

# Ruth Halova

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Holubov

Czech Republic

Interviewer: Lenka Koprivova

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Mrs. Ruth Halova is from the beautiful southern Bohemian town of Cesky Krumlov. Although during a large portion of her life she lived and worked elsewhere, after she retired she returned here, and I visited her in Holubov, a small town surrounded by the hills of the Czech Forest. Already on my way to her place, I was saying to myself that I'd never seen such beautiful forests as they have here anywhere else. And after meeting Mrs. Halova, I'm convinced that I've also never ever met such a beautiful and kind person as she is. As she herself mentions, already from the time she was little, she was fascinated by the gift of life - hers was saved by Nicholas Winton [1](#), who enabled her and her sister to leave for exile in England. It's already been some time since she celebrated her 80th birthday, but thanks to her vitality, no one would ever guess that she's really that old. Mrs. Halova is a member of the Plzen [Pilsen] Jewish community, and among other things, she was very involved in the saving of the synagogue in her hometown of Cesky Krumlov.



Life is the greatest of the gifts that God gave to Man, and the greatest miracle is the fact that the life of every being in the universe is singular and unrepeatable. In this life of mine, I've had the luck that it was given to me twice, which is why I was asked to talk about what I remember of it.

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**Growing up**

I'm originally from Cesky Krumlov, where in 1926 I was born to my parents, Leopold and Zdenka Adler, as their second child - my sister Eva was born five years earlier. Alas, shortly after I came into the world, Dad left it - during World War I he'd been a Legionnaire, and had traveled through Siberia with his unit. While crossing one mighty river, my dad refused to be taken across by boat - though as an officer he had the right to that, but he decided to swim across with his soldiers. That sealed his fate; he fell ill, and when I was ten months old, he died. So that she could support us, Mom worked at Spiro's factory as a secretary, which is why her mother, our self-sacrificing grandma Marie Kohnova, took care of the household.

Grandma Marie was from Kostelec, not far from Hluboka, where her family had a farm. When she got married, she lived with her husband in Protivin, and together they ran a general store; they also had their two daughters there, my mom Zdenka and my aunt Olga. While this part of my family was composed of Czech-speaking Jews, my dad's mother tongue was German. His mother [Josefa Adlerova] was from Sobeslav, and Grandpa [Jakub Adler] was from somewhere in the Czech-Austrian border region. One day he appeared, selling Hungarian flour, and met Grandma. The Adlers then lived in [Ceske] Budejovice; one could say they were a family of public servants.

The same year that I was born, so in 1926, Grandpa died. It was actually my grandma from Budejovice who then held the entire family together; we used to gather at her place for all Jewish celebrations. Grandma cooked, baked, and served - she was in her element. She made a living by selling Tiger brand cheese for some Swiss company. I used to go shopping with her in Budejovice, and they knew her everywhere. She was this well-known, beautiful, canny woman. She belonged amongst those in the Jewish community who take care of corpses [Editor's note: The interviewee is referring to Chevra Kaddisha: an Aramaic term for a volunteer group or association that performs last rites and oversees the performance of funerals.]

Dad was one of five siblings. The oldest was Uncle Max, a professor of Latin and Greek, initially at a girls' high school, and then at the German university in Prague. Second was Aunt Ida, whom I particularly loved. She got married and moved to Linz, Austria, which lies about 60 kilometers from Krumlov, and I always yearned to go visit her, Uncle Richard and my cousin Fritz. Even more so, when I found out that their good friends raised boxers - I've liked animals all my life. Alas, it never worked out; Uncle Richard would write and send me fairy tales about the beautiful blue Danube, which were supposed to console me. It was a consolation, but in my eyes a poor one nevertheless. Aunt Ida immigrated with her family to the United States still before the war.

Another of Dad's brother's was named Arthur, and it was actually thanks to him and his wife Marta that my parents met. You see, Aunt Marta was a widow from her first marriage, and besides her two sons, Franta and Karel, she also inherited from her husband the responsibility for a chocolate factory in Budejovice, where my mother started working as an accountant. Dad's youngest brother Hugo was a physiologist, and for long years he was the director of a hospital in Usti nad Labem, where I also worked after the war.

Already when I was very little, I was fascinated by nature. My earliest memories are of trees - I'm lying in a carriage and looking up into their crowns. The person pushing the carriage is my kind grandma Marie. Alas, the conditions weren't there for me to have some sort of animal at home, which was my only wish for all my birthdays. My mother's older sister, Olga Ledererova, died while giving birth to her second child, and Grandma had to start taking care of her household, too - the

newborn Hanicka and Jenik, two years older; at least until Uncle Sigmund remarried. Thus when she proclaimed, either an animal or me, that was the end of my hopes. Several times I tried to smuggle some animal foundling into the house, but success was always only temporary. My first animal at home wasn't until my second marriage.

As a little girl, I didn't want to go to bed. I had the feeling that life was too interesting to sleep through. For the same reason I later didn't want to read - after all, life was too precious for me to waste it reading! I loved life and I loved colors. I was very tormented by the fact that some don't see the world in all its colors. You see, for me each numeral and vowel had its own color. Once I saw a beggar on Krumlov Bridge. For several subsequent nights, I woke up from a dream crying - I couldn't stand the thought of him and his sad life. Grandma and Mom tried to console me, but nothing helped.

Then, one night I again woke and wept for the blind beggar. Mom and Grandma rushed over to me, but I was embarrassed to tell them that I was again weeping for him. And so I told a lie - I said that I was crying because I didn't have a daddy. It wasn't true, I never knew my dad, so I couldn't miss him, but I immediately realized from the sad look in their faces how sorry they were for it. Certainly they tried to do everything to make up for our losing our father. Back then I clearly realized what lying was, and swore that I'd never lie again.

At that time there were about 9000 people living in Cesky Krumlov. About half of them would've been Czechs, and the other half German-speaking citizens of the Czechoslovak Republic [2](#). The town might have been located in the Sudetenland [3](#), but really, until Henlein [4](#) came along and the Germans began with their 'Heim ins Reich,' we lived in peace. My friends were Czechs, Germans and Jews, and no one saw any problem in it. [Editor's note: The 'Heim ins Reich' initiative (German for 'Back to the Reich') was a policy pursued by Adolf Hitler starting in 1938 and was one of the factors leading to WWII. The initiative attempted to convince people of German descent living outside of Germany that they should strive to bring these regions 'home' into a greater Germany. This includes both areas ceded after the Treaty of Versailles and areas which were not previously part of Germany such as Sudetenland. Source: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Heim\\_ins\\_Reich](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Heim_ins_Reich)]

Despite that, Uncle Max, Dad's brother, who after our father's death became our guardian, made a wise decision, and put us into a German school. One reason was for us to really learn German properly, but our uncle also used to say that anti-Semitism is much more noticeable in German institutions than in Czech ones - and so it would be best for us to get used to it as early as possible. As it turned out, our uncle was right, but only later; in the beginning I didn't perceive anything like that.

## **My school years**

I began attending German elementary school, and fell in love with my teacher, Miss Martha Nehybova. She was young, beautiful, and wore her long black hair braided in a ponytail on the nape of her neck. Besides that, she was also kind, truthful, just and noble, and I think that we absorbed more human values in that first school year than in the next several decades.

Martha died no long ago; when I visited her once, she remembered how once long ago my grandma had pleaded with her to talk to me, so that I'd start eating breakfast. Because grandma knew that whatever my teacher told me was holy to me, and because I was a skinny child, that

looked forward to school so much in the morning that it refused to eat breakfast, she told Miss Nehybova about it. Martha then really did mention in front of me that eating breakfast is good, so I began eating breakfast, and a few days later Grandma again appeared at the school to thank her.

I had not even a clue about this episode, I didn't find out about it until now. After the war, Martha and her family were deported [5](#). I think it was precisely to Sudeten Germans such as these that our former president Havel's [6](#) apology for the deportations belonged.

The members of the Krumlov Jewish community represented an insignificant fraction of the entire population of 9,000, about one percent. Most of them were employees of the paper factory in Vetrni, whose owners, the Spiro family, were also Jews. We didn't have a rabbi, the one from Budejovice used to come see us, but we did have our own cantor, Mr. Karel Krebs. He was a nice young man, who was most likely from Hungary, and devoted very much of his time to young people. He taught us religion, put on plays with us, and so on.

The construction of the Krumlov synagogue was financed by the Spiro family, and I think that they were far from being bad employers. Besides building the synagogue, they also founded the Krumlov Jewish cemetery, and the Christian church in Vetrni. We lived in one apartment building that belonged to the factory. The building was divided into five apartments, and I remember that we even had subsidized electricity. This only applied to electricity from wall outlets, so we mostly used table lamps, and very rarely switched on the [main, ceiling] lights.

