

# Judita Schvalbova

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Presov

Slovak Republic

Interviewer: Barbora Pokreis

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Mrs. Judita Schvalbova lives with her husband in a cozily furnished apartment near the outskirts of Presov. Mrs. Schvalbova was born in the year 1936, which is why she wasn't able to give us information about pre-war Jews in the town of her birth, Zilina. Despite being very small at the time, she remembers in relative detail the suffering connected with hiding during the Holocaust. Mrs. Schvalbova is a very kind and vigorous lady, these days already in retirement. Her joys in life are her grandchildren and the winged residents of her balcony, who she with love calls 'my poultry!'

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## **My family background**

My paternal great-grandparents were the Donaths. He was named Gabriel and she Roza. The only thing that I know about them is that they lived in Varin. I don't know how they made a living, because no one at home ever spoke about it. They are buried in Zilina at the Jewish cemetery. I didn't know at all that they are buried in Zilina, because when a person is younger, he's not interested in these things. Neither did I speak about such things with my parents. I found out about their grave completely by chance. The cemetery caretaker told me that there were some other Donaths buried there as well. I had originally assumed that their graves have to be in Varin. I had always wanted to stop at the cemetery to look for the graves of my grandparents, but I never got around to it. And so I found out that these are the great-grandparents who they had talked about at home.

The Donaths had about eight children, some of whose names I know, but others I have no clue about. My grandfather was named Zigmund. His older brother Emanuel was a veterinarian in Nitra. Of the boys I still remember Bartolomej, who everyone called Berci. There were also several sisters. Two set out for America and also married there. One of them was named Hana. And I remember one more sister, who lived in Zilina, but unfortunately I don't remember her name any more.

My maternal great-grandparents were named Yisrael Pick and Roza Pickova. By coincidence this great-grandmother was also named Roza. My great-granddad lived from the year 1829 until 1911.

Great-grandma Roza was born in 1830 and died in 1904. Both are buried in Zilina. Great-granddad was likely a Talmudist, because my mom used to say that he was a 'Bibelforscher' [German, one who studies the Bible, in this case the Five Books of Moses]. The Picks had eight children. I know their names, because my uncle in Los Angeles put together a small family tree. They had three sons: Simon, Moric – my grandpa, and Jakob. The girls were named Eva [Joseph] Pick, Maria Hoffmann, Hermina Vogel, Julia Lowy and Kati Spitzer.

There was one interesting thing in the Pick family. There was hereditary diabetes in the female lineage. That means that all the boys were healthy, all the girls that I've named had diabetes. On the other hand, in the next generation the girls were healthy and the boys suffered from diabetes. My great-grandfather's sister Julia married a man by the name of Lowy. Her grandson is still alive, my second cousin Dan Auerbach. He's got three children: two daughters, Karin and Maya, and a son, Avi.

About Simon Pick I can't tell you much. He had two children, a son, Laszlo Pick, and a daughter, Elsa. Grandpa's brother Jakob died before the war, but I don't know what caused his death. He had five sons: Geza, Arthur, Gustav, William and Eugen. Eugen Pick lives in Los Angeles, and it's he who put together our family tree. He's 87 years old. He has one daughter, Nava Earley, and one granddaughter, Ronit Attlesey. William moved to Palestine, where he also died. He had a son, Tomas, who lives in Los Angeles, and Jurko, who is currently settled in Prague. Jurko owns Zlatnictvo Michal [Michal Jewelry] in Prague. William had one more daughter, Vera Waldmann, who lives in Israel. Arthur died in a concentration camp. He didn't have any children. Gustav was also in a concentration camp, but he returned. He died shortly after the war. Jakob's daughter, Irena Kalus, died in a concentration camp. She had two sons, Ivan and Gregor. One of the uncles, Geza Pick, died after the war in Bratislava.

There's one more interesting thing in our family. It's got to do with Hermina Vogel [sister of grandfather Moric Pick]. She had three sons, Laci, Bandi and Zoli. Laci died in Zilina shortly after the war, he didn't have children. Zoli died in a concentration camp. Bandi was like a 'white crow' in the family, because after the war [World War II] he joined the Jehovah's Witnesses. He settled in Bratislava, I don't know if he has any children. I don't even know if he's still alive, but if he is, he must be very old by now.

As for my grandparents, Moric Pick and Jozefina Pickova [nee Kraut], they originally had six children. Only three of them remained alive. One boy died at six, one girl at the age of three, and one was stillborn. My mother Melania had two more brothers, Oskar and Gejza. Mom was the youngest of the three.

Uncle Gejza picked an interesting wife. So many nationalities have mixed in our family...her mother came from Berlin, while her father was a Turkish Jew, a goldsmith. They were married in Berlin. I don't know how exactly they ended up in Zilina. My uncle's wife [Herta Pickova] worked as a clerk in a textile factory, and that's where they met. They had one son, Albert Yisrael Pick. Albert is named after the great-grandfather whose grave I found. Uncle Gejza moved to Israel in 1948. His son lives there to this day, he's got three children. Albert has three children: Ariela, Daphne and Merav. These days he's already got several grandchildren, but I don't know their names. My mother's second brother, Oskar, married a non-Jewish woman, who you could say saved our lives during the war. They lived in Zilina. They had no children, because his wife was ill and had to

undergo three gynecological operations. Oskar died in 1983, the year after my son's graduation.

The Picks originally lived in Horni Hricov near Zilina. My grandfather owned a distillery there, which was burnt down during a pogrom during World War I. He had to leave there, because they had no way of making a living. I don't know anything more about the pogrom, only what was talked about at home. In Zilina they had to start over. My grandfather opened a pub and soda shop in Zilina. When he got it together a bit, he took out a mortgage and bought a house on the main street. I know that my mother, her brothers, my uncles, used to reminisce that my grandfather worried horribly, because he didn't think that he'd be able to pay the mortgage. He was afraid that he'd put his family in the poorhouse, but in the end everything turned out fine and he paid that mortgage off. That house belongs to us to this day, I inherited it. My grandmother was at home, as was the custom. The house stood on the main square in Zilina. There was a bathroom with running water, electricity, everything. We heated with a stove, as was the custom in those days. My grandparents had only a cleaning-woman. I don't remember there being a cook.

My grandparents on my mother's side dressed in a modern way. In the photographs I have, they're dressed normally. I don't remember at all how my grandparents observed holidays. I don't know what political opinions they had or what political party the Picks preferred. I don't remember it, because they died when I was very small. My mom didn't talk much about her parents with me. I only know a story about my mom's little six-year-old brother, who died as a result of a dog bite. Apparently he got blood poisoning and subsequently meningitis.

Here I'd like to recall one more interesting thing, how my grandma Pickova's sisters got married. My grandmother was named Jozefina, and had a younger sister, Berta. Berta's daughter married someone in Vienna. She also survived the Holocaust. After the war she brought her mother, my aunt Berta, to live with her in Vienna. During the war Aunt Berta hid with her other daughter, Zita. After Berta's death her daughter, whom she had lived with in Vienna, moved to America, where she also died.

Another sister, Regina, married this one big landowner in Velky Kolacin [today Nova Dubnica, Ilava county]. Velky Kolacin is located over the hill from Trencianske Teplice, in the direction of Nova Dubnice. She and her husband together took care of a large farm. They had two sons. The younger one helped in farming the fields. The older one was an army officer during World War I, they were terribly proud of him. During the war he was wounded and wasn't well off health-wise. Still before the war he fell in love with the daughter of Count Andahazy. The Andahazys owned a manor in a nearby village. They had two daughters and my mother's cousin fell in love with one of them. The parents on both sides were very much against their relationship. The Andahazys didn't want a Jewish son-in-law, and the other side didn't want a count's daughter as a bride. In the end they married anyways.

Three children came of that marriage. The oldest son was called Laci - Laszlo. The middle daughter was named Ildiko, the youngest Eniko. Their father, my mother's cousin, fell ill as a result of his wounding in World War I. Apparently he suffered from Parkinson's disease. He suffered for a relatively long time, he even survived the Holocaust. After the war one aunt took care of him until the end. After the coming of Communism his wife tried to escape the country across the Morava River. His wife and the middle daughter Ildiko were on a different boat than the son with the youngest daughter, Eniko. Ildiko and her mother ended up in jail, because they caught them. The

son Laci with the youngest daughter Eniko were on another boat. They managed to escape and got to the other side. When they released the countess and Ildiko from jail, they again tried to escape. This time they also succeeded.

Today the entire family lives in America. I don't have any contact with them, I know only very little about them. My cousin, Albert Yisrael Pick has some sort of connection with Laci. When my son needed an immunology textbook, it was Laci who found it for him. He had our address from Albert Yisrael. I thanked him for it, and thought that we'd stay in contact, but that was the end of it. He didn't show any interest. I know that Laci married a Slovak woman from Povazska Bystrica. In America he worked his way up to being a professor of mathematics, he developed one very unusual mathematical theory, so he did very well there. His wife is a painter, she's quite respected. The middle daughter, Ildiko, had already started to study chemistry in Czechoslovakia. She married very well; her husband was the European representative of one large company. The youngest, Eniko, supposedly got married in Mexico and has these little Mexican children with narrow eyes. This much I know about them, and nothing more. In the meantime, their mother died. After 1989 she stayed here for a time.

