

# Dagmar Lieblova

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Prague

Czech Republic

Interviewer: Pavla Neuner

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*Dagmar Lieblova lives with her husband in a wonderful apartment in a new housing development in Prague.*

*he interview took place in her large cozy living room which is full of old pieces of family furniture and books.*

*Mrs. Lieblova is a very pleasant person, as is her husband.*

*She is also a very well-respected and elegant lady whose many activities and great energy are worthy of admiration..*

- [Family background](#)
- [Growing up](#)
- [During the war](#)
- [Post war](#)
- [Glossaries](#)

- **Family background**

I can't remember my grandmother or grandfather on my father's side too well, as I never spent much time with them, even though we used to visit them twice a year in Cimelice, which is a small town near Pisek. My grandfather on my father's side was called Vilem Fantl and was born in Lubenec in 1858. He lived in Cimelice, south Bohemia, where he had a farm with land under crop and horses that he was very proud of. He also had a store there, which is still standing, although it now sells Dutch furniture.

My grandmother on my father's side was called Jindriska (nee Hechtova) and was born in 1859. She came from Suchomasty, Beroun. The Hecht family must have lived there for a long time, for we came across a grave in the local old Jewish cemetery on which was written the name 'Filip Hecht aus Suchomast' [German, Filip Hecht from Suchomast] - he was my grandmother's grandfather.

This forefather of mine was a glassmaker, which I know from a document written during the war by my father in which he mentions that "Filip is an unusual name for a Jew, as is the occupation." He did this so as not to be subject to discriminatory regulations, but it was still of no use.

My grandparents were both religious. They had separate sets of dishes, ate kosher food and probably had a Jewish wedding, but my grandfather didn't wear a yarmulka. Their devoutness was not, I think, passed on to any of their children.



At the beginning of the 1930s my grandparents sold their house and farm in Cimelice and moved to Beroun, where they built a little house with rooms and a kitchen downstairs and an attic upstairs. Unlike Beroun, I can't remember Cimelice. We always went to Beroun on the first of May, and my parents always wanted us to leave before all the ceremonial processions in Prague started up. We went there from Kutna Hora via Prague.

My grandmother used to cook excellent flour dumplings; mom would always ask her how she does it and she would say - "Don't you know how to do flour dumplings?" We always had dumplings and Polish sauce or goose. Polish sauce is sweet and has plums and raisins in it.

There was always good soup, too. I can remember that grandfather would go a bit of the way with us in the car to see us off on our way home. And he always blessed us when we parted I do not remember what he was whispering, but he always put his hand on my forehead. Both my grandparents died before the deportations began - grandmother in January 1940, grandfather six weeks later.

My grandparents had seven children. Ota, who died in infancy, Rudolf, Emil, Ruzena, Marenka, my dad Julius and another son, Ota. Rudolf was born 1883. He married a Jewish woman, Rezi, who was my mother-in-law's sister. They lived all their lives in Ceske Budejovice. Rudolf inherited a distillery from his father-in-law.

When he died in 1922, the business was run by his wife, who did not survive the Holocaust. They had two daughters together, Marie and Lilly, who were my cousins. Lilly married a non-Jewish man; living in a mixed marriage, she managed to survive the Holocaust. She gave birth to a daughter in 1944, shortly before being incarcerated, and had another four children after the war.

Marie also married a non-Jew, by the name of Antonin Rozanek. Marie was sent to the Small Fortress [1](#) and then transported to Auschwitz. She was in the Frauenlager [German for women's camp] in Birkenau and, according to her sister Lilly, perished in Bergen-Belsen. Her husband survived the persecution, as did their daughter Helenka, who married Josef Moravek, a chemist, with whom she emigrated to America, where they live to this day. Antonin remained in Bohemia. He went to visit her a few times, but he died in Bohemia.

Emil was born in 1886. He married Josefa Franklova, a Jewish widow with a son called Ludvik who was born in 1913. They had a grocery store on the square in Hyskov, which is a village near Beroun. They also sold fabrics and farming implements.

They had another son, Rene, in 1922. Both of their sons were fine boys. When we went to visit our grandparents, we would go for a snack in Hyskov after lunch. We were there on vacation sometime in 1939. I was very fond of Ludvik and Rene - they were older than me and it was fun to be with them.

Their parents also used to sell paints in the store; the boys would take water from the pump in the yard and add paint to it. Rene taught me the crawl stroke in the river Berounka. Ludvik studied law and was just about to graduate when the universities were closed down. Rene had already graduated and was wanting to study chemistry, but it was too late for that. [Exclusion of the Jews from schools in the Protectorate] [2](#) He was dragged off to a labor camp in Lipa.

We saw a lot of Ludvik and his parents in Terezin. <sup>3</sup> Ludvik was the stoker at the baths in the Vrchlabske Barracks, and sometimes, on Saturdays when nobody was around, he would let us take a bath there in secret. Rene was transported from Lipa to Terezin in the summer of 1943.

Emil was put on the September 1943 transport to Birkenau, together with his wife and Rene; Ludvik volunteered to go with them. I saw the boys again in Birkenau. Once, I met them as they were carrying some dead bodies and they looked terrible. They ended up in the gas chamber.

Marie died at a young age. I think it was tuberculosis. She was single.

Ruzena was born in 1890. She married Ota Beran, who, I think, was a coffee importer. They were well-off financially, but their only son, who I never met, was killed in a bike crash long before the war. Ruzena lived with her husband in Prague and later built a villa in Stranice, where we once came to visit.

