

# Jiri Munk

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Interviewer: Terezie Holmerova

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I met Mr. Munk and his enchanting wife for the first time in one literary café in Prague, at their request. We quickly got organizational matters out of the way, and started speaking of all manner of things, so I had the opportunity to get to know their incredible élan and wide perspective in various areas of social and cultural goings-on. Despite the fact that Mr. Munk was always amenable, it wasn't always simple to agree on a meeting, as one time they were preparing to go to a concert, another time to an English, computer, or exercise class. When I was, however, finally sitting in their small, cozy apartment in the Prague neighborhood of Vokovice, and listening to his words, I realized how beautiful it is when a person in his position can say, and hopefully Mr. Munk says it to himself, that he didn't betray himself. Mr. Munk was never afraid to call evil by its true name, and never betrayed his beliefs, even at the price of comfort or material well-being. Today he gives off the impression of a very composed person, and I think it's due to the fact that he never lost face.

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## Family background

Unfortunately, I never knew my grandparents from either side. As far as our oldest ancestors go, most of them came from and lived in the Polabi region [the land along the Labe River between the towns of Jaromer and Lovosice; it literally means 'along the Labe']. The Munk lineage was from Privory, which is a small village near Vsetaty [a small town in Central Bohemia northeast of Prague]. Our great-great-grandfather, Ingac [pron. Ignatz] Munk was a poor merchant in Privory and his wife was Terezie Lustigova, whose parents were from Jirny [a small town on the eastern outskirts of Prague]. Most of our oldest relatives were probably door-to-door salesmen, only my grandfather, Eduard Munk, like many village Jews, had a pub, as he had a liquor sales permit. And because just the pub wouldn't have supported him, he also had a small farm. Grandpa married Paulina Glasnerova from Cernuce, which is also a small village in the Polabi region.

The Nachod family, my mother's relatives and ancestors, were most likely from Prague as far back as her grandparents. I'm assuming that they all still lived in the ghetto, because until about the year 1860 Jews weren't allowed to live anywhere else in Prague but the ghetto. The father of my grandfather on my mother's side was Simon Nachod, who had a smoke shop in the ghetto, at

building Reg. No. 146. His wife, Franciska Neuern, also lived in the ghetto before they were married, in building Reg. No. 105 [in Czech towns and cities, buildings have evidentiary, or registry numbers that are unique in the municipality, as well as street numbers].

All I know about the parents of my grandmother on my mother's side is that my grandma's father was named Jakob Eisenschimmel and his wife was Aloisie. In one document I found that my grandfather on my mother's side, who was named Rudolf Nachod, also lived in Rychnov nad Kneznou [a town in Northeastern Bohemia at the foot of the Orlicke Mountains], where he worked as a lawyer. It stood there: Rudolf Nachod - lawyer in Rychnov. But my mother and her siblings were born in Brandys nad Labem [currently the town of Brandys nad Labem - Stara Boleslav in Central Bohemia, northeast of Prague], and from 1915 the entire family lived in Prague, like their ancestors. They lived in Smichov [the city ward of Prague 5] in a street that back then was named Presslova, at No. 15. Their apartment was located near the church of St. Wenceslaus in the center of Smichov. Unfortunately, we know almost nothing about my grandfather's wife, Hermina Eisenschimmelova.

My father, Adolf Munk, was born in Brandys nad Labem. He had two siblings, Aunt Bedriska and Uncle Josef. Auntie Bedriska Munkova married Mr. Vilem Vohryzek and Uncle Josef Munk married Mr. Vohryzek's sister, Marta Vohryzkova, which caused quite an interesting family situation. The Vohryzeks had two children, Hana and Helena. The older daughter, Hana, was very beautiful. It was even said that one adjunct from the farm, where she lived with her family, shot himself because of her. The Munks had only one son, who was named Jiri Munk, like me.

Uncle Josef Munk was a legionnaire in Russia during World War I. When after World War I land reforms were taking place, and large estates belonging to the nobility were being sold off, legionnaires had priority and thanks to this my uncle came by a large farm estate near Teplice [a town in the northeast of Bohemia], which was called Doubravice. The estate was in the border region, or the Sudetenland [1](#), where back then there lived mainly a German-speaking population. Originally it had belonged to some noblemen from Lothringen, which was foreign nobility. The nobles were forced to sell off their estates; of course it wasn't confiscated for nothing.

The estate in Doubravice was relatively large, it was actually this small chateau. Both families - the Vohryzeks and the Munks - bought it half and half, and so owned it together. At the time that they got the estate, about 150 hectares of land belonged to it, and later they most likely bought additional land. Especially the Vohryzeks belonged to the 'better' landowners back then, they used to ride in a carriage to Teplice and their daughters belonged to the so-called rural cavalry. The rural cavalry was this group of, as they would have said back then - Czech village kulaks. It was a big honor to get into the rural cavalry. They took part in all significant celebrations and had their own riding horses.

The farm in Doubravice employed dozens of people. There was also an adjunct, that was the estate owner's representative, who was learning his trade. And also 'deputats.' A deputat was actually a share of the harvest, and these deputats received part of their salary in kind. Auntie Bedriska loved her family very much, especially her husband. She was a very strong woman, as far a physique goes.

Apparently Uncle Pepa [Josef] wasn't very content in his marriage. His wife was a very energetic woman, outgoing, while my uncle was more of a domestic type, similar to our father. In the family

they used to say that they were each completely different. Uncle Vilem liked to walk, or would make the rounds of his estate on a bicycle. They wore three-quarter length pants and like most farmers in those days, a hunter's hat. He had some problems with his thyroid gland, and due to this he had these unusual, bugged-out eyes.

All the relatives that we know of spoke Czech, probably including our grandfathers and grandmothers, even though back then during the time of Austro-Hungary, they of course had to know how to speak German as well.

When in 1938 the Germans annexed the Sudetenland [2](#), and expelled our relatives from there, the Vohryzeks then lived with us in Brandys and the Munks somewhere in Prague. I suspect that all our relatives that came to Prague from the Sudetenland were among the first to be selected for the transports, which didn't go to Terezin [3](#), but straight to Lodz [4](#) or to Estonia. Among them was Hana Vohryzkova, who was married to Hugo Stein. They both died in Lodz and were already declared dead in 1942.

The remainder of the Vohryzek family, Uncle Vilem, Aunt Bedriska and their younger daughter Helena left on a transport, at first to Terezin, and then to Auschwitz, where they died in 1944. The Munks, that is, Aunt Marta, her husband Josef and son Jiri Munk, left on a transport to Estonia, where they were declared dead in 1943. The first transports to leave Prague contained very rich and very poor Jews. Apparently the Jewish community, on the orders of the Germans, had to report the names of very rich and very poor Jews and they then had to leave together.

Unfortunately we never talked much about our ancestors with our parents. Just our mother reminisced about her youth in Brandys. It's interesting that some aunt there took care of her and her sister Elsa. But it's also possible that she was only a governess. My mother had two siblings, Elsa and Quido. She would occasionally recall that they were kept on a very short leash. Back then, the at that time future emperor, Archduke Karel [Archduke Karel Frantisek Josef Ludvik Hubert Georg Maria, later emperor and king Karel I. (1887 - 1922): last Austro-Hungarian emperor 1916 - 1918] used to stay at the chateau in Brandys, and had his own regiment of dragoons [dragoons: from the 16th Century, cavalry infantry, later a type of usually light cavalry]. My mother used to say that they were beautiful guys, and that her aunt refused to let her meet them.

Later Elsa, Quido and my mother lived in Prague, in Smichov, and there their grandmother Aloisie Eisenschimmelova looked after them, because their mother had died very early on. Their grandma lived in Zizkov [the city ward of Prague 3] and walked to their place in Smichov every day. They say she was very strict. Apparently she was the only one that still observed Jewish customs, because my sister says that she used to have separate dishes for meat and milk.

Uncle Quido didn't turn out, somehow. I don't know if he even graduated from high school, most likely not. He was always changing jobs and didn't manage to stay long in any of them. After the war he worked as a treasurer for the Social Democrats. But he wasn't incompetent; he was good at fixing everything. He married Bedriska Adamkova. She wasn't Jewish, so was probably the only Christian in our family tree. All her life Mrs. Bedriska used to reminisce about how apparently the writer Jirasek had been in love with her. [Jirasek, Alois (1851-1930): Czech writer and playwright] She had love letters from him stashed away. She likely met him in the amateur theater, where she and our uncle used to act. She was apparently a very beautiful actress. They were childless.

My mother's sister, Aunt Elsa, was a language teacher. She had a beautiful apartment in Prague, where she gave private language lessons. She taught German and French, and also knew English. I remember once as a child coming to her place for a visit, and being completely bedazzled, because a maidservant in a white cap came to open the door - like at some rich people's house, which we never were. Auntie Elsa at first married some Mr. Grund, but she then divorced him. Apparently he was a con man. In documents we then found out how many times he'd been married. Apparently he was really good-looking. Elsa then remarried, this time to Mr. Ederer. He was this kind, short, bald man, plus he was rich; he worked as a traveling salesman or something.

Our family wasn't very religious. I think that already Grandpa Eduard definitely wasn't, we certainly didn't observe any rules, we only went to synagogue during the High Holidays, and as a small boy and later also after the war I used to go to Jewish religion lessons. We didn't celebrate the High Holidays at home, we observed Christmas, like Christians.

My nanny, who I'll talk about later, was a very devout Catholic. Thanks to her I fell in love with Catholic services, in Brandys and Stara Boleslav; we used to go to Catholic churches together. I remember this one incident. In Stara Boleslav there's a famous church dedicated to the Virgin Mary, and in 1938 there was a big clerical celebration taking place there. Because the church had a miraculous statue of the Virgin Mary, which was at that time being transported to Prague. Currently it's the pride of the Church of Our Lady Victorious in the Lesser Town in Prague [the city ward of Prague 1]. At the time, the primate Cardinal Kaspar came to Boleslav, he walked at the head of the procession, and crowds of people lined the way. My nanny pushed me through to the front and told Cardinal Kaspar to bless me. The cardinal blessed me and gave me a holy picture with his autograph! Sometimes it occurs to me that perhaps thanks to this I survived Terezin...

## Growing up

I was the youngest in the family. The oldest was my sister Helena, then my brother Viktor and I was born last. I was actually an unwanted child. My mother once told me that she hadn't wanted another child, but my father talked her into it. He promised her that I'd get a nanny as soon as I was born, and my mother got a diamond brooch from my father after I was born! I was born in the U Zahorskeho maternity hospital on Londynska Street in Prague, back then it was this upper-crust sanatorium, a private maternity hospital. And despite the fact that I was born in the most luxurious sanatorium, I got the flu right away, and almost died. They put me in an incubator, so I'm marked by it, at least according to psychoanalysis.

Already in the maternity hospital they put me in the care of my nanny, and this nanny subsequently took care of me constantly, she nursed me, and actually ceaselessly devoted herself to me up to the war. We used to call her Nanicka. She loved me very much. Eventually I was embarrassed by it, because I was big. In our family, feelings were never shown very much. We didn't kiss or hug each other. I don't remember ever getting a kiss or something from my mother. But Nanicka was the complete opposite. No one in my life ever loved me as much again. She didn't have a child of her own, and she loved children. All her life she'd been with various children, but never had one of her own. She loved me like her own child. She also fattened me up. Often she'd collect the skin from all the mugs of milk at breakfast, and she'd then strain them through a sieve into my cup of cocoa.

I know that my siblings used to laugh at me because I was fat. Back then it was considered to be a sign of good health, and so my nanny proudly showed me off everywhere. I actually didn't spend that much time with my family. I had a room where I lived with Nanicka, and for all vacations as well as at Christmas I went to her family's place, in this village near Hradec Kralove [a larger town in Eastern Bohemia], while my family spent their free time in Doubravice, or in the summer in the Krkonose Mountains [highest Czech mountains, on the northern border of Bohemia, with Poland].

My nanny was from a family of sixteen children. Her mother was German, her father Czech, a head teacher by profession. She herself was educated, she had a nursing diploma and for some time worked at U Zahorskeho in the sanatorium where I was born. She was a devout Catholic. But despite being a Catholic, she mostly worked as a nanny for Jewish families. She used to go to Italy with one very rich family, so she spoke a bit of Italian, and thanks to my mother also excellent German. Curiously enough, she didn't teach me any of that German. My father was probably against it. In Brandys there weren't any Jews that spoke German, there Jews spoke only Czech. My father also didn't want Nanicka to be with me constantly, so he used to buy her tickets to the movies on Saturdays and Sundays, he used to tell her that she had time off, for her to go 'see men' or something similar, but she didn't want to, they had to literally chase her out of the house.

They probably paid her well, because with the money she made she built herself a little house in that village near Hradec Kralove, which was named Brezhrad [today it's already a part of Hradec Kralove]. Then I used to go there during holidays. I've got very nice memories of my stays in Brezhrad. I really felt good in that large family, everyone paid attention to me and mainly my nanny's brothers were always playing with me. The tragedy is that in her old age before she died, when Nanicka was living in this house, a quarrel broke out between her relatives about who would inherit the house from her. On top of everything else, the poor thing had to live through all this before she died.

I spent my childhood in Brandys nad Labem. I've read that Brandys has a long Jewish history. The first references to a Jewish community in Brandys reach as far back as the 16th century. Apparently there were a lot of Jews in Brandys because the town was a center of the United Brotherhood, which had a better relationship with Jews than the Catholics. [United Brotherhood - Unitas Fratrum: a protestant church that was born from the major religious awakening in Bohemia (Hussitism). It was founded by Brother Gregory in Kunvald in northeastern Bohemia in the year 1457.] Jews also moved to small towns near Prague because they'd been expelled from Prague many times, and settled nearby, so they could eventually return.

There's still a synagogue standing in Brandys, which was originally in Renaissance style, but was reconstructed many times. In the 19th century, there was still a Jewish school in this synagogue. One of the people that attended it was Vojtech Rakous, a Czech-Jewish writer who was active in the assimilation movement and wrote about rural Jews in the Polabi region. [Rakous, Vojtech (1862-1935): real name Adalbert Östreicher, a Czech-Jewish writer] Besides the synagogue, there's also a very old Jewish cemetery in Brandys.

According to records, as late as the 19th century there were 250 people living in Brandys that identified themselves as being of the Jewish faith. After Jews were given equal status with all other citizens, in 1860 I think, they began to move to Prague, so in 1930 there were already only 60 people that identified themselves as Jews in terms of religion. However, there were also people

there that didn't identify with the Jewish religion, but had Jewish origins, because on the basis of anti-Jewish laws, over 80 people then went into the transport.

During my childhood, Jews in Brandys were already very secularized, I don't remember someone there being Orthodox or conservative, someone celebrating Passover and so on, there wasn't even a rabbi there. But as far as I remember, most people attended synagogue for the High Holidays and a rabbi used to come, most likely from Prague. I remember that during Purim we children walked around the synagogue with candles and sang, that's this Jewish custom. I liked that synagogue very much. Inside it has vaulting like the sky, blue with gold stars. That's my only memory of the synagogue.

Jews in Brandys were mostly businessmen, who worked their way up economically during the First Republic [5](#). They were mainly in the textile business. They had around three textile stores there, plus a beverage factory and a leather processing workshop. My father was an exception, because he was a lawyer, and then there was also a doctor, Dr. Laufer.

The largest factory in Brandys was named Melicharka, and its owner, Mr. Umrath was of Jewish origin. The history of Melicharka began when an ordinary blacksmith and locksmith from Brandys - Mr. Melichar, at the end of the 19th century invented some amazing improvement in seeding machines. His idea greatly improved work, and because Mr. Melichar was poor, he manufactured it solely by hand. A rich Jew from Prague, Mr. Umrath, found out about his invention, got together with the poor blacksmith and in twenty years they managed to build up the largest farm machinery factory in Czechoslovakia, which exported into all of Europe. Mr. Umrath was a really rich man, but we never came into contact with him. Maybe he didn't even live in Brandys. There was a factory-owner's villa there, but most likely only Mr. Melichar lived there. But the other Jews in Brandys belonged, I think, to the middle class, none of them were neither too rich nor too poor.

There apparently was no organized Jewish community in Brandys, a rabbi from Prague used to travel there to teach religion. But there must have been some sort of miniature organization in Brandys, because someone had to pay the rabbi, but I don't know what sort of organization it was, nor who was its head. I only had religion lessons when I was attending 1st and 2nd Grade, then I was no longer allowed to continue. I liked attending the classes, because the rabbi would bring me candy. I remember that I used to go to religion class by myself. Either there weren't Jewish children of my age in Brandys, or they didn't go to religion class. I don't remember much from the religion lessons, I remember only that we read the Old Testament.

Before the war I was still small, so I didn't think about whether people looked at us, Jews, in some different fashion, worse. Neither did I feel that we somehow differed from the others, I was only aware that we were richer. In my class at school there were completely poor, often barefoot children, whom I occasionally gave my lunch. I didn't feel any signs of anti-Semitism from children, that actually didn't begin until later, when the Germans arrived. My father had a very good reputation in Brandys, because as a lawyer he helped the poor. Old-timers remember him to this day.

My father, Adolf Munk, came, as I've already said, from Brandys nad Labem. He was born in 1887. Back then it wasn't the custom for children from poorer Jewish families to attend high school and university, but my father managed to do it. I think that his siblings didn't even have high school diplomas. However, my father wasn't a very good student. Apparently he had problems in high

school, and so they sent him to some Uncle Kohn, who was a rabbi in Rychnov nad Kneznou, to keep an eye on his studies. My father likely also lived with him.

Once it happened to me that a classmate of mine in architecture school, when she saw my name, asked me whether my father hadn't studied in Rychnov. She said that her father, who unfortunately had already died, had often reminisced about a very good friend of his, a sociable and excellent person, someone by the name of Munk. I think that my father was also in Rychnov for work experience at some local lawyer's, but we don't have any exact information about that. He then studied at the Faculty of Law in Prague. He even studied philosophy with Professor Masaryk [6](#). Somewhere I've got his subject index with a beautiful specimen of Masaryk's signature. But Father didn't have the best marks in law either.

