Jozef W.

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Mr. Jozef W. is an educated and timeless person with an admirable outlook on the world. His attitude towards life as such is unique and inimitable. Perhaps exactly this is why he managed to speak with us openly and without restraint about the events that he lived through during his long life. To be sure, he like many other Slovak Jews had a beautiful childhood; all the worse then were adolescence and youth with a bitter aftertaste left by the loss of loved ones. Even despite all that met him, he did not cease to be first and foremost a human being. At his request, we are publishing only the initials of his family's surnames in this interview.

My family background

My grandfather on my father's side was named Natan W., and his wife, my grandmother, was named Rebeka, nee Weilova. She was born in some village not far from Vranov [Vranov nad Toplou – Presov region]. She also told me about her father, thus my great-grandfather, who lived to be 100 or 101 years old. He was named Weil. I don't know how he made a living.

Grandpa Natan W. was from Jaslo. Today, if I'm not mistaken, Jaslo is in Poland, or the Ukraine, I don't know, I haven't looked into it [Jaslo: a town in Poland – Editor's note]. That was during the time of Austro-Hungary, and how he got to the territory of today's Slovakia, I don't know. I as well don't even know how he met his wife. My father was already born on the territory of today's Slovakia, in the village of Orlik [Orlik – Presov region], not far from the town of Svidnik [Presov region]. But later my grandparents moved to the town of Chmelov [Presov region], which is about 80 kilometers east of Presov.

My grandfather was an Orthodox Jew. He had a beard, but as opposed to some that don't take very good care of their beards, he cultivated it. He looked very distinguished. Because he wanted to

support his family, he went to find work in America and for some time lived in Chicago. He had this back basket and there in that back basket he had buttons, drawstrings for pants and so on, and he sold these things. There were large slaughter houses in Chicago, and their owners wanted him, because he was Orthodox, to stamp the meat [Hechsher: authorization or permission confirming ritual cleanliness. The most familiar form of hechsher confirms that meat or other foods are prepared according to ritual regulations – Editor's note]. He turned it down, though, because he didn't trust those people. He didn't believe that they wouldn't foist off on him meat that hadn't been prepared in ritual fashion. He saved up some money in America, and returned to Chmelov, where he bought a little house. He also bought two cows and a small plot of land.

Besides my father, my grandfather and grandmother also had another son and daughter. My father's Hebrew name was Joshua. But in the birth register, he's written as Osias W., and his brother was named Pinchas W. My uncle Pinchas fought in World War I. I don't know if he was wounded in battle, or suffered from shock, but after that he constantly trembled. He was married, he took a girl from Spis as his wife. They had two sons, Reuben and Jakub. Both of them died during fighting in the Slovak National Uprising 1.

My father's sister was named Ester. It was said that she had been very pretty. Before World War I, Ester ran away from home to America. There she married a lawyer, Dr. Solomon. Later my son and I tried to find out something more about her, but as there are very many Solomons in America, I didn't manage to establish contact with this part of the family.

Orthodox Jews were so engrossed in the Talmud that they mainly devoted themselves to its study. This was also the case with my grandfather. As a farmer he worked in the fields. There he would sow, plow, and reap. He took care of the cows, mucked out the manure, and so on. All his life he was healthy, and he lived to be very old. I remember that each morning he would have himself a shot of brandy. Together with my father's brother and his wife, my grandparents had a little shop. It was a small general store, which my grandma ran with her daughter-in-law. Besides this little shop they also had a pub. But there were no conflicts between them and the other villagers [in Slovakia, Jews are often portrayed as barkeepers that inebriated the Slovak nation – Editor's note]. I'd say it like this: they would tug on my grandpa's payes, but it was in fun. Despite the fact that people realized the "otherness" between themselves and Jews, in that village environment I wouldn't characterize it as anti-Semitism. They simply couldn't not realize the otherness. Everyone respected my grandfather, and downright liked him.

My grandparents spoke Yiddish to each other. They however also spoke the local dialect, especially Grandma. My father's brother's wife also spoke the Spis dialect, as she was from Spis. My grandfather wasn't very talkative. I do know, though, that he was very strict. Once, when I was about 6 or 7 years old, I lit up on the way to his place. He smelled that I had been smoking, and then he gave me a good licking with his belt.

In her youth my grandmother had been renowned for her beauty. Her daughter Ester then inherited it from her. Granny wore a wig, and when she didn't have it, she'd cover her head with a headscarf. She led a strictly kosher household. My grandparents prayed every day, and lived according to Jewish regulations – the halakhah. If I still remember properly, then by me my grandfather used to wear a dark suit, a caftan. And Grandma, as far as I remember, used to dress normally. Though she did wear, as I've mentioned, a wig, or a headscarf.

My grandparents lived in a small house: a front hall, on the left the general store, on the right a huge room, that was the bar where Granny served brandy, but to a reasonable degree. She never served a drunk even a small shot. And then there was one more little room, which also served as a bedroom. As a small boy I slept there with Grandpa. Grandpa also had a lot of religious books in this room, even a tabernacle with the Torah. Sometimes Jews from the village and its immediate surroundings would come to pray there. My grandparents' house also had a typical farm courtyard. They raised cows, poultry and other animals, and also had cats. Of course there was also a stable and hayloft. In the back part of the courtyard there was a manure pit.

My grandparents lived together with their son Pinchas and his family. As far their daughter-in-law was able, she helped out with the household. On Saturdays a so-called shabesgoy used to come help out. Goy means non-Jew. It was a lady neighbor of theirs, who used to help out with various light work and would get paid for it. On Saturday, they for example weren't even allowed to light candles. On Friday they'd still light candles themselves, but not anymore on Saturday [during the Sabbath, 39 main work activities are forbidden, to which the injunction against others is related. The "kindling of fire" is also among the forbidden activities – Editor's note].

My grandfather's family was very religious. My grandfather even went about circumcising far and wide [mohel: performs ritual circumcision – brit milah. Circumcision is one of the fundamental rules of Judaism – Editor's note]. Here I also recall one hiding I got from him. The circumcision tools had to be sterile. I don't know what kind of metal they were made from, but they were beautiful, shiny and stored in a tube. That tube was inserted into another cover, and was carefully hidden in the hay in the attic. As a young boy I found this hiding place. My bad luck was that my grandfather caught me and gave me a good hiding. Twice in my life I got it from him. Once when I was playing with those tools, and the second time when I had been smoking.

In my grandparents' neighborhood there lived non-Jews with whom they got along very well. They were Slovaks that had returned from America, so Americans [at the turn of the 19th and 20th Century, many people, especially those from poor areas of today's Slovakia, left for the USA for work. Those that returned were called Americans – Editor's note]. The only thing that my grandmother couldn't understand was her neighbor's peculiar inclination. She had as many cats at home as in a Zoo, and when a cat died, she would bury it in the garden. She even gave every cat a little tablet with its name. Their whole courtyard looked like a cemetery. My grandmother thought it was bizarre. After all, she also had cats at home, but for catching mice.

On the whole, relations between people in the village were friendly. This is based on the fact that the Protestant priest in the town of Chmelov, Marencin, didn't distinguish between Christians and Jews, and that villagers were very generous and were friendly to Jews that they met.

Both of my grandparents died before the war. I don't remember exactly when anymore, but it was either in 1936 or 1937. Grandma was sickly, but I know that my grandfather was never ill. And that thanks to his lifestyle. Well, according to neighboring farmers, he probably had something with his prostate, maybe prostate cancer. They're both buried in the town of Podlipniky [Presov region]. I went to find them, but unfortunately it's so overgrown with weeds that I didn't even find their gravestones.

Uncle Pinchas and his wife were deported in 1942. And their sons? During the war Jakub was being hidden by one 90-year-old farmer. When the Czechoslovak army was approaching, he didn't want

to hide any more. According to an eyewitness, he went to nearby Milkulas [Liptovsky Mikulas – Zilina region] to join the army. Svoboda's Army 2. Of course there was fighting, and that's why soldiers used passwords to communicate. Well, because he didn't know the password, and on top of that was blond, they thought that he was a spy, and shot him.

I met Reuben as a partisan, north of Banska Bystrica. He was serving in a rebel unit of the Slovak police. The way it was, was that one part of the Slovak State 3 police joined the rebels, just like many soldiers and others served the Fascist Slovak State. Unfortunately, he also died tragically, which another eyewitness told me about. Reuben was sent to a partisan unit whose commander was a Russian, a big anti-Semite, which sealed my cousin's fate. When he arrived with his orders, the Russian spotted him. As a blue-eyed blonde, he seemed suspicious to him. But Reuben protested, that he was a Jew. With this he was ordered to show that he's circumcised. And it was this that sealed his fate, as he was leaving they shot him in the back. That's how my two cousins Reuben and Jakub died.

As far as my mother's [Etela Weit] family goes, I don't know as much about them. My mother was born in what is today Poland, not far from the town of Tarnow there's this village that's called Gruszow Wielki. How she got to Slovakia and how she met my father, I don't know.

When she was already married, she would visit her parents in Poland. When I was a small boy she also took me along with her. I was there twice on a visit. My mother told me about this one thing that happened to her at the border. I was still a baby, and at the border, when she was taking care of passport matters, she put me down one some woodpile that was there. And while she was taking care of the passport paperwork, I suddenly began crying, and the people that were there and saw me began shouting that someone had forgotten their child there. My mother was completely flustered by it.

I remember my Polish grandparents only dimly. Grandpa was named Juda Kohane and was a kohanite [kohenim: members of the tribe of Levi, descendants of Aaron. Priestly origins are inherited from the father. Most of the kohenim's responsibilities ceased after the destruction of the Temple, however several of them have survived to this day. For example, a kohen is the first to be called to read from the Torah – Editor's note]. This means that he was of priestly descent. I don't remember the name of his wife, my grandmother, any more. I unfortunately don't know anything else about these grandparents. I never got to know them very well. I don't think that my mother had any siblings, as she never mentioned any.

My birth father was named Osias W. and was born in 1887. I don't remember my father, because he died the same year I was born [1916]. I was born in February, and in October he died tragically at the Russian front as a soldier of the Austro-Hungarian Army. What I'm going to tell you now is 100% true. A person who was in the same unit as my father, and was witness to this incredible death told it to my mother. My father had finished a letter to my mother and put it in a pocket of his uniform. Then he began to clean his rifle. While he was doing that, a man from a neighboring village came to talk to him. The village was named Proc. Because he was illiterate, he wanted my father to write a letter to his mother for him. My father asked him to dictate to him what the letter should say. And while he was dictating, for him to clean the rifle. As he was dictating to my father, he was cleaning the rifle, and accidentally pulled the trigger. He shot my father right in the head, and my father's blood also soaked the letter that he had written to my mother beforehand. The

acquaintance, who survived, brought the letter to my mother. It was then a family relic of ours. I hid this letter and my mother's last letter during the war as an invaluable remembrance of my parents. In 1944, when I was in the Slovak National Uprising, while marching across the Martin meadows, we stopped to wash at a stream. I put my rucksack down to one side. When I finished washing, I saw that the rucksack had disappeared. Someone had stolen it along with the reminders of my parents.

