

The Dorniks visit Udol, 2003

Dornicove cesta do Ujaka, 2003



The Dorniks visit to Udol, 2003

It all started back around August 2003, while sitting at my computer one night, I got the idea of searching the telephone directory of Slovakia, for any of my relatives that might still be living in Udol (Ujak), the village of my father's birth. I pulled up the directory for Udol and punched in "Dornic" the correct spelling of my surname, which somehow going through Ellis Island got changed to Dornik. Anyway after a short while the computer returned a record "Jan Dornic" living in Udol, along with his phone number and address. At the appropriate time (considering the + 6 hrs difference) I called Jan Dornic. A female answers and when she hears my american accented "po nashomu" on the line, she immediately hangs up. I hit redial and immediately call back and this time an answering machine picks up and to my astonishment, the outgoing message is in english. "Hello, your call is very important to us, we cant come to the phone right now....." You get the picture. Its the original outgoing message that comes with an answering machine made for the US market. I leave a message, in english but did not leave my phone number, since I did not want them to spend their money, for a transatlantic call to someone, who may not be a close relative or indeed may not even be related, at all.

About a week later, I get a phone call from Slavo Gladis, a young man living in the Baltimore area and having a name that I was totally unfamiliar with. Turns out Slavo is the nephew of Jan Dornic and was told of my phone call and had been searching through all the Dornic's he could find in the US online directories and eventually found me, the one who called his uncle. We had a wonderful conversation and I was exceedingly happy to find out that we are, in fact, very closely related. Jan Dornic is the son of the youngest daughter (Hanya) of my father's (Peter Dornic) oldest sister (Maria). Jan's mother is my father's niece. Jan's mother Hanya and myself, having the same grandparents are first cousins. Jan and I are first cousins once removed. Jan has two sisters, Margita who also lives in Udol and Helena, who lives in Stara Lubovna. Slavo is the son of Margita which makes Slavo and me first cousins twice removed.

The next weekend I drove down, from Madison Connecticut where we live, to the Baltimore area, with my wife Lydia and daughter Lauranne and met Slavo, his wife Gina and their baby boy Stefan. We talked about Ujak, where Slavo was born and family and how I always wanted to see the village that I had heard about all my life. At this point I decided we would go to Slovakia do some sightseeing and visit Ujak, perhaps for a day or so. I also thought we would stay at a hotel in Stara Lubovna. Slavo then tells me, matter of factly, that if we go to Ujak, we cant stay at a hotel. His mother would be highly insulted and crushed, if we did not stay with her. I reluctantly agreed

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that we would stay with his mother Margita, when we got to Ujak and thank God we did. Staying right there in the village, with Margita and Stefan Gladis turned out to be the most wonderful, precious experience that far exceeded anything we could have imagined. It was unforgettable.



From left Gina, Slavo and Stefan Gladis

Sunday, of the Baltimore weekend, we all went to St. Mary's GC church in Joppa, MD where my cousin and Slavo's uncle Fr. Ivan Dornic is the priest. Fr. Dornic, who also was born in Ujak, spent the early years of his career, as a parish priest in Johnstown, PA. Fr. Dornic's uncle, his mother's brother was Michael Timko, who was also my godfather, who I knew very well. The last time I saw Fr. Dornic was in 1957. I was eighteen, just out of high school and ready to start college and he was twenty-two and about to be married, just prior to his ordination. It was very good to make contact with him and see him again and it is unfortunate that we haven't kept in touch all these years.

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From left Lauranne Dornik May, Matushka Hanichka, Fr. Ivan Dornic, Lydia Dornik and John Dornik

