

Jan Hanak

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Zilina

Slovak Republic

Interviewer: Martin Korcok

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Dr. Hanak was interviewed in his home town of Zilina, where he was born as Jan Herz. The uniqueness of this story rests in the fact that until the deportations started, he had no idea of his Jewish origins. Despite the fact that both his parents were Jews, they were completely indifferent to religion. As a result, Mr. Hanak had automatically attended Roman Catholic religion classes in school since he was very small, because his friends also attended these classes. Alas, even in this case anti-Jewish legislation made no exceptions, and their entire family was deported. From his life story, we find out how one can come to terms with such a complicated situation in life. In this interview, Mr. Hanak also speaks of the loves of his life: his family and sports.



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My family background and growing up

My father's family was from Horna Marikova in the Povazska Bystrica district. My grandfather's name was Gabriel Herz, and he was born in 1864. He owned a butcher's shop. But I don't think he sold kosher meat [1](#). As far as I know, our family wasn't at all religious. We never paid any attention to religion and rituals. I never knew my grandfather. He died before I was born, in 1930 in Horna Marikova. My grandmother's name was Berta Herz, nee Spitz. She was born on 25 December 1866 in Kliestina in the Povazska Bystrica district. I don't remember her very much. All I know is that in 1944, when things began getting "hot", she came to Zilina to stay with us. But she stayed for only two weeks. Then she left to stay with her daughter Maria Goldberger in Trencin. The Germans rounded them all up. Grandma Berta was murdered in the Auschwitz concentration camp in 1944.

My father was born in Horna Marikova as Armin Herz in 1900. After the war our entire family changed their name to Hanak. My father had three siblings, a brother and two sisters. His older brother's name was Dezider Herz. Dezider died of typhus that he caught as a soldier during World War I. One of his sisters was Regina Herz. She married a textile merchant in Povazska Bystrica by

the name of Valdapfel. They had a son, Paul. During the Holocaust she was transported away and murdered. My father's other sister was Maria Goldberger, nee Herz. Maria married a widower by the name of Goldberger in Trenčin. Her husband had two sons from his first marriage. Their names were Hans and Tomi [Tomas]. Maria and her husband perished in a concentration camp. Hans joined the partisans. Alas, he didn't survive the war. The younger one, Tomi, ended up in Terezín [2](#) from where the Red Cross took him to Sweden to recuperate [3](#).

Around two years before my father died [he died in 1986], I proposed to him that we drive to Horná Mariková, where he was born. I didn't even know exactly where the town was located. I said to him: "Let's go to Mariková. Show me where you were born, where you lived." We went there to have a look. Their family home had been torn down. We stopped an older woman in the street. She was of my father's generation. She remembered that there had been some sort of a Jewish butcher in the village. But she no longer remembered any names, nothing.

My mother's family was from the eastern part of the first Czechoslovak Republic [4](#). My grandfather, Emil Lányi, was born in Porostov, today in the Sobrance district. He was born on 17 September 1877. His family name was Lipovics, which on 20 September he changed to Lányi. He worked as a teacher in Košice. He died very young, on April 1923. His father's name was Izak Lipkovics. He was born in 1837 in Porostov and died in 1907 in Tibava in the Sobrance district. Izak's wife was named Hani Lipkovics, nee Friedmann. She was born in 1843 in Vilmany. This town is located in what is today Hungary. She died in 1893 in Tibava.

My grandmother's name was Etel Lányi, nee Salomon. She was born on 19 January 1879 in Košice. My mother's parents were married on 11 August 1900. My mother's father's name was Moric Salamon. He was born on 3 October 1828 in Secovce, today in the Trebišov district. He died on 4 January 1913 in Košice. His wife's name was Hani Salamon, nee Müller. She was born on 26 December 1850 in the town of Barca; today it's a part of Košice. He died on 21 February 1931 in Košice.

The parents of my great-grandfather Moric Salamon were named Jozef Salamon and Gizela Salamon, nee Spiegel. Jozef Salamon was born in 1797 in Čičejovce, today in the Košice-okolie district [the district surrounding, but not including the city of Košice], and died in 1885 in Košice. The parents of my great-grandmother Hani Müller were named Izrael Müller and Xenia Müller, nee Silberstein. Izrael was born in 1809 in Barca and died in the same town in 1852. Xenia was born in 1808 in Poland and died in 1894 in Košice.

After they were married, my grandparents had three daughters. All three in Košice. The oldest was named Erzsebet Lipkovics. She was born on 28 June 1909. A year after she was born, they changed her surname to Lányi. Erzsebet graduated from law school and married a lawyer in Budapest named Dr. Aladar Kelemen. They had son, István. Pista, as we used to call him, who died tragically. When he was about 18, he drowned in the Danube. My aunt then got divorced and remarried. Her second husband was named Tessenyi. Erzsebet died on 15 July 1947 in Budapest. She died of gas poisoning in her apartment. To this day we don't know if it was suicide or an accident.

My mother's other sister was named Elvira Littna, nee Lányi. Elvira was born on 24 September 1914 and died in around 1995 in Brighton, Great Britain. Elvira and her husband met in Prague, where he was studying law. Littna was a diplomat working for Great Britain. During World War II they were in London, where Elvira joined the British army. After the war she worked in Germany

and Prague for a certain time. She was a liaison officer for UNRRA [UNRRA: United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration – Editor's note]. The Allies were distributing material and food relief via UNRRA to people afflicted by the war. They had two daughters, Eva and Marina. Marina died of acute leukemia. Eva lives in England.

I probably didn't even meet Grandma Etel Lanyi before the war. When she reached retirement age, she moved to Budapest to be with her younger sister. Her sister was also a widow. I don't know what her name was. Everyone in the family called her Krema. Krema had heavy asthma, and her sister took care of her. They survived the war in hiding in Budapest. Luckily they didn't deport them. Grandma Etel lived until about the age of 95 in Budapest, and then moved to a Jewish retirement home in the city of Szeged. There she died in 2002 at the age of 101. She's buried at the local Jewish cemetery. My grandmother was probably the most religious person in our family. She prayed every day. As far as the other members of our family go, by this I mean my parents' generation, they didn't even really know what religion was. Neither on my mother's nor on my father's side. They didn't attend church [synagogue] and didn't observe customs. Absolutely nothing. Everyone took religion absolutely "sportingly". They didn't have any prayer books at home. For us, the Jewish religion was something like "volleyball".

My mother was born as Edita Lanyi. She graduated from academic high school in Kosice. She and my father were married on 5 September 1932 in Kosice. After the wedding she took my father's surname and was named Herz. After the war they changed their surname to Hanak, and so my mother's name was Edita Hanakova. My father attended business academy. After graduation he started working for a power plant in Zilina. Right at that time, a branch of the power plant was being built in Zilina. Back then electricity wasn't such a matter of course as it is today. There were only two hydro stations. One was in Bratislava and the other was in Zilina. Another one was being built in Kosice. Back then, my father was given the task of, among other things, setting up the Kosice power plant. He was renting a room from his future wife's mother. That's how they met. After his job there ended in 1933, my parents moved to Zilina. My father worked at the power plant as a manager. Back then only large cities had electricity, and it was gradually being introduced into the countryside. It was also necessary to deliver materials like power poles, wire, insulators, transformers, basically everything. My father was in charge of the supply department. Later they relocated him from Zilina to Bratislava. He used to work weeks there, meaning that during the work week he was in Bratislava, and for the weekend he'd return home.

