

Petr Weber

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Brno

Czech Republic

Interviewer: Zuzana Strouhova

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Petr Weber is a former president of the Brno Jewish community, and is still an active functionary. He was born to Jewish parents in a concentration camp in Poland, but when he was two years old, a group of fellow prisoners managed to get him out of the camp and transport him to the then Slovak State [1](#). He thus virtually never knew his parents, as they remained there and later died. He grew up in a Czech Christian family, which however supported his Jewish upbringing. He worked as a nuclear systems designer for Skoda Pilsen, which he had to leave for political reasons, and subsequently worked as a programmer. He is currently retired. He lives in Kyjov with his wife.

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I'd say that my life story is a bit on the blurry side. It's not even completely clear to me, because I got it from various places second-hand, and that only much later. I found out a lot from my uncle, Schlomo Königsberg, who was the brother of my mother, Lola Königsberg, married name Preiss, and from her sisters Toshka and Esther. These three were the only members of my original family to survive. I later met up with them in Israel. I'm also in touch with Tommer Brunner, who's Toshka's grandson. From him I got copies of photographs that indicate another branch of the family, a certain Hersh Leib Forman from New York, the son of Rivka Dorman, née Kellman. Likely somewhere in that generation of grandmas, one from the Königsberg family married into the Kellman family, but I don't know anything about it for certain. Someone by the name of Yehuda Schlomo Kellman is there, apparently the brother of Zissl Königsberg, who was probably my grandmother, the mother of Lola Preiss. So her maiden name would then have been Kellman. According to the same source of information, my mother's grandmother was named Chana Kellman, née Weiser. Apparently she died in 1929. So that's perhaps how both families are related. Both families lived in the same small town, Bochnia in Poland, near Krakow.

[Growing up](#)

This is how it is, more or less: in 1942, when I was born, my parents Lola Preiss and Aaron Preiss – both Polish Jews – were already imprisoned in the concentration camp in Bochnia. It wasn't an extermination camp, but likely a certain type of ghetto where local Jews were concentrated before being sent to the places of "final solution", like Auschwitz and other camps to the east. So that's where I was born. We were all together until 1944, when a certain group of people managed to

escape from that camp, among which was also my uncle [*Schlomo Königsberg*], at that time a young lad of seventeen. And they took me, a two-year-old child, with them. My parents stayed there. On the way through the Slovak State, my uncle left me in the care of one Jewish family in Liptovský Mikulas, that was in 1944. There I was discovered by the daughter of my later adoptive parents. My adoptive father was 50 years older than I. That's why I don't know much about my grandparents, neither my own nor my adoptive ones.

I know almost nothing about the parents of my real mother and father, not even their names. My grandmother, my mother's mother, was perhaps named Zissl Königsberg, but I'm not sure of that. She died before the war, in 1931. My grandfather was perhaps Josef Moshe Königsberg, I've got a couple of his photographs and a photograph of his sister, Chana Königsberg.

Similarly with the parents of my adoptive mother, Marie Weberova, there I don't know much either. Perhaps only that her father was something like a government official. He worked, I think, for the police, still during the time of Austro-Hungary, and that they lived in Prague in a rented co-op apartment. Already back then there were co-ops. On the side of my adoptive father, Josef Weber, it's also hazy, we're dealing with stories about people that lived 70 or 80 years ago, which is a huge gap in time. I've of course got only very, very sketchy memories of it all. My father was from a farming family from around Pilsen. They were farmers, but in a region that is agriculturally very poor. They grew what was normally grown in that region. All four cereal crops. As far as animals go, they certainly must have had a cow, and pigs were also a matter of course. A goat, that I don't know, and for sure they didn't have horses. They lived on this little farm, drew water from a well, and in those days there wasn't any electricity there either.

It's hard to tell from such a distance how well off both families were, both my father's and my mother's. Probably a little below average. Not that they were beggars, but neither were they well-off people. For sure they didn't have servants. My father's family must have read a lot; I found entire volumes in boxes. Back then that was literature of very high quality. It was a standard Czech book collection, but my attention was captured by collected volumes of *Vilimkovy Humoristicke listy*, which in those days was something like Reflex [*a weekly magazine dealing with current issues and interesting personalities of our times - Editor's note*], but back in the days of Austro-Hungary. They were this family, bookish as people used to say. Meaning a family with lots of books. They were definitely well-read. What daily papers they read there, whether any at all, that I however don't know.

My real parents were from Poland, as I've mentioned. Their mother tongue was Polish and also Yiddish, because they lived in an Orthodox Jewish environment. I myself don't know Polish, or more precisely, I know it, or rather I understand it, like every Czech who isn't illiterate. I don't know anything at all about my real father, that's an absolute black hole. All I know is his name, Aaron Preiss. The only information about my real relatives is from my mother's side, there thanks to being in touch with her siblings I have certain clues, some names.

My real mother was named Lola Königsberg. She was, I think, one of seven or nine siblings, most of which were girls. My mother was the oldest of them all, so she actually brought them all up. She lived with her husband in Bochnia, Poland. Years later, my uncle Schlomo Königsberg, my mother's brother, told me the address where we used to live, and I even went there to have a look. I can't say whether my parents dealt mainly with others from the local Jewish community, but one can

assume this to be so. It was a traditional Jewish environment, it's hard to imagine that they'd somehow differ from the rest. But it's not impossible for them to have had closer friendships with non-Jews as well. I have no clue as to how, where and when they died. As I've said, when I was two, my uncle escaped with me and some other people, and I then grew up with adoptive parents, and had no information about the fate of my real parents. My connection to my original family are my mother's siblings, Uncle Schlomo, who got to the Palestine via the Slovak State, and two of my mother's sisters, Toshka and Esther, who moved to what was back then the Palestine still during pre-war times, probably around 1935, and thus survived and became this bridge between me and my past. They lived in Tel Aviv. So from the entire Königsberg family, only these three survived, Toshka, Esther and Uncle Shlomo. My mother and her other sisters, by this I mean Dina, Lea, Bracha and another brother David, all those died during World War II.