I was really impressed by the place at the time, for there was a room with a door that led straight onto the garden via a staircase. Ruzena and Ota were both transported to Terezin in September 1942 and straight on to Maly Trostinec, where they perished.

Ota was born in 1894, remained single and lived in Prague, at Koubkova Street 3. He had been to high school and I think he worked for a firm involved in foreign trade. He wrote short stories and had a literary talent. Ota was a really nice gentleman and a very witty person. He used to go to Kutna Hora to visit us.

On my dad's birthday he would always arrange for a cake to be sent to him from Mysak's. In Prague there were two famous candy stores, Mysak and Berger, both in Vodickova Street. When I was born, I received some silver cutlery from Ota. He was transported to Terezin and straight on to Treblinka, where he perished in 1942.

My grandmother on my mother's side was called Augusta Reitmanova (nee Hermanova) and was born in 1870 in the Bohemian-Moravian highlands in a village called Pokrikov. Her dad apparently had a tavern or a little store. My grandmother had several brothers and sisters. Karel and Zikmund lived in Brno, where they made confectionary.

Another brother, Emil, lived with his wife, Petronila, and two daughters in Hermanuv Mestec. He lived in a mixed marriage, which saved him from deportation, but he hanged himself during the war. My grandmother also had a sister, Matylda, who was single and lived at home in Malin.

She died sometime in 1933 and is buried at the Jewish cemetery in Kolin. Later, grandmother had another little brother, Jindrich, but he died in childhood. I bumped into Karel's granddaughter, quite by accident at a congress for children who had survived the Holocaust, which was held in Prague in 1999.

Eva lives in Israel. She moved there with her parents soon after the war, got married and had four children. I knew that Eva was still alive, but she didn't know about me at all. She asked someone at the congress if they could remember her mom, so that was how we met.

When, later on, I was at her place with her daughter in Israel, she showed me a letter I had sent to my dad after the war, which she had kept. It was a long letter and was signed Danko, but she didn't

know who it was.

My grandfather on my mother's side was called Maxmilian Reitman and was born in Trhova Kamenice near Chrudim in 1870. He lived with my grandmother a short distance from Kutna Hora in the village of Malin, where they had a little house with a little grocery store inside.

Malin was about 7 km from Kutna Hora and is now part of the town. A very old community, silver was mined there sometime back in the tenth century. Behind the store was a kitchen and, further on, two rooms and a courtyard. I think that they didn't have running water and the toilet was in the yard. It was a rustic building. I remember it must have been a very low structure because my dad, who was relatively small, could touch the ceiling.

My grandparents had a dog called Haryk, who could always sense well in advance when I was coming with my parents for a visit. He would then start barking. My grandparents were rather poor. They had store and an assistant in it but my grandmother was mostly at the counter.

Various ideas used to come to my grandfather, so one day he would sell vegetables, another day something different, so my grandmother was the mainstay of the store. My grandparents sold the house and store in 1934 or 1935 and moved in with us in our house in Kutna Hora.

Housemaid of my grandparents once told me that my grandfather Maxmilian's dad was in the army with my grandmother's dad Josef Herman. According to my calculations, this must have been in 1866. They are said to have made friends at the time and to have arranged to get married once they had children, which is what happened later. Allegedly, my grandmother was originally with someone else, but her parents didn't approve as he wasn't a Jew, so she married the suitor of their choice.

In his youth, my grandfather had a fine figure and a beard that he was very particular about. He had a restless nature and I think that it can't have been an easy life with him. I heard at home that they were living in Bosnia and Herzegovina a few years before World War I, sometime around 1908.

I don't know why or how they got there, but I suspect grandfather went there to sell things. They stayed in Mostar and Novi Sad, which were the first foreign cities I heard about as a child. [Before WWI both, the Herzegovinan Mostar and the Hungarian Ujvidek (that was renamed as Novi Sad after the war) were parts of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy just like the Czech lands.] Then they returned to Bohemia and spent at least part of World War I in Prague. My grandmother would always recount having to wait in line for bread. Later, they returned to Malin, where they remained.

Both of my grandparents came from a Czech-speaking family. I don't think either of them had any higher education. My grandfather was religious and went to the synagogue regularly, not only on the main holidays, and he would take me with him. Near Malin there was a synagogue but no-one went there any more, so my grandfather, who was an ardent Sokol [4](#) member, somehow arranged for the Jewish community to sell it to Sokol.

The building was knocked down at least twenty years ago. My grandmother was also religious. She didn't go to the synagogue, but she did try to observe the Sabbath. She prayed with mom at home and they both fasted on Yom Kippur. My grandmother had varicose veins and ulcers, so, as far as I can remember, she wasn't very steady on her feet.

As she couldn't get about, she sat and knitted for days at a time. Not on the Sabbath, though. She tried to observe the rule about not working on the Sabbath. When she was living with my grandfather at our place in Kutna Hora and dad wanted us to do the housework on Saturday with my sister, grandmother would say that it could wait until Sunday. Grandfather died in 1941, he had Jewish burial, grandmother did not survive concentration camp.

My mom's elder brother, Ervin, was born in 1895 in Malin. He lived in Dejvice, Prague, in what is now Ckalova Street, and worked as a bank clerk. At the end of the 1920s he married Helena Schillerova, a Jewish woman. Her father had married twice, so she had two step-sisters who lived in Kolkovna Street in Prague. During the Protectorate [5](#), when Jews had to move out of the better quarters, Ervin and Helena later moved in with him.

