

Pavol Skalicky

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Slovakia

My name is Pavol Skalicky.

I was born in 1949 in Kosice. My parents come from central Slovakia. My father, Tibor Silberstein, was born in Kremnica in 1914. He was a businessman. He spent World War II in the anti-fascist resistance. He died in Kosice in 1976. My mother, Edita Weissova Silberstein, was born in Prievidza in 1918. She died in Kosice in 1995.

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Family background

My parents moved to Kosice after the war, when my father found a job in this town. By that time, they already had my brother, Peter. He is five years older than me. Peter lives in Kosice, married with two daughters, who are also married and already have children.

My wife, Eva, comes from Kosice, too. In 1977, she gave birth to our daughter, Linda, who studied medicine in Kosice.

I have more documents about my mother's family than my father's side. My maternal grandmother, Irma Weissová, was born on March 5, 1882, in Prievidza. She lived with our family until she died on June 11, 1969, in Kosice. Her parents were Július Steiner, who was born in Bosáca, Slovakia; and Júlia Lovingerová, who was born in Austria. I don't know the exact place of her birth. From my mother I learned that she lived 103 years. My great-grandparents had 10 children - six girls and four boys. One of the girls was Irma Steinerová, my grandmother.

My grandmother Irma married Adolf Weiss. They had seven children - five sons and two daughters. One of those was my mother, Edita Weissová. My mother had a high school education and worked as a shop assistant.

Grandfather Weiss was born in 1877, but died quite young in 1920, at the age of 43, just after the youngest girl, Josefina, was born. My mother was only 2 when she lost her father. At the time of his death, my grandfather was a groundskeeper of Pálffy properties in Bojnice. He was killed in a traffic accident while driving a horse carriage. The reason why the horses started to stampede is not known but the carriage toppled, and my

grandfather did not survive. My grandmother did not marry again and, according to my uncle, she could hardly accept her fate, that her husband died and that she would have to take care of seven children by herself. However, her parents were well-situated, and helped her. They continued helping her until her sons completed their educations, and took over the responsibility of supporting their mother. The family not have big financial problems.

Grandmother's oldest son, Vojtech Weiss, was born in 1908 in Prievidza. He was a lawyer. Before the war he went with his brothers to Tanger, Morocco. They were businessmen in some international trading zone.

The second son, Alexander, born in 1910, worked in Slovakia as a sales representative of the Bata Company, and he spent the war years in Indochina and Saigon, Vietnam. He died in Casablanca, Morocco, in the 1960s.

Edmund Weiss, the third brother, was born in 1912, and worked as a director of the Bata Company for Moravia and Slovakia, but was also managing the partnership with his brothers in Morocco, who stayed there when the war broke out in Europe. You could say that their business saved their lives, thanks to the fact they had started as Bata representatives before the war. By working abroad, they avoided deportations and the Holocaust.

The fourth son was Tibor. He was born in 1914 in Prievidza. He worked as a sales representative for a company in Slovakia. He was deported from Zilina and died in Auschwitz.

The youngest son, Ladislav, was born in 1916. He was a lawyer. He studied in Prague at the Charles University, and after graduating from the law school he also went to Casablanca, Morocco, following his brothers, and was lucky escape the atrocities of war and the Holocaust. After liberation, he came back as an enthusiastic builder of Czechoslovakia. Nevertheless, he was persecuted, fired from his work, and forced to find a job as an unskilled worker. After some time, he was rehabilitated. Today he is 83, lives in Prague and is married to a woman who is not Jewish. They don't have children.

The youngest child in the family is my Aunt Josefína. She was born in 1920. She survived the Holocaust and lives in Cologne, Germany, where she emigrated in 1968 or 1969. She followed her children, who emigrated to Germany some time earlier.

Július and Júlia Steiner (nee Lovingerová), my great-grandparents and the parents of my grandmother Irma, had 10 children. The boys were Jozef, Izidor, Jakub and Eugen. Jozef completed a secondary school in Prievidza and worked as the head of the post office in Dolny Kubín. Izidor lived in Topolcany. He had a workshop where he dealt with agricultural machines. He

was married, but didn't have children. Jakub Steiner was a skilled mechanic, a locksmith, who immigrated very early to the USA and, after that, no one from the family ever heard from him again.

