Dagmar Simova

Dagmar Simova
Prague
Czech Republic
Interviewer: Lenka Koprivova
Date of interview: March - April 2006

Mrs. Dagmar Simova is yet another of the children who owe their lives to Nicholas Winton 1. Her childhood was spent in a quiet little town nestled in the Kasperk Mountains, and she very much enjoys telling engaging stories about all the sorts of mischief she got up to there. Mrs. Simova was quite the rapscallion... Unfortunately the war ended this part of her life, and she spent the war years in exile in England. As the niece of a prominent diplomat, she was very close to the Czechoslovak political émigré community, and more than a few of her memories are tied to leading politicians of the Czechoslovak state. Upon her return to her homeland, and after February 1948, she however paid the price for these connections and for her determined resistance to the Communist regime, and among other things was expelled from university... Mrs. Simova didn't want to discuss the post-war period very much, and so in her story, her memories of the happy and carefree years of her life dominate.

Family background">Family background

The families of my grandfather, Hynek Deiml, and of my grandmother, Emilie Straussova, came from the same village, Dobriv, by Rokycany. They were the only two Jewish families that lived there, and were completely assimilated into their Czech surroundings. Dobriv didn't even have a synagogue, the closest one was in Rokycany, which they visited perhaps once a year, when they would go to Rokycany to shop. They definitely didn't normally go there.

Grandpa Hynek was born sometime before the year 1860; Grandma Emilie was born in 1861. Both were from crofter families, which means that they had a small field, a bit of poultry... They likely had siblings, but I know only of Grandma's brother, because after the war, when I returned from England, his wife, Ema Straussova, was my only relative that had survived the war, and I then lived with her for some time.

My grandfather was a very enterprising person. As the youngest son and a good student, he was sent to high school in Rokycany. And what's important is that at the age of 16 he in some fashion artistically 'improved' a painting of His Highness the emperor, he gave him something extra. Perhaps it was even in school. This of course landed him in hot water, and at home too, because

his family was afraid of what they'd do to them. Back then things were quite strict. And so Grandpa picked up and left. He didn't have even a crown in his pocket, and many weeks later he arrived on foot all the way over in Hamburg, where he took a job as a servant on a ship, and left for America.

He then lived in America for a relatively long time; he got to Chicago, where he found an area where it was completely impossible to find any vegetables. Back then there of course weren't any cars, nothing, so he borrowed some money and a pushcart, and each morning he'd haul a pushcart full of vegetables to that area. This is how he started, and gradually he worked his way up to his own vegetable wholesale business. But when he wanted to get married, he wanted to marry a Czech woman, so he once again bought himself a boat ticket, returned to Dobriv, married my grandmother and opened up a shop there. In his shop he then sold absolutely everything. My grandparents lived in Dobriv until about 1926 or 1927. When I was born they were already living in Strakonice, later they then moved to Prague.

My father was the youngest of seven children. His oldest sister, Alberta, died very young, and the two children that she left behind were then brought up by another of their sisters, Malvina. Malvina was born in 1879 and died in 1942. Next was Zofie, who was born in 1880 and also died in 1942, then Josef, born in 1882 and died in 1944, then in 1884 came Frantisek, who died as a child, then Helena, born in 1888, died in 1943. None of the siblings, that is, except for those that had died earlier, survived the war. Except for Josef, who had an Aryan wife, they all died in concentration camps. But Josef was working against the Germans, they arrested him and he died in jail in 1944.

My father, Rudolf Deiml, was born as the youngest of seven children on 14th December 1889. He graduated in medicine in Prague, served as a doctor on the Eastern front in Russia, and then opened a practice in Strakonice. I don't really remember him telling me anything about his childhood, but I do remember one story from when he wasn't yet married. He bet on the horses a lot, and used to have a fair bit of luck. One time he got lucky and won a larger amount of money, with which he bought a small car. An Aero or something like that. But not only did he not have a driver's license, he didn't even know how to drive, and now, where to take the car? So, to Dobriv, to his mother's. Some friend of his drove it there for him, on the outskirts of the village my father got out, took a rope, tied it to the car, threw the rope over his shoulder and towed it home. A practical joker. This he told me about. And then when he got his license and went out for his first drive, he hit a cow. It had to be put down. Grandma carried on of course, because the family then had to pay for it.

My father's family, and my mother's as well, was perfectly assimilated. For sure they didn't keep kosher or anything like that. All my father's sisters married Jews: Berta was Baumlova, Malvina was Schlessingerova, Zofie - Steinerova, Helena - Witzova. Uncle Pepa's [Josef] first wife was also Jewish, they had one daughter together. But his second wife was Aryan, which is why my uncle didn't go to Terezin 2. He made a living as a merchant, and he and my father were very close, in fact they even looked alike. Aunt Berta died relatively young, and Aunt Malva [Malvina] and Grandpa and Grandma then took care of her two children. Actually it was because of them that my grandparents moved, first to Strakonice, where we were already living as well, the orphans were attending high school there, then to Prague, where they attended university. Besides Aunt Helena, who lived in Chrudim, all my relatives lived in Prague. Grandpa died in 1934. All I remember of him is him sitting in a brown leather chair and smoking a pipe, one of those rustic ones. Grandma was this normal woman. My other grandmother also lived in Prague, and so always when I went to visit

her, I also visited this one as well.

My family on my mother's side was purely Czech as well, they came from eastern Bohemia. Grandpa was named Arnost Korbel and was born in 1874, most likely in Novy Bydzov, because his parents lived there too. Grandpa died in Terezin in 1942, he was there for only a short time. Grandma was named Olga Korbelova, nee Ptackova; she was also born in 1874, but somewhere in some village on Austrian territory. She died in Auschwitz in 1944. Grandma and Grandpa had three children; the oldest was my mother, Marketa, who was born on 12th March 1903 in Novy Bydzov. Then the family moved to Kysperk, now Letohrad, where on 24th August 1906 Jan was born. He died in 1980 in Malta. And the youngest brother was named Josef, he was born on 20th September 1909 and died in 1977 in Denver, in the United States.

My great-grandfather worked in Novy Bydzov as a stationmaster. Grandpa also worked for the railway, but he didn't last long there. He soon moved to Kysperk, where he opened a lumber business. They lived right across from the train station, where there were warehouses, and that's where he sold the lumber. The first match factory in Bohemia was located in Kysperk, and Grandpa used to supply them with wood. He then bought shares in some quarries in nearby Litice, little by little he worked his way up, until finally, sometime at the end of the 1920s, they moved to Prague, where he opened a construction material business in the Sporilov neighborhood.

More than anything else it was the Jirasek Bridge that helped them, because my grandfather supplied all the material that it's made of. They opened it sometime in 1930; Grandpa, Grandma and I were there when they cut the ribbon. In the 1970s the bridge was undergoing reconstruction, and in Vecerni Praha [Evening Prague] they described how hard it was to dig up the road surface. So I was proud of my grandfather, of what high-quality material he'd supplied. But back then they were only doing some smaller- scale repairs, so the bridge still stands as Grandpa built it.

