a type of resistance, also supposed that each prisoner survived at the expense of someone else. His position as a teacher was certainly also a better starting point for survival than the position of a slave doing manual labor. It was, perhaps, exactly for that reason that Jiří Franěk placed great emphasis on public communication about the fate of survivors and on scientific processing of the problem of active resistance in the concentration camps.[19]

Also quite unique was Franěk's editorial interest in Karel Poláček and Jiří Orten, with whom, thanks to his cousin Oto Reiner, who photographed his friend Orten, he could even shake hands.[20] This reference of Franěk's, which is another manifestation of his Jewishness, should be evaluated by a literary historian. In our brief musings we have concentrated only on the role Judaism played in the life of one brave, militant man who was born in the turbulent 20th century as a Jew.

19 Manuscript in computer version, undated.

20 In 1991, Jiří Franěk published *Citového průvodce po Kutné Hoře ve verších a fotografiích. (An emotional guide through Kutná Hora in verse and photographs)*. Verses written by Orten (Jiří Jakubec), photographs provided by Oto Reiner (J. Hron).

"WE SIMPLY LAUGHED AT THE CONCENTRATION CAMPS"

Professor Jiří FRANĚK (formerly Frischman) Born in 1920 in Vysoké Mýto, died on Dec. 30, 2007, in Prague, Czechoslovakia

June 27–30, 2004 recorded and transcribed (in Czech) by Jan Dvořák
August 2008, translated into English and commented by František Franěk and Jacob Franek

Where do you come from? Tell us about your family.

I come from Vysoké Mýto, which was then a little town of 15,000 souls in Eastern Bohemia, in the Pardubice[1] region. My father's given name was Frischmann. The whole family used the double "n"; however, one "n" fell off my name, probably the rabbi's mistake, in the registry record. I changed my name when I started Slavic studies[2] and learned that the Germanic names had been forcefully assigned by the Emperor Joseph II. A clerk assigned a Jew a name according to his [the Jew's] financial situation. Therefore, my ancestor was neither too poor, nor too rich. If he had been rich, he would have been named Goldschmidt.

My father's side of the family considered themselves Czech. For instance, my father knew Laufr, who was Jewish and the first sports commentator of Czechoslovak Radio. My father had a large collection of books and his favorite author was Bezruč[3]. All this indicates that the family felt Czech to a large extent. Not entirely though, since some of the relatives were Germans, more precisely German Jews. The Czech side, however, dominated. My father died when I was ten years old.

1 the biggest city in Eastern Bohemia

2 in North America now more commonly referred to as Eastern European studies

3 Czech poet from the Ostrava region

My mother came from the Vohryzek family and there Czech sentiments were unmistakable. This had a large influence on me, though the love for Bezruč (despite him being an anti-Semite) I inherited from my father.

What did your father do for a living?
My father married into my mother's embroidery business. Where I come from was the beginning of the *Českomoravská vysočina*[4], and there, many farmwives traditionally made a living by hand-embroidering monograms onto underwear, bedding, and tablecloths. My mother got the "živnost"[5] (that is how they used to refer to business) as a wedding gift from her father, and it had an enormous impact on our family. Thanks to it, the whole family and I met a large number of country people and learned their ways. When widowed, my mother assumed the leadership of the company, and when the Germans came, she passed it onto one of her employees, although it was later confiscated.

What did you speak at home?
At home we spoke only Czech. My mother did not know any German. We children started learning German at school in grade four, so I did know some German. My mother had some German customers, but not from Germany, from America. When she needed to communicate with them, I had to help, as she was not capable of conversing with them in German, for instance over the phone. When there was a need to write a business letter, one of our aunts who was perfectly fluent in German had to correct it, as well as our German homework.

Where did you go to school?
In Mýto[6], I went to a Czech elementary school and then to a Czech Reálné Gymnázium.[7] The closest German school in the area was in Lanškroun.[8] I attended the Gymnázium until septima.[9] Then the Germans came and I was kicked out. Since my family was of the opinion that I had to have a graduation diploma, I was sent to the only Jewish Gymnázium in the Czech and Moravian lands, in

4 Czechomoravian Highlands
5 craft
6 a short-form reference to the city of Vysoké Mýto
7 a type of high school
8 a city nearby Vysoké Mýto
9 a pre-war Latin-based colloquial term for grade 7 of Gymnázium; today grade 12

the city of Brno. I finished oktáva[10] there; however, the Germans did not allow us to take the graduation exam.

It is a curiosity that I have three graduation diplomas though I did not take a single graduation exam. When in Brno, at the time when my graduation exam was approaching, an SS[11] came saying that he had a "befehl"[12] to cancel the exam. Then came an official of the regional school board, unfortunately I do not know his name, and he assured us that he had verified the level of knowledge in the whole class and that we would all get our graduation diplomas regardless. After the war I asked for my diploma and, with a big delay, I finally got it (one professor who witnessed it survived the war); there were five of us who received the promised diplomas. After the war, when I was applying for admission to university, before receiving my diploma, professor Kopal (let God rest him in peace, otherwise a very nice person, probably even philo-Semitic) told me that without a graduation diploma I could not be admitted. This was in 1945. The so-called "swindle courses" were taking place then; during the first summer after the war, they were attended by those students who for whatever reasons were not allowed to complete oktáva (or a lower grade). The authorities were afraid that too many of them would not fare well in the exam and so the state school board announced that we would not take the exam and that the final report card from the course would be valid as a graduation diploma. I received my diploma from Brno before I finished the "swindle course" where I also got a diploma without writing the exam. Meanwhile, a decree was issued that all who had reached at least septima before the war were to get a graduation diploma based on the average marks achieved in the graduation subjects during the whole period of study. So, just before the completion of the "swindle course," I received my third graduation diploma, this time from my home city of Mýto. So I have three graduation diplomas, yet I did not take a single exam, which should go into the Guinness Book of Records as there is likely no other such person in the world. So I have them instead of taking the graduation exam in 1941 with my classmates, with whom I am in frequent contact today.

Otherwise our family lived a moderately religious life. I mean, we took part in Yom Kippur, New Year (Rosh Hashanah), and Passover ... about two or three holidays. On top of that, we celebrated Christmas, Easter; we took part in "šmerkusta" (when you carol for decorated Easter eggs). I was a member of

10 a pre-war Latin-based colloquial term for grade 8 of Gymnázium; today grade 13
11 a colloquial term for members of SS
12 a German word for order

Photo No. 1: JOHANNA PFEIFEROVÁ AND ALFRED FRISCHMANN, JIŘÍ FRAŇEK'S PARENTS. Archive of Mrs. Zdeňka Fraňková.

Sokol[13], also of Boy Scouts that I loved enormously – it helped me survive, for all I learned there came into good use during the war.

Did you encounter any anti-Semitism in Sokol?
I reckon that is where my memories differ [from the recollections of other Jews]. I did not encounter anything like that in Vysoké Mýto. It was not there. I had no idea what it was. I have some vague recollections that only once in a while somebody told me (most often my parents) that such people existed. At the Gymnázium there was a professor who my mother told me was "anti." But I had no clue what that meant. So she explained it to me. Then a good friend of mine who I used to play soccer with (he was a wild one, but I had a soccer ball and he did not) was held back in grade five, while I had all A's and then I heard for the first time, "of course, the Jew Frischman..." In jest we used to yell, "Catholic, Catholic, sat down on a spike, Evangelic[14] spilled the bucket, Jew, the devil will come for you!"[15] But I did not see it as anti-Semitism then, and I do not see is so today either, for it was mostly anti-clerical and anti-religious.

13 Falcon – a sports and physical education organization with a pronounced nationalistic flavor
14 a member of Evangelical church
15 in Czech, this phrase rhymes

Otherwise I did not really encounter any anti-Semitism and I often ask my friends who write about it (I have one concrete example on my mind of a guy from Český Brod.[16] At home they only spoke German). If you read the book *Svědek málem stoletý*[17] (memoirs of Dr. Steinbach prepared by Fischl), he writes in essence the same as I remember. It is also found in Poláček.[18] The main character Bajza in *Bylo nás pět*[19] is in fact a little Jew from Rychnov.[20]

Bajza lives in complete integration with the Czech community. In Eastern Bohemia, the "Czech-Jewishness" was deeply rooted and deeper [than elsewhere in Czechoslovakia]. And Viktor Vohryzek[21] was also from Eastern Bohemia.

Was there then a Jewish Community in your town?
No. We belonged to the Luže[22] community. Luže was a town even smaller than Mýto, but they had a synagogue (now it is functioning again). There is also a Jewish cemetery. There were six, may be eight Jewish families in Mýto (thirty, at most, fifty people). During Hitler,[23] they had to be gathered together, so all of a sudden there were more of them. Otherwise Mýto was entirely a Czech town. After the war, actually after the fall of communism,[24] when I successfully tried to have a commemorative plaque to the Jews of the town [Vysoké Mýto] installed, we could not peg down the overall number (about seventy people, different sources put forth different numbers). When I got the names from the transportation lists, I realized how many I did not know. Those were the ones "gathered."

Was your mother a member of any association or a political party?
My mother for sure was not. My father, however, I assume that he was. He had these inclinations, but I have no evidence. In this respect my mom was not very social (otherwise it was just the opposite). I realized early on that she did not understand politics at all. After my father's death, she was very busy and had

16 a city east of Prague
17 the title means *An almost hundred-year-old witness* [to Czechoslovak history]
18 Karel Poláček, a Czech Jewish writer
19 *The Five of Us*, a famous children book by Poláček
20 Rychnov nad Kněžnou, a small town in Eastern Bohemia
21 a relative, a brother of his grandmother
22 a nearby city
23 a slang reference to the period when Hitler was in power
24 in 1989

Photo No. 2: JIŘÍ FRANĚK WITH HIS BROTHER FRANTIŠEK, CA. 1924. Archive of Mrs. Zdeňka Fraňková.

a lot of problems to deal with. She worked day and night and so did not participate in any associations or clubs. We did not have any significant social life; mom simply did not have the time. If anything, she dropped by our neighbors' place (or they to ours). My brother and I were immersed completely in Czech circles. We Jews were united only during the war. Most of my contacts with Jews were in tennis. I played it with passion. There were five to six Jews in the tennis club, but for such a small town it was a thus viewed as a "Jewish sport." However, for us it was meaningless whether any actual Jews were playing tennis; it simply did not interest us.

Did you take notice of what was going on in Germany?
I must say that we did take a great deal of notice. I remember it. Despite being eleven years old in 1933, I remember it clearly. We listened to the radio day and night and we even discussed whether it could come to Czechoslovakia. My mother could not comprehend how this was possible in central Europe. So we registered it a lot. My wife was one year younger, but she said that she had not noticed it that much. It may be that we were conditioned by the anti-Semitism taking place in Germany to take it more seriously. Both my brother and I started to be politically active early on. We participated at school in political discussions with our professors (for instance at the onset of the Ethiopian war[25]). We took political stands. Already at the Gymnázium we had a fraternity, politically leaning quite to the left, as were most intellectuals these days. Eventually, I was left out of the fraternity, as I was in danger anyway. Some of the boys later founded a clandestine group and after a betrayal, twelve or more of them were executed. Today we are all summarily accused of being communists then, but whoever knows the circumstances understands that we could not be anything else.

Who was your role model then?
Without a doubt, it was Masaryk.[26] In the whole wider family of ours, Masaryk was a saint (and in my wife's family similarly so). I have several small statues of him that survived the war. I also have my brother's portrait painted just before we went to the concentration camp. It was painted by a young Jewish woman when we were gathered as Jews. Her name was Hanka Picková; she also died in the camp.

Did you encounter Zionism at that time?
Of course we knew about Zionism. I, under the influence of Viktor Vohryzek, grew up in a total rejection of Zionism. When I studied his writings after the war (and later the writings of Jindřich Kohn[27]), I realized that there could be Czech Jews who understood and accepted Zionism. Before the war it was quite naively perceived as "either Zionism or assimilation." In my family, Zionism was completely rejected and it was viewed as a matter of nationalism – Zionism was professed by German Jews who were ashamed to be Germans but did not know how to be Czechs and that was why they turned to Zionism. Ruth Elias might agree. However, for instance, my good friend Avi Fischer was a Czech in his heart, yet after the war he went to Israel.

Did you consider emigrating?
Yes, we did. Mom had some health problems, but wanted us, the children, to emigrate. My brother was to be the first; it had even been prepared. In Prague we had an uncle who was a medical doctor and quite wealthy. It is alleged that

25 Mussolini's Invasion of Ethiopia in 1935
26 the founding father of Czechoslovakia and its first president
27 Jindřich Kohn, 7/3/1874–12/3/1935, a Jewish lawyer, a leading personality of the Czech Jewish democratic and humanist movement

in Vysočany[28] he financed a clandestine organization. So this uncle arranged and paid for passage to Switzerland for my brother, where he was to be taken illegally across the border to France. There he was to enlist in the army. The family "committee" decided (so shortsighted and so symptomatic of the times) that he first had to complete high school. Yet Paris fell two weeks before his graduation exam, so though he passed the exam in 1940, the whole plan fell apart. My brother, unfortunately, then died in Auschwitz.[29]

Later in Brno, I befriended Jindřich Wertheimer and together we planned an escape. Nevertheless, our plan was never realized. As young boys we did not really know how to go about it and we were also worried about our parents. And, when somebody escaped, the whole family was punished. Also, France completely surrendered at that time, and so any escape was quite elaborate through Slovakia, Hungary, to Greece and possibly farther. You could count the successful attempts on the fingers of one hand.

I would like to add a comment. Though my brother was rather more socially adept than I and had better marks at school, I was a bit more courageous in some ways. With one of our American customers, I was the only one to communicate in German. His name was Mueller, so he probably was of German descent. He took to a liking in me and so he mailed me an affidavit.[30] It was still possible to emigrate at that time with an affidavit, and my mother would have agreed with my leaving then, but the affidavit never arrived. Unfortunately, this is not the only case. The same happened to the writer Pavel Eisner, whose affidavit a different Pavel Eisner used to leave – he even met him after the war. I am sure that Mr. Mueller sent the affidavit. As in the Eisner's case, some clerk took it and sold it for good money. There were not too many Frischmans, so the name was probably falsified. Similarly the birth date must have been falsified, and some other information. Simply, most likely somebody else managed to escape on my affidavit.

How was it in your family with kashrut[31]**?**
Well, we did not know too much about it. We knew it existed. There was this view that it was just a bunch of obsolete notions; for instance pigs were not to

28 a district in Prague
29 Auschwitz-Birkenau was the largest of Nazi Germany's concentration camps, located in Poland approximately 50 kilometers west of Kraków and 286 kilometers south from Warsaw
30 an affidavit that the person would be taken care of after the arrival to the USA
31 Jewish dietary laws

be eaten for they often suffered purples[32] and so were decreed "unclean," a kosher wine was to be dispensed by rabbis to prove it was not watered down, and all of that no longer had any validity. Of course, this thinking was based on Victor Vohryzek's ideas. He knew how to explain it all. A man does not get closer to or farther from God by eating a pig. We even kept pigs and had pig slaughtering. One of our tenants was a butcher, so I had my fill of sausages in my youth. They were so good; I never had one like that ever again.

How did you perceive Munich[33] **and the beginning of the protectorate**[34]**?**
For us the most deplorable was the behavior of the people. However, many behaved impeccably. For instance, one of my friends, a son of a collaborator,[35] kept pointedly acknowledging me. We were walking around the Town Square and I kept sending him away (as a Jew I was forbidden to be in contact with him). But he opposed me and argued with me not to worry because in case of problems, his father would straighten things out.

All of a sudden we were very lonely and could only contact Jews. Even so, some non-Jews kept associating with us. For instance, the painter Hana Picková had a boyfriend Dr. Cejp, who later became a professor at the university in Olomouc.[36] He was not afraid and he kept associating with us. How he managed it, I have no idea. Beside other things, he acquainted us with communism and Marxism. He committed suicide after the war, supposedly for being persecuted by the communist regime. Regardless of the families we came from, this particular Jewish group was politically quite to the left of center, even the richer people. Our mother did not understand it: "Why would workers need communists when they have Social democrats? And we, the small business people, must of course vote for živnostníci![37]"

And then the well-known measures – yellow star, ban on using sidewalks, ban on attending movie theatres, etc. – we the younger ones, unlike our parents, took it with good humor: "What does Hitler think he can gain by it?" I was really pissed when I had to hand over my bicycle, as I passionately loved

32 a pig disease
33 1938 Munich agreement signed by Nazi Germany, France, Britain, and Italy permitting German annexation of Czechoslovakia's Sudetenland
34 The protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia, established by the Nazi Germany when they took over the remnants of Czechoslovakia, lasted 1939-1945
35 collaborator with the Nazi invaders
36 second largest city in Moravia
37 a small-business political party

to ride it. Nevertheless, as far as food was concerned, we had it quite good, for every so often somebody secretly gave us something to eat. Often they wanted something in return, for instance, a cup of goose fat. But not always.

