

# Antonie Militka

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**Brno**

**Czech Republic**

**Interviewer: Barbora Pokreis**

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This interview with Mrs. Antonie Militka took place during our visit to the Jewish Community in Brno. This sprightly lady still works for the local Jewish community, and devotes all her time and energy to people that depend on her help.

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## My family background

My maternal grandparents came from Romania, from the town of Drachinet [*Drachinet: the town of Drachinet belonged from 1775 - 1918 to the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, from 1919 - 1944 to Romania, from 1945 - 1991 to the Soviet Union, and from 1991 it belongs to Ukraine - Editor's note*]. My mother's parents, Samuel Reiter and Rezi Reiter, were farmers. My brother and I inherited their Jewish names. My name is Antonie Rezi, and my brother is Karel Samuel. I never knew my grandparents, as we didn't visit Romania. I know them only through stories. My mother always reminisced about her beautiful childhood, but relatively hard life on the farm. My grandparents had eight children: four daughters and four sons. The Reiters followed the Jewish religion in everything, and raised their children in the same spirit. They attended Jewish schools. When she arrived in Brno, my mother knew not only Romanian and Yiddish, but also spoke Hebrew and German. Their household was strictly kosher [1](#) and they prayed before eating.

My paternal grandparents, Karel Michal and Grandma Michalova were from Brno. Grandpa was a book printer by trade. He worked for a printer in Starobrnenska Street. I didn't know him, as he died before I was born. He had a serious case of eczema from the chemicals he used in his work. With this diagnosis he was admitted to the hospital, where he died of sepsis [*blood poisoning - Editor's note*]. Grandma was a good and hard-working woman. They lived in Vinohradska Street in Brno. Despite the fact that they had three children, they lived in a one-room apartment. They had it modestly but tastefully furnished.

There were three synagogues in prewar Brno. The nicest synagogue stood by the Morava River. Alas, today it no longer exist, because during the Crystal Night [2](#) they torched it as the police and



firemen stood by and watched. It stood alone in a large open space, which is why it was so easy to torch. We used to visit mainly the synagogue in Na Kolisti St. There was also an Orthodox synagogue in Brno, which was in Na Skorepce St. It's still there to this day. It's a small, modern building. I don't remember if Brno had a mikveh [*mikveh: ritual bath – Editor's note*]. Brno also had a Jewish nursery school, but I don't remember anymore where exactly it was located. On Silingrovo Namesti [*Silingr Square*] there was a Jewish primary school. We attended it for five years. The Jewish high school was at No. 44 Hybesova St. Today the building serves as one of the pavilions of St. Anne's Faculty Hospital in Brno. During my childhood, all the roads were paved, in some places they were better and in others worse. Streetcars ran throughout the entire city. They didn't run as often as they do today, but it was excellent.

We didn't have one favorite merchant. We bought meat at the kosher shop in Dominikanske Namesti [*Dominican Square*]. Later, when kosher meat was hard to get and the price increased dramatically, we slaughtered poultry at home. That was our father's job. We always had a lot of geese, chickens and ducks. Sometimes they'd swim away along the river. Mostly they'd return in the early evening, and if they didn't we children had to go look for them. Once a week our father would go shopping at the co-op store in Na Pisarkach, as he was a member and so had a discount.

I remember only my mother's oldest brother, Osias Reiter, who took care of her during World War I. My mother was born in the town of Drachinet, in Romania. She came to Brno during World War I, in 1916. Her oldest brother Osias Reiter served in the Austro-Hungarian army. He had a high-ranking post with the military police. After their parents died, he asked my mother to come live with him in Brno, because there was still fighting going on in Romania. Their village and the surrounding bridges burned down. She saved herself at the last possible moment. My brother helped her through all that military bureaucracy so that he could get her away from where the fighting was. She started working at the age of 16. He found her a job at the post office, where my mother then sorted parcels and letters. After the war my mother's brother returned to Romania. But prior to that he found her a sublet with one older Jewish lady, who became very fond of her. She considered her to be like a member of her family. She was more like an aunt to her. This lady lived a nice social and mainly Jewish life. I don't remember her name anymore, but I do know that she lived in Na Prikopech St. During World War II the building was destroyed by a bomb.

The lady had a large, luxurious apartment. I can still see it today. My mother and I used to visit her. She lived in an older building in a large apartment. All the rooms were large, with white doors and windows. The apartment was luxuriously furnished, with luxurious accessories. I mainly remember the beautiful dining room with candelabras. I felt like I was in a palace. The furniture and accessories were according to her taste. My mother had her own room. The room was more modest, but fit in with the style of the furniture. The lady didn't have her own children. My mother lived alone with her. For the most part, Jews didn't isolate themselves. They regularly socialized at her apartment. Many people would get together there, mainly during holidays, for the Sabbath on Friday evening [*Sabbath: The fourth of the Ten Commandments says: "Remember the Sabbath and keep it holy." (Exodus 20:8) because God rested on the seventh day after creating the world. Certain types of work are forbidden during the Sabbath, and believers are supposed to devote themselves to resting and the study of holy scriptures – Editor's note*]. In this rich city environment, my mother entrenched the foundations of the Jewish religion that she'd brought with her from home. She learned everything perfectly, because she used to help out, but through this she also

learned. When she got married, she was perfectly prepared, because this lady had taught her everything.

In 1922 my mother met my father, Ludevít Michal. They met at one party at this lady's place, where my mother was living. She supported my parents' relationship. My father wanted to marry her, and my mother liked him too. My mother's brother, Osias Reiter, objected that it was out of the question, because my father wasn't of the Jewish faith. He absolutely disagreed with her getting married. Osias was acting in his father's name, who was no longer alive. Even despite her brother's objections, my mother wanted to marry him. Her brother wrote her that if she did so, she should count on his disowning her as her brother. My mother was immensely hurt by all this, because she wanted my father, but on the other hand she didn't want to lose her brother either. She asked that lady what she should do. The lady told her: "How would your brother look at it if this gentleman converted to Judaism?" My mother asked my father, and he said: "Of course, I'll do everything for you, after all, Christianity grew out of Judaism. I'll do everything so that your brother will allow you to marry me, and so that we'll be together and happy for the rest of our lives." My mother asked her brother if the situation would change if her fiancée converted to Judaism. Her brother's answer was that then there wouldn't be any problem. So my father went for advice to the rabbi at the large synagogue.

Conversion wasn't simple. He had to go through everything a Jewish boy had to go through. That meant that my father spent at least three years taking lessons from the rabbi. Besides that, he went to services with my mother. He learned to read Hebrew, prayers, and also history. After three years he had to take exams. He was proclaimed a Jew, and was admitted to the Jewish community. I don't remember my father's Jewish name. So that's how my father became a member of the community.

The wedding took place in 1925 in the large synagogue. They had a proper Jewish wedding. The wedding and banquet was arranged by that lady that my mother lived with. Otherwise, my mother was, alas, alone, because no one from her family came. It was very difficult for them to make the trip there from Romania.

My father's family didn't have any objections when my father converted. They liked my mother very much. They were only concerned whether he'd have the means to provide everything that my mother was used to. They weren't thinking only of food and social life, but also education. My mother was raised according to Jewish traditions that existed in her family. This type of life was financially demanding, which is why they were concerned whether my father would be able to support the family and provide it sufficient security. And you know what young people are like, they'll promise their parents everything. And my father really did live for us. He was very accommodating, and did everything he promised for our mother and for us.

My father was a barber by trade, but despite that worked at a textile mill. He finished technical textile school while working.

After getting married, my parents lived in the city ward of Bohunice, in a rented flat. In 1930, when I was three, my father found out that they were looking for a superintendent at the newly-built Maccabi [3](#) sports field in Pisarky [*a neighborhood in Brno - Editor's note*]. There was also an apartment for the superintendent there. The new field had a good location, I think that it was the most beautiful field in the country. There was enough room there for soccer, handball and track

and field, and there were tennis courts too. Twice they even held horse races there. There was also a restaurant, and lawns for families that would come during the weekend. They'd spread out blankets there, and play with their children. Jewish families congregated in this beautiful place, usually on Saturdays and Sundays. The superintendent's job was a very difficult one. In those days, machines and equipment to make the job of maintaining the fields easier didn't exist yet. This was precisely the job they offered my parents. My parents worked for the Maccabi, but the income wasn't enough to support us. We also had a large garden and livestock. My mother took care of the garden. She grew fruit and vegetables. This kind of work wasn't foreign to her, she'd learned it back home in Romania. And so we had chickens, rabbits and a goat. The animals had a stable back behind the house. Despite the fact that my father worked hard at the field, he also opened a coal and wood shop in Hybesova Street, in that textile mill where he'd worked before. The owners had moved out, and the company premises had remained vacant. There were large rooms there that were being rented to various small entrepreneurs – carpenters, merchants and auto mechanics. There were tailor's workshops there, and auto repair shops. My father also rented one huge warehouse. He obtained a business license. The coal and wood was brought in from Ostrava. He also leased a truck and a forwarder that transported the goods. The forwarder had a very important task, because the coal wagons could only stand at the station for a certain amount of time. All the goods were stored in that rented space. My father would then deliver the coal directly to his customers. He employed two workers in the warehouse. My father had good relations with his employees. During the winter months, my mother tried to have warm meals prepared not only for our family, but also for the workers. As children, we also had to help carry wood. The workers would bring us large pieces of wood from the sawmill. The wood would then be cut up right in the store. Our parents took us everywhere with them. Whether we were going out into the garden or to the store, we were always together. As I've already mentioned, they weren't strict, but took us with them everywhere they worked, and so we learned everything.

We had a very simple apartment. My parents bought themselves very nice furniture. We had a utilitarian, but nicely furnished kitchen and bedroom. Not only athletes visited the field, but also women visitors with small children that needed to be fed. My mother let them nurse their children in peace in the bedroom, or warm up food in the kitchen. That society was of a certain, high standard. If everything wouldn't have been according to etiquette, and proper, no Jewish woman would've brought her child there. My mother's task was to make sure the changing cabins were clean. She laundered and also mended athletes' jerseys. She also took care of the safe, where she stored money, jewels and documents for players and spectators. The depository was needed, because the changing cabins were left open, and anyone could enter them.

Maccabi Games were held regularly. They were big events, with exercises performed on the soccer field. We had beautiful blue & white uniforms. Many athletes and spectators would show up. The parking lots were full of cars. The leader was Fredy Hirsch [4](#), who was later active in Prague. He led the entire Maccabi Games. He was a big athlete that mainly taught us to exercise regularly, and also to do track and field. Alas, he died in Auschwitz. During the winter, we used gymnasiums. I unfortunately don't remember the names of the rest of the important athletes. The Maccabi also had a soccer team, and though it didn't ever win, it participated in tournaments every year nevertheless. They didn't pay just at the Maccabi, and when they went to play soccer somewhere else, my father would go with them. He'd carry their jerseys and shoes. Sometimes he'd take me with him.

I don't know if the Maccabi had anything to do with Zionist associations [5](#). There were several Zionist organizations in what is today the building of the Jewish Community, where young people but also older ones would meet. I didn't belong to any association, just to the Maccabi.

My people were the kind of people that lived for democracy. They were definitely democrats. My father wasn't a member of any organization. My parents were for good will amongst people. That's how they lived and worked. They weren't that interested in politics so as to be active in it. They were interested only in culture. Before their wedding, they used to attend choirs and theaters together.