When I was last in Letohrad, in 1999, this touching incident happened to me. They were unveiling a memorial plaque on the house my uncle Josef had been born in. My cousin from America had come because of it, there was some sort of concert held, there was a gala supper and this one little old man came over to me. That as a young man he'd often danced with my mother, before she was married. That my mother had loved to dance. That's true; I remember that also in Strakonice my parents used to go to balls at the Sokol lodge, to 'sibrinky' [Sokol masquerade balls]...

At first Grandma and Grandpa and their sons lived in a large apartment in the Vrsovice neighborhood, later, when their sons had left home, they moved into a small apartment in the Vinohrady neighborhood. Jan stayed with Grandpa in the business, and before he was married in 1932, Grandpa sent him to America for work experience. When he returned he brought me a doll. And my mother's other brother, Uncle Josef, as the youngest, went to school. He finished law and then worked for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

I don't know when and where my parents actually met. It must have been some sort of coincidence, when each of them was from a different part of the country. But their wedding took place in 1926 in Prague, at the Old Town Hall. At that time my father was already living and working in Strakonice, my mother moved there to be with him. I was born on 19th March 1928, and my sister Milena four years later, on 9th December 1932.

The Strakonice of my youth looked similar to the way it does today. The city center is the same. The castle and church are still there; just the bridge over the Volynka has been torn down. Actually, the Volynka feeds into the Otava in front of our house, now it's been done so that the bridge over the Otava also goes across the Volynka. There, where there used to be this sprawling neighborhood of little bungalows with gardens, there is now a concrete city of 'panelaks' [prefab apartment buildings]. And also in the middle of the old town, where our school used to be, there's a hideous eyesore of a heating plant with a hideous, tall chimney.

Father wasn't the only doctor in Strakonice, there were lots of them, but he definitely had the most patients and was very popular. Still to this day, when I meet with my former classmates, they remember him. My father's practice was at home. But he was also the railway doctor, and used to have hours in the railway clinic, and was also a school doctor. Back then a doctor had to manage everything. A general practitioner was really a general practitioner. He knew how to mend broken bones, pull a tooth, deliver a child. To recognize pneumonia. Not like now, when someone specializes in the left eye, he doesn't understand the right one.

Growing up">Growing up

We lived in a building that my father had had reconstructed. It was someone else's building, but my father had another story built onto it, which we had all to ourselves, four rooms, a kitchen and a little room for the maid. Through our windows we looked out on the one side over this little square, and on the other side out on the Volynka and the Strakonice fez factory. In this little square there was a little park, and in it a beautiful pub. Single-storied, from sometime around the year 1600, it was decorated with frescoes and its owners had inherited it from generation to generation. And behind the pub stood a synagogue. When the Communists came, they demolished both the synagogue and the pub. The synagogue, OK, that I don't care about, but that beautiful antique pub... I'll never forgive them for that. And now there's a parking lot and department store instead.

My sister, Milena, was almost five years younger. As opposed to me, she was skinny and had curly hair. She was also more agile, she even knew how to climb, which is something I've never been good at. Of course, outside we each had our own friends, there we didn't play together, but at home I used to boss her around a lot. She suffered a lot from me, for example we'd be playing school, and she'd have to sit with her hands behind her back and so on. On the other hand, I used to read to her, that I liked.

Both our parents did a lot of sports, and also encouraged us to do sports as well. They swam, skied... Always, when Father closed his practice before lunchtime, he'd go for a swim in the Otava, a little ways away from us, underneath the castle, there was a weir. When I came home from school I'd go with him. It was fantastic. There'd be water falling on us below the weir, it was simply very nice...

There was also a swimming pool in Strakonice, it was called Na Podskali, and was a little further down the Otava, we used to go there on foot through gardens. There I learned to swim, which was even before I started going to school. At first the lifeguard had me in this sort of ring on a pole, then on a rope, and then I was swimming in the pool without a rope, and finally, which was a test, I had to swim across the Otava and back again. The lifeguard drove alongside me in a boat, and Father was with him, he wouldn't have let me go alone. I passed the test and also got some sort of

certificate from it.

On one bank of the Otava there were restaurants, on the other there was this slope with a memorial to Celakovsky [Celakovsky, Frantisek Ladislav (1799-1852): Czech poet] a native son of Strakonice, and beside it a bench. Later, when we were older, we'd always swim across the Otava, sit on the bench and wave to our parents on the other side.

Our father was a hiker, and used to go with other hikers on long walkabouts. Back then knee breeches were in fashion, so he also wore them, he had a hiker's walking stick... My mother didn't go hiking, but often our whole family would go for trips into the hills around Strakonice, we used to go picking mushrooms in the forest... Father was a great believer in the mountains. He was convinced that in the summer it's much better to spend a week in the mountains than fourteen days by the sea. We were in the middle of the Sumava [region] and we also enjoyed the mountains in the winter. I skied from around the age of three. At that time I still had these little skis, you could walk in the boots. They were rectangular, it had these metal plates, leather bindings and a buckle at the back. Almost every Sunday we used to go skiing at Kubova Hut, that was fantastic.

Then in the winter I also used to go to Harrachov to see my grandmother, always regularly to the Bellevue Hotel. This was Grandma Korbelova, and I worshipped her, terribly. She was very kind and self-sacrificing... Even before I started going to school, she used to take me with her to the mountains and would put me in a ski school there; she herself didn't ski, but just kept an eye on me. When I was five, I got the whooping cough, so she spent six weeks with me in the mountains so that I'd get rid of it. And so that the baby wouldn't catch it, my little sister. The things that Grandma and I experienced in the mountains... Once, in the summer, we were all in the mountains and I was again sharing a room with my grandmother. It was just after lunch, we were lying on the bed and suddenly ball lightning flew through the room. We were lucky, nothing happened to us, we just had this horrifying experience because of it.

So, every winter I was in the mountains with my grandma for one week. It was this sort of spring break of mine, which otherwise didn't exist. I remember that once I returned to school beautifully tanned. The principal of course knew what was up with me, but he couldn't help himself to not ask, because he always asked everyone who'd been away from school for some time. Well, and I told him that I'd been sick. To which he replied that I must have had a bed by the window, since I was so beautifully tanned.

In Strakonice I attended all of elementary school, which is five grades. Boys' and girls' classes were separate, but in the same building. On the whole I enjoyed going there, I didn't have to do too much homework. I absorbed it all in school and had straight A's. Which was good. I just had problems singing, because I'm tone deaf. But I wanted terribly to sing in the choir, which there was, because they used to go sing during various occasions. Until finally the teacher had mercy on me and said that I can be there, but I can only move my mouth, I'm not allowed to emit any sound. So I was also a member of the choir.

Our school was terribly old. The classrooms still had tile stoves. And in front of the building entrance there were three massive store steps, the middle of which my girlfriends and I always used to sit on and talk after school. When they were tearing the school down, one of my girlfriends took a wheelbarrow and carted that middle step away to her garden at home. She's still got it there, and when we get together, we sit down on it and keep talking. This friend of mine wasn't

local, she used to walk to school along the Volynka from Radosovice. We, the ones from Strakonice, always terribly envied the out-of-towners, because at lunchtime they were allowed to stay in the classroom and make a ruckus, while we had to go home for lunch. For a complete warm meal, while they had only a crust of bread and a ball of butter, and despite that we envied them.

