

Gertrúda Milchová

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Bratislava

Slovak Republic

Interviewer: Martin Flekenstein

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Mrs. Gertrúda Milchová lives in Bratislava, surrounded by her much-loved family. The main thing that captivated me was her storytelling talent, which I noticed during the transcription of her life's story. It's as if one weren't reading a transcript of a spoken text, but an actual book.

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Family background

My father's ancestors, the Milchs, lived in what was back then named Párkány, so in Stúrovo [the town of Párkány was renamed to Stúrovo in 1948]. Grandpa Max Milch was in the lumber business. I didn't know him personally, because he died in 1910; all I know about his is from what my father [Eugen Milch] told me. He was a temperamental person who liked to live, liked to eat, and liked to have fun. He took care of his family, and was quite authoritarian. Due to the fact that they had a big house, and there was always someone coming over to visit, guests and business partners, they had a lady that took care of the children, a nanny. My father used to talk about their nanny, who was German. She was from the town of Danzig. She came to Párkány, to a Hungarian environment, and learned Hungarian, brokenly, but nevertheless. She was a Protestant, and had one condition: 'Mr. Milch, when I die, don't bury me in a Catholic cemetery!'

I can't tell you anything about Grandma Milchová. All I know is that she had a brother, the painter Berci Lipner [Lippay, Dominik Berthold (1864 - 1920): real name Lipner. He was the Pope's court painter in Rome, later a portraitist in Vienna. His works can be found in the collections of the Budapest Museum and the Vatican Gallery]. As Stúrovo lies along the Danube, he had very close ties to Ostrihom [in Hungarian Esztergom], specifically with the archbishop in Ostrihom. Well, that archbishop who was there at that time became very fond of Berci Lipner. He was constantly helping him and supporting him. Due to his influence he converted, and changed his name from Lipner to Lippay. Berci is even listed in encyclopedias as having been a portraitist. He married an Austrian woman. They had two children, and when the 'Hitleriada' [1](#) broke out, the children went to their aunt's in Budapest, because they needed papers. They were of course 'half-Jews,' as despite the conversion, their father remained a Jew. They managed to submit a substitute confirmation from the Church, saying that their birth records had been destroyed in a fire. I never knew his children. My grandmother definitely had more siblings, but I didn't know the rest of them.

My grandfather was married twice. His second wife was named Lina, Karolína Milchová. She married a Milch, and was herself born Milchová. She was from Kotesová, near Zilina. Her mother tongue was Hungarian and German, and they also spoke these languages at home. I knew Karolína Milchová very well, because when the anti-Jewish laws [2](#) came into effect in Slovakia, and she couldn't have a servant and I wasn't allowed to attend school, they sent me to her, to help her with the household. I lived with her for nine months. She lived in Melcice, near Trenčín.

Karolína Milchová was a very interesting person. At the age of seventy she wasn't missing even one tooth. She had reddish hair, and was a very good cook. She had two daughters. One was Tekla, the other Margita. Tekla got married to a man in Budapest and Margita to one in Vienna. This quasi-grandma of mine loved those two girls very much, and supported them in any way she could, as her second husband was a tightwad. I witnessed one very unpleasant scene there. I felt terribly sorry for her. She had large closets full of underwear, bedsheets and dresses. The Guardists [3](#) came and were searching for something, and of course her husband was there. When they opened a closet, her husband saw that half the things were missing. He then proceeded to bawl her out terribly, because she'd given it all to her daughters.

Tekla was a very pretty, elegant woman. She married Mr. Schöffner, but their marriage wasn't a very happy one. She had a son, Robert, who caught tuberculosis somewhere. At that time she decided to leave her husband, and lived alone with her son. She nursed him, got infected, and also ended up with tuberculosis. Both of them died during the war, probably in 1942.

Manci, Margita that is, married Mr. Salzer from Vienna. She wasn't as pretty as Tekla, but thought that she was prettier. She had a son, who the family called Miki, but he was named Max after Grandpa. Their marriage wasn't a happy one either. Manci liked to flirt a lot, she always had some suitors and that bothered her husband a lot. I've got this impression that he committed suicide. Before the occupation of Austria, Manci and her son came to Bratislava. My father took them in, and found her work in a dairy. She worked as the dairy's manager. Miki attended school with me. My parents weren't very well off, we lived from hand to mouth, there was no money to spare, which is why my mother used to resent Manci, as my father supported her a lot. Manci decided that she wouldn't stay here, and found a job in England, and Miki went with the Jugendaliyah [young aliyah] to Palestine, where he was a kibbutznik up until the day he died. He settled in a kibbutz below the Golan Heights. In 1994, when I was in Israel for two weeks, he took us under his wing and showed us all he could. He died in 2003.

The Milchs declared themselves to be Jews, but didn't keep kosher [4](#), that I know for sure, because the foods that my father preferred didn't belong amongst the kosher ones. They observed the high holidays, but religion didn't play a special role there.

The Milchs had six children. The oldest was Géza. Géza died right after World War I of the Spanish Flu. The second oldest, Hugo, ended up in Vienna as a bank clerk. People used to say that his hands weren't clean, which is why he left for Australia already back during the time of Austro-Hungary. The third was Laci [Ladislav]. Laci I knew personally. He lived in Budapest. He very much liked to paint; he must have inherited some talent from Lipner. His apartment looked like a gallery. He was constantly buying paintings.

Anika [the fourth child] married Dr. Wilhelm, who was a physician. They lived in Budapest. Mr. Wilhelm was a very kind person, a good doctor. He never got upset, and was this calm, principled

person. Though he didn't show it when he was upset, his work nevertheless weighed on him, and he got stomach ulcers. [Editor's note: one of the last Nobel prizes for medicine were given to two Australians who proved that stomach ulcers aren't caused by stress, but by the bacteria *Helicobacter Pylori*] My aunt Anika registered for a six-month dietitian's course, and began cooking him a diet, which helped him a lot. They had two boys. The older one was Ernest, and the younger was named Andor. Andor graduated from law, and became a lawyer. Ernest graduated from high school, and worked for an international shipping company, Schenker. After the war, Andor got married, and had a daughter, whom I don't know, however. He was also a party member, which is why he changed his name from Wilhelm to Villányi [5](#). But when the Rajk trial [6](#) began in Hungary, he got mixed up in it somehow, and they sentenced him to death. They executed him. Due to the influence of these experiences, Ernest found a wife who wasn't Jewish and they left for Canada. They had no children.

The youngest of my father's siblings was Edmund, Dönci. After the disintegration of the monarchy, the older siblings left for Budapest, and my father and Dönci went to Bratislava. Dönci never got married. He never had a steady job, and lived as a bachelor. He was very fond of the company of the former nobility, the Pálffys, and so on, and was always trying to get something out of them. Sometimes he succeeded and sometimes he didn't.

Dönci and my father went into the lumber business. My father was one very honest person, and Edmund was literally a con artist. For example, they had an order in central Slovakia. The workers were supposed to be paid on Saturday, so my father gave Dönci money, as he was more mobile, to arrange it. He gave him money, and on Monday morning they called him, asking where the money was. He'd gone off to Vienna and frittered the money away, just like that. Of course, in two years their company went bankrupt. My father ended up paying the debts until he died.