My mother, Olga Nachodova, was born in 1897, and was ten years younger than our father. She was from Brandys nad Labem, but in her youth lived in Prague, in Smichov. As I've already mentioned, she had two siblings. Their mother died very early on, which is why their strict grandmother took care of them. So, they had an apartment in Prague, and on top of that also bought in Brandys what was later to be our house from some distant relative.

By coincidence my mother's father was also a lawyer, and probably because our father needed experience, he started working for his father-in-law. He then likely gave the practice to my father. This means that along with our mother, our father also got the practice and house as a dowry. Apparently our mother was very pretty when she was young. The wedding took place on 27th September 1923. Mother was 26 and Father was already 36, so before that he must have already had a fair amount of work experience. Apparently he'd also worked somewhere in Duchcov [a town in northwestern Bohemia]. Back then it was common that graduate lawyers worked as articled clerks for even several years before they started their own practice.

I don't think that my mother and father were suited to each other very much. My mother was never very satisfied with her life. She didn't like small town life and constantly yearned to escape from Brandys. Sometimes she'd take off on our father by taxi to Prague. Apparently she very much liked to go to cafés there.

Our father was the complete opposite. He longed for peace and quiet, more or less like me. I've inherited more of my father's personality than my mother's. Though our father had bad legs, he liked going for walks. He always took the dog, who was named Rek, and took the road through the fields in the direction of a village named Zapy. Occasionally he took me with him, or walked with our family doctor, Dr. Laufer. Back then there weren't any cars yet, and so they walked along the road and discussed the international situation. I don't exactly know what my father's political opinions were like, but someone told me that he was a social democrat.

Dr. Laufer was Father's closest friend, who he saw the most of all. The doctor had a very famous brother, who before the war was such a famous sports reporter [Laufer Josef (1891 - 1966): founder of Czech sports journalism and radio sports reportage], that the Germans left him alone during the whole war. While he was also from a mixed marriage, what helped him most of all was his famous name from before the war. He commented all the important soccer games on the radio. However, his brother, Father's closest friend and our family doctor, went with his entire family to Auschwitz.

Besides walks, Father liked carpentry and also painted. In the laundry room he had a completely equipped carpentry workshop. In his spare time he made all sorts of things, small items of furniture, chairs, tables. He obviously enjoyed it very much. It was a source of amusement for all our friends and relatives, because Father used to give them his finished products as gifts.

Father also painted. He'd shut himself up in the attic, where he had an easel, and through a window a view out over the Polabi landscape. There he'd paint mainly genre paintings. When I was a child, he drew soldiers and horses for me. He drew and painted beautifully. We also inherited some basic artistic talent from him, and my brother later also further devoted himself to it. My sister longed to be a fashion designer all her life, and even our mother drew nicely, but we didn't make use of it in any particular fashion.

My brother was a much bigger rascal than I was. I also think that he was more lively, while I wasn't very active. He did badly in school, I guess it wasn't enough fun for him. Maybe that's also why our father designated me to one day take over his law practice. I wouldn't say that my brother and I had a similar physique, he was 5 cm taller and skinnier than me. But apparently we looked alike, because later people used to get us mixed up. We didn't play together very much, there was, after all, an age difference between us. It wasn't until during the war that we played together more, when we were shut up in the house and weren't allowed out [7](#).

Once I paid the price for that playing. We were chasing each other around a round table in the dining room, and my brother somehow infuriated me, which didn't happen too often, because normally I'm a calm person. I fell down and dislocated my arm. Back then that was quite bad, because I had to go to the hospital because of it. The closest was the Na Karlove children's hospital in Prague [in the ward of Prague 2], which is perhaps still there. I remember that horrible trip with a dislocated arm by taxi to Prague, it hurt like hell. Dr. Laufer, who arranged it there, went with me. Somewhere inside me I still have that horrible experience when they were giving me anesthetic. Back then they used to put a mask on your face, and on it they'd pour chloroform. I was screaming, 'Doctor Laufer, help me!' After that it was all right, but that terrible trip has remained in me, and to this day anesthetic makes me anxious.

I remember several more important events from before the war, that I experienced personally. One was the visit of the Romanian king, Karol [Karol I of Romania: Romanian king (1881 - 1914)]. The delegation drove by right in front of our house, they had beautiful helmets with feathers on their heads. I also remember the last Sokol Slet (Rally) [8](#) before the war, I think it was in 1937 or 1938. In Brandys we had Yugoslavs as a visiting delegation, mainly Croats and Serbs. They then formed a procession and proceeded to Prague. I remember that all the girls liked the Yugoslavs.

My sister was very pretty. She was said to be one of the prettiest girls in Brandys. She turned a lot of boys' heads. I remember that back then before the war, young people used to go on dates to Stara Boleslav, where there was a confectionery named U Horacku. Once, I don't know on what occasion, I saw my sister there with some boy, and he bought me some ice cream so that I wouldn't tell when I got home. I think that my sister didn't take advantage of her assets. Our mother probably gave her a bit of a complex, because she used to say to her, 'Don't think that you're going to be some sort of beauty.' And she, despite being pretty, was all miserable because she had freckles.

Our house stood on the main avenue, which back then was named Masarykova, I think. It was an unusual house from about the middle of the 19th century, which from the street had two floors, and in the back only a ground floor. It was oriented along a north-south axis, so its front part was always very cold. Our father's offices were on the ground floor, and on the first floor there was an apartment that had about five rooms and a kitchen. It actually wasn't a very modern house for the times. I lived upstairs in a room with my nanny. We had windows that looked out over the garden.

My earliest childhood memory is connected to our dog waking me up. In the summer, when we had the windows open, he'd always jump into the house in the morning and lick my entire head and in this way wake me up. Since then I like dogs. Ours was a German shepherd, who was given to us by relatives from Doubravice. He was basically the same age as me, so we grew up together. He was always guarding me, and when other boys chased me while we were playing, he'd defend me.

I remember that by the house in the direction of the courtyard, there was also a veranda covered in purple clematis, which you could eat in the summer, and a cellar built into the hillside. Mother would occasionally send my brother or sister into the cellar for coal, and they were afraid to go in it. Across from our house, on the spot where today there are apartment blocks, was a large, beautiful garden with centuries-old trees, which they later chopped down because of the apartment construction.

On the first floor was a dining room with a large round table, around which we all used to sit and eat breakfast, lunch and supper together. We had to eat everything on our plate. Our father was from a poor family, so he made sure that we weren't spoiled. Often there were scenes, my brother for example couldn't stand cauliflower soup, it made him nauseous, and despite that he had to eat it all. There was no being picky. When you took a piece of meat, you got at least three times as many fixings, and had to eat it all. It wasn't until later, during the war, that we began to appreciate this upbringing, because we weren't the least bit spoiled.

Besides my nanny, two more women worked in our house. The cook, Mrs. Klouckova, was a very stout lady from a poor family. There was also some younger woman, most likely the cleaning lady. Our father also had another three employees in his law office. All of our father's employees recall how well he took care of them. They were more or less like members of our family.

Before I started going to school, I didn't come into contact with other children very much. It's only now that I realize that Nanicka and I used to go for daily walks, but I didn't associate much with other children. We'd make the rounds of all the shops, and because Nanicka knew all the salesladies, we found out what was new, all sorts of gossip. Then we used to go to the so-called Nobles' Garden by the chateau. Now it's devastated, but when I was young it was a beautiful garden with renaissance balustrades. There I'd play. Nanicka would sit somewhere on a bench and I'd run around and play by myself. Eventually Nanicka evidently began to realize that there was some sort of a problem, because she'd say to me, 'Jiricku [Georgie], go fight with someone!' or 'Jiricku, go climb a tree!' and I'd say, 'But...', I didn't want to, I guess it was already part of my nature, that I didn't much yearn for other children.

So I never attended any kindergarten, because I was with Nanicka. Then I went straight into elementary school. It was an all-boys school, as back then schools were divided into boys' and girls'. There were a lot of us in the class, around 25 children, maybe even more. Despite not being used to children, I don't remember it being any sort of a problem for me. The other children didn't

pick on me. I know that a few times some kids wanted to fight, but all I had to say was, 'I've got a brother that's four years older, and he's big!' and from that time on they left me alone. My brother grew up very quickly, he was exceptionally tall for his age. Our father was also tall, he measured about 183 cm. I know that pre-war Jews were generally of smaller stature, and so when Jews gathered somewhere, our father was a half a head taller than they were. Our mother, on the other hand, was small and petite.

My experiences from school weren't bad, in general. Our teacher was the kind Mr. Karhan, who in the first grade called my father in for a meeting and told him that I've got perfect pitch and that I should take music. Unfortunately, and this is probably what I regret most in my life, I never had the opportunity to devote myself to music. I think that I'd have been much happier. In the second grade we then had some man and lady teacher, but I don't remember them at all, I've only seen them recently on a school photo.

My greatest impression was of this special smell the school had, which I'm not able to describe. It's a smell that gives me an anxious feeling in the pit of my stomach, but on the other hand isn't completely unpleasant. It was some sort of mixture of chalk, sponges, blackboards and the children that were afraid, you could smell that as well.

In the beginning I didn't have any close friends at school. After school I'd go straight home and the nanny would devote herself to me again. She was probably afraid for me and so wanted to be constantly with me. But that didn't bother me. Then they found a friend from the second grade for me, who was named Homolac. His family had moved there from someplace in Moravia. His father began working in Brandys at the new Bata [9](#) branch office, which by the way is still standing, it's a modern, functionalist building on the way down to the bridge. When they moved to town, that little Homolac didn't have any friends in Brandys, and my father arranged me for him somehow, because he probably realized that it wasn't good for me to not have any friends.

So then I was friends with this Homolac kid. Most often we'd play at our place in the garden. This was because my parents wouldn't let me go away from the house by myself, and so he'd always come to our place. We had a ping-pong table in the garden, so we often played ping-pong. Even during the time when I'd already been thrown out of school, his parents allowed him to come to our place for some time, which was in those days slowly becoming dangerous.

There were no Jewish children in my class. At school there was only Honza Lustig, who was some distant relative of ours. He was a year younger, and was in Grade 1. I didn't talk to him much. Once in a while the Lustigs would come over for a visit, but that was all. There were two Lustig families in Brandys. One had a textile store, and the others had a beverage plant.

In Grade 1 and 2 I did well in mostly everything, it was only with handwriting that I had problems. But I got all A's. I know that in our class there was a huge difference between children of 'better' families and poor families. Already back then this social instinct grew up in me, because the children from poor families had to work, were poorly dressed, didn't have lunches and so on. Already in Grade 1, you could clearly see the class differences.

At the beginning Nanicka used to come meet me in front of the school, later I was embarrassed by it, so I'd go alone. It's interesting that before I started going to school, I was a downright obese child, but as soon as I started going to school, I lost weight and that's how I stayed. That of course

doesn't include the time after my return from Terezin, back then I was even much skinnier, but otherwise I stayed basically the same, but just grew a little taller.

I've actually only got two grades of public school, Grades 1 and 2. By third grade I was already not allowed to go. Luckily they accepted me into Grade 1 prematurely, it was in 1938, when I wasn't six years old yet. That's because I was born in November, so theoretically I wasn't supposed to go until the next year. Otherwise I wouldn't even have the two grades. In the next school year, 1939/40, I was already ending, because then Jewish children weren't allowed to go to school any more. For Grade 3 they then hired a special teacher for me, who used to come to our house and teach me, but in time she grew too afraid.

After the war I went straight into third year of council school [10](#). I didn't know how to read and write properly, I was missing four grades. I didn't know grammar, math, the basics. Even by university I didn't know fractions and had to make up for it. So I didn't get much schooling during my childhood.

## During the war

After the Germans arrived in Brandys, it was necessary for someone to be responsible for the Jewish community in the town and its surroundings. Of course, no one wanted to do it. Finally my father took it on, so he was then the president of the Jewish community during the war. As a result, the Gestapo used to come to our place frequently. I remember that once my father was standing at attention, and the Gestapo officers were swearing at him and slapping him around. And this was despite the fact that he was much taller than they were. Once our Rek tried to bite a Gestapo officer on the boot. He pulled out a pistol and wanted to shoot him, but then said that he can't shoot such a nice-looking dog. My father took care of administration and registration in the community, because Jews had to first register. The Gestapo was very strict in checking this. It was something similar like with the Prague Jewish community, which under the Gestapo's control had to organize transports.

Right the next day after the arrival of the Germans, a notice came from the bar association that our father wasn't allowed to practice any longer. It may have been the Czech bar association, but its members basically wanted to take advantage of the situation and eliminate Jewish competition, both doctors and lawyers. I can't even imagine how horrible it must have been for my father.

Step by step and gradually, anti-Jewish laws and measures began to take effect. Of course, as a child I didn't notice it as much. I do remember, however, that we weren't allowed to leave Brandys. Then they also forbade us from going to the park, and even to go out into the street outside of certain hours. We had to hand in all sorts of things - jewels, radios, cameras, sports equipment, toys, bicycles, silverware, art and so on, they put a hold on all our money in the banks. Of course, the worst was that we had to give away the animals. We had a cat, dog and even a tame jackdaw, who luckily someone finally shot.

As a child I didn't even mind so much that I wasn't allowed to go to school, I was only eight at the time, and took it from that kid's viewpoint. But I remember that the biggest scenes took place when Nanicka had to leave. She wanted to take me with her, and was offering Father that she'd hide me during the war, that she'd pretend I was her illegitimate child, that her whole family would

help her, so that no one would find out about it. Father refused, saying that our family had to be together under all circumstances. At that time no one suspected what awaited us. I read somewhere that Dr. Laufer was considering emigration, but in the end stayed home. Only in that large Jewish factory, Melichar, there were Jews working in highly placed positions, who all emigrated in time.

At that time emigration wasn't a simple thing anymore. No country was accepting Jews, no one wanted to give them a residence visa. It's only now coming to light that the Americans weren't accepting Jews, even though they knew that they were in danger. They closed off America, closed off Canada. American Jews were against the immigration of European Jews, because they were afraid that they'd have to support them. Only in some African countries was there interest in Jewish farmers. For example Rhodesia, which was still an English colony back then, accepted Jews from Europe, as long as they made a living in agriculture. Similarly perhaps Canada, Australia and New Zealand accepted farmers in limited numbers. So our father and Uncle Vohryzek considered emigration, my uncle was after all an excellent agricultural expert, but it was probably too late and back then no one knew what was waiting for us.

We didn't get normal rations like other people. We didn't have milk, eggs, and meat, they gradually eliminated all our food coupons, so we received practically none. This extortionist used to come to our house, he had a briefcase and in it fake candy, I don't know what it was made from. Because back then during the war, there was no real candy. He'd always open the briefcase, where he had the candy in boxes, and sold them to us for a high price. Our father then used to say that that man used to even threaten him, that if he didn't buy the candy, he'd turn us in.

What's more, people weren't allowed to heat much, so we were always cold. We could have a maximum of 18 degrees in the house, crossing this limit meant the concentration camp. We had an American stove, and Father was always checking to make sure that the temperature didn't exceed 18 degrees. Especially during 1941 and 1942 there were terrible winters. We had a small courtyard in front of the garden, which we used to flood with water, and my brother and I would then go skating there. We had clip-on skates, which we then had to give away, the same as skis and all other sports equipment.

Our dog Rek wasn't allowed to go inside the house. Back then, when it was 20 below [Centigrade], we wanted to take him inside, so that he wouldn't freeze to death outside in the doghouse. But he refused! He had it deeply fixated that he wasn't allowed in the house. In the end we had to carry him in by force. But when he jumped into my room through the window, to lick me all over, he didn't look at it that way, that he was in the house. He'd jump out again through the window.

Of all us children, the war must have been the hardest on our sister, because she was at that age when a person should get the most from that young lady's world, back then she was 16. It must have been truly horrible for her. On the other hand, for a long time friends kept coming to visit her. The Laufers' son used to also come to our place, they used to call him Osi [Oskar]. They used to meet at our place with some other non-Jewish young people, and together played ping-pong, volleyball, they had a gramophone and perhaps even danced together... Only one of them then became a collaborator. These friends were all from families that were less affluent than we were. For a long time they continued to be unafraid of visiting us.

Our father made a fair amount of money, even despite the fact that he was basically a lawyer for the poor. People respected him, and said, 'That Doctor Munk, he's such a good person that you'd think he wasn't a Jew!' When someone didn't pay him, Father didn't hound him, and his secretary often had to take steps in his place. I found a pre-war tax return of his, and so I know that on average he made about 350,000 a year. This of course wasn't an immense amount, but for pre-war times it was a lot, even for lawyers in general. But our father never invested his money, he put it into insurance. That was then all lost. Father had money in the bank. He didn't buy a car, we had no other real estate.

On the other hand, Dr. Laufer, for example, who lived on the corner of the town square, gradually bought up all the houses in the street. Before he went to the concentration camp, he'd bought up almost the whole street. We actually did make one investment - together with Dr. Laufer's brother, a journalist, our father bought a parcel of land near Stara Boleslav in the direction of Novy Vestec. There are dense pine forests that start behind Stara Boleslav, and our parcel also had tall trees on it. But besides trees, there was only a small, unfinished shack. I remember that already as small children, and then before the war, we'd got there on Saturdays and Sundays. We lost this parcel after the war as well, because our mother sold it for a low price. Otherwise our father also had several fields as collateral, given to him by debtors when they didn't have money and couldn't pay their IOU's.

I think that we were a well-liked Jewish family - our father was a really good person, he never did anyone wrong, it never happened that he'd cheat someone. It was precisely during the war that it became apparent that there were no serious problems in relation to other people, on the contrary. Of course, some people coddled up to the Germans right away, but I think that the majority helped us, or at least sympathized with us. Helena's suitor, some Mr. Koliandr, wasn't at all afraid of helping us, and even helped us pack for the transport. He was truly courageous and finally he even got into Terezin in some fashion. Various people hid some things for us. But the bravest was the poorest one - some clerk from the savings bank, whose wife worked for our father, who used to come to our place up to the last minute, even despite the fact that he could have lost his job. He used to come in a cap on which was written 'City Savings Bank.'