I was in touch with my uncle regularly, by mail. And then, when there was that short period when things let up, around 1966, 1967, I also traveled to Israel for the first time, to go see him, because his was the only name that I knew. But another two aunts were also there to greet me, so there I found the remainder of my family. But all three of them are dead now. I don't know of any other relatives that would be this close.

I of course have a few pieces of information about my uncle, but it's again not all that much. He lived in Jerusalem, and then in Tel Aviv. He was, as I've mentioned, a deeply devout, strictly Orthodox Jew, and so also had that sort of family, meaning large. He had at least seven children. His children were of course also religious, so he's got at least two rabbis in his family. His daughter married a rabbi in England, his son is in New York, and he then moved there to live with him, where he was until the end of his life. But I don't know any more than that about his children. His wife died a while back, about 4 or 5 years ago, and about a year ago he died as well. He most likely met his wife in Israel, but I'm not certain of that. I don't even know what nationality she was. But she was definitely a Jew, deeply religious. My uncle was a watchmaker. He made a living more with the repair than with the sale of clocks. He had little shop about the size of this small room (ca. 3 x 2 m). He was never in the Czech Republic, he was back in Poland at least once to have a look, and I've got this feeling that he lived with that one daughter in England for some time. But he probably lived most of his life in Israel, except for those final years, that is.

As far as my aunts Toshka and Esther go - definitely the former and perhaps both - after their arrival in Israel they worked in a kibbutz. Then they were both housewives, both of them got married. Esther's married name was Fleisher, and Tonka's was Brunner. Her grandson, Tommer Brunner, is very interested in the lives of his ancestors. He still lives in Israel, and his parents live there too; his father is the son of Auntie Toshka. Toshka had a daughter and two sons. As for Esther Fleisher, she's got two daughters in Israel, both are still alive. One of them is still single, so is still named Fleisher. The other one is married and is named Darewski. She's a private music teacher. And he, her husband that is, I don't know, he's got some sort of managerial job I think. Neither of my aunties is alive anymore. Esther died at home, and died, I don't remember anymore, sometime between 1993 and 1997. Toshka died in a senior citizens' home a year and a half ago. Both of them in Tel Aviv.

So that's about all that I know as far as my real relatives are concerned. My adoptive parents, whom I'm named after, Weber that is, were already of a quite advanced age when they took me in. They must've been married sometime long before the war, I don't know exactly when. They were a

Christian, Catholic family, but one can't at all talk about any great degree of religiosity. I don't know anything about my adoptive parents' political opinions, that wasn't something that was the subject of conversations at home.

During the war

My father Josef Weber was born in a small village by Pilsen named Chalupy, and to this day it's still a mere hamlet. He was born in 1892, and was 50 years older than me. He had a vocational college education, and worked as a technical clerk. He worked for Skoda in Pilsen. There, he was I'd say a very good, maybe even excellent worker. I recall, for example, his considerable skill and cleverness in the manufacture of various things, a washing machine for example. After the war washing machines were scarce, but he made one himself. As far as hobbies are concerned, he was a passionate stamp collector. My father worked at the Skoda Works, as the company was then officially named, in the cannon manufacture department, and then worked for a Skoda branch plant in Slovakia, in Dubnice nad Vahom. Skoda was at that time starting up the plant there, and it continued even under the Germans [*meaning during World War II - Editor's note*]. My father had already been working there before the war, and also worked there during World War II, which was relatively rare, because as is known, after the Slovak State was declared in March 1939, all Czechs had to leave Slovakia [2](#). After 1945 he left Slovakia to work for a short time back in Pilsen, and then retired. As far as I know, at one time between the two world wars he lived in Yugoslavia, where he'd been sent by the company, again it was to do with the manufacture of cannons, in Kragujevac. Otherwise he lived mainly in Pilsen, after the war quite certainly only there, and finally he returned to his native village. That's where he also died, in September of 1959. When he died, only the two of us remained, so I buried him. He was cremated and buried in Prague, the same as my adoptive mother.

My father was relatively strict, pedantic in fact. And very, very clever and skilful. He demanded work and order of me. We didn't do much together, we didn't go on trips much, neither did we go fishing, or things like that. I don't even remember him or my mother reading me fairy tales or something. It was more a case of me reading by myself, and very early on at that. But I don't remember much of it. But you have to take into account that huge age difference, age-wise he was more my grandfather than my father. I shared his fondness for collecting stamps a bit, as a boy I also collected them, so yes, I guess there was some sort of my father's influence there. Unfortunately my father's collection was lost, today it would perhaps even be quite valuable. He concentrated on Czechoslovak stamps. I don't really know how exactly he came by them. Back then I don't think there were trading exchanges back then. He was probably a member of some club, because he used to get those stamps as a normal subscription, that yes, but whether he traded them, bought and sold them, that I don't know.

His brother, Jan Weber, also lived in his native village, he was older and died before him. As the oldest of the siblings, his brother Jan ran the farm he'd inherited, he was a small-time farmer. He likely had some sort of basic education, but I don't know any more than that about him.

My adoptive mother's maiden name was Marie Faloutova. She was born in Prague, in 1896 I think. I think she had a basic education. I don't know exactly when she married my father, nor where all they lived after that, but I have the feeling that they didn't move around much, just the places I've already mentioned. She never actually held a job anywhere. After the war, when they were let's

say living modestly, economically speaking, she worked as a seamstress at home. She sewed things for factories. She also died in that little village by Pilsen, in Chalupy, in March 1958.

She had both brothers and sisters. I don't recall much about her brothers. Her sister lived in Prague, she was younger, a lot younger than she was, and survived her by many years. I think that she died sometime after 1970. She was named Bozena. As far as her employment or education are concerned, I don't know anything. She was married, her husband died before her. They had a daughter, Vera.

