

# Katarina Löfflerova

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Bratislava

Slovakia

Interviewer: Martin Korcok

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*Mrs. Löfflerova lives in an old-fashioned building in the heart of Bratislava, with her daughter and son-in-law. The apartment is furnished with old-fashioned furniture.*

*Mrs. Löfflerova's room is decorated with books, pictures and the portraits of her favorite politicians – among others Emperor Franz Joseph, T. G. Masaryk [1](#) and Vaclav Havel [2](#).*

*In spite of her advanced age, Mrs. Löfflerova is very sprightly; she walks into the city everyday. The interview was conducted in four sittings.*

*She answered each of the questions openly and coherently, never leaving out a humorous anecdote. The only subjects she didn't like to speak about were her two first marriages.*

*This request we naturally respected, and further questions in regard to this were skipped.*

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## Family background

I don't have a lot to tell about my great-grandparents. Somehow it wasn't like it is now, where many eighty-year-old people are living around me; I'm already past ninety myself. In the time of my great-grandparents, there were no sixty-year-olds alive, so when I was born none of my great-grandparents were living.

My father's family came from Velky Meder, my great-grandparents and also my grandparents lived there. Big families were popular then, there were kids everywhere. There were also a lot of children in our family. My paternal grandfather, Ignac Weisz, had two brothers.

The oldest brother, Miksa Weisz studied to be a lawyer. He lived in Komarno, still under the name Weisz. The youngest of the three, Moric Weisz settled down in Gyor as a doctor. There were girls in

the family, who married and didn't magyarize their names. At the time of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, changing one's name was almost a daily occurrence.

There were a lot of magyarizations. What happened later? Their grandchildren slovakized their names. The sisters, I recall, lived with their husbands in Kaposvar. As a child, I remember only one very old aunt. She was a very old aunt, probably fifty at the time. I don't remember her name, we weren't in contact with them, because we traveled by train then, and they lived far from us in Bratislava.

My grandfather [Ignac Weisz] tried everything, but he was the only one in the family who didn't succeed in anything. He wandered from one city in the Monarchy to another, and had children in every city. That's how it happened, for example, that my father, Jozsef Weiss, was born in Pest [Budapest].

My father's younger brother, Otto was born in Vienna, and the youngest brother, Bela, was born in Velky Meder. Somehow nothing worked out for him. The family was called Weisz. When the boys matriculated, they magyarized their names. My grandparents were still Weisz, while my father and his brothers became Vidor. My maiden name was Katalin Vidor. I don't remember my paternal grandfather, because I was still a little girl when he died [1919].

My grandmother, Stefania Weisz, nee Abeles, was a very charming creature. We really loved our paternal grandmother. My widowed grandma lived with her eldest daughter, Etel, who lived with her husband in Kaposvar. There was no pension then. All her children sent Grandma a certain amount every month.

Every year, this grandmother who lived in Kaposvar came to see us in Bratislava. She stayed with us for a month. Our relationship was extremely good. She was a very cheerful, slightly chubby creature. She spoke Hungarian, German and French perfectly. Somehow they [her parents] were well-off, because they had had a French teacher woman.

When my grandmother was here, if we were going down the street, she always had a pencil and little pad, and took notes. I said, 'Grandma, what are you writing?' 'Oh, my dear little one, I'm learning Slovakian now. Because if I come back in the future, I want to know more.'

Signs were written in three languages everywhere – Slovak, German and Hungarian – and if there was a sign up, she read it and wrote it down. At the end, when she'd been here many times with us, she understood what they were saying. Of course, in Bratislava then, very few people spoke Slovakian, but she understood it. We really, really loved her.

When I went to school, the education system was different. They arranged a student ball here or there. Grandma came to those, too, if she was here. I regularly went with my parents, but they had enough by midnight. They said, 'Oh, Kato [Katarina], come on, let's go home.'

Well, of course, I fell into despair; I could have been fourteen or fifteen. Of course, I didn't want to go home, and I'd start crying, 'Can't we stay just a little longer.' This most beloved Kaposvar grandmother would say, 'You just go on home, don't worry about her, I'd love to stay with her because I like it here, too. I'll come home with Kato.'

My wonderful little grandma stayed with me until three in the morning and then we went home. Of course, the boys escorted us home too, so it wasn't particularly quiet. By the time we got into the apartment, my parents woke up, and Grandma got it [the blame] for being out so late with me, and then she whispered in my ear, 'It's better if I get it, than you.'

On my mother's side, I'm old Pozsonian [meaning old Bratislavian in Hungarian]. You must know that my maternal grandfather – I don't know where he was born – lived here in Bratislava as a young man. My grandfather's name was Gyula Hahn. How it was, what school he went to, I don't know at all, because I was about eight or nine when he died. I don't recall anyone in the family ever mentioning anything about it.

My grandmother, Ida Hahn, nee Singer, was likewise from here. She was the only girl. My Bratislava grandparents had three daughters; one of them was my mother, who went to school here with her two sisters. They only had three girls. The oldest Hahn sister was Etel. My mother, Anna, was the middle child, and the youngest was Emma. They lived here and of course, all married, and had children, so there were quite a number of us. Aunt Etel, the oldest, had two daughters. Then my mother likewise had two daughters, me and my younger sister. To the joy of my grandparents, the youngest girl had one boy, finally a boy in the family. He's dead already. None of the cousins are still alive, only me alone.

None of the families were Orthodox [see Orthodox communities] [3](#). In 1871, if I recall correctly, the Neolog [4](#) community was founded in Hungary. [The Orthodox and Neolog communities split after the 1868-69 Israelite Universal Congress.

The status quo ante community took a different direction in 1871]. Quite quickly a lot of people joined the Neolog community which they said was mainly because the Jewry living here wanted to melt into the life of the surrounding residents; they wanted to live a similar lifestyle. They had to live a more modern life than the Orthodox.

So everyone on my paternal side, just like on the maternal side of my family were members of the Neolog community. That was mostly thanks to Bratislava's most famous rabbi, Chatam Sofer [5](#), who by today's standards was more Orthodox than the Orthodox.

There was [hired] help at my Bratislava grandparents' house [maternal grandparents']. They lived on Michalska Street, there, where the Ruefa travel agency was. There's a very nice store there, a branch of N. Neumann, a Viennese ready-made clothing company.

My grandfather was the head of that branch. It was once considered a very nice, very elegant men's clothing store. They lived there, too. The residence was in the courtyard. The building next door had the Katarinska chapel built into it. The chapel supposedly dates from the 16th or 14th century, I don't know exactly.

A lot of young people came here. Once, a country girl asked my grandmother if she knew of any work, because she'd like to find a position with a family. How happy she would be if she could come to this chapel every day.

My grandmother answered, that she could start immediately at our house. And really, while my grandmother was alive – because Grandpa had died – this young creature preparing for the nunnery (later she wasn't so young anymore) stayed there beside my grandmother, always happy,

satisfied because the chapel was open.

My grandparents didn't really have a circle of friends. They had acquaintances, but aside from the theater or concerts, they didn't go out to cafes. They worked a lot in the business. They closed every evening at seven. On Saturday and Sunday, they opened at eight and closed at twelve. My grandmother even helped out, next to doing the housework, she sat at the cash register. They worked very, very much.

My grandparents didn't talk about their childhood. We didn't live together, since all their daughters lived in different places – and well, raising kids was a different thing then. Today my grandchild says 'ciao' to me. At that time, all of us grandchildren had to go in to Grandma and say 'I kiss your hand,' and we had to kiss her hand.

That was enough, and we could leave. We had to do this every blessed day, and we did it. The Bratislava grandma was very strict, even with herself. If I think back on all those years, I realize that's why we didn't like her so much. It's true, she really looked out for us, and directed her daughters on how to raise children, how strictly. Of course, today I see that it wasn't such a bad method of upbringing.

It wasn't characteristic of the time for my parents to talk about their parents. The respect regarding parents was absolute. At that time, a different opinion didn't exist. If my father said, or my mother said, that it's this way, then it was natural for me that it was this way. I didn't even have to think about it, not because I didn't have the occasion to, but rather, because it just wasn't the habit.

After the war, when I came home, my parents weren't alive any more. I had no one. I was already married. I lived here for half a year, but didn't have anything to wear. The old stores started to open up again, and the selection got better. There was a textile store downtown, where my mother had sometimes gone to shop.

The storeowners stood out in front of their doors and coaxed in – that is, caught – customers. When I passed by there, I asked the owner if he had any textiles. He said, 'Come in and see.' The first one had gotten a very pretty textile from Austria. I went in, I had money. I wanted a suit.

I had never chosen material for myself alone, I'd always bought these kinds of things with mother. I couldn't choose, so I told the storekeeper to give me some advice. He gave it, and gave me the address of a tailor, too.

My father, Jozsef Vidor was born in Pest in 1882, and finished school there, a commerce school [4](#) as the oral family tradition goes. As an exceptionally clever young man, he got into the bank right after graduation. The bank where he worked in Budapest, opened a branch here in Bratislava. They were so happy with him, that they named him branch director at age twenty-three, which was already considered a big career then. Judging from pictures of him as a youth, he was a very handsome man, good-tempered, nice, and full of humor. He met my mother here in the theater. They took my mother and her siblings to all the bigger performances. That acquaintance then became a marriage. My mother went to a secondary school for girls in Bratislava.

## Growing up

I was born on Grosslingova Street [in Bratislava] in 1910 – today it's called Medena Street. At that time, the house was pretty new; they called it a modern apartment, because there was a bathroom in it. During World War I, they put out a law that said, those heads of families who were called up for the army didn't have to pay rent for a certain time – I don't know how long. While my father was away, we really didn't pay rent.

In spite of that, the woman who owned the house told my mother we had to leave the apartment. My mother said, 'That's fine, if we have to, we'll leave.' She was very sorry, she didn't know where to go, what to do. In the meantime, my father got home, but he said we should leave, we're not staying, we'll find someplace else.

He met a friend who had his own house in Tobrucka Street (it was called Rojkova Street then), and there, a four-room apartment just became available. They had emigrated [the residents], and that wasn't a very popular thing then, they left Bratislava. That night they transferred the apartment to my parents, so we lived there from 1916.

My father was called up [for World War I] in Bratislava. In the city of Bratislava, there was the 13th National Guard and the 42nd National Guard. My father was in the 13th National Guard, and went directly to the front with the first units, to Przemyśl [in Galicia] [7](#). Przemyśl still belonged to Austria then, later Poland, and it lay near the border of Russia.

Przemyśl was a fortification. He stayed there for quite a long time. My father – I don't know after what time, sometime in the evening, when they could leave the fort and go into the city – this is one of the humorous anecdotes of my family history – went into the city. He went into the only bank there was in the town, and asked for the director.

He introduced himself and said that they were colleagues, that he was also a director of a bank, in Bratislava. The other man was very glad to meet my father, and invited him to dinner. My father was quite a man at cards, and they sat down to 'rumble the flats.' They invited my father, saying anytime he was in town, they would gladly welcome him. A couple days later he came back, and played cards again.

The next time there were three of them, I think they played 'preference' or 'undercut' [games played with an Austro-Hungarian deck], because the Przemyśl bank director had also invited another friend. Again they invited my father for dinner, and had a great time.

My father had to return to the fortification by midnight. While he was at dinner, the Russians occupied the fort, so he couldn't go back. It was difficult, but somehow my father got away. On the way home [to Bratislava] he met Austro-Hungarian units here and there, who just passed him on to the next one – report here, report there.

In the end, after a long time, he got home. My father said that's how cards saved his life. Keep in mind that many of the fathers of my first grade classmates, who were close in age to my father, didn't come back, but ended up as prisoners. If they survived the imprisonment, by the time they got home, it had been Czechoslovakia for a long time [see First Czechoslovak Republic] [8](#); and if they didn't, they died.

The war went on. In view of my father's merits, he got a local assignment in the military. He didn't get his merits on the military field, but [got them] at home. Namely, that he had to register military

loans, and my father succeeded in getting military loans from the bank and other companies [see War bonds in the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy] [9](#).

The biggest of these was the big Stollwerck factory. [Franz Stollwerck opened his candy factory in 1839 in Cologne. After his death his five sons developed the company under the name 'Gebrüder Stollwerck,' which became a joint stock company in 1902. The factory in Bratislava was founded in 1896 by two Stollwerck brothers, its original name was the K. K. Österreichisch-Ungarische Hof und Schokoladenfabrik.

Despite a catastrophic fire in 1900, the company showed more than a million crowns profit that year. In 1948, it was formally nationalized.] Then there was the Patron factory [in Bratislava, founded by the Viennese private firm, György Roth et Co. around 1870, to produce ammunition for the Austro-Hungarian army.

During the war, 3000 people worked there, and by 1918, it was a separate company called the Bratislava J. Roth Rt. In 1928, it was among the biggest factories in Czechoslovakia.] And then there was Dynamit. [One of Slovakia's oldest chemical factories.

One of many similar enterprises around Europe, it was officially known as Dynamit Nobel, for its founder Dr. Alfred Nobel, the Swedish inventor. The state nationalized the factory in 1946.]. My father raised such a large sum of money, that for his merits, they hired him here. He could go into the bank also, but just for military service.

After the death of Franz Joseph [1916], Charles IV and Queen Zita followed. They came in March of 1918 to Bratislava to introduce themselves. They floated down by boat from Vienna, got off in Bratislava, were here for a couple hours, and then went to Budapest. Naturally, there was a big reception here in their honor, various organizations were expecting them. On the corner of Market Square [today SNP Square – Namestie Slovenskeho Narodneho Povstanie (Slovak National Uprising Square)] various debutantes lined up. My father, as the head of the bank was likewise among these. I was in the eighth grade. Father said he would take me to see the King up close. Rabbi Funk – unfortunately, I don't have my photos anymore, because after World War II, all of my things disappeared – everything and everyone was there, and Rabbi Funk blessed them. They [the royal couple] were sitting in a horse-drawn carriage.

My younger sister [Alzbeta Dukeszova, nee Vidor] was born in 1917 in Bratislava. I was seven years old when she came into the world. There is seven years between us, which is a big difference, and I always wanted revenge, because she was the baby, she was everything. I wasn't. I was jealous of my sister. My mother's sister came to visit. She found me sitting on the ground at the gate, with a lot of toys around me. 'How come you're here?' I said, 'I'm leaving this house, waiting for the bad people to come to take me away. I'm not staying in a house where they constantly hug and kiss such an ugly black baby.'

In spite of the fact that I was jealous of my little sister in the beginning, since everybody paid attention to her, we ended up having a really good relationship. After my sister finished her studies, she worked for a while in the cultural field at the Nova publishing company. It was a Hungarian publisher.



She married in 1938, in a Jewish ceremony, of course. The young couple lived in Nitra. First an apothecary from Roznava courted my sister. Roznava became Hungarian after the First Vienna Award [10](#). The apothecary went home, but soon came back to us, because he was drafted – there was a general enlistment here and there – and he didn't want to serve as a Hungarian soldier, he wanted to go to Palestine. He wanted to marry my sister, and then she would follow him.

My parents objected – though he was a very nice, decent young man – saying that once he had already found a position in Palestine, and everything worked out, then he should come back for my sister. That suitor had a friend named Stefan Dukesz who had been courting a Catholic girl for a long time. When it came out that they weren't allowed to touch each other [see Jewish Codex] [11](#), Dukesz was left without the Catholic girl, because they didn't dare get together.

My sister and Stefan consoled each other. They consoled each other until they got married themselves. They were lucky, because their marriage was one of the most beautiful and best marriages I've ever known. Unfortunately, neither of them is still alive.

My younger sister had a daughter [Zuzana] and a son [Pavel]. The daughter was born during the war, while she was fleeing, which isn't an everyday occurrence. My sister pushed the one-year-old baby's bed over to the neighbor lady, who was a Christian teacher, and was raising four of her own children.

My sister went up to the mountains with her husband. They weren't deported, but lived up in the mountains. When the war ended, and they came out of the terrible conditions in the mountains, completely broken from the cold, they searched for their daughter. The little girl was nowhere to be found.

The teacher had been forced to give her to an orphanage, because the neighbors had threatened, that when the war was over, they would say the baby was fathered by a German. The orphanage had been emptied. A peasant couple came, who had no children, and they had given the girl to them.

It took a while before they found her. That was my sister's daughter, whom we buried six weeks ago. My sister's son is living in the Slovakian Komarno, and is an agricultural engineer. He has two children.

After the war, my sister and her family returned to Bratislava, and then they were driven into the eastern part of Czechoslovakia. My brother in law, of Slovak nationality, was an attorney, but didn't finish his studies, but with a family, he had to live somehow. They placed him in the Hungarian region, in the little town of Hurbanovo.

He got an apartment there. Next to Hurbanovo is Bajc. In Bajc, one of the biggest Czechoslovakian state farms was founded. My brother in law wasn't a party member. He worked as a tradesman, in a vice director's post.

My sister was employed as foreign department director at Cedok [The largest travel office, whose headquarters was founded in Prague in 1920. The name is an abbreviation of Ceskoslovenska Dopravni Kancelar or 'Czechoslovakian Travel Office']. They lived in Hurbanovo until their retirement.

My sister and her husband didn't keep anything [Jewish traditions]. If I recall correctly, Judaism wasn't talked about at all in our house, but as I understand it, my brother-in-law considered himself a good Jew. But just from the ethnic point of view. They didn't teach their children anything. The son and the daughter both live in mixed marriages. My daughter also. The whole family is full of them.

Bratislava, built in the style of Budapest, was explicitly rural, a city of about sixty thousand residents. Due to its favorable geographical position, there was a lively, cultural life here. The artists who traveled from Vienna to Pest as guest performers, I mean any great artist, even Caruso [Enrique Caruso (1887-1947): Italian opera singer, (tenor), Member of the Metropolitan Opera from 1903-1920], performed here one night for sure.