We used to buy our midmorning snack right across the school at the dairy, a roll and a glass of soured milk for 20 halers. Beside the school there was a stationery store that also sold candy, which was an excellent opportunity for us to spend our pocket money. For ten or twenty halers you could buy licorice on an elastic, this excellent thing that looked and tasted nice. It was a ball of licorice that had a thin elastic embedded in it, so you could spin it around. And then you'd eat the licorice. [Editor's note: In 1929, when it was decreed by law that a Czechoslovak crown (Kc) = 100 halers, as the current unit of Czechoslovak currency, is valued at 44.58 milligrams of gold.]

During the 1930s, when there was that horrible unemployment 3, there was terrible poverty in Strakonice. Both the fez factory and weapons plant were laying off, and many fathers lost their jobs. Because our father was a doctor, we were better off materially, and so we always brought those girlfriends from my class, whose parents were unemployed, to our house for lunch. My mother and the maid cooked twenty lunches a day. Even when the table was folded out, we had to eat in two shifts so that we could all have a turn. It went on like this for about three years, from Monday to Saturday, because back then you went to school on Saturday too.

Before the war, religion classes were compulsory in schools. Everyone had to attend them according to which birth register they were in. So I attended the Jewish ones, we were taught by the Strakonice rabbi. He was this beautiful man: young, with a gorgeous voice, he had small children that we used to go play with. He taught us the Old Testament and Hebrew, but I don't remember any of it. Of the Jewish holidays that we celebrated, it's Chanukkah that's mainly stayed in my memory, I quite liked it. We used to go to the synagogue with lights, we used to get candy... But at home we celebrated Christmas as well, and I even used to walk with my girlfriends in the Corpus Christi procession, but the rabbi never saw that. Once I made this big blunder. We had a Christmas tree at home, and I thought it was a matter of course, so out of great love, this was probably in Grade 1, I invited the rabbi to come to our place to have a look at it. He didn't come, of course, and to top it all off he was horrible about it. So thus ended my great faith, even though I had to keep on attending religion, which was mandatory.

Before the war there were relatively a lot of Jews living in Strakonice, I'd say that maybe even thirty families. We had our own synagogue and rabbi. The community was fairly cohesive, so my parents had quite a few Jewish friends that they saw, but also had a lot of non-Jewish friends. Of course, I didn't pick my friends according to what religion they were, but among others I was friends with the children of the co-owner of the Strakonice fez factory, the Menkators, who were Jews. They lived not far off in a large building we called the palace, surrounded by a garden. The Menkators had four children in all, though I knew the two older ones, I was mainly friends with the younger ones, twins, a boy and a girl. This was the only Jewish family in Strakonice that survived the war complete. This was because in 1938 they went to the United States on vacation, and when Munich 4 came, they stayed there.

Then there were some mixed marriages there as well, so if I leave those out and count only the Jews that passed through Terezin and then through some concentration camp, three men and one

woman returned. Two were the Ehrmann brothers, strapping twenty-year-old boys, who the Germans found handy for some labor. It was the same case with Seidl and with the girl. One of the brothers had already escaped to Canada in 1945; the second didn't manage it until 1968 5. The woman, Liba, emigrated to some relatives in the United States, also right after the war, so in Strakonice there was no one left from the original community. The synagogue isn't there anymore either, now in its place there a parking lot and department store.

My girlfriends and I got up to all sorts of mischief. Normal kinds of things. For example, back then you just couldn't go out without a cap or this little hat. Hanging on the back of the hat were these two ribbons, and I dare say that all of us girls in the class had the same little hat. I remember that one afternoon we went for a walk, put the ribbons in front and then were blowing on them. And we'd shriek out cheeky sayings at everyone who turned around to look at us. However we managed to do this in front of the building where our teacher lived. She looked out the window and the jig was up. Also, one time in the park the planted a linden tree in honor of Masaryk. In general, we were brought up the Masaryk spirit 6. Well, the linden had a grate around it that was supposed to protect it from being damaged. I once stuck my head inside, and then couldn't get it out. Someone had to come and saw the grate apart, and my father then paid for the repairs. Quite overjoyed was he.

Our father on the whole paid quite dearly for us. For everything that we got up to at school... For the various broken windows... We used to throw paper balls around, and so that they'd fly better, we used to put rocks inside them. Then, which was splendid and my sister and I even had permission for this, the whole winter a roasted chestnut vendor used to stand outside in front of our building, and my sister and I used to lower a basket down out of the window, into which he used to put the paper cones [full of chestnuts]. When our father would come home, he'd always pay for all the cones. To this day I recall this fondly.

We used to go on a lot of outings with our parents, also during summer vacation. Then we would spend tons of time in Litice, near Kysperk. Grandma used to come with us, it was gorgeous there. I used to walk with Grandma along the Orlice River along this gorgeous route, then we'd come to a mulberry grove... it was beautiful. In 1999 I visited Kysperk [now Letohrad] again, and my husband and I set out to have a look at Litice as well. I very much wanted to see that mulberry grove again. We found the house that we lived in, it's actually still there, and then we kept going and I found it strange that the mulberry grove was nowhere to be found. Not one mulberry, but instead, one cottage after another. So I was very disappointed.

Sometimes I also spent part of my vacation in Cestice near Volyne, with some distant relatives from my father's side. Perhaps it was my grandpa's brother, I don't know any more. Because they lived nearby, we used to go visit them relatively often. They lived in this chateau, where they had a farm with a dairy. Their place was fantastic. All I had to do was stick my hand out the window and I could pick a grape. Or I took a glass, went to the dairy, and pour myself some yogurt. I'd put, say, some jam in it, and I really like remembering that.

Once, the previous summer, before I started going to school, that great- grandfather or whatnot of mine was celebrating his 100th birthday. Relatives from far and wide gathered there, about fifty people, and we sat at an immensely long table, arranged by age. I was the youngest, and was sitting far from my parents at the end of the table, across from that great- grandfather. I was

terribly bored. After all, even those that were sitting around me and were closest to me in age were a lot older. No one was paying any attention to me. I couldn't just eat the whole time either, I was already almost feeling ill because of it. And so I started to rock back and forth on my chair. But there was a parquet floor, and the chair slid out from under me. As I was falling, I grabbed the tablecloth. There was of course more than one tablecloth there, but the one long one that was in front of me flew down with me, along with everything else. Luckily someone had the presence of mind to grab it, so not that much fell down, but still. I hit my head, began shrieking, then my father took me, it's a wonder that not by the neck, and led me outside. I remember this to this day, how that tablecloth slid down with everything along with me.

We didn't go abroad with our parents. I know that the two of them were on vacation in Italy on their own, but during that time Grandma took care of my sister and me. As I've mentioned, I worshipped my grandma, while on the other hand I was terribly afraid of my grandfather, my mother's father. Of all the relatives, he was the strictest. I've also got several experiences that took place at their place. I can still hear, how very late at night the telephone was ringing for a long time, before someone woke up and answered it. Then I heard Grandpa saying, 'Thank you, I'll come.' They were calling him that his brother, Uncle Max, the manager of a bank in Teplice, had been hit by a train.