Once, when the Hitlerjugend [11](#) was already in Brandys, but we were still allowed to go out on the street wearing a Jewish star [12](#), I met a gang of those boys in uniforms. It looked like they wanted to give me a beating, but I gave them the slip and hid somewhere. Another unpleasant experience took place at school. Some kid named Bocanek used to sit in the desk beside me. His father was a government official and before the war he used to bow before my father all the way to the ground, but later, already during the occupation in 1939, that boy's parents must have said something to him, and that Bocanek simply raised his hand one day in school, and said, 'Sir, I'm not going to sit next to this kid.' And when our teacher asked him why, he answered, 'He stinks.'

I also remember, that some time before when we went to the concentration camp, several people came to our place. I think that they were mainly women, who had gone over to the Germans. At a time when we were still normally living in the house, these women came and said, 'I'll take this...I'll take that...I'll take this...' They came in and divided it all up amongst themselves.

Before we went into the transport, our father, who had his carpentry workshop, made all sorts of hiding places for money, like in shoe brushes, clothes brushes, or heels of shoes. First he'd take it

apart, hide the money, and then glue it all back together again. He put German marks in there. Father even made a mezzanine in the house, this hiding place, where we hung Hungarian salami, he also hid some other food there and then also an old World War I pistol. After World War I our father had been a reserve officer of the Czechoslovak Army.

When the Heydrichiade [13](#) took place, they were searching house by house. About, say, 20 soldiers came inside unexpectedly, and searched the house, they were looking for precisely those types of hiding places. I remember them knocking on the walls in the hallway, and I was saying to myself - OK, that's the end, they're going to find that pistol and shoot us all. But they didn't find anything.

Another experience is that during the war all of us children got scarlet fever, and if I remember correctly, that saved us. Because even before the transport they wanted to move us out of our house, but because Germans came to have a look and our father told them that we had scarlet fever, they ran away and didn't return again until we left for Terezin.

During the war, everyone had to go through a complicated process to prove that they weren't of Jewish origin. Jewish birth registers had been kept for ages, where all people of Jewish origin in a given region were recorded, and these registers became for the Nazis a fundamental source of information regarding the 'racial origin' of the population. The smarter Jews soon smelled danger, converted to Christianity and had their children recorded in Christian birth registers. It wasn't of any help to them, because the rule was you had to prove the non-existence of Jewish ancestors two generations back. Thus the efforts of some priests to give Jews false affidavits of belonging to the Christian faith were also useless.

Actually, thanks to the fact that our father caved in and took as thankless a job as was running the Jewish community during the war, we were saved. Because all Jews from Brandys, except for our family, went on the first transport from Brandys, CL. This transport stayed in Terezin only a short time, just a few months, and then they all went to Auschwitz and into the gas. I read that only a few people survived, who afterwards didn't return to Czechoslovakia and remained somewhere abroad.

As I've already said, in 1930 there were 60 people in Brandys that identified themselves as being of the Jewish faith, but another 20 people were designated for the CL transport, meaning also those that didn't identify with the Jewish faith, so in the end about 80 people in all left on that transport. People from all the villages around Brandys were also put on that transport. Zapy, Bysice and other villages fell under our father, as the community representative, but they had only a few Jews.

Our transport, CM, left shortly after the first CL transport, it was basically only a few days later, these transports followed closely one after the other. At first we went to Mlada Boleslav [a town in Central Bohemia, northeast of Prague], to the castle. Everyone went to Mlada Boleslav separately, so we went on an ordinary passenger train. We were wearing stars and had a few pieces of luggage with us. I remember that some people on the train were laughing at us. At the castle in Mlada Boleslav, they took our last few valuables and from there we left on a train, on which were only people being transported to Terezin.

At first we went to Bohusovice, because back then there wasn't a spur line from Bohusovice to Terezin, so from Bohusovice we went on foot with all our luggage to Terezin. It's about two or three kilometers. We were being led there by constables, and I remember that one constable was talking

to my father during the trip there, and they were reminiscing about how they'd both been in the army in Terezin during World War I. The constables behaved very decently towards us. A number of constables were even executed back then, because they'd been passing information and helping the prisoners in Terezin.

In Terezin we lived in the so-called Hamburg barracks. Families were separated. Besides various potentates, who had though small, but their own apartments, all the others were divided up by age and sex. Children up to about the age of 13 lived together with their mothers, no matter whether they were boys or girls. Older boys lived with their fathers in different barracks. A lot of children, though they had families in Terezin, were placed into youth homes, which were called Kinderheime.

To this day, I regret not being in a Kinderheim, because there the children studied. Despite teaching being officially forbidden, the children's caretakers in the Kinderheime secretly organized it, so children were still able to learn all sorts of things. What's more, they were children of my age. I was completely alone in Terezin. I don't know why, but my mother kept me with her, so I was with only women.

Inside the barracks where we lived, there were three-tier bunk beds packed closely together, the aisles between them were so narrow that you could barely walk through them. When we arrived in Terezin, all the bunks were occupied, so we had to sleep on the floor between the bunks in those narrow aisles. I remember that we all had fleas there. That was completely normal, but worse were the bedbugs. When you fell asleep at night, they began dropping down and biting horribly. Getting rid of them was a problem, because when you squashed them, they gave off an awful stench. So we had to burn them with candles. Often at night people would light candles and burn bedbugs. There were also lice there, at the end of the war even ones infected with typhus.

Another experience of mine had to do with the fact that I was living among hundreds of women, and I was only eleven years old. There were still 'washrooms' there back from the army barracks days, which were basically troughs about ten meters long, with taps above them. They were huge washrooms, big enough for about a hundred people. Naked women of all possible age categories were washing or bathing there. They of course weren't embarrassed. I was an 11-year-old boy, and all around me were women - old, young, all together, it was a real shock for me.

Our father lived with my brother in the Hannover barracks, which were only a little ways off, so we could visit each other. But every little while it was forbidden, for example when someone escaped. The general rule was that when someone did something, we were then forbidden to leave the barracks as punishment, visits weren't allowed and so on.

I felt very lonely in Terezin. I don't remember there being another boy in the Hamburg barracks. Apparently somewhere right by the Hamburg barracks there was a children's home, where children were together, but my mother didn't put me in it. She either didn't know about it, or simply didn't want to. I actually don't even know why she kept me with her. And because all adults had to work, I wandered around Terezin by myself. Despite the fact that children got special food rations, I was always hungry and so I scrounged about for something to eat, like potato peels by the kitchen.

Occasionally I'd meet some other boy, but they all eventually left on the transports. I remember about three such friends, with whom I'd play soccer, always just two of us alone off somewhere, but basically I never got into any sort of larger collective. Only one time, when I used to go up to the

attic, where some sculptor was secretly teaching children how to sculpt. He used to get food packages via Turkey, and gave it all to us. He also soon left on a transport.

In the beginning my mother did cleaning. It must have been horrible for her, because she cleaned toilets. She was this 'lady' from a good family, where they had maids, and now she had to wash toilets, and on top of that she had a fanatic boss, a Jewess, who tormented her. She made her do the same tasks twice over, and basically picked on her.

Luckily my mother later got somewhere else. Behind Terezin they'd built some wooden shacks, where they used to peel mica, which was material for the German war industry. Mica was used in the construction of airplanes. Likely our mother's work saved us, together with the work that our father ended up doing. Because transports were leaving Terezin ceaselessly. Apparently Father knew some people in the leadership, but I don't know anything else about it. Maybe thanks to that our father became a judge in Terezin. Because Terezin had a Jewish court, which took care of various offences that took place there. The Germans left the Jews a certain amount of self-government, even though more serious things were of course investigated by the Gestapo.

Our father was mainly responsible for inheritances. There were hundreds of people dying in Terezin daily, and the only things that they left behind were for example perhaps only a suitcase with a pair of glasses inside, or a couple of other personal items. Our father's job was to find any possible relatives and potential inheritors, otherwise the 'property' forfeited to the ghetto, or the leadership. Besides investigating petty thefts, this was actually our father's main job.

In Terezin there were also Jewish police, called the 'Ghettowache,' which was responsible for keeping order inside the ghetto. They were young guys in uniforms. Before the end of the war, the Germans sent them all into the gas, because they were afraid of the danger of some sort of rebellion or revolution from their ranks. Apparently our father's job protected us from transport for some time. But in the fall of 1944 the last transports left, and with them also my father and brother. That time nothing could save them anymore, at that time the ghetto leadership also left on the transports, and the rest of our family was likely saved by our mother, who peeled mica for the German war industry.

I remember the famous children's opera, Brundibar [14](#). This work was composed before the war by the modernist composer Hans Krasa [Krasa, Hans (1899-1944): a Jewish composer from Prague, murdered by the Nazis in Auschwitz], and the text for it was written by Adolf Hoffmeister [Hoffmeister, Adolf (1902-1973): Czech painter, illustrator, caricaturist, poet, playwright and author]. In Terezin someone took it up and presented it. Children from all of Terezin used to come to see this optimistic performance, where good triumphs over evil. It was amazing for us. But the children playing in it were constantly changing, because always before another performance was to take place, a transport would in the meantime have gone to Auschwitz. Only a few of the actors survived, but some of the survivors are still alive.

Sports festivals were also held in Terezin. They were organized by the famous Fredy Hirsch [15](#), himself an athlete, who worked in Jewish physical education before the war. He devoted himself to children immensely, and tried to give them some self-realization, so various games and contests were held. We even had 'uniforms' - shorts and some sort of t-shirts, each barracks had a different such 'uniform.' There were even these little Terezin games held. But mainly we exercised and played on a small soccer field. Fredy then left voluntarily with children for Auschwitz, and when the

children were supposed to go into the gas, he committed suicide, although he could have saved himself.

We also played soccer in Terezin. Several adult men's teams were put together, one of the teams was composed of the 'Ghettowache,' another say the firemen and so on, actually it was this miniature soccer league. They'd play in the courtyard of one of the barracks, and we children used to go watch the games. Later the Germans forbade it.

When the last transports left Terezin, there was suddenly a big labor shortage. Up to then the mandatory working age had been 15, but now they lowered this limit, so I also had to start working. Mainly in 1945, I did so-called 'ordonantz,' which was a messenger-boy between the ghetto leadership and its residents, or between the ghetto leadership and the German command. I used to be afraid, because I occasionally had to take some document or report to the SS headquarters. My hands would shake when I had to go among the SS-men. True, most of them were more indifferent than anything else, but there were also sadists, who used to for example drive around Terezin on a bike and beat people. Most of them were executed after the war, but some of them managed to escape. But the SS didn't show their faces much in the ghetto itself, because order was kept by constables. But when we did by chance come across a member of the SS, we always went and hid somewhere, because we were afraid of them.

I also remember the celebrated visit by the International Red Cross. Back then all of Terezin was being cleaned up, fixed up and various props were being built. A coffee shop was even set up. Worthless money began to be issued, so-called 'Ghettogeld,' with which you could however not buy anything. A store was opened, where you couldn't buy anything, but where various mustard substitutes and other 'groceries' were put on display. I've even kept a 'savings book,' where I was ostensibly saving money, because as a regular employee I was 'getting paid.' That was of course all only because of that commission.

They set up a children's playground in the park, and I heard that when the Red Cross commission arrived in Terezin, some children were playing on the new playground, and the commander at the time, Rahm, began to distribute to them chocolate, oranges and sardines in front of the commission. Everything was recorded on film, there's a film that exists about it from the well-known German pre-war director Gerron [Gerron, Kurt (1897-1944): real name Kurt Gerson, a Jewish actor and director. During World War II jailed in the Terezin ghetto, where he was forced to direct the propaganda film Theresienstadt. He was murdered in Auschwitz]. The children had to say, 'Uncle Rahm, sardines again? Why are you giving us sardines again?' It's all completely unbelievable.

Basically neither the Allies nor the entire commission wanted to see what was being hidden behind this facade. The Swiss man that was head of the commission has to this day not admitted that a mistake had been made somewhere. I read his statement not long ago. He's constantly defending his actions back then. The German Red Cross was entirely under the influence of the Nazis.

But there were more such unusual things that happened. For example, completely unbelievable is the fact that in 1945, thousands of Allied airplanes were flying over Auschwitz. Back then the Germans' anti-aircraft defenses had already been destroyed, so Allied planes could fly very low. They must have seen the concentration camps, known about the gas chambers. It would have been enough to destroy them, and thus they would have saved a few hundred thousand people.

But the air force generals forbade such a strike, that they weren't military targets. There are documents that prove this. It goes against the grain of normal reasoning.

What's more, it's becoming clear that many American Jews didn't feel any particular empathy for European Jews. They only saw the masses of poor Jews, for example from Poland, and were afraid that they'd immigrate to America, where they'd have to support them. From various documents, it's obvious that American Jews didn't particularly press their government to take some steps in granting asylum to European Jews. That's not even talked about very much these days. Similarly, there's a question mark hanging above the Pope, why he didn't say very much, even though the Church is now trying to claim that back then some sort of intervention would have caused Jews even further harm.

About 90% of transports from Terezin aimed for Auschwitz. At night they would bring you a centimeter-wide strip of carbon paper, with our name, transport number and that you were supposed to report. Later the expedition of transports was moved to the Hamburg barracks, where we were no longer living at that time. Everyone that had been summoned had to gather in the courtyard of these barracks. They could have only one piece of luggage with them. They walked through the barracks to the other side, where there was a locomotive and freight wagons, that's where they embarked on the transport.

None of us knew where the transports were actually headed. On the ramp stood the German ghetto commander, Rahm, and had in his hand the last list of people, who were to be dismissed from the transport for various reasons. Most often they were those that in some fashion worked for the Germans. Each prisoner designated for transport had to have a card with his number and the transport number hanging from his neck. A person stopped being a person, and became just a number. I remember that already during the trip to Terezin, we had numbers, I was CM390. In the transports to Auschwitz, a person got a new number. Twice my mother and I stood by the open wagons, showing our numbers to Rahm for the last time, and twice he sent us away. Most likely he had information that my mother was working with mica.

My mother, however, had terrible problems with her work with the mica. She wasn't able to meet the quotas. They even wanted to throw her out, but apparently fate intervened. It was very unhealthy work. Large chunks of mica had to be split by hand into tiny pieces. But in the end it saved us from the transports.

Our father wasn't so lucky. Already before the war, our father had had heart problems. He was taking some medicines for it. I don't know exactly what disease he had, but in Terezin he caught a chill on top of it, and evidently had a kidney infection, because he used to have to wrap his back with rabbit furs. So our father went on the transport in 1944 a sick man. Despite being only 57 at the time, he looked quite old and that apparently was the deciding factor during selection.

My brother survived thanks to a coincidence, which is tied to one previous incident. My brother had a bar mitzvah in 1941, which oddly enough we celebrated, though otherwise we didn't go in for Jewish celebrations much. My father had some old Swiss wristwatch hidden away somewhere that was of a good brand, and gave it to him as a gift on this occasion.

Then when in 1944, at the age of 16, skinny but tall for his age, my brother was standing on the ramp in Auschwitz in front of the selection, some SS-man noticed his watch and asked him, 'What

kind of watch is that?' My brother answered something back, and the SS-man said to him, 'OK, give it to me!' My brother gave him the watch without hesitation, because you then had to give everything away anyways. But the SS-man then also asked how old my brother was, and when he answered that he was 16, he gave him this advice, 'During the selection, say that you're already 18.' And my brother has always been convinced that this incident saved his life, because if he would have said that he was 16, he would probably have gone straight into the gas.

My brother then lived through horrible things. Our father evidently went straight into the gas in Auschwitz, but my brother passed through Auschwitz and got into another concentration camp, by the name of Kaufering, I don't know for sure. [Editor's note: by the Dachau concentration camp, the Nazis set up two huge underground factories - Kaufering and Mühldorf, where they then transferred a major part of arms manufacture; working here in inhuman conditions were mainly Jews from Poland, Hungary and the Baltic states.]

At the end of the war my brother ended up in a death transport. They loaded him and other half-dead prisoners onto a train, locked them in, didn't give them anything to eat or drink, and for several days they traveled somewhere, so that half the people in the wagon died during the trip. What's more, they were attacked by Allied planes, who thought that it was a military transport. They shot the locomotive to pieces, so the train remained standing on a track somewhere in a forest.

That was already at the end of the war, sometime in 1945. Viky said that he was almost dead. Some friend of his managed to pull him off the train, where there were only dead bodies left, somewhere into the forest, and there the Americans found them. But the Americans weren't familiar with what kind of state they were in, so they gave them normal meals, and many people died because they suddenly ate too much. After the war my brother had serious health problems, among other things tuberculosis as well, and for a long time had to be treated in a sanatorium.

At the end of the war, in 1945, men from mixed marriages came to Terezin; up till then they had been protected. They were like apparitions, because they were cleanly dressed, fed, and had even brought food with them. Up until then they had lived in relatively normal conditions, as their Aryan wives had supported them in some fashion. One beautiful lady, it was said that she was the lover of the ghetto leader, was designated as their boss. This lady grew very fond of me, you could even say fell in love with me, and because she didn't have any children of her own, treated me like her own son. I worked as a messenger-boy between this directress and several hundred new arrivals from mixed families.

They protested mightily that they were supposed to obey 'some woman.' Evidently they had lived a more or less normal life up to that time, and when they arrived in this new environment, where they had to be obedient, adhere to some program and live within some limits, they began to rebel and show their disagreement. It was quite unpleasant, even though as the messenger-boy they spoiled me, gave me everything that they'd brought with them, so it was a fairly nice way to end the war.

This lady was named Taussigova. I had this early erotic experience, because she used to often hug and kiss me like her own child. I was almost 13 years old. After the war she very much yearned to see me, but I was embarrassed and never saw her again. I don't think that she had any children of

her own after the war either.

## Post-war

Right at the end of the war, it might have been the last month, the Germans finally came to an agreement and handed over supervision of Terezin to the Swedish Red Cross. Swedish soldiers arrived, who were supposed to protect us, and posters with 'Under the protection of the International Red Cross' were pasted up all around Terezin. Sometime before, or maybe not until after, half-dead prisoners from the death transports, who'd before that lived through hell in the worst concentration camps, were withdrawn back to Terezin. Those that had survived were now transported to Terezin. Most of them were infected with typhus and because everyone in Terezin was afraid of the infection spreading, a little concentration camp was set up for them, surrounded by barbed wire, and there they took care of them.