Primarily, when Czechoslovakia was already created, and they built the Reduta Theater. They started building the Reduta in 1914 and finished in 1919. Because of the war, they had only got to the first floor, then they finished it, and there the modern Philharmonic was formed, the great hall. I think it's the most beautiful, biggest hall in the city, at that time it was, too.

The residents have always been ten percent Jewish in Bratislava. That's thanks to the yeshivah also, which was really the most famous in Central Europe. Chatam Sofer himself founded it. Later, still during the Czechoslovakian period, he made an even greater reputation for himself all over - very, very many people came from other countries to study here.

After World War I, when a lot of people moved to Bratislava - the birth rate was high, and they drove many people here - the city had 130,000 residents, 15,000 of them were Jewish. In 1946, there were 3500. In 2004, today, there are 2800 in the country.

[According to the census taken in the 1930s in Slovakia, there were 137,737 residents of Jewish religion, among those 44,019 (32 percent) considered themselves 'Czechoslovakian' nationals; 9,945 (7 percent), as German nationals and 65,385 (48 percent) considered themselves of Jewish nationality.

After the First Vienna Decision, about 90,000 Jews were left in Slovakian territory.] In the city of Bratislava, it's not possible to know exactly, but about 600 were living here. Bratislava, Kosice and Presov were among the biggest Jewish settlements. In smaller rural towns, in villages, hardly any Jews lived there.

On the castle road there was a very, very old but extraordinarily valuable Orthodox synagogue. It was large. Unfortunately, they tore it down immediately after the war, because it was sinking. It stood on the steep part which leads up to the castle. Really, many times the waves of the Danube washed it.

Ours, the Neolog synagogue was on Fish Square. It is the only eastern style building in the city of Bratislava, built in the style of the Moors. The temple was very-very pretty. Around the major holidays, the New Year, the Day of Atonement [Yom Kippur], it was naturally fully packed. In fact, that's why they sold tickets for seats, good for the whole year. The temple had to be kept up financially.

There was always a guard in front of the temple on the high holidays. His job was to check the tickets. I always had to show my number - the tickets didn't have names, just numbers. I'll allow



myself to tell you a joke, which was a big thing then. During the Long Day [Yom Kippur] there's a 25-hour fast, and they pray all day.

Of course, there are breaks, and they used these breaks in the Orthodox temple, like we did in the Neolog temple, for the community to visit each other. Now, a male guest came from the Orthodox temple and wanted to get in. The guard said, 'Show me your ticket.' 'But I haven't got a ticket, I'm just here for a visit, because my aunt is sitting inside.' The guard said, 'You watch yourself! It looks like you came to pray, not to visit.'

We had a fantastic rabbi, he was a modern rabbi. His name was Dr. Funk. He spoke exquisitely, so that whether a person wanted or not, his devotion really got you. We, young girls, were in temple almost all day long, because he spoke very nicely. The rabbi spoke in German, though the greater part of the participants' general form of speech was Hungarian.

There was an organ in the temple here. Our cantor was a fantastic tenor, in addition to him was the chorus, so really a person didn't go to temple because they had to, but because we had a good time here. The eastern songs were truly very pretty, the chorus and the cantor also sang beautifully.

Since this was in such opposition to the Orthodox rules and the way to respect God in the Orthodox synagogue, the Orthodox said about the Neologs, that they were worse than the Catholics. We had an organ, which wasn't allowed, and something else - we usually went in shoes, and not in slippers.

It's true that we got dressed up, we never went in some I don't know, cut out skirt. If the Orthodox women have a wig on, that's good, if they don't, then they cover their head. In the beginning this was the case with Neologs as well, but we girls didn't have to. Later this practice gained a lot of supporters, and women had to observe this custom as well.

In the year 1923 they built a synagogue in Hejdukova Street. It may have been small, but at least it was a synagogue. The smaller prayer halls, I don't know their exact number, but there were a few, were mainly Orthodox. Each synagogue had to have two rooms. One was for men, the other was for women.

There was also one in Kapucinska Street. I can't remember it exactly now, I never went there. When ours [Rybne Namestie] still stood, I attended there, but after the war it wasn't there anymore.

They used our temple on Fish Square [Rybne Namestie] as a warehouse during the war. After the war, since the Germans had smashed it up, we put it back together from donations. We didn't have to rebuild it, just fix it up. There was a big entrance hall.

They placed about 25 centimeter little plaques on the walls, those who bought them and had them made, for the people whose relations didn't come back [from deportation]. One cost 2000 koruna. That 2000 koruna was the equivalent of 20,000 today. [In 2004, 100 koruna = about 3,5 USD] I bought one in memory of my parents.

They renovated the whole temple very, very nicely. When it was finished in 1946, they consecrated it. The cultural minister at the time, Novomesky [12](#) was there. We had a rabbi then. Doctor Frieder was his name. We had a rabbi, a cantor and a chorus.

I don't remember our cantor, unfortunately, because he was new. He was young. The first cantor left. Novomesky made his beautiful speech. I think he was a very decent person, writer and poet, that's why they liked him.

Unfortunately, an unforgivable thing happened. In 1972, they made a plan for a new bridge. According to the plan, the synagogue was in the way of the bridge, so they decided to tear it down. At that time, the community had no influence at all.

The few older Jews who had lived through the Holocaust, were not leader personalities. So they couldn't save the synagogue, and it was torn down. The doubly sad thing about it is that even today it could be standing, because since then the place has been empty.

There was a mikveh in Bratislava. On Klariska Street, as you go up, there was a bath there, and a mikveh as well. Of course, they didn't renovate it after the war either, but built a new one. Over where the Chez David restaurant is.

[This is the only Jewish restaurant which opened in all of Slovakia for decades. Originally intended to be a kosher restaurant, due to lack of interest, they no longer keep a kosher kitchen.] I was there for the opening. Now they've closed it down again, because nobody uses it, except the rabbi's wife.

Today, everybody has a bathroom, and it's a normal thing nowadays, but it wasn't like that back then. As it happened, my grandparents didn't have a bathroom inside, when they lived on Michalska Street. In fact, the toilet was outside also. That's what apartments were like then. So for that mikveh, I think, there was still a need then. Today there isn't.

In the center of town, the businesses were 70 percent Jewish. The main reason for that was: my grandparents' contemporaries weren't allowed to go to university, they weren't allowed to study. Farther out, outside the center, there weren't many Jewish businesses.

During the time of my youth there were many Jewish lawyers in Bratislava. They also built a Jewish hospital during that time, in Sulekova Street. They employed only Jewish doctors, not only from Bratislava of course, most of them came from the countryside.

This hospital was first-class, especially the maternity ward, but also the other wards. It was so good, that when it was nationalized [see Nationalization in Czechoslovakia] [13](#), they evaluated it as the best in the whole city.

We went to different markets to shop. There was one where the old market-hall is now, on SNP [Slovak National Uprising] Square. In the old market-hall you could get everything. They sold fowl on the first floor. The goose-women were all Jewish, and many came from Dunajska Streda, from Galanta.

We naturally cooked with goose-fat – many cooked with goose-fat – my mother bought geese quite often from one certain goose-lady whose name was Mrs. Dressler. I think she was from Bratislava and always trustable. If the lady said, this one's got a big liver, then that goose had a big liver.

There were stands in front of the market-hall, shacks, and they sold the nicest fruits and vegetables there. There was a separate vegetable market, across from the Manderlak building on

that square. [Editor's note: After WWII the Manderlak was the highest building in Bratislava, referred to by old Bratislava inhabitants as skyscraper.]

Bulgarians sold their wares here, too. [Bulgarian gardeners occupied a significant part of the vegetable produce market around Europe. The Bulgarian gardener migration started around the turn of the 18th and 19th centuries. They entered Slovakian territory at the end of the 19th century.

In the interwar period (1935) there were an estimated 320 Bulgarian gardeners in Slovakia, most found around Kosice and Bratislava.] They were in Ligetfalu [today Petržalka]. The Bratislava peach was famous, the Ligetfalu ones were perfect. You would order what you needed from these Bulgarians and they delivered it to your house. Naturally, there weren't worms then, and you made preserves at home. They sold great vegetables; you could get the best green peppers here.

The Ligetfalu potato was famous. You had to order them. You ordered fifty or a hundred kilos for the winter and put them in the cellar. They [the sellers] sat on the ground with their green peppers, spread out around them, shiny and everything. Peppers were put out cut up and stuffed too, and for stew, you needed a lot of them. So now they did the following: Mother started loading up, and when she had a load, he could only say in Slovak 'dost' ['enough'].

Mother would ask, 'how much is that', and he said one koruna. So Mother would keep loading, and he would say 'dost' ['enough!' in Slovak]. Two crowns, she got two crowns' worth. With the carrots, and with parsley, they didn't weigh it; they just bought and sold it by eye. That was at the end of the 1920s, beginning of the 1930s.

There was a fish market on Fish Square. You went there to buy fish. The Danube carp, well those were fabulous. The continuation of Fish Square was called Zuckermandel [The base of the Bratislava castle, today is an agglomeration of the oldest parts.

Here on the so-called Schlossgrund Street – today Jewish Street – was where the Jewish community resettled in 1599, and a free-standing settlement developed here. The settlement gates were closed every night. This continued until 1850, when it was joined to the city.

The south side of the settlement went along the Danube beneath the castle, and the Zuckermandel area, which probably began to be called like that in the 18th century, formed a central axis. The oldest street in Zuckermandel is the Hauptstrasse [High Street] which was renamed Maria Theresia Street after 1879.

Today, we can only follow it theoretically beside a fragment of Ziskova Street to the west, its eastern side was swallowed up by a wide parking lot beside the renovated walls of the old water tower.

The other parts have completely disappeared during the earthworks required for construction of the new bridge.] It usually was my mother who did the shopping, but not just with us. She always took a long time. We lived dead close to the market. The market was the promenade for housewives.

The housewives showed up there, the gossip started, small-talk, that's why they always liked to go to the market. When I didn't have school and I was still a young schoolgirl, I loved to go there. I

remember, we took big market bags.

We always had a maid, it was natural. They usually came from the Csallokoz [First Czechoslovak Republic], only knew Hungarian and were glad to get a chance to come to the city. Our maids were like members of the family. They all lived with us, but they ate separately. The last girl who was with us incidentally wasn't from Csallokoz, but from Zahorie, she was a Zahoracka ['a Zahorie girl' – Zahorie is a territory whose borders are defined by the Lower Carpathians, White Carpathians and the Morva River in Slovakia.]

She was an exquisite creature. She married here in Bratislava. Maria Sevcikova was her married name. She was an intelligent creature. She cooked, cleaned and aside from that, she was in charge of taking care of me.

If Mother went out in the afternoon, or wasn't home, then she watched me, to see that I studied and practiced for an hour on the piano. Of course, she only listened in, she didn't know I wasn't practicing. I put the book I was reading into the score holder, and played scales while I read, because I didn't have to concentrate to play them.

So, she was in charge of that. I really really loved her, and she loved us, too. She came from the town of Velke Levaré. When she wanted to, she could take time off and visit her parents. Here in Bratislava she had a serious relationship, and my mother was even planning their wedding. Then she moved away. So we didn't have a maid, just a cleaning lady.

Maria and her husband lived a little farther out. They had an apartment and during the war, she hid my mother three times in 1942. When I came back from the camp, in June of 1945 it was my birthday: my first birthday, when my parents were no longer living, or any of our family for that matter.

Suddenly, our Mari [Maria] appeared at our house. She brought a dish of cherry strudel and said, 'You haven't got a mother, but this is your favorite, your mother always made it for you, so I'm bringing you cherry strudel in her place.' I was terribly happy of course, and I cried, and I said 'thank you very much, you are an angelic person.'

While she was alive, she often came over to visit us, a girlfriend relationship formed between us. After the war, when I was married again, and my daughter was born – this was during the deepest time of Communism – I was notified that the daughter of our Mari got promoted, she had become a doctor.

I told my husband, who didn't know her, that we had to go to this promotion. My daughter says to that – could she have been twelve at the time? – she looked at me with horribly terrified eyes, 'Mommy, we had a maid? My God, we were capitalists?!' I had to explain to her that it didn't have anything to do with capitalism – of course, I didn't explain it exactly like it was, but she understood and then everything was all right – that these poor country girls were glad that they could come to the city and get a wage, a room and full board.

If I recall correctly, there were two kindergartens in the whole city. The kindergartens were free, but those who went there were those who weren't well off, because the kids got board there. I was never in a kindergarten, not me, not my sister, and none of the children of my friends.

Not just my Jewish friends, nobody's kids went. If I remember correctly, there was a private kindergarten where they only kept the children in the mornings for two or three hours. They put their kids there, if mothers, siblings, or grandmothers had to go somewhere they couldn't take the kids along. Aside from that, there was no permanent daycare. The maid, who was always at home, looked after me.

Anyway, they had them in a lot of families, like we did, a Fraulein [governess], who came to our house, so we could learn German. My mother's younger sister, whose husband died in World War I, had a son. My parents took in this cousin of mine, whose name was Istvan Klein. Istvan was two years older than me.

We both had a Fraulein who quit a short time later because she couldn't take us. We always did what we weren't supposed to. We weren't very good children, and we never listened, and that's why after a short year, she couldn't stand it, and left. So we didn't learn too much German from her. On the other hand, she learned a lot of Hungarian from us. Here in Bratislava, you didn't have to study extra German, because it was so infectious, since half the city spoke German. That's how we learned it. We went to German classes, to learn the orthography because that we didn't know.

## Going to school

I went to a Neolog grammar school on what is Zochova Street today. There was an Orthodox grammar school, a Neolog grammar school, and there was a Civil School [14](#) for boys, across from us. Naturally girls also went to school. We wore sailor suits.

The boys wore pants, and we put on skirts. I had a sailor suit regularly up until I was fifteen; I always got it from my grandfather. In secondary school, we weren't allowed to go to school together - the boys and the girls had to go to different schools.

I finished my first year of grammar school during World War I. There was no school on Saturdays, but we had to go on Sundays. There was a small prayer house there. On Saturdays - I don't know anymore if we had to go or we just went if we wanted to - I don't think we had to, but we went every Saturday morning.

The first grammar school started classes at 9am not 8am and only lasted three hours. Only the first grade had women teachers. The upper grades were taught by male teachers, whom we of course didn't call sir or comrade, but Mister Teacher or Miss Teacher. They somehow got more respect from us that way, than in modern times.

After that, I went to the Lutheran lyceum [Interwar Czechoslovakian school system], which was, at that time, the best secondary school. Those who were preparing for Lutheran or protestant priesthood went there. I had classmates who really became Protestant ministers.

It was a first-class school. It was the so-called 'conservative' high school, because aside from Latin, we learned Greek, too. I believe the teachers chose the area of study for most of the students, if they didn't show special aptitudes. If you liked a teacher, whatever he taught was your favorite subject.

This happened to me twice. The homeroom teacher, who taught us Latin, was a disgusting guy. My grades weren't bad in Latin, but I didn't like him. But I had a cute, sweet teacher for Greek. I got a one in Greek. [In the pre-war educational system, one was the best and five meant failure. This system is still used today in Slovakia.] I loved it so much, that today I can still read it, and write it.

However, Greek wasn't my favorite subject. History was. We had an excellent, first-rate teacher. In this period, which isn't a good period, 14-15-16 years old, we listened with gaping mouths in complete silence. Though the French Revolution wasn't all that interesting to us. But we knew exactly that we were learning to please him, because we really liked him and he was so kind.

History probably left a little deeper impression on me, but after the war, I didn't really have time for it, because I had a job. But I always read profusely everything connected to history, and for many decades I've been interested in history, most recently in the history of the city of Bratislava. I also loved geography, because I was taught by an excellent teacher.

When I was still going to grammar school, naturally, we were taught to read Hebrew, not to write. I can still read Hebrew, though not well, and naturally, we learned religion, too. When I was going to the Lutheran school, the Lutherans' religion classes were very good [because the Catholics and Jews didn't have classes.]

We went sleighing with the Catholics in the winter, they always had a sleigh hidden somewhere for when that class took place. If the Catholics had their religion class during the day, then we [the Jews] went sleighing with the Evangelists, because we didn't have class, because there was only one teacher who could teach us in the afternoon, but none of us went in the afternoon, because it wasn't obligatory. However, in our report cards, one of the subjects was religion. Since nobody went, we automatically got a one, the best grade.

I never felt anti-Semitism when I went to the Lutheran lyceum after grammar school. The Lutheran church had quite good relations with the Jewish religious community. The teachers were all Lutherans. The class I was in, there were thirty-four of us, about thirty were boys, and at the beginning we were four girls, later only three. I was the only Jew among us girls, but in the other classes, there was only one. There were only four of us in the whole school, one of us had just graduated.

Among the boys, there were two Jews. We were totally good friends. They called me Vidor, and my friend who sat next to me was called Videsz, so they always called us out together. We were so close, that we did our homework together. She would come over to our house, spend the night, I went to their house, and I slept over.

One Sunday she says: 'Mass is at noon, and I'm going to the cathedral. Are you coming?' I said, 'Why are you going there?' 'Well, I'm going to mass.' 'Mass? What for?' 'Because I'm Catholic.' I had no idea what religion she was. I went with her to the cathedral. I asked her, 'Do you know that I'm Jewish?' 'What does that mean, what's that?' I said, 'Well, nothing. Just so you know.'

In fall, we'll have a holiday, I'll take you to the synagogue.' Well, of course, she came with me. This wasn't a single incident I'm telling you about, a lot of things like this happened.

I did sports, too, and I didn't know who was Jewish, and who wasn't, what their religion was, nor even their nationality. Here in Bratislava, we spoke three languages, or rather two, we only learned



Slovak a lot later. But there weren't even Slovaks, a lot of first-rate athletes came from the Czech Republic.

The Bratislava tennis champion, Nedbalek was Czech. The Czechs were better skiers, so we were average with them, but here it never happened that they would judge you for religion. I never ever felt that, and I have to say, that I never heard about anti-Semitism at home.