There's an interesting story tied to her time here. After the revolution she wanted to reclaim two portraits of her parents. Likely they were from a known artist and probably also had interesting frames. During Communism the pictures were confiscated, and I don't know whether they maybe belonged to the collection of some gallery. She submitted a request for their return, but she didn't manage to get them back.

I was two years old when my grandmother died, and four when my grandfather died. I don't remember my grandma at all and my grandpa only foggily. Thank god that they both avoided the suffering that was soon to come. My grandmother died in 1938 of liver cancer at the age of 63. My grandfather died in 1940 of angina pectoris, he apparently had a heart attack, in those days it was all called angina pectoris. Both are buried in Zilina, to this day I take care of their graves. I faintly remember my grandpa's funeral. In 1940 you could still have a funeral according to Jewish traditions, that was still possible. They created a museum in one part of a small Orthodox synagogue in Zilina. In one display case in the museum I came upon a Chevra Kaddisha register. The register was opened on precisely the page where my grandfather's name was written, among others.

My paternal grandparents, the Donaths, that is Maria Donathova, nee Polacsek and Zigmund Donath, they lived in Zilina. My grandfather was a master electrician in the Ganz factory in Budapest. He found a wife in Budapest, my grandma, who he brought back to Zilina. Grandma came from a family of eleven children. Her family lived in very, very modest circumstances. This I can judge, because grandma even worked as a servant for one family in Budapest. About her siblings I only know that one of her brothers was a 'kalauz' [conductor] on a streetcar. They were very proud of him, that he had made it that far.

Both of my grandparents were born in the same year, 1873. Grandma came from Pokafa, a village near Zalaegerszeg in Hungary, and my grandpa from Varin, a village near Zilina. My father, Jozef Donath, was born in 1901, still in Budapest, but his younger brother Ludovit was born in Tatranska Kotlina. My grandfather came there as an electrician. At that time electricity was being brought to the Tatras. So at first they lived in Tatranska Kotlina, and after a time they decided that they would

live in Zilina. In Zilina they founded a dispatch service named the United Dispatch Company. We had it until the war [World War II]. Later my father and his younger brother also began to work for the family business. Though Ludovit did begin studies as an electrical engineer in Prague, he didn't finish school because he was, how would I describe it...well, he liked to enjoy life. My father had to work hard on his account, so that's why my grandfather called Ludovit back home.

The United Dispatch Company was a family business. Besides my grandfather, my father and uncle, and a secretary, Jolanka Vatolikova, also worked there. She wasn't Jewish, but was a very decent woman. She took care of administrative matters. We also had horses, these cold-blooded haulage horses. They were very necessary for us, because they pulled a moving wagon. We employed one coachman, and one man that slept with those horses. We didn't have any other employees. The company also owned a large warehouse right by the railway tracks in Zilina. The warehouse still stood until recently, but now, when the Zilina railway station was being enlarged, there were new tracks being built in that direction and the warehouse had to be demolished. Our company ceased to exist when the nationalization [in Czechoslovakia] [1](#) started. The dispatch company mainly dealt with the distribution of goods to companies in Zilina. The goods were unloaded from wagons and stored in the warehouse, from where they were distributed to various businesses. Of course, goods were sent both in and out.

The beginnings of my grandma's life in Zilina were very hard for her, because she didn't know even a word of Slovak. My grandfather tried to help her learn Slovak as best he could, but somehow it didn't go very well for her. He also brought in a young maid from Liptov, so she could learn Slovak from her, but the opposite happened and very soon the maid spoke better Hungarian than my grandma Slovak. There was one cute story about my grandmother that was told in Zilina. When my grandmother could already get by with her Slovak, she went out to the market. In those days, fowl pest was common in the Zilina region. It used to be a custom to bring live poultry to the market. Well, and she saw some farmwoman selling a goose that had already been killed and cleaned. She became suspicious, whether that goose hadn't died of the pest. She tried to find out with her broken Slovak, and began to ask the farmwoman, 'Lady, does that goose kick?' Meaning did it kick the bucket [die of disease], that's how she meant it. And the woman answered, 'Well, my lady, I'm old, gray, but I've never seen a goose kicking!' So this was a story they told about my grandma in Zilina.

My father's parents at first lived in one house in Zilina. During the time of the Slovak State [2](#) they moved into the building owned by my other grandparents, the Picks. The building stood on the main square. In the courtyard there were several small houses, and in one of them there was a nice two-room apartment with a bathroom and everything. So that's where my grandparents moved with my father's younger brother. What did their first apartment look like? It's very difficult for me to describe it in detail. I don't remember their first apartment at all. I only remember how my grandma [Donathova] brought her mother Cecilia Polacsek from Hungary. She died in Zilina at the age of 92. I could have been maybe three or four at that time, I remember that she had terribly thick lenses in her eyeglasses. I was terribly afraid of her. She sat me on her lap, but I would pull away from her. I have only this memory from their first apartment. She also has a grave in Zilina, which I take care of. Well, and then the next apartment, where they moved during the time of the Slovak State, that one I remember. It had typical furniture for the times, mainly I remember the carved furniture that was in the dining room.

I don't remember my grandparents' neighbors in their first house. When they moved to the second house, the owners of the surrounding houses were also Jews. There were also several Jewish families in our building. During the time of the Slovak State we had to move from the main street to those small houses that we had in the courtyard. At the Donaths' they spoke Hungarian, and at the Picks', German. My grandparents dressed normally, not at all like religious Jews. My grandfather didn't wear a kippah or a hat. They were completely modern, I never saw them dressed like people that strictly follow their religion.

The Donaths promoted more of a Neolog [3](#) tendency, we didn't concern ourselves with religion very much. From the pre-war period I remember only one seder led by my father. And even that I don't remember in detail, just this one little thing has remained in my memory. There's a seder custom that the door is opened and one waits for the prophet Eliahu [Elijah]. At that time we did it, according to tradition, and suddenly our dog came in. For me, as a child, that was very amusing, so that's why it's stuck in my memory. And I also remember, that I said the mah nishtanah. My grandparents went to the synagogue on only the major holidays. I was an eight-year-old child when in 1944 they went to Sered [4](#) and from there to a concentration camp. I don't remember them very much.

I have no way of knowing if my grandfather was a member of a political party or what political opinions he had, because during the war we didn't concern ourselves with politics. We concerned ourselves with saving our lives. Unfortunately, this effort didn't work out for the larger part of our family.

## **Growing up**

During my childhood Zilina had maybe 18,000 people. As a child it didn't overly interest me, but for sure it didn't have more than 20,000 [according to the 1921 census, Zilina had 12,255 inhabitants]. Just recently I read that in the pre-war period there might have been about 3,600 Jews living in the town [in 1942 there were around 3,500 Jews living in Zilina]. From my childhood I don't remember a mikveh, yeshivah and similar Jewish institutions, because as a six-year-old it didn't interest me very much and my parents absolutely didn't practice this. Now that I'm retired, I read that there really was a mikveh here. There were two communities in Zilina. There was a Neolog community. Its members built one large, modern synagogue which stands to this day, but now is used for cultural purposes. And then there was another, smaller group of Orthodox [5](#) Jews, who had a tiny little synagogue. Even after the war there were services held in the Orthodox synagogue, up until the time of the two waves of emigration to Israel. Up until then it was relatively full. I don't remember the names of the rabbis that were in Zilina in the pre-war period. During the war religious life didn't exist, I was very small at that time. After the war, cantor Halpert served there for a time, he later left for Ireland. Mr. Halpert married us, so that's why I remember him.

We used to attend the large Neolog synagogue. I don't remember the details of what the interior looked like. A faint memory of Purim from the year 1941 has remained with me. I remember walking in a procession, and people up in the gallery showering us with candies. I know that the Purim celebration was held for us children. As a small girl I sang very well, so I performed there. I had on a pink knitted dress that was embroidered with small flowers.

There used to be a big market held in Zilina before the war. They sold poultry and vegetables there. Usually my mother and grandmother used to go to the market. I don't remember if our

servants also went with them.

When we lived in the modern house, in 1939 there was this procession with torches that passed under our windows. I was only three years old at the time, but those torches have remained in my memory. My mom later told me that they were singing: 'Cut and hack that Czech head 'till it bleeds!' [see Czechs in Slovakia from 1938-1945] [6](#) It was the time of the creation of the Slovak State.

My mother Melania Donathova, nee Pickova, was born on 17th January 1910 in Horni Hricov near Zilina. She attended high school in Zilina, so she had a high school education. Before the war my mother didn't work anywhere, because she married relatively early and devoted herself to running the household. My father, Jozef Donath, was born in 1901 in Budapest. First he attended high school in Zilina. In 1919 he was among the first graduates that graduated in Slovak. My father and mother attended Slovak schools. After graduation my father completed training as a customs declarer and then began to work for the family business. The job of customs declarer was very important in a dispatch company, because goods being shipped out of the country had to go through customs. My father was a very good-natured man. He never laid a hand on me, I don't at all remember ever getting a spanking. My mother was the stricter one, she would sometimes even smack me.

It's hard for me to recall details of how my parents met. Young Jewish people used to meet in Zilina, and somewhere there they met. They were married in 1931, but I don't know the exact date. I wasn't born until five years later. Our family's financial situation was very good. I think that we lived well. We had nice furniture, my mother liked nice things. She liked buying china, part of which I have in my collection and the rest is from my grandma Pickova. My parents dressed in a modern way, always according to the fashion of the day.

