Kurt Kotouc

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Prague
Czech Republic
Interviewer: Pavla Neuner
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Kurt Kotouc lives in a small apartment in Prague, in a pleasant neighborhood close to the city centre. Mr Kotouc is a very elegant and friendly gentleman who comes across as being calm and well-read. We did the interview in a room where one wall was covered in books; the focus of many of the volumes was visual art.

Family background

My grandfather's name on my father's side was Leopold Kotouc. He didn't come from a Jewish family. He made his living as a miner. He met my grandmother in Oslavany, which is a village not far from Brno - it was known for its coal mines and that's where he would commute to work. In those days, miners didn't belong to the proletariat the way they were later made out to be in socialist literature. In reality, he was employed and had a salary, so it's very probable that he was grandmother's equal partner. [He was up to the social level of his wife.] I mean, we are not talking about being rich or anything. I didn't know my grandfather at all; he died in Oslavany in the 1930s.

My grandmother on my father's side was named Johana Maria Kotoucova, born Hanslova in 1862 in Oslavany. Her father was Salamon Hansl. My grandmother was from a Jewish family but a non-religious Jewish family, and she herself was not religious. My grandmother was an ordinary woman. After the death of her husband, she moved to Brno with her daughter. I loved her, but my contact with her was minimal. I remember her as a withdrawn woman, with illnesses appropriate to her age. I think she didn't have any siblings.

My grandfather on my mother's side was named Alois Sensky. He was from Ivancice, which is a small town in Southern Moravia, where there used to be a Jewish settlement and where you can find a beautiful, romantic Jewish cemetery, which is also interesting because it isn't flat but spreads into a hill. Grandpa had a secondary school education. He lived in Mohelno with Grandma. At that time, it was a pretty big Czech village with about two thousand inhabitants. Grandpa had a shop with mixed goods; they sold groceries and sweets but also whips, shoes and hoses. I remember how once someone came, who needed shoes. Grandpa put this person's foot on a piece of paper and traced it to get the size. Then he brought the shoes back from Trebic, where he would travel to buy goods. There was an old, rickety bus that would go from Mohelno to Kralice, which was where

the nearest railway was. When Grandpa would travel to get the goods he would take the rack wagon with him.

In the village, it worked that tradesmen served people for penny profits. Goods were sold on holidays and during the work week. The difference was that, during the holidays, the store was formally closed, but if someone really needed something, they would come to the back. I remember once we were sitting down to have Sunday lunch and suddenly we heard banging on the back door. Grandpa was irritated that someone was interrupting his lunch but he got up and gave them the goods they needed. There was a great deal of discipline in the family, Grandpa was a stern man but also an honest man.

Grandpa was an educated person and for many years he acted as the school alderman on the local town council where he was in charge of education. Twice he was even elected mayor of the village. People would come to Grandpa when they needed help with a request. When Grandpa wrote a letter, especially in German, it could be considered a graphic piece because he used handwritten runic lettering [gothic script of the German language] different from classic Latin script. It was an example of his elegant and cultured expression.

Grandpa had a brother named Jakub and I think a brother called Simon as well. This branch of the Sensky family also had a store with mixed goods; it was the second shop with mixed goods in Mohelno. Jakub took a non-Jewish woman for his wife and together they had many children and most of them married non-Jewish partners, so they were spared the Holocaust. Only Jakub's daughter Cili married a Jewish man. Together they had a son named Felix, who was deported to Terezin 1 and then to Auschwitz. By some kind of miracle Felix survived. Jakub died before the war even began.

Granddad died in Mohelno in 1934 and is buried in the Jewish cemetery in Ivancice.

My grandmother on my mother's side was named Josefina Senska [nee Steckerlova] and was born in Miroslav in 1875. Miroslav was a large village in the border region of Southern Moravia where the largest population was the German minority. [Editor's note: Prior to the creation of the Czechoslovak state (1918), Moravia was a province of Austria within the Austro-Hungarian double monarchy. The German population became a minority later, within Czechoslovakia; at the time Mr. Kotouc is describing they were an integral part of the German-Austrian majority.] The history of Miroslav dates back into the 13th century during which time a Jewish community settled near the original medieval settlement. So, one of the oldest settlements in this region is the Jewish one. In Miroslav there used to be a yeshivah and a synagogue. In 1938 the Germans took over Miroslav, just as they did the Sudetenland 2 and they chased out all the non-German inhabitants - the Jewish people being the first to go. From my childhood, I remember there was a Jewish street that led to the synagogue. Miroslav was close to the German border [in fact it is near the Austrian border] and is better known under the German name Misslitz.

Grandma came from the Steckerl family. Although she spoke Czech fluently, same as Grandpa, her mother tongue was German. My grandparents lived with the consciousness that a Jewish tradition existed but it was not accompanied by any rituals. They were religious and I think that they probably went to the synagogue for the high holidays. However, they didn't cook kosher food at home.

Grandma had a younger sister, Elsa, who was born in 1890. She was not married. She was transported to Terezin in 1942 and two years later she was killed in Auschwitz. In Terezin she acted as a nurse, so she had some sort of secondary school with a health practice orientation. Grandma also had a brother named Karel and I know that he was in the Austro-Hungarian [KuK] army 3 in World War I and that he was schooled as a butcher. Somehow, under circumstances that I'm not aware of, he escaped the Nazis through Austria and then to London.

My father was named Otto Kotouc and was born in Oslavany in 1895. Dad probably studied in secondary school. It is possible that he was a trained weaver because textiles were something he really knew a lot about. He was nineteen when World War I broke out in 1914, and so he entered the Austro- Hungarian army. I'm not exactly sure where he served but he got shot in the foot on the Italian front 4. He didn't talk about the war very much. After marrying my mother, they moved to Brno where dad engaged in textile trade. In Brno there were many textile factories producing a great deal of textile waste that could be further processed. My father would buy the leftovers and do just that. The leftovers were unwoven and processed differently, depending on what kind of textile it was. He wasn't particularly successful in his trade; I know at one time the company fell apart completely. I think he was trying to assert himself.

My mom's name was Stella Kotoucova, born Senska in Mohelno in 1902. Although she did not go to university, she was a very educated woman in her day. After elementary school she attended a secondary school for women, which was a German school in Brno, where she learned subjects ranging from maths and Czech to cooking. After marrying my dad, she stayed at home, but she helped him with the company.

My mom had four siblings: her brothers were Hugo, Bedrich and Hanus, her sister was named Greta. My aunt Greta was born in Mohelno in 1910. My aunt was known as a woman of great beauty and she had many suitors but she stayed single. One of my teachers was interested in her and so I had special status at school thanks to that. Aunt Greta had an offer for marriage from a rich furrier from Brno who was named Piowaty. He wanted her to marry him and he told her that he had already arranged everything, that together they would go to Canada and that there they would live beautifully. But my aunt couldn't abandon her mother and so she stayed and perished in [Lublin] concentration camp.

Hugo was born in Mohelno in 1896. He went to Miroslav for training; Grandpa probably wanted him to take his place. In Miroslav, Hugo fell in love with a certain young woman who came from a very wealthy family. He gave her gifts, bought her jewels and worshipped her. Unfortunately, he bought things that he didn't have the money for and he would borrow the money from the business where he was in training. And then he had no way of paying them back. He was afraid to admit it, so he shot himself. This all happened before World War I.

Bedrich was born in Mohelno in 1899 and went to university and became a construction engineer. He was sort of an adventurous type. When World War I started he was an officer in the Austro-Hungarian army. During the war he became ill with malaria and all his hair fell out and then he didn't have a single hair on his entire body. He always made jokes about it, he said it was the reason he was so socially successful because wherever he came everyone noticed him thanks to his bald head. As a construction engineer, he went to Slovakia after the war where he fell in love with a bigoted Catholic named Katka [diminutive of the Hungarian name Katalin]. Bedrich was so

clever that even though Katka was of a strict upbringing he started to go out with her, which her family had no intention of supporting.

