Pavel Werner

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Pavel Werner, whose full name is Pavel Mendel Manes ben Chaim Werner, is by profession an economist specializing in foreign trade. His life story is an eventful one, having been fundamentally marked by the loss of his parents and younger sister during the Holocaust. The war years forced him to grow up prematurely, at the age of fifteen circumstances forced him to learn to rely only on himself. Pavel Werner is now in retirement, he however still actively participates in programs of the Terezin Initiative 1, gives lectures about his life experiences and the horrors of the Holocaust to young people in schools in the Czech Republic and also abroad, so as to pass on his testimony to the next generation. He tries to convey to young people the unconceivable, to impart to young people a sense of the wartime period, the suffering of the Jews in the ghettos, concentration camps, and on death marches, for he believes that only in this way can we have the hope that nothing similar will ever be repeated in the future. For this reason he also agreed to this interview, even though thanks to his eventful life he has developed a certain wariness and mistrust, reserves the right to his privacy and does not wish to publicize any details from his personal life after the war. Although some chapters of his life were left out according to his wishes, the interview with Pavel Werner was nevertheless extremely interesting, full of humorous as well as solemn anecdotes, pieces of a mosaic, as it were, that piece together the extraordinary life of a Czech Jew, lived during the extraordinary time that the 20th century inarguably was.

My family history

I know practically nothing about my father’s ancestors; neither do I have any materials or photographs. The only thing I know is that my father’s family came from Poland. When I was little, we never discussed my father’s parents or any of his other ancestors. I only knew some of my father’s cousins that lived in a village named Hroubovice in the Pardubice region, not far from Chrudim.

Fritzi Wernerova, who was apparently a distant cousin of my father's – by now I can't remember how exactly they were related – had a large factory in Hroubovice, I think a textile mill or laundry. Fritzi was very rich; she had married some Jew and belonged to the elite. They moved to Prague and in Hroubovice had only the factory. I recall that as a sign of respect to their family we would regularly send them from Pardubice whole bags of the renowned Pardubice gingerbread, which was in those days something, nowhere else did they make such amazing gingerbread. Fritzi, along with her daughter Gerta, passed through Auschwitz-Birkenau, returned. However, after February 1948 2 she secretly emigrated, I didn't know about it at all. In emigration Fritzi married a journalist that worked for [Radio] Free Europe 3.

Hroubovice was also home to my father's cousin Beno Werner, who was this tall man that owned an embroidery company, back then that was a common business in villages. I also recall my father's cousin Zigi Werner. How he made a living, I have no idea. Zigi's son, Erich Werner, survived World War II thanks to the fact that his parents sent him to the West, so he didn't spend any time at all in the camps. He joined the Western army, was in Africa, Palestine, Tobruk 4. After the war he also emigrated to the West. For long years I knew nothing of my relatives that had emigrated, because it was dangerous to maintain relations and correspond with people abroad.

During the First [Czechoslovak] Republic 5 we were registered in Hroubovice as it being our home municipality. The institution of the home municipality was very well thought out – every citizen had to have a home municipality, which was responsible for him. In the event that a person wandered, or committed something, or became a vagabond, he was expelled back to this home municipality, which had to take care of him.

My father, Karel Chaim Werner, was born on 9th February 1890 in Poland, in Kopyczynce. His cousins lived in Czechoslovakia, they invited him in the middle of the twenties [1920s], to come join them. He found work here, later in the 1930s when he met my mother, he settled here. I can't say that we were badly off, we for example had a maid, but we didn't have a car and on the whole our family wasn't in the same class with the rest of the members of the family, the rest of the Werners were a somewhat higher class. My father spoke Czech and sometimes German, we never heard even a word of Polish from him.

My father was a sales agent for the Kudrnac company, which manufactured various rubber products, and had its head office in Nachod [the company exists to this day under the name Rubena]. My father traveled by train around Slovakia, where he had his circuit and his clients, he visited individual shoemakers or small shops and sold them rubber heels and soles. He'd be away the whole week, he actually only returned on Sunday or Saturday and then left again. My father had the 'traveling salesman's disease': he was a gambler. Most traveling salesmen played cards, because when they arrived in a strange town, where they had no family, the only thing that was left to do was to get together and play cards. I remember that as soon as my father came home from his travels, the whole gang would get together in a pub or café, and play the card game Marias. He had this notebook, in which he would record how much he had won and how much he had lost. I think that in this respect my mother had a lot of problems with him. He was likely quite well-known as a card player in Pardubice, because people used to call my sister and me 'the soroklings' – from the Russian word sorok, which means forty – which is a term used in Marias.

My grandfather on my mother's side, Adolf Weissenstein, was a tailor. I never knew my grandpa, as he died before I was born. I only remember my grandmother Pavla Weissensteinova [nee Pollakova]. My grandma was born on 17th November 1868 in Nachod, where she also lived her entire life. I remember that my grandmother was ill, she suffered from heart disease, I recall that she had spots on her arms from leeches that were applied to the body, to lower the patient's blood pressure. She died on 5th January 1938; she was buried at the Jewish cemetery in Nachod, but that cemetery is no longer there, today there's a park that was built in its place. I remember by grandma very foggily, the only thing that's remained is the impression that she was ill and that her arms were purple from the application of leeches. From photographs I know that we used to visit her, but I really otherwise don't remember, I was very little.

My mother, Ella Wernerova [nee Weissensteinova], was born on 2nd May 1906 in Nachod. My mother was this refined figure, she was very cultivated. I don't remember getting a spanking from her, and if I did, it was only a couple of times.

My mother had an older brother, Otto Weissenstein, who was born on 1st March 1894 in Nachod. I remember him well, although I hadn't been to Nachod very many times. Uncle Otto had this magical box, which when it was opened in some fashion, always contained a candy. I've always loved sweets, which is something that has stayed with me, so I remember this impression very well. Every time he saw me, which wasn't that often, he always had that candy box with him. Otto died on 8th January 1936 of heart disease. He was buried at the Jewish cemetery in Nachod, but his gravestone is no longer standing, as the entire cemetery was liquidated, today in its place there is a park.

I remember my uncle's fiancée, Zdenka Camrova, who wasn't Jewish, but had a close relationship with my uncle. Zdenka was a nursery school teacher, back then it was a very valued profession. Nursery schools were quite rare and were intended for children from the upper classes. Few and far between could afford to put their children into one; poor people didn't have the money for it. Zdenka even drew this fold-out booklet about me, which had pictures and rhymes. After the war I met her once, and I don't think that she was happy; by the looks of it she hadn't married according to her expectations.

One more relative from my mother's side lived in Nachod, I don't know the exact relation, I however called her auntie. This aunt married a bank clerk of non-Jewish origins; she therefore lived in a mixed marriage and avoided the fate of the camps. If she was in Terezin 6 at all, then it was for only a short time. I remember that she used to send us parcels to Terezin. After the war I visited her in Nachod two or three times, when I passed by on a trip. She was an extremely kind woman, unfortunately she died relatively young.

I don't know anything about how my parents met; in this case I can only imagine how things happened. I think that they likely met at some spa at the end of the 1920s. I've seen photographs of my father in various spa towns from that period, so it's possible that he and my mother met someplace while on vacation. During my childhood I never discussed it with my parents, after the war I no longer had the possibility of asking anyone. That's why I don't even know when and where they had their wedding. It likely must have been in the year 1930.

