

The Hanak Brothers With Their Mother



In this photo, from right to left: I, Jan Hanak, my mother, Edita Hanakova, and my brother, Milan Hanak. The picture was taken in Zilina in 1968.

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, 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 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.

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.