” And I was like, “Actually, my study abroad is being paid for by this contest.” And he was. “Oh, I didn’t realize they actually did stuff.” And I said, “Yeah...”

O: So, it’s, I don’t know, it’s interesting. It’s just so hard to explain because then people stop you and be like, okay, so what’s the point? And you’re like, uh, I don’t really know?

B: It’s become like a—my one friend was asking me, “How can you tell what different kroje look like?” and I said, “Well, I know now! If I see one, I cannot tell you exactly unless it’s a very specific one, but like, I can be like, oh, you must be from somewhere in Southern Moravia and, it’s just weird. It’s just a weird talent I have now.”

O: That’s funny.

B: Yeah, I try not to talk about it in school so much because I’m like, what would my professors think? They’re already not so sure about this Czech community in America because they hear some, I don’t know, if they meet people, maybe they don’t meet people who are from Nebraska or something, they just meet people who are from these very disorganized ones and I’m like, “No, we’re actually pretty organized and we have a bunch of cool stuff!”

O: But I can see that they would even think that it’s like, offensive, the queen thing, like you’re mocking. Well, I don’t think it’s like that, but I can see why some people would, you know? You’re dressing up and imitating this thing when unfortunately—not at the national level—but a lot of these Chapter queens just, they say, well they don’t know a thing about Czech culture or Czech...

B: Yeah, sometimes I get really angry when I meet a girl, because especially after doing it, I feel...I’m glad I did it, but I have really mixed feelings like you do. Especially now, I’m like, wow, I wonder if I would have done that again now? Or like, what would have happened at my age? Sometimes I think that I would be a better queen, but then other times I’m just like, well, maybe you wouldn’t be as enthusiastic about things, because you know a lot of stuff. But then, I’m still a little proud of it, but then I meet girls and I’m just like, please don’t talk to anyone! Just let everyone else handle this!

O: Yeah, I feel the exact same way.

B: Yeah, sometimes, I think I would really call MaryElizabeth and have some section on the queens because it comes up now, when I have the Czech culture in Nebraska. It came up, of course, when I talked to Steve and Julia.

O: Uh-huh, yeah, I feel like that's a big part of Czech communities in Nebraska. If that's your focus, I think you need to say something. I think so, if you can fit it in there.

B: Well, it's becoming a part of it, so like, right now, I'm just trying to see what I come up with and then the research will be based on that. Okay, so, really one more question.

O: Okay.

B: Do you have family or friends in the Czech Republic?

O: Umm, family, kind of like we touched on earlier, probably distant family that I don't know about. Friends...well, you! And Katarina and well, Martin, our professor from last year. Yeah, all the people I met I'm still in contact with and that's cool.

B: I think it makes you feel more involved when you know people from there, instead of just being, "Oh, I have Czech ancestry, but I don't really know anyone there or do anything about it."

O: Yeah, well, I love having those people on Facebook, I can see statuses in Czech once in a while and tidbits about what's going on there. I met one of Katarina's friends, Zdenka...I can't pronounce it. It's the soft n...I can't.

B: Oh, Zdeňka?

O: Yeah, and I met her when I was there and she added me on Facebook, so I can follow what she does and it's just cool to see regular people, living their lives there, staying in touch that way. It makes me feel really excited to go back because I have those contacts, you know, in Brno, Prague...

B: If you ever need a place to stay!

O: I'll probably take you up on that, if I have money to go back, you know, in time.

B: I wish...I never realized that being an adult costs so much!

O: Haha, no kidding!

B: It's like, crazy! I think that's the end of all of the, all of the official questions.

Appendix 5:

Brown Transcription:

Transcription key:

C- Carolyn "Carrie" Brown

B- Brianna Tichý

This transcription took place on Sunday, March 30, 2014 in the living room of Carrie Brown in Prague, Czech Republic.

B: Alright, so, it's going to be super informal—I'm going to ask the questions, but honestly, it's going to be more about conversations about how you feel. So, do you feel more Czech, Czech-American, or just American? How would you describe it to other people?

C: I think I would say American-Czech more than Czech-American, because I would claim American first. When someone says, "Oh, what nationality are you?" First, I'm American and then I would identify with Czech.

B: So you feel like you are a Czech person who was raised in America?