But that's not the end of Dönci's mischief. My mother had gotten a beautiful lace bedcover as a wedding present. Dönci came over for a visit, and was admiring it greatly. My mother was glad that he liked it. Dönci: 'Lend it to me, I'll bring it back!' Of course he didn't bring it back, but gave it to some count. For example, when we'd be walking down the street, he wouldn't recognize us. We'd greet him, like well brought-up children, and he... One more anecdote about Dönci: He used to sit around in cafés, as was the custom in Bratislava before the war. It was his 40th birthday. One guy came over to him and said to him: 'Congratulations on your publishing a book.' He said: 'What book?' 'Forty years without a job.' That was Dönci. Dönci was notorious for being a Hungarian, as he still spoke Hungarian. After the war they didn't want to recognize his citizenship. He disappeared in some mysterious fashion, and ended up in Canada.

I knew my mother's parents very well; they died in a concentration camp in 1944. They deported them. Those that returned told me that they had actually died of hunger. My grandfather's name was Emil Grün, and he was a very courageous, just, and sociable person, who loved learning, and who ruled his eleven children with an iron hand. He provided them with what he could. Three of the five boys attended university, and of the other two, one graduated from business academy, and the second apprenticed as a shop assistant in the textile industry. The girls only attended council school, and my mother had business school. Grandfather Grün tried to make sure that his children would have good jobs.

My grandfather made a living by selling grain. He had his warehouse space in the house in Trnava. The street where they lived was named Zbozná [Devout]. It was a typical village house. In the front there was a so-called clean room, then there was an office where my grandfather could smoke, because his wife didn't allow it anywhere else. There were bedrooms and a kitchen. Behind the kitchen was a closet. The house didn't have running water, it came from a pump. Out in the courtyard there was a toilet. My grandfather like making things so much, that beside the toilet he also built a toilet for the children.

My grandmother, Róza, was the so-called 'executive shadow.' She cooked, did the laundry, organized the household and took care of the children. I remember that Grandma had wire-frame glasses. She kept a kosher household. On Saturday, she'd always pull out a prayer book and read. When my sister and I would come over, she'd run across the street to the corner store, and would buy us candy that was sold by weight in a paper cone. She was very kind and extremely frugal. She deposited all the money she got into a savings account. She loved her children very much.

They didn't speak Hungarian in the Grün family, because my grandfather didn't like Hungarian. It apparently stemmed from the fact that before they moved to Trnava, they'd lived in Horná Poruba, which is close to Ilava, where Slovak was spoken. They knew Slovak to such a degree, that when my mother began attending school, Grandpa hired a teacher who tutored the children in Hungarian. My mother hated it a lot; she always talked about how they called her Ernestine, while she was named Ernika.

In Horná Poruba, my grandfather had fields rented, and had a store and house there. Horná Poruba seemed a village to him, the children were growing, and so still during the time of Austro-Hungary, he bought land in what today is Hungary. Well, and when the monarchy fell apart [in 1918], he lost them. The first few children - Hugo, Margit, Laci, [Ladislav] Minko [Herman], Erna - my mother and Mariska [Mária] were born there. The rest in Trnava.

The Grüns had eleven children. Laci and Minko were fraternal twins. Minko had dark hair and was tall, while Lajko was blond and had a shorter, stocky build. Lajo apprenticed in the textile industry. Minko studied law, and graduated with honors. My grandfather was very proud of him. After graduating, Minko got a job at a law office in Vrútky. He worked as an articled clerk. He had a very romantic nature, and fell in love with his boss's wife. She was butt-ugly, and it suited her that such a good-looking young person was after her. He was dead serious, and tried to convince her to get divorced. She laughed at him, of course. And he, instead of going home and crying about it, talking about it to his family, he went and jumped in front of a train. He committed suicide. That was sometime during 1933-1934.

Lajko [Ludvik] worked in a textile store in Trnava. He was a very good dancer, and liked music. I don't know much about him. He got married, but that was already when times were bad; I've got this impression that they deported him.

Hugo finished school, and worked as an agronomist. He studied in Budapest, because he was a soldier during the time of Austro-Hungary. He got married and worked as a farm administrator in Liptovský Peter. He had two beautiful daughters, Juditka [Judit] and Esterka [Ester]. His wife's name was Blanka, she wasn't pretty, but was very wise. Hugo's whole family died in the Holocaust.

Margit got married in Trnava, to a man named Reich. She had two girls - Katka and Marta. A big tragedy happened there, because they deported the two girls, but their parents remained, because my uncle, Salamon Reich, was a farmer and they granted him an exception. On the advice of a Protestant priest, they had themselves christened. After the war they cancelled it and returned to the Jewish community. Salamon and Margita survived, they had friends that hid them. For days and days on end, Margita would go to the train station to wait for the girls. It was only later that she found out that they hadn't survived. It was a terrible shock for her. After the war, Uncle Reich worked as a butcher. He was still working long past retirement age. They lived in Galanta for some time, but finally bought a co-op apartment in Piestany. They died of old age. First my aunt, then my uncle.

Laci studied electrical engineering in Prague, but when he finished, that time of crisis [7](#) began, and he left for France. There he worked in a factory, but not as an engineer, as just a normal worker. He learned to speak French well, and saw the world. Then he returned, and got a job as an engineer in a factory in Bytca. He married Elza Weiner, the sister of the painter Weiner [Weiner-Král, Imro (1901-1978): Slovak painter of Jewish origin]. Laci and his wife were very leftist-oriented. They weren't members of any party, but were just members of the Union of Friends of the Soviet Union. Well, and when the fascist Slovak State [8](#) was created, they wanted to arrest his wife; at that time they had a seven or eight-year-old little girl. Vierka [Viera] was her name. My uncle said: 'You know what, why don't you take me, and let her stay with the kid!' They agreed. They jailed him in Ilava, and he went to Lublin with the first deportations. He even sent us one note [Editor's note: correspondence from the camp, on which prisoners had to write a dictated text], and also bequeathed us something. I know that he tried to escape and they shot him. Elza and Vierka held on until 1944, when they left for Bratislava, and were caught in a raid and deported. They didn't survive.

Mariska got married and moved to Sastín, and was the only one in my family to remain religious. She married Mr. Rudolf Ehrenreich. The Ehrenreich family was one very Orthodox and wealthy family. They had two children; the son was named after him, Rudko [Rudolf]. I don't remember the girl. They were in the textile, haberdashery business. They all died [in the Holocaust].

Piroshka Wollitzer's name was Priska, but everyone in the family called her Piroshka [Little Pyrogy]. Mr. Wollitzer was in the coal business. They lived in Trnava, and had a son, Ivan. All three died [in the Holocaust].

I've got to mention one thing, that in adulthood the Grün girls worked in the Trnava distillery as clerks. My mother was the first, then Piroshka worked there, and also Irena. The lady that owned it didn't have children, and they became very fond of the girls and supported them. Well, and when the youngest, Mikulas, finished business academy, Grandpa went to see them, that he's got a new candidate for them. And they said: 'We don't take men, as there's the danger that they'll learn to drink here.' So then he found a job in Bratislava.

Sáríka got married to Mr. Kohn who lived in Banská Stiavnica. Mr. Kohn was a widower and already had a son. Sáríka and her husband were in the uprising [9](#). They shot them in Kremnicka [10](#). Mr. Kohn's son survived, but I don't know anything about him.

Irena married Mr. Singer from Novy Ban. They didn't have children. They were shot along with the Kohns in Kremnicka.

The youngest, Mikulas, worked as a clerk in Bratislava. His first salary was 600 crowns. [Editor's note: In 1929, the Czech crown was decreed by law to be equal in value to 44.58 mg of gold.] At first he lived with us. Here he found a wife, Jenny; they got married and had a daughter, Darina. Miki and Jenny and Darina moved away to Israel in 1948. He worked there all his life as a gas station attendant. Jenny was at home. Darina was later diagnosed with schizophrenia, which can't be cured with any medicines, but can be treated. She even worked as a government clerk. When Miki died in 1979, contact with Jenny and Darina cooled off completely, because we didn't like that Jenny. She wasn't a good wife for him.