There were three languages spoken in our family. The Picks spoke German. I don't know why they spoke German, but in that part of Zilina German was prevalent. For sure they also knew how to speak Slovak, but among themselves they spoke German. That was the custom at one time. My grandparents spoke only Slovak with me. The Donaths spoke only Hungarian. My grandfather spoke Slovak very well, but my grandmother's Slovak was very poor. My parents spoke to each other mainly in Slovak, but sometimes also in Hungarian. With me everyone spoke only Slovak.

In the beginning we lived in this one relatively modern apartment building. On the ground floor there was a large bookstore, owned by the Travnicka family. Above the bookstore there were apartments. The building also had a winter-garden. I remember my parents having a nice bedroom. My father had a den with a sofa and chair. Of course, there was also a dining room. We had these three rooms. The apartment had high ceilings and tall double doors. When I grew up a bit, my parents allocated me one of the couches in the dining room to sleep on. I had my own wardrobe. The apartment also had a large front hall, a kitchen and balcony. I was maybe five when we moved in with my grandparents, the Picks.

Before the war we had a large library at home. Long after the war, my mother still subscribed to books published by SPKK [The Friends of Beautiful Books Society]. Our greatest pride and joy was a large set of Brockhaus dictionaries. To this day I can see before me those beautifully bound books. After the war, when my parents had financial problems, it was after the currency reform, they took the dictionaries to a used book shop. To this day I regret that this happened.

My grandparents used to go to spas and my mother accompanied them, mainly my grandmother. But otherwise I don't remember vacations before the war. After the war I remember more: they used to go to Trenčianske Teplice, to Sliac, Karlovy Vary [7](#) and Teplice nad Bečvou. The only foreign places they visited before the war were Budapest and for their honeymoon, Salzburg.

I was born on 22nd March 1936 in Zilina. My name is Judita Schvalbova, nee Donathova. I know my Jewish name from my mother, it's Jitl. I didn't attend nursery school, as my mother was at home. I'm an only child. Before the war we had this one Fraulein [German for 'governess'], who spoke German with me. She was named Irma and was from Bratislava. My mom stayed in contact with her for quite a long time after the war, and even with her son as well. I know that Irma suffered seriously from diabetes and they had to amputate her leg. When she died, her son let us know.

### **During the war**

In 1942 they sent the first transport of young girls from Zilina. The Guardists [Hlinka-Guards] [8](#) appeared at our place too, and wanted to take me with them. At the Hlinka Guard headquarters I was mistakenly registered as having been born in 1926 instead of 1936, so according to them I was 16 years old. My parents had to prove at the Hlinka Guard headquarters via various documents that they only had the one six-year-old child. In hiding with us was this one girl, Ilonka Steinova. Ilonka was from Ruzomberok or Liptovsky Mikulas, I don't exactly know any more. She was staying with us, to take care of me, as if she was my nanny. Ilonka suffered from epilepsy. On that occasion, when they came for me, they saw her and counted her in, that is, took her to the camp instead of me. During the transport, or right after her arrival at the camp, she must have had an epileptic seizure, because they sent her to the other side right away. She went straight to the gas chambers.

I don't remember any exceptional tomfoolery from my childhood. I was a very good child. Most of my memories are from the post-war period, because I was nine when the war ended. I only remember fragments from before the war. At my grandparents', the Donaths' place I had a little dog. At home I played with a midget rooster. At that time there was a fowl pest in Zilina, and he got it too. He died. We children buried him in a shoebox.

I spent part of my childhood in Zilina. In 1942 my parents had themselves baptized in order to protect us. We knew this one priest in Kysucke Nove Mesto, who baptized us. At that time I was already of school age, so my parents registered me at a school run by nuns, a so-called 'sirotar.' There were many other Jewish children hiding out with the nuns, and they were very nice to me. Many Jewish girls attended school there. I can't tell you what the ratio of Jews to non-Jews was. In my class there were three other Jewish girls. One was named Martuska Witenbergerova, who never returned from the camps. Because I was attending a Catholic school, I also had to go to First Communion, because according to documentation I had been baptized. The biggest paradox of my school attendance during the Holocaust was that I, a Jewess, had to be a member of the Hlinka Youth. [Editor's note: Slovak youth organization operating in Slovakia during World War II, similar to the 'Hitlerjugend.'] All children were, so I also had to be. My entire membership consisted of the fact that they registered me. I didn't have a uniform. During meetings we would read the magazine Sunshine. I remember an article about President Tiso [9](#). I parroted these things automatically as a child, at that age one didn't think about it.



Gradually they Aryanized our dispatch company. The Aryanizer, though, didn't at all understand how to run the company, so he needed my father and uncle, and that's why they received an exception called 'economically important Jew'. Up until the [Slovak] Uprising [10](#) we more or less still kept our heads above the water. The uprising broke out the summer that I was on summer vacation at our relatives' in Sucany. Our relative came from Zilina. They sent him to Sucany to practice as a doctor. After the uprising broke out, my parents sent this one boy of about 20 to bring me back home. We barely managed to leave, because the front ran through that region. Only with great difficulties did I manage to return to my parents. We then immediately left Zilina. We set out to some relatives' place in Zlate Moravce. My parents guessed that the Germans wouldn't be there yet. During the train trip we found out that they were already there. We got off the train in Piestany. In Piestany I lived through the time from the beginning of the uprising in 1944 until liberation.

In Piestany we moved into the Hotel Pro Patria. We wanted to stay there as guests of the spa, but someone warned us that there was going to be a raid there. So we quickly packed our things and moved to the Hotel Eden. Later my mother told me about the raid at the Hotel Pro Patria, that people were jumping out of windows to save themselves. There were a lot of Jews there. We were in the Eden only temporarily and my parents looked for other alternatives.

My mother's brother Oskar was married to an Aryan woman. In a mixed marriage my uncle Oskar was protected. His wife was our guardian angel. She always brought us some money, because wherever a person hid, it was necessary to pay well. They found us a contact, a person that had at one time had a bicycle shop in Zilina. In Piestany he lived in an old house. We only stayed with them for a couple of weeks, because the conditions there were horrible. His wife regularly went to Bratislava to a German officers' club. She was a prostitute. They had one child at home that had been born as a result of these activities of hers. It was only a couple of months old, and she didn't take care of it at all. She also had a daughter who was a bit older. My mother took care of the household and of those children.

Everything was working relatively well, up until one day when his wife unexpectedly brought over a German officer. He was obviously her lover. He came over to their place for a visit. We stayed shut up in the room in which we lived. We stayed there for 24 hours with nothing to eat or drink. We couldn't even go to the bathroom. I still remember how we were peeing into a vase. My father quietly removed a pipe from the chimney and poured the contents of the vase into the chimney. Then the Germans announced that whoever was hiding Jews would be punished. People were frightened, and without any advance notice the man told us, 'Clear out of here!' And so in the evening, even though there was a curfew, we took off on a wagon to where my grandparents and uncle were living [the Donaths].

We moved into an apartment building located where today there is a large market. The owner was named Mrs. Adamcova, and rented rooms to spa guests. We lived next door to my grandparents. Our rooms had a connecting door that was always open. In the meantime we got fake papers in the names Dobos and Dudas. I remember it, because I had to memorize everything in detail. One was from Dobsina and the second from I don't know where. I had to know everything: where I had gone to school, who was named what and so on. My name was changed, my parents' name, and I, a child, had to memorize everything.

My grandparents were still waiting for fake papers, which were supposed to be brought by my uncle from Zilina. They were supposed to get them shortly after us. My uncle worked in a group that manufactured false documents. When we were there for some time already, we thought that it was going to be fine and that we'd probably survive. It was the end of October. Every day my grandfather would go to buy milk for me. On 1st November, All Souls' Day [in Slovakia this day is a national holiday; people light candles in cemeteries in memory of their deceased relatives] he set out as usual with a canteen, to go buy milk for me. Everyone was trying to convince him to not go, that it was 1st November, and someone from Zilina who'd be there to visit the cemetery could recognize him in the street. They didn't want to let him go. He said all right, he wouldn't go.

But after a while my grandpa, a stubborn old man, grabbed the canteen and disappeared. We only heard the door slam. In a little while he returned. I know this from my mother, because as a child I didn't notice things like that. Suddenly he was sitting there, depressed and strange. Not even a half hour went by, and suddenly the Guardists were banging on the door: 'Identify yourselves!' They hadn't even had time to scald the milk. It used to be that lamps had this outlet on the side, and you could plug an electrical cord into them. This was at my grandparents' place. The cord from the hotplate led through that door to a lamp. In our room, on a cupboard, there was a hotplate on which we used to boil milk. When the Guardists banged on the door, my father quick-wittedly unplugged the cord and pulled it into our room. We closed the door and moved the cupboard, so that we were separated.

Through the wall we could hear everything that was going on in the other room. 'Get dressed and come with us.' After a while they came into our room as well. My mother stuck me into a big bed that we had there and piled all of the duvets on top of me. One of the Guardists looked at me. We had false papers. The Guardist thanked us and the door closed. We all just watched, to this day it's fixed in my memory, my grandparents and uncle walking, being led away across the long courtyard that was in front of the building. My grandma had sore and swollen legs, she walked with difficulty. My father was utterly devastated. In fact he suffered such a shock, which I only found out about when I was an adult, that as a result of that stress he became impotent. After the war he didn't want to go for treatment. He was a young man, 43 years old, it was a minor family tragedy.

