

## **Hospital Olympics**

### **BRUSSELS, 9 to 15 May 2009**

**First day, Saturday 9th May, 2009,  
Ljubljana, Jože Pučnik Airport – Brussels**

At 6 am we gathered at the Brnik airport. Some children, such as Domen from Muta, had woken up already at 3 am. From the first moment, all of the children were brave and eagerly looking forward to their new adventure. The parents and adult escorts were concerned about whether everything would go well, and whether we forgot anything. No doubt, they had questions such as “Is everything going to be okay with my child?” “Is it responsible for me to leave my child for a number of days with these people?” “What if something goes wrong?”

Robi was accompanied by his entire extended family, who were on their way to a family celebration. After checking in, Robi said goodbye to all of them and walked to the waiting room with the other participants to await departure. After the pre-departure procedures, we waited a little longer to board the aircraft. For all the pupils except Anne, this was their first flight. The young people courageously dealt with their fears of flying, and when we took off, they immediately began to enjoy the flight.

Adria took good care of Domen and Robi, carefully entering the plane with their wheelchairs. They safely entered the plane first and exited the last.

The flight was quiet and nice, which was not surprising, considering that Robi’s cousin, Iztok, was our pilot. We safely landed in Brussels. The weather was pretty good there, partly cloudy and 10 degrees C.

After landing, we made our way through the long airport corridors with escalators, got our luggage, and joined Robi and Domen with Irene and Tanja.

Our colleagues from Brussels - Christian, Olivier, Isabelle, and Pierre - were already waiting for us at the airport. They demonstrated great hospitality, caring for us well, and preparing a well-planned itinerary, even on the first day.

First, we said goodbye to Anne and her mother, whose relatives were waiting for them to spend two days together. Then we were taken to the location of the former Expo and to the famous Atomium monument, an iron atom, which is also a restaurant with a viewing platform. Pupils and a few adults enjoyed the great view from the platform.

We then continued the journey to the winter royal garden, which belongs to Belgian King Albert II and his Italian wife, Paola. The garden is only open to the public 14 days a year, so there were many visitors. The garden features beautiful flowers, grasses, ferns, bushes, common and exotic trees, all highly cultivated and lush. There is underground heating throughout so the plants can prosper. Although we were tired, at the end of the tour, we were enchanted by an especially enchanting display of flowers at the end. They resembled the waves of the sea and were moved by a special string. When you purchase one flower, you help building a network to prevent child abductions by pedophiles, a crime that has increased recently in Belgium. Since we were in the royal garden, we also used the royal toilets. After each use, the toilet was cleaned and disinfected, as it would be for the queen.

In the park, our Belgian colleagues prepared a picnic for us, which made it easier for us to wait to arrive at our hotel. We also fed the black Belgian crows, probably royal crows, very smart, clever, and very hungry birds!

In the Bruegel hostel, there were some complications with the rooms, but were solved soon.

Our first day demonstrated that we were a really good team that helped each other and demonstrated patience when necessary.

We were a bit late arriving at the comic strip museum, a very beautiful and spacious building (art nouveau). Our brilliant Greek guide shared the secrets of the Belgian comics and their heroes (Tin Tin, Lucky Luc, Smurfs...). We could have stayed at the museum for a week because there are thousands of stories, with each more interesting than the next. Although we were tired, our magical guide was good at keeping our attention.

At 6:30 pm we were ready for dinner at the Belgian hostel and had a well-organized, social meeting. We played the game Electricity, won by Irena, who delighted us with an exceptional song. Although the sun was still shining at 8:30 pm, we decided not to go out because we all needed a good rest. But the skate park across the street looked so attractive...

Anyway, tomorrow is another day... Branka and Sabina prepared a travel book for us for the next day, which looked very interesting.

## **Second day, Sunday 10th, May, 2009**

### **Brussels - Brugges - Damme - Sluis - Cadzand Bad - Knokke-Knokke - Hest - Brussels**

After a good night's sleep, as agreed upon Saturday evening we met for a relaxing breakfast and then gathered in the hostel lobby at 8.45. Christian and his colleagues arrived before 9 to pick us up in two vans; we were thus able to leave Brussels before the rush hour. With the celebration of Europe Day and the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary in the region of Brussels, there were a lot of preparations for celebrations with some streets closing. We were able to drive quickly out of town, but still managed to see an interesting antique shop, which operates every day, and a large multi-cultural marketplace, where you can buy spices from Morocco, Turkey, India, and elsewhere, so you can cook authentic foods from these countries. We noticed that in Brussels an environmentally friendly tram is available as an alternate means of transportation.

