



Czechoslovak Political Prisoners

This book introduces ten victims of Stalinism who survived their own death. Political persecution changed the lives of individuals, families, and perhaps whole generations in many countries. Here we deal with the 1950s in former Czechoslovakia. Young Czech authors, both doctoral candidates from Charles University in Prague, introduce five memoirs of labor in Stalinist prisons and uranium camps, but also illustrate how active citizenship, patriotism, and civil resistance of the youth were rewarded in the Soviet times. They show the everyday life behind the Iron Curtain where sudden captivity for ideological reasons was a daily bread. All the narratives were recorded in 2007–2008 using the method of oral history interview. The authors believe they can be used as an educational tool for today's youth. Witnesses of the past eighty years describe in them what they had gone through in a very frank way. What and how are they telling us has one major aim: to share the secrets of those who were meant to be forgotten.

See also: www.politicalprisoners.eu



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Life Stories
of 5 Male and 5 Female
Victims of Stalinism

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Tomáš Bouška, Klára Pinerová:

Czechoslovak Political Prisoners. Life Stories of 5 Male and 5 Female Victims of Stalinism.

www.politicalprisoners.eu

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Preface

This book is part of a larger project targeted at commemorating the victims of Stalinism. We, the young volunteers from the Czech Republic, are introducing life stories of former political prisoners as an educational tool for youth and wider public. Lives of political prisoners persecuted in 1950s, then young people themselves, seem hardly believable today. It is the very subject of our interest, the narrators and their personal beliefs, strengths and hopes that underline the times when Europe was split into two ideological blocs. It is their stories that question the basic values we take for granted nowadays. It is their voices that will commemorate the victims of Stalinism.

We do not mean to rewrite history by this book. In today's world nothing is older than yesterday's newspaper. Life is fast and even faster is the information all around us. In order to achieve an effective and efficient distribution of the results of this project a combination of communication tools is used. We publish our work on our website, in a book publication, and during youth conferences and workshops. Our intention is to stress an interdisciplinary approach where interpretations of the past can be studied from the perspectives of history, sociology, penology, political science, anthropology, psychology, and many others.

Male and female memories of political oppression in former Czechoslovakia offer a complex interpretation of the recent past. Individual histories are something we do not have to believe in. However, we can try to imagine how it felt. To be a young captive sentenced for crimes against the Czechoslovak regime. Crimes which usually did not contain any criminal activity at all. Victims of political brutality became the worst enemies of state. They were not allowed to live a free life, to study, travel, or see their families. They were sent to prisons and forced-labor camps instead. What is seen beyond possible today was a daily bread then.

What is more, the men and women who survived and started new lives after release were meant to be forgotten. Their persecution went on. They had to find manual jobs only, their children were put aside from the official education system. As former political prisoners they refused to support Communist government and leading institutions and they had to pay for it.

They did pay indeed. They lived a bound life full of stigmas. The political pressure about their anti-communist belief did not stop until 1989. Finally, when most of them were in their twilight years, they were free. Luckily, they agreed to share their memories with us. Some of their slavers are still alive. Some of the "modern slaves" too. What do we know about them? Do we want to know? The answer is up to everyone of us. But we, the authors, want to voice the life stories of those who would probably never be heard again. It is not the solution but it may help us in finding the right answer.

Life story interviews and biographical narratives started to be popular in Central Europe after the fall of Communism. Even this book has been prepared using the modern approach of oral history. Yet not all the experts studying recent history are familiar with these methods, some even refuse them strictly in the Czech Republic. This is why we would like to contribute to the debate and offer empirical examples how fruitful oral histories can be. We do not argue that

spoken memories equal historical sources like standard historical annals, chronicles, and other records (that are equally subjective). What we believe in is they are equally valuable sources of historical and perhaps even general knowledge. Individual histories should contribute to the descriptions of the past especially there, where official historical records fail. Such information can only enrich the well known facts. After all, history was at first oral and all the knowledge was spread by a spoken language. It is our task to put down the words of those who "were there." If not for us then for generations after us as it seems obvious that such stories can teach us more than many textbooks.

It was not always easy to explain to the narrators there is a sense behind all the recording, transcribing and editing.

As a result we gathered ten examples of the "little history" of former Czechoslovakia in this book in 2008. We provide you, our readers, with stories dealing with "big history," but using one's own words and delivering personal explanations and interpretations of what has happened, what has been seen and lived through. We do it at dawn of electronic technologies which offer fast and precise information and data on-line. Reading books may seem old fashioned and unpractical especially from the point of view of today's youth. However, we are aware of it and our aims go further than that. We do not want to fall back "just" with conventional books. This is why we created a website dedicated not only to former Czechoslovak political prisoners, but to all who were once politically oppressed. We wish to give the floor to all who feel they belong to the huge family of political prisoners in the world.

Last but not least, it is important to thank at this place to all who assisted in making this dream come true. This book would never be born without the kind help of Kamila Nováková and Justin A. Osswald who translated it in English from the Czech original. Many volunteers including Marcela Kubíčková, Michal Louč, Berta Štěpánová and many others contributed to the existence of our initiative with great enthusiasm. The Czech non-profit organization ANO pro Evropu (YES for Europe) gave us the auspices for running a project supported by the Education, Audiovisual & Culture Executive Agency of the European Commission. Some of the necessary costs related to publishing this book were covered by this project. Another important partner to be mentioned is the Czech Oral History Association and mainly its President, Mirek Vaněk, who kindly supported our work with great understanding. Special thanks goes to Ondřej Kafka, head of Kafka Design studio, and Jana Petřelová, graphic designer, who gave this book its visual identity.

However, the biggest gratitude shall be expressed to the heroes of this book. The ten former political prisoners introduced in this book are the most precious result of this project. Their stories are the peak of an ice-berg of victims of political oppression in the sea of oblivion. Unfortunately, one of the narrators, Mr. Jozef Kycka, will not be able to read this book anymore as he passed away before it was published. It is for the memory of people like him, respected wise men and women, why we run initiatives like politicalprisoners.eu Therefore, we wish to dedicate this book to all the political prisoners who are unable to read it anymore.

*The authors.
Prague, Christmas 2008*

Historical Overview

Postwar Development of Czechoslovakia

The development of the Czechoslovakian society in the postwar was an important historical break in its story. The relations in Europe changed since the European political field got two new great powers, the Soviet Union and the United States of America. They fought together to knock down Nazi Germany. After the victory, the interests of these two countries were increasingly different until they divided into two antagonistic blocks. Czechoslovakia was attempting to become, "A bridge between East and West." That means it would be a country that would connect both blocks and would maintain good relations with both, whether in economical, political, or a cultural way. That did not happen though and the years from 1945–1948 Czechoslovakia was inclining more to the Soviet Union.

The end of WWII meant for this country great changes in the political, economic, and social sphere. The most expressive change was in the population structure because the German inhabitants were displaced from the Czechoslovakian border area. This dramatically ended the co-existence of German-Czech relations, which had existed since the German colonization in the Middle Ages. The irreconcilable German attitude and longing for reward after the war arose was evident in the first part of the displacement when there were many cases of violence, inhumanity, and humiliation. The organized displacement started January 1, 1946 when the great powers gave their consent to it at the Potsdam Conference, which took place on August 2, 1945. In this way, Czechoslovakia lost more than 2.5 million German inhabitants¹, which also contributed to a huge economic problem in the border areas since the new inhabitants never filled such numbers. The population was lower in the border areas and people there were not that skilled in cultural, moral, and economic ways to fully replace the old population.

The Czechoslovakian government also tried to displace the Hungarian population living mainly in southern Slovakia. This displacement was not successful though, because it was not supported internationally.

Another consequence that was brought by the end of the war was the pursuit and punishment of those who were cooperating with the Nazi powers. As well as the leaders of Nazi Germany who faced the Nuremberg Trials in 1945 also some Czechoslovakians were to be punished for their crimes. Here it happened on the basis of vindictive decrees number 16. The members of the protectorate government were judged by the newly established National Court and these processes were a big political precedent and the judges' independence was affected.

¹ Not only were Germans supposed to disappear, but also the names that people could remember them by. The circular of the Ministry of Internal Affairs from August 10, 1945, "*The regeneration of the constitutional aspects and new legal position of Germans in Bohemian and Moravian territory requires the renaming of streets and public places. The Ministry of Internal Affairs requires (...) so that all names would be dispatched (...) reminding of the time of a lack of freedom, Nazism and its representatives, as well as any Germanization and German culture. The old names will therefore be replaced with new ones, better names.*" Old names that had nothing to do with Nazism were also dispatched. For example in Plzeň they renamed the Saxon bridge to Roosevelt's bridge or the "Empire outskirts" was renamed to Southern although these names were given during the Era of Monarchy and had nothing to do with Nazi Germany.

The collaborators who were not that high in society and other people who cooperated with the Nazi power were judged by the extraordinary people's court. In total 33,000 people were sentenced.

The postwar rise of the left and the transformation of the country.

With the end of WWII the political situation in Czechoslovakia changed and turned dramatically to the left. Of course this was a worldwide effect and similar tendencies for example were seen in Italy and France. After the war the prewar political parties on the right were prohibited. In Czechoslovakia this meant the end of the Czech Agrarian Party and the Slovakian People's Party. The prohibition of these two was explained with words that these two parties, "Strongly overstepped the interests of the country."² A new block was established under the name National Front and it formed the national political scene. There were four Czech parties: the Communist Czechoslovakian Party, the Czechoslovakian People's Party, the Czech National Social Party, and the Czech Social Democratic Party. There were also two Slovak parties: the Democratic Party and the Communist Party of Slovakia. The time between 1945-1948 is called delimited democracy because there was no opposition against the National Front, although this party was forming the state politics, influencing the main problems, and business issues of the country. Its decisions were accepted with complete consent and was obligatory for government, parliament, and others in public service. The special position in government had its presidium: a chairman and five deputies, who were representing the other political parties. These six people were deciding on all the important questions and they were holding an unusual amount of power this way.

The strongest interference into the state economy was the nationalization³ of industry, mines, and financial institutions whereby Czechoslovakia was on its way towards socialization. The nationalization happened in other countries too, but its reach was not as extensive and it was done for the purpose of propping up certain major industries that were suffering as a result of the war. The governments in other countries deviated towards nationalization with compensation and they were counting on the fact that the organization will be ready for denationalization later. Czechoslovakian denationalization was distinguished with its huge extension. Its main bearers were two political powers: the Social Democratic Party and the Communist Party. The other parties finally agreed on everything, but there were disputes about its reach. The demands of the Communists and the Social Democrats seemed to high to the other

² **The Republican party of agriculture and farming**, in short the Agrarian party. During the Second Czechoslovakian Republic it was a main part of a Party for national unity. It was often upbraided for collaboration during WWII. However, many of its representatives joined the rebellions abroad and had no sympathy towards Nazi occupants. As it was already mentioned, the representatives of the protectorate government were sentenced after the war to imprisonment.

Hlinka's Slovakian People's party was a Slovakian right political party, which existed in the first half of the 20th century. Its original aim was the autonomy of Slovakia, but gradually an authoritative and fascist tendency grew in it. It was a leading party of the newly established "Slovak Republic" on March 14, 1939. The main ideas this party proclaimed were: catholic clergy, nationalistic intelligentsia, and a Christian and nationalistic thinking nation.

³ Nationalization is mentioned in an interview with Pavel Levý who said, "*My father lost his business quickly. First it was stated that businessman will gather in cooperatives, but finally everything was nationalized in 1949. The business was taken over by a company called Mototechna and then by Domáci potřeby and my dad was kept there as the manager. The typical way they did it was taking his business over with unpaid invoices. He had to pay those. My father did not have much stuff, but if one bought new machines he had to pay them off for a long time then. This happened to my colleague from work whose parents had a mill and they had to pay off the machines for the rest of their lives. Then there was a financial reform and all money lost its validity 1:50 and debts dropped on 1:5. It was a thievish regime.*"

political parties and especially to President Edvard Beneš⁴, but they all finally conceded. For the nationalized organization the compensation was supposed to be paid, but that never happened. In the end, more than 60 % of the industrial production was nationalized.

The next big change in the possessive relations was the agrarian reform. That meant the confiscation of land from Germans, Hungarians, collaborators, and enemies of the state whose land was given back to people who did not have any land and to small farmers. All though this was mainly land located in the Czechoslovakian border area there were also changes happening in the interior⁵. The reform dispatched large private estates and the face of the village changed because the socially weaker population left. This agrarian reform was done mainly by the Communist Party, which received a lot of future votes as a result.

The successful elections of the Communist Party

The first postwar elections in Czechoslovakia took place May 26, 1946 and for a long time these were the last democratic parliamentary elections. In the Czech lands four different parties were campaigning: Communist, Social Democratic, National Social, and the People's Party. In Slovakia there were two possible winners, the Democrats or the Communists, but just before the elections two more parties were established which were the Party of Freedom and the Labor Party. The voters who did not agree with the present regime and existing parties had the chance to express it with the so-called, "white ballots." It was expected that these ballots would be used by the supporters of the prohibited parties. The Communists came up with this idea of the white ballots and other parties thought it was a trick and originally did not agree with this suggestion. The Communist Party was bringing many mottos and slogans to the campaign, but most of them were just varieties of one theme, "More work for the country, that's our issue." It also proclaimed that it would work, without benefit to themselves, on construction and farming. The economic effect of this activity was not big, but it brought them powerful political power. The Communist Party got over 40 % of the total vote and for the first time in the history of Czechoslovakian it got into the government. It was benefiting mainly from the postwar attitudes and expectations and its ideas spread mainly between the middle class and rural folk. It mainly got the votes of the already mentioned Agrarian Party, which was not renewed. The day after the elections, Monday May 27, the newspaper, "Rudé Právo"⁶ came up with banner headlines, "*Communists as a Leading Power of the Nation – No political party ever had so much support before – In the most democratic elections the population proved and extended the Communist mandate – The nation is happy – Only a few people used the white ballots against the People's Democratic Regime and against the National Front.*"

President Beneš was again elected unanimously to be the head of state and on July 2, 1946 he named the new government, which was represented by the Communist Prime Minister, Klement Gottwald. The government put in its program a new constitution and a two-year economic plan, so that within two years the postwar damaged economy would be renewed.

⁴ **Edvard Beneš** – Edward Beneš was the second President after T.G. Masaryk from 1935 to 1938. He was also a President in exile in 1940–1945 and the President of Czechoslovakia after the War (1945–1948). Together with T.G. Masaryk and M. R. Štefánik, he took part in the resistance movement during WW I and he is one of the founders of Czechoslovakia. After the WWII his position of President was confirmed and he was newly elected on June 19, 1946. He was one of the leaders of the 1st resistance group and the head of the 2nd resistance group.

⁵ **Collectivization** took place in Czechoslovakia during the 1950's. As a result the major part of agricultural land was centered into JZD – Unified Cooperative Farms. This process was not without violence and threats.

⁶ **Rudé právo** – (in English „Red right“) before 1989 a daily newspaper of the Communist Party.

The government in crisis and the Communist power taking over

The main change for the newly growing Eastern Bloc was in 1947. In this year the relations among the Great Powers became tenser and Communists were openly and secretly getting ready to take over. The good picture of this was, "The story of accepting and refusing the Marshall Plan" in July 1947. The U.S.A. decided to support European Democracy and Economies. In June 1947 the Secretary of State, George C. Marshall, introduced the new plan for economic help to countries destroyed from war. Czechoslovakia also wanted to participate because it could foresee the great and fast regeneration of the economy. So it accepted the program's invitation to Paris. The Soviet Union refused to participate in this plan and that meant that the Czechoslovakian foreign policies were standing against the policies of the Soviet Union. The decisions in participating determined the country's development for many years and decided on which side the country will ally itself with. On July 9 the Czechoslovakian delegation, composed of Klement Gottwald, Foreign Minister Jan Masaryk, Minister of Justice Prokop Drtina, Secretary to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Arnošt Heidrich, Chief of Staff to the Prime Minister Reiman, and the Ambassador Borek left. On the same day at 11pm they were accepted at Stalin's office. This night ended with the Kremlin's ultimatum. If Czechoslovakia does not call off its agreement with the Marshall Plan by July 10, at 4 p.m. there will be serious consequences between the relations for both countries. One thing was Stalin threatening with ultimatums, but the final decision was decided by the Czechoslovakian government. A special meeting was called right in the early morning on July 10. After a long procedure the Czechoslovakian government called off the invitation to Paris. Jan Masaryk, the son of the first Czechoslovakian President, Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk, commented after returning from Moscow, "To Moscow I left as a Czechoslovakian Minister, but I came back as Stalin's plowboy." Accepting Stalin's ultimatum, Czechoslovakia came under the power of Moscow and it was just a matter of time when the last remains of democratic principles would be taken away and when the country would fall under the dictation of the "Proletariat."

In the fight for power the Communist Party used the secret state police as its main support. This secret state police was under the control of the Communist Party. On February 17, 1948 the government crisis started in Czechoslovakia. The big meeting of government started in the morning. The main point of the program was a report from the Minister of Justice. This report was connected with government's resolution that was given out on February 13 and gave commands to the Communist Minister of Internal Affairs to stop the personnel changes in state police. It was connected with eight non-Communist officers who were supposed to be transferred to other positions. This government resolution was not fulfilled and so the Ministers of three non-Communist parties: National Social Party, People's Party, and the Democratic Party decided to resign. They were relying on the fact that they would be supported by another party, the Social Democrats and also by the President, who could refuse their resignation or rename a caretaker government. However, the Communists used other instruments, the whole party "mobilized" and started to strongly influence the public. So one part of the population was threatened and the other part was supporting its politics. The whole crisis then started to snowball, after one week everything was settled. The Communist party became the leading political power in Czechoslovakia.

During this big week in February new powerful organs started to establish themselves and they were called the Action Committees of the National Front. Their members were mainly Communist and they were destroying the positions of their political rivals. In factories the Peo-

ple's Militia was established: these were armed units, which were not supposed to have a place in democratic systems. These units were right under the direct command of the Communist Party and its main commander was the General Secretary of the Party. Their munitions were stored right in the industrial organizations. The one-hour general strike to support Gottwald happened on February 24. The Prime Minister Gottwald, with his cabinet, refused to resign. Two Social Democrats and two independent Ministers named Jan Masaryk⁷ and Ludvík Svoboda⁸ stayed. Gottwald offered to President Beneš that he would fill the missing positions in his cabinet with members of other parties whose Ministers resigned recently. President Beneš did not have a clue though, that the Communists had their fellows in these parties as well. Three parties on the left were relying on the final word of the President to solve this government crisis. However, President Beneš gave in to the suggestion of Gottwald. Right after the Presidential signature, Klement Gottwald came to Wenceslas Square where he presented on a stage to thousands of supporters and said, *"I am just coming back from the castle, from the President of the state. This morning I gave him the suggestions to accept the resignations of several Ministers who resigned February 20 and at the same time I also recommended to him a list of people who should replace them and help reconstruct the government. I can tell you that the President accepted all of my suggestions exactly the way they were put to him."* During this February revolution the Communist Party opened its way to the full control of the state⁹.

The chasing and locking up of political protestors now started. Many of the soldiers who fought in the West, politicians, priests, nuns, businessmen, but also farmers and workers were disappearing behind the gates of prisons and working camps. With internment they were also punishing people without due process. Many thousands of men and women were forced to work in forced labor camps for years without charging them with a crime. To get into the forced labor camp one did not have to commit a crime, suspicion was reason enough to send one preventively into the forced labor camp. Some of the reasons people were put into the camps include, *"...having contacts abroad, his sister is Austrian, doesn't have a positive attitude toward the regime, listening to the foreign radio, didn't agree to nationalization, was spreading false messages, owned a luxurious residence, in touch with stockholders, he is a gambler, he is avoiding work, wife was against nationalization, ..."* Any one could be sent to the forced labor camps between 18 and 60 years for a time of 3 months up to 2 years. Many Communists in function used this as retaliation not just against their political enemies, but other people as well.

Searching for the enemy, political processes in Czechoslovakia

As of 1948 the big wheel of various political processes started spinning. These were also called, "Monster Trials," and they were with political elites, clergymen, but also with party

⁷ **Jan Masaryk** (1886–1948) was a son of the first Czechoslovakian President Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk. In 1925–1938 he was an Ambassador in England, he was a Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Government in exile. After the war he had the same position. He died on March 10, 1948 of strained circumstances. There are three theories about his death – it was a murder (he was thrown out of a window), he committed suicide (he jumped out of a window) or the third version is that he was escaping from his apartment (where enemies were at that moment) and he was climbing on the window sill and fell down.

⁸ **Ludvík Svoboda** (1895–1979) was an army general, in 1945 he was a Minister of Defense as an independent and in 1968 he was elected as the Czechoslovakian President.

⁹ There are **various opinions** on the situation in February 1948. One says it was just a formal finish to a longterm process that was directed from the U.S.S.R. that started already during WWII, continuing in the years 1945–1947. The Government crisis was just a catalyst that made things quicker. Results would happen anyways.

functionaries. These trials were mainly run by the State secret police. They prepared the trials very well, in many cases they were preparing them, constructing the charge, forcing the victims with physical and psychological violence, pushing them this way to memorize the scenario of the trial. The accusations were supposed to be very big because the punishments to fit the crime were to be very severe. This way, the Communist regime was strengthened and the other purpose was to threaten the Czechoslovakian population. The Soviet consultants were taking part in the biggest trials, making them up, and giving advice to the investigators on how they should obtain the confession. Besides this, they were also providing psychological help. They legitimized the violent actions of the investigators and if there were some doubts towards the political trials and the tactics used, then they told them that the Soviet Consultants had extra secret information. Since Czechoslovakian investigators did not have this information, these steps could have seemed excessive. One of the main investigators who worked on the big trials wrote in his memoirs, *"I remember one chat with a guy from the people's militia named Mr. Bruha, who told me shortly after his entrance into the secret police, 'You know, if there weren't these consultants I wouldn't believe anything and I would think we're doing some pretty dirty business, but this way it's different. Those people know what they are doing.'"*¹⁰

The main wave of the political trials took five years. The national court, which was established for these purposes gave out 232 death penalties out of which 178 were executed. This number is the highest number of executions of European countries gathered in the Soviet Bloc. One of the biggest trials was the one with General Heliodor Píka¹¹, who worked in one of the foreign partisan groups during WWII. In January 1949 he was sentenced to death and was executed.¹² By the way, General Heliodor Píka used to be a schoolmate of the French President De Gaulle. When he was executed a whole day of national sorrow was observed in France.

The whole world was paying attention to the trial of the ex-National Socialist politician Milada Horáková¹³ in June 1950. There were another twelve politicians, publishers, and public officers involved in that. The prep time for the trial was coordinated by Soviet Consultants, who among others established special preparation for the accused. The accused people had to learn and memorize their speeches for the court over and over again. The way the processes looked and that everything was decided before the trial are illustrated in words of Antonie Kleinerová, who was one of the thirteen accused in Horáková's process, *"Šváb was present at my hearing three times. During each visit he smashed my face until it would bleed. At the last meeting he yelled at me, 'If you confess or not, that doesn't matter. We have sentences for you anyways...'"*

¹⁰ *StB o sobě: výpověď vyšetřovatele Bohumila Doubka*. Připravil Karel Kaplan. Praha: Úřad dokumentace a vyšetřování zločinů komunismu PR, 2002, s. 61 an.

¹¹ General **Heliodor Píka** (1887–1949) was a Czechoslovakian soldier and legionnaire. During WWII he formed an army unit out of Czechoslovakian soldiers in Soviet camps. In May 1945 he returned to Prague where he was named the Deputy of the Chief of General Staff of Czechoslovakian Army. After February 1948 he was arrested and executed. In 1968 his process was renewed and fully rehabilitated.

¹² Historians are convinced today that Communists executed General Heliodor Píka because he had all the Soviet concentration camps monitored since he was a chief of the Czechoslovakian Million Army in Moscow. Plus he knew what inhuman things were done there. *In Process s Heliodorem Píkou. První poúnarová justiční vražda*. In http://www.totalita.cz/proc/proc_pikah.php. Last observed on November 3, 2008.

¹³ **JUDr. Milada Horáková** was a Czech politician. During WWII she was arrested and brutally interrogated by Gestapo. She was sentenced to death and then this was changed to life imprisonment. The rest of the war she spent in the concentration camp in Terezín. After the war she joined the National Socialist party. In 1949 she was arrested, sentenced in the communist political processes to death. She was fully rehabilitated in 1968.

The whole trial was effected by communist propaganda. In factories, offices, and even schools where people got tickets to enter the courtroom, working people were taken there by buses.¹⁴ The trial was extraordinary also for its public acceptance. After the first three days the court was swamped with appeals from factories, offices, and towns. All of them demanded cruel punishment and most of them for the death penalty. Similar appeals had been even voted on by pupils at some primary schools. The whole thing went so far that the accused peoples' kids were forced to disown their own parents¹⁵.

Although the process was prepared in detail, its continuance sometimes got out of the hands of organizers and the accused worked to defend themselves at court, trying to disprove some accusations. The whole trial lasted for nine days. Each day, after the court was over, people from the secret police were meeting members of government, evaluating the run of the day. The whole process ended with 4 death penalties and none of the protests from abroad helped avert the executions.¹⁶

Another group of people who often got high sentences were clergy and catholic intellectuals. The Catholic Church was gradually becoming an object for persecution since the spring of 1949. In December 1949, an alleged miracle happened in a small village named Čihošť in Eastern Bohemia. During the mass, given by priest Josef Toufar, a half-meter-long cross (19 inches), placed on the great altar, moved a couple times from side to side. This event was recorded in the history of the country as the "Čihošť miracle." The secret police locked up pastor Toufar in January 1950. During the process they started with him, he was supposed to "confess" that he staged the cross's movement. He was tortured and as a result of the torture he died on February 25, 1950.

Right after this event, another process started that consisted of members of male monastic orders. Among the representatives was the Abbot of Želiva Monastery – Vít Tajovský. On April 4, 1950 the state court had a trial with ten men accused of disrupting the state. Final sentences ranged from 2 years of imprisonment to life. National Defense Corps and peoples' militias unexpectedly occupied male monasteries at night from April 13 to 14, 1950. This campaign was known as "Action K." 219 religious houses were liquidated and 2376 monks jailed. A similar destiny was then waiting for the nuns of the country.

The universities and colleges, where future Czechoslovakian intelligence was growing-up, were not left out from pursuit either. On March 4, 1948 a meeting of teachers and professors was held at the Faculty of Arts and Philosophy at Charles University. So-called "reactive" teachers and students were suspended. The only person who stood up against that decision was the art historian professor Růžena Vacková.¹⁷ She paid for her courage and ended up in prison for fifteen years.

¹⁴ This "theater" with monster processes is remembered also by Josef Čech, "Here in Pardubice they ran the monster processes in the Grand hotel. That does not exist any more, but it was the biggest hall in the town for 400 or 500 people. They were giving us tickets to that. People used to go to watch the processes and they were so fanatic that they would really see criminals in those victims. There were for example businessmen who just hid their fabrics and were later detected as "fat cats" who wanted to earn during a crisis. They paid for the fabric and they were just saving it for a better moment to sell it!"

¹⁵ The stories of children whose parents were arrested can be found at <http://www.enemysdaughters.com/>

¹⁶ Many smaller processes started all over the country after this one. In 35 processes 639 people were sentenced, 10 people to the death penalty and 48 were sentenced to life.

¹⁷ **Růžena Vacková** (1901–1982) – a professor of classical archeology, the estetician and kunsthistorician. She studied archeology at the Faculty of Arts at Charles University in Prague. During WWII she participated in illegal activities. In 1947 she was named an adjunct professor of the university. In February 1948 she was the only professor taking part in the anti-Communism demonstrations of students, in the first term of the academic year 1950–51 she could not teach, February 22, 1952 she was arrested and sentenced to 22 years in prison. She was released in spring 1967 and in 1969 she was fully rehabilitated, in 1971 she was derehabilitated. In January 1977 she was one of the first to sign the statement of Charter 77. October 28, 1992 she was posthumously honoured with the Decoration of Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk.

Political processes were launched against all sections of society and did not miss even the main representatives of the Communist Party. From 1950 the State secret police concentrated on "Searching for the enemy even among its own." The leading communist investigated was the General Secretary of the Communist Party Rudolf Slánský¹⁸. His process was nothing special in the Eastern Communist block. Similar processes were run in other countries as well. In Hungary the Foreign Minister Laszlo Rajko was sentenced, in Bulgaria it was Trajčo Kostov, in Poland Wladyslaw Gomulka. After months of physical force and never ending trials, all of the accused people in the process with Slánský got together at the courthouse in Pankrác. The trial took place from November 20th – 27th, 1952. All of the accused had to memorize their testimonies, which were written by investigators. All of them had to rehearse a couple of times before the main trial. The process was strongly supported throughout the whole country, more than 8500 people openly supported the sentences, out of which a majority voted for the death penalty.

There were fourteen people on trial, besides General Secretary Slánský there were also Vladimír Clementis, the Foreign Minister Artur London¹⁹, the Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs and Karel Šváb, the Deputy Secretary of the Interior. All these people stood high in the communist hierarchy. Finally, eleven death penalties were passed and all sentences were executed on November 3rd in the morning hours at Pankrác prison. Ashes of the condemned were scattered by members of the secret police on a road near Prague.

Methods and techniques of State secret police investigations

"You are arrested" were the words that changed lives of tens of thousands of people. The words meant a complete turning point in their lives. After these words one fell into another world all of a sudden and was interrogated by the secret police (StB). Trials and interrogations hardly ever took place without psychological and physical violence and terror²⁰. Using cruel methods was indirectly recommended at meetings and for the training of investigators. It even became a part of the criteria for their work evaluation. Investigators who were not meeting the required effects and did not use enough violence or did not use it with enough power, were considered weak and incapable.

Why were these cruel and inhuman methods, with psychological compulsion and physical violence used, explains the before-mentioned inspector Bohumil Doubek this way, *"Since we had no convincing evidence or testimony, Karel Košťál²¹ and I were told, that a sophisticated enemy and experienced spy does not leave any material or proof and we have to push him to confession. We were also told that these kinds of people are very obstinate and we cannot give them time to get ready for trials. The consultants were emphasizing the need to tire the person's nerves out, make him sure that he has no chance to be saved and point out that confession can give him at least some kind of advantage."*²²

¹⁸ Rudolf Slánský (1901–1952) – Czech communist politician, member of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia and General Secretary of the party (1945–1951).

¹⁹ Artur London wrote his memories on the time of investigating a book *Doznání (Admission)*.

²⁰ Jindřich Veselý (the investigator) said, *"Doctor, have you ever been kicked by a horse? Then he punched me so hard that I had to go up about three meters high in the air. After that, I don't know how, but they burned my palms. My whole palms were burned except the place in the middle and all the burns turned to blisters. I also had a cut on my cheek, which already disappeared. After sometime a bump appeared right behind my ear, which was full of blood and pus. From that time I couldn't hear from that ear."* (see the interview with Dr. Jan Pospíšil).

²¹ Karel Košťál – secret police investigator and the General Secretary to the Minister of Internal Affairs.

²² KAPLAN, Karel. *Nebezpečná bezpečnost. (Dangerous security)*. Brno: Doplněk, 1999, s. 239.

The incarcerated were beaten in various ways, they suffered from sleep deprivation, they were forced to walk in their cells back and forth, often they did not get any food, they were brought low, and threatened that their wives, children, or friends would be arrested as well. However, there were also other, drastic methods of interrogations, from tying, hanging up, hitting the sensitive parts of body, to using electricity and faking executions²³. Josef Kycka remembers this experience very well, *"They came up to me. You know, I didn't wash there for three months, just wiping with a piece of cloth, you couldn't comb your hair. My hair was getting long, all glued together with oil...so they came to ask me whether I would like to take a bath. So I went. They twisted a towel around my head, leading me to the bathroom. There was a beautiful bathtub with clean, warm water. I couldn't wait, took my clothes off quickly, got inside and all of a sudden it started to move. I cannot describe this well. My eyes were blinking, mouth was moving, arms and legs everywhere...I fell out of the bathtub, in each joint there was so much pain. They sent electricity into the tub. So I was washed for a long time this way."*

Women were not spared from this inhuman treatment. Julie Hrušková remembers one interrogation, *"I went through one extremely hard interrogation when they hit my head against the table, slid me around, pushed my body towards the closet, anything that came up in their minds. I tried not to fall down. Finally a telephone saved me because they had to get to another arrest. The guard took me to Orlí, where they put me into solitary confinement. In the early hours of morning I found out I was bleeding. I called for a doctor, but the secret police officers had no time to take me to the hospital like the prison doctor ordered them to do. I was pregnant by my American soldier. I was already in the third month and I aborted. They let me bleed for three days until total exhaustion set in. The whole ward of prison was rebelling, demanding someone help me. Finally one old guard helped me and on his own risk he transported me to the hospital in Brno. There they saved my life, but the child was dead."* The same story we can get from the investigation report of Vlasta Charvátova, who had such a brutal hearing that it led to the loss of her baby, *"I had to get naked and without a mattress and blankets I was kept for another ten days... After I was put into a dark room and I found out I was bleeding badly so I told this to Pešek, who was the investigator and also the woman who was guarding me. I mentioned I was afraid of aborting my baby. I asked both of them for a doctor, but Pešek just answered that it would be better off if another beast like me would never be brought into the world."*

Physical violence was one of the most common ways people were pushed into confession or at least to say something at all whether it was true or not. Some people also went through the Gestapo hearings of WWII and some commented this way, *"The Fascist torturer wanted to tear out the truth from you, the Communists in this country wanted the lie."* Bringing a person down was also another widely used method. These methods were also crossing the bounds of human logic and that can be illustrated in the words of Ladislav Holdoš, *"In the morning some-*

²³ How the interrogations were run and what was happening during the investigation we can picture thanks to the report from a complaint of Dr. Horňanský who complained about practices in prison in Uherské Hradiště in South Moravia, *"He said (the suspected), was assaulted with fists to his head so that he bled out of his nose. He was put his face down, beat with rubber truncheons, mainly on the chest, lower back, buttocks, and legs. He was mainly hit to his feet where blister bruises appeared afterwards. He was forced to do knee bends and in case he fell he was kicked. Then the electricity was used during the investigation process, the electrodes were put into his shoes... After the hearing he was put onto a metal bed and each arm was tied to the bars of the headboard."*

thing terrible happened. The door opened and into the pigsty came a guard with a tub full of shit. He was telling me to wash myself, I refused, showing him the water in the tub wasn't clean. The guard was ordering me though, to wash myself! Again I didn't want to do it. So he grabbed my neck and put my head into the tub and I started to fling about... No where (in any other prison that Mr. Holdoš went through) did they every degrade us like they did in this one instant."

The investigators found another way to persuade Communists who were also victims and involved in the process with Rudolf Slánský. Those were the people who most trusted Communism and its ideas until the very final moment they thought it was either a mistake or that with their confession they were helping the Communist party. Ladislav Holdoš, who was persuaded or passionately communist described this tactic this way, *"In October 1951 I started to "plead" again. The party wants that, so I will do it. There was Doubek, the boss of the investigators and he was present during one of my interrogations. Throttling me and yelling that I would confess something that I had never dreamed about... Doubek said, "You are on one side of the river, the party is on the other. If you want to help it, you will have to jump into the cold water, swim across, confess your guilt as well as the others. Then everything will be alright."* The methods of investigating had just one aim, to destroy the suspects' morality, to undermine their dignity, and force them to into confession. To confess was very important to investigators because that was the base under which the whole process was built. From their point of view, it was necessary to make the accused person speak. It was not important whether he said the truth or a lie, more important was whether it suited the direction of the investigation. At the end of the investigation there was a trial, which was a comedy though, because the sentences were already prepared. In any case, none of the sentences were short. Most of the time the punishments were longer then ten years. When such a sentence was decided, many people felt relief because in many cases there was a possibility that they could have had a worse sentence, the death penalty.²⁴

Prisons and working camps in Czechoslovakia

Let's focus shortly on which prisons and working camps the prisoners could be sent to after their trials. The Czechoslovakian prison system was specific with the uranium working camps, which were located near Slavkov and Příbram, but the most popular place for these camps was Jáchymov. These areas are located mainly in Northern Bohemia excluding Příbram in Middle Bohemia. The conditions here were really cruel. The prisoners worked in the uranium mines where they were exposed to the dangerous radioactivity. Work was hard and there was a high danger of getting injured. The food was not adequate. Prisoners' lives were also complicated by the natural conditions because in winter the temperatures dropped well below freezing in some of the camps. In 1953 there were almost 15,000 prisoners, which was nearly half the total number of people imprisoned in Czechoslovakia at that time.

What did these camps look like? For example, the camps at Jáchymov were surrounded with two rows of fencing 2.5 meters high with barbed wire. In between the inner and outer fence there was a space of about 1 – 1.5 meters wide tilled with white sand on which the potential

²⁴ *"They were suggesting the death penalty for me at the end of my indictment, the absolute punishment. So to tell you the truth one was really happy when one got eighteen years."* – see the interview with Zdeněk Kovařík.

escapee could be seen well. In the corners and in the middle between the corners there were guard towers with a height of six meters with lights and machine guns. The whole fencing system was lit with strong lights. In case the electricity was cut off, there were special generators that could produce electricity. Prisoners were housed in small wooden houses, which they could not leave during the night. Some mines were placed right in the camp and to others, prisoners had to walk and in these cases special corridors were built to the mine. In other cases prisoners were tied together with steel cords into so called, "Human packages," which were also known as, "Russian Busses."

The names of the camps were usually derived from the names of the mines where the prisoners worked. The most infamous mines belonged to camps that were named by Communists after the basic motto of the French Revolution, Equality (Rovnost) and Brotherhood (Bratrství). The third camp was named Concord (Svornost). To call it Freedom would have been to provocative. In camp Equality the main commander was Paleček, originally named Albn Dvořák. He was known especially for his cruel re-education of Jehovah Witnesses²⁵. He was also beating prisoners without any special reason. A couple of prisoners he repeatedly shot. They also say he shot some prisoners while they were trying to, "escape." According to the memories, Paleček liked to go pick mushrooms with one of the prisoners who had to march 1.5 meters in front of him. If Paleček thought the "Mukl" made a suspicious movement, he was shot. Another famous labor camp was called Vojna, near Příbram. Today we can find there a memorial, revealing what kind of conditions the prisoners lived and what a prison camp looked like.

A special camp was called "L" also known for its liquidating. It was a small camp practically formed out of four buildings. In one building there was a headquarters and in the other there was a kitchen and infirmary. Prisoners lived in the remaining two buildings. Prisoners classified as incorrigible and most dangerous were sent here. Finally the most learned and intelligent people in the state were gathered here, from bishops and priests, to officers, professors of theology, and high school professors. In this camp there was also the "Tower of Death" where the clean uranium ore was ground. Prisoners had to work here without any special protective equipment and they were constantly exposed to the radioactivity as well as at work as in their houses that were built close to this tower.²⁶

What was the arrival to the camps like? Were the prisoners taught how to work in the mines? It was inconceivable. One of the political prisoners described his first working day this way, *"When I went down into the pit for the first time in my life I met there an official guard and he told me I would be a breaker, that I would chip. In front of me they put hoses, drilling sticks, and a drill. Up at the surface I already got a special carbit lamp, but I didn't have a clue how it worked. I also got a helper who was a math professor and he didn't know how to hold a shovel. Then we were told that we were supposed to make a progress of 30 centimeters a day per person and that the progress was measured four times a month. The guards' helper who was*

²⁵ Josef Čech speaks about Jehovah Witnesses in one of the interview, *"I forgot to mention that in Rovnost (Equality) there were Jehovah Witnesses. They came because they didn't want to join the army or work in the mines to get the uranium. These people were abused in ways you cannot imagine. They would let them stand in uniforms with hats in the snow and frost until they would fall down. Then they were taken to the infirmary and that was repeated several times. They didn't break them so they transported them to other camps where they worked in laundries and other departments that were not attached to the war or violence."*

²⁶ For more information about the tower of death and the work conditions in the camp read the interviews with Hubert Procházka and Zdeněk Kovařík.

giving us the equipment added if you don't meet the requirements, you will not get anything to eat, good luck."²⁷

The conditions in the uranium working camp were the worst in the Czechoslovakian prisons. The quotas to be met were high and to not fulfill them meant restricted meals. People worked in the very harmful radioactive environment out of which most of them left with various diseases from leukemia to cancer²⁸. The headquarters made these conditions even more difficult, giving prisoners extra jobs after their work. It often did not even make sense, for example prisoners would often get the task of moving one pile of snow to another place. Sometimes the prisoners were often given the added punishment of going to solitary confinement, which was like a prison within a prison. They would be put there for some kind of offense, which was often made up. They were getting only half portions of food and the biggest thing was that they did not get any blankets. This way, days and nights, when there was minus 20 degrees Celsius, it was unbelievably cruel. The solitary cell was often just a reinforced concrete bunker, where there was no glass in the window.²⁹

However in prisons, inside the stay was not any easier or more pleasant. Pankrác and Ruzyně were the most infamous prisons in Prague. In Pankrác there was a hospital for the prisons and to this hospital all seriously ill prisoners were transferred. Many political prisoners were waiting for the group trial in prison in Pankrác. Another important prison was the one in Plzeň-Bory, which was located in the western side of Bohemia. The building was in the shape of a star so that all its parts would be visible from one location. On June 21, 1949 General Heliodor Píka was executed there. In this prison was a special department called "Kremlin" where there was a Commander V. Trepka who was known for his cruelty. This department was safeguarded with double bars in the corridors and in the windows and the doors of the cells had special locks. The prison at Bory was known for its case in which one of its guards Čeněk Petelík was accused and sentenced to death for helping the prisoners. Six other guards were sentenced to long-term sentences in prison. Of course it was a made-up case where the named guards were set up in another "Monster Process" where their colleagues would see everything. It was supposed to be a deterrent so that guards would not help the prisoners.

There was also a prison called Leopoldov located in Slovakia, where political prisoners with high sentences were placed. In this prison the conditions were also very miserable and inhumane. Eating and accommodation were not adequate. These conditions lasted until 1953 when Leopoldov was visited by the commission led by Minister of National Security Karol Bacílek. After this visit the conditions got better. In 1956 a new department was established called "Vatican," which served to separate out the clergy. Similar conditions were in other prisons such as in Mírov and Valdice.

²⁷ PETRÁŠOVÁ, Ludmila. *Vězeňské tábory v jáchymovských uranových dolech*. The labor camps in uranium mines in Jáchymov 1949–1961. Sborník archivních prací, ročník XLIV., 1994, s. 392.

²⁸ For example Mr. Hubert Procházka gave testimony about his health problems due to the uranium's radioactivity, *"Together with the cancer I also have damaged joints. I am 15 centimeters shorter and I have an artificial hip joint. I should get another artificial hip joint in the next half of year. My backbone is damaged as well, since my spinal discs are disintegrating. My fourth vertebra pulls forward towards my stomach. So actually I can't really move that much so the vertebra won't move further and I won't pinch my spinal cord. Then I would have to be in a wheel chair."*

²⁹ Such a stay in solitary confinement is well described by Alois Macek, *"Solitary confinement on Vršek was one of the worst things I went through during my whole imprisonment. In winter when the temperature was between -15 and -20 we didn't have any beds. There were only iron bars put into the ground and at night you could put wooden boards to lie down, but we didn't get any boards. We also didn't get any blankets and there were three of us - Jindra Hermann, Sotolář, and I started a hunger strike because this was above what a human could possibly stand."*

For women there was a prison in Pardubice. At the beginning they were putting political prisoners here with sentences of ten years or higher and later in the 1950's this rule was changed and women had to share the place with murderers, prostitutes, and thieves. There was a special department called "Castle" where the politically active women were located. Out of them we could name the professor of Charles University, Růžena Vacková, Dagmar Skálová, or Vlasta Charvátová. In total there were sixty-four women in this department. Besides this department there was another department called "Vatican" for nuns and a department called "Underworld" where they mainly put women with venereal diseases, prostitutes, women with mental problems, and habitual offenders. Besides the normal prisons women also worked in something called "commandos" out of which the best known was Želiezovce in Slovakia. Here women worked out in the fields in very hard conditions³⁰.

Chapter for itself in the army imprisonment was called "Little House" in Kapucínska street in Prague, Hradčany. It was an institution of the 5th department of the Headquarters or known also as OBZ. There they mainly kept soldiers, who were forced to testify in certain ways via cruel inspecting methods. Professional soldiers were brought there and they had their hearings there complete with all the cruel tactics of an interrogation³¹.

The conditions in the prisons and working camps got much worse after February 1948. Bullying became the daily bread, especially for the political prisoners. Guards who looked after the prisoners for decades were fired and in their place came young guards who were easy to manipulate. These new guards considered political prisoners the biggest criminals, who wanted to destroy society and to destroy the whole "human-democratic" regime.

Diversity of prisoners in Czechoslovakian jails

The society in communist prisons and working camps was very diverse. In a small place ex-generals met abbots of different monasteries, prominent politicians and murderers, thieves and collaborators³². Karel Pecka put his life experience in a book called "Motáky ztracenému" (Secret messages to the lost man) and in it he described society within the camps. *"Mukls in working camps were divided into groups or classes. The first one, highest in its number, were state prisoners, or so-called political. The second group was formed by Germans, whose biggest characteristic was passivity. Life had given them a lesson and so they didn't show any*

³⁰ For more about the conditions in Želiezovce Mrs. Květoslava Moravečková reports.

³¹ See the interview with Augustin Bubník.

³² Josef Stejskal can remember the various people who he was in prison with, *"From solitary confinement I went to a normal cell. I was making rope. There were cells from number 45 to 60 working together. At one cell there were between 40-70 people. There I met different people, many times these people were famous. So I got to know generals, bishops, professors, prime Ministers, politicians ...people who already had life experience. (...) From generals it was General Janoušek, who was the commander of the Czech pilots in England, (...) General Kutlvašr, who led the Prague riots. Then there was General Syrový, who was the commander of legions in Russia. I called him Mr. General when I saw him and he replied, Pepiček, have you ever been in Sokol, how did we call each other over there? So ever since we would call him Brother General. He was so nice. I was only 27 years old and he was close to 70. Then there were poets, writers,..."* General Kutlvašr and his natural authority is mentioned in a funny story of Alois Macek, *"There are some special stories as for example the one about General Kutlvašr, who led the Prague riots. We sat together in cell 43. There were 60 of us and it was really hot. I took my pants off and I had just white prisoner's underwear. There was lunch and I was holding my pot on my knees eating potato goulash. General Kutlvašr came up to me and he told me, "Hi Lojzík." I replied, "Hello, Mr. General." I had a huge amount of admiration for him. He asked whether he could sit next to me and I just blushed because to sit next to General Kutlvašr was a great honor for me. He went on, "You know it's a hard time we are going through here, but even though we got into such humility by our own nation and we still have to remain people and we need to uphold a certain level. So please Lojzík, put your pants back on."*

secret disdain to the guards, they avoided all possible conflicts, they were well disciplined and always fulfilled the commands the way they were used to from the war. Out of their lines, there were the lowest number of sneaks. Although they were in cahoots with others, they were not friendly to the political prisoners. The third type was individually in total disharmony and consisted of criminals. They consisted of murderers to bullies and safebreakers to people who stole something from national property, to rapists. A wide gallery of people out of which the majority sympathized with political prisoners, no matter what these criminals sat for. They looked for their company and participated on their postures and things. Many times criminals (also called "tattooed") pretended to be political prisoners and behaved very well. The fourth category was represented by collaborators and the fifth by Slovak Fascists. Except for the gift to hate everything, all Czechs, democracy, all values and ideas, they were characteristic in their ability to behave like a parasite, using everything for the own prosperity."

