

# Ruth Goetzova

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Prague

Czech Republic

Interviewer: Pavla Neuner

Date of interview: October 2004



Mrs. Goetzova lives in one of Prague's housing estates in a smaller apartment that she likes very much. Our interview took place in a comfortable living room. Mrs. Goetzova's life history is very interesting and her telling of it was very engaging. Mrs. Goetzova comes across as a fragile, but very energetic and cheerful person.

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## **My family background**

My grandfather on my mother's side was named Jindrich Krauskopf and was born in the year 1872 in Otice, near Klatovy. I don't know what level of education he achieved, but I know for certain that he didn't go to university. He lived with my grandmother in Prague, in the beginning on Vodickova Street. In those days they began from zero, they sewed caps and jackets and other things for newborns and gradually worked their way up, until my grandfather opened a cap and hat factory in Vysehrad in Prague. [Editor's note: Vysehrad is a historical quarter of Prague, part of the Prague 2 municipality. Vysehrad lies on a marked area of heights on the right bank of the Vltava River.] The company had an English name, ERKA CAP. ERKA was a trademark that came from the initials of grandfather's son Rudolf Krauskopf. The factory sewed on a large scale; we had many sales representatives that traveled throughout the whole country. The factory itself had around 200 employees.

I remember that we even had the honor to sew caps for President Masaryk [1](#). In March, for his birthday, we sent three so-called Masaryk caps in white, dark blue and black to the Castle. The caps were sent in a special box covered in gold paper with three drawers, one for each cap. [Editor's note: The Prague Castle was from the end of the 9th century the center of Czech statehood, the seat of Czech princes and kings, twice the seat of Germano-Roman emperors, the seat of presidents of the CSR, CSSR, CSFR and CR. The Castle was founded as the fortress of the

Premyslids, probably in the 80s of the 9th century by Prince Borivoj.].

The shipping department was in the factory courtyard, while production was on the first and second floors, which were large, long halls, with two rows of machines. In the center were troughs where the seamstresses put their finished products. I remember that while they were working, the seamstresses had their feet on pedals that looked like footrests. The women lived mostly outside of Prague and commuted to work. The workshops had huge iron stoves, which had to be stoked on winter mornings. I recall how my grandfather insisted that when the women arrived at work, each of them had two hot bricks wrapped in cloth on their pedal. More than twenty years ago it happened to me that some woman stopped me on the street and said, 'You're a Krauskopf? You know, I'll never forget your grandfather, because he was the best boss that I ever had in my life.'

I think that my grandfather tended towards the Social Democrats, but I don't know if he was a member of some political party. He had a big hobby, which was his car, a Skoda Tatra [2](#). I recall that he had some special hood put on it. He would get up at seven in the morning and go to work. At eight thirty he would eat a soft-boiled egg and a biscuit with butter for breakfast. It was exactly on the half hour, and particularly soft-boiled as he liked to have it. At twelve he ate lunch and returned to the factory. He spent the whole day there, dressed in a work cloak and hat. At six was supper, for which he always changed into a suit, even though the two of us ate alone. In the evening he then read the papers or some book, listened to the radio and rested. My grandfather was a man with whom I knew that every Thursday this would be for dinner, and every Saturday that. Everything simply had to be exact and on time, otherwise it would annoy him terribly.

Grandpa had two brothers, Simon and Ludvik. In the spring my grandfather and I would always go visit them in Klatovy. They had their own families, but I don't know any more about them, just that they didn't survive the war [World War II].

My grandmother on my mother's side was named Anna, née Glucksmannova. I think that she was born sometime in the 1870s, in Horni Litvinov. I don't know anything about her family or possible siblings. I don't think that she had any sort of higher education. She was a Czech Jew; at home they made a point of speaking Czech.

Grandma ran the household. Although she used to go shopping at the market, she had a driver in livery for it. I don't know what sort of family she came from, but she was probably used to that. Once a week one of the seamstresses from the factory would come over and organize her wardrobe, do the laundry, ironing and sewing. Everyone in the factory liked my grandmother, as the kindly boss's wife. On her name day, St. Anna, the workers had a day off, a band was hired and there was a dance in the factory courtyard. My grandmother met with her friends, who were all of Jewish origin, in a coffee-house, which I recollect with horror, as my nanny used to take me there sometimes, and I then had to curtsy to each of the ladies and kiss their hand. Then I got something sweet and the nanny took me home again.

My grandmother was unfortunately ill; she had problems with her thyroid gland, which I've inherited from her. She died in Prague in 1932, when I was a little girl. She's buried in the Jewish cemetery.

My father was a German Jew named Georg Goetz. He lived in Chemnitz, Germany. He used to raise racehorses and also did harness racing. I don't know much about him. His parents were both Jews,

but I didn't know them at all. I don't know what sort of education my father had, or if he was religious. I have the impression that my parents met at some spa, where my mother used to accompany her mother.

After their wedding my mother moved to Chemnitz, where I was born and lived during my first four years. I remember being told that we had lived in some sort of villa, which was near a farmstead where my father raised his horses. Supposedly I was constantly under the supervision of a nanny and teacher, but once it happened that I found myself alone in the farm courtyard. They told me how I started running and fell into a cesspool of liquid horse manure. They pulled me out and put me in the tub, where they first rinsed me still dressed.

My parents' marriage didn't last long, and they divorced after four years. After that my mother returned with me to Prague, but my father didn't want to let my mother keep me. In the end they had to go to court, which decided that I would live with my grandmother and grandfather on my mother's side.

My father then remarried, but had no other children, so I remained his little girl. I liked him. Though Dad didn't come to Prague to visit me, my grandfather used to take me to the German border, where I saw my father several times. He died in 1934 in Chemnitz.

My mother was named Hilda, born Krauskopfova, in the year 1900 in Prague. She was a housewife. I don't know what sort of education she had. About a year after we returned to Prague from Germany, she married for a second time, a Czech Jew named Ota Las, who came from Serlovice near Tabor. He was born in 1898. They were married at the Old Town Hall in Prague, and didn't have a Jewish wedding. My stepfather and I got along very well; he treated me wonderfully. In 1930 my mother had a daughter, Vera, whom she loved very much.

Although my mother and I lived in the same building, we didn't see much of each other. I was with my grandfather, and my mother had started a new family. Our relationship was very unusual, and was far from a warm and cozy mother-daughter relationship. Later I always took care of her when it was necessary, because in the end she was my mother, but I don't remember her ever giving me a hug or kiss.

My stepfather had a brother, Robert, who had a Jewish wife. Both died [in the Holocaust].

My mother had a sister, Erna, and a brother, Rudolf. Erna was two years younger, was childless but married, her husband was named Oskar Kolb. Oskar was a Jew and worked as the director of a distillery. Aunt Erna was a housewife. Each Sunday my grandfather and I would pick up my Uncle Oskar and go to the cemetery to visit my grandmother, and on the way back we would have a mid-morning snack at my aunt's and would then continue on home for dinner. I remember that Aunt Erna had a dog. I don't think that Erna and Oskar were particularly religious, but for sure they at least went to synagogue for the high holidays. Oskar died before the transports; Erna was transported to Terezin [3](#) in the fall of 1942, and that same year further on, to the concentration camp Maly Trostinec [4](#), where she was shot.

Aunt Erna also used to have my grandfather's former cook, Baruska, who I liked very much. After the war Baruska used to visit me and each time she would bring me some family item of my aunt's. It was humorous that she would bring it to me as a gift, but even so I was ever so grateful for it,

because in this way I got to my things. I worked a lot, and Baruska always said that my grandmother must be turning over in her grave, when she sees how I slave away, and offered to come and help me out. After the war, Uncle Rudolf took her in, he was alone, so she took care of him, and he then made sure she was taken care of in her old age.