In 1934, my older brother Milan Herz, later Hanak, was born in Zilina. A year later [1935] I was born [Jan Hanak, born Herz]. Our address was Moyzesova Street, Zilina. I can't talk about the mischief that we used to get into as children; if I did we'd be here for a week. Beside our street there was a vacant lot, basically a large field. There were about fifteen boys around the same age as my brother and I on Moyzeska St. Every afternoon, because back then school was only in the morning, all the boys from Moyzeska would meet up in that field. None of us did any schoolwork. Despite that, some of us ended up as university professors. Hantala, for example. During the 1960s he was the dean of the Faculty of Law at Comenius University. In that field we played according to the time of year. In the winter we'd make a skating rink. The first snowfall would usually be already around [St.] Martin [November 11th]. During the summer we'd have foot races. The track was Moyzesova and Stefanikova Streets. We were enthusiastic athletes, and that's stayed with me to this day. That's how we lived until the summer of 1944.

During the war

I'd just like to say that my father was a very wise man. When the visible persecution of Jews began in the world, in 1938 [5](#) [6](#), he had our entire family christened. I was only three at the time. They converted us to Roman Catholicism. My father had never studied any religion, and didn't devote himself to philosophy either. He didn't care if it was Judaism or the Roman Catholic religion. The main thing was how to protect us from danger. All he devoted himself to was his work at the hydro station, sports, wrestling, and he was also a sports official. Naively, he thought that conversion would make "a black man white". The evolution of the political situation back then was the only reason for the conversion. During school we automatically attended Roman Catholic catechism classes. Back then they used to sell postcards with a religious theme. On the other side of the postcard you'd paste stamps. Also with a religious theme. The postcards were like lottery tickets, and would be sent to Trnava, to the St. Vojtech Association [The St. Vojtech (in English St. Adalbert) Association: a Roman Catholic association carrying out cultural and publishing activities. Today it is known mainly for the publishing of religious literature. It was founded in 1870 – Editor's note]. You could win all sorts of things with them. In each class, some pupil would be entrusted with this task. Usually only the most trusted and most responsible. The irony was that in our class it was I. This mission, as we used to call it, was my responsibility. We didn't have the least problem with anti-Semitism or anything similar. In 1942 they began concentrating Jews from all over Slovakia in Zilina. A collection camp was created there. At the time I saw people wearing yellow stars [7](#). I asked at home, why are they wearing them? Because they're Jews. It never occurred to me at all that I had anything in common with them. At that time it had nothing to do with me.

We didn't know anything at all about it. We didn't know that it concerned us as well. I think that my age excused it. Back then I very much liked my Roman Catholic religion. Our entire school would go to church. On Sunday we'd meet up around 9:00 a.m. in front of the school, and we'd go to church. Both teachers and students, together. I even had my first communion, along with the others. During catechism class back then, they taught us that Jews had crucified our Jesus. I liked baby Jesus very much, after all, at Christmastime he'd bring us presents! I was absolutely scandalized by the fact that the Jews had crucified our baby Jesus! I was eight years old at the time.

That's how it was until the summer of 1944. We didn't have any problems at all. My brother and I also didn't have any clue about any sort of Jewishness. In July 1944 our mother told us that we had to leave the city and that we'd be going to a nearby village by the name of Peklina. Back then it was normal. The cities were being bombed, and people were hiding in villages. At that time my father was working in Bratislava. He'd be there during the week, and on weekends he'd be home. In Pekina we were living with a farmer by the name of Hudec. There, one day in August behind their house, I heard a conversation between the wife of the gamekeeper and some farmer's wife. She said: "The Germans are coming here, and those Jews are living at Hudec's place. Not only he but the entire village will have problems because of it." Right away I told my mother what I'd heard. That was around lunchtime. In the early afternoon, we left. My brother and I didn't ask our mother about anything. We returned to Zilina, but our apartment was sealed. So we continued on, to Bratislava. My mother intended to find our father. In Bratislava we took a room at a hotel near the main train station.

In the morning our mother went to find our father. She returned, weeping. She said that we couldn't stay there, that we had to leave. She also said that our father was on a business trip and that we had to leave the hotel and that we'd be going to our father's sublet in Patronka with the Vrabec family. Back then all we found out from her was that our father had been sent on a business trip, and that he wasn't in the city.

In reality something else had happened. My brother and I didn't find this out until after the war. My mother had gone to our father's work. Our father wasn't there right then, so she waited for him. He returned around lunchtime and took my mother for lunch. They were walking along the street, and were stopped by a patrol of the Hlinka Guard [8](#) and the SS. They asked for their papers. While my father was looking for his ID papers, my mother kept on walking. They didn't pay any attention to her. A couple of dozen meters further on, she turned around, and saw them leading our father away. She quickly returned to the hotel, where we were waiting for her. Later we found out from our father that they collected them in Bratislava, and later he ended up in the Mauthausen concentration camp [9](#). He also recalled that he'd been in the Gusen camp [10](#) in Austria. In Gusen he worked in some arms factory. There some Russian made him a cigarette case from aluminum. I found the cigarette case in his things after he died, and have it to this day. From Gusen he went to Mauthausen. My father was big athlete, a wrestler. When they took him away, he weighed about 115 kg. He returned in very poor health and weighed only 49 kg.

We stayed with the Vrabec family in Patronka for one night. Then we had to leave. In the city, across from the Manderlak: [Manderlak or Manderla Tower: considered to be the first so-called skyscraper in Bratislava, and in Slovakia. It was built in 1935 according to the designs of Rudolf Manderla, after whom it is named. It has 11 floors and for a long time was the tallest residential building in Bratislava – Editor's note] there was a cinema. We hid in this cinema's furnace room for four nights. My mother slept on a stool, and my brother and I on the ground. We had to leave there as well, because the person who was hiding us there was changing shifts with someone else, and was afraid that his colleague would turn us in. He arranged us another hiding place in an apartment. It was this relay. My mother had some money, and that's what we paid with. We hid out for another few nights in that apartment. Once I heard some yelling in the street. I looked out the window, and a horrible scene played out in front of me. The Guardists and Germans were chasing someone, and then they shot him on the sidewalk under our windows. We had to leave that apartment as well. We moved to Vinohrady [Vineyards] by Bratislava. There we lived in a shed where they stored shovels and other tools for people that worked in the vineyards.

A family by the name of Vasut lived on Moyzesova St. in Zilina along with us. They had two daughters who had just graduated from high school. The older one was named Olga. She was 19. She came to see us in Bratislava and took my brother and I to an orphanage in Trnava. There some nuns took care of us. Our mother remained in Bratislava. As we later found out, she'd found a sublet and was looking for work using false papers. But someone reported her and she ended up in the Spandau work camp near Berlin [Spandau: the westernmost part of Berlin. During 1944 – 45, thousands of women at the camp in Spandau did forced labor for the German company Deutschen Industrie-Werke AG. The camp was liberated by the Soviet Army on 24 April 1945 – Editor's note]. From there they took her to Ravensbruck [11](#), where she was until liberation.

