Ota Gubic

Ota Gubic
Karlovy Vary
Czech Republic
Interviewer: Barbora Pokreis
Date of interview: August 2005

Mr. Otto Gubic lives among his family in Karlovy Vary. He spends his free time collecting photographs and archival documents that are directly related to prewar, but also postwar life in his beloved home town of Prievidza. He gladly provided to us his collection of photographs and documents that thoroughly map not only the life of his family, but also of the entire Jewish community in prewar times. After the war, he started a new life in Karlovy Vary, where he became an active member of the Communist Party, from which he was repeatedly expelled though, due to his Jewish background. Due to his past, Mr. Gubic spoke about life in Communist Czechoslovakia only very reluctantly and marginally.

My family background

I don't remember my paternal grandparents, because my father [Bernard Gubitsch] was married twice, and was already older when I was born. No one talked about them either. I know only their names. My grandfather was named Moric [Moritz] Gubitsch, and my grandmother Anna Gubitsch, née Steiner. I didn't know my father's first wife either, and his second wife was our mother.

I do know my maternal grandparents. My mother was born in Medzibrod. That's a hamlet in Slovakia, between Banska Bystrica and Brezno nad Hronom. She was born in 1893, and was named Aranyka, Zlatica Friedova. Her parents were Aneta Friedova and Emil Fried. They owned a general store in Banska Bystrica, at 28 Dolna Street. The store wasn't large, but was prosperous, so they had a relatively decent standard of living. They didn't have any assistants, because that was all taken care of by Aunt Jozefina [Friedova]. She lived with my grandparents on Dolna Street. Up until her later years, when Fascism was approaching and she got married and moved to Banska Stiavnica. She didn't survive the war, the same as her husband, Safranek.

The Frieds weren't devout, they were Neologs, keen Neologs 1. I think that for the most part they kept kosher. I'm not completely sure, but they probably didn't eat pork, only poultry. They also had separate dishes for meat and dairy foods. They attended synagogue only during the High Holidays.

The Sabbath, and the lighting of candles? Certainly not that, but they knew that the Sabbath existed. As I say, they were very Neolog, after all, the store was open on Saturday as well.

My grandparents lived at 28 Dolna Street. Their apartment was divided into two parts - living quarters and the store. There was a kitchen, from which you entered one room, and in the courtyard there were two more rooms. One was small and the other larger. I don't think that my grandparents got along very well, because my grandfather had a peculiar nature. He'd been in America, but returned because he hadn't been successful there. Well, and then he married my grandmother. We loved our grandma very much, both my brother [Ervin Gubic, born Gubitsch] and I [Ota Gubic, born Gubitsch]. Our maternal grandfather not so much, because he was a bit of a codger. He wasn't very well-liked in the family either, and his reputation as a grandfather wasn't very good. I know that in that general store of theirs, they had a storefront room that faced the street. Between the storefront room and the kitchen, they had this dark room where they served liquor, and our aunt [Jozefina Safrankova, nee Friedova] used to get very angry at our grandfather because he used to serve his friends for free.

My brother and I used to go to Banska Bystrica regularly. Mainly during summer vacation, and sometimes during the winter as well. In those days there wasn't yet a direct connection between Prievidza and Banska Bystrica. You would go to Hronsky Svaty Kriz, or to Klastor pod Znievom, and from there to Banska Bystrica. Depending on what the weather was like. I remember when we were young, how we'd be all bundled up against the cold, and you could see only our eyes. During the summer months it was different, because our childhood [in Banska Bystrica] was very nice, mainly thanks to Uncle Moric [Fried]. Our uncle had two girls, Norika [Nora], and I don't remember the name of the second one any more. We used to spend summer vacation with them. As far as I know, our grandparents died during the war.

The Frieds had seven children, I think my mother was the oldest. Next after our mother was Moric Fried. He was apparently the second biggest and most important person in the wool industry in Slovakia - Moric Fried from Banska Bystrica. Uncle Moric was very well-known in Banska Bystrica, and it's said that he also had an exception from Tiso 2. They needed him as an expert on wool. He managed to hold on until January 1945, because in 1944 the Germans had already occupied Slovakia 3. Unfortunately, in the end he died during the war. His wife was named Helena, Erzineni, Drechslerova, and was also from Banska Bystrica. They lived on the main square. She liked me and my brother very much.

Aunt Jozefina Safrankova excelled in baking so-called Fried bread. Very popular in Banska Bystrica in those days. Half the city used to go buy that bread. Jozefina, who was called by the Hungarian name of Jozaneni in the family, fell in love with bread-making and married a baker in Banska Stiavnica. They had no children, because she got married at a quite advanced age, perhaps that was also the cause. My aunt and her husband didn't survive the war. I won't do her memory an injustice when I say that she loved bread more than Mr. Safranek. So that was her hobby. And that Fried bread was very popular in Banska Bystrica. Not that I used to help out, but I was only interested in how the bread was baked. So I used to go there with her. I remember that there was this big cauldron in the bakery which must have held at least 50 and maybe even 100 kilos of dough.

Uncle Emerich Fried ended up alone, a bachelor. He was an excellent violin player, and was the heart and soul of the Banska Bystrica Jewish community's cultural life. He didn't survive the war. Aunt Elza Friedova never got married either. Since she was little she did handiwork, and it led to her opening a handiwork store in Sahy. I don't know what happened to her during the war. The Hungarians occupied Sahy 4, and later they apparently deported her.

They youngest, Jeno [Eugen Fried] was a prominent figure, because he ended up in France as a representative of the Comintern 5. Already as a high school graduate in Banska Bystrica, at the age of 17, he excelled in these political matters. He was an exceptionally educated person, and read a lot from the time he was very young. He was very talented. They allegedly killed him in Brussels on 3rd August 1943. He was in France, and when the Nazis came to Paris, he escaped to Brussels, and that's where they probably caught him as well.

Blanka Friedova was also a fervent Communist, because her brother Jeno had been a fervent Communist since he'd been young, and she looked up to him. She eventually worked as a professional Communist functionary in Prague 6. But to this day it's a mystery to me how she survived the war in Prague. She never talked about it, but I think that she was hidden by the Communists.

After the war, I searched her out, and she was very surprised. That was a very, very mysterious meeting. I found out her address from some Communist Party members. I went to the address I'd been given. I opened the gate, behind which was a long hallway. Suddenly a figure approached me, so I let it walk past me a bit. I had seen Blanka only a couple of times while visiting my grandparents, but I recognized her. I let her walk by, and when she was already walking around the corner, I yelled out, 'Blanka.' She turned around: 'For God's sake, who are you?' I said, 'Have a good look!' 'I don't know.' 'Otto,' I said. 'Jesus Mary, where did you come from!? How did you get my address!? No one knows it!' In 1945 she was still being careful.

She died at around the age of 65, apparently of leukemia, in Prague. She never actually got married, but during those last years she lived with a certain Mr. Stastny. He was a Communist Party official, that's likely why they got along so well. She didn't have any children.

Jewish life in Prievidza

During my childhood, Prievidza, my home town, might have had a population of about 5000, of that about 400 could have been Jews, about 60 families. [In 1940 Prievidza had a population of 4578; Source: The Lexicon of Towns in the Slovak Republic, State Statistical Office, Bratislava 1942] Prievidza didn't have a Jewish quarter. The largest number of Jews lived on and around the town square. The Müllers, for example, had a textile store there, the Freibergs a restaurant. The Gemainers had a general store on one corner of the town square. Freiberg owned the Slavia Hotel. Slavia was a hotel as well as a restaurant, where Jews used to go on Sunday to play cards. My father used to go there too, but he didn't play, but only kibitzed. He was a very notorious kibitzer in Prievidza, because my mother didn't allow him to play cards. But she would at least let him go to the café to kibitz. That was his Sunday afternoon pastime. In Prievidza Jews mostly made a living as businessmen.

Among the most well-known families were the owners of Carpathia. [Carpathia: founded in 1875 by the Heuman family. The company focused primarily on the processing of fruit and jams. During

World War II it was proclaimed to be irreplaceable. It focused itself on producing food for the army. From 1994 it has belonged to the MAGGI brand, and since 2001 to Nestlé Slovensko s.r.o.] Carpathia exists to this day, but it's not generally known that at one time it used to be a Jewish company. The owners used to lived on the so-called Wooden Ring, in a multi-story building. They were two brothers, they used to call them the Lower Heumans and the Upper Heumans. They managed the company. The lower Heuman used to manage it more than the upper one. The lower one had two sons. Fero [Frantisek] Heuman was a major adventurer. He even fought in the Spanish Civil War 7. After the war he apparently moved to Canada and took up farming. It's rumored that he died tragically, he was run over by a tractor. I don't know whether it's true or not, but that's what they used to say in Prievidza. The younger, Richard, attended high school with my brother. They graduated together in 1938. The Lower Heumans moved to Chile after the war, but they're all dead now. They survived the war precisely because they were very well-known and hid in a bunker in Kanianky [Prievidza district], which is a village close to Prievidza in the Maguri basin. They were supported by their former employees, because they were very decent people. There was only one strike in Carpathia, which was organized by the Upper Heumans' older son. He was a fervent Communist, and organized a strike against his own parents.

