

Agi Sofferova

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Znojmo

Czech Republic

Interviewer: Zuzana Strouhova

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Mrs. Agi Sofferova, née Kahan, is from Subcarpathian Ruthenia [1](#). She was born in Mukachevo in 1923, as the youngest of eight children. Mrs. Agi Sofferova married Josef Soffer, whose first wife and son did not survive the war. They then had two daughters, Ruzena and Vera. Mrs. Agi worked in a nursery school, and her younger daughter Vera, who until the revolution [2](#) worked as the principal of a nursery school in Znojmo, followed her in this occupation. After the revolution she started a business. Her older daughter Ruzena worked as a nurse her whole life, and after the revolution she commuted to work in Austria. Mrs. Agi currently lives in a house in Znojmo with her daughter Ruzena. She has five grandchildren and three great-grandchildren, and is in constant contact with the families of her siblings. For its part, the Soffer family has reunions where relatives from various corners of the world get together.

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Family background

In light of the fact that I'm the youngest of eight children, and my father, Bence Kahan, was around 50 when I was born, I don't know much about his parents nor about the parents of my mother, Miriam. It's been so long, I don't remember them. At that time most of them weren't alive any more, and I don't even actually know when they died. We don't have any documents; everything was lost during the war. All I have left is my birth certificate.

My grandfather's surname must have been Kahan, because that was my father's name, but I don't know his first name. My father was from Máramoros Sziget [the Hungarian name for what is today the Romanian town of Signet Marmatiei] in Subcarpathian Ruthenia, and his parents most likely lived there their whole lives. My grandmother's name was Hana, I think. But I don't know anything else about them or their siblings, whether they had any, I don't know. And their education? What kind of an education could they have had back then? Just count how many years it's been, at least 150. Grandpa maybe had only Jewish schooling, cheder, as it's called. Their mother tongue was Yiddish.

My mother's parents were from Mukachevo, they were both born there and always lived there. Their mother tongue was Hungarian and back then people also spoke Yiddish in those parts. I don't remember Grandpa at all; I think that he was no longer alive when I was born. He was named

Berger, I don't know his first name, nor anything about his education or work. He was probably a merchant, or had some sort of trade. I can't tell you anything about that.

I do remember my maternal grandmother. She died in 1933, I was ten, that's easy to calculate. Her maiden name was Hochman. The family had a bakery, they baked bread, but I don't know whether it belonged to her parents or her brother. I don't remember her first name, it's so terribly long ago now, 60 years. You really forget all sorts of things in that time. I should have made a family tree when I was younger, now I could use it, now it's lacking. Neither am I certain how many siblings Grandma had. She probably had a basic education, after all, what sort of education could people in Subcarpathian Ruthenia have had back then? And women in general didn't have much of an education.

All my grandparents definitely lived in a religious manner; there people observed everything. People attended synagogue, observed the Sabbath, observed holidays, everything. I'm sure they were no exception.

My father was named Bence, which is a Hungarian name, in Hebrew it's ben Zion, the Son of Zion. He was born in Máramoros Sziget. Today he'd be around 130 years old. When I was born, my mother was already over 40, and my father must have been around 50, so he was born around the year 1873. While he was still in Máramoros Sziget, he attended elementary school, back then it was a poor region, and they couldn't afford an education. Neither time-wise nor money-wise. His mother tongue was perhaps Yiddish, but he also spoke Hungarian, Hungarian was spoken in those parts. Later he left Máramoros Sziget for Mukachevo, and there he married my mother, Miriam. I don't know how they met. My father also died in Mukachevo, in 1939. So the war didn't affect him.

During World War I he was at the front, and caught a disease there, angina pectoris, so afterwards he didn't work much anymore. Before that he had been a merchant, selling all sorts of things, he had these stalls. According to what I've heard, during the war he served somewhere in Italy, but exactly where and during which years, that I don't know. But I do know that he fought. He wasn't in the infantry, perhaps he was with the artillery, because apparently he was somewhere on one of those wagons or whatnot, and some shrapnel fell on it, and he miraculously survived. He might have talked about his wartime experiences, but not with me. By the time I was a little more grown-up, he was already somewhat old.

My father observed Jewish traditions, he celebrated everything, attended synagogue, or more often went to prayer halls. He attended both morning and evening prayers, that was the custom in Mukachevo. Kashrut [3](#), as it's called, was observed at home. We had three sets of dishes. The Passover ones were kept up in the attic, and always at Easter it had to be brought down, they were decorated ceramic ones. Seder was always a big celebration, because the family would gather. You know, the kids that had already gone out into the wide world would return. That was always nice. Even Saturday was observed, and strictly. They wouldn't cook, wouldn't do anything.

I don't know how many siblings my father had. I think that there was a sister, I met her in the concentration camp, in Auschwitz. They arrived there from somewhere in Subcarpathian Ruthenia. I remember that I also met one of her daughters, in Auschwitz, and then also in Karlovy Vary [4](#) after the war. I've got this memory, my sister Rozika [Ruzena] had a baby in Terezin [5](#). Before the war she lived in Czechoslovakia, so she went from here. She gave birth to a child, and they picked her out for a transport to Auschwitz. So she sewed herself a big bag - she and another lady - put

the baby to sleep, and took it onto that transport. In Auschwitz my father's sister also took care of the baby. But then they both went into the gas. So that's why I remember that my father had a sister, otherwise I maybe would not even have known about it.

My mother was named Miriam, née Berger. She was born in Mukachevo around the year 1882. I was born in 1923, and my mother was around 40 when I was born. Her mother tongue was Hungarian, and her education was most likely elementary. She didn't work, she was a housewife. She lived in Mukachevo her whole life, up until the transports. The transports went there very quickly. If the ghetto was there for a month... What here in Czech took them four years, they did in Mukachevo in a couple of months. In April of 1944, my mother and I left together for Auschwitz, where my mother died. My mother of course lived in a religious manner, she observed the kashrut, everything, and attended synagogue during the High Holidays. But women didn't attend synagogue very much, and what's more, they sat separately.

My mother had a brother, who soon after World War I, perhaps in the 1920s, wandered off to America. His name was Herbert Berger. He had a lot of children, perhaps eight, but we never had any contact with him. While my mother was alive he used to write, or send an occasional package. Then my mother also had three sisters, those I remember, those we used to see. One was named Mermelstein, the second was named Taube, but I don't remember her surname, and I don't remember the name of the third one either. All three were married and had children.

Mermelstein was a teacher at a Jewish school, at a cheder. They had a larger number of children together, five or seven. During the war almost all of them died in concentration camps, what else. One of their daughters survived, she lives in Israel, I ended up meeting her there later. And one son is in Uzhorod [today Ukraine].