My brother and I were at the Trnava orphanage from the second half of September 1944 until Christmas. We attended school. Each morning they took us to church services, as the orphanage

was part of the church. In the morning there would be Mass, and after lunch we had to say Hail Marys. There were twelve of us in the room, and we had bunk beds. With some exaggeration I can say that it was training for the concentration camp. I had no idea how many Jews were in hiding there. During the Christmas holidays, on the first day of Christmas, the Guardists came. The Mother Superior had us summoned. My brother and I went there along with two other boys. Their names were Borsky and Rosenberg, or Rosenzweig. I don't remember the name exactly. They escorted all four of us off to the labor camp in Sered [12](#). This camp was both a labor and a collection camp. There they filled out the prisoner's records. They also had a section for religion. There weren't only Jews in Sered. Political prisoners and criminals ended up there as well. In the religion section my brother and I filled in Roman Catholic. Several days later they called us in for a medical checkup. I think that the head doctor's name was Frisch. He had us take off our clothes and they checked whether we were circumcised. They were speaking German. My brother they automatically called "Jude". With me he thought for a while. Finally he looked at my face and said: "Das ist einer typischen Jude." [German: That is a typical Jew – Editor's note]. Now I had tangible proof that we were Jews. We spent a few weeks in Sered, and at the end of March or beginning of February 1945 they loaded us into cattle rail cars.

We passed through Malacky, Kutý and Brno, through Prague to Terezín [In 1945 there were three transports dispatched from the Sered collection camp to Terezín: January 16, March 9 and March 31 – Editor's note]. There was straw on the floor of the cattle cars. There might have been around fifty of us there. Men and women together. Higher up there were small, barred windows. In the corner there was a pail as a toilet. The bucket would be emptied at station stops. Several people died during the trip. They were also offloaded at the stations. I don't remember how long we traveled for. When we were passing through Prague, my brother and I took turns standing on each other's shoulders and looked through the barred window. We saw Hradčany [Hradčany: a city quarter of Prague. A large part of the quarter is occupied by the Prague Castle – Editor's note]. At that time I said to myself whether I would ever in my lifetime see it other than through those bars. After many years, when I was in the army and saw Hradčany, I returned in my thoughts to my wish in the cattle car. Finally we arrived in Terezín.

From my point of view, Sered and Terezín were equally bad. First of all, I missed my parents, I missed school, I missed playing. A kid needs something else than being in jail. Secondly, I was always cold, terribly cold. In Sered there were several dozen of us in a room, and we had only one small stove. People used to call it a "Vinčko". We were also very hungry. The Germans had a kitchen, and my brother and I used to go pick through their garbage cans. We used to pick potato peels out of the guards' garbage cans. We'd then roast them on that small stove and eat them.

In Terezín they for some incomprehensible reason put us with the men. That saved our lives. The rest of the children remained with their mothers, and they deported them onwards to extermination camps. We lived in the men's quarters. I left a piece of bread sitting there, which they stole. There was some sort of quarry outside of Terezín. Up front someone would dig something up, and we'd pass the bucket he'd filled along. We stood in a long row and handed the bucket from hand to hand. Originally there had been a lot of children in Terezín. They even put on their own plays. One of them was named Brundibár [13](#). But they gradually transported all the children away. Further transport was practically a death sentence. Most of them perished [Of the 7590 littlest prisoners deported eastward from Terezín, only 142 lived to be liberated. Only those

children that remained in Terezin for the entire time had a chance to be saved. On the day of liberation, there were around 1600 children up to the age of 15 in Terezin (source: www.pamatnik-terezin.cz) – Editor's note].

I tried to escape from Terezin. There was a section that was guarded by Czech guards, and so my brother and I decided to try to leave that way. Czech guards were more benevolent than German ones. A guard was walking around there, and when he was far enough away, I walked around the Small Fortress [14](#). They called it the Kleine Festung. That's where they tortured people. You could hear the screams from there from far and wide. I waited for my brother. My brother didn't come. Several tens of minutes later I again saw an opportunity when the exit wasn't guarded, and slipped back in. I asked my brother, why he didn't come. He told me: "Where would we go, anyways? They'll turn us in right away, after all, no one will let themselves be killed. They'll catch us at the first house, give us to the Germans, who will kill us."

After the war

A few days before the liberation of Terezin, a Red Cross commission arrived [On 4 May 1945 members of the Czech Aid Project commenced a rescue effort in the Little Fortress, and at the same time made contact with representatives of the International Red Cross, which on May 2 had already put the police jail and ghetto under its protection. On the evening of May 8 the first units of the Red Army passed through Terezin on the way to Prague (source: www.pamatnik-terezin.cz) – Editor's note]. At that time they relocated my brother and me to the Kinderheim [children's home in German – Editor's note]. We had Czech-speaking teachers taking care of us. They also taught us songs. One of them has stuck in my memory: "Spring will come, will come, soon it will be May. The meadows will bloom, the woods will bloom." As a child, I projected it onto our situation. At that time it was the end of April 1945. Spring will come, will come, soon it will be May. That was the time of year we were in right then. The meadows will bloom, the woods will bloom. I imagined our street, Moyzeska [Moyzesova Street – Editor's note] and children's games in Zilina. All this would come again with spring. At that time some children even ended up in Sweden. One of them was my cousin Tomi Goldberger, the stepson of my mother's sister Marie, who'd gotten married and moved to Trencin. We didn't find out about his stay in Terezin until after the war.

Terezin was suddenly without any leadership. Transports from various concentration camps began arriving, from which they were unloading human derelicts onto the ground in front of the wagons. It was sunny May weather. Nurses with Red Cross bands on their sleeves were going back and forth. Concentration camp survivors were lying helplessly on stretchers. They were skin and bones. Others were trying to feed them. A doctor was walking around and shouting at people: "Don't give them food! Don't give them water! Only slowly, by the spoonful! Otherwise you'll kill them!" These were the appalling scenes we witnessed even after the war.

Trucks began leaving Terezin, each with a banner with the name of some town. For example Pardubice, Usti nad Labem, and so on. The name Zilina of course didn't appear. My brother didn't know what would be next. We had no one to take care of us. Suddenly we saw a truck with a sign saying Brno. We said to ourselves that because we'd gone to Terezin via Brno, let's get on that truck. What was interesting was that in Czech towns and villages there were tables set up at the side of the road, and on them loaves of bread cut into slices. People probably knew that prisoners would be returning that way, and so prepared some food for them. We arrived in Brno. We had no

idea what to do next. We didn't have even one crown, nothing. So we set off for the station, and waited for the first train that would be going to Slovakia. We took the train to the Kutý border crossing. From there we continued on foot. In Slovakia we got on some freight car. We got to Leopoldov that way. Then we continued on foot again to Žilina. Here and there some soldiers gave us a ride. We ate what we came across on the way. For example in Trnava we saw some beets, so we picked some apples growing on trees at the side of the road. Finally we ended up in Žilina.

My brother and I set out for our apartment on Moyzesova Street. There was already someone else living in the apartment, and when they saw us they slammed the door. We remained out on the street. What now? We remembered that when we had converted from Judaism to Christianity, we had to have godparents. Our godfather was Mr. Simora, an engineer. My father had been the supply manager at the power plant, and Mr. Simora had a wholesale electrical parts business. He'd been very glad that our father was purchasing many parts for the hydro plant from him. That's how they gradually became friends. Ironically, his wife was also a Jewess that had converted. They were our godparents. Mrs Simorova had a dog. Before the war, she'd always give me a crown [in 1929 the Czech crown was decreed by law to be equal in value to 44.58 mg of gold – Editor's note] for taking him for a walk around town. Often she'd give me five crowns to buy the dog horsemeat sausages. But I liked them so much that I'd eat some of them too. We'd share. When we arrived they told us that our parents hadn't returned yet, and that they didn't know what had become of them. They took us to an orphanage in Žilina. We remained there until the fall of 1945, until our mother returned. She learned from the Simoras that we were at the orphanage, and came to get us. She'd also found out that our father had survived. He was in the dermatology ward in Trenčín. He'd gotten ulcers all over his body from malnutrition. All four of us had managed to survive, but we didn't have anywhere to live. A Roman Catholic family had taken over our apartment. Their name was Galbavi.

