

# Blanka Dvorska

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Mrs. Blanka Dvorska experienced many things during her lifetime, both good and bad. She however always remained true to her principles and opinions. She never judged people for their origin, skin color or religion. She tried to help people when she could. She and her loved ones were very much marked by the years of World War II, and later the Slansky trials [1](#). She has lived through a lot, and lost a lot. However, nothing ever broke her faith in people and in life.

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## My family background

My paternal grandparents were named the Friedmanns. My grandfather was named Aron, and my grandmother Hilda. Alas, I don't remember her maiden name anymore. Neither do I know where they were from, and when they were born. But the important thing is how I recall them, and how they've remained in my memory. I know that they lived in Stropkov. My grandmother was a housewife, and my grandfather had a small store with textiles. I remember them very well, because as a little girl I spent every summer vacation with them in Stropkov.

I also remember that Grandpa Friedmann's father, so my great-grandfather, was a very important citizen of Stropkov. Today I don't know what his name was anymore. From what my grandparents told me though, I remember that this great-grandpa of mine was the advisor of some district administrator, which is why everyone respected him, and he belonged among the town's elite.

But let's return to my Grandpa and Grandma Friedmann. I loved them very much, and above all I respected them. They treated me like their own daughter. I didn't get along very well with my mother, and so Grandma Hilda had me over at their place every summer vacation. I lived with my parents and siblings in Presov. At the beginning of the summer my grandma would come for me on



a carriage, and take me to Stropkov, which was 50 kilometers away. I'd then spend the entire summer there with my grandparents. Grandma and Grandpa spoke Yiddish to each other. But they also spoke German and of course Saris [Saris dialect: one of the Slovak dialects, used in the Saris region. The center of the region is the city of Presov – Editor's note]. Since his father had such an important position, my grandpa was definitely originally from around Stropkov, but where my grandmother was from, I don't know.

My grandfather was an Orthodox Jew [2](#). He wore payes and never went anywhere without a hat. As I still remember well, he wore a caftan, but I also used to see him in a regular suit. For her part, my grandmother always wore a scarf on her head. I know that she didn't wear a wig, but her daughters-in-law – my aunts and also my mother, did [3](#). In that they were strictly Orthodox, and my grandparents of course had a kosher household [4](#). For example, they'd buy a large duck or hen at the marketplace. If my grandmother didn't like the looks of it, she'd go see the rabbi, so he could tell her whether it was kosher or not. My grandma was very strict about that. They also had separate dishes for dairy, and then there were dishes for meat. For example, Easter [Passover] dishes were completely different. They were never used during the entire year. They were only used during the Easter holidays.

As I've already mentioned, my grandparents lived in Stropkov. Stropkov was this smaller town with a relatively large Jewish community [In 1940, about 2000 Jews lived in Stropkov and its immediate vicinity. In Stropkov itself there were about 1500 of them. Stropkov was a town of Hasidic Jews, to whom belonged both synagogues in the town – Editor's note]. I daren't guess at the ratio between Jews and Christians, all I know is that there were more Christians in Stropkov. Well, I've got to say that Christians and Jews mixed very well there, and got along well with each other. Jews didn't have any separate part of town. They lived in the town center, on the main square, and then in various parts on the outskirts. I know that Stropkov had a synagogue, and that there was a mikveh [mikveh: a ritual bath – Editor's note] there too.

My grandparents' house was next door to a Catholic monastery. I know that there were monks living there, but what order, that I don't remember any more. The space between my grandparents' house and this monastery measured about a half meter. They were really built quite close to each other. The house where my grandparents lived faced a common courtyard that had another four residences around it. I don't know exactly who lived there anymore. All I know is that they were most likely some relatives of ours, and that they were Jews. The house where my grandpa and grandma lived had two rooms and a kitchen. They even had a washroom there. I don't know if every family had their own, but I know that in those days it wasn't usual to have a washroom, and they already had one. The two rooms were furnished on the whole normally. There were two beds in the bedroom, which were right next to each other, but during menstruation they'd be separated by a night table [according to Jewish laws, a woman has to notify her husband that she had begun menstruating. From this moment on, he is not allowed to touch her. Even the touch of one single finger is forbidden. This edict lasts until menstruation ends and the woman's subsequent ritual cleansing – Editor's note]. Plus there was a wardrobe there, and so on. My grandparents' house was simply and tastefully furnished.

Because my grandfather was a merchant, my grandparents used to come into contact with both Jews and also Christians. But when they were already home, their neighbors were exclusively Jews. So they also had Jews as friends, and had very good relations amongst themselves. But have to say

that my grandparents, and later also my father, were very open and obliging people. They didn't have any prejudices and behaved very nicely and decently to everyone, no matter whether he was a Jew, Christian or Gypsy. You know, in those days there were also quite a few Gypsies living in Stropkov. I myself worked there in the 1930s after graduating from teaching school, and this one incident with Gypsies happened to me: Once some Gypsies played for me for free. Because my father might have been around 18 or so, when he saved a Gypsy child that had fallen into the well in the town square. Well, and suddenly there was a big commotion. As I've already mentioned, my grandfather had a store on the square, across from the well. And what happened? When he saw that, my father lowered himself down into the well and saved that little Gypsy kid that had fallen into the water. He just saved him, because that's what they were like, the Friedmanns. And I, as a teacher, you'd think that it was already so many years later, I went into a pub somewhere around there, and when they saw me they said: "That's Jozko's daughter!" And quiet. They came over to me: "Young lady, what should we play for you?" "And why should you play?" "After all, you're Jozko's girl, so for you we play for free." Years after my father pulled their child out of the well, they rewarded me for a change, for that good deed of his.

I don't know the circumstances leading up to my grandparents getting married. I don't even know where and when they were married. The only thing that's certain is that the wedding was certainly Jewish, and that in the course of their marriage my grandma Hilda brought six children into the world. Five sons: Jozef, Herman, Natan, Ignac and Filip and one daughter, Mancik [Malvina]. Jozef was my father. But today I know more only about my father's brothers Natan, Filip and Ignac. Today I don't remember various dates and their personal details anymore.

Of my father's siblings, I remember Uncle Natan well. Probably because he lived in Stropkov together with my grandparents. At first he lived in the same courtyard as they did. But later, when he got married, he opened his own clothing shop on the square, and not far from the shop he built a little house. The only other thing I know is that he and his wife didn't have any children, and the two of them lived alone. For some time I also lived with Uncle Herman in Giraltovce, but that was during the war, and those were very troubled times.

Another of my father's brothers whom I recall from stories I heard, even though I never met him, is Icik, Ignac. My grandparents were forcing him to marry some older woman. I think that she was some rich widow. But he didn't want to marry her at all. Probably he didn't like her. And so it happened that during the wedding ceremony, as he and the bride were standing together under the chuppah [Chuppah: a canopy under which the pair stands during the wedding ceremony - Editor's note], he suddenly jumped up and ran away, right in front of the rabbi, bride, and the entire wedding party. No one from our family ever saw him again after that. But I've always wondered why no one ever went to look for him. The cause was likely the fact that he'd disappointed the family by not marrying the woman they'd picked for him, and that he ran away so "shamefully" from under the chuppah, and thus brought shame not only on the bride, but also on his loved ones.

My father's third brother Filip lived in France. He lived right in the capital, Paris. He was single and childless. Of my siblings, my one-year-older brother, Bernat, had the fondest memories of Uncle Filip. This was because Bernat lived with him in France from 1932 to 1938.

My knowledge of my mother's family starts with my great-grandmother Weil from Jaslo in Poland, who died in 1936, at the age of 105! We always heard a lot about her. She ran a farm by herself. And that she managed to do it and had enough strength for it was helped by the fact that she married at the age of 15 or 16, and her husband died when she was around 30. Due to the fact that she was married for such a short time and her husband didn't vex her, she had enough strength to tend to the farm. And also thanks to this, she in the end lived to such a beautiful age.