My father, Eugen Milch, was born in 1892 in Stúrovo. He attended the local parochial school. He didn't talk about his school days much, the only thing he told us was that they had a 'különóra,' meaning a separate class. They had to dig for potatoes for the convent. My father fell ill with whooping cough. He got over it, but back then they didn't know that it could also have further consequences. It damaged some glands, and he stopped digesting fats. He grew terribly fat, even though up until then, he'd been a skinny, bespectacled boy. When he got married, he weighed 110 kilos. He was even on one radical diet, because on average he had 130 kilos. Because they'd lived in Párkanyi, he was of course used to the water. He was a good swimmer, went fishing, boating. He did this with us, too. When we were little, we used to go to the Danube, to the Morava. My father wasn't in the army, he had an exception due to this illness.

My mother, Erna Lustigová, was born in 1899. She finished business school. My parents' marriage was arranged by a shadkhan. The wedding took place in Bratislava. My parents lived together up until 1939, when my father died. He'd been very ill for about four years, as his heart couldn't handle his weight. A doctor used to come visit and give him injections, diuretics, but it didn't help. He was 49 when he died. He was young.

My father was in the lumber business, he was the main supplier of wood from the Bán region to Hungary. Besides supporting the family, he also had to pay debts left by that miserable Dönci. My mother took care of the accounting and corresponding for him, because she had business school. She of course cooked, did the laundry and took care of the household. We also had a household helper.

Growing up

In Bratislava we lived at No.12 Moskovská Street, across from a pub. When my parents were getting married, there was a terrible housing shortage in Bratislava, and you had to pay 'key money.' We lived on the outskirts. They had to pay the former owners for the apartment. And their condition was that they had to buy the furniture, too. For years we lived with ugly old-fashioned carved German furniture. Gradually it was modernized. Those were apartments without bathrooms. There were forty apartments, and only two bathrooms. The landlady decided when each family could take a bath. One thing was good there though, that both rooms had big built-in stoves, that heated excellently. The apartment also had a small kitchen. It had both electricity and running water. In the kitchen there was a tile stove.

In our family, my mother did the shopping. Close to Moskovská Street, on the corner, there was a dairy where they sold bread, rolls, cottage cheese and cheese. Back then you still had an account and paid at the end of the month. We used to go there with a liter milk can, and a roll used to cost

25 halers [1 Czechoslovak crown = 100 halers]. In today's Postová Street, Mr. Klichá had a butcher shop, and that's where we bought meat. We didn't keep kosher, we bought bacon, Hungarian salami and similar delicacies. We bought fruit and vegetables at the market. I don't even know anymore where in Bratislava the market was, but I remember my mother dragging those bags around all right.

My mother was an excellent person. Naturally wise, she was interested in everything. She used to order books and read a lot. We had a lot of books at home, which is also something I inherited from her. The books were mainly in Hungarian and German. Back then salesmen used to come around offering books. When she saw that they were translations from American and Russian literature, she'd buy them. She devoted herself to that a lot. She loved theater, she even had a season ticket, because she attended the theater often. A German theater company from Vienna used to come here. She didn't miss a single performance.

She attended the theater alone, because her husband had no interest in it. In the beginning she would invite him, but then she gave up on it. The theater was a source of disagreements between them, because our custom at home was that supper was at 7pm, and theater performances also started at seven. So when my mother went to the theater, we had to eat supper earlier, and my father didn't like that. My mother also had literary proclivities, and even wrote one play. It took place in Trnava. The main figure was a person who was in a mental home, but wasn't crazy. I read it, but I don't remember it much anymore. It was quite interesting. She was very proud of that play. She wanted to give it to someone for evaluation. She told her husband, and my father made a scene, that his wife won't be writing any plays, and he won't permit any theater, so he forbade it. That was a big disappointment for her.

My father was one absolutely apolitical person. My mother was more inclined to social democracy, but wasn't an active member. We knew many people, but had closer relations with only two families. The first family was the Richters, Christians. Their son was my sister's age. They also lived on Moskovská Street. The second were Jews, the Deutsch family. I went to school with their son. My father loved playing cards, and Mrs. Deutschová was also a big card player. So this little group formed. My mother didn't play, she wasn't too interested in that. We used to go on outings to Koliba [a recreational area near Bratislava], and in the summer we used to go swimming. My mother also had a cousin in Bratislava, Mrs. Irena Porges. She lived on today's Podjavorinská Street, so my mother used to go over to her place often.

The anti-Jewish laws didn't influence our relations with the Richters in any way, because we'd already stopped seeing them before that. I've got this impression that it was because my father accused Mr. Richter of paying too much attention to my mother. My mother was one absolutely integral [integer: in German morally pure, i.e. a person of integrity] person, and it didn't even occur to her. So with the Richters it fell apart even before. We kept seeing the Deutsches until they transferred Mr. Deutsch to Palúcky, near Liptovský Mikuláš. He was a chemist, an engineer, so they sent him there to this one factory. We kept in touch with them all our lives, as they survived the war. Their son died, because he'd been deported. Mr. Deutsch died, he had stomach ulcers, and Mrs. Deutschová lived in Liptovský Mikuláš. My mother used to visit her.

I was born in 1923, in Bratislava. I didn't attend nursery school, we had a nanny. She was the daughter of a police official. She was always scaring us with ghosts and relished taking us for walks

to the Ondrej Cemetery. Despite this, I don't have any bad memories of her. She was named Mrs. Ivka Sarsúnová. My sister did attend nursery school for some time, but not I.

My sister and I attended a Neolog [11](#) school on Zochová Street. There they taught in German. Mrs. Hoffmanová was my favorite teacher. She taught everything. And then Mrs. Vermosová, she taught handiwork. I loved that, because she used to read us girls' books while did our work. After public school I wrote entrance exams for a German state high school, which I attended for four years. I didn't manage to graduate, because those Hitlerjugend [12](#) girls were constantly harassing me, so then I transferred to a Slovak high school. I finished septima [seventh of eight years of high school, the equivalent of Grade 11], and then, well, the Slovak State arrived, and that meant going to school was forbidden.

The girls at school were very aggressive, they razzed us and yelled 'Sara' [derogatory term for Jews] at us and so on. The boys were more restrained. Some little bit of courtesy still remained in them. The worst was that the Hitlerjugend girls were pushing around professors, Jews. They drove away the German professor, Fluss, who was an excellent teacher, even though the school principal was Czech. He was powerless. Of course, the German teachers didn't make things easier for us either. The worst was Pinkl. He wrote horrible poems, which we were required to buy. Well, and during those unsettled times when his book was published, he'd already started 'Jewing.' There were large differences, because old Schiff was a liberal German, and condemned it sharply.

I was very glad when my sister Erika was born, and then when she was growing up. From the time she was little, she was terribly charming. One some people came over for a visit, and she was still using a potty, and had to go pee. So she took the potty and brought it over to the visitors, too, and offered: 'Don't you want to?' She wore glasses because she had astigmatism. She was the family pet, but Mrs. Deutsch saw through it, and once told my mother: 'Listen, you've got two kids after all, so pay attention to the other one, too, not just the little one!' I didn't hold it against my sister, we got along well until the day she died, though after the war she lived in Hungary. She had very good qualities. She was intelligent, witty, and looked good. She was an extremely charming person.

At home we spoke Hungarian, because until his dying day my father could never speak Slovak properly. My mother could, but in an Upper Ilava dialect. Miki introduced Slovak at our place, when he lived with us. Everywhere in my old report cards from before the war, my surname was written without the 'ová.' It wasn't until I transferred to the Slovak school, that there the absolute process of Slovakification began. As I've already mentioned, because of my father we spoke Hungarian at home, I attended a German school, and it wasn't until later that I had to learn Slovak.

