

# Viola Rozalia Fischerova

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The following text will lead us through the moving and difficult life of Mrs. Viola Rozalia Fischerova. Immediately upon her birth, she was faced with problems caused by her mother's serious illness. This is why she spent the first years of her life being raised by her aunt. She was barely an adult when she was struck by another cruel stroke of fate. Almost her entire family was murdered during the Holocaust. After the war, she started studying medicine in Prague, but she had to give up her dream because of a lack of money and poor health.



She married an excellent person, Juraj Fischer. Mr. Fischer is one of four people in Slovakia who were awarded the highest French award: the Ordre national de la Légion d'honneur [the National Order of the Legion of Honor]. He earned this award during Operation Dynamo at Dunkerque in 1940, and Operation Overlord, or the landing at Normandy, in 1944. Their mutual happiness did not last long, however. During the era of the totalitarian regime that was in power in Czechoslovakia, her husband was falsely accused of "sabotage" and sentenced to death. The sentence was later reduced, and so for long years he ended up as a prisoner in the Jachymov uranium mines. His suffering was magnified by the fact that he also shared a cell with German Nazi criminals who'd been sentenced in Czechoslovakia after the war. With precisely those criminals who had participated in the murder of Jews in Bohemia and Slovakia. During her husband's stay in prison, Mrs. Viola was subjected to incessant degradation. She even had to put up with vulgar remarks regarding Jews at her work. The greatest joy of her life are her daughters and grandchildren. In her free time, she devoted herself to poetry, among other things. We have included one of her poems in the interview. She wasn't the only one in the family to inherit a talent for poetry and prose. Besides her, there were also two young authors in her family, her cousins Imrich Haasz and Sandor Berko. Imrich was beaten to death in Lucenec at the end of the 1940s, and the life of the more famous of the two, Sandor, came to an end in a concentration camp. Sandor Berko is heretofore considered by literary critics to be one of the best Slovak writers who wrote in the Hungarian language.

At Mrs. Fischerova's request, we had to shorten the interview. This is because she was devoting all her time to her very ill husband, with which her grandson Peter was also helping her. She also started weeping while reminiscing about her closest family members, whom she'd lost during the fury of the Holocaust. Alas, several weeks after the end of the interview, her husband died. Many Slovak and foreign politicians and ambassadors came to pay homage to the memory to a great person in Slovak history.

My name is Viola Rozalia Fischerova. I was born into a Neolog Jewish family in Lucenec in 1922, as Ibolya Rozsa Stern. During my life I've always followed the slogan: 'Én nem ezt a lovat választottam, de ez van ezt kell szeretni!' [Editor's note: the literal translation from Hungarian is: "I didn't pick this horse, but I've got him, and I've got to like him." The equivalent saying in English would be: "You've got to play the hand you've been dealt."] This is my life story:

### [My family background](#)

#### [Growing up](#)

#### [During the war](#)

#### [Post-war](#)

#### [My grandson](#)

#### [Glossary](#)

### **My family background**

I can't tell you any details about my grandparents. I only remember my father's mother. Her name was Roza Stern. She was born in 1856, as Roza Reiner. She died when I was still very young. Around 1926, or something like that. I was still very small; they didn't even take me to the funeral. My grandma had high blood pressure, and back then they didn't treat that yet. The only treatment was just the application of leeches. Up to when I was six, I was raised by my mother's sister, Aunt Irena Ambrozs, née Braun. My mother [Ilona Stern, née Braun] was very ill. They removed one of her kidneys. She wasn't able to take care of all three children, and so her sister helped raise us. We had a hard life already from childhood.

My father's parents, Mor Stern and Roza Stern, originally lived in the town of Kiskovesd [in Slovak: Maly Kamenec, a town in eastern Slovakia]. From what I heard I know that my grandfather was a businessman. I don't know anything more about him. After Grandfather died, my grandma moved to Lucenec to live with us. My father [Andor Stern] was one of six children. Three boys: Ignac, Sandor and Andor, and three girls: Blanka, Regina and Jozefina.

Ignac Stern was married twice. I didn't know his first wife. The second one was named Licike Stern, née Braun. Aunt Licike was my mother's sister. Uncle Ignac had three children from his first marriage. They all lived together in the Hungarian town of Miskolc. The boys were named Bela and Jozsef. In our family we called Jozsef Jozska. The daughter's name was Ilona, or familiarly Ilonka. Before the war [World War II] the boys graduated from university. Both of them worked as engineers. Ilonka was a secretary. He [Uncle Ignac] didn't have any children with his second wife. Uncle Ignac had a workshop where they sewed bedding and things like that. He was my father's oldest brother. He was a beautiful person with white, curly hair. They murdered this entire family during the Holocaust. None of them survived.

The wife of my father's second brother, Sandor Stern, was named Gizella Stern, née Sacher. They were childless. Sandor was a partner in the Sachers' store in Lucenec. Both were murdered during the Holocaust.

The next boy in line was my father, Andor Stern. His wife, that is, my mother, was named Ilonka Stern, née Braun. My father was the deputy director of a distillery named 'Trecséni borovicska és likőrgyár.' We lived on just his salary, as my mother was very ill and couldn't work. During the war, the distillery for which he worked fell to the Slovak State [1](#) and our town to Hungary [2](#). So when

Lucenec fell to Hungary, my father had to leave his work. He opened a small store where he sold enameled pots. When we fell to the Hungarians, our situation in life got much worse. During the time of the first Czechoslovak Republic [3](#) life for people in our town had been better. Hungary was poor compared to Czechoslovakia.

