

# Anna Mrazkova

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Anna Mrazkova is a nurse by occupation. She comes from Luze, near Vysoke Myto, an important center of the Jewish community, where her grandfather and father were presidents of the Jewish religious community. Thanks to this fact, she was raised in an Orthodox spirit, and her family observed all Jewish religious holidays. The family, however, also devoted itself to Czechoslovak activities, such as attending Sokol [1](#) - even now, Anna Mrazkova poignantly recalls the atmosphere of the last pre-war all-Sokol Slet [Rally] in Prague in 1938, and to this day has kept piously stored away the garland she as a teenager wore on her head during the exercises. Her adolescence was significantly marked by the proclamation of the Protectorate of Böhmen und Mähren [2](#); at first she was prevented from going to high school [3](#), and later the entire family was fundamentally affected by the anti-Jewish laws [4](#), when gradually almost their entire property was confiscated, they were denied access to public places, forbidden to associate with their friends, and ordered to wear a six-pointed star [5](#). In December 1942 deportation to Terezin [6](#) followed, where Anna worked as an assistant in a hospital. From there, in 1943, she was transported along with her parents and sister to Auschwitz-Brezinka. After the selection in Auschwitz, Anna was separated from her family, ended up in Block B VI, and worked in the so-called 'Weberei' [German for 'weaving mill']. Towards the end of the war she did forced labor, cleaning up the aftermath of air-raids on Hamburg, from where she was transported to the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp [7](#). There she experienced the liberation, and from there she returned home in July 1945, after finding out by chance that her mother and sister had survived the war. During the Holocaust, she lost 27 members of her family. After the war she worked at a research institute, and later helped out at the Jewish religious community in Prague. She married twice. She is childless due to the consequences the Holocaust had on her health. Talking to Anna Mrazkova was exceptionally pleasant - despite all the tribulations that fate has bestowed upon her, she is an utter optimist, a woman full of life, who always manages to look at life with detachment and with her characteristic ironic humor.

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## Family background

My grandfather on my father's side, Hynek Polak, was born in 1860 in Jicin. He graduated from business academy and devoted his entire life to business; he and Grandma owned a shop where

they sold liquor. His son, Bedrich Polak, and his wife Greta also had a store in the same building in Jicin. His other son, my uncle Josef, had a daughter Hana, who died in the Holocaust, and Vera, who survived the war. We used to go to Jicin to visit my grandparents, but I don't remember it that much, I was still very small.

My grandparents were believers, but observed Jewish holidays more out of tradition, as some sort of folklore. They practiced, but we never really talked about it much. I do know that my father used to go to the synagogue, because it was necessary for ten adult men to meet, meaning men that had had their bar mitzvah, so that they could have a minyan for prayer.

My grandmother, Helena Polakova, née Alterova, died in 1934. Grandpa Hynek spent the whole war in Terezin, luckily he had cataracts, and so always when he was supposed to go into the transport, he went for an operation and thus avoided deportation. This was because the Germans didn't deport sick people eastward, because they were still claiming that there were work camps in the east, and it would thus have been suspicious if they would've been sending the disabled and ill to work. It seems that the Germans were counting on him dying of disease in Terezin, as he was 85! But Grandpa survived all his children, most of his grandchildren, and died long after the war, at the age of 96.

My father, Emil Polak, was born in 1895 in Jicin. He had two brothers, Bedrich and Josef, and a sister, Hedvika, who died as a sixteen-year-old girl. When as a child I asked how she'd died, they told me that she'd fallen out of a window, but under what circumstances, that I never found out.

My father and mother were cousins. Because my father's mother [Helena Alterova, née Polakova] and my mother's father [Max Alter] were siblings. As if that wasn't enough, my mother had the same name as her future mother-in-law - Helena Polakova, and both had the maiden name Alterova. So if I'm a little meshuga, it's my family's fault! In genetics class, one professor told us that unions like that are very dangerous, but if good qualities combine, a genius can actually be born! Could that be my case? But I've got to say that though they were cousins, they didn't know each other as children or youngsters. It was only when my father's brother Bedrich got married in Proseč, that they went to visit Luze, where my father saw my mother for the first time. And that was that!

My mother's parents were named Max Alter [1860 - 1930] and Kamila Alterova [1865 - 1938]. Grandpa Max loved me a lot. That nice relationship was mutual, I also loved him a lot, we used to go out hiking together and for walks in the forest, we'd pick mushrooms and blueberries. I got a lot of mileage out of my grandpa during my childhood, because my parents were very busy with the store, and so I spent a lot of time with Grandpa and Grandma. Grandpa Max died in 1930, and is buried at the Jewish cemetery in Luze. Grandma Kamila died in 1938, after Munich [8](#), when Hitler annexed the Sudetenland [9](#), but she didn't live to see Hitler occupy us. Grandma was the last person to be buried at the Jewish cemetery in Luze during the war.

I remember that when Grandpa died I was six, I probably missed going on the walks that I used to take with him, so once I went off on my own. I met some ladies, and they asked me where I was going, alone like that and far from home. I said that I was going for a walk. They took me with them and led me back home, where they told my parents that they'd run into me by the river, alone. My mother was terribly distraught, her head was full of the things that could have happened to me, that I could have gotten lost, or drowned in the river. She told Father that he had to teach me a

lesson so that I'd remember that I'm not allowed anywhere by myself; at that time Father had to give me a whopping, but I think that it hurt the poor guy much more than it did me.

My mother, Helena Polakova [née Alterova] was born in 1901. My mother was one of five children, her siblings were named: Jiri, Karel, Bedrich and Marie. My mother's oldest brother, Jiri Alter, was an astronomer. When Hitler came to Czechoslovakia, Uncle Jiri got an offer to go work at an observatory in England. He took the offer, and left with his family for safety. In England Uncle Jiri's daughter, my cousin Erika, wanted to join the Czechoslovak army, but as they didn't take women she joined the English one. She learned perfect English, so even native Englishmen couldn't understand why it said in her passport that she was a Czechoslovak citizen, they couldn't believe that she wasn't a native Englishwoman. Jiri's son, my cousin Bedrich, left for Palestine. Uncle Jiri's youngest son, Arnost, was arrested for illegal activities back when the transports weren't on yet, he was the first of the family to perish, even before we were deported.

My mother's second brother, Karel Alter, was president of the Czech Council of Jewish Communities during the Protectorate, was a doctor of law and had two sons - Bedrich and Pavel. Another of my mother's brothers, Bedrich Alter, fell during World War I. My mother's sister, Marie, married Karel Kraus from Caslav, and they had two children together, Milena and Frantisek.

## Growing up

I was born on 6th June 1924 in Luze in the Vysoke Myto district. I've got a sister, Eva Liskova [née Polakova], who's five years younger than I am, born in 1929. Today my sister lives in Losina, out in the country near Pilsen, and belongs to the Pilsen Jewish religious community.