Uncle Rudolf was born in 1898 in Prague. His wife was Jewish, Aunt Lilly, born Rubinova in 1905. They had two sons, Pavel and Jiri. Jiri was born in 1926 and Pavel nine years later. Jiri and Pavel were like brothers to me, and my aunt meant more to me than my own mother. I loved her very much. They were my main family. Uncle Rudolf used to say: 'Every normal person marries a woman and has as many children with her as he himself wants. Instead of two children I have three, and instead of one woman two.' And then he would explain it: 'When we buy something for my children, Ruth has to get the same. And when my wife is having something sewn for her, the same has to be sewn for Ruth as well.'

I remember how my aunt and I once came to our tailor, and my aunt saw this beige 'koverkot,' a suit fabric. And she said: 'Mr. Beran, what beautiful fabric you have here.' And the tailor Beran answered: 'But madam, that's your husband's, he's having a suit made from it.' My aunt asked him to make suits for the two of us from it. And Mr. Beran answered: 'But that's for a suit and your husband is supposed to come in a week for a fitting.' To this my aunt said: 'Don't worry about that, I'll take care of it. And would it be enough for two suits?' And he says: 'Well, two suits could be made from it, yes.' - 'So make us two suits, and old Rudolf will just buy himself something else.'

Rudolf and his family lived in Prague. At first they lived with us in our house, but then they moved into a beautiful, large apartment, which was also in Vysehrad. They belonged to the wealthier part of society. Later Rudolf took over the factory from my grandfather, and proved to be very good at it. Rudolf would tell how Grandpa first sent him to some associate, who also owned a factory, so he could get himself some work experience. When Rudolf arrived for his first day of work, he was wearing a fancy suit and a hat. He came, introduced himself, and asked what it was that he was supposed to do. And the person told him: 'Well, in the first place, take those clothes off, put on some coveralls, and then you're going to go sweep the courtyard.'

Aunt Lilly came from a very rich family. Her father, Max Rubin, had a large carpet and linoleum store. They owned a corner building with an arcade on today's I.P. Pavlova Square in Prague. My aunt had a brother, Franta, who was born in 1898. When my aunt was getting married, she got a million crowns as her dowry from her father. Apparently both fathers were arguing about it, my grandfather was telling Lilly's father that he doesn't need his money, that he has his own and doesn't have to wait for some dowry, that Rudolf was marrying Lilly for love, and not for money. Lilly's father, on the other hand, was threatening that he won't allow the wedding if they don't take the dowry. There simply wasn't any sort of financial need [in those families].

I remember us going shopping, because Lilly wanted to buy a belt to go with her dress. A different one caught her eye, one which, however, didn't go with anything she already had, so she simply just ordered shoes and a handbag.

My aunt loved dogs and had Borzois. When they still lived in Vysehrad, all of a sudden, counting puppies, she had nine or ten. Of course she also employed a person to take care of the dogs. When she and Rudolf moved into their own place only one dog was left.

Aunt Lilly was unfortunately not healthy; she had cancer of the esophagus. As time progressed she wasn't able to eat any more, and I used to care for her and feed her. Unfortunately she also had skin cancer, which itched terribly. From 1941 we couldn't even have a nurse for her any more, who would have wanted to go work for Jews? She couldn't swallow anything any more, and in this state they transported her away to Terezin.

## Growing up

My childhood was beautiful and carefree. I lived with my grandfather, who took excellent care of me. We lived in the Vysehrad neighborhood of Prague; it's a beautiful place that I like to visit to this day. When you walk around Vysehrad, you can see out over all of Prague.

We lived right by the factory. It was a three-story residential apartment house with a garden. My grandfather had a five-room house on the first floor, and my mother and her family lived on the second floor. When Uncle Rudolf moved away with his family, my grandfather and I moved to the second floor into a smaller, three-room apartment, where the two of us each had his own room. I lived alone with my grandfather, because my grandmother died at the beginning of the 1930s.

The apartment also had a common dining room, and of course a hall and bathroom. We had electricity and running water, which was heated by a 'karma' [gas flow-heater]. I also recall there being a beautiful cast-iron 'American Heating' stove with mica windows. We had parquet floors, and some of the rooms were wallpapered. The original five-room apartment had an entrance from one of the rooms into the garden, which ended above the factory courtyard. The garden fence was covered with wild grapevine; there were flowerbeds, and at the end of the garden stood a beautiful gazebo.

On Friday everyone would meet at our place for supper. The whole family would be there, my mother, her husband, Lilly and Rudolf, and Erna with her husband. I don't think that we cooked kosher. I recall that we often had shoulet [chulent], but I didn't like it. We celebrated Jewish holidays, Chanukkah not very often, but Passover regularly. We had Passover supper; I recall hard-boiled eggs, matzot and vegetables. Grandfather was an expert at the Passover ritual. I fasted for the New Year, but as I was a child, for only a half day. And then I was once leaving the synagogue and saw my stepfather and my Uncle Rudolf, leaving a local butcher's with their mouths full.

My grandfather was likely a quite religious person. I remember that once at Christmas I wanted a tree, and he told me that he wouldn't have that in the apartment. But later I had that tree in the room that was used in the summer to enter to the garden, but wasn't used in the winter, and my grandfather made like he didn't know about it. With my grandfather, Christmas simply wasn't celebrated. But it was at Aunt Lilly's place. I've never since seen so many presents as at her place during Christmas. The room would be so full that there was no place to stand. There were presents for everyone, including the staff.

My grandfather was as precise as a Swiss watch, and he lived his life with the same precision. Every Sunday we would go visit my grandmother's grave with Uncle Oskar, and would return before noon. On the way back we would stop at the 'U Mysaka' pastry shop on Vodickova Street. Grandpa would wait for me in the car while I went inside and politely greeted Mrs. Mysakova, who sat behind the till. She would turn to the sales clerk, and tell her to wrap me a slice of cake, then a cream puff with whipped cream and caramel, which was what I liked most, and then something for

the cook. Every Sunday it was the same piece of cake.

At twelve noon I had to be sitting down at lunch, and at one o'clock we would be leaving on the train to Lounovice by Jevany, which is a smaller village about 20 kilometers from Prague. It's a place that I love to this day. From the time I was in first grade I used to spend my summer vacation there, and spent my beautiful childhood and youth there.

In Lounovice we had a floor permanently rented out in a villa from the Hora family, a little ways away from a fishpond. Beside us was a farmstead belonging to the Zverina family, who baked bread for our entire family. Today I like it, but in those days I couldn't stand it. It was black and hard even when it was fresh. Winter or summer, we would leave Lounovice at four thirty. Grandpa would honk the horn, and I had to be at the car within five minutes. No exceptions were possible, even if I would have liked to stay by the pond or somewhere else.

At six o'clock I was home for supper. When I was at Sokol [5](#) sometime during the week, I wasn't able to make it home for six for supper. This was permitted, because Sokol was an important thing for my grandfather. He wanted to be left in peace to listen to the radio, so I didn't bother him and had my supper in the kitchen with the cook, which were my favorite days. I always asked for and got some soft white bread or soft buns, and some store-bought mayonnaise salad. I loved it immensely, because otherwise I wasn't allowed to eat it.

I was born in Germany, so I had German nationality, but in those days no one worried about that. Grandfather always said: 'In the end she'll get married anyways, so why should we do anything about it?' My mother tongue was Czech, because my mother was Czech. My nanny and governess were as well, but I was able to speak both languages. My mother sometimes spoke German with me, when my stepfather wasn't around, because he didn't know any German.

## My school years

I began attending a normal Czech public school in Vysehrad. I was the only Jewess there, because there were only two Jewish families in Vysehrad. We were one, and then there was some family by the name of Reich, who had a textile shop on the corner down on Vratislavova Street. They had two sons. None of them survived the Holocaust.

