

# Ruzena R.

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Bratislava

Slovakia

Interviewer: Martin Flekenstein

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*This interview with Mrs. Ruzena R. took place over several sessions in her apartment.*

*Editing the interview was made easier by the fact that all information stated in it was exact, and so was easier to verify.*

*At the request of the interviewee, the final text does not contain surnames from her father's side of the family.*

*Despite that, this material offers valuable witness to the life of one branched-out Jewish family on the territory of today's Slovakia.*



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- **My family background**

My father's father was named Rudolf R. He was born in the Hungarian city of Pápa. He supported himself and his family by selling supplies to village shoemakers at fairs. My father's mother was named Rosalia, née Goldschmidt. That's who I got my first name from.

They lived in Trnava, where they had three children. Grandma took care of the household and the children. My grandparents' oldest daughter was Johanna, next was my father [Ignac], who was born in 1876, and the youngest was named Arnold.

I know more or less nothing about Grandpa Rudolf, because he died very young. My father said that he caught a cold during one fair, from that he got pneumonia, which back then was definitely a deadly disease, antibiotics didn't exist yet, and he died of it. He left behind three little children with no means of support. Grandma got remarried, to Simon Weiner, with whom she had a son, Max.

My father left home at the age of twelve to become an apprentice in Vienna. He had to leave home early on because he was the oldest son and the family was poor. He kept in only sporadic contact with his family, which is why I know practically nothing about my father's family from that time

period.

In Vienna my father apprenticed as a bookbinder. After finishing, he worked as a traveling salesman. He sold office supplies, mainly to notaries. Because his original name sounded German, he changed his name to sound more Hungarian, mainly because his customers wanted it that way. Naturally, this was still before World War I. My assumption is that he lived in Vienna up to around 1912.

During his travels around Slovakia, he met a widow who had a store with office supplies in Topolcany, and married her. After the wedding he took over the store, which was on the verge of bankruptcy. After he took it over, it began to grow and flourish.

Part of the store was also a book printing and binding business. In 1941 his business was Aryanized [Aryanization: the transfer of Jewish stores, businesses, companies, etc. to the ownership of another, non-Jewish person – the Aryanizer] by his employee Stefan Radic, who was a member of the HSLs [1](#) and perhaps also a member of the Hlinka Guard [2](#).

My father's first wife died after World War I. No children were born of this marriage. Before the Aryanization, our family was well-off financially. Because our father had been poor when he was young, he liked saving money in case of hard times.

During the time of the Slovak State [3](#), 1939-1945, we lost everything. One law and regulation after another was passed gradually confiscating various parts of Jewish property, so we were left with nothing, including our savings. They took everything we had [4](#).

My father's sister Johanna married Mr. Adler. I never knew him, because I think that he died before I was born. The Adlers lived in Vienna. They had four sons, one of whom [Alfred] died before the war, the oldest, Rudolf, immigrated with his family to Palestine in 1938, and Fritz and Richard perished during the Holocaust.

After Hitler occupied Austria [5](#) in 1938, Aunt Johanna came to stay with us in Topolcany. But she didn't stay there long, because the day the First Vienna Decision took effect [6](#), the cessation of southern Slovakia to Hungary, when the Slovaks had already left the territory to be occupied by the Hungarians, and the Hungarians hadn't yet occupied it, Jews that didn't have Slovak citizenship were transported to this territory. They were mostly emigrants from occupied Austria. It was in November 1938, shortly after the proclamation of Slovak autonomy, thus still before the proclamation of the independent Slovak State.

Later, Aunt Johanna went to Brno, where she lived until they deported her. The last letter from her came from Terezin [7](#). From Terezin they most likely deported her to Auschwitz. She didn't survive the war.

Before the war, I didn't know much about the Adler family. It wasn't until my aunt came to stay with us, and, similarly her son Fritz came to Topolcany, whom they deported in March 1942 [8](#), that I got to know them better.

My father's brother Arnold lived in Budapest. His wife's name was Malvina. They had a son, Rudolf. All of my father's siblings, including my father, named their oldest son Rudolf, after their father. Arnold's son Rudolf immigrated to Chile before the war.

Uncle Arnold was a rich man; he owned some factory and lived in Budapest, on Rózsadomb [9](#). That address in and of itself said a lot. My uncle and his wife managed to get Swedish passports with the help of the Swedish diplomat Raoul Wallenberg [10](#). Unfortunately, not even this helped. They were shot during the Szálasi regime [11](#).

After the war, their son once showed up in Slovakia. He met with only my father, as he'd only come to Bratislava, and our financial situation at the time could only afford one ticket from Topolcany. Since then he hasn't been in contact.

After the war, Rudolf Adler also got in touch once, but once he found out we were alive, he didn't contact us again. I think that he was interested in my father's property, and not in us. I currently have no news of this branch of my family.

My grandmother's fourth son was named Max Weiner. He worked as an accountant for a sugar refinery in Trnava. In 1929, during the Great Depression [12](#), he lost his job and then lived with us in Topolcany, until they deported him in 1942. I don't know what happened to him. He unfortunately didn't survive the war.

My mother, Margita, née Goldberger, was born in Zbehy, where her father rented a farm. She had five siblings. Grandpa, Samuel Goldberger, was from Dolné Otrokovce, near Hlohovec. That's where our family survived the war.

Grandma Johana, née Deutelbaum, was born in Vítkovce, near Topolcany, as the youngest of her parents' twelve children. They were a large family, but only up until the Holocaust. In my mother's generation there were 46 or 48 cousins. Around three quarters of them didn't survive the war.

I was never on the farm in Dolné Otrokovce during the time my grandfather farmed there. When he got old, he left the farm to one of his sons and he and Grandma moved to Topolcany. There they lived in this dark apartment that I didn't like at all. Grandpa died there, too, when I was around five. Grandma then moved to a nicer apartment in the city.

Grandma wore a wig. From what my mother told me, I know that her oldest son was very ill. Back then she swore that if he got well, she'd wear a wig. When I was a child, that wig seemed very tawdry to me.

But Grandma was devout, so she kept her promise to God. She observed all the holidays. Every Friday evening she'd light candles, and she kept a kosher household [13](#). I even lived with her at one time. My brother got scarlet fever, and I got sent to stay with her. That was in 1935.

I lived with her in 1939 as well. I know that at that time German soldiers were marching through Topolcany. Grandma was afraid of the clumping underneath her windows, and sat by me on my bed and was all afraid that I'd wake up.

I slept like a log. At that time, the German Wehrmacht [14](#) was crossing Slovakia to Poland. On 1st September 1939, the war began [15](#). It was during that time. Grandma was teaching me handiwork, mainly knitting. Because she was a diabetic, she used saccharin instead of sugar. I didn't like that food.

I liked my grandma very much. I think that of all her grandchildren, I liked her the most. It's no wonder, the others didn't spend as much time with her as I did. She also used to come to our place to visit at least once a week. She'd usually come on Friday to bathe before Saturday, because we had a bathroom and she didn't. During the war she moved in with us. She and I slept together in the same room.

I remember how one night in 1942 they came for her at night and wanted to take her away and put her on a transport. At that time she was over 70. Four of them came for her: one German from the Deutsche Partei who had a brown shirt and a band on his arm with a swastika, a Guardist in a Hlinka Guard uniform, one policeman and one gendarme.

They used to go around at night, around 3am. At that time my mother had a so-called yellow exception, in which my grandmother was listed as well. [Editor's note: this was an exception for Economically Important Jews.

It was given to Jews that were irreplaceable for the economy of the Slovak State.] Economic Jews' exceptions protected their parents as well. Back then they cancelled that part of the exception, which is why they had come to take my grandmother for transport.

Luckily, my mother's younger brother, Maximilian Goldberger, was a pharmacist who worked in Prievidza. At that time, the cancellation of parental protection didn't extend to academically educated workers.

My mother sent my oldest brother Andrej to get him. They returned still that same night by taxi from Prievidza, and reclaimed Grandma on my uncle's papers. My grandmother had to leave right away to go to Prievidza with my uncle. After that I saw her only one more time.

My mother's brother Maximilian Goldberger originally lived in Hlohovec. He was the only one of my mother's siblings to have a university education. He married into money with Edita Linkenberg, who was from Topolcany, and with her dowry my uncle opened a pharmacy in Hlohovec.

In 1930 they had a daughter, Lilly. During the time of the Slovak State his pharmacy was Aryanized and the Aryanizer threw him out that same day. By the way, its Aryanizer was Dr. Entner, a German, who later founded Slovakofarma in Hlohovec. [Editor's note: the beginnings of the first and largest Slovak pharmaceutical company go back to the year 1941. In 2003, Zentiva was created with the merger of the Czech company Leciva and the Slovak Slovakofarma.]

After they threw him out of his own pharmacy, my uncle found a job in a pharmacy in Prievidza. The family moved there, too. In 1942 they brought my grandmother to Prievidza as well. They lived in Prievidza until the Slovak National Uprising [16](#) broke out.

My uncle left for rebel territory with his wife and daughter, but first they found a hiding place for Grandma with one family in Bojnice. I don't know the subsequent details, but I know that they found her hiding place, deported Grandma at the end of 1944, and most likely immediately sent her into the gas.

