Alexander Gajdos

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Mr. Alexander Gajdos is currently the president of the Karlovy Vary Jewish community. The interview took place in his office at the community.

My family background

My grandparents on my father's side lived in Nitra when my father was young. My grandfather was named Bernat Goldberger, and his wife was named Terezia Goldbergerova. Unfortunately, I don't remember anymore what my grandma's maiden name had been, and I don't even know where my grandparents were from. My grandfather died around 1935 to 1937, and my grandmother a few years before him. They're both buried in the Jewish cemetery in Nitra. I was at their funerals. Because they died while I was still small, I remember them only very faintly. My grandpa was taciturn. He always just sat with a pipe on a bench in front of the house, and just pondered. He had a dog, which always sat beside him.

In Nitra they lived in a neighborhood down below the castle. In those days there were small family bungalows there. But it wasn't the Jewish quarter. The Jewish quarter in Nitra was Parovce. My grandparents also lived in one of those bungalows. From the courtyard you walked directly into the kitchen. Besides the kitchen they had another three rooms. In one they had a bedroom, then there was one more little room and then a living room. They went into the living room, as they say, 'Once a year.' The house already had electricity and running water. They basically lived a normal life there.

None of my father's immediate family members were devout Jews. One of my father's [his father was named Heinrich Galik (changed from Goldberger)] brothers, Gyula [Julius Gal (changed from Goldberger)] owned a radio store and workshop. My father had four siblings, three brothers and one sister. His brothers were named Gyula, Rudi [Rudolf] and Jozko [Jozef], his sister Cecilia. Cecilia married a barber, Mr. Horn. But he died at the beginning of the 1930s. I don't even remember him.

I used to visit my father's parents every summer. I would basically spend the summer in Nitra. Most of the time I lived at my father's sister Cecilia's place. So I slept at my father's sister's place and for lunch I'd always go to one of the family members' place. Depending on who invited me over.

Otherwise I spent most of my time with my cousin, Alexander. We called him Sanyi; he was Cecilia's son. We used to go swimming together and so on. I only stopped going to Nitra once the war began.

I don't know what my grandparents' mother tongue was, but with me they always spoke Slovak. Besides this they of course spoke Hungarian and German. They weren't religious, nor did they lead a kosher household. But our family observed holidays. Grandpa had a general store. He had one room that was full of all sorts of things. You walked into the store right from the kitchen. On the door there was a bell that rang when someone entered. Someone would then run out of the kitchen and serve them. Otherwise I don't remember any special anecdotes about my grandparents. As a child, there was a certain distance between us. I don't even know who was my grandparents' neighbor. Later, my father didn't tell me about them either.

My mother's parents were from Trstena, on the Orava River. My grandfather was named Markus Lubovic. I can't remember my grandmother, because she died before I was born. My grandfather then remarried, but I don't remember his second wife's name anymore either. Grandpa had a bakery in Trstena. But I don't know anything else about his bakery. When I was young my grandfather had serious diabetes. Back then insulin didn't exist yet, so the disease couldn't be treated. My grandfather went almost completely blind from it. He wasn't completely blind, but almost couldn't see a thing. He used to walk with a cane. Then my parents found him an apartment in Vrutky, where he moved together with his second wife. My mother and her sister Ruzena took care of them. Because back then old people didn't get a pension, so my parents supported them. I don't remember the name of my grandfather's second wife at all. But she spoke Hungarian, while in the Orava region people spoke mainly Slovak, even the Jewish population. My grandfather also spoke German, and I think Hungarian as well. During the war they were both deported and died.

My grandfather had three daughters with his first wife. My mother, Sidy, and her sisters were named Lina and Ruzena. From his second marriage he had a son, Zoli. Lina married a barber in the town of Nowy Targ in Poland. I think he was named Löwenberg. Ruzena never married. She stayed an old maid.

I spent more time with my grandfather in Vrutky than with the other one in Nitra. But we didn't have any type of special relationship. He lived in a two-room apartment full of old furniture. From my point of view at the time, nothing much. He of course already had running water. How many Jews lived in Vrutky, that I don't know. But on the whole it had a decent-sized community, with a nice synagogue. I even had a bar mitzvah in this town. My grandparents on both sides were Neolog Jews [1], which means that the High Holidays were observed in the family, but the Sabbath less, and the kashrut not at all.

My father was named Heinrich Goldberger. He was born on 17th July 1898 in Nitra. After the war he changed his name to Galik. That was in fashion back then. He died in 1978, he was exactly 80. My father had a basic education. He worked as a traveling salesman. He supported himself this way until he went into business for himself. Later he opened his own store in Zilina. I don't know when exactly my father moved to Zilina, but he did it because of work and my mother. Because she worked for the same company as my father. It was Mendl & Son, a wholesale business. That's where my parents met and later they married, as I was on the way. My mother was born in 1900 in Trstena. I don't know when she died. She was deported and after that we didn't find out any more

about her.

Financially, I'd classify our family between poverty and the middle class. When they worked for that Mendl, they had a relatively decent salary. When my father went into business for himself, he opened a general store. He took out a bunch of loans, and then the Wall Street stock market crash came, and the depression 2 began. There wasn't any work, the executor came and that was the end. If I remember correctly, my father was the first in the region to have an electric slicer for ham and smoked meats. Unfortunately, after the stock market crash he didn't have anything to make payments with. Besides my father, my mother also worked in the store, plus another employee that did heavier work. For example he used to go get flour and worked in the warehouse.

As far as my father's political opinions go, it's hard to say. You know, when I was a child he didn't talk to me about things like that. I assume though, that he was a social democrat. I don't know it for sure, I only kind of deduced it. My father wasn't a member of any associations or anything similar that I know of. I also remember that as a young man he served as a soldier in World War I, but I don't know anything else about it. He always mentioned that he was in the war, but never told any specific stories. If we were to talk about what my father liked to do, he mainly devoted himself to business. Besides that, he was more or less a skirt- chaser, that was his hobby.

My parents spoke Hungarian amongst each other. With us children they spoke Slovak. Well, and as far as my father goes, I'd say he was a skirt-chaser. You know, he married my mother because she was expecting me. My mother was of a mild nature, you could say even introverted. She even wouldn't go out on the street by herself.