Apparently my parents' marriage was arranged. I don't doubt that they had an Orthodox wedding. All Jewish rules were observed in our family. My mother was an Orthodox Jewess and dressed accordingly. She always wore a wig or a headscarf. On normal weekdays she dressed normally, like the other farmwomen, but during holidays she always dressed up. She also kept a kosher household. Despite her religious convictions, she wasn't a fanatic; she always said that we're all people.

As a widow, my mother got a newsstand, but she probably wouldn't have survived on the newsstand alone. She also had a little general store as well as a little pub. The same as my father's parents. When she looked at a person and saw that he'd already had enough, she didn't serve him any more. And I remember that this caused scandals. They'd yell at her: "You Jewess, damn you!"

Growing up

I was already 8 years old when she married a second time. She married her cousin. He was also from Gruszow Wielki, from some poor family with a lot of children. I know that he was a cattle merchant and being a cattle merchant is what brought him here. When they met, my mother didn't want to live alone, so they married. They had a daughter, Maria, in Hebrew Miriam. I was very glad to have a sister. I loved her very much and she loved me very much too. She was interested in embroidery, and somewhere I've got some embroidery that she did, to remember her by.

My stepfather was named Viktor Weit and my sister was named Maria Weitova. When she was born I wasn't living at home, but with my grandparents in Chmelov, where I was attending a regular elementary school where there was also a teacher of religion. He was quite the original character! He had a classroom in the basement of one richer Jewish citizen, and that's where he taught us, Jewish children starting from 3 years of age, the Bible [Hummash: The five books of Moses – Editor's note] and Hebrew. Apparently he also taught us to write in the Latin alphabet, because when I entered 1st grade of people's school, I didn't like it. I was constantly bored, because I already knew it. That happens very often to Jewish children in normal schools.

And Viktor? Viktor was an interesting person. I held Viktor in high esteem. Though he could read Hebrew, he didn't understand what he was reading. But what made him special? Not only was he an excellent farmer, he very much lived for it and knew all about it. And what was the most important, and what I very much regret, that I never had a tape recorder and that I didn't record it. Because when the villagers used to gather in that large room of ours where the bar was and where people would drink, people would tell stories. Who had experienced what at the front. My stepfather was a naturally talented humorist. I remember that the Pusovce locals laughed till their bellies hurt when he told stories. He knew how to turn everything into a joke. He had a special talent for telling funny stories. He didn't read the jokes somewhere, he made them up. But they were excellent.

My native village of Pusovce [Presov region] was predominantly Catholic. There were about 34 houses, of which I think four families were Protestant, those were the Anderkos, and the rest were Catholics. The house where I was born was earthen, made from unfired bricks. We had this modest house. It had only one larger room, where my mother had the bar; there the floor was made of dirt. Then there was a little room, that's where the store was. I remember that I also occasionally sold cigarettes, or sugar. I helped out when I came home during vacation. Well, and one room, that was already big luxury, because it had a wooden floor. And we also had a kitchenette. We raised chickens until my mother remarried. Besides this we had a pigeon coop. I loved pigeons.

Then, when my mother was already remarried, we had a farm. Viktor was a very good farmer. He was a cattle merchant, but when he made enough money he left the business, because he liked farming. So he bought a neglected piece of land, where nothing would grow. He meliorated it [melioration: a combination of measures that permanently improve soil for various uses – Editor's note] by draining it. To this day it's the most fertile land in Pusovce! It's land left by Viktor. So that was the first field that he bought and made fertile. Then he bought more and more, until he finally had 14 hectares. For those times that was really a lot. Because most farmers had five, six hectares. He grew everything, potatoes, wheat, barley and oats. He also raised horses. As a good farmer, the residents of Pusovce trusted him to the degree that he even had a breeding bull. The villagers used to come to our place to fertilize their cows. He was such an expert that he bred cattle.

Then he sold that house where I was born. He bought a brick house with a beautiful garden. We of course had a helper for the household, when my mother couldn't manage it all herself, and we also had a coachman. Back then they called him a coachman, but he was a servant. And the furniture in that house was better too. I was nice and modern. However, from the age of 3 or 4 I was with my grandpa in Chmelov, because I was attending religion school there. I had to live with him there, because it would have been impossible for me to commute between Chmelov and Pusovce. Back then there weren't buses yet.

When I was at my parents', I got used to going to the hayloft to smoke. Once one hayloft almost burned down. Viktor Weit's brother, who was a shoemaker, was at our place for a visit. My mother found out that she was missing some cigarettes and matches, and he came looking for me. I was smoking in the hayloft, and I threw the match someplace off to the side. Then I only remember that he didn't catch up to me, because he was putting out the fire that I had unwittingly lit in the hayloft.

Let me return to my home. So, in Pusovce I had a good friend from school, who was also my neighbor. My mother was also friends with his mother. He was named Juraj Migas. For example, when my mother had work to do, she asked Mrs. Migasova to feed me. I was still a baby, so she nursed me and on the contrary, when Mrs. Migasova was out in the field, then my mother would nurse Juraj. We were milk brothers [milk brother: children from different mothers, nursed by the same woman – Editor's note] and later excellent friends.

We were the only Jewish family in Pusovce. We used to travel to Chmelov to pray. The prayer hall was at my grandpa's place in that little room which was also a bedroom. The ten people [minyan: a prayer minimum of ten men older than 13 – Editor's note] for prayers came from the towns of Radvanovce, Chmelov and Pusovce. In Chmelov there were two more families, the Schönfelds and the Altmans. From the whole larger region, only one of the Schönfeld daughters and I survived the

Holocaust. They would always all meet at my grandfather's on Saturdays and holidays. At the age of 13 I had a bar mitzvah. Well, it was a big celebration. I don't remember it all that precisely any more, but I know that there was a feast. My mother was happy. My grandfather was proud of me.

I liked celebrating the Sabbath very much. But you won't find a person that wouldn't reminisce about it. It belongs to the poetry of the Jewish religion. Everywhere absolute cleanliness and a set table. On the table wine, barches and chicken soup. On Saturday we had shoulet for lunch. My mother would make it on Friday. We had an oven that was lit, and I remember that when the shoulet was put in the oven, she didn't take it out until later, on Saturday. It smelled wonderful! We also had meat – usually goose. It was very festive. We of course observed all the holidays. I remember that I liked the carnival – Purim, because I liked acting. Jewish children from several villages would get together, and we'd put on plays. I usually played the part of a drunk. We made fun of Haman, the Hitler from three thousand years ago. During the Purim holiday my grandfather would tell me about how in the Persian Empire the Jews were threatened by genocide, which Haman [Purim recalls the victory over Haman, the minister of the Persian king Ahasuerus, who wanted to exterminate the Jewish nation. These events took place during the years 369 – 356 BCE – Editor's note] wanted to unleash. When we were talking about it, he reminded me that the Jews were persecuted later as well, in Spain. They forced them to convert to the Christian faith, and those that didn't do it, they murdered, burned them alive 4. From him I learned of the Inquisition.

During childhood there was one more holiday that I liked, that that was because it was poetic. It was Sukkot, the holiday of tents. It's a commemoration of the fact that Jews didn't have any houses, when they were wandering through the desert for 40 years, being led by Moses. The sukkah was covered by evergreen branches, and my sister and I would make all sorts of decorative garlands. It was beautiful. Also an interesting holiday. My mother served food into the sukkah through the window. And no one in Pusovce damaged the sukkah.

Well, and Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement and purification. At the age of 13 I fasted. I didn't even drink water. Even as a Communist, when I remembered Yom Kippur, I went to the Heyduk [in Heyduk Street in Bratislava stands the only preserved synagogue in the city – Editor's note] and studied the prayer book there for a while. I at least partly fasted. And then a person is glad that the fast is over, and supper follows. I'll still return briefly to the evening before this High Holiday. I'll always be connected to it by the enchantment by the beautiful melody Kol Nidre [Kol Nidre (all vows): sung three times at the beginning of services during Yom Kippur – Editor's note].

I also have to mention an important thing, which is why my mother got along so well with the locals. She quickly became familiar with Saris [Saris dialect: one of the dialects used in the territory of Eastern Slovakia – Editor's note], and spoke it fluently. At home we spoke Yiddish, with the neighbors in Saris, but she also learned German. She even learned grammatically correct Slovak. She was also very interested in culture. There was an amateur theater group in the village, boys and girls would put on plays. My mother attended the performances and wrote reviews or critiques. She was also self-taught in health sciences. She was quite well versed in pills and medicines. When someone fell ill, she went to help them. She was terribly kindhearted. My mother was an exceptionally good person, and that's why they liked her very much.

As far as political or other opinions are concerned, my stepfather Viktor, being relatively uneducated, didn't show any interest in such things. My mother, however, very much admired

Masaryk 5. When Masaryk died in 1937, she wept.

As I've already said, from the age of 3 I had a religion teacher in Chmelov, where we learned the Torah. Then I attended elementary school, for four or five years, I think. I don't know if it was a state school or a church school. I know that the principal was named Jarmay, a Hungarian name, but of course spoke Slovak and also taught in Slovak. Then my mother decided that besides Slovak I have to also learn German. Back then it was this trend, as it was the international language of Central Europe. No only Jews, but also many of those who wanted to succeed in that geographic region, needed to know German.

So I began attending school in Gelnica [Kosice region]. A Jewish religion teacher lived in Gelnica, I think he was named Reichner. He was some relative of my aunt's, the wife of Pinchas from Circ [the town of Circ – Presov region], probably a cousin. My mother arranged that he'd not only teach me, but that I'd also live with him. At the same time she sent me to and registered me in a German elementary school, into higher grades. I don't know, but probably it was from the time I was 10. In the German school all subjects were taught in German, and of course Slovak was compulsory as well. After finishing elementary school, I continued at a German council school 6. Reichner taught only the lower grade of religion education. My mother had this idea, though she wasn't any fanatic, that I could at the very least better educated in the Talmud. I'm guessing that she wanted me to be a rabbi – certainly she wouldn't have had any objections to it.

There was a yeshivah in Gelnica. Though it wasn't as well-known as for example the yeshivah in Huncovce. Back then Huncovce was very famous. Almost as much as the yeshivah in Bratislava. So I attended it at the same time. To this day I can't imagine how it was. I attended council school, finished council school, and continued with the rabbi. Then I didn't live with Mr. Reichner any more, but at a dormitory. The rabbi that led the yeshivah had a dormitory for boys of my age. I remember that it was this duplex building. On the one side lived the rabbi with his family, and there was also a classroom there, the yeshivah, and on the other side was the dormitory.