C: No, I feel like I'm an American person who knows more than the average person about Czech culture. I grew up with Czech cultural things, so I identify with that more than any other nationality besides American.

B: Are you anything else besides Czech?

C: My mom's 100% Czech—not from the Czech Republic or Czechoslovakia. And my dad is a mix of a lot of different things, so I don't really identify with any of those.

B: Do you celebrate any of those?

C: No, not at all.

B: That's like, for the community I think it's more what you celebrate instead of what percentage you are. Do you speak Czech?

C: Yes, somewhat. Not very well.

B: *laughs* Compared to everyone else in this interview you speak Czech!

C: Yes, not fluently, but I do.

B: Do you think that it is or isn't important for your Czech identity, personally?

C: Yes, because the reason I know so much about my heritage is because of my grandparents. My grandmother spoke Czech, so I saw that she could help people from that and she had a lot of great memories from her early childhood speaking Czech. We had family stories of people who used to speak Czech. I guess I just wanted to keep that in the family and so, I just nominated myself to be that one who could do it.

B: You volunteered as tribute!

C: Yes, I volunteered as tribute to study Czech!

B: Does anyone else in your family speak Czech?

C: Right now, one aunt and one cousin speak a little bit, but I speak more than they do.

B: What do you celebrate to show your Czech identity, in your family?

C: I think living here and experiencing it firsthand is the best way, but I know that's not feasible for many Americans. My family mostly celebrates it with music and food. And some words, like we use some Czech words in my family that I didn't even realize were Czech until I came here.

B: Really?

C: So, like *špůnt* and *ty, ty, ty* and some children's rhymes. My grandmother always did those with us.

B: Did you just think that they were gibberish?

C: Yeah, pretty much. My Catholic parish where I grew up is traditionally Czech, but they're more Hispanic there now. They always had some Czech connection there—we still have a Czech festival there. I think, kind of like, I wouldn't say having the Czech part of my religion or faith—just the community part of that—I don't think it helped me develop more of an interest in it, but it did...I don't know, it just did...I was just aware, okay, this is Czech. This is a Czech song, this prayer is in Czech, this hymnal is in Czech. I was just more aware that it was there. But I still would have had the family Czech connections if my parish wasn't Czech.

B: Does your family do anything differently than other families that you grew up with that would be seen as "it's because we're Czech."

C: Definitely. For holidays, we always make the food and...

B: Like what kind of food? For the sake of the interview...

C: We make potato dumplings and sauerkraut for most every big family holiday. Every year since, I don't know, before I was born and since my ancestors came over from the Czech Republic or Czechoslovakia, my family has made *vánočka*...we call it *houska*.

B: My family calls it *houska*, too!

C: So, we make a lot of that every year and sing Czech Christmas carols as best as we can while we make that and every year for the parish festival, we make *koláče*...*kolaches*. And, at various times during the year, we make *strudel*, that too.

B: Because they're delicious!

C: Yeah!

B: What is the most important part of the things you do, to you?

C: I would say making *vánočka* is the most important to me because one of my earliest memories is my grandmother standing in front of me and teaching me about the dough and how to roll out and how to braid it and stuff. She had to approve every

batch, when it was rolled out. You know, when the rising is done, you just take it over to grandma and she'll poke it and say what you need. And also, my family gets together often, but for vánočka day, or houska day, even the cousins that you don't see all that often, even they come to that, so I'd say that it's my favorite "non-holiday holiday" ever.

B: It sounds like it's a holiday at your house.

C: Yeah, it is! It's like, the friends of our family know that, "Oh, the Vankats are going to make this," and "Oh! We want one loaf!" It's nice to give as a Christmas present because it's not like, you know, American Christmas cookies or whatever. And I don't know many families who make it. I don't know any families who make it, actually. Maybe old ladies in the Czech club. And maybe other Czech people in the states. I guess my family just makes a ton of it as presents, so.

B: I think it's really sweet to give people as presents too, because it's homemade and a good present. My next question is, have you ever been to the Czech Republic or Czechoslovakia, but as we're sitting in the living room in Prague, I think we know the answer! *Laughs*

C: Well, I've never been, but I would like to go someday! *Joking*

B: When was the first time you came?

C: I came in 2008—June of 2008.

B: How old were you?

