Ladislav Urban

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Iza

Slovak Republic

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Mr. Ladislav Urban was born a few years before the outbreak of World War II, into a financially secure family. He didn't get to enjoy much of the carefree childhood that would have awaited him under normal circumstances. First of all came the persecution of Jews, which directly affected him and his family. In 1942 he lost his mother. The remainder of his family spent the following years in hiding and as inmates of concentration camps. After the war, he studied and graduated from a technical university. For almost his entire life, he worked as a manager in a company that concerned itself with the building of hydro projects and dams. He is currently in retirement, and thus has more time, which he devotes among other things to the study of history, especially in relation to the Holocaust.

My paternal grandfather was named Sigmund Urban. He was born in Piestany in 1858. His wife was named Terezia. She was born in 1863. I don't remember my grandparents the Urbans at all; they died before I was born. My grandfather in 1931, and my grandmother in 1925. They're both buried at the Jewish cemetery in Piestany. My grandfather had a textile store in the town, which my father then took over. The store is still there. But our family no longer runs it. My grandmother was a housewife.

My grandparents the Urbans had 13 children. All were born in Piestany. Their names were Alexander, Emanuel, Eugen [Jenö], Gizela [Gizi] Helena [Ilus (pron. Ilush)], Johana [Hana], Jozefina [Jozka (pron. Jozhka)], Julius [Gyula], Rudolf, Sidonia [Sidka], Tibor. I don't remember the names of the rest at the moment. Emanuel died in childhood of tuberculosis.

Eugen Urban was the oldest of the siblings. His wife was named Janka, informally Jeany. They had a son, Robert. They lived in Bratislava. Uncle Eugen was the owner of *Kohlengrüben Urban*. The company offices were on what is today Hviezdoslav Square in Bratislava, across from the American embassy. The lived in an apartment house in Na Palisadoch St. They owned two whole buildings there. They also owned a villa in Na Cervenovej St. Currently that villa is home to ether the Austrian or Italian Embassy. He also owned a villa on a large piece of property across from Slavin. My uncle's buyer, Dr. Banhegyi, rented it from him. Later they built a Jewish hospital on part of the property. He donated the property, where it was later built. Besides this, he also owned properties that were on what were back then the outskirts of Bratislava. Recently there was a large central market there. In the past there was a coal railway station there. They used to transport coal there from mines in Austria, and it was then further distributed and sold.

Uncle Eugen was what today we could call a workaholic. He wore terribly thick glasses and worked from morning till night. It was a large company, with many employees. All of my uncle's employees were Jews. His office buildings and staff were in Februarka [*February Victory Street*]. The buildings are still there. His two chauffeurs lived there too; they drove his cars, which were parked in garages there.

My uncle's wife, Aunt Jeany, was born in Zlate Moravce. I remember one comical incident that happened in the family. During the beginnings of World War II, the entire family used to get together for lunch at my parents' place. My father's sister Jozefina [*Jozka*] Deutschova would cook for us. When the weather was good, we'd eat out in the garden. First the kids would eat, then the men, and finally the women. Jeany was a vegetarian. My father [*Alexander Urban*] yelled at her: "Jeany, come eat already, or your lunch will wilt!"

Jeany used to go picking herbs with her son Robert. She'd then dry and monnkey around with them. This family couldn't stand physical work, couldn't handle it, to be more precise. They weren't capable of physical work. Without his glasses, my uncle was completely blind. Robert was the same. I was there when he got a slap and his glasses flew off. He really couldn't see a thing without them! During the war, they were hiding out in Piestany. They caught and deported them. Probably to Auschwitz, or Lublin. Only Robert survived the Holocaust. They nationalized all their property 1. So nothing was left of it.

During the war, he lived with us for a certain time. My father adopted him, along with our cousin Ludevit [*Lulo, Louis*]. After the war, Robert graduated from high school in Piestany. In time he left with Joint 2 to Canada. Finally he graduated from law. After the revolution, in 1989, he wanted to move in with us. We couldn't agree with it. His personality can be illustrated with the following anecdote. At one time he was working in Prague. Once during the night, my phone rang. It was Robert. He says: "Imagine, I bought an apartment in Prague, and the can doesn't work. It won't flush." No one wanted to come and fix it for him, and he asked whether I wouldn't come to Prague , to fix his toilet. That shows his strange way of thinking. I'm not saying that he wasn't normal, but he had ideas that bordered on abnormality.

Gizela Klinger, née Urban. We called her Gizi neni [*Aunt Gizi in Hungarian*]. She was married to Mr. Klinger, who was a watchmaker. They lived in Budapest. They had a daughter, Maria, Marcsa. After the war, Maria moved with her husband to Paris. When Mr. Klinger died, Gizi neni left for France to live with her daughter.

Helena Quittner, née Urban. In the family we called her Ilush neni. Her husband was named Ignatz Quittner, and owned a store with lumber and construction materials. Her husband died before I was born. Aunt Helena owned and operated a well-known and notorious restaurant in Piestany. It was named Kominar [*Chimneysweep*]. She employed two cooks and a barman. The barman, besides pouring beer, also took care everything that was necessary. One of the rooms in the restaurant was decorated with hunting trophies. There were antlers, heads of wild boar, deer, and so on. The food was excellent there. We used to go there often. We'd always get something sweet. In the restaurant courtyard, there was a large icehouse. In the winter, when the Vah [River] would freeze over, they'd organize ice-cutting. The ice would then be stored, and that's where they'd chill beverages. There weren't any refrigerators. Everything that needed to be chilled, or frozen, was chilled with natural ice. Aunt Helena was childless. Alas, she didn't survive the war. They took her

to a concentration camp, where she was murdered like almost all the women in our family.

Johana Lichtensteinova, née Urban. We called her Hana. For many years, she worked as a member of the Piestany city council, where she was in charge of the social commission. Her husband, Erno Lichtenstein, was the superintendent of a large farm belonging to Count Erdody. The farm was located in the municipality of Rakovice, about eight kilometers from Piestany. They had one son. His name was Leo. He was quite a bit older than I. In the second half of the 1930s, Leo finished his medicine studies in Prague. He was then in hiding there during the entire war, and managed to survive. Before the war, he changed his name to Leo Liska. He helped us a lot then, and when we were returning from the concentration camps as well. He examined me in Prague. Back then, we were there for about two weeks, but I'll get to that later. Later I used to play competitive basketball, among others for Slovan Bratislava. When our team went to Prague for a league game, I'd always call him. "Leo, I'm here, do you have time?" When he had time, he always came to see me. He was accustomed to slipping me a hundred, so that I'd have some money to "see the town". His mother was murdered in a concentration camp.

Jozefina Deutschova, née Urban. For everyone in the family, she was Jozka. Her husband was named Julius [*Gyula*] Deutsch. They lived in Bratislava, and were childless. Aunt Jozka used to cook for the entire family at the start of the war. They were in hiding at our place. Uncle Guyla used to sit in just one room. He couldn't go anyplace, as he didn't have papers. I used to go there to visit him and talk to him.

Julius Urban lived in Paris. He has a daughter, Tereza. I'm not in touch with her. They survived the war, they were in hiding someplace. I was at their place for a visit about 30 years ago. They were living in very bad conditions. In the 19th District, in one old building that was in horrible shape. Tereza worked in health care all her life. She was a CT [*Computer Tomography*] operator.

Rudolf Urban had two sons. One was named Tibor, and the other Imre. Imre left with the Aliyah for the Palestine in 1938. There he joined the army, and worked his way up to colonel. He was in the Israeli army his whole life. When he retired from the army, he moved to Australia. His brother Tibor survived the Holocaust and moved to Israel to be with his brother. He started a tailoring business in the town of Ramat Gan. He employed around 50 people. They've both since died.

Sidonia Sohnenfeldova, née Urban. In the family we called her Sidka. Mr. Sohnenfeld was a traveling salesman. They had a son Ludevit, Lula. They lived in Bratislava, on Vysoka St. Lula's parents were also killed during the war. After the war, my father adopted him. At that time Lula also changed his surname to Urban. He did his basic army service in the Czechoslovak Army. They put him in with the Black Barons 3. So he served his time in the army as a lumberjack by Ruzomberk. He studied civil engineering. He worked for the Civil Engineering Research Institute. Once he went with Cedok [*The official Czechoslovak state travel agency during Communist times*] to Cannes for a week-long holiday. He never returned home from France. He settled down in Paris. He never married. He worked as a chief engineer at water and waste treatment plants. He died last winter [*2006*].

Tibor Urban lived in Samorin. He had a house on the main square. He sold textiles there, just like my father. Tibor and his family survived the war. They've all since died, though. Most of them are buried at the Jewish cemetery in Budapest.

The youngest of the Urbans' sons was my father. My father was named Alexander Urban, and was born on 22nd November 1901. As he was the youngest of the entire bevy of children, his uncle, who lived in Alexandria, took over his upbringing. His uncle owned a hat shop, and my father grew up with him. He attended school there for about four years. Thus he also learned languages. He knew seven world languages, both spoken and written. He spoke English, German, French, Spanish, Arabic, Hungarian and Slovak, and could of course read Hebrew. He then began studying business in Vienna, and eventually at a school for diplomats in the Swiss town of Schafhausen. It's still there. It's one of the oldest schools of its type in the world. Many of his classmates later held important political functions, and during their diplomatic visits to Czechoslovakia they'd to visit my father as well. After his father died, my father returned to Piestany to take over the family business. That was around 1931. He lived in Piestany after the war too. He died in the hospital in Bratislava in 1984. He's buried at the Piestany Jewish cemetery, in his parents' grave.

My father also served in the Czechoslovak army. He joined up in Trencin. He told me that they even promoted him. He worked as a laborer in the kitchen. A local Jewish merchant used to supply them with meat. Well, and once it didn't smell good, and they refused to cook it. By the barracks there was an alley with plum trees. They ordered some soldiers over to pick the plums, and made plum dumplings from them. They cooked them out in the courtyard. Their superiors liked the lunch so much that they promoted the cooks. The second time was when they drafted my father during the mobilization in 1938 4. But he stayed there for only a short time.