The yeshivah was a larger room. We had our books open, the Talmud. The rabbi lectured and explained. The explanations! The Talmud is one big mystery. What did that person two thousand years ago actually mean? It can be explained like this, and like that. It's an incredible treasure trove of explanatory possibilities. One can tell riddles, but also hone reason. We young ones didn't dare argue with the rabbi, but his assistants, who would then take us into smaller groups, they argued. We were witness to how they didn't agree with the rabbi's explanations, and said: "You're not right, Rabbi. It's actually like this...!" We liked it very much, and we'd say to ourselves: "Just wait. When we finally...!" When the rabbi was finished explaining, studies continued in small groups. The groups weren't very big. Usually the way it was, was that there were about five or six of us 13 to 14-year-olds, and one of the older ones, the rabbi's assistants. In Yiddish he was called the chaser bocher. In Yiddish chaser means to repeat, and bocher is a young person, a student. So it means a student that repeats things with students. Well, and now, when he'd tell us his explanation, we'd of course pipe up, discuss and argue. The windows were open, and it was an awful commotion. That's why they say: "A commotion like in a Jewish school." That commotion is always very important. On the one hand, the citizens and Christian boys made fun of us, that we're kicking up a fuss there. The importance of it was that it was excellent at honing brains. For us the teaching at the secular council school was ridiculous, that there was no need to explain anything there, everything was written down and you only needed to know it the way it was written.

What was worse was that I apparently wasn’t inclined towards being religious. Simply put, I was obstinate. Well, and once it happened that we had a fight one Saturday morning at the dormitory. The rabbi heard yelling and came over "What are you doing here? Why, it’s Saturday! You can’t fight! You’re breaking the holy Sabbath!” And we made faces at the rabbi. And I remember that he grabbed me by my shirt collar and shook me. And I said: “Rabbi, sir, the collar will tear off and it’ll be your sin. That’s also work, when you’re shaking me.” He gave me a slap. I said: “That’s even more work. That’s a sin.” [during the Sabbath, 39 main work activities are forbidden, to which the injunction against others is related. During the subsequent scuffle the Rabbi broke several rules, in that he was basically doing physical work – Editor’s note]. Well, that was bad. He complained to my mother. I don’t know if he wrote her, or what. And when I came home for the holidays, my mother already knew about the conflict. My stepfather wasn’t home right then, and she was rolling some dough. And I said: “Mom, I don’t think that God exists.” She started crying, and I remember that she showered the dough with tears. I felt terribly guilty. After that I apologized to her. It was terrible. But the truth is that I refused to return there. So that’s how my studies at the yeshivah ended. I didn’t become a rabbi. At least I finished council school.

My mother was then worried about what we were going to do, but my stepfather said: “After all, he’s already quite smart, let him work.” My mother wouldn’t let it alone. Because I was quite good at drawing and I was interested in art and photography, I decided to go to Presov. In Presov there was a photographer and at the same time painter who was well known at the time. I think that he was named Szekes. He also did religious paintings. I made up my mind and told my mother that I was going to go and study with that painter. “Now you’ve gone crazy! You won’t make a living with that!” That was her reaction.

Instead, she registered me into a fourth council school, a Slovak one this time. I finished this school as well, and had good grades. Only one grade wasn’t good, math. At that time we had an excellent principal. He was a Czech, and I came to see him: “Sir, I can’t have a grade like that. I’ve got to have all good grades.” “Why?” he asked me. “Because I want to apply to the teacher’s institute. And they won’t even accept me for entrance exams if I don’t have a better grade.” So he said: “All right, you study and I’ll let you know. You’ll have a make-up exam.” Ultimately I think I even got an A in math, though I wasn’t all that good in it.

So I got to the entrance exam for the teacher’s institute, where they accepted me. Among four hundred students there were about five, six of us Jews. Two boys and three or four girls. One Jewish girl from Bardejov was an amazing mathematician. I remember that even the professor admired her. That’s where I ended up graduating from. They gave me a C in Slovak, despite the fact that I was good in it. This was because the Slovak language professor was a nationalist. He was named Janosik. A big purist when it came to the Slovak language, and to this day I’m a purist after him. I’ve got to say, that my ears hurt when I hear something that doesn’t meet “Janosik’s standard”. And this Janosik gave me a C in Slovak. He said that a Jew couldn’t know Slovak. It was in the year 1937.

After my studies at the teacher’s institute I became a teacher. I began looking for work. I found out that the Kosice Jewish community had a Jewish primary school. So I submitted at application for this school. My competition was someone by the name of Kraus. Because he knew Hebrew better than me, I didn’t succeed in the competition. Finally I passed exams for Levoca, where there was a one-room school [meaning children from multiple grades studied in one classroom, and the teacher

had to devote himself to each grade separately during class – Editor's note]. I taught there during the 1937/38 school year.

Originally I had inclined to Communism. I was influenced greatly by Professor Lon at the teachers' institute in Presov. The Professor was from Moravia, and was a Communist. He never concealed his convictions. During strikes he liked to discuss this theme with us. Gradually I began getting to Communist literature in Czech, and later also in German. When I became a social democrat, because also the Minister of Education at the time was a social democrat. But later I went to teach at the Jewish school in Levoca, where a member of the Zionist organization Hashomer Hatzair 7 was working, so I became a 'shomer'.

In Hashomer we used to go to summer camps. I remember that we were not far from Spisske Vlachy [Kosice region] and those were scouting experiences. We were Jewish leftists, Zionists. We definitely rejected Jabotinsky's 8 nationalism.

I still have to return to my sister. She liked our parents, but she was very fixated on me as well. I've got this impression that didn't study further than elementary school. When we had a farm, she worked on it like every other farmer's daughter. Her friends were the local girls. Shortly after my wedding, in March of 1942, the Guardists 9 took her away. When they came for her, our father wasn't home. When he found out what had happened, he wanted to commit suicide. Mother stopped him. Before it happened, they had been warned by a Slovak policeman by the name of Cincala. He warned my parents that Mana [Maria's nickname] should hide, because the Guardists were coming. I don't know if our parents didn't believe it, or if they were afraid. In the end Viktor didn't commit suicide, but then their turn came. They thought that they were being sent to work. So they gave away the furniture, which was of better quality, to their friend Anderko, and my mother gave him my father's watch, which he had inherited from his grandfather, who had in turn inherited it from his grandfather. That courageous person, Juraj Anderko, has a certain measure of credit for my survival. But I'll get back to that later. They took my sister, who was 18 years old at the time, away to Poprad.

During the war

My sister went on the first transport 10 that was sent out of the Slovak State. A friend of mine from Levoca told me that she saw her in 1943, working in the so-called Canada [Canada was the name of a warehouse in the Auschwitz concentration camp, where arriving prisoners' luggage was sorted – Editor's note]. My sister supposedly borrowed a comb from her. That's all that I know of her fate.

Now back to Levoca, where I worked as a teacher. From there I got to Bratislava as a functionary of the Hashomer Hatzair movement. At that time several Jewish organizations were headquartered at 3 Venturska Street in Bratislava. A Zionist one was among them as well. Back then Hashomer was supposed to nominate one of its members for the position of head of the Office for emigration of Jewish young people to what was then the Palestine, the youth Aliyah. As I was a teacher and had a relationship to young people, they nominated me for this position, even despite my youth. Besides me, there was one more shomer, who looked like an Ethiopian, and so we called him Negush. Besides us there was Dr. Schlessinger, who was responsible for contacts with the Slovak State civil service. The Slovak civil service had very corrupt people working for it, and he knew how to deal with them. Back then Jews were still allowed to emigrate. Almost every Jew wanted permission to emigrate. The Damocles' sword of Hitler hung above us. In our positions we tried to justly evaluate

all requests. I personally never took a bribe, not one crown. So it happened that during 1939/40 I managed to get about 200 young people from all of Slovakia to the Palestine. Later I met many of them again.

One day while I was working in that office, a poor, scruffy, shabbily dressed person came to see us. He was a poor tailor from Tesin in Poland. He had gotten onto Slovak territory thanks to Slovak border guards, who didn't sympathize with the Fascist state. For sure they were also aware of the situation in Poland, where the Germans were shooting people en masse. That man came in and said: "You're sitting here, holding office, you're sending children to the Palestine, and there they're killing our people. They're being driven into the forests, killed. One Polack, a Catholic, has taken in a small group of children and is sheltering those children in a sod hut not far from Polish Tesin. The children have to be saved." I think that there were fourteen of them. The youngest one was 5, and the oldest, a very pretty girl, Brona, was 16. I told the Hashomer Hatzair leadership that we were going to Poland to go get those children. So it happened that thanks to the Slovak border guards the tailor and I got over to the other side, into Polish Tesin. We walked across hills and valleys for six hours, in December. Eventually we came to a pub where there was a large picture of the Führer. We were completely exhausted. The tailor connected me with a certain lawyer. With him I was supposed to go to Berlin, to the Youth Aliyah headquarters, where they already knew me through correspondence. Luckily I managed to get to Berlin without any papers whatsoever, and received the necessary money from our headquarters. The Polack finally handed the children over to me after I gave him a password that I had from the tailor. I set out with the children for the Slovak border. The Polack that had been hiding them and I alternated carrying the smallest one. They say that the Polish are genetically afflicted by anti-Semitism, but as you can see, you can find good people everywhere. He was a good person. Finally we and the children got to Slovakia. There we divided them up amongst poor Jewish families. What happened to them after that? To this day I'm still looking for them, especially the youngest one. If he's alive, he's about 70 years old.

I didn't remain at that office for much longer. Very soon the Slovak state stopped officially permitting emigration. From Hashomer they sent me for hachshara. Hachshara means physical work and preparation for Aliyah. Not far from Velke Levare [Bratislava Region] we had our hachshara. We were helping regulate the Morava River, so that it wouldn't overflow its banks. In time I found out that they needed a Jewish teacher in Trencin. I think three of us applied for that post, and I got the job. During 1941 and 1942 I worked at the Jewish primary school in Trencin.

In Trencin in March 1942 I married Anka. Anicka Rosefeldova was also a shomer. By coincidence she was doing hachshara in Trencin, where we met. Her father, a Czech Jew, and a doctor, worked in Rozhanovce [Kosice region]. From there he'd been expelled to Czechia, for one as a Jew, for another as a Czech 11, and for yet another as an officer of the Czechoslovak army. So Anicka remained alone. Her mother had died before the war, of blood poisoning. She had gotten blood poisoning, and her husband, a doctor, was of the opinion that her arm needed to be amputated, but she didn't want to have it done, and finally died of her wound.

Those were sad times, the principal of the Jewish primary school, Belo Brunner was deported. Right before the deportations, Belo had a child born to him. They deported him along with his wife and baby. Another colleague of mine, Alica Rosenbaumova, hid along with her mother. After the war I found out that they had been in hiding. After the suppression of the uprising [Slovak National Uprising] they caught them, and dragged them off to Nemecka [Banska Bystrica region] where

there was a limekiln. There they shot them all and threw them straight into the burning lime. Gradually my class began to empty. Until one day it was completely empty.