I attended Sokol from when I was little. As a child I attended ballet for some time, but mainly because I was very fond of those ballet slippers. Otherwise I'm a completely non-athletic type, but I did and still do like swimming. At first my nanny took me on walks, even when I was already in public school. I was around ten when I went out by myself for the first time. I was outside with some older girlfriend, and in Vysehrad, at the rotunda of St. Jiri [George], I broke my leg. My friend had to then drag me home.

Some sort of clerical dignitary lived in Vysehrad, and in the evening he telephoned my grandfather, asking what had happened to me, that he saw me in the afternoon being carried on the back of some girl. And my grandfather started yelling into the phone at him, like at a little boy: 'Aren't you ashamed of yourself, you saw it and you allowed some girl to carry her, couldn't you have called me so that I could have driven her home, she's got her leg in a cast.' He yelled at him and was completely red in the face.



Nevertheless, my grandfather decided that you could still go to school with your leg in a cast. So in the morning the chauffeur would drive me to school, carry me up into the classroom and sit me down at my desk. In those days there were no walking casts. When school was finished, he would carry me down to the car again and drive me home. Everyone thought that I was spoiled, but on the other hand, when the other children had broken legs, they didn't have to go to school and stayed at home. I couldn't walk, but I had to go to school. That's simply the way my grandfather was, he couldn't stand any sort of slacking off.

Before I started attending school, my governess would take me for French lessons to this one old French woman. We also studied French in high school; our teacher was this incredibly sweet lady. I spoke fluently, but my grammar wasn't very good. And my teacher insisted that I had to learn it, while I insisted that I spoke French the best out of the whole class, so we had a conflict. And she said that if I didn't learn that grammar, she'd fail me. And I contradicted her, that she couldn't do that. And so we argued back and forth, until in 'sekunda' [the 2nd of 8 years], in a quarter where there wasn't a report card given, but an evaluation, she gave me a 4 [5 being the lowest]. And so at home they almost lynched me; I had to do extra studies to make up for it. Today I unfortunately can't speak it at all.

I attended a high school on Slezska Street. Because of the anti-Jewish laws [6](#) I had to leave in 'kvarta' [4th year]. Through some people we knew I got into a private commerce school, where I spent one year. With this my studies ended, because upon my return from prison camp I had other worries, and so I simply never graduated. My life's goal had been to study medicine, and devote myself to children's medicine, but due to wartime and post-war circumstances this never happened.

### During the war

Before the Germans came, I never felt any anti-Semitism. We never had any problems in our Vysehrad neighborhood. Our whole family was well liked there. For long years we had shopped at the corner grocer's, and when shopping was limited for Jews by restrictive rules [7](#), the grocer's wife herself used to bring food to our home. People were nice to us.

Of course, memories of anti-Jewish measures are unpleasant. It's as if a person all at once stopped being a person. I wasn't allowed to go to school, to Sokol, I was forbidden from seeing my friends in public, and there were people who really were afraid to talk to you, but I never experienced someone calling me names in the street.

I personally had a lot of friends that tried to help me. Across the street from us in a rented apartment lived some boys that were attending the UMPRUM [Academy of Arts, Architecture and Design in Prague]. They became my friends. Once I met them on the riverfront in front of the UMPRUM building, I was wearing a suit and a raincoat with a Star of David sewed onto it. They had some sort of gallery exhibition, and invited me to come have a look at it. I refused, because I didn't want them to get into trouble.

Suddenly a well-known painter, Professor Zrzavy [8](#) walked up to us, and said: 'Hey kids, what's going on?' And my friends said to him: 'Mr. Professor, this is our girlfriend, and we'd really like for her to come and see our exhibition.' And he said - So why doesn't she go? Then he looked at me and said: 'Young lady, permit me to take your cloak' - and offered me his arm.

He then led me off to the exhibition. I went there with him, and I'll never forget it, it was one of the nicest experiences in my life. It would have never occurred to me that a person of his name and stature would put himself at risk for some Jewish girl that he'd never met before. After the war my friends even tried to contact me through the radio, and when we did meet, it was a joyful reunion.

At home we talked about emigration, but only talked, because my grandfather said: 'Why should I leave here, after all I haven't done anything to anybody, I was born here and I'll die here. Uncle Rudolf said: 'You can't expect that I'll leave Brezany behind... For he and Lilly had a beautiful villa in Brezany near Prague that they had bought in a devastated state and had entirely renovated it. We used to go there mainly in the summer, and it was a beautiful place.

They had added a balcony, and a shelter in the smaller front yard. There was a terrace where they used to dine and a wine cellar. From a magnificent dining room you exited to a large back yard. In Brezany they had electricity as well as running water. The villa had two very valuable rooms. The first was the so-called Golden Ludwig salon, decorated with hand-embroidered Gobelin tapestry, but it was more just for show. Then there was a gorgeous dark dining room, which did get used. The table, chair and desk legs were these carved columns, each with a lion's head that had a bronze ring in its mouth. There was also a beautiful golden bedroom with shiny furniture with mother-of-pearl ornamental inlays.

When the Germans confiscated the factory soon after the occupation, we had to move out of our building. My stepfather and mother then lived in a tiny apartment in Prague's Kacerov neighborhood. It was just a room and a kitchen. My mother was always in bed; she was a hypochondriac, and when something didn't feel right, she would right away go and lie in bed. I used to help them out. When we weren't allowed to ride the streetcars any more, it was a long way to have to walk, from Vysehrad to Kacerov. So I sometimes slept there, and sometimes at home. My grandfather stayed in Vysehrad in a small apartment.

## Terezin

In August of 1942 I was transported, together with my mother and sister, to Terezin. My grandfather wasn't transported until a half-year later, but I didn't know about it at all, and never met up with him there. When I found out from the Terezin memorial book in the 1990s that he had also been in Terezin, it was a cruel blow to me. [Editor's note: Terezin memorial book, Miroslav Karny and coll., published by the Terezin Initiative - Melantrich, Prague, 1995. This memorial book contains the names of those that became victims of the deportation transports, in which the German occupiers dragged away from the Czech lands men, women and children that fell under the so-called Nuremberg Laws.]

My stepfather, Uncle Rudolf and Aunt Lilly's brother stayed in Prague for the time being. Mr. Beran, who was a Czech and had a fur factory, employed them as workers, by which he protected them from the transports. They were recognized as 'wirtschaftlich wichtig' - economically important. Mr. Beran cooperated with the Germans, for the sake of appearances, and began producing fur boot insoles for the soldiers at the front.

In Terezin I lived in barracks block L-200 with my mother and sister Vera. There were about ten of us to a room. We slept on straw mattresses that were laid next to each other in rows. Because of a lack of space, as one of the youngest I had to put my mattress in the middle at night, so I had feet



on both sides, which was a pretty horrible way to sleep. In the morning we had to hunt for fleas and bedbugs. In the summer, when I really wanted to have a decent sleep, I carried my mattress outside into the courtyard, where there was some sort of shed, crawled up on the roof and made my bed there. Later I found out that the shed served as storage for corpses before they were taken away and disposed of.

At first I worked in the Hamburg barracks. I did office work, with a card catalogue for tickets for bread. I was lucky to have that work, and to have the person who led it. He took it matter-of-factly, that one simply had to work. One day though, he told me that I had been transferred to boot insole manufacture. None other than Mr. Beran had started this up in Terezin, as I soon found out. In a wooden building, fur remainders were sewed together and glued to boot insoles. Then they were sent to the Russian front.

One day two SS soldiers arrived with one civilian, who was none other than Mr. Beran. He had ostensibly come to have a look at how people were working, he was looking about discreetly, and then he picked me out, as if by chance, that I was going to be responsible for it for him. He had brought a large container with him, which the SS soldiers were carrying, and said to me that it was glue and that I was to take care of it. He stressed that it was valuable, and that I had to be sparing with it and guard it, that I was responsible for it. I was petrified with fear, because I suspected that it was some sort of scam. Then he said that I should put it away somewhere so it wouldn't be out in the open for everyone to see. When we were then leaving work later that day, I peeked into it and it was full of food, which in fact the SS soldiers had brought me. There was a lot of it, and my mother, who also worked there with me, and I had to inconspicuously carry it off bit by bit. It was utterly fantastic.