I remember the horror of those wretched people, when they wanted to delouse them in the showers. They all thought that they were going into the gas, and so they had to chase them in there with sticks, so that they could even delouse them. After liberation a large group of Czech doctors arrived in Terezin, who took care of these people. Then shortly after the war, a quarantine was declared. Because of typhus no one could go in or out of Terezin.

At the end of the war there were streams of Germans, who were running away from the Russians, flowing on the road running by Terezin, which was now under the protection of the Red Cross. Occasionally they'd shoot from their cars into Terezin with machine guns, or threw a grenade into it, so even at the end of the war Terezin was occasionally quite dangerous. But soon after them the Russians arrived. I don't think a person could feel that much of joy again. It was an indescribable feeling, when the Russians arrived in Terezin on their tanks. The first thing they did was that they stopped the tanks and pulled down all the fences between the road and Terezin. But then they saw another fence that separated Terezin from where the prisoners from the extermination camps and death transports were being treated, and because they didn't know anything about the quarantine or these prisoners' situation, they let them out.

Try and imagine what it's like, explaining to a Russian general why some prisoners are still locked up. It was a huge amount of work to round those poor wretches up again, and get them back into closed quarters. What's more, before that the Russians had apparently stolen a large amount of chocolate somewhere, and so they stuffed us all with chocolate, including those prisoners that weren't supposed to eat yet.

At the end of the war my mother and I were alone in Terezin; we didn't have any relatives there, because my sister, who had met Mr. Kovanic in Terezin and married him, had in the meantime left for Switzerland on a transport that was supposed to have been in exchange for German prisoners of war. One day we found out that someone was looking for a list of people, we among them, who were supposed to report to a designated location. We were very surprised, because at that time there was still a strict quarantine.

When we got there, there was a bus standing there that scouts from Brandys had arrived on. I don't know how those scouts actually found out about it, whether the radio in Brandys had announced it, but in any event they had done the math, that about 60 or 80 people had left

Brandys during the war, and so that one bus should be enough to drive us all back to Brandys in two trips.

Those scouts were in Terezin for about two days, and finally they managed to find out that the two of us, along with some lady from a village not far from Brandys, were the only ones left. So in the end three of us drove away from Terezin with those scouts in an empty bus. So we arrived in Brandys earlier, before the end of the quarantine, which they for some reason allowed us to violate. From that time on I was an enthusiastic scout.

When we arrived in Brandys, Mother went to have a look inside our house, and found someone else living there. Alone, without our father, our mother wasn't able to deal with anything and so let those people keep on living there. On the ground floor there was supposed to have been some Protectorate constable, and later for a long time there was a music school in our house.

So we had no place to live, no money, nothing. Luckily some Mrs. Zahalkova took us in. She was likely from a mixed family, she had some Jewish ancestors. Her husband had been in a concentration camp due to his being a Communist, and he hadn't returned yet. And because our father had taken care of this lady during the war, after they'd imprisoned her husband, Mrs. Zahalkova now let us live with her in a small villa right in Brandys.

At that time, Soviet soldiers were encamped in Brandys. Back then we were all very naive. We had no idea that there were already certain differences between the Allies, in the beginning we were big fans of theirs. There was this incident that happened back then: One of the Soviet soldiers had borrowed a bicycle somewhere and didn't return it, basically he stole it, and when the owner went to complain to an officer, the officer shot the soldier on the spot.

Also at that time some Soviet soldiers met my mother and Mrs. Zahalkova, and were invited to Mrs. Zahalkova's place for a visit. Mrs. Zahalkova had a 13-year-old daughter, and I remember that both mothers were afraid that the soldiers could do something to us, and so they locked us up. They were afraid of them, but at the same time were afraid to refuse them. Of course, some wristwatch went missing. So after that impressions of the Russians after the war were more ambivalent, even though of course that first impression from the liberation stayed with us all.

We had no news of my sister, my brother, nor of my father. For a long time after the war, Mother believed that Father would return, even when he had already been declared dead. She was completely lost without him. A person can't imagine what sort of situation she found herself in. My mother didn't have any higher education, not even a high school diploma. She only had mercantile school and some business courses, and was completely helpless when it came to the practical things in life. She had been used to our father doing everything. There were probably more women like that back then.

My sister and brother returned home still in 1945, but several months later than Mother and I. For a long time we had no news of my brother, and we had no clue whether he was even alive. Back then many people didn't know anything about the fate of their loved ones, and finding anything out was very complicated. The Red Cross helped a bit, but otherwise people had to primarily help themselves. Because my brother was in terrible shape, right after the war was over the Americans sent him to some sanatorium, where he was treated for tuberculosis. After he returned to Czechoslovakia he continued his treatment in a local sanatorium.

Of our relatives, besides our father, neither did his siblings and their families survive, meaning the Vohryzeks with their children, and Uncle Josef, Father's brother, with his wife and son. Our mother's sister, Aunt Elsa, who was childless, didn't survive either. Also most of our more distant relatives didn't return. We had relatives in Kadan, Cesky Brod and Kutna Hora [Kadan: northwestern Bohemia, Cesky Brod, Kutna Hora: eastern Bohemia]. Only those that had been in mixed marriages survived, among which was our mother's brother, Uncle Quido. He married a lady of Aryan origin, which is why he didn't go to Terezin until the end of the winter in 1945. A similar situation also saved our distant relative Viktor Munk from Kutna Hora. Some cousin of our father's had managed in time to get married to some Aryan in France, and thus avoided the war. After her marriage she was named Besson and was a teacher at a lyceum in Dijon. Father's cousin Pavel Munk managed to emigrate to America in time.

After the war we were utterly poor, we didn't even have anything to wear. Back then lists of war damages were being put together, and who for example knew how to bribe also got some reparations, but our mother didn't know how to arrange things like this, so we didn't get a thing. She only got 300 crowns for me, she herself used to get 600. After the war I was the poorest in my class.

Our mother ended up selling our house to some butcher. She sold it for about 160,000 crowns, but right after that, about a half year later, the currency reform took place [16](#) and money completely lost value, so we were left with nothing. We simply don't and never have had luck with things like that. And despite the fact that they tried to talk my mother out of selling the house, in the end she did it anyway, because it was a constant source of worries, the tenants always wanted us to fix something, and the entire rental income then went towards these repairs.

It's been about five years since we went there to have a look. Some descendants of the butcher that bought the house from our mother long ago, called to tell us that they'd found rolled-up old photographic negatives in a rain gutter, unfortunately they were so damaged that they were unusable. My nephew Jirka wanted to see our house, and so after a long time we again went there to have a look. But it was a very sad visit for me. Those people had gutted and redone the entire interior of the house. And even without this fact I don't like going to Brandys, because the entire town is a very sad sight for me. Perhaps the situation will improve now, but the prefab apartment blocks across from our house will likely never be torn down.

In Prague, on Truhlarska Street [city ward of Prague 1], lived some relatives of the Lustigs, the Pavelkas, who were so kind as to take us in after the war, and so we moved into their not very large apartment in Prague. Mr. Pavelka, an engineer, wasn't a Jew himself, but had married a Jewess by the name of Vilka, and apparently she was a distant relative of ours. They had a daughter, Emina, who was about two years older than I. I was 13 back then, and she was 15 or 16. She slept in this little servant's room, and they'd always make a bed for me on the floor beside her. I remember that under my head, instead of a bolster, I had Palacky's 'History of the Czech Nation', but not much of it penetrated into my head. [Palacky, Frantisek (1798-1896): Czech historian, promoter of political and cultural life, founder of modern Czech historiography. Work: History of the Czech Nation in Bohemia and Moravia (Geschichte von Böhmen), 1836-76 (5 volumes)]

If it hadn't been for Uncle Pavelka, I probably wouldn't even have started attending school. Right away, still in May of 1945, Uncle took me to the nearest school on Sanytrova Street, to be more

exact, at the corner of Sanytrova and Dusni, right across from the Church of Simon and Judith. Today this school is right beside the Intercontinental Hotel. I began going there right away, in May, so I only attended six weeks of the first school year.

At first I had some problems, because I was missing four or five years of studies, and I basically started right off attending second year of council school, but due to the fact that I was evidently open to new ideas and attended school with the poorest children in all of Prague, who didn't study at all, in the end I used to get straight A's on my report card. This was because my classmates were children from Frantisek, that was a neighborhood close to today's Convent of St. Agnes, where the scum of Prague lived - thieves, prostitutes, pimps. The writer Geza Vcelicka wrote about them, today that name probably doesn't mean anything to anyone anymore. [Vcelicka, Geza (1901-1966): real name Antonin Eduard Vcelicka, Czech journalist, poet and writer] Compared to them, I was truly a model student, the principal even took me on as his helper, so I would for example announce things on the intercom, or go help teachers, who back then after the war were just beginning to study at university, to write down lectures and so on.

My classmates were incorrigible scoundrels of the worst sort, sometimes I couldn't believe my eyes. For example they'd even make fun of President Benes [17](#). Nothing was sacred to them. They were armed from the revolution. They were 13-year-old boys, but had pistols and grenades. Once when the police came in the middle of class, they collected a whole basket of these weapons. It's interesting that no one dared try anything with me, evidently they knew about what had happened to the Jews during the war, and that's probably why they respected me. Otherwise, though, they were always fighting amongst themselves, they behaved like animals.

But a boy by the name of Erich Wildau was also in my class. We hung out together, and soon we became best friends. His father was a Jew. Still before the war he had left Erich's mother and moved away to Argentina, where during the war he became a rich man, he owned a textile factory. Erich's mother, who wasn't of Jewish origin, proclaimed that the father of Erich and his two siblings was some Aryan tailor, so as to protect her children from Nazi repression. So thanks to this, Erich Wildau spent the whole war at home in Prague. There were more such cases, when in an effort to save her children a mother proclaimed that their father was someone else. In the end Erich's mother married the tailor and they had some more children together. Later Erich's father brought all his children over to live with him, so in 1948 my best friend moved to Argentina.

Erich Wildau brought me into a scout troop [18](#) that he'd already belonged to before we became friends. So I experienced my nicest years after the war among scouts, up until the Scout movement was forbidden. Already in 1945, Erich and I went together to a scout camp in Pobezovice, near Domazlice, in the Czech Forest [southeastern Bohemia]. We lived in a former Hitlerjugend camp. It was a relatively large center, with room for about 200 scouts. It wasn't a completely ordinary camp, because we also performed guard duty. This is because at that time in the border regions there were still Germans that hadn't yet been expelled, and we watched to make sure that they handed in their entire harvest, as it was right after harvest time. They drove me to some German farm and I kept watch by the scales. The Germans gradually brought in grain, and I kept records, checked the scales and so on.

Pobezovice was located in the part of the country that was jointly occupied by the American and British Army after the war. The Americans and Brits, who were going out with local German girls,

were told various horror stories by them about how Czechs were raping and misusing German girls after the war, and thanks to this the Americans despised us Czechs. It even happened once that when a group of scouts went to a village, the Americans gave them a beating. All of us at that scout camp were suddenly aghast, that the Americans actually didn't like us.

In the morning at roll call, we'd always hoist a Czech and Soviet flag, and the Czech and Soviet anthems would be played. One day at roll call, when we'd just hoisted the Soviet flag and were listening to the Soviet anthem, an American patrol came to our camp. It was a group of American soldiers. First they walked up to the flagpole, cut down the Soviet flag and one of them stuffed it in his pocket. Then they went over to the record player, picked up the record, went over to our leader, whacked him over the head with it, and left without saying a word. We stood and stared, dumbfounded.

On the other hand, once we were at some meeting in a forest school in Rybniky, not far from our camp [a forest school was actually a form of scouting college], and General Patton also came to this meeting with his officers, who were actually former American scouts, and they, on the contrary were very friendly towards us. [Patton, George Smith Jr. (1885- 1945): General of the US Army. The 3rd American Army, which he commanded during World War II, liberated the west and southwest of Bohemia, including the town of Pilsen.] They sat with us around the campfire and sang, they even put their small plane at our disposal, so we were able to fly around up above the countryside, and they also lent us a car and driver. The American command, as opposed to normal soldiers, probably knew what the real story was as far as the Czech nation was concerned. Overall, you could say that where the Germans hadn't been expelled [19](#), there the Americans had an anti-Czech attitude, while there where there were Czech girls, like in Domazlice, there the Americans liked us.

During the time we were at the camp in Pobezovice, there were armed members of the SS on the run, so-called 'wehr-wolves,' wandering in the forests, and this is why when we'd go to German farms and dwellings, older armed scouts who were called rovers had to guard us. The region around Pobezovice was all German, we were the only Czechs in the entire area. I remember that we used to walk in processions, at the front of the procession we'd be carrying a Czechoslovak flag, and we'd be singing loudly. The Germans would come out of their houses to see what was going on. They had various hats on their heads, and when someone didn't take off his hat, our rovers would run over and beat him up, slap him around, because he hadn't taken off his hat before our flag. Already back then I didn't like that very much. It was right before their expulsion.

But otherwise I really found myself in the scouting movement. After the war I felt like I didn't belong anywhere, I was suddenly practically without relatives, without anything. I think that basically all the survivors felt uprooted and yearned to fit in somewhere. They had no property, families, relatives, jobs, they didn't have those things that normally make up a person's collective and supports him. Later some people found this support in the Communist Party, I chose the Scouts. In scouting I found a new way of self-realization as well as a replacement collective. I accepted the ideals of scouting as my own. Unfortunately it all ended after 1948, when the scouting movement was forbidden.

After the 1945 summer holidays, I again went to council school. That was already the third grade of council school. I still don't know how I could have bridged that huge lack of knowledge caused by the war. This lack of knowledge actually didn't make itself apparent until high school, because the

standards at that council school were so low, that I was a one-eyed king in the land of the blind. Third year of council school wasn't very hard work for me, and only thanks to the fact that I got straight A's on my report card did I get into high school, because with straight A's I was able to transfer over without doing entrance exams. I definitely wouldn't have passed the exams, because high school professors didn't make any allowances for the fact that I hadn't been able to attend school during the war.

So I started attending the Old Town high school in Prague. Back then high schools were going through a chaotic transformation period, they were changing their nature, and were always moving. I couldn't make heads or tails of it. Just during the time I was studying we merged with about four other high schools. At first we were a boys-only high school, then we merged with a girls' high school, subsequently the girls' section was separated off again, and in the end it was a mixed high school again.

The high school was on Dusni Street [city ward of Prague 1], today there's a business academy there. Once again, my 'uncle' registered me there. My mother maybe even didn't know where I was going. She never even came to the high school to ask how I was doing. All she had to do was sign the class record book. That's why I was already completely independent in high school, and due to our financial situation, I did brigade work during summer holidays to make money.

In the beginning high school was a very tough time for me. I floundered in grammar, I floundered in math. In those days high school was a relatively elite matter, only around ten percent of the population got in, as opposed to today, where almost everyone goes to high school. Of course, my high school wasn't among the best, I could have never attended such high-quality and renowned high schools such as the one in Truhlarska or Neruda High School were, already from before the war. This one was more of an average Prague high school.

Already in 'kvarta' [fourth of eight years], when I arrived, the high school was divided into two branches. The first branch was classical, where they taught Latin and French, and the other was technical, where they on the contrary studied descriptive geometry and English. I would of course have gravitated more the Latin branch, but that wasn't possible, because students in fourth year of the Latin branch already had three years of Latin behind them, and also knew a bit of French. It was a branch that concerned itself with only the humanities, while I had to attend the technical one, which then also had a great influence on my choice of university.

One of my classmates was a Jewish boy, Petr Rossler, who had also gone through concentrations camps during the war. He had left on the first transports to Lodz, and he and his brother had survived Auschwitz. He'd lost his parents, and because after the war orphans had the possibility of moving away, both brothers moved to Australia, probably in 1948. This was because after the war there was a relatively high interest in Jewish orphans. Jewish families, mainly in Australia or Canada, were offering to take them in. Petr and his brother succeeded in moving away, despite their having an uncle here. Both brothers established themselves in Australia, and founded families. My classmate became a chemist and his brother a famous architect. Not long ago they received some property of their uncle's in restitutions. Rossler was my only Jewish friend in our class.

There was probably only one real anti-Semite in our school, our chemistry teacher. I found out from my classmates that he'd been a well-known collaborator. He had beaten students when they didn't

want to sing the German anthem, 'Deutschland, Deutschland.' Many collaborators later became Communist agents. This person did it like this as well, because he joined the Party [20](#) very early on, and in 1948 he even became the school principal, when he took the position of the old Masaryk-style principal, who had to retire. This new principal and chemistry teacher didn't like me, so I was always failing chemistry. It was very sad for us students to watch how many people from the teachers' ranks gradually joined the Communists, even though earlier they had supported the National Socialists [Nazis].

Back then it wouldn't have occurred to me that I'd one day study architecture. I was interested in astronomy. Because we had a physics teacher who, though he wasn't a Jew, was very interested in what Jews had suffered through during the war, and felt sincerely sorry for us. He used to lend me books about astronomy, which was in fashion back then.

Thanks to my brother, who read many works of international literature, I was also from the age of 15 immersed in classical literature. I remember that once, still before the year 1948, my brother brought home a box full of the collected works of Flaubert [Flaubert, Gustave (1821-1880): French realistic novelist], which he'd bought from some private bookseller. I read that whole box, there were about twenty or thirty books. I basically read everything my brother brought home.

My brother liked reading the 'cursed poets' - Rimbaud, Baudelaire, Verlaine. I got to them when I was around 16 years of age. I also very much liked to read the works of the ancient philosophers, mainly Epiktetos [Epiktetos (ca. 55-ca. 135): Roman stoic philosopher, originally a slave] and the other stoics. Evidently I was in this stoic mood back then, maybe it was due to puberty. All in all I read a really huge amount of books - all of Russian, French and even German classic literature.