I attended Sokol from the age of three, my father used to attend it as well, and when my sister Eva was born, they also had her registered at about the age of three. I liked Sokol a lot, but later we stopped going there, so as not to endanger the rest of the Sokol members by associating with them. I exercised together with my father at the last pre-war all- Sokol Slet [Rally] at the Strahov Stadium in 1938. To this day, I've still got the garland that I had on my head back then! The last rally was very nice, I've got beautiful memories of it. The atmosphere was pleasant, and none of us back then wanted to admit that things would soon so drastically change for the worse, that Munich and the war would come.

I remember that Uncle Jiri used to know one piano virtuoso from Vienna, Steurmann, for whom he used to help arrange concerts in Prague. He had a daughter, Mausí Steurmannova, who played the piano beautifully. During one visit to our place they asked her to play, it was magnificent. I was supposed to play after her, but I hid in a corner, as I would've been embarrassed to play after her. My parents paid for piano lessons for me, but soon realized that I'd never be a virtuoso!

I attended public school in Luze, and then my parents decided that I had to go to high school, and because there wasn't one in Luze, they sent me to attend high school in Prague. I attended first and second year, so two years, of high school in Prague, and during that time lived with Uncle Jiri. I did third year of high school in Vysoke Myto, I then managed to make fourth year, but then Hitler arrived, and apparently was afraid that I was too smart, so forbade me from studying. But I have to admit that I was actually glad, because I didn't like studying too much. School was my number one enemy!

So then for a year I studied to be a seamstress, but then even that wasn't possible, I could only be there on the sly, the lady in charge became afraid that she could have problems if she kept me on as a student. So a friend of my father's who was a tailor took me on. However it then began to be dangerous for him too, he was afraid, so I left. So then I was at home, and sewed various bags, and then when the transports began I sewed various bedcovers, embroidered blankets, everything that could come in handy for us. But it was only for us or for friends, so for free, as I was no longer allowed to be employed anywhere.

My parents ran a prosperous business, a general store with fabrics as well as some groceries like coffee, but they didn't sell bread for example, because there were three bakers in the area. The store was right in our building, made a decent amount of money and was fairly prosperous; my mother and father worked in it. But when Hitler came, my father had to close the store, and the only work they allowed him to do as a Jew was shoveling snow and similar menial activities. Our neighbor, who had a bakery next door to us, told my father at the time: 'Mr. Polak, if what happened to you happened to me, if they took my store away, I'd probably hang myself!' and back then my father said to him: 'As long as I'm with my family, nothing else can affect me.'

In Luze our family had been living for generations in an old family home at 202 Jeronymova Street; alas today our house is no longer there. We had five rooms and two kitchens - one large and one smaller one. The street was named Jeronymova, but people used to call it Zidovna [from 'Zid' the Czech word for Jew], as earlier there had been a Jewish ghetto there. At the time I lived there, Luze was a relatively small town - there were only about 1360 people living there. But located in Luze was the center of the Jewish religious community for surrounding towns as well. All Jews from the area belonged to the Jewish religious community in Luze.

My grandpa, Max Alter, was the president of the Jewish religious community. After my grandpa's death some Mr. Cervinka was president, and after he died my father, Emil Polak, became president of the Community. My father became president when the war hadn't started yet, and remained so up until the transport, so all organization of handing over of property was done by my father.

First was the decree that Jews had to hand over animals. For me, as a young girl, that was terribly sad. I took it very hard, because I loved our animals very much, we had these clever and very good dogs. To me they were friends, I believe that animals have intelligence, and that they're capable of experiencing, when they feel something, they're able to express it. For example, when my mother was angry with me and wanted to punish me, all it took was for her to raise her hand at me, and those dogs would jump at her hand and thus show that they didn't want her to punish me. I loved our animals very much, and took it very hard when they were taking them away.

Religious life was, understandably, practiced in our family, if for no other reason, than because Grandpa, and later after him my father, were presidents of the Jewish religious community in Luze. I've got to say that it was tradition, that we lived in a religious fashion, but our family never went overboard with it.

We observed all the Jewish holidays, at least until Grandpa died. On Friday evening we'd light candles and pray, though I never understood the prayers at all, I had them memorized and always recited them exactly. But I wouldn't say that observance of holidays was done in some affected fashion, to me it's more this traditionalism than some sort of religiousness. During the Sabbath the men would leave for the synagogue, they dressed up in traditional clothing, carried prayer straps -

tefillin, and Grandpa covered his head [10](#). During the Sabbath my mother and I baked barkhes. The table had to be set festively. We cooked various puddings, which later however, when poverty and the war came, we had to stop making, because they used up lots of eggs and butter.

My mother also baked excellent little cakes with blancmange. To make blancmange, my mother always mixed eggs and wine in a water bath, and mixed for so long until she'd whipped up an awfully good froth, which would then be poured over the cakes. While Grandma and Grandpa were still alive, we used to use kosher dishes [11](#).

My father had a sense of humor; I remember when the we were observing the Long Day [Yom Kippur], an all-day fast, they'd be praying in the synagogue, and as a joke my father says to the rabbi: 'Forget about all this here, come over to our place, we've got roast goose at home!' and the poor rabbi had to stay there and all day his mouth would water.

At our place the tradition of Jewish holidays was strictly observed. While my grandfather was alive, we observed only Jewish holidays, celebrating Christmas was out of the question! But I remember that once this peculiar thing happened in the family - when my cousin Franta Kraus was born in Caslav, as a baby he was seriously ill, he got an ugly case of pneumonia and was apathetic and breathing laboriously. Back then it occurred to my aunt that she had to think of something to break through my cousin's apathy, something to get his attention. She decorated a Christmas tree with lots of candles and lights - and it really worked, and the lights got my cousin's attention, so in the end he got well. Thanks to a Christmas tree he survived a serious case of pneumonia, but of course later the poor guy ended up in the gas because of Hitler anyways.

In Luze we normally associated not only with Jews, but everyone else, too. My best friend wasn't Jewish. We knew each other from nursery school, her father was a basket-maker. We got along very well, but then I left for high school in Prague, and she for Pardubice. We had a gentile servant, then later we just had a helper that used to come over, and during the war we understandably had no one. One servant was named Baruska, our dolls were named after her, she was very nice. Another was Andula, she was also awfully nice and loved us a lot. During the war, when we weren't allowed to associate with so-called Aryans, Andula used to do so proudly, so much that my mother was afraid for her, and told her that she shouldn't come over, for her own safety.