Then Mr. Beran perhaps got a bit of a swelled head; I'm not sure what exactly happened, but once they sent the 'Winterhilfe' [winter relief] to the Italian front instead of the Eastern front. The Germans started to investigate, and not only did they put Mr. Beran in prison, but also those three Jews of ours. All of them went to Terezin, but didn't go to the ghetto, but to the Small Fortress [9](#). Our Jews were then sent directly to Auschwitz, but didn't get into the family camp [10](#) like us, but to a normal prison camp, which helped them and in the end all three survived.

In the confusion that ensued during the occupation of Auschwitz, my uncle Rudolf somehow got away and went over to Svoboda's army [11](#), with which he then returned home. After the war we found out that Mr. Beran's wife had tried to save her husband. They were very rich, and she didn't want him to stay in jail. So she bribed one SS soldier, whom she gave a million crowns, to get her husband out of the Fortress. That SS soldier took the money, led Mr. Beran out of the prison, and on the way to Prague shot him.

In the meantime, my much-loved aunt Lilly and Pavel came to Terezin. Some sort of mistake had happened at that time, because their older son Jiri got a transport summons much earlier, and went to Terezin completely alone. Jiri was included with some other Krauskopfs from Prague, and from his departure to the transport no one ever saw him again. Aunt Lilly had already suffered from cancer before the transport, and died of her illness in the Terezin hospital. Her younger son Pavel was then put on an orphan transport, and went from Terezin directly to the Auschwitz gas chambers. No one was ever able to find out what happened to Jiri. Uncle Rudolf searched for him even after the war, but didn't find anyone who knew him or had met him, who could confirm or

refute that he had been killed in Auschwitz.

In Terezin I met Ota Himmelreich, who was quite a bit older than I. Ota was a smart young man from Prerov. We fell in love, and for sure would have gotten married after the war. He had a job outside of the ghetto walls, and therefore could stay in Terezin and so also save his family, that is either his parents or wife. His parents wished us well and liked me a lot. They said, 'We're not important any more, simply have the rabbi marry you, and you'll stay here together.' It was a horrible decision to make, whom to sentence. In the end he voluntarily put his own name in for our transport to Auschwitz, and left his parents in Terezin. Neither he nor his parents survived, which is something I'll never be able to get over.

Once, this was already some time after the war, I ran into a friend of his, who told me that Ota had died in Bergen-Belsen right before they liberated us. I was in absolute shock, that he had been so close and I hadn't known it. His friend told me that Ota had thought of me continuously, and if he had known that I was close by, he maybe would have survived those few last days.

## Auschwitz

My mother, sister and I were transported to Auschwitz in December of 1943, and were put into the family camp. Each one of us was put into a different block, though. At first I carried rocks, it was typical work, so that people would be hungry. One day we carried a rock off somewhere, and the next day we carried it back. Then we worked directly in the block, where we sat on stools and manufactured rifle slings out of some coarse plastic. Although we had to work there all day, we had the advantage that we sat under a roof. I don't think that my mother worked anywhere. My sister lived in a little girls' block.

I had an unusual experience in Auschwitz, connected to a German prisoner named Willy, a former sailor, who was in jail for murder. He delivered bread to the camps, and somehow he found out that we were in the family camp. And one day this Willy called us over, and when we came we found that he had brought my stepfather, who was with the others in the main camp, and left us to talk to him for about a quarter of an hour. That was something unexpected, and from that time onwards my mother absolutely believed that we would survive. While still in Terezin she had had her cards read by a fortune teller, who had predicted that she would leave Terezin in the winter, that it would be snowing, that she'd go to a different country, to a different camp, where she would meet her husband and that we would all return home.

For me the hardest times began when the September transport went to the gas chambers, in March 1944. Then some transports arrived, from Hungary I think. The crematoriums couldn't keep up, so they burned people in piles soaked with gasoline. I'll always be able to see those horrible, huge greasy ashes that sometimes flew all the way to our camp. It was the most horrible feeling that I can remember. And throughout it all, my mother kept repeating: 'I'll return, I'll survive, I'll return.'

My mother was young, a bit over forty, but of course looked horrible. I didn't believe in survival, and now I was terrified that after the September transport, we were next. Which at that time we all thought. And then the selection came. I belonged in it both by age and appearance, because in Auschwitz I had more or less sat and made straps, so I wasn't so ruined. While working, we talked about food all day, so maybe I even got some sustenance from that. It's interesting that the time

we passed along the most recipes to each other was in Auschwitz.

Only I was selected, neither my mother nor sister was of the right age. And at that moment another extraordinary thing happened. In the girls' block, where my sister lived, who at that time was a skinny thirteen-year-old little girl, also lived one girl, who was older and incredibly beautiful, and her surname was very similar to my sister's. The block leader at the time was some Polish woman, who had taken a great liking to my sister. And when the SS soldier came to do the selection, he was looking the girls over; he put the pretty one's card separately and then kept on picking out other girls. The block leader tried something, and took my sister's card and also put it on that pile. When the SS soldier was leaving, he said - what's this card? And she said: 'Mr. Hauptsturmführer [equivalent of captain], that's the girl that you picked' - and he took it. And so my sister got onto the transport.

Then we found out from a girl who was also with her mother in the family camp, that from the people that had been selected, two or three women had in the meantime died. We got up the courage to go to the camp typist, that we had heard about the deaths of the selected women, and whether he wouldn't put our mothers' names in their place. He was an older man, neither a Czech nor a German, and he did it. When we were leaving the camp, they were reading out numbers, and one of them belonged to my mother.

But that wasn't the end of it. Before departure they gathered us in another prison camp, the women's camp, where the selection continued anew. I passed through normally, and as if it were yesterday, I can see my sister and mother, as they are going naked to the selection. A skinny child and my mother with skin hanging loose, because before Terezin she had weighed about 80 kg, and had lost a lot of weight. They stood there along with Hanka Heitlerova, who was a friend of my sister's, a year or two older than her. She was from the September transport, and was saved by the fact that during that March of 1944, she had been sick. Then she came to my sister's block and they became friends.

When I saw them there like that, I said to myself that this couldn't end well. I don't know who was making the selection, if it was Mengele himself, but when their turn came, the SS soldier was at that moment lighting a cigarette. And so that Hanka began to run around him, to the front of the line, and my mother and sister ran after her. He was lighting a cigarette, and some three Jewesses weren't worth his while to interrupt that. So a complete coincidence gave them the chance to get out of Auschwitz and save their lives.

Then we left via the transport to a suburb of Hamburg named Dessauer Ufer, where we lived in this silo. It was practically right by the sea. There were metal stairs leading up to the room that we were in, and the SS soldiers would remove them so that we couldn't get out. The first night we were there, an air raid came, and we were in complete shock from it. We began to pound on the door and make all sorts of noise, and when we broke open the door, we couldn't go any further.

The SS soldiers would wake us up every day by walking around with a cane, and shouted at us and pounded the bunks and us. Early in the morning they would take us to work on a steamboat. At first we worked in some sort of factory where they made asphalt. It was all bombed out, and there were layers of asphalt everywhere. We had to work early in the morning, because later it was too warm and the asphalt got runny. We had to throw the asphalt into these steel drums. It was endless work, because it would run out again and again.

Then they drove us off to Neugraben or Neuengamme. We were there during the winter, at first we would walk to the town to cart away debris, clean bricks, basically cleanup detail. It was terribly cold; we had wooden shoes on our feet and worked without gloves. It was horrible, the SS had a basket of coal over which they warmed themselves, and we toiled. Then we worked in a sand pit, digging and loading sand. Then we went to another prison camp, and there we worked in a brick factory. The brick factory stood under a bridge that was bombed, but luckily no one was seriously injured.