Even after 1948, I still used to visit the so-called Academic Library. It was a library meant primarily for university students, but high school students were also allowed to go there. It was located in a building in Klarov [city ward of Prague 1], across from today's Straka Academy [the seat of the Czech government], in a building that back then also contained a public swimming pool. In this library there were long lists fastened to chains, that listed books that one could borrow and take home. It's symptomatic that already in 1948 these lists had some items crossed out. Someone had gone to the trouble to go through the thousands of pages of those lists and blacked out with ink many works, for example by Karel Capek [21](#), Balzac [Balzac, Honore de (1799-1850): French novelist] and other novelists, indicating that they could no longer be lent out. Some pages were even stuck together. But there was this kind, old man working in the library at the time, who lent me all books, even those that were blacked out in the lists. And I really read everything, for example I read all of Goethe [Goethe, Johann Wolfgang von (1749-1832): German poet, writer and scientist]. I even tried to write poems and stories, but in the end I threw it all out. I don't think that anyone in our family had developed healthy artistic self-confidence, you could see that primarily in my brother.

After the war most Jews no longer professed the Jewish religion, many even changed their names. They claimed that the reason was their German names, but in reality they more likely probably wanted to forget that they were Jews. Despite being a typical assimilated Jewish family - our father was a Czech patriot - we never hid our Jewishness. Already during council school, and later also during high school, I began taking religion lessons from the famous Rabbi Sicher. He was an educated man, he lectured at Charles University, evidently Hebraism or Jewish history. I used to go

alone, because no one applied for Jewish religion, while I still had a mark from Jewish, or Israeli religion on my report card. Because after the war, religion was still mandatory for some time.

I used to like going to see the rabbi, because he was able to talk beautifully about the Old Testament. I learned Hebrew, but unfortunately I've forgotten it all. Always at the end of the year the rabbi gave me some book, where he had written 'For excellent studies.' When I had a break between subjects at school, I also used to stay for Catholic religion, because there they also took the Old Testament. Always when my classmates didn't know anything, the catechism teacher held me up as an example for the others, he'd say, 'Look at Munk, how he knows the Old Testament!' That cracked the guys up, of course.

One day, sometime after 1948, this young man came to see me, and introduced himself as a member of an organization that was organizing emigration to Israel. Even before the creation of the independent Israeli state [22](#), pilots for the Israeli army had been training in Czechoslovakia. Then when Israel was created and the Arab states immediately attacked it, the only thing that saved them, and the Israeli generals themselves claimed this, were pilots and planes from Czechoslovakia. So this man, most likely from the Israeli secret service, came to see me and was trying to convince me, even though I was only 16 at the time, to go help out in Israel, that they'd train me in Czechoslovakia and then I'd be able to work in Israel as a pilot. But it didn't really intrigue me, our family was never inclined towards Zionism [23](#). As far as I know, there were never any Zionists in Brandys.

During the time of the February putsch in 1948 [24](#), I was 16 years old. I perceived these events like most other scouts - I had an aversion to Communism. It's interesting, that at one scout camp we held this little election in our troop, and only one of us showed himself to be a convinced Communist. We were always arguing with him, and because he was unwavering, in the end we always threw him in the water. In my opinion I was closest to social democracy and social reformism. I was from the beginning convinced that Communism is wrong, that it's an unrealizable fantasy, and that no ideology that contains the idea of violence can bring anything good.

In the summer of 1948, the last All-Sokol Slet [Rally] was held in Prague. Back then Edvard Benes was still president, and all Sokols came to Prague to support him. I remember that a ceremonial Sokol procession walked through Parizska Street, in which the individual districts walked one behind the other. The Pilsen district carried American flags, and actually all of Parizska Street was bedecked with American and British flags. Crowds of people stood on the sidewalks, and together with the procession cried out various slogans, like for example, 'Let the whole world hear, Benes must go back to the castle!'

When they walked by the tribune where the Communist big-shots stood, prepared to greet and wave to the ceremonial procession, all participants in the procession fell silent and did a 'left face' so that they turned away from the tribune. So the Communist lords waved and waved, but the entire procession was looking the other way. Then at the end of Parizska Street, there were StB [25](#) buses parked, they were arresting people from the procession and driving them away. I thought it better to disappear.

We had beautiful Scout clubhouses in the pillars of Cechuv Bridge in Prague [city ward of Prague 1]. These pillars stood right by the Vltava under Letna hill, today there's a road there that leads along the riverbank in the direction of Straka Academy. Shortly after the putsch the scouting

movement was disbanded, our leaders jailed, one of them was even executed. Our clubhouse was used alternately by a boys' and girls' troop, and so we came into frequent contact with the girls, so my first loves are tied to the clubhouse and a scouting environment.

One day the StB also came to our clubhouse, they beat us, threw all our things outside and closed the clubhouse. I had a good friend in the Scouts, a Croat, by the name of Ante Peresin. Sometime after 1948 they drove all Yugoslavs out of the country, as a result of political changes related to the Soviet-Yugoslav rift. [Editor's note: On 28th July 1948, the participants of the Informbiro expelled the Communist Party of Yugoslavia from their association. The Informbiro resolution was the culmination of tensions between Stalin and Tito, whose roots reached back to the period during World War II, when Tito's partisans succeeded in liberating Yugoslavia without the direct intervention of the Soviet Army. Tito thus always behaved towards Stalin in a sovereign and self-confident fashion. Neither did the internal development of Yugoslavia proceed according to Stalin's expectations - Tito defended himself against the espionage activities of Soviet "advisors," who finally had to be recalled from the country. From that time on, the intensity of the process of divergence between the two countries strengthened.] One day the StB came for my friend and his family, and they were driven to the border at night. One day I came to visit him, but the apartment was empty.

So, our troop fell apart. Occasionally former scouts would get together and go to various cultural events, debated about philosophy and so on. Each Sunday we had a meeting at St. Jacob's Church in Prague, where they had beautiful organ concerts during services. Thanks to this I had a black mark in my political profile - they contained information that I was a Jew and at the same time attended a Catholic church. The punch line is that I later found the main initiator of our cultural get-togethers in a list of StB agents. Undoubtedly he was reporting on us, but because we never got around to any sort of subversive activity, none of us were jailed.

We were one of the few Jewish families where there wasn't even one Communist. We held on through the entire Communist era, even though it of course had a strong influence on our careers. It basically never occurred to us to join the Party. After the war, some Jews not only denied their Jewishness and changed their names, but also denied their rich, bourgeois ancestors. It was quite sad. Some Jews emigrated, and those that stayed mostly joined the Party.

A yearning for a collective that will accept you unconditionally, induced many Jews to identify with the Communist ideology. Others found themselves in Zionism, and others, like me, looked for new support in the Scout movement. I identified with the ideals of scouting, even though many experienced people made fun of their ideals. I took their moral code completely seriously. I think that my membership in the Scouts had a bad influence on my political profile still for a long time after.

While I was studying there, my high school was attended by predominantly children from bourgeois families. Although we all had to join the Youth Association [26](#), only a few students joined the Communists. An exception was a boy whose father was an StB officer. This boy behaved like an utter cynic, he made fun of everything. In adulthood he worked as a Communist agent abroad, and when he returned after the revolution in 1989 [27](#), he changed his name three times, and even had plastic surgery done on his face. I don't remember any other Communist from the ranks of students.

During final exams the situation was worse. Present in the graduation committee there were also representatives of the Party and various Party organizations, who could recommend applicants for acceptance to various universities. Each high school got so-called guide numbers, which was the number of students that could be recommended for acceptance at individual universities, but they were very low quotas. I knew that it was of no use to apply for philosophy, as the only thing that awaited one there was the study of Marxism-Leninism, so finally I applied for medicine, where however on the other hand knowledge of Latin was necessary.

In the end I was wholly resigned to the fact that no one would recommend me for any university. The graduation committee didn't fail to remind me of my bourgeois roots, and in general one could say that my profile was a bad one for the times. Everywhere I had remarks that I was indifferent, that I didn't participate in all sorts of events and so on. Nevertheless, in the graduation committee there was some Communist who had himself experienced a concentration camp, and he took my side, he mentioned that I'd been in a concentration camp during childhood, and took the stand that I should get some sort of opportunity.

By coincidence, no one had applied for AAAD [Academy of Arts, Architecture and Design in Prague], the school had a quota of about two people that it could recommend, and so I was allowed to take entrance exams for AAAD. They were difficult, three-day exams, which included drawing in the field, in the studio, I had to design some sort of fountain, but mainly prior works had to be presented to the committee. I'd never drawn, even though in high school I had all A's in drawing, and because my brother, on the other hand, was always drawing, I took a stack of his drawings, and without telling him took them with me to the exam and submitted them to the committee. Surprisingly, I ended up well, of eighty applicants they were taking fifteen, and I was the fifteenth. Back then there wasn't as much favoritism and corruption during the acceptance process as later.

I had barely started attending AAAD when the rector, Smetana, called me in, that he'd found in my application documents that I had applied for medicine, and so that I actually hadn't even wanted to get into AAAD, and that he'd just gotten an order from the Party's Central Committee that he has to accept the son of some Communist bigwig, and so whether I wouldn't mind if he arranged for me to study architecture at technical school [technical school or CTU: Czech Technical University: created in 1803 as the first polytechnic school in Central Europe]. Back then I didn't care one way or the other, so in the end I went straight into technical school, which surprisingly I also graduated from.

I naively assumed that the Communists can't do anything to architecture. Unfortunately I didn't know that in the Soviet Union architecture had been already long ago been deformed by Socialist Realism. The ideologist Zhdanov promoted this monumental return to old historical forms, while I liked pre-war functionalism. [Zhdanov, Andrei Alexandrovich (1896-1948): Soviet state and Party official. From the year 1944 he especially devoted himself to ideological questions, issues of Marxist-Leninist philosophy and literary theory.]

Actually, during my studies I experienced the worst era, when everything had to be done exactly like it was in the Soviet Union. There were unbelievable things happening back then. We weren't allowed to design wide windows, because in the USSR they were narrow. Our professors - the best architects of that time, who before the war had designed famous functionalist villas in Baba [city ward of Prague 6] and other noted buildings, were now continually going to Moscow and bowing down before the bizarre architectural creations there. Architecture had been completely violated.

This is why no great architect arose from our generation, because we were deformed, just like the times. Shortly after I graduated, in 1957, the situation began relaxing to the point that the students that came after us could already study relatively normally.

During the time of my studies, the main ideological watchdog at our school was a young man of Jewish origin, the son of a very well-known rich merchant family, who had emigrated during the war. After the war his parents had stayed abroad, and the son returned home as a Communist. At a public Party meeting he disowned his parents and his name, and from that time he used a new name to show that he had nothing in common with them. He kept very strict watch so that all the students were correctly ideologically focused. He was the terror of all the professors in the Faculty of Architecture. Gradually the scrutiny decreased. In 1968 this person was again signing his name with his original surname hyphenated with his new name.

After the revolution I met him at the Jewish community as a devout Orthodox Jew, who went there regularly and now signed with only his original name, after his parents. I reminded him of who I was with the words, 'We know each other from the faculty, back then there you were...' And he quickly replied, 'Yeah, yeah, the stupid things we did in our youth!' That's this peculiar instance of Jewish fate...

At the faculty, anti-Semitism showed itself mainly from the direction of the cadre [political] department. Often I was accused of not involving myself in politics enough. Once the cadre officer even summoned me, some laborer from Kolbenka [CDK], he began talking about how he didn't like Jews, and it ended with the words, 'And we'll drive all you Jews into concentration camps again anyways. That's where you belong!' [CKD, Ceskomoravska Kolben Danek: one of the famous industrial firms of pre-war Czechoslovakia. After the war the company was revitalized and quickly nationalized. Among its most important activities were manufacturing of locomotives in Vysocany and streetcars in Smichov. The company was gradually becoming one of the largest manufacturers of streetcars in the world, and employed up to 50,000 workers. After the revolution in 1989 and with the economic collapse of the COMECON, CKD lost its largest customers, and after a series of changes, sell-offs and bankruptcies the company essentially disappeared from the marketplace.]

I didn't feel any anti-Semitism from the professors. I blended in with the others, because I don't look all that Jewish. Sometimes I had to deal with awkward situations, when someone was talking about Jews in front of me in a not exactly nice way, I didn't know whether I should speak up and say I was Jewish, or ignore the situation with decorous silence. I was also the only one in our entire class of that year that the cadre department didn't allow to even go on a study trip to Poland.

After finishing my studies at the Faculty of Architecture, I got into my first real conflict with the Communist regime. After graduating from whichever faculty, the graduate got these so-called placements. They were vouchers for concrete positions in certain companies. Because what work conditions were like in various places was general knowledge, there was always a big battle for these placements. Because of this, it would happen that already a year before graduation, all relatives were on red alert and were looking for connections to get influence and to get a good position for their candidate. I didn't have any relatives, so I left it all up to fate. I really didn't care where I ended up.

One connection that I did have was a friend of my brother-in-law, by the name of Erich Kohn. He was a pre-war Communist, during the war he'd been in Terezin, and during the time I was finishing

my studies, he had a relatively important position, he was the director of some research institute. My mother forced my brother-in-law, who had worked with Mr. Kohn in Terezin and where they had become very good friends, to go ask him for help. Apparently that Kohn refused with the words, 'Forgive me, but I, as a Jew, can't afford to help another Jew.' That was the only connection that I could perhaps have had in my life, but didn't have.

It was during the difficult times after the Slansky trials [28](#), which Mr. Kohn survived, and as a fanatic Communist was trying to be as careful as possible. Due to the fact that we weren't a Communist family, we couldn't have been directly affected by these trials, because they were only related to Communists, but at the same time, we of course felt that the anti-Semitism was also aimed at us. We said to ourselves that it's not without consequence, because back then the entire Communist leadership, including Slansky, was behaving truly atrociously. Deep down we, non-Communists, maybe even wished these trials on them a little, and said to ourselves, just let them go ahead and slaughter each other.

I got a placement in Jablonec [a town in the north of Bohemia] at a regional hygiene station. When I arrived there, I was informed that they didn't need an architect there. So right away I had them confirm that they didn't need me, because back then that was a big advantage. When you got rid of the placement, you were basically free and could pick a company where you wanted to start working. Back then there was a labor shortage, especially university graduates.

All overjoyed, I returned to the faculty and boasted to my classmates, who'd all had to make use of some sort of connections to find decent work. One of my colleagues, who had a brother higher up in the faculty management, arranged it so that they took that placement away from me, despite the fact that my name was on it, so theoretically someone else could use it. I guess God punished him, because he died of cancer at the age of 30, he had a brain tumor.

They gave me another placement, this time for Agroprojekt Liberec. There they once again informed me that they didn't need an architect, and that my task would be agitating for and starting up agricultural cooperatives, later the JZD [29](#). I said to myself that I didn't study in order to start up agricultural cooperatives, and that even the Communist Party can't want that an architect into whom they invested money should go found JZD's. I simply didn't start there, which was a crime back then. Some of my friends had done something similar, their company parted ways with them, but no one paid any further attention to it. But my director had me charged.

Despite the fact that I was given only a suspended sentence, they diligently recorded my offence in my cadre records. Due to this, I then couldn't find any work for two years, because they refused me everywhere, as soon as they had a look into my cadre file. On the other hand, I was applying for jobs regularly, so they couldn't put me in jail for being a parasite. It wasn't until after 1990 that I was legally rehabilitated.

So I stumbled around like this for about two years, and was always with one foot in jail. I was constantly answering various ads with work offers, but they refused me everywhere as soon as they saw my cadre profile. I was in danger of having to serve time, because I had a suspended sentence and wasn't working, which was an offence. So rather than that I went to work in Cheb [a town in western Bohemia], as a manual laborer on the renovations of the historical center of town, but there was still a question mark hanging over my head.

Back then Cheb was in the closely guarded border zone, and I was moving about freely there. Someone informed on me to the StB, that I was trying to cross the border. Because the StB offices were located right on the town square and I walked by them every day, I stopped by one day, and asked them, 'I hear you're looking for me?' They were surprised, because they'd received a report that I'd crossed the border long ago. It was a farce.

Besides work in Cheb, during this period I in some fashion got to some interesting work for the architect Zazvorka [Zazvorka, Jan Sr. (1884-1963): Czech architect], who was a very prominent architect, who'd designed for example the Vitkov Memorial and Smichov Railway Station in Prague. He was perhaps the only architect who during these difficult times had his own private studio. He had connections, though he wasn't a Communist, because after World War I, as general of the Legion, he'd been the district commissioner in Kladno [a town in central Bohemia, west of Prague], and during the time of the labor hunger protests there, he refused to obey an order to shoot at the workers. At the time he was demoted, but later the Communists tried to make it up to him by letting him have a private studio.

Back then, companies were classified according to cadre profile into groups 'A,' 'B' and 'C,' where A were the 'best' companies and C the 'worst.' In 1959 I finally found a job in one C company, thanks to the fact that their cadre officer had mercy on me and took me on despite my poor cadre history, saying that it can't be in the Party's interest for a young person who wants to work to not work. It was a cooperative. Cooperatives belonged to the lowest cadre group, C. 'A' were normal project institutes, I had no chance there, B were smaller, town, not state institutes, and on the lowest level were cooperative project companies. These companies worked for villages, for village consumer cooperatives, or Jednotas [30](#). Our work was setting up and fixing up various small, ugly shops, pubs and shopping centers. Back then we had very limited possibilities, only what socialist construction manufacture allowed us. It didn't really have much to do with architecture.

In 1960 there was a big amnesty of political prisoners. Many people who'd gotten 20, 40 years in jail for absolutely nothing were now rehabilitated, they got some small financial compensation, and many of them were sent to our company to work, so that they'd have them all under control. They were a quite pleasant group of people. I worked in this company until 1965, when they founded a new company, whose purpose was to renew the retail network in Prague's historical center. This was because after 1948, all stores in the center of Prague were nationalized and gradually closed. When a person for example walked the Royal Road [city ward of Prague 1], all stores had their blinds drawn, nothing was open anywhere. In 1965 we were given the task of reopening these stores. It was pleasant work, because we were designing the renovation of entire historical streets, including store and restaurant interiors. Unfortunately, it all stopped after the occupation in 1968 [31](#).

Nevertheless, I held on in this new company until 1971, when I returned again to my original company. There I 'soldiered on' until retirement. So except for a couple of exceptions, I never made it to really 'big' architecture. Many architects preferred to leave and go work in research institutes, because it was better to design nothing than to design 'panelaky' [prefab apartment blocks].