The Jewish community in Luze was quite large, as it was the center of Jewish life in the region. During the war the shammash's apartment was occupied by some person that cured rabbit hides, and he dried them right in the synagogue! This basically had one advantage, that during the war the synagogue wasn't dank and didn't go moldy, as because of the drying of rabbit skins it had to be ventilated a lot. After the war the Luze synagogue fell into disrepair. Today it belongs to the Prague Jewish community, and was renovated several years ago; it's no longer used for religious purposes, but concerts and exhibitions are held there.

During the synagogue's reconstruction they found some hidden baby shawls that had been hidden there for ritual purposes. The Jewish cemetery in Luze also fell into disrepair after the war, and was partially pillaged, as tombstones were very valuable. Our family's tombstone was also pushed over, but because it was very heavy the thieves didn't steal it. The cemetery was also renovated a few years ago.

## During the war

Forty-one Jews left Luze for the transport. Before we left for the transport, my mother's sister, Marie Krausova [née Alterova] moved from Caslav with her husband and children to stay with us. This was because there were a lot of anti-Semites living in Caslav, life there was difficult for my aunt, and so my mother told her to return along with her family to her old family home. They lived with us for some time, it was nice for the family to be together, but soon my uncle received a summons from the Gestapo, and the transports began.

My aunt's family was sent to Lodz [12](#); my aunt died before we were even deported. The way we found out about it was that we got a correspondence card from my uncle. Of course nothing specific could have been written in it, they wouldn't have allowed my uncle to send it then. That's why my uncle used this secret code - in the space for the sender, together with his name [JuDr. Karel Kraus] by the address he wrote the year of my aunt's birth and the year of her death, and underlined the whole thing, so we realized that this was his way of secretly telling us that my aunt had died. After that we never had the opportunity to find out from anyone what had happened, but she had most likely died of some infectious disease, because many people in the ghettos died of infections.

Uncle Karel died in Auschwitz. As I found out later, my cousin Milena Krausova could have saved herself. However, during the war some unpleasant aunt who Milena didn't like was constantly with her, and so she said to herself that she didn't care where she goes, the main thing would be for it not to be with this person. Alas, Milena went into the gas.

I remember realizing that the situation was bad when they annexed the Sudetenland. People who up to then had been closet Fascists suddenly showed their true colors, and that was quite a big shock for us. But I've also got to say that at home in Luze the situation was a little different, in that Jews, as a quite strong community, had lived there for generations, and there weren't any problems. We'd always associated with non-Jews as well, no one differentiated there.

For example, when Jews were ordered to turn in animals and other things, the Czech police chief, some Mr. Burian, came to notify us ahead of time. Mr. Burian came ahead of time and warned us that they had a confiscation order, so that we'd have time to hide valuables with friends where they'd be safe. Almost everything was being confiscated: valuables, jewels, gold, furs, dishes, carpets, cars, bicycles, radios, dogs, cats, household animals.

So thanks to the warning, we were for example able to hide our furs with friends, and turned in these horrible old ratty moth-eaten furs - when you touched them, clouds of vermin would rise from them. Or we for example turned in our bicycles, but this policeman, Burian, came after the war and brought our bicycles back. He was an awfully decent and honorable man.

What's ironical is that they somehow forgot to confiscate our car. Because we had a four-seater Praga-Piccolo convertible. It was a very beautiful car, a light coffee color with black fenders. Riding around in a car like that as a little girl was a huge experience for me! The roof was taken down for the summer, for the winter it was put back up, the windows were of mica, so you couldn't see much through them, we could see only forward. When my father used to go on vacation to Slovakia with friends, he always took our Pragovka. To make up for the fact that we'd stayed at home, our father



would send us one or even two postcards a day from various towns in Slovakia!

For some reason the Germans forgot to confiscate our car, and as we later found out, our car was taken by partisans during the war. After the war someone advised my mother that she should ask for compensation, but she refused, with the words that if our Pragovka served a good cause, for partisans, there's no way she'd ask for any compensation. What's more, she herself didn't know how to drive, my father was no longer alive, and we were moving to Prague. To this day I still occasionally run into similar Praga Picollo cars on the streets of Prague, now they drive tourists around in them on sightseeing tours, and I always say: 'Hello Picollino!'

When they forbade my parents to run their store any longer, my mother told their former customers to come, that we'd sell them various things. People were thrilled, because already at that time things were bad, and lots of things weren't available. We for example had a little coffee roaster that had belonged to Grandpa, and in the store there was a bale of green coffee beans left. We were roasting the coffee, and suddenly my mother realized that you could smell it everywhere, as coffee has a beautiful and penetrating aroma.

Another time, we'd bought a half a pig from some friends, someone brought it to us through the back door, as right across from our house, they'd moved the head of the NSDAP [Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei, National Socialist German Workers' Party or Nazi party] into a house that had belonged to some Jews. This head of the NSDAP, a German, had been a non-commissioned officer in Vysoke Myto during the First Republic, and had a wife who was a former 'Bordelmutter' [Madam of a bordello]. But she was kind-hearted, actually she was a very decent woman, because she had no problems talking to us from her window across the way. Even though everyone was already forbidden from talking to us. And so it happened that when we were baking the pig, and she must have smelled the aroma, she leaned out of her window and asked if someone had brought us meat. I told her that after all, everyone wants to eat. She didn't inform on us, although she must have often seen that we were doing something forbidden.

I remember that we got a large yellow sheet, from which we had to cut out and trim six-pointed stars, and we had to sew them onto our clothes, there where your heart is. I've got my star hidden away to this day, it's this reminder of wartime. I didn't feel that wearing the star was something I should be ashamed of. We were Jews, everyone knew that, so I didn't perceive it as an insult. Once my cousin Milena Krausova received a summons, and was walking along the street in Prague with a star on her lapel, and two young workers she didn't know came up to her, each of them took her by one arm, and proudly walked along with her. It was this nice gesture, they showed demonstratively that although no one was allowed to talk to her, they were proudly walking around with her. Because my cousin was also a very pretty girl!

My sister, mother, father, Grandpa Hynek Polak and I all went into the transport together. We got a summons, packed our rucksacks with the allowed 20 kilos. We took practical things - some dishes, a pan, mess tins, I think a cooker, too. It made no difference, because they confiscated a bunch of things, and also stole all sorts of things along the way.

I must admit that I took it all fairly optimistically, I was even looking forward to Terezin, because there were no young people in Luze, and I was hoping that I'd meet someone there I could talk to. So, on 2nd December 1942 we got on some trucks, and they drove us to Pardubice. Just from Luze there were 41 of us, they took us there together with the rest of the Jews in the Pardubice district.

There, we slept a couple of nights just like that on the bare wood floor of the Pardubice Sokol Hall.

