Chava Pressburger

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Prague
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Interviewer: Pavla Neuner
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Mrs. Chava Pressburger lives in both Israel and the Czech Republic. It was in Prague, in her cozy and tastefully furnished apartment, where the interview took place. Mrs. Pressburger impressed me as a very educated and cultured woman and works as an artist. I met her for the first time at the end of 2004 in a Prague bookstore, where she was signing a newly published book of diaries of her brother, Petr Ginz. I was immediately captivated by the book's cover, which she designed.

Family background

I unfortunately didn't know either of my grandfathers; they died before I was born. My grandfather on my father's side was named Josef Gunz, and was born in 1857 in Barchovice. According to his birth certificate, he was circumcised at birth. His father was named Filip Gunz and was a merchant, his mother was Estera, nee Pickova, and came from Lesna. Later, grandpa 'Czechified' his name, and changed the 'u' with an umlaut to an 'i'. So my father's last name was already Ginz. Grandma was named Berta, nee Stastna. She was born in 1866 in central Bohemia. From my grandfather's birth certificate, it's obvious that my grandparents and their parents were merchants. I don't know how religious they were, and how much they observed Jewish customs, but I imagine that Jews in those days were all very religious.

My grandparents lived in Zdanice, near Prague. In the beginning my grandpa was a teacher, but then, I don't know at what point in his life, he began to deal in antiques. He opened an antique store, at first in Kostelec nad Cernymi Lesy, and then he moved with his family to Prague, and opened an antique store on Jungmannovo Namesti [Jungmann Square] in Prague. According to various letters, notes, pictures and what I had heard from my father, my grandfather was a very educated person, though I don't know where he came by his education; most likely he was self-taught. Grandpa also knew many languages and was very intelligent and had a talent for art. I have several pictures that he himself painted and that look like they were done by a professional artist. He also wrote poetry, and I have part of his business correspondence written in verse in German and also in Czech. Besides artistic talents, my grandfather also showed a talent for

business. When he died in the year 1912, at a relatively young age, he left behind an extensive collection of antiques and an estate large enough to enable his wife and five children to lead a comfortable life. This could have lasted up to her death, but unfortunately the Nazi regime severed this beautiful family.

My grandfather's store on Jungmannovo Namesti was in those days a well- known place in Prague where Czech and German artists and poets would meet. They would mainly pick through rare books that my grandfather was an expert in. A large part of his antique collection was made up of rare old books. While he was still alive, my grandfather was a big proponent of Czech culture and associated with the Czech intellectual elite. He's buried in the Jewish cemetery in Prague at Olsany and has a Czech inscription on his tombstone.

From what I hear, my grandpa and grandma's household was modern for the times. They dressed as was the custom in the West in those days: my grandpa in a nice suit and tie, and my grandma in beautiful dresses. Their Prague apartment was comfortable for the times, it had about five rooms. Of course, they had running water and electricity. After my grandfather's death, grandma and grandpa's son, my father's brother, Viktor Ginz, turned one of the rooms into a lawyer's office and did business there. In my grandparents' home, German and Czech were spoken, and they always had a maid.

The apartment was furnished with beautiful and valuable antique furniture. Antique paintings hung on the walls, including one of Christ's head. After various trials and tribulations that painting finally ended up in my possession. It's a portrait painted by the Austrian Gabriel Max on the cusp of the 19th and 20th century. Gabriel Max was a well-known artist who also lived in Prague for some time, and the National Gallery in Prague has many of his paintings, which are often exhibited in the Convent of St. Agnes 1. This painter used to shop in my grandfather's antique store when he was staying in Prague, and would buy skulls from him, which he then used as models for painting people's heads. He owed my grandfather some money, and from correspondence between Max's widow and my grandfather it follows that she sent my grandfather a painting, Christ's Head, instead of paying the debt that her husband left when he died. This correspondence thus documents that the painting is real, and not a forgery.

I used to go regularly to my grandma's for a visit every Saturday. I remember these visits very well, and I used to like them very much. In those days one didn't talk with children much, the adults sat apart and spoke Czech to each other, or German when they didn't want us children to understand, but despite all this Grandma always had special little cakes prepared for us, spiced in a peculiar way, whose taste I even now feel on my tongue. The household was of course kosher, the synagogue was attended on only the major holidays and the rest of the Jewish holidays were observed at home. My grandfather didn't wear a kippah or caftan or anything like that. Neither did my grandmother wear an Orthodox wig.

My grandparents had five children. The oldest daughter, Herma, was born in 1890, two years later came a son, Viktor, who was nicknamed Slava. Two years on, a daughter, Anna, was born. Then came my father, Otto, and finally, in 1898, the last son, Emil. None of these siblings or their families survived the concentration camps, only my father, I and Emil's daughter Hana were saved.

My father married a Christian woman, and so did his brother Emil. My grandmother proclaimed that if her third son, Slava, did the same, she would commit suicide. The whole family knew that Slava

was going out with Marie Ciolkova, who was also a Christian, a very nice woman. They went out for about ten years, but Slava never got up the courage to marry her. If he would have done so, she would have protected him from the concentration camp. As it was, he was one of the first to be transported, and died. Miss Ciolkova then waited for him another two years, still hoping that he would return from somewhere. Later she married an Armenian. Marie was a good friend of my parents' and my father hid the diaries of my brother, Petr Ginz, with her, which were found not long ago and which I publicized. Marie died in one apartment house in Modrany, alone and ill with Alzheimer's. This apartment house was then bought by a certain person, who didn't throw out my brother's diaries after discovering them, which he did with most of the things he found in the apartment house. When, after the tragic crash of the shuttle Columbia in 2003 along with Petr's drawing 'Moon Landscape' on board, Petr's name became known almost everywhere in the world, the owner of the apartment house remembered Petr's diaries and put them up for sale. After some time I finally acquired them.