Another family that belonged among the more affluent were the Werners. Their son Palko [Pavol] was a friend of mine. Palko distinguished himself by bringing us genuine leather balls - soccer as well as volleyball, which back then was a miracle. The Werners had two children, Palko, as I've already mentioned, and a girl named Eva. Palko was born the same year as I, 1922. I didn't see them after the war, I don't know if they were deported or what happened to them. Then there was also the family of Bienenstock, a wholesaler. Samuel Kelerman owned a textile store. Later he was the president of the Prievidza Jewish religious community. He had two children. Edita was very pretty, and had an athletic figure. People condemned her, because her boyfriend was Jarda Machala, the son of the commander of the local police station. He was a Catholic, and in those days that was a big, big sin. But despite that they went out together for years, until as part of the 'Czechs walk to Prague' campaign 8 in 1938, Machala had to leave. In the end she married a textile merchant. The Kelermans' son, Lacko [Ladislav] was my best friend. Lacko was also into sports, and by coincidence also apprenticed at a competing book printer's, so we were not only friends, but also colleagues. But he didn't survive the war.

Two Jewish photographers - Adolf Kramer and Dezider Braun - belonged among the town's important figures. Braun was a very good friend of my older brother's. Kramer was known for having a Leica. Leicas already used film, so Kramer could photograph everything daily. Prievidza can thank him that the town's pre-war life was preserved in his photographs. Kramer was a documentarian, and photographed daily life. Braun just kept to his craft, people used to come to him, and he used to go to weddings and birthdays.

There were two religious communities in the town. The Neolog one was larger, and the Orthodox 9 one was smaller. My father played a part in trying to have the Orthodox community dissolved. In the end he didn't succeed. He was always somewhat of a rebel. He was very anti-Orthodox. He didn't like them, I don't know what it was. The Orthodox community didn't have more than 30 members. The Neolog community was much larger and stronger. My father even held a position in it for some time. We had one synagogue, whose cantor was Hellmann. He had a very nice tenor. There was a building beside the synagogue where the cantor lived with Frieder the trustee, who

took care of religious matters. You could say he was at the same time the religious community's secretary. He had a son who became a rabbi and later became very famous. He was named Armin Frieder 10. During the war he worked on having the deportations stopped 11. He for example had very good relations with the education minister, Jozef Sivak, because Sivak was also from Prievidza. [Sivak, Jozef (1886 - 1959): teacher, author of textbooks, politician, education minister under the Slovak State. He gave up this function in 1944 (he didn't agree with the invitation of the German Army).]

I've got this impression that there was a mikveh at the Bienenstocks' but only the Orthodox used to go there. I think that we had only one shachter [ritual butcher]. This was the aforementioned Frieder. By the church [synagogue] there was a building where he and the rabbi lived, and that's also where they used to slaughter animals. There was a room there dedicated for that purpose, so people used to bring him poultry. In our family I was usually the one that would bring them to be slaughtered. The act of slaughtering was very, very simple, but interesting. I used to go there quite often, because from a child's perspective it was an attraction. The room had a concrete floor, and in the corner there was a gutter so the blood could drain off.

I remember the first car in town. We used to call it 'ring-a-ding.' I think it was a Fiat, an open one. Its owner was Mr. Iring, a watchmaker. His watchmaker's was across from our building on Piaristicka Street. I can't tell you the exact year, but it might have been around 1930, and maybe even earlier. I remember that it was a big sensation. Mr. Iring was a very interesting figure. He liked novelties, and he was certainly one of the first who had a camera, besides Kramer and Braun, the professional photographers. The first cameras might have appeared before 1930. Because we were curious and knew him, Mr. Iring would allow us to sit in his car, and later we would ride around at the Heumans'. They, as the owners of Carpathia, also had cars, but apparently they were company cars, though they also had them as personal ones.

The best-kept road in Prievidza was the so-called Bojnice road. Bojnice is a spa, and a poplar-lined road led there. It was a straight road, about three kilometers long, which led from Prievidza Station, which is why it was called the Bojnice road. It was kept up, paved with cobblestones. They were also used on the town square, and then I remember that sidewalks were gradually made. Piaristicka Street was fixed up quite early on, and the town square as well, because every day there were markets held on the square, and each month a fair. The small markets mostly sold fruit and vegetables, but also smaller poultry like ducks and geese. From our family only our mother used to go, and we children would accompany her. More often I, because my brother was a bookworm. He was always sitting and reading. My mother used to go shopping to Mr. Werther's [Ignac Werther owned a general goods and liquor store]. His store was across Piaristicka Street in the so- called Carpathia building.

Fairs were held each month on the square. All sorts of things were sold there - clothing, alcohol, vegetables, fruit. There was also one merchant there who made a living only by selling textiles in markets, because he didn't have a store. Cattle wasn't sold there. There was a building for that purpose built by the Handlovka. The Handlovka is a stream that merged along the Bojnice road with the Nitra River, which flowed southward from Klak through Prievidza, Novaky, and then flowed into the Danube.

All political and social events in Prievidza took place in the square. I even remember one Communist meeting that was broken up by the police. They definitely took place more often, but I remember only this one. It might have been around 1930, because I was still in public school.

My parents

My parents were named Bernard Gubitsch and Zlatica Gubitschova, née Friedova. My father was from Urmin [in 1948 renamed to Mojmirovce, Nitra district]. The Nitra River runs through this town. His parents lived there as well. I know that my father had some sort of house there, more of a hovel, because there were always requests coming from Urmin for them to fix it up. But we never had the kind of money needed to fix up that house. I don't know how it finally ended up. My father apprenticed as a printer in Budapest. He was married twice. I never met his first wife. I think that my father was a widower, and then he married my mother. He probably didn't have any children from his first marriage, and if he did, I never met them. My father was an excellent person. He understood us very well, and didn't resist childhood games; on the contrary, he very much supported me in my enthusiasm for sports. They didn't have to support my brother Ervin in any particular fashion, because he was always sitting at home surrounded by books, that was nothing unusual. Our father even set up a small library for him in the store, and he also visited the town library. After the war the librarian told me that there had never been a reader like my brother in Prievidza. I also read, but not as much as Ervin.

My mother was from Banska Bystrica, from the Fried family. My mother finished a two-year mercantile academy in Banska Bystrica, and then worked in a distillery, likely as a clerk. I don't know how she and my father met. I do know that there was a very large age difference between them. As my mother had never been anywhere else besides Mezibrod and Banska Bystrica, they probably met through a matchmaker, which back then was nothing unusual. Even despite the 19-year age difference, it was a nice marriage. I don't remember there being any conflicts in our family, really just a nice childhood. This was probably given by the fact that my father was no millionaire. We lived modestly, from the stationery store, bookstore and printers'. My father employed one apprentice, Emil [Emil Steiner], and even he was the son of his sister [Zofia Steinerova]. He apprenticed at my father's, stayed on as a journeyman, and in the end immigrated to Palestine.

My mother was very pleasant, very educated, a faithful wife. She took exemplary care of us. She had no interests other than the family. She helped Father in the store and negotiated with suppliers. A sales representative would come, I remember Mr. Klapac from Prague, who would bring two large crates with samples. My mother picked our and ordered goods. She took care of all the administrative work in the store.

I would characterize our financial situation as 'from hand to mouth.' We didn't own very much. Quite the opposite, our business was kept above water by the Gazdovska Bank and its manager, Stefan Vunder, who was a friend of my father's. I don't know if they met during World War I, but I do know that the Gazdovska Bank kept a protective hand over our company, because after the war we had to pay a debt of 60,000 crowns that our father had run up there. [In November 1945 the value of the crown was set to 1 Kcs = 0.0177734 g of gold.]

After my mother had been home for fourteen days, a letter arrived from the Gazdovska Bank: 'Dear Mrs. Gubitschova, we've found out that you survived the war, and your husband left a debt of

60,000 crowns. We request that you come within 14 days, and as the lawful heiress, pay the debt.' Luckily, after 1939 the Patria printing company swallowed up Bernard Gubitsch's company, and the debts were transferred to it. [Patria: in 1899 Gubitsch opened the first printer's in Prievidza. In 1917 a printer's belonging to Kohn opened. In 1939 the Patria printing house was created by the merging of the two. The printing house is currently still operating, and has around 140 employees.] The Aryanizers moved it, they were greedy and thought they'd get rich, but they didn't get rich. [Aryanization: the transfer of Jewish stores, companies, businesses etc. into the ownership of another person (the Aryanizer).] They moved everything, two A4 format [European paper format roughly equivalent to US letter] printing machines, and one flatbed press for poster making.