I always had a best friend of some sort. One of them was Edit Bauer, who's still alive, and lives in America. The Bauers were very wealthy, bechovet Jews. Mr. Bauer was a lawyer. Once they invited me over for seder. That was a great experience, because Dr. Bauer's uncle was very religious. The old man lead it, it was all according to custom. They drank and sang. It left a fantastic impression on me, because at home we observed holidays according to food. We made matzah dumplings, drank matzah coffee. We made chroises with apples. [Editor's note: charoset: in Bratislava jargon chroises. Grated apples with red wine, cinnamon and raisins. Charoset is part of the ritual seder meal.] I don't have any recipes of my mother's, except for nut cake, but that doesn't have anything to do with the holidays. My daughter also adopted the recipe, and when it's someone's birthday, he gets a cake. To make it you need: 8 eggs, 350 g of icing sugar, 3 tablespoons of cocoa, 150 g of

ground nuts, 1 lemon, 150 g of butter or margarine, and a bit of strong black coffee. Cake: mix 6 egg yolks, 200 g of icing sugar, 2 tablespoons of cocoa, a bit of strong black coffee and juice of the entire lemon. Add 150 g of ground nuts and thick whipped egg whites from 6 eggs. Put the mixture into a greased and floured cake tin, and bake at medium heat. Icing: in a water bath mix 2 whole eggs, 150 g of icing sugar, and a tablespoon of cocoa. After it cools, add 150 g of butter or margarine and cover the cake in the icing.

My father insisted on us being home by 7pm, which is why my friendships were quite limited. After lunch we did homework, and then we could go out. Sometimes we played in front of the house. Friendships took place on Sunday, when there wasn't school, because on Saturday we had to go to Jewish school at the synagogue. We weren't used to promenading, because Moskovská Street was relatively far from the promenade. Rarely we'd go to a restaurant, more often to a confectionery for a good grade in school. I remember the Lido [a swimming pool in Bratislava, on the bank of the Danube], we'd go swimming in the Danube, and once we had lunch there. They served beef soup, and in it they put chopped parsley, and that bothered me so much that it disgusted me, because we didn't use parsley at home.

Summer holidays meant tough times for Mom, because she had to distribute us. Two weeks at our grandparents', two weeks with Aunt Margita, later even with Laco. Our parents never visited spas or took holidays. Most of all I liked going to Trnava, because there were girls our age there, and my aunt was an excellent cook, and I like to eat, even to this day. My uncle very much liked going to cattle markets, and would buy cattle. He used to go all over western Slovakia. He used to buy it for the farm, but also for a slaughterhouse. He used to also go to Nitra, where there was this one confectioner, who used to make special mini-bites, and he'd bring them back for us. We liked going there, because we had fun there. We used to go to the sugar refinery to swim, there where they washed the beets. They'd fill it with water, and we could swim there. My grandparents were too old for us, so we preferred going to our uncle's.

The first time I was in a car was when I was four. My father took me to Budapest. Because he was so fat, he liked taking taxis. We got off the train at the western station, and he ordered a taxi. We got in, and when he sat down, I popped up... The second time was with Grandma Lina, when we went to Trenčianské Teplice, but by then I was already a student.

During the war

As a student I joined the Hashomer Hatzair [13](#), but just out of curiosity, I didn't believe in anything. It was curiosity. They talked about all sorts of things to do with Palestine, about Jews and problems of Jewishness. Well, and of course the external pressure brought a person closer to people who thought the same. I was on a brigade just once, a winter one, in a moshav [14](#) in Radvan. Then later I was already doing hakhsharah [15](#) by Hlohovec. There was one exemplary farmer there, Mr. Fussmann, who took on 25 to 30 Jewish boys. In the beginning there were only two of us girls, but then others arrived, who'd escaped from Poland. We cooked, cleaned and did the laundry. I learned to bake bread there, too. That was already during the Slovak State. The girls from Poland didn't tell us anything, because in the first place, there was a language barrier. That wouldn't have been such a big problem, more likely they didn't want to talk.

The effect of the Jewish laws was that I couldn't go to school. Secondly, my Grandma Lina in Melcice couldn't have a servant, so they sent me there to help her. We had to move out of our apartment, because policemen from the part of the republic that had fallen under Hungary came to live there. We got a substitute apartment, of course considerably worse than the one we'd had. During that time I was partly living at the hakhsharah with Mr. Fussmann by Hlohovec. It was called Panónia. There were boys working in various areas there. They had vineyards, grain, poppies and also cattle. We girls took care of the household. After the dissolution of the hakhsharah, I was in Melcice. People from Hashomer Hatzair alerted me that deportations [16](#) were going to take place, for me to escape. So I escaped to Hungary, and there my family took me in, my father's brother Laci and my father's sisters Anika and Tekla.

I got to Budapest with my mother's help. My mother found a driver who was willing to drive me across the border between Slovakia and Hungary. At that time it cost only a thousand crowns. [Editor's note: The value of one Slovak crown during the Slovak State (1939 - 1945) was equal to 31.21 mg of gold. The exchange rate between the German mark and the Slovak crown was artificially set at a ration of 1:11.] Later it cost horrendous sums. Because I spoke Hungarian, one Jewish family on the other side of the border took me in, and the next day they put me on a train. That's how I got to Budapest, and I was there until 1944.

In Hungary, the period from 1942 to 1944 was relatively mild from the standpoint of persecution of Jews. I had one piece of paper on which I lived. It was a police registration. At that time they didn't want to see any papers at the police. I arrived there, filled out a form, and instead of resident of Bratislava I put Stúrovo. [Editor's note: Bratislava and Stúrovo (in Hungarian Párkány) belonged to the First Czechoslovak Republic. After the First Vienna Decision [17](#), Stúrovo fell to Hungary.] They stamped it for me, and I lived on this document.

At first I lived with Aunt Tekla, but when in June my mother and sister arrived, we found ourselves a small bachelor apartment. We were registered there, but we didn't have food coupons, and so every three months that had to be arranged. My sister was an apprentice with a tailor, and my mother took care of a baby for a lady whose husband was in the army. I also babysat for one family. We had some income, but lived frugally. In 1943 we were caught in a raid, and they jailed all three of us as foreign citizens. We were sent to the Ricse internment camp. It was this camp that had a separate men's and women's part. Well, and then in 1944, when the Germans arrived in Hungary [18](#), they divided us up, because Ricse was shut down. The women were put in the Nagykanizsa jail, and from there they deported us to Auschwitz-Birkenau [19](#).

I mentioned that the Hungarian conditions were less severe. It was possible to get a reprieve from Ricse, and because my sister was a minor, they permitted her to continue her apprenticeship. Uncle Laci vouched for her. Just my mother and I remained. My sister was in Budapest. On 2nd May 1944, we arrived on the second Hungarian transport in Birkenau.

I'd estimate there were about a thousand people in the transport. Selection, of course. At that time I was 21, and my mother was healthy and strong. We ended up on the side of life. The whole surroundings, how men in striped clothing arrived, and guards with dogs, filled you with dread. One woman we knew, who already at that time had white hair, went into the gas, but that we found out only later, what was going on there. We felt very sad for her. When we came inside, we took off our clothes and showered. They cut our hair off, gave us horrible rags, men's underwear or something,

and army jackets with red paint and a cross on the back. My mother and I looked at each other. We looked like guys. We began to laugh. Tattooing was next. We realized that among the officials that were doing it, were also women from Trnava. They immediately recognized my mother, and took us under their wing. We spent four weeks in quarantine. After the four weeks, we got into one of the better commandos, into 'Canada' [20](#) There they sorted the clothes of people that had been brought in.