Only now, with the passage of time, do I realize how hard it must have been for Grandma to make ends meet on Mom's modest salary for a household of four. I actually had this normal, happy childhood. I've got to say, that until the time the Germans began with their Turnvereins [7](#) and began goading people against us, our life flowed on in uninterrupted peace. During the summer we went swimming, in the winter we skated and sledged.

One fall day in 1938, I went to school as usual. I entered the classroom, sat down and began to take things out of my briefcase. But my classmates began chanting the slogan 'Juden raus!', 'Jews out!', so I stacked my things nicely back into my briefcase, and my Jewish friend Leo and I left the class. We were the only two Jews in the class. I remember telling him in front of the school: 'The worst thing about it is that now we'll stay dumb forever, as we can't count on any more education.'

## During the war

I was in sekunda [second year of an eight-year high school, or Grade 6] when I was forced out of school. My sister was even worse off; she was in her last year. We spent the next few days at home, and couldn't even go out into the street - young Germans, the Hitlerjugend [8](#) were marching around outside, and you wouldn't have met a decent person in the street. But my brave mother kept on going to work. One day, still at the beginning of September, she returned and said that we were to pack up some necessities, because we could no longer remain in Krumlov. She ordered a taxi, and sent us to Protivin, her hometown north of the Sudeten border. She herself remained in Krumlov, saying that she'd try to pack up our household.

It's peculiar, but I have to admit that I wasn't afraid for her. A child probably doesn't fully realize how dangerous a situation can be, plus I was convinced that my mom could handle anything. She did handle it, plus the Spiros, when they were leaving their factory and moving to Prague, offered

her a job working several hours a day as a companion for old Mrs. Spiro. Mom of course took the job, found some accommodations in Prague for us, and we moved from Protivin to be with her in Prague.

A couple of days later, our home became part of the German Reich - Czechoslovakia was forced to accept the humiliating agreement, and give up its border regions. To this day, I remember the tears in the eyes of the soldiers, who were mobilized [9](#), but then recalled again, and didn't get a chance to defend their homeland.

In Prague I began attending school again, while my sister didn't continue her studies. She went to learn how to cook and bake pastries instead. I attended a school located on Namesti Jiriho z Podebrad [Jiri from Podebrady Square]; it's this large building, and is a school to this day. But soon my school attendance was once again interrupted - on 15th March 1939, a sign appeared on the school gates that there was to be no school until further notice. The Germans had arrived - Czechoslovakia was occupied. It was a cold, gray day, and the German tanks drew black lines on the snowy streets of Prague.

With the passage of time, my mom's face grew more and more serious. I don't know where, but somewhere she'd managed to find out that someone was helping Jewish children get into foster families in England. And so she took my sister and me to an office on Vorsilska Street to register us, then we stood in a long, long queue for passports, and on the last day of June I was leaving Wilson Station towards an unknown fate. I had the luck that one English family had decided to take me in. My sister also managed to get into England, and went in the following transport: in the last one to leave Czechoslovakia.

Mom didn't have to explain much to me before the trip. After all, I was already a big girl, and knew that the situation was serious. During the train trip, I also felt that at the age of 13, I belonged to the older ones in the transport, and should therefore help take care of the younger children - the two women the Germans had allowed to come with us couldn't keep up with caring for 250 children. In the compartment where I was sitting, there was also one toddler. Before we left, his mother had stuck a bottle of milk for him through the window to us. I took it and put it on the bench, but when the train started moving, the bottle fell over and the milk spilled. For the rest of the trip we fed the little tyke chocolate that we'd all been given for the trip.

When we were crossing the German border, we stood still at it for a terribly long time. The wait seemed endless to us, and we began to be gripped by fear. German uniforms were walking around the train station, and from the faces of the adults and fragments of conversations, we realized that some important documents weren't in order, or perhaps were even missing. Somehow it was all cleared up, the train once again began moving, and after long, endless hours we arrived at Hoek van Holland [Hook of Holland] harbor. We boarded a ship, and when I climbed up on the top bunk in the cabin, I was terribly afraid that I'd fall off it in my sleep.

## **My escape to England**

On 1st July we arrived in London. It was by coincidence my mother's birthday. Before our foster parents took us our separate ways, we were sitting in this large, green room, maybe a gym. We had name cards hanging around our necks, and I clearly remember my feelings, not so much of sadness or tragedy, but of absolute helplessness. This is how calves must feel, when they're

separated from the nourishment and protection of their mothers, put in human hands and at the mercy of human beings, I said to myself. My young friends gradually disappeared, leaving with their new parents to their new foster homes, until finally a few of us for whom no one had come remained in that whole big room. You can imagine the anxiety we little pilgrims sitting on our suitcases felt.

When I was still back home in Czechoslovakia, I'd received a letter from the couple whom I was supposed to live with. So I knew that I was going to be living in Birmingham, with the Joneses. Unfortunately they didn't manage to pick me up in London, so a young man came over to us and said: 'Come along, young people, I'll take you to the train and your families will pick you up in Birmingham.' It was only years later, when I met him again, and knew who he was, that I realized that this young man had been Nicky Winton.

The Joneses were a very kind, older pair. They lived in the suburbs of Birmingham, where they ran a newsstand that also sold all sorts of sweets and ice cream. Aunt and Uncle, as I called them, were very kind to me, and used to give me as much ice cream as I wanted. Another consolation for me was that the Joneses had a female German shepherd named Peggy at home. I could speak Czech to her, and she was the only one that understood me, even if no one else did.

Even though I'd studied some English basics before departure, my knowledge was far from sufficient. And so I didn't understand Englishmen at all, and they didn't understand me. When the Joneses noticed how fond I was of Peggy, our home menagerie grew even bigger: a kitty and a budgie joined it. Another person who tried to make my melding into the new environment as easy as possible was the butcher's helper from the store next door. We were about the same age, and whenever he noticed my tears, he sat me in the sidecar of his motorcycle amongst the sausages and meat, and drove me around. He was also my first English teacher, and my English soon came to resemble his. The problem was that he had a strong Birmingham accent, which of course I didn't know, so my style of speaking must have chafed sensitive ears.

I liked it at school, and I quickly made friends with my classmates. My English surroundings behaved very kindly towards me, and in all manner of ways tried to help me get used to the new environment. Despite that, I had big problems with it. I had problems getting used to England, and upon my return, to once again get used to Czechoslovakia. What bothered me a lot in England was that form was emphasized over content. Everyone says 'sorry,' while they're not at all sorry. Also the sentence 'That's not done' always irritated me greatly, and I couldn't get used to it.

When my first school year in England was drawing to a close, my compulsory school attendance was also drawing to a close. Was this to mean the end of my further education? I didn't want to accept the fact that for the rest of my life I'd be as dumb as I felt myself to be back then. The Joneses were planning to set up a little business for me in this little shop, where I'd sell cotton, wool and silk, and teach people to knit, crochet and embroider. I'd actually always liked handiwork, but the notion that all my life I'd just sit and embroider, or perhaps sell wool? Luckily, a solution was found.

The Joneses wouldn't have had the money to support me in some high school. Mrs. Evelyn Sturge managed to find the finances; she actually wasn't a Mrs., but an older unmarried lady, who used to visit us emigrant children from time to time to see how we were doing. Once she simply arrived, asked how things were, then stopped by at my school and then left again. A few days later a

message arrived that I'm to move from Birmingham to Rugby, and that I'd be attending high school there!! It's very moving to recall a person who made this possible for me.

On the way to Rugby, I stopped off at an annual gathering of Quakers in Birmingham, and Miss Sturge introduced me to a white-haired man with a round, kind face. Mr. Albright walked with a cane, and when we met, he just patted me on the head and said: 'So you're Ruth? Well, well.' Later, many years after his death, Miss Evelyn revealed to me that he'd been the one who'd made my studies possible. He hadn't wanted me to find out about it while he was alive. Such beautiful people live amongst us...

In Rugby I lived with the Cleaver family. The man was named Eric, the lady Phyllis, and they had two children, Russell and Rosemary. Later, when I was already leaving them, they had a second son, Marcus, whose diapers I helped iron while I was still there. And they also had a beautiful longhaired smoky-gray cat, Smoky. But despite everything, taking care of an emigrant child on top of their own children was a burden for an average wartime English family. We didn't go hungry, but food was rationed. And so it would happen that we emigrant children would be cared for by several families, and we'd shuttle back and forth between them. It was once every half-year or year, so not extremely often, but despite that, just when you finally got used to your new home, you'd have to move someplace else.