Ervin and Helena had a son, Tomas, who was born in 1936. I don't know how religious they were, but I think that Uncle Ervin wasn't devout. They all later perished in concentration camps. Uncle Ervin and Aunt Helena went to Terezin relatively late, in 1943, and were sent to Birkenau on one of the September transports in the very same year.

When my mom and I arrived in Birkenau in December 1943, we met people who had been on the September transports. We were standing in line, waiting to be given a number tattooed on our arm, when an acquaintance of my mom's appeared and told her: "You know that Helena Reitmanova is a widow?" She knew that my mom knew Mrs. Reitmanova, but not that she was her sister-in-law and that the person who had died was mom's brother. Aunt Helena was sent with Tomas to the gas chamber in March of the following year.

My dad was called Julius Fantl and was born in 1892 in Cimelice. He was a blue-eyed blond. While studying medicine, he became involved in student activity against Austria and was sentenced to six months at the age of twenty-two.

He was only in prison for three years though, because there was an amnesty in 1917 when Emperor Franz Joseph died [November 21st 1916] and a new emperor came along. Dad was condemned and permanently expelled from all the universities in Austria-Hungary.

My grandfather Vilem wrote a letter to a prison in Arad, Romania [Arad was attached to Romania only after the Great War, as late as 1920. Julius Fantl was imprisoned in the Austro-Hungarian city.], asking if his son Julius was there and if he was alive and well. He received the letter back with the following note written on it in German: "We can inform you that your son Julius is here and is well."

A lawyer later explained to me that this made sense because if they had replied on different paper, they would have had to archive it and to send an official reply. After my father had received an amnesty, he later served in the army in a Czech regiment in Hungary, and in 1918 resumed his studies once again.

He would often relate what happened when he went to put his name down for the degree ceremony: a clerk at the rector's office looked in his documents and pointed out that he had been permanently expelled from all universities in Austria-Hungary. In response, dad said that Austria-Hungary is no longer in existence. He was a general practitioner all his life.

My mom was called Irena Fantlova (nee Reitmanova) and was born in Malin in 1901. After completing her basic education, she did a cookery and sewing course. She lived in Malin and helped out in the store and with the household. Mom was a beautiful woman.

When she became sick one day, a neighbor supposedly said to her: "Young lady, why don't you go to Kutna Hora, there's a new doctor there, it's a Jew but he is a really nice person." Dad had been given a position in Kutna Hora as a doctor at the Masaryk Institute for Social Work, as well as setting up his own practice.

This is apparently how they met, according to the family. But in fact, they actually met, I think, through a joint friend of Mr. Ohrenstein, the father of the poet Orten. [Orten Jiri: maiden name Jiri Ohrenstein, Czech poet, 1919 - 1941] They got married in 1926 in Prague, but it wasn't a Jewish wedding.

Dad bought a house in Kutna Hora in 1932. Before that, we had been renting a place from Mrs. Roubickova. Dad bought it from Mrs. Taborska, who was butcher and originally had a store in the house. As Kutna Hora had been undermined and the ground was falling through, a big cellar was formed in the house when it was being built in 1904 or 1905.

The butcher used this as an ice cellar. My father turned her store into a consulting room. Our house stood on the corner of the streets Ceska and Hradebni. It was a one-story building with a garden. We had running water, electricity and gas. Our house was relatively large, with about five apartments - two upstairs and two downstairs, along with a consulting room.

We had a four-room apartment on the ground floor. The house had a turret with a bay window, and there was a corner room that was hard to heat as there were seven windows. There was furniture that a carpenter in Kutna Hora had made to commission - a cupboard, glass cabinet, table, chairs, desk, two small armchairs and a collapsible leather couch. It was a large room and, like the other ones, had parquet flooring.

Only the entrance hall and bathroom were tiled. In the apartment was a hallway, dining room, guest room, bedroom and living room where I lived at first with my sister. When we were a bit bigger they put me and Rita in the guest room. That was only for a while, though, because after our grandparents had moved in, they lived in the guest room and me and my sister were back in the living room, where there was an American stove.

Our grandparent's maid, Fanyinka, slept in the kitchen. It was a cold apartment; the kitchen was north-facing and had fashionable terrazzo flooring with really cold stone tiles. The rooms were over four meters high, which made them difficult to heat. There was a coal stove and a gas-fired two-ring cooker in the kitchen.

Mom always had socks and a sweater on when she was there. The American stove in the living room couldn't heat everything, so we later used a Musgrave stove which heated both the living room and the bedroom.

Mom was a housewife. She was religious like my grandmother, as she also fasted on Yom Kippur and on the Sabbath, I think, she only did what was necessary, but she didn't go anywhere. She prayed but she did not light the candles or cook cosher. Dad didn't observe fasts at all. We didn't celebrate Jewish holidays at home. Me and my sister were not brought up in a very Jewish way. We



went to the synagogue only on the New Year and Yom Kippur. We celebrated Czech holidays and had a tree and presents at Christmas. I knew about Jewish holidays, however, because we learnt about them in religion lessons. On the Pesach we used to order eleven kilos of matzot from the Bernard Schutz Firm in Pardubice. Mom would break matzot into pieces and put them in white coffee and we also gave them out to our friends. But we also ate bread. Our relatives came over to see us around Pesach at Easter, as they did at Christmas. We celebrated Easter rather than Pesach; we would paint eggs [Easter tradition] and go to the fair and buy Turkish honey [traditional sweet, sold typically on markets throughout the ex- Habsburg lands].

