Jiri Franek

Jiri Franek
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Jiri Franek, formerly named Jiri Frischman (83), is a professor of Slavic studies who has lectured at leading German universities, at the Charles University in Prague, has contributed to the Svoboda and Odeon papers, and the Lidove (People's) publishers.

Today he is retired, but nevertheless is still interested in the issues of his field and participates in conferences about the Holocaust. The interview was made in his Prague apartment, where he lives with his wife.

Jiri Franek belongs to the family of the famous Viktor Vohryzek 1, the founder of the Czech-Jewish movement 2. Jiri Franek has his own theory of Jewishness, according to which Jews don't form a nation or religion, but a 'pospolity,' or community.

For this reason he also refuses to write jew with a capital 'J.' He was also brought up according to the Czech-Jewish movement. He rebukes today's Jewish life for gradually removing itself from Czech life – he feels that he is a Czech of Jewish origin. Conversing with him was very pleasant, because he is capable of telling anecdotes from his life dispassionately and with humor.

[Editor's note: Upon Mr. Franek's request we publish his biography using small letter "j" for the word "jew" and the like.]

- **My family background**

I don't remember my grandparents, because I never met them, when I was born they were already dead. I do though know relatively a lot about them, because we had a strong family tradition and after the war I started to become interested in our family's history. Unfortunately I know more about my mother's side than my father's.

I don't know where my father's ancestors – the Frischmanns – came from. In the end they lived in Benesov, where my grandfather Adolf Frischmann had a wholesale grain business. The

Frischmanns most likely still ‘Germanized’ quite a bit, that is, expressed themselves more in German than in Czech, but their children already tended towards Czech identity, as was the case in those days in many jewish families. Grandpa’s mother tongue was most likely German and as opposed to his children he was inclined towards German. My grandfather’s family wasn’t Orthodox 3.

I know very little about my grandmother, who was named Frischmannova, née Wallersteinova; I don’t remember her first name. She lived with Grandpa in Benesov, and she was likely a housewife. They spoke German at home, although later I came by her poems, which she wrote in Czech. Grandma had a feeling for literature. Later I wanted to publish her poems, but it never worked out.

My father’s oldest brother, Uncle Arnost Frischmann, lived in Benesov, and was married to Otylie Frischmannova, née Krausova. They had a daughter, Anicka Frischmannova. He inherited my grandfather’s wholesale grain business. Uncle Arnost became a member of the resistance and was shot by the Gestapo sort of outside of the jewish quota, that is, not for being jewish.

My uncle was shot during the German occupation before the deportations to concentration camps started. Now in Benesov near Prague there is a memorial hall in which my uncle occupies quite an honored place. I gathered all the relics and reminders of him, because I used to collect those types of things, and already before the war started I buried them, that’s why it all got saved.

The memorial hall for deceased jews is in a former cemetery morgue, and I sent them all the materials I had. It’s not his memorial hall, but in the deceased jews’ memorial there’s simply a section for members of the resistance.

My father’s other brother, my uncle Rudolf Frischmann, graduated from law school. He fought in World War I, during which he met Jan Masaryk 4. In fact, it was said that he saved Masaryk’s life. How, that remained a secret. Of course it could be true, or not, but one thing is certain, and that is that when my uncle Rudolf died, my aunt got a newsstand. I have one or two letters from Jan Masaryk, which I later gave my aunt’s sister.

Rudolf Frischmann’s family continued to have ties with Jan Masaryk long after World War I. Uncle Rudolf’s wife was my mother’s cousin – so we were de facto doubly related. Aunt Marie was born Stukartova, which is a quite famous German name, but she was jewish. My uncle Rudolf and aunt Marie met each other at my parents’ wedding

Unfortunately I was a witness to my uncle Rudolf’s death. In those days they lived in Usti nad Labem, and during the night he had a stroke. My aunt told me to run and go get a doctor, and I had no idea where I should run – they lived in this villa, so my aunt ran out in a nightshirt to show me the way and told me run quickly and tell the doctor to hurry, that for sure it was a heart attack.

She also said that the doctor was a German, but that hopefully he’d come anyways. So I ran to the doctor’s house, in those days there were no after-hours services and one had to go to the doctor’s home, I woke him up and told him that it was urgent, a heart attack. He took his time and kept saying ‘come on, what’s the hurry’, he delayed purposely, so that when he finally arrived, all that was left for him to do was pronounce him dead.

Another of my father’s brothers, Dr. Alois Frischmann, lived in Chocen, right beside Vysoke Myto, where our family lived. My uncle was a completely ‘Czechified’ jew. He was a very good tennis

player and was the local tennis functionary. In fact, after the war they named after him a street that ran beside the tennis courts in Chocen, Alois Frischmann Street.

Not long after that, when exactly I'm not sure, as of course no-one announced it to me, they renamed it. Once when the communists were already in power I arrived there on a visit, and what do I see but that it's been renamed to U Tenisu [Tennis St.], which is what it's called to this day.

My uncle was never involved with any resistance activities, as opposed to his brother [Arnost Frischmann], but also came to an unfortunate end, because he was denounced by a colleague of his, for continuing to practice at a time when jews were no longer allowed to practice medicine.

I still remember that, he simply kept on practicing despite the ban, because people were used to him, and he must have been a good doctor. That's quite obvious, because all warnings of 'it's dangerous for you, and for me' were for nought. People said 'Mr. Doctor, you have to see me. You have to come. And you say you have a jewish star 5? So come at night.' In the end the whole town knew about it.

Chocen had a population of six or eight thousand, and no one said a thing, until one fellow doctor denounced him. I know his name, but I don't want to name him, because his descendants would want proof, and that of course doesn't exist. Because of this my uncle was shot before the start of the Holocaust.

My father, Alfred Frischman, was born in 1881, I'm not sure exactly where, but after getting married he spent the rest of his life in Vysoke Myto. His mother tongue was Czech. My father was a merchant, a tradesman – he wasn't able to study because his parents couldn't afford it. He was in business together with my mother, they had a company where they manufactured and also sold lingerie, bedding and towels. We manufactured it, and in the surrounding villages they stitched monograms onto it.

My father was a leftist in his thinking, he was apparently a free-thinker, his library testifies to this. He was a bit of a 'pub athlete.' I remember his large library, which was full of Czech books, he had complete collections by Macha 6, Sova [Antonin Sova (1864 – 1928)], his favourite poet Bezruc 7, free-thinking authors from Hasek's 8 circle – Kulda and Saur.

To this day I have books from his library that weren't lost during the war, saved and given to me by a friend of mine. My father's library was a testament to his total assimilation. He wasn't anti-religious, more like non-religious. My Czech identity comes for the most part from my father.

Otherwise my father was apparently a political person, very politically aware, he had wanted to study, but since his two older brothers were already studying, the family couldn't afford it. Rudolf studied law, Alois medicine, and there was no money left for the third brother, so he couldn't study, which bothered him for the rest of his life.

Dad was an athlete, he was friends with Laufer, the first Czechoslovak sports commentator, who broadcast mainly soccer and hockey on the radio. Laufer was a jew and Dad was a good friend of his, and constantly boasted about it. I don't exactly know why my father didn't fight in the war, but he wasn't in the army, although both of his brothers fought in the war.

My father and mother met at the first All-Sokol Slet [Rally] 9 held after World War I. I don't really know if my father had some girls before that or not, probably he did, because he was quite a handsome man. However, Mother did later confide in my brother and me that she had had several boyfriends, in fact I know some of them by name.

However, because of her parents there could be no thought of her marrying a non-jew. In those days parents were obeyed, so in the end she was happy when she met a person who was jewish – and therefore satisfied her parents – while also suiting her – they understood each other thanks to their common opinion regarding Czech-jewishness.

Unfortunately my father died prematurely at 31, of appendicitis. When my father died, he was cremated according to my mother's wishes, which in their generation was a common thing in our family: that the funeral was carried out with an urn, as opposed to a strict jewish ritual. My mother believed that when a person dies they have to be cremated, because she was afraid that people buried in a coffin could revive, and that it must be a horrible thing.

A cremated person has the certainty that he's dead, and can't wake up in a coffin. Though my father was cremated, the ceremony was blessed by a rabbi. I don't remember anymore who was rabbi at the time, but it was quite a big funeral, which started in Vysoke Myto. I was small when my father died, so my impression at the time was more of some celebration than my father's funeral.

In my mother's family it's more jewish, but at the same time more Czech-jewish, because my grandmother was born Filipina Vohryzkova, sister of Viktor Vohryzek, the founder of the Czech-jewish movement. Grandma's mother tongue was therefore Czech, that's something that was emphasized in their family.

The whole family had a clear impetus from Viktor Vohryzek, it was a programmatically Czech-jewish family, still very religious, however anti-Orthodox and anti-Zionist. My grandma studied at a girls' home economics school, and when she married my grandfather, Moritz Pfeifer, became a housewife. She died very young, of cancer, long before I was born. Her grave is in the jewish cemetery in Pardubice.

My grandmother's brother, Viktor Vohryzek, was born in 1864 in Prestavlky. Our family considered him to be the founder of the Czech-jewish movement. Later, when I began studying it, I found that he wasn't by far the founder of the movement, but his significance over preceding generations was that he brought Czech-Judaism into the centre of political events.

This was confirmed by his successor, the head of the Czech-jewish movement, Jindrich Kohn 10. Viktor Vohryzek was a great admirer of Tomas G. Masaryk 11 and even exchanged several letters with him. He and his colleague, Jindrich Kohn, had differing opinions on Zionism – Viktor was decidedly an anti-Zionist. Although he was very religious, he was also anti-Orthodox.

In opposition to this Jindrich Kohn expressed an interesting idea, which I think is true, that Zionism is a type of assimilation. He claimed that jews don't want to be anything extra, and so have two choices – the first, assimilants, become part of another nation. The others, the Zionists, want to build a new state and nation in Palestine. Therefore he perceived both as assimilation.

Viktor Vohryzek had a prominent place in the entire family, his memory had to be honored. A typical example of this was the wedding of my father's brother, Alois Frischmann, who wasn't at all

a blood relative of the Vohryzka family. According to the custom of those days, someone played matchmaker and suggested a girl who would make a suitable bride for him.

He went to have a look at her and they ‘fell for each other.’ Alois then went to see my parents so that he could ask their advice. The first question was: ‘Is she jewish?’ and he said ‘Yes.’ ‘And is she Czech?’ and he said ‘No.’ That was a complete catastrophe! He had to promise that his wife was going to learn Czech.

Later she really did learn Czech, and quite well, because she came to Chocen, to a solely Czech town. In this way Czech-Judaism was propagated not only in the Vohryzka family, but then also in the Pfeifer family, in the Frischmann family, in short it was all under the influence of Viktor Vohryzek.

Then I found out that Vohryzek’s religious life was purely jewish, which is interesting, how quickly it went. He left behind extensive works – stories, essays, I think not very good poetry, two dramas and many long theoretical and controversial articles.

Viktor Vohryzek practiced medicine in Pardubice. I have a very romantic impression of him. I don’t know if all the legends about him are true – but it was said that he used to have his carriage stop under a streetlamp and he would sit and read in its light. In this fashion he for example studied philosophy and other texts that interested him.

How much truth there is in this we’ll now never know, but since the profession of a doctor is quite difficult and time-consuming, it could have happened. By coincidence, as I later found out, Viktor Vohryzek once treated my wife’s mother.

Viktor Vohryzek married and had a son, Jiri Vohryzek. Jiri was a chemical engineer in Pardubice. Jiri’s daughter Vitezslava, the granddaughter of Viktor Vohryzek, was a dentist in Prague.

My mother’s family was pronouncedly religious, and for them jewishness was exclusively just a religion. Viktor Vohryzek led polemics with Zionism and was pretty well its enemy. His articles listed all of the negatives, unfortunately some of them, actually almost all, are true to this day.

That they won’t all fit [jews into Palestine], that the country won’t provide them a livelihood, that there is a shortage of water there, that there are Arabs there who won’t give up and retreat. But near the end of his life he said, ‘Well all right, if you want, why couldn’t those jews who consider themselves to be a nation, why couldn’t they live in Israel. You may be successful, but you’ll have to make peace with the Arabs.’ It always takes two to make peace.

His successor, Jindrich Kohn, wrote the philosophical work Assimilation and The Ages, in which he develops his theory of Czech-jewishness. He claims that Zionism is nothing more than assimilation. This interesting theory in turn influenced the whole Vohryzka family.

He [Jindrich Kohn] had a grand theory of assimilation, in which he claimed that jews are an abnormal nation, he calls it the ‘jewish clan,’ which I don’t consider to be very appropriate terminology. But he did perceive one important thing, that jews are neither a nation nor a religion, it’s something else, for which a term has to be invented.

According to him jews are brought together by the ‘jewish clan.’ It spread throughout the entire Vohryzek family, that Zionists really don’t want anything other than to be a nation like everyone else. So they wouldn’t be divided, so they could assimilate as a whole, as opposed to the assimilationists that want to assimilate as individuals.

I think that it gripped our family, with the exception of Vera [Vera Bysicka, stepsister of Jiri Franek’s mother], who via her Germanic roots came by a somewhat mystic Judaism. Otherwise the whole family considered itself to be Czech. I think that this almost certainly applies to not only just our family. Zionism and assimilation are no longer viewed as opposites. This was a novelty, for I did live through times where they were perceived as opposites.

Viktor Vohryzek was at first uncompromising when it came to the question of nationality. Later that changed, somehow for him jewishness was something completely obvious, but nationality was Czech. Jewishness was for him simply and solely a religion, he didn’t accept any other view.

He had an enormous influence with his theory of jewish ‘pospolity,’ or community. Unfortunately today he is fading into obscurity, although occasionally somewhere they cite him and write about his life. Of course things evolved, when Zionism came about, all jews retreated from their positions a bit, they allowed that he who wants, who can and who was raised that way, can be a Zionist, can feel himself to be a member of the jewish nation. I have my own theory on this, I claim that jews are neither a nation nor a religion, that it’s something that has yet to be named.

Viktor Vohryzek died in 1918 in Pardubice, so I never knew him. I do remember his brother Max Vohryzek a bit, he lived a little ways away from us in Vysoke Myto and had a wife named Hermina. I also vaguely remember the children of Viktor’s other brother, Lev Vohryzek.

Viktor Vohryzek has a beautiful monument, built for him by the Czech-jewish League at the jewish cemetery in Pardubice. The family grave of Max Vohryzek and Hermina Vohryzkova is right beside Viktor’s monument. All three were buried according to jewish rituals, in their generation this was still viewed as a matter of fact.

For this reason I often visit the jewish cemetery in Pardubice, and in fact lately I have been participating in an attempt to revive the jewish cemetery and jewish life in Pardubice, in which the non-jew Tyc helped me. We wanted to found a ‘Victor Vohryzek Society.’ However Tyc died and with that it all collapsed, because he didn’t have a chance to initiate a successor. What’s more, there are perhaps only two jews in all of Pardubice, and I can no longer handle it alone.

My grandfather, Moritz Pfeifer, was a baker in Nove Hrady. There is a beautiful rococo chateau there. Relatively long after the war [WWII] I visited the town and asked about if anyone remember baker Pfeifer. I found an old man, who told me where Moritz Pfeifer had a window out of which he sold his goods, where he had his ovens and so on.

When my grandfather’s daughter, that is my mother, was of marriage age, he decided that he had to do something for her. He bought a house in Vysoke Myto that for those times and in that town was quite spacious. It was a one-story house with a large tract of land in the back where he built a bakery. When he died in 1921, the ovens were sold at a fraction of their value and it was a horrible family and financial calamity.

Only a tall factory chimney remained, which I then inherited. According to the wishes of the National Committee I had to have that huge chimney demolished at my own expense, which was a very hair-raising and wild experience.

Grandpa Pfeifer had five children. Two daughters were from his first marriage. One married some Bysicky and they moved away to Germany. I still to this day keep in touch with my great-grandniece, Vera Bysicka, who lives in Berlin.

First she became Germanized, and as opposed to her ancestors, then jewified. Now she is a bigoted jewess. She travels to Israel, so far she hasn't moved there yet. She is a very intelligent, educated young lady. She translates from Russian for a leading German publishing house.

Grandpa Pfeifer lived long enough to see my brother: he's on a photograph, holding him. He died in 1921. When I was born, I had not even one grandfather or grandmother. So from this viewpoint I'm an orphan.

My mother had a much older sister, named Tyna Feiglova. Aunt Tyna was childless. She had a junk shop, which of course one wasn't allowed to say in front of her. One had to say that she had a 'store with used and new clothing,' because she always had about five new outfits there. Her store was on Maislova Street in Prague, now there's some sort of company there, I don't even know which. It was a huge store, with two display windows and two entrances, and Aunt Feiglova also lived there.

My aunt's husband was a businessman. He went bankrupt and eventually died. Aunt Tyna went through tough times, but got through them. That junk shop did very well for her, she became very rich. I still remember her, as an old lady, in tall lace-up boots and long skirts. She was always terribly strait-laced, she would never in her life have worn short sleeves. During the last years of her life she was apathetic, but whenever we would come to visit, we had to say, 'I kiss your hand, auntie.'

Tyna we called her, and she would pull out two hundred-crown bills, one for my brother and one for me. These days that would be at least five hundred [500 Czech crowns (CZK)]. We always looked forward to having money in Prague. Only we were deathly afraid that we would have to sleep at her place when we came for a visit from Vysoke Myto to Prague. Her apartment, you see, which was also on Maislova Street, was horribly infested with bedbugs.