I lived like this with the Cleavers and Boags. Jack Boag was just 15 years older than I, and had married his wife Isabella shortly before I came to live with them. They lived in a gorgeous bungalow on the outskirts of Rugby, and the view from their dining room windows looked out over meadows and fields of ripe wheat. So that we could get our fill of that beautiful view, all three of us used to sit on the same side of the dining room table, and fed not only our bodies with food, but also our souls with beauty.

The town of Rugby lies not far from Coventry, and so when Coventry was subjected to destructive German air raids, Rugby had its share, too. It was always a very unpleasant experience, when German bombers were flying above our heads. Jack was a member of the fire department, and always when the air raid siren sounded, he'd take his safety helmet and flashlight, and go to work. In the meantime, Isabella and I would hide under the stairs to the attic, and from scratchy khaki wool knit scarves, gloves and socks for soldiers.

When after several nighttime air raids, Coventry was almost razed to the ground, one morning the Boags brought over an older married pair from Coventry and their mentally ill daughter, who'd lost the roof over their heads. Because that lady was bedridden, Jack and Isabella even gave them their bedroom. And this isn't the end of the list of new occupants of our house at that time. In England my sister Eva was attending a nursing school at the orthopedic hospital in Birmingham. At the time of the Coventry air raids, she was helping out at the Rugby hospital, and the Boags arranged for her to live with us, too; she shared my tiny little room with me.

Back then, all this seemed natural to me, but today when I look back, I feel a deep admiration for my foster parents, which in their attitude and actions showed an almost unrivalled example of selfless service. They definitely set the bar of my obstacle race through life very high.

The Boags, like Miss Sturge and Mr. Albright, were Quakers. But besides that, they were also Methodists, so on Sunday we'd go to both services, and there was nothing unusual about it. I didn't

have any contact with anyone from Jewish society; no opportunity to do so even ever came up. I know that some rabbis reproached Nicky Winton for having Christian families raise Jewish children. Nicky's answer was something along the lines of that perhaps they prefer a dead Jewish child to a Jewish child being raised in a Christian family, but he certainly doesn't, and in that case they themselves should do something to save them.

The school where I studied was the elite Rugby High School. I liked it there a lot; for one, my beloved friend Anne was there, and for another my beloved teacher Connie Everett. Anne Heidenheim had been on the same boat as I had. She was also a Jewish child that had been sent into emigration, but as opposed to me, from the German town of Chemnitz. I called her 'Ducky' and she called me 'Dicky.' Each day, we'd meet halfway to school, and then we'd walk the rest of the way holding hands. Anna was a year older than I was. I very much wanted to be in the same year with her, and thanks to the fact that we had a considerate lady for our school principal, it was made possible for me. We sat in the same desk, lent each other clothing, and shared food as well as all our troubles and joys.

Connie Everett taught biology, and I transferred my love for her to her subject as well. I'm not completely sure of it, but it's possible that one of the reasons I worshipped Connie so much was because she had certain qualities in common with Martha, my elementary school teacher.

One day I'd caught a cold, and was sent home with a temperature to sweat it out. On the way there I was passing a library, and so it occurred to me that I could borrow some book to pass the time while sick. I went up to the shelves and took one at random. What I pulled out was the biography of Louis Pasteur. [Pasteur, Louis (1822-1895): French chemist and microbiologist known for his remarkable breakthroughs in microbiology.] I've stopped believing in coincidences long ago. There's a universal plan, and he who is its author is also its dramaturg and director. We're just actors on the stage of life. Who else could have led the hand of a snuffling, coughing, 15-year-old schoolgirl? One thing is certain: From that day onwards, I knew that I wanted to be a microbiologist, and would consider nothing else.

The microbes that live everywhere around us as well as inside our bodies, and are so small that even the sharpest human eye cannot see them, fascinated me to such a degree that my interest in them has lasted my whole life, and has brought joy and a feeling of satisfaction into each new day of my active life.

I completed my studies at Rugby High School with an exam called the Oxford School Certificate. The Boags were moving to the country, and so once again I returned to the Cleavers. I of course tried to find work as soon as possible, so I wouldn't keep burdening their family budget. My priority was work in a laboratory; I sent an application to several dozen of them, but with no success. It was wartime, and state institutions weren't allowed to employ foreigners. And so I started working at a local drugstore.

When I was 17, I got the most beautiful birthday present. A letter from the Boags, who'd in the meantime moved from the country to London, and were writing me that I could again move in with them, and not only that: Jack was working at a hospital in Hammersmith, and had spoken with the head of the bacteriological department about me. They were urgently looking for a new employee for the bacteriological department just then, and the department head had decided to sidestep the law in my case, and give me the job!!! And I started working there, and was absolutely happy...



However, the head lab technician and my boss didn't much like my dream of becoming a lab technician. He kept needling me, that I've got more potential than to just work as a lab technician for the rest of my life, what's more in England, where the pay of lab technicians is very low. He pressured me to try to keep studying, and for this reason asked the Czechoslovak government-in-exile for a scholarship. But I refused it, I stood my ground, and said that I wanted to stay where I was and become a qualified lab technician. And so, when I wasn't going to do it, he visited our ministry-in-exile himself. He found out from the officials there that a Czechoslovak exile school was just in the process of being opened in Wales, and that I should start attending it and finish my Czech high school there, which I would need in any case upon my return home. That they'd consider my scholarship after I graduated, if by then the war wasn't over.

I hope I don't have to emphasize very much that I didn't have the smallest desire to leave the laboratory. With a heavy heart, but nevertheless, I left for Llanwrtyd Wells in the fall of 1943, where at a Czechoslovak high school of the boarding school type I spent two years full of friendship, which I very much like to reminisce about. We were a varied group: most of the students were children from the children's transports, whose lives, like mine, had been saved by Nicholas Winton. Part of us were also children of soldiers and airmen who were serving in the British armed forces, or children of civil servants and high officials of the Czechoslovak government-in-exile. After two beautiful years, I graduated from there. It was May 1945, the end of the war.

## Post-war

We didn't have much information about what was happening at home. Despite that, we suspected that it wasn't anything nice. We were all living in uncertainty, as to what fate had befallen our loved ones, and to this day I remember the day when I found out about my mother. It was one of the most joyous days of my life. At the school they gave out mail during lunchtime in the cafeteria. One May day I received a postcard written in pencil and with the first Czechoslovak stamp in six years. It was from one family friend who'd returned to his homeland as a soldier right after Victory Day, and met my mother in the Jewish ghetto in Terezin [10](#).

My boldest hope had been fulfilled, my most fervent prayer had been answered. I lived through the next several weeks that separated me from my repatriation on 25th August and the subsequent reunion with my mother on the platform of the Usti nad Labem train station in some sort of trance, as if I was floating on a rose-colored fog of joy, and my feet were barely touching the ground. All I can clearly remember is that on that big day, I wanted to look my best, and wore a bright red beret, like Marshal Montgomery wore, which flew off my head and rolled along the platform right when I flew into my mom's arms. [Montgomery, Bernard (1887-1976): Field Marshal, nick-named 'Monty'; most well-known British general of WWII, best remembered for his victory at the Battle of El Alamein in 1942.] We met up in Usti nad Labem, which was more or less halfway between Prague and Teplice, where Mom was living after the war. At that time my sister was already at home, as a nurse she'd returned right after the war ended, and helped stop the typhus epidemic in Terezin.

What had been the fate of my family after I left for England? Mom and Grandma had to leave our Prague apartment and moved to some little closet on Kourimska Street, where they lived up until my mom's deportation to Terezin. Actually, almost all the members of my family were deported, except for Aunt Ida's family, who'd managed to immigrate in time to the United States, Uncle

Hugo's family, who'd emigrated to Norway, and Grandma Marie Kohnova. Grandma died shortly after Mom's departure, probably from sorrow, in the Jewish hospital in Prague's Old Town. Alas, of those that went to Terezin, most also kept going, and so no one else from the family survived.

My mother survived, working as an X-ray technician in Terezin, and this thanks to her cousin Arnost. Arnost was an engineer, and was responsible for the Terezin water plant. You see, they'd hidden the fact that they were cousins, and they got married in Terezin. Thanks to this, my mom remained in Terezin and didn't go any further onwards.

The thing that surprised me the most upon my return to Czechoslovakia was how small all Czech towns and squares were, and how narrow were Wenceslaus Square in Prague and all the streets of Krumlov, in comparison to the images that had lived on in my memory for all those years. In Czechoslovakia there were shortages of absolutely everything: food, warm clothing and shoes, electricity and public transport, but that didn't bother me so much. What touched me much more painfully was the mentality of my fellow citizens. I'd gotten used to English politeness and patience, to the way they stood in orderly queues, and couldn't bring myself to shove my way forward and fight for a place in an overcrowded streetcar, bus or train. All transportation in those days really was overcrowded, and differed in no way from pictures from overpopulated India, with travelers hanging in clusters around doors and windows of wagons like dark grapes.

