



12 CZECH JEWS AND THEIR INTERNMENT IN TEREZIN (THERESIENSTADT)

Excerpts from the Centropa interviews

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“[In Terezin] everything was intense. I never experienced such intensity before, or since then. Everything that those children were doing there, whether they were drawing something, or writing, was full-on. The entire leadership tried to do as much as possible for them. Because in their view the only ones that had a chance of survival were the children, or the young people. In the end it wasn't like that, but even so, they tried.”

ALENA MUNKOVA

Prague, Czech Republic

“The paradox of Terezin was that on the one hand people were dying of hunger, desperation, dirt, disease, hopelessness, but on the other hand people played soccer, there were concerts, operas such as Brundibar, The Bartered Bride, and so on. In Terezin people sang, people died. And you have to put that together.”

TOMAN BROD

Prague, Czech Republic

INTRODUCTION

Centropa is a Jewish historical institute based in Vienna, Budapest, Hamburg and Washington. The first phase of our activities began in 2000, with an oral history project that spent ten years interviewing 1,200 elderly Jews still living in Central and Eastern Europe, the former Soviet Union, the Baltics and the Balkans. We never used video in our interviews, we did not focus solely on the Holocaust. Instead, we asked our respondents to tell us stories about the *entire* century, just as they lived it, and we digitized 24,800 of their old family pictures and documents, all of which they annotated for us. There has never been an oral history project like this before; it is too late to attempt one now. Please visit our website, www.centropa.org, to find the English translations of our interviews and the annotated photographs. For academics wishing to access the original language word-for-word transcriptions, please contact our office in Vienna.

OUR CZECH INTERVIEWS: HOW THEY SURVIVED THE SECOND WORLD WAR

Between March 2003 and September 2007, Centropa interviewed forty-four Jews still living in the Czech Republic and two Czech Jews who had immigrated to Israel. With a team led by Pavla Neuner and Martin Korcok, twelve interviewers collected a total of 214 hours of audio from these interviewees and digitized 951 privately-held photos.

We interviewed twenty-five women and sixteen men. Fourteen were born in Prague, the others in Brno, Trebic or in cities and towns in modern-day Germany, Poland, and Slovakia. Our interviewees go into great detail about their lives before the war. Indeed, they paint a lively picture of growing up in interwar Czechoslovakia, the only stable democracy in interwar Central Europe.

Then came the war.

Twenty-six of our interviewees, or sixty-three percent, were deported from their homes to Terezin (in German: Theresienstadt), a ghetto and transit camp just north of Prague.

Nine interviewees remained in Terezin during the entire war, mostly because their parents were employed in jobs the Germans needed them for.

Sixteen of our interviewees were deported from Terezin to Auschwitz, and as the Soviet Army edged closer to Auschwitz in January 1945, some of our interviewees were deported to other concentration or labor camps.

Three Czech Jews we interviewed escaped the horrors because their parents sent them to England in 1939 on the Kindertansport arranged by Nicholas Winton. They returned home at war's end. [The stories they tell can be found here.](#)

The other thirteen interviewees survived the war in myriad other contexts. These included being sent straight to a concentration or labor camp rather than passing through a transit camp or ghetto; serving in forced labor in the Slovak Army; escaping to Shanghai and then to Palestine; and being smuggled out of a ghetto as a child.

OUR INTERVIEWEES AFTER THE WAR

In their detailed online biographies (which we give links to below) each of our forty-six interviewees share with us stories of why they chose to remain in (what was then) Czechoslovakia and they share with us how they rebuilt their lives. As stated above, two immigrated to Israel after 1948.

Our forty-six Czech interviewees went on to pursue a variety of careers in the postwar decades. Nearly all of them went back to school, completed their education and pursued higher degrees in fields such as education, history, nursing, chemistry, and botany. Several pursued careers in the arts, including scriptwriting, photography, and theater directing.

Seven interviewees were involved in Jewish- or Holocaust-related work at some point, often with their local Jewish community or the Terezin Initiative, an organization based in Prague. In addition, all of the interviewees married and most raised children as well.

LIFE AND DEATH IN TEREZIN, ‘THE MODEL GHETTO’

The Czechoslovak state was forced to cede the Sudetenland, the outer rim of Bohemia and Moravia, to Nazi Germany in the fall of 1938. Adolf Hitler had promised the British and French leaders this would satisfy his territorial ambitions. He was lying. In March 1939 German troops invaded the rest of the country while Slovakia broke off to become a puppet state of Nazi Germany. The portion of the country now known as the Czech Republic, or Czechia, is comprised of two regions, Bohemia and Moravia. Under German occupation it became known as “the Protectorate.”

There were 118,310 Jews living in the Czech Republic then and once occupied, restrictive laws were placed against Jews: they had to wear yellow stars, could not ride public transport, were thrown out of schools and jobs, were forced to give up radios. Then in late 1941 the first deportations began and most Czech Jews would find themselves, at least for a while, in the fortress town of Terezin, which Austrian Emperor Joseph II had built in the 1780s and had named for his mother, the Empress Maria Theresa. Ironically, the fortress had been built to keep the Prussians out of the Austrian Empire. Now it was being used to keep Jews from Austria, the Czech Republic and Germany in.

Terezin was built to hold approximately 5,000 residents, but as a portion of the barracks town was converted into a Nazi ghetto, tens of thousands of Jews were forced into its streets and barracks. There were but 900 toilets, never enough drinking water and conditions were abominable. Those who led the Jewish community in the ghetto were faced with unspeakable choices about food and medicine.

Thousands of Jews from the Czech Republic, Austria and Germany (and smaller numbers from elsewhere) were sent into the Terezin ghetto. In 1942 the Nazis called for the ghetto leadership to assemble hundreds, sometimes thousands of ghetto inmates for further transports “to the east.” No one knew what that was. But everyone knew it wasn’t good to be called onto the transports. These transports to the east continued until late 1944.

Terezin became known as the ‘model ghetto’ because in spring, 1944 it was cleaned up, painted and a Red Cross delegation brought in to inspect it. Before they arrived, thousands of Jews were sent to the gas chambers of Auschwitz. After they left, a propaganda film to show the pleasant conditions of the ghetto was made, although it was never publicly released. A great many of those who were featured in that film were also sent off to be gassed.

The Soviet Army liberated Terezin in May 1945 and when the totals were tabulated, these were roughly the statistics historians generally agree on:

140,000 Jews were deported to Terezin
75,000 of these were from Czechoslovakia
88,000 were deported from Terezin to the East
60,000 of these were from Czechoslovakia
3,000 of these deportees returned after the war
33,000 died in Terezin
9,000 were in Terezin at war’s end
150 of these were children

We call your attention to the accompanying eReader entitled, “Terezin: A Portrait,” that is also available on our website and here you can learn more of how Terezin became ‘the model ghetto.’

Our director, Edward Serotta, narrated and produced a seventeen-minute film on Terezin for ABC Nightline and [it can be seen here](#).

TWELVE CZECH JEWS RECALL THEIR IMPRISONMENT IN TEREZIN

As stated above, twenty-six of our interviewees were interned for at least some period in Terezin, and we have arbitrarily chosen twelve of their stories as descriptions of what life was like there. The first three excerpts in this eReader were taken from those who remained in the Terezin Ghetto for the entire war the other nine are from interviewees who were transported from Terezin to places considerably more horrific.

As you will read, these twelve Jews describe a surprising amount of creativity allowed within the walls of the ghetto. They performed plays, attended classical concerts, wrote newspapers and attended art classes but they also describe the horrors they witnessed in unblinking prose.

Nearly all of them reflect on what it meant to them to be interned in Terezin, and we are deeply grateful to all of our Czech interviewees, as well as our interviewers, who have preserved their memories for us.

NOTE

Centropa’s interviewers were: Dagmar Gieselova, Dagmar Greslova, Terezie Holmerova, Lenka Koprivova, Martin Korcok, Martina Marsalkova, Pavla Neuner, Zuzana Pastroková, Barbora Pokreis, Eva Pressburgerova, Silvia Singerova, and Zuzana Strouhova.

Source consulted: “Theresienstadt.” Holocaust Encyclopedia. The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. <https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/theresienstadt>.

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ALENA MUNKOVA

Prague, Czech Republic

Interviewer: Terezie Holmerová

Date of interview: January 2006

Alena was born in Prague, Czech Republic, in September 1926 to Emil Synek and Marie Synkova. Her father was a politically and professionally active dentist. When Alena was ending first grade, her mother died of cancer. Her father remarried twice. His second wife died of cancer five years later and his third wife was non-Jewish, which protected him against the anti-Jewish laws and deportations. Alena's older brother, Jiri, survived the war in hiding. Alena was sent to Terezin, but was protected from being sent to Auschwitz because she was considered to be a half-breed. After the war, Alena returned to Prague. She learned that her father and stepmother had been denounced and sent to Auschwitz. While her stepmother survived, her father died in Auschwitz. In Prague, Alena graduated from the Faculty of Journalism at the University of Political and Social Sciences and worked as a dramaturge and scriptwriter in animated and puppet films until her retirement. Alena married twice: first to Josef Till, an architect, in 1924, and then to Jiri Munk, in 1932. In 1965, Alena and Munk had a daughter, Hana.



[Read Alena Munkova's biography here](#)

[Click here to see her family pictures](#)

In 1942, my brother was summoned to the transport. Alone, of course, because our father was protected by his marriage to a non-Jew. But my brother didn't get on the transport, and instead left a letter that he'd committed suicide. Then very uncomfortable situations followed, because we were in contact with him and I was the connection. Either I or my stepmother would bring him things that he needed. It was so terribly risky. Everything was full of fear and risk. I think that that atmosphere of fear molded me for the remainder of my life. From that time I've never been far from a state of anxiety. I don't want to say depression, that's a strong word. They were more like states of anxiety. Fear of the unknown.

Later, I realized that that these experiences meant that I would always have a misunderstanding of the world. I would have questions like: Why am I? Why do I do this? And, why do people do that? It's this feeling that I can't communicate what I'm feeling. Basically, not to anybody. And that I have to come to terms with that constant misunderstanding.

Alena in Prague, Czech Republic in 1940.

I've got this incident, completely abstract, just to explain this feeling more closely. In that apartment on Letna, where I lived, to get to the room where I slept you had to cross from this large room where we used to have supper, through this quite large front hall. The light switch for that hallway was completely on the other side. So I had to cross it in darkness. To this day I've still got an intense memory of sitting there and being unable to go to bed. No one knew about it – I of course didn't tell my father about it. I remember that I exerted all my energy, or strength - it's more of a symbol, what I'm saying now - to walk through that dark hall. When I entered the children's room and turned on the light, I was completely exhausted. I think that this extreme exhaustion from that journey, which today in my memory is so short, but back then seemed unimaginably long to me, is a symbol of my entire life.

This fear-filled period lasted up to December 1942, when I myself was summoned to the transport. That's when I saw my father for the last time. He had completely collapsed because there was nothing he could do. Even before that he had been living under terrible tension, in terrible fear, and then suddenly... For him

I was a little girl, even though I wasn't all that little any more. Certainly he also blamed himself for everything. Because he was so extremely just, so absolutely humanistic, and he idealized the world - even though back then it was still possible, today I don't idealize it anymore, and I don't think I'm alone. He still believed that it wasn't possible for Czechoslovakia to be gone and for the Czechoslovak state to not care for its citizens.

There was this one incident that took place. After the Anschluss, after the annexation of Austria, some distant cousin of his, who was then continuing further on, arrived in Prague. He was at our place and telling us about the horrors that were taking place there. Well, when that cousin left, my father said, 'That's not possible. He must be crazy, he needs to go to a mental institution.' He didn't believe it, he didn't want to believe it. He wasn't alone in that, it must have been utterly horrible for those people back then, that powerlessness. What's more, back then a man was still the head of the family, someone who takes care of his family members. That has changed a bit, after all.

You see, before the war I had the possibility of emigrating but my father didn't let me go. When I was very small, when that first mother of mine was ill, I had had a nanny, Miss Saskova. This Miss Saskova - that was around 1939 - left for England to work as a nanny for some family, also some dentist. She apparently liked me in some fashion, and so she came to see my father and asked if she could take me with her, that I'd learn a trade there. My father said it was out of the question.

I remember that even later there was always talk of emigration around us, but we didn't have any contacts. It was said that certain Jewish families had a lot of money and information, so they had at least some possibility of emigrating. Often it was a question of money. I don't know anything exact about it, just that very few people got an affidavit. They may have had one promised, for example, but then it never happened. I know that the Petchka family was terribly rich. They even transported out all of their employees, an entire train. But I'm convinced that even if someone had offered my father something, he'd have turned him down.

We, for example, didn't even know about Winton's activities, how he transported Jewish children out. We didn't find out about it at all. It's true that we weren't in very close contact with the Prague Jewish community. But maybe it wasn't just because of that. We were recorded [in the Jewish community] there. Jews, for example, used to get summons, while they were still in Prague, to clear away snow. Well, that we used to get every once in a while, my father and brother. That was so humiliating, you'd be shoveling snow, wearing a star, and on top of that people would be yelling things at you. It was always terribly difficult to get out of it. It was so-called compulsory labor. So we were in the [community] records.

I expected the transport, I knew that it would come, and was afraid. When I got the summons, I knew that I had to go, that I couldn't do what my brother had done. For a week before they took us away, we were in a so-called quarantine at Veletržní Palace [The Trade Fair Palace, a Modernist 1920s exhibition hall]. I knew that my father was only a few buildings over, but with that star he couldn't even come see me. But he sent someone, because through some guard I got a box of candy with a letter.

The conditions were quite bad for us in the Veletržní Palace. I ended up with a fever from it all. At that time an excellent person took care of me there, Gustav Schorsch, who unfortunately never returned. By complete chance, he had the number next to mine. The transport was named 'Ck,' and I had number 333; I guess the threes were 'lucky.' When you entered the quarantine, there were mattresses arranged there according to those numbers. Schorsch saw me there, that I was alone and crying. He helped me very much during that week before they transported us away, and also the whole time in Terezín, until they sent him further on.

When he knew that I was sick, or that something was wrong, he'd always come to check on me. He used to put on plays there, gave lectures, and in general was culturally active. He was a lot older than I was, nine years. He'd already graduated from high school, and as a student had already acted on the stage. He was the founder of Theater 99 on Narodní Avenue. He was an exceptional stage talent.

After the war a book about him came out, *Nevyuctovan zustava zivot*. After the revolution, in the 1990s, I also wrote a script about him. The film exists, and was shown on TV. Unfortunately, I was only able to use interviews with other people. His photographs exist, but there was little authentic material, except for some plays he'd dramatized. They've even been put on at the National Theater. He was an exceptional person, a lot of people reminisced about him, his former classmates and so on.

I don't exactly know what went on with my father after my departure. I think that someone there helped him, that someone from those Letna residents, either from his former patients or the businessmen there, used to go to see him. All the business owners there knew each other. I think that my father must have had contact with someone, because during that year that I was in Terezin, he managed to smuggle through a letter, apparently via the Czech policemen that guarded us in Terezin. I've got it hidden away to this day. It's beautiful, full of hints. He wrote 'Jirina is all right,' that was my brother, Jirka.

Our stepmother apparently maintained contact with my brother then. But both she and my father were arrested about a year after me. He had the dental practice right up to his arrest. Then there was apparently some German there, because after the war all the equipment was still there. When we returned, my stepmother rented it out via a so-called widow's law.

In Terezin, I wasn't all alone anymore, some sort of society formed there. The people there were in the same situation. When I arrived, we were in the so-called *shloiska*, which is a quarantine. We had to report there, and precisely because of the horrible complex of mine that I was something different, I reported that I was a half-breed. I had no idea that this had been the first transport that had contained half-breeds, otherwise I would have been found out, and I wouldn't be sitting here now. It was a completely irrational thing. It seems like I've made it up, but that's really how it was.

After some time in Terezin I was put in the children's home. There were children from about 11 or 12 upwards there, up to about 15 or 16, I think. I don't know exactly. I was among the oldest ones there. Younger children were with their parents. For example, my husband, who's younger than I, was with his mother. Children who had arrived in Terezin with their parents were also in the children's home; I was more of an exception, having arrived alone. But my uncle, my father's brother, was already there. He was lying there in this hospital room where people with tuberculosis were. I used to go see him occasionally. My father's father was in Terezin at that time. He died very early on, and then my uncle as well. That was in 1943. I didn't have any other relatives there.

In Terezin, I became friends with Vera, back then Bendova, who was also a half-breed, but a real one. We were bunkmates - there were triple bunk beds, and we slept up on the top bunk together. She was the only one who knew the truth about me; I had to tell someone what the case was with me. Always, when I was summoned - half-breeds used to be summoned to the headquarters - neither of us slept. We're of course in touch to this day. She lives in Olten, Switzerland, where I went to visit her after the revolution.

As a half-breed I was allowed to stay in Terezin; it protected me from further transport, and my best friend as well. Of the people in our room - we lived in No. 29 in L410 - mostly everyone else was transported further on. Some returned after the war, and some didn't. Plus, when Brundibar was put on there, new children had to be recruited to replace the ones that had been transported away. I myself never played in Brundibar, as I never knew how to sing.

We then tried to put on a play by Klicpera with Schorsch. But mainly I wrote - trifles, various poems. Mostly they involved reminiscences, for example, about a girlfriend that had remained in Prague, or laments over what I had lost. There were all these sentimental things, with tendencies towards romantic expressions. Not long ago there was a reunion of girls from Terezin, and they said, 'Listen, we were always thinking about food, and you were writing poems. We used to say to ourselves that you weren't normal.'

I, of course, also experienced love in Terezin. And not just once. I think that I fell in love there at least five times. I never counted, and I always also soon got over it. It never lasted very long for me, which was still the case long after the war. I perhaps stuck out a bit in Terezin; I was completely blond and blue-eyed. Maybe it also says something about that period, it was sometimes for only a couple of days, but intense.

However, there were one or two stronger relationships. Not one of them returned. One was named Jiri Kummermann. That boy, though he was 17, was already composing. I've still got some notes, some fragments, hidden away to this day. His mother, a former dancer, was also there; she didn't return either. Because I knew that I'd probably stay in Terezin, I had some of his notes with me. But after the war I gave them to his relatives. I guess that the relationship was quite intense, because long after 1945 I still thought that he might appear.

Then there was Karel Stadler, who I knew from Prague because he was a friend of my brother's. An exceptionally educated boy. He was about four, five years older, while the musician was the same age as I. So I was impressed by him, and felt embarrassed that I was completely dumb compared to him. I wasn't the only one to fall in love there. Of course, during the day we couldn't see each other much, but curfew wasn't until after 8pm, so we could still be outside in the evening.

Terezin was an amazing education for me. First of all, I wouldn't be the person I am now, but that's normal. But mainly I was introduced to values there that I would never have had the chance to know. For example, what friendship can do for a person. But not only that. How important the influence of art is. There, the people that had come to Terezin – and they were professors, artists – all of them truly tried to convey what they knew. There's no way that could happen in a normal situation. In Terezin everything was extreme, it wasn't a normal situation there. That's of course hindsight, back then I couldn't have realized it.

We lived through extreme situations there. For one, we feared further transport. No one knew when they'd have to leave, and where to. Even though, of course, no one of our generation wanted to at all allow for the fact that it could be the end. Almost to the end of the war, I didn't know that the gas chambers existed. That was because I was in Terezin. Maybe someone there knew it, but I think that most of them didn't. Not until 1945, when people were returning.