Aunt Herma was the oldest and married a rich person, Karel Levitus, who was the general manager of the insurance company Asecurazione Generali in Prague. My aunt had a large collection of antiques from my grandfather, to which was devoted an entire floor of their villa in Prague in which they lived. My aunt was a housewife; they had no children. Both were put on one of the first transports and both died in 1942 in the Maly Trostinec concentration camp in Poland.

The other daughter, Aunt Anna, remained single and lived with my grandmother. We liked her very much; she spent a lot of time playing and romping about with us. She didn't survive Auschwitz, and died in 1943.

Emil's wife was named Nada. She wasn't Jewish. They had some relatively small firm that manufactured printing cylinders, and thought that they could save it by divorcing and transferring it to her name. Unfortunately, as a divorcee, Emil was soon summoned to the transport to Terezin [2] . Then he was transported further east, from where he never returned. Their daughter, Hana, survived the Holocaust, she stayed in Terezin until the end of the war, but their son Pavel died.

My grandparents on my mother's side aren't of Jewish origin. My grandpa was named Antonin Dolansky and my grandma Ruzena, nee Pultrova. I don't know when they were born, but my grandma came from around Hradec Kralove, where later she and her children lived. Grandpa was a country teacher. He died young, he was a little over 40, and left my grandmother alone with five children and a small teacher's pension. They were very badly off, literally poor, and so all the children had to work. My mother didn't get married until she was 29, even though she was very pretty, but she had to help support the family, so that the younger siblings could study. I don't know if my mother actually converted, but when she married my father in 1927, she completely gave herself body and soul over to Judaism. Her family wasn't against it - Grandpa wasn't alive any more at that time - in those days before Hitler, when a Czech girl married a Jew, it meant that she was lucky, because a Jew didn't drink, usually made good money and was a good father and husband, which my father really did fulfill.

My mother had a brother, Josef, who died before the war in a motorcycle accident. Then she had an older sister, Bozena, who married the director or deputy of the Zivnostenska Bank in Hradec Kralove. Their son was a well- known Czech actor, Ota Sklencka. They also had a daughter, Eva. The oldest sibling was Ludmila, who married Mr. Vanek and they had two daughters together.

Mother's brother Jaroslav married a girl whose father owned a printing house in Hradec Kralove, which he later took over. Another brother, Bohumil, had a beautiful mixed-goods store in Hradec Kralove. My grandma was paralyzed for the last 15 or 20 years of her life due to a stroke. She lived with her housekeeper, who looked after her and all of her well-positioned children took care of her. She died in 1943.

My father was named Otto Ginz - later, when Hitler came to power, he shaved his mustache and changed his name to the more Czech-sounding Ota - and was born in the year 1896 in Zdanice near Prague. As opposed to my mother, my father was a withdrawn and strict person, and didn't show his feelings, though I know that he liked my brother and me very much. His life's hobby was membership in the Esperanto movement, and during an international congress of this movement that took place in Prague he met my mother, who was also a passionate Esperantist. My mother would tell that when she saw my father, she thought that he was a Spaniard, because he was a little on the darker side. Because everyone spoke in Esperanto, you couldn't tell who was from where. But then, when they got to know each other more and spoke a bit, it came out that they were both Czechs. Their marriage took place in Prague at the city hall.

My mother was named Marie Dolanska and was born in Cibuz, near Hradec Kralove, in 1898. My mother grew up in the country and then in Hradec Kralove, where she went to a commerce-oriented high school and then worked as a secretary at an insurance company. She also took German and French at school. At home they spoke Czech. Our mother was much more open and approachable than our father. My mother had many interests, all sorts of intellectual ones, but she also used to go to gymnastics.

My brother was named Petr Ginz and was born in 1928 in Prague. Our childhood was more or less the same. Petr was two years older and I loved him very much. He had his bar mitzvah in the Maisel Synagogue in Prague, I remember that afterwards there was a small celebration at home with relatives, and a chocolate cake. Petr was a talented boy, and when Jews were no longer being accepted at high school [see Exclusion of Jews from schools in the Protectorate] 3, my parents put him in a school named the Experimental School, in Nusle. It was a special school for talented children where they were attempting to teach with not completely conventional methods. Our parents thought that here his talent would take root and develop. But soon after they threw Petr out of this school as well, because of his Jewish origin. My brother was always very curious and Mother and Father supported education.

Petr began to write already as a child; he wrote many articles, stories and poems. He drew a lot as well. He wrote several short stories from the age of 11 to 12: 'Ferda's Adventures', 'From Prague to China', 'Journey to the Center of the Earth', which belong to Yad Vashem 4 in Jerusalem, and later from the ages of 13 to 14, more voluminous novels, 'The Secret of the Devil's Cave', 'The Wise Man of Altai', 'Around the World in a Second' and 'A Visit from Prehistoric Times'. Somewhere Petr notes that he's already got 260 pages of 'The Wise Man of Altai' finished. Unfortunately only 'A Visit from Prehistoric Times' survived, the rest of the later novels was lost. But perhaps, like his diaries, those works will also surface somewhere. I own 'A Visit from Prehistoric Times'. Like every young boy, he liked to read Verne's novels full of fantasy. Petr imagined that he had found a forgotten novel of Verne's, in the attic of Verne's old apartment building, translated it from French to Czech, and that he's presenting it for the first time to Czech readers. It's about some prehistoric reptile that lives somewhere in the Belgian Congo. In the novel he describes this monster, which is in reality a large

robot, controlled by a dictator who through it wants to dominate the entire continent, and all of Africa is terrified of it. It's an analogy to Hitler and is relatively long. Petr bound and illustrated the book himself. He wrote the novel shortly before he was transported away in 1942, so he wasn't yet 14 at the time.