We drove north to Brugges, a picturesque town at the channels, often referred to as the Venice of Belgium, because of the channels. As Christian told us, in the 12<sup>th</sup> century, it was a seaport. In this rich city, the locals built extremely beautiful villas, just as in Venice.

Brugges fascinates everyone, even those who have been there many times, including foreigners, natives, younger and older children. It's so nice to walk through the picturesque streets and admire the beautiful, interesting, and almost fairytale-like houses, and dozens of mighty churches. Crossing the channels and entering stores with laces, chocolates, toys, and Christmas decorations also add to the charm. It was pleasant to sit and drink juice or coffee, observing people from around the world admiring beautiful Brugges. We had the opportunity to meet 16 nuns from the monastery, who were attending the baptism of the baby girl, Niobe.

We ate our lunch in the shelter of these fairytale-like houses, and were able to continue our trip. During this time, we drank the famous Domen's drink.

Shortly before leaving Bruges, we visited the magnificent, great Gothic cathedral. The altar of the side ship is adorned with a beautiful Michelangelo statue of the Madonna and Child. It is very realistic – beautiful and gentle, as if not made of stone.

We continued our journey towards the sea. The landscape was becoming similar to the Dutch landscape, completely flat, crossed by a number of channels, with cycling tracks and many cyclists. Near these roads, there were many Dutch windmills. We drove through a typical village, which was very well maintained. Many farms have been transformed into restaurants, but here are still huge fields and pastures, where we saw cows and sheep eating grass. Cows were lying near the water, and Darko came to the conclusion that a swimming test should be administered to the cows!

We arrived in the Netherlands, in the town of Sluis. If Christian hadn't mentioned that we had crossed the border, we would not have noticed. Good thing that Darko caught our crossing in his camera!

Sluis is a very nice town. Just by driving through, we were able to catch its' lively beat. Even though it was Sunday, all of the shops were open, and people were happily crowding the streets, many of them with a red rose in hand, since it was Mother's Day in Belgium.

We continued our way towards the Dutch Sea. We touched the sea in the town of Bad Cadzand; actually, only Tjaša, Branka, and Tanja (Bečan) did. The long, sandy beach, full of shells, was too attractive not to be walked on. The wind was strong and cold, but the sand was hot, so it was really nice. Some of us began to feel cold, so we didn't stay long. This sea cannot compare to the Adriatic coast, but it still left some of us enchanted.

Christian wanted to show us the Belgian sea, so we visited the town of Knokke-Hest. Soon we noticed a difference. The wind was a little cooler and there were more waves. In addition, there were quite a few surfers in the water, less sea shells, and the sand was not as hot. There were large hotels and huge housing blocks, which are used mainly on weekends and during holidays. This is an important difference between the Belgian and Dutch coasts. Christian explained that this is why the Belgian coast is more crowded in summer. But, for some people in our group, especially Tjaša, who enjoyed laying on the sand, the Belgian sea had its charm. Even though it was cold, we still enjoyed ice cream, purchased by Christian.

We hurried on towards Brussels. Our Belgian hosts were a bit concerned about how to return to Brussels because of the Sunday traffic jams, and particularly concerned about how to reach the hostel despite many closed streets and roads. Because we were in a small bus, we were allowed to drive through in spite of roadblocks.

We were very grateful to our Belgian friends, who had been extremely friendly and helpful to us on our second day. We said goodbye at 7 pm and at 7:30 we were ready for an evening stroll through Brussels.

First, we tried a very tasty kebab, chips, waffle, and drink, this time not Nix, but Coca Cola Zero, which is not the same. There is a substantial difference between them. First, one doesn't really exist, the second one does. At this dinner, Tjaša taught us lady-like behavior, including how to drink and eat like a lady; the secret is in the position of the small finger.

After dinner, we walked to the central market of the Brussels Grand Place. It offers a breathtaking view; later, when we returned to the market, the evening lights had been turned on, which made it look even more magical. So not to lose time, we viewed the famous Brussels' boy relieving himself, Menikken Pis. Some of us had previously different expectations and perceptions of the statue, but we all found it to be a nice piece of artwork.