My mother was one of eight children. Her siblings lived in Romania with their families. We never met, and my mother didn't see them either. She kept in written contact only with her oldest brother, Osias.

My father had two siblings. His brother's name was Josef Michal. He worked as a journalist, but I don't remember where. During World War II he was arrested and ended up in a concentration camp. For political reasons, I think. At that time he already had a family of his own, a wife and daughter. They lived in Prague. The youngest of the siblings, Frantiska, survived the war and lived to a ripe old age, over 90. Her daughter is my only relative here in the Czech Republic. Frantiska never married. She apprenticed in a factory for pots and pans as a decorator. Back then they were manufacturing pots and pans decorated with flowers and various other ornaments. She was very clever and talented. She painted beautifully, which is why she had a very nice job up until the war. During the war everything changed. After the war she helped her daughter, who'd become a seamstress. They both sewed to make ends meet. She died in an old-age home.

My parents never went on vacation anywhere. In the summer, during the sports season, there was the most work. As superintendents of the Maccabi, there was no way they could go anywhere. When we were small, my parents never went anywhere without us. During the winter they'd take us to see children's plays. During the holidays we'd go to synagogue and to various events organized by the school and the Jewish Community. Our life was rich in events the whole year round, but our parents never went anywhere alone, only with us.

Observing the religious side of life was a simple matter for us. As I've already mentioned, my mother knew it all from home. During the High Holidays, we attended the large synagogue. We observed the Sabbath at home. That was Mother's task. She'd prepare a beautiful supper. She'd regularly bake barkhes, and would light candles. She'd serve roast poultry or veal au naturel. On Saturday we'd have shoulet. For the High Holidays we'd have goose. Everything was according to Jewish recipes. We didn't eat any pork. Everything was kosher, because meat was available in the kosher store. Poultry my father would slaughter at home.

As children, we liked all the holidays. One of our favorite holidays was Passover [*Passover: commemorates the departure of the Israelites from Egyptian captivity and is characterized by many regulations and customs. The foremost is the prohibition of consuming anything containing yeast – Editor's note*]. For Passover we'd eat matzot and everything was beautiful. We'd buy large sacks of matzot. There was a bakery in Na Prikopech St. that baked matzot. For ten days, we ate only matzot. As children, we liked Chanukkah best [*Chanukkah: the Festival of Lights, which also commemorates the Macabbees' uprising and the re-consecration of the Temple in Jerusalem – Editor's note*], because we'd get gifts. Each evening, Mother would light candles. We'd pray daily,



and the most festive food was served. She'd tell us about how it used to be at their house. All the holidays were beautiful, but these two stood out the most for us. Our mother's favorite was Yom Kippur [*Yom Kippur: The Day of Atonement. The most celebrated event in the Jewish calendar. The day of "the cleansing of sins". Fasting is observed – Editor's note*]. At school we mainly looked forward to Purim [*Purim: the holiday of joy. As is written in the Book of Ester, the holiday was decreed by Mordechai in memory of how God's foresight saved the Jews of the Persian Empire from complete annihilation – Editor's note*]. It's the holiday of joy, and at that time we'd always play and have fun. I don't remember anymore exactly what games we played, but their intent was for us to not forget Jewish traditions.

Passover, Purim and Chanukkah celebrations took place in the building of the Jewish Community, which was located at 31 Legionarska St., today Trida Kapitana Jarose [*Captain Jaros Avenue*]. In the building next door, which had a huge hall, the Jewish Community and the rabbi organized holiday celebrations for children and adults. For Sukkot [*Sukkot: Festival of Booths. A festive atmosphere reigns during the whole week that the holidays lasts, where the most important is to be in the sukkah – Editor's note*] they'd always build a cabin [*Sukkah: a tent used during the Sukkot festival – Editor's note*], where people could pray, talk, drink wine and be merry. The tent wasn't very spacious, only a few people could fit inside, and the rest stayed outside. The tent was built out in the courtyard of the synagogue. This tradition has been maintained to this day. We children would get apples and candy. Unfortunately, my brother missed his bar mitzvah [*bar mitzvah – "son of the Commandments", a Jewish boy that has reached the age of thirteen. A ceremony, during which the boy is declared to be bar mitzvah, from this point on he must fulfil all commandments of the Torah – Editor's note*], because during the Holocaust it wasn't possible, and he had to be in hiding.

For Chanukkah, my father's sister Frantiska, who lived in Brno, would come visit during the holiday. She'd come visit us during Christmas, when we'd be observing Chanukkah. We had festive food and everything that belonged to the holidays. No one in my father's family expressed any objections. My aunt would come to see us at Maccabi along with her daughter, and they participated in everything with us. They all felt good in each other's company. During the holidays, they'd eat with us. Religion wasn't a barrier to anyone. Each respected the other.

It wasn't that difficult for us children to get used to going so far to the Jewish primary school, which was on Silingrovo namesti [*Silingr Square*]. We got used to it. My favorites were drawing, history and math. Maybe because I was good at these subjects. I can't say which subjects I didn't like. In primary school it was all good, but by high school, I didn't like physics and chemistry. I wasn't interested in that.

I had an excellent professor whose name I don't remember. He was our home room teacher, and liked me a lot. When I arrived at the concentration camp [*ghetto*] in Terezin [6](#), he'd been sent with a labor detail to Oslavany, to the mines. He heard from someone that I was alone in Terezin, and made contact with my parents, who were still in Brno. He told them that if they wanted to send me a letter or parcel, to send it to him. He, as a prisoner in Oslavany, was able to send things to Terezin. He supported me for a time, until he returned to Terezin. He wrote me that I should address him as "Mein Liebe Onkel", which meant that the letter was meant for my parents. And my parents really would get it.

We had only a few books at home. My mother liked German books. My father was a Czech. Our parents concentrated on us. They bought us story books and later for school. But as for books, not that they weren't interested, but there was absolutely no time nor money to expand the number of books. They were interested in everything, they tried to fit in, but I can't say that they were able to do something as far as education goes, neither time-wise nor money-wise.

## Growing up

I was born in 1928 in Brno. My main memories are from back when I was four, when my brother Karel was born, which was my greatest joy. Beginning at that time, my memories are coherent. We had a beautiful childhood. Everything was for the children. Our parents didn't live very luxuriously, and didn't do much for themselves, but for us they did everything. They concentrated only on the children. If someone looked at it today, he'd say we were spoiled. They definitely gave us freedom and love. Maybe someone would even have misused it. Luckily, we tried to return it to them. They weren't strict, not at all, just in extreme situations, but mostly they trusted us. We could've misused it, we could've said we were in school and they wouldn't have checked up on us. Nor on our schoolwork. We were always something amazing for them, and it was a beautiful childhood.

I remember that when my brother was 5, he got lost. That was something awful. Some children were playing, and suddenly, when the neighborhood children were slowly returning home, my brother didn't return. The Svatka River ran by the Maccabi grounds. It was a beautiful place, you could play sports there, and be surrounded by gorgeous nature. My mother asked where Karlicek [Karel] was, and the other children said that they didn't know where he was. Well, so we started looking for him, and my mother was asking everyone if they hadn't seen him. We asked them to look for him too. They looked along the river and everywhere. An hour, two, but no one saw him. My mother was becoming utterly desperate. After a long time searching, the vegetable growers from the Bulgarian gardens [*Bulgarian gardeners: Bulgarian gardeners assumed an important position in vegetable cultivation in all of Europe. Their migration began at the cusp of the 18th and 19th Centuries. They began arriving on Czech territory at the end of the 19th Century - Editor's note*] joined the search party too. They knew Karlicek too, because he used to go there once in a while. When they found out what had happened, they left their work and searched. One woman gardener finally found my brother. He'd fallen asleep underneath a veranda where dry hay was stored. He'd hidden there during a game, and fallen asleep. It was an incident with a happy ending. A great danger was that he could have drowned, the river's banks were steep, and it really didn't take much for a tragedy to take place.

During the summer holidays, they regularly organized children's camps at Maccabi. Everything was very nice. When the summer was already drawing to a close, they'd organize a celebration with singing and dancing. Food was prepared, and plays were put on. The way it was at Maccabi was that the children would come there for the day. They didn't stay there overnight, only during the day. We used to go to Maccabi on a streetcar rented by the Jewish Community. The stop was by the old theater. The children would gather there at 7:30, and the streetcar would already be waiting there. The route led towards Pisarky. From Pisarky it took only a little while, as it was only a short walking distance from there. It was this little outing to Maccabi. When they arrived, a perfect breakfast would be waiting for them. After breakfast they'd play and study in various groups led by teachers and student volunteers. There'd be up to 80 children there. The Maccabi also had a kitchen, a dining room and one large room. There the children would gather when it was raining.

After lunch at the camp, you had to lie down and rest a bit. In the afternoon, at around 4:00 p.m., it was time to go back to Pisarky to take the streetcar. The trip into town on the streetcar took about a half hour, and around 5:00 p.m. the parents would pick up their children. Everyone envied us the fact that we lived there and didn't have to go into town. The second [camp] session was already preparing to say goodbye to summer, to say thank you to the teachers and workers. The party took all month to prepare, along with an entertainment program. The parents and relatives that acted in it came too. Only Jewish children attended the camp. Only Jewish ones, because the Maccabi was Jewish.

We had a large dog, who was named Tiger because he looked exactly like a tiger. He was huge. He guarded us, but we had more dogs back then. They were all huge. When my brother was born, my parents showed him to him, that here's Karlicek, you've got to guard him. When my mother put the carriage in front of our building, he'd lie down there, and everyone had to give him a wide berth. He'd never let anyone even get close to him. To be on the safe side we gave him a muzzle, that had to be so that some sort of accident wouldn't happen. At night he was very important on those grounds, he'd signal if anyone wasn't wanting to climb over the fence. There were thieves, who only wanted fruit. There were large alleys of fruit trees there, cherries, apples and pears. My parents took care of them, because they were the superintendents. Their fruit would be eaten at camp. Whoever in the camp wanted, could pick some, because everything was free.

My best friend at school was named Kitty. They lived in [*the neighborhood of*] Hlinky. She and her family died in a concentration camp. We had a lot of common interests. At school we were interested in books and drawing. We liked going on outings. She attended Maccabi. My parents also supported our friendship. I used to go to their place but rarely. After school we'd do our homework together, and then she'd come to our place at Maccabi, and there we'd play with a shovel and so on. Then later I had another friend, Gustinka.

I exercised like all the children, but only in the gym. I never excelled at anything in particular. I liked swimming best, that's also stayed with me. I also had a bicycle; at that time I wasn't attending school yet. From the time he was little, my brother was interested in cars. This interest also saved his life. During the Holocaust he hid in an auto mechanics' workshop while my parents and I were in the prison camp. My brother liked soccer and skiing. We used to go skiing around Maccabi, because all around it were hills. My parents didn't do any sports, just my father would play a bit of soccer once in a while.