Growing up

We lived in several places in Zilina, depending on how our financial situation was declining. Every time we moved into a cheaper apartment. At first we lived downtown, near the main square; that's where I was born. Then we lived over towards the cellulose factory. Later we moved to the part of town where the power station was at the time. Finally we had to move to where the city apartments were, which is where the cheapest places to live were. From there we moved to Vrutky. I don't remember much from the first apartment. I know that there was one large room there, where I used to ride around on a tricycle. I don't remember the other rooms anymore. In the beginning we also had servants that cooked and cleaned. They lived with us until about 1937. Several of them came and went, so I don't even remember them very much. But when I was born, I even had a wet nurse. I didn't develop a close relationship with any of them. Did we have Jewish neighbors? Each time we had someone different. Because we were always moving. But they were mostly non-Jews. My parents didn't have many close friends. Well, my father had some friends, women, widows and whatnot, something like that. We'd sometimes go there, and otherwise some extra close friends, those they didn't have. I don't remember it that way.

We didn't observe holidays very strictly in our family. On Friday my mother lit candles and then most of the time we'd have roast chicken. Later, when my father already didn't have the store and he became a traveling salesman, he'd leave on Monday but would always return home on Friday. He traveled all over Slovakia. He sold flour for various mills. But he didn't go to synagogue very often, only for the High Holidays. We used to attend the big Neolog synagogue in Zilina. There were a lot of Jews living in Zilina before the war. During the High Holidays the synagogue was full, despite the fact that you had to pay for a place there, and it wasn't cheap. Everyone had to pay for

his place. We for example observed Rosh Hashanah. On that day we'd eat supper at home, and then go pray at the synagogue. Other than that I don't remember anything in particular about that evening. For Yom Kippur we'd fast, but when I found something, I pinched off a bit for myself. But I liked Yom Kippur the best of all the holidays. But mainly because I'd meet up with all my friends in the synagogue courtyard. In the back, beside the synagogue, there was a Jewish school with a big schoolyard, and we'd fool around there. Our parents would still be sitting in the synagogue. Once in a while we'd make an appearance there, and then we'd disappear again. We also more or less observed Chanukkah, mainly we'd also go to the synagogue then, but for example we didn't observe Sukkot or Purim at all. We also still observed Passover. In the evening we'd read from the Haggadah and the holiday table would be set. But the other things, like not eating bread, we didn't practice. We had matzot, that's true, but we also ate bread.

There were also Orthodox Jews 3 in town, though there were a lot less of them, and they observed everything. I also used to come into contact with Orthodox Jews. My father even sent me to the yeshivah in Zilina. This nasty little man used to teach us. But I didn't study at this school for long. You see, my mother didn't care about traditions very much any more, and at home we didn't eat kosher 4. So it was normal for her to wrap me up a bun with ham for teatime. That little man saw it, ran over to me, took me out into the courtyard and 'gave me a licking.' He told me to not show my face there anymore. That was the end of my religious upbringing. Otherwise, at that time I didn't even know what I had committed with that ham.

As I've already mentioned, my father was from Nitra. He had four siblings, Julius, who everyone called Gyula. Then there was Rudolf, called Rudi, Jozef and their sister, Cecilia. My father's oldest brother was Jozef; he ran the store after Grandpa. He and his family lived in Grandpa's house. His wife was named Malvina. They had a son, Tibor, and a daughter, Magda. Both children survived the war. Tibor moved to Ecuador and Magda to Sweden.

Gyula was about two years older than my father, which means that he was probably born in 1896. He lived in Nitra with his family. He owned a radio store, where they also repaired radios. He had two sons, Michal and Pista [a nickname for the name Stefan]. We got along fairly well. When I was in Nitra during summer vacation, I'd often visit them. We used to go swimming together, or we'd go hiking to the top of Zobor [a peak by the city of Nitra (588m above sea level), in the Tribec mountain range]. In Nitra in those days, there used to be a swimming pool below the castle. I don't know if it's still there. Maybe they've already built over it. Gyula's wife was named Vilma, nee Braunova. She was very much a lady. She came from better circles. They lived on Spitalska Street. In the building they lived in, Gyula also had his store and workshop.

My father's third brother was named Rudolf, or Rudi. He was about five years older than Father. He graduated from construction school and worked as an architect, in those days it was Mr. Architect. Rudi had two sons, Walter and Babi. Besides them, he also had a daughter. I don't remember her name anymore. She was slightly physically handicapped, she was a bit hunchbacked. But she ended up studying medicine and became a pharmacist. I don't remember his wife's name anymore. During the war they ended up in Terezin. The entire family survived the Holocaust and after the war they ran away to what today is Israel.

My father's only sister was named Cecilia. She married Mr. Horn, who had a barbershop in Nitra on Hlavna [Main] Street. They lived in an apartment above the shop that had an addition into the

courtyard. They had it on the whole nicely furnished. Unfortunately, her husband died very early on. They had one son, who was named Alexander, or Sanyi.

Only one of my father's siblings, Rudi, survived World War II. He then moved with his family to Palestine in 1946 or 1947. After several years they returned, they had a hard time dealing with the climate there. The rest of my father's siblings died during the war.

My mother had three siblings, two sisters and one half-brother. My mother's oldest sister was named Lina. She married a barber by the name of Löwenberg in the Polish town of Nowy Targ. I never even met the man. I know that they had two children that died along with Lina during the war. Only their father survived, someplace in Russia.

Another of my mother's sisters, Ruzena, also died during the war. Before the war she lived for some time with us in Zilina, and then also in Vrutky, where we'd moved. Aunt Ruzena and I got along fairly well. Which basically means that we didn't have some sort of heartfelt relationship, but neither did we quarrel. I can't say much about my mother's youngest brother, who was named Zoli. He was quite a bit older than I, so we didn't hang out together much. He died along with the others during the Holocaust.

I, Alexander Gajdos [born Goldberger], was born on 8th April 1924 in Zilina. I had my name changed at the beginning of the 1950s. Why did I pick the surname Gajdos? It really didn't even depend on me that much. I already had that name when I was in German captivity, which we'll get to. Well, and when I was changing it I had to list three names. I dictated three names, Gajdos, Gordon, and the third I don't remember, and the officials picked out Gajdos.