After the uprising was suppressed, my uncle and his family retreated to the mountains. There Edita accidentally stepped on a mine. She died on the spot. The explosion alerted the Germans or Guardists, I don't know exactly. They captured those that had survived the explosion. They shut

them up in a barn in Motycky, and set it on fire. They're buried in Stare Hory.

My mother's oldest brother was Viktor Goldberger. He married Aranka, née Rosenthal. They lived in Prievidza. Viktor owned a large textile store in the center of town. In 1922 they had a daughter, Truda. Girls of that age were deported on the first transport in March 1942.

Her father wanted to buy her out, to bribe the officers in charge, but she said that she was going to go with her girlfriends. Her parents were put into the labor camp in Novaky [17](#). There, they applied for the Yom Kippur transport, the last transport before the temporary end of the deportations, because they wanted to go be with their daughter. Their daughter was no longer alive at that time, and they also died. Such terrible tragedies!

My mother's youngest sister was Jolana. Her first husband was Adolf Guttmann, who had already died before the war, and in 1942 she remarried. Her second husband was named [Alexander] Fröhlich. From her first marriage she had a son, Mikulas – we called him Miki – who was born in 1930. Up to 1944 Fröhlich had an exception, meaning they were protected from the transports.

Uncle Fröhlich was an administrator of one large farming estate. When exceptions no longer helped, the Guardists came for him. They caught my uncle as well as Miki. Jolana hid. Because they'd taken her husband and her son, she surrendered voluntarily, so they'd go together.

They got to Auschwitz, where they sent my aunt into the gas; her son and husband survived the war, because they ended up in the coal mines in Gliwice [18](#). Uncle Fröhlich cared for Miki a lot in the camp. At that time Miki was only 14. They both managed to survive.

The tragedy is that the husband and son survived the war, and my aunt was killed. These two men moved away to Israel in 1949. I'm in contact with my cousin Miki to this day. You could say he's my closest relative from my generation.

My mother's youngest brother was Béla, in Slovak Vojtech Goldberger. Béla ran a farm he'd inherited from his father. For a wife he took Erna, née Zobel. Erna was from Dunajska Streda, but was of Polish origin.

Her mother had already died before the war, and her father and brother were deported to Poland already in 1939 or 1940. Back then the Hungarians weren't deporting their own citizens yet, but they most likely didn't have Hungarian citizenship. Béla and Erna had two children, a son, Zoltán, who changed his first name to Shlomo, and a daughter, Marta. After getting married, Marta was named Kohen. Béla's family survived along with our family, we'll get to that later.

My mother graduated from council school [19](#). Her first husband was named Hugo. Together they had a son, Andrej. Hugo was an administrator of a farming estate in Tardóskedde [in Slovak Tvrdošovce, a town in the Nove Zamky district].

Hugo got cancer at a very young age, and died of it. My mother was left alone with a little son. That's why she moved in with her parents, who at that time were living in Dolné Otrokovce. So that she wouldn't be a burden to them, she opened a store and a village pub. With this she supported herself and her son.

How did my parents meet? In German it's called 'geregelt Partie' [arranged marriage]. My father was a widower, my mother was a widow. This one man and his wife, who was related to my mother's sister-in-law, used to live in my father's building.

They arranged it. That's how people got married back then. My parents had two weddings. The first one was civil, at the notary's office in Horné Otrokovce, and the proper one was in Piestany. They were married by a rabbi. For sure it was an Orthodox wedding, because in Topolcany, where my father was already living at the time, and where my mother also moved, there was only an Orthodox religious community [20](#).

We spoke German at home. My father learned his trade in Vienna, where he'd lived from the age of twelve almost up to World War I, so German was his mother tongue. My mother could also speak German, but her main language was Hungarian.

With the maid my parents spoke Slovak, and when they didn't want the children to understand them, they spoke Hungarian together. We, the children, spoke Slovak together, after all, all three of us attended a Slovak school. So at home there were three languages spoken, but German dominated.

As far as clothing goes, we all dressed the same as everyone else of our social class, regardless of religion. Which means no typical Jewish clothing. My father always wore a suit. Under his suit jacket he had a vest, and pinned on it he had a pocket watch on a gold chain.

My mother liked wearing silk dresses most of all. Up until she died, she wore mostly silk dresses, even at home. Up to lunchtime she'd wear a normal dress, so that the silk ones wouldn't smell like the kitchen, and after lunch she'd shower and put on a silk dress. I remember going around looking for silk for her dresses. Because back then you couldn't always get it.

My father was a very kind father. You know, he was already relatively old when his children were born. My brother Rudolf was born when my father was 52, and I was born a year later. We were his treasures. Otherwise he worried about his business. He lived for that.

He and Mother got along very well. Sometimes he'd grumble a little to himself, but I never heard them argue. My father was a very honorable person. Honor was very important in our home. One always kept one's word, and lying was completely out of the question.

They were principles, which today, especially in Slovakia, are no longer at all principal. I observe the principles I was brought up in to this day, and my brother Rudolf is a very correct and principled person. Our mother was very strict with us. She always emphasized what a person's responsibilities were. She never talked about rights.

My father was always praising my mother, especially her cooking skills. He never liked anything else as much as what she cooked. He used to say that there wasn't another cook like her. Of course, when hard times arrived during the Slovak State, priorities were elsewhere than on good food. An understandable nervousness dominated our home. That was no longer 'normal' life.

We lived with our parents in a large, two-story building that had a courtyard but no garden. The entire courtyard was paved with concrete. There were two stores facing the street. One was our store, and my father rented the other one out.

Above the stores there were four windows that belonged to our apartment. It was a large four-room apartment with a bathroom, which was a relative rarity back then, a large front hall and a courtyard gallery. The apartment had old-fashioned furniture.

Back then there weren't the conveniences there are today. The entire apartment, except for the bathroom, had wooden floors. A fairly rare convenience – as I've already mentioned – was a bathroom and running water. You see, Topolcany didn't have a city water main. We had a well dug in the courtyard, from which a pump supplied water upstairs. The pump always had to be turned on by hand, and watched so that the pump motor wouldn't burn out. Which also quite often happened.

There was an oblong building attached to the house, perpendicularly. It contained workshops, specifically a book bindery and a printing shop. Above the workshops was another apartment, and in the back on the ground floor, there were another two smaller apartments.

One had one room, and the other had two. The Schick family, who also rented the other shop in our building, lived in the larger one. The Freund family lived up on the first floor, and an older lady by the name of Finkelstein lived in the smaller ground-floor apartment. None of them survived the Holocaust, except for two of the Schicks' sons.

Our staff was composed of a maid and a 'Kinderfräulein' [nanny], who watched over me and my brother Rudolf. The household was under my mother's command. The maid cleaned house and cooked. In the morning she'd go to the market with my mother, and would bring it home.

She'd then receive instructions as to what to do while my mother would go and help my father in the store. The maid cooked, set the table and after lunch would wash the dishes. Once a week, a so-called 'pedinerka,' from the German word 'Bedienerin' [cleaning woman], would come by. She would scrub the floors. She scrubbed the wood floors and the entire stairwell.

I liked our 'Kinderfräulein' very much, as she did me. By this I mean the last 'Kinderfräulein' that worked for us. My brother Rudolf didn't get along with her very much. He's got a very different personality from me. Our 'Kinderfräulein' was a devout Catholic.

She wasn't only religious, but also very superstitious. She was a very good person. She would have even given her soul for me. These relationships weren't as bad as the Communists claimed, that the rich exploited the poor, who had to serve them.

She came to work for us when I was four, and was with us until she had to leave, when Jews were no longer allowed to employ so-called 'Aryans.' At that time I was 11. We both wept. She even hid some things for me during the war, and after the war she searched me out and returned everything to me.

We kept in touch until she died. I was also at her funeral. During the last years of my mother's life, she used to come to our place when I went on holiday, so that my mother wouldn't be alone. On those occasions she used to stay with us even longer, because she wanted to be with me as well. This was always a holiday for her. She got along very well with my mother as well.

Our apartment: three of us slept together in one room, the 'Kinderfräulein,' my brother Rudolf and I. Then there was my parents' bedroom and one huge room, a so-called dining room, which was used only rarely, and a living room where my brother Andrej also used to sleep.

A huge front hall ran alongside the rooms, and the kitchen was separated off by a hall to the stairwell. The dining room was used sparingly. It had a large Persian rug on the floor. The dining room was used when guests came, and during seder and Passover.

My father's printing shop printed mainly business cards, invitations, posters and so on. Books less so. But for example Valentín Beniák had us print a book for him. [Beniák, Valentín 1894-1973: Slovak poet and translator, a representative of symbolism]

My father employed two typesetters. One of them, Stefan Radic, Aryanized our store in 1941. My older brother, Andrej, was an apprentice typesetter in this workshop. Another two employees worked in the bookbindery, a woman and a man. The man's name was Schenk Mayer. Another young Jewish girl worked in the store. Besides this girl and my brother Andrej, all of my father's other employees were Aryans.

As far as religion goes, my father was very lukewarm. He liked ham, which isn't kosher. But my mother observed kosher regulations at home. When my father wanted to enjoy some ham, it was kept secret from the children, too, so that they wouldn't divulge it to anyone. It was done so that no one would know about it.

Because my mother couldn't show up in a store that sold non-kosher meat herself, she'd send the maid there. My father would shut himself up in the dining room, where he'd dig in with relish.