Growing up

I was born in Prague in the year 1930. Since then not much has changed in Prague, that is, modern technology has of course changed things a lot, there are many more cars driving around and the metro. But as far as streets and buildings go, they're the same streets, the same buildings, the same Vltava River, that I knew as a child.

I remember from my childhood that Esperanto played a very important role in the life of my parents. Quite often we would have visitors from all over the world, and I remember, for example, how once at Christmas a black man from Nigeria, an Esperantist of course, came to visit us. And when we were walking along the street with him, one primitive lady, when she sighted him, began to run away and yell 'A devil! A devil!'. Our household was always a hive of activity and fun, and we always had visitors over, and also our Ginz relatives, grandma and my father's brothers and sisters. My father's four siblings and mother lived in Prague and we would visit them regularly every week. On Sunday we would go for a walk in the park, together with the children of the other uncles and aunts we would run on ahead and play, and the parents would walk behind us and talk. Back then we had to be nicely dressed though - white stockings and shiny shoes - so we wouldn't cast a bad light on the family. We went to visit my mother's siblings' families in Hradec Kralove about twice a year, and they visited us as well.

We attended the synagogue on only the major holidays. Our mother led a kosher household at home, but in a somewhat liberal fashion. At Passover, for example, I remember that we had matzot, but at the same time we ate bread and rolls. Dishcloths and utensils for meat and milk were separate, we didn't eat pork, we bought meat at a kosher butcher and as children we were brought up in a Jewish spirit. We observed all Jewish holidays. Chanukkah usually came out to be around Christmas time, we would light the menorah, and for Christmas we would go to Hradec Kralove to my mother's Christian family, and would celebrate Christmas there with them and would get gifts. It was a rich and happy childhood, which unfortunately lasted a very short time.

The apartment which we grew up in was relatively modest, nevertheless furnished with all the necessities. We had two rooms and a kitchen with conveniences. When we were small, we slept with our parents in the bedroom, later in the living room. The apartment was furnished mainly with antique furniture that our father had inherited from his father. We had a maid who lived with us, and slept in the kitchen. We went through several of them, among them were also one or two Germans, because our parents wanted us to learn German from her. In the end, though, she learned Czech from us more quickly.

Our father and mother had a large library, and we children were allowed to read some of these books. And we also had our own children's books there. In those days it wasn't the custom for children to get a lot of books as gifts, so we would go to the public library. We borrowed books there quite often. We used to visit the City Library on Marianske Namesti [Square], which still functions to this day.

I don't think that my parents belonged to some political party, but by their opinions I judge that they were social democrats. They had many friends, mainly from Esperanto circles, but also from others, and they were always very cultured people.

Both my brother and I grew up at home. We started our school attendance at the Jewish elementary school in Prague on Jachymova Street. I think that my favorite subject at school was drawing. Outside of school we didn't have any private tutors, but we both regularly attended the gym, which I liked a lot. My girlfriends from elementary school were in a similar situation as I, all came from well-to-do Jewish families and our childhood was very happy. Besides my Jewish classmates I don't remember any friends outside of school.

In our home it was important that the children pay attention to their responsibilities and that all was in order. In the morning we rose, the maid prepared breakfast and then Petr and I would walk by ourselves to school. In those days there weren't very many cars about and the streets were safe for us. We lived at Tesnov, close to Hlavkuv Bridge. It was a beautiful walk; on winter mornings the gas lamps would still be lit and the snow would crunch under our feet. School was in the morning, I usually finished earlier than Petr and my mother would be waiting for me in front of the school. Then we would have lunch at home; only our father was in the office and came home later. After lunch our mother would go lie down and we would do our homework; in those days there wasn't much of it.

Then we would play a bit at home, and then go out for a walk, usually with the maid. Often we would go to Stvanice, which is an island in Prague, there we would toboggan or play with a ball, and when it was warm, you could bathe in the Vltava there. And in the winter we would again go to the Vltava, to skate; the river froze over regularly and we would skate from Hlavkuv Bridge to the weir and back again. Sometimes we would go skating to the arena on Stvanice, but there you had to pay. They had music playing there and you would skate round and round. We would go shopping to the market at Ovocny Trh [Fruit Market]. I remember how there would be old women sitting there, selling pats of butter and cheese, and would let us have a taste, which I liked to do very much. The butter would then be kept in the pantry, in cold water. We would also have fruit preserves or sauerkraut stored there. When we returned from our walk, it was suppertime, and then Petr and I would like to read, there really wasn't any other form of entertainment. Reading was our main hobby.

During longer holidays and summer vacation we would always go outside of Prague with our parents. At Christmas and Easter we would go skiing to the mountains, while summer vacation we spent in the countryside, where our parents rented a bungalow. One place was named Radosovice. It was close to Prague, and our father would come visit us on the weekends. We were there alone with our mother and the maid. We would go swimming, for walks, picking mushrooms in the forest and so on.