As a small child I attended nursery school. In our part of the country it was called 'ovoda.' I had a fairly good teacher. I even enjoyed going to that nursery school. I don't have any particular memories of the nursery school. I remember only how we were playing in the schoolyard. Then I transferred to the elementary Jewish school in Zilina. It had five grades - from Grade 1 to Grade 5. It was attended by both boys and girls, together. A fair number of Christian children went there, too, because it was a better school than the others. I particularly didn't like math and German. My favorite subject in school was gym. We had one excellent teacher that knew how to handle us. We really like him a lot. Of course, we exercised a lot, and mainly played handball. It was simple, and all we needed were two goals in the schoolyard. Banged-up hands and legs of course belonged to the game. Our gym teacher was named Braun. We also went on short trips in the region around the town, especially to Duben and to nearby castles.

In the Jewish school we of course also had to go to Judaism class. Not going, that was impossible. Our attitude to religious upbringing amounted to us always fooling around on the rabbi. I don't remember his name anymore. He was an old man, and we used to do terrible things to him. For example, I remember that we had a bell, and halfway through the class we rang it, and someone exclaimed: 'it rang.' To which he said, 'if it rang, it rang' and class was over. In the hallway we ran into the principal, who was a huge man with a cane, and he asked us where we were going. We told him that the rabbi had said that the bell had rung. He said: 'But it couldn't have rung yet.'

The principal also used physical punishment. For example, this one slower boy used to be in our class, and he'd always do something to the girls. For example when they were exercising, he'd steal their clothes from the changing room, and so on. Outside of school we had this group of

Jewish boys, we went everywhere together and spent a lot of time together. There were about five of us. Besides us there was one more group of Jewish boys, and so we used to fight each other, throwing stones and so on. We were about ten or eleven years old.

In Vrutky I also prepared for my bar mitzvah ceremony. My father arranged tutoring for me with one rabbi. He was a young person of shorter stature. He was from Czechia, and belonged to the Neologs. He taught me. The main thing was for me to learn the text that I was to read during the ceremony. Nothing else was required of me there. Well, up to the bar mitzvah I somehow learned it. The bar mitzvah itself took place in the synagogue in Vrutky. They summoned me to the Torah, I read some text, and that was all. I don't remember there being a party at home, and neither do I remember whether I got some presents on that occasion.

When I was 14, I began feeling anti-Jewish moods. I attended five grades of Jewish elementary school, and then got into high school 5. They expelled me from high school in third year, after that I wasn't allowed to attend school in Zilina anymore. But otherwise nothing special was going on, I just couldn't go to school. We weren't discriminated against in some way. Just some snot-nosed kids in the street would yell: 'Poo, smelly Jew!' at us, but that wasn't anything new.

It was right at that time that we were moving from Zilina to Vrutky, where I entered the fourth year of council school. Actually, they didn't accept me into school right in Vrutky. I had to commute by train every day to the nearby town of Varin. I was the only Jew there. Basically no one paid any attention to me. All the teachers were in the Hlinka Guard 6, even the principal, for them it was like I didn't even exist. I used to sit in a desk in the first row, but they didn't call on me even once, despite this I got all C's on my report card. This was in 1939. I got along well with my classmates, that wasn't a problem. There were also a couple of Czechs among them, who hadn't been chased 7 out of Slovakia. I was friends particularly with those that commuted with me. There were four of us that used to take the train from Vrutky to Varin, and back in the evening.

During the war

Besides me, my parents also had my sister Viera. She was born in Zilina in 1927. We got along well, but not so much that we'd go about together outside of home. Each of us had his own friends. Unfortunately, my sister didn't survive the war. She went to the camp together with our mother, but we don't know at all where they disappeared. Despite us searching for them, their trail disappeared. During the war they interned our whole family in the collection camp in Zilina in 1942, and we were there up until the Slovak National Uprising 8 broke out in 1944. During that time, between 1942 and 1944, when no transports were going 9, we worked in that Zilina camp.

During that time, life in the camp was on the whole good. We used to go work on the construction of a sports stadium in Zilina. My father also worked there. The stadium was located near the Vah River. The work wasn't all that heavy. The guards, Guardists, would lead us there from the camp. They'd then go sit inside somewhere, or all go their separate ways to go drink beer. There was one person there that was in charge of us, and he was a decent guy. My mother worked in the camp kitchen, and my sister didn't do anything.

Life during that time was really quite bearable. I even used to go into town. I didn't even wear a star 10, I never ever had one. I never even heard of a case where someone would have ratted on someone for that. Those of us that were from the Zilina camp didn't wear stars. In the camp I lived

with another five guys. Here and there someone ran away, but escapes weren't very common. We learned about what was happening in Poland from the railway employees that were accompanying the transports to the Polish border. The railroaders brought us the news of the crematoria in Auschwitz. I think that it was through them that the news spread.

During the uprising my father, mother and sister hid in the forests around Rajecke Teplice. They then caught them all there. They took my father somewhere else than my mother and sister, and so he managed to survive. My father got into Sachsenhausen 11 and then into Buchenwald 12. Well, and my mother and sister were sent to the women's camp in Ravensbrück 13, and that's where their trail disappeared. During the uprising I joined the army. In Zilina there was an army garrison, and that entire garrison retreated towards Martin, to Strecno. Before the war I'd been a member of the Hashomer Hatzair 14 youth movement, but that's not why I joined the army. A person went there, where there was a chance of survival.

We were part of some defenses in Strecno. We dug trenches, and had the task of holding the reserve line. Of course we weren't just passive observers. Once we got orders to attack on a railway line with a tunnel. When we were drawing near, suddenly a Tiger [a German tank, mass-produced from 1942] appeared and began firing at us. We retreated into some trenches. There were French partisans with us there, who'd been in captivity in Slovakia, and during the uprising had managed to escape. I don't know anything else about them; I didn't meet up with them very much. There were only two Jews in our unit, my distant cousin Elemer Diamant and I. Unfortunately, I don't know whether he survived the war, because afterwards our paths diverged.