I had a lot of friends who weren't Jewish, because I did sports – tennis, swimming – and it was natural. Mainly, we got together with everyone in skiing, so I was in an absolutely mixed social group. The Grossling swimming pool was built in 1908. I was five years old, when my mother told me that five-year-olds have to learn how to swim. She took me to the Grossling, instruction was cheap then, I learned, spring came, then summer, and we went to the Danube pool.

In the Danube pool, there were significantly fewer Jews. Princess Odescalchi was there every blessed day. The Odescalchis live here in Bratislava then. This was already in Czechoslovakia, but they stayed here. The Esterhazys, and a few of the Palffys also stayed here. A few of the Abonyis, too.

This Princess Odescalchi appeared everyday from ten to twelve. The water in the Danube [pool] was cold, but we regulars at the Danube got used to it. We sat around at the edge of the pool, on the steps where you had to get in, we soaked our legs.

This Odescalchi princess showed up ten minutes after ten every God-given day. Naturally, not in a short sleeve, or sleeveless swim suit, she rather wore an elbow-length blouse, and here pants came down below her knees. Dressed in this manteau [sic], she got into the water, went up and back twice, got out and then said to us in German: 'So jetzt konnt ihr gehen' [German – 'now you all can go']. I suppose there were really more non-Jewish women than Jewish ones. But almost every day my mother came, it was a natural thing, to get together with everyone.

I also had piano lessons, I really didn't like them, for sure, not practicing. But I went, I practiced because it was important to know how to play the piano. The girls from so-called good families attended everything.

When I married, and we settled in, the first thing I did was sell the piano, and I haven't sat at a piano since then. I don't know now how old I was, 15 or 16, when my parents said, now I have to learn a foreign language – aside from Slovak, German and Hungarian, which didn't count as foreign languages. Then everybody was learning French. The language of diplomacy was French. They sent me to sign up at a language school.

The language school was on Hviezdoslavovo Square then. The classrooms were off of a pretty long hallway, they were just rooms, because not too many took one course, a maximum of six or eight. There was a list for Italian, for English, naturally for German and French.

I look around, thinking, 'where's the French,' and I simply couldn't get to it. There were so many people standing in front of the doorway. I check, and everyone is waiting for the French, to get in and sign up for it. I went on, the next one was English. Nobody was standing there, I knocked and went in. They greeted me very nicely, and I signed up.

I was the exception, because I took English. I immediately went to my girlfriend at the time, who was a Christian. I only had Christian girlfriends. (Six of us are still friends today, I'm the only Jew.) We convinced her mother that it would be much better if she studied English.

We showed up, and there were only two of us in English class all day. We had a very darling teacher. She'd lived in Bratislava for two years, and didn't know a word of anything except English. From the start, she only spoke English with us. I can truly say, that after two terms we could make ourselves understood, but we kept on with it. I stopped going after two years, but I still read a lot [in English].

After school, I got a position in the Klinger factory, in the foreign department. It was an Austrian factory, which was quite a large plant here in Bratislava, where 220 employees worked. Here in Bratislava, they produced two things, garden hoses and straps.

A lot of English knowledge was required, since the products were primarily exported to India. The entire correspondence was in English. My boss was a Czech from Prague, who spoke English like he spoke Czech. If I hadn't known English, he wouldn't have let me work for him. I had to type his English letters as fast as he dictated them. I really had to know English.

My younger sister went to the same grammar school I did, then got into the lyceum, but didn't stay there. She changed to the School of Commerce. She graduated there. My sister is a completely different type than I. First of all, she was much prettier than I was.

Second, she was an incredible housewife. I wasn't. She did beautiful needlework, baked brilliantly, so she paid attention to these kinds of typically female things. She was excellent in every area that I wasn't. I could never knit or hook-knit properly. I knew how, because I learned how, but it wasn't one of my favorite occupations. My sister, however, while she was living, would watch TV, meanwhile her two hands were moving, because she was knitting. Sports, no. She wasn't so good. But she knew languages, too.

There were about thirty tea-party associations in Bratislava, which were concerned with organizing get-togethers. They arranged a lot of cultural events. I want to mention here something about the ball season. The dress ball season, when carnival time started, that was a really, really big thing.

They organized a Jewish Ball, called the Menza Ball. I only went to the Menza Ball two times in my life, but I can't say why only two times. I was there two times in two years. It was very beautiful, a very elegant ball. It was a perfectly natural thing that the mayor was there, too.

Dr. Vavro Srobar [15](#), from one of the ministries in Prague, was in charge of Slovakia. He didn't come himself to the ball, but always sent a cultural personality. There were lawyers who brought their Christian lawyer friends. So there were Christians at these very elegant and very successful Menza Balls.

I don't know how many, but they were there. When there was a Lawyer's Ball, for sure at least a quarter of them were Jewish. Then they held a Doctor's Ball, naturally there were Jews there as well. Which was what carnival was about: we celebrated carnival together.

My parents also socialized. My father was a member of the Economics Club. He went there to play cards; they took me there on dance nights. My mother's circle of friends were all Jewish ladies. We

had the best possible relations with the non-Jewish neighbors, there was never a misunderstanding or anything, absolute civility reigned on the whole street. But the kind of friendship where they might visit each other...there wasn't. Their friends were all Jewish, and something else – not Orthodox.

Since my father's cousins also lived in Bratislava, we were often at their house. My father's oldest cousin was a city representative. While I lived at home, as I think back on it, they never had an argument, they completely agreed with each other regarding politics.

Between the two wars, you didn't feel any anti-Semitism. My parents didn't feel any anti-Semitism either, though there was a certain amount of segregation around. This segregation came from the Jewish side, not the Christian side.

My father often met Christians and was friends with them. They would meet on the street, for example. There were a lot of members of the Economist Club, doctors and all kinds with whom he played cards, but visiting each other somehow didn't work out.

Today, it seems to me that this certain segregation came from the Jewish side. Later this stopped. My parents were athletic. We often went swimming together. Here, too, I noticed something. My mother was an absolute exception. That generation didn't go swimming regularly.

They let us do anything on Saturday and holidays [that is, the family didn't keep Sabbath]. If the weather was nice, we went on excursions. We went out to Devin to the Morva [Morava] river. Devin was our favorite place.

They would go out by boat to Devin, at that time it was terribly cheap. It cost one koruna. They had a great beach, a sandy beach. Naturally, we went up to the ruins, to the castle. Then we visited the Mountain Park, the Sandberg [excursion places in the vicinity of Bratislava], the Lower Carpathians are full of tourist places. We traveled a little ways by train, then went on foot. We toured seriously.

What did the families do on summer evenings? We didn't have TV, and not even radio until 1928. It was natural to walk down to the banks of the Danube after dinner in the summertime. On the corner of Fisherman's gate [Rybna brana] and present-day Sturova Street, where they've just begun restoring a few ballrooms, there was the Kern tavern with a very pretty terrace.

The walk generally ended with dad sitting down for a beer, and I would get a 'krochedli' or an ice cream. I should explain what a krochedli is. It was raspberry syrup, which you had to drink around a little ball in it. If you pushed the little ball, then it made a 'grrr' sound. So we went there. We walked every day in the summer.

We would sit down somewhere just occasionally. But on the bank, it was so comfortable, to walk all the way there, where today the PKO [Park kultury a oddychu – Culture and Rest Park] is. The Devin bank was nicely built up, with a lot of flower gardens. The Devin Hotel didn't yet exist then.

There were old houses standing there, you could see the Palfy Palace from the corner. There were these cute one-floor palaces there. Of course, the city looked totally different then, we shouldn't forget that Bratislava wasn't such a large city at that time.

Summer vacation was fifty to sixty percent similar everywhere. Families did the same things. There were three kinds of summer vacation. The first was to stay at home. You went to the Danube pool to swim or to the beach, to the Lido. A person bought a season ticket there.

The season ticket down on the Danube bank was good for the pools and cabins up top, and the square tents down at the bank – a person, for one season, could rent one of these, and then you stayed there. You took your foldable chair, and lived there. In nice weather, you went there whenever you had the chance.

That was one of the forms of vacation, the most common form. The other form was to go for two weeks into the Tatras [mountains]. By the way, you didn't even go to the High Tatras, just the Low Tatras. For example, we went to Korytnica, I knew the Ruzomberok well. A person went to Ruzomberok, and that was much different than Bratislava. And the third possibility – actually, I should have said it second – because we often went down to the Balaton [Lake].

I preferred most to go to the Balaton for the summer. It was very pretty, and good, and clean. I have a lot of photos. We really really loved to go to the Balaton. I was there many times, I couldn't say how many. There was a good train connection to the Balaton.

You didn't even have to transfer, we could take this train to Boglar or Fonyod [Balaton lakeside villages]. Of course, not to Siofok because it was significantly cheaper to get off in Boglar. The Czech [Czechoslovak] crown was very strong then. In Czechoslovakia, we lived in a better economic situation, than they did in Hungary then.

They called my mother 'her madam szokolos' there, where we stayed – there was always a certain room we rented, which you paid for in hard currency. The Czech koruna was called 'szokol' in Hungary. I don't know of anyone of my parents' acquaintances who might have gone to the seaside for vacation.

They went to the Tatras, and also close-by, they would go to Karlsbad [16](#) for health cures. Those who had lung problems went to Meran [Merano, Italy, a resort town in South Tirol, visited as a climatic health resort for its mild, temperate climate. The cool surrounding area served as a summer resort.] The big trips abroad cost serious money, and weren't usual.

I don't know the exact date that I sat on a train in my life, I only remember where we were going. My father's only female cousin lived in Velky Meder, she had two daughters of her own. I was still in elementary school when we took a trip down there. I'd like to tell you one funny thing about automobiles.

This happened once, and it's characteristic of the time. Men usually came home from work for lunch. I was a student up in Palisady [a district of Bratislava], and I lived quite far from there. They told me at home, that I had to cross the middle of town – Michalska Street, the main square, and the section in front of the theater – to come home.

Once they cancelled a class, so I started on my way home a bit earlier than usual. Of course, because they had forbidden it, I went by way of Market Square, around the place where Manderlak stands today, and I came upon my father, who had just left the bank to have lunch.

He stopped and I nearly sunk into the ground with shame that we met here. Then my father said, 'You know that I don't like you to come this way, but you don't know how dangerous it is. Last week, I saw an automobile come by here.'

We never kept the Sabbath. My grandparents didn't either. Just the New Year and Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement. We didn't have seder at Passover. But a couple times, when I was a child, my father took me to a seder evening organized by the religious community.

That was the maximum, and that was just so I could see it and hear it. We bought matzah, but we ate it along with bread. Passover was a nice holiday, like the others. Everybody cooked really good things at Pesach, for example our acquaintances who knew we didn't have it [that is, didn't celebrate Pesach] made fabulous cakes out of matzah.

To this day I always have matzot at Easter, and we make dumplings out of it. The only one who likes them is my son-in-law, who isn't a Jew. We didn't keep a kosher household. We partook of the best of everything living.

We only fasted for the Day of Atonement. Everybody did, even me. I'd like to say something about fasting. After the war, when I remarried, I went with my husband to Switzerland in 1947- he was officially in Switzerland, so I could go with him. It was the first time I was in the so-called West, and it was Yom Kippur.

I told my husband, 'Let's go eat something nice today, because I'm going to fast until tomorrow night.' I had already found out where the temple was. This was in Geneva. He said to me, 'Let's go have dinner, you already fasted enough for a lifetime in the Lager [camp].' I didn't leave it at that, I fasted.

I didn't eat breakfast, but when my stomach started to fight, I had lunch. It didn't take more than two hours - the first time in my life, and I hope the last - I got such a colic [stomach cramp] that the little money we had, we were forced to spend it on a doctor so he would give me an injection for expensive Swiss francs. I'm convinced to this day, that was God's way of punishing me for eating. After that, I always fasted. In my seventies, I only fasted a half day, now I don't fast anymore.

My parents didn't go to the temple for New Year or Yom Kippur, but they went when there was a holiday to pray for the dead. [The last day of Pesach, the second day of Shavuot, during Semini Aceret and for Yom Kippur there is a maskir, or memorial for the dead]. I do that, too. I go to the synagogue here when there is a maskir.

My parents were believers. Not [regarding] what was proper for religion, but what was proper for the good Lord [sic]. I never came across religion and traditions, that kind of thing. I never heard about a bat mitzvah, only when I was already an adult. I definitely got a certain faith from home, and this faith has stayed in me to this day.

This was how it was for my parents, also, which was intensified in me. At my old age, now that I have quite a lot of problems to struggle with, the only good feeling I have is that I'm Jewish. I wouldn't want to be anything else.

Now, we always celebrate Christmas. I came home once in my childhood saying all the girls were talking about Christmas trees, and I realized that I was the only one without one. So my father went to the confectioner's, bought an artificial Christmas tree, not big, but we decorated it with candies and put it in the dining room. It was Channukah at the same time. We naturally lit Chanukkah candles, while my father said a prayer. Since it coincided with the twenty-fourth we lit a candle on the tree as well.

The tree fell over, and caught fire. My mother had the wits about her to throw a huge tablecloth over the burning tree. The fire didn't last for more than two or three minutes, and then everything was okay. My mother said, 'This will never happen again, the good Lord told us with his threatening finger not to light candles on a Christmas tree at Channukah.'

After that, we really never did that again. I never had another Christmas tree, except now, but none prettier. For my part, I really like it, I like the Christmas holiday. It somehow seems that a whole lot of horribly bad people are a little nicer at Christmas.

After school, first I was at an insurance company, but only for a short time. Where I worked for the longest time was in the Klinger factory [founded by Heinrich Klinger, who exploited the general surplus of workers due to the vineyard blight. Production was directed toward fabrication of impregnated (water-resistant) materials which were primarily of interest to the army and navy. To supply the growing demand, Klinger built industrial works in Liptovsky Mikulas and outside of Slovakia, one of which ensured housing for its employees.

This began the construction of family houses in the area. The factory's production stopped after 1945.] One of my uncles was a member of the board of directors, and he brought me in. We worked a lot. We worked on Saturdays back then. It was a very good school [learning experience]. Everything happened in German. Because I had gone to a gymnasium [preparatory high school] and not the School of Commerce, I couldn't take shorthand.

I learned that, and picked it up very fast, they were very pleased with me, I just couldn't read it. There was an older colleague, and she read my own shorthand to me. I was there for years, all the way up until they threw me out. Germans took over the factory, and kicked out some of us for being Jewish. The head engineer was Jewish, one of the directors was, too. I was thrown out near the end, because I was employed in the export department, and the Germans needed my English knowledge, too.

Somehow, between the wars political talk was minimal. The politicians were political and the residents weren't. The residents were aware of what was going on. Altogether, ten percent of the newspapers were about politics, the rest was advertising, and they had short stories, literary works. It was a totally different life then. I presume and I believe I'm not mistaken in this, that my father's thinking was based a little in the socdem [social democratic] direction. Maybe it isn't the result of that, but when I concerned myself a bit more with it, I was most sympathetic to that solution.

I never took part in any political activities. Politics was a completely unfamiliar thing to young people. We didn't even know the [prime] minister's name. We weren't political, we didn't know about it. There were some, three or four years older than me, who were already Communists. That also happened. I remember that, once, twice, three times I was with a young communist man, and



of course, he was very convincing because I didn't understand the whole thing.

I started repeating these things at home, not like they were my own thoughts, but because I liked these things. My father was terribly against it, he really didn't like it. He said, 'I ask you kindly, to leave those Leninist things alone. Forget them, they're very unpleasant things. We need not speak of them.'

He really dissuaded me from those ideas. I came across them again, here and there, but it was really a movement, like Zionism was for the Jews. I wasn't a Zionist, either. I wasn't a part of any movement.

It's true, I played tennis in Maccabi and went for light athletics. [see Maccabi Sports Club in the Czech Republic] [17](#) I swam in the [SK] Bar Kochba [18](#) but I had more friends that were not Jewish, than Jewish ones. I was a 'Czechoslovak' until the beginning of 1938.

My social circle was always comfortable. Of course, there were a few mixed marriages, too. All the way up to 1939, it was such a natural thing. Naturally, the sadhen was at my friends house, sometimes, we would even look for, let's say, some girl who had a big dowry. But those who had the big dowry, wanted a groom who had some title, at least an engineer or doctorate degree, a lawyer or a doctor.

There were a few of them, naturally, but not in my circle of friends, since the greater part of them weren't Jewish. Sports brought us together. It didn't matter if I competed for the Maccabi team, if there were a lot in the Slovak sport clubs [that is, the non-Jewish sport clubs], we mutually competed.

## During the war

In 1933, Hitler came to power in Germany [Hitler became chancellor then]. Up to this point, we had no idea what anti-Semitism was about, we'd never heard about it, not many even knew [what] it [was]. When they passed the Jewish laws in Germany, it's horrible to say what they did there.

The first [German] Jewish emigres fled to the Czech Republic, not to us. For us, the year 1938 was terrible. After Masaryk stepped down, we didn't believe in Benes [19](#) as much; Benes was such a Czech that he wasn't even on good terms with the Slovaks, so surely not with the Hungarians. He never did anything good for the Jews, so they didn't really believe in him.

After 1936, a sort of phantom appeared, there was a feeling among Jews, that Masaryk is gone, so now what will happen. This thing continued until 12th March 1938, when Hitler took Austria [see Anschluss] [20](#), and the first emigres from Vienna and Austria arrived, and they told us a lot.

At first, we didn't want to believe it, namely, that on the first day such things happened in Vienna, like that the Jews were made to scrub what's now the Judenplatz with toothbrushes. So we didn't believe that, didn't think that could be possible.

Then we were truly frightened, and then the emigration started. It's true, that in the winter of 1937, probably already in December and January of 1938, the situation was already insecure. I met my circle of friends once a week in the Carlton [one of the oldest and most esteemed hotels in

Bratislava]. And then – young people aren't scared, we weren't scared either – we saw demonstrations.