My parents usually spoke Slovak to each other, but would occasionally also speak Hungarian and German, because Prievidza was surrounded by German villages. The German Pravno [renamed in 1946 to Nitrianske Pravno], Tuzin [Germ. Tuschin], Gajdel [Germ. Gajdell]; those were all German communities. My father's native tongue was Hungarian, but he never taught it to us. I learned to speak it like my father spoke it. I can still get by in Hungarian. My mother and father dressed modestly, very modestly. My father had a Sunday suit and a normal suit. We children had one normal suit that we wore - pants, short pants and coats with these big buttons and dark- colored Sunday clothes. We didn't follow any modern trends.

Electricity and running water were brought in to Prievidza probably around 1927. We had a three-room apartment. The rooms were in a row, one behind the other, and it continued on with the printing room, larder, woodshed, and behind that was the yard belonging to the building owner, Chikan. He had two sons. I was friends with one of them, with Mikulas. Our parents also had good relations all those long years that we lived there.

The building also had a garden that the owners, the Chikans, took care of. My mother had only these wooden boxes where she grew flowers. We also had a household helper, but only up to the Great Depression of the 1930s 12. I remember that we had a square table in the kitchen, which during the day was used as a dining table, and at night our maid slept there. I don't remember her name any more. She didn't cook, but only cleaned and kept an eye on us.

Our parents didn't socialize very much. Just our father, which our mother didn't like, used to go to the café to kibitz, because as I've already mentioned, our mother didn't allow him to play cards. My mother had a good friend, the wife of the Prievidza photographer. She came to a bad end, suicide. I don't know the cause, but it was at the time when Fascism arrived. I think it was more of a matter of nerves, and not politics.

Our father had a brother. He apparently lived in America. I don't know anything more about him, all I remember is that each year at Rosh Hashanah, a greeting card would arrive from America. Otherwise they didn't keep in touch, and neither was any money ever sent. Nothing, just that one greeting. Until sometime after 1989 13, his grandson, Danny Gubitsch, came to visit us, and was researching his family tree and also his mother's, who was from eastern Slovakia. I also knew Father's sister, Zofia Steinerova. Zofia had only one son, Emil, who apprenticed with us and moved to Palestine.

Growing up

I was born on 1st June 1922 in Prievidza. I remember my childhood very well, mainly the time I spent in the courtyard of Adolf Kramer's photo studio. At that time, Braun, the photographer, was studying with him; he liked children a lot, and used to take me everywhere with him. Braun was a fervent fisherman, and we used to go fishing together, but he never had a license, so when we saw the police we would run. The Nitra flows near Prievidza in the direction of Bojnice, so we used to go there.

I used to attend the Jewish school in Prievidza at Dreveny Rynek. Grades 1 and 2 were combined, and classes took place in one room. I absolved five grades in the Jewish school. Classes were mostly held up until lunch, but some subjects were also in the afternoon. For sure I know that religion was in the morning. There was no school on Saturday and Sunday. On Saturday people went to synagogue. I wasn't some sort of exceptional student, even when I had A's, but I didn't study much at home the way my brother did, who always had his head in books and textbooks, and knew them by heart. I was more into sports. My favorite subject was also sport [physical education].

The school principal was Ungar, who had this common touch. He would often take us on trips to the so-called 'wilderness.' The wilderness was about two and a half, three kilometers in the direction of Vtacnik [Vtacnik: a mountain range in the Central Slovak Mountains. On the west, north and northeast it is bordered by the High Tatra Basin, the Ziar mountain range and the Strazov Hills, on the east the Kremnica Hills and the Ziar Basin, and on the south Tribec and the Stiavnica Hills]. There he'd always order sour milk for us from the game warden, it used to have these lumps in it. That's not something very popular these days. The warden had his own cow, so also his own milk, and he used to make it for us. I remember that we used to pay 50 halers. I got to like that sour milk so much, that it hasn't stopped being a favorite of mine to this day, but unfortunately today it's no longer made. It was an excellent treat.

I used to attend Maccabi 14 in Prievidza, and was also a very good volleyball player. I may be of small stature, but as a setter I was notorious for being able to attack. So the spikers picked me out as their setter. I liked volleyball in high school as well, and it stayed with me until later years. After the war, in Karlovy Vary, I was still playing volleyball. It was my favorite sport. Otherwise I was active, I used to skate. When I was older I also had a bicycle. Not some sort of racing model, but a normal, standard bike.

The Prievidza Maccabi had about 20 to 25 members. They were focused mainly on physical education. Boys and girls used to attend separately. The Maccabi had some space at the Jewish elementary school. There was a yard there, as well as a volleyball court, and a horizontal bar. We didn't have our own gym, we used to rent space at the Prievidza high school. We used to practice twice or three times a week, always in the evening. The team probably didn't achieve any larger sports success, just the men participated in the Maccabiade in Zilina, sometime in the 1930s.

I attended high school in Prievidza. The principal was Mr. Lenco. I remember our art teacher, named Vtacnik, who called me up in front of the class in the first quarter year, and said, 'Look at Gubitsch, he'll never ever be a painter. But none of the several hundred students that I've taught up to now has ever turned in 42 drawings in the first quarter! He'll never be a painter, but he's a very self-sacrificing and industrious person!'

One of my favorites at school was also Professor Hromadko, the gym teacher. I think it was mutual, because I met his strict requirements. He had all sorts of technical aids, for example when doing arm raises we had to stand as straight as a yardstick, which he also used. He would always say, 'Try to break the gym walls with your middle fingers. You'll do arm raises without looking at your arms, and you'll have them stretched out like a yardstick.' I followed this, so he considered me to be an example, which is why I got used to demonstrating things. As a child I was good at sports. I played volleyball a lot. Hromadko the gym teacher put me on the senior team even though I was younger.

So these are those memories of school days. The high school was nice. The building stands to this day. There was a beautiful garden there, and when the year 1938 came, they made it into a large military training ground, because military training was instituted as a school subject. It was expected that Hitler would attach Czechoslovakia, and they were counting on us as soldiers 15.

I did only four grades of high school, and in 1936 I left to learn the printing trade. I was already a clerk by trade, so as a former high school student they gave me a one-year credit for my apprenticeship period. In those days the apprenticeship took four years, and high school students were credited with one year. Officially I finished on 31st August 1939, but that was already the time of the Slovak State 16, and they didn't let me take my journeyman's exam. In 1942, when the deportations began, someone pushed through that I was able to take my journeyman's exams. I don't know exactly, but I have this feeling that it was intervention by the Communists. But I got two invitations in the mail. One for the journeyman's exam in Nitra, and the second to the Novaky camp 17.

My father phoned me, because in 1942 I was already on hakhsharah 18 in Budmerice by Trnava, 'So what are you going to do?' I said, 'Don't worry dad, I'll go to the journeyman's exam, because that's the most important thing in my life, and then we'll see.' So, on March 30th I absolved my journeyman's exam. On Sunday I arrived in Nitra, slept over at my father's sister's [Zofia Steinerova], and on Monday morning I went to Stefan Husar's printing plant in Nitra. I remember that the journeyman's exam was supposed to last two days, but after the practical part on Monday, at 4pm, Husar called me in and said, 'All right, I've got a message here from the master that you've passed the practical portion, and you still have to do the theoretical part on Tuesday, but I know that you're an educated boy.' So he asked me three or four easy questions, if I knew who Guttenberg was and similar things to do with printing. Husar knew what the situation was, so I didn't have to come on Tuesday, and could already go home on Monday evening.

At home there was a big commotion, because we from Hashomer Hatzair 19 were supposed to go into hiding in the Low Tatras, but my parents didn't want to let me go into parts unknown, that we'd go to the Novaky camp all nice and proper. [Low Tatras: found in Slovakia, and contain a renowned national park. The Low Tatra mountain range runs for 80 km from west to east between the Vah and Hron river valleys. The highest peaks are Dumbier (2043 m) and Chopok (2024 m).]

During my school years I had a very good friend, Vladko [Vladimir] Kuhra. Vladko was the son of the Czech forest warden Kuhra. He had two or three sisters. I was friends with them too. Vladko was my best friend, and then also Lacko [Ladislav] Kelermen, the son of the president of the Neolog Jewish religious community in Prievidza. Already in prewar times we felt anti-Semitism, to this day I still remember the insulting sayings that Christian children used to yell at us at Dreveny

[Wooden] Ring. That's where we used to play soccer matches, Jews against the Christians. Once we'd win, once they'd win, but usually it would end with them yelling insults at us. We also used to yell things like 'Christian, Catholic, crapped on a stick....' I don't know how it continued.