We were still in good humor when my mother's relative, Ing.[38] Vohryzek, rented a passenger railway car which the Czech Railways, with good grace, incorporated in the train. In it we traveled to the gathering camp in Pardubice. We believed that the Germans had already lost the war and if Hitler thought he could get us by "gathering us," we would have none of it (we knew that they were going to gather us in one city, but we did not comprehend what it really meant).

We lost our humor the moment we entered the gathering "subcamp" in Pardubice. That was where the first slapping and beating took place. The SS with guns and dogs patrolled it. We slept crammed on one mattress, several men, women, and children. With our clothes on, for there was no place to undress. That is where we lost our humor overnight. It was after Russia (then the Soviet Union) joined the war, in 1941.

All the time in Czech society and in western radio broadcasts it was being proclaimed that the end of the war was near. Yet it took many years before the offensive started. Of the Jews of Mýto, only an uncle of my mother and I survived; nobody else.

What did you do with the belongings you were supposed to hand over?
This will be a long story. It depended. We had a house, but we were not rich by any standards. We had to hand over something, but whatever was possible to hide, we hid. As I mentioned before, we had it good for a while with food, but partly because we paid for it. Sometimes with clothes, other times with duvets or something. Mother was sick and worried all the time about having everything arranged before she died. At one point she told us what was hidden where, and what was sold to whom. She stressed that she did not owe anything to anybody. Often there were some shady deals, false debt notes and etc., so mother made sure we knew she had no debts. Some of our belongings we sold. This caused some problems after the war. After the war I got just a few of these things back. And our house was stolen from me by three consecutive regimes.

38 In Europe, Ing. is a title used by people who finish engineering studies

What did it look like when you got to the gathering camp?
The best way to describe it is shock. We left Mýto on December 1, 1942, for Pardubice. The gathering camp was located in a school, where our transport was crammed (about one thousand people) into the classrooms and the gym. We spent four days there before our transport to Theresienstadt[39]. The moment we entered, the SS showed us what they were about. Our family was in the gym. We were allotted a space good enough for a single mattress. I am not sure whether they shot somebody dead (I might be influenced by one of Lustig's[40] films), in any case there was shooting into the air. For food we only had what we brought with us. The worst was water. There was a faucet, but not enough for a thousand or so people.

Were you registered there?
I do not recall any registration there; everything was arranged by my uncle for all of us. But we had transport numbers. Most likely, we had no documents. I know that I lost my identity card there.

When did you arrive at Theresienstadt?
On December 5, 1942 we arrived by train (squeezed in passenger cars) at the railway station Bohušovice. From there we had to walk to Theresienstadt on foot. It was quite horrible because we all had as much on us and in the suitcases as possible. Most of it was confiscated anyway in "šlojska".[41] Essential for us was food and warm clothes. My brother and I managed to sneak sleeping bags through the "šlojska" that we had brought from home. The sleeping bag came in very handy later. I am quite a target for insects (I had big problems with them in all camps) and the sleeping bag provided at least some protection at night. First I was accommodated in the Hamburg barracks, then I got into "Kinderheim"[42] as a "Betreuer" (attendant and teacher) and it was kept quite clean. There was a little more room. Bedbugs, fleas, and other bugs were not so numerous there as elsewhere.

39 Theresienstadt (Terezín in Czech), the most famous Jewish ghetto in Czechoslovakia during the war

40 Arnošt Lustig, a Czech Jewish writer

41 a colloquial term originated in Theresienstadt for a check point where all possessions were usually confiscated, the word derives most likely from a slang word for stealing

42 a German term meaning a home for children

And what about your mother and brother?
It is a sad story. My brother was very intelligent, skillful, gifted, and physically able. In Theresienstadt he even acted in a theatre (I still keep a poster). He worked in supplies, so he was protected to some degree from transports [to the extermination camps]. He wanted to save our mother [from being transported], but he did not succeed. So he joined her voluntarily in a transport to Auschwitz a month after we arrived at Theresienstadt. Our mother went to the gas chamber right away and my brother died half a year later.

I did not go in that transport because a well-known actress Vlasta (Váva) Schönová (after the war, Nana Shan; she just recently died in Israel) shot a dose of milk into my buttocks and I got very sick. It was quite an adventurous undertaking in the men's room. There were several ways to get sick. Milk or petrol shots into the muscles gave one a high fever so they were removed from the transport. It was crazy. People were sent to their death, but in order to preserve some order it was said that they were transported to forced-labor camps. Thus, they had to be healthy. The shot was arranged by my brother and Váva did it. She worked in the hospital in the Vrchlabí army barracks. That is where I later had my "surgery." Doctor Reiss laughed that he removed from my ass half a kilo of cottage cheese. I survived, but I still have a scar today. Every such attempt was to be reported, but he [Dr. Reiss] did not [report it].

What work did you do in Theresienstadt?
Thanks to a professor I knew from the Brno Gymnázium, I met a classmate from a significant Zionist family. This Zionist lady assigned me to "Jugendfürsorge" (the Department of Youth Care) in a "Kinderheim" in the Hamburg barracks. There I used to tell the children modern fairy tales which I remembered and played Boy-Scout games with them. After a month, Oto Klein (also a Zionist, yet after the war he became a communist) took me as a "Betreuer" to the prestigious "Kinderheim" L417.

In this building, a friend and I built a little dwelling in the attic. It was interesting, when for instance we were stealing the heraklit[43] from the warehouse and getting caught meant death. But once the dwelling was built, nobody asked where we got the heraklit from. And they left us alone. When we gathered enough courage, we added a cook Kurt Frankfurter and stole more material and completed the dwelling. During the building, I utilized all my Boy-Scout skills.

43 building material

I built myself a hammock with my sleeping bag. Since we incorporated a cook and later a clerk, we had some food. Of course, we were staying there illegally. If I had stayed in Theresienstadt, I would have survived the war nicely.

What was the attitude to stealing and "organizing" in Theresienstadt?
All in all, it was not viewed as something horrible. All our emotions were so blunted just to survive to that point. Somehow we all accepted it. If today somebody stole your last shirt, you would go nuts. There was always a way to get something somehow. In Theresienstadt, people were allowed to receive parcels [from outside friends or relatives], so there was something for people to exchange. I always claim that Theresienstadt was a shadow of a normal life (somehow flattened, a distorted projection). It was much worse in Auschwitz.

One had in Theresienstadt some sense of home in the barracks. Though the space was sparse, one could still leave his stuff there and not always have it stolen. After work, there was some time to relax; one could rest or even go for a walk with girls. He who was lucky even had his family intact.

Some beating of course took place, but we gradually got used to it. One of the positive aspects was our fervent belief that the end of the war was near. Except for the pessimist, we all had hopes. The optimists claimed it would be over by the Christmas (it was to end by every Christmas during the war). The biggest optimists put it in six weeks at best.

Did you have any information about what was going on outside of Theresienstadt?
Even about Stalingrad, the command hung up bulletins, which we read with gusto. Then they stopped. Sometimes we had an opportunity to listen to the radio in the "komandatura"[44] or someone from a transport that had just arrived smuggled in a newspaper. So some information we did have. I was already a member of the Communist party. The information from outside was filtered to prevent unnecessary pessimism, or to prevent "bonkes" or "latrína" (false information, rumors). The most frequent rumor was that "the Russians are already in Náchod!"[45] – like in the First World War.

It was a big advantage of being a [Communist] party member in Theresienstadt. We had some briefings by real experts. We were told the real situation on

44 the office of the command
45 a northern city in Eastern Bohemia

the fronts. Quite precise, when I could compare it with the reality after the war. It meant a lot to us. We were able to keep our composure.

Can you tell more about the political life in Theresienstadt?
There [in Theresienstadt] the National Front[46] started to work. It was later very important in Auschwitz. There were a few organized groups comprised of Czech Jews, Zionists, Jewish communists, German Jews, and even Danes. Individual communist groups were involved in political activities. We also used to have "training," where we were told a lot of what would be considered nonsense today, but we were also lectured by the cream of the crop of Jewish humanist scholars (for instance, by the university professor Cvikr or Poláček). They often went to the "Heim"[47] to lecture the kids, and to indoctrinate us in the party's way of thinking.

When I was leaving for Auschwitz, the leader of my [Communist] cell gave me the name of a person I should contact there. He said that secret lists would be going with us there, but if I was not on the list or for any other reason, I should contact Alena Vogelová. She was important.

Did you encounter some cultural life in Theresienstadt?
I did not take any active part in it, just a passive approach. But I was informed. My brother, though he spent a short period of time there, acted in a theatre doing poetry by Walker[48] with Váva Schönová. I mostly took part in lectures, and this trait stayed with me until now.

I keep saying that cultural life in Theresienstadt had one negative aspect. It hid real life in Theresienstadt. It was just a shadow of normal life. People were dying there en masse, hunger was omnipresent, and the danger of being transported hung over us all the time. Many people did not even know that there was any cultural life.

However, not all of the culture that took place there has been brought to light. For example, musicians (accordion players, singers) performed in individual rooms on their own after work, sometimes for money, or at least for a piece of bread. This was not documented; nobody writes about it.

46 a term used often in these times for a coalition of heterogeneous groups for a common goal against the Germans

47 barracks

48 Jiří Wolker, a Czech poet

On the other hand, some believe there was nothing else going on but operas, concerts, theatre, cabarets, lectures and so on. It is so amazing that it attracts all the attention and it misses the fact that the music in Theresienstadt was the music of death.

I personally was totally absorbed by my work as a "Betreuer." I started in "Heim" number 6 as a helper of an excellent "Betreuer" Jirka König (later a medical doctor, then a docent[49] of Charles University[50]). We taught the children although we had no textbooks, and at the same time we had to instill some discipline in them. After one of us in the "Heim" failed while I came across fine when some problems with discipline arose there, I was sent to number 10 to straighten it out.

So that you understand me, the word "Heim" has two meanings: the school that we attended, and that was called school, it was "Kinderheim" L417; and in this "Kinderheim" were individual classes, also labeled as individual "Heims." Thus the "Heims" were numbered 1 to 10. This is often confused.

It was a hard task, the guys in number 10 completely refused to obey. I realized that I simply could not give in. I ended up leaving them standing in the corridor instead of letting them go for lunch. They grasped that they could not behave like that. I had no other recourse than to deny them food. I got the boys under control and functioned for a short period of time as the youngest "Betreuer" of the whole "Heim."

Later, as the youngest, I had to join in the war production when the Germans instituted it. We manufactured some heaters for the Russian front. I kept living in the school with all the others; I was still on the staff so to speak, but I had to go work every day.

How did you work with the guys to keep them under control?
I figured out early on that youth is inquisitive. I had quite a wide range of knowledge and so I talked to them about geography, history, and so on. Of course, it was forbidden. Especially later in Auschwitz, somebody always had to be on the lookout for the SS. When I delivered the material to the kids in an interesting way, I found that they really listened. It was the basis of my work. Otherwise I tried to work with my hands. I could neither paint nor sing, but that was taken care of by others. With the youngest I played Boy-Scout games

49 something like Associate Professor, but more prestigious

50 the most prestigious Czech university

("kim seton"[51], paper folding, or I taught them the art of tying knots). They were quite grateful for having some opportunity to do something. All the kids venerated the collective morality. They were a collective, they helped each other and they tried hard.

Do you recall any sport in Theresienstadt?
Some sport life was happening there, but I did not participate. In actuality, soccer was the only game played. Not with eleven players, but smaller, I think with seven players. I was never chosen. In Theresienstadt, it was sometimes possible to get something to eat. In Auschwitz, there was not a single day without feeling hungry. In L417 in Theresienstadt, the guys [the soccer players] got seconds [servings] from the cooks during the games. Even the supply department had its own team. They were not only always well fed, but they could even go outside (I knew from my brother). Also the "Zimmerälteste"[52] from the individual barracks had their own teams.

Did you experience the census?
Yes I did. For that, they herded us to the Bohušovice hollow[53]. It is well known from the literature. It was horrible; it was equaled only by Auschwitz.

Did you have any inkling of the camps in the east?
None. Possibly the "Lagerälteste"[54] (Eckstein or Edelstein) knew or suspected something. It is still being discussed today. It was also our defense mechanism; we did not want to know. My brother went east soon after our arrival, of his own will, to accompany our mother. I went after a year, also voluntarily. Well, not exactly, because I worked in a protected manufacturing facility for the front, I was exempt [from being transported]. Any time a clerk wanted to save a relative or a friend, he tried to put somebody else's name on the list. That is how my name got there. I told myself that though I did not have to go, my mother and brother were there; that maybe I should go while I still had some strength left. I left on the December 1943 transport.

51 probably references to Kipling's book Kim and to the author Ernest Thompson Seton, both very popular among Scouts
52 the room commanders
53 a shallow valley near the town of Bohušovice
54 the camp elder, or camp leader

How was the transport to Auschwitz?
This time we traveled in cattle-boxes, totally cramped and with a single bucket. A lot has been written about it. When we came to the "šlojska" in Auschwitz, we had gone through the showers where our rags were disinfected, we were shaved and had prisoner's numbers tattooed. Men, women, all the same.

We arrived at ramp B2 and that was awful. They herded us out of the car. All luggage on one pile. Before they took our clothes and shoes, they rushed us into a barracks. Of course, we had not had anything to eat since Theresienstadt. I had good "kanadas"[55] on my feet; I had them since my Boy-Scout days. Suddenly, a boy accosted me. I even remember his name, Harry Kraus. He was a "Läufer" (running gofer for a block kapo[56]). He told me that they would confiscate my boots anyway and if I gave them to him, he would make sure that I would get some reasonable shoes rather than wooden clogs. I gave him my boots, as I believed him. He really got me a pair of solid dress shoes. Thanks to my trust, I was a thousand times better off than the rest.

It also played a role when I went for inspection to Fred Hirsch when asking for a job as a "Betreuer" because the way you were dressed indicated how capable you were. I had black pants, a dark jacket (they made a cross on it with a waterproof color), and the shoes. That is why I was also a bit more mobile around the camp.

When the next transport arrived, Harry and I did something similar again. We took a milk can and walked around the "šlojska." Told everybody to give us their stuff, that we would return it to them later. The majority did not believe us, and so they lost it. About twenty percent believed us, after all. Some gave us their watch or gold and we returned it to them after. In the thick of this action the feared SS "Bulldog" (his real name was Bundtock) came and inquired at what we were doing. Our answer was that we brought milk to the newly arrived prisoners. We were scared stiff that he would want us to open the can, but luckily, he only screamed at us and then ordered us to bugger off. Harry, as a "Läufer," had the ability to hide the stuff somewhere. Whoever later found us, we returned the stuff, but we were also left with a lot which nobody claimed. And it was an important "currency."

In the car to Auschwitz, I traveled with Ariel Edelstein, a son of the Theresienstadt "Lagerältester"[57] (his father was shot dead right at the ramp; however,

55 Canadian army-style leather boots
56 a leader of the block
57 camp leader

first they shot dead his wife and another son so he could watch). In Theresienstadt I had Ariel in my "Heim" and we liked each other. On the train he told me about the Auschwitz "Kinderblock"[58] and that he knew Fred Hirsch and that he would put in a good word for me.

After my arrival [at Auschwitz], I found the aforementioned Alena Vogelová. She inquired what I had been doing previously. When she found out that I had been a "Betreuer," she promised to try to get me a similar job, otherwise I would have no chance of surviving. It did not happen for some time, but when I finally got to Fred Hirsch, he told me that he had heard of me and to come tomorrow. The next day he really gave me a job in the "Kinderblock." Until now, I do not know who put in a good word for me. In all probability, he or she saved my life; otherwise I would have not survived. So I became an Auschwitz "Betreuer."

How was it organized?
We slept in barracks like everybody else and after "Appell,"[59] instead of going to work ("Arbeitszeit"), we went to a special barracks to take care of the children. The children lived separately and were collected only during the day (not like in Theresienstadt, where the children and the "Betreuers" lived in the "Heims" together). Small children slept with their mothers. When they were bigger, they slept according to their gender. I am a bit fuzzy whether we were allowed to eat with the children or if they just once a while gave us something to eat on the side, but I recall not being too hungry then. I had an aunt who distributed the soup, "Eintopf"[60]. She got me a mess tin or half of the thick soup from the bottom every so often. She and my cousin Eva were the only relatives I encountered in the camp. She [Eva] was quite a close relative. When her father died, as a child, she lived with us.

After little Eva went to the gas chamber, my aunt directed all her care at me. Paradoxically, she avoided going to the gas chamber because she was ill. She did not believe that Eva was dead. She did not want to believe it. It was said that they went to "work in Heidebreck," but such a city probably did not even exist. Many people in their self-preservation refused to believe despite the visible flames and foul odors. One tried to blind oneself.