As a child I took violin lessons, but I wasn't very good at it. My father dreamt of us being able to play the violin, because he played the clarinet. He hoped that we'd play on better instruments than he. He was thinking of the violin and piano. And when even after three years I didn't make the kind of progress he'd assumed, he switched me to piano. Even though my brother was four years younger, he bought him an accordion. From the age of five he took lessons from this one teacher. The accordion was large, and my brother wasn't able to carry it, and so our father would bring it to the teacher's at the proper time. After the lesson, he'd come get it again. In the meantime, I was taking violin lessons with the Hlavacek family. Mr. Hlavacek was a violin teacher, and his son was preparing for the conservatory. I took lessons with this family. But I didn't do well enough for them to be satisfied with me. So it was decided that I'd take piano. For piano lessons, they sent me to the Mautner family, who were Jews. They Mautners lived in Krizova St. I took lessons there until they began preparing for the transport. At that time all the nice times ended, and that music was



part of that too. Not only school was forbidden for us [7](#), but also interests like music and exercise [9](#). Thus all that was nice ended, and after the war I no longer had time for similar interests. My brother had real musical talent. My father played the clarinet, I the violin, and my brother the accordion. He tried to make a small band of us, so that we'd enjoy music too. He was always telling us to practice.

When we were later living in that temporary apartment in Hybesova St., beside us was an army command, not the Gestapo, but an army command. When we returned in 1945, the building was empty. As I was walking by, I heard someone playing the piano inside. I stopped and stood and listened to the beautiful music. When the music finished, I looked in, and saw my little brother sitting behind a piano. Right away I ran home to tell my mother to come have a look at how wonderfully Karlicek was playing. She stood there and wept. At that time my brother was 13. I don't know anymore what composition he was playing. When he left for Israel, he took his accordion with him, and eventually my father bought him another two.

We didn't often go to restaurants with our parents. Just once a year, we'd go for New Year's Eve. Our parents never went anywhere without us. This is why when they did go somewhere, it was only there where you could take children, and we'd return home early. So we used to go to the exhibition grounds. People entertained themselves in restaurants and at social events. At the House of Art they'd organize a New Year's party for the children before lunch, and in the afternoon there'd be a New Year's party for the adults. Our parents would go celebrate with us. We'd go home by 6:00 p.m. The other adults would leave later, they'd dance the night away. There was no way our parents would go somewhere alone, or leave without us.

They also used to send us on trips, we were able to go, but we made use of this opportunity only twice. In the summer we were in the Beskids [*The Beskids; a nature reserve in Moravia - Editor's note*] for 14 days. Once we were in Ivancice, near Brno, for a few days. This trip was organized for children by the Jewish Community. In Ivancice there was a building that had formerly been a sugar refinery, which belonged to a Jew. The building was abandoned. He put the entire grounds at the disposal of the Jewish Community, so that they could organize summer camps there. We were there twice. Once it was for boys, and once for girls, so we alternated. It was amazing in Ivancice, not only the place itself and historical buildings, but mainly its surroundings, nature, forests and water. That was a beautiful summer vacation there. For us, the stay also meant a change, that we weren't just at that Maccabi.

When I got to sit in a car, that was something new for me, because our parents didn't have one. Once in a while some family would take to Maccabi in a car when I was small. Besides that, I was lucky that I attended Jewish primary school on Silingr Square. My classmate Frantisek Tichy, who was from a rich Jewish family, sat beside me in school. They lived in Hlinky, and his mother would drive him to school, and also come pick him up. In the summer she'd ride in a red convertible, wearing a hat. She liked me very much. The way from Maccabi to Pisarky was in the same direction as Hlinky. A streetcar ran there, which I used to take to school on Silingr Square. Instead of Pisarky I'd go to Hlinky, and they'd already be waiting for me there, or I'd wait there for them. She always told me to come there. So I'd come to their building, and she'd come out or already be standing there. In the afternoon she'd drive me back, sometimes she'd drive me all the way to Maccabi. Those were the best experiences, I really was that spoiled by the Tichy family. Well, and Frantisek was a very talented, genial, cute boy. He attended school with me from Grade 1. Back then

children didn't associate with each other, as far as girls and boys go, so he didn't talk to me. He sat beside me, but when he saw that I didn't have a green pencil crayon, he'd immediately give me one. He let me see everything he was writing, acted very friendly, but wouldn't let the other children see that he was talking to me, not at all. Imagine that it used to bother me, as I wanted to talk to him. That's stayed in me. He went from Grade 4 to high school. He was very smart, and so didn't attend Grade 5, but went directly into first year [of high school] [9](#). Only the smartest ones, whose parents had submitted an application and were accepted, only those got in. There were only a couple of them. They got into first year of high school right away, and when I started high school, they were already a year ahead. After that I didn't see him much. And then I saw him in Terezin, during roll call. He was standing across from me, and we were looking at each other. At that time I said to myself that maybe now he'd say a few words to me. He didn't. He looked at me across that distance, and didn't do anything to be able to talk to me. We never saw each other again, he left on a transport. His entire family perished.

When we were little, at that time we didn't experience any anti-Semitism. But when the war began, then we felt it. Our parents' friends even avoided them. We, as children, also went through our share, though we didn't really understand what was happening around us. Some children, but also adults, would try to humiliate us. On our way to school, a group of German boys threw stones at us and called out: "Jews, why don't you go to the Palestine?" My brother was relatively quite spunky. He wanted to retaliate. I had a hard time restraining him, because then it would have looked like he'd attacked them, when they were already turning things against Jews so badly. That happened right after 1939.

## During the War

We had friends that used to go to the sports field. Not only people from the Jewish Community and Jews from Brno used to congregate there, but also Czechs and Germans. Before the war, there hadn't been any large differences. That was during the so-called depths of peace. But the social side of things, I'd say that it was a very hard time for the poor. Games were played at the field, of course there were large tournaments and so also other teams came to play here, not only Jewish teams. There were mutual visits and relationships. Before the war I didn't feel any anti-Semitism, that wasn't until during the war. Back then, some sympathizers alas wanted to gain the favor of the Germans, which is why they behaved very unpleasantly toward us. On the other hand, there were also those that risked and helped Jews. They helped our family too.

When we left Maccabi, we lived in Pisarky. We had a little house, a garden, and beside us ran the river. We three, as Jews, got food coupons – my mother, my brother, and I. The coupons were very modest... just our father had full food coupons. Once, I don't know where anymore, he met one baker, who told him that he'd sell us bread and rolls even without coupons, but that I'd have to come to a certain place for them. The amount we could get with the food coupons wasn't enough for us. The place where I was supposed to wait for the baker was by a bridge in Pisarky. The baker was delivering bread at that time, and was carrying it on his back. He was supposed to come there at a certain time. He arrived, I paid him, he gave me the goods and I went home. But before I got home, I ran into one German citizen who lived near us, had seen me leaving, and so wanted to see where I was going. He'd followed me for a ways. He waited for me on a small footbridge over a wider stream. He spent his time informing on people. I already saw him from a distance, standing on the bridge that I had to cross; there was no other way home. I backtracked a bit. At that time it

was the end of February. The ice was already thin, and the water was still ice-cold. I'd gotten to know that stream as a child, so I knew how deep it was in which parts. I put the bread, rolls and my shoes into a bag, which I held above my head, and crossed the stream like this. My coat and the rest of my clothes were wet, because the water reached almost to my shoulders. I didn't care at all that the water was icy and that half-melted chunks of ice were floating by me. That's how I got home. My mother was all upset. That person was waiting for me, he'd probably already lost patience, because there was only one way home there. So let him spot me. I went out into the garden, where he saw me. He was surprised that I'd gotten home. I don't know what he thought, he stopped and looked whether it was me. I'm sure that his enmity grew even worse.

Another thing happened to my brother and I when I was 12 and he was 8. Jews weren't allowed to go to parks and to walk in certain streets. Everything was forbidden for us. Even in the streetcar, we had to stand in a certain wagon. Life was so limited that all our parents would say was don't go anywhere, all you'll do is cause us trouble. They always watched over us. Despite the prohibitions, once on Sunday we went out for a bit. There was a movie for children being shown at the exhibition grounds. We didn't tell our parents where we were going. Each of us got 5 crowns in pocket money for when we went to see some other children. We went to the movie, I think they were showing Laurel and Hardy. We decided to go even despite the fact that there was: "No entry allowed to the cinema for Jews!" We bought tickets, they cost a crown, and sat down amongst the children and waited. The lights went out, and right then before the film began, one lady stood up and shouted: "Turn on the lights, there are Jewish children here!" They turned on the lights and asked her where they were. She pointed at us, and so they led us out of the theater. The usher didn't do anything, he just politely led us out and said: "Don't come here, so you don't have problems like today, and your parents too." So we learned a lesson. Some time later, someone told our mother about our adventure. She asked me why I hadn't told her about it. My answer was that I didn't want her to be upset.

Another incident, after this one, was when my brother was outside somewhere and wasn't coming home for lunch. So my mother started looking for him, and I did too. We asked everyone we ran into whether they hadn't seen my brother. These people immediately began helping and looking for him everywhere. In the streets, in yards, around the river. We were already afraid that he'd fallen in the river. We kept looking for him until the evening, and then one lady we knew that lived nearby brought him. We were grateful to her for it, because she'd heard him calling. There'd been a Czech soccer field there, which was then taken over by Germans; just like we had Maccabi, this was the Brno branch of Sokol [10](#). The superintendent was a German, named Siegel, who had three sons and a wife. He'd caught my brother before noon somewhere, and locked him up in a shed. He was showing him and telling him how his parents and sister were going to be tortured in Mauthausen [11](#). By then the war had already begun. My brother was locked up until late afternoon, when that lady had heard him shouting. She came to the soccer field, you could get there not only through the main entrance, but also from the side. She opened it and freed him. My mother was afraid of our father finding out, because he might have gone to have it out with him, and the entire family would've paid for that. My brother was in shock from this incident, and didn't even talk. It was only later that he told us how and what had gone on. He hadn't actually hurt him, he hadn't done anything to him, but just kept showing him how we'd be tortured in Mauthausen. He already knew about it. He caused that child to have a hard day.

Several times the Gestapo called my father in for interrogation. Luckily he always returned. It was a very dangerous time. The persecution was very hard, but even despite that we hoped that we'd see the end of the war, but it kept lasting and getting worse for us Jews.

The Maccabi field was taken over by the Germans during the war. They also used it for sports. We'd walk by and look. Already in 1938, when Austria was suddenly annexed [12](#), anti-Jewish sentiments began to increase noticeably, and enemies of Jews – Czech ones too, were already showing them that anti-Semitism had carved its path here. At that time we moved to Hybesova St. In 1938 I was 10, when we were evicted from Maccabi. We weren't that free there anymore, all that was still done by Czechs, up to 1938. So right away, my father bought an older house and had it enlarged, and that's where we moved. That took three months. We lived there until 1943, until the Gestapo chased us out of there.

When we left Maccabi, we had a house and garden. We had had to demolish the house and raze it during the war. In 1943 the Gestapo simply ordered us to raze our house within 14 days. My father called the neighbors to take it apart, some things also got buried. Unfortunately, he injured himself seriously during the demolition. He was on the roof, which he wanted to take apart. He was of course not an expert in this. Underneath the roof he also had taken something apart, so he flew through the roof and kitchen. On top of that, the cellar was open, and so he also fell down into the cellar, where he fell on his thigh. They had to operate on him. Within 14 days of that, I was already off to Terezin.

