

Samuel

unedited novel by Norbert von Amehr

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To Samuel, Iveta and David, with love

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Prologue:

Blow chimney, blow Suck out the flames
Fire against the snow
Don't blow my baby away

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How he wasn't exactly born

Samuel wasn't exactly born. He was taken out by Caesarean. I don't know the background of that word but it adds a noble quality to his birth, I guess. My wife was told there was absolutely no chance of trying to save him because it was too soon. However, when she woke up she was told that Samuel is in the incubator. It had another name a little house as I was later told by my schoolmate who also had a premature baby. The doctor told my wife that when Samuel was taken out he shortly moaned and he had an erection. I don't know if that is important but it is certainly true. Why deny it then? My wife called me from the hospital, said that she deliver it and asked if I had any name in mind. What do you mean, it? I asked irritated. Perhaps I was too hard on her then considering what she must have gone through, so I said a bit more gently: Perhaps Samuel would be most appropriate. She had four spontaneous abortions before and one instance was particularly painful. It was not exactly spontaneous either, she was given and injection. Four and half months into this pregnancy it was found the baby did not have a brain. The doctor was a Catholic who never did abortions but he said there was no chance of the baby surviving. I remember I went

to the library to have a look at the pictures of such children and it was not a pleasant sight. As a rule, these children survived about three weeks on average. Iveta, that is my wife, went to the confession and we prayed for a miracle which did not happen. It would have to be a miracle.

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I was already depressed at the time Samuel was born but this state was quite deepened by the circumstances of his arrival to this world. Is the word world a euphemism? I would say it is rather neutral.

When I saw the frail and frail is an inadequate expression here little limp body through the glass I started to cry, never mind the pretty doctor was standing nearby. She asked if I wanted a chair and I said no.

Some people faint, you know. she added.

I repeated I was ok and then asked if I could take a picture of him. She said no problem. The first shot I took was through the glass and the Dr. Hornikova offered to open the glass for

me. I protested, being afraid of infection, but she said

something along the lines that I should not be afraid so much and that the way I washed my hands was rather surgical. The

last word was pronounced with a bit of irony, but I could

understand. These people are dealing with death everyday and my armchair sensitivity was a bit out of place here.

I am glad I took another picture without the glass getting in the way as this gives a much clearer memory of that day.

Samuel lay there with pipes connected everywhere and his body was smeared with some kind of grease. He looked rather like an extraterrestrial being saved from a broken Mother ship.

How we did not live for three months

We did not have a life the following three months. We visited once a week, Iveta sometimes went alone. I was thinking if those men (I am not one of them) who liked to watch their

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children being born would also want to see a Ceaserian birth of a premature baby. I guess not.

How we called every day

We called every day. The doctors always tried to be nice, but sometimes it was felt that they were nervous. It wasn't exactly

a quiet place, this ward by the name of Pathological newborns department.

At one time we were visiting in person Dr. Hornikova was telling me how they tried to make him water or perhaps about some other complication (there was one almost every day) and I asked if he was otherwise healthy. She just smiled a painful smile. I should have known better. I should have derived it from the name of the ward.

About a month later his state again became serious as there was an infection in the ward. Several babies died and we heard this rumour. One of the babies that passed away was a twin. At that moment my Catholic instincts woke up again and I called a local parish. I informed the priest what was happening and we agreed to meet at the hospital in about an hour for the purpose of baptism. I wasn't exactly calm and thoughtful at that time and when I gave it a second thought I did not go. I left him there praying for Samuel for I was sure that was what he did.

When I called the next day, the doctor responsible for the ward asked:

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Mr. Amehr, were you arranging for a baptism of some kind?

I was.

Well, the man was waiting here for two hours.

I am sorry to hear that but I already apologized to him. I said.

That was not exactly true. I did fax a letter to the parish office, in which I said I was afraid that the baptism might be the end of the baby. I did say I was sorry that I left the priest waiting there.

How I exercised religious activities

There were more of religious activities on my part at that time.

I posted a prayer request at various Internet sites and I got two prayers. One of them came with a recommendation to say it twice a day, which I did. I memorized the prayer in English

and repeated it twice a day. Every single day for more than two months. Then I got another one and used that. I am sure I

worked at that time too, but this somehow slipped out of my

mind. I just remember the prayers, particularly one sent by an American priestess. She represented a strange kind of religion,

a blend of Christianity and Buddhism and stuff. But Christ

was mentioned in the prayer. In the end He was identified

with the person reading the prayer. That seemed to me like a blasphemy but I also remembered that the psychologist whom

I visited while suffering from depression once told me that God

himself was receiving communion in the person taking the wafer and that the priest knew it very well.

How he undertook an eye operation

Samuel undertook an eye operation. Laser surgery on both eyes. The oxygen he was given and the prematurity caused the veins in his retina to grow askew and they had to be burned by laser. They would then grow again, but this time the way they should.

We were visiting after the operation and there was a young nurse who changed his nappies and then wiped something off his lid without first washing her hands. I was horrified.

She also told us that Samuel was very clever. Oftentimes he set the alarm going by taking the oxygen tube out of his nose. Very clever indeed!

Perhaps he had enough of the filthy environment. On the other hand, I must give credit to those doctors and nurses, as working in that ward was particularly stressful.

Breathe baby, breathy

We're breathing with you Your breath is all we need

We're all that you do

In case you were wondering why another prologue, rest assured it is not. In order to cope with my depression now deepened by Samuel's coming into this world, I started to record songs on my PC and these are the lyrics of one of them. The prologue itself is another song of mine as at the time this all happened we installed an oven in our flat. The block of flats is an old one and it sufficed to refurbish the chimney a bit and

now we use wood to heat our flat. We only use central heating at night. This didn't go smooth either as our good neighbours wrote a letter to inform authorities about it. Never mind this, we use it to this day and our baby is still with us.