My brother, Ervin Gubitsch, was born in 1920 in Banska Bystrica. There was a two year age difference between us. He buried himself in books from the time he was little. We had a writing desk with drawers that were full of books. In later years there was also a smaller library in our father's store. I don't think he was interested in much else. He had one very good friend, Karolko [Karol] Handler. Karol was a fervent Communist, he may even have been the chairman of the Komsomol 20. But during the war he bungled things, because he was drafted, and back then you could buy your way out of the army for ten crowns a day. He made the cardinal mistake of buying his way out and coming to Prievidza. The fascists of course found out about it, and dragged him off on the first transport.

Karolko was a very talented journalist. He wrote for A-Z, which was a tabloid magazine. I know that he used to come to our store to borrow books and magazines. He used to read there because his father was a glass cutter. He had a glazier's in Prievidza in Piaricka Street, but was very clumsy. When he was cutting glass, before he managed to frame a picture he wasted more than he produced. So they weren't wealthy, he belonged to the poorer of Prievidza tradesmen.

Ervin attended Jewish elementary school in Prievidza and high school in Banska Bystrica, where he also graduated. However at that time the Numerus Clausus [limitations on accepting students on the basis of economic or political reasons] was already more or less in effect, so he could no longer study. Ervin suffered very much because of this. I remember that in 1938, after the Munich meeting 21 he threw himself on the couch and began shouting, 'There won't be anything! There won't be anything! There won't be any school!' It was a huge shock to his psyche that he practically never recovered from.

Even when after the war he could have studied, I also tried to convince him, he also came to Prague to see me. He could have gone to school, because I was making decent money and also had an apartment, where we could have put another bed, but he didn't have the strength any longer. For the rest of his life he made a living in all sorts of ways unsuited to his talent and intelligence. He for example worked as a gatekeeper at the Bojnice spa, and practically also a bouncer in restaurants. He got married, his wife was also Jewish. She had gone through Auschwitz. He had two daughters, Katka [Katarina], who graduated from law. I think that she's already a judge in Prievidza, and his second daughter, Marika [Maria] remained a worker. I think that she studied cooking.

Our religious life

Our parents were Neolog, but we observed all holidays. For Rosh Hashanah we would go to synagogue, and after the holiday we would have a big festive supper, which started with an appetizer - some sort of horseradish mixture. Then soup with meat and dumplings and the main course. On the table there of course also had to be round carrots slices, honey and apples. [Traditionally at Rosh Hashanah foods that have a symbolic value are eaten. For example, carrots symbolize plenty, apples soaked in honey that the next year will be good and sweet.] We didn't observe it in a completely Orthodox fashion, but just those Jewish customs. My parents fasted at Yom Kippur, but I was a rebel, so I even bought some ham and ate it secretly with a friend. My

brother fasted, I think. It was all the same to him, he just sat at home buried in books and had no appetite for food.

For Chanukkah we'd light the menorah, which would be put in the window, and I think that the next day we'd go to the synagogue. My brother and I would light the candles, and our father would pray. We didn't pray very much, even though we knew how. Even today I still know the Hebrew alphabet. As children we also played with dreidels for nuts and things. We observed Sukkot according to custom. Every year we had a booth [sukkah] set up in the courtyard. The building owner wasn't religious, so he didn't object. Neither did his wife, who was from a very Christian family from Prievidza, have any objections. During the holiday we ate only in the booth.

We also observed Passover. There'd be a major housecleaning. Usually our mother cleaned, but I also helped. We'd pull out the Passover dishes and put away the normal ones, and buy matzot. In the evening we'd have seder, and have soup with matzah dumplings. On the table there would be water with vinegar, eggs, everything that should be there. A goblet with wine would also be ready. By custom I also had to ask questions, but that was only a formality. I knew that it belonged, so I didn't want to resist my father. [Mah nishtanah: the so-called four questions. Traditionally recited by the youngest participant of the seder during the Passover holiday, when reading from the Haggadah begins.]

My brother and I had a bar mitzvah. I still remember something of it. First I had to recite a passage from the Torah at the synagogue, and though I knew Hebrew I didn't learn it by heart, so I recited it after a fashion with the help of a prompter. In the afternoon there was a feast. On the occasion of my bar mitzvah, I got a new outfit, this sailor's outfit with big buttons. My brother and I played hide and seek. There was a chicken coop nearby, and I climbed up on it and jumped off. I ripped my pants apart. That caused a big commotion, I think I even got a spanking. The first and last time I remember getting a spanking. 'What do you think, that we steal?' said my father. 'Do you know how much money it cost?' For the times it was an expensive outfit. Otherwise, I wasn't religiously inclined. I was a member of Hashomer Hatzair, which was an atheist organization, and I behaved accordingly.

I attended Hashomer Hatzair from the age of ten. My father tolerated it, but I'd say more that he tried to ignore it. We used to meet once a week, and then at summer camp. One was even in Prievidza, but as luck would have it, they didn't cook kosher there. The camp was about three kilometers out of Prievidza. My parents went out for a walk and came to see me. When they saw where we were, that was my last time at camp. It wasn't until 1938 that I managed to get to a camp in Povazska Bystrica, and that was only with my grandma's agreement. First I arrived in Banska Bystrica for summer holidays, and talked my grandmother into letting me go. Finally my father found out about it anyways, and after a week took me back home.

But I attended the weekly Hashomer meeting regularly. We studied Hebrew and went on outings. During wartime I was also in hakhsharah for a short time, which they had opened in Prievidza in 1939. At that time I had already finished my schooling, but couldn't take my final exams. As a journeyman I didn't get any work, and our printing shop was already more or less Aryanized, so I left for hakhsharah. First to the Heumans' brick factory, where we worked either directly in the factory or with various merchants. There were eleven of us, of which one was a girl. Bianiciova, from Presov or Sabinov. I liked her a lot. We didn't study much in Prievidza, but mostly worked in

companies like Carpathia. On hakhsharah in Letanovce we studied agriculture, because it was a farm. From there we would also go to Novy Majer by Budmerice, where we also did farm work and worked in the stables. It was a Jewish farm that had an exception from President Tiso. We were ten boys and one girl. Rachel Hoffmanova, by coincidence from Prievidza. A very hard-working girl. She was from a poor family, and unfortunately didn't survive the war.

In hakhsharah there were often various lectures on Zionism 22 and Judaism. I especially remember a lecture by Dr. Oskar Neumann 23, because I have notes from his lecture to this day. I knew only one person who moved to the Palestine, which was my cousin Emil Steiner. He left in 1939 in the first wave of emigrants, which was organized by Hechalutz 24.

In Budmerice we worked on property belonging to the Sonnenfelds. It was a farm, and I worked in the pig barn. I found it very interesting, especially the breeding station, because they were cross-breeding the German Edelschwein breed with English sows. They were these long pigs that would be sent to Prague for Prague ham. Sonnenfeld was a very curt Jewish farmer, a big-shot, not even once did he come to see our living accommodations. Our accommodations were very modest, one room and a kitchen. Rachel Hoffmannova slept in the kitchen, and the ten of us boys slept on plank bunks in that little room.

During the war

As I've already mentioned, in 1942 my father called that I'd been invited for my journeyman's exams, and that's actually what saved me from the transport, because while I was on the phone with my father, an escort arrived and dragged off everyone from the hakhsharahh. After my exams I came home, and it was a big tragedy. I didn't want to go to Novaky, but both my parents started weeping, what sort of son was I, because if I don't go, they'll take them. Nothing could convince them, even when I told them that it was only a question of time before they came for them too. First they'd take the young boys, and then their turn would come. It didn't help. Finally I agreed and said, 'All right, I'll go to the camp.' I still remember the date, 31st March 1942.

The Novaky labor camp was set up in 1941 on property where there were army warehouses. There were three sections, between which there were about ten houses. The highest number of people allowed in Novaky was about 1000 - 1200 people; it's believed that it was at the behest of General Catlos 25, the interior minister of the Slovak State. The first transports to Poland went from Novaky. I was also supposed to be on one such transport to Poland, but people from Prievidza on the camp's Jewish council 26 pulled me off at the last moment, and transferred me to the third section, because those that worked were gathered there. The first building was concentrational [they concentrated people for further deportation there], the second contained the farm buildings and the kitchen.