My father's oldest sister was named Blanka Haasz, née Stern. She married Mr. Haasz, who owned a glass shop. They had a son, Imrich [Imre]. Around 1940 or 1941, Imrich was beaten up in the street by Nyilasovites [4](#). They sent him home, all beaten up, but he died as a result of his wounds. Imrich Haasz made a living as a writer. He wrote in Hungarian. When he was dying, the only one he allowed to be by his side was my older brother [Sandor Stern]. My brother was holding his hand when he died.

Another of my father's sisters was named Regina Frank, née Stern. She and her husband lived in the Hungarian town of Miskolc. They had one son together. His name was Bela Frank. He was a lawyer. They murdered them all during the Holocaust.

The last of my father's sisters was Jozefina Berko. Her husband died at the front during World War I. Aunt Jozefina was supported by my father. She earned money by sewing aprons at home. She also embroidered and crocheted. She had three daughters: Bozsi [Erzsebet], Magda, Lili and one son: Sandor. Sandor Berko worked as a writer and translator. He translated Czech poets into Hungarian, for example Jiri Wolker [Wolker, Jiri (1900 – 1924): Czech poet]. He wrote several books, like for example: 'Az ördög köpenyében' ['In The Devil's Frock']. Even today, literary critics rank this work among the top Hungarian works of authors writing in the Hungarian language living in Slovakia. Sandor was murdered during the Holocaust along with the rest of his family.

Only Lili survived the war. She was saved by the fact that she was married to a Christian. After the war she got diabetes. I don't even know anymore what year she died. She's got one son, whose name is Tomas Lukac. That boy didn't turn out well at all. When he sees a Jew nearby, he walks the other way.

My grandparents on my mother's side were named the Brauns. My grandfather's name was Bertalan Braun. Friends and family called him Berci. He was a butcher. He died of cancer. They weren't rich, but weren't poor either. They lived in the village of Heves. That's somewhere in Hungary. I don't even know my grandmother's name. My grandparents died before I was born.

My mother was one of six children. There were five girls in the family: Gizella, Iren [in Hungarian; in Slovak: Irena, nickname: Irenka], Licike, my mother Ilonka, and one other girl whose name I don't know. Her only brother was named Imre. Irenka was married to Mr. Aladar Ambrozs. He was a Jew from Romania. They lived in the village of Heves. Aunt Irenka didn't have children. As I've already mentioned, my mother was very ill, and Aunt Irenka raised me up to the age of six. Aunt Irenka and her husband Aladar were murdered during the Holocaust.

Aunt Gizella married Mr. Molnar. They had one son, Lacika [Laszlo], who was a lawyer. My aunt became a widow relatively early on, so my father had to support her as well. Gizela didn't survive the war; she was murdered. Only her son Laszlo survived, who after the war had an outright negative attitude towards Jews. He lived in Budapest after the war. I've already mentioned Aunt Licike when talking about my father's siblings. She married my father's brother, Ignac Stern. My mother's brother Imre and her sister whose name I don't remember died while they were still

children.

## Growing up

Up until I was six, I was raised by Aunt Irenka in the Hungarian village of Heves. After my sixth birthday, I returned to be with my parents in Lucenec. There was a very large Jewish community in Lucenec before the war. I'd estimate that there were more than two thousand Jews living in the town. [Editor's note: the number of Jews in Lucenec in 1939 exceeded 2000, of which up to 90% died during the Holocaust.] Most Jews belonged amongst the Neologs [5](#), despite that, the Orthodox [6](#) minority dominated almost all important Jewish institutions and associations in the town. The Orthodox group had Rabbi Salamon Undorfer. They murdered him in Auschwitz in 1944. The Neolog rabbi was Dr. Artur Reschovsky. The Neolog rabbi was married to a Christian woman, and his brother-in-law was a catholic priest. They were childless. His brother-in-law, the priest, wanted to save him during the war. Reschovsky told him: 'My sheep are going away, so the shepherd has to go, too!' He didn't survive the war. Only a little over a hundred Jews returned to Lucenec after the war.

The Jews in the town were wealthy; after all, we had a beautiful Neolog synagogue. They built it in 1925 according to plans by the architect Baumhorn. Jews in the town kept together, but were separated into castes. That means that the wealthier ones didn't worry too much about the poorer ones. Most of the Jews weren't poor, but of course there were poorer ones to be found as well. There were in fact three synagogues in Lucenec: two Neolog ones and one Orthodox one.

There was also a Sephardic [7](#) community in the town, who'd arrived there mainly from Poland, after the dissolution of the Austro-Hungarian monarchy. They didn't have a separate synagogue, just a prayer hall. We didn't associate much with them, because they were mostly dirty and lice-ridden. No one concerned themselves with them. They differed from the rest of the Jewish population in that they wore large hats and also large payes [8](#). They were different, and then the rest of us were judged according to them, too. We belonged among the Neologs. My mother observed the holidays, but not a kosher [9](#) diet. We didn't have separate dishes, and even ate pork.

