

Viera Slesingerova With Her Mom Helena Pollakova And A Relative



This picture was taken in 1939 in Prague, on the terrace of our apartment on Horni Stromky Street. We were sunbathing there. I am the one sitting in striped clothes, my mom Helena Pollakova, nee Paszternak is standing behind me and beside me there is Marie, daughter of one of my dad's cousins. The picture was taken by Marie's husband. We left Slovakia as all Czech state officials had to return to Bohemia. My dad was supposed to have taken office in Prague, but as this was just after the Nazi occupation, he didn't. He received a basic salary but was no longer employed. When we were moving, Slovak guardsmen checked all out furniture that we were sending to Prague, to see if we were smuggling anything. That was very unpleasant. Otherwise I didn't encounter any specific manifestation of anti-Semitism directed against me before the war. All I can remember is an incident on a train when I was traveling with my mom from Zilina to see my grandparents in Kosice. We were sitting in a compartment with a man who was calling Jews names. He talked about how young Jewish women were all made up and such like. He then said to my mom who, as I mentioned earlier, spoke Czech without an accent, 'You, dear lady, look like a modest Czech woman.' In reply, mom said, 'Yes, and I am Jewish.' The man then stood up and went straight out of the compartment. We toyed with the idea of emigrating. My parents put in an application for a US visa, but unfortunately our relatives abroad were not wealthy enough to speed things up in any way. My parents wanted to send me away. I know that they made arrangements with someone in England and that they wanted to send me off to do a nursing course. But when the war broke out in

September, my mom was to have an operation and I didn't want to leave her on her own, and after that it wasn't possible to go anywhere.