I had two friends, Alfred Löwy and Lacko [Ladislav] Kelerman, who were cousins. Lacko's mother and Alfred's father were brother and sister. Lacko's father was the president of the Prievidza religious community, so he had some connections. When I arrived at the camp, they 'stole' me off the transport to Poland and took me away to that third section, and assigned me to Nandor Löwy, Alfred Löwy's father. Nandor Löwy worked in Novaky as a delivery man. He had a horse and wagon at his disposition, and took care of supplying the camp. The supply warehouse of the former Czechoslovak army was in Zemianske Kostolany, but we also often went to Prievidza. They of course made use of me, I had to illegally carry into the camp all sorts of packages and food from

relatives.

For long years Nandor Löwy had been a fireman in Prievidza, which was very unusual, because Jews weren't firemen too often. All of Prievidza had only two people in the fire crew. The tinsmith Nandor Löwy, and his competition, Spitzer, also a tinsmith. Löwy became the delivery man, which was very good, because he had various connections. One of them was also Stefan Wunder, who owned a grocery wholesale business and was one of the camp's suppliers. At least once a week we'd be in Prievidza at Wunder's, and sometimes also to see Kardos, another wholesaler, but he was afraid and didn't want to be too involved. Wunder was very Christian, he even had some position in Orol, a Catholic organization.

Visits to Wunder looked something like this: in the front there was a store, and in the back there were offices and a warehouse. We used to come to the back, and more or less semi-legally loaded up goods. Most things went through accounting, but we always also loaded up things that were being smuggled in. I remember that once we managed to bring a whole case of sardines into the camp. That enriched our menu, otherwise the food was very scant. Occasionally we also got some meat, semi-legally as well, calves were brought in. I consider it to be one of those miracles that happened that it always came off.

As a delivery boy I also experienced one very, very unpleasant event. The Löwys had three children - Alfred, Palko [Pavol] plus a girl. Palko and Alfred survived, but the girl was dragged off to Poland. Their mother couldn't stand the sight of me, because she would immediately start shrieking 'You're here and my baby is gone!' She couldn't stand her daughter's friends, nothing could be done about it. So I tried to keep out of her way, it was hard, because I was her husband's assistant.

An illegal Communist organization was formed in Novaky. You could say that it was led by the Hagar brothers [Frantisek Hagar and Jozef Hagar]. They escaped and formed a semi-illegal organization in Vtacnik, semi-illegal because it was persecuted only for the sake of appearances, in front of the Germans. In reality it was a quite large organization. It was supported by people from the surrounding towns, who would also bring them food.

I also used to go from the camp illegally to Vtacnik. A small stream ran all the way down from Vtacnik to the camp, and at night we used to follow the stream up there. We dug a hole under the barbed wire, and at night we'd carry out food. People would come to meet us, and we'd give them the packages. There was a lot of vegetation around the camp, high trees, and that's where we would give it to them. Of course, some prisoners held it against us, but we would explain to them that we still had something in the camp, while they didn't have anything, so it was our duty to help them.

The Upper Nitra Partisan Brigade, with the Hagar brothers and Frantisek Miseje, was active in Vtacnik. I was the connection between the camp and the partisans. I remember it as if it were yesterday. In May of 1943 I went from the camp along the creek all the way to Vtacnik, they led me all the way to the top. It was a beautiful day, and they showed me the camp, you could see all three parts of the camp. The roofs were made of tar paper, and were beautifully lit by the sun. It was a sight to see. At night I returned to the camp and brought them the news that we wouldn't survive another winter in the camp, because there was going to be an uprising in 1944.

The camp's leadership knew about our nighttime outings. In 1942 we used to go underneath the barbed wire, and after Stalingrad 27 in 1943 we got ourselves a key to the front gate. Because after Stalingrad even the Guardists 28 were growing nervous, and weren't that strict and tough anymore. One Guardist got especially involved, not publicly but in secret, and gave us keys. 'But you can only leave at night, not during the day!' We made a key in the machine shop, and normally got out. In 1943, a Jewish guard was instituted at the third camp, so we didn't have to go under the fence and on the sly anymore.

The commander of the Novaky camp was Polhora, who escaped after the war. They caught him in Austria and convicted him. Jozef Polhora, a handsome guy in a Guardist uniform. After Stalingrad they replaced him, because the Guardist sentries were being replaced by ones from the police. Those were the Slovak fascist government's pass-the-buck politics. The police often did what we wanted and looked the other way when we left he camp, by then it was better.

They camp was basically liberated by the Slovak National Rebellion on 28th August 1944, and thus the Novaky era ended as well. Part of the former prisoners joined the Novaky unit. Imrich Müller, a professor from Prievidza, became the unit's commander. His fate after the war wasn't good, because he was persecuted during the 1950s. During the first days of the rebellion, many of us fell by Batovany. I don't know if it was anti- Semitism or whether they considered us Jews to be the most self-sacrificing soldiers, but we ended up in the front line. Luckily, I wasn't there, because I still had work in the camp. Because we didn't have military training, they transferred us to the army training camp in Hiadel.

After the fall of the uprising, we joined Yegorov's brigade, and lived in a log cabin above Pohronsky Bukovec. There were ten of us in the cabin, including two Russian parachutists, Nikolai Galkin and Yevgenii Yonuv. Yonuv was Chuvashian, and Galkin was originally a Siberian, but we considered him to be a Russian. There were two Frenchmen there, and also Janko Brada from Banska Bystrica, who was by coincidence a friend of mine. They used to live in Banska Bystrica in a neighborhood named Hustak, right by the Hron River. The Brauns owned a hardware store. It wasn't until after the war that they changed their name to Brada. Janko Brada survived, I was with him after the war, and I think he moved to Israel.

The farmers from Bukovec and their wives used to bring us bread, bacon, eggs and butter. They basically fed us. But we also used to go on ambushes. I remember one ambush, when things got pretty scary. We got a message that around 10pm a German column would be going from Brezno to Banska Bystrica. So we attacked them. Some shooting took place, but the Germans called for support from Banska Bystrica by using flares, and we had to retreat. I managed to escape along a ridge.

Sometime in February, I think on 28th February 1945, we arrived in Myto pod Dumbierom. We'd learned that this territory had already been liberated. We were put up individually in people's homes. I also had one adventure. They put me up in one old lady's attic. There was hay and straw in the attic, and as I was deathly tired, I quickly fell asleep. When I woke up, there was a farmer holding a pitchfork standing above me. I didn't much feel like laughing, but in the end everything ended up fine. We proceeded on foot from Myto pod Dumbierom to Poprad, and there they dissolved our unit. That was the end of the uprising for me.

In Poprad I started working at a printer's, they were happy that a typesetter had arrived. My first task was to typeset a mobilization proclamation. I was in Poprad for only a month, because as soon as I found out that my mother had survived, I set off for Prievidza.

My brother was born in 1920, so in 1939 he had to join the so-called 'kosher company' that was located in eastern Slovakia. My brother ended up in a camp whose commander became the former mayor of Prievidza, Anton Adamic, an invalid from World War II. When my brother arrived in the camp, and he saw the name Ervin Gubitsch on the list, he had all the boys in the camp stand in formation and shouted, 'Gubitsch, front and center! Look here, this is the son of the most decent Jewish family in Prievidza.' Mayor Adamic put him in charge of the canteen, so he wasn't deported and thus survived. The minister of national defense, Ferdinand Catlos, took charge of the work company 29. Despite the fact that he tried to liquidate them, it's said that he saved the company from deportation. He refused to deport them, and argued that they were soldiers. After the army, they either transferred them to the Novaky camp, or to the Sered work camp 30.

My brother arrived at the Novaky camp in 1942. As he was the son of a book printer, they assigned him to the cartonnage workshop, and it was in the cartonnage shop that an interesting incident took place. In 1943, after the Battle of Stalingrad, a delegation from the Ministry of the Interior came from Bratislava. The delegation was composed of members of the Ministry of the Interior, and the head of the delegation was named Pecuch [Julius Pecuch]. They probably came to sniff out what Jews thought about the solution to the Jewish question. Pecuch came up to my brother, and asked, 'What will happen to us after the war?' At that moment my brother was working on a machine that was processing cardboard. He didn't answer him, but drew a hammer and sickle on the cardboard. Pecuch asked him again, 'Well, and what will you do with us?' My brother answered him, 'You'll hang!'

Well, that caused a big uproar in the camp, everyone thought that they'd grab my brother and hang him, but nothing happened. He had a tendency to act the hero. In that sense my brother became the hero of the Novaky camp. That was already in 1943, after Stalingrad. After the camp's liberation, he also joined a partisan unit, and returned home after the war. We weren't in the same unit, and didn't know anything about each other until after the war.

Our mother survived, but our father died in her arms in the mountains. They were hiding in a cabin up above Horny [Upper] Jelenec. My father had diabetes, and his feet got frostbitten, he got gangrene... He's buried above Horny Jelenec; they didn't want to allow us to have him exhumed. The officials were asking fifty thousand crowns to issue the permit, and I didn't have even five thousand, much less fifty thousand. So my brother and I said to each other: 'We were both partisans, so our father will remain in the mountains!'