Not military ones, but the Germans who came and went here and there, and they yelled, 'Lieber Fuhrer mach uns frei vor der Tschechoslowakei.' The Hungarians also showed up yelling, 'Red, white and green, Bratislava is Hungarian again.' Slovaks didn't have any special reason to demonstrate, but the Hlinka [21](#) Party already existed and the Guard was being created as well.

They also participated, but I don't remember any more what they were shouting. Their demonstrations didn't have that many participants, as they were local. It was more Hungarians and Germans demonstrating.

The emigrations started after 1933. It wasn't an easy thing. You didn't only need a visa to America, but [also] something else, an invitation. And the person inviting the emigre had to commit himself to full support of the emigre, not to burden the United States. To get one of these, you had to have a really good friend or relative. It was very difficult.

The easiest was to go to France; French visas were somehow easier [to get]. The French government made it a little easier at the time. The pessimists emigrated, those who didn't see any good. The optimists, like myself and my family, we stayed.

Because we said – this was already 14th March [on this day in 1939, Tiso's kind of fascism formed in Slovakia] – that in a country where the head of state [Tiso] [22](#) was a Catholic priest, the kind of things happening in neighboring countries couldn't happen here. Well, that's what started the trouble.

During the First Czechoslovak Republic, I never encountered any anti-Semitism. Not just me, but none of my family members either. During the war, when Slovakia declared its independence, and became one of Hitler's satellite countries, then naturally we felt it a few times.

As far as the city of Bratislava was concerned, here things didn't change that much. The Hlinka-Guards were here, but they were quite bearable, they weren't as monstrous as I heard they were in the country towns; how much worse the situation was there! With the star system [see Yellow star in Slovakia] [23](#), when they introduced it, some of us at first had to wear the six centimeter star, sewn on the part of your clothes visible under your overcoat. Later there was an order that workers didn't have to wear it, if they were working.

Then another order came, that workers should wear a plastic star and affix it with a pin to their clothes. I was going down the street and if I saw an acquaintance; it was so embarrassing for them not to be allowed to stop with me there that they turned away. I felt on every occasion how embarrassing it was for them, and how they were even ashamed of themselves.

The first horrible experience for me was when my father came home one time. He had had some errands to take care of that afternoon and said, a young man had verbally abused him and slapped him. That was really horrible, even just to hear about.

After the formation of the Slovak State [24](#), every week more and more anti-Jewish decrees came out. First you had to submit all your valuables, jewelry, furs – not just full fur coats, but coats with small fur collars as well. You also had to bring in your radios, so we couldn't be informed about

what was happening in the world.

I just remembered that I had to bring my sports equipment in as well. I was really sorry about that – namely, the ski equipment, the skis, they were very expensive at that time. You had to personally go in and submit them. It really, really pained my heart, to part with this stuff. Broken-hearted, we submitted our things.

Then, in 1940, we didn't know yet, that soon enough the time would come when it wouldn't be our valuables we submitted but our lives.

According to the anti-Jewish laws [in Slovak state] [25](#) then, if somebody got a job, then they got a work permit also. I was the only one in this respect, who was lucky in our family. My father's nephew's law office was in Bratislava, and was Aryanized with a personal request by one of the mayors. At that time, Bratislava had three mayors – a German one, a Slovak one and a Hungarian one. The Hungarian one, was Dr. Victor Forster. He Aryanized it. I stayed in my job in the law office.

Dr. Forster successfully got me a work permit on every occasion. Very often, sometimes every day, I had to go to court. This was at the time when you only had to wear the small Jewish star. I was terrified, I always had case dockets in my arms, because there were altogether 200 young [Hlinka] guards in uniform in Bratislava – they called themselves, astronomers – who went around the city, looking for Jews who didn't wear the star, to punish them.

The fine was a hundred crowns, which was a lot, about a thousand crowns today. There were two young men, I knew their faces. I generally squeezed the star in my left hand. If I saw them somewhere, I pinned it on quickly. One time, I noticed them too late, but tried to get the star on quickly. They stopped me, and said, 'Be very careful, one time you could get blood poisoning, if you prick your finger.' So there were these kind of people, too.

I have to mention an interesting character, just because, in the middle of all the monstrosity a few humane things happened here and there. What they call SNP Square today was Republic Square. In the place where the market-hall is, there were greengrocer stands, some vegetables but mostly fruits.

As I passed by, I noticed they had some beautiful grapes. If I could buy some grapes for my mother, how great that would be! I stood hesitating, because it was forbidden to shop there.

As I was standing, I saw the astronomers approaching; they didn't notice that I quickly pinned the star on. The Guardists approached in my direction and said, 'Well, what happened here, that you're standing around?' I answered truthfully, that I envied those that could buy grapes, that I'd like to too.

They said to give them fifty koruna, they went over and bought two kilos of grapes, I could hardly carry them all home. They bought them for me, then disappeared. So there were these kind of characters, too. Of course, they moved on, and merrily punished those that they met.

This is how we made it through life all the way to 1942. On 26th March 1942, the first group of girls went. [Slovakia was one of the first nations annexed by fascist Germany, from where Jews were deported to death camps. The first wave of deportations started in 1942 and lasted almost seven months. Between 25th March and 20th October 1942, 57 convoys of freight trains were sent with

57,751 Jews.

Nineteen were sent directly to the Auschwitz death camp, the other 38 trains with almost 39,000 Jews were sent to the area around Lublin.] They said that they were taking everyone from 16 to 30 years of age to Poland to work – and of course, they meant the women also, who didn't have husbands, were divorced or widows.

Unfortunately they took 90 percent of them. The mothers escorted their young daughters to the station and sure enough, handed them over, there. It took a long time before we knew about Auschwitz; it was unknown until then. A couple of months went by until we realized that, whoops, that really isn't a work camp, that's something else. 1942 was a horrible year, full of anxieties.

Of course, they took the Jews to work. [Paragraph 22 of the Jewish Codex said Jews between the ages of 16 and 60 were required to work. This paragraph became symbolic in the later Jewish tragedy, the Slovak government used it as well, citing exactly that paragraph, in March 1942 to begin the deportations of Jewish residents from Slovakia.] The three men, my sister's husband, my husband and my father, who was fifty-some years old, were taken to Ilava. There they built an electricity dam.

My father and the two other men were active in the hydrocentrala [hydro-electric power plant]. This happened in about 1942. My mother, my younger sister and I, and others who were relatives, had a special identification which said that while they worked there, we had protected status.

The city police headquarters was in today's old City Hall. Its commander was Konzinka. Kozinka, who would just out of habit send cops out to chase Jews, had them taken to camps, or for interrogation. During the time that our men weren't at home, the police brought us in 11 times.

He'd look at our ID, then announce that everything was in order, and send us home. While people are young, they aren't so scared, but I really wasn't a coward, so one night – this was the eleventh inspection – I told them, 'Look here, we're not allowed to go out on the street until six in the morning.

We're going home, but not alone. Please have us escorted.' He really gave us a policeman, who escorted us home, but they never brought us back down at night. Whether it was because of what I said or not, I don't know, but it's enough that it happened.

One of the young ladies, whose husband was likewise in Ilava, came over to our house and said she'd just gotten notified that they'd taken our husbands away to Zilina to the camp and were deporting them from there. [There were many collection camps in Slovakian territory, but all trains going from Zilina went to Auschwitz.]

Again I needed a good connection and a thousand koruna for that; it was a terribly large amount of money. Within an hour, I got a travel permit from the foreign ministry. I got on a train, and went to Zilina – the first time in my life I saw Zilina. There in Zilina, again I ran into a judge with humane characteristics, who dealt with these things. I told him what the situation was.

I won't tell all the details, but I successfully got a permission and got into the Lager [German for 'camp'], where they were keeping my father. As an older person, there was nothing he could do. I got a permission with his name on it, so he could get out of the camp. My father told me

meanwhile, where my husband and my brother-in-law were working and that they would come back from work at five. Father was the oldest, I had to save him first.

I got myself together, went in, Father was very glad, packed up whatever he had, rucksack on his shoulder and we start to leave. On the road, I gave my father the permission. Father reads it, stops and says, 'This isn't in my name, I'm not going. I never did a false thing in my life, I won't now either.'

Of course that it was false ID, it was in the name of someone that was no longer alive. I pinched him in the shoulder so that's he'd be quiet, and dragged him away from there. Finally we got out of the camp, and I said, 'Father, for the love of God, it's like this...' And I explained to him how things were. My father was saved. I still had to arrange things for our sons.

In Zilina, there was a hotel close to the station, the so-called Grand Hotel. You could rent rooms there by the hour. I went in and asked for a room. As soon as the porter saw a young woman with an older man, I got the key right away, I took my father up and locked the door.

I gave him a newspaper, and said to him, 'You sit here, and read. I don't know when I'll be back. Don't leave, don't answer any knock at the door, nothing. I'm taking the key, so they don't open the door on you, and so you can't either. I'm going to arrange things for the boys.'

I left. The porter looked at me, I said we weren't going to, just like that, I'm going to buy some wine. I left and luck was really with me – and my connections, of course – I arranged to have the two younger men sent on the train which went to Novaky [labor camp] [26](#), not the one going to Auschwitz.

When this was worked out, I went back to my father who was waiting for me in the hotel, and we left. The porter said, 'I'm not surprised you finished so fast, you're a pretty young woman, and still you go with such an old man.'

We went to the train, got on the Tatra express, which was forbidden for Jews to ride on. I went into the dining car, which was even more forbidden for Jews. I ordered dinner, Father couldn't swallow one bite from nervousness. We got home.

The next day, I asked for another travel permit, to go to Novaky to see whether the boys had arrived. Well, that's how I saved my immediate family in 1942, none of them were outside the country's borders. As we know, the deportations stopped in 1943.

We moved four times during the war. There was always a new decree about which streets we could live on, and which not. Among others, one said we couldn't even live in a house built after 1938, or one where there was central heating.

To this point, many had arranged to go into hiding – we called this 'into the bunker.' We started to be a little optimistic, that maybe it was possible to survive this. That's how we spent the year 1944. We breathed a little easier in 1944.

I listened to London radio at our Christian acquaintances' house and found out what was happening, what was the news. In 1944, there was an invasion on the beaches.

[Editor's note: on 6th June 1944, the Americans and British started the invasion at the beaches of Normandy, whose goal was the capture of the English channel, and securing a military bridge into the northwest coast of France, from the German troops directed by Rommel.]

The happiness was inexplicable, we cried with joy at home. We thought now, one-two, the whole thing will be over. On 20th August 1944, the Slovak National Uprising broke out. It would still have been possible then to successfully get away from here, but now it was impossible, because both the train stations were totally shut down, not just with police, but with [Hlinka] guards, too. Bratislava was inside the zone of the Uprising.

In September, the weather was very, very warm and comfortable. A few friends and I would have liked to go out to the water and swim once. My mother – she was still relatively young – and three of my friends and I went.

There was a small bay toward Devin, where nobody went, so we went there to swim. We swam once, then came back. My mother was still swimming. Suddenly, we were horrified to realize, that a few meters away, Kozinka, the old town director of the police headquarters was getting undressed and heading straight for the water. Kozinka turned toward my mother who was swimming there, they stopped, he said something, and my mother got out. Kozinka kept swimming.

The nightmare of what that could mean! Mother sat down, and began, 'Imagine that, Kozinka told me we should go home and disappear, because the Germans are invading us.' That's how it happened; we quickly dressed and went home. We started to worry – the three of us women there – about what would come next.

My father was at home, he didn't have to go to Novaky. We successfully got my brother-in-law home early by getting him a work permit as a mason at a construction company. Exactly one week before that, before that incident with Kozinka, we succeeded in getting my husband out of Novaky, so that he also had a physical labor job at a construction company. Actually, there were a few of us home. Now, naturally, the problems were what we could live on. Jewish people could only buy food after ten o'clock; this was what they allowed us because of the war.

It's true that here in Slovakia, there was still something to buy. Though, after ten the stalls were a lot emptier than before ten. There, where my mother shopped everyday, the business was German, a German woman's. Once she said to my mother, 'Miss Vidor, listen here, leave your shopping basket here, put a list of what you want in it, and come back for it in the afternoon.'

That's how it happened. From then on, whatever we really needed, we got. Because the lady always packed in whatever it was we needed, vegetables or anything Mother wrote down, flour, sugar or bread. That happened with the Germans, too. I want to mention that, because you can't put all members of any nationality in one basket. Any nationality can have decent and honorable members, and there can be evil ones and murderous ones.

The Germans invaded us and we lived in great anxiety about how it would continue. In the meantime, we listened to the news, and we knew that the Germans were suffering very, very big losses. We kept on living in anxiety, and then, one night, the [Hlinka] guards came for us.

They took us in on 27th September 1944. The guards took us to the Jewish Center – this was where the center is now, the building constituted the Jewish religious community's property. They took us



there, I don't know how many of us, about 1,500 or as many as they could successfully round up in the city.

In 1940 there were 15,000 Jews living in the city. There were only about 1,500 left which could be found in their apartments. We spent the entire night standing on the two stories of steps there.

Quite early in the morning, before eight we then had to march off. The Germans ordered everyone into rows of five, the so-called 'Funferreihe,' and we had to march through the whole city like that, to the called Nove Mesto Station. This station has been gone for a long time.

It was at the end of Dunajska [Danube] Street. A lot of people were standing outside on the street; they saw what was going on there. They stopped and watched. Some stood around with fallen gazes. I saw a lady who cried when she saw this.

There wasn't any rejoicing, they were really, really sad standing there, quite ashamed. We got there [to the station], and stood in lines of five all day long. We were lined up; me, my mother, my father, one of my aunts and another person – that was our line of five.

At every pole stood a Freiwilligenstaffel [FS – German volunteer corps]. The local Germans, who weren't SS, were Freiwillige; it was an organization similar to the SS, just a local Slovak organization. Everyone had a machine-gun in his hands, pointing at us.

The guy across from me was an old schoolmate of mine from the Lyceum. His father was the mathematics teacher. This schoolmate of mine was called Ede [Eduard's nickname] Ulreich. He stood exactly in front of me, pointing with his machine-gun at us.

My parents were healthy, but the terrible anxiety was hard to bear for them in their fifties, and my mother got sick. She asked for a glass of water, she said, if she could get one she'd be much better right away. We stood there, it was very warm, the sun burned down. So I called out to Ulreich in German, 'Magst du mir ein Glas Wasser fur meine Mutti bringen?', that is, could he bring her a glass of water. To that, my ex-classmate said, 'Kusch, oder ich schiess' – Shut up or I shoot.

I'll say one more thing in connection to this Ede Ulreich. He had a little sister, who was very nice, a very pretty creature, whom I ran into two or three years after the war. We greeted each other, then I said, 'and your brother?' 'He's in Vienna, I'll write him to tell him you're here, he'll be so pleased.' I said, 'Well, he sure will be pleased! And what's Ede doing in Vienna?' 'Well, he's a religion teacher in a Lutheran lyceum.'

A good couple of years later, I'm going up the steps and I see this strange figure. Oh my god, that's Ede Ulreich! He left with very quick steps towards our apartment, where my younger sister lived. I ran after him, but he went faster than me, and I only caught up with him at the gate. I called out, 'Ulreich'!

He turned with an unearthly smile, happiness, to see me. For the first time in my life, I gave him such a terrible slap that I couldn't feel my arm. I said, 'You dirty, lowest of killers, villainous trash.' The slap was so strong, though he was much taller than I, that his glasses fell on the ground and broke.

He didn't say a word, just stood there, like a petrified statue. Meanwhile, the gate had opened, and a man living there had come in, and watched what was going on. Ulreich stood there ashamed, because he [the man] had seen the end. I got myself together, and like I'd just finished a job well done, I left.

Then something happened to me, that I can't explain to myself: as I went down the street, I sobbed. I thought later, that maybe because my fate had brought me to such a humiliating situation that I had struck out at another living being. But I've never killed [sic] anything, not even a fly. I saw such monstrous things in the camp, that I can't cause the end of any living thing, not even a flying bug.

Now I'll continue with my own life. So we stood there at the station until noon. Then at noon, they put us in the boxcars. We ended up in Sered [27](#), which was already a collection camp by that time. We were there in Sered for three days; that was something horrible. Due to the lack of space, they crammed us horribly together; it was monstrous. The boxcars came, again they packed us in for the first round. In the freight cars, there could have been seventy of us, or maybe more. When we reached Cadca, then we knew we were going towards Auschwitz.

I knew exactly what there was in Osviencim [Slovak name for Auschwitz. The Slovaks and even Hungarian-speakers rarely use the German name], and that Osviencim existed. It was known, because two prisoners had successfully escaped in March 1944 [see Auschwitz Protocols] [28](#), and my husband at the time had met one of them.

They had prepared a huge file – made maps of Osviencim and Brezinka. They marked where the gas chambers were, where the crematoriums were – there were four crematoriums, gas chamber, C-barrack, the men and women's barrack, as well as the gypsy [Roma] barrack. Vrba and Rosenberg [38](#) who'd gotten away, gave my husband the scroll [rolled up documents]. Everything was drawn there precisely – this had to be passed on to Dr. Tibor Kovacs, who was the unofficial director of the Jewish Center [29](#).

I lived on Simoniho Street then, it doesn't exist today – it was there, where the Devin Hotel stands now. We lived there, but I brought it here to Kozia Street from there. The UZ – Ustredna Zidov [Jewish Center] was there. Somebody had to take the map over, it was a terribly long roll of paper, at least as long as a table [longer than a meter] and it was rolled together.

The question came up of how to deliver this by hand [to the Jewish Center] without attracting attention. Unbelievable, but the choice fell on me, which today is a little miracle. My husband, Oskar Klopstock, was a member of the underground movement, he recommended me.

