

## A VISIT FROM MATUS LACO

### *A journey 20 years in the making*

In July, Matus Laco made the trip from his home town of Bratislava, Slovakia, all the way here to Billings Montana. The trip is similar to one made by his uncle Daniel Laco nearly 20 years ago, coming to our part of the world to join the MasterLube family. Over the years Daniel's sons Michael and David each have also enjoyed a month with us here in Billings, making this trip somewhat of a family tradition. While here Matus stayed with Bill and Marylin and spent his time working in our MasterLube stores while also taking some time to enjoy our great state in all its splendor.

Kalinovo, where Matus grew up, is a small village a few hour's drive away from Bratislava, the capital and major city in Slovakia. Education is important for the Laco family and so attending the highly regarded C.S. Lewis Bilingual High School in Bratislava was a goal Matus' parents had set at a young age to ensure he had the best educational opportunities. Being that the school was in Bratislava, his father's brother Daniel Laco, who lives in Bratislava and is a founder of the school, offered for him to live with them and their three kids to achieve that. Matus would spend the next 4 years in Bratislava during the week, and at home on weekends and holidays (there are a lot of holidays in Slovakia). At the age of 19 he then moved into a student boarding house to finish his final year. While attending C.S. Lewis Matus unknowingly began preparing for his trip here by Matus took in the Red Lodge Rodeo during his visit studying English, in fact 5 hours of each school day was dedicated to English studies. While this was huge in helping him during his stay, there is really no way to prepare for some of the 'slang' terms or nuances of how we converse on a daily basis that break the standards of a 'proper' English education. He is continuing his education at the University of Slovakia, which he has attended for 1 year thus far.

Before coming to us and being welcomed into the MasterLube family Matus admits he had never really worked on a vehicle before, other

than changing a few tires here and there. He was eager to get his hands dirty alongside the crew and experience the same thing his uncle had so many years ago. He thoroughly enjoyed his time spent in the stores and talked extensively about how amazed he was with MasterLube's process and the efficiency of our crews during what we like to call 'The Show', admitting that it took him a few days of hearing the call-outs before he really knew what exactly it was that was being said and why. After spending nearly a month working alongside our staff he felt that his knowledge and understanding of vehicles had grown by leaps and bounds.



When not working Matus was able to enjoy a few new experiences, one of which was attending the Rodeo in Red Lodge his first weekend here. This was something that he had only really been exposed to a couple of times on TV and so seeing the intensity of it up close and in person was a real treat. Other highlights of his trip were time spent with Les Left Hand doing some fishing on the Big Horn, successfully landing a few nice Brown Trout, and making a day trip through Yellowstone National Park. While he mentioned all the bison, antelope and critters they saw, it was the geysers like Old Faithful and a large grizzly spotting that stood out most. Matus was also able to pay a quick visit to our local KTVQ office where he gave his best Bob Mcguire impersonation in front of their green screen. Back home Matus and a few of his friends have transformed the basement of one of their houses into a semi-formal Tea Room that they operate primarily for fun, taking donations for hosting parties or small gatherings. It was because of this that before leaving Matus made his way into a couple of Billings local tea stores, Boston Harbor Tea and Tea City, to check out their offerings.

Since returning home Matus has discussed with family the value of having a time of reflection



"You don't have to see the whole staircase, just take the first step." - Martin Luther King Jr.

## Anniversaries October



Brytnee Gallagher - 10 Years



Joseph Birdtail - 1 Year



Samantha Kniefel - 1 Year

to better understand yourself and broaden your view of life. His stay here is something that he says he will always remember and he is grateful to Bill and Marylin, as well as the whole MasterLube family, for hosting him, teaching him some new skills in automotive service, and allowing him the opportunity to experience a few things that he otherwise might have never been able to.

# HISTORY DOESN'T HAVE TO REPEAT ITSELF

By Darrell Ehrlick: Reprinted with permission from the Billings Gazette, September 10, 2017

Milan Cecil believes that the best way to prevent history from repeating itself is using it to fight against the future.