Growing up

My Jewish name is Pavel Mendel Manes ben Chaim Werner. I don't use the entire name, for me it's rather exotic. I was born in 1932 in Prague, but our family lived in Pardubice. My childhood in Pardubice was at least in the beginning joyful and I enjoy recalling it. At home we spoke Czech; German was spoken only when my parents didn't want my sister and me to understand them. But because I took private German lessons from some Mrs. Hochova, I knew German practically from childhood and I even learned that old-fashioned lettering, 'Kurrent' [Kurrentschrift, also known as black-letter script]. I took German lessons, along with a friend of mine, with Mrs. Hochova, who was this old, wicked Jewess. I was afraid of her – she had this big, mean dog, a Doberman.

As a child I was an avid reader, for my age I read even, I would say, more difficult works. Besides this, I must have read completely all the pocket-novels, back then they were published as a series. Someone scrounged them up for me, and there wasn't a single pocket-novel that I hadn't read. I loved to read. We used to go skating; we also used to go to the park by the Pardubice Chateau to the so-called dahlias, for in the fall gorgeous dahlias would bloom in the park.

We lived in a quite nice building near the Pardubice railway station. My childhood was beautiful. My mother didn't work; she was a housewife and took care of me and my sister. My sister, Lenka Wernerova, was three years younger than I; she was born in the year 1935. We had a nice apartment on the first floor, with a large dining room, a kitchen and one more room. We also employed a maid. When the Germans came, we were allowed to stay there a while longer, however then we had to move to the outskirts of Pardubice [see Anti-Jewish laws in the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia] 7. Our new dwelling was this little one-story house that belonged to this small businessman, the file-maker Mr. Lochmann, who along with an employee manufactured files there. Mr. Lochmann was a very decent, older person. When I used to play in the garden, I would occasionally run into the workshop after him and watch him grinding and making files.

In Mr. Lochmann's house our family lived in two rooms – one room and a kitchen – we were quite crammed in that apartment, we had no conveniences. They were of course different living conditions than what we had been used to before, but I very much liked it in the new apartment, because there was a garden there, into which we could at least sometimes go when the owner permitted it. So my sister and I could occasionally go outside and play with the rabbits that we used to keep there, although Jews weren't allowed to keep any animals. I don't recall that anyone shunned us because we were a Jewish family, for example a little girl from the neighborhood, non-Jewish, used to normally come and play with us in the garden.

Life in Pardubice was nice, up until the Germans arrived. Of course even as a child a person felt that atmosphere, I personally was afraid and was quite scared of the boys from the Hitlerjugend 8. When they used to march around, they evoked terror; they wore these dark corduroy pants and brown shirts. At that time I wasn't even wearing a star yet [see Yellow star – Jewish star in Protectorate] 9, but already I was afraid of them, and when they marched, I would quickly hide somewhere. In our new neighborhood on the outskirts of Pardubice we were isolated from the center, where we were no longer allowed. We were only allowed to move about along certain selected roads. At that time my father lost his job, they fired him from the Kudrnac company, that I remember well. They sent him to work with other Jewish men: in Pardubice they cleaned the brook, sewers; they walked about with shovels and did various manual labor.

I remember that a little ways off from us along the road into town, when you walked through the park, there was this little shop in town, in whose display window the 'Vlajkari,' members of Vlajka 10, an organization of Czech Fascists, had an information center. Back then I was attending second grade, I already knew how to read, so I could read what was written there. There were texts aimed against Jews. Jews were drawn there with these big noses, they looked like disgusting creatures. I remember it very well, that I was standing there, read it, looked at the pictures and thought about it. Back then we were already in the Protectorate [of Bohemia and Moravia] 11, some political parties were outlawed, one big party named Narodni Sourucenstvi [National Alliance] 12 was created, which brought together various political groups. From the second grade of elementary school, when I read it, I to this day remember one slogan: 'Is the National Alliance for the nation, or for nothing? We Vlajkari at you are winking.'

In Pardubice I started attending school, I managed to only finish two grades, then they banned us from attending a normal school. Officially I couldn't go to the third grade and I began attending these secret classes for Jewish children. We would meet by the Pardubice synagogue and the classes were held in the rabbi's apartment. The Pardubice rabbi was named Feder, if I remember correctly. Children of all ages together in one class – we were this one-room school – this one young student used to teach us, her name was Krasova. I, along with two or three little girls, was the youngest ones, the rest were older. We formed one class, and were taught all at once, which went on for a year, up until 1942, when we had to embark on the transport.

I remember that I had to go to this school via a long detour, because as a Jew I was already wearing a star and wasn't allowed to be on certain streets. From our place on the outskirts it was a relatively long route to the school in the synagogue, which was actually in the center of Pardubice. The way was long and complicated, as I had to go via a long detour; It took me a terribly long time. I had to take various little side-streets, so that I wouldn't set foot on some main street. But I don't remember anyone attacking me or abusing me along the way, I didn't meet up with anti-Semitic attitudes. I was aware of relatively few anti-Jewish measures, I was afraid of the Hitlerjugend, I was aware of the anti-Jewish program of Vlajka, I knew that I wasn't allowed to go along main streets, that I had to wear a star. However, I didn't really ask my parents about these things, it didn't seem downright dangerous to me. I was relatively small and I didn't realize many things, and so they didn't trouble me. I concerned myself with my own worries, for in the third grade I fell in love.

I was in love with my classmate Eliska Weissova, who was two years older than I. She looked more womanlike, that's probably why I liked her so much. But she took absolutely no notice of me, because for her I was much too little. Eliska's family had escaped before the Germans from the border region, from the Sudetenland 13, at that time her father had bought a farm in Nemosice, not far from Pardubice. I met this Eliska again after the war, in a Jewish orphanage at 25 Belgicka Street in Prague, where she lived for some time. Then we didn't see each other again for around 45 or 50 years, and a year ago I met up with her at the congress of the Terezin Initiative. I suddenly saw her and she was very surprised that I had recognized her. So I revealed to her my love for her at the time, I said that I had loved her, and she – nothing. So as a child I was in love with Eliska, and they were trying to foist my classmate Ilona Klaubaufova on me, who I didn't like at all. They put on this children's wedding for us, the way children play. Ilona didn't return from the concentration camp.

Out of all the children in Pardubice that attended the secretly improvised classes, only I, Eliska Weissova and our classmate Fiala, formerly Fienberg, returned. His family changed their name still before the war. After the war he immigrated to Israel. And one of the Schwarz brothers, who also immigrated to Israel. The Schwarz boys were from a mixed marriage, Mrs. Schwarz wasn't Jewish. It was an interesting family. They belonged to the poorer class in Pardubice; Mr. Schwarz made a living by collecting rags and hides, you could say that he was this collector. The brother that returned immigrated to Israel and there worked as a maintenance worker or electrician at a hospital, where he met a nurse, an Arab girl, whom he married. That's quite unusual, that a Jew in Israel marries an Arab woman.

I also had a classmate, Karel Fuernberg, whose family escaped before the Germans from the Sudetenland, from southern Moravia. Karel's father was seriously handicapped, when we left on the transport to Terezin, he didn't have even one leg. In Terezin the whole family survived thanks to the fact that they didn't send Mr. Fuernberg to the East, into the gas as they say, to Auschwitz. They didn't transport cripples to Auschwitz, they left them in Terezin. Thanks to this Mrs. Fuernberg and Karel also stayed there, because they were taking care of the old man. After the war, Karel returned to Pardubice. I also lived in Pardubice for a year, so we attended Scouts [see Czech Scout Movement] 14 together, however only up to the time that Karel immigrated to Israel. How he fared there, I have no idea, because after that I didn't keep in touch with him at all. For it was terribly dangerous to correspond with a foreign country, let alone Israel.