They summoned me to the transport of 7th April 1944. People designated for the transport were gathering by the Veletržní Palác [*Trade Fair Palace*]. From there people went to Terezin, or elsewhere. On 9th April they moved us to the main station, where there was already a train waiting for 250 people from Brno and its surroundings. On this train they transported us to Terezin, to Bohusovice actually. At that time the tracks didn't lead directly into Terezin, those were built later. We walked from Bohusovice, where there were already people from Terezin waiting, and wagons onto which luggage was loaded. Everything was transported on these wagons, bread and corpses too.

As a replacement, my parents were given a pitiful, substandard apartment. Excuse me, not given, but my father found it, and that's where we moved. That was still in Hybesova St. We put our furniture into our coal warehouse. Because my brother was close to the workshop. So at night he could cross the street between the workshop and home. The apartment belonged to our former landlady, and was in the courtyard.

When my mother went into the transport in August 1944, she got a summons for my brother as well. At the Gestapo she said that she hadn't seen her child for a long time already. That he'd been lost during the bombing of the city. Despite that, the Gestapo was of course constantly searching for him. Luckily they didn't find him, because we had quite a lot of people that were helping him. They took Mother to Prague. She was jailed there for 6 months, guarded by the Gestapo. Then in February 1945 they transported the prisoners to Terezin, where I once again after a long time saw my mother. She worked in Terezin as well. We waited there for the end of the war. Liberation day was full of joy. But many people found out that their family members were no longer alive. Thus joy mixed with tears. We found out that my father had lost his legs, but that he was alive.

With the coming of Hitler, my father had to produce Aryan papers. Because he was of Aryan origin, he managed to arrange false documents. This is why he was able to keep running his warehouse until 1944. When my mother was arrested, they arrested him a month later. Before he was arrested, a custodian came and took over his business. They arrested him for having a Jewish wife. They notified him that he had to go into internment. They put him on a transport to the Postelberg labor camp, or Postoloprty in Czech. There he lost his legs. It was a labor camp for men that had Jewish wives. The camp was close to a German airport, where mostly prisoners worked. They worked two shifts. In March 1945, they were leaving after the night shift in the dark and in a blizzard, where you couldn't see a thing. The Allies were bombing airports, and the prisoners were repairing them. They worked through the day but also into the night, and would then go home. The roads weren't safe, because it was dark and you couldn't see. They walked close to some railroad tracks. Trains would pass by the airport, transporting everything that they needed. The prisoners were returning along the tracks, and a freight train was passing by, being pushed by a locomotive. There was a wagon in the front, and you couldn't hear or see the train. The prisoners were walking in single file along the tracks to the camp. One was calling to the next, look out, a train. My father was in front, they called to him: "Look out, a train!" My father heard something, and so jumped aside. But apparently he tripped, because among the large rails there were also small rails, for wagons for material. He tripped on these tracks, and then it hit him. His body fell alongside the tracks, and his legs stayed there. The train ran over both of them. This happened in March 1944. The railway workers were Czechs. They didn't see my father as a prisoner. They quickly took him and bandaged up his bleeding legs. They brought him to Most, to a German hospital. After the war, they operated on him. In the beginning, my father was very badly off, emotionally. We consoled him, up till then you'd taken care of us, now we're going to take care of you. The main thing is that you're alive! My father walked on prosthetics, and that's how he ran his store.

Now back to Terezin. As soon as we arrived in Bohusovice, they took our luggage, as the way to Terezin was relatively long. Terezin is actually brick ramparts, it's a fortress. Everything in the camp was numbered and had a name. New prisoners were registered and told to hand in money and valuables, and that then we wouldn't have any problems. Otherwise they'd liquidate the entire transport. If everything takes place properly, that they'll assign us work and we'll have a better life here than soldiers at the front. But if they find money on one of us, or gold, medicine, or something of value – contraband, then all 250 will go to Auschwitz. Immense stress ensued. I'd found out that we were going onto the transport only a short time beforehand. Two of my mother's lady friends came, because my mother had half-collapsed from it, and all night they sewed marks into my garter belt.

Between two layers of material – one outer one and one inner one, she sewed a few thousand marks. She also baked cookies and cakes, and told me what to wear. They put on me three sets of underwear, blouses and sweaters, leggings, a skirt, knee stockings plus a coat on top, even though it was already April. I couldn't even button the coat because of so many layers of clothing. She said: Tonicka, what you're wearing will most likely stay with you. With the suitcase it's worse, that can get lost. They filled my pockets with medicines, cotton balls, toothpaste and soap. They stuffed it all in so that I'd have these things to start with. I asked myself what would happen now, I've got thousands here, plus one silver ring. I hadn't taken any more than that. I handed it in. I saw my friend Edita Weiss, who lived in Zahradnicka St., how she took off a wide leather belt and cut it into pieces. The marks were falling out all over the place. She had marks sewn into that belt. I saw



everything people were giving away in a crate that had been prepared, covered by a sheet. Nothing remained but for me to take off that belt of mine and throw it in there. No one dared to endanger others because of money.

Working in the Transportleitung was one young woman, a student, who came over to me: "You're Tonicka Michalova, remember me, I used to exercise at Maccabi. Where are your parents?" I answered that for the time being I was alone. "Well, you know what, if they ask you whether you've already found accommodations, tell them that you're going to the girls' home at L410, to No. 24, I know there's room there. After all you know how to work in gardens and fields, so apply for that. Apply for everything right away, voluntarily and on your own." When my turn came, they wrote us all down. Then we were searched, which was performed by female Gestapo members. That girl I knew kept an eye on me, and also brought me to the Mädchenheim, where there were 32 girls living. There were three-story bunks built in the room.

I was weeping profusely. One girl came over to me, later she became my best friend, and said to me: "I don't know why you're crying. I'm here three months, and I haven't cried yet. And yet, when I look out the window, I can almost see Litomerice, where I was born and grew up. I can't go there, but despite that I didn't cry." At that point I was a bit ashamed. "You're lucky, once a week we get better food for going to the garden. You'll get some. You're very lucky to have gotten in here, and that you've got extra food rations." In the end we became such good friends that we shared everything. We got along very well. We helped each other, but unfortunately things were constantly changing. They were selecting for the transports, and girls were leaving with their parents. When I arrived there, they were already opening the barracks. Before that, children were separate, men separate, women separate. When I arrived we were able to get together, before that they couldn't even see each other. Not long after, mass transports began.

At first I worked on the ramparts. It was soil that hadn't been tilled since the times of Maria Theresa. First we had to weed out deep grass roots, and carry the weeds down on stretchers. I think the ramparts were about one story high, with roads on them. Later the roads disappeared, because compost was carried up onto them, into which plants were planted. Almost everything went to Gestapo families, and some of it also went into the ghetto kitchens. You also knew how to steal something from there. It was dangerous, but of course we took something, and something was also issued to us. Mainly during harvest time, then we'd eat our fill. We'd carry it home, and for example exchange it with old people for bread, as that was in short supply. Every fourth day we got 1.5 kg of bread for two of us for four days. We drew lines on the bread. We had two small slices per day, morning and evening. Every second day was only soup, one day there was only coffee. One slice – that wasn't enough.

There were various guards. There were also hired Protectorate [13](#) police, mostly also decent ones. They even helped us carry parcels when we were returning from work. When we were outside the ghetto, occasionally someone would throw a parcel into the bushes. The policemen would act like they didn't see anything. When the international inspections were supposed to come, all the "effects" were made. A major cleanup began, a café opened, money was printed, and everything had to be washed, even the sidewalks. At that time life in Terezin was grand. They came, inspected what they could, and left, satisfied. As soon as they left, the Calvary of thousands of people in transports began, and everything went straight into the gas. Everything was very cleverly disguised.

We were very careful with ourselves, as far as cleanliness went. Our surroundings too. Alas, despite our efforts, we were tormented by stink bugs and lice. Each day we battled for cleanliness. Once a week we could put our bed sheets into the laundry. The girls had various characters. Once one girl arrived, who from one day to the next learned everything, even though at home she'd been waited on hand and foot by cooks and maids. On the other hand, another one had the type of nature that she acted as if she'd never in her life changed the cover on a duvet. We told her that if you don't mind, your sheets aren't clean and don't smell nice, it bothers us, and you've got to change them. When she resisted, we were so nasty that we threw her things out the window into the mud. We didn't care if she cried, we just wanted her to learn the rules. When she didn't like it, she moved away from us. They moved her into accommodations full of old, pitiful dying grannies; there she realized how much worse off she was. We felt best when we were learning things. We didn't only learn school things, but also how to dance, poems, etc.

When I met my mother in Terezin, I was glad to see her. At the same time, I realized that I can no longer look out for just myself, and that I have to help her as much as I can. From that point on, I had to watch out that nothing happened to her. We were of course hoping the war would end soon. All of us wanted to live. We were afraid that if the Germans didn't manage to empty the camp in time, they'd slaughter us on the spot. That was what we were most afraid of, that they'd kill us right there.

We were preparing for the moment of liberation. We knew that at that point, chaos would ensue. This is why my mother and I agreed on which streets we'd walk down. She lived close to Hamburg [ *the Hamburg barracks - Editor's note*], and I lived on the town square at L 410. Towards the end of the war, where before there had lived about 5,000 people, they'd now stuffed about 60,000 prisoners. That meant that the streets were full of people during the day. Not only in the morning and when they were returning from work, but they were mostly always completely full - on the sidewalks, on the streets, always. When you walked along one side, you couldn't see anyone on the other side. That's why I told her that she had to get to such and such a place. I walked along the route with her twice, and taught her the way. That was my greatest wish, for me to not lose my mother, or her me. That's why we agreed on this. When the Russians arrived in their tanks in the morning, they futilely called out to us. We were afraid to come out. Only when people we knew arrived, and said that they were Russians, did we come out. We knew that soldiers had arrived, cars and tanks, but we still didn't believe that the war was over, and that they were Russians.

## After the War

As soon as the war ended, they notified us that trains to Prague were going to be organized. My mother and I said to each other, all right, let's go. Two of my friends also said that they'd go with me to Brno. I proposed that we had to get close to the station, because when the train arrives, there'll be a crush of people. At the station there was one building that was in ruins from the bombing. There, we set up camp on the courtyard gallery. The building was a couple of meters from the tracks. There was no guardrail there, but despite that, we camped out on the gallery for the night. My mother tied us to some metal post, I don't even know where she found the rope. We were on the first floor, and she was afraid that if we rolled over, we'd fall down. Squalid, but despite that, we got some sleep there. In the morning we went to the train. We managed to get only into open cattle wagons, but were on our way to Prague. On the way, people greeted us at each stop, we had baskets of cakes and food, they wept and embraced us, asked us about people, one about

the other, whether there wasn't someone there. That's what our trip to Prague was like. In Prague they were already waiting for us, because when we left, they'd hoisted a yellow flag above Terezin. A yellow flag means heavy quarantine. Typhus had broken out. There was no more leaving Terezin. Some people were even under quarantine for two months, had no place to go, and were dying there.

In Prague the Red Cross caught us. They checked us thoroughly, as to whether we were healthy, whether we didn't have lice and scabies. They took everyone to the station at Masaryk [Train] Station. They didn't let anyone go, there was a whole army of them. It was something amazing, they were holding us out of fear that we were coming from the camp and were bringing epidemics and dirt with us. They held us for only a few hours. After the checkup we were allowed to get on the train again. The train traveled for a long, very long time. In all, the trip from Terezin lasted about three days.