Understandably, we also had fun in Terezin. And those love affairs. Everything was experienced intensely, because there you couldn't count on having time. I think that whether you're an adolescent, or 20 or even 50 years old, that's a very unusual situation. There you didn't at all have the feeling that time was uselessly running between your fingers. The intensity of the time was also given by the fact that we were hungry. Everything was intense. I never experienced such intensity before, or since then. Everything that those children were doing there, either they were drawing something, or writing, was full-on. The entire leadership tried to do as much as possible for them. Because in their view the only ones that had a chance of survival were the children, or the young people. In the end it wasn't like that, but even so, they tried.

I don't know if some country, or some group, some small nation, does in a normal situation as much as was done back then in those extreme times in Terezin. Back then, everything was at stake. It was also necessary to help the adults as well as the young people, to make them aware of the fact that they have to watch themselves so that they won't decline morally. All that was terribly important. You had to preserve the feeling that you're not in some hole.

The question – why did I return and not someone else? – this feeling of guilt, we've probably all got it. That's been reflected upon many times already. I of course, don't have an answer to it, and you can't even feel guilty. But I think that the percentage of those best ones that didn't return is very high. You also don't know what those children would have become. Certainly there were many talented people there, and with that experience, that intensity that I've talked about, everything was amplified even more.

What do the people that survived have in common? I don't have a definite answer to that. I think that the majority of the people that returned are today much more tolerant than people without this experience. But it of course also depended on what sort of way of life you ended up in. That also molded you. If you remained completely alone, or if at least a bit of your family remained. It's a way of thinking and intellectual position. Life itself.

There are all sorts of people. Lots of them moved away, as well, and those, when they come here, are also completely different. But there is something there, some sort of common fate. Not that we're extremely close, but there is something there that I can easily and immediately identify with. With someone who didn't go through it, I'd have to do a huge amount of explaining to give them an idea of what it's about. Here I don't have to. There's no doubt that we have a common experience, which binds us. It's hard to say, maybe we're connected by some sort of reappraisal of values. A larger degree of tolerance, that for sure.

Of course, there are some individuals who don't fit the pattern, but even now, when I meet with people, it's clear to me from the first moment who is a survivor. I also think, though maybe I'm fooling myself, that those who survived won't succumb to concerning themselves only with economic matters. I think that they're a little less susceptible to the influence of today's way of life. That they're a little more themselves. There is, after all, something there, some experience that sets them apart. If I was to summarize what my stay in the concentration camp took from me, it took my past. That severing of the past, that's something I have to come to terms with.

We were terribly looking forward to returning home. But of course there was no place to return to. I suddenly didn't know what to do. How to live, why at all, and mainly there was no one to turn to for advice. My brother, who also survived, didn't pay much attention to me, he had enough of his own cares and worries. He was running all over the place, they were already starting up a newspaper and he was given an important editorial position, head of the cultural section. They got what was then a German paper, *Mlada Fronta*, and he was basically a founder. He was 23, and J. Horec, later the editor-in-chief, was, I think, 24. [Horec, Jaromir, b. 1921, was a popular Czech poet, writer, journalist and publicist.] He had absolutely no time for me.

I remember that back then, after I had returned, I went to report to something like the people's committee of the time, I don't know what it was called anymore, because I needed identification. There they gave me two pieces of underwear, panties, and some sort of nightie, and about five handkerchiefs.

My father didn't survive the war, he died in 1944 in Auschwitz. I've got two dates: one is in February, the other is in May, no one knows for sure. They arrested him in the fall of 1943, he passed through Karlovo namesti [Charles Square], where he was interrogated, through the Small Fortress to Auschwitz; he didn't go on a normal transport. He was most likely arrested because of my brother. My stepmother was also arrested, but she returned after the war. But she also didn't know why they actually arrested them. It's quite likely that they were denounced by someone. She passed through the Ravensbrück and Barth concentration camps. [Barth was a camp within the Ravensbrück concentration camp.] She didn't return until somewhat later, not until the end of June 1945, and was seriously ill.

ANNA LORENCOVA

Prague, Czech Republic

Interviewer: Pavla Neuer

Date of interview: July 2003

Anna was born in 1927 in Most to Richard Weinstein, a doctor, and Gertruda Weinsteinova, a nurse. She also has an older brother, Hanus Hron, who was born in 1925. Anna described her family as assimilated and her father as apolitical. After Germany occupied the border regions of Czechoslovakia in 1938, her family moved to Prague. Lorencova survived the war in Terezin with her family. After the war, she married Bohumil Lorenc. Although they divorced, they had two daughters together. Anna also held various jobs, including working as a photographer and a bookkeeper.



Anna and her brother Hanus in Prague, Czech Republic in the 1930s.

[Read Anna Lorencova's biography here](#)
[Click here to see her family pictures](#)

After the Munich Pact, when Germans occupied the border regions, we moved to Prague, where we lived in a small apartment on Hermanova Street. Dad was trying to arrange for us to immigrate to America.

On the same street, a bit further down, on the second floor in a normal residential apartment, was a Jewish prayer hall where we would go sometimes. As children, we didn't find all the anti-Jewish measures and restrictions as difficult as adults did, for we just adapted to things. When we were no longer allowed to travel by tram, we went to the Hagibor sports grounds by foot, although it was pretty far from where we were living.

My dad was no longer looking for employment in Prague. He was doing what he could to be able to immigrate to America, but it didn't work out for him. It was extremely difficult, for it required a lot of money, we weren't from the area, and he didn't know anyone here. Dad wasn't familiar with the local conditions and probably didn't have the right nature for this kind of thing, as he was actually a shy person. In short, our family didn't manage to immigrate.

In the end, there were some people, perhaps acquaintances, who left for America. America required an affidavit, which meant having some kind of sponsor. Either you had to deposit a certain amount of money somewhere, or somebody had to accept liability for you. We didn't have anyone in America to help us, so our parents gave the relevant people nearly all their savings so that they would put down an affidavit for us. And those people then sent word that they had lost the money. After that, there was no money and no possibilities left. Only Shanghai was still an option for Jewish immigrants. Dad managed to get there, traveling by train across the Soviet Union. It took several months before he could arrange the necessary permits for us. He sent each of us the appropriate document, but by the time we got it, we weren't able to leave. In Shanghai, my dad worked as a doctor.

When we came from Most to Prague, we moved into a new house that had been built in 1938 for employees of the National Bank. It was an entire housing block on Letna Plain [large plain in Prague,

popular place for summer walks]; building work was still going on around it, but three houses were already standing. Our house had a wide marble staircase, the apartments had modern facilities with electric cookers, the cellar had a modern laundry room with a washing machine, spin-drier and a drying area, and we had district heating.

The house was situated in an area where a lot of Germans were living. Because it was a very nice house, Germans often came round to look at our apartment. That could have been the reason why we were summoned for deportation as early as 1941. This is corroborated by the fact that when we returned, the apartment was empty, as German tenants had just moved out of it.

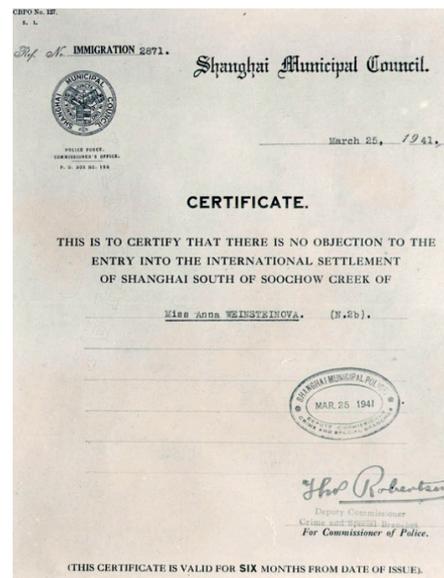
The transport summons stated what we must and must not bring with us. Other families who went later were usually prepared, but we weren't. My dad was no longer there and mom had decided not to leave our beautiful furniture for the Germans, so she swapped it for some old junk that belonged to another family in the house. She hid her jewelry and other items where various acquaintances were living and gave the janitor's family several suitcases, mostly full of clothes. When we returned, the janitor was no longer alive; he had been murdered by a German two days before the end of the war. He now has a small memorial plaque in the street.

The assembly point was in wooden buildings on the Trade Fair grounds near what is now the Park Hotel. It was just a short distance from our apartment, so we went there on foot. Various administrative operations and thefts were still under way at the assembly point. Identity cards, money and jewels, if people had any left, were handed over. Out of fear, and out of defiance, people threw money down into the latrines. I think that house keys were also handed over and people had to sign various declarations legalizing all the robbery that was going on. For quite some time our accounts had been blocked, which meant that we could withdraw only a very limited amount of money. We spent almost three days and, I think, two nights at the assembly point.

Early in the morning, probably about 4am, we were taken to Bubeneč Station, from where we left on passenger trains to Bohusovice. When we were seated in our compartment, an SS man appeared and called out our names. We had to stand up, but the benches were so crammed that we could hardly squeeze our way out. The uniformed German then handed over a letter that my dad had sent Mom. In Bohusovice the 'Transportdienst' [transport service] was already waiting; young Jewish guys loaded the heavy luggage onto carts and we went on with only one bag each. We were taken away to a 'Schleuse' [German: literally 'sluice'], which was a kind of sorting center. We were registered again here and then assigned to billets, the latter falling within the scope of the Terezin Jewish self-government.

At first, we lived with Mom in the Podmokly barracks, but after a short while we were moved to the Hamburg Barracks. At that time, in December 1941, Terezin was still inhabited by Czechs; not everything had been cleared out yet and people lived only in the barracks. My mom volunteered as a nurse, so I lived with her in the nurses' room. It was pleasant there because we were living with mostly young, clean, and refined women - all of them nurses. They had various shifts, so there was always someone to talk with. I was the only one who had no work to do, but I still enjoyed myself enough, being among the nurses. They spoke about all kinds of things that I was very interested in, and they secretly smoked. Some of them were really strong smokers and they would swap cigarettes for food rations.

I can well remember one of them in particular. She was called Hanka and was about 18 years old. She smoked so much that she exchanged a large proportion of her food for cigarettes and, as a result, was always hungry. The nurses occasionally had an obligation - although it was perhaps to their benefit - to



Anna's certificate for immigration to China, which unfortunately arrived in Prague too late.

work in the fields; they would pick flowers, grass, or ears of corn and use them later to decorate their corner of the room. I can remember one day when Hanka was sitting on a table, dangling her legs and she asked the other nurses: 'Do you think you can eat flowers?' 'Why not, after all, cows eat them, and they live.'

But, basically, I didn't have anything to do and I was bored. A girl I had been friendly with came on the same transport as me. She was also called Hanka and she lived with her mom in the same barracks. We would often stroll together through the long corridors of the barracks or through the courtyard, thinking up ways of amusing ourselves.

Fortunately, sometime in the spring of 1942, the Jewish self-government set up a separate room in the barracks for girls, which was where we moved to. We had a great supervisor, Kamila Rosenbaumova, who was a dancer. She rehearsed a program of recitation and dance with us, which was based on Nezval's poem 'Znam zemi blizko polu, znam divukrasnou zem...' ['I know a country near the pole, I know an exquisite country']. [Nezval Vitezslav, 1900-1958: Czech poet, dramatist and translator.] The poem in praised the Soviet Union, and we recited it as a chorus or in combination with solo acts, and it had a kind of simple melody, a bit like a 'voiceband.' And as she was a dancer, she had shown us various movements to perform.

At that time, we also started to do work in the garden, the so-called '*Jugendgarten*' [German: garden for youth]. It was a great achievement and the Jewish self-government did a lot for children by employing them. They no longer felt bored; instead they felt useful, they could be outside and, from time to time, they could nibble at vegetables when they were ready for picking.

By 1942, all the original inhabitants of Terezin had been moved out and the entire town had opened up. Jews moved in and occupied all the houses, and the transports kept coming. At that time, young peoples' homes were also being set up. The girls' home 'L410' was situated next to the church. It was a three-story building, and the girls were put in separate rooms according to their age. We older children went to work during the day and when we got back we were attended to by a tutor. At first I was in room 29, where the tutor was Rozi Schulhofova. Plenty of interesting people, including professors, writers, and musicians came to see us to give talks or to discuss different topics.

My brother lived in the Sudeten Barracks with the men. At first we weren't at all allowed to go there since we couldn't leave our barracks without a pass. After a certain period of time, it was arranged that girls under 14 could go to the men's barracks once a fortnight, provided they were accompanied, so as to see their dads. I was 14 and actually didn't belong to that group, but my mom somehow always managed to push me through, so I was able to see my brother. Now and again, I would bring him the odd button and such, or I would stroll around the courtyard with my friend Jirka.

My brother was very skilled with his hands, so from the outset he was employed in the locksmiths' workshop. In 1944, he volunteered to join a group of artisans who were sent to do work in Wulkow, which was about 30 kilometers from Berlin. They were to build timber buildings for the '*Reichsicherheitshauptamt*' or RSHA - the Reich Security Head Office - which were intended for the RSHA archives and also for the Germans who were supposed to work there.

The deportation list to the extermination camps was drawn up by the Jewish self-government. Because it was routine policy at Terezin not to split up families, my brother actually saved us from deportation throughout the time he was away. The group returned to Terezin in the spring of 1945. We had been put on the deportation list at the beginning of 1942, which was when I was still living with Mom in the Hamburg Barracks. Anyway, my mom put me to bed - actually we still slept on the floor back then - and somehow she arranged for a doctor she knew to say that I had scarlet fever, so we were crossed off the list. None of the people on those transports ever returned. Later on, I was put on another deportation list, but I think that was when my brother was in Wulkow, so I was crossed off the list again.

In 1943, there was a typhoid epidemic in Terezin, which struck me too. It spread very quickly and an infection ward for those infected with typhoid was set up in the Vrchlabi barracks. They were long barrack rooms and because there were four or five girls between the ages of 15 and 16, we were put next to each other. We were there for quite a long time, with severe diarrhea and, at the beginning, we were in a state of semi-unconsciousness. When we finally got up, we were unable to walk. On my left was Ruzenka Voglova, with whom I established a friendship that has lasted to this day, even though Ruzenka lives in Israel.

When they let us out, we returned to house 'L410' and were put in a convalescence room, instead of being with the other girls. I then moved out with Ruzenka, and we stayed together until the fall of 1944, when she was sent to Auschwitz. Apart from her and her grandmother, who stayed in Terezin, none of her family survived. After the war she lived with her grandmother in Zatec; at that time, we were hardly ever in touch with each other. In 1948, she left for Israel. But she has an apartment in Prague and she comes here regularly.

ANTONIE MILITKA

Brno, Czech Republic

Interviewer: Barbora Pokreis

Date of interview: December 2004

In 1928, Antonie was born in Brno. Her father Ludevít Michal, who converted to Judaism in order to marry her mother, worked as the superintendent for a newly-built Maccabi sports field in the city. Along with Antonie's younger brother, Karl Michal, her family celebrated a range of Jewish holidays. In 1938, the Germans took over the Maccabi field and evicted Antonie's family from their home. Until they were deported to Terezín in 1944, Antonie's family remained in Brno. Antonie was liberated from Terezín with her mother and they were soon reunited with her father. Karl immigrated to Palestine alone in 1948. Antonie married Ladislava Militky in September 1957 and they had one son. Antonie worked as accountant for twenty years and then for the Jewish Community.



Antonie with her brother Karl and dog Mega in Brno, Czech Republic in the 1930s.

[Read Antonie Militka's biography here](#)
[Click here to see her family pictures](#)

When we left Maccabi, we lived in Pisarky. We had a little house, a garden, and beside us ran the river. As Jews, we three – my mother, my brother, and I – received food coupons. The coupons were very modest...only our father had full food coupons.

Once, I don't know where anymore, he met a baker who told him that he'd sell us bread and rolls even without coupons, but that I'd have to come to a certain place for them. The amount we could get with the food coupons wasn't enough for us. I was supposed to wait for the baker by a bridge in Pisarky. He was delivering bread at that time, carrying it on his back, and he was supposed to arrive there at a certain time. He arrived, I paid him, he gave me the goods and I started home.

But before I got home, I ran into a German citizen who lived near us, had seen me leaving, and wanted to see where I was going. He'd followed me for a while. He waited for me on a small footbridge over a wider stream. He spent his time informing on people. I already saw him from a distance, standing on the bridge that I had to cross; there was no other way home. I backtracked a bit. It was the end of February.

The ice was already thin, and the water was still ice-cold. I'd gotten to know that stream as a child, so I knew how deep it was in which parts. I put the bread, rolls and my shoes into a bag, which I held above my head, and crossed the stream like this. My coat and the rest of my clothes were wet, because the water reached almost to my shoulders. I didn't care at all that the water was icy and that half-melted chunks of ice were floating by me. That's how I got home.

My mother was all upset. That person was waiting for me, he'd probably already lost patience, because there was only one way home there. So I let him spot me. I went out into the garden, where he saw me. He was surprised that I'd gotten home. I don't know what he thought, he stopped and looked to see whether it was really me. I'm sure that his enmity grew even worse.

Another thing happened to my brother and I when I was 12 and he was 8. Jews weren't allowed to go to parks and to walk in certain streets. Everything was forbidden for us. Even in the streetcar, we had to stand in a certain wagon. Life was so limited that all our parents would say was, 'don't go anywhere, all you'll do is cause us trouble'. They always watched over us.

Despite the prohibitions, once on Sunday we went out for a bit. There was a movie for children being shown at the exhibition grounds. We didn't tell our parents where we were going. Each of us got 5 crowns in pocket money for when we went to see some other children.

We went to the movie – I think they were showing Laurel and Hardy. We decided to go even despite the fact that there was: "No entry allowed to the cinema for Jews!" We bought tickets, which cost a crown, and sat down among the children and waited. The lights went out, and right then, before the film began, one lady stood up and shouted: "Turn on the lights, there are Jewish children here!" They turned on the lights and asked her where they were. She pointed at us, and so they led us out of the theater. The usher didn't do anything, he just politely led us out and said: "Don't come here, so you don't have problems like today, and your parents too." So we learned a lesson. Some time later, someone told our mother about our adventure. She asked me why I hadn't told her about it. My answer was that I didn't want her to be upset.

Another incident, after this one, was when my brother was outside somewhere and didn't come home for lunch. So my mother started looking for him, and I did, too. We asked everyone we ran into if they had seen my brother. They immediately began helping, looking for him everywhere: in the streets, in yards, around the river. We were already afraid that he'd fallen in the river. We kept looking for him until the evening, and then one lady we knew who lived nearby brought him. We were grateful to her for it, because she'd heard him calling.

There'd been a Czech soccer field there, which was then taken over by Germans; just like we had Maccabi, this was the Brno branch of Sokol [a Czech sports organization]. The superintendent was a German, named Siegel, who had three sons and a wife. He'd caught my brother before noon somewhere, and locked him up in a shed. He was showing him and telling him how his parents and sister were going to be tortured in Mauthausen [a concentration camp located in Upper Austria]. By then, the war had already begun. My brother was locked up until late afternoon, when that lady heard him shouting. She came to the soccer field – you could get there not only through the main entrance, but also from the side. She opened it and freed him.



My mother was afraid of our father finding out, because he might have gone to have it out with that man, and the entire family would've paid for that. My brother was in shock from this incident, and didn't even talk. It was only later that he told us how and what had gone on. The German hadn't actually hurt him, he hadn't done anything to him, but just kept showing him how we'd be tortured in Mauthausen. He already knew about it. He caused that child to have a hard day.

Several times the Gestapo called my father in for interrogation. Luckily he always returned. It was a very dangerous time. The persecution was very hard, but even despite that we hoped that we'd see the end of the war, but it kept lasting and getting worse for us Jews.