What the other couples did, I don't know. I think Taube had one daughter, who then had five sons. By coincidence she then married my cousin, Weider, my father's nephew. During the war both died in a concentration camp, but all five of their sons survived. One lives in Belgium, he's the same age as me, another lives in Mukachevo. We don't write each other much anymore. My mother's third sister had a son, I think. But they're also not alive anymore. I don't know, maybe they died in a concentration camp.

As I've said, I'm one of eight children. My oldest brother was named Mendu, but used the name Ubul. Today he'd be over 100 years old. I was born in 1923, and he was definitely around 30 years older than I. He must have been born sometime at the end of the 19th century. He was a journalist. He definitely had some sort of education, probably high school, otherwise he wouldn't have been able to do that. Or maybe he only had talent. His mother tongue was Hungarian. He was born in Mukachevo, but lived in Uzhorod, where he got married. His wife was named Hermina. In 1944 she had a son, but they then went to a concentration camp, straight to Auschwitz. She survived, but the baby didn't, and neither did her husband, my brother. He probably died sometime in 1944 or 1945.

My second oldest sister was Jolan [Jolana]. She was born around 1903 in Mukachevo - she was about 20 years older than I - and then got married to some man named Fried in Nyirbator [a town in Hungary, located in Szabolcs - Szatmar - Bereg county], Moric Fried. She had two children with him and died together with them in Auschwitz. Their daughter was named Veruska [Vera], she was five or six when they went to the concentration camp. I don't remember the name of the little one-

year-old boy anymore. Jolan was a housewife, and her husband was a horse-trader.

Next was my brother Jan. He was also born in Mukachevo, in 1905. He lived in Mukachevo, survived the concentration camp, returned to Mukachevo and died there. During the war he was in several concentration camps, because he fought in Spain [6](#). He went there in 1938 as a volunteer. He was in a prison in France, there they helped him get home illegally to Mukachevo. It was like a miracle, you know, there was an underground movement there, too. He got home, but he wasn't there for even an hour or two, and right away they came for him. They took him away to a concentration camp in Hungary. From there he went to Auschwitz. So he went through a lot, but returned and stayed in Mukachevo, where he died sometime in the 1980s. After the war he was in charge of some quilted blanket factory, or something like that, as in Spain he'd been on the side of the Communists, and then the Russians were in Mukachevo, so they let him run the factory. Jan was married, but had no children. His wife was named Moni [Monika].

Next was Rozika, Rozi. She was born in Mukachevo in 1907, but then moved to Znojmo. She bought some sort of business there, and made bras and garter belts. She met Emil Jocker there, who she married. He was also born in 1907. She had only one child, which was born in Terezin and died in Auschwitz. She herself also didn't survive the war, she most likely died in Auschwitz in 1945.

Then there was Kolja, who was also born in Mukachevo. He was born in 1913. He had two university degrees, and had a big talent for languages. His mother tongue was Hungarian, and he definitely also spoke Yiddish and German, and also Russian, English and French. He studied in Prague at Lingua, where he then taught languages. He was also in France at the Sorbonne, where he most likely also studied languages. In Prague he also studied law, he already had a JUDr. degree, and was only one exam short of his PhD. I don't know how he came to be in Prague, and how he managed it, I don't know, because he couldn't have gotten anything from home, as we were poor. Before the war he worked in Prague at an embassy, at the Polish one I think. Then he went further and further into the interior of the continent, he was an officer in the army, where thanks to his knowledge of languages he had a certain measure of freedom. But finally he ended up in a concentration camp in Russia, and sometime in 1944 or 1945 he died there. He was single and had no children. I don't know anything more about him. Though the age difference between us wasn't so large, he was away quite often.

My next brother was named Josef, or Joe. In 1939 or 1940 he made it over to England, where he was an aviation electrician in the Air Force. He was born in Mukachevo in 1916. After the war he made a living in England as an electrician, and got married to an Englishwoman, Margaret, who they called Peggy. They had four children together. One son is named George, he's in Canada. Then there's Mary, who lives in England. And then there's John, and then Peter, who lives in Scotland. Joe and Peggy lived in Orpington, which is a small town not far from London. When you take the train from the harbor to London, it stops in Orpington. Even during Communist times I would occasionally go to visit him, my brother always sent me an invitation and they would let me go. He didn't come over to visit us until after the revolution [1989]. He died not long ago, in 1998, also in Orpington. I was at his funeral with my granddaughter Magda.

My last sibling is Helena, who we call Ibi. She was born in 1919. Before the war she studied to be a teacher in Miskolce, and then taught in Uzhorod. She left for the concentration camp from Uzhorod, along with her students. She's still alive, in the Canadian city of Halifax; she's older than I, but is a

chipper gal. After the war she married that Emil Jocker, the husband of her sister Ruzena who had died during the war. They lived in Znojmo, but right before the revolution [before 1989] they wandered off to Canada, where their daughter Jana, a doctor, had gotten married, and their son Pavel had also escaped to there. He works as a rep for some company in Canada. Groceries and so on, something like that. Right now he's in Prague, during the winter he works here, and in the spring returns to Canada. Back then Jana wanted to get out, and so married a man that lived in Canada. She emigrated when she was about 21, so it must have been sometime in 1970. Jana was born in 1949 in Znojmo. Pavel was younger, he was born in 1953, also in Znojmo. He emigrated two or three years later, along with his wife and children - they've got two sons, Tomas and Jan. At that time they left for Yugoslavia and never returned.

Growing up

My name is Agi Sofferova, and I was born on 15th March 1923. When I came into the world, I was this ugly duckling, and my poor mother was embarrassed. Back then her neighbor said to her, 'Don't cry, Miriam, they'll all leave the nest and she'll be the only one to stay.' And it really did happen, they all left the nest and the two of us went onto the transport together.

My mother tongue is Hungarian. At home we spoke Hungarian, a little Yiddish, too, but mainly Hungarian. And I had Hebrew schooling. But over the years I've of course forgotten my Hebrew. There was no one to talk to, so I forgot. Here I adopted Czech. I also know German, and now also English. Once upon a time I also spoke Yiddish, I used that as a base for German, Yiddish is quite similar to German. So now I don't speak Yiddish, but German. Even though maybe I'd still be able to get along in Yiddish. I had four years of high school, but then I had to stop attending school, because in 1938 or 1939 the Hungarians arrived [7](#).

Up to the transport, I lived in Mukachevo. It was a large, beautiful modern city. Pavement, electricity, we had all that stuff. Mukachevo was built by the Czechs. [Editor's note: during the years 1918 - 1938, Mukachevo was part of the territory of the First Czechoslovak Republic. Most of the city's older buildings were built during this time period.] When they arrived, it was this no man's land. It had changed hands a lot, there were Romanians there, Hungarians and Ruthenians, and then in 1945 it was ceded to the Russians, so it became part of the Soviet Union, and we [the interviewee means Czechoslovakia] lost it. It used to be beautiful, fertile land, similar to here in Znojmo, grapes, apples, apricots. Then the Russians began mining salt there, and dug it up and ruined it all.