Around the 5th or 6th of December, we got on the transport to Terezin. We went by train, it wasn't in cattle wagons, but a normal passenger train. The whole time in the train, I had this tendency to keep by my family. I met some young people there, and they told me to come sit with them, but I didn't want to leave my parents. So much so that my father had to tell me that everything was fine, that I should go ahead and go chat with them. The Deutsch brothers from Policka were there, these nice guys, there were about five of them. The entire way, we told jokes and stories, it was great fun - we laughed all the way from Pardubice to Terezin.

Back then there wasn't a spur line to Terezin yet, so we walked from Bohusovice to Terezin with our rucksacks on our backs. It was cold, our bags were so heavy, we were wearing two coats, we looked like we were pregnant...

In Terezin they were registering us, we were standing in line, and they asked Jirka Deutsch and me if we were husband and wife. So I said: 'Jesus Christ, no!' - 'So you're engaged?' - to this Jirka answered 'Yes,' so I had to say 'He's full of it,' and he was terribly insulted, that I hadn't said that we were together. If I would've said that we were engaged, they would have given us a place to live together, and who knows how I would've ended up, because the Deutsches went right on the next transport to the East, in January. I would probably have died along with them. Back then, everything was a question of coincidences like that!

We didn't know much about life in Terezin, it was more of a hunch. For example, we knew that we'd be living separately - men and women and children separately. But we didn't have much information, as it was forbidden to write and associate with other people in the region. The first prisoners, the men from the AK1 transport, who'd been summoned to prepare the ghetto for the future camp, weren't allowed to write anything home. Some of them broke the prohibition and managed to smuggle out information. They were sentenced to death for it, and what's more in such a fashion that they had to shoot each other, so that the Germans didn't dirty their hands. Later, Fischer the executioner took care of executions in Terezin. He was a person who was a former executioner, and applied for this job in Terezin on his own accord.

My father lived separately, with the men. My mother, my sister Eva, my cousin Vera, her sister and mother and I lived in this smaller room. We were six relatives living together, we were extremely lucky that Vera's husband was from the AK [short for 'Arbeitskolonne' - 'Work Column'], so he arranged this room for us. The room was relatively puny, on top of our suitcases we laid the straw mattresses that we slept on at night, and during the day we shoved them against the wall.

The room was full of bedbugs, it was terribly unpleasant. One night my cousin and I could no longer bear it, and took our mattresses outside, where we laid them down on these small stools. We thought that we'd sleep better outside, and that the bedbugs wouldn't torment us. We didn't improve our lot very much, however, because someone poured a bedpan out the window above us right onto where we were sleeping... As I say, there was no shortage of excitement in Terezin!

My cousin Vera survived the war, but her husband died during a death march. After the war Vera remarried and had three children - Jana, Hanka and Petr. Jan Munk, her oldest son, is the director of the Terezin Memorial.



In Terezin I worked at the outpatient clinic, I worked as a sort of auxiliary nurse, although at that time I hadn't yet taken nursing. I helped wherever it was needed, I sterilized equipment and so on. The head physician at the clinic was Dr. Leichstag, who was a Hungarian who'd studied medicine in Czechoslovakia, got married here, and before had been a doctor right in Terezin. So he went from Terezin to Terezin! Doctor König, with whom I later worked in Prague, also worked there. The nurses at the clinic were always changing, because they were leaving for the transports. That's why they gave a quick nursing course there, which I registered for.

One day a nurse came to the clinic to apply, and during the interview we found out that before the war she'd worked in a ward where my uncle Karel Alter had been a doctor. This nurse ran off, told me to close my eyes and open my mouth, and placed a chocolate-covered date in my mouth. A chocolate-covered date was an immense rarity in Terezin! I asked her what I had done to deserve such a gift. She said because I was a relative of Dr. Alter's.

Cultural life in Terezin was of a very high standard, concerts took place, plays were put on. I remember the plays of Karel Svenk, 'At zije zivot!' [Long Live Life!], another was named 'Posledni cyklista' [The Last Cyclist], that one played in Prague after the war as well. The play of course had a political subtext, but that's not why it was popular, the play was mainly really very well written.

As a young girl I was hungry for culture, I attended all the various cultural events I could. For example, the conductor Karel Ancerl rehearsed 'Eine kleine Nachtmusik' in the ghetto. [Editor's note: Serenade No. 13 for strings in G major, K 525, more commonly known as 'Eine kleine Nachtmusik' ('A little night music'), one of the most famous compositions by Austrian composer Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756-1791).] The pianist Alice Hertzova also played in Terezin. Those were beautiful experiences! However, when a transport left, lots of these people left and the concerts and plays had to be rehearsed anew, with different members. I remember 'The Bartered Bride' put on as a concert, where a children's choir sang beautifully, back then that touched me greatly.

You had to get tickets to the concert, I never had one, so I used to go listen from behind the doors, and whenever the custodian by the doors wasn't watching, I'd secretly sneak inside. Everyone thought it was very funny. My boss noticed me too, and was a bit astonished that such a young girl, I was 18 at the time, was interested in classical music.

Then when I got the summons for the transport to Auschwitz, my boss offered to get me an exception. But I said that even if he managed to get me an exception, my family would have to leave anyways, and I didn't want to remain alone in Terezin, knowing that my family was far away in the East. When I went to the clinic to say goodbye before departure, Dr. König and the playwright Karel Senk were lying there as patients. I told them: 'Guys, you be good here, I'm being promoted,' I remember that Svenk's eyes were full of tears, he probably suspected what was waiting for me, and probably said to himself it was a shame, such a young girl. In the end I survived the war, while Karel Svenk died in Auschwitz in 1944.

We boarded the transport to Auschwitz-Brezinka on 18th or 19th December 1943. We went in cattle cars, we didn't know where they were actually taking us. Suddenly we saw the sign 'Auschwitz,' we froze a bit, but the train kept going, so we were still living with the hope that they'd take us elsewhere. We had no idea that the camp was so big. We stopped in Birkenau, which was of course part of the camp. Then everything went lickety-split - the men here, mothers with

children here, old people here. My mother and I ended up amongst the women, because though my mother was already 40, she looked very good for her age.

Right upon arrival they tattooed us, which hurt, they were tattooing with a needle, point after point, absolutely amateurishly, crooked and ugly. We were terribly tired from lack of sleep and hungry, they led us into some buildings where it was terribly cold, and instead of a floor there was only packed dirt, on which we slept.

I got into a building together with my future friend Ruth Blochova and her brother, whom I met the first day in Auschwitz. The two of them had been working in the children's kitchen in Terezin, so they'd been relatively well off. Their mother had gone on the previous transport to Auschwitz, and they'd been afraid for her and wanted to be together with her, so they got onto our transport on the sly, in the hopes that they'd meet up with their mother. But in Auschwitz they soon found out that their mother had ended up in the gas. The boy was a born organizer, so he came up with the idea that at night we'd lie down in this circle, always one head on another's legs, who had someone else sleeping on his legs, so we at least warmed ourselves up a bit, and could get some sleep.