While I left for England with one suitcase, I returned home with two. So I could say that I'd actually improved my lot; I'd collected some clothes in England that we used to get from the Red Cross, and then there were some books that I couldn't bear to part with. But it wasn't anything too amazing. I remember that winter boots were a big problem. England didn't have very cold winters, so normal shoes sufficed, whereas here it was really freezing. Mom managed to find some leather on the black market, and so she had a shoemaker custom-make me these boots.

I also brought frostbite back with me from England. The English, being convinced that they don't have a real winter, had only single-glaze windows in their homes, and only one heat source, which is a fireplace. And so always when we came home frozen through, we'd rush to the fireplace and try to warm up. I got frostbite right that first year, and it lasted several years. They're these large sores that itch a lot. I had them only on my feet, whereas my friend Anne had them on her hands as well.

## **My university years**

With a feeling of patriotic pride, I registered as a student of the Faculty of Sciences at the old and famous Charles University in Prague. Today's students would probably have a hard time comprehending what it meant for me back then, that our Czech university had survived the German occupation and six years of war, that I'd also survived that horrific time, and that I was allowed to set foot on academic ground that had been founded by such an enlightened and wise ruler as was the Father of our nation, Charles IV [Charles IV (1316-1378): Czech king, from 1355 Roman Emperor], for whom I feel great respect and admiration to this day.

The field I'd picked was, what else, microbiology. And to this day I'm convinced that it was the right choice; it's a beautiful field, it's so exciting, it's interesting, and a very suitable profession for a woman. It has no night or weekend shifts... I found a sublet with one Prague family in exchange for teaching both their daughters English. I hope that my services were better than the cubicle that I

was given in a beautiful bourgeois apartment on the riverfront in Smichov. It was a small closet behind the kitchen, apparently intended for a servant, and it had no heat. So during my first winter in Prague I suffered a lot, and my frostbite from England tormented me quite a bit.

The lecture halls at the faculty, the same as the trains that I used to take every Friday to Teplice to see my mom, were overcrowded and the glass was missing from windows in many of the wagons. When I once got onto one of these cold wagons and was sitting, all frozen, in the draft, I met another angel that stepped into my life. He was an older gentleman without one outstanding feature that would have recorded itself in my memory, besides his rare kindness. By that broken window, he promised me that the next Friday he'd bring an electric heater for me to the train station. He said that he wouldn't miss it - and he really did bring it that one week later. I still thank you today, my angel, thank you, because for an extra hour or two of English a week, I was allowed to turn it on in my closet, and so I survived that first winter unscathed.

### **Working at the hospital in Prague**

As soon as I could, I found work in a diagnostic lab at the hospital in Motol in Prague. At that time we were investigating many infectious post-war diseases. Croup was rampant among small children, and many youngsters as well as old people were suffering from tuberculosis. I later wrote my dissertation on the laboratory diagnosis of croup, for my PhD in Science. So many people were dying of tuberculosis back then several cases a day were dissected at our pathology department. The bacteriological laboratory was separated from the dissection room by only an old, ill-sealed door, and between 1945 and 1948, all employees of the pathology department came down with tuberculosis, with the exception of the head pathologist and me.

Perhaps to partly compensate for the dangerousness of this work, we used to get special rations in addition to the usual food coupons; I think it was thirty eggs, some butter and some milk for the month, whether also meat, that I don't remember any more. But I used to take these special coupons home to my family in Teplice, because they were quite starved after Terezin, and they never did receive any special assistance.

I was never a very fervent reader, perhaps with the exception of several periods of my life, when I first devoured the books of Axel Munthe, then the novels of Romain Rolland, later Franz Werfel and finally Dostoevsky [11](#). When I read all his books in one go, and got to his diary, I was shocked by his anti-Semitism and disappointed by his opinion that Russia will save the world. [Munthe, Axel (1857-1949): Swedish physician and psychiatrist, best known for his autobiographical work 'The Story of San Michele.' Rolland, Romain (1866-1944): French novelist and dramatist, best known for his novel series 'Jean Christopher,' a satirical criticism of the world he saw about him. Werfel, Franz (1890-1945): Austrian-Jewish novelist poet and playwright, born in Prague, whose 1933 realistic novel 'The Forty Days of Musa Dagh' won him international fame. He fled from Nazi-Germany in 1938 and immigrated to the USA in 1940. He died in California five years later.]

Otherwise I tried, besides keeping tabs on professional literature, to widen my perspective from time to time. One day I even began to read Schopenhauer [Arthur Schopenhauer (1788-1860): German philosopher, best known for his work 'The World as Will and Idea' (1819)]. I've got to admit that I didn't get too far, but an invisible hand must have pointed with an invisible finger exactly to that place where I was supposed to read, and which has engraved itself indelibly into my memory. It was a deep wisdom that related to my first marriage, and in retrospect I'd say that it could've

even influenced my choice of partner. Schopenhauer believes that a young person is attracted to precisely that partner who is needed so that their union can bear precisely that child for which he yearns, or which he is fated to have. That's the main force that ignites first loves in inexperienced young couples and apparently no longer has an effect on the choice of partner in a more mature phase of life.

Because I'd experienced anti-Semitism already in my youth, and believed that my future husband must be as one body and one soul with me, I suffered from a fixed idea that I had to marry a Jew. Not because the Orthodox faith forbade mixed marriages. For one, I'd grown up in a liberal Jewish family, and for another, prohibitions for which I could find no justification had always on the contrary goaded me into defying them. But I couldn't at all imagine that 'part of my body and soul' could ever hold my being Jewish against me. But it's possible that back then the main reason was still deeply buried in my subconscious. I was internally certain that I'd have at least two longed-for children, a boy and a girl, and that they'd have typically Jewish dark eyes and black, curly hair.

### **My first marriage**

I met my first husband, Ing. Hanus Eisler, in 1946, soon after his return from emigration to the United States. He was a childhood friend of my dorm roommate Eva. Up until then all my first loves and friendships had been platonic. His American behavior differed from my Puritan upbringing, and he got me into bed; I became convinced that I had to marry him.

We were married in November 1947 in the Clam-Gallas Palace on the Old Town Square in Prague. The first months after the wedding, I was truly happy. We had to skimp and save a lot, as we both had small salaries from which we had to furnish our household. Because back then everything was in short supply, and we were always happy when someone gave us something that they no longer needed. We were happy for every iron bed frame, old mattress or piece of carpet. At the end of December 1948 our son Petr was born, and I worked up until the doctors urgently advised me to take maternity leave early due to the danger of infection. I continued my studies by correspondence, because our cheerful and very active son was the center of my interests.

Alas, after our son was born, the problems in our marriage culminated. Already when I was marrying my first husband, I couldn't help but see certain features of his character from which one could suspect that life with him won't be a walk through a rose garden. But when a person is in love, and back then I really was, he moves in more elevated spheres and his feet barely touch the ground. I think that in no way was Hanus a bad person. Alas, he suffered from a strong jealousy complex, which was aimed at everything around us far and wide. Perhaps it was also caused by the fact that he grew up as an only child.

The German psychologist Alfred Adler developed a theory according to which a younger sibling has to come to terms with the lust for power, because he understandably wants to rule as much or even more than his older sibling, while an older child must learn to not be jealous of the younger one for getting more attention as the new addition to the family. When children grow up together, they learn in a natural way to come to terms with both problems, which weakens their childhood egocentricity, which of course is stronger in an only child. Another important factor is that through that same natural process, children learn to share things and attention in the family. [Adler, Alfred (1870-1937): Austrian-Jewish doctor and psychologist, founder of the school of individual psychology. Along with Sigmund Freud and a small group of his colleagues, Adler was among the

co- founders of the psychoanalytic movement.]

In the beginning he was even jealous of my mother, when I wasn't pleased by his indecent behavior towards her and often took her side, then of my friends, when I for example dared to treat them to fried eggs that used up more eggs than was allegedly usual in our modest household, and after our son was born, he didn't like it at all when my mom or sister came to help me out. The situation wasn't easy, but I was convinced that I'd manage everything, and in any case, I wanted a second child. Hanicka was born in 1952, when I finished school and Petr was three.

After about a year, I wanted to start working again. By coincidence, it was at the time when the political trial with Jewish doctors was taking place in the Soviet Union [12](#). Another coincidence was that one of them was named Adler, the same as my maiden name, which was enough for me to not be able to find any work. This is an example of the anti-Semitism that I encountered after the war. Though I answered ads that were offering a position for a microbiologist, after a certain time, a negative answer would come. My friend Frantisek, who as a journalist had access to cadre materials, revealed to me the reason for my failure.