I would have liked to have devoted myself to architecture, even at school I was interested in the renovation of historical buildings, and that's also why I went to work as a manual laborer during the reconstruction of the center of Cheb. I wanted to get into the so-called State Institute for

Renovation of Historical Towns and Objects, nicknamed 'debrisproject,' because there they worked on the renovation of historical buildings, and it would have certainly been nice work, but I couldn't get in there, because it was a state institute in the A group.

In the beginning my colleagues and I participated in various architectural contests, and had a few successes, for example in the contest for the Old Town Hall in 1962, but we soon learned that to succeed you needed the right connections.

After the war, my brother at first attended council school with me, because he was also missing five years, and then began attending a graphics school under Petrin [a popular hill in the center of Prague]. Back then it was a renowned school, where many talented young people, like for example the artist Vladimir Boudnik had studied. [Boudnik, Vladimir (1924-1968): Czech painter and graphic artist] However, my brother didn't finish this school. Because he was of a much more revolutionary nature than I, he got to the forefront of a conflict with the principal of the graphics school. Their entire class had revolted against him for some reason, but everyone, with the exception of my brother, then took back their position. They then threw my brother out of the school, and he never studied any other school after that, and worked as a laborer all his life.

First he worked as a proofreader in a graphic factory in Hradistek near Stechovice, where they manufactured various decals. This work at least had something to do with art, my brother was even in charge of an art course for the other workers. Before retirement, though, he was working in the Amati Kraslice factory, where he only packaged trumpets and other musical instruments, though he still did art as an amateur.

In 1959 I met my wife. After the war, many Jews who had returned from the concentration camps married non-Jewish girls. For one, there weren't enough Jewish girls, and also Jews apparently didn't want to have anything to do with their origin any more. My wife and I were an exception. Initially we didn't know that we had a common past. We had both been in Terezin at the same time, but hadn't known of each other. My wife had been in a 'Kinderheim.' When we met, sometime around 1959, and found out that we both had a similar history, it made us very close. People who hadn't experienced what Jews had during the war were after all somewhat distant, because they couldn't understand how we felt. I had never talked about my experiences anywhere. We tried to suppress our feelings and forget about them, and as a couple it was simpler.

My wife comes from Letna [city ward of Prague 7]. Though her father was a dentist, her ancestors' family tradition was connected with book publishing. Her grandfather was the first publisher of Schweik [32](#) and founded the Synek publishing house, which before the war had been known for publishing quality books. My wife's mother died of cancer when my wife was still a baby, and her father then found a new wife. Shortly thereafter they registered my wife as a Catholic in the assumption that it would help her in life, but unfortunately during the war entirely different points of view were decisive.

My wife was one of two children. Her brother, Jiri Synek, later known under the pseudonym Frantisek Listopad [Listopad, Frantisek (b. 1921): real name Jiri Synek, Czech poet and writer], who today lives in Lisbon, had a very interesting fate during the war. Back then he was about 18 or twenty years old, and was involved in some underground organization, which is why he hid out with various people in Prague during the entire course of the war. It's unbelievable that no one discovered him, and he must undoubtedly have been very brave. He used to tell stories about how

for example he had to steal a rubber stamp in some government office, so he could then use it to stamp some documents. After the war he got an award for courage from President Benes.

He was the only Communist in our family, but a Communist of a different type than were those that during the Communist era bowed down before the regime. Before the putsch in 1948, my wife's brother had gone to France on a business trip, where he then published some political magazine. When after the putsch the Communists summoned him back to Czechoslovakia, he refused to return and stayed abroad.

My wife then had many troubles due to him, they used to take her in to the StB, because her brother occasionally broadcast on Radio Free Europe [33](#), which in the 1950s was no joke. It was all carefully noted in their cadre files. Because from the regime's point of view, a Communist who emigrated was much worse than a non-Communist. My wife's brother devoted himself mainly to literature, he's a well-known poet, writer and playwright. He currently lives in Portugal, and is very respected there as a cultural authority. He even represented Portugal in negotiations regarding the Czech Republic joining the European Union. He's received many decorations and awards in Portugal as well as the Czech Republic, most recently for example an award from President Havel [34](#) as well as the Czech foreign minister for promoting Czech culture in Portugal.

My wife graduated from journalism. At first she worked as a journalist in some magazine, later she worked in Barrandov [a well-known film studio in Prague] as a dramaturgist. During the 1950s, very strict background checks took place in many companies, the last of these took place I think in 1957 or 1958. Many employees in companies in cadre groups A and B lost their jobs. I remember that back then they fired many assistants from our faculty. At that time they fired my wife from Barrandov. She was always getting into trouble because of her brother, and thanks to this often didn't even have money for bread.

Luckily she started working in film animation for the group 'Bratri v triku,' and she stayed there until retirement. For a long time there was a shortage of scripts for animated films and thanks to this in 1965 we began to write scripts for animated films together. My wife began with it, but I soon joined her, because I found it fun. Cartoons about two doggies - Staflik and Spageta [Stepladder and Spaghetti], became widely popular.

In 1999 the Albatros publishing house approached us with the idea of realizing Staflik and Spageta in book form. [The Albatros publishing house was founded in 1949. It was the only publishing house in the former Czechoslovak Socialist Republic that specialized in publishing children's literature.] We wrote two books, the first sold out a press run of 20,000, and was also translated into other languages. The second came out recently, so it's still too early to evaluate it. Staflik and Spageta were shot as a cartoon from 1968. The original name was 'A Dog's Life,' and of course after the Russian occupation this was a problem. Some censor noticed it, so in the end we had to think of a new name. The cartoon sold into about 40 countries. Thanks to the fact that the cartoon was without any spoken text, there was no need for dubbing. This is why when we wrote books we had to make many things up completely anew.

We made up that the dogs live in a town named Psinice [Dogtown]. There's a funny story connected to this. Because some lady from the publishing house came and told us that Psinice by Jicin [the town of Jicin lies northeast of Prague in the Bohemian Paradise tourism region] really does exist, that they had a cottage there. We said to ourselves that this has got to mean trouble,

because we were making fun of this town of Psinice in our books. Recently we were invited to Psinice, and it turned out to be exactly the opposite. A big celebration was held on a local soccer field, with majorettes, firemen, village residents and even the mayor. They named Staflik and Spageta honorary citizens of Psinice, and long afterwards we were still signing our books under a tent on the field.

Our other scripts didn't become as famous. These were for example Edudant a Francimor according to K. Polacek, Pucalkovic Amina based on the book by J. Plachta, or Pozor, bonbon! about two beavers, which was an attempt at a cartoon detective story, and others.

The 1960s were probably the nicest time of my life. In 1965 our daughter Hana was born, we bought our current apartment in Vokovice [city ward of Prague 6] and what's more there was even an obvious thaw happening in the political arena. It was a beautiful feeling, because it seemed that everything was aiming towards something better. This tendency was most evident in culture. Excellent plays, movies and books began coming to Czechoslovakia.

Back then my wife was friends with Josef Skvorecky and other important cultural personages. [Skvorecky, Josef (b. 1924): Czech prose writer, essayist and translator] Among them were for example the writer J. Jedlicka, the poet J. Zabrana, the painter M. Medek, the philosopher I. Svitak and others. My wife was always very socially active. I don't know how she met so many important people, but most likely they had studied together, and later she met many people through her work in film.

I was also politically active in those years. In 1968 some other non-Party members and I founded a so-called KAN, Club of Involved Non-Party Members, within the Architects' Association. Back then there were artists' unions in all fields, including writers, artists, musicians, etc., which then served as a platform for the creation of various reformist groups, like KAN for example.

These clubs weren't isolated, and in 1968 communicated with each other about political matters, and basically to a certain extent co-created politics. For example, our club invited to its founding meeting the philosopher, poet and politician Ivan Svitak, who was a very noted person back then, as he was very active, wrote newspaper articles, participated in various similar meetings. [Svitak, Ivan (1925-1994): Czech philosopher and political scientist] At the same time we also had delegates from other unions as guests. This founding meeting took place in July 1968. To this day I remember his speech about the direction of reforms back then, which ended with him saying that either the situation will stay the same for some time more, or that the Russians will occupy us. Back then all of my architect colleagues laughed at him, but in a few weeks, or perhaps even days, his prediction came true [35](#).

In the last weeks before the occupation, there was almost complete freedom of the press, so we could read about everything what was happening back then in the papers. We also listened to foreign radio stations. So we knew about the trip by Dubcek [36](#) and other politicians to Moscow, we knew about the negotiations in Cierna nad Tisou [29th July - 1st August 1968: the members of the leaderships of the Czechoslovak and Soviet Communist parties met in Cierna nad Tisou (in a railway car)].

Along with other people around me I was of the opinion that it wasn't wise for reforms to charge ahead at such a tempo, and that it wouldn't at all be a problem for them to be more careful and

take place more gradually, so that we wouldn't provoke the Russians and wouldn't expose ourselves needlessly to danger. But back then there were already forces at the forefront that drove the reform process forward at an extreme pace.

Today we know that even in the Soviet Central Committee there were for a long time disagreements regarding whether military intervention should take place. But of course it's difficult to speculate whether an eventual slower or more careful direction would have prevented tragedy. The fact is that we were drunk on freedom and without inhibitions.

Right on the day of the occupation, 21st August, I was alone in our apartment in Vokovice, because my wife was with our daughter, who was three at the time, on a recreational trip organized by the journalists' union at the Roztez chateau by Kutna Hora. During the night I heard planes flying overhead, I heard tanks driving in from the airport, those small ones that can fit into airplanes. I said to myself, those have got to be some sort of maneuvers again, it didn't at all occur to me what was really going on.

Back then we had a car, a Renault, so in the morning I normally got in the car and drove to work, which was in Stupartska Street [city ward of Prague 1]. I was driving along the main road in our neighborhood, Vokovice. Back then cars could normally park on that street, and I noticed that that day all the parked cars were completely demolished. Because the tanks that had driven through had flattened them. Not a soul to be seen, the street was completely empty, I was driving along the street all by myself. People had left their cars at home, because they were afraid. The streetcars weren't running, I was driving along an empty street, I only saw some pedestrians once in a while, and said to myself how terrible it was that the transit system was once again not working.

At the end of the street some man stopped me and asked me if I could drive him to work. So he got in the car and began telling me how terrible it was, what had happened, but I still didn't make the connection. When we arrived at the Prasny [Powder] Bridge [a bridge that spans a valley, leading towards the Prague Castle], suddenly two columns of tanks surrounded us on both sides, because one column was heading uphill, and the other was heading the opposite way, downhill. I'd gotten in between them. It was a strange feeling, they were these huge colossi, roaring, and their tracks were lumbering right beside my little car, which in that instance seemed like a child's toy. It was only at this point that I realized what had happened.

When we were driving along Chotkova Street, we passed machine gun emplacements. Chotkova Street is a serpentine that leads downhill, and as I was driving by the machine guns, their muzzles aimed at me and followed my position the entire way. They followed me constantly. Luckily in the end they didn't stop me. When I got to work, everyone was amazed, and told me that I was crazy to have come by car.

But right the next day I again took the car, because I didn't know what was happening with my wife. I decided to drive to see her. Prague was again completely empty, I didn't meet a single car besides Soviet columns and tanks. The situation by Kutna Hora was the same. About three times I was stopped by Russians with machine guns. At the time we were all wearing a tricolor [ribbon] on our shirts, which they tore off me along with my shirt the first time, as soon as I stepped out of the car. They then began to search the car, they were probably looking for valuables or some propaganda materials.

Each time they also went to look in the trunk, and they always flew into a rage, because there was a motor in the trunk, which was unfamiliar to them, and they couldn't understand it, maybe they saw it as some sort of anti-state activity. They then ran to the front, where they didn't find a motor, and were completely beside themselves from it. I was afraid that they'd shoot me because my motor was in the back.

Kutna Hora and its surroundings were occupied by the Polish. They also occupied the chateau where my wife was on the journalist's holiday. There were also some important people there at the time, like for example Jiri Dienstbier [Dienstbier, Jiri (b 1937): Czech journalist, politician and diplomat]. The Polish officers were apologizing to everyone for what had happened, that it wasn't their fault, that they had to. I picked up my wife and daughter and we drove back to Prague.

On the way back it was already all organized. The local residents were showing us the way so that we'd avoid check stops. The Russians, on the other hand, were being directed up blind alleys, into forests or fields, we saw tanks that had ended up in mud in a field and couldn't get out. Soviet soldiers were then going from door to door and begging for water, but the locals refused to give them even water. Everywhere people took down road signs, village name signs, street signs, direction signs were sometimes turned in the opposite direction, so that the Russians wouldn't be able to orient themselves. They then wandered with maps in places that they didn't know, and until local collaborators helped them were completely confused.

We knew that with the existence of atomic weapons and a bipolar world, what's more after the experiences in Hungary [37](#), that we had practically no chance that the West, concretely America, would help us. We found out that the Soviets had informed the Americans in time about the planned intervention in Czechoslovakia, and also about the fact that they were depending on the validity of agreements regarding spheres of influence and thus also the division of Europe, and thus that America wouldn't help Czechoslovakia.

Sometime at the beginning of September, we had a trip to England with the Architects' Association that had already been planned in advance. So about ten days after the occupation, we left by train via Paris to London. The train was full of emigrants, because back then no one needed exit visas. During departure everyone was saying goodbye to us, that we won't be returning. Of course we too were considering emigration. Every day we debated whether we should or shouldn't stay in England, in the end we decided that we'd return. Most of our friends emigrated. We said to ourselves that we can't let ourselves be pushed out just like that. I'd never been a member of the Communist Party, and said to myself that no one can force me to do something that I don't want to do.

What's more, we didn't like the fact that some emigrants were misusing the situation, where everyone abroad was very accommodating and catered to their every wish. They were mainly young people, students for example. I met two students who had moved in with some highly placed older man, and were misusing his assistance. Some Czech girls were working there in strip bars and once we even saw an ad for the highlight of some bar - a strip show by a student of the Philosophical Faculty of Charles University in Prague. There were more of such things, and we were embarrassed by them.

Plus we thought that it would be possible to salvage something in Czechoslovakia, and weren't capable of imagining what a hard line would take effect after the beginnings of the Normalization

38. At the time we were the guests of the Architects' Association in Britain. We were received by Robert Matthew, who was the director of the largest architectural firm in England. He asked us if we'd like to stay in England, that he could give us jobs if need be. He was a very influential man, who owned many properties, and gave us, architects, a palace in Saint James Park at our disposal, including servants. We then went to Edinburgh and finally back to Prague. When we returned, I thought that the nation won't let itself be broken that quickly, but the opposite was true.

During the entire time of the Normalization, my wife worked as a dramaturgist for animated films. It was pleasant work, given the possibilities in those days. Animated films kept up their good level of quality, because the Communists couldn't pervert them as much as normal movies. This field became home to some well-known artists who couldn't work anywhere else, because they were uncomfortable for the regime. For example, my wife brought the artist Vladimir Jiranek [Jiranek, Vladimir (b. 1938): Czech illustrator, cartoonist and humorist] into animated films, who had discredited himself by drawing political caricatures in 1968 and so didn't have many ways of making a living, or the excellent artist J. Salamoun [Salamoun, Jiri (b. 1935): Czech graphic artist].

During the Normalization period we were personal friends with some of the leading figures of the dissident movement, but to be honest, the dissident movement repelled me, because 90% of them were former Communists. I couldn't ignore the fact that in the 1950s these people had gotten ahead on the basis of their party membership, at a time when many innocent people had been executed or sentenced to many years in prison, and didn't 'wake up' until the 1970s, at a point when not that much could happen to them. But that doesn't mean that we didn't participate at all. We had friends among dissidents, we attended various secret meetings and in 1987 my wife signed the Several Sentences petition. Before the revolution in 1989, we also smuggled in secret materials from Switzerland for noted dissidents.

We lived through thirty years of Normalization in this sort of subdued fashion. No one hoped any longer that he'd live to see some fundamental changes in the regime, and so many people emigrated. It wasn't that difficult any more, but we didn't consider it. Our ties to the Czech environment and mainly to Prague were too strong.

In our company, the political purges that followed after 1968 affected only a handful of Communists. Most of my colleagues were against the regime, and were no longer afraid to openly show it, even though there were informers everywhere. Those that yearned for a career and property joined the Party in place of those that were thrown out. Those that didn't have anything, like us - we had no car, cottage or villa, only an apartment in a prefab apartment block - and didn't want to get ahead, could live in relative peace. I think that freedom is a question of internal convictions, which no one can take away from you.

So during the time of the Normalization we devoted ourselves to the writing of scripts for cartoons. As far as my work as an architect goes, I was only working on smaller construction and renovation projects in the countryside or on interiors. A housing shortage, for 20 years nothing had been built, forced the government in the 1960s to build prefab housing developments, which have so negatively impacted our cities. The construction industry gained a disproportionate amount of political power, and determined what and how architects should design. It was a caricature of the Utopian visions of the architect Corbusier [Corbusier, Le (1887-1965): Swiss architect] from the 1930s. Most architects were forced to design these absurd 'rabbit hutches.' So I was glad that I was

able to avoid this.

Despite the rigid normalization, the possibilities in cultural life were relatively broad, even though many of our artists were taboo. My wife, as I've already said, made possible as a dramaturgist for Animated Film for a number of them to work under other people's names, and similarly this took place in other places as well. Even though it was common knowledge, the regime no longer had enough strength to prevent it. During these times we assiduously attended excellent concerts, small and large theaters, and exhibitions, both officially permitted and not. Translations of international literature were published, quality foreign films were also shown. Occasionally we even got abroad, and we devoted ourselves to sports a great deal. We often spent weekends at the tennis club, where we had an excellent circle of friends.

Due to her political profile, our daughter had a problem getting into any university, so in the end she had to settle for the Faculty of Education, though she claimed that she'd never teach. On top of that she had to pick a field that people were the least interested in, which was understandably enough Russian, which she began studying in combination with art education. After the revolution she switched Russian for educational psychology, and this she then studied along with art education until the end of her studies.