The prison society could be divided into three groups – vindictive prisoners, who were sentenced for their activity during war, many of them collaborators, informers, and helpers of the Nazis; criminal prisoners, who always appear in every prison and political prisoners. The democratic prison is different. During Communism political prisoners were seen as the worst group, they were sentenced according to paragraph 231/ 1948 Sb. Among them we could find many innocent people, who were just standing in the way to a newly growing communist regime and people who really actively fought against Communism. Whether they printed the leaflets and distributed them among people, or sent secret messages and reports to foreign countries, or whether they were part of the organized anti-state groups. They had one thing in common. They did not want to stand in the corner and watch how Communism got stronger in Czechoslovakia and close their eyes and not see the harm and injustice they inflicted. On the base of all this they were regarded as the most dangerous criminals because they threatened the whole "human-democratic" regime.

People from various groups and different moral characteristics were meeting in prisons and working camps and had to find some "modus-vivendi" to learn how to get along well together. Let's have a short look at how the relations among the prisoners looked like. On one side there were those who were ready to take advantage of anything they could from prison headquarters. They became the "olders" of camps and cells and instead of making the lives of their prison mates easier, they just made it tougher. They had power over others plus they got some material benefits like packages, visits, letters, or even money tickets. One such "older" in the camp was also a vindictive prisoner Břetislav Jeníček who organized a beating group of the camp. This group was officially allowed to beat others, mainly political prisoners of course. Jožka Husek mentions this, *"All in all, they would attack us, political prisoners, and they would hit us, beats us, and kick until we would fall unconscious."* We could go further with names, people who acted in similar ways was also Rudolf Fuchs in camp Concord (Svornost) or Václav Bidžovský in camp 12 near Slavkov.

On the other hand, there were a majority of those who decided to respect each other. Alois Macek speaks of some in his interview, *"...such thieves and defaulters were quite nice people. I would say criminal prisoners had a high respect for us and tried to behave well towards us. We were tolerant and forbearing because we didn't know what they were sentenced for. It matched quite well together."* All relations must be considered individually. Of course there were always people who felt powerful and liked to terrorize others. On the other side there

were people who worshiped moral statements and would never go so low as to serve the regime. Finally all of them knew there was just one enemy, the communist regime, in prison represented by guards.

Starving strikes and protests

The life in prison was basically very monotonous and each day had its rhythm and routine – starting with wake-up and ending with bedtime and going to bed finally. Sometimes this monotonous life was disturbed a little, especially during protests, hunger strikes, and refusing to start working. There were not many cases that were big and had many people involved, but if they happened they were spontaneous and never really organized. Anyways, one thing they had in common-the majority of prisoners joined in without a previous agreement.

One famous example was the hunger strike of 1954, which took place in the women's prison in Pardubice. From May 4-7, approximately sixty voluntarily protested and went on a hunger strike. They were all from the department called "Castle." They called a commission from the Ministry of Internal Affairs and they investigated the whole situation. The gain for the protesters was the possibility to get basic hygienic things and regular canteen hours.

Sixteen months later in September 1955 there was another hunger strike, which was bigger in its range. The estimated number of prisoners who participated vary. Some estimations say there were about 520 women others are more conservative with 105 women who participated on the hunger strike. Hana Truncová describes the start of the strike this way, *"When the hunger strike broke out it went by as a "Chinese Whisper" and at that time there was a new guard in Pardubice. No one told us her name so we immediately gave her the nickname of Elsa Koch, who was originally a guard of a concentration camp during WWII."* The majority of women I talked to said the hunger strike started as a protest against the bullying from guards and especially the one they called Elsa Koch. There are often other reasons mentioned such as bad food and bad living conditions. Some people say that the exact reason for the hunger strike was putting Dagmar Tůmová into solitary confinement. The hunger strike lasted for a week and some women starved even longer. Julie Hrušková describes, *"Afterwards all women stopped starving, but I decided to continue. There were three of us in one cell and it had lasted for seven days and the guards made the decision that they would start feeding us. The first was Božka Tomášková who found out that the strike was over and she quit. Then there was Vendula Švecová who tried to fight, but finally they fed her anyways. I was the last. They were trying to hold me, but I told them, "Look that's under my dignity to fight here with you. You have an order to feed me, so go ahead." So they put a tube in me and gave me broth, but when they were taking the pipe out afterwards I vomited the food on the guard named Ruzyňák who was always very meticulous about his appearance. They took me back to my cell, in total we were on the hunger strike for fourteen days and we were knocking morse codes. Vendula was already writing me that she didn't feel well. They told us that the next day we would be taken to Pardubice to be fed through the nose and not the mouth. I was anxious about it, because I thought I would tell the doctors everything that was going on. Vendula kept writing me that she didn't feel fine so I told her to start eating that I was fine and I would go to the hospital alone. However, she collapsed in the evening and without me she refused to start eating, so I had to stop starving."*

Women who were found as the main initiators of the protest were transported to the secret police department in Pardubice on December 15, 1955. There they were punished with ten days of solitary confinement. Other women who joined the hunger strike could not write letters, receive parcels, or have visitors.

In Pardubice there was one more incident when there were twelve letters sent to the general secretary of the OSN – Dag Hammarskjöld on June 28, 1956, where women were describing the reasons and ways of arrest and also the conditions of the Czechoslovakian prisons and working camps. They were demanding the rights of political prisoners. Some letters were even translated depending on the language skills of the author. Of course the letters were never sent and even today they are in the personal reports of the authors.

Probably the biggest revolt maybe for its mass, character, time, or resulting punishments was the so called, "Noodle Revolt" in the working camp Vojna in 1955. It started on Monday July 3 and up until today the participants continue to argue the reason for it. Some of them say it was bad food with worms, some say as an honor to the anniversary of the United States being established, and some say the main commander of the camp started it because he insisted that prisoners line up before each meal. Frantisek Šedivý says, *"The reason for the hunger strike was getting noodles for lunch for several times. That's also why it's called the Noodle Strike."* Mr. Šedivý remembers, *"The situation became acute when hard working prisoners refused to eat boiled noodles served several times and they announced a hunger strike. It looked like a narrow-minded reason, but it had great consequences. The noodle was also refused by other shifts so the headquarters couldn't allow hungry prisoners back into the shafts. So the hunger strike just changed to a strike. The strike was at the same time as the anniversary of America's independence so the political implications were even deeper. The head commander called the emergency services, the camp was enclosed, and the guards were armed more heavily. On the next night a row call was commanded and during that people from emergency services came into the buildings and they began to heavily toss all the cells also called, "filcunk." High emotions supported prisoners to resist. When the commander ordered the lineup after the cell toss prisoners responded with singing the national anthem. The earnestness of the men who were plundering grew, sugar on the floor, together with tobacco, torn up blankets, mud, down trodden clothes. Wooden walls, where we were hiding literature, as well as the floors were torn up. It turned into a real mess that can only be done by an uncontrolled violent apparatus. The majority of our books were destroyed. The hunger strike lasted four days. Some prisoners collapsed because they were physically and psychologically exhausted. On Friday there were just a couple people left who hadn't eaten yet. The whole camp was a real mess. Areas between the buildings that were always fresh and clean were damaged, the flowers were trampled on, and everything that was possible to destroy was destroyed. During the hunger strike some prisoners were transported to normal prisons often with their sentences extended. So the lineup for each meal was finally enforced and together with that the worst form of bullying."* Some prisoners were able to starve until July 9. They were 45 men who were punished with solitary confinement and they were sent to normal prisons. Eleven prisoners were sentenced for organizing the strike and their sentences were raised from eleven to twelve years.

Never ending desire for freedom-escapes

The conditions in prisons and working camps were inhuman – lack of food, hard work, unhealthy conditions, and the nonstop hassling. That is why some prisoners decided to do something about it and they planned an escape. The escapes were done in various ways. Sometimes it was individuals and sometimes it was organized in groups. Some escapes were done without much thought and depended on the opportunity at hand. Others were planned with great detail for a couple of months, for example the very popular dig for freedom in a camp called Nikolaj. As for the unsuccessful ones those were lost because the very participants of the escape were not careful and they revealed their plans to too many people. The prisoners always appreciated the subordination of the successful groups to escape and also when there were many people involved in the plan. Then they did not mind either tussling or repressions that logically followed. Jožka Hošek wrote in his book, *“All men stopped being tired and no one was really mad at the group that escaped. On the contrary, the whole camp was kind of empowered with happiness that the escape was successful.”* Anyway there were many escapes that were constructed and provoked by the headquarters of prisons or camps. In fact the biggest escape in the history of the labor camps is the one when twenty prisoners escaped from the mine “Kamenná” on November 29, 1952. At this escape of prisoners there were two mine guards and there was also one master involved. The prisoners stole explosives and they used this to make a tunnel from the mines, but soon after escape they were caught. In 1953 they were tried again and their new sentences were around three years for prisoners and around eighteen months for the civilian employees. At that time these sentences were really low.

The most tragic consequence was during the attempted escape of twelve prisoners from mine number 14 near Slavkov. These were prisoners from camp XII and they escaped on October 15, 1951. Only four prisoners survived alive, Karel Kukal, was able to give us a testimony in his book called, *Ten Crosses*. Two of these prisoners were sentenced to death and the third one lost his memory after the inhuman beatings. Karel Kukal himself was sentenced to another twenty-five years³³. The dead bodies of the participants were taken back to the camp and this left many bad memories for all prisoners who were eyewitnesses. The bodies of their friends were thrown into the middle of the courtyard and those who were caught alive had to stand next to them and the whole camp had to march along it when no one was allowed to pay their respects. If someone did it, they were put into solitary confinement for a couple of days. Jožka Jelínek describes this experience, *“From that moment we had hardly any sense of forgiveness. Even for priest, who had “love the enemy” in their job description, this commandment became a life-long problem.”*

The escape has another dimension though that is important to mention here. I remember one interview with Alois Macek who was arrested as a nineteen-year-old and sentenced to sit for 12 years. In camp Mariánská his friends decided to escape and since they knew Mr. Macek had a similar attitude they told him about their plans. Alois Macek refused to participate though because they were planning on killing one of the guards on their way. The escape was ruined and all of them were caught, than followed cruel interrogations and a search for other prisoners who were aware of the plan and did not say a word. After sometime it was revealed that Mr. Alois Macek knew about it. Later, a huge “Monster Process” was organized and many peo-

³³ See more in the interview with Doctor Jan Pospíšil.

ple working in the camp as guards watched it. Four death penalties were sentenced and Alois Macek got off with only "20 years" of imprisonment. When telling me this sad story where four young lives were lost, Mr. Macek also told me, *"Since then I have always had on my mind, "If I had reported the planned escape the whole Confederation of political prisoners would never have talked to me, I would be the worst bastard, in camp others would be kicking me and my life would not be worth it, but four people would be alive." It was the highest principle I simply couldn't break."* As Mr. Macek says it was the "highest principle" he could not break. This was a principle set deep in the prisoner's code of ethics, as well as the rule that nobody would snitch. On the other hand this example shows us, in what kind of marginal situations prisoners were often put in and how their decision can lay heavily and haunt them up until today.

Many other successful and unsuccessful escapes were attempted. All of them have one thing in common though – the desire for freedom. Freedom was withheld by the communist regime for some years, although these people fought for democracy, human rights, and freedom of speech.

Even long-term imprisonment cannot break the human spirit

People who were sentenced by communist justice, often to very high imprisonments, suddenly stood at the edge of society. They did not only have to spend their best years behind bars, but this pursuit was extended for the rest of their lives after release. They had difficulties to find jobs, which they would deserve according to their education³⁴. Despite this fact it is admirable that some of them were able to reconcile with this situation and they do not recall it with bitterness how we would expect. Jakub Antonín Zemek describes this, *"It was hard but beautiful times. One could meet a lot of good, hard, high-principled and upright people."* Other people remember these times in a similar way, for example Tomáš Sedláček says, *"My time in prison offered me a chance to get to know myself. What I am like and what I can bare. I really found my possibilities and where is my potential bottom. I was lucky that I went to prison in very good physical and psychological condition. As I already mentioned I was always waking up with the motto, "Hold on!" and this really kept me above water. Also, I met a lot of people who remained my friends for the rest of my life. How I was able to go through my life with my conscience clear and my backbone straight is the thing for the others to judge. I hope I managed it quite well."*

Others appreciated the experience they had a chance to develop in prison. They mentioned they were influenced by great chance meetings with other people and the prison university, which deeply touched their lives. The question that is easy to ask is will they ever forgive their incarcerators? Hana Truncová replied, *"To tell you from my own opinion, I have never forgiven them because they stole a huge piece of my life and I had my own plans that can never be given back. I only wanted to live in freedom, travel, and do everything that would make me happy. All of that was very limited."* We can not wonder about this, but on the other hand when these people are telling you about their imprisonment, you can feel this period of life

³⁴ The majority of people were released in 1960 via a Presidential pardon. The pardon did not take away the sentence, but only the punishment. So these people were still criminals, many of them were released on probation and they were worried that if they commit any minor offence they would be arrested again. When they were released they had to sign a document that they would never speak about their experience. The fact that some of them were afraid to commit minor offences for example a ticket for speeding is documented on the words of Josef Stejskal, *"I asked for an effacement of my crime. I already had a driving license and I knew as a driver I could easily get into trouble with the law and as a person who was in prison I would get a high sentence."*

was one of the biggest experiences of their lives. The majority of them admit that if they would not have spent a part of their life in prison they would have missed a special experience and reality in their lives. If they should decide again, whether they would be politically active against the state or whether they would sit home in peace they would want to fight again against the communist regime. They would say that it was a good decision even for the high price they had to pay for it.

Some of them reconciled to their destinies, *"I left the prison completely reconciled. I don't think I was even mad. I wasn't even mad, furthermore, to accuse the regime and the Communists and god knows what else, not at all. I accepted these nine years right after the trial,"* remembers Mr. Fučík. This demanded a huge inner energy and power of the person.

The most beautiful answer to my question, "What did the prison take from you and give to you?" was answered by Mr. Macek. I was not able to describe these feelings better and so here I'm giving word to the witness. *"Prison influenced my life 100% and it gave me a base for my values for the rest of my life, thanks to being in prison I was able to meet an amazing value of friendship that was born during such terrible conditions. It didn't matter who was who, but what was the person like and how can you trust and rely on him and how much did he fight for his friends. For example, Lada Majer was able to climb over the barbed wire of the solitary confinement in camp Nikolaj. It was freezingly difficult and he was risking his own life in front of the machine guns just to throw me a piece of bread, tobacco, and newspaper to wrap a couple cigarettes through my window. These we called "balenky," that were appeasing hunger and I also got a thing called "cunder" to light it up. Why did he do that? Explain it to someone who didn't go through that? These are values and memories for your whole life and for the rest of your life you really have to recall all of these things. Then you can understand that if you meet these people as a free man, there is no wonder that you will have tears in your eyes and that you will be standing as a weakling, without words and a hug. If there wasn't prison I would have never lived this and it wouldn't have shaken me.*

The prison gave me a chance to meet the most beautiful and intelligent of our nation and the chats with our people allowed me to learn what wasn't learned before. During that time I still had to realize that I had a lot to catch and make up for. I'm really telling you the truth when I don't regret the time spent in the prisons and the working camps, because even the terrible moments gave us a chance to wake up. ...I'm not a writer or poet and I can not describe what I feel in my heart when my thoughts stray into that time. All I know is that I'm not the only one that feels it like this. This is proven by our meetings that are really unique. I would be happy if our nation would find out that these are the people that are the most pressing gemstones. What to tell to the Bolsheviki? We don't feel hate towards you, but more disdain! You are aware of the crimes you did, but only to gain power you are willing to commit them again. I feel sorry for you because you do not know what you are missing!

What did the prison take from me, well that's twelve years of life, nothing else. Although it's not a lot, the positive side is so high above the loss, that these seem to be just trifles."

The previous words are proof that not even long-term imprisonment can break the human spirit. If one can elevate above the hardships and humiliation that means the overthrow of the regime. From our point of view, these are the words that are most worth writing down. We should always bare them in mind when speaking about political prisoners in the 1950's in Czechoslovakia.

Jindřiška Havrantová was from a farming family. She was arrested with her father on March 8, 1954 and sentenced to 18 years of prison. She was released on February 20, 1963.



We didn't want freedom for ourselves, but for everyone.

Interview with Mrs. Jindřiška Havrlantová

At the beginning I would like to ask about your childhood and where you were born.

I was born in the Hostýnské Mountains¹ on October 28, 1929. I wasn't even six years old yet and I started school. I also had a sister who was four years older and I really liked her books. I was not even six and I was able to count up to ten by twos. However, there was a lot of work at our place. I was five and was given two cows, but today I am finally happy for it. I was really interested in school and I was waking up at four in the morning so that I wasn't late for school. It was an hour trip. The school was more at the end of lower Rajnochovice².

You had school in the village?

Yes, it was in Rajnochovice and there it was written, "To our kids." It was an eight-year school, but there were only four classes. I left with honors, but it didn't help me because I didn't go anywhere else. When I was nine years old Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk³ died. It was raining at that time and we took our shoes off because there was a lot of water running on the road. We came to school and there was a black flag. Then the principal came and said, "Kids come tomorrow and each of you bring a flower." We had that day off then and there were no classes for about three days. Each kid brought a flower. As a result of all the candles, the black board caught fire and burned down. I remember my mom said, "What will happen now?" They liked Masaryk a lot and grandma said, "There will be a war," and there was.

How big was your farm?

We were living on Bílová⁴, on the meadows. There were just a few people, perhaps seven cottages and each had a part of the field and that's how we were making a living. We had cows, three or four for plowing the field. We were raising pigs and poultry. During the war we were ordered to contribute supplies. We had to hand over pork and beef, butter, and eggs. Though we were not given punishments or charged fees for not fulfilling the requirements. At that time we couldn't get money anywhere. We were just happy to survive and happy to have the bare necessities. They required 100 kilograms (220 pounds) of butter per year. We were handing in butter each Monday, once a week then. Many times we didn't even have one egg left for us, but we were getting money for that. With the supplies we always had to go to the town hall. German controls never came to us. Once my dad said to them when we didn't fulfill the requirements, "I have nothing to pay you with. I'd rather go sit in prison," but they didn't put him in. In a shop we were usually buying salt and yeast. As kids we always had to help during the harvest.

Were there any German patrols accommodated in Rajnochovice?

In Rajnochovice there was a big depot of Czechoslovak ammunitions. In 1939, Germans took everything away. As I said, Germans were not walking around the countryside, but they were

¹ Hostýnské mountains are located in the northeast of the Czech Republic.

² Rajnochovice – a small village in northeast of the Czech Republic.

³ Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk – the first President of Czechoslovakia, he died in 1935.

⁴ Bílová – a small settlement where Mrs. Havrlantová used to live with her family.

in the village. They were checking on municipal authorities and even businessmen. Once they came to us. I was home alone then. They just wanted to know the way from Bílová to Rajnochovice. They were very polite and for my advice they all said thank you, but I was afraid of them.

Do you recall the beginning of the Protectorate?

Well, the bad times started then. I was going through it with my dad because my dad was really interested in politics. We didn't have a radio because we didn't even have electricity, which wasn't installed until 1948. The forester had a radio on batteries. When we were occupied by Hitler, dad went to listen to it. Then he came and said, "It's sad, our people were determined to fight, but it would be a worthless waste of blood." I was taking it all in because it concerned me as well. Then it started. On Bílová there were seven cottages and in one of them they didn't have any kids. Dad was friends with the neighbors who were living over the hill and once they came to us and said that they would move paratroopers to us. Their name was Měšicovi. They said that they would not delay us for a long time. They wanted to stay in our stalls, which were empty at that time. Dad agreed to it, but was afraid because we had a neighbor who didn't have kids and at night she was walking around eavesdropping. It was agreed that they would come to our stalls. Finally, we didn't hide paratroopers there. It didn't take long and my schoolmate came and asked what homework did we have for school and I asked him, "Well Franta, how is it possible that you don't go to school?" He answered me, "You don't know that our whole family was picked by the Gestapo?" They were all arrested during one evening. There were five sons and they left out only their mom and dad, but finally they were later arrested as well. Their mom died in Dachau. Three of the sons were finally executed in 1942, one returned and their dad died a month later. Those were very honest people, when they were going to the execution they were singing a song, Green Groves.

Were Měšicovi executed for hiding paratroopers?

They were hiding the paratroopers and the paratroopers were later caught at the border. One of them confessed about their hiding place and then I started to worry that he would betray us because those were the same paratroopers that were supposed to hide in our stalls. Luckily, nothing happened. From 1942 partisans started to walk around. The first who came were Nikolai and Ivan. They were prisoners of war and had escaped from their camp. We didn't know them. They wanted alcohol and cigarettes from my dad, but he was completely abstinent and a nonsmoker. They didn't know this and didn't believe it at all and they pointed a gun at him. They were really impudent. I was so scared that I started yelling, "Shucks, we really don't have any, he doesn't smoke, come and look, we don't have any!" Then they calmed down. From 1942 we didn't have one calm night. Often there were as many as forty or fifty partisans stopping in throughout the night. We never got a good night sleep. As soon as we turned the lights off the dogs started barking and the partisans were knocking on the door.

You lived in the meadows and partisans came to visit you every evening. What memories do you have of them?

The commander of the partisans was Štěpanov Ivan. He was a fair guy. Štěpanov always gave his own opinion. He was a smaller man, blond, and a peace-loving person. He was strict with partisans, but wanted to oblige people. He didn't let anyone get hurt. I really liked him. In 1944

Murzin⁵, a new commander, was supposed to come and so partisans wanted to welcome him⁶. A day before, they were waiting for a plane, standing on guard. They wanted a pig from us, but we didn't have one. We owned just a sow with small piglets and we didn't want to give that up. Dad offered a sheep instead, but they were not interested in that. Finally they got a pig from our neighbor, from our uncle. They came to our house to cook it and get it ready for the celebrations. The uncle, who had owned the pig, came to us the next morning and told my dad, "If you have the partisans over here, tell them to leave because they stole my pig and I'm going to report it. The Germans will come here to check it." Dad didn't even have time to give him an answer whether we had partisans over or not. When our uncle was on his way home, the partisans beat him up. His son went to report it, unfortunately. He didn't have to do it, however, because he was afraid that it would be found out and he would get into more trouble. He could have easily gone to report it the following week. At the police station there were only two people, he made the report to them and went back home. Then, the next morning, they were taking Murzin across the fields and meadows down to the neighbors. There they shaved him and he ate as well. When he found out about the report, he gave a command, "So this is how the "meadowers" behave? We will be fighting and they will betray us?" At that time, many partisans came out from the forest, in two lines. It was terrible. My cousin was already back home from the police station and the partisans stabbed him to death. They lit his house on fire and by chance they shot an aunt dead too. It was hard to tell whether they wanted to or whether it was a mistake. Uncle survived as the only one. At that time, when someone said Murzin, I didn't understand how someone could give out such a command.

How did you live through the end of the war?

Once a doctor was taking care of a wounded person and his wife was afraid because weird looking people came to pick the doctor up. He didn't come back for a long time and she went to the police and reported it. Then he came home and when he found out that she reported it, he was terrified. Nothing could be done and he said that he was in an abandoned cottage. The abandoned cottage was a gamekeeper's house in Bílova which was near our house. It was morning, February 8, 1945 and the end of the war was close. I got up in the morning, I looked out the window and I saw many German SS soldiers standing next to each other. Dad was mixing feed for the animals so he couldn't see anything and he just heard, "Achtung." Partisans ran out and blocked all the doors and told them they couldn't get in. We had to listen to what the partisans said because we had empty hands. Shooting started and right by my temple there was a bullet that flew by. Everything at that moment was in God's hands. We hid down in the cellar. Then the shooting stopped, we got out, and saw that our cottage was on fire. We had tar on the roof and when that was on fire it was popping. The Germans insisted that there were munitions, but it was just tar. The partisans made a mistake, they didn't stay alert and in the morning they were sleeping like the dead, I was the first one who saw the Germans. One partisan died in the fire, a guy named Boris was shot. Three neighbors were shot and another gave up.⁷

⁵ **Cptn. Of the Soviet Army named Dajan Bajanovič Murzin** – after the establishment of the 1st Czechoslovakian partisan brigade named after Jan Žižka of Trocnov, he was named the chief staff officer. After the main commander Ján Ušiak died, he took over. He organized a new group and moved to another area near Vsetín. They participated in partisan activities in the area of Vsetín, Vizovice and Zlín (Moravia).

⁶ **D. B. Murzin** landed at night and stayed from 30th to 31st of August 1944.

⁷ Compare to source: POSPÍŠIL, Jaroslav. Hyeny, Vizovice:Lípa, 1996, s. 133 – 115.

How did you get out of all of it?

Dad ran away because he wanted to save some machines, but everything was burnt down anyways. He was really terrified because of that. Mom let all the cattle go and I was taking some clothes from the closets to have something left. I didn't have a clue what would happen because I was just fifteen years old. It was terribly cold and the snow was up to the knees. They dragged all the cattle to Loučka where there was a Gestapo base and they slaughtered them. We were taken to Bystřice pod Hostýnem prison where we were interrogated.

What did the interrogation look like?

There was one Austrian guy who could speak Czech, once they were beating me with small chains because I didn't want to say out the names. It lasted for about a month. They arrested my mom, dad, and I and also my sister who was living at a rectory, but they released her after a week. My sister didn't live with us. She was supposed to go to Germany for work, but a priest in Rajnochovice took her as a cook. We were taken to Brno to the prison called Cejl. I was there as a youth and I was getting double portions, but I wasn't hungry so I was sharing it with the others. I was dead tired and I didn't have a taste for food. At Cejl there were twenty-four of us and many bedbugs. Each evening we had to put a scarf around our neck so they would not eat us. There were terrible conditions. Every time there was an air raid we had to put a straw mattress into the window through which the guard gave us food. Right before the war the Germans let mom and I go, but to where were we to go? We had just a little shed by the house where we finally went, but we didn't have spoons, cups, nothing. The clothes that I was saving were also burned so I didn't have anything to wear. People helped us out a lot and we tried to get reparations because we wanted to build a new cottage. The Communists offered us to go to the border area⁸, but dad didn't want that. Dad made many trips to the reparation office to Brno. After the eighth time he asked for reparation, he took his coat off and said, "I'm not going there any more, they want me to join the party and after that I will get reparations. I will still get it, but I can't build it on our own land. It was already forbidden to build new houses in the mountains. Only little chalets could be built. Mom and I were even willing to go to the border area, but dad said, "I'm not going to a foreign place. It would tear my heart apart. I had my own place, that's what I wanted, and I will not go to a foreign place." Of course we didn't go anywhere finally.

Do you remember what happened to the commanders of the partisans after the war?

I don't know whether it is true or not, but after the war Murzin and Štěpanov met face to face on Černava Hill and Murzin won. We were at Štěpanov's funeral⁹.

What did life in the village look like after the war?

In the meadows there were seven cottages left. We stayed there, the Pánkov family went to the border area, the Kubičkov family didn't have kids and they died. In 1946 there were elections. I still wasn't old enough to vote though. The damage was appraised at 700,000 crowns, but we got only 40,000. We had to buy everything for that, cattle included. We were still living in the little shed and it was really small and uncomfortable and we were trying to enlarge it. The year 1948 was really cruel. We already had a radio and electricity, but in winter we had problems with it, sometimes the electricity didn't work. At that time we found out from the

⁸ **The Czechoslovakian border area** was depopulated because the Germans were displaced after WW2.

⁹ **Štěpanov** died April 10th on Černava Hill. Partisans themselves did not talk about this much. Some of them presented the whole thing as a matter of bad luck, some had another opinion.

radio what was happening. Then we were getting information about other stuff, from everywhere around. In 1949 a group, Hostýnské Hory¹⁰ started and many of our friends were put in prison. In total it was more than 700 people, for example one of our friends, his name was Doležal, my cousin's husband. My cousin was ill, her mother was ill, they had two kids, a horse, and a shed full of cattle. I went to help them with daddy and they kept arresting someone all the time.

Did you know the reason why they were arrested?

Of course it was dissatisfaction. The Hostýnské Hory group started in 1949 and some people were arrested and then released again for a lack of proof. Finally they were all arrested again and in 1952 there was a hearing where six people were executed as a warning. We started in the same year with an anti-state group. I wasn't very sympathetic to the Communist party because of the way they treated us after the war. You could either join the Communist party or move to the border area. I couldn't imagine that I would be sitting and waiting with my arms crossed.

How did your anti-state activities start?

Through Mrs. Románková we were introduced to Josef Mach. In our group we agreed that Mach would be hidden by the Kovář family and by the Židek family. Both of these families saw family members get arrested as they were members of the Hostýnské Hory group in 1949. Yet, their sons also decided to stand up against Communists. Mach wanted to leave for abroad, saying he would leave a radio to communicate with. My boyfriend Karel, escaped from the army with a sub-machine gun and he also started to hide himself. Also, Alena Svobodová was hiding with them as well. That lasted for quite a long time and later they didn't really hide anymore. People in Rajnochovice were meeting with them and wondering who they were. They all wanted to escape abroad, but they were all waiting for the most opportune time. Mach wanted to make the group bigger and take other people from the surrounding villages. So he kept hiding in Rajnochovice, but the secret police started to follow him. I also had a feeling that something was happening and that I was being spied on. Once I was walking to the dentist and a car stopped and wanted to give me a ride. I knew I was being followed by it, so I refused the ride. I needed to give some messages to people in hiding and I didn't want to give them away.

How long were you hiding them?

It started in 1952, when we began with our activity until March 8, 1954, that means two years then.

What did your anti-state activity involve? Were you arrested for just hiding people or did you try to spread your involvement into other things?

Except for hiding these three people we were also getting guns and sending messages through the radio. Once we even heard these messages from Radio Free Europe. We were working this way so that the Communists would be a little afraid and people would know what they were doing. I finally got eighteen years and other sentences were twenty and twenty-five years. We were sentenced with people we really didn't know, because Josef Mach organized

¹⁰ A rebellious group named Hostýnské Hory (after Hostýnské mountains) was established at night from June 26th to 27th 1948. The first commander of the group was the most experienced man, Josef Čuba. This group existed until the end of 1949, in the area of Bystřice and Vsetín (East of the Czech Republic). Many of its members were active in partisan antinazi groups, only in Rajnochovice were 15 people imprisoned.

another group. They were also farmers – Gába, Hruška... Karel was sentenced by the army court and had the penalty of death, but that was a year after our sentencing. Alena and I were in the process together.

How did they find out about you and your group?

The first person arrested was Josef Zajíček, to whom Mach gave a letter. He went by bus to Southern Moravia where he was supposed to send the letter. There they arrested him, examined him, and took the letter. That was a week before our arrest. At that time he didn't come back and we didn't know why. Then Mr. Židek didn't return home from work. Right after that the arresting started.

What was your arrest like?

When I was young I used to go out to village parties and I let men walk me home. One young man was taking me home this way and when we were going through the forest all of a sudden we heard, "Put your hands up." I wasn't surprised, but the guy walking me home was frightened because he didn't have a clue what was happening. They probably thought I was meeting Karel, the one who escaped from the army, in the evenings, but I never went out to meet him. I asked Karel pretty strictly when he appeared after his escape, "Why did you leave, what do you want here?" He took offence to what I said and we rarely ever met after that. Yet, on that night, they just frightened us. Two weeks after this, on March 8, 1954 they came to arrest Dad and I. They knocked on the window and daddy went to get the door. I don't know how many of them came. They just said, "Ms. Růčková, get up, the time of settlement has come." I got so angry, "You want to settle with me, but I didn't do anything!" At that moment I was really sorry I didn't have a gun for myself although I was offered one by Josef Mach. Today I don't regret that anymore. Who knows what would have happened if I had had one. I didn't feel guilty at all, we just wanted a good life for us and for others. Dad and I had to get dressed, mom was crying. Then they took us to Bystřice.

Do you know how Alena Svobodová, Josef Mach, and Karel were finally arrested?

When dad and I were taken to prison, in Rajnochovice we could see that something was happening, but we didn't have a clue what. Josef, Karel, and Alena were in Rajnochovice with the Kovář family when we were arrested. In the morning hours the secret police got to them and started a shoot out. They shot one boy there and they took his body with them and no one even today knows where he ended up. Another nine-year old kid lost his nerves and never got well again. It's interesting that the Žídkova family, the other family where we were hiding people at, wasn't arrested. Only the Kovář family had to pay the price. Those three were lucky to escape, Karel was shot in his heel, but he took the bullet out himself. Alena Svobodová, from Brno, went with him and took care of him. They got home to Bílová where they were hiding for another month, by that time, Karel's leg really began to heal. Once a forester came to them and offered to take them to safety, but he took them to where the secret police were waiting and arrested them. Josef Mach also escaped and he was hiding in Loučka by Kunovice. There he established another group. Mach trusted the sister of Mr. Židek. She worked as a nurse in a hospital in Kroměříž. He confided everything to her and he also told her where the code key was for breaking messages. She was bringing him medicines, pretending she was working for us, but she wasn't arrested with us and there was no confrontation with her. His escape looked like this: one farmer who was in another group, which was also organized by Josef Mach, took him to a certain place. There was an ambulance car standing there that Žídková was supposed

to get. She was supposed to give a signal that the air was clear, but when they came to the certain place and she gave him the signal, Mach already saw that the ambulance was already full of secret police. So he shot himself finally.

Did you ever meet Alena in prison?

Yes, we were together in Pardubice, but we weren't in the same cell. Yet, in Pardubice it was all right, the worst was Uherské Hradiště¹¹ – that was a famine. From Hostýnské Hory we knew that Grebeníček¹² was in power there. In the morning we got a little piece of bread and were told that's also for supper. For supper they gave us a little piece of Olomoucký Cheese. Before the evening came I always ate everything. Conditions in the prison were horrible. While sleeping we had to have our hands on the blanket, but when you fell asleep you put them underneath. You could easily fall asleep on a dirty straw mattress, under dirty blankets, and on a dirty pillow. When one came exhausted from questioning, one would fall asleep really quickly.

Where did they take you after your arrest?

They took me to Bystřice, but that wasn't a real prison anymore. That was some kind of storage. After a couple of hours I heard that they brought someone else in next door. So I knocked the morse code on the wall and it was Ilonka Romanová from our group. Her mom was arrested three days later. In Bystřice we stayed only until the evening, then they took us to Uherské Hradiště where examinations went on until the morning. The interrogations lasted about a month.

What did the interrogations look like? How did the investigators treat you?

They didn't beat us at that time anymore. I was really surprised about that because in 1952 they were beating the men from the group, Hostýnské Hory, very badly. Yet, the behavior of the guards was very mean, we always got a handkerchief to blindfold us across the eyes so I didn't see anything. I was walking slowly because there were steps, but the guards didn't really care and they dragged us from one side of the corridor to the other. We promised each other we would not say anything and I was telling myself that I could not break that. Then I realized that there was a lot out already. They got my accomplices to speak and they had a great deal of information on me and noted that I had never admitted to anything. Finally I got eighteen years. From March 8 to August 14 I was confined to a solitary cell. I had a little spider there and I was looking after it. It was there with me for the whole time. There was just a small bench, bed, and two steps so that one could do their business. There was a horribly dirty blanket that stunk. They never let me sleep. They starved me and interrogated me during the evening and at night.

What did you go through in your solitary cell?

I divided my day this way. First I prayed, then I sang, and said some poetry. Sometimes I put a letter together for my mom, which I was then saying aloud while I was walking around in my cell. In the interrogation cell I didn't get one letter. On August 14 I had a hearing, it was strung out over several days, but I didn't have a hearing with my dad, because he was sentenced in another court. In 1960 there was amnesty, but I wasn't released because in our process there were guns included. They let me out on February 20, 1963.

¹¹ **Uherské Hradiště** – a town in Southern Moravia.

¹² **Alois Grebeníček** – from the end of forties till the beginning of the fifties he was one of the investigators people feared the most. He worked for the Secret police in Uherské Hradiště prison.

When did you have the trial?

The court trial, which lasted for three days, took place at Uherské Hradiště. It was secret so my mom wasn't present. For a little while after the trial I stayed in Hradiště where I worked in the laundry and then my hands started to be sore. So then they put me in the kitchen to peel potatoes, which was nice because we actually got something to eat. From bad food I had festers all over my body. I was used to everything that was homemade and there all kinds of unnatural preservatives and artificial things were added. In Uherské Hradiště we stayed about a month and then they took me to Pankrác¹³. I only stayed there for a couple of nights, but I have some really ugly memories from that. I slept upstairs in a double-room and dogs kept howling all night. I was looking out the window and girls were saying that there would be executions again. There on the square where the executions were held, were also resting mothers with their babies who were born in prison. We were at Pankrác for three nights and then we went to Chrudim for a short while, and then finally they took us back to Pardubice. I came there in 1954 and stayed there until 1963 when I was released. They put me into a sewing workshop right away although I didn't understand it at all. Anyways, I quickly got into it and the sewing machine quickly became my friend, but the main thing was that in Pardubice we were living so freely. After one of us had a visit, she would share it with everyone. I must tell you that we all got along really well there because we were all of the same opinion and frame of mind. We knew about those who were snitching and we ignored them, for example I didn't talk to them at all. I had a really nice circle of friends around me.

What was your arrival to Pardubice like?

After our arrival we went for a check-up that was done by a Doctor-Prisoner Blanka Picková. I went to section A and there were about 16 other girls, but no one paid attention to me. My accomplice was put to section B, so I was completely alone and didn't know anyone. It was a three story building that had to be made lower after the detonation in Semtín.¹⁴ There were twenty-four girls in the same room with bunk-beds. I came with my bag like some kind of bag-lady. They just pointed to the bed where I should sleep. On the bunk-beds I was always sleeping up on top because I was younger. None of the Czech girls paid attention to me there, they were all lying on the bunks and resting. Then it was 2 o'clock and I was still sitting there like a bag-lady. My bundle was still next to me, since I still didn't know how to fold my blankets or anything because still, no one showed me how. All of a sudden, Elfy Tandler came up to me and she started asking questions and realized I was really hungry. She brought me bread, grease, cheese, and jam. There we were already able to take bread without limits. She was really nice to me and she even made my bed. She was really treating me well. She was a German, but spoke Czech really well. I will never forget about that. She wasn't a vindictive prisoner¹⁵, but a political one. Then after the other Germans came she sometimes talked to them rather to us, but I didn't obstruct her. Afterwards she always came back to me. When they released her, she married a Czech and moved to Frankfurt. Even my daughter visited her in Germany later.

¹³ **Pankrác** – one of the biggest and well known prison in Prague.

¹⁴ **Semtín** – a town close to the prison where was a factory.

¹⁵ **Vindictive prisoners** – prisoners sentenced on a basis of "vindictive decrees" for cooperation and collaboration with Nazi Germany. A state prisoner was also called a political prisoner, then there was a category of criminal prisoners.

Were you sharing the room with criminal prisoners as well?

At the beginning we were all political prisoners, but then they started mixing us with prostitutes, gypsies, and angel women who worked with abortions. It was ok until 1960, but after the amnesty political prisoners were spread to different rooms and they were usually the only one together with criminal prisoners. The guards were afraid of gypsies because they were always fighting among themselves. Some guards were such heroes that they were afraid to go between them and they told us, "Help yourselves some how." To us they were nice and they didn't attack us or do any harm to us. After 1960 it was horrible. I was sorry for the older ladies like Růženka Vacková or Nina Svobodová. They were precious women. Růženka Vacková was a really tough woman who was always steadfast opposed to the commands. There were various elements in the prison, not just that they would fight each other, but sometimes they would hurt themselves as well. Yet, we didn't really pay attention to such prisoners. We, the political prisoners stood by each other and took care of each other.

Do you remember the University in prison, for example Růženka Vacková?

Růženka had her own girls there who were high school or college age. I didn't fall into this category, but I was interested. I had a friend, Edulka, who was meeting her. Růženka was really special. I was later bringing her letters from Ilka Ondrášová, who was a professor of math and physics and was released earlier than me. She used to write to me like my sister did. I was bringing that to Růženka who was then reading it to other girls, who knew this professor. She had her girls who she was getting ready. Of course, it wasn't really possible that so many people could be together in one building, so I couldn't really take part in her lectures much.

On which blocks were you living on?

After I came I was living in "A," but then they put me in the stable. That place really used to be a stable and there were rats living with us. We always had to put bread under our heads so they wouldn't eat it, but they could smell it and they kept jumping over our heads. Then the wooden houses were built, "C," "D," and "E" were built and I moved to "E" later on. There was hot water running there. I was telling myself, "Why did they put me here, I didn't deserve this?" So I was at least bringing that warm water in buckets to the grandmothers in "B." A Guard yelled at me once that I would be reported if that ever happened again. Anyways, I kept doing it, but there always had to be someone looking out.

What did the correction look like in Pardubice? How often did you get something to eat there?

Once every two days there was food. Every morning there was black coffee. There was a hard bed that was just concrete and a blanket. For example, Růženka came there during Christmas because she refused to work on Sundays. She spent fourteen days over the most beautiful holidays. She was then released at a certain hour and we were all waiting for her. When she saw us, she opened her arms wide as she would like to give all of us a hug saying, "Girls, I spent there such a beautiful holiday." The guard just turned her head around thinking she had gone nuts. She didn't go crazy, she was from a devout family so she prayed the whole time and spent the whole Christmas in peace.

When you start talking about Christmas, please, what was Christmas like in prison, how did you live through it?

We always got together in a group, we prayed a midnight mass and we sang carols. It always depended on what guard was on duty. Those who were solid let us sing and if one was bad

then he would come right to us and we had to line up. Sometimes those line-ups were just horrible. They couldn't count us all and there was always someone missing. We had to line up and stay there for an hour all chilled. Then in the morning we had to get up for our work shift. They were really able to make one's life sour. In the evening we had potato salad and a little piece of Christmas bread. In Pardubice it was acceptable, even the cooks were trying. We also got a little piece of fish.

Did you ever meet any nuns there?

There were departments called "Castle" and "Vatican," with them we were not allowed to meet. When the nuns were divided between us I even brought a missal to one of them. One of my friends Ilka Ondráková told me before she was released, "You know, in my things I have a missal, I would like to give it to you." I responded that, "There will be a "čůzák"¹⁶ (read [chou:sack]; a slang word from prison for a guard, in Czech language it comes from the word „bitch“) for sure who will not allow it." She just said, "Don't worry, we will make it somehow." So I went with her and all though there was a "čůzák," he was talking to someone, and in the meantime she gave me the missal. Then we said goodbye to each other. Then I had to go to the other building at Wenceslas Square where there was a commander standing. He just unlocked the door and let me go to my building. I was nicely surprised that he let me by without problems because he was the one known to always be yelling at us and we called him Škrhola.

What did the prison clothes look like?

Brown pants with white and black fur sticking out. It scratched. The jackets were the same kind. Simply said, it was clothes for prisoners. If someone was released, we switched blankets and whichever was worse we gave it back. In 1958 before Christmas we were told to write home and ask for warm underwear. So we all were sent long under pants for men and long-sleeve undershirts. We slept in this about two or three times and then were told that a boiler broke down. That winter during Christmas time was really chilly. They took these warm clothes from us and let us freeze. Almost all of us were ill and got the flu. The whole prison was ill and just a few of us kept going to work. So finally it wasn't worth it to them to take our clothes.

How often did they change your clothes?

Maybe every two weeks, but it was worse with washing. In Pardubice we had only bathrooms and a manger where there was only cold water. At most went once a month or once every two months to the bathroom that was close to the kitchen. Showering over there had to be very quick because everyone wanted to get in. I went there rarely. I remember only one good washing. Water always stopped running and they didn't let us in any more. So both winter and summer we were washing only in cold water.

Did you get anything for hygiene, like a toothbrush, soap, or toothpaste?

We could have bought soap from a prison canteen. We got toilet paper and sanitary towels. The terrible thing was that this stuff came in such small amounts. Hygienic things were absolutely deficient. One always had to keep track of their money, so lets say you got 12 Crowns per month, one half had to be saved for hygienic things, the rest of the money could be spent any way one wanted. The wage was always according to the amount of work. In the beginning it was less because it took a while before one was trained.

¹⁶ A guard.

What things could you get in the canteen shop?

The choice of goods was limited of course. You could get artificial fat, marmalade or plum jam, some cheese, and toiletries. There wasn't any fruit. I remember we got fruit only once. Our teeth were already loose, I lost my front teeth there. Once we could order fruit so I ordered ten kilos (22 pounds).

What did the daily routine in prison look like?

Every morning a guard yelled, "Wake-up time!" So we all finally woke up, even those who had the afternoon shift and could sleep longer. Those who had a morning shift had to get up. They went to wash their faces and made their beds. Sheets and blankets had to be put in a certain order. If it wasn't, a guard messed it again, sometimes on purpose. Then there was role call before the morning shift. Girls started to line up in front of the gate. Then we sat down by the machines, each of us already knew what to do. Two girls were distributing tasks and then machines started off. When the weather was extremely hot, we moistened some big sheets and hung them in window frames. We never had anything like a break or a snack. We worked until 2 p.m. Then there was lunch. I didn't smoke so I only got up to go to the bathroom, which was always booked by smokers. At the end of the first shift, the machine had to be cleaned because the second shift was coming. Afterwards we ate in the canteen and then we could go to our cells. What we didn't eat, we could take with us. We already got our tin pots for food when we went to work. Then we could have a rest. Whoever wanted to read, could read, whoever wanted to rest, could have a rest. In the late afternoon there was a gathering for a walk, then the blocks closed down. The second shift worked late until 10 p.m. Then they were counted and if they were all there, we went to bed.

Do you remember why a hunger strike started in 1955 in Pardubice?

We were not treated well. The guards were arrogant, made us nervous, and they were always making up something when we worked. To solve this and put some order in things, we started a hunger strike. They promised that guards who were treating us badly and made us nervous during work, would be sent away. Even a commission from Prague came. We were all put in line facing a wall and promised that reparations would be done. Some girls didn't believe it and continued their hunger strike. Some of them went nine days without eating and they had to be treated by a doctor. I didn't take part in that because I didn't want to ruin my health just because some "čůza" was so arrogant. I followed the hunger strike myself for three days. What was interesting was that commanders were much nicer to us than "čůzas" (the woman guards). The reparations really finally came. The worst guard, who we called Elsa Koch, had to leave.

In Pardubice there was also another event, when 12 women wrote a letter to the Secretary General.