The whole family on my father's side was religious. On Friday they attended synagogue, and observed all holidays. They'd take poultry to be slaughtered to the shachter [*shachter: ritual butcher – Editor's note*]. Bread we'd take to the Jewish baker. The bakery was by the old, Orthodox synagogue. There they also baked matzot for Passover [*Passover: commemorates the departure of the Israelites from Egyptian captivity and is characterized by many regulations and customs. The foremost is the prohibition of consuming anything containing yeast – Editor's note*]. As I child, I used to take bread there every week. I had a little wagon, and in it would be two or three loaves of bread in a basket. I'd take them to the baker in the morning, before school, and on the way back from school I'd pick them up.

My mother's parents [*Alzbeta Urban, née Grünfeld*] lived in Trnava. My grandfather was named Bernat Grünfeld. He was a tall, strong man. He wore a mustache that had a bit of a curl. I don't remember my grandma's name. They were both deported. First they were in the collection camp in Zilina, and from there they took them to Poland. They killed them in Majdanek 5.

My grandfather owned a pub. It was called 'Zeleny strom' [*The Green Tree*]. To this day, there's still a pub in that location in Trnava. The pub was by a sugar refinery, and served as a "travelers' inn". It was mainly for the coachmen who used to bring sugarbeet to the refinery. They'd also bring it from Rakovice, where my uncle Erno Lichtenstein was the superintendent. Because the coachmen came from far away and couldn't return the same day, they'd stay there. They also had a water trough for the horses in the courtyard. It was all at their disposal. They also cooked at the pub. The food wasn't kosher 6. They cooked for everyone. It was a very nice, clean inn. On the counter, beside the beer taps, stood a beautiful, shiny cash register. It would ring when it opened. Beside the register were pretzels on a stick. They cost 10, maybe 15 hellers [*in 1929 it was decreed by law that one Czechoslovak crown (Kc) – 1 Kc = 100 hellers, was equal in value to 44.58 mg of gold – Editor's note*], and when they were making change, the guests would get a pretzel instead of those

few hellers. As kids, we'd always come and take those pretzels. I also remember that once, right before Christmas, some carolers came to Grandpa's pub. They were wearing masks. It was very nice. They sang carols, and also put on performances. That was the first time I'd seen anything like that in my life. Then my grandfather gave them gifts, and they went on. We didn't ever stay too long in Trnava. When we did go there, it was only for the day. We'd eat something, my parents would talk a bit with our relatives, and right away we'd go back home again. It was a question of several hours. I don't even remember how my grandparents lived, how their house was furnished.

My mother's name was Alzbeta Urban, née Grünfeld. She was born in Trnava in 1913. I don't know how many siblings she had. We knew only one of her brothers. He appeared at our place after World War II. It was a very hectic time. I can't even tell you anything more about him.

I don't know how my parents met, but before my brother and I were born, they used to go on various outings and vacations. I've for example got a ton of photographs from trips and vacations in Georgia and Italy. Of them bathing, and on a motorboat. My parents had two sons. First I, Ladislav Urban, was born in 1934, and in 1938 my brother Tomas. Our mother tongue is Slovak, but in our family everyone also spoke German and Hungarian. Before the war we didn't have a chance to play much together, as my brother was still little. Here and there, we'd go for a walk in the park. I used to attend Maccabi [7] with my older friends. We used to play ping-pong, or go on outings. We used to go into the hills around Piestany, and in the winter there'd be skiing on Cervena Vez [*The Red Tower*]. We were of various ages. I was still quite small, and there were even 20-year-olds among us.

I attended a Protestant school. Actually first a Catholic one, but they threw me out of there. They didn't allow Jews to attend it. For about two months, I was at home. So that I could continue my studies, my parents had me baptized. I attended this course, where we studied the Bible. The parson's name was Dr. Alexander Barica. I've still got the baptism certificate he gave me, which later was of no use to me after all...

When I was in Grade 3, our teacher was Alica Zelienkova. She was a real Xanthippe [*a reference to Socrates' wife who was said to be domineering and sharp-tongued – Translator's note*], who beat me. One anecdote occurs to me in relation to her. It was my birthday, and my father's sister, Aunt Ilus Quittnerova had bought me a soccer ball. I took it to school, and almost the entire school was playing with it. There were about 50 students there. We were all chasing the ball around. Someone kicked it into the latrine. I had two good friends. One was Ivan Stankovic, and the other Dusan Goljer. They were Protestants. They held me by my feet, and I pulled the ball out of the john. It was all covered in shit. We washed it off, and Dusan took it to class. It was sitting in the corner, and smelled awful. When class began, this teacher came in. She asked whose ball it was. I admitted to it. She took a cane, and beat me so badly that I had to go see a doctor. The next day, Aunt Ilus went to complain to the principal about her, and that was even worse. After the war, I had one more incident with this teacher. I was studying in Bratislava, and I'd run into her every day on the way to school. She walked at the same time on the same sidewalk as I did. I said to myself that I won't say hello to her. She got so angry that once on Sunday she set out from Bratislava to see my father in Piestany, to complain about me.

The soccer ball didn't have a happy end either. When I returned from the doctor's, Ilus neni sent me to play with some children near the Vah [*River*]. Because it was my birthday, I invited them to

come play soccer in a field. Ilus neni had prepared a basket full of cakes and some cocoa in a thermos for us. I didn't play, because I was so sore from the beating I'd gotten from my teacher. So I didn't get anything out of the soccer, plus the ball got all torn up, as there was gravel there. With us there at that time was my classmate Judita Goldbergerova, who they later murdered in Auschwitz.

The building where we lived had been finished in 1842. I know this because a few years ago we found a cast-iron plaque walled-up there that said this. Our apartment was upstairs, and downstairs my father had his textile store. We always had running water as well as electricity. The building belonged to our family. The store is there to this day. We recently enlarge the building. We added another floor. Currently some of the space is being rented to the companies Allianz and Home Credit. During my youth, there was a warehouse behind my father's textile store, and then a tailor's shop, where Mr. Goldsteinova sewed; later she changed her name to Galova. Mrs. Goldsteinova sewed custom shirts and men's underwear. Her daughter graduated from medical school, and after the war worked as a doctor.

We used to go on vacation with our parents regularly. Every year we'd go to the High Tatras, to Tatranska Lomnica. We'd go there both in the summer as well as during the winter. Most of the time we'd stay at the Grand Hotel. The last time we were there was in 1941, I think. I've also got photos from those times. I remember that the trains were so high that we children weren't able to get on. The trip lasted quite long, for us. In the Tatras we'd go sledding, and in the summer we'd walk around and play. Chasing squirrels and so on. Our parents would also take us to restaurants. We used to go there together with friends. Mainly our father, who used to play soccer in Piestany. He'd begun back when he was a student in Vienna. He even played defense for some team there.

We observed holidays mostly at home. For the high holidays my father would go to synagogue, and as a little boy I used to come see him. As children we didn't last long just sitting there, and so we'd run around and play in the courtyard. We attended the new, Neolog synagogue 8. The Maccabi clubhouse was close by too. Karol Grünwald and Pavol Blum used to go there too, for example. Pavol was the Czechoslovak cultural attaché in Rome, and Karol was the Israeli ambassador in Prague.

Before the war, my father bought a villa near Piestany from Janko Alexy [*Alexy, Janko (1894 – 1970) was a Slovak writer, painter and publicist – Editor's note*]. The villa was in the direction of Cervena Vez. Before that, Janko Alexy had had a studio there. Trainees, painters, used to come visit him. We lived in that villa for some time. I used to go to school from there on a bicycle. Together with my father; he'd go to work, and I to school. I'd leave the bicycle at my father's work, and after lunch we'd got home together.

The villa was by the Vah River. We had a kayak stand by the river, along with a dock. My mother used to go kayaking with Mrs. Majercakova a lot. Her husband, Dr. Eugen Majercak, was a lawyer for the Piestany spas. When the anti-Jewish laws 9 began coming out, we had to give up the villa. My father came to an agreement with Mr. Alexy that he'd buy the villa back from us. It then became a conspiratorial house for partisans. We'll come back to this chapter, as during the war we hid out here for a long time.

How did the anti-Jewish laws affect me? At that age I didn't understand them yet. In the first place, we had to move out of our villa and return to the house in the city, where we'd lived before. But by

then we were only living in the rear part of the house, because the architect Alfred Perl from Vienna and his wife had moved into the front part, which faced the park. He was an Austrian, and wore a swastika pinned to his suit. He had his studio in Vienna, where he'd sometimes disappear, but in two or three days he'd be back. We got along well with him. They used to have my brother and I over. I think that was sometime in 1941. We had only one room that had windows facing the park. There all the men in our family would meet. My father had a Lorenz brand radio, which he hadn't turned in, and there they'd illegally listen to broadcasts. I later used this same radio too, when I was a university student in Bratislava.

The Aryanizer [*Aryanization: the transfer of Jewish stores, businesses, companies, etc. to the ownership of another, non-Jewish person – the Aryanizer – Editor's note*] of my father's store was a young German woman. Her name was Lea Klostemann. She might have been about 24 years old. She was a woman of lighter morals. The Germans had garages nearby, and already in the morning she'd be sitting around there with them. Benko's Garages they were called. These days there's a shopping arcade there. There were still Jewish salesmen working there [*in the store*]. Those that my father had employed. There were two women in the office. In the front, in the store, there were two or three men. One of them was named Oskar Stern. Alis [*Alica Urbanova, née Haasova*], who my father married after the war, worked there too. Alis worked for us as a helper. She cleaned, brought the mail, basically whatever. After the war, when they returned the store to us, she worked at the till. When the store was being Aryanized, my father tried to hide some of the goods. He had a lot of ready-made clothes, and so he and my cousin, Lulo Urban, "stole" it and walled it up at the rear of the attic. The made an entrance through the roof. You had to prop up a ladder, and that's how you got in. There was a large quantity of clothes there, coats, but also textiles and similar goods. Later part of these goods was distributed to partisans. The rest stayed there, and when we returned from the concentration camp, my father quickly got the store running again. It was painted, cleaned up, and these hidden goods formed the foundation of the newly opened store. After the war my father also bought a truck, which he used to drive to Brno to get goods.