One time we were attacking some Germans hidden in some woods. There, some German began firing at me. Unfortunately, he also hit me. He shot me in the shoulder, luckily the bullet passed through and exited out the other side. It was a relatively serious injury, but they got me through it. First they dragged me away from where the bullet had struck me. They were dragging me along the ground, and in a dangerous spot they ran onto the road with me. After some time an ambulance came for me, and took me to the hospital in Martin. I was there for one day, because the Germans had broken through the front, and shells were falling on the hospital. They quickly evacuated us to the town of Sliac.

The territory held by the rebels was by then already very small. Basically it was only around the towns of Banska Bystrica, Sliac and Brezno. Everything else was either occupied or surrounded. In Sliac they asked me if I was able to walk. Because I could walk, they discharged me from the hospital. I also met Elemer there, because he was also in the hospital. During fighting in the town of Vrutky he'd gotten into some skirmish and ended up with shellshock. They discharged the both of us at almost the same time. I set out for the partisan headquarters, and he said that he wouldn't go there, that he'd think of something else to do. So we parted ways, and since then we never met up again. From the hospital I went to Banska Bystrica, to the headquarters. There they accepted me into the guard detachment. I stood guard in front of the headquarters on the main square in Banska Bystrica.

The Germans were pushing on into Banska Bystrica as well. People were being evacuated into the mountains, Stare Hory [mountain town in the Starohorska Valley, Banska Bystrica district], Donovaly [mountain town located between the Velka Fatra and Starohorske Vrchy mountain ranges], Kozi Chrbat [today a forest reservation located on the northern side of the Low Tatras]

and so on all the way beyond Chabenec [Chabenec (1955 m): a monumental mountain massif in the Low Tatras]. Chabenec is where for example Sverma 15 froze to death. At that time many of us got dysentery. They put up all of us that got it separately in this one zemlyanka [an underground shelter, usually military]. But a local citizen sent us away from there with the words: 'You can't stay here, we can't feed you, we don't even have anything for ourselves!' They told us that they'd take us to the edge of the forest where there were villages, and that we'd have to scrounge something up from the locals. At that time I'd gotten to know this one Czech from Ostrava. I unfortunately don't remember his name anymore. From that time onwards he and I slugged it out together. They led us to the edge of the forest, and told us to disperse. There they announced to us that we were still on evidence as partisans in that detachment, whose name I don't remember anymore. They also told us that if we betrayed something, they'd come and find us.

This all took place at the end of November and beginning of December 1944. My Czech friend and I found a fairly decent place behind some hill, and dug us a bunker. The closest village was about three hours' walk away from there. So we said to ourselves that we'd stay there, and each evening we'd go to the village to beg for some food and supplies. So that if a lot of snow fell, we wouldn't starve to death. Luckily at that time it wasn't snowing yet, because we were somewhere in the Low Tatras [an 80 km long mountain range in Slovakia]. In one place they'd give us some beans, someplace else potatoes, and so on. Whenever possible, we also took some supplies. When we had enough supplies, we said, 'All right, and now we'll go have something to eat one last time!'

So we went for one last meal. We knocked on the door at one house, and a very decent farmwoman opened the door. She said, 'Oh, you poor boys!' Right away she gave us some supper. Then she noticed our clothes, and so with the words, 'Why, you're being eaten by lice, I'll wash them for you,' she had us undress and put us into bed, under feather duvets! We told her to wake us up once dawn started breaking. To which she replied, 'Of course, of course.' Well, and suddenly a hubbub in the village. Germans yelling. Our things were already washed and dried, and we quickly dressed. We said to her, 'Why didn't you wake us up?' - 'It seemed a shame, you were sleeping so soundly.'

We ran out of the house and right on the square, one sentry with a machine gun, at the other end another sentry with a machine gun. The Germans were already making the rounds from house to house. So we ran out the back. We skirted the square and got onto a path. We were already out of the village. Suddenly two Germans appeared in front of us. The idiots had to be walking right along that path, and we two ragged civilians were walking right towards them. We'd already passed them, we were already about ten steps apart, and suddenly they stopped. Something seemed suspicious to them, and one of them yelled out: 'Hey, partisan!' So they captured us. They gathered us all in the square in the middle of the village. So that we wouldn't be walking empty-handed, they loaded each one of us up with ammunition. So we had something to carry through the snow that had fallen in the meantime.

Eventually they put us on a train and took us to a prison in Banska Bystrica. We were there from the beginning of December until the end of February. And we vegetated there in that jail for those two, three months. Once in some hubbub, they'd chase someone out to Kremnicka 16. They would chase them out there with dogs, machine guns. Then for a week it would be quiet. Then they'd round them up again, and go shoot them all again. Well, and we were still vegetating in that room. There was one Ukrainian there, I, plus two more Jews. They didn't know for sure that we were Jews,

but thought we were.

At the end of February, they suddenly led us out, and some high-ranking Slovak came over. They were Slovaks. We were guarded by Slovak prison guards. He was shaking his head, that how was it possible that we were still there. He told us, 'The ones that were here before you, they've all been killed in Kremnicka!' They had somehow forgotten about our room. So they opened the door and asked us, 'what are you doing here? You're not supposed to be here anymore!' Well, and we said, 'We're not supposed to be here?' According to the paperwork, the entire jail was supposed to be empty. The files were already being destroyed, as the liberation army was already conquering nearby Brezno, and they already wanted to also evacuate Banska Bystrica.

So they made a note of us and left, so we had another week's peace. Then someone different came, and again made a note of us. Well, about three or four days later, a member of the SS came, that he was going to take us to be interrogated. Across the street was the Banska Bystrica courthouse, and that's where they had their headquarters. So they led us there, into a hallway. Then another one came, and asked our names. I told him Gajdos, born in Zilina. He wrote it down and left.

In a little while some high-ranking officer came, a Sudeten German 17, and said in Czech, 'I'm going to give you your release papers now. Go home. Don't you dare go east! Because if our soldiers see you there in those rags, they'll shoot you.' So we got our papers and left. My Czech friend and I were wondering: 'What are we going to do?' Of course we headed east. Right in the first village outside of Banska Bystrica one man stopped us. We showed him our papers, that we'd just been set free, and that we needed to get to a partisan unit. 'All right,' he said, 'here's some supper, you'll get some sleep and early in the morning I'll take you to the main road and show you where you should go.'