I don't know much about my grandparents, the Weils. I didn't know my grandmother at all. All I know is that they had a restaurant. They had three daughters and one son together. In the end, I know only relatively little about my mother's family.

My mother was born in Jaslo, Poland in 1886, and her maiden name was Dorota Weil. My father was born in 1884 in Stropkov. My mother and father were married in 1910. I don't know how my parents came to be married. The fact remains, though, that it must have been an arranged marriage. For my mother it was a hard life, coming as she did from a family that wasn't all that Orthodox. My mother was raised in an almost bourgeois fashion, and certainly in a more modern fashion than my father. My parents were married under a chuppah. But whether they were married in Stropkov or in Presov, that I don't know. All I know is that already in 1910 their first child was born, my oldest sister Lujza.

My mother's native tongue was Polish. But she had a big talent for languages. She spoke excellent German and Yiddish, and very quickly learned Saris. For two years my parents lived in Velke Kapusany, where during that short time my mother learned fluent Hungarian. During the time when we children were already attending school, she knew Slovak grammar so well that she used to check our homework. She had a talent for languages. My father also knew several languages, but didn't speak even one of them so well that you could say he was excellent at it. His mother tongue was Saris, and he could get by in Saris, German, and when necessary, also Hungarian.

During the first years of their marriage, my parents lived in Stropkov, later in Velke Kapusany, and finally they settled in Presov. I was born in 1916, and at that time my parents were living in Stropkov. I was born at my grandparents' house. I was the fourth child, and after me another four were born. So there were eight of us children. But I'll say more about my siblings later.

My clearest memories are from when my parents were already living in Presov. They lived there from 1917 until they were deported. In those times Presov might have had a population of around 24,000 [according to census figures, in 1940 Presov had a population of 24,394 – Editor's note]. There was a relatively large Jewish community there. I do know that the city had two synagogues, a Neolog one and an Orthodox one. There was also a mikveh in Presov. The town baths had a part that was reserved just for Jews, and that was the mikveh. I also remember that the town also had a cheder [Cheder: religious primary school for teaching the Torah and Judaism – Editor's note], which my one-year-old brother Bernat attended. He attended it from around the age of three, and studied there. I know that when my brother was around five or six, a bocher [bocher: student – Editor's note] used to come to our apartment and study there with my brother.

In Presov Jews of course had their rabbi. He was a very wise man. Everyone respected him. One interesting thing was that this rabbi was a friend with the Catholic papal prelate. They used to meet around three or four times a week. They used to walk around town together. During the week it wasn't anything unusual to see the prelate coming out of Levocska Street, and part of the way the

rabbi would walk by his side. They'd meet and walk like that up and down, along that main street, and debate about things. You know, I'll never forget that. Never. Before the war people got along so well, and I simply can't forget that.

Even today I still remember how on Mondays and Fridays a market would take place in Presov. We never had money to spare, and so everything that was necessary for the household was arranged by my father. At our house it was very simple. So for example on Friday we'd take the shoulet to the baker's, and on Saturday we'd bring it home. Otherwise food wasn't arranged in advance in any special way. There simply wasn't any to do that with. I know that my mom used to put some meat in that shoulet, but goose we had only when once a year some aunt from Giraltovce would send us one, nicely fattened up. I know that she used to raise that goose especially for us. She used to feed her by sitting on her and stuffing corn into her beak, and squeezing it down the goose's neck. That's how she nicely fattened up that goose for us. My mom would then make an excellent shoulet with goose meat.

I remember when T.G. Masaryk [5](#) died. He died in 1937, and we wept profusely. Then Benes [6](#) took his place. But the era of Masaryk's government was characterized by the creation of the First Republic [7](#). And it was a republic where there weren't only Czechs and Slovaks. During the First Republic, many teachers came to Slovakia, but also other civil servants too [after the creation of the 1st Czecho-Slovak Republic, the local government didn't have enough educated and loyal civil servants. This is why Czech immigrants streamed into Slovakia. Among the first were postmen, teachers, technicians, civil servants, doctors and theater workers – Editor's note]. People united and helped each other in order to help something along. And not for reasons like it was at the end of the First Czecho-Slovak Republic. At that time certain groups began uniting in order to harm others. Individual differences in religion, origin and so on increased. That's where that enmity against Jews began. Well, but now I'm getting ahead of things...

I'll return to my parents. I know that before I was born, my father was in the tobacco business, and his partners took advantage of him or tricked him in some way. So my father lost even the little that he had. But I'd prefer to talk about what I remember from my own experiences. When I was about three, my father owned a grocery store. This store was on the main street. My mother worked in the store too. On the one hand, she was a housewife that was fully employed by a numerous family, and on top of this she also sold in the store. But I have to say that that store was more like a general store, and not just one with groceries. I remember that at one time we were for example selling folding beds there. My parents latched onto whatever they could. They would've perhaps sold anything there. There my mother sold excellent, home-baked bread, or homemade soap that my father used to make in a cellar by the millstream.

I remember that when I was attending school, it happened more than once that I had to help out in the store. That little store of ours was so pitiful, that it would also happen that a customer would come for a kilo of sugar, for example, and we wouldn't have it. So I'd quickly run out of the store and run across the main street to the grocery wholesaler's. There I'd buy that kilo of sugar and run with it back to our store. There I'd sell the sugar for some five or ten hellers more [In 1929 it was decreed by law that one Czechoslovak crown (Kc) 1 Kc – 100 hellers, was equal in value to 44.58 mg of gold – Editor's note]. So that is truly how we did business.



Because my parents were Orthodox, we observed all rules at home. We were a strictly kosher household. My mother kept a strict eye on it. We observed all the holidays. My father regularly used to go pray at the synagogue, along with his brother. My mother made sure that everything in the household was as it should be according to the rules.

Our Presov apartment was very modest. The whole family, which is two adults and eight children, lived in two rooms plus a kitchen. The apartment wasn't ours, but we rented it from Professor Frantisek Guttmann. The apartment was also downtown, near the store. We had one room, then there was a very small kitchen, and a second room. The one room might have been about five meters by three. It had two iron beds, between which there was a large steamer trunk. The trunk for one thing separated the beds from each other, for another it was used to store bedclothes, and it also served as a place to sit. Then in that room there was a large, I'd guess about two-meter table, at which we used to eat. We'd study at it and do our homework. Around the table there were of course some chairs that we'd sit on. That was all the furniture there was in the room.

From that room you went into the kitchen. There in the kitchen there was a brick oven in which we baked and cooked. Beside it there was this narrow space for cooking, some sort of workbench or small table. That stretched along the wall, from the oven all the way to the door. There was also a stove there. This little room is where food was prepared. It was too small for us to also eat there. It might have been just over a meter wide, and wasn't all that much longer either. We ate in the room, at the table. From this little kitchen you could for one go into the other room, but you could also go down a ladder into the cellar. From the kitchen you went into the other room. This room was a little smaller than the first one. It might have been around 3.5 by 3.5 meters. It was also, as one would say, a room for all of us. My parents didn't have anything like a bedroom. There were many of us, and so everyone slept where he could. In beds, on mattresses, even on the table. But something more about the second room. It had two beds, like in that first room. Then there were two wardrobes.

Our apartment had running water as well as electricity, which wasn't completely common for that time. We had cheap electricity. And so that we'd be able to pay for it, we had only two lights. For example, at the door between the kitchen and the room there was a light, movable of course. It was a bulb attached to a movable wire. When needed, we used the light in the kitchen, and then when it was needed in the room, we moved it along on the wire, and lit up the room. The second light was again at the door between the kitchen and the other room, and could be moved in a similar fashion as the first. These light bulbs didn't give off a lot of light. But in any case, they served us well.

I remember that when I was still quite small, a little girl of only two or three, we had a helper in our apartment in Presov. She was a maidservant, and was named Mariska. She was like a member of our family. But she had to leave us after some time, because we couldn't afford to pay her. Working for us for free wasn't practical for her. Then I was already older, and along with my older sisters, I helped out at home. We did all the housework, and also worked in the store.