Back then you didn't know who you could trust. For example, before the harsh anti-Jewish laws began, my father liked to fish. He used to go fishing with his friends, and once he ran into some man who worked at the SS headquarters in Piestany. His name was Jan Isachenko. After the war he turned out to be a Russian agent. His real name was Alexander Alexandrovich Isachenko. He became the head of the Russian language department in Bratislava. My father already knew that he was an agent in 1941, when they moved us out of the top floor of our house into the rear part. Back then they also stole our piano. Ten soldiers were carrying it down the stairs. One officer had come with him, which was him. So he'd actually come to introduce himself. He said to my father in German, you're Mr. Urban? We'll be seeing a lot of each other yet. He was friendly to us. He hinted that if we wanted to play the piano, we can come to his place. He was living at the Royal Hotel. Later this hotel was renamed to Slovan. After the war we could've taken the piano back, but who would have wrestled with it?

During the war, my father became the head of the Jewish religious community in Piestany. His deputies were Mr. Faber and Alexander Spronc. Shortly upon that they put him in jail. He was an irritant – he was very enterprising and that got in a lot of people's way. They took him to a jail in Bratislava. From there they helped him escape. It was apparently organized by my uncle, Ernest Lichtenstein. The jail was across from a brewery. The escape was perfectly prepared and timed.

Here's what happened: there was a railway track next door. His escape was coordinated with the arrival of the train. It made noise, and thus the guards didn't hear anything. By the jail the train slowed down so that my father could jump on. They took him to Rac, where he jumped onto another train, which was heading in the direction of Prague. Past the tunnel in Lamac he jumped off, and there some railway worker was waiting for him. Then they hid him for some time. In time they arranged a Tiso exception 10 for him, and so he was able to return home. He got the exception in 1942.

That same year, they rounded up all the Urban women. They were looking for my father, and set up some sort of financial maneuvers to get at him. They didn't find him, so they took all the women, except for Gizi Klinger. She alone wasn't in Piestany. They took them all to Ruzovy Mlyn [*The Pink Mill*]. It was a big mill where they were gathering all the Jews from Piestany and its surroundings. From there they transported them to the collection camp in Zilina. My father and I set out to go look for them. They tried to have them released in all manner of ways. In Zilina we booked into Hotel Polom. There we hid out. My father tried to make some contacts and get my mother and his sisters out of jail. That same night that they were supposed to set them free, a different event took place. Partisans broke into the jail in Ilava, and freed about a hundred prisoners. The same night, they also broke into the collection camp in Zilina. They got in over the fence, and were pressed for time. They looked for them there, but there were lots of people there. The mission was unsuccessful. My mother's parents were there at that time. In the end they all ended up in the Majdanek concentration camp in the town of Lublin. My mother and her parents were murdered in Majdanek in 1942.

After the unsuccessful liberation mission, we got on a train and traveled to Nitra. There we booked into the Hotel Löffler. The owner, Mr. Löffler, was a Jew. He was still running his hotel. You know how it is, a hotelier like that knows lots of people. Lots of people helped him in exchange for money. After everything that had happened, my father said something which he then maintained until the end of his life: "You won't find a single decent person in Zilina." Always, when after the war someone mentioned Zilina, he'd just give a wave of his hand and say: "You won't find a single decent person there."

Then we returned to Piestany. My father had an exception, which protected us for a certain time. The we had to hide again. We hid out in Alexy's villa, which had belonged to us before the war. There was a phone there, and when there was supposed to be a raid, his brother always let us know. He'd call, and the code was: "let out the pigeons, because there's bad weather coming." Which meant that we were supposed to leave. The Germans chased me as well. An entire squad was running after me, but didn't catch me. I ran all the way to a huge haystack. There were deep holes dug into that stack. Into one we used to put bags, and in the second we slept. Often I slept there all night alone. I'd stay there until someone came and told me that I can come out. In 1944 partisans started gathering there.

Mr. Alexy had a beekeeper's cottage at Havran, about five or six kilometers from Piestany. We had a key to this cottage, and when they notified us that "you have to let out the pigeons...", we'd usually go there. After the partisans arrived, things began to get bad. As I've already mentioned, by the villa there was a dock, with a couple of boats. One night, the partisans "borrowed" them, and paddled to the other side of the Vah, to Piestany. In the town they pilfered some grocery stores, and returned. It was clear that the next day the Germans would be searching the surrounding area.

They increased the sentries on the bridge. We were about 300 meters away from the bridge, so we had a good view of it. They were checking the ID of everyone crossing the bridge.

Michal Wagner had a mine nearby, where they mined painters' clay. It would be then ground up and sold to painters as pigment. My father dug a tunnel above the shaft, where we could hide in an emergency. You couldn't stand up in it, but it had benches dug into the walls, on them hay, and you could sit there. You could even sleep there. It wasn't cold in there. Mr. Wagner also helped us a lot. When we needed to send someone a message and things like that. He behaved quite insolently, which was an advantage during those times.

In time searches in the surrounding area became a daily occurrence. That's why we decided to go to the cottage that was further away, at Havran. Alexy's villa had two cottages in the yard. One was for trainee painters, and in the second lived the gardener and his family. We occasionally met in that gardener's cottage, and sometimes also slept there. The gardener's wife, Mr. Pelikanova, used to help us. The trainees were two young painters, during the war lieutenants in the Slovak State army. They'd both deserted from the army. One of them was Josef Dubravsky, who after the war lived in the town of Soporna, and the second Ladislav Snajdar from Piestany. Ladislav Snajdar rode horses and was the connection between us and the partisans. But mostly he stayed with the partisans. Leading up to the cottage at Havran, there were I'd guess about a hundred steps. The steps were quite high. One morning I went to empty out the basin I'd been washing in, and suddenly I looked and saw an SS helmet and heard a metallic clodding. A guy with a submachine gun was going up the stairs. There were four of us hiding there, my father, brother, I, and Alis, who was taking care of us. She cooked for us, did the laundry and so on. That was in October of 1944.

The day before there'd also been a raid, but that time we'd spotted them. It had been too late to escape. My brother and I hid underneath some duvets. Alis hid in the pigsty, and my father hid behind the door. Already at that time we had incredible luck. The first one to enter was a Guardist [11], and two steps behind him a German with a submachine gun. The Guardist entered, and saw my father behind the door, recognized him, and started. He yelled: "There's nothing here!" and they left. From what people told us we learned that the Germans were suspicious as to why the Guardist had run out of the room so quickly without searching it at all. That's why they returned the next day. They weren't rude to us. They told us to come with them. When we'd packed out things, they sent us down to wait for them by a truck. There wasn't anyone by the truck, and the keys were even there. In a while the Guardist that had been there the day before appeared. My father asked him: "What would happen if I started it?" He says to him: "Where do you want to go? You can't go to the bridge, because I have to fire off a shot, and if I suddenly fire one off, they'll make mincemeat of you down there. There's no use going in the other direction, because it doesn't lead anywhere." Because in that direction we would've left the forest, and they would've easily caught us. They drove us off to the jail of the district court in Piestany.

They kept us in the jail for about 10 to 14 days. My brother, Alis and I were in one cell. In another were Mrs. Terezie Kollmannova and her son Juraj, and my father was in a third. There were also 3 or 4 captured partisans there. Today the building houses the Electrical Technology High School, where a friend of mine teaches. Once I met him on the street and asked him for a favor. I explained to him that I'd like to recall what it looked like, and whether he wouldn't show it to me. Now there are labs there. From there, they took us all to the camp in Sered [12].

After about three days, they separated us from our father. The men went to the right, and the women and children to the left. We stayed together with Alis. Mr. Spronc, who'd been with my father on the board of the Jewish community in Piestany, was already in the camp. He even had some sort of a position on the organizational committee. He helped us arrange various things. We knew that we'd be deported further onwards. All we had were suitcases, which were impractical. We needed a knapsack, or something similar. He rounded up some potato sacks, and we braided some straps together from string. So my brother, Alis and I had these sort of "knapsacks". One day a big commotion suddenly broke out, and they told us that we'd be going further onwards. They were loading us onto wagons. It was about 3:00 p.m. Into each wagon they also loaded paper bags full of bread and some little things to eat. It was so full that we could barely sit down. Mr. Spronc told us that we should sit by the door, and when they'd be opening the sacks, we should take the bread on top. Baked inside it were tools for opening up the wagon doors. Our father had the same thing in the other wagon. They'd prepared our escape. Everything had been arranged ahead of time. Ladislav Snajdar was supposed to be waiting for us.

The train departed the station in Sered around 4:00 or 5:00 p.m. The train crawled at almost a walking pace from Sered to Leopoldov all night. Then from Leopoldov to Puchov, the driver drove it like a racecar. But something in the organization of that escape had gone wrong. Because the partisans were waiting for us by Horna Streda, so on the second section, which we flew through. There we were supposed to all jump out and then continue on the Vah by boat. Most likely the engine driver had been given the wrong information.

In Puchov we turned in the direction of Morava. Then we saw the station at Cesky Tesin. We thought that we were going to Poland. The second morning, we were suddenly at the station Ceska Trebova. They turned the train around, and sent it on the tracks to Prague. At around lunchtime that day, we were in Kolin. We were standing there about 30, maybe 40 meters from the first platform. People were walking by us. As I was standing right by the door, every time they opened, I had to jump up, so that they wouldn't scrape me. I was glad to get up, at least I could straighten up. In the wagon we had one pail, which was dirty. The pail was being poured out, and a German handed it to me, saying: "See that tap? Bring some water." On the other side there was a locomotive, and the engine driver in it said to me: "Screw the water, jump in and we're off." He was calling me over, but how could I, when in the wagon beside me were my brother and Alis? If they would have said, run away, we'll hide you... It as all kind of suspicious. Plus I was only a child. I got the water and brought it back. The next stop was at the Czech-German border. We were stopped in a forest. When I jumped out of the wagon, there was so much snow that I wasn't able to climb my way out of it. We heard them talking amongst themselves, that we'd be standing there for a some time. During the entire trip, we basically didn't even know our guards were there. They didn't do anything to us. Just that we were shut up there. The next station was Berlin, the train station hall. There was a train on almost every track. We stood there for a couple of hours, and then it continued on. The next station was Bergen-Belsen 13. We arrived there at around 9:00 p.m. It was raining hard, pouring down.

