



## Interview with Petr Havel, founder of the Naše voda web portal

**Mr. Havel, at our last meeting, you said you started out as a drummer in a big beat band and you also wrote lyrics. How long is the journey from music to water management and environmental protection?**

It is, of course, a long journey and has been lined with a number of unrepeatable coincidences and life situations, which ultimately resulted in the “transformation” of the lyricist and poet into a journalist. In this profession, I went through a range of positions – from regular journalist to editor-in-chief – as well as a variety of media from radio, press, internet portals to social networks, which I consider very important because each position and each type of media have represented a different inspiring experience that I try to make the most of.

**In the meantime, however, you also worked in a bakery. What does the logistics of delivery bring to a young man’s life?**

A lot, actually! For example, the need to plan and create some (delivery) strategy, in which, at the same time, it is necessary to leave room for improvisation according to the development of the situation, which is actually true for life in general. However, it was also a great school of communication, as the number of people I came in contact with on a daily basis included virtually all types of personalities and behaviour. Each required a slightly different approach in order to reach the desired agreement, if possible, for all parties. Such an experience is always useful, and in journalism in particular.

**How does these practical knowledge and activities combine with poetry and literature? You also take part in many book projects, you write poems and have a collection in samizdat, you performed in Viola Theatre – is it**

**a kind of regression and purification from the not very romantic reality of today’s state of nature?**

I started writing poetry mainly because, after I got married, I finished with music and I lacked contact with the cultural environment. Therefore, I participated in various literary competitions (surprisingly for me, very successfully), which eventually resulted in the author’s theatre of poetry and public reading of my texts, including Viola Theatre. At that time, I wrote mainly about Prague, which was unusual in a way, and therefore perhaps successful. However, I wrote about nature as well, again in a romanticized way, but also with the aim of improving the then state of the environment and because, for me, nature has always represented relaxation and a certain escape from the anonymity and hecticness of the city.

**What made you set up the Naše voda web portal eleven years ago? And how strong was the competition in the market then?**

It was, in a way, a logical reflection on the topics of agriculture and the environment, which I specialized in as a journalist. There, I would repeatedly come across the topic of water, water quality, resources and uses, but also very little public awareness of water. Even today, many people take it for granted because it flows from the tap, and apart from the price of water or the amount of water in wells, the actual topic is not very interesting for them. Having said that, this partly changed after our country had been negatively affected by several consecutive dry years. However, the Naše voda portal was created before that, in 2011. Therefore, the competition was not very great at that time, especially in terms of the topic of water, which we try to perceive comprehensively and in context on our portal. Most websites on water only follow a section of this issue, either according to professional interests

and priorities, or they consider the topic of water as a sort of marketing strategy, or they even use it to promote lobbying interests.

**So now you are the creator of the most watched portal on water in the Czech Republic. When you see the numbers of followers, are you proud of yourself?**

I would be lying if I said I wasn't. When my colleague and I were launching the portal, I didn't think we would reach thousands of hits a day and, along with our portal's Facebook page, tens of thousands of hits a month. At that time, my main goal was to create a media product in our market which everyone claimed to be beneficial, but no one did it in practice. I didn't intend to do it either, but my belief in the importance of online news and raising awareness about water as a whole ultimately made me make a voluntary commitment that actually takes a lot of my time. But I don't regret it.

**You said that Naše voda is actually a family business. Do you really have no employees or collaborators? Is it manageable?**

The content is mainly the work of me and my wife, who takes photos and makes water-related videos. We still have a fellow colleague – co-founder, but he is not an employee. It is very time consuming, especially due to illustrative and documentary photographs from the field, but photographs increase the attractiveness of texts and can often attract attention better than text. Fortunately, a large number of water organizations send us their press releases, which we reprint without editing so that there are no interpretive shifts. In any case, when you enjoy what you do, it is a pleasure.