After she finished school she wanted to make a living as a fine and graphic artist. She designed book covers, business cards, and finally also made it into the film industry. At first she worked on a graduate experimental film and animated pictures by the painter J. Dubuffet [Dubuffet, Jean Philippe Arthur (1901-1985): French painter]. Later she wrote a script for a film about the Jewish artist Robert Guttman, for which she received funding from a committee that subsidizes various film projects. [Guttman, Robert (1880-1942): well-known Prague painter and Zionist. Died in the Lodz ghetto]

She also wrote a film script about my brother, but unfortunately not enough financial resources have been raised yet to shoot it, so currently my daughter is actually unemployed. She lives in Prague, in Vinohrady [city ward of Prague 2], in an attic apartment. This apartment was my last project.

At the time of the revolution in 1989 I was 58, and was working as an expert on commercial buildings in our head office. Due to the fact that I had been imprisoned during the war, I already had the right to retire in 1989, because every person that was unjustly imprisoned during the war could retire a year earlier for every year he'd been imprisoned. I wanted to keep working, but things quickly changed. The Communists in the existing management privatized the company, or to be more exact converted it into their personal property. This process lasted roughly up to the spring of 1991, when all employees were let go and the company stayed in these people's hands, and is basically operating like this to this day.

They were mainly representatives of a new generation of Communists, who had graduated from universities in the 1980s, and managed to join the Party before the revolution, but didn't look at their party membership from an ideological perspective, but from a solely pragmatic one. They were simply aware of the fact that you can't find decent work without party membership, and it didn't cause them any problem to address this little matter.

After our company de facto fell apart, I was forced to retire, and because back then there were no limits on retirees regarding making extra money, I worked another five years as a small businessman as a member of the Chamber of Architects. But I didn't like this work at all. Everywhere I went I ran into huge corruption. Without bribery it was practically impossible to get a decent contract. A person easily found out that when he's alone, he's got no chance of survival in a corrupt environment, because all advantages are gradually collected by the large companies, who make use of what are officially called commissions, but I call it corruption.

The way it works is that when someone 'finds you a job,' they ask for maybe 10 or 20 percent of the profits. Corruption flourished in government offices, but for example even the conservationists approved projects mostly just in exchange for bribes. A person saw how state property was being stolen. In 1995 I said to myself that I don't have the stomach for it, and that I don't have the need for it either, and really retired.

Besides this, after the revolution I had to deal with the restitution of our property for the entire family. It was terrible torture, which ruffled my nerves and ruined ten years of my life. I found it especially hard to take because I despise property and have never wanted to own anything, but I felt a responsibility towards my family, mainly towards my daughter, to ensure that justice be done.

After the war my mother had carefully recorded all the things that we had lost, and added up their value to be about three and a half million prewar crowns. After the war we eked out an existence, and besides our house nothing at all was returned to us. This was because the government had collected all records of property that Czech Jews had had taken away from them, so that they'd have evidence in hand that would be usable within the scope of international negotiations with Germany. As Sudeten Germans on the other hand were asking for the return of property lost in the expulsion, both governments negotiated until they agreed that both opposing property claims would be dismissed and no one would get anything.

However, the Germans were of course compensated by their government. On top of that, the question of property that had stayed in the country was addressed. So just in Prague, a third of the buildings, be they residential or industrial, that were owned by Jews before the war, fell to the state, because their owners hadn't survived the war. Thus many Jews had a theoretical right to inherit property from their deceased relatives. We didn't have particularly rich relatives, only the Vohryzeks had a farming estate in Doubravice, for which our father had lent them some money, and the rest were smaller houses in various locations in Bohemia.

After the war the property left by deceased Jews was supposed to be returned on the basis of normal inheritance law, but it was more complex, because most of this property had been confiscated by the Germans during the war. After the war, our officials then again confiscated the property as being German. It was necessary to prove that the Germans had actually taken the property from the Jews, which was a problem, especially in the border regions. What's more, it was also necessary to prove that the testators had identified themselves to be of Czech nationality from the year 1926, otherwise it wasn't possible to regain the property back into private hands and it stayed in the ownership of the state as property that had been confiscated from Germans.

The de-confiscation lasted several years, they delayed it until 1948, when the majority of restitutions were halted, however not officially. All inheritors were forced to give up their claims.

We ourselves rather gave up our claims voluntarily. After 1989 they didn't want to return anything to us either. I won't even bother to describe the ten-year long history with the estate in Doubravice and the other smaller properties, it would be downright shameful.

One example will speak for all - we were supposed to get a building after our relatives on the town square in Kadan. In the 1990s it was bought by some former officer of the StB. When we went to Kadan to claim this building, a lawyer at the local government office told us that everyone was afraid of that person, and sold him the building with the caveat that if we claim it, he'll return it to us. But he then recommended to us that we shouldn't come to Kadan again, because something could happen to us there.

At the land registry office a clerk even told us that there was a time limit after which this restituted building wasn't allowed to be sold, but that those people had torn pages out of the register and pre-dated the transfer in such a way so that the whole transaction took place before this date. It was exactly one day before the time limit expired. The clerk admitted that the new owner of our building had torn the pages in question out of the register, but at the same time alerted us to the fact that she won't be a witness for us, because she's afraid of that person.

The problem made it all the way into court, and it was a farce, because the judge, a Communist from before the revolution, had obviously colluded with that person, and made downright fun of us. He talked about how our relatives had probably joined the Germans during the war, because there are no records of the Germans confiscating our building. Before the war the building had belonged to one of our father's cousins, but the judge said that we have to obtain records of our relation back to our great-grandfather, and if we won't have them, that he won't even discuss it with us.

So we managed to find records reaching back to 1780. At the next session I submitted these records and the judge said that he didn't need them. It was the worst humiliation of my life. In that kind of situation a person is completely defenseless. We appealed to the Supreme Court, but it found that everything had been in order. I'm talking about these details because many other Czech Jews had similar difficulties with restitutions. It's unbelievable that such things took place after the Velvet Revolution.

As far as claims in other countries go, our experiences weren't much better. We experienced unbelievable things - reluctance to help, reluctance to give up anything whatsoever. We got many letters from foreign insurance companies, where they wrote blatant nonsense, just so that they wouldn't have to pay out anything to us. On top of that we had the bad luck to have incompetent lawyers. Finally American law firms forced these foreign insurance companies to pay out at least part of the claims, under threat of court proceedings. The whole thing was embarrassing and absurd.

Another struggle has to do with benefits for political prisoners. The disgrace was that the Union of Political Prisoners was downright anti-Semitic, because it claimed that we're not any sort of political prisoners, and shouldn't therefore get any benefits that political prisoners had, because we weren't defending our country, nor were we undertaking any political activity.

Still in the times of socialism, we had some benefits, but they were dubious and only symbolic. There was the so-called No. 255, which was an ordinance, on the basis of which political prisoners could gain benefits, as long as they presented a document from the Ministry of National Defense

confirming their imprisonment during the war. 'Benefits' from this ordinance rested in the fact that for each year in a concentration camp we could retire a year earlier and then for each year of imprisonment we were supposed to get a hundred crowns of additional pension, which was ludicrous. The only benefit that we currently have is that we have free bus and train travel in the republic.

After the revolution in 1989 my wife and I both began to actively participate in the Jewish community in Prague, and helped renew its activities. To make use of my profession, shortly after the revolution I became a member of the construction committee. Besides this I'm also a board member of the Matana joint-stock company, which administers Jewish property that was returned to the community in the restitutions.

Because my whole life I read primarily belles-lettres and in philosophy I once long ago ended at the Antiquities, I have recently begun to devote myself to that which I never managed to find the time for, which is modern philosophy and Eastern teachings, primarily Zen Buddhism. On top of this, my wife and I recently completed a second book about Staflik and Spageta, which has already been published.

We didn't have a car, and in this we're also an exception. To have a car, or even in other respects to live better than others, during the Communist era usually meant the necessity of a Party career, or as the case may be other cooperation with the regime, and we weren't willing to do this.

We also try, in the realm of our capabilities, to keep in good physical and mental shape for as long as possible, so as not to be a burden on anyone. We exercise, swim, play tennis, improve our English and work on a PC. In this respect the Jewish community helps us by putting on various courses and so on.

In this country, where our ancestors lived for many centuries and successfully assimilated themselves, we experienced all horrors and revolutions of the turbulent 20th century. Most of the few Jews that survived left his country in several waves of emigration, and are scattered all over the world, from Israel to the USA. Despite unfavorable political and economic conditions we stayed, and tried to continue the life of our ancestors, especially their moral values, which are also contained in the Old Testament.

The appalling experiences of imprisoned Jewish children, the loss of a family base and all relatives, the post-war Communist regime that was unfavorable for Jews, left permanent scars on us, and were also transmitted to our children. We're trying to pass on these difficulties to convey experiences to further generations, so they won't experience anything similar again. We recently returned from a small town in Italy near Bologna, where on Holocaust Day we were telling local children about our experiences. My wife is one of the last living children that wrote poems in Terezin, which were preserved, and are contained together with drawings in the book 'Butterflies Don't Live Here,' which was translated into all major world languages. Many of these poems were set to music all over the world, made into dramas, or are part of Holocaust memorials.

## Glossary

## **1 Sudetenland**

Highly industrialized north-west frontier region that was transferred from the Austro-Hungarian Empire to the new state of Czechoslovakia in 1919. Together with the land a German-speaking minority of 3 million people was annexed, which became a constant source of tension both between the states of Germany, Austria and Czechoslovakia, and within Czechoslovakia. In 1935 a Nazi-type party, the Sudeten German Party financed by the German government, was set up. Following the Munich Agreement in 1938 German troops occupied the Sudetenland. In 1945 Czechoslovakia regained the territory and pogroms started against the German and Hungarian minority. The Potsdam Agreement authorized Czechoslovakia to expel the entire German and Hungarian minority from the country.

## **2 Munich Pact**

Signed by Germany, Italy, the United Kingdom and France in 1938, it allowed Germany to immediately occupy the Sudetenland (the border region of Czechoslovakia inhabited by a German minority). The representatives of the Czechoslovak government were not invited to the Munich conference. Hungary and Poland were also allowed to seize territories: Hungary occupied southern and eastern Slovakia and a large part of Subcarpathia, which had been under Hungarian rule before World War I, and Poland occupied Teschen (Tessin or Cieszyn), a part of Silesia, which had been an object of dispute between Poland and Czechoslovakia, each of which claimed it on ethnic grounds. Under the Munich Pact, the Czechoslovak Republic lost extensive economic and strategically important territories in the border regions (about one third of its total area).

## **3 Terezin/Theresienstadt**

A ghetto in the Czech Republic, run by the SS. Jews were transferred from there to various extermination camps. The Nazis, who presented Theresienstadt as a 'model Jewish settlement,' used it to camouflage the extermination of European Jews. Czech gendarmes served as ghetto guards, and with their help the Jews were able to maintain contact with the outside world. Although education was prohibited, regular classes were held, clandestinely. Thanks to the large number of artists, writers, and scholars in the ghetto, there was an intensive program of cultural activities. At the end of 1943, when word spread of what was happening in the Nazi camps, the Germans decided to allow an International Red Cross investigation committee to visit Theresienstadt. In preparation, more prisoners were deported to Auschwitz, in order to reduce congestion in the ghetto. Dummy stores, a café, a bank, kindergartens, a school, and flower gardens were put up to deceive the committee.

## **4 Lodz Ghetto**

It was set up in February 1940 in the former Jewish quarter on the northern outskirts of the city. 164,000 Jews from Lodz were packed together in a 4 sq. km. area. In 1941 and 1942, 38,500 more Jews were deported to the ghetto. In November 1941, 5,000 Roma were also deported to the ghetto from Burgenland province, Austria. The Jewish self-government, led by Mordechai Rumkowski, sought to make the ghetto as productive as possible and to put as many inmates to work as he could. But not even this could prevent overcrowding and hunger or improve the

inhuman living conditions. As a result of epidemics, shortages of fuel and food and insufficient sanitary conditions, about 43,500 people (21% of all the residents of the ghetto) died of undernourishment, cold and illness. The others were transported to death camps; only a very small number of them survived.

## **5 First Czechoslovak Republic (1918-1938)**

The First Czechoslovak Republic was created after the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy following World War I. The union of the Czech lands and Slovakia was officially proclaimed in Prague in 1918, and formally recognized by the Treaty of St. Germain in 1919. Ruthenia was added by the Treaty of Trianon in 1920. Czechoslovakia inherited the greater part of the industries of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy and the new government carried out an extensive land reform, as a result of which the living conditions of the peasantry increasingly improved. However, the constitution of 1920 set up a highly centralized state and failed to take into account the issue of national minorities, and thus internal political life was dominated by the struggle of national minorities (especially the Hungarians and the Germans) against Czech rule. In foreign policy Czechoslovakia kept close contacts with France and initiated the foundation of the Little Entente in 1921.

## **6 Masaryk, Tomas Garrigue (1850-1937)**

Czechoslovak political leader and philosopher and chief founder of the First Czechoslovak Republic. He founded the Czech People's Party in 1900, which strove for Czech independence within the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, for the protection of minorities and the unity of Czechs and Slovaks. After the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy in 1918, Masaryk became the first president of Czechoslovakia. He was reelected in 1920, 1927, and 1934. Among the first acts of his government was an extensive land reform. He steered a moderate course on such sensitive issues as the status of minorities, especially the Slovaks and Germans, and the relations between the church and the state. Masaryk resigned in 1935 and Edvard Benes, his former foreign minister, succeeded him.

## **7 Anti-Jewish laws in the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia**

In March 1939, there lived in the Protectorate 92,199 inhabitants classified according to the so-called Nuremberg Laws as Jews. On 21st June 1939, Konstantin von Neurath, the Reich Protector, passed the so-called Edict Regarding Jewish Property, which put restrictions on Jewish property. On 24th April 1940, a government edict was passed which eliminated Jews from economic activity. Similarly like previous legal changes it was based on the Nuremberg Law definitions and limited the legal standing of Jews. According to the law, Jews couldn't perform any functions (honorary or paid) in the courts or public service and couldn't participate at all in politics, be members of Jewish organizations and other organizations of social, cultural and economic nature. They were completely barred from performing any independent occupation, couldn't work as lawyers, doctors, veterinarians, notaries, defense attorneys and so on. Jewish residents could participate in public life only in the realm of religious Jewish organizations. Jews were forbidden to enter certain streets, squares, parks and other public places. From September 1939 they were forbidden from being outside their home after 8pm. Beginning in November 1939 they couldn't leave, even temporarily, their place of residence without special permission. Residents of Jewish extraction were barred

from visiting theaters and cinemas, restaurants and cafés, swimming pools, libraries and other entertainment and sports centers. On public transport they were limited to standing room in the last car, in trains they weren't allowed to use dining or sleeping cars and could ride only in the lowest class, again only in the last car. They weren't allowed entry into waiting rooms and other station facilities. The Nazis limited shopping hours for Jews to twice two hours and later only two hours per day. They confiscated radio equipment and limited their choice of groceries. Jews weren't allowed to keep animals at home. Jewish children were prevented from visiting German, and, from August 1940, also Czech public and private schools. In March 1941 even so-called re-education courses organized by the Jewish Religious Community were forbidden, and from June 1942 also education in Jewish schools. To eliminate Jews from society it was important that they be easily identifiable. Beginning in March 1940, citizenship cards of Jews were marked by the letter 'J' (for Jude - Jew). From 1st September 1941 Jews older than six could only go out in public if they wore a yellow six-pointed star with 'Jude' written on it on their clothing.

## **8 Sokol**

One of the best-known Czech sports organizations. It was founded in 1862 as the first physical educational organization in the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy. Besides regular training of all age groups, units organized sports competitions, colorful gymnastics rallies, cultural events including drama, literature and music, excursions and youth camps. Although its main goal had always been the promotion of national health and sports, Sokol also played a key role in the national resistance to the Austro-Hungarian Empire, the Nazi occupation and the communist regime. Sokol flourished between the two World Wars; its membership grew to over a million. Important statesmen, including the first two presidents of interwar Czechoslovakia, Tomas Garrigue Masaryk and Edvard Benes, were members of Sokol. Sokol was banned three times: during World War I, during the Nazi occupation and finally by the communists after 1948, but branches of the organization continued to exist abroad. Sokol was restored in 1990.

## **9 Bata, Tomas (1876-1932)**

Czech industrialist. From a small shoemaking business, he built up the largest leather factory in Europe in 1928, producing 75,000 pairs of shoes a day. His son took over the business after his father's death in a plane crash in 1932, turned the village of Zlin, where the factory was, into an industrial center and provided lots of Czechs with jobs. He expanded the business to Canada in 1939, took a hundred Czech workers along with him, and thus saved them from becoming victims of the Nazi regime. [10](#) People's and Public schools in Czechoslovakia: In the 18th century the state intervened in the evolution of schools - in 1877 Empress Maria Theresa issued the Ratio Educationis decree, which reformed all levels of education. After the passing of a law regarding six years of compulsory school attendance in 1868, people's schools were fundamentally changed, and could now also be secular. During the First Czechoslovak Republic, the Small School Law of 1922 increased compulsory school attendance to eight years. The lower grades of people's schools were public schools (four years) and the higher grades were council schools. A council school was a general education school for youth between the ages of 10 and 15. Council schools were created in the last quarter of the 19th century as having 4 years, and were usually state-run. Their curriculum was dominated by natural sciences with a practical orientation towards trade and business. During the First Czechoslovak Republic they became 3-year with a 1-year course. After 1945 their curriculum was merged with that of lower gymnasium. After 1948 they disappeared, because all

schools were nationalized.

## **11 Hitlerjugend**

The youth organization of the German Nazi Party (NSDAP). In 1936 all other German youth organizations were abolished and the Hitlerjugend became the only legal state youth organization. At the end of 1938, the SS took charge of the organization. From 1939 all young Germans between 10 and 18 were obliged to join the Hitlerjugend, which organized after-school activities and political education. Boys over 14 were also given pre-military training, and girls over 14 were trained for motherhood and domestic duties. In 1939 it had 7 million members. During World War II members of the Hitlerjugend served in auxiliary forces. At the end of 1944, 17-year-olds from the Hitlerjugend were drafted to form the 12th Panzer Division 'Hitlerjugend' and sent to the Western Front.