Hanging in my living room is a painting that this Uncle Max gave to my mother as a wedding present. That's another anecdote. Uncle [Max] was single and childless and during World War I he got to know a Russian painter, who'd been imprisoned in a POW camp in Teplice. The POWs were very badly off, for one they were poorly fed, and for another they didn't treat them very well. I don't even know how her uncle got to know that painter, but he then used to buy him canvases and brushes, he'd sell his paintings and give him the money. Uncle Max got three paintings from him, so that he'd have them as wedding presents for his nephews and niece.

Twice in my life I got into a conflict with my grandfather. He had a dog, a fox terrier, which he loved above all else. I also liked him, and the dog liked me, which was the thing, he always wanted to play with me. At the time my grandparents were already living in Vinohrady; I wanted to read, but he kept on bringing a ball or something, for me to throw it to him. I was getting fed up, so I put him on his leash and tied it to a doorknob. But then my grandfather came home and discovered that his beloved dog was being abused. So he confiscated my book, tied me by the leg to a table and left me there like that until the evening. I was shrieking and my grandma wasn't allowed to even come near me, to untie me.

So that was one conflict. The second took place during the last prewar All- Sokol Rally 7 in 1938. We were all Sokol members, and I was even supposed to exercise during the rally. Grandpa used to go watch the program, and took me with him. It wasn't much fun for me to watch, it was all just exercising that I knew by heart, it was organized on city, district and regional levels. Well, so I was sitting there, bored, but then my attention was caught by the intercom, which was regularly announcing something, that this or that child was lost, and this or that child had on the other hand been found, for the parents to pick him up here or there. This really impressed me. So during the intermission I ran away from my grandpa and had myself announced, for him to come and collect me. Which he did. But not right away, not until the end of the program, and I had already 'gotten lost' during the intermission. He took me into a taxi, we drove home, and the entire time he didn't say even a word. I could see that he was hopping mad. Punishment didn't come until we were at home; I was locked up in the bathroom.

But Grandpa would never have hit us. Our parents didn't beat us either. My father only hit me once in my entire life, and that time I really did deserve it. The father of one of my girlfriends from school was the superintendent of that palace belonging to the Menkarts, and at the same time worked as a chauffeur. My girlfriend was riding a bike and was hit by a truck - she cut her head open. Her father, Mr. Broulim, carried her across the bridge in his arms; I saw them from the window and ran down to unlock the door. My father wasn't at home, but I knew that he had to be home within a half hour, because his practice was supposed to be open that afternoon. I saw that she was bleeding, that her head was injured, and so I began treating her. Because after all, I wanted to be a doctor when I grew up. Well, of course my medical help upset my father, because I could have hurt her. So then he gave me a thrashing, so that I'd remember that until my studies are finished, I'm not allowed to treat anyone. I really did deserve it.

Back then I thought that I was going to study medicine. Later I realized that I'd probably faint, in the autopsy room, everywhere, so I forgot about it. But at that age... my father was my idol; I was convinced that I'd be like him, and that I already knew what to do and how to do it. My father then stitched up my friend's head, he had to shave her head because of it, and she was very sad, because she had beautiful hair. Her hair grew back, but imagine that when I returned to Strakonice after the war, she was addicted to drugs, a 17-year-old girl... She died very young. Back then I didn't even really know that something like that even existed.

We always had a lot of books at home, and I liked to read a lot. Actually, it was probably my favorite activity. Old Czech Fables interested me the most. Then I also read those girls' books, which today no one knows any more. Ruze z Kavkazu, Mezi Druzkami [Caucasian Rose, Among Friends]... They were about this Georgian girl that was named Nina Dzavacha Ogli Dzamata. Even though I've got a bad memory for names, her name I'll remember till I die. I was the story of her life from childhood up until the time she was a grandmother, they were these fat books, and by the time I was 11, before I left for England, I'd read them all. Of course I read children's books, Broucci ['Fireflies' (1876) by Czech writer Jan Karafiát (1846-1929)], Marbulinek [book by Otakar Haering, full title: 'Marbulinek, Kasparek, Fenek the Doggie and Their Merry Adventures'], those we loved... even though at the age of ten I pretty well turned my nose up at that sort of thing. Interestingly, I didn't like Kaja Marik 8, which I didn't finish.

My father was short, fat and bald. He was very popular with his patients, and had a lot of them. This of course gave those that envied him a reason to resent him. There was this one doctor in Strakonice that didn't have many patients, but before the Germans arrived, the malice was more or less latent. I'd perhaps call it a competitive struggle. But then, when the Germans came, this doctor joined forces with the head doctor at the Strakonice hospital, you can probably imagine what he was about, if during the time the Germans were there he became the mayor of Strakonice, and they arranged for my father to be thrown out of the medical chamber. But at that time I was already gone, I didn't find out about it until after the war.

So, my father doubtlessly had experiences with anti-Semitism, even though in Strakonice up to the war it was relatively good. Basically anti-Semitism didn't exist there, I know only of one explicitly anti-Semitic family. I knew that we were of a different religion, but as far as coming across some expression of enmity? Not in school, there no one cared who was of what religion. Perhaps only that I would have very much liked to have joined the Scouts, but as a Jewish girl they didn't want me. The Scouting movement, at least the one in Strakonice, was a very anti-Semitic organization.

So that disappointed me.

During the war">During the war

In 1938 my grandfather retired. It was already looking dicey. Hitler was in full bloom, so Grandpa and my uncle decided to sell the wholesale business in Sporilov. My uncle then left for England to found a construction materials factory, his family went to join him, and then they stayed there. When during the war London was bombed, and so many people lost the roof above their heads, it was necessary to build quickly, and so my uncle Jan invented 'panelaky' [prefab apartment blocks]. You could build them quickly. So my uncle Jan has all of these eyesores here on his conscience. In England, however, they took it as a temporary measure, and have long since torn them down. It's only we that still have these blots on the landscape. The other uncle, Josef wasn't even in Prague anymore at that time before the war; he was working as an attaché in Belgrade. [Korbel, Josef (1909 - 1977): original surname Körbel. Czech diplomat and political scientist. The father of Madeleine Albright.]

People had been talking about Hitler for long years already. Of course, everyone was afraid. We were required to take German in school as a second language, so I didn't want to learn it. I always said that I wouldn't study a language that... Then the Germans came and it was worse and worse. I remember how on that 15th March 1939 9 it was snowing, a terrible snowstorm. And the Germans were driving across that bridge. I can still see it in front of me, how it's cold, snowing, and the Germans are arriving in Strakonice.

There were of course some Germans already living in Strakonice before the war. I didn't know very many of them, but one of them lived in our apartment building; he had a garret rented there. He was named Neuen and his daughter and I were friends, even though she attended a different school. When I arrived in Strakonice after the war, some people I knew said to me, 'For God's sake, please, go see Mr. Havrda and put in a good word for Mr. Neuen, after all, the entire time before your parents were deported, he was bringing them food.' Mr. Neuen was in a collection camp, and I managed to reclaim him 10. But in the end he left the country anyways. Plus one of my classmates was from a mixed marriage. Her father was a Czech, her mother a German. Except for that girlfriend of mine, by coincidence also named Dasa, the entire family behaved in an abominable fashion during the war, her brother was in the Hitlerjugend 11... Dasa stayed here after the war. No one needed to be afraid of her; she was a Czech and remained one. These were all the Germans that I knew. But probably there were more of them living in Strakonice...