Our way back to the hostel was a little difficult. Partly because of the long and interesting day, and also because Brussels' roads are not really suited to a wheelchair due to cubes, large and small, and high pavements. Thus, driving the trolley or a wheelchair requires great skills, strength and ingenuity, and therefore, is very tiresome.

Due to increased fatigue, we postponed the evening meeting until the following morning after breakfast. Some of the children were disappointed because they eagerly expected playing the game Electricity. But, we had obviously run out of energy.

### **Third day, Monday 11th May, 2009**

#### **Brussels - visit to the European Parliament**

It began to rain Sunday night. As the weather forecasters predicted, on Monday morning it was still raining. The cold, strong wind was not supportive to using an umbrella. As we looked at the gray sky, it made us appreciate yesterday's nice weather. Fortunately, we had planned to be inside much of the day, as our agenda included a visit to the European Parliament.

At Monday morning's meeting, we reviewed the plans for the day. We talked about what it means to visit the European Parliament. It is a great honour, and appropriate behavior, no chewing, careful listening, and only imperceptible yawning were allowed.

Our Belgian hosts, this time Olivier and Bruno, arrived at the hostel at the scheduled time and accompanied us to Parliament. Tanja Babnik had previously arranged this visit with the assistance of her friend, Alenka, who lives in Brussels.

The Belgians brought us in front of the Schuman entrance, but we quickly realized that it was not the European Parliament, but the European Commission. Fortunately, Olivier and Bruno had not left, and after directions from the receptionist, brought us to the right direction. However, the traffic was a bit of a challenge. Brussels has many one-way streets and detours, so we had to drive out of our way to enter the Parliament at the correct entrance. We understood why our Belgian friends were diligently asking us which entrance to the Parliament was the correct one. Directions in Brussels are much more challenging than in Ljubljana.

Under the flags near the Spinelli entrance, Mrs. Alenka was waiting for us. She escorted us into the Parliament. It is a magnificent building, although, as Domen commented, it is not a tall building. Within Parliament, procedures and order prevail. After going through the security X-ray process, we arrived on the 4<sup>th</sup> floor, where we met Mr. Rok Koželj who was in charge of our group.

Through Rok's presentation and a helpful film, we learned organizational components of the European Union and its institutions. Our pupils asked interesting questions and Rok provided detailed, cordial answers. We were proud of our clever pupils, Tjaša, Anna, Darko, and Robi. At the end of the presentation, Rok told us that he is married to an Italian lady with whom he has a son. With their son, his wife speaks Italian and Rok speaks Slovene. Rok has a

demanding schedule, arriving at work at 9 a.m. and not returning home before 6:30 p.m.

Darko mentioned that the work schedule seems a bit crazy.

We learned some interesting facts about Parliament. Each member has only three minutes to speak per discussion. After three minutes, without mercy, the microphone is turned off, and the matter is solved. Darko noted that the member could shout after the microphone is turned off, but Rok explained that this is not correct behavior. Members of the Parliament don't shout, they talk, coordinate, and seek compromises.

We saw cabins in which translators work feverishly during sessions. Indeed, any member may speak in their own language. We noticed that »slovenščina« was written on one cabin, and on another, »slovenčina«. With only one different letter, it is easy to mistake Slovenia and Slovakia!

We were not able to meet with the MPs from Slovenia.

On June 7, the European Parliament elections would be held. A week ago, all current member terms expired, so empty seats were waiting for the newly elected members. Rok encouraged Darko to go to the European elections.

In Brussels, important decisions that impact Slovenia are efficiently taken care of, as Rok explained.

Did Rok convince Darko to take part in the elections?

Although we should have left the Parliament at noon, we were there until 1:30 p.m. Therefore, our Belgian friends had been waiting for us for quite awhile. However, we were able to notify them by cell phone of our delay. We thanked Rok and gave him the Olympic mascot (fish) and an Olympic T-shirt. We explained to him why we were in Belgium, a bit about the hospital Olympics, and how long we had been working with the Belgians. He listened attentively and asked many questions. He promised to hold his fits for our Olympic team the next day.