Katka was from Southern Slovakia, from the town of Modry Kamen, near the border with Hungary; she was from a wealthy country family. For them he was a nothing - just a poor engineer and a Jew on top of it. In the end, they married at the beginning of World War II. They had two children together and lived in Banska Bystrica. She remained Catholic and went to church regularly. My uncle wouldn't be baptized but it worked for them. When the deportations began in 1944, my uncle hid at his friends' in the mountains. After the communist take-over [February 1948] 5, the situation with her parents totally changed. They went from being rich farmers to kulaks 6, who had everything taken away. Bedrich died in 1967 and Katka died recently.

Hanus was born in 1910 in Mohelno. He finished textile industrial secondary school and became an expert on textile. His wife was a Sudeten German named Margareta; thanks to her he wasn't transported to Terezin before 1945. Together they had a son named Petr who was born in 1939. In 1948 they emigrated. Hanus was a fairly well-known textile expert and two British businessmen, who bought textile equipment in Bohemia and wanted to start up production in Rhodesia [today Zimbabwe], turned to him with the request to choose reliable equipment and mediate the sale. Then they told him that they would like to take him on board. My uncle was afraid that it wouldn't be possible because after the communist take-over no one could leave the country freely. They told my uncle: 'look here, they are interested in us because we are buying equipment and because they will have other orders with us.' In a flash he arranged passports and travel permits for Hanus, Margareta and my cousin to travel out of the country. Hanus and his family then moved to Rhodesia and my uncle became the manager of a textile company and later became independent. However, Rhodesia became the totalitarian state of Zimbabwe and they chased out the white people and took their land and property. In 1966 my uncle died and my aunt moved to London to be with her son, Petr. Petr already had a son there, whose name is Tomy and who is a professor in London today. Petr died a year ago [2003].

My father had a sister named Marie; she was born in 1890. During the 1930s my grandpa died and Grandma and my aunt Marie moved from Oslavany to Brno. They lived together and they both helped my father: he would always bring textile to a storage space and they would unweave it. I remember that the last storage space that he had was in a shack that was in the courtyard of a house on Bratislavska Street. I loved my aunt very much and she loved me; I was a spoiled good-looking child, like out of the movies. She was crazy about me and kept wanting to give me something and talk to me. She had some sort of a hormonal problem; she was overweight as a result. Probably because of it, she never married. So she didn't have her own family and as a result she was closer to my father. She was friends with my mom. Marie wasn't religious at all.

Growing up

My brother Hanus was born in 1924 in Brno. Before the war he studied at an industrial secondary school, but he finished his last two years after the war. My brother still managed to have a bar mitzvah that our relatives, the Steckerls, organized in Miroslav.

Brno was the second city after Prague. There were about three hundred thousand inhabitants. Almost a third of those were the German minority which was not noticeable up until 1938. I wasn't conscious of the Czech- German relations issue up until that time. As a child, the crazy German

national consciousness took me by complete surprise; it came across in long white socks and leather pants among other things [Austro-German folk wear, later abused by the Nazis]. All in all, old Brno was an industrial city with many textile factories.

I'm not able to say how strong the Jewish community was in Brno. There were about three synagogues there. A Jewish life existed there but it was assimilated and on a non-religious basis. I never met a person there with side-locks and in caftans. I remember the cafe Esplanade, which was known to be a 'Jewish' cafe. Our family didn't partake in Jewish community life at all. As a child I didn't have any great consciousness of Judaism. That came in 1940 when restrictions were put into place. Up until that time, I can't say that I experienced any anti-Semitism. I didn't go to the synagogue regularly, only my parents did during the high holidays and mostly because of our relatives. We didn't uphold the holidays at home and we didn't cook kosher. Our parents didn't raise us in a Jewish way. My father was of Jewish origin on his mother's side but he wasn't religious at all; my mother was the same. My mom knew how to write Hebrew a little; she learned it during her childhood. If my parents upheld any traditions, it was out of respect for their parents. At home we celebrated Christmas: we had a Christmas tree, gifts and everything else that is part of it.

I think we lived in relative poverty. We lived in an old rental unit in a two-bedroom apartment with a kitchen, a hall and without a bathroom. There was a little garden and gazebo that we also rented. In the apartment, everything was very basic, primitive almost. I remember as a small child my mother bathed me in the kitchen in a basin. My brother and I shared one small room: we each had our own bed and my father's typewriter and desk was also in our room. My mother and father were next-door in the other small room. They had a bed, a night table, an old dresser and mom's vanity table. When we had guests, we received them in the kitchen. In the kitchen we cooked on a stove; we heated the apartment with coal or wood that we would bring up from the basement. We had cold running water and electricity. In the room we had wooden floors and in the kitchen there were wooden boards on the floor. The walls were also painted crudely. My parents were both from the countryside, they were new to the city and so they were adjusting to city life. It can't be said that we had a painting of value or any kind of art in the apartment.

Given to the large German minority in Brno it was very important to have a strong command of the German language. My parents not only spoke German well; they spoke it just as well as they spoke Czech. When my father was writing business letters, he wrote in Czech or in German, depending on what company he was dealing with. My parents had their office at home and when my father dictated a business letter to my mother, I could hear him switching easily between Czech and German. Given the nature of my father's business he had many friends and acquaintances. Relatives would also come for visits at our place. My parents never divided people into Jews and non- Jews.

I attended a Czech general school in Brno on Mendlovo Square. A significant part of the school was made up of the sons of the proletariat. School attendance was, of course, mandatory. The parents of Roma or circus performers got around the attendance law by sending their kids to school at the end of the school year, so that their child would receive a report card. Perhaps they were getting 5 [the worst grade] or they failed but on paper it was proof of attendance. [Editor's note: They were occasional performers visiting Brno and they had no constant residence. This is why their children were often left out from school.] I remember a grotesque scene where a circus performer came to school and he chased the teacher with a whip because the teacher didn't want to give his son a

report card.

At school, there were very few Jews. We were an exception; we didn't have to go to the religious classes with everyone else. I remember in the fourth or fifth grade, there was a young and elegant Catholic religion teacher. Once he called me and asked me to come to his place for a visit. He lived in a Jesuit convent; it was a real experience for me because the Jesuits were a very wealthy order. Upon entering the convent I walked through halls with high carpets and then I knocked on the teacher's door. In the room there were beautiful glass windows, a bed and a small table; everything was very elegant. And then he said, 'Listen, don't you have any books in Hebrew at home?' I answered that I didn't know. He said that he would be very interested, that he would like to read one. I came home and told my mom and she said that we didn't have any books in Hebrew. I said that I needed them for the teacher, so then I guess my mom found the book that I later took to the teacher, at my grandma's place.

In 1941 I completed elementary school and was supposed to start gymnasium [secondary school] on Na Porici Street, but it wasn't possible anymore [because of the exclusion of Jews from schools in the Protectorate] 7. I started attending the co-educational Jewish gymnasium. There were only two in the whole country: in Brno and in Prague. The Germans allowed teaching to happen but on the report cards it read: this report card is not a valid public school report card. Before the war, the school didn't have enough Jewish teachers because the Jewish community was so emancipated and assimilated. When Jewish teachers and students were forced to leave all other schools, our secondary school experienced a short renaissance. The school was the last place where many Jewish pedagogues could teach, among them was sociologist Dr. Bruno Zwicker, previously an assistant at Masaryk University in Brno, Valtr Eisinger, previously a teacher at a secondary school in Kyjov and Orlov, Otto Ungar, Arnost Gerad and others. Everything was carried out under an atmosphere of nervousness and fear, so discipline and teaching slackened. In May 1941 the Nazis took control of the building and so teaching stopped. The Jewish Community tried to keep some improvised teaching going in Valeji Street for some time. At that time, I would go to Mrs. Stefi Fiserova to learn English.

In grade five, I went to the Tatra Mountains with my elementary school. In those days, trips like that were quite rare. We had a very active teacher who organized trips. His name was Novotny and he taught Czech language and thanks to him it became a favorite subject of mine. Otherwise, I usually spent my free time with friends. In the summer, we would swim in the Svratka and in the winter we would toboggan on Kravi Mountain. We would go to a park near my apartment, back then it was called Obilnak; it was a wild place, where bushes of all kinds grew. There were all sorts of different places to climb and secret places where we would play, shoot from sling- shots or horse around in different ways. All that only until 1940.