C: twenty...almost twenty. Nineteen, yeah. I came for 20 days with a tour group. We were in the Czech Republic the whole time. We went all over the country and it was amazing—totally sparked my interest even more than ever before. That was after I had done all of the pageant...well, I was still doing all of the pageant stuff.

B: Did you meet up with Marta while you were doing it?

C: Yeah, my mom and my Aunt Jenny and I stayed with her family for 3 days after the whole tour. So then we went back home, and I was involved in Czech stuff back home. Then, I decided in the summer of 2010 that I wanted to learn more of the language here and learn to play the bagpipes, so I got the contacts of a family through another bagpipe player friend and I ended up living with them for two months in the summer and I ended up doing a month-long language course as well. And then, after college in 2011, I moved here.

B: We used to meet up in Lincoln and go to the bar and talk about how much we missed Czech Republic...and now we're here! It's funny how things work out!

C: Yeah, I think in 2008, I never would have thought that I would live here. I kind of had it all planned out—yeah; I wanted to come back someday. But then I ended up living here for 3 months and now it's going to be 4 years.

B: Do you think that the tour was a good way to start here? Or was it too touristy or something?

C: Well, it was touristy, definitely!

B: Yeah, well, I guess a tour *is* the definition of touristy...

C: We had bright yellow shirts and everything.

B: Well, that was so you didn't get lost! *Laughs*

C: I think it was a good way to start. If I had just come alone with my mom and my aunt, I don't know...I still encourage people to go on that same tour that we did. It's one of the best that comes from the states. It takes people to not only Prague and Brno and Olomouc, or just the bigger places. Like, we went to Klenčí [pod Čerchovem]. We went to Uherské Hradiště...I can't say that! The smaller places, we specifically went there when there were festivals and we had a private night in the cellars. I think it was a great way to start my experiences, because I had never been abroad before. It was a great way to start that.

B: Do you follow Czech history or current events?

C: Well, my crazy roommate likes to talk to me about Czech history and that stuff... *laughs* ...but, I really don't follow what she's saying! I keep up on it a little bit, but I wouldn't say that I'm a big follower. Other than electing the president, I tried to follow that. The history, I don't know...I can't tell you dates and I can't tell you who did what, but I know the important people.

B: Do you think it's important to follow? For you personally?

C: Umm...I don't even like American history or politics, so if I don't follow it for my own country, I probably follow it less for any other country. I think that's your focus, then yeah, it's important to study it, but I don't think that...I think knowing the gist of the history is important for me living here, but if I was in the states, I wouldn't. I'm not like a big history buff or a political...person. I know when burčák season starts, does that count? Current events like that, yes!

B: Do you think for your Czech identity having Czech citizenship is important for calling yourself Czech or not?

C: I do not think that having Czech citizenship makes you Czech. Someone can know a lot about Spanish history and you can know more about Spain than somebody who has Spanish citizenship, just because that's what you do. I think that if you have Czech citizenship, your life is probably easier here. Some things are easier, I would say, but I think on the other hand, if you can't speak the language and you have the citizenship, that's a shame. I mean, if you can't speak the language at all. I don't know, the people who left here and have or had Czech citizenship—the reason they left doesn't make them any less Czech. They have the traditions and stuff. I don't know, I think it depends more. Citizenship is not necessary.

B: If you could have dual citizenship, would you? Would it be important to your understanding of “Yes, I’m Czech”...is it something you’d do?

C: Well, I think it would be nice to have equal, dual citizenship. Then travelling in the EU and getting things done here would be easier. Like I wouldn’t need a visa. But, if I hadn’t had lived here, I never would have needed that citizenship. It’s only a fact of living here. I don’t think having a Czech passport makes me any more Czech.

B: Would you ever think that you deserve Czech citizenship a little bit? If you could keep American citizenship and have the same rights and stuff—do you think that you would claim Czech citizenship?

C: If I had to choose another place to have citizenship, it would be here. But I don’t think that I need it or anything.

B: So you don’t feel that it affects your Czech identity?

C: No. That was shaped growing up. I’m already as Czech as I always have been or ever will be.

B: Do you feel something together with other Europeans? Do you feel that there’s a European togetherness in your opinion?

C: Because I live here or because of my Czech identity.

B: Because of your Czech identity.