58 a block where children were living
59 roll call
60 normally, a traditional German stew consisting of a great number of different ingredients

How was it possible to work [with children] in Auschwitz at all?
There was a barracks with berths separated at the distance of the pillars. Anyone who has visited Auschwitz knows what I am taking about. Fred Hirsch somehow managed to get some chairs so the children sat in a semicircle around the "Betreuer." That was our only space.

Because the block for children was at the end of Czech family camp B2b, there was a little space a width of maybe half a block. Today, there is nice grass, but back then there was nothing but mud. We could only go there when the weather was good. Due to its size and shape (it was such a narrow noodle) we more pretended to play than actually played games there. I do not know if it is my time-lag memory distortion, but I think it was always windy there, raining, or overcast.

We could not really do too much with the children. In Theresienstadt there was at least a library; here the SS left us only about five books for the whole camp. So the only thing we had was our memory. We tried to have some kind of instruction. We talked, played some Boy-Scout games. We strove to give it some form of an actual school. There was a recess after an hour. Of course, none of us had a watch. At most, may be Fred Hirsch or his deputies Roubíček and Hugo Lengsfeld [had one] (he later changed his name to Pavel or Petr Lenek, a real teacher, English; he survived and after the war he was a director of some theatre agency; got into trouble in the Slánský[61] trial, but he survived this as well). To keep the children engaged, we gave lectures in Czech, history, geography, and math. At least that is what I was doing. Without a pencil, paper, or chalkboard. I used to be good in math. So despite everything I was able to do something with them.

To illustrate how we tried all kind of things, I prepared a collection of Czech poetry. The paper came from the wrappings of parcels somebody received every once a while. We were able to cut A5 sheets from these wrappings. Despite the ban, there were knives; they were for slicing bread. I recall I made covers from cardboard and even managed to get a string to tie it all together. It was not a big problem to put the poems together. I knew by heart big parts of "Máj"[62], knew Neruda[63], Bezruč, and a whole bunch of other poems. What I did not know, I got from others. I bugged everyone to dictate some poems to me. At

61 the most famous communist monster-process in Czechoslovakia with a top ranking communist official Slánský in the early 1950's
62 a famous poem by Karel Hynek Mácha
63 Jan Neruda, a Czech writer

the end, I had about twenty to thirty poems that were then used as a teaching tool. The biggest problem was to write it all up, for we had no pencils. However, as I mentioned before, you could get anything from the order-loving Germans. I managed to get a quill pen. I tried in vain to concoct some ink from clay, ash and water. At the end I managed to get hold of a pencil and a fountain pen, so something was written in pencil, something by fountain pen. Of course, getting it caused a great deal of delay. But the result was a classical literary textbook: Svatopluk Čech[64], Vrchlický[65], Sova,[66] etc.

Once a lady-painter Gottliebová drew something the SS liked very much, and so we were allowed to decorate the whole "Kinderblock" with drawings. We had a Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs there. Whoever knew how, tried to play theatre with the children; even several groups together. The SS often came to watch. Their attitude was that it did not matter in the end so why not to allow it; after all it helped keep order. It was described for instance by Jirka Fraenkl, who also survived. After the war, we published his book. In it he even presented the plays they gave. We helped ourselves any which way we could. Whoever could sing, sang. Whoever could draw, drew. When we managed to get hold of a few pencils, the drawing took place. But most of the time it depended on the "Betreuer," what he could tell and how he could focus the children's attention. We considered it important to instill in the children a feeling that they were preparing for life. They did not know and could not accept death, but they had some inkling. They saw transports arriving but not leaving; the smoke and flames of the crematoria. Sometimes they even joked about it: "Don't boast, you'll fly out of the chimney anyway!" The only weapon against it [death] was this "normal" life we were trying to lead.

The children were very attentive. There were no problems with the discipline as in Theresienstadt. The closer to death, the more serious the children were. Through all my time, I never had any discipline problems. And as I can recall, nobody else did either. In my department, I had about ten to twenty children, and not a single one survived, for they were too young. The children block was also undergoing the selections[67] and only a few passed. These were real exceptions that you could count only on the fingers of one hand. It only

64 Svatopluk Čech, a Czech writer
65 Jaroslav Vrchlický, a Czech poet
66 Antonín Sova, a Czech poet
67 selection of who would live and who would go to gas chamber

happened if they were tall enough and managed to stand in front of Mengele[68] and state calmly that their age was older than their real age. I can recall a boy named Alster; he was exceptionally able and smart. He often contributed to teaching, especially in geography. Of course, it did not interest the Germans. If so, just to kill him.

When did you leave the kinderblock?

Before the selection, or because of it. Yet before we leave the topic of Auschwitz, I would like to discuss something, as I have some problems with it. Until this day there has been some kind of competition between the survivors of Auschwitz I (Auschwitz, camp A) and the survivors of Auschwitz II (Birkenau, lager B), where we were. It concerns mostly the resistance. In A1 there was an organized resistance. But even serious authors do not take too seriously the resistance in B2.

I have to start with the fact that I got rich all of a sudden. My boys, including Ariel Edelstein, found on the camp road a bag full of Reich marks[69]. Nobody can figure now how it got there. The boys said that they did not know what to do with it, so I should do something reasonable with it. I was then more courageous than I would be today (there were watch towers all over, with guards with machine guns, so one had to be really careful).

I went to the wire fence (next to us was the quarantine camp B2a, where you went when you went to work) and was trying to find somebody who would sell something for the marks. I colluded with a Polish guy and we made the exchange through the wires of the fence. I gave him the marks and he pushed through some bread and cigarettes. There was no more to get. He also gave me a map, but I will leave that for later. With my boys, we ate our fill. The cigarettes were my trumps, the currency used in the camp to obtain food and any other help. I had 200 cigarettes left when I was leaving for a forced-labor camp. They had to be hidden, there were constant "Filzungen" (searches). I hid them in my straw mattress.

Now from a different angle. As I said, I was a member of the [Communist] party. Alena Vogelová sent me to Hugo Lengsfeld, who became kind of my party father. He often tried to help me (for instance, he gave me two cigarettes

68 Josef Mengele was a German SS officer in the Nazi concentration camp Auschwitz-Birkenau. He gained notoriety for being one of the SS physicians who supervised the selection of arriving transports of prisoners, determining who was to be killed and who was to become a forced laborer.
69 a German currency then

that could be exchanged for a piece of bread). The so-called National Front was established there, you must know it from history classes. Here it was uniting communists, Czech Jews, German Jews, and the Zionists. They all united in preparation for resistance. I claim that these preparations started before March 8, 1944, hence before the "gassed out" transport from B2b (so-called family camp), still during the "normal stay." Others claim that this National (or People's) Front formed only after the first March transport to the gas chambers, after the attempt to mutiny, or after the attempt to persuade Fred Hirsch to lead another mutiny after the first unsuccessful attempt. When it did not work, it was concluded that the preparations must be more thorough.

It is probably unclear who was right today. The fact is that in this period, Lengsfeld told me to contact Avi Fischer with anything important. Avi Fischer was a man that would be worth more interest (he was a classical Czech Jew who lost his beliefs; after the war he left for Israel, but has kept coming back ever since it [visiting Czechoslovakia] was made possible). He became my leader and we were a trio. Me as a Czech Jew and a communist, Avi Fischer as a Zionist, and Sonnenberg, a German "Vorarbeiter"[70]. They wanted to prosecute him [Sonnenberg] after the war. Of course, I gave him a positive reference. All three of us survived. In the trio we did not do too much. Firstly and foremost we tried to get our hands on matches or anything that could set ablaze the straw mattresses. Secondly we needed to learn how to get water. The plan was simple: to set ablaze the mattresses and in the ensuing chaos to try for the watchtowers. Some would succeed and they would incapacitate the machine guns, then we would climb over the wires and try to join the partisans. From today's vantage-point, it is all laughable.

For instance, I should not have had any contact with leading persons [of the clandestine resistance] like Hugo Lengsfeld, Růžena Lauscherová, or Egon Fried. But I knew them, was quite close to them, and so got all my information from them. Their take on it was that only one percent might survive, but that it was still better than going to slaughter like sheep. It was all so naive. Lengsfeld told me that we had one or two revolvers, but I took it with a big grain of salt. I am grateful to Karel Rosen (Roden), who recently published a book where he described it. He claims that it was he who brought in the arms because he was allowed to move outside the camp with the "Rollwagen"[71] (he fetched bandages etc.). I did not know him from the camp and so it was such an unexpected validation of my recollections. Lengsfeld told me then more important things, not to be known by anybody else. For instance, that it was clear that after a half a year or so in the family camp we all would go to the gas chambers. We wanted the whole camp to mutiny, including Auschwitz 1. We were to start it. But the resistance leaders from A1 let us know that it would be pointless. That for us they would not risk the ninety-percent mortality of all prisoners. The mutiny would end up in a massacre and nobody would survive. They had news that the end of the war was near and that the chances of surviving to the end of the war were better in the camp than by organizing any resistance. This is a point of contention among us to this day. I had an article published in the magazine *Osvětim*[72] only after a big fight; for a long time they refused to put it in print. An Austrian writer and an expert, Langbaum, wrote about it in his book *Wie die Schafen* (*Like the Sheep*) and he wrote off the resistance we were preparing in B2b in one sentence as totally insignificant.

Now we can return to the map. We were to reach the partisans using a map to be provided by Lengsfeld. The map from Lengsfeld was given to Avi Fischer to draw some copies (I learned that just before his death). Allegedly it was a map obtained from the SS command (some SS then were also helping; it was no longer just like "a single man"[73]). But it is possible that it was the map I exchanged with the Pole through the wires. Of course I had no use for it, so I gave it to Lengsfeld. I have been wondering to this day whether it was that map.

The whole story has a tragicomic ending. The Polish guy later called me to the wire fence again and asked me to return all the stuff he had given me, because the marks were counterfeit. I answered that it was not possible as the bread had been eaten a long time ago and the cigarettes had all been smoked. Even if I cut myself into little pieces, I could not return it. He threatened to get me killed, that he could arrange it as he had contacts in our camp. I told him that the only thing I could return was the map. His response was that I could keep it, as it was as false as the marks I gave him. In the end, some reliable SS from the command swore that indeed we were going for forced labor in Germany and not to the gas chambers, so the whole mutiny was called off. We knew that, even with the gas chambers, there would be more survivors than the

70 foreman
71 roll car

72 the Czech name for Auschwitz
73 a reference to a slogan proclaiming all SS to act as a single man

one percent we estimated going against the machine guns. Indeed, we went to a forced labor camp.

How was it possible to transmit information between Auschwitz 1 and Birkenau, when the camps had separate supplying?
That's true, but there were individuals moving between both camps. For instance, the aforementioned Rosen (Roden), even had a horse and a wagon. He ferried garbage from the medical ward (one hesitates to use the term hospital). In addition, Ota Kraus (he disappeared as an old man, simply vanished) and Erik Kulka, who had a maintenance workshop. These people could move between the camps (either alone or under the escort of the SS) and had opportunities to carry over some information. But how many? I could not tell you. But I reckon there were more of them. From our camp it could be at best our "Lagerälteste." After all it might have even been the SS. In particular, the Waffen-SS,[74] like for instance this Romanian who helped Lederer to escape. I remember one who attended the "Appell." He kept enticing some guy named Mautner, who was tall and looked good, to escape. But it looked like a trap.

The coming of the end of the war took horribly long for us. The Germans fought to the very last day. Thankfully, towards the end they were replenishing the SS not only with hardcore Reich Nazi believers, but also through conscription of the so-called Volksdeutsche from all over the Europe (ethnic Germans living for generations in other countries). So among the SS were even some innocent conscripts not of their own will. There were very few, but they were not hardcore Nazis and on occasion were willing to help. I encountered such especially later in Schwarzheide[75].

When you mentioned the escapes, what was the attitude of the fellow prisoners? Every escape was sure to bring in repressive measures.
In simple terms, the attitude was overwhelmingly positive, as we all were sure to perish. Everybody was wishing for them to succeed, for there were many escapes and they all ended badly. There was always repercussion and torture. Yet, despite it, we always felt for the ones brought back. It was the same in all the other camps.

When they apprehended somebody, an emergency "Appell" was put in place or some similar measure. When somebody escaped from B2b, they might

74 Waffen-SS was a group of combat units composed of volunteer troops
75 a labor camp in a town north of Dresden in the direction of Berlin

select every tenth person to go to the gas chamber. We were told that, over there, they were leading the ones "who thought they might escape from here." We told ourselves, "What a pity, guys, that you did not succeed." I remember that a lot of Russian POW's tried to escape. I recall that especially from Schwarzheide. They knew if they were not beaten or starved to death by the Germans, after their return they would be destroyed by Stalin. So they tried to get to the partisans. There were lots of them; uncountably many who escaped and were caught and killed.

How were the selections executed?
Ours was the only transport that did not undergo selection right at the ramp on its arrival. We all walked to camp B2b. That was probably the reason behind the speculation that it would be some kind of a "show-off family camp." When our half was being readied for forced labor, then a selection took place. It was horrible; I still remember a lot of images. For example, a Czech teacher Lederer. He was told not to mention during the selection that he was a teacher. He replied that he had been a Czech teacher all his life and that he would die as a Czech teacher.

Mengele asked, "Beruf?"[76], the teacher answered "Lehrer,"[77] and Mengele sent him "by the chimney." Let me explain the term "by the chimney." The selections took place in the "Kinderblock," as it was easy to vacate. We were coming from one side and the ones who were sent behind Mengele were saved. The ones who were sent to the end of the "Kinderblock" with the chimney later went really "through the chimney." One could already guess from the composition of the groups, which one was to go to the gas chamber and which one had a chance to go for forced labor (in case it was supposed to go for the forced labor at all; we could not know). After that, our group was washed and "Lysolised" (they disinfected our privates and armpits, we had no hair; they simply slapped us with a rag soaked in Lysol). It was in June 1944, just before the invasion.[78]

During the selection we were allowed to keep just a belt. In the belt I hid my fountain pen, and under my tongue a golden ring I obtained somehow. I still had some bread and the 200 cigarettes. I had a white blazer jacket (I kept it for quite a while). One line went for the Lysol disinfecting and the other went back.

76 trade or occupation
77 teacher
78 the 1944 Allied invasion in Normandy

Between the two lines stood an SS. I look like a hero now, and today, I cannot even imagine that I was brave enough to do it; I skipped between the two lines and managed to smuggle through all that stuff. I say if I had to do something like that during a time of peace, when one values his life somehow more, I could not do it. The cigarettes helped a lot during the transport.

After the selection we walked towards the gas chambers. In my row was one of the organizers of the clandestine movement, Egon Fries (later on to become an editor of *Rudé právo*[79]). We were not allowed to speak, but we somehow learned to speak through clenched teeth, one did not need to open one's mouth to speak. We were saying that the SS guy lied to us and were discussing whether we could do anything at that point. Then we noticed that the front of the column was turning around the chimneys towards the ramp. We fell silent with relief as we realized that we were indeed going to a forced labor camp rather than to the gas chamber. I have to admit one horrible aspect. We did not think at all what would be happening to all those old men, women, and children; they would most likely go to the gas chambers. We did not think that way. We were just thinking of whether we were going to the forced labor camp or to the gas chambers.

How did it go during the transport?

On the ramp they herded us to the cattle-boxes; we got one bucket of drinking water and one for the other use. We were assigned two SS to guard us: old men, clearly conscripted Volksdeutsche. They close the door but left it ajar and sat there with their feet dangling out. I told Sonnenberg about the two hundred cigarettes I had. All heard it and insisted that he should, as a German speaking "Vorarbeiter" (and thus knowing how to handle the SS), give them [the SS] one hundred, and he did. They in return allowed us to keep the door open more widely and to go out to empty our bucket and bring in water, which helped us a lot (they even once brought the water themselves). It was another reason I vouched for Sonnenberg after the war.

We might have been the only car that went through the trip to Schwarzheide without a problem. For some it was hell. We arrived on July 5, 1944, and the SS were all of a sudden like different people. They did not know how to treat us. Soon, news spread that the invasion had taken place. We all reckoned a few days before we would be liberated. But it took almost a year.

79 the newspaper of the communist party and the official newspaper of the regime

What was your first impression of the new place after you came from Auschwitz?

A big relief. As it turned out later, it was quite false. We saw that we were in a factory, that there were people around us, so probably we were brought here for forced labor. We simply thought we were saved. As it turned out, life would be much more complicated. The SS quickly regained their composure and were the same as before. And we had to face a new danger, the aerial bombing raids. The raids were really bad. However, the initial impression was really one of great relief, feeling that I had survived it. Especially the first few days when the SS did not beat us. It took them about three days to recover and to realize that the invasion would not go so fast.

What did Schwarzheide look like?