They were called "Hamršildky,"¹⁷ but they didn't send the letter anywhere. At least it was a protest where we showed they could not do everything to us. We didn't want to be treated like a lower caste of people. We were not people to them. We had to say our numbers instead of our names, so we were simply only numbers to them. We found things out from each other and we all knew the content of the letter. We all protested against the way they treated us, especially when they disturbed us at work. As a result we were delayed with everything and

¹⁷ **Hamršildky** – here means a group of 12 women, who sent a letter to the Secretary General of OSN Dag Hammarskjöld. It happened on 28th and 29th of June 1956 and the women were complaining about the bad conditions in Czechoslovakian prisons.

were sanctioned. Plus there were injuries, Edulka for example, cut her finger because of how nervous she was.

Can you, please, explain to me how you spent your free time?

We got together and chatted. On radiator pipes we boiled water for coffee and then we talked about various things. Those were the dearest things to me. We didn't have many books there. How I was telling you about the missal, before I was supposed to give it back to the nun Marta, I wanted to read it. I got deep into it and didn't notice that a guard came in. We called him "Headtwister." He asked in a second, "What are you reading? Give it to me!" I was swearing to myself for carelessness. I gave it to him, he looked into it, gave it back and said, "Leave this to the old ones here. You are too young for this stuff." I didn't expect this. I finally gave it back to the nun Marta.

Did you stay in touch with your family? How often could you send letters?

I was always writing to my mom and sister, but everything was censored. The letter couldn't be closed. More or less I was mainly writing that I was alive. More likely writing about nothing. I wanted to know more from them, what was new at home. When I was in Pardubice, mom didn't come to visit me since she was home alone and had to take care of the cattle. She used to visit dad in Ilava and I didn't want her to travel so far to see me. So my sister and brother-in-law visited.

You were released in 1963. Did conditions change any way after the big amnesty¹⁸?

They put us in different cells, together with murderers and thieves, so that we could moderate their behavior. They respected us. Some gypsies would fight together right away, but they would never do any harm to us, since we were so good to them. They sort of liked us. It wasn't the worst thing for us, but we weren't together any more to chat at night for example.

In prison you met many people you would never spend time with or even meet in your normal life out. What were your feelings like when you were in one cell with murderers or thieves?

I minded it. Once I even jumped. There was one murderer living with me. She was a beautiful girl, eyes like stars. She portioned out her kid and let her husband eat it. She wanted to scare me and knocked on my forehead once. I was terrified in that moment because I knew she was a murderer, able to do anything, who was standing over me. She got only 12 or 13 years, which I thought wasn't enough for what she did. Although there were guns in my situation, I never held one in my hands. In fact, I was always against it.

What was your release like?

They called me to the front. I didn't go there often, just when my sister came to see me. I didn't want them coming too often as it was far to Pardubice from where we lived. I didn't have a clue what they wanted from me. Sometime before that there was a political officer¹⁹ and he was offering to take me to any town. He wanted to show me how well people are doing in the socialistic state, how they love each other, how well dressed they are, simply said that

¹⁸ **A pardon from the President Antonín Zápotocký on May 9, 1960.** It was announced on the 15th anniversary of the end of WW2. This pardoned the sentences for seditious crime. It was the biggest amnesty from 1946 until the fall of communism in 1989.

¹⁹ **Political officer** – a special person in prison, who was taking care of "political issues" – e.g. he organised various ideological lectures for prisoners, he gave out his opinion when someone was released earlier, he checked whether the sentence was being fulfilled – whether the prisoners worked, and spoke nicely about Communism. All in all, he was supposed to have an ideological impact on prisoners.

there is joy and peace everywhere around. I just said, "I don't want to go anywhere, you put me in here and this is my daily bread." Then he started telling me that there are some sabotages in the workshop and that I had to notice it. I told him that we were always given tasks, I had to fulfill them as I knew if I didn't my mum could be the one who was harmed. So I was taking care of only meeting the norms. I then told him, "You don't want me to snitch around do you? The only thing I know is that each person is taking care of their own responsibility." He then replied, "That's what you think, that everyone takes care of their own work and doesn't do any sabotage on the side, but we know that's not true." At that time he chased me out. I simply told myself that there is no rescue for me and that I will have to fulfill my sentence until the end. In four months they called me again, but that was already because of my release. There was a boss from the workshop, a political officer, the head commander and others. They told me that the President of the Republic, Novotný, pardoned me and that I was free to go. I didn't expect that at all. There were others girls with me, standing there who were not released. So I asked the people who worked there, "Shall I be released alone? Let everyone go home." They said, "There were others pardoned as well and no one ever took care of you." Yet, you know, they did take care, because the girls who left cried for us, the ones who were staying. Then they offered me a job in a clothing factory in Prostějov. I was experienced and they said that they would arrange it. I refused, because I had to go and help my parents. They also told me, "If something happened to you and people in your village would want to criticize you because you were in prison, then you must report it to the police." Yet, I said to myself that they could jump on my back with that.

In retrospect, how do you feel or what do you remember about prison?

Memories about the prison are the most beautiful thing we have left. We had a wish that after our release they would make us a town or village where they could concentrate us. We understood each other better than our own relatives. Although we were all from different places, we were all of the same opinion and ways of thought.

Did you ever get together after your release?

Yes, of course. I received the biggest amount of mail in our village. They warned me to reduce it, but I was living through that. When I came back in February there wasn't work in the fields yet, so I was writing everyday almost everywhere. When I was first told in prison that I was going home, I laid down on my mattress and cried. The commander who was quite good and who always treated us like humans, came up to me. His wife was ill and he did every piece of work he could, so that she could go to the spas. He came to me and asked me what was I doing? I just answered, I'm supposed to go home, but I will not go alone, let everyone else go with me. He couldn't understand it or he couldn't get it.

Did your parents know that you were released?

They didn't know. At night I knocked on the window of my sister's and they thought I was a ghost. I stayed with her and her son played and sang. Then I went home where I registered at the town hall in Rajnochovice. My parents killed a calf right away. Right after getting back I had to find a job. I found that at the forestry department they were really helpful. I could have started whenever I wanted, so after my release from prison I stayed home for another month to relax. The girls over there accepted me and didn't look at me through their fingers. It simply went on without any problems. We were planting trees in the spring and the quota was a hundred trees a day.

So people didn't look at you through their fingers or you didn't lose old friends because you were in prison?

To tell you the truth I didn't really consider these girls as my friends. I treated them as my coworkers. The important friends were the girls with whom I was in prison. Then I found out that my manager in the forestry department was assigned to spy on me.

Did you feel in 1968 that it was getting a little easier²⁰?

In 1968 Věrka Kadlecová came to say goodbye because she was leaving to immigration. At that time I was helping at home in Bílová where I didn't really pay attention and I knew just a little about things. My dad didn't take care either of the changes, he was really ill at that time and down and out.

What do you think about when I say the year 1989²¹?

The biggest thing I was concerned about was to inform Milan and Věrka. I was extremely happy. I was having a little brainstorm that I would fly away because I was so happy. I was really glad that everything was over, but I was having different ideas about how it would be. I thought the President, who would be elected, would radically break from Communists. Yet, Havel did a different thing. He gave them the chance to freely live and breathe, although they never gave us that chance.

What was your rehabilitation like?

Before Havlíns left to immigration in the sixties, Milan came up to me and asked if I was rehabilitated yet? I didn't really think about that because Communists would never rehabilitate me. In the nineties the whole case was reviewed. I didn't have to take care of it much. In 1991 I got a letter that said I was fully rehabilitated, but I had to wait a long time before I got any restitution or compensation. From the office in Brno I got a note that they were working on it and to be patient. Naďa Kavalírová, the head of the KPV²², helped me a lot and they gave me the retribution very quickly thanks to her help. We finally got it step by step. My sister got compensation for my dad.

What do you think about the political situation now?

I would be happy if the Communists were put out behind the second railway and that they would never come to power again because it was a criminal organization. They killed so many good people. Everything was really hard for my family, but from my point of view it made sense and had value. The pupils at school should really find out how everything was and how they treated people. We didn't want freedom for ourselves, but for everyone. When I recall everything, I don't think I did anything bad. It was all just my convictions.

What helped you live through the years in prison?

Mainly it was the friendships I had. I must tell you, up until now they have been my best lady friends. People who were not there would not be able to understand this. You would have to live through this. The friendships kept us alive. When one of us lost a relative we all cried with

²⁰ **1968 was a year of political relaxation in Czechoslovakia.** The political regime was more open and a slow process of democratization started. This process is known as "Prague Spring." Nevertheless, this process was ruined by the invasion of the Soviet Army and the armies of the Warsaw agreement, at night from 20th to 21st of August 1968. Then there was a period of twenty years during which all demands for change were strictly punished and turned down.

²¹ **During 1989 the communist dictatorships all over Europe fell.** In Czechoslovakia riots and demonstrations took place between 17th of November and 29th of December 1989. Since the revolution was not harmful and violent, hence the name "Velvet revolution."

²² **KPV** – The Confederation of Political Prisoners of the Czech Republic – the association of political prisoners from former Czechoslovakia. It was established January 3, 1990.

her. When one laughed, we all laughed. Many times the guards were going nuts, but they couldn't do anything to us because the whole cell acted together.

Thank you for the interview.

Julie Hrušková assisted at illegal border crossings in the communist Czechoslovakia. She was accused of espionage and sentenced to fifteen years of prison. She aborted after a brutal interrogation in Brno. She was released on the amnesty on May 9, 1960.



“It was meant to be and life just went on. I don’t feel any hatred or bitterness.”

Interview with Julie Hrušková

Where did you grow up and what are your early childhood memories?

I was born on May 18, 1928 in Boskovštějín, which is a small village not far from Znojmo¹. My father worked as a gamekeeper for Earl Trautsmendorf. Our house was a gamekeeper's lodge in the middle of nowhere, about thirty minutes from the village where we went to school. I was left-handed and they tried to force me to write with my right hand and they used to slap me on my left. That's why I didn't like school very much. However, we had good teachers and we were learning how to write neatly, read books, and even love literature. I had two sisters and a brother. Together with my brother, we took our cattle out to feed, but my brother liked to go and see the boys in the village and used to tell me, "You will watch the cows now." I always answered, "Okay, but bring me something to read," because I used to be a keen reader then. Sometimes I would forget the cows and they ran away. I had quite a nice childhood and I went to my senior school in Jevišovice. It was an hour journey to get there, but the milkmen usually gave me a lift.

Can you remember how was your family doing during the war?

During the war, the property of the Earl came under German custody. There was a person appointed, a Czech, who wanted to appeal to the Germans and wanted to open a grammar school on the castle land. At that time, we attended senior school already and when father asked us, "Would you want to go to a German grammar school?" we were getting education along the lines of President Masaryk's philosophy and patriotism, so we said we didn't want to go to that grammar school and our father refused the offer. My father's subordinates were timber men who cut trees and woman workers who planted trees or picked strawberries and raspberries to supply the castle. They eventually said that if Hruška's children weren't going to go to the German grammar school, their children wouldn't go there either. The man who made the initial proposal for the school started to dislike my father, of course. In the end, we moved on to a farm in Blaný and my father worked as a field hand there. They grew carrots and other things there. There were hired workers who worked for the Earl and they stole carrots, of course. My father was responsible for that. They brought some carrots to my mother as well and when there was an inspection, they searched the cellars and found some carrots in our cellars too. They all went for a trial and got ten days in prison. My mother told herself that it could be worse if she appealed, so she accepted the sentence. The hired workers didn't accept the sentence in the end, they appealed, and they got a pardon. So, my mother went to prison in Moravské Budějovice for ten days during the war and she saw with her own eyes what it was like there. My father was fired, we had to leave the flat, which came with his job, and that's why we rented a house in Černín u Jevišovic and moved there. My father was called up to do forced labor in a bakery in Znojmo to replace an Austrian man who had been sent to the battlefield. At that time, Znojmo was an annexed area already. My father worked in the

¹ Znojmo – town in South Moravia.

bakery until the end of the war. He could have returned to Boskovštěj after the war ended, but in the meantime, during the war, a young gamekeeper with two children started to work there and my father said that he wouldn't like to drive him away. All our relatives, from my mother's side as well as from my father's, were in Znojmo. My sister and I used to smuggle things for them all the time because my mother worked for farmers during the war and used to get food from them. My sister and I would stuff our bras with lard, salami, flour, poppy seed etc., and that's how we smuggled it. Since my relatives had chosen Czech citizenship², they got only half-sized food rations and were struggling to feed their children. The end of the war saw our family in Černín. We experienced the Russians going wild there. The Army of Malinovsky marched through and its soldiers raped women all over South Moravia. That's why our parents shut my sister and I in our cellar and we spent the end of the war there. A doctor told me later that 60 women were raped around Jevišovice area and 7 of them died due to incurred health problems. One man was shot by the Russians when he was trying to protect his daughters and another man had to watch the rape of his wife. It was atrocious and that's why we were not in favour of the Russians.

What was it like after the war?

They forced the Earl to move away and his castle was turned into a senior citizen's home, but that was not until 1948. In 1945 all his property was confiscated because he was an Austrian citizen. He resettled and he started a rifle factory in Vienna and sold guns and ammunition there. The Countess left to live with her daughter in Italy and the marriage probably fell apart. My father got an offer for a job as a gamekeeper in the border area in Vranov nad Dyjí. He got a beautiful hunting ground and a lovely house with lots of bedrooms. My mother didn't want to move there though, because the house was on the side of a hill and to enter the barn and the shed you had to climb steps. The house was below a castle and nearby was a road leading across the border. I finished my senior school during the war and my parents got me a job with a doctor's family where I took care of the doctor's child and cleaned his medical offices. He was a doctor and had a dentist working with him. When the war ended, I wanted to study painting, but my parents didn't agree, so they got me a place in a so-called dumpling school, a school for housewives. Eventually, I only stayed for one year. I fell in love with a soldier who was already engaged, so I knew I had to forget him. My sister fell in love with a member of the State secret police³. He was a former partisan. To forget the soldier I found a job far away in Aš⁴, at the western tip of the Republic and I and my sister started to work there from September 1, 1946 until 1948. Then I had a disagreement there with a man and I moved to Brno. There I worked at a lawyer's office. I minded his two sons and did cleaning for him. I read a lot of books there. I also attended a painting course and wanted to study at an art college for a year. Once, a professor who led the painting course came to me to sort out some social papers in order to get me a scholarship for the talented, but then he asked me, "Are you a member of

² **Choosing citizenship** – After signing the Munich Treaty in September 1938, according to which Czechoslovakia surrendered a part of its border regions (Sudetenland amongst others) to Germany, the Czechs who stayed in the Sudetenland, as well as those who moved away, were asked to state whether they wanted Czech or German nationality. However, those who claimed Czech nationality lost the right to live at their original address and those who chose German nationality were in danger of being drafted into the Wehrmacht.

³ **State secret police** known under the abbreviation **StB**, was a political police force in Czechoslovakia during the communist era.

⁴ **Aš** – a town in Western Bohemia.

the Communist Party? Are you a member of the Youth Organisation? Oh, you are not? Well, only members are entitled to the scholarship.” Later, I had to stop working for the lawyer because it was forbidden to have servants. I found a job in a factory called Matador then and made rubber coats.

How did your anti-state activities start?

Well, 1949 came and there was a boy working in the factory who was in prison in 1948. He did 6 months in prison and wanted to disappear. There was another guy who never said what he was engaged in, but according to what he did mention, I think that it could have been Světлана⁵. Both of them were arrested in 1949 and questioned for 2 weeks, but then released, because they wanted to get more people, I guess. They both decided it was time to disappear. Because they knew how I felt, they came to ask whether I could help them to cross the border. I disliked the fact that they started to imprison foreign soldiers, mainly pilots. I didn't like the communist regime and was against it. So I agreed, but told them to take me along. I thought that there would be an army established abroad, like it was during World War II and that I will take part in fighting.

One of those boys, Ruda, had a girlfriend here, who was in the hospital at that time undergoing some treatment and so he had to leave without her. They came to meet me at the lodge and they were three. It was in February. I didn't say anything to my parents and waited until they were gone. We went to the wood and in the afternoon, around three o'clock, we were crossing the border. We got stopped by an Austrian financial patrol⁶ who knew me because of my father. I didn't know whether they were good guys or bad guys though, so we decided to run away from them. They were good people, however.

How did you get to Vienna and then to the Western Zone?

We continued walking for about twenty kilometers towards the railway and in one small village we persuaded a rail worker to put us up for the night at his railway station. He took me to his office, laid me down on his bed, and went to sleep on the table. He gave us tickets for the Vienna train and also schillings⁷ for the tram. We were still in the Russian zone then⁸ and had to be very careful. We caught the train at five and at eight in the morning we were already in Vienna. We came to the office of the American CIC⁹, and when I reported our arrival there, everybody was surprised, “How come you are here so early? How did you get here so quickly?” They thought we would walk all the way there. They received a report from the border from the financial patrol that the daughter of gamekeeper Hruška with three young

⁵ **Světлана** – a resistance group in Czechoslovakia, which was founded by a former partisan chief Josef Vávra-Stařík. It was founded in 1948 in the city of Zlín that was at that time re-named to Gottwaldov as a tribute to the first working class President Gottwald. The group was named after the daughter of Vávra-Stařík “Světлана.” There were three men who were the main leaders: Apart from Vávra-Stařík, there was Josef Matouš and Rudolf Lenhard. From March 1949 until May 1950, StB arrested 400 citizens at the border of the Moravian and Silesian region and also in South and Central Moravia. The prosecutors, together with StB officers, put the members of Světлана into 16 groups, which were sentenced in 16 trials during two years, starting in April 1950. Eleven people were sentenced to death and executed, including J. Vávra- Stařík, Josef Matouš, and Rudolf Lenhard.

⁶ **Financial patrol** was in charge of monitoring whether the state and financial borders were respected.

⁷ **Schillings** – Austrian currency used at that time.

⁸ After the War, Austria was divided into four occupation zones in the same way Germany was. This division lasted until 1955.

⁹ Counter Intelligence Corps (CIC) was an American intelligence service established during WWII in December 1943. Its task was to search for and eliminate German agents in the ranks of allied armies. After WWII its activities were focused on the Soviet Bloc, and especially in the 50's it recruited and trained agents who were employed to work within the region of Soviet influence including Czechoslovakia.

men had crossed the border. Then they subjected us to questioning and put us into a dormitory house. The boys met a Hungarian there who told us that he would take us into the Western Zone provided we pay for his travel. We went to Linz with him where we came to a refugee camp. Soon I went to a dance with another emigrant to get to know what life in freedom was like. Well, I was a young girl then. There I met an American soldier. His name was Frank Ferneti and later on he proposed to me. I was twenty years old and you became an adult at the age of 21 then. So the wedding had to wait. At least, the American managed to get me out of the camp and arranged a private accommodation with an Austrian family for me.

Did you know what was going on at home and with your parents?

My parents were very watchful at home. I sent a letter from Linz that I had emigrated and told them not to worry about me. They had to report that their daughter left for abroad, but they knew it in three days anyway because they were told by the Austrian financial patrol. An arrest warrant was issued on my name. My mother sent me a secret letter via the financial patrol that said, "Please do not come home, they have issued a warrant for your arrest. If you happen to be in Czechoslovakia, don't go anywhere near the lodge because we are being monitored." There was a soldier standing by the castle and checking all people going in the direction of the lodge. However, there was another path to the lodge that they didn't know about.

Did you stay in the Austrians' flat all the time or did you visit the camp occasionally to chat with the Czechs?

Well, I was alone among foreigners, so I used to go back to the camp. Czechs lived there that I could have a conversation with. It was when Frank left for a military drill that I learnt, during one of my visits, about a possibility to join in illegal activities. They were looking for somebody to secretly go back to Czechoslovakia. I told myself that I would be back from Czechoslovakia well in time for Frank's return from Germany and together with two other boys, we set off for our country. I was returning with a mission to establish an espionage unit in the Republic and take more people, who were in danger of imprisonment, across the border.

What was your motivation for going back to Czechoslovakia despite knowing that you were putting yourself in danger and that you were under arrest?

Most importantly, I wanted to help the people. We stayed in Czechoslovakia for 2 weeks and each of us had a mission. In two weeks time we met up again and I was being followed by an agent who worked for the secret police in Brno. His name was Josef Eichler. I didn't have a clue about this though. We crossed the border via a different route this time so we didn't go through Vranov but through České Budějovice. We were supposed to take several people across, but in the end they decided not to emigrate due to personal circumstances. That's why we ended up going back in four. Ruda, who emigrated with me in February without his fiancée, was taking her with him this time.

The agent I didn't know about at that time, found out our route. There was a man returning with us, whose name was Franta and had been doing espionage since 1948. He was an agent-walker. As we went, he picked up some things at Studánky. I was taking care of his briefcase where he had maps of all border areas – from Aš to Šumava, as well as lists of telephone numbers of all Czech and Slovak factories. We crossed the border in Šumava, went by bus to Linz and there they were already waiting for us, policemen with machine guns surrounded the bus. Both boys from our group passed through because the police were not looking for them. They

were looking for me and they had my photograph from the agent. They found the suitcase I was carrying and accused me of espionage. Together with me, they arrested Ruda's fiancée too because she had no ID on her. She knew nothing about what I was doing, so I wasn't afraid that she would discuss me. They handed us both over to the Russians.

What happened next?

At that time, Austria was divided into zones and I was arrested in the Soviet Zone. The Russians offered me cooperation provided that I bring them plans of an American airport. They knew that I was seeing an American soldier in his military quarters and that's why they were very interested in me. However, they wanted to keep Ruda's fiancée as a hostage. I refused because I could have never forgiven myself if I had left her there. I don't like to recollect my experiences from the Russian prison. The interrogations were carried out mostly at night, from about ten to three or four a.m. They wouldn't let me sleep during the day. When I lied down on the bench without a mattress or blankets, a soldier who guarded the door of my cell started to kick and bang at the door and I had to get up. Ruda's girlfriend caught pneumonia. They called her a doctor and he ordered warmth and more nutritious food. She got mattresses for the bench in her cell, blankets, an electric heater, and officer's meals. I ate almost nothing because all they gave us was borsch and dark bread that even mice refused to eat. Then they handed us over to České Budějovice. Agent Eichler was arrested together with seven Slovaks. Allegedly, he was leading them across the border, but he took them straight to the Russians. He was in the same transport to České Budějovice as me, but he requested a place in Brno and he was transported there. He managed to run away from Brno three times. Eichler crossed the border a couple more times and got many people into prison. He was not present at my trial, but his court records had information against me.

How were you treated in the prison in České Budějovice?

I came there in May 1949. I was starving and I ate about two liters of tasty soup and the same amount of spinach with dumplings brought to me by a Moravian prison guard on my arrival. She also reunited me with the girl I had taken across the boarder. Later, when they called us for questioning to the secret police office in Budějovice, they started to scream at us, but I told them, "You have a reputation in Linz for treating people badly here." The officer in charge then gave an order that they must not touch me and note down what I say. So, the questionings were okay, without violence. I kept telling them the same thing, I went home to get a blessing from my parents and my case was closed down in 2 weeks. I was told that I would get about 18 months. Then Brno asked for me, surprisingly. In Budějovice, they thought I had some connections there, but I knew that agent Eichler worked for Brno and that it would be much worse there than in Budějovice.

So the questionings continued in Brno?

They wanted to convict us of espionage and they wanted to know more names. I would have to kneel on a chair, I had my shoes off and when Horák came, one of them hit me several times on my feet with a truncheon. When my feet were swollen, I used to put a piece of cloth on them and by the morning the pain wore off. Sometimes I felt like fainting. The one, who was making a record of what I said, let me sit down when he saw that I was about to faint. Then Horák came, he was one of the senior investigators, and asked, "Is she speaking? Giving evidence? Naming people? No? Kneel, then!" I wasn't so much afraid of the beating as I was of them giving me an injection to make me speak. That's why I didn't drink water they brought

for me from elsewhere, I refused food and stayed hungry for several days. Sometimes the girls in the cell gave me a bit of their lunch. There were six to eight of us there. They started to call me “Mosquito” then and people still call me that today. In the cell there was a window, which was above the table and I used to hang onto the window to have a look at the new people they brought in. The jailors started to use that nickname too and it stayed with me until these days.

Were the questionings in Brno much rougher?

There they weren’t playing around. I experienced one really rough questioning when they banged my head against a table, dragged me across the room, hammered me against a closet and used whatever they could get hold of. I tried not to fall down. A phone call saved me in the end. They had to get ready for new arrests quickly. A guard took me to Orlí¹⁰, where they put me in solitary confinement. In the early hours of the morning I realised I was bleeding. I reported to a doctor, but the secret police officers had no time to take me to the hospital like the doctor ordered them to do. I was pregnant with my American soldier. I was in my third month and I aborted. They left me bleeding there for three days until I was totally drained. The whole ward of the prison revolted and requested help for me. There was an old jailor who eventually helped me and took responsibility for my transport to the Brno maternity hospital. They saved my life there, but couldn’t save the baby. They treated me really well in the hospital and let me have anything I wanted. The doctors told me that I had to rest. They then changed all the interrogators. I was interrogated by a different man who also recorded everything and the records contained only things that I had already said. Then they handed me over to the custody of the court.

What was the trial like?

I am telling you it was a farce because the verdicts were pre-arranged by the secret police officers anyway. My lawyer wasn’t helping me at all because he was assigned to me as a court appointed defendant. I got a sentence of 15 years for espionage. When I was in custody before the trial, I used to write letters to one “mukl”¹¹ and I found out that we were a part of the same case. He was a driver of the Avia¹² van and he was accused of handing over some documents to Franta, one of the boys I was crossing the border with. That was the reason for them to accuse him of espionage. I spoke to his lawyer and we agreed that I would help him in case he gets mentioned at the trial. During the trial, when he defended himself that he had had no idea of what had been going on, I put my hand up and said that Franta, the agent-walker had boasted to me that he had managed to steal some documents from the Avia and, logically, he couldn’t have known anything about it. The judge looked at me and asked me why I didn’t say this during the investigation. “Nobody asked me about that. I didn’t know this gentleman, so perhaps nobody thought we could have something in common.” I answered. The investigators were baffled and in the end he got only three years.

¹⁰ Orlí – a prison in Brno.

¹¹ “Mukl” – someone who was in prison, the word “mukl” itself comes from the abbreviation of – “a man on death row” (in Czech: muž určený k likvidaci). It was a label given to political prisoners imprisoned by communist or Nazi regimes that were not supposed to be released and were supposed to die in prisons or concentration camps. Later on, this label started to be used for all political prisoners.

¹² Avia – a lorry.

Where did they take you after the trial?

They took me to Znojmo where all inmates were starving and from Znojmo to Charles Square in Prague. From there I went to Kladno¹³ where I was seriously considering my escape. Ruda's girlfriend, who had tried to cross the border with us and had been arrested too, was there with me. She didn't want to leave though. I don't know whether it was her or somebody who heard us by chance who betrayed me, but they called me into their office and told me, "Well, well, so you would like to escape and you are trying to talk the others into going with you." Of course I wanted her to testify and they called her, but she testified against me and therefore they took me to Ruzyně¹⁴. There was no interrogation, nobody spoke to me about that. I was there for about ten days, they put a note "escape" into my papers and put me in Pankrác¹⁵ to a transport cell and from there they transported me to Jičín. I stayed there for four months. In the meantime they sent me to Terezín to work in a prisoners' commando. After 2 weeks they found out that I tried to escape and sent me back to Jičín. From Jičín they transported us to Lomnice nad Popelkou from where a women prisoner, who was a climber, had escaped shortly before we arrived. She had escaped through a bathroom window on the second floor and people said she had managed to get across the border and abroad. We weaved canvas in Lomnice. We stayed there for about four months again and then got transported to Hostinné, where they had a spinning factory. We worked at the wet hall and swapped shifts with civilian workers. The work was hard, but we had a good commander. He allowed us to take parcels from visitors and we also took money on the sly. The commander went shopping in town every day together with a vindictive prisoner¹⁶ and she bought everything for us. From there we were transported to Hradec Králové. That was already in 1952 when they were establishing Pardubice and they transported me there and I stayed there until my release.

What was your arrival at Pardubice¹⁷ like?

Prisoners were transported from Litoměřice, Česká Lípa, and Chrudim. We were taken from Hostinné to Hradec Králové and then to Pardubice. There we noticed that something was going on because guards treated us nicely and were telling us, "Girls, this isn't going to be a pleasant experience for you." We were actually the second transport to arrive at Pardubice. The first one was from Pankrác. We were used to a certain look of jailors' shoulder boards and all of a sudden we saw red shoulder boards and we knew we were guarded by the secret police¹⁸. They gathered us on the prison yard where they gave us numbers. I got number 176. We were put into one cell, it was a big hall divided into double rooms. We lived on the first floor because there were offices on the ground floor. It was called "A" section because there were also men in the "B" section. Then they gathered us in front of the "A" section, brought

¹³ **Kladno** – a town in Central Bohemia.

¹⁴ **Ruzyně** – a prison in Prague.

¹⁵ **Pankrác** – a prison in Prague.

¹⁶ **Vindictive prisoners** – prisoners sentenced on a basis of "vindictive decrees" for cooperation and collaboration with Nazi Germany. A state prisoner was also called a political prisoner, then there was a category of criminal prisoners.

¹⁷ **Pardubice** – there was a prison for women. The first transport of political female prisoners arrived on March 26, 1952 and was supposed to prepare the location for coming prisoners. Mostly political prisoners with high sentences were placed into this prison.

¹⁸ On May 1, 1951, the Ministry of Justice handed the Pardubice prison to the Home Office. From then on, the security ceased to be provided by prison guards and was taken care of by the police. Prisoners agreed that as soon as the institution was handed over to the Home Office, the prison conditions tightened up, violence occurred on a larger scale and stricter disciplinary rules were introduced.

straw and we had to stuff our mattresses. We were given covers and mess tins and we had to hand in our civilian clothes and we got prison clothes. We had no work place yet, because part of the prison was still being built. So in the beginning our job was to help the men with carrying bricks. We also scrubbed floors, which were pitch black. There was a madman of a captain and he used to come in wearing boots covered in mud and he used to say, "Now, scrub it all again!" We used glass, straw, and cold water for scrubbing the floors. There were about 80 of us at the beginning. When we had free time, we used to go lie down and chat behind the main square where grass and apple trees were, and also some vegetables were grown there. That lasted about a month. At first, they called for somebody to work in the garden, but I didn't want to do that. I was at first working in the cable room, then in the sewing room, and then the cutting room.

In September 1955 there was a hunger strike in Pardubice. What was your experience with it?

That was when I was working in the sewing room and the hunger strike originally started at the knitting room. We didn't know who started it and why. It was only later that we learnt that the overseer at the knitting room was a downright sadist, but we never had to deal with her. They rushed us to the yard and were surrounded by secret police officers with machine guns and a ministerial commission came. The girls who started the whole thing were taken to a secret police office in Pardubice. At that time, there was a change in leadership, Sultán swapped with Huňáček. When some of the women were taken to the secret police office, Merina and I, my closest friend in prison, told ourselves that we would start a hunger strike to protest. We were put into a run-down building, which started to fall down after the "big move" in the summer of 1955. The hunger strikers were divided into groups of about three and put into cells. Then, the girls who started the hunger strike came back from the Pardubice secret police office. All women finished the hunger strike, but I decided to go on. There were three of us in our cell and it had been seven days already and they made a decision to feed us. Božka Tomášková went first, but when she learnt that the others had finished the hunger strike, she finished it too. Then Vendula Švecová went and she tried to fight, but they fed her anyway in the end. I was the last. When they started to hold me tight, I told them, "Look it's beneath my dignity to fight with you. You have an order to feed me, so feed me." So they put in the feeding tube, put in the broth, but when they were pulling it out, I threw up all over Ruzyňák, a jailor who was very meticulous about his uniform. They took me to a cell next to Vendula. All in all, we were on hunger strike for 2 weeks and we used the Morse code to communicate. Vendula messaged me that she was unwell. I remember they told us that they would be taking us to the hospital in Pardubice the following day to feed us through the nose not mouth. I was looking forward to it because I thought I would shout out what was going on in front of the doctors. Vendula kept messaging that she was feeling sick. So I messaged her back to start eating and that I was feeling well so far and would go to hospital on my own. However, she collapsed in the evening and wouldn't start eating without me. So I had to finish my hunger strike.

What was the situation with hygiene in the prison? What about washing clothes or having a bath for example?

There was filth in Kladno, so we did our washing by soaking our clothes in cold water, soaping it, rolling it, and rinsing it off the next day. The most important for us was to be clean during the visiting times. We did the ironing mattress style. We slept on the clothes and in the morning we had creases ironed, skirts and blouses. We could only use cold water. If there was

some warm water we were happy to be able to use it to have a wash. In Pardubice we went to a washroom once a week or once in a fortnight, but I never went because it all depended on which jailor was on. Some of them were bitches and let us soap ourselves and then shouted to finish up and either turned off the water or turned on the cold. Later on I found out that the jailors came to watch us there. So I didn't want to show off. During the whole time in prison, I was in the washroom only about two times.

What was your experience with guards, both male and female?

In the sewing room, the overseer was Permoník and he was good. For example he saw me with the nun and he said, "Hrušková, you have been talking to Huberta for the last thirty minutes!" "I am only explaining the sewing to her, she can't get her head around it." He never sent anybody to report themselves.

Suchá Anka was the one who worked us most. Then there was another one, whom we nicknamed "Rozšlápnutý kunerol" and she used to be a prostitute. There was also Škrhola. Once Jáno made me report myself. He was always pushing me to do part time jobs. Then there was a guy who came from close to where I live now. We used to call him Prince Bayaya. Once the guards tossed cells and I forgot to hide my English textbook. So I already parted with it. In a couple of days Bayaya came and told me, "I dumped your English behind the closet," and it was really there! I never told anyone about it though.

Could you do anything in your free time?

There was an art club, but later on Potůčková-Taussigová¹⁹ became the organizer. She was a Communist and I stopped going there because I couldn't stand it. I had my principles. She was put in my cell at one stage. It was during the events in Hungary and she was worried that we would hurt her. She was very lonely in the prison and I have to say that she had a bad time there. In the "C" section I got to know Nina Svobodová²⁰, a writer who wrote poems and I used to learn them by heart. She had the idea to do theater there. After we finished work, we used to act short plays and I used to paint masks, paint the faces of the girls who acted, and did all that needed. We also used to entertain ourselves by listening to the news on the prison radio every day at seven o'clock. I used to write down the most important news, make notes and comments, and when the afternoon shift came back from work at ten, I used to read it for them. Sometimes we could even listen to classical music on the prison radio. However, the prison radio was on only during the last couple of years of my stay. It was the same with newspapers and we used to have one newspaper for the whole building. I remember once we organized a ball. We used to play music in the bathroom, one girl whistled on the comb, another sang, I played the drum, and the girls danced. Nina Svobodová saw it and liked it very much. This was still in the winter of 1953. Nina liked it so much that she wrote a program and the girls dressed up in masks and played historical parts and characters from fairy tales. There were seven dwarves, Admiral Nelson, a princess with a star on her brow, a Hawaiian dancer, Hadrian from Rome, and others that I cannot recollect. The musicians were supposed to be beetles. We made antennas, but mine kept falling off my head because I had shaved my hair

¹⁹ **Jarmila Taussigová-Potůčková** (1914–) – a member of the Communist Party, one of the leading members of the Party Inspection Committee. She was responsible for political and stalwart activities within the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia. She was sentenced in a trumped-up trial with Rudolf Slánský in 1952 and released due to amnesty in 1960.

²⁰ **Nina Svobodová** (1902–1988) – a Czech writer and journalist engaged in the activities of catholic cultural movement, worked as an editor for the calendar "Czechoslovak Woman" and cooperated with the weekly "Catholic Woman." Member of the People's Party and sentenced in the Liberec monster-process.

off the previous autumn, so I couldn't be bothered and took them off. In the end the people in masks were sent to solitary confinement and since I had no mask, I didn't go into the dark cell. People said that the chief commander of the prison really regretted not having seen our performance. The deputy, whom we called Pepánek, came. The girls spent about two weeks in solitary. A couple of days earlier, Jiřina Štěpničková²¹ came and she was completely taken aback with all this, especially our masks.

Did you ever receive or send a moták (secret message)²² during your imprisonment?

Of course, I sent many of them in prison. In every prison I used to send secret messages to somebody, mostly to men. My mom used to send me secret messages too. She would put them into scones because they didn't check them. They only cut big marble cakes. I used to tell people I trusted to eat carefully because there might be a secret message inside. I always had to wait until the message was found and only then would I hand out the scones. I also used to hand over secret messages during visits in Pardubice. I would glue one to my palm and when I stretched out my hand to give a handshake, I would squeeze the person's hand. My mother knew that I had something in there, so she took the message and pretended to cry and wipe her tears and that's how she put the message in her pocket. In 1958 we were allowed to sit at a table. Before then we received visitors always behind railings. I would like to share a little story with you. In 1956, the women from the "Castle,"²³ which was a closed department, wrote letters to the UN Secretary Hammarskjöld.²⁴ In 1958 when they transported them back from Prague, where they were serving their punishment, Zenáhlíková, Dáša Šimková,²⁵ and Irenka Vlachová again wrote similar letters to Hammarskjöld and I joined in. I handed these letters in the form of a secret message to my mother. At that time, my parents didn't live close to the border, but they lived in Věstonice²⁶ and had no way of sending the letters abroad illegally. My mother was afraid and that's why she sewed them into the insides of an armchair. When I came back from prison, I had long forgotten about that and my mother didn't mention it either. In 2006 I wanted to throw the armchair away, but had this hint and decided to cut the armchair open. A tinfoil packet fell out and there they were, the letters from 1958!

Another thing I should mention is that I also exchanged secret messages with Merina, who was my best friend in prison. I can't remember anymore why, but she got a placement at the "Castle." She was without scruples and was very honest with everybody. The commander, whom we nicknamed Sultán, knew about our secret messaging, but he had no idea how we handed over the messages. I was working in the cutting room, where the pay was a bit bet-

²¹ Jiřina Štěpničková (1912–1985) – a Czechoslovak theater and film actress. She was sentenced to 15 years in prison in a trial in 1952.

²² "moták" – a secret message usually distributed among prisoners on a small piece of paper.

²³ Special prison department called the 'Castle' for prominent politically engaged women. For example Růžena Vacková, a professor at Charles University, Dagmar Skálová, and Vlasta Charvátová were imprisoned there. Altogether there were 64 female prisoners. Apart from this department, there was a department established for nuns, which was called the "Vatican," as well as another department called "Underworld" where women with sexually transmitted diseases, prostitutes, women with mental disorders, and recidivists were placed.

²⁴ On the turn of the 28th and 29th June 1956, 12 prisoners from the "Castle" department wrote letters to the UN Secretary General Dag Hammarskjöld which described reasons and means of arrest procedures, together with the conditions in Czechoslovakian prisons, and work camps. The women were demanding their rights as political prisoners. The letters were supplemented with translations according to the language skills of each individual author. Naturally, the letters were never sent out and were enclosed into the personal prison files of their authors.

²⁵ Dagmar Šimková wrote a book of her prison memories called *"Byly jsme tam taky" (We Were There Too)*.

²⁶ Věstonice – a village in Southern Moravia.

ter and we were also allowed to receive parcels once every six weeks or two months. Once, at Christmas, I got a parcel and the commander brought it to me. Sultán was the commander then. He came to the "Castle" the following day and saw that Merina had the sweets from my parcel spread on her bed cover. Sultán told her, "Jandová, I am not going to punish neither you nor Hrušková, but tell me how did you manage to get that here?" He was constantly trying to figure out how I was sneaking the things there. Well, what I did was I went to the toilet at night and crawled through the railings there. Merina and I had an agreement about the time I go through and she was waiting for a signal and cast down a thread with her bundle of secret messages, or I tied my bundle onto the thread and she pulled it up to the second floor where the "Castle" was.

In prison, did you know about women who decided to cooperate and give information about other prisoners?

One never knew who could be cajoled into cooperation. They used promises with some people and threats to take away children and put them into foster homes. It was obvious that every mother would do anything to save her family. They never tried to persuade me because they knew that I had had a big chance with the Russians, who had tried to talk me into cooperation, but I had refused. I remember one woman who signed up to cooperate. That was during the time of Huňáček in 1958 and there was a search raid and they found my English textbook. I studied English the day before, pulled out a box with a double bottom and I had my English hidden there. One of the inmates asked me, "Mosquito, how did you come off?" I replied, "All right (in English)." and I was staring into the box. I was thinking about it and recollected that Věra was there. Her husband was imprisoned, her father was abroad and she came from a well-established family in the region of Hradec. They threatened to put her child into a children's home. I wanted to verify it first. Once, when we were sitting in our cell alone, I started to write a secret message for one of the male prisoners. She came to me and asked, "Mosquito, what are you writing?" "Oh, I am just writing to the boys, to one of the 'mukls'." It was a trap I set for her. In a couple of days, I was called in for questioning, "You are having correspondence with the male prisoners!" and he started to recite the first line of my message. So I told him, "How can you know that? Have you found it? That's interesting!" I didn't send the message instead I burnt it, but I was playing stupid. "Did you find him? Did you punish him?" "Of course he got a punishment and you will get one too." "What for? You know, I never sent any message to anybody. I just wanted proof and you will see the consequences in a little while." The following day I wrote a letter to the Ministry saying that they make people spy and threaten to put prisoners' children into foster homes. All in all, it was a complaint to the Ministry about the conditions. I said that they bossed us around, they put us into the "Dump" for nothing, gave us food only once in two days, that it was freezing there, and we had to sleep on the cement floor etc. I gave it to Škrhola and asked him to hand it over to the commander and said that I was going to start a hunger strike. They took me to the secret police office in Pardubice where a doctor came to check on me every day. On the seventh day she told me, "If I can give you a piece of advice, the letter has been delivered to the Ministry, they will come to carry out an investigation, but you are risking your health with the hunger strike." So, in the end, I stopped my hunger strike and they put me back into the very same cell. I learnt that the commander had come to the cell to do the counting in the evening and he said, "Věra, Hrušková is spreading the news that you are an informer." She went red. I didn't tell anybody, but he told

her in public in front of the whole cell because they didn't need her anymore. I came back to the cell and she wouldn't speak to me. I was thinking, "You signed because you were cornered, so I can't condemn you, but I wanted to help you. I hadn't done it to get revenge. That's why I wrote the letter to the Ministry." About a month later, the Ministry people came to carry out an investigation, so I explained the situation to them and the prison was probably told off for letting us sleep on the cement floor, because from then on there was always a mattress. Then it was Christmas time and I went around the cell to give Christmas wishes to everyone. We always made some cheerful entertainment at Christmas, because we didn't want all the mothers to be sad that they are alone, parted from their children. So we used to organize an entertainment show. Every year I made a nativity scene out of paper and every year it got confiscated. So I came to Věra and told her, "Věruška, I didn't want to hurt you, I wanted to help you." She held me like this and said, "Mosquito, thanks a lot because now they are letting me be."

You have mentioned guards tossing cells, what was that like?

They were carried out mostly when we were at work. Sometimes it was really big. They ripped straw from mattresses and threw it with jam and sugar all together into one big heap. Once I was ill and they came to do a search raid. The trouble was that I was hiding things for the girls in my cell in my bed. Ruzyňák came and he was a scary man. "How come you are in bed? We came to toss cells." "I am ill. Do I have to get up?" I didn't want to leave my bed because I had all those things that needed to be protected like photos, sweaters etc., under my duvet. So he told me, "You can stay in bed then. We'll be decent." So I covered my head because I didn't want to watch it and they were done in a minute.

I heard that there was a "big move" in 1955 in Pardubice. Can you describe what it was like?

Once, they told us that we were going to move. Everybody from the "A" section had to move to the "B" section and vice versa. That was in the times of Sultán, when he started seeing Jana, a doctor, in her office. We were told that we needed to move different types of closets too. In fact, the whole prison was being moved around. We were moving down from the third floor and were dragging the closets down the steps. The whole building was shaking. All of a sudden somebody found out that there was a hole on the third floor and it was getting bigger. They reported it and that was the end of the "big move." They invited a committee from the Ministry, which came the following day and they told us to go to sleep wherever we could find space and nobody was allowed to enter the third floor. So everybody found a sleeping place with people they knew. Eventually, they found out that the third floor needed to be knocked down because of disrupted static. Later, they put us into a stable that used to be a storage room for textiles and moved all the textiles from there to barracks in Pardubice. In the stable, Vlasta Nováčková found a nest of newborn mice in the pocket of her jacket. Mice crawled into all our clothes, so we started to hang them up on hooks on the walls.

You met various types of people in prison. Could you say something about them?

For example we lived with vindictive prisoners and they used to say, "If it was up to us, we would pave Wenceslas Square with your heads." They hated us. What's more there were guards from concentration camps and they met with their former prisoners there. The vindictive prisoners were sent to Germany in 1955. After 1955, there were only us, the political prisoners in Pardubice, and later on criminal prisoners started to come in gradually. The murderers used to say, "We only killed one person, but you wanted to kill the whole nation." In short, some were with us and some against us. What was worse were the prostitutes from Ostrava. They spoke

bluntly about this or that in a way that would make your stomach turn. They only came in the final years, towards the end of the fifties. Then there were prisoners who defrauded money, some of them were innocent, but others were frauds. Gypsies lived there too. Guards never intervened when they were having a fight among themselves. Though the gypsies were never aggressive to us.

It seems that you always knew how to take care of yourself in prison and you had no problems speaking out. Except for the hunger strike in 1955, in which you were the last person to hold on, were there some other forms of protests?

I have a funny story from Kladno prison. We refused to move because of a fart. There were about 32 women in our cell and our woman commander lived right next to us. It was the only building without bedbugs. Vindictive prisoners lived opposite to our building. The commander used to invite her lover over and one of my inmates used to watch them because it was a cabin made of wood. Once, the lover let out a fart while having sex. The inmate who was watching them got carried away and shouted out loud, "Girls, he farted while doing it!" Of course, the commander heard it. She went home for the weekend. Another commander came and because I was the cell leader at that time, he told me, "Hrušková, this is a list according to which this cell is going to be divided and moved into different cells. This room is going to be vacated and the commander will use it as a storage room." I replied, "Commander, wait a second, we are not going to move because of a fart, are we?" He gave me a slap in my face and I thanked him for it. He turned and left. He was followed by another commander and he gave me a punch in the face. My nose started to bleed, so I left for the washroom to try and stop the bleeding. He then proceeded to beat up all prisoners from the cell. My nose was broken. In 1962, I had a tumor close to my nose and when I was having it removed by a plastic surgeon, the doctors tried to fix my nose bones but they couldn't do it. The bones healed up badly and the wound was too old. I suffered from frequent nose bleeding then, especially in hot weather. I still suffer from it today, especially when I am ill with cold.

To get back to the revolt, we refused to move then and the following Monday a truck came and all of us were transported to Karlák²⁷. We were put into a large sitting room and one by one were questioned. I, as a cell leader, went first. I told them the truth. When the fifth inmate came, the interrogators were already protesting, "We don't want to hear about the fart again!" and the investigation was dropped. We pinched our fingers, got some paper from somewhere and played cards. After two weeks we were transported back to Kladno. I knew they were going to move us. That was it for the commander, as she was not allowed to bring her lover there anymore. We were moved into a building with bedbugs. The bedbugs liked my blood very much and they were killing me.

What was your release like?