Later my brother Rudo brought him around to religion. Because whatever he did, he did thoroughly. He began attending a Jewish school, but after 1940 Jewish children weren't allowed to attend any other schools but Jewish ones.

Back then he had a choice: either a normal Jewish school or a school where they educated the boys in an Orthodox spirit, led them to know the Torah and other Jewish religious literature. This school was preparation for yeshivah.

All morning and afternoon they taught only religion, and in the evening they had two hours of civil subjects, from 4 to 6pm. The students – exclusively only boys, were engaged in studies all day. Two or three would debate amongst themselves, and thus learned.

My brother is and also always was very bright and clever. Back then he drove both our parents crazy with religion. He stood above my mother while she was preparing meat, to make sure she was doing it correctly kosher. My father began going to synagogue each Friday.

Whether he gave up ham, that I don't know. That was already at the beginning of the war years. Even in Novaky, my brother was still driving the whole family crazy with religious regulations. He didn't manage to catch me and my brother Andrej up in it. Right before the war, I became a member of Hashomer Hatzair [21](#). Hashomer was atheistically oriented. Back then I didn't yet know what being a leftist was.

We observed all the holidays at home. For Rosh Hashanah we'd go to synagogue. At that time my mother would also go, as well as for Yom Kippur. I'd go visit them during the day. For Yom Kippur they'd sit in the synagogue all day. On that day everyone would fast except for me and my brother Andrej.

Back then the two of us kept a common front in this. Then, when Yom Kippur was over, there'd be a festive supper at home. Grandma Johana would also come for it. I don't remember exactly what sort of food was served, but for supper before Yom Kippur, we definitely had soup with noodles and meat.

During Passover we had seder. As the youngest member of the family, I'd say the mah nishtanah. The two of us, my father and I, would sing together. I liked that very much. I can do it to this day. For Passover our parents would usually buy us new spring clothing. We'd get a new jacket and so on.

For Sukkot we for example didn't have a sukkah. Our neighbors had a sukkah built in their courtyard, and I envied them that. They had all sorts of cutouts hanging in it, and I liked that. Their courtyard began where ours ended. Between them was a low fence with a gate.

They lived in a one-story house and were friends with our parents. They were named the Felsenburgs. During the summer my parents would sit up on the courtyard gallery, the Felsenburgs would sit in the courtyard, and they'd talk over the fence. Our parents got along very well with them. They had a little garden, and in it they had that sukkah set up.

My mother would bake excellent pastries for each holiday. That's something she kept up until she died. After the war she'd bake them for Christian holidays, too. Because she liked pastries, liked baking them, and even Christian holidays were a good opportunity for that.

For Purim a carnival was held in Topolcany, and what a carnival! Always only indoors, usually in some large gym. They put on masquerade balls for the young people, which we usually attended. But during the war it all stopped, and in Topolcany forever.

My older brother Andrej had his bar mitzvah when I was still quite small. I remember only that there was a party in that large room of ours. It was full of people, including a rabbi. My mother told me that what she'd prepared didn't seem to be kosher enough to the rabbi, and he didn't want to eat it.

So my mother offered him a can of sardines. Rudo didn't have a bar mitzvah. Right at that time he was being operated on for appendicitis. Everything for the bar mitzvah had already been prepared.

He'd learned his droshe, he was supposed to read from the Torah, and he also learned it. To this day he claims that it wasn't appendicitis, but that he'd just wanted to get out of school and had faked it. It ended up with an operation, and the bar mitzvah wasn't held.

In Topolcany, the Jewish population didn't live together with the non-Jewish. Contacts weren't frequent. I for example had only one girlfriend who wasn't Jewish. She lived in the building across from us. We attended Jewish school, and there we had our Jewish friends.

In one class [year] there were around 40 children, so from there we also had our friends. My mother also had many relatives in town, and they fraternized amongst themselves. One of our relatives had a large house with a nice garden. We used to go visit them, too. They also used to come to visit us as well, and that's how we'd meet.

My parents weren't inclined towards any political party or to any associations. Not even Zionist ones. My father even didn't go out with friends by himself. Neither did they approve of me becoming a Hashomer member very much.

In their opinion, 'better' people didn't belong to Hashomer, as there were leftists there, so mainly poor people. There was also a Betar [22](#) in town. As Hashomer members, we were enemies. Why, that's something that I didn't understand at all back then.

We also used to go on vacations, but the whole family never went together. The business couldn't close. They actually weren't even vacations. My parents used to go, each separately, to spas, so for treatments.

According to their philosophy, if a person did go somewhere, it had to be necessary for his health. Otherwise it was a waste of money. My father used to go to Karlovy Vary [23](#) and Luhacovice. My mother used to go to Karlovy Vary.

### • Growing up

I'll tell you one anecdote: My mother's brother Maximilian, the pharmacist, was very well off, and he and his wife set out to Opatija, to the seaside. To explain to his parents why they were going to the seaside, he told them that he had to go for treatments, because he had lumbago.

To the end of her days my mother thought that that's why he'd gone there. Later, long after they were already dead, I told her that if he had wanted to treat lumbago, Piestany was just on the other side of the hill. They lived in Hlohovec.

But I didn't succeed in convincing my mother. That was a typical Jewish attitude towards vacations back then. Only spas were recognized as being appropriate for vacations. My parents even went to Karlovy Vary for their honeymoon.

We children spent our vacations with my mother's siblings. Once I was in Hlohovec at my uncle's place, and a few times in Dolné Otrokovce at another uncle's. Nowhere else. I was always terribly bored in Dolné Otrokovce, so sometimes they'd also invite my cousin Lilly from Hlohovec.

Once they sent the two of us from Dolné Otrokovce to a neighboring village, Merasice, about two kilometers away, for meat from the ice plant. Back then refrigerators weren't common, and when someone bought meat for several days, they'd put it on ice in an ice plant.

The Reichenthals had an ice plant in Merasice. On our way back it began to rain. We cried the whole way, until we returned with the meat, soaked to the skin, to Dolné Otrokovce. We were also frightened. Back then I was nine, Lilly eight.

Now let's return to my early childhood. I was born in Topolcany in 1929. I didn't attend nursery school. The 'Kinderfräulein' lived with us. I began attending Jewish school in 1935. I liked going to school, high school, too, up to graduation. I liked all subjects. I had straight A's.

The teachers praised me and held me up as an example for the other students. I liked that, they probably less so. In Grade 2 the teacher would pass my exercise books around to show what good handwriting should look like. So because of things like this, I wasn't very well-liked by my

classmates.

In 1940, when Jews were allowed to attend only Jewish schools, we had a teacher who'd come to Topolcany from Presov. His name was Jozef Roth. Him we all liked. He was young and single, not handsome, very shabbily dressed; one could see that he didn't have money to spare.

He talked to us as if we were adults. But he liked us, and knew how to deal with children. He would tell us interesting things. He was my favorite teacher, and not only mine. Sadly, they deported him right on the first transport, in March 1942. I never took any private lessons outside of school except for English, which I attended with my brothers from 1938 or 1939.

The city that I grew up in was very anti-Semitic. Many residents behaved horribly towards Jews. For example, on the way to Jewish school we had to walk through a narrow little street. We would walk in double file all the way to the end of the street under our teacher's watchful eye. Non-Jewish children, from the lumpenproletariat of course, would be waiting in ambush there, to beat us up.

Waiting at the end of the street would be our parents, some other adults, or the 'Kinderfräulein.' Often children who had no one waiting for them would also walk under their protection. So the teacher would then hand over the children to the protection of other adults.

As far as the attitude of the population towards Jews goes, Topolcany was the worst city in Slovakia. Where else were they still beating Jews after the war? Only in Topolcany, in the today already notorious pogrom right after the war.

I and my classmates were friends. We were one big gang. My best friend was Herta Nagelová. Her father was a baker and we used to meet in his bakery, mainly during the winter; we used to go there in the afternoon, after school. At that time the bakery would be empty, because Herta's father baked bread and pastries at night.

There we'd play and talk. Mr. Nagel's father was also a baker. His bakery was on the main square. We used to take shoulet [chulent] there on Fridays. Because this bakery was the closest to us. The shoulet was still raw in the pot, which was covered by paper and our name would be written on it.

When you came for your shoulet, you recognized your pot. In the worst case by the name on the pot. I remember that once the shoulet didn't come out very thick, and I poured it out all over my coat on the way home.

I used to spend my free time with my classmates or in Hashomer Hatzair. I felt very comfortable in Hashomer. We used to have lectures and on Saturday we used to go on tiul - an outing. We used to go out into the country. We were learning the basics of Hebrew. From those times I remember the word 'sheket,' which is what you'd shout to quiet people down.

Otherwise, Hashomer Hatzair was a leftist organization, and they tried to indoctrinate us with Marxism. My brother Andrej, who brought me into it, wasn't a very big Zionist [24](#). His friends went there, and that influenced him. Before the war Andrej was supposed to aliyah [immigrate to Palestine]. He was already even all set to go, but in the end it didn't happen.

We never went to restaurants with our parents. That's something no one in Topolcany even considered. My father used to say: 'Why would you want to eat somewhere else, no one cooks as

well as your mother.' I've got a whole book of recipes from my mother.

Some years ago I sat down with her so that I could preserve her recipes for myself. Some recipes I have from Mrs. Weissová, who was friends with my mother until my mother died. Her cooking was practically the same as my mother's, because that's the way almost all Jewish households in Topolcany cooked.