The head doctor at the Motol hospital helped me, by arranging for me to start working at Motol as a lab technician. And when the director changed, I was able to transfer to a microbiologist's position. I got a raise, and was even promised my salary would be matched three months back, but then the currency reform arrived [13](#) and nothing was remained of the money. Despite that, I've got to admit that poverty bothered me much less than relationships in our marriage.

One day, when I was once again taking the unheated streetcar to Motol, to work, I began daydreaming. Then I woke up and was truly horrified, when I realized what I'd been dreaming about: that World War III had broken out, that they'd drafted Hanus into the army, and I - had felt relieved! It terrified me that I could think of something like that lightheartedly, but on the other hand I forced myself to face the truth. I had to ask myself the hardest and most painful question of all: How is it possible that I don't love him any more? Up until then, I'd believed that love was eternal, that it never dies. It was actually only later that I realized that human love is a feeling, and that it's subject to change, as opposed to God's pure love, which is a state, and nothing can shake it. Slowly I began to realize that during eight years of marriage, my husband through his jealousy had managed to achieve that I no longer felt anything towards him.

Anyways, when things came to a head in our relationship and I couldn't provide a calm, happy and safe home for our children, I decided to leave. Our friends and later also lawyers advised me to try to preserve the marriage at any cost, and I remember courteously answering them, that I'd be glad to follow their advice as to how I should do my hair or how long my skirt should be, but I asked them to not try and influence me in such an important life decision.

Then the long journey of our divorce proceedings began. I had to go degradingly to the Ministry of Health and there ask for them to transfer me somewhere where I'd at least get one room for the children and me. So I was transferred to the Soviet sanatorium in Karlovy Vary [14](#). I'll mention just two experiences from there: for one a recollection of a man who spoke relatively openly about the conditions that existed in the Soviet Union, and was amazed as to why we wanted to outdo our big brother in everything, which was our motto, when for example our social facilities, from nursery schools to hospitals, were at a much better level than the Soviet ones. He was Maestro Mravinskij, a great conductor, and a great, brave person.

Another memory is of a decree, according to which when a patient was leaving, we had to count more blood cells and hemoglobin in his blood test than he had when he arrived. You see, the truth wasn't very popular with Communists. At Marxist-Leninist night school, which was mandatory for university students, they even taught us the heretic thesis that the truth changes with conditions and over time.

The divorce proceedings went on for an unbelievable seven long years, and I think that the saddest part of it was the fight over our children. Once again, the Communist Party [15](#) and its ideology had a part to play in it. Both Hanus and his mother were Communists, and after the wedding they'd decided to give me an ideological education as well. Up till then I'd never even had the slightest brush with politics, but because I'd come across class discrimination two or three times in British society, I agreed and submitted an application to the Communist Party. During my two years of candidacy, they were hard at work persuading me to end my membership in the Jewish religious community. If, as they claim, there's no God, why be in some group like that? But I, for my part, wasn't about to do that, especially because of solidarity with dozens of friends and relatives who'd died as victims of Nazism, back then not even so much because of some strong belief in God. I believed in Love, which leads and teaches us all our lives, but back then I didn't yet call it God.

I don't even know for what reason, but after two years of candidacy, the comrades swallowed my being Jewish and accepted me into the Party. I have my membership to thank for the fact that my children were with me those entire seven years when we were getting divorced. Otherwise they would probably have been taken away from me earlier. This way, they weren't taken away until we moved to Usti nad Labem, where I began working at the virology department of the local Regional Hygiene Station. My former husband and mother-in-law had managed to convince the court to grant them custody. The reason given was that while their paternal grandmother was a party member, and thus being in contact with her was commendable, their maternal grandmother wasn't in the Party, and it was thus necessary to avoid contact with her.

## **My children**

Then that wild merry-go-round began, where I wasn't willing to give up my children at any cost, and where my ex-husband and his mother didn't intend to back down either. Alas, I went from court to court, and always lost. I appealed all the way to the Supreme Court, and the civil servant that met me at the security desk got into the paternoster lift with me, and we rode it round and round. It seemed strange to me that we weren't getting off but he then began talking: 'Look, madam, you love your children, and I love my children, too. That's why I'll tell you something, and will trust you to keep it between the two of us. I've studied your file, and it's clear to me that the decision is unjust, and their being taken out of your custody is groundless. But what I'd like to tell you is that you can't win this battle. This is because your opponent is the secret police [16](#).' Then I realized that this was something he couldn't tell me in his office - it would definitely have been heavily bugged.

Despite everything, the children were still with me, from time to time a lady from the children's welfare department would visit us and have a talk with them; she'd ask them where they wanted to be, and they always said that they wanted to be with me, and so for a while there'd be peace. Until one day, when a lady from the social welfare department called me at work, and in an agitated voice told me that my husband, armed with a copy of the court decision and with the assistance of

his mother and two SNB officers [17](#), had picked up the kids from school and taken them away somewhere. There'd been a big commotion at the school because of it, because Petr's father had dragged him by force down the stairs, with little Hanicka walking behind them, meek as a lamb, with tears streaming down her face.

My children were in Prague and I remained in Usti with my great pain and justified worries about them. Not even ten days had gone by, when Petr ran away from Prague and returned to Usti. He apologized that he hadn't been able to take Hana with him for fear that his escape would be given away, but gallantly offered to go get her. I could well imagine how sad Hanicka must have been alone in Prague, and so I set out to her school. But I didn't find her at school; her father had hidden her away somewhere. Now my small, brave daughter decided to act. She took out of her piggy bank exactly as much money as she'd need for a half-price ticket from Prague to Usti, and got home without any problems.

So the children actually decided for themselves that they could stay with me. Because after that the street committee took things in hand. This was a local citizen's organization, which officially under the aegis of, in reality under the command of the Communist Party, was responsible for local civil matters and supervised the behavior of citizens in a given area and definitively decided that the children would stay with me.

As I've already mentioned, at first I worked as a lab technician, then as a science PhD at the autopsy department of Motol Hospital in Prague. In Karlovy Vary I worked for a year doing biochemistry at the Imperial sanatorium, and from there I went to become the head of the virology department of the Regional Hygiene & Epidemiology Station in Usti nad Labem. Back then, we were testing a polio vaccine. That was a big breakthrough in immunology back then, and for us it was an exciting project. Two American doctors had found a way to save thousands of children from death or lifelong paralysis, and needed to test this new vaccine.

Under socialism, our health care system was highly organized. Each child had to be registered, and had a record at the children's health center. Preventive vaccination was mandatory for everyone, and the law was that whoever didn't show up with their child for vaccination after receiving a written request, was to be summoned to see the police.

That was exactly what was needed for this project. Dr. Salk, the American doctor who'd developed the vaccine with his colleague Dr. Sabin, even came to Czechoslovakia to personally sign the appropriate agreement. The vaccine was given orally, and our virology laboratories were performing thousands of tests on children's stools for the presence of the weakened virus at various intervals after its administration. There was a lot of work involved, but the whole project was successful, and showed itself to be a major blessing for millions of children and their parents. Thanks to it, one of the most feared childhood diseases simply disappeared from the world.

I really enjoyed my work there, even though I've got to admit that I would've enjoyed it more if the absurdity of socialist management hadn't been so evident in it. At that time the activity and power of the party organization at our institute was at its zenith. Whatever its functionaries wanted, and of course whatever those higher up in the Party hierarchy wanted, had to be unanimously agreed to and performed. So once when a decree came that one of our young colleagues, who'd I'd come to know as a good and hard-working person, was to be thrown out of the institute for political reasons, I was the only one who defied the principles of so-called democratic party centralism, that

is, the fact that the minority obeys the majority, and voted against his expulsion.

Another of my conflicts with the system came when I refused to vote for one candidate in elections to the party committee; but the climax of our mutual clashes didn't take place until a young lady doctor started working there as a hygienist. The faculty of hygienic medicine had been founded in socialist times, and gave Communists and their sympathizers an easier opportunity to get a university degree. This lady doctor soon began to act like the department head, and when I caught her taking a sterile syringe out of water where it had been boiling for a half hour with her un-sterile fingers, I knew that I had no intention of staying there. But where to go next? In Usti there was only one remaining choice for me: the regional lab for cultivation of mycobacteria, located at a detached hospital for lung and respiratory illnesses on Bukov Hill.

By coincidence, this very hospital was co-founded during the time of the First Republic by my beloved Uncle Hugo, my father's brother, who headed it until 1939, when he immigrated to Norway. When I asked the director whether they didn't need a microbiologist, he took me on immediately, and so I started there in 1959, and didn't leave until the day before my 55th birthday, when as a mother of two children, I was eligible for retirement.