It wasn't the custom to eat in restaurants, we ate at home, but my parents often went to coffee shops with their friends. There weren't many cars yet in those days, and so every car ride was quite a big experience. For me, unfortunately, a bad one, because during every ride I suffered from carsickness and would be nauseous. On the contrary, riding on the train wasn't anything special for us. We didn't have our own car.

I recall all sorts of national celebrations, mainly the anniversary of the founding of the [First] Czechoslovak Republic 5. In the streets there would be parades with flags, and music would play. The holiday was also celebrated at our Jewish school. I think that Jews were always similar to the nations in which they lived. Thus Czech Jews were very similar to Czechs, and so responsibility, hard work was just as characteristic for Czech Jews as for Czechs. I didn't know anti-Semitism in my early childhood at all. Then when I was attending Jewish school, sometime in 1937 or 1938 or so, because of a lack of space a part of the school moved to the neighboring German boys' school on Masna Street. During recess we would go out into the schoolyard, which was separated from the yard of the German school by just a fence, and those small German boys would even then yell things like 'Juden heraus!' [Jews out!] and 'Jews to Palestine' at us.

During the war

I remember a few important political events from my childhood. When Hitler came to power, Munich in 1938 [see Munich Pact] 6, when the Germans invaded Poland [see Invasion of Poland] 7 and when the Germans occupied Bohemia and Moravia in March 1939 [see Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia] 8. I was nine years old at the time. And in the years leading up to these events, the years of critical political events, I heard adults' conversations, my parents, friends and relatives. They were conversations that the adults led among themselves, daily, in great tension, and we children of course felt this strained atmosphere, even though our parents and the others didn't talk to us about it.

We felt anti-Semitism soon after the occupation. The financier Petschek [Petschek Ignatz, a German industrialist of Jewish origins; did business in Bohemia mainly in the sphere of brown coal. Controlled the majority of mining and market with brown coal in Bohemia and partly also in Germany; had significant influence on the Czechoslovak economy], in one of whose firms our father worked as manager of the export department, arranged emigration permits and employment in foreign countries for all of his Jewish employees. For our father as well. At that time we were supposed to emigrate to New Zealand, but our parents didn't take advantage of it in time. They said to themselves, we have our apartment here, and we're going to go somewhere at the ends of the earth, it won't be all that bad. Later it was already too late. All anti-Jewish prohibitions and regulations [see Anti-Jewish laws in the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia] 9 applied to our family as well, even though our mother wasn't of Jewish origin. Our father they threw out of work, us they threw out of school. The Jewish school was definitively closed during the school year 1941/42. The number of food stamps we were allowed was limited, and we were only allowed to ride in the last tram car, we weren't allowed to sit. All the others, Czechs and Germans, sat. We weren't allowed to go to the park and to various public places, and so on. At birth my brother and I had been registered in the Jewish birth register. My brother and I were considered according to the Nazi Nuremberg Laws to be half-breeds of the 1st degree, and therefore all anti-Jewish measures applied to us. There was only one difference: that the Germans took these children from mixed marriages to the concentration camps only from 14 years old and up.

And so it happened that my brother was transported to the Terezin ghetto alone in the year 1942, at the age of fourteen. My transport followed two years later. This decree was very cruel, and I'd say that for mixed families often worse, because the family couldn't stay together. The Germans tore from a family a child, which then had to leave alone, which was horrible both for it and for the

rest of its family. I remember my feelings when I was waiting to turn 14 with the knowledge that my parents were going to have to give me up to the Germans. The feelings of my parents, their fear and helplessness were similarly indescribable. Our father was protected from the transports due to his marriage to an Aryan. This privilege was however revoked by the Germans in February 1945.

Occasionally you were allowed to send postcards from Terezin, which were censored and written in German. So we got a few cards from Petr, and we were allowed to reply with thirty words. About twice we also got an illegal letter from Petr, one that had been smuggled by a Czech policeman that had hidden it and brought it to us. Usually those policemen didn't do it for free, but for good money. Both letters were written on very thin paper, so the policeman could securely hide it in his clothing.

My father didn't want to work at the Jewish Community in Prague, where many Jews that had lost their jobs worked as clerks. He said that it's not for him, that it's slacking off. He went to work in a Jewish orphanage, where he washed dishes, and I sometimes went there to help him out. The orphanage was run by the Freudenfeld family. At that time they were also rehearsing the today well-known children's opera Brundibar, so in Terezin they followed up what had been rehearsed in the orphanage. [Editor's note: The children's opera Brundibar was created in 1938 for a contest announced by the then Czechoslovak Ministry of Schools and National Education. It was composed by Hans Krasa based on a libretto by Adolf Hoffmeister. The first performance of Brundibar - by residents of the Jewish orphanage in Prague - wasn't seen by the composer. He had been deported to Terezin. Not long after him, Rudolf Freudenfeld, the son of the orphanage's director, who had rehearsed the opera with the children, was also transported. This opera had more than 50 official performances in Terezin. The idea of solidarity, collective battle against the enemy and the victory of good over evil today speaks to people the whole world over. Today the opera is performed on hundreds of stages in various corners of the world.]

In 1944 I had to embark on the transport. I was never able to imagine it, but as a mother I know that it must have been unimaginably cruel. In this sense the fate of half-breeds was much worse than when the whole family left together. When the family had to tear itself apart and go into the unknown, that was very difficult for the mother as well as for the child. My mother was always strong, she comes from this healthy Czech family, and that's probably why she was able to endure it all.