I for example didn't manage to get my mother's recipe for fish with nuts in time. Mrs. Weissová gave me this recipe. What I didn't learn was how to bake a barkhes, especially how to braid it.

The first time I sat in a car was when I was five. My mother's cousin, who they shot along with his whole family in 1944 in Nemcice, was getting married. The wedding was in Piestany, and the whole family took a taxi to the wedding. I remember the taxi driver's name. He was named Mr. Cerveny.

Because Topolcany is on the Prievidza - Nitra train tracks, we traveled mainly by train. For example to my mother's brother's place in Prievidza. We used to mainly buy textiles from him. Once my mother bought me cloth for a coat there. That was the last coat that I got before the war.

We also used to by train to Malé Bielice for recreation. There was this small spa there, just for the day, without accommodations. There I learned to swim in this tiny pool. Once a year we'd travel to Dolné Otrokovce. By train of course, to the nearest train station. Dolné Otrokovce isn't on the train tracks. There a coach would be waiting for us, which would take us where we were going.

My brother Andrej became a typesetter by trade. When the deportations began, he was already 20. Each time there was a sweep being done in Topolcany, they would come for him. He ended up in Sered [25](#) for six or seven weeks. They took him there on one of the first transports. To this day I don't know how my mother managed to get him out of there. He returned to Topolcany, and they would come for him during every transport.

They used to come for the rest of us almost every week as well. It was horribly nerve-wracking. Our mother was constantly running around and arranging postponement of deportation. We had our rucksacks packed the whole time.

I had a smaller one, because I was only 13 at the time, and the others had bigger ones. Our mother had an exception because we owned some fields, because according to the exception she was farming on them.

All in all, I can say that she was constantly working on it, and our family has her to thank for its survival. At that time my father was almost 70, and a person as old as that couldn't get up to much at that time, under that horrible stress.

### • **During the war**

In those days I didn't understand the political events of the beginning of World War II very well. The first thing that afflicted us, children, was that they didn't accept us into high school, where I wanted to go study.

This was in 1940, when Jewish children weren't being accepted in any schools except Jewish ones. So I stayed in Jewish school. They added new grades for students that had been thrown out of other

schools. Before that the Jewish school had had five grades, and from 1940 it already had eight grades. Because before that, students had gone from Grade 5 to council school or to high school.

Since the school didn't have enough room, Grade 6 was mixed, and also had boys from Grades 7 and 8. This large class was located in the gym. Grade 7 and 8 girls made up a separate class. I attended Grade 6 and 7 there, up until we left for Dolné Otokovce. We left for there on 13th July 1942.

From Rosh Hashanah in 1940 we had to wear a six-pointed star [26](#) as a mark. We weren't allowed to go to the cinema, to the city park. We weren't allowed out after 6pm. We weren't allowed to go shopping, neither to the market nor to stores, before 10am. Then the Aryanization of my father's store arrived, and finally the transports, from which we tried to save ourselves, with exceptional luck, successfully.

All businesses were already Aryanized, for the sake of appearances. In the first round of Aryanization, the Aryanizer got 60%, and 40% remained in the hands of the Jewish owner. Afterwards they changed this ratio to 90 to 10%.

My father's business was Aryanized later, when the Aryanizer already got everything. That was in 1941. My father had already stopped ordering goods long before, so the Aryanizer didn't get a lot of goods.

To this I'd also like to add that the printing shop and bookbindery were 'purchased' from my father by Radic and Schenk Mayer for a symbolic price. My father was constantly having some problems, because until they got to the last source of finances, they didn't let him alone.

Problems began with bankbooks that my father hadn't reported in the list of property that Jews had to fill out in 1940. They found out about it somehow, that there were some deposits not on the list of property. This caused terrible problems. My parents were completely shattered by it all. Back then I didn't understand it yet.

To this I have to add an interesting little story: a few years ago, already after 1989, Radic phoned me, whether our family members, specifically my nephew, could arrange for him to have the print shop returned to him.

I'd heard of cases where people - even some Aryanizers - helped Jews. But us no one helped. To this I have to add that at the beginning of the 1970s I once met our Aryanizer Radic on the street in Topolcany, and he said to me: 'I was decent to you, I didn't send you to Auschwitz!'

After the Aryanization came the transports, which was the most horrible thing I've ever experienced. I was 13 at the time, and was attending school. There were gradually less and less of my classmates at their desks. There were less and less teachers, too.

We had a couple of teachers who were single. Those they took first. I've talked about how they came for my grandma. She was so fright-stricken that she left for the Jewish school, where they were gathering people for the transport, in only her nightshirt and slippers.

They yanked us out of our sleep at around 3am. My mom told me to wrap up some essentials for her and take them to the school. I met there our needlework teacher. The poor thing. Because

they'd written that everyone should bring some tools with them, she took her knitting and crochet needles with her.

I'm sure it was in vain, I'm sure that she went straight into the gas. The school superintendent, who was there, made faces at her behind her back, snickered and was entertained. She was a primitive, disgusting anti-Semite. Her name was Tonková. She was all glad to see the Jews gathering in the schoolyard.

There were more people gathering around the school. They were jammed against the school gates, were laughing, and for them it was a big show. I saw it all on other occasions as well, as I wanted to help by at least letting know those that didn't know about it, and could help those that had been afflicted.

Finally we got Grandma out of there, to my uncle's place in Prievidza. She stayed with him until 1944. After the Slovak National Uprising broke out, my uncle left for rebel territory with his family, and found a hiding place for her in Bojnice. There were three women there.

My grandmother, my uncle's mother-in-law, so Aunt Edita's mother, plus another lady their age. The third one somehow lost her nerve, left the hiding place and went out onto the street. Thus she gave away the others as well. They took them all at the end of 1944. She ended up in Auschwitz, in one of the last gassings! Horrible!

They used to come for us every little while. They would, of course, always be given something so that they'd leave and leave us be. I remember one time, when two of them came. Dobrovodsky, a city cop, and the gendarme Sládek. Sládek's wife was also an Aryanizer.

My father pulled 2,000 crowns out of his briefcase. [The value of one Slovak crown during the Slovak State - 1939-1945 was equal to 31.21 mg of pure gold. The rate of exchange between the German mark and the Slovak crown was artificially set at 1:11.]

Later that came back to haunt me, because after the war, during the Slansky affair [27](#), they expelled me from technical university. My cadre profile for that purpose had been sent from Topolcany. It was written by the same Dobrovodsky, who'd become a city clerk when they dissolved the city police force.

He wrote that besides other things my father had two apartment buildings, and that he was a big capitalist. Meanwhile, the other building wasn't my father's. Once I met Dobrovodsky in Topolcany, and I remember my conversation with him:

'Mr. Dobrovodsky, what was it that you wrote about my father having two buildings?'

'On the main square, this and this building,' and he pointed to two neighboring buildings, of which only one was really ours.

'But that other building is Polak's!'

'Oops, so I was wrong.' That's what people were like. The cadre material that he'd put together followed me all the way to retirement. All my life I had problems based on this material, and they de facto persecuted me because of it, or for my being Jewish.

So on 13th July 1942 we left Topolcany for Dolné Otrokovce. At home I've got a copy of the request that my father wrote so that they'd allow us to go away – Jews were forbidden to leave the town where they were registered with the police. This application had, according to regulations, a six-pointed star in the upper corner and the designation 'in the matter of a Jew.' Our entire family left: my parents, my two brothers and I. My uncle Béla lived there, with his wife and children, Zolo and Marta. He farmed on a farm he'd inherited from my grandfather. We moved in with him. It's only now that I understand properly how it got on his nerves when one day a family of five arrived. Especially his wife didn't like it. She was very religious, and at that time I'd had myself baptized. It was especially I that stuck in her craw. It even went so far that she stopped talking to me. She also caused me other unpleasanties. I guess we mutually very much got on each other's nerves. But in that situation none of us knew what to do.

In Dolné Otrokovce I was allowed to attend a state school, because I'd been baptized. The standard [of education] that I'd come with from the Topolcany Jewish school far outstripped the standards of that two-room village school.

So I had several privileges. For example, when the teacher was teaching, he'd sit me behind his desk and gave me my classmates' exercise books to correct. I, of course, had straight A's. Even though I didn't deserve the one for drawing.

The people living in this village were without exception decent people with a humane attitude towards Jews as well. After the atmosphere and experiences of anti-Semitic Topolcany, it was a big relief. Only once did it happen to me that one kid at school started yelling at me and cursing me that I was a Jew. He was smaller than I was, so the way I resolved it was that I beat him up.

Many people there helped us. Peter Durka, for example. We were like one big family with the Durkas, which has lasted almost to this day. The commander of the gendarmes in Horné Otrokovce, the Horné Otrokovce notary, helped us as well.

Despite this, in 1943 someone in the village informed on us. First they took Uncle Béla, then his family and finally us as well. We ended up in Novaky. I don't remember the name of the person that informed on us, but allegedly he fell in the uprising. I'll never forget the night that we spent in the jail in Hlohovec before the trip to Novaky.

Although we were five, we had only three narrow beds at our disposal, so my mom and older brother sat all night, and the rest 'slept' on beds that had paper sheets that rustled with every movement.