Over the holidays, what I liked best was going to visit my grandparents in Mohelno. There were two rivers - the Jihlavka and the Oslava that ran beside the village. The nature there is romantic and beautiful. My brother would visit our relatives in Miroslav more often than me; I didn't like Miroslav as much as Mohelno. In Miroslav, there was a strict order and I didn't have the freedom to just pick up and go run around the woods. In Mohelno there was beautiful nature and I liked it there very much. Near the house, there was a fairly big garden, where there were no garden-beds but only fruit trees. After Grandpa's death Grandma moved to another small house where she lived until her deportation.

From 1939, Brno's powerful German minority began to buzz with traditional German hats and Henlein 8 organizations. Suddenly, the way to school along the Spilberg hillside became dangerous. Teens from the Hitlerjugend 9 waited for us there and our only defense was humiliating: all we could do was run away. It wouldn't be more than an adventure, if we, Jewish children, could share these experiences with our non-Jewish friends - as a shared fate. But we had to give up our friendships and start new ones with other Jewish boys out of self-protection; we had to exchange friendships that came naturally for friendships that arose from being the condemned. I remember going to visit a friend. His mother opened the door a crack and said, 'He isn't home!' The same thing happened the next day. Later, some feeling inside told me that my friend was not home for me because I was a Jew. I came home and because I felt shame, I didn't even tell anyone about it.

Later, in the streets, I met my favorite teacher, who used to praise my brother Hanus and me for our good school performance. On his collar he wore the symbol of the Narodni sourucenstvi [Czech fascist organization, from 1939 - 1945 the only legal political party in the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia.] and he said, 'I knew that it couldn't end differently with the Jews.' Another time a group of guys jumped me and they twisted my arm behind my back and one of them asked, 'do you know where you belong Jew?' By coincidence someone was passing by so I was let go. At home, my father warned me not to go there. I realized, with bitterness, that he couldn't help me.

During the War

In Brno the rise of Nazism and the persecution of the Jews [see Anti-Jewish laws in the Protectorate of Bohemia-Moravia] 10 was quicker than in other regions. At the end of the 1940s the Gestapo barged into our apartment for the first time. Two men were throwing the contents out of the wardrobe into the middle of the room. My mom had to put some of the things, like clothing and sweaters into a suitcase and it was sealed. One of the men, who had a vulgar expression on his face said, 'Das wird alles fur die NSDAP gut sein! Wir sind nicht eure republikanische Polizei.' [German: This will all be good for the NSDAP. We are not your republican police.] The next day my dad had to go with the suitcases to the law faculty building which had been converted into the headquarters of Brno's Gestapo. We lived through two days of anxiety, but my dad came back that time, even with the things that had been confiscated. It was a stroke of luck: the Gestapo administrator had served on the front with my dad during World War I and so for this reason, he let my dad return home.

Soon afterwards, we had to leave our apartment on Falkensteiner Street. In 1941, we were forced to move into a three-room housing unit, near Koliste Park in Brno, with two other Jewish families. I can still see a colorful kaleidoscope of the inhabitants of the building, stuffed together into a small space, made even smaller by a bunch of useless objects that their owners were unable to part with. It was a grotesquely diverse group of people who kept tripping over one another in a Kafka-like environment, but they wanted to maintain their pride, at least to the outer world. This apartment was also taken over by the Gestapo in August of 1941. In panic, I threw the butter that my parents had gone to a lot of trouble to acquire, out the window. Our room was the furthest removed, so the voices of the commando traveled to us and then the scene from Falkensteiner Street repeated itself. During this raid, both my parents and also the Weinsteins, immigrants from Vienna, were brought to the Gestapo.

The Weinsteins returned from the interrogation later and were silent about what had happened. Our parents were put into jail: my father was sent to the Kounic Hall 11 and my mother was sent to the jail at Cejl. By strange coincidence, we had a chance to see my father for a few seconds a couple of times after that. It was permitted to bring clean laundry into the residence once a week. During one of these times, my brother saw my father in the window of the building. So then we would regularly try and walk by there at the same time of day and my father sometimes did look out of the glass window. However, after a short period of time, my parents were deported to concentration camps. In 1942, they were both murdered in Auschwitz; my mother was in Ravensbruck 12 before this.

At that time, my brother and I didn't know about the death of our parents. Basically, we stayed alone, I was twelve and my brother was seventeen. Of our relatives, only my father's mother and sister lived in Brno, but grandma was over eighty and my aunt was chronically ill. They were both quite powerless. In 1942 they were murdered in Treblinka and Rejowiec [Poland]. We received a permit to move to our family in Mohelno. I was looking forward to escaping the scary atmosphere of Brno but in Mohelno it was no better. We hardly went out on the streets: in the village, our fate was that much more uncommon and visible and the yellow star on our clothing that much more humiliating. We were included in the transport leaving from Trebic. In May 1942, a family friend, a farmer named Rudolf Mohelsky took myself, my grandma, my aunt, my brother and our 50 kg baggage by horse- drawn carriage to Trebic. It was a beautiful spring day. At the Trebic school they transformed the transport of people into camp numbers. In the train we were with Grandma Josefina and Aunt Greta together for the last time, because after our arrival in Terezin we were separated at the so- called sluice. [Sluice: from the German word Schleusse. That is what the place where the transports were received and checked out was called.] We didn't even know when they dragged them out further east. They were murdered in the concentration camps in Auschwitz and Lublin in 1942.

In Terezin I was placed in Sudeten barracks; my brother was elsewhere. We were not allowed to leave the barracks and walk freely in the streets until 6th July 1942. [The civilian population left Terezin at the beginning of July 1942 and then the whole city became a ghetto.] For me it was a very bad time because I didn't have anyone there, I didn't know anyone and I knew nothing about my parents, my brother, my grandma or my aunt. I remember when the barracks were opened I ran out of the gates with a whole mob of people and everyone was looking for their relatives.

Gradually, my brother worked in a number of locations. At one time, he worked in the disinfection squad where he used very dangerous gas; I think it was called Ventox. For some time he worked in a kitchen as a helper and so at least he could eat a little better.

The Jewish self government starting organizing life in the ghetto and I was lucky because I got into building L-417. It was in a Terezin school building where there were ten boys' 'heims' [homes in German]. Each home had its own room, its own caretaker, who we called 'madrich' [leader in Hebrew], its own number and its own name. I was in number one. The dozen boys, who were all around thirteen, who came together at number one created a specific social group that was different from the other units in the building. The reason for its specific character was the age difference. With the exception of home number five, we were the only ones who were coming of age. At the beginning of the occupation we were too grown up to be able to lock ourselves into the microcosm of children. Actually, all these events sped up the process of growing up, at least

psychologically and spiritually. We witnessed our homes being uprooted and our parents' powerlessness. Marked with stars and transport numbers, in quarantine and in sluice, we saw the fall of conventions, the fragility and impermanence of human relationships, selflessness and selfishness, we listened to the heavy breathing of the dying and to the breathing of couples making love.

That is the state our madrich, Valtr Eisinger, got us in. He himself was also quite young: he was twenty-nine years old. He was a talented teacher who was just starting out. He was given the opportunity to test his abilities, live out his ideals about life and the world. He had so much to do to take care of himself and on top of it he wanted to help us. We loved his confidence and his certainty in that unpredictable ghetto world. Eisinger didn't question surviving but announced, 'after the war, I will try for a doctorate.' He was close to us, that is why we could and wanted to follow the example of our great teacher who spoke about the philosophy of Ghandi, translated poetry, played soccer, moved into the dorms with us, sang in the opera 'Prodana nevesta' [The Bartered Bride, opera by Czech composer Bedrich Smetana] and loved his wife Vera from Terezin. Awareness of our common fate and Eisinger's personality allowed us to create a social atmosphere that made no difference between an orphan and the son of a scientist.