Before the deportation from Trencin, they created a collection camp by the station, and there they collected children, which is how they would trap their parents. I found out that they were guarded by a Guardist. I said to myself: “What should I do, as a teacher?” So I bought two, three kilos of candy and went to at least sweeten those children’s lives a bit. We didn’t yet know that it was going to be the extermination of Jews. We knew that they were going to be very badly off, but we didn’t know about the murdering. At that time the Jewish Center 12 was spreading information, whether for consolation, or whether they had to, that people are going to go work. When I came with the candy, the Guardist immediately addressed me in a familiar tone: “Where are you going?” I said: “I’m these children’s teacher. I want to say goodbye to them and I want to give them candy.” “I’m not gonna let you!” And that’s when my nature showed itself. I don’t know who I inherited it from. Maybe it’s because I’m a village boy and as such I was used to fighting. I grabbed that Guardist by the shirt collar and said: “When I whack you one, you’ll let me all right!” And he stood there surprised. “Go then, but I won’t let you out! You’ll go with them!” I said; “We’ll see whether you won’t let me out.” So I said goodbye to the children, and at least gave out the candy. When I was coming back out, I looked the Guardist straight in the eyes. He stood there with his rifle as if hypnotized, and let me out.

In 1942 the Guardists didn’t take me and my wife. We only had to move out of our apartment, we couldn’t afford to pay for it any more. At the beginning of June 1942, though, they deported my parents, my mother and stepfather. A few days before their deportation, the postal carrier, who was a friend of my parents, sent me a telegram. She informed me that the Guardists had taken my parents away. The postal carrier was related to Marencin, the Protestant priest from the town of Chmelov. I knew that they’d send them to the collection camp in Zilina. The camp’s commander, who was named Marcek, was bribable, but I didn’t have any money. So I turned to the Jewish community in Trencin. The chairman of the community helped me organize a collection among people that they hadn’t deported yet. We collected ten thousand crowns. I arrived in Zilina on the day that the train from Eastern Slovakia that my parents were on was also due to arrive. They herded people from those cattle wagons to the camp. Suddenly you could hear singing. Right at that moment, a Catholic procession carrying holy icons was passing by, of course also with the Virgin Mary, and the Guardists that were driving the people along stopped beating them. As soon as the procession passed, they continued in their “work”. Unfortunately I didn’t manage to buy my parents out, because the camp commander was already asking for 15 thousand. On 6th June 1942 they transported my parents to Auschwitz.

I of course traveled to Zilina illegally. At that time the anti-Jewish laws 13 were already in effect, and Jews weren’t allowed to travel. Everyone that traveled had to obtain a Fahrschein, or permission to travel. I didn’t have any document. I didn’t wear a star 14 out of principle. I bought myself a copy of Gardista Magazine, and when the Guardists were checking ID, I read the paper and they left me alone. When I finally met my parents, Viktor was completely numb. Because he was a farmer, and in the fields the wheat was slowly ripening. He couldn’t understand how they could tear him away from his land. My mother was somehow resigned to what was to come. I tried to pass them bread through a gap in the wagon. Some Guardist saw it and threw a rock at me from behind. If I wouldn’t have ducked, it would’ve killed me. From that time I had no news of my

parents.

After many years I found out that I had had an exemption until the end of August 1942. I didn't know about it at all. It wasn't a presidential exemption 15, but an exemption from the Minister of Education. It's well known that the Minister of Education helped where he could. He was one of the moderate supporters of the Slovak State. And then I found out that the school inspector in Trencin, who was an exceptionally decent person, had arranged the exception.

On the 14th or 24th of October, my wife and I arrived in the Novaky labor camp 16. Like all the other prisoners, we also worked. Anicka worked in the sewing shop, and I was a bricklayer. There was one Guardist there, named Breznik, who took pleasure in beating us. In time they transferred me to the quarry. There was one Guardist there, originally a miner from Handlov [Trenciany region], a decent person. He taught us how to drill into the cliff wall, how much dynamite to insert, how to jump away when the wall was collapsing. I even enjoyed it, as I like creative work, and this was creative work. Later they permitted the founding of a school in the Novaky labor camp. With the camp commander's agreement, they put me in charge of setting it up. The Guardists put me in a truck and drove me off to look for furnishings and equipment for the school. We brought back blackboards and desks from abandoned Jewish schools. I don't even know any more if it was from Nitra [Nitra region] or Sered [Trnava region]. Then Juraj Spitzer moved my wife and me into the school building. We got one little room, and across from it was another, larger one. That's where we set up the one-room school. I was even allowed to bring my pedagogical library from Trencin. Well, and so I began working as a teacher in the Novaky concentration and labor camp.

I worked there up until 31st January 1944. Back in 1943, Sano Mach [Alexander Mach] came out with the following statement: "Come March, come April, and the transports will come!" But in 1943 the transports didn't come. My wife Anicka said in January 1944: "Come March, come April, and in '44 those transports will come. Let's not wait for the transport!" We decided to escape from the camp. We lived near the main gate. We'd noticed that every day at midnight the Guardists walked around the camp, and the gate wasn't as closely watched. We slipped through the gate and literally jumped into a riverbed – there was a small stream there. There we squatted, waited for signs of anything behind us, and then on our feet! Across fields, above the town of Kos [Trenciany region] to Prievidza [Trenciany region]. We had been getting wages of 50 halers a day. We were farsighted enough to not spend that money on any trifles. We put it all away. We managed to save enough to buy train tickets during our escape. We set out for the town of Rozhanovce [Kosice region], in Eastern Slovakia.

We aimed for Rozhanovce, Anicka's hometown. Before the war her father had been a doctor there. Out of principle he had treated poor people for free. During the night Anicka knocked on one poor Rozhanovce resident's window and he looked out: "The doctor's Anicka!" So he immediately welcomed us. Anicka had an aunt, her mother's sister in Budapest. Her husband was a lawyer. She hoped that as a relative her aunt would take her in. That's why we told this person that we needed to get to Budapest. My wife spoke Hungarian, but I didn't and to this day don't. He said that at night he'd lead us through the mountains and forests to Kosice. 18. That apparently another person from Rozhanovce was working there, a formerly poor person whom Dr. Rosenfeld had also treated for free, that he'll help us for sure. So we got to Kosice, to Presovska Street. Back then it of course had a Hungarian name, Eperjesi Utca. That person greeted us very warmly and hid us in the cellar.

While Horthy's regime 19 in Hungary did persecute and discriminate against Jews, it wasn't done in such a manner as in our country. That man in Kosice gave us money, bought train tickets to Budapest, and accompanied us there himself. In Budapest my wife and I separated, she lived in Buda and I in Pest. In Budapest I managed to find the address of my old friend from Michalovce [Kosice region]. We'd met each other during the time in Hashomer. He was named Jozef Baumer. He lived with his friends under a false name, and he also arranged false papers to other people, as well as illegal emigration to the Palestine. He even arranged work for me with one businessman who manufactured dolls. My job was to paint their faces.

In Budapest I lived in relative calm from the end of January to the end of March [1944], until the Germans occupied the city [Hungary was occupied by the Germans on 19th March 1944 – Editor's note]. At that time my friends and I wanted to illegally take a boat down the Danube to the Palestine. The problem, however, was that the boat was small, and applicants many. As I was among the last on the list, I had to stay behind. In the end, although with difficulty, they did succeed.

My wife and I had gotten used to Budapest to such a degree, that one nice March day we bought tickets to the operetta. Back then I was using false papers under the name of Wojcechowski. For I had found out that Horthy had good relations with the Polish government in exile in England. That's why he let Polacks live in Hungary. I went to the police and spoke in the Saris dialect. The Hungarian police thought it was Polish. So I got documents with the name of Wojcechowski. On the way to the operetta, we met a former member of the Hashomer, who was from Poland. It was the same day that the Germans occupied Hungary. That acquaintance told us that he knew a German communist woman, who was hiding Polacks for a small sum. So we decided to not go to the operetta, but to the German woman's place. We stayed at her place for only a little while.

During one raid, my wife and I were crossing the street. When I noticed that the Germans were checking everyone's papers, I sent my wife to go hide in the basement of a nearby theater. In the moment t hat I remained alone, I remembered the plot of one American detective film that I had seen during my student days. At that moment I made use of it. I stepped out towards them, and addressed the Gestapo officer in German: "Entschuldigen Sie bitte, wieviel Uhr ist es?" [German: Excuse me, what time is it?] He looked at his watch: "Halb Zwölf." [German: eleven thirty]. I disappeared behind his back and continued onwards. That was a moment of surprise, a moment that truly decided whether I would live.

After that I told Anicka: "We're not staying here, we'll return to Slovakia." We knew that Slovakia wasn't deporting [deportations from the territory of the Slovak State were stopped in October 1942 – Editor's note. See also 10]. That was in March 1944, and somehow we suspected that something horrible was being readied in Hungary [on 5th April 1944, Horthy agreed to the deportation of 700,000 Hungarian Jews – Editor's note]. So we went to the station, Keleti Palyaudvar [train station in Budapest – Editor's note], and there we watched which trains were leaving, how they were checking people and so on. We found out that both Hungarians and Germans were performing the checks. Hungarian cops were checking citizenship cards, and Germans the Fahrschein [travel permit]. I had learned to make false stamps, and so I forged us some documents. But I didn't know how to forge a Fahrschein, I didn't have a sample and so Anicka and I decided that we'd fold an ordinary piece of paper and just hold it in our hands. The departure plan was as follows. We went separately, as if we didn't know each other. We had only light bags. We arrived at the station a few

seconds before the train's departure. So we just quickly waved the papers at the inspectors. They asked: "Hova, hova?" Hungarian: "Where, where?" Anicka answered "Kassaba." "To Kosice." The Hungarian cop yelled: "Hamar, hamar". In translation from Hungarian: "Quickly, quickly". So we jumped on the train. At that moment you could have cut me to the quick and not found blood. It was horrible. You can imagine it, when a person escapes death. At each station we were stood in fear and watched the police. We jumped back and forth from one wagon another as needed to avoid them. Finally we arrived in Kosice.

Anicka had a cousin in Kosice. She was married to a tradesman, an electrician. Both were Jews. I had a friend there, a shomer. I knew his address. He got me a form. Because it wasn't possible to get into the city center without papers, and we needed to get to the other side, to Eperjesi Utca. I made false papers for Anicka and myself. Her cousin and her husband joined us, but they already had papers. We again decided to separate. The women dressed up in local costumes and took a different route from us. A German and Hungarian checked our identification. They examined our papers for a very long time, and finally told us that we could go. When we were a couple of steps away from them, I whispered: "And now he'll shoot. And now he'll shoot." He didn't shoot. We rounded the corner and got to our railwayman, who I already talked about. Right away he took us in, fed us, and in dialect told us: "You'll go to Budzimir" He meant the village of Budimir [Kosice region]. I don't know why not to Rozhanovce, where we'd already been before. Apparently there they also knew Anicka's father, Dr. Rosenfeld. His son led us to Budimir. There he knocked on someone's window: "I'm bringing you Jews". They gave us buttermilk and bread. Then they sent us to the barn behind the house. It was cold; we got a blanket and hid in the hay.