As far as my siblings are concerned, I don't know of any real ones. As I've mentioned, when they took me in, my adoptive parents had an already adult daughter, Anna, who was about 25 or 30 years older than I was. So she became my stepsister. I don't know that much about her, she was born in Prague, her mother tongue was Czech. If I remember correctly, she had only a basic education. After finishing school she went through several jobs. She worked as an office clerk, a saleslady. Most of the time she lived with us in Pilsen, and then in that village, in Chalupy. Just one time, when she got married, which was sometime after the war, she lived in Karlovy Vary [3](#). She worked there as a clerk for CSAD (Czechoslovak Bus Lines). I don't know any more about that. We had a very good relationship, she was sort of like my younger mother to me. Back then I even once went to stay with her during the holidays, for about a week or ten days. That was my first encounter with Karlovy Vary.

That was an incredible experience for a young boy, a city like that. I was around 12 or 13 at the time. What captivated me the most there? You know, Karlovy Vary is a nice place in every respect. I for example remember excellent whipped cream 'rakvicky' [*'little coffins', sponge-biscuits with whipped cream*] at Elefant, which was and is a renowned coffee and pastry shop in Karlovy Vary. Since that time, this is what reminds me of Karlovy Vary. And especially of that Elefant pastry shop. We used to sit there, though not really regularly, as it was expensive, but we were definitely there several times. The coffee shop is still there, it's been stylistically renovated, because it's something akin to Sacher in Vienna. Karlovy Vary wafers, they're in the colonnade, but this is somewhere else. When you walk from the old colonnade and pass through this place where it narrows, by the spring, then a bit past it, about 20-30 meters to the right, is one of the best places in Karlovy Vary, as far as desserts are concerned, the Elefant coffee shop. We also of course made the rounds to see the local sights, from Jeleni Skok, to the springs, the Russian Orthodox church and so on.

But then my sister got divorced, sometime in the mid-1950s, and moved back again, and lived the rest of her life in the village. I actually don't know anything about her husband, not even what kind of work he did. They didn't have any children together, she didn't ever have any children at all. She married only once, after the divorce she lived only with us, and didn't even have any other partner. She died in that village by Pilsen around 1955, when I began attending high school. She wasn't very old, though she was already over 40, my whole adoptive family were already older people.

As far as my life is concerned, I was born, as I've already mentioned, in a little town in Poland named Bochnia. Bochnia is located by Krakow, which is a region known for salt mining. When I was in school they were still teaching about the Bochnia and Wieliczka salt mines. My date of birth, well, right off the bat there's the first thing that's all tangled up. Officially, in my documents, I've got 1st march 1942. But because my life, as I've already mentioned, is a bit convoluted - I'm actually a wartime foundling, they discovered me at the age of about two - so the doctors, when

they were setting the my official date of birth, set it to the date I mentioned. After many and many years, I found out that they'd been mistaken by roughly a month, which I think is not such a bad result. So my real date of birth is March 29th. I got this information from my relatives, whom I got in touch with after the war. My own parents were understandably not alive anymore then. They died early on, in Poland. And I myself of course don't remember anything from my childhood in Bochnia.

So when I was about two, my uncle took me away with that group that managed to escape from the concentration camp in Bochnia. The whole group went through Slovakia, through the Slovak State, on to the Balkans and to the Palestine, where they, including that uncle of mine, managed to finally get to. They left me, a small child, for reasons that today I can only guess at – perhaps they were afraid, for themselves, for my life, it's hard to say – in any case, they left me back there in Slovakia. In the hands of Jews, in a Jewish family, which – in 1944 Jews in Slovakia were also in difficult circumstances – at that time was living in one of the collection points before the deportations, namely Liptovsky Mikulas.

A Christian girl used to visit that family to see her love, her boyfriend. That's where she first saw me, that's where I apparently first caught her eye, and she took me from that family and brought me to her own family. I don't know anything about that Jewish family, neither their names nor their employment and so on. That girl, my future stepsister, then found another boyfriend, because this one died. I don't even know whose idea it actually was to take me in. And why did that Jewish family actually give me to a Christian one? They were in danger, at that time they must have already known... They were actually already interned. So it was exactly the other way around, no that they gave me up, but that she was a way to save me.

My new family was Christian, they were Czechs who had by chance remained in Slovakia, which is a story in itself, because Czechs had to leave Slovakia in 1939. They stayed there because my later adoptive father, thus also the father of the girl that found me, worked in the arms industry and apparently as an expert had an exception and could stay there. So they took me into their family and during the remainder of the war pretended I was a nephew from Prague. For this purpose a cousin from Prague used to even come visit for these camouflage visits, which also wasn't exactly a simple matter. My adoptive parents knew of my origins – they had my relatives' trail, as they knew who had left that child in Slovakia. Who he'd been with and where he'd continued on to. So they knew roughly what the deal was.

[After the war](#)

After the war, I don't know exactly when, but for sure very soon after its end, my uncle was looking to re-establish contact, which he succeeded in doing, and tried very vehemently to have me handed over to him, so I could go to the Palestine. But the husband and wife kept the child and then adopted it. So they became my parents. I never knew my real parents, my biological parents. It's likely that some sort of tension developed between my adoptive parents and my uncle regarding my being handed over, I don't know, but the family probably simply didn't want to, they'd already gotten used to the new child. I myself couldn't have had much say in who I'd be with, at the end of the war I was only three years old. I found out that I was adopted very early on, as soon as I had a brain, as they say. It was completely natural, without any drama or secrecy, it was simply common knowledge. My new parents even supported my Jewish upbringing.

For some time we still lived in Dubnica nad Vahom. That's a time from which I already have these faint memories. I remember things, like cannon fire, our garden, shelling and things like that, when the front was passing. But that's already the end of the war, then there are you typical post-war things. So I can't have my own personal experiences, they're only second-hand and let's say gleaned.

After the war my father returned to Pilsen – because he'd been sent to Slovakia from the parent Skoda plant in Pilsen – and worked in the factory until his retirement in 1948. And so we lived in Pilsen for some time. There I also began attending school, which was in 1948. Before and also afterwards, only my mother took care of me, she didn't have any helper. In 1949, when my father was already retired, we returned from Pilsen to his native village of Chalupy, which is also in the Pilsen region, about 30 km away from the regional city.

It's a very small village. It's not an independent municipality, but a mere hamlet. About 40 houses, for example ours had only an outhouse in the yard. The village already had electricity, but during that time there was no running water, only wells. Everyone had his own water. We, for example, lived in this little house on a little bit of a hill, and the well, the town well, was at the bottom. When I was living there, there wasn't even a paved road, only this better dirt road. And of course, I was also the only Jew there.