I didn't associate with other people very much. I felt very good at home. I didn't even go anywhere. I spent my spare time with my mother. I took care of her. We were like two girlfriends. I loved her very much, and she me as well. I of course loved my brothers very much, too. My parents didn't address me otherwise than 'kislany' ['little girl' in Hungarian]. I was brought up honestly, justly, modestly and to respect my parents. I appreciated everything at home very much. Life is very hard for me now, I never felt better anywhere than at home. I had a very nice family. Our parents gave us everything in the world. Never ever in my life did I get a whipping from my parents. Never. When our father came home, we'd greet him: 'Kezit csókolom!' [from Hungarian: 'I kiss your hand'] and we'd even kiss him. He didn't call my mother by any other name than Ilonka [a diminutive, affectionate form of Ilona]. A very nice family we were.

I can't brag that we lived God knows what sort of lifestyle. We couldn't throw money around because we were living on only my father's salary. On top of that my mother was very ill, too. There were three of us children at home, but our father gave all three of us as much as he could. All three of us graduated from high school. My oldest brother, Sandor Stern, even attended medicine in Prague, but then when the bad times came he couldn't study anymore [10](#), and so he apprenticed as an auto mechanic. My other brother, Gyula [Gyuszika, Jiri, Juraj] Stern was an

artistic carpenter by trade. Gyuszika was also in a concentration camp, and it hounded him his whole life. After the war he graduated from university and for the rest of his life he worked as an aeronautical engineer.

At home we spoke exclusively Hungarian, because my parents were Hungarians. After the war I had a hard time with Slovak. I don't even call them anything else but Tótok [Tot: the Hungarian name for a Slovak. Tótok is the plural of Tot.] I don't have good memories of Slovaks. Most of them embittered my entire life, and many of them lied to me. They hounded me my whole life for being born a Jew. They wouldn't even let us live. I'll jump ahead a bit. My husband, Juraj Fischer, participated in the invasion of Normandy [11](#) as a soldier. He is one of the four Slovaks in history to hold the highest French award, the Legion of Honor. Before him, this award was received for example by Milan Rastislav Stefanik [12](#) as well. Before he accepted this award, he experienced utter hell. The Communists accused him of sabotage and jailed him as a spy and Zionist [13](#). They even wanted to execute him. The fact that he was a Jew and that the Slansky trials [14](#) were in full swing made it worse for him. I'll return to these events. I just want to say that as a result of this, they didn't accept our older daughter Helena at university. When the same was waiting for our younger daughter Viera, I dug in my heels and began making a fuss. I told them that we'd never done anything to anyone, so why are you persecuting us like this our whole lives? My daughter wants to go study! She's got the brains, so let her! Finally we succeeded and Viera graduated from mathematics.

My mother was born in the Hungarian village of Heves. Her maiden name was Braun. My father was born in the town of Kiskoves in 1888. After the breakup of the Austro-Hungarian monarchy, this town fell to Czechoslovakia. In Slovak it's called Maly Kamenec. I don't know anything about their youth. We never spoke about it. Neither do I know how they met and where they were married. All I know is that after finishing high school, my mother worked as a bookkeeper for one of my uncles. I've already talked about my father's work.

I was born in 1922 as Stern Ibolya Rozsa, but after the war the Tótok renamed me to Viola Rozalia Sternova. Up to the age of six, I was brought up by my aunt Irenka in Heves. She and her husband had a large six-room house. They lived very well. I grew up in a very nice family. When one of my parents' siblings was in need, all the others would help him. Once, when I was already a little bigger, I saw these very nice shoes. I showed them to my father. They were relatively expensive. My father told me: 'Little girl, I can't buy them, because I've got obligations towards my sisters. They've got children that I've got to take care of!'

I started attending school in Lucenec, I and my brothers, too. My entire family was intellectually inclined. All my male cousins had a university education. There were lawyers, engineers and writers among them. When I was already in high school, I met one boy, a Jew. His name was Alojz Markovics. He fell very much in love with me. He used to walk with me to school. He even bribed the school principal to call me out of the class during a period, so he could talk to me. At that time in school they called me 'Stern Ibolya Rozsa and the whole flower garden.' [Editor's note: in Hungarian, ibolya is a violet, and rozsa is a rose.] The principal came into the classroom, and said: 'Stern Ibolya Rozsa, your cousin is here again.' We were going out together, but then those bad times began... After the war we ran into each other in Prague on Wenceslaus Square. He walked over to me and said that tomorrow he was flying to the USA. He wanted us to get married and fly away together. That evening he came to see me, and brought me a bouquet of red roses. He was

trying to convince me to go with him.

I had three brothers. My oldest brother was born sometime in 1917, but died at birth. My second brother was born on 17th May 1919. His name was Sandor [Alexander, Sanyi] Stern. After high school, he began studying medicine in Prague. Sanyi was studying medicine, but when the anti-Jewish laws [15](#) were enacted, they expelled him. At one school they said that they'd take him for law, but I don't know how much money would have had to been paid, and my parents didn't have the money for that. When he returned home, he apprenticed as an auto mechanic. But soon the Hungarians took him away for 'munkaszolgalat' [forced labor] [16](#). He died very early on, even before they deported us. He was injured, and they had to amputate his leg. He got some sort of mental illness from that. We didn't even tell my mother about it, she wouldn't have been able to bear it. We learned what had happened from the brother of a girlfriend of mine. Her name was Kleinova. Her oldest brother, Zoli Klein, was with him on 'munkaszolgalat.' After they amputated his leg, his friends were carrying him around on a stretcher. But he didn't want to let them do that, so in the winter he sat down on the ground and said that he'd die there. He died, too, he froze to death.