The management of the North Slovak Power Company for whom our father worked behaved very respectably towards us. They emptied an office on the top floor of the power station building and made it into an apartment for us. We got only the bare necessities, but nevertheless we had a place to live. We had a roof over our heads. Back then the general manager was Mr. Reich. He wasn't a Jew. His son František Reich competed on the Czechoslovak rowing team at the 1948 Olympics in London. Later the power company built three residential buildings on Štefanikova Street in Žilina. They then allocated us an apartment in one of them. So our father got his job back right away. At first our mother was at home. She'd graduated from Hungarian academic high school in Košice. After the war she got a job in the school system. She did minor office work. After work she took part-time business courses, so she then got a better job at the Regional Union Council in Žilina.

I'd like to return to the prewar era and my later stay in Terezín, and the practice of religion. You know, at that age I didn't much understand religion as the worshipping of God. I liked Roman Catholic rites. Before the war I'd been an altar-boy. My friend Alino Trgo from Moyzeska St. got me involved in it. Alino was from a very devout family and was also an altar-boy. Once he asked me if I didn't want to try it. I said yes, and learned how to do it. To this day I can do almost the entire Mass in Latin. I know all the prayers. Here I can't but help make one remark. I misbehaved quite a bit in school. Back then teachers were allowed to use corporal punishment. Either they'd bend us over a desk and whip our behinds with a cane, or we'd get on our hands. Because I misbehaved a

lot, I was punished a lot. But back then I said just wait, come Sunday you'll beg for forgiveness. On Sunday we'd all go to church from the school, along with the teachers. In the Roman Catholic rite when they perform the offertory and the changing of the blood of Christ into wine, the altar-boy rings a bell and everyone else in the church kneels. The priest raises the hosts and cup and people kneel. Before this, I would always look at all the teachers, especially the ones I'd gotten it from that week, and said to myself silently: "Now you'll beg for forgiveness." I'd ring the bell, and watch with delight as they'd kneel. I'd imagine that they weren't kneeling because of the offertory, but were begging for forgiveness for what they'd done to me.

I even served as an alter-boy in Terezin. There masses took place in a room. They weren't done by a priest, but by some very religious person. The way even a layman can give the last rites to a dying person in an emergency, so can he in an extreme situation lead services. They used me for Jewish services as well. I worked as a sort of shamash [shamash: translates as "attendant", and designates a paid general employee, especially one that takes care of overall maintenance of a synagogue – Editor's note]. My brother wasn't interested. He wasn't inclined towards religion. I was also fascinated by religious songs that were sung during the holidays. When the organ and singing started, I'd feel shivers run up and down my spine. The organ's sound was so powerful and the words of the songs so beautiful that it fascinated me. You know, it was amazing. I lived for it. I liked the service, and I liked the music. So I wanted to continue in it after the war as well. When I returned to the church in Zilina after the war, the sexton, Mr. Pozak, asked me: "Where in hell were you all year?!" I answered: "You guessed it, in hell." I also served during funerals and weddings. To this day I still meet people in the street whom I'd ministered to at weddings.

The entire time we were imprisoned I thought that it was one huge mistake. That I wasn't supposed to be there. It had nothing to do with me. That one day they'd find out and apologize and let us go. That our family will once again be together and will live like before. I lived in the hope, in the illusion, that it was all a mistake. I saw people dying of typhus, of hunger. Every little while a dead body would be carried out. Women and children went somewhere else than my brother and I. We were with the adult men in these barracks. All this convinced me that my prospects for the future weren't so bad...

At the end of the war our family decided to change its name. German names were too obvious to everyone [15](#). From today's perspective, decades after the war, it's perhaps naive. But back then that psychosis, that anti-Semitism, that fear, drove you to eliminate everything that could endanger you in some way. Even things like a name change could appear as important. It was sometime around the end of 1945 or start of 1946. We were sitting down at supper, and thinking of a suitable surname. My mother for example suggested Horak, or various surnames that people we knew had. Then my brother and I noted that during the war we'd been in hiding at an orphanage in Trnava, where there'd been about fifteen of us to a room. Three of them had been terrible hoodlums. They ended up in a reform institution. Their names were Duris, Filo and Hanak. I recalled these names, and my brother said that we should be Hanak. So that's how we got our name.

My brother, Milan Hanak, was an excellent pupil. At that time the school system was such that you had to attend five grades of people's school, and then could transfer to council school [16](#), and the better students to "gymnazium" [academic high school]. Under exceptional circumstances you could go for your entrance interview for high school after Grade 4 of people's school. My brother managed it. When he graduated, he left for Prague to study architecture. There he met a nurse

who was originally from Hradec Kralove. They got married and had three children. Two daughters, Zuzana and Lucie, and a son, Filip. Zuzana is a well-known Czech actress [Drizhalova, Zuzana (b. 1975): a Czech actress – Editor's note]. She was for example in serials like Hospital on the Edge of Town or Family Ties. As far as I know, my brother maintains no contact with the Jewish community in Prague.

As opposed to my brother, I'm registered with the Jewish religious community in Zilina. After the Velvet Revolution [17](#) friends from the community approached me and asked whether I wouldn't be interested in joining. From a religious perspective I don't feel myself to be a Jew, but I am a Jew by race. When memorial events for victims of the Holocaust take place, I also participate in them. After all, many members of my family were murdered during the Holocaust. It's my responsibility to honor their memory. But I don't participate in the religious life of the community at all. I was a Roman Catholic since the age of three, and currently I'm an atheist. A person has to confront all his opinions with reality. In my opinion, religion is a lot of humbug. The turning point came when I started my basic army service. As a soldier I had a lot of time to think about the meaning of life, existence and my future. Eventually a person has to pose himself such fundamental questions. The main thing is for us to meaningfully fill the time that we have here on Earth. Because at the close of life, everyone will take stock of whether or not he used his time meaningfully. During that time I also more or less decided for my future occupation.

I decided for my future employment right before I entered the army. I was studying at a mechanical technology high school, and in my free time I devoted myself to parachuting. During one jump I ruptured the meniscus in my knee, and I had to go to the hospital for an operation. I had a doctor friend there with whom I'd played hockey in Zilina. He told me that the hospital had a library, and that I could borrow something to read. I asked him to bring me some book in which I could find out in detail what they had actually operated on. I got an interesting book called Forensic Medicine. Back then I realized that this was much more interesting to me than some mechanical engineering. That was during the time I was entering the army.

I entered the army in Trencin, where they had signal corps. Right during the entrance procedures they announced that everyone who'd played first and second league hockey should report. In Bohemia the army team was Dukla Litomerice, and the second army team was composed of players from Moravia and Slovakia. That one was based in Presov. The main army hockey team was Dukla Jihlava. So I reported. About 30 of us got into Presov. They did a selection for the team there, and I got onto it as well. Besides this, I was a member of the paratrooper brigade. I liked that a lot. Back then I was very physically fit. Paratroopers undergo very tough training. The value of food for soldiers was determined according to calories expended during training. For example gunners, tank crews and the infantry got 14 crowns a day. Paratroopers got 30 crowns. So you can imagine what the training was like. Parachute jumps aren't the main part of paratrooper training. The jump itself is only a way of getting somewhere quickly. But once there you have to perform tasks that are extremely physically as well as mentally demanding. Besides this, we had hockey practice and on the weekends hockey games. First we played on the regional level. From there we battled our way to the second league. Finally we got into the first league, but by then I was already leaving for civilian life.