**You mentioned that you already have 150,000 photos...**

In reality, we have even more photos in the family archive. Many of them are not on the website; we would flood it with data and slow it down for users. With a few exceptions, their author is my wife Nina Havlová.

**Your portal has a very wide range of topics. You will find everything from the government's programme statement on agriculture and the environment, negotiations on Turów in Poland and the issue of power stations, to ponds, Czech strawberry growers, and news about weather, floods and the like. There is also practical advice on how to choose an economical washing machine or when not to leave the house due to wind. Do you consult with anyone about the choice of topics?**

The choice of topics is up to me; I intuitively try to follow what seems important to me and at the same time is somehow associated with water. The breadth of topics can be unnecessarily large for someone, but the goal of this tactic is for as many people as possible who visit the site or follow it regularly to find some interesting information on Naše voda portal.

**You are also very active in agriculture – you have been an advisor to several agriculture ministers, including Mr. Jurečka. Do you remember what you really managed to win as an advisor, what you helped to achieve, for example?**

I saw these activities more as an attempt to provide politicians, if interested, with some feedback – either from agricultural practitioners who, for some reason, were not heard or did not have the opportunity, or from the non-agricultural public. However, I was also actually involved in some of the measures taken, such as rejecting efforts to "double tax" ponds when talking about water, or limiting the complete destruction of bee colonies during bee plague. However, it was always in cooperation with people who had the same opinion on the solution to the problem as I did.

**Do you not think that the protection of the environment and biodiversity, the effort to retain water in the landscape, support of regional farmers, the fight against bark beetle and erosion, etc., are promised at the beginning by every government?**

Of course, those are long-term "sexy" topics. However, their importance is growing not only in theory but also in practice, and I must say that much has changed for the better, for example in the area of water retention in the landscape. A lot of it is not visible at first glance, so the public often feels that nothing is changing for the better. I am convinced that there is still a lot to improve in the Czech Republic in landscape protection, as well as the attitude to agriculture and forestry, but it is not that nothing is happening. Among others, Naše voda portal ([www.nase-voda.cz](http://www.nase-voda.cz)) is about the fact that something is happening.

**As a journalist working for years in water management and ecology, how do you take, for example, the news that a car park will be built in Jablonec instead of the planned wastewater treatment plant?**

The construction of new or the reconstruction of existing wastewater treatment plants should be one of the highest strategic priorities in terms of water and water quality management anywhere and at any time. This is also because the demands on water quality are constantly growing, and not only drinking water. The later this problem is addressed at the national and local level, the more expensive it will be, regardless of the potential health risks.

**In the last issue of VTEI, we published an interview with the Minister of the Environment, Anna Hubáčková, where we talked, among other things, about one of her announced priorities, which is the protection of drinking water. Have you offered the new Minister cooperation with your water portal?**

So far, there has not been opportunity for it, and it is not just up to me either. I am personally prepared to cooperate online with anyone sensible, because meaningful communication can be a means of meaningful problem solutions, if people listen to each other.

*Thank you for your useful work on the Naše voda web portal and for the time you spent with our interview.*

**Mgr. Zuzana Řehořová**

## Petr Havel

Petr Havel, born on 19 April 1956, is an agrarian analyst dealing with agriculture, the environment, forestry, and water management. He has been working in media since 1994. He was involved in the creation of information portals such as [agris.cz](http://agris.cz) and [foodnet.cz](http://foodnet.cz), and for many years he worked in the management of the Club of Agricultural Journalists and Publicists. At present, he is a member of IFAJ (International Federation of Agricultural Journalists). In 2010, he received the Antonín Švehla Foundation Award for defending democracy and the peasant state. In 2011, he founded the news and education portal Naše voda, of which he is a co-owner and editor-in-chief. As a co-author, he participates in various publications, such as *Krajina a voda* and *Půda a život civilizací*, whose main author is Václav Cílek. Petr Havel is married and has two children.