The Germans took over the Maccabi field during the war. They also used it for sports. We'd walk by and look. Already in 1938, when Austria was suddenly annexed, anti-Jewish sentiments began to increase noticeably, and enemies of Jews – Czech ones, too, were already showing them that anti-Semitism had carved its path here. At that time we moved to Hybesova St. In 1938, I was 10, when we were evicted

from Maccabi. We weren't that free there anymore, all that was still done by Czechs, up to 1938. So right away, my father bought an older house and added an addition to it, and that's where we moved. That took three months. We lived there until 1943, until the Gestapo chased us out.

When we left Maccabi, we had a house and garden. We had to demolish the house during the war. In 1943, the Gestapo simply ordered us to demolish our house within 14 days. My father called the neighbors to take it apart, some things also got buried. Unfortunately, he injured himself seriously during the demolition. He was on the roof, which he wanted to take apart. He was of course not an expert in this. Underneath the roof he also had taken something apart, so he flew through the roof and kitchen. On top of that, the cellar was open, and so he also fell down into the cellar, where he fell on his thigh. They had to operate on him. Within 14 days of that, I was already off to Terezin.

They summoned me to the transport of April 7, 1944. People designated for the transport gathered by the Veletržní Palác [*Trade Fair Palace*]. From there people went to Terezin, or elsewhere. On April 9, they moved us to the main station, where there was already a train waiting for 250 people from Brno and its surroundings. On this train they transported us to Terezin, to Bohusovice, actually. At that time the tracks didn't lead directly into Terezin; those were built later. We walked from Bohusovice, where there were already people from Terezin waiting, and wagons onto which luggage was loaded. Everything was transported on these wagons, bread and corpses, too.

I'd found out that we were going onto the transport only a short time beforehand. Two of my mother's lady friends came, because my mother had half-collapsed from it, and all night they sewed marks into my garter belt. Between two layers of material – one outer one and one inner one – they sewed a few thousand marks. They also baked cookies and cakes and told me what to wear. They put on me three sets of underwear, blouses and sweaters, leggings, a skirt, knee stockings plus a coat on top, even though it was already April. I couldn't even button the coat because of so many layers of clothing. They said: Tonicka, what you're wearing will most likely stay with you. With the suitcase it's worse, that can get lost. They filled my pockets with medicines, cotton balls, toothpaste and soap. They stuffed it all in so that I'd have these things to start with.

As a replacement, my parents were given a pitiful, substandard apartment. Excuse me, not given, but my father found it, and that's where we moved. That was still in Hybesova St. We put our furniture into our coal warehouse because my brother was close to the workshop. So at night he could cross the street between the workshop and home. The apartment belonged to our former landlady, and was in the courtyard.

When my mother went into the transport in August 1944, she got a summons for my brother, as well. At the Gestapo she said that she hadn't seen her child for a long time already. That he'd been lost during the bombing of the city. Despite that, the Gestapo was of course constantly searching for him. Luckily, they didn't find him, because we had quite a lot of people helping him. They took Mother to Prague. She was jailed there for six months, guarded by the Gestapo.

Then, in February 1945, they transported the prisoners to Terezin, where after a long time I once again saw my mother. She worked in Terezin as well. We waited there for the end of the war. Liberation day was full of joy. But many people found out that their family members were no longer alive. Thus joy mixed with tears. We found out that my father had lost his legs, but that he was alive.

Upon Hitler's arrival, my father had had to produce Aryan papers. Because he was of Aryan origin, he managed to arrange false documents. This is why he was able to keep running his warehouse until 1944. When my mother was arrested, they arrested him a month later. Before he was arrested, a custodian came and took over his business. They arrested him for having a Jewish wife. They notified him that he had to go into internment. They put him on a transport to the Postelberg labor camp, or Postoloprty in Czech. There he lost his legs. It was a labor camp for men that had Jewish wives.

The camp was close to a German airport, where mostly prisoners worked. They worked two shifts. In March 1945, they were leaving after the night shift in the dark and in a blizzard, where you couldn't see a thing. The Allies were bombing airports, and the prisoners were repairing them. They worked through the day but also into the night, and would then go home. The roads weren't safe, because it was dark and you couldn't see. They walked close to some railroad tracks. Trains would pass by the airport, transporting everything that they needed. The prisoners were returning along the tracks, and a freight train was passing by, being pushed by a locomotive. There was a wagon in the front, and you couldn't hear or see the train.

The prisoners were walking in single file along the tracks to the camp. One was calling to the next, look out, a train. My father was in front, they called to him: "Look out, a train!" My father heard something, and so jumped aside. But apparently he tripped, because among the large rails there were also small rails, for wagons, for material. He tripped on these tracks, and then it hit him. His body fell alongside the tracks, and his legs stayed there. The train ran over both of them.

This happened in March 1944. The railway workers were Czechs. They didn't see my father as a prisoner. They quickly took him and bandaged up his bleeding legs. They brought him to Most, to a German hospital. After the war, they operated on him. In the beginning, my father was very badly off, emotionally. We consoled him, up till then you'd taken care of us, now we're going to take care of you. The main thing is that you're alive! My father walked on prosthetics, and that's how he ran his store.

Now back to Terezin. As soon as we arrived in Bohusovice, they took our luggage, as the way to Terezin was relatively long. Terezin is actually made of brick ramparts, it's a fortress. Everything in the camp was numbered and had a name. They registered new prisoners and told us to hand in money and valuables, and that then we wouldn't have any problems. Otherwise they'd liquidate the entire transport. They said that if everything takes place properly, they'll assign us work and we'll have a better life here than soldiers at the front. But if they find money on one of us, or gold, medicine, or something of value – contraband, then all 250 of us will go to Auschwitz. Immense stress ensued.

I asked myself what would happen now, I've got thousands here, plus one silver ring. I hadn't taken any more than that. I handed it in. I saw my friend Edita Weiss, who lived in Zahradnicka Street. She took off a wide leather belt and cut it into pieces. The marks were falling out all over the place. She had had marks sewn into that belt. I saw everything people were giving away in a crate that had been prepared, covered by a sheet. Nothing remained but for me to take off that belt of mine and throw it in there. No one dared to endanger others because of money.

One young woman who worked in the *Transportleitung*, a student, came over to me: "You're Tonicka Michalova. Remember me? I used to exercise at Maccabi. Where are your parents?" I answered that for the time I was alone. "Well, you know what, if they ask you whether you've already found accommodations, tell them that you're going to the girls' home at L410, to No. 24, I know there's room there. After all, you know how to work in gardens and fields so apply for that. Apply for everything right away, voluntarily and on your own." When my turn came, they wrote us all down. Then we were searched by female Gestapo members. That girl I knew kept an eye on me, and also brought me to the *Mädchenheim* [German: girls' house], where there were 32 girls living. There were three-story bunks built in the room.

I was weeping profusely. One girl came over to me, later she became my best friend, and said to me: "I don't know why you're crying. I'm here three months, and I haven't cried yet. And yet, when I look out the window, I can almost see Litomerice, where I was born and grew up. I can't go there, but despite that I didn't cry." At that point I was a bit ashamed. "You're lucky, once a week we get better food for going to the garden. You'll get some. You're very lucky to have gotten in here, and that you've got extra food rations." In the end we became such good friends that we shared everything. We got along very well. We helped each other, but unfortunately things were constantly changing. They were selecting for the transports, and girls were leaving with their parents. When I arrived there, they were already opening the

barracks. Before that, children were separate, men separate, women separate. When I arrived we were able to get together; before that they couldn't even see each other. Not long after, mass transports began.

At first, I worked on the ramparts. It was soil that hadn't been tilled since the times of Maria Theresa. First we had to weed out deep grass roots, and carry the weeds down on stretchers. I think the ramparts were about one story high, with roads on them. Later the roads disappeared, because compost was carried up onto them, and plants were planted in them. Almost everything went to Gestapo families, and some of it also went into the ghetto kitchens. You also knew how to steal things from there. It was dangerous, but of course we took something, and something was also issued to us. Mainly during harvest time, then we'd eat our fill. We'd carry it home, and for example exchange it with old people for bread, as that was in short supply. Every fourth day we got 1.5 kilograms of bread for two of us for four days. We drew lines on the bread. We had two small slices per day, morning and evening. Every second day was only soup, one day there was only coffee. One slice – that wasn't enough.

There were various guards. There were also hired Protectorate [of Bohemia and Moravia] police, mostly decent ones. They even helped us carry parcels when we were returning from work. When we were outside the ghetto, occasionally someone would throw a parcel into the bushes. The policemen would act like they didn't see anything.

When the international inspections were supposed to come, all the "effects" were made. A major cleanup began, a café opened, money was printed, and everything had to be washed, even the sidewalks. At that time life in Terezin was grand. They came, inspected what they could, and left, satisfied. As soon as they left, the thousands of people were transported, and they went straight into the gas. Everything was very cleverly disguised.

We were very careful with ourselves, as far as cleanliness went. Our surroundings, too. Alas, despite our efforts, we were tormented by stinkbugs and lice. Each day we battled for cleanliness. Once a week we could put our bed sheets into the laundry. The girls had various characters. Once one girl arrived who from one day to the next learned everything, even though at home she'd been waited on hand and foot by cooks and maids.

On the other hand, another one acted as if she'd never in her life changed the cover on a duvet. We told her that, if you don't mind, your sheets aren't clean and don't smell nice, it bothers us, and you've got to change them. When she resisted, we were so nasty that we threw her things out the window into the mud. We didn't care if she cried, we just wanted her to learn the rules. When she didn't like it, she moved away from us. They moved her into accommodations full of old, pitiful, dying grannies; there she realized how much worse off she was.

We felt best when we were learning things. We didn't only learn school things, but also how to dance, poems, etc.

When I met my mother in Terezin, I was glad to see her. At the same time, I realized that I could no longer look out for just myself, and that I had to help her as much as I could. From that point on, I had to watch out that nothing happened to her. We were of course hoping the war would end soon. All of us wanted to live. We were afraid that if the Germans didn't manage to empty the camp in time, they'd slaughter us on the spot. That was what we were most afraid of, that they'd kill us right there.

We were preparing for the moment of liberation. We knew that at that point chaos would ensue. This is why my mother and I agreed on which streets we'd walk down. She lived close to Hamburg [*the Hamburg barracks*], and I lived on the town square at L410. Before, 5,000 people had lived in Terezin. Toward the end of the war, they stuffed in about 60,000 prisoners. That meant that the streets were full of people during the day. Not only in the morning and when they were returning from work, but they were mostly always completely full – on the sidewalks, on the streets, always. When you walked along one side, you couldn't see anyone on the other side.

That's why I told my mother that she had to get to such-and-such a place. I walked along the route with her twice, and taught her the way. That was my greatest wish, for me to not lose my mother, or her me. That's why we agreed on this. When the Russians arrived in their tanks in the morning, they futilely called out to us. We were afraid to come out. Only when people we knew arrived, and said that they were Russians, did we come out. We knew that soldiers had arrived, cars and tanks, but we still didn't believe that the war was over, and that they were Russians.

As soon as the war ended, they notified us that trains to Prague were going to be organized. My mother and I said to each other, all right, let's go. Two of my friends also said that they'd go with me to Brno. I proposed that we had to get close to the station, because when the train arrives there'll be a crush of people.

At the station there was one building that was in ruins from the bombing. There, we set up camp in the courtyard gallery. The building was a couple of meters from the tracks. There was no guardrail there, but despite that, we camped out on the gallery for the night. My mother tied us to some metal post, I don't even know where she found the rope. We were on the first floor, and she was afraid that if we rolled over, we'd fall down. Squalid but, despite that, we got some sleep there. In the morning we went to the train. We managed to get only into open cattle wagons but we were on our way to Prague.

On the way, people greeted us at each stop, we had baskets of cakes and food, they wept and embraced us, asked us about people, one about the other, whether there wasn't someone there. That's what our trip to Prague was like. In Prague they were already waiting for us, because when we left, they'd hoisted a yellow flag above Terezin. A yellow flag means heavy quarantine. Typhus had broken out. There was no more leaving Terezin. Some people were even under quarantine for two months, had no place to go, and were dying there. In Prague the Red Cross caught us. They checked us thoroughly, as to whether we were healthy, whether we didn't have lice and scabies.

They took everyone to the station at Masaryk Station. They didn't let anyone go, there was a whole army of them. It was something amazing, they were holding us out of fear that we were coming from the camp and were bringing epidemics and dirt with us. They held us for only a few hours. After the check-up we were allowed to get on the train again. The train travelled for a long, a very long time. In all, the trip from Terezin lasted about three days.

HELENA KOVANICOVA

Prague, Czech Republic

Interviewer: Terezie Holmerová

Date of interview: February 2006

Helena was born in 1924 in Prague, the eldest of three siblings. Her parents, Adolf Munk and Olga Nachodova, also had two younger sons: Viktor and Jiri. Around 1929, the family moved to Brandys nad Labem—the same city where Olga had been born. Helena recalls a childhood filled with studies, reading, friendships, and family hiking trips, although these experiences ended as the war approached. Helena was 14 when the Germans arrived in March 1939, and her family remained in Brandys under German rule until they were deported to Terezin in January 1943. While in Terezin, Helena met her husband and they married in the concentration camp. Helena's father was murdered in Auschwitz, but Helena, her husband, her mother, and both of her brothers were reunited in Prague after the war. Helena and her husband had one son, Jiri, in 1952, and their granddaughter Helena was born in 1983. Helena also worked at various companies as an office clerk and accountant.



Helena (third from left) with family and friends in the Krkonose Mountains in the 1930s.

When the war began, I was fourteen and a half. On March 15, 1939, the Germans arrived. That day there was a blizzard, it was snowing horribly. I was in school, in high school, and I remember that Helena Mareckova, Pepik Marecek, and Zdenek David, my friends who I used to hang out with and who were about six years older than I, came to meet me at the school and walked home with me. In the main square in Brandys there were already Germans on motorcycles with sidecars. It was a horrible feeling, to see them there. I got home. I remember that we had garlic soup and cream of wheat for lunch.

The next day we got a notice in the mail that my father had to close his office. All doctors and lawyers had to immediately cease practicing. The Czech law and medical associations were glad that they had gotten rid of Jewish doctors and lawyers. They immediately confiscated all the money we had deposited in the bank. I managed to finish my fourth year of high school [Grade 9], but then I wasn't allowed to go to school anymore, so I actually didn't graduate. Unfortunately, neither did I finish any school after the war, because I was awfully afraid of math.

During the war all three of us children got scarlet fever. Back then the Germans already wanted to move us out of our house and take it over for themselves. Once they came to our house, and when they found out that we all had scarlet fever, they quickly left and then they apparently were afraid to come over, and so we were able to live in our house until our departure on the transport.

During the war my father was the head of the Jewish religious community in Brandys nad Labem, and Jews from villages around Brandys also belonged. Progressively, various orders, prohibitions, and

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regulations came, and someone had to take care of administration, to keep track of the Jewish population, and send out this information to them. My father was forced to take this position upon himself and set up an office in our former dining room, where he would work. Often Germans would come to our house. Once the Gestapo rang the doorbell, and my brother Viktor went to open the door. They got horribly upset at him, because he wasn't wearing a Jewish star. For we had to wear the star at home, too.

During the war at first I helped my father with administrative work related to the running of the Jewish community in Brandys, and then they sent me to work in the forest. There I worked together with other young Jewish girls, from July 1942 until December of that year. Back then we'd already had to hand in even our bicycles, but because the work in the forest was far away, on the other side of Stara Boleslav, they lent us bikes, and so every morning I rode with a hoe tied to my bicycle to go work in the forest.

In the beginning it was horrible, because we didn't know how to do anything. The forest warden, for example, told us to dig some holes for planting trees or sowing seeds, and then left, and we stood there, not knowing what to do, so we started to dig and dig until we had dug a huge pit, and the forest warden then came back, threw up his hands and said that it was supposed to be a shallow little trench. Most often we worked in the meadows, and because it was summer it was usually terribly hot. My cousin always had horrible headaches from the sun. But gradually we somehow got used to it and in the end we got to like going and working in the forest.

What I liked most was working with hay. On the other hand, the worst of all was picking potatoes behind the devil. The devil was a machine for plowing up potatoes. It drove quickly, so there wasn't even time to straighten up. We gathered the potatoes into baskets, dumped them into sacks and threw them up onto trucks that then carted them away. The sacks were terribly heavy, so it was very arduous work. Back then the gathering of hay and picking potatoes fell under the Forestry Service. The forest warden was very nice to us.

Besides us there were also some women forestry workers working in the forest, who weren't there to do forced labor, and had worked there before the war. As Jews we weren't allowed to associate with them at all. The forest warden always said that he much preferred to work with us than with 'those bimbos,' that all they are is vulgar, and that with us it was fun. Once he even brought us some sweet stuffed cakes, because back then we had almost no tickets for anything, not for meat, nor butter or fruit and vegetables.

The only thing we had during the war was this artificial honey, which was really disgusting, horribly sweet, sticky, and had an unpleasant taste. I don't even know what it was made out of back then. My mother would always pack us two slices of dry bread with this artificial honey between them, which by lunch would have soaked into the bread, so it wasn't very good. But my mother still had some Van Houten puddings at home, so she'd always make some pudding and put it in a glass for me to take with me. It may have been made with only water, but back then I liked it.

We got a very small salary, on the order of crowns and halers, but my mother was always glad when I brought at least some small sum home, and I felt that I was helping to feed the family. When we were supposed to go to Terezin, the forest warden tried to save us and asked to be allowed to keep us for forestry work, that we were terribly important there and that without us nothing was possible. Of course he didn't succeed.

People from Brandys weren't allowed to associate with us at all. They weren't allowed to say hello to us, and when we went shopping, we had to be served last of all. During the war even our neighbors from across the fence, before we were supposed to leave on the transport, came to our house by the back door and took duvets and curtains home, with the excuse that after all we can't leave them there. The thing that I most regret is that they also took the picture my father had painted. Everyone hoped that we wouldn't return, so that they wouldn't have to return anything to us. Then, when my mother and my youngest brother returned to Brandys (I arrived somewhat later), those people had our curtains hanging and no one

remembered the picture anymore. My mother didn't want to ask anyone for anything, as she wasn't attached to any property and in the end it didn't matter to her, anyway, when my father didn't return.

Before we left for Terezin, my father would make various hiding places for money. He had several gold St. Wenceslaus ducats. My father would make, for example, little sewing kits with a double bottom, and would put one ducat into each one. He hid money in shoe polish, too. Unfortunately I don't know where these items ended up.

Sometime before our departure for Terezin we had to leave for the local castle in Mlada Boleslav, where they had moved all Jews, and there we had to hand in all of our jewels and enroll for the transport. Before we left for Terezin, I also got jaundice. I was constantly feeling awful and throwing up, and didn't know what was wrong with me, until finally my eyes turned yellow. So I left for Terezin already ill.



A postcard depicting Brandys during the interwar period. In the postcard, Helena explained, you see the main town square.

We left Brandys on the transport on January 5, 1943. It was a day later than the rest of the Jews from Brandys, due to the fact that my father was the head of the local Jewish community. That day we on our own left our house for the train station and took an ordinary train to Mlada Boleslav. We had sacks instead of luggage, because they didn't allow us to have suitcases. It was a strange feeling, to be leaving home with only a few bags and leaving everything there. Apparently, after our departure, the *Hitlerjugend* [the youth organization of the German Nazi party] were in our house. After the war there was a music school in our house, and the principal's apartment.

On the way to Terezin we stopped in Mlada Boleslav. There they gathered us in some school and then we continued on the transport to Bohusovice. From there we went to Terezin on foot, because at that time the tracks didn't yet lead directly into Terezin, those were built later by Terezin prisoners. From Bohusovice to Terezin we were led by our people, Czech policemen. In Terezin we were handed over to German women, who were called ladybugs. They rifled through our baggage and took what they liked.