Plans for the Ujak trip were now starting to gel. I bought airline tickets, online from Austrian Airlines, from JFK nonstop to Vienna Austria, for the incredibly low price of \$377 plus tax round trip. Vienna Austria is only about 38 miles from Bratislava, Slovakia so it makes sense to fly into Vienna, a much bigger airport with much more service. Slavo has another cousin Milan Dornic who I never knew of, that lives in Petrjalka which is a suburb of Bratislava. Slavo kept in touch with Milan by telephone and kept him apprised of our plans, as they developed. Milan is an extremely kind and helpful man and insisted on picking us up at the Vienna airport and he also made arrangements for us at a hotel in "stari mesta" the old town section of Bratislava. We stayed for one night at the Film Hotel which was just renovated and we had a lovely suite of two bedrooms and a large sitting room for about one hundred dollars. And this is in the capital of Slovakia. I cant imagine what such accommodations would cost in any other european capital. Food also in Bratislava was extremely inexpensive and delicious. A cooked meal lunch with wine, desert and coffee for three was less than twenty dollars and the portions were too large to finish. Wine was cheaper than bottled water. On the other hand, when we got to Budapest, lunch for three was over sixty dollars and you left the table hungry.

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Myself, wife Lydia and daughter Lauranne arrived at Vienna airport on Sunday morning and it was raining lightly. As mentioned above, Milan Dornic and daughter Barbara met us at the airport. Barbara previously spent some time in the Baltimore area with her cousin Slavo so she could speak english fairly well. Milan spoke essentially no english. Milan showed us the sights of Bratislava sunday afternoon and afterwards we had dinner with Milan and his brother Ivan. Ivan Dornic has a son, also named Ivan who is an excellent hockey player and was drafted this year by the New York Rangers of the NHL. Good job Ivan. We were too excited to sleep on the plane and the plane was full and too cramped for sleeping anyway, so shortly after dinner we started to get very tired and needed sleep. We made a quick trip over to see Bratislava Hrad and then we got to bed fairly early sunday night.



Arrival in Bratislava, Sunday morning
From left Lauranne, Barbara, Milan, Lydia

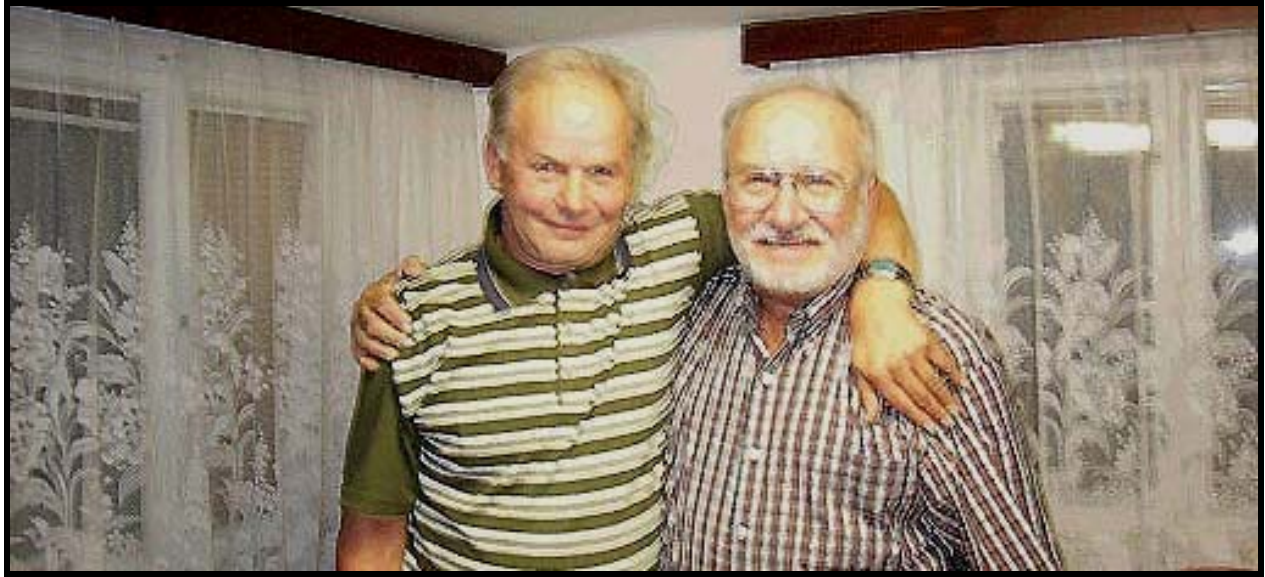
Next morning Milan picked us up at the Film hotel and we all went to breakfast. After breakfast Milan took me over to the Bratislava airport where I picked up our rental car while Lydia and Lauranne did some shopping, at the mall with Milan's secretary. Significant savings were possible by renting the car in Slovakia rather than in Austria. At about eleven we left Bratislava for Ujak. The drive to Ujak is very pleasant and scenic. The roads are surprisingly good and well signed. As we traveled northeast, the mountains got higher and higher until reaching a maximum at Poprad. There was essentially no traffic to speak of.

