

The Polak Family



This photograph was taken in the 1930s, most likely in Caslav, and shows my grandfather Hynek Polak (the man in the hat in the middle of the picture); sitting beside him is my aunt, Stefi Alterova, my uncle Jiri Alter's wife. Standing in the upper row at the left is my mother, Helena Polakova, and to the right of her is my aunt Marie Krausova, who wasn't much older than my mother, but turned gray early, so seemed older. My grandfather on my father's side, Hynek Polak, was born in 1860 in Jicin. He graduated from business academy and devoted his entire life to business; he and Grandma owned a shop where they sold liquor. His son, Bedrich Polak, and his wife Greta also had a store in the same building in Jicin. His other son, my uncle Josef, had a daughter Hana, who died in the Holocaust, and Vera, who survived the war. We used to go to Jicin to visit my grandparents, but I don't remember it that much, I was still very small. My grandparents were believers, but observed Jewish holidays more out of tradition, as some sort of folklore. They practiced, but we never really talked about it much. I do know that my father used to go to the synagogue, because it was necessary for ten adult men to meet, meaning men that had had their bar mitzvah, so that they could have a minyan for prayer. My grandmother, Helena Polakova, née Alterova, died in 1934. Grandpa Hynek spent the whole war in Terezin, luckily he had cataracts, and so always when he was supposed to go into the transport, he went for an operation and thus avoided deportation. This was because the Germans didn't deport sick people eastward, because they were still claiming that there were work camps in the east, and it would thus have been suspicious if they would've been sending the disabled and ill to work. It seems that the Germans were counting on him dying of disease in Terezin, as he was 85! But Grandpa survived all his children, most of his

grandchildren, and died long after the war, at the age of 96.