Right after we arrived, they took our things and our clothes. We were issued clothes made of burlap that hung off us, darned socks, and wooden shoes carved from one piece of wood, so you couldn't bend your feet properly in them. Sewn on the clothes were two triangles of various colors, forming a six-pointed star. Various groups had differently colored triangles, murderers for example had green, political prisoners red, homosexuals purple, I think. Then we got coats from people that had gone into the gas. But so that we wouldn't have normal clothing, we had to exchange various parts of clothing amongst ourselves.

I got a light gray coat, and along with it the sleeves of my girlfriend's green coat - this was so that if we by chance succeeded in escaping, we'd be conspicuous at first sight. As my friend Lala had the same red hair as I did, and we had basically the same coats - I a gray one with green sleeves, and she a green one with gray sleeves - they would mistake us for each other. Back then that was a great compliment for me, because Lala was an awfully pretty girl, so I was glad that they were mistaking me for such a beauty!

Soon came another selection, where the men had to go separately, the women separately, the children separately. From that moment on, we were completely separated as a family, because Eva went among the children, my mother among the women, my father among the men, and they ordered me to go to Block B VI. They were selecting young girls, and my father was terribly afraid of what they were going to do with me there. I was calming him down, and saying that I was lucky that I was a Jew, that because of that no Nazi would dare do anything with me, because he'd be afraid of 'Rassenschande,' so-called 'racial defilement.'

For Block B VI they wanted young and more or less good-looking girls, no emaciated ones, due to the fact that in Block B VI, jazz was played for the entertainment of the SS. For us it was like a miracle, because in the Protectorate of Böhmen und Mähren, jazz wasn't allowed to be played, due to its being American music. In Auschwitz they didn't care that it was actually black music, they somehow forgot about that, or perhaps they didn't even know it! In any case, a band played there to entertain the SS soldiers, and we were allowed to be there, so that when Nazi visitors came to have a look at us, it looked like we were content and not lacking anything.

Our daily food ration was a quarter brick of bread, melita [a coffee substitute] without milk or sugar, and at noon something they called soup. Often not even that though, because those that portioned the bread often managed to steal some, so our rations were shortened. The conditions were especially horrific during the winter. On one side of the camp were latrines. On the other side was a building where we had the only washing facilities, which were two troughs in the middle of which were taps with cold water. We were issued one dirty, small and smelly bar of soap, which was supposed to last us for the entire time in the concentration camp.

When you wanted to wash your clothes, it was only in cold water, there was of course no other kind, and as everyone had only what they were wearing - nothing spare existed - you had to put on wet clothing that then dried on you. In the winter that was especially unpleasant!

Each morning was a roll-call, then another two or three during the day, I don't remember exactly anymore. Lots of times we had to stand for even several hours before they came to count us. Once during a roll-call, when we'd been standing a long time, I fainted. They dragged me off a ways and were trying to revive me. I remember that I was already coming to a bit, and I heard a girl standing above me saying: 'Uh oh, she's not going to see another day!' As I was coming to my senses and heard her words, I was suddenly filled with this amazing strength, and to myself I said: 'You know what, you stupid goose, I will, too!'

Surviving the concentration camp was among other things also a question of willpower and attitude towards life. I was always an optimist, I felt in myself strength and resolution to survive it all. I do though remember one girl who was terribly pessimistic. She was constantly repeating that we were all going into the gas, she wasn't capable of thinking of anything else, and saw everything from the worst perspective. She survived, but after she returned home, she remained a pessimist. She soon died, and I think that her pessimism and negativism was to a large degree at fault. Such a useless death.

We lived in wooden barracks, in the middle of which was a so-called chimney. They heated in the winter, but one can't talk about any sort of warmth, because you could easily lay your hand on the stove, it was completely lukewarm. Both sides of the barracks had three-story bunks - lower, middle and upper. Lying diagonally above me was one girl that was pregnant, her stomach was already large, she was in an advanced stage of pregnancy. I still remember her when we were leaving for Hamburg, we girls hid her stomach so that no one would notice she was pregnant. She was still with us during the clean-up work in Hamburg, but then they sent her away somewhere, and I didn't know anything about her after that.

## Post-war

After the war I found out that she'd survived and written a book. In her memoirs she writes that she survived, but for the price of having to strangle her own child. She was forced to, they gave her a choice - either they'd kill her along with the child, or she'd survive, but would have to kill her own child... Even terrible things such as these happened during the war. A person that didn't live through it can never comprehend what a concentration camp was. Years later I met her, luckily she'd managed to start anew after the war, she moved to Israel. She's got children and grandchildren, and looks great. She published a book, her autobiography.

In Brezinka I worked in the so-called 'Weberei,' a weaving mill, where we wove belt substitutes. There was a leather shortage, so we were weaving belt substitutes from plastic string, which then soldiers had attached to their machine guns. Or other times they forced us to carry rocks from one place to another, just like that, for no purpose. They were thinking up absolutely senseless work, so that they could harass us. We had to do it, but on the other hand we didn't mind so much, because we at least had something to do. Being in Brezinka and doing nothing would perhaps have been even more depressing.

In Auschwitz we met the September transport that had gone from Terezin before us. On the birthday of President Masaryk [13](#), 7th March 1944, the entire September transport went into the gas, which was a bad omen for us. We did the math, that the next time it would be our turn, that likely in June we'd go into the gas. However, one day they herded me and some other women prisoners, amongst whom there were, however, no members of my family, onto a train. We had no idea what they were planning to do with us. We rode along for a relatively long time, and the entire way were thinking about where and why they were transporting us. Until we arrived in Hamburg, which was horribly bombed-out, and there we found out we'd be doing clean-up work.

After an air-raid we'd always clean up the rubble and then moved somewhere else where a bomb had fallen, and that's how it went time and again. We lived in various barracks and similar buildings.

After the war we were contacted by a man who lived in Hamburg, and in one of the locations where we'd lived in Hamburg, he had a memorial plaque installed; every year on the anniversary of the liberation he went to Israel and visited Czech Jewish women that had survived the Holocaust.

The conditions in Hamburg were hard, many of us died there. We lived through many air raids, which were mainly at night, sometimes even twice or thrice. However, they weren't normal air raids, but so-called phosphorus ones, which was horrible filth, because when phosphorus fell on asphalt roads, people got fried. It may have been horrible, but it was reciprocity. The Germans also did filthy things!