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We got to Ujak after dark on Monday night and had no idea where Margita's house was. Presently, we came upon a man walking along the street and asked if he knew where Stefan Gladis lived. He pointed to a house just next door to where we were and said "right there". It turned out to be Stefan Gladis' house but the son's not the father's where we intended to go. Stefan the younger came out and hopped in his car and we followed him to his father's house, about two minutes away. When we arrived everyone inside rushed out to greet us. We hugged and kissed and laughed and cried and although we had never met or seen each other before, it was clear to me that we were jedna rodina, one family.



Daughter Helena and Moma Hanya



Jan Dornic & John Dornik



From the left Stefan Jr., Helena, Milan, Margita, Stefan

I feel very fortunate and blessed in that my parents spoke "po nashomu" in our home, when I was growing up and that I had the interest and inclination to learn our language, at that early age. We were talking that first night and Stefan said to me "you know its worth a million dollars that we can sit here and talk to each other. If you

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couldn't speak our language, what would we do, sit and smile at each other?" What else could we do? It was so funny, while we were out walking, a neighbor passed by and asked Stefan who his visitors were. He replied, two Americans and one of us. I felt as though I had really arrived. I knew spiritually I was an Ujacan, well maybe half, my mother was from Plavnica, but I didn't know it showed. Another neighbor, an older lady, stopped and talked with us in the street and just before she left she turned and said to me "its so nice you can speak po Ujaski.

Our stay in Ujak was a four day moveable feast. Margita stuffed us like the proverbial vianoce hus (christmas goose) and there was always something to drink and something to drink to. We also had dinner at Jan's house and at Helena's. Everyone was extremely kind and extremely generous to us.

Stefan has three pigs in a small barn behind his house and he has chickens running around and producing the most delicious eggs I have ever tasted. The chickens are truly free range birds and the color of their egg yolks is dark orange. I have never before seen eggs with such dark and flavorful yolks. Stefan also keeps some rabbits. There is a pivnica (root cellar) at the rear, which was full of potatoes, among other things. Curiously, the potatoes were imported from the US. Jan tells me that Stefan has the best pivnica. Potatoes tend to sprout in his so he brings them over and stores them at Stefans.



From left Lydia, Lauranne, Pan Zajcik, Stefan

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We had the most fun one evening when Margita and Helena decided to dress my daughter Lauranne in the traditional Ujak folk wedding outfit. While they were dressing her, Margita and Helena were singing Rusnak folk songs, in beautiful close harmony. The outfit was about three sizes too small for Lauranne and it must have struck the women funny. We got to laughing so hard we couldn't stop. It was hysterical but maybe you had to be there.



Dressing the bride
From left Helena, Lauranne, Margita

We visited the cemetery where my ancestors are buried and we visited the church where my father was baptized and worshiped as a child and young man. Ujak for me is a very special place. I found nourishment there for my Rusnak soul that I know would not be found anywhere else on this planet.

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Before we left, I asked Margita for a spoon and we went out into the garden and I took a small jar of soil, Ujakova zemla. When we got home, we took that Ujak soil from Margita and Stefan's garden and sprinkled it over my parents grave.



Sprinkling the soil from Ujak on my parents grave

I hope to get back to Ujak, in the not too distant future. If only things could stay as they are, which of course they cannot.

by John Dornik

**(Syn Petrus Dornic Narodil 1896 Ujak, Austria-Hungary i Zuzanna Kuncewicz
Dornic Narodila 1902 Castle Shannon , Pennsylvania Ameriky)
(Vnuk Joannes Dornic i Helena Fecisin Dornic)**