

Michaela Vidlakova's Graduation



This photograph is from my graduation from university in 1960. It was taken in Prague at the Carolinum. I invited our prewar servant, Terezie Hronickova, second from left, whom I used to call Rezinka, to the graduation. Rezinka used to spend a lot of time with me, and we liked each other very much. She was happy that I'd invited her to my graduation ceremony.

Before our attempt at emigration I'd been attending the French high school. Back then the principal was Vanda Mouckova-Zavodska, whom I liked and I think that she liked me as well. But when I came to see her, saying that I'd been given amnesty and that I had to be looked upon as someone without a record, she said that she didn't care, that such elements had no business being at her school. During the war she'd been jailed for being a Communist, perhaps even sentenced to death, so I thought that she'd have a certain amount of understanding for people from jail, but evidently her Communist ideals were stronger. So I remained without a high school diploma and entered the work force.

I began working for Potravínový projekt as a technical draftsman, or more precisely as someone that had studied technical drawing. I basically drew projects with Indian ink, and my starting salary was 450 crowns. The manager of our office was Ing. Fanta, a prewar capitalist, whom they were also persecuting and threw him out of everywhere they could. When he heard my story, he willingly took me on and was very nice and decent to me. My other co-workers were excellent too, they took care of me and understood my life's trials. I even met Mrs. Eliska Schrackerova there, a lady my mother's age, who'd also survived Terezín. I have very fond memories of that year and a half.

At that time I finished my high school degree at night school, and in 1955 I finally graduated. My previous report card as well as the one from the school-leaving exam had straight A's, so according to the rules I was supposed to have been admitted to university without having to take entrance exams. Back then I didn't know that, nevertheless I once again had straight A's on the exams for the Faculty of Science at Charles University, where I'd applied. But I received a notification where it once again said: 'You passed the exams, but due to the high number of applicants, we were unable to accept you.'

They recommended that I apply to agricultural college or economics, because they had a shortage of students. But I said that I wanted to study biology, so I kept appealing and appealing. Finally it went all the way up to the Office of the President and back to the rector's office and dean's office, and then they finally accepted me, after the summer holidays. Then two years later they tried to expel me, but once again it somehow worked out, so in the end I graduated. My thesis was on the metabolism of sugar in insects. I graduated in 1960.