In Bergen-Belsen we basically didn't do anything for days on end. We were put into a newer blockhouse. You could say that it was in relatively good shape, I mean as opposed to the rest. Because it was raining during our arrival, there was so much mud in front of the blockhouse that we were slogging through it up to our ankles. The mud was at least 20 cm high. Something awful.

Some prisoners, women, brought us tools. We were ordered to dig a ditch around the blockhouse so that the rainwater could run off. The water was already coming into the blockhouse as well. I was still a child, and so I was hanging around the women digging the ditch, so that I'd get outside. At that time I also experienced my first roll call. We stood outside for around half the day. Around us were 20 SS-men, with Kramer 14 in front. There was so much arrogance and yelling... Names were called out, and we had to yell "hier". If someone didn't yell it out, they made a fuss.

It's my guess that we must've gotten into a sector where Russians had been before. The night we arrived, there was a huge orange tent standing there. It reminded me of a circus tent. We were separated from it by barbed wire. All of Bergen-Belsen was divided up into various sectors by barbed wire. Individual parts were also then divided up into smaller parts. So between us and this tent there was a smaller fence. Smaller in comparison to the ones that separated the sectors. Well, and when the roll call took place, they'd eliminated the entire tent along with the Russians. There wasn't anything at all there anymore.

At first they were giving us black coffee and square bread that was as black as coal. A ration of this bread was about 35 cm, and was about 3 cm thick. Gradually the rations grew smaller. The last month, they were almost nonexistent! Then we also got soup made from fodder beets, with pieces of poor-quality meat or skin floating in it. At first you couldn't eat it. In order to get used to it, you had to "train". Occasionally you'd even find a spud in this "soup". The soup became gradually thinner and more meager. At first they stopped putting spuds into it, and finally also the "meat". They stopped giving us coffee after three months. For Christmas and New Year, instead of that disgusting soup, we got two or three potatoes cooked in their skin, and red cabbage.

We were in Bergen-Belsen from the end of October up until its liberation *[15th April 1945 – Editor's note*]. It lasted 7 months. Not far from our blockhouse, to the east, was another, empty one. The blockhouses were separated from each other by a fence and gate. Around the third or fourth day after our arrival, a transport of women arrived there. It wasn't until then that we saw what kind of shape people who'd been in concentration camps since 1942 were in. They looked horrible. They were more dead than alive. They were so starved that they ate everything we didn't eat. I have to emphasize that in the beginning we weren't used to such food.

During our entire stay in the concentration camp, we lived in three different places. From there we got a few meters over, behind a different fence. There they were doing medical experiments on people. I can't tell you what sort of experiments they were. My file from Bergen-Belsen was found, and the Red Cross stored it away in Geneva. Due to this, they later also examined me in Bratislava as well. They did experiments on both women and on children. I myself got two injections. After the war I had health problems. Already as a schoolchild I had a shortage of stomach acid, and chronic intestinal problems. I absolved many examinations. They found something in my lungs, I had frostbite up to my knees...

Finally, in the coldest depths of winter, we were put into some sort of "hall". I'd guess it to be at the end of January and beginning of February 1945. It wasn't until then that we saw that the whole camp looked like. We ended up close to the so-called "Main Street". We called in Lager Hauptstrasse. It was a long corridor about 35 to 40 meters wide. In certain sections, let's say every kilometer, there were army kitchens, a shelter with huge cauldrons. That's where they cooked that swill, the soup. Around them were mounds of spuds prepared for use. But I don't know where they

were putting them, because there were almost none in the soup we used to get. If you were on good terms with someone there, they'd throw you a spud over the fence, or an onion, which would sometimes be there too. Some of the SS-men walking around would entertain themselves by picking up a potato or onion and throwing it amongst some children. Then they'd entertain themselves watching them fighting over it.

The third place where we stayed was blockhouse number 211. In front of our blockhouse was a ward, a hospital. There was practically no escape from the hospital. Once you got in there, you didn't leave alive. Right across from the ward was a guard tower, from which they would shoot according to "necessity". These towers were along the entire road, spaced around 200 to 250 meters apart. Of course everything was surrounded by an electric fence. I remember an incident when two women ran out of the hospital, holding hands, and aimed straight for that fence. They sizzled and that was the end of them. Close to the tower that stood by us was a latrine. People from the hospital used the latrine as well. The whole thing was a large pit, in front of which was a long, rough tree trunk. You had to sit on this tree trunk, and do your thing. People were in such horrible shape that they couldn't even stand on their feet. Some terrible things took place there in front of my eyes.

We had almost no contact with the Germans. You had to avoid them. They were capable of playing cruel jokes on us in the name of fun. For example, women guards used to go for walks after lunch beside the last blockhouse we lived in. Each SS-woman had a German Shepherd with her. At that time it was useful to leave the latrine. Sick people that had diarrhea sat there for even tens of minutes. They had cramps and weren't able to empty themselves. A German woman would let her dog loose on a sitting person, and the dog would push him into the shit. No one would pull a poor sod like that out again.

The sectors were divided into sections, and everything was separated by narrow alleys that were surrounded by barbed wire. These narrow alleys led into Lager Hauptstrasse. People had to walk down these alleys in single file. You entered the alleys through a gate by which a guards stood. The gates were about a meter wide, so that more than one person couldn't go through at a time. To the right of us was a little blockhouse where Polish Jewish women lived. This little blockhouse was very pretty. It had curtains, inside were checkered blankets, and it was clean. There were about 30 beds. These women worked in the kitchen, and we children got to know them. At that time I had a big problem with shoes. I was growing, so were my feet, and I needed bigger shoes. My feet hurt so much that I couldn't walk. These women contacted someone from the stores for me, and exchanged my shoes for me. At night they used to let us go there. It was dark, it was all arranged with the guard, otherwise we wouldn't have been able to cross the alley. We used to go there in twos, and would get fed. Usually they'd give us a larger piece of meat cooked in that beet soup. It looked almost like a piece of cooked bacon, and bread to go with it. We had about a quarter hour to eat, and then we had to quickly disappear. We children would always take turns there. When there were two of us, one waited outside, and then we'd change places and then we'd go back together. There were about 30 of us children, all of us were from Slovakia. Not all of us risked such nighttime outings.

Right beside the Polish women's blockhouse was a kitchen, where they cooked for German soldiers. Their blockhouse was situated in such a way that two doors led to the fence. Through the window you could either jump into the part that led towards us, or to the entry into Hauptstrasse. We didn't

hand around much there, as it was dangerous. The only functional well in the entire sector was about a hundred meters away from that blockhouse. Towards the end of the war, before the liberation, there was almost no water anywhere in the camp. The water in all the wells around was infected. Typhus was very widespread, and people were afraid to drink. Those of us that were still running around the camp used to go to that well for water. Gradually long queues formed there. People stood in rows five wide, and waited for water for two or even three days. Thousands of people stood in line. The way we did it was that several of us would stand in various parts of a line, and after several hours we'd change places. So everyone who got a liter of water, you didn't get more than that, then shared with the others. When someone else got water, he again shared it, and so on it went. My brother was already in close proximity to the well, it could have maybe been another hour or two, and he'd have gotten to the water. Suddenly a tractor fully loaded with canisters arrived, and the Germans wanted to start drawing water into the canisters. You couldn't pull more than seven or eight liters of water out of the well at one time. At that rate it could have taken all day. The prisoners rebelled, and didn't want to let the Germans past. I saw that they'd taken a table out of the nearby kitchen through the window. I thought to myself that something was going to take place there. I stood a ways away, leaning against a tree, and watched. Suddenly an SS soldier got up on the table, and I saw that they were handing him a submachine gun. I began yelling, and suddenly he started firing. He mowed down everyone standing by the well. My brother was exactly in that bunch into which he was firing. I hid behind the tree, so there was no way he could shoot through it. When he suddenly changed magazines, everyone who could ran. I also started running away. My brother didn't arrive for a long time. He returned the morning of the second day. There'd been such a brouhaha there that he'd fallen into the well. An SS-man pulled him out. They then held him somewhere. When he arrived he had the cup with which he'd set out for water, full of pea soup. They'd even dried him off and given him dry clothes. This took place about ten days before the liberation of the concentration camp.

During our stay at Bergen-Belsen, I also had my share of suffering. I had sore feet from shoes that were too small. They were very slippery boots. In general, it was hard to walk on the main street. It was paved with so-called unfinished stones. They were very sharp, and in the winter ice formed between them. You had to walk carefully in order to not slip. So I had to watch out in order to not sprain my ankle, and my small shoes caused my feet to be constantly cold. It of course happened that you'd catch the flu. I also had high fevers after the injections they gave us.

After the liberation, the English were filming everything there. I knew where everything in the camp was, so in the beginning I was walking around with the film crew. Not far from us they set up a place with an intercom. From morning till evening they broadcast in many languages who was looking for whom. It was a whirlpool of nations. They also set up a board, where people would come and pin up notes for family and friends. After the liberation, I got typhus. In the meantime, there were already ambulances driving around the camp, taking away the ill. The English film crew arranged for them to take me right away. I got into a hospital that they'd set up in the barracks left by the Germans. Everyone who got in there had to go through a delousing procedure and a steam bath. At that time I could no longer walk. They left me lying there in the steam for a certain time. From there I was put into a room where three Englishmen were lying. These soldiers took care of me. A lot of English soldiers there also caught typhus. In Bergen-Belsen, several dozens of doctors, nurses and soldiers who'd become infected there even died. In two months they liquidated practically the entire camp, and torched it so that the infectious diseases wouldn't spread any

further.