Despite a long delay, the day ended well. As our host hospital teachers know, plan A is rarely possible; it is always necessary to have a plan B, as well as a plan C. According to plan M, we drove to Pizza Hut, where we had a good meal. With full stomachs, we were taken to our hostel.

The weather had changed during our visit to the Parliament. The sun was shining and the temperature was warmer, 20 degrees. The Belgians had planned a visit to a leisure park, but plan B did not work. We needed a little rest, and quite a few of our school children enjoyed a pleasant afternoon nap.

Some of us had previously agreed to go for a walk through the city center, the others decided to visit the skate park across the street. So we did. Domen was able to purchase his cards and the saucers, and others enjoyed watching the diabolical tricks of the skaters so much that we visited the park again after dinner. The skate park is a showplace for talents, so our Tjaša and Anna started to sing and dance. Darko tried the cha cha with Tanja, but they were not able to follow Barbara and Irena. Darko was enchanted by the dancer, who was eagerly, persistently, and especially elegantly dancing in the skate park.

As it became a little cooler, we returned to the hostel and agreed to have a meeting to discuss the next day's agenda, when we entered our competitions.

After the meeting, we played the game Electricity, which Domen had been waiting for impatiently. Robi was the big winner. Irena then invited us for a Picnic, a very interesting game, in which some thinking is necessary. She demonstrated how well-developed her sense of smell is, and we could not figure out how this was possible. We doubled up in laughter.

Later, we had some short phone calls, but the connections were not the best. Sabina taught us the game, Straight and Cross, and Darko did an excellent demonstration.

Since the activities of the following day were very important, we needed a good night's rest and had no choice but to finish the meeting and get some sleep.

#### **Fourth day, Tuesday, May 12, 2009**

##### **Brussels, St. Luc, Paediatrics, Ecole L'Escala - Hospital Olympics**

Olivier and Bruno were supposed to pick us at 8 a.m. However, due to a morning traffic jam, they arrived a little later. Nevertheless, we arrived at the huge hospital, St. Luc, on time. We could hardly wait to begin our games – the hospital Olympics.

St. Luc is so large, that as Olivier explained, patients and visitors are guided to the appropriate departments by hospital volunteers. We arrived at the junior ward just before the start of the hospital Olympics. Immediately, we recognized the concerned looks on the teachers faces, hoping all of the events would go well. Having coordinated hospital Olympics many times before, the Slovene teachers understood exactly how they were feeling. Even though we did not have much space, we tried to prepare our teams without inconveniencing our host teachers. We understood space problems, as space was also an issue in our old hospital.

After a short ceremony with words of welcome, we met the Secretary-General of the Slovenian Embassy in Brussels, Ms. Mateja Kobav, who was invited by L'Ecole Escale. She gave us delicious Belgian chocolates. Robi brought the Olympic flame from Slovenia, gave it to the Belgian pupil, we sang the anthem of the hospital and the games started. At the start of the games, participants signed an oath of fair play and received the cards that indicated which team they were in (red, blue, black, yellow). Participants competed individually, and monitoring the results was a challenging work.

Competitions were in four games:

- Targeting the Olympic circles and catching from them,
- Tobogan bowling,
- Targeting the desktop panel through openings,
- Targeting Triglav with rings.

Games were conducted in four rooms, so competitors had to move around. At the end of the games, we gathered in one room for the presentation of Olympic medals.

Our pupils won four medals: Darko, Robi, Tjaša and Anna, each in one game. Medals were delivered by the principle doctor, Mrs. Mateja from the Embassy, and Tanja Bečan. All of the participants were awarded certificates.

The games, including the concepts for the competition, were very well thought out. The preparations were well organized, and the Belgian pupils learned a lot about Slovenia. In many classrooms, we noticed carefully prepared posters of Slovenia. In the poem that was read at the end of the Olympic games, they mentioned Triglav, which was also included in one of the games. This was touching and enchanting to all of us.

The games themselves seemed to take place very quickly. Our Belgian colleagues were pleased to have their main clinic director in attendance, because it happened for the first time. This meant a lot to them, as it would mean a lot to us in Ljubljana.

Unfortunately, our pupils couldn't talk much with their Belgian friends due to language barriers. Also, some patients were so ill that they had to go to their rooms soon after the games.

But we cheered for everyone, and there was a nice spirit of competition. Our pupils assisted other competitors as well as organizers.