The decision that I should go to England took place sometime after the occupation. Then it all went lickety-split, I was supposed to leave on a transport in July [1939]. My sister was also supposed to go, and we'd been picked out by some family, that we'd be staying with them. But then my sister broke her leg, and what then happened is something I'll never forgive my parents. They said that she can't go anywhere with a broken leg, and that she won't leave until the September transport, when she's well. As is known, the September transport never left. The family that I was supposed to live with backed off, they wanted siblings, so that it would be easier, so then it was in some way arranged with those uncles of mine, who were both already in England, so I was told that I'd go visit my uncles for the summer holidays, which I was terribly looking forward to doing. When I was saying goodbye to my parents and my whole family, I had no inkling of how things would end up,

that I'd never see them again. I can't imagine that my parents wouldn't have been afraid for me, but doubtlessly their fear was less than that of parents that had no idea of what was going to happen to their child.

I took tons of talismans from my teachers and girlfriends with me to England. Unfortunately over time they've all either been lost or something has happened to them... For example, one of my teachers, whom I liked very much, gave me this blue glass bear on a blue, transparent ice floe. I used to take it everywhere with me, until one time I had it on the edge of a pool during swimming races, someone kicked it and it broke. For years on end I then kept at least the shards in a bag. I also had this doll that was eaten by moths...and so on.

I remember that I couldn't wait to ride on a ship; I'd never been by the sea before. But, unfortunately, we crossed at night, so I was terribly disappointed. There were many children with me in the transport, whom I then also met in the Czechoslovak school in Wales; a young girl who was accompanying us later married our Czech teacher.

When I arrived in England, I didn't know a word of English. At first my uncles tossed me back and forth. So initially I lived with Jan in London, who had a villa rented with his family. Their children were younger than I was. I was terribly bored at their place. We constantly had to be out in the yard. I wanted to read, they wanted to play with me. So I was glad when I then moved in with the other uncle, Josef, there I liked it, because my cousin was two years old, and didn't want to play yet. So I was let out among the children in the street so that I'd learn some English. But what happened was that in fourteen days my girlfriends there spoke on the whole decent Czech, but I not even a word of English. I was simply a strong personality, and demanded Czech.

When Grandpa sold those Litice shares of his, he divided up the resulting revenues among his three children. Uncle Jan was already in England, and because they knew that I'd be going there too, my mother transferred her portion to England too, and it was basically intended for me. It paid for the boarding school that I entered. There were a lot of boarding schools in England, and it was considered to be this better education, especially because this school was considered to be something posh, because Mrs. Churchill had studied there in her youth.

I loved it there at that school. When I started, I knew almost no English, so they gave me to Jenny to look after. And she looked after me perfectly. Along with another girlfriend, Sheila, who was the granddaughter of some long-ago premier. Those two girls were excellent, and Jenny and I are best friends to this day. When during Communism we weren't allowed to leave the country, Jenny used to come visit me here. We have a cottage near Mirotice, so she used to come to our cottage, which she really liked. My grandchildren have known her from birth, just imagine that. I always told them, that is my own children too, but mainly my granddaughters didn't want fairy tales when they were little, but instead begged for me to tell them stories from my life. So I told them about the various mischief we used to get into, and also about how this Jenny took care of me, how I'd been sad that I was in a foreign country and didn't understand anyone...

Well, and now my granddaughters are going to school, and both of them are taking care of someone. And they're terribly proud of it. Right the first day of Grade 1, when she returned from school, the younger one, Veronika, told me, 'Grandma, I'm looking after Goran. He's a refugee from Croatia. He can't speak Czech.' And then she looked after some Georgian girl. The older one, Marketa, looked after a little Chinese boy. So when you imbue children already from childhood with

some experiences...

Children in England started school at the age of five, not at six like here. So that I'd be among children of my own age, I had to take some tests, and because I did well at them, I even went a grade higher, so I was two years ahead. At school I learned English very quickly. The first year I still had a few problems, but on the other hand the entire class took advantage of this when they weren't sure of themselves. They told me to hold things up, what I should ask the teachers about...and I obliged them, gladly. I've got to say that my surroundings accepted me very well. The English are very friendly people.

Besides me, there was one other Czech girl, a bit younger than I, in the English boarding school. We weren't supposed to talk to each other, which is why they put us each at different ends. But when it was possible we talked to each other anyways, and decided that because we were terribly homesick, that we'd return home. That we wouldn't stay in England any longer. The war was raging on, but we simply decided that we'd return. We had it planned that we'd hitchhike, she to Prague, I to Strakonice. We squirreled away cookies, because nothing else would keep, until the day came when we said, 'All right, tonight we're taking off.' And we took off. We crawled out of a window in the hallway onto a fire escape... and that's as far as we got. Someone saw us, so someone nicely explained to us that this just wouldn't do... It was sometime in 1939. There was no bombing yet; we didn't even know what war looked like.

I was at that boarding school until 1944. Then, at the age of 16, I graduated. Their system is a little different from ours; each university has some high schools that fall under it that they take care of during graduation. In the spring university professors arrive and the students do the oral part of their graduation exams. Then in June written exams are sent to all the schools, and everyone writes them on the same day. And all summer you wait in suspense how it ended up, the results aren't published until August, in the newspapers. Those that pass their exams with honors can right away register with a higher grade of high school graduation and go to university. This I managed, I had Oxford final exams, and now what? Though I was at boarding school, I didn't forget my Czech, I was at home with my uncles for a relatively long time three times a year. A month at Christmas, a month at Easter, and two months during the summer. But my level of knowledge was at a 5th grade level. And because there was a Czech school in Wales, they put me there for that last year.

My uncle Josef in London associated with exiled Czech politicians, and I also met them occasionally. My uncle was in charge of the Voice of the Free Republic 12, Czech broadcasts, and when they occasionally needed a child's voice, I went there to read. There I used to meet Ornest [Ornest, Ota (1912-2002): real name Ohrenstein. Czech theater director, translator] and Tigrid [Tigrid, Pavel (1917-2003): real name Schönfeld. Czech journalist, publicist and politician], who I liked very much, we were good friends. Jan Masaryk 13 also used to visit the Korbels regularly, he was this big wisecracker. He often took part in debates on the English BBC, it was called Brain Trust, and he was better known through these debates than as a Czech diplomat. Living on the floor below us was Prokop Drtina [Drtina, Prokop (1900-1980): Czech lawyer and politician], later a minister, and living with him was his niece, Sylvia Loewenbachova, who was my friend. I met Benes 14 only once, by chance, and I was so stupid that I was too embarrassed to speak up.