After the liberation, my brother lasted in the blockhouse only a few days longer than I did. Then he got malaria. He basically underwent the same procedure as I did, only they were isolated in a different location. They were in the sector on the edge of the woods. The building looked like a former monastery. I don't know what it could have been before. Everyone else was forbidden to go there. You couldn't get in there at all. When I got a bit better, I began asking what was up with my brother. The building where I was lying was at the very end of the barracks. Under the window was just a tall fence of barbed wire. In front of the fence ran a wide, two-lane paved road that ended here, and after that it was just nature. There was a huge meadow there, and here and there a copse of trees. Military vehicles were arriving on this road. Tanks, heavy machinery, and cannons; people who were capable of walking would come by to have a look. It took about five hours before the last vehicle parked. In the crowd I recognized Mrs. Kollmannova, who was also from Piestany. I shouted to her from the window. She recognized me. She was looking for her son Juraj. She told me where my brother Tomi was. They kept me in the hospital for about a month. Then I returned to the blockhouse, where there were people who'd arrived in the same transport as we had. To be more precise, those lucky ones that had survived. They were women and children. My brother also got well, and in time joined us. Alis was also with us. She was with us from the beginning to the end. Only a handful of us remained. Juraj, whose mother was looking for him, was in such poor health that they had to take him to Sweden. They then took his mother there to join him. They stayed in Sweden for three years. Eventually they returned and lived in Piestany.

In those days there was a bus connection between Prague and Bergen-Belsen. It used to take home the survivors. It worked as follows. By the kitchen there was an office. It was headed by an English captain who spoke Czech. There was also an English soldier named Foltyn. This office functioned as a "consulate". They investigated from which family, who survived, and where he was. They were also persuading people to not return home, but to go to the USA, the Palestine, or whereever they might want to go. As there were a lot of children there that had lost their families, they investigated where they had relatives. When someone said that they had family anywhere in the world, they contacted those relatives and asked whether they wanted to take them in. The driver of the bus that used to come there would also write down names. We dictate our names and address to him. He went back and forth every week. Once he came to see us and told us that our father was alive, that he was in Prague and was looking for us. It really was true. Alas, when we arrived in Prague, all we found was a note on the doors of one school where people were also leaving messages. The trip from Bergen-Belsen to Prague was long. We were passing from the American sector to the English one, and we had to wait a long time at this "border". I remember that it was in Köln, Nuremberg, and finally in Pilsen in Czechoslovakia. Everywhere they checked our papers, and then fed us. The bus was full of children and also a few mothers too. There might have been about 35 people. I'd guess that about two thirds were children. The trip to Prague took about a week.

I'd like to mention one incident. On Sunday at around 4:00 p.m. we arrived in Pilsen. The bus stopped in a square in front of a large church. Our guide, who was traveling along with the driver, got out. He was probably arranging where we'd eat. In the meantime some old ladies came out of the church, and when they saw us, they started weeping. I remember that right there in the street they organized a collection and collected 100 crowns for each one of us.

We arrived in Prague at around 8:30 p.m. It was just getting dark. They put us up in Branik. We stayed there for about two weeks. We also met with our cousin Leo Lichtenstein, who'd changed his name to Liska. He helped us register at the repatriation office. We got ID and some money. A Catholic charity gave us some more money. In Prague I also went to the hospital, because of my frostbitten feet. It was from my too-small shoes. They were almost all black, up to my knees. There they re-bandaged and washed them. They X-rayed my lungs, and similar things. It was in the hospital where Leo was a doctor. Then we wandered around Prague. We were at Hradcany, Charles Bridge, and Wenceslaus Square. We walked up and down and watched what was going on around us. We couldn't get any further in the direction of Bratislava. It was possible to buy train tickets, but they were dissuading us. The were saying for us to wait, that we'd get tickets. So we waited for our turn to come up. The trip from Prague to Bratislava took all day. The train was so packed full that people were even sitting on the roof. In Bratislava, dormitories had been set up on what is today Slovak National Uprising Square. During the war it was named Adolf Hitler Platz. In the room we were assigned, there were beds for about 10 to 15 people. It was just an overnight bed, nothing more. There we stayed for a few days and waited for an opportunity to get to Piestany. Finally we got to our home town, where our father was waiting for us with my cousin Lulo Sohnenfeld, who later took the surname Urban. Another couple of people were waiting along with them. They were standing a few meters away from us, didn't come any closer, and wept.

My father had been transported to Sachsenhausen 15. From there they assigned him to some neighboring camp, from where he and a few fellow prisoners managed to escape. They crossed the border of the Protectorate east of the town of Jachymov. There were about ten other miners with them, led by the Party head Ondrej Tatar. They were quite scattered, because some of them were in better condition, and some in worse. They'd been working together in some mine by Sachsenhausen. It was actually some sort of war industry, where part of the production was inside a mountain. The miners were tasked with enlarging the space for the arms factory. The entrance to the complex led across a bridge that spanned some water. Each day they walked three kilometers to the mine, and three back to the camp. My father worked there in an electrical workshop with some Frenchmen. When the miners were getting ready to leave, my father joined them along with one doctor. The doctor's name was Dr. Soltes. After the war he became the health care commissioner in Slovakia [*The Health Care Commission: a specialized institution equivalent to the Ministry of Health – Editor's note*]. When they were trying to get across the German-Czech border, my father climbed a tree. He wanted to find out if there wasn't anyone around. Suddenly a machine gun started firing, and wounded his arm in several places. After a few days he developed high fevers, so they had to look for help. They got him to the town of Dolni Bela, where Dr. Boris Jacenko treated him. He was an immigrant that was working in the town as a doctor. He operated on my father. He had another two people that he was hiding at his place, and so they decided that they'd try to take a car across the front to the Americans. Finally they also succeeded. Until the end of the war, my father worked for the American army as an interpreter. He wore a uniform, and made it all the way to Prague. There he worked for some time at the repatriation office. From there he then returned to Piestany. In Piestany he ran into my cousin Lulo, and together they threw the people out of our apartment. He came there and said: "Leave here, I'll be moving in here in two hours. It's my property." Lulo was helping them carry things out. When we came home, the apartment once again belonged to our family. We kept in touch with Dr. Jacenko after the war too. When I was attending university, I visited him often.

After the war, they renewed the Jewish community in Piestany. My father didn't return to its leadership. I'm not saying he didn't get involved, but gave up leading the community. Some of the community officials also returned. For example Mr. Faber, and Spronc. Of the other returnees, I can mention Oskar Stern, who worked for my father at the store. During the war he was in hiding. In Bergen-Belsen his sister Aranka Sternova approached us. She'd been deported from Budapest, where she'd been living on false papers. In the concentration camp she was in the same blockhouse as the rest of the Hungarian women. They somehow knew how to find food. They helped the capo carry infirm women to roll calls, and thus were a bit better off. She used to call us over to see her. The Hungarian women guarded their blockhouse, as people stole. So they always had someone at the door. We'd agreed as to what time we'd come, and the woman on watch would let us in. Aranka had bread and a pail full of jam. So we got a half-centimeter thick piece of bread and on top of that three centimeters of jam.

After the war, my father opened his store again in a relatively short time, and began selling. With the advent of the Communists 16, he became a capitalist, and so he couldn't find work. At first he worked as a driver's assistant in this still half-private company that specialized in medical equipment. Later it turned into Chirana [*Chirana Piestany a.s. was founded in 1962 – Editor's note*]. He worked for a department that specialized in the repair of old medical equipment. He worked there for several years as a driver's assistant. Then when they set up a central collection point for equipment repairs, he became the head. He gradually got better and better at it, and worked there for practically the rest of his life. It didn't ever occur to my father to emigrate. He was a big capitalist, and kept claiming that socialism couldn't last long, and that it couldn't continue on like this. He didn't like any of their measures. Whether it was the banking sector, the financial sector or economy, it all went against his logic. We had buildings that they confiscated. My father died in 1984. He's buried at the Jewish cemetery in Piestany, in the same place as his parents and later also his second wife.

The Slansky trials 7 didn't affect us in any particular fashion. My father didn't have any problems. As for me, I got more than my share of anti-Semitic remarks from my teachers at the Piestany high school. They made fun of us, because we looked very bad. When I arrived in Piestany, the doctors gave me about two years to live. I got the flu. The doctor came, and said: "He won't suffer long. He won't survive it!"

During high school I was this outcast. I played basketball, first I tried to play basketball for the school, but also for the city team. There were five or six of us our class that also played for the city, basically one lineup. The city club players were all veterans, and didn't let us participate much. Because I was very persistent, I was the first to succeed in getting onto the top team. Otherwise I was a good swimmer, despite having only learned at the age of 13. I don't remember ever having gone to a pool before the war. After the war, at the Eva swimming pool, my classmates caught me and threw me into deep water. I drank half the pool, and learned to swim. The members of the Piestany swim club were mostly children whose parents were doctors, it was hard for anyone else to get in. They were all excellent swimmers. In Piestany our family belonged among the quite important ones. The building we owned in the center of town before the war belongs to us to this day. We renovated it recently. My stepsister Hana Urbanova lives in the back part.

My health wasn't the best; I couldn't breathe well. I stopped swimming and started playing basketball, running, and cross-country swimming. I ran 3000 and then 10,000 meters. In the winter

I took part in ski races. I was among the best in Slovakia. I was a member of the Piestany Spa Team. Soldiers also took part in the races. They belonged among the elite. They'd take the top prizes, but I was definitely right after them. The soldiers did all they could to prevent me from winning. During one race, they pushed me off the track so badly that I tore a tendon. I had a very bad fall. I fell down a terribly steep hill. They treated me in the hospital in Hradec Kralove. I was even nominated for the national team, but in the end I didn't become a member, because I did one stupid thing. I exchanged my skis, which wasn't allowed. My father always bought me the best skis and equipment. They custom-made it for me. I had several pairs of skis. My father would always plane, wax and tension them. He took care of all that. I was the only one that went to races with two pairs of skis.

They didn't recommend me for university, because in my cadre assessment I had: *imprisoned in a concentration camp*, which was a synonym for *Jew*. But in high school I had a teacher, Mr. Emil Zahoransky, the former principal of the council school. He was from around Brezna. He was a Slovak, and my father's trusted friend, and in the end also our neighbor at our cottage. Dr. Valach lived on the other side. Professor Emil Zahoransky went with me to the entrance exams, and made a fuss there. He walked right up to the commission in front of which I was supposed to do my exams and said: "Now Laco Urban is going to come, a person who's been in a concentration camp, and there's no way you won't take him!" I picked civil engineering. I started school in 1952. Originally my father had wanted me to attend textile college, because he'd been planning to build a small textile plant. The factory owners from Brno that used to sell him goods were persuading him to prepare a young person from the textile trade. He even took some steps, and had some property reserved. The property had to be by some water, so there'd be a place for the water from the textile factory to flow into. In the end nothing came of it. The textile trade was taught in Liberec, from where the state each year sent two people to Poland to study. It was unthinkable to push through that they send me.