We didn't have any animals at home. There wasn't any room or food for them. But what I am proud of is our library. Even though we lived in very poor conditions, we bought books. When they were already employed, my older sisters, Lujza and Annuska [Anna], bought various literature. Not just I, but all members of our family liked to read. But we also used to go to the Presov town library to

borrow books. And we also used to buy newspapers. I think that at that time it was Azet and Kassai újság.

My parents' first-born was my sister Lujza. She must have been conceived shortly after the wedding, as it was still 1910 when she was born, so the same year my parents got married. She finished business school. She was a very clever and talented girl. Alas, she died during the Holocaust.

The next to be born was Anna. That might've been in 1911. I unfortunately don't know it exactly. Annuska, as we called her at home, was also talented, and wrote so beautifully that when she was still in council school, they sent some of her composition work and various literary works to President Masaryk. Alas, she wasn't able to keep on studying, as we simply couldn't afford it. She was only about 14 or 15 when she went to work at a law office, for the lawyer Fuchs. She was very clever, and so she very quickly found her footing at the law office. After a certain time my sister had such a good name in Presov, that when she for example went to the bank for money, she didn't need any extra papers. All they'd say was: "Annuska, if you say so, we believe you." She didn't make all that much there. If I still remember correctly, it was probably 400 crowns [In 1929 it was decreed by law that one Czechoslovak crown (Kc) 1 Kc – 100 hellers, was equal in value to 44.58 mg of gold – Editor's note] a month. Annuska also had perfect musical hearing. She attended music school, where excellent Czech professors took her under their tutelage, and she learned to play the piano and violin very well. Besides this, she also inherited our mother's talent for languages. Like the rest of us she spoke Slovak, Yiddish, German and Hungarian. But she also learned French and English through private lessons. She was really an all-round gifted person, and amazingly talented.

When in the second half of the 1930s Professor Frantisek Guttmann evicted us from our apartment, my older sisters Lujza and Anna made sure that we didn't end up on the street. They gave us money, and found us a new place to live. By intervening in this way, Annuska gained the right to marry according to her wishes. She got married in 1936, and had one son with her husband, whose name I unfortunately don't know anymore. The child was splendid in all respects. Alas, Annuska perished along with her young family during the time of the Nazi rampage in one of the concentration camps.

I also had one older brother. He was not quite a year older than I. He was born in 1915. His name was Bernat. As a young boy and teenager, he was very strongly religiously oriented. His upbringing of course played a part in this, especially from our father. Later, my brother lived several years with our father's brother – our Uncle Filip in France. If I'm not mistaken, he lived there from 1932 to 1938. When he then returned home, he was unrecognizable. He returned as a young, open-minded and world-wise participant in the Interbrigade in Spain [6](#). After returning home, Bernat was involved in organizing the resistance. He was one of the founders of the Capajev partisan group [Capajev partisan group: created in August 1943 in the forest by Matiaska. Later this group grew into a partisan alliance that played an important role in armed anti-Fascist activity in eastern Slovakia – Editor's note] and was also a member of an illegal regional committee of the KSS [Communist Party of Slovakia] in eastern Slovakia. His life was very interesting, and marked by many events, political but also personal ones. After the war, my brother changed his name to Stefan Kubik. He managed to survive the hardships of the years 1938 to 1945, but even after these tough tribulations, his life didn't stagnate. On 19th January 1945, he returned to Presov along with

the Red Army. The post-war government took advantage of his abundant experience. They made him the regional director of the StB [State Security] in Presov. Later he was sent to the embassy in France several times. Paradoxically, his reward for these services was jail in Ruzyne, which lasted for 33 months. He was jailed in 1951, and they released him on 24th May 1954. After his release from jail, he was of course rehabilitated, and all trumped-up charges against him were dropped. My brother got married after the war. He and his wife had two sons.

## **Growing up**

I was the next to be born. That was in 1916, not even a year after my brother was born, and my parents named me Blanka. I was born in my grandparents' house in Stropkov. You know, on the one hand my father was very strongly religious, but again on the other hand, already earlier, when I was an adult, I wondered about how it was possible that there was such a small age difference between my brother and me? Well, so my father probably didn't observe some regulations to the letter [because of the small age difference, the interviewee most likely was wondering about the fact that her conception took place during the six-week post-natal time period called the lochia, which is characterized by bleeding as the lining of the womb is discharged. This would have been in contravention with the Jewish regulations regarding the prohibition of intercourse during menstruation - Editor's note]. If I'm to be honest, my mother wasn't thrilled by my conception and birth either. It's logical that she didn't want to have another child so quickly after my brother. I felt it, and alas to this day can't forget it. I loved my parents above all, and respected them. Thus it saddens me all the more, when I think of how I used to spend summer vacations separated from my family, with my grandparents in Stropkov, or when I recall many details that happened, and that bother me to this day.

In 1921 my sister Malvina was born, my parents' fifth child. She was born in Presov. After her was the sixth, my brother Henrik, I know that it was in Presov but I don't remember the exact year anymore. After him was my sister Matilda, in Presov in 1924, plus after her Alzbeta. Malvinka, Henrik and Alzbeta perished during the Holocaust.

Matilda survived three and a half years in Auschwitz. After returning home she was very marked by it - most likely the same as everyone else. Those that survived the camps are marked by it for the rest of their lives. Today my relationship with my sister isn't very active, though we live in the same town. But I'll talk about our childhood. When she was two, my sister was made a ward of mine. I was supposed to take care of her. But she was a very active child, and would often fall on her nose. I didn't know how to keep an eye on her, for which my parents quite often punished me. Due to these countless falls, my sister had a bent and deformed nose. My father thought that precisely this would protect her from deportation. But in the end they deported her too, and as I've already said, she survived for three and a half years in the Auschwitz concentration camp.

I know that I'm getting ahead of myself, but from this it's clear that in the end only my brother and I weren't deported to one of the concentration camps. Of the entire family, only Bernat, Matilda and I managed to survive.

I've already talked about my grandparents, parents and siblings. It's time to say something more about myself. As I've mentioned, my name is Blanka Friedmannova, and I was born as the fourth child, in 1916 in Stropkov. During the first years of my childhood I was in the care of my mother and older siblings. I was raised in a strongly Orthodox spirit, and one could say that I was the one



that the religion and knowledge of Judaism stuck to the most.

As I've already mentioned, we had a kosher household. That means separate dishes for meat, and separate dishes for dairy products. For example, the Easter dishes [meaning Passover dishes] were completely different. They weren't used at all during the normal year, but just for Easter [Passover: commemorates the departure of the Israelites from Egyptian captivity and is characterized by many regulations and customs. The foremost is the prohibition of consuming anything containing yeast - Editor's note]. That was an extra-special holiday for Jews. Everything had to be completely and absolutely organized and clean. Mainly there couldn't be any breadcrumbs, nothing. After the cleaning my father would then walk around the room, like he was going to go burn even bread dust [meaning chametz, or leavened dough, which is forbidden to be used during Passover. Based on this is the obligation to make one's home kosher le-pesach (proper for Passover). After a major cleaning, chametz is collected from the entire household and burned - Editor's note]. During Easter the custom at our house was also that my father didn't eat matzot in his soup. The matzot wasn't even dipped in it [strictly religious families don't put matzot into soup because after coming into contact with water it would swell up. In their minds this meant leavening - Editor's note]. We wouldn't be allowed to put matzot into the soup until the last day.

If I'm to be honest, I never really looked forward to the holidays that much. We were very poor, and at our house the holidays also had very modest and simple dimensions. There were eight of us children, and when there wasn't anything material, we tried to at least dress up the holidays by having fun and spreading good cheer amongst each other. We'd joke around and have fun.