The superintendent's wife came and said to us, 'You'll have to leave here, I'll find you another place.' One of the Guardists warned us, he was a more decent type, and said to us, 'Mrs. Adamcova, tell those others to disappear from there as soon as possible. I could see very well what they are. It's only that the child in the bed, which was so upset - because I was shaking and my teeth were chattering - I felt so sorry for it, that I didn't say anything. I can vouch for myself, but I can't vouch for my colleague.' Mrs. Adamcova was a very decent woman.

There was one building in a street around the corner, which is still there, at least it was in May of last year, when I took a picture of it. It's still there, but it's only a ruin now. I don't know if it's ready for demolition, or reconstruction. It was a large rooming house with many tenants. The owner was named Mrs. Burzikova, a very decent lady. Mrs. Burzikova rented us a room from which I could see out into the street. I suffered terribly there, because we were shut up there for days on end, and I could see children walking to school, while I was constantly inside. As soon as we arrived she greeted us with a nice dinner. I remember that we had roast goose, but we didn't even have a chance to eat it and already there was a raid, and again they were checking our papers. After the Guardists left, 'Auntie' Burzikova came over, she was very kind, and said in Hungarian, 'My dears, I

prayed one long Lord's Prayer for you, that nothing would happen to you.'

We stayed there almost up until the liberation. My mother and I counted that in Piestany we had to move 13 times in all. Mrs. Burzikova's building had a very unusual cast of characters living in it. One lady tenant worked as a waitress in the Hotel Europa and got along very well with the Germans. There was this one man, named Axel Lambert. He was a loud, tall man, who spoke German and took himself very seriously. After the liberation we found out that he had used the opposite tactics as we had. He was also Jewish, and pretended to be a German, this was how he intended to save himself. The house had one room that to me, a child, seemed to be an enchanted chamber. It was locked, sealed. Aunt Burzikova said that two Jewish sisters had lived there, someone had informed on them and they had dragged them away. One day the door was opened. I remember a beautiful pink umbrella and a mountain of knick-knacks, photographs. They liquidated it all without mercy. They had no feeling for it.

We spent only a certain amount of time in Mrs. Burzikova's building, because when my uncle from Zilina came to see us and brought us money to pay the rent, on the train he had met a person who confided in him that he was harboring a Jewish family. My uncle asked him to take us in as well. So we moved there, so as not to be in the same place too long. These people had a grown-up son. The lady of the house had a very nasty, domineering nature. It's stayed in my memory, that when they brought us rolls for breakfast, she had picked everything over. She picked out the soft or crispy rolls for herself, her son or husband. We ate the leftovers. My father and their son tried to dig a bunker underneath their house. Because they began to excavate it, I think that they finished it, too. The wife of that man, his name was Tonko Bartovic, was terribly against us living with them. She was constantly arguing with him.

In the meantime we were again in danger. Their son wanted to join the partisans. There were a lot of partisans in the region around Piestany. Apparently there were provocateurs among the partisans, their son found out about it, but only later, because he brought them there, where we lived. So we once again ended up in Mrs. Burzikova's lap. In time there was also some sort of a problem at Mrs. Burzikova's place, so we had to return to Mr. Bartovic. Mrs. Bartovicova, Nana they called her, was terribly dissatisfied, as I've already mentioned, and was constantly provoking her husband. Once they were cooking together, because they were cooks by trade and had at one time lived and worked in Paris.

Mrs. Bartovicova was constantly harassing him. He told her, 'If you're going to be constantly nagging and annoying me, I'll take this knife - that he was using to cut meat - I'll stab myself with it.' And she said, 'Well, that I'd like to see! That I'd like to see!' Mr. Bartovic really did it. The house had a garden in front, she ran out for help. By coincidence some garbage men were passing by and loaded him on their garbage truck. The hospital was in the center of Piestany, and we lived on the bank of the Vah River, which was about 100 meters from the hospital. They loaded him onto the truck and quickly drove him to the hospital. They operated on him, luckily he had only pierced his pericardium. The operation was a success, but he died of blood poisoning. We didn't find out the details, but by chance someone from our family had a young nurse in hiding there, who had assisted during the operation. Before they anesthetized him, Mr. Bartovic had constantly repeated, 'What have I done! I wanted to save the lives of two families and now I've abandoned them!' We didn't find this out until after the war.

And so we again returned to 'Aunt' Burzikova. In the meantime the German front command had taken up residence in her building. The commander picked out our room, we went into the cellar. My mother heard them speaking in German, 'Hey, that woman seems kind of dark to me, don't you think she's a Jew?' And the other said, 'What're you talking about, we're close to Hungary, there all women are dark.' So we seemed suspicious to them. My mother cooked for them, she helped Aunt Burzikova. The commander had an injured finger, which had become infected, and my mother used to go treat it. This is how we existed until about the beginning of April.

One day, I remember that a messenger came on a horse and ran upstairs to the commander. My mother saw that there was something going on up there. We heard a lot of stomping and running around. My mother asked one of them what had happened. 'Well, tomorrow you're already going to have the Russians here, we're taking off.' I was lying in the cellar with plaster falling on my head, as the Germans had blown up a bridge. The next day the Russians were already in Piestany. It was on the 3rd to the 4th of April. So we were saved. Actually, first the Romanian army arrived, and then the Russians. One day they rang at our door, and asked for some buckets. Everyone was afraid of the Russians, because they were doing all sorts of things - they didn't know what a flush toilet was, drank water from it, they raped some women, and so on.

They took the buckets. Everyone was afraid of what it was they wanted to do. Then it came out that they had a herd of cows by the Vah, and needed to milk them. Well, suddenly a soldier arrived at our place with two big pails full of milk. And we weren't afraid any more. But then there was this incident: someone told the Russians that there had been a German command post in Mrs. Burzikova's house. The Russians came, stood there and shouted, 'Where Germans!' well, and auntie said that there weren't any Germans. 'Here Germans!' And they pressed her terribly, and she got so horribly upset that she had a heart attack and died. We had this back luck, that everyone who helped us during the war, went to the next world after the war.

### **After the war**

The second day after the liberation, some people unloaded these large crates in front of the Mazac bookstore in Piestany, and handed out small Czechoslovak, American, English and Russian paper flags. They must have had them very well hidden. Towards the end of April, when they also liberated Zilina [30th April 1945], my father set out for Zilina on a bicycle to find out the situation there and whether we could return. The trip took four days, because all the bridges were destroyed and he had to go with the army across pontoon bridges. Later the trains also started to run, and so we made it home.

After my father's brother returned from the camps we found out what had happened the day they had dragged him away with my grandparents. They led them away to the Hlinka Guard headquarters, and called in the man that had informed on them, to confront them, whether it was really them. At that time he had the opportunity to say that it wasn't them. But: 'yes, that's them.' The person that informed on my grandfather was this one builder that sometimes lived in Zilina. He was of Italian origin and was named Cicutto. His family lives in Piestany to this day. My grandparents went to Sered. My grandfather met his older brother Emanuel from Nitra there, along with his daughter as well. Together they left in one transport for Sachsenhausen. After arrival in Sachsenhausen there was a selection and my grandfather and his brother were sent to the undesirable side. At first my uncle was in Sachsenhausen, for a while in Dachau plus what other

camps I don't know. They liberated him in Dachau. He returned home very ill, and died at the age of 62. He couldn't hold out any longer than that. My grandfather didn't return, and all I know about my grandmother is that she got to Ravensbruck [11](#). She was 72, and so she couldn't handle the suffering. When I visited the Jewish Museum in Bratislava, I found my grandmother's name in a memorial section that had been devoted to women in Ravensbruck. My lady friend who visited Ravensbruck every year found out my grandmother's prison number and date of death. She died on 12th January 1945. They took her to Sered on 1st November.

As far as Mr. Cicutto goes, the man who informed on us, my uncle pressed charges against him after the war. Nothing was ever done in the matter, because someone always buried it. I've met up with the name Cicutto, when my sons used to go to tennis tournaments and played with a Cicutto from Piestany. He must have been a grandson of his. One is named Remo Cicutto and is the mayor of Piestany. I met Mr. Shaimovich from Piestany, and told him the story of how I had been hiding in Piestany. He was completely horrified, and said that he had never met such a decent family as the Ciccutos, and that he doesn't even want to believe that their grandfather did this.

The worst thing for me during the Holocaust was that I was shut up inside for days on end, and on top of it I got a salivary gland infection. My father also fell ill. We had high fevers, up to 40 degrees, we barely lived through them. Aunt Burzikova was very considerate. She brought a doctor to see us, he worked for the underground movement, and so there wasn't any danger of him doing us harm. I remember the terrible anxiety and constant fear when we were in hiding, the horrible fear of the Guardists and the Germans. After I returned to Zilina I returned to Judaism, because as they say, blood is thicker than water. The synagogue didn't entice me whatsoever, but I went straight to Maccabi [12](#), to my peers that had survived.

There's one more sad memory that's tied to wartime. My uncle, Oskar, who lived in a mixed marriage, had contacts in the Guard. There was a reception camp in Zilina. One day he went there, because he wanted to help someone. One distant relative in the camp had approached him. She was named Mrs. Feuermanova and came from Cadca. She asked him, because she and her entire family had already been in the camp a long time, whether he could take her eight-year-old daughter home with him so she could take a bath. The next day he would bring her back. My uncle arranged it and took the girl, Evicka [Eva], with him. He brought Evicka home to us, so my mother could clean her up. The next day he wanted to take her back to her parents, which he also did. In the meantime, during the night, a transport had left the camp, with her parents and brother. So he took Eva and brought her back to us. She stayed with us and went to school with me in Zilina.