During my studies they were building hydro stations, so I said to myself that I'll take hydro engineering. I had this notion that they'd build a whole bunch more hydro stations on the Vah, and that I'd have work for the rest of my life. I was excellent at school. In second year, Professor Potiagin and his wife invited me for a special lunch at the Hotel Devin. He was an 85-year-old granddad. Once during a lecture of his, we were calculating a very complex example. There were at least 200 students sitting in the lecture hall, listening to his lecture. I was writing it down, word for word. As I was calculating, I found a mistake. Because I knew about the mistake, I calculated it for myself, and came to a certain conclusion that couldn't be the same as his result. Well, and when he asked where he'd made a mistake, I got up and showed him. He asked me: "What's your name?" I told him my name, and after that his assistants began paying attention to me. Every class I was asked to come up to the blackboard, and they dreaded it terribly. We had this one Xantippe, now she's already a professor. She's this bearded virago. She was very good in math, and kept on calling on me. She gave me a hard time, but that helped me, because I passed my exams without any problems. There was one assistant there from Piestany, and his hand shook when I picked up the chalk and went to the board, that I'd show him something. I always made things up, and when he said one thing, I tried to say another. I was good; I finished hydro engineering with honors.

After school I started working at a waterworks construction project in Sala. I wasn't there long. My professor who I did my thesis with convinced me to go work for Vahostav [*The company VAHOSTAV*

Zilina was founded in 1954 by the then Ministry of Construction of the Czech Republic. Its mission was the building of dams and hydro stations on the central and upper Vah River – Editor's note]. Vahostav was beginning a new waterworks project in Zilina. I went there as a head technician. They were supposed to issue me an apartment in town. The director at the time, who's still alive, told me to make myself at home in Zilina, as they were going to be building more dams there. He claimed that there was work there for the next 40 years. But this director left to go to Bratislava, and forgot about me. That's when bad times for me started. It was at the beginning of the 1960s. They called me up for army service. I was at Bor U Tachova, near Pilsen. I worked as the construction manager for a tank shooting range. I practically wasn't even a soldier, I just wore a uniform and ate with the others. From Vahostav I later transferred to Hydrostav [*Hydrostav: a construction company. Provides comprehensive construction services – Editor's note*].

I started my army service in 1959. I felt very good there. It was the first time that I went skiing every Saturday and Sunday. I was building a tank firing range in the border region, seven kilometers from the border in the neutral zone. There were Soviet advisors there, and a Czechoslovak-Chinese friendship regiment. We often ate rice, which didn't hurt. My division was in Pilsen, where my commanding officer was. His name was Lieutenant-Colonel Strasik, later Colonel. He was a very fair guy, and I would submit my reports to him. He used to go to the Ministry of Defense, and when he'd return, he'd invite me to the best hotel in Pilsen, because I always did my work perfectly. When I was in Pilsen, I'd go swimming practically every day, with the local Dukla team. They accepted me without any problems, because there were many guys from Piestany there. For example Mato Majercak, an older guy from an aquatic company in a battalion in Pilsen. He'd lived in the same street in Piestany as our family. Mato had apprenticed under my father. He even put together a report for me which was part of my officer's exams. I reached the rank of First Lieutenant. That was in 1960. I built a tank firing range, as well as a control tower.

I met my first wife in a relatively interesting fashion. I was introduced to this one music professor. I don't remember his name. He found an apartment for me at Mr. Stark's place in Fucikova St. The Stark family was from Liptovsky Mikulas. They were a Jewish. The Starks observed Jewish customs. Mr. Stark attended synagogue in Heydukova St. in Bratislava. It was a meeting place for Jews. Back then there were still many families. Young Jewish people met there too, to play roulette. After the war I didn't observe anything [*religious customs*] at all.

Their son, Peter Stark, was older than I, and was studying electricity. He wasn't very independent, and would tag along with me. In those days I was playing basketball for Slovan Bratislava. I traveled a lot, and had a lot of friends. When we finished school, Peter emigrated. He finished a half year before me. At first he emigrated to Belgium, and then to America. He worked for General Electric for about 20 years. Then he ended up back in Europe, he was with General Electric in Vienna. He was general director for Western Europe. My first wife, Agi Sandorova, was helping Peter when he was moving. They knew each other from back in Liptovsky Mikulas, they'd been classmates. It was actually at the Starks' that I met Agi. When I was in the army, she lived at this one professor's place. It wasn't heated, and was frightfully cold. I got along with the Starks very well, and they were happy with me. Once I came there, and she was there too... Our wedding was in Piestany.

We were married in 1961. We were living in Bratislava. At that time I was still in the army, but I was able to find an apartment very quickly, because I started a housing co-op. I had a friend that

worked for the city. I said to him: "Listen, I need an apartment.' He said: "Start a co-op, and then we'll help you." So I started a co-op. Right away, they assigned us a building. I had to deposit a certain sum of money within a week. I had to borrow it. In the meantime I arranged for Mrs. Sandorova's family home to be sold. It was actually the demolition of my wife's family home. In Ruzomberk, they were going to be regulating the flow of a stream that flowed into the Vah River. Their house was in the way, so we managed to take advantage of the situation and sell it to the town for a decent price. Old Mrs. Sandorova's siblings were still alive and were financially well off, so I borrowed the aforementioned sum from them. By Christmas 1961 we were already living in our own apartment. Before that I'd had nothing, just a guitar, one suitcase and a clothesline. I'd stretch a string from the window latch to the doorknob, and hang up my couple of pairs of pants and two, three jackets. Those were horrible conditions.

We didn't go abroad very often. We were in Hungary a couple of times. My wife had an aunt who lived in Budapest. I never went to the seaside with my first wife. Back then it wasn't possible yet, and neither did we have the money. On the other hand, we often went to the Tatras.

In the beginning, we used to go on vacations to our cottage in Nova Lehota. Often we'd also go to the Tatras and to Vratna Dolina. Vahostav, where I worked, had a company cottage there. When I began my postgraduate studies, I made friends with the cottage supervisor. He was at the same time also a shepherd at a farm in Sutovsko. Often I used to go visit him at his place. I've got very good memories of this. We used to go to Vratna, where we'd go skiing as well. We used to go to a cottage below Sokoli. We knew all the lift operators at Malino Brd. I had a friend by the name of Pista Bradiak. When I'd come from Bratislava to visit him, I'd always buy him a bottle of rum, as he drank rum. The whole week I'd be there I wouldn't have to pay for the lift. Here and there I'd also run the lift. For example it was carnival time, and people were in the mood for skiing, and so they came and said: "Listen, can you turn on the lift for us?" It was midnight. "Are you crazy? I can't." "Go arrange it." So I had to go wake up Bradiak, who gave me the keys from the cabinets. "Do you know what to turn on?" So at midnight I turned on the lift and who wanted to ski, skied.

After the war, my brother, Tomas Urban, started attending electrical engineering with Duro [*Juraj*] Kollmann. They were like twins. Best friends, they did everything together. But my brother was lazy, to be more precise he had it good. Back then one of our uncles, Ernest Lichtenstein, who was de facto his tutor, was still alive. When Tominko [*Tomas*] showed up in Piestany, he always said: "Tominko, come visit me." There he'd get lunch, and some money. It gradually got to the point that when he needed money, he asked Ernest for it. Ernest Lichtenstein was alone, he didn't have anyone, and so he willingly gave it to him. He got used to not being in need, though he didn't have anyplace to live. He hung around with my friends that I played basketball with. We were a very good bunch; when he didn't have a place to live, they even took care of him. They took him to Mlada garda [*Mlada garda: student dormitories at the Slovak Technical Univesity – Editor's note*], and found him a place in the dorm. He lived there for about a year on the sly. No one knew about it, and he didn't even have to pay.

My brother didn't finish school. They threw him out in second year. Then he began taking chemistry, but after two years they threw him out again. By then our father began taking an interest in his ideas on life. He started as an apprentice at Slovanaft [*SLOVNAFT, whose headquarters are in Bratislava, is a petrochemical company – Editor's note*], where he worked after leaving school. His boss ended up being a man from Piestany, Mr. Sojcek. He began working for

Slovnaft as a laborer, but he gradually worked his way up. In the meantime technology was changing. Because he knew both electricity and chemistry, he had two years in each field, he knew a lot. He had a solid foundation. He got out, to Iraq. He was there for about five years. They were commissioning a large thermal generating station.

Tomas got married before his trip to Iraq. It was in the 1960s, at that time I wasn't in Bratislava, but in Zilina. I was just commuting to Bratislava. He married the daughter of Mrs. Hermina Berkovicova from Bergen-Belsen. They were from the East. This lady had lost her husband and had married a colonel. She was then named Kollarova. My brother's wife was Dr. Eva Urbanova. She was a pediatrician, today she no longer works. They lived near Grosslingova St. in Bratislava. His mother-in-law was very active. She fished and rode horses. She was a heavy smoker, even though she had asthma.

My brother and his wife didn't observe Jewish traditions at all. From a religious standpoint, my brother didn't even understand Judaism. He had no relationship to it, because he grew up in fascism, and then ended up in socialism. He was a completely different type from me. He smoked like a chimney, and stank of cigarettes. Alas, he's dead now. He died after a heart valve operation. His doctor, Viliam Fischer, sketched out for him what he was going to do on a piece of paper. I went to see him, because we know each other, and said to him: "Listen, you can't even do this on a cow, five bypasses in one go, plus ones like these!?" "What are you afraid of, what are you talking about, you don't know anything about it." That's what he told me. After the operation, my brother was behind a glass wall and wrote on a large piece of paper that "everyone's a either whore or a prick" My brother is buried at the Bratislava crematorium.