In that Czechoslovak school they divided children into classes by age. That's why I couldn't go straight into oktava [8th year], but had to go into sexta [6th year]. Well, I didn't learn much at that

school, but at any rate it was absolutely excellent there. For one, a lot of us children from that transport met up there again, we hadn't seen each other since then. And then the relationship between students and professors was completely different, because they were in charge of us 24 hours a day. There were some attendants that were supposed to keep an eye on us outside of class hours, but basically it was all up to the teachers. Some of them weren't much older than we were. For example, we really liked our Czech teacher. His wife had accompanied us on the transport, she was already 19, so she couldn't go as a child, but due to some lucky circumstance she succeeded in leaving as well. She then worked as a guardian at that Czech school, and married the Czech teacher, who taught there. While still in England they had a daughter, Marenka, and so when the two of them wanted for example to go to see a movie, we were happy to babysit her. That's the kind of relationship we had with them. This little Marenka is the mother of Pavel Zuna [Zuna, Pavel (b. 1967): up to 30th June 2006 moderator and manager of several TV Nova projects], who works at Nova [the most-watched Czech commercial TV station].

We didn't have any information about what was going on at home. We were able to keep in touch with our parents only up until the war broke out. Then for some time it was still possible through friends in Switzerland, but soon not even this. During the last years of the war news of the horrors that were going on here gradually began to filter through. Right after the war ended there were lists from the Red Cross that came, but they were unreliable and a person didn't find out much from them. I found only my mother in them, that she'd died while still in Terezin, where there were still relatively well-kept records. With those that had continued on it was worse, we had only very scant information at our disposal. I found out gradually what had happened to my family. When I was returning to Czechoslovakia, I knew only what had happened to my mother, otherwise nothing.

Post-war">Post-war

I actually returned as soon as it was possible, with Uncle Josef's family on the first repatriation transport. It was sometime in May, at latest in June, there were still barricades in Wenceslaus Square. The repatriation was organized by the air force, and we were transported on bombers, we sat on wooden benches in the space that before had held bombs. We couldn't see a thing, and I was terribly bored there, so I went forward to have a look, to where the pilots were. They then did this one crazy thing, when we were flying above Dresden, they said they'd show me how they'd magnificently destroyed it there. So they did vroom... I didn't mind it, but the poor wretches sitting in the back flew all over the place. So the first flight of my life took place in a bomber in place of a bomb.

When I arrived in Czechoslovakia, right away I started trying to find out who'd survived. It was clear to me that if someone was to return, our meeting point would be Strakonice, only there could we meet, otherwise no one had anyone's address. We kept asking around in Strakonice, but nowhere, nothing. At the time I was going there, I still needed a pass into the American zone. At the U Hybernu building in Prague, the Red Cross had lists posted, so I used to go there to have a look too. Finally my two cousins from my father's side returned, from my mother's side, no one. The last thing I found out, about a year after the war, was that my father had died in Auschwitz.

Possessions that my parents had hidden with friends were returned to me without a problem. That which had been confiscated, furniture, the car, my father's office, nothing remained of that

anywhere. Overall I've got to say that I was very warmly received in Strakonice. Everyone greeted and hugged me, reminisced about my father... my father really was very popular.

Upon my return I initially lived with Uncle Josef, who had an apartment on Hradcanske Namesti [Hradcany Square]. But very soon he left for Belgrade as an ambassador, and I stayed with my grandmother's sister-in-law, who I'd never met up till then. She was an old lady, over 80. Those that were of age were lucky, they got an apartment. Those that weren't were out of luck. Some of my classmates went into foster homes, some even into children's homes. It was quite cruel for those that didn't have anyone.

I also had to somehow support myself. I had a 600-crown orphan's pension, which was quite paltry. [In November 1945, the crown was set as 1 Kc = 1.77734 mg of gold.] Never in my life have I had it so bad as here after the war. My aunt on my father's side, Uncle Josef's wife, returned and took me in with her from that old lady; she even got her old apartment back. But she also had a very small pension, so it really was quite rough. Besides this, we didn't have anything at all to heat with, because coal was rationed, and the ration was somehow sized according to how much was used up. It was simply horrible.

The first winter was in general terrible. I was still dressed for the weather in England, I didn't have warm boots, I didn't have a winter coat, I didn't have anything. Luckily my aunt, who'd remained in England, knew a lot of people here that had children and I taught them English or babysat them. So I made the rounds to these families, I actually got fed there plus they paid me. At the same time I was studying for the nostrification [nostrification: acceptance of foreign university degrees as equal with native].

The next year I already knew that I'd be entering university, so in the summer I was able to go to Most to work in the coal brigade. We worked in a surface mine, loading wagons. Both boys and girls, even though there weren't too many girls there. It was terrible. We also worked night shifts. But after some time they saw that girls really can't do that type of work, and so scattered us about to different camps into the kitchens. I shared a room with one medical student who was dating my future husband, Vladimir Sima. That's how I met him. That was one positive thing about the brigade. The second was that we got paid for the work, which back then wasn't insignificant. We also got vouchers for clothes and shoes, and most importantly, a share of the coal. So the coming winter we already had a cellar full of coal, and we weren't cold. And because we used up a lot of it, we then also got a larger ration.

We were very well informed about what was Communism, and that's why we followed the events that led to its introduction with anxiety. In February 1948 15 I took part in that large student demonstration that went up to the Castle. I was lucky, I managed to escape before they began rounding them up. The procession went up Nerudova Street, and in that bend where Nerudova bends upwards to Hrandcanske Namesti, lived by chance friends of my uncle. So when things began to happen, I ran into the entrance to their building, hid there and watched the events from afar.

In our faculty it was also good, until they threw me out. Did I have problems from having been in England... mainly I had problems due to the fact that I had no guardian. In those days a person didn't reach the age of majority until 21, it was only the Communists that lowered it to 18, so that they'd have more voters. My guardian was Uncle Josef. After the war he became an ambassador in

Belgrade, and after February emigrated along with this family. The last time he was in Prague was at Masaryk's [Masaryk, Jan (1886-1948)] funeral, already alone. When he escaped, and I wasn't yet of age and was basically a person that had no rights, I couldn't arrange anything myself. On 26th December my uncle resigned from his position in the United Nations, left for England, and then for America.

So that was in December. And in January there were background checks, vetting, at the universities. I had the bad luck that I ended up in front of a commission led by a person I knew from England. He was a teacher, a loathsome Communist, who'd taught us at that Czech school, at our faculty he lectured in Old English. He and my uncle despised each other; they were always having some sort of arguments. This guy had wanted to make a Communist speech in that Czech broadcast, while my uncle, who of course was never a Communist, disagreed with this. When I came for that vetting, it was clear to me that it would end badly. And true enough, the first thing that he barked at me was, 'Where's your guardian?' 'Well, in Paris.' I didn't know yet that my uncle had escaped, I thought that he was in Paris and was working there in the commission, but this asshole already knew it. So he began talking some garbage, and it was clear to me that they'd throw me out. So I took the liberty and said to him, 'And Mr. Professor, since when does one address university students informally?' [Translator's note: The professor had used the Czech informal 'you' (ty) instead of the formal (vy). Adults normally address all children as 'ty'. Thus in a university environment it would be considered a sign of disrespect and inappropriate in a formal situation]. That was the last thing we said to each other. With this my studies ended.