Eva had an aunt who lived in Turany. She was her mother's sister. I've mentioned that I was in Sucany during the uprising. Eva was in the next village, in Turany, on holidays. During the uprising that boy came for me and was supposed to pick up Eva as well. But the front line had advanced so much that he didn't know how to get to Turany. Eva stayed with her uncle and aunt in the mountains during the war. They survived in bunkers. After the war, when they returned to Turany, her aunt brought her to my mother. She said, 'Here you go, Mela, I've brought you Eva back.' My mother was beside herself. Childless, she had no children, it was her sister's child, and she brings her to strangers! My mother took her: 'if you don't want her!' After the war Eva began to attend school with me. She was so terribly afflicted by the fact that she didn't have parents. She spent entire days sitting on the front steps. We lived on the main street, and she sat on the front steps of the building and she approached everyone on whom you could see that they were returning from

the camps, and asked if they had seen her parents. Her entire family died, no one returned. She remained with us. My mother brought her up, dressed her. We used to get clothing. They helped however they could. My mother didn't want to adopt her, but would have given her anything, as if she was her own.

In 1947 one of my uncles came and wanted to take Eva on a trip. My mother let her go. My uncle took her to Trencin. In Trencin there lived a husband and wife who had lost their only son in the war. He was named Dr. Polak and they wanted to adopt her. They didn't even let Eva return to us. Eva cried there, she was completely beside herself. My uncle told her that she'll be happy there and that she should stay. My mother was crying; it was a complete circus. In the end Eva had to stay there. They were very, very good to her. They let her study, and she graduated as a pharmacist. The lady [Dr. Polak's wife] was a very strict, grumpy person and Eva suffered a lot there. In the end we made peace with them. I used to go visit them during summer vacation and Eva would come visit us.

Eva married a doctor who, just like her, had lost his entire family. For a time they lived in Prague. Her husband got to Chicago on a study visit in medicine. In the meantime they had two children. She had two boys, Ivo and Petr. After the arrival of the Russians in 1968 she picked up and left with the two small children to join her husband in Chicago. We stayed in touch only by mail. Once in a while she sent my mother some small gift from America. It wasn't until 1997, when I was in Los Angeles visiting relatives, that Eva came on a visit from Chicago. In Los Angeles we met after many years. At that time she told me why her aunt had brought her back to my mother. Her uncle, her aunt's husband, had been molesting her. It began in the forest in that bunker. Her aunt noticed it, and after they returned home it continued. Her aunt wanted to prevent a family tragedy. So she rather took upon herself the burden of my mother condemning her. We talked about it all, and from that time on we've stayed in close contact. Last year we met at the spa in Piestany. Upon her return home, Eva felt terribly tired and went for a medical checkup, where it was found that she was suffering from acute leukemia. On 1st February [2005] Eva turned 70, and on 5th February she died. I'm an only child. For a time Eva and I grew up as sisters, together we were members of children's organizations.

During the war we managed to save a large part of our furnishings, mainly pictures, china and carpets. My mother's sister-in-law locked up our furnishings in a room in her apartment. So that's how our furnishings were saved. After the war people used to come over to look, as if at a miracle, because everyone had everything lost and stolen. I remember this one episode from my childhood. My mother used to have one old lady sew dresses for me. She knew how to sew beautiful children's clothing. She was the grandmother of Mirek Prochazka [a writer], the husband of Marie Kralovicova. She made me a beautiful dress from blue taffeta, decorated with various flowers, with a white collar and lace. After the outbreak of the Slovak National Uprising we had to leave the apartment in a hurry, and in that hurry we forgot the dress there. When we returned after the war, we found only a looted apartment. Nothing was left. We only had those things that my aunt had hidden away for us. One day I was walking along the street with my mother, and suddenly towards us is walking this man with a little girl, about as big as I was, and she was wearing my dress that had been made for me by that lady. I was utterly shocked. My mother went to buy similar material and had the same dress made for me, so I wouldn't be so heartbroken.

After the war the Aryanizer returned our dispatch company, which we then ran until they nationalized it in 1948 or 1949. After the war the company was modernized, of course, and a few trucks were added, but we also had horses with which we delivered goods around town. After the company was nationalized it was put under CSAD [Czechoslovak Bus Lines] and my father and uncle were employed there. After the war my mother worked part-time in the Okrasa cooperative. She did light manual labor there, I think that she worked in the packing department.

My parents considered leaving for Israel, and everything was even prepared. They assessed my father with a millionaire's tax and he had to pay the state a certain amount of money. We had no money left. My mother's brother, Gejza, left with his family in the first wave. My father helped him. People were renting moving wagons onto which they loaded their belongings. Things were packed under the eyes of customs officials. We also had a moving wagon prepared, and suddenly they assessed us with the millionaire's tax. And so we stayed.

After the war no one cared that we'd been baptized. It was taken as something important for our survival. Nobody in our family was a member of a Zionist organization, only I attended Maccabi. We didn't do a lot of sports in Maccabi, I would almost say that after the war it became a cultural organization. We sang songs in Ivrit and religion was taught in a haphazard way. Occasionally we went on bicycle tours, but that's all as far as sports go. I attended Maccabi only until 1949, as after that there weren't enough of us children around.

After the war we celebrated the high holidays only symbolically. We also went to the synagogue only on those occasions. For Passover we ate matzot and various traditional foods prepared from matzah such as for example matzah dumplings. I also had a Jewish wedding. My father attended the synagogue occasionally, or when they needed a minyan. In time it all ceased, because there was no one to attend. My parents celebrated Christmas because of me, because as a child I didn't want to have anything that was different from my classmates. We also exchanged gifts. Why can't a person practice that which is nice? There's nothing wrong with that. Up to the age of six I didn't attend religion classes, and then the Slovak State was created and everything else that followed. The only place I learned anything was in Maccabi. It's only now, in adulthood, that I sometimes read something about Jewish history and various events.

After the war I associated mainly with Jewish children in Maccabi. In 1949 the Aliyah came and everyone moved away to Israel. In Zilina there was no one of my age left, maybe three of us. At school I had many girlfriends, I was friends with practically all the children. It's like that to this day.

We were a relatively large family, and met regularly with those that had survived. Mainly we stayed in contact with my mother's brothers and their families, until Gejza left for Israel. Uncle Oskar lived beside us. Gradually everyone died, only my mother and her brother Oskar remained. That was our social circle. My parents had mainly Jewish friends, but also met with non-Jews. I can say with certainty that Jews made up the majority. As much as it was possible, we went on vacations outside of the country. I know that my mother was with my aunt in Vienna and they also used to visit Budapest. We younger ones were used to going to the seaside; my parents were no longer of an age where they could have come with us.

At first I attended a school called sirotar in Zilina. After the war, because I had been in hiding for a year and hadn't attended school, I had to write make-up exams so I could start attending public school. After the end of public school I started attending the Girls' Gymnazium [high school] in

Zilina. I was in precisely the grade where they were making various changes and were trying to form a unified school system. By the time I graduated, I hadn't absolved eight years of high school, but eleven. Among my favorite subjects were biology and geography. I didn't like math and physics at all. My favorite teacher was our home room teacher. Now, in the fall [2004] we had a 50-year high school reunion, and I met him there. To this day I keep in touch with my former classmates from Zilina. Besides school I attended piano lessons for seven years. Today I don't play any more, and I don't know if I'd be able to play anything either. We studied German in school, which I looked forward to very much, as from home I spoke it only conversationally, while in school we improved not only our conversational skills, but also grammar. In my free time I took French lessons.

I can't judge whether I felt any anti-Semitism in the prewar period. After 1945 there might have been some moments in school, but all in all, nothing. I didn't feel it. I can say the same about at work. During socialism, people somehow didn't show their anti-Semitic feelings. I would say that I meet up with it more nowadays. There are various things, like written slogans and vandalized cemeteries. We hear about it in the news, but also from our friends in Kosice, and from Presov, where they spray-painted their houses with anti-Semitic slogans.

I didn't go to university, as I got married right after I graduated from high school. I always say that if I had to live it over again, I wouldn't get married so early. Not because of my husband, but because your youth is gone; I got married at the age of 18. I wanted to study medicine, but as a former capitalist my father had a very bad political profile, so I also didn't get a profile that was good enough. My entry interview was in Kosice. I could feel that due to my origins they didn't even want to let me go on to the oral portion of the exam. I was inclined towards medicine, so that's why I took a job in a laboratory here in Presov. I had to study nursing in another city so that I would have at least some sort of qualification. There was no school of medicine in Presov, and so I used to commute to Kosice. When my children were grown up, I finished one additional degree in my field. I'll always regret that I didn't go study at the Faculty of Philosophy or Pedagogy in Presov. I could have chosen a combination of language and biology, in that time I did three high school degrees. I could have also finished university.

My husband is named Otto Schvalb; he was born on 1st April 1925. There's an age difference of eleven years between us. He was born in Presov. His father was a doctor and his mother a housewife. His mother came from Trstena na Orave. His father was a native of Presov. My husband graduated from the Faculty of Medicine in Prague, in dentistry. For some time he worked at a clinic in Kosice, but he eventually returned to his parents. He specialized in periodontology. He worked his way up to senior periodontological consultant.