We called our group 'Republika Skid.' The name came from Eisinger who told us about the Russian book 'Republika Skid' that he liked very much. [Boys literature, by Belych, Grigoriy Georgiyevich and Panteleev, Alexei Ivanovich, 1927.] We were all taken by this and we wanted to be Skids. In brief a Skid comes from the 'Skola Imeni Dostoyevskovo' [school called after Dostoyevsky], a school for the homeless kids in post-revolution St. Petersburg [orphanage]. A Skid was secret. Although a symbol of our home hung on our wall Eisinger told us to explain this title to strangers as 'Skola I. domov' [school in house number one]. We were therefore a republic and had our own leadership, which was established on a festive Friday night on 18th December 1942. We were each given duties and responsibilities that corresponded with our interests and abilities. The members of the group were elected to different functions and at one time I acted as the chairman. A notable characteristic of Skid was that it was a collective where each person found their place.

One of Eisinger's strongest characteristics was his sense of tolerance. He himself firmly believed in a new, socially just way of organizing the world, but he didn't require us to mechanically take on his beliefs. In contrast, he said at our age it would be too early for us to have a set opinion, first he thought it was important to experience and know many things. His opinion came across in his practice; the diverse lectures in our home were a good example. People with all sorts of opinions visited us. For Eisinger it was dangerous to organize this kind of upbringing in a concentration camp [ghetto], with a flag, a group hymn and even a magazine that we produced. Back then, we didn't understand that; for us it was an adventure and it gave us the illusion of freedom.

The magazine Vedem 13 was exclusively the domain of us, the boys. Professor Eisinger only wrote introductions and sometimes he contributed with a translation from Russian. On Friday night we would always sit around the table, or on the bunks and each person who had written something that week would read their contribution. The magazine was not publicized in any other way than during these Friday night session. For two whole years, we 'put out' our magazine each Friday thanks to the leadership of our editor, Petr Ginz. Petr was great for this work, he had all the right predispositions; he had brought them from home, from Prague. He was an extremely intelligent boy. He was a year older than us. He even had experience editing a magazine, I think from the

time when he studied in Prague. He spent all his time working on the magazine, all week, day after day he worked on the latest issue. It was hard work, especially when he handwrote all the contributions that he had gotten in any way he possibly could. He would make a fuss and he would try to appeal to our consciences but sometimes he wrote the entire issue himself under different names to save the situation. I would try and get contributions from the boys and sometimes from the adults; here and there I wrote something and took care of organizational details. The magazine reflected many of the personalities in Terezin and house number one became a well-known place in the ghetto. That is why different, noted guests would come to us: people like Karel Polacek 14, Norbert Fryd, Hans Adler and different personalities like that, who would come lecture or come and chat about something with us. Petr was a really great guy. I can still see him sitting on his bunk with his legs under him, working away on something. Petr was dragged away to Auschwitz in September 1944 where he died in the gas chamber.

On a regular day at L-417, forty boys would go do different work around the ghetto. They were chosen from the homes where the oldest boys lived: homes one and five. I myself began going to work in 1943. It wasn't particularly hard work; usually we worked in the vegetable garden in the barricades around Terezin. At least we had a little bit of nature there. We were supervised by one Jewish gardener, a very sympathetic young man, who we called Manci; I think his real name was Manuel. Occasionally, we were allowed to steal a tomato or a kohlrabi. The special thing about the group who worked in the garden was that to go to work we had to walk through a few hundred meters on 'free land', if that is what you can call the streets of the Protectorate [of Bohemia and Moravia] 15.

The wake up call was at six or seven in the morning, then we washed under cold water, cleaned the living quarters, and divided the daily duties: that is cleaning the rooms, the halls, the WC and the courtyard. Then we had breakfast and roll call. All the members of the homes gathered on the steps and the leader of L-417, Otik Klein, outlined the daily plan. Then the teaching began that all the children in the building attended. The teaching happened in the individual homes, but because of lack of space it mostly occurred in the attic, where it was also less likely that we would be barged in on by the SS. Wherever we were taught, one boy was always on guard duty. Each class was prepared to immediately start doing something different, like cleaning, in case the SS came to check up on us.

Of the eight or ten teachers, only two or three were trained teachers. We didn't have any resources and often children of very different ages and from different educational backgrounds were put together in the same classes. None the less, the teachers tried to establish some kind of system and they would consult each other at teacher meetings. They taught for about three or four hours a day. To this day, I still remember math, history and geography. Hebrew was not 'mandatory.' The system wasn't only about the teaching, but also about the day to day living of the boys with the teachers and caretakers. I realized how effective it had been after coming back from the concentration camp: I found myself in a normal school and actually, I was not behind at all.

We would go to lunch with a mug where one had to wait in a line in front of the kitchen in the Hamburg barracks. Afterwards we reviewed the material we had learned in the morning but without the teachers. Real free time started in the late afternoon before supper, between four and six. Some of the kids had their parents or other relatives in Terezin and so they would go visit them during this time. After supper, the homes became separate worlds, where the children would

entertain themselves differently, depending on their age and their caretakers' abilities. We, the older ones, would stay up later. We even got to see the famous Terezin attic performances: cabaret, theater recitals and concerts.

I also remember expeditions, where after dark we would go to steal coal. Once I almost paid for it dearly because I couldn't crawl back out of some basement. 'Lights out' was at ten but we chatted after that until even the hardiest fell asleep. Those were magical moments, when the lights were out and we spoke to each other from the bunks. Eisinger was a great storyteller, we could have listened to him talk for hours. It is important to explain that it was unusual for a caretaker to live in the home. The caretakers had their own room in L-417. Just the fact that Eisinger decided to really live like one of us says more about him than words can ever say.

My brother and I were in Terezin until October 1944, until a series of transports practically wiped out the ghetto. My brother was deported at the beginning of October and my deportation ensued a few days later. I think there were seven transports and they went quickly one after the other. We didn't know where we were going at all, first the train headed west to Dresden but there it turned east. It probably went in a zig zag fashion because in the freight car some prisoner from the transport before us wrote in pencil 'to Auschwitz.' In Auschwitz-Birkenau, where 1,500 of us came to, most people went directly from the train into the gas chambers. Back then we didn't know what it was all about, but somehow I knew that I should group myself with people who were stronger. When we came to the ramp in Auschwitz, the prison camp guards jumped into the trains that they called 'Kanada' and they started taking our baggage. There was a young guy among them and I refused to give him my things. And he asked me, 'Wie alt bist du?' [German: How old are you?]. I told him I was fifteen or sixteen. And he advised me, 'Musst sagen du bist achtzehn!' [German: You have to say that you are eighteen!]. When I stepped out on the ramp, no one asked me for my age, but I tried to stick to the group of prisoners who were physically stronger, who then went to the camp together.

When we entered the premise, the crematoriums were operating and the wind blew the smoke from the chimneys at us. We marched to our appointed building, which took a while because we had to go through the disinfection room where they shaved us and poured some kind of solution on us. As they led us, I saw Jirka Zappner behind the wires; he also used to be in home number one in Terezin. He waved at me when he saw me. Otherwise, I was in Birkenau by myself. When we came to our building at the camp we had our 'greeting' right away. There our kapo [the word kapo was probably introduced into Dachau by Italian workers in the 1930s. During WWII, in popular language, kapo became a generic term for all inmate (prisoner) functionaries.] 'greeted us' with the words: 'Damit ihr wisst, wo ihr seid. Ihr seid in Auschwitz! Bei uns stinken die Toten nicht!' and at the same time he pointed at the chimneys. [German: So that you know where you are, you are in Auschwitz! Here the dead don't stink!] He was a terrible person. For Auschwitz it was typical that the positions were filled by career criminals and after being in the camps for such a long time they deformed into sadistic beings. This creature beat a prisoner to death on the second day, under the guise that the prisoner had taken an extra portion of food. Some assistant kapos held the prisoner on a bench and he beat him with a cane, until he totally exhausted himself, he was heaving and his veins were popping out, as he gave the blows.

The days in Birkenau were indescribable. There wasn't anything to eat; it was so bad that people picked potato peels out of the mud. You couldn't sleep, because the wooden house was so full that

you had to lie on your hip. People were crammed together on each level of the bunks. If we were not going to do some kind of work we were ever on guard. Drills and commands and constantly standing on guard in the harsh, cold weather were worse than the work in Birkenau.