At that time I was already seeing my future husband. They lived in Vinohrady on Francouzska Street, my husband was also from this poorer family. That is, also... I wasn't, but back then we were both poor. I went to see them and only his grandma was home. I loved her dearly; she was very kind to me. Well, in the kitchen they had a coal stove. Granny was stoking the stove and cooking. And because she had the coalscuttle beside her, I took out my school index and threw it into it. Granny pulled it out, wiped it with her apron like this, and says, 'Keep it, you never know when it'll come in useful.' And she was right. When the rehabilitations were taking place in 1990, my index with the stamp 'Expelled' helped me a lot. They immediately accredited me, and I even got a diploma with honors. Though I can't use a title, we did even have a graduation ceremony.

Originally I didn't even want to go for that rehabilitation; I didn't like the fact that the people apologizing to us weren't the ones that had hurt us and thrown us out, but people that had nothing to do with it, who hadn't done anything to us. But then some law was passed, according to which old- age pensions were supposed to be increased by some percentage for each year of studies, including unfinished years. And because I, as a non-party member had had a low salary and thus also a small pension, I gritted my teeth and let myself be rehabilitated. So I was glad to have the index, and to this day remember how Granny wiped it off with her apron.

I've got to say that my husband's family was fantastic, the way they behaved towards me. As soon as I turned 21 and thus was of age, I got married. My husband was still studying, but he had it arranged so that whenever he was prepared for an exam, he could go take it, and didn't have to conform to class years. He finished school in 1950, and right after the graduation ceremony he had to join the army. And because I was his wife, he went to the PTP 16 and into a mine. The mine was named Starkov, which was in northern Bohemia, then he was at a sawmill in southern Bohemia in Cerna, and then also worked in the forest in Brdy. He got out of the army in 1952, and that only

when he signed a paper that he'd do construction work for them. But that was the field that he'd studied, so that wasn't so bad.

When my husband joined the army, I had no job. The railway was taking on people, and was taking everyone; so that I'd be able to at least somehow exist, I applied and was supposed to start working at the Vrsovice train station, keeping records of wagons. But the day before that someone from the head office called, that he'd found out that I had a high school diploma and that they had a desperate shortage of accountants, so whether I wouldn't want to take a crash course. I was all glad that something like that had come along, and I initially worked as a bookkeeper in the company kitchen at Wilson Station, and then in the railway apprentice boarding school in Sporilov. I stayed there until my daughter was born. My older daughter, Jana, was born in 1952, the younger, Olga, in 1958.

When the children were small, I worked at home. One relative of my husband's had a knitting machine and knitted for some co-op. So I said to myself that that's a good idea, and in some complicated fashion, through Tuzex, I obtained a knitting machine and knitted for the Clothes Service as a home worker. [Tuzex: during totalitarian times Tuzex was a sought-after store where people would go to purchase foreign goods that were otherwise unavailable.] And it was horrible. As soon as you got up from the machine, you stopped making money. I didn't like it there, the managers were uneducated and overbearing...

Then I luckily got an opportunity to train new workers in some factory, and through that to a sample workshop, where they made sample sweaters for the Barrandov film studios. That was better, but in any case I was glad when in the 1960s one friend from the Czech school in England called me and said that they were starting up an English service in CTK, the Czech News Agency 17 . That they already had two, and were looking for another four people, and that it's excellent there... I translated news stories into English. I experienced the year 1968 18 there, that was quite harsh. Because our building was occupied, we broadcast from I.P. Pavlova. Subsequently, most decent people were thrown out. Nothing happened to us, we weren't included because we weren't party members. We huddled down together in some fashion. So I lasted there until retirement.

Bringing up the children was complicated for me. At home we taught something else than at school, and I was always stiff with fear that they'd say something at school. So I always told them, 'This is our big secret.' And the children were glad that they had a big secret with me. And when my older daughter was in first or second grade, she one day came home from school and said: 'Mummy, we don't like Stalin any more.' I breathed a sign of relief. 'Thank God.' Our older daughter studied English and Russian, our younger one economics.

For a terribly long time we weren't allowed to visit the West. Actually, the first time wasn't until 1966, at that time my husband was working for Chemoprojekt, in a glue factory, and they were collaborating with the English, French and Germans. He was lent out for a half year to that English company, and I got permission to go see him, the children had to stay at home. For some time after the occupation you could on the whole still go if you had an invitation, so I was there several times to visit relatives, and our older daughter spent one summer vacation with her cousin. The younger one was still little, and her I took to England in 1980, when I went there again on a promise and exit visa.

I basically kept in normal contact with Uncle Jan. He'd been in England since 1938, so the Communist regime didn't consider them to be escapees. They even used to come here, not very often, but it was possible. Keeping in contact with the second uncle was worse. So once a year some friends of ours used to help us with it. Everyone who lived here probably at some point considered emigration. But something always happened to complicate it, so in my case it never happened. And I also wasn't completely sure if I had the right. Because I think that a lot of people didn't have that right. Nothing bad was happening to them here... simply put, I was convinced that if everyone emigrated, the nation would cease to exist. So I knew that I had to last it out. I was convinced that it wasn't here till the end of time, but it was complicated here, that's the truth. So the fact that I didn't emigrate makes me feel more sorry now, when I see what sorts of people made it where they did.

Before the war I never met up with anti-Semitism, neither did I meet up with it after the war. I didn't maintain any sort of contact with the Jewish community. I of course follow the events in Israel, but in the same fashion that I follow the situation in Darfur [Sudan], for example. I'm sorry that they've got unrest in Israel, but I definitely don't feel that I should be living there.

The fact that our departure for England was organized by Winton was a surprise for me as well. We knew that some organization was behind it, but we didn't know of any concrete person. So we were surprised more by the fact that he surfaced than that it was him in particular. I met him for the first time when he came here. And it was beautiful. We were at the airport, each of us with a flower... Each one of us spent a bit of time with him. Then we invited him when we had a reunion of our school. That was in 1998. Back then our class was still complete, and we celebrated our 70th birthdays together. It was a wonderful get-together. Then last year was the 60th anniversary of the end of the war, another reunion took place in Wales, but I didn't take part in that one, I only went to a reception at our embassy in London.

Things were hard at the beginning of the 1990s. Prices skyrocketed, my pension was small, and all [socialist] publications that I had been translating for ceased to exist. It took some time until a substitute came by. I still got my good name, and there's constant interest in my work.

Glossary">Glossary

1 Winton, Sir Nicholas (b
1909): a British broker and humanitarian worker, who in 1939 saved 669 Jewish children from the territory of the endangered Czechoslovakia from death by transporting them to Great Britain.

2 Terezin/Theresienstadt
A ghetto in the Czech Republic, run by the SS. Jews were transferred from there to various extermination camps. It was used to camouflage the extermination of European Jews by the Nazis, who presented Theresienstadt as a 'model Jewish settlement'. 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 cafe, a bank, kindergartens, a school, and flower gardens were put up to deceive the committee.