In Terezin I lived in a girls' home at L 410. Some things from life in Terezin I remember, others are completely wiped from my memory. Our home was led by Willy Groag and Mrs. Englanderova. I also remember that my cousin Hanka Ginzova was there with me, and also Sary Veresova. I recall one incident. The girls had gotten a small Christmas tree from somewhere, because there were a lot of half-breeds there. These were children that often had been brought up in a completely Christian fashion, and the Germans had sent them to the concentration camp only due to racial reasons. They were used to the Christmas holidays and so put the tree in the middle of the room. Then Willy Groag, who was a big Zionist [see Zionism] 10, arrived and got horribly upset, grabbed the tree and flung it on the ground.

Our mother supported us in Terezin a lot: she tried to send packages, even addressed them to other people. We would then get the packages from them and give them a certain share. That is,

mainly Petr, because I wasn't in Terezin that long. Our mother tried from Prague to save us in some way, and so went to see one of the top Gestapo commanders, whose name I don't remember. He received her in his office 'gnadige Frau hin a gnadige Frau her' [my dear lady here and my dear lady there], sat her down and said, 'My dear lady, you don't have to worry about your children in Terezin, they belong to a special group, and according to orders that group won't be transported further on and will stay in Terezin.' Other sources also mention this decree.

People have asked me, how it was then possible that Petr was transported further on. But he wasn't the only half-breed that was sent from Terezin to the East. Though the explanation causes me great pain, I can't hold it against anyone, that when he tried to save a member of his family and had the opportunity to put a half-breed, though usually only a child, on the transport instead, he did it. It was a matter of life and death. I think that that's the way it happened, but I can't condemn it, because if I had been in that situation and could have saved my brother in this way, I maybe would have also behaved similarly. Petr was transported to Auschwitz in the fall of 1944. He was already sixteen, and so maybe that protection didn't apply to him any more. This is all just speculation. No one from the Terezin Altestenrat [Council of Elders] is alive to explain it. When Petr was assigned to the transport to Auschwitz, I volunteered to go with him. I then got a card, where they wrote in German that they aren't accepting me for the transport, because they already have enough of them.

As a small child, Petr wanted to be a scientist, writer or journalist. In Terezin he was the initiator and editor of a secret magazine, Vedem 11, which was published every Friday by a group of boys in Barracks No. 1 in L 417, where Petr lived. They had all intellectual activities strictly forbidden by the Germans, and so in the evening during the reading of this magazine in a forum of all the boys, one of them stood on guard, so he could warn them in time if one of the guards was approaching. Vedem was of a very high standard, it had philosophical, historical and other articles, and also a lot of boyish humor and self-criticism. When Petr, the magazine's editor, didn't collect enough articles from his friends for Friday's edition, he wrote the articles himself under various pseudonyms.

During those two years in Terezin, when Petr lived in the boys' barracks L 417, his personality developed significantly. Petr had access to the library, which was composed of books confiscated from Jews after their arrival at Terezin, and Petr tried to read as many as he could. His notes from Terezin, in which he tasks himself what he has to learn and what to read, prove this. A small sample from these notes: 'September 1944... I read: Schweitzer: From My Life and Work, Dinko Simonovic: The Vincic Family, Thein de Vries: Rembrandt, Thomas Mann: Mari and the Magician, Dickens: A Christmas Carol, Danes: Origin and Extinction of Natives in Australia and Oceania, Milli Dandolo: The Angel Spoke, K. May: The Son of the Bear Hunter, Oscar Wilde: De Profundis and other novels'. Shortly after this note Petr was sent to his death in Auschwitz.

I have one witness to how Petr died. Jehuda Bacon, a well-known Israeli painter, who knew Petr from L417, told me that he saw him walking on the road to the gas chambers. Petr was always quite tall, skinny and pale. He was already in Terezin for two years when they transported him to Auschwitz, and he most likely didn't pass the selection.

My father came to Terezin in April 1945, when after another change in the Nuremberg Laws he lost the protection of his 'Aryan' wife. Together we were then liberated by the Russian Army and in one Russian car returned to Prague, where my mother had already worn a hole in the floor standing in

front of the window. Our reunion couldn't be happy without Petr's return, month after month we waited, but to no avail.

At the beginning of the war, living with the worry that the Germans would confiscate their expensive antique furniture from my grandfather, my parents moved the furniture to Hradec Kralove to my mother's family. Everything that was hidden with relatives, we got back after the war without any problems. Many things were also preserved because my mother stayed home for the entire duration of the war. Problems came up in the case of property of my father's siblings, which was hidden with various Czechs. Only a small part of that property was returned, some simply denied it and refused to return it. What the Germans didn't take, the Czechs kept.

Post-war

After the war, like many other Jewish children, I had a strong desire to learn, because for five years I hadn't been able to go to school. I prepared for the high school entrance exam with Prof. Irma Lauscherova, passed it successfully, and entered the 'kvinta' [fifth year] of the Gymnazium [High School] of Hana Benesova in the Prague quarter of Vinohrady. After two years, I on my own initiative transferred to the Reformist Practical High School on Dusni Street in Prague. I tried to learn as much as possible, so outside of high school I also took some sort of library course, learned how to drive a car and subsequently passed my driver's exam, and for two years I attended the School of Applied Arts on Narodni Avenue in Prague three or four times a week. There my specialized artistic education began. In high school I studied French, which I very early on made use of. I was supposed to graduate in 1948, which however didn't happen, because right before graduation I left with my then boyfriend and future husband, Jindrich [Abraham] Pressburger, for France. At that time it was the last chance to leave Czechoslovakia [see February 1948] 12. I left without my parents, halfway illegally, using someone else's passport.