There was amnesty and they read the decree out for us. We didn't laugh, weren't happy at all though. Everybody was wondering why? Well, it was because there had been a rumor going about for some time, because they moved lots of people from the "C" and "D" section to the "B" section in March. At "C" they only left one room with nuns and then murderers and prostitutes came. They emptied a room at "A" for us and we were trying to find out why they had put us together. In the end, we found out that allegedly we were all sentenced for espio-

²⁷ Prison at Charles Square in Prague.

nage against the Russians. So, I was thinking that the amnesty wouldn't probably apply to us. Each of us had to have an agreement from their hometown or village saying that they would be accepted back. My brother-in-law, my younger sister's husband, was a Communist. I would say he was an idealist though, and he trusted the Communists. He was chairman of the village council here in Věstonice and hence he knew when my release would be due. My mother told me that on the day of my release, he came to our place a couple of times to ask whether I had already arrived. They took us to the train station in small groups, one group at a time, because they were probably afraid that we would start a revolution there. Our tickets had been bought in advance and they walked me to the train and off I went straight away. We traveled in our prison uniforms. I came to Brno, but went to see a friend from the prison first and went home after that. I rang the doorbell, my mother came to answer the door and asked me, "Are you just visiting or is this permanent?" I said, "It looks like I have been released, but I have probation for 10 years." Then my mother went on to tell me that we would go and visit all our relatives and we would see where we could get a warm welcome. In the end, everybody was glad that I was back, so there was a happy ending to it.

You were sentenced at the age of twenty and spent eleven years of your youth in prison.

What was the most important thing that kept you so strong?

Faith. I was friends with a girl who was imprisoned because of her catholic activities. We used to go for walks together and she taught me a whole mass by heart. That way we were able to hold masses at the prison yard. My friend was even able to sneak in some wafers. We were constantly being persecuted because of these "masses." Nuns used to do it in a similar way. The jailors found out and we were sent to dark cells. However, during my prison years I kept my faith and I still keep it today. I always say that the mills of God have a nuclear power engine. I grew up in a religious family and that's why I saw all that as my punishment. My mother warned me not to come back to the Republic, but I wouldn't listen. I also promised the American I wouldn't go back to Czechoslovakia again and I betrayed him. My mother sent me a letter in Linz saying that there had been a warrant of arrest issued in my name and urging me not to come back and avoid our forest lodge. I didn't listen. As I am saying, it was God's punishment for my imprudence and disobedience. Still, I managed to come to terms with it. I still keep my faith.

Apart from the problems with your nose cartilage, do you suffer from any other health conditions as a result of your stay in prison and cruelties during interrogations?

As a result of my miscarriage and long imprisonment, I developed a uterine tumour at the age of 45. First, it had been only the size of a nut, but in three months it grew into the size of a baby's head. I had to undergo a serious operation during which my uterus and one of my ovaries were removed and the other sterilized. That was the end of my hopes of getting pregnant. This was the biggest blow I suffered from the Bolshevik regime.

Did you have a chance to meet your American boyfriend later on?

No, I did not. I wrote him a letter from prison, but they didn't send it to him to America. Later, when I was released due to the mass amnesty in 1960, I didn't know how to contact him. I was being watched and on the top of it, I was on a conditional discharge with ten years probation. So, I bought a book called "Travels through Czechoslovakia" and sent it to him. There was a photo of Věstonice inside on which I wrote in English, "This is my home." In three months time the book came back though. A few years ago, I eventually managed to trace him down.

The children of a relative of mine, who have good computer skills, found him using his name and date of birth. They found out that he died in 1991, just after the Revolution. Computers were not common in 1989, so there was no way for me to look for him. That's why I only found him after his death.

Is it at all possible to get over all the suffering, pain, and loss that you have been through?

When I was in prison I always had strong support from my parents. Nevertheless, I had to come to terms with the fact that I lost my child. I always say that it was meant to be and life just went on. I have managed to reconcile with everything. I don't feel any hatred or bitterness. When I came back from prison at the age of thirty-two, I wanted to have a baby, but I couldn't anymore. It just wasn't possible after eleven years in prison. So, I stayed alone, faithful to my American.

Thank you very much for the interview.

Květoslava Moravečková was a teacher in a nursery school. She was arrested in 1952 because of hiding a secret agent. She was sentenced to ten years of prison.



“What helped me most was that I was myself and I didn’t take the others into consideration. My mind was always at home.”

Interview with Mrs. Květoslava Moravečková

I'd like to start with a question about your childhood. Where did you grow up and what are your memories of your parents?

I was born February 10, 1924, I was the only child and my parents were very kind. My mom and dad would do anything for me. I went to school in Malín¹ and I had quite good grades. In Malín there was an elementary school that I attended for four years. Then I passed entrance exams to Vlašský Dvůr secondary school and stayed there for another four years. My family had farm land, about 12 hectares, and we also farmed a field that my uncle owned, so that we had enough for the cattle. Altogether we had four cows, a heifer and a few horses. My family was Czech and my granddad always taught me Czech songs. My granddad and my dad could speak German and Czech perfectly. I was supposed to go on an exchange program² to learn German, but unfortunately it never happened because the war started. Before the war started I had gone to a training college for nursery school teachers in Křižovnická Street opposite the Parliament³ because I had always wanted to bring up small children.

Did you farm your land by yourselves?

My mom had a maid, Kristýnka, and she helped with the household and we also had a house that we used for accommodating farm workers. These workers helped us with work and of course got paid for it. Yet, we were cottagers and my father never pretended to be a farmer, although in reality he was a farmer through and through. We also had two women working for us and they did the hoeing. Sometimes my auntie from America came. Auntie wrote for the journal *Ženské Listy* in America and for the *Hospodářské Noviny* newspaper also in America. One time a woman called Mrs. Pavlíková, who also wrote for *Ženské Listy*, came with auntie. They both knew Alice Masaryková, the daughter of Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk⁴. In America, there was an organisation called the Czech Ladies Association, a member of which was also Alice Masaryková. Alice was always telling them to stop by at Lány⁵ when they come to Czechoslovakia. Once when my auntie and Mrs. Pavlíková did go to Lány, they took me along. I was about ten years old, they dressed me up fine and off we went. I will never forget the meeting with President Masaryk. I see it as clearly as if it was today. He came riding a horse, jumped down nimbly, handed the reins to the groom and bowed for the ladies. I remember auntie telling me that I must not greet the President 'Ruku líbám!' (Kissing your hand Sir.), but I must tell him, 'Nazdar!' (Hi!) So I told him 'Nazdar!' (Hi!) and shook his hand. He replied, 'Nazdar!' (Hi!). I still like to recollect the meeting even today.

¹ Malín – a small village close to Kutná Hora which is a town in Central Bohemia.

² Exchange program – this is an exchange of children between families for about one year when children were supposed to learn a foreign language and some profession. In Czech this was usually an exchange with German families.

³ Nowadays it is the Rudolfinum building in Prague.

⁴ Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk was the first Czechoslovak President. He was in office from 1918 to 1935.

⁵ Lány – the seat of Czechoslovak and Czech Presidents.

Which political party did your parents lean to?

My father was not a member of any political party, but during the First Republic he tended to lean towards the Social Democrats. For example, he liked Štefánik more than Beneš⁶ or Masaryk⁷. He was held captive by the Italians during the World War I and he was telling me about Masaryk, Beneš, and Štefánik coming to Czechoslovakian soldiers and trying to persuade them to join the legions⁸, but some of the soldiers were wounded, for example my father was shot in the leg, so how could he go and fight? But Štefánik came and addressed them, "Brothers, this is the situation we have and those of you who can, please join the legions, but we don't want to put any pressure on you." However, Masaryk and Beneš did put pressure on them. My father didn't join the legions in the end. With him was a man called Brychta, also from Malín and he used to bring bones for my father to crush and make into soup. However, it spread and Brychta didn't get away with it. My dad used to tell him then, "Brychta, if I ever get back home and slaughter a pig again, I'll invite you for every single pig slaughter I do." So he did. Every time we slaughtered a pig, Brychta came around and helped my father.

How big actually was Malín? How many inhabitants or houses did it have?

There were 25 houses altogether. The wealthiest farmers were Zedník, Pokorný, Vlk, and another Pokorný. Us, the Zima family, the Fuchsa family, and our neighbor Filip were, I would say, middle farmers.

Did you feel any changes around 1938? What was your experience with the establishment of the Protectorate?

We, in Central Bohemia, didn't really feel any changes. Although, we had relatives in the mountains and there was a totally different situation. I used to go there as a child, but later, to go there people had to have a special permit and I, as a child, didn't have it. I only had a Kenncard. Every time I came there, Pepík Hnykú, who was a clerk, would take me to do the cheese delivery with him. He used to say, "Květuška, we will take the car and do the cheese delivery and we will go to the Sudetenland⁹." I didn't have the permit, so I had to crouch and Pepík could speak fluent German, so he would tell the SS officer, "Das ist meine Schwester" and handed him a cheese, so it always went smoothly.

What was Malín like during the war?

Aircraft flew over and bombarded Kolín and bombs flew over our heads. Once we were slaughtering a pig. We did it on the sly and it was illegal. We had an electric steamer and they cut off electricity, so we couldn't cook the meat. Mum lit the stove quickly. It was Velebníček who slaughtered the pig that time and he said to my father, "Calm down, Mister, if someone comes, we will just say that I came to take care of the piglets' teeth and it will be fine..." In the end we managed to finish anyway, the blood sausages and everything... and we had a jolly good feast.

⁶ **Edward Beneš** was the second President after T.G. Masaryk from 1935 to 1938. He was also a President in exile in 1940–1945 and the President of Czechoslovakia after the War (1945–1948). Together with T.G. Masaryk and M. R. Štefánik, he took part in the resistance movement during WWI and he is one of the founders of Czechoslovakia.

⁷ **Milan Rastislav Štefánik** was a Slovakian politician and a general of the French army. During WWI he organized Czechoslovak legions and he is seen as one of the founders of Czechoslovakia.

⁸ **Troops of volunteer soldiers** that were formed during WWI mainly in Italy, France, and Russia. They supported Czech and Slovak emigrants in their effort to create an independent Czechoslovakia.

⁹ **The Sudetenland** was a region in the area in the Czech territory with a majority of German inhabitants. After the Munich Agreement in 1938, this region was surrendered to Hitler's Germany.

Did you have to pay taxes to the Germans?

Yes, we did. We paid in kind for example eggs, but I can't remember anymore because I was just a little girl. I remember that we had to hand in eggs because once my aunt, my mother's sister, came and my mom had promised to give her some eggs, but my mom used them for paying the tax, so she had nothing to give her and aunt scolded her. Mom said, 'I'm not going to let them give me a fine just because of aunt.' She came for the eggs a week later.

Were there inspections?

If some inspectors came, my father would start speaking to them in German and it would be OK. We weren't friends with the Germans, we were Czechs, but my father was more a Slovak because he loved Štefánik. For one, Štefánik was a protestant like we were and second, he didn't try to persuade them.

Can you remember the liberation?

They shot about 9 to 12 people here who are buried here in Malín. Germans shot them when they were retreating. I don't particularly like Russians either. They were too familiar at the beginning, but also were a bit aggressive.

Do you recollect the post-war period?

After the war I became a teacher in a nursery school and stayed there until the time when I was arrested. When the Communists got me that was it, my life was spoiled. I divorced my first husband because he was a Communist with every bone in his body and I was not. Then, when they arrested me, they brought me to Kutná Hora, the same place where Havlíček Borovský was imprisoned. I remember wondering to myself in which of those cells could Havlíček have been locked up?

Why did you get arrested?

Because we kept an informer in our house. I barely knew him because I was working then and when I came back he was gone. My uncle, Mr. Žďárský, brought him to us. His name was Němeček and he said he was cooperating with America. He stayed for about two months. You know, they were so good, my family would die of hunger to feed other people. My parents had a heart of gold and they always gave to beggars. Němeček was arrested later and so was everybody who had something to do with him. We were pro-American because we have relatives there and perhaps that's why my father believed him. We really didn't think twice about it. We didn't know that they would make such a monster-process out of it and one thing that never ever crossed our minds at all was that we could end up in prison because of him. Lots of people from Malín got arrested because of him.

Can you describe your arrest?

We were arrested in one day, my father and me. Father was arrested in the morning and I in the afternoon and we were both arrested at home. I did some training in Kouřim at that time and there was a rumor that people were being arrested. We were all shaking with fear. When they came to arrest my father in the morning I was in Kouřim, but I faked being ill. I got home in the afternoon and then my mom told me that my father had been arrested. Eventually, in the afternoon, they came to take me too. They came and said, "You'll come with us. We want to ask you some questions!" They had to show me their ID and they took me to the district council. That was when there were lots of arrests going on in Kutná Hora and they were starting to arrest people in Malín too. I really didn't know at all why I was being arrested, but I had a clue that it could have been because of Němeček. They took me for questioning at the Kutná

Hora district council, but I denied everything. I was arrested on February 7, 1952. My trial was in May 1952. I was sentenced to ten years, got a three-year pardon and was released on February 7, 1959. My mom kept asking for sentence reductions during my time in jail.

Can you describe the interrogation process?

It was relatively calm. They weren't being really aggressive and they didn't use swear words neither. They accused us of knowing Němeček. I didn't deny it because he was a husband of my schoolmate. Then they locked us up in a prison in Kutná Hora and I remember the freezing cold weather that day. The jailor took everything away, even my coat. I had a skirt and they gave me stockings that kept sliding off my legs. They also gave me pieces of string and I didn't know what for. The string was to tie the stockings and hold them up. The jailor was incredibly stupid, she couldn't even spell the word "cigarettes" correctly. With me was a vindictive prisoner¹⁰ Ilona Hofferová and she was trying to calm me down when I started to swear and told me that woman was a chief officer. I had a golden watch and it was stolen. When I think about it, there were many things I never saw again. So they didn't beat me or anything in there, but after the trial they brought us to Pankrác, where it was catastrophic.

Could you describe the cells in Kutná Hora a little bit?

We were about four in our cell: Mrs. Königová, Hofferová, and one more. It was a dreadful place. There was a "šajzák," a washing pot, where we went to relieve ourselves. It stank disgustingly. We had beans for lunch, that was a nightmare, and then we had potatoes, but we never got meat with that. When they were taking us to the monster-process, my father gave the jailor sugar to give to me. He believed in sugar the same way I do. The jailor told me, "Miss, when you are eating potatoes, watch out you have there something from your daddy." Dr. Motejl helped me in a similar way when he was employed as a doctor for female prisoners. About two days before the trial, the jailor brought me some glucose, "The doctor sends you this. He says you should eat it, it's nutritious." The jailor we had there was good. Glucose is also good for your nerves. First, they gave us white ribbons, those were for district prisoners, but then before the monster-process, they gave us green ribbons. Mrs. Königová told me that we would have a trial at the state court. Her husband was executed and she gave me a small loaf of bread before the trial started. I went to the trial thinking that I would be released. I had no idea that it would end up the way it did. I was certain that I wouldn't stay in jail for long. In the end I served seven years out of ten.

I'd like to go back to your trial. Can you remember the proceedings?

During the monster-process, they were feeding me. It was just a bit of black slurry and a piece of bread, but for example my father didn't get anything at all. However, I will never forget the potato soup, it was nothing special, but we got a scone with the soup. I said, "Commander, could I send this scone to my father please?" I was allowed to, so I sent it to him. They just gave them absolutely no food at all, and my father had had a stomach operation.

I shared the cell with Mrs. Königová, as I said before. She told me, "Květuška, when you are before the court, you tell them everything." That's why I wasn't afraid of them. She gave me support that I needed so much. They tried to throw shame on America, but I told them, "What do you know about America, have you been there? It's true that I haven't been there, but my

¹⁰ **Vindictive prisoners** – prisoners sentenced on a basis of "vindictive decrees" for cooperation and collaboration with Nazi Germany. A state prisoner was also called a political prisoner, then there was a category of criminal prisoners.

relatives live there." That's what I told them in front of the entire court hall. There were many workers from factories in the neighborhood and the hall was completely full. I felt sorry for my father, first and foremost, but he wasn't afraid either. We just didn't want to play the inferior and the humiliated. The trial was in a local public house in Malín, the same place where theater plays used to be put on. On the stage, all the people of the village were sitting. We were supposed to be judged by prosecutor Čížek,¹¹ but he renounced the job. There were twelve people to be judged. I knew almost all of them. They were people from Malín: Holec and his son, Havelka, Eliška Štípková, my father, me, the postman, whose name I've already forgotten, and I can't remember the rest either. I remember Holec declaring, "Ladies and Gentlemen, I do not see this as a trial. This is a theater play." The trial lasted one day and the sentences were: 10 years for me, 12 years for my father, the same for Holec, and 12 years for his son too, I think. The sentences were severe. Eliška Štípková got the least severe sentence because she was a sister-in-law of that informer rat Němeček and she only got one year. Němeček wasn't put on trial with us. If he was put on trial somewhere else, I do not know and we never saw him again after that. He was said to get a good position and had some kind of a hotel some place.

My uncle, who introduced us to Němeček, had a trial in Kutná Hora in Tyl's Theater. They loaded us into vans and took us to Pankrác¹². I sat next to my father and he told me, "Květa, I'll give you a slice of bread because the bread in Pankrác is terrible and you will not want to eat it." That was the last time I saw my father until my release from prison.

Can you remember your arrival at Pankrác?

When we arrived at Pankrác, we had to stand facing the wall and put our hands up. I was terrified they would shoot us. When I went to the hospital for a check-up later, I fainted there. There was a doctor or "mukl"¹³ sitting next to me with a wet towel in my face and he was telling me not to be afraid because he was a "mukl" as well. That was my first time in prison and I had no idea what the word "mukl" meant. Then they put me in the cell with Eliška Štípková and we went to beat the carpets for the guard officers. At that time, I was stupid enough to give them a proper beating.

Where did they take you from Pankrác?

From Pankrác they sorted us into units or so called "commandos." I got transported to Jilemnice and it was a nice commando. Although it had a wet hall, it was fairly good there. I had relatives who owned a grocery shop there. We used to take a cart and do shopping for the kitchen. We always went with the jailor, of course. They always gave me butter, fruit and vegetables, so we were fine. The officer had a good time too, because every week he would walk away from the shop of my relative Mr. Tuž, with a case overflowing with fruits and vegetables. When they found out we were relatives, they banned me from going shopping. I didn't even thank them for helping us so much, but I was worried because they were constantly monitoring me.

What work did you get in Jilemnice?

We spun linen and put it onto spools. We only had one shift and worked about 8 hours. Then we went to the camp and had something to eat there. Then it was time for lights out and we

¹¹ **JUDr. Karel Čížek** was a prosecutor who was famous for taking part in communist monster-processes during the 1950's.

¹² **Pankrác** – a prison in Prague.

¹³ **"Mukl"** – someone who was in prison, the word "mukl" itself comes from the abbreviation of – "a man on death row" (in Czech: muž určený k likvidaci). It was a label given to political prisoners imprisoned by communist or Nazi regimes that were not supposed to be released and were supposed to die in prisons or concentration camps. Later on, this label started to be used for all political prisoners.

went to sleep. We were patrolled by factory people. Later only 12 of us remained, but I must say that the staff officers were really nice to us, the real political prisoners, and we had cocoa and sweet buns. We stayed there together with the regional prisoners and we lived in the same block, but each group had a different room. Once, when we were walking to the factory, a bus appeared all of a sudden and one inmate jumped under the wheels. She was a murderer. A day before she came to me and said, "Mrs. Vosátková, do you believe in life after death? For I had a dream that my husband, whom I had killed, came for me." After that she was just sitting there doing nothing, lost in thoughts. The problem was I couldn't give her any answer really and the following morning this thing happened. There was chaos and we were asked whether there was a doctor amongst us. Lída Krupičková was and said so and she escorted her all the way to the hospital. Later, she told me, "Květa, I shouldn't have gone there with her, it was awful." During that week I had visitors and my mom learnt that a prisoner had jumped under a bus. My mom was upset because she was worried that they were treating us badly. From Jilemnice I went to Minkovice and from Minkovice to Varnsdorf and then through Pankrác to Zlín and from there directly to Želiezovce. From there I went to Pardubice in 1956 where I stayed until my release.

From Jilemnice they transported you to Minkovice and that was perhaps a smaller commando. What do you remember about it?

In Minkovice we abraded stones and I enjoyed that work. It was an easy job there. In Varnsdorf we weaved nylon. That was in 1953. The directors came and chose big handsome girls for the night shift and I was one of them. During the first night shift I was very sleepy. There were machines as big as my house and I switched them on, all spools, sat down on a box and slept. All of a sudden the overseer came and said, "You only had six spools on, switch on the whole machine." I woke up and walked sleepily to switch on all spools and went to sleep again. I did very little work then. From Varnsdorf I got transported to Liberec. The prison van came and I took all my things. In Liberec I got a two-year pardon. When we arrived, the overseer came and asked us, "Girls, what's the court you've been sentenced by? By the state? Do you like tripe soup? Two pots full of thick tripe soup and a half-slice of bread for everyone, supervisor!" We were all caught by surprise, we were starving because they didn't give us enough food in Varnsdorf. Then the escort came and we went off to Pankrác where I collapsed and that's why they made an X-ray in the Pankrác hospital. They found out that I was catching tuberculosis, but I had no TB, just weak lungs. From Pankrác we left by bus. We had to wear civilian clothes so that nobody could see that they were transporting prisoners. We drove around my home and I saw our house and tears went down my cheeks. I was saying to myself, "Mom, I wish you could give me just a piece of bread crust." Later, when my mother came to see me, she was telling me about this dream she had that I came to knock on her window and ask her for a piece of bread.

Where were you transported?

We came to Zlín, which unbelievably stank of rubber. All food stank of rubber. We worked at the assembly line and each of us had her own task to do. I felt sick all the time and the foreman saw me and I went to the doctor. The doctor told me to stop working at the line immediately. I was happy that I didn't have to be in the stench anymore. Then they closed it down and we got transported directly to Želiezovce. When we arrived, they divided us into quarters. The following day there was a line-up and we were assigned various jobs and I was lucky. I got a job in

a place called "járek," where the disabled worked with us. We went to work by a small handcar and I worked in the tobacco gang. It used to be very hot there.

You said that you worked together with the disabled?

Yes, poor souls! They were mentally disabled and if you saw how they were treated! They were treated like slaves. They got up in the morning just like us and they got black slop. They got a piece of bread and went out to work into the scorching sun and each of them got a line of beetroots to hoe. A supervisor was following them, with a long stick in his hand, watching how everybody worked. If one of them didn't do the hoeing properly, the supervisor took the stick and the disabled had to go back. They were so scared of the supervisors, poor souls! It was unbelievably drastic. This was how socialism looked like.

What was the arrival in Želiezovce like?

When we came to Želiezovce, it was snowing hard and the weather was freezing cold. I wouldn't wish this on anybody. It was snowing and raining and we were walking through corn fields. All was wet. We came to our quarter and there was a small stove to be shared by 40 people. In the morning our clothes were still wet as we were putting them on. It was slavery! We got a small bucket of coal, but ended up using corn for fuel anyway. The accommodation was awful because there were bedbugs all over the place and we had to kill them every night. We lived in sheepfolds, they were kind of wooden houses. There were large rooms that slept about 40 people and each of us had a bunk bed. There were normal houses as well. In one of the stone houses nuns and prostitutes lived.

Can you remember the hepatitis epidemics?

First there was a typhus epidemic in Želiezovce. They were supposed to give us vaccination and I was afraid of it. I remembered my father who was telling me that they got typhus vaccination during the war as well, but he was telling me, "I always squeezed it and there was a squirt of blood, but I was able to bear the vaccine better than the others." The doctors came first and they were supposed to vaccinate us, but then they only left the vaccines behind and left. One ampoule was supposed to be for two or three prisoners. The woman who gave us the injections was not a doctor at all, she was a kind of backstreet abortionist. There was a line-up and I came forward and said, "Officer, I would like to report to the chief officer because of the way you give us the vaccination here, we don't even give it to our pigs at home." I came to see the chief officer, we had to report ourselves like soldiers do, "Prisoner number such and such reports arrival." I told him I was not going to get the vaccination. He replied, "OK, I will tell the doctor to boil the needle and use a new ampoule for you." I was on cloud nine because I expected he would send me to a correction cell. As soon as she gave me the injection I squeezed the spot. Later, doctors from Pankrác arrived and said it wasn't typhus but hepatitis. We were to get gamaglobulin and again they had to boil the needle for me and open a new ampoule. There were prostitutes and who knew what kind of diseases they could have had.

In Želiezovce did you get to know for example about the Hungarian uprising?

Well, once when we were on our way to work and we heard distant sounds of shooting. It was close to the Hungarian border. The supervisors told us to ignore it because it was from the marble mines. However, we knew already that it was the revolution in Hungary. The following day, when we were going to work, there were soldiers everywhere. We arrived at the yard, lined up, and got divided into the state and the regional prisoners. We, the state prisoners, were put in quarantine and weren't allowed out anymore. We were issued a three-liter

bottle of milk, tomatoes, peppers, better bread, and bigger food rations. We didn't work, we just caught bedbugs. Then they sent us to Pardubice. I was happy because I thought that it would be closer for my mom to come for a visit and she wouldn't spend so much money on traveling.

How often did your mother visit you?

Mom went to see my dad as well and she didn't have so much money either. She came to see me in Želiezovce one time. I had no contact whatsoever with my dad, we didn't even exchange letters. In the end we met only when I was released.

Was it a problem to communicate with murderers and prostitutes?

Not with the prostitutes, no, but was with the murderers. Some of them were sadists and had no feelings. I used to study characters and people in prisons. I met all sorts of people there. In Pardubice there was a gypsy woman who used to come to see me. She couldn't read and she got letters from her child, so I used to read them for her. The jailors didn't like gypsies and were aggressive to them. They mixed us, for example they put nuns together with prostitutes just to humiliate them.

How was your arrival in Pardubice?

We arrived and I got a job at the garment factory, but I didn't like it there. The norms were too tough. Lída Krupičková assigned the easiest jobs to enable me to meet the norm, but I didn't manage anyway. On New Year's Day there was supposed to be an announcement of who failed to meet the norms. My name was announced and the chief officer came to see me in the garment room and was asking me why I wasn't meeting the norms. I replied, "Officer, I came from Želiezovce and I can't do anymore." He said, "Would you like a lower norm?" However, I never told them that I needed something from them, so I told them that it didn't matter to me. The Tesla factory in Přebouč was just being opened there. There they trained us to do potentiometers. It was better there and then I worked slowly not to increase the norm.

Were there sanctions for you for repeatedly not meeting the norm?

Yes, for example I wasn't allowed any parcels when my mom came to see me when I had a sanction. My mom was sad, but on the other hand, I was sometimes glad because I knew that mom had very little for herself sometimes.

What did you wear?

In Želiezovce we had skirts and white man shirts with no collars. When it was very hot in there we pulled them out and we had a bit of air circulation around our bodies, but we weren't allowed to wear bras. In Pardubice I got trousers, a coat, and a shirt and it was all made of itchy cloth. We all had the same brown or grey-brown. We also had square black grey scarves. Our underwear was provided by the prison as well. They changed it for us every week but I used to hand wash it to have it clean. I put it over the frame of my bed and sometimes the other inmates got angry because of that. Well, it really was an ordeal sometimes. The rest of the clothes they never changed for us. When we came to the camp, we got two blankets, a bolster and that was it. There was a straw mattress and that's how we made the beds.

Could you briefly describe what was the daily routine like? When was the wake-up call, what were the working hours, when you got lunch, and when did the lights go out?

In Želiezovce we woke up at six every morning, had breakfast, the first line up was already at seven o'clock, we were divided into work gangs, and we went to "járek." My workplace was a bit further. We picked tobacco there and put it on long bars. The bars were later hung in

a drying house. Then we picked tomatoes and I used to eat them on the sly. The food wasn't great- watery soup only with a bit of hulled barley in it and bread. They brought us lunch there. We got lunch around noon and we worked until three or four o'clock and then went back to the great yard by handcar and there was the general line-up. The line-up was usually around six or seven o'clock and it lasted about an hour or an hour and a half, I can't tell you precisely because we had no watches. We could only tell the time according to the sun. If somebody ran away, as for example Dáša Šimková¹⁴ did once, the line-up was longer, because it took a long time to count us and find out if and who was missing. After the line-up we went to bed already. We were glad that we could go to sleep. It was real slavery there! In Pankrác, it looked like this: In the morning we had to empty the shit pots and there was a revolting smell from them everywhere. Then we got bread and disgusting tea, it was a wish-wash really. At noon, some of us worked, so they took them, for example we beat the carpets and other prisoners could sit down, but couldn't lie down. Some of them had to walk around without stopping. In Pardubice we got breakfast in the morning, went to the garment room, and did sowing there. I was never able to meet the norm 100 %. We got some wages for the work we did and could treat ourselves and buy something for the money. We worked until two o'clock and then we went for lunch, which we could take with us to the dorms. Around six o'clock there was the evening line-up and we went to sleep.

Did you ever have any free time? What did you do then?

For example we did various kinds of handiwork. In Varnsdorf we made flowers, we begged for pieces of fine wire off the electricians and wound them around a pin and then we took the wire and wound some yarn around it. I have a flower like this at home. My mom secretly smuggled it from the prison for me. It is a bit out of shape though, because when my mum came to visit, we shook hands and I had the flower hidden in my hand. Luckily, nobody realised it otherwise I would go into solitary confinement as a punishment. Sometimes we got lemons in a parcel, so I made a piglet out of it. We used to cut bookmarks out of toothpaste paper boxes, and we made different things out of bread too. That's why I wasn't interested in doing board games such as "Člověče, nezlob se!" (a game "Man, don't get mad!") Some even did chess. My dad, for example, had a wallet for camp money made out of toothpaste that I still keep at home.

Was it possible to borrow books from the library?

We could borrow books, but it was only socialist books and I didn't read them. We could borrow a newspaper, but only the newspaper Rudé Právo¹⁵. I remember reading the paper once. The thing was that after finishing our own work, we had to do another job - we had to help builders. I used to run away to the toilets because they couldn't go there to get us. Once he came though and caught me reading the paper. When a jailor came to the dorms, we had to stand up and report ourselves just as soldiers do during their military service. It was shortly before my release then and I was thinking he could as well bugger off. He came and I was sitting by the window and he says, "Don't you know what you are supposed to do when an officer comes?" I got up very slowly, "I am very sorry, officer, I did not see you as I was reading the paper." He continued, "Which is your bed?" He took my blankets and threw them on the floor.

¹⁴ Dagmar Šimková wrote a book about her memories of the prison called "Byly jsme tam taky" (We were there too).

¹⁵ Rudé právo – (in English "Red right") up until 1989, a daily newspaper of the Communist Party.

Of course, we had to have our beds made the military way and when he was leaving, I said aloud, so that he could hear me, "I hope he doesn't think I am going to make my bed before the line-up!" However, I had to do a second job in the building site. We carted bricks. I used to go and take one brick, put it in the wheelbarrow, take a rest, take another brick, put it in the wheelbarrow, take a rest. The jailor shouted at me to work faster, but I ignored him.

What was the hygiene like in prison? For example, how often were you allowed to have a bath?

There was no hygiene. When we came back from work we went to the washroom, which was for about twenty people. There were troughs full of water. The washrooms were dreadful and I wonder how come I didn't catch anything serious in the prison.

Was there a supply of toiletries, such as toothpaste or soap?

This we had to buy with the "treat" money, with the camp money. I had very little when I was working at the garment factory. In Tesla we could have up to 80 Crowns, so I used to give some of it to Terezka Vejsadová who had a job stringing beads and earned like five crowns, which was barely enough to buy the toilet paper. I gave her a bit extra, so that she could buy other important toiletries. She was older, so she didn't have to buy sanitary towels. She was like my mom. She was unhappy when I was leaving and she was staying. Her son emigrated abroad and her daughter used to come to visit her. They also confiscated all their estates. Anyway, in the canteen we could buy sugar, biscuits, toilet paper and sanitary towels. Chocolate, tinned food and other goodies were not available.

What was the food like in Pardubice?

In Pardubice we had most often potatoes and carrots, carrots and potatoes. It was very bland. The sight of carrots used to make me sick for a couple of years after that. In Želiezovce we picked peppers and tomatoes in the fields because the food was dreadful there. The soup was water and a small piece of bread and we were starving all the time.

Would you be able to describe the difference between a stone prison and the so-called "commando"?

In prison a jailor came and stuck a pot of coffee, soup, or some food through the door window and closed it again. Then I just sat on the straw mattress, but it was forbidden in some places. In a commando it was a bit freer, we could move around as we wanted. Pardubice despite being a stone prison was better, in any case. It is true that the food was terrible too, but we were warm. However in Želiezovce we had to work in foul weather, in sleet and frost.

You said that you met a vindictive prisoner, Mrs. Hofferová, in the Kutná Hora prison. Did you meet other woman prisoners who were sentenced according to the Vindictive Degrees?

What were the relations among you like?

I have to say that they wished it on us to be imprisoned. Mrs. Königová, who tried to familiarize me with the realities of prison life, told me, "Watch out for Ilona Hofferová, she cooperates with the jailor and is an informer."

Did you know also in Pardubice, for example, which one signed the cooperation documents and started to give information on people?

No, we didn't know because there were far too many of us. That's why I was always alone in the prison, I didn't believe anybody. I was alone, alone with my thoughts, and thinking about my mom and dad.

What was your release like?

Well, I wrapped all my things I owned into a blanket and had to hand in all things I got from the prison at the sick room. When I was leaving I left my camp money to Terezka and a kilo of sugar to Johanka¹⁶. At the sick room, I got my civilian clothes. I left for home and the girls stayed. The jailor took me to a small gate, behind which inmates unloaded coal. My father, who came to meet me there, told me, "Look, they are saluting you." My father came, he had been at home for almost a year, he was released after serving half of his sentence.

What was it like coming back home?

When I came back, people avoided and turned their back on me. I lived with my parents, but an informer was sent into the village. Her name was Kučerová and she was eavesdropping on us and sent the information further. She could do whatever she wished in the village. Once her husband broke my arm. They planted them here when my mom was alone here. They stayed until I got married. Not only us, but everybody feared them. It was like living in a second prison. When I came back I went to the job center and said that I was looking for a job, but commensurate with my education. So they told me, "We can offer you Mira, where you could do sowing or the state farm or the brewery." I applied for the Mira job, I left my ID there and was supposed to pick it up two days later. However, I had had an argument with Kučerová before and she made it impossible for me to get that job. So I went to work in the brewery, but that was no good for me because my nose kept bleeding and I was wet all the time. So I had to go to work in JZD¹⁷ (Unified Cooperative Farm) in Sedlice. I wanted to work in the garden, but after about two weeks the administrator Mr. Medřický came and said, "I am sorry, but I cannot do otherwise, but send you to work in the field with the rest of the women. This work is too posh for you." So I started to work in the fields. Once, on my way from work, it was the season for hoeing potatoes, the administrator ordered me to take a basket full of potatoes. I really appreciated it at that time, as we were quite poor. When I returned I didn't even have a bed and had to sleep on the floor.

Did you have to report yourself after coming back?

When I came back I got an invitation to come to the secret police to get my ID, as I didn't have it. The policeman told me, "Sit down here and wait for the superintendent." He came and told me that he would like to have a word with me, "You could cooperate with us and get various privileges in return..." He was telling me all this and I replied that I would think about it, but was saying to myself, "I don't give a damn. Me, cooperating with such rubble? You took everything away from me: my health, my property, and I will cooperate with you on top of this?" Later, I didn't sign anything and as a consequence didn't get a better job.

How did the people in the village treat you?

That varied. For example, when my father came back from prison, my mom didn't have even a potato, or a plate or a spoon. So my dad took a basket and went to see a farmer, to whom he had once helped when his farm had caught fire. He went to him thinking that he didn't want anything for free, that he would pay for everything. The farmer told him, "I'd rather give it to the pigs!" Some people behaved towards us as towards criminals, but on the other hand, some of them were helpful. Once my father told me to take money and go to Mr. Linek to buy

¹⁶ Hana Truncová

¹⁷ JZD – Unified Cooperative Farm. It was supposed to simulate Soviet collective farms. Many farmers were forced to give up their land and machines for the organizing of Unified Cooperative Farms.

carrots, lettuce, and onions and Linek told me, "Keep the money and off you go. Don't tell anybody that you got it for free." It was terrible, all of a sudden I was a beggar, and all of a sudden we had nothing. I used to go to the dairy shop and I wanted to buy a 200g piece of butter because it was cheaper, but then Mrs. Poláková winked at me and told me to wait a minute and gave me two pieces of butter for free. I went to the butcher's and they had a beautiful pig's head there. Mrs. Miškovská told me then, "If you wanted, I could give you a pig's head like that every week with the chin fold as well," and she did. I was happy because I was able to get a big and good lunch for very little money. I came home and started to cry. We used to be a respectful family and the Communists turned us into absolute beggars.

What happened to your estates?

JZD took the fields and at that time we only kept a few hens. We had an administrator appointed by the state and later they sold my estates for building sites. The whole of our garden. It was the worst part for my father, he couldn't bear it when they started to parcel out our garden.

Did you speak to your parents about prison?

Never, not even with my father. We both had our own experiences. When he came out of prison, he had frostbitten feet. To my second husband I told very little. I didn't keep in touch with the girls either because I was afraid.

Did you take in the events of 1968?

That was when the Russians invaded. I was working at Skalka. Mr. Zahradník took me there and he worked for Kopřivnice. He wasn't supposed to take me there because I was not reliable, but he took me there anyway. I was working with Mrs. Plačková. My husband repaired the house of the Bruner family from Prague and we would put them up for the night. I went to work at five in the morning. At the cemetery wall I met Mrs. Macháčková and she told me that the Russians invaded. As quick as a shot, I rushed home, woke everybody up and said, "Switch on the radio, something is up." We switched on the radio and I didn't go to work that day because I was scared. We saw tanks going by. I stayed at home for two days and fortunately it was not a problem at work.

What did 1989 mean for you?

I got a pension, my mother and father were gone, so I couldn't speak to anybody about it. I welcomed the fall of the Communists, but still didn't trust the whole thing. Now they are getting more power again.

The life in prison must have been gruelling, in Želiezovce the work was extremely hard and on top of that, you were sentenced unjustly. What helped you to survive the years in prison?

What helped me most was that I was myself and I didn't take the others into consideration. I had my mother and my father and kept thinking about them all the time. I protected my health and that was important. I didn't really make any friends and just kept imagining what it might look like at home. My mind was always at home. I would never move into some kind of hotel or nursery. This is where I belong and as my father used to say, I will stay here until it falls on my head.

Thank you for the interview.

Drahomíra Stuchlíková was born on 19 December 1919 in Prague, the Czech Republic. She worked as a bookkeeper in a German-Czech Company and later in the Czechoslovak Chamber of Commerce. She was arrested on 6 June 1949 because of printing information leaflets. She was sentenced to 13 years of prison.



“Freedom is the biggest thing in life.”

Interview with Mrs. Drahomíra Stuchlíková

At the beginning I would like to ask you where were you born and what was your childhood like?

I was born on December 19, 1919, a year after WWI, in Karlín¹. There I lived until I was six years old and then we moved to Žižkov². At Žižkov we unfortunately stuck it out for fifty-four years. My older sister felt ashamed of Žižkov and insisted on continuing school in Karlín where she started her vocational secondary school. I copied her and didn't want to go to school at Žižkov, so finally I went to school in Vinohrady on the Square of King George. I never finished there because I lost interest. I was about fourteen years old when my mother enrolled me in a family school. I finished there in three years with two B's. Then I stepped into the real world. Later, I was employed by a private company which was Czech-German. There half the staff was Czech and the other half was German. Bosses were both, one Czech and one German. I really have to tell you that we had a very good standard of living at that time. Then I realized maybe my life was too good and I started working in the Chamber of Commerce. I liked it a lot there and stayed up until my arrest.

What kind of employment did your father and mother have?

After my father came back from the legion in France he was employed at the office for crushing the usury. At that time there was real democracy. No one could do anything they wanted. No one could just think out that if an egg costs 30 hellers that he would be selling it for 50 or that someone would be adding water to alcohol or milk. My father was checking all this so everything was all right. My mother was a housewife. Then I had an older sister, but she wasn't at home any more because she had her own family and we were only getting together at Christmas time. Then I also have a younger sister who was in prison and she put in six years there. In 1973 she got married to Germany and has been living there ever since.

How did March 15, 1939 look like in Prague³? What was the atmosphere at that time?

I really remember that well because in the morning there was sleet. When the Germans came over I was on Na Příkopě street. They were announcing it on the radio, but I'm that kind of person that doesn't believe anything. It was horrible because in front of the Slavic House there were hoards of Germans who were enthusiastically greeting soldiers. That made me sick and I went home.

How did you personally get along with Germans before the Munich Agreement⁴?

We were getting along with Germans during the First Republic. I was working in a Czech-German company that was bilingual and we didn't have any problems among us. In that com-

¹ Karlín – Prague district

² Žižkov – Prague district

³ On March 15, 1939 Germans start to occupy Czech countries.

⁴ Munich Agreement was signed on September 29, 1938 in Munich. Representatives of four countries – Neville Chamberlain (Great Britain), Édouard Daladier (France), Adolf Hitler (Germany) and Benito Mussolini (Italy) – agreed on the fact that Czechoslovakia must give up the Sudetenland to Germany, Poland and Hungary. Representatives of Czechoslovakia were present, but not invited to the deal itself. Up till today this agreement has been "painful" and controversial topic in Czech history.

pany I met just one person who was a real piece of work. When Hitler ordered that Germans must have kids, he quickly had one more. Anyway, he wasn't vindictive and he didn't denounce. Probably from 1941 I was already working in the Chamber of Commerce where I was working fully for the war effort. The work in Triola, where we were making rubber masks, was organized by the Chamber of Commerce. Since it was made from rubber we were piercing it with a pin. Finally, one German came and scolded us, but we pretended not to understand. In the end they took the gas masks from us and we were sewing underwear for German soldiers. I also have to say that we were gluing glass shields onto the gas masks. We were using acetone and because acetone is harmful to your health they gave us an extra bun and milk – about a quarter liter of milk.

Did you have problems getting food during the war?

People were getting special tickets, rationing tickets. For that we got about one egg a month, a week, I can't really remember. We couldn't do anything about this, it was war. We didn't have any relatives in the country who could help us, and so we had to get through it by ourselves. There were a lot of people like that. The worst thing was that they took our money. I had on my credit book about 200,000 and I don't even want to say how much my parents lost. For example to get cloth for dress was very difficult. Not everyone could afford this. It was very difficult, but finally we struggled through this.

What did the Prague demonstration look like?

I was in Prague then, in a basement vault at Žižkov. At Vítkov⁵, there was a little chalet and one German was shooting at us from there. All of a sudden there was a young man walking with a bazooka and he kind of minimized the danger. The German got him and it completely tore him apart. My lady friend had his arm right behind her window, it was just disgusting. Then the Russians came and my lady friend and I wanted to go to Wenceslas Square, since we thought there would be a chance for dancing. However, it was still not allowed to go there so we returned home. We didn't go out until May 9th. Prague was awfully demolished, cobblestones were torn out from the sidewalks because of the barricades that were built everywhere. Trees were just in bloom, like nothing was really happening. From our house there was a man who worked at the Old Town hall and he got stuck in there on Saturday. He came back home after everything was over. Everyone rushed out to welcome him and he couldn't resist and fainted. He was at the town hall for five days and all the strain on his nerves finally caught up with him.

After the war it was mainly revealed how greedy we were. During the rebellion they had brought a full bucket of smoked foods to the cellar. I was walking by the butcher's shop in the street daily and all of a sudden people came with a message that they had looted him because he was German. I didn't have a clue that a guy named Hromada could be German. They said that the food would be split up among people in the cellar. Then they took everything somewhere and I can just tell you that they didn't even let us smell the meat. I really lost my faith in people.

How did you live through February 1948?

Of course I was brought up in an anti-communist family. When someone mentioned the word Communism or Communist, my parents were like red cloth to a bull. We lived in Žižkov and

⁵ **Vítkov** is an extended hill on the right bank of the Vltava river. It forms a border between Karlín and Žižkov.

there were tons of Communists. In our house there were also some people who had a daughter and a son, plus or minus, who were my age. We didn't want to meet them. In short, when the year 1948 came, I didn't want it.

Why were you arrested?

In the year 1948 there were elections and someone threw into our mailbox leaflets, on which was written, "Vote with white ballots." At that time I didn't have any thing better to do than to bring it to work. The stance written was that people shouldn't vote, but just throw in just white ballots. I liked the idea at that time and I gave it to others to read. I never thought, that it could have such consequences. Firstly, I didn't think someone could be arrested for leaflets. At the court I also told them that during the First Czechoslovakian Republic there was the slogan, "Vote for one, don't vote for five" and nobody was arrested. So I didn't think this could be a crime. Of course we were gripped by those leaflets and started to copy them. Someone denounced it of course, until the President of the Chamber of Commerce found out about it and called the secret police on us. It was enormously quick.

How did your arrest look like?

Mr. Jech called the secret police on us. They came and took us to Bartolomějská street No. 4. I was arrested May 29th-30th in 1948. What was happening at number four at that time, nobody can imagine. We were crammed into horrible dark prison cells. In the corner there was a little wooden closet, which I thought, was a telephone booth. It was a metal or iron toilet. For a walk we went out onto a little square, three by three meters. From number four they transferred me to Pankrác prison, where I stayed for 21 months. There I was with various people. I remember the arrival to Pankrác very well. Before checking-in they made me stand by a wall. From each side there were Gypsy women. They were all dirty and later I found out it was from blood. Then they took me to my cell. That was also magical because from the prison square there was a big iron gate and me, how I was rushing in, I didn't think that it would be connected underneath. I stumbled and flew into the square, I almost spread like a frog on the floor. That was a beautiful entrée...

How did it look like at Pankrác⁶?

At Pankrác I quite liked it, I didn't miss any work. Girls were advising me to sign in for a job, so at the beginning they put me to a place where they made bags. From there I was kicked out because I didn't get along with a "čůzák"⁷ (read [chou:sack]; a slang word from prison for a guard, in Czech language it comes from the word „bitch"). After that I was in laundry, in printing works, and finally we ended up in a dispatch cell. That was an "eincell" (a cell for one person), but there were seven of us in there. We were supposed to make hemp rope. We blocked a toilet with the rope twice. Once we made a ball, which I took out afterwards and threw it behind the old, non-functioning printing works. On the next day, we had a walk. When we got out to the square I thought I would go nuts. One of the dogs that was running around was playing with it. Anyway, I finally threw a second ball there as well because I had nothing to do with it. Then we were supposed to glue flags together in the cell. That was also charming because they gave us a box of flags and skewers and told us to glue. As they didn't give us any glue, we concluded we couldn't do anything. So we put everything under a bed.

⁶ Pankrác – one of the biggest and well known prison in Prague.

⁷ A guard.

Then a čůzák came and said, "Take out what you have done." We answered we didn't have anything as we didn't get any glue. So they gave us a stone vessel, full of glue. Again, we pushed that under the bed because they didn't give us a single brush. When he came up again we said we unfortunately didn't have anything as we didn't have a brush. So he took everything from us and we figured he wouldn't make us do it, that he would lose his nerves on it. We never glued anything after that.

