

Marek Slaby lived with Richard Parkers during past year

Polish student completes his high school studies

by Phil Conger

Persons attending the South Harrison graduation on May 15 may not have been familiar with one of the names on the commencement program.

Marek Slaby, an exchange student from Poland, was one of the 50 graduating seniors who received diplomas that afternoon from School Board President Charles McKinny.

For Marek, the walk across the stage completed a successful journey through the American educational system and a primer course on life in the United States.

Slaby, who comes from the Baltic port city of Swinoujscie on the Baltic sea, got off to a rather rough start upon his arrival in America to begin his final year of high school. Slaby left Poland before he could be told that his Bethany host family had moved from the South Harrison school district and he did not have a place to stay.

Slaby had been given a photograph of the family with whom he planned to live during the 1993-94 school year and had thought they would be waiting for him when he arrived at Kansas City International airport.

"I kept looking around the airport for a face that I had seen in the picture,"

Marek said, but his expected host family was not there.

Instead, Marek was met by a representative from the sponsoring American-Scandinavian Student Exchange program (ASSE) who explained the situation and said arrangements were being made for him to stay with another family while attending school at South Harrison.

Bethany residents Richard and Karen Parker were contacted and agreed to host Marek's stay in America. As it turns out, the Parkers were a perfect match for Marek who has aspirations to go on to law school following his graduation. Richard Parker is the associate circuit judge of Harrison County.

The ten months Marek has spent in the United States represented a dramatic change for the Polish exchange student. Marek describes his hometown as a "small city" of 50,000 population whose main industries are tourism, fishing and a bustling shipyard.

Swinoujscie's location on the Baltic sea, which is warmed by South American currents, makes it a prime spot for tourism. Some 6 million visitors come to the city each year to enjoy the town's relatively mild climate. Marek's father, a retired member of the

Marek Slaby, right, believes that European schools are tougher than American schools, but U.S. students have more variety in courses.



Polish army, runs a travel agency, and an import business.

Marek's family resides in an apartment house located on an island about two miles from the German border. "I had to use a ferry to get to school," the exchange student says, adding that one of his main high school activities was sailing.

Marek grew up in Poland when the former communist nation was under-

going a transition to a free society. Because of his age, he only dimly remembers the Polish uprisings against Poland's communist government.

"I remember tanks in the street," he said, "but it's like a dream."

Like other students who attended Polish schools during the years when Poland was behind the Iron Curtain, Marek was required to learn the Rus-

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