We stayed there only a short time. As we were already on Slovak territory, we needed to obtain false Slovak papers as soon as possible. In what manner we managed to get to Bratislava, that I don't know any more today. In Bratislava I had an interesting meeting with a former classmate from Presov, Vojtech Andreansky. He hailed me on the street: "Jozka, what're you doing here? Are you crazy?" He took us to his place and advised me: "Try going to the notary office, maybe you'll somehow manage to get some sort of birth certificate." Luckily at that time there were only two people at the notary, and the birth register was opened like this [the interviewee indicates an open book]. A person ahead of me was receiving a birth certificate. That person was born in 1916, and so was I. Unnoticed I glanced into the register, and saw that some Vladimir Buchta had been born in 1916. My turn came up: "What would you like?" "A birth certificate". "What's your name?" "Vladimir Buchta". "When were you born?" I told them, paid a fee and had a birth certificate. Though Anicka didn't have a birth certificate, we did mange to get travel papers once again.

We set out for Zilina. My colleague, a Jewish teacher, was still in Zilina. At that time there were still two, three such Jews in Zilina, ones that I knew. One Jewish boy, a friend of his, was an electrician. That electrician was employed, I don't know if secretly or officially, in Hlinkova Street, by a businessman that had an electrical workshop and was named Malik. He was a Czech, and his wife was Slovak. That electrician told Malik who we were, what we were. He employed me as an accountant on my false papers. I objected: "I'm not an accountant." "That doesn't matter." He got me an accounting textbook, and for one or two days I studied accounting day and night. I started and began working. Eventually I began wondering how to save Malik some money in taxes. For me the state was the enemy. I remember that I also got a very good salary. We lived in Borik [Borik: currently a neighborhood of Zilina – Editor's note]. The owner of the building where we were

renting a room was named Adamov, and knew that we were regularly employed. We made friends in Borik. We made them by noticing that Adamov occasionally listened to Moscow, or London, and then also other neighbors. When the Germans invaded Zilina because of the uprising [Slovak National Uprising], it was possible to escape from Borik across a hill. The Zilina barracks also rose up, and joined the uprising. Soldiers and officers were handing out weapons to the rebels. Whoever came got one. We also got rifles. But we didn't know how to use them. We didn't wait around to see how it would end up in Zilina, and over the hills we got to the other side. In the morning, when I was washing after the night and after many hardships in the mountains, someone stole, as I've already mentioned, my backpack where I also had my mother's letters and family relics.

My wife was still with me. She was a partisan as well. We volunteered in Sklabina [Zilina region]. The commander was named Velicko. Our brigade was named the Milan Rastislav Stefanik 20 Brigade, and our partisan column was named the Sovorov column. They deployed us into battle, and though I didn't know how to use a weapon, I got a machine gun. A Russian partisan, who was teaching us how to shoot, told us that we have to save the ammunition for the enemy. They sent us to fight by Drazkovce [Zilina region]. They were bloody battles, because the Germans were firing mortars at us from the Martinske Hole [Martinske Hole: mountains in the Mala Fatra mountain range, rising above the town of Martin (Zilina region) – Editor's note]. Then we made it to Vrutky [Zilina region]. I remember that my wife was saving people as a Red Cross nurse. The experiences that I had there I recorded and published in the rebel Pravda 21. I published under the name V.B. Later the then editor-in-chief of the rebel Pravda, Miroslav Hysky, testified that it really was I who brought him that manuscript.

About two weeks before the uprising's end, I got to Banska Bystrica [Banska Bystrica region]. I was supposed to work there as a writer for the Nove Slovo weekly 22. Gustav Husak 23, who was at that time the representative of the Interior on rebel territory needed someone for this paper. I worked in Nove Slovo up until the uprising was suppressed. Gustav Husak was the managing editor at Nove Slovo, and the editor-in-chief was I think Lubomir Linhart. He was a Czech member of the resistance, who had a Slovak wife and used the pseudonym Ftorek [and also the pseudonym Blodek – Editor's note]. I remember how the Germans were bombing Banska Bystrica, and one bomb fell in the courtyard of the Nove Slovo offices. It knocked us to the ground, and to this day I have this smaller scar from glass, but it wasn't anything serious.

British paratroopers came to Banska Bystrica as part of assistance to the uprising, and among them were four paratroopers from the Palestine. Three men and one woman. She later died in Kremnicka, they killed her. Her name was Chaviva Reich 24. We had known each other from the time I had been in Hashomer Hatzair. I got in touch with her in Banska Bystrica right before the Germans were drawing near the town.

When the Germans were already close to Bystrica, these paratroopers said that we had to disappear into the mountains. One lieutenant, or second lieutenant, from Svoboda's Army also joined us. A Slovak from Myjava [Trenciany region] who had been dropped into Sliac [Banska Bystrica region]. We went through Slovenska Lupca [Banska Bystrica region]. There the locals gave us some potatoes and food. We got to the top of a hill above the village of Pohronsky Bukovec [Banska Bystrica region]. There we built some zemljankas [zemljanka: underground shelter, usually military – Editor's note]. There was also a shepherd's shed, and closer to the town also an abandoned gamekeeper's lodge. We hid in the zemljankas. The lieutenant said that he had

information that the rebel army would be retreating to Chabenec [Chabenec (1955 m): a large mountain massif in the Nizke Tatry (Low Tatras) mountains – Editor's note], and that we should attempt to get to the retreating Czechoslovak army. It was at the beginning of November 1944. Of course, in that freezing cold, we warmed ourselves by a fire at night. But we were tired and sleepy, and went into the zemljanka. Lying first from the edge was Sano Wollner, I was second, and third was the lieutenant. Only the lieutenant was armed, he had a revolver and a grenade. We weren't armed; after all, I had just come from the newspaper office. My wife, Anicka, had stayed behind with some group by the fire. Just before morning we were attacked by Vlasovites 25. Suddenly we heard explosions. They killed the guards. The lieutenant grabbed me, that you're quickly coming with me! I wanted to shout to my wife Anicka, but he clapped a hand over my mouth. "Don't yell, or they'll shoot you, and her as well, when she answers you." So we made off down in the direction of the gamekeeper's lodge. There we stopped, and he said: "We're going towards Chabenec."

He gave me the grenade, and kept the revolver. When we reached some scrub bush, we heard someone speaking Russian. We didn't know, however, whether they were Russian partisans or Vlasov's men. We hid behind the scrub and watched them. We saw that they had equipment that they had taken from us during that attack. We knew that we had to be careful of them, and that it would be better to avoid them. In Brezno and Podbrezova [both in the Banska Bystrica region] there were steelworks that the Germans had taken over and renamed to the Hermann Göring Werke. Because they needed people who could communicate with the Slovak workers, they had installed Czech engineers there. When we were walking in the direction of Chabenec, we heard some voices in the distance. It seemed to us to be the Czech language. They were Czech engineers with their wives and children. They were afraid of German reprisals, and so were running away from there. They were loaded down with food and cakes. As we didn't have any bags, the father of one of the families asked us to grab a rucksack. We led the way and they followed us. They asked us where we were going, and we told them to Chabenec. The hilltops were covered in snow, and I saw something suspicious. Something was moving. Suddenly the lieutenant tells me: "Quick, throw that grenade over there in that direction!" I threw the grenade and machine-gun fire started! We could feel the bullets whizzing around us, and what's interesting is that apparently they didn't hit anyone, because there was no screaming or crying to be heard. When the shooting stopped, we hid behind some bushes. And this I'll never forget, that in extreme situations, when it's a matter of life and death, a person is capable of overcoming terrible shocks. We overcame it by sitting down behind a bush, opened that rucksack, and both of us ate with great relish everything that it contained. Up till then we hadn't had anything proper to eat. We'd been living on berries that we found in the forest. It also happened that people from the surrounding villages would be running away from the Germans. When we'd meet them, they'd give us something to eat. It sometimes happened that we ate only raw meat. As soon as I had finished enjoying the cakes in that rucksack, I got dysentery, but not from the cakes [dysentery; a serious infectious intestinal illness. Its symptoms are severe diarrhea mixed with blood and fever that is accompanied by stomach pains – Editor's note]. That's a horrible disease. Instead of a stool I bled. The disease was accompanied by severe pain. The lieutenant was a real pal. He said: "We'll go downhill, as there's a village near here." So we aimed for that village. Near the village we approached the first person we met: "I'm seriously ill. We need to get to a hospital." That person said to me: "Don't worry. I'm the chairman of the revolutionary National Committee. I'll drive you to the station and you'll get to the hospital in Brezno." I said my goodbyes to the lieutenant, who had saved my life, and whom I never saw again.

The chairman of the National Committee made sure that I got to Brezno by train. I arrived at the hospital's reception. Not far from the hospital, there was a building occupied by the Gestapo. The head physician at the hospital was a very decent person. He gave orders that they should admit and treat everyone, regardless of who he was, what he was! I said to a nurse: "I'm a Jew and a partisan. You could hand me over to the Germans." "We'll never hand you over, the head doctor said that we're supposed to treat people, and we'll put you in a ward where the Gestapo doesn't go." They put me in the typhus ward. In that typhus ward I got unsweetened tea, cooked unsweetened and non-greasy rice and of course medicines. I stayed there until I was cured.

When they released me, I said to myself that if my wife is alive, she'll be trying to get to the East, where she was from. In the East the front was already approaching. Both the Soviet Army and the Czechoslovak Svoboda's Army were advancing. When I left the hospital, one of Vlasov's soldiers approached me. I had a watch. I didn't wait for him to take it from me, but offered it to him straight away. He answered: "I don't want it!" Imagine, he paid me for it. Then I set out by train for Eastern Slovakia. I got near Presov, and suddenly a fellow countryman noticed me. He greeted me in a very friendly fashion. He asked where I was headed. I said: "I want to get to the other side of the front, otherwise they'll kill me." I asked him to get in touch with Juraj Anderko, our family friend. He told me that I should hide out at his sister's place until he finds Anderko. After some time Juraj Anderko also arrived. He gave me a gold watch, a family heirloom from my father that my parents had hidden with him. I then sold the watch to a jeweler. I'm sure that I sold it too cheaply, but despite that I got a lot of money for it. Once I had that money I was able to move about.

Now I could set out for the front. I got to a village not far from Margecany. I remember buying a razor blade. A razor blade so that in the event that the Germans captured me, I'd commit suicide. I wouldn't let myself me captured. I stayed in that village for a while. I told people that I was running away from the Germans, so that they couldn't send me for forced labor. Because I had money, I was able to pay for accommodations. I even attended church there, so that I wouldn't be conspicuous. I don't know how they would have reacted had they known I was a Jew. I was already quite exhausted by the constant hiding and so I went to the pub in Margecany, like that time when we had been saving the Jewish children in Polish Tesin. I ordered a beer. Sitting beside me was a Hungarian soldier from Kosice. We started talking and suddenly I sensed that he's probably not a big Hungarian, and a big supporter of Fascism. He told me how at the Eastern front they'd been dropping leaflets down on the Hungarian and German units, for them to surrender, that the war was lost. Because he had confided in me, I also told him who I was. He was named Hoffmann and told me that he'd try to save me. We became friends.