It stank of the petroleum that it was wiped, sprayed and gassed with. This was completely futile, because the entire neighborhood was infested. Otherwise she had a nice apartment. But I remember the bedbugs to this day, there I could have trained for the concentration camp.

I can't stand those little critters, because of them I didn't sleep for months on end in the concentration camp. When I had a bit of luck I had a beautiful sleep, and when we came the second day, the bedbugs were back. So it was a completely futile battle that my aunt waged.

Then my mother was born, she was named Hana Pfeiferova. She was from the second marriage. She must have been a pretty woman, she got a lot of attention, even some major wanted to marry her. By that time my mother didn't feel the need to have a jewish husband.

Of course she considered herself to be jewish, but she was absolutely non-religious and assimilated. Of course her parents insisted that she must marry a jew. She was very lucky to have met my father, the man of her dreams, who was at the same time a jew.

Grandpa bought my mother a house and set her up with a shop, hand embroidery – sort of a little factory. Mother called herself a hand embroidery industry. She took orders and had three or four workers that did the sewing. They sewed lingerie, bedding, towels.

Then they would be printed with patterns, distributed among the villages and the country women would embroider them during the winter. At one time the firm was actually quite prosperous and we supplied Mrs. Hana Benesova [wife of Edvard Benes 12, president of the Czechoslovak Republic] with tablecloths, napkins and suchlike, I remember that.

She even exported her goods to America, which should have and could have changed my life. But it didn't, because of various scams with affidavits that were common in those days. Before the war, at its beginning and during the war, while it was still possible, before the Germans arrived, when someone wanted to move out of the country, first the other country had to accept him.

So these comments, like why didn't you escape and so on, are completely senseless, because the Germans wouldn't let you out and were shooting people at the border, and other countries weren't accepting jewish refugees. If and when someone had the luck to get across the border, he was immediately imprisoned there and then sent back.

The only way was if you had an 'affidavit.' This was a confirmation by someone trustworthy, who had to prove to the authorities that he had enough money and resources, and was willing to feed, clothe, house, basically support you, so you won't be a burden on the state.

Mother's company exported to America, and there was some man there, Egon Waldemar Muller, I remember his name to this day. Once after my father's death, when Egon Waldemar Muller came to Prague on business, my mother, who now led the family business, realized that she wouldn't be able to communicate with him, because she didn't speak German.

So she asked me to do it, even though I spoke very little German, only on a fourth or fifth grade level. I summoned up the courage and met with him. He was delighted by such a small boy dealing with him. I even spoke to him by phone. He gave me a pocket knife, then he gave me a jacket with a zipper, today everyone has one, but in those days it was something unheard of.

He became very fond of me, and when the situation here started becoming very bad, he wrote my mother that he couldn't afford to support our entire family, because the rules in those days were very strict in determining this, but that he was inviting the youngest – which was me – that he was sending me an affidavit.

That affidavit never arrived. Of course it's possible that he never sent it, but from what I knew of him it seems most likely that he did send it. The thing was, affidavits were often stolen. The same thing happened to Pavel Eisner 13, for whom some writers obtained an affidavit, which never arrived.

Pavel Eisner, who survived thanks to Czech doctors, found out after the war that his affidavit was stolen by another Pavel Eisner who then managed to travel out of the country with it. In fact Pavel

Eisner met him after the war. So I live with the fact that some other Georg [Jiri] Frischman, which also wasn't a rare name, or someone who slightly changed it and made it into for example Josef from Jiri, left the country instead of me.

I'm one hundred percent convinced, without the slightest doubt in my mind, that Mr. Egon Waldemar Muller sent me that affidavit. Nothing prevented him from saying, 'Look, it just isn't possible.' I remember that he was extremely fond of me, he said: 'That's a bright boy, he's bold and capable.' Beside my timid mother I looked like a particularly daring young man.

So I don't believe that he would have written: 'I've sent an affidavit.' and not sent it. That affidavit most certainly got sent. Where though did it end up? Perhaps it was confiscated by the Germans for some reason, or if it arrived and some other Frischman left the country with it, that's something that will remain a mystery.

My mother managed at the last moment to 'sell' the firm to one of our employees, so the company existed even after our departure. She sold it to our best embroiderer, Muhlbachova – who had a German name, but wasn't German – and her brother. He was a dance master, she also had artistic tendencies, which was evident from her beautiful embroidery.

For example, when we had an order for bedding from the president's wife, Mrs. Benesova, it always had to be embroidered by Mrs. Muhlbachova, because she was the best. She also danced with her brother, I remember that. In the end the Germans confiscated the company from her anyways. When I visited them after the war, I found out that the fact that they got the firm from us caused them more harm than good.

My mother was a kind woman, and extremely hard-working. She took care of the household and firm, and when my father died, we had the misfortune that our so-called business representative stole some money. Suddenly we had debts. Mother paid it all off, to this day I remember that when we were due to leave for the concentration camp, we all thought that we were going to get through it with no problem.

We were even annoyed with our mother for saying: 'If I don't survive this, I'm telling you now, I don't have even a crown in debts.' But after the war people appeared with debt notes that weren't real. At that time I paid off about 50 thousand, because I didn't want to argue.

But it was completely obvious that these notes were created by my mother for the case that if someone found our property with people that we had hidden it with, those people could claim that they had it as collateral for money they had loaned us. Of course in reality they hadn't lent us anything.

I don't think, though, that these people meant it badly, they simply forgot how it had originally been arranged before the war, and thought that I actually owed them the money.

I recall that when the Germans arrived on 15th March 1939, my mother told my brother and me that if the soldiers started touching and molesting her, after all she was still a nice-looking woman, that we had to stay calm and not to take any notice and leave it alone.

I still argue about that, we had no idea that the Germans would be killing, and what's more, in such a fashion that we would arrive in Auschwitz and that same day be sent to the gas chambers, that

was beyond imagining...My mother has a memorial plaque in the jewish cemetery in Pardubice on which it says that she died in Auschwitz.

My mother had two younger brothers. The older of the two, Josef Pfeifer, became a doctor. They even wrote about him in the papers, that during World War II he treated some resistance fighters. He was a familiar figure in the Vysocany neighborhood, on Vysocany Square [after the war renamed to People's Militias Square, today OSN [UN] Square] there was Briedl's Pharmacy, in which he had an apartment.

My uncle was a well-known humanitarian who treated the poor for free, and that isn't just some made up story that people tell, because after his death it was written about it in the papers. Despite this he became relatively wealthy. He had a beautiful apartment and a car; in those days having a car meant also having a chauffeur. His apartment was beautifully furnished and arranged by an architect.

From his belongings I still have his library and furniture. He probably had larger ambitions, because he knew many university professors and doctors. His jewishness consisted of his inviting everyone over every Christmas and New Year's. Of course at midnight there would be a traditional Christian soup called 'prdelacka' [literally 'ass soup'].

He lived outside of Prague with some lady pharmacist, who of course wasn't jewish and so his parents were always talking him out of it and forbidding him to marry her. He never did marry her, and stayed single. He died right before the war of heart disease.

Mother's other brother, Leo Pfeifer, also had a girlfriend that wasn't jewish, who he ended up marrying. Her name was Karla Rulfova, a poor typist. She was an immensely beautiful woman. Their marriage was a good one, and not only did she save him from the concentration camp, but at the end of the war also gave birth to his son. When I was in the concentration camp she sent me lots of care packages.

Thanks to his wife not being jewish, my uncle stayed with her in Prague. In fact they had a child during the war, which was extremely dangerous, because it was illegal for an Aryan and non-Aryan to have a child together.

Aunt Karla Pfeiferova came from a bigoted Catholic family. She remained a faithful Catholic her whole life, but one that was completely jewified. She observed Catholic holidays and visited jewish cemeteries, where she lit candles according to Catholic rites. After the war she constantly reminisced and kept saying, 'My jews, where are my jews?'

So it would very much interest me how it looked when in her nineties she was dying in a hospice. The others would have constantly heard her, for she complained endlessly and wanted to know about those people, so she kept asking, 'Where are my jews, where are my jews?'

When I returned from the concentration camp, my first refuge was at Uncle Leo's and Aunt Karla's. At first they were frightened, that I might have some sort of disease, because their son was small, having been born just before the end of the war. Later we had a bit of a disagreement, when I brought over my future wife. In the end it turned around, and my aunt and wife became fast friends.

Both were non-jews. After that my aunt wouldn't let anyone say an unkind word about her and my wife used to go take care of my aunt when she wasn't feeling well. It was truly some sort of Christian-jewish symbiosis. The Vohryzek and Pfeifer families were a source of deep feelings of both Czech and jewish identity.

- **Growing up**

I was born on 24th November 1922, in Vysoke Myto, up above Pardubice. Our jewish Community was in Luze. The more significant holidays, if my memories of early childhood serve me right, were celebrated in Pardubice. There I had my bar mitzvah.

I have this feeling that I was born in a completely different town, country, on a different planet than all of my current friends, who I think grew up in similar conditions, and yet recall with great sentiment all the jewish holidays and jewish life. How they walked the streets with a cap – a kippah on their head, anti-Semitism, how they were persecuted. We lived and entirely Christian lifestyle. I have no memories of anti-Semitism from my youth, of course at the end of the 1930s that changed very rapidly, from day to day.

We never denied that we were jews, everyone knew that about us. It was no secret or a taboo that couldn't be talked about. After the war I found that people avoided using the word jew. Because 'jew' became a swearword. The tendency not to use the word 'jew' existed even before the war, for example our jewish community in Luze, to which we belonged, called itself an Israelite community.

On my report card I had 'denomination of Moses.' These avoidances existed even then, and I think that jews chose the right approach when, as opposed to the Gypsies, who went at it from the opposite angle, they said, so what, we're jews and if that's a swearword for someone, that's his problem. It changes nothing.

The word jew has become relatively common even in everyday life. And yet I do occasionally meet people, though they mean well, who say, 'Well, you know, he's of your faith.' They wouldn't say the word jew for anything. Or they say, 'Well, him too, he's like you, you know. He's the likes of what you are.' And similar verbal detours, trying to get out of saying the word jew. Especially the first while after the year 1945, that was something like a curse.

I have a few memories of some jewish holidays from earliest childhood. I recall having to read the Haggadah, that I said the mah nishtanah. But that's about it. We didn't have a local synagogue, only a prayer hall rented out in a private home. Once in a while, about once every three months or so, mother would send us off to the prayer hall, especially after our father died. My jewish life began when, after my father's death, I found lots of Czech-jewish literature in his library and began thinking about it.

When my father died, my mother decided that we were going to have bar mitzvahs. My brother at least had it in some sort of celebratory fashion and according to custom got long pants [Long pants were a proclamation that according to jewish ritual, a boy had become a man]. For me there were no long pants left, so I had short pants.

I travelled to go see the rabbi in Pardubice and he told me what I would have to say. He gave it to me in Hebrew, of which I couln't read a single letter. So he said, 'You'll learn it next time.' The next

time I came and stuttered. He said, ‘Nothing doing, you’ll have to read from the paper.’ I read it from the paper, and when I was finished, he said to me, ‘You’re the biggest idiot I’ve ever had here.’ So that was my pre-Hitler farewell to religion.

New Year [Rosh Hashanah] was also observed, I don’t even know why, and the Long Day [Yom Kippur] was also observed. These two were observed and my mother had a theory on this, that once a year she cleaned the whole house, so that once a year the body’s insides also has to be cleaned out [fasting], that it’s not so much about God as about that good cleaning out.

So we had to obediently starve until evening, until we got to eat again. That was really our entire religious life, because we went to the prayer hall once or twice a year, no more than that. The others [jews] were the same. Quite often there weren’t enough for a ‘minyan.’ Two or three people would show up and then had to go home again. The rabbi, who used to travel from Luze, was annoyed that he had to come when no one showed up at the prayer hall.

For example, I used to go do ‘schmerkust’ at Easter. Some boys would always come and say, ‘Come on Jiri, let’s go.’ So I took my ‘pomlazka’ [willow reeds about a meter long, braided together, that boys use to ceremonially whip girls as an Easter tradition], some sort of basket from home, and set out with the other guys, and would get eggs, a one or five crown coin – the latter rarely – occasionally a twenty or fifty, sometimes a piece of chocolate or candy, and with that triumphantly return home and that was that.

At Christmas we had a tree and always played the German song ‘Stille Nacht’ [Silent Night], a favourite in Bohemia. I did however have to have a bar mitzvah. So this was a mixed Czech-jewish upbringing, in spite of us all being jews. It wasn’t until my mother’s generation that people started to marry non-jews – in my grandparent’s generation that was unthinkable.

A student organization was founded in Vysoke Myto, originally it was Communist, then anti-German resistance; most of those people paid with their lives. This progressiveness, in quotes or not, had its roots in the past and was evident in that we for example refused religion. This ‘healthy core’ – this is how the best Communists were called – either never went to religious services at all, or went and caused a commotion.

All of us did this, whether Catholic, Protestants or jews. Thanks to these progressive ideas at the Vysoke Myto high school, I lost whatever jewish upbringing, religion, that existed there. There were interesting counterpoints, on the one hand were we the youth, there were maybe three or five of us at jewish religion classes, and we would say: ‘Why do I need, Alef, Bet [Hebrew alphabet] for me it’s enough to know A, B, C, D’ and similar things.

We were terribly radical, because of this later I never understood Hebrew at all. On the other hand there were our teachers, who were very liberal and understood each other. Always before religion class, the Catholic priest, Mr. Moucka, the Protestant minister and Rabbi Lewi would meet, walk together in the hall or outside and lead long discussions in deep mutual understanding.

Our family would meet at our house in Vysoke Myto. At Christmastime there were always thirty or forty people, jews and non-jews. Let’s say that there were eighty percent jews, maybe ninety. But for example, my parents’ and uncles’ friend Franta Ambroz wasn’t jewish, but would come over to our place for Christmas.

We were a sort of family centre, where everyone met. We even slept on the floor, because there were so many of us. At Christmas we served typical jewish food, roasted goose livers with whipped goose fat gravy. Everyone looked forward to it. Our neighbor, Mrs. Koudelova, who lived below us, used to cook for us.

- **During the war**

We had a nice one-story house with a large courtyard. My mother got it from my grandfather [Moritz Pfeifer] as her dowry. It was a huge farmyard, in one section we had four rooms and an enormous kitchen, where the maids lived. In another part of the building were workshops where my mother conducted her business.

When Hitler was advancing and poverty came, we started to rent some of the rooms, where the workshops were. At that time my mother's business was barely scraping by, we were poor and my mother had to let the servants go. The Germans moved Mr. Klazar, who worked for the revenue department and was an excellent person, into the space beside us.

There was a boarded-up door between his room and ours. We made that boarding removable. When the Germans prohibited us from listening to the radio, we used to go over to Mr. Klazar's and listen to [Radio] London.

We were left with three rooms – the kitchen, living room, and bedroom. At this time my mother was still trying to run the business, the living room was used for receiving visits from rich customers from the surrounding region, who were for example having nightshirts embroidered.

Thus the house progressively shrank, until we were left with two rooms – the kitchen and one other room. The room was used as the receiving salon, and we lived in the kitchen. When some lady customer came, we poor boys had no place to hide.

In the end the Germans forced us out of even there, we had to move out. The Germans took over the entire building and moved in various families we didn't know. One of the meagrest apartments, out on the courtyard gallery, was given to a lady whose children had unfortunately died, she had tuberculosis and had to be in a sanatorium. We reached an agreement with her that she would rent the apartment to us until she returned. Only thanks to this, were we able to remain in the house where I had been born.

We never had a nanny in the proper sense of the word, but our family servant Marie Polakova, who we called Mary, had an enormous influence on our upbringing. She lived in our family her entire life and also helped out in my mother's siblings' households. She became a part of the family. She brought up loads of children, who except for me all died in the Holocaust. Marie lived with us, in the kitchen. She became such a part of our family that she never had any boyfriend, never married, which really, from her viewpoint, was a tragedy.

When my father died, my mother had financial problems, she needed money for the household and for the business. She had to borrow money, the poor woman didn't suspect that in the end the Germans would take it all from us anyways. Mary had some savings, so she lent us 30 thousand, which was an enormous sum in those days.

When I returned after the war, as the only family member left, Mary acted very offended. I had no idea why. Later, when she sensed that she would soon die, she wrote me that she was very annoyed that I acted in such a way, that I undoubtedly have money and that I refuse to return it to her.

I set out to go see her, her house was near Vysoke Myto, and there it came out that my mother had paid off the debt before the war, but she had given it to Mary's sister. Of course her sister hadn't given her anything and kept it all, because they had had a falling out. So I promised her, that although I was studying and had no money, that I'll get some from somewhere and pay the debt off.

After all, by then that thirty thousand was worth much less than when she had lent it to us. I paid it to her and she was all overjoyed that it hadn't been us, but her sister who had betrayed her. It was easier for her to accept her sister's betrayal.

Shortly after it was all explained, she broke her leg and had to go to the hospital. There they told her that at her age her situation was hopeless, that she would soon die. I wrote her that I and my wife were coming to visit her. My wife bathed her and brushed her hair, Mari was overjoyed to see us, and right after our visit she died. I think that she was holding on to life so that she could see me again. So in the end we made peace.

We also had a German tutor so that we would learn German. We also had maids living in our household, who took care of it and cleaned, of course they didn't have to do the laundry or iron, that was all done as part of the firm's activities. When our father died and our mother didn't have enough time for us, the maids would make us lunch and so on. Later, when we were badly off, and Hitler was approaching, our mother did everything herself and had no servants.