Our work was to then clean up the debris, they'd take us there, as they didn't worry themselves over us dying there during an air raid. They couldn't afford to risk the lives of Aryans, because there were unexploded bombs lying around everywhere, but our lives were, of course, of no interest to them. I've got to admit that we were praying for there to be still more and more of those air raids, 'Dear God, more heavily and bigger drops!' Of course, we wanted them to miss us, but for there to be as many of them, and for the war to finally be over. In Hamburg, as we'd been selected for hard work, on top of our ration, which in Brezinka had been one piece of bread a day and black melta without milk, we also got somewhat thicker soup, so that we could withstand the physical stress.

From Hamburg they transported us for a time to Bergen-Belsen. Compared to Bergen-Belsen, Auschwitz, even with all its gas chambers, was still paradise! Bergen-Belsen was the worst concentration camp, hell on earth, the conditions there were truly catastrophic. We slept on a packed dirt floor, it was incredibly cold, we laid packed one against the other. We warmed each other, until we'd suddenly realize that the person beside you is no longer warming you, because they're dead. At night you couldn't even turn around, as we were lying right on top of each other. When you wanted to go to the toilet, you had to step on the others. There were no latrines there,

and there was dirt and excrement everywhere. The conditions were unspeakable! From that filth and overall deficiency, we got typhus. All of us fell ill, without exception, and if there was one, it confirmed the rule.

This was the miserable state we were in when the English liberated us on 15th April 1945. I remember that I saw my first Englishman, and then I don't remember anything more, because I had typhus and for a long time was out of it. I was bedridden for a long time, and quite a long period has been erased from my mind. I got into a hospital, and thanks to that I was able to survive. Lying there with me was Ruth Bloch, who I'd made friends with right the first day in Terezin.

Ruthie stuck to me like glue the whole war, she went everywhere with me, because she was a pessimist, and I was on the contrary an incorrigible optimist. She even stood beside me during the selection in Auschwitz, and was nodding towards me, that she had to come with me. I was afraid, I told her that I didn't want to draw attention to myself in any way, that it was enough that I had red hair, which already made me quite conspicuous. Despite that, during the selection Ruthie ran over to me, she would perhaps rather let herself be shot than leave me. And so in Bergen-Belsen she didn't leave me in the hospital either, and laid beside me.

Later she told me that when I was out of it, I'd been looking for something under my pillow. She asked me what I was looking for, and I answered her: 'Lemon juice. My Mom brought it for me.' You see, typhus affects the brain as well. I was hallucinating and looking under my pillow for lemon juice from my mother! I, of course, didn't know anything about my mother, I was just babbling, I was completely out of it. Ruthie was then telling me about it, and said: 'Yeah, well, that's you all right.' Ruthie survived the war, and after the war she got married to a man in Israel.

When I felt a bit better, I would go outside to look around, there was a Czechoslovak committee there, where they were making lists of who'd survived, who'd died, who was looking for whom. These notices hung behind a window. Once I went there, and noticed that there was a letter there, and by the sender you could still see a stamp saying 'Vysoke Myto' and the addressee 'Mrs. Eva Schwarzova.' I looked for and found Eva Schwarzova. I told myself that I must know the person that sent her that letter. The letter to Eva was from Eva Koudelova, her brother's fiancée, and among other things, the letter said that a bus from Luze had arrived in the Vysoke Myto town square, and out of it had stepped Mr. Schwarz, Eva's husband, and Mrs. Polakova with little Eva. So that's how I found out that my mother and sister were alive, and that they were home.

They didn't know about me, they'd even read somewhere that I was dead. I also had no idea what had happened with my family. I was overjoyed when I found out that I at least knew for sure about Mother and Eva, that they'd survived. As I later found out from them, they both went from Auschwitz- Brezinka on a death march [14](#), it was during the winter, they were walking barefoot, and slept in barns. They managed to escape from the death march, and while on the run ran into the Red Army, which was advancing from Slovakia. My mother worked for the Russians as a cook, and got to Bohemia with the army. My father died on a death march from the Auschwitz-Brezinka concentration camp sometime in January 1945. We never found out the exact details of his last moments, I'm assuming that he was already weak, and couldn't handle the journey in those terrible conditions.

If back then in Bergen-Belsen I wouldn't have learned that someone from my family had survived, I would have probably gone to Sweden, which was offering those concentration camp prisoners who didn't have anyone good conditions for starting a new life. If I wouldn't have found out that my mother and sister had survived the war, I really would have gone to Sweden, because I was afraid to return home, where there was no one. I was afraid that it would be a terrible shock, and I didn't know if I could have handled returning alone. But in the situation where I knew that I had something to return to, I couldn't wait to see my family again.

It wasn't easy to get to Czechoslovakia, the train tracks had been bombed, but somehow I finally got to Prague by train. The irony of fate is that I still didn't have anything proper to wear - I'd thrown out my lice-ridden clothes, and in Bergen-Belsen I'd found some SS tunic, which I put on. The whole way home in the train, I was saying to myself: 'Dear God, just don't let anyone think that I'm from the SS!' Life is full of paradoxes!

I arrived in Vysoke Myto around 15th July 1945 I think, and as it was Sunday, there was no longer a connection to Luze. Eva Koudelova's family offered that I could sleep over at their place in Vysoke Myto, and then go to Luze on Monday. To welcome and treat me, her family made roast pork with dumplings and sauerkraut and a roast goose. I didn't want to insult them by not eating it, and so I ate all that food after that long period of starvation. But I couldn't wait till the next day to see my mother and sister, so I decided to go home on foot. It was about sixteen kilometers from Vysoke Myto to Luze. Eva offered to accompany me, and because it was far, we decided to go on a bicycle.

However, along the way I began to feel terrible, my organism had gotten unused to food after that terrible hunger and illnesses, and I got horrible digestive problems. I was feeling really horrible, so I told Eva that she should go back home, that I'd manage somehow, and would rather go the rest of the way on my own. So Eva left me the bike, so that I could lean against it on the way, because I probably wouldn't have managed to make it there without some support.

Finally, even with those problems I arrived in Luze towards evening, I was walking along the street, leaning against the bike, and suddenly a group of young girls came walking by me. Suddenly one of the girls said: 'Hey, Eva, that's your sister!' My sister Eva stared and didn't even dare believe it, she was afraid that it didn't have to be the truth. We walked home together, and my mother almost fainted. They no longer believed that I was alive, they had even already read somewhere that I was dead. So that's what our reunion was like!

My mother and sister and I lived in Luze for some time longer, and everyone from the vicinity was sending us fresh cow's milk from the sheer joy of our being alive. So it happened that I got foot-and-mouth disease from that milk! On the other hand, maybe it was lucky for me, as because of the foot- and-mouth disease I couldn't eat anything, so what happened to many people after starving - that they overate and their stomach burst and they died - didn't happen to me. As it was, I couldn't eat anything at all, everything hurt, even swallowing saliva was extremely painful.