## **12 Yellow star (Jewish star) in Protectorate**

On 1st September 1941 an edict was issued according to which all Jews having reached the age of six were forbidden to appear in public without the Jewish star. The Jewish star is represented by a hand-sized, six-pointed yellow star outlined in black, with the word 'Jude' in black letters. It had to be worn in a visible place on the left side of the article of clothing. This edict came into force on 19th September 1941. It was another step aimed at eliminating Jews from society. The idea's author was Reinhard Heydrich himself.

## **13 Heydrichiade**

Period of harsh reprisals against the Czech resistance movement and against the Czech nation under the German occupation (1939- 45). It started in September 1941 with the appointment of R. Heydrich as Reichsprotektor of the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia, who declared martial law and executed the representatives of the local resistance. The Heydrichiade came to its peak after Heydrich's assassination in May 1942. After his death, martial law was introduced until early July 1942, in the framework of which Czech patriots were executed and deported to concentration camps, and the towns of Lidice and Lezaky were annihilated. Sometimes the term Heydrichiade is used to refer to the period of martial law after Heydrich's assassination.

## **14 Brundibar**

The children's opera Brundibar was created in 1938 for a contest announced by the then Czechoslovak Ministry of Schools and National Education. It was composed by Hans Krasa based on a libretto by Adolf Hoffmeister. The first performance of Brundibar - by residents of the Jewish orphanage in Prague - wasn't seen by the composer. He had been deported to Terezin. Not long after him, Rudolf Freudenfeld, the son of the orphanage's director, who had rehearsed the opera with the children, was also transported. This opera had more than 50 official performances in Terezin. The idea of solidarity, collective battle against the enemy and the victory of good over evil today speaks to people the whole world over. Today the opera is performed on hundreds of stages in various corners of the world.

### **15 Hirsch, Fredy (1916-1944)**

Member of the Maccabi Association, a sports club founded in the middle of the 1920s as a branch of the Maccabi Sports Club, the first Jewish sports association on the territory of Bohemia and Moravia. Hirsch organized the teaching of sports to youth at Prague's Hagibor, after his deportation to Terezin he continued in this activity there as well. After the reinstatement of transports to Auschwitz in 1943 and after the creation of the "family camp" there, Hirsch and other teachers organized a children's home there as well. They continued to teach until the Nazis murdered virtually all the members of the "family camp", including children and teachers, in the gas chambers.

### **16 Currency reform in Czechoslovakia (1953)**

On 30th May 1953 Czechoslovakia was shaken by a so-called currency reform, with which the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia (KSC) tried to improve the economy. It deprived all citizens of Czechoslovakia of their savings. A wave of protests, strikes and demonstrations gripped the country. Arrests and jailing of malcontents followed. Via the currency measures the Communist regime wanted to solve growing problems with supplies, caused by the restructuring of industry and the agricultural decline due to forcible collectivization. The reform was prepared secretly from midway in 1952 with the help of the Soviet Union. The experts involved (the organizers of the first preparatory steps numbered around 10) worked in strict isolation, sometimes even outside of the country. Cash of up to 300 crowns per person, bank deposits up to 5,000 crowns and wages were exchanged at a ratio of 5:1. Remaining cash and bank deposits, though, were exchanged at a ratio of 50:1.

### **17 Benes, Edvard (1884-1948)**

Czechoslovak politician and president from 1935-38 and 1946-48. He was a follower of T. G. Masaryk, the first president of Czechoslovakia, and the idea of Czechoslovakism, and later Masaryk's right-hand man. After World War I he represented Czechoslovakia at the Paris Peace Conference. He was Foreign Minister (1918-1935) and Prime Minister (1921-1922) of the new Czechoslovak state and became president after Masaryk retired in 1935. The Czechoslovak alliance with France and the creation of the Little Entente (Czechoslovak, Romanian and Yugoslav alliance against Hungarian revisionism and the restoration of the Habsburgs) were essentially his work. After the dismemberment of Czechoslovakia by the Munich Pact (1938) he resigned and went into exile. Returning to Prague in 1945, he was confirmed in office and was reelected president in 1946. After the communist coup in February 1948 he resigned in June on the grounds of illness, refusing to sign the new constitution. [18](#) Czech Scout Movement: The first Czech scout group was founded in 1911. In 1919 a number of separate scout organizations fused to form the Junak Association, into which all scout organizations of the Czechoslovak Republic were merged in 1938. In 1940 the movement was liquidated by a decree of the State Secretary. After WWII the movement revived briefly until it was finally dissolved in 1950. The Junak Association emerged again in 1968 and was liquidated in 1970. It was reestablished after the Velvet Revolution of 1989. [19](#) Forced displacement of Germans: One of the terms used to designate the mass deportations of German occupants from Czechoslovakia which took place after WWII, during the years 1945-1946. Despite the fact that anti-German sentiments were common in Czech society after WWII, the origin of the

idea of resolving post-war relations between Czechs and Sudeten Germans with mass deportations are attributed to President Edvard Benes, who gradually gained the Allies' support for his intent. The deportation of Germans from Czechoslovakia, together with deportations related to a change in Poland's borders (about 5 million Germans) was the largest post-war transfer of population in Europe. During the years 1945-46 more than 3 million people had to leave Czechoslovakia; 250,000 Germans with limited citizenship rights were allowed to stay. (Source: [http://cs.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vys%C3%ADdlen%C3%AD\\_N%C4%9Bmc%C5%AF\\_z\\_%C4%8Cesk\\_olovenska](http://cs.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vys%C3%ADdlen%C3%AD_N%C4%9Bmc%C5%AF_z_%C4%8Cesk_olovenska))

## **20 Communist Party of Czechoslovakia (KSC)**

Founded in 1921 following a split from the Social Democratic Party, it was banned under the Nazi occupation. It was only after Soviet Russia entered World War II that the Party developed resistance activity in the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia; because of this, it gained a certain degree of popularity with the general public after 1945. After the communist coup in 1948, the Party had sole power in Czechoslovakia for over 40 years. The 1950s were marked by party purges and a war against the 'enemy within'. A rift in the Party led to a relaxing of control during the Prague Spring starting in 1967, which came to an end with the occupation of Czechoslovakia by Soviet and allied troops in 1968 and was followed by a period of normalization. The communist rule came to an end after the Velvet Revolution of November 1989.

## **21 Capek, Karel (1890-1938)**

Czech novelist, dramatist, journalist and translator. Capek was the most popular writer of the First Czechoslovak Republic (1918-1939) and defended the democratic and humanistic ideals of its founder, President T. G. Masaryk, the literary outcome of which was the book *President Masaryk Tells His Story* (1928). Capek gained international reputation with his science fiction drama *R.U.R.* (*Rossum's Universal Robots*, 1921), which was the first to introduce the word robot to the language. He blended science fiction with his firmly held anti-totalitarian beliefs in his late drama *Power and Glory* (1938) and the satirical novel *The War with the Newts* (1937). Frequently in contact with leading European intellectuals, Capek acted as a kind of official representative of the interwar republic and also influenced the development of Czech poetry. The Munich Pact of 1938 and, in particular, the subsequent witch-hunt against him, came as a great shock to Capek, one from which he never recovered. (Information for this entry culled from Benét's *Reader's Encyclopedia* and other sources)

## **22 Creation of the State of Israel**

From 1917 Palestine was a British mandate. Also in 1917 the Balfour Declaration was published, which supported the idea of the creation of a Jewish homeland in Palestine. Throughout the interwar period, Jews were migrating to Palestine, which caused the conflict with the local Arabs to escalate. On the other hand, British restrictions on immigration sparked increasing opposition to the mandate powers. Immediately after World War II there were increasing numbers of terrorist attacks designed to force Britain to recognize the right of the Jews to their own state. These aspirations provoked the hostile reaction of the Palestinian Arabs and the Arab states. In February 1947 the British foreign minister Ernest Bevin ceded the Palestinian mandate to the UN, which took the decision to divide Palestine into a Jewish section and an Arab section and to create an

independent Jewish state. On 14th May 1948 David Ben Gurion proclaimed the creation of the State of Israel. It was recognized immediately by the US and the USSR. On the following day the armies of Egypt, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Yemen, Iraq, Syria and Lebanon attacked Israel, starting a war that continued, with intermissions, until the beginning of 1949 and ended in a truce.

### **23 Zionism**

A movement defending and supporting the idea of a sovereign and independent Jewish state, and the return of the Jewish nation to the home of their ancestors, Eretz Israel - the Israeli homeland. The final impetus towards a modern return to Zion was given by the show trial of Alfred Dreyfuss, who in 1894 was unjustly sentenced for espionage during a wave of anti-Jewish feeling that had gripped France. The events prompted Dr. Theodor Herzl (1860-1904) to draft a plan of political Zionism in the tract 'Der Judenstaat' ('The Jewish State', 1896), which led to the holding of the first Zionist congress in Basel (1897) and the founding of the World Zionist Organization (WZO). The WZO accepted the Zionist emblem and flag (Magen David), hymn (Hatikvah) and an action program.

### **24 February 1948**

Communist take-over in Czechoslovakia. The 'people's democracy' became one of the Soviet satellites in Eastern Europe. The state apparatus was centralized under the leadership of the Czechoslovak Communist Party (KSC). In the economy private ownership was banned and submitted to central planning. The state took control of the educational system, too. Political opposition and dissident elements were persecuted.

### **25 Statni Tajna Bezpecnost**

Czech intelligence and security service founded in 1948.

### **26 Czechoslovak Youth Association (CSM)**

Founded in 1949, it was a mass youth organization in the Czechoslovak Republic, led by the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia. It was dissolved in 1968 but reestablished in April 1969 by the Communist Party as the Socialist Youth Association and was only dissolved in 1989.

### **27 Velvet Revolution**

Also known as November Events, this term is used for the period between 17th November and 29th December 1989, which resulted in the downfall of the Czechoslovak communist regime. A non-violent political revolution in Czechoslovakia that meant the transition from Communist dictatorship to democracy. The Velvet Revolution began with a police attack against Prague students on 17th November 1989. That same month the citizen's democratic movement Civic Forum (OF) in Czech and Public Against Violence (VPN) in Slovakia were formed. On 10th December a government of National Reconciliation was established, which started to realize democratic reforms. On 29th December Vaclav Havel was elected president. In June 1990 the first democratic elections since 1948 took place.

## **28 Slansky trial**

In the years 1948-1949 the Czechoslovak government together with the Soviet Union strongly supported the idea of the founding of a new state, Israel. Despite all efforts, Stalin's politics never found fertile ground in Israel; therefore the Arab states became objects of his interest. In the first place the Communists had to allay suspicions that they had supplied the Jewish state with arms. The Soviet leadership announced that arms shipments to Israel had been arranged by Zionists in Czechoslovakia. The times required that every Jew in Czechoslovakia be automatically considered a Zionist and cosmopolitan. In 1951 on the basis of a show trial, 14 defendants (eleven of them were Jews) with Rudolf Slansky, First Secretary of the Communist Party at the head were convicted. Eleven of the accused got the death penalty; three were sentenced to life imprisonment. The executions were carried out on 3rd December 1952. The Communist Party later finally admitted its mistakes in carrying out the trial and all those sentenced were socially and legally rehabilitated in 1963.

## **29 JZD (Czech), JRD (Slovak)**

Unified Agricultural Cooperative: a form of organization of a socialist agricultural enterprise. The "collectivization process" (more precisely the elimination of private farming) took place in stages. Stage 1 (1949): On 23rd February the Communist-dominated parliament passed a law, by decision of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia (KSC), regarding unified agricultural cooperatives. The campaign to form JZDs commenced already in April. However the campaign did not meet with a favorable reaction and did not bring the expected results. At the end of 1949, only 2039 JZDs existed, mostly of the first type, which was communal farming of land with the conservation of boundaries. It needs to be added that the presidents of the cooperatives were installed by decision of regional Communist Party committees. Stage 2 (1950): in this year it was decreed that JZDs move to the third (collective plant and animal production) and fourth (members are not paid in proportion to their land contribution) types. This met with great resistance, whose result was an attempt at wholesale leaving of JZDs. To this the Communists replied with the "purchase" of agricultural machinery. Most machinery was "purchased", however with no economic effect. The machines were mostly immediately taken out of operation and scrapped. Stage 3: (1952): on 3rd June 1952 the Party and government passed a law regarding further JZD evolution. A direct frontal attack on villages and their inhabitants commenced. In each region the attack was managed by a three to four member commission at the regional KSC committee. Brigades of functionaries arrived in the countryside, visited farmers and "persuaded" them to enter the JZD. The methods of persuasion grew more and more harsh. Most new JZDs were created against the will of farmers and despite their resistance. If the farmers weren't willing to submit, they were disadvantaged. For example their children could forget studies, and even had problems with apprenticeship placement; it even happened that entire families were forcibly moved from the village into the abandoned border regions, into some ruin. The first wave of collectivizations at the beginning of the 1950s wasn't completely successful. After the mid-1950's came a second wave. After 1960 Czechoslovakia already belonged among the Eastern Block countries where the collectivization had taken place most thoroughly. At the end of the 1970s, only three thousand people were still farming privately in the villages.

### **30 Jednota**

A network of consumer cooperatives in socialist Czechoslovakia; their primary task was to ensure supply of the rural population via a retail network. It also bought up supplies and at the same time also ran a chain of restaurants. From 1964 it opened stores in cities as well.

### **31 Warsaw Pact Occupation of Czechoslovakia**

The liberalization of the communist regime in Czechoslovakia during the Prague Spring (1967-68) went further than anywhere else in the Soviet block countries. These new developments were perceived by the conservative Soviet communist leadership as intolerable heresy dangerous for Soviet political supremacy in the region. Moscow decided to put a radical end to the chain of events and with the participation of four other Warsaw Pact countries (Poland, East Germany, Hungary and Bulgaria) ran over Czechoslovakia in August, 1968.

### **32 Hasek, Jaroslav (1883-1923)**

Czech humorist, satirist, author of stories, travelogues, essays, and journalistic articles. His participation in WWI was the main source of his literary inspiration and developed into the character of Schweik in the four-volume unfinished but world-famous novel, *The Good Soldier Schweik*. Hasek moved about in the Bohemian circles of Prague's artistic community. He also satirically interpreted Jewish social life and customs of his time. With the help of Jewish themes he exposed the ludicrousness and absurdity of state bureaucracy, militarism, clericalism and Catholicism. (Information for this entry culled from Benét's Reader's Encyclopedia and other sources) 33 Radio Free Europe: Radio station launched in 1949 at the instigation of the US government with headquarters in West Germany. The radio broadcast uncensored news and features, produced by Central and Eastern European émigrés, from Munich to countries of the Soviet block. The radio station was jammed behind the Iron Curtain, team members were constantly harassed and several people were killed in terrorist attacks by the KGB. Radio Free Europe played a role in supporting dissident groups, inner resistance and will of freedom in the Eastern and Central European communist countries and thus it contributed to the downfall of the totalitarian regimes of the Soviet block. The headquarters of the radio have been in Prague since 1994.

### **34 Havel, Vaclav (1936- )**

Czech dramatist, poet and politician. Havel was an active figure in the liberalization movement leading to the Prague Spring, and after the Soviet-led intervention in 1968 he became a spokesman of the civil right movement called Charter 77. He was arrested for political reasons in 1977 and 1979. He became President of the Czech and Slovak Republic in 1989 and was President of the Czech Republic after the secession of Slovakia until January 2003.

### **35 August 1968**

On the night of 20th August 1968, the armies of the USSR and its Warsaw Pact allies (Poland, Hungary, East Germany and Bulgaria) crossed the borders of Czechoslovakia. The armed

intervention was to stop the 'counter-revolutionary' process in the country. The invasion resulted in many casualties, in Prague alone they were estimated at more than 300 injured and around 20 deaths. With the occupation of Czechoslovakia ended the so-called Prague Spring - a time of democratic reforms, and the era of normalization began, another phase of the totalitarian regime, which lasted 21 years.

### **36 Dubcek, Alexander (1921-1992)**

Slovak and Czechoslovak politician and statesman, protagonist of the reform movement in the CSSR. In 1963 he became the General Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Slovakia. With his succession to this function began the period of the relaxation of the Communist regime. In 1968 he assumed the function of General Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia and opened the way for the influence of reformist elements in the Communist party and in society, which had struggled for the implementation of a democratically pluralist system, for the resolution of economic, social and societal problems by methods suitable for the times and the needs of society. Intimately connected with his name are the events that in the world received the name Prague Spring. After the occupation of the republic by the armies of the USSR and the Warsaw Pact on 21st August 1968, he was arrested and dragged to the USSR. On the request of Czechoslovak representatives and under pressure from Czechoslovak and world public opinion, they invited him to the negotiations between Soviet and Czechoslovak representatives in Moscow. After long hesitation he also signed the so-called Moscow Protocol, which set the conditions and methods of the resolution of the situation, which basically however meant the beginning of the end of the Prague Spring.

### **37 1956 in Hungary**

It designates the Revolution, which started on 23rd October 1956 against Soviet rule and the communists in Hungary. It was started by student and worker demonstrations in Budapest and began with the destruction of Stalin's gigantic statue. Moderate communist leader Imre Nagy was appointed as prime minister and he promised reform and democratization. The Soviet Union withdrew its troops which had been stationed in Hungary since the end of World War II, but they returned after Nagy's declaration that Hungary would pull out of the Warsaw Pact to pursue a policy of neutrality. The Soviet army put an end to the uprising on 4th November and mass repression and arrests began. About 200,000 Hungarians fled the country. Nagy and a number of his supporters were executed. Until 1989 and the fall of the communist regime, the Revolution of 1956 was officially considered a counter-revolution.

### **38 Political changes in 1969**

Following the Prague Spring of 1968, which was suppressed by armies of the Soviet Union and its satellite states, a program of 'normalization' was initiated. Normalization meant the restoration of continuity with the pre-reform period and it entailed thoroughgoing political repression and the return to ideological conformity. Top levels of government, the leadership of social organizations and the party organization were purged of all reformist elements. Publishing houses and film studios were placed under new direction. Censorship was strictly imposed, and a campaign of militant atheism was organized. A new government was set up at the beginning of 1970, and, later that year, Czechoslovakia and the Soviet Union signed the Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation and

Mutual Assistance, which incorporated the principle of limited sovereignty. Soviet troops remained stationed in Czechoslovakia and Soviet advisers supervised the functioning of the Ministry of Interior and the security apparatus.