3 Great depression

At the end of October 1929, there were worrying signs on the New York Stock Exchange in the securities market. On the 24th of October ('Black Thursday'), people began selling off stocks in a panic from the price drops of the previous days - the number of shares usually sold in a half year exchanged hands in one hour. The banks could not supply the amount of liquid assets required, so people didn't receive money from their sales. Five days later, on 'Black Tuesday', 16.4 million shares were put up for sale, prices dropped steeply, and the hoarded properties suddenly became worthless. The collapse of the Stock Exchange was followed by economic crisis. Banks called in their outstanding loans, causing immediate closings of factories and businesses, leading to higher unemployment, and a decline in the standard of living. By January of 1930, the American money market got back on it's feet, but during this year newer bank crises unfolded: in one month, 325 banks went under. Toward the end of 1930, the crisis spread to Europe: in May of 1931, the Viennese Creditanstalt collapsed (and with it's recall of outstanding loans, took Austrian heavy industry with it). In July, a bank crisis erupted in Germany, by September in England, as well. In Germany, in 1931, more than 19,000 firms closed down. Though in France the banking system withstood the confusion, industrial production and volume of exports tapered off seriously. The agricultural countries of Central Europe were primarily shaken up by the decrease of export revenues, which was followed by a serious agricultural crisis. Romanian export revenues dropped by 73 percent, Poland's by 56 percent. In 1933 in Hungary, debts in the agricultural sphere reached 2.2 billion Pengoes. Compared to the industrial production of 1929, it fell 76 percent in 1932 and 88 percent in 1933. Agricultural unemployment levels, already causing serious concerns, swelled immensely to levels, estimated at the time to be in the hundreds of thousands. In industry the scale of unemployment was 30 percent (about 250,000 people).

4 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 (Tesin 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). 5 Prague Spring: A period of democratic reforms in Czechoslovakia, from January to August 1968. Reformatory politicians were secretly elected to leading functions of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia (KSC). Josef Smrkovsky became president of the National Assembly, and Oldrich Cernik became the Prime Minister. Connected with the reformist efforts was also an important figure on the Czechoslovak political scene, Alexander Dubcek, General Secretary of the KSC Central Committee (UV KSC). In April 1968 the UV KSC adopted the party's Action Program, which was

meant to show the new path to socialism. It promised fundamental economic and political reforms. On 21st March 1968, at a meeting of representatives of the USSR, Hungary, Poland, Bulgaria, East Germany and Czechoslovakia in Dresden, Germany, the Czechoslovaks were notified that the course of events in their country was not to the liking of the remaining conference participants, and that they should implement appropriate measures. In July 1968 a meeting in Warsaw took place, where the reformist efforts in Czechoslovakia were designated as "counter-revolutionary." The invasion of the USSR and Warsaw Pact armed forces on the night of 20th August 1968, and the signing of the so-called Moscow Protocol ended the process of democratization, and the Normalization period began.

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 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.

8 Wagnerova - Cerna, Marie (1887 - 1934)

wrote under the pen name of Felix Haj. She was employed as a housekeeper at a parsonage in Mnisek pod Brdy. Her literary works were directed primarily at young people. The culmination of her career is the popular seven-part work Kaja Marik. During the totalitarian regime, it's publication was forbidden.

9 Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia

Bohemia and Moravia were occupied by the Germans and transformed into a German Protectorate in March 1939, after Slovakia declared its independence. The Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia

was placed under the supervision of the Reich protector, Konstantin von Neurath. The Gestapo assumed police authority. Jews were dismissed from civil service and placed in an extralegal position. In the fall of 1941, the Reich adopted a more radical policy in the Protectorate. The Gestapo became very active in arrests and executions. The deportation of Jews to concentration camps was organized, and Terezin/Theresienstadt was turned into a ghetto for Jewish families. During the existence of the Protectorate the Jewish population of Bohemia and Moravia was virtually annihilated. After World War II the pre-1938 boundaries were restored, and most of the German-speaking population was expelled.

10 Forced displacement of Germans

one of the terms used to designate the mass deportations of German occupants from Czechoslovakia which took place after World War II during the years 1945-1946. Despite the fact that anti- German sentiments were common in Czech society after World War II, 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.

11 Hitlerjugend

The youth organization of the German Nazi Party (NSDAP). In 1936 all other German youth organizations were abolished and the Hitlerjugend was the only legal state youth 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. After reaching the age of 18, young people either joined the army or went to work.

12 Voice of the Free Republic

in 1939 the BBC began regular broadcasts in Czech. Initially for 15 minutes a day, but at the end of 1939, after the definitive recognition of the Czechoslovak government in exile, the BBC granted this broadcast two additional time slots; they were advertised as the Voice of the Free Republic. The head of the Czechoslovak department was Sheila Grant-Duff. Working on the staff was the former editor-in-chief of the Tribuna paper Josef Kodicek, G. Stern from the same paper, Josef Kosina, Misa Papirnik, J. Patzakova and others. They were later joined by people like the poet Ivan Jelinek, journalists Karel Brusak and Pavel Tigrid and the theater director Ota Ornest.

13 Masaryk, Jan (1886-1948)

Czechoslovak diplomat, son of Tomas Garrigue Masaryk, the first president of Czechoslovakia. He was foreign minister in the Czechoslovak government in exile, set up in Great Britain after the dismemberment of the country (1938). His policy included cooperating with both, the Soviet Union as well as the Western powers in order to attain the liberation of Czechoslovakia. After the liberation (1945) he remained in office until the 1948 communist coup d'etat, when he was

announced to have committed suicide.

14 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.

15 February 1948

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

16 PTP (Technical Assistance Battalion)

was created in 1948 for politically unreliable persons, such as for example people of noble descent, capitalists, sons of farmers and estate owners that didn't agree with collectivization, clergymen,... "PTPers" didn't have a time limit for their army service (basic army service lasted two years). Because of their political unreliability they weren't issued a weapon. They mainly performed arduous physical labour. In the 1950s over 44,000 men absolved the army work camps. In the time of the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic, the Technical Assistance Battalion officially never existed. Colloquially they were called the Black Barons.

17 Czechoslovak News Agency

Shortly after the outbreak of World War I, the Czechoslovak News Agency was created in Washington; concurrently, T. G. Masaryk founded the Czech News Agency in 1916 in London. These organizations can be considered as the precursors of today's CTK, founded by the Czechoslovak National Assembly presidium on 28th October 1918. CTK's evolution was interrupted by the war. In November 1950 CTK merged with the Slovak Press Agency, which was created during the rebellion in Banska Bystrica in 1944. During the 1950s the publishing of all news was subject to the approval of the agency's political secretariat; in 1953 it had only two foreign correspondents and all other foreign news was taken from the Soviet agency TASS. From 1954 onwards, CTK performed the monitoring of foreign radio stations, which however wasn't a normal service, but was meant for special clients. In 1991 the signature CSTK, which in Slovakia had been used since 1968, began appearing under its dispatches. At this time in Slovakia the news agency began using the abbreviation TK SR. In 1992 the local branches became independent, and in November the Independent News Agency SR Slovakia with the signature TASR was created. The Czech agency once again returned to the signature CTK.

18 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 was 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.

#next_pages_container { width: 5px; hight: 5px; position: absolute; top: -100px; left: -100px; z-index: 2147483647 !important; }