

Marcela Hanakova's University Graduation



This photograph was taken on the occasion of the graduation of our daughter Marcela Hanakova from the Faculty of Medicine of Comenius University in Martin in 1991. Marcela is in the center of the photo. On her right is my wife, Ludmila Hanakova, and I, Jan Hanak, am on her left.

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.