My other brother, Jiri Stern, or Juraj Stern, was born in 1921. He died in 1999. After the war he graduated as a mechanical engineer. He was an excellent student. Back then the Letnany airport in Prague had announced a competition, because they needed a mechanical engineer, who they'd then put through aeronautical engineering school. My brother applied and they took him, too. He devoted himself only to math and some calculations. He wrote books and had all sorts of professional articles published. His wife worked as a secretary at CKD Sokolov. They were childless.

### During the war

During the war we were at home until 1944. In 1944 the deportations began [17](#). In Lucenec they created a ghetto; they allocated several streets for it. They kept us there for a certain time. Then they deported us to Auschwitz. That's how my story began. I got off the wagon, and right away there was a selection. The left side was the side of death, and the other side was the side of life. During the selection I stayed by my mother's side. But they sent my mother to the side of death. They pushed her so hard that she fell down. She went to the side of death, and I to the side of life. It was a horrible life I had. I can't any more...

In Auschwitz they performed medical experiments on me. They ruined my red blood cells. After the war I was being treated in Prague at a hematological clinic. As a result of the experiments, my medical results gradually got worse. It deteriorated to the point that they had to remove everything in my gynecological area. Luckily I managed to give birth to two daughters [prior to that]. In the concentration camp they beat me with a stick so hard that I'm deaf. When I take off my hearing aid, I don't hear a thing. I don't hear anything at all. We had a hard life. There were days when I had to kneel the whole day. Other times they gave us bricks to hold, and let us stand there with them until we fell down from exhaustion.

They then transported us away from Auschwitz. For some time I worked in a factory for the Siemens company. When there was an air raid, they'd herd us into the cellar. We had to sit there in water. I suffer the consequences of that to this day. Liberation arrived in the Ravensbrück concentration camp [18](#).

## Post-war

After the war, my brother Juraj and I settled in Prague. Before the war we spoke Hungarian, and so our parents had named him Gyula, familiarly Gyuszika. In Czech he changed his name to Jiri, and in Slovakia they called him Juraj. After the war both of us wanted to study. I applied for medicine, and got in, too, but fell ill. At that time Joint [19](#) was working. We were getting a terribly small amount of support. They didn't even put us up in a dormitory, we had to rent from someone. One support payment went right for rent, and we hadn't even eaten yet. It was necessary to decide who'd study, I or my brother. We decided for my brother. I said to myself that I'd get married. My future husband, Juraj Fischer, was already courting me. So I got married. We supported my brother, and he also graduated.

My husband, Juraj Fischer, was from Lucenec, from a prominent Jewish family. They owned a wholesale business that sold steel, paints, stoves and gasoline. His parents were named Gyula Fischer and Sara Fischer, née Sacher. Sara died very young, when my husband was still a small child. My husband had another two brothers; Zigmund [Zsigmond] and Juraj [Gyula]. One of the brothers, who was a lawyer, had his little daughter die on him. He lost his mind as a result. He used to go to her grave every Sunday. Once the Nyilasites caught him. They said to him that they were going to take him in. He answered them: 'Don't take me in yet, I don't have an umbrella! I'll go home for an umbrella, and I'll return, on my honor.' He returned.

My husband left the country as a nineteen-year-old when the persecution of Jews [20](#) was just beginning. In later years, he gave only one longer interview, in 2004, to the weekly Domino forum [a weekly Slovak magazine featuring political and social issues]. In it he described his life story. The story of the escape of a Jewish boy at the start of the war from his hometown of Lucenec, the story of a journey filled with hardships through the Balkans and the Middle East to France, where he took part in Operation Dynamo by the French harbor town of Dunkerque [21](#). From there he went to England, where he joined the Czechoslovak Army. After the landing at Normandy, on 6th June 1944 he took part in Operation Overlord. [Operation Overlord: the name of the landing in Normandy on 6th June 1944. It was one of the largest military operations of World War II.]

After returning home, when he found out that his loved ones had died in concentration camps, he ended up at the beginning of the 1950s as an accused 'saboteur' of the Communist regime in the uranium mines at Jachymov. He survived it all. He also survived the fact that after 1989 [22](#) the courts of a democratic country weren't capable of seeing justice done, and compensate him for the fact that their family's home in the center of Lucenec had been confiscated during the war on the basis of race laws of Szalasi's fascist [23](#) government. The work of the Nazis was topped off by the Communists with an unbelievably shameless act, when they applied a decree on the confiscation of the property of Nazis and their collaborators against a hero of the anti-Fascist resistance!

As if it wasn't enough, in 1996 the District Court in Lucenec refused his request for compensation with the argument that he wasn't the owner of the house: according to the laws of the Fascist Szalasi regime. But the fate of their house had come to an absurd end long before - when in 1975 they tore it down and on its property built the building of the Regional Committee of the Communist Party of Slovakia. Somehow too many symbolic events!