Although he came from a religious family, dad ate everything, probably because he always knew how things were in jail. I listened to him, but it wasn't until much later that I understood. He said that prisoners watched each other so that nobody would eat more potato peelings. I understood this later when I ate them myself. But I know there was food he didn't like, even though we didn't cook or eat kosher. Roast sirloin with cream, for example. I think the reason was that they didn't cook it at their house. We always did dill sauce with beef instead of cream.

I think that dad was a good doctor. There are still people around who can remember him. He employed nurse at the Masaryk Institute for Social Work, but he did everything for himself at home. Mom came in the evening to clean his instruments and to boil the syringes.

He was the only Jewish doctor in Kutna Hora. Because he was a Jew, he was allowed to work as a general practitioner only until 1939, after which time he could treat only Jewish patients. Dad was a member of a number of professional associations, but I don't think he held any posts in them. He was a retired officer and saw himself as a Czechoslovak patriot.

His political sympathies were with the Social Democrats. At home we read 'Pravo lidu' [The People's Rights], which was a Czech-language daily paper read by the majority of Social Democrats.

### • Growing up

My younger sister was called Rita Fantlova and was born in Kutna Hora in 1932. We were together a lot of the time and had a normal sibling relationship. I was an irate child and she would sometimes tease me a bit, so I would be shaking with rage. Our parents always told me that I should be more sensible, as I was the oldest.

It annoyed me whenever they said that. In the summer and winter, when the school term was over and we had no homework to do, we used to play in the garden in front of the house. Our parents saw to it that they didn't leave us outside.

We had friends who would come round to see us, but when I was older and wanted to go out, I had to bring Rita everywhere with me, which I wasn't too keen on. But then again, Rita wasn't too pleased about having to wear my cast-offs.

Dad wouldn't get home until the evening, for he was always busy. Mom would sometimes ask him to tell her things after he had got back, but he would say he had been speaking all day. When they had a day off, my parents used to go to the cinema.

There were two cinemas in Kutna Hora at the time and they went to every film that was on. Mom always joked about dad falling asleep there. They also went to amateur theatres, concerts and whatever cultural events were on in Kutna Hora. Other than that, we would always go somewhere in summer, and if it was warm, we would head for Vidlak Pond, which is about 15 km away.

We even went there on workdays, after dad finished work. On the weekends we would go swimming, often in the River Sazava. We also went to Caslav, which is about 15 km away. That is where my mom's cousin on my grandfather's side, Vera Mullerova (nee Reitmanova) lived. She was also married to a doctor, Lev Muller, and they had two sons, Jirka and Zdenek, who were a year older than me and Rita.

We often went on trips with them. We also went to places on vacation, twice in the Tatra mountains in Slovakia. When I was very small, we spent a few holidays in Stare Splavy near Machovo Lake, where we stayed in a hotel. Each year we would spend from two to three weeks in some place or other. I can remember going to the swimming pool in Luhacovice when I was five or six. Steps led up to the big pool from a children's paddling pool where we were supposed to stay.

One day I tried the first one, then the second one, which was already under water, and then the third step, by which time I was under water and had started to drown. A young lady pulled me out and I got a smack on the bottom from my parents, but then they put me in for swimming lessons.

I also remember being at Velichovsky Spa in 1938, where the locomotive organs were treated, as they still are. The spa is in the border regions and I can remember walking on the ramparts. Aunt Helena was a furtive smoker and I can recall her handing cigarettes to soldiers from her car. In winter we used to go skating; mom even bought some skates and boots and went along with us. Kutna Hora is all very hilly, so there were also lots of opportunities for sledging.

Kutna Hora is a nice town, but I didn't realize this until later. I took the area for granted as a child. When we were in Terezin later on, I didn't like the fact that everything was flat and square there. I had been used to winding streets and to there being hills everywhere. Wherever you go in Kutna Hora, there is always a uphill to go up. The land become flat on the way to Kolin, but remains hilly with forests on the way to Sazava.

My parents had a number of Jewish friends, of course, but in general they didn't care too much about their friends' origin. We mostly met with other family members, particularly with our relatives in Caslav. We saw each other nearly every week, and if not, mom would at least speak to my aunt on the phone. A doctor was required to have a telephone and ours had the number 17.

In those days you had to turn a handle and then wait for the exchange to put through your call. We were a middle class family. We had a car - a Tatra. In Kutna Hora there was only one gas station, and that was owned by Mr. Kubin. The first car my dad bought, when I was born, was dark green. He bought a new one sometime in 1936. Our first ride in the new car was to Ceske Budejovice, for dad's twenty-fifth school reunion.

Dad was always the one behind the wheel, because mom couldn't drive and also had a bad sense of direction. Once we were supposed to go to the Krkonose Mountains for Easter, when Rita was probably about four years old. We were already half way there when Rita said she had a soar throat and headache, so our parents turned round and went back.



They put her to bed, took her temperature to see if she had a fever, which she didn't, and dad looked at her throat and saw there was nothing wrong with it. After she had recovered, they asked her what had happened and she said she was scared of Krakonos the Giant. [Mythic giant who is believed to protect the Krkonose Mountains, between the Czech Republic and Poland] Our parents used to go on hiking trips before we were born, and me and my sister soon became used to hiking from an early age. We liked to go to the forest and dad always went mushroom picking when we were away somewhere on vacation.

At home we had a maid, called Anicka, who came to our place sometime in 1932. She was with us until it was prohibited. Later on, Jews were not allowed to have a maid under the age of fifty, so she had to leave us. We didn't have another maid after that. Fanyinka, the maid of my grandparents who had moved in with us, was older, so she could stay at my grandmother's place. That was a stroke of luck because she really helped us out during the war.