We arrived in the evening at the station in Adamov. Adamov is about 25 km from Brno. The trains from Adamov to Brno weren't running, because the bridges had been destroyed. In Adamov, there was one lady waiting for us who had a grandson who'd also been in Terezin. She asked about him right away. We wanted to walk, but she offered that we could sleep over at her place. She had a house, a dairy. She was constantly asking about the boy. Her daughter had married a Jewish man, and they had a little boy. They'd taken him along with the husband. Several times she'd written me a letter, my father had given her my address in Terezin. I'd never seen the boy. She kept waiting for the transport from Terezin to arrive, which is why she'd found out about that train. She let us have a bath. She made coffee with milk and gave us something to eat. In the morning we went home on foot. We had an indescribable fear of what our home would look like. Here they were already saying that Brno had been bombed. We asked people as to how it looked on Hybesova St., we were afraid for Karlicek. We found out that not one building on Hybesova St. had remained standing. Our neighbor, Mrs. Jilkova, said that Karlicek was at Mrs. Ruprechtova's. Finally we met. He said: "See mommy, I always told you that Tonicka would return from the concentration camp, and here she is." They didn't bring Father until a week later, in a wheelchair. My mother wasn't able to push him around, her health was broken. My father was given a newsstand so that we could support ourselves, and I had the store. We'd gotten everything back, except for the fact that my father was an invalid.

When they'd arrested my mother, my father went to his friend's place. Mr. Sturza was the owner of an auto repair shop, and at the same time was a racer. My father was complaining to him, they took my wife away, and I'm just waiting that any minute I'll be going. Most of all, he was afraid for Karlik. Mr. Sturza, my father's friend, said no problem. Karlik will be in the shop, he visits here anyways. He'll get keys to the workshop and the office, and when he'll be in danger, he'll sleep there. I'll give him a pair of overalls, and he'll blend in, there's about eighteen apprentice auto mechanics anyways. The apprentices were Czechs. He said that this would be the best place for him to hide. Sturza wasn't allowed to repair civilians' cars, only German army, police and Gestapo ones. He wasn't allowed to even change a light bulb in a civilian car; everything was designated for the army. So my brother got a pair of coveralls. Mr. Sturza claimed that my brother was his best apprentice, and that they didn't have to ask him to anything twice. When they'd bring in a car for repairs, the hood had to be opened and they'd lay a blanket under the car, because the mechanic worked underneath the car. It wasn't like today, with all those machines. And then, when it was

fixed, he went with them for a test drive, they had to test it out. That's how he survived. As far as the other boys go, they probably knew something. When one of them knew something, they all knew it. Some parents, when they were giving their boys snacks, also gave them one for Karlik. They were from the countryside, because those that lived in the city didn't have such resources. In the city, it was quite bad as far as food went. We also knew a butcher whose store we used to shop at, so they also knew that Karlicek was there. This family also supported him, and they used to send him a small pot with food. My father left him some money, so he could also buy food for himself. But he himself couldn't go to the store to buy something, he couldn't go outside. He always asked someone, who bought it for him. No, no one ever turned him in.

One lady, by the name of Jilkova, lived on the ground floor of that building where they'd moved us during the war. Her husband was doing forced war labor in Germany. They had three children. She knew that my brother was in hiding. Once they were looking for him there, who knows, perhaps even more than once. She said that the Gestapo had come and were asking about Karlicek, whether she ever saw him. No, she told them. And whether she doesn't know where he is, that they want him to come to see the Gestapo. They told her: look, it would be good for you to remember, you could pass on to him a summons to come to the Gestapo on a certain day. On top of that they then warned her that she's not in such a good situation, with her husband doing labor in Germany and she with three kids. So it'd be better for you to do what we want. She was quite frightened by that. My brother then told me that as he was sneaking through the hallway, she was waiting for him. Karlicek got a scare, who was that standing there, and it was Mrs. Jilkova. She was very kind to him. Karlicek, you know, I'm terribly sorry, but the Gestapo was here, and here's a summons. You've got to go there, I'm afraid for my husband and my children, if I didn't obey them and didn't give you this summons, they'd be in danger. Karlicek took the summons and said, don't worry Mrs. Jilkova, I'll go there. He took it, went home, packed his bags, taking some money, cards, photos and some clothes. He locked the apartment and walked across Brno. We had some friends in Vranov. He walked across all of Brno, through the forest. He arrived in Vranov before dawn. Those friends of ours took him in. He told them that at home the Gestapo were looking for him. Our friends had a house and garden in Vranov, even there he couldn't go outside, but at least he had everything that he needed. He was worried about our apartment, what if someone robbed it. He didn't last long there, and so he thanked them and after two weeks he went back. He was rarely in the apartment, and slept in the workshop. One other lady used to help him, who lived at 55 Hybesova St., Mrs. Ruprechtova. She was Jewish, and her husband was a Christian. They had three children. She and her daughter survived, one son, a student, was shot in Brno. They other son was married, they shipped him and his whole family, that is, his wife and child, to Terezin, I saw them there once. She knew that Karlicek was in that workshop across the street. She snuck over there and told him that on Friday evening, once it's dark, she'll leave the building unlocked and he can come over to her place and have a bath. And what was very important, and for him impossible, that he can also sleep over there, and leave in the morning. So he had Fridays there, on Friday evening Mrs. Ruprechtova would take him in. He had it very good there.

Alas, her son and his wife and six-year-old son were in Terezin for a very short time. They transported them to Auschwitz. Mrs. Ruprechtova stuck to me after the war, and I constantly had to tell her about what they'd been doing in Terezin, where they'd been, how they'd lived. She also asked whether they could still return; I said that they could, if one of them was ill, they'd still be in some sanatorium somewhere. She just kept hoping and hoping that her son's family would return. I

constantly had to repeat the same story to her, what life in Terezin had been like, and when I'd last seen them. So this was the woman that used to bathe my brother, and in the morning fed him and gave him clean underwear. She put herself in danger, because taking care of a Jewish child equaled an immediate stay in a prison camp.

After the war, my brother was supposed to enter second year of council school. But he didn't know any of the material. That wasn't yet the biggest problem, that he hadn't attended school for three years. When I returned from the camp, they brought me my father wrapped up, legless, from the camp, my mother's health was broken and she had heart problems. My brother hadn't been in school for three years, he'd just been hiding wherever he could, but on the other hand, he knew how to repair cars. All I saw was the problem that he was supposed to attend school. I was terribly worried. I was 17 at the time, right away I ran to the school board and there I asked whether they could advise me as to what I should do for my brother, that he was supposed to start school, but he'd be at the absolute bottom of the class, which would be terrible. At the school board they told me that over here, by the convent, is something like an orphanage. There were abandoned children there, being taken care of by the nuns. They said to me, if we give you a letter for reference for them, you could take your Karlicek there, and we'd ask them to take care of him every day, and prepare him for school. They'll do it, because there are child care workers there. Karlicek wasn't thrilled by this, because he was free, he'd managed to take care of himself even when the Gestapo had been looking for him. But I convinced him that this would be no good, and so I took him there. He always came home for one day. After two months, around the middle of August, he announced that he no longer wanted to stay there. He'd learned a few things, and then started attending first year of council school. It's true that he was supposed to start in second year. His education wasn't all that, three years were missing of course, well, he did what he could. He dreamt about leaving for the Palestine; he yearned for it terribly. At home, he attended the Hashomer movement [14](#), where he was preparing to leave for the Palestine. In 1948 he succeeded; he was 17 at the time.

No one we knew went with him. My mother was unhappy, she was afraid for him, that he'd be alone and without family. To this he said, don't worry, on the other hand I'll be free. And I don't want to listen to anyone maligning me any more, I won't stay here, Mother forgive me, but I'll come visit you, and you'll come visit me too. When he arrived in the Palestine, they put him up in Ramat Gan. In those days there weren't any cars there, all he wrote about was the sun. I asked him how are you, how are things going. So he wrote back, lots of sun and sand here.

My brother enlisted in the army right away. He served under the Jordan Hills, he didn't even go to sleep without his rifle, it was very dangerous. He was a big hero. He's not the type of person to complain and be unhappy. He said that it was good there, fine, we didn't do anything there, that's it. He was happy. He always returned to that kibbutz. When he was leaving in 1948, customs officials came to our place and checked what he was taking with him. He wanted to take his bicycle and accordion along. He played the accordion very well. The customs officials didn't allow him to take the harmonica, nor the bike. I said, just take what you want, and see what happens at the border. Well, so he packed those things up as well. The border guards didn't check the wagons, whether it had all passed through customs. My mother and I went with him to Breclav, where the customs people were. In Breclav, the trains were switched towards Austria. It was very sad at the station. I told my brother that when the customs officials arrive, to start playing some Czech folk



songs on the accordion. When he began playing, everyone was thrilled by it. They just looked at his papers, but not his bags, because they were in the freight cars. He played, and they liked it. The train was about to start, it had already moved a bit, to connect to an Austrian locomotive, at which time we said, hey, we'll go to Austria. My brother agreed, and we got on. Then my mother said: And what about Dad? And so we began banging on the doors, to the guards, and so they stopped the train, and we said goodbye. We had the chance to leave. Later he reproached us for it in letters. You're always writing me that you're sad, you should have all come at once, but you can still come to Israel. My father was worried about how he'd make a living there and all. In the end we found out that my father would have gotten post-war compensation, that even we would have been able to live off it. I wasn't scared of work. My mother was no longer able to work, as she had a weak heart. Living in a kibbutz, that wouldn't have even been a question for me. My brother used to say, I'm leaving with a light heart because I know that Tonicka [*Antonie*] won't abandon you. If I wouldn't have been here, he wouldn't have done it. My mother was very unhappy, but my father always said that he saw him as a great hero, and if that's what he wants, let him go his own way.

When my brother arrived in Israel, it was of course a big change for him, one he wasn't expecting. He went to the Haogen kibbutz. There were a couple of Czech boys there. So he began learning how to farm. They put him, who'd studied to be an auto mechanic, to work doing irrigation, they had to reclaim the desert. There were patrols there too, because the Arabs were stealing cattle from them at night. So it wasn't an easy life there. Collective life wasn't all that ideal either. He was young, and so began to miss certain freedoms, and the idea of only working, and not having even a penny, only for food and clothing, that happiness didn't last long. He had an accordion with him, and that was all as far as culture went. There were no cinemas, no theater, they had to put on all the plays themselves. On one such occasion he first met his wife.

He's still in Israel. He worked for two or three big companies. At first he worked for an Italian company, and then as a manager for Volkswagen. Later he built his own workshop, and employed auto mechanics. He himself was an excellent mechanic. He studied at Volkswagen and also repaired Japanese cars. Later, he unfortunately lost a leg. Now he's paralyzed. Despite his handicap, he comes here every year; they put him on the plane in a wheelchair, and I pick him up from the plane, and so we see each other every year. I used to go there often before.