In Novaky we lived in the first complex. The second complex had workshops, and the third was also residential. My mother worked in one workshop in the first complex. This workplace was for women that had small children and for the old and sick who weren't able to walk over to the second complex to go to work.

Already back then my mother had problems with her legs, and wasn't able to make the daily walk to work in the second complex. In the workshop in the first complex they did various work: knitting, and cutting rags for rugs that were also woven there. They did all sorts of other things, too.

My father worked in the cardboard-making shop with my brother Andrej. Then Andrej was transferred to the cabinetmaking workshop. Rudo worked in the tinsmiths' workshop. From my first

to my last day there, I worked in the sewing shop.

Overall, the living conditions in Novaky were good, especially in comparison to what was taking place in the German concentration camps. We were especially afraid of the Germans occupying Slovakia as they'd be retreating and the front would be passing by here.

We expected that the first thing they'd do would be to immediately send the interned Jews in the camps to camps in Germany or Poland. Thank God, this didn't happen. It was prevented by the uprising. So we can also be thankful to the Slovak National Uprising for our lives.

As soon as the uprising broke out, on 29th August 1944, they dissolved the camp. Everyone could go where he liked. My mother sent Rudo to Prievidza to stay with his uncle. Andrej stayed in Novaky and I and my parents went to the train.

We were left with only what we were wearing. Everything else that stayed in the camp was stolen. We got on exactly the same train on which Rudo was returning from Prievidza, as he'd found that our uncle and his family weren't there anymore, and so he intended on going to Topolcany.

As the train was arriving at the station in Topolcany, my mother wanted to get off. My father pulled her back onto the train with the words: 'Topolcany stinks' and that under no conditions whatsoever would he go to Topolcany. So we kept going, and ended up in Dolné Otrokovce. Later this showed itself to be a fortunate decision.

Uncle Béla and his family were also in the Novaky camp and also returned to Dolné Otrokovce. We decided that we'd wait in Dolné Otrokovce to see what would happen next. My parents were so exhausted by those two years of fighting for survival and the stress connected with it, that they didn't want to think about or do anything. Because I wanted to do something and not just sit around and wait, I set out for Nitra, that I'd find something there.

After two or three days I returned, because my nerves couldn't handle it. All I did was cry constantly. In the meantime they had come to round up Jews in Dolné Otrokovce as well, but someone had warned my parents and Uncle Béla ahead of time. I've got this impression that either the commander of the gendarme station in Horné Otrokovce or Mr. Durka warned them. When I returned, they were already all in hiding. I went to see one local family, and they told me where I could find them.

When they left, they didn't have time to take hardly anything with them. My mother was accustomed to taking duvets everywhere with her instead of clothing. That paid off when they took us to Novaky and then also during our return from Novaky to Dolné Otrokovce, and it showed itself to be a good decision this time as well.

So anyways, still before dawn, I set out to look for them. I got there by morning, and spotted my mother. They were hiding in a grove of trees, under the open sky, together with my uncle's family. There was nothing there, just a quickly dug out 'zemlyanka' [a shelter dug into the ground] made of twigs and branches.

Then it somehow spread that we were there. We had to leave. We set out for Horné Otrokovce, where there was an abandoned forester's lodge. During the day we stayed outside - we were lucky that the weather was nice - and at night we slept in the lodge on a bare cement floor.

Once in the morning, when it had begun to rain a bit, a man with an axe appeared. My mother went out and began with a quavering voice: 'For the love of God, please don't hurt us, we're Jews and we're hiding here.' The answer was very surprising: 'Why, I recognize you, I'm Dr. Roth from Hlohovec.' The Roth family was hiding in Horné Otrokovce, and survived the war.

After several days, someone from the village warned us that they'd be coming to look for us - someone had probably informed on us. We had to immediately leave for Dolné Otrokovce. You see, in the meantime we'd found out that they'd already looked for us in the 'zemlyankas,' so we returned to the same 'zemlyankas.'

Remember, all movement was done at night. The most dangerous part was when we had to go along a road. Luckily back then there weren't as many cars on the road as today, so at night we didn't run into anyone. The weather in September was still nice, so several farmers from the village set out on a Sunday outing and came to visit the Jews hiding in 'zemlyankas.'

Back then, my mother, correctly guessing the value that land had for farmers, said that she would give the one that saved us his pick of part of our land. The next day one of the farmers returned with a kettle of soup. It was Peter Cizmarik. 'Here's some soup from my wife. So, let's make a deal on that land.'

It was signed and sealed. After nightfall we went to their place. We then stayed with them in one room, nine of us, our family - five people, and my mother's brother and his family - four people. We stayed there until liberation on 2nd April 1945.

We paid extra for the food they gave us - the fields were only in return for saving our lives. Despite this, what the Cizmarik family did for us was amazing. Peter Cizmarik endangered his whole family, he had five children. His wife cooked for all of us.

That means that she cooked for seventeen people, and all the while no one was allowed to see what large quantities of food she was cooking. The food wasn't anything special, we didn't get supper at all, but we ate and didn't go hungry.

After the terrible months of hiding, liberation arrived. Nitra was bombed on Easter Thursday. On Saturday we were looking through the curtains in the room, and saw that there were Germans running away through the valley below. In the afternoon a drummer came and announced that people shouldn't go outside. In the distance we heard artillery fire. The village is located in a valley, and above it there's a hill.

The Russians were already behind the hill. The lads from the village went up on the hill to have a look at the Russians, and one of them paid for that. The Russians didn't know who they were, and to be on the safe side shot at them, and killed one of them.

The last night, the farmer sent us all into the cellar. I was completely hysterical down there. I was imagining that after all that we'd lived through up to then, that they could kill us on the last night. Just before morning, we heard someone moving about in the yard.

The farmer came out into the yard and asked who was there. The answer was one of the most beautiful ones of my life: 'We're Russians.' The following evening we went back to the apartment where we'd lived in Dolné Otrokovce during the war.

The Russians were having a lot of fun with the village girls there. We lived in that apartment until May. I was the first in the family to go to Topolcany, because I wanted to investigate possibilities regarding attending school.

- **After the war**

Gradually our entire family returned to Topolcany, but not to our own apartment. Our Aryanizer, Stefan Radic, was living in our apartment. We had two free rooms upstairs, where one family who'd been deported had lived, and they'd all died.

Our kitchen was on the ground floor, where there was a vacant apartment from one old lady that had also been deported, and the Aryanizer had been using it for storage, and freed up one room for us, which we used as a kitchen.

There were strong anti-Jewish feelings in the town, fed by those that had things stolen from Jews who had returned and wanted their things back. During those times we constantly heard: 'More of you returned than left.'

This mood also fed the pogrom that broke out at the end of September 1945. It began with the fact that a Jewish doctor, Dr. Karol Berger, was vaccinating children who were going to school in the local convent. Already in the morning it spread through town that many children had died as a result of the vaccinations, which was a lie.

At that time I was in high school. That day our class didn't have school because of a so-called Principal's Holiday. When I got wind of what had happened, I left town. My older brother Andrej was working on a farm in Velké Dvorany as an accountant.

I went to see him. Alone and with no money. On the way there, I stopped off in Topolcany at a sawmill, and there I asked one man who was a friend of my father's for a hundred crowns for the trip. [In November 1945 the value of the crown in gold was set at 1 Kcs = 0.0178 g of gold.]

My mother stayed in town. My father went to visit a friend of his, also a man of similar age. Soldiers who had joined the pogrom came there for him, and took them away with them. They brought him, all bloodied, to the police station, where the town's Russian commander had ordered all the Jews to be gathered. Someone had beaten him on the way there. They took him to the hospital for treatment. He was the oldest of the Jews that had been beaten.

Soldiers came to our home for my brother Rudo. They were brought there by our Aryanizer's brother-in-law, Moravcik, who was helping his brother-in-law, our Aryanizer, at the store that had originally belonged to my father. The soldiers also took Rudo to the police station.

On the way there he was hit in the face so hard that he started bleeding. It happened in front of a store where the Aryanizer Korec was. During the war Korec was a well-known Guardist and participated in the rounding up of Jews.

I remember how he came for our neighbor, Ruzena Felseburgova, who they'd caught while she was attempting to cross the border into Hungary, to save herself from the transports. She'd gotten a half hour to pack her things, and Korec was ordering her to quickly finish.

In the evening, when Andrej and I returned home together, everything was over with, as gendarmes from Bratislava had arrived and restored order. Nothing happened to the people that had initiated the pogrom and took part in it, and demonstrably beat Jews.

They put them on trial, but let them go. At home we found our mother, who hadn't dared to turn on the lights, because she didn't know what things looked like outside and whether the pogrom wasn't still continuing. She didn't know anything about any of us, where we were, and was very glad when she saw my brother and me.

Then we went to the police station and there we met our father and my brother Rudo. Both of them had already gotten medical treatment. Then, accompanied by a Bratislava gendarme, we all went home.

My father never ever got back into his business, because he needed to get a so-called 'reliability' [a state certificate of reliability or loyalty]. I don't know exactly what it was called, but people used to call it 'reliability.' It was a piece of paper that certified that the person hadn't collaborated after the First Republic [28](#).

As the Aryanizer had a friend in the people's committee, he got a 'reliability,' but they refused to give my father one. The reason they gave was that we were Hungarians and Germans. At the time it was forbidden to speak German, and my father didn't know how to speak Slovak well. That was the reason he didn't receive that 'reliability,' and thus the store remained in the Aryanizer's hands and my father couldn't get his own store back.