A person has a lot of humorous experiences in the army. My army entrance took place in Trencin. Each barracks had a room that was called the "hlaska" [reporting station]. Each evening all the

barracks in Slovakia had to contact Trenčín, where the district command and the central reporting station were. Women soldiers, professionals, worked there. You had to report. This was done in Morse code. There were acronyms for everything, called Q codes. For example QRS meant "repeat text" and QST "transmit more quickly". So if something wasn't understandable, they'd write QRS from the central station. My roommates struggled with Morse code, and those at the central station would make fun of them. They kept on sending them the Q code for "transmit more quickly". The soldiers at the receiver would be in a sweat, but couldn't send any quicker. They were unhappy because of it, and were also talking about it in the mess during lunch. They were thinking about how to get their revenge on the women at the central station. At that time the reservists had also entered the army. One of the reservists was a Czech who offered to come in the evening and help them. The soldiers gave him the text he was supposed to send. He began incredibly quickly. From the central reporting station they however sent the Q code "transmit more quickly". But despite the fact that he was transmitting awfully fast, the women were still capable of receiving it. Suddenly he pulled out some sort of device. It was an apparatus that had a lever. When he moved the lever to the left, it sent dots. When it was moved to the right, it sent dashes. You see, he was an electrical engineer, who'd participated in nationwide and international Morse code races. He began transmitting using this device. Suddenly the Q code "repeat text" came. He repeated. The code "transmit more slowly" came. He was sending so fast that they weren't capable of registering it. Then he let the soldier back in his place to transmit. They then investigated from the central station who'd been sending so fast, and found it out too. But they never repeated their jokes.

Another anecdote is a bit disgusting, but for a soldier, humorous. During one hockey game the meniscus on my other knee ruptured. They operated on me at the military hospital in Košice. There were also a few civilian patients at the military hospital. There were eight of us in our room. Four on one side, four on the other. Lying under the window was one old guy. A homeless type, you could say. He had a venous ulcer, and so every winter they'd admit him to the hospital. He was called Jozsi bacsi [Uncle Jozsi in Hungarian]. He pestered everyone around, especially the nurses. They didn't like him. Do you know how he washed? Under the bed he had a bottle of mineral water. In the morning a nurse would come and bring him a washbasin. Jozsi bacsi would take the bottle from underneath this bed, and stand above the basin. Then he'd fill his mouth from the bottle. His cheeks were completely stretched. I'd guess that a half liter of water fit in there. He'd spit the water out into his hands and wash his face with it. It made our stomachs churn. Lying in the bed beside me was a soldier from the air force. When Jozsi bacsi was sleeping, we took his bottle and peed in it. In the morning we were waiting for him to wash. None of us went into the washroom. We were all watching. He repeated his ritual. He took a mouthful, spit it into his hands, and washed himself. We began to roar with laughter. He sniffed the bottle, and realized what was up. He began to yell at us in a mixture of eastern dialect and Hungarian: "The visit will come, the colonel will come. I gonna tell him everything, and you gonna go to the prosecutor's office." We knew that he'd tell, but we didn't know how the head doctor would react, who was at the same time a colonel. The visit came, ten doctors. They came over to Jozsi bacsi: "So, Jozsi bacsi, how are you?"

"Mr. Colonel, you got to arrest those ones over there!"

"What for?"

"They pissed in my bottle."

"Good for them. What's preventing you from going to wash normally? You're always putting on the same act here." Luckily it ended up all right.

During my basic army service in Presov I thought about what would be once I return to civilian life. I didn't like mechanical engineering very much. I wasn't an inventor. So I thought about going to study medicine. I however had to prepare for it, because they have admittance interviews on things that I'd never before come into contact with. For example, I'd never taken biology or organic chemistry. In mechanical engineering we'd taken inorganic chemistry. In 1958 I left the army and really did prepare for medicine. In 1959 I successfully passed the admittance interview for the Faculty of Medicine of Comenius University in Bratislava. I studied medicine from 1959 until 1965. I had two phenomenal roommates at our residence. Today they're both university professors. One was named Viktor Bauer and the other Ciampor. Bauer worked for the Slovak Academy of Sciences, and Ciampor was the director of a virology institute. After I graduated from medicine, I started work for a surgery clinic in Zilina. I worked there for 21 years. Then I became a medical examiner, and last year [2006] I retired.

After finishing school I married my classmate, Ludmila Vtakova. We'd attended school in Martin. Back then the Faculty of Medicine in Bratislava opened a branch in Martin. For us it was closer, so we ended up there. Currently it's named the Jessenius Faculty of Medicine of the University of Comenius in Martin. Our wedding ceremony was on the day of her graduation. Our wedding was a strange one, because her parents came to the graduation and didn't know about the wedding. The graduation was supposed to be at 1:00 p.m. Her parents were at the residence when my bride announced at 11:30 a.m.: "You should get ready. We've got to go soon."

"What for, it's only 11:30 and the graduation isn't until 1:00?"

"The graduation is at 1:00, but the wedding is at 12:00."

"What wedding, whose wedding?"

"Mine!" By the time her parents came to, they were already at the National Committee. From there we went to a theatre, where the graduation ceremony was taking place. My in-laws were angry at us. Especially my father-in-law. They were from a village, and there it had been the custom that they'd announce to everyone that their daughter was getting married. That their relatives are really going to be upset, that their daughter had a wedding and they hadn't been invited.

My wife was from the village of Visnova. The Cachtice Castle rises high above the village. She studied academic high school in Nove Mesto nad Vahom, and then at the Faculty of Medicine of Comenius University in Martin. My father-in-law was truly angry at us. He said that the entire village would stone him to death. We persuaded him to tell them that he hadn't known anything about it. Later it came out that people in the village had been waiting as to who'd start with this sort of wedding. After that many continued in this fashion. You know, in villages there are various customs and to-dos around weddings. Wedding preparations already begin two weeks beforehand. They invite several hundreds of people... The best thing is when you pay a hotel, and they arrange everything. Back then the entire wedding cost us about a thousand crowns [in 1953 the equivalent gold content of the Czechoslovak crown was decreed by law to be 0.123 grams, which remained in place until the end of the 1980s – Editor's note]. All told, there were ten of us. So our wedding was in June 1965. We had two daughters. Marcela in 1966 and Michaela in 1969.

After the wedding we moved in with my parents in Zilina. My wife worked for some time at a Zilina hospital, but we weren't very well off financially. I had no money, she had no money. We needed to become independent. We wanted to live on our own. One company in Zilina was building an apartment building. They had this condition, that if a company doctor came to work for them,

they'd assign him an apartment. My wife took the job. Thanks to that, we got a three-room apartment. She worked there until she reached retirement age. Luckily her health is good, and she's still working, as an audit doctor for a health insurance company.

My parents lived in Zilina for the rest of their lives. My father died in 1986, and my mother in 2002. Both are buried in the local Roman Catholic cemetery. My grandmother Etel Lanyi lived the last years of her life in the Hungarian town of Szeged. She died at the age of 101, and is buried in a Jewish cemetery in Szeged.