I also had a classmate named Ludek Klacer in Pardubice, who was two years older than I; he was even in Birkenau with me. Ludek also returned from the concentration camp, but then emigrated. Of the children that I used to attend the secret classes with and who survived, I was the only one that remained in Czech, everyone else emigrated.

I can't precisely estimate the size of the Jewish community in Pardubice during my childhood. Our family associated with about six Jewish families – the Klacers, Klaubaufs, Seiners, but I don't remember the other names. My parents weren't particularly religious, my father, nevertheless, was a little closer to faith, as he was from Poland. But at home they didn't pray, neither did they go to the synagogue on Saturday, only during the high holidays, when he took me there a couple of times.

During the war

In the fall, 3rd November 1942, we got on the CG transport to Terezin. The whole Pardubice region one day got a summons; we got a summons to gather in the Pardubice Commerce Academy, which was conveniently located, as it was right beside the train station. Beside the freight train station, not the one from which passenger trains left. We knew that we could take with us only as many things as we could carry. Our place in Pardubice, where we lived after we moved out of our original apartment, was on the outskirts and quite far from the commerce academy. The man we lived with at the time, Mr. Lochmann, lent us this little wagon with four wheels, so we'd have something to load our things onto. This old man went with us the entire way to the commerce academy; far enough behind so that no one would see that he's walking with us. On the platform we unloaded our things and left the wagon standing there, and he then picked it up. I didn't see that, but he told me about it after the war.

The trip from Pardubice to Terezin was on the whole good – at that time they were still normal passenger wagons; they weren't some sort of cattle wagons. However at that time there wasn't yet a direct track to Terezin, that they built only later. So we had to get off at Bohusovice, which was still about three or four kilometers from Terezin. That doesn't seem like much, but I was wearing a lot of clothing, I had a winter coat on, so I was sweating a lot, I was dragging a bag – I can't exactly remember what I had in it. It was too much for me; I was sweating and crying that I can't go any further. At that time my father started in on me, told me to look at Lenka, how brave she is, that she's not crying and is walking on, and at the same time she was younger than me. So I have a vivid memory of this experience, that I was this weakling boy. In the end we somehow crawled our way to Terezin.

In Terezin I lived with my sister and mother, my father lived separately in the 'Hannover' barracks. We lived on Nadrazni Avenue in one of the buildings that had been adapted for the arrivals. There were ten women and three children living there in one room. When I later considered it, life in Terezin wasn't again that cruel for me. Though my sister died there, but at the time, as a child, I didn't feel it as much, as opposed to my parents, for whom it must have been a horribly cruel blow, to have a young child die. Lenka was eight years old when she died of tuberculous meningitis. Of course, in Terezin mainly older people and small children died – sick people who didn't have medicines. Otherwise I think that you could more or less survive there, a person didn't go nuts there, it was possible to do something.

Then for some time I lived at the L417 residence, in the home we had some sort of classes, but I don't remember it any more. Terezin also had a cultural life. There were performances of the children's opera Brundibar. [Editor's note: The children's opera Brundibar was created in 1938 for a contest announced by the then Czechoslovak Ministry of Schools and National Education. It was composed by Hans Krasa based on a libretto by Adolf Hoffmeister. The first performance of Brundibar – by residents of the Jewish orphanage in Prague – wasn't seen by the composer. He had been deported to Terezin. Not long after him, Rudolf Freudenfeld, the son of the orphanage's director, who had rehearsed the opera with the children, was also transported. This opera had more than 50 official performances in Terezin. The idea of solidarity, collective battle against the enemy and the victory of good over evil today speaks to people the whole world over. Today the opera is performed on hundreds of stages in various corners of the world.] I didn't play in Brundibar, but I also had a performance. Back then my father had taught me the Russian song 'Volha, Volha,' so I recited it there, although I think that I can't sing at all. We used to attend various concerts, there was activity, interests were enlarged upon. I, for example, collected razor blade wrappers. I walked around those huge army washrooms, where the men would shave, and collected razor blade wrappers. I had a whole large collection, and I and the others that also collected them would trade amongst ourselves. That also remained in Terezin when we left.

One day in March 1944 we received a definitive summons for the trip to Auschwitz. We had been summoned to the transport once already, but at the time I had a middle ear infection, so we were exempted from the transport, because acutely ill people weren't transported to the East. Of course, the second time we didn't manage to again avoid the transport. I remember the trip very well; this time it was quite cruel, they transported us in these cattle wagons. The wagons were overfilled, there was a horrible lot of us, and there was only one pail for bodily functions for everyone together. I don't remember all the details any more, but this I remember very well: what a terrible

problem it was with one single pail, all the more when there were so many people crowded around.

We arrived in Auschwitz at night, and that was some experience, I can still see it before my eyes. For one, there were lights everywhere, because everything had to be horribly lit up, then there were electrical wire fences everywhere that separated the individual camps. I remember the horrible light and bellowing on the ramp. The prisoners from the commando that was disembarking us were bellowing, the Germans were bellowing, a person felt like he had landed in a different world.

We got into the family camp. I lived with my father, my mother lived somewhere else. For some reason unknown to me I wasn't placed in the 'Kinderblock' [German for children's block] with the other children. Maybe I looked older, I had always looked older. So this way I also avoided the secret classes that were held in the Kinderblock – of course classes were held only while the family camp existed. So I practiced by myself. I found a piece of pencil and a cigarette package – at the time Polish 'papirosy' had a package made from hard paper – and I wrote on the blank side, counted, multiplied, divided. I was afraid that I'd forget these basic mathematical functions.

Auschwitz was cruel, there a person experienced something. I remember the shouting, our 'Lagerkapo,' the former Terezin executioner Fischer, who was always on a rampage. [Editor's note: A 'Kapo' was a concentration camp inmate appointed by the SS to be in charge of a work gang, a 'Lagerkapo' for a whole camp.] Once he even hit my father with a cane, I don't even remember why any more. Fischer was the only executioner in Terezin, he performed the one or two executions that took place in Terezin. Before the war he'd been a butcher and then worked in an autopsy room. Fischer was a deformed person, both physically and mentally. He was hunchbacked, he walked around hunched over, his face also looked horrible – he was this monster. Perhaps in reality he was actually this wretch that was compensating for his complexes. However, he was a human monster. In Terezin he worked as an executioner, in Auschwitz he became the Lagerkapo. He was constantly walking about with a stick and beating someone, bellowing and flying furiously about the camp. He inspired fear, and I was constantly afraid of him, especially after he hit my father. Fischer the Executioner had a lot of power in the camp, he was actually the second in command after the camp commander. He nearly had greater power over the prisoners than some SS officer, because he was in constant touch with them, he could whenever and with no reason kill any prisoner, and didn't have to justify it to anyone.

In Auschwitz my mother carried barrels of soup. Now when I picture it, it seems unbelievable to me, because our mother had a somewhat weaker constitution – she had scoliosis of the spine – but in the concentration camp did such heavy physical labor. She, who had never before worked physically; before the war she had been a housewife and took care of the children. Two women always dragged along a huge wooden barrel of soup. They had specially made handles on the barrels, they carried this harness, one in the front and one in the back, and dragged that unimaginably heavy barrel about, so that they could then scrape out the dregs of the soup. My father and I would always go there, and we'd get a little more of the soup scraped from the bottom of the barrel for our canteens. My father was physically quite badly off, he was completely down and out.