How he learned to breathe

The big part of Samuel's journey here was to learn to breathe. While still in the incubator, they tried to disconnect him from the breathing machine, but this went very slowly. We breathed with him for a month or so before he was able to do it on his own. I remember that at times I shed I tear or two while playing the above song on my guitar. Finally, after more than a month he started to breathe but the difficulties were not over. However, I learned another lesson that even such basic thing as breathing is not a matter of course.

One of the neurologist that saw him said that we were lucky in our misery. She said that his brain wasn't marked by bleeding as much or perhaps at the important centers. By saying this she confirmed the words of another doctor who was working at the pathological newborns ward. what Other neurologist said he would walk for sure and she was later proven right. She knew that from the way his legs moved.

After three months of immense strain and suffering he was finally released from the hospital. I held him in my arms and he was very little and fragile. His birth weight was 950 grams and one of the doctors said that in Holland they don't even try to save babies like this. I did not know then that life would be

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difficult and I was very tired but felt victorious nevertheless. Now he weighed 2615 grams. That sounds better, eh?

How he exercised

Iveta started to exercise with Samuel. According to some doctors this was necessary for him to learn to walk. He cried a lot during these exercises and after hearing it Iveta's mother said she couldn't bear to listen to his cries. Iveta and I somehow got used to it. She held him in restrained positions until he was red from anger and crying. This also went for a long time and at times I tend to think that it might have caused psychological issues with him.

How she visited hospital

Iveta and Samuel visited hospital 23 times a week. She saw various specialists there. But we had him at home most of the time which was good in itself. He was unable to suck from Iveta's nipples so she had to suction he milk and give to him in a bottle. I remember that Dr. Hornikova, who is now the head doctor at the premature children ward said that even sucking at the bottle will be a difficult exercise for him. This was another signal causing fear deep down in my soul as was her answer to my question if he was healthy. Iveta was suctioning her milk away until she was tired of it. I was a bit afraid lest it should impair her breasts, but this was just a momentary thought; our primary concern was Samuel.

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How he learned to sit

It took a long time before he learned to sit. At first we supported him with pillows and the pictures from that period are quite cute. I mean he is cute in them.

How I addressed him in English

Samuel made various sounds at first and it seemed that they might develop into speech which did not happen so far. I addressed him in English which is what I did with my older son David who was born normally and who can speak English quite well now. Iveta wanted another child right after David and I strongly disagreed then, giving some political reasons against the idea. That is why I sometimes feel responsible for all the mishaps concerning children in our marriage. However, everyone is a general after the fight. The fact is we started to be afraid he would not speak.

How she had an accident and he fell off the mattresses

As I said Iveta drove Samuel to hospital often and at one time, as if there wasn't enough of misfortune, she had a car accident. The breaks in her car failed and she pushed the pedal so strong that she broke two fingers on her foot which are a bit crooked now. Samuel just whined in his sleep, being tied in his safety chair. That was very stressful, but the angels interfered. My English friend Gary said much later that he was sure angels were taking care of Samuel. Feeble human beings are being taken care of much more in the spiritual realm. He

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expressed this opinion when I told him how often Samuel fell when he started to walk. He often hurt and bumped his head in the process.

Iveta finally bought straps and secured him while he walked. And he would fall less and less. One particularly striking falling incident happened in the bathroom. The bump was so strong that I immediately rushed into the bathroom. She used three mattresses as a support after taking him out from the bathtub and upon a moment of Iveta's inattention he rolled over and fell to the tiled floor. There was a blood mark on the bathroom cabinet made of wood. Angels intervened again.

How they took him away from us again

When he was a few months old (in this case months are counted from the expected day of birth, so when he was born

he was approximately 3 months old) he fell ill. We went by car to a special respiratory hospital in Podunajské Biskupice and the doctor there told us he had not enough oxygen in his blood and must stay there. Iveta came to the car to tell me the bad news and we both cried right there in the parking place. We hugged each other and wept. We left Samuel there and Iveta went home and back again. She just took some things with her.

Even as I write this, my heart flutters a bit. I am not very strong and the things I did to myself and those that some demons did to myself and Iveta had their impact.

However, she was not there for very long; I think it might have been two weeks or so and after that we had our little precious helpless thing back at home.

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How a pedagogue said it was not certain he would attend regular school

After a while I ceased to talk to him in English as a pedagogue that worked with him said it was not certain he would speak at all and that she would not recommend it. Until that time it never occurred to us he might not be able to attend normal school but she started to hint that the worst thing that might be expected is that he would have to attend a special school but still be able to take care of himself. At one time she said he was clever and at other times, particularly when he would not cooperate, she said that the school for normal children would probably not be an option. His performance was rather varied and he seemed to be quite stubborn. He would have to be greatly motivated to do something asked of him.

How it started to turn out the pedagogue was probably right

As time progressed it became more and more clear that the pedagogue might be right. He was saying usual baby babble including words similar to mama but never quite repeated what was said to him. Later, with great effort on our part he could pronounce something similar to tata, which means daddy in Slovak but even that ceased with time.

How the man wanted to help using distilled water

Of course we wanted Samuel would progress so I made use of help from a friend who is a writer and he referred us to an alternative doctor, something like a medicineman. He used to

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be a neurologist and he said that helped some folks to walk,

My friend referred to him as the greatest professional in Slovakia specialized in energotherapy.