Near the end of 1944, it became more common to pick prisoners for labor in Birkenau. The German industry was doing so badly that they needed slaves. In one of these rounds, some civilians came: they were engineers and representatives of German factories. We were told to stand guard and all the metal trade people were ordered to identify themselves. At that point I already knew that the only way to save myself was to get out any way that I could. But we also all knew that it was very dangerous to pretend that a person had a specific trade. If they found out it wasn't true, it cost you your life. But I had no other chance so I stepped out of the row and identified myself. The civilians accompanied by the SS walked through our row and asked each person who had stepped out to say what they were. I said that I was an electrician. One of the factory representatives looked at the other and said: 'isn't he a bit young?' The other one just waved his hand, and by miracle I got into one of the transports leaving Birkenau for work.

We were deported to the labor camp Niederorschel in Western Germany. [Niederorschel is in Thuringen province, today Eastern Germany.] The camp was near the city of Kassel and fell under the jurisdiction of the camp Buchenwald 16. It was a long journey. We were so crowded together in the cattle-cars that we could only stand. One prisoner made a nervous movement with his hand during the inspection. He was told to step out and was shot on the spot. There were a number of victims in the train, some people were not able to stand on their feet for entire hours, without water and without sanitation.

In Niederorschel there was an airplane factory, Junkers, where we worked riveting aircraft wings. The so-called 'Aussenkommando Niederorschel' had existed a few months before our arrival and about seven hundred prisoners from a number of countries worked there: Poland, Hungary, Romania, Holland, France. My co-worker was even from Riga, and there were also German anti-fascists there and some Russians. But about 80 percent of the people there were Jewish. I had a pneumatic hammer, which I used to put rivets through tin. A more experienced prisoner hammered the rivets from the other side using a hammer and an iron bar. The work was directed by German bosses. I can't say there was any close contact, but I was lucky to have a decent boss; his name was Andreas Schroter. He was an older, graying person. On Christmas he brought a piece of Christmas cake for two of us prisoners who he supervised.

Looking back, it can be said that Niederorschel was a hard camp, but back then, after Birkenau, I felt like I had been re-born there. Death was not so at hand: that a person would see the smoke from the crematoriums and would constantly be waiting to be called upon for selection and sent to be gassed. We lived in an old building that had been a textile factory from which we would walk down a long, narrow corridor lined with a wire. It was cold and there wasn't enough clothing for the prisoners. They didn't heat the factory. I found a paper bag from cement somewhere and crammed it under my prison clothing to warm myself up a bit. Each week, we received three cigarettes and about twice they poured a little beer into our mugs. Today, it seems laughable, but for those three cigarettes I always got a piece of bread from one German soldier. The SS guarded the factory exits and soldiers led us to and from work through the corridors. Inside, we were guarded by civilians, employees of Junkers, some of them were adamant Nazis.

In Buchenwald, German political prisoners acted as the kapos which was a contrast to Birkenau where these functions were performed by various criminals and horrible individuals. So in Buchenwald there was a certain mutual order that was maintained. The kapos supported the prisoners to work out things amongst themselves. They ensured a certain order of things. A source of news was our kapo Otto Herrmann and his two assistants. He was from Halle an der Saale and he had been deported to the ghetto right at the beginning of Hitler's reign. The German political prisoners managed to maintain a degree of self-esteem in relation to the SS officers and sometimes they even got away with quite a lot. In his 'office' Otto Hessman had hung up a map of Europe that had been published in some German newspaper. Even though the SS would go to him, he kept tabs of the front on his map.

Once I was going along the hall and he walked out and saw me. As a kapo he was not short of food. He asked me, 'Willst du Suppe?' [German: Would you like soup?] and in his hands he held a bowl full of soup. Of course I wanted it and I got it. He added, 'Musst nicht auswaschen!' [German: You don't need to wash it!] I thought that he was saying it as an act of kindness but there was a different reason. Later, I understood that he didn't want anyone to know that he gave his soup to someone, because the kapos had their bowls washed in the kitchen. I realized it at the moment when I brought him the washed bowl and he got angry at me.

We worked in the factory until the end of March 1945. Near the end, work was often interrupted because the German economy was not working anymore. Earlier, the wings had been transported elsewhere, where they put them together with other airplane parts, but because transport was not working, it was no longer possible. The wings started to pile up beside the factory and they started to send us to do other work, so our conditions worsened as a result. With the accompaniment of the SS, we started going into the forest for wood. We had to dig out tree roots from the frozen ground and we did other work in the woods for which there just wasn't enough labor force to do. We experienced a great deal of cold and hunger. When we were accompanied to work by some of the milder SS officers, we would look around, and when we saw a piece of beet that had been forgotten in the field, we dug it out from the ground and ate the frozen beet. I will never forget how once, when we were working in the forest, a middle aged woman came to us, a German woman. None of us knew her and she brought us a big pot of boiled potatoes. For me it was a big experience, not only because of the food alone, but because Mr. Schroter, with that piece of Christmas cake and decent behavior, and this woman restored my idea of the Germans. They convinced me that among the Germans there are good, non-violent people, because a person needed a lot of courage to do what they had done.

In March 1945, the western front came close to the camp; you could hear the rumbling and the gunfire. The leader of the camp tried to cover it up. Once, at roll call, he noticed that the rumbling was getting attention. He announced that they were blowing up rock in a quarry. At another roll call he said' 'Ihr denkt, wir haben den Krieg verloren. Aber da irrt ihr euch. Und wenn, dann werdet ihr das nicht erleben!' [German: You think that we have lost the war, but you are mistaken. Even if we do, you will not live to see it.] He almost managed it because following that, we were sent to the central camps in Buchenwald, on one of the notorious death marches. That was the second day in April 1945. We were unexpectedly called upon. Shortly before that, I had had leather shoes. They were completely beat up, they leaked and my feet were freezing in them. So I exchanged them for wooden clogs in the storage because at least those did not leak. That was my bad luck, because I

had to do the whole march in wooden clogs. The march was long and cruel and I hardly survived it. My feet stopped serving me: the sole didn't bend on those wooden clogs, so I was limping from the last of my strength. I just pulled myself along and wasn't aware of what was happening around me. We marched at night and during the day and we would rest in old barns. It was because American planes were appearing in the sky more and more often and the danger of an airplane attack became more and more likely, and the SS were clearly afraid of that. Also, at night the civilian population couldn't observe us.

The march took seven or eight days. Whenever we stopped to rest in some old barn or building, I would take off the clogs and look at my battered feet. In this desperate situation, we would look at processed wheat stalks to see if there was one grain, so that we could at least swallow something. The German soldiers knew that the war had been lost and so they just walked in silence. We got to Buchenwald, where right the next day, we were liberated by the American army. Later I found out that the Americans circled the whole of Buchenwald, which was located on a hill, before they came up to the camp. For a short while, shooting could be heard, the Germans surrendered and suddenly we saw the first jeep with a crew of one driver, two soldiers and one woman.

After the War

I didn't get back to Czechoslovakia until June, when buses started arriving to pick up the prisoners. Although I was very much looking forward to seeing the place of my birth, Brno, at the same time I thought that I wouldn't find any of my family members alive. After my return, I found out that my brother was alive and I traveled to Mohelno, to my mother's birthplace, to rejoin him. My brother had gone from Auschwitz to the work camp Gleiwitz 17 in southern Poland. It was a camp where they repaired damaged wagons and had been under the jurisdiction of Auschwitz. He survived there until the end of the war. In Brno we got an apartment left behind by a Hitler supporter who had run away. My brother finished his studies that he had started before the war at the chemical industrial secondary school. We had to live modestly but we were young.

In 1948 my brother immigrated to Germany. Although I knew that he had been thinking about emigration, I had no idea when it would actually happen. Then I got a greeting card from Germany, from him. Hanus wanted to go out into the world and he wanted to get away from the place where we had experienced so much horror. The communist turn-over motivated him even more. At that time, I hadn't even thought of emigrating; my goal was to finish my secondary school education. Another reason why I didn't emigrate was that Valtr Eisinger had significantly influenced me in Terezin and so I didn't see the communist regime as a threat but more as a promise of something better. I had certain ideals and I really believed that the socialist regime would bring the solutions to the main problems people were facing.