Half the population of Mukachevo was of Jewish origin. There was a Jewish street, but Jews were basically scattered over the whole town. Jews perhaps differed a bit in that they were more into business, they had these little shops. But often they were also tradesmen, cobblers, tailors and so on, all kinds. What were relations between Jews and Christians like? Well, life went on. Of course, when someone was rich, he was envied. But I grew up among Christians, and we always got along well with our neighbors. My friends tended to be Jewish, but where we lived there were also Christian families, and so we played with those children as well. I never met up with anti-Semitism.

The Jewish community in Mukachevo was varied. There were even a lot of Hasidic Jews [8](#) there. But we didn't have any friends or relations among these radical Jews, with their payes and caftans [9](#), even though in our family we also observed everything. There was a large synagogue there, and

then small synagogues and these small prayer halls. They were everywhere, in every street, or in every other street. My father tended to rather go to the prayer halls. We perhaps only went to a synagogue for the High Holidays. My mother definitely used to go to a mikveh, which was also there.

All traditions were strictly observed in Mukachevo. The kashrut, everything. My favorite holiday was Passover. That was beautiful. Father would lead the seder, and the family would meet. The New Year [Rosh Hashanah] was also important. Those were probably the most important holidays. But my favorite was Passover, because by then it was already spring. I took the restrictions related to traditions simply as a matter of course. As I've said, Mukachevo was half Jewish, so there it was normal. But later we didn't observe it that much, young people didn't take it that seriously any more, on Saturday we would even turn on the lights. The older generation of course reacted badly to this, especially our father. Because his sons turned away from it quite a bit, they no longer believed like he did. He was still quite devout, and our mother too, but not the kids. My older sister Jolan, she observed a lot, everything, even after she got married. The other siblings, Rozi, Jan, Kolja, those not so much any more, I think. They may not have observed things, but they never disowned their origin. Neither did I.

We also had a lot of Jewish schools there, those cheders, a lot of kids attended them. In any case, there were several schools in Mukachevo, Russian schools, Ukrainian ones; I attended the Hebrew high school. It was quite far from our place, but of course there was nothing like bus service in those days. They walked me to school. Up to the age of ten I certainly didn't walk there alone. It really was quite far. The school itself didn't particularly stick in my memory. I think that we used to go places on trips.

We never went anywhere with our parents, as I say, there was no money for that. I only remember that we used to go into the forest, or swimming in the river, with our parents or also without them. On Saturday we used to go to synagogue, and then, as children, we'd play in the yard, and when we were older we had this group of friends and used to go for walks and so on. Mukachevo had beautiful parks, where we used to often go before the war came. We didn't do too many sports activities at home, my mother was already past 40 when I was born, my father was also older, and ill. But there were Jewish sports clubs; up to the war life in Mukachevo was basically normal. I didn't do much sports either.

There were wealthy people living in Mukachevo as well, but we didn't belong among them. I'm from a poor family, no servants or nannies, we never had anything like that. There, where we lived - it was this beautiful, large street - was this large courtyard and people lived on all sides of it. Rich people in Mukachevo had beautiful houses and everything. Besides Christian families, there were also a lot of Jews living in our neighborhood. We rented a two-room apartment with a small kitchen and front hall. The apartments didn't have too many amenities, we for example didn't have a bathroom. There was probably a small library, my mother for sure used to read. And my father used to go study the Torah. I also used to read a lot. When I grew up, I read literature, beautiful books. Romain Rolland [Rolland, Romain (1866-1944): French author, dramatist, musical historian and literary critic], Feuchtwanger [10](#) and so on. Beautiful books. I used to often say to myself: 'Dear God, don't let me die, so I can finish reading this.' When I then read the same books perhaps twenty years later, by then they made a different impression on me.

I was the youngest, so I then lived alone with my mother and father. Each of my siblings had already gone their own way. Then in 1939, my father died. It wasn't at all easy, my older sisters helped my mother, after all, the family had to somehow get by. You know, there weren't any pensions, nothing. I also made some money, as I knew how to sew a bit. I basically did what I could. For some time I lived with my sister Jolan. Those were hard times.

During the war

As I've said, the liquidation of Jews in Mukachevo was very quick. We had to go to the ghetto, but that was there barely a month. In April of 1944 my mother and I went on the transport to Auschwitz. My oldest sister, Jolana, went with two children in 1944 from Hungary, from Nyirbator, where she lived. Another sister, Helena, went from Uzhorod, where she worked as a teacher.

As I've said, Rozi lived in Znojmo, so she went to the concentration camp from Czechoslovakia. At first she was in Terezin, there she became pregnant and to punish her they sent her to Auschwitz, as I've already told you. Well, I hadn't even gone through the camp gates, and already some people I knew were there and told me, 'Your sister is there, your sister is there.' It hadn't even occurred to me that she could be there. And so we met there by the barbed wire, where she showed me her baby too. Rozi had it in her arms. When they were liquidating the family camp in Auschwitz, they picked the young people for work. And so she left for somewhere in Germany to work, where I don't know. She didn't survive the war.

From what I've been told, I know that they perhaps went on some sort of death march [11](#). Either she got some sort of poisoning, or was so weakened that she could no longer go on. That was probably sometime in 1945, when back then before the end of the war they were moving prisoners around. Apparently she wanted to return in this fashion. But she had bad luck, the poor thing. Those that were with her and survived, then told me about how good-natured she'd been, how she'd kept their spirits up, despite having it so hard, child and all. She had wanted a child so badly; if she hadn't gotten pregnant, she could have survived. But with a baby she had no chance. Also very few kids survived. Maybe still in Terezin, but in Auschwitz? And there were so many beautiful children there, who knows what they would have been like if they'd grown up. They were truly beautiful and talented.

When my mother and I went onto the transport, we could only take 20 kilos of luggage. Well, what could I have taken with me? It wasn't much, enough for few pieces of clothing and a bit of food. I remember that my mother forgot a cup or perhaps a small pot in the ghetto, and so returned, and some policeman pushed her, a Hungarian policeman. I can see it as if it was today. I stepped in front of her and said, 'That's my mother.' He was completely taken aback. We were all dragging those bags along with us, it was quite far, they were driving us along across the whole city to the brick factory. My poor mother, she was quite kosher, but when she saw that there wasn't anything, she bought me a piece of sausage. She herself didn't eat it, but bought it for me. Some things dig themselves down into your memory and you can't get them out. There was one father there, he was pulling his retarded daughter along on a wagon. An SS soldier told him to leave her there. He didn't want to. He of course shot the father. What happened to the child, I don't know, whether they also shot her, or left her there. But they didn't trouble themselves too much with these things.