He measured Samuel by measuring Iveta, as he said Samuel was too little to be measured. He would not sit still and stuff.

He then prescribed Apis 1000, which is a homeopathic medicine.

All you will find is just distilled water if you care to analyze it. he said.

Moreover, he also said that the souls of the children Iveta lost in previous abortions were probably the cause why Samuel could not talk and perhaps learn other things. They were envious of him that he was alive in this world. Being in this world must be a precious thing, I guess. He charged 1 000 crowns (approximately € 33) for his services. We were giving Samuel his medicine for a long time. Iveta was not taking it although the medicineman said the she must take it as well as the baby is interconnected with her.

We did not visit this man again as it was quite expensive for us and the trust just wasn't there.

How it was difficult to find a kindergarten

At first Iveta had a great problem finding a kindergarten. We were nowhere wanted. After much exertion Iveta finally found

one within a special school for children with various mental and physical issues.

It was a room dedicated to afterschool care for children whose parents worked. This was free during the time these bigger

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children had their classes and so it could be used as a kindergarten. There was a young teacher there who seemed eager to work with Samuel and get him to talk. Slowly her enthusiasm subsided though. It just didn't work.

However, Samuel found his first friend here whose name was also Samuel and he didn't talk either. There were often just the two of them present with the teacher, as children often stay at home because of some illness or other. The teacher called our son Samulko to distinguish between them.

Finally she got pregnant, started her maternity holiday and the special kindergarten was temporarily cancelled. Iveta had to look for another one and she finally found it, though it was not as close to our home as the first one in Karpatská street.

The kindergarten in Cyprychova street was headed by a woman who had a child with disability too. At one time she advised Iveta not to enroll Samuel in school later but had him placed in a special home for disabled people. She said Samuel

would not learn anything anyhow and even if he did learn a thing or two he would not be able to take care of himself. When we saw the pictures of the home she recommended on the Internet, we firmly decided for school rather than for this

home. Our Samuel didn't do much but it was not obvious to a stranger when he or she looked at him. He seemed quite a normal boy and a handsome one at that.

When Samuel attended the kindergarten in Cyprychova, someone gave a tip to Iveta to visit an autistic society and she did visit their office. There they said that for 50 euros per hour they would teach Iveta some tricks that might help Samuel with his development. It was not certain at all whether he was

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autistic at all. We thought about the offer and what those tricks could be that might be learned in one day. It was a one day training of a kind. So finally we decided not to go along.

In this new kindergarten Iveta met a professional who helped her apply for some social benefits she didn't know about. The kindergarten director whom I briefly talked about gave Iveta this woman's phone number. That was quite helpful. It even seemed that we were entitled for a subsidy to buy a car but we did not follow on that. Still, Iveta acquired some more money in benefits thanks to this woman.

Here Iveta also met another mum whose girl had a serious life threatening condition and had to use a wheelchair. She came to like Samuel and as far as we could tell Samuel liked her. Her mother was very determined and she recommended Iveta another healer in the village of Košúty who did not take any money except what you gave him voluntarily. Still, Iveta gradually stopped visiting him as he gave two different diagnoses and we could ill afford to drive that far so often.

How he left kindergarten (in his own thoughts)

I am in the kindergarten and all children are in the backyard, it is just me who is inside. Perhaps I am inside because once I cried when they wanted to take me outside along with other children. I am bored. Where is my mom, she ought to be here by now? I want to go to the loo, I can hardly hold back: Where is everyone?

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Samuel enters the hallway, he can see there is no one anywhere. He walks as far as the door and then out into the street. This way we once walked with mom to the tram stop, I shall walk on my own, I kind of recognize the path. I need to go to the loo or if anyone gave me the chamber pot at least...but these people who pass by me on the sidewalk are obviously strangers. Never mind, I walk on and maybe I shall meet my mom, she will give me the chamber pot and then we shall go sliding. Or swinging.

Samuel walks towards the tram stop. Is there a panic at the kindergarten right now? Nobody knows at this point. Mom is driving to fetch Samuel from kindergarten and daddy is going through his mails. He is in the middle of another working day. Sometimes he believes he can sense danger from afar. Today he is undisturbed and calm.

Samuel stops for a while and looks upwards, exactly as he does during his meals in kitchen where he is partly fed and partly uses his spoon in a clumsy way. His dad would say he is smiling at his angelic friend. The fact he has acquaintances of this kind was confirmed by Dr. Hornikova of Pathological newborns department. She did not use these exact words, in fact she said something to the effect that she would recommend those stones which were placed in the incubator by his father. Lapis, Zircon and one more, Citrine perhaps? They could as well be the names of angels, couldn't they. Samuel realizes that he must cross the road at this point as the tram stop is on the other side of it. Luckily, red light is on for the cars. When the cars have red

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light, angels have green and vice versa. Samuel feels he is no longer able to hold on. He enters the road...

In the meantime, his mother is driving her car in the opposite stream of vehicles and at this moment the cars get their green

light. The angels have red, but one of Samuel's friends,

enormous Lapis with the pairs of wings doesn't give a shit for Highway Code, he follows Samuel into the road and takes him

by the hand. The first car gets round Samuel. The second one stops and honks. Nobody is wondering why a six-year-old child is standing in the middle of the road; we live in capitalism and everyone has enough worries of his own. This is not a reproach, it is simply a fact of life.