My husband and I met thanks to my aunt and his mother. My mother-in-law was at a spa with my aunt, and after some time my mother in law and her son came to visit my aunt. While they were chatting my aunt remembered that they had a girl in the family and so on. We were married in 1954 in Zilina. We had the first Jewish wedding in Zilina since the war. The ceremony was held under a chuppah. I didn't go to a mikveh before the wedding, as observance of Jewish rituals was never a hundred percent. My mother missed me very much when I left home at eighteen.

After the wedding we lived in a room at my husband's parents' place. The building was on the main square. In time one of the tenants moved away and we moved into the empty apartment. So that was our first apartment. One day they announced to my husband and my mother-in-law that the



building was going to give way to urban renewal. They demolished the old building and we tenants got replacement apartments. That's where we live to this day. My mother in law used to live across from us.

In 1957 my first son, Ivan Schvalb, was born. He graduated from the Faculty of Medicine, specializing in allergology. He has a private practice here in Presov. His wife Ludmila is a high school teacher. They have two sons. Michal is 21 and is a student of political science at the local university. The younger, Martin, is 14 and is currently attending high school in Presov. Our younger son, Peter Schvalb, was born in 1960. He graduated from the Faculty of Food Hygiene at the University of Veterinary Medicine in Kosice. For many years now, he has been working for a company named Imuna in Sarisske Michalany as director of sales. His wife Maria graduated from medicine, and has a private allergology practice. She's half Jewish. Her father is Jewish. According to halakhah she's not Jewish, but otherwise she takes after her father. My grandchildren say that they're three-quarters Jewish. They also have two sons, both of them are in high school. The older, Tomas, is 15, and the younger, who's named Alexander after my husband's father, is 13.

My sons weren't circumcised. After the war circumcisions weren't performed very often, and we weren't that religious of a family to consider it to be absolutely necessary. In fact, my husband's father also refused to have him circumcised, because during the war many people lost their lives when it was discovered that they were circumcised. We brought our sons up so that they knew that they were Jews. We didn't emphasize the religious aspects. They used to observe seder with my husband's mother, but when she died it all departed along with her. My husband and I only symbolically observe holidays. Once I took my sons and grandsons to a Chanukkah supper in Kosice. I thought that they'd like it, but as luck would have it, the rabbi in Kosice, who didn't yet speak Slovak very well, led an endlessly long sermon. He didn't give them what I wanted, I would almost say that he put them off with that endless sermon.

My grandsons don't concern themselves with religion at all. Even their parents avoid religion. As far as Jewish history goes, they know everything. They're immensely interested in the events of World War II, the Holocaust. When a movie on this theme comes out, they analyze it in detail. They know about Israel, they know where we belong, where their grandparents belong, they know all that. My older son Ivan and his wife agreed amongst themselves that as far as religion goes, they would bring up their children neither as Jews nor as Christians. Ludmila isn't a devout Catholic, she doesn't observe anything besides Christmas. But I've taken them with me to the occasional Purim gathering in Kosice. Neither my sons nor my grandsons are registered at the [Jewish] community. My older son regularly attends the synagogue with us at Yom Kippur, but otherwise not.

Since they've started attending high school, I see my grandchildren once a week, on the weekend. When my one son's boys were in elementary school, I used to see them every day. Their school was close, and so they would come over every day. They would have something to eat, and after dinner their parents would pick them up. I saw the other grandsons only once a week, on the weekend, as they lived on the other side of town. I didn't have such a close relationship with them. We see our sons, Ivan and Peter, practically every day.

My husband and I have so many books that we don't know where to put them all. Whenever my husband goes downtown, he always drags some more home with him. He's got an amazing hobby, the 'factography' [factual history] of World War II. Whenever a book comes out, or someone's

biography of important wartime personages, we've got to have it at home. We have one large bookcase in the cellar, and there we've mothballed fiction that we don't read any more. In his room my husband has one large bookcase, but we can't even fit books in there any more. After my mother died we had to get rid of her books – at least those that were in Hungarian or German. There was no one in our house to read it. My daughter-in-law, who teaches Slovak and German in high school, and thus needs literature, always asks us whether we don't by chance have it at home. Usually we find for her the more well-known authors, like for example Feuchtwanger [13](#).

In Presov my husband had his circle of friends and acquaintances, with whom we associated and still do to this day. I have very good girlfriends from work. Today we're all retired and meet regularly. I didn't have any hobbies, so I devoted all of my free time to the children.

To this day I still cook traditional Jewish foods, mainly matzah dumplings. I know which foods should be served during which holidays. At the Passover table, besides matzot, we're used to serving ground nuts with apples. We also have a pitcher of salty water, and wine on the table. At the seder table we have at the most one glass of wine and a wrapped matzah. I don't have a separate set of Passover dishes, we don't observe holidays in such detail. Everything is done only symbolically. I have a Chanukkah candle holder [menorah] at home, but have to admit that I don't light candles. When my husband and I were younger, we used to fast during Yom Kippur. We haven't done it for some time now, as we're both on medication. At our age a person has a certain collection of illnesses. When we were young we fasted, but also not completely strictly. My husband sometimes had to have a cigarette, in those days he smoked on the sly, as it would make his mother upset.

My father died in November 1975 in Zilina, and my mother died here, in Presov, in March 1991. Both of them are buried in Zilina in the Jewish cemetery. I had my mother cremated, because she wanted it. I did something that isn't according to Jewish custom and put her ashes into my father's grave. People know and don't know about it, it's this public secret that isn't talked about.

I didn't register the onset of Communism in any unusual fashion. I was only a child. I knew that they had nationalized our business. As a child I took it that that's how it should be. I didn't feel that anything was wrong. In the 1950s during the Slansky trial [14](#) I began to think more seriously, and came to the conclusion that something wasn't right. In school I was a pioneer [see All-Union pioneer organization] [15](#) and also in the Socialist Youth Union [16](#). I was even a leader of our pioneer troop. My father, mother and uncle were in the Communist Party [of Czechoslovakia] [17](#). They didn't become members due to their convictions. After the liberation it was fashionable to join the Communist Party. Later, during screenings everyone was thrown out. Due to this I had one plus in my dossier, but that didn't help me get into university. I never joined the Party. My husband was a member, but during the purges in the 1970s they threw him out. Since then we haven't concerned ourselves with it, we don't follow any political party.

During Communist times I wasn't afraid that we'd be persecuted. Our professions weren't in any sphere in which we could have been a threat to someone. Both of us worked in medicine. We never had any conflicts with the authorities. My husband had patients all over, and when he needed something, he always managed to get it. In 1978 he even traveled to Australia. They let him go visit his relatives. His mother also got permission to go. Now that they've opened the Nation's Memory Institute [18](#) website, my children found his name, that he was among those that had been

vetted. It was logical, as they had let him go abroad, they must have been watching him. Relatives from abroad also came here to visit us, which was a very rare thing. I never had problems at work due to my Jewish origins, for a time I was even a divisional secretary of the ROH [19](#).

In 1968 [see Prague Spring] [20](#) I was on vacation with my children in Zilina. There were horrible things happening in Zilina, I suffered a mild shock from it. Not far from where we were staying, a tank ran someone over. I was frightened, because I didn't know how the children and I would get back to my husband. When the tension eased a bit, we managed to get to Presov. In general everyone was railing against the Russians, that they had come. People forgot that they had also liberated us, that was already history, people judged only the present. It was definitely a shock, but we got used to it. During those years they had trained us to listen and as the Germans say: Keep your mouth shut and toe the line. We did everything that was necessary. We didn't belong among those that were in the dissident movement or engaged in similar activities. We went to work and kept on working.

We read Samizdat literature [in Czechoslovakia] [21](#), to this day I still have some magazines from 1968 stored in the cellar. In those days it wasn't a problem to get them, you could do it. I have them stored away as a memento. The year 1989 [see Velvet Revolution] [22](#) made us very happy. It was truly unreal, we didn't imagine that everything would collapse like a house of cards in such a short time. We experienced it with great joy. My mother was still aware of it, at that time she had already had two strokes. She was aware of it, it made her very happy that they returned our house in Zilina in 1991. They returned our building during the first restitutions. By utter chance I had documents about its nationalization at home. My mother, when she came from Zilina to live with us, brought piles of documents with her. One day my husband and I sat down and sorted them out. I threw out many unnecessary documents and papers, but by complete chance I kept the nationalization document. So I didn't need to run around on its account.

Our building was the second in Zilina to be returned in the restitutions. I had inherited one half and my mother the other. After my mother died the building fell to me. The building stands on the main street. The apartments that were in it don't exist any more, as even before it was nationalized, the building was being rented out by Modex. [Editor's note: Modex is a company that manufactures women's wear. The company has long years of experience in this field. Its history began in 1950, when it was created from a workshop of small Zilina entrepreneurs.] They set up workshops in it, they removed all interior partitions and rebuilt the entire interior. There's a cafeteria from those days. The building also has two commercial storefronts. One of them is occupied by Dracik [a toy store] and the other by a store with high-end fashions from Trencin. We rent out the space in the building, and that's how we make a living. Every year we divide up the rent money with our children as well. Of what use would all of it be to just us? I sold the house in the courtyard, where we used to live during the time of the Slovak State. Its interior looks completely different now. What it looked like before the war is something that exists only in my memories.