My sister-in-law was studying education in Tel Aviv at the time. She was still living with her parents. Once a girlfriend of hers invited her to a celebration at a kibbutz. She saw my brother playing there, and was very attracted to him. She complimented him on the nice music, and said that she'd like to learn to play the accordion. They came to an agreement, and in the end she invited him over. He was also in the army for another three years, he went from that kibbutz straight into the army. When he returned, he got married. He was 21. My sister-in-law's name is Nica Cvi, her surname is Michalova now. They had a daughter, Shani. Alas, my brother is seriously ill, he's a paraplegic and is missing one leg. They had to amputate it. On top of that, he then had a stroke.

Shani ended up getting married, to an Israeli. After the wedding, her husband said that he had an uncle in America, and that they could take over his store for a year. That they could make more money there than in Israel. She loved him, and so agreed. They stayed there for about a year, but then he didn't want to return. Shani wanted to return at all costs, because she has friends and her parents only in Israel. She didn't feel at home there, and didn't want to stay there for any amount of money. It was a big battle, my sister-in-law had to go to America. It took three months until

Shani got divorced and could return home. Her ex-husband stayed there, and after the divorce he married some Jewish girl. He thus became an American citizen, as she was an American. A year later he divorced again, returned to Israel, and wanted Shani back. But at that time he revealed his reasons, that he'd wanted to get American citizenship. Shani's ex-husband had a worldly nature, he wanted to travel all over, to be free. Shani told him that he'd disappointed her once, and that she no longer trusted him, and that she'd rather be alone. So now she takes care of her ill parents. She also has work that interests her. At first she worked for a large company. Besides that, she studied at the Faculty of Science. Then she started her own business, flower arranging. She arranges for weddings, decorates theaters and ballrooms. She started her own garden on the roof of the house. She works as a landscape architect. She's happy. She takes care of her father every day, helps wash and dress him, and then runs off to work.

When Mom and I returned from Terezin, it wasn't easy to start living everyday life again. It's true that we were all alive. My brother had survived too, people helped him. As for my father, they brought him without legs. We'd all lived in very tough conditions, but we'd managed to escape with our lives. My father was terribly unhappy that he was no longer of any use, now that he had no legs. We consoled him, up to now you took care of us, now we'll take care of you. Right away we asked for a newsstand, which they also granted us. My father also got a wheelchair. We opened the newsstand right away. I used to take my father there. My father sat behind the counter, with the goods around him, and served people. In the evening we'd go home. The newsstand was on the other side of town, we were far away from it. Each time, people had to help me onto the streetcar with the wheelchair, and then off again. Four people had their work cut out for them to lift him up. There weren't any streetcars with access for the handicapped, but one could get by. At the age of 17, I had to care of my invalid father and the newsstand. My mother was at home, she was very weak, and so couldn't work. She was glad when she managed to cook a light meal. We had a large garden, we'd gotten it back. My father worked alone in that newsstand up to the age of 78. I used to go there with him almost every day. After 1948 [15](#) the Communists limited sales [16](#), but it was enough for him to make a living. Mainly he was satisfied, that he was working, that he'd remained in contact with people, and that he was supporting himself. He died in 1983, at the age of 83. Despite not having legs, he was physically and mentally healthy. My mother was only ever at home, she had a seriously ill heart, and died at the age of 59.

We couldn't get our house back, as we'd lost it. We'd had to raze it. After the war, we returned to our pitiful apartment. My mother immediately began looking for someplace for us to move into. Someone told us that in the building just around the corner, on the ground floor, there was a vacant three-room apartment that had been abandoned by a family that had left for Germany. So we went to the National Committee, which of course immediately issued it to us. We were also given another option, but my father had that wheelchair, so we could only live on the ground floor. So we began living again, began working, and were happy.

My brother was associating with young Jewish people, and studying. He wanted to leave for Israel, and was systematically preparing for it. He said that he doesn't want to listen to someone call him "Jew". He wants to be in our country, and doesn't believe that the Germans won't return. As a child, he overcame something that he can't forget. He survived bombing, queues, he can't forget that there were dead horses lying on the corner, and people were cutting meat off them. He didn't want to live here. Our Mom was distraught over it. When he was born, he'd meant the whole world to

her. Our father on the other hand, said that it's heroic of him, you've got to support him. Karlicek left when he was 17.

I couldn't abandon my parents. It was out of the question, it wasn't at all to be considered. My brother said: "After all, you've got Tonicka, otherwise I wouldn't leave, if you were here alone. She won't abandon you." But now even he says that despite that, we should've all gone, because even so, they assigned him to a kibbutz. If we would've gone to the kibbutz too, we would of course have lived and worked there, just like here. Even though our father didn't have legs, he was very capable, he had a head and hands, and would have made a living there too.

We had friends that left too. We admired them, because they were, after all, going off into the unknown. Even though it was our country, it's not that easy to arrive somewhere with just some bags. You can never know how it'll be and what'll be. The desire to be free was the strongest thing for them. Not everyone was satisfied to be "accepted" in Bohemia. I can't say that we're oppressed here, but here and there an anti-Semitic remarks comes along. Personally, I think that anti-Semitism is just envy. I even convinced some people otherwise. "Hey, you're a Jew? Aren't you ashamed of it?"

"Why should I be ashamed? I've never hurt anyone, and neither did my parents, nor our ancestors, so I don't know why I should be ashamed. Imagine, I'm even proud of it. Why do you think I should be ashamed of it? Why don't you like Jews, should everyone who's a Jew be ashamed of it now?"

"My mother told me that she worked as a servant for Jews, and they didn't treat her well. When we were little, and were learning about religion, they told us that the Jews killed Christ."

"It really is sad that they oppressed your mother. It's too bad she didn't leave such a family. But do you think that it couldn't have happened that she'd have worked for Christians, and would also have experienced injustice? I unfortunately can't defend those people, if they weren't good to your mother, but she should definitely have left them. That wasn't because they were Jews, that was because they perhaps didn't have good character. There are only two things in the world: good and evil. And what else do you want to blame Jews for? Do you think it's our fault that we're of the Jewish religion? We're just as much Czechs as you, we just have a different religion. We were born here, just in Jewish families. We inherit the religion and traditions of our ancestors, but that doesn't mean that we're bad. Of course, in each nation and each country, there are good and bad people. And so it is also among citizens of the Jewish religion. Is it someone's fault that he's oppressed and doesn't know why? Is when, to whom and where you were born your fault? Is it your fault? And what if you wouldn't have been born into a Jewish family? Think about it, and try to put yourself into this situation. Maybe you wouldn't even have been happier than you are today. You wouldn't have been led to hate. They would've only taught you to believe in God, in good. They would have led you to education. You're still young, you can still learn, so that you'll realize that you can't let yourself be influenced. As far as Jesus Christ goes, the Jewish didn't crucify Jesus. I can tell you that. The Romans decided about it, and also executed the verdict."

This hate seems to be endless. Today priests come to us and ask for forgiveness, that this hate towards Jews had been there since it's been mentioned in books. That nation was persecuted for it didn't do, and Hitler took advantage of this thought, which was very bad. This lady then apologized to me, I told her: "It's not your fault that they led you to hate like this." One blames another for what's not his fault, and on top of that tries to crush him, he wants to eliminate him and kill him.

I met my husband, Ladislava Militky, at the spa in Lipova in 1956. At first we wrote each other letters, then he invited me over to his parents' place. I also invited him to mine, and in September, in 1957, we got married. He moved to Brno. I was undergoing treatment, I'd had frostbitten toes from Terezin, when we used to go outside. In Terezin we didn't work just in the fields, but they also sent us to do construction work. They were organizing the building new barracks for the prisoners. There was water and ice everywhere. The Germans also made use of us during hunting. We served as beaters for pheasants and rabbits. They selected several beaters from our group. When they took us with them, our shoes got soaked. It was cold, below freezing. Our shoes didn't have time to dry properly by morning. Actually, they almost never dried out. That's how I got my frostbite. I was treated for it for several years. When I was getting married in 1957, I still had it. It was over ten years that I suffered from it. One friend of mine, who was in Bergen Belsen [17](#), got such frostbitten feet during the march [18](#) that her toes fell off. She also died right away. My husband had some sort of eczema, which is why he was at the spa. That's where we met, and in the end got married. I always wanted to marry a boy that was educated, handsome and from a good family. Which is also what happened. We were happy. We had a boy. He makes us happy.

My husband, Ladislav Militky, was born on 12th January 1929 in the town of Litovel, in the Hana region of Morava, near Olomouc. His father worked for an agricultural savings bank. He prospered there, they even built a villa. They did well, for ten years he was an only child, until his sister was born. My husband isn't a Jew. I got along very well with his family. They got along well with Jewish families, in fact, not only did they know them socially, but also visited the baths with Jewish families. One of my husband's best friends is also from a Jewish family. There wasn't even a hint of anti-Semitism amongst them.

My husband worked in construction, and worked in various jobs. After he moved to our place in Brno after the wedding, also completed hotel school. He worked in a student cafeteria and in various recreational facilities. That was all fine. But a crisis took place in our lives. His social life took on an unfortunate direction. In his youth he did various sports, after the wedding he participated in sports only passively, and liked very much to attend games and various contests. Unfortunately, this hobby caused him to be more interested in it than the everyday life of his family – his wife and son [*Ladislav Militky, familiarly Ladicek – Editor's note*]. So he spent less and less time with his family – later women that wanted him also came along. In the end we got divorced, because he literally abandoned his family.

We were divorced in 1978. After the divorce he moved in with one woman that lived out in the country, who'd been chasing after him for three years. He used to claim that he was thinking about us, even out there. After a year and a half he wanted to return. Living with this woman, he had to make a living with manual labor, to which he had an aversity. In response to that, I said to him: "That's what you wanted, so go ahead and see it through." My husband was always educating himself, he understood, read and studied everything. He knew a lot. He was like a dictionary. But work around the house – like the car or yard – that he disliked. We also had a cottage. The way he saw it was that we didn't need all that, because maintaining it requires work, which was my invention. He always said that we didn't have so much work that needed to be done, that it was just I who was inventing it. For him, the household was a launch pad, when he left, he also returned. Although he died last year, and did love us, he didn't know how to show his love the way it should be done. To just say I love you and give you some money, that's not enough. Love has to

be proven through sacrifice and work. If you don't prove it, then it's not a true relationship. When he returned, he claimed that something has to be fixed. Of course, nothing was fixed, just troubles arrived. Personally, I was never able to tell him that I no longer wanted him there. So he stayed. He got a weak stroke, and a heart attack. We were still divorced, but lived together for another 25 years. People kept asking me, why don't you get rid of him and move out.

I never took my husband's keys from our apartment away from him. Our son was studying in Ostrava, and came home from the dormitory regularly. When our son was at home, my ex-husband also used to come for a visit. We also used to go on smaller trips together. I think that despite our divorce, my husband was unable to cut himself free of his family. My life focused on the life and future of our son. Under those conditions it was no longer so simple. Luckily I still had my father. I always felt that the most important thing was that we had a son together. He grew up. He got married, and they had three children. Today they're all studying and working, and everything's fine. I never remarried, even though I could have.