C: I don’t think just claiming to be American-Czech helps me identify with any other Europeans. I don’t feel unified in that. It’s more like living here that’s changed that. I think the language has helped as well because it’s not usual. In America you have a ton of languages, but I think it’s different to be in Europe speaking a language from the country you live in. I think there’s more unity in that. When I go to France and I hear people speaking Czech, I would say that I feel like, “Ah, home!” But I wouldn’t say that I feel anymore unified...

B: Do you consider religion as an important part of your Czech identity or would you say that it’s not connected?

C: It’s definitely like I’m Czech and I’m also Catholic...like, it’s split. It’s definitely being a Catholic and living here—I don’t know many Czechs who go to church regularly or practice their faith in anyway. I think that being a Catholic here is harder than being a Catholic in the States and I don’t associate that with being Czech in any way.

B: Before you came here did you feel like your Czechness was tied to your Catholicism, because you were in the Czech-Catholic parish?

C: The only way that I think it was connected for me was through my grandmother, because she always had a bunch of Czech prayer cards and she would pray in Czech. She would always wear an Infant Jesus of Prague medal. I don’t think I ever saw her

without it. That was the catholic connection for me. I would say I didn't really ever connect it because in Omaha there would be the Irish Catholic Parish or the Croatian Catholic Parish. It doesn't make me any different. Like, you're just Catholic and you're also something.

B: For background purposes, How far back is your Czech ancestry? When did your family leave the Czech Republic?

C: I don't remember the year, but it was like my great, great, great grandparents.

B: And are the folk traditions important to you? Why or why not?

C: Yes, they are important to me. I think that's what makes a place unique, because of those traditions and honoring those traditions. I think being from the States, when we think of what is Czech, it's the costumes, it's the food, it's the music—things like that. They're all—we celebrate the old stuff, we don't really celebrate the new stuff very often. It's very important to me. That's what I chose to live in Domažlice those four years ago. I understand that it's not a huge part of the culture anymore, but I also don't think that it should be forgotten.

B: Did that play a roll in what kind of instrument you wanted to play?

C: Definitely. Knowing where my ancestors were from and knowing that the bagpipes were prevalent there—well, maybe prevalent...like, prevalent not so much. At least people know what they are there. I definitely thought it was better than playing the accordion or something. That's not—yeah, it's traditional, but it's not the same as the bagpipes that are medieval.

B: Okay, so these are more of the questions about the pageant stuff that I wrote, but it applies to some more general stuff too. Do you feel a connection with modern day people living in the Czech Republic? Or people in a certain area in the Czech Republic...like, you feel more of a connection with those people?

C: Well, I would say yes but not because of the pageant.

B: Well, it doesn't matter—the questions are about your identity. So these were just questions that I wanted to ask MaryElizabeth or the contestants—if they felt connected to a certain region.

C: Oh, okay. Um, connected to the modern part?

B: Yeah, or like, when you were in the US did you feel, “oh, Czech people—my family is originally from there. I feel this inexplicable connection to there or this area.”

C: Yeah, I think so, because I knew I would have something in common with them, automatically and you're kind of drawn to people like that. I think that if a Czech person would come to a festival, of course you want to talk to them. To be like, oh, I'm Czech too! I think that through the Robitschek program, I learned more about the modern things and felt connected through those students, whereas growing up I didn't

really have that connection. But when I started the pageant stuff and started the queen stuff, I was interested in researching the family history. We had *kroje* from Domažlice and my grandma always wore them and aunts and whoever, other than the ugly black, red, and white ones. So then I felt the connection to Domažlice as well and the Chodsko region, knowing that that's where my family was from. I guess I felt connected to the country through the Robitscheks and through Marta, of course. But then specifically to Domažlice when I started to do my research.

B: Do you think most of the contestants in the national pageant or even just the Nebraska state pageant, do you think that all of their ancestors left around the same time or do you think that it's very different? Like someone's ancestors left 50 years ago and someone's left 100 years ago...

C: I think most of them left a long time ago, but there are a few like Sandy or Theresa whose parents were the ones that left. I think that those girls do feel a different connection because it's less distant, but at the same time, you can be one generation away and know nothing about the Czech Republic. I think it just depends on how you were brought up and how into it you are, or what kind of effort, knowing that that's where my family was from. I guess I felt connected to the country through the Robitscheks and through Marta, of course. But then specifically to Domažlice when I started to do my research.