You could see planes flying above the camp, whole squadrons of bombers at a great height; we saw how they were shooting at them. Only later did it occur to me that the Allies knew exactly how

things were in Auschwitz, and didn't do anything, didn't hit anything. Of course, bombing the camp wouldn't have solved anything, that would have been absurd, but they could have much earlier on bombed the train tracks, so that the transports couldn't reach it. Thousands, maybe hundreds of thousands of people wouldn't have reached there, who this way went straight into the gas. If they would have bombed the tracks, although by this time not a lot of Czech Jews, but a lot of Hungarian ones would have been saved, many of which died towards the end of the war. They knew very well what was going on there, the Americans knew, the nunciature in Rome knew it, but everyone acted as if nothing was happening, as if they weren't exterminating people there.

We saw the flames from the crematoriums and the smoke, we smelled the stench of burned corpses, but in the beginning I didn't perceive it as mortal danger, I was eleven, twelve years old, so I didn't grasp that in the end I could also one day end up there. But for my parents, for the older ones in general, that must have been something terrible, the knowledge that next time it could be our turn – because it was known that the March transport, which had been in the family camp before us, went complete into the gas. My parents already knew it; they were only waiting to see what would happen. And then the selection came.

The selection was in July 1944, when they were liquidating the family camp. I went to the selection with my father, because for some reason I was with my father the entire time, I wasn't like most of the other boys in the children's block. I didn't know anything about my mother; naturally the women's selection took place separately. We all stood naked in a horribly long queue in front of Dr. Mengele, who organized it all. While we were still standing in the queue, my father, who probably sensed that we won't be together, told me what I should do in case I should by chance return home earlier than he. By the way he said it, I know that he hoped that he'll return too, he didn't want to believe that he wouldn't return. He said to me, 'Listen, whoever returns home first, if you get there first, you know where in the shed our tomcat Mourek used to sleep, dig in that corner there, you'll find some things there, OK.' So that I naturally remembered.

I went first, stepped in front of Mengele. He was this nice-looking young man, he looked at me, didn't say anything, the prisoner that was sitting beside him just wrote down my tattooed number with a pencil on a piece of paper. And Mengele just pointed that I should go to one side. [Editor's note: What the interviewee means is that Mengele selected them himself. This is a frequent statement, although they did not know anything about Mengele at the time, and it is not even sure that it was him.] They didn't write down my father and showed him that he should go to the other side. We were practically just a little ways away from each other. In this way, gradually both sides were slowly filled up. The side that I was on, there were very few of us, we were all young boys. The other side was already quite full.

Suddenly I noticed that my father had separated himself from that group that was already through the selection, and somehow managed to again get to the back of the queue. They couldn't find out that he had already been there once, because the queue was terribly long, those people were going one after another. I didn't even see him in the back, but I was watching when he again got in front of Mengele. It was a short distance away from me, so I saw and heard everything well. My father told them in German that he'd like to go to that side, because his son was there. And Mengele told him, 'you won't be together anyways,' and again sent him to the other side. Nothing, not like he beat him or something like that, not that, but he simply said 'you won't be together anyways.' After some time both groups parted ways.

My group, where there were a few of us boys, joined up with another group, so all together there were about 90 young boys and we relocated to Camp D, the so-called men's camp. The next day we found out that across Camp C, across the wires, you could see into Camp B. We saw wires and the silhouettes of those that still remained in Camp B – about 90% of the people from the selection remained there. Us 90 boys they sent to Camp D, and only a small percentage of those that Mengele chose for work, went to Camp A. All of us boys immediately pressed as close as possible to those electrically charged wires. It was possible to get within about a half meter, because everywhere there were signs in German and Polish 'danger of death', everywhere there were signs with a skull and crossbones. When someone approached the wires, they shot at them.

So we saw those silhouettes of people in Camp B. Even though it was hard to see, you couldn't see faces, because it was quite far. And suddenly I saw my parents. I recognized them by their silhouettes, that it was them, especially when they were standing beside each other. They recognized me as well. Both my mother and father were there, we began waving at each other. For a while we stood there like that and then we had to leave again. The next day we again came to the wire and again we saw each other, recognized each other and waved at each other. And the third day there was no one there. We didn't know exactly what had happened, someone said that they sent them into the gas, but no one wanted to believe that. We didn't believe it, we weren't in a situation where we could say to ourselves, well, and now they're gone. Up until the end of the war I wasn't convinced that they had died there, a person still hoped. None of us believed it, everyone hoped even when they returned home, that perhaps their parents would still return.

In Auschwitz I at first worked in a so-called clothing warehouse, in the 'Kleiderkammer,' which was an amazing score. It was excellent, because for one I was working indoors, where I sorted all sorts of things and clothing, and for another I could pick out for myself some clothes that fit, winter clothes, a winter coat. Of course, the most important thing was that I could pick out shoes – excellent shoes that lasted me the whole death march, I walked all the way home in them. Thanks to that, I didn't have to walk around barefoot or in wooden shoes. Naturally I couldn't take anything extra, that I'd for example have some extra underwear to change into, a spare shirt, socks. Nothing, that didn't exist, a person could have only what he had on him. We didn't even have a place to put it, because we slept in berths, it wasn't even certain where exactly a person would sleep, he didn't have an exact spot. The biggest problem were shoes, because you weren't allowed to take your shoes up with you. I slept in the bunks up on the second tier, there were loads of us there, and when someone had nice shoes and left them below, in the morning they were gone, someone would undoubtedly steal them. We weren't allowed to take things up with us, but we did it, otherwise we would have lost everything. Luckily no one found out that I was hiding them under my straw mattress, so I didn't have anything confiscated, otherwise I would have gotten a beating. Because this was checked on by this one Ukrainian, Marian, but there were six hundred of us sleeping in the building, so he couldn't check everything.

So working in the Kleiderkammer commando was excellent, occasionally I managed to steal something, but it wasn't called 'steal,' but 'organize.' So here and there I organized for example some ladies' stockings, back then there weren't nylons, but silk stockings, luxury goods. I then passed the goods over to one friend, Ludvik Klacer, who I knew from childhood from Pardubice, a very clever kid, who was three years older than I. Ludek then in some fashion offered it to some fat cats and in exchange got from them perhaps a piece of bread, a bit of margarine, or other things.

Ludek and I had a so-called commune, which meant that I found him something, he organized it further along, and the end result we split fairly amongst ourselves. Ludek always cleverly organized something, whereas I wasn't as capable, so he always gave me hell, that I hadn't stolen anything. However, once in the Kleiderkammer something bigger disappeared, this one Greek stole it. It must have been something big because they found out about it. It wasn't some stockings like I sometimes carried out. At that time I had been working there for a relatively short time, and that Greek blamed it on me. So first they gave me a sound beating and then they threw me out of that swell job.

They put me into another work commando, into the so-called 'Rollwagenkommando,' where there were thirteen of us boys hitched to these village wagons, which had earlier been pulled by horses or cows. The wagons had wooden wheels clad with iron, no rubber tires. Some had the harness, others, I was among them, pushed in the back, and the strongest stood in the front by the carriage beam and steered. We transported all sorts of materials; we even drove out, outside the camp. Always some Kapo would come with us, some highly placed prisoner, who knew what was supposed to be done, where something was to be taken. In this fashion we also got into the crematoria.

Towards the end of 1944 the Germans had already blown up the crematoria, because the gassing had stopped, the transports had stopped. Before I had only had the opportunity to see the crematoria from afar, we saw from the camp, as it was only a ways away, the wagons approaching on the tracks, we saw people getting out and going in single file in the direction of the crematoria. A little while later the chimneys began to smoke, you could see flames. However with the Rollwagenkommando I had the opportunity to get inside. The crematoria may have been destroyed, demolished, but the rubble hadn't been cleared away, it had all just been blown up. We crawled down, dragged out various things that had remained there, clothes, wood, various remnants. We carried it all onto our wagons and carted it away. Now we knew very well what it looked like there – before that we of course didn't have a look there, because whoever had a look, never returned. So we had the opportunity to nicely look it all over.