It was a small rather unknown camp north of Dresden in the direction of Berlin in the region of the former Sorbia (originally Schwarze Pumpe). We were about a thousand young men and about four hundred survived. Towards the end of the war, five hundred or so prisoners were added, but already they were not Jewish. Some Jews were among them, but just a few from France and the Netherlands, so during the liberation the camp was not purely Jewish any longer.

In Schwarzheide, there was a large gasoline plant. Until this very day, the chemical company BSAF is located there. During the war the company was called IG Farben and it produced Cyklon B.[80] In the plant, brown coal[81] was used to produce synthetic gasoline. There was a highway to the plant and around it several camps: "Ostlager" (for the Eastern front), next to it our camp, and an SS camp. Somewhere near there must have been a camp for Western prisoners, since they used cars. The American prisoners, I must admit, treated us quite with contempt. They laughed at us, but sometimes they threw us some cigarettes. They were probably getting them from the Red Cross.

Compared to Auschwitz, the camps here were lightly guarded. There was the usual double barbed wire but without electricity and towers with machine guns. The guards had a bomb shelter for only a single person, only for the one who was on duty, to make sure we were not using the bombing raid to escape (so-called "Einmannbunker"). We got new green-and-white striped prison outfits and it was virtually impossible to escape in them. When we got to know the

80 Cyclone B, the gas used for killing in the gas chambers
81 very low quality coal

Germans around (the civilians we came in contact with), we knew they would report us immediately. There was nowhere to escape.

What work did you do there?
Our task was to repair damages after air raids. We ferried away the wreckage and debris, defused bombs, built shelters. When the allies hit a plant, we had to put out the flames in a very primitive way. For instance, we had to disconnect flaming cars full of oil, to prevent them from igniting the rest. There I met the only brave SS during the whole war. He ran among the cars and with his gun prodded us to separate them. Though SS, surprisingly, he was there among the flaming wreckage with us. On the other hand I met several SS who, pardon my language, shat their pants during an air raid. In general, during air raids they were rather cowardly. Well, that was our work.

There I met for the first time German workers. Some of them tried to help; they slipped us a piece of bread or a letter or such. Some paid for it when they were apprehended. Often, though, they just baited us. It happened to me directly in the town of Schwarzheide where we were removing wreckage and bomb craters. We found some prepared sandwiches. When the SS found us there, they beat almost to death everyone they found with a piece of bread in hand. It may be that somebody prepared it with good intentions, but somebody had to report it. I do not know.

Since there were no children, I worked normally with all the other prisoners. We were divided into various "Arbeitskomands"[82] and assigned concrete tasks. In every "Komand"[83] it was different. There were what we called "cooking komands" where they "cooked"[84] and then so-called "universities." I always tried not to get into a "cooking komand." I'll explain. We were constantly hungry. Most of the guys used any opportunity to talk, to talk about food. How to cook this, someone what ate that was good and when, and so on. For me, it was torture, and that's why I always tried to get to a "university." When an explosion demolished something, we were there to pick up the unbroken bricks. We stood in a bucket-brigade-like line within hearing distance. As we were passing the bricks along, we chatted and lectured about all kind of things. I lectured on the history of Czech literature. I recall some Czech Jew named Stránský (he did not survive) and he lectured in a very captivating way about the history of

82 work groups
83 group
84 talked about food all the time

music. He could even prelude a bit. Quietly, but still. As I say, it was easier to forget the hunger in a "Komand" where the "university" took place rather than in the "Komand" where "cooking" was the topic.

How did the Germans treat you?
There already were SS who openly indicated they were fed up with it [the war]. Especially among the conscripted Volksdeutsche. I personally witnessed some. One such was guarding us in an open space during a wreckage cleanup from an air raid he told us we could hide, that he would guard us (in a different meaning of the word than he was supposed to). Of course, when a higher rank SS or foreman walked by, he drove us very hard. He beat us when he had to, but was careful not to knock out any teeth.

I had several other interesting encounters when I was lightly injured and had to stay in the camp for a week or so. Instead of work, I had to go to the SS camp. Once an SS asked me to split wood and then, when I went to return the ax and knocked on his door, he was asleep and did not answer. I entered and he exploded, screaming at me that I had no right to enter without knocking. I defended myself that I had knocked. So I was claiming that he was lying? Well, I got beaten up twice. Once for not knocking on the door and once for accusing him of lying.

The most feared SS called "Rákoska"[85] had a bicycle. Apart from other trades, I was a certified mechanic from Mýto (when I was banned from studying in Brno, I went into apprenticeship there). "Rákoska" brought his bike because it was not working right. I had to disassemble the bike to find the problem. When he saw it, he exclaimed I could never put it back together and that he would shoot me dead. I was able to fix it and so he ordered me to give it a try. I was afraid I would get shot for riding a bike belonging to an SS. He said he would not shoot me. So I had to ride around the yard about four times. He was very happy. Not only he did not shoot me; he gave me four mess tins of food and escorted me to our camp to prevent other SS from killing me for stealing. In the camp I was with Karel Fischer (we had a commune together), so I split it with him and we both stuffed our bellies.

The most interesting event took place one day when I was sweeping and saw a coffeecake on a windowsill. I immediately fancied the cake. In the window an SS guy showed up and he beckoned me to taste it. I did not trust him;

85 a Czech word meaning "whip"

he would either beat me or shoot me. But he insisted that nothing would happen to me. He even invited me inside! When inside, I pretended to sweep. He confided in me saying that he was a conscripted Yugoslavian, a Volksdeutsche, and that he had a son of my age. He asked me what I needed. I urgently needed a needle and thread, because it was the worst when during an air raid something got torn; we could not mend anything. We were forbidden to have stuff like needles under punishment of death by shooting. He gave me about three needles wrapped in a thread.

Such humorous and positive events, though, cannot overshadow the horror of life in the camp. For instance, "Rákoska" what a person, I do not know how many people he killed with his own hands. But when he saw the bike fixed by me and he tried it and it worked, he became like a small child. He forgot that I was a Jewish swine ("Judeschwein") and he richly rewarded me. Apparently he was taken prisoner when the Russians showed up.

You mentioned a commune with somebody. Did any clandestine organization, party, or resistance form in Schwarzheide?

I am not aware whether resistance preparations continued there, I did not encounter any. Then the end of war was really approaching. The [Communist] party was quite active there. However, I was expelled from the party. It happened during an inspection. The SS learned that, despite all effort, I had managed to smuggle in some gold. As I already mentioned, I brought from Birkenau a fountain pen, some cigarettes, an a gold ring under my tongue. When they went around with a collection box, I gave them the ring and the pen. The kitchen commander gave me a large pot of potatoes. I split it with my friend Karel (he now lives in Germany). The party decided that I violated the party moral, that I was involved in business with the SS; I should have thrown it away rather than give it to the SS. So I was expelled from the party during the war. I do not accept it, and am sure that my decision then was correct. Hugo Lengsfeld-Lenek, who after the war apologized to me, expelled me. This was the end of my contact with party life in the camp. I think that the organization, the National Front, was kept up, but no resistance was in preparation. There was no time.

How did you withstand the air raids?

The factory was raided daily; production was virtually halted. In the building where the brown coal was distilled, there were these tall smokestacks. The

moment they started to belch smoke, the Allies noticed and the raid started shortly thereafter. First a fighter plane showed up, outlined the area [of the factory] with a smoke barrier, and then the bombers came. The "divers,"[86] though, were not too precise, so every once in a while some of the nearby camps were hit.

During one of the largest raids, the Russian POW camp was hit. I got hit – both legs, when we were removing the wreckage. An SS then pointed a rifle at me: "Get up immediately or I'll shoot you." I have no idea how I managed, but, with my last remnants of strength, I got up and ran the two hundred meters to the camp. At the time, I had the feeling that I was running "home." There [at the camp] I collapsed and was not able to move my legs at all; they had to carry me to the sick bay. Until this day, no doctor was able to explain it to me how it was possible. I had shrapnel in both my knees, yet I managed to run the distance. A doctor named Sachs (he also survived; after the war changed his name to Sever) carried me on his back to the bunker, where I underwent surgery without any anesthetic. In the bunker, Kurt Frankfurter was next to me. He was the cook with whom we had developed rapport in Theresienstadt. He lost his arm in the raid. In Sachsenhausen,[87] where we were shipped later on, a short time after the liberation, I got him some cigarettes and he soon died of his injury, knowing, however, that the war had ended.

Could you protect yourself in any way during the raids?

We had several primitive bunkers that could protect us at best from flying shrapnel. Just holes in the ground covered by boards and dirt. Sometimes we were not even allowed to hide there and were ordered to stay in the barracks. Through them [the barracks], shrapnel cut like a knife through warm butter. Many of us perished there this way. Although we were happy that the raids were happening at all – as they signaled the end of the war – we were bitter that they [the Allied bombers] did not aim better. For example, one carpet raid[88] went completely astray. One half went into the woods, the other into the grasslands. The raid was perfect, however, one crater next to another. But there were many unexploded bombs; of course, we were forced to search for them. We had to

86 diving bombers

87 Sachsenhausen was a concentration camp in Germany, operating between 1936 and 1945. From 1936 to 1945 it was run by the National Socialist (Nazi) regime in Germany as a camp for mainly political prisoners; from 1945 to spring of 1950 it was run by the Stalinist Soviet occupying forces as "Special Camp No. 7" for mainly political prisoners.

88 the phrase "carpet bombing" refers to the use of large numbers of unguided gravity bombs, often with a high proportion of incendiary bombs, to attempt a complete destruction of a target.

pull them out and the SS explosive experts took them somewhere for defusing. If that raid had managed to hit the plant, there would be nothing left at all.

What kind of regime was there?
As I said, there were a thousand of us and about half did not survive the labor, raids, and the malnutrition. Then they [the Germans] added more prisoners. The food was after all a tinge better than in Auschwitz, yet the work was much more demanding: removing wreckage, filling holes and craters, and so on. In the morning we got a coffee substitute. As laborers, at around 10 o'clock in the morning we got an additional "snack": a very tiny slice of bread with artificial honey or "Schmierwurst," an artificial sausage. At noon, usually it was the "Eintopf." Sometimes, the work was not too hard and was quite easy to withstand, but, at other times, it was very demanding and dangerous.

Until when did you stay there [Schwarzheide]?
We remained there until the end of the war. It was then that the so-called "death march"[89] to Sachsenhausen took place, since Schwarzheide was an "Ausslager" (outer camp) of Sachsenhausen. I did not have to walk as I was so badly wounded. Instead, the whole sick bay was loaded into two buses and we were driven to Sachsenhausen, where we had to wait and survive for another two weeks. Just before the liberation of the camp [Sachsenhausen], another "death march" had left. I of course presumed that I would go, but Zdeněk Eliáš talked me out of it. He was a Communist, after February '48,[90] he emigrated and became a high-ranking official at Radio Free Europe. Interestingly, we were together in the same Communist cell in Theresienstadt, but later on he did not believe me, he could not recall. He even forgot that he had written two rather successful dramas with Jirka Stein, *Dým domova*[91] and *Skleněná hora*.[92] He [Eliáš] told me: "Are you nuts, you moron, it [the march] will be painful and they will shoot you in the end anyway because you will not be able to bear it. Come on, we will stay here, will have a good night sleep – and then they will shoot us." I conceded, and, well, we both survived.

When we were driven by bus from Schwarzheide [to Sachsenhausen], our Dutch driver (an enormously courageous chap) took us through Berlin

89 the death marches refer to the forcible movement on foot of thousands of prisoners, mostly Jews, from German concentration camps near the war front to camps inside Germany.
90 refers to February1948 Communist takeover of Czechoslovakia
91 *The smoke of home*
92 *A glass mountain*

under aerial bombing. There was unbelievable chaos; some were running in one direction, and others in the opposite direction, civilians and solders alike. All in the midst of wreckage and bombing. The solders were retreating, but refused to capitulate so as to save two or three extra days of Hitler's life. All of a sudden, a Wehrmacht[93] officer halted us and wanted to confiscate the bus for the retreating army. He bellowed at the top of his lungs, "Alles raus!"[94] but our driver calmly responded, "But all aboard here are Jews." The officer clearly could not imagine embarking on a bus that previously ferried "mangy, scruffy Jews." Thus, with relatively few problems, we got through Berlin, and those [the retreating] solders probably remained there.

When we arrived at Sachsenhausen, they forced us to stand on a little patch of ground. It was just next to a gas chamber, as we later learned. We stood there not knowing why. Finally, an SS came and exclaimed, "Los, los! Da ist kein Gas mehr!"[95] The whole sick bay was to be gassed, but they ran out of gas! What luck! We were very likely the first batch from the "Ausslagers" that was not gassed. They let us freely disperse throughout the camp. That was yet another moment when I was indeed very close to death.

For about the next three days, we had nothing to eat and nowhere to sleep. The camp was overcrowded and the prisoners treated each other like dogs. They would not let me lie down anywhere under a roof. I crept into the Czech barracks and begged for at least some potato peels. They threw me out. People like me feeding on potato peels brought in typhus, and I should not even dare to show up again, I was told. It was horrible, but everybody saw it from his own perspective then. At the end, we managed to squeeze in somewhere.

After a few days, I was awakened by the bell from the "Appellplatz"[96] early in the morning. So I hobbled along to find out what was happening. I wore a woman's nightgown – in the camp we were issued whatever. At the gate stood two Russians. I could not believe my eyes; I just stood there and stared at them. Then I tried to speak to them in Russian (I learned some in the camp from a Ukrainian inmate). One of them bestowed upon me a watch, some chocolate, American cigarettes, and an overcoat. I wore it [the coat] long after the liberation. I decided to pass the cigarettes on to the cook Kurt Frankfurter. And he,

93 the regular German army
94 Everybody out
95 Get lost, go, we have no more gas
96 the grounds where roll call was taking place

quite happy because they were "Ameriky,"[97] smoked two of them and passed away.

For you, was this the moment of liberation?

Yes. These solders, as I found out later, were a Russian reconnaissance unit. They concluded that there were no SS and so they just left. They even closed the gate after leaving. A day later, Sachsenhausen was liberated by the Polish army. But for me, the moment of liberation was when I, dressed in a woman's nightgown, met the Russian patrol which bestowed me with so many gifts.

How did the liberation proceed?

Around the camp were the SS barracks. You cannot imagine what was stored there. A whole city could live off of it. There were tin cans, preserves, suitcases, an unbelievable amount of food, and all kinds of other things. In Sachsenhausen, the last few days before the SS left, there was overwhelming hunger. When we could finally go into the SS camps, quite a few people died from simply overeating. One should not eat a full tin of sausages, let alone of lard [when near starvation]. Then people were suffered in real agony.

I was lucky to realize that I should not eat it. The first few days I only ate potatoes, and later, rabbit. The SS kept Angora rabbits. I knew how to tend animals as I took care of them at home before the war, when my mother was sick, so I knew how to kill a rabbit and how to skin it, but I did not know how to cook it. So my friends always sent me to fetch the rabbits and the Dutch guys then roasted them. Admirably, the Dutch got organized rather quickly; they took care of the camp kitchen and so on.

I recall that nearby stood a little house. We ran out of spices, so I was sent to beg for some, for I knew some German. Well, I prepared a rabbit and then entered the house. When the Germans who lived there saw me, they started to scream in panic that they had not ever killed anybody and that they were not Fascists. I was surprised by their panic. Even though throughout the whole war I kept imagining that if I survived I would kill the first German I would see, I was not thinking of killing these people at all. Then I realized that I was standing there holding in my hand a bloody ax I used to slaughter the rabbit. Well, we talked it over, I put the ax aside and got the spices. It was kind of a funny moment at the end of the war.