Hoffmann right away went to see his commander and told him that he's got a Hungarian colleague who wants to join the army. That the problem is, however, that he doesn't speak Hungarian, because his mother was Hungarian, but died and he was raised by his father, a Slovak. As they didn't have any more uniforms, I got only a Hungarian cap. The next day an order sounded, which was, retreat! The Soviet Army is advancing. So we got from Margecany to Nizny Medzev [in 1960 the town of Nizny Medzev and Vysny Medzev merged into the town of Medzev – Kosice region]. It was a mostly German village. The Germans that lived here were loyal Hitler supporters. We were boarded with one Fascist, who would have done anything for us due to the fact that we were fighting alongside the Germans. Suddenly the commander summoned my friend, that it was necessary to go get pants for the soldiers at the joint Hungarian – Slovak army warehouse. The

warehouse wasn't far from Martin [Zilina region]. Hoffmann said: "All right, but I won't go alone, as I've got my friend here." And so we got near Martin as soldiers, showed our papers and each got one sack of pants. We were returning via Krutky and Poprad [Presov region]. In Poprad we got off and walked in the direction of Krompachy [Kosice region]. Behind Krompachy was already the front line. We kept going until we arrived above the town of Zakarovce [Kosice region]. The forest was full of people. Down below there was already shooting. The people from Zakarovce who were hiding from the Germans in the forest didn't trust us. Luckily Hoffmann, or rather his father, had had some contact with people from Zakarovce. He remembered the name of one miner from Zakarovce. That identified us. We had basically deserted from the Hungarian Fascist army.

Finally a boy arrived with news that the Soviet army was already in the town. Right away a celebration started, with liquor and all. The Soviet soldiers got properly drunk. The friend from Zakarovce took us two in right away. We stayed there for about two days. Suddenly a Russian soldier, who supplied the units with food, arrived. Kosice had been liberated [Kosice were liberated on 19th January 1945 – Editor's note]. Neither the Hungarian nor the German army was there. Hoffmann and I left for Kosice, to go see his parents. As they hadn't had any news of their son up to then, they were very glad to see him. It was an unbelievably joyful occasion.

After the war

A short time later I was crossing Hlavnej [Main] Street in Kosice, and saw a sign that said editorial office. It was the office of the newspaper of Svoboda's Army. I applied and they took me on. I worked there for only a short time. In Kosice I had met a lawyer by the name of Rasl, and he told me that Pravda 26 also needed journalists. Pravda was a mouthpiece of the Communist Party. The editor-in-chief of Pravda was Julo Sefranek. I told him that I had briefly worked for the Czechoslovak Army magazine and before that for Nove Slovo. They hired me. I worked there until Bratislava was liberated [Bratislava was liberated on 4th April 1945 – Editor's note]. After the liberation of Bratislava everything was moved to Bratislava. In Eastern Slovakia the Party began publishing new daily paper Vychodoslovenska Pravda. And I started working for it as an editor and later became editor-in-chief.

Once, that was still in the Kosice offices of Pravda, the General Secretary of the Slovak Communist Party, Edo Fris, announced at a staff meeting of the paper that: "They need an editor in Moscow, as everyone has already returned home, and the Czechoslovak department of Moscow Radio needs an editor. Who agrees? Who'd want to go?" Right away my hand shot up. Back then I thought that a person could have no greater mission than to be an editor in the radio of a victorious anti-Fascist country. So he wrote down my name. This was in 1945.

Some time later, my good friend from Presov, a Jewish boy, Tibor Rosenwasser, appeared in Presov. We ran into each other on the street: "Jozko, you're alive? Your wife, Anicka, is in Presov." I said: "That's impossible." "Yes, it's possible, I'll bring her to you." Then I learned what had happened to her. The group of people that Vlasov's soldiers caught in the forest had been taken to Banska Bystrica, to the offices of the Gestapo. The overwhelming majority of them were dragged off to Kremnicka and there they shot them. Among them was also the Palestinian paratrooper Chaviva Reich. My wife had also managed to escape during the attack. She had aimed for Zilina. There she worked as a laborer, and used the money she earned to get to the East. She ended up in some Ruthenian village not far from Bardejov [Presov region], and from there got to Presov.

In 1946, in Kosice, our son was born. Janko. Unfortunately, he got an inner ear infection. Despite the fact that one of our friends was a good doctor, we were unable to save him. Back then there weren't antibiotics yet, and people died of these sorts of diseases. We buried Janko in Kosice.

In March of 1947 we arrived in Moscow. At that time I didn't speak Russian yet. Back then I met Soviet workers for the first time. I remember that they had a work holiday. It was named Stakhanovsky Vtornik, Stakhanov Tuesday. I don't know, I don't remember anymore exactly what its significance was. I think that it had something to do with suggestions for improvement, the improvement and rationalization of work. In the Czechoslovak broadcast offices we mastered Russian relatively quickly through contact with our Russian colleagues. Anicka also worked for our office. She had graduated from academic high school. She had an exceptional talent for physics and math. In Moscow, on 1st January 1946, our son Vlado [Vladimir] was born. We didn't have an apartment. We lived in a hotel room.

Unfortunately, my and Anicka's relationship was no longer as rosy. On the anniversary of the Great October Revolution 27, in 1949, I was terribly busy, as delegations from Czechoslovakia had arrived. I had to devote myself to them. We no longer lived in the hotel by Kiev Station, but downtown, closer to the radio offices and close to a very good Georgian restaurant. At the time Vlado was a little over a year and a half old. That day I went to that restaurant with him. The service there was very slow. When we returned to the hotel, we couldn't get into our room. I had it forced open. Anicka was lying on the floor, half-dead. It was discovered that she had overdosed on some pills and was unconscious. I quickly called the Red Cross and we took her to the hospital. But it was on the anniversary of the Great October Revolution. At that time Russians drink and party, and the hospital was full of drunks. I took a long time before her turn came. I remember that several days later they notified me that she had died. It was on 12th November 1949. The funeral took place at a crematorium in Moscow.

As I was a widower and had a lot of work, Vlado was put in a children's home. They grew extremely fond of him there. One of the caretakers took care of him as if she were his own mother. Of course, I visited him often. I remember that when we were leaving the Soviet Union in 1953, I gave that children's home almost all the money I had for how well they had taken care of my son.

Immediately after Slansky's trial 28, in February 1953, Vlado and I returned to Prague. The management of the radio in Moscow assumed that I could have problems due to the trials that had just taken place, because during the trial they hung and shot most significant functionaries of Jewish origin. That's why they sent a letter praising me from Moscow to the Czechoslovak ministry. Upon my return I wanted to return to Pravda as an editor. In Moscow, besides working in radio, I had been a correspondent for the Bratislava offices of Pravda. When I told the Party's central committee that I wanted to return as an editor, they said: "No! You've worked in Moscow. You'll get a position of responsibility." I said: "I'm not a functionary, but a journalist." But in short, nothing could be done, they stuck me into the position of deputy to the director of Czechoslovak Radio in Slovakia, in charge of programming. I was in charge of music, literature, politics, children's programming. In other words, everything. It was a very responsible position. I didn't like some organizational aspects that had dominated there up until then. For example, up until my arrival, there hadn't been any record library. I basically founded it there. I remained in the position of first deputy until the year 1956.

After Stalin's death in 1953, an overall relaxation took place. Khrushchev 29 needed to get international cooperation moving. It was also necessary to activate the international radio organization, OIR, which had offices in Prague. In 1956 they made me the General Secretary of OIR in Prague. Its members were radio stations in socialist countries, plus two non-socialist ones, Egyptian and Finnish radio. My task was to get it going. I consider organization to be creative work, and I have to say that I was successful in organizing cooperation and the exchange of programs and experiences of member as well as non-member radio stations.

In the meantime I had remarried. My wife worked for the Academy of Sciences. She was probably the one most afflicted by my work. Because during a time span of three years, I wasn't at home for 220 days. I traveled to many countries, organized meetings. Finally in 1959 we returned from Prague to Bratislava, where I became editor-in-chief of political broadcasts of Slovak Radio. I worked there until 1963, when I applied for the position of teacher at the Department of Journalism at Comenius University. I won the competition.

In 1968, as a teacher at the Department of Journalism, I took part in a conference on information and international relations in Ljubljana, Yugoslavia. My paper got a good reception. At the conference I was approached by the rector of the Munich Academy for Television and Film. He proposed that I come lecture at their university. In those days they were leading very stormy discussions with their leftist students. I told him to send the invitation to the Department of Journalism, and that the department will pass it on to the Minister of Education. If he agrees, I'll gladly accept the invitation. During that time 30 the entire procedure wasn't very complicated. It went relatively quickly and if I'm not mistaken, during the winter semester of 1969/70 I was already working in Munich. I was very much surprised by the students at that school. They were fanatical Communists. Their idols were Che Guevara and Fidel Castro. Of course there were also some opponents of Communist regimes to be found. My task was to familiarize them with socialist theories of journalistic sciences. My work connected with lectures as well as informal meetings with students in Munich was good, from the viewpoint of the school's management. I'd say also successful. I think that those students expected a more radical and leftist attitude from a person from Communist Czechoslovakia. They, on the other hand, surprised me that radical leftists were returning to the era before the Great October Revolution, when the issue of free love had been an oft-discussed theme. Vulgarly put, their attitude was one of everyone doing it with everyone. Apparently it was related to the fact that they were returning to early times, when besides revolutionary ideas carried by the ideal of justice, the fight against ossified customs and conventions was being formulated. The students imagined it as completely uncontrolled and uncontrollable freedom. About the same as we see today, when even people without any sort of responsibility are in important positions.

When I returned to Czechoslovakia from Munich, cadre [political] interviews were taking place. These interviews ended badly for me. They designated me as a traitor and imperialist. They attributed things to me that I never done or said. They expelled me from the Party and I wasn't allowed to lecture. Despite the fact that I wasn't lecturing, I continued to receive a salary. This was unpleasant to me, and so I turned to Professor Krna, the head of the Department of Journalism at the time. He said: "You know what, Jozef? Pick a theme, if it's interesting we'll approve it and you can work on it. Whether it'll be published though, that I don't know." So I worked on the theme: Information, Journalistic Information, or journalistic intelligence and facts. This is how it was for a

half year. I wasn't allowed to publish. Finally in 1971 they summoned me to the cadre department, where the department head informed me: "Comrade, you can no longer work here." He gave me a form letter, that I'm leaving voluntarily. I had to sign it, there was no other option.