My wife's parents didn't know about my Jewish origins. My wife of course did. She even knows more about Judaism than I do. She read a lot about it, and was in Israel as well. She knows a lot about this area too. Ludmila is Slovak in the best sense of the word. She's very insulted when she hears Slovaks say that Jews used to use the blood of Christian girls to make matzot, and similar nonsense. She was also saddened by the fact that the nation that she'd like to be proud of is capable of such atrocities as what took place during World War II. After all, many Jews from Slovakia were leading figures in culture and sport. Jews founded many sports committees and organizations. Her mother used to work for Jews as a maid, and said that she'd never had it so good as with them. They were decent to her. Jews usually always dealt with everyone in an upstanding fashion. Everyone knew this. But during the time of the Slovak state [18](#) they saw how they could easily get to their stores, workshops, apartments, property... People were capable of joining the Hlinka Guard. They were capable of collecting and deporting Jews to Poland. Up until 1944, everything in Slovakia was done by Slovaks [19](#). They liquidated Jews using the most fantastic justifications, that they're vermin. The Jewish Codex [20](#) and all that cause her great chagrin.

When I was working, I wanted to realize my long-ago dream, to be a great athlete. Alas, I didn't succeed. I was basically an anti-talent, but I loved sports. In some sports I was even a member of the Zilina team. I played hockey, handball, athletics, soccer and tennis. My greatest successes were in tennis. I became regional champion. Aside from tennis, I was more or less a benchwarmer. In athletics I did long-distance running. To this day I don't know a more beautiful aroma than that of a sweaty hockey dressing room. As former soldiers, paratroopers, we also have our own club and we get together. We put on various events, including jumps, shooting and trips. I'm also a member of the Zilina Old Boys hockey and soccer team. We get together with the guys once a year to sit around and reminisce about old times.

I was usually a substitute; when someone dropped out of the main lineup I'd fill in for him. But I wanted to advance. When our older daughter was born, I said to myself that I'd try it with her. I began to study tennis coaching. I took many courses, both theory and practice. We turned the living room into a gym, and I began to teach her techniques with a ping-pong paddle. How to stand, posture, swing technique. You can teach all this with a ping-pong paddle. We gradually moved on to larger rackets. In time we achieved results. Marcela several times became the Slovak champion in tennis. In Czechoslovakia she was second. She was at the center of elite sports with current top Slovak coaches, at the same time coaches of the national team, Mecir [Mecir, Miroslav (b. 1964): former Slovak tennis player. Olympic champion at Seoul (1988). Currently captain of the men's Davis Cup national team – Editor's note], Stankovic [Stankovic, Branislav (b. 1965): former Slovak tennis player and coach. Currently the director of tennis tournaments in Slovakia – Editor's note], and Vajda [Vajda, Marian (b. 1965): former Slovak tennis player. I currently the coach of one of the best tennis players in the world, the Serb Novak Djokovic – Editor's note].

Our daughter made it among the top players in Czechoslovakia, and there was a real hope that she could make it into the top 20 in the world. I knew that she wouldn't be in the top ten, because she's got slow legs. She compensated for it with fantastic technique. She was a very sharp thinker, and was also good at the net. With a good partner, they could have been among the best doubles teams in the world. We were already putting her together with another top Czechoslovak player, Zrubakova [Zrubakova, Radka (b. 1970): former Slovak tennis player and currently a tennis coach. She was a member of the Czechoslovak national team that won the Fed Cup in 1988 – Editor's note] from Bratislava. Her father was vice dean at the Faculty of Physical Education and Sports of the University of Comenius in Bratislava. Also a tennis fanatic. His daughter was a good runner, she'd have played in the back and Marcela would have been up at the net.

At that time I was fully focused on her career. My boss at the time, the surgeon Cerny, wanted to specialize us in various fields, and wanted to make a plastic surgeon out of me. In those days Cerny was a big name. Later he transferred to Bratislava, where he became the head of the Kramare Hospital. I liked his idea about the plastic surgery, but I'd have had to leave for three years to Bratislava, to study. I told him that I wasn't going. Instead of thinking up some excuse, like for example that my mother was ill, I told him the truth. I can't go. Who will coach my daughter? As a result of this, he wrote me off. He was of the opinion that a surgeon should be a fanatic for whom everything else takes a back seat. No mother, no daughter, not even tennis! Later, when I wanted to do further attestations, he didn't let me. He looked for various pretexts. That's why I worked at the outpatient clinic all my life. My daughter was my hobby. During this I had to keep in shape. I began running long distances and marathons.

Alas, my daughter's career ended prematurely. While training in a gym, she fell and suffered a compound fracture of her forearm. She had to hang up tennis. She recuperated for a long time, and at last applied at the Faculty of Medicine at Comenius University in Martin. She did her attestation in anesthesiology. Several years ago she went to the USA for a study stay. When she returned home, she told us that they have an amazing top-quality facility there, incomparable to the ones in Slovakia. Something like that won't be here even in a hundred years. That she'd like to work and live there. So she found out everything necessary to be able to work in the USA. Today she works as an anesthesiologist for cardiac surgery in the city of Albany, the capital city of the state of New York. At the same time she does part-time work teaching medical graduates who want to pursue anesthesiology. She has no family yet; she's single.

Our younger daughter is named Michaela. She's also single. She graduated from nursing high school. She then applied at the Faculty of Philosophy of Comenius University in Bratislava. She graduated from the Department of Education and Nursing. School seemed easy to her. She arranged an individual study plan for herself. She worked in London, where she took care of children. At the same time she was taking exams at school. After graduating from university she decided to leave. She moved to Canada. She lives in the city of Vancouver. In Canada they didn't recognize either her nursing high school diploma nor her university degree. The Canadian Association of Nurses didn't give their agreement. It's very strange, because Canada has a shortage of nurses. In order to be able to stay there, she took work that's very unattractive by Canadian standards. She took care of children. She did that for almost four years, until they finally recognized her diploma. Now she works as a nurse in cardio surgery. In the meantime she also got Canadian citizenship. While she's working she's also attending university. When she finishes, she'll

be this sort of connection between doctors and the hospital. Let's say a doctor sends someone to the hospital for a gall bladder, stomach or heart operation; that person has to undergo a pre-surgery examination. Basically he has to be prepared for the surgery. This is done by nurses who are qualified for it.

We see our daughters very seldom. The younger one has been abroad for eleven years, and the older one seven. Even the two of them don't visit each other. Albany and Vancouver are very far away from each other. They're very busy with school and work. Work abroad can be compared to sport. When our athlete starts with a foreign team, he's got to be better than the local players in order to stay. It's the same with work. It's not enough to be like the locals. You've got to be better. They have to be better, and that doesn't happen by itself. My wish for my 70th birthday was for all of us to be at home together again. They'd been here several times, but never together. For my 70th birthday it finally happened. It was a great present for me. Otherwise we're constantly in contact. We phone and email each other.