My mother had brought home with her several girls who'd managed to escape from the concentration camp. These girls had lost their families, and had no one. At the end of the war they were barely sixteen, so it's actually a miracle that they survived the war, as in most cases children were sent straight into the gas. One girl was named Rezka, she later went to Israel. Another girl was named Gita. On the way home my mother had been taking care of one more girl, but one Jewish doctor, a general of the Red Army, upon finding out what had happened to her, took her



home with him to the Soviet Union, where this girl married his son.

After the war, my mother had an 'In Memoriam' plaque installed at the Jewish cemetery in Luze, for my father and the rest of our relatives who had perished during the war. My mother decided that we'd move to Prague, as our house in Luze was dilapidated, and there was nothing to keep us there. We still didn't know what had happened to Dad, and were hoping he'd survived. But we said to ourselves that Luze is a small town, so if he returned, the neighbors would tell him where to look for us. My sister had to finish public school, and I had only four years of high school, and my mother thought it would be best for us to finish school in Prague. So we moved to Prague, to my cousin Vera's, who'd gotten an apartment after her first husband.

The first year after the war, I worked in Prague in a Jewish old-age home as a night nurse. I attended typing and shorthand courses, but I didn't like it too much, I told myself that that wasn't anything for me. I decided to become a nurse, and took a two-year course at a nursing school in Jecna Street. Later, while working, I took an extension in that two-year specialization, and after taking night courses got my diploma. I worked at the Research Institute in the clinical department in nutritional research, later I transferred to the experimental department, where we did experiments on animals.

I was supposed to retire at 52, but I continued working part-time for another two years. Right when I was retiring, the Jewish religious community was looking for someone to help out, so in 1978 I went as a retiree to do some office work and help out at the Jewish religious community in Prague.

Right after the war I joined the Communist Party [15](#), my reason was that the Communists had fought against Hitler. However, when the trials [16](#) started, I saw the light. It was quite a major shock for me. I went to see the party chairman, who was by coincidence a doctor, also a Jew, and told him that I could no longer be in the Party, if he didn't see it that way [too]. Then at one meeting someone proclaimed that Jews are evil, and that they didn't deserve anything else anyways, and it was then that I decided that that was the last drop. I wrote a letter that I was leaving the Party, and also took the luxury of saying why. It bothered me how they were behaving towards Jews, and what they were saying about them.

The leadership sent this young guy to come see me, to find out why I had left, and he tried to change my decision. I didn't feel like talking to him at all. He came to see me at work at the research institute, and I told him that it was a dangerous environment for him, isotopes, radiation everywhere, that he'd better leave. He apparently thought that if I could be there, that nothing would happen to him either, and wouldn't let himself be brushed off. He says to me, whether I didn't think it was a shame to leave the Party after so many years, whether I wouldn't still change my mind. I stood fast, and again gave him the same reasons, that the officials' anti-Semitic statements were insulting to me. That young guy says: 'And you're going to leave the Party over a trifle like that?' I lost my patience, and forcefully told him that if he feels it's a trifle, then I certainly do not. Twenty-seven of my relatives had perished in the concentration camps, I'm Jewish, I never denied it, it's neither something virtuous nor shameful, and I'll always stand by it. There was nothing he could say to that, he didn't have any arguments against it, and he left.

I wasn't worried about problems at work, the most they could have done was transfer me to some village hospital, but that wouldn't even have mattered to me. There was a shortage of nurses, and they themselves would have had a big scandal if they would have persecuted me, a nurse. After

all, I hadn't done anything bad. At work they understood my decision, as there were reasonable people working in health care, I think that they thought the same, just didn't have the courage to say it out loud. I think that they understood me, and didn't have any problems with it, because they knew me and knew what I thought.

I met my first husband, Karel Capek, at the faculty hospital in internal medicine. At the time I was working at a clinic, and he was there as a medic, doing a thesis in rehabilitation. Back then they wanted to transfer me to the countryside, to be a head nurse somewhere far outside of Prague. But I didn't want to be a head nurse, because that work is more about arguing with employees and cleaning ladies. While I'd gone to study nursing mainly because I wanted to work with the ill. Alas, back then they told me that because I was single, they weren't going to discuss it with me at all, and would simply transfer me to the country. I was complaining about it to the medics, and at that time Karel said: 'All right, I'll marry you!' We were married in 1950, but as I say, just the circumstances of the wedding were a sign that the marriage wouldn't last long. After a year we were divorced. My second husband, Karel Mrazek, was an academic painter.

The first years after the war, I didn't have the desire to tell anyone about what I'd lived through. Shortly after the war, one doctor from Luze who'd moved away to America approached me, whether I wouldn't write down my reminiscences for him. He was interested in my history, what I'd gone through in the concentration camps. But back then I had to refuse, I apologized to him, that it wasn't the right time yet. I needed to forget those horrors, not bring them to life.

I've also never gone to Auschwitz to have a look, I was afraid of that, today I probably don't have to be afraid anymore, but visiting Auschwitz doesn't entice me in the least. On the other hand, we girls who'd been in the camp together used to meet regularly in Prague. I remember that the son of one of them was terribly surprised at how it was possible that we always laugh so much together, that he'd never heard so much guffawing as when we meet and recall the concentration camp. But we used to have fun like this in the camp, too! To this day, I attend various memorial events, and my friends and I always have a laugh.

When I realize that at our age we're all so optimistic and full of humor, I have the feeling that that Hitler fellow conserved us, whether he didn't on the one hand benefit us in the end. Sometimes I say to myself, that I've lived through so many illnesses, a heart attack, two cancer operations, a war, that maybe I'll never die, illnesses are afraid of people like that! I'm lucky to be an optimist.

## Glossary

### **1 Sokol**

One of the best-known Czech sports organizations. It was founded in 1862 as the first physical educational organization in the Austro- Hungarian Monarchy. Besides regular training of all age groups, units organized sports competitions, colorful gymnastics rallies, cultural events including drama, literature and music, excursions and youth camps. Although its main goal had always been the promotion of national health and sports, Sokol also played a key role in the national resistance to the Austro- Hungarian Empire, the Nazi occupation and the communist regime. Sokol flourished between the two World Wars; its membership grew to over a million. Important statesmen, including the first two presidents of interwar Czechoslovakia, Tomas Garrigue Masaryk and Edvard

Benes, were members of Sokol. Sokol was banned three times: during World War I, during the Nazi occupation and finally by the communists after 1948, but branches of the organization continued to exist abroad. Sokol was restored in 1990.