After the selection I lived with about ninety boys in our block. Today we call ourselves the 'Birkenau Boys.' It's a group of those that survived; today 34 of us are alive, of those six in the Czech Republic. One of us, a very clever guy by the name of Johny Freund, who lives in Toronto, took it upon himself to find and contact everyone that survived. A whole book was published, in two editions already, where each of us has a photo and a short article. The book is named 'After Those Fifty Years', because after fifty years, in the year 1995, we met here in Prague at the Community. Not everyone showed up, but a lot of the boys came with their wives. For the most part we didn't recognize each other after those fifty years. When I think about it, I think it was due to the fact that the experiences from the camps were so intense that they drowned out everything else.

I remembered two boys, one of them, Goldberger, who's not alive any more, him I remembered vividly, that we were sitting together in the camp at Melk and were peeling potatoes. And he for example didn't remember me at all. It seemed to me that he still looked exactly the same, he had been this very nice-looking boy, he looked a little like a girl. And indeed the higher-up men in the camp were after him. Overall I can say that homosexuality very much flourished in the camps, a person didn't even have to be homosexual by nature, but there were simply no women. When we came to Camp D after the selection, we were the center of attention of the block leaders, the elite.

Those Kapos simply looked us over and at that time they picked out several boys that they moved in with them as helpers. Of course, they were helpers in bed. Back then I was frightfully disappointed that no one had picked me out, I was inexperienced and naive, I had no clue what it entailed. But I have to admit, that those boys had it great: they got food from the block leaders.

The block leaders in Birkenau weren't Jews, mostly this work was done by Poles, political prisoners, they had red triangles, who had joined up with the Germans, they used to call them Volksdeutsche 15. The block leaders used to steal from us, because they got food for the entire block and were supposed to distribute it among us. They distributed food in such a fashion that an absolute minimum of food reached us – the daily ration was half a slice of dark bread and half a slice of bloody salami. The block leaders divided up the rest amongst themselves. There were always a few loaves of bread and some salami left over for them, and in the camps that was a huge fortune, because bread could be traded for cigarettes, for example. The same thing was done with all food, with margarine, salami.

So thanks to this the block leaders also looked the way they did – our block leader was the Pole, Bednarek, he had this shaved jailbird mug, he was horribly bloated, and walked around in a striped prison uniform. We walked around in normal civilian clothing, just that we had a red stripe painted on our backs with paint that couldn't be washed off, similarly our pants had a red stripe running their whole length on the side. This was in case someone managed to escape, so that they'd be recognizable at first sight. In the beginning, when I was still working in the Kleiderkammer, some clothing was being set aside exactly for this purpose. Earlier, normal clothing had had an opening cut into the back, into which striped prison material was sewn, but as that was too time-consuming, it was abandoned and they simply painted red stripes onto civilian clothing.

In January 1945 the liquidation of Auschwitz came. We could already hear the booming of cannons, that the Russians were coming. And those German idiots dragged the whole camp, all of Auschwitz-Birkenau, westward. They simply didn't want the Russians to take over the camp. So in January 1945 they chased us out on a death march, it was just in time for my thirteenth birthday. And I've got to say, it was cruel, it was punishing. We walked for three days and two nights, we walked non-stop in the cold and snow. We were aiming for some station in Silesia.

I remember that when Auschwitz was being liquidated, our Rapportführer [German for report leader] said that we shouldn't go on the death march, that we were really still children, that we should stay in the camp, because the trip would be extremely hard. But we shouted, 'we're strong, we'll go,' because we were afraid to stay in the camp with the old, weak and sick – we already knew that it smelled of something unpleasant. We were afraid that they'd kill us on the spot, though the gas chambers weren't working any more, but that they would shoot us or get rid of us in some other fashion. So it was decided that we'd go. Which was, when I look back at it, a big mistake, because we wouldn't have had to undertake that difficult death march, and for another thing, within about ten days the Russians arrived at the camp.

It's actually a major miracle that in the end all of us boys endured it and survived. I've got to say, completely openly, that the end, which means from January up to May 1945, those were the hardest times of the entire stay in the camps. First the march from Auschwitz in January to the train, that was the first death march, then we plodded on foot to Mauthausen, to Melk, then again to Mauthausen, to Gunskirchen. All in all, it was the hardest time. When the 'Birkenau Boys' met

years later, and we thought back on it all, we agreed that if it had lasted fourteen days longer, we wouldn't have endured it any longer, and would have gone insane. Because death doesn't happen in that a person suddenly falls down and is gone. No, I saw death approaching. First you lose that appetite, you no longer have the desire to eat, you're not even hungry, you're basically not a person any longer, you're only moving about in some way. A person's eyes sink in, his face gets this black color, he doesn't speak, doesn't do anything any more, he simply somehow winds down, in two, in three days he simply drops, without even knowing about it, and it's over for him.

Already in April we had no food or water whatsoever, we drank from puddles. In Gunskirchen we couldn't even lie down when we wanted to sleep, because the building was completely packed full – we had to sit in rows behind each other with our legs spread, so that we could fit. We couldn't go lie down outside, because it was in the forest and in April it was still very cold, the nights were cold, it was raining, wet. Well, just horrible. So if it would have lasted about fourteen days longer, maybe not even, we'd have started to go nuts, be out of it, it was only a question of days, and we wouldn't have survived.

The Terezin executioner Fischer also went with us on the death march from Auschwitz, he suddenly appeared and tried to be very friendly. But I was still afraid of him, because I remembered what sort of person he was, how he was capable of becoming enraged, brutish and give you a thrashing. I couldn't forget how he had behaved towards my father, how he had beaten him for no reason. So he marched along with us, we walked for three days, and suddenly we noticed that he had disappeared, suddenly he was gone. Apparently he hadn't been able to stick it out, began to lag further and further behind, and the SS shot him. For it had already been apparent that he wasn't in shape, that he won't manage the march, so likely this is how he died. So that was the end of the feared Terezin executioner Fischer.

On 4th May 1945 the Americans liberated us in Gunskirchen. Roughly fifty years later, a reunion of former prisoners and American soldiers, liberators, took place in that village. All of those soldiers were already old men; they came with their wives and had these baseball caps with the number of their brigade. There were far more of those soldiers that of us former prisoners. From the Czech Republic only two of us came, it was more Hungarians and Poles. From the camp the Americans transferred us to the airport in Wels, which a short ways away from Gunskirchen, where we spent roughly a month. Then we went back to Melk, to these huge barracks, where the Americans handed us over to the Russians. The Russians transported us to Vienna's New Town [Wiener Neustadt], where they let us be, there no one paid any further attention to us.

So the guys and I decided that we'd go home on foot. We calculated it to be about ninety kilometers. Three of us picked up and set out on foot for Bratislava. How we found the way, that I don't know. It was quite a dramatic trip. It was June 1945, horribly hot, we were extremely weak, so we agreed amongst each other that we couldn't manage the trip during the day, that we'd walk at night. We didn't have any gear, food, nothing. One night we happened upon some drunk Russians. They thought that we were some young members of the Hitlerjugend and wanted to shoot us. This was because we were wearing German uniforms, just without the insignia. The Americans had dressed us up in them at the airport in Wels, when they took off our prison rags, because the warehouse in the barracks was full of German uniforms and they didn't have any other clothing for us.