Besides routine cultivation, isolation, tests for sensitivity to anti-tuberculosis substances and classification of various types of mycobacteria, there was also time for various experiments and research. Most of them were related to shortening incubation time. Mycobacteria grow much more slowly than other microbes; they need three to six, sometimes even nine weeks before they form colonies on substrates rich in egg protein and other nutrients. Once I heard one German professor say that mycobacteria must exude special volatile essences, vibrations or something that helps form beautiful relationships among people. Perhaps that's also the case, but definitely that slow growth of theirs plays a role.

Work and working conditions in this field were calm. No one was rushing to be the first to come up with some earth-shaking discovery. Everyone tried to share their scientific knowledge with their colleagues in a spirit of friendly collaboration. The relations in this field of medicine were really a rare exception in today's egocentric world.

Somewhere in the Five Books of Moses, I once found mention of the fact that the Lord spoke to him not only when awake, but also when he was asleep. Dreams played an important role in my life. When thanks to my English brother Russell Cleaver I got to know the work of Carl Jung and his teachings on dreams, I began recording them faithfully. Since that time, dreams have taught me and showed me the way. [Jung, Carl (1875-1961): Swiss psychiatrist, influential thinker, and founder of analytic psychology.]

Once at an opening of a show of children's drawings, I met a young violinist with guileless blue eyes, Milan Hala, and I fell in love with him. Milan was a Christian and steered me towards reading the New Testament; up till then I'd only read the Old. I began reading, and my heart melted. Here was the gospel of love expressed in the most moving picture of the embodiment of love itself, that of the gentle Nazarene. But soon I stood before a serious problem: Could I, as a Jewess, accept something like that? Wouldn't it be a character flaw, to be so enthused by Christianity the moment I fell in love with a Christian?



Right during that time I had a dream. I was at a concert, where Jews and Christians were sitting separately. I was among the Jews. But my neighbors were making so much noise that I couldn't hear the music at all, much less take it in. And then my Uncle Hugo came along, took me by the hand and sat me down amongst the Christians. Milan and I were married the day before my birthday in 1965. Milan was an angel, literally and to the letter, and my children accepted him readily. We spent a beautiful 41 years together. He died this last summer; we were together in the forest, picking mushrooms, and I'd just said: 'it's beautiful here' and suddenly I heard this thud. Milan was dead. Few are granted such a beautiful death, and I'm glad that Milan was one of them.

After the famous Prague Spring [18](#), after the entry of allied tanks onto our territory on 21st August 1968 [19](#) and after the occupation of our country by the Soviet army, after Mr. Alexandr Dubcek [20](#) was forced to abdicate, all state employees were faced with tragicomic torture in the form of so-called political screening. I'm choosing the word 'tragicomic' because when I look back today, it seems to me to have been an unbelievably stupid farce, that every citizen of an occupied country was to answer the same main question, whether he agreed with the arrival of the troops. But it wasn't only a comical, nonsensical game. It was a tragedy, because almost all employees lied out of fear for losing their jobs and being persecuted, and thus actually confirmed the occupants' right to perpetrate the blatant injustice under which we all lamented.

I think that the screenings began shortly after the first anniversary of 21st August, when a large majority of the nation went to work that day in black, as a sign of mourning and protest. The Communists must have been beside themselves with rage, but they couldn't pillory us, because they couldn't object to the wearing of black or to walking. Besides, at that time there were many of us that went like this - hundreds and hundreds of citizens in every town. Which is probably why those in high places thought up the screening, to keep people afraid. Every employee had to come in front of the commission and answer that nonsensical, feared question about the entry of the troops, or brotherly assistance, which was the official terminology for the Russian occupation. Most people answered yes and signed a supplementary evaluation for their cadre materials, upon which they could leave the room and remained in their job positions.

When it was my turn, our director, who meant well, read me my evaluation and asked me whether I was willing to sign it. The first sentence read: 'Comrade Dr. R. H. agreed with the Party's politics both before August as well as with the Party's policies after 1968.' At first I thought that he was joking, and began laughing. It wasn't a joke, and finally I ended up in tears. When I told him that I can't sign something that doesn't make sense, and what's more isn't true, the director grew angry and asked me that feared question, which perhaps he had wanted to avoid with that formulation, because he was well aware of my opinions.

We were actually quite good friends, because he loved his boxer and I my poodles, and during the time of the thaw under Dubcek, we'd talked together quite openly several times while walking our dogs. I answered that I didn't agree with the entry of the troops. I asked whether the goal of this torment was letting some people go from work. The director answered that no, but when he read the final version of my evaluation, the last sentence said: 'We recommend that our comrade remain in her position she has held until now.'

So I can't help but note that my assumption was correct. The atmosphere grew tense. I told him: 'If you don't need me here, tell me, and I'll go work someplace else.' That was too much for him, and

he shot back: 'You can be sure that with the evaluation you'd leave here with, you wouldn't get a job just like that somewhere.' By then I was in tears, but I asked him one more thing, why was he tormenting people like this, whether someone wasn't forcing him? That after all, I knew that a year ago his thinking had been quite normal. In front of all the members of that sad tribunal, the director had been forced to say that he'd been mistaken back then.

This moment of truth cost me a lot of money. Not only that I didn't get a raise when the long-promised and awaited wage reform in the health care sector was implemented, but I also lost my premiums, including the so-called 'funeral allowance' for working in the region with the worst air pollution in the whole country. But for my conscience it meant a huge relief. I left the Party during the time of Israel's conflicts with its neighbors. At a party meeting, someone addressed this issue in a report, and during the discussion that followed, our ambulance medic, Bohousek, a Russian by origin and still an illiterate, proclaimed that it was after all common knowledge that Jews are like rats leaving a sinking ship. All eyes turned to me, and I turned red from head to toe. I sat there stunned, and waited for someone to say something. No one said even a word. I took advantage of this incident to rid myself of a yoke that had long weighed on me.

I think that the Communists harassed me the most because of another thing related to the occupation of Czechoslovakia, this being that my son Petr had decided to emigrate right afterwards. So they once again summoned me to be interrogated, and tried to get me to say that he'd escaped because of the occupation. I started crying there - can you imagine what it's like when your child runs away, you don't know anything about him, and on top of that they torture you like this. I kept repeating that I didn't know why he'd escaped, that he hadn't let me in on his plans, which was also true, but they were adamant.

After several hours, I said to the person that was interrogating me: 'Excuse me, permit me to ask one question. Do you have children?' He said yes. I asked him: 'Can you imagine your son escaping. You don't know anything about him, you can't help him, you don't know what's happening to him out there in the world, so why are you torturing me because of it here? Is it of some use to you, or what?' So he then let me go, but it was really horrible.

Petr went to Canada, and I went there to see him in 1975, when he was graduating. It wasn't my first trip to the West, but it's true that such trips were few and far between. Actually, the first time I went abroad was in 1963. Beforehand, however, people from the secret police were coming to see me, saying that I must certainly have many friends in the West, and if I'll work for them [the secret police], I'll be able to go visit without any problems. I played dumb, that I wasn't capable, that I didn't even remember whom all I knew there... Then they came again when I was getting divorced, and at that time I argued that I wasn't after all going to go traveling when my children were being taken away from me.

So the first time I got to England after the war was in 1963, when a friend of mine from the ROH [21](#), a decent person, arranged an internship for me there. Upon my return, I had to write a report on my trip, and say which emigrants I'd met with, and what we did. So of course, I wrote up five copies of the report, but everything was only about laboratory methods that I'd learned there. I argued that the entire time I'd worked and worked, that I'd been shut up in a lab, and so didn't have time for anything else. I'd of course made use of the trip to meet up with my old friends, but after all that wasn't something I was going to tell them. One more thing about relations with investigators: I

found out that when you find some sort of human connection with even the biggest snoop, you'll be able to come to some sort of agreement.

Actually, the way I got to go see Petr in Canada is also very interesting. In this I had help from my faithful canine friends, concretely poodles, that I was breeding. The puppies that they had were simply irresistible. We gave one of them to a friend of ours that worked for the passport and visa department, and soon the powerful department head himself developed a strong desire for a puppy like that, too. Because I used to go give Bobik regular haircuts, too, he really did help make my trip abroad possible. But I had to promise that I wouldn't tell anyone that it was through doggie acquaintances.

When I wanted to go visit my family in Israel in 1989, nothing similar helped me. I was retired, so if I'd emigrated the state would have only saved money on my pension, but the comrades dug in their heels and didn't want to give me permission to leave. They did offer me that I could meet my relatives in Romania, which was purportedly how other Czechoslovak Jews did it, but this solution was on the other hand not satisfactory to me.