The creation of Israel is something that made me very happy, as my relatives were living there. My parents and uncle, while they were still alive, listened to news from Israel every evening. And when the wars in Israel came, we all followed it closely, really, we lived and suffered with them. I have a close relationship with Israel, and consider it to be the homeland of all Jews that live in the Diaspora. I only hope that it will all end well there, because they're surrounded by Arabs like a grain of sand in the desert. Nothing but enemies around them. During Communism I didn't keep in

touch with my relatives in the West. It was detrimental to us. My parents, as older people, were allowed to keep in touch with close relatives. My mother corresponded with her brother and sisters in America. We used to get nice packages of clothing from them, which I ended up wearing for long years. My mother's brother Gejza came and visited in 1962. In 1982 my mother and Uncle Oskar wanted to go visit Israel, but they didn't get permission. They were horribly hurt that they couldn't go see their brother.

My parents were never in Israel, they died before it was possible to travel freely. In March 1991 my mother was already very ill, so we couldn't go anywhere. When my mother died and before then my husband's mother as well, we were free, as before that we had had to take care of them. In the fall of 1991 we traveled to Israel. The second time we managed to get over there, with our son as well, was in the year 2000. We were in Israel in the spring and at that time everything was still fine. Then in the fall the intifada began, and the bad times have continued up to the present day.

Visiting Israel gave me a good feeling. I felt great joy that I could meet relatives and childhood friends. I felt good, because there were Jews all around me and I didn't have the feeling that I'm unique and that someone could say to me that I'm different. I liked everything there, except for one thing. I couldn't read the store signs. That bothered me a lot. I recalled some Ivrit songs that we had learned in Maccabi as children. So that language has remained close to me, and to this day I know what some words mean, but reading, that's a catastrophe. I asked my cousin why they don't write it in the Western alphabet as well. And he replied to me so rudely that it really upset me, 'And why don't stores have signs in Ivrit where you live?' I didn't like those signs. After all, there were many foreigners there as well, and not everyone necessarily knows Ivrit. When you see pictures from Asia, though they also have different writing there, they also write it in the Western alphabet so that foreigners can understand it. I think that it's better in Israel now, because in the year 2000 it wasn't like that any more.

Before 1989 we used to go on the customary vacations to Bulgaria, to [Lake] Balaton and to Romania. I took part in a company vacation, we went via Vienna, Graz, and Belgrade and on the way back to Budapest. In those days making that circuit was quite something. In 1969 my husband and I went on a train trip. We slept and ate on the train. We traveled through all of Italy, from top to bottom. We saw Naples, Capri and all the important cities. And in 1991 my husband and I were in Israel, and in 1992 in Sydney to see relatives. We spent at least two months everywhere we went. In 1997 - 1998 we spent two months in Los Angeles with my uncle and his daughter. Plus we were in Israel in 2000. We spent one more vacation in Tenerife in the Canary Islands. In 2001 my husband fell ill and now we only travel to Piestany and back. We've seen a fair bit of the world. On the way back from Sydney we stopped in Singapore for several days. Now when I look at various documentaries on TV I can say, 'I've been there too.'

I saw the opening of the Western borders as a positive thing. I could freely contact my relatives, and not only that they could visit us, but we could go and visit them. Our life changed mainly with regards to finances, as they gave me back our family's property that my grandfather had so fretted over, worrying that he would drive his family to the poorhouse. They say that Jewish property won't survive two generations, but I'm the third generation and we've got it back.

My relationship to Judaism hasn't really changed. During holidays we go to the synagogue and I make traditional foods. Nothing more than that, it's all just symbolic. My husband and I belong to

the Presov [Jewish] community. I participate in the Hidden Child Foundation in Kosice and regularly attend their events. Besides this I'm also a member of the Ester organization. We have regular meetings in Kosice and Presov. During holidays or relatives' Yahrzeit they call my husband to the prayer hall to make a minyan. He goes as necessary. We both receive reparations for our suffering during the Holocaust from the Claims Conference.

## **Glossary**

### **1 Nationalization in Czechoslovakia**

The goal of nationalization was to put privately-owned means of production and private property into public control and into the hands of the Socialist state. The attempts to change property relations after WWI (1918-1921) were unsuccessful. Directly after WWII, already by May 1945, the heads of state took over possession of the collaborators' (that is, Hungarian and German) property. In July 1945, members of the Communist Party before the National Front, openly called for the nationalization of banks, financial institutions, insurance companies and industrial enterprises, the execution of which fell to the Nationalization Central Committee. The first decree for nationalization was signed 11th August 1945 by the Republic President. This decree affected agricultural production, the film industry and foreign trade. Members of the Communist Party fought representatives of the National Socialist Party and the Democratic Party for further expansion of the process of nationalization, which resulted in the president signing four new decrees on 24th October, barely two months after taking office. These called for nationalization of the mining industry companies and industrial plants, the food industry plants, as well as joint-stock companies, banks and life insurance companies. The nationalization established the Czechoslovakia's financial development, and shaped the 'Socialist financial sphere'. Despite this, significantly valuable property disappeared from companies in public ownership into the private and foreign trade network. Because of this, the activist committee of the trade unions called for further nationalizations on 22nd February 1948. This process was stopped in Czechoslovakia by new laws of the National Assembly in April 1948, which were passed in December the same year.

### **2 Slovak State (1939-1945)**

Czechoslovakia, which was created after the disintegration of Austria-Hungary, lasted until it was broken up by the Munich Pact of 1938; Slovakia became a separate (autonomous) republic on 6th October 1938 with Jozef Tiso as Slovak PM. Becoming suspicious of the Slovakian moves to gain independence, the Prague government applied martial law and deposed Tiso at the beginning of March 1939, replacing him with Karol Sidor. Slovakian personalities appealed to Hitler, who used this appeal as a pretext for making Bohemia, Moravia and Silesia a German protectorate. On 14th March 1939 the Slovak Diet declared the independence of Slovakia, which in fact was a nominal one, tightly controlled by Nazi Germany.

### **3 Neolog Jewry**

Following a Congress in 1868/69 in Budapest, where the Jewish community was supposed to discuss several issues on which the opinion of the traditionalists and the modernizers differed and which aimed at uniting Hungarian Jews, Hungarian Jewry was officially split into to (later three)

communities, which all built up their own national community network. The Neologs were the modernizers, who opposed the Orthodox on various questions. The third group, the so-called Status Quo Ante advocated that the Jewish community was maintained the same as before the 1868/69 Congress.

#### **4 Sered labor camp**

created in 1941 as a Jewish labor camp. The camp functioned until the beginning of the Slovak National Uprising, when it was dissolved. At the beginning of September 1944 its activities were renewed and deportations began. Due to the deportations, SS-Hauptsturmführer Alois Brunner was named camp commander at the end of September. Brunner was a long-time colleague of Adolf Eichmann and had already organized the deportation of French Jews in 1943. Because the camp registers were destroyed, the most trustworthy information regarding the number of deportees has been provided by witnesses who worked with prisoner records. According to this information, from September 1944 until the end of March 1945, 11 transports containing 11,532 persons were dispatched from the Sered camp. Up until the end of November 1944 the transports were destined for the Auschwitz concentration camp, later prisoners were transported to other camps in the Reich. The Sered camp was liquidated on 31st March 1945, when the last evacuation transport, destined for the Terezin ghetto, was dispatched. On this transport also departed the commander of the Sered camp, Alois Brunner.

#### **5 Orthodox communities**

The traditionalist Jewish communities founded their own Orthodox organizations after the Universal Meeting in 1868-1869. They organized their life according to Judaist principles and opposed to assimilative aspirations. The community leaders were the rabbis. The statute of their communities was sanctioned by the king in 1871. In the western part of Hungary the communities of the German and Slovakian immigrants' descendants were formed according to the Western Orthodox principles. At the same time in the East, among the Jews of Galician origins the 'eastern' type of Orthodoxy was formed; there the Hassidism prevailed. In time the Western Orthodoxy also spread over to the eastern part of Hungary. 294 Orthodox mother-communities and 1,001 subsidiary communities were registered all over Hungary, mainly in Transylvania and in the north-eastern part of the country, in 1896. In 1930 30,4 % of Hungarian Jews belonged to 136 mother-communities and 300 subsidiary communities. This number increased to 535 Orthodox communities in 1944, including 242,059 believers (46 %).

#### **6 Czechs in Slovakia from 1938-1945**

The rise of Fascism in Europe also had its impact on the fate of Czechs living in Slovakia. The Vienna Arbitration of 1938 had as its consequence the loss of southern Slovakia to Hungary, as a result of which the number of Czechs living in Slovakia declined. A Slovak census held on 31st December 1938 listed 77,488 persons of Czech nationality, a majority of which did not have Slovak residential status. During the period of Slovak autonomy (1938-1939) a government decree was in effect, on the basis of which 9,000 Czech civil servants were let go. The situation of the Czech population grew even worse after the creation of the Slovak State (1939-1945), when these people had the status of foreigners. As a result, by 1943 there were only 31,451 Czechs left in Slovakia.

## **7 Karlovy Vary (German name**

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

## **8 Hlinka-Guards**

Military group under the leadership of the radical wing of the Slovakian Popular Party. The radicals claimed an independent Slovakia and a fascist political and public life. The Hlinka-Guards deported brutally, and without German help, 58,000 (according to other sources 68,000) Slovak Jews between March and October 1942.