In my daily life, I was a fervent anti-Communist. At the surgery, I had an operating day once a week. It was on Thursday. I'd enter the operating theater and greet the staff with Heil Hitler. Once they asked me why? I answered: "Same regime, same greeting." I didn't see any difference between Fascism and Communism. One was wore black and the other red. I think that I also hold the record for the shortest membership time in the Communist Party [21](#). I never attended any club meetings or gatherings. Nothing like that. During my studies they commented on it a couple of times, but I always made some excuse. I was an athletics coordinator, and did a whole lot more than the other "party members". Once, when I'd gone to play tennis, my classmates had a meeting. Upon my return everyone was smirking at me. They said that every club had the task of pushing someone into joining the Communist Party. The way it was back then was that in order to be promoted to a higher position, you had to have a certain amount of Party members below you. It was the same in medicine. If someone wanted to be a chief physician, a certain percent of his staff had to be in the Party. It didn't matter if they were cleaning women, nurses or doctors. They told me to join too, to improve the percentage. I filled in the application in the hopes that they wouldn't take me. As a reason I filled in something in the spirit of that I'd been nominated, and the fact that I wanted to join should be an honor for the Communist Party. I remember that the party chairman at the Faculty of Medicine, a gynecologist, was enraged. He read my application at the regional meeting of party chairmen. How could such an application have made it to the regional committee for approval? In the end they accepted me. Before the end of sixth year, the gynecologist, Dr. Zvarik, summoned me. By the way, he was the older brother of the actor Frantisek Zvarik. He told me: "You know, we needed to create some party members, so we approved you at the membership meeting." He handed me an envelope with my registration, which I was supposed to hand in at my new place of employment. I of course didn't hand anything in. Alas, the regional committee in Martin sent a copy of my application form to my workplace. Everyone had an ID booklet, into which you had to paste a membership stamp once a month. At our work, a man that worked in the plaster room was in charge of the stamps. He'd always call me in to the plaster room. I'd give him ten crowns. That's how much a stamp cost. But I wouldn't glue it into the ID booklet, but onto the tiles in the plaster room. In 1968, the screening of all party members began. Whether they agreed with the entry of the allied troops [22](#), and so on. They never even summoned me to the screening. I got a piece of paper, which I have put away to this day. It says: "Due to the fact that you did not fulfill your responsibilities – though I don't know which ones

- your membership in the Communist Party of Slovakia has been revoked." According to the dates on the document, a total of seven days had passed from my acceptance to my expulsion.

I was of the opinion that it was my responsibility to not only complain about the regime, but also to act. In 1989 the possibility of change began to be felt. But change don't come on its own. It depends on people. At that time I was working as an assessment physician at the Regional National Committee, Department of Social Affairs. At one meeting, at which the entire executive was present, the chairman and sixteen department heads, I spoke up about the need for change. The VPN [23](#) had been created in Slovakia, which was promoting democratic elections, the cancellation of the leading role of the Party, freedom of religion and so on. I proclaimed that I was founding the Zilina branch of the VPN, and that I was asking for their cooperation. Whoever was interested in the making these changes could join. Alas, even the VPN was only composed of people, with all their characteristics. Many began to take advantage of it for their own ends.

It was similar to when during the time of the Slovak state they'd wanted to push the Jews out. The difference was in that back then they wanted Jewish property. The VPN was basically the same. They wanted to get rid of all the top Communists. Alas, not because they were Communists. They wanted their positions. I can become a director there, or there. They were pushing people aside just because they had a Party membership. In the meantime, there could have been those among them who'd been sticking their stamps on tiles somewhere. But no one looked into that. They also got rid of first-class experts who'd helped wherever they could. I took a stand against these methods. That's how I got into a conflict with the executive of the VPN and the governing coalition at the time. At that time the governing coalition was composed of the VPN, DS [24](#) and KDH [25](#). They all wanted posts for themselves and their relatives. I didn't agree with this, and asked that they say what concretely the person they were letting go was guilty of. Many of them had families to support. They had years of courageous work behind them. Now we're to send them out on the street? Just because they had some sort of piece of red paper? Alas, one of those being installed also ended up in charge of the directorate for my profession, and I had my work cut out for me in order for me to not be kicked out either.

But I can't say that after the war I was ever persecuted for my Jewish origins. A lot of people didn't know about my origins, and still don't know. But I do meet up with rude remarks regarding Jews. For example, once at the hospital we admitted a patient, let's say Mrs. Grünova. The hospital staff would make comments like: "We admitted that Yiddo." It was: "...that Yiddo in number six." [The Jew in room number six - Editor's note], or: "The kike in number sixteen." That hurt you at the time. But I personally never met up with discrimination. When I did have some problems in life, it was due to my own shortcomings, and not because of my origin.

Glossary

[1](#) Kashrut in eating habits: kashrut means ritual behavior. A term indicating the religious validity of some object or article according to Jewish law, mainly in the case of foodstuffs. Biblical law dictates which living creatures are allowed to be eaten. The use of blood is strictly forbidden. The method of slaughter is prescribed, the so-called shechitah. The main rule of kashrut is the prohibition of eating dairy and meat products at the same time, even when they weren't cooked together. The time interval between eating foods differs. On the territory of Slovakia six hours must pass between the eating of a meat and dairy product. In the opposite case, when a dairy product is eaten first and then a meat product, the time interval is different. In some Jewish communities it is

sufficient to wash out one's mouth with water. The longest time interval was three hours – for example in Orthodox communities in Southwestern Slovakia.

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

3 Swedish Red Cross

One of the oldest branches of the International Red Cross. Established in 1865, it played an important role in Jewish rescue operations in Hungary during 1944-1945. Carl Danielsson, Swedish Ambassador in Budapest, stood up for Hungarian Jews in June 1944, asking permission to board and lodge Jewish orphans, and to issue free passes for those Jews who had relatives or long established business connections in Sweden. The action was led by Dr. Valdemar Langlet, envoy of the Swedish Red Cross in Budapest, who exceeded the limit with regards to the number of free passes issued. Another rescue operation was the agreement with the SS-leadership arranged by the Swedish diplomat Count Folke Bernadotte. Accordingly, 36 buses of the Swedish Red Cross took out more than 25,000 Danish and Swedish political prisoners (in the majority Jews) from German concentration camps and brought them to Sweden in March and April 1945.

4 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.

5 Crystal night [Kristallnacht]

On 7th November 1938 in Paris, Herschel Grynszpan, a seventeen year-old Jewish youth, shot the legation secretary Ernst von Rath, erroneously assuming that he was the German ambassador. During interrogation he said that he had carried out the assassination in retaliation for how the

German civil service had treated his parents; this was taken advantage of by Goebbels, when as every November 9th he was celebrating the anniversary of the failed putsch in 1923. He devoted the majority of his speech to an attack against Jews, with which he provoked a huge pogrom against Jews. According the latest numbers, there were 91 Jews killed, 29 Jewish stores burned, 171 residential buildings and 10 synagogues destroyed or burned and 7500 stores devastated. The members of the SA didn't however limit themselves to only street violence. On Hitler's orders on this night about 35,000, according to other sources 26,000 Jews were dragged off to concentration camps. This coercion was to serve to speed up their emigration. Hermann Goring also forced Jews in the German Reich to collectively come up with one billion Reichmarks and so pay for the damage caused by the Nazis. The shattered display windows gave this pogrom its name, "Crystal Night" [Kristallnacht].

6 Anschluss

The annexation of Austria to Germany. The 1919 peace treaty of St. Germain prohibited the Anschluss, to prevent a resurgence of a strong Germany. On 12th March 1938 Hitler occupied Austria, and, to popular approval, annexed it as the province of Ostmark. In April 1945 Austria regained independence legalizing it with the Austrian State Treaty in 1955.