Gradually we found out what was actually going on there. Before that we hadn't known, or rather we hadn't wanted to know, what that Auschwitz really meant. Uncle Laci, who had supported us in Budapest, he regularly listened to English radio, and there they talked about those death camps. At the time it didn't sink in, it only sank in when we found out that our friend had died. So for a while we were in that 'Canada,' but we were very lucky, because they were organizing a commando that was going to Rajsko. There was one institute there, which was researching substituting rubber with specially bred dandelions. At first, the commando left Auschwitz- Birkenau for Rajsko every morning, and came back. Then came fall, and they put some of us up directly in Rajsko. Compared to Birkenau, it was completely different, better. Everyone had his own bed there, and you could shower every day. There was one female SS officer there, a former teacher, who had a principle that everyone had to get what the state decreed, and so you couldn't even steal in the kitchen. The portions were limited, but we got them. We were there until the evacuation of Auschwitz-Birkenau, and then they forced us out on a death march [21](#).

At night we marched, and during the day they herded us into these large shelters, they were probably some sort of open hay stores. When the evacuation started, we had only some light shoes that we'd found in those piles in 'Canada.' My mother was a very practical woman, she cut apart a sheet and we wrapped our feet in the strips of cloth. That saved our feet from getting frostbitten. When we had the daily rest, we laid down on the rags, and dried them with our own bodies. Then we'd wrap them around our feet again. Those women that had high boots, or other shoes, got frostbitten feet. We arrived at Ravensbrück [22](#). That was another calamity.

We arrived at Ravensbrück in February, and it was still freezing. Due to the fact that the camp's capacity had long been exhausted, they built something like a circus tent in the courtyard. They put beds in it, and herded us in. The way they gave out food was that they'd herd us outside, and as we went back in one by one, they gave us our share. It was very dangerous, because a person could lose his place on a bed. My mother stayed inside, I got one portion, a miserable one too, and that's what we lived on. The hunger there was severe. The biggest calamity wasn't that we didn't have anything to eat, but that the thaw began. It warmed up, and the whole base on which the tent stood began sinking. When something fell from the bed, what little you had, a comb or spoon, it was lost. The Ravensbrück command didn't know how to deal with the masses of people that were there. They divided them up into external camps, which however weren't concentration camps, but work camps. That's how we ended up in Malchow [23](#). There the hunger was absolute. They still needed laborers for work in the forest, and so I applied, hoping that we'd get some sort of soup. But again, that same water with three little carrots like normal. Of course it was dirty there, and you couldn't wash. That was at the end of March or in April, and you could already feel the German Reich decomposing.

Then, they wanted to take us from Malchow to Terezin [24](#), but they didn't manage it, because the front was already there. By then we weren't accompanied by the SS, but by soldiers. We arrived in

an area that some of them were from. Well, and then they saw that there was nothing anywhere, no food or anything; from hunger we were opening potato cellars and eating raw potatoes, and that kept us going. They said: 'You know what, do what you want!' And left us there. It wasn't anything dramatic. Suddenly we were free. Dirty, hungry, and wanting to live. You've got to know, that that year the spring was beautiful. The sun was shining, by the roads there were fruit trees blooming. That buoyed a person.

We met two former prisoners of war, Canadians, and they told us that in such and such a direction there was a town, and in the school there were Poles, and that maybe they'd take us in there. We found lodging there, I think it was the town of Neichen. There were seven of us. My mother, I, then Manci from Martin, two Austrian women, both named Liesl, plus Malka from Bratislava. Those Poles weren't from a concentration camp, but had been working in Germany. They gave us this corner, and that's where we lived. It was under the American Army, close to the Elbe, so we also saw that change, when the Americans left and the Russians arrived. We walked around the village, asking for flour and eggs. Those people were neither good nor bad, they didn't hurt us in any way, but gave us something. We didn't want to end up in the large collection centers, but made our own way.

My sister had a different fate from us, because she was in Budapest. She then returned to Slovakia illegally. She lived under an Aryan identity, but in the end they caught her and deported her to Terezin. In Terezin she took care of children. That meeting was quite dramatic, because we left Neichen slowly. The Russians took us part of the way, they allowed us to sit on a car and took us a ways. We walked a ways. We ended up in a place from where they were transporting concentration camp inmates to Prague, and so we arrived in Prague. I think so, I've got a gap there. In some fashion we found ourselves at the station in Brno, but from where, whether we'd come from Prague, that I don't remember anymore. We were still looking for a way to get to Bratislava. In Brno they told us: 'Wait, a train from Terezin is supposed to arrive, it's going to Budapest, so it has to go through Bratislava!' We waited there. The train arrived, it was only these cattle wagons. Suddenly the doors flew open, and someone was shouting: 'Mom, mom!' My sister was on that train. Then she remained with us, and that's how we got home.

Post-war

We arrived in Bratislava. It was very odd. I went to our old apartment. I rang, and said that I used to live there. The first thing was: 'We won't leave here!' I ran into some shomers [shomer: member of the Hashomer Hatzair movement], who had survived, and they told me that my aunt [Margita Reichová] was alive, in Trnava.

Margita, Mrs. Reichová, was my mother's oldest sister. They were living normally in their apartment, because for months someone had been hiding them. So we went to Trnava, and they took us in. One tried to find out who'd survived and how they'd survived. Right away I got in touch with some shomers. One evening I was telling them about my experiences from the concentration camp, and that lifted a burden off me. Then life began. I had to gain weight, because I was skinny. In the beginning we kept together, but then when the aliyah [emigration of Jews to Palestine] was being organized, they were trying to convince me to go with them. I didn't go, for one because of my mother, and for another because of school. They then renounced me; I was a renegade shomer.

My mother found an accounting job in Trnava. My sister didn't know how to fit in with the new conditions, and wanted to return to Budapest. She returned, too, and married there. My brother-in-law is also Jewish. His family had a different name at one time, but his father was already named Barabás, they Hungarianized [25](#) their name. My brother-in-law had been doing 'mukaszolgalat' [Hungarian for forced labor]. I don't know anything about the other members of his family. I know that his brother Tibor survived, and two sisters, Alica and Berta. Their family wasn't overly decimated.

My brother-in-law was into textiles. He was a Communist and in the end became the manager of a department store. My sister worked in foreign trade, and after work studied at university, because they wanted her to have qualifications. Whenever it was exam time, Mother would go help with the household. My sister graduated from economics, foreign trade. She had three children, two sons and a daughter. The oldest died in a car accident at the age of 22. The other two children are alive, I'm still in touch with them, they come here regularly. My brother-in-law died, he had diabetes.

In the beginning we visited each other only rarely, because we didn't get permission. When the oldest son was born, my mother only with great difficulty went to see her grandson, but then, when it was simpler, I was there once a year, and she would come, too. We kept in regular touch until she died. She died in 2002. My sister's family didn't observe anything, in fact she was even cremated. They didn't light candles. They didn't fast during Yom Kippur.

The first thing I had to do upon my return was graduate from high school. I couldn't finish my last year anymore. They were organizing courses in Bratislava. I used to commute from Trnava. First I graduated, and then I wanted to study. But what? I had friends that had gone to study languages, but one of the shomers wanted to study chemistry at an engineering school. So I went with him and took engineering, specializing in paper and cellulose. For 27 years I worked at a paper and cellulose research institute. From there I retired.