These drunk Russians thought we were Germans, they wanted to kill us. It was night, dark, we had to try very hard to convince them that we're not Germans, for them to not shoot us. We were crying, showing our tattooed numbers and were saying 'Czech, Czech, Czech,' because we didn't speak Russian. The problem is that it's impossible to lead a conversation with a drunk, much less a soldier, and what's more when you're walking about at night in a German uniform. It was already looking quite grim, they had their pistols out and at any moment could have started shooting. Finally we managed to convince them.

After the war

We arrived in Bratislava on 26th June 1945, where they deloused us and gathered us together in a place where there were loads of other people, not only we. Then suddenly someone came and said, 'you're going to Prague,' so I went. Everyone was transported to Prague, but suddenly I realized that we'd be passing through Pardubice, which is on the railway line. I didn't know what I'd do in Prague, I didn't know anyone there, so I got off in Pardubice. I was still hoping that I'd maybe meet up with my parents there.

After I returned home, I remembered my father's words, what he had told me before the selection, about the things hidden in the shed. So I dug in the spot that my father had described to me, I thought that I'd find some valuables there. I found a five-liter pickle jar. In the jar were only documents and papers, birth certificates and residence certificates. But I also found a list of things, where it was written what my parents had hidden and with whom. My guardian, a professor from the Pardubice Commerce Academy, got a hold of that list, and reclaimed those things from people. I know that he was very upset, that some didn't want to return them. They however weren't valuables; they were things like for example two easy chairs, underwear that people couldn't return anyways, it was already worn out. I got back books – Goethe, Schiller, Dumas, Capek.

Hidden with my mother's brother's fiancée there was a diamond engagement ring, my father's gold watch and some silver, which on the whole, however, didn't have any value, more a symbolic one, as a remembrance; they were family things. I lost these valuables anyways, when my Prague apartment was broken into. However, to this day I have and still wear my father's bathrobe, by now it's all translucent, but I still like to wear it. I also got back some shirts, glass and porcelain sets.

I came by our family photos more or less by chance, because they weren't on the list. But after the war I visited Mr. Lochmann in Pardubice, with whom we had lived after they had moved us out of our apartment. He told me that there was some sort of suitcase up in the attic, that he didn't know what it contained. Either he really never opened it, or he already knew what was in it, I really didn't care. We climbed up into the attic and in that suitcase I found all of our family albums, all of our family photographs.

After the war I found out that my father had a brother, whom up to then I had never heard about. All of a sudden I got a letter from Palestine from some Moses Werner, who wrote me that he was my uncle. He had apparently found out about me through an information service, a database of survivors, where it stood that some Werner from Pardubice had survived, and my uncle realized that I've got to be his nephew. He sent me photos of his family; he had sons a lot older than I was at the time. Moses Werner was already a very old man. He wrote me that unfortunately they can't take me in with them in Palestine, probably because they weren't very well off financially. For some time, about a year or two after the war, he used to send me parcels. I'd always get some food and

an accompanying letter in terribly quaint Czech, because my uncle knew only Polish. I broke off contact with my uncle after a few years, because it was dangerous to correspond with foreign countries, let alone Israel.

After I arrived in Pardubice, I lived for some time at a residence for repatriates, across from the train station. From there they sent me for recreation to Albrechtice, by Tyniste nad Orlici. In Albrechtice I lived in this little hotel together with other people from the camps, where they had gathered us for recuperation. I had ulcers and various other problems, I got injections to clean my blood, they also found something in my lungs. In the sanatorium we got better food, so that we would recover more quickly. I was the only child there. Because it was the end of June, and school was still on, they sent me to school for a couple of days, there in Albrechtice. There was only an elementary school up to the fifth grade there, so they sent me to the fifth grade of public school, although according to my age, I belonged to the fourth grade of council school. [Editor's note: This means that they put him in the 5th grade, despite the fact that age-wise, he belonged in the 9th grade of elementary school.] It was a gas, basically it was so that I would see what school looks like. I spent the entire summer holidays recovering in that little hotel in Albrechtice.

When I returned from the sanatorium back to Pardubice, I went to live with the Cervinka family for a year. The Cervinkas were a young couple, a young married pair, who had known our family before the war. However, I didn't remember them any more. So I lived with the Cervinkas in this little cubbyhole of a room; room and board however was paid by my guardian. Some Mr. Alfred Eisner took charge of me, a Jew from Pardubice, whom I hadn't known before the war, neither did he know me, and he told me that he was going to be my guardian.

Alfred Eisner was a professor at the commerce academy in Pardubice, during the war he had been in Terezin, however he arrived there only near the war's end, and only for a short time, as he had been from a mixed marriage, and these people didn't go on the transport until later. He acted as my guardian up until I was of age, he was a very meticulous and solicitous person, who took very good care of me, supervised my education and really tried to lead me well. I wasn't a family member, our relationship wasn't an intimate one – I used to address him as 'Mr. Professor' and his wife as 'Mrs. Professor' – however they treated me very well. Mr. Eisner was an excellent person, he treated me very well, he took care of me with respect to finances, as well as concerning himself as to how I was doing in school, how I was behaving, what will one day become of me. I started going to school in Pardubice, the fourth grade of public school. I had to study hard to catch up to everything. I did practically nothing but study, I sat up with my schoolbooks until late at night.

After a year I transferred to Prague, to a Jewish orphanage on 25 Belgicka Street, where after the war they had set up a home for Jewish orphans. So I lived for a year in a Jewish residence. I worked as a librarian there, I was in charge of the library, and attended a so-called one-year course, which was extended schooling. None of the people that lived there at the time live in Czech any more, they emigrated and live on all possible continents. Some of them weren't even from Czech, they were from various countries, from Slovakia, Hungary, Ruthenia [see Subcarpathia] 16. I left the Jewish faith, because I said to myself that if all of those wartime events could have happened, the Holocaust, that God can't exist, so that I'm an atheist.

After absolving the one-year course, my guardian Eisner asked me what I'd like to do next. I told him that I'd like to work as a gardener or forest warden, some occupation that is close to nature. At

first he didn't say anything, but when after a time I repeated it to him, he told me to forget about it, that I'd have no place to live, as in those days those jobs didn't come with any accommodations, no residence and support. And so my guardian said that he knew someone in Zlin, some Mr. Devaty, that I'd go apprentice as a shoemaker in Zlin, that I'll learn to be a shoemaker and during my studies will also have accommodations at a dormitory. It wasn't however just like that, that a person decided to be a shoemaker and that they immediately accepted him – I had to go to Zlin to take some exams, which took two days; I had to do psycho-technical tests. I didn't want to be a shoemaker for my entire life, stand at an assembly line and do the same thing over and over again. However, I went to that school mainly because that there was the possibility after finishing to decide for one of two specializations – as part of the Bata 17 plants there was a so-called export school, which educated sales people, which I was interested in.

In Zlin I was active in the Youth Union, where there were various ensembles, I led the recital ensemble. Everything of course had a strong Communist foundation; there I entered the Communist Party at the age of sixteen. I was a bit apprehensive, as our teacher was a National Socialist, but he was a very kind person and in the end joined the Social Democrats. In the beginning the National Socialists tried to entice me, but I had a special relationship to the Communist Party, which stemmed from the fact that in our barracks at Auschwitz we lived with Russian prisoners, who at the time made a hugely strong impression on me – they were awfully highly principled. Although I had nothing in common with them, the way they behaved amongst each other moved me, how they sang each evening. I had a peculiar, positive affinity to them, and as soon as I heard that the Communist Party had something in common with Russia, I said to myself that that was the right choice. I saw it solely through my experiences in the camp, how they affected me, I didn't think of it in any political sense, I really didn't know much about that. In Zlin they sensed that I was very leftist-oriented, so they accepted me into the Youth Union, I traveled around doing lectures, various schooling, I was active in this respect.

