

Petr Ginz At School



This picture was taken in 1936 at the Jewish elementary school on Jachymova Street in Prague. It's a picture of my brother Petr Ginz' 2nd grade classroom. The teacher, in the center, is Stela Bergerova, who later married the famous writer Viktor Fischl (Avigdor Dagan). She was a great teacher and Petr was her favourite pupil. Petr is the second boy on the right from the teacher, the one with the braces. My brother was born in 1928 in Prague. Our childhood was more or less the same. Petr was two years older and I loved him very much. He had his bar mitzvah in the Maisel Synagogue in Prague, I remember that afterwards there was a small celebration at home with relatives, and a chocolate cake. Petr was a talented boy, and when Jews were no longer being accepted at high school, my parents put him in a school named the Experimental School, in Nusle. It was a special school for talented children where they were attempting to teach with not completely conventional methods. Our parents thought that here his talent would take root and develop. But soon after they threw Petr out of this school as well, because of his Jewish origin. My brother was always very curious and Mother and Father supported education. Petr began to write already as a child; he wrote many articles, stories and poems. He drew a lot as well. He wrote several short stories from the age of 11 to 12: 'Ferda's Adventures', 'From Prague to China', 'Journey to the Center of the Earth', which belong to Yad Vashem in Jerusalem, and later from the ages of 13 to 14, more voluminous novels, 'The Secret of the Devil's Cave', 'The Wise Man of Altai', 'Around the World in a Second' and 'A Visit from Prehistoric Times'. Somewhere Petr notes that he's already got 260 pages of 'The Wise Man of Altai' finished. Unfortunately only 'A Visit from Prehistoric Times' survived, the rest of the later novels was lost. But perhaps, like his diaries, those works will also surface somewhere. I own 'A Visit from Prehistoric Times'. Like every young boy, he liked to read Verne's novels full of fantasy. Petr imagined that he had found a forgotten novel of Verne's, in the attic of Verne's old apartment building, translated it from French to Czech, and that he's presenting it for the first time to Czech readers. It's about some prehistoric reptile that lives somewhere in the Belgian Congo. In the novel he describes this monster, which is in reality a large robot, controlled by a dictator who through it wants to dominate the entire continent, and all of

Africa is terrified of it. It's an analogy to Hitler and is relatively long. Petr bound and illustrated the book himself. He wrote the novel shortly before he was transported away in 1942, so he wasn't yet 14 at the time.