When he first left Germany, Hanus was in a refugee camp. Then a Brazilian businessman came through, who bought and sold seeds, and my brother got an offer to work for his company. He got a permit to move to Brazil. Until all the permits were worked out, he worked as a waiter and did other odd jobs in Brazil. After a few years, he became independent, set up an office and began doing business with construction ceramics. He married and lives in Rio de Janeiro. Unfortunately, his wife died, but he has a large family: three sons and grandchildren. As an immigrant he couldn't come for a visit and so we saw each other again after a long forty years, once I received a permit to travel abroad.

In 1949, I completed Industrial Art School in Brno, and I did various jobs. First, I was at the Institute of Regional Planning where I helped with the graphic design of maps. I wrote articles about art exhibits and thanks to that I got work at the Brno House of Art where I had opportunities to meet artists and organize exhibits. From 1958, I worked in the Centre for Trade Art in Brno. In 1963, I re-located to Prague to work in the head office of the Centre for Trade Art. The last twenty years I've worked in the National Gallery in Prague preparing art catalogues and posters.

I married for the first time in 1951. My first wife had gone to the same secondary school. She wasn't Jewish and it didn't matter. At the beginning of the 1950s two sons were born, Jirka and Dan. When I moved to Prague, we divorced but I stayed in close contact with my family. My younger son, Dan, unfortunately died of cancer at the age of thirty-four. He was single. In the second half of the 1960s I married again, but the marriage only lasted until the beginning of the 1970s. My second wife worked as a journalist in CTK [Ceska Tiskova Kancelar, Czech press agency]. My older son, Jirka, lives in Brno, he completed university and at the current time he is an engineer and has an electronics company. He is single.

I became a member of the Communist Party [of Czechoslovakia] 18 right after returning from the concentration camp. Gradually, I began to lose trust in the regime and in the end I even thought of emigration, but I already had a family and it wasn't so easy. The trials of the 1950s [Slansky trial] 19 and their open anti-Semitism were shocking and sobering for me. One had to remain cautious because to openly distance oneself from the regime could cause a serious threat to one's existence. After the war, anti-Semitism was evident even in official politics. Concrete instances of anti-Semitism directed at me personally only came on a few occasions. During the trials I was working for the Brno House of Art. At that time I was at the army base, doing mandatory military service. After my return from the army, my friends told me that in the Brno House of Art there was some doorman or caretaker saying that I was a suspicious individual, perhaps an anti-state collaborator. He was a totally illiterate primitive and I'm convinced that his motivation was because I was Jewish. After the war, I didn't draw attention to the fact that I was Jewish, but I didn't deny it either. The Holocaust and the concentration camp awoke a consciousness about the Jewish fate in me. But I didn't think that this made me different from other people; being Jewish was simply a question of my fate.

About a hundred or a hundred and ten boys went through house number one in Terezin and of those about ten survived the Holocaust. Zdenek Taussig brought the magazine Vedem from Terezin to Prague; he was the only one from the entire 'Heim' who had stayed in Terezin the whole time. His father was a blacksmith in Terezin and he was the only one capable of re-shoeing a horse. Zdenek lived with him in the blacksmithery; they converted the coal storage room into a place to sleep. After returning to Prague, he passed the magazine on to my friend from house number one, Jirka Brady, who gave the material to me when he emigrated in 1948. Life went differently than we had dreamed.

The anti-Semitism that came after February prevented us from publishing our youthful literary attempts from Terezin. With the Prague Spring 20 of 1968, Zdenek Ornest and I were playing with the idea of putting together a book that would contain at least some fraction of the eight-hundred pages of the magazine. We were hesitant. With some detachment we had to choose the best prose and poems, of which all spoke to us in the intimate voices of our childhood friends. That is why we were glad to cooperate with Marie Rut Krizkova who is a literary historian. During the normalization

period she was a dissident and Charter 77 21 spokeswoman. A publishing house accepted our book in 1971. A year later, we closed a deal and put together a publication of the Terezin Memorial and the Severoceske publishing house. The final draft of the book called 'Je moji vlasti hradba ghett?' [We Are Children Just the Same] was refused by Dr. Vaclav Kral, who in his strange judgment managed to connect the publishing of children's prose with the 'aggression of Israel against the Arab world.'

In 1968, we had the goal of turning our building in Terezin into a museum of the ghetto, but those in charge of normalization created a monstrous museum SNB [short for Statni narodni bezpecnost, police during communist regime] and revolutionary traditions of the Northern Czech lands. Oto Ornest, Zdenek's brother, tried to smuggle the book across the border but the whole matter ended up in court because they caught Oto at the border. I was incredibly afraid, because before they caught him, we had met on a number of occasions: I had given him manuscripts to be sent abroad and I had supported this project financially. When he later got in front of the court, he only said what he had to and he didn't give away me or any other participants. He was sentenced, the procurator said that sending literary contributions across the border was a threat to our society. Thanks to the care of Marie Rut Krizkova the manuscript was published in 1978 as a samizdat 22. The response to the first edition led to a second edition at the end of the 1980s; again it was written on a type-writer in a different format. It was shown like this in 1990 at the Frankfurt Book Fair.

I was expelled from the communist party after the Prague Spring. At that time, I was working at the National Gallery in Prague, where I worked in uncertainty because I wasn't a member of the Party. I was the director of the print section, which bothered one director who constantly emphasized that I shouldn't be allowed to continue in my function. In the end, I managed to hang in there, in part because the National Gallery was directed by Jiri Kotalik. Many people reproach him for cooperating with the regime because he remained diplomatic with party and state representatives. Otherwise, they wouldn't have kept him there but at the same time, he allowed the National Gallery to work with certain people who would otherwise have been politically unacceptable. That in itself is notable because at that time, it was difficult to employ someone who had been expelled or written off by the party to a position that was not manual labor.

I managed to stay in my job but I was constantly living in doubt. After I divorced for the second time, I shared an apartment with a man who was a traffic police officer. Once, early in the morning, his friends came to visit him and they were in uniform. I was lying in my room and I could see the movement of the uniforms through the frosted glass on my door and in my sleepiness, I was sure that they had come for me. But other people experienced much worse things. Because of my work at the National Gallery, I didn't have a great deal of free time. I liked to travel and I was one of the lucky people who because of various exhibits got to go abroad. I retired in 1987.

In 1989 there was so much happening in Europe that there was reason to believe that it would come here too, although in earlier years I didn't hope that I would live to see it. I was incredibly thrilled about November [see Velvet Revolution] 23, I even participated in the famous student march from Albertov [the march was stopped at Narodni Avenue with brutal police intervention]. Since then my life has changed completely, even though the change-over reached me at a time when I was an older person. When I was of an active age, I was lucky to be able to do work that I enjoyed. From this point of view, it was a beautiful time. However, the feeling that came with the

return of a democratic regime meant a lot of things to me. After 1989, I visited America, Israel and Canada. I visited Israel as a delegate of the Terezin Initiative 24.

An exhibition about the literature of the prisoners was created as part of the Terezin Memorial, I contributed to it with Marie Krizkova. Recently, we prepared a traveling exhibit about the magazine Vedem. I also worked in the Terezin Initiative that was founded in 1990. The initiative publishes its own magazine and played a large role in the creation of the Terezin Memorial. The initiative has done and continues to do very good work and was a key player in the battle for compensation that I also received. Like many survivors, I didn't tell my children much about the concentration camps. This is because, a person who went through a concentration camp lived through the complete devastation of a human's character and that is an extremely humiliating experience. When the book 'Je moji vlasti hradba ghett?' came out in 1995 my son read it and found out many things that he knew nothing about before that.

Many people are disappointed with the post-November developments, but I am not. I'm a sceptic thanks to my lifetime experiences, and so I didn't paint some kind of a rosy future. Right at the beginning of the new regime, I didn't assume that things would develop the way people imagined that they would. The difficulties that we face today leave me indifferent. We live in freedom, we travel abroad, as we want to, we can read freely, talk and do everything that a person wants to do and I see that as a really important thing.