Just then Citrin pinches his mother's cheek and she beholds Samuel in the middle of the road, in his open slippers. She could as well fail to notice him. She stops the car, leaves it in the middle of the road along with her handbag and everything

else and runs. She runs as the girl named Lola in the movie

Lola Runs and even faster. She holds Samuel madly in her embrace. Her pulse is two hundred a minute and she seems to

feel something but doesn't pay any attention to it right now. She can't comprehend how these folks on the sidewalk could

just stand there and watch and how the first car went around him indifferently.

They go back to the kindergarten. The teachers are stressed almost as much as she is. They promise it would never happen again.

They give her a glass of water and Samuel is wondering why they came back to the kindergarten again. The place is quite boring anyway.

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Why are we still hanging around here? The teachers are somewhat red in the face, usually they are not like this at all. Samuel tugs at mom's hand. With his look he tells her he wants to go home. He can't wait to tell daddy how he stood there bravely among all those cars. Actually, he won't be able to tell him as he is unable to talk. At least for the time being. Never mind, mom will certainly tell him herself.

How he came to recognize shapes

Iveta taught him to recognize shapes like triangle, circle and square, with difficulties. Even more difficult it was to teach him colors. In the end he was able to put red object into a red cup and so on. But still it wasn't clear if he understood the abstract concept of colour or at least connect the word with the proper object until one day I got an idea, based on schola ludus. I told him to put on red bricks on a toy lorry and drive them away and then green ones and he did it the first time. But then, he keeps forgetting things and he can't repeat the trick today. Perhaps he just doesn't want to, he sometimes certainly seems like it.

How he watches Wolf and Rabbit

This is a Russian cartoon (yes, they produce them as well) of the Communist era and he just loves it. When Iveta goes to buy groceries, he sits in the cheap canvas chair, his legs comfortably lifted up and laughs at particular sequences all over again. When the Rabbit sings O sole mio, he he is

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laughing aloud.
He also likes Tom and Jerry and a Polish cartoon about a mole.

How he laughs for no reason

Sometimes he does that up to a point when it is really annoying for others. Iveta and me at times ascribe it to viruses eating the laughing centre of the brain, however, we can't be sure. Occasionally he laughs for no reason for an hour or even more. For a few minutes it is funny for people around but, as I said, it gets on one's nerves quite soon. Luckily he does not do it that often. Nothing will ever stop him when he is in full swing, no ass smacking or anything else will ever help.

How he broke thick glass with his head

A glass case was part of our furniture at one time but one day Samuel broke it accidentally as he fell. He accomplished that

with his head. The glass was about eight millimeters thick and he didn't cry one bit. We could not understand it. I removed the vases and other objects behind glass and used the empty space as a bookshelf. Our Samuel has a hard nut and this is true in a figurative way as well.

How he throws things and hides them into various holes

Throwing things is one of his greatest passions. He throws

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them anywhere, sometimes behind the sofa or bed, at other times into the bathtub. He can fill up the bathtub or any hole he can find around the flat in a matter of minutes if he is not being watched and/or reprimanded. He also throws bigger objects at our TV set and it really makes me angry. Iveta is a bit more tolerant in this regard.

How he drove an electric motorcycle and a pedal balance bike

When he barely walked we bought him an electric tricycle. He was able to push the pedal and run it, however, he wasn't capable of taking his foot away to stop it. I still have a short video made with my phone where he is seen to drive it. He was very cute and at that time we had no suspicion of what lies ahead; that he might be unable to take care of himself ever.

The motor bike broke down in a matter of days as most things you buy nowadays and we replaced it with a pedal balance bike. I opened the box and there seemed to be parts missing in it, so I sent Iveta back to the store where they found out that I was just too blind. I was always jumping to conclusions.

When she brought it back again I assembled the bike and he drove it too, although not without small support wheels. Not

that he liked it too much, even as I write this, I must always do a fair amount of persuasion to make him ride it. But he does from time to time, usually when I lead the way on the scooter. He is unable to balance the scooter, though. I sometimes help

him hold it straight and he pretends to drive the scooter as well. Perhaps some day he will be able to do it. I never lose

hope. I have to add that I do not work with him as often as Iveta whom I once spat at for saying that the worse he gets as

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to everyday performance the better. It was not meant seriously, of course, and this utterance followed an opinion she heard from a doctor dealing with disabled children who said that people would never come to terms with the fact their child is so and always try to squeeze something more of their children which is not always the best thing to do.

I wish to add that until the present time he is unable to pedal any bike and believe me, we tried quite a lot.

How we went on holiday to Greece and to Croatia

When we almost came to terms with the fact that Samuel will never be a normal boy (though he is quite normal to us now) we went on our first holiday with him. We flew to Greece, to the island of Rhodos. The plane was about an hour late and we were strolling to and fro in the waiting room. When we finally were about to board the plane, Samuel started to cry very much. The flight attendant tried to talk to him to calm him down in the corridor but he calmed down only after we fastened our seat belts. He immediately fell asleep, however, I prayed the whole flight through and did not touch the food they gave us as a kind of penance or offering for our safe landing. We did land safely, though we were a little frightened by the fact that the airport personnel in Rhodos airport were wearing surgical masks as the so-called pig flu was around at that time.

The holiday itself went quite well and I still remember holding Samuel in my arms in big waves. I think he was a bit afraid but still liked it. Most of the time he was throwing stones in the sea. Iveta had to watch over him all the time as he would just enter the water or fall in, as his walking was not so stable.