## **2 Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia**

Bohemia and Moravia were occupied by the Germans and transformed into a German Protectorate in March 1939, after Slovakia declared its independence. The Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia was placed under the supervision of the Reich protector, Konstantin von Neurath. The Gestapo assumed police authority. Jews were dismissed from civil service and placed in an extralegal position. In the fall of 1941, the Reich adopted a more radical policy in the Protectorate. The Gestapo became very active in arrests and executions. The deportation of Jews to concentration camps was organized, and Terezin/Theresienstadt was turned into a ghetto for Jewish families. During the existence of the Protectorate the Jewish population of Bohemia and Moravia was virtually annihilated. After World War II the pre-1938 boundaries were restored, and most of the German-speaking population was expelled.

## **3 Exclusion of Jews from schools in the Protectorate**

The Ministry of Education of the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia sent round a ministerial decree in 1940, which stated that from school year 1940/41 Jewish pupils were not allowed to visit Czech public and private schools and those who were already in school should be excluded. After 1942 Jews were not allowed to visit Jewish schools or courses organized by the Jewish communities either.

## **4 Anti-Jewish laws in the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia**

In March 1939, there lived in the Protectorate 92,199 inhabitants classified according to the so-called Nuremberg Laws as Jews. On 21st June 1939, Konstantin von Neurath, the Reich Protector, passed the so-called Edict Regarding Jewish Property, which put restrictions on Jewish property. On 24th April 1940, a government edict was passed which eliminated Jews from economic activity. Similarly like previous legal changes it was based on the Nuremberg Law definitions and limited the legal standing of Jews. According to the law, Jews couldn't perform any functions (honorary or paid) in the courts or public service and couldn't participate at all in politics, be members of Jewish organizations and other organizations of social, cultural and economic nature. They were completely barred from performing any independent occupation, couldn't work as lawyers, doctors, veterinarians, notaries, defense attorneys and so on. Jewish residents could participate in public life only in the realm of religious Jewish organizations. Jews were forbidden to enter certain streets, squares, parks and other public places. From September 1939 they were forbidden from being outside their home after 8pm. Beginning in November 1939 they couldn't leave, even temporarily, their place of residence without special permission. Residents of Jewish extraction were barred from visiting theaters and cinemas, restaurants and cafés, swimming pools, libraries and other entertainment and sports centers. On public transport they were limited to standing room in the last car, in trains they weren't allowed to use dining or sleeping cars and could ride only in the lowest class, again only in the last car. They weren't allowed entry into waiting rooms and other station facilities. The Nazis limited shopping hours for Jews to twice two hours and later only two hours per day. They confiscated radio equipment and limited their choice of groceries. Jews weren't

allowed to keep animals at home. Jewish children were prevented from visiting German, and, from August 1940, also Czech public and private schools. In March 1941 even so-called re-education courses organized by the Jewish Religious Community were forbidden, and from June 1942 also education in Jewish schools. To eliminate Jews from society it was important that they be easily identifiable. Beginning in March 1940, citizenship cards of Jews were marked by the letter 'J' (for Jude - Jew). From 1st September 1941 Jews older than six could only go out in public if they wore a yellow six-pointed star with 'Jude' written on it on their clothing. [5](#) Yellow star - Jewish star in Protectorate: On 1st September 1941 an edict was issued according to which all Jews having reached the age of six were forbidden to appear in public without the Jewish star. The Jewish star is represented by a hand-sized, six-pointed yellow star outlined in black, with the word 'Jude' in black letters. It had to be worn in a visible place on the left side of the article of clothing. This edict came into force on 19th September 1941. It was another step aimed at eliminating Jews from society. The idea's author was Reinhard Heydrich himself.

## **[6](#) 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.

## **[7](#) Bergen-Belsen**

Concentration camp located in northern Germany. Bergen- Belsen was established in April 1943 as a detention camp for prisoners who were to be exchanged with Germans imprisoned in Allied countries. Bergen- Belsen was liberated by the British army on 15th April, 1945. The soldiers were shocked at what they found, including 60,000 prisoners in the camp, many on the brink of death, and thousands of unburied bodies lying about. (Source: Rozett R. - Spector S.: Encyclopedia of the Holocaust, Facts on File, G.G. The Jerusalem Publishing House Ltd. 2000, pg. 139 -141)

## **[8](#) Munich Pact**

Signed by Germany, Italy, the United Kingdom and France in 1938, it allowed Germany to immediately occupy the Sudetenland (the border region of Czechoslovakia inhabited by a German minority). The representatives of the Czechoslovak government were not invited to the Munich conference. Hungary and Poland were also allowed to seize territories: Hungary occupied southern and eastern Slovakia and a large part of Subcarpathia, which had been under Hungarian rule before World War I, and Poland occupied Teschen (Tessin or Cieszyn), a part of Silesia, which had been an object of dispute between Poland and Czechoslovakia, each of which claimed it on ethnic grounds. Under the Munich Pact, the Czechoslovak Republic lost extensive economic and

strategically important territories in the border regions (about one third of its total area).

## **9 Sudetenland**

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

## **10 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. [11](#) 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.

## **12 Lodz Ghetto**

It was set up in February 1940 in the former Jewish quarter on the northern outskirts of the city. 164,000 Jews from Lodz were packed together in a 4 sq. km. area. In 1941 and 1942, 38,500 more Jews were deported to the ghetto. In November 1941, 5,000 Roma were also deported to the ghetto from Burgenland province, Austria. The Jewish self- government, led by Mordechai Rumkowski, sought to make the ghetto as productive as possible and to put as many inmates to work as he could. But not even this could prevent overcrowding and hunger or improve the inhuman living conditions. As a result of epidemics, shortages of fuel and food and insufficient

sanitary conditions, about 43,500 people (21% of all the residents of the ghetto) died of undernourishment, cold and illness. The others were transported to death camps; only a very small number of them survived.

### **13 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.

### **14 Death march**

In fear of the approaching Allied armies, the Germans tried to erase all 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 and there was no specific destination. The marchers received neither food nor water and were forbidden to stop and rest at night. It was solely up to the guards how they treated the prisoners, if and what they gave them to eat and they even had in their hands the power on the prisoners' life or death. The conditions during the march were so cruel that this journey became a journey that ended in the death of most marchers.

### **15 Communist Party of Czechoslovakia (KSC)**

Founded in 1921 following a split from the Social Democratic Party, it was banned under the Nazi occupation. It was only after Soviet Russia entered World War II that the Party developed resistance activity in the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia; because of this, it gained a certain degree of popularity with the general public after 1945. After the communist coup in 1948, the Party had sole power in Czechoslovakia for over 40 years. The 1950s were marked by party purges and a war against the 'enemy within'. A rift in the Party led to a relaxing of control during the Prague Spring starting in 1967, which came to an end with the occupation of Czechoslovakia by Soviet and allied troops in 1968 and was followed by a period of normalization. The communist rule came to an end after the Velvet Revolution of November 1989.

### **16 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.