When I was studying in Zlin, my guardian got reports regarding my behavior, in each letter I had to account for the money I had spent, what I had bought with it. When I made a mistake in the letter or wrote something carelessly, I had to write it again in the next letter, and correctly. As I was sometimes not sure in spelling, I sometimes mixed up the letters 's' and 'z', I used to cheat on those letters, so that they would look in such a way that you couldn't tell which letter I had written. He found out that I was doing it so that it wouldn't be apparent that I didn't know the exact spelling, and so in the next letter I had to write 'z' about twenty times as a penalty. But he meant well, he was a very kind person.

My guardian was an excellent economist, so I didn't have it so bad in my studies. My classmates' parents used to send them packages from home, I may have not gotten packages, but Alfred Eisner used to send me food coupons for bread. Back then you couldn't buy bread without coupons. As apprentices we were fed at school, but otherwise we couldn't buy any food unless we had coupons. I also went to visit Mr. Professor at Christmas, as I didn't really have any other place to go.

After finishing shoemaking it then had to be decided what I would do next. I had two possibilities: the factory had two schools – a master shoemaker's school, which was actually a lower vocational school, and a school of commerce, which had classrooms in the normal business academy. This was a specialization that existed nowhere else except for Zlin, that both schools belonged to the

state-owned company Svit [the Bata Works were nationalized and renamed to Bata – National Enterprise, later the state-owned company Svit, from which the state-owned Precision Machine-Tooling Company was carved off on 3rd July 1950], which was a tradition dating back to the time when the factory belonged to Tomas Bata. Even before nationalization, Bata's system was in place here – everyone had to take a basic shoemaking course, and those that were capable could then go to the school of export. These students were called 'Tomasovci' [after Tomas Bata], they dressed well, when they came to the factory, they had to change and work just like everyone else. Bata then nurtured senior executives from among these people; he would send them abroad to gain experience and had them learn languages.

However, during the time when I was making my decision as to what I would do next, the Bata company was nationalized, and that possibility no longer existed, so I decided for commerce school, where I at least studied two languages. Studies were arranged so that one week we would work from 6am to 12pm, and then we had school from 2pm to 6pm. The next week it switched around, we would attend classes in the morning and from 2pm to 10pm we would work. We had a huge load, it was tough to manage all your studies and on top of that regularly work in the factory.

When I was in my second year, they announced at school that the foreign trade commerce academy in Prague was accepting students into third year – specially selected cadres, as it was called. I and a friend both applied, saying that we were interested in the offer, and were accepted. So I transferred to the third year of commerce academy, specializing in foreign trade, on Resslova Street, in Prague. We were two years older than our classmates, as before that we had worked in the factory in Zlin. At the commerce academy I was also the chairman of the company Youth Union Committee, studies went well for me, I didn't have any problems. I lived in a dormitory, which we had from the Ministry of Foreign Trade on Jugoslavska Street. In the third year I also met my future wife.

After finishing commerce academy I applied to the University of Economics, to a department specializing in foreign relations. At the time I was applying, those were critical times, the trial with Rudolf Slansky was taking place [see Slansky trial] 18. During those times I opened my eyes and realized what the Communist ideology was really all about. Of course I followed the developments in Israel, it interested me, and I remember it all very well, I simply didn't believe that those accused were some Zionist agents. That was an utter stupidity. When they found them guilty and I heard those speeches, for example Slansky's 19 speech, I knew very well that it's all for show, that it's a dirty trick. However I had a dilemma, what to do, how to act – I had already applied to university, so I of course didn't publicly proclaim my opinions, I wasn't stupid, because I knew that if I say something somewhere, I'll be included in all that, and they won't accept me to university. But they accepted me. In my papers it was written that I was a Jew, but I was also a worker cadre, I was a member of the Party, so in the end they couldn't reject me.

So in the end I got into the University of Economics, I had to work hard, because I had in the meantime gotten married, after a four-year courtship, and my wife and I were expecting a child. We didn't have any money. I had nothing at all and my wife wasn't from any sort of wealthy family either. I had an ordinary rubber briefcase and one pair of worn pants that I had to constantly repair, because I couldn't afford new ones. I of course lived in a dormitory. I had money only from allowances that I collected as an orphan and a needy person. I had no money, what I had left over I had to spend on the dormitory and food vouchers. After the wedding it was quite harsh, because

we had no place to live.

One time I had a summer job on a construction site, where the University of Economics was building new dorms – afterwards they allocated me a room there, which my wife and I moved into. Then I got a better dorm in Podoli, where we lived with the baby. We had one miniature bachelor apartment, the washroom, toilet and gas cooker were in one room – so there you would cook, a person if need be showered there and then went to the toilet. It was hard, anyways these were the conditions in which I finished my studies. I had to work part-time and at the same time study.

I had problems mainly with math, because I didn't have mathematical reasoning, I wasn't capable of doing higher math. Rather, I had a talent for languages. I was lucky that in the fourth year they picked me and one of my classmates to do translations abroad. We left with some military groups for Egypt. That helped me get some experience, and I also made a bit of money. We had a large baggage allowance coming back from Egypt, so I brought back some wool and textiles, clothing, a leather briefcase. My wife and daughter were able to dress nicely. So in this fashion I actually finished university.

After university I was in the army from 1959 to 1960, I went through basic training, where in the north, in Bor u Tachova, I crawled through mud with younger guys, which was tough, but then they transferred me to the position of translator, so I had a relatively tranquil army service. During socialist times a person couldn't choose where he wanted to work, I simply got a placement in Motokov, I accepted the job, and that's how my professional life began.

I've worked my whole life in foreign trade. I was actually a traveling salesman, like my father, with the difference that he traveled and offered goods in Slovakia, and I offered goods in various countries of the world, from Asia to America. Today I'm already retired, however I'm involved with the Terezin Initiative, I participate in forums with students, I talk about the Holocaust, so that the young generation has at least some idea of what the war was, so that similar horrors can never be repeated.

Glossary:

1 Terezin Initiative
In the year 1991 the former prisoners of various concentration camps met and decided to found the Terezin Initiative (TI), whose goal is to commemorate the fate of Protectorate (Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia) Jews, to commemorate the dead and document the history of the Terezin ghetto. Within the framework of this mission TI performs informative, documentary, educational and editorial activities. It also financially supports field trips to the Terezin Ghetto Museum for Czech schools.

2 February 1948
Communist take-over in Czechoslovakia. The 'people's democracy' became one of the Soviet satellites in Eastern Europe. The state apparatus was centralized under the leadership of the Czechoslovak Communist Party (KSC). In the economy private ownership was banned and submitted to central planning. The state took control of the educational system, too. Political opposition and dissident elements were persecuted.

3 Radio Free Europe

Radio station launched in 1949 at the instigation of the US government with headquarters in West Germany. The radio broadcast uncensored news and features, produced by Central and Eastern European émigrés, from Munich to countries of the Soviet block. The radio station was jammed behind the Iron Curtain, team members were constantly harassed and several people were killed in terrorist attacks by the KGB. Radio Free Europe played a role in supporting dissident groups, inner resistance and will of freedom in the Eastern and Central European communist countries and thus it contributed to the downfall of the totalitarian regimes of the Soviet block. The headquarters of the radio have been in Prague since 1994.