Eugen Steiner was a veterinarian. He worked in Szolnok and Budapest, and he owned a farm in Sásshalombata, near Budapest. After the war, he immigrated to the USA. There he had two children. One of them, George, became a medical doctor. He studied in Vienna and in Lausanne and, after getting a degree, he established a clinic in New York. He died at a car accident in the USA, leaving two children.

One of Grandmother Irma's sisters married a Mr. Dalnoki. She died naturally. She had another sister whose name I do not know. This family has a sad and tragic history. They had a daughter and two sons. Both of their parents died at the same time of Spanish flu. Jakub Steiner took care of the sons. They were all deported to a concentration camp, where they died.

My grandmother's sister Zali married Mr. Blody. The Blody family had a clothes shop in Prievidza. They had a son, Jenó, and a daughter, Vilma.

Next sister was Katarína, who married Mr. Fromer. Fromer's family were salesmen in Prievidza, and owned a clothes shop. They were the competitors of the Blody family, into which one of the Steiner sisters was married. Katarína and her husband had two sons, Adolf and Bedrich. Adolf probably emigrated to the USA, and Bedrich was a business partner of my uncles who lived in Morocco.

There was one more daughter, my grandmother's sister, Etel, who married Mr. Cigler. They did not have children. The Cigler family had a factory of dairy products in Prievidza. They died in a concentration camp.

My only living relatives are Uncle Ladislav, who lives in Prague, and Auntie Josefina in Germany.

Neither my father's nor my mother's families were very religious. Father's family was small, they were only two children. His sister was two years older. They lived in Kremnica, where they owned a little textile shop. My grandmother's family came from Kremnica, and she had many brothers and sisters there. One of the siblings had a small watchmaker's shop and my grandparents had a clothing shop. Back in those days, my father's family was named Silberstein.

My parents talked about the family history, but I have to admit it was not a very common theme. The reason could be that a part of our family survived thanks to their jobs and duties in foreign countries. Those who stayed here - my mother, my father and my grandmother, as well as my older brother - survived thanks to some good people who gave them underground shelter in

Klenovské Lazy in the mountains. My father was a member of a partisan brigade. He survived the uprising and the period of deportations to concentration camps by hiding in the mountains. Aunt Josefina survived in hiding somewhere in Hungary with her husband. The others were abroad and after the war, in the 1950, when I grew up, this just wasn't a proper conversation subject. It was after high school that I became interested in these matters and began to learn more about my family.

Being Jewish

I remember an interesting moment when I learned I was actually Jewish. It was an experience I remember very well. When I was 6 and at school for the first time, a girl mocked me for being a Jew. I had no idea what it meant and why she was making fun of me. I only understood that it was some mockery. I reacted very simply and physically attacked her, not driven by the meaning of an insult at all. I probably beat her and she complained at home. When the case was examined, since her parents came to school complaining that I had hurt their daughter, the teacher had to examine the origin of the conflict. I told her exactly how it all had started. So, for me I learned for the first time that there is something called Jewry and Jew.

My parents were called in to meet with my teacher. Fortunately, we had a very good teacher who knew the case very well and found out that the girl's parents were talking at home about my parents and had made abusive remarks about Jews. Their little girl did not understand the meaning of their words, but did understand the character of the speech. The teacher energetically asked the parents to change their attitude in front of their child, to behave in a civilized way.

Concerning the expression of the Jewish religion in our family, to be truthful, it was not present. I think the situation developed in such a direction because of what my mother's siblings had gone through, so at home we simply did not talk about it. I learned more about these things only after I got married.

I married a Jewish girl, but not because she was Jewish. I did not even know at first. I found out about her origin later, when we were dating. Actually, she is Jewish because her mother is Jewish; her father was not Jewish. As I married a Jewish woman from a family where this tradition was much stronger, I learned much more about the Jewish religion than in my own.