My husband comes from Slovakia; he was born in the year 1924 in Bratislava. He worked in the Zionist movement Hashomer Hatzair 13. We met thanks to sports. I received a notice about a trip to the mountains that this Zionist organization was putting on, I went skiing with them, and so met Abraham.

After leaving Czechoslovakia we got to Vienna, where we stayed for about six weeks. Then Abraham was sent as a leader of Zionist youth to Paris. In Paris he worked another year for Hashomer Hatzair, and then we emigrated to Israel, where we were then married, and my husband took the name Abraham. My leaving Czechoslovakia was motivated mainly by my husband's Zionism and my love for him. A strong reason was also my desire for freedom, from the age of nine I had not been free and after the Communist putsch in Czechoslovakia I saw that another similar regime was coming. If it hadn't been for Abraham's Zionist tendencies, I would have at that time rather stayed in France. I was very happy during the year that we spent there. For one, I was young, and for another Paris, freedom and the cultural atmosphere there very much suited my nature.

We arrived in Israel from Marseille on a ship named Negba, which translated from Hebrew means 'To Negev'. And we really did drop anchor in Negev, in Ber Sheva. Hebrew became my second language, the same as English. When we came to Israel, Hebrew was a difficult language for me, and so I began to read all books in English. I also speak French, German and also Esperanto from

childhood.

My parents stayed in Prague until the year 1956, and then also moved to Israel. My mother kept a kosher household in Israel as well, as opposed to me. She was also a big Zionist and had a talent for lecturing. While still in Czechoslovakia she and my father gathered films and slides and she lectured on Israel at the Esperanto Club. She then also gave lectures on the ship on the way to Israel. In the beginning it was very difficult for them in Israel. My husband and I worked, we already had a child, and my parents lived with us in a small apartment. That was a tough situation. But then, on the basis of an agreement with Germany [BEG - Bundesentschädigungsgesetz, a West German law from the year 1956, according to which claims for compensation put forth by victims of National Socialist persecution are processed] they began to receive compensation, which put them on their feet. They bought their own apartment and after that things went well for them. My father died in 1975, my mother lived until the age 93. Both are buried in a cemetery near Haifa.

In the beginning we lived in Ber Sheva in a comfortable apartment that my husband was allocated as part of his employment. A few years later we bought a small house in Omer, near Ber Sheva. The house stands in a very nice residential neighborhood, which isn't officially a part of Ber Sheva, but practically everyone that lives here works there. A lot of doctors, professors, more or less an intellectual elite, live here. The house stands on a lot measuring 1,000 square meters. I take care of our garden. When the house was being built, it was desert, today we have a beautiful lawn and many plants, bushes and tall evergreens, which have since grown to a huge height. We planted them because we were homesick for Europe, and wanted to have our own forest.

Both of our children, our son Yoram and daughter Tamar, lived with us up to their entry into the army. Yoram was in a special unit in the army as a parachutist, and took part in the Lebanese War [see 1982 Lebanon War] 14. That was a very difficult time for us, when we were afraid that we'd perhaps never even see him again. Luckily he got through it all, was decorated, and began to study Mechanical Engineering at the local university. After he finished his studies he left for America, where he received a scholarship and completed a PhD. He then stayed in America and now works in his field for a private company. Tamar lives in Jerusalem, she also finished university in Israel and has a PhD from the University of Jerusalem. The thesis of her doctorate was 'The attitude of Israeli and German media towards the Holocaust' and this work of hers was then also published in book form. Tamar also lived partly in America, where her first son was born, nonetheless she currently lives in Israel and works as the head of a scientific research department of the Myers-JDC-Brookdale Institute in Jerusalem.

Our household remained secular, as well as that of my son, his wife and his daughter in America. Tamar is the most inclined to observe traditions. Although she isn't Orthodox, she nonetheless observes all holidays, and so does her husband. We traveled abroad several times with the children, but now my husband and I travel alone. We've been to America several times to see our son and we often travel to Prague, which we both like very much.

I still devote myself to art. I think that Petr and I inherited a talent for art from my mother's family and actually from Grandpa Ginz as well. My mother also liked to paint. I drew from my youngest years, in those days I imitated Petr. I have no formal, integral art training. While still in Prague, after the war, I attended evening classes at the School of Applied Arts on Narodni Avenue. In Paris I then attended lectures at the Beaux Arts on an informal basis; I tried to catch what I could here and

there. Then beginnings in Israel weren't easy, our finances didn't allow me to register in some art school, we had to work to make ends meet. Despite this, though, I attended various private courses given by various Israeli artists. I also learned artistic printing techniques such as etching, lithography, and finally also a technique that I have actually been using for more than the last ten years and which I have further perfected. This technique consists of the hand-manufacture of my own paper, which I then use for my artistic works. I make beautiful paper from plants that I pick myself and then process. Something similar is known as Japanese paper. Nevertheless, I don't just make paper for paper's sake, but during the manufacturing process I'm already forming a work of art. I give it various shapes, colors, or artistically print or finely draw on the finished paper.