At the Olympics, it is important to take part, but if there is no medal at the end, some of the competitors are very disappointed. Also, in the Belgian hospital Olympics, some of the pupils were going through difficult times of grief. But we know that going through grief makes us stronger, and we can easily survive the future storms of life.

After the games we thanked and congratulated the organizers on successfully planned games. And they thanked us, because we brought them a lot of joy, laughter and good will. We enjoyed the words of thanks and praise; so in return we sang them two or three songs.

Then we went to lunch in the huge dining room of this large hospital. After lunch, we had planned to take a sightseeing tour that was arranged by the teachers from the Belgian hospital school. However, due to rain and strong winds, along with our fatigue, the trip was shortened. As always, we had an additional plan.

We took a short walk through Brussels, and looked at the famous Brussels street gallery, a covered and very elegant interior street. At the Grand Place, the Belgian hospital teacher from L'Ecole Escale explained some background information about the famous historical buildings on the market and told us three legends of the Manikken Pis.

A special surprise de luxe followed; we were taken to the famous Neuhaus chocolate store, where we eagerly tried delicious Belgian chocolates. We were given the task to try to locate a specific building at Grand Place. Anna was the first to locate the building while the others were enjoying chocolate packets. By then, it was raining cats and dogs, so we cut our walk short.

Being rather tired from our busy day, we decided to rest in the hostel for an hour and a half. The welcome break passed quickly. That evening we had to prepare our dinner, so we bought food suitable for an evening snack. Tanja Babnik, Sabina, Branka, and Katarina along with the help of Darko and Anna, did an excellent job of putting the meal together, and we enjoyed a delicious dinner in the hostel.

While they shopped for dinner, some of us stayed in the hostel and played the game One. Later that evening, we wrote and signed postcards. After dinner, we had an official meeting to discuss the next day's agenda. We sang the Olympic and national anthems, as well as a few other songs.

We decided to appear the next two days in our elegant, dark blue T-shirts, donated to us by Association Kros.

Darko was asleep on the couch, so it seemed appropriate to conclude the meeting. The show of Impro League was really nice – Anna, Tjaša and Domen performed the school scene Cheating. Irena and Barbara were great twins, together with Anna and Tjaša. After a few more songs, it was time to retire for the evening. Tomorrow we need to get up a little earlier and compete again.

## **Fifth day, Wednesday May 13, 2009**

### **Brussels, St. Luc, Child Psychiatry, L'Ecole Escale, Sport games**

The hostel is becoming increasingly full, making it somewhat challenging to find space in the breakfast room. However, we were able to eat there.

Afterwards, we met at the reception desk at 8:25 a.m. Olivier was waiting for us and noticed our beautiful T-shirts. We surprised him by giving him the same T-shirt. Later, as a thank-you gift, we also presented our Belgian friends with the same T-shirts.

Because we were running a little late, Olivier drove Irena, Katarina, and the children in his van to get to the games on time. The others waited for Christian's van. We all arrived at the hospital simultaneously. The route you take in Brussels can be crucial to arriving at your destination on time.

At the child psychiatry ward, everyone was ready for our arrival. We were divided into four groups. Our group engaged in conversation with the Belgian children and moved from one group to another. Today there were no competitions scheduled, just socializing and participating in non-competitive games. The sport games were enjoyable and entertaining. We took part in polygon, boxing, basketball, and sabacan.

Polygon, which was located on the terrace, involved driving a wheelchair around obstacles; this included driving backwards, circling the obstacles, and throwing a ball to a marked place. The children alternately drove the wheelchairs. Although the tasks were simple, they were fun. It was sometimes a challenge to turn the wheelchair around the obstacles and to keep to the marked trails.

Boxing was fun because of the exceptional boxing teacher. It involved the child's taking a peg from an opponent's clothes, putting on gloves, and boxing with a teacher.

Basketball meant more than just throwing the ball into the basket. First there were warm-ups, then dribbling, and finally throwing. The challenge for the pupil was following the teacher's instructions. Although this might seem quite simple, it was not necessarily so. It could be difficult to stand in line, go for the ball, hit the basket from one side first, and only then start throwing from the other side; simple but difficult at the same time.