Nothing remained of our prewar property. We got back only a little of it. I remember how once my mother went into the courtyard and from one neighbor's clothesline yanked some dishcloths and similar things, which had originally been ours and she was drying it out in the yard. They didn't even have enough shame to hide the things they'd stolen. Our neighbor saw it, but said not a word.

My mother even found our closets in one apartment. On the back of these closets, my father had written down the numbers of bankbooks he'd burned, as he hadn't included them in the declaration of property in 1940, when Jews had to declare their property, so that they could gradually confiscate what they'd declared.

He had the same numbers scored into a little pillbox that he'd carried on him throughout the whole war. My mother entered that apartment with a policeman. They, of course, immediately began with what was this supposed to mean and so on. The policeman said: 'Turn those closets around.' The numbers of course matched, and so we got the closets back.

Things like this naturally fed the pogrom mood. This is also why in his speech on the radio Lettrich [29](#) asked Jews to not ask for their things back from people they found them with, because it was causing needless anti-Jewish sentiments. It was always typical to turn the victims into the guilty.

With his property and income, my father belonged to the upper middle class. After the war, nothing remained of his property. We returned home with only the clothes on our backs. After the war, I went around in a coat I had gotten from one aunt.

I had only one dress, and I didn't get others until a few months after the war, from cloth sent by the UNRRA [The United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration]. From January 1946 I started

tutoring classmates, and with that money I bought myself clothes, because my parents didn't have money.

Our family' composition wasn't very well suited for emigration. My father was old, and he soon died, in 1948, and my brother Rudo and I were still snot-nosed kids, plus both of us wanted to study anyways.

Our brother Andrej did talk about how he would work to support the family, but we couldn't expect that of him. We also made a few attempts, but they ended up in failure. We had a relative in the United States, whom my father had entrusted with a huge sum of money in case we needed it.

His wife came to visit us before the war, and took 400,000 crowns [in 1929 it was decreed by law that the Czechoslovak crown – Kc – as a unit of Czechoslovak currency was equal in value to 44.58 mg of gold] back with her to the USA, but after the war they returned almost nothing.

They just sent us some used clothing and around 20,000 crowns, and that was it. He was my mother's cousin. During the war I was memorizing their address, and I knew that it was because we had lots of money there.

My father died in February 1948, and is buried in Topolcany, at the Jewish cemetery. My mother remained alone in Topolcany. My brother Rudo and I were studying in Bratislava, and Andrej was commuting to Piestany for work.

They wanted to throw my mother out of her apartment, saying that she was alone and didn't need it. They didn't want to recognize that all three of us siblings had our permanent address in Topolcany. Andrej went with me to the police station, they were the ones that wanted to throw my mother out, there he banged on the table and that helped. That's how it was finally resolved.

After the war, we didn't practice any religion in the family at all. My mother used to say that the God that had allowed what had happened is not God, and turned her back on him. She never set foot in a synagogue again.

Neither did we ever fast, and on Friday we didn't light candles. We just made pastries for the holidays, that remained. My father died in 1948, and he didn't have any affinity for religion at all. What's interesting is that my brother, who had at one time attended yeshivah, also became a non-believer.

We all became atheists. While he was still in Novaky, Rudo had been very devout, and when we began hiding out, during the first few days he didn't want to eat any meat, and ate only bread and milk, and butter when there was some.

After the war my mother told him that if he wanted it, she would lead a kosher household. He told her to not bother. After the war something in him changed, and he became a Communist. But he got over that as well.

My mother was very exhausted from saving the family, and no longer had the energy for anything bigger. In 1948 my father died, and from that time on she became very dependent on me. She did work at one time, she worked as an invoice clerk for minimum wage, but only so that she would get at least some sort of pension. Her first pension was 400 crowns. Because we had no property left,

she lived from hand to mouth. She lived in Topolcany, and Rudo and I in Bratislava. My brother Andrej did live in Topolcany, but worked in Piestany, so wasn't home during the week. When he got married, his wife also moved in with our mother.

I didn't get to a relatively decent apartment until 1962, and my mother would spend most of the year with me. Near my apartment there's a park where she used to sit on a bench with her friends – Jewish women her age. In 1966 she moved in with me completely.

She lived with me from then on, until she died. She died in 1977. She had heart problems and very limited mobility, so during the last few years she didn't even go out anymore, and insisted on not sitting at home alone, so I spent most of my time outside of work with her. According to her explicit wishes – 'I don't want to be eaten by worms' – we had her cremated, and her urn lies in an urn grove.

After the war, Rudo spent a year at home preparing for being accepted to high school. After the pogrom, he didn't want to live in Topolcany. He never even returned there, and lives in Bratislava. He decided to go into science. He made it as far as a doctorate.

Andrej eventually got a job, at first he worked in a printing plant in Bratislava. His last workplace before retirement was a book printer's in Partizanske. He died in 1994.

After the war I wrote my high school entrance exams, and after graduation I went to Bratislava to study at the Slovak Technical University. I managed to successfully graduate, even though in second year, in 1951, during the Slansky trials, they expelled me from school.

They gave various reasons: that I was a careerist, that I had a bad – capitalist – class background and so on. One of them was even true. I really don't have a fondness for manual labor. That was true, I was always more inclined towards mental and not physical labor, which back then meant mainly work with a pick and shovel. In order to prove my fondness for labor, I applied for brigade work, washing windows at a newly built building on campus.

During the brigade work, I received an invitation to register for the next year. The woman clerk at the dean's office didn't want to register me. The dean of the faculty resolved it. He formally gave me a dean's 'reprimand' for 'behavior unbecoming Communist youth.' 'And now run and get yourself registered.'

Before I graduated the Communists tried to expel me one more time, but this time the university chancellor came to my rescue. He then talked about such cases in television after the year 1989 [30](#), that he didn't allow good students to be expelled for 'singing Communist Youth songs out of tune.'

However, I received such a cadre profile that I could only work in a factory. In it they wrote that they had expelled me from school, but that they'd refused it at the chancellor's office, because 'the chancellor's office contained elements similar to Ruzena R.'

This is what I had written in my cadre profile, which followed me my whole life until retirement. By those 'elements' they meant that there were some Jews sitting in the chancellor's office, and that they had arranged it for me. It took me several decades before I realized this.

And that at the instigation of a non-Jewish girlfriend of mine. Those were the 1950s, today we know that they were strongly anti-Semitic, but back then we didn't understand it. So finally I finished my studies after all. Everything ended up fine, just in Marxism-Leninism I couldn't get higher than a C, the worst grade, but enough to pass the exam.

After finishing my studies, I got a placement offer for the Dimitrovka [Editor's note: The Juraj Dimitrov Chemical Works, today named Istrochem. One of the oldest companies in the chemical industry, it was founded in 1873 by Alfred Nobel, the inventor of dynamite.]

Apparently my 'diagnosis' [cadre profile] contributed to this. They greeted me enthusiastically, because they had a shortage of engineers. Back then, no one wanted to start working there voluntarily. The conditions there were very bad. Whoever could, got out of there. I used to say that through a process of natural selection, the only ones to remain there will be either stupid or with a bad cadre profile. In other words, people who didn't have a chance anywhere else.

My cadre profile chained me to that place all my life, which they made sure was thoroughly bitter. In what way? My boss, who was my boss for ten years, was a terrible anti-Semite. When I needed only one day's holiday, because I wanted to have a long weekend because I was going to go visit my mother in Topolcany, his answer was: 'Not on Monday, take Tuesday off,' and so on. During the time he was my boss, he never even once gave me a raise. After 1968 [31](#) conditions improved a bit.

After 1968, a slightly softer era began in the plant as well. My position improved a bit, too. I no longer had an anti-Semite for a boss, and I was treated decently, too. In 1983 I was eligible for retirement, as I had a so-called 255 [32](#); because they asked me, I stayed there and worked for another three years part-time.

Those were the nicest times in the plant where I worked for 33 years. In June 1986 I retired. I still remember that the most beautiful day of my life, besides 2nd April 1945, when we were liberated, of course, was 30th June 1986. After that I did translations at home and worked as an interpreter. I translated mainly from German to Slovak and vice-versa. This I did until 1991.

My lifelong hobbies have been reading, swimming and attending the theater. My friends were from various circles. In the first place, I had to be sure that they weren't anti-Semites. I've got very sensitive ears for subtle insinuations.

They apparently don't realize this. For example, one female colleague of mine was scandalized by Jews being thrown out of good positions [during the 1950s]: 'they should really have kept them working - for us.'

I was 48 when my mother died, and right after that, I began to concern myself mainly with my own illnesses.

From the time I learned to read, I read every day. Luckily I'm able to pick from among several languages, which was an advantage especially during the Communist era, when there weren't a lot of good books being published in Slovak or Czech, as they were forbidden.

I came by my linguistic capabilities quite early on, and therefore also easily. At home, besides Slovak we also spoke German, my parents also spoke Hungarian to each other, I took private

English lessons since childhood, in high school we had French, and I caught on to Russian. I'm sorry that I don't know Hebrew, because most of my next generation of relatives in Israel don't know any other language.