In Auschwitz there was a crematorium, I don't know how many, and I don't know how many gas chambers. They gassed people wherever it was possible. Already in those wagons, when you were sitting there, you expected it... you heard things... at least I expected it. Well, and when we stepped out of the wagon, I said to my mother, 'Here nothing matters any more.' Because I saw those dogs and the Germans were shouting, 'Everyone out, everyone out' and you saw those chimneys smoking, and smelled it, and you knew that wasn't from a bakery or something. Well, and then on that ramp they separated us. To the right, to the left, as they used to say. I went to the right, my mother to the left. I never saw her again.

But what's interesting is that then the Hungarian transports arrived, people from Hungary, from Budapest, from Debrecin and around there, they thought that it was a bakery. And they said, 'Well, here we'll have it good. Here even lunatics are free to walk around.' They thought that those people with shaved heads in rags and wooden shoes were lunatics.

Not everyone was put to work, I was picked by chance, I was lucky. My sister-in-law was also there, the poor thing, she had a little child and they took it away from her. It went into the gas with its grandmother or someone. They were picking out workers that spoke German. And she could speak German. So she went where they kept records, because the Germans wrote it all down. They liked to have everything organized just so.

They were also picking out Jewish women for the kitchen. There was a large kitchen there, big kettles, and originally Polish women had been cooking there. Instead of them they picked us, among others. First they picked my older sister, and were tattooing her, and when I saw that, I had a fit. My sister didn't want us to be separated, so I worked in that kitchen. Apparently we were better than the Polish women, who were dirty. Though they were all dolled up, with makeup, sometimes with a dye job. One SS woman also mentioned that she had to admit that we were hard workers. We had to work hard, haul heavy things around. But perhaps we survived partly thanks to that. After all, a potato here and there, or a bit from some tin, or a larger piece of beet. A person occasionally came by something.

We worked there for a half year, up to 1945. On January 18th the Russians were approaching the camp. [Editor's note: The Auschwitz concentration camp was liberated by the Russian army on 27th January 1945.] The Germans wanted to blow it up, but somehow they didn't succeed. So they drove us off onto a death march. Helena and I experienced it together. Twice. If something had happened to one of us, the other wouldn't have survived either. You were at the end of your rope. So, the first march was in January. One hundred twenty kilometers in three days. We walked to Breslaw [in Polish Wroclaw], which was in Poland. There they loaded us onto open wagons and drove us to Ravensbrück [12](#). I remember how cold it was. We were sitting in open wagons, and then they left us outside in Breslaw all night.

The second march was in April. That one was perhaps worse than the one in the winter. The weather was beautiful, you walked and walked, you had to walk, because if you didn't, they would shoot at you and leave you lying there. But the survival instinct is strong. In that month of April they wanted to have us walk to Terezin, but that didn't happen, because the front was on all sides, and we couldn't go there. For a long time we walked here and there. The Germans drove the prisoners further west, because they wanted to be captured by Allied soldiers, the Americans. They were terribly afraid of the Russians. The SS women already had civilian clothing under their SS

uniforms. They were horribly afraid of bombing.

One hundred twenty of us women remained. Somewhere in Germany, I don't exactly remember the name anymore, you know, it's long ago now, but it was somewhere by the Elbe, because we crossed the river there and then back again, and then burrowed under some hay in some stable. Even though that German, the owner, didn't want to let us in, that the horse has to have peace and quiet. There was also one SS soldier with us, he probably had something with one of the prisoners, so he stayed with us and protected us. We stayed under that hay, and then the next morning you could hear the scouts, Russian scouts. The second day, when there was shrapnel falling already, the owner of the horse was lying there, spread-eagled, dead. The Russians were fighting a little ways away from there. Well, and then the Russians liberated us.

What happened to the other German I don't know, after that we separated. Only ten or twelve of us that knew each other best went together. We confiscated a horse and wagon and on it made our way from Germany to Czech. I was so weakened that they sat me on the wagon, and my sister too. The horse took fright and the wagon turned over. That could have been it for us, but luckily nothing happened. Just Helena sprained her ankle, and nothing happened to me. We must have been close to the border, because we soon arrived in Usti nad Labem. But that trip was full of hardships. One Russian would give, another would take. And they wanted to rape us. We just barely managed to fend them off, really.

Post-war

We then traveled by train from Usti nad Labem to Prague, where we arrived sometime at the end of May or beginning of June. Prague was beautiful. The city was all abuzz, the way Prague welcomed the prisoners, that was something. It was something amazing. That's something that one can't forget. There were three or five places where you could eat. They took care of you, clothed you, you had a place to sleep, you could take the streetcar for free. My sister was worried about not having a permit. But I said to her, I don't know if I anticipated it, but I said to her, 'Don't worry, you'll show your tattoo and you'll see.' And truly, it was enough to show your arm, and she rode around Prague in streetcars for free. Originally we'd already been sitting in a train to Mukachevo, when some woman we knew came by. 'You dummies,' she said, 'where are you going?' And lucky for us that we didn't go. Everything in Mukachevo was horrible, in chaos.

We were in Prague for a while, two or three weeks. But we had no time nor were we in the mood for sightseeing. You arrived weakened, hungry, lice-ridden. You know, in Auschwitz I worked in the kitchen and had this warm underwear there. That's where lice lived, lice and scabies. Despite the fact that you washed every day. There were these buckets in which we washed, though only with cold water, and I didn't get scabies, but lice I did get.

From Prague we arrived here in Znojmo. Before the war my older sister Rozika had lived here, the one that had that kid. We came here to look for her. But only her husband, Emil, survived, who then married my sister Helena. He took us in and we lived with him. In the meantime our younger brother Josef, a British soldier, had been looking for us. We met up here in Znojmo. He was always this calm type of person. When I saw him, I yelled up at my sister Helena, 'Ibi, Ibi' - that's a nickname - 'Ibi, Ibi, Josi is here,' And he said to me, 'Why are you yelling like that?' And that was after not seeing each other for so many years, and after the war.

After the war I remained in Znojmo, and only went to Mukachevo to have a look. None of my siblings had returned there, but I did have some friends and relatives there. For some time after the war, my brother Josef also lived in Czechoslovakia. He was given some store with electrical supplies in Mariánské Lázně [13](#). His first son, George, was born in 1945 still back in England, but his daughter Mary was already born here in Karlovy Vary in 1947. In the 1950s, when those things began happening here, how they were attacking Westerners [14](#), those that had fought in England, and they went after them quite intensively, he left for England with the children.

After the war I didn't return to high school. I did a two-year nursery teachers' course in Boskovice. Back then, they let us study even without having finished high school, because they had a shortage of teachers. They formed two classes, because there was a lot of interest in that course. I did distance studies. Because in 1954, after I had children, I started work as a foster mother. And the course was from 1958 to 1960. I worked as a nursery school teacher until I retired, which was in 1978. But then I still worked a bit. They still needed me, so I still worked there. Not full time, but only part time. I could have retired at the age of 55, because I'd been in a concentration camp, but I worked longer.