While in Pilsen I attended a big school, here in Chalupy I attended a one-room schoolhouse my first year. It was in the closest village, about two kilometers away. Every day we'd walk there. I wasn't so terrible, but as a six or seven-year-old kid... well, it is a bit of a trudge. I still remember the crackling fire in the stove in the winter, they still heated with coal. The next year, they closed the one-room schoolhouses and put us all into a larger school in a different town. There we were already transported by bus. But the closest stop was again in that village two kilometers away. I then attended high school, one with eleven grades, in a district town, in Stod near Pilsen.

I liked going to school. I was a good, if not excellent student. I liked almost all subjects, but mathematics and physics, those were definitely my hobbies. And that wasn't anything very common among students back then, and isn't to this day, as I'm convinced. Among my least favorite subjects were music and art, for reasons of clear lack of talent. I have absolutely no musical hearing, as far as art goes it's not all that great either, and due to the fact that otherwise all my marks were excellent, this was an irritating blot. So I understandably didn't participate in any music clubs, nor sports; in any case such things didn't even exist at our school. On the other hand, I did take German lessons, and quite early on. In the town where the school was, there was this one retired teacher who used to give private lessons. So I can speak decent German, but also English, a very little French and of course Russian, because I studied in the Soviet Union, where I graduated from university as a nuclear systems designer.

As far as hobbies go, already as a child I had this peculiar deviation, I liked to read a lot. Anything and everything. I grew up on everything that was being published back then, especially stories by Verne [*Jules Verne*]. Balzac [*Honoré de Balzac*] too, him for example I read quite early on, but I don't know exactly when anymore, whether already in elementary school. For me the best Christmas present was a book, I used to get 15-20 books under the tree. It's hard to pick a favorite one, but I think that it could have been Dumas's *Three Musketeers*, with beautiful illustrations. And also stories by Verne. I also pored over Jirasek [*Alois Jirasek*], but that was more because I had to.

Jirasek's Collected Works, which we subscribed to at the time, took up about two meters on our bookshelf. But I liked reading very much, and that's how I spent most of my spare time during childhood. I also read books from libraries – back then even villages had them – and it's stayed with me into adulthood. But we had, as far as I remember, our own quite rich book collection. It was my father who mainly read, my mother I'd say for one less and for another a different sort of books, that lighter women's genre. So we also had some romance novels at home. As far as magazines go, not very much.

I of course also used to have ambitions in sport, but little talent for it, so I used to try running a bit and so on, but it was more of the sort to be doing at least something. I liked short track running the best. As far as ball games, it was soccer, that's something a village boy always gets around to playing. Surprisingly, back then ponds still used to freeze over, so we also used to like playing hockey. I very much regretted not doing any skiing in childhood, though I had always very much wanted to. And so later – in high school and university – I had a very hard time catching up during ski trips.

So that's how I mostly spent my free time as a child. Our parents never took us anywhere on trips, neither to go see sights nor into nature. That wasn't our custom and neither did our financial situation permit it very much. One child, that is I, was in school, so they concentrated mainly on what was necessary from this standpoint. There was no television back then, villages don't have exhibitions, a mobile cinema used to come around, so that yes, that was an attraction. And I remember for example, when television began in 1953, the one and only television receiver was at the school superintendent's in the school in the neighboring village. We kids used to go over there to watch it. That was also an attraction. I don't really remember much of what we used to do on Sundays, most likely I was running around somewhere outside. And what's more, don't forget that our hamlet was a remote hole. Which did have a pub, but didn't even have a store. So to do some sort of cultural activities there... there wasn't anywhere to go, even if you wanted to. And the nearest bus stop was, as I've said, in the next village. True, occasionally we went to visit relatives, we were in Prague a few times at my mother's sister's or in Pilsen. I of course couldn't go to my grandparents' during vacation, they weren't alive anymore. My older sister, who got married and moved to Karlovy Vary, was partially usable as a destination for family visits, but she had a job.

The Pioneer movement [4](#) already existed at that time, but I didn't go to any camps. Scouting was stopped I think in 1949 or 1950, and wasn't restarted until after 1990. So I missed out on that too. What's more, for me vacations always meant work. Because we had to – or I had to – help pad out the family budget. And so I spent my vacation in the forest picking everything there was, mushrooms, blueberries, cranberries and so on. We would then sell the results at a collection point. That was hard-earned money. I remember that I'd leave for the forest early in the morning, almost crying. I'm not saying that I spent all of summer vacation like that, but certainly a good half fell to that.

As far as friendships from those times go, I'll mention one thing: recently we had an elementary school reunion – which is in itself quite unusual. Usually people have high school reunions, so it quite surprised me. The reunion was organized by classmates that stayed in the village, who actually during that whole time never got out into the world. They put in the work and effort and invited us all, repeatedly even, as since then the reunion has taken place twice. I of course hadn't seen anyone during those fifty and more years, but despite that we didn't have problems picking

up the conversation there where we'd interrupted it those many years ago. Even if sitting here was someone who was now a professor, beside him a doctor, across the table a farmer and beside him a caretaker. This didn't play any role, and I guess that it's not a bad result. Otherwise I always based friendships more from my working life than my student days; a few friendships also lasted on the basis of my Jewish origin, from the ranks of young Jewish people in Pilsen and later in Prague.

I lived in Chalupy near Pilsen up to my high school graduation in 1959. Our years were affected by the shortening of school attendance, so we graduated when we were already 17. Then I went to study in Prague. By coincidence when I was 16 my adoptive mother died, then when I was 17, three months after graduation, my father. So I started my university studies as a youngster of 17, and a complete orphan. A double one, actually. At that time my relatives on both my father's and mother's side were of course still alive, but I remained alone and lived alone. I had an orphan's pension and a scholarship. And I lived at the university dorm. In Prague I studied at the then (today as well) prestigious Faculty of Technical and Nuclear Physics (FTJF), design of nuclear power systems, which was during the years 1959 to 1961. But after two years I left on a scholarship for the Soviet Union, to Moscow, and there I then finished my studies in 1965. I left for there not even so much because I didn't have anyone here anymore, but because it was a very enticing offer. At that time the Soviet Union was at the forefront of my field.