How did the investigators behave towards you? Did any of you go through some physical violence?

Well, firstly, nobody would be trying that on me, and secondly they were not that cruel at that time yet. Yes, we heard a couple times shouts from next door and how they were punching someone, but from my point of view, that was happening sporadically. All that increased rapidly in 1949. Although they were on a first-name basis with us, threatening us, calling us names, they never physically attacked me.

You mentioned your younger sister was also arrested, for what reason?

She was held as a precaution before the funeral of President Beneš. At that time I was cleaning at Pankrác and mother came to tell me. Somehow, inconspicuously, she told me in the corridor. After the funeral they let my sister go back home. Well they were really worried that people would be rioting and so they held various people as hostages. Then she was tried with me and convicted for six years.

Did you ever meet again in prison?

We met just once. She had a lesser punishment than me, and so she could get on something called commando. She went to the town of Varnsdorf to an Elite factory, where nylons were made. I was sentenced to be in a normal prison, but once when I went to Chrastava, they allowed me to see her on a visit. I came over there in the afternoon, maybe more the evening and early in the morning I had to leave again. Anyways, I was happy I could sit down with her for that moment and we chatted a little. Then she visited me when she was released. I can even tell you that two of my friends visited me. Each of them just once, but I was glad anyways, since they didn't throw me overboard. One friend kept sending me letters and also a picture of her son. I was lucky in this way because some people were not afraid and came to see me. It was real heroism to not be worried and be seen with a convicted person.

When did you have a court date?

I had a court date on June 6, 1949. I received a notice only two days before the process. When I wanted to give it to my mother, my own lawyer jumped up and tore it out of my hands, saying I wasn't supposed to have it. She was appointed to me by the court, but she still demanded money from my parents. Mrs. Dr. Turečková had a husband who was a chairman in the Chamber of Law and so she had the high privilege to take money. My parents paid her something, but afterwards they opposed. She didn't defend me at all. She came up to the court, had blond hair, a light blue dress, and came there as a star. She didn't get me ready for the situation and how to behave at court. The only thing she said was about my hairstyle and that I shouldn't have it because it could make jurors angry. Then she asked what dress I would be wearing at court. That was all she told me for the run of the whole process. When they asked me after whether I felt guilty or not, I didn't know what to answer. Finally, I said I felt partly guilty. At that time I was counting I would get twenty years. When I finally got thirteen, I was quite happy. Twelve of that I sat, but I wasn't wondering why, I wouldn't have given freedom to

a woman like me either. Today I must laugh about it, at that time I was really fighting against them and one of my lady friends kept telling me, "Please, don't look at them like that or they will never let us go home!"

Did you think you would really have to serve all the time or that you might have been released early?

Nobody really believed at that time, that we would have to serve the whole sentence. Even once in Litoměřice a prosecutor came there and one after another he called us to him. He asked each of us when did we think we would go home. We all regretfully said we didn't know. None of us knew, if we would have to serve the whole sentence. She could have died the next day.

Were you ever in solitary confinement?

I was once in solitary confinement at a judicial prison because I had sent a scornful letter about a prison home. For the letter I got a month of correction and out of that once or twice a week in a darkroom. I was starved and had to sleep on a floor. When I had a normal day I got water for washing and a broom to sweep. In the evening they gave me a straw mattress and one blanket. Once I was also given a bucket with water to wash the floor. I didn't really want to do it, but finally I managed it. In the afternoon the guards were changing and another čůzák came and started yelling that I hadn't washed the floor properly. That was understandable because I didn't really give it much effort. I thought about it and then when I was given another bucket and water, I made the whole floor completely wet. He came at four o'clock and the floor was still wet, so no smudges were visible on it. He just caught his breath and left. It was terrible to sleep on a wet floor, but I risked it anyways. It made me so happy to know I took the wind out of his sails.

What was interesting was, that all čůzáků were driven crazy by my singing. I remember that when we were in Želiezovce prison, where we worked so hard, we were supposed to put down a ton of root beet. After a couple of years, my friend wrote me in a letter, how she still remembered me, how I started singing. She said, if that didn't happen, she would never have been able to bear it.

What came next after the court?

After the court I went to Litoměřice prison⁸, where I stayed for nine months. In Litoměřice we enjoyed it because we went into it with so much fear and worry. Vlasta Charvátová⁹ traveled with us, with another group of people, she shot and wounded one of the guards in Litoměřice. They wanted to release some of the political prisoners there. Vlasta stayed at the gatehouse and all of a sudden this person came there and she shot him. She was lucky she got his shoulder. Vlasta finally went to apologize to him. He was a nice person and forgave her. They gave us various jobs to do, but all in all, they weren't successful. For example they wanted us to strip feathers. The girls would start to work immediately, but I told them, "Girls, have you gone crazy? Never in my life have I seen how to strip feathers." So they all stopped and if they stripped, they were making puffs for slippers, stuffing for their pillows and so on. When čůza came in the afternoon, I took one piece of feather into my hand and said, "And now, please,

⁸ Litoměřice – local town prison in Northern Bohemia.

⁹ Vlasta Charvátová was born on October 19, 1925, studied at the Faculty of Arts and Philosophy, Charles University in Prague. After her studies she made a living as an interpreter. She was arrested on August 22, 1949 when she wanted to help her friends break free out of a prison in Litoměřice. During this action she shot and wounded a guard and the whole group was arrested. Vlasta herself went through brutal inquisitions and she aborted during that time. Her husband was sentenced to the death penalty, Vlasta Charvátová was sentenced for life. She was released on December 18, 1963.

tell me, what shall I do with this feather?" She took it and from one side ripped it as well from the other and gave me the feather in one hand and the quill in the other. The girls couldn't stop laughing. After nine months, I went to Znojmo. That was also magical because they transported us in an "anton,"¹⁰ whose door didn't work and kept opening. We knocked on the driver's and čůzák's doors twice. Twice the driver came to close it and on the third time he said we would have to hold it. So we held our door until we were in Znojmo.

You didn't think you would run away?

No, because when you have parents at home, you are thinking that you wouldn't help them with this at all. I had to leave all this on the side, it wasn't possible. Imagine this, in Znojmo we had another big laugh. There was a head guard, some Mária and she read out loud our names from the list. One girl's name was Orlová-Cvetkovičová. Mirka always put her hand up twice for this name. But then, when the head wanted to change us into other clothes, she counted us and it didn't match. There were ten of us and she had 11 names on her list. For god's sake, she couldn't figure it out. We kept saying, "Mirka, tell her you have got two names," but she had such a sense of humor she kept putting her hand up for both names. Finally, we made her say it. That time we had fun. In jail, there were moments when one had fun and sometimes it was just the opposite and it was difficult. So in Litoměřice and Znojmo I was in normal prison cells. I didn't get to work anywhere and was just in the prison. Then I went to Česká Lípa prison¹¹. In Česká Lípa it was good because the head guard of the prison was quite human. From there I went to Liberec, where I stayed for a couple days and from this prison they divided us into different commandos and I got to Chrástava, like I already mentioned to you. We had really awful food there because one mistress wanted to save money and kept telling us that we would get everything back for Christmas. So she was giving us boiled pork all the time. I won't eat boiled pork, even if I was standing underneath the gallows. I will rather tell an executioner, "Please, hang me up already and the boiled pork will be eaten by a dog." I tried it warm, cold, salted, with mustard, but when I see boiled pork, I have nausea. Then it showed up that she stole everything she could and we didn't have anything at Christmas. In jail they were stealing themselves. I had a violet lipstick and when I was in Litoměřice, one čůza had the same one. Then they didn't give me my purse back of course so I found out, she must have simply took it. From this commando, I went to Pardubice. At that time the prison in Pardubice was starting and was supposed to be a brig for the highest corrections. At the beginning there were only political prisoners. There were sewing places and a laundry, we went to work also in the garden. That was so fine, although hazing was also quite bad there. There I stayed about two years. Then I went to Želiezovce.

Dagmar Šimková also writes about Želiezovce prison, could you also tell me a bit about it?

When Dagmar Kočová was narrating about that place once to me, because she was there, I couldn't imagine it. The truth is that there were large pieces of land. For example – you saw a little village on the horizon and you thought it was a couple of steps away, but it took half a day to get there. That was just terrible, especially for me, who never tried to excel anyway in speed. Girls were always in the front and I was still trudging somewhere in the middle. Lastly it all ended because I strained my backbone. From that time I was suffering from the spine for

¹⁰ "Anton" – a closed police van for transport of prisoners.

¹¹ Česká Lípa – another local town prison in Northern Bohemia

about 20 years. From Želiezovce I brought a nice little gift. All of us, and there were 300 of us, got jaundice. At the end I got out of it pretty well, but there are girls who are having troubles from that up till today. With jaundice it was of course me again who came down with it first. During that time we went to collect corn from the fields. I felt a pain on my right hip, by my gall bladder, and I had a higher body temperature. That was why I decided I wouldn't go to work. A doctor had also just about enough of me and told me to bring urine, to be evaluated. A little later she flew in, told me to pack my things and I went to quarantine, because I had it on three crosses¹². Soon after that there were others coming in. The jaundice epidemic started in 1956, when there was a riot in Hungary. Čůzáks were off colors, as we were practically on the borders. There you saw mountains that were already Hungarian. The authorities knew the rioting could easily cross over from Hungary to us, and they had their hearts in their mouths. Right at that time we got jaundice. We all occupied a whole block of wooden houses.

Where did you go after Želiezovce?

Then I traveled to Ruzyně, for about a month, to do translations. That was a bit of variety and change. There we had only two or three guards and others could get there. Those of us from Prague, were enthusiastic because we had visitors and could get parcels. There was a more relaxed regime. We weren't locked in cells, we could move freely and have a small chat after work for example. There were about twenty of us working there. Men were translating some secret stuff. We got just concepts which we were rewriting on copy stencils. Everything was awfully private. Soon it was over though and we had to get back to Želiezovce.

Where did they take you from Ruzyně?

From there they took us back to Želiezovce and then they sent me to Bratislava later. There we knitted sweaters. Never in my life was I good for knitting and I wasn't able to imagine I should knit a whole sweater. In the end I managed somehow and from Bratislava, they took me back to Pardubice, where they released me. I traveled the whole country like this. To all that you must also count up the breaks of staying overnight in Ilava, because it wasn't possible to manage a whole trip in one haul. I was in many prisons then.

Was there any difference in the behavior of male and female guards?

Well, not really, they were cast in the same mould. Men I didn't recognize as real men. It was a čůzák to me, and that was it. In Pardubice I was in correction once and in the corridor there was a water supply, where we could wash ourselves. A čůza let me there once and at the same time, she was talking to a man. He wanted to get in and have a look at me. I told to myself, "That isn't a man, it's just a čůzák," so I took my clothes off and washed myself. He can please himself, that wasn't the issue. For us the issue was the Sultán, the governor of the jail in Pardubice, that was fundamental. On the other hand, girls were often making fun of čůzáks.

In what way?

Well for example once, they decided they would reeducate us. So they started giving us some lectures. The girls would always put their hands up and ask about something. For example, something about Masaryk. Then the čůzák said, "Well, I don't know that, I must ask about it, I will tell you next time." The next time he didn't show up there of course. You know, there were many stories running around, about the way they spoke. For instance, instead of tinfoil they were saying tinloif. Once when I was in Chrastava on commando, one of them was hint-

¹² With three crosses dead bodies used to be marked. Here it suggests Mrs. Stuchlíková was seriously ill.

ing at us to sign a socialist commitment¹³, promising they would send us home earlier. When he was done with his speech, Bohuška and I put our hands up and said, "Mr. Commander, we can't sign it. We are not provided with all the human rights from court. Our signature has no weight." And there we broke it down.

Were the criminal prisoners more susceptible to reeducation or to signing various work commitments?

Some of them were, of course. I think that some woman who had kids at home were more liable to this. One of my lady friends, who I have been friends with up till nowadays, and I still reproach and blame her for it, signed the cooperation agreement. She simply wanted to get home because both of her parents were sick and her son in the army got a very serious infection of jaundice. She knew she couldn't help them out while in jail. Up till today she has had troubles with that though, because nobody ever asks her why, why did she sign.

How did you get through visits of your friends and relatives and how long did they last?

The visits were a chapter in itself because it always depended on the čůzák, who was present at the visit. It happened to me once that my father came to Litoměřice, we welcomed each other and I asked about mother and the čůzák ordered the visit to end right there. When the čůzák was full of spite he didn't give you the pleasure to have a visitor. Once in Pardubice, I couldn't get nuts of candies that were in a parcel, and so they took it out and stole it. It always depended on their moods, how well they slept. We were dependent on all of that. We always looked forward to having a visit, but when they left, we were so sad... you knew you had another long time ahead, before you saw them again. Sometimes I said to myself that people who visited had it worse. In front of the gates the visitor had to beg and plead because the guards were also harassing them. Visitors were worried whether the parcel would be delivered and how long the visit would take and so on.

How often did you have visits?

According to the prison order, it was possible once a month, but if you did something bad, they could stop or shorten it. When I was on the command, visits were more relaxed, sometimes a parcel could be handed over. At Pankrác the parcel was properly checked. Well, when you think about it deeply, when they were giving you a parcel at the beginning of prison, they had to take it away from their own mouths because there was still a ticket system.¹⁴ So we didn't really care for the parcels much.

In which prison did you experience the worst hunger?

I was starving the most in Bartolomějská police prison, because there they had tin pots and when they gave you black slop in the morning, it smelled like the previous day's goulash, and when at noon something different, it smelled like the black slop again, which they called noble coffee. At Pankrác I got back to normal again. At weekends, we were getting an egg for lunch and bread for supper but they didn't fuss about us. Anyways, when we were going to work, for example to the printing works, then we were getting one bratwurst and a bun. But nowhere else did we get anything better.

¹³ Within **socialist commitments** people obliged themselves for example to work extra hours or also on Sundays and national holidays. They then got various privileges, e.g. to write more letters home, to get more parcels. It was also promised they would be released earlier.

¹⁴ **Ticket system** was annulled in Czechoslovakia in 1953, during a monetary reform.

How did the institute clothes look like?

It was like what a household provided. In Litoměřice it took 14 days before we were changed into the institute clothes. At the end we were given rags from German soldiers. There we struck a blow when we tore them apart, wherever it was possible, and we set out on May 1st for walk. Then they gave us some better clothes. Winter stuff was from furry, hairy cloth and summer clothes were with stripes and was called "cvilink." I was glad we were getting clothes because my parents couldn't provide them all the time.

Was it possible to borrow books?

Yes, it was. At Pankrác it was written, "Who ever damages it, pays for it and will be strictly punished." We had quite old books there, but in Pardubice it was better. On the other hand, when a better book arrived, it was wanted by everyone, so we had to wait until someone finished it. You could borrow about three books per month.

Were there ever any conflicts arising among you?

Well, there were some of course. There were some distractions in Pardubice, for example you could go out to the square, but you could never avoid being in a cell with someone you didn't get along with. For instance there was a Slovakian girl who was really nasty to me. I understood her though because the prison was getting into her head and nerves. Though it still didn't give her the right to spoil the life of others around. The worst were the sisters who always quarreled. I also wasn't always nice, but I tried hard. Conflicts were beginning from trifles. Conflicts were never coming out of politics because there it fell apart. There were girls from all political parties and various religious. It could always happen that you said something and insulted somebody. I would rather call it a submarine syndrome.

Do you remember a hunger strike in Pardubice prison in 1955¹⁵?

I also took part in that at that time, but I wasn't a mover. They still put me in a hole though (solitary cell). There I wanted to continue on a hunger strike, but they told me they had agreed to something and everything was over. I think it began because of sanitary towels because some girls reacted badly to them. I don't know whether they wanted to increase the allowance or be able to buy them with their own money. I really don't remember that.

What was hygiene like in prisons? How often could you wash yourself for example?

In Pardubice it was quite alright. On each floor there was a big bathroom with a big tin trough. There ten girls could wash at once. In Želiezovice there were French toilets¹⁶ and there were mice and rats. In Želiezovce it was like the Middle Ages. Terežka Procházková was always saying, "When I see a mouse on the square I tell myself, "Yey, a little sparrow." When I see a rat – See, a pigeon." This way she was consoling herself to not be afraid. You know, when you go to a toilet and there is a rat watching you, it is nothing funny.

Some girls tried to keep hygiene up. They would come from the fields, load everything into a trough, wash it, hang it up and in the morning they went to work in clean clothes again. We tried to wash and shower. In Pardubice it was more civilized. There we went to showers with warm water once a week.

¹⁵ **The hunger strike in Pardubice** started in September 1955 and supposedly 520 women prisoners were protesting this way. Some for a week, some even longer. Main reasons included bullying from guards, bad food, and bad working conditions. The initiators were sentenced to solitary cells and others could not send and receive letters or have visits.

¹⁶ **French toilet** – special toilet system when the toilet does not have a porcelain bowl, but there is only a hole in the floor and two steps for feet. Sometimes called "Turkish toilet" too.

How were you released?

I was released on amnesty. Initially we were supposed to go home on May 9th, but because one čůza needed help with ironing, I was released on May 10th. I got 375 Crowns (\$20 today, in 2008) as earnings for 12 years. I had a blouse and a skirt borrowed. Everything else I had was stolen. They stole my book of English and clothes. In Pardubice they bought us train tickets and we went home.

Did you have troubles finding a job?

I must tell you I was really lucky because our girls always helped me. After discharge I went to the work office to hand in my papers and then I was flying around the town. I met one lady friend who asked me what I was doing. At that time I really didn't know what I should do. She told me she was just on her way to the Źiřkov storage area as they were hiring. We went there together and we both were hired. I was pulling pallets there, in which there was loads of chocolate, even though I was pregnant. After delivery I didn't go back to it. After another three years I was looking for a job, but I was so simple-minded that I always told everybody I was in prison. Of course they never gave jobs to convicts then. Then another lady friend spoke to me on a tram, asking, "What are you up to?" I answered I did nothing. "Would you like to go to my work, I'm giving it up?" She was a storekeeper in a big factory, but only formally on paper. There I got a questionnaire and there they asked me what I did in the past. That time I wrote that I was sewed clothes for a firm in Hradec Králové that never existed. That was good, but if I wrote down I was in a criminal, it would never work. Finally everybody knew anyways, but that didn't matter any more. I stayed up until the time when they built a new factory in Stodůlky. I didn't want to commute from Karlín to Stodůlky¹⁷, so I wandered around in the streets again. I met a ladyfriend and she asked, "What are you up to?" "Nothing, looking for a job." She told me to go to her husband to be a matron and I did that until I went to retire. My girls always helped me.

How did your old friends behave to you after you came back?

My two best friends, who also visited me once in prison, they stayed with me forever. With the others I never tried to get in touch again. I didn't have much to talk about with them and no taste to meet them. I was like in another world. I was only able to speak to people who were arrested like me. It didn't matter whether it was a man or woman. Finally, I also married a "mukl"¹⁸, he was in prison for 11 years. He had so many friends and so did I. At Easter and Christmas I kept writing and sending so many postcards, it seemed impossible. While we were at our cottage, we never had one free Saturday or Sunday alone as someone would always come for a visit.

How did you perceive the year 1968¹⁹?

I was with my son at the cottage and my mother-in-law came and told us the Russians came. A week before that our relatives from Vienna came over, telling us the Russians would occupy our country. I got really furious then and said, If they will occupy us, that means they will occupy you

¹⁷ **Stodůlky** – Prague periphery; nowadays part of a large urban district.

¹⁸ "**Mukl**" – someone who was in prison, the word "mukl" itself comes from the abbreviation of – "a man on death row" (in Czech: muž určený k likvidaci). It was a label given to political prisoners imprisoned by communist or Nazi regimes that were not supposed to be released and were supposed to die in prisons or concentration camps. Later on, this label started to be used for all political prisoners.

¹⁹ Czechoslovakia was occupied by the armies of Warsaw pact on August 21, 1968. The country remained under Soviet dominance until November 1989.

as well. Just remember how it was during Hitler's era. He got really mad at me. Shortly he said, in Vienna they knew that much earlier than us. We have a cottage on the Sázava river, where the tanks went through and they made a huge noise. We just watched what was happening. I would have never allowed it. I always thought it was impossible. Then I saw the after-effects, how they were shooting at people on Vinohradská street. Don't ever tell me they were brothers.

Did you, after August 21st, after the arrival of the Warsaw brigades²⁰, have any problems at work?

No, I formed my principle for this, that I will never deny it. Also, that I will never start talking about it. However, I had to break this rule once. At one time, I was at a cottage with my son and the neighbors from next door had a little girl, who was going to kindergarden. She asked, "Mrs. Stuchlíková, were you in prison?" That was the first time when I denied it because I told to myself that kid doesn't need to know anything about it. I was mad at her parents though because they should be more careful when talking in front of kids. I also didn't want to admit it because of my son, so he wouldn't have problems out of it. He knew it about his dad because he knew his friends. Finally we had it all out in 1989.

How do you recall the year 1989 in your memories?

I wasn't in Prague at that time, so I didn't know much about it. I didn't go back to Prague before the Confederation started to be formed. I couldn't care about it that much because my husband was very ill.

Do you have any health problems from the experience in the prisons?

In Želiezovce I strained my backbone after the first month and I was suffering from that for another 20 years. Other girls had problems from the jaundice, about which I have told you already.

When were you rehabilitated?

I was trying to do that already in 1968. I had a judge Bohdana Smolíková, or something like that. In her speech she made a murderess out of me, because I had one accomplice, who was sentenced for one year. I hardly knew him but during the twelve years I was in prison, he died. She blamed me for his death. So the rehabilitation ended with another fiasco. Then I was rehabilitated in 1989 without any problems.

Would you be able to forgive them for all the injustice?

You know, the thing I minded the most was living behind the bars. When someone complains how badly we were treated there, I would forgive them all that. Even if the bars would be made of gold, they could never be a substitute for freedom. Freedom is the biggest thing in life.

What helped you to live through the years you were in prison?

I think it was anger. I'm not a person who would cry out, but when injustice happens to me, then I get very angry. Finally, in prison there is life as well, you have some fun, but there are also terrible things happening there. We had to live through everything. Don't forget to put this in. There are about twenty of us who were in prison, our husbands were in prison, and we don't have the pension money and we will never get it.

Thank you very much for the interview.

²⁰ **Warsaw brigades** – Warsaw Agreement was an army pact of the European countries of the Eastern bloc, which existed in 1955 – 1991. It was based on the *Agreement of friendship, cooperation and help*, which was signed on May 14, 1955 by representatives of Albania, Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Germany, Poland, Romania, and U.S.S.R. in Warsaw.

Hana Truncová was born in a trading family in Teplice in 1924. She was arrested in 1951 because of assisting at illegal border crossings in the communist Czechoslovakia. She was also printing leaflets against the Communist Party after 1948. She was sentenced to thirteen years of prison. She was released in 1960.



“It gave me confidence and from the political view it gave me the anti-communist view.”

Interview with Mrs. Hana Truncová

Can you tell us about your parents, childhood and youth?

Of course, with pleasure. I was born in Teplice¹ in a trade family. My father's ancestors came from the area of the Křivoklát forests and they moved to the border area sometime in the 19th century. I have a sister and I must say that we had a very nice childhood. We had a big garden and many friends. All of my friends came from a Czech, German, or Jewish environment. The town of Teplice had the same structure – one third was Czech, one German, and one Jewish. You can see the evidence of this in Teplice cemeteries. During the First Republic I lived in a border area. We also stayed there during the war. We were lucky to have a little short wave radio at home. At 10 p.m. I used to listen to the Calling from London² with my father. It was very risky because we lived in a terraced house and the radio stood by the wall, therefore my father had to make proper insulation, so none of our neighbours knew that we were listening to that radio program. It could have cost us our lives.

Did you witness the post-war transfer³?

Yes, in those days they drove families out of their houses. The fathers were not usually at home, so mothers and children were just rooted out basically from their kitchens. That was the beginning of the transfer in June 1945. Those people were not even allowed to take 30 kilograms of their personal belongings (which was allowed later on), they just had to go. They were kicked out from their homes. Partly I am not so surprised, it was a kind of revenge. People were excited and did not think reasonably or humanely. Human relationships were gradually disappearing. I lost many friends from school due to the transfer. Also, my family lost many good friends who had nothing to do with Hitler. I used to know some Czech families who returned to the border area after 1945, but they could not live there so they went back inland.

The Czech-German border areas got resettled during the post-war period. Most of the houses, farms, flats, land, factories, valuables, and accounts suddenly did not belong to anybody and were being given away. People who went there and were able to tolerate owning someone else's property got it.

How did you spend February 1948⁴?

I had a part-time job in one building company in Teplice from June 1945 to February. It was a part-time job because I also helped my father with administration in his business. We had

¹ **Teplice** – a town in the north of Bohemia.

² **Calling from London** – During WW II, the radio station BBC broadcasted short news in the Czech language. Each day three times for 15 minutes. In the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia listening to the foreign radio was punishable under the sentence of the death penalty.

³ **Post-war transfer** – After WW II a transfer of the German people out of the Czechoslovak border area to Germany and Austria. About 3 million people were deported between 1945 and 1946.

⁴ In **February 1948** the government crisis started in Czechoslovakia. The primary reason was the resolution pertaining to the State secret police from February 13, 1948. There were a series of events during this month and as a result the Communist party became the leading political power in Czechoslovakia. This series of events was crowned on February 25th, when the President accepted the resignation of non-communist ministers and replaced them with representatives suggested by Communists. During this February revolution the Communist party cleared its way to full control of the country.

quite a big joiner's workshop and lived in a busy street. Hundreds of people used to walk past our house on their way to work. It was in February 1948 when my mom opened the window at 10 am and was very surprised to see many people walking home from work. I stayed at work at that time. I worked in a building company and my office was on the ground floor. There were about 25 employees in the company and many of them would stand on their tiptoes by the window to see whether I was sitting at my table. I think one of them wagged his finger at me. My boss helped me to stay there and keep on working, but unfortunately it was my sister who was dismissed from work. She used to work in a tent and canvas factory. That sacking prompted her to apply for legal emigration from Czechoslovakia.

She worked as an organist in a parish church in Novosedlice. The head of the parish was Dr. Johan Thies, an Austrian who was not driven out but a man who wanted to move to Austria. Thanks to him my sister had contacts for all the offices in Prague and she did the same thing as him. She applied for emigration, she did not accept the Czechoslovak citizenship which was recently given to people during Communism. She was given permission to emigrate in autumn 1950. The permission was valid until the end of March 1951. She moved to Austria, to the Russian zone, where she got help from our father's business partner. He lent her an identification card of another woman who looked a bit like my sister. Using that ID card she got to the western zone and later to Western Germany where she stayed.

Did you have any problems due to your sister's emigration?

The problems started after I was arrested. The secret police would threaten me during the questioning by saying, "Your sister is in Austria in the Russian zone and we will bring her here." At that time I did not know if she managed to escape from there or not. I was very scared because they were able to arrest anyone they wanted, put him in a car and drive him back to Czechoslovakia. It would not have been the first or the last case, and it was very easy for them to arrest people in the Russian zone.

As you have already mentioned being arrested and questioned, I would like to ask, why did they arrest you? What subversive activities did you do?

I longed for freedom, you know. I was a child from the border area and I remember that, during skiing in the Krušné Mountains we could easily cross the borders. The custom officer only asked, "How long will you stay there kids, where will you go, come back afterwards." I was used to a life full of freedom in the borders. When I saw all those changes after the war, no tourism, no opportunities, no culture, no books, magazines, or newspapers I hated it. It was all very chauvinistic and I did not like it. I longed for living in a different political system and that is why I was brave enough to do something against that. We had contacts for the people on the border crossings, there was one man who took people from Eastern Germany, from Zinwald (Cínovec). He did that for quite a lot of money, because he also had to make his living. I used to send him some people who had to escape from the country, for example they had to run away from the threat of being arrested. So suddenly my family and I became part of the group who helped people cross the borders. I do not know if one of those people we helped was a police informer, but I think we must have been under observation because soon we realised something had started happening around us.

So you were arrested for illegally taking people across the borders?

Apart from helping people cross the borders, we also printed leaflets. There were no computers in those days so we wrote the leaflets on good quality typewriters where we could make

more copies. Sometimes we printed ten copies at once. The leaflets were then distributed in different ways. At that time I had my part-time job and a really nice boss. He did not have a clue about my plans and activities. He used to take us for trips, we distributed our leaflets there and he never found out.

We also put the leaflets in peoples' letterboxes. The net had already started closing in on us. Then I started to work in a spa in Teplice and had a great boss again – Mr. Sova. I wrote a diary in German stenography in those times. Yet, I could feel it with my sixth sense that the problems were coming. I brought my diaries to work and put them in an old folder. We used to go for lunch with spa guests in the canteen. One day my boss came in and told me not to come back to work anymore. The secret police were already in the office, looking through my bag, typewriter, and everything else that was accessible. Luckily they did not check the old folders. I knew I had to do something with the diaries and could not take them back home. I had one single colleague, his name was Emil Topinka and I asked him to save those diaries for me. He took them and hid them for a long time. When we were nearly sentenced he dared to bring them to my future husband's mother, Mrs. Marie Truncová. She was scared to have those at home, so she buried them somewhere in the shed.

Did you find them in the end?

Yes, I did, but I must tell you I am completely lost with them today. For example the names are not written in stenography and I do not remember them or cannot even imagine most of those people today.

How did your arrest happen?

I was arrested in my office in the Imperial Spa. The Emperor used to stay there during the Austro-Hungarian monarchy. That day I could see a black tatra plan car coming – I was born at 11 o'clock and arrested at the same time. They did the house search and took me to Ústí nad Labem (Aussig). My mother experienced many more house searches after my father was arrested. Male prison officers were not allowed to examine me, so a female one came to do it. When I saw her I could not believe my eyes, and she felt the same, because we knew each other by sight. She used to work for that building company where I had my part-time job. She joined the secret police after that and then she was there to examine me. She let me keep a gold chain and a little gold crucifix. She had to take the other things I had. I did not see my earrings, valuable rings, or watch again. It had to go. The chain with the crucifix had to go soon as well. We had to wear male shirts with no collars so our necks were uncovered. I took it off in my solitary cell, but there was nowhere to put it. There was no chance. The officers always checked the only pocket you had and your hands. I would have had to swallow it.

What did the cells in Ústí nad Labem look like?

They were little cells under the pavement with no ventilation. Only when a prison officer opened the door, you could smell the mustiness from the corridor. Everything was underground, you got down there by an elevator and there were prison bars everywhere. There were only solitary cells in Ústí nad Labem, no hygiene, no showers, and no hot or cold water in the cell. There was a so called French toilet embedded in the floor, but no water. There was not even a jug, so you had nothing to drink. The air was dry, so dry and not fresh. The cell was about three by three steps big and there was a big wooden bunk-bed which could not be folded and was full of bedbugs. I wasn't allowed to lay down on the bed during the day, only at night. There were no blankets, you had to lie on the bed with hands next to your body

and the bedbugs came out of the bed. That was horrible. The prison officer opened the door to the corridor in the morning and we took turns to have our morning hygiene. There was no toothbrush and I did not comb my hair for about three months. There was one basin with cold water in the corridor and only one towel hanging next to it. You could see blood stains of all the prisoners on the towel. I am very sensitive when it comes to hygiene, but I must admit that at that time I did not mind the dirty towel, because I knew that some of my close friends or relatives used it as well.

Did you know about any of your close friends or relatives, for example your father or future husband, being in prison too?

My fiancé was arrested before me and I used to bring him clean clothes before my arrest, so I knew about him. I found out that some other people were there as well because I heard some people whistling. We all liked and used to use one tune by Beethoven, and I could hear that tune in the prison, so I knew there had to be someone from our group. After years I found out, that my future husband engraved some message for me on an aluminum dish, because he thought that the dishes went around the prison and I might have been given food in that one. Yet, I was a naive prisoner and did not search for secret messages. The prison officers realised that he was doing that and he had to clean all the dishes. After that the regime of tin spoons and tin dishes started and lasted for many years. It was a big punishment for me, even bigger than correction, because we were given neither a knife to cut our food nor fork. There was only that spoon and the dish. For years we washed the dishes in cold water because there wasn't any hot water in the prison. For some time we had our own dish, but then it changed and we had to take them to the kitchen and pick them up from there as well.

Did any prison officer help you?

It was in prison in Litoměřice where they sometimes took me when I didn't give evidence to the secret police. One officer there helped me. It was an older man who probably also worked there before the war. That generation was later swapped for newly educated staff. Although I did not know that something like a hunger-strike existed in prisons, I stopped eating. In the course of time I think they might have put something into my food. I was so mentally and physically exhausted that I started to perceive everything through my nose. I used smell more than sight. There was a tip-up table in the cell, which I was allowed to use only when they gave me that bit of food. I could smell some disgusting odor rather than a beautiful smell of wood from that table. So I stopped eating. That old prison officer noticed that and even though he was not supposed to, he came to my cell and told me to eat and not to lose energy. I do not remember if I asked him or if it was him who noticed, but he brought me a comb. It was a dirty comb from some other prisoner, but it did not matter, I cleaned it.

How did the examiners behave to you?

Their behavior was horrible. Their brutality and arrogance was horrendous. For example the way they spoke with us. We were not allowed to mention our family members. We could not say mother or sister. We had to say the whole name, which sounded like we were talking about a stranger. Their brutality was simply terrible. They used to take me up by the elevator to be questioned. I could see the Střekov rock with some white slogan on it, probably, "Hello from the Communist party." The window was usually opened during the questioning and I could see that rock. I can tell you that more than once I was thinking about jumping out of that window, but one has the self-preservation instinct. They put handcuffs on our hands and moved us from

Ústí nad Labem to Prague, Pankrác prison by a paddy wagon which had only small windows and we got in through the back door. It was a long journey, you know, and some of us needed the toilet. It was literally peeing under the machine gun. At the end of the day we were not shy anymore so we did not mind them watching us. Before Prague we had to change from wagon to tatraplan car and they blindfolded us. In Pankrác we were put into holding where we could wear our civilian clothes. When they arrested us, I thought that it would be for a longer time, but I was an optimist and did not expect it to last for so long. Apart from the suit, which I was wearing, I took a black warm coat. I was really happy that I did, I used it as a blanket, especially in Pankrác because there were not enough of them.

Did you experience any confrontation?

They confronted me with one man – a priest, František Blais. The examiners shouted at me, “So you say that your mother did not know about you helping people crossing the borders!” I wanted to protect my mother, because if they had arrested her, my grandma would have stayed alone, so I had to deny everything. They told me, “You may change your mind.” I was blindfolded and did not take the cloth off my eyes, but I knew that they would beat František Blais. He took a real beating. He confirmed everything, but maybe he did not recognise me, but I recognised his voice. My mother stayed at home even though her life was quite tough, but she was there together with grandma, which made things easier.

How was your trial?

First, I thought that everything would be solved by the court. I imagined that I would have to swear on some crucifix, but all the crucifixes were already gone. I was such a naïve prisoner. Our trial was open to the members of our families. I could see my mother, my future husband's parents, and wives of my accomplices. There were eleven of us on trial, but I was the only woman. The trial took place on 27th and 28th November 1951. Communists arrested their own Communists that night, the Jewish group of Slánský, Goldstücker, London, and the others. They told us the proposals on the first day, the fact they arrested that Jewish group caused lighter sentences on the next day. So our group got 15 years. I got 13, then someone else got 12, 11, 10, 7, and one got 5 years. After the trial they took us underground, I looked back at my father and the people I knew. The police officer told me off for doing that, but I said, “I will always be part of my family, whenever and wherever!” He reported me. I started the next day with my punishment. I got ten nights on a hard bed and half-portions of meals in solitary confinement in Pankrác.

What was solitary confinement in Pankrác like?

There was a wooden bunk-bed that looked like this: a plank and gap, plank and gap with no mattress on it and bedbugs everywhere. Every evening you had to report your name, number and so on. The officer asked me, “Do you have it with or without a lid?” First I did not know what was going on. There was that toilet embedded in the floor and I think there might have been rats. At the end the officer gave me the lid, so I covered the toilet and fell asleep. I did not finish that punishment. Two or three days before the end I was taken away and moved to Kladno. They probably needed some extra prisoners. We never knew where we were going, the sign on the bus always said “tour.” We left on December 6, 1951, on Saint Nicolas Day.

What happened in Kladno?

In Kladno I worked in steelworks in a smelting plant. There were cranes with some liquid alloy moving above our heads and big pots with some boiling hot stuff. It looked like hell. It stank very badly, even a slice of bread you had in your pocket got stinky. I worked with a ma-

chine where there were some long poles and I had to estimate, after it went through some other machine, whether the poles were straight or not. The civilians were not nice to us there, they were brutal, vulgar, and they spat on the ground when they saw us. The prison officers did not have to take care of us so much because the proper communist workers did their jobs for them. I got a really bad migraine in January. I felt so bad that even a police officer took pity on me and took me outside to get some fresh air. Then they changed my position. I had to dig out metal chips, using a pickaxe. I worked together with another prisoner, Mrs. Stará. We had to dig the chips out and put them in carts.

When did you have your first visit?

I had it in Kladno. The visits took place by a big wide table. It was all very strictly observed. My grandma came. She was a tough and brave woman and she brought me a homemade pie, but the prison officers did not want me to have it, so she said, "Eat that pie." So I ate the whole pie in front of the officers' eyes. She also brought some photographs from which I stole one for myself. It was a little photo from the last New Year's party in our house. In the prison we used to wear jogging pants with an elastic band around the waist, which was very suitable for hiding things. I showed that photo to one of my friends, but I am sure she did not put me down. I only had a few friends there, but they were good ones. I think someone else must have seen it and told an officer. They came to search my cell, but I hid the photo very well, so they did not find it. Soon after that, in February 1952, they took us to Jilemnice. No accommodation was ready for us. It was only a small prison with two or three little cells. It was only made for escorts, not for staying in. Later we lived in a factory, which had already been closed down. There were bars on the windows and a kitchen in the ground floor. Every day we walked under surveillance. We worked for the Technolen company, which was about 15 minutes away from where we were staying. We spun flax there. So I was in Jilemnice from February 1952, I stayed there over Christmas, and in January 1953 they moved us to a different workplace where we worked with hemp and then they moved us to Varnsdorf. That was a labor camp where we worked only at night because the civilians did not want to do the night shifts. Most of us spoiled their sight there, because of working at night. We were in Varnsdorf when Stalin and Gottwald died.

What were the prison officers' reactions to those events?

We took a different way to work and we somehow felt that the female prison officers were scared of us and did not know what was going to happen.

Did you know that Stalin and Gottwald died?

Of course we knew. The Czechoslovak army practised their parades and marches under our windows and they shouted the news to us. We whispered the news to each other on the way to work. For this reason they decided to concentrate all people sentenced to 10 or more years to one place and they sent us quickly to Pardubice. I arrived there on May 19, 1953. The weather was hot in those days and we were all thirsty. They told us to stand on the small yard facing the wall, the sun was shining strongly on us. The chief of the Pardubice prison came and told us that none of us would leave and we would all serve our sentence. All of us were sentenced to 10, 15, or 18 years.

Could you please describe the prison in Pardubice?

There were masonry buildings "A" and "B," which were built during the reign of Marie Teresa, and a big administration building by the pavement at the edge of the prison. The

prison looks totally different today. The "A" building cracked during a detonation in Semtín⁵. We lived there for a little longer. The building was supported by wooden columns, but they were afraid we would die there and built new quarters – blocks "C" and "D" and block "E" next to "B." The "C" and "D" blocks were full of rats after one week. They were very wet and mildewed inside and there was hoarfrost in the winter. They stopped using the "A" building and moved us. Before those new buildings were finished, they emptied the big storehouses of the prison, put the straw mattresses on the floor and moved us in. There were sixty of us and we had only one toilet, which was the most private place from everything. The hall was very messy because there was one mattress right next to another. We could hide the cabbage we stole from the gardens right next to our mattress. The years went by in the Pardubice prison. Not only was it necessary to adapt our selves to the regime, but also to make our own little private space. When I am thinking about it now, there was less than one square meter per person. There were 12 double-beds in each cell, it was a very small space, but we did not get on each other's nerves. We used to exchange things, for example I got a little stool, which was like a treasure to me. I also got a little wash-bowl which was thrown out during each search, but I always found it and brought it back. Each of us had our little hiding place, our little secret, our life. Each of us had to somehow escape from reality in our own way. We had to learn to live a double life, to make our plans and dreams.

What were you thinking about?

I was thinking about my future life. I planned a family and was also thinking about things that happened. In my imagination I walked on trips, travelled, and remembered my life. I would say that a prisoner lives again the life he has already lived. You remember everything from childhood, you remember people who were important to you. It is not that you would judge your life because you cannot change anything, but in prison you appreciate the fact that you were able to live your life and enjoy it. I regard that as a beginning of humbleness towards life and towards higher values like family and friendship. I survived in prison thanks to remembering my life, but without getting stuck in the past. You can't do that, you must have your daily routine and daily life. There were different events happening around us, we had visitors, letters, and each of us lived our lives inside. There were things happening in our homes, for example a big loss or pain in our family and we were not able to help, to go to a funeral or visit our ill relatives, so we comforted each other and made ourselves happy. That helped a lot.

Did this mutuality work only among political prisoners or also among criminal and political ones?

There were only a few criminal prisoners among us. Time to time they moved and mixed us, so there also appeared murderers among us. I shared a quarter with one Slovakian murderer, or there was a small illiterate gypsy in our cell and she was allowed to have a child's reader, it was a big thing. We did not even have papers or pens. I would say that there was big solidarity among us, the state prisoners. The criminal prisoners tried to assimilate. I did not experience that, but the women who were not granted amnesty in 1960 and stayed longer became a minority and I can tell you they went through hell.

I lived together with a murderer who adapted herself in all the ways. When any of us had visitors and brought something back to the cell she would divide it into parts and put one part

⁵ Semtín – a town close to the prison where was a factory.

on each mattress. The murderer did the same. She was jealous of her husband and killed him, but the whole family used to visit her. She always got sweets and shared them with us. I was not able to eat it because she touched it with her hands, with hands that killed a man. I pretended that I had eaten it and liked it. We had to get on well with each other. That was a kind of unwritten prison law. You simply had to adapt yourself. We were all in the same boat.

Did you meet nuns in Pardubice?

They were there, but they separated them from us for some time. That was the biggest mistake they could have done. They did it on purpose because they wanted the nuns to be separated from us. The nuns were full of discipline and humbleness, so they were thought to be dangerous to the other prisoners. Politically prominent prisoners were isolated as well. That is how the two sections of "Castle" and "Vatican" originated. Later those isolated prisoners were mixed and moved back to normal cells.

Could you please tell us something about the hunger strike in Pardubice in 1955?

It was very interesting because the hunger strike spread like a Chinese whisper. There was a new female prison officer in those days. She was not introduced to us, so we did not know her name, but everybody called her Elsa Koch – a prison officer from the concentration camp from the Second World War. We were on that hunger strike because of her. At the end she was removed and that was the end of the hunger strike. We were on strike because of the brutal treatment of the prisoners. Those of us who took part in the hunger strike were forbidden to get letters or visits for three months.

Would you be able to remember the Hammarskjöld event, when women from "Castle" sent 12 letters to the General Secretary of UN?

It was in that time women from "Castle" asked for paper and pens, because we were not allowed to have them, and sent those letters. I don't think that the letters were ever sent. No visitors came after that, never mind international ones. The answer to the question about the number of political prisoners was that there were only two. They counted in Fráňa Zemínová⁶, who was a National Socialist and I think the other one was Antonia Kleinerová⁷ who was a National Socialist too. We did not even exist for the chieftains.

Did you, the women who did not take part in that event of 12 letters, feel strange? Did you actually know about that?

No, we did not know anything in that prison, because the women from "Castle" were isolated at that time and we were not in touch with them. They even had extra walks, but later it spread around the prison very quickly.

What did the visits and correspondence with your relatives mean to you?

In the course of time I would say, even though it might sound as self-praise, that we were all very brave. We simply lied. We were not allowed to talk about many things, so when we met our visitors we usually took delight in their civilian clothes and voice because we could not shake their hands. The bravery of our visitors was very important too. My brave grandmother or mother used to visit me a lot. I must say that none of them ever cried. You could not say

⁶ Fráňa Zemínová was a Czech politician. In 1918–1939 she was a member of parliament, representing the National Socialist Party. In fall 1949, being 68 years old, she was arrested and sentenced for 20 years in a constructed trial with Milada Horáková. She was released in 1960.

⁷ Antonie Kleinerová joined the Czechoslovakian National Socialistic Party after WW II. With this party she was then elected into the Constitutive National Assembly. In 1949 she was sentenced in a trial with Milada Horáková for a life term. She was pardoned in 1960.

any names, possibly the first names, so we usually talked about flowers, plants, and domestic animals. And letters? We were not allowed to have paper or a pen, but we were allowed the letters. They gave us A5 size paper with the camp's letterhead. We called all the letters essays, because it was usual to start writing about your fantasies or we wrote a whole letter about a bird. On the other hand it was also important what the writers told you. It was actually better when they did not tell us much because we were absolutely powerless and unable to help.

I got letters from my family and my fiancé. Those were love letters, which were censored twice. First in the prison where they were sent from and then in the prison where they were sent to. Talking about Pardubice, I must mention a big wooden box. We were supposed to put letters there we already read but the prison officers had no chance to keep up with it because the letters had no numbers or anything. They went through censorship and were opened when we got them. Then we had three days to read them and had to put them into the wooden box. I had never put there any letter from my fiancé. I just could not do it. I had them hidden on my body or behind a beam. It felt like reading a very old calendar because the things written in the letter were already things of the past, but they were handwritten and I could still feel a kind of fluid coming out of it.

What were your relationships among the female prisoners like?

I think it was easier for us than for those people outside. We were there together. There were only a few criminals, most of us were state prisoners and I swear we never argued. We sometimes had different opinions on things, but we always somehow discussed that and were convinced or not, but we never argued. Even the fact that we called each other terms of endearment when we did not know the name shows a lot. We all had very good relationships.

What was the life in the prison in Pardubice like?

We were constantly at risk there. It was forbidden to go to a different cell or block. Sometimes we wanted to talk, let the others read a letter or we did some craftwork and needed instructions. Many beautiful things originated there. We did everything secretly. For example we boiled horse's bone until it was white, then secretly got a knife from somewhere and kept carving for weeks. Unfortunately it was suddenly all gone. The prison officers probably took some of those things as souvenirs. There were bracelets, embroidery, etc. and it was all gone. Each of us could do a different craft. Then we would give our products to each other at some special occasions, for example at Christmas. Not only soup or biscuits from the shop⁸, but also handmade things worked as nice and precious gifts. We always hid our presents in different places and lost them during searches.

Many prisoners, not only men, but also women, remember so-called prison university, would you be able to remember it as well?