There were several schools in Kutna Hora, and children went to the one nearest their home. Me and my sister went to the elementary girls' school. A bit further on there was another elementary school which was coeducational. There was also a school where students from the nearby teaching institute used to train.

There wasn't a Jewish school in the area. I didn't have any problems at school, in fact I enjoyed it on the whole. As far as I can remember, I didn't have any particular favorite subject. There was only one other Jewish girl in my class, and she was called Hanicka.

I attended religion classes with her, but I didn't really make friends with her in the first grades. But she became my only friend when we were not allowed to go to school from 1940/41 and we had lessons at home instead. My other schoolmates somehow disappeared. Rita started school in 1938, so she only finished the second grade. I finished the fifth.

Both my parents knew German; dad could speak English as well, as he had learnt it at evening lessons with Mr. Strakosch, who was from one of the local Jewish families. My parents spoke German in front of me when they didn't want me to understand what they were saying.

So I planned to learn German so I could understand them and then to learn English if they switched language. I started going to German lessons in the third grade and then English at the age of eleven. On Wednesday and Saturday afternoons we went to Sokol Hall where we trained on the rings, beams and vaulting-horses.

There wasn't a very big Jewish community in Kutna Hora. Most of the local Jews were dad's patients, so they were on friendly terms with him. There was a synagogue and for a while we had our own cantor. Afterwards, Doctor Feder of Kolin used to come over; he was later to become chief rabbi of Czechoslovakia. He also gave us religion classes.

We didn't have a yeshivah or a mikveh there. At the time, there were about thirteen or fourteen thousand inhabitants in Kutna Hora, of which there were probably about two hundred Jews. The Strakosch family had a shoe factory and produced for exported. Another wealthy Jewish family, the Reiningers, had a clothing factory called Respo. There were also Jewish lawyers. On the whole, the local Jews were middle class businessmen. They lived a normal Czech life, and only a few of them went to the synagogue.

- **During the war**

The 'Arijsky boj' [Aryan Struggle] tabloid started coming out after the occupation, but I think that Jews made fun of it at the time. It was not local, it was edited by fascist organization called Vlajka. In each issue of this paper - I think it was a weekly - there was always gossip about what this or that Jewish woman was talking about. It also mentioned my parents.

No-one took it too seriously. Once, when I was no longer allowed to go to school, I met a former classmate who spat in front of me. That was the only specific case of anti-Semitism I can remember coming across. But I didn't take it seriously, in fact I thought it was quite funny. I don't know if my parents were afraid of Hitler, but dad probably thought nothing could happen to him as he was a Czechoslovak citizen.

My parents were certainly not Zionists. They were typical Czech Jews. Dad probably thought that Jews would be left in peace if they assimilated. I think that my parents didn't make any attempt to emigrate. Firstly, they certainly couldn't imagine how far things would end up, and secondly, it wasn't easy to leave with their family in 1938, when I was ten and my sister was six, especially as they didn't have any relatives abroad or any extra resources. I know that they once mentioned someone who was sending children to England, and that dad said I was too young for that.

However, my parents must have known something because émigrés from Germany were coming to Bohemia. Mr. Abraham was a German Jew who came to Kutna Hora with his wife sometime in 1936 or 1937. He spoke Czech badly, and his wife couldn't speak it at all. He was active as a cantor and also taught German to local Jewish children.

I can remember that he had a completely incompressible teaching method, so I could not understand what he was saying. Mr. Abraham also wrote a book about his experience in Germany and published it at his own expense. I don't know what happened to him because he simply disappeared before the occupation.

My parents read his book, so they must have had some idea about what was going on. People were somehow informed, nobody could say they weren't, but they didn't come to the right conclusions.

Having had to hand in his car, my father then received permission to use a bicycle. I went on his bike sometimes, but that was the only bike we had. In those days it was common for wealthier people to have bicycles or skis. We had to wear the Jewish star and there was only one store where Jews could do their shopping.

All the anti-Jewish regulations of the Protectorate were in force in Kutna Hora. My parents were no longer allowed to go to the theater or cinema. Traveling was forbidden. Dad received permission to leave the city limits because he had patients in the surrounding villages, so he could travel to see them on his bike.

We lived in Kutna Hora until we were deported to Terezin in the summer of 1942. At first, we had to go to the assembly point in Kolin, and then to Terezin. My father stayed in the Sudeten Barracks, while me and my mom, sister and grandmother were in the Hamburg Barracks. My sister then lived in the Kinderheim [children's home] and I was in house L- 410. Mom initially worked as a cleaner in the Kinderheim and then she got a job with the Menagedienst [food distribution service] in the

kitchen of the Sappers Barracks.

My father was employed as a doctor in the Jägerkaserne [Gamekeeper's Barracks], which was where the deportees from Germany were sent. The living conditions were fairly good, in comparison with the way things turned out. There were about 24 girls of the same age in the children's home.

At first we were under the care of Magda Weissova, then of Laura Simkova. We worked in the garden during the day and sang and recited in the evening. I gained a deeper feeling for music, poetry and literature in general. Some of us performed in the children's chorus that appeared in the opera Brundibar, which was a big event for us. [Brundibar was written by Prague Jewish composer Hans Krasa in 1938 and sang by children from Terezin more than 50 times. Krasa was murdered in Auschwitz in 1944.]