In 1968 I had a huge amount of work. I couldn't even leave work, I was so busy. The director of Hydrostav, whom I worked for at the time, was on vacation in Yugoslavia. He was constantly phoning and giving orders: "Don't even go home, if need be, stay there, because everything has to hustle along!" We finally met our objectives, and everything was going well; we didn't have any problems. We were working like mad. Back then I was working in Komarno on the construction of a dam and levee. We commuted there every week, and stayed in a dormitory. In the morning there'd be a mess there, as a whole bunch of guys would be going off to work. I lived with the head of the technical department and with the main personnel manager, Porubsky. In the morning he ran out and was yelling: "Get up! Russians! Occupation! 18" I thought to myself: "Have they gone nuts?" I shot back: "I'm sleeping, I don't start work till nine." Everyone else left, but I came in at nine, as if nothing was happening.

That night we were working on an underground wall, which made history as the first of its kind in the whole of Czechoslovakia. We saw the Russians crossing underwater in tanks, under the Komarno bridge. At 4:00 p.m. one foreman ran over and said: "Listen, hurry up and come have a look, there's all sorts of things going on here, tanks are going along the top, they're ripping up rails on the railway bridge, and three are driving in the water. "How do you know?" "I saw them!" He drove by our yard and kept going. I said to him: "Don't worry about it." One of my colleagues, a former classmate, who I'd brought over to Komarno, told me: "On Wednesday we're going home [*to Bratislava*], get ready, we'll take you too." We took a company car along the levee all the way to Bratislava. No one stopped us. Bratislava was full of Russians.

The ministry had bought the license for underground wall technology from Soletance, a French company. There were two suppliers in Czechoslovakia. One was Vodni Stavby Praha, and the second was Hydrostav. At that time I'd already worked my way up to being head of technical supervision. I was in this position for 17 years. I was in Paris a few times too. They selected me as the liaison officer between Soletance and Hydrostav. That was in 1966. I was in Paris about five times, and then also in Montreaux, because that's where their research facility was. Montreaux is about 50 km south of Paris.

The director of Soletance was named Professor Hafen. He was coming here often back then. Once he was here when there was that famous hockey tournament between Czechoslovakia and the Soviet Union, when Golonka [*Golonka, Jozef (b. 1938): former Slovak hockey player and coach. One of the best forwards that played for the national team of the former Czechoslovakia – Editor's note*] was beating the ice with his stick. The professor and his assistants were living at the Hotel Devin [*Hotel Devin: a traditional four-star hotel located in the center of Bratislava – Editor's note*]. The professor says to me: "Isn't there a TV somewhere here, where we could watch the game in peace?" I answered him: "Only at my place." "Can't we go to your place?" "Sure we can, c'mon, I've got my car here." At that time I had a brand-new Skoda. I'd bought it in 1967. I drove him home to our place. We watched the hockey game and they returned to the hotel. The next day our head director called me, that he'd heard that the Frenchmen had been at my place, and how did I dare to do that. I told him, we were watching the hockey game, I put a bottle of gin on the table, and wanted to make coffee too, but they didn't want anything at all. They didn't touch a single thing.

There were of course great differences between life in Czechoslovakia and in France. You can't even compare the two. Life there was calm, perfect. I spent some time in southern France too. First I was in Avignon. There we were looking at large marine structures, by La Ciotat. They were building garages for submarines. There were huge numbers of American soldiers there. We saw all of southern France, because we had a car at our disposal. I went on these trips mainly with Czechs, from Prague. We got along well.

Besides France, I was also in Russia. Twice I was the guest of the Soviet Academy of Sciences. There was this one Jew there, Viktor Danushevski. He was from Lithuania; today he teaches in Philadelphia. His mother-in-law, Olga Davidovna Lipschitz, was the head of the German department at Lomonosov University in Moscow. I used to like going to her place very much. At Christmas I'd even send her presents. She was one superb professor. I've even got one of her dictionaries with a dedication from her.

I had a good relationship with Israel, because the Israeli ambassador in Czechoslovakia was Karol Grünwald. I don't know his Israeli name. I used to meet with him regularly, as he used to come to Bratislava. They were these secret visits. That was during the years 1960 – 1965, lets say. I used to arrange accommodations at the Hotel Devin for him. I'd arrange for him to be able to see the people that he wanted to meet. No one was allowed to know about it. Then, when I went to Prague, all I had to do was call and say "I'm here." Nothing else was needed, he'd find me. He always knew where I was. He lived in Prague 4. He had an apartment there, and also employed a cook and a maid. They both belonged to the StB 19. When I'd arrive, he'd give them time off. He had to prepare for my visits up to two weeks in advance, so that they'd go on a trip, or to see a movie. No one could see me when I was at his place. I was never in Israel; I just used to see him.

I got married for a second time, and moved to the town of Iza. I'd already known my second wife long before that. A friend of mine, Frico Horsky, worked at a shipyard, and was the secretary of the soccer team and sports club. He told me to come there, that's I'd have it good there. I'd have cheap food here [*The town of Iza is in the Komarno district. The area around this district is well-known as a developed agricultural region. A surplus of produce meant economic self-sufficiency and lower prices – Editor's note*], and the Hungarians won't abuse me for being a Jew. I tried to get here. I was working on preparations for Gabcikovo [*Construction on the Gabcikov – Nagymaros hydro project on the Danube River began in 1977 – Editor's note*], and tried to have the head office locate research closer to Komarno, so that I wouldn't have to travel so much from Bratislava to Gabcikovo. Gradually I educated a whole number of operational managers. I also worked in eastern Slovakia. I worked on the foundations for an oil pipeline by Bodrog. I participated in the building of the highest chimney in Slovakia, in Novaky.

I began to play basketball again. I started a basketball team in Komarno, and even had a hand in the creation of this regional contest for older men. About five teams participated. Pravda 20 played, they had Karol Fako, formerly an excellent hockey player, and Milos Bobocky, the director of Pravda. I myself had once played basketball for Slovan Bratislava. In Sali there was a Hydrostav plant, where a lot of our classmates worked; they got together there and formed a team. We put on tournaments, once here, another time there. Another of our classmates, Emil Kubo, worked for Vahostav. He lived in this house, where he raised ducks. He had about a hundred ducks. The cleaning ladies used to take care of them for him. When we were going to be playing in some big match, I'd say to him: "Emil, we'll go to the match, and afterwards we'll go to the pub. You'll supply the ducks, and I'll roast them there..." That's how it went. We became famous for putting these parties, with food and good wine. We treated everyone who came to play. We all became mutual friends.

Back then I began speculating that I could settle down permanently. But I couldn't live in a dormitory. At work they suggested that I start building a house, that they'd help me. So the director issued an order: "He's building a house, so bring him everything that he'll need, as far as equipment is concerned." One day a van arrived, and delivered everything from shovels, picks, nails, wire, boards to who knows what else. Basically everything. I asked the company committee, and got it officially. When I needed to order something in the workshop, I wrote up a request, that I need such and such piece of sheet metal, welded in such and such a way. They billed me for it, but as an employee I paid a lower rate.

Our old director was transferred, and a new one arrived. He was a bit flighty. He didn't understand the work at all, and he became the director of Gabcikov. About a month after I'd booked out of Bratislava, he submitted my papers for transfer to Gabcikov. I told him: "Put in the papers what I'll be doing there!" At that time I could boast that I wasn't just an ordinary Urban, but was the only PhD candidate at that location, that I was in charge of all the technology, in charge of the concrete plant. Everyone respected my authority. Once he transferred me, that I had 24 hours to go to Gabcikov. My wife was pregnant, we were building that house, and he suddenly transfers me. I told him that it wasn't possible. I had ambitions to be the head plant engineer, which carried with it a certain salary and prestige. They didn't want to give the job to me. Finally they threw me out. That was in about 1983. First we wanted to go to Bratislava. I'd found a job for my wife Eva, and as far as I went, work wasn't a problem. Vahostav wanted me to come work for them too, but Eva was a

Party candidate for the position of hospital director in Komarno. But the regional committee jumped in. There was this one Jew there, named Tibor Breiner. He said: "What are you thinking, you don't have to go anywhere, you're our man. You'll stay here, and well find you work." He was the director of Agrostav [*Agrostav: a company extant in all of Czechoslovakia, that performed project design, construction, trades and installation work and so on – Editor's note*] and didn't have an technical deputy, so they installed me in that position. Under me was Edmund Klein, an engineer. He was already an older man. He was head of the project engineering department. I managed 50 people: designers, engineers, and technicians. It wasn't easy, but we excelled at it. We regularly ended up amongst the best when project engineering organizations were evaluated. We even prepared a potato germinating project for Russia. We supplied the project plan for the building of an automated computer-controlled germinating warehouse. I worked there for about ten, eleven years. I built solar grain dryers, did geothermal shafts. I drilled five of them: in Marcelov, in Zemianska Olse, in Komarno, in Svaty Petr, and by Chotin.

At the beginning of the 1990s I retired. I started a small business, I was the first small businessman in the entire region. Even still during the time of "bad socialism" ["*bad socialism": an expression for the last stage of socialism in the former Czechoslovakia, and the beginning of the Velvet Revolution, see 21 – Editor's note*]. The regional party secretary summoned me, and asked me what I was living on. I told him to not worry about it, that he didn't have the right. The heads of individual cooperatives were very good acquaintances of mine, two or three were even excellent friends. They were the ones I worked for. I worked on contracts. And so what? I always thought up all sorts of things. A member of the Federal Assembly, and at the same time the chairman of the Marcelov co-op, came to see me, and said: "Think of something that others won't have, so I can brag." So I thought it up. Besides this, one of my sons-in-law is also a project engineer, so I look at his work, advise him...

Now that I'm retired, I devote myself to politics, history and mainly concentration camps. I work on perfecting my knowledge, speak to people and sometimes I even find subject matter that I've already forgotten about. When they call me from the Komarno Jewish community to say a few words, I go. Once a year I speak during a memorial ceremony for the victims of the Holocaust. That's even in the papers.