First I lived together with my mother and many other people in the so-called Hamburg barracks. Later they emptied the Hamburg barracks and made a so-called '*slojska*' out of it. It was a place where they would herd all the people who were called up for the transport, they'd shut them up in there, and directly from there they would get on trains which then headed to Auschwitz and other places.

Between the wars my father had been in the Association of Czechs Jews. Sometimes I suspect that maybe someone from that association took my father's side and thanks to this our family didn't leave on the first transports from Terezin to Auschwitz, but we all stayed in Terezin for a relatively long time. Very few people from Brandys stayed in Terezin, mostly they right away went further onwards, most often to Auschwitz. For a short while our friends - the Laufers - stayed in Terezin, but they then had to leave. Not even the fact that they all had themselves baptized during the war helped them.

The first person that I got to know in Terezin was Jirka Maisel from Caslav. He was maybe a year older than I. We used to walk around Terezin and would always be talking about something. He'd tell me about school and about student life. He even lent me some blanket so that I could cover myself better, as back then my jaundice was still affecting me. Later I met my husband there.

In Terezin, there was a diet. They used to give us this gray water to eat, which they called lentil soup. Sometimes there would be a bit of turnip or potato floating in it. About once a week they gave us a small piece of meat, but more often than not it was some piece of sinew.

Due to my jaundice I visited a doctor there. After talking a while, we found that our high school principal had been his teacher! This doctor wrote me up a disability slip, but in March 1943 I had to go to the Terezin employment office and began working. For everyone had to work their so-called '*Hundertschaft*,' or a hundred hours of work. I was able to pick either work in the mechanized woodshop, or to do the cleaning in the hospital for those with typhus. I preferred the woodshop.

We worked in three shifts - from 6am to 2pm, from 2pm to 10pm, and from 10 pm until morning. At night the '*Obersturmbannführer*' [Lieutenant Colonel] Karl Rahm himself used to occasionally come check up on us, to see if anyone was sleeping there. I don't know what would have happened if he had found out that someone was sleeping during the night shift. Likely he would have given that person a thrashing, or shot him, probably whatever occurred to him at that moment.

Later my husband used to tell how he arrived in Terezin on the very first transport. Back then Terezin's original inhabitants still lived there, and they had to move away. It was necessary to build bunks for the emptied barracks and also beds for the normal houses, where Germans then lived. That's actually why the mechanized woodshop, where I worked from March onwards, existed.

So I stayed in the woodshop. There were a lot of young girls like me there, which was really great. We were always singing, and we had this one excellent, merry co-worker there who entertained us. He sang us songs by Voskovec and Werich [Czech actors and playwrights]. In the end, I found out that he was my husband's friend. There I learned how to hammer together bunks and beds. We also made latrines and these standalone little wooden shacks.

In Terezin there was a warehouse of hearses, on which we carted around material ourselves. We'd load it up on a hearse, two girls pushed from behind, two stood on the sides, one at the drawbar, and like this we drove around Terezin. We'd stack it up somewhere, perhaps carry it up for installation, and then drive back.

In Terezin I also ruined my feet. When I went to Terezin, I took with me these beautiful shoes, which Mrs. Krejcova from my father's office had some shoemaker in Prague make for me. But after a year in Terezin I had worn these shoes right through. Because in Terezin everyone had the right to have their shoes resoled once a year, this is what I did, and I never saw them again. They sent me to some warehouse with men's shoes, so I could pick some different shoes as a replacement, so I picked some boys' shoes, and that's what I then walked around in, even for some time after the war. After the war I was even married in them, because I didn't have any others! Otherwise in Terezin I wore these flimsy canvas shoes, something like today's tennis shoes, but those are at least a little shaped because of flat feet. These were only a husk, a piece of canvas with some rubber. Since I was always standing on concrete in them, my feet then hurt. Due to this my arches fell and from that time onwards I've had trouble with flat feet.

Once in a while it was possible to send a parcel to Terezin. It could have been about once every three-quarters of a year that we'd get a special stamp, which had to be sent to relatives, and with this they could send a five-kilo parcel. A parcel without this stamp wouldn't get to Terezin, and we got only a very few stamps.

Once in Terezin my father gave me this tiny wooden box with a little board that slid out, which he had made himself, drew some national motif on it in pencil, or perhaps a little heart, I don't exactly remember any more.

My mother's sister, Elsa, and her husband were also in Terezin. My aunt would always promise me that after the war she herself would make my wedding dress. Understandably this never happened, because

neither Aunt Elsa nor her husband ever returned. They left on a transport, the same as the Vohryzeks – my father's sister and her husband and daughter – to Auschwitz, where they were in the so-called family camp for half a year. In March and July 1944, it was liquidated, all of its inhabitants were sent into the gas. Our relatives, the Munks, went on a transport from Prague directly to Lodz and then to Riga, where they were most likely shot.

My husband was my boss in the mechanized woodshop, and thanks to this we got to know each other. I remember that it was my birthday, and he somehow found out about it, because otherwise we didn't really talk much, and suddenly for my birthday he brought me some chocolate-covered orange peel, which I loved. I was completely in seventh heaven from that orange peel, I kept it under my pillow and didn't eat it at all, because I wanted to save it!

In Terezin my future husband was trying to convince me to marry him. He explained to me that if we weren't married, they could send me away alone on a transport, and he wouldn't be able to help me in any way. In the end I agreed. We found some rabbi in Terezin, who married us, but after the war the officials didn't recognize our wedding, so we had to get married again anyhow.

My husband, Rudolf Kovanic, was born on December 16, 1908, into a Jewish family. Before the war he graduated from business academy and worked for the Justitz company in the grain wholesale business. He spoke fluent German and for a long time also studied English. His father was a traveling salesman, so he was often on the road and apparently also liked to play cards. My husband didn't inherit this passion from him; on the contrary, he never liked cards. His mother was a nice-looking lady, she took very good care of herself. Her maiden name was Kafkova.

My husband was one of four children, he had two brothers and one sister. His sister Hana is still alive, she was the youngest of all the children. She was born in 1920, so she's four years older than I am. The youngest of the brothers was named Karel. In appearance and personality he was similar to his father. While he didn't finish council school, in the end he earned the most money of all the brothers. He had a franchise from some shoe company. He survived the war, but unfortunately neither his wife nor child returned. He had a very pretty wife, and in Terezin they even had a beautiful little girl. She was like a miracle, chubby, with rosy cheeks, she was named Alenka.

The middle brother was named Franta [Frantisek]. He was the only one of the brothers to serve in the army. Franta didn't return after the war. At first he was in Auschwitz, and then they sent him to work in Glivice [a satellite labor camp in Auschwitz] in Poland, where he died of blood poisoning. His wife Truda, along with little Janicka [Jana], died in Auschwitz, because in Auschwitz all mothers with children went straight to the gas.

My husband's mother was a very kind lady and managed to still get to know my father and mother. My parents liked my husband a lot, only he seemed a little old to them, as he was almost 16 years older than I. But our father was also ten years older than Mother, so it wasn't anything that unusual. My husband was an amazingly kind person. I probably have never met a kinder person.

Unfortunately, due to Terezin he had serious emotional problems, he almost had a nervous breakdown there. As I've already said, he was in Terezin right from the beginning, about four years all in all, which must unavoidably have marked him in some way. What's more, my husband had a relatively large amount of responsibility in Terezin, he began there as an administrative manager and later they entrusted him with further tasks.

People in Terezin were desperate and, for example, stole wood for heating, or tried to improve their lot in other ways, but often there were checks, which, if they found out anything like that, would immediately have caused my husband to be arrested by the Gestapo.

Once, when my husband had some problem like this, he was completely a mess because of it. Luckily in the end the matter was resolved only with the ghetto's Jewish leadership, which was presided over by some Mr. Freiburger, because Terezin had this Jewish self-government. It was called the '*Ältestenrat*' [Council of Elders]. Once, another thing that happened to my husband was that he met the supreme commander of the ghetto, Karl Rahm, who out of the blue told him to take off his glasses, and gave him a couple of cuffs. Basically the Germans could do with us what they wanted.

Once our entire family was summoned to a transport. The transport summonses were delivered at night. It was a horrible feeling, at night someone would bang on the door and bring a thin strip on which was written who should present themselves where and when. We had to gather in the '*slojska*,' which as I've already mentioned was a building that was open at the back, from which one would leave directly into the courtyard to the transport, because at that time the track right to Terezin had already been finished. So Rudolf volunteered to go with me.

They told us that there'd be a selection in the courtyard. It was the first and last selection in Terezin, otherwise the selections weren't done until in Auschwitz. Apparently the selection was aimed only at young people, because neither my father nor my mother was summoned to it. Rudolf went with me. We all walked by the Terezin camp leader, Karl Rahm. Whoever Rahm didn't stop, automatically went straight onto the transport. Us he stopped. He asked me where I worked, and I told him that I worked in the woodshop. Rahm was familiar with the woodshop, plus I had overalls on, as I didn't have anything else. Rahm then asked Rudolf, and he told him that he was with me voluntarily, because we were going to be married. Back then in Terezin it was possible to apply for a civil wedding, which we had done. Rahm bellowed '*Thr werdet heiraten!*' [German: 'You will marry!'], which meant we didn't have to get on the transport, that he'd rejected us.

In October 1944, we were supposed to go onto the transport for a second time, and again we were rejected. I think that Rahm rejected all those who worked in the mechanized woodshop. The first time Rahm rejected my husband's sister like he had us, but the second time he didn't reject her. The last brother, Franta, worked in the constabulary service, you could recognize it by this special cap he wore. Apparently he had gained some esteem, so he went to see Rahm and told him that in Terezin they were three brothers, a sister, and mother, and if he could leave the sister, Hanka. Rahm agreed.

My husband's brothers, Franta and Karel, were often mentioned in connection with Terezin culture. One of them, Franta I think, wrote the so-called 'Terezin Hymn' to the melody of Jezek's 'Song of Civilization.'

In Terezin I had to lug around horribly heavy things, so once it even happened that my back went out and then I had to lie in bed for three days without moving. After the war it happened again, I've got a herniated disc, lower back problems.

My older brother, Viktor, worked with the carpenters in Terezin. Back then he was about 14. Like all manual laborers in Terezin, he also got a tiny food supplement. In the morning and evening we got black 'Melta' [a coffee substitute] in our canteens and also this one piece of bread for the whole day. We always tried to divide up the meager ration, one little slice for breakfast, one little slice for supper. Viktor could never hold himself back and always ate all the bread at once, so then he had nothing left.

Our father went to Auschwitz on the very last transport, my brother went on the transport before him. My mother remained in Terezin, because she was working for the German war industry, she peeled mica for German airplanes. My mother had these short, fat fingers and I guess she wasn't very good at it, because she always had problems filling the required quota. Finally they fired her, but it was too late for her to leave on a transport. My youngest brother Jiri was in Terezin with our mother the whole time, back then he was about 13 years old.

For sure our father went directly to the gas, because back then he was 58 years old, and apparently they sent everyone from 55 up to the gas. My husband had two brothers and two sisters-in-law with beautiful little children in Terezin, but both mothers with the children went to Auschwitz and directly to the gas.

When my brother Viktor went to Auschwitz, he perhaps wasn't even 14 yet. Some SS soldier on the ramp apparently asked him how old he was, took his watch and advised him to say that he's a year older, and only thanks to this was my brother saved and didn't go directly to the gas. From Auschwitz he was sent to Kaufering, which was a branch of Dachau. [Editor's note: near the Dachau concentration camp, the Nazis set up two huge underground factories - Kaufering and Mühldorf, where they then transferred the chief portion of arms manufacture. Primarily Jews from Poland, Hungary, and the Baltics worked here in inhuman conditions.]

There he got typhus. Apparently they left him lying there with the others in some pits, and then they loaded them onto open wagons and were taking them to the gas chambers. In the meantime, the Allies bombed the train, so it remained standing somewhere on the track. My brother's friend from Prague died there by morning and my brother was found by the Americans, who dressed him and sent him to a hospital, where spent a long time. Apparently they found him as a human skeleton, he weighed 28 kilograms.

For a long time, we had no news at all of him, not until sometime in August 1945 when he wrote Mrs. Krejcova, our family friend and household helper, because he thought that none of us had returned. Mrs. Krejcova immediately let us know that my brother was at a sanatorium on Sokolska Street. His nerves were completely shot and he was also in horrible physical shape. For a long time after the war, he didn't want to talk about anything that he had lived through.

It wasn't until sometime after the war that I found out about the International Red Cross's visit to Terezin. As I worked three shifts, I had practically no means of finding out what was actually happening in Terezin. I only know that at that time they had built a music pavilion and set up a park in the town square.

My mother returned from Terezin with my younger brother before I did. My husband and I didn't return until about July 6, 1945. At first my husband and I lived with his brother, who had returned before us, sometime in April or May. We lived on Londynska Street in a three-room apartment with a hallway, which had remained empty after some Germans, together with my husband's brother and his friend Slavka, whose sister my husband's brother later married, because neither his wife nor child had returned. We had the bedroom in that apartment to ourselves. At the same time we were trying to find our own apartment, but all vacant apartments had already been occupied. It was very difficult, but we finally managed to find an apartment in the Prague 10 district through a mutual friend of ours from Terezin.

HARRY FINK

Karlovy Vary, Czech Republic

Interviewer: Barbora Pokreis

Date of Interview: August 2005

Harry was born in 1931 to a financially secure family in Prague. His father Ludvik Fink was a businessman, his mother Marketa Finkova had a servant to help run the household, and they went on vacations, often to visit family living throughout the Czech Republic. Harry attended the Men's Teacher's Institute, a grade school, until he was forced to switch to a Jewish school. In 1942, Harry was deported to Terezin with his parents. From there, Harry was sent to Auschwitz and then on a death march, until the Americans liberated him. Harry was the sole survivor of his family. After World War II, Harry worked in mines and later volunteered for the Czechoslovak army. He was married twice and has two children and two stepchildren.



Harry in Prague, Czech Republic in 1937.

inseparability of families, or how it was called, was in effect, so they let my father out of jail and sent him to Terezin to be with us. Several times we were supposed to leave Terezin on a transport, but my father had some connections from the resistance, so he always managed to get us off the list. Finally he said, enough, it's no use always trying to get us off the list, and so in December of 1943 our whole family went to Auschwitz.

In Terezin, my mother didn't work, and my father did something, but what exactly I don't know. I studied at the town power station in Terezin. In fact they counted that year as part of my years of education. From the time I was small I was interested in electricity, so I arranged it and they took me on as an apprentice electrician. I lived in a 'Jugendheim' [German: youth home], in L417. My father lived in the Cultural Hall

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My father was always complaining about politics, the same way people complain today, too. It probably wasn't any better than it is today, but despite this he was a member of the resistance right from the beginning of the war. He joined a cell at Wilson Train Station in Prague. He was friends with one mechanical engineer from the Wilson Station depot, and the connection was made through him, but exactly what and how things took place, that I don't know. I only remember them coming to arrest him. Two Gestapo officers came to our place.

I was the first one to see them, because we had a courtyard gallery, and they were on the floor above, looking down, checking things out. I ran after my father: 'Dad, there's a couple of guys in leather coats!' The Gestapo came and when they were taking him away, said: 'Don't worry, your father will be back this evening!' They spoke Czech, for sure they were Sudeteners [Germans from the Sudetenland]. They arrested him in 1941. He was jailed in Charles Square, up until they deported us to Terezin.

In 1942, my mother and I went on the transport to Terezin. At that time that perverse law regarding the

and there up in the attic they used to build these sheds out of various materials. My father also scrounged up some materials and built himself a shed there. My mother at first lived in Q218, and when my father built it, she moved in with him.

Our class was a good bunch. I was assigned to a boy who was already studying, he was 17. I used to go everywhere with him, and time flew by. The most unpleasant experience that I had in Terezin took place sometime in the fall of 1943. At that time there was a census and they herded us into the Bohusovice Valley. It was cold and raining hard. We were there from morning until evening. This was perhaps the most unpleasant experience of all from Terezin.

In 1943 they transported us to Auschwitz.

EVA MEISLOVA

Prague, Czech Republic

Interviewer: Pavla Neuner

Date of interview: March 2003

Eva was born in 1923 to a middle-class family in Tábor. Her father, Alois Bohm, was a businessman and worked for his father's drapery shop. Her mother, Stepanka Bohmova, ran the household and family matters. Eva also had an older brother, Rudolf, who was born in 1921. Eva was deported to Terezin along with her family in November 1942, and she was liberated from Bergen-Belsen with her mother in 1945. Eva married Jiri Meisl in 1946. She owned a small confectionary business until its nationalization in 1948, and then worked for Jednota, a collective consumer co-operative.



Eva with her paternal grandparents, Jakob Bohm and Veronika Bohmova, at their home in Celkovice, Czech Republic, in the 1930s.

[Read Eva Meislova's biography here](#)
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When we were taken to Terezin we didn't have any idea about that place. We found out how terrible it was pretty soon, though.

In 1939, the rumor was circulating that the Russians were already coming to liberate Tabor. The Germans then organized raids and arrested a lot of Czech people, mainly Jews, including my dad. At first he was a prisoner in Dresden and then he was sent to Oranienburg. [Editor's note: There was a concentration camp in both Dresden and Oranienburg, the first was a subcamp of the Flossenburg concentration camp, and the second a subcamp of the Sachsenhausen concentration camp.] He was used to smoking, drinking good coffee and having a good meal, so he just couldn't bear it. They were also torturing people. My dad died in Oranienburg in 1940. What was interesting was that they sent us his urn from Oranienburg, along with his clothes and all his other things

including his denture with a gold palate. We also got the death certificate. There was still a Jewish cemetery in Tabor so we took his remains there. Then the cemetery was liquidated and since the urn hadn't been there for a long time we were allowed to remove it and take it to a Catholic cemetery. They had made a space for Jews near the cemetery wall there, and my dad's remains have been there ever since.

At the beginning of the war I fell sick and couldn't do as much as before. The pain started in 1939. The doctors said that it was my appendix and sent me for surgery. But the pain remained, and in 1940 I was diagnosed with a tumor on my ovary. I had my last period in Terezin. But we got food with quinine in it there, and it stopped the menstruation of most of the women in the camp.

It was terrible when we were deported to Terezin in November 1942. All the Jews from Tabor and the surroundings received summons for the transport to the ghetto from the Jewish community in Prague. We were put into the school building. There were about a thousand people crowded there. We arrived there in the evening, didn't get anything to eat and slept on straw mattresses for one night. Early in the morning we were taken to the train so that no one would see us. It was bitter cold. We knew we would go to Terezin

but had no information about the place. Until then we hadn't suffered physically because my mother had sold all the goods from the shop, so we had had assets to live on.

I lived in L309, a kind of youth hostel for girls. It was a single-storied house, and I shared a room with twelve girls there. I remember that the cembalist Zuzana Ruzickova stayed in the room next door. This house originally belonged to a woman who was also kept in Terezin. I worked in a laundry situated outside the ghetto. My mom took care of a 5-year-old boy called Kaja. Kaja was there with his father only. They somehow became our relatives. My brother worked in agriculture first, and then in the *Kinderheim* [German: children's home]. My grandfather died a month after our deportation to Terezin, and my grandmother died a month after him. The burials in Terezin were the same for all people. The corpses were burnt, and the ash was thrown into the water. We were allowed to take part at the funeral. We said a prayer and received my grandparents' clothes.

In the evening we got a piece of bread for dinner, for lunch we usually had lentil soup. Sometimes we also had millet pudding, which I have been cooking ever since our liberation. It's kind of a piety for me. I say that this is a memory of Terezin I keep. I like millet pudding, but I prepare it better because I cook it with milk, and in Terezin it was only cooked with water.