I sang in the choir. We sang a lot under the encouragement of Magda, who was originally in the Schachter Choir [the most famous choir in Terezin, lead by conductor Rafael Schachter] in the Prodana nevesta [opera written by Bedrich Smetana] and in other operas. In house L-410 there was a cellar room with a harmonium which we sometimes borrowed. Karel Berman dropped by once and, sitting at the harmonium, rehearsed the whole of Rusalka [opera written by Antonin Dvorak] with us.

We stayed in Terezin until December 1943. They took us away in closed cattle cars. We didn't know where we were going, but on the way we realized it was to the east. We arrived at night in Auschwitz. They took us straight away to a block inhabited by those who had come in September.

Transports from September and December 1943 and May 1944 went to Family camp in Auschwitz without selection. They began tattooing numbers on our arms. That is when mom found out that her brother was no longer alive, which was our first shock. Then we left for the baths and I can remember someone saying: "Just come back safely."

At the time, none of us understood what that was supposed to mean. After our bath we were given clothes, which were nothing but thin rags, hardly enough for us to keep warm in the December cold. I lived with my mom and sister in the same block. One day we saw dad at roll- call, but we could hardly recognize him, for he had become terribly run- down in just a few days.

Mom did what she could to help us, so she found work carrying out huge barrels of soup. The advantage was that those who distributed the soup could scrape what was left from the bottom of the barrel. But it was difficult work for mom, so she then stood guard over the toilet in the block which was for those who hadn't the strength to get to the outside latrine.

My father was a doctor in Terezin and when we arrived in Birkenau, he was told to see the chief physician who asked him if he had studied at a Czech or German university. My father was very patriotic, so naturally he said he had been to a Czech one.

He was asked another two times but kept saying he had been to a Czech university. If he had said he had been to a German university, he could have been a doctor there as well, but he would never have said that. Instead, he had to go around checking the inmates to see if they had flees. In one way this was good for us because he could go to the women's blocks, so we could see him. Afterwards, I went to the children's block where I later looked after ten-year-old boys.

In 1944 we somehow suspected that there was little remaining time for us. I had a strange kind of feeling. I was fifteen and couldn't imagine that we would get out of it or, on the other hand, that it would all come to an end now. I can remember saying that I would never see trees or forests again, or go anywhere by train.

We became alarmed when we saw two other transports arrive from Terezin. Then came news that all those fit to work would be sent off to work. Those fit to work meant women from sixteen to forty and men from sixteen to fifty. I was fifteen, my sister was twelve, dad was fifty-two and mom was forty- three.

None of us fell into that group. But then the block leader came and read out the numbers of those who were to go through the selection process. My number was called out - 70788. I said it was a mistake, but it was on the records, so I had to go, which was lucky for me. I don't know who made the mistake, but it was a mistake that saved my life.

Fifteen-year-olds could later volunteer to go, but I wouldn't have left my mom and sister. So I went to through the selection, which I passed because I was quite big and not too thin yet. We didn't know if there had been some kind of trick, if we were really going to be sent away to work.

First of all, we were sent to the Frauenlager [German, female camp], where we stayed for a few days in terrible conditions. We were put in little cubicles, twelve people in each, where we sat, and the only food we got was soup from a single pot and without spoons. A few days later we were given our prison clothes and shoes and after a few selections they took away the last of us and loaded us onto trucks. It was a strange feeling, finally to be leaving Auschwitz.

A few days later, we arrived in Hamburg, at the Dessauer side of the port. It was a July Thursday. We were given fantastic accommodation with two-level bunk beds and a wash room, as well as tables to sit at. We didn't go anywhere the next day and after all those long months we were given something other than soup to eat - potatoes and pickled herring.

However, an error seemed to have been made, so we were given soup again. We had to go to work on Saturday. We got up while it was still dark, went to the port and went on boats to the bombed factories where we cleared away the wreckage and dug out the rails. It was bad there as there was at least one air-raid every night.

In September they sent us to Neugraben, which is a district on the outskirts of Hamburg. At first we were guarded by members of the Wehrmacht, who were later replaced by the SS, but they weren't too bad. They were then sent to the front and the next guards we had were old customs officers, some of whom were decent, others were not.

Emergency accommodation was being built in Neugraben for those whose houses had been bombed out. We dug the foundations for these houses, as well as ditches for the water and electricity connections. We did this even when it was freezing and the ground was covered in ice.

Once we were working in a place where a lady with a twelve-year-old son was living. Her son always said a few words to us and his mom asked our guard if we could carry pieces of turf into her garden. She later invited us in and gave us black coffee and some bread and cheese.

Before Christmas the boy brought us a large sack, saying that Weinachtsmann (Santa Claus) had brought it. Inside was a yellow turnip, cabbage and a few potatoes. For him it was nothing special, but for us it was a princely gift. We were then sent to clear away the snow in Harburg, where we dug out bricks from piles of debris.

We then went to dig an anti-tank ditch around Hamburg. We were working alongside prisoners of war. In February we had to move again, this time to a quarter called Tiefstack, which was at the other end of town. I couldn't move, though, because I had a badly lacerated leg, so they took me, along with the other sick people, in a truck, so we didn't have to walk.

We didn't have the customs officials as guards here. Instead we had SS-women who were worse. Once again we had to dig out bricks and clear the area for further use. One day we returned from work and our camp had been bombed out.

Some time later we were sent away from Hamburg. First of all we went to the railway station and then we went by train to Celle. That was at the end of March 1945. Several people managed to escape on the way. From the station in Celle we then went to the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp. It is hard to describe what it was like at that time.

In the barracks that we went to, there was a bare floor where we had to sit as we were so cramped. The hygienic conditions were shocking, as there was no water or anything. Piles of dead bodies were lain everywhere between the blocks. A few days later the SS-men escaped because at that time you could hear cannon fire everywhere. There wasn't any food left at all.