They knew that I was pretty bold, that I didn't get scared and more than that, I was still quite a pretty woman. They also knew, that they had to do something quickly, so I did it. For example, there was an immediate death penalty for those who listened to London radio, I listened to it every day, and every day I listened to the German one, too.

So I wasn't scared. When they asked me, whether I would accept [the assignment], of course, I accepted. And it got there [to the Jewish Center] without a problem. Of course, that day that I took the roll, I didn't pin on the star. Afterwards I went home. That was my only role in it, nothing more.

Dr. Kovacs's task was to get it to Hungary, to Horthy [30](#) and the papal nuncio. As I understand, the scroll was put in the hand of the papal nuncio, to pass on to the Vatican. They gave a copy to Horthy. The papal nuncio reported this to the Vatican, and Pius XII, the pope at the time, condemned the events [the camps] only in writing. That's why when I first saw Auschwitz, it wasn't totally unfamiliar to me.

We had just arrived, and of course not there, where it said 'Arbeit macht frei', but in Birkenau, where the gas chambers were. It so happened, that the first female doctor in Bratislava, who was a surgeon, was in the boxcar with us and her mother.

The mother was maybe a very strong seventy years old. She gave her mother a lethal injection, and then gave one to herself. We had these two corpses already when we arrived. Supposedly there were more in the other boxcars – older people, small children, babies, people who had killed themselves or died from the rigors of the trip.

We had to get out, they were yelling: 'Raus, Raus!' The rucksack wasn't allowed to be taken, we had to leave it inside [the boxcar], we had to leave everything, we came out, and they separated us. The women separate, the men separate. I saw my father and my husband for the last time then.

Again we were lined up in fives. Again, it was my mother, me, my aunt and two unfamiliar women. We were very far in the back, the line shuffled forward. I never saw Mengele in my life. We were far away from him, I didn't get over there, because at every fifth step there was an SS-man standing with a machine-gun pointing at us.

The line moved with difficulty, sometimes stopping. I was crying bitterly. My mother consoled me, 'Don't cry, my Kato, this is the kind of life we've been living in the last years, it's nothing to cry about. Don't cry about this, it wasn't a human life anymore.'

An SS-man who was standing not far from there, was from here, from Forev. He understood what my mother said. He looked at me, grabbed my arm and asked, 'How old are you?' Everybody whom they asked said, twenty-eight, twenty-nine, because they thought then that those older than thirty were gassed. I answered honestly, I'm thirty-four. He said, 'You're still strong, you're going to work.'

I stood with my arms around my mother, but somehow they shoved me over to the other side. I almost fell over, two Bratislava ladies standing in line, grabbed me: 'Come on, we heard your name is Kato, come along.' That's how I got on the side of life.

Those who had gotten on the so-called side of life went a completely different way than those who were immediately gassed. Because they had started the liquidation of Auschwitz, the Russians were very close. So, having already gotten on the side of life, we wound up where you had to strip down to nothing, and they shaved our hair off.

We then went to a shower place, and we were certain that now, there'd come the gas, and we stood there, but water came out of the taps and not gas. They showered us, then we could get dressed. We got – this is monstrous – the clothes of the people they'd already executed. The clothes were bloody here and there, and dirty. I got a summer dress and everybody got clogs, and then we marched into the barracks.

This part took from morning to afternoon. In the afternoon, a familiar Bratislava [person] called Glauser came in. Whoever was there, crowded around, saying, 'Where's my father, where's my husband, where's this person, that person, where's my mother, siblings, children.'

She just wrote down the names, though [Glauser] had come over because she'd heard that a transport had arrived from Bratislava. There was the so-called Staatsgebaude office [German for 'state office']. The Jews who had been there for three years already worked there. There weren't too many there, eight or ten.

They allowed these [Jews] to move freely around one area of the camp, because [the rest of us] couldn't leave the barrack. She wrote down the names of who had come and said that the next day, or two days from now, if she could get back again and could get information, then she'd tell us something. She'd be able to tell us, because she'd got a couple good friends who were assigned to the gas chambers, and had to take the gold teeth from the dead.

In two days, this Glauser showed up, and of course, everybody surrounded her. She could even tell a few people what happened. I stood there and stood there, and waited. We knew each other well, my parents and her parents, so I turned to her and asked, 'Do you have anything to tell me?'

At first she didn't answer, she looked into what she'd written down for herself. I said, 'I beg you, even if its bad news, tell me the worst of it, too. I don't want to live hoping, even if it's really bad, it'll be better for me to know.' She said, 'Yes, between two and three in the morning, it was your parents' turn.' I know the exact date, 4th October, when they executed my parents.

There were three bunk beds in the barrack, everybody had to sit down. We sat in a circle, they brought a bucket in front of us, in which there was some brown liquid, which stunk even from afar. We didn't know what it was, what to do with it.

An SS-man came and commanded us to eat, this was dinner. After that another woman came, who had her hair tied up, so we knew she was a prisoner too, and who had been here for a long time, that's why she was allowed to wear a scarf. Now she says, 'Wolf it down, I'm not leaving here until you devour that.'

Somebody said to that, 'There aren't even spoons!' 'And there won't be, dip it out with your hands. But devour it.' We were so terribly glad that she spoke to us like this. 'Listen up, you're going to wolf that down, because they [the SS] can die, but we still want to live. If we want to survive, we eat all the shit.'

That's what she said. It turned out she was a woman doctor from Kolozsvar [Cluj, Romania]. At that time, Kolozsvar was still Hungarian, and they [the Jews] had been deported from that area long before. We didn't eat a lot of the liquid then, but two days later we finished it all.

I was in Auschwitz for a total of ten days. The liquidations started heavily. The gas chambers were operating day and night. The air was so bad, there was no grass there, no bird, because the stench of burnt flesh was so horrible. We lived there without thinking, you couldn't [think] there.

We could only go to the latrine if ten of us had to go. It wasn't too difficult because, if you had to, we could convince two or three others to come with us. The latrines were a little farther away, on one side twenty holes, the same on the other. We sat with our backs to one another.

At every fifth step was an FS [Freiwilligenstaffel] or SS-man, we couldn't tell the difference anymore, because they wore the same uniforms. I saw myself, that among them there wasn't one who could have been normal, because they stared at our naked bottoms constantly and you could see they enjoyed it. It was terrible, these things were beyond human dignity.

Ten days later they put us back into the boxcars. We were put into boxcars, and for two days they hauled us around. After two day, we arrived in Germany, in Freiberg [one of the sub-camps of the Flossenberg concentration camp], this was between Dresden and Chemnitz.

There was a porcelain factory thirty kilometers from Dresden, which had been transformed into a military factory. In the porcelain factory, for two months, five hundred ladies – almost all from the old Czechoslovak Republic, mainly the Czech Republic, but almost 200 of us were from here in Slovakia – manufactured wings, and certain parts for the rockets, with which they were bombing London [V-series rockets which were used to bomb London from June 1944].

We worked there for two months, either twelve hours a day or twelve hours a night. It was difficult physical labor. They always assigned us somewhere else. First, where I worked, a person had to stand on a little platform, the plane wing was secured, and we had to drill little holes in the airplane wing with a drill machine.

The designer drew these little circles, where they would put these little studs. These we had to drill with the drill machine. The drills weighed five kilograms. We held them on our shoulder to drill the holes. You had to really pay attention, to be precise, because if someone missed, they got such a slap that they would tumble off the platform.

Then there was a part where four of us worked at a kind of spinning lathe machine. There we made spare parts. We also had to file steel plates. That was merciless work, because the steel plates were sharp. Normally, this work would be done in gloves. Naturally, we didn't get any gloves. There were a few accidents.

We worked under constant female supervision. I have to mention, the female SS-guards were a lot more cruel than the men. We were continually tormented by hunger: the six dekagrams of bread we got had to be enough for the whole day. For breakfast, we got some kind of very dark solution they called tea, which was lukewarm, at least.

At noon, there was that kind of soup, in which there were three unhappy, raw potatoes first, by the last week there was only one. We lived on the top floor of the factory, which was terrifying. It was full of bedbugs. A person came up after the night-shift, those sleeping there at night had to get up, because we were sleeping in their places. Twice we had to sweep off all the bedbugs. We were living in horrible conditions.

We worked there for a couple months. After seven months, they suddenly told us they're closing the factory. We stayed inside during the day, and those who worked upstairs saw that the SS were fleeing, and the previous workers, who had trained us, were fleeing as well. We weren't even allowed to talk to them.

They bombed Dresden for two days and one night. They locked us in the factory – those were the most bearable two days for us. We weren't scared of the bombs, sometimes the sky was red day and night, we were lying down on the ground and could finally get some sleep, finally we didn't

have to wake up.

We were scared of the SS and the Gestapo, not the bombs. So actually, I survived the Dresden bombing, too. [The US carpet bombing of Dresden from 13th-14th February 1945, along with the firestorm that ensued, nearly obliterated the entire city.]

Then this happened: the work was abandoned, they resettled us in a barrack camp outside the city, we didn't get any food, not even tea. The barracks were in the middle of a meadow. Three days later the grass disappeared, the ground was bare.

They grazed all the grass. They ate it. When we thought, now we were really going to starve to death – and that's a horrible death, because it takes so long – again they put us in boxcars, but this time in freight cars without a roof. And now comes the worst part of my war Calvary [sic]. We were in those open wagons for sixteen days, they hauled us back and forth around Austria, Germany and the onetime Czechoslovakia.

We went, with the Russians coming from one direction, the Americans coming from the other. Our enemies [the Germans] came from everywhere. We moved continuously for sixteen days – in the rain, the snow, the wind, and the sunshine. Meanwhile, April came. After sixteen days there were corpses, in our train car as well. We stopped a bit in Usti nad Labem [a Czechoslovakian port city on the Labe River]. When the locals found out what was going on, they threw bread into the cars. That was all that we ate. Then we went further, night and day, until finally we stopped.

Suddenly, they opened the boxcars. The SS struck in with loud yells, 'Alle raus, alle raus!' Everybody out, everybody out! We didn't know where we were, I didn't have the strength to get out – we'd been sitting for sixteen days, we hadn't eaten.

Then the SS-guy, who was in front of our car, jumped up and kicked us out, the ones who couldn't get out, with his boots. We fell onto the stone paving, we were weak, thin and somehow nobody broke anything. A miracle after all, because in normal situations that wouldn't have been possible.

We stood in Funferreihe, five in a line. The woman standing next to me, asked if it didn't say Mauthausen over there. I had traveled to Austria often, as a Bratislava resident, but I still had no idea where we were. The SS standing next to us answered in German, 'Das heisst Mordhausen.' [a German play on words; roughly, 'this is called Deathhouse.']

So not Mauthausen, but death. Well, here's the end, but it really didn't matter, let them gas us, we couldn't stand it like this anyway, it wasn't living, we had enough. As soon as they got everybody off the boxcars, we left.

We went up to the Mauthausen fortification – this isn't far from Linz, about five kilometers on quite a steep road. Those who couldn't keep up and sat down, were shot in that moment. So only a few of us arrived.

We got up there, and they took us to a barrack. Before we arrived in Mauthausen, the train had stopped somewhere in Austria for a long time. We heard that there was a train that had stopped next to us, but we couldn't see anything.



There were Russian prisoners in it, and they yelled over to us, 'Hitler, kaput!' We thought they wanted to console us, maybe that wasn't true, but it was nice that they were bringing such good news. The news was really true, he wasn't alive anymore in April. [Hitler committed suicide on 30th April 1945 in the Chancellor underground bunker in Berlin.]

[In Mauthausen] The really unlucky ones – and I was really unlucky – ended up down in the so-called Gypsy camp, where the SS-women were already fleeing. There were only a few left there, and since they knew that Jews were coming there, they gave the Gypsies authority and gave them a white armband.

They watched over us. I'm not a racist, but I have to say that it was horrible. The gypsy-women – the whole time I was under deportation, I had never had any corporal punishment – they flogged me once so badly that I had marks on my back for months. I was lucky the whole thing didn't last very long.

There was a very nice creature among us, a lot younger than me. She said, 'Whoever wants to come with me, I'm escaping.' I immediately joined up. We were seven women, we left. We didn't get far, there was a forest there, we went around like little red riding hood and the wolf. We constantly went around and around, it was pouring with rain the whole time. Well, what do we do? Let's go back. We couldn't find our way back.

We got somewhere, and saw steps, but leading somewhere fantastically high up. This woman, who was strapping strong, and leading us, says, 'Wait here, I'll climb up, to see what it is.' We waited a little, then slowly started to follow.

'Come on, these are some kind of lager [camp] barracks.' She yelled in Slovak down to us. We started climbing up on all fours, until two or three men came out of the barrack, gathered us up, because by the time we reached the top, we didn't have the energy to move.

This was the Czech political camp. They hid us in the hay, because they had beds here, filled with hay. That's how we ended up in a barrack with Novotny [31](#), the later president of the Czechoslovak Republic. They brought us something to drink, what it was, didn't matter, and they hid us there, just our heads were sticking out, but they always threw something over us. But they weren't controlled anymore [except for roll-call], they were political prisoners after all.

## Post war

That day they said, 'Ladies, freedom is here, the Americans are coming!' At that, we climbed out with great difficulty, and got up. This was 4th May 1945. There was a balustrade there, we stood and watched, you didn't want to believe your eyes.

They got out, and came up, but the Americans were already coming, the commanders. It was uncomfortable that whenever you said something to them [the American soldiers], they backed off. It was the first camp these Americans had liberated, they'd never seen women prisoners before, and we looked horrifying without hair, and so thin. It turned out, they were backing off because we stunk so horribly.

They disinfected us; we had to raise our arms, and they sprayed something on our heads, then gave us blankets, in which we could wrap ourselves up well. They said, 'Put out your right hand, and stand in line.' We held out our shaking hands, because we thought finally, they were going to give us food – we were horribly hungry, the hunger hurt badly.

We opened our hands, and then we thought we'd die. They gave us a toothbrush. First some of us had to brush our teeth, so we didn't smell so bad. We cursed them, but we did it and came back. Again they said open your right hand. Well, now comes the food! We got four different kinds of pills.

First we had to take the white one, then wait a while and take the colored ones. The white was a stomach relaxant, and the others were vitamins. We didn't know that word: vitamin. We swallowed the pills. Again the soldier comes back. I knew English pretty well, though I didn't know how to cuss, but a few of us did.

They told these American soldiers a few things that made them dizzy; true, that they had to laugh afterwards. Again we held out our hands, and we got a half-liter mug and in it a half-liter of milk. Now finally, but we just stood there waiting, for when the decent food, something to bite into, would be coming. We didn't get anything. The ladies, you know what they did then: they almost beat them up.

I'd like to say one more interesting thing, maybe it will be more understandable to see why I believe in miracles. They put us in the former SS-barrack, where there were pillows and hay – up to now, we hadn't had anything, and these were luxurious beds for us. I went and occupied a lower bunk. I heard crying in the one above me, I look up, well there's a very pretty young girl lying there, and crying.

I climbed up next to her, caressed her, and consoled her: 'Don't cry, we've been liberated, the war is over, now everything will be good, don't cry!' She cuddles next to me, and whispers, 'Mommy, oh good that you're alive, it was terrible without you, I'm so happy you're here next to me.' She thought that I was her mother. I stroked her and felt she was burning with fever.

I stayed by her side for about twenty minutes, then got down and told one of the soldiers that we needed a doctor. They had quite a lot of doctors with them, one came. He said it was typhus. I had two very uncomfortable days, when I struggled with myself, about whether to tell him that I'd laid down beside her for almost half an hour.

Then again, I would be suspicious if I caught it later. It had been said that the following week we were going home, and they wouldn't let me then. My god, what do I do? I was in despair. I decided that I would wait for two or three days, and if I didn't get a fever, then everything would be okay. Despite that I lay there with her for half an hour, I didn't get the fever, didn't have any problems, so this I consider a God-given miracle.

By then we were getting a little more solid food, we were put in with the prisoners of war, and could move about freely. It was fantastic the way the Russian prisoners acted around us. They had much greater experience than we did, they went off, they said, to devour something – this meant, they went to the village for this or that. They always shared with us, those who couldn't move, they were very-very good, and there wasn't a big language problem between us, which counted a lot.

We learned that we were going home by boat. And really, we traveled in an enormous ship. They transported the Romanians home by ship as well. There was a ship going in front of us that was sweeping the mines out of the Danube.

The Danube was full of mines, so that from Mauthausen – which isn't very far, and the Danube runs down that way to Bratislava – it took us three days and two nights to get home by ship. On 22nd May we arrived in Bratislava. When we saw Bratislava castle, of course some of us were already sobbing, we were standing out in the pouring rain.

There wasn't a bridge, nor a dock. Our last apartment had been there at the beginning of Zuckermandel, which was considered a kind of ghetto [during the war]. The ship stopped exactly in front of that house, the one that they'd taken me away from. It stopped, and the words fell out of my mouth, 'Well, they've got something honorable in them. They took me away from here, and they're delivering me back to my home.'

So that's how I got home. I wanted to get off, of course, but the captain said, 'Please wait here, I'm going to talk to the Russian Commandantura [Military Commander] to get permission to debark, because you were liberated by the Americans.' We were very sorry that the poor captain had lost his mind.

The Americans and the Russians had fought together, they were friends. What's this about special permission?! He left, and I said there to one of the ladies, 'You know what, I'm going to escape. I've laid around up to now, I'm not willing to stay here.'

There was a wood plank, put out to the bank, I stepped on it, and one of the ladies yelled after me, 'You'll fall in the Danube!' Well, I answered, 'I can still swim.' It was pouring with rain, and a guy was standing on the bank, leaning on the fence, watching me as I swayed on this board. I get over to him, but I couldn't stand up, so he helped me.