In 1922 I began attending a Neolog people's school in Presov. It was right beside the Neolog synagogue. I remember that the school also had a big courtyard where we played as children. The school also had this one large hall that was used for prayers on Friday and Saturday. People prayed there on the stairs, and not in the Neolog synagogue. But back to the school. It was a school with three classrooms. First Grade was separate. Grades 2 and 3 were together, and so were Grades 4 and 5.

Already back in people's school I met some girls with whom I was later very good friends. As I was attending a Jewish people's school, they were of course Jewish girls. We'd get together whenever we could, and spent our free time together. We'd always meet on Saturday afternoon, and talk about all sorts of things. About three or four of us would get together, and we'd discuss anything that came along. This habit lasted even after the war, even though only a few of us survived.

After finishing Neolog people's school, I started attending state council school [9](#), also in Presov. I wasn't able to attend high school, as there you had to pay. When I started attending council school, my sister Annuska had just finished it. She was an excellent student, and the principal assumed that with me it would be similar. He wasn't wrong. I liked school a lot. I did well there, and liked to study. I did well, and the principal and I were discussing my transferring to high school, as I was excellent at math. I also liked Slovak, and recited a lot. I also had a talent for singing. In signing class I sang everything from soprano to third voice. Wherever they needed someone to help out in singing class, or to sing something, my teacher put me there.

But one semester in council school it happened that all the girls got a B in behavior. You see, I attended a girls-only class at council school. And all of us got a B because the teacher hadn't shown up for class and we were talking. We weren't making noise. But when she entered the

classroom, one of our classmates was imitating her, and we were laughing. Our classmate was pretending she was the teacher: "Students, stand up!" She was trying her best to imitate her, and we were all cracking up. Well, and right then the door opened and the teacher walked in. She saw that we were making fun of her and laughing at her, because she had a really strange voice and visage too. She of course became angry and so we all had a B in behavior on our Grade 5 mid-year report.

After finishing council school I very much wanted to go to Prague to study health care. I also spoke to the principal about it, but it was very difficult, as there was never any money at home. Back then I thought that I might be able to for example educate those classmates of mine that were from very poor families. Those that lived in even worse conditions, almost like Gypsies. They lived in terrible poverty. In these little houses. It's true that they were clean and all, but were very poor. And also thanks to this, many of them then became women of low morals and made a living by selling their bodies. Well, I wanted to improve this situation. I wanted better conditions for them. But when I confided in the principal and told him about my desire to go study in Prague, all he told me was: "So, Blanka. What'll we do? Your Dad's got no money." All that happened was that in the end I didn't go to Prague to study because: Dad didn't have any money.

Around when I was in kvarta [fourth of eight years in the secondary school system. The equivalent of Grade 8 - Translator's note], my father found me some students to tutor. I tutored them in math. They paid me 90 crowns a month for it, but the money didn't go to me, but my father. This was because he'd found the work and the students. Well, and I was left with nothing to do but silently accept it. We were living from hand to mouth, and we older ones had to contribute something to the family budget.

In my last year at council school, one more unpleasant thing happened to me. As I've already mentioned, we were an all-girls class. Well, I was sick for about a week, and so wasn't at school. There were around 36 of us girls, of that 12 were Jews, and we sat scattered about in various places in the classroom. When I returned to school after a week's sickness, the seating arrangement was different. I looked around the classroom, and all the Jewish girls were sitting together in the desks by the stove. I said to them, as I was used to: "Hey there! Did you leave a spot for me?" Well, because I was the shortest, they'd left me a place in the front desk. And I said to them: "What's up? Why did you sit here? Who sat you here? After all, we were sitting completely differently!" To that one of the girls answered me that one of our classmates, named XY, said that Jews stink, so all the Jewish girls had moved. I said: "Who? XY? All right!" I sat in the place that had been designated for me, and didn't say anything. Then came math. I was sitting in the front row, and who did the principal call out [to the blackboard] to answer a math question? XY! The classroom was quite small, and so was the space in front of the blackboard. I saw that XY had math formulas written out on her hand. At first I didn't say anything. I just watched her. But then I did something I'd never in my life done before. I yelled out to the entire class that she's got stuff written on her hands, and that she's cheating! All I remember now is that the principal took it relatively well, and perhaps even praised me. But I closed the whole thing off by us Jewish girls staying put there where we were, together. I told them: "No one's going to sit anywhere else. We'll sit here! We'll see who stinks!"

In the end, after finishing council school I decided to register at teaching academy. This academy was also in Presov, and had an excellent teaching staff. But getting into teaching academy was

very hard. You had to have connections. Because this school had an excellent reputation, it was attended by students from all over Slovakia and also Czechia. Really. I even had classmates from Prague.

The problem was also in that my father didn't want me to continue studying. He wanted me to find work and start making money. During my last month of school, when I was finishing council school, he took me out of school. He put me to work for the Schnitzers, as a bookkeeper. He didn't want me to go take the entrance exams for teaching academy at all. But in the end, due to many coincidences and circumstances, things ended up so that I did go take the teaching academy entrance exams. You see, my council school principal stood very much behind me. He believed in my abilities and knowledge, and supported me in my studies. The entrance exams took place on Saturday, but I couldn't be there that day, as I'd already started doing the accounting work. So the principal helped me again. He asked some inspector, and the lady principal of the teaching academy, whether I couldn't take the exams on Monday. I was supposed to pretend that I couldn't be there on Saturday because there was something wrong with my hand. When I arrived on Monday at the teaching institute, I had a bandaged hand, and when the principal of the academy came in, she asked me right away: "Friedmannova, your hand doesn't hurt anymore?" Even today I recall the feeling that washed over me then. Well, it was truly quite unpleasant. The exams themselves ended up well. I entered teaching academy in 1932, and finished it in 1936. It was a four-year school.

So I finished school at the age of 20. After that I was very rarely at home. Because as a teacher, the teaching inspectorate was moving me around to substitute and teach in various places. But I visited home during the holidays, but that was already during the time when various nationalist tendencies began to make themselves known in Presov as well. It for example happened that our former classmates would chase us off the Korzo [promenade]. For example, Christian boys, who before used to take us to cafés, would now chase us away off the Korzo, and forbid us to be there.

But back to my work. So in 1936, after finishing teaching academy, I got my first temporary position. The Presov council school was short of teachers, and the inspector asked me to go teach there. So I of course agreed. After all, why not? I was glad that I had work. The inspector already knew me, which is probably one of the reasons he asked me. But of course, at first this caused a commotion. The council school was state-run, and the classes I was supposed to teach were Catholic. So it bothered some people that a Jewish teacher would be teaching there. This quickly spread all over Presov. After all, almost the whole town knew Blanka Friedmannova. We lived downtown, on the main street. Children on the street were saying: "Friedmannova is going to be teaching us!" So I really did also start there. There was no rumpus or any problems in my class. In two weeks there, I built up respect. There was peace and quiet in my class. I didn't achieve it by yelling or something. At first I let them be, I let them talk, and then told them: "Imagine that you'd be standing here like this, in front of a class full of students. Just imagine that you'd be standing here." That's how I went at them. They of course got it, and treated me with respect. The second problem was the teachers at the council school. Those that before had taught me were now to be my colleagues. The very first day, when they were welcoming me, as I was standing there, I said to myself: "My dear fellow teachers. If I ever angered or upset you, please forgive me everything. I would never have done anything like that if I'd experienced what the behavior of students means to a teacher." Then they came up to me one after another, and told me that I hadn't been such a

bad student, after all. But one teacher came over to me and jokingly said: "But Blanka, I never pulled you by the ear. So I'll do it now." He came over to me and pretended to pull my ear a bit. So I've got on the whole nice memories of my first workplace. Even though I'm convinced that not everyone there was all that fond of me. But it was only a temporary position. I worked there for only a few weeks.