7 Yellow star in Slovakia

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

8 Hlinka-Guards

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

9 Mauthausen

concentration camp located in Upper Austria. Mauthausen was opened in August 1938. The first prisoners to arrive were forced to build the camp and work in the quarry. On May 5, 1945 American troops arrived and liberated the camp. Altogether, 199,404 prisoners passed through Mauthausen. Approximately 119,000 of them, including 38,120 Jews, were killed or died from the harsh conditions, exhaustion, malnourishment, and overwork. Rozett R. – Spector S.: Encyclopedia of the Holocaust, Facts on File, G.G. The Jerusalem Publishing House Ltd. 2000, pg. 314 - 315

10 Gusen

prior to 1940, the concentration camp was known as Mauthausen-Gusen. it was a large group of Nazi concentration camps, built near the villages of Mauthausen and Gusen in Upper Austria. By the end of 1939, the Mauthausen camp was already overfull with prisoners. Around that time, construction of a new camp began in Gusen, about 4.5 km away. Gusen used its prisoners for slave labor in granite quarries. Besides this, it also rented them out to various local businessmen. In 1942 Gusen was expanded to include the central SS warehouse, where various goods stolen from occupied territories were sorted and sent onward into Germany. In March 1944 the former SS warehouse was rebuilt into a new branch camp that was named Gusen II. Until the end of the war, it served as an improvised concentration camp. There were from about 12,000 to 17,000 prisoners in the camp. In December 1944, another part was opened in nearby Lungitz. Here, a part of a factory was converted into a third branch camp – Gusen III.

11 Ravensbruck

Concentration camp for women near Furstenberg, Germany. Five hundred prisoners transported there from Sachsenhausen began construction at the end of 1938. They built 14 barracks and service buildings, as well as a small camp for men, which was completed separated from the women's camp. The buildings were surrounded by tall walls and electrified barbed wire. The first deportees, some 900 German and Austrian women were transported there on May 18, 1939, soon followed by 400 Austrian Gypsy women. At the end of 1939, due to the new groups constantly arriving, the camp held nearly 3000 persons. With the expansion of the war, people from twenty countries were taken here. Persons incapable of working were transported on to Uckermark or Auschwitz, and sent to the gas chambers, others were murdered during 'medical' experiments. By the end of 1942, the camp reached 15,000 prisoners, by 1943, with the arrival of groups from the Soviet Union, it reached 42,000. During the working existence of the camp, altogether nearly 132,000 women and children were transported here, of these, 92,000 were murdered. In March of 1945, the SS decided to move the camp, so in April those capable of walking were deported on a death march. On April 30, 1945, those who survived the camp and death march, were liberated by the Soviet armies.

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

13 Brundibar

The children's opera Brundibar was created in 1938 for a contest announced by the then Czechoslovak Ministry of Schools and National Education. It was composed by Hans Krasa based on a libretto by Adolf Hoffmeister. The first performance of Brundibar – by residents of the Jewish orphanage in Prague – wasn't seen by the composer. He had been deported to Terezin. Not long after him, Rudolf Freudenfeld, the son of the orphanage's director, who had rehearsed the opera with the children, was also transported. This opera had more than 50 official performances in Terezin. The idea of solidarity, collective battle against the enemy and the victory of good over evil today speaks to people the whole world over. Today the opera is performed on hundreds of stages in various corners of the world.

14 Small Fortress (Mala pevnost) in Theresienstadt

An infamous prison, used by two totalitarian regimes: Nazi Germany and communist Czechoslovakia. It was built in the 18th century as a part of a fortification system and almost from the beginning it was used as a prison. In 1940 the Gestapo took it over and kept mostly political prisoners there: members of various resistance movements. Approximately 32,000 detainees were kept in Small Fortress during the Nazi occupation. Communist Czechoslovakia continued using it as a political prison; after 1945 German civilians were confined there before they were expelled from the country.

15 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.

16 People's and Public schools in Czechoslovakia

In the 18th century the state intervened in the evolution of schools – in 1877 Empress Maria Theresa issued the Ratio Educationis decree, which reformed all levels of education. After the passing of a law regarding six years of compulsory school attendance in 1868, people's schools were fundamentally changed, and could now also be secular. During the First Czechoslovak Republic, the Small School Law of 1922 increased compulsory school attendance to eight years.

The lower grades of people's schools were public schools (four years) and the higher grades were council schools. A council school was a general education school for youth between the ages of 10 and 15. Council schools were created in the last quarter of the 19th century as having 4 years, and were usually state-run. Their curriculum was dominated by natural sciences with a practical orientation towards trade and business. During the First Czechoslovak Republic they became 3-year with a 1-year course. After 1945 their curriculum was merged with that of lower gymnasium. After 1948 they disappeared, because all schools were nationalized.

17 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.

18 Slovak State (1939-1945)

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

19 Deportation of Jews from the Slovak State

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

on Slovak territory. About 10,000 Jewish citizens were saved thanks to the help of the Slovak populace.

Niznansky, Eduard: Zidovska komunita na Slovensku 1939-1945

20 Jewish Codex

Order no. 198 of the Slovakian government, issued in September 1941, on the legal status of the Jews, went down in history as Jewish Codex. Based on the Nuremberg Laws, it was one of the most stringent and inhuman anti-Jewish laws all over Europe. It paraphrased the Jewish issue on a racial basis, religious considerations were fading into the background; categories of Jew, Half Jew, moreover 'Mixture' were specified by it. The majority of the 270 paragraphs dealt with the transfer of Jewish property (so-called Aryanizing; replacing Jews by non-Jews) and the exclusion of Jews from economic, political and public life.

21 Communist Party of Czechoslovakia (KSC)

Founded in 1921 following a split from the Social Democratic Party, it was banned under the Nazi occupation. It was only after Soviet Russia entered World War II that the Party developed resistance activity in the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia; because of this, it gained a certain degree of popularity with the general public after 1945. After the communist coup in 1948, the Party had sole power in Czechoslovakia for over 40 years. The 1950s were marked by party purges and a war against the 'enemy within'. A rift in the Party led to a relaxing of control during the Prague Spring starting in 1967, which came to an end with the occupation of Czechoslovakia by Soviet and allied troops in 1968 and was followed by a period of normalization. The communist rule came to an end after the Velvet Revolution of November 1989.

22 Warsaw Pact Occupation of Czechoslovakia

The liberalization of the communist regime in Czechoslovakia during the Prague Spring (1967-68) went further than anywhere else in the Soviet block countries. These new developments were perceived by the conservative Soviet communist leadership as intolerable heresy dangerous for Soviet political supremacy in the region. Moscow decided to put a radical end to the chain of events and with the participation of four other Warsaw Pact countries (Poland, East Germany, Hungary and Bulgaria) ran over Czechoslovakia in August, 1968.

23 The Public Against Violence (Slovak

Verejnost proti násiliu, VPN) was a democratic political movement in Slovakia active from 1989 to 1992. The movement was created during the events of November 1989, and was the main opposition force at the time. Its priority was to lead the country to free elections, which took place in 1990.

24 The Democratic Party (Slovak

Demokratická strana, DS) was a Slovak political party. It was active during two periods: before the takeover of Communism during the years 1944-1948, and after the fall of Communism, during the years 1989-2006. In 2006 it merged with the Slovak Democratic and Christian Union. The

Democratic Party officially ceased to exist on 13 February 2006, when it was deleted from the register of political parties kept by the Ministry of the Interior.

25 The Christian Democratic Movement (Kresťanskodemokratické hnutie, KDH) is a Slovak political party

The ideology profile of the KDH can be termed as right-wing and conservative. The KDH was created on 17 February 1990, making it one of the oldest entities on the post-1989 Slovak political scene.