That lady, whom I'd told I was leaving, she also came, he also helped her. I said, 'Would you be so kind as to give me a koruna, I want to make a phone call.' I didn't know who was alive and who wasn't. He smiled at that, 'The telephone doesn't work, but here's some money', and he gave me a hundred. The lady who came with me, yells, 'Wow! We're rich, we're going to stay at the Carlton.' Then it turned out that a kilo of strawberries, cost a hundred koruna.

We headed toward the city, and our rabbi at that time, Dr. Frieder was coming straight toward us, with two Jews. He sees we just got off the ship, with no hair, bald. He says, 'The girls just came by ship, I'm getting the permit, the captain telephoned.'

Everybody can get off here.' 'And where do we go, we don't know because...' 'Go to the Jewish kitchen to eat.' I said, 'Where's that?' Well, it's over here, where Chez David is today, the kitchen was there. We went there, opened the door, it was packed with men, everybody smoking, there was so much smoke that I could hardly see. But in the kitchen part, I saw a familiar older lady.

My mother had known her well; she had had a nice leather shop sometime in Bratislava. She was cooking. She saw us, and was really glad, she said, 'Have a seat.' We sat down, and she brought us a café au lait and kuglof [coffee cake]. We thought we were dreaming; we started to eat.

After that shock, the people standing around us started in: 'Were you with my mother, did you see my sister, you didn't see my daughter, did you?' One after the other, it was all questions. One of the women cooking said, 'Keep quiet, are you blind, leave them be, until these two women have eaten!'

One of the older men, who was looking for his daughter, broke down in tears and said, 'But they're just eating and eating and eating, and it'll never end, and they won't say a word, how long do we have to wait?' So that was the first day of my arrival.

Most people I knew greeted me very warmly, there were even those whose eyes filled with tears. I of course looked horrible. I was skinny, with no hair. That's probably why they invited me for lunch, so I could have a proper meal.

Back then I didn't feel sad [from what had happened during the war] - and I wasn't an isolated case. For me only one important thing existed: to eat and eat and eat. I was invited mainly by non-Jewish friends, who said to me: 'You've got no one, come over to our place, you'll eat your fill.' I had bad luck only in that after the war there wasn't a very large selection of groceries.

So it happened that I even ate potato paprikash three times in a row. But that tasted great too, the important thing being for me to put something in my stomach. I can really only tell you how good it was. I only heard about some others, who had aggressive incidents towards them, like that more came back than were taken away, but nothing like that ever happened to me.

Before the war, we had a completely furnished four-room apartment. By the end, all we had - because we had to move four times during the war - was a two-and-a-half bedroom apartment at the beginning of what was once Zuckermandel, in the kind of house where there wasn't even a bathroom.

Though, it was completely furnished, with even a bit more furniture than it needed. I didn't take one step in there, because I still wasn't ready to step into the place, where I last lived with my parents, when I already knew what had happened to them. But I had to sleep, not just eat.

On Venturska Street, I met one of my best girlfriends; of course, we didn't know anything about each other for a long time. We kissed each other, and cried in our joy of meeting again. A stranger lady, who saw this, stopped and opened her bag, and took out a handkerchief, and gave it to me - that was the first thing I owned. She also asked, 'And where are you sleeping?'

I said that I was invited to stay at two places already. She said, 'You know what, I've got room, you can sleep there for a week, come with me.' Well, that was a real joy. On the corner of Kupelna Street, we lived with the woman who later became the well-known writer and cabaret singer, Laszlo Kalina. She'd gotten an apartment there, where she had lived alone until then.

She said we could stay with her until we found something better, or somebody from our family with whom we could live. We stayed there for nearly a week. She also tried to get food here and there, but the food was the least of the problem.

Before the war, my mother's relatives, whose siblings were here [living in Bratislava] for years, had come once a week, in the afternoon, to the café, to the Carlton. I heard that you could get some kind of coffee-like drink, which had nothing to do with coffee. It was some kind of black drink, but

you could get really good bread with it.

Well, I thought, I'm going in there. I went in, sat down, the head waiter who was called Mr. Kiss, came over and says, 'Well now, young lady, how glad I am to see you! Your sweet mother and aunts, how are they?' I told him none of them were living, just me alone.

He left – meanwhile I had already ordered the coffee-stuff from another waiter – fifteen or twenty minutes later, he brought out a big tray of the best food possible. 'I'm very, very sorry that I can only serve this to you, and not to your mother and aunts as well.' Those kind of things happened to me. During that period, however I think about it, there's nothing bad I can say.

Meanwhile, my father's youngest brother came back. Bela Vidor was his name. He was only in Terezin/Theresienstadt [32](#). He was married and had a co-op apartment. He got the apartment back immediately without a hitch.

It was a three-bedroom apartment, but so many people came that it didn't matter if it was a co-op or not, they would have put a family with three children in there. There as an office, on the corner of what is Obchodna Street today, it was called the 'Repatriacny urad' [Slovak – Repatriation office]. Those who came home had to register, and everyone got 500 or 1000 crowns, which was quite a lot of money. The office was on a hall on the second floor.

As you went up the steps, there were names and addresses written everywhere. Everybody read all of them. When I signed in, that I had returned, I put down my name there, too. I had to erase my address two times, because it was always changing.

By the time this uncle of mine arrived, he immediately went there too, and found out where to find me from there. He found me, and that's how I wound up living with him. This was a very satisfactory solution, on his part as well as for me. I knew exactly what hour my parents had been executed, and how it happened. Not too long after, I also found out that my husband at the time also died there. They gassed him too.

My former husband [Oskar Klopstock], who didn't return, had a good friend, a notary. Once, still during the war, we packed up a coffer together. He took it away to keep it safe, to this Pezinok friend. I didn't know him. When I came home, and I had nothing, well, this trunk would have been really good for me. I didn't remember if there was something in it other than my clothes.

Well, but how can I get it here, I can't carry it. I had the address, and my uncle says, 'Look here, find a forwarding agency, go in, if they're going that way, they'll bring it for you.' On Hviezdoslavovo Namesti I discovered a small office, with the sign 'forwarders.' I entered and asked. I remembered that it wasn't really even a suitcase, but a trunk.

They answered affirmatively, but only couldn't tell me the exact date. Apparently if they had to go there empty, it would be very expensive, but that when they would be in the area, they would bring it to me. That I should ask in two weeks. Despite this I gave them the address, and they really did tell me that the shipment was already here.

I didn't have a telephone, they rang the bell, and a handsome young man stood in the door, and said, 'I've just come from Pezinok, so and so forwarding agency. You're the owner of this – it was small, there were four of us there, we had a truck, and we brought the trunk from Pezinok.'

There were two men with him, they'd bring it up. I was completely happy. They brought it up and I told them to put it down. They put it in my room. The workers leave, and he looks at me and says, 'Who's going to be able to open it?' I said, I didn't know but I'd try later. He said, 'Oh no, bring me some kind of axe.' I went to my uncle's kitchen, brought back some kind of crowbar, and he opened it for me. I said, thank you very much.

I looked terrible, I have to say. I'm very thin now, but I was even skinnier then, and didn't have hair. He started to unpack it: there was very little clothing in it, but there were sheets in it, which meant a lot to me then. He said, 'How rich you are, I've counted seven sheets so far! Who's got seven sheets after the war!' So, he was a really funny guy. I thanked him kindly.

I knew his name by then. He came back and brought the receipt, I don't know anymore what it came to, and he said, 'I brought something else.' You couldn't get coffee at that time. He said, 'I got some coffee, make one cup for the two of us.' That's how we got to know each other. That was Ladislav Löffler, my future husband.

The Löfflers came from Moravia, and lived in the city of Hodonin. My later husband's grandfather went to school with Masaryk. The village where my husband was born was called Studienka. It wasn't far from Malacky. He went to grammar school in Malacka, and then came to Bratislava; they came after World War I.

His father had died in the meantime, he lived with his widowed mother and his older sister and brother-in-law. They were Jewish, but likewise not religious. He came here to the Academy of Commerce, he matriculated here in Bratislava. After that he was in Vienna for some one-year - they call it today a 'bakalar' [first university graduate level] in exporting.

He came back, and then got a position at Schenker. It was the biggest forwarding agency in Europe. They had a few thousand employees all across Europe. They sent him to Prague, too. He stayed there for a while.

When the Germans occupied Prague, he immediately returned, but in the meantime, here the Slovak State had been formed. He stayed in Bratislava and lived through the war here, too, with false papers. He was really handsome, with blond hair and blue eyes. His mother tongue was Slovakian.

I had no ambition to get married. I knew that I could support myself alone, since I spoke four languages. I could get a job, they'd already asked for me, but I didn't really feel okay, yet. Meanwhile, the summer passed somehow. I got together with my sister and her family.

They had hidden in the mountains, somehow escaped like that. They lived in Piestany then, I was with them for a while to somehow recover. I was in a bad state. One day, I became so horribly ill, and got such a headache that those who were often with me then - that was Löffler - called the ambulance, and they took me to the state hospital in MICKIEWICOVA Street.

They contended that I had meningitis, and that it was infectious. The hospital was full of wounded soldiers, Russians. I was in a separate room, because I was the only patient that was sick with meningitis. I was lucky at the time that I had no idea how dangerous it was. They started treating me.



Penicillin existed then, they knew about it, but not here in this country. [Mass-production of penicillin began in the USA in 1940, but was not generally available in Czechoslovakia throughout the 1940s.] They still didn't have it, so I got a completely different medicine, which likewise had to be injected every six hours. The important thing is: I really got better.

In those days, the clinic president was Professor Derer. On occasion, very rarely, all those doctors would make a visitation. In the morning, the nurse came – they were nuns – gave me a fresh sleeping gown, and started brushing the little hair that was already growing back. I begged her, please don't, because my head is terribly sensitive.

She said, she had to, because I was going to a demonstration. 'Good Lord! Well, I can hardly walk, I can barely sit up!' – I was in despair. In a few minutes, Professor Derer showed up with a lot of doctors and nurses. It turned out, I was the only one who got better from this medicine that they were using in place of penicillin, in a relatively short time.

As he examined me, everything was great, when he touched me, he said to the nurse, 'Take this patient's temperature!' I had a temperature of 39 degrees [Celsius; 102 degrees Fahrenheit]. He said, 'Well, today we aren't going anywhere.' They left, and I immediately started to cry, that now, after I'd already been better, this happened.

The two nun nurses reassured me, 'Don't cry, there's no reason to'. She said to me, 'You just didn't want to go, that's why you got a fever.' I said, 'Sister, don't say such things. The professor knows what he's talking about.' 'How would he, he's just a professor, but I'm the head nurse here!' She was right, because two days later I was completely alright.

A cousin of mine also came back from the camp. He came back from Dachau. Nobody was allowed to visit me, because there were children everywhere and I was infectious. The only person who visited me every day in the hospital, ignored the warnings, and who said that he wasn't afraid, was Löffler, my future husband.

He brought me now and then, special things to eat, too. I was in the hospital for two months. They really cured me. When they let me go, he came for me. The doctor asked, 'Who are you living with?' I said, 'Well, I actually live by myself, because I've got a room at my uncle's, but they all work, so I'm always by myself.' 'You can't stay by yourself, because it will take a good half year, or maybe more, before you can be alone, there are many different consequences from this serious brain infection.'

We left and on the road, instead of asking for my hand, he said, 'See, you can't be alone, we have to get married.' And that's what really happened: in 1946, not even a year later, we were already married.

At the end of 1938, when the war mood was everywhere and the big emigration wave started, my husband, Löffler wanted to leave. He was too late. By the time it was his turn, he couldn't go. After the war, the emigration started again.

Many people came back, and they said they're not staying in this country, they'd rather emigrate. We worked a lot – I also worked with him, he already had his own forwarding agency. We worked night and day, Saturday and Sunday, a lot. In those days emigrants could also take their furniture, appliances, whatever would fit into one wagon and with special permission they could even take

silverware with them. Many took advantage of this possibility.

My husband said, let's hurry up, so we don't miss the boat again. We missed the boat that time as well, but in reality neither one of us really wanted to leave. If both of us had really wanted to, we wouldn't have been so interested in profits and the company, but would have let everything be and would have gone.

The third occasion was in the year 1968, when at least half the friends we had left. By then we didn't really want to leave. I was born here, my family had lived here for a century and a half, in this city. I really, really loved the city I was born in, and I only feel at home here. The truth is that whenever there was any threat of danger, I never wanted to leave here.

Some friends or ours, a married couple succeeded in getting over to Austria, and with a lot of difficulties, they arranged their emigration passports to go to Palestine. They stopped in Vienna – the lady had a very large knitting shop.

She was very clever; they stayed there, didn't go on. I got a letter here and there, or they telephoned, invited us. That was the only time when we both thought about it [emigrating]. Both of us worked, and my daughter Anna had been born [in 1948]. Then the thought of it, leaving – it always got farther and farther from me, so that in the end, we stayed here.

Since Fascism took our lives away, I thought, the only possible change left was Communism. Naturally, we didn't know – I think, there was hardly anyone who could have known – who this Stalin guy actually was. My mother had a girlfriend who was in hiding with her family and miraculously stayed alive.

They were all party members. Her son was a doctor, who said, 'Kato, your place is in the Party. Join up, please!' He even brought me the questionnaire. I filled out the form and one fine day went down to hand it in. I lived in Old Town [Stare mesto], the Communist party center was in the Town Hall of Old Town.

I went to the Town Hall, and it was written there which office you had to go to. I opened the door, well, there were a lot of people there. Desks in a semi-circle, there was quite a lot of smoke, because after the war everyone smoked heavily. On the right side, a young man was sitting, he saw me and called out: 'Finally, you've come, this is the place for you, too!' I looked at him, and he was the young German resident of Zuckermandel, whom I had always been scared of.

Bratislava wasn't such a big city, that you wouldn't know someone at least by sight. I knew that he'd harassed Jews, and I also knew that he was horribly dangerous. Uncountable times I'd wanted to leave home – and often tried without the star – but if I saw him, I always stopped and waited until he disappeared. And this figure was sitting there in the Party, as some functionary.

I looked at him without a word. I turned around, and went out into the Old Town Town Hall courtyard, ripped up the form and left. I never again considered joining the Party, where that kind of thing was possible. It was a very good thing, because much, much later I heard what had actually happened in the Soviet Union.

In the 1940s and 1950s, you only heard about the party directors everywhere. The press, the radio continually encouraged you to work, which the simple people contributed to by 'building the

country.’ The real events in the background, which happened behind the political coolie-sack [sic], were never spoken of. In 1952, in the Slansky period [see Slansky Trial] [33](#) we sat by the radio, and just listened and I think we got the same thing most of the citizens did.

When we first listened to the transmission, we thought: ‘Oh my God, is this possible, that’s really horrible, what are people capable of?!’ The accusers’ manner of speaking started to get suspicious, we sat and listened, but somehow my husband and I kept feeling, God save us if they find out I listen to London radio. But when the local interrogations happened, they condemned them with such a strange psycho mode, you heard such soulless sentences.

It was somehow displeasing. We tried to learn something more, from some other sources. When the time for the arrests came, among those whom we knew were the world’s most honorable people, that was terrible.

When these show trials went on, then both of us thought for the first time, that seriously, it wasn’t possible to stay in this country – meanwhile the Rajk trial [34](#) went on in Hungary – that somehow, we had to get over to Austria. But that was only a plan.

At first, I had a position at a construction company, but only for a short time. The longest time I worked at one place was at ‘Domace potreby’ [Household Business], in the head office. My husband was employed in Nitra. We went there to live, and we stayed for ten years.

My daughter was a student at the economics high school then, that’s where she got her diploma. In 1966, we returned to Bratislava. I got this position. There were 220 of us employed, I didn’t know anyone. I was in the propagation department, my task was to insure the procurement of the annual stock.

We got orders from the yearly buyers in Levice and Palarikovo, therefore they put me out there, where they mainly spoke Hungarian. I went out to those places. Before the market, about a week earlier, I traveled out there. I arranged the huts, and rooms for the sellers. The market generally lasted one week.

After I arranged that, I was always there, naturally, at the opening, because I was the so-called ‘povernicka’ [Slovak: in charge]. When I finished work, I went home.

I’ll tell you, how I got home. There was no bus, nothing. I met our planner, who revealed to me that the director was also getting ready to go home, and that he would certainly take me by car. I didn’t know the director, that’s why the planner asked him. Of course, he’d take me home, I just had to be at the gas station at one o’clock. I was at the station at exactly one, and I got into the big black car. He sat next to the driver telling him to get moving. Ten minutes later, nobody was left alive but me.

The director said to the driver, ‘Pridaj plyn’ [Slovak: put your foot down!]. He put his foot down and we slammed into a power pole. I put my two hands in front of my face when I saw we were going to hit it, but after that I don’t know what happened.

A bus coming from the opposite direction saw the accident happen, stopped, they got out and came over to the accident site. One of them said, ‘Hey, I hear some groaning back here, somebody’s still alive.’ That’s when they saw I was lying in the back. There was a man with them,

who had an axe with which they cut out a hole large enough to pull me out. Then they took me to the hospital.

That's how I got on physical disability [pension] at the end of the 1960s. I suffered some serious injuries. My vertebrae, my spine was broken in two places, I had head injuries, but they treated me and in the end I got better.

That's how I was on disability pension before, and only later did I start working as a tourist guide. After I was pensioned, I worked for twenty-six years at a travel agency. At the beginning, I just helped out, but then I got to like the work. I often guided Germans from the DDR [German Democratic Republic] and the Austrians also, during the so-called socialist period.

There wasn't a play, not one premiere, that we missed. I always loved going to the theater. There was television. Here in Bratislava you could watch Vienna [channel], whereas in Nitra you could get Pest [Budapest TV]. When we got back to Bratislava, the television was an absolutely satisfying thing, but we went to the theater regularly. After every lunch, the Vecernik [evening news] came out. There was nobody from Bratislava who didn't buy the Vecernik. At one time, we got Pravda also, and we considered that a real well-informed newspaper. Then they dropped the Pravda, but the Vecernik was a daily newspaper, for sure.