In Prague I also went through a half year of military service for university graduates, back then I was one of the last ones to manage to still do only a half-year term. I served with the anti-missile defense. We didn't go to the army to learn something. We were being prepared for officer positions, so we arrived there as deputy officers, not as regular soldiers. And it was quite funny that I, though having basic service rank (they didn't give us one star and the rank of second lieutenant until we were in our last month), I was one of the platoon commanders and the other commanders were career officers. Many times it happened that I would be signing leave for soldiers that were even of higher rank than I was. Well, but otherwise it was a waste of time, which is a frequent opinion of basic army service to this day.

When I was still in Prague, local young Jewish people themselves approached me, you can say that they found me. And pulled me into the Jewish community of that time, this was during the 1960s. In the Soviet Union I of course also met up with Jews. But general contact was minimal. I was in the synagogue in Moscow several times during holidays, but I didn't establish wider contacts.

If I was to compare my studies in Prague and Moscow, one could say that what I studied here was more of an academic nature. That is, what I began to study, because right in first year they transferred us from Charles University to CVUT [*Czech Technical University*]. The studies were more theoretical, even though in the first couple of years that's hard to discern. Well, and in the USSR I then switched to a purely practical, engineering direction. Plus I'd say that the studies here in Prague were more difficult. Even though again it's hard to compare, because starting school is always difficult. So from this standpoint, after the initial break-in period, let's say one year, when language difficulties subsided, it wasn't anything especially dramatic. And as far as life itself goes, in that there was of course a huge difference, because back then the Soviet Union was at a significantly different point as far as standards go. For example living standards. I lived in a dormitory like all other students, sublets didn't exist. There were dozens of nationalities studying there with me, Europeans, Africans and Asians. There were also Chinese, Koreans or Vietnamese, a

varied international society. But we don't keep in touch at all anymore.

Back then, we of course traveled around the Soviet Union as much as we could. During vacation I and other students, Czechoslovaks or a lot of Germans too, tried to go on various trips. As far as it was of course possible, it wasn't at all a simple matter. And so besides Siberia and the Far East, and of the Baltic countries Estonia, we visited all its interesting corners. Back then Estonia was a strategic region, it was simply out of the question. And for many reasons. The conditions in the Soviet Union were a little different, and we had to get used to them. For example – just for interest's sake, today this is something utterly incomprehensible for us – we didn't have a visa for the Soviet Union. We had a visa for Moscow. For Moscow and 50 kilometers around Moscow and that was it. Whenever we wanted to travel further on, we always had to have special permission. And getting it was complicated. You had to report it, you had to arrange it. Of course it was possible to embark on a trip even without it, it's not as if they checked at every station. But if they did find out that you were traveling without a permit, you'd have problems. These trips used to be organized, so they had to be prepared long in advance. The exact route had to be defined, for example. And we of course had a guide with us, a local one. We weren't allowed to go anywhere by ourselves.

After my return from the Soviet Union in 1965, I got a job in Pilsen. I again worked for Skoda, like once my father had. The company was at that time named the V.I. Lenin Works (ZVIL) and I got placed into nuclear research (Nuclear Power Station Works – ZJE). Thus I participated in the construction and commissioning of the first Czechoslovak nuclear power station, in Jaslovske Bohunice in Slovakia. I was at Skoda for only a short time, a couple of years, so I didn't work for that long in my original field. I left in 1971, officially because I was laid off because of redundancy. I don't think that it was due to my Jewish origin, more likely it's got to do with 1968 [5](#) and what followed [6](#). Back then the situation progressed differently at different levels, my position was cancelled and the position that was offered to me – because they had to offer me a position – was such so that I would refuse it, or so that I would at least be humiliated as much as possible. I don't remember anymore what exactly they offered me, something like a warehouse worker, but from a university graduate's position it was several levels down, so for workers with a basic education. Well, and when I didn't accept it, I got dismissed. I was unemployed for a long time, about a year and a half. I even decided to take the Skoda syndicate to court, and was even partly successful. Only slightly, but successful. I charged them with unjustified dismissal, and back then I was awarded about three months' severance pay. The court acknowledged that the dismissal really was invalid on the date that it was issued, and that it wasn't valid until a later date. I've even got an official document that confirmed that I was officially unemployed, so they couldn't even jail me for parasitism, as was the custom under Communism. Unemployment today and back then are in general “about something different”, as they say today with that ugly modern Czech.

It wasn't unemployment of the type “lost a job”. It was of course political persecution. While today unemployment isn't anything unthought-of, it's a common thing, it isn't in general demeaning, it can happen to anyone and has happened to many, or happens, back then it was almost a crime in society's eyes. It wasn't only about the fact that I'd lost my job, and for me it wasn't just a job, for me it was a profession that I had myself chosen, which I considered to be a mission and a calling. Because from one day to the next, I found myself at the edge of an economic abyss. A person has to support himself somehow. I may have been alone, I wasn't yet married, but I had to buy food,

pay the rent, take the train... But the fact that I didn't have a family was an advantage. Maybe it was my only luck, one could say that if I had one, everything would have been much harder. But even so it wasn't anything simple. I didn't even have parents, no one. Back then I dealt with it by working under the table for some kind people. But of course work in my field was out of the question, I helped bricklayers and so on. It's hard to say if I thus learned something new that's since been useful to me, probably only in a very limited way.

But then I by chance got to a little different profession, in the field of computers, and for the majority of my productive life, actually from 1971 until the end of the century, I spent among computers. That was already in Moravia. Not in Brno, but in Kyjov - I joined my future wife in Kyjov, where we live together to this day. After all, I got my job precisely thanks to her and her friends. As the saying went back then: when will life be good all over the world, well of course when everyone will have connections everywhere. I learned my new profession on the job, I never attended any computer school, everything was self-taught. We did economics calculations, that was still the era of so-called punch cards. I worked as a programmer in Hodonin, in the Computer Technology Company (PVT), which engraved itself into people's consciousness especially during the coupon privatization of the early 1990s. I was there until 1995, then I underwent a heart operations and after recuperating I left. I worked for another several years in the same field somewhere else, in Veseli nad Moravou. Well, and then began "sweet" retirement.