Glossary:

1 Nationalization in Czechoslovakia

The goal of nationalization was to put privately-owned means of production and private property into public control and into the hands of the Socialist state. The attempts to change property relations after WWI (1918-1921) were unsuccessful. Directly after WWII, already by May 1945, the heads of state took over possession of the collaborators' (that is, Hungarian and German) property. In July 1945, members of the Communist Party before the National Front, openly called for the nationalization of banks, financial institutions, insurance companies and industrial enterprises, the execution of which fell to the Nationalization Central Committee. The first decree for nationalization was signed 11th August 1945 by the Republic President. This decree affected agricultural production, the film industry and foreign trade. Members of the Communist Party fought representatives of the National Socialist Party and the Democratic Party for further expansion of the process of nationalization, which resulted in the president signing four new decrees on 24th

October, barely two months after taking office. These called for nationalization of the mining industry companies and industrial plants, the food industry plants, as well as joint-stock companies, banks and life insurance companies. The nationalization established the Czechoslovakia's financial development, and shaped the 'Socialist financial sphere'. Despite this, significantly valuable property disappeared from companies in public ownership into the private and foreign trade network. Because of this, the activist committee of the trade unions called for further nationalizations on 22nd February 1948. This process was stopped in Czechoslovakia by new laws of the National Assembly in April 1948, which were passed that December.

2 Joint (American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee)

The Joint was formed in 1914 with the fusion of three American Jewish committees of assistance, which were alarmed by the suffering of Jews during World War I. In late 1944, the Joint entered Europe's liberated areas and organized a massive relief operation. It provided food for Jewish survivors all over Europe, it supplied clothing, books and school supplies for children. It supported cultural amenities and brought religious supplies for the Jewish communities. The Joint also operated DP camps, in which it organized retraining programs to help people learn trades that would enable them to earn a living, while its cultural and religious activities helped re-establish Jewish life. The Joint was also closely involved in helping Jews to emigrate from Europe and from Muslim countries. The Joint was expelled from East Central Europe for decades during the Cold War and it has only come back to many of these countries after the fall of communism. Today the Joint provides social welfare programs for elderly Holocaust survivors and encourages Jewish renewal and communal development.

3 PTP (Technical Assistance Battalion)

was created in 1948 for politically unreliable persons, such as for example people of noble descent, capitalists, sons of farmers and estate owners that didn't agree with collectivization, clergymen,... "PTPers" didn't have a time limit for their army service (basic army service lasted two years). Because of their political unreliability they weren't issued a weapon. They mainly performed arduous physical labour. In the 1950s over 44,000 men absolved the army work camps. In the time of the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic, the Technical Assistance Battalion officially never existed. Colloquially they were called the *Black Barons.*

4 September 1938 mobilization

The ascent of the Nazis to power in Germany in 1933 represented a fundamental turning point in the foreign political situation of Czechoslovakia. The growing tension of the second half of the 1930s finally culminated in 1938, when the growing aggressiveness of neighboring Germany led first to the adoption of emergency measures from May 20th to June 22nd, and finally to the proclamation of a general mobilization on 23rd September 1938. At the end of September 1938, however, Czechoslovakia's defense system, for years laboriously built up, collapsed. Czechoslovakia's main ally, France, forced them to submit to Germany, and made no secret of the fact that they did not intend to provide military assistance. The support of the Soviet Union, otherwise in itself quite problematic, was contingent upon the support of France. Other countries, i.e. Hungary and Poland, were only waiting for the opportunity to gain something for themselves. (Source: http://www.military.cz/opevneni/mobilizace.html)

5 Majdanek concentration camp

situated five kilometers from the city center of Lublin, Poland, originally established as a labor camp in October 1941. It was officially called Prisoner of War Camp of the Waffen-SS Lublin until 16th February 1943, when the name was changed to Concentration Camp of the Waffen-SS Lublin. Unlike most other Nazi death camps, Majdanek, located in a completely open field, was not hidden from view. About 130,000 Jews were deported there during 1942-43 as part of the 'Final Solution'. Initially there were two gas chambers housed in a wooden building, which were later replaced by gas chambers in a brick building. The estimated number of deaths is 360,000, including Jews, Soviets POWs and Poles. The camp was liquidated in July 1944, but by the time the Red Army arrived the camp was only partially destroyed. Although approximately 1,000 inmates were executed on a death march, the Red Army found thousand of prisoners still in the camp, an evidence of the mass murder that had occurred in Majdanek.

6 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.

7 Maccabi Sports Club in the Czechoslovak Republic

The Maccabi World Union was founded in 1903 in Basel aT the VI. Zionist Congress. In 1935 the Maccabi World Union had 100,000 members, 10,000 of which were in Czechoslovakia. Physical education organizations in Bohemia have their roots in the 19th century. For example, the first Maccabi gymnastic club in Bohemia was founded in 1899. The first sport club, Bar Kochba, was founded in 1893 in Moravia. The total number of Maccabi clubs in Bohemia and Moravia before WWI was fifteen. The Czechoslovak Maccabi Union was officially founded in June 1924, and in the same year became a member of the Maccabi World Union, located in Berlin.

8 Neolog Jewry

Following a Congress in 1868/69 in Budapest, where the Jewish community was supposed to discuss several issues on which the opinion of the traditionalists and the modernizers differed and which aimed at uniting Hungarian Jews, Hungarian Jewry was officially split into to (later three) communities, which all built up their own national community network. The Neologs were the modernizers, who opposed the Orthodox on various questions. The third group, the sop-called Status Quo Ante advocated that the Jewish community was maintained the same as before the 1868/69 Congress.

9 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.

10 Exemption and exceptions in the Slovak State (1939-1945)

in the Jewish Codex they are included under § 254 and § 255. Exemption and exceptions, § 255 – the President of the Slovak Republic may grant an exemption from the stipulations of this decree. Exemption may be complete or partial and may be subject to conditions. Exemption may be revoked at any time. In the case of exemption, administrative fees are collected according to § 255 in the following amounts:

1. for the granting of an exception according to § 1, the sum of 1,000 to 500,000 Ks.
2. for the granting of an exception according to § 2, the sum of 500 to 100,000 Ks
3. for the granting of an exception according to single or multiple decrees, the sum of 10 Ks to 300,000 Ks
4. a certificate issued according to § 3 is charged at 10 Ks

§ 255 enabled the President to grant exceptions from decrees for a fee. Disputes are still led regarding how this paragraph got into the Jewish Codex and how many exceptions the President granted. According to documents there were 1111 Jews protected by exceptions, including family members. Exceptions were valid from the commencement of deportations from the territory of the Slovak State, in 1942, up until the outbreak of the Slovak National Rebellion, in the year 1944.

11 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.

12 Sered labor camp

created in 1941 as a Jewish labor camp. The camp functioned until the beginning of the Slovak National Uprising, when it was dissolved. At the beginning of September 1944 its activities were renewed and deportations began. Due to the deportations, SS-Hauptsturmfuhrer Alois Brunner was named camp commander at the end of September. Brunner was a long-time colleague of Adolf Eichmann and had already organized the deportation of French Jews in 1943. Because the camp registers were destroyed, the most trustworthy information regarding the number of deportees has been provided by witnesses who worked with prisoner records. According to this information, from September 1944 until the end of March 1945, 11 transports containing 11,532 persons were

dispatched from the Sered camp. Up until the end of November 1944 the transports were destined for the Auschwitz concentration camp, later prisoners were transported to other camps in the Reich. The Sered camp was liquidated on 31st March 1945, when the last evacuation transport, destined for the Terezin ghetto, was dispatched. On this transport also departed the commander of the Sered camp, Alois Brunner.

13 Bergen-Belsen
concentration camp located in northern Germany. Bergen-Belsen was established in April 1943 as a detention camp for prisoners who were to be exchanged with Germans imprisoned in Allied countries. Bergen-Belsen was liberated by the British army on April 15, 1945. The soldiers were shocked at what they found, including 60,000 prisoners in the camp, many on on the brink of death, and thousands of unburied bodies lying about. Rozett R. – Spector S.: Encyclopedia of the Holocaust, Facts on File, G.G. The Jerusalem Publishing House Ltd. 2000, pg. 139 – 141

14 Kramer Josef (1906 – 1945)
SS official who served as the commandant at Natzweiler from April 1941 to May 1944, and at Bergen-Belsen from December 1944 until the camp's liberation in April 1945. He was tried and executed by the British. Rozett R. – Spector S.: Encyclopedia of the Holocaust, Facts on File, G.G. The Jerusalem Publishing House Ltd. 2000, pg. 293

15 Sachsenhausen
concentration camp in Germany, operating between 1936 and April 1945. It was named after the Sachsenhausen quarter, part of the town of Oranienburg. It is estimated that some 200,000 prisoners passed through Sachsenhausen and that 30,000 perished there. That number does not include the Soviet prisoners of war who were exterminated immediately upon arrival at the camp, as they were never even registred on the camp´s lists. The number also does not account for those prisoners who died on the way to the camp, while being transferred elsewhere, or during the camp´s evacuation. Sachsenhausen was liberated by Soviet troops on April 27, 1945. They found only 3,000 prisoners who had been too ill to leave on the death march. Rozett R. – Spector S.: Encyclopedia of the Holocaust, Facts on File, G.G. The Jerusalem Publishing House Ltd. 2000, pg. 396 – 398

16 February 1948
Communist take-over in Czechoslovakia. The 'people's domocracy' became one of the Soviet satelites in Eastern Europe. The state aparatus was centralized under the leadership of the Czechoslovak Communist Party (KSC). In the economy private ovnership was banned and submitted to central planning. The state took control of the educational system, too. Political opposition and dissident elements were persecuted.

17 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.

18 Warsaw Pact Occupation of Czechoslovakia

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

19 Statni Tajna Bezpecnost

Czechoslovak intelligence and security service founded in 1948.

20 Pravda

in the past, the newspaper was the Slovak equivalent of the Soviet/Russian newspaper Pravda. Founded in 1945 (other Slovak *Pravdas* existing before [in 1925-1932, 1944] were shut down), it was a publication of the Communist Party of Slovakia and, as such, it became a state-owned newspaper. Its equivalent in the Czech part of Czechoslovakia was the Rude Pravo. After the Velvet Revolution, Pravda temporarily became the newspaper of the Social Democratic Party, the successor to the Communist Party of Slovakia. Today, however, it is a modern neutral newspaper and one of Slovakia’s main newspapers.

21 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.