97 American-made cigarettes

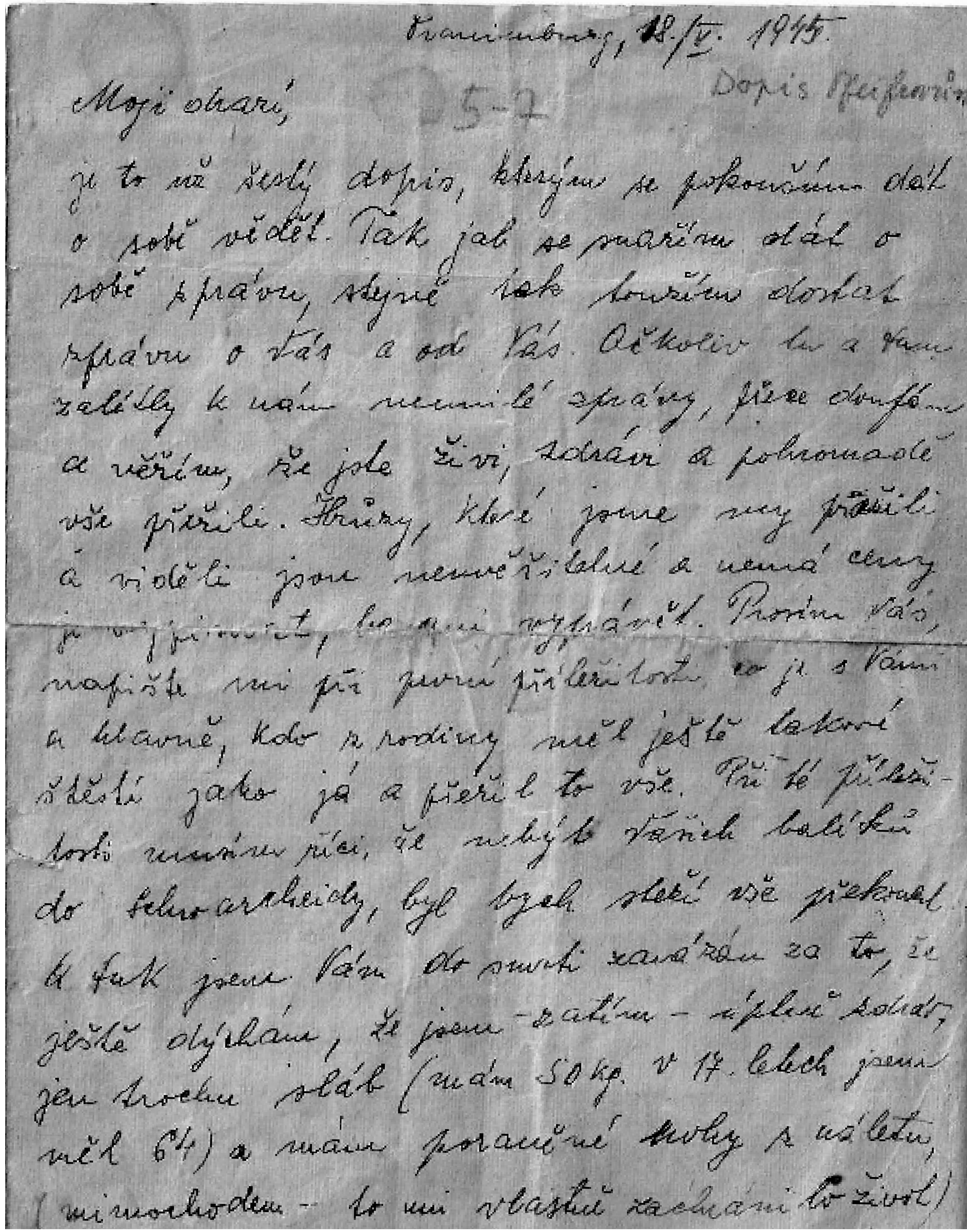

Oranienburg, 18./V. 1945.
Dopis Pfeiferovým
5-7
Moji drazí,
je to už šestý dopis, kterým se pokouším dát
o sobě vědět. Tak jak se snažím dát o
sobě zprávu, stejně tak toužím dostat
zprávu o Vás a od Vás. Ačkoliv sem a tam
zalétly k nám nemilé zprávy, přece doufám
a věřím, že jste živi, zdrávi a pohromadě
vše přežili. Hrůzy, které jsme my prožili
a viděli jsou nepředstavitelné a nemá ceny
je vypisovat, to ani vyprávět. Prosím Vás,
napište mi při první příležitosti co je s Vámi
a hlavně, kdo z rodiny měl ještě takové
štěstí jako já a přežil to vše. Při té příleži-
tosti musím říci, že nebýt Vašich balíčků
do Schwarzheidy, byl bych stěží vše překonal
a tak jsem Vám do smrti zavázán za to, že
ještě dýchám, že jsem - zatím - úplně zdráv,
jen trochu slab (mám 50 kg. v 17. letech jsem
měl 64) a mám poraněné nohy z náletu,
(mimochodem - to mi vlastně zachránilo život)

Photo No. 3: LETTER OF JIŘÍ FRANĚK TO RELATIVES FROM THE CONCENTRATION CAMP SHORTLY AFTER LIBERATION. Archive of Mrs. Zdeňka Fraňková.

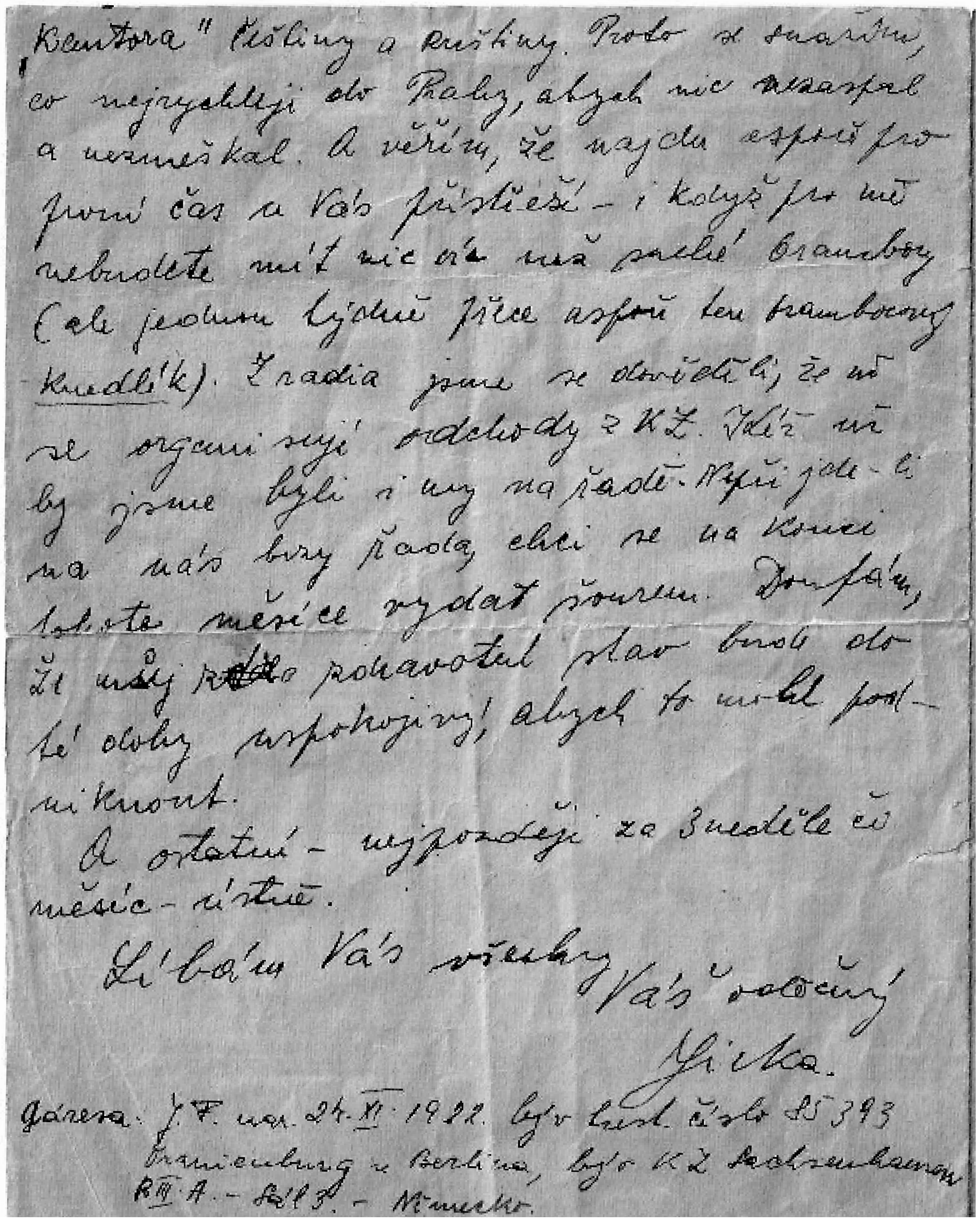
které se však velmi rychle hojí. Jsem Vám tedy na věky zavázán a vděčný – a snad nezůstane u těch věčně opakovaných slovech, snad budu moci ještě se Vám opravdu odvděčit a když ne Vám, tak aspoň Vašemu potomkovi, o kterého jste prý požádali, jak jsem se ještě v Birkenau dověděl. Ale více o tomto novém občánkovi nevím. Ani je-li to kluk či děvče, ani jméno, ani kdy se narodil. Tak to mi brzo pověztě, mám-li bratránka, či sestřeničku.

Jsem-li u toho nešťastného, strašného Birkenau. O smrti Frantově a Evině jsem se dověděl přesné zprávy, ba dokonce s Evou jsem byl do poslední chvíle pohromadě. O mámě mám jen kusé, ale, žel Bohu, tragické zprávy, stejně tak o tetě Micce a o Chocenských. Jak rád bych se dověděl, že aspoň něco z toho byl omyl!

A teď trochu o přítomnosti. Žijeme v nemocnici bývalého KZ Sachsenhausen.

Máme se zde, jako snad nikdy v těchto dobách. Žrádla, co hrdlo ráčí, ale vaří nám zde Němci a dle toho to vypadá. Mastí tolik, že máme zkažené žaludky, ale z mouky nedovedou nic jiného ukuchtit než – polévku. Ani z bobů noky nedokážou. Z nudlí a makaronů nám dělají kaši! – zelí nám vaří v kotlech bez octa a cukru – a je to pak vše – ale či ji to – mí kuchaři z toho dělají šlichty, jak je to učili jejich slavní vládcové po deset let – eintopf, eintopf!

Knihy zde také máme a času, že nevíme, co s ním. – A ~~tak~~ více toužíme všichni po jednom. Domů!! – do Čech. Kousek knedlíku, nebo dokonce bílé bábovky a nějaká rozumná práce – to je naším snem. – Já osobně jsem trochu nervosní, ale jinak naprosto pohromadě na ty tři strašlivé roky. A plány do budoucna mě neopustily. Rád bych, co nejrychleji domů a na podzim, bude-li to jen trochu možné na universitu. Na


„Kantora" čočky a rozinky. Proto se snažím,
co nejrychleji do Prahy, abych nic nezaspal
a nezmeškal. A věřím, že najdu aspoň pro
první čas u Vás přístřeší – i když pro mě
nebudete mít nic než naše pečené brambory
(ale jednou bych přece aspoň ten bramborový
knedlík). Z radia jsme se dověděli, že už
se organisují odchody z K.Z. Též už
bychom byli i my na řadě. Nyní jde-li
na nás brzy řada, chci se na konci
tohoto měsíce vydat pouze. Doufám,
že můj zdravotní stav bude do-
sti dobrý uspokojivý, abych to mohl pod-
niknout.
A ostatní – nejpozději za 3 neděle či
měsíc – ústně.
Líbám Vás všechny
Váš vděčný
Jirka.
Adresa: J.F. nar. 24.XI.1922, býv. host. číslo 85393
Oranienburg u Berlína, býv. KZ Sachsenhausen
RIII A. – Bl. 13. – Německo.

How did the solders treat you?

When I look back at my time after the liberation of Sachsenhausen, I am surprised how uncritical we were of the Russians. We had no idea what they were really about. I did have several events with them. For example, from the SS warehouse we found a few radio sets which let us listen to news from home, but a Ukrainian solder wanted to confiscate them. Luckily, the camp commander, a major, a female, a medical doctor, and by a coincidence, a Jew, prevented it. She insisted that it was not proper to take anything away from prisoners. There was really a lot of stuff, but we prisoners were allowed to take home only very little. Some of the stuff was of course sold on the black market.

After all, the so-called German economic miracle after the war had partly been built on the enormous amount of stolen stuff hidden in such SS barracks scattered all over the Germany. They were gigantic army warehouses. If all of them were as full as the one in Sachsenhausen, it was enough for Germans to live off until the time the Americans started to feed them. They were helped both by the stolen gold in Switzerland and by the Marshall Plan.[98]

A second interesting moment came when the Russians started to take the census. It was very interesting. They asked us for documents, but, of course, we had none. That piece of paper from them [the Russians] was in fact our first piece of documentation in many years. New documents were issued to me only after I got to Prague. Among other questions, they inquired about our nationality. When one said "Czech," they wrote down "Czech." For example, one could say that he was Tonda Nováček from Prostějov, Czech. They would give him a look, and if he had slightly curly hair and a hooked nose they put down "Jevrej"[99] without any recourse. On the one hand they simply considered Jews a nationality, and on the other hand for many Jews, myself included, who proclaimed themselves Czech, they put down "Czech." We had no inkling at that time how anti-Semitic they [the Russians] would turn out to be.

I started to learn Russian immediately. I had somehow already started in Theresienstadt. My teacher there was some Eng. Kondratěnko. Of course, as a Ukrainian, he was teaching me Ukrainian and not Russian. I only found out [that it was Ukranian] later at the university when I started to study Russian properly. After some time, buses arrived for us. One of them was driven

98 The Marshall Plan was the primary plan of the United States for rebuilding and creating a stronger foundation for the allied countries of Europe, and repelling communism after World War II. The initiative was named after Secretary of State George Marshall.

99 "Jewish" in Russian

by a well-known pre-war Czech car racer, Turek. I got all the way to Prague with him. In Prague I was supposed to go into quarantine, but I avoided it. I went on to live with my uncle who, as a so-call "Arischversippt" (married to a non-Jewish Aryan), was saved from going to the camp.

If we can return to Sachsenhausen for a moment, I would be interested in whether you noticed any differences between the behavior of the Polish army that liberated you and the Russian army that later administered the camp. When did the actual army change take place?
I am really unable to answer; I frankly do not know. In simple terms, first Sachsenhausen was occupied by the Polish; maybe it was a regiment or so. Then they left and some time after the Russians came. I think that the Sachsenhausen Institute could give you some answers. They have a similar institute there to ours in Theresienstadt.

When did you leave the place [Sachsenhausen]?
We stayed there from April to June and then the buses came. I got to Prague on June 21, 1945. I can remember that much, but for any additional details, I would have to do some searching. Czech buses came to pick up the Czech prisoners. The whole convoy took several trips. I was not in the first load; we could not all fit. Some decided to go home on their own; some of them managed to get there, but many perished. It was not safe. There were still a lot of solders wandering around. I have always been of the opinion that it was unnecessary – one could wait for a bit longer.

You mention radio sets that you had. Did you catch the Prague radio broadcasting for help?[100] What did you think about it?
Yes, we caught it. It did not arouse any particular sympathy in us, for we had been calling for help all the time. We knew that there was some fighting and that the Russians were close and the Americans even closer. It did not occur to us that they [the Americans] would be stopped near Plzeň.[101] We were glad that there was fighting; it meant that the war would be soon over. I remember discussing it with Zdeněk Eliáš. We did not think too much about the bombing in Prague; it lasted for just four days. We were used to it; we were under bombing

100 during the Prague uprising against the Nazis in May 1945, just at the end of the war

101 a city in Western Bohemia, about 40 km from the western border, and about 50 km west of Prague, where the American army stopped advancing

all the time. When I got to Prague, my uncle told me all about it and it was for the first time I realized how afraid they were during that time. We condemned it [the bombing] by saying, "Look at those German swines, they shoot people in Prague even on the last day of war."

When still in Sachsenhausen, we experienced the heated Battle of Berlin. At most a single grenade hit us, if any. The Russians and the Polish were quite careful about it. The Dutch, organized as always, spread a huge white sheet with a red cross across the whole "Appellplatz." Where and how they managed to get it [the sheet], is a mystery to me. But they managed to pull it off.

How was your return to Prague?
When we arrived, Mr. Turek or some other driver sent us for a medical exam. We stopped at Opletalova Street where we were told to stay in quarantine so as to check whether we had any infectious diseases. I underwent an examination and I was issued a slip of paper indicating that I was a so-called "returnee." I still keep it. Because we were not guarded, I decided to slip out [of the quarantine] and to go to my uncle's [place].

I had a small suitcase, small enough that I could carry it even with my badly injured legs. I knew my way around Prague, so I took a streetcar and went to see my uncle. He could not believe his eyes; he had information that nobody from his family had survived. They had just had a small baby, so they were afraid I might infect him. I had to leave all my clothes on the balcony and went directly to the bathtub. Only after that did they feed me, but at that point I was not very hungry. Otherwise they treated me nicely. I stayed with them until I met my future wife.

What was your health condition when you returned?
My "behind," that I had operated on in Theresienstadt, was almost healed. During a particular air raid in Schwarzheide, my wound there reopened. On my right leg, close to my foot, I had a large boil, and both my knees were shredded by shrapnel. So I had four open wounds on my legs. I walked ver poorly, but otherwise I was physically quite okay. I was checked privately by Dr. Jerié, a family friend. I can recall it as if it were yesterday. He said that I had survived the horror remarkably well. I felt great. I was in Prague and quite euphoric.

Later on in Mýto, when a friend returned to me my bicycle, which I had hidden with him, I met Mr. Nekvinda. He remarked that we must have had it really good in the camps because I was so chubby. It made me mad that he

thought so, but I was not able to explain it to him. We were extremely undernourished in the camps. Though after liberation I really restrained myself from eating too much, I was gaining weight. In fact too quickly, as it was mostly liquid. I was all swollen and puffed, which is quite dangerous for the heart.