4 Tobruk

harbor town in Libya on the Mediterranean Sea. During WWII heavy battles for Tobruk took place, in which together with the British Army Czech soldiers also participated. On 22nd January 1941 it was occupied by the British Army. On 21st June 1942, after a siege of several months, if was occupied by the Wehrmacht led by Field Marshal Rommel. On 12th-13th November it was again conquered by the British Army. (Source: Illustrated Encyclopedic Dictionary, Academia, Praha 1982, pg. 261)

5 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.

6 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.

7 Anti-Jewish laws in the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia

In March 1939, there lived in the Protectorate 92,199 inhabitants classified according to the so-called Nuremberg Laws as Jews. On 21st June 1939, Konstantin von Neurath, the Reichs protector, passed the so-called Edict Regarding Jewish Property, which put restrictions on Jewish property. On 24th April 1940, a government edict was passed which eliminated Jews from economic activity. Similarly like previous legal changes it was based on the Nuremburg Law definitions and limited the legal standing of Jews. According to the law, Jews couldn't perform any functions (honorary or paid) in the courts or public service and couldn't participate at all in politics, be members of Jewish organizations and other organizations of social, cultural and economic nature. They were completely barred from performing any independent occupation, couldn't work as lawyers, doctors, veterinarians, notaries, defence attorneys and so on. Jewish residents could participate in public life only in the realm of religious Jewish organizations. Jews were forbidden to enter certain streets, squares, parks and other public places. From September 1939 they were forbidden from being outside their home after 8pm. Beginning in November 1939 they couldn't leave, even temporarily, their place of residence without special permission. Residents of Jewish extraction were barred from visiting theatres and cinemas, restaurants and cafés, swimming pools, libraries and other entertainment and sports centres. On public transport they were limited to standing room in the last car, in trains they weren't allowed to use dining or sleeping cars and could ride only in the lowest class, again only in the last car. They weren't allowed entry into waiting rooms and other station facilities. The Nazis limited shopping hours for Jews to twice two hours and later only two hours per day. They confiscated radio equipment and limited their choice of groceries. Jews weren't allowed to keep animals at home. Jewish children were prevented from visiting German, and, from August 1940, also Czech public and private schools. In March 1941 even so-called re-education courses organized by the Jewish Religious Community were forbidden, and from June 1942 also education in Jewish schools. To eliminate Jews from society it was important that they be easily identifiable. Beginning in March 1940, citizenship cards of Jews were marked by the letter 'J' (for Jude – Jew). From 1st September 1941 Jews older than six could only go out in public if they wore a yellow six-pointed star with 'Jude' written on it on their clothing.

8 Hitlerjugend

The youth organization of the German Nazi Party (NSDAP). In 1936 all other German youth organizations were abolished and the Hitlerjugend was the only legal state youth organization. From 1939 all young Germans between 10 and 18 were obliged to join the Hitlerjugend, which organized after-school activities and political education. Boys over 14 were also given pre-military training and girls over 14 were trained for motherhood and domestic duties. After reaching the age of 18, young people either joined the army or went to work.

9 Yellow star – Jewish star in Protectorate

On 1st September 1941 an edict was issued according to which all Jews having reached the age of six were forbidden to appear in public without the Jewish star. The Jewish star is represented by a hand-sized, six-pointed yellow star outlined in black, with the word *Jude* in black letters. It had to be worn in a visible place on the left side of the article of clothing. This edict came into force on 19th

September 1941. It was another step aimed at eliminating Jews from society. The idea's author was Reinhard Heydrich himself.

10 Vlajka (Flag)

Fascist group in Czechoslovakia, founded in 1930 and active before and during WWII. Its main representative was Josef Rys-Rozsevac (1901-1946). The group's political program was extreme right, anti-Semitic and tended to Nazism. At the beginning of the 1940s Vlajka merged with the Czech National Socialist Camp and collaborated with the German secret police, but the group never had any real political power.

11 Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia

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

12 National Alliance

during the years 1939-1945 this was the only Czech political party permitted in the Protectorate. Its first leadership was named based on the composition of the last pre-Munich government coalition. The party was intended to become a supporter of the Protectorate government. Until the year 1941 part of it cooperated with the resistance, subsequently loyalty to the German occupiers predominated.

13 Sudetenland

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

14 Czech Scout Movement

The first Czech scout group was founded in 1911. In 1919 a number of separate scout

organizations fused to form the Junak Association, into which all scout organizations of the Czechoslovak Republic were merged in 1938. In 1940 the movement was liquidated by a decree of the State Secretary. After WWII the movement revived briefly until it was finally dissolved in 1950. The Junak Association emerged again in 1968 and was liquidated in 1970. It was reestablished after the Velvet Revolution of 1989.

15 Volksdeutscher

In Poland a person who was entered (usually voluntarily, more rarely compulsorily) on a list of people of ethnic German origin during the German occupation was called Volksdeutscher and had various privileges in the occupied territories.

16 Subcarpathia (also known as Ruthenia, Russian and Ukrainian name Zakarpatie)

Region situated on the border of the Carpathian Mountains with the Middle Danube lowland. The regional capitals are Uzhhorod, Berehovo, Mukachevo, Khust. It belonged to the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy until World War I; and the Saint-Germain convention declared its annexation to Czechoslovakia in 1919. It is impossible to give exact historical statistics of the language and ethnic groups living in this geographical unit: the largest groups in the interwar period were Hungarians, Rusyns, Russians, Ukrainians, Czech and Slovaks. In addition there was also a considerable Jewish and Gypsy population. In accordance with the first Vienna Decision of 1938, the area of Subcarpathia mainly inhabited by Hungarians was ceded to Hungary. The rest of the region was proclaimed a new state called Carpathian Ukraine in 1939, with Khust as its capital, but it only existed for four and a half months, and was occupied by Hungary in March 1939. Subcarpathia was taken over by Soviet troops and local guerrillas in 1944. In 1945, Czechoslovakia ceded the area to the USSR and it gained the name Carpatho-Ukraine. The region became part of the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic in 1945. When Ukraine became independent in 1991, the region became an administrative region under the name of Transcarpathia.

17 Bata, Tomas (1876-1932)

Czech industrialist. From a small shoemaking business, he built up the largest leather factory in Europe in 1928, producing 75,000 pairs of shoes a day. His son took over the business after his father’s death in a plane crash in 1932, turned the village of Zlin, where the factory was, into an industrial center and provided lots of Czechs with jobs. He expanded the business to Canada in 1939, took a hundred Czech workers along with him, and thus saved them from becoming victims of the Nazi regime.

18 Slansky trial

In the years 1948-1949 the Czechoslovak government together with the Soviet Union strongly supported the idea of the founding of a new state, Israel. Despite all efforts, Stalin’s politics never found fertile ground in Israel; therefore the Arab states became objects of his interest. In the first place the Communists had to allay suspicions that they had supplied the Jewish state with arms. The Soviet leadership announced that arms shipments to Israel had been arranged by Zionists in Czechoslovakia. The times required that every Jew in Czechoslovakia be automatically considered a Zionist and cosmopolitan. In 1951 on the basis of a show trial, 14 defendants (eleven of them were

Jews) with Rudolf Slansky, First Secretary of the Communist Party at the head were convicted. Eleven of the accused got the death penalty; three were sentenced to life imprisonment. The executions were carried out on 3rd December 1952. The Communist Party later finally admitted its mistakes in carrying out the trial and all those sentenced were socially and legally rehabilitated in 1963.

19 Slansky, Rudolf (1901-1952)

Czech politician, member of the Communist Party from 1921 and Secretary-General of the Czechoslovak Communist Party from 1945-1951. After World War II he was one of the leaders of the totalitarian regime. Arrested on false charges he was sentenced to death in the so-called Slansky trial in November 1952 and hanged.