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There was one incident over there which disturbed the feel good factor of the whole holiday. One night somebody was banging at our door at around 2 in the morning. I called the police. They were nice and explained that it might have been some drunkard. It later transpired that the woman who tidied up the apartments lived in ours before we arrived. The man was probably an acquaintance of hers. She must have been scolded for this incident by the owner of the apartments as the last but one day of our stay she came to tell us in broken English that a baby from another apartment fell ill and had to go to hospital and that it probably was the pig flu. That was her vengeance and it worked, in my case certainly; Iveta is a bit harder as women usually are. All in all it was a nice holiday and as one of the air carriers went broke, we even had it prolonged by two days for free, before the travel agency could find another plane.

How he kissed himself in the mirror

One day he kissed his picture in the mirror. That was encouraging, that meant that he cared. How can you love anyone or anything if you don't love yourself? I have a beautiful photograph of this.

How I massaged his background

One winter Samuel fell ill and he had temperature. When he could not sleep, I massaged his back until he could. However, as soon I stopped rubbing his neck and back, he woke up. This

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went for quite a long time and I felt I do something good for once. Sometimes it doesn't take much to do something good.

How we visited Croatia

Not that it would be anything very special for us, Iveta and I had spend some honeymoons over there before we were married. She looked beautiful in a denim overall even if her legs were a bit stronger, her face was youthful and she that spark in her. The sweet thing about memory of happy moments is that it still lives. This time we went with Samuel, on a bus. He managed the journey quite well. We came very exhausted and it took us a few days to get him in the water properly; afterward it was difficult to get him out. Not that he would swim or anything, he just walked in up to his waist or so, holding hands with Iveta. There was a Polish woman there who was very nice to us and seeing him scream and fight at first when I tried to dip him a bit, she offered some toys floating on the surface, just to lure him in. Later we heard her praise us how we can manage our sick child. These were her own words. She thought we couldn't understand her, but Slovak and Polish are quite similar languages and perhaps she did not realize it. I was quite unhappy about the word she used. I do not wish see my child as sick a want to see him as different. One day I mentioned a slide to Samuel and that I should not do. We were looking for it during the whole afternoon, asking young children and teenagers here and there. At last, two little

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girls who couldn't speak English helped us. I motioned my hand in the air to describe what we were looking for and they said:

Aaaah, izviačnica!

That was the Croatian word for it. They showed us the way and we trudged in the greatest heat to a little town of Omiš, where there was one slide for the whole town, located near a block of flats where locals lived, not the tourists. I noticed

there were many cats there. There was nothing called izviačnica at the seaside near our apartment.

Samuel was tired from the walk in the heat, anyway, he still slid a few times. We all look tired as if in the middle of Sahara desert in the picture taken in Omiš next to izviačnica. Since that day, we often had to go there, sometimes on foot and at other times we took a small bus a private business operated by a local man. On some days we just flatly refused as soon as Samuel began to point in the direction of the road leading to his beloved izviačnica.

How he ate a rubber plant

Samuel often looks out of the windows, especially when there is snow outside. There is a lake in front of our house and the shores leading to the water are quite steep. Children and their parents sledge there. Samuel likes sledding very much, he could do it for hours on end. He also likes to feed birds with Iveta; that is why he likes to look out of the window facing that lake, actually it is a balcony door, but it is more like a French

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windows.

We removed most dangerous domestic plants, mostly the ones with sharp leaves, as he had eye injuries several times. He was lucky that it was nothing serious, the doctor just prescribed some eye drops when he poked accidentally in his eye, with a wood brick toy. However, one plant remained just behind the French window and one day Iveta noticed that he was chewing on something.

On closer examination we found that a part of the leaf belonging to domestic rubber plant variety is missing and in his mouth. It was too late for trying to take it out of his mouth, which we did several times before, in case of other things he ate.

We called the hospital and the doctor there said this particular plant could trigger allergy, but we were lucky again; nothing happened.

How he started to stretch

One day he started to stretch himself upwards from time to time, as if he prepared to take off, his hands stretched a bit backwards and pulling his head upwards in the process. He used to do this quite often and he looked quite funny. Perhaps he felt some discomfort in his back, we simply don't know as he would not tell us. The only way of communication is asking him yes or no and he would nod in agreement or turn his head left and right to say that he doesn't want something. Off

course, he can point with his finger if he wants something and he can also do small tasks, like switch on the light and stuff. At one time we punished him for breaking something by

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shutting him in the room and he started to cry instead of opening the door, even though he is able to. So we had to open it almost immediately.

How he purses his lips

When he is sad, he pulls his lower lip upwards and covers his upper one with it. It looks funny and sad at the same time, but when he does this, we immediately know that something is not all right. However, he often changes this grimace into a smile, especially when we hush him in jest, as we don't want to see him sulk, he is one of us, naturally. At times he does this for no apparent reason and then we hush him even more and after he has laughed, everything is as it should be again.

How he returned Santa Claus

Samuel was finally enrolled in a special school. There are 5 children in his class, two with Down syndrome and two others with severe learning difficulties. For instance, if the teacher asks how much seven plus five is, one of the children lifts her hand and says:

I know it. I know it. It is eleven.

There are two children there who do not talk our Samuel as well as one of the girls having Down syndrome. His best friend there is Lucka who talks and says that she loves him and it seems he loves her too. When I talk off her at home, he lights up.

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One day the children were getting presents, small packages of sweets. We celebrate Santa on the 6th of December here.

He was given this package, looked at it and gave it back to the teacher. That was very amusing, for the teacher as well as for us, when we learned of it later in the day. I think that Samuel is too proud to take anything for free, isn't he.

How he steals clothes and slippers

Samuel, whom we call Samko mostly goes around flat and steals freely discarded clothes and slippers and pillows and whatnot.