I taught for ten years at the Visual Art Center in Ber Sheva, but it has unfortunately ceased to exist. I became a member of the Artists' Union in Israel. I frequently exhibited in Israel as well as in Europe, also several times in America. A portion of my works is focused on the theme of Shoah. In this respect my most important exhibition took place at the Jewish Museum in Prague, then in Texas at the Houston Holocaust Memorial Museum, then also in Los Angeles, West Hartford and in Providence. This project concerns itself with the story of one house, a villa in the Podoli quarter of Prague, that had belonged to my uncle Karel Levitus and aunt Herma, my father's sister. It was a beautiful, large villa, which we often visited as children and where we very much liked to be. In this exhibition I show and describe the beautiful pre-war idyll and then the arrival of the Germans, who threw my uncle and aunt out of the villa, stole all of their property and sent them on one of the first transports to a concentration camp, where they were murdered. A large, beautiful antique collection, that took up the entire upper floor and which my aunt had inherited from my grandfather the antiques dealer, was stolen and confiscated, and how then after the end of the war the house waited for its original owners to return, which however didn't happen because they were no longer alive. This house only passively watches everything that happens in it. After the Germans the house was occupied by Czechs to whom it had been allocated. Then the villa got into the hands of the Communist regime, which again moved its own people into it. After the fall of this regime the new government wanted to return the house to its original owners, and as their inheritors I and my cousin received a certain amount of compensation for it. But the house keeps living its life even with new residents, however I frequently dream that at night its original owners, my relatives, appear.

Glossary

1 St

Agnes of Bohemia: the daughter of the Czech king Premysl Otakar I. During her entire life Agnes of Bohemia was active as a member of the Clarisian Order, she also significantly participated in the public life of her times, had significant influence on among others her brother, King Vaclav [Wenceslaus] I the One-eyed. Agnes was also behind the fact that the burial ground of Czech kings was transferred from the St. Vitus Cathedral at the Prague Castle to the Clarisian convent Na Frantisku. Agnes of Bohemia died in 1282. Soon after her death Agnes began to be considered a saint by the Czech people, it was believed that numerous miracles were happening at her intercession. The canonization of Agnes was attempted, unsuccessfully beginning with Jan Lucembursky, then his son Charles IV, and later for example Leopold II of the Habsburgs - it wasn't until 1874 that the Archbishop of Prague, Cardinal B.J. Schwarzenberg managed to have Agnes

beatified - she was then proclaimed a Saint on 12th November 1989 by Pope John Paul II.

2 Terezin/Theresienstadt

A ghetto in the Czech Republic, run by the SS. Jews were transferred from there to various extermination camps. It was used to camouflage the extermination of European Jews by the Nazis, who presented Theresienstadt as a 'model Jewish settlement'. Czech gendarmes served as ghetto guards, and with their help the Jews were able to maintain contact with the outside world. Although education was prohibited, regular classes were held, clandestinely. Thanks to the large number of artists, writers, and scholars in the ghetto, there was an intensive program of cultural activities. At the end of 1943, when word spread of what was happening in the Nazi camps, the Germans decided to allow an International Red Cross investigation committee to visit Theresienstadt. In preparation, more prisoners were deported to Auschwitz, in order to reduce congestion in the ghetto. Dummy stores, a cafe, a bank, kindergartens, a school, and flower gardens were put up to deceive the committee.

3 Exclusion of Jews from schools in the Protectorate

The Ministry of Education of the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia sent round a ministerial decree in 1940, which stated that from school year 1940/41 Jewish pupils were not allowed to visit Czech public and private schools and those who were already in school should be excluded. After 1942 Jews were not allowed to visit Jewish schools or courses organised by the Jewish communities either.

4 Yad Vashem

This museum, founded in 1953 in Jerusalem, honors both Holocaust martyrs and 'the Righteous Among the Nations', non-Jewish rescuers who have been recognized for their 'compassion, courage and morality'.

5 First Czechoslovak Republic (1918-1938)

The First Czechoslovak Republic was created after the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy following World War I. The union of the Czech lands and Slovakia was officially proclaimed in Prague in 1918, and formally recognized by the Treaty of St. Germain in 1919. Ruthenia was added by the Treaty of Trianon in 1920. Czechoslovakia inherited the greater part of the industries of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy and the new government carried out an extensive land reform, as a result of which the living conditions of the peasantry increasingly improved. However, the constitution of 1920 set up a highly centralized state and failed to take into account the issue of national minorities, and thus internal political life was dominated by the struggle of national minorities (especially the Hungarians and the Germans) against Czech rule. In foreign policy Czechoslovakia kept close contacts with France and initiated the foundation of the Little Entente in 1921.

6 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).

7 Invasion of Poland

The German attack of Poland on 1st September 1939 is widely considered the date in the West for the start of World War II. After having gained both Austria and the Bohemian and Moravian parts of Czechoslovakia, Hitler was confident that he could acquire Poland without having to fight Britain and France. (To eliminate the possibility of the Soviet Union fighting if Poland were attacked, Hitler made a pact with the Soviet Union, the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact.) On the morning of 1st September 1939, German troops entered Poland. The German air attack hit so quickly that most of Poland's air force was destroyed while still on the ground. To hinder Polish mobilization, the Germans bombed bridges and roads. Groups of marching soldiers were machine-gunned from the air, and they also aimed at civilians. On 1st September, the beginning of the attack, Great Britain and France sent Hitler an ultimatum - withdraw German forces from Poland or Great Britain and France would go to war against Germany. On 3rd September, with Germany's forces penetrating deeper into Poland, Great Britain and France both declared war on Germany.