Then I started working at a Slovak people's school in Uzhorod [a town in Subcarpathian Ruthenia, see [10](#) - Editor's note], later in Somotor, and so on. They transferred us from place to place, wherever they needed us at the moment. When I taught in these various villages and small towns, I lived with my aunt and my Uncle Herman. She used to tell me about my mother and our family. Once on Saturday there was a day off. Her husband was working, and then went to church. To a Jewish one, of course. Well, and so my aunt says to me: "Blanka, come here. Here to the bed. We'll talk a bit." She began telling me about my mother. It's said that when my mother came from Poland, she was very beautiful. For two years she didn't wear a wig at all. She didn't even have one, as she wasn't used to anything like that from home. Her parents weren't as Orthodox as that, and didn't bring her up that way. And that apparently my mother had beautiful skin. She had a very pretty face and skin, and that it's said people used to come look and marvel at her. They wanted to know what she did to have such a pretty face. The apartment next door shared a bathroom with the apartment where my mother lived, and the neighbors used to come watch my mother comb her hair, and to see what she was putting on her face. Finally she began wearing a wig, I don't even know why. In the end my mother was the most religious of us all.

Let me add a little more information. From 1936, when I finished at the teaching academy and started in my first position at the Presov council school, I taught, as I've already mentioned, in Uzhorod, Somotor, and many other schools. They were schools where the teaching language was Slovak, but also Hungarian. I taught in Lemesany, and finally in 1939 I found myself in Giraltovce. But there that wasn't a school anymore, not in the proper sense. The school inspector placed me there, because he knew who and what I was [meaning he knew that she was Jewish - Editor's note]. He wanted to help me by doing this. So I started working there and taught Jewish children in a one-room schoolhouse.

### **During the war**

When the big witch-hunt for Jews started, and the first refugees from Poland started arriving, my Uncle Herman, whom I lived with, was hiding them. That's why I moved out of his place. All my expenses and expenditures were being paid by my cousin at the time, but back then I didn't know that yet. I'm very grateful to him for that. I'm just sorry that to this day I haven't been able to repay him. With the help of the Jewish Center [11](#) he obtained false papers for me. I've got them stored away to this day. My cousin helped me get all that. Otherwise, he was a dentist. I unfortunately can't remember his name. In any case, I've still got the papers, on the basis of which I was named a teacher in Giraltovce. They state that: On that basis of submitted ballots, approved by appropriate authority, it is proclaimed that I was elected as a regular teacher at the stated school. As a temporary employee. At the same time, I am notified that I am to commence work on 9th May 1939. And another document is from 1942, and contains this: For the teacher Blanka Friedmannova. To Giraltovce. Jewish people's schoolteacher in Giraltovce has been eliminated from Slovak scholastic life. This decision is valid until repealed. Well, and this and all the other documents I have from that time are false. My cousin helped me get them. He helped me and

many others get various papers and documents. In this fashion I got through almost the whole war in Giraltoyce under the protection of Uncle Herman, my cousin and one could say they school inspector too, who I've already mentioned. Because he knew who I was and where I was, and despite that protected me and didn't inform on me.

I didn't leave Giraltoyce until 1st May 1944. I was already in great danger, and my life was at stake. One document that I have from that time confirms this. The sender of the document is the Jewish Center, and is dated 11th May 1944. On the basis of a personal order of the Minister of the Interior, Section 14, we confirm that Friedmannova, Blanka born 17th May 1916, the last resident of Giraltoyce, fulfilled the mandatory registration ordered by the Minister of the Interior, and registered in the registry of Jews evacuated from the Saris-Zemplin district, currently residing in Bratislava. So I really do have all necessary palpable facts stored away for these reminiscences of mine.

But even before that, I received one document dated 9th May 1944. It was issued by the scholastic and cultural department of the Jewish Center in Bratislava. It stated that: We take due note of the forced departure of the Jewish population of the Saris-Zemplin district, and based on this, as a public Jewish people's school teacher in Giraltoyce, your temporary job location has been chosen to be the people's school in Hlohovec. The Vranov nad Toplou School Board. So this came from the inspectorate. The inspector there helped me quire a bit too. He for example came to Giraltoyce for an inspection, and said: "Tell that Jewish teacher to come see me." I went to see him, and he began talking to me normally about everything. He talked to me as an equal. There was no innuendo, and all the while everyone thought how devoted he was to the regime of the time.

### **The National Slovak Uprising**

In any case, I'll only add that I never started as a teacher in Hlohovec, but just registered there. I was afraid to stay there, because there was one policeman there who'd been in Giraltoyce before. They'd transferred him there shortly before my arrival. I thought that he could recognize me and cause me problems. But as I later found out, it was precisely that policeman who was supposed to protect me. He was a reliable person. But how was I supposed to know that, when no one told me? So I played it safe and left Hlohovec. I arrived in Bratislava in May 1944, and then joined the Slovak National Uprising [12](#).

There were also other events that preceded my joining the Slovak National Uprising. While I was still living in Giraltoyce, I was in touch with my brother Bernat. Upon returning from France, he'd become an active member of the Communist Party. I knew about it of course, but at first I myself didn't participate in the uprising or the party. It was only later that various small tasks came, that needed to be performed. To deliver something someplace, make contact with someone, and similar activities. I had nothing against it. I knew that I had to join this party. There were laborers and similar people there, and these people were sympathetic to me. At some point during that time my brother also changed his name from Bernat Friedmann to Stefan Kubik. It was for one because of false papers, but also for other reasons. After the war he didn't change his name back anymore.

Before I got to Banska Bystrica and joined the uprising there, I had to absolve the dangerous journey from Bratislava to there. Trains in those days were running irregularly, so it was very hard. I got lucky and traveled together with one friend, who later became the president of the Central Union of Jewish Religious Communities of Czechoslovakia. I got money for the trip from partisans. It



was 150 crowns, and a certain man from Piestany brought it to me. So that friend of mine and I set out for Banska Bystrica. As I've already mentioned, trains were already by then not running, or if they were, then only sporadically. So we took one train to at least Zlate Moravce. We got off at the station there, and were thinking about what to do next. We didn't know anyone in the region; we had no one to contact. So we went to a hotel and pretended we were going to a wedding. We of course each asked for our own room for the night. The next morning the chambermaid came up to me and said to me: "But you didn't sleep here, the two of you slept together, right?" They thought we'd slept together, and I didn't want to have to explain anything, so I just told her: "Yes, but don't tell anyone." Back then there really was no point in explaining to some strange woman how and what. From Zlate Moravce we eventually got to Zvolen, and from there to Banska Bystrica.

In Banska Bystrica I went right away to report to the Central Committee of the Communist Party. I didn't know anyone there yet, but they knew about me and were expecting me. When I arrived there, Smidke [Smidke, Karol (1897 - 1952): Communist politician. One of the main figures in the Slovak National Uprising - Editor's note], Bacilek [Bacilek, Karol (1896 - 1974): Communist politician. Bore a significant amount of responsibility for the repressions at the beginning of the 1950s (see [1](#)) - Editor's note] were there, plus one more. I've unfortunately since forgotten his name, but I do know that he was a professor. They asked me whether I'd come to see Husak [13](#). But I didn't know him, neither before nor after that, and really, I don't regret it. He was an anti-Semite, who had an appalling attitude towards Jews. But enough about that. Smidke and the other two told me that I was late, because the connection going to eastern Slovakia had left about a quarter hour earlier, and so I had to stay in Banska Bystrica. You see, I had hoped to be able to get all the way to Giraltovce.

So there was nothing I could do. I didn't know what to do now, and they told me: "Don't worry. You'll go identify yourself, and after confirmation you'll go work somewhere." So I went out onto the street, and suddenly I hear: "Friedmannova!" and I turn around had say: "My God, Oskar Jelen!" It was a teacher from our teaching academy. He hated me! His sister, she worshipped me. But at that moment he was so glad to see me that he was almost beside himself. I told him: "But I don't have any proof it's me." [meaning that she didn't have her papers, and thus couldn't identify herself - Editor's note]. At that time he was a major functionary, so he gave me confirmation that he knew me personally, and that I was a teacher. Right away they also gave me ID papers, and sent me to go work at the Education Commission, despite the fact that I was a teacher. I worked at that commission in Banska Bystrica until 28th October 1944. At that time the Slovak National Uprising was crushed, and we had to go hide in the mountains.

