

Jiri Munk As A High School Student



This photograph was taken when I was about 16 or 17, and was attending high school in Prague. Because I hadn't gone to school during the war, I was missing several grades and had to do a lot of catching up. 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. It was in Dusni, today there's a business academy there. 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. 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 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 Nazis.