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B: Do you think there are different interests in those contestants who had ancestors really far back and those that are more current? Do you think they focus on different things?

C: I think people whose parents who left, maybe grandparents, they're going to have a much more modern view than the people who don't even know personally anyone who has lived over here. They don't know stories from their great, great, great grandparents, or if they do, that's about life way back when. Their interests are about life way back then, unless they study stuff like you do.

B: How big a roll do you think speaking the Czech or Slovak language plays, especially in this competition where you're supposed to represent the people? Do you think it's important? Do you think it's not important?

C: I think it's nice but not necessary. The language is extremely difficult, so if it were a requirement for people to know how to speak this in order to be in the pageants, we

wouldn't be able to have a pageant. I also think when I was competing that it was like, "oh, well she can speak Czech, of course she's going to win!" It was like an unfair advantage. I think that if you're interested in something and you know a lot about it, not knowing the language shouldn't really hinder you that much.

B: Why do you think it's important for the pageant and the contestants to wear *kroje*?

C: I would like to say that it represents their ancestry, but I think that's only true for a percentage of them. If they did their research and know what the *kroje* from that region looked like, then it's nice to represent that. If people just wear random *kroje* then it's not important. Why are they doing that? It's Czech and I'm Czech. Okay, it's pretty and you're probably going to win just because it's pretty, but for me it's always been about the connection to it. I specifically did research, I had seen my family in pictures with them. I think we wear it to honor our ancestors and the reason that we're in America is because they came over, so it's just one way to honor them in that. I also think that I don't know how long that can actually last. People don't wear them over here and you can't get those things. It's not just sold on the streets or in a shop on the corner in Prague. I don't know how long that aspect will be around.

B: Do you think it would change the feeling or the meaning of the pageant if we did away with the costumes?

C: I think it would definitely have a different feel because in every picture of the queens, they're all wearing *kroje*, Americanized *kroje* generally, with giant sleeves. Yeah, it would definitely look different and I think that that's one part that girls generally love dresses and dressing up and that's one part that if you're not so sure about, why am I getting into this? Then you see, oh, here's a mock dress that my great, great, great grandmother might have worn at one point. So, yeah, I want to wear that too. If you know about the politics, great! But if you can put something on yourself, it's a different feeling.

B: Do you think that it would take away from the meaning if they weren't wearing the folk costume? That the feeling of being an ambassador or it being a cultural thing, would it cheapen it or be a move in a more modern direction?

C: I think it could be a move in a more modern direction, like more of an ambassador type of roll. If you come wearing your *kroj* here, you look weird.

B: Do you think the community would get behind it?

C: No, because they still have the Czech mindset of hundreds of years ago.

B: Is it important for the American community? Do you think it would be weird if they didn't wear folk costumes?

C: Well, the ones they wear now aren't traditional anyway. In a way, it's not like they don't wear anything, but they also don't wear the right thing, so it's like we're somewhere in the middle. I think that it would change the meaning because that's... I think it would become more about, yeah, just the modern stuff.

B: Do you think there's an interest in the modern stuff? Like, community-wide, not just a few individuals?

C: Umm, I want to say yes, but the truth is probably no.

B: Okay, the point of this whole interview is not to prove that there is Czech identity in Nebraska, but is to look at it and see that how different it is from Czech identity here, so if you want to say, they don't want to wear folk costumes or anything, there's no wrong answer. If you want to be like, the truth is blah, blah, blah, blah, blah... We're looking for the truth!

C: Right, but I wish the truth were different.

B: Speaking of Americanized costumes, how would you describe the Americanized folk costumes.

C: *takes a deep breathe and looks nervous*

B: Don't hold back!

C: Plain and fake and easy.

B: If you were trying to tell someone who had never seen these before and maybe was like a Czech person, what would...?

C: I don't know, it's a black vest and a white blouse and a red skirt.

B: What would you say? Like, why are these people making Americanized costumes? Why do they want to wear them?