My husband was named Josef Soffer. That's a Hebrew name. Soffer means scribe. He was quite a bit older than I; he was born in 1907 in Kravsko, which is here, a little ways away from Znojmo. His native tongue was Czech, and he always considered himself to be a Czech; he was a big patriot. He had moved to Znojmo with his parents as a kid and attended school here. He only had public school [15](#), but maybe then had some sort of mercantile school, the kind that shop assistants had. Before the war he had worked as a sales rep for a large company. He sold shirts and ties and was relatively successful. Well, and then he went to the concentration camp. He was in several camps, in Terezín, in Auschwitz. There he lost his first wife and child. His first wife was named Herta, the same as his sister. She was quite petite. His son Robert was only ten years younger than I. Herta wasn't old when she went into the gas, but mothers with children had no chance. From Auschwitz my husband then went to Germany to do work. I think that he was liberated while in Buchenwald [16](#).

My husband's parents were named Hynek and Anna. She was very kind, this small, petite lady. She was refined, from a good family. Their daughter Herta got them to Palestine in some fashion before the war, where they then lived together in a kibbutz. In 1947 they both returned here to Znojmo, and at one time lived with us. Because the Germans had nationalized their house before. But my husband got it back in restitution [Restitution: law regarding the return of property]. Before the war, my husband's father had had a store in the front, and in the back he had a cold box, as he was a butcher. He sold chickens, hens, geese, in short poultry. In 1948 his parents returned to Israel, and Grandma, my husband's mother, died there. So Grandpa returned to Znojmo again. I remember that when the children were ten, he lived here for some time. But then my husband paid for his trip and he returned to Israel, again to that kibbutz. He was always able to return there. Both of my husband's parents are buried in that kibbutz in Israel. His father died sometime in the 1980s.

My husband had three sisters, two older ones, Trude and Herta, and a younger one, Herma. Herta lived in Israel in a kibbutz, and died there. Trude, who was the oldest of the siblings, immigrated along with her husband to Chile, where they had three children. But then they also immigrated to Israel, and only their oldest daughter stayed in Chile. Trude died sometime in the 1990s. Then he also had a brother, but he died early on. He got to Israel, on that ship, the Patria, the one that the

English didn't want to let in, they did something to the ship and it sank. He got some sort of disease from the water and died. [Editor's note: The Patria was a ship with Jewish refugees that on 25th November 1940 was sunk in the Haifa harbor, with around 267 people on board.]

My husband and I met here in Znojmo. He saw me, fell in love, and wouldn't be dissuaded. He was crazy about me. We got married in 1947. There was quite a large age difference between us, 17 years. At the time we were married he was 42 and I was 25. Today I wouldn't recommend it to a daughter of mine, but back then I let myself be persuaded. After the war a person felt uprooted, I was so in pain that I didn't want a Christian man for a husband. Nor was there an opportunity, to tell you the truth. My sister Helena also let herself be persuaded, she married that brother-in-law, our sister Rozika's husband, Emil. Because Jewish boys, the ones that returned, mostly married Christian women. They didn't care for us, and yet I wasn't ugly.

After the war my husband worked for Fruta [National enterprise Fruta Brno: a food company, which, for example, in 1968 produced the first Coca Cola beverage under license in Czechoslovakia]. At first as a warehouse employee and then as a buyer. He stayed there until retirement. He died in Znojmo, in 1999. All the same, he lasted a long time, considering what he'd gone through. He was over 90 when he died.

We had two children together: Ruzenka [Ruzena] and Veruska [Vera]. Our custom is to name people after the dead, not after the living. Ruzenka is named after my sister Rozika, and Vera after my niece, Jolana's daughter. We used to call her Pötyi, in Hungarian small, petite. She was beautiful, this clever, smart little girl. She didn't survive either. When my daughters had their own daughters, my wish was that they name them Miriam, after my mother. Well, they didn't listen to me. Both of our daughters were born in Znojmo, Ruzenka in 1948 and Veruska in 1950.

Right after the war we wanted to immigrate to Israel; we thought about it, but I became pregnant with Vera. Plus it was difficult. My husband didn't have any sort of trade. And he wasn't much good at languages either. So then we were afraid to go, and stayed here. But it would have all been different, because back then I still spoke Hebrew well, and knew how to sew a bit, that would have been useful. Well, but it was hard. If he'd been an electrician or carpenter, or something else. But a merchant... when you don't know the language, what would he have done? Plus my sister was here, I didn't want to leave her. But in the end she was the one to leave. So in the 1950s we considered it, but not later.

So we stayed in Znojmo and lived in a house in the old town, close to city hall. All the houses there have cellars, about three levels deep. Apparently they were all even somehow interconnected. We lived close to the entrances to the underground. But unfortunately the cellars were full of ground water. Then they repaired them, they made these 60 centimeter thick walls.

During our time off we used to go with the children to Vranov, which is about 20 kilometers from here. There, when they started giving out loans, we built a cottage, this log cabin. There we spent holidays with the kids. It was a beautiful cabin. In the beginning, when we didn't have a car, we used to take the train there, and walked. With knapsacks. It used to be nice there, sociable, with the neighbors and so on. We knew a lot of people around there. One of them started building a cottage, my husband saw it, and had to have one too. So during the summer we lived there. It was fun there, we made campfires, you could swim there, go picking mushrooms and raspberries in the woods. Our children grew up at that cottage.

Ruzena graduated from medical high school here in Znojmo and worked as a nurse for a general practitioner. In 1990 she went to Austria to work, to Sankt Pölten, which is about 90 kilometers from Znojmo. She didn't live there, she just commuted. She had an apartment in a dormitory for nurses, which she used when she had shifts or when she didn't go home. She used to work 12 hour shifts, and when she had two or three shifts, she then had three days off. She worked there until retirement, which was sometime last year or the year before that. There was some sort of law passed in Austria according to which she was able to retire earlier. Because she worked in intensive care, with little children, and so belonged among those with difficult jobs. Well, and when she was able to retire, she took advantage of it, because that commuting back and forth wasn't easy. It cost a lot of money, and she also suffered a lot from migraines. Since she stopped commuting, her migraines have eased off.

Ruzena married Karel Svoboda, who worked as an auto mechanic and then as a driver. Now he's retired. They've got two children together, Hana and Kajin [Karel]. Hana was also born in Znojmo, sometime in 1972. She lives in Znojmo and is a hairdresser. She's married; her husband is named Petr Vrabec. They have two little children, David and Vendulka. We call her son Kajin, so as not to confuse it with the name of his father, Ruzena's husband. He's named Karel Svoboda. Kajin is younger than Hana, he was born around 1975. He was also born in Znojmo and lives here. He's a cook by trade and has a pub here in Znojmo. He's not married and has no children.

