

Guided Imagery Story

Imagine that the year is 1989—that’s just 14 years ago—and you live in the city of Prague. The streets are very narrow and some of the buildings—former castles—are hundreds of years old. Your grandparents had been farmers in the rolling hills and valleys of Bohemia, but they were forced to move to the city after World War II because under communism people could no longer make a good living farming. Your parents work in a factory that makes steel. At first the factories were good places to work. But because the government controlled everything (from how much money people could make to where they sold their products and at what price), there was no reason to make factories better or more productive. So many of the factories are now out-dated and run down.

One night you overhear a conversation between your parents and some of their friends. They are talking about overthrowing the communists. You remember learning in school that a group of Czechs had tried to change the government back in the late 1960s, to make it less controlling. But that had backfired: The Soviet Union had cracked down on the Czech people and made life even harder after that. So some people are afraid to speak out for change. Others think the times are different now because the leader of the Soviet Union, Mikhail Gorbachev, actually wants reforms that would bring greater freedom and competition to communist countries. They say the Czechs don’t have to be afraid of the Soviet Union anymore and that now is the time to demand change.

Well, it turns out they were right. The very next day demonstrations began, and it took only 6 weeks, from November 17 to December 10, to peacefully overthrow the communists and form a new democratic government. People in other countries called it the “Velvet Revolution” because it was a complete turnover of power with no violence, so it was soft, like velvet. What it did have was lots and lots of demonstrations—people of all ages, including you and your family, marched in the streets and refused to go to work. One demonstration in Prague had over 750,000 people! The communist leaders were totally unprepared to deal with this popular unrest and they resigned their power on November 29, 1989. Within a year the first elections in 40 years were held. More than 96 percent of the population went to the polls to vote for the new Parliament.

The future is much brighter now. Things that were banned by the communists, like religion and rock music, are coming back. Churches have thrown open their doors and are renovating their buildings—including the church your family attends, called Unitaria. The building at 8 Karlova Street was once a medieval palace and has been the home of Czech Unitarians since 1924. People are once again making music in the streets and celebrating the old holidays. Who knows what this new freedom will bring?