He takes those things to our bedroom which also serves as a depositary for his toys and throws those things on the ground.

He especially loves to throw things from our bed to the floor, making a big mess in the process.

Sometimes he steal my slippers which are at the foot of the bed where I lie before I am able to stop him. At times it is difficult to find a Tshirt or a slipper in the heap he creates when he is thus working an hour or so. We don't know why he does this, I suppose that he just doesn't like when things are not in order, e.g. in a closet, because he also closes open drawers, sometimes before I am able to remove a pencil or whatever the reason was for opening it. I guess, he inherited my perfectionist's instinct, though this can be very much annoying sometimes.

How I helped pick him up at school

Iveta takes him to school where he spends two hours a day and

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one day I went there with her. He seemed to be quite happy that I came along. In fact I felt he was radiating joy. He happily held both my and Iveta's hand on the way home. The special school has the same feel as any other school except that the children have different abilities and their report card are all As. I mean they get no other mark but A for all the subjects which are a bit different to normal school.

The school janitor was a quiet type and he seemed to have some kind of disability too, but had the look of a compassionate man. The same look women doctors usually have. I like this look a lot, it reminds me there is goodness in people.

How he says ay, yay

This approximately means "oh my" in Slovak. I don't know if he is unhappy inside when he says that but I doubt it as he would say that a lot. I mentioned he did not speak but does make sounds most of the time and sometimes it gets on people's nerves a lot. The only word he says is mama and he knows what that means; if you ask him where mama is he would point to her or go to her and touch her. When he was quite little he sometimes succeeded in saying tata, which means daddy in Slovak, however, nowadays he would not say that no matter how hard I persuade him to.

How he puts things into the kitchen sink

He likes to watch his mom when she washes the dishes. He

would hold on to the rim of the sink and follow her until she is done. I call him "the warden of the little lake" in jest.

Sometimes he helps to put things into the hot water with bubbles, like a plate, a pot and the like. He goes around the kitchen and the rest of the flat, bringing dishes to her. He even takes a clean spoon which has just been washed and puts it back into the little lake. His mom is angry about that, of course.

How he watches his mom to wash clothes in the washbasin

He also watches over his mom when she washes things in the washbasin. She doesn't wash everything in the washing machine. Small things, like his tights, some underwear and sometimes T-shirts she washes by hand. He stands there and hands in the socks or whatever she is working at. Perhaps this means he likes water, however, this notion is partially contradicted by our initial experience by the seaside.

How he gets angry while walking outside

Iveta or me take him for a walk almost every day. In summer he uses slide and he can do it ad nauseam. He often pulls one to a playground, even in winter when sliding is impossible. It can be quite hard to explain that no one is sliding in winter or swinging or whatever one can do at a playground. At times he gets so angry that he touches the sidewalk with his hands in a kind of fit. He also pulls one in the direction he wants to go even if there are good reasons not to go there. I noticed, however, that I can manage him better

that my wife, though it was not so at first. I have to admit being quite hard on him during his fits, like squeezing his hand until it hurt. Perhaps that is why he respects me more. Iveta is more patient than me and he seems to abuse this.

How he loves the sledge

We live nearby a lake. There is a noisy road just under our nose, however, after you cross this, you are at the lake. The shores of the are quite steep so that you can sledge there in winter. And that is what we do, especially when the lake is frozen.

Samo can go up and down ad infinitum. He is always angry when I or Iveta want to go home. I always have to help him move his legs across the sledge when he sits down on it and put his feet on the bottom so that they don't get in the way and function as brakes.

When we finally come home it doesn't take long before he goes to the window offering a view to the lake and passionately, I mean really really passionately pointing out. He would go back there immediately.

How his school certificate was all A's and B's

He got his first halfterm certificate at school. It was all A's and B's, however, all children got similar certificates, they differed in names only. The subjects were a bit different compared to a regular elementary school, like "Development of Social Skills" but he got an A in case of Mathematics too, even

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if can't do anything in this area. Who cares, we are lucky that he can attend any school at all. Because of other responsibilities of the stressful life in a developed industrial society, which, as someone said, devours all alternatives as a part of its healthy diet, I came to see the certificate as late as two months after it was issued. Samuel probably doesn't understand a bit of it.

How I smacked him on the face

One day he made me awfully angry and perhaps I was irritated owing to some other reason, anyway, I smacked his face and he bit his tongue in the process. I wanted to punished him for throwing things near the oven with which we heat out flat to save money. There is a little improptu fence in front of the oven, however, he could bring it down easily and get burned.

I felt remorse as I saw blood in his saliva and I felt that I smacked him too hard. He did not cry, he seldom does because of pain: It would have to be a harder blow as when he falls down hard. I repeat, I felt quite bad about myself, though he does not listen when I warn him, I should not do it, his life is not easy as it is. I am sorry, Samuel.

How Iveta spanked him and I won his love

One day he did something that made his mother angry and she spanked him. Seeing that I spanked her for a change. I wanted to side him this time. Samuel came to me and hugged me. That was something! Ecclesiastical law says I should love my

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wife first but it also says you should protect those who are unable to protect themselves.

How he tears paper on the bed and throws it on the ground

He had a papertearing period, too. Iveta gave him some magazines or newspapers and he tore it to pieces and threw it on the ground until it was messy, laughing copiously as he did so. I think he was occupied with this pastime for a month, maybe even longer. We did not mind, he is much more dangerous when in the kitchen!