Glossary

1 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.

2 Sudetenland
Highly industrialized north-west frontier region that was transferred from the Austro-Hungarian Empire to the new state of Czechoslovakia in 1919. Together with the land a German-speaking minority of 3 million people was annexed, which became a constant source of tension both between the states of Germany, Austria and Czechoslovakia, and within Czechoslovakia. In 1935 a nazi-type party, the Sudeten German Party financed by the German government, was set up. Following the Munich Agreement in 1938 German troops occupied the Sudetenland. In 1945 Czechoslovakia regained the territory and pogroms started against the German and Hungarian minority. The Potsdam Agreement authorized Czechoslovakia to expel the entire German and

Hungarian minority from the country.

3 KuK (Kaiserlich und Koeniglich) army

The name 'Imperial and Royal' was used for the army of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, as well as for other state institutions of the Monarchy originated from the dual political system. Following the Compromise of 1867, which established the Dual Monarchy, Austrian emperor and Hungarian King Franz Joseph was the head of the state and also commander-in-chief of the army. Hence the name 'Imperial and Royal'.

4 Italian front, 1915-1918

Also known as Isonzo front. Isonzo (Soca) is an alpine river today in Slovenia, which ran parallel with the pre-World War I Austro-Hungarian and Italian border. During World War I Italy was primarily interested in capturing the ethnic Italian parts of Austria- Hungary (Triest, Fiume, Istria and some of the islands) as well as the Adriatic litoral. The Italian army tried to enter Austria-Hungary via the Isonzo river, but the Austro-Hungarian army was dug in alongside the river. After 18 months of continous fighting without any territorial gain, the Austro-Hungarian army finally suceeded to enter Italian territory in October 1917.

5 February 1948

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

6 Kulak

Wealthy landowner, the major group of the agrarian bourgeoisie. The originally Russian term was adopted in Czechoslovakia in the 1950s. The 20-50-hectare kulak estates were based on the work of both, family members and external laborers, mainly the village poor. Often they maintained non-Agrarian activities too, i.e. milling, tavern keeping, transporting, etc. By absorbing smaller estates the kulaks grew stronger in interwar Czechoslovakia; also, the first Czechoslovak land reform (enacted gradually after 1919) was beneficial for them. During the First Czechoslovak Republic they took strategic positions in the countryside and gained important positions in the local governments; they were the main supporters of the Agrarian Party, the Hlinka Party (radical Slovak nationalists) and later the Democratic Party. After 1945 they were against the 'people's democracy,' they sabotaged the production and acquisition plans, therefore legal acts (even arrests) were applied against them. The collectivization of agriculture destroyed their economic positions.

7 Exclusion of Jews from schools in the Protectorate

The Ministry of Education of the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia sent round a ministerial decree in 1940, which stated that from school year 1940/41 Jewish pupils were not allowed to visit

Czech public and private schools and those who were already in school should be excluded. After 1942 Jews were not allowed to visit Jewish schools or courses organized by the Jewish communities either.

8 Henlein, Konrad (1898-1945)

From the year 1933, when Adolf Hitler took power in Germany, the situation in the Czech border regions began to change. Hitler decided to disintegrate Czechoslovakia from within, and to this end began to exploit the German minority in the border regions, and the People's Movement in Slovakia. His political agent in the Czech border regions became Konrad Henlein, a PE teacher from the town of As. During a speech in Karlovy Vary on 24th April 1938, Henlein demanded the abandonment of Czechoslovak foreign policy, such as alliance agreements with France and the USSR; compensation for injustices towards Germans since the year 1918; the abandonment of Palacky's ideology of Czech history; the formation of a German territory out of Czech border counties, and finally, the identification with the German (Hitler's) world view, that is, with Nazism. Two German political parties were extant in Czechoslovakia: the DNSAP and the DNP. Due to their subversive activities against the Czechoslovak Republic, both of these parties were officially dissolved in 1933. Subsequently on 3rd October 1933, Konrad Henlein issued a call to Sudeten Germans for a unified Sudeten German national front, SHP. The new party thus joined the two former parties under one name. Before the parliamentary elections in 1935 the party's name was changed to SDP. In the elections, Henlein's party finished as the strongest political party in the Czechoslovak Republic. On 18th September 1938, Henlein issued his first order of resistance, regarding the formation of a Sudeten German "Freikorps," a military corps of freedom fighters, which was the cause of the culmination of unrest among Sudeten Germans. The order could be interpreted as a direct call for rebellion against the Czechoslovak Republic. Henlein was captured by the Americans at the end of WWII. He committed suicide in an American POW camp in Pilsen on 10th May 1945. 9 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. 10 Anti-Jewish laws in the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia: In March 1939, there lived in the Protectorate 92,199 inhabitants classified according to the so-called Nuremberg Laws as Jews. On 21st June 1939, Konstantin von Neurath, the Reichs protector, passed the so-called Edict Regarding Jewish Property, which put restrictions on Jewish property. On 24th April 1940, a government edict was passed which eliminated Jews from economic activity. Similarly like previous legal changes it was based on the Nuremburg Law definitions and limited the legal standing of Jews. According to the law, Jews couldn't perform any functions (honorary or paid) in the courts or public service and couldn't participate at all in politics, be members of Jewish organizations and other organizations of social, cultural and economic nature. They were completely barred from performing any independent occupation, couldn't work as lawyers, doctors, veterinarians, notaries, defence attorneys and so on. Jewish residents could participate in public life only in the realm of religious Jewish organizations. Jews were forbidden to enter certain streets, squares, parks and other public places. From September 1939 they were forbidden from being outside their home after 8pm. Beginning in November 1939 they couldn't leave, even temporarily, their place of residence

without special permission. Residents of Jewish extraction were barred from visiting theatres and cinemas, restaurants and cafés, swimming pools, libraries and other entertainment and sports centres. On public transport they were limited to standing room in the last car, in trains they weren't allowed to use dining or sleeping cars and could ride only in the lowest class, again only in the last car. They weren't allowed entry into waiting rooms and other station facilities. The Nazis limited shopping hours for Jews to twice two hours and later only two hours per day. They confiscated radio equipment and limited their choice of groceries. Jews weren't allowed to keep animals at home. Jewish children were prevented from visiting German, and, from August 1940, also Czech public and private schools. In March 1941 even so-called re-education courses organized by the Jewish Religious Community were forbidden, and from June 1942 also education in Jewish schools. To eliminate Jews from society it was important that they be easily identifiable. Beginning in March 1940, citizenship cards of Jews were marked by the letter 'J' (for Jude - Jew). From 1st September 1941 Jews older than six could only go out in public if they wore a yellow six-pointed star with 'Jude' written on it on their clothing.

11 **Kounic Hall in Brno**

Built as a student residence hall in 1925, the Kounic Hall was converted into a prison by the Gestapo in 1940. It also functioned as an assembly point for deportations from Brno to concentration camps. Over 1,350 people were executed in Kounic Hall after 1941. By the time of the liberation of Czechoslovakia (May 1945), up to 35,000 people had been incarcerated there. In 1978 the hall was declared a national cultural monument.

12 **Ravensbruck**

Concentration camp for women near Furstenberg, Germany. Five hundred prisoners transported there from Sachsenhausen began construction at the end of 1938. They built 14 barracks and service buildings, as well as a small camp for men, which was completed separated from the women's camp. The buildings were surrounded by tall walls and electrified barbed wire. The first deportees, some 900 German and Austrian women were transported there on May 18, 1939, soon followed by 400 Austrian Gypsy women. At the end of 1939, due to the new groups constantly arriving, the camp held nearly 3000 persons. With the expansion of the war, people from twenty countries were taken here. Persons incapable of working were transported on to Uckermark or Auschwitz, and sent to the gas chambers, others were murdered during 'medical' experiments. By the end of 1942, the camp reached 15,000 prisoners, by 1943, with the arrival of groups from the Soviet Union, it reached 42,000. During the working existance of the camp, altogether nearly 132,000 women and children were transported here, of these, 92,000 were murdered. In March of 1945, the SS decided to move the camp, so in April those capable of walking were deported on a death march. On April 30, 1945, those who survived the camp and death march, were liberated by the Soviet armies.