When this camp was destroyed, they took us by train to Bergen-Belsen [12](#). You can't imagine anything worse. We were in barracks without bunks. As we arrived, we had to sit down and draw our knees up to our chins. Then another row arrived, and another, and in the end we were all sitting there, squeezed up against one another. We were locked in, sitting there, and about two or three times a day they would lead us out by stages to the latrine. It was horrible. Outside there were corpses lying around, people would walk and never get there. It was in the spring of 1945. I don't know how long we were there, the days seemed endless.

We got food once a day, soup, to be precise. It was in this steel trashcan, which was carried on iron poles. Five of us could go, four would carry the trashcan, and the fifth was there in case one fell. And we could take as much of the soup as we could carry. It was for the entire building. Every morning the dead would be carried out, so then we didn't sit any more, after a time we could even lie down.

The Germans already knew that the front was approaching, so they gradually disappeared. Then Hungarians were guarding us, and if someone left the building, they would start shooting. We didn't even know that the Germans were gone, we were completely decimated. But people that had a little more strength left in them, they went and looted the supply stores, and it cost almost all of them their lives, because they ate a can of pork or something, and their bodies couldn't handle it.

## Liberation

The English liberated us on 15th April 1945. Their behavior toward us was excellent; they worked miracles. They brought in running water, so we could finally bathe, began to distribute biscuits and food that we could eat. It was a horrible experience for them; they had come to a prison camp that was littered with corpses. Germans that hadn't managed to escape, or had been captured somewhere, had to clean it up. In a short time, before the war had ended yet, they emptied a small town named Celle, and moved us there. There also the captured Germans had to clean up.

I lived to see the end of the war there, but in bad shape, because around the 9th of May I got spotted fever [typhus]. My mother and Vera got it, too. Again, it was nevertheless luck that we didn't get it until after the war's end, when they were able to take care of us. Spotted fever is accompanied by high fever and terrible headaches. I recall having the feeling that there were two buses driving around in my head, having frequent collisions. When I regained consciousness, I saw a member of the SS standing above me, but he was a prisoner. The English health workers were taking care of us, but in addition captured Germans were also helping out. But I simply saw an SS soldier standing above me, and fainted again. My mother and sister also had spotted fever, my mother lost her hearing for a time, but luckily they took excellent care of us and spoiled us, and in July we were among the last to return home.

The English took us all the way to Pilsen, but that was as far as they were allowed to go. When we were crossing the Czechoslovak border, the train stopped, we got off, knelt on the ground and sang the national anthem, and they stood at attention and saluted. In Pilsen we got off the train, received some clothing and food parcels and said goodbye to them.

We were handed over to some young men from the Revolutionary Guard, who greeted us with soup. We declined it, because we wanted to get to Prague as quickly as possible. Then an open freight train used for transporting cement arrived. And those boys told us to get on it, that they would take us to Prague. We answered - yes, but we've only got the clothes on our backs, we can't get into that dirty wagon, what if it rains during the night. And they said - so clean it up. We had been spoiled by the English, so we asked them - don't you have some Germans around to clean it up? And they looked at us as if we were crazy. In the end we swept it out and got some paper and cardboard. And during the night they transported us in those open rail cars to Prague.

We arrived at the Smichov train station, and after three years we were experiencing this kind of reverential feeling. I was sitting at the back, leaning up against the wagon, and on the way I had fallen asleep, and after we arrived in Prague I cried for about a half hour, because a man from the Revolutionary Guard had boarded the wagon, tapped me on the shoulder and said: 'Hey you, you're comin' over from the Yanks, you got cigarettes?' It was a horrible feeling. It was four months after most people had returned, the greetings had already taken place, and we were only interesting as a potential source of American cigarettes.

I knew from one fellow prisoner, who was from Pilsen and had returned earlier, because she hadn't gotten typhus, that my stepfather had survived and that he had an apartment in Prague on Plavecka Street, a short distance from Vysehrad. When we arrived in Prague, they told us that we had to wait in quarantine. I refused, and remembered that we had some acquaintances in Smichov. We walked to their place, and luckily they were at home. I left my mother and sister with them, got some money for the streetcar from them, and went to Plavecka Street. I found my stepfather there, and he returned for my mother and sister. Then they went to the doctor, because my mother was in a bad way. The doctor asked my mother: 'Granny, how old are you?' And she answered that she was 45. And he said: 'Granny, you're confused.' She looked horrible. When she and my sister returned, I had already had a bath, it was the first thing I had done. We undressed our mother and put her in the tub, and then we stood there and wept, because we were afraid to even lift her, we thought that she would fall apart on us.

When they heard of our return, some friends came to see us and brought us food and clothing. But I also experienced ugly situations, when people with whom we had hidden some things before the war suddenly didn't know anything about it. Once I went to see some friends with whom we had left some feather duvets and suchlike, and they told me: 'Well, you know, times were hard and we were hungry, and we had to sell it all.' To this I said: 'Well, you know, I don't know what hunger is, we had an abundance of everything.'

The apartment that my father had been issued had initially been completely furnished. Just like we had had to leave our apartments and leave everything behind, so the Germans had had to leave this apartment. But when our father moved in two days later, there wasn't anything left except for bare furniture and a mangled stamp collection. Someone had in the meantime stolen everything. I don't know how my father came by money in the beginning, but gradually we got food stamps and

clothing vouchers. Before the war I actually hadn't lived with my mother's family, but I had no one else left. In prison camp I had taken care of my mother and sister, and so I took this responsibility upon myself again as a matter of course.

## Post-war

Soon I began to have problems related to my citizenship. Although I had attended Czech schools, I had no documents to prove it, I had no report cards. I made the rounds to my public school, high school and Sokol and everywhere asked for confirmation that I had always been a Czech. I didn't even have a birth certificate, and couldn't get a duplicate because I was born in Germany.

I recall being at the police station on Krakovska Street, there was this pleasant older man sitting there, who said: 'What am I supposed to do with you? I don't have your birth records.' I showed him copies of my school report cards and said: 'Here's my report card, so I must have been born.' In the end it was necessary to make a solemn declaration, which made me laugh, because I had to declare that I had been born. Then I got a birth certificate. But I still had German citizenship. It took quite a long time, I had to run around to all possible and impossible government offices, and I even had to hire a lawyer.

Citizenship was given out at a government office on Parizska Street in Prague. I was dealing with some young man there, who over and over wanted additional documents. When I brought yet another document, he always said: 'That's good, but in addition I need this from you.' I had been going there for perhaps three months, and still he wanted something new. I was desperate and disgusted by it all. I said to myself that that person must mortally hate me, that he must be some sort of anti-Semite. Then I came there once again, and he said: 'All right, that's finally all, but please, if you don't take care of this, then you won't get your citizenship' - and stuck a piece of paper into my hands. I left, and when I was out on the street looked at the paper. There it said: 'Tonight at 8pm in front of the Vysehrad high school.'

I had serious misgivings, so I asked my cousin Viktor to secretly watch and to intervene if something happened. Victor's father Zikmund was my stepfather's brother. In the evening I arrived in front of the school, that civil servant was standing there with a gorgeous bouquet in his hand and said: 'Don't be angry with me.' To this I said that he must have lost his mind. And he said: 'I know that I've lost my mind, I'm a nut, but do you remember me? I attended the Vysehrad high school.' I told him that I had attended a different school, and he answered that but at that time I had been going out with this one young man from the Vysehrad high school and that I had been with him at some party. Then he said that I had been dancing with my boyfriend, but that I had refused to dance with him, so he had wanted to get back at me. That I had had that citizenship issued for two months already, and then he didn't know how to delay it any longer, that they were upset with him at work and that they had almost fired him, and that he had told them that he would force me to go out on a date with him. So that's how I got my Czechoslovak citizenship then.