How he stuffs all his toys into my bedstand

He had a period during which he stuffed all his toys into my bedstand. I rebuked him for that as I keep my notebook in it and at one time I found it on the ground so I did not want him to be near my bedstand. Once he even called me to show me what he did, he told on himself in effect, which is kind of cute, right? He told me when I called him to lie on my bed; I have two of them and my wife says I have a copy of everything: I have two notebooks, two ereaders, two printers and....two sons, one of whom is Samuel.

How he whined he could not have his plastic foam tube

When our older son's girlfriend slept over in our apartment, she slept on David's bed, and he used a plastic foam mattress for bed. This mattress is rolled up beside Samuel's bed, in case he fell off his bed, because he tosses and turns all night. When

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he went to sleep on that day, he started to whine, because he could not see this safety mattress in its usual place, which was kind of funny, you know.

How he brings tissue to people when he has a cold

When he catches a cold, which is quite often, he always brings tissue to Iveta or me, though I have to say that I hate touching infectious material so more often than not I would send him to his mom to do it. Sometimes he brings the whole packet of tissue, I mean the big one with ten smaller packets inside.

How he coughed during the night and we carried him to and fro

Sometimes he wakes us up during the night with his coughing. I sometimes get nervous about this as I have to work on translations in the morning which is very hard when I don't get enough sleep. On one such night I went to the other room and then back until we got into conflict with my wife and she

angrily took him in his arms and brought him to the other room to sleep on the carpet beside him, so that I might get some sleep. However, she did this angrily and I sensed it and took Samuel to my arms and brought him back to our common bedroom. Upon seeing how we move him to and fro, he started to laugh; he just considered it funny. That was something positive about the early morning chaos and mess.

How he takes out a plush animal before he falls asleep

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He went through a period during which he took out a plush animal out of the plastic toy box next to his bed. He put this animal, whether it was a little squirrel or a tiger or whatever, onto his pillow, just to have a companion for sleeping, just like normal kids do. I do not say he is not normal, he is certainly normal to us, though he might not be for others.

How he creates his own words

I already said he likes to throw things. Among those he likes to throw are little balls. He would throw these dangerously around the flat. At times he throws them in such a way as to lose them, in a corner or someplace else. Then he would come to Iveta or me, bend down and point with his finger to the ground. He thus compiles his own dictionary and this is one of its entries:
* finger pointing to the ground in a bent position 1. n ball 2. vt to lose as of a ball or something on the ground

How he likes to be kissed on his ear and cheeks

He very much likes to be kissed on his ear and on the cheeks, he wouldn't flinch and he would smile even if my unshaven skin might tickle him at times. On the other hand he doesn't like to be held or inhibited in any way, I suppose it might have its roots in the times he spent in the incubator when doctors often held him during little operations of which there were many.

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How he started to limp

There was a short spell when he started to limp on his right foot. An ortopeadic surgeon said that it could be even worse, that this kind of disease may have symptoms worse than this

and that he couldn't tell what was wrong with him considering the fact Samuel was unable to speak and tell him. The doctor was obviously irritated that day. We had several similar encounters with doctors and we do not use their services unless we absolutely have to. Like the English say: Avoid doctors and lawyers. Luckily the limp subsided, at least it is not visible when he is not trying to run, which he cannot do anyway. It is kind of funny to watch him try, though.

How I massage the soles of his feet

When he goes to bed I now massage the soles of his feet, instead of playing a song on my guitar as I used to. When I push his little toe, he laughs a strange laugh, which could also be an expression of pain, as I sometimes push it quite strong. They say it is the brain's point and I push it in the hope that his thinking might get better as the brain gets stimulated.

How he asked for an anorak from his knapsack

One day he asked for his anorak to be taken out of his rucksack, of course, he did this while being outside with Iveta. He saw her sweater move in the wind and touched it and then

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the rucksack where she put his anorak away before. He also wanted to experience this feeling of something moving on him in the breeze.

How he laughs aloud for prolonged periods

Sometimes he can't stop laughing aloud. It is unnerving, especially when he does this in the morning when we intend to sleep a little longer, particularly during weekends.

But it can get on your nerves even when done during the day. He just laughs and laughs on end. Sometimes a threat of spanking will stop him for a while but he soon resumes the pastime, if I may call it that.

How he rejoiced seeing a garbage truck

We were in a park with him where he did his usual routine of climbing the stairway to heaven, namely the slide and then sliding down and repeating the cycle.

Suddenly a garbage truck stopped by and the men holding to the rear started emptying some garbage cans. On seeing this, Samuel started his dance of joy, waving his body to and fro. One of the garbage men waved him and Samuel smiled and

moved his body to and fro. Garbage truck sure is a simple source of joy, one that "normal" people, especially adult ones can but hardly appreciate and if they can, it is through perfect boys and girls like Samuel.

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How he sang and fervor was seen in his eyes

One day we listened to music and though he only makes sounds and does not speak, I suddenly had this idea that singing might be a way to some words spoken by him and I prompted him to sing. And he smiled and really started signing, although it sounded like aaah, aaah, but it was evident he understood what that meant and I when I praised him for that, there was fervor in his eyes and a sparkle of pride. How difficult it must be for a man when he knows he can do something but at the same time is clearly aware that he just can't.

How he puts on his track suit when he wants to go out

He does this regardless of the fact whether Iveta intends to take him to the playground or not. He can work on it for a very long time until he starts to be nervous. It is quite difficult for him to put one just one leg on as his hands are not as dexterous as with other people who were lucky to be born on time. Sometimes he succeeds and we rejoice with him even if it does not always mean that he is going out right away.