Even though opportunities for travel were very limited, I tried to take vacations abroad. But always when I returned, especially from the West, it took me a few days to get used to the conditions here. As soon as it was possible, my first trip was to Israel.

That was in 1991. I was there for three weeks. I wanted to make use of the possibility as soon and as much as I could, because my health was rapidly getting worse. I mainly visited my relatives and friends from school in Topolcany.

I tried to see everyone, as I hadn't seen them for 40 years. The sight that made the greatest impression on me was Masada. I was captivated by that whole atmosphere. Of course, visiting the Wailing Wall was also a big experience for me.

I was no longer able to fully take advantage of the changes after 1989. My age and bad state of health didn't allow it. But during the first few months I was very happy that I'd even lived to see the change.

I realized that the euphoria that I had also allowed myself to be enraptured by wouldn't last long, but I enjoyed it to the fullest. I remember that right when it was going on, I was lying in the hospital. I got discharged home from the hospital, at home I turned on the TV, and had an immense feeling of happiness.

Several months later, the filth began. Communists were leeching off it, nationalists were rearing their heads, mainly descendents of the wartime Slovak State, and once again history began to be rewritten.

In 1991 this one funny thing happened to me. My cousin from Israel and his wife were at my place visiting. On the street I met the wife of one of my colleagues, who we called 'Emil the Communist.' In his time he used to threaten me that my comments could have dire consequences for me. With great satisfaction I said to his wife: 'Right now I've got relatives from Israel visiting me, whom I kept a secret from the Communists for 40 years.'

The revolution in 1989 influenced our daily life, starting with being able to find the basic necessities of life. I say to people that I'm no longer able to imagine how we used to shop back then, because every day on the way home from work, I'd go stand in a queue to buy something - whatever they had right then.

The store was up on the first floor, and the queue used to stretch down to the ground floor. There I stood and waited, to see what I'd get that day.

Today I spend my spare time at the computer; I send emails and also look around on the internet a bit. I recently found the address for Yad Vashem [33](#) and I'm upset over the lists of those that perished, whom I'd known and who for me aren't an abstract concept. I correspond with friends, I talk to some of them on the phone regularly, and sometimes I watch TV, on the rare occasion that there's something interesting on.

I'm glad that research of this type is being carried out, so that what went on during that bloody 20th century will be recorded, and I consider it my duty to leave the facts about my life for those that will come after us. Though I'm not very convinced that it'll be of interest to anyone.

## Glossary

### **1 Hlinka Slovak People's Party (HSLs)**

A political party founded in 1918 as the Slovak People's Party, in 1925 the HSLs. Had an anti-communist, anti-socialist orientation, based itself on Catholic ideology, and demanded Slovakia's autonomy.

From 1938 assumed a prominent position in Slovakia, in 1939 introduced an authoritarian one-party regime, its ideology was a mixture of clericalism, nationalism and fascism. Its leader until 1938 was Andrej Hlinka, after him Jozef Tiso.

The HSLs founded two mass organizations: the Hlinka Guards, a copy of the German Sturmabteilung, and the Hlinka Youth, a copy of the German Hitlerjugend. After the liberation of Czechoslovakia in 1945, it was banned and its highest officials put on trial.

**2 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.

### **3 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.

### **4 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.

## **5 Anschluss**

The German term "Anschluss" (literally: connection) refers to the inclusion of Austria in a "Greater Germany" in 1938. In February 1938, Austrian Chancellor Schuschnigg had been invited to visit Hitler at his mountain retreat at Berchtesgaden.

A two-hour tirade against Schuschnigg and his government followed, ending with an ultimatum, which Schuschnigg signed. On his return to Vienna, Schuschnigg proved both courageous and foolhardy. He decided to reaffirm Austria's independence, and scheduled a plebiscite for Sunday, 13th March, to determine whether Austrians wanted a "free, independent, social, Christian and united Austria."

Hitler' protégé, Seyss-Inquart, presented Schuschnigg with another ultimatum: Postpone the plebiscite or face a German invasion. On 11th March Schuschnigg gave in and canceled the plebiscite.

On 12th March 1938 Hitler announced the annexation of Austria. When German troops crossed into Austria, they were welcomed with flowers and Nazi flags. Hitler arrived later that day to a rapturous reception in his hometown of Linz.

Less well disposed Austrians soon learned what the "Anschluss" held in store for them. Known Socialists and Communists were stripped to the waist and flogged. Jews were forced to scrub streets and public latrines. Schuschnigg ended up in a concentration camp and was only freed in 1945 by American troops.

## **6 First Vienna Decision**

On 2nd November 1938 a German-Italian international committee in Vienna obliged Czechoslovakia to surrender much of the southern Slovakian territories that were inhabited mainly by Hungarians.

The cities of Kassa (Kosice), Komarom (Komarno), Ersekujvar (Nove Zamky), Ungvar (Uzhorod) and Munkacs (Mukacevo), all in all 11.927 km<sup>2</sup> of land, and a population of 1.6 million people became part of Hungary. According to the Hungarian census in 1941 84% of the people in the annexed lands were Hungarian-speaking.

## **7 Terezin/Theresienstadt**

A ghetto in the Czech Republic, run by the SS. Jews were transferred from there to various extermination camps. The Nazis, who presented Theresienstadt as a 'model Jewish settlement,' used it to camouflage the extermination of European Jews.

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 café, a bank, kindergartens, a school, and flower gardens were put up to deceive the committee.

## **8 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 Decision 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, 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. (Source: Niznansky, Eduard: Zidovska komunita na Slovensku 1939-1945, [http://www.holocaust.cz/cz2/resources/texts/niznansky\\_komunita](http://www.holocaust.cz/cz2/resources/texts/niznansky_komunita)) Niznansky, Eduard: Zidovska komunita na Slovensku 1939-1945)

## **9 Rozsadomb**

The area known as Rózsadomb (Rose Hill) is a rich and well-heeled area of the Buda side of Budapest, the capital of Hungary. Most of the city's wealthiest and most famous residents live here. House prices are amongst the highest. The area has a great deal of natural beauty with easy access to local parks and the forests and hills around the Buda area.

## **10 Wallenberg, Raoul (1912-47?)**

Swedish diplomat and businessman. In 1944, he was assigned to Sweden's legation in Budapest,

where he helped save approximately 100,000 Hungarian Jews from Nazi extermination. He issued Swedish passports to approximately 20,000 Jews and sheltered others in houses he bought or rented.

Adolf Eichmann, heading the transport of Jews to concentration camps, demanded that Wallenberg stop these activities and ordered his assassination, but the attempt failed. In 1945, the Soviets, who had just entered Budapest, imprisoned him, possibly because of work he was doing for the U.S. secret service.

In 1957 the Soviet government announced that he had died in prison of a heart attack in 1947, but he was reported seen at later dates. In 1991 Soviet authorities released KGB records that, although they did not contain proof that Wallenberg was dead, appeared to confirm that he had died in 1947, most likely by execution. He was made an honorary U.S. citizen in 1981. (Source: The Columbia Encyclopedia, Sixth Edition. 2001)

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

Ferenc Szalasi was the leader of the Arrow-Cross Party, prime minister. He came from a middle class family, his father was a clerk. He studied at the Becsujhely Military Academy, and in 1915 he became a lieutenant.

After WWI he was nominated captain and became a member of the general staff. In 1930 he became a member of the secret race protecting association called Magyar Elet [Hungarian Life], and in 1935 he established his own association, called Nemzeti Akarat Partja [Party of the National Will].

At the 1936 interim elections his party lost, and the governing party tried to prevent them from gaining more ground. At the 1939 elections Szalasi and his party won 31 electoral mandates. At German pressure Horthy appointed him as prime minister, and shortly after he got hold of the presidential office too.

He introduced a total terror with the Arrow-Cross men and continued the eradication of the Jewry, and the hauling of the values of the country to Germany. He was arrested by American troops in Germany, where he had fled from Soviet occupation on 29th March 1945. He was executed as war criminal on 12th March 1946.

## **12 Great Depression**

At the end of October 1929, there were worrying signs on the New York Stock Exchange in the securities market. On 24th October ('Black Thursday'), people began selling off stocks in a panic from the price drops of the previous days - the number of shares usually sold in a half year exchanged hands in one hour.

The banks could not supply the amount of liquid assets required, so people didn't receive money from their sales. Five days later, on 'Black Tuesday', 16.4 million shares were put up for sale, prices dropped steeply, and the hoarded properties suddenly became worthless.

The collapse of the Stock Exchange was followed by economic crisis. Banks called in their outstanding loans, causing immediate closings of factories and businesses, leading to higher unemployment, and a decline in the standard of living. By January of 1930, the American money market got back on its feet, but during this year newer bank crises unfolded: in one month, 325 banks went under.

Toward the end of 1930, the crisis spread to Europe: in May of 1931, the Viennese Creditanstalt collapsed (and with its recall of outstanding loans, took Austrian heavy industry with it). In July, a bank crisis erupted in Germany, by September in England, as well.

In Germany, in 1931, more than 19,000 firms closed down. Though in France the banking system withstood the confusion, industrial production and volume of exports tapered off seriously. The agricultural countries of Central Europe were primarily shaken up by the decrease of export revenues, which was followed by a serious agricultural crisis.