My stepfather was ill, my sister was a feeble fifteen-year-old girl, and my mother was also quite badly off. We had nothing. I had to take care of the household and didn't have the possibility of continuing my studies. In 1946 our father opened a small clothing workshop. It was in the name of one tailor who worked for us, and on his business permit. It did fairly well. I helped with the paperwork, and at home I cooked and cleaned and took care of the household. We had a couple of seamstresses and one cutter and that tailor man, and that was how we made a living.



My sister didn't want to stay here after the war. She was seeing a young man, who had relatives in Israel, was a fervent Zionist and wanted to move there. My sister married him and they left in 1948. She worked as a stewardess on some international steamship. There she met her second husband, and together they decided to stay in America. She lives there, in Los Angeles, and has four children. For some time we wrote each other, but I have to admit that we don't have a lot in common and don't keep in touch. I never even considered emigrating. For one I had my mother and stepfather here to take care of, but even so I wouldn't have left. I love Prague and wouldn't want to live anywhere else.

In 1948 [13](#) our business was nationalized and became a Clothing Cooperative. I started working there as a secretary, and eventually became an accountant. My stepfather also worked there, as well as my Uncle Rudolf, who even eventually became the director. They then threw him out because of his bourgeois roots. Uncle Rudolf returned to Czechoslovakia at the end of the war with Svoboda's army, and thanks to this got his villa in Brezany back. On the weekends he would invite people over and I would help him and be the lady of the house. Rudolf remarried soon after the war, but the marriage didn't last long. At the beginning of the war the Germans had confiscated the villa in Brezany, but they didn't let it become dilapidated, they even installed central heating. But otherwise they carried off what they could. Right after the war my uncle was given an apartment on Jungmannova Street in Prague and after a few years even got back into his former apartment building in Vysehrad, when a free apartment came up there.

My father had diabetes and then also got tuberculosis, and in 1951 he died. He's buried in the Jewish cemetery in Prague. My mother had a very small pension, so I got her work in a document warehouse, where the manager was this one decent older man. But then the cadre officer called me in and said that it wasn't possible for both of us to work there, that my mother had to leave. To this I told him that my mother wouldn't leave, because she had never worked before, while I could manage to find another job. He told me that he wanted me to be the one to stay. Then he said: 'Don't tell me that you don't have anything to live from.' I answered him: 'Look here, we returned from the prison camp, so you certainly know that we didn't have any time to make money. If you think that all we need in life is a bare bed, a table and chairs, then we would have something to sell after all. But you have to promise me that on the first of every month you'll buy something from me. We can't live on my mother's pension.' In the end my mother stayed there, and I found another job.

I lived on Plavecka Street with my mother and one girlfriend of mine, who had returned from the concentration camp alone and had no one. It was a double bachelor apartment with a large terrace. Once, in the 1950s, someone rang at the door. I peeked out and there was some lady standing there. I said good day to her and asked her what she would like. 'I'm here to look at the apartment,' she said. And I said: 'And what do you want to see in our apartment?' She said: 'Well, you see, I'm moving in here; I'm going to be exchanging apartments with you.'

She had likely taken a liking to our apartment, and at the housing office they had approved the exchange. No one was interested in the fact that we had come from a prison camp and that we were three single women living there. It had never occurred to me that I would be leaving that apartment; it was close to my much-loved Vysehrad. At that time I blurted out without thinking that there was going to be no moving, because we already had it exchanged. Which wasn't true, but I managed to organize it within a couple of days, and we moved to I.P. Pavlova Square, to Sokolska

Street. It was a nice building, almost in the city center. My mother died in 1963 in Prague, where she's buried in the Jewish cemetery.

For a while during the 1950s I worked in one textile cooperative where I didn't like it very much. But I was lucky, that at the time I was considering changing jobs, I met my former cadre officer of that cooperative. When he found out that I was looking for work, he asked me whether I wouldn't want to work for the Igra cooperative. Igra manufactured toys and later musical instruments as well. I told him that I had the stigma of a merchant, and he told me that they had thrown him out of his previous position because they had qualified him as a merchant as well. He said that he had used to stand in a passageway, put a plank on two sawhorses, put fruit and vegetables on them, which he then sold. That he was now a cadre official at Igra, and that I should come by the next day, that they were looking for an accountant.

So I went there the next day and they hired me. I worked there at first as an accountant, and later as the manager of the accounting department. The first few days no one talked to me, because it had gotten around that I had been recommended by the cadre official. Once we all got to know each other, work became my second home. This cooperative was also interesting in that if someone was a good worker, he could do well there even despite having blemishes on his cadre assessment. I remember that for some time I sat in our office together with Mrs. Hejdankova, who was a former professor and the wife of Dr. Hejdanek, the spokesman of Charta 77 [14](#).

I wasn't a member of the Communist Party [15](#), despite the fact that I was in a management position. Of course, they tried to convince me to join the Party, but I always managed to wriggle out of it somehow. One of our cadre officers lived outside of Prague, and once there was some sort of fair there, and he invited a few people out. When we got there, I got out and he came over to me and said: 'I kiss your hand.' I was completely flabbergasted, but from that time on we got along well. For all those years Igra was ruled by a spirit of collective friendship. When I started there, there were about 120 employees, and when I left many years later, it was one of the largest cooperatives in Prague, which had about 1500 employees.

As far as society was concerned, the 1950s were not a nice time. I was quite frightened by the Slansky trial [16](#). When I returned from the prison camp, I said to myself, now everything's going to be all right. But there were three good years, and then it all went to pot again. And then to top it all off, those trials came, and I said to myself, what's still waiting for me, hadn't that concentration camp been enough? I had an unpleasant feeling, because in those days anyone could have decided that he didn't for some reason like me, and denounced me. But luckily nothing happened. I didn't even have any property, for me to be in someone's way.

I've always loved children, as a girl I had wanted to become a children's doctor. When I returned from the prison camp, doctors told me that I shouldn't count on being able to get pregnant. I was very disappointed by this and so I was in no hurry to get married. Then I met one divorced man, who was taking care of a six-year-old girl named Miluska. So I said to myself, that if I couldn't have my own child, why couldn't I at least raise someone else's. I got married in 1955, and the following year I got pregnant and had a son, Rene.

## Married life

My husband at that time was born in 1918 in Prague, was a Czech and was named Jiri Setina. We met through our work. He worked for a company named Lab Instruments, where they had begun manufacturing a gas chromatograph. He and one of his colleagues learned to use it, and then when their company began to sell it, they would travel around to teach people how to use it. His business card said: 'Expert in gas chromatography.' So he traveled all over the world and was almost never at home. We divorced in 1972; he had found a younger woman of Russian origin. He died fifteen years ago.

In 1968 [17](#) Miluska immigrated to Vienna and then to America, where she lives to this day. I have two grandsons there. I've visited Miluska several times, but now she mostly comes here to visit me. We have a beautiful relationship. I went to visit her for the first time in the 1970s, but in those days it wasn't that simple. I remember that the police summoned my husband and questioned him as to why I wanted to go to America if I wasn't her mother.

After high school, Rene wanted to go study classical guitar at the conservatory. But he had a bourgeois origin plus an emigrant sister, which was a big problem in those days, so they didn't accept him at the conservatory. A few months later we were supposed to go to Russia, where my husband was supposed to be working. He arranged studies at a music school for Rene. We were to leave during summer vacation in August, but at the beginning of the month we went to see the director of Laboratory Instruments, who told us that we couldn't all leave. My husband was needed there, and could go home every half year, but they wouldn't let him take his family there due to the daughter in America. I said: 'But Mr. Director, I don't have only a daughter, but a son as well. He's just finished his primary education, vacation is ending, and he's been accepted at the conservatory in Moscow.' And he said: 'Yes, well, Mrs. Goetzova, I've been thinking about it, don't worry about it, we'll take care of him, I promise.'