Sabacan entailed using a device for blowing arrows used to perforate balloons. Quite a few competitors were able to break the balloons with a loud crack. This requires the right blowing technique and an adequate lung capacity. We played this game in the classroom and had very strict rules. Competitors could only sit on designated competition chairs; to prevent accidents, they were not allowed to move around the room. Everyone sat peacefully, as instructed.

After the second game, there was a short break for beverages and rest. Due to language barriers, we were not able to have deep conversations with the Belgian children. Also, some of the Belgian children were very young and had serious health problems. However, little Morgan found our Tjaša, and for quite some time, stayed on Tjaša's lap.

After the games, we all went to a special, beautiful room where we were served delicious sandwiches and Coca Cola. We sang two songs to the Belgian children and their teachers, and then waved them goodbye.

We noticed that the hospital teachers in this department had very difficult work; they all seemed quite tired. Each child requires one-on-one attention, and even if the patient has the most serious problems, he or she should be integrated into the activities of the department. This is not always easy to accomplish, as we noticed in our three-hour visit there. But, hospital teachers never give up. As Gil said, the job of a hospital teacher is not an easy one, and not for everyone.

Olivier and Bruno drove us back to the hostel. However, it was 1 p.m., and the hostel is closed from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m., at which time no one is to be in the building, so we went for ice cream and coffee, followed by a short afternoon meeting in the skate park.

We agreed to rest in our rooms from 2 p.m. – 3:15 p.m. and then go shopping in small groups in the city. At 6:30 p.m., we planned to meet outside the dining room in the hostel for dinner. At our evening meeting, we shared stories of our successful shopping expeditions, that included well-thought-out purchases. Everyone had an enjoyable afternoon. Tjaša, Ana, Domen, and Darko showed us their purchases. Domen mentioned that he had quite enough shopping. We had already spent a lot of money. Domen even mentioned the possibility of selling some of his purchases! A number of our children bought souvenirs of the famous Belgian boy, Menniken-Pis. We were surprised to hear that our pupils remembered all three legends about him.

Tomorrow would be a very busy day, so we decided to stay up until 9 p.m., and then go to sleep. We had one homework assignment, before tomorrow's dinner, to write our impressions of the week that we spent together.

We also played our most popular game, Electricity, but soon became tired. Thus, the one who dropped out of the game went straight to bed. The pupils tried to eliminate the older ones from the game first, but the plan didn't work. As I dropped out of the game towards the end, but not at the end, I didn't know for sure who was the last to leave; I think that honour belonged to Robi.

### **Sixth day, 14th May 2009, Brussels, Rehabilitation center Lennox, Games**

At 8 a.m., our friends, Olivier and Bruno were waiting for us. They drove us to the Lennox Rehabilitation Center, about 30 km from Brussels. The drive was a bit of a challenge because of extensive roadwork.

The Lennox Rehabilitation Center was built in 1972. Belgian society at the time believed that those who are little different should be kept out of view from ordinary people. The Center is located in the middle of a forest, in a beautiful, idyllic setting. There is room at the Center for 80 adults and 80 children. The school that operates within the center employs 15 teachers. When we arrived, we immediately noticed the different sports venues, but did not yet quite understand what the venues would entail. First, we had to register. Then, all participants were divided into three large groups, which moved from venue to venue. We competed in disc toss, frisbee toss, cycling, and bow shooting. Two additional games - long jump and high jump were also prepared. Darko took part in later.

Disc toss required throwing a disc as far as possible between two labeled trees. There were several discs, each of a different weight. Because these discs were very heavy, it seemed to be extremely difficult. But, our Olympic competitors bravely participated against very tall and strong young men.

Frisbee toss required aiming to hit either a tree or a circle. For the tree version, hitting the closest tree earned 10 points, the medium-distance circle 20 points, and the furthest tree 50 points. The other circle version, hitting the closest circle earned 10 points, the medium-distance circle 20 points, and the furthest circle 50 points. After a little practice, we were able to get the frisbees to fly quite far. Although we tried hard, as mentioned previously, there were taller, stronger guys that were able to throw harder. However, their frisbees flew past all the trees to the parked cars ( I think the cars belonged to the teachers), so their total points were actually no better than ours.