When my son was in Grade 2, they notified us that he'd been selected for a newly opened elementary school. The school started with Grade 3. Each school was supposed to select two of its Grade 2 students. Our son was also one of them. I agreed, so did my son. We were supposed to decide which class he was to go into. I wanted him to go into an English one, while my husband wanted our son to go into the French one, because he'd also graduated in French, in which he was fluent. I asked him why he'd chosen French. He said because then he'd be able to help him study. I told him that I didn't think that he'd help him study. English opens up the world. Already back then, in 1966, I was saying that. He retorted, no, no, French. To this I replied: "Yes, before the war, but English is useful absolutely everywhere. He can go wherever, a everywhere he'll be able to speak and study." I'd also taken English for two years, I'd also taken courses and so on. So I said to myself that in the beginning I can help him, and then we'll see. In the end my son did go to an English school, though it was at the other end of town. I was extremely concerned and afraid for him. He was little, going to Grade 3 on a streetcar, and had to transfer in busy places. Despite that he did well, they took everything in English, and the only thing they took in Czech was Czech. Already after one year he knew how to speak English. In the beginning they learned through playing and songs, which he didn't even know how to translate, but knew what they were about. Within a year he could communicate in English. When we went to Israel, he spoke English on the boat. At that time he was 9. He translated everything for me. My brother was amazing, and left money for us with the captain, so that we could enjoy ourselves on the ship. We were there for two days, as back then you could still travel by steamship. We stayed in Israel for two months. It was good there, my brother was still healthy. He had work, he was an auto racer and had a beautiful life.

Ladicek applied for a school of foreign trade. When he returned from the entrance exams, he was excited that he'd known it all, and that he had the questions answered as they were writing them on the blackboard. A week later a letter arrived, I don't remember exactly what it said, but something to the effect that they weren't accepting him for political reasons. So I carefully explained to him that even despite the fact that he knew everything, not everything we strive for always works out. Ladicek was of course miserable because of it. I called some high schools to find out whether they still had room. My son was always very good at drawing, so I also called vocational schools, so that if they took him as a house painter, he could, if he was still interested in studying, get into tech school later. I went to see the economics school principal, and asked him for



the reasons they hadn't accepted him, when he'd been one of the best in the entrance exams. And why are they punishing children and taking away their future, when nothing's their fault? Then the principal asked me if we'd be satisfied if they accepted Ladicek into general economics. That it may not be foreign trade, but that's a narrow specialization, and if he didn't manage to find work with some company doing foreign trade, he'd have to learn and work in general economics anyways. He explained it beautifully to me. At home I asked Ladicek whether he'd be satisfied if they accepted him into general economics. Of course, of course, he said. He did well in school, he won a shorthand contest. Once his teacher called me in and said that during the four years she was teaching him, there was no better student. After the graduation exams, his teacher turned to the teaching staff and proclaimed: "Don't forget that his student was accepted here on appeal."

After high school he applied to Economics University in Ostrava. There he met his wife, Venuska. After first year, their son, Zdenecek [*Zdenek*] was born. When they were graduating, and coming to the front for their diplomas, Zdenecek was already nodding to them, and saying "Aha, mom and dad." They eventually had another two children, Michaela and Jiri. We helped them, during the day we took care of the kids and they attended school, and during the evening they studied together.

Zdenek did artistic facades and stuccoes on castles. He also knew how to draw very well. After high school he'd wanted to attend civil engineering, but he didn't pass his math exams. He got a job with one company that was in the roofing material business. He's supplementing his studies with night business courses at university. Michaela is studying to be a teacher. Jiri is still in high school. During the school year, I see my grandchildren less, but we call each other relatively often. When the grandchildren were small, they spent a lot of time at my place.

Our boy attended university in Ostrava. There was no economics school here, and that's what he wanted. He also played competitive badminton for one club. Despite the fact that he played a lot of sports as a boy, I used to take him to hockey, to the arena. He was already on the ice at 5:00 a.m. About three times a week, we'd get up at 4:00 a.m., sometime with tears, too. In the meantime, there was soccer too, but he came to like badminton best. He traveled, competed, and liked it very much.

After the war, I at first helped my father run the newsstand. Later I worked at a machine works, where I stayed for 20 years. They put me into the computing center. We put together production reports for the finance department. We put together calculations for the accounting department for parts production, for which we issued salaries for workers and experts. I did that for 20 years. Technology advanced during that time. I liked this work, on the whole. After some time, I switched jobs and went to the computing center of a railway construction firm, where I was manager for four years. Sixteen girls worked there. We worked for all of Moravia. The head office was in Bratislava. From there I retired. In 1986 they called me from the Jewish Community, which was under the leadership of Mr. Arnost Neufeld. His secretary was leaving, and they asked me whether I couldn't take her place. I was a bit afraid to take the job, as I didn't want to commit myself. I could've been someplace else, where there was money to be made, because at that time you worked for the Community almost for free. Sometimes a person wants to do something good, which may not be paid so well, but is all the more useful.

I still work for the Jewish Community today, the difference just being that I only visit people that want it, or to be more precise need it, or I take them to the doctor, as the case may be. I just do

social visits, or when there's some sort of event. Before that I was a social worker and was also in charge of the secretariat. We established contact with old people that needed it, who were for the most part alone. Every decent family, when they have a grandma or grandpa, takes care of them in all respects. And when people who were alone needed to be taken to the doctor, or to be brought or taken somewhere, to be accompanied to the synagogue or outside, whatever, we did it. Then this activity developed to the point that if a woman was living alone, volunteers from us would come and help her out. Sometimes we arranged nursing services, or for example she'd need to call a plumber, get something fixed or painted, so we organized all that. Simply put, we kept in touch with those people that asked for help.

My colleagues at the railway construction firm didn't express anything related to me being Jewish. Perhaps they might have had certain anti-Semitic thoughts, but luckily they didn't express them. When I started there, there was comparatively harsh political vetting. The strictest conditions were for someone who was applying to the army, to the police, and then to the railways. At that time, the political officer that was interviewing me told me that he liked the fact that I'd told him everything, that I had a brother and friends in Israel. "Well, Mrs. Militka, I like that you're telling me everything openly like this. We've also got employees that deny everything. So we're looking forward to you working here." I didn't have problems. And I told him, why should I try keep it a secret, maybe you knew about it even before I arrived. In my preceding job, every time I arrived back from a trip abroad, they'd call me into the political department. They wanted to know whom I'd met with and so on. There were unfortunately people there whose work consisted in monitoring other, according to them suspicious people. Once I said to them: "I don't have the education nor the personality to move about in these spheres that you're asking about. When I went to Israel, I went to see my brother, his wife and daughter and my girlfriends, and to see the country. I got to know its history and historical sites, and relaxed by the sea. And nothing else... and I was happy that I was with my brother, because every day with him is valuable to me. The Germans robbed us of a lot of time, when we weren't able to be together. Now we again can't be together, though we've not done anything to anyone, and despite that we're not allowed to be brother and sister, neither here nor there. " To which he replied: "Would you like to live there?" I said: "Not for now."

"And why?"

"It's very hot there." They saw that they won't budge with me.

Especially in Communist countries, people tried to avoid work and made up various excuses and stories. I can't claim it for sure, as I didn't see it around me. I just know that there were those that informed on each other. That was unpleasant. Otherwise they didn't avoid work. Informers were also paid for their work.

I was happy when I got my pension. I'd already been making plans how we were going to do and enjoy everything when I'll have the time. Everyone who's healthy looks forward to that. But I retired right after a gall bladder operation, and was weak. Then I realized that with each day a person gets older, and has to battle against it. Despite the fact that I like my apartment and household, I miss having people around. That's why I said to myself that I had to get well and get out among people.

My son has a positive relationship with Judaism. When he was little, he used to go to the synagogue with me. We observed holidays, and didn't eat what was forbidden. For Passover we'd make food from matzot. Even to this day, I make stuffed fish, which I like very much, and bake barches, roast

meat. Because my husband wasn't a Jew, I tried to prepare their holidays for him. We used to observe those too.

My grandsons are also interested in Judaism. They read books and study literature. They weren't brought up in any faith, as their mother wasn't religious either. My grandsons aren't registered at any Community. Venuska is afraid that what happened to us could happen again, that someone could come, take the register and would then have them.

My parents observed Jewish traditions. Not as much as before the war, of course. They didn't eat kosher anymore, but they didn't eat what was forbidden. My parents are buried at the Jewish cemetery. Karlicek managed to get permission to come to our mother's funeral, but alas when it came to our father's, he wasn't successful. He wanted to arrange permission in Israel, but they [*the Czech Communist government*] wouldn't give it to him. He also tried it through the Swedish embassy, he even got to Vienna, but no further. He had to fly back to Sweden. Because of him, we postponed the funeral by ten days. Back then the times were such that they didn't allow siblings to see each other, for a son to come for his own father's funeral. They didn't respect people at all.

I told my son about what took place during the Holocaust. I was very careful, just fragments, so he had to put it together himself. It wasn't like now, when we're sitting here and I'm telling you everything. I wanted to protect him, because it's been proven that the fear gets passed on up to the second generation, that even his children would still have been afraid... I wanted to protect him from that. My son is registered at the Community, but his children aren't. Venuska is afraid that what happened to us could happen again, that they'll take the records and would then have them, too.

I always liked to read. Even now, my apartment is full of books. My son's books that he didn't take with him are still here. They've also got a lot of books at home. I concentrated mainly on literature for my son. He was always interested in history, so we used to buy him books on world history. When newspapers were still cheap, my husband used to subscribe to all the dailies. He always read a lot, and was like a walking encyclopedia; it's just too bad that he never shared his knowledge with anyone. He never asked me what he could do so that I'd read more. He claimed that there wasn't that much work, that I was making the work up.

We used to go on vacations to Romania, and to Yugoslavia. We also had a cottage, where we spent our free time. My father never understood why we used to go on vacations, when it was so beautiful at our cottage. He always used to say, the sun, mountains, beautiful nature, what else could you wish for. But we used to go because of people, in each place there were different people, different customs. Once we managed to meet up with my brother in Romania. It was, how would I put it, neutral territory. He came from Israel, and I from Czechoslovakia.

Before 1989, my brother was in Czechoslovakia for our mother's funeral. Once a trip from Israel was organized for those that had family in Czechoslovakia. I think that an ad came out in the papers. My brother also applied. The trip was through a travel agency. He was with us for a while, and then he joined a tour group and they traveled to beautiful places in Bohemia – Karlovy Vary and so on. That was a year before our father's death. They then didn't let him come for the funeral. The tour was advantageous for the state, because it put foreign currency into the state treasury. Lately, my brother has been coming every year. In Israel they put him on a plane, and I then pick him up. Alas, now he's a paraplegic, but despite that he comes here regularly.

I didn't have a lot of time for friendships, because I devoted my entire life to my son. Ladicek was a very active child. He used to play hockey, soccer, and I don't even know what else. Besides that, I worked, and every day I visited my invalid father.

The year 1948, the arrival of Communism, meant almost nothing to me. I was taking care of my parents. Right after the war, my father got a newsstand. After Communism arrived, various prohibitions and limitations were issued, what you could and couldn't sell. He wasn't allowed to sell tobacco and tobacco products. He could only sell newspapers, magazines and some smokers' accessories. And even that was left to him only so that they wouldn't limit the life of an invalid that had returned from a prison camp. So that he wouldn't lose his customers, my father used to buy cigarettes for the full price, and then would sell them for the same price. He'd noticed that while buying magazines, people would also buy cigarettes.

