

Question & Answers with Jim Lukach

- Can you tell us what the book is about?

JL: *Lost Inside the Happy Noise* is about my time living and teaching in Slovakia right after the fall of Communism. It was a time of great change in Europe and also for me. It is a collection of essays/stories about the people I knew, the places I went and my day-to-day life in and out of school.

- How would you sum the book up?

JL: Loss, beer, but ultimately it is about love.

- Why did you write the book?

JL: I don't think that I would be exaggerating to say that for the past ten years I have been haunted by my experience in Slovakia. I don't want to suggest that writing *Lost Inside the Happy Noise* was a way to make sense of everything—because it doesn't—but writing and the creative process were the best ways that I had of dealing with it. Layered on top of the personal are a bunch a wacky, off-beat moments that could have only happened there—wild boar hunting safaris, being thrown into the middle of theater festival with an impromptu performance and classroom moments with people who never met an American before.

- Is that why you chose to write *Lost Inside the Happy Noise* as a collection rather than a straight narrative where Jim arrives in Slovakia, Jim lives, loves, drinks beer and then he comes home?

JL: Definitely. I couldn't stand the idea of writing traditional narrative. It would make the entire experience seem so final. I don't think I could I have written the words, "The End." And besides, my time there was filled with so many highs, lows and unreal moments that they could only fit into an essay/story form.

- So are they stories or are they essays?

JL: Yes...I like to think that they are essays with fictional elements, but some of the pieces are definitely fiction that read like essays or memoir—if that makes any sense. Take the story, *Hlavna Stanica-Kuty, Slovakia* for example. The kernel of the story—Dave and I losing an afternoon at a train station drinking beer and watching our train leave seven times is true, that happened. Paul telling the story about Africa is true, but it was told several times during different situations. And the character of Sasha, the dark-haired woman is completely fictional. As an aside, the real end to that story is that

we finally got on a train going to Bratislava, drinking the whole way until we arrived at Em's birthday party where I immediately vomited.

- Nice...Who are your influences?

JL: From the American side, I'd have to say Barry Lopez and Annie Dillard. The way Lopez explores the natural landscape blows my mind and I'd like to go to the same places on the internal landscape. And Annie Dillard for the seemingly simple way her writing illuminates the world. On the fictional side I like the genre bending Europeans like W.G. Sebald and the Dutch writer Cees Nootboom and Peter Esterhazy. I have no idea what to call their books—novels, history, non-fiction? I love it.

- So what's next?

JL: I'd like to do something about Milltown where I grew up. I'm doing some research into that now—leaning more towards fiction with essay/documentary elements rather than the approach I took with *Lost Inside the Happy Noise*. I also want to take a return trip to Senica. I need a dose of Petra cigarettes and some real beer.