Post-war

Our mother continued living in Prievidza; in 1946 her health was already very poor and in June she died. We buried her in Prievidza at the Jewish cemetery, which unfortunately has since been destroyed. The Jewish cemetery was on the way to Handlova. When I was there last, the house of mourning was still there, but the graves had already been destroyed. She was buried by someone from the Prievidza religious community, because after the war the Jewish community was renewed. About forty of us returned, but then everyone moved to Palestine. I don't even know anymore why I didn't move away as well. We didn't have any resources, and it was more people that had some

funds hidden away that were moving there, or they had gold that they sold. All we had hidden away were documents.

In Prievidza they allocated us a tiny little room with a kitchen. I started working at the Patria printing house as a typesetter. I had this childhood dream, as a typesetter I wanted to study typography in Leipzig, because Leipzig was the biggest typographic power in Europe. I knew that it was only a dream and that I couldn't get over there, so I accepted a position in Prague. So in 1945 I set out for Prague in the back of a truck belonging to Carpathia. The Heumans, the owners of the jam factory, had given me an address to go to. Surprisingly, I found it very easily.

I got a room on Liliova Street. There were three of us living there. I, the Heuman's son, and some woman. Heuman then moved away, so I remained alone. I was close to work, all I had to do was cross the courtyard, and I was in the print shop. It was a good thing for me, I was being paid 4500 crowns [in November 1945, the crown's value was set at 1 Kcs = 0.0177734 g of gold]. I was single, I was five minutes away from the National Theater and the Estates Theater, the Vltava River was also five minutes away, and my window looked out over Bethlehem Square, so for me the years 1945 and 1946 were beautiful.

In 1947 I arrived in Karlovy Vary for some treatments, and here I met my wife, who used to come here to visit a girlfriend. One thing led to another, and on St. Nicholas Day in 1947 we were married. They allocated us a one-room apartment. I got a job in a printing shop. I didn't have any problems due to my being Jewish. I'm a communicative person, and didn't have any problems fitting in. I used to play table tennis. The company had a table tennis league, and they immediately accepted me onto the team. We even played in the regional championships. I don't even know anymore how they convinced me to become the regional secretary. That was in February 1948 31. Before February 1948, the Communist Party created the position of so-called district secretaries. Each region was divided up into districts. It was a major coup for the Communist Party, because they got close to the people. I was in charge of about five organizations. Meetings were held at least once a week, sometimes even twice. In February, I also took part in those February events.

I started working as the secretary of the regional committee of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia. I held this position for five years, and then was a cultural officer at the Regional Committee. This is a sad chapter of my life, even though my hands are clean. I don't have even a smidgen of blood behind my fingernails, neither was I persecuted after the revolution, because I acted normally. I can look back at those five years with a clear conscience, but on the other hand, it was after all no smooth ride being a secretary of the Communist Party. There were enough of all sorts of Communists here, so it was quite difficult. I also had a lot of enemies. Finally I had to leave my position and then worked only as a typesetter, from where I went into retirement.

I lived through democracy as a social order, I had the partisan movement behind me as well as illegal Communist work. For me it was a matter of fact that after the war I remained a Communist. In the 1950s they threw me out. I didn't accept it very easily, so I tried to get them to take me back, which I finally succeeded in doing, but then 32 they threw me out again. I was too much of a democrat for their tastes.

Married life

I had already superficially gotten to know my wife [Terezia Gubicova, née Schweitova] in Hashomer Hatzair. We then met again in Karlovy Vary. I had come to Karlovy Vary for treatments, and liked it here. I got work here, and they also allocated me an apartment. My wife was from Levoc, but after the war she lost her home, so she came to Kraslice to see a girlfriend of hers. She got a job in the Amati factory, which manufactured musical instruments. She used to come to Karlovy Vary to see a friend. One thing led to another, and on St. Nicholas Day in 1947 we got married. The wedding was Jewish, and very modest. The only participants were my wife's witnesses and my witness, Janko [Jan] Porges. Three witnesses, and us. That was all. After our wedding, my wife at first worked for the regional committee, and after a year got a job at an elementary school. She taught Grade One.

We had two children. In 1949 our daughter Tatiana was born, and in 1950 our son Igor. Both our children work as teachers. Tatiana married Mr. Koskuba, but they got divorced. It wasn't a good marriage. They had a daughter, Lenka. Tatiana and Lenka live in the same apartment with me. Igor married a girl from Kutna Hora. He's got a daughter, Daniela, and a son, Stefan. Daniela works in Karlovy Vary as a spa nurse, and Stefan is studying archeology in Pilsen. Igor is the principal of an elementary school in Nejdek. Igor is the type of person who doesn't look for any conflicts, but on the contrary tries to resolve everything with a cool head. Tatiana as well. My children never had any conflicts, neither in school nor now.

My wife and I had season tickets to the Karlovy Vary theater. We also used to attend various social events. My wife wasn't a big dancer, but I liked dancing. I was also big on sports, which is why I encouraged my children to play sports. My daughter eventually graduated from physical education, but also teaches Czech. My wife and I didn't observe any Jewish traditions. Our children know that they're Jews, but don't know anything about Judaism. We had Christmas, but only symbolically. I'm used to going to the prayer hall for the High Holidays, because ten people have to gather for prayers, for a minyan, and when there aren't enough, they call me.

I was glad when the state of Israel was created, and that Jews from the whole world over will have a home. I felt myself to be a Slovak by nationality. Jewishness was in second place. I had friends from Catholic Christian circles, so I knew a fair bit about Christianity. I of course felt myself to be a Jew, in my youth I also practiced it, after all I was in Hashomer Hatzair, but in adulthood I no longer cared for it. I had this one slogan: 'One war was enough for me, I don't want to live through another!' I've never been to Israel. In my spare time, I concern myself with history, write my memoirs; to tell the truth, I'd like to publish them.

Glossary

1 Neolog Jewry
Following a Congress in 1868/69 in Budapest, where the Jewish community was supposed to discuss several issues on which the opinion of the traditionalists and the modernizers differed and which aimed at uniting Hungarian Jews, Hungarian Jewry was officially split into two (later three) communities, which all built up their own national community network. The Neologs were the modernizers, who opposed the Orthodox on various questions. The third group, the sop-called Status Quo Ante advocated that the Jewish community was maintained the same as before the 1868/69 Congress.

2 Exemption and exceptions in the Slovak State (1939-1945)

In the Jewish Codex they are included under § 254 and § 255. Exemption and exceptions, § 255 - the President of the Slovak Republic may grant an exemption from the stipulations of this decree. Exemption may be complete or partial and may be subject to conditions. Exemption may be revoked at any time. In the case of exemption, administrative fees are collected according to § 255 in the following amounts: a) for the granting of an exception according to § 1, the sum of 1,000 to 500,000 Ks. b) for the granting of an exception according to § 2, the sum of 500 to 100,000 Ks c) for the granting of an exception according to single or multiple decrees, the sum of 10 Ks to 300,000 Ks d) a certificate issued according to § 3 is charged at 10 Ks § 255 enabled the President to grant exceptions from decrees for a fee. Disputes are still led regarding how this paragraph got into the Jewish Codex and how many exceptions the President granted. According to documents there were 1111 Jews protected by exceptions, including family members. Exceptions were valid from the commencement of deportations from the territory of the Slovak State, in 1942, up until the outbreak of the Slovak National Rebellion, in the year 1944.

3 Slovak Uprising

At Christmas 1943 the Slovak National Council was formed, consisting of various oppositional groups (communists, social democrats, agrarians etc.). Their aim was to fight the Slovak fascist state. The uprising broke out in Banska Bystrica, central Slovakia, on 20th August 1944. On 18th October the Germans launched an offensive. A large part of the regular Slovak army joined the uprising and the Soviet Army also joined in. Nevertheless the Germans put down the riot and occupied Banska Bystrica on 27th October, but weren't able to stop the partisan activities. As the Soviet army was drawing closer many of the Slovak partisans joined them in Eastern Slovakia under either Soviet or Slovak command.

4 First Vienna Decision

On 2nd November 1938 a German-Italian international committee in Vienna obliged Czechoslovakia to surrender much of the southern Slovakian territories that were inhabited mainly by Hungarians. The cities of Kassa (Kosice), Komarom (Komarno), Ersekujvar (Nove Zamky), Ungvar (Uzhorod) and Munkacs (Mukacevo), all in all 11.927 km2 of land, and a population of 1.6 million people became part of Hungary. According to the Hungarian census in 1941 84% of the people in the annexed lands were Hungarian-speaking.