People liked listening to him, because each time there was a story hidden in there somewhere: 'I lived through absolute freedom, pain, joy and despair,' he used to say. At the close of the summer

of 1944, the largest operation in history took place on the coast of Normandy, France. They battled on land as well as on the sea. 'I was in an American Sherman tank. It was a good machine, but it had one fault. It was very slow. When we were driving by Caen, I counted as many as 200 destroyed tanks. It wasn't a pleasant sight. They were in flames. Lying around them were dead bodies. Those that hadn't been shot had burned alive in their tank. We were given the task of occupying important bridges. We were determined to obey the order at all costs. Though we surprised and confused the Germans, they responded very readily. They were shooting at everything that moved. Fighters, bombers, grenades, bullets, swamps and thousands of dead. A friend threw himself on a mine to save us. There was no time to mourn him. Thick machine-gun fire pinned us to the ground. We found out that Hitler was still in doubt whether this was the true invasion. We were lying in a stream. The Germans were already less than 5 meters away from us. We were tired. Our commander's submachine gun slipped from his shoulder. It clanked against his helmet, which he had placed on the ground beside him. The Germans heard it. At that moment, I realized only one thing - that they can't kill the commander. I jumped up from the stream and bellowed for them to surrender, that there were mines everywhere here. They surrendered! We were saved. We kept advancing. The Germans were putting up resistance mainly by the seashore. At the beginning of August, the Allies had the road to Paris along the Seine open.'

After the war, my husband worked for a wholesale company in Lucenec. He was the deputy director. The wholesale company distributed various goods to other stores. They distributed motorcycles, furniture, and dishes, for example. All sorts of things. My husband knew the director very well, as they'd served together as soldiers of the Czechoslovak army abroad during the war. Once some new motorcycles arrived. It was on Saturday, and they couldn't put them into the warehouse, because there was simply no room for them there. They left them out in the courtyard and carefully covered them with tarpaulins. Then the StB [24](#) came for his director. They arrested him for purposefully damaging state property, meaning those motorcycles. My husband went to get him out of there, and that's how it all started...

During the Slansky trials they arrested him and accused him of sabotage. It took place as follows. When I came home from work, the house was full of members of the StB. They'd come in two cars and throw everyone out of the house. This was in February, and I began feeling very ill. They went into the kitchen, brought a pot full of cold water, and poured it on me. What more can I say to that? At that time they confiscated my husband's house and summoned us to the local National Committee offices in Lucenec. They dealt with us in a Gestapo-like manner. It's a good thing that they didn't put us up against the wall! It was horrible.

I don't even know anymore how many years he got. They wanted to hang him. They convicted him in such a manner that they even changed his personal data. In the court records it's written that he was born in the district of Filakovo, when in reality he was born in Lucenec. He did his time in Jachymov, where the prisoners were drying radioactive material. I received permission to visit him, but my brother went there because I had no money.

When they convicted my husband, I had a nervous breakdown. I wanted to kill the prosecutor in Banska Bystrica. When they pronounced the verdict, I stood up. I walked and walked and was pushing a table in front of me. I wanted to pin him against the wall. When they saw this, they took him out the other set of doors. In Jachymov he was among Germans that had been convicted of war crimes. There were bunks there, but there were less of them than convicts. They wouldn't let

them lay down. I sent my husband a photo of me. One German asked him: 'That's your wife? But she's not Jewish?' He answered: 'No.' So they let him lay down.

After the war they persecuted me too, and wouldn't even give me a proper job. For 29 years I worked as an economist for an agricultural company in Lucenec. At work they didn't call me anything else but a dirty old Jew. We had a very hard life. I'm very worn out; while my husband was in jail, I had to take care of the family. Because he was in jail, they gave me the lowest wages. During the day I worked, and at night I sewed, in order to support the family.

After the Velvet Revolution, various travails regarding the return of our property began. We didn't succeed in this either. One of the more joyous occasions came in 2004, when my husband was awarded the Legion of Honor in France. He was given the award by President Jacques Chirac. [Chirac, Jacques (b. 1932): French politician and from 1995 – 2007 president of the French Republic.] The Slovak president also accompanied him on the trip. But a year later his health began to deteriorate rapidly. When I was with him in the hospital in Lucenec, they among other things told me: 'You know what, Mrs. Fischerova, you can stick that award you know where...'

### **My grandson**

My husband died on 9th May 2007. During the toughest times, our grandson Peter Cizmarik helped us. He even moved us from Lucenec to live with him in Bratislava. After his death, everyone suddenly remembered my husband. The funeral took place at the Jewish cemetery in Lucenec, and was arranged by our grandson Peter. Before the funeral, he was getting phone calls from the Office of the President and from the French, British and Israeli embassies. Peter took to the funeral his grandpa's uniform, awards, and also a gift-wrapped bottle of calvados that my husband had received on the 60th anniversary of the Allied landing in Normandy in June 2004.

He also brought three copies of an older edition of the novel 'Count of Monte Cristo' [by French novelist and dramatist Alexandre Dumas (1802-1870)]. After my husband had taken a ship from Beirut to Marseille during the war, he ended up on the famous island of If. On the same one where they'd once held Count Monte Cristo prisoner. In his interview for Domino forum in 2004, my husband said with an undisguised sense of humor: 'After three days on the island of If, we went to the town of Agde, where the Czechoslovak army was located. There I got an army ID number, and they assigned me to the anti-tank artillery. To be more exact, they assigned me to one mare mule that was supposed to pull a cannon. The mule was such a bastard – excuse the expression – that the more energy you expended on her, the more odious she was. Then one farmer gave me some advice: my boy, you've got to be gentle with her, pet her, say come little mule, and she'll go herself. And it really worked.'