Were those people to be trusted? What else could we do? He really did look very trustworthy. In the morning he took us to the road and showed us the way. We were supposed to go to the town of Priechod, where there were Hungarian units that had broken away from the Germans. So we went in that direction. After some time my friend needed to take a crap. So he went over onto some field, looked around and saw some figure in white, standing there and looking at us. We took off running. We were running through an open field. When we stopped, thinking we were far enough away, we saw a group of German soldiers in front of us. They saw us! We couldn't do anything else but walk towards them.

Of course, they took us prisoner and led us off to some village. They presented us to the commander, with the words that they'd caught us and that we're either partisans or bandits, and that we should be disposed of. The commander asked us if we spoke German. Because I remembered a bit from school, I told him that we'd just been released. I showed him our papers. He then began arguing with another soldier, whether they should kill us or not. The soldier was for killing us, the commander against. Finally the commander gave the order that that night we'd sleep in the same room with him. When we were alone with him, he said to us in German, 'You've got to sleep with me, because he's a Nazi, and I can't vouch for him.'

The next day he sent us with a soldier back to Banska Bystrica, to make sure that they'd actually released us. That person, the Sudeten German who'd issued us the papers, spotted us. He came over to us and began speaking Czech so that our escort wouldn't understand. 'You two, what did I

tell you, that you're supposed to go straight west and that you're not supposed to wander around!' Of course, the German soldier didn't understand anything, and reported that we were bandits and that we had false papers. He said to him, 'You're saying that my signature is fake?' He gave him what for! We got it, too: 'What're you gawking at, get lost right now, if they bring you back once more, that's the end!' So we ran out again. The German solder ran out behind us, sat in the car and quickly 'ran' away.

We again set out in the same direction as the day before, eventually we more or less recognized it. The second time around, we managed to get to the village of Priechod. Right away sentries stopped us. They asked us what we wanted there. We said that we were going to the partisans. There some guy in civilian clothing took charge of us. He spoke both Slovak and Hungarian. We told him that we'd like to join some partisan unit. All right, but have some supper first. The Hungarians had it good, they had sweet poppy-seed buns. So we stuffed ourselves full there!

The territory we were on was free, because a Hungarian army unit had broken off from the Germans. Finally talk came around to where we'd sleep. They told us that up above the village there was a gamekeeper's lodge with a partisan unit. There were a few partisans and Hungarians there. We moved ourselves over to the lodge. There we got another supper, again some sweet cakes and goodies. We were each issued a green Czechoslovak uniform and a rifle. Finally we went off to sleep. There were about fifty, sixty of us there. In the morning, around 5am, we were woken up by yelling and shooting.

In the morning, the village of Priechod had been surrounded by the Germans. They'd used a ruse. As there were Hungarian soldiers there, the Germans sent ahead some other Hungarian soldiers that were on their side. Thus they managed to get to the sentries, because they replied to their challenge in Hungarian. So they disarmed the sentries and entered the village. As people ran out the houses, the Germans shot them straight off, like rabbits. They gathered up part of the men and led them off to the edge of the village under a steep hill. They ordered them to run. As they were running, they shot them all. Only one German boy managed to escape, he might have been about 16 or 17. Earlier, this boy had joined the partisans. He was the only man who managed to survive. Finally the Germans torched the village. Some of the women had survived, and they then remained and lived in that pillaged village.

Eventually we learned that the traitor had been the man who'd taken charge of us after our arrival in the village, and who'd fed us the cakes. If he wouldn't have sent us up to the gamekeeper's lodge to the partisans, I wouldn't be here today. He de facto saved us. His role had been to gather supplies and at the same time he worked as a German agent. In the end the Russians caught and executed him. We stayed in the lodge for some time. From there we used to go on patrols to the surrounding villages, for example to the village of Podkonice and so on. But the Germans were everywhere. We just heard snow crunching beside us. Because their patrols would go to the edge of the villages, to the forest, and would then return. Despite the fact that they were only a few steps away from us, we couldn't fight them. It would have been hopeless for us. We knew that it was hopeless.

The Germans' main road of retreat led through Podkonice, in the direction of Ruzomberok. We gradually moved from the gamekeeper's lodge to bunkers in the forest, where we posted sentries. At the end of February, beginning of March we continued through Chabenec and the Low Tatras to

Brezno. Brezno had already been liberated. There were Romanian soldiers there. There they split us up. The Hungarian soldiers that had been with us went down south. Czechs and Slovaks marched in the direction of Poprad. On foot from Brezno to Poprad [the traveling distance between the towns of Brezno and Poprad is around 90 km]!

After arriving in Poprad I reported to the First Czechoslovak Army Corps. There I was accepted into junior officers' school. I got a nice uniform, a weapon and served there until June 1945. I graduated from junior officers' school in the army corps with the rank of lance corporal. Since then I've worked my way up to lieutenant colonel in the Czechoslovak Army. After finishing school I left with the other soldiers, as part of our training, on foot from Poprad to Martin [the traveling distance between the towns of Poprad and Martin is about 130 km]. We walked for three or four days. In Martin we met President Benes 18, who'd come from Kosice 19. There we boarded some vehicles and they sent us as reserves to Moravia, where there was still fighting going on. But the soldiers up ahead of us always managed to break through the front, and so we never participated in direct fighting. In this way we followed the front all the way to Prague.

In Prague, we as soldiers used to go on 'maneuvers.' We'd for example train for fighting in the streets of the city. It was up on Bila Hora [White Mountain]. Grannies were running out in gas masks and shrieking, 'Jesus Mary, the Germans are back.' They didn't know that they were just exercises, and that we were only using blanks. There was noise in the streets and the so the grannies wanted to get into the shelters. We told them: 'Granny, it's only make-believe, it's not real.' At the end of June they sent us back to Slovakia, to the army column in Nitra, from where they discharged me into civilian life.

During my stay in Prague I contacted the former mayor of Vrutky. He'd been the deputy of the Hlinka Guard commander in the town, but at the same time our protector and family friend. He told me that my father had returned and was living in Zilina. So that's how I knew about it. While I was in Nitra I stayed with my father's brother, Rudi. He survived the war in Terezin 20. I slept at his place on an ironing board. After several days I set out on a freight wagon from Nitra to Zilina.