Let us go back to Prague. Your first steps were to your uncle's?
Yes. They welcomed me nicely. They were quite happy; they already knew that nobody else from our family had returned. But they were very afraid of infectious diseases as my cousin Ivan was just two years old. I stayed with them, but after a month or so I started to look into what had happened with my apartment and house in Mýto. Soon after I left them. I also started to look into the possibility of university studies and how to get admitted.

You mentioned documents. What kind and where did you obtain them?
I buried them in Mýto under a chimney. That was one of the first things I did. I hid my grandfather's watch (I already passed it on to my son), my birth certificate, my mother's birth certificate and "domovský list."[102] It was a real advantage to have all those documents; the bureaucracy was really horribly slow at the time.

Did you get any help; for example, were any meals arranged for you?
I would not know, as I said I was living with my uncle. However, the others had some places to go for meals. I did not really need any help. I had my uncle and more importantly my "Aryan" aunt (his wife), who had sent parcels to me in the camps. She probably helped save my life. In Schwarzheide she sent me socks I had asked for. They were thigh high, more like stockings, so I could stay warm. I wore them during the air raid when I was wounded and the doctor told me that they had clogged my wounds like tampons, preventing me from bleeding to death.

I stayed at my uncle's until I moved to a student dormitory. They [my uncle and aunt] did not try to push me out; it was more me trying to stand up on my own legs. I did not stay for too long in the dorm, as my future wife had a bachelor apartment that her father, a prisoner in Buchenwald,[103] had been given. My uncle was not too happy about it; he thought I was not mature enough to get

102 a certificate to which town or village one belonged by birth

103 Buchenwald was one of the largest concentration camps on German soil, primarily for forced labor

married. I was twenty-four years old at the time. It was just before the elections in 1946. My son was born in December 1947, right after the wedding.

Ninety percent of survival was a matter of luck and chance. When you were shoved in the gas chamber, you could be the smartest and the bravest in the whole world, but it would not help you. It seems to me that it also depended heavily on whether you preferred "cooking" or the "university."[104] It was also significant that as a "Betreuer" I had to work with my head all the time. There were very few "Betreuers," but about eighty percent survived; not just by being able to avoid heavy labor, but also by working mentally quite intensively.

Did any of your other relatives survive?
I have a few really nasty recollections from my return, but the positive ones outweigh the negative. I am in a constant debate with my friends, who paint our return as tragedy. I experienced as well that many people did not return my stuff to me. Sometimes these are humorous stories, in other cases more tragic. I think it was the studying at the university, and the leftist circles I moved around in, that made me view my return rather positively.

A lot of our stuff was hidden and I got back quite a lot. The clothes were too big for me, most of them from my dad. Our neighbor in Mýto was a local postman, quite a poor guy. We hid a whole box of shoes with him. After the war he came to me and returned them with apologies for using one pair until they fell apart, for he could not afford his own.

I feel compelled to mention again the fiction of the culture in Theresienstadt. It really is dangerous if one paints the camp quite positively and pays too much attention to the cultural life. Yes, there was cultural life in Theresienstadt, but we must not forget that it was all built "on a pile of manure." It was already rather bad there. On the other hand, the people who returned, especially the Jews, expected a warm welcome and it was not like that, so they then viewed their return quite negatively. I should not generalize my personal experience, but my discussions with Jews from Eastern Bohemia (who were generally very Czech-oriented) led me to believe that the majority of them perceived their return positively. For Prague and in particular for Brno, it would probably not hold true.

Of the entire family, my mother's uncle and I were the only ones who returned from the camp. His was a strange case; he was an engineer by educa-

104 a reference to "cooking" and "university" "komands" discussed above

tion, but he had a little farm where he tended to his farming. We did not have extensive contact, but we had a very friendly relationship. I still meet with his niece Hanka. I knew that the family perished. I had learned in Auschwitz how my brother had died; he died of pneumonia soon after he passed the selection. There was no doubt about my mother. As for my little cousin Eva and my aunt, I already told you. After the war, my great-uncle Pavel, who had lived his whole life abroad returned and could not comprehend that my aunt, and especially my cousin Eva, were dead. He constantly insisted that I tell him what happened. He kept on asking, "But why would they kill them without a reason...?" And I had to keep explaining it him. I was not in a state of shock upon my return; I was rather blunted.

How did your return to Mýto proceed?
From Prague I already tried to find out if I would get my house back. We had a one-story house where during the protectorate we were left in the smallest apartment. There was this large wing at the far end of the house where we used to play as kids. During the war, a German woman, Mrs. Drimmel, confiscated the house. We didn't have any issues with her and she let us live in the smallest apartment, which was quite generous of her at the time. We had much bigger problems with another tenant, Mrs. Nekvinda, a wife of a soldier and a woman who felt quite German during the war. Supposedly, our mother treated her badly. So she kept reporting on us to the Gestapo[105] and so on.

After the war, the house was taken away from Mrs. Drimmel and was returned to me. She tried to prove that she was in fact Austrian. It was discovered that she had put a lean on the house. The tax office wanted thirty thousand crowns from me, which, for a student with a family, was an unimaginable amount. I could not explain it to them. The saddest part is, when I later talked to my friends, I found that many returnees facing a similar situation had their debt forgiven. In my case it was not forgiven and thus the royalties from our [my wife's and my] first Russian translation were completely consumed by it [the debt]. We even had most of our belongings confiscated by court order. They almost confiscated my typewriter as well. That kind of garbage. But overall, my return to Mýto was quite positive. I found my friends. Quite simply, I was back home.

105 A secret police in Nazi Germany

What did you consider then as most important?
This is a rather hard question. I was a student and studied with a passion, though not always respecting all the rules. On top of it I had a family; my son was born in 1947. So I must say that it was the family where I focused my main attention, and have been doing so ever since. The period after the war was rather euphoric. I studied with verve, participated in the Boy Scouts again, went to the movies, theaters, etc. There was no time to think about the war, I had my whole life ahead of me. The family life was quite an adventure. In a small one-room apartment we had a small boy who did not even have proper diapers.

My wife's father was imprisoned in Buchenwald, together with Filla,[106] Peroutka,[107] and Čapek.[108] He was arrested during "Action Albrecht"[109] on September 1, 1939. He was a member of the French Legions,[110] an intellectual, a town mayor. When we met, we understood each other well. Every time we met we reminisced on (mostly humorous) stories from the camps. We simply laughed at the camps.

I'd like to make a remark. I kind of classify the people who survived into three types. The ones who never returned, I mean mentally; they still live there, they still talk about it to the exclusion of almost anything else. The second type who do not want to hear anything about it, nothing to learn about it; it is a chapter they closed for good, which I think will come hurt them later. I consider myself the happy medium, the third type: we are willing to return to it any time, talk about it or discuss it, yet we still live here and now... or maybe in the future as it is getting shorter each day. Hopefully, it is an advantage.

Did ethnic or national differences among the prisoners play any role in the camp?
We had very little contact with other ethnic groups. Some German and Danish Jews came later to Theresienstadt, but we all lived in separated commu-

106 A Czech painter
107 A Czech journalist
108 A Czech writer
109 On the commencing day of WWII, the Nazis put in place an action code-named "Albrecht," meant to arrest the cultural and political Czechoslovak elite. About two thousand people were arrested and sent mostly to Dachau and Buchenwald concentration camps.
110 During WWI many Czechs defected from the Austrian army and joined the Allies, forming Czech army units there. French legions thus consisted of many Czech deserters in France. The legions were instrumental in securing the independence of the Czechoslovak Republic that was formed at the end of WWI in 1918.

nities. There was a palpable hatred for German Jews, for we assumed it was their innate nastiness that made them somehow German. In particular, we did not like the Sudeten[111] Jews. We did not understand that whoever was born in Sudeten or Germany could not be different or speak differently. But it was all kind of abstract, as we had very little contact. In Auschwitz, we were completely isolated. With the Pole, I spoke through the wires. The camp officials were mostly German criminals, non-Jews. "Lagerälteste" Berkmann was kind of decent. I myself came in touch with other nationalities probably only in Sachsenhausen. The Dutch who drove us there and then organized our life there were not Jewish either.

Did you meet any Orthodox Jews? If so, what was your impression?
My first impression was of course rather negative. I already had that attitude from home. But as I got to know them better, my opinion of both the religious and the Zionists changed dramatically. Take for instance Avi Fischer, in Theresienstadt he was already morphing into a Zionist. On top of it, the Zionists helped me there a lot. There are among them both decent and indecent people. The notion of mine that the Czech Jews were the only legitimate ones, and that the Orthodox Jews and the Zionists were bad, underwent a radical change there. Fred Hirsch himself was a Zionist, probably rather liberal since he accepted me. About the other "Betreuers" I have no idea what kind of persuasion they were. We never got to it; such things were secondary in Auschwitz.

How did you get admitted to university when you did not have the high-school graduation diploma?
I do not know where to start. I always considered myself a mathematician. Descriptive geometry and geometry were my favorite subjects. I used them to boost my average, as I was not very good in languages. It is ironic that I became a professor of literature. But after all I loved reading books and I even tried writing poetry.

In the Brno Gymnázium, I had professor Bock for mathematics and all the technical subjects; a multitalented intellectual, with a love of music and unfortunately one problem – he was an adamant Zionist. He forced us to study the Hebrew language even though it was not exactly mandatory. I almost flunked it. I did not do well at all. To compensate, professor Bock gave me a C [in descriptive geometry], though I was probably the best in Descriptive Geometry in the whole oktáva (and since it was a Jewish class, that did mean something!).

In Brno, I became very close to professor Eisinger who directed me towards Czech literature and poetry. His name became quite well known. Later on, in Theresienstadt, he became leader of "Heim 1." In Brno I started to perceive the Czech language as my future interest. As much as I could, I tried to address myself to Czech literature. In Auschwitz, I composed poems and created the aforementioned literary anthology.

As the war progressed, my political orientation swayed more and more to the left. I began studying Russian in Theresienstadt. It was out of question in Auschwitz, but I continued again later on in Sachsenhausen. My teacher there was a Ukrainian, Eng. Kondratěnko. In Schwarzheide, I was already dreaming about becoming a high-school professor in my hometown and lecturing on Czech literary classics, a dream which I later realized. I used to put myself to sleep with these visions. That is why my first priority after the war was to get to the university.

The moment I could send a letter home,[112] I wrote to my uncle asking him to sign me up at the university for courses in the Czech and Russian languages. He responded that it had to be done by me personally, and I was, surprisingly, able to do it. It is unbelievable, but the mail traveled fast then. I signed up for both Czech and Russian, since I thought that I could speak Russian. Initially, I requested a combination Czech and geography, but they wrote back that there was no such combination available. I did not consider signing up for mathematics, as I was under the impression that with a bad mark in descriptive geometry, I would not be accepted. Only later in Prague did I learn that it was irrelevant, but I was already running in a different direction.

The moment I arrived to Prague, I tried to enroll in a special summer semester that was instituted in order to salvage at least something from the school year. A professor of French, Kopal, who told me that without a graduation diploma I could not be admitted, conducted the enrollment selection. He directed me to the so-called "swindle course" which I took immediately in Vysoké Mýto, at the local Gymnázium. I spent a very short time there, for I had almost completed oktáva before the war and the principal Fink was aware of this.

After the course was over, we still did not take the graduation exam, as I discussed before, and then I received the three graduation diplomas. Now

111 The Jews from the region bordering Germany, the so-called Sudetenland

112 after the liberation

that I was able to show my diploma, I was admitted without delay to the winter semester at the Faculty of Philosophy at Charles University.[113] I was very good in Czech, however, my Russian was not that great. There was a remedial course in Russian, but I attended it rarely. I did not have time, but the instructor let me pass, since I was talked to her about the concentration camps. In reality, I did not spend too much time on the courses at all. Instead, I immediately took part in the activities of the "Association of University Students" and spent most of my time there. I organized student summer camps and such.

Who was at the Faculty of Philosophy at that time?
I remember for example professor Havránek, but mostly professor Bohumil Mathesius. Though he was branded a Trockyist after the February putsch,[114] he was allowed to re-join the party since it was in the party's interest, as was the case for many other intellectuals. He had a great deal of influence on me. When he died, he bequeathed his entire literary estate to me. Later on, I prepared a collection of his writings, but until this very day I have not found an interested publisher.

Further, professors Kozák and Kolman. Naturally, Patočka,[115] for even then, his was a big name. I started to frequent his lectures, but I soon realized that I did not understand their content and slowly phased out my attendance. I took pedagogy with professor Stejskal. After the February putsch, I could not understand why he was forced to leave the faculty, along with many others – so I got into conflict with myself as a Communist. Another leading personality was Mukařovský. I did not frequent his classes, which backfired on me later: he did not hire me at the Institute for the Czech Language when I applied there.

How did you get in touch with the KSČ[116]?
The Communists acted quite publicly, inviting all people to their meetings, but I did not attend under the impression of my excommunication in Schwarzheide. Later the people who excommunicated me apologized. I accepted the apology, and started to frequent their meetings.

113 the most prestigious university in Czechoslovakia
114 a reference to a February 1948 Communist putsch; being branded a Trockyist was rather dangerous at those times.
115 a well-known Czech philosopher
116 an acronym for Communist Party of Czechoslovakia

I got into conflict with the party again at the university, when I could not understand why some excellent professors were forced to leave. Of course, then came the infamous political monster-trials that shook me up badly. You can call it fear, but after what I went through during the war, I had no appetite for undergoing it again. And to quit the party always meant some form of punishment; for example, I would not be allowed to finish my studies. I could not even think about it. I had a son and so I stayed in the party until 1968, when I was "scratched from the party list."[117] My wife on the other hand was expelled.

At the university, did you participate in party life?
Oh yes, it was watched with intensity: whether we wore the lAppell pin, whether we attend the meetings. It was a dictatorship, and it helped many people to see it finally for what it was. I participated as minimally as I could. When I started to work in a publishing house, the [Communist] party [organization] there had a different flavor and meaning, as it was formed from a select group of people with some reasonable goals who were not there simply to kick people around. It was a fantastic collective and we did not double-cross. So I worked in the [Communist] party there much more intensively and reached my functional apex: for a year I was the chairman of the company's party organization. This is my whole party history.

I was shaken badly by all the political monster-trials that took place across all the People's Democracies.[118] Propaganda was all we were fed ad absurdum, but all information was so filtered out that we had no way to obtain objective facts. I realized that it was not just the Czech Communist party that was dictatorial – they all were. But revolt was not possible, and so I remained in the party until they scratched me out. At the end, that is why I lost my job as a university professor.

You have a visible prisoner's number tattooed on your arm. How did people around you react to you as a "concentration camp inmate"?
It was a positive attribute. I personally moved among people who approved of it (for instance SVS, the "swindle course"). Even at the university it gave me some advantage: Professor Báraniová gave me a better mark and then discussed the camps with me because it interested her. After 1945, there were occasional

117 considered a lighter punishment than being expelled
118 a term Communist countries used at the time to refer to themselves, indicating an imperfect state before reaching the perfection of Communism.

manifestations of anti-Semitism, but not in any significant way. When I arrived home to Vysoké Mýto by train, for the first time, some guy at the railway station uttered to his companion, "They are here again!" It concerned me for sure; he had to have known me from somewhere. Even the term "Jew" was uttered. I was glad when the train started to move. I was quite feisty, but I was also still very weak. The other [anti-Semitic person I met] was a high-school professor Zima. Before the war he was known as a right-wing anti-Semite. After the war he started to teach Russian, though he was a professor of German. He was a member of the committee at City Hall in charge of returning the property left behind by the Germans. When I asked for the furniture from my parents' apartment, he said with sarcasm, "We are not like the Germans, we will guard the property of your parents for them. You will get only the necessities. You do not need a night stand!" Eventually I got the furniture, against professor Zima's wishes. There were other incidents like this.

It took a long time for me to straighten out the relationships with our longtime servant, Máry. After the war she was convinced that we cheated her of the bedding she had duly paid for. Eventually, it was revealed that her sister Růžena, who was supposed to secretly carry it from our place, stole it. Toward the end, we reconciled and she recalled the beautiful times with us before the war. We were almost like her children. When she fell sick, my wife tended to her daily in the hospital until her death. It was incorrect to use the term "servant" under the Communists as it indicated exploitation. But there were servants before the war, and some were more like family members.

The "Mister Engineer,"[119] who arrived one day with my mother's debt note in hand, used to be a real friend of Jews. But he was quite old then and did not have it all right in his head. Maybe my mother gave it to him to provide him with some documents for the Germans[120] and then he started believing that the note was real. I did not want to argue with him. He assumed that I had inherited millions. In spite of the fact that my mother told my brother and me before her transport that she did not owe anything to anybody, I decided to pay.