He then called me at the end of the month, my husband was already in Russia, and said: 'Well, I haven't been able to arrange anything yet, so for now he'll start as an apprentice electrician. Nothing can be done, he's got to be somewhere, and so far I haven't found anything else.' And so instead of the conservatory Rene started as an apprentice; he had no other choice and he also stayed there and completed his apprenticeship.

Once his master called me and told me that Rene was working without any interest. I asked him if Rene comes to work late, or works poorly, and he answered that in this respect he has no problem with him, but it's just that he can see his absolute lack of interest. So I explained it to him, and said that I respected my son for going there at all, but that one can't expect interest from him, because if there was one thing he hadn't wanted from life, it was to learn to be an electrician.

He didn't get to his guitar until the army, where he had it fairly good, because as a soldier he toured as a soloist and played concerts. There were lots of army ensembles, but they didn't have a solo guitarist. He was trained and served with the Signal Corps, which was unusual, when he had been labeled as [politically] unreliable. Before his service had definitively ended, he went to one firm to apply for a job. They welcomed him, that they're anxious to get trained experts from the army. They gave him a questionnaire to fill out, but when they found out that he had a sister in America, they refused to take him on. He had a friend who in the end helped him, and Rene went to work as a communications worker for the fire department.

Thanks to this he then studied at a technical college in Frydek-Mistek, the only one in the entire republic specializing in fire safety. Until the revolution in 1989 [18](#) he worked as a technician at Orion and other factories, after the revolution he worked as the head fire safety technician at Motol Hospital, which is fairly responsible work. After our entry into the European Union he got a call from the school in Frydek- Mistek, with an offer to be a fire safety and security auditor. That he's apparently one of a very few experts who has the proper education and experience. Today he's this public auditor, he's got more work than he can handle, but it interests him and he enjoys it.

Rene is happily married and has a daughter. His wife is an economist. When Rene was born, his father wanted to have him registered with the Jewish Community. But I refused. I said to myself, that if he will at some time feel himself to be Jewish, let him register himself, and that I don't want to decide for him. I didn't bring him up in a Jewish way very much. In our family my grandfather was the last person that observed Jewish traditions in at least some fashion. Although my son is interested in my past, he himself doesn't feel Jewish. We celebrate a normal Czech Christmas, during this time we get together at my son's along with his wife's parents.

After the war I was used to going to synagogue for the high holidays and mainly for prayers for the dead. I was also a member of the Jewish Community in Prague. Through my marriage I came by a six-year-old child that hadn't the faintest clue that there are Jews and that they celebrate some Jewish holidays. Miluska knew Christmas and Easter. My husband didn't know much about Judaism either. No one forced me into or away from anything, but we celebrated traditional Czech holidays. I had Jewish and non-Jewish friends, but I never really distinguished between the two. I valued the extent of this or that friendship, but not the person's origin.

We didn't have a cottage or house in the country. After the war I was on vacation with my husband in one of my favorite places, Lounovice, a couple of times, but he didn't like it there. When I worked for the Igra cooperative, I became fond of Slapy. The coop bought a company house there, in an isolated place near Zivohost. You go towards the water down a hill, and behind you there is a forest. We used to go on vacations there. On the weekends we would take the children on trips or for a walk. The weekends were completely devoted to the children. After the company fell apart I was disconsolate that I wouldn't have the opportunity to go to Slapy any more, but it was bought by an individual who told me that I could come and stay whenever and for however long I wanted, that I was an honored guest. And so my vacations consist of first going to a spa, and then straight to Slapy. My son and the owner became friends, and so he has the task of watching over me.

My husband and I lived in a large apartment in Prague's neighborhood of Karlin. I had four rooms, a hall and kitchen. After our divorce my ex- husband remarried and brought his new wife into our place, at that time I was leaving to go see Miluska in America. I told him to exchange that large apartment for two small ones, that I'd be fine with anything small that would have a washroom and a kitchenette; the important thing would be that I'd be there by myself. We argued back and forth across the ocean, because he on the other hand was saying that he put tons of work into renovating that apartment, and that the only way he'd leave it would be on his back, feet first. We didn't come to any agreement, so we all stayed in the original apartment, including our son.

Our son got married and moved out, my ex-husband soon died, and I stayed there with his second wife. She was very polite and courteous towards me, but we certainly didn't become friends. My son then found an apartment for me through his father-in-law, and I live in it to this day. It isn't

large, but is mine and I like it here very much.

I've never had some sort of relationship with Israel. I've never been there and didn't even want to. The fact that it's next to Palestine never gave me a good feeling and I've always had the impression that it's not going to end well. I've never had that desire to move there, like for example my sister's first husband. I never understood Zionism or Orthodox Jews. I can't say that I'm not interested in what's going on over there, but I've always felt sorry for people that left for Israel so that they could finally have peace.

I stayed past retirement age in the Igra cooperative, I didn't want to retire, but I finally left in 1990. Then I worked in the audit commission of the Terezin Initiative [19](#). I welcomed the year 1989 with great joy. I was never a member of any political party, and never will be. My political sympathies lie on the right. After the revolution life changed for us all, and I think that for the better. My financial situation also improved after the revolution, as in addition to my pension I started getting money from the Claims Conference. It's not some sort of riches, but they're regular payments that almost pay for my apartment.

## Glossary

### **1 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.

### **2 Skoda Company**

Car factory, the foundations of which were laid in 1895 by the mechanics V. Laurin and V. Klement with the production of Slavia bicycles. Just before the end of the 19th century they began manufacturing motor cycles and, in 1905, they started manufacturing automobiles. The name Skoda was introduced in 1925. Having survived economic difficulties, the company made a name for itself on the international market even within the constraints of the Socialist economy. In 1991 Skoda became a joint stock company in association with Volkswagen.

### **3 Terezin/Theresienstadt**

A ghetto in the Czech Republic, run by the SS. Jews were transferred from there to various extermination camps. The Nazis, who presented Theresienstadt as a 'model Jewish settlement,' used it to camouflage the extermination of European Jews. Czech gendarmes served as ghetto guards, and with their help the Jews were able to maintain contact with the outside world. Although education was prohibited, regular classes were held, clandestinely. Thanks to the large number of

artists, writers, and scholars in the ghetto, there was an intensive program of cultural activities. At the end of 1943, when word spread of what was happening in the Nazi camps, the Germans decided to allow an International Red Cross investigation committee to visit Theresienstadt. In preparation, more prisoners were deported to Auschwitz, in order to reduce congestion in the ghetto. Dummy stores, a café, a bank, kindergartens, a school, and flower gardens were put up to deceive the committee.

#### **4 Maly Trostinets**

Village in eastern Belarus located near Minsk, camp and site of mass murder of Jews. About 200,000 people were murdered in the Trostinets area. During 1942, Jews from Germany, the Netherlands, Poland, Austria, and the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia were brought by train to be killed in Maly Trostinets. Most of the victims were lined up in front of large pits and shot. The prisoners in the camp were forced to sort through the victims' possessions and maintain the camp. They occasionally underwent selections. This happened more frequently during 1943. In the fall of 1943 the Nazis began to destroy all evidence of mass murder by burning bodies. As the Soviet army approached in June 1944, the Germans killed most of the remaining prisoners. On 30th June the Germans completely destroyed the camp. When the Soviets arrived on 3rd July, they found a few Jews who had escaped.

#### **5 Sokol**

One of the best-known Czech sports organizations. It was founded in 1862 as the first physical educational organization in the Austro- Hungarian Monarchy. Besides regular training of all age groups, units organized sports competitions, colorful gymnastics rallies, cultural events including drama, literature and music, excursions and youth camps. Although its main goal had always been the promotion of national health and sports, Sokol also played a key role in the national resistance to the Austro- Hungarian Empire, the Nazi occupation and the communist regime. Sokol flourished between the two World Wars; its membership grew to over a million. Important statesmen, including the first two presidents of interwar Czechoslovakia, Tomas Garrigue Masaryk and Edvard Benes, were members of Sokol. Sokol was banned three times: during World War I, during the Nazi occupation and finally by the communists after 1948, but branches of the organization continued to exist abroad. Sokol was restored in 1990.