Another time we had a yeast dumpling with special black sauce, which was very tasty. It was sweet and made from black coffee residue mixed with bread and some margarine. I was trying to prepare it after the liberation, but it was never as tasty as it was in Terezin. Sometimes we also had stuffed cake. My mom didn't like the dumplings so I swapped it with her for the cake. We drank water.

Once we were listed for a transport to an extermination camp, and Viktor Kende, a friend of ours, helped us to get crossed off the list of people to be transported. In December 1943, we were listed again, just my mom and I, but Viktor couldn't help us this time. My brother and Jiri weren't on the list for this transport but they enlisted themselves voluntarily, so they went with us. Jiri's parents had already gone, but he had been sick at the time so he hadn't gone with them.

We didn't know where we were going. It turned out to be Auschwitz. We spent about two days in cattle-trucks. In the end the doors were opened, and we saw the notice '*Arbeit macht frei*'. [German: 'Work makes you free', the words inscribed on the infamous gateway to the Auschwitz concentration camp.] Germans were shouting, and we had no idea what was going on. We had expected that we would be going to a place similar to Terezin.

In Auschwitz we were in the so-called Family Camp. [The "Family Camp," established in September 1943, was an area reserved within Auschwitz for Czech Jews deported from Terezin.] I was carrying barrels with soap. Mom still took care of the small boy who was gassed along with his father later. My brother worked with children in the *Kinderblock* [German: children's block] with Freddy Hirsch. [Freddy Hirsch, originally from Austria, emigrated to the Czech Republic before World War II, and was known as a great Zionist and sportsman. In Terezin, he took care of children and was very popular among them.]

After half a year I was moved with my mom to forced labor in a *Frauenlager* [German: women's camp] near Hamburg. We stayed there for four days, and it was very bad. Once they left us kneeling down the whole day. Then we went to Harburg, a suburb of Hamburg, where we stayed in some barns and went to Morburg, a huge oil factory, by boat. We were rebuilding the factory. When the factory was supposed to be reopened air raids started and it was destroyed again.

After that we worked in Neugraben [a subcamp of the Neuengamme concentration camp], where we were scavenging through debris; and in Tiefstack [another subcamp of the Neuengamme concentration camp] we worked in a brickyard. There wasn't enough food. In the evening we got a quarter of bread and my mom said to me, 'You must not eat it all, you have to save half of it.' So we were saving part of the bread but our fellow prisoners stole it. From then on we ate everything at once.

In 1945, we were taken to Bergen-Belsen, which was a terrible place. I remember tents full of corpses. We were liberated from there by English troops on April 16, 1945. Some women from Czechoslovakia paid for the bus to get their men back home. But their men weren't in this camp. I remember my mom telling me that there was a bus going home and that we had to take it. It took us about two days to get back. The bus was old and just about to fall apart. At night we slept in the open air. I don't remember this personally because I was sleeping but my mom said that our two drivers attacked some Germans at night, killed them, and stole tires. Then we came to Prague where we stayed at some first-aid place for prisoners in the beginning. Afterwards, we decided to return to Tabor.

HERTA COUFALOVA

Sumperk, Czech Republic

Interviewer: Barbora Pokreis

Date of interview: November 2004

Herta was born in 1926 to Emanuel Glasner and Irma Glasnerova. Herta's brother, Harry Glasner, was born three years later. Growing up in Trebic, Herta's family lived in a five-room house, had a maid for many years, and possessed an extensive library. Herta visited her relatives in Trebic on a nearly daily basis. Although Herta never experienced anti-Semitism, as a child that changed once the Nazis annexed Czechoslovakia and instituted anti-Jewish laws. During World War II, Herta was deported to Terezin and then to Auschwitz, and was eventually liberated from Bergen-Belsen in May 1945. Herta's parents and brothers perished in the war. After the war, Herta married Karel Coufal, a Catholic, and they raised three children. Herta also worked as the reception manager in a hotel, among other jobs.



Herta with her brother Harry in Trebic, Czech Republic, in the 1930s.

[Read Herta Coufalova's biography here](#)
[Click here to see her family pictures](#)

The anti-Jewish laws gradually changed our lives. We had to give up our jewelry, fur coats. We didn't have a radio, because my father didn't like it. I even had to give up my bicycle that I had gotten in 1938.

The Gestapo arrested my father in 1941 and took him away to Jihlava. We never saw him again. We never found out the reason for his arrest. I think that our neighbor, who worked for the police, denounced him. He was at our place twice during house searches by the Gestapo.

After my father was arrested, they froze our bank accounts. We had no cash. Everything stayed in the store. In December 1941, we got a telegram that said: '*Ihr Ehemann ist im Konzentrationslager Auschwitz verstorben.*' [German: 'Your husband died in the Auschwitz concentration camp.']. In October of 1941 the Gestapo summoned my mother, as well; it was on the second day of the Rosh Hashanah holiday. That was the last time that I saw her. From Jihlava they sent her straight to Ravensbruck [a concentration camp for women near Furstenberg, Germany]. My grandma Hermina and I remained alone.

of the Jews from Jihlava moved to Trebic, to the former Jewish ghetto in Zamosti. There were seven of us crammed into our house, I and my brother, Grandma, Uncle and Aunt Lang, and their children Ludka and Petrik. Quite enough for one toilet and kitchen. Food was distributed via a system of coupons. We could only go shopping at a certain time, in only one store. We used to get a much smaller ration than Aryans.

During this time, Jews were being expelled from certain towns, for example Jihlava, which had to be *judenfrei* [German: 'free (purified) of Jews']. Most

Despite the bad times there were people who risked their lives and helped us. Mr. Novacek, my father's friend from World War I, used to come visit us. He would bring cheese, milk, and eggs. He also helped a lot after the war. A few years after the fall of the German Fascist regime the Communists sent him off to the Jeseniky Mountains where the poor man died.

We had no money, our bank accounts were blocked. We had to gradually sell our furniture, a beautiful Petrof piano... In May of 1942, an edict was passed that all Jews had to leave Trebic. Two transports set out from the region of Jihlava, to which Trebic belongs. In March or April, a list of all Jews was drawn up and in May we gathered in the Trebic high school. We were there for only a short time. They sent us to Terezin via the AW transport. Each person was allowed a maximum of 50 kilos of luggage. At that time the trains didn't travel directly to Terezin. We got off in Bohusov and from there walked to Terezin.

We younger ones managed the trip and the heavy load, but for older people it must have been very exhausting. We tried to help them with their luggage. After we arrived at the Terezin ghetto we each got a registration number and a mattress. They divided us up and put us into barracks. I went to the Hamburg barracks, while my grandmother went to the Dresden barracks. During the war years in Trebic living conditions hadn't been rosy, but a person could always bathe and have some sort of privacy, while in Terezin it was terrible. As time passed and we got to Auschwitz, Terezin seemed like Mecca.

We young ones were lucky in that we could work. At first they employed me in the laundry, where I worked with a friend of my father's, Mrs. Goldman. I worked there for about three quarters of a year. After that came work in the fields and gardening. While doing this work in Terezin I got into the Zionist association Irgun Dalet. Life was easier when you belonged to some sort of social circle. With the passage of time the association ceased to exist, because the transports that were constantly leaving Terezin completely wiped Irgun Dalet out. Most of the people who belonged to this association, naturally those who survived, emigrated to Palestine after the war.

My last job in the ghetto was helping out in the bakery. It was extremely hard physical work. On the other hand, I have to say, though it may sound stupid, that I always tried to work somewhere where it was possible to steal something. Though the fact that 'Thou shalt not steal' is one of God's commandments, stealing food was a question of life or death. In the ghetto, my friend Janecek was a staff captain. You could say that in his function he was practically on the same level as the Germans. Once he brought his mother five radishes. They found out about it and immediately punished him. In the ghetto, a person did things that he would have condemned in normal daily life. The luckiest, though, were those that managed to get work outside of the Terezin ghetto gates.

In Terezin, I also met my aunt Erna Durnheim, my father's sister with her husband, who unfortunately died there. Life in Terezin was very cruel for old people. Most of them didn't know how to get to anything, mainly to food, where to find it.

When we came to Terezin, we weren't allowed to move about freely, as non-Jews still lived there. In 1943, there were no more Aryans in the ghetto, so we could then freely move about. After work I would always run to visit my grandma in the Dresden barracks, because I was in the Hamburg barracks and my brother was in L417. That was a youth home - *Jugendheim*, where there were only boys. After the original inhabitants left and there were free houses, we got into L316, thanks to connections. There were 16 of us girls in one room. We had double bunk beds. There were a larger number of rooms. We were lucky, because there was also a bathroom in the house.

In 1943, there were an awful lot of fleas and bedbugs in the ghetto. There were so many of them that we couldn't even sleep, we had to drag our mattresses out on the terrace, and slept there. A group of men, called *Entwesung* [German: 'disinfestation'], would gas the houses. It was done in stages, at that time we had to move out. The cause of the epidemic was overcrowding and insufficient hygiene. After all, they were old houses. There was also a large percentage of old people living there, those I felt the most sorry for. Their buildings were the most disease-ridden.

There were very dedicated doctors in the ghetto. They had a minimum of medicines at their disposal, but tried to do the best they could. Dr. Hans Schaffa was a very selfless person. He was born in Mikulov. Before the war he worked as a pediatrician in a Brno hospital. He was transported to Terezin on the first AW transport in May 1942. In Terezin, despite great obstacles and difficulties, he established a children's hospital in one of the buildings, including a tuberculosis ward. It wasn't anything big, but in that time and place it was a miracle! He helped many children, unfortunately most of them died, just like the hospital employees.

Funerals in Terezin weren't carried out in any traditional way, there were carts drawn by people that would come along the street, placing the dead bodies on them. Later, a crematorium was built. When a lot of ashes built up they would be dumped into the Odra River. Nowadays there is a large cemetery on that spot.

Terezin's self-government was a big plus. Cultural life in Terezin became an unforgettable experience for me. I remember the conductor Rafael Schaechter, who was from Brno. He managed to organize a beautiful concert. His concerts weren't officially allowed in the ghetto, but for people that loved music it was balsam for the soul. His last concert in Terezin was Mozart's Requiem. I will never forget this performance of Mozart's work, even though I've heard it several times since the end of the war. When the performance was near, and the musicians had learned the compositions, they were often designated for transport. There was always talent to be found. I heard the Requiem there, and the Bartered Bride [opera by Bedrich Smetana], sung by a world-famous soprano from Hamburg. The musicians had to interrupt their careers while still young.

I had the opportunity to hear Gideon Klein sing, and then Vava [Vlasta] Schonova – later she changed her name to Sanova. She used to live in Haifa. As an actress she had no success in any Israeli theater. So she started working in radio. After the war we met twice. The first time was in May 1965: we were on a beautiful trip in Bet She'an together. Towards the end of her life she suffered from cancer. From Haifa she moved to Jerusalem to be with her daughter, an Orthodox Jewish woman. She died a few years ago in Israel. That cultural life helped us. For the young there were various educational activities and lectures. A whole lot was done for us, the young people, in terms of education and various lectures.

Education wasn't formally taken care of. The little that was done for young people had to be done on the sly. We were taught by university professors. They did a great service; even so, they put them on the transports.

I remember Willy Groag, who came from Prostejov. [Groag, Willy, b. 1914, Czech painter, doctorate in Chemistry. He started drawing in Theresienstadt, where he taught the children. Groag emigrated to the Kibbutz Maanit in 1945. He worked in agriculture, art was his hobby. Later he worked in painting and silk-screen printing. He first exhibited at age 77.] In Terezin, he founded a home for young girls. He was constantly fighting dissolution and illiteracy, despite having to do most things on the sly. He survived the war in Terezin together with his wife Madla. After the liberation they emigrated to Palestine. Madla was one of the first victims of polio that broke out in Israel in the 1950s. Groag married again. He had a daughter from his first marriage and a daughter and son from the second. He lived in the Maanit kibbutz, where he built a factory, what kind I don't remember. He was and still is a person respected everywhere, where his former wards live. Later on he established a fund for university studies that bears his name.

I was in Terezin from May 22, 1942 until October 16, 1944.

JAN FISCHER

Prague, Czech Republic

Interviewer: Silvia Singerová

Date of interview: November 2003

Jan was born in Prague in 1921 to Richard Fischer, a photographer and a social-democratic sympathizer, and Julie Fischer, an orphan who came from a poor family. Jan had a brother, Herbert, who was six years older. Growing up, Jan's father sold German goods. In the 1930s, as Hitler's power was growing, fewer Czechs were interested in such products. As a result of his debts, Richard committed suicide in 1938. During the war, Jan was deported to Terezin and then to Auschwitz, where he was liberated by the Soviets in 1945. Neither his mother nor his brother survived the war. Jan married Hana Fischerova in 1947. They lived in Prague, where they had two children and Jan worked as a theater director, among other jobs.



Jan (left) with his brother Herbert in Prague, Czech Republic, in the 1920s.

[Read Jan Fischer's biography here](#)
[Click here to see his family pictures](#)

This was now the period of the Protectorate [of Bohemia and Moravia]. I can't leave out March 15, 1939. In the morning, when I was going to school, the first motorized divisions were already coming into Prague: a few armor-plated vehicles, motorbikes with sidecars, and plenty of trucks on which soldiers with guns between their legs were sitting rigidly, like sculptures that cannot see or hear. It was snowing heavily, crowds were pushing forward and they were shouting, whistling, and spitting at the soldiers. There was a huge amount of tension in the air, and no one knew how to act or had any idea what could possibly happen. There could have been a massacre, but it didn't happen. Soldiers were already running about at the school.

For me, everything that was German ended that day. I forgot the German language and began to hate Germans. 'Schluss aus' [German: 'all is over']. Our family's situation got increasingly worse, but I was 18, an age where there is a strong desire to live. Out of an understandable inferiority complex, I joined a boxing club. Apart from my sporty friends, I also mixed with a different sort of people with whom I frequented cafes, went on trips, went canoeing on the Vltava in summer, and so forth.

Then they stamped the letter 'J' in my ID-card [The J-passport was a special passport given to Jews during WWII], and when ration cards were introduced, we received less food. But the worst thing came next. I was forced to wear a yellow star with the inscription 'Jude.' As I recall, they enforced the regulation to wear it by the end of the week. [In the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia the yellow star was introduced in March 1939.]

So, I went up to the captain of my hockey team, who didn't suspect I was a Jew and that I had to wear the star, and I told him that I wouldn't be coming to the match on Sunday. 'Don't be daft', he said. 'You know there's a lot at stake on Sunday.' To which I replied: 'I'm a Jew and as of Saturday I have to wear this badge.' And I showed him the nice yellow cloth star. He went silent for a while and then said, 'Oh shit! Well, don't bother about the bloody star now. Just start wearing it on Monday!' So I went to play hockey on Sunday and then shook my mates' hands. No more fun.

I waited to see how people on the street would react, how they would behave when faced with this new fashion? Everyone pretended not to see you. I wasn't allowed to go in cafes, pubs, the cinema or the theater. On the tram I was only allowed to use the rear carriage, and I had to be home by nine in the evening, and so on, and so on. I moved with my mom to an even smaller apartment in Vrsovice [on the outskirts of Prague]. I slowly started to get the feeling that something had to happen soon. This was not life, it was something makeshift.

In our house lived another Jew, Mr. Weil. When we met on the stairs, he always made very pertinent remarks. One word led to another, and he invited me in for tea. After a while it turned out that he was a member of the Communist Party [of Czechoslovakia]. I soon fell for his ideology. I longed to do something active. I hated fascists and Nazis from the bottom of my heart and Communists were their arch-enemies.

One day I asked Mr. Weil if I could become a member of the Party. I wanted to fight. But I wasn't asked to join. Apparently they needed working-class cadres, and I was apparently an intellectual; I doubted that one. I was told, however, I could work for the Party in my particular sphere, spreading the word, and so on, and so on. I was bitterly disappointed, but things were moving swiftly, and soon it was all sorted out for me.

In December 1941, I received an order to turn up at six in the morning at the old Trade Fair Palace. We were allowed to take mattresses and quilts with us. Our transport was AK2, Construction Unit No. 2, a thousand young men who were supposed to make all the necessary preparations at Terezin for the arrival of other transports. Hence the mattresses and quilts, for there was absolutely nothing in Terezin.

We were each given a number. My number, 687, was painted on my mattress. To my amazement and joy, a cousin of mine from Uvaly, Jirka Fischer, turned up and was given the next number, 688. We had hardly seen each other before. He was a great guy from the country, a trained plumber. We were both genuinely pleased to see each other, as it was clear things would work out better if we stuck together. For two or three days we had to wait in some barracks before they took us to our destination.

The strangest person there was Mr. M, who had been appointed by the religious community to keep order. Taking the Germans as his role model, he went around in riding breeches and jackboots, had a horsewhip, shouting and threatening. He was basically a lout and a stupid Jew. We went on normal passenger trains to Terezin, as people. Then everything got worse. We were crammed into some kind of large warehouse: mattresses on a concrete floor, tiny washbasins, dirt everywhere, and no detergents. People used whatever they had; those that had nothing had bad luck.

This 'suffering' at the start was laughable in comparison with what was to come, but every beginning is difficult, and it seemed cruel and inhuman to us. My dear cousin arranged for me to work as his assistant, and because a plumber is an exceptionally important person we had certain advantages from the outset. It

was great luck for me that I worked with him in Terezin. I had a good job where there was relative freedom.

One day they lined us up in the yard. One of the SS commanders had a few words to say: 'We have found several letters that some of you put into mail boxes in the town, even though this is strictly prohibited. Those who committed this offence, take two steps forward.' They knew our names anyway. I was one of the sinners, as I had wanted to send a letter to my mom in Prague. I was about to step forward when the person standing next to me held me back. 'Don't be an idiot,' he said, 'if they know the names, let them call them out.' I thought he was right, so I didn't step out of the line. Nine lads stepped forward. 'Take them away!' Then they disappeared into the slammer.

A few days later we were officially informed that those nine lads had been hanged for gross breach of orders. One of us had to carry out the execution. It was an ambulance man from the pathology section who set about this terrible task. He thought he could get over it better, since he was used to death. He was evidently mistaken. I found him one day in a large empty room, sitting on a straw mattress, crying. It was a brutal psychological trick the Germans had played as a way of ensuring discipline. A lot of things were to happen later but this terrible execution was a singular case.

Suddenly everything changed around us. The normal world disappeared beyond the horizon. The lives we had been leading until then came to an end and the new, horrifying reality showed its face. We were in the hands of madmen and murderers and, from then on, no one could be sure of his life. Amen.

It is very difficult to describe life in the ghetto. Even the Germans didn't know how things would be there. The '*Endloesung*', the final solution of the Jewish question, was just being explored. In the meantime, they were trying to cram as many people as possible into Terezin. Civilians moved out and the town was filled with poor wretches who had been thrown out of their homes and forced to live in inhuman conditions: everywhere three-tier bunks, even in the attics, hardly any food, the most appalling hygiene, medical care with great doctors but without medication or instruments. Women and men lived separately in barracks, children in homes. Lights out at about 9pm. We were protected from the world by ramparts and walls, and by our jovial Czech gendarmes. They guarded well.

Mortality in the ghetto was colossal and there was soon no room for burial. As they were afraid of epidemics, the Germans decided to build a large crematorium quickly. Jirka and I were called on to finish off the water mains for the building.

We worked from morning to night, and two ovens were already working at full blast. Coffins weren't used, of course. The dead were carted in on rough boards with loose lids in three consecutive rows. The boxes were returned and only the lid was incinerated. Involuntarily, we became experts in cremating bodies. It is a terrible thing, but one can get used to anything, even dead bodies. The ones who didn't get used to it were our roommates in the barracks. They cursed us: 'You stink of dead bodies, you shits! Go and sleep somewhere else!' Yeah, we all stunk of dead bodies, but we couldn't smell it yet.