8 Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia

Bohemia and Moravia were occupied by the Germans and transformed into a German Protectorate in March 1939, after Slovakia declared its independence. The Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia was placed under the supervision of the Reich protector, Konstantin von Neurath. The Gestapo assumed police authority. Jews were dismissed from civil service and placed in an extralegal position. In the fall of 1941, the Reich adopted a more radical policy in the Protectorate. The Gestapo became very active in arrests and executions. The deportation of Jews to concentration camps was organized, and Terezin/Theresienstadt was turned into a ghetto for Jewish families. During the existence of the Protectorate the Jewish population of Bohemia and Moravia was virtually annihilated. After World War II the pre-1938 boundaries were restored, and most of the German-speaking population was expelled.

9 Anti-Jewish laws in the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia

In March 1939, there lived in the protectorate 92,199 inhabitants classified according to so-called Nuremberg Laws as Jews. On June 21, 1939, Konstantin von Neurath, the Reichsprotector, passed the so-called Edict Regarding Jewish Property, which put restrictions on Jewish property. On April 24, 1940, a government edict was passed which eliminated Jews from economic activity. Similarly like previous legal changes it was based on Nuremburg Law definitions and limited the legal standing of Jews. According to the law, Jews couldn't perform any functions (honorary or paid) in the courts or public service and couldn't participate at all in politics, be members of Jewish organizations and other organizations of social, cultural and economic nature. They were

completely barred from performing any independent occupation, couldn't work as lawyers, doctors, veterinarians, notaries, defence attorneys and so on. Jewish residents could participate in public life only in the realm of religious Jewish organizations. Jews were forbidden to enter certain streets, squares, parks and other public places. From September 1939 they were forbidden from being outside of their home after 8 p.m. Beginning in November 1939 they couldn't leave, even temporarily, their place of residence without special permission. Residents of Jewish extraction were barred from visiting theatres and cinemas, restaurants and cafés, swimming pools, libraries and other entertainment and sports centres. On public transport they were limited to standing room in the last car, in trains they weren't allowed to use dining or sleeping cars and could ride only in the lowest class, again only in the last car. They weren't allowed entry into waiting rooms and other station facilities. The Nazis limited shopping hours for Jews to twice two hours and later only two hours per day. They confiscated radio equipment and limited their choice of groceries. Jews weren't allowed to keep animals at home. Jewish children were prevented from visiting German and from August 1940 also Czech public and private schools. In March 1941 even so-called re-education courses organized by the Jewish Religious Community were forbidden, and from June 1942 also education in Jewish schools. To eliminate Jews from society it was important that they be easily identifiable. Beginning in March 1940, citizenship cards of Jews were marked by the letter "J" (Jude - Jew). From September 1, 1941 Jews older than six could only go out in public if they wore a yellow six-pointed star with "Jude" written on it on their clothing.

10 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 Dreyfus, 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.

11 Vedem

The magazine Vedem was put out by boys from the 1st boys' home inTerezin (located in a former school designated L 417), which for practically all of its existence was led by the educator and teacher Valtr Eisinger, alias Prcek [Squirt]. He established the principle of self- government in the home, and named it after a Russian school for orphans, which was named 'Respublika Skid'. Vedem began to be published as a cultural and news magazine. In the beginning it was available to all, thanks to it being conceived as a bulletin-board magazine. Subsequently for security reasons this approach was abandoned. After each publication the magazine was passed around, and its entire contents were discussed at the home's plenary meetings held every Friday. Everyone who was interested could attend these meetings. Vedem was published weekly from December of 1942, and always as one single copy. The magazine's pages are numbered consecutively and together the entire magazine has 787 pages. The authors of the absolute majority of the contributions were the boys themselves, who ranged from 13 to 15 years old. We can, however, also find in the magazine contributions by educators and teachers. Published in Vedem were stories, critical articles, articles

inspired by specific events, educational articles, poems and drawings. Mostly the boys describe in their works the situation in the camp, state their perceptions relating to life in Terezin, but also concern themselves with the problem of the Jewish question, Jewish history, and so on. Often-used literary devices are irony (especially in commenting the overall situation in the camp), satire (mainly in poems), metaphors, the use of contrasts. Most articles are written anonymously, or under various nicknames. Some boys, supported by the efforts for collective education that ruled in Terezin, formed an authors' group and all used the pseudonym Akademie [Academy] for their articles. Part of the magazine Vedem was published in book form by M.R. Krizkova in collaboration with Zdenek Ornest and Jiri Kotouc under the name 'Are The Ghetto Walls My Homeland?'

12 February 1948

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

13 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.

14 1982 Lebanon War

also known as the 1982 Invasion of Lebanon, and dubbed Operation Peace for the Galilee (Shlom HaGalil in Hebrew) by Israel, began June 6, 1982, when the Israel Defence Force invaded southern

Lebanon in response to the Abu Nidal organization's assassination attempt against Israel's ambassador to the United Kingdom, Shlomo Argov, but mainly to halt Katyusha rocket attacks on Israeli population in the northern Galilee region launched from Southern Lebanon. See also Operation Litani. After attacking Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), Syrian and Muslim Lebanese forces, Israel occupied southern Lebanon. Surrounded in West Beirut and subject to heavy bombardment, the PLO and the Syrian forces negotiated passage from Lebanon with the aid of international peacekeepers.