I went abroad regularly, mostly to Pest [Budapest]. I went to Pest because my father's two brothers and three sisters were there, everybody remained alive – they didn't live here in Czechoslovakia, only my father did.

So I immediately made contact, when I got home and every other month I went down to Pest for at least a couple days to stay with my cousins, sometimes even a week. Our passports were no problem, we got them easily.

When my daughter got a little bigger, I was at the Balaton with her once or twice. I went with my husband twice. In general, he always had a lot to do and so we couldn't go [together]. We could go on vacation to the Tatras, we went there a couple times, too, but nowhere else.

That particular married couple, our friends who settled in Vienna, they were very diligent and their business went well. I wrote to them; she was a good lady friend of mine. Her husband got seriously ill and died.

She called then, saying that her husband had died, the funeral was such-and-such and she'd be expecting me. I said, 'Well, you know, to come see you I don't only need a passport, but also permission to travel out of the country.' She said, 'Yes, I know that, and that's why I'm sending a written invitation.' That was the only stipulation, but just to go to the West. I handed in the request and the written invitation.

At the time, the way it worked, they sent a kind of policeman who interviewed the person. I was at home, and he came over in civilian clothes and told me why he was here. I took him into the living room, we sat down next to each other, and I even made some coffee for him.

We started talking, he asked everything, it was all there on the request form. In the little box next to the names of my parents, I put a little cross next to my father and my mother. He asked me, 'What does this mean?' I said, 'They are no longer alive, they perished in Auschwitz at this and this

time.' I told him the exact date. He looked at me with a little smile, 'Anybody can say that, maybe in the meantime, they're living in America, and things are going great there for them.' That hurt me so unfathomably, that without a thought I stood up, looked at him and said, 'Get out!'

Anyone who speaks like that with me about my parents, who died martyr deaths, has no business here, get out!' He got so frightened, he thought I might beat him up or I don't know what, so he left. He left his hat in the front room, I threw that after him, he caught it.

My husband came home in the evening, I told him about what had happened and said, 'I don't know, I might get a refusal tomorrow.' We waited, waited, but I didn't get a refusal, nothing. But I didn't get a passport for Austria either, so I didn't go anywhere.

1968 was a very interesting year [see Prague Spring] [35](#). We had jobs, I was quite satisfied as a tourist guide. I didn't have big expectations. A person could find pleasure, could live a cultural life, fantastic shows were staged one after the other. My husband was head accountant at a firm.

There wasn't one single Jew among his colleagues. It wasn't an issue, especially not here in Bratislava; it was an absolutely tolerant city, where nobody knew if you were or weren't Jewish. Our neighbors in the building weren't Jewish, just us. We had a good relationship with the director.

The company director had to be a party member and he was very nice, but he liked to have one glass too many. And then he did such idiotic things. It made you angry, my god, a man of this importance and he drinks!

Before 21st August 1968 [when the Soviet, Hungarian, East German, Polish and Bulgarian Armies occupied the country and put down the so-called Prague Spring.], we knew that everything was happening here. After midnight the telephone rang. Since I was closer to it, I jumped out of bed first.

I picked up the phone and the director said in Slovakian, of course, 'Horrible, one tank after the other, how many people, full of Soviet soldiers, terrible!' I said, 'The director of this, the director of that, sir you're a drunken pig.'

My husband jumped out of bed at that, he takes the phone from my hand, what right do I have to talk to the director that way. In the meantime, I went over – as a matter of fact, we live down in Leskova Street – to the window and saw what was then Malinovska Street. Oh my God, one tank after the other, it was really true!

We lived on the first floor [up]. Below us on the ground floor lived a very nice married couple, Dr. Gallik, a doctor and his wife. They had three boys studying at the Academy. We got along well. The lady was from Kecskemet, didn't know a word of anything except Hungarian.

She went to the window, and she yelled over to me, 'Kato, Kato, they just called from the hospital that the Russians have invaded us.' I said, 'I know, us too, I just found out.' 'Come down quickly.' It could have been about two in the morning, we went down like we were, in our pajamas.

The man, the doctor, paced up and down. 'Well what do we do now, what do we do?' The woman, with the utmost calm said, 'We drink a stampedli of cognac, then I make black coffee, we drink that, that's what we'll do.' And that's what we did.

Then the lady says, 'Kato and I will go down to the corner where they sell food and go shopping. We need flour, pasta, rice, sugar at home.' It was six in the morning already, we got ourselves together, us two women, and got dressed.

The shop opens at seven, so let's get there as early as we can. Well, there was a kilometer long line there already. We waited in line anyway, meanwhile we talked, we shopped, we could barely drag home the two big bags of goods. I didn't have to buy anything in the world for three months, because the pantry was full.

Anti-Semitism. Now I don't want to say that it got stronger and stronger, but it didn't get much smaller. I never came into conflict over my Jewish heritage. During the socialist time, I tried to immediately let them know that I was Jewish, because I've always liked to know what side we stand on, who's the enemy and who's the friend.

Once, on 8th March, on the occasion of International Women's Day we got together in a restaurant, where we had lunch. This was still in Nitra. Everybody got a cup, of course not with tea in it, but wine, and a really nice atmosphere ensued. I thought, how could I tell all these people, that I would know who's the enemy and who isn't.

The one who didn't come over, was the vice-director. So I asked, 'And so and so, how come that he isn't with us today?' One of the colleagues answered, 'He couldn't make it, because they called him in to the temple [used in Hungarian for Christian church as well].' I said, 'Temple?' – I was totally surprised, as he was such a serious party member – 'but now, in the afternoon?

Is he Catholic or Evangelist?' 'Don't be funny, when we say temple, we mean the party center.' I said, 'I thought they really were going to the temple for religion, that's why I go.' They looked at me. As a matter of fact, I had raised my voice, and pretty loudly said, so that those sitting around me could hear and tell the others – 'I'm a Jewish lady. I'm not religious, but I'm a believer. And I make it to the synagogue at least once or twice a year.'

I didn't see any surprise, they must have thought, I don't know what, but I had an absolutely good relationship with them all the way until I retired. There I never heard a word [about it]. After retirement, I was a tourist guide at the Cedok travel agency. I guided for a lot of Germans.

I bought a Magen David, which I put on a chain, and I always wear it, so from the first moment they see who I am. In this way, I never had a problem my whole life. I always tried to say, be careful, because I'm Jewish.

We aren't religious, but I'm a believer. I didn't direct my daughter in the spirit of Orthodoxy, because I myself received a free upbringing. Since I worked as a tourist guide, I could always take the time, if I wanted, to go to the temple.

I never concealed my visits to the temple; there wasn't anyone who I ever had to conceal it, or anything else, from. When there were high holidays, my daughter also came with me to the temple. She doesn't pray, doesn't talk about it, it's not an issue.

Such a beautiful Christmas tree, as the one we have every year, is hard to find anywhere. Since my daughter's marriage in the 1970s, we started decorating a Christmas tree again. Then, when my daughter got a job, she met her present husband. He husband isn't Jewish, he's an atheist, so my



daughter is as well.

I've lived under one roof with my daughter since she's been married. My daughter has worked for twenty-three years at Smena. Their head office was on Prazska Street. Smena is a book and periodical publisher in Bratislava, but they have a daily paper also.

The publishing house closed about fifteen years ago. It published very many books, original Slovak works, as well as a lot of translations. It was one of the largest publishers during socialism. My son-in-law works in the construction industry; after the Velvet Revolution [36](#), he started a private construction company with a colleague.

They do exclusively reconstruction and renovations of apartments, so they don't build houses, they just fix them up. After the change of regime, you could buy apartments, and a lot of people redid their bathrooms, and kitchens. They had a lot of work.

He worked in that business until last spring [2003], then he quit. Now he's retired. My daughter is also retired. They have a garden. They have a little weekend house, they spend whole afternoons there and both of them are mainly gardening now.

They also have just one daughter. Petra was born in 1977. She didn't get into university, but she finished a three-year travel program, went for a half-year to London as an au pair girl – she knew English before that, but learned it perfectly there. And when she came back, she translated books from English and German.

My grandchild is now living in Hradec Kralove [a Czech city], she has a life partner and mostly translates from English and German, but not books anymore, technical texts. She works very, very much and they are very happy with her.

1989 was the time of the big social changes, the Velvet Revolution. Every single day I went to demonstrate on SNP Square. There were four of us, two of my good friends and another lady. So that I would see and hear better, we would always hurry to the front and stand at the railing.

The joke was - in those days everyone said that when Carnogursky [37](#) was to make a speech, he would come out on the podium, look around and say: 'Mrs. Löfflerova is already here, so we can begin.' I was always there. When everything came together, then I missed it. I don't go anywhere to demonstrate anymore.

Since the regime change, the world isn't worse, but not really, that I can give my opinion without risk. I give it anyway, but I'm always a little scared. I say it everywhere, whether they like it or not. My family is definitely living better than we did. You can live, it's not so dangerous.

You can always do something and make money, you just have to want to. Of course, the younger people have to get used to living like Americans, that it doesn't matter how many academic degrees you have, if you have to sweep the streets or wash dishes, until something better comes along. I had to do that, too. That's what they never learned here.

There were big changes everywhere: the sense of community among the Jews was never like this. Namely, there are meetings, we attend great performances. I never knew that there are so many Jews still, and I find out who is who. The meetings are much richer when it comes to cultural

events.

Though, as the rabbi also says, they are also a lot more accommodating in religious areas. There aren't enough Orthodox Jews, today there are only Neolog Jews. We're only in the temple on high holidays, but then we're there to gossip.

In 1991, I took my first western trip abroad, to Israel. I don't have anyone there, so I took part in a trip arranged by the local travel agency Tatratur. We went together with seven Catholics and one Lutheran minister. One of my girlfriends, who is Jewish, went with me. It was miraculous, and we got a first-rate guide.

For my own self, I have to admit that I've never encountered something so perfect. I think we went everywhere, for eight days everywhere, we swam a lot in the sea, the Dead Sea, and the Red Sea, too. I was enchanted, incomprehensibly happy. Four years ago, I went for the second time. I constantly root for Israel, but I wouldn't like to live there.

Maybe I'm too Central European for it, to live there. I'm terribly sorry for myself that I'm aging, since there's so much to see in the world. Now, when I could allow myself a nice trip, I'm no longer physically able to.

I try to organize my days to keep my physical and mental strength in balance. I get the daily paper with my breakfast; it takes a while for me to get through the whole thing. Then I go down for a half hour walk, weather permitting.

At the age of ninety-four, I feel it when the wind is uncomfortable or the rain dampens a person's back. In the worst case, I sit out on the balcony, because there's never enough fresh air inside. My afternoon time is taken up by writing letters; I have a lot of pen-pals all over the world. In the evenings, I like to read, mainly historical books, those with references to Bratislava are especially my favorite.

There are six of us lady friends, six widowed ladies. Only one of us is Jewish, I'm the only one, but our relationship is so close, that if the religious community hosts an event, some kind of garden party, one or two of them come with me to have some fun.

We got reparations; we got them here, too. Those of us who were in the camp and I think, those who were refugees, they also got a little amount from Germany. Really, if you convert Euros to crowns, well, you really have something to start with. Not bad, not bad. For my part, well, I don't count, because I haven't got special desires and the more humble a person's desires, then there's no problems.

## Glossary

### **1 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.

## **2 Havel, Vaclav (1936- )**

Czech dramatist, poet and politician. Havel was an active figure in the liberalization movement leading to the Prague Spring, and after the Soviet-led intervention in 1968 he became a spokesman of the civil right movement called Charter 77.

He was arrested for political reasons in 1977 and 1979. He became President of the Czech and Slovak Republic in 1989 and was President of the Czech Republic after the secession of Slovakia until January 2003.

## **3 Orthodox communities**

The traditionalist Jewish communities founded their own Orthodox organizations after the Jewish Congress in 1868-1869. They organized their life according to Judaist principles and opposed to assimilative aspirations.

The community leaders were the rabbis. The statute of their communities was sanctioned by the king in 1871. In the western part of Hungary the communities of the German and Slovakian immigrants' descendants were formed according to the Western Orthodox principles. At the same time in the East, among the Jews of Galician origins the 'eastern' type of Orthodoxy was formed; there the Hassidism prevailed.

In time the Western Orthodoxy also spread over to the eastern part of Hungary. 294 Orthodox mother-communities and 1,001 subsidiary communities were registered all over Hungary, mainly in Transylvania and in the north-eastern part of the country, in 1896. In 1930 30,4 % of Hungarian Jews belonged to 136 mother-communities and 300 subsidiary communities. This number increased to 535 Orthodox communities in 1944, including 242,059 believers (46 %).

## **4 Neolog Jewry**

Following a Congress in 1868/69 in Budapest, where the Jewish community was supposed to discuss several issues on which the opinion of the traditionalists and the modernizers differed and which aimed at uniting Hungarian Jews, Hungarian Jewry was officially split into two (later three) communities, which all built up their own national community network.

The Neologs were the modernizers, who opposed the Orthodox on various questions. The third group, the so-called Status Quo Ante advocated that the Jewish community was maintained the same as before the 1868/69 Congress.

## **5 Chatam Sofer (1762-1839)**

Orthodox rabbi, born in Frankfurt, Germany, as Moshe Schreiber, who became widely known as the leading personality of traditionalism. He was a born talent and began to study at the age of three. From 1771 he continued studying with Rabbi Nathan Adler. The other teacher, who had a great influence on him, was Pinchas Horowitz, chief rabbi of Frankfurt. Sofer matriculated in the Yeshivah of Mainz at the age of 13 and within a year he got the 'Meshuchrar' – liberated – title. The Jewish community of Pressburg elected him as rabbi by drawing lots in 1806. His knowledge and personal magnetism soon convinced all his former opponents and doubters. As a result of his activity, Pressburg became a stimulating spiritual center of the Jewry.

## **6 Business (commerce) schools**

(1) Primary business education: schools for commercial apprentices. The 1868 law of compulsory school attendance opened the way to structured apprentices' education. The organizational rules of professional business education were first published in 1872.

The Industrial Law of 1922 reconsidered the system of commercial schools. (2) Secondary business education. The Academy of Commerce of Pest, established in 1857, was already considered a secondary educational institution and served as a model for the foundation of many secondary commercial schools in the following decades.

According to regulations published in 1872, the term of schooling was 3 years, which was subsequently lengthened by one more year beginning in 1920. (3) University education: The Economic Faculty of the Royal Hungarian University of Sciences in Budapest was also established in 1920.

## **7 Przemysl**

A border town in southern Poland about 100 km. from Lviv, Ukraine. A fortified castle was built here in 1874, but partially obsolete by the start of WWI. From the beginning of September 1914 to 9th October, the Russian army besieged the castle but despite very great loss of lives, the fort could not be taken.

On 11th November, a second siege began, and the siege ring stayed in place until 22nd March, when the defenders' food supplies ran out, and the high command ordered the destruction of all war materials, then blew up the fortifications and surrendered the castle. On 3rd June 1915, after a siege of a few days, the Hungarian National Guard retook the fort.

## **8 First Czechoslovak Republic (1918-1938)**

The First Czechoslovak Republic was created after the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy following World War I. The union of the Czech lands and Slovakia was officially proclaimed in Prague in 1918, and formally recognized by the Treaty of St. Germain in 1919.

Ruthenia was added by the Treaty of Trianon in 1920. Czechoslovakia inherited the greater part of the industries of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy and the new government carried out an extensive

land reform, as a result of which the living conditions of the peasantry increasingly improved.

However, the constitution of 1920 set up a highly centralized state and failed to take into account the issue of national minorities, and thus internal political life was dominated by the struggle of national minorities (especially the Hungarians and the Germans) against Czech rule. In foreign policy Czechoslovakia kept close contacts with France and initiated the foundation of the Little Entente in 1921.

## **9 War Bonds in the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy**

During WWI, in the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, state loans were issued eight times on the pretext of covering the expenses of the war. The Hungarian war-loans put out amounts of 18 billion crowns, the Monarchy's war expenses came to 110 billion.

After the war, Hungary only honored those war loans which were in the hands of Hungarian citizens at a certain date, and those held by foreign citizens whose country didn't acquire Hungarian territories. The consequence of this was that Hungarians now living outside the country were stripped of lesser or greater amount of money, sometimes losing their property.

## **10 First Vienna Award**

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 km<sup>2</sup> 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.

## **11 Jewish Codex**

On 9th September 1941, the Slovak Government issued Decree No. 198/1941 On the legal status of Jews - the so-called Jewish Code - a comprehensive legal norm based on racial principles and regulating the entire life of the Jewish community in Slovakia. The Jewish Code contained 270 paragraphs and was one of the cruellest anti-Jewish laws in Europe. It largely adopted many of the anti-Semitic norms that had been published in Slovakia since 1940, inspired by and taken from the so-called Nuremberg Laws in Germany of 1935. The solution to the so-called Jewish question was based on racial grounds, using the definition of "Jew" (anyone descended from at least three grandparents of Jewish origin) and "Jewish miscegenate" (persons descended from two or one grandparent of Jewish origin, respectively), and this principle was partly applied to mixed marriages as well.

According to its content, the Code can be divided into three parts. The first severely restricted the personal, civil, religious and social rights of Jews: e.g. public labelling of Jews, exclusion from schools, prohibition of free movement, enactment of forced labour, expropriation of synagogues by the state, etc. The second part of the Code dealt with the property rights of the Jews and deprived them of certain items of personal property. The third and most extensive part of the Code dealt

with the norms governing the transfer of Jewish property to "Aryan" ownership. The regulations also contained sections that allowed the President of the Republic to grant full or partial exemptions from the provisions. Both the Roman Catholic Church in Slovakia and the Vatican protested against the issuance of the Jewish Code and expected its modification. All critical responses were ignored by the state leadership.