#### **6 Exclusion of Jews from schools in the Protectorate**

The Ministry of Education of the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia sent round a ministerial decree in 1940, which stated that from school year 1940/41 Jewish pupils were not allowed to visit Czech public and private schools and those who were already in school should be excluded. After 1942 Jews were not allowed to visit Jewish schools or courses organized by the Jewish communities either.

#### **7 Anti-Jewish laws in the Protectorate of Bohemia-Moravia**

In March 1939, there lived in the Protectorate 92,199 inhabitants classified according to the so-called Nuremberg Laws as Jews. On 21st June 1939, Konstantin von Neurath, the Reich Protector, passed the so-called Edict Regarding Jewish Property, which put restrictions on Jewish property. On



24th April 1940, a government edict was passed which eliminated Jews from economic activity. Similarly like previous legal changes it was based on the Nuremberg Law definitions and limited the legal standing of Jews. According to the law, Jews couldn't perform any functions (honorary or paid) in the courts or public service and couldn't participate at all in politics, be members of Jewish organizations and other organizations of social, cultural and economic nature. They were completely barred from performing any independent occupation, couldn't work as lawyers, doctors, veterinarians, notaries, defense attorneys and so on. Jewish residents could participate in public life only in the realm of religious Jewish organizations. Jews were forbidden to enter certain streets, squares, parks and other public places. From September 1939 they were forbidden from being outside their home after 8pm. Beginning in November 1939 they couldn't leave, even temporarily, their place of residence without special permission. Residents of Jewish extraction were barred from visiting theaters and cinemas, restaurants and cafés, swimming pools, libraries and other entertainment and sports centers. On public transport they were limited to standing room in the last car, in trains they weren't allowed to use dining or sleeping cars and could ride only in the lowest class, again only in the last car. They weren't allowed entry into waiting rooms and other station facilities. The Nazis limited shopping hours for Jews to twice two hours and later only two hours per day. They confiscated radio equipment and limited their choice of groceries. Jews weren't allowed to keep animals at home. Jewish children were prevented from visiting German, and, from August 1940, also Czech public and private schools. In March 1941 even so-called re-education courses organized by the Jewish Religious Community were forbidden, and from June 1942 also education in Jewish schools. To eliminate Jews from society it was important that they be easily identifiable. Beginning in March 1940, citizenship cards of Jews were marked by the letter 'J' (for Jude - Jew). From 1st September 1941 Jews older than six could only go out in public if they wore a yellow six-pointed star with 'Jude' written on it on their clothing.

## **8 Zrzavy, Jan (1890 - 1977)**

Czech painter, graphic artist, illustrator and stage designer; important member of the Czech artistic avant-garde beginning at the start of the 20th century. Studied at the Academy of Arts, Architecture and Design in Prague. Founding member of the Sursum group, member of the Manes Artists' Association, Tvrdosijne (Hardheads), Artistic Discussion, Hollar Union of Czech Graphic Artists. In the 1920s he traveled to Italy, Belgium, and lived in France. His first creative period (Valley of Tears, Nokturno, Still-life with Lilies of the Valley, Suffering) is characterized by the connection of Czech Art Nouveau symbolism and Expressionism with Cubistic elements. Influenced by B. Kubista, J. Vachal, inspired by the Italian Renaissance, especially Raphael and Leonardo. After World War I, his works led to the formal harmonization of images and a typically vague lyrical and softly dreamlike shape (Melancholy, Girlfriend). In his second creative period (from the 1920s onward) he devoted himself mainly to landscapes (Camaret, San Marco at Night, San Marco in the Day, Ostrava Slag Heaps), in which he created a painterly metaphor of melding with natural forces of harmony, peace and timelessness. From the middle of the 1930s onwards he left behind the poetic palette of pastels for more vibrant colors. During World War II fate and lyricism appear in his landscapes (Via Appia), alongside themes of death but also hope (Venetian Still-life). His entire oeuvre is typified by adherence to one motive (especially the motive of Cleopatra). Zrzavy was also an important illustrator (K. H. Macha, May, K. J. Erben, Bouquet) and stage designer (A. Dvorak, Armida).

## **9 Small Fortress (Mala pevnost) in Theresienstadt**

An infamous prison, used by two totalitarian regimes: Nazi Germany and communist Czechoslovakia. It was built in the 18th century as a part of a fortification system and almost from the beginning it was used as a prison. In 1940 the Gestapo took it over and kept mostly political prisoners there: members of various resistance movements. Approximately 32,000 detainees were kept in Small Fortress during the Nazi occupation. Communist Czechoslovakia continued using it as a political prison; after 1945 German civilians were confined there before they were expelled from the country.

## **10 Family camp in Auschwitz**

The Auschwitz complex consisted of three main camps, of which Auschwitz II, or Birkenau, comprised a camp for families. On 8th September 1943, 5,000 Jews were transported to Birkenau from the Terezin (Theresienstadt) ghetto and put up in a special section. Women, men and children lived in separate barracks but were allowed to move freely on this site. The family camp for the Czech Jews was part of the Nazi propaganda for the outside world. Prisoners were not organized into work-commandos; they were allowed to receive packages and were encouraged to write letters. Despite this special treatment more than 1,000 people died in the family camp during its six months of existence. On 9th March 1944, all those still alive in the camp were gassed.

## **11 Army of General Svoboda**

During World War II General Ludvik Svoboda (1895-1979) commanded Czechoslovak troops under Soviet military leadership, which took part in liberating Eastern Slovakia. After the war Svoboda became minister of defense (1945-1950) and then President of Czechoslovakia (1968-1975).

## **12 Bergen-Belsen**

Concentration camp located in northern Germany. Bergen- Belsen was established in April 1943 as a detention camp for prisoners who were to be exchanged with Germans imprisoned in Allied countries. Bergen- Belsen was liberated by the British army on 15th April, 1945. The soldiers were shocked at what they found, including 60,000 prisoners in the camp, many on the brink of death, and thousands of unburied bodies lying about. (Source: Rozett R. - Spector S.: Encyclopedia of the Holocaust, Facts on File, G.G. The Jerusalem Publishing House Ltd. 2000, pg. 139 -141)

## **13 February 1948**

Communist take-over in Czechoslovakia. The 'people's democracy' became one of the Soviet satellites in Eastern Europe. The state apparatus was centralized under the leadership of the Czechoslovak Communist Party (KSC). In the economy private ownership was banned and submitted to central planning. The state took control of the educational system, too. Political opposition and dissident elements were persecuted.

## **14 Charter 77**

A manifesto published under the title Charter 77 in January 1977 demanded the Czechoslovak

government to live up to its own laws in regard to human, political, civic and cultural rights in Czechoslovakia. The document first appeared as a manifesto in a West German newspaper and was signed by more than 200 Czechoslovak citizens representing various occupations, political viewpoints, and religions. By the mid-1980s it had been signed by 1,200 people. Within Czechoslovakia it was circulated in samizdat form. The government's retaliation against the signers included dismissal from work, denial of educational opportunities for their children, forced exile, loss of citizenship, detention, and imprisonment. The repression of the Charter 77 continued in the 1980s, but the dissidents refused to capitulate and continued to issue reports on the government's violations of human rights.

## **15 Communist Party of Czechoslovakia (KSC)**

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

## **16 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.

## **17 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.

## **18 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.

## **19 Terezin Initiative Foundation (Nadace Terezinska iniciativa)**

Founded in 1993 by the International Association of Former Prisoners of the Terezin/Theresienstadt Ghetto, it is a special institute devoted to the scientific research on the history of Terezin and of the 'Final Solution of the Jewish Question' in the Czech lands. At the end of 1998 it was renamed to Terezin Initiative Institute (Institut Terezinske iniciativy).