During the first 20 minutes of the service, our grandson showed the beginning of Spielberg's film 'Saving Private Ryan.' Those that have seen it know that the scenes in it are naturalistic. Maybe too much so. Like the reality on the beaches of Omaha on 6th June 1944, and many days afterwards. After representatives of the town, the Ministry of Defense and telegrams from the Office of the President, the chargé d'affaires of the Embassy of Great Britain, Tom Carter expressed his condolences in person. He spoke of how his country immensely values and respects people like Juraj Fischer. After all, from year to year there are less of them. The first secretary of the French Embassy, Xavier Rouard, spoke in a similar spirit, in Slovak and without notes. The merits and works of the deceased, were also praised by the consul of the Israeli Embassy, Chaim Levy. He

then also participated as the only one of the diplomats present in the second part of the funeral at the Jewish cemetery.

I can't talk about my trials and tribulations anymore. That's why I'd like to end our interview with a poem that I wrote for future generations. So that they don't forget that I was also here, that I also lived...

“Elmúlt egy év, elmúlt egy nap és huszonnégy óra.  
Elmúlt egy hét, elmúlt egy élet. Egy élet és mindennapi élet.  
Jöjj vissza nyár, hozd vissza a fiatalságom már!  
Tudom, hogy ez mind csak álom!  
Hozdd vissza a beteg férjem, nekem ő még így is kell...  
Én majd meggyógyítom. Meggyógyítom a szeretetemmel.  
Ó, jöjj vissza nyár! Add vissza a fiatalságom már.  
Ó gyere vissza, ne hagyj itt! Még mi együtt fogunk menni a vasúton.  
Kéz a kézben, nevetve fogjuk a gyerekeink kezét, és megyünk előre.  
És megyünk. És megyünk a dombtetőre, hogy megmutassam a gyerekeimnek a szép világot. Ott fogtok élni boldogan, együtt az egész család.  
Ne nézzetek hátra! Ott csak a szeretet vár. Nektek előre kell menni a dombtetőre.  
Ott minden szép, nincs hazugság. Ott csak egyetértés van. És megyünk, és megyünk.  
Én már nem tudok menni, fáradt a testem, és a testemmel elfáradt a lelkem is.  
De akkor is megyek. Az út szélén majd lesz egy gödör, ott majd eltemetnek.  
Lehet, hogy ott tesznek valami sírkövet és ráírjátok  
„Itt nyugszik a drága jó édesanyánk, nagymama,  
aki még a szélről is féltett minket.  
Úgy nevelt felt és már nagyon várta a nyugalmat!”  
Most nyugalma lesz neki. Aludd örök álmodat, drága jó nagymamám,  
örök békében. Te vagy a mindenünk, aludd örök álmodat. Így is fogom csinálni.

One year, one day and twenty four hours passed.  
A week passed, my life passed. One everyday life.  
Come back summer, return me my youth!  
I know that this is but a dream!  
Return me my ill husband, I need him even so...  
I'll make him well. I'll heal him with my love.  
Oh, summer, come back! Return me my youth!  
Oh, come back, don't leave me here alone! We'll still travel together by train.  
Hand in hand, smiling, we hold our children by the hand and so stride forward.  
And go. We go to the top of a hill, so I can show our children this beautiful world.  
There we'll live happily, the whole family together.  
Don't look around! Only love awaits you there. You just have to keep going forward, up to the hill.  
There everything's beautiful, there's no lie there. There's only understanding there. And we're going, still going.  
I can no longer go on, my body's tired, and my soul has become tired too.  
But despite my tiredness I walk on. On the edge of the road there will be a pit where they'll bury me.

Maybe they'll even build a monument there, where you'll write:

"Here lies our dear mother, grandmother,

Who protected us even from the wind.

She brought us up and greatly desired rest!

Now she'll be in peace. Dream your eternal dream, my dear grandma,

In eternal peace. You're everything for us, just dream your eternal dream." And I'll do that.

## Glossary

### **1 Slovak State (1939-1945)**

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

### **2 First Vienna Decision**

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

### **3 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.

### **4 Arrow Cross Party**

The most extreme of the Hungarian fascist movements in the mid-1930s. The party consisted of several groups, though the name is now commonly associated with the faction organized by Ferenc

Szalasi and Kalman Hubay in 1938. Following the Nazi pattern, the party promised not only the establishment of a fascist-type system including social reforms, but also the 'Solution of the Jewish Question'. The party's uniform consisted of a green shirt and a badge with a set of crossed arrows, a Hungarian version of the swastika, on it. On 15th October 1944, when Governor Horthy announced Hungary's withdrawal from the war, the Arrow Cross seized power with military help from the Germans. The Arrow Cross government ordered general mobilization and enforced a regime of terror which, though directed chiefly against the Jews, also inflicted heavy suffering on the Hungarians. It was responsible for the deportation and death of tens of thousands of Jews. After the Soviet army liberated the whole of Hungary by early April 1945, Szalasi and his Arrow Cross ministers were brought to trial and executed.

## **5 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 so-called Status Quo Ante advocated that the Jewish community was maintained the same as before the 1868/69 Congress.