I visited my former colleague and the then secretary of the UV KSS [Central Committee of the Communist Party of Slovakia]. He received me, and I told him: "Comrade, I'm unemployed in socialism. I'm not allowed to publish." He said: "Comrade, it'll all settle down, that was a political earthquake. They also threw out my brother, the director of the Bardejov shoe factory. It'll all settle down. You can work, but you can't work in areas of ideology. Find some other type of work." The deputy of the Minister of Industry was a very decent person. I had already met him. I contacted him through the wife of the former director of Czech, later Slovak Radio. The deputy received me and I told him what sort of situation I was in. He said: "The Academy of Industrial Systems Engineering belongs under our ministry, you'll work there. I'll call the director right away." They gave me a job, and I got my first position, the director's secretary. My job was to take minutes and besides this to serve coffee. So as a college lecturer I served coffee to functionaries who were discussing issues connected to industrial automation in Slovakia. There I learned that some programs are compatible, and some aren't compatible. But what kinds of programs they were, I had not even the slightest idea. I didn't understand a thing. When I came home, my wife asked me: "So, how was it?" And I answered her: "Well, besides preparing coffee, I didn't understand anything."

But it didn't take long, I'd guess no more than a half year, and after a half year the academy moved, to Prievoz. And as a pedagogue they asked me to develop techniques to convince the directors of Slovak industrial companies to not be afraid of computers. And they were afraid that hidden reserves would be discovered. So I had to first know what that automated control system was, and what that computer actually is. I began reading books, but it wasn't enough. They put me in touch with one excellent computer expert, for those times, from Slovnaft. I don't remember his name, otherwise he was also physically disabled, very talented and intelligent, and lectured excellently for me, as a layman, and led me to understand it. And so it happened that after a year or two, I gradually worked on that methodology and became the leader of one team that was responsible for this. The team was composed of sociologists, journalists, psychologists and economists. I was the manager and would send them out into the field to put my methodology into practice. Along with the rest of them, I also went about and lectured at various companies. I lectured for directors, and that methodology, when it had already been published as a whole, had great success at the general directorship of Skloplast in Trnava. When we had a departmental conference, I received thanks and even a diploma from the director. And in 1976, at the age of 60, I retired.

My wife and I met in Moscow. As a student she occasionally helped out at the radio station. She was a friend of my first wife. My second wife is also a Jewess. But to be honest, that wasn't at all why I married her. We had a civil wedding. My wife and I didn't observe any religious rules at home, and neither did we observe holidays. I only go to synagogue during the High Holidays. One daughter came of our marriage.

I'd like to tell one story, perhaps an educational one, but in those days certainly not an unusual one. I didn't tell my son that I was a Jew. When he was 14 or 15 years old, we were on vacation by the Cerveny Kamen castle. There was a well-preserved Jewish cemetery. My son and I sat down and I began to read the writing on the tombstones. My son said: "You can read it?" To which I

replied: “Yes, I’m a Jew.” At that point I told him everything, that his mother had also been, and so was he. He began shaking and said: “Why didn’t you tell me? Why?” After this experience we decided it would be better to tell our daughter everything right away.

In 1968 our son met his wife-to-be. She was studying art restoration. In 1969, on the anniversary of the August 21 occupation 31 they were on SNP [Slovak National Uprising] Square and were witnesses to a cop beating some woman. This was one of the reasons they decided to leave Czechoslovakia. They got to Italy, to Rome. They went with their child in arms. In Rome they found out that a charitable Jewish organization was helping Jews. With the help of this organization they got to New York. Up to 1973 we had no information about them. In 1973 we got a letter from our son, where he wrote about what all they had gone through. From that time onwards we’ve kept in touch. He and his wife settled permanently in the USA. They had a pair of twins there.

As far as my friends are concerned, I’ve got to say that I don’t seek out only Jewish company. I’ve got friends both among Jews and non-Jews. I don’t differentiate between them.

In closing I’d like to say a few words. We, who survived the Holocaust, often ask ourselves, why and how? To this day we can’t understand why the Nazi regime picked Jews as victims of the slaughter. The SS were worse than predators. They considered it an honor to cleanse their race by exterminating us. Sometimes, while talking about what we lived through and how we lived through it, we stop and ask, was it possible? Is it true? How was it possible? If I have to sum it up, it was possible only thanks to the fact that there were good people to be found, who helped us. Sometimes they were people that were grateful to our parents for something, or to our grandparents. Friends helped us, former classmates. Very often what helped us was lightning-quick wit and resourcefulness, which took those murderers by surprise. And when we weren’t afraid to risk in a given situation, we survived. First we survived the day, then another and finally the entire Third Reich. Another thing I’d like to say is that totalitarian regimes are regimes that murder. The Nazi regime picked the Jewish race. I don’t believe that there is such a thing as the Jewish race. Because many Jews are descendants of crossbreeding, just like the “Aryans”. So the Nazis picked a race that they had made up. The Stalinists also murdered millions. They, however, didn’t make up a race, but so-called enemies of the people, and arbitrarily destroyed and murdered even their nearest and dearest. Basically, even today it’s horrible. In this democratically oriented system, people are afraid to express resistance to neo-Nazism and terrorism. I’m coming to the conclusion that a completely just society doesn’t exist. Either the regime destroys people, or in a freer society, people destroy each other. Everything depends on the responsibility and conscience of the individual.

Glossary:

1 Slovak National Uprising

At Christmas 1943 the Slovak National Council was formed, consisting of various oppositional groups (communists, social democrats, agrarians etc.). Their aim was to fight the Slovak fascist state. The uprising broke out in Banska Bystrica, central Slovakia, on 20th August 1944. On 18th October the Germans launched an offensive. A large part of the regular Slovak army joined the uprising and the Soviet Army also joined in. Nevertheless the Germans put down the riot and occupied Banska Bystrica on 27th October, but weren’t able to stop the partisan activities. As the

Soviet army was drawing closer many of the Slovak partisans joined them in Eastern Slovakia under either Soviet or Slovak command.

2 Army of General Svoboda

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

3 Slovak State (1939-1945)

Czechoslovakia, which was created after the disintegration of Austria-Hungary, lasted until it was broken up by the Munich Pact of 1938; Slovakia became a separate (autonomous) republic on 6th October 1938 with Jozef Tiso as Slovak PM. Becoming suspicious of the Slovakian moves to gain independence, the Prague government applied martial law and deposed Tiso at the beginning of March 1939, replacing him with Karol Sidor. Slovakian personalities appealed to Hitler, who used this appeal as a pretext for making Bohemia, Moravia and Silesia a German protectorate. On 14th March 1939 the Slovak Diet declared the independence of Slovakia, which in fact was a nominal one, tightly controlled by Nazi Germany.

4 The expulsion of the Jews (Sephardim) from Spain

In the 13th century, after a period of stimulating spiritual and cultural life, the economic development and wide-range internal autonomy obtained by the Jewish communities in the previous centuries was curtailed by anti-Jewish repression emerging from under the aegis of the Dominican and the Franciscan orders. Following the pogrom of Seville in 1391, thousands of Jews were massacred throughout Spain, women and children were sold as slaves, and synagogues were transformed into churches. About 100,000 Jews were forcibly converted between 1391 and 1412. The Spanish Inquisition began to operate in 1481 with the aim of exterminating the supposed heresy of new Christians. In 1492 a royal order was issued to expel resisting Jews in the hope that if old co-religionists would be removed new Christians would be strengthened in their faith. The number of the displaced is estimated to lie between 100,000-150,000.

5 Masaryk, Tomas Garrigue (1850-1937)

Czechoslovak political leader and philosopher and chief founder of the First Czechoslovak Republic. He founded the Czech People’s Party in 1900, which strove for Czech independence within the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, for the protection of minorities and the unity of Czechs and Slovaks. After the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy in 1918, Masaryk became the first president of Czechoslovakia. He was reelected in 1920, 1927, and 1934. Among the first acts of his government was an extensive land reform. He steered a moderate course on such sensitive issues as the status of minorities, especially the Slovaks and Germans, and the relations between the church and the state. Masaryk resigned in 1935 and Edvard Benes, his former foreign minister, succeeded him.

6 People’s and Public schools in Czechoslovakia

In the 18th century the state intervened in the evolution of schools – in 1877 Empress Maria Theresa issued the Ratio Educationis decree, which reformed all levels of education. After the passing of a law regarding six years of compulsory school attendance in 1868, people's schools were fundamentally changed, and could now also be secular. During the First Czechoslovak Republic, the Small School Law of 1922 increased compulsory school attendance to eight years. The lower grades of people's schools were public schools (four years) and the higher grades were council schools. A council school was a general education school for youth between the ages of 10 and 15. Council schools were created in the last quarter of the 19th century as having 4 years, and were usually state-run. Their curriculum was dominated by natural sciences with a practical orientation towards trade and business. During the First Czechoslovak Republic they became 3-year with a 1-year course. After 1945 their curriculum was merged with that of lower gymnasium. After 1948 they disappeared, because all schools were nationalized.

7 Hashomer Hatzair in Slovakia

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

8 Jabotinsky, Vladimir (1880-1940)

Founder and leader of the Revisionist Zionist movement; soldier, orator and a prolific author writing in Hebrew, Russian, and English. During World War I he established and served as an officer in the Jewish Legion, which fought in the British army for the liberation of the Land of Israel from Turkish rule. He was a member of the Board of Directors of the Keren Hayesod, the financial arm of the World Zionist Organization, founded in London in 1920, and was later elected to the Zionist Executive. He resigned in 1923 in protest over Chaim Weizmann's pro-British policy and founded the Revisionist Zionist movement and the Betar youth movement two years later. Jabotinsky also

founded the ETZEL (National Military Organization) during the 1936-39 Arab rebellion in Palestine.

9 Hlinka-Guards

Military group under the leadership of the radical wing of the Slovakian Popular Party. The radicals claimed an independent Slovakia and a fascist political and public life. The Hlinka-Guards deported brutally, and without German help, 58,000 (according to other sources 68,000) Slovak Jews between March and October 1942.

10 Deportation of Jews from the Slovak State

The size of the Jewish community in the Slovak State in 1939 was around 89,000 residents (according to the 1930 census – it was around 135,000 residents), while after the I. Vienna Arbitration in November 1938, around 40,000 Jews were on the territory gained by Hungary. At a government session on 24th March 1942, the Minister of the Interior, A. Mach, presented a proposed law regarding the expulsion of Jews. From March 1942 to October 1942, 58 transports left Slovakia, and 57,628 people (2/3 of the Jewish population) were deported. The deportees, according to a constitutional law regarding the divestment of state citizenship, they could take with them only 50 kg of precisely specified personal property. The Slovak government paid Nazi Germany a “settlement” subsidy, 500 RM (around 5,000 Sk in the currency of the time) for each person. Constitutional law legalized deportations. After the deportations, not even 20,000 Jews remained in Slovakia. In the fall of 1944 – after the arrival of the Nazi army on the territory of Slovakia, which suppressed the Slovak National Uprising – deportations were renewed. This time the Slovak side fully left their realization to Nazi Germany. In the second phase of 1944-1945, 13,500 Jews were deported from Slovakia, with about 1000 Jewish persons being executed directly on Slovak territory. About 10,000 Jewish citizens were saved thanks to the help of the Slovak populace.
Niznansky, Eduard: Zidovska komunita na Slovensku 1939-1945,
http://www.holocaust.cz/cz2/resources/texts/niznansky_komunita

11 Czechs in Slovakia from 1938–1945

The rise of Fascism in Europe also had its impact on the fate of Czechs living in Slovakia. The Vienna Arbitration of 1938 had as its consequence the loss of southern Slovakia to Hungary, as a result of which the number of Czechs living in Slovakia declined. A Slovak census held on 31st December 1938 listed 77,488 persons of Czech nationality, a majority of which did not have Slovak residential status. During the period of Slovak autonomy (1938-1939) a government decree was in effect, on the basis of which 9,000 Czech civil servants were let go. The situation of the Czech population grew even worse after the creation of the Slovak State (1939-1945), when these people had the status of foreigners. As a result, by 1943 there were only 31,451 Czechs left in Slovakia.

