

Susana Balaszova

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Family background

My father was Jozef Balasz; he worked in a bank as a clerk. His father was born in Svinica, near Kralovske Chulmec. He had an estate in Svinica. He had gone to America for a while and worked there. He was a rich man, but he had invested everything in his property. He owned 500 hectares. They grew all sorts of crops and had vineyards. They would bring their harvest to the city. They also had horses and chickens. One servant lived in the house, and workers helped with the land. The shochet would come out to his estate from the village every week to slaughter chickens for him.

My grandfather had three brothers: they were a doctor, a businessman and a banking clerk. He was married to Hermina Starck, a very strict and hard woman. She cared for the children and made sure they received education. She died of breast cancer during the First Czechoslovak Republic [1](#).

My mother was born Malvina Neumannova in Kosice in 1897. She studied economics at school and after her graduation, she worked in a bank. My mother had two sisters. Kati Neumann, who got married to Martin Perlmutter. When World War II began she was deported. She died in Bergen-Belsen. Her husband didn't survive the Holocaust either. He died in some other concentration camp, but I don't know which one. The other sister, Helena Neumannova, was married to Moritz Haber. Moritz didn't survive the Holocaust, he died in Bergen-Belsen.

Their father, Ignatz Neumann, owned a pub near the railway station in Kosice. I recall that he died here in Kosice in 1936. He was very kind to me and he loved having his family around. His pub was on Mill Square Street, and it simply bore the name of the street. He didn't serve food, just beer, wine and spirits. He was married to Rosza Lebovitch. She came from a village near Kralove Chulmec. They went to the synagogue regularly - the Neolog [2](#) synagogue. There was also a Status-Quo synagogue and a Neolog Jewish school here in Kosice.

Growing up

I was born on 25th May 1922 in Kosice. Here in Kosice there was a large percentage of rich city Jews and they invested in the Neolog school and synagogue. We, children, had snacks and milk every morning, which was considered a luxury back then.

We lived in a three-bedroom apartment. My social circle was completely Jewish and as a girl growing up, I belonged to different groups, like the Maccabi [3](#), which even had a center where we could meet. Or, if there was no organized group, like, say, for ice skating, my Jewish friends and I would go together.

During the war

Things turned bad for us beginning in 1938. My father was fired from his job after the Hungarians arrived [4](#). All the relatives in his family started helping each other in every way they could. I don't know the circumstances, but I never heard the issue of emigration being discussed. Still, I went to school and I graduated from high school in 1941.

When the Germans came here in 1943 my mother and I escaped to Budapest. My father arranged all this for us in advance, and he was to come later, but first he had to help his own family out. He didn't make it. He was deported from Kosice in 1944. My mother and I survived in the Budapest ghetto. While there, I was grabbed and taken to the train station, on a transport bound for Germany. My mother came to the station and she just pulled me off. This happened in 1944. When the bombardment started my mother and I hid in a cellar. She really didn't look like a Jew, and I think that's partly what saved us.

I remember the Russian soldiers who came into Budapest then. [Editor's note: the interviewee is referring to the liberation/occupation of Hungary by Soviet troops at the end of WWII.] It was clear some of them didn't have any idea of where they were.

My mother and I returned to Kosice. We were the city's urban Jews—well educated and well off. We suffered horribly over the years. First came the Hungarians, who took our apartment. Then came the Germans and deported everyone still here. And then came the Communists [see Communist Party of Czechoslovakia] [5](#), who took the houses all over again.

Post-war

I learned Czech in Brno and went to university there. I received my degree in pharmacy. My husband receives a monthly pension of around DEM 200 per month now. He was in Ferramonti [see Italian internment camps] [6](#).

Now that we are old we have no family at all to turn to. My son lives in Bratislava. When I was growing up, I had such a huge family to turn to, even though I was an only child. Now there's just the two of us, my husband and I. Each year it gets worse and worse. The pain I feel for having lost my entire world, my family, cannot be soothed away. That world cannot be replaced.

Glossary

1 First Czechoslovak Republic (1918-1938)

The First Czechoslovak Republic was created after the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy following World War I. The union of the Czech lands and Slovakia was officially proclaimed in Prague in 1918, and formally recognized by the Treaty of St. Germain in 1919. Ruthenia was added by the Treaty of Trianon in 1920. Czechoslovakia inherited the greater part of the industries of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy and the new government carried out an extensive land reform, as a result of which the living conditions of the peasantry increasingly improved. However, the constitution of 1920 set up a highly centralized state and failed to take into account the issue of national minorities, and thus internal political life was dominated by the struggle of national minorities (especially the Hungarians and the Germans) against Czech rule. In foreign policy Czechoslovakia kept close contacts with France and initiated the foundation of the Little Entente in 1921.

2 Neolog Jewry

Following a Congress in 1868/69 in Budapest, where the Jewish community was supposed to discuss several issues on which the opinion of the traditionalists and the modernizers differed and which aimed at uniting Hungarian Jews, Hungarian Jewry was officially split into two (later three) communities, which all built up their own national community network. The Neologs were the modernizers, who opposed the Orthodox on various questions.

3 Maccabi World Union

International Jewish sports organization whose origins go back to the end of the 19th century. A growing number of young Eastern European Jews involved in Zionism felt that one essential prerequisite of the establishment of a national home in Palestine was the improvement of the physical condition and training of ghetto youth. In order to achieve this, gymnastics clubs were founded in many Eastern and Central European countries, which later came to be called Maccabi. The movement soon spread to more countries in Europe and to Palestine. The World Maccabi Union was formed in 1921. In less than two decades its

membership was estimated at 200,000 with branches located in most countries of Europe and in Palestine, Australia, South America, South Africa, etc.

4 ??? - entry to be added

5 Communist Party of Czechoslovakia (KSC)

Founded in 1921 following a split from the Social Democratic Party, it was banned under the Nazi occupation. It was only after Soviet Russia entered World War II that the Party developed resistance activity in the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia; because of this, it gained a certain degree of popularity with the general public after 1945. After the communist coup in 1948, the Party had sole power in Czechoslovakia for over 40 years. The 1950s were marked by party purges and a war against the 'enemy within'. A rift in the Party led to a relaxing of control during the Prague Spring starting in 1967, which came to an end with the occupation of Czechoslovakia by Soviet and allied troops in 1968 and was followed by a period of normalization. The communist rule came to an end after the Velvet Revolution of November 1989.

6 Italian internment camps

After the creation of the Independent State of Croatia, a fascist puppet state which also included Bosnia and Herzegovina, an increasing number of Jews tried to find refuge on Italian-controlled territory. In 1941 and 1942 Italy created several internment camps for Jews on Adriatic islands and the coastal litoral, which it had seized from Yugoslavia in April 1941. The Italians refused the demands by Croatian fascists to send back Jewish refugees but interned them in 'concentration camps for war civilians' instead to protect them from the Croats and the Germans. The main camps were on the islands of Korcula, Brac, Hvar and Lopud and in the villages of Gruz and Kupari.