

## Zuzana Wachtlova Celebrating Her 82nd Birthday



This photograph was taken on the premises of the Brno Jewish Community on the occasion of the celebration of my 82nd birthday on 29th January 2002. Standing on the right is Mr. Neufeld, the Brno cantor. Congratulating me is Mr. Weber, the chairman of the Brno Jewish Community at the time. At the back, on the left, you can see my daughter Marketa Gottvaldova, nee Wachtlova laughing.

We celebrated my birthday on 25th January, and on 29th January my daughter and I went to the Jewish Community as always. Marketa had secretly organized a small celebration in my honor. Already when we were walking up the stairs, something didn't sit right with me. I knew that it was my birthday, but I wasn't expecting anything. Marta, however, was holding some wine and flowers in her hand. When we entered the room, there was a big surprise waiting for me. Several of my good friends had met there because of me. Among others I was congratulated by Mr. Weber, the then chairman of the Jewish Community, and Mr. Neufeld, our cantor. My daughter was quite entertained on my account. We had a beautiful evening.

Jewishness is for me an automatic and inseparable part of my life. I'm not an Orthodox Jew, I don't have a kosher household. However, during the high holidays I go to the synagogue at the former Vlhka Street. Almost every Tuesday, I use to go the Brno Jewish community and meet other pensioners there. We talk and recollect memories of the past. Even though I have family, I like these meetings in the community because at least once a week, I have a place to go and a feeling of belonging to a certain group of people.

We also take part in Jewish funerals. Three members of the Brno Jewish community always wash and dress the dead and prepare him/her for the funeral. The former chairman of the Brno Jewish community, Mr. Weber, several times talked me into giving some kind of interview or into making speeches on the Holocaust at schools. In fact, some Jews who returned from the concentration camps are not able to talk about their suffering and torture. Once I delivered a speech for students

of one secondary school in Brno. The audience was very attentive and the interest with which they listened to me surprised me a lot. My speech was also recorded on video.

Later on, I provided an interview to students of the Palackeho University in Olomouc and to Doctor Lorencova from the Jewish Museum in Prague. Everybody was interested only in the Holocaust. Spielberg also recorded interviews in Brno about the Jews who survived the Holocaust. As a matter of fact, I didn't want to stand in front of the camera, so I refused the interview.