Vera graduated from high school, and then did a second high school degree, so that she could work as a nursery school teacher. That she studied for about four years, distance learning. She then worked in Znojmo as the principal of a nursery school. After the revolution in 1990, she went into business. Along with my son-in-law - she married Pavel Sestak, a surveyor - she ran a fitness center. It also had a small restaurant, a cosmetic salon and a hair salon. Then she got divorced, and now she runs the fitness center by herself.

She's got three children, Magda, Pavlina and Petra. They were all born in Znojmo. Pavlina is 28 or 29 and Petr is 23. Magda is the same age as Kajin. Pavlina is married and works as a cosmetician. Petr is single and is studying Czech and education in Prague; he's going to be a teacher. He's got one more year to go. He interrupted his studies and was in England, where he worked a bit and learned English.

Similarly, Pavlina and Magda were also abroad. Magda studied in Israel, some theater or art school. She left for there right after graduating from high school, and was there for four or five years. She really wanted to go there, and wouldn't let herself be talked out of it. Then she was in America for a year, where she studied English and worked. I think she worked as an au pair. Now she's on maternity leave, but because she was self-employed and didn't have any health insurance, she has to support herself somehow. Now working part-time is allowed, so she works as an interpreter, for example at weddings, and translates, I think mostly from Hebrew.

When our daughters grew up, we split up our property among them. Ruzena got the house we had in the old town, and Vera got the cottage. But Vera needed money, so she sold it. And also because after the divorce she was alone, and a cottage needs a man to take care of it. Today she regrets it, but they're moving to Prague, so they wouldn't be able to go there anyways.

Ruzena also sold that house in the old part of town. They had always wanted a bungalow. So in the 1980s they sold it, and with the money bought this house and fixed it up. They took out a loan,

back then they weren't as expensive, and put in an attic apartment - that wouldn't even have been possible in that old neighborhood. And there wasn't even gas there, here it's more modern. So upstairs they have a beautiful apartment. Downstairs we fixed it up, new doors, new windows. I lived here with my husband, and when I won't be here anymore, my granddaughter Hana will come here. And they'll fix it up how they want it.

During Communism I didn't have any big problems. Life of course was no rose garden. My salary wasn't very big, my husband also didn't make much. From a distance Communism didn't even look that bad, because I'm socially conscious, one didn't know about those atrocities. In the 1950s I was terribly shaken by the Slansky [17](#) affair [18](#) and so on, that I remember. But I personally didn't experience any oppression. I used to travel out of the country, I was in England several times, my brother always sent me an invitation. We would also get some money from him from time to time. He wasn't rich, but supported me you know, helped me. I think that he was also getting something from the Germans. But mainly he was frugal.

We also had a friend in Austria. He was from Znojmo, he had a wife here, but got divorced because she was good for nothing, and got married in Austria. He would always give us a thousand shillings, that was a thousand crowns [At the beginning of the 1960s the rate of exchange between the Czechoslovak crown and the Austrian schilling was 1:1. The last definition of the gold content of one crown was decreed by Act No. 41/1953 on monetary reform, when the gold content of the crown was set (unrealistically and without a wider context) at 0.123426 g of pure gold, which remained until the end of the 1980s - Editor's note]. And for a thousand shillings you could already buy all sorts of things. Back then there was nothing here, and when you saw those things there, those cheeses and meat and all, that was something. You had five pounds or something like that, here you paid tons of money for them, and there you imagined that you'd buy half of England for it. I remember that we brought back a TV, a microwave oven, some bedclothes. Well, we had all a huge load when we were returning, and the customs officials let us in without any problems. They were amazing. We didn't even have to hide anything. My husband and I were also in Vienna several times, because his sister Herma was there. That was also by invitation. Herma was originally perhaps a housewife there, but then she went to work. Somewhere where they package medicines. And her husband manufactured something. I also visited a relative of mine in Canada.

The Communists didn't even pressure me to join the Party. But they wanted my husband to inform on people. But that didn't even come into consideration. Our only problem with the Communists was that they didn't want to let my husband go to see his sister. He had a sister in Israel, and terribly wanted to go there. That's also a tragicomedy. When he could, when he had the money, they wouldn't allow it. He applied, several times he applied. The poor guy had everything, he would always bring them that invitation in his briefcase. But they didn't let him go. In 1977 we had two weddings. By then my husband was retired, but was working and so made some money on the side. Well, and the money that the poor guy had saved up, I took that from him for those two weddings. Well, and then, when he didn't have money, they gave him permission to go. And when they gave him that permission, and there would even have been enough money, he no longer had the strength. By then he was too old and ill. I was in Israel, but secretly, he didn't know about it, because if he had known, he'd have died.

I was in Israel once, not until after the revolution. Magda, my granddaughter, studied there, so she invited us. Ruzenka was working abroad, so she gave it to me as a Christmas present. And I had

that brother in England, who helped me a lot, so I had a bit of money from him and could pay for things while there. I went there with my daughter Ruzena, and we lived with our granddaughter Magda in Jerusalem; she had an apartment there, so we didn't have to pay for accommodation. We were there for three weeks or a month.

I liked everything in Israel. I met up with my cousin's daughter there, she was my mother's sister's daughter, who lived in Israel, in a kibbutz. So I went to visit her. We usually don't keep in touch, but when I was there, I went to see her. She had it good in that kibbutz, she didn't have any complaints. I also met the daughter of my husband's sister Herta there, with Ruth. She also lived in a kibbutz. I could communicate well only with her husband, who was a Hungarian Jew, and spoke Hungarian.

We also went to have a look around Israel. We were in Natanya. My husband had a cousin there. The children still live there, and we keep in touch with them. We were also at the Dead Sea, at archaeological sites, we were at the Jordan River, I dipped my feet into the Jordan. That was also an experience, that Jordan. The water there is very dirty, and they even drank it. There was one woman there, she prayed, in Arabic I think, and then went into the water and her husband was washing her. I guess it was some sort of tour group, and we had happened along. You just stood and stared, when you saw them splashing about in that water. Then I also liked the crucifixion in church, the atmosphere also affected you there. There was a huge crowd of people there. Not that I liked or didn't like it, but that atmosphere, the fanaticism, it grips you. And by the Jordan as well. The Wailing Wall was also interesting, there it's also impressive. When you see how they pray there, and how they stick those little pieces of paper into it.

When the revolution came in 1989, I was in Austria at the time, for a week or so, to visit my husband's sister. And there we saw it on TV. The biggest influence it had on me was that I could then travel abroad without an invitation, and my daughter could go work outside, in Austria. The opportunity came along, and because she spoke German, she took it. Because when my husband and I didn't want the kids to understand what we were saying, we spoke German, and she caught on to it. She's got a talent for languages, she's probably got that from me, it runs in our family. The other daughter, Vera, is more into math. So Ruzenka applied and it's good that she did, because what she bought herself when she was working there, she wouldn't buy here if she lived another twenty years. You know, the difference was quite large. Even though commuting to work wasn't anything easy, nor was that work easy. But I was at home and could watch the children for her. That made it easier for her.