Cycling was funny, but a little dangerous, at least for me. The children and adolescents were able to select from simple bikes, trikes, and specially adapted bikes. They rode along the marked route, made a sharp turn, and then went downhill, so it was necessary to have some skills. Most importantly, Domen, Tjaša, Anna, Robi, and Darko ended their route happily,

without incident, although they rode very fast. Barbara and Irena enjoyed cycling in tandem. In the class »elegance competition« they were certainly the best.

Bow shooting was led by two experienced sportsmen. One of them knew our Kranjska Gora, as he has already visited it. This sport requires strict discipline due to the use of arrows. Therefore, a very determined lady took care of us. Bow shooting is not easy and everyone got a short lesson on shooting techniques. Our children, including Katarina, turned into real Robin Hoods.

During the course of the games, there were some breaks in the competition. This provided opportunities for Darko to meet with the Belgian girls. He missed the lunch and even the gala awards to our team, which was rewarded with medals. Our team returned with a total of nine medals.

After the awards and Darko's farewell to his Belgian girlfriends, we went to the school that no longer works within the Ecole L'Escale. It is a school that was created in 2005 at the initiative and with the great efforts of parents. The school has a total of 52 children, handicapped and with other problems. This school includes a kindergarten, and the parents are now trying to establish a high school. Even though the school is quite large, they are running out of space with so many children and activities.

Our nurse, Katarina, was somewhat shocked to see a small room where a nurse performs all her duties.

We met some pupils who showed us their nice drawings which they created with their tutor, Patricia, an artist, who is one of many volunteers regularly assisting teachers in the school. There are not enough teachers to work one-on-one with the students, and each child requires their own teacher. Thus, the volunteers play a very important role.

The Belgian school children were interested in finding out our names and ages. They also wanted to know about our country and why we came to Belgium. They eventually found out that we were very tired! This meant it was time to end the visit because we were all like sleepy flies!

Unfortunately, we did not see the city of Louvain le Neuve, a special place, built in the middle of fields around the new university. This school was established because the Flemish University prohibited the study of French. Houses around the University were built strictly to house the student population. Since the community was dead during the holidays, other inhabitants began to settle in the area. This is now the youngest Belgian artificial city, a city without cars (all cars are parked in an underground garage).

When we arrived in Brussels, storm was raging, so it was a miracle that on the short way from the van to the hostel, we were not completely wet, only poor Olivier was soaked.

After arriving at the hostel, we rested an hour or so and then started socializing.

We decided to prepare our last supper alone. Tanja (Babnik), Sabina and Branka went shopping and we started daydreaming, talking, and playing games, including Electricity.

Dinner was delicious. Afterwards, it was our last evening together and our last meeting.

Even if we had considered a large party for the last evening, the timing was not right. Some of us were already thinking about re-connecting with our families, and others were tired. We said some nice things about our roommates, and then finished our evening by playing the game Electricity. The game based on »falling out« and once again, the younger team was much more successful than the older one.

We were a bit sad because our week was ending. We will always remember it fondly in our hearts; in this week, we strengthened our ties, made new friends, and new supporters.

We agreed to meet the next morning at 9:30 a.m. at the reception desk to collect linens, towels, and keys. Our Belgian friends wanted to take us to the aquarium and then after lunch to the airport. The Belgian airport is huge, and check-in takes a lot longer than at our Brnik. We need a lot of energy to endure the lines at the airport!

Tanja (Bečan) praised Darko, Anna, Robi, and Tjaša. We were this week often very proud of them throughout the week; they are exceptional boys and girls. They were respectful and playful, serious and undemanding, always ready to help each other. During the sports competitions, they played with all their hearts and competed fairly. They listened carefully to all interpretations and explanations. Now they know a lot about Belgium and Brussels. These are really exceptional teenagers.

Tanja (Bečan) thanked all the co-workers - Irena, Tanja (Babnik), Katarina, Branka, and Sabina; they were a great team. This was also confirmed by our pupils, who always felt comfortable with us.

For our Belgian friends, we designed a special thank-you card, which was decorated by Tjaša and Anna.

### **Seventh day, May 15th 2009, Brussels - Ljubljana**

The morning started as planned, but then the hostel's elevator broke! We had already carried a few suitcases downstairs. But, it was a great relief when the elevator was repaired.

At the reception desk, we returned all linens, towels, and keys. Olivier and Bruno were waiting for us. We had to strategically pack our luggage in the vans, which filled the vehicles to capacity.