Up to the year 1938 I have no real memories of anti-Semitism. When I really try, I can remember two or three incidents. In fact, I remember my mother once saying, as we were talking about school, 'He's an anti.' And I said, 'What's anti?' And she said, 'Well, an anti-Semite.' And I replied, 'So why are you saying anti? And what is it?' So she named some teachers, who in her opinion were anti-Semitic.

As I later had the chance to find out, it was partly true and partly not. Because for example Professor Jedlicka was very right-wing, but a pronounced Semitophile. He used to come visit us during the war, which would provoke the Germans, that he was visiting jews.

Another professor, Jelinek, perhaps he was an anti-Semite, but his anti-Semitism consisted entirely of one thing: when we were studying antiquity [at school in history class] and jews, he had this peculiar trait, he swayed from side to side so that one was afraid that he would fall over. He used to rub his hands together and say, 'Jews in those days, they were still courageous, and tried to fight for their freedom.' and so on.

So his anti-Semitism was all based on the fact that he contrasted jews of ancient times and modern jews. The biggest anti-Semite I met later, my mother didn't even know him yet, was Professor Zima, about whom another leftist and progressive professor, Behounek, the brother of the literary scholar, wrote that he was truly a nasty person.

I also recall this one boy, whom I used to run into in this garden through which led a walkway, and who would always jump me and say, ‘OK, Frischman, now I’ve got you.’ He would always start to beat me, and I was of course afraid of him. He never once said ‘you jew.’ To this day I don’t know why he used to do this.

One day I got up the guts and started to fight back, and beat him up, from that time on he left me alone. After the war I returned and he said, all chummily, ‘Jirko, how’s it going, you survived it, wow, you’re amazing!’ Was he an anti-Semite? Wasn’t he? That was it for anti-Semitic incidents.

I remember, in public school as it was then called, my best friend was from the poorest of families, and I had a soccer ball and he didn’t, he always ran over and said, ‘Jirko, c’mon, let’s go kick the ball around.’ I wanted to be Planicka, a famous soccer player, and he wanted to be Puc, left forward.

The two of us would kick the ball around for hours. He would attack the net and I would be in goal. When I was leaving school with all 1’s [straight A’s] and he had flunked out, I remember him complaining, ‘Jew Frischman has all 1’s and I’m flunking.’

Sometimes a ‘religious battle’ would break out in our class, and we would taunt each other – ‘Jew, jew, the devil’s gonna come for you.’ ‘Catholic, Catholic, sat on a stick.’ And ‘Evangelic,’ [Protestant] – now came a rude word – ‘shit in a kbelik [pail].’ After that things began to quickly change, as soon as Hitler came to power. At the same time, our jewishness, which had been on the decline, began to experience a resurgence.

The writer Petr Bezruc was a favorite of my father’s and I inherited this from him. I was never able to grasp whether Bezruc was or wasn’t an anti-Semite. It wasn’t until adulthood, when I looked into it, that I came to the joyful conclusion that he wasn’t. He summarized it in the sentence:

‘I, Vaclav Vasek,’ that was his real name, ‘could never have been an anti-Semite. Petr Bezruc had to be one.’ Which is to say that as a poet he had to express feelings. I was very glad that Vaclav Vasek wasn’t an anti-Semite. But then I came by his letters. I had also corresponded with him a little, before his death, and when I worked at a publishing house I acquired his letters to Bohumil Mathes, those are very anti-Semitic. I was very disappointed that my idol had once again shown himself as an anti-Semite.

After the annexation of the Czech border areas, I was sitting with a few friends at my home, and we were debating what was going to happen and how things were going to be, what the Slovaks were going to do, how to act when the Slovaks break away, and so on.

I recall that on the day of the occupation of Czechoslovakia, we were standing outside of the high school, because the doors still hadn’t been opened. And this one old friend, who after the annexation of the border areas had sat at our place and discussed politics, suddenly says, ‘You jews are now going to have to hang onto your hats, just wait, you’re going to have to hang onto your hats.’ It wasn’t just a statement of fact, it was ugly.

Things changed from day to day, they truly did, because so many times before he had been over at our place as a friend, and the next day he was saying, ‘You jews are going to have to hang onto your hats.’ Then it started. I could still attend school, one professor there was unpleasant and no matter what I did, I was the bad one and according to him I didn’t know anything.

I had two friends, one was the son of a Protestant minister, the other the son of a bigoted Catholic, we were this funny threesome. Our professor was beside himself, the Protestant didn't bother him that much, as much as the fact that a son from a bigoted Catholic family is friends with a jew. He persecuted all three of us, of course this was nothing in comparison to what was to follow.

The fact is, that thanks to this the jews came together, before we hadn't really associated with each other that much, even though we knew about each other. We occasionally played a game of tennis or walked about the promenade, but there were no jews among my friends.

This now changed, because more and more we were herded into a group. For me it had a fateful significance that all of those young people were suddenly leftists. I still recall how one Karel said about another Karel: 'You know, so what? Karel will inherit the shop, and when we're going to have Communism, then Karel will be store manager. Practically nothing will change, in fact he'll be better off, because now, when there's a crisis, he's got to spend his own money, this way the state will help him out.'

This was the notion of communism. It had great significance for me, also because there was one beautiful girl there, Hanka, a painter. To this day I have a painting she did, of my brother. Hanka was going out with this one high school professor, who used to hang around with us, he wasn't afraid.

He associated with us and promoted Communism and Marxism. An ironic twist of fate is that this person committed suicide after the year 1945. Everyone said that he did it because he was persecuted by the Communists. He had later returned to his mother's faith, who had been a very bigoted Catholic – but that was only half of the truth.

The other half is that he reproached himself for not marrying that painter, Hanka. That if he would have married her like he wanted, she would have survived, because mixed marriages had a greater chance of survival. At that time no one knew that, though, how could he have known? On the contrary, he didn't want to complicate her life either, that she would be accused of sullying the Aryan race.

Meeting this professor at the beginning of the war was one of the things that led me to further activities in the [Communist] Party in the concentration camp. When we came to Auschwitz, the Party promptly changed into an illegal resistance movement and united itself with Czech jews, German jews, with Zionists. Something that after the war was called the National Front, or People's Front was created there.

The resistance movement was initiated and organized by the Party. We were very strongly organized. Now they don't want to recognize the resistance at Birkenau 14, it's a sad chapter, how one set of communists says, 'We were the true resistance.' Other communists, 'No, you weren't the true resistance, we were the true resistance.' I got into the resistance via the Party. No rebellion took place, because we found out that this time we really were being transported off to work. But the resistance was prepared.

I had a brother, Frantisek, a year older than me, who was more capable, smarter, better at school and was tall and strong, a real looker. He attracted girls from at least twenty kilometers around. There wasn't a one that he missed, and there definitely weren't any indications of anti-Semitism

there.

My brother Frantisek finished the eighth year of high school and in 1940 graduated, in Vysoke Myto. Our uncle, Josef Pfeifer, a wealthy doctor from Vysocany, wanted to pay my brother's way to the Swiss border. He even found a guide that for a lot of money promised to lead him there.

From Switzerland he was then supposed to go to some addresses in France. God only knows how it would have ended up. It was all arranged, and our family knew about it, but said, 'In any case he has to finish his studies and graduate.' It was a month before my brother's graduation, so it had to be delayed by a month. But during this time the Germans occupied Paris.

And it was Paris where my brother was supposed to be going. If he would have escaped, God knows how he would have ended up. One doesn't know, it could have worked out, but he could also have been killed in the army. In any case I also don't know how we would have ended up, in those days families of escapees ended badly.

The family was usually shot. So in the end my brother didn't escape, he had to go to the concentration camp and didn't survive. But it's a testament, in this case a sad one, to the value that was placed on education.

I managed to finish seventh grade. Then in 1940 jews were forbidden to study in Czech schools. Our family conference once again decided: 'He has to finish his studies. Without graduation he'll never get anywhere in life.' Someone in our family found out that there was a jewish high school in Brno, where I could finish my last year and graduate. So I had to go there.

I arrived in Brno, and lived with the Eisners in Cerne Pole. At that time we were still allowed to have bicycles, before we had to hand them in, so we rode on bikes, which wasn't a problem in Brno. Thankfully the Eisners at that time still had a relatively decent apartment, I lived with them the entire time and rode my bicycle to school, summer or winter. With streetcars it was somewhat complicated, I know that I used to ride on the rearmost platform, but I don't know if at that time it was already forbidden.

Now Petr Ginz's diaries have been published, he was a young fourteen-year-old boy when he came to Terezin 15. He kept a diary before he went to the concentration camp, and there's an interesting poem there that captivated me, because I realized that I myself don't know it, in that poem he mentions one ban after another – bicycles, radios, fur coats, skis and so on and everything set to poetry, which is very interesting. Reading his diary is very interesting, he was truly gifted, it completely represents the lifestyle of that Czech jew, it beautifully shows the spiritual life of assimilants.

I came to know jewish life at the jewish high school in Brno, I have many jewish friends from that time, and from post-war times as well. In Brno I lived at my father's sister Marie's place. There I began to live a very intensive jewish life, not Orthodox however. There was a minority of Czech jews there.

There were German jews, also a minority, because no one wanted to identify themselves, they even tried to suppress their German pronunciation, but everyone knew that they were originally German jews. Most were jews with no attribution, simply jews, who felt as such, without saying that they are of the jewish nation. The smallest minority were Orthodox. At that time Orthodoxy was

unpopular.

At high school I fit in well. I would say that I didn't have to realize my jewish roots, because I knew them despite the fact that I lived a non-jewish life. But there I did somewhat reflect on them. We would meet and talk about Judaism.

I and my classmate Jindrich Wertheimer tried to run away out of the Protectorate 16, it didn't work out because we didn't know how to go about it, we didn't know what to obtain and how, and then the Germans were advancing so quickly and we didn't know where we should run to.

We wanted to go via Switzerland to France, but France was already occupied. It was quite naive, we didn't realize it, but today no one takes that seriously. We tried to hold our tongues, and I think that we did, even if we did have the courage to at least write about it.

When we were then more or less ending that last school year, and Jindrich Wertheimer was in Melnice, and I was in Vysoke Myto, we definitively decided that we were giving it up, that we couldn't have on our consciences some sort of cruel persecution and death of our parents and relatives, and we didn't even yet know that it would come anyway, not the slightest idea.

What was most evident on our Brno class was its enormously high standard. It's of course natural that everyone isn't stupid, but if we ignore that, then the thing was that only the select went there, those that really wanted to finish their studies. So knowledge of German was taken for granted, there were only a couple of us that didn't know German.

One classmate, Bekova, a poet, spoke it fluently. I was one of those that didn't speak much, but even those who weren't bilingual had a certain knowledge of German. I can't tell you a percentage, but it was a lot, certainly over 50 percent, and a lot more than half already knew French, from studying it at home, so just as an example, the knowledge of languages there was exceptional.

Even among the girls there weren't those hopeless cases that I still remember from Septima [seventh year of high school] in Vysoke Myto, those that couldn't grasp even the simplest things and who used to say: 'Lordy, we just don't understand that math'. I was convinced that it was a question of education.

In Brno there were no cases like that, though now I do realize that there was at least one. This one girl, who I then tutored to make some extra money, who later became a capo [concentration camp inmate appointed by the SS to be in charge of a work gang].

Manicka was an exception, because she was quite exceptionally dumb, but I got along with her perfectly, because I mainly taught her descriptive geometry, which she couldn't grasp at all. I taught her how two pyramids intersect each other, I tried to describe it to her. That less than capable girl later in Auschwitz became 'Kleidungskapo,' or block leader, in a special block where there was clothing. We walked about in rags, it was horrible, but that block was chock full of clothing. They were those that had connections, so they could dress perfectly, literally perfectly.

One classmate, who is still alive today, was telling me that when she saw Manicka, she ran over to her and said hello, and she had this little whip and immediately lashed her with it, that she didn't want to know her. Of course I didn't know this at the time, and also greeted her, and I have to say that for me being her teacher she was very reserved towards me, but she answered my greeting

and said that she was fine and that she also hoped I was fine and behaved decently towards me. But as far as telling me: come for a scarf or something similar, because she had it all under control, that she didn't do. Not that.

So, that was the one exception, but otherwise that class of ours in Brno was at an exceptionally high standard, and it wasn't uncommon that people who excelled in mathematics, geometry and so on, also excelled in languages. They were very well read. Because of this I had to try very hard to catch up, it was quite a difficult situation for me, but I excelled in mathematics, physics and descriptive geometry, which I consider an honor, because it was in that class that was at such a high standard.

In Vysoke Myto I used to have all 1's and all of a sudden there I had 3's, which never played any important role, but does at the same time show that that high school was infected by something that I call false Zionism. We had Hebrew, it wasn't a compulsory subject, but was relatively compulsory, that meant that we had to attend it, therefore it was compulsory, but the grade didn't count towards our average, so that whoever had a bad mark in Hebrew could still pass with honors.

Professor Unger used to teach it to us. I knew absolutely no Hebrew, so it's quite interesting that he and I became very good friends. Somehow he grasped my situation, that I had never had any contact with Hebrew, so he wasn't annoyed with me at all, and the only thing that he wanted from me was for me to promise him that I would someday start to learn Hebrew. So he didn't give me a 5 (the lowest mark) but a 4. Today I quite regret not fulfilling that promise, but I never really had the opportunity.

I am however proud that I excelled in that jewish school with high standards, in mathematics, physics and mainly in descriptive geometry. I had an uncommon ability to visualize, which has since left me. To a certain extent I was able to measure the angle of intersection of those objects and lines in my head, which was extraordinary.

From professor Filip Block, who was an excellent mathematician, linguist, literary expert and talented musician, I got a descriptive example that I as the only member of our class solved. But then he found that where there was supposed to be an intersection, that I had a gap of about two or three millimeters, that it didn't intersect. And he said to me, 'For me it's enough to look at the last mark, and I know who should get what.'

That last mark was Hebrew, I got a five in it. So because he couldn't give me a five for all three subjects, he gave me a two and in the end a three. That is of course a personal story, but it shows the spirit of that high school, that there could have existed such a professor, that that society hadn't developed to the point where it wouldn't have allowed that. In spite of being an uncommonly intelligent person, he was spiritually backward, for him knowledge of Hebrew was everything.

Basically the high school was divided up into Czech jews, Zionists and Communists. No-one wanted to be associated with people who were clearly of German upbringing, not only by language, but by what they said, no-one identified with Germanic identity. I recall one very bright boy, named Meitner, who later never returned from the concentration camp.

We once went on an outing on our bicycles, I don't know if it was still permitted at that time or not. He had that German upbringing, you could tell, even if he absolutely didn't identify himself as such. I remember asking him, 'Listen, I'm a Czech, that other guy is a Zionist, that one's a Communist, so what are you? You aren't anything.' And he started into me, why does he have to be something.

That he really is neither a Zionist, a Czech, nor a German, not for a long time, and he doesn't have to belong to the Communists. In those days that was something unimaginable for me. I thought that everyone has to be classified somehow and somewhere.

I have to admit that to this day it's not something that I can fully accept, but these days I know more of such people and they are mainly jews, that simply don't identify themselves as part of any one group. It was in Brno that I first came across this, then I realized that that Meitner wasn't alone, that he's a human being that's all.

I can't imagine this, each person is somehow classifiable and has to be classifiable. There were no Orthodox jews among my classmates. Being an Orthodox jew somehow wasn't an option. Truth be told, he would have been a laughing-stock. It seemed comical to us young people that someone would walk around in summer in a fur coat. Orthodoxy existed as a concept that we knew was out there, but really nothing more.

About a month before I was to do my graduation exams, the Moravian provincial inspector came around. He said to us, 'Do you know that you won't be graduating?' We said, 'Unfortunately we already know this.' And in front of the entire class he said, 'I guarantee you, that after the war I will confirm graduation for you all, I know you and you won't have to even write the exams.'

Which was quite courageous, even among jews, because for one, a traitor could have been present, which I don't think likely, but of course there could have been a loose tongue that would have let it out somewhere. And that would have been the end of the poor guy.

To talk about the war in 1941 in the context of the Germans losing it, that was an obvious thing. He was absolutely convinced that there was no other option than that the Germans were going to lose the war, he told us that he guaranteed us all graduation, that he knew how good we were.

Unfortunately only four of us students returned and one professor, and in the end he got the right to confirm our graduation, even though it surely wasn't recorded anywhere, but they believed us four and him, and in the end the promise, that the Moravian provincial inspector couldn't himself influence any more, that promise got fulfilled.

I finished my last, eighth year at the Brno high school, but right before graduation the Germans forbade us from graduating. I got my graduation confirmation after the war, even though I never did the exams. The only professor to survive the Holocaust, Professor Weinstein, got the right after the war to give out these diplomas to those that survived – out of 29 classmates there were only four of us left. So we four got a report card signed by Mr. Weinstein that we had absolved our schooling with such good marks that it was clear that we would have passed the final exams.

I then later got two more report cards, without any final exams! This was because later I had to go to this school in Vysoke Myto and take this course for those that couldn't finish their studies. There they didn't forbid us from doing our final exams, but they were afraid that some of the Communists and their children that were there because of connections wouldn't be able to pass the exams, so

they said that we would be able to graduate without them.

Then the high school principal in Vysoke Myto gave me a high school diploma on the basis of a Ministry resolution, because I had had completed seven grades in Vysoke Myto with excellent marks. So I have three high school diplomas and didn't do a single final exam, which is quite the rarity!