The Slansky trials [26](#) deeply shook my faith in Communism, but the final consequences didn't come until Stalin's death. Shomers were leftists, and Communism addressed not only the problems of Jews, but of nationality as such. The trials shook it terribly. Everything fell apart, and everything became a lie. It was very hard, but for the time being it didn't evoke opposition in me, for me to do something against it. That didn't come until later. It's hard to describe, because one doesn't like to recall it.

I'd summarize my free time as follows. In the first place, it was work, which interested me, and I also liked going to the theater. Then I met with the father of my daughter, and we spent that free time together. When I became pregnant, he didn't want to know anything about it, we didn't even get married. After she was born, I was fully employed raising her. I was on maternity leave, at that time I was living with Mom. In the meantime, my mother had married a second time, so I was there. She married a man in Tomášov, which is here by Bratislava, now it's almost like Bratislava. So I spent my maternity leave there. Well, and when I went on business trips, my daughter was at Mom's. My mother helped me very, very much. She was shocked by the fact that I hadn't married, and that the child was born out of wedlock, but despite that she loved her and supported me with all her might.

My mother's new husband, Mr. Lustig, was very devout, and when he married my mother, he had a condition that she had to keep a kosher household. She also kept it, and used to go to Bratislava to

a schachter [ritual butcher], because they had poultry at home. It was an arranged marriage, my mother wanted to be independent. She married in 1948 or 1949. She was very decent about it, and asked me and my sister. We of course told her that if she thought it was the right thing, we wouldn't stand in her way, that we could only support her.

Mr. Lustig had two daughters, both of them survived the concentration camp. The younger one got married first, to a man named Horák. At first they lived in Samorín, and later came here to Bratislava. We see each other to this day. Margita worked at the Central Union of Jewish Religious Communities. The older one married a man from [Liptovsky] Mikuláš. Both daughters, especially the one from Mikuláš, observed Jewish traditions after the war. But they didn't have a kosher household anymore. After the war, I stopped believing, when I went through that concentration camp hell. I don't even observe Yom Kippur, nothing.

My daughter and I used to go on vacations regularly. We were at Kremnicka Skalka, Demänovska Dolina. We used to go on outings with a colleague of mine from work; she had two children of the same age. And we used to see each other with my stepsister, because she's got a daughter and a son. Her daughter is the same age as mine. My circle of friends wasn't very large, more on the small side.

At the age of eleven, my daughter announced that she wanted to study languages, and kept to it, and now she's a translator. She studied French and Russian, but also translates from Hungarian, because she speaks Hungarian very well. When the kids from Budapest come to visit, she has to translate, because neither my son-in-law nor my grandchildren know Hungarian.

My daughter liked going to the V-Club, and my son-in-law was also active in it. [Editor's note: The V-Club belongs to the National Enlightenment Center, which is a national cultural institution. Besides culture, it is also active in areas of edification, information, science and education.] Before him she was in love with some Dusan, who I couldn't stand. He kept turning her against me. When I told her don't come late, or don't do that, he kept saying: 'Again she wants something!' She was popular, and attended the V-Club, where my son-in-law took a liking to her, and began persuading her: 'What are you going out with that Dusan for. Look at me, I'm more attractive!' Well, in the end they fell in love, and got married.

They had their wedding in Tomasíkovo, at the National Committee. It was in the summer. My daughter had only this summer dress and flowers, and my son-in-law had a wool suit and a turtleneck. How he sweated in that heat. It was his parents' mistake that they'd dressed him up like that. His father was intensely moved by the whole experience. A girlfriend of mine, who's no longer alive, showed up with a couple of shopping bags, because she wanted to see my daughter get married. There was no banquet, they went for dinner. Two witnesses, a girlfriend of my daughter's and my son-in-law's friend.

After the wedding came the problem of where they'd live. His parents lived in a four-room apartment, but it was such an unfortunate apartment that all the rooms interconnected. No one could have any privacy. I had a two-room apartment, but laid out so that one room was separate off the hallway, and the second room was also separate, so I told them to come here. Six years we lived together. On the whole we've got good memories. Then my daughter finished school, got a job, and her work assigned her a co-op apartment. After a month or so, when they'd already settled in, and had come for a visit, my granddaughter opened the door to the room where they'd lived,

which had twelve square meters, and said: 'All of us lived here!?'

My granddaughter is named Alexandra Kissová, and my grandson is named Peter Piovarcsy. Sasha was born in 1975, and Peter was born in 1979. Sasha graduated from theater school, she's a makeup artist by trade. She didn't study any further. Peter graduated from an electro-technical vocational school, and then studied economics, and got a bachelor's degree, he didn't study any further [In Slovakia and other Central European countries, a bachelor's degree is only three years, and most university students do a five-year Master's degree].

We see each other regularly, because we live in the same building. My daughter moved to Petržalka [a part of Bratislava] and I stayed here. But after some time, a great deal of tension developed between my granddaughter and my son-in-law, so my granddaughter moved in with me. She got married and had a daughter, which all happened at my place. The building where we live at one time belonged to the National Committee. There was a nursery school, the police, and something else here. When my grandson went into business, he liked the building, and bought it from the National Committee for his company, and made it into this family building. Now we all live here together, four generations. I, the senior, am on the ground floor, then my granddaughter with her family, then my daughter with my son-in-law, and finally my grandson. That's my salvation, because otherwise I'd be here all alone, like a tree in the desert, if I didn't have my family here.

In 1969 I was in the West on an internship in France. I was there for three months. Truth be told, nothing there really stunned me, because in Bratislava we used to get Viennese TV, and we had some sort of an idea of what life in the West was like. I was in Grenoble [town in southeastern France]. I worked there in a research institute, and you know what stunned me the most, it's almost funny, that every day cleaning ladies with rubber gloves would come, sprayed something from some tube onto some glass doors, and it was clean. That stunned me. Otherwise nothing. For one, there was a terrible caste system there, and the various social strata didn't associate with each others. I was used to normal relationships, whether someone was a director or cleaning lady, they were all people. There it was precise, castes. The shop windows and the hubbub that was there also made a big impression there. They were very kind to me, I was satisfied, but I was already feeling home tugging at me. They also tried to convince me, whether I didn't want to stay.

I was also in Israel. That's not Europe. There life is more fast-paced, varied, but more difficult. Here we lived in peace, and there... We put together some sort of program, it was decided, but right away it was all changed and we did it differently. It's not anything for me, nothing draws me there. Neither did I ever even regret not going with them on the aliyah after the war. It never occurred to me.

After 1989 [27](#) no changes in my life took place. I was already retired. I looked forward to the fact that my grandchildren and my family would have a better and freer life, and that I'd be able to travel. For me, going from Bratislava to Vienna was 'far.' It was insurmountable, and today, when my granddaughter wants to go buy some shoes, she goes to Vienna.

I always try to fill my spare time with something. In the first place, I'm interested in our family. I play a bit with my great-granddaughter, I take care of my household. I have to go shopping, I have to cook myself something, I have to clean, and that takes time. I solve crossword puzzles intensively, I work on the computer; I've got solitaire on it. There's always something - sew this on,

patch this, and so on. I've also got some friends that I see, they come visit me. I'm not bored, I'm never bored. I watch TV, and more and more often I 'curse' at it, because what's on is worse and worse.