After the initial horrors, the Germans then came up with the idea of a transit camp. Transports in, transports out, the latter usually sent to their deaths. With time, the Germans lost interest in what was going on inside the old fortress. Let them sing and dance, play football, or do theater. What difference does it make? They won't escape their fate anyhow.

I have already admitted to having had a love for the theater since childhood. In my room, on the opposite bunk to me, there was a great guy, Zdenek Jelinek [1919-1944, born in Prague, died in Auschwitz]. He was a poet and translator who also wrote his own stuff. He was a person full of humor and always in a good mood. I owe a lot of my knowledge, wisdom, and observations to him.

He lent me the book *Lasky hra osudna* [*Fateful Play of Love*], which was written by the Capek brothers [Capek, Josef and Capek, Karel. I was enthused, carried away, enamored. 'We have to play that!' More

enthusiasts came forward, one person got hold of one thing, another came by something else, and one day we found we had a stage in the attic of an abandoned building. For lighting we had a powerful light bulb on wire. We didn't need a curtain; after all we were the avant-garde!

I played the part of Scaramouche and my costume consisted of the bottom part of a gent's leotard. The costume was ready once Franta Zelenka, that wonderful person and great set designer, had painted colorful diamond shapes on my body.

There are many things that I can't remember about this, but I will never forget the wonderful atmosphere. In that dark hole we suddenly had poetry; a world of fantasy filled us with joy. It was our world. The real world was an awful long way off. Someone had to keep guard at the entrance to see if the SS were about. At that time, you see, culture was still prohibited. Nothing was 'normal' - not us on the stage, nor those in the audience, not to mention the period. The theater was given a completely new dimension, one that surpassed all criteria.

We were not good actors. I didn't see this at the time, of course, but I didn't know anything about it, as I was a novice. Most of us were amateurs. We couldn't have acted well, but that was not what it was all about. This is a key to everything. We did theater, with the same people in the audience and on the stage. It wasn't that the actors were looking for contact with the audience; they just wanted to say something to each other. They all said one and the same thing. That viewer/actor correlation was completely different there... The 'timeless' nature of the thing played an evident role, because it wasn't about career, money or love - none of that existed. It was about some residue of the soul that was desperately calling out for help. The soul was all the stronger and our efforts had to be all the stronger, too...

The second show that I was involved in took place during the '*Freizeitgestaltung*', an awful word that, in its clumsy way, was supposed to mean leisure time. By now, our captors had realized that they would have fewer problems if they let us express ourselves through culture. Gogol's 'Marriage' was, I think, one of the best shows in the ghetto... I played a smaller role, the suitor to the bride, called Chubkyn. The only thing I know is that my arm was in a sling, as I had a festering inflammation that just wouldn't heal. I had two operations, without an anesthetic, but without success. Later on, fortunately, a young doctor managed to save my arm. There had been a risk of amputation. The arm in a sling looked particularly sophisticated.

I also acted in a folk play about Esther, which was once prepared by E.F. Burian [Czech theater director] and brought to Terezin by the writer Norbert Fryd [1913-1976]. People sang, acted, recited and danced in Terezin. Never again will you find so much culture in one spot...

By the time my bad arm had gotten better, however, my plumbing days were over. I then was in charge of the youth library. I don't know where the books came from, though. They were available on loan only for people under 20. There was a hunger for education. In addition, we held lectures, which was an even more important activity. The Germans were given only the titles of individual lectures, so they didn't suspect that the lectures comprised entire series. These were intended as a substitute for school. We tried to give young people at least a basic education, as there was no school.

The library was run by a council composed of people of various political persuasions, from Communists to Zionists. They began to argue with each other only after the war. It was great work and made sense. At the given moment, that is.

A famous actress appeared in Terezin. She was older than me and had a husband in Terezin, but I was madly in love with her. Totally and hopelessly. She sometimes came to our rehearsals, gave bits of advice now and again, and I ran after her like a dog. The marriage of my beloved Hana, as she was called, was going through some kind of crisis, so my crazy infatuation with her didn't remain a secret. As a prominent person, Hana had been given her own, small room.

So, we had a relationship, but one that was not purely sexual. It also had a romantic side. I can remember one time when I was playing chess with her husband. He was a likeable, intelligent guy, and it wasn't possible for me to hate him. So we played chess, as she looked on. Things suddenly got tense, though, and we realized that we were playing for her love. Her husband was a better chess-player than me, but he was obviously too sure of his victory, because he made a mistake and lost.

I loved Hana so much that I have to admit to an ethical indiscretion. I haven't yet mentioned that my mom, Julie, was also in Terezin by then. She had come over at the beginning of 1944 and worked in a warehouse full of clothes that had been stolen from people. We saw each other occasionally; I went to see her in the barracks, but I really had little time. Work, theater, love, it was all too much.

She had received her deportation order in the fall. In this situation there emerged a terrible dilemma for members of the family: to register voluntarily or not. We suspected that we would be going to a worse rather than a better place, perhaps a labor camp. We didn't know anything about the reality of Auschwitz, so deportation was just an uncertain kind of threat. It was difficult for me. My conscience told me that I should go, but my mind told me that I would hardly be able to protect her. My sense of morality drove me to the transport. But I was in love, I had my civic duties in the library, and I adored the theater. There was a faint glow of hope. After all, mom was a '*Mischling*', of mixed race! Her father was Serbian; perhaps it would be possible for her to be spared from deportation! That was the card we were betting on, so I didn't volunteer for deportation.

On deportation day I secretly sneaked into the barracks, from where they were departing. I got up to the attic so as not to be seen, and looked down at the yard. In the middle of the yard stood the SS chief deputy Bergl. Mom was there, wearing an old trench coat, low shoes with heels and a scarf around her head. She looked terribly small and wretched from that height. I saw her as she stepped before that demigod, stood to attention and started to explain something to him. He stood, slightly swaying. I think he was drunk. He waved his hand towards the gate and the little figure of my mom left through the open gate and got onto the freight train. That was the end.

I broke down in tears. I wanted to go out of the barracks, but was stopped by the '*Ghettowache*', the internal Jewish guard, and they shook me. I collapsed and started to cry hysterically and fell to the ground. They had to bring me round and attend to me, so they were glad to get rid of me after a while. I never found out any concrete information about my mom after that. I don't know where, when, or how she perished. My brother Herbert disappeared in a similar way. He came to Terezin where he worked as a sewer cleaner, but he didn't stay there long. He left on a transport to the east, where he vanished without a trace.

Back to that fateful game of chess. It was the fall of 1944 and mass transports were now under way. The first to leave was Hana's husband, then it was my turn, and then Hana voluntarily registered for deportation, as she wanted to go to see her husband. She returned, as did I, but he perished. He lost the game.

There is one incident that I feel I should mention here, one that I remember well. It all began to break down very quickly: transports were dispatched, one after another, until we went too. But in the intervening time, before things started to break down, before we knew that the ghetto was being dissolved, that something was going on here, we were sitting together and someone, I don't know who, brought in a postcard that he had apparently just received. He didn't know where it was from - some place called Auschwitz.

It was in those few lines that were permitted, that we deciphered the first letters, '*Gastod*' [German: 'death by gassing']. And now what? It is incredible, but we didn't have any idea what it was! It wouldn't have occurred to anyone that there were gas chambers there, that people were being liquidated in gas chambers! That they were being shot, hanged, bludgeoned to death, yes, but gas chambers? We didn't believe it! It's a strange detail... you don't realize that what you've experienced, stays inside you. That you can't get rid of

the experience. It's like when you have an unexploded bomb inside of you. Today, now I know it won't explode in me at my age, that's clear to me. Without knowing, you are inevitably marked by it.

On September 28, 1944, St. Wenceslas Day [St. Wenceslas, patron of Bohemia], a transport of 2,500 men aged 18-50 was dispatched from Terezin. This was quite evidently a work transport. From this we figured that they need us for work somewhere, perhaps digging trenches on the eastern front. We were crammed into cattle-trucks, in groups of 50 per truck, luggage included. It was nice of them to allow us luggage, as they immediately took it off us when we reached our destination. On the journey we used the luggage as something to lie on, but that was also why it was so crammed in the truck. For hygiene we had two buckets.

First of all, we headed north. That seemed promising, for we'd take work in Germany! We went through Dresden but then we turned to the east. We knew this from the position of the stars in the night sky. It would probably be more accurate, however, to say that we were stationary rather than moving. We weren't given any food or water. Each person had a bit of food with him and there was water in a bucket for fifty people. Next day we went through Breslau and it was then clear.

LUDMILA RUTAROVA

Prague, Czech Republic

Interviewer: Dagmar Greslova

Date of interview: February 2007

Ludmila was born in 1920 to a secular Jewish family in Prague and had a brother, Josef, who was two years younger. In Prague, her parents, Alfred Weiner and Helena Weinerova, owned a general store. However, Ludmila spent a significant amount of her time living with her aunt in Nadejkov, near Tabor, where she received a Catholic upbringing. During the war, Ludmila attempted to escape with her boyfriend to Canada, for which she had herself secretly baptized in 1939. In the end, this plan was not successful. Her brother was transported to Terezin in November 1941, and Ludmila and her parents followed in April 1942. After Terezin, Ludmila was sent to Auschwitz-Brezinka, Hamburg, and Bergen-Belsen, from where she was liberated. In July 1945, Ludmila returned to Prague with her mother and they were reunited with Josef. Her father was murdered in Auschwitz. Soon after, Ludmila married Karel Rutar, though she quickly became a widow and raised their two children. She also worked as a bookkeeper for many years.



Ludmila in Prague, Czech Republic, in 1941.

[Read Ludmila Rutarova's biography here](#)
[Click here to see her family pictures](#)

My brother Josef left in November 1941 on the second transport to Terezin, AK2, or 'Arbeitskommando' [German: 'labor battalion']. From that time on we didn't have any news of him, because the men from AK1 and AK2 weren't allowed to write home. When someone wrote home, they were shot. I, along with my parents, went on the transport in April 1942. The assembly point in Holesovice, by the Veletrzní Palace, where we waited for about three days for the train to Terezin, was horrible.

We were all gathered in this huge hall, which is no longer there today, where there was absolutely nothing, just columns along the sides. Everyone got a mattress to lie on. As far as toilets and washing facilities go, they were catastrophic. After about three days, a train took us to Bohusovice, where the tracks ended, because the spur line to Terezin hadn't been built yet. So we walked from Bohusovice to Terezin, and dragged our luggage along.

I remember that as soon as we arrived, some guys I didn't know were calling out my name, 'Liduska,' and immediately started helping me with my suitcase. They were guys who worked for the 'Transportleitung' [German: 'transport management'], helping the arrivals with their luggage. They recognized me right away, even though they'd never seen me before, as I supposedly looked a lot like my brother, who was already in Terezin. My brother Pepik was living with them in the Sudeten barracks.

At first my brother Pepik worked in the 'Hundertschaft,' which was 100 guys that helped people with their luggage upon arrival. Then he went to work in the barracks, where they were sorting things from stolen suitcases. His boss was SS-Scharführer [squad leader] Rudolf Haindl. The work consisted of sorting luggage contents - food was put in one place, clothing in another, and so on. Pepik was clever, and so a couple of times it happened that during the sorting he'd for example come across a shaving brush that he'd

screw apart and find money hidden inside. However, that was handed in, because what good would money have done us in Terezin?

At first they put us up in the basement of the Kavalir barracks, just on some straw. We were there until they placed us somewhere. You just picked a spot, and that's where you slept. My father then stayed there, and my mother and I went to the Hamburg barracks. Initially we were living on the ground floor, where I got sick, I had some sort of flu, and spent most of my time in bed. They then moved us to the first floor to room No. 165, where about fifty of us women lived together.

I remember that when I arrived in Terezin, on Thursday, we had dumplings with this brown gravy, I don't even know anymore what it was made from, probably from melted Sana [margarine]. When I got it, I said that I wouldn't eat this, and so gave it to my cousin Karel. My cousin told me that this was the best food you could get in Terezin. Otherwise, we got only bread and soup.

In Terezin my mother worked as a '*Zimmerälteste*' [senior room warden], so she was in charge of the entire room. She'd always be issued food and then would distribute it. She also did '*Stromkontrolle*' [i.e. she was in charge of electricity], so she had to walk around the rooms and check whether, despite it being prohibited, anyone wasn't cooking or otherwise wasting electricity. People, of course, brought hotplates with them, but only those who had special permission were allowed to use them.

Terezin had a special currency, so-called '*Ghettogeld*' - I think they were ten, twenty, fifty, and hundred-crown bills - which we'd get for doing work. There were a couple of shops in the ghetto where you could get things that had been stolen from people that had arrived in Terezin. We could buy these goods - for example bed sheets, towels, and dishcloths - with '*Ghettogeld*.' There were grocery stores, but all you could get in them was vinegar and mustard, basically nothing. I bought myself a pair of beautiful high leather 'Cossack' boots there, I loved wearing them, and finally took them with me on the trip to Auschwitz - but we went there in May, and my feet were terribly hot in them, so I cut the tops off.

The entire time in Terezin, I worked in agriculture, in the so-called '*Landwirtschaft*.' We'd always assemble, and initially we used to go to Crete [an area beyond the ghetto's borders] to hoe carrots, thin out beets, cultivate tomatoes, shuck beans, and all sorts of other things. In the winter, we made straw mats for greenhouses. Once in Crete I was hoeing carrots, and found a buried bundle of money! And it was a lot of money, in Reichsmarks! I told my friend Hanka, with whom I worked, and we split the money in half.

The next day Hanka came and told me that she couldn't keep the money, that her family was afraid. You see, her brother-in-law worked for the Terezin staff, and she was afraid that if it was discovered that we'd found money and kept it, her brother-in-law could have problems. I then came home and told my mother that Hanka had returned the money to me. My mother told me: 'If Hanka won't keep it, neither will you!' The next day Hanka and I went to hand in the money to the '*Landwirtschaft*,' where two brothers, Tonda and Vilda Bisic were in charge. They must have thought we were crazy for not keeping it, but what could they do. Vilda wrote up a protocol, that we'd handed it in.

In Terezin I got to know Regina, a girl I worked with in the staff garden, where we cultivated cucumbers and other things. We used to steal the cucumbers, but I didn't know how to steal much, I was bad at it. Regina on the other hand was clever, she'd always pluck one for me and tell me: 'Just stick it in your bra!' So I'd stick it in my bra, and could smuggle something into the ghetto for my parents.

One day some Weinstein came by, people called him 'Major,' I don't even know why, and was looking for some handy girls. My friend Hanka and I put up our hands, were issued baskets and a ladder, and from that time onwards picked fruit. All told, there were only four of us girls from the ghetto picking fruit; it was good work, because while working I could eat as much fruit as I could. We picked pears, apples and other fruit in the ghetto in gardens where there were fruit trees that had belonged to people that had lived there. We had to put the fruit in crates and it was then shipped to an army hospital, to Crete, for sick German soldiers.

Our boss, Mr. Stern, and his daughter used to accompany us while we worked, then one older German who didn't know even a whit of Czech, and one young guy. Then there were three Germans that took turns, Haam, Altmann, and Ulrich, who lived in Crete. Everyone was afraid of Haam; he had these bulging eyes, but was quite kind to us. He treated us well; every other day he'd bring us lunches. Other times he'd for instance warn us to not steal anything, that there were nasty guards at the gate, such as Sykora or Ullmann, for example.

When it was cherry season we used to go up on the ramparts to chase away starlings. My brother, Pepik, once brought me a nice watch, the kind that people used to wear way back when, on a clasp. He'd found it while sorting confiscated luggage. Haam really took a liking to this watch, and was always saying: 'Lida, that's a beautiful watch!' But it didn't mean anything to me, just that I knew what time it was. Once I lost it while picking fruit. Haam made a great fuss, he was so unhappy over that! He walked from tree to tree and looked for my watch in the tall grass, and, of course, he didn't find it.

Another time Haam heaved this sigh, and said that his daughter's name day was coming up, and that she'd really like a purse. He didn't say it because he wanted me to give him one of mine; he just sort of heaved this sigh. I asked my brother if he couldn't find a purse for me. The next day Pepik even brought two - a black one and a white one, so that there'd be something to choose from.

When I gave them to Haam, he couldn't believe it, and kept asking how he could repay me. He asked me what I liked best. I said to myself, if he wants to know what I like best, I'll just go ahead and tell him, he wouldn't be able to arrange it anyway. I told him that what I liked most of all was fish. He didn't say anything to that. The next day he actually brought me a fish! And he told me: 'But do you know where you have to stick it?' Boy, did I stink, a fish in my bra! But the fish was good; my mother prepared it in a very tasty fashion.

In the fall we used to go to the river, the place was named Erholung, and there was an alley of nut trees there. Men would beat the trees, and we'd gather them from the ground into baskets. I like nuts a lot, but there I ate so many of them that I got terribly sick. Hanka and I had this idea that it would be pleasant to take a dip in the Ohra; we were sweaty, it was September, and we wanted to go swimming. Hanka and I went to see Haam, and said to him: 'Mr. Haam, it's such a shame, do you know how many nuts fall into the water while the trees are being beaten, and float away? Couldn't we catch them in the river with a basket?' Haam praised us for having such a good idea.

So the next day we took our bathing suits and went swimming. But the water was already cold, and what's more, because we were wearing bathing suits, we couldn't smuggle nuts into the ghetto. So we got dressed again and went gathering. Haam was quite kind to us, but otherwise everyone was afraid of him, and it was said that he was nasty.

Once we were picking pears in the garden behind the school in L417, there's a wall there that the pears were falling behind. Lots of people gathered behind the wall, to take some pears for themselves. When Haam saw that, he ordered me to go behind the wall, gather the pears there, and if someone came and wanted to take the pears for himself, to call him over.

I was gathering them for a while, when this young guy came over to me and wanted me to give him some pears. I told him that if it was up to me, I'd give them all to him, but I warned him that there was a nasty German behind the wall, and that he'd catch him. I dropped one pear and he wanted to take it, I told him not to do it, that Haam would catch him. He took it anyway.

Haam saw him, grabbed him, and took him to Headquarters. I felt awfully sorry for him, but there was nothing I could do. Other times I managed to smuggle in fruit, but it had to be arranged ahead of time - two girls, Lilka and Rita Popper, slept beside me in the block, so I arranged it with them that when I went picking, I'd come back to the block to go to the toilet, leave them some pears on the toilet lid, and they'd then pick them up. That's how we pulled it off.

In Terezin, I sang for Rafael Schächter in 'The Bartered Bride' [opera by Czech composer Bedrich Smetana, 1824-1884], in 'The Kiss,' in 'The Czech Song,' and in the 'Requiem' by Giuseppe Verdi. Initially we practiced in a cellar, where the piano was. We were organized by voice, and got parts that someone was rewriting. The National Artist Karel Berman [Berman, Karel, 1919 -1995: Czech opera singer and director of Jewish origin] would come to sing the solo bass parts, later he picked fifteen girls, among them also me, and with him we prepared the opera 'Lumpacivagabundus' [humorous satire by Austrian playwright Johann Nestroy, 1801-1862] and the 'Moravian Duets' [by Czech composer Antonin Dvorak, 1841-1904]. We sang in attics and in our spare time, as well as in the gymnasium of the former Sokol Hall.