Yes, those were walks in the yard. We would make groups according to our own will. We used to walk in our groups. Each of us knew different things and there were also women who were lecturers at universities. Some of us were deeply religious and were able to say long prayers, which I would have had read from a prayer book. So we usually joined the group, which would teach you something or where you talked about things, which made you forget about the prison. We used to walk around pretending that we were talking, but one of us usually gave a lecture on various topics. When we came out of the prison we used to say, "The

⁸ A small shop where prisoners could buy basic hygienic things for prison money and some food in limited selection.

prison was actually my university." I was always interested in psychology so I secretly studied characters and the behavior of other people. It was a great opportunity to share a cell or a walk with people who were interested in something or wanted to pass on their knowledge. This was how we got knowledge. That was precious and helped you forget about daily life in the prison. One woman asked me once to describe a day in the prison. It was not easy at all to do so. Someone who has never been there would probably say that the life there is very monotonous. There was a regime, which you had to follow from dawn to dusk. That is true, but you had time for your ideas and that time cannot be taken by anyone. You basically lived a double life. The days there were not monotonous because there were constant transports, searches, letters, and so on.

What about the hygienic conditions in Pardubice?

They were horrible from the beginning to the end. We got used to cold water after some time. We dealt with water like ladies in Africa. Once we exchanged a wooden dish and then each of us grabbed it from one side. Those things were forbidden, but tolerated. We asked for hot water in the kitchen and then used that one load of water to wash our faces, hair, then clothes, and then the floor.

There was one kind of soap for everything. The wash room was horrible, it was dirty and mildewed. We were strictly forbidden to wash or dry our clothes. Some chief arrived one day and we set our conditions. We wanted to wash our clothes and finally we were allowed to do it.

Do you remember any cultural activities?

They started showing films. I do not remember which year it was. We never knew what was going to be shown and that was the purpose. The films were voluntary and when we went to watch it, they had time to search our cells.

I remember that once somebody told us about a beautiful film which was going to be shown. It really was beautiful, but when we came back to our cells they were in a mess and all our things were jumbled like sugar, straw from the mattresses, everything on one big pile. They also showed a Soviet film a couple of times, but I do not remember its name. I saw it more than once, but always had to finish it because they did not let us out.

Do you remember the day when you got released?

I was released before the amnesty in 1960. The Communists knew that the changes were coming so they started releasing people in 1959. At the end of 1959 they called me into the administration building. They asked me some questions there, but I was not successful. I think they would have released me, but I did not reply in the right way. So I went back to the camp and had my ninth Christmas in the prison. My family applied for my release, but I never asked for it. They called eight of us again in January 1960. I did not answer in a different way. They decided to release me on probation. I still had four years to go, but the probation lasted for eight years and that was very inconvenient. Nobody wanted to give you a job, but you had to work so you had to accept some inferior one. We did not know the money or means of transport, we did not know that the third class did not exist in trains anymore. We felt like we fell down from the sky. One guard took us to the train station. We called him Čáp. I did not have any civilian clothes. I had to borrow them from Vlasta Brhelová. I looked like a scarecrow. The guard bought us the tickets and told us the times of our trains. We were like children.

How was it when you returned home?

I came to Teplice early in the morning. My mother worked in a hotel Thermia. I asked one dispatcher to call the hotel and asked if my mother was at work. He called there and found out that she was there. I walked through Teplice, it is a hilly town and as I walked up Leninova Street I had problems catching my breath. I got all my courage and entered the hotel. My mother took a day off and went home with me. My father was not at home, but my grandmother gave me a warm welcome.

When were your father and fiancé released?

My father was released in 1955 and my fiancé was granted amnesty in 1960. I never believed in that amnesty. Some prisoners were kept alive thanks to the vision of amnesty, but I never hoped for it, even though I was such an optimist.

How was it, to come back to normal civilian life?

Coming back to civilian life was very difficult even though I had a good family background. It was a bit easier thanks to my mother who told me to stay at home for some time. I got a new identification card and I did not go out of the house. It was not easy at all to join society again. Nobody would believe me, but I can tell you that I missed the prison, I mean, the people there, because there was that support and guarantee. I did not know what to talk about with other people. I think that the way of thinking of the prisoner cannot be changed from day to day. You cannot suddenly think and talk about normal things. Many times I remembered the words of my co-prisoner Žofie Slováčková. She used to say, "Do you know what I would like? When we are all released I would like us to live in big villages or small towns all together, all the prisoners together." She was right, it probably would not work that way, but living somewhere with each other would have been good. It would have been lovely to live in mutual help and friendship.

When you look back to the time in the prison, could you tell me what it gave to you?

It gave me confidence and from the political view it gave me the anti-communist view. I will never ever support their party. I cannot understand that some young people support them and their program. I know that they lie.

Have you ever forgiven the Communists for all the injustice they did to you?

Once I had a lecture in the hall of a grammar school in Northern Bohemia together with Archbishop Karel Otčenášek. I let him start and he started as a true Christian with speech about forgiving. I knew that he had experienced a very hard time in prison. Then it was my turn to talk and the first thing I said was that I felt like a rebel standing there next to him. I told the students that nobody ever said sorry to me. The archbishop said that we should forgive, but should not forget. Those are very important things. Personally I have never forgiven them because they stole a big part of my life. I had my plans and ideas and I lost them and they can't be taken back. I wanted to live a free life, travel, and do things to make myself happy. They spoilt it.

Thank you very much for this interview.

Augustin Bubník was born on November 21, 1928 in Prague. He played ice-hockey as one of the youngest members of the Czechoslovak national team, won 1948 silver medal from the winter Olympic Games in St. Moritz (Switzerland) and 1949 golden medal from the World championship in ice hockey, Stockholm (Sweden). He was accused of planning to emigrate from Czechoslovakia and sentenced to fourteen years of prison. He was released in 1955.



“Jáchymov was the suffering of a nation that can never be forgotten.”

Interview with Mr. Augustin Bubník

First let me ask you about your childhood and place of birth.

I was born on November 21, 1928 in Prague, so in the zodiac actually I'm in the last week of Scorpio. Scorpions have always been proud fighters and they were able to get together and do the best thing in every situation. In 1928 when I was born, according to my mom and dad, there was terribly frosty weather. Even while they were taking me to my baptism, they thought we would freeze. So I was probably predetermined to frost and to ice hockey. It proved true already during my childhood. My father was a butcher and he worked in a slaughterhouse. My mom was a shop assistant at a butcher's. They both came from Southern Bohemia to Prague and we all lived in Holešovice in Prague 7. My mom was a big Sokol attendant¹, so she used to take my sister, who was two years my junior, and I, to the Sokol training area at Libeňský most. There was an ice-rink created each winter. There we actually started to learn to ice-skate. Then I found out that there was ice near our household, at Štvanice Island, where you could ice-skate and play ice hockey.

When did you start to play the major league hockey game?

After the war, the major leagues were the Olympic games in 1948, where we pulled off an upset by tying Canada, with a score 0-0. For Canada it was a shock. Up until that time they kept coming to Europe and beating Czechoslovakia. The first match against Czechoslovakia in 1911 was 30-0 and then we were only losing by 20 and later a 10 goal difference. Canada was coming to Europe for a World Cup and it was a vacation for them, they were beating everyone around. It was a shock for them when we ended up 0-0. After the end of the Olympic games there were conflicts between the captain Vladimír Zábrodský and the head coach Matěj Buckna. Coach accused Zábrodský of establishing the wrong tactics – we should have played offensively, not defensively. Buckna kept disputing that each of the players had a big chance and opportunity to score a goal, and the Canadians as well. Thank heavens we had a great goalkeeper, Mr. Modrý, and the match ended 0-0. We got an invitation to Canada, to measure our strength against some Canadian teams at home. At that time there were only 6 professional hockey teams playing in Canada.

What did your "seditious" activity consist of?

In that post-war time they were flaunting us as the most popular European hockey team from LTC Prague². Every New Year we played in Switzerland in a tournament called the Spengler's Cup. Right after the Olympics in 1948, the whole team got into a conflict with Czech immigrants from LTC Prague, those who were already living in exile³ in Switzerland. The people in exile asked Mr. Zábrodský, as a speaker of the team, to organize our stay there. That would

¹ **Sokol** – The Czech association of Sokol (ČOS) is a civil association, whose almost 190000 members attend voluntary sports, which include physical activities in clubs.

² **LTC Praha** – abbreviation for Czech ice-hockey association (1903–1950).

³ **Exile** stands for absence of a man or a group in a home country. In consequences of deportation, expulsion, stripping citizenship, political, national, race, or religious chasing.

mean the whole team would stay abroad, playing under the name of the Czechoslovakian national team-in-exile. We would play in Europe, in England, and we would advertise the image of this team. At first, Mr. Zábrodský promised everything. Then they didn't give him double the money as they had promised, for each player, and so he refused the whole thing. There was even a vote, where 8 of the players were for returning and 6 for staying. In that moment, in Switzerland brother Zábrodský and doctor Fáma, who was a lawyer, stayed. He was then 26 or maybe 28 years old, but knew well he couldn't come back to the country. They were spokesmen for this organization and that was why they knew there was no return for them. We went back and that was the beginning of everything.

Did the persecussions start soon after returning to Prague?

Not yet, in 1949 we became world champions in Sweden. All of a sudden we beat Canada 3-2! That was the first victory for Czechoslovakia against Canada. The score was 3-2 if I remember well, Konopásek scored the first, I scored the second, and the third was Roziňák, I think. All in all we won 3-2, which dethroned Canada. When we came back, the government was welcoming us at the train station in Prague. There was the Prime Minister Zápotocký, and other Ministers. They greeted and congratulated us in a private government saloon in the railway building. The train station was full of people.

In 1950 they didn't let us go to the next world championship in Great Britain though. They wanted us to proclaim that we would forego participation because Czechoslovakian reporters didn't get visas to travel with the representation. In the meantime, my sister who worked at one state office here in Prague, got in touch with friends from the British information service and photocopied the problematic visas. The visas were available, all the reporters had to do was pick them up on Saturday, but they never came.

So we all got together immediately at "U Herclíků." That was a little pub by the National Theater in Prague and the owner was a brother of a Sparta player, Zdeněk Ujčík. It was a pub where we, civilians and soldiers, were getting together. We drank and ate well there. I remember, we dropped the things from the airport at home and by 5 p.m. we started to get together. Inside there were already some people, there was a bagpiper who also played the harmonica. There we always sang, various songs about sport or about Prague. Memories, you know. When merry-making was at its peak, when it was revealed why we didn't fly to the championship, we all were pretty courageous. I can sincerely admit we swore a lot, from time to time, we also ran out into the little square and yelled out, "Death to Communists!" and "We will not let you cut our wings, we will reveal the truth!" In that moment we heard from a radio how a reporter Edmund Koukal said, why hockey players didn't leave for the championship. He said exactly what he was told to say. Hockey players had foregone participation because the reporters didn't get visas. So we called Mr. Lauf immediately, saying, "Come here, we will tell you the truth." No, they didn't come. We called Koukal right after the commentary to come to us and he answered, "Guys, I will not come." When merry-making was at its peak and we were already very drunk, we started to sing some songs on the ex-football player Vlasta Kopecký. It was a Slavia song. Instead of Vlasta Kopecký we sang Venca (Czech name Václav) Kopecký, who was a Minister of Schools and Sports. When that hit its climax, I was walking by with Roziňák and suddenly two men got up from one of the tables and caught us. They told us we would go with them.

What are your memories and what comes to mind when I mention “domeček”⁴ at Hradčany?

The time I lived there was from April 15th to the beginning of May. When they finished the investigation and I was transported to holding at Pankrác, that was the worst time in my life. I was a young kid, having fun with all those things, thinking nothing bad could have happened to me. Maybe we would get a punishment for the disturbance we caused in the pub, but everything that happened then, all that investigating of the whole case, and everything that was rolled onto us, was really cruel. The worst times were of course those, when we were in the hands of Pergl⁵, the boss of the “domeček.” The most terrible thing was when they took us to the general staff at Dejvice. Whether it was in the morning, noon, evening, or at night, everything depended on how much the investigators were in a mood to talk to us. The worst was his abuse and treatment in the “domeček.” The cruelest was a dungeon cell under the staircase where, once he got the command, put me and the other boys (though I spent the most time there). It was dark and there was no daylight, no bulb. It was a hard-packed cell, wet and closed. There a man was like a mouse in a hole adrift until they brought coffee or a piece of bread, if they gave us something.

Those were horrible things. From the moment we went into the “domeček” he used violence, a truncheon, and he had cat o’ nine tails with little bullets. He was hitting a person with that from the front, from the back, many times I fell down and he behaved like a beast that was being satisfied with that cruelty on us. Of course, his expressions and everything made you worried about your own life. Many times he led me to the inquisition pointing a gun at me. I didn’t know whether it was full and whether it was on safety, but he said, “Make another step and I will shoot you like a dog, you seditious bastard” or “Will you speak or not?” The worst was when the investigators didn’t get out of me what they wanted. When I couldn’t confess what they were suspecting of me, then the nights and days were bad. The truth is that they had to give us some laxative in the coffee, because we were starving. I remember Tonda Španinger saying once, “If I could catch a bird sitting on the ledge, I would eat it.” It was that brutal over there. So in that “domeček” there were six of us, six soldiers. The guards weren’t men, they were beasts, who were our age, maybe a little older. They kept walking in corridors, kicking the doors and we had to either do push-ups or knee-bends or run away... briefly, they always wanted to crush us so the investigators would get us in such a state, to be able to do anything with us. I remember getting to Pergl’s office and I saw various instruments hanging on the walls...

Once they gave me a metal belt around my head and kept pulling it tighter and tighter, so I thought it would squash my head. They tied your arms together so you couldn’t defend or fight back and they did what ever they needed. I really lost thirty kilos (66 pounds) while I was there. I came in with a weight of eighty kilograms (176 pounds) and when I was left I was nearly fifty kilos (110 pounds)... they still wanted to prove me guilty, that I was the head ini-

⁴ “Domeček” (in Czech “little house,” read [domacheck]) – The place in Kapucínská street in Prague – Hradčany, called “domeček,” became the specific prison for soldiers. It was an institution of the 5th department of the Headquarters or known also as OBZ. There they mainly kept soldiers, who were forced to testify in certain ways via cruel interrogation methods.” (source: BÍLEK, J., *Nástin vývoje vojenského vězeňství v letech 1945–1953*, s. 127.

⁵ The staff captain **František Pergl** alias “Dry linden” or “Black penicillin” was “only” a caretaker of the “domeček,” that means a custodian of the 5th department of Headquarters in Kapucínská street. Pergl was known for his brutality already because of his service in the prewar Czechoslovakian army. He met every command given to him by investigators to persecute prisoners and he himself made up various styles of torture.

tiator and traitor, and that it was me who persuaded others to stay abroad. I always wanted a confrontation. When the investigator declared that Josef Jirka⁶ said this and that, showing me his papers, I said, "No, I want you to put us face to face." Even once when we were going by a car with Jirka together to another interrogation I said to him, "What the hell were you saying in there, it isn't the truth at all." He was absolutely down in a low psychotic state, they could and did anything they wanted. We would have signed anything. So they took us to the office to be confronted. When I said I didn't tell him anything in the car, he started crying and totally broke down. I knew it and I believe and not only us, but also big soldiers of the foreign army and generals, Pergl really scourged us. He wasn't a human being, he was a hyena, reigning there, and he did exactly what they wanted him to do. He was getting people ready for the interrogation process. When all that was over, I was really happy I got to Pankrác and I was waiting to go through the interrogation there.

How long did the "domeček" situation last?

It was from March 15th. They took me into custody on the 13th then they took me to the fifth department by the Saint Nicholas church two days later, the one at Malá Strana. Then Lieutenant Hůlka came to pick me up, he was in the army gym club in Chuchle, he was also a member of OBZ⁷. Also this, "Dry Linden," Pergl was there. From Saint Nicholas they took me to the "domeček." So I was there from March 15th. When I was traveling back then, a flower called golden rain was in bloom. I remember it was May Day, because I heard the big celebrations on the Ring Square. I was there until the beginning of May, when they took me over. So it lasted seven, maybe eight weeks.

The six friends, can you name them?

Who was at that "domeček"? Of course I can, it was me, Kobranov, Štock, Hainý, Španinger, and Jirka, all six of us who were on the national team and who was nominated for the world championships in London. In fact, we all were soldiers. Some in the basic service, some who for two years had already played hockey for the army sport club. We represented the army and we had the basement in Chuchle Station. We lived in a villa and commuted to the stadium at Štvanice to train and play. So there were these six soldiers, but some of us left at different times from there. Not all went as late as I did. I think that I was one of the last ones who was moved to Pankrác⁸.

Nevertheless you were one of the youngest ones.

Unfortunately and of course I was really a naive young boy. I can see today. I didn't have a clue what was spreading around and what Communism was.

How old were you at that time?

In March of 1950 I was twenty-one and a half. I wasn't even supposed to start my military service yet. I went as a basic soldier because my best friend Vofka Kobranov went as well and we played two years before that on the national team. So he talked me into it. I went into the military service a year earlier than I had to. I wanted to be in the military service so that we both could play for the army sport club.

⁶ Josef Jirka – team-mate

⁷ OBZ – the press agency for the Czechoslovakian army.

⁸ Pankrác – prison in Prague

Out of six, was there any who didn't confess?

For sure Jirka confessed everything that they knew on him. For sure Hajný confessed, he even got only one year of punishment because he confessed that he had plans to stay abroad. He was a really smart and intelligent kid. He was also doing track and field events and he was connected with Václav Mudra. Mudra became the biggest chief of OBZ after 1948 because he was an athlete and they were doing athletics together in Slavia. So it was possible that Mudra helped him out a little bit out of the case or out of the whole thing. So for sure Jirka confessed everything he was doing, what he smuggled, and everything else. Španinger didn't have to confess about anything because he was in the whole case by chance. He wasn't even in Switzerland with us where we voted whether to stay there or not. Štock was also supposed to go or fly for the first time in his life for the national team and according to the paper I later found out, that Štock said even those things that he didn't have to talk about. So they got him on everything that they wanted. For sure Vofka Kobranov didn't confess and neither did I.

Just for interest, how did you vote in Switzerland?

In Switzerland the whole thing finally collapsed when the immigration group didn't convince the whole team to stay and play as the Czechoslovakian team-in-exile. The main initiator and speaker was the captain of the team Vladimír Zábrodský who put the whole thing together. The other day in the morning he said the team voted eight players for returning and six were for immigration. So the decision was resting on him, how he would decide. If he would decide to stay I am sure the other eight players would have stayed as well. Maybe some of them would have returned, because at that time it was really hard. For a person who wasn't even twenty-one years old yet, parents had to give security. That meant if we stayed abroad our parents would be arrested and the whole family would be liquidated. The other ones who were older, like Konopásek, Roziňák, Trousílek, and the others, lived either alone and they had families and they were just older than us twenty year old kids.

Were you for returning or for exile?

I was for returning because I didn't want to get my parents into such trouble.

When you moved from „domeček“ to Pankrác, what did they sentence you for?

When we got to Pankrác I was in a cell with two other prisoners who were also waiting for their trial. That wasn't a solitary cell. There were no more beatings, no more fear that they would come up with something. The worst for me was the interrogation when they wanted to beat out a confession that I was giving messages to a Mr. Bow. He was the boss of the American Embassy here in Prague who was giving out the entrance visas to Germany to all four zones whether it was the American, British, French, or Russian zone. That was the man Mr. Modrý introduced me to. He was coming to hockey games and he played golf, his wife played golf, and I really started a friendship with them. They used this as a pretense that this Mr. Bow was to inform me and I was giving him other messages or info as to what was happening in the army. Yet, in my army nothing was happening. We played hockey. When I was telling them this, they didn't want to believe it and they still insisted on a confession about what messages I was giving him. He was supposed to be the main initiator, a person who was persuading me, to persuade the whole team to immigrate, which wasn't true at all. I later found out that in twenty-four hours he was deported out of the country because he was accused of espionage.

So when we came to Pankrác it was already a little different there. For me it was terrible what I was learning there. Other prisoners were giving me advice on how things go there,

when breakfast and lunch are brought. We went out for a walk once a day for a half hour out on the square between the blocks of Pankrác prison. A man learned something there and was given other advice from other prisoners. The worst was when they were telling me once that early in the morning there was some murmur they could hear. I actually came right before the execution of Milada Horáková⁹. Of course the other prisoners knew those who were there for a couple weeks or months on how it goes. The breakfast was longer and we were watching out the windows onto the square whether something was happening, but Horáková was executed off out on a corner. It was terrible for me when I saw that. We were also watching out through a little half window that we tilted down. Though we were not allowed to do that, but a man could look into the reflection and see that square. The awful part was the view of people called "řetězáři" ("chainers"). Řetězáři were the people who had tried to escape. There were also people called "provazáři" ("ropers"). "Provazáři" were people on death row. The other prisoners, I don't remember their names, were counting them. They knew how many were there. When one was missing all of a sudden they were saying, "Oh well, so another one was taken away, hung up, or sentenced." These "provazáři" were pronouncedly down in the cellars, in dungeons where they were waiting for executions. "Řetězáři" were people who had escaped from labor camp and they really had leg-irons and from those they were chained to the wall. That really existed. In that cell the prisoner couldn't move, he was just sitting on a little chair and couldn't do anything else. When he needed to defecate, there was a little bucket to be used. When they were walking on their walk, they had to hold their chains behind them because the leg-irons had protrusions, so they had to walk with their legs wide apart, otherwise they would trip and fall. I can tell you that was a terrible sight, for me, a twenty-year old kid, to see that something like that existed.

What happened after that?

That's how I lived through that time until I had a hearing at court in September. Before that they were calling us, they were coming to us, and they were calling us until we got two lawyers who were representing us. Roziňák and I had a man named Lindner who was a really tough lawyer. When he read everything, all the papers, he said, "They can't sentence you for anything. You can just get something for the disturbance in the pub. Maybe you will get a year or two. They will sentence you and put you into a military prison. Yet, other paragraphs that are here like spying, high treason, and disrupting the socialist state they can not prove because there is no proof and it's all just fiction." Finally there was a trial. The first day we all thought that through all the contacts with our families and through our lawyers, that our wife and kids would be in that big hall. We were having court in that huge hall as Horáková did and all these cases. We thought that we would see our relatives somewhere, but when they were dragging us through the corridors no one was there. We came to the reception hall and there was also no one waiting. The first one to be called in was Mr. Modrý who was testifying for almost half a day. In the afternoon it was me. I was next. Our court hearing was for two days actually. We were really surprised that the court wasn't a civil court. There were twelve of us, six civilians and six soldiers. We learned from the papers that they didn't have a civilian court, but we had a military court. They also called the process to be top secret so people who had nothing to

⁹ Dr. Milada Horáková was a Czech politician, executed during the communist political processes in the fifties, for putative conspiracy and high treason.

do with that case could not be present in that hall. Whether it was associate lawyers or the master of the court, we saw just one person that I remember really well. It was the communist editor, Václav Švadlena who was writing for the newspaper "Rudé právo"¹⁰. He was the only one who had free access to this whole process.

What was your perception of the whole court process?

We thought it would be easy and we would be acquitted of those charges. When we saw that the head judge started dealing with our charges we still thought we would get some leniency. The second day Bóža Modrý and I were sitting there the whole day and the others were testifying, Roziňák, Konopásek, Macelis, Jirka, Štock, Španinger, and the pub owner Ujčík, who got three years for not stopping us from the disturbance. When we were waiting for the final sentence, we were all standing.

What were the final verdicts?

We heard the speech of the judge as we were all acquitted from the death penalty, but we were each given sentences: Modrý 15 years, I 14 years, Konopásek 12 years, Roziňák and Kobranov both 10 years, then it was 6 years for Jirka I think, 3 years for Červený, 2 for Macelis, Hajný got a year, and Španinger got 9 months¹¹. The pub owner Ujčík got three years. All of a sudden we were standing there completely depressed because we were standing up against something that couldn't be recalled. Of course after we consulted with our lawyers the five of us who were given the harshest sentences for high treason and spying immediately appealed to the highest court. The five of us who had 15, 14, 12, and 10 years appealed to the highest court¹². We were put back into our cells and I remember such a funny story. When I came back to the cell, two of my cellmates were already both sentenced. One of them had twenty years and the other had maybe eighteen years, so we came and they said, "So how much did you get?" and I said, "fourteen." "Man that's nothing, you'll sit that on a razor blade," they said. I answered, "What? On a razor blade? Fourteen years on a razor blade, that's not possible." They said, "that's how it's said here, when a person isn't hung-up, and he can walk away from the sentence and go on living."

What happened next after the court verdict?

We were waiting for a long time in the court department and sometime in November they chased us out and loaded us on a bus. The whole escort was maybe around thirty people. We were together and I remember I was tied up to the arm of big Červený, our goalie. They put us on the bus. The bus was surrounded by police cars. We were leaving and we didn't know where we were going whether it was a prison or a camp. From our cellmates we were informed that you can either go to another prison or a camp. All of a sudden we appeared at the prison Bory¹³. When we came there it was just terrible. The welcome process when we were walking in the corridors to the main square ... I think it was "B" ... a big circus started. There was a guard who started yelling at us and calling us names. Some prisoners were even making fun of it and also Červený was making fun of it, he was quite a joker. There they hit

¹⁰ **Rudé právo** – (in English "Red right") before 1989 daily newspaper of the Communist Party.

¹¹ The New York Times published an article about the trial on the front page on 10 October 1950. The western world was partly informed about such events.

¹² **Highest court** stands for the court organ, which has different functions in countries – in general it is an organ that has the last decision and against which there is not another appeal allowed.

¹³ **The prison Plzeň – Bory** is situated in the western part of Bohemia, during the communist era it was one of the strictest prisons, where mainly political prisoners were placed.

us with nightsticks and we had to line up. Whether it was Trepka¹⁴ or Brabec¹⁵ and the other guards. During that terrible process we had to take our clothes off and we got a sack in which we found prison clothes and other things. The fun was, for example, I had pants up to my neck and then they took it away from me and switched it with someone else. They put us in those stripes and in a little while someone else took us away. By the way, right after we came there, they took us upstairs into a room and took a picture of us. First they took our pictures in civilian clothes and there I got my prison number. After that they took us downstairs and barbers came and shaved us bald. During everything very funny stories were made up. I remember that when they were giving us the stripes Zlatko Červený, who was a big joker, was asking, "Who sewed your clothes, such a suit, they don't even sell at Bárta's shop." That was the most popular tailor on Na Příkopě street where the rich people had their clothes made. Of course he was hit in a second and punished. Another funny thing was when they shaved our head. On my head I had a big laceration and you could see a scar. So Zlatko didn't forget to make another joke, "Well your head is sewed up together nicely, everyone will like you," and he was smacked. The guards were smacking us here and there. So they took our pictures in civilian clothes, dressed us up, and took our pictures in stripes. I have all these pictures and when I look at them I must laugh. Then they put us into the dungeons where we were either in solitary cells or in pairs. There real prison life started and we had to conform to everything. When a guard kicked your door and he was demanding something, one had to do it.

What was your first experience with forced labor like?

Always every morning they threw a bag of dirty goose feathers into our cell. After that another bag, we were in pairs. We had to strip the feathers, we had to learn to tear off the quill from the little feather and put this into a special bag. The rate of output was very high and so was the bad smell from the feathers they brought. We had to strip all the stuff they brought. I don't remember exactly, but at one time it was about 33 dkg (7.3 pounds) and then they increased it on 60 dkg (13.2 pounds). A man from Bory described that in a book of memoirs.

If one didn't do it, they didn't get food. Work over there was really hard for people who had never done it in their lives before, or whose fingers were numb and couldn't. Some of us were working and got so good at it that we were able to help a cellmate. When I saw I had about 60 dkg done and they didn't come to get it, although it was after supper and we had a whole day for it, I quickly gave help to my cellmate. They always took it away and never weighed it in front of you. So you didn't really know whether you met the quota or not. You didn't have a clue whether you would get a quarter of bread or soup or just some peas and barley or something that they served. One simply didn't know and depended on the mercy or disfavour of the guards, whether they admit it or not and whether they feed you or not. Although it was a cruel time over there and we lived through hard days and months, there came a day when they took us out of the dungeons and moved us from "B" block to another department, I think it was "D".

¹⁴ **Mjr. Trepka** – was the head of solitary confinement in Plzeň – Bory. He was known for his brutal practise and violence towards prisoners

¹⁵ The guard **Brabec** was especially known for his brutality towards the prisoners.

How did it look like over there?

There were bigger cells, five of them, with ten pallets, that were called beds. As we found out later, this department was called "Kremlin"¹⁶ and there were about fifty prisoners, or ten people in each cell. There were a couple of "katers," that means a couple of iron bars. From each of these bars, a different guard had a key. So one guard couldn't get through it alone, there always had to be two or three of them.

In that unit there were people who we could call "the best of the Czech nation," not only generals, but also politicians, priests, and officers of the Eastern and Western armies, the pilots who made up a British squadron, the mayors of Brno, Lenora¹⁷ and other towns, where they were taking people across the border. Among these ten people, life was different and again specific in certain ways. Before that you were just with one person and didn't get to see the others unless it was during the compulsory walks. We went to walk between the houses because the prison in Bory was built in a shape of a star. So I could see there were others walking there too, possibly a friend or just a familiar face. We also went to have a shower once a week and that was it. When we got to the new department, to the "Kremlin" it had changed, there was a different way of living. We were getting food, there was a corridor of servicemen who were bringing us food. Breakfast in the morning, a quarter of bread and coffee, then lunch in a tin cup.

Do you have any positive memories from this time?

At "Kremlin" I later recognized that I was in a completely different prison system. As a young boy who didn't have a clue what was happening in the world around, I learned a lot there. It was my first university. The people opened my eyes. The head of general staff was telling us about a front on the West. Pravomil Reichel who was my cellmate and who was something like my mentor, kept telling me about Russia. How he escaped from a gulag¹⁸, where there was such hunger that when someone died, others ate his body...my eyes were popping out of my head when hearing this. Priests talked about what was done to them before the court. I was there together with one army general, Mr. Paleček, the head of paratroopers on the western front, who was sentenced for life imprisonment. There was a lot of generals and also Mr. Podsedník, a mayor of Brno, who was sentenced because he was a National Socialist. Next there was Červenka, a mayor of Lenora at Šumava, who had stories about helping and leading people and other big shots over the borders to Germany. There was also a member of the People's Party, Mr. Herold, who told us what was happening after 1945 in Parliament. How they had arguments and then went to drink together, whatever party they were from. I was gaining knowledge there and they taught me everything – in these cells we worked too. We couldn't go out to work, although those who had lower sentences could leave the prison and go to workshops. We were not allowed to go out, but they brought us various things to work on. Whether it was flags we had to glue on wooden sticks or making snap fasteners which were brought from Koh-i-Noor¹⁹. On everything there was a quota. We were also cleaning silverware, which they stole from different chateaus and castles and brought it to us in a decrepit

¹⁶ **Kremlin** refers (here ironically) to The Kremlin, which is a historic fortified complex at the heart of Moscow. The complex serves as the official residence of the President of Russia.

¹⁷ **Lenora** is a small town by Prachatice, Southern Bohemia.

¹⁸ **Gulag** was one of the departments of the secret police in the Socialist bloc, managing a system of concentration and working camps in SSSR. The word gulag was then used for a group of these camps and camps under this institution.

¹⁹ **Koh-i-Noor Hardmuth a.s.** is a Czech producer of writing and stationary products.

state. We had to clean it with ammonia and a white chalk until it was nice and shiny. They even gave us sewing machines and we had to learn how to sew cables from cloth or leather. We worked there with leather a lot. We were making straps, making parts for textile machines, working with hemp, and we had to bead rolls. Everything was under quota and everyone had to fulfill the quota as the food was depending on that. So it was ten people that were already a group who were quickly working as a team. The most beautiful thing was on Saturday afternoon, I don't know anymore if it was at three or five o'clock, but they locked down all the bars and we knew that until Monday morning there would be nothing happening and no one would be dragged through an inspection. Always on Saturday or Sunday afternoon one person from each cell had homework to prepare a story he wanted to talk about. It was a little university there, but big training for a man. We were still waiting for the final word from the highest court. We were still living with high hopes that the punishment would be reduced and instead of fourteen years we might get only a year or two. So there was hope living in each of us that we would be released from prison.

When did it come, the result from the highest court?

It was terrible that it was autumn and we were still in these dungeons, five of us who appealed were still sitting in the "Kremlin." In each dungeon there was one of us, Bóža Modrý, Kobranov, Roziňák, Konopásek, and I. We all went through that. It was close to the ice rink in Plzeň so we heard each goal. They were playing hockey there and we were in the "Kremlin," sentenced to so many years. From that point of view it was horrible, to find out that it's the end of your sports life. I was just twenty and when I thought I would have to spend fourteen years there I would come out at age thirty-four and I could just go and dig potatoes and not play hockey.

When did the statement finally arrive?

That hope was still living in us when all of a sudden they announced that the appellate court will be on December 22, 1950. So we were waiting to see what would happen. They came for us, dressed in prison clothes, and they put us in an "anton."²⁰ In front of us and behind us there were cars with machine guns and we were still hoping at least at this court we would see our parents and our children.

You hadn't seen them until that time?

We hadn't seen anyone at all, absolutely not. They took us again to that court and I remember as though it happened earlier today. The chairman of the court was Mr. Kruk. Then they called us in. All five of us were standing there. First, a plaintiff spoke then our lawyers were speaking and pointing out the facts that nothing had been proven. They were insisting that there was reasonable suspicion, but they had no proof and therefore there was nothing they could sentence us for. Our lawyers were telling us that and we still believed it. Yet, the prosecutor was a real bastard. He kept reading various protocols, even a statement of a woman who was a caretaker of a house we were living in where my father had a shop, a butcher shop in Podbaba²¹. This caretaker was taken care of by my father during the whole war and he gave her things to help her out. This lady wrote about me because she was a secret communist confidante that I was the last root of a Golden Prague Youth that must be cut off. I was rolling my

²⁰ "Anton" – a closed police van for transport of prisoners.

²¹ Podbaba is a lokal name for neighbourhood in Dejvice.

eyes when I heard what people from my building wrote about me. What people who knew me and knew I was a famous person wrote about me. So the prosecutor put the worst on us again regardless of proof or confirmation from the court that it's standing on our high sentences, but we were still hoping. I remember Dr. Kruk as though it was today, how his hands were shaking, sweat was running down, and he was completely flabbergasted. This guy was certainly doing something that was against his will, his voice was shaking when he confirmed that all the sentences are confirmed by the highest court.

What ran through your head at that moment?

I remember that even at that moment, even Modrý, who still continued to play the hero, said, "Well guys the cage door just closed and we're inside. No one will help us now. " The highest court confirmed the sentences of the state court and we knew that we couldn't do anything, just live through that time or wait for a presidential pardon or be released on a two-thirds or one-half punishment for good behavior and satisfactory work. All prisoners were fooling themselves that they wouldn't be there for their whole sentence and that they would get out earlier. That was happening later too when I got into camps in the Jáchymov area or the Příbram area. In every prisoner there was a little light of hope that their day of freedom would pop out. There would have to be a rebellion or a war and then we all would be released or that we would be released on a condition reversed by the court or something similar to that. When we were getting back from the highest court on the 22nd of December, just two days before Christmas Day, I remember in front of Pankrác Hall there were our parents, sisters, boys' children and none of them were let into the process.

Did you have a chance to see any of your relatives during this time before the final court decision?

No, but I have a little memory in my head when we were coming to Prague. They took us in an "anton" all tied up together to the rail station in Plzeň. There we had a wagon with a coup reserved and surrounded by police so no one could enter. We went this way to Prague and when we got to the main Prague train station, the train stopped on the first platform. They took us out from the wagon to a special government room, which still exists there and from there we were waiting for another "anton" to take us to Pankrác. This car backed up right to the entrance and we went from the room, to the car, and straight to Pankrác. Of course we went straight in so that no one could see us. While we were sitting in the government salon, we were allowed to speak although there were secret police around. We looked at each other and said, "So guys, can you see this? One year ago, another train took us to the first platform. Here the government welcomed us, Zápotocký²², all the Ministers, and all of Prague were at our feet and today they took us to the same saloon." I remember that so well. So we thought that not even a year later, we were something completely different for the nation. We returned the same way, to the saloon, from the saloon, to the train, by train back to Plzeň, then into the same "anton" and back to Bory. We got back to the dungeons and continued to work as I've already described.

How did the daily routine of a political prisoner look like in a stone prison?

I was lucky, out of the fifty people who were transported there, I was the youngest one. Right at the time, one of the prisoners, who was on hall duty left and a commander Trepka had me

²² Antonín Zápotocký was the President of Czechoslovakia at that time.

do it in his place. I didn't know what it was, but they took me out and I found out that my boss was general Paleček, one of the biggest war heroes. He was a really good man who taught me all the duties of prison. All of a sudden I was serving food, pouring soup, and together we were putting food onto tin plates and putting them into the little windows where the prisoners were taking them from us. This way I knew about everything that was happening there. Paleček taught me various tricks, for example how to take "moták"²³ from one dungeon to another. When we were pouring out the piss and shit, disinfecting the bucket and putting it back into the cell, guards were usually away and we could put a piece of paper which had a message. When soup was poured in, and if I was holding a "moták," I blinked my eye and I dropped it in for the one I was giving it to. Then he knew he had a message. That was something amazing for me. I was also going to pick food from the central, so I saw the daily life in prison. That was nice and I can tell you at that time I cheered up a little, even though I had fourteen years with not knowing how it will go on.

How did you get to Jáchymov²⁴?

I can't tell you exactly when it was, but it happened within a year, sometime in 1951. Suddenly they started transporting us, probably canceling "Kremlin," because some prisoners were taken to Leopoldov. Others somewhere else, and some of us were taken to Jáchymov. We came to Vykmanov by Ostrov nad Ohří river, where there was the main gathering camp and from that one they divided us into different camps. In a short amount of time I was right next to this camp. This camp was called "L" and also a licvidation camp. Here the iron ore²⁵ was broken, split up, put into barrels, and sent to Russia. That was really a death camp. Whoever was there for a long time had really bad health problems from the dust and radiation. Some people didn't even stay there for a month and some people stayed two or three months, some a half year, and some had health problems for the rest of their lives, because of blood decay, muscle decay, muscle or bone decay, and so on. That was the worst camp. I was there for a short time, maybe a week or two weeks and I didn't get to the crushing department. I was doing just some helping work, around. Then another transport came and they took me up to Jáchymov and there I went through many different camps. One of the worst one was called Nikolaj, up above Jáchymov. There were German "vindictive" prisoners²⁶ who were sentenced in 1945. There was always a commander and a main camp guard. Together they organized something like a little trip either at night or during the day. They went into the blocks. They chased everyone out where people had to stand sometimes in the frost and in their cells they made a huge mess. If we had food in the lockers, they stepped on it and threw it out. That was just a nightmare.

Which camps were you kept at?

If I remember well, the first camp was Nikolaj, then I went to XII, from there to Prokop, from there to Ležnice, from Ležnice back to X and then back to XII. I returned there because they thought I might be a candidate²⁷ to run away. Once I worked with a group that later tried to es-

²³ "moták" – a secret message usually distributed among prisoners on a small piece of paper.

²⁴ Jáchymov is a spa town close to Karlovy Vary, near the German border. Working camps for prisoners were often established near these mines and political prisoners tend to call them "concentration" camps. Historians rather prefer working camps – concentration camp is a term connected with Nazism. Concentration camps existed in Southern Africa already in the early 20th century. Great Britain built them there during the second Boer War. In Czechoslovakia there were "vindictive" prisoners and later also political and criminal prisoners. Prisoners were used as cheap labor.

²⁵ The narrator means ore that contains uranium.

²⁶ Vindictive prisoners – prisoners sentenced on a basis of "vindictive decrees" for cooperation and collaboration with Nazi Germany. A state prisoner was also called a political prisoner, then there was a category of criminal prisoners.

cape. I was even considered a “runaway” for a short time, because at one point I was transporting stone on small wagons from mining shafts to the lift that took the stone up. One Sunday this group didn’t take me on the shift and during the evening they tried to escape. I can tell that this was my holy luck or maybe my bad luck that I couldn’t participate in this. For a long time they had agreed that they would try to escape and one guard even helped them. The worst was that they caught them and shot them. When they brought them back to camp they just threw them on the camp like they were nothing and everyone had to walk around them. Beware to anyone who had their head down or made a cross. If you did, you were hit right away and almost knocked out. It was something horrible to see shot dead friends. It was almost the whole of Kukul’s group that tried to escape. I worked with them a couple of shifts and from this base they took me to Ruzyně²⁷. I can tell you at Ruzyně I went through something similar to the “domeček.” They wanted to shake out or beat out from me that I knew about the escape and that I didn’t want to tell the secret police. I knew a little bit, but I didn’t have a clue that the group had agreed for a long time. Kukul wrote a book²⁸ then about the escape. When I met him, he signed the book and wrote me a message in it, “We escaped you, thank god!” They actually escaped away from me and saved my life this way, because if I had gone with them they probably would have shot me like the others. So then I was at Ruzyně in Prague.

What memories do you have of the prison in Ruzyně?

I was in Ruzyně for about a half year and they still tried to get out of me what I knew about the escape. Again, they tried to trap me. It was at my lowest point and I didn’t think I was going to get out from the bottom. Once I even heard down in the dungeon an International song²⁹ being sung. There were people yelling and singing of the International song and the guards were beating them. I heard them weeping... and it was Slánský and Co.³⁰ Down there in the dungeons was all of Slánský’s group who were finally sentenced to death and executed.

They assigned a priest to me and I didn’t know whether it was a real priest, but he continued to insist he was. They knew psychologically I was doing really bad. The priest wanted me to write a “moták” to my parents so that they would have news of me. There were a couple of months where no one knew anything about me, where I was, if I was living, or if they already shot me. The priest made me write a “moták,” especially to my sister who still worked in the office of Martin Bow. Again they wanted to prove that I was connected to this office even though Mr. Bow wasn’t there and someone else had already taken over. The priest kept saying that he has good connections through one of the guards and that they would give it to my sister. So I wrote a little message on a piece of paper that he gave me, but I did it very carefully. I told them to say hello to uncle this and that although the uncle had been dead for a while. I believed she would understand that the letter wasn’t a true one. Later I found out that this priest was for sure an imposter and a confidante of the state and was assigned to me to trap me. When he gave the message to my sister out in the street, they arrested her and wanted to

²⁷ **Ruzyně** is the name of a Prague district and a prison in it. Some well known people were kept there during the communist totality.

²⁸ **KUKAL, Karel: Deset křížů.** (Ten crosses). 2. Vydání, upravené a rozšířené. Rychnov nad Kněžnou: Ježek, 2003. 127 s.

²⁹ **Internacional song** is an international anthem of the labor movement, which is sung in many countries by Communists and sometimes Socialists and Social Democrats too.

³⁰ **Process with Rudolf Slánský** – Political processes launched against all sections of society, which did not miss even the main representatives of the Communist Party. From 1950 the State secret police concentrated on “searching the enemy even among its own.” The leading communist investigated was Secretary-General of the Communist Party Rudolf Slánský.

make her work for the State secret police. Anyway, she didn't really have time to read what was on the "moták" and they released her after about three days. She continued to work at the office for some time. So they were trying to pull such tricks on me because they were trying to get me in trouble and get me extra years in prison. When they caught someone during an attempted escape or being connected with civilians, they held a new court hearing and they gave you five more years. So I kind of saved myself this way, because it was revealed that everything that I wrote on the "moták" was false.

From Ruzyně you returned to Jáchymov?

Of course, they took me back to pit number XII, but only for a short time. I was unlucky that I was marked on my clothes. We had pants and on those were white stripes. Whoever had one stripe had it all right. Whoever had two, that was already a dangerous person of whom they kept a special eye on. I had an extra circle on my back as a mark that indicated I was not allowed to stop. That also meant that I was the most dangerous person for gathering people and organizing them in a group. So for the whole time I was working in the Jáchymov camps, when ever there was Christmas, May Day celebrations, or what ever different holidays, they put me in solitary confinement as soon as I got out from the pit wet and dirty. "Confinement" was separate housing that was a part of the camp, a dungeon and that was where I would spend my holidays. I couldn't move around the camp because in a moment my friends came up to me and quickly we were two or three and a siren started to wail and they were indicating we were not allowed to get together. They still expected that we were getting ready to escape. I was labeled like this until the end of my stay in the working camps.

Do you remember the prison number you had in Jáchymov?

I even have them written down. My first number was 1257, but then for others I would have to look into the letters my parents were writing to me. They always had to write my prison number and "Bory" or "Karlovy Vary." So I had about three or four different numbers, but my first number was 1257.

Did you ever come across homosexuality in the camps?

No, never. Although at these camps there was something different. There were groups of people who were interested in culture, theater, and who learned language. We mainly propagated sports. We got together with friends from Brno, Ostrava, and Slovakia. Volleyball was played there, of course when the work was at full stretch and the staff of the camp let us. We also played football, a match of Bohemia versus Moravia and that was always a big event because many people came to watch. Even right before I was released they let us at camp Bytíz build a small ice rink where we could play hockey. Bytíz was my best camp where I spent almost two years. I even remember finding a letter where I was writing to my parents to send me ice skates and we also smuggled in pieces of wood to create barriers for the rink. That was already in the year 1955 and right after that I was released so I "unfortunately" didn't play hockey in the prison camp.

Could you summarize what comes to mind when you hear the name, Jáchymov?

A huge amount of suffering of the best people who were Czechoslovakians, or people who followed their convictions and belief took place here. They were people who knew what Communism was and were fighting against it. I think that Jáchymov was the suffering of a nation that can never be forgotten.

Mr. Bubník, thank you very much for the series of recordings we have done together.

I am really happy I can talk about it like this, because out of our group of twelve there are only Mr. Konopásek, who doesn't really remember the history anymore, and I. Thank god "Uncle Alzhiemer" who I keep chasing away, hasn't visited me yet.

Zdeněk Kovařík was accused of high treason in a show trial called “Group JU1” and sentenced to nine years of prison. He had to work in the uranium labor camps in Jáchymov until 1955 – he spent two and half years in the labor camp “L” called also “Liquidation camp” and two years in the forced labor camp Nikolaj.



“Find your goal in life and go and get it until the very last breath.”

Interview with Mr. Zdeněk Kovařík

At the beginning of our interview I would like to ask you about your childhood.

I was born in 1931 in Hradec Králové¹ where I practically lived the majority of my life. We were four siblings and I was the oldest one and my youngest brother was eight years younger. I can say that as for my childhood I had really wonderful parents and a great childhood. There were four of us and we all had some duties and my parents didn't really have it that easy. My father was a laborer who worked as a driver of city buses in Hradec Králové. He had to work hard to feed four children. Fortunately, I had a good advantage because I was quite independent and I didn't act out against my parents. I was also, well I don't want to praise myself, but I was quite hard working so I always had time for my hobby and fun.

Can you remember the 1938 mobilization or the beginning of the war?