There were three of us that went together. A girlfriend of mine originally from Bardejov, my cousin Hersi [Hersl (Herschel)] and I. No one else. At first we hid out in a hayloft up above Selce for six days. From there we set out for a nearby village, Nemce. Not directly for the village, but up above the village there was this shelter built by shepherds, and that's where we stayed. Well, and I had with me my own ID for one, and my Party ID for another. I thought that it would be best to get rid of them, which is also what I did. I said to myself: "Where am I, what am I? I don't know. So I'd rather not have any papers." Finally we went down to the village. We were already sure that there were no Germans or Hungarians there. I stayed there with the Kabanov family up until 25th March 1945, when Banska Bystrica was liberated by Soviet and Romanian soldiers.

## **After the war**

When the soldiers arrived in Nemce, they wanted food. But people didn't want to give too much of what little they had. These soldiers put me in charge of finding them food. So I went from house to house and asked for potatoes. Really, to some of them I had to emphatically say: "All right, you've got two possibilities, either you'll give them the potatoes, or we'll do it another way and call the Germans back." But in the end they gave as much as they could. It's true that some of these soldiers weren't all good either. One, I don't even know his name anymore, once began to make advances to me. So I quickly told him that if he wants to eat, he'd better keep his hands as far as he can from me. And he really did leave me be. I was talking with him some more after that, and he says to me: "You're Jewish, aren't you?" And to this I said to him: "Well, yes. We're Jews." Then I said to him: "But listen, the way you talk, did you study German?" To this he says to me that: "Yes. Ich spreche ein bisschen deutsch." I say: "Know what? I'll tell you something my dear boy, you're a Jew." I based it on the fact that he spoke German. Russians didn't usually speak this language. He looked at me oddly, and said to me: "I was in Hungary, as many women as I wanted, I had. You're the first who told me that if I wanted to eat I should keep my hands off. So I said to myself that only a Jewess that stayed alive could have this kind of courage." Yes, I had even this kind of encounter. By then the end of the war was approaching, and I set out for the east, for home.

On my way, I met some girls in the Tatras who were returning home from the Polish prison camps. It was already evening, and we laid down to sleep. Suddenly someone says to me: "You're Blanka Friedmannova." I said: "All right, but who're you?" She said to me: "I'm a girl from Bratislava who they banished, and Jews from Bratislava were banished to the East. At that time when they banished me to the East, they allocated someone to each family. I was with your family. You were there once too, and that's how we met." We'd been together for such a short time, that it really couldn't occur to me who it was. Right away she told me that my father had died of natural causes before they managed to deport him. I can't even describe how much we wept that night, and how awful we felt. The next day I kept going, because I was curious who had survived, and was hoping to find at least Bernat in Presov. I knew that all my sisters had been in camps, and didn't have much hope anymore. During the whole way I didn't meet any soldiers. Everywhere I just read: Beware of mines and grenades!

Finally I got to Presov. I knew that Bernat was there too, because on the way I'd already met a couple of people who'd come out of their hiding places and told me. A bit before Presov, I stopped a military vehicle and the soldiers took me to town. They let me off in the street and didn't give a hoot what would be with me. I found myself on the main street, and suddenly the manager of one store walked out and said to me: "Blanka!" It was already dark, as it was late in the evening, and then he said: "Jesus, is your brother going to be glad." He told me where I'd find Bernat, though at that time he was already named Kubik. Finally he told me that my brother was at a café, and that he'd rather go get him. He brought Bernat, and I can't even describe how glad we were to see each other. We wept. We wept horribly, horribly, over the loss of our family, but at the same time we were glad that we had at least each other. My brother then took me with him, because he already had a place to live. He took me to a place where partisans and returnees from the camps or the front were staying, and that's where we slept.

After a couple of weeks, my brother managed to find an apartment, where we then lived together. After some time our sister Matilda got in touch with us. She wrote us a letter that she was alive and was coming home. She didn't know if any of us were alive. Finally she returned home in September

1945. It was a beautiful reunion. What had happened with my sister was that she was the only one whom my father hadn't hidden from the deportations, because he thought that they wouldn't take her because of her broken nose. That was a mistake. In the end she was the first one to be deported. Our father blamed himself for it and couldn't come to terms with it. In the end my sister survived three and a half years of hell in the Auschwitz concentrations camp. After returning home she also changed her name, to Kubikova. Her plan was to emigrate as soon as possible.

I had in the meantime married Miroslav Dvorsky, on 11th September 1945. My husband's original name was Moric Moskovic. Like me, he was also a Jew. He was two years older than I, and was born in 1914. He was from Brezovice, near Sabinov. We had a civil wedding. Neither my husband nor I were interested in a clerical wedding, and we didn't observe any Jewish traditions in our household.

As I've already hinted with regards to my sister, she had decided to go to Yugoslavia. But first she finished school and wrote her high school exams, because back in 1939, the same as other Jews, they'd expelled her from school [14](#). But to be able to leave she needed a certain amount of money. So my husband and I gave her a certain sum, along with various things for the household, so that she'd have everything she'd need. But in the end what happened was that they stole it from her at the station in Prague. Ultimately she stayed in Prague and even studied there for a while, but didn't finish the school. After that I didn't keep close tabs on her life. My sister married her friend of long years, from back in the days of the Hashomer [15](#). He was an excellent chemist. But the both of them having experienced the horrors of the Holocaust and camps firsthand scarred their marriage. My sister to this day lives in the same town as I do, but we don't have a very close relationship.

Now back to my family, which I started with Miroslav Dvorsky. You see, I had originally not wanted to get married at all. Around me I saw many marriages that hadn't ended well. Be it before the war or after it. But when we knew that my sister was alive and returning home, we wanted her to have a home. My husband and I had met back when he was still a student at a Protestant high school. He wasn't my type at all. He'd been in love with this one girl in school. She wasn't Jewish, but a Christian, though that wasn't the reason why there weren't together. She got married. Then came the war, my husband was a soldier.

In any case, my husband and I lived in Presov in our apartment. In 1946 our first son was born, and we named him Peter. Three years later, our second son, Juraj, was born. Also in Presov. We didn't raise our sons in a Jewish spirit at all. We didn't observe any holidays, neither Jewish nor Christian ones. I said to myself: "Religion is a private matter. It's my thing, and it's not anyone's business." But one evening, it was shortly after the end of the war, a few of us that were Jewish met at a friend's apartment, and celebrated Passover. We asked my brother to lead it. We didn't invite any Christians, and were all only Jews there. We made seder supper [Seder: a term for home religious services and the prescribed ritual for the first night of Passover - Editor's note]. We weren't even halfway through the celebration, when the chairman of the regional national committee and the party chairman showed up and told us: "So, you're having fun here like this, and outside there are Banderites [16](#)" Those were these Russians deserters and soldiers who were causing trouble in Presov. They were such swine that for example right during the first Easter after the war, they killed two young Jewish girls in Presov. These swine got fed by Jews, and then went to beat them.

Shortly after arriving in Presov, I went to work for the Party. I had already officially joined the Communist Party back in Banska Bystrica. Then I worked for the party, and became the chairman

of the Women's Union. I did this until I left for Bratislava, which was in 1950. While I was still in Presov, I had two small children and I worked, well, simply put I had quite a lot of responsibilities. But in that union we accomplished a lot, especially with village women. We taught them to express themselves correctly, when to act a certain way, what to say on which occasion. Yes, we were a good bunch, and accomplished a lot.