In Zilina I met up with my father, who already had his own place rented. We used to go to his girlfriends' for dinners. One time to one's place, then to another one's... We didn't manage to get back absolutely any of our property. To make ends meet, I began working as a plumber. Despite my not having a trade certificate, I got a job with one company in Zilina. The owner was a Jew, too.

Post-war

In the postwar period, the functioning of the Jewish community in the town was renewed as well. But the Jewish community's numbers were continually declining. My father moved to Karlovy Vary 21 still in the year 1945. He decided to do so because of his friend, Mrs. Katzova. She had friends in Karlovy Vary, the Kleinman family. My father came here imagining that he'd rent a guesthouse. Basically everyone left for Karlovy Vary imagining that they'd do well. I joined them at the beginning of the spring of 1946. I lived with my father. After all, we got along well. My father got a job in a spa. First he was in the oxygen shop, where they filled oxygen tanks. Then he became an accommodation officer at the head office. He stayed there until retirement. As a pensioner he worked as an inspector in the colonnade. Basically he walked around there all day, from morning to evening, and watched over things.

During that time I met my first, today already deceased wife. Her maiden name was Irena Rothova. She was born in 1926 in the town of Kajdanove in Subcarpathian Ruthenia 22. Kajdanove belonged to the Mukacevo district. She was from a devout family, but after the war she wasn't that devout any more. After the war she returned to Subcarpathian Ruthenia. She found out that all of her girlfriends that had survived the war had dispersed all over the world. One of her mother's brothers lived in Karlovy Vary. As luck would have it, it was Mr. Kleinman that my future wife came to stay with. I met her at my father's friend's, Mrs. Katzova's. I came to her place for supper, and my future wife was there, too. Mrs. Katzova and Mrs. Kleinmannova were friends. So we met 'by chance.' We had a Jewish wedding, under the chuppah, in Karlovy Vary, in 1946. But the officials there didn't count that as an official wedding. We had a civil wedding in the fall of 1948. We celebrated our wedding, the Jewish one, at the Kleinmans'. About 20 people gathered there.

My wife survived the war in Auschwitz, from there she got to some factory and finally ended up in Terezin. Her parents died in Auschwitz. Besides her parents, she also had two brothers. Both survived the war, and moved away, to Israel. They were named Imre Roth and Bela Roth. I later met Imre in Karlovy Vary. He was here two or three times. I haven't met his brother. My wife met up with him someplace in Budapest. After my wife died I lost contact with them. But I think that they're not alive anymore either. My wife spoke Hungarian and Yiddish, and of course Czech. I speak Czech and Slovak, and can also get by in Hungarian and German. After the war we observed the high holidays. We didn't observe the Sabbath very much, only my wife in the beginning lit candles, later not even that. We also celebrated Passover. My wife would prepare Passover supper, soup with matzah balls.

After World War II, the activity of the Jewish community in Karlovy Vary was renewed as well. After all, there were enough Jews here. But in time many of them moved away. The left mainly for Israel and America. The ones that stayed here always quarreled amongst each other. In the end, just like in all communities. There was of course also a prayer hall here, which today no longer exists. The community also had a rabbi and a shammash. But the rabbi emigrated. We didn't participate very much in the town's Jewish life. A couple of times a year, my wife and I would go to the prayer hall, mainly for Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. The boys didn't go with us.

I personally viewed the creation of the state of Israel as a positive thing. I even wouldn't have objected if my wife and I had moved there. During totalitarian times, she was there to visit her brothers. The first time was in 1965, I think. I told her, 'We'll move.' Her answer was, 'Not for anything. I've seen it there, and I know what it's like. I'm not going there!' Her younger brother, Bela, who lived in Beer Sheva, was doing quite well. He had a company that transported sand to construction sites. Her older brother, Imre, lived in Natanya. He had a furniture store. Once in a while he'd go bankrupt, then he'd get it back together, again and again. Both her brothers had families. As far as religion goes, neither of them was religious.

Irenka worked as a seamstress. For long years she sewed uniforms as well as for friends at home. Basically she was always sewing. After I arrived in Karlovy Vary, I worked as a caretaker for the company Czechoslovak Hotels. I used to go around hotels fixing taps and similar things. Well, and then I got the position of district secretary for culture for the KSC 23. I was a member of the Party since 1945. Despite the fact that I entered it with my father, he used to say to me, 'You'll never be a Communist.' He used to say that to me because I never believed the Communists. Gradually the Slansky trials 24 began. But basically they didn't affect me at all.

I looked upon the events of 1968 25 as being positive. At that time I was working in a national enterprise, and was the chairman of the company union council. Basically, in 1968 in Karlovy Vary there was a conference held regarding the Party's direction. At this conference, certain members of the district that had a new way of thinking stood up and slammed the district Communist Party secretary. At that time I was in the electoral commission, and we managed to elect new people to Party functions, which later of course worked against me. But I believed that we were doing the right thing. In the end they criticized me for participating in that conference. Things went so far that in 1970 they kicked me out of the Party 26. Before that, the boys from the StB came to see me. They told me that they didn't want anything from me, only for me to... I told them that I wouldn't rat on anyone. As chairman of the company council I had always tried for everything to be fair, and I didn't stray from that. Later I got a job as a construction technician. I drove around to construction sites in the area, for example Prague, Chomutov, Cheb, As, basically the whole region. There wasn't a lot of free time.

In Karlovy Vary we initially lived in a small, cold and damp ground-floor apartment. That was at the beginning of the 1950s. Eventually our two sons were born. Milan in 1953, and Roman in 1956. We tried to raise our sons to be decent people. They weren't circumcised; my wife wouldn't allow it due to past experiences. She said that she didn't want to ruin their lives... We of course didn't keep their origin a secret from them, and they knew about everything.

In time we also got a new, beautiful and sunny apartment on Vitezna Street. We also used to go on vacations together. Back then you couldn't go to the West. You couldn't get a permit to go there. We used to go as a family to Bulgaria. My wife had a lot of girlfriends, and I also had one colleague from work with whom I got along well. We spent a lot of time together outside of work as well. We used to get together at our place, or at theirs. Unfortunately, he's also since died. My wife and I also used to go with the children on various camping trips. Irenka also used to visit spas. Mainly Frantiskove Lazne and around Pisek. I of course always took her there and then would come back for her, so that's about all I got from those spas.