After the Germans came I could already remember such moments as the one when my father got home from two mobilizations, one in June and one in September 1938². He came and he was angry and sorry at the same time, not knowing whether he should cry or take a shotgun and return to the borders and start shooting someone there. That was something like the first introduction to finding out that you are helpless. I started to understand that a person should never give up easily and a person always has something to fight for. Already at that time, in 1939 I wanted to join Scouts³. After the Germans came scouting was unfortunately prohibited so it only remained a wish and as a friendship with those who used to go to Scouts. We were really lucky that we were such a nice group of boys. During the war the Gestapo locked up one whole family in a house in Hradec. Since they were doing that at night, we only found out what they did with the people later on. Then it was something as an inner resistance of things happening around us. Next to us there lived Karel Kodeš who was a couple years older than me, at that time he was probably eighteen. He immigrated then and after the war was over I found out he fell in as a member of a flying squadron and that he was shot down over the Bay of Biscay. These are the kind of memories that have always tidied me through hard times and when I think of them they would motivate me to do something.

¹ **Hradec Králové** – a town in the Northeast of Bohemia.

² **In May 1938 the military** information service got information about the massive concentration of the German army by the Czechoslovakian borders in Saxony and Silesia. This information was interpreted as direct preparations for an attack on Czechoslovakia. For this reason it was decided to mobilize one unit of defense and five units of technical internal defense. It was not a mobilization in the true meaning of the word because the reserve forces were not activated and the defense only strengthened the formations. This act of "guarding the boarders" in 1938 was called a "small mobilization." In September 23, 1938 a real mobilization was announced and on this day Czechoslovakia started a general service. After the Munich Agreement was signed, all forces were dissolved.

³ **Scouts** is an international movement whose aim is education and self-education of children. During Czech history, Scouts was prohibited three times by a regime (by the Nazis and Communists) because it always stood up actively against totalitarianism. Many scout representatives died during the rebellious activity, were executed, or imprisoned in Nazi concentration camps. Many of them were victims in political processes in the 50's. Scouting always did its best with political freedom (in 1945, 1968, and 1989) and immediately renewed its activity.

What was life like after the war?

Right after the important days in May 1945 I quickly joined the Scouts. I joined a good group again, which was led by a couple of young scouts. The whole group was called "War twins." Later on, these guys got state honors for their Anti-German and Anti-German occupation activity. One of them was even shot during their partisan activity. His name was Karel Šimek and he died tragically in 1945 when he was shot by Germans. He was cutting the telephone connection from Hradec to the airport. So these older scouts who had such incredible experiences during the war were teaching us how to do these things. It was kind of enlightening for one that you can always do something to affect what is happening. The scout activity finally led me to prison, but these are already different things to talk about.

Were you lucky to finish school after WWII?

Right after the war I started an apprenticeship and I learned to be a telephone mechanic. Right in 1950 I started going to school and I started at the College of Industry in Pardubice⁴. One month after that I was locked up so I was locked up as a student, a student with a high school education.

What did you think about 1948? How did you accept the change of a regime?

It was tragic because I leaned toward the National Socialists. At school we had a really great teacher who was introducing us to quite a few different political ideas. Some things that the Communists were doing I didn't like at all and I had a really big aversion towards it. I remember that we were searching for a camp in 1946 when the elections⁵ were just being held and the Communists prepared the figures and they hanged them on the square in Bystřice nad Perštejnem and they marked them with the voting numbers of the National Socialists and the People's Party. They made eight or ten gallows and there they hanged these figures, meaning they were burning the effigy of these political candidates. So a normal person could not agree with this stuff. It goes without saying that when we were establishing the Confederation of Political Prisoners⁶ in the 1990's we were getting similar letters, I mean threats.

What was your incarceration like and what were you actually arrested for?

The thing I was arrested for I found out much later. We had the scout group and what we did was write threatening letters and once we also destroyed the campaign office of the Communist party in Hradec Králové. We hid a small bomb there and later detonated it. It broke the door, the shopping window, and all the posters hanging there. No one was injured, nothing was burned, but it was the night before May 1, 1950. It was a demonstration against what was happening here.

So what exactly did your arrest look like?

I came home from school and the same day I was supposed to say goodbye to my close friend who was going to join the army. We did sports and from 1948 I participated in the regional, county, and national tournament three times in what was called Zborov's Race. From the regional we moved on to the national championship. Zborov's Race had various army disciplines, which included sprinting, swimming, and others. One of our friends was entering the army to join the paratroopers.

⁴ **Pardubice** – a town which is app. 26 kilometer far from Hradec Králové, towards the south.

⁵ In elections into Parliament in 1946 the Communistic party of Czechoslovakia won.

⁶ **KPV – The Confederation of Political Prisoners of the Czech Republic** – the association of political prisoners from former Czechoslovakia. It was established on January 3, 1990.

On September 29, 1950 I came home from school in Pardubice. About 7 p.m. a guy came up to me and said, "I would need to talk to you, we are interested in some things." I lived in the suburbs of Pardubice called Slezské in the outskirts and there was a small park about a hundred meters from our house. He told me we would meet over there absolutely not knowing what was going on. He told me, "I am from school and I would need some parts for radios and such stuff." I just replied that I don't do things like that. I still didn't have a clue what was going on and when he saw that he wouldn't get anything out of me he gave a sign and all of a sudden there were some fifteen men saying, "We are arresting, we are arresting you," and that was it. Then they came home with me and searched my house. My parents were frightened as well as my remaining three siblings. By 11 p.m. they transported me to the prison in Hradec Králové, not saying a word to my parents, just mentioning that they would ask me a few questions and that I would return the next day. I came back in five years.

What exactly did they look for during the house search?

They were searching for anything. I was just working on a radio. I wanted to make a radio connected to an LP player because such stuff was not available on the market, but they thought it was the construction of a radio transmitter. I sympathized with Americans and from 1946 I got a bulletin from the American Embassy. There weren't any political things against Communism, it was just a bulletin distributed by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. That was also evidence and then we were sentenced for the Americanism. They were searching for anything that they could sentence us for. At 11 o'clock they transported me to the prison and there I waited for three days not knowing what was going on. They wrote some papers with me and they let me be for three days.

Then they blinded my eyes and took me to the Ulrichovo Square where the offices of the secret police were. That was my first interrogation and it lasted from 10 a.m. until 1 a.m. They were still trying to convince me to tell them something, but I kept saying, "I don't know anything, I don't know about anything." I wasn't admitting anything so they ended it at night and they took me back to the jail. On the second and third day it looked the same and on the third day they just told me, "Hey, don't be ridiculous, here are the reports. We locked up others and they've already told us everything that you were doing."

Did you know the people that were written up in the reports that they showed you?

I knew them because we did one silly thing since we agreed on establishing an official scouts group. Unfortunately, another guy who wanted to escape across the border in 1949 joined our group as well. They caught him and punished him with a half year of imprisonment for attempting to cross the border. He was showing off that he had friends he could write to and that we could come and get him out of prison. He was already somewhere by Jáchymov, somewhere at Vykmanov on "C." He probably told this to someone who was already cooperating with the secret police. This person had to give out our names and so they came and arrested us all. That was already after the bombing of the Communist's building. That was the biggest thing we did and the policemen called it, "Noisemaker." They were wondering who did that for about a year and half before this "good boy" told them.

What happened when they brought your colleague's reports and showed you?

I just read the reports and I found out there was my compliant named Ctirad Andrýs and another compliant Lubka Škaloud. "Oh, it's good, there is three of us." I thought to myself. They practically threw out the things that weren't deniable anymore. So I just told them I agreed,

I signed it and that was the end. Then they weren't okay with it and they called me back in two weeks. These interrogations were taking place in a prison in Hradec. My cell there was just a little distance from the interrogation room. It was about ten meters away so I could hear all the interrogations taking place. At night it was crying or some beating. It wasn't anything nice when all of a sudden at night you hear some horrible screaming. First there were some investigators yelling and then there was the prisoner crying because they were beating him.

There they brought me and told me that I didn't tell them everything. I denied that and said I did. So they turned me to the wall and I had to squat and hold my arms out straight. On my arms they put a ruler and I looked in front of me and on the wall I saw dried blood. So I thought to myself, "Well this is where all the fun is ending, this is where it gets tough." This I repeated to myself about three times. Sometimes they hit me over my arms with that ruler on the strengthened side, but they didn't get anything else out of me. So they let me be and all of a sudden in January after the new year they called me up for more investigations again. There I heard again, "You didn't tell us everything." Everything was again the same. Later we found out that Zbyněk Škaloud started to make things up and let his fantasy go and started to give them names. I don't know whether he wanted to please them or what. That meant that he helped get others arrested including Květa Pilmanová, who was a friend of ours, Radek Brožový, Karel Havránek, Jirka Pašta, or Bohouš Marek.

Do you know whether he did it on purpose or by mistake?

I really think he did it on purpose. Later I found out that he was a real covert. He liked to show off and because he talked too much he practically got eight other people arrested.

How did you make it through your trial? Did you have a clue that you could get such a high sentence?

On March 14th-15th, 1951 we stood in front of the court. It was a monster-process. It was a public process where they invited all the young students from the schools and all the young representatives from the factories. It was in a court hall in Hradec and we were judged as a dangerous and frightening case to society. They were judging us for being scouts, because all though scouting was prohibited we kept doing it. This was decided right at the beginning because they were accusing us of high treason, espionage, and I don't know what else because there were about six charges that were really serious. They called us, "Group JU1," and I don't know why it was JU, but maybe from Junák Group and the first one. There were nine of us. Lubka Škaloud got the highest sentence, 14 years. Then there was Zbyněk Škaloud who got 12 years. I got the third highest sentence – 11 years. Then behind in a row was Ctirad Andrýs and these are all people who are dead now: Ctirad Andrýs 10 years, Radek Brož 9 years, Bohouš Marek 7 years, Pašta 7 years, Havránek 4 years and Květa Pilmanová, who had her eighteenth birthday on the day of the trial, got 1 year.

Were your parents present?

My parents were there. There was my mother, my father, and even my girlfriend who I was dating at that time. This young lady was waiting until my release and we have lived together up until today.

What happened after your trial?

After the trial things happened really quickly because we stayed in Hradec for a couple of days and then transferred to Pankrác. That was something like a stay over and from there we went to Jáchymov, where I arrived sometime around March 25. That means that in about ten

days after my trial I was already at the labor Camp "Bratrstvi" (Brotherhood), which was the head camp. There we stayed the night and then they took us away again. Three of our group went to camp "L"⁷ where the iron ore⁸ was being processed. There we got prisoner's clothes and the majority of people working over there were young. It wasn't really easy work, it was really hard, and not very good for your health.

What kind of job was it and what was your daily routine like?

It was a so-called iron ore processing plant called OTK. This work place was located in Horní Žďár in a village called Vykmanov. Right next to that there was one old camp called "C" and we were at the new camp, which was "L." It was also called the liquidation labor camp, which was quite an exacting name. When I came there in March of 1951 there was only one building standing there, well actually two buildings, one was for accommodation and the other was for everybody. There was a kitchen, canteen, infirmary, doctor's office, and other equipment that was necessary at every camp like this. What was interesting was that there were no showers. If we didn't ask for showering at the work place, which was right next to it, then we practically didn't have a place to shower at. In spite of these bad conditions we were still able to maintain our hygiene and keep ourselves clean so that we could live through all this.

A little later in the fall of 1951 another building was erected because the whole labor camp got bigger. They started taking all the iron-ore from all the other mines from Czechoslovakia at that time. We had to construct this other building during the afternoons, meaning after our morning shifts, as an unpaid job. Of course we didn't get anything for it, rather ,it was on the prejudice of on our free time. The number of people there increased from 150 to 300. The material, which was taken to Russia, to the place called Čierné při Čope. That was a whole train and it was filled up, called "Věrtuška." When we came there in 1951 there were only two trains leaving per month. After the production increased there were trains leaving every week. I was leaving from there in 1953 and at that time it was one train every two or three days. One fully loaded train contained from 25-30 wagons each weighting 25 or 30 tons each. There was a lot of material. This was high quality pulverized material. I talk about this because there were two kinds of material. One was strongly radioactive and it was being processed on grinders in the place we called the "Tower of Death." Then there was the second one, of a low quality and this was freely transported, loaded, and enclosed in wagons that were originally intended for cattle transport. It all was all strategic material, which always had an escort. In the front and back part of the train there were escort guardians and there were about eight people in each who were guarding the train through the whole country.

What exactly did you do?

Actually I went though all of the work places there excluding those where they were working on chemical samples. I was also unloading material from the trucks because at that time the trucks didn't have hydraulic lifts so everything had to be loaded and unloaded manually. The minimum we had to unload was four trucks plus I had to load up twelve trailers, which held one ton of material each. This wasn't any fun and I always said thank god I was so young and I could survive all this. This was the outside work place. Then there was a second work place where we worked on the high quality ore and this was transported in small boxes. These boxes

⁷ Camp "L", sometimes called also a camp for liquidation. There was a "tower of death" where the prisoners were coming into direct contact with radioactive uranium.

⁸ The narrator means ore that contains uranium.

weighed from forty to ninety kilograms (88 – 198 pounds) and they were 45cm and each had a lid. At the beginning they were sealing them, but they later didn't have time for that so after a while they just had latches so the box wouldn't open. These boxes were measured for how much radioactivity they had and they were loaded into larger containers. One container was from one shaft. We were taking these small boxes from one shaft for four days until we filled one container. In that box there were from 45-60 tons of material.

When the box was already full and it met the required tonnage, the material was put on a long conveyor belt. This belt was about fifty meters long and about eighty centimeters wide. The container was narrow and we had to load everything manually. We didn't get any gloves so all of our joints on our hands were scraped. On this belt the material ran into the first grinder where above the grinder there was a net, the smaller material went through and the bigger pieces went through and could fall into the grinder then. Here it was crushed into smaller pieces and it ran on the second conveyor belt, which was forty or fifty meters long again. It ran into a tower where everything was sorted and separated through another net, but this net was finer so it let even smaller pieces through and the larger pieces that were about five centimeters went through the grinder and were crushed into pieces of about five millimeters. From here everything was taken out, put into a bunker, and from the bunker to the trailer and this was taken to the last floor of the tower. This tower⁹ was about twenty-seven meters high and it's standing there nowadays. Here the material was taken out on separating machines and using gravity the material was sorted for the last time. When there was a bigger piece left it would go back to the grinder again. So this way, everything was running until the granulated material was no bigger than five millimeters. This final product was then taken to the bottom floor into the bunker again and from there the barrels were filled. The barrels were about fifty centimeters high and wide. It's opening was fifteen centimeters wide and into this we had to push sixty kilograms of granulated material from each shaft. It's important to say that some materials from some shafts, for example from Slavkov were lighter. So to push in sixty kilos was quite a challenge. Material from Příbram was heavy and loading that was an easier job. There were six people standing and one of them was loading the barrel while the other six used tamping irons to pack it in tighter. Then the barrel was weighed and it went into a place where it was sealed. On each seal of the barrel you could find a stamp with the information from which shaft it came from, what was it's total weight, and some other specific markings. Then everything was put in storage. This storage was very long 150 – 200 meters on each side. A stamping machine was in the middle and then the barrels were taken, well actually kicked by your foot to one side or the other of the storage building. There were about 300 barrels to stack onto of each other. Finally, the wagon came, we would open the door, and we would roll the barrels into the wagon. As I already mentioned this train was called "Věrtuška." So this was the process of the tower.

Were there any other ways the ore that contains uranium was processed?

When I was speaking about the square there was something we called the "poor grinder" or "grinder three." Big pieces of material were crushed here again and processed, but this process was slow. It was ground, separated, and put into the bunkers. From here it was manually loaded into wagons by shovels. The high quality iron ore that was being processed in the camp

⁹ This tower was called "The Tower of Death." It still stands in North-West Bohemia, close to Jáchymov.

went through grinder number two. That was almost clean uranium. This was one of the worst working places because everything was being processed manually and before loading there came about forty boxes. These were all unloaded onto a big pile and from here the material was manually thrown onto the net and everything that was left on the net had to be picked up and manually thrown into the grinder. The soft granulate was already moving on the conveyer belt and everything was ground down to pieces less than five millimeters again. Before it was done we had to do this process about seven times. Everything had to be mixed well together so there would be a steady mix of the quality of the iron ore. So the whole process was done seven times and this grinding produced a lot of dust. On one side there was a grinder and right next to that, five meters away we were working and putting the materials together. There was no ventilation and we didn't have any respirators or masks. We didn't have anything like that so we left each day grey or red depending on the iron ore that was being processed. When we were processing Příbram the tower was producing dust of course and this dust was red because all the material from Příbram was mainly red in color. When we were processing Slavkov the color was gray-green and that was a weird color. Finally, when the iron ore was from Jáchymov the color was gray-blue or dark gray. We also knew that when we were processing material from Lužnice we knew exactly which two concrete shafts were working. After this first half-year we knew everything perfectly about it.

Do you remember any names of the guards or people who were checking on you there?

There were mainly nicknames because we didn't know their real names, but the commander on "L" was Píbil, who was later a mayor in Pardubice. I, for example, found out when I was already on "L" that I knew one guard. I was asking myself where the heck do I know this guy from? It turned out to be Josef Kulek, one of the scouts! He used to be a member of the group "War twins" and he joined the secret police. He started talking to us and suggested that we could be friends and if we needed something he could work on it for us. I just told him, "Josef just let it be and don't even talk about that. Here is the fence and you are on one side and I'm on the other. The fence is barbed-wire so you always have to keep your eyes on this." Anyway, he probably got back at me a little because right in 1951 I got solitary confinement and I don't know why, but during Christmas they took 47 people from "L" and put us all in solitary confinement. I was one of the twelve who were put into confinement in "L" and the remaining prisoners were taken to the nearest camp, camp "C" for solitary confinement. There I was from December 20 to January 12. Why and for what I haven't found out even up to today.

Could you describe solitary confinement in more detail?

Solitary confinement was a small wooden shed and it had two rooms, which looked like rabbit hutches. They were about 1.3 meters wide by 2.5 meters long and 1.75 meters high. I was 1.77 meters so I always had to bend when I stood up. There they put six of us and for the night they gave two blankets. One blanket we put underneath and we slept head legs, head legs. In this way six of us stayed until January 12. In the morning we would get one pot of decaffeinated coffee and one slice of bread each. It was a really small slice of bread. At noon we would get soup, but the soup was really watered down again with a small piece of bread and the same thing for supper. We couldn't wash and instead of a toilet we had a small pail. We did everything into that. This pail would be hung on the door for the night otherwise we wouldn't have been able to lie down. The worst thing was when the guard would rush in at night opening the door and all the contents of the pail would splash out. That was nothing nice. It's hard

to describe it. I believe not many people would believe the stuff I'm saying and say to themselves, "This man is making it up," but this was really happening.

Have you ever met Josef Kulek, since your release?

Yes, I met him when I was a civilian. About a year after I came back he wanted to talk to me and I told him, "We have nothing to talk about together." I met him in 1978 or 1979, I don't know exactly. I was working for the sugar factory in České Meziříčí. I worked there as a designer and builder. We were putting new technologies to work and all of a sudden someone was standing above me and I told myself I know this man and it was Mr. Kulek. A year after the secret police called me and asked what I did, how did I do it, was I behaving myself, and so on? So he didn't let me be until the last moment of his life.

How long did you stay at camp "L" and when were you transferred?

On "L" I stayed for two and a half years and for the last two years I was in camp Nikolaj in the mine Eduard. This was a special rarity in camps because from camp Nikolaj on mine Eduard you would walk through a special corridor for about half or three quarters of a kilometer on a local public road. In the morning we got up, leaving on the morning shift, and they would turn the lights on through out the whole corridor. They would tie us together with a steel cable – about 300 people. In the back they locked it. This was a farce and we called it a "Russian Bus" and the worse was in winter when we walked at 4 a.m. when there would be 40 centimeters of new snow. That was nothing to cheer about. Sometimes it also happened that someone would slip and the others would slowly walk over. In those moments guards would start yelling, "Stop," and similar stories were happening there.

So this was the way you walked to mine Eduard?

Exactly, one day we would go there to be told that we would be going down and the other day I would have to go down to the shaft and work like a normal miner even though there were no instructions or they didn't show us how. Then I was told I would clean the gutters. So I cleaned the gutters where the water was running away. Then I worked as a mine carpenter – I did carpentry on chimneys, stepladders, and so on. Then I worked with the bricklayers putting up the chimneys. Then my friend Husnik told me, "Come with me, we will work as breakers." That was something like the pinnacle of the mining experience. Other breakers were breaking horizontally, but we were breaking into the ceiling. We didn't want to get any iron ore, but there were percents for the iron ore so we would go and steal the material where the civilians worked. Here we would steal a small box of iron ore, we ground it, and we would sprinkle it back on. The measurements showed that we did a good job right away. So we had some percentage, we benefited from it, and we didn't only break stone, but we had some iron ore. Yet, up in the grinder they couldn't benefit from any of this because it was wasted rock.

You told me that after two and half years you were transferred to Nikolaj from camp "L," did they tell you any reason why?

No, they were never giving any reasons to anybody. I know that many of my co-prisoners switched from four to eight camps or prisons during five years of imprisonment. It depended on how they needed to place them. In the end, meaning in the second half of the 1950's they were dividing us also according to professions. Because, for example in Opava they built offices for project engineers and so some of us who studied various technical schools were taken there and started working for the Ministry of Interior. Also, when someone would try to escape he would be transferred somewhere else or into a normal prison.

Can you remember any Communists who were in prison with you?

There was a guy named Pepík Just and he worked at one of the ministries and he was a member of a subgroup in the process with Slánský¹⁰. I also met Gustav Husák¹¹, he shortly went through Jáchymov and stayed for about three days. The Slovaks wanted to lynch him, but I told them it didn't have any sense and there would only be trouble from it and he left quickly anyways.

How were you finally released? Originally you were sentenced for eleven years, but you went home in 1955, how did that happen?

According to the decree of the President Zápotocký¹² in 1953 I received a written announcement that my sentence was being lowered to five years from the original eleven¹³. My prison mates and even the guards were advising me to ask about a probationary conditional release. I refused to do that because if I agreed to do that I would have to cooperate with the secret police and Communists like to do that. I radically refused to do this right on the first day.

How many times did you see your parents when you were in prison?

Well I remember for the whole amount of time there were three visits, two in camp "L" and one in Nikolaj. There weren't any more.

During four and half years?

Yes, during four and a half years. I theoretically was able to ask for a visit once every half year. Every time I would ask though I would go into solitary confinement or they would make up some disciplinary punishment. When I worked at Nikolaj for the first months it took a while until my work efficiency went up to 100 % and prisoners under 100 % were automatically left out from the opportunity to write letters, have visits, and so on. So visits and letters were something like a reward for a good job. In camp "L" it happened that right before Christmas the commander Šlachtecký would bring a whole amount of huge letters on a tray. It was snowing and a big wind was blowing. The wind blew and all the letters started flying towards the fence that separated the camp from the surrounding and he said, "If you want your letters go and get them," but there was a threat that if we did the guards would start to shoot. So this was one of the ways of suppress the number of messages from home.

Even I had an illegal connection with home though and it was through Stěpánka Baloušková. When I wrote a letter within two weeks, sometimes earlier my parents knew what I wrote. They got the letter and would send an answer back. So I had pretty good information of what was going on at home and my parents knew about me. I was a friend with the future General Husník. We were together for two or three years at both camps. He had some experience because during the war he was in prison as well and he knew how to get in touch with civilians. Thanks to Stěpánka Baloušková, whose husband was a Brigadier Captain Baloušek, who Husník knew before our prison terms, we had contact on the outside. One of the civilian employees

¹⁰ **Process with Slánský** – political processes launched against all sections of society, which did not miss even the main representatives of the Communist Party. From 1950 the State secret police concentrated on "searching the enemy even among its own." The leading communist investigated was Secretary-General of the Communist Party Rudolf Slánský.

¹¹ **Gustav Husák** (1913–1991) – Czechoslovakian Communist politician and President of The Czechoslovakian Socialistic Republic from 1975–1989. In 1950 he was accused together with V. Clementis, L. Novomeský, and many others for so-called bourgeois nationalism. In February 1951 he was locked up and in 1954 sentenced for life imprisonment. He was one of the minority who did not confess any blame. That probably saved his life. In 1960 he was pardoned by President A. Novotný and in 1963 he was fully rehabilitated. In 1969 he was a leader of the Communist party – by May 1971 he was the General Secretary of the party. In 1975 he became a President of the Czechoslovak Socialistic republic.

¹² **Antonín Zápotocký** was the President of Czechoslovakia at that time.

¹³ In May 1953 there were 15 379 prisoners released on a pardon. This pardon also referend to 4035 prisoners from the labor camps for uranium.

working in the camp mediated between us and Stěpánka and she then sent the messages further inland. Within this group, Stěpánka was mediating mail for up to forty-seven people. Husník and I coordinated it. We were distributing and gathering letters. The civil employees in both camps helped with it.

How exactly did this secret postal system work?

We had to write on the thinnest kind of paper so there could be the maximum number of papers to take at one time. Then we had to collect them all in a certain way and tell certain people whose turn it was. There had to be some kind of order in it because we couldn't receive thirty letters at once. Each week there could be five to eight letters coming in. The letters were sent to Prague and from there were distributed to Bohemia and Moravia as well. It wasn't just letters, through the civilians we had the opportunity to buy some food, which was scarce. Families were also sending us normal civilian money and packages with the most necessary things, that meant mainly clothing and shoes because these things were totally missing in prison.

How exactly did you contact civilian employees there?

Husník had the main contact in camp "L" with the storekeeper lady. I knew her just from sight, I never even talked to her. On Nikolaj it was easier, Husník got in touch with civilian geologists and surveyors. These people were able to freely move in the mines and we were able to have contact with them. I knew the civilian geologist Míla Novotný who has already died. The other one was Mirek Mikšovský. Up until today we are friends. When I was released we kept going on holiday together to our cottage in Říčky for twenty-five years. So it's a friendship that has lasted until now.

When we look at your family relations or the aspects of your imprisonment, how did your family look at it? How did they manage when they had a nineteen-year old son behind bars?

It wasn't easy because my mom was a cleaning lady at the Regional Hall and right after I was locked up she was fired and they didn't want to give her a job anywhere after that. My father was a driver at the transport company driving buses and tram buses. He was also fired a month later. He had to go through the new recruitment process. The worst was for my siblings, two sisters and a brother, who couldn't go to proper schools. All three of them had to go to trade schools. At that time my brother used to go to a normal secondary school and there was one teacher, Mrs. Višňáková, who was terribly malicious. I know that once he had to stand on a platform for the whole hour. She would always turn to him and say, "So this is the brother of the national traitors and spy."

Do you have any "souvenirs" or things from the time you were in prison? For example are there any pieces of silver or other things that you were sending to your family?

Yes, some of it remains. Husník and I were actually making things like that. Not just for us, but for other prisoners. From my prison mate Bohouš Šesták I have two beautiful things he carved for me. One of them is a fully carved chess board and pieces. The figures are about 2 centimeters high and the queen about 4 centimeters. Then I also have a triangular shaped ashtray. On this there is a symbolic scout lily carved and finally I have a little figure of a man. The Triangle is the sign of life, the figure of the man means us "Mukls"¹⁴, and the lily is the symbol of the

¹⁴ "Mukl" – someone who was in prison, the word "mukl" itself comes from the abbreviation of – "a man on death row" (in Czech: muž určený k likvidaci). It was a label given to political prisoners imprisoned by communist or Nazi regimes that were not supposed to be released and were supposed to die in prisons or concentration camps. Later on, this label started to be used for all political prisoners.

scouts' ideology for which we were in prison. I was also putting pictures into plexiglass. I put in photographs of my family, which I later sent home. My sister still has one picture like that. We were also carving various objects from bones or we were making little hearts from plexiglass and various other things. I made tons of things for my prison mates. It was a hobby to relax and it was also a petty clockmaker's job because everything was so tiny and small. For example, there would be a little cross preserved in one of those hearts or someone would chew bread and then he would make sandals out of it and a sleigh. There were various ideas on what to do or create. I still have a lighter that the "Mukls" made.

When you heard your sentence that you were potentially going to prison for eleven years what helped you struggle through that time when you didn't know that you could go home in 1955?

(Light laugh) It was our general belief that we would not sit there, hoping that something would happen and all that we started in this world would not leave, especially after the execution of Dr. Horáková¹⁵ or General Píka¹⁶. We didn't trust that this would be a permanent state, how it lasted for forty years as it did. This gave us energy and we were hoping that we would get out earlier and we really finally didn't sit for the whole sentence. Many people were released on probation although they were in prison for ten or thirteen years. Yet, the people with fifteen or twenty years were a couple people who sat their sentence to the end.

How did your rehabilitation and compensation turn out?

Right in 1989 we established the Confederation of Political Prisoners. I had first-hand information because I was one of the founding members and the head of one of the branch offices. When they started talking about rehabilitation in 1990 we straight away got ready everything for rehabilitation and we informed our members of the confederation and offices in Hradec about the conditions of rehabilitation. There were about 350 people. In Hradec everything went all right. I personally got all the compensation that I was supposed to get.

What comes to mind when you hear the name Jáchymov?

I have a chill running down my back. Everything is fixed in my head. Sometimes it unfortunately happens to me that I have a dream or that I am in a prison in Jáchymov. It's an overwhelming experience that I can not erase from my memory and subconsciousness. Especially now, for example, when I am finding out that one of my friends who I had there has leukemia and is practically fighting with death. These are the red threads that line my memory. He used to be a young person, but today he is written off because he has leukemia from the radioactivity.

Did you also leave with some permanent health problems or were you so lucky that it went around you?

I had a few smaller injuries, broken fingers and ripped off nails. That often happened at the work place in "L" when we were handling barrels. Then I had two injuries in Nikolaj, one of them was really quite a misery. I was carrying something and then the ladder broke from underneath me and I fell down. I flew and landed on my back four meters below and I cut my elbow and twisted my shoulder. I crawled down the tower and there I gave a message for Hus-

¹⁵ **JUDr. Milada Horáková** (1901 – 1950) was a Czech politician, executed during the communist political processes in the fifties, for putative conspiracy and high treason.

¹⁶ **General Heliodor Píka** (1887–1949) was a Czechoslovakian soldier and legionare, important representative of the anti-nazi revolt abroad and he has a victim of communist terror.

ník that I was injured. In the infirmary they gave me first aid, put stitches in, and on Monday I was working again although my wound was seven centimeters long and very deep. So this is just an idea of how they took care of the working people in Jáchymov.

What did you think of the regime change in 1989?

I was happy it was the end. From November 17 I was a little naive when I heard how many people ended their memberships in the Communist Party. I thought that giving up the membership would solve everything. I later saw many people who used to be members of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia and now they are in government or now they have political functions. We weren't happy about this at all and we knew that things should be improved. So we did everything we could to pass the "Lustration Law."¹⁷ This is our problem even today because we can see how even this law is not being followed and people are getting around it in a bad and nasty way. We could not agree when we see ex-secret police and informers sitting in the main leading positions of the state and elected positions. If we have a public speech because we are invited by the candidates we always have to make sure these people were never apart of the party or they didn't cooperate with the secret police whether it is local, parliament, or European parliament elections. If they had something to do with the Communists we would not talk to them and we do not talk to them, at least in Hradec Králové we don't.

Is there anything you would like to tell to the young generation of today?

Find your goal in life and go and get it until the very last breath. Nothing else. Let your health and perseverance help you.

Thank you very much for the interview and I wish you a lot of health and success.

Thank you also and I hope young people will understand this because we do it for them. We don't want to cry because when we struggled until now, we have to struggle until the end of our lives, but if we can we want to give them the information because no one will later give it to them. Such authentic information they can get from us. A film can be very much distorted and it doesn't represent reality in its true nature. Some movies were done really well, but they were missing the thought, the inner feelings that only we can give to it. The feeling of the family solidarity because the family in civilian life was sometimes affected more than we were in our minds. They weren't locked, but they had financial problems and health problems, problems on how to make a living and if we didn't have this family solidarity I don't know whether we would have survived in prison.

¹⁷ "Lustration law" – a name for a set of laws that were discussed or passed in post-communist countries. These laws prohibit members of the powerful elite and armed brigades during the Communist regime to hold an office, local autonomy or positions in the military.

Jozef Kycka worked as a civil employee in the uranium mines in Jáchymov since 1948. He was sentenced to eighteen years of prison in the same camps because of meeting his old friend who worked as a secret agent. He was released based on the amnesty in 1960.



“It is like if someone does something bad to you, you forgive, but you do not forget. That’s it, to Jáchymov, I think.”

Interview with Mr. Jozef Kycka

First I would like to ask you something about your childhood. When and where were you born?

I was born on February 23, 1928 in Opatov, in southern Slovakia. The region is Zlenice. My father occasionally worked for farmers or people who had land. I lived there from February to September 1928 and then my whole family moved to the United States where my father got employment in a factory that made batteries. It was in Cleveland, Ohio. After about three years we had to return together with my mom and older brother since there were some property disputes in Slovakia. It all was solved in 1937 and then we were supposed to move back to the United States. I don't really remember this well, but I know there were two different companies, Brehmen and Loyd and one of them was facing bankruptcy. Another agent came to us and offered another company that we could travel with. Finally it took all so long that we couldn't travel from Hamburg anymore, because it was 1938. We were then supposed to leave from Turkey, through the Suez Canal, around Africa, and then back to America. That all finally didn't happen so we stayed here. My brother joined the Slovakian Army¹ and was sent to the fast division on the Eastern Front in Russia. When they were retreating he got lost all of a sudden and we got a statement that he died, but I couldn't believe it. I went to the grammar school in Trnava because Hungarians occupied Levice. In our village there was one lady who was a nun in Trnava and she offered us to live in Trnava in the orphanage as boarders and go to school there. We attended grammar school in the town of Trnava until 1944, until the Slovak National Rebellion.²

Do you remember the process of the Slovak National Rebellion and the way the Soviet Army behaved in this case?

It didn't happen close to us. It happened so quickly that on the night of the 28th they were broadcasting it on the radio and on the 29th there were already Soviets in our country. We were set free by the Soviet Army on December 20, 1944. We were occupied by the Soviet Army and they stayed until the end of March when they finally took Budapest. During those three months we really learned about their brotherly love. It was the Second Army from Ukraine, which was led by Malinovsky and these people were mostly from Gulags³. What they were saying to us, we couldn't believe. They picked sixteen year-old boys, including me. We shouldn't really say they choose us rather they came and told us, "Tomorrow, you start." I had to go to the bakery to help for three months. There were prisoners working with us and also soldiers who had a special sign on their uniforms. This meant they were the elite guard. The main commander of this part of the front lived in our house. Every two weeks or once a month they

¹ **Slovak State (officially the Slovak Republic)** Today's Slovakia. It existed in 1939–1945 and was abridged of the occupied Hungarian territory. The first Slovak Republic was a political and military ally to Nazi Germany.

² **The Slovak National Rebellion** – it was an armed riot of the anti-fascist power in Slovakia at the end of WWII.

³ **Gulag** was one of the departments of the secret police in the Socialistic bloc, managing a system of concentration and working camps in the U.S.S.R. The word gulag was then used for a group of these camps and camps under this institution.

held a trial and always sentenced someone to death and they would always kill him in our yard behind the well for water. Once my grandma was going outside to throw out potato peels and she saw how they shot someone in the back of the neck. So then they started shooting everyone in our yard.

Did you have the chance to talk to Gulag prisoners about their fate?

These Cossacks were telling us unbelievable stories for example, a group was running along the labor camp and they were yelling that they didn't meet the quotas and they should get death as a punishment. They were reporting themselves asking for death. I didn't understand why. I was telling myself that wasn't possible. There were cases where a prisoner would tell you he didn't even know why he was there and that he never found out. Then his neighbor would come into the Gulag and he would convince the first guy that he had informed against the first guy and so on. Then the next guy would come into the Gulag and say he had informed on the neighbor. I was always imagining that Gulags or exile was something like exile during the era of the Tsar, but after the stories we were told I found out that these Gulags were liquidation camps where the whole families were separated. Wives on one place, kids to another, and these people would die there starving and in utter misery. They had to build their own dugouts and live in that. I don't know how they did this when it was 40 degrees below zero. We were not even able to imagine it. We were suspecting that they were only saying it to get drink or wine because when they were sober they didn't want to talk about it at all. Only the army would be their answer.

Who exactly told you these stories?

These stories were told by Cossacks who were accommodated in our house and then when we helped in the bakery. It was in the bakery where we helped to mix dough, make bread, carry bread, and so on. The bakers were telling us about it. There was a guy telling us he was a priest and we thought he was a priest, but then when we learned more about the Russian language we found out he was a prince, Sokolovsky. He was the captain of the second navy class and from 1921 he was in the Gulags in Siberia. He went through many Gulags and he said that his ability to bake saved his life. He would always bake some pastries for the commanders and would be saved. He was already sixty maybe sixty-seven. He was really deaf because somewhere close to him a mine exploded or something similar to that.

All this happened before Communism started in 1948. Did you have any notion of what Communism meant?

I did because there was an old postman living nearby. He was a democrat and I used to go on visits to see him. We talked and he was explaining what democracy meant and gave me three books. These books were called "October Revolution" and they were written by Trotsky. It wasn't funny and it wasn't a novel. It was written chronologically and for example there was: Town Carycin, November 7, 7 p.m. or 8 p.m., A professor and his family was executed behind the town garages, or Leningrad, 8 p.m., from the bridge someone threw a doctor and his family into the Niva. There were more stories that happened in other towns and at different hours. The officials who did this were also described in the books.

You told me that your brother got lost at the Russian Front and you got the announcement about his death. Did you find out later what happened to him?

After the war my brother came home. He told us that when he was captured near Odessa he had to walk to Jekatërinodar. They forced them to walk. When Svoboda decided to organize

his own army my brother decided to join it. He didn't talk about things much, but when we drank a bit he started to open up and that was something horrible.

What was Slovakia like after the war? Did you finish school?

After the war I went back to the Gymnasium in Levice. I got into some trouble there. One friend of mine whose name was Palán broke his leg and since he was in hospital we wanted to go and visit him. I didn't want to look disrespectful so I wore a tie and my friend Stano did as well. There were two other girls going with us. When we came to school a professor came and pointed his finger at Standa and I, hit us, then asked why we were dressed like that. We replied that we were going to visit our friend in the hospital, but he didn't believe us. He said, "It's March 14⁴ today and this used to be the Slovakian national holiday." They chased us to the director's office and they called our parents to school. Finally I was suspended from school because I had a "bad report," and I was forbidden to study at any high school in Czechoslovakia. I had to go to work in the heavy industry in Ostrava. That was already in 1947 when they started to chase democrats. I was in Ostrava during the February events. The workers got shotguns and they were put around the gates and important objects around town.

You didn't stay long in the north of Moravia did you?

No, from there I left because after that February a friend of mine escaped across the border. He left a suitcase at my place telling me he was going to visit an uncle in Prague to see about a job. His uncle was a head doctor. My friend was caught trying to cross the border and was in prison in Cheb for two weeks. From there I got a letter with his apology for not telling me anything and for betraying me. He also promised he would explain everything after he was released. He never came back. He was released and he escaped.

So he successfully crossed the border then?

Yes, after a month policemen came to my boarding house asking me where he was. I just told them he was in Prague and that he left a suitcase at my place. I took the suitcase out and it was locked. They opened it, went through it, and they took the suitcase with them and me as well. Then I was released, but I had to sign a paper that I wouldn't tell anyone about what happened and what they asked me about. At that time I already noticed someone who was trying to be really discreet, so much so that he was actually visible. So I went home to Slovakia and my brother, who then worked at Jáchymov, was there by chance. The prisoners started to work in Jáchymov in 1945 or 1946 already. They recruited these guys who were unmarried to be guards. So my brother went and he told me, "Hey, come to Jáchymov. There are Russians and no one will keep an eye on you there." So I went. In the fall or maybe in the end of summer in 1945, sixty Russian soldiers with one commander came to Jáchymov and they occupied some camps. The names of the camps were Svornost (Concord), Rovnost (Equality), and Bratrství (Brotherhood). They stayed there and they didn't let anyone else in except for the people who were supposed to work there. Then sometime in October they signed an agreement because it came out that the Soviets would like to mine. So I came to Jáchymov and I really got a job from a lady named Pusiková in lab number 1. I worked with the high quality iron ore⁵. I was measuring the ore and I just vegetated there. I came there in June of 1948.

⁴ On **March 14th** the Slovak State was formed. This year was a national holiday from 1939 to 1945.

⁵ The narrator means ore that contains uranium.

What was your experience and your brother's experience? You had to meet political prisoners there is that right?

There weren't many of them there yet. They started coming in 1949 and they practically took turns after the German prisoners. I was in Horní Slavkov where the prisoners also started coming. There were a couple of political prisoners among them, but they never talked about it. If you asked what they were sentenced for then you would get the answer, that they were caught reading political magazines in someone's apartment. They were making fun of it and didn't want to talk about it until they got to know you a little better. Then I met a couple boys from Slovakia. There was a guy named Kanys. There were more of them and they were telling me what was going on, what they were sitting for, and what things looked like so I was informed a little bit at that time.

You were working in a lab the entire time you were there?

Later I worked as a technical controller. When the trailers for active uranium arrived, but the content wasn't the greatest. I was supposed to go there and check it. I did it really simply saying, "Guys, you are just fighting against yourselves. You throw the big stones that don't contain any uranium away, but on the smaller ones you put a paper "A" meaning they are for the "active trailer." If there is no uranium they will dump it out, but if there is, you will get 50 crowns per kilogram." So they simply started doing this. All of a sudden a friend who emigrated appeared. We grew up together. I was just asking him, "What are you doing here?" He replied, "Well I came back, where do you work?" He showed me his identification and it said that he worked in the mine of Ludvík Svoboda⁶ in Ostrava, but he had a fake name there. I told him, "Hey, play this game with someone else." So he told me what he was doing there and he slept over two or three times. In Jáchymov they made a forbidden zone and everyone who lived in Jáchymov had to have this information in their ID. This friend of mine was locked up in our village. He was arrested there because he wanted to see his mother. He stayed at an old woman's place, who used to be a countess. It was her property that was confiscated. As a result they let her stay and live in a monastery. Imagine that she died in the monastery that night. Since her lights were on men who were coming home from the pub were curious to see what she was doing. They threw a couple small stones in and because there was no reaction they went in. They wanted to ransack the house, but right in that moment a policeman came. My friend was locked there in the other room and couldn't escape because there were bars on the window. Anyways he had a letter for me just with the information that he would go to Mariánské Lázně near Karlovy Vary and he would like to meet me. He was asking me if I could come to a train station. All in all, this letter was quite innocent. Now I am guessing because I never saw it. Then I was being followed for about a month. My friend was locked up in March and I was locked up one month later.

What was your arrest like?

I was arrested on April 25, 1952. For sure they had been keeping their eyes on me. I was transferred from Slavkov to Rovnost (Equality). They put me there probably so they could watch me because there were two co-workers that they had. On April 25, 1952 at the end of the afternoon shift I came out of the shaft. We came to the gate and there they couldn't find my ID so

⁶ **Ludvík Svoboda** (1895–1979) was an army general, in 1945 he was a Minister of Defense as an independent and in 1968 he was elected as the Czechoslovakian President.

the gatekeeper told me, "Come in." So I went in and when I was in someone put their fingers into my back saying, "In the name of the Czechoslovakian Republic keep your arms at your side and you are arrested." Then they dragged me outside and in front of the gate there was a Tatra police car with policemen standing next to it. The whole convoy of cars started moving and they took me down to Jáchymov to a place called Lužice, which was a spa house. There they put me into a cell, which already had four people. There was something like a bed made from wooden boards and on that was straw and a blanket. There we vegetated. There were two East Germans from Johajurgenstadt and two Czech boys, I was the fifth. There I stayed for twenty-one days. They took my pictures from both the front and side and they started investigating and interrogating. They knew about my friend, I couldn't deny that. I said, "He was here once on the day of miners. He came to see me from Ostrava and over there he worked in a mine of Ludvík Svoboda. He showed me his ID and ever since I haven't seen him." Imagine he said the same thing! We didn't see each other to make this deal. Then they took me to Klatovy to the investigation department that they called Jestřáb (falcoln). This was Jáchymov's counter espionage unit. Here they were taking all people who either tried to escape or were planning an escape and all these people were transported here and investigated.

When I was locked up I was 92 kilograms (200 pounds) and I knew that because the week before I was at a check-up. Three months later I was 61 kilograms (135 pounds), what a diet!

What were the conditions like in Klatovy?

In the morning and at noon we would get a small piece of bread, maybe 12 decagrams and a little bit of black coffee, which we called mud. For lunch we got soup in a small enamel cup. Mine was numbered 49 sometimes 47. You know, in prison you try not to go crazy and you need to work and you need your mind to work somehow so for example I would count the knots in the wooden boards and I tried to remember how many did the third or fifth board have. I always counted 19 ½ to 20 spoons of soup. That was lunch and sometimes for supper we would have the mud again. Only on Fridays would we get three small tiny potatoes in a peel and coffee.

What was the hygiene like in Klatovy?

Hygiene... there wasn't a comb and there wasn't a toothbrush. There was a rag for washing the floor, 30x30cm (14x14 inches). Using this we washed ourselves and then we washed the floor. In Klatovy they gave us a bucket with water, which was also used for the floor afterwards. Plus they would give us the cloth for the floor, so first we would wash ourselves, then pour the water out and wipe off the floor. That was what the hygiene consisted of over there.

Did you stay in Klatovy the whole time?

Later they took me to Nitra for the confrontation to meet my compliant. They handcuffed me and took me there and put me into a dark cell and then they took me to the officer. That was a sharp man. I refused to eat because I was in "the dark." I was telling myself, "I am in the dark and I don't know why?" So the officer called me out and he asked me why didn't I want to eat? I just replied, "Because I am here, I am in the dark, and nothing is happening to me." He sent me back, but not into the dark anymore. They put me into the cell next to the old one. There were two prisoners, Doctor Homola and an accountant from the cooperative. After five weeks they transported me to my confrontation with my compliant who was in Nitra. One guard who was trying to be diligent took him to my cell. We were together for the whole night so we were able to explain things to each other.

Did you find out everything that your friend did and who was he working for?

He worked with the French. They were hiring people among the immigrants and he was supposed to go to the legion or work in a company. His father was also in America, but it was a stepfather and he never invited him. My friend was hoping he would, but he never did. So he stayed in Germany and he worked for the French. He was coming to Czechoslovakia and he always went back. In Slovakia they finally caught him. He had a trial with another group of people in Slovakia because he formed two or three different groups, all together numbering fifty people. I was sentenced alone and from Nitra they took me to Bratislava. At that time there was some really hot weather and they put me in a Škoda car and I had to lie down. They put some fur coats over me that guards wore in winter. After they took me out of the car I was so sweaty that you can't imagine it. They took me up a stairs on a spiral staircase and up there I was put into a cell. I was completely exhausted and my head was buzzing and I lied down. A guard opened the door for food and asked, "What's wrong with you? Aren't you feeling well?" I didn't answer. He opened the door completely, came to me and asked, "Would you like to take a shower?" I said, "No, not really." "Are you sure?" "Yes." "Come and have a shower." He blinded me and we went up the steps, once down, then they spun me around.

