

Pavel Kovanic



This picture of my father Pavel Kovanic was taken in Prague in 1941 by the brother of Frantisek Kowanitz, the husband of my sister Gertruda Kowanitzova, nee Kovanicova.

My dad was born in 1891 in Kolin. He went to a Czech elementary school and probably trained as a shop assistant later. He came from a Czech family, so we spoke Czech at home.

My dad and mum spoke German together only when they didn't want me to know what they were saying. My dad could also speak Russian, because he had been in Russian captivity in World War I as a soldier in the Austro-Hungarian army.

He was still in captivity in Moscow with his brother Leo in 1917, when they applied to join the [Czech] Legion. They got a letter which read: 'Brothers, your application is being dealt with. For the time being watch out for Jewish Bolshevik agents who are mixing with POWs.'

After reading that, they couldn't give a damn about the Legionnaires, so they stayed in captivity until the end of the war. My dad was a supporter of Masaryk and a patriot.

He wept whenever he heard patriotic anthems like Our Czech Song [Ta naše píseň česká]. He respected Masaryk for the stance he took in the Hilsner Trial.

My dad became a commercial traveler, selling perfume for a firm called Korwig. He usually traveled by train; he didn't have a car.

Every Sunday my dad would go to the Bulvar Cafe. That was on Wenceslas Square in the center of Prague. In the afternoon I used to go with mum to fetch him.

From time to time he liked to smoke a cigar or a Virginia. He was a great person - so nice and kind. I remember that he had really beautiful hands.

In 1940 or 1941, dad was no longer allowed to work as a commercial traveler. His boss was no longer Mr. Korwig but a Mr. Simsa, who wasn't a Jew. Mr. Simsa behaved very decently and even gave dad some money, although he was no longer working for him.

Jews weren't allowed to travel or to be employed by an Aryan-owned firm. Jewish firms were closed down. After that, dad got a job painting lampshades, and I helped him with it.

They were garish items for export to Germany, but at least he got the odd crown for them.