I left Brno for Vysoke Myto, where at first I went to work for my friend's father, Mr. Jiracek, in his workshop. We knew that we had to work and that we needed some sort of manual trade. I worked in a mechanical workshop, we repaired bicycles and for a time also manufactured tricycles.

This experience was very useful for me later in the concentration camp. Eventually they threw me out of Jiracek's workshop, that I'm not allowed to work in workshops, that I can't work as an apprentice. Then I went and worked on farms, either to Netolice or for someone named Netolicky, don't remember any more which.

There I got into the local chronicle because I managed to make a herd of bullocks bolt, which is quite the accomplishment because they're incredibly calm animals, but I managed it, so I'm recorded in their chronicle. From there I went to Vysoke Myto to work on a farm belonging to the husband of one of my mother's employees.

I had to work from morning to night, but it was great, because I could always bring some butter or something home. In fact during the war, up to the deportation, we didn't suffer at all. Just the opposite. We never ate so many chickens in our lives as in those days.

That wasn't enough for the Germans, so they drafted us to the 'Arbeitslager,' it was a work camp in its true sense, in that we could leave, no one guarded us, and so on. For a while I worked near Chotebor, I'm not able to say exactly from when to when, digging water canals.

Then I got a special permit to leave and be at home, because of my mother being very ill, and since no one was allowed to care for her, at least no Aryan, they allowed me to go home and take care of her. Because we had farm animals, I fed the geese and chickens, which surprisingly they hadn't confiscated. They didn't think of that, that jews could have geese, so as I said, we had never had it so good as far as food goes, up to our departure to the concentration camp.

So, I took care of the farm and tried to read before we had to go. My brother was sent to work on the construction of a generating station in Pardubice, and was there the whole time, but this was still an Arbeitslager, so he was allowed to go home and visit, every two or three weeks, always on a Sunday he'd be allowed to go home.

They left my mother at home until our departure, because of her illness. Try as I might I can't remember when they took the embroidery business away from us, but I think she was at home for about a year or year and a half.

We left Vysoke Myto for Terezin on 2nd December 1942, as still a whole family. We arrived there on 5th December, and stayed together during our time there. I remember when we were getting onto the Terezin transport, it was very interesting, one of the merriest days. For us kids it was a gas, we were young and didn't have a clue as to what was really happening.

The Czech railways gave us a passenger car, so we were sitting there with no worries and having fun and saying, ‘And they think that they’re going to take us to Pardubice, and from Pardubice, by then we’ll know that we’re going to Terezin, and that it’s going to stun us or something? After all, they’re already defeated.’ It was all a big laugh.

Well, the laughing stopped when we came to the assembly area from which we were leaving Pardubice for Terezin. There the blows started flying, there the shooting started, I don’t know if anyone was actually shot or if they were just warning shots. It was the breaking point.

Up to then life of some sort had existed and we ignored things, we had to ignore them if we wanted to live. Even despite those extensive limitations, which people aren’t even able to imagine today, how horrible it was when we weren’t allowed to walk on the sidewalk, we weren’t allowed into the movie theatre, into the woods, to the swimming pool and so on. Despite that we always found something, like getting together and playing chess for example.

I should perhaps say one more thing, that we had never had it as good as before our departure for Terezin. People actually would bring us bread, butter, smoked meat, everything; at that time they already knew that we’d be deported.

It was forbidden to bring us things, dangerous, our neighbor was a German and she used to report us. But someone would always manage to slip through, they would wait until Mrs. Nekvinova would go out somewhere and then bring us something.

If I ate like that these days, I’d be twice as fat as I am now. So that moment, not arrival at Terezin, but at that assembly point in Pardubice, that was the enormous breaking point that showed us what all Terezin was going to be.

In Brno at high school I made friends that then later helped me very much in the concentration camp. One professor, today very well known, Eisinger, took a liking to me as the best student of Czech, but at the same time made a great impression on me as a Communist at the school I’m going to talk about in a moment.

He drew me into a cell of the best Communist professors. They were professors Eisinger, Zwinger and Kohn. When I arrived in Terezin, Eisinger told me, ‘You have to get into the children’s home. As a teacher, not a student, because it’s all about life or death here.

You’ll get there by going to see Lenka, your classmate, whose mother is an important Zionist functionary, and they have control over the youths, she’ll get you in there.’ So I went to see Lenka like he told me. And I really did get through the Communists to the Zionists, and through the Zionists I got into the best children’s home.

First though I got into this children’s home, where I was supposed to show if I was capable, because it was completely falling apart. In about two months I had it all fixed up, then Ota Klein came to see me, he was a familiar figure, and said:

‘All right, from today you’re with me.’ I went to L 417, where a magazine called Vedem [17] was being put out by Petr Kincl. L 417 was divided up into classes, each class had a group and that group was also called a ‘home.’ So there the word home had two meanings – ‘sub-home’ and ‘home’ you could say. All of L 417 was a home and within it there were individual homes.

There in L 417 I worked with a person that later became well-known, Jiri Kohnig, who after the war was a professor of medicine. He was my boss. I was a ‘Betreuer,’ which in Hebrew is madrich, a male nurse, but we were teachers, nurses and friends to those children.

Professor Eisinger was in the home next door, I was in constant contact with him, then he left for Auschwitz before I did and died there. A few people that remember him say that he lost all of his spark, that he realized that survival wasn’t possible and that he became an embittered pessimist. He was quite a big and important man.

In L 417 I got to test the knowledge I had from Scouts, how to deal with younger children, even though I myself was still young. I discovered the talent for teaching in myself, which then never left me. Only when they later threw me out and I had to work on the railway did I stop working as a teacher. That means that I’ve been a teacher from the concentration camp [ghetto] right up to my retirement at the Charles University Faculty of Philosophy in Prague.

When someone was in Terezin, he would say that it couldn’t be lived through, how could such horrors exist. But when he then came to Auschwitz, he then said, ‘blessed Terezin, how wonderful it had been’. And how terrible Auschwitz is, how great a horror it is. From a distance Terezin still resembled life, perhaps by the fact that after work you really had time off.

In Terezin at least the young and middle aged people survived, you could manage to not die of hunger there. But Auschwitz really was about dying of hunger. It was known that Terezin was much better than what awaited us in the east, but no one suspected that it was the end of life.

Today people constantly wonder, why didn’t the jews emigrate? Because we couldn’t. We had no place to go, no way to get there and nowhere to go from, because the Germans weren’t letting anyone through, they were shooting people at the border and wouldn’t give any permits to leave.

Despite everything, in Terezin a person did find a way of life. There was cultural life. Not long ago I was thinking about the fact that Terezin’s cultural life has one negative aspect, that it suppresses the horrors that existed there. The cultural life there was so exceptional and such a miracle, that many people are interested only in it. They then don’t realize the horrors, the suffering and death. Terezin’s cultural life was immense and multifaceted, operas were written, books, but the most significant were events put on for the public.

Mrs. Makarova has now published a voluminous collection on Terezin from another viewpoint, about lectures in Terezin, a very interesting book, the Czech edition is called ‘University of Survival.’ Unfortunately many people are under the impression that life in Terezin was lived in such a way that people just went from theater to theater.

Now in the summer there is a reconstructed theater there, which is completely hopeless, because the sorrow and suffering cannot be reconstructed! Plays were performed on the ground such as it was: filthy, used for, I don’t know, fifty years after the construction of those buildings, and in the case of barracks, even longer.

For example, ‘The Bartered Bride’ was performed. You cannot reconstruct that. So that deforms the impression of life in Terezin a bit. But, as I say, life in Terezin was still ideal compared to what awaited us in Auschwitz.

My brother was extremely capable and clever, so he got a job at the so-called ‘Spedition’ and was protected from the transports. He had me injected with a milk injection, which was given to me by the famous Czech actress Vlasta Schonova, so that I would get a fever. There were various tricks, to convince people that they were work camps, so the sick didn’t have to go.

After that milk injection I fell ill, and then I remained the whole year in Terezin. My brother in fact went to Auschwitz voluntarily, because he didn’t want our mother to go there alone. He didn’t succeed in having her removed from the list, so he went voluntarily with her. Our mother went immediately to the gas chambers. My brother lasted there for a half year as a plumber, and then he died of pneumonia.

The last time I saw my mother was in Terezin, when she came to visit me in the hospital. I was lying there with a fever, so I don’t have any concrete memories of her visit. My mother was very sensitive, she didn’t want to upset me, so she held herself back when she was saying farewell to me.

When my work in the children’s home ended – in the Kinderheim, where I was that ‘Betreuer,’ I was transferred to war manufacture. In Terezin the Germans erected a large tent and that’s where we worked. We manufactured car motor heaters. When their vehicles froze up in Russia they had to think of some solution, after all they were quite clever, so they came up with these gas heaters that heated up the motor from below without damaging it, and the vehicles could continue on.

We manufactured these in that tent in the town square. Each enterprise, in the wider sense of the word, such as a kitchen or our children’s home, was required to send a couple of people into war manufacture. I was the youngest of the ‘Betreuer,’ so it fell to me. I worked in the heater plant during my last month in Terezin.

People that worked here in that German Wehrmacht factory were automatically exempt from transport. But various tricks and frauds were perpetrated – who had the means, pulled his friend from the transport and stuck someone else in their place, like perhaps someone working in war manufacture.

So it happened that suddenly I received a summons for transport. It was a question of a half day, during which I could certainly have gotten an exception, that I was indispensable, that I’m working in war manufacture. But I said to myself, here I’m alone, and my mother is there, it never even occurred to me that she could be dead, my brother is there, he’s already settled there, he’s a clever guy, he’ll certainly already have some good job.

In that sense I went voluntarily. I don’t know why so many people can’t grasp this. Everyone that looks at what we lived through and at those concentration camps, judge it from today’s perspective. They ask, why? Everyone knew that it was worse there, but I said to myself, ‘I’ll be with my brother.’

And my brother was an immensely capable and strong young man, I would have liked to be able to depend on him again. Well, so I simply voluntarily left for Auschwitz, not making use of the fact that I was protected. I expected to meet up with my mother and brother there, and of course I was very, very surprised when I arrived there. These are things that are hard to imagine today.

I got onto the transport on 15th December 1943, and arrived in Auschwitz on 17th December. In general I'm sure people know what it meant to arrive in Auschwitz. As soon as we got off, they confiscated our luggage, there was noise, beatings, basically everything so that we would realize that Terezin was ideal in comparison.

The first few days there were quite an adventure. I am sometimes amazed at my courage then, the things that I did. But already on the way there I met Ari, the son of Jakob Edelstein, who was a so-called 'Lagerältester' [camp elder] in Terezin. He was the jewish mayor of Terezin, who of course had minimal powers. But despite that he managed to accomplish something.

His son Ari attended our school in L 417. Ari took a big liking to me, so he went to see Fredy Hirsch 18, and told him that he wanted me to be his teacher again.

Fredy Hirsch was an amazing man, very intelligent and courageous, even the Germans paid attention to him, because he had this direct way of staring and looked so unafraid, later they killed him as well. He accomplished a real miracle, he stood his ground and managed to wring a children's home out of them, first one, then another.

He had the courage to stand up to the SS, he reasoned with them, that the children are going to get in the way during roll calls, because children also had to present themselves at roll call, that they are going to be in the way during assembly for work details, and that it would be simpler to have them all in one place somewhere and a couple of people to take care of them. So in this way he managed to create blocks where the children were gathered and divided up into groups.

Just for interest, my placement went via two paths, because I was an organized party member, so the Party also pressed Hirsch that he has to take on some of their members, which was lifesaving. Young Ari Edelstein did a lot for me, he was plucky and took a liking to me. He gave me some money, which got me cigarettes, and that meant food, and so on and on. But the Edelsteins ended up badly.

After a short time they led Jakob Edelstein, his wife, even little Ari away. First they shot the son in front of his parents, then they shot the wife in front of Jakob Edelstein, and finally they shot him too.

Hirsch said to me, 'I've already heard of you, come over!' I think that one thing that also helped me was that I was 'well dressed.' That was very important, because he saw that immediately after arrival, I was already capable of scaring up some decent clothing and shoes – which was no mean feat and showed that I was probably a capable person.

When we arrived, they bathed us, shaved us bald, tattooed us, and then we went to the sauna where they disinfected us. We stood there naked and then the 'Kleidungskapo' [something like a clothing warden] threw us whatever clothing he had at hand. Luckily I got these black pants made from decent material, a shirt, and a brown light jacket, it wasn't very warm clothing, but since I then worked inside it didn't matter so much. But during roll calls I froze.

What was important, we all arrived with decent shoes, I had these beautiful high lace-up 'army' boots. Even before we got through all the insane entrance procedures, this boy came into our quarantine area, gave me the once-over, including my boots and said, 'Give me those boots and I'll give you something decent, otherwise you'll be in wooden shoes, you won't get socks, I'll give you

socks and some decent shoes.' And I believed him, I don't know if it was intuition or that I had already managed to have a look around and knew that it was true.

So we agreed on how we'd find each other later, I then gave him those army boots, which he then proudly wore and I would look at them with envy, and he gave me socks and shoes. Normal shoes, but decent ones, which was a real scoop there, because they stayed on your foot, a person could walk normally, in that freezing cold normal shoes were still better than the wooden shoes that everyone froze in. And I think that that was also one moment that influenced Hirsch. He saw that in the space of one or two days I managed to get myself some shoes, which was a definite plus, when a person knew how to go about things.

Fredy said to me, 'Come tomorrow, and we'll see.' I went to work for only about one day and that was murderous work, almost impossible to live through without a large dose of luck. So the next day I of course immediately ran over to Fredy and he said, 'OK, you can start.' The children's block had some chairs, and that was about all.

Later they even painted it [this means that the painter Gottliebova was allowed to paint pictures on the bare walls, which is a very unusual story], but we weren't allowed to have any teaching aids, we were allowed to teach, but there wasn't anything to teach from, they already knew that those children were going to die, so they mercifully let us teach. They didn't really care whether we were teaching or not, while in Terezin teaching was not allowed.

We sat and around us sat the children. We sat next to each other, we had no paper, no pencils, and everything depended on how a person was able to tell stories and what he was capable of. I think that I showed that I had a broad knowledge of literature, that I could recite the history of Czech literature from memory, at that time they were interested in Czech literature, not German or Hebrew, and that I could talk about geography:

I had the atlas memorized, so I could for example talk about how one would get to Palestine. I was able to enthrall those children for the whole half day. I had a decent knowledge of history, today I wouldn't know it like that, also something of philosophy, which was of interest to those fifteen year old boys.

I didn't know how to sing, which was a problem. But I did manage this one small miracle, I put together a collection of Czech poetry, this little textbook. That meant that first I had to scare up some paper. We were allowed to receive packages, so I had to cut the [wrapping] paper to size.

In Birkenau, scissors were a rarity. To cut it up and iron out the pieces, that was a major problem. I also cut these cardboard [from packages, which were later allowed to be sent] covers, in the middle of the front cover I glued a white paper square [about 7x7 cm] and I recall that to this day, I can't draw at all, but I did manage to draw on it some picture of a landscape with a building, probably a school.

The next problem was ink. I tried to make some myself – someone advised me that it could be made out of ashes – but that didn't work for me. Finally by some miracle I managed to get a pen and some ink from somewhere, and so I began to write.

In those days I had a prodigious memory, to this day I think about those poems that I used to know, I don't think I'd be able to recite them today. I had Bezruc almost all memorized, of course I also

knew large portions of Macha, also Viktor Dyk and many other poems. I also asked my colleagues, who gladly recited things from memory for me, so in the end it was a beautiful creation. Forty or fifty Czech poems, which I then lent to some of the other teachers. We read those poems and strangely enough it got the interest of those boys.

Maybe because they saw how it came about. I don't know if children are really that interested in literature, but when I was presenting Czech poetry to them, they really did pay attention and asked questions. I knew a lot of war poetry, and particularly that interested the children, they could understand it, after all, they also had personal experiences with the war. To this day I'm proud of that work, that I managed to put together material for that collection of Czech poetry in such difficult conditions.

When we meet today, we are finding out that the 'Betreuer' had the highest survival rate out of everyone. Let's say that there were a hundred 'Betreuer' and that thirty of forty of them survived, which is an enormous number. There were ten thousand of the others and only two hundred of them survived. It's simply a huge percentage of 'Betreuer' that lived through it.

The writer Primo Levi writes that everyone who survived did so at someone else's expense. [Levi, Primo (1919-1987): Jewish-Italian memoirist, novelist and poet, active in resistance during WWII, captured and taken to Auschwitz, best-known for his autobiographical trilogy 'Survival in Auschwitz,' 'The Reawakening' and 'The Periodic Table.'] In its own way it's true, if I hadn't been a 'Betreuer,' I would have died while building some road and someone else would have been that 'Betreuer' and would have survived. Primo Levi wasn't able to live with this thought, that he is alive instead of someone else. I have to say that I've been living with it for years and years with a view that it was fate.

We get together and every little while someone talks about where he had been a 'Betreuer.' They're also people that have a clean conscience, because it's not as if they did something bad back then. If someone was a boss, a cook and so on, that was after all different.

We were inside where it was warm and taught children, instead of spreading gravel on a road in the freezing cold with our hands, because there were next to no tools. Or if when there was widespread hunger, and some person took the piece of meat intended for the entire camp and cut off half of it for his own dinner, that's a difference. We didn't have to go out into the freezing cold, we didn't have to perform hard physical labor and were always together. An intellectual society that constantly held together intellectually, that was why relatively many 'Betreuer' survived.