## **6 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).

## **7 Sephardi Jewry**

(Hebrew for 'Spanish') Jews of Spanish and Portuguese origin. Their ancestors settled down in North Africa, the Ottoman Empire, South America, Italy and the Netherlands after they had been driven out from the Iberian peninsula at the end of the 15th century. About 250,000 Jews left Spain and Portugal on this occasion. A distant group among Sephardi refugees were the Crypto-Jews (Marranos), who converted to Christianity under the pressure of the Inquisition but at the first occasion reassumed their Jewish identity. Sephardi preserved their community identity; they speak Ladino language in their communities up until today. The Jewish nation is formed by two main groups: the Ashkenazi and the Sephardi group which differ in habits, liturgy their relation toward Kabala, pronunciation as well in their philosophy.

## **8 Orthodox Jewish dress**

Main characteristics of observant Jewish appearance and dresses: men wear a cap or hat while women wear a shawl (the latter is obligatory in case of married women only). The most peculiar skull-cap is called kippah (other name: yarmulkah; kapedli in Yiddish), worn by men when they leave the house, reminding them of the presence of God and thus providing spiritual protection and safety. Orthodox Jewish women had their hair shaved and wore a wig. In addition, Orthodox Jewish men wear a tallit (Hebrew term; talles in Yiddish) [prayer shawl] and its accessories all day long under their clothes but not directly on their body. Wearing payes (Yiddish term; payot in Hebrew) [long sideburns] is linked with the relevant prohibition in the Torah [shaving or trimming the beard as well as the hair around the head was forbidden]. The above habits originate from the Torah and the Shulchan Arukh. Other pieces of dresses, the kaftan [Russian, later Polish wear] among others, thought to be typical, are an imitation. According to non-Jews these characterize the Jews while they are not compulsory for the Jews.

## **9 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.

## **10 Exclusion of Jews from schools in the Protectorate**

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

## **11 The Battle of Normandy**

was fought in 1944 between Nazi Germany in Western Europe and the invading Allied forces as part of the larger conflict of World War II. Operation Overlord was the codename for the Allied invasion of northwest Europe, which began on 6th June 1944, and ended on 19th August 1944, when the Allies crossed the River Seine. Over sixty years later, the Normandy invasion still remains the largest seaborne invasion in history, involving almost three million troops crossing the English Channel from England to Normandy. Operation Neptune was the codename given to the initial assault phase of Operation Overlord; its mission, to gain a foothold on the continent, started on 6th June 1944 (commonly known as D-Day) and ended on 30th June 1944.

## **12 Stefanik, Milan Rastislav (1880 - 1919)**

Slovak astronomer, politician and a general in the French Army. In 1914 he received from the French government the Order of a Knight of the Honorary Legion for scientific and diplomatic successes. During the years 1913 - 1918 he organized the Czech-Slovak legions in Serbia, Romania, Russia and Italy, and in 1918 the anti-Soviet intervention in Siberia. He died in the year 1919 during an unexplained plane crash during his return to Slovakia. He is buried at a burial mound in Bradlo. (Source: <http://www.osobnosti.sk/index.php?os=zivotopis&ID=755>)

## **13 Zionism**

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

## **14 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.

## **15 Anti-Jewish laws in the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia**

In March 1939, there lived in the Protectorate 92,199 inhabitants classified according to the so-called Nuremberg Laws as Jews. On 21st June 1939, Konstantin von Neurath, the Reich Protector, passed the so-called Edict Regarding Jewish Property, which put restrictions on Jewish property. On 24th April 1940, a government edict was passed which eliminated Jews from economic activity. Similarly like previous legal changes it was based on the Nuremberg 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, defense attorneys and so on. Jewish residents could participate in public life only in the realm of religious Jewish organizations. Jews were forbidden to enter certain streets, squares, parks and other public places. From September 1939 they were forbidden from being outside their home after 8pm. Beginning in November 1939 they couldn't leave, even temporarily, their place of residence without special permission. Residents of Jewish extraction were barred from visiting theaters and cinemas, restaurants and cafés, swimming pools, libraries and other entertainment and sports centers. On public transport they were limited to standing room in the last car, in trains they weren't allowed to use dining or sleeping cars and could ride only in the lowest class, again only in the last car. They weren't allowed entry into waiting rooms and other station facilities. The Nazis limited shopping hours for Jews to twice two hours and later only two hours per day. They confiscated radio equipment and limited their choice of groceries. Jews weren't allowed to keep animals at home. Jewish children were prevented from visiting German, and, from August 1940, also Czech public and private schools. In March 1941 even so-called re-education courses organized by the Jewish Religious Community were forbidden, and from June 1942 also education in Jewish schools. To eliminate Jews from society it was important that they be easily identifiable. Beginning in March 1940, citizenship cards of Jews were marked by the letter 'J' (for Jude - Jew). From 1st September 1941 Jews older than six could only go out in public if they wore a yellow six-pointed star with 'Jude' written on it on their clothing.

## **16 Forced Labor in Hungary**

Under the 1939 II. Law 230, those deemed unfit for military service were required to complete "public interest work service". After the implementation of the second anti-Jewish Law within the military, the military arranged "special work battalions" for those Jews, who were not called up for armed service. With the entry into northern Transylvania (August 1940), those of Jewish origin who had begun, and were now finishing, their military service were directed to the work battalions. A decree in 1941 unified the arrangement, saying that the Jews were to fulfill military obligations in the support units of the National Guard. In the summer of 1942, thousands of Jews were recruited to labor battalions with the Hungarian troops going to the Soviet front. Some 50,000 in labor battalions went with the Second Hungarian Army to the Eastern Front - of these, only 6-7,000 returned.