5 Comintern

The Communist International, also known as the Third International, was created by Vladimir I. Lenin in 1919. Its openly stated purpose was: to fight "by all available means, including armed force, for the overthrow of the international bourgeoisie and for the creation of an international Soviet republic as a transition stage to the complete abolition of the State." The Comintern's mission was to spread Communist revolution into the whole world. But at its 7th World Congress in 1935 the Comintern on Stalin's orders gave up the revolutionary overthrow of capitalism as its mission, and called for the creation of people's fronts against fascism in Western countries - which was Moscow's primary policy at the time.

6 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.

7 Spanish Civil War (1936-39)

A civil war in Spain, which lasted from July 1936 to April 1939, between rebels known as Nacionales and the Spanish Republican government and its supporters. The leftist government of the Spanish Republic was besieged by nationalist forces headed by General Franco, who was backed by Nazi Germany and fascist Italy. Though it had Spanish nationalist ideals as the central cause, the war was closely watched around the world mainly as the first major military contest between left-wing forces and the increasingly powerful and heavily armed fascists. The number of people killed in the war has been long disputed ranging between 500,000 and a million.

8 Czechs in Slovakia from 1938-1945

The rise of Fascism in Europe also had its impact on the fate of Czechs living in Slovakia. The Vienna Decision of 1938 had as its consequence the loss of southern Slovakia to Hungary, as a result of which the number of Czechs living in Slovakia declined. A Slovak census held on 31st December 1938 listed 77,488 persons of Czech nationality, a majority of which did not have Slovak residential status. During the period of Slovak autonomy (1938-1939) a government decree was in effect, on the basis of which 9,000 Czech civil servants were let go. The situation of the Czech population grew even worse after the creation of the Slovak State (1939-1945), when these people had the status of foreigners. As a result, by 1943 there were only 31,451 Czechs left in Slovakia.

9 Orthodox communities

The traditionalist Jewish communities founded their own Orthodox organizations after the Universal Meeting in 1868- 1869.They organized their life according to Judaist principles and opposed to assimilative aspirations. The community leaders were the rabbis. The statute of their communities was sanctioned by the king in 1871. In the western part of Hungary the communities of the German and Slovakian immigrants' descendants were formed according to the Western Orthodox principles. At the same time in the East, among the Jews of Galician origins the 'eastern' type of Orthodoxy was formed; there the Hassidism prevailed. In time the Western Orthodoxy also spread over to the eastern part of Hungary. In 1896, there were 294 Orthodox mother-communities and 1,001 subsidiary communities registered all over Hungary, mainly in Transylvania and in the north-eastern part of the country,. In 1930, the 136 mother-communities and 300 subsidiary communities made up 30.4 percent of all Hungarian Jews. This number increased to 535 Orthodox

communities in 1944, including 242,059 believers (46 percent).

10 Frieder (Abba) Armin, (1911-1946)

Was rabbi in the "status quo" community at Zvolen and the Neolog community of Nove Mesto nad Vahom, Slovakia, from 1938. He was an active Zionist. In 1942, he became a member of the underground Working Group in Bratislava, established to save the surviving Jews of Slovakia, and Frieder was the group's contact with Slovak government circles. Under his influence the home for the aged in Nove Mesto became a refuge before deportations. After the suppression of the Slovak Uuprising in the autumn of 1944, he found refuge in a Catholic monastery. At the end of World War II, he was appointed Chief Rabbi of Slovakia.

11 Deportation of Jews from the Slovak State

The size of the Jewish community in the Slovak State in 1939 was around 89,000 residents (according to the 1930 census - it was around 135,000 residents), while after the I. Vienna Decision in November 1938, around 40,000 Jews were on the territory gained by Hungary. At a government session on 24th March 1942, the Minister of the Interior, A. Mach, presented a proposed law regarding the expulsion of Jews. From March 1942 to October 1942, 58 transports left Slovakia, and 57,628 people (2/3 of the Jewish population) were deported. The deportees, according to a constitutional law regarding the divestment of state citizenship, could take with them only 50 kg of precisely specified personal property. The Slovak government paid Nazi Germany a "settlement" subsidy, 500 RM (around 5,000 Sk in the currency of the time) for each person. Constitutional law legalized deportations. After the deportations, not even 20,000 Jews remained in Slovakia. In the fall of 1944 - after the arrival of the Nazi army on the territory of Slovakia, which suppressed the Slovak National Uprising - deportations were renewed. This time the Slovak side fully left their realization to Nazi Germany. In the second phase of 1944-1945, 13,500 Jews were deported from Slovakia, with about 1000 Jewish persons being executed directly on Slovak territory. About 10,000 Jewish citizens were saved thanks to the help of the Slovak populace.(Source: Niznansky, Eduard: Zidovska komunita na Slovensku 1939- 1945, http://www.holocaust.cz/cz2/resources/texts/niznansky_komunita)Niznansky, Eduard: Zidovska komunita na Slovensku 1939-1945)

12 Great Depression

At the end of October 1929, there were worrying signs on the New York Stock Exchange in the securities market. On 24th 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 its 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).

13 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.

14 Maccabi Sports Club in the Czechoslovak Republic

The Maccabi World Union was founded in 1903 in Basel at the VI. Zionist Congress. In 1935 the Maccabi World Union had 100,000 members, 10,000 of which were in Czechoslovakia. Physical education organizations in Bohemia have their roots in the 19th century. For example, the first Maccabi gymnastic club in Bohemia was founded in 1899. The first sport club, Bar Kochba, was founded in 1893 in Moravia. The total number of Maccabi clubs in Bohemia and Moravia before WWI was fifteen. The Czechoslovak Maccabi Union was officially founded in June 1924, and in the same year became a member of the Maccabi World Union, located in Berlin.

15 September 1938 mobilization

The ascent of the Nazis to power in Germany in 1933 represented a fundamental turning point in the foreign political situation of Czechoslovakia. The growing tension of the second half of the 1930s finally culminated in 1938, when the growing aggressiveness of neighboring Germany led first to the adoption of emergency measures from 20th May to 22nd June, and finally to the proclamation of a general mobilization on 23rd September 1938. At the end of September 1938, however, Czechoslovakia's defense system, for years laboriously built up, collapsed. Czechoslovakia's main ally, France, forced them to submit to Germany, and made no secret of the fact that they did not intend to provide military assistance. The support of the Soviet Union, otherwise in itself quite problematic, was contingent upon the support of France. Other countries, i.e. Hungary and Poland, were only waiting for the opportunity to gain something for themselves. (Source: http://www.military.cz/opevneni/mobilizace.html)

16 Slovak State (1939-1945)
Czechoslovakia, which was created after the disintegration of Austria-Hungary, lasted until it was broken up by the Munich Pact of 1938; Slovakia became a separate (autonomous) republic on 6th October 1938 with Jozef Tiso as Slovak PM. Becoming suspicious of the Slovakian moves to gain independence, the Prague government applied martial law and deposed Tiso at the beginning of March 1939, replacing him with Karol Sidor. Slovakian personalities appealed to Hitler, who used this appeal as a pretext for making Bohemia, Moravia and Silesia a German protectorate. On 14th March 1939 the Slovak Diet declared the independence of Slovakia, which in fact was a nominal one, tightly controlled by Nazi Germany.

17 Novaky labor camp
Established in 1941 in the central Slovakian town of Novaky. In an area of 2.27 km? 24 barracks were built, which accommodated 2,500-3,000 people in 1943. Many of the people detained in Novaky were transported to the Polish camps. The camp was liberated by the partisans on 30th August 1944 and the inmates joined the partisans.

18 Hakhsharah
Training camps organized by the Zionists, in which Jewish youth in the Diaspora received intellectual and physical training, especially in agricultural work, in preparation for settling in Palestine.

19 Hashomer Hatzair in Slovakia
The Hashomer Hatzair movement came into being in Slovakia after WWI. It was Jewish youths from Poland, who on their way to Palestine crossed through Slovakia and here helped to found a Zionist youth movement, that took upon itself to educate young people via scouting methods, and called itself Hashomer (guard). It joined with the Kadima (forward) movement in Ruthenia. The combined movement was called Hashomer Kadima. Within the membership there were several ideologues that created a dogma that was binding for the rest of the members. The ideology was based on Borchov's theory that the Jewish nation must also become a nation just like all the others. That's why the social pyramid of the Jewish nation had to be turned upside down. He claimed that the base must be formed by those doing manual labor, especially in agriculture - that is why young people should be raised for life in kibbutzim, in Palestine. During its time of activity it organized six kibbutzim: Shaar Hagolan, Dfar Masaryk, Maanit, Haogen, Somrat and Lehavot Chaviva, whose members settled in Palestine. From 1928 the movement was called Hashomer Hatzair (Young Guard). From 1938 Nazi influence dominated in Slovakia. Zionist youth movements became homes for Jewish youth after their expulsion from high schools and universities. Hashomer Hatzair organized high school courses, re-schooling centers for youth, summer and winter camps. Hashomer Hatzair members were active in underground movements in labor camps, and when the Slovak National Uprising broke out, they joined the rebel army and partisan units. After liberation the movement renewed its activities, created youth homes in which lived mainly children who returned from the camps without their parents, organized re-schooling centers and branches in towns. After the putsch in 1948 that ended the democratic regime, half of Slovak Jews left Slovakia.