## **12 Novomesky, Laco (1904-1976)**

Slovak poet, publicist, politician. From 1943-1944 a member of the 5th illegal leadership of the Slovak Communist Party (KSS). 1945-1950 Minister of Education and Enlightenment in the Slovak National Assembly (SNR).

In 1951, on the basis of construed accusations was stripped of all functions. Jailed 1951-1956. In 1963 civically and legally rehabilitated. In 1964 declared a National Artist. 1968-1977 a member of the KSS Central Committee and presidium of the Slovak Republic. 1968-1974, chairman of the Slovak Matica. Works of poetry: Nedela (Sunday), Romboid, Svaty za dedinou (The Holy Man Outside The Village). (Source: Illustrated encyclopaedic dictionary II, Academia Praha, 1981, pg. 699)

## **13 Nationalization in Czechoslovakia**

The goal of nationalization was to put privately-owned means of production and private property into public control and into the hands of the Socialist state. The attempts to change property relations after WWI (1918-1921) were unsuccessful. Directly after WWII, already by May 1945, the heads of state took over possession of the collaborators' (that is, Hungarian and German) property. In July 1945, members of the Communist Party before the National Front, openly called for the nationalization of banks, financial institutions, insurance companies and industrial enterprises, the execution of which fell to the Nationalization Central Committee.

The first decree for nationalization was signed 11th August 1945 by the Republic President. This decree affected agricultural production, the film industry and foreign trade. Members of the Communist Party fought representatives of the National Socialist Party and the Democratic Party for further expansion of the process of nationalization, which resulted in the president signing four new decrees on 24th October, barely two months after taking office.

These called for nationalization of the mining industry companies and industrial plants, the food industry plants, as well as joint-stock companies, banks and life insurance companies. The nationalization established the Czechoslovakia's financial development, and shaped the 'Socialist financial sphere'.

Despite this, significantly valuable property disappeared from companies in public ownership into the private and foreign trade network. Because of this, the activist committee of the trade unions called for further nationalizations on 22nd February 1948. This process was stopped in Czechoslovakia by new laws of the National Assembly in April 1948, which were passed that December.



## **14 Civil school**

(Sometimes called middle school) This type of school was created in 1868. Originally it was intended to be a secondary school, but in its finally established format, it did not provide a secondary level education with graduation (maturity examination).

Pupils attended it for four years after finishing elementary school. As opposed to classical secondary school, the emphasis in the civil school was on modern and practical subjects (e.g. modern languages, accounting, economics).

While the secondary school prepared children to enter university, the civil school provided its graduates with the type of knowledge which helped them find a job in offices, banks, as clerks, accountants, secretaries, or to manage their own business or shop.

## **15 Srobar, Vavro (1867-1950)**

Slovak politician, physician, a professor at the Bratislava Komensky University, one of the founders of HLAS newspaper (1898), and a follower of Masaryk. He was plenipotentiary minister of Slovakia from 1918-1920, and headed a number of ministries from 1919-1922; he was a representative from 1918-1925, and from 1925-1935 was an agrarian party senator.

He was a leading advocate of the Czechoslovakian movement. He directed a minor anti-fascist group in the Tiso period of Slovakia, and during the Slovak National Awakening, he was one of the two presidents of the Slovak National Council.

After 1945, he headed a number of ministries (financial minister, minister for the harmonization of Laws). In 1946, he started the Strana Slobody Party (Party of Freedom), for which he was elected President.

## **16 Karlsbad (Czech name**

Karlovy Vary): 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.

## **17 Maccabi Sports Club in the Czech Republic**

The Maccabi World Union was founded in 1903 in Basel at the VI. Zionist Congress. In 1935 the Maccabi World Union had 100,000 members, 10,000 of which were in Czechoslovakia.

Physical education organizations in Bohemia have their roots in the 19th century. For example, the first Maccabi gymnastic club in Bohemia was founded in 1899. The first sport club, Bar Kochba, was founded in 1893 in Moravia.

The total number of Maccabi clubs in Bohemia and Moravia before WWI was fifteen. The Czechoslovak Maccabi Union was officially founded in June 1924, and in the same year became a member of the Maccabi World Union, located in Berlin.

## **18 SK Bar Kochba Bratislava**

the most important representative of swimming sports in the First Czechoslovak Republic. The club was a participant in Czechoslovak championships, which it dominated in the late 1930s.

The performance of SK Bar Kochba Bratislava swimmers is also documented by the world record in the 4 x 200m freestyle relay, which was achieved by four swimmers: Frucht, Baderle, Steiner, Foldes. They also won several Czechoslovak championships in relays.

SK Bar Kochba was also the most successful from the standpoint of number of titles of Czechoslovak champion in individual disciplines. In 1936, despite being nominated, athletes of Jewish nationality didn't participate in the Olympic Games in Berlin. The Czechoslovak Olympic Committee didn't recognize this legitimate protest against the political situation in Germany, denounced it in the media and financially penalized the athletes.

## **19 Benes, Edvard (1884-1948)**

Czechoslovak politician and president from 1935-38 and 1946-48. He was a follower of T. G. Masaryk, the first president of Czechoslovakia, and the idea of Czechoslovakism, and later Masaryk's right-hand man.

After World War I he represented Czechoslovakia at the Paris Peace Conference. He was Foreign Minister (1918-1935) and Prime Minister (1921-1922) of the new Czechoslovak state and became president after Masaryk retired in 1935.

The Czechoslovak alliance with France and the creation of the Little Entente (Czechoslovak, Romanian and Yugoslav alliance against Hungarian revisionism and the restoration of the Habsburgs) were essentially his work.

After the dismemberment of Czechoslovakia by the Munich Pact (1938) he resigned and went into exile. Returning to Prague in 1945, he was confirmed in office and was reelected president in 1946. After the communist coup in February 1948 he resigned in June on the grounds of illness, refusing to sign the new constitution.

## **20 Anschluss**

The annexation of Austria to Germany. The 1919 peace treaty of St. Germain prohibited the Anschluss, to prevent a resurgence of a strong Germany. On 12th March 1938 Hitler occupied Austria, and, to popular approval, annexed it as the province of Ostmark. In April 1945 Austria regained independence legalizing it with the Austrian State Treaty in 1955.

## **21 Hlinka-Guards**

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

## **22 Tiso, Jozef (1887-1947)**

Roman Catholic priest, clerical fascist, anticommunist politician. He was an ideologist and a political representative of Hlinka's Slovakian People's Party, and became its vice president in 1930 and president in 1938.

In 1938-39 he became PM, and later president, of the fascist Slovakian puppet state which was established with German support. His policy plunged Slovakia into war against Poland and the Soviet Union, in alliance with Germany. He was fully responsible for crimes and atrocities committed under the clerical fascist regime. In 1947 he was found guilty as a war criminal, sentenced to death and executed.

## **23 Yellow star in Slovakia**

On 18th September 1941 an order passed by the Slovakian Minister of the Interior required all Jews to wear a clearly visible yellow star, at least 6 cm in diameter, on the left side of their clothing. After 20th October 1941 only stars issued by the Jewish Centre were permitted. Children under the age of six, Jews married to non-Jews and their children if not of Jewish religion, were exempt, as well as those who had converted before 10th September 1941.

Further exemptions were given to Jews who filled certain posts (civil servants, industrial executives, leaders of institutions and funds) and to those receiving reprieve from the state president. Exempted Jews were certified at the relevant constabulary authority. The order was valid from 22nd September 1941.

## **24 Slovak State (1939-1945)**

Czechoslovakia, which was created after the disintegration of Austria-Hungary, lasted until it was broken up by the Munich Pact of 1938; Slovakia became a separate (autonomous) republic on 6th October 1938 with Jozef Tiso as Slovak PM.

Becoming suspicious of the Slovakian moves to gain independence, the Prague government applied martial law and deposed Tiso at the beginning of March 1939, replacing him with Karol Sidor. Slovakian personalities appealed to Hitler, who used this appeal as a pretext for making Bohemia, Moravia and Silesia a German protectorate.

On 14th March 1939 the Slovak Diet declared the independence of Slovakia, which in fact was a nominal one, tightly controlled by Nazi Germany.

## **25 Anti-Jewish Laws in Slovak State**

In March 1939, the Slovak state was established as a result of the Nazi expansionist policy in Central Europe. The "solution" of the Jewish question became one of the most important tasks in the new state. Very quickly, the first legal interventions in the Jewish community took place. Already in April 1939, on the basis of Government Decree 63/1939, the first definition of a Jewish citizen was adopted. However, this regulation also already guided the number of Jewish citizens in

certain professions - editors, lawyers. This trend was subsequently continued. In addition to "guiding" the number in various professions, Jews lost their political and civil rights. Then, in the spring of 1940, Law 113/1940 - the so-called first Aryanization Law - was passed. (Aryanization was the Nazi term for the seizure of property from Jews and its transfer to non-Jews).

On 9th of September 1941, the Slovak Government issued Decree No. 198/1941 on the legal status of Jews - the so-called Jewish Code - a comprehensive legal norm based on racial principles and regulating the entire life of the Jewish community in Slovakia. The Jewish Code contained 270 paragraphs and was one of the cruellest anti-Jewish laws in Europe. It largely adopted many of the anti-Semitic norms that had been published in Slovakia since 1940, inspired by and taken from the so-called Nuremberg Laws in Germany of 1935. The solution to the so-called Jewish question was based on racial grounds, using the definition of "Jew" (anyone descended from at least three grandparents of Jewish origin) and "Jewish miscegenate" (persons descended from two or one grandparent of Jewish origin, respectively), and this principle was partly applied to mixed marriages as well.

According to its content, the Code can be divided into three parts. The first severely restricted the personal, civil, religious and social rights of Jews: e.g. public labelling of Jews, exclusion from schools, prohibition of free movement, enactment of forced labour, expropriation of synagogues by the state, etc. The second part of the Code dealt with the property rights of the Jews and deprived them of certain items of personal property. The third and most extensive part of the Code dealt with the norms governing the transfer of Jewish property to "Aryan" ownership. The regulations also contained sections that allowed the President of the Republic to grant full or partial exemptions from the provisions. Both the Roman Catholic Church in Slovakia and the Vatican protested against the issuance of the Jewish Code and expected its modification. All critical responses were ignored by the state leadership.

## **26 Novaky labor camp**

established in 1941 in the central Slovakian town of Novaky. In an area of 2.27 km<sup>2</sup> 24 barracks were built, which accommodated 2,500-3,000 people in 1943. Many of the people detained in Novaky were transported to the Polish camps. The camp was liberated by the partisans on 30th August 1944 and the inmates joined the partisans.

## **27 Sered concentration and labor camp**

created in 1941 as a Jewish labor camp. The camp functioned until the beginning of the Slovak National Uprising, when it was dissolved. At the beginning of September 1944 its activities were renewed and deportations began.

Due to the deportations, SS-Hauptsturmführer Alois Brunner was named camp commander at the end of September. Brunner was a long-time colleague of Adolf Eichmann and had already organized the deportation of French Jews in 1943.

Because the camp registers were destroyed, the most trustworthy information regarding the number of deportees has been provided by witnesses who worked with prisoner records. According to this information, from September 1944 until the end of March 1945, 11 transports containing

11,532 persons were dispatched from the Sered camp.

Up until the end of November 1944 the transports were destined for the Auschwitz concentration camp, later prisoners were transported to other camps in the Reich. The Sered camp was liquidated on 31st March 1945, when the last evacuation transport, destined for the Terezin ghetto, was dispatched. On this transport also departed the commander of the Sered camp, Alois Brunner.

## **28 Auschwitz Protocols**

(also known as the The Vrba/Wetzler Reports) With the help of their fellow prisoners, two Slovak Jews, Alfred Wetzler and Rudolf Vrba escaped from the Auschwitz concentration camp in April 1944, and brought with them documentation about the camp. Wetzler and Vrba's news was received by the International Red Cross, the Czechoslovakian Émigré Government and the Allied powers.

## **29 Jewish Center**

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

The Jewish Center's jurisdiction was determined by the scope and regulations of the particular instance it fell under. This fact fundamentally influenced the center's operation. It limited the freedom of activity of individual clerks. The center's personnel was made up of three categories of people.

From bureaucrats, who in their approach to the obeying of orders did more harm than good (second head clerk of the Jewish Center A. Sebestyen), further of those that saw the purpose of their activities foremost in the selfless helping of people who were the most afflicted by the persecutions (G. Fleischmannova), and finally of soulless executors of orders, who were really capable of doing everything (K. Hochberg). Besides the Jewish Center there was also the Work Group, led by the Orthodox rabbi M. Weissmandel, but whose real leader was the Zionist G. Fleischmannova.

Though Weissmandel wasn't a member of the Jewish Center, he was such a respected personage that it would be difficult to imagine rescue missions being carried out without him. The main activity of the Work Group was to save as many Jews as possible from deportation.

Of those in the Work Group, O. Neumann, A. Steiner and Rabbi Weissmandel and Neumann survived. In the last phase of activity of this underground group Neumann, who also became the chairman of the Jewish Center, lived in Israel.

Steiner and Rabbi Weissmandel emigrated to Canada and the USA. Weissmandel and Neumann wrote their memoirs, in which they quite justifiably asked the question if the Jewish Center and especially the Work Group hadn't remained indebted towards Jewish citizens.

### **30 Horthy, Miklos (1868-1957)**

Regent of Hungary from 1920 to 1944. Relying on the conservative plutocrats and the great landowners and Christian middle classes, he maintained a right-wing regime in interwar Hungary. In foreign policy he tried to attain the revision of the Trianon peace treaty - on the basis of which two thirds of Hungary's territory were seceded after WWI - which led to Hungary entering WWII as an ally of Germany and Italy.

When the Germans occupied Hungary in March 1944, Horthy was forced to appoint as Prime Minister the former ambassador of Hungary in Berlin, who organized the deportations of Hungarian Jews. On 15th October 1944 Horthy announced on the radio that he would ask the Allied Powers for truce. The leader of the extreme right-wing fascist Arrow Cross Party, Ferenc Szalasi, supported by the German army, took over power. Horthy was detained in Germany and was later liberated by American troops. He moved to Portugal in 1949 and died there in 1957.

### **31 Novotny, Antonin (1904-1975)**

in 1921 he joined the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia (KSC). During WWII Novotny participated in the illegal activities of the KSC - he was soon arrested and during 1941-1945 imprisoned in the Mauthausen concentration camp.

In the year 1953 he became the First Secretary of the Central Committee of the KSC. Novotny reached the apex of his political career in the year 1957, when he was elected to the post of President of Czechoslovakia.

In 1960 Novotny courageously proclaimed that socialism was being built in Czechoslovakia - subsequently the word Socialist became part of the name of the republic (Czechoslovak Socialist Republic - CSSR). Novotny's withdrawal from the political scene began in the second half of the 1960s, when reformist tendencies began to appear in the Communist Party. During the time of the so-called Prague Spring, in 1968, Antonin Novotny was forced to abdicate from the function of President of the Republic. (Source: <http://zivotopisyonline.cz/antonin-novotny.php>)

### **32 Terezin/Theresienstadt**

A ghetto in the Czech Republic, run by the SS. Jews were transferred from there to various extermination camps. It was used to camouflage the extermination of European Jews by the Nazis, who presented Theresienstadt as a 'model Jewish settlement'.

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 cafe, a bank, kindergartens, a school, and flower gardens were put up to deceive the committee.



### **33 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.

### **34 Rajk trial**

Laszlo Rajk, Hungarian communist politician, Minister of the Interior (1946-48) and Foreign Minister (1948-49), was arrested on false charges in 1949 in the purges initiated by Stalin's anti-Tito campaign. He was accused of crimes against the state and treason (of having been a secret agent in the 1930s), sentenced to death and executed. His show trial was given much publicity throughout the Soviet block. In March 1956 he was officially rehabilitated.

### **35 Prague Spring**

A period of democratic reforms in Czechoslovakia, from January to August 1968. Reformatory politicians were secretly elected to leading functions of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia (KSC). Josef Smrkovsky became president of the National Assembly, and Oldrich Cernik became the Prime Minister.

Connected with the reformist efforts was also an important figure on the Czechoslovak political scene, Alexander Dubcek, General Secretary of the KSC Central Committee (UV KSC).

In April 1968 the UV KSC adopted the party's Action Program, which was meant to show the new path to socialism. It promised fundamental economic and political reforms. On 21st March 1968, at a meeting of representatives of the USSR, Hungary, Poland, Bulgaria, East Germany and Czechoslovakia in Dresden, Germany, the Czechoslovaks were notified that the course of events in their country was not to the liking of the remaining conference participants, and that they should implement appropriate measures.

In July 1968 a meeting in Warsaw took place, where the reformist efforts in Czechoslovakia were designated as "counter-revolutionary." The invasion of the USSR and Warsaw Pact armed forces on the night of 20th August 1968, and the signing of the so-called Moscow Protocol ended the process of democratization, and the Normalization period began.

### **36 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.

### **37 Carnogursky, Jan**

Lawyer, politician. In the 1970s, he was famous all over Czechoslovakia for defending religious believers and political dissidents. In 1981, they expelled him from the legal chamber because of a political trial where he was the defense attorney, but he continued his legal consultant activities on behalf of the religious and opposition forces. Between June of 1988 and October 1989, he put out his own samizdat paper under the name 'Bratislavske Listy'.

On 15th October 1989 he was arrested and accused of anti-state activities for the publication of his samizdat paper, and for the preparation of a memorial for persons executed during 1968. After the Velvet Revolution, he became one of the leading figures in Slovakian political life. Between 1990 and 1992, he was the vice-president of the Slovakian government. From April 1991 to the parliamentary elections held in June of 1992, he was the Slovakian president, and from 1992-1998 he was a representative of the Slovak National Council. From 1997-1998 he was vice-president of the European Christian Democratic Union.

### **38 Note**

Katarina Löfflerova made a mistake in names of the prisoners. The prisoners names were Rudolf Vrba (Original name Walter Rosenberg) and Alfred Wetzler.