## **17 19th March 1944**

Hitler found out about Prime Minister Miklos Kallay's and Governor Miklos Horthy's attempts to make peace with the west, and by the end of 1943 worked out the plans, code-named 'Margarethe I. and II.', for the German invasion of Hungary. In early March 1944, Hitler, fearing a possible Anglo-American occupation of Hungary, gave orders to German forces to march into the country. On 18th March, he met Horthy in Klessheim, Austria and tried to convince him to accept the German steps, and for the signing of a declaration in which the Hungarians would call for the occupation by German troops. Horthy was not willing to do this, but promised he would stay in his position and would name a German puppet government in place of Kallay's. On 19th March, the Germans occupied Hungary without resistance. The ex-ambassador to Berlin, Dome Sztojay, became new prime minister, who - though nominally responsible to Horthy - in fact, reconciled his politics with Edmund Veessenmayer, the newly arrived delegate of the Reich.

## **18 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.

## **19 Joint (American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee)**

The Joint was formed in 1914 with the fusion of three American Jewish committees of assistance, which were alarmed by the suffering of Jews during World War I. In late 1944, the Joint entered Europe's liberated areas and organized a massive relief operation. It provided food for Jewish survivors all over Europe, it supplied clothing, books and school supplies for children. It supported cultural amenities and brought religious supplies for the Jewish communities. The Joint also operated DP camps, in which it organized retraining programs to help people learn trades that would enable them to earn a living, while its cultural and religious activities helped re-establish Jewish life. The Joint was also closely involved in helping Jews to emigrate from Europe and from Muslim countries. The Joint was expelled from East Central Europe for decades during the Cold War and it has only come back to many of these countries after the fall of communism. Today the Joint provides social welfare programs for elderly Holocaust survivors and encourages Jewish renewal and communal development.

## **20 Anti-Jewish laws in Hungary**

Following similar legislation in Nazi Germany, Hungary enacted three Jewish laws in 1938, 1939 and 1941. The first law restricted the number of Jews in industrial and commercial enterprises, banks and in certain occupations, such as legal, medical and engineering professions, and journalism to 20% of the total number. This law defined Jews on the basis of their religion, so those who converted before the short-lived Hungarian Soviet Republic in 1919, as well as those who fought in World War I, and their widows and orphans were exempted from the law. The second Jewish law introduced further restrictions, limiting the number of Jews in the above fields to 6%, prohibiting the employment of Jews completely in certain professions such as high school and university teaching, civil and municipal services, etc. It also forbade Jews to buy or sell land and so forth. This law already defined Jews on more racial grounds in that it regarded baptized children that had at least one non-converted Jewish parent as Jewish. The third Jewish law prohibited

intermarriage between Jews and non-Jews, and defined anyone who had at least one Jewish grandparent as Jewish.

## **21 Operation Dynamo**

began on 26th May 1940. The goal of the Allied army was to evacuate as many soldiers as possible to England from the besieged French town of Dunkerque. The Germans didn't manage to occupy Dunkerque until 4th June, when the evacuation was mostly nearing its end, and the main part of the army was saved. However, 40.000 French and British soldiers remained in the town, defended it until the last moment, and enabled their fellow soldiers to escape the siege. All the defenders were captured by the Germans.

## **22 Velvet Revolution**

Also known as November Events, this term is used for the period between 17th November and 29th December 1989, which resulted in the downfall of the Czechoslovak communist regime. A non-violent political revolution in Czechoslovakia that meant the transition from Communist dictatorship to democracy. The Velvet Revolution began with a police attack against Prague students on 17th November 1989. That same month the citizen's democratic movement Civic Forum (OF) in Czech and Public Against Violence (VPN) in Slovakia were formed. On 10th December a government of National Reconciliation was established, which started to realize democratic reforms. On 29th December Vaclav Havel was elected president. In June 1990 the first democratic elections since 1948 took place.

## **23 Szalasi, Ferenc (1897-1946)**

Ferenc Szalasi was the leader of the Arrow-Cross Party, prime minister. He came from a middle class family, his father was a clerk. He studied at the Bacsujhely Military Academy, and in 1915 he became a lieutenant. After WWI he was nominated captain and became a member of the general staff. In 1930 he became a member of the secret race protecting association called Magyar Elet [Hungarian Life], and in 1935 he established his own association, called Nemzeti Akarat Partja [Party of the National Will]. At the 1936 interim elections his party lost, and the governing party tried to prevent them from gaining more ground. At the 1939 elections Szalasi and his party won 31 electoral mandates. At German pressure Horthy appointed him as prime minister, and shortly after he got hold of the presidential office too. He introduced a total terror with the Arrow-Cross men and continued the eradication of the Jewry, and the hauling of the values of the country to Germany. He was arrested by American troops in Germany, where he had fled from Soviet occupation on 29th March 1945. He was executed as war criminal on 12th March 1946.

## **24 Statni Tajna Bezpecnost**

Czechoslovak intelligence and security service founded in 1948.