After the war, my father also got married. He married a woman by the name of Eda Kleinova. She was from Subcarpathian Ruthenia. Edina's sister lived in Prague with her husband. The four of them decided to buy a house in Prague together. My father and his wife lived upstairs, and his brother-in-law and his wife lived downstairs. We of course used to visit them, about two or three times a year. My father died in Prague in 1978. His second wife died as well, about ten years after my father's death.

Irenka had a stroke at the beginning of the 1990s. Half her body was then paralyzed. As if that wasn't enough, she also got pneumonia. She died of it in 1994. We buried her at the Jewish cemetery in Karlovy Vary. In the meantime, our sons grew up. Milan lives in the town of Tachov. It's about 60 kilometers from Karlovy Vary. He's an electrician by trade. But initially he worked in Tachov feeding cattle, because they granted him an apartment on the condition that he works there. Roman graduated from civil engineering in Prague. After finishing his studies he stayed in Karlovy Vary. His office is right next door to the Jewish community. He designs buildings, and is doing quite well. But he's never gotten married. He spends entire weeks in his office, weekends, too, and goes home for supper around 10pm. Milan married a non-Jewish girl, who already had a son. Together they've had another boy. Both their children are already grown up, though.

About five years ago, I went to visit Israel. It was with a tour group. Life there was like I had imagined it. Busy streets, cafés. The roads there are top-notch. Outside of town they were all lit up, which you won't find here. I said to myself that it's quite good. As far as standard of living goes, that I don't know. I wasn't there that long to be able to judge. What surprised me? I happened to be in Natanya during Sabbath. I was expecting that on Saturday everything would be quiet. In the morning I got up, went to the window, and everywhere there were traffic jams. There were as many cars as during a weekday. The beaches were also full, and the streets were constantly busy.

At the turn of the millennium I met my second wife, Miluska. She was working in the grocery store where I used to go shopping. So we were always smiling at each other, until once she ran out after me, that she's got two tickets to the theater. She asked me whether I wouldn't go with her. At that moment I was shocked. I've got to say that I more or less liked her. I answered that I can't say right away, but that I'll check if I'm free at that time and get back to her. At that time I was already the head of the Jewish community in Karlovy Vary. I of course immediately ran to buy a suit, and then I returned to the store and said, 'Yes, let's go to the theater.' It ended up with us getting married. Miluska isn't Jewish. We had a civil wedding. With my son Roman, she became friends right away. In the beginning Milan was a little reserved, but then it was fine. Miluska has three sons and seven grandchildren from her first marriage. So now we're a fairly big family. As far as holidays go, now we don't observe anything, because she even abolished the Christmas tree that my previous wife and I used to have at home. In the beginning we used to go to the swimming pool together, and now mostly out in the garden.

For several years I was on the board of the Jewish community in Karlovy Vary. At one time I was vice president. The president of the community at that time didn't meet the expectations of the rest of the members. According to them, he was arrogant. For example, at Passover he didn't want to give matzot to someone because he didn't come to the community often enough, and so on. He locked up the cemetery, and people had to go to him for the key. But he didn't want to lend the key out to everyone. He was simply not liked. Finally, at one annual meeting Mr. Gubic spoke up, that the functions of religious leader of the community and that of the community president should be separated. Finally they voted that the former president would stay as the community's spiritual leader, and they elected me president. This was about seven years ago.

My role is to take care of the community's property. Religious matters are taken care of by Rabbi Koci and the shammash, Rubin. They take care of the sphere or religion. As time passes, the community has less and less active members. There's about ten of them. There are seven of us on the board; about those you can say that they're more or less active. There are about 98 members in total. Not all of them are right in Karlovy Vary. We also have members in surrounding towns, like for example Sokolov and Jachymov. The Jewish community has its own prayer hall, where people meet every Friday and Saturday to pray. Sometimes they don't have a minyan, there are only five or six. But Karlovy Vary is a spa town, with many guests, Jewish ones, too. So it's nothing exceptional for even twenty men to gather here. Some of the spa guests that have already been here several times automatically also come to the prayer hall. We also observe the high holidays. For Sukkot we also put up a sukkah in the courtyard of the community building.

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 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 it's feet, but during this year newer bank crises unfolded: in one month, 325 banks went under. Toward the end of 1930, the crisis spread to Europe: in May of 1931, the Viennese Creditanstalt collapsed (and with it's recall of outstanding loans, took Austrian heavy industry with it). In July, a bank crisis erupted in Germany, by September in England, as well. In Germany, in 1931, more than 19,000 firms closed down. Though in France the banking system withstood the confusion, industrial production and volume of exports tapered off seriously. The agricultural countries of Central Europe were primarily shaken up by the decrease of export revenues, which was followed by a serious agricultural crisis. Romanian export revenues dropped by 73 percent, Poland's by 56 percent. In 1933 in Hungary, debts in the agricultural sphere reached 2.2 billion Pengoes. Compared to the industrial production of 1929, it fell 76 percent in 1932 and 88 percent in 1933. Agricultural unemployment levels, already causing serious concerns, swelled immensely to levels, estimated at the time to be in the hundreds of thousands. In industry the scale of unemployment was 30 percent (about 250,000 people).

3 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).

4 Kashrut in eating habits

Kashrut means ritual behavior. A term indicating the religious validity of some object or article according to Jewish law, mainly in the case of foodstuffs. Biblical law dictates which living creatures are allowed to be eaten. The use of blood is strictly forbidden. The method of slaughter is prescribed, the so-called shechitah. The main rule of kashrut is the prohibition of eating dairy and meat products at the same time, even when they weren't cooked together. The time interval between eating foods differs. On the territory of Slovakia six hours must pass between the eating of a meat and dairy product. In the opposite case, when a dairy product is eaten first and then a meat product, the time interval is different. In some Jewish communities it is sufficient to wash out one's mouth with water. The longest time interval was three hours - for example in Orthodox communities in Southwestern Slovakia.