My husband also had a lot to do. In 1949 they transferred him, and he worked in Bratislava as the director of a meatpacking plant. He was in charge of the nationalization of meatpacking plants [17](#). That took place in August 1949. But my husband came home to Presov every week. This was because we had to stay there for the time being, as we had no place to live in Bratislava. But after some time my husband managed to arrange a beautiful apartment in Malinovskeho St. So then in 1950 we all moved in there together.

Our good fortune didn't last long. That is, in 1951 they put my husband in jail. They made up various accusations and put him in jail for eleven months. This was because they didn't have anything to prove him guilty. The same fate met my brother as well. However, he was in jail for a lot longer. He was jailed from 1951 until 1954. He did his time in the prison in Ruzyne [in Prague]. Then he was released, the false charges were dropped, and he was rehabilitated. Really, that Jewish witch-hunt and the whole affair with the Slansky trials [1](#) changed my outlook on things. When my husband and brother were in jail, I tried as best I could, and was arranging various things. I wanted them to be home from jail as soon as possible. On top of that it was very hard, because I had to cover the whole household and all expenses with my one teacher's salary.

In Bratislava I at first worked for the Industry Commission [in post-war Czechoslovakia, starting in 1948, ministries were created in the Czech portion. Their equivalents in Slovakia were commissions – Editor's note]. Originally they'd wanted to employ me as the head secretary of the Bratislava Women's Union, but I refused the job. So in the end I began working for the Industry Commission. I liked the work there a lot; the work there really went well. But then, when they threw my husband in jail, I had to leave this job.

I started working at Zdroj [Zdroj: a retail grocery store chain – Editor's note]. First I wrote various memos and letters for inspectors that made the rounds to check up on things. But after a short while they realized that it was a shame to waste me on that kind of work, that I was capable of more. So the director himself pushed me through and arranged for me to take care of accounts. But by then it was already 1951, my husband had already been in jail for several months, and I'd already been notified that he was supposed to be released. So I went to the Central Committee of the Party. I went there to see someone I knew from back in Banska Bystrica, but today I don't remember his name anymore. So he told me: "All right, you know what? You'll go and teach at school. You'll go to the Ministry of Education and arrange it there. There's a certain XY there, you'll tell him that I sent you, and he'll give you some sort of position." It took a while, but in the end they found a teaching job for me.

In 1951 I began working at the Red Army elementary school as a math teacher. It was an eight-year elementary school, and I then taught there until retirement. Right the first year I was teaching children math, I began to prepare them for the math Olympics. I prepared them so well, that they placed very well, as excellent solvers of math problems. As soon as that happened, I got a good name in the school. I always knew how to deal with children, and they didn't give me any problems.

They respected me and I got along with them excellently.

As far as my colleagues at work go, right at the beginning I made it clear who I was and what I was, to avoid any unnecessary misunderstandings. I think that they took it relatively well. Later they told me: "You were the only one where we always knew you were Jewish." And to this I told them: "All right." And they continued: "Because when you first introduced yourself, you said - I'm hereby notifying you that I'm of Jewish origin." I taught there until I was supposed to retire. I'd been working there for almost thirty years, 27 to be exact, and I could leave for a well-deserved rest. I retired in 1978.

My husband finally returned from jail after 11 months. They didn't have any evidence against him, so they had to let him go. It was hard. Alone with two kids. I didn't have even a crown to spare. I lived from paycheck to advance, and many times I also had to borrow money from someone. After returning home, my husband had to undergo re-education as a laborer, and then worked as a common laborer. After a certain time the political situation settled down. It was found that they'd blackened and accused him of things that he'd never done, and transferred him to a different location. He began working for Hydrostav [Hydrostav: in the past one of the largest construction companies in Slovakia - Editor's note]. His job there was better than as just a laborer.

My husband didn't live to be able to retire. He became ill and before he could enjoy a bit of peace and quiet, he died. That took place in 1971. He's buried in Bratislava. After my husband's death, I moved from the apartment in Malinovskeho St. to the apartment I live in now. This apartment is just right for me. It has two rooms, but that's enough for me, because I'm here alone. I've got a kitchen, a room for when company comes over, so a living room, and a bedroom. The furniture is according to my own tastes, and I feel good here.

Both my sons graduated successfully from university. The older, Peter, graduated from electrical engineering in Bratislava, and the younger, Juraj, from architecture. Also in Bratislava. Both of them are very clever and like every mother, I'm proud of my children. After finishing school, both sons got married and started their own families.

### **Glossary:**

1 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.



## **2 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.

## **3 Orthodox Jewish dress**

Main characteristics of observant Jewish appearance and dresses: men wear a cap or hat while women wear a shawl (the latter is obligatory in case of married women only). The most peculiar skull-cap is called kippah (other name: yarmulkah) (kapedli in Yiddish), worn by men when they leave the house, reminding them of the presence of God and thus providing spiritual protection and safety. Orthodox Jewish women had their hair shaved and wore a wig. In addition, Orthodox Jewish men wear a tallit (Hebrew term) (talles in Yiddish) [prayer shawl] and its accessories all day long under their clothes but not directly on their body. Wearing payes (Yiddish term) (payot in Hebrew) [long sideburns] is linked with the relevant prohibition in the Torah [shaving or trimming the beard as well as the hair around the head was forbidden]. The above habits originate from the Torah and the Shulchan Arukh. Other pieces of dresses, the kaftan [Russian, later Polish wear] among others, thought to be typical, are an imitation. According to non-Jews these characterize the Jews while they are not compulsory for the Jews.

## **4 Kashrut in eating habits**

kashrut means ritual behavior. A term indicating the religious validity of some object or article according to Jewish law, mainly in the case of foodstuffs. Biblical law dictates which living creatures are allowed to be eaten. The use of blood is strictly forbidden. The method of slaughter is prescribed, the so-called shechitah. The main rule of kashrut is the prohibition of eating dairy and meat products at the same time, even when they weren't cooked together. The time interval between eating foods differs. On the territory of Slovakia six hours must pass between the eating of a meat and dairy product. In the opposite case, when a dairy product is eaten first and then a meat product, the time interval is different. In some Jewish communities it is sufficient to wash out one's mouth with water. The longest time interval was three hours – for example in Orthodox communities in Southwestern Slovakia.

## **5 Masaryk, Tomas Garrigue (1850-1937)**

Czechoslovak political leader and philosopher and chief founder of the First Czechoslovak Republic. He founded the Czech People's Party in 1900, which strove for Czech independence within the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, for the protection of minorities and the unity of Czechs and Slovaks. After the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy in 1918, Masaryk became the first president of Czechoslovakia. He was reelected in 1920, 1927, and 1934. Among the first acts of his

government was an extensive land reform. He steered a moderate course on such sensitive issues as the status of minorities, especially the Slovaks and Germans, and the relations between the church and the state. Masaryk resigned in 1935 and Edvard Benes, his former foreign minister, succeeded him.

## **6 Benes, Edvard (1884-1948)**

Czechoslovak politician and president from 1935-38 and 1946-48. He was a follower of T. G. Masaryk, the first president of Czechoslovakia, and the idea of Czechoslovakism, and later Masaryk's right-hand man. After World War I he represented Czechoslovakia at the Paris Peace Conference. He was Foreign Minister (1918-1935) and Prime Minister (1921-1922) of the new Czechoslovak state and became president after Masaryk retired in 1935. The Czechoslovak alliance with France and the creation of the Little.

## **7 First Czechoslovak Republic (1918-1938)**

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

## **8 Spanish Civil War (1936-39)**

A civil war in Spain, which lasted from July 1936 to April 1939, between rebels known as Nacionales and the Spanish Republican government and its supporters. The leftist government of the Spanish Republic was besieged by nationalist forces headed by General Franco, who was backed by Nazi Germany and fascist Italy. Though it had Spanish nationalist ideals as the central cause, the war was closely watched around the world mainly as the first major military contest between left-wing forces and the increasingly powerful and heavily armed fascists. The number of people killed in the war has been long disputed ranging between 500,000 and a million.