C: I think that people want to feel some connection through the clothing, so they've done it in a way that's partly representative. People have started to accept this as the real costume, because they're easier to make than the real things. The costumes are more easily accessible than the real things and in the dance ensembles and the things like that, they look more uniform and easy to make. I would say, I think more people know that they're Czech or they're Bohemian or whatever. People claim that and when they see this broad version of the Czech costumes and they say, okay, I'll wear this. When people do the research more, I think people do have them made or have a different style or different colors because I saw people in a picture with these colors. I think just because people say that "I'm Czech,"...like, I say that I'm Czech and my family is from Chodsko, if you ask me. But they people who just say, "I'm Czech"...ugh.

B: What do you think this represents? Do you think it's evolved to be more of an American Czech thing? I think that these days people know that these aren't real or aren't authentic, especially in the pageant now that we have the categories Americanized and Czech ones. Do you think it's taken on a new meaning or do you think it's just ignorance?

C: Well, I think that if you are talking about just the queens in the pageant, if you look at pictures from I don't know how many years ago... 20 years ago... you'll see all of

these people wearing those. Even like 10 years ago or so, people were wearing that one. Maybe, this is just a theory, that popped into my head right now, but maybe as the Internet became more accessible and travel became easier and people came here to do their research, then the queens wearing different *kroje* became more and more prevalent. I think that it's great that a few of us have done the research and have done something more, you know, authentic, but I also don't think that if someone wants to wear a black vest and say, "Oh, it represents my Czech heritage!" Then wear that black vest, go do it.

B: Do you think that they've sort of become a symbol of the Nebraska Czech group or Czech groups in America? Like, people are wearing them as, "well, we're in America and this is what we wear here?" and it's a symbol of American Czech?

C: Yeah, I think it definitely has become a symbol, because even the people who aren't Czech put on a vest and say that they're Czech for the day. The clothing has become a part of the Nebraska bit. In Texas, I can't really say...in Texas, Oklahoma, South Dakota, I guess people did it.

B: South Dakota they only have those. I've never seen a girl with an authentic costume.

C: Well, Michael has some.

B: Yeah, but he's not a queen! *Laughs*

C: Okay, yeah, I'm just talking about like at the festivals or those dancers that travel. But yeah, I guess it is really a Nebraska thing. I went to a festival in Baltimore and they had some more authentic ones, but that was only because they had had people in their club who had come from the Czech Republic and had known about it. But I guess in Nebraska, I guess we don't have any "real Czechs." Aw, man!

B: Do you consider that there's a difference between real Czechs that grew up here and Czech-Americans? Do you consider, like if you met a Czech who grew up here, that you would consider yourself not a real Czech in comparison?

C: I usually say that my ancestry is Czech.

B: Do you think that there's common ground? I mean, not all the time, but do you think that there are things that you have in common more with Czech people because of your ancestry?

C: Yeah, like more in common than some random Swedish person, or?

B: Yeah.

C: Yeah, I'd definitely say that I do have a lot more in common, but at the same time, if you compared me to Marta for example—a 25-year-old woman—I'm sure she doesn't know how to make *vánočka* and I do! I'm sure that she doesn't know how to make dumplings, and I do! She doesn't have *kroj*, and I do! So, growing up Czech has a totally different meaning if you grew up here and lived here or if you lived in
America

B: This is kind of the last question. Do you think that Czech-American culture or Czech culture in America—is it the same as here? What do you think the differences are?

C: I think it's really different because in America we're a lot more focused on the past, whereas here, they're like, "Why focus on the past?" Imagine if America would have stopped in 190-whatever...people would laugh at us! So, our picture of Czech culture in the states is a little but frozen in that time that people came over. I think it totally helps that travelling is easier now and that people can come over here and that we live here. That definitely helps and I think to go back and be the voice of that in the Czech community there, I think that's really important because people need to stop calling it Czechoslovakia and people need to stop thinking that the red skirt, white shirt, black vest is the real thing and people still wear that now! I think those myths should be...busted!

B: Do you think that when you move back to the US, that you'll sort of become this person for the Omaha Club?

C: I don't know if the Omaha Club is going to exist for much longer. I don't know if any of them will exist for that much longer.

B: That's interesting because when I talk to older people, they think it will survive, but when I talk to younger people, they're all worried for it.