After the revolution we also found out that my husband had had his first wife insured for 20,000. I somehow found it out by coincidence, I hadn't even known about it. They had sent some papers from Bavorov. Back then some lawyer was taking care of it for old people. So they also sent me the papers, they thought that I didn't have anybody, and that they'd take care of it for me. But he took a large part of it. We didn't even know that, we found out about it through the computer. And we didn't even know that my husband had his wife insured for 20,000. So we got something, I don't know how much, a few dollars. I got half of that insurance, and the girls each a quarter. Well, you know that I gave it away. I'm not good at holding on to money.

Recently we were in Austria during the summertime, where we had a Soffer family reunion. Relatives from Austria met there, those were Herma's children, from Israel, and also from America -

old Mr. Soffer had a sister there. Truda's entire family came from Israel, her son with his wife and children, from Herta there was only her son, Ruth didn't come, she had a child die of mushroom poisoning or something, and since then she hasn't been completely right. All told there might have been about 35, 40 of us. It was a very interesting reunion, we've got it recorded on DVD. It's got it all, the whole family and the whole reunion, supper and lunch and speeches and photos. It was organized by my niece's son. They wanted us to meet regularly, that we should put together I don't know how many euros, and pay for the trip to America, and that they'd then pay for things there. I said no, I'm 82 years old, and don't even have that sort of money. Maybe in two years the reunion will be in Prague, so that it would be held somewhere closer. If I'll still be here.

As far as religion goes, after the war my husband and I didn't observe it that much any more, perhaps certain holidays, Chanukkah, Passover and so on, but only half-heartedly. The kashrut, for example, where could you keep it here? That means you wouldn't be able to eat anything, meat, milk, that didn't exist at all here. Not until later, in Brno. Here in Znojmo there used to be a beautiful synagogue, but it was destroyed during the war. After the war, my husband then led the Jewish community's agenda here, but it then moved to Brno. So now I'm a member of the Brno Jewish community, I'm registered there, and pay the tax in Brno. I don't much observe either Christian nor Jewish holidays. Well, we do decorate a Christmas tree, and give each other gifts. But mainly for the children. You know, after the war it was tough. There were no Jewish children here, and the girls saw the trees, so we also had one. And today we again do it because of the little ones. You know, a person assimilated and after the war was sort of split down the middle.

But as I've said, I myself never felt any anti-Semitism. When someone called my kids names, I took care of it. Once, when the girls were in school, some little boy was calling them names. I grabbed him, squashed his mouth, and said to him, 'You say something to them one more time, and I'll whip your butt so that you won't sit down for a month.' And that was that.

Once I was in the hospital, they were doing heart surgery on me, and there was one lady from Znojmo there. I had these nice little washcloths there, disposable ones, that my daughter had brought me. When I was leaving the hospital to go home, I gave them to that lady. But when she left the room, the other lady said to me, 'Don't give them to her. She was bad-mouthing you.' I say to myself, what could she have said about me? She could have said that I'm a Jew. But I'd never deny that. That would be like denying my own mother. Why? Christians are no worse and no better. There are good and bad people among both. I've got it from my parents, I didn't pick it. If I had the opportunity to choose, that would be something different. Even though I don't observe holidays much, I'm a full-blooded Jewess; that's the way I feel.

With my children it's something different. You know, back then here, after the war, there wasn't the opportunity for them to marry Jewish boys. Because the Jewish boys were mostly marrying Christian girls, and we had to take it as it came. Both I and my daughters. When they were still young, they used to meet with Jewish boys in Brno, but those then left Brno. There wasn't the opportunity. There aren't, there weren't. In Znojmo not at all, and where should they go looking? None of my children or grandchildren keeps up traditions, only my granddaughter Magda, she's the only one.

So now Ruzena and I live in the same house. I live downstairs and she lives upstairs. The street here is beautiful, quiet and peaceful, but it's not far to the center of town. We've also got a garden,

and now my daughter's built a swimming pool, her dream was to have a swimming pool. But I don't go out much anymore, I don't dare to by myself. Sometimes it's worse, sometimes it's better. When it's at number 3 [bio weather index, risk level number 3], I usually don't feel well.

Sometime after the revolution, when my daughter began with that fitness center, maybe because of the stress, they found out I have diabetes. I've been treated for years now, I was taking pills, and now it's about a year or three quarters, that I'm using insulin. My daughter injects it for me, and when she can't, I do it myself. Then I give myself bruises. But she's a nurse, so she's got a gentle touch. It doesn't hurt when she does it.

That diabetes is a louse, an insidious disease. Since I started injections, when I'm not careful it's very unpleasant. When you've got a higher level of sugar it's not as unpleasant as when it's low. At first you don't have any experience with it, once I injected myself and my sugar fell when I was in town, and boy, did I ever feel sick. Now I'm careful. The first thing is that I have to have breakfast. A slice of bread, coffee. And I've also got to watch my diet a little more. And I've also got a machine for my heart, a cardiostimulator. I had a weak heart attack, and I think it's back then that I got the machine. One thing follows another. Infected legs, spleen. Actually, at first the CT scan showed the pancreas. But luckily it wasn't the pancreas. But there was something on my spleen, so they removed it. You know, the years grow, but not health.

Glossary

1 Subcarpathian Ruthenia

Is found in the region where the Carpathian Mountains meet the Central Dnieper Lowlands. Its larger towns are Beregovo, Mukacevo and Hust. Up until the World War I the region belonged to the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, but in the year 1919, according to the St. Germain peace treaty, was made a part of Czechoslovakia. Exact statistics regarding ethnic and linguistic composition of the population aren't available. Between the two World Wars Ruthenia's inhabitants included Hungarians, Ruthenians, Russians, Ukrainians, Czechs and Slovaks, plus numerous Jewish and Gypsy communities. The first Vienna Decision (1938) gave Hungary that part of Ruthenia inhabited by Hungarians. The remainder of the region gained autonomy within Czechoslovakia, and was occupied by Hungarian troops. In 1944 the Soviet Army and local resistance units took power in Ruthenia. According to an agreement dated 29th June 1945, Czechoslovakia ceded the region to the Soviet Union. Up until 1991 it was a part of the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic. After Ukraine declared its independence, it became one of the country's administrative regions. **2 Velvet Revolution:** Also known as November Events, this term is used for the period between 17th November and 29th December 1989, which resulted in the downfall of the Czechoslovak communist regime. A non-violent political revolution in Czechoslovakia that meant the transition from Communist dictatorship to democracy. The Velvet Revolution began with a police attack against Prague students on 17th November 1989. That same month the citizen's democratic movement Civic Forum (OF) in Czech and Public Against Violence (VPN) in Slovakia were formed. On 10th December a government of National Reconciliation was established, which started to realize democratic reforms. On 29th December Vaclav Havel was elected president. In June 1990 the first democratic elections since 1948 took place.