12 Jewish Center in Bratislava

its creation was closely tied to Dieter Wisliceny, German advisor for resolution of Jewish affairs, a close colleague of Eichmann. Wisliceny arguments for the creation of a Jewish Center were that it will act as a partner in negotiation regarding the eviction of Jews, that for those that due to Aryanization will be removed from their current positions, it will secure re-schooling for other

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

13 Jewish Codex

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

14 Yellow star in Slovakia

On 18th September 1941 an order passed by the Slovakian Minister of the Interior required all Jews to wear a clearly visible yellow star, at least 6 cm in diameter, on the left side of their clothing. After 20th October 1941 only stars issued by the Jewish Centre were permitted. Children under the age of six, Jews married to non-Jews and their children if not of Jewish religion, were exempt, as well as those who had converted before 10th September 1941. Further exemptions were given to Jews who filled certain posts (civil servants, industrial executives, leaders of institutions and funds) and to those receiving reprieve from the state president. Exempted Jews were certified at the relevant constabulary authority. The order was valid from 22nd September 1941.

15 Exemption and exceptions in the Slovak State (1939-1945); in the Jewish Codex they are included under § 254 and § 255

Exemption and exceptions, § 255 – the President of the Slovak Republic may and exemption from the stipulations of this decree. Exemption may be complete or partial and may be subject to conditions. Exemption may be revoked at any time. In the case of exemption, administrative fees are collected according to § 255 in the following amounts;

a) for the granting of an exception according to § 1, the sum of 1,000 to 500,000 Ks.
b) for the granting of an exception according to § 2, the sum of 500 to 100,000 Ks
c) for the granting of an exception according to single or multiple decrees, the sum of 10 Ks to 300,000 Ks
d) a certificate issued according to § 3 is charged at 10 Ks
§ 255 enabled the President to grand exceptions from decrees for a fee. Disputes are still led regarding how this paragraph got into the Jewish Codex and how many exceptions the President granted. According to documents there were 1111 Jews protected by exceptions, including family members. Exceptions were valid from the commencement of deportations from the territory of the Slovak State, in 1942, up until the outbreak of the Slovak National Rebellion, in the year 1944.

16 Novaky labor camp

established in 1941 in the central Slovakian town of Novaky. In an area of 2.27 km² 24 barracks were built, which accommodated 2,500-3,000 people in 1943. Many of the people detained in Novaky were transported to the Polish camps. The camp was liberated by the partisans on 30th August 1944 and the inmates joined the partisans.
17 Mach Alexander (1902 – 1980): Slovak leader who headed the fascistic Hlinka Guard and held various positions in the Slovak government. Mach was one of the main supporters of the Deportation of Slovak Jewry. In the summer of 1940 Mach became Minister of Internal Affairs in the Slovak government, which was a sattelite of Nazi Germany from 1939 – 1945. In september 1941 Mach and Tuka called for the deportation of 10,000 Jews from Bratislava, Slovakia´s capital, to eastern Slovakia. The deportations began in March 1942 and were carried out buy Mach´s ministry. Almost 58,000 Jews were deported over he next seven months. In February 1943 Mach tried to restart the deportations. However, he was unsuccessful. Mach stayed in his ministerial position until the Slovak national uprising. After the war, he was sentenced to 30 years in prison.
18 First Vienna Decision: On 2nd November 1938 a German-Italian international committee in Vienna obliged Czechoslovakia to surrender much of the southern Slovakian territories that were inhabited mainly by Hungarians. The cities of Kassa (Kosice), Komarom (Komarno), Ersekujvar (Nove Zamky), Ungvar (Uzhorod) and Munkacs (Mukacevo), all in all 11.927 km² of land, and a population of 1.6 million people became part of Hungary. According to the Hungarian census in 1941 84% of the people in the annexed lands were Hungarian-speaking.

19 Horthy, Miklos (1868-1957)
Regent of Hungary from 1920 to 1944. Relying on the conservative plutocrats and the great landowners and Christian middle classes, he maintained a right-wing regime in interwar Hungary. In foreign policy he tried to attain the revision of the Trianon peace treaty - on the basis of which two thirds of Hungary’s territory were seceded after WWI – which led to Hungary entering WWII as an ally of Germany and Italy. When the Germans occupied Hungary in March 1944, Horthy was forced to appoint as Prime Minister the former ambassador of Hungary in Berlin, who organized the deportations of Hungarian Jews. On 15th October 1944 Horthy announced on the radio that he would ask the Allied Powers for truce. The leader of the extreme right-wing fascist Arrow Cross Party, Ferenc Szalasi, supported by the German army, took over power. Horthy was detained in Germany and was later liberated by American troops. He moved to Portugal in 1949 and died there in 1957.

20 Stefanik, Milan Rastislav (1880 – 1919)

Slovak astronomer, politician and a general in the French Army. In 1914 he received from the French government the Order of a Knight of the Honorary Legion for scientific and diplomatic successes. During the years 1913 – 1918 he organized the Czech-Slovak legions in Serbia, Romania, Russia and Italy, and in 1918 the anti-Soviet intervention in Siberia. He died in the year 1919 during an unexplained plane crash during his return to Slovakia. Is buried at a burial mound in Bradlo. http://www.osobnosti.sk/index.php?os=zivotopis&ID=755

21 Povstalecka Pravda (“Rebel Pravda”): started being published on 9th September 1944 during the Slovak National Uprising, in Banska Bystrica. It was published by the central body of the Communist Party of Slovakia. Pravda informed its readers about the progress of the war at home and in the rest of the world, helped in the mobilization and organization of all forces in the fight against Fascism. The editorial offices were led by M. Hysko, later J. Sefranek. The last issue was published on 25 October 1944 in Mezibrod, near Slovenska Lupca. By the end of the war, half of the editorial staff had been murdered.

22 Nove Slovo

a political, economic and cultural weekly. It was published by the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Slovakia via the Pravda publishing house. It was created in Banska Bystrica during the Slovak National Uprising, where from 24th September 1944 to 22nd October 1944, five issues were published with a press run of 4,000 - 5,000 issues. The founder and managing editor was Gustav Husak. After liberation, the publication of the weekly was renewed on 1st June 1945, in Bratislava.

23 Husak, Gustav (1913–1991)

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

as General Secretary of the Communist Party, and on 10th December 1989 as a result of the revolutionary events also abdicated from the presidency. Symbolically, this happened on Human Rights Day, and immediately after he was forced to appoint a government of ‘national reconciliation.’ The foundering of his political career quickened his physical end. Right before his death he reconciled himself with the Catholic Church. He died on 18th February 1991 in Bratislava.

24 Reich, Chaviva (1914 – 1944)

real name Marta Reikova. Joined Hashomer Hatzair in 1930, where she took the name Chaviva. In 1938 – 1939 she worked as a secretary in the Keren Kayemet Lejisrael organization. In 1939 she married and emigrated to the Palestine. In 1942 she joined the Palmach military organization, after secret military training she became a member of the Royal Air Force (RAF). On 17th September 1944 she flew to Slovakia as one of five Jewish volunteers in the Amsterdam group. Her task was to liaise between the English Allied Command and the command of the 1st Czechoslovak Army in Slovakia. On 31st October 1944 she was captured, and after interrogation and torture she was executed in Kremnicka on 10th November 1944.
DURANOVA, Ludmila: Chaviva Reiková – Mladá hrdinka z Povstana, In. Zaujímavé Zeny v nasej histórii, SNK, Vol. 5, No. 4, 2004, pg. 205

25 Vlasov military
Members of the voluntary military formations of Russian former prisoners of war that fought on the German side during World War II. They were led by the former Soviet general, A. Vlasov, hence their name.

26 Pravda
started being published as a daily paper from 1st October 1925. It was the press organ of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Slovakia (UV KSS). During the time of the Slovak State, it was prohibited and was published illegally as the rebel Pravda. Pravda began to be legally published from 7th January 1945 in Michalovce, from where the editorial offices moved via Kosice to Bratislava (13th April 1945). Pravda is published as an independent daily paper in Slovakia up to the present day (2006), and at the same time is among the most widely read dailies. Regional versions of the Pravda paper are published in five additional Slovak cities.

27 October Revolution Day
October 25 (according to the old calendar), 1917 went down in history as victory day for the Great October Socialist Revolution in Russia. This day is the most significant date in the history of the USSR. Today the anniversary is celebrated as ‘Day of Accord and Reconciliation’ on November 7.

28 Slansky trial
In the years 1948-1949 the Czechoslovak government together with the Soviet Union strongly supported the idea of the founding of a new state, Israel. Despite all efforts, Stalin’s politics never found fertile ground in Israel; therefore the Arab states became objects of his interest. In the first place the Communists had to allay suspicions that they had supplied the Jewish state with arms.

The Soviet leadership announced that arms shipments to Israel had been arranged by Zionists in Czechoslovakia. The times required that every Jew in Czechoslovakia be automatically considered a Zionist and cosmopolitan. In 1951 on the basis of a show trial, 14 defendants (eleven of them were Jews) with Rudolf Slansky, First Secretary of the Communist Party at the head were convicted. Eleven of the accused got the death penalty; three were sentenced to life imprisonment. The executions were carried out on 3rd December 1952. The Communist Party later finally admitted its mistakes in carrying out the trial and all those sentenced were socially and legally rehabilitated in 1963.

29 Khrushchev, Nikita (1894-1971)

Soviet communist leader. After Stalin's death in 1953, he became first secretary of the Central Committee, in effect the head of the Communist Party of the USSR. In 1956, during the 20th Party Congress, Khrushchev took an unprecedented step and denounced Stalin and his methods. He was deposed as premier and party head in October 1964. In 1966 he was dropped from the Party's Central Committee.

30 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.

31 Warsaw Pact Occupation of Czechoslovakia

The liberalization of the communist regime in Czechoslovakia during the Prague Spring (1967-68) went further than anywhere else in the Soviet block countries. These new developments was perceived by the conservative Soviet communist leadership as intolerable heresy dangerous for Soviet political supremacy in the region. Moscow decided to put a radical end to the chain of events and with the participation of four other Warsaw Pact countries (Poland, East Germany, Hungary and Bulgaria) ran over Czechoslovakia in August, 1968.