

Ruth Halova In Grade 1



This is my Grade 1 photo. It was taken in Cesky Krumlov in 1932.

Uncle Max, Dad's brother, who after our father's death became our guardian, made a wise decision, and put us into a German school. One reason was for us to really learn German properly, but our uncle also used to say that anti-Semitism is much more noticeable in German institutions than in Czech ones - and so it would be best for us to get used to it as early as possible. As it turned out, our uncle was right, but only later; in the beginning I didn't perceive anything like that.

I began attending German elementary school, and fell in love with my teacher, Miss Martha Nehybova. She was young, beautiful, and wore her long black hair braided in a ponytail on the nape of her neck. Besides that, she was also kind, truthful, just and noble, and I think that we absorbed more human values in that first school year than in the next several decades.

Martha died no long ago; when I visited her once, she remembered how once long ago my grandma had pleaded with her to talk to me, so that I'd start eating breakfast. Because grandma knew that whatever my teacher told me was holy to me, and because I was a skinny child, that looked forward to school so much in the morning that it refused to eat breakfast, she told Miss Nehybova about it. Martha then really did mention in front of me that eating breakfast is good, so I began eating breakfast, and a few days later Grandma again appeared at the school to thank her.

I had not even a clue about this episode, I didn't find out about it until now. After the war, Martha and her family were deported. I think it was precisely to Sudeten Germans such as these that our former president Havel's apology for the deportations belonged.