Me and my friend Dasa found a carrot in a pit and took it. Then, when it was impossible to endure much more, along came the British army on April 15. I didn't even have the strength to stand up to see what was happening. They brought some food, but me and Dasa only took a can and smeared the carrot with grease.

There were people there who ate a lot of food very quickly and that was their end. There was an inconceivable amount of lice and flees. Makeshift bathrooms were put up to give us showers and to disinfect us. I later caught a high fever and had to stay in hospital until July 1945.

### • **Post war**

As soon as the war was over, I wrote home to Fanyinka, at whose place we had hidden things before the war and who had send us packages throughout the war. People from Bergen-Belsen were supposed to go to Sweden for recovery, and I was to go there too. But just before setting off, I received news from a person who Fanyinka had been with during the war. It was one of my father's friends and he wrote that they were awaiting my return.

The first train from this area was dispatched to Czechoslovakia in July 1945. We traveled by train through conquered Germany for almost a week and then arrived in Pilsen, where we had to get off as it was supposed to be the end of the American zone. They then put us in open coal trains and we went on to Prague.

My dad's friend, the professor, found me in Prague and took me to Kutna Hora where our Fanyinka also was. The next day they took me to see the doctor and it turned out that I had a very nasty

affection of the lungs. The doctor arranged for me to stay in a sanatorium in Zamberk, where, as I later found out, the only reason they accepted me was to give a doctor's daughter a decent place to die. I stayed in the sanatorium for two and a half years, until February 1948. I was then given an apartment in our old house and returned home.

After returning home, I decided that I should study because I hadn't even finished my elementary school education. First of all I went to English lessons and then I resumed my piano lessons. During the next year I started to prepare for entrance exams for high school, so I would have a proper education.

The professor friend of my father's became my guardian and gave me support. But he wasn't too keen when said that I wanted to continue with my studies. I was quite stubborn, though, so I managed to complete my high school education after many difficulties and got a place at the Arts Faculty of Charles University in Prague, where I studied German and Czech. I was given a full disability pension at the time.

It was during my studies that I met my future husband, Petr Liebl. He was born in Ceske Budejovice in 1935 and his parents were a mixed couple. Towards the end of the war his mom was incarcerated in Hagibor [6](#) and Terezin and his dad was sent to the Postoloprty labor camp. [7](#) Petr spent this time at his grandmother's on his father's side in Ceske Budejovice.

At the end of the war, Petr's father, together with another man who had also been at Postoloprty camp and also had a wife and daughter in Terezin, took a horse and cart and went to Terezin, where they dropped off their wives and left the day before the houses in the camp were quarantined.

Petr's mother was expecting a baby boy who was born immediately after the war. I knew Petr from what was said by our cousin Lilly, who I went to see after the war. Before I met him, I heard that he was interested in math and that he weighed little balls, which seemed odd to me. Then one day in summer someone rung the bell and Lilly said - hey, it's Petr Liebl here, shall I tell him to come up? So I said - yes, if you want to. I wasn't curious about him at all. Then he came and was completely different from what I had imagined.

We got married in October 1955. We lived in Prague - he was in a hall of residence while I was subletting. On Sundays we would go to Kutna Hora to see Fanyinka, who we then called aunt.

I gave birth to my daughter Rita in my fifth year of studies at the faculty. I then stayed at home and wrote my dissertation. We had little to live on, for all we had was our grant. When my grant finished, which was before my finals, I started looking for a job. I finally found a place at a high school in Caslav, where I taught German from 1956.

In the meantime, Petr finished his studies and got a job at the Mathematics Institute in Prague. I then had a second daughter, Zuzana, in 1959 and we tried to get an apartment in Prague. In the end, we joined a cooperative and bought a housing society apartment, which we moved into in 1961. In those days I thought that we would never be able to pay for it.

A year before that, Petr was offered a job in Dubna near Moscow, so we went there with our children. In the meantime, I got a place at a language school and promised that I would be back at the beginning of the school year. So I returned with my children in August 1961 and Petr came



back for Christmas.

In 1965 we went to Ghana, as the Mathematics Institute offered Petr a job teaching mathematics at the university there. We stayed for three beautiful years in Africa. I taught German there and, for a while, Russian. Our children did not go to school for the first year, as I taught them at home.

Zuzana went to the first grade, Rita to the fourth. We then moved to the university campus, and then they went to a school that was for university staff. We returned to Czechoslovakia in the summer of 1968. I was pregnant at the time. For the most part, I experienced the events of 1968 [Prague Spring] [8](#) in the maternity ward, giving birth to my son, Martin, in September.

We were a bit confused by the situation because we had been completely out of it in Ghana during that time, even though we had read Czech newspapers. We didn't really understand much of what was going on, and, thanks to Martin, I was mostly absorbed in my family.

In 1972 I moved to the 17th of November University, which was a college for foreign students, also with a translation and interpreting department for Czechoslovak students. The university was soon closed down, however, the department moving to the Arts Faculty.

During the holidays, we always went with our children to stay with Petr's parents in Ceske Budejovice. We never actually considered emigrating. We toyed with the idea of going to New Zealand, we had got this offer while teaching in Ghana, but in the end we returned home. I had an acquaintance in Israel, since a lot of people had emigrated there, but we didn't keep in touch.

My first trip to Israel was in 1993 with my husband, and I was back again in 2000 with my daughter. Rita got married and moved to Canada in 1987. Zuzana and Martin live in the Czech Republic.