Glossary

1 Anschluss

The German term "Anschluss" (literally: connection) refers to the inclusion of Austria in a "Greater Germany" in 1938. In February 1938, Austrian Chancellor Schuschnigg had been invited to visit Hitler at his mountain retreat at Berchtesgaden. A two-hour tirade against Schuschnigg and his government followed, ending with an ultimatum, which Schuschnigg signed. On his return to Vienna, Schuschnigg proved both courageous and foolhardy. He decided to reaffirm Austria's independence, and scheduled a plebiscite for Sunday, 13th March, to determine whether Austrians wanted a "free, independent, social, Christian and united Austria." Hitler's protégé, Seyss-Inquart, presented Schuschnigg with another ultimatum: Postpone the plebiscite or face a German invasion. On 11th March Schuschnigg gave in and canceled the plebiscite. On 12th March 1938 Hitler announced the annexation of Austria. When German troops crossed into Austria, they were welcomed with flowers and Nazi flags. Hitler arrived later that day to a rapturous reception in his hometown of Linz. Less well disposed Austrians soon learned what the "Anschluss" held in store for them. Known Socialists and Communists were stripped to the waist and flogged. Jews were forced to scrub streets and public latrines. Schuschnigg ended up in a concentration camp and was only freed in 1945 by American troops.

2 Jewish Codex

Order no. 198 of the Slovakian government, issued in September 1941, on the legal status of the Jews, went down in history as Jewish Codex. Based on the Nuremberg Laws, it was one of the most stringent and inhuman anti-Jewish laws all over Europe. It paraphrased the Jewish issue on a racial basis, religious considerations were fading into the background; categories of Jew, Half Jew, moreover 'Mixture' were specified by it. The majority of the 270 paragraphs dealt with the transfer of Jewish property (so-called Aryanizing; replacing Jews by non-Jews) and the exclusion of Jews from economic, political and public life.

3 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.

4 Kashrut in eating habits

Kashrut means ritual behavior. A term indicating the religious validity of some object or article according to Jewish law, mainly in the case of foodstuffs. Biblical law dictates which living creatures are allowed to be eaten. The use of blood is strictly forbidden. The method of slaughter is

prescribed, the so-called shechitah. The main rule of kashrut is the prohibition of eating dairy and meat products at the same time, even when they weren't cooked together. The time interval between eating foods differs. On the territory of Slovakia six hours must pass between the eating of a meat and dairy product. In the opposite case, when a dairy product is eaten first and then a meat product, the time interval is different. In some Jewish communities it is sufficient to wash out one's mouth with water. The longest time interval was three hours - for example in Orthodox communities in Southwestern Slovakia.

5 Villányi, András (1913 - 1950)

police officer. In 1936 finished law studies, then was a law candidate. In 1944 was put in a labor camp, from where he escaped to the Soviet front. From 1944 was a police clerk. From the beginning of 1945 he was a police counselor, in April he joined the Hungarian Communist Party. In 1947 he passed law and judicial exams. That same year he organized and subsequently also headed the economic police. From 1948 he worked at the Ministry of Finance as a section head. During the Rajk trial on 13th September 1949, he was arrested on the basis of construed charges, sentenced to death and executed. He was rehabilitated in 1956.

6 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 crime 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.

7 Great depression

At the end of October 1929, there were worrying signs on the New York Stock Exchange in the securities market. On 24th October ('Black Thursday'), people began selling off stocks in a panic from the price drops of the previous days - the number of shares usually sold in a half year exchanged hands in one hour. The banks could not supply the amount of liquid assets required, so people didn't receive money from their sales. Five days later, on 'Black Tuesday', 16.4 million shares were put up for sale, prices dropped steeply, and the hoarded properties suddenly became worthless. The collapse of the Stock Exchange was followed by economic crisis. Banks called in their outstanding loans, causing immediate closings of factories and businesses, leading to higher unemployment, and a decline in the standard of living. By January of 1930, the American money market got back on it's feet, but during this year newer bank crises unfolded: in one month, 325 banks went under. Toward the end of 1930, the crisis spread to Europe: in May of 1931, the Viennese Creditanstalt collapsed (and with it's recall of outstanding loans, took Austrian heavy industry with it). In July, a bank crisis erupted in Germany, by September in England, as well. In Germany, in 1931, more than 19,000 firms closed down. Though in France the banking system withstood the confusion, industrial production and volume of exports tapered off seriously. The agricultural countries of Central Europe were primarily shaken up by the decrease of export revenues, which was followed by a serious agricultural crisis. Romanian export revenues dropped by 73 percent, Poland's by 56 percent. In 1933 in Hungary, debts in the agricultural sphere reached 2.2 billion Pengoes. Compared to the industrial production of 1929, it fell 76 percent in 1932 and 88

percent in 1933. Agricultural unemployment levels, already causing serious concerns, swelled immensely to levels, estimated at the time to be in the hundreds of thousands. In industry the scale of unemployment was 30 percent (about 250,000 people).

8 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.

9 Slovak Uprising

At Christmas 1943 the Slovak National Council was formed, consisting of various oppositional groups (communists, social democrats, agrarians etc.). Their aim was to fight the Slovak fascist state. The uprising broke out in Banska Bystrica, central Slovakia, on 20th August 1944. On 18th October the Germans launched an offensive. A large part of the regular Slovak army joined the uprising and the Soviet Army also joined in. Nevertheless the Germans put down the riot and occupied Banska Bystrica on 27th October, but weren't able to stop the partisan activities. As the Soviet army was drawing closer many of the Slovak partisans joined them in Eastern Slovakia under either Soviet or Slovak command.

10 Kremnicka

From 5th November 1944 to 5th March 1945, German fascists and their Slovak henchmen brutally murdered 747 people in Kremnicka: 478 men, 211 women and 58 children. It is the largest mass grave from the time of World War II in Slovakia. Among the executed were members of 15 nations, of this more than 400 Jews (372 identified). The victims were captured rebel soldiers, partisans, illegal workers, part of the members of the American and British military mission, and primarily racially persecuted citizens.

11 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.

12 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. At the end of 1938 the SS took charge of the 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. In 1939 it had 7 million members. During World War II members of the Hitlerjugend served in auxiliary forces. At the end of 1944 17-year-olds from the Hitlerjugend were drafted to form the 12th Panzer Division 'Hitlerjugend' and sent to the western front.

13 Hashomer Hatzair in Slovakia

The Hashomer Hatzair movement came into being in Slovakia after WWI. It was Jewish youths from Poland, who on their way to Palestine crossed through Slovakia and here helped to found a Zionist youth movement, that took upon itself to educate young people via scouting methods, and called itself Hashomer (guard). It joined with the Kadima (forward) movement in Ruthenia. The combined movement was called Hashomer Kadima. Within the membership there were several ideologues that created a dogma that was binding for the rest of the members. The ideology was based on Borchov's theory that the Jewish nation must also become a nation just like all the others. That's why the social pyramid of the Jewish nation had to be turned upside down. He claimed that the base must be formed by those doing manual labor, especially in agriculture - that is why young people should be raised for life in kibbutzim, in Palestine. During its time of activity it organized six kibbutzim: Shaar Hagolan, Dfar Masaryk, Maanit, Haogen, Somrat and Lehavot Chaviva, whose members settled in Palestine. From 1928 the movement was called Hashomer Hatzair (Young Guard). From 1938 Nazi influence dominated in Slovakia. Zionist youth movements became homes for Jewish youth after their expulsion from high schools and universities. Hashomer Hatzair organized high school courses, re-schooling centers for youth, summer and winter camps. Hashomer Hatzair members were active in underground movements in labor camps, and when the Slovak National Uprising broke out, they joined the rebel army and partisan units. After liberation the movement renewed its activities, created youth homes in which lived mainly children who returned from the camps without their parents, organized re-schooling centers and branches in towns. After the putsch in 1948 that ended the democratic regime, half of Slovak Jews left Slovakia. Among them were members of Hashomer Hatzair. In the year 1950 the movement ended its activity in Slovakia.