My aunt Marie – my mother's cousin and the wife of my father's brother, Rudolf Frischmann – used to distribute soup. Those people were then allowed to scrape out the soup pots, so each one of them managed to scrape out at least one full canteen. It was only the leftovers at the bottom, but at least it was the thickest. My aunt ate extremely little, she was all skin and bones and I'm amazed that she managed to carry it all.

Her daughter died, she went to the gas chamber. So my aunt became completely fixated on me. For her I was a substitute for her daughter, and at the same time I was more important for her than herself. She took great care of me, quite often there would be soup for dinner or supper, so thanks to my aunt I had relatively enough to eat for those conditions, I didn't suffer from that enormous hunger.

We also organized a rebellion in Auschwitz. It also had various ups and downs, though with the realization that a rebellion would be hopeless. I was a member of the resistance in Auschwitz. A large portions of jews and Czechs didn't trust the German-Russian agreement 19, they suspected some sort of fraud, and rightly so as it turned out.

At that time jews were becoming members of the already illegal Communist Party. There was no party ID, I can't give an exact date, in fact even before I entered the concentration camp I was surrounded by some Communists, then in the concentration camp I became a direct member of a Communist cell.

In Birkenau my party chief came to me and told me that the gas chambers are waiting for us. Not only the Communists were organized, the Zionists, members of Sokol, Czech jews also agreed among themselves to organize an uprising. So these 'troikas' [groups of three] arose. One was a Zionist, one a Czech and one was something else. I was in a 'troika' with this one guy who was already at that time a Zionist.

You see, people changed a lot, because they had the impression that their particular faith had let them down, so Zionists became Communists, Communists became Czech jews, Czech jews became Zionists and so on. Avi Fischer, who was in my 'troika,' was a big Czech jew and then later left for Palestine, but he was a swell guy.

On the other side I had Kurt Sonnenberg, who was a German, a jew of course, but otherwise German to the core. But I think that he was honest. Because he was 'Vorarbeiter' – work group leader, a 'preparation' master – so after the war they put him on trial, I had to take his side, if only because we were in that 'troika' and he was also preparing for the uprising.

Our work was minimal. We were to obtain matches, you can't very well imagine what it meant to try to find matches in Auschwitz. Besides that we were to find blankets, those we more or less had, and containers for water. Our plan was the following: when the time comes for us to go to the gas chambers, we'll set our straw mattresses on fire to create confusion. We'll throw wet rags, that's why the water, on the electric fence to short it out. And then we'll run towards the partisans. We even had a map, which thanks to money from Avi Edelstein we got from the Polack Leshek.

Money – marks was found by 'my' children on the road leading through the center of the camp, did someone lose it, or place it there on purpose? They didn't know what to do with it, so they brought it to me. I exchanged it 'through the wires' for food, two hundred cigarettes – which were later to play a big role – and a map of Auschwitz's surroundings.

I gave it to the leader of the resistance Lengsfeld – named Lenek after the war – he gave it to Avi Fischer, who made copies. To this day I have no idea if it was 'my' map, or if Lengsfeld's version was correct, that the map was 'stolen' from the SS headquarters by prisoners on cleaning duty. If it was 'my' map they used, then to this day I don't know if it was a real map.

Avi Fischer was in my 'troika', and copied the map, which of course presented him with all sorts of problems – finding paper, pencils and so on. Avi Fischer unfortunately died. We were friends, but I never asked him about it, I just never got around to it to asking him how that map looked.

These are all of course terrible tragicomedies. I had gotten the map from that Polack for marks which Ari Edelstein had given me before his death. Leshek was in the camp next door, on the other

side of some electrified barbed wire. It was possible to talk through the fence, it was dangerous, but possible. So Leshek says to me one day, ‘Listen, you better give it all back to me, those marks are counterfeit,’ We couldn’t yell much through the wire, there were guards after all, who could start shooting, so we couldn’t talk long, so I said:

‘How do you want me to return cigarettes? They’ve all been smoked. We’ve eaten the food, I can’t get it back. I had no idea those marks were false.’ And he says, ‘You know, it doesn’t matter. You gave me counterfeit marks, I gave you a counterfeit map.’ Imagine the tragicomedy! I’ll never know.

Lenek is dead, Fischer as well, so no one knows whether that map that they were reproducing in case of escape was real or not. That can’t be ascertained any more. Or perhaps Lengsfeld-Lenek, whom I had given my map, really did get a map from the SS headquarters, as he claimed he did.

In any case, when the transport that had arrived before us went to the gas chambers, our ‘troika’ became very active and we had the feeling that it was time for action. But we couldn’t do anything more than keep collecting rags, matches and water in case the uprising came. This has led to the fact that the resistance is underrated, that we didn’t accomplish much. The question is, whether we should have rebelled.

We knew that those to whom the Germans had claimed that they are going to work, were all murdered. One day we also found out that we were to go to work in Germany. When we were preparing the resistance, there was a motto: ‘One to two percent of prisoners can be saved.’ It’s better to save two percent than for one hundred percent to go off like sheep into the gas chambers.

In the resistance everyone couldn’t know about everyone else, so that in the case of interrogation everything wouldn’t be found out. Therefore I was only supposed to know about the two men in our ‘troika’ – Fischer and Sonnenberg, but I knew some others from the ‘Heim’ [‘Kinderheim,’ children’s home] and also a few from the Party, including the ‘resistance head,’ Hugo Lengsfeld = Pavel Lenek.

When they were dissolving our prison camp in Auschwitz, I had no choice but to go. We marched from the camp, ostensibly to go work in Germany, however at first it looked like we were on our way to the gas chambers. I had a friend behind me, who I knew was also in the resistance, we weren’t allowed to talk, there were SS with rifles everywhere. But a person learned to talk without it being perceivable, I don’t think I’d be able to do it now.

And so we said, ‘What’s up? Are we going to the chambers? Are we still going to rebel? Or are we going to give up on this life?’ And then we saw that we had begun to move and that we were going to the ramp, where the trains arrived and departed. So I finally got out of Auschwitz when Hitler found that he had too few workers, and that better than to kill people just for being jews, is to work them to death, simply to let them work until they dropped, but so that they are doing something useful.

When there were air-raids, I twice saw an SS soldier crap himself. During the raids we had to move about there, and once on the other hand I saw a brave SS soldier, who ran about with his revolver commanding us about, so that we would pull the burning wagons apart from each other and put

them out one by one so that if one exploded it wouldn't cause the others to explode.

He was running about among us, if there had been an explosion he would have been a goner along with us. I always tell people that I'm afraid when I talk about the concentration camp, that I talk about those exceptions, with regards to the SS, even some of those humorous scenes that distort the picture, because the evil ones, the bestial ones, of course full of fear for themselves, were 99 percent of them.

A big book about uprisings in concentration camps came out, and there isn't much there about our resistance movement, only a couple of lines, as if it hadn't existed. Allegedly it wasn't resistance, when there wasn't a single shot fired and no one fell. But that isn't true! Unfortunately a rivalry arose, between the main camp at Auschwitz and us at Birkenau.

The main camp truly did have a well organized resistance, but they didn't rise up either. In fact we had considered cooperating with the main camp – after all, there was movement between the two – for example locksmiths used to go from one to the other, so they could have brought over some information, provided a connection.

The resistance in the main camp wasn't interested in our planned uprising though! Here there was a real rivalry, because the main camp [Auschwitz I.] said: the end of the war is approaching, and such an uprising will cost more lives than if we wait for the war to end. Even in the eventuality that departure for the gas chambers will be drawing near, and we rise up, they refuse to join us; that it doesn't make any sense any more, the end of the war is approaching, and more people will die than just waiting for the end of the war.

If I'm to talk openly, there was likely some anti-Semitism involved, because the main camp at Auschwitz, that wasn't really a jewish camp, while we, Birkenau, that is BIIb, were expressly a purely jewish camp. So from today's viewpoint our resistance is neglected, not acknowledged, and I think that we're being done a great injustice. Perhaps the resistance movement of the main Auschwitz camp has also done us a great injustice.

This lasts to this day – when the chairman of the Auschwitz Historical Group, Bartek, had a lecture regarding the Auschwitz resistance, he didn't mention even a word regarding the fact that an uprising had also been planned in Birkenau.

I'm a member of this Auschwitz Historical Group, so I also asked to speak, and added that Birkenau also had a highly organized resistance, of which I had been a member, that it should be taken into account. He told me that such a remark must be made in writing, so I submitted it in writing, and he nevertheless did not publicize it anywhere.

So I rebelled and at the next opportunity I forcefully expressed myself, and it ended up that the group's internal magazine for historians, named 'Auschwitz,' published my protest, that there had also been a resistance movement in BIIb. That's interesting, that all of a sudden it was too little for them that we had merely been preparing for it.

Another thing that's interesting. After I came out with this, some former prisoners said this to me, orally and without witnesses: 'you're telling us something here and you don't have any witnesses, no one else has written about this.' And almost as if to spite them, right at that time a book by Karel Roden, 'Life Inside Out,' came out, and there he even writes that he smuggled revolvers into

BIIb.

He doesn't say how many, I think probably one or two, but even that shows that we meant it seriously! Karel Roden was allowed out of the camp, because he was hauling some garbage out, so he was allowed to go in and out. He didn't know me or that I existed, we had no agreement, but what he wrote furnished proof that there was organized resistance in Birkenau and that it was meant seriously.

From Auschwitz we went to a gasoline refinery in Schwarzheide, where they made artificial gasoline from coal. It's between Dresden and Berlin.

On 1st June 1944 I boarded the transport and was in Schwarzheide that same day or the next. There, there were no children's homes, there I had to work extremely hard. It was dangerous as well. But the food was a little better, because they wanted us to be able to work. These were small differences. The knowledge that the front, which we could sometimes hear, was approaching, that was fabulous.

While I was in Schwarzheide, if a person said he was sick, he didn't have to go to work, but of course had to show up at roll call and had to do the cleaning up, and be available. I was ill and was in the camp, and suddenly they were calling out through the entire camp, as was the practice:

'Is there somebody here that knows how to fix a bicycle?' So I said to myself: of course I know how to fix a bicycle – after all in Vysoke Myto before the war I worked in a mechanical workshop. So I told them I could, and they led me off under guard to the SS camp next door, where the commander came over to me, the 'Lagerführer' [camp commander] or SS commander of the entire camp, the most feared man among all the SS. They called him 'Rakoska' [cane] because he always walked about with a cane and whenever he could he would whack people with it.

This commander brought me a bike which didn't work, it was in bad shape... And now: 'Can you put it together?' And I said, 'Well, if there's nothing missing and if the tires can be blown up and you have a pump, I'll put it together.' He said, 'Well, try inflating the tires first, try it.' I said, 'I have no tools.' So he said, 'They'll bring you some.' And they brought everything that I needed; now, I knew what I was doing. I could see that that bicycle needed to have everything lubricated and cleaned, so I took it apart down to the last screw.

He gave me a room at my disposal, even paper so that no screws would be lost, since there were of course no spare parts, so I had it all taken apart, and he came by and saw it and said, 'Well, if you don't put that bike back together, I'll shoot you!' Which with him was no joke, he meant it completely seriously. I said, 'I'll put it together.' And well and truly...they even brought me some grease and so on, back then it was no problem for me, I don't think I'd be able to do it now. Anyways I put the bike back together and saw that everything was fine.

He came over to me, and said, 'All right, now get on it so that I can see that it works.' I got scared and said, 'And you'll shoot me for riding on an SS bicycle.' He said, 'My SS word, that you can ride around in the courtyard here, I won't do anything to you.' So I got on it and rode around, he let me ride for a little bit, not too long, then he started beaming – that multiple murderer; upon which he sat on the bike and rode back and forth, braked, accelerated again.

When he was finished, all of a sudden he said: ‘Warte!’ [‘Wait!’]. He brought two canteens full of food and that’s not all. This mass murderer now said to me, ‘Eat!’ And I said, ‘You know, I’m terribly hungry, but I can’t eat all this no matter what I do.’ He said, ‘So take it with you to the camp.’ And I said, ‘They won’t let me into the camp with this, they’ll shoot me at the gate.’ ‘So hand it over the fence. Do you have a friend there?’ I said, ‘Yes, I do.’ Which I really did. And so I said, ‘So then that one over there will shoot me…’, and I pointed at the guard in the tower, which were around our camp and between our camp and the SS camp.

And he said, ‘No they won’t, come with me!’ And so this criminal went to the SS officer that was in the tower and said to him, ‘Alles in Ordnung’ [‘That’ll be OK.’]. And I was allowed to call my friend Karel Fisher, Fishi we used to call him, who as luck would have it was also off sick that day. I called over the fence:

‘Have them call Fishi, tell him to immediately come to the wire with two canteens.’ In a bit a completely terrified Fishi ran over, carrying two canteens, ‘Rakoska’ guarded us, and we dumped the food from those SS canteens into the prison canteens. Fishi quickly ran back to be as far as possible from the wire, so that no one would shoot him, and I left in absolute calm – of course accompanied by SS soldiers – back to our camp. In fact I’m not sure whether that SS officer shook my hand, which likely never happened to anyone else.

‘Rakoska’ was shot when the SS were escaping, Fishi is still alive, I’ll have to write him so he can confirm that it’s true, because anyone who knew ‘Rakoska’ wouldn’t believe it. I’ve thought about it many times, and think about it to this day, that even in that supreme criminal there was a bit of something childlike, that he was overjoyed that he could ride on a bike that he scrounged up from somewhere, it was impossible to find a bike then, he didn’t have anyone to fix it, and that childlike glee of his expressed itself in friendly behavior towards a prisoner that he otherwise totally despised from the bottom of his heart.

Our factory was bombed. Always when the tall factory chimneys started to give off smoke, that meant that production had started. So when they started smoking, that same day a reconnaissance plane appeared, made a little smoke circle in the sky, and in four to five hours planes appeared and dropped bombs on the plant. I lived through many air raids there, some of them also hit the concentration camp, which cost additional lives and wounded.

During one of them, when I was running from the factory to be at least in the camp, I was wounded. It was 17th March 1945 and I got what was perhaps a piece of shrapnel in the legs. I couldn’t walk any further, and an SS officer wanted to shoot me, but I got up and ran – it was about fifty meters – I ran those fifty meters all the way.

When I finished running I fell down and could no longer bend my leg. That’s psychology, later I asked a doctor about it and he said that everything is possible, that much about people is still undiscovered. After that I couldn’t move the leg any more.

One fellow prisoner – who died recently – carried me on his back from the camp gates, where I had literally fallen, to this caricature of a bomb shelter in the camp. After the raid was over, I crawled to my barracks and then to the camp hospital, where, while I was fully conscious, they pulled fragments from my knee, apparently more from shattered stone than the bomb itself.

When the front came close even to Schwarzheide, which is close to Berlin, they carted us off on 15th April 1945 by bus, through burning Berlin to Sachsenhausen 20. Those of us that were wounded. We of course had no idea what was going on, we rode a bus through burning Berlin, and when we arrived in Sachsenhausen, they stood us in a row and left us standing there, hungry and ill.

I had both knees shot through, we stood there and waited to see what would happen, we had no clue. You never had a clue. Then one SS soldier came over, whether it was meant ironically or if he wanted to help us I don't know, he said, 'Kein Gas mehr, ihr könnt' gehen.' That they don't have gas anymore. We were standing in front of a gas chamber, they wanted to gas us – this is what saves a person's life, coincidences like this.

If we had arrived a few hours earlier, I would have died in a gas chamber. While a similar coincidence, completely senseless, took someone else's life. So we stood there in front of that gas chamber, and not until that SS soldier came and said, 'You can go, there's no more gas,' did we find out why we were standing there. Of course we scattered.

There wasn't all that much solidarity, in the last concentration camp it was horrible, there was no place to lie down, nothing to eat. This is all described in Jiri Frankl's book 'The Burning Heavens.' Jiri lived through it all along with me. He describes those last few days, when we were completely starved, because no one gave us anything to eat and we were emaciated. He describes how he crawled among the refuse, picking through it to try and find a bit to eat.

Life is simply terribly complicated, at that moment there was some Ukrainian woman also crawling in front of him, and her skirt hitched up – all of a sudden her legs were entirely bare. This started to turn him on, but not for long, because after all a potato was more important. He writes about his best friend, my friend also, who is walking in the death march 21, and knows that he can't go on.

Because he has good boots, he gives him his boots and says, 'Here are my boots, I'm going to go and stay in the back, they'll shoot me.' The very end of the war, but he just couldn't go on. He also describes how two friends tried to escape, they caught one of them and right at the end of the war they executed him

Another prisoner, Edy [Alfred] Kantor, wrote a book 'The Book of Alfred Kantor' – this person had an incredible memory. Kantor took the same path as I, he drew during his time in the concentration camp and managed to save a couple of pictures.

Especially right after the war ended, Kantor was in a bad way, he went to the hospital, where he sat and drew. He had an artist's memory, he could remember which SS uniform had what uniform facings, he drew Terezin and Auschwitz, what the crematoriums really looked like, even though it's a bit hard to make out, because it's dark and flames are shooting out of them. He also drew Schwarzheide, where we manufactured gasoline, you can see the air raids, he faithfully recorded everything in his book.

Kantor and I parted ways in Schwarzheide, he went on a death march and I left via bus, through burning Berlin to Sachsenhausen. I realized that Hitler's primary goal was extermination of the jews, and only after that was war. Our bus trip illustrates this thought of mine.