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

Before I left Terezin, there was a Red Cross visit being planned, and we had to do so-called '*Verschönerung*,' or beautification. Terezin was to be decorated, for the sake of appearances, to fool the Red Cross delegation. However, I wasn't there to see the Red Cross visit. I was in Terezin from April 1942 until May 1944, when I left with my brother for Auschwitz. My mother and father left on the first May transport for the so-called family camp, and my brother and I left on the third one in May 1944. When my brother and I were boarding the train, Haindl came walking along, and when he saw Pepik and me, he was surprised that we were leaving, and asked why we hadn't come to tell him we'd been included in a transport, that he could have gotten us off it. To that Pepik told him that our parents were already in Auschwitz, and that we had to leave to go join them.

MARTIN GLAS

Prague, Czech Republic

Interviewer: Lenka Koprivova

Date of interview: August 2006

Martin Glas was born in Prague in 1931, into a German-speaking family. However, when his parents, Julian Glas and Gertruda Glasova, decided he would attend a Czech school, his family began to speak Czech at home instead. He spent much of his childhood in Terezin, though his father and brother were transported further than Terezin. Martin survived in Terezin with his mother, as her work in agriculture protected them against further transports. Martin recalls his years in Terezin in great detail, including the time spent with his family and friends, the culture in the transit camp, and how he once bribed a barber to receive a haircut. After the war, Martin and his mother were reunited with his brother in Prague. Martin also attended university, married, raised one child, and worked as a manager in the entertainment industry.



Martin (second from left) with his parents and brother Jan in Prague, Czech Republic, in 1931.

[Read Martin Glas' biography here](#)
[Click here to see his family pictures](#)

My brother's last year of school was Grade 8 – he wasn't allowed to school after that. I don't know how, but he then got brigade work with some farmer in eastern Bohemia. He actually could have stayed there for the whole war, because no one knew that he was a Jew. He got normal ration coupons like everyone else, he even got tobacco coupons. But when Jews had to register with the Gestapo, our parents were suddenly afraid that someone could inform on them, that they've got one more son. So they persuaded the police commissioner to register my brother after the fact. My

brother registered in Prague, and then left with us for Terezin.

One evening someone rang at our door, and brought a summons to the transport. It was about a week or 14 days before our departure, because Mother managed to hide some of our things with friends. I know that she hid a piece of family jewelry that she'd gotten from my father's father. According to the family story, at the beginning of the 19th century an ancestor of his had it made for his daughter. It's said that since then there hadn't been another daughter. After the war we got it back, and my son and I have already agreed that when my granddaughter is grown up, she'll get it. I don't know what else Mother hid. I hid a bag of marbles, a game called 'fifteen,' and a wooden 'hedgehog in a cage' brainteaser, which I got back after the war and still have to this day.

We were supposed to report to the Gestapo in Stresovice on April 16, 1942, for which we got permission to ride the streetcar. We had smaller bags with us, the large ones were probably carted off by truck, as we would scarcely have been able to carry the permitted 50 kilos. I had a transport number, my parents were constantly repeating it to me, that I had to remember it, EZ 24, my brother EZ 22, my mother EZ 23 and my father EZ 21. The abbreviation meant 'traveling individually.' As I found out only after the war, my real number was ST 34. Back then about twenty other people left for Terezin with us.

My parents didn't explain much of anything to me, I knew only that we were going to Terezin, and they asked me what book I wanted to take with me. It was *Záhada hlavolamu* [*The Mystery of the Brainteaser*] by J. Foglar.

Along with my parents, I believed that by my birthday in June I'd be back home. This faith, that by the summer, by Christmas, and again by the summer and so on, it would be over, this conviction buoyed us the whole time in Terezin. Whether this was also the case in Auschwitz and further on, I don't know. We survived on faith in the future. After the war, I brought this trait with me back from Terezin. I need to constantly be looking forward to something. Perhaps I was born with this trait. I always say that the only thing I don't look forward to is the dentist.

At the Gestapo, a Gestapo officer stole our jewels and a watch while checking the list. Then we got lunch and, in the afternoon, a jail paddy-wagon – a so-called 'Green Anton' – drove us to Hybernské, today Masaryk Station, and then we left on a normal passenger train under the watch of several civilians, probably from the Gestapo, to Bohusovice. At that time, there wasn't yet a spur line from Bohusovice to Terezin, and so we walked to Terezin; the luggage and old people were probably carted there on trucks.

In Terezin I was actually better off than in Prague, because there I had friends. Even though I was of course hungry, was afraid of the transports, and experienced and saw various bad and very sad things, but nothing actually happened to me; I returned. I like living—that I learned in Terezin. I'm glad to be in this world. That's probably the most valuable thing I brought back with me from Terezin.

Once I told my friend from Terezin, Petr Seidemann: 'Terezin was a good school of life.' And he said: 'It was, but a little too dangerous.' He's right. Terezin gave me the fact that I'm able to value life - and that's priceless. The fact that I think about Terezin like this, and that I think about it at all, is I guess given by my tendency for 'eytsenizing' [Yiddish: *eytsn*, to advise]. In Terezin, they called me 'Eytsener,' or in Jewish 'Wiseguy.' It's only now, in retirement, when I go to Terezin for seminars and so on, that I have time to think about things again and again.

At first, we lived in the *shloiska* in the Magdeburg barracks, then I was with my brother and father in the Sudeten barracks, and I arrived, the same as my mother, in the Hamburg barracks. Our entire family used to regularly meet at my mother's place in the Hamburg barracks. Then everyone was moved out of the barracks, and she lived in some house, perhaps on Crete. She worked in agriculture, which had several advantages. For one, her tuberculosis improved. Being out in the fresh air was very beneficial to her, and her lungs began to function again.

It was also good that she could eat some vegetables in the field from time to time, and so help herself and us. It wasn't all the time, not everything could be eaten raw, but for example when it was tomato season, Mother ate her fill of tomatoes and then left her ration for us. By the way, after the war she never ate another tomato.

What was probably the most important, people working in agriculture were protected, they didn't have to go into the transports. Up to the age of sixteen their children were protected, too. Which is why I also stayed in Terezin until the end.

Of course, we witnessed the so-called 'beautifications' of Terezin. I remember that there were tents containing war production in the Terezin town square, which was for the greater part of my stay there. When Terezin was being beautified, they removed the tents, the fence, too, and put in a lawn and planted flowers. I also remember there being a café in Terezin, where you could get *melta*, and where some sketches, cabarets, took place.

In the corner of the square was a music pavilion, which interested me the most. Two bands used to play in it, one of them played swing. Up until then I didn't know swing, we weren't allowed to have a radio, and the second one played symphonic music. That was more familiar to me, that I knew from before. The local

orchestra was roughly the size of a chamber orchestra, and played all sorts of things. I really liked the drummer, who not only played on the tympani and beat a small and big drum, but also had a harmonica and a triangle and some sort of gong and chimes... He was constantly playing something, and I liked that a lot, just like the music itself.

They would, for example, play the 'Ghetto March.' Later, after the war, I found out that it had actually been Julius Fucík's 'Florentine March.' Why they renamed it the 'Ghetto March' I don't know, but perhaps they didn't want the name of Julius Fucík to be heard. [Fucík, Julius, 1903 - 1943: a Czech writer, journalist, politician, literary and theater critic and translator. Executed by the Nazis in 1943.] Because that was not only the name of the Terezin bandleader, but also of a Communist journalist, his nephew.

My father and brother were members of the Terezin mixed choir. My father had already been singing in a choir before the war, and now he continued in it. They met about twice a week. I used to like going to their performances, I saw 'The Bartered Bride' about three times, and 'The Kiss' perhaps even five times. In 'The Bartered Bride' I really liked the comedians with the trumpet and drum. They also put on Verdi's 'Requiem,' and I admired Rafael Schächter, who, when he was playing the piano and didn't have his hands free, conducted with his head. I'd never seen anything like it before - actually, I'd never seen any sort of concert before, all I probably knew were the organ and choir from church.

Culture was a significant part of life in Terezin. That was precisely what distinguished life in Terezin from other concentration camps: people "tried" to continue in their prior lives. Family life may have been seriously disturbed, because families mostly didn't live together, but despite that, they tried to get together as much as possible. Especially culture was, for us, a reminder of times when we'd still lived a normal life.

Another manifestation of the desire for a normal life were visits. I know that my parents often met with the Auerbachs, who they knew from before the war. Mr. Auerbach also worked on staff, he and his wife had gone on the same transport as my father. Because food was scarce and there wasn't anything to offer guests, everyone always brought something along with him. The desire to lead a normal life in Terezin was admirable. There, it was still possible. People were still trying to remain human.

My brother was going out with one girl in Terezin, and the story of their relationship is a very sad one. I think her name was Lixi, her last name I don't know. She was a bit younger than my brother, and had a hump. She had beautiful long hair, was very kind, and her parents even arranged a wedding for them. It, of course, wasn't officially valid, weddings from Terezin weren't officially recognized. Lixi then left on a transport. I think that as a hunchback, she immediately went into the gas. Whether my brother told his future wife about that, that I don't know.

In Terezin, we tried to celebrate holidays. We celebrated birthdays, but there wasn't too much gift-giving, there wasn't anything to give. So, I made gifts, for example. Once I gave my mother, probably for Christmas, a New Year's card. On it was Libuse's prophecy with a picture of the Prague Castle. I didn't have any example to work from, I remembered the panorama only vaguely, and so I drew some towers against the sky. And underneath: 'Behold, I see a great city, whose fame will touch the stars.' My mother likely didn't even know it, because she'd never studied Czech history, but I don't think it mattered. The main thing was that she had something from me. I'm also delighted when my granddaughter draws something for me. That's the thing that's nice about it, when a person feels that no one gave a child advice, that it expressed itself on its own.

As far as religious holidays go, Chanukkah is a family holiday, but how could we have one celebrated family holidays in Terezin? I remember Passover. In 1943, Rabbi Feder [head provincial rabbi in Brno] came to our 'Heim' to perform a service. During Passover you're supposed to eat root vegetables. But where to find those in April, in Terezin? Under different circumstances, they'd be grown in a greenhouse, but there were no greenhouses in Terezin. And if there were, then they were for Germans, not for us. So I remember that Rabbi Feder brought us these skinny little parsnips and skinny little carrots. And all the while he sang: '*Elbeneybe, elbeneybe, elbeneybe, zuzi chad'kad'kad'oo...*' What it means, I don't know. I'd never heard it

before nor ever again after that. I guess it was important for me somehow, I don't know how, I don't know why.

There were about 35 of us boys there. Those of us who had a cap put a cap on their heads, others used a handkerchief or their hand. I'd been christened, but I didn't say that I wouldn't celebrate Passover – after all, it was still the same God. For Jews, for Christians, and for Muslims. My mother told me many times, that I returned from Terezin as a child with an old man's head. Probably she was right.

Our whole family lived together from May until September 1944, when my brother left. At the end of October of that same year my father also left. He left on the last transport from Terezin, on October 28, 1944, and apparently died on October 30 or 31, 1944. The entire staff, who went into the gas without any selection, left on the last wagon of that transport. The Germans probably wanted to get rid of witnesses, even though everything was finally exposed anyways. Three weeks later, the gas chambers were blown up, so my father was one of the last people to die in this way. For the next 30 years, up until she died, my mother was a widow.

My mother and I remained, alone, but Grandma Fischer used to come visit us regularly. Almost every day my mother and I would say to each other that, when the war ends, my father and brother will return and we'll all be together again. In those peculiar circumstances in which my mother and I lived alone, without my father and brother, a very singular relationship developed between us, one which I very much like to recall.

My mother would leave for work early in the morning, when I was still asleep, and when she returned home late in the afternoon, I'd be tired and asleep again. So, I began saying that we lived like two people who don't like each other - how I came by this comparison I don't know, because I didn't know any such couple. Nor was I able to comprehend, for a long time after the war, how people who don't like each other could live together, or even how a father and mother could get divorced and abandon their family!

After some time my mother began having some female health problems. I didn't understand it, but I knew that she was bleeding. Dr. Klein then operated on her, and so she needed to eat well. By coincidence, at that time they were issuing marmalade in the commissary, and Miss Porges allowed me to scrape out the already scraped-out marmalade barrels for myself. So I lowered myself to the bottom of both barrels, and scraped them out right down to the wood, so thoroughly that I eked out a full pot of marmalade from them.

I was miserable from that work, because I was all sticky from marmalade, but my mother indulged herself, and was constantly telling me that I'd saved her life. I was embarrassed, because you don't say that to little boys. My mother used to say that even long after the war. Back then I actually wasn't at all little any more, even though I wasn't an adult yet either. As I mentioned earlier, my mother also used to say, after the war, that I'd returned as a child with an old man's head.

Being embarrassed for an adult was always especially awkward for me. Once I experienced greater embarrassment than ever before, which was when my mother and grandmother told me to go get a haircut. The barber was across the street. But because out of habit in the morning I'd wet my hair before combing it – since back then I had a 'mattress' on my head which was hard to comb when it was dry – the barber told me that he couldn't cut wet hair. So I came back 'empty-handed.' Just my grandma was home, who was upset, and because just then it was tomato season and my mother always brought some home, Grandma stuck three tomatoes in my hands, to give to the barber.

So I set out once more and, as soon as I arrived, clumsily gave him the three tomatoes (because I'd never 'bribed' anyone before). I immediately saw something unbelievable: the barber 'broke' in half, as if he'd cracked, with deep bows sat me down into a barber's chair, and began fawning over me, cutting, dusting. It's a wonder he didn't shave my smooth child's face. Finally, he sprayed me with something, and then, bowing, accompanied me to the door, where he once again bowed deeply, as if I was some sort of

princeling. What three tomatoes could accomplish in Terezin - apparently he was seeing them again for the first time in a long time. I was terribly embarrassed for him, and will never forget this experience.

I then moved into the larger part of our room, as they'd put Mrs. Hellerová and Mrs. Tumová into the smaller one. Mrs. Hellerová was the aunt of the last Jewish elder, Mr. Vogel, an engineer, who died a few years ago; she herself has been long dead. Initially, Mr. Vogel had been head of the Terezin plumbers. Petr Seidemann apprenticed with him. I remember that once in the Magdeburg barracks a plank fell into the latrine and got stuck there, and so they lowered Mr. Vogel on a rope into that pipe to bring up the plank. Then he had to go wash right away, because he was very dirty and stank terribly. Otherwise, Mrs. Hellerová played solitaire, Napoleon's Square. I don't remember the rules precisely anymore, but she always laid out the cards while saying that this year the war would finally be over. I'd look on, and occasionally give her a bit of advice. Sometimes it worked out, sometimes not.

That long-awaited day came on May 8, 1945. It was already almost evening, I was standing by the road that passed by Terezin, and was watching the cars with German soldiers that were running away. Someone threw a hand grenade in our direction from one of them, but luckily nothing happened and the grenade didn't explode. The Germans were gone, about a half-hour's silence ensued, which was interrupted by the arrival of the Red Army.

TOMAN BROD

Prague, Czech Republic

Interviewer: Lenka Koprivova

Date of interview: April 2005

Toman Brod was born into an assimilated Jewish family in Prague in 1929. Growing up, Toman's father, Arnost Brod, worked as a grain wholesaler while his mother, Olga Brodova, ran the household and took care of Toman and his younger brother, Hanus. Toman recalls his childhood in Prague as "idyllic," as he remembers a room full of toys shared with his brother, attending large Czech fairs, cheering on his favorite soccer team, and spending summers at their summer house. When Toman's father died in 1938, the family had to move to a smaller apartment out of financial concerns. Around that time, the anti-Jewish measures in Czechoslovakia were becoming increasingly stringent. Toman and his family were deported to Terezin in July 1942. In December 1943, they were sent to Auschwitz, and he was liberated from there in 1945. After his liberation, Toman returned to Prague and learned that his mother and brother had not survived the war. Toman studied History at Charles University, married, and raised one daughter.



Toman's photograph for his first citizenship certificate, taken in Prague, Czech Republic, in 1941.

[Read Toman Brod's biography here](#)
[Click here to see his family pictures](#)

The situation kept getting worse. It was no longer permitted to go outside of Prague; a Jew wasn't allowed to leave his area of residence. It was forbidden to ride the train, ride in the streetcar – or maybe we were permitted just in the last wagons, later not at all. The limitations kept getting worse and worse, but it was still life, when a person could lie down in his own bed, perhaps eat in a decent environment, and still have decent food.

In Terezin it was something else again, though even that Terezin wasn't the worst. Horror has its dimensions. When I give a talk somewhere, I say that when someone lived in London or New York during the war, and imagined that he was in occupied Prague, he was horrified how it could be possible to live under such a Hitlerite dictatorship. And when someone lived in Prague, he was happy, that he could live in Prague and did all sorts of things so he wouldn't have to go to Terezin. And Terezin, that was another stage, another dimension of horror. And understandably Terezin, when we got to Auschwitz, we saw that it hadn't been any horror, that

there in that extermination camp was the real horror, and then on and on. Horror is a relative concept, it can descend into great depths, to great lows, before reaching its bottom, and then it can no longer be graded.

Some of our friends emigrated while there was still time, but no one in our family left the country. All of the Petrovsky brothers stayed here, because they had property here, they couldn't take their buildings and factories and their farms on their backs. They said to themselves: 'We'll survive it. After all, we're not going to abandon our real estate that we have here, our sawmill, while it doesn't belong to us any more, we still have to watch over it somehow.' Karel, who had a Christian wife, collaborated with the Germans in some fashion, or perhaps she collaborated, so they were protected in some way, and thus stayed here. The others stayed, as well, right up until the bitter end, when there was no longer any escaping.

That's this Jewish characteristic, no one imagined that the worst would happen. We'll live through it somehow. We can't go to coffee shops, so we'll play cards at home. We're not allowed to attend the theater, that we'll survive. After 8pm we're not allowed to go out, so we won't go anywhere. It still wasn't dangerous. What the Germans were doing, it was this tactic of whittling down. They didn't say it all at once, so people got used to it. It was this mentality, though we're oppressed, second-rate, it's still livable. If they don't allow us to shop in stores, we've still got some money, so we'll buy on the black market. You could still get food.

There were Christians that helped us, of course: our cook, she also had her connections, and then there were friends from when we were still in that house on the riverside... This one Christian woman used to come over, Miss Janska. We always looked forward to her coming over, not only because of the news she would bring us, but also because to celebrate her visit. Mrs. Kopska would always prepare open-faced sandwiches and excellent potato salad. So it was always this pleasant get-together. Miss Janska listened to the radio, had connections with the underground, brought us secret magazines, especially *Boj*. Each time we threw ourselves at her and wanted to know what London was saying, we were waiting and waiting that the war would be over.

In 1940, we were waiting, thinking that it couldn't last long. We very much believed what that 'dependable news one lady was saying,' in Terezin; it was called *Latrinengeschichte* [German: empty rumor]. And so it was until the end of the war: we were constantly waiting, thinking that it can't last long. Like the writer Milan Kundera says in his novel *The Joke*: 'optimism is the opiate of the masses.' But it worked precisely like that. Imagine that they would have told the Jews, that it's going to last six years and that they'll go somewhere to the East to extermination camps. Many would have committed suicide. Even so there were a lot of suicides during those times.

In May 1942 [Reinhard] Heydrich was assassinated. Martial law was proclaimed, but we still didn't take it seriously. That day our mother left to sleep in Kozi Street, but it was so crowded, infested, dirty, that many people couldn't maintain any hygiene, and so we two boys stayed that night as well, after martial law was proclaimed, in the apartment on Masna Street.

The Hitlerites were conducting inspections of all buildings, to see if there wasn't someone unregistered there; they were combing through Prague, looking for the assassins. Can you imagine what would have happened had they come there? We would have all been dead; they would have shot all of us as illegal and unauthorized inhabitants. Our mother wasn't with us at that time, and of course found out from friends what was happening during the night, that SS and police patrols were going about, so she couldn't sleep. She couldn't even go out at night, since there was martial law. So it wasn't until 6am that she arrived, all terrified, to see if we were all right. We didn't know about a thing, and luckily were all right, the German patrols hadn't come here. These are coincidences... the coincidence was that we were saved. And coincidences played a big role in my life later on.