Surveying the events in Europe and America, Cecil believes that we're at a turning point. The good news: We can use history to make better choices than we did years ago, and he should know. Cecil has lived through the communist days of his native Slovakia; he saw communism fall in the Velvet Revolution; and now he's seeing his grandchildren's generation not know what it was like to say or write the wrong thing to someone you thought was a friend, only to be visited by the police for interrogation.

"So many things are happening in Europe and the States that indicate that history might easily repeat itself," Cecil said while in Billings last week.

Cecil was in town with history teacher Jana Kerekretyova, who is an instructor at C.S. Lewis preparatory school in Bratislava. Together with local history professor Jenifer Parks, they're building a really innovative program with Rocky Mountain College. Cecil is a longtime friend of community leader Bill Simmons who is helping to build the cultural exchange.

In a pilot program they hope to start in 2018, students at Rocky will take a course on 20th-Century central European history. It will focus on the rise of fascism, then communism, then collapse and finally looking toward the post-Modern era. The idea is to learn in Billings, travel to Slovakia where students will meet with folks who lived through those eras, then travel to where history happened.

"We're in a special moment in history," Cecil said. "These people who lived through the history are still alive."

"Looking at today in history, there are patterns and they can repeat themselves," said Kerekretyova. "There were authoritarian regimes that affected the way everyone lives and it was largely not for the better. But it was a process. It didn't happen in an instant. It was over time and we can ask, 'What were the processes that led to that?'"

For Cecil, it's not just about teaching history, it's about a deeper responsibility to the next generation.

"I deeply believe what the German poet (Johann von) Goethe said that your responsibility to your children is to give them deep roots and strong wings," Cecil said.

Combining Goethe's philosophy with fellow countryman Vaclav Havel's philosophy that the most powerful weapon

any society can use is the truth, they hope to build a historical and cultural exchange that gives local students a perspective about their own American republic.

Cecil tells the story of how his country slowly adapted to the regimes which controlled almost every aspect of daily life, including trying to coerce beliefs. Cecil grew up and continued to practice as a Christian, becoming what he described as a "second-class" citizen even though he was a computer programmer and his wife was an architect.

At least several times a year, he was brought in for interrogation about his religious beliefs, something viewed as Western and against communism.

"For the first -- I don't know -- three or five times, it was terrifying," Cecil said, "But then, you get used to it. It's kind of like having a gun stuck to your head. When it's pointed at you for 30 seconds, it's terrifying; when it's pointed at you for 42 years, you kind of get used to it."

He could withstand the interrogations by himself; however, the treatment of his children bothered him.

He remembers one of his daughter's first day of school. The students were all asked to sing a song, and his daughter, Katarina, sang a hymn.

The teacher recoiled. Where, she wondered, had Katarina learned such a thing? Surely, it must have been from a grandmother, the teacher said. But,

Katarina, Cecil's daughter, being young and oblivious to the danger, told the teacher she had learned it at Sunday school.

"My kids did not have the right to choose for themselves. They would be stigmatized and that was unfair," Cecil said. "But then I remembered Goethe. I knew that I had to give them their heritage -- their roots."

For people who take religious freedom as a catchphrase, a guy like Cecil is a reminder of just how amazing a country like America still is, even with its present unrest and friction. There's no making it great again. It is still and has been for a long time. A person like Cecil is a reminder of that.

Cecil remembers gathering with other Slovaks in the town square of Bratislava during those heady days of the Velvet Revolution in November 1989. He watched as the communist system in Czechoslovakia crumbled. It was an epiphany.

"I was crying in Bratislava's main square," Cecil said. "Not because I got freedom from the secret police, but because my kids got the chance to be in a different world."

As a journalist who has spent more than two decades playing around with worlds like "freedom" and "liberty" on opinion pages, I suppose that's the best definition I've heard of freedom.

## THE CREW IS BACK STATE-SIDE

*Les, Craig, and Michelle Return from Bratislava*

The MasterLube leadership crew was overseas visiting our friends from Oil Partner in Slovakia, collaborating with them on the day to day workings of their lube centers as well as taking in a few sights

We'll let them recover from jet lag and then have a story all about their trip in next month's Luber News. Stay tuned!



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