She also gave us the names of people she had hidden some stuff with. There was not too much; we were not rich enough. Eventually, I got most of it back. Some people didn't even know that I had survived.

119 a good-manners way to address men in pre-war Czechoslovakia was as Mister followed by a title, if they had any.

120 so he could not be accused of hiding a Jewish property, for he purchased it, which was OK.

Yes, I did encounter anti-Semitism once in a while, but definitely not in the amount that it is often portrayed as being, for example, as portrayed in *Ve městě jsou Steinové*.[121] Around me were mostly left-oriented philo-Semites. The anti-Semites: Gottwald[122] and his merry band.

You got your Mýto house back. How did this happen?
In 1945, I got it back without any major problems. After the February '48 putch, it was confiscated by the Communists. Luckily, I got it back again after 1989, in restitution. It was appraised for 1 million crowns then, but the house was in shambles and had to be fixed.[123] The repairs were estimated at two million, so I was forced to sell it. I got very little for it, since the buyer knew I had to sell. What a pity that I did not sell the house in 1945 when I was offered a million (in the old currency) by some friends. But my uncle convinced me not to do it: "Money will lose its value, but a house will always have good value." Well, about some other things at least, he may have been right.

Did you contact your home Jewish Community after you returned?
No, I did not. There was nobody left. It used to be in Luže, but only two Schwarzes returned along with Andula Poláková. It was not enough for a Community. As for Mýto, from a hundred or so people, my mother's uncle and I returned, oh, and maybe Hanka Taussigová. I cannot recall any other name. There were a few survivors among those "gathered." I reckon that at best one out of every ten survived.

How did your friends and acquaintances from before the war embrace you?
I'd say rather positively. I was quite friendly with the Klazarovys, our tenants, who had a flat just next to ours. I used to listen to the radio at their place during the war. They warmly embraced my wife when she moved in. The Boy Scouts welcomed me back rather nicely as well. I cannot recall an old friend or acquaintance that disappointed me. During a visit of my old friend, I noticed that I was walking on our carpet, and when I mentioned it, her mother insisted that she had duly paid my mother for it. Except for professor Zima, I do not remember any explicit examples of anti-Semitism.

121 *The Steins are in Town*

122 The chairman of the Communist party and the first Communist president

123 some of the repairs were actually officially mandated

What was your attitude towards Germans after the war?
Horrible. I perceived them as outcasts of humanity. I totally loathed them. I even forgot the German language, though it was the only foreign language I knew well. Later on, I had to re-learn it. Of course, it went faster the second time around. When I started getting invitations to scientific symposia in the GDR.[124] I had to refresh my German. Then I got invited as a visiting professor to the FRG,[125] initially only for three months, but I stayed for three years. I returned home in 1970. I realized there that it was much more complicated with the Germans. I even made some friends there. When I was leaving for Germany, my wife did not want me to go. She was worried that the SS was still there and that something might happen to me. In Germany, I hid that I was Jewish. Well, I did not hide it really, nobody ever asked me about it. I simply did not advertize it. I was there as a docent[126] from Charles University and I wanted to be viewed as such.

At the same time, I realized that there was more anti-Semitism in the Germans than in the Czechs, at least in my generation. But I also noticed a certain feeling of guilt [among the Germans]; as a Jew I think I was a bit more sensitive to it. About three months after I was replaced by my colleague Honzík, I went to lecture in Bochum and it came out that I was Jewish. He [Honzík] mentioned it somewhere and when I came back [from Bochum], everybody knew about it. But I did not experience any anti-Semitism towards myself before or after that incident, all I noticed was that the comments that "the Jews kind of brought it on themselves by exploiting the Germans" disappeared. The same people then asked why I had hidden my Jewish background and then simply tried to butter me up. I recall one publisher; we had become good friends before he learned about it. During the war he was a bomber pilot and deeply regretted his bombings. He was really traumatized by it.

I even made acquaintances with a former SS. Strangely, he loved Russia. He always stayed with us when he was passing through Prague. He lost his arm during the battle of Stalingrad and I used to tease him that he was going there [to Russia] looking for it. I never told him that I was Jewish. He was very reserved towards Jews. He claimed that they had brought it on themselves by their behavior. He had not reconciled with his war role either. He actively tried to atone for what he committed during the war. As a member of the Ostinstitut,[127] he actively promoted both Russia and Czechoslovakia, though he was a committed anti-Communist. I was always bemused by the thought of what he would do if he learned that I was Jewish. I do not know if he ever found out, and whether he is still alive.

124 German Democratic Republic, the Communist state formed by the Russians in Eastern Germany
125 Federal Republic of Germany, the democratic state formed in the Western Germany
126 an academic rank below full professor (so similar to associate professor, but more demanding to reach and more prestigious)

When you lived in Prague, did you have any contacts with the Jewish Community there?
I have to disappoint you. I acknowledged the Community and I always declared my Jewish religious affiliation, though I was a total nonbeliever. The religious dimension is the only category left if one wants to declare his Jewishness without a need to be viewed as a member of the Jewish nation. As I said before, you cannot change your nationality when you are eighty; and I have no innate need to change from a Czech to a Jew.

In reality, except for a few official functions, I had minimal contacts with the Community. I attended the gathering on March 8th commemorating the victims from the Czech Family Camp. Once, I even gave a speech there.

I am member of the "Terezínská iniciativa,"[128] the "Historická skupina Osvětim,"[129] and a similar group from Schwarzheide. I am not a member of the Sachsenhausen group, although I cooperated with them on several occasions. I had almost no contact with the Prague Community for a long period of time. In the last five years I have become more active because of my daughter's involvement there. In general, I am not at ease when Jewishness is too emphasized. As I also mentioned, I do not like to spell the word "jew" with a [capital] "J."

Had you seen the "Věstník ŽNO"?[130]
Yes, I read the bulletin once in a while, but not regularly. I was not a subscriber. Usually I just browsed through it in the reading room of the Faculty of Philosophy, or when somebody drew my attention to some article there, for example about Poláček and so on.

Can you recall some organizations after the war?
I do not recall any pre-war associations or clubs. After the war, we organized according to the camps. In the beginning we were really into it, we the

127 Institute of East European Studies
128 Theresienstadt Initiative
129 The Auschwitz Historic Group
130 Bulletin of the Jewish Community

"Švarzhajďáci"[131] were organized by Karlovský. He invited anybody he knew. The groups "Osvětim"[132] or "Terezínská iniciativa" were similarly founded. I cannot recall any official founding act. I was a chairman of the "Schwarzheide Association" through the whole period of "Bolševism."[133] This association never ceased to exist, though we felt certain pressure from the Communists: [they wondered] why we were not satisfied with the official "Association of Freed Political Prisoners and Survivors," or the "Union of Fighters for Freedom," containing even the former partisans and the former fighters of the Prague uprising. Today, some think that these few old men [the surviving prisoners] should be under control of the Ministry of National Defense.

You obtained an apartment in Prague with SOPVP's[134] help. How did that happen?

My father-in-law was a member; as a Legionnaire, he was imprisoned in Buchenwald. At that time the union was called "Svaz osvobozených politických vězňů a pozůstalých po obětech nacizmu."[135] He knew all the future officials of the union from the concentration camp. When he returned, he applied for a bachelor apartment in Prague and got it. His daughter lived there. I moved in with her from the dormitory, we got married in 1946, and in December 1947 our son was born.

Did you work with children after the war?

In a sense yes, the students in the Faculty of Philosophy were children to me. I hope I can claim that as a teacher I was rather popular. I never was short of students wanting to sign up for my courses and I supervised numerous senior theses. When I finished my studies, I did not have a doctorate degree, but I had a family to support. On a recommendation from Professor Mathesius, I went to work in the Svoboda publishing house as an editor. It was another dream of mine realized.

The publishing house was, however, soon disbanded, so I moved into the Odeon publishing house as a chief editor. At the time the publisher was called

131 loosely translated as "the Schwarzheide guys"

132 Auschwitz

133 Bolshevism, a colloquial derogative term for Communism, is derived from a Russian name for the Communist party of Bolsheviks.

134 it is an acronym for "Sdružení osvobozených politických vězňů a pozůstalých," in English, "The Union of Freed Political Prisoners and Survivors"

135 The Union of Freed Political Prisoners and Survivors of the Victims of Nazism

"Státní nakladatelství krásné literatury, hudby a umění,"[136] thus the acronym SNKLHU. Everything then had to have the adjective "state." When we were allowed to change the name, the editor-in-chief, Jan Řezáč, a big expert in the field, changed our name to Odeon, named after the publishing house of Jan Fromka from the First Republic[137]. It was a well-respected, and, at the same time, left-leaning publishing house then.

There [at Odeon], I was promoted to the head editor of the department of Czech literature (a Czech "kolchoz"[138], as we used to say). The Institute for Czech Literature (where I previously had been rejected by Professor Mukařovský) was preparing books for us and we published them in the "Classic Library" edition (Tyl, Neumann, Wolker, Němcová, Klicpera, Čelakovský, Arbes, Vrchlický[139] and so on).

One by one, the private publishing houses were either disbanded or denied publishing rights, and we, as a state publisher, were taking over their unfulfilled commitments. Yet, that was not good enough for the leaders at the top. According to the ÚV KSČ,[140] we were to publish only battle and heroic literature, and not somebody's "collected writings." I think it was also my achievement that we managed to publish at least all of Vrchlický's poetry, though we could not do the same with his plays and theoretical works.

Did you come across any news about Polish "pogroms"[141] or restitution[142] cases (e.g. Nettl's sisters[143])?

I cannot recall any concrete restitution case, but I know that such things were happening. We knew it all from our own experience; we explained it as a local anti-Semitism. To us leftists, it was not a big problem; we were against private ownership anyway. We hoped that everything would be nationalized.

136 State Publishing House for Fine Literature, Music, and Arts

137 First Republic is a common designation of the era 1918 to 1938, since the conception of the Czechoslovak republic in 1918 until its demise by Nazi Germany.

138 a Russian term for a cooperative farm, later often used as a derogative term indicating an inefficient bureaucratic entity, but in the early days used to indicate a fresh new style of doing business.

139 all well-known Czech writers.

140 The Central Committee of the Communist Party, the de-facto seat of all power in the country.

141 "pogrom" is a Russian word for catastrophe; it was used by the Russian Jews to describe the riots of local peasantry against their fellow Jewish villagers, usually involving house burning and beatings or killings. This term is now commonly used for violent riots against all kind of different ethnic or religious communities.

142 a case of deciding whether one should be returned the property owned previously.

143 despite their title to the property, they were in fact denied it.

Photo No. 4: WEDDING PHOTOGRAPH OF JIŘÍ FRANĚK, CLAM GALLAS PALACE, OCT. 25, 1946. Archive of Mrs. Zdeňka Fraňková.

Even though this was before the February putsch, nationalization had been discussed much before. So it had no impact on my leftist friends and me, even the Jewish ones. We always considered Poland, and I am afraid correctly so, as an anti-Semitic country.

Some Polish Jews fled the pogroms through Prague. Did you meet any?
Yes I did, and I personally talked to them. I kept thinking that if I were not a Communist, I would most likely be a Zionist. Nevertheless, my whole essence was a Czech Jew and I could not change it. I recall a discussion in the "Obecní Dům"[144] with a particular group of Polish refugees heading for Palestine. What they said clearly indicated virulent anti-Semitism in Poland. We communicated in Russian. They were not Orthodox. It was a friendly exchange of information.

144 the Municipal House, a city community center and a famous restaurant in Prague.

What kind of people were you in contact with? What kind of friends did you have?
I was active in the Association of University Students (SVS) and organized some volunteer work and camps with Jirka Vrba and other, mostly non-Jewish, friends. I was in charge of organization and then of inspections. I myself took part in a camp and in volunteer work in Nýrsko near Karlovy Vary. After the forceful repatriation of the Germans, we partook in the harvest and took care of the stock that they had left behind.

How did you meet your wife?
In 1946, during a student procession, we marched side by side and I offered her a cigarette – I picked up the habit in the camps, and it took quite a bit of effort to quit later, I am a foe of smoking – that is how we started our relationship. Soon after I moved in with her. We had been going steady for about five months before we got married.

I fit in her family very well; my wife's parents were exceptional people. My wife often grumbles that when I talk about what the marriage meant to me, all I talk about is her parents. Of course, she meant a lot to me. This relationship cemented my "Czechness"; not by design, but I simply found a Czech girl and got into a family that took me in as one of their own.

My early marriage anchored me. It wasn't long before we had two children, so I again had a family and I revered my in-laws as my own parents. That might be one of the reasons I was so free to discuss the camps; I did not dwell on them, I was not re-living the experience. I consider it my greatest personal luck.

A large proportion of Jews, especially Zionists, emigrated after the war. Did you meet any?
Yes, for example Avi Fischer. He was a great Czech who had been transformed by the war to Zionism and left for Israel. Ota Kraus, a writer and a friend of mine, also emigrated there. He wrote in Czech, so we discussed how to publish it. The actress Váva Schönová left as well. My good friend Zdeněk Eliáš emigrated to the West. Karel Fischer, with whom I had commune with in Schwarzheide, also emigrated to Israel and then to Germany.

Many of my friends emigrated. When we were finally allowed to travel abroad I had reached a stage where I accepted and understood Zionism. Our whole society was on Israel's side. I have a lot of friends who left the

ČSSR[145] and it made no dent in our friendship. What became difficult was maintaining communication, as ČSSR was officially hostile to Israel.

Early on, Hagana[146] got its training there [in Czechoslovakia]. We were really helping the newly created state of Israel. But there was a marked change in official opinions during and after the political trials in the 1950's. But it was very hard to change our friends into enemies overnight, as Stalin desired. Much later, I studied the topic of Jews in Czechoslovakia and discovered the ideas of Jindřich Kohn; this fastened my opinion that being Czech and being Jewish were not necessarily in conflict.

When and under what circumstances did you change your name?
At the university, when I started to study the Czech language. Of course I was not happy with a German name. My hatred of Germans during and after the war was enormous. During my studies, I learned about how the German names for Jews came to be. Professor Jílek gave us several lectures on the topic. It happened during the reign of Emperor Joseph II in 1775; the Jews were forced to adopt German names. I realized that my name had very little to do with my Jewish roots, so I decided to get rid of it.

Did the people around you support it?
On the balance, yes, though some considered it unnecessary. When I was in the process of deciding, I met two girls I knew from the camp and we discussed it. Their take on it was that they had it simpler – they would marry and that would change their name anyway. But it was up to me to make the change for myself. I considered accepting my grandmother's name Vohryzek, but there were quite a few well-known Vohryzeks (including an anarchist from the First Republic). The other possibility was to "translate" my mother's name (Pfeiferová) to Czech, to "Pískáček"[147] ("pfeifen" = "pískat"[148] in Czech), but I wanted to preserve the monogram JF. The girls suggested that a relatively common Czech name starting with F was "Franěk," and I agreed (it did not occur to me then, that it had, paradoxically, Germanic roots). I got married under my original name, since the process dragged on. My wife was recorded in the marriage

145 The Czechoslovak Socialist Republic, the official acronym of the name of Czechoslovakia in the period 1960-1989.
146 a Jewish clandestine organization fighting the British for the independence of Israel.
147 Whistler
148 to whistle

index with the name Frischmanová[149]. Later the name Fraňková was added, so everybody assumed that she was married for a second time, and she always had a lot of explaining to do.

Overall, there is a bit of hysteria about it. Everybody assumed I did it to get rid of my Jewish name and I must still explain that there was nothing Jewish about our German names. I personally detested having a German name. Until today, some of my Jewish friends do not understand it, for instance the Stránkýs. They claim they have always been Stránskýs, in contrast to me. Well, there have been some Slavic Jewish names; I spent some time studying the topic later on.

Do you think that changing one's name was kind of fashionable then?
As I said, I did not have many contacts with the Jewish Community, but many of my friends changed their names. I might recall two or three, in most cases from German to Czech (from Eckstein to Eliáš). Some started to use their nickname as their official name (Tigrid instead of Schönfeld). Often, they just changed it to a Czech spelling. It is a common practice. When somebody immigrates to the USA they often Anglicize their names, or if anybody comes to Israel, he takes on a Hebrew name (Fischl is today Dagan). When I was studying the history of literature, I realized that it was always a rather common practice – names are not etched in stone (Apollinaire, Conrad[150]).

The poet Jiří Orten used to be Ohrenstein. As an interesting aside, his two brothers changed the same name to Ornest. Zdeněk[151] was with me in L417, and Ota[152] had passed away. My father felt very Czech, so I am sure that he would never have lived with a German name after the war. He died early on so I did not spend too much time with him, but I know that his pro-Czech feelings were rather strong. Definitely more militant than mine.