## **9 Tiso, Jozef (1887-1947)**

Roman Catholic priest, clerical fascist, anticommunist politician. He was an ideologist and a political representative of Hlinka's Slovakian People's Party, and became its vice president in 1930 and president in 1938. In 1938-39 he became PM, and later president, of the fascist Slovakian puppet state which was established with German support. His policy plunged Slovakia into war against Poland and the Soviet Union, in alliance with Germany. He was fully responsible for crimes and atrocities committed under the clerical fascist regime. In 1947 he was found guilty as a war criminal, sentenced to death and executed.

## **10 Slovak Uprising**

At Christmas 1943 the Slovak National Council was formed, consisting of various oppositional groups (communists, social democrats, agrarians etc.). Their aim was to fight the Slovak fascist state. The uprising broke out in Banska Bystrica, central Slovakia, on 20th August 1944. On 18th October the Germans launched an offensive. A large part of the regular Slovak army joined the uprising and the Soviet Army also joined in. Nevertheless the Germans put down the riot and occupied Banska Bystrica on 27th October, but weren't able to stop the partisan activities. As the Soviet army was drawing closer many of the Slovak partisans joined them in Eastern Slovakia under either Soviet or Slovak command.

## **11 Ravensbruck**

Concentration camp for women near Furstenberg, Germany. Five hundred prisoners transported there from Sachsenhausen began construction at the end of 1938. They built 14 barracks and service buildings, as well as a small camp for men, which was completed separated from the women's camp. The buildings were surrounded by tall walls and electrified barbed wire. The first deportees, some 900 German and Austrian women were transported there on May 18, 1939, soon followed by 400 Austrian Gypsy women. At the end of 1939, due to the new groups constantly arriving, the camp held nearly 3000 persons. With the expansion of the war, people from twenty countries were taken here. Persons incapable of working were transported on to Uckermark or Auschwitz, and sent to the gas chambers, others were murdered during 'medical' experiments. By the end of 1942, the camp reached 15,000 prisoners, by 1943, with the arrival of groups from the

Soviet Union, it reached 42,000. During the working existence of the camp, altogether nearly 132,000 women and children were transported here, of these, 92,000 were murdered. In March of 1945, the SS decided to move the camp, so in April those capable of walking were deported on a death march. On April 30, 1945, those who survived the camp and death march, were liberated by the Soviet armies.

## **12 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.

## **13 Feuchtwanger, Lion (1884-1958)**

German-Jewish novelist, noted for his choice of historical and political themes and the use of psychoanalytic ideas in the development of his characters. He was a friend of Bertolt Brecht and collaborated with him on several plays. Feuchtwanger was an active pacifist and socialist and the rise of Nazism forced him to leave his native Germany for first France and then the USA in 1940. He wrote extensively on ancient Jewish history, also as a metaphor to criticize the European political situation of the time. Among his main work are the trilogy 'The Waiting Room' and 'Josephus' (1932).

## **14 Slansky trial**

In the years 1948-1949 the Czechoslovak government together with the Soviet Union strongly supported the idea of the founding of a new state, Israel. Despite all efforts, Stalin's politics never found fertile ground in Israel; therefore the Arab states became objects of his interest. In the first place the Communists had to allay suspicions that they had supplied the Jewish state with arms. The Soviet leadership announced that arms shipments to Israel had been arranged by Zionists in Czechoslovakia. The times required that every Jew in Czechoslovakia be automatically considered a Zionist and cosmopolitan. In 1951 on the basis of a show trial, 14 defendants (eleven of them were Jews) with Rudolf Slansky, First Secretary of the Communist Party at the head were convicted. Eleven of the accused got the death penalty; three were sentenced to life imprisonment. The executions were carried out on 3rd December 1952. The Communist Party later finally admitted its mistakes in carrying out the trial and all those sentenced were socially and legally rehabilitated in 1963.

## **15 All-Union pioneer organization**

a communist organization for teenagers between 10 and 15 years old (cf: boy-/ girlscouts in the



US). The organization aimed at educating the young generation in accordance with the communist ideals, preparing pioneers to become members of the Komsomol and later the Communist Party. In the Soviet Union, all teenagers were pioneers.

**16 Socialist Youth Union (SZM):** a voluntary mass social organization of the youth of former Czechoslovakia. It continued in the revolutionary tradition of children's and youth movements from the time of the bourgeois Czechoslovak Republic and the anti-Fascist national liberation movement, and was a successor to the Czechoslovak Youth Union, which ceased to exist during the time of the societal crisis of 1968. In November 1969 the Federal Council of Children's and Youth Organizations was created, which put together the concept of the SZM. In 1970, with the help of the Czechoslovak Communist Party, individual SZM youth organizations were created, first in Slovakia and later in Czechia, which underwent an overall unification from 9-11th November 1970 at a founding conference in Prague. The Pioneer organization of the Socialist Youth Union formed a relatively independent part of this whole. Its highest organ was the national conference. In 1975 the SZM was awarded the Order of Klement Gottwald for the building of the socialist state. The press organ in Czechia was Mlada Fronta and Smena in Slovakia. The SZM's activities ceased after the year 1989.

### **17 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.

### **18 Nation's Memory Institute**

a public institution founded by the Act of the National Council of the Slovak Republic No. 553/2002 Coll. The mission of the Institute is to provide individuals access to the heretofore undisclosed records of the activities of the repressive organs of the Slovak and Czechoslovak states in the period of oppression. Functioning within the scope of the institute is also a department of legal analysis and reconstruction of documents. It processes and evaluates the records and the activity of the security agencies of the state in the 1939-1989 period from the penal law perspective, focusing on the actual perpetration of crimes against humanity and other severe criminal acts, conflicting with the fundamentals of rule of law. In cooperation with the Public Prosecution Office, it works out and files charges against these crimes. The Section, using the evidence available from the acquired documents, reconstructs the organizational structure of the security agencies, including its development, changes and staffing and maps their repressive activities. Information gained from the processing of documents from so-called relational databases lead to the reconstruction of destroyed and lost documents.

## **19 ROH (Revolutionary Unionist Movement)**

established in 1945, it represented the interests of the working class and working intelligentsia before employers in the former Czechoslovak Socialist Republic. Among the tasks of the ROH were the signing of collective agreements with employers and arranging recreation for adults and children. In the years 1968-69 some leading members of the organization attempted to promote the idea of “unions without communists” and of the ROH as an opponent of the Czechoslovak Communist Party (KSC). With the coming to power of the new communist leadership in 1969 the reformers were purged from their positions, both in the ROH and in their job functions. After the Velvet Revolution the ROH was transformed into the Federation of Trade Unions in Slovakia (KOZ) and similarly on the Czech side (KOS).

**20 Prague Spring:** A period of democratic reforms in Czechoslovakia, from January to August 1968. Reformatory politicians were secretly elected to leading functions of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia (KSC). Josef Smrkovsky became president of the National Assembly, and Oldrich Cernik became the Prime Minister. Connected with the reformist efforts was also an important figure on the Czechoslovak political scene, Alexander Dubcek, General Secretary of the KSC Central Committee (UV KSC). In April 1968 the UV KSC adopted the party’s Action Program, which was meant to show the new path to socialism. It promised fundamental economic and political reforms. On 21st March 1968, at a meeting of representatives of the USSR, Hungary, Poland, Bulgaria, East Germany and Czechoslovakia in Dresden, Germany, the Czechoslovaks were notified that the course of events in their country was not to the liking of the remaining conference participants, and that they should implement appropriate measures. In July 1968 a meeting in Warsaw took place, where the reformist efforts in Czechoslovakia were designated as “counter-revolutionary.” The invasion of the USSR and Warsaw Pact armed forces on the night of 20th August 1968, and the signing of the so-called Moscow Protocol ended the process of democratization, and the Normalization period began.

## **21 Samizdat literature in Czechoslovakia**

Samizdat literature: The secret publication and distribution of government-banned literature in the former Soviet block. Typically, it was typewritten on thin paper (to facilitate the production of as many carbon copies as possible) and circulated by hand, initially to a group of trusted friends, who then made further typewritten copies and distributed them clandestinely. Material circulated in this way included fiction, poetry, memoirs, historical works, political treatises, petitions, religious tracts, and journals. The penalty for those accused of being involved in samizdat activities varied according to the political climate, from harassment to detention or severe terms of imprisonment. In Czechoslovakia, there was a boom in Samizdat literature after 1948 and, in particular, after 1968, with the establishment of a number of Samizdat editions supervised by writers, literary critics and publicists: Petlice (editor L. Vaculik), Expedice (editor J. Lopatka), as well as, among others, Ceska expedice (Czech Expedition), Popelnice (Garbage Can) and Prazska imaginace (Prague Imagination).

## **22 Velvet Revolution**

Also known as November Events, this term is used for the period between 17th November and 29th

December 1989, which resulted in the downfall of the Czechoslovak communist regime. A non-violent political revolution in Czechoslovakia that meant the transition from Communist dictatorship to democracy. The Velvet Revolution began with a police attack against Prague students on 17th November 1989. That same month the citizen's democratic movement Civic Forum (OF) in Czech and Public Against Violence (VPN) in Slovakia were formed. On 10th December a government of National Reconciliation was established, which started to realize democratic reforms. On 29th December Vaclav Havel was elected president. In June 1990 the first democratic elections since 1948 took place.