This is why I sent a letter from Dresden to my cousin Yakov in Israel, for him to send my promised plane ticket and money to the Israeli consulate in Vienna, and mainly for him to not mention anything in letters written to me at home. Because I knew that the comrades were reading my mail. Some letters didn't arrive at all; other mail from abroad came regularly every Tuesday. My plans finally succeeded, and I traveled to the Holy Land in the spring before the revolution [22](#), in 1989.

The country thrilled me. In the beginning I was afraid of what sort of an effect it was going to have on me, so many Jews in one place, but the atmosphere there was excellent, this... participation. I had the feeling that the people there needed to be a part of the lives of others, everything interested them... For example, I'd just sat down in the bus, and already everyone was asking what I'd done during the war, what I'd experienced, which was beautiful. Also, when I was walking around, for the first time I felt truly free.

Alas, I've got to say that with every subsequent visit I felt that the situation there was getting worse. When I last visited my cousin, who lives in the north, an atmosphere full of fear, stress and hate weighed on me. Cars with loudspeakers were driving around and announcing that we should go into shelters.... it didn't at all leave a good impression on me. I've got to say that now I feel freer in India than in Israel.

And what's my opinion of Israel? I'm not a politician, and I can just state my subjective impressions. It's a beautiful country, full of holy light, but over which they'll keep arguing until they realize that all humanity is one family, and that we people have to share things. As to why I didn't emigrate there? When I returned home from England after the war, I was glad to be home and had no thoughts of another emigration. My cousins live in Israel, along with their large families; their names are Hanicka and Fricek, who calls himself Yakov after Grandpa Jakub.

## Retirement

I retired the day before my 55th birthday, with great joy. I enjoyed my work, but my health wasn't the best, and I've also got to say that work was continually sadder and sadder. While in the post-

war years tuberculosis was very widespread in our population, gradually the percentage of patients with it declined, and the percentage of those that had lung cancer grew.

Cancer is a much more dangerous enemy than tuberculosis. During my entire career, the best result we achieved in the treatment of cancer was survival for five years of 25 percent of patients operated upon. It's very difficult to diagnostically distinguish between carcinoma and tuberculosis, and often an exact diagnosis is impossible until you open up the chest. By chance, it was I that was given the responsibility for these diagnoses. It was extremely demanding work, and I was always very afraid that I'd hurt a patient through some mistake of mine.

But mainly it was extraordinarily sad work. The air quality in northern Bohemia definitely also had an influence on how rapidly the number of cancerous tumors was increasing. It was actually a written-off region. When you drove from Prague and were nearing Lovosice, you could already see this orange cloud above the city. The inhabitants used to get certain premiums for having to live there, but that three hundred a month for ruined health was ludicrous. What's more, this 'funeral money' was taken away from me after I disagreed with the entry of the occupational troops.

[Editor's note: the last setting of the gold content of the crown took place with Act. No. 41/1953 on currency reform, when the gold content of the crown was set (unrealistically and outside of any wider context) to 0.123426 g of pure gold, which remained so until the end of the 1980s. ]

So as soon as it was possible, I left northern Bohemia and returned to my home region, to southern Bohemia. It's unbelievable, but I've already been retired the same amount of time as I spent working. At least I see how relative time is. The first 30 years dragged on in an unbelievable fashion, and these ones have gone by so fast that I don't even want to believe it. We got ourselves our miniature dachshund Cliff, and I used to take him for walks every day; here we'd pick herbs, there pine cones for heating...

When we lived in Budejovice, I among other things occupied myself with teaching English at the local Faculty of Education, and guiding tourists around town. Amongst the first guests that I was privileged to tour around was the Danish queen Margarethe II.

During retirement I also started painting. Up till then I thought that I don't know how, but one day my friend, the painter Jan Cihla, brought me an article by Winston Churchill, where it said that whoever hasn't tried to paint during his lifetime, has lost out on a lot. That all you need is a brush, paper, paint, and a good dose of courage. Winston Churchill was always a big authority for me, and to this day I claim that it was he who won the war for us, and so I started painting.

In amateur painting everything is allowed. At first I slavishly followed the subject, but then I found out that it after all doesn't have to exactly the same. Mainly the overall harmony can't be disturbed. There's harmony in the universe, in nature, and its disturbance is a big mistake. This criterion is also decisive for me in deciding what is kitsch and what isn't. When I look out the window and see blue sky, in it white clouds, in front of the house a pond with a swan, everyone would say that that's kitsch. But it's actually this Ladaesque harmony. [Lada, Josef (1887-1957): Czech painter, best known as illustrator of Jaroslav Hasek's World War I novel 'The Good Soldier Schweik.' Lada produced landscapes, created frescoes and designed costumes for plays and films. Over the years he created a series of paintings and drawings depicting traditional Czech occupations and situations.]

This is why painting is so beneficial, that a person learns to concentrate, and is forced to look at the world in such a way as to be able to pass on his point of view. I found out that every dot, line and free space is terribly important. That's also how I imagine the mosaic of our life; one could say that I've got this notion of a God that sits there and is putting a puzzle together. Each one of us is unique, has his own shape, his color and place in the world that belongs to him and him alone.

Today I know that all the joys and pains, all the successes and failures that life prepared for me were lessons from which I'm to draw lessons, that everything that once came to be must also disappear, and that there's not only the external world, in which this drama takes place, but also the internal one, the world of our unborn and immortal soul. Everything I lived through in my life was preparation for the commencement of searching for the truth about my soul, or a so-called spiritual journey.

Already at the age of 17, I was pondering on the purpose of life. Back then I wrote in my diary that I think that it's probably: 'To be happy and help others be happy.' When I was 37 and my children no longer needed to have their noses blown and behinds washed, I felt the need to stop that merry-go-round of everyday life, to ponder about things, and widen my earlier credo, which still counts for me. I asked myself questions that humanity has been asking itself since ancient times: 'Why am I here, what is the purpose of my life? Where have I come from, and where am I headed?' That was in 1963, and back then I was allowed to travel to England for the first time since 1945.

I threw myself on for us forbidden and thus inaccessible literature, and with the help of books by Carl Jung began my search for the Truth. For five full years I regularly recorded my dreams and contemplated them. I learned to sort through them and recognize which events originated in my subconscious, which means from unfulfilled desires or from strong, not yet processed experiences, and which ones come from somewhere up above, from some heavenly teacher or advisor. As soon as a person turns his attention inwards, further help is at hand.

In 1965, soon after my second wedding, I met my first spiritual teacher through my husband. He was a man with a big and loving heart, and until his departure from this world in 1994, thus for almost a whole 30 years, we exchanged countless letters and visited each other regularly. Besides exchanging many questions and answers, we also sat together in silence every time. We didn't call it meditation, but silence. Not until this teacher of mine 'preceded us,' did the teacher of all teachers let himself be known to me: Sai Baba, the incarnation of God walking among us in Puttaparthi, a small village in the south of India, where he was born. [Sathya Sai Baba: born Sathyanarayana Raju in 1926; a South Indian guru and religious leader.]

For ten years already, I've been translating his words from English to Czech, and I regularly go to India to see him, to 'be silent' in his ashram. For me Sai Baba is God incarnate. He came to teach and lead us, to remind us of who we are, and to console us. He teaches us that we aren't a body, but clean, unselfish love and clear consciousness, an eternal and immortal soul - the spark of Godliness.

## Glossary

### **1 Winton, Sir Nicholas (b**

1909): A British broker and humanitarian worker, who in 1939 saved 669 Jewish children from the

territory of the endangered Czechoslovakia from death by transporting them to Great Britain.

## **2 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.

## **3 Sudetenland**

Highly industrialized north-west frontier region that was transferred from the Austro-Hungarian Empire to the new state of Czechoslovakia in 1919. Together with the land a German-speaking minority of 3 million people was annexed, which became a constant source of tension both between the states of Germany, Austria and Czechoslovakia, and within Czechoslovakia. In 1935 a Nazi-type party, the Sudeten German Party financed by the German government, was set up. Following the Munich Agreement in 1938 German troops occupied the Sudetenland. In 1945 Czechoslovakia regained the territory and pogroms started against the German and Hungarian minority. The Potsdam Agreement authorized Czechoslovakia to expel the entire German and Hungarian minority from the country.