The regime change in 1989 [9](#) was actually to be expected. Although I hadn't been persecuted by the regime, I'm glad that it happened, if only because we are at least free to travel abroad. I didn't come up against any specific case of anti-Semitism towards me after the war.

At present I am the chairperson of the Terezin Initiative. [10](#) As a Holocaust survivor, I go to various meetings that I am invited to. Recently, for example, I was in Hamburg, which was hosting a new exhibition on subsidiary camps, so I found myself in places that I had been during the war. I often attend talks in Terezin with students from the Czech Republic and Germany.

I also travel to Germany a lot, because the Friends of Terezin Association is based in Lower Saxony. For many years I also worked at the local branch of the Association of Freedom Fighters. I was also chairperson of the Commission of the Swiss Fund for Needy Holocaust Victims and am now on the Appeals Commission for slave and forced laborers within the framework of the Czech-German Future Fund.

I have never forgotten that I am Jewish. My children, too, have always known. It has always been taken for granted in our family. My children were not brought up in a Jewish way, because I myself had not actually had such an upbringing, but they are very interested in Jewishness.

#### • Glossaries:

## **1 Small Fortress (Mala pevnost) in Theresienstadt**

An infamous prison, used by two totalitarian regimes: Nazi Germany and communist Czechoslovakia. It was built in the 18th century as a part of a fortification system and almost from the beginning it was used as a prison. In 1940 the Gestapo took it over and kept mostly political prisoners there: members of various resistance movements.

Approximately 32,000 detainees were kept in Small Fortress during the Nazi occupation.

Communist Czechoslovakia continued using it as a political prison; after 1945 German civilians were confined there before they were expelled from the country.

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

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

## **3 Terezin/Theresienstadt**

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

Czech gendarmes served as ghetto guards, and with their help the Jews were able to maintain contact with the outside world. Although education was prohibited, regular classes were held, clandestinely. Thanks to the large number of artists, writers, and scholars in the ghetto, there was an intensive program of cultural activities.

At the end of 1943, when word spread of what was happening in the Nazi camps, the Germans decided to allow an International Red Cross investigation committee to visit Theresienstadt. In preparation, more prisoners were deported to Auschwitz, in order to reduce congestion in the ghetto. Dummy stores, a cafe, a bank, kindergartens, a school, and flower gardens were put up to deceive the committee.

## **4 Sokol**

One of the best-known Czech sports organizations. It was founded in 1862 as the first physical educational organization in the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy. Besides regular training of all age groups, units organized sports competitions, colorful gymnastics rallies, cultural events including drama, literature and music, excursions and youth camps.

Although its main goal had always been the promotion of national health and sports, Sokol also played a key role in the national resistance to the Austro-Hungarian Empire, the Nazi occupation and the communist regime. Sokol flourished between the two World Wars; its membership grew to over a million.

Important statesmen, including the first two presidents of interwar Czechoslovakia, Tomas Masaryk and Edvard Benes, were members of Sokol. Sokol was banned three times: during World War I, during the Nazi occupation and finally by the communists after 1948, but branches of the organization continued to exist abroad. Sokol was restored in 1990.

## **5 Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia**

Bohemia and Moravia were occupied by the Germans and transformed into a German Protectorate in March 1939, after Slovakia declared its independence. The Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia was placed under the supervision of the Reich protector, Konstantin von Neurath.

The Gestapo assumed police authority. Jews were dismissed from civil service and placed in an extralegal position. In the fall of 1941, the Reich adopted a more radical policy in the Protectorate. The Gestapo became very active in arrests and executions. The deportation of Jews to concentration camps was organized, and Terezin/Theresienstadt was turned into a ghetto for Jewish families.

During the existence of the Protectorate the Jewish population of Bohemia and Moravia was virtually annihilated. After World War II the pre-1938 boundaries were restored, and most of the German-speaking population was expelled.

## **6 Hagibor**

## **7 Postoloprty**

## **8 Prague Spring**

The term Prague Spring designates the liberalization period in communist-ruled Czechoslovakia between 1967- 1969. In 1967 Alexander Dubcek became the head of the Czech Communist Party and promoted ideas of 'socialism with a human face', i.e. with more personal freedom and freedom of the press, and the rehabilitation of victims of Stalinism.

In August 1968 Soviet troops, along with contingents from Poland, East Germany, Hungary and Bulgaria, occupied Prague and put an end to the reforms.

## **9 Velvet Revolution**

Also known as November Events, this term is used for the period between 17th November and 29th December 1989, which resulted in the downfall of the Czechoslovak communist regime. The Velvet Revolution started with student demonstrations, commemorating the 50th anniversary of the student demonstration against the Nazi occupation of Czechoslovakia. Brutal police intervention stirred up public unrest, mass demonstrations took place in Prague, Bratislava and other towns, and a general strike began on 27th November.

The Civic Forum demanded the resignation of the communist government. Due to the general strike Prime Minister Ladislav Adamec was finally forced to hold talks with the Civic Forum and agreed to form a new coalition government. On 29th December democratic elections were held, and Vaclav Havel was elected President of Czechoslovakia.

## **10 Terezin Initiative Foundation (Nadace Terezinska iniciativa)**

Founded in 1993 by the International Association of Former Prisoners of the Terezin/Theresienstadt Ghetto, it is a special institute devoted to the scientific research on the history of Terezin and of the 'Final Solution' of the Jewish question in the Czech lands. At the end of 1998 it was renamed to Terezin Initiative Institute (Institut Terezinske iniciativy).