5 People's and Public schools in Czechoslovakia

In the 18th century the state intervened in the evolution of schools - in 1877 Empress Maria Theresa issued the Ratio Educationis decree, which reformed all levels of education. After the passing of a law regarding six years of compulsory school attendance in 1868, people's schools were fundamentally changed, and could now also be secular. During the First Czechoslovak Republic, the Small School Law of 1922 increased compulsory school attendance to eight years. The lower grades of people's schools were public schools (four years) and the higher grades were council schools. A council school was a general education school for youth between the ages of 10 and 15. Council schools were created in the last quarter of the 19th century as having 4 years, and were usually state-run. Their curriculum was dominated by natural sciences with a practical orientation towards trade and business. During the First Czechoslovak Republic they became 3-year with a 1-year course. After 1945 their curriculum was merged with that of lower gymnasium. After 1948 they disappeared, because all schools were nationalized.

6 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.

7 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.

8 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.

9 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)

10 Yellow star in Slovakia

On 18th September 1941 an order passed by the Slovakian Minister of the Interior required all Jews to wear a clearly visible yellow star, at least 6 cm in diameter, on the left side of their clothing. After 20th October 1941 only stars issued by the Jewish Center were permitted. Children under the age of six, Jews married to non-Jews and their children if not of Jewish religion, were exempt, as well as those who had converted before 10th September 1941. Further exemptions were given to Jews who filled certain posts (civil servants, industrial executives, leaders of institutions and funds) and to those receiving reprieve from the state president. Exempted Jews were certified at the relevant constabulary authority. The order was valid from 22nd September 1941.

11 Sachsenhausen

Concentration camp in Germany, operating between 1936 and April 1945. It was named after the Sachsenhausen quarter, part of the town of Oranienburg. It is estimated that some 200,000 prisoners passed through Sachsenhausen and that 30,000 perished there. That number does not include the Soviet prisoners of war who were exterminated immediately upon arrival at the camp, as they were never even registered on the camp's lists. The number also does not account for those prisoners who died on the way to the camp, while being transferred elsewhere, or during the camp's evacuation. Sachsenhausen was liberated by Soviet troops on 27th April, 1945. They found only 3,000 prisoners who had been too ill to leave on the death march. (Source: Rozett R. - Spector S.: Encyclopedia of the Holocaust, Facts on File, G.G. The Jerusalem Publishing House Ltd. 2000, pg. 396 - 398)

12 Buchenwald

One of the largest concentration camps in Germany, located five miles north of the city of Weimar. It was founded on 16th July, 1937 and liberated on 11th April, 1945. During its existence 238,980 prisoners from 30 countries passed through Buchenwald. Of those, 43,045 were killed.

13 Ravensbrück

Concentration camp for women near Fürstenberg, 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 18th May 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 existence 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 30th April 1945, those who survived the camp and death march, were liberated by the Soviet armies.

14 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.

15 Sverma, Jan (1901-1944)

Czechoslovak communist politician and journalist; leader of the Czechoslovak Communist Party (KSC). From 1939- 1940 he led the international bureau of the KSC in Paris. After France's defeat he left for the Soviet Union. During the Slovak National Uprising he was sent to Slovakia as the representative of the KSC leadership in Moscow in September 1944. After the rebels' retreat he died during the crossing of the Chabenec Mountain on 10th November 1944.

16 Kremnicka

From 5th November 1944 to 5th March 1945, German fascists and their Slovak henchmen brutally murdered 747 people in Kremnicka: 478 men, 211 women and 58 children. It is the largest mass grave from the time of World War II in Slovakia. Among the executed were members of 15 nations, of this more than 400 Jews (372 identified). The victims were captured rebel soldiers, partisans, illegal workers, part of the members of the American and British military mission, and primarily racially persecuted citizens.

17 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.

18 Benes, Edvard (1884-1948)

Czechoslovak politician and president from 1935-38 and 1946-48. He was a follower of T. G. Masaryk, the first president of Czechoslovakia, and the idea of Czechoslovakism, and later Masaryk's right-hand man. After World War I he represented Czechoslovakia at the Paris Peace Conference. He was Foreign Minister (1918-1935) and Prime Minister (1921-1922) of the new Czechoslovak state and became president after Masaryk retired in 1935. The Czechoslovak alliance with France and the creation of the Little Entente (Czechoslovak, Romanian and Yugoslav alliance against Hungarian revisionism and the restoration of the Habsburgs) were essentially his work. After the dismemberment of Czechoslovakia by the Munich Pact (1938) he resigned and went into exile. Returning to Prague in 1945, he was confirmed in office and was reelected president in 1946. After the communist coup in February 1948 he resigned in June on the grounds of illness, refusing to sign the new constitution.

19 Czechoslovak Provisional Government in Kosice

Formed on 4th April 1945. "National committees" took over the administration of towns as the Germans were expelled under the supervision of the Red Army. On 5th May a national uprising began spontaneously in Prague, and the newly formed Czech National Council (Ceska narodni rada) almost immediately assumed leadership.

20 Terezin/Theresienstadt

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

21 Karlovy Vary (German name

Karlsbad): The most famous Bohemian spa, named after Bohemian King Charles (Karel) IV, who allegedly found the springs during a hunting expedition in 1358. It was one of the most popular resorts among the royalty and aristocracy in Europe for centuries.

22 Subcarpathian Ruthenia

Is found in the region where the Carpathian Mountains meet the Central Dnieper Lowlands. Its larger towns are Beregovo, Mukacevo and Hust. Up until the World War I the region belonged to the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, but in the year 1919, according to the St. Germain peace treaty, was made a part of Czechoslovakia. Exact statistics regarding ethnic and linguistic composition of the population aren't available. Between the two World Wars Ruthenia's inhabitants included Hungarians, Ruthenians, Russians, Ukrainians, Czechs and Slovaks, plus numerous Jewish and

Gypsy communities. The first Vienna Decision (1938) gave Hungary that part of Ruthenia inhabited by Hungarians. The remainder of the region gained autonomy within Czechoslovakia, and was occupied by Hungarian troops. In 1944 the Soviet Army and local resistance units took power in Ruthenia. According to an agreement dated 29th June 1945, Czechoslovakia ceded the region to the Soviet Union. Up until 1991 it was a part of the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic. After Ukraine declared its independence, it became one of the country's administrative regions.

23 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.

24 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.

25 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.

26 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.