We wounded left Schwarzheide by bus because we couldn't walk. I got shrapnel in the knee, so I had it straightened out and had to sit beside the driver, who was Dutch. My leg was freezing but I heard and saw everything. We drove through burning Berlin, which as a humanist shouldn't cause me joy, to see what a bombed-out city looks like.

Our driver was incredibly courageous, from that time on I have the greatest respect for the Dutch. We drove on, and in both directions marched German soldiers, they had their orders, but I can't comprehend that not a one of them rebelled, even the crippled marched. All of a sudden an SS officer stops us, opens the door and says, 'Everyone out! We'll load on our wounded!' And the SS soldiers with us couldn't manage even a word, while our Dutch driver says, 'These are jews!' And that officer shut the door and left.

It was almost mystical, that when someone gave an order that this bus will transport jews, it was not to be argued with. He couldn't have known where he was driving us, which was to be gassed in Sachsenhausen, where there was a small gas chamber.

The German soldiers that were retreating, had no idea why jews were riding in that bus, they had no idea that we were destined for death, which thank God missed me. Jews were something completely outside the human community. And when someone issued the order that we were going via this bus, that was not to be argued with. When the front was collapsing, trains carrying jews to the gas chambers had priority over army trains – that's something not widely known.

The gas chambers functioned up to the last moment. Hitler was abnormal, now they write that he kissed some child or something, so he was so normal! That's stupid. I think that to this day there is no psychological evaluation of how he influenced that entire nation, that they all stopped seeing jews as something human.

April 21 was the liquidation of Sachsenhausen, the death march from Sachsenhausen. The SS ran about and yelled, 'Alle raus' ['Everyone out!'] and 'let's go on the death march', of course they didn't call it a death march. Everyone who went got a loaf of bread. Where they managed to find a loaf of bread for everyone in those times is a mystery to me.

A loaf of bread and a piece of salami, something that we had never ever seen there. I had already decided that I was going. I said to my friend Zdenek Elias, who later became a well-known emigrant, 'OK, I'm going as well.' Zdenek announced that he wasn't going.

I told him that whoever stays behind in the camp will be shot. He just raised himself up a bit, looked at me and said, 'Well, isn't it better to be shot than to go marching with those shot-up legs? To march with pain and then be shot anyways? Isn't it simpler to stay here?' I said, 'You're right.'

A person becomes so cynical that he doesn't realize that it's the last day and that he should still want to try to get through it. So I pulled my blanket up over my head, the camp was empty and all of a sudden we had enough room. I slept and suddenly the ringing of a bell woke me up, and there were two Russian soldiers standing out on the assembly square and ringing the bell.

I ran over to them, like a proper party member I had been studying Russian, so I spoke my Slavic pidgin to them, which I know to this day and which I call Russian. I talked with them and they were all happy. I'm probably the only person that got a watch from Russian soldiers. The one said, here you go, 'Davaj, beri, beri.' [I'm giving, take, take]. And gave me a watch, the second one gave me

chocolate, American cigarettes, and a raincoat, which I wore at home for a long time afterward. That was my liberation.

Then I argued with fellow prisoners and historians where the Soviet soldiers had come from. ‘You didn’t recognize that they were Polish soldiers,’ and I said, ‘No, they spoke Russian.’ I did know enough Russian to recognize that. They then figured out that it was a Soviet scout team and after that came the Polish army and liberated the camp.

Then I had other experiences, these were already humorous incidents, like how the Germans were afraid of me, when I was carrying a bloody axe, because I had been butchering rabbits. And sad things, how around us from those that had survived there laid corpses of people who died because they had overeaten the first day. I held myself back, in that the first day I only ate potatoes, even though we suddenly had everything we could want.

- **After the war and later life**

You can’t imagine what SS supplies looked like. The war was over, there were these SS barracks, so full of food, whatever you could think of! Cans of food, lard, full hutches of fattened angora rabbits. And all this was suddenly at our disposal. After that hunger some people lost control over themselves and ate. I had enough self-control to know that I can’t start stuffing myself right away, I ate bit by bit.

Nevertheless when I arrived at home, I remember the husband of the German woman, who lived with us and used to report on us, saying, ‘Wow, you must have had it good there, you’re so fat.’ I was extremely emaciated, of course. But I hadn’t been able to control myself completely, ate too much and bloated.

I was bloated and swollen all over, but despite that could ride a bicycle. Then I was at the doctor’s and he said to me: ‘My fellow, you have to be careful that you don’t get fat, you’ll have to watch yourself all your life.’ He knew our family well, so he said, ‘You all have a tendency to get fat and with you it would be particularly bad.’

Within a month it all disappeared and I was once again as skinny as a stick. I wanted to kill that guy. ‘You must have had it great there, here no one’s that fat.’ I don’t know you could or couldn’t tell that I was swollen.

The armies of the USSR came to the camp on 22nd April 1945, but there are endless arguments regarding this between the officials historians of Sachsenhausen, how the liberation took place. On 22nd April advance scouts of the Soviet army came to the camp, and on June 12 a bus came for us, driven by a Mr. Vlk. I left Sachsenhausen on 17th June and arrived in Prague on 20th June 1945.

To this day neither science nor psychology has grasped the complete uniqueness of the Holocaust, it just isn’t completely understandable. When you read Hitler’s biography, you find that he didn’t have any particularly bad experiences with jews, on the contrary they were on the whole positive.

He didn’t have any special reason to hate jews, but probably realized one thing: that it’s the bait that you can lure people with, he was enough of a politician for that. What’s completely incomprehensible is that the whole German nation went insane, at least from today’s perspective.

Jews stopped existing for them; they were no longer human beings.

That's why it's incomprehensible that the uniqueness of the Holocaust hasn't been scientifically or historically analyzed, let alone understood in an ordinary way. That's why people can dare to compare today's, though also huge, horrors and genocides with the Holocaust.

The Holocaust was unique in that it was on an industrial scale, it really was that factory, as people sometimes say, that death factory. Another thing was that jews were tortured in the most horrible ways before being killed. The thing that probably upset me the most was when they were recently slaughtering en masse those so-called mad cows, and the newspapers wrote that it was a 'Cow Holocaust.' One doesn't know if it's humor in bad taste, or something else. Or, that for example the Czech Republic hadn't officially recognized the Holocaust Victims' Memorial day until this year, 2005.

While I was still at the concentration camp, and we had begun to receive mail, I applied to study Czech and geography at university. Those two subjects were my favorites, that's something that I inherited from my father, and Professor Eisinger also influenced me. I wrote poems and only ever had one single one published, I know it by heart to this day. While still in the concentration camp I received a reply, that Czech and geography as a subject doesn't exist.

So I decided to study Czech and Russian, as I was under the impression that I had learned to speak Russian quite well in the concentration camp. During my studies, to my horror, I learned not only that I don't know Russian, but that I had absorbed a completely spoiled version of it in the concentration camp. I mixed Russian words with Ukrainian and Czech ones, I never managed to correct it completely, and sometimes I say as a joke that I'm a genius, because I managed to gain a professorship in Russian and I don't know how to speak Russian.

My return from the concentration camp was probably more pleasant and easier than that of my acquaintances, because I was welcomed by my old friends, and I even found some girls in Vysoke Myto. They all recalled my brother, everyone would run over to me and ask what had happened to Frantisek. I had lots of worries with the house and didn't know how I would come up with money.

I was arguing with this one anti-Semitic professor, who said to me when I didn't have anything to sleep on and he refused to give me a bed: 'We're not going to be like the Germans, who took everything from the jews. This belongs to Germans and we have to wait until the state decides.' In the end the National Committee intervened and he gave me the bed.

I met my wife, Zdena Kolarska, during a parade early on after my return from the concentration camp. I'll never forget it, how we were marching in the parade, and walking beside me was this voluptuous, nice-looking woman. Compared to her I was then a skinny little shrimp, I don't know if I was still swollen then or not.

I was smoking, even though I'd always been against smoking, but they taught me to smoke in the concentration camp, actually on the trip from Auschwitz to Schwarzheide, even though it was of course forbidden. When we arrived back home, for a short time there were cigarettes named 'America,' so I had these 'Americas' in my pocket, and suddenly this woman beside me says to me, 'I'd really like to smoke but I don't have any.' We all called each other comrade, and so I said to her, 'Comrade, can I offer you one?' And she said, 'And you smoke?' and I said, 'Well, I smoke, I'm

not happy about it, but I smoke.'

Those were our first words that we spoke to each other. With this a completely new life began for me, because we soon moved in together, then got married, and very soon upon that came our first son, Franta [Frantisek]. My wife is a magnificent woman, all of a sudden I had a home, her parents accepted me, I called them Dad, Mom. Suddenly I was living a normal life. They were such an amazing family, they took me in as their own.

After I finished my studies and held a few different jobs I started teaching at university, married a teacher, her father was a school principal and her mother also a teacher.

Our daughter Vera, her married name is Dvorakova, is a teacher, a translator from French, and has a doctorate in pedagogy. She studied in the Soviet Union, and after the year 1989 in America. Our son, Frantisek Franek, teaches mathematics and computer science at a university in Canada, so we already have about ten teachers in the family.

Have I brought up my children to be jewish? In fact during the Slansky trials 22 we did keep it a secret from our son, but our relatives soon let him know the truth. They called him 'jew-child,' in a kindly fashion: 'Come here, I want to hug you, my little jew-child.' and so on.

Our son, when he was small, would swear, because 'you jew' was an oath in the Old Town, so he would swear at people and say 'you jew.' And some Mrs. Polakova came and complained, that we should do something about it, that our boy is saying 'you jew' to her boy. So then I started to step by step slowly tell him about the war. I couldn't tell them that they imprisoned me just like that, for no reason.

I used to go to meetings of the Terezin Initiative, meetings of the Freedom Fighters, and also did a lot of work in the Schwarzheide Society, of which I was almost the founder. Schwarzheide was my next to last concentration camp, and a relatively large number of us survived it, a large number even to this day – although there are maybe only two or three dozen now – we became very close, and I came up with the idea of forming a group, which exists to this day.

Currently Richard Svoboda is its chairman, for a long time I was the chairman. My children heard that I had been imprisoned, and took it as part of the resistance against the Germans, as in those days there was a lot of anti-German feeling.

Zdenka's cousin used to tell them about it, but my son was small and didn't understand it. And because we didn't live a jewish lifestyle, it went in one ear and out the other. But we never kept it from them, except for the first two years after the war, when we said, just please don't let it happen again. We were afraid of how we could explain it to our son, we didn't know how to go about it, but we never hid from our children the fact that they are jews.

Our son, when he arrived in Canada, told us that there whoever doesn't belong to some religion, is considered worse than a Communist. Of course at first he said 'no religion,' they were completely startled, what is that? 'What's that please? Why, you have two arms, two legs, how can you be without belief?' So he thought about it, and then said that he's a jew.

Our son therefore identified himself as a jew in Canada, he knew from home that it wasn't anything negative. But we never led him to it, later we did discuss it, but more or less in the same way as

about the roundness of the cosmos, so it wasn't very personal, but he did know about it.

Our daughter married a non-jew, but a couple of years ago, she 'jewified' herself, she internally accepted Judaism. In fact she even wanted to join the Jewish Community, but she's not allowed, because her mother isn't jewish. Even though that now she's more jewish than many others, the Orthodox rabbi won't accept her into the Community. Despite this she won a competition to be principal of the Lauder School, though in the beginning they didn't want to accept her, also because of the fact that she isn't one hundred percent jewish.

I've had the luck in life to be doing what I enjoy. I studied with Professor Bohumil Mathesius. Professor Bohumil Mathesius was one of the greatest translators during the time of the First Republic 23, he translated from German, French, Latin and mainly from Russian. His most famous book is 'Songs of Ancient China.' I eventually published it. When he was dying, I didn't go see him, but despite this he willed me his estate.

Unfortunately not his finances, which I could have used as well, but its stewardship. I prepared his writings, which didn't get published, I wrote his bibliography, which also didn't get published. The Communists reproached me with the fact that he wasn't a Communist, even though he became a professor of contemporary Russian, therefore Soviet literature, they reproached him for not being a proper Communist. In spite of this they managed, like with all the professors, to force him into joining the Party, so that after the year 1989 24 I again didn't have any success in finding someone to publish him.

Mathesius was from an Evangelical [Protestant] family, and when he first got married, it was to a jewish actress named Zdenka. They divorced, from what I know of it after all these years, the fault was hers, she always felt dissatisfied and wanted to be more important. While he was very important in the sphere of culture.

She committed suicide before the war. Mathesius blamed himself for the rest of his life that she committed suicide because of him, he blamed himself for permitting the divorce, even though she was the one that wanted it. But she killed herself in a state of utter despair, she had a heavy illness and suddenly couldn't act, was utterly disconsolate, and that's something that he couldn't have pulled her out of. He blamed himself for being an anti-Semite. Due to his wife, and due to Otokar Fischer 25.

Because when Otokar Fischer was just beginning, Mathesius wrote a tract called 'Anti-Semitism, non-Semitism and Humanity.' He propagated the thought that jews should concern themselves with jews, and for Otokar Fischer to concern himself with jews and not Czechs, to leave Czech literature alone. He was very young at the time, I know this from the stories he would tell, but Otokar Fischer took it very seriously at the time, and even considered stopping writing about Czech literature and poems, if they didn't want him. Mathesius felt guilty about this his whole life, and when he was on his death bed, he wanted to make up for these two youthful anti-Semitic sins, which he had long ago made up for with his entire life. Out of those that could have taken care of his estate, he chose me. Partly because he trusted me, but mainly because I'm a jew. He wanted someone jewish to continue with his work.

I became Mathesius' successor, then I was in Germany for four years, where I had significant successes. I went to Germany in 1966, when they were looking for someone to lecture on Soviet

literature. First they invited Soviets, but were unhappy with them because all they did was Soviet propaganda.

So they invited emigrants, but they on the other hand did nothing but political anti-Soviet propaganda. This they didn't like either, so they wrote to Prague. Here they decided that I would go there for three months. I was very successful there, because I presented it as a unified whole. For me it was simply Russian literature. So they were satisfied with me, I got a professorship there, and wanted to stay for as long as possible, but I didn't want to emigrate. Then I received a one-year Humboldt scholarship.

During that year I was allowed to work on only my own things, then I went to Tübingen. I worked at the foremost German universities, and lectured for a total of four years. In 1970 they wrote me from the CSSR that I have to decide, to either immediately return, or be considered an emigrant. I was in Germany with my entire family, so I guess it was my free choice that we returned.

After we returned from Germany, they very quickly threw me out of the Faculty, threw me out of the Party, but that I had already been thrown out of. In the critique they wrote: 'Associate professor Franek comes from a rich jewish family from Prague.' In those days that was the worst thing you could be. Meanwhile we hadn't been rich, when my father died, my mother sometimes didn't know if she'd be able to put dinner on the table, and I'm not exaggerating.I wasn't born in Prague, but in Vysoke Myto, but 'rich jewish family from Prague' sounds better. I never denied being from a jewish family. At that time jews were being persecuted, so they wrote from a jewish family.

How did I find out about it? It was all top secret, but somehow they made a mistake in my critique and had to write a new one. They took it out of the typewriter and threw it in the wastepaper basket. One day the cleaning lady knocked on my door and said, 'I have something for you.' I said to her, 'What do you have for me?'. 'It's your vetting review, from the garbage.' I have it stored away to this day. I know exactly what they wrote about me.

I had been away on official business, but despite that, when I returned they threw me out of the Faculty as a German spy. I worked in the Lidove [People's] Publishers, in fact as the assistant chief editor, but because I had been thrown out of the Party, someone had to vouch for me. One acquaintance of mine did vouch for me, the literary critic Vladimir Dostal, but when he died the director of the publishing house immediately threw me out, and I ended up working for the railway.

I have to say that I very quickly got used to working for the railway. One of my colleagues found me the job, she had remained at the faculty and then later became a faculty dean in Olomouc; her best friend worked at the train station. She told me that they were always looking for people there, so I went and introduced myself.

First I had to go for schooling and then they took me on, because they had personnel shortages. During Communism there were always personnel shortages, because each job was done by ten people instead of one, so of course there were never enough workers. So I got in and got schooled to be a signalman. I worked at the railway station in Sedlec.

Signalman, that means that I got to work in a so-called switch tower, those are the little houses that stood right beside the tracks, there was a signalman in it, who had to watch the signals, and it had a telephone so that I could let them know if a train hadn't by chance remained stopped or if a

wagon hadn’t by accident become disconnected. I worked outside of the train station and sometimes it was in the middle of nowhere. My job was to watch and see if the train was whole and on the right track. Besides this, right in Sedlec there was a rail spur, that was always stressful for me.

There was a fish cannery in Sedlec, so trains with refrigerated rail cars would arrive, and I had to let them off the main line into the cannery, according to very strict rules. During this I would always be shaking, but not even once did I screw up. I’m proud of that.

I had yet another task, a little further on there was this empty track, with idle locomotives on it, and one time I was supposed to let one go. The procedure was that I got an order as to which locomotive should depart, the locomotive would go on the main track, I was supposed to signal it to go to the train station, and only then would the conductor give the final signal for it to go. I mixed it up, and let that locomotive go straight out on the main line! My boss was completely beside himself, saying: ‘What if there had been a train coming, what a disaster would we have had.’

As punishment I had to return to the train station, so that I would be under closer supervision. There was this little shed there, right behind the station, I once again worked as a switchman, only that there was more work, because there were more switches.