## **4 Henlein, Konrad (1898-1945)**

From the year 1933, when Adolf Hitler came to power in Germany, the situation in the Czech border regions began to change. Hitler decided to disintegrate Czechoslovakia from within, and to this end began to exploit the German minority in the border regions, and the People's Movement in Slovakia. His political agent in the Czech border regions became Konrad Henlein, a PE teacher from the town of As. During a speech in Karlovy Vary on 24th April 1938, Henlein demanded the abandonment of Czechoslovak foreign policy, such as alliance agreements with France and the USSR; compensation for injustices towards Germans since the year 1918; the abandonment of Palacky's ideology of Czech history; the formation of a German territory out of Czech border counties, and finally, the identification with the German (Hitler's) world view, that is, with Nazism. Two German political parties were extant in Czechoslovakia: the DNSAP and the DNP. Due to their subversive activities against the Czechoslovak Republic, both of these parties were officially dissolved in 1933. Subsequently on 3rd October 1933, Konrad Henlein issued a call to Sudeten Germans for a unified Sudeten German national front, SHP. The new party thus joined the two former parties under one name. Before the parliamentary elections in 1935 the party's name was changed to SDP. In the elections, Henlein's party finished as the strongest political party in the Czechoslovak Republic. On 18th September 1938, Henlein issued his first order of resistance, regarding the formation of a Sudeten German "Freikorps," a military corps of freedom fighters,

which was the cause of the culmination of unrest among Sudeten Germans. The order could be interpreted as a direct call for rebellion against the Czechoslovak Republic. Henlein was captured by the Americans at the end of WWII. He committed suicide in an American POW camp in Pilsen on 10th May 1945.

## **5 Forced displacement of Germans**

One of the terms used to designate the mass deportations of German occupants from Czechoslovakia which took place after WWII, during the years 1945-1946. Despite the fact that anti-German sentiments were common in Czech society after WWII, the origin of the idea of resolving post-war relations between Czechs and Sudeten Germans with mass deportations are attributed to President Edvard Benes, who gradually gained the Allies' support for his intent. The deportation of Germans from Czechoslovakia, together with deportations related to a change in Poland's borders (about 5 million Germans) was the largest post-war transfer of population in Europe. During the years 1945-46 more than 3 million people had to leave Czechoslovakia; 250,000 Germans with limited citizenship rights were allowed to stay. (Source: [http://cs.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vys%C3%ADdlen%C3%AD\\_N%C4%9Bmc%C5%AF\\_z\\_%C4%8Cesk\\_oslavenska](http://cs.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vys%C3%ADdlen%C3%AD_N%C4%9Bmc%C5%AF_z_%C4%8Cesk_oslavenska))

## **6 Havel, Vaclav (1936- )**

Czech dramatist, poet and politician. Havel was an active figure in the liberalization movement leading to the Prague Spring, and after the Soviet-led intervention in 1968 he became a spokesman of the civil right movement called Charter 77. He was arrested for political reasons in 1977 and 1979. He became President of the Czech and Slovak Republic in 1989 and was President of the Czech Republic after the secession of Slovakia until January 2003.

## **7 The Turner Movement**

An athletic movement with a nationalist and political subtext, propagated in the German states from the 1920s. It was based on the sport system of A. Eisenel (1793 - 1850), it became politicized with a goal of uniting Germany. Its main organization from 1860 became the Deutsche Turnerschaft.

## **8 Hitlerjugend**

The youth organization of the German Nazi Party (NSDAP). In 1936 all other German youth organizations were abolished and the Hitlerjugend was the only legal state youth organization. At the end of 1938 the SS took charge of the organization. From 1939 all young Germans between 10 and 18 were obliged to join the Hitlerjugend, which organized after-school activities and political education. Boys over 14 were also given pre-military training and girls over 14 were trained for motherhood and domestic duties. In 1939 it had 7 million members. During World War II members of the Hitlerjugend served in auxiliary forces. At the end of 1944 17-year-olds from the Hitlerjugend were drafted to form the 12th Panzer Division 'Hitlerjugend' and sent to the western front.

## **9 September 1938 mobilization**

The ascent of the Nazis to power in Germany in 1933 represented a fundamental turning point in the foreign political situation of Czechoslovakia. The growing tension of the second half of the 1930s finally culminated in 1938, when the growing aggressiveness of neighboring Germany led first to the adoption of emergency measures from 20th May to 22nd June, and finally to the proclamation of a general mobilization on 23rd September 1938. At the end of September 1938, however, Czechoslovakia's defense system, for years laboriously built up, collapsed.

Czechoslovakia's main ally, France, forced them to submit to Germany, and made no secret of the fact that they did not intend to provide military assistance. The support of the Soviet Union, otherwise in itself quite problematic, was contingent upon the support of France. Other countries, i.e. Hungary and Poland, were only waiting for the opportunity to gain something for themselves. (Source: <http://www.military.cz/opevneni/mobilizace.html>)

## **10 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.

## **11 Dostoevsky, Fyodor (1821-1881)**

Russian novelist, journalist and short-story writer whose psychological penetration into the human soul had a profound influence on the 20th century novel. His novels anticipated many of the ideas of Nietzsche and Freud. Dostoevsky's novels contain many autobiographical elements, but ultimately they deal with moral and philosophical issues. He presented interacting characters with contrasting views or ideas about freedom of choice, socialism, atheisms, good and evil, happiness and so forth.

## **12 Doctors' Plot**

The Doctors' Plot was an alleged conspiracy of a group of Moscow doctors to murder leading government and party officials. In January 1953, the Soviet press reported that nine doctors, six of whom were Jewish, had been arrested and confessed their guilt. As Stalin died in March 1953, the trial never took place. The official paper of the Party, the Pravda, later announced that the charges against the doctors were false and their confessions obtained by torture. This case was one of the worst anti-Semitic incidents during Stalin's reign. In his secret speech at the Twentieth Party Congress in 1956 Khrushchev stated that Stalin wanted to use the Plot to purge the top Soviet leadership.



### **13 Currency reform in Czechoslovakia (1953)**

on 30th May 1953 Czechoslovakia was shaken by a so-called currency reform, with which the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia (KSC) tried to improve the economy. It deprived all citizens of Czechoslovakia of their savings. A wave of protests, strikes and demonstrations gripped the country. Arrests and jailing of malcontents followed. Via the currency measures the Communist regime wanted to solve growing problems with supplies, caused by the restructuring of industry and the agricultural decline due to forcible collectivization. The reform was prepared secretly from midway in 1952 with the help of the Soviet Union. The experts involved (the organizers of the first preparatory steps numbered around 10) worked in strict isolation, sometimes even outside of the country. Cash of up to 300 crowns per person, bank deposits up to 5,000 crowns and wages were exchanged at a ratio of 5:1. Remaining cash and bank deposits, though, were exchanged at a ratio of 50:1.

### **14 Karlovy Vary (German name**

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

### **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 Statni Tajna Bezpecnost**

Czechoslovak intelligence and security service founded in 1948.

### **17 National Security Corps (SNB)**

played the main role among the repressive instruments of force in Communist Czechoslovakia. The SNB for one performed tasks that in democratic states are usually done by the police - which was delegated to an organ named Public Security (VB), and then intelligence activities, aimed at the battle against the "internal" and "external" enemy - these activities were performed by the infamous State Security (StB). The decision to found the SNB was made by the Kosice government on 17th April 1945. As opposed to the State Security, which on orders of Minister of the Interior Richard Sacher ceased to exist on 1st February 1990, the Public Security organ was transformed on 15th July 1991 into the Police of the Czechoslovak Republic.

## **18 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.

## **19 August 1968**

On the night of 20th August 1968, the armies of the USSR and its Warsaw Pact allies (Poland, Hungary, East Germany and Bulgaria) crossed the borders of Czechoslovakia. The armed intervention was to stop the 'counter-revolutionary' process in the country. The invasion resulted in many casualties, in Prague alone they were estimated at more than 300 injured and around 20 deaths. With the occupation of Czechoslovakia ended the so-called Prague Spring - a time of democratic reforms, and the era of normalization began, another phase of the totalitarian regime, which lasted 21 years.

## **20 Dubcek, Alexander (1921-1992)**

Slovak and Czechoslovak politician and statesman, protagonist of the reform movement in the CSSR. In 1963 he became the General Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Slovakia. With his succession to this function began the period of the relaxation of the Communist regime. In 1968 he assumed the function of General Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia and opened the way for the influence of reformist elements in the Communist party and in society, which had struggled for the implementation of a democratically pluralist system, for the resolution of economic, social and societal problems by methods suitable for the times and the needs of society. Intimately connected with his name are the events that in the world received the name Prague Spring. After the occupation of the republic by the armies of the USSR and the Warsaw Pact on 21st August 1968, he was arrested and dragged to the USSR. On the request of Czechoslovak representatives and under pressure from Czechoslovak and world public opinion, they invited him to the negotiations between Soviet and Czechoslovak representatives in Moscow. After long hesitation he also signed the so-called Moscow Protocol, which set the conditions and methods of the resolution of the situation, which basically however meant the beginning of the end of the Prague Spring.

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

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

## **22 Velvet Revolution**

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