How I met my wife, that's a story. I met my future wife because of a trip to Israel. At the time I was going there to meet my one and only relative, real relative. It was my first trip to Israel, and basically also my first trip to the "West". When I was getting ready for the trip - which was combined, by train to Greece, from Greece by ship - I got a message from one old lady from Prague that she was going on the same ship, and whether we couldn't travel together. So I said, why not. We met in Prague at the train station, got on the train and traveled to Vienna; in Vienna we were supposed to continue on in the evening by express - even in a sleeping car - all the way to Athens, to be more precise to the port of Piraeus. The train from Prague was arriving at Franz Joseph Bhf, the train to Greece was leaving from Süd Bhf, we had a bit of a delay and before we transferred to the other train station in Vienna, all we managed to do was to wave goodbye to the last wagon and our expensive sleeping car. And the next train wasn't until the next day.

My fellow traveler had some friends there in Vienna, and could sleep over at their place. I wasn't worried about where I'd sleep, I took my suitcase and went to lie down in the park. I did fall asleep beautifully on a bench, but around 4:00 a.m. someone tapped on my shoulder - a Vienna policeman - and courteously, decently but uncompromisingly sent me away. Well, I waited it out somehow, the next day got on the same train, but no longer into a sleeping car, but into a normal compartment, and in the next compartment over there was this group of interesting people. A group of Polish Jews were traveling from Warsaw to Israel and with them a black-haired nurse from Moravia, who'd left Czechoslovakia a day later. And so we met, there on that train. She was also going to Israel for the first time, to visit friends. I was a ripe old 26, she a touch older. We all traveled together, I was the only one who could mangle a bit of English, and so was their tour guide and interpreter in Greece, we slept over one more night in a harbor hotel before setting sail. The next day we then got on a ship to Haifa, and after traveling for a one and a half days, we disembarked and went our separate ways to see friends and relatives. So then we really first met, exchanged addresses and as they say, sparks flew. For some time we were friends, then we lived

together, and finally we were married. we had a civil wedding, not in a synagogue.

My wife' name is Vera, née Baderova, and is Jewish. She was born in Brno in a maternity hospital, but lived her whole life in Kyjov, if we leave out the period during the war when she was in Terezin. Her mother tongue is Czech. She's a graduate of nursing high school, she's worked her whole life as a nurse, initially at an ophthalmological ward and then as a scrub nurse during surgery. She's retired now.

She had only one brother, Jirka [*Jiri*], who died during the war, the same as her father, Max. Only she and her mother survived. Her brother was older than she, but I don't know exactly what year he was born, I think around 1930. He died in Auschwitz. When, that would be possible to search out in the transport documents, evidently in 1944. They transported him to Terezin in January 1943, their whole family, and he later went with his father to Auschwitz. At that time he was still a young lad, of school age. Their father was the owner of a store. Back then they called it a wholesaler's but basically it was a store with mixed goods of all types.

The mother and daughter survived, then lived in Kyjov, and never ever moved anywhere. My wife's first husband was also of Jewish origin. He was a career soldier, then left the army and worked as a dispatcher at CSAD (Czechoslovak Bus Lines). He then became seriously ill, he had cancer of the pancreas, and died of this disease. My wife divorced him, sometime around 1970. She's got a son, Jiri, from that marriage. The two of us were married much later after we met. We had a simple civil wedding, with only witnesses, in 1976, after knowing each other for almost ten years.

Her son Jiri from her first marriage is actually my only son, thus my stepson. The two of us never had any children together. Jiri is of course named Süss after his own father, and got his first name in memory of his deceased uncle. He was born in Kyjov on 22nd April 1956. He's a high school graduate, he studied at economics high school in Hodonin. He held various jobs, both in Hodonin and in Kyjov, but unfortunately the past while he's been unemployed. As a stepson, he accepted me well, there wasn't any problem there. There's a 14-year age difference between us, when I married my wife he was already 20. He's married, since 1989, and his wife is named Lenka, née Hyskova. She was born in Hodonin. She herself isn't Jewish, but that's not a problem. Even as a young boy, Jirka didn't seek out partners among Jewish women, you see, he didn't even have the opportunity, there aren't any girls like that in our town and its surroundings. He and his wife have two children, a boy, Jan, who's 15, and a girl, Gabriela, who's 12.

As a family we used to go on vacations more in the winter than in the summer, mainly skiing. Now I go to the mountains only sporadically. Skiing is one of my favorite activities, both cross-country and downhill, I more or less managed to catch up in it. I also like bicycle riding. We weren't too much into trips around the country, say on weekends, into the countryside or sightseeing. We mostly spent weekends at home. We've got a house, a relatively large one, with a garden – that's actually non-stop work. Occasionally we go to the theater, but not so much to the movies. When I was in university I of course used to go to the movies, especially things that were a little exceptional, a film club and so on. And I used to go to the theater whenever possible. I studied in Prague, and our favorite stage was Semafor.

During Communism I maintained written contact with my relatives in Israel on the whole without problems. I'm sure our correspondence was monitored, but I didn't worry about it. I don't know of any problems stemming from it, and otherwise it didn't worry me. I didn't travel much to the

“West”, one could say almost never. I went on one business trip to London in 1968. So there were no opportunities for problems. I of course listened to Free Europe, the English BBC broadcasts or the Voice of America [7](#), back then they were the only sources of independent information and by the way an excellent opportunity to learn foreign languages. I wasn't too familiar with samizdat [8](#) writing, it didn't come around to me. I never had the feeling that it was necessary to hide my Jewish origins.

When the year 1989 [9](#) arrived, a fundamental change in our lives was the return of my wife's house, which was former family property, confiscated by the Communists. That certainly influenced our life in a significant way, and in a good way. During the Velvet Revolution, everything was interesting, but I've got a rather guilty feeling that I participated in it only as a spectator. I was no longer able to find the courage and strength to participate in it. I didn't go to any demonstrations, but that was never something that I gravitated towards. As far as employment goes, I kept working in the same place even after the revolution, and my wife didn't change jobs either.