## **9 People's and Public schools in Czechoslovakia**

In the 18th century the state intervened in the evolution of schools – in 1877 Empress Maria Theresa issued the Ratio Educationis decree, which reformed all levels of education. After the passing of a law regarding six years of compulsory school attendance in 1868, people's schools were fundamentally changed, and could now also be secular. During the First Czechoslovak Republic, the Small School Law of 1922 increased compulsory school attendance to eight years. The lower grades of people's schools were public schools (four years) and the higher grades were council schools. A council school was a general education school for youth between the ages of 10

and 15. Council schools were created in the last quarter of the 19th century as having 4 years, and were usually state-run. Their curriculum was dominated by natural sciences with a practical orientation towards trade and business. During the First Czechoslovak Republic they became 3-year with a 1-year course. After 1945 their curriculum was merged with that of lower gymnasium. After 1948 they disappeared, because all schools were nationalized.

## **10 Subcarpathian Ruthenia**

is found in the region where the Carpathian Mountains meet the Central Dnieper Lowlands. Its larger towns are Beregovo, Mukacevo and Hust. Up until the First World War the region belonged to the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, but in the year 1919, according to the St. Germain peace treaty, was made a part of Czechoslovakia. Exact statistics regarding ethnic and linguistic composition of the population aren't available. Between the two World Wars Ruthenia's inhabitants included Hungarians, Ruthenians, Russians, Ukrainians, Czechs and Slovaks, plus numerous Jewish and Gypsy communities. The first Viennese Arbitration (1938) gave Hungary that part of Ruthenia inhabited by Hungarians. The remainder of the region gained autonomy within Czechoslovakia, and was occupied by Hungarian troops. In 1944 the Soviet Army and local resistance units took power in Ruthenia. According to an agreement dated June 29, 1945, Czechoslovakia ceded the region to the Soviet Union. Up until 1991 it was a part of the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic. After Ukraine declared its independence, it became one of the country's administrative regions.

## **11 Jewish Center**

its creation was closely tied to Dieter Wisliceny, German advisor for resolution of Jewish affairs, a close colleague of Eichmann. Wisliceny arguments for the creation of a Jewish Center were that it will act as a partner in negotiation regarding the eviction of Jews, that for those that due to Aryanization will be removed from their current positions, it will secure re-schooling for other occupations. The Jewish Center's jurisdiction was determined by the scope and regulations of the particular instance it fell under. This fact fundamentally influenced the center's operation. It limited the freedom of activity of individual clerks. The center's personnel was made up of three categories of people. From bureaucrats, who in their approach to the obeying of orders did more harm than good (second head clerk of the Jewish Center A. Sebestyen), further of those that saw the purpose of their activities foremost in the selfless helping of people who were the most afflicted by the persecutions (G. Fleischmannova), and finally of soulless executors of orders, who were really capable of doing everything (K. Hochberg). Besides the Jewish Center there was also the Work Group, led by the Orthodox rabbi M. Weissmandel, but whose real leader was the Zionist G. Fleischmannova. Though Weissmandel wasn't a member of the Jewish Center, he was such a respected personage that it would be difficult to imagine rescue missions being carried out without him. The main activity of the Work Group was to save as many Jews as possible from deportation. Of those in the Work Group, O. Neumann, A. Steiner and Rabbi Weissmandel and Neumann survived. In the last phase of activity of this underground group Neumann, who also became the chairman of the Jewish Center, lived in Israel. Steiner and Rabbi Weissmandel emigrated to Canada and the USA. Weissmandel and Neumann wrote their memoirs, in which they quite justifiably asked the question if the Jewish Center and especially the Work Group hadn't remained indebted towards Jewish citizens.

## **12 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.

## **13 Husak, Gustav (1913-1991)**

entered into politics already in the 1930s as a member of the Communist Party. Drew attention to himself in 1944, during preparations for and course of the Slovak National Uprising. After the war he filled numerous party positions, but of special importance was his chairmanship of the Executive Committee during the years 1946 to 1950. His activities in this area were aimed against the Democratic Party, the most influential force in Slovakia. In 1951 he was arrested, convicted of bourgeois nationalism and in April 1954 sentenced to life imprisonment. Long years of imprisonment, during which he acted courageously and which didn't end until 1960, neither broke Husak's belief in Communism, nor his desire to excel. He used the relaxing of conditions at the beginning of 1968 for a vigorous return to political life. Because he had gained great confidence and support in Slovakia, on the wishes of Moscow he replaced Alexander Dubcek in the function of First Secretary of the Czechoslovak Communist Party. More and more he gave way to Soviet pressure and approved mass purges in the Communist Party. When he was elected president on 29th May 1975, the situation in the country was seemingly calm. The Communist Party leaders were under the impression that given material sufficiency, people will reconcile themselves with a lack of political and intellectual freedom and a worsening environment. In the second half of the 1980s social crises deepened, multiplied by developments in the Soviet Union. Husak had likely imagined the end of his political career differently. In December 1987 he resigned from his position as General Secretary of the Communist Party, and on 10th December 1989 as a result of the revolutionary events also abdicated from the presidency. Symbolically, this happened on Human Rights Day, and immediately after he was forced to appoint a government of 'national reconciliation.' The foundering of his political career quickened his physical end. Right before his death he reconciled himself with the Catholic Church. He died on 18th February 1991 in Bratislava.

## **14 Jewish Codex**

Order no. 198 of the Slovakian government, issued in September 1941, on the legal status of the Jews, went down in history as Jewish Codex. Based on the Nuremberg Laws, it was one of the most stringent and inhuman anti-Jewish laws all over Europe. It paraphrased the Jewish issue on a racial basis, religious considerations were fading into the background; categories of Jew, Half Jew, moreover 'Mixture' were specified by it. The majority of the 270 paragraphs dealt with the transfer of Jewish property (so-called Aryanizing; replacing Jews by non-Jews) and the exclusion of Jews from economic, political and public life.

## **15 Hashomer Hatzair in Slovakia**

the Hashomer Hatzair movement came into being in Slovakia after WWI. It was Jewish youths from Poland, who on their way to Palestine crossed through Slovakia and here helped to found a Zionist youth movement, that took upon itself to educate young people via scouting methods, and called itself Hashomer (guard). It joined with the Kadima (forward) movement in Ruthenia. The combined movement was called Hashomer Kadima. Within the membership there were several ideologues that created a dogma that was binding for the rest of the members. The ideology was based on Borchov's theory that the Jewish nation must also become a nation just like all the others. That's why the social pyramid of the Jewish nation had to be turned upside down. He claimed that the base must be formed by those doing manual labor, especially in agriculture – that is why young people should be raised for life in kibbutzim, in Palestine. During its time of activity it organized six kibbutzim: Shaar Hagolan, Dfar Masaryk, Maanit, Haogen, Somrat and Lehavot Chaviva, whose members settled in Palestine. From 1928 the movement was called Hashomer Hatzair (Young Guard). From 1938 Nazi influence dominated in Slovakia. Zionist youth movements became homes for Jewish youth after their expulsion from high schools and universities. Hashomer Hatzair organized high school courses, re-schooling centers for youth, summer and winter camps. Hashomer Hatzair members were active in underground movements in labor camps, and when the Slovak National Uprising broke out, they joined the rebel army and partisan units. After liberation the movement renewed its activities, created youth homes in which lived mainly children who returned from the camps without their parents, organized re-schooling centers and branches in towns. After the putsch in 1948 that ended the democratic regime, half of Slovak Jews left Slovakia. Among them were members of Hashomer Hatzair. In the year 1950 the movement ended its activity in Slovakia.

## **16 Banderites**

members of Ukrainian military fascist units during World War II. Were active in the former Soviet Union, Poland and Czechoslovakia. Their name comes from the name of their leader, Stepan Bandera (1919 – 1959). Bandera units took advantage of the unstable postwar situation. They attacked, stole and murdered the local population until November 1947, when their activities were completely suppressed.

## **17 Nationalization in Czechoslovakia**

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



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