14 Moshav

Village community in Palestine (then Israel), where - in contrast to the kibbutz - people did have own homes and could decide independently about their own lands. At the same time they farmed collectively, and members of the community helped one another. The emigrants of the 1880s established the first villages of this type, and there were 18 of them by 1897. A majority of them became important towns.

15 Hakhsharah

Training camps organized by the Zionists, in which Jewish youth in the Diaspora received intellectual and physical training, especially in agricultural work, in preparation for settling in Palestine.

16 Deportation of Jews from the Slovak State

The size of the Jewish community in the Slovak State in 1939 was around 89,000 residents (according to the 1930 census - it was around 135,000 residents), while after the I. Vienna Decision in November 1938, around 40,000 Jews were on the territory gained by Hungary. At a government session on 24th March 1942, the Minister of the Interior, A. Mach, presented a proposed law regarding the expulsion of Jews. From March 1942 to October 1942, 58 transports left Slovakia, and 57,628 people (2/3 of the Jewish population) were deported. The deportees, according to a constitutional law regarding the divestment of state citizenship, could take with them only 50 kg of precisely specified personal property. The Slovak government paid Nazi Germany a "settlement" subsidy, 500 RM (around 5,000 Sk in the currency of the time) for each person. Constitutional law legalized deportations. After the deportations, not even 20,000 Jews remained in Slovakia. In the fall of 1944 - after the arrival of the Nazi army on the territory of Slovakia, which suppressed the Slovak National Uprising - deportations were renewed. This time the Slovak side fully left their realization to Nazi Germany. In the second phase of 1944-1945, 13,500 Jews were deported from Slovakia, with about 1000 Jewish persons being executed directly on Slovak territory. About 10,000 Jewish citizens were saved thanks to the help of the Slovak populace. (Source: Niznansky, Eduard: Zidovska komunita na Slovensku 1939- 1945, http://www.holocaust.cz/cz2/resources/texts/niznansky_komunita) Niznansky, Eduard: Zidovska komunita na Slovensku 1939-1945)

17 First Vienna Decision

On 2nd November 1938 a German-Italian international committee in Vienna obliged Czechoslovakia to surrender much of the southern Slovakian territories that were inhabited mainly by Hungarians. The cities of Kassa (Kosice), Komarom (Komarno), Ersekujvar (Nove Zamky), Ungvar (Uzhorod) and Munkacs (Mukacevo), all in all 11.927 km² of land, and a population of 1.6 million people became part of Hungary. According to the Hungarian census in 1941 84% of the people in the annexed lands were Hungarian-speaking. [18](#) German Invasion of Hungary: Hitler found out about Prime Minister Miklos Kallay's and Governor Miklos Horthy's attempts to make peace with the west, and by the end of 1943 worked out the plans, code-named 'Margarethe I. and II.', for the German invasion of Hungary. In early March 1944, Hitler, fearing a possible Anglo-American occupation of Hungary, gave orders to German forces to march into the country. On 18th March, he met Horthy in Klessheim, Austria and tried to convince him to accept the German steps, and for the signing of a declaration in which the Hungarians would call for the occupation by German troops. Horthy was not willing to do this, but promised he would stay in his position and would name a German puppet government in place of Kallay's. On 19th March, the Germans occupied Hungary without resistance. The ex-ambassador to Berlin, Dome Sztojaj, became new prime minister, who - though nominally responsible to Horthy - in fact, reconciled his politics with Edmund Veessenmayer, the newly arrived delegate of the Reich.

19 Birkenau (Pol

: Brzezinka): Also known as Auschwitz II. Set up in October 1941 following a decision by Heinrich Himmler in the village of Brzezinka (Ger.: Birkenau) close to Auschwitz, as a prisoner-of-war camp. It retained this title until March 1944, although it was never used as a POW camp. It comprised

sectors of wooden sheds for different types of prisoners (women, men, Jewish families from Terezin, Roma, etc.), and continued to be expanded until the end of 1943. From the beginning of 1942 it was an extermination camp. The Birkenau camp covered a total area of 140 ha and comprised some 300 sheds variously used as living quarters, ancillary quarters and crematoria. Birkenau, Auschwitz I and scores of satellite camps made up the largest center for extermination of the Jews. The majority of the Jews deported here were sent straight to the gas chambers to be put to death immediately, without registration. There were 400,000 prisoners registered there for longer periods, half of whom were Jews. The second-largest group of prisoners were Poles (140,000). Prisoners died en masse as a result of slave labor, starvation, the inhuman living conditions, beatings, torture and executions. The bodies of those murdered were initially buried and later burned in the crematoria and on pyres in specially dug pits. Due to the efforts made by the SS to erase the evidence of their crimes and their destruction of the majority of the documentation on the prisoners, and also to the fact that the Soviet forces seized the remaining documentation, it is impossible to establish the exact number of victims of Auschwitz-Birkenau. On the basis of the fragmentary documentation available, it can be assumed that in total approx. 1.5 million prisoners were murdered in Auschwitz-Birkenau, some 90% of who were Jews.

20 Kanada (in German, or usually Canada)

The luggage of the Jews deported to Auschwitz was taken on arrival to a series of special warehouses known collectively as "Kanada." As the mass of deportations arrived at Auschwitz during 1942 new storage facilities (Effektenkammer) staffed by prisoner labor squads were created to accommodate the goods arriving with deportees. From 1942 to 1943, between 1,000 and 1,600 male and female prisoners worked in two shifts. Kanada I was moved to the BIIg sector of Birkenau, consisting of six storage barracks. Until December 1943, Kanada I served as the central facility for sorting material looted from arriving prisoners and preparing this material for future reutilization. Kanada I was run by a succession of SS men. Kanada II, comprised 30 barracks, started operating in December 1943 and functioned until the liquidation of Auschwitz. Kanada II quickly became larger than Kanada I and in late July 1944 had a total of 590 men assigned prisoner laborers. By October 1944, probably more than 1,500 to 2,000 men and women prisoners worked in Kanada II at sorting the contents of the luggage for reutilization in the German war economy. This included clothing, personal possessions like hair brushes and tooth brushes, and eventually also byproducts of the killing process: such as, dental gold and human hair (used as fleece linings in military jackets). The prisoners considered the labor squads in Kanada as better "Kommandos," since there they had the chance to obtain illegally food, clothing, and other valuables. (Source: http://lastexpression.northwestern.edu/essays/glossary_milton_main.htm)

21 Death march

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

22 Ravensbrück

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

23 Malchow

A small German town in the province of Mecklenburg-Pomerania. In 1943-44, a prisoner of war camp was added to the munitions factory beside the town, which served as a sub-camp of about 4000 deportees for the Ravensbrück concentration camp.

24 Terezin/Theresienstadt

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

25 Adoption of Hungarian names

Before 1881 the adoption of Hungarian names was regarded as a private matter and the liberal governments after the Compromise of 1867 treated it as a simply administrative, politically neutral question. At the end of the 19th century the years of the Millennium brought an upsurge in the adoption of Hungarian names partly because the Banffy cabinet (1895-1899) pressed for it, especially among civil servants. Jews were overrepresented among those adopting a Hungarian name until 1919 (the last year when more Jewish than Christian people were allowed to do so).

After WWI, during the Horthy era, politicians did not consider the nation a mere political category anymore, and one had to become worthy of a Hungarian name. Assimilation of the Jewry was also controlled by this process (only the Minister of the Interior had the right to decide on it), and in 1938 the adoption of Hungarian names by the denominational Jewry was practically stopped. After WWII, between 1945 and 1949, 50,000 petitions were filed, about a third of them by Jews, on reasons for changing German or Jewish sounding names.

26 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.

27 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.