Even some Czechs changed their German names (Professor Heidenreich changed it to Dolanský, Professor Oberpfalzer accepted his mother's name Jílek). I think that even some politicians did, too, but I cannot recall any concrete examples.

149 in Czech a wife's name is always affixed with a suffix "ová" indicating belonging-to.
150 both writers had assumed names
151 Eliáš
152 Kraus

Photo No. 5: JIŘÍ FRANĚK WITH HIS DAUGHTER VĚRA DURING THEIR VISIT TO THE SCHWARZHEIDE CONCENTRATION CAMP, CA. 1964. Archive of Mrs. Zdeňka Fraňková.

How did you bring up your children?
In both Czech and secular ways. We used to live in the first District of Prague. For school children there, the term "Jew" was a swearword meaning "greedy" or "curmudgeon." We avoided discussing it in front of our son for some time (he was born in 1947). He was told by his cousin one day that he [our son] was of Jewish blood, so my daughter, who was younger, took quite an issue with it. Our son was taken aback a bit, but that was all.

Did you participate in any holidays after the war?
Not at all. I did not have anybody to do so with and did not go to the Community. At home we used to have a Christmas tree and at my wife's home as well. Moreover, for the first Christmas we got our son instead of a Christmas tree. In Mýto, under the tree we would play fiddles, and our whole family would attend, including our non-Jewish friends.

Did you go to the synagogue after the war?
Not after the war, and before that very sporadically. My brother had a Bar Mitzvah. My mother could not imagine me not having one too, so I commuted to a rabbi in Pardubice to learn the Torah. I had huge problems with the reading of Hebrew text, so he eventually transcribed it for me into Latin. As punishment, I did not get long trousers, as was the custom. So I had my Bar Mitzvah, but I was not circumcised. Somehow it did not seem important then.

If you don't mind, I have a personal question. You have only five clearly visible digits tattooed on your arm, the sixth one is almost illegible. Was this a result of an attempt to get rid of it?
Oh no, the numbers were tattooed using special ink, when they ran out, they used just ordinary ink. Sometimes they even used ordinary pens. The prisoners who were doing the tattooing were just learning how to do it, how to get the ink just under the skin. If it went too deep, it festered; if not deep enough, it started to fade away fast. The guy who tattooed me probably did not do it right, so the sixth digit started to fade away even while in the camp. No, I did not do anything about it, though I knew it could be removed.

How does it feel to live with a number on your arm?
Today people do not take notice, but back then it was a kind of badge. In the summer, I always wore short-sleeved shirts. Just recently, I was in a spa and a young masseuse asked about its meaning. So I explained it to her; she did not have a clue. Today there are people who do not even know what the Holocaust was, especially the young.

After the war, some removed their tattoos, but not too many, though. Obviously, during the war, the escapees tried to get rid of them they usually tried to burn it off. Two girl friends of mine (Eva Weissová and Ruth Iltisová) escaped from the camp disguised as "Hitlerjugend."[153] They burned their tattoos off. They were afraid that they might be discovered for having bandages on the same place on the same arm.

My wife and I just explained it to our kids when they asked about the number on daddy's arm. It created animosity towards the Germans.

153 Hitler Youth, it was a paramilitary organization of the Nazi Party for young children and teenagers

How was your health after your return?
I always tried to exercise. I used to jog for many years until they found something with my heart. I was afflicted by cancer, lost a kidney to it, it came back and I had to undergo radiation therapy. I also have diabetes. Until about eighty, I managed to deal with all my health problems well. Back then, I was still riding a bicycle; nowadays I just drive a car. There were a few people who survived the Holocaust, and many of those perished soon after their return.

Did any of them suffer any permanent mental traumas?
I think so; it is very hard to ascertain. I used to discuss it a lot with Avi Fischer. He claimed that all the Jews carried trauma from history; according to him it was older than the camps, the camps just made it deeper and more pronounced.

I already mentioned that some Jews kept constantly talking about the camps (they never "left it"), while others did not want to know about it at all. I think that I am in the golden middle somewhere. I think I was spared the trauma. I somehow have a healthy attitude about this tragedy. I was helped tremendously by my wife and her family. I think that my early marriage and family helped speed up my recovery.

Did you consider February '48 as a victory?
Just partly and in "quotes." My whole family admired Masaryk and I married into a similar one. I, for instance, was in the infamous march in support of Beneš[154]. I was lucky that I was not arrested or beaten up; it was just before exams and since the demonstration was just passing through Nerudova street, I decided they could finish it without me and went home to cram for the exam just before the police showed up. Without consequence, I demonstrated in support of Beneš, whom I still deeply admire.

I had my doubts, for instance, the forced removal of some professors. There were many more such indications: during the student screening [of their political leanings], a well-known Communist came to my defense. He helped me pass. My wife also faced problems. She was asked why she was not taking part in political activities. She answered that it was because she was breast-feeding.

So I always had doubts. But I had very few doubts about the philosophical underpinning, the Marxism. As an atheist, it was easier for me to accept

154 Eduard Beneš, the president of Czechoslovakia during the February 1948 Communist putsch

materialism than some belief in God, Jewish or otherwise (I could never picture what language God and Moses used; I have my own theory about it: it was Moses' appeasement of paganism to claim that all came from God). My reservations were increasing; among friends we concluded that the leading authorities of Communist power should listen to us more.

But the biggest shock was the trials. Then, on the inside, I ceased to be a Communist, though I did not leave the party. Out of opportunism, out of fear, because of the family etc., and it was virtually impossible to do so. I perceived the trials as essentially anti-Semitic; I can recall my revulsion about the accused being introduced as "so and so, of Jewish descent."

Did anybody blame or accuse you as a Jew after '48?
Surprisingly, no. I have a feeling that the people in the publishing house were distinctly philo-Semitic. In my circles, the trials were viewed with animosity.

What did you think about emigration, the fact that you were losing good friends?
It was really hard on me; I really missed Zdeněk Eliáš who was my best friend at the end of the war. Somebody suddenly disappeared or died. I did not understand the emigration. Once in a while my Zionist friends exhorted me, but for me it was out of question. My profession, the family, and my beliefs – I did not hide that I could not consider the Jews as a nation. They have a national potential, but they become a people only in Israel, but even that is something new, they are no longer Jews and that is why they call themselves Israelis. Well, so my theory goes. It is all connected to my perceiving the Jews neither as a people nor as a religion, but as a community. A Jewish community.

If one wants to define Jewishness, one cannot make do with only the notions of nation and religion. I am an agnostic who is not of Jewish nationality, but a member of the Jewish community (Jindřich Kohn calls it a clan, Dr. Soukupová refers to it as a minority).

Since 1967, I have lectured in West Germany. In 1968, the whole family was stayed there with me. After the August invasion[155], it was more or less a technical question if we should stay there. I considered it, but we never did.

155 August 21, 1968 invasion of the Soviet Union and the Warsaw pact to stop the so-called Prague Spring and the ensuing democratization of the Communist power

Photo No. 6: JIŘÍ FRANĚK NAMED PROFESSOR AT CHARLES UNIVERSITY (JUNE 9, 1990). Archive of Mrs. Zdeňka Fraňková.

In August 1968, I helped many young people. One could say that I was kind of a "safety anchor" for Czech tourists and students in Germany. Many people met in our place; we even had a TV appearance. I managed to get some financial support for the students who just escaped after the August invasion with no financial arrangements. I worked then in the Auslandinstitut at the University of Dortmund, lectured in Bochum, Göttingen, and Tübingen. When the Soviet army entered the ČSSR, many people spontaneously left. It was rather naive; most of them had no profession or trade, nor education. We created a help center where we invited mostly the students and discussed with them why they wanted to emigrate. Those from politically persecuted families got one hundred marks from us to help them stay in Germany, but we sent many young people back home. I still believe it was quite a useful undertaking.

After my return to Czechoslovakia, I was accused of being a German spy and implicated for my speech on German TV against the occupation (Dr. Fojtíková from the Faculty of Philosophy was the driving force behind it). I was

always negative about emigration; that is why I returned (well, I did not know how the future would turn out). I had to leave the party for the second time and definitely.

The expulsion from KSČ did not bother me so much, but it hurt me that I had to leave the university. The fact that I returned[156] was not good enough for them. I was kicked out of the university and for about a year I was allowed to work as an editor for the magazine *Sputnik*. After that, I had to work for the Czechoslovak Railways as a gate signalman at the Bubeneč station. I can show you the pictures. When they were firing me[157], a lot of lies were used.

After all, I survived it all. But I lost a lot professionally. I continued my research in private and published some stuff illegally. When we were finally allowed to visit our son who had emigrated to Canada, I brought with me some texts to Škvorecký's[158] for publication. I was also in contact with Tigrid. He provided us with about thirty thousands crowns so we could publish in "samizdat[159]" at least one volume of Masaryk's writings. The Historic Institute of the Academy of Sciences lent me (of course, illegally) Athenaeum[160] and some Mr. Topinka photocopied Masaryk's articles in a bank for us. It was all rather complicated. We made about fifteen copies and completed it in 1989.

Did you participate in any way in the activities of the Czech Jewish Community after '89?

Indirectly, through my daughter. She is a teacher by profession, but had a problem with her vocal cords, so she looked for a different job. The "Foundation of Victims of the Holocaust" was looking for an administrator. My daughter entered the competition; in the hiring committee there was Tomáš Jelínek, the chairman of the Jewish Community. She instead was offered and accepted the job of manager of the office of the Jewish Community. Then a competition for the principal of Lauder's Jewish Schools took place. Since my daughter qualified in both education and experience, she won the competition. Many people

156 from Germany

157 from the university

158 Josef Škvorecký, a Czech writer residing in Canada, his wife Zdena used to run an exile publishing house in Toronto, 68 Publishers

159 samizdat, a Russian word, was the clandestine copying and distribution of government-suppressed literature in Soviet-bloc countries. Copies were made a few at a time, and those who received a copy would be expected to make more copies. This was often done by handwriting or typing.

160 České Athenaeum, bulletin for literature and literary criticism published in 1884-93 under the editorship of T. G. Masaryk

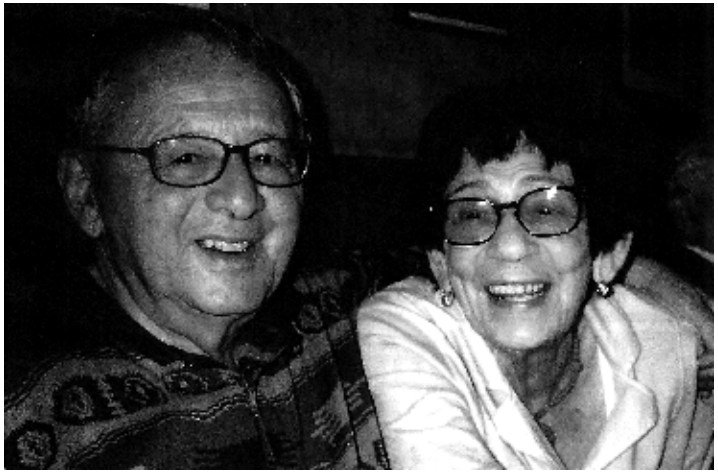


Photo No. 7: DIAMOND WEDDING ANNIVERSARY OF JIŘÍ AND ZDEŇKA FRANĚK , 1996. Archive of Mrs. Zdeňka Fraňková.

though protested and were supported by rabbi Sidon, the director of the Jewish Museum Dr. Pavlát, and the previous chairman of the Community Jiří Daníček. It all culminated in a demonstration in front of the Jewish city hall, which I consider de-facto an anti-Semitic act. After four years of unsuccessful attempts to relieve my daughter of her post as a principal, she was finally released after a strike in the school was staged as a reaction to her firing a teacher who was found using the school's web server to download really deviant pornography! I gradually got more and more involved not only in this case, but in other day-to-day activities of the Community. As an experienced publisher I could comment for instance on the activities and financing of the Jewish Museum and its publishing house. I consider the whole case around the Lauder's Jewish Schools highly immoral and am in fact glad that the rabbi was dismissed. I think it is good for a rabbi who lies not to be a rabbi. I think it totally corrupt to dismiss a person hired after a proper contest, just because she was inconvenient to them.

What do you think about the re-establishment of the Community after '89, about its concept? Are there enough people for a viable Community?

There are about three thousand Jews, of whom about one and a half thousand live in Prague. Mostly not orthodox. I think it is awful that my daughter was denied membership in the Community just because her mother was not Jewish.

During a debate with the Israeli ambassador, the chairman of ŽO[161] Zeno Dostál proclaimed that the Jewish problem would be solved when again every town had a little shop owned by some Bondy or Eckstein. The ambassador disagreed; according to him everybody who felt Jewish was obliged to go to Israel. I think that whoever feels Jewish (religiously or nationally) should go to live in Israel. To reconstruct small Jewish communities all over the country is pointless. The communities have their meaning in cities with old Jewish tradition like Frankfurt or Prague. They should preserve the heritage and study it.

If there was anything positive about Sidon, it was that his dissident and charter[162] history attracted young people. Some converted, some just rediscovered their Jewish roots. I agree that the Community is an anachronism in its orthodoxy. But today I have some sympathy even for the Orthodox Jews.

But here and there, it really was an anachronism. Just consider the personalities of the last great rabbis... prior to 1900, no orthodoxy and neology existed. Orthodoxy started its separation only with the advent of Zionism; there was nothing like that before. Then, just as all the Christians attended church, all the Jews attended the synagogue, so what orthodoxy? In the country it was not possible to always find kosher meat, etc. Rabbis Zicher and Federer, I still remember, were preciously liberal, though personally they were orthodox and observed "kashrut." They did not ask who your grandfather or grandmother was. Simply, you wrote down Jewish, so you were Jewish, end of story. That was the practice. A rabbi must be a fair person.

What do you think about the activities of neology and reformed Jews in the Czech Republic (e.g. Bejt Simcha[163])?

Well, they are of course closer to my heart. I think that Judaism should be reformed. At some point I tried to figure out the roots of using the head cover (*kipa, yarmulke*) and found out that nobody really knew and that it was relatively recent. To dwell on fundamentalism is never good.

161 acronym for Židovská Obec, the Jewish Community

162 Charter 77 was an informal civic initiative in Czechoslovakia from 1977 to 1992, named after the document Charter 77 from January 1977. It played an important role in the fight against the Communist oppression.

163 a liberal Jewish organization

Photo No. 8: MEETING OF FORMER PRISONERS OF SCHWARZHEIDE, HOTEL INTERCONTINENTAL, RESTAURANT ZLATÁ PRAHA, CA. 2000. Archive of Mrs. Zdeňka Fraňková

One more question. How did the compensations for the camps proceed?
I can tell you a lot about it. I always voiced my opposition to compensation, even though in principle I agreed with it. The compensation was the German duty, for they stole a lot and we were forced to labor there for free. So in principle it was OK. But I could not understand that the Communist countries were left out. For this the Germans had no right. I proclaimed it everywhere and anywhere. They simply waited for the Jews to die out (because in Russia and Eastern Europe there were at least a million of them); they put forth some obstacles all the time, claiming to make sure that the Communist governments would not steal it. In fact they just simply waited for half of us to die, so the costs were so much smaller.

I was thus against it. I even had no moral problem with the fact, that when everybody applied, I did likewise and accepted the compensation. In my case, the Germans stole so much from me that the compensation could never come even close to covering it (unless I stay alive for a thousand of years). Once in a while somebody asks me why I accepted it when I cast the single vote against

the compensation (the vote was 300:1). According to me, it was unconscionable that it had to wait until the fall of Communism. I was offended that I was endlessly asked for proofs of my time in the camp. The whole process of applying for the compensation was demeaning.

What do your children do?
My son studied mathematics and became a professor of Computer Science at McMaster University in Hamilton, Canada. He has both RNDr. and Ph.D. degrees. He emigrated in 1977. My daughter studied at the Faculty of Pedagogy, has a PaedDr degree and is a teacher.

What do you consider as a fundamental thesis of Czech Jewishness, or, if we can say so, Jewish Czechism?
That Jewishness is not a nationality. Vohryzek was rather religious; he viewed Jewishness in exclusively religious terms. There is this legend (most likely true) that some of the "Čeští bratři"[164] wanted to preserve their faith and names in 1650 so badly that in some Moravian villages they converted to Judaism rather than become Catholics. For instance, Korálek's and Kavan's families perceived themselves as such. Allegedly, they even have some supporting evidence. But it has not been really documented and some scholars deny it. The oppressed Czech nations and the Jewish minority are close to each other; these were Masaryk's words. Well, that is it.

How did you feel during the interview?
I am quite tired now, but if you want to ask some more, go ahead. There have been no questions that would offend me. When I read the transcript, I will recall some additional details, I am sure.

Photographs are from the personal archive of Mrs. Zdeňka Fraňková. The editors of Urban People are grateful for this loan.

164 Czech Brothers, a Protestant sect in the time of forced Catholization by the Hapsburgs