Romanian export revenues dropped by 73 percent, Poland's by 56 percent. In 1933 in Hungary, debts in the agricultural sphere reached 2.2 billion Pengoes. Compared to the industrial production of 1929, it fell 76 percent in 1932 and 88 percent in 1933. Agricultural unemployment levels, already causing serious concerns, swelled immensely to levels, estimated at the time to be in the hundreds of thousands. In industry the scale of unemployment was 30 percent (about 250,000 people).

### **13 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.

### **14 Wehrmacht (German Armed Forces)**

Wehrmacht was the official name of the German Army between 1935 and 1945, which consisted of land, naval and air forces. Apart from the soldiers of the Wehrmacht, the members of the Waffen-SS also participated in actions during WWII.

It grew out of the para-military SS (Schutzstaffel) body established within the Nazi party in 1925 after their takeover and originally constituted Hitler's personal bodyguards. Placed under the

Wehrmacht, however, the Waffen-SS participated in battles from 1939. Its elite units committed the massacres of Oradour, Malmedy, Le Paradis and elsewhere.

## **15 German Invasion of Poland**

The German attack of Poland on 1st September 1939 is widely considered the date in the West for the start of World War II. After having gained both Austria and the Bohemian and Moravian parts of Czechoslovakia, Hitler was confident that he could acquire Poland without having to fight Britain and France. (To eliminate the possibility of the Soviet Union fighting if Poland were attacked, Hitler made a pact with the Soviet Union, the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact.)

On the morning of 1st September 1939, German troops entered Poland. The German air attack hit so quickly that most of Poland's air force was destroyed while still on the ground. To hinder Polish mobilization, the Germans bombed bridges and roads. Groups of marching soldiers were machine-gunned from the air, and they also aimed at civilians.

On 1st September, the beginning of the attack, Great Britain and France sent Hitler an ultimatum - withdraw German forces from Poland or Great Britain and France would go to war against Germany. On 3rd September, with Germany's forces penetrating deeper into Poland, Great Britain and France both declared war on Germany.

## **16 Slovak Uprising**

At Christmas 1943 the Slovak National Council was formed, consisting of various oppositional groups (communists, social democrats, agrarians etc.). Their aim was to fight the Slovak fascist state.

The uprising broke out in Banska Bystrica, central Slovakia, on 29th August 1944. On 18th October the Germans launched an offensive. A large part of the regular Slovak army joined the uprising and the Soviet Army also joined in.

Nevertheless the Germans put down the riot and occupied Banska Bystrica on 27th October, but weren't able to stop the partisan activities. As the Soviet army was drawing closer many of the Slovak partisans joined them in Eastern Slovakia under either Soviet or Slovak command.

## **17 Novaky labor camp**

Established in 1941 in the central Slovakian town of Novaky. In an area of 2.27 km<sup>2</sup> 24 barracks were built, which accommodated 2,500-3,000 people in 1943. Many of the people detained in Novaky were transported to the Polish camps. The camp was liberated by the partisans on 30th August 1944 and the inmates joined the partisans.

## **18 Gleiwitz III**

A satellite labor camp in Auschwitz, set up alongside an industrial factory, Gleiwitzer Hütte, manufacturing weapons, munitions and railway wheels. The camp operated from July 1944 until January 1945; around 600 prisoners worked there.

## **19 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.

## **20 Orthodox communities**

The traditionalist Jewish communities founded their own Orthodox organizations after the Universal Meeting in 1868-1869. They organized their life according to Judaist principles and opposed to assimilative aspirations.

The community leaders were the rabbis. The statute of their communities was sanctioned by the king in 1871. In the western part of Hungary the communities of the German and Slovakian immigrants' descendants were formed according to the Western Orthodox principles.

At the same time in the East, among the Jews of Galician origins the 'eastern' type of Orthodoxy was formed; there the Hassidism prevailed. In time the Western Orthodoxy also spread over to the eastern part of Hungary. In 1896, there were 294 Orthodox mother-communities and 1,001 subsidiary communities registered all over Hungary, mainly in Transylvania and in the north-eastern part of the country,.

In 1930, the 136 mother-communities and 300 subsidiary communities made up 30.4 percent of all Hungarian Jews. This number increased to 535 Orthodox communities in 1944, including 242,059 believers (46 percent).

## **21 Hashomer Hatzair in Slovakia**

The Hashomer Hatzair movement came into being in Slovakia after WWI. It was Jewish youths from Poland, who on their way to Palestine crossed through Slovakia and here helped to found a Zionist youth movement, that took upon itself to educate young people via scouting methods, and called itself Hashomer (guard). It joined with the Kadima (forward) movement in Ruthenia.

The combined movement was called Hashomer Kadima. Within the membership there were several ideologues that created a dogma that was binding for the rest of the members. The ideology was based on Borchov's theory that the Jewish nation must also become a nation just like all the others.

That's why the social pyramid of the Jewish nation had to be turned upside down. He claimed that the base must be formed by those doing manual labor, especially in agriculture - that is why young people should be raised for life in kibbutzim, in Palestine. During its time of activity it organized six kibbutzim:

Shaar Hagolan, Dfar Masaryk, Maanit, Haogen, Somrat and Lehavot Chaviva, whose members settled in Palestine. From 1928 the movement was called Hashomer Hatzair (Young Guard). From 1938 Nazi influence dominated in Slovakia.

Zionist youth movements became homes for Jewish youth after their expulsion from high schools and universities. Hashomer Hatzair organized high school courses, re-schooling centers for youth, summer and winter camps. Hashomer Hatzair members were active in underground movements in labor camps, and when the Slovak National Uprising broke out, they joined the rebel army and partisan units.

After liberation the movement renewed its activities, created youth homes in which lived mainly children who returned from the camps without their parents, organized re-schooling centers and branches in towns. After the putsch in 1948 that ended the democratic regime, half of Slovak Jews left Slovakia. Among them were members of Hashomer Hatzair. In the year 1950 the movement ended its activity in Slovakia.

## **22 Betar**

Brith Trumpledor (Hebrew) meaning Trumpledor Society; right-wing Revisionist Jewish youth movement. It was founded in 1923 in Riga by Vladimir Jabotinsky, in memory of J. Trumpledor, one of the first fighters to be killed in Palestine, and the fortress Betar, which was heroically defended for many months during the Bar Kohba uprising. Its aim was to propagate the program of the revisionists and prepare young people to fight and live in Palestine.

It organized emigration through both legal and illegal channels. It was a paramilitary organization; its members wore uniforms. They supported the idea to create a Jewish legion in order to liberate Palestine. From 1936-39 the popularity of Betar diminished. During WWII many of its members formed guerrilla groups.

## **23 Karlovy Vary (German name**

Karlsbad): The most famous Bohemian spa, named after Bohemian King Charles (Karel) IV, who allegedly found the springs during a hunting expedition in 1358. It was one of the most popular resorts among the royalty and aristocracy in Europe for centuries.

## **24 Zionism**

A movement defending and supporting the idea of a sovereign and independent Jewish state, and

the return of the Jewish nation to the home of their ancestors, Eretz Israel - the Israeli homeland. The final impetus towards a modern return to Zion was given by the show trial of Alfred Dreyfuss, who in 1894 was unjustly sentenced for espionage during a wave of anti-Jewish feeling that had gripped France.

The events prompted Dr. Theodor Herzl (1860-1904) to draft a plan of political Zionism in the tract 'Der Judenstaat' ('The Jewish State', 1896), which led to the holding of the first Zionist congress in Basel (1897) and the founding of the World Zionist Organization (WZO). The WZO accepted the Zionist emblem and flag (Magen David), hymn (Hatikvah) and an action program.

## **25 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.

## **26 Yellow star - Jewish star in Protectorate**

On 1st September 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 19th September 1941. It was another step aimed at eliminating Jews from society. The idea's author was Reinhard Heydrich himself.

## **27 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.

## **28 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.

## **29 Lettrich, Jozef (1905 - 1968)**

Slovak politician. From 1939 active in the anti-fascist resistance. During 1945-1948 the head of the Democratic Party, the chairman of the SNR (Slovak National Council) and a member of the National Assembly. In 1948 he was forced to resign from his post of chairman of the SNR. He immigrated to the USA, where he was active in exile organizations.

## **30 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.

### **31 Political changes in 1969**

Following the Prague Spring of 1968, which was suppressed by armies of the Soviet Union and its satellite states, a program of 'normalization' was initiated. Normalization meant the restoration of continuity with the pre-reform period and it entailed thoroughgoing political repression and the return to ideological conformity.

Top levels of government, the leadership of social organizations and the party organization were purged of all reformist elements. Publishing houses and film studios were placed under new direction. Censorship was strictly imposed, and a campaign of militant atheism was organized.

A new government was set up at the beginning of 1970, and, later that year, Czechoslovakia and the Soviet Union signed the Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation and Mutual Assistance, which incorporated the principle of limited sovereignty. Soviet troops remained stationed in Czechoslovakia and Soviet advisers supervised the functioning of the Ministry of Interior and the security apparatus.

### **32 Certificate under Article 255/1946 Coll**

: Certificate awarded to certain people involved in the national struggle for liberation during World War II. It was issued by the Ministry of Defense and entailed certain advantages, such as early retirement.

### **33 Yad Vashem**

This museum, founded in 1953 in Jerusalem, honors both Holocaust martyrs and 'the Righteous Among the Nations', non-Jewish rescuers who have been recognized for their 'compassion, courage and morality'.