My adoptive parents were, as I've said, Catholics, but not very religiously active, more lukewarm. Their own parents, a generation back, especially living in a village, certainly must have been religious and attended church. It was unthinkable for it to be otherwise. Religion, the concept of God or so on, wasn't even a subject of conversation in our home. Nevertheless, my adoptive parents very sincerely supported my religious upbringing, as far as they could, and I'm glad of it. They never hid my origin from me, and themselves kept close and continual contact with the Jewish community in Pilsen, and with my uncle in Israel. I used to go to Pilsen for Jewish religion lessons and I also had my bar mitzvah [*bar mitzvah - literally “son of the Commandments”, a ceremony absolved by a Jewish boy that has reached the age of thirteen. In the synagogue he is first called to the Torah, and from that point onwards he is eligible to be part of a minyan, a group of at least 10 men that are allowed to pray, and has all the rights and responsibilities of a devout Jew. This day is considered to be a family holiday - Editor's note*] there. I'd say that it was very noble and considerate behavior on my parents' part. Due to their non-religious orientation, I didn't get the roots of upbringing the way others would have, but I'm grateful to them for making it possible for me to live in contact with the Jewish world. That's probably the main thing. As far as my parents are concerned, my being Jewish probably didn't have any influence on them. I don't know why they actually supported my Jewish upbringing, whether the wishes of the Slovak Jewish family played a role, or of my uncle, who must have contacted my adoptive family very soon after the end of the war. That's something that of course can't be proven now, none of them can say anything anymore. About I think that they felt that they had - and now I'll say it a very not nice way - that they had something sort of borrowed. A thing for which they were responsible. And with which they couldn't do completely what they wanted, but had to respect where that thing was from, right? Be it that I'm allowed to talk like that about myself, I'd never dare to designate another human being as a thing.

Pilsen, where I used to go to the Jewish community, was about 30 kilometers from our village via this three-stage method of transportation... first on foot, then by bus, and finally by train. We used to go there for the main Jewish holidays, most certainly at least once a year. Well, and then when I was preparing for my bar mitzvah, I used to go there to study. The lessons lasted several months, and I used to go there once a week. I was of course obliged to learn to read and understand Hebrew prayer texts, but I'll admit that I learned it primarily phonetically. And since then I've again

successfully forgotten it. So today I don't know Hebrew.

My participation in Jewish holidays during my childhood didn't only take the form of my parents for example taking me to Pilsen, waiting, and then returning back the Chalupy with me. There weren't again that many of those holidays, that was really usually only that one time a year, Yom Kippur [*The Day of Atonement. The most celebrated event in the Jewish calendar. – Editor's note*]. For that holiday were the guests of the Jewish community at their expense, and were put up in at a hotel, because it of course lasted until the evening. So my parents were with me the whole time, that's self-evident, and as guests they also participated in the celebrations.

Back then the Jewish community in Pilsen still had over a hundred members, but after the war there were only four of us children, with the age difference between the youngest and the oldest being almost 14 years. I was of course the youngest. There was for example a girl about two years older than me, they used to put us together even later, and we're good friends to this day, though we rarely see each other. At that time I was the only boy of that age, plus an orphan, being brought up in a Gentile family. All this contributed to making the celebrations back then an utterly exceptional event. I would get tons of presents, everyone congratulated me, for a while I was like the child of the whole community. After the service in the synagogue, we'd then all go for a gala supper at a hotel, at the largest hotel in Pilsen, and as a 13-year-old boy, albeit chaperoned, I found myself in a bar for the first time. Later I didn't absorb any additional Jewish upbringing, that which I know and feel is from my own studies, listening and watching.

I don't know anything about the religious behavior of my real parents. It's of course hard to judge from such a distance and through others. My uncle, who survived, was a very deeply religious, Orthodox Jew, however whether from the very beginning or only later, that I don't know. Both aunts that arrived in Israel still before the war, were on the contrary very liberal, I'd say. And their husbands as well. So both forms of approach to religion exist or existed in our family.

Since childhood, Yom Kippur has been among my favorite holidays, and to this day it's for me the most significant of all Jewish holidays. But favorite is perhaps not the right expression. It's the biggest holiday, the main holiday, sort of the innermost one. It's a day where you do an annual balancing of deeds, when the believer should come to terms with his friends as well as those others. It's a day of fasting, a day of contemplation and all-day prayers. So that's why it's the biggest holiday. That's how it's decreed by the Torah. And when I take it personally, it was so unforgettable precisely because it was so demanding. So from this standpoint it was the first and only one with which I became familiar in early childhood. The one I observed, or at least tried to observe. I had this awareness that it was necessary, that it was proper, that it was right. The rest is this maybe yes, maybe no. But this here for sure yes. For example, already from childhood I observed the prescribed fast. And at first sight that looked very difficult, but on second sight already as a child I had this feeling that I was doing the right thing. And surprisingly, which of course I realized only later, it's also healthy.

Today my wife and I observe the main Jewish holidays, sometimes we also go to synagogue. Most certainly, without any sort of doubt, the most important for us is the celebration of the Jewish New Year [*Rosh Hashanah*] and the holiday of atonement [*Yom Kippur*]. We also celebrate the holiday of crossing, Passover. But in first place I put the holiday of atonement, the traditional time of fasting. The nature of the others is of more joyous holidays, they can but don't have to be observed, now

I'm talking for our family. We're aware of them, but it doesn't mean that we'd have to do something special right on that day. We don't observe the feast of lights, Chanukkah, much in our family, but try to pass its tradition on to the next generation, to our grandchildren, but only moderately, soberly. We don't observe Christian holidays, though we do accept a brief invitation for Christmas Eve because of the grandchildren.