I recall doing a lot of my own work there – I read innumerable books, which was strictly forbidden, I even did translations there. I had to have three eyes. With one eye I read or did corrections, with the second I watched what was going on out on the tracks, and with the third eye I watched out for the controller.

So it was a bit suspenseful in its way, but I managed to finish a nice portion of my work there. I put together a library of literary science, which I wasn’t officially allowed to sign as my work, I wasn’t even allowed to be a so-called responsible editor, I wasn’t allowed to put it together and so on, but I practically created the whole library by myself.

Working for the railway had the advantage that you worked a morning shift, then the next day the afternoon shift, and then had a day off. So I had lots of days off, I would go to the library and also to the swimming pool. Once I was running to catch a streetcar on my way to the swimming pool, and I slipped and fell and broke my little finger, so I wasn’t able to work.

The doctor gave me a note that I can’t manually move switches with my hands, so they put me on disability, which could last up to a year. We had very little money. From disability I went into early retirement, where I got half of my pension, but didn’t have to do anything any more, and then they gave me my full pension.

Then, after the year 1989, they took me back to the faculty with a certain amount of ceremony. The first time I did my professorship of Slavonic studies was in Göttingen, Germany, in 1990 I defended my professorial degree and became a professor of Russian and Soviet literature, everything was perfect.

Except that they then threw us all out, when money started getting tight, that we were too old. I had a couple of supplements, which people reproach us so much for, for the time in the concentration camps. So we’ve always been able to manage, plus my wife is a very modest woman and has lasted it out with me. Now I’m trying to still work, but it’s not going very well any more.

I changed my name, as opposed to others, completely of my own free will. Because when I started to study Czech, I learned that Josef II 26 had decided to institute a two-name system. Before that, your father could be named Novak, because he was a newcomer.

His father, who was a tailor, could have been named Krejci [Tailor]. Kucera [Curly] if he had curly hair. Names weren't at all hereditary. Josef II decided that he would institute this; because he was a little afraid of this step, people tried to talk him out of it, in the year 1795, if I'm not mistaken, he decided to try it out with the jews.

It was basically a good idea, that everyone would have his own name, and that his children will be named after their father. Because along with this step he was also conducting Germanization, a condition was having a German name, or a German-sounding one.

When I found out about this at the very beginning of my studies, I read a wonderful article by Pavel Eisner about this, Eisner didn't change his name, as he was already famous as Eisner, but he grasps that if someone was named Schweinkopf [pig's head], that he would have understandably changed his name. The way this happened was that in the time of Joseph II, whoever didn't have money to pay the official in charge, became Schweinkopf, was Goldstein [gold stone] or at least Stern [star].

Changing your name was possible long ago, so jews gradually changed it. Some Czech names also got preserved among jews – Vohryzek, Rostovsky, Hostovsky, Ruzicka, Benes, Novak, Bysicky, Radvansky. How those people managed to keep them, the devil only knows. They must have had to pay a lot, or requested the name change very early on, or convinced the official in charge that it sounded German, and sometimes it worked, Vohryzek was possible to read as Worytzek.

When I found out about this, I asked myself: 'What would have dad done today?' My dad would have abandoned his German name, with which we have no relationship, there is no famous Frischman, and we don't know anything about Frischmans. [There was a German bishop named Frischmann, but probably not of jewish origin].

I thought about what name to choose and ended up screwing it up horribly. Because Franek is also not of Czech origin. I had wanted to take the name Vohryzek, after my grandmother, but I felt that would be inappropriate, because Viktor Vohryzek was still fairly well-known then. I met some lady friends from my concentration camp days, one was named Iltisova, she said that it's not a German name, but jewish, so she has no reason to change it.

The second said that she was going to get married soon, so she wasn't going to worry about it. They said to me: 'Hey, why are you putting so much thought into it, call yourself Franek, that's a good Czech name.' And stupid me, I went home and wrote up an application with the name Franek.

It wasn't until later that I realized that the name comes from 'Frank,' which is originally from German, that I had gone, as it were, from the frying pan, and into the fire. My son also has the name, and they call him Frank, they've Anglicized it. He lives in Canada with his family, my daughter's married name is Dvorakova, so that I'm the only Franek. If I would have married a bit sooner, I would have taken my wife's name, Kolarsky, which I like a lot.

I met up with anti-Semitism after the war as well, in fact quite early on, but the difference is huge. Anti-Semitism remained here from the war. When I arrived in Vysoke Myto, I'm not sure if it was for

the first time, standing there at the train station was this one guy I had known. He saw me getting out of the train, and hollered out so the whole train station could hear, it's a small local train stop, so everyone must have heard: 'the jews are here again.'

Then I met a professor, who when he was supposed to give me things, I've already talked about it, a bed, bed sheet, duvet, so I would have something to sleep on, plus a table, and I didn't even want anything more of the things confiscated from the Germans, he was rude and said: 'We're not like the Germans, who took everything from the jews. We're not going to give the jews anything from German things we have stored here.'

On the other hand, as I student I regularly met other students who talked about concentration camp literature, and jewish authors. There I never met up with anti-Semitism. I never met up with anti-Semitism in the Faculty of Philosophy. I worked for the University Students' Union, we organized student camps. I had been involved in the Scout movement before the war – after the war be began to meet and then I read that scouting was being organized again.

People from the Scouting Presidium decided to co-opt the members and that they'll present themselves in front of the officials and the public as the Czechoslovak Junak-Scout organization. There were three in the presidium: one was a psychologist named Brichacek, another was a doctor by the name of Pfeiffer, but not a relative of mine or a jew.

The third was the writer Alexej Pludek, who was at first an anti-Communist and later joined the Communists and had quite hard anti-Semitic views. Alexej Pludek decided to renew the Scout movement, perhaps on the basis of anti-Semitism or what, who knows. He wrote anti-Semitic books. I never found out whether he knew that I was a jew. And to come up and say to him, 'Hey man, I'm a jew,' that's also not the easiest thing to do.

When I found out that the three of them wanted to found this organization, I right away called Brichacek and Pfeiffer and said to them: 'look here, you obviously don't know this, I'm a writer, if Pludek is to be a restorer of Scouting, you should be aware that I will immediately write to the World Scouting Organization, that a known anti-Semite is founding Scouting in Prague.' They really did verify if it was true, and subsequently squeezed him out. So I met up with anti-Semitism, and right after that with two people that tied into him, that we can't have anti-Semitism.

So after the war I did meet up with anti-Semitism more often, but usually at work on the railway, or at the pub. People would say things like: 'those jews, they want something again.' And sometimes with civil servants, when they were supposed to return confiscated property. Because they returned it twice, once in 1945 and then after 1989. But of course these manifestations were all disguised. One time there was an anti-Semitic newspaper, but I don't know what it was called.

One thing that started to really bother me, as I later found out, it also bothered Frantisek Langer 27 , people started to write the word jew with a capital 'J.' Because a jew with a capital 'J' is in Israel, and even there he doesn't officially call himself a jew, but an Israeli. But Frantisek Langer, Otokar Fischer, Frantisek Gellner 28, Karel Polacek 29, Egon Hostovsky 30, those are all jews with a small 'j,' I can't help myself in this. These are all Czech writers. It really began to bother me, and I rebelled against it wherever I could. Completely without effect.

I know Petr Pithart [contemporary Czech politician], who is a noted Semitophile, but jews for him have a capital 'J.' And I said, 'Please, how can you say that Czechs, Germans and Jews lived here. Why don't you say that Czechs, Germans, Hungarians, Croatians lived here.' There were about as many Croatians living here as jews.

There were many minorities living here. Jews didn't form Czech culture as jews. And Otokar Fischer formed Czech culture as a Czech and in a big way. And Jiri Orten 31, it wasn't until the end of his life, forced by the Germans, that he withdrew into his jewishness.

Before that he was a Czech poet and nothing else. How can you put on an exhibition of Germans, Czechs and jews? No, that can't be done. Germans, Czechs, then you can put on a different exhibit, Czech jews, German jews, Zionist jews in Bohemia and their influence. Gustav Mahler 32, there perhaps you could talk about him being a jew. He was connected to Moravia and otherwise he was a German [Editor's note:

The interviewee is aware that Mahler wasn't German; he means culturally more Germanic than Czech.]. But there you see it again. Gustav Mahler was a German jew, but was more a German than a jew, and his descendant Zdenek Mahler is completely Czech.

My opinion regarding the state of Israel gradually changed. Towards the end of my time in the concentration camps I met jews who were truly jews, or were Germans. but didn't feel to be any more, and started to become jews. And suddenly I began to comprehend, when they fantasized about Palestine, literally fantasized, I began to understand that they don't have any other nation and have no other choice.

The evolution of my opinion, the same as with Viktor Vohryzek, especially like after with Jindrich Kohn, started at first with absolute refusal, that it's an Arabic country, an Asian country. But if you want, try it, we certainly won't put up barriers in your way. From outright refusal to acceptance.

In my youth people talked about Zionism, which was something absolutely unacceptable for me. Here the battle was between Czech jews and German jews. People used to say, why are they being German? Jews who were Germans, were returning to German culture, which had it's advantages during the time of the Austro-Hungarian monarchy. But at first people said about Zionists:

'Let them go to Palestine, be off with them if they don't like it here.' And of course there were embarrassments, people said, what do we have in common with you? Why are you identifying with us? We're Czechs and you? Why do you wear a hat, why do you wear payes? Why don't you dress normally? It was real hatred, which gradually changed.

When the war ended, right away a battle of jews began. I even saw how some jews escaped from Poland. At that time I was still a devout Communist, I met once this group of Polish jews in the Municipal House, I was talking to them and I said to them, 'You know, if I wasn't a Communist, I'd for sure be a Zionist.' It wasn't true, because very soon I stopped being internally a Communist, and before I knew what was happening, there were the first trials [Slansky trials].

I could never have denied my Czech identity, it was too strong in me. I told them that I would at least come and wave goodbye to them: 'I've at least got my fingers crossed for you, even if I can't do anything else.' Already from the year 1945 I stood clearly on the side of the jews, on the side of Israel, which didn't exist yet.

Many people in the university environment in which I moved about had exactly the same opinion. They swore at the Arabs, the Arabs boasted that they would drive the jews into the sea. Suddenly it was the Arabs that were running away into the sea. Who would have known that it was going to turn out like that. From that time I absolutely respect Zionism, and if it helps, I've got my fingers crossed for them in that battle.

I always understood the conflicts regarding Palestine, that that country is Arabic. Now that the jews are already there, Europe should have told the Arabs: 'You have to stand aside, you have to make room for them. You have as much room as in all of Europe, and there are as many of you as in Germany. So why couldn't you make a bit of room for the jews.' No, they weren't capable of doing that. In the meantime the jews will go on arguing among themselves.

I have my own theory, different from the others, about what jewishness is. According to me jewishness isn't a nationality nor a religion, jewishness is in my view a 'pospolity:' a community, or society. A jewish community; religious jews, national jews, and jews that are religious and national.

Besides that, there are jews that are neither religious nor national, who are simply designated as jews by society. This all forms something that is neither a nation nor a religion. Imagine a person that doesn't feel himself to be a part of the jewish nation, is an atheist, and finds himself in a society that is plagued with prejudice against jews, and everyone says 'you're a jew.' Try as he might, he won't get away from it.

What does he belong to, if he's not a member of the jewish nation, nor the jewish religion? This type of person belongs to that third level, which is perhaps the largest: together with nation, religion and this level is formed what I today call the jewish 'pospolity.'

It's my own theory, I'm quite perplexed that no one else has come to the same conclusion, because to me it seems quite clear and simple. It's obviously because people are used to thinking in terms of religion or nation. But what if something different exists? And something different does exist! What's necessary is to come up with a name. I thought of 'pospolity,' but maybe it's not the best name for it.

Something similar exists in the works of Jindrich Kohn, 'Assimilation and the Ages.' Kohn though calls it a 'rod' [clan, family, tribe, breed etc. – Translator's note]. Which I don't consider to be a very good choice, because the word 'rod' has numerous meanings. I chose 'pospolity,' I didn't find a Latin expression, Greek scholars advised me to use 'koiné moira,' maybe someone will make some new word out of it, or think of some other all-encompassing name.

After the war I didn't live in any particularly jewish fashion, but I always remained a member of the Jewish Community. My wife and I celebrate both Easter and Passover. We celebrate Christmas, but don't really celebrate Chanukkah. I always took part in the major concentration camp remembrance ceremonies, so in this way I remained in contact with jewishness.

Of those that survived, there are those that say that they don't want to hear anything more about concentration camps, that they've had enough of it. Then there are the others, that still live in it. Even that poor guy Arnost Lustig 33, who I know quite well, I get the feeling that he's gone a bit nutty from it.

When he talks normally like this, well, the fact is that he doesn't talk normally. I've preserved a healthy middle position, where I can talk and write about it. I also do research in books, for example I'm researching Karel Polacek's works, who's a jew, but I've also written on other, non-jewish themes. I live a completely different life. The two themes meet, but don't overlap.

Glossary:

1 Vohryzek, Viktor (1864–1918)

doctor, writer, founder of the bi-weekly, later weekly magazine Rozvoj (Development) (1904), which programmatically publicized critiques of the older generation. Co-founder of the *Society of Progressive Czech Jews* (1907), which in time became the main organization of the Czech-Jewish movement.
Viktor supplied the movement with a new ideological foundation – he and his successors considered assimilation to be first and foremost a religio-ethical matter. They felt Czech nationality to be an unchanging fact, somewhat complicated by Jewish origins.

They didn't consider being Czech as a question of language or nationality, but a religio-ethical problem, a matter of spiritual standard and culture – in agreement with the first Czechoslovak president, T.G. Masaryk, whose efforts to a moral renewal of society and political engagement after 1914 they supported.

2 Czech-Jewish Movement

Czech assimilation had three unique aspects – Jews did not assimilate from the original ghetto, and gave up German. Therefore the language and culture, which they had recently accepted, and its resultant advantages, and decided to assimilate into a non-ruling nation.
After the year 1867 the first graduates began coming out of high schools, these patriotic students in 1876 founded the first Czech-Jewish organization, the *Society of Czech Academics-Jews*.

In 1881 the society began publishing a Czech-Jewish Almanac, the first Jewish periodical written in the Czech language. The members of the first generation of the C-J movement considered themselves to be Jews only by denomination.

The C-J question was for them a question of linguistic, national and cultural assimilation. They strove for 'de-Germanization', published C-J literature, organized patriotic balls, entertainment, lectures, founded associations (*Or Tomid*, 1884).

In 1893, the associations both in Prague and outside of it merged into a culturally oriented fellowship, the *National Czech-Jewish Association*, which published the *Czech-Jewish Papers*. At the end of the 19th century Czech Jews were also successful in having many German – originally Jewish – schools closed, which Czechs considered to be advance bastions of Germanism.

The rise of anti-Semitism and the close of the 19th century caused a deep crisis within the C-J movement. The younger generation was against the older generation's politics, represented from

1897 by the *Czech-Jewish Political Association*.

Starting in 1904, the bi-weekly. later the weekly magazine *Rozvoj* (Development) came out with programmatic critiques of the older generation; it was led by the writer and doctor Viktor Vohryzek and subsequently by the lawyer and journalist Viktor Teytz.

In 1907 the Union of Czech Progressive Jews was founded by a group of malcontents. This younger generation gave the movement a new impulse: assimilation was considered to be first and foremost a religio-ethical one.

They felt Czech nationality to be an unchanging fact, somewhat complicated by Jewish origins. They didn't consider being Czech as a question of language or nationality, but a religio-ethical problem, a matter of spiritual standard and culture – in agreement with the first Czechoslovak president, T.G. Masaryk, whose efforts to at a moral renewal of society and political engagement after 1914 they supported.

3 Orthodox communities

The traditionalist Jewish communities founded their own Orthodox organizations after the Universal Meeting in 1868-1869.They organized their life according to Judaist principles and opposed to assimilative aspirations. The community leaders were the rabbis.
The statute of their communities was sanctioned by the king in 1871. In the western part of Hungary the communities of the German and Slovakian immigrants' descendants were formed according to the Western Orthodox principles. At the same time in the East, among the Jews of Galician origins the 'eastern' type of Orthodoxy was formed; there the Hassidism prevailed.

In time the Western Orthodoxy also spread over to the eastern part of Hungary. 294 Orthodox mother-communities and 1,001 subsidiary communities were registered all over Hungary, mainly in Transylvania and in the north-eastern part of the country, in 1896. In 1930 30,4 % of Hungarian Jews belonged to 136 mother-communities and 300 subsidiary communities. This number increased to 535 Orthodox communities in 1944, including 242,059 believers (46 %).

4 Masaryk, Jan (1886-1948)

Czechoslovak diplomat, son of Tomas Garrigue Masaryk, the first president of Czechoslovakia. He was foreign minister in the Czechoslovak government in exile, set up in Great Britain after the dismemberment of the country (1938).
His policy included cooperating with both, the Soviet Union as well as the Western powers in order to attain the liberation of Czechoslovakia. After the liberation (1945) he remained in office until the 1948 communist coup d'etat, when he was announced to have committed suicide.

5 Yellow star in Bohemia – on September 1, 1941 an edict was issued according to which all Jews having reached the age of six were forbidden to appear in public without the Jewish star

The Jewish star is represented by a hand-sized, six-pointed yellow star outlined in black, with the

word *Jude* in black letters.
It had to be worn in a visible place on the left side of the article of clothing. This edict came into force on September 19, 1941. It was another step aimed at eliminating Jews from society. The idea's author was Reinhard Heydrich himself.