C: Yeah, that's because the older people have all the jobs and none of the younger people want to step up. I was on the Nebraska queen board for a year when I moved here and I would totally be in the queen board again when I moved back, but I don't really... Who's going to be around that has that Czech mentality? Like, who's going to be around anymore that's going to make a festival? I don't want people to listen to 14 accordions for 3 hours. I don't think that makes me Czech at all, so I don't. My mom's going to kill me for saying this, but I don't want to have a festival of that. I don't think that that's necessary to make me feel Czech.

B: Do you think—I know when you talk to our parents' generation and people who are involved, I know that in talking to my parents and stuff, they've just recently become more involved as they've gotten older. I know that when they were our age or even teenagers that they didn't want to take responsibility for a lot of it, so I almost think maybe the older generation assumes that we'll be the same way and that when we get into our thirties and forties, we'll be like, "Oh, it was great growing up with that!" and then we'll keep it around.

C: Maybe they will, but also the generation above us can remember the people who came over. My grandmother was fluent. My mom knows that and my mom knows that my grandma's brothers and sisters and that whole family—my grandma's parents—those were the authentic, like came from Czech, lived on a farm, didn't speak English until they went to school. And my mom remembers those people having Czech conversations and their stories, but I don't. I remember my grandma speaking Czech a few times to help somebody, but I don't have those authentic

experiences. Well, my authentic experience is here, but that's a different kind of culture than what they had.

B: Do you think that it would die out? Even the folk-y Americanized one that we have, or do you think that even the next generations, like in the town of Wilber will have some sort of Czech feeling to them or some kind of... Or do you think that in a town like Wilber that it could die out and just become a normal American town?

C: I think it will still be around for a while. But once the people who don't speak the language anymore are gone, I think that's going to make it die out anymore.

B: Do you think that there's a push for people, even like a small push, to do more authentic things or do you think that people are really happy with what they're doing now and don't feel a need to change it?

C: Like, which generation?

B: Just in general, do you feel like there is a push back from all of the folk things or do you think that the whole community is more willing to express folk-y culture and preserve that kind of thing?

C: Well, I don't think that the modern culture is different from the American culture. Okay, it's different in many ways, but I think that we celebrate, or it's easier to—like, we have the visual way to celebrate it with the costumes, we have the food that celebrates it, and now, you can find a Mexican restaurant around the corner here. So, this place is becoming a lot more modernized, so that going to the states is not so different.

B: I just mean that people who live in the States are more willing to care about the modern stuff or learn the language or something?

C: Nope.

B: Not even a small group?

C: Very few people in the States want to learn Czech.

B: Do you see any young people interested in it, like us?

C: A few, like us. I mean, I know that there's the Czech language course in Lincoln and that there's a few more—like two?

B: Well, there's a bunch of courses, but it really depends on enrollment.

C: But how many people in the States use it? I don't think it's very many, so I'm saying that I think it's dying out.

B: I'm just focusing on Nebraska, otherwise it would get really big. But I guess I'm just asking is if you think that there's even a small group who wants to...? This is bad because I feel like I'm leading the question. It's a very leading question.

C: Well, yeah, because there's Komenský Club.

B: What I'm asking is if you feel like anybody cares about the modern culture, or that they're just like—whatever!

C: Um, if you know that you're Czech then you might travel over here and learn about the modern culture. But I think other people just want to wear their *kroje* and eat kolaches all day and they don't care about the modern stuff because that's not what they know to be Czech.

B: So, do you think when you say that there's a difference in the Czech-American culture and the culture here, do you think that one could learn from the other or what do you think?

C: I definitely don't think one's better. They're each progressing or not progressing in the same ways. I wish that more people here in Czech would know about it and at least know about what the Czech bagpipes are. Like, that's a part of their culture and they don't even know it! It's a shame. I'm not saying that they need to wear *kroje* or do any of this stuff, but that they don't even recognize that that's their culture, that's not good. I think then it makes the Americans who focus on those things and stuff better at that, but then we're bad at realizing that modern things happen here and that life is actually progressing here, so.

B: Well, I think that's pretty much it. I'll turn the magic recorder off...

Appendix 6:

Dvořák Czech Identity in Nebraska Questionnaire

This questionnaire was sent out to Bryon Dvořák via email due to his involvement with the University of Nebraska Czech Komenský Club. It was returned to me on March 21, 2014.

1. Do you feel Czech, Czech-American, or just American?

I feel that I am a Czech-American.