The worst thing about Communism was that people weren't free. Everyone was monitored. You couldn't travel freely. There was constant harassment by the authorities. Once, I traveled illegally to Israel without my passport – you see, you could persuade the customs people to not stamp your passport. The way we did it was that I went to Frankfurt to visit a girlfriend, and from there secretly to Israel. Upon my return, the StB [20](#) was waiting for me. Someone had seen me at the airport in Frankfurt. I told them, that's possible, my friend took me to see so many places, it seems to me that we'd passed a couple of airports. I don't know Frankfurt, how should I know that it's an airport? After a few hours of interrogation and intimidation, they finally released me, because they realized that they wouldn't get any further with me. It was quite unpleasant, because they kept using phrases like "we'll prove it", "we know everything about you." and so on.

In 1968 the Soviets arrived [21](#). My son was at a Pioneer summer camp, and I was terribly afraid for him. I wanted to go see him. I went to see someone I knew, to borrow his motorcycle. He was persuading me in all manner of ways to not go there, that it's nothing but tanks on the road now, and that it's dangerous, but the children are definitely in a safe place. Finally he succeeded in changing my mind. Ladicek returned home after a few days; camp had ended early. At work they were assuring us that they'd hung a Red Cross flag in front of the camp.

When the state of Israel was created, we were happy, that those people would finally have a home. When a person has a home, he becomes stronger. I always admired people that set out into the unknown. Even Karlicek, when he left, said that for him it would be enough to get something to eat and to have a place to sleep. I felt very proud at the time.

My brother and I wrote each other. We were allowed to send letters, and also got them from him. Occasionally it happened that they were opened, but we got them. During the wars I was afraid for my brother. At the same time, I was proud that such a small country managed to defend itself against so many Arabs. In a figurative sense, it was like for example a small country like Slovakia defending itself against surrounding countries. That pride, that a handful of Jews managed to defend themselves. I just never understood why they called Israel an aggressor, when it was the Arabs that attacked.

I've been in Israel countless many times. I liked everything, especially the people, their character. Many compare them to a cactus. On the surface they've got dense thorns that prevent access to them. Inside them is sweet milk. They maintain a certain distance from foreigners, I guess it stems from the fact that no one behaves considerately towards them. They can't expect help and

understanding from anyone. But when they see that you're honestly interested in them, they open up. Few nations have a heart like they do. They have an amazing patriotism. Here, young people avoid military service, but there everyone tries to fulfill his patriotic duty. In the beginning I didn't like that reserve of theirs.

## **Glossary:**

### **1 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.

### **2 Crystal night [Kristallnacht]**

On 7th November 1938 in Paris, Herschel Grynszpan, a seventeen year-old Jewish youth, shot the legation secretary Ernst von Rath, erroneously assuming that he was the German ambassador. During interrogation he said that he had carried out the assassination in retaliation for how the German civil service had treated his parents; this was taken advantage of by Goebbels, when as every November 9th he was celebrating the anniversary of the failed putsch in 1923. He devoted the majority of his speech to an attack against Jews, with which he provoked a huge pogrom against Jews. According the latest numbers, there were 91 Jews killed, 29 Jewish stores burned, 171 residential buildings and 10 synagogues destroyed or burned and 7500 stores devastated. The members of the SA didn't however limit themselves to only street violence. On Hitler's orders on this night about 35,000, according to other sources 26,000 Jews were dragged off to concentration camps. This coercion was to serve to speed up their emigration. Hermann Goring also forced Jews in the German Reich to collectively come up with one billion Reichmarks and so pay for the damage caused by the Nazis. The shattered display windows gave this pogrom its name, "Crystal Night" [Kristallnacht].

### **3 Maccabi Sports Club in the Czechoslovak Republic**

The Maccabi World Union was founded in 1903 in Basel at the VI. Zionist Congress. In 1935 the Maccabi World Union had 100,000 members, 10,000 of which were in Czechoslovakia. Physical education organizations in Bohemia have their roots in the 19th century. For example, the first Maccabi gymnastic club in Bohemia was founded in 1899. The first sport club, Bar Kochba, was founded in 1893 in Moravia. The total number of Maccabi clubs in Bohemia and Moravia before WWI was fifteen. The Czechoslovak Maccabi Union was officially founded in June 1924, and in the same year became a member of the Maccabi World Union, located in Berlin.



#### **4 Hirsch, Fredy (1916-1944)**

member of the Maccabi Association, a sports club founded in the middle of the 1920s as a branch of the Maccabi Sports Club, the first Jewish sports association on the territory of Bohemia and Moravia. Hirsch organized the teaching of sports to youth at Prague's Hagibor, after his deportation to Terezin he continued in this activity there as well. After the reinstatements of transports to Auschwitz in 1943 and after the creation of the "family camp" there, Hirsch and other teachers organized a children's home there as well. They continued to teach until the Nazis murdered virtually all the members of the "family camp", including children and teachers, in the gas chambers.

#### **5 Zionism**

a movement defending and supporting the idea of a sovereign and independent Jewish state, and the return of the Jewish nation to the home of their ancestors, Eretz Israel – the Israeli homeland. The final impetus towards a modern return to Zion was given by the show trial of Alfred Dreyfus, who in 1894 was unjustly sentenced for espionage during a wave of anti-Jewish feeling that had gripped France. The events prompted Dr. Theodor Herzl (1860-1904) to draft a plan of political Zionism in the tract 'Der Judenstaat' ('The Jewish State', 1896), which led to the holding of the first Zionist congress in Basel (1897) and the founding of the World Zionist Organization (WZO). The WZO accepted the Zionist emblem and flag (Magen David), hymn (Hatikvah) and an action program.

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

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

## **8 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 Nuremberg Law definitions and limited the legal standing of Jews. According to the law, Jews couldn't perform any functions (honorary or paid) in the courts or public service and couldn't participate at all in politics, be members of Jewish organizations and other organizations of social, cultural and economic nature. They were completely barred from performing any independent occupation, couldn't work as lawyers, doctors, veterinarians, notaries, 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.

## **9 People's and Public schools in Czechoslovakia**

In the 18th century the state intervened in the evolution of schools – in 1877 Empress Maria Theresa issued the Ratio Educationis decree, which reformed all levels of education. After the passing of a law regarding six years of compulsory school attendance in 1868, people's schools were fundamentally changed, and could now also be secular. During the First Czechoslovak Republic, the Small School Law of 1922 increased compulsory school attendance to eight years. The lower grades of people's schools were public schools (four years) and the higher grades were council schools. A council school was a general education school for youth between the ages of 10 and 15. Council schools were created in the last quarter of the 19th century as having 4 years, and were usually state-run. Their curriculum was dominated by natural sciences with a practical orientation towards trade and business. During the First Czechoslovak Republic they became 3-year with a 1-year course. After 1945 their curriculum was merged with that of lower gymnasium. After 1948 they disappeared, because all schools were nationalized.

## **10 Sokol**

One of the best-known Czech sports organizations. It was founded in 1862 as the first physical educational organization in the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy. Besides regular training of all age groups, units organized sports competitions, colorful gymnastics rallies, cultural events including drama, literature and music, excursions and youth camps. Although its main goal had always been the promotion of national health and sports, Sokol also played a key role in the national resistance to the Austro-Hungarian Empire, the Nazi occupation and the communist regime. Sokol flourished between the two World Wars; its membership grew to over a million. Important statesmen, including the first two presidents of interwar Czechoslovakia, Tomas Garrigue Masaryk and Edvard Benes, were members of Sokol. Sokol was banned three times: during World War I, during the Nazi occupation and finally by the communists after 1948, but branches of the organization continued to exist abroad. Sokol was restored in 1990.

## **11 Mauthausen**

concentration camp located in Upper Austria. Mauthausen was opened in August 1938. The first prisoners to arrive were forced to build the camp and work in the quarry. On May 5, 1945 American troops arrived and liberated the camp. Altogether, 199,404 prisoners passed through Mauthausen. Approximately 119,000 of them, including 38,120 Jews, were killed or died from the harsh conditions, exhaustion, malnourishment, and overwork. Rozett R. – Spector S.: Encyclopedia of the Holocaust, Facts on File, G.G. The Jerusalem Publishing House Ltd. 2000, pg. 314 - 315

## **12 Anschluss**

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

## **13 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.

## **14 Hashomer Hatzair**

Left-wing Zionist youth organization, started up in Poland in 1912, and managed to gather

supporters from all over Europe. Their goal was to educate the youth in the Zionist mentality and to prepare them to emigrate to Palestine. To achieve this goal they paid special attention to the so-called shomer-movement (boy scout education) and supported the re-stratification of the Jewish society. They operated several agricultural and industrial training grounds (the so-called chalutz grounds) to train those who wanted to emigrate. In Transylvania the first Hashomer Hatzair groups had been established in the 1920s. During World War II, members of the Hashomer Hatzair were leading active resistance against German forces, in ghettos and concentration camps.

### **15 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.

### **16 Nationalization in Czechoslovakia**

The goal of nationalization was to put privately-owned means of production and private property into public control and into the hands of the Socialist state. The attempts to change property relations after WWI (1918-1921) were unsuccessful. Directly after WWII, already by May 1945, the heads of state took over possession of the collaborators' (that is, Hungarian and German) property. In July 1945, members of the Communist Party before the National Front, openly called for the nationalization of banks, financial institutions, insurance companies and industrial enterprises, the execution of which fell to the Nationalization Central Committee. The first decree for nationalization was signed 11th August 1945 by the Republic President. This decree affected agricultural production, the film industry and foreign trade. Members of the Communist Party fought representatives of the National Socialist Party and the Democratic Party for further expansion of the process of nationalization, which resulted in the president signing four new decrees on 24th October, barely two months after taking office. These called for nationalization of the mining industry companies and industrial plants, the food industry plants, as well as joint-stock companies, banks and life insurance companies. The nationalization established the Czechoslovakia's financial development, and shaped the 'Socialist financial sphere'. Despite this, significantly valuable property disappeared from companies in public ownership into the private and foreign trade network. Because of this, the activist committee of the trade unions called for further nationalizations on 22nd February 1948. This process was stopped in Czechoslovakia by new laws of the National Assembly in April 1948, which were passed that December.

### **17 Bergen-Belsen**

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

## **18 Death march**

the Germans, in fear of the approaching Allied armies, tried to erase evidence of the concentration camps. They often destroyed all the facilities and forced all Jews regardless of their age or sex to go on a death march. This march often led nowhere, there was no concrete destination. The marchers got no food and no rest at night. It was solely up to the guards how they treated the prisoners, how they acted towards them, what they gave them to eat and they even had the power of their life or death in their hands. The conditions during the march were so cruel that this journey became a journey that ended in death for many.

## **19 Karlovy Vary (German name**

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

## **20 Statni Tajna Bezpecnost**

Czechoslovak intelligence and security service founded in 1948.

## **21 Warsaw Pact Occupation of Czechoslovakia**

The liberalization of the communist regime in Czechoslovakia during the Prague Spring (1967-68) went further than anywhere else in the Soviet block countries. These new developments were perceived by the conservative Soviet communist leadership as intolerable heresy dangerous for Soviet political supremacy in the region. Moscow decided to put a radical end to the chain of events and with the participation of four other Warsaw Pact countries (Poland, East Germany, Hungary and Bulgaria) ran over Czechoslovakia in August, 1968.