How he wants to be held in ones arms when he hears music he knows

He often does this, however, he has grown quite a bit recently, so we are unable to lift him without risking back injury, so I just kneel down and give him a hug.

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How he brought me tissue when hearing a sad song

Once he brought me a piece of tissue upon hearing an evidently sad song. Like he wanted to say: I'm gonna cry and you would have to wipe my tears. This seemed incredibly cute to me and Iveta. If Samuel is perfect at something, it is feeling. His brain is more on the sentimental than logical side, but what is logic anyway?

How he is going to lose his milk tooth

His milk tooth is loose a bit, perhaps he bumped himself a bit somewhere, considering his diminished motor skills. He often brings tissue to Iveta or me to take it out, as we have done before, but then he shrinks back as it hurts a little. The tooth is not ready to go, I suppose.

How he runs out of the bathroom

After Iveta washes him in the bathtub every evening, he runs out of the bathroom barefoot, running to the kitchen like mad or to some other part of the flat. I rebuke him for running barefoot on the cold tiles, but he only laughs, he is uncontrollable. During a certain period he wanted to be lifted and brought to bed, but he became quite heavy for that, so I do not do it anymore.

How I told him I wanted to listen to his heartbeat

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Once I told him I wanted to listen to his heartbeat as I felt his heart was beating too fast a perhaps he needed some Chamomile tea, but he said no: he turned his head from side to side. But I insisted and he smoothly went from turning his head from side to side to quite a deep bow, which means yes. Then he really allowed me to hear the heartbeat though he doesn't like to be physically restricted in any way; probably a remnant of his experiences while he was in the hospital where they did it many times, I suppose.

How he rejoiced when David came from holiday

His older brother David usually doesn't give a shit as far as Samuel is concerned. Still, when David returned from holiday in Croatia, where he drank more that swam in the sea, as he went with his adolescent friends, he was obviously very happy. He literally came alive. Well, love can be one directional.

How he lifts his leg as a stork

He does this at home, probably because his heel aches because when he is outside, he climbs the slide over and over and he walks and walks ad infinitum, never taking a break. He also climbs over climbing frames, at least those he can handle. When he lifts his leg up, he also touches it, balancing on one foot and he is quite funny to watch.

How lifted him to put him in the bathtub

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I bathed him very rarely, but on one occasion I did it and I lifted him to help him into the bathtub, not realizing he was not a baby anymore. Some kind of lumbago took over me and since then I have not been lifting him anymore.

How he remembered the seaside

We were again in Croatia and when we returned home, the next day he brought swimming suit to Iveta; obviously he liked it there. Also, he saw a bus in the street waiting for the green light and he ran towards him as he thought all buses go to Croatia the same way as all roads lead to Rome. However, he was wrong in this as I might become a Buddhist after reading a particularly interesting book, though I was born a Catholic. By the way, did I tell you calls the sea a Big Water. How do I know that when he does not talk. I just know it.

How his smile resembles a toothless saw

When he lost a few milk teeth, his smile resembled a toothless saw, however, he looked very cute, especially when laughing aloud with his mouth wide open. He oozed pure and simple happiness as happiness can never be complicated. Devil is complicated and he probably caused all this, still, joy may and will appear even in the middle of an unhappy situation. God is greater that all.

How we were afraid his teeth would not grow

His milk teeth started falling out when he was about eight,

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and the new ones just would not grow. We were afraid that something was wrong and that he would have to undergo general anaesthesia, which is never good for these children, as we were told once by a specialist doctor. Iveta cleans his teeth every night lest his teeth would go bad. Again, the dentist would probably be unable to drill without general anaesthesia. Luckily, after some months of waiting, one two lower teeth and one upper finally appeared and we could sigh with relief.

How he discharges snot all the time

We do not know whether this is allergy or weak immunity, but he catches cold so often that I gave him a nickname "Little Snot". Perhaps this sounds derogatory in English, however, in Slovak the name is quite cute.

How he squeaks

When he does not like something, he gives out these ultrasound squeaks. It can be very unpleasant to listen to, especially when you have to concentrate on something. I do mental work at home and it would drive me crazy at times.

However, the other day we looked at pictures in a picture dictionary one of the few activities he is able to do for longer than a minute and he started his ultrasound squeaking for no reason. Well, I am sure he had one I could not know about. The whole situation was quite funny. Imagine me naming

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different things and he pointing with his clumsy fingers at relevant pictures and squeaking in very high tones.

His eyes

I wanted to say a few words about his eyes and the look in them. They emanate awe, incredible depth of infinity and joy at the same time; you can but be fascinated by the look. They are so unlike the look of a "normal" boy, but they immediately possess you; I think they mirror some of the Kingdom of God, a great part of it actually.

How Iveta had a breakdown and he described it afterwards

Owing to an expensive central heating we installed an oven into our flat and started heat with wood. We had measuring devices on the central heating radiators, so we were able to save some money and, moreover, we were warmer.

Then "good" neighbors reported us to authorities and we had to pay various administrative fees that were quite high. One

day a letter came saying we were liable to pay a fine up to 800

euros, which is more than that twice the money Iveta gets in

the form of social benefits. Iveta had a nervous breakdown and as she lied on the tiles in the kitchen crying out a little

pool, Samuel watched it all, though I tried to take him away, he wouldn't go.

Then later, when she was able to come together with the help of our other son David, Samuel was in the kitchen with us and

he touched her nose a few times, which means "to cry", then

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pointed to the floor where she lay and protruded his lower lip,

accentuating the crying element. It was so very cute and sad at the same time that I immediately decided to write it down for you, and I am glad did.

To be continued....

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