2. Do you speak Czech? Do you feel like speaking the language is or is not important for your Czech identity?

Yes, but I am not that great at it, I only took one year but my sister-in-law is Czech so I speak it with her whenever I can. I do feel like it is important because it helps me identify with my heritage.

3. Why do you think it's important to keep Czech identity/the Czech community alive in the US?

I think that the Czech Republic is a very underrated nation and more people in America should be cultured to the European countries.

4. What do you do to “celebrate” or show your Czech identity or heritage?

I don't do much, I speak Czech with my sister-in-law and I have the Czech coat of arms on my business card. Also whenever someone pronounces my last name in correctly I correct them and explain why it is pronounced the way it is.

- a. What is the most important part, in your opinion?

I feel pronouncing my name is the most important part.

5. Have you ever been to the Czech Republic or Czechoslovakia?

Yes.

6. Do you think Czech citizenship is necessary to be “properly Czech”?

No I think just representing my heritage is enough.

7. Do you follow Czech history or current events? Why or why not?

When I was in the Czech Republic I went to as many museums as possible and I have read on book by Benjamin Kratz on the history of the Czech Republic. I also stay up to date on the big news events that happen in the Czech Republic.

8. Do you feel “European”?

Yes, but only Eastern European.

- a. Do you ever think about the European Union?/Does the Czech Republic's membership mean anything to you?

No and no.

9. Do you consider religion an important part of your Czech identity, or is it separate?

Not really, but when I was there I thought the churches were really cool and made me fell spiritual.

10. How far back is your Czech ancestry?

As far as I could trace, all the way back to 1600s.

11. Do you have family/friends in the Czech Republic?

Yes, I have a mother-in-law, father-in-law and a brother-in-law. I also have five friends, two are very close and I am welcome to stay at their house anytime I come and visit.

- a. If so, how important is it for you to keep in touch with them?

Very important for the two that are close to me, if I will be heading to the Czech Republic I would contact the other three to meet up for old time sake. And as for my in-laws I will only meet them when I go to the Czech Republic with my sister in law and this is because they don't speak any English. But I have Skyped with them.

12. Do you feel any sort of connection to people living in the Czech Republic today?

Yes, I feel we share some of the same views, at least from what I picked up from the locals while I was there.

13. Do you think that Czech-American culture is different from modern Czech culture?

Yes, I feel like it is more commercialized, when ever I go to a Czech festival they only have goulash and one or two Czech beers, also they only have kolache, but when I was in the Czech republic I learned of numerous alternatives to these main ones and all were great.

14. What, as a member of the Komenský Club, is your main interest/aim?

To stay up to date with Czech Republic and try and learn as much as possible about the Czech Republic.

15. What is the mission of the Komenský Club?

To bring Czech culture to the UNL campus.

16. Do you find the surrounding Czech community supportive of your program? Do they attend all of your events?

Yes, very supportive and yes, I attend as many events as possible.

Appendix 7:

Kroft Notes

This is an incomplete transcript as it was not recorded. The following is a list subjects discussed in Jennifer's living room in Lincoln, Nebraska of February 6, 2014.

- From Dwight, Nebraska
 - Used the term *bohunk* as an insult growing up
- *Mother didn't want anything to do with Czech*
 - *She stopped speaking Czech*
- *Butler County enclave of Moravians*
- *Czech/German tensions in the history of Nebraska and the UNL Komenský Club*
- *Czech was an unintentionally acquired identity*

- *Felt a need to find answers from her youth...feels a strong calling to go back to the Czech Republic*
- *Did not realize grandparents had an accent—just thought they talked funny*
- *Feels there are two strains of Czech-American history*
 - *Protestant//Freethinker*
 - *Catholic*

Appendix 8:

Dr. Šašková-Pierce Notes

This is an incomplete transcript as it was not recorded. The following is a list of subjects discussed on February 6, 2014 at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln campus in Lincoln-Nebraska.

- Origins of the Komenský Club at UNL
 - Always a struggle
 - has its goals shifted?
- Who are members of the club?
 - What are they most interested in about the Czech culture?
 - Is there more of a pull towards modern or folk culture?
 - It depends on the person...
 - Does a lot of work with the Czech and Slovak Society of Arts and Sciences
 - Wilber community is more folk-based, but there are a few people who care about modern Czech events and culture