Our son Jiri is another step further along in the sense of more tolerant, more liberal behavior, so he celebrates holidays even much less. On his own, from his own impetus, I'd say, he doesn't celebrate anything, plus his wife isn't Jewish. But while his grandma and grandpa were still alive, the traditions were observed more. We don't observe kosher regulations in any particular fashion, but as far as his grandparents were concerned, they tried to not commit significant offences. In short, let's say that pork wasn't served. So our son Jiri was brought up in a Jewish manner when possible. He's circumcised, had a bar mitzvah. And for the High Holidays the family regularly visited the synagogue. Grandma, my wife's mother, who after the war remarried and again married a Jew, a devout Jew, she kept the Sabbath relatively strictly. My wife and I less so, I'd say almost not at all.

Our grandchildren are also aware of their Jewish origins, they of course know about them. They both very much like to for example come here to the Jewish community, but it's more got to do with the fact that they feel a certain importance here, that their grandfather works here and so on. They also come here during the biggest holidays and for memorial ceremonies. I've never had a problem due to my Jewish origin. People already knew about it in elementary school, but no one ever looked at me in any negative way. Neither in school nor at work.

Another fundamental change that the revolution brought, this time as far as being Jewish is concerned, was that I was pulled into being a functionary and later also elected president of the community in Brno. I myself would never have thought, not even in my wildest dreams, that something like that could happen. I was of course always in contact with the Brno Jewish community here, but as a regular member, more on the passive side. Well, and back then the head cantor, still alive at the time, the recently deceased Mr. Arnost Neufeld, approached new, until then "unused" functionary cadres, and so invited me to do this work. At the complete beginning I began helping during last farewells for our members, ritual cleansing [*the tahara ceremony, which is by the way one of the most honorable "mitzvot", obligations in Jewish society - Editor's note*], funeral oration, and similar things. Thus I slowly "sunk in my claws" and in the end I ended up with everything.

I commenced this type of public service in 1996, and do it to this day. I didn't run directly for the post of president, according to our rules a body is elected, that means a group of functionaries called the presidium, and then it picks a president from among itself. I ran for the presidium voluntarily, and more than anything else let myself be talked into the function, there wasn't and isn't any excess of candidates, which is too bad. How did they convince me? I don't know. Objectively, though considerably immodestly put - I was probably the most suitable from the existing "portfolio". So I agreed, with a heavy heart, but agreed.

Well, and when they elected me in the next electoral period as well, I said that it's the last time, that if I was to be elected one more time, I'd consider it to be a personal failure, that I didn't manage to find and prepare a suitable successor. This I more or less adhered to, even though I was

still “left with” the function of vice-president. I was president for 8 years before that. My family didn’t look at my presidency very positively, and doesn’t. For one for reasons of time, thanks to it I’m very often away from home and that at the most varied times, and for another my wife has a markedly different opinion from me on a number of things in the affairs of the Jewish community.

I myself felt already back then, and feel to this day, that my work at the Jewish community is a bit like the repayment of an old debt. But it’s hard for me to evaluate something myself. What’s more, it’s also a certain enrichment for me. Perhaps primarily in that a person sees at least some sort of tiny furrow plowed behind him. That yes, let that be my reward. But it’s terribly hard, hard because working with people is hard. And a person perceives that only once when he’s in an executive function and has to make decisions. And he’s got to decide against this person and for this one, and next time the other way around. Truly, especially complex decisions? Certainly there were. And not in all of them am I convinced that I decided correctly. But there’s another thing that’s worse than to decide incorrectly, and that’s to not decide at all.

I visited Israel several times. I was there twice, thrice to see my family, once I stayed with my wife with friends, once I was there on business. Everything in Israel captivated me. Especially on my first visit. And that was right upon entering the harbor, where the passport official addressed me in flawless Czech: “Welcome, Mr. Weber, and you’ll remain here with us, won’t you?” None of my relatives in Israel of course spoke any Czech. But I didn’t experience any long questioning at the border back then, that didn’t exist there yet, in 1966 it as something completely different than today. And then, you know, a young person, who was in the “West” for the first time, gaped with eyes wide open at everything. At gas stations, at roads, at beverages, at advertisements, at nightlife, at food, at whatever. Everything was new, everything was unsoiled, un-shabby, everything was different. I of course also saw the main Israeli sights, I took some tours, I was taken somewhere by one aunt, somewhere by another. Including the Dead Sea, Masada, Eilat, Jerusalem, that especially. It’s hard to say if something there took me aback or if I didn’t like something, definitely positive impressions were the rule during my first visit.

During my first visit I considered very seriously whether I should stay in Israel, but I didn’t find the courage. Mainly I was afraid of the language barrier. Not even later, already with my wife, who doesn’t have relatives there but friends, did we consider it.

My relationship with Israel is of course highly emotional and positive, it’s my second homeland, even though I’ve never lived there. As far as the current political situation is concerned, it’s of course a somewhat different question, that certainly isn’t something open and shut. Like every state, Israel can be criticized, not everything is exemplary there. But as far as I know, none of my relatives had serious problems, neither my uncle not my aunts.

Glossary:

1 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.

2 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.

3 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.

4 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.

5 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.

6 Political changes in 1969

Following the Prague Spring of 1968, which was suppressed by armies of the Soviet Union and its satellite states, a program of ‘normalization’ was initiated. Normalization meant the restoration of continuity with the pre-reform period and it entailed thoroughgoing political repression and the return to ideological conformity. Top levels of government, the leadership of social organizations and the party organization were purged of all reformist elements. Publishing houses and film studios were placed under new direction. Censorship was strictly imposed, and a campaign of militant atheism was organized. A new government was set up at the beginning of 1970, and, later that year, Czechoslovakia and the Soviet Union signed the Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation and Mutual Assistance, which incorporated the principle of limited sovereignty. Soviet troops remained stationed in Czechoslovakia and Soviet advisers supervised the functioning of the Ministry of Interior and the security apparatus.

7 Voice of America (VOA)

is the official international radio and television broadcasting service of the United States federal government. VOA was organized in 1942 under the Office of War Information with news programs aimed at areas in Europe and North Africa under the occupation of Nazi Germany. VOA began broadcasting on February 24, 1942. During the Cold War, VOA was placed under the U.S. Information Agency.

8 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).

9 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.