13 **Vedem**

The magazine Vedem was put out by boys from the 1st boys' home inTerezin (located in a former school designated L 417), which for practically all of its existence was led by the educator and teacher Valtr Eisinger, alias Prcek [Squirt]. He established the principle of self- government in the home, and named it after a Russian school for orphans, which was named 'Respublika Skid'. Vedem

began to be published as a cultural and news magazine. In the beginning it was available to all, thanks to it being conceived as a bulletin-board magazine. Subsequently for security reasons this approach was abandoned. After each publication the magazine was passed around, and its entire contents were discussed at the home's plenary meetings held every Friday. Everyone who was interested could attend these meetings. Vedem was published weekly from December of 1942, and always as one single copy. The magazine's pages are numbered consecutively and together the entire magazine has 787 pages. The authors of the absolute majority of the contributions were the boys themselves, who ranged from 13 to 15 years old. We can, however, also find in the magazine contributions by educators and teachers. Published in Vedem were stories, critical articles, articles inspired by specific events, educational articles, poems and drawings. Mostly the boys describe in their works the situation in the camp, state their perceptions relating to life in Terezin, but also concern themselves with the problem of the Jewish question, Jewish history, and so on. Often-used literary devices are irony (especially in commenting the overall situation in the camp), satire (mainly in poems), metaphors, the use of contrasts. Most articles are written anonymously, or under various nicknames. Some boys, supported by the efforts for collective education that ruled in Terezin, formed an authors' group and all used the pseudonym Akademie [Academy] for their articles. Part of the magazine Vedem was published in book form by M.R. Krizkova in collaboration with Zdenek Ornest and Jiri Kotouc under the name 'Are The Ghetto Walls My Homeland (Je moji vlasti hradba ghett).

14 Polacek, Karel (1892-February 1945)

writer, journalist, whose entire literary life's work is permeated by Jewish life and Jewish literary experience. He came from a strongly assimilated Jewish merchant family. During World War I he served at the Balkan and Eastern fronts. From the year 1920 he was a journalist with Lidove Noviny (People's News), contributed to the magazine The Present, wrote film themes and scripts. During the time of the Protectorate he wasn't allowed to publish due to "racial reasons," and his works came out under the names of other authors. He found employment with the Jewish Elders' Committee; he worked on inventories of confiscated collections of books of the Jewish religious communities in Prague, Pilsen, Prostejov, Brno and so on. Out of love for his life companion, who he didn't want to leave, he didn't make use of the possibility of avoiding the transport, from which the Prague Jewish Community wanted to save him. In July 1943 he was transported to Terezin, where he actively participated in cultural life: here he presented a total of six lectures between 23rd December 1943 and 21st June 1944. He was transported to Auschwitz on 19th October 1944 - this day was long given as the day of this death, however, according to his fellow prisoners, he was apparently transferred in November 1944 from Auschwitz to the Hindenburg (Zabrze) camp, where he even wrote a sketch for the women's section of the prison about a psychic that tells her fellow prisoners' fortune. He died either during a death march that left the camp on 19th January 1945, or later, at the Dora concentration camp, where prisoners were transported from Gleiwitz in open wagons.

15 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.

16 Buchenwald

Nazi concentration camp operating from March 1937 until April 1945 in Germany, near Weimar. It was divided into 136 wards; inmates were forced to labor in the armaments industry, quarries; approx. 56,000 thousand of the 238,000 inmates, representing many nationalities, died. An uprising of the prisoners broke out shortly before liberation, on 11 April 1945.

17 Gleiwitz III

A satellite labor camp in Auschwitz, set up alongside an industrial factory, Gleiwitzer Hutte, manufacturing weapons, munitions and railway wheels. The camp operated from July 1944 until January 1945; around 600 prisoners worked there.

18 Communist Party of Czechoslovakia (KSC)

Founded in 1921 following a split from the Social Democratic Party, it was banned under the Nazi occupation. It was only after Soviet Russia entered World War II that the Party developed resistance activity in the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia; because of this, it gained a certain degree of popularity with the general public after 1945. After the communist coup in 1948, the Party had sole power in Czechoslovakia for over 40 years. The 1950s were marked by party purges and a war against the 'enemy within'. A rift in the Party led to a relaxing of control during the Prague Spring starting in 1967, which came to an end with the occupation of Czechoslovakia by Soviet and allied troops in 1968 and was followed by a period of normalization. The communist rule came to an end after the Velvet Revolution of November 1989. 19 Slansky trial: In the years 1948-1949 the Czechoslovak government together with the Soviet Union strongly supported the idea of the founding of a new state, Israel. Despite all efforts, Stalin's politics never found fertile ground in Israel; therefore the Arab states became objects of his interest. In the first place the Communists had to allay suspicions that they had supplied the Jewish state with arms. The Soviet leadership announced that arms shipments to Israel had been arranged by Zionists in Czechoslovakia. The times required that every Jew in Czechoslovakia be automatically considered a Zionist and cosmopolitan. In 1951 on the basis of a show trial, 14 defendants (eleven of them were Jews) with Rudolf Slansky, First Secretary of the Communist Party at the head were convicted. Eleven of the accused got the death penalty; three were sentenced to life imprisonment. The executions were carried out on 3rd December 1952. The Communist Party later finally admitted its mistakes in carrying out the trial and all those sentenced were socially and legally rehabilitated in 1963. 20 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.

21 Charter 77

A manifesto published under the title Charter 77 in January 1977 demanded the Czechoslovak government to live up to its own laws in regard to human, political, civic and cultural rights in Czechoslovakia. The document first appeared as a manifesto in a West German newspaper and was signed by more than 200 Czechoslovak citizens representing various occupations, political viewpoints, and religions. By the mid-1980s it had been signed by 1,200 people. Within Czechoslovakia it was circulated in samizdat form. The government's retaliation against the signers included dismissal from work, denial of educational opportunities for their children, forced exile, loss of citizenship, detention, and imprisonment. The repression of the Charter 77 continued in the 1980s, but the dissidents refused to capitulate and continued to issue reports on the government's violations of human rights.

22 Samizdat literature in Czechoslovakia

Samizdat literature: The secret publication and distribution of government-banned literature in the former Soviet block. Typically, it was typewritten on thin paper (to facilitate the production of as many carbon copies as possible) and circulated by hand, initially to a group of trusted friends, who then made further typewritten copies and distributed them clandestinely. Material circulated in this way included fiction, poetry, memoirs, historical works, political treatises, petitions, religious tracts, and journals. The penalty for those accused of being involved in samizdat activities varied according to the political climate, from harassment to detention or severe terms of imprisonment. In Czechoslovakia, there was a boom in Samizdat literature after 1948 and, in particular, after 1968, with the establishment of a number of Samizdat editions supervised by writers, literary critics and publicists: Petlice (editor L. Vaculik), Expedice (editor J. Lopatka), as well as, among others, Ceska expedice (Czech Expedition), Popelnice (Garbage Can) and Prazska imaginace (Prague Imagination).

23 Velvet Revolution

Also known as November Events, this term is used for the period between 17th November and 29th December 1989, which resulted in the downfall of the Czechoslovak communist regime. A non-violent political revolution in Czechoslovakia that meant the transition from Communist dictatorship to democracy. The Velvet Revolution began with a police attack against Prague students on 17th November 1989. That same month the citizen's democratic movement Civic Forum (OF) in Czech and Public Against Violence (VPN) in Slovakia were formed. On 10th December a government of

National Reconciliation was established, which started to realize democratic reforms. On 29th December Vaclav Havel was elected president. In June 1990 the first democratic elections since 1948 took place.

24 Terezin Initiative

In the year 1991 the former prisoners of various concentration camps met and decided to found the Terezin Initiative (TI), whose goal is to commemorate the fate of Protectorate (Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia) Jews, to commemorate the dead and document the history of the Terezin ghetto. Within the framework of this mission TI performs informative, documentary, educational and editorial activities. It also financially supports field trips to the Terezin Ghetto Museum for Czech schools.