3 Kashrut in eating habits

Kashrut means ritual behavior. A term indicating the religious validity of some object or article according to Jewish law, mainly in the case of foodstuffs. Biblical law dictates which living creatures are allowed to be eaten. The use of blood is strictly forbidden. The method of slaughter is prescribed, the so-called shechitah. The main rule of kashrut is the prohibition of eating dairy and meat products at the same time, even when they weren't cooked together. The time interval between eating foods differs. On the territory of Slovakia six hours must pass between the eating of a meat and dairy product. In the opposite case, when a dairy product is eaten first and then a meat product, the time interval is different. In some Jewish communities it is sufficient to wash out one's mouth with water. The longest time interval was three hours - for example in Orthodox communities in Southwestern Slovakia.

4 Karlovy Vary (German name

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

5 Terezin/Theresienstadt

A ghetto in the Czech Republic, run by the SS. Jews were transferred from there to various extermination camps. The Nazis, who presented Theresienstadt as a 'model Jewish settlement,' used it to camouflage the extermination of European Jews. Czech gendarmes served as ghetto guards, and with their help the Jews were able to maintain contact with the outside world. Although education was prohibited, regular classes were held, clandestinely. Thanks to the large number of artists, writers, and scholars in the ghetto, there was an intensive program of cultural activities. At the end of 1943, when word spread of what was happening in the Nazi camps, the Germans decided to allow an International Red Cross investigation committee to visit Theresienstadt. In preparation, more prisoners were deported to Auschwitz, in order to reduce congestion in the ghetto. Dummy stores, a café, a bank, kindergartens, a school, and flower gardens were put up to deceive the committee.

6 Spanish Civil War (1936-39)

A civil war in Spain, which lasted from July 1936 to April 1939, between rebels known as Nacionales and the Spanish Republican government and its supporters. The leftist government of the Spanish Republic was besieged by nationalist forces headed by General Franco, who was backed by Nazi Germany and fascist Italy. Though it had Spanish nationalist ideals as the central cause, the war was closely watched around the world mainly as the first major military contest between left-wing forces and the increasingly powerful and heavily armed fascists. The number of people killed in the war has been long disputed ranging between 500,000 and a million.

7 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. [8](#) Hasidic Judaism: Haredi Jewish religious movement. Some refer to Hasidic Judaism as Hasidism. The movement originated in Eastern Europe (Belarus and Ukraine) in the 18th century. Rabbi Israel ben Eliezer (1698- 1760), also known as the Ba'al Shem Tov, founded Hasidic Judaism. It originated in a time of persecution of the Jewish people, when European Jews had turned inward to Talmud study; many felt that most expressions of Jewish life had become too "academic," and that they no longer had any emphasis on spirituality or joy. The Ba'al Shem Tov set out to improve the situation. In its initial stages, Hasidism met with opposition from several contemporary leaders, most notably the Vilna Gaon, leader of the Lithuanian Jews, united as the misnagdim - literally meaning "those who stand opposite." [9](#) Orthodox Jewish dress: Main characteristics of observant Jewish appearance and dresses: men wear a cap or hat while women wear a shawl (the latter is obligatory in case of married women only). The most peculiar skull-cap is called kippah (other name: yarmulkah; kapedli in Yiddish), worn by men when they leave the house, reminding them of the presence of God and thus providing spiritual protection and safety. Orthodox Jewish women had their hair shaved and wore a wig. In addition, Orthodox Jewish men wear a tallit (Hebrew term; talles in Yiddish) [prayer shawl] and its accessories all day long under their clothes but not directly on their body. Wearing payes (Yiddish term; payot in Hebrew) [long sideburns] is linked with the relevant prohibition in the Torah [shaving or trimming the beard as well as the hair around the head was forbidden]. The above habits originate from the Torah and the Shulchan Arukh. Other pieces of dresses, the kaftan [Russian, later Polish wear] among others, thought to be typical, are an imitation. According to non-Jews these characterize the Jews while they are not compulsory for the Jews.

[10](#) Feuchtwanger, Lion (1884-1958)

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[11](#) Death march

the Germans, in fear of the approaching Allied armies, tried to erase evidence of the concentration camps. They often destroyed all the facilities and forced all Jews regardless of their age or sex to go on a death march. This march often led nowhere, there was no concrete destination. The marchers got no food and no rest at night. It was solely up to the guards how they treated the

prisoners, how they acted towards them, what they gave them to eat and they even had the power of their life or death in their hands. The conditions during the march were so cruel that this journey became a journey that ended in death for many.

12 Ravensbrück

Concentration camp for women near Fürstenberg, Germany. Five hundred prisoners transported there from Sachsenhausen began construction at the end of 1938. They built 14 barracks and service buildings, as well as a small camp for men, which was completed separated from the women's camp. The buildings were surrounded by tall walls and electrified barbed wire. The first deportees, some 900 German and Austrian women were transported there on 18th May 1939, soon followed by 400 Austrian Gypsy women. At the end of 1939, due to the new groups constantly arriving, the camp held nearly 3000 persons. With the expansion of the war, people from twenty countries were taken here. Persons incapable of working were transported on to Uckermark or Auschwitz, and sent to the gas chambers, others were murdered during 'medical' experiments. By the end of 1942, the camp reached 15,000 prisoners, by 1943, with the arrival of groups from the Soviet Union, it reached 42,000. During the working existence of the camp, altogether nearly 132,000 women and children were transported here, of these, 92,000 were murdered. In March of 1945, the SS decided to move the camp, so in April those capable of walking were deported on a death march. On 30th April 1945, those who survived the camp and death march, were liberated by the Soviet armies.

13 Marianske Lazne/Marienbad

A world-famous spa in the Czech Republic, founded in the early 19th century, with many curative mineral springs and baths, and situated on the grounds of a 12th century abbey. Once the playground for the Habsburgs and King Edward VII, as well as famous personalities including Goethe, Strauss, Ibsen and Kipling, Marianske Lazne has been the site of numerous international congresses in recent years.

14 Western Resistance (Zapadny odboj)

After the year 1948 (the advent of socialism in Czechoslovakia), soldiers from Czechoslovakia that during World War II fought on the Western front were designated as Imperialist collaborators and spies. Many of them were put on trial, jailed, lost their jobs and the rank they had received during World War II.

15 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. [16](#) Buchenwald: One of the largest concentration camps in Germany, located five miles north of the city of Weimar. It was founded on 16th July, 1937 and liberated on 11th April, 1945. During its existence 238,980 prisoners from 30 countries passed through Buchenwald. Of those, 43,045 were killed. [17](#) Slansky, Rudolf (1901-1952): Czech politician, member of the Communist Party from 1921 and Secretary-General of the Czechoslovak Communist Party from 1945-1951. After World War II he was one of the leaders of the totalitarian regime. Arrested on false charges he was sentenced to death in the so-called Slansky trial in November 1952 and hanged.

[18](#) 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.