6 Macha, Karel Hynek (1810–1836)

representative of High Romanticism, whose poetry, prose and drama express important questions of human existence. Reflections on Judaism (and human emancipation as a whole) play an important role in his work.
Macha belonged to the intellectual avant-garde of the Czech national society. He studied law. Macha died suddenly of weakening of the organism and of cholera on 6th November 1836. Macha's works (*Krivoklad*, 1834) refer to a certain contemporary and social vagueness in Jewish material – Jews are seen romantically and sentimentally as beings exceptional, tragically ostracized, and internally beautiful. They are subjects of admiration as well as condolence.

7 Bezruc, Petr (Vladimir Vasek) (1867– 1958)

poet, writer of prose, author of socially critical realist poetry. He expressed the Silesian people's resistance against national and social oppression. His *Silesian Songs* (1909) enjoyed a significant response among the Jewish literary public, despite his sometimes being considered an anti-Semite. He had a number of friends in the Jewish literary community, who he captivated with the intensity of his descriptions of poverty, grievous wrongs and resistance to injustice. Jewish themes appear in *Studies From Café Lustig* (1889). Bezruc's mistrust towards the Jews did not have a racist or nationally chauvinistic motivation, but was basically a reflection of the author's elementary experiences and it cannot be interpreted as "anti-Semitism".

8 Hasek, Jaroslav (1883–1923)

Czech humorist, satirist, author of stories, travelogues, essays, and journalistic articles. His participation in WWI was the main source of his literary inspiration and developed into the character of Schweik in the four-volume unfinished but world-famous novel, The Good Soldier Schweik. Hasek moved about in the Bohemian circles of Prague's artistic community.
He also satirically interpreted Jewish social life and customs of his time. With the help of Jewish themes he exposed the ludicrousness and absurdity of state bureaucracy, militarism, clericalism and Catholicism. (Information for this entry culled from Benét's Reader's Encyclopedia and other sources)

9 Sokol

One of the best-known Czech sports organizations. It was founded in 1862 as the first physical educational organization in the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy. Besides regular training of all age groups, units organized sports competitions, colorful gymnastics rallies, cultural events including drama, literature and music, excursions and youth camps.

Although its main goal had always been the promotion of national health and sports, Sokol also played a key role in the national resistance to the Austro-Hungarian Empire, the Nazi occupation and the communist regime.

Sokol flourished between the two World Wars; its membership grew to over a million. Important statesmen, including the first two presidents of interwar Czechoslovakia, Tomas Masaryk and Edvard Benes, were members of Sokol. Sokol was banned three times: during World War I, during the Nazi occupation and finally by the communists after 1948, but branches of the organization continued to exist abroad. Sokol was restored in 1990.

10 Kohn, Jindrich (1874 – 1934)

philosopher, supporter of organized Czech assimilation. In his works, published posthumously under the title Assimilation and The Ages I-III (Prague, 1936), he laid the philosophical foundations of a new concept of the role and purpose of assimilation, and therefore of the Czech-Jewish movement.
He was a supporter of the Pan-European idea, and considered assimilation to be a process that should far exceed the scope of Jewishness. He attributed to assimilation a model purpose and content pertaining to all peoples: that it shows other nations the path from separation to higher, trans-national and trans-state wholes, founded on absolute humanity.

Kohn was a staunch opponent of Zionism (“My Zion is Prague”), he did, however, try to find some common points between both movements, which he considered to be a contemporary expression of much-needed Jewish self-realization. Positions of this type were not common within the Czech-Jewish movement: most proponents of assimilation rejected Zionists as a matter of principle as early as the end of the 19th century, when the first Zionist associations began to appear in Bohemia.

11 Masaryk, Tomas Garrigue (1850-1937)

Czechoslovak political leader and philosopher and chief founder of the First Czechoslovak Republic. He founded the Czech People’s Party in 1900, which strove for Czech independence within the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, for the protection of minorities and the unity of Czechs and Slovaks. After the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy in 1918, Masaryk became the first president of Czechoslovakia.

He was reelected in 1920, 1927, and 1934. Among the first acts of his government was an extensive land reform. He steered a moderate course on such sensitive issues as the status of minorities, especially the Slovaks and Germans, and the relations between the church and the state. Masaryk resigned in 1935 and Edvard Benes, his former foreign minister, succeeded him.

12 Benes, Edvard (1884-1948)

Czechoslovak politician and president from 1935-38 and 1946-48. He was a follower of T. G. Masaryk, the first president of Czechoslovakia, and the idea of Czechoslovakism, and later

Masaryk's right-hand man.
After World War I he represented Czechoslovakia at the Paris Peace Conference. He was Foreign Minister (1918-1935) and Prime Minister (1921-1922) of the new Czechoslovak state and became president after Masaryk retired in 1935.

The Czechoslovak alliance with France and the creation of the Little Entente (Czechoslovak, Romanian and Yugoslav alliance against Hungarian revisionism and the restoration of the Habsburgs) were essentially his work. After the dismemberment of Czechoslovakia by the Munich Pact (1938) he resigned and went into exile.

Returning to Prague in 1945, he was confirmed in office and was reelected president in 1946. After the communist coup in February 1948 he resigned in June on the grounds of illness, refusing to sign the new constitution.

13 Eisner, Pavel (1889 – 1958)
writer, translator and journalist; one of the most distinctive representatives of Czech-Jewishness in Prague (despite whatever objections he may have had to its program) in literature and journalism of the first half of the 20th century. From 1921-1938 he worked as freelance journalist for the daily paper Prager Presse. In 1939 he was sent into early retirement due to "racial reasons." Viktor Fischl wanted to help him emigrate, but a guarantee from H.G. Wells, by fault of the British consulate in Prague, was sent to another person with the same name. During the time of the Protectorate he lived in seclusion. From the end of the war until his death, he made a living as a translator and professional writer. He strove to foster mutual understanding between Czechs and Germans and translated the works of Franz Kafka, Thomas Mann and Rilke into Czech.

14 Birkenau (Pol

: Brzezinka): Also known as Auschwitz II. Set up in October 1941 following a decision by Heinrich Himmler in the village of Brzezinka (Ger.: Birkenau) close to Auschwitz, as a prisoner-of-war camp. It retained this title until March 1944, although it was never used as a POW camp. It comprised sectors of wooden sheds for different types of prisoners (women, men, Jewish families from Terezin, Roma, etc.), and continued to be expanded until the end of 1943.

From the beginning of 1942 it was an extermination camp. The Birkenau camp covered a total area of 140 ha. and comprised some 300 sheds variously used as living quarters, ancillary quarters and crematoria. Birkenau, Auschwitz I and scores of satellite camps made up the largest centre for extermination of the Jews. The majority of the Jews deported here were sent straight to the gas chambers to be put to Heath immediately, without registration.

There were 400,000 prisoners registered there for longer periods, half of whom were Jews. The second-largest group of prisoners were Poles (140,000). Prisoners died en mass as a result of slave labor, starvation, the inhuman living conditions, beatings, torture and executions. The bodies of those murdered were initially buried and later burned in the crematoria and on pyres in specially dug pits.

Due to the efforts made by the SS to erase the evidence of their crimes and their destruction of the majority of the documentation on the prisoners, and also to the fact that the Soviet forces seized the remaining documentation, it is impossible to establish the exact number of victims of Auschwitz-Birkenau. On the basis of the fragmentary documentation available, it can be assumed that in total approx. 1.5 million prisoners were murdered in Auschwitz-Birkenau, some 90% of whom were Jews.

15 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.

16 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.

17 Vedem

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

Vedem began to be published as a cultural and news magazine. In the beginning it was available to all, thanks to it being conceived as a bulletin-board magazine. Subsequently for security reasons this approach was abandoned.

After each publication the magazine was passed around, and its entire contents were discussed at the home's plenary meetings held every Friday. Everyone who was interested could attend these meetings. Vedem was published weekly from December of 1942, and always as one single copy.

The magazine's pages are numbered consecutively and together the entire magazine has 787 pages. The authors of the absolute majority of the contributions were the boys themselves, who ranged from 13 to 15 years old. We can, however, also find in the magazine contributions by educators and teachers.

Published in Vedem were stories, critical articles, articles inspired by specific events, educational articles, poems and drawings. Mostly the boys describe in their works the situation in the camp, state their perceptions relating to life in Terezin, but also concern themselves with the problem of the Jewish question, Jewish history, and so on.

Often-used literary devices are irony (especially in commenting the overall situation in the camp), satire (mainly in poems), metaphors, the use of contrasts. Most articles are written anonymously, or under various nicknames.

Some boys, supported by the efforts for collective education that ruled in Terezin, formed an authors' group and all used the pseudonym Akademie [Academy] for their articles. Part of the magazine Vedem was published in book form by M.R. Krizkova in collaboration with Zdenek Ornest and Jiri Kotouc under the name 'Are The Ghetto Walls My Homeland (Je moji vlasti hradba ghett).

18 Hirsch, Fredy (1916–1944)

member of the Maccabi Association, a sports club founded in the middle of the 1920s as a branch of the Maccabi Sports Club, the first Jewish sports association on the territory of Bohemia and Moravia. Hirsch organized the teaching of sports to youth at Prague's Hagibor, after his deportation to Terezin he continued in this activity there as well.
After the reinstatements of transports to Auschwitz in 1943 and after the creation of the "family camp" there, Hirsch and other teachers organized a children's home there as well. They continued to teach until the Nazis murdered virtually all the members of the "family camp", including children and teachers, in the gas chambers.

19 Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact

Non-aggression pact between Germany and the Soviet Union, which became known under the name of Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact. Engaged in a border war with Japan in the Far East and fearing the German advance in the west, the Soviet government began secret negotiations for a non-aggression pact with Germany in 1939.
In August 1939 it suddenly announced the conclusion of a Soviet-German agreement of friendship and non-aggression. The Pact contained a secret clause providing for the partition of Poland and for

Soviet and German spheres of influence in Eastern Europe.

20 Sachsenhausen

Nazi concentration camp located in eastern Germany, near Oranienburg. Created in 1936. Political prisoners, Soviet POWs, priests were sent there. The prisoners were employed in heavy industry. Medical experiments were also performed on the inmates.
In 1941 the first attempts at killing inmates with automobile exhaust fumes took place. Gas chambers were opened in 1943.Over 200,000 prisoners passed through Sachsenhausen, 116,000 died. The commanders of the camp during the war were: H. Loritz, A. Kaindl. The camp was liberated in 1945 by the Soviet Army.

21 Death march

the Germans, in fear of the approaching Allied armies, tried to erase evidence of the concentration camps. They often destroyed all the facilities and forced all Jews regardless of their age or sex to go on a death march. This march often led nowhere, there was no concrete destination. The marchers got no food and no rest at night.
It was solely up to the guards how they treated the prisoners, how they acted towards them, what they gave them to eat and they even had the power of their life or death in their hands. The conditions during the march were so cruel that this journey became a journey that ended in death for many.

22 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.

23 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.

24 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.

25 Fischer, Otokar (1883–1938)

literary and theater historian, theoretician, critic, poet, script editor, university professor. He came from a Czech-Jewish family, and studied German Studies and Romance languages and literature in Prague. In 1903, he lectured on the theme of Ahasver, the eternal Jew, for the *Society of Czech Academics-Jews*.
In 1911 he had himself baptized for personal reasons (marriage to a Christian). Later he re-evaluated his approach to Judaism, and in 1922 he published a volume of poetry entitled Voices, where he reflects on his Jewishness, while still assuming a critical stance. After Hitler's rise to power (1933) he reacted with a series of lectures, in which he outlined his conception of the contribution of Jews to individual national literatures.

26 Joseph II (1741-1790)

Holy Roman Emperor, king of Bohemia and Hungary (1780-1790), a representative figure of enlightened absolutism. He carried out a complex program of political, economic, social and cultural reforms. His main aims were religious toleration, unrestricted trade and education, and a reduction in the power of the Church. These views were reflected in his policy toward Jews.
His ‚Judenreformen' (Jewish reforms) and the ‚Toleranzpatent' (Edict of Tolerance) granted Jews several important rights that they had been deprived of before: they were allowed to settle in royal

free cities, rent land, engage in crafts and commerce, become members of guilds, etc. Joseph had several laws which didn't help Jewish interests: he prohibited the use of Hebrew and Yiddish in business and public records, he abolished rabbinical jurisdiction and introduced liability for military service.

A special decree ordered all the Jews to select a German family name for themselves. Joseph's reign introduced some civic improvement into the life of the Jews in the Empire, and also supported cultural and linguistic assimilation. As a result, controversy arose between liberal-minded and orthodox Jews, which is considered the root cause of the schism between the Orthodox and the Neolog Jewry.

27 Langer, Frantisek (1888 – 1965)

doctor, playwright, writer, stronger reflections upon Judaism only towards the end of his life's work. Came from a religiously lukewarm family, which tried to observe the Jewish way of life while at the same time adapt to their Czech surroundings.
When Frantisek's brother, Jiri Langer (author of the book 'Nine Gates,' inspired by Hasidic apprentices) found during his student years the meaning of life in embracing Orthodox Hasidic Judaism, which he ostentatiously showed off – the family reacted very reservedly and had a hard time coming to terms with this fact. Frantisek Langer merged with the democratically and humanistically oriented Czech intelligentsia.

In the years 1935-1938 he was the creative director of the Vinohrady Theater in Prague, in the summer of 1939 he traveled via Poland to France, and then stood in the head of the medical service of the Czechoslovak army in England. Became chairman of the Czechoslovak PEN Club. Reflects on Jewishness in the books 'Were and Was' (1963) and 'Philatelistic Stories' (1965).

28 Gellner, Frantisek (1881–1914)

poet, writer, painter, journalist from a generation of anarchistic individualists, a representative of Prague's Bohemian community at the beginning of the 20th century. His work is marked by cynicism, irony, and sarcastic commentary on contemporary politics.
The son of a less than wealthy Jewish merchant family, he devoted himself to the Jewish question via countless verses, pieces of prose and articles. From the year 1911 he was a journalist with Lidove Noviny (People's News) in Brno. In August 1914 he joined the Austro-Hungarian Army. His trail disappears at the Halic front.

29 Polacek, Karel (1892–February 1945)

writer, journalist, whose entire literary life's work is permeated by Jewish life and Jewish literary experience. He came from a strongly assimilated Jewish merchant family. During World War I he served at the Balkan and Eastern fronts. From the year 1920 he was a journalist with Lidove Noviny (People's News), contributed to the magazine The Present, wrote film themes and scripts.

During the time of the Protectorate he wasn't allowed to publish due to "racial reasons," and his works came out under the names of other authors. He found employment with the Jewish Elders' Committee; he worked on inventories of confiscated collections of books of the Jewish religious communities in Prague, Pilsen, Prostejov, Brno and so on. Out of love for his life companion, who he didn't want to leave, he didn't make use of the possibility of avoiding the transport, from which the Prague Jewish Community wanted to save him.

In July 1943 he was transported to Terezin, where he actively participated in cultural life: here he presented a total of six lectures between 23rd December 1943 and 21st June 1944. He was transported to Auschwitz on 19th October 1944 – this day was long given as the day of this death, however, according to his fellow prisoners, he was apparently transferred in November 1944 from Auschwitz to the Hindenburg (Zabrze) camp, where he even wrote a sketch for the women's section of the prison about a psychic that tells her fellow prisoners' fortune.

He died either during a death march that left the camp on 19th January 1945, or later, at the Dora concentration camp, where prisoners were transported from Gleiwitz in open wagons.

30 Hostovsky, Egon (1908 – 1973)

author of psychological prose. He always regarded himself as a Czech writer, however he may have felt ties to Jewishness, with which he connected eternal banishment and exile – "the historical law of modern man". He came from a fully assimilated Jewish family, and was conscious his whole life of being "different," and had a nostalgia for something elusive, which led him to an interest in Jewishness. In order to learn about Jewish Orthodoxy, he visited Hasidic Jews in Ruthenia and Halic. From 1931-1936 he edited the Czech-Jewish Almanac, later he worked for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. On 25th February 1939 he left for Belgium, later emigrating to the USA (he became a US citizen in 1957). Even in exile he showed interest in the participation of the Jewish element in the evolution of Czech literature – he contributed to the first volume of the monograph The Jews of Czechoslovakia with the study Participation in Modern Czech Literature (1. vol., 1968, s.439-153).

31 Orten, Jiri (1919–1941)

poet, writer, journalist. His works bear signs of Existentialism, a lifelong feeling full of contradictions and tragedy (the diaries *Blue, Striped* and *Red Book*). Came from a Jewish family of small-time merchants. After high school participated in Prague's dramatic and literary life, contributed to various magazines.
Was expelled from studies for "racial reasons," lived from occasional royalties and gifts, began working for the editorial department of the Jewish religious community. Died tragically under the wheels of a German ambulance on 30th August 1941 at the age of twenty-two.

32 Mahler, Gustav (1860-1911)
Bohemian-Austrian conductor and composer of Jewish origin, recognized among the most important post-romantic composers and best-known for his last two works, 'Symphony No. 9' (1909) and 'The Song of the Earth' (1908).

33 Lustig, Arnost (b
1926): Czech-Jewish writer. 1950–58 a reporter of Czechoslovak Radio; 1961–68 scriptwriter for Barrandov Film Studios (Prague). Emigrated in 1968, from 1972 he lectured on film and literature at the American University in Washington.