The first of our relatives to be deported were my uncles, Jindrich and Jiri Petrovsky, with their families: already in 1941 they went with all their children to Lodz [ghetto]. My family, my mother, brother, and I, went to Terezin on July 27, 1942. We packed our bags and along with them we were gathered at the so-called New Exhibition Grounds, where otherwise they exhibited tractors or something like that during trade shows. Now people were gathered here before transport. We stayed there for about three days, it was pretty sad, we slept only on mats. Then, in the morning, they led us off to the railway station in Bubny,

from where we left – still in normal passenger rail cars, watched over by policemen – not for Terezin but for Bohusovice, because at that time there wasn't yet a rail spur to the ghetto. Our transport was named Aau and contained about a thousand people. Under eight percent survived [to the end of the war]. From Bohusovice we had to walk about three kilometers, carrying our luggage, which they soon confiscated and we never saw again. I found myself in Terezin.

All ties were newly formed here. People lived in various barracks, in different buildings, different lodgings, it was necessary to make new contacts. Uncle Jindrich Brod from Pardubice, who arrived there around the same time we did, worked as a cook. In fact, when he could, he always gave us something extra with our food.

My mother lived in the Hamburg barracks, I lived in school L417, and my brother lived in a different boys' home. Even though she had never held a job in her life, my mother adapted quite well to the conditions there. She was a very courageous woman, who didn't fall into any sort of despair. On the contrary, she provided us with some sort of security. In Terezin she worked as a nurse for mentally and physically handicapped children, and behaved well. We went to visit her almost every afternoon.

In the afternoon we would have lessons. And what was taught? Mostly they talked about food; it's interesting that in concentration camps they always talked about food. There they'd cook in their imaginations, exchange recipes, talk about what's the first thing we'll make for dinner when they liberate us. Of course we studied mathematics, we studied history, religion, naturally. At noon we had time off, and we would go visit our mother. In the afternoon there might have been some smaller chores: we took care of the garden, or played soccer, read, and so on. We also sometimes went to see some performance, to see Brundibar or something else. Under the guidance of our tutors we also rehearsed a varied repertoire of our own, the girls joined us and together we put together some recitals, theater, concerts, and played various games.

For children, life in Terezin wasn't such a catastrophe. Of course, we knew that we were stuck in the ghetto by walls, that there was a certain restriction, but we didn't perceive it as an immediate horror. Maybe the smaller children did – well, everyone experienced it differently, everyone has different experiences. As I am saying, for me Terezin wasn't so horrible. It may also have been due to the fact that we were 13, 14 years old and we were starting to live like young people, we were beginning to experience loves, we were forming impressions of what it was going to be like when we would once again be able to live like normal people; it was the springtime of our lives. While we weren't yet utterly destroyed, like in Auschwitz or other camps, while we were healthy and strong, fed after a fashion, really after a fashion, we also thought about pleasant things.

The head teacher in our boys' home was named Ota Klein. He was this young guy, who was something over 20 years old. Actually, all the teachers were young people between the ages of 18 to 25. And understandably each one of them had his own idea of how to lead his section of the home. For example, in No. 1, Eisinger, who was older, a Communist, led his class in a leftist way. They published a magazine called *Vedem*, which was leftist. On the other hand, Franta Mayer in No. 7 was a Zionist, and so the children were led towards Zionism.

Our teacher, Arno Ehrlich, was a Czech Jew, who led us in this pseudo-scouting spirit: we had various principles, we 'hunted beavers' [Translator's note: similar to collecting scout badges in various disciplines] by Foglar's example, we learned Morse code and so on. I think our magazine was called Beaver, but unfortunately it hasn't been preserved. I don't know why. In the end a number of boys remained in Terezin and could have saved it; in any case it didn't happen. I remember that I drew some covers for it. Each issue had some sort of slogan. One slogan for example was 'help your fellow man' – a scout helps his fellow man. And so as a symbol I drew two people shaking hands. The cover was symbolic; it was supposed to represent the concept of the entire issue. Thanks to his naturalness and his way of behaving, Arno Ehrlich was much respected and liked among the boys. He also went to Auschwitz, but he survived. Now he's named Arno Erban and he lives in America.

Friday evening was Erev Shabbat. Each home had to line up, and Otta Klein walked about and checked whether everything was clean, if boots were clean, if there weren't bits of food in your canteen... Points were given for all this, and if someone had a mess, everyone lost points. The boy in question then became the subject of derision, because he had ruined the entire home's evaluation. You see, the homes competed among themselves as to who would have the best marks that month. You know, the teachers were always trying to in some fashion separate us from that everyday ghetto life, from the everyday horrors of that prison. They tried, within the realm of possibility, to give us some sort of normal living conditions.

We competed in soccer; each home had its own soccer team. We played on some sort of field that had been built on the fortress walls. [Editor's note: The town of Terezin is basically an old fortress, which was surrounded by walls – in places very wide ones. As the town gradually developed, soil was piled up around some of the walls and so in places it reached the height of the walls – that's why it was possible for a soccer field to be located 'on the walls.'] Of course, the grown-ups also played soccer in the barracks courtyard. That was always a big event. Several hundred, perhaps a thousand people would gather around and cheer for the individual teams.

Other things also helped us free ourselves from the reality of prison. A performance of 'The Bartered Bride' was a huge experience, though it was a concert performance, without costumes, but with amazing singers: German singers learned their parts in Czech, and sang it with such amazing style that it was said that that performance would have held up even on the stage of the National Theater. It was performed in the school gymnasium, and the effect of them singing 'a good thing has happened, true love is victorious...' – everyone was so moved they wept. It was a huge spiritual support.

We got packages our former cook, Mrs. Kopska, sent us, and this was a huge material support. It wasn't a simple thing, the post office was accepting fewer and fewer packages, and if, for example, some anti-Semitic clerk was sitting behind the counter, he would peer suspiciously at them, in the sense of 'what are you, Christians, doing sending packages to Jews?'

Another thing was finding the food, which wasn't at all a simple matter, because food was rationed via coupons. It was expensive. Where Anci got the money, I don't know, perhaps her mother left her some cash. She even managed to send us packages to Auschwitz, when about twice there was the opportunity to do so. They were addressed to the Arbeitslager [labor camp] near Neubeuern – no one knew where that was. So we got one or two packages from her even in Auschwitz. Then it stopped. The packages weighed about five kilos, three to five kilos.

Of course, bread was sent, some flour, cream of wheat...simply basic foodstuffs. Maybe some salami, it was a big help. There wasn't such a horrible hunger in Terezin, like there was later in Auschwitz, at least not for us, for the children, because, for example, we were given packages that came for the other prisoners but were undeliverable, because they had either died or left for the East. The Jewish self-government then gave these packages mainly to the children.

The situation of old people was entirely different. They died horrible deaths in Terezin. Over 30,000 people died here, mainly old people, and mainly from Germany. Young German Jews were sent from their homes to the East right away, old people were sent to 'spas.' They were told that they could purchase a stay at the spa in Terezin, if they pay for it, give the Hitlerites their home, sell all their belongings, and in exchange for that they can move to the Terezin spa, where they will have accommodations with a view out on a lake, on a park.

They then arrived in Terezin and saw in what conditions they would have to live here. In buildings packed from cellar to attic, in absolutely desperate hygienic conditions. If there were toilets at all, they were dry, water always only ran for a little while, there were bugs, dirt, disease...And so those that arrived from some sort of civilized environment to these horrible conditions, quite often died. They had it the worst here.

We children would, of course, see them from time to time. Not that we would go visit them in their homes, that was something so repellent, that we were disgusted, and it was also dangerous, there were bedbugs, fleas, it was simply horrible, horrible conditions. These people got no rations, there was no one left in Germany to send them packages, and so they would stand at the food distribution points and beg for soup. We children didn't eat soup, because it wasn't soup, it was some sort of warm water left over from boiling potatoes or something, so we would give it to them, we weren't as hungry as all that. I also remember them picking out rotten potatoes...they simply lived in desperation, but that was the paradox of Terezin. The paradox of Terezin was that on the one hand people were dying of hunger, desperation, dirt, disease, hopelessness, but on the other hand people played soccer, there were concerts, operas such as Brundibar, The Bartered Bride and so on.

In Terezin people sang, people died. And you have to put that together. For example, lectures. There were dozens and dozens of lectures. You know, the SS didn't mind, the SS mainly said to themselves: the main thing is that you're not preparing some sort of rebellion, that you're keeping the order that we've ordered you to keep. The Jewish self-government is to keep an eye on that, and as long as there isn't some sort of disorder, you can do what you want. Maybe not. More likely it was tolerated, rather than someone permitting it. But there were amazing lectures. Historical lectures, philosophical lectures, law lectures, musical theory, Jewish history... I'm saying that Terezin was in this respect the freest town in the entire Protectorate or Reich. Because there could be no thought of what was put on here, be it lectures, allegorical sketches, or theater performances, that something like that could be held in the Protectorate. So in this spiritual respect it was the freest place.

Another paradox. Don't forget, that Jews who met here were really the elite of all of Europe, whether they were German, Austrian, or Czech Jews, whether they were painters, writers, musicians, doctors, scientists...it was simply an intellectual elite that, when it had the means, made itself known here. And again, it's necessary to put this into the proper perspective. Of course, Terezin was for one a place where people died, that was one of its purposes, but it was also a place where one waited for further transport.

For young people life in Terezin wasn't the worst thing. During their time there they managed to adapt to the local conditions, they managed to make some connections in the kitchen or with the guards, they went to work in gardens outside of the ghetto, so they would bring back some vegetables, they got packages... The longer a prisoner lives in certain conditions, and this doesn't have to do with just Terezin, this is in every jail, the better he is able to make connections, orient himself, find where you can get what advantages, which guard is more sympathetic, which one you can talk to, who will help or how you can smuggle something in.

People managed it, and those who managed to stay in Terezin until the fall of 1944, when the transports to the East were stopped, saved their lives, while people who didn't escape the transports, 99 percent of them died. In Auschwitz, in Treblinka, in Majdanek, in Minsk, or wherever they were sent. The biggest fear of young people in Terezin was the wait for the next transports to the East. In Terezin everyone tried to avoid the transports, and it really was the biggest luck of their life when someone managed it. How many people survived from those Eastern transports? And especially children didn't survive. As long as children stayed in Terezin, they had a chance of survival. But children that were sent to the East, had practically no chance at all.

We left Terezin on the December transport in 1943, for Auschwitz.

JIRI FRANEK

Prague, Czech Republic

Interviewer: Dagmar Gieselova

Date of Interview: January 2005

Jiri was born in 1922 to non-religious but politically aware parents who strongly identified as Czech. His father, Alfred Frischman, died prematurely at age 31 of appendicitis, so Jiri was raised primarily by his mother, Hana Pfeiferova, who ran a hand embroidery shop. Jiri recalls few instances of anti-Semitism before the German annexation of the Czech border areas. However, once anti-Jewish laws were instituted, Jiri began to experience significant changes, such as having to move from Vysoke Myto to Brno to finish his education at a Jewish high school. In 1942, Jiri was deported to Terezin along with his mother and brother, neither of whom survived the war. From Terezin, Jiri was deported to Auschwitz, a factory in Schwarzhilde, a city between Dresden and Berlin, and then to Sachsenhausen (a concentration camp in eastern Germany near Oranienburg). After liberation, Jiri moved to Prague, where he studied at university, became a professor, married, and had children. [Editor's note: Upon Mr. Franek's request we publish his biography using small letter "j" for the word "jew" and the like.]



Jiri at age nineteen in Brno, Czech Republic, in 1941.

[Read Jiri Franek's biography here](#)

[Click here to see his family pictures](#)

We left Vysoke Myto for Terezin on December 2, 1942, still as a whole family. We arrived there on December 5, and stayed together during our time there. I remember when we were getting onto the Terezin transport, it was very interesting, one of the merriest days. For us kids it was a blast; we were young and didn't have a clue as to what was really happening. The Czech railways gave us a passenger car, so we were sitting there with no worries, having fun, and saying, 'And they think that they're going to take us to Pardubice, and from Pardubice, by then we'll know that we're going to Terezin, and that it's going to stun us or something? After all, they're already defeated.' It was all a big laugh.

Well, the laughing stopped when we came to the assembly area from which we were leaving Pardubice for Terezin. There the blows started, there the shooting started, I don't know if anyone was actually shot or if they were just warning shots. It was the breaking point.

Up to then life of some sort had existed and we had ignored things – we had to ignore them if we wanted to live. Even despite those extensive limitations, which

people aren't even able to imagine today, how horrible it was when we weren't allowed to walk on the sidewalk, we weren't allowed into the movie theatre, into the woods, to the swimming pool and so on. Despite that, we always found something, like getting together and playing chess, for example.

I should perhaps say one more thing, that we had never had it as good as before our departure for Terezin. People actually would bring us bread, butter, smoked meat, everything; at that time they already knew that we'd be deported. It was forbidden to bring us things, dangerous. Our neighbor was a German and she used to report us. But someone would always manage to slip through, they would wait until Mrs. Nekvinova would go out somewhere and then bring us something. If I ate like that these days, I'd be twice

as fat as I am now. So that moment, not arrival at Terezin, but at that assembly point in Pardubice, that was the enormous breaking point that showed us all that Terezin was going to be.

In Brno, at high school, I made friends that then later helped me very much in the concentration camp. One professor, today very well known, Eisinger, took a liking to me as the best student of Czech, but at the same time made a great impression on me as a communist at the school I'm going to talk about in a moment. He drew me into a cell of the best Communist professors. They were professors Eisinger, Zwinger, and Kohn.

When I arrived in Terezin, Eisinger told me, 'You have to get into the children's home. As a teacher, not a student, because it's all about life or death here. You'll get there by going to see Lenka, your classmate, whose mother is an important Zionist functionary, and they have control over the youths, she'll get you in there.' So I went to see Lenka like he told me. And I really did get through the Communists to the Zionists, and through the Zionists I got into the best children's home.

First, though, I got into this children's home where I was supposed to show if I was capable because it was completely falling apart. In about two months I had it all fixed up, then Ota Klein came to see me, he was a familiar figure, and said: 'All right, from today you're with me.' I went to L417, where a magazine called *Vedem* was being put out by Petr Kincl. L417 was divided up into classes, each class had a group and that group was also called a 'home.' So there the word home had two meanings – 'sub-home' and 'home,' you could say.

All of L417 was a home and within it there were individual homes. There in L417 I worked with a person that later became well-known, Jiri Kohnig, who after the war was a professor of medicine. He was my boss. I was a *Betreuer*, which in Hebrew is *madrich*, a male nurse, but we were teachers, nurses, and friends to those children. Professor Eisinger was in the home next door, I was in constant contact with him, then he left for Auschwitz before I did and died there. A few people that remember him say that he lost all of his spark, that he realized that survival wasn't possible and that he became an embittered pessimist. He was quite a big and important man.

In L417 I got to test the knowledge I had from Scouts, how to deal with younger children, even though I myself was still young. I discovered my talent for teaching, which never left me. Only when they later threw me out and I had to work on the railway did I stop working as a teacher. That means that I've been a teacher from the concentration camp [ghetto] right up to my retirement at the Charles University Faculty of Philosophy in Prague.

When someone was in Terezin, he would say that it couldn't be lived through, how could such horrors exist. But when he then came to Auschwitz, he said, 'blessed Terezin, how wonderful it was,' and, 'how terrible Auschwitz is, how great a horror it is.' From a distance, Terezin still resembled life, perhaps by the fact that after work you really had time off.

In Terezin at least the young and middle aged people survived, you could manage to not die of hunger there. But Auschwitz really was about dying of hunger. It was known that Terezin was much better than what awaited us in the East, but no one suspected that it was the end of life. Today people constantly wonder, why didn't the Jews emigrate? Because we couldn't. We had no place to go, no way to get there and nowhere to go from, because the Germans weren't letting anyone through, they were shooting people at the border and wouldn't give any permits to leave.

Despite everything, in Terezin a person did find a way of life. There was cultural life. Not long ago I was thinking about the fact that Terezin's cultural life has one negative aspect, that it suppresses the horrors that existed there. The cultural life there was so exceptional and such a miracle, that many people are interested only in it. They then don't realize the horrors, the suffering and death.

Terezin's cultural life was immense and multifaceted, operas were written, books, but the most significant were events put on for the public. Mrs. Makarova has now published a voluminous collection on Terezin from another viewpoint, about lectures in Terezin, a very interesting book, the Czech edition is called *University of Survival*. Unfortunately, many people are under the impression that life in Terezin was lived in such a way that people just went from theater to theater. Now in the summer there is a reconstructed theater there, which is completely hopeless, because the sorrow and suffering cannot be reconstructed! Plays were performed on the ground such as it was: filthy, used for, I don't know, fifty years after the construction of those buildings, and in the case of barracks, even longer. For example, 'The Bartered Bride' was performed. You cannot reconstruct that. So that deforms the impression of life in Terezin a bit. But, as I say, life in Terezin was still ideal compared to what awaited us in Auschwitz.

My brother was extremely capable and clever, so he got a job at the so-called 'Spedition' and was protected from the transports. He had me injected with a milk injection, which was given to me by the famous Czech actress Vlasta Schonova, so that I would get a fever. After that milk injection I fell ill, and remained the whole year in Terezin.

My brother in fact went to Auschwitz voluntarily, because he didn't want our mother to go there alone. He didn't succeed in having her removed from the list, so he went voluntarily with her. Our mother went immediately to the gas chambers. My brother lasted there for a half year as a plumber, and then he died of pneumonia. The last time I saw my mother was in Terezin, when she came to visit me in the hospital. I was lying there with a fever, so I don't have any concrete memories of her visit. My mother was very sensitive, she didn't want to upset me, so she held herself back when she was saying farewell to me.

When my work in the children's home ended – in the *Kinderheim*, where I was that 'Betreuer,' I was transferred to war manufacture. In Terezin, the Germans erected a large tent and that's where we worked. We manufactured car motor heaters. When their vehicles froze up in Russia they had to think of some solution, after all they were quite clever, so they came up with these gas heaters that heated up the motor from below without damaging it, and the vehicles could continue on. We manufactured these in that tent in the town square.

Each enterprise, in the wider sense of the word, such as a kitchen or our children's home, was required to send a couple of people into war manufacture. I was the youngest of the 'Betreuer,' so it fell to me. I worked in the heater plant during my last month in Terezin. People that worked here in that German Wehrmacht factory were automatically exempt from transport. But various tricks and frauds were perpetrated – whoever had the means pulled his friend from the transport and stuck someone else in their place, like perhaps someone working in war manufacture.

So it happened that suddenly I received a summons for transport. It was a question of a half day, during which I could certainly have gotten an exception, that I was indispensable, that I'm working in war manufacture. But I said to myself, here I'm alone, and my mother is there, it never even occurred to me that she could be dead, my brother is there, he's already settled there, he's a clever guy, he'll certainly already have some good job. In that sense I went voluntarily.

I don't know why so many people can't grasp this. Everyone that looks at what we lived through and at those concentration camps, judge it from today's perspective. They ask, why? Everyone knew that it was worse there, but I said to myself, 'I'll be with my brother.' And my brother was an immensely capable and strong young man, I would have liked to be able to depend on him again. Well, so I simply voluntarily left for Auschwitz, not making use of the fact that I was protected. I expected to meet up with my mother and brother there, and of course I was very, very surprised when I arrived there. These are things that are hard to imagine today.