Among them were members of Hashomer Hatzair. In the year 1950 the movement ended its activity in Slovakia.

20 Komsomol

Communist youth political organization created in 1918. The task of the Komsomol was to spread of the ideas of communism and involve the worker and peasant youth in building the Soviet Union. The Komsomol also aimed at giving a communist upbringing by involving the worker youth in the political struggle, supplemented by theoretical education. The Komsomol was more popular than the Communist Party because with its aim of education people could accept uninitiated young proletarians, whereas party members had to have at least a minimal political qualification.

21 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).

22 Zionism

A movement defending and supporting the idea of a sovereign and independent Jewish state, and the return of the Jewish nation to the home of their ancestors, Eretz Israel - the Israeli homeland. The final impetus towards a modern return to Zion was given by the show trial of Alfred Dreyfuss, who in 1894 was unjustly sentenced for espionage during a wave of anti-Jewish feeling that had gripped France. The events prompted Dr. Theodor Herzl (1860-1904) to draft a plan of political Zionism in the tract 'Der Judenstaat' ('The Jewish State', 1896), which led to the holding of the first Zionist congress in Basel (1897) and the founding of the World Zionist Organization (WZO). The WZO accepted the Zionist emblem and flag (Magen David), hymn (Hatikvah) and an action program.

23 Jewish Center

Its creation was closely tied to Dieter Wisliceny, German advisor for resolution of Jewish affairs, a close colleague of Eichmann. Wisliceny arguments for the creation of a Jewish Center were that it will act as a partner in negotiation regarding the eviction of Jews, that for those that due to Aryanization will be removed from their current positions, it will secure re-schooling for other occupations. The Jewish Center's jurisdiction was determined by the scope and regulations of the particular instance it fell under. This fact fundamentally influenced the center's operation. It limited the freedom of activity of individual clerks. The center's personnel was made up of three categories of people. From bureaucrats, who in their approach to the obeying of orders did more harm than good (second head clerk of the Jewish Center A. Sebestyen), further of those that saw the purpose

of their activities foremost in the selfless helping of people who were the most afflicted by the persecutions (G. Fleischmannova), and finally of soulless executors of orders, who were really capable of doing everything (K. Hochberg). Besides the Jewish Center there was also the Work Group, led by the Orthodox rabbi M. Weissmandel, but whose real leader was the Zionist G. Fleischmannova. Though Weissmandel wasn't a member of the Jewish Center, he was such a respected personage that it would be difficult to imagine rescue missions being carried out without him. The main activity of the Work Group was to save as many Jews as possible from deportation. Of those in the Work Group, O. Neumann, A. Steiner and Rabbi Weissmandel and Neumann survived. In the last phase of activity of this underground group Neumann, who also became the chairman of the Jewish Center, lived in Israel. Steiner and Rabbi Weissmandel immigrated to Canada and the USA. Weissmandel and Neumann wrote their memoirs, in which they quite justifiably asked the question if the Jewish Center and especially the Work Group hadn't remained indebted towards Jewish citizens.

24 Hechalutz

Trailblazer, pioneer, a Zionist youth group with socialistic tendencies, which overarched several smaller Zionist groups. Its main goal was emigration to Eretz Israel.

25 Catlos, Ferdinand (1895-1972)

Czechoslovak officer, Slovak general and politician. During WWI he fought in the Austro-Hungarian Army at the Russian front. Graduated from Military College in France. In March 1938 (at that time he had the rank of Lieutenant-Colonel of the General Staff) he was named General I. Class of the Slovak State and simultaneously became the Minister of National Defense. He fully participated in activities of the Slovak Army during the German-Polish War and also had a hand in the sending of Slovak soldiers to the Eastern Front after 1941. In 1944 he attempted to contact the resistance. After the liberation, he was put on trial within the scope of the retribution decree, and was jailed during the years 1945-1948. He then worked as a civil servant in Martin, and died in obscurity.

26 Jewish council

appointed by German occupying authorities to carry out Nazi orders in the Jewish communities of occupied Europe. After the establishment of the ghettos they were responsible for everything that happened within them. They controlled all institutions operating in the ghettos, the police, the employment agency, food supplies, housing, health, social work, education, religion, etc. Germans also made them responsible for selecting people for the work camps, and, in the end, choosing those to be sent to camps that were in reality death camps. It is hard to judge their actions due to the abnormal circumstances. Some believe they betrayed Jews by obeying orders, and others think they were trying to gain time and save as many people as possible.

27 Stalingrad Battle

17th July 1942 - 2nd February 1943. The South- Western and Don Fronts stopped the advance of German armies in the vicinity of Stalingrad. On 19th and 20th November 1942 the Soviet troops undertook an offensive and encircled 22 German divisions (330,000 people) and eliminated them. On 31st January 1943 the remains of the 6th German army headed by General Field Marshal Paulus

surrendered (91,000 people). The victory in the Stalingrad battle was of huge political, strategic and international significance.

28 Hlinka-Guards

Military group under the leadership of the radical wing of the Slovakian Popular Party. The radicals claimed an independent Slovakia and a fascist political and public life. The Hlinka-Guards deported brutally, and without German help, 58,000 (according to other sources 68,000) Slovak Jews between March and October 1942.

29 The Sixth Labor Battalion of Jews

The first discriminatory legal statute of the Slovak State in the army was the government decree No. 74 Sl. z., dated 24th April 1939, regarding the expulsion of Jews from public services. On 21st June 1939 a second legal statute was passed, government decree No. 150 Sl. z. regarding Jews' military responsibilities. On its basis all Jews in the army were transferred to special work formations. Decree 230/1939 Sl. z. stripped Jewish persons of rank. All stated laws were part of the racially discriminatory legal framework of the Slovak State. In 1939, 1940 and 1941 three years of Jewish draftees entered army work formations, which formed the so-called Sixth Battalion. The year 1942 did not enter, as its members were assigned to the first transports. The first mass concentration of Jewish draftees into an army work formation was on 3rd March 1941 in the town of Cemerne. On 31st May 1943 three Jewish companies were transferred to work centers of the Ministry of the Interior watched over by the Hlinka Guard. Most members were transferred to labor camps: Novaky, Sered, Kostolna and Vyhne. A large majority of them later participated in fighting during the Slovak National Uprising. (Source: Knezo Schönbrun, Bernard, Zidia v siestom robotnom prapore, In. Zidia v interakcii II., IJ UK Bratislava, 1999, pp. 63 - 80)

30 Sered labor camp

created in 1941 as a Jewish labor camp. The camp functioned until the beginning of the Slovak National Uprising, when it was dissolved. At the beginning of September 1944 its activities were renewed and deportations began. Due to the deportations, SS-Hauptsturmführer Alois Brunner was named camp commander at the end of September. Brunner was a long-time colleague of Adolf Eichmann and had already organized the deportation of French Jews in 1943. Because the camp registers were destroyed, the most trustworthy information regarding the number of deportees has been provided by witnesses who worked with prisoner records. According to this information, from September 1944 until the end of March 1945, 11 transports containing 11,532 persons were dispatched from the Sered camp. Up until the end of November 1944 the transports were destined for the Auschwitz concentration camp, later prisoners were transported to other camps in the Reich. The Sered camp was liquidated on 31st March 1945, when the last evacuation transport, destined for the Terezin ghetto, was dispatched. On this transport also departed the commander of the Sered camp, Alois Brunner.

31 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. 32 Political changes in 1969: Following the Prague Spring of 1968, which was suppressed by armies of the Soviet Union and its satellite states, a program of 'normalization' was initiated. Normalization meant the restoration of continuity with the pre-reform period and it entailed thoroughgoing political repression and the return to ideological conformity. Top levels of government, the leadership of social organizations and the party organization were purged of all reformist elements. Publishing houses and film studios were placed under new direction. Censorship was strictly imposed, and a campaign of militant atheism was organized. A new government was set up at the beginning of 1970, and, later that year, Czechoslovakia and the Soviet Union signed the Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation and Mutual Assistance, which incorporated the principle of limited sovereignty. Soviet troops remained stationed in Czechoslovakia and Soviet advisers supervised the functioning of the Ministry of Interior and the security apparatus.