Before we started, we thanked Olivier for the hospitality, including all of the assistance from the Belgian hospital teacher. Although Olivier always seemed a bit strict, we noticed that he was touched by our words.

That day, Brussels' trade unions organized manifestations, so there were some additional road closures. Therefore, the way to the aquarium was not easy.

When arrived to the aquarium, we noticed a normal residential neighborhood. Once inside, a nice lady explained many secrets from the world of fish. She instructed us to be quiet, not to come too close to the fish, and not to take any flash photography.

We learned how fish breathe, breed, and feed. We viewed fish that change colour, goldfish, fish that look below and above the water, and fish that kill insects by spitting.

Our guide showed us colorful frogs, which are very toxic. She explained why fish are different colors, why we should take care of nature, and the importance of balance in nature. If fish die, they will not eat more insects and so on. Though we did not see dolphins, whales or sharks at this aquarium, it was a very interesting experience.

Continuing on, we visited a large shopping center, not to shop, but to have lunch. Then it was time to depart for the airport.

It started raining again, at times quite heavily. Being Friday afternoon, there was a lot of traffic on the bypass road. However, we managed to arrive at the airport before 4 p.m.

Anna's mother joined us at the airport. We were surprised by our friend Luka, who also stopped by with his one-year-old twins. While we were helping the twins with their snacks, our check-in line opened, and we had to say goodbye.

Christian was not able to come to the airport because of a school inspection (the inspector wanted to know a lot); so he wished us happy flight by text message.

It was two waiting hours before we were able to board our plane. We had to wait in line before our hand luggage was inspected. The lines were long and the luggage inspections were precise. The inspection machine was whistling all the time. We had to open our bags. Branka forgot that she had bottled coffee in a bag, and they took deodorant from Anna's mother. We rushed to door 51 A, but then found out that the departure was moved to door 63 A. We had to rush to door 63 A and fortunately made it. We sat down in the airplane with a sign of relief that we had finally made it.

Although Robi's cousin, Iztok was not piloting our plane, we had a nice flight that seemed very fast. We actually spent more time in the lines at the airports than in the air!

We landed on schedule at 8:10 p.m. in Ljubljana. The same rainy weather with 16 degree temperatures greeted us.

As agreed upon earlier, our Olympic champions wore their medals around their necks. Before we met with our families, we gathered once more as a happy group, singing together, »Slovenia, Where Your Beauties Come From«. The song was not very powerful, because we were all a bit emotional about seeing our relatives again. Therefore, it was time to hug them and start sharing our travel stories.

Tanja (Bečan)

Tjaša Gorše

I most enjoyed going to the sea and to Brugge. It was a very cool time! Although it was a nice time, I looked forward to going home. I have overcome the fear of flying, so I will travel farther distances in the future only by plane. I received a 3rd place medal and am happy for this success. I had good roommates, Anna and Tanja Babnik. We were a good team. I was never bored. Branka often laughed and made me laugh! We went to the European Parliament and viewed the mannequin Pis. Another interesting place was the skate park next to our hostel. I enjoyed the skate park a great deal. Our Belgian friends were hospitable and friendly; without them we would have had trouble finding anything, and we wouldn't have had such a good time. I will always remember this trip.

Domen Kaiser

It was nice to be able to go to the city several times and to shop. It was interesting to visit the Belgian and Dutch seas, Brussels, and Bruges. The roofcovered Brussels street was special, as was the Atomium, and the Hospital Olympics were especially interesting and fun.

Anna Andolšek Bloomstrand

The trip to Brussels evoked special memories for me because Brussels is my birthplace. During our visit, we walked a lot, but we were pleasantly tired. We saw the European Parliament, Grand Place, and other areas of interest. At the hospital Olympics, I was very happy to receive a medal. The two visits to the skate park were great fun. Our Brussels friends were friendly and hospitable. I will always remember socializing with the group and seeing the sights in Brussels.

Robi Bojanec

When we arrived in Brussels, we were kindly greeted by nice Olympic games hosts. They drove us to see the famous Atom, and we went to the museum, which I really liked. We also visited the European Parliament. The following day the Olympic games started, and we did a pretty good job.

Darko Kraner

It was great to socialize with children who have similar problems to ours. I am proud of our assistants, who were very nice to us and we had fun, whatever we did.