I didn't want to believe this because I didn't have a good experience from Klatovy. There it happened that a guard came to me and asked if I wanted to take a bath. After he walked me there I didn't want to believe it. It was a beautiful clean warm bathtub. It was joy. I took my clothes off and it started moving me. Electricity! I fell out of the bath and the guard was just laughing. He was looking at me through the observation hole in the door laughing, "So what? Did you have a bath already?" I didn't even wipe myself off, I got dressed, he blinded me, and sent me blind across the corridor yelling, "Hey, I'm sending him to you." I bumped into something and it made a terrible commotion. I stepped on something and I fell over. There were washbasins and buckets stored there. I bumped into it, threw it down on the concrete and in a second someone was next to me and dragged me away. I never wanted to have a bath again.

Anyways in Bratislava I was telling myself that this guard looked nice so I went to have a shower, "Set the water as you like it." I set the water, he gave me soap and a brush saying, "Take it easy and shower. Wash yourself properly." So I washed and I wiped myself. I came back into the cell and he said, "Lay down I'm guarding until taps so you can sleep." He asked me if I was hungry and I said yes. He brought me coffee, but it was sweet coffee for soldiers and a piece of bread. I ate it all and I fell asleep in a second. Do you know how I felt?! In the morning I woke up. He was there again and told me, "You are leaving today, I'm transporting you to Bohemia," and I went back to Klatovy.

You came back to Klatovy again where you had such bad memories. Did something change over there?

The food changed beyond recognition. There was lunch. The food was served through a small little door and they would push your cup with soup towards you using their leg. We got one cup, a second cup, and the guy was taking it away. All of a sudden I saw something like a can and I just asked, "What is it?" We ate the soup and all of a sudden there was another meal, some potatoes, some sauce, and a piece of meat. So I said, "Excuse me, but am I in Klatovy?" My prison mate answered, "Yes, that's the place." I responded, "This food?" "Well friend, we've had this food for about two weeks." So I asked, "Why?" There was a new prisoner who

was a member of the International Red Cross who was invited into the country as an expert on snake farms. He was made a prisoner because an officer from the secret police who was a spy in Switzerland was caught. It was understandable that they wanted an exchange so this specialist from the Red Cross was arrested so this exchange could happen. He refused to speak and he was refusing to eat as well. In two days a consul came from Switzerland and was threatening with the possible inspection from the International Red Cross. They didn't do the inspection, but the food got better. We got a meal for lunch and supper and that improved things a little bit.

I also have another story to tell you. In the cell there was a prison mate named Pepík Fořt. Once he was called out and a little while after that I heard a terrible cry and yelling underneath the windows. In a moment they brought Fořt back and put him back into his cell without his towel. The guy was white as a wall. I asked him, "What's wrong?" He was shaking, telling me, "Man this is horrible, do you know what happened? They took me and another prisoner and they let the dogs out to chase us, but the dogs went after the guards." Meanwhile we heard from our cell, "See good for you then, you weren't supposed to do this. Why did you irritate the dogs in the clothes for "Mukls"? You thought they would go after the uniform, but they go after the smell." This guard was training the dogs to chase "Mukls" and he would come, dressed in a "Mukl's" uniform and he was brutal to the dogs in the cage. When they saw him coming they would growl. He thought they did this because of the uniform, but the dogs learned the sounds and smells. So in the moment they took the two prisoners out and he was standing by them, the dogs pulled him down to the ground and Pepík Fořt quickly took the towels down from his eyes. One dog was holding the guard's leg and the other the shoulder and they couldn't get them off. So Pepík returned to his cell. Things like that happened there.

Could you describe in detail how the investigations went?

It went like this, they would take me there and in the beginning it was quite common, sweet things, and reasoning that you have a family, a son, and that you will sit for a long time. My son was born in December 1950. Once there came a lady who brought in some papers. She hit me so hard that I fell down from my chair. It was a punch as from a canon shot. My teeth were broken so I spit them out. They let me be like that. I refused to give testimony the way they wanted so I wasn't allowed to sit. I had to keep walking in my cell and if I stopped in a second they were banging on the door. At night they kept waking me up even though I wasn't at any hearings or interrogations. Sometimes they would investigate, I would sit, and five or six people would exchange seats at the table. It was a circle. One would give you these questions and another would give you different ones to make one completely confused. Then I was practically sleeping, but I was still speaking and suddenly finding out that I didn't know what I was saying. These things were quite unpleasant. I had to keep marching. I had sandals from which my legs were swollen. It was like standing on needles. My soles were swollen and I complained about it. They kept making up things about me all the time. At night they would kick my door, I would have to jump up, and report my presence every quarter of an hour. The light would be constantly on and we had to lay straight on our back with arms at the top of the cover. In

⁷ "Mukl" – someone who was in prison, the word "mukl" itself comes from the abbreviation of – "a man on death row" (in Czech: muž určený k likvidaci). It was a label given to political prisoners imprisoned by communist or Nazi regimes that were not supposed to be released and were supposed to die in prisons or concentration camps. Later on, this label was used for all political prisoners.

a moment when I turned around there would be knocking at the door again. You had to jump up and report your presence once again. The arms had to be out because it was happening that someone would want to cut their wrists. We had to lie on our backs, the bulb was lit above our heads, but people still fell asleep because of the tiredness.

Once I was invited by an investigator and I had to stand up by the wall. At that time there was paper money and I had to keep my arms behind my back holding the paper bill by my nose on the wall. The paper money fell down, I got such a slap from the back that my nose broke against the wall. They were making fun of it. Sometimes they would let you sit in the corner and they would threaten you with a saber, but the worst were the psychological forces. When he started telling me that they will arrest my wife or even that she is arrested and that the kid is somewhere away. He told me, "What do you think you can do to us? Out of you we will make corpses, your wives will become whores, and your children will become orphans, and we will bring them up that they will never even come and look at your grave."

What confession did they want to hear? What exactly was their goal?

They wanted to hear what I told my friend. I said, "From me he didn't want to hear anything." When I told him, he wouldn't get anything out of me and they said that they had information from other places. I was in Klatovy for 2 weeks maybe 3 weeks and then they put me in a car again and took me to Pankrác⁸. In the morning they woke me up, I had to take my clothes off, cross the cell to another side, take one step to the back, and lean against the wall. It got dusty down there and dusty in my armpits. They were spraying us with DDT. It was like an enema. It stunk and it was burning. I came back to the cell and there was a guy waiting for me. When I came he said, "Hey, I will be washing you down." So I had to wash in the toilet. In Pánkrac we washed our dishes in the toilet and drank water from the toilet because there was nothing else. There I stayed for about five weeks, I don't know how long. Then they took us in an "Anton"⁹ to Cheb. They took eight or nine of us.

So did you confess to anything?

No, there was nothing I could confess to. There was a trial and of course my defendant was doing a great job. He spoke to the court and the court said that it knew he (the lawyer) has got me as a court appointed lawyer. It was also said that the court will not look at the defense with sympathy because it's their duty not to and that the court will be strict, but righteous according to my age. That was it. The prosecuting attorney made a real bad man out of me such as a drunkard and an irresponsible person. I was also psychologically influenced when I was a kid because I was brought up in a monastery.

When were you sentenced?

I had a trial in October 1952. I got eighteen years of so-called heavy prison and for ten years they took away my civil liberties and all my property was confiscated. The National Senate in Cheb came to the opinion that out of my position I could give out the most important information for the country's defense and that is why they sentenced me to eighteen years of heavy prison. They also suggested the death penalty so I could be happy I got eighteen years. I didn't believe though that the regime would stay in this country for another forty years. I gave it five, a maximum of six years.

⁸ Pankrác – a prison in Prague.

⁹ "Anton" – a closed police van for transport of prisoners.

What were you exactly charged for?

When they were giving out the sentence I don't know how many pages the charge was. In the end there was a suggestion for the absolute punishment. Three days before the court the head of the senate read it to me. The next day another man came telling me he was now my court appointed defendant. He introduced himself as Dominik Skutecký or something like that. He told me that I should confess everything or I'll get the death penalty.

Where did they take you after the trial?

I was transported to the central camp that was in Jáchymov called Bratrství (Brotherhood). There they shaved our heads, changed our clothes, and got a couple of new things. There were two blankets, a cup, a spoon, and clothes called "Halina." We were sorted into groups, I was sent to a place called Vršek and then they took me to Nikolaj. In two years I was taken from Nikolaj and sent back to Rovnost (Equality). Totally I sat for eight years. I was released on a pardon in 1960.

What were the relations like in camp? Did you have any friends there?

There were friends, when I came there were two other guys who came to see me from Slavkov. I knew they worked at mine 11 and I helped them a couple of times because I used to work at Slavkov as a mine inspector. They brought me sugar and tobacco and they could have gone to prison for this.

What was it like when you used to work there as a civilian employee and all of a sudden you were in the same position as a "mukl"?

I couldn't do anything about it. I had to be there and I practically knew why. It was helplessness. I could see how the civil workers who knew me, started running towards me. I just told them, "Hey, keep back, continue in your work and don't pay any attention to me" because I was worried that they would keep watching me and there could be others, ruined and unhappy, because of me. My wife lived in Jáchymov, but I never sent anyone to see her because I couldn't put her in danger and the person as well. Although she was under surveillance as well, I'm sure of that. A couple of times she came when we were riding in the Russian Bus. Do you know what that is?

No, could you be more specific?

Well for example 250 people had to stand up, always according to the number that was supposed to go on the shift. They counted us on the square and then we had to come together so that we would be touching each other's hips and bodies. Then they went around us with a steel rope, which was about 5 millimeters thick and then they locked this with a padlock and in this way the whole package of people marched. I don't know if you can call it marching though, we were actually jiggling, walking to the shaft because shaft Eduard was 800-900 meters away from camp Nikolaj. We had to walk on the main road where there was no corridor or main fence. It took us sometimes even an hour before we jiggled there like this.

What were the conditions like in Camp Nikolaj?

Camp Nikolaj was known as one of the worst camps. There was a main Commander Šambergr. There was also a commando, which was making prisoners who were sentenced by the National Court to sign the Socialist Commitment¹⁰. The prisoners were not called "political prisoners,"

¹⁰ Within **socialist commitments** people promised for example to work extra hours or also on Sundays and national holidays. They then got various privileges, e.g. to write more letters home, to get more parcels. It was also promised they would be released earlier.

but they were called “state prisoners.” One would commit him self to work over 100 %. If you didn’t sign it the commando would beat you up.

Did you know who was in that commando?

Well the boss of the commando was called Jeníček¹¹ and the whole group was 12 people if I remember it well. There was also Baxa, Jirka Kužela and Grygar. The last thing they did was beat Honza Mátl and Šošenko. I don’t remember who ran up to the building and told us, but we simply said we would not respect that. So we ran to the gatehouse and from there they started jumping out from the windows because they were worried. They were always calling people to the gatehouse to be beaten up. This time the commando got a great whipping. Then they took all of them to the infirmary and Jeníček was transported to camp “L.”¹²

When I say prison university, can you tell me anything about it?

Well yes, there were two things. At first the guards were giving us trainings. There was a guy we called, “Filth.” He was a cultural educator¹³, he would wake us up at 11 p.m. and we had to get to the culture house. All shifts had to get there and then he would give us training for an hour. He would always say, “Filth, is it right?” and those who were sitting in the first row would have to nod their heads. “Is that right, Filth?” That’s why we called we him “Filth.” Then he had a lecture called “Stalin Sent a Word.” That meant he kept telling us all hour what was Stalin’s message. Also there was another guy, another cultural educator called “The One Who Told Seven Lies,” and this one was always saying, “What I’m telling you here are facts that really happened.” At this moment no one could laugh. Or he would be explaining to us the difference between socialism and capitalism. He told us to look how long it took the Soviet Union to dig a channel from the Volga to the Don. That was a result of a socialist camp. He told us to look at how long it took the capitalists to dig the British Channel. You couldn’t laugh about that.

Then someone suggested that we could get together in the buildings. When you asked the guards carefully the guards would say yes. There was always someone who would be giving a lecture on something for example there was Baťovci¹⁴ who told us about Baťa, his system, and so on. Then there were professors who would gather people into a group and tell people about philosophy or chemistry. It depended on what you wanted to hear. So this was called the University of Jáchymov. Actually it was a good school for us you know. First thing was one met a lot of good people over there and then whoever wanted could learn wonderful things.

Do you have any health problems from prison?

I can not see I would have health consequences, but for example my fingers are cracking. I have tiny little cracks. I have that from sorting the uranium. I worked all four years at a place where uranium was sorted by hand. We didn’t get any gloves. For a long time I had azoneurosis (he did not get enough blood into his fingertips). Until today, when the weather turns colder my fingers turn white. That was from working with a machine, but all in all I don’t have any other problems.

¹¹ **Břetislav Jeníček** was a leader among prisoners (the highest position in the prisoner’s autonomy). He was sentenced to life for cooperation with the Gestapo. In camp Nikolaj he made political prisoners’ lives tough, since he organized various beating commandos.

¹² **Camp called “L,”** sometimes called also a camp for liquidation. There was “a tower of death” where the prisoners were coming into direct contact with radioactive uranium.

¹³ **Cultural educator** – person who organized various political and ideological lectures.

¹⁴ **Baťovci** was name for a group of people who attended Baťa’s school. This school was established in Zlín by Tomáš Baťa who was one of the best businessmen during the First Czechoslovakian Republic (1918–1938). He is an important icon in the history of management and business.

If we looked at your story with the eyes of your wife, how did she struggle during this separation? You were a father of a family correct?

I think that our wives, parents, and families were psychologically affected much more because those of us in the prison were together. We all had similar attitudes. We were all of the same blood group, we say, but those who stayed at home had it hard. People were turning their back on them, being malicious, and doing bad things on purpose. For example, they would come up to my wife at midnight with dogs, wake her up, made a mess in the whole apartment, tell her that I escaped, and they also told her that if I showed up she would have to report it or she would go to prison and that our kid would be sent away to foster homes. Then in two weeks they would tell her they caught me! They told the same stuff to my mom and in two weeks they told her again that I was shot and wounded while trying to escape. At that moment my mom had just gotten a permit for a visit so she would come and coincidentally I would really be wounded a little bit. Some stones fell on me and it tore my eyebrow. I was a little pale and my mom said, "Boy, why are you doing this? Don't you know you have a family?" I didn't know what she was talking about. "Well, they will kill you." Then the guard jumped up and I replied, "Kill me?" Mom asked me where was I shot and I tore apart my shirt asking, "Where was I shot?" The guard ended the visit telling us we can only talk about family matters. I told him it was a family matter if they tell my mom her son is shot, wounded, and constantly tries to escape! So they were chasing them as much as they could. They were pushing the women to divorce. They were switching her from one job to another, telling her if she divorces then she will get another job.

During the time you were in prison you were working on small gifts that you sent to your wife is that right?

I sent those not only to my wife, but we made those for all our friends. You know we did that because we wanted to give something to our visitors. If you had a contact through a civilian worker there you could also send some things. For example, at Christmas time we were making little cards, little figures, crosses, and such little gifts.

What was your return to civilian life like?

One felt really insecure. It took a long time before we felt civilized again. I did a good thing because I took a month off. I was supposed to report myself to the labor office, but I went to Slovakia. I told myself I haven't had a vacation for eight years so why couldn't I have a rest? I let the doctors check me up properly and they sent me back. They told me to get back into shape or it would be bad for me.

Why were they telling you this?

Well, because of the radioactivity. I had about 14,000 white blood cells. Míla Adámek, who was a doctor prisoner who was studying the results of radioactivity on people's health was the biggest icon in this medical field. He was giving me 2-3 years to live if I leave the mines. Then we met in 1989 and I told him, "Miloš, hey you don't know how to count. He said, what do you mean? And I said that you gave me 2-3 years to live. He just replied, "Be happy that I can not count well..."

Where did you go when you came back from prison? What kind of job were you searching for?

I could go to the work in the quarry because in Levice there was an old quarry and there was a factory called Onyx. There they were making various things out of it: paper weights, tables, various chess figurines, and other things made from stone. They wanted me to be a teacher

at a trade school to teacher penmanship. Doctor's recommended that I get back to the radio-activity for a while and slowly work my way out of it so I listened to them. They didn't let me go down into the shafts anymore because I was seriously ill, but I was bravely going down until May.

What do you think about Charter 77, dissidents, and the year 1989¹⁵?

Well my opinion is that they didn't really want Communism to disappear. They wanted Communists to meet the promises they made in Helsinki. Why didn't they make dissidents out of us? Why did they execute and make criminals out of us. They executed 240 people, they beat to death many of them, many of them died in mines, many on the borders, no one knows exactly today. There are many people who are reported missing, but somewhere there bones lie, and these people were dissidents. To Rovnost (Equality) they once brought Goldstücker¹⁶, Hromádka and Láďa – the guy who was a member of the Central Committee. Goldstücker was punched at Rovnost camp really hard and they beat him like a horse. Do you know why? Because he was giving a statement in the UN that we don't have barbed wires here.

How do you as a political prisoner look at modern history? What would be the easiest way to give this to the young generation and inform them?

Tell them the truth. It's necessary to speak about things. Freedom doesn't mean I can do everything I want. Freedom means responsibility so the things wouldn't fall apart. It means toleration. I think this, I don't care who is communist today, that is his own business as long as you don't do any harm to others. Or if someone believes and has faith it's his own business or he can be in a political party that he likes. I imagine that in this government we have the positions for the reason so no harm is done to the nation. The opposition and coalition must agree on things that would benefit the whole country. When the Germans were able to de-Nazify their offices why weren't we able to do it here?

What comes to mind when I say Jáchymov?

Jáchymov. One would rather forget about bad things. Or you do not forget about it, but you stop thinking about it. It is like if someone does something bad to you, you forgive, but you do not forget. That's it, to Jáchymov, I think. When you say Jáchymov the labor camps don't come into my head. When people speak about them, I can think about everything, but now like this they don't come into my head.

After you were released did you ever meet any of your guards, court prosecutors, or someone who influenced your life's destiny for such a while?

Yes, I met them. For example I applied for rehabilitation in 1969. The lady prosecutor took it and said, "Well yeah, that's clear." She gave me my charge asking me whether I read it and I said I didn't. So she asked why did you sign it? I just said I had to. If I wouldn't it would have been bad for me. So everything looked all right. At the time I got the invitation to one of the last court hearings. I went to Plzeň, to the regional court and there was sitting the same judge

¹⁵ The phenomenons of modern Czechoslovakian history that are directly connected with the fall of the Communist regime in November 1989.

¹⁶ **Eduard Goldstücker** (1913–2000) was a Slovakian Germanophile and interpreter. After the German occupation in 1939 he had to emigrate from the country because his origins were Jewish. He worked for the Czechoslovak government in exile in London. In 1948 he was a Czechoslovakian ambassador to Israel, but in 1953 he fell victim to the political purge and he was in prison for three and half years. In 1955 he was rehabilitated and started his career as a teacher at Charles University in Prague. He studied and translated German-Jewish authors of the 20th century. In 1960's he became a member of the National Assembly. In 1968 he sharply criticized the invasion of the Soviet army and had to emigrate. He left to the U.K. where he taught German literature. In 1990 he returned to his native country.

who sentenced me. Now he was a chairman of the Senate that was supposed to rehabilitate me. So I told myself, "That's it." He called me to the coffee table and asked me, "Do you know what happened in Chile?" I said, "Sure, there was a plot. Pinotchet started a revolution." Then he said, "You see, then you can not be rehabilitated then." So because Pinotchet started a rebellion in Chile, they could not rehabilitate me. So I asked, "What does Chile have to do with that?" He answered, "Well we are in the same camp." So I wasn't rehabilitated.

I was rehabilitated after 1989. I wrote another application and in a week I had a statement that I was rehabilitated.

What do you think about the moral rehabilitation? Do political prisoners get enough attention?

You know I don't support any glorification of people. I only think the biggest satisfaction would be if the Bolsheviks would say they were sorry. When the political prisoners already accused someone it should be ran to the end. The person doesn't have to go to prison, these people are also so old. The nation should know what really happened. I'm not going for someone's throat, but there were cases when people were executed in monster processes. Even the surviving relatives of the executed never received any compensation. Money can not make up for their loss. No one cares about these people today, although they live in deep poverty. Communists just laugh and they are putting their hands up in government whether someone should be compensated or they should be given back their property in which they stole from them in the first place. What kind of law is that? This is the time we live in and this is the law and we who are old can't do anything about it. It's a pity we are not twenty years younger.

Thank you very much for the interview.

Jan Pospíšil is the oldest of our narrators. Born in 1916 he witnessed most of the 20th century. Working for a non-communist Minister brought him to prisons and the Jáchymov uranium grinder. He was sentenced to 20 years of political captivity.



“Work as well as possible and do not believe in people who speak too much.”

Interview with Mr. Jan Pospíšil

Where were you born and what was your childhood like?

I was born on August 13, 1916 as the second son of the math and physics professor who taught at the first vocational secondary school in Brno. I wasn't born in Brno, but in Černovice near Tábor, which was a small town in Central Bohemia. During WWI when I was three months old I caught dysentery. It even went so far that our family doctor said, "Mrs. Pospíšilová, this wasn't meant to live, put it on the side." He said that about me. Today he would probably be amazed because the thing that didn't look like it would live is almost 92 years old.

The majority of my life I spent in Brno. I attended the fourth real school where I also graduated. If I remember correctly I wasn't one of the most obedient kids in school. I was the head of the class who always got into trouble somehow. I graduated in 1934 and 1935. I graduated in both years because I wanted to go study law and I had to practice Latin more. That meant I had to wait and after a year I had to take the special graduation exam in Latin. I also wanted to improve my German so I signed up for the German Technical School in Brno. There I got my first lessons in politics because that place was a stronghold of Nazism. What I remember was that there were three of us pureblooded Czechs. After passing Latin, I started at the Law faculty where I was studying law and doing sports. I did rowing, athletics, hockey, and dancing (he laughs) I lived a happy life.

Did you study law in Prague or Brno?

I studied law in Brno because the faculty in Brno had a much better reputation than the one in Prague. There was a Professor Vážný, who was the European authority in Roman Law. Then there was Professor Vejr, who was an expert on constitutional law. Also Professor Baxa taught there. We had a really good array of professors, but there were also disadvantages to that, for example when we went to our first state exams, out of eighteen students who entered the exams there were three of us who passed. I studied quite hard and the majority of exams I passed with honors. I finished the Law Faculty just in that unlucky year when they closed down all the universities¹ in the Czech Republic. I was also hit by that because just before I entered the graduation ceremony, and despite the fact that I had passed all my exams, the universities were still shut down. So I was a lawyer without a graduation ceremony, that didn't matter though. At first I got a job in the Pension Institute in Brno where I stayed for about three months. The Pension Institute was divided into Czech and German offices and the Czech one was getting smaller. There it was natural the last man who came was let go. So I started to visit various shops and workshops of radio businessmen. I helped them to repair and fix radios, which other

¹ On the occasion of student Jan Opletal's funeral who died after the hard demonstration repression made by Nazi occupation power, another demonstration was held on November 15, 1939 which was the last demonstration of aversion towards the German Nazi occupation on Czech and Moravian land. On November 17th, Hitler gave out the command that all demonstrations will be strictly punished with the army power. **The Czech universities and colleges were closed down**, the main representatives of university students were locked up and executed, 1200 Czech students were beaten and dragged to the concentration camps. In 1941 in London November 17th was pronounced as the international day of students.

technicians didn't know how to do. It was a good job, although it was dangerous. Meanwhile, my brother who was a docent of math at the University in Brno, was locked up by the Gestapo. He was locked up, sentenced, and died a little while after being released from prison.

Why was your brother sentenced?

He was sentenced for Hochverrat, which means high treason because he was a member of a resistance group. My uncle, Doctor Vilém Pospíšil, who was the ex-governor of the national bank came to Brno for a visit. He looked into what I was doing and he gave me recommendations for a job at the newly established labor office where I was supposed to specialize in different things, but things I should normally do. Two months after that my uncle was visited by the Gestapo in Brno and after that visit he was found dead in his apartment.

What year was that in?

That was in 1941. I was at the office working in the welfare department at the so called Familienhilfe and the Sondenhilfe. At these departments I stayed almost to the end and in the last three months the Gestapo was interested in me, but it wasn't that hot because they had other work to do as well. There were trenches all over Brno since it was in danger of a direct attack from the Russian Army. The government in exile came back from London² and they were going through Brno and also Dr. Stránský came back. He was teaching us criminal law at the Law Faculty. Since he knew me and he knew I was interested in politics, he asked me to join his cabinet. At first he was a Minister of Justice and then he went to the top level of government as a Deputy Chairman. At that time I was interested in a real job so I accepted his offer and started January 2, 1946 at the top level of government and got into his cabinet. In his cabinet I was working on national economic policy and for Minister Stránský I was preparing a package of potential laws that were being considered at that time. There I worked until the elections in 1946. After elections Minister Stránský switched to the Department of Education and I went there as his secretary. I stayed at the Department of Education until that infamous February. You can see well that I'm not any giant and I don't look like I would like to fight, but I was dragged outside by seven guys holding submachine guns.

When did that happen?

That was February 24, 1948. I probably had to get a really bad record in the evidence list for the Communist party, because from that time on I was unemployed. I have a package of applications where I was asking to be employed by various ministries and also the private sector, but I always got an answer saying, "The working class does not consider you as a reliable person." In better cases they answered the position has already been filled and since I had a lot of time I was doing various things. I was mainly interested in border crossing and the checkpoints because Minister Stránský was getting ready to escape. So I started organizing his escape and I was really successful at this. With Minister Stránský we said our goodbyes at the summerhouse, Hvězda, in July 1948. There he got into a van as a worker and he crossed the border near Karlovy Vary the same day. His family went to the West before he did.

Could you remember anything in detail about the organization concerning the escape? How did you prepare it?

A custom officer named Snopek helped us during that. Also, a businessman from Prague, who was selling carpets was in the process. His name was Losenický and he was able to go

² Government in exile – established in July 9th by the Czechoslovakian National Commission.

abroad to buy carpets. He was getting rides from Mr. Honc who had a freight company. Mr. Losenický escaped on time before Christmas before 1948 around Vimperk. Honc was locked up because his own son reported him. I was locked up much earlier. The escape itself was talked over in 1954 although I was locked up January 12, 1949. Honc was locked up in 1954. I was sentenced on February 20, 1950 and in 1954 I was taken from my job site in Jáchymov and taken to another round of trials, in a different prison. I even helped to build this since I was in a group that worked on this.

Did you lead people across the borders regularly?

When I was without employment I was doing this from time to time and I helped a couple of people. I was interested in the areas especially around Vimperk and Karlovy Vary.

Why did you choose these two places?

I chose Vimperk because I knew Šumava and Karlovy Vary because I had a connection there through (XXX)³, but I will not be speaking about these things because I know Drtina made a big mistake when he spoke about the way he got out of the Protectorate because the only possible way of escape was closed. I will not be running away, but I could close some else's way if I talked about it now.

I understand.

At Vimperk it was good, there was a good organization of things, but then the trap closed sometime around May 1949. I found out that probably the guy named Honc, who helped us at Karlovy Vary was cooperating with the secret police, but he didn't speak about everything, about all the cases. I helped Doctor Rohlíček, the ex-secretary to the Minister and I was getting ready to organize another escape across the borders for Mrs. Zemínová⁴ and Mrs. Klemrová, but that didn't happen because I was locked up. Before that I was trying to have some kind of employment, so I pretended to be employed by a builder named Jiříkovský in Prague. Unfortunately, this guy was locked up based on the testimony provided by agent Anderle and then because Jiříkovský provided testimony, I was locked up. Finally, Jiříkovský wasn't standing against me at the court because he died in prison, but I got twenty years.

What happened after you were arrested?

When they locked me up the head of the State secret police⁵ Jindřich Veselý⁶ was interested in my case. They didn't do the hearing with me in Prague, but they took me to Olomouc. I had a lot of friends in Prague and they were worried about that. So then I was interrogated in Olomouc where Jindřich Veselý and another famous secret police person, Kamil Pixa⁷ was there. There they roughed me up. I will tell you that was something. I was in the cellar of a police department from where Pixa dragged me out of the room, took me upstairs to the first floor, blinded me, and took me out on the scaffolding around the building because they were re-

³ The narrator chose on purpose to keep the name anonymous.

⁴ **Františka Zemínová** (1882–1962) was a Czech politician, a long-time member of the National Socialist Party and one of the victims of the fabricated process along with Milada Horáková. She was sentenced for 20 years in prison.

⁵ **State secret police** known under the abbreviation **StB**, was a political police force in Czechoslovakia during the communist era.

⁶ **Jindřich Veselý** (1906–1964), from 1933 he worked as the central secretary of the Czech Communist party, from 1939 to 1945 he was in a concentration camp in Buchenwald. From October 1945 he was a member of the Inspectorate of national secret security police, From 1948–1950 he was a main commander of State secret police. March 5th, 1950 he tried to commit suicide for the first time. After he was recalled from the director of Institution of socialist history on March 19th (20th) 1964 his second attempt was successful and he died.

⁷ **Kamil Pixa** was one of the founders of the communist State secret police, in 1951 he became a representative of the 1st sector of The Head Government of State police.

modeling the building. They walked with me there and they took me back downstairs. Then they put me in a car and drove me through a couple streets, my eyes being covered all the time. Then we came back to the police department. Although your eyes are blinded sometimes while in custody, you can get an idea of what is happening, so I knew we were back. They started the interrogation with me. Jindřich Veselý said, "Doctor, have you ever been kicked by a horse?" Then he punched me so hard that I had to go up about three meters high in the air. After that, I don't know how, but they burned my palms. My whole palms were burned except the place in the middle and all the burns turned to blisters. I also had a cut on my cheek, which already disappeared. After sometime a bump appeared right behind my ear, which was full of blood and pus. From that time I couldn't hear from that ear.

How did the interrogations go?

On February 17, 1949 I was picked up by Veselý and Pixa again in a big truck. They covered my eyes with my red scarf and rode with me somewhere. I have the scarf still today. Pixa said, "You will have a red cold running out any ways, so that scarf will match." We stopped somewhere by a roadside, there we stopped to urinate, and when I went Pixa fired off a whole round of bullets right next to my ear. From that time on, when I wanted to urinate I had a hard time getting started. After sometime it got better. Then we stopped somewhere and they took me out of the car. I took my clothes off, eyes still closed and they put me in between two big bars. There I was left standing for a little while. Then I was taken to a cell where there was nothing, but a table and a chair. They let me sit down naked on a chair and we started the interrogation. Where all this was happening I didn't know until two years ago. Then I found out, those were cells at Ruzyně. There was twenty-four cells together, twelve upstairs and twelve downstairs. There you weren't allowed to say your name and you couldn't see anyone, not even the policeman or your guard. He only said, open your window and pushed your food inside with his foot. Then I was taken to Bartomějská and from there to Pankrác⁸. I didn't have any records about the stay at Ruzyně in my papers. It wasn't nice there. I was right opposite the room where they held the interrogations and I heard all that. That wasn't nice at all.

Do you remember who you heard from that room?

I remember an agent and a woman. I didn't know the names though.

So you were arrested at the beginning of 1949.

Yes, I was arrested at midnight on January 12, 1949. They came for me in my apartment and checked it out. They sealed off my library. My daughter who was seventeen months old tore down all the seals the next day. I didn't know that though, my wife told me that later. From there I was taken to Bartolomějská and then to Olomouc.

What exactly did they want to hear from you?

Jiříkovský gave testimony that I was probably helping people across the borders, but he also talked about a radio station since I had a close connection with the radios, because I was an amateur radio operator they were also interested in that as well.

What was your political affiliation?

I was a National Socialist, but I wasn't really active politically. I was very busy as a general secretary.

⁸ Bartolomějská, Ruzyně and Pankrác are prisons in Prague.

Did you confess to anything in Olomouc?

No, they didn't even document it there. It was just a beating session.

Do you remember any names of people who beat you there?

Yes, I remember a name from Olomouc. He was a member of the state police, named Housírek, he was one of the men in charge there.

I know that it's not easy to remember this, but could you describe in detail what they did to you during the interrogation?

During the interrogation they were spinning me around. That means that they punched me anywhere so that I would move away, but closer to another person. Then they were also beating me with truncheons. Notice one thing, the majority of "mukls"⁹ are deaf in the left ear. Why, because they were always hit by the truncheon on the left ear because most of the policemen were right-handed. Notice that.

Who was the person who was making a case against you?

In Ruzyně it was Pixa. Then my trial was held July 1949, when they locked up Horáková¹⁰ they were dragging me out of my cell at midnight. She was supposed to say that we had ridden the trams together once and she was giving me warnings that people kept talking about me because I was the one who kept helping people across the border.

What is true? Did you know Mrs. Horáková?

Of course I did, she was a member of congress, but that meant nothing. I would still be in prison, even if she did know something on me. She probably knew something on me from Zemínová. This lady had her leg broken and she was learning to walk again afterwards. There was man named Kočí with whom I was preparing her escape.

I don't know whether that was his real name.

Where was the file or case that they had built up against you?

In Ruzyně.

When did the trial start?

The trial was on February 22 and 24 in Prague. The head judge was Dr. Rudý¹¹ and as a counsel for the prosecution, Dr. Brožová¹². Dr. Rudý was trying really hard to get me in prison. We started a quarrel a couple of times and with Mrs. Brožová as well. I had my defense lawyer and he was a really nice man. He informed me that Jiříkovský was dead. So I could speak about everything. So we all were arguing and according to the fact that I was resisting them the court was postponed until the 24th. So I was sentenced two days later, but that didn't really matter.

Were you alone in court?

Yes, alone, it was an individual court.

⁹ "Mukl" – someone who was in prison, the word "mukl" itself comes from the abbreviation of – "a man on death row" (in Czech: muž určený k likvidaci). It was a label given to political prisoners imprisoned by communist or Nazi regimes that were not supposed to be released and were supposed to die in prisons or concentration camps. Later on, this label started to be used for all political prisoners.

¹⁰ **JUDr. Milada Horáková** was a Czech politician, executed during the communist political processes in the fifties, for putative conspiracy and high treason.

¹¹ **JUDr. Vojtěch Rudý** participated on many sentences during the political court processes, including the process with Milada Horáková.

¹² **Ludmila Brožová-Polednová**, the ex-communist counsel for the prosecution is known especially from the process with executed politician Milada Horáková. In 2008 she was sentenced for an 8-year imprisonment. At the time of this book being written is not clear yet, whether she will start the sentence.

What were you sentenced for then?

At that time there didn't exist a written sentence, that means they wrote it down, but it stayed only in my records with no public notification. The verdict was in much later, after the hearing with Honc. I got paragraph 1, high treason and paragraph 5, espionage¹³. The other reason for being sentenced was because I was a high state official. I knew many people in government since I was a counselor in government. They tried to prove that I played tennis with Mayor Krtek, who was the head of espionage of Czech Republic and then later of the whole of Europe. They didn't like that I was also meeting diplomats from the West. I got twenty years. The original suggestion was a rope, but that didn't happen.

What ran through your mind when you heard the verdict?

I thought I was being put in cold storage for a while, but all in all I was quite calm.

What happened after the trial and what did they do with you next?

After this trial I was transferred to Bory¹⁴. There I was put in a cell called Waldes. From there, I don't know why, but I was transferred to the book workshop after half a year. That was wonderful. We had our own stove there so we could warm up the place and we had our own little room there as well. Three of us were state prisoners¹⁵ and the rest were vindictive prisoners¹⁶. The guards didn't order us around and we lived quite peacefully.

Do you remember any important prison-mates from Bory?

When I was in "B" I slept on one bed with a Mr. Podsedník, the ex-mayor of Brno. Then there was also Dr. Cahín and two pilots, Mikš, who was also called Julíšek, and Nový. Julíšek was shot and up until now he still has a bullet in his shoulder. The guy named Nový crashed his plane and broke his leg. So these two guys were pilots. Then there was Cirda Musil, who used to represent the country in cross country skiing and who I had met before when I went skiing in Vysočina. This guy was later killed in Canada. He escaped from Jihlava and he got abroad, from there he traveled to Canada, and there he was killed by his girlfriend's brother who was Yugoslavian.

Do you remember Gusta Bubník?

Yeah, I know him from Bory and from labor camp XII. He was on XII, but he was going down underneath and I was just a worker upstairs or above the mines.

Do you also remember Pravomil Reichl¹⁷?

I know Pravomil Reichl very well because I was with him in the same cell. I remember him once talking through the window with another soldier from the army and he was caught. Brabec¹⁸ beat him with a short whip and they sent him into solitary confinement. Pravomil Reichl was missing a piece of meat and he was shot. He was a good boy. He slept in the corner of "B" in number 8.

¹³ **The law 231/48 Sb.** according to which most of the political prisoners in Czechoslovakia were sentenced in a massive way.

¹⁴ **The prison Plzeň – Bory** is situated in the western part of Bohemia, during the communist era it was one of the strictest prisons, where mainly political prisoners were placed.

¹⁵ **State prisoners** = political prisoners.

¹⁶ **Vindictive prisoners** – prisoners sentenced on a basis of "vindictive decrees" for cooperation and collaboration with Nazi Germany. A state prisoner was also called a political prisoner, then there was a category of criminal prisoners.

¹⁷ **Pravomil Reichl** was the legendary officer of the Czechoslovakian army who went through the Gulag (a work camp in U.S.S.R.), fights at Dukla, and brain death. He went through the political processes and prisons in Czechoslovakia, he escaped from Leopoldov, emigrated, and lived to see the democratic Czech Republic.

¹⁸ The guard **Brabec** was especially known for his brutality towards prisoners.

Where were you sent after a half year at Bory?

From Bory I went to Jáchymov in "B" in the central camp. Then I was sent to camp Mariánská¹⁹ for about two months. In fact, that was a camp for youth, then I went to camp XII. I went back to Jáchymov in 1952 and I stayed there until the end. Well, not actually until the real end because in January of 1960 I was again taken to some hearing in Ruzyně. Then I was released from Ruzyně in 1962, but I was forbidden to be in Prague so for the whole day until 9 o'clock I was followed by a policeman. I was telling him, just go home, this doesn't make any sense at all. No, I have to stay with you. I was walking with him all around Prague. In Na Příkopě I bought a kilogram (2.2 pounds) of nugat chocolate for my daughter. I got home earlier than the boys from camp did. My wife had a schoolmate whose husband was in the same camp that I was and his name was Razík. He wrote in a letter that he would come home and my wife kept crying that I didn't write anything, but I came home earlier than he did.

What kind of work did you do at Mariánská?

At Mariánská I mainly worked as a bricklayer and digger, but mainly I was laying brick. Finally I was even a boss of a little group where eight of us were lawyers and I was giving commands because I was the only one who knew how to do these things. I am for example able to allocate and do similar things. I knew how to work with dolomite and I had a soft pencil so there were eight lawyers, one farmer from Košice, and another forester from Orava, both Slovaks. So this was our little group. They had plans and we were building.

What did you build?

We built houses in housing developments. At last it was a housing development in Příbram, the house of culture, then our group built the whole kindergarten, where there were special round columns made from concrete and we did all that. Our group did the whole building. They were taking us there from camp Vojna.²⁰ It happened once for example that we were about to leave by bus and there was a woman standing and waving on the road. The bus driver stopped and I found out it was my wife (laughing) and it took the commander for the escort from morning until 3 in the afternoon to figure out whose wife it was because there were five of us whose name was Pospíšil. So she was standing by the bus, waving to us. She was there with other wives like Mrazíková and Ploucková, they were running around these camps searching for us.

How did they end up there?

They got there some how. You know, you will not believe this, but when I was at Bory and there was stuff running out of my ear my wife made such a commotion that the doctor, Bolský, who was at Bory as the main doctor managed that I would be taken everyday to the medical center for treatment. She was not afraid and she insisted on things.

What was your contact with your family like? When did you see your daughter for the first time?

In the beginning it was every half of year if they really let us have visits. Then it was every quarter a year, but I'm not sure if we could really call it visits. There was a glass, but no contact was possible. At Bory I had a prison-mate, Mr. Spálenka, who was a member of the army guard

¹⁹ **Mariánská** – the working camp at the area of Jáchymov.

²⁰ **Vojna** – used to be prison from 1947 to 1949 for German war prisoners, then in 1949–1951 it turned in to a working camp and finally a camp for political prisoners of the communist regime from 1951 to 1961.

who was looking after President Beneš.²¹ This man's wife was English and with her there came a guy from the British Embassy for visits. He started such a commotion and we all lost our visitors because they canceled all of them. I saw myself how Brabec hit the lady.

For how long did you stay at camp Mariánská and what did you do there?

At Mariánská I had really short stays, twice for two months I think. The thing that happened was that the prison doctor at Bory put in my record that I was refusing his treatment and that I was faking an inflammation of my ear. That was bullshit of course. At Mariánská there was a German doctor, a very polite man and this guy said, "What kind of bullshit is that? How can you pretend to have inflammation?" So they sent me to the hospital in Karlovy Vary. There I stayed for a week. During that time they brought there my old acquaintance, Dr. Pešek who used to be secretary to Mr. Nebesář, who was the head of the Czechoslovak National Bank. These two guys were already in prison as well. Pešek was being interrogated and they took him to the hospital because his heart was inflamed and he finally died there. He recognized me, but I didn't recognize him though because he looked so much older. He asked, "That's Dr. Pospíšil right?" and finally I asked, "And who are you?" He said Pešek. Thanks to that I recognized that we really knew each other.

Could you tell me anything about the legendary escape from mine "XII"?²²

Well as for the escape from number "XII" that happened right on the second day I got there. I was in block number 1 and there was one priest with me. This priest was supposed to go on the shift with the same group that was planning to escape, but the group changed it so someone else could go with them. Then in the middle of the night we were taken outside and forced to stand in a circle, bodies of the dead boys were lying on the ground and the commander was kicking them and jumping around. They took out two who were caught alive. We could see they were really badly beaten. They were supposed to walk around and point out those of us who knew about the escape. These two were not really sane at that moment. Anyways they walked around and took two boys from our group. Later in the nineties, I got deeper into this case as a member of the UDV.²³ I found out that the whole thing happened completely differently and that the planned escape was known about beforehand. The guard who was helping with the escape was in prison before and they had a trial with him previously. They called this guy Frenchie, because he was an ex-patriot from France. So the guards knew about the escape in advance.

Did Karel Kukal know about all this when he wrote his book about the escape?²⁴

He didn't and neither did Štich. That was interesting because Štich had been beaten so badly that he stopped speaking. When he was in hospital a policeman was trying to find out whether he was pretending by burning his toes with a cigarette. He started speaking much later and he is still alive. He doesn't know about anything that happened there since he has a complete memory gap.

²¹ **Edvard Beneš** – Edward Beneš was the second President after T.G. Masaryk from 1935 to 1938. He was also a President in exile in 1940–1945 and the President of Czechoslovakia after the War (1945–1948). Together with T.G. Masaryk and M. R. Štefánik, he took part in the resistance movement during WW I and he is one of the founders of Czechoslovakia.

²² **Escape** which happened at night from October 14th to 15th. Eleven prisoners escaped from the shaft no. 14 in camp XII from the Jáchymov uranium mines. The group was not successful though and on the next day the majority of the escaped prisoners were caught and shot. Out of eleven were left only Karel Kukal and Zdeněk Štich. The rest were either killed or sentenced for the life term. The memories on this escape are described by Karel Kukal in his book *"Ten Crosses."*

²³ **ÚDV** – Council for Crimes of Communism, Documentation, and Investigation. (established in the early 1990s after the fall of Communism)

²⁴ **KUKAL, Karel: Deset křížů.** (Ten crosses). 2. Vydání, upravené a rozšířené. Rychnov nad Kněžnou: Ježek, 2003. 127 s.

What exactly did you do in camp "XII"?

I went to the housing development and there I laid concrete. Then I became unemployed because in 1953 they didn't have any other work for us.

What did Camp "L"²⁵ look like when you got there?

In "L" there was a great deal of starvation and hazing. I saw there how they put a hat on Mr. Šlachtecký's head and they tore off his shoulder patches. It happened this way, a bus was sent there that had equipment for x-raying the lungs. The night shift went to bed and shortly after that they were woken again to go get their x-rays. Prisoners started getting really angry and they started fighting. It ended up that someone put a hat on the commander's head and tore off his shoulder patches and the dog handler was such an idiot that he brought his dog there. So they brought the dog there and the dog bit the head commander in his ass...

Imagine that we got a box and it had 270 kilos (594 pounds) and it wasn't full yet. It was clear uranium. The worst thing was that in "L" the strongest iron ore²⁶ was produced and the ventilation was directed straight to the camp. Yet, before there was no ventilation at all.

Were you employed in the grinding department?

Yes, I was at the grinding department "2"²⁷.

How long did you stay in camp "L"?

I stayed a year and a half, I was at the grinding department and then I was transferred to the forced labor camp Bytíz by Příbram. From there I had to go to court because I was called to give testimony on someone. Finally, I said I didn't know the person. He said he didn't know me either and this way it was finished. Then I asked the judge for my lost wages that day since I had to come and testify for a guy I didn't know. I suggested that the policeman who called me to testify should pay for my lost wages. The judge only laughed, what could they do to me, throw me in jail? They could put me into solitary confinement, but that would be normal. In camp "L" we went there on all national holidays regularly. For example on May 1st they came for us with blankets and we knew what was coming up next.

What was solitary confinement like?

The solitary cells were alright. It used to be a pigsty. Before it was in a cellar for potatoes or coal. There was also a great deal of bullying when we were in solitary confinement. There were thousands of barrels we were storing here and there for nothing. A pile of sand was transported from here to there, back and forth. In winter we had to take all the hot coals from the fire place at 6 o'clock in the evening. There was no heat. All these buildings in camp were standing on pylons, and most of them had special linings so the buildings wouldn't fall apart, but camp "L" was the only one where the lining was missing so under the floor you could hear the wind blowing. There was no water and no showers. Those were outside and in solitary confinement only cold water. I remember Radim Kočan washing his face with coffee. There was nothing else, there was simply nothing else!

Can you remember your prison number?

017764 and then they changed it to 02008, but for the longest time I had the first one.

²⁵ **Camp called "L,"** sometimes called also a camp for liquidation. There was "a tower of death" where the prisoners were getting into direct contact with radioactive uranium.

²⁶ The narrator means ore that contains uranium.

²⁷ **Grinding department** – the department where the iron ore was ground into a soft powder.

What comes to mind when you hear the name Jáchymov today?

Well you know I can't really say it nicely.

In total, how many years did you stay in prison?

Eleven years, four months, and a couple days.

What was it like to return to civilian life?

I was released on the basis of pardon. My family was alright, but it was something like a whale of tears. The landlord let me into the house and I rang the doorbell and I could hear how my daughter was running towards it. She was thirteen years old. My wife's schoolmate got a message that he was coming back, but my family didn't hear anything from me. In spite of that, they expected me.

How did you look for new employment?

First I started as a bricklayer and carpenter in a company called Stavba. They were bigger thieves than criminals because for all the work I did I earned about a thousand crowns a month. These people were the bigger thieves. We worked in small groups, the maximum number was seven people. I was writing a building book for them and I could hear how a bricklayer said, "Hey, what are you doing? How come you are writing a building book, doctors are supposed to do that." Then the master builder said, "He's not supposed to do that, he was in prison." In this company I stayed just for a while because fortunately my mother-in-law saw an announcement that Svazarm was opening a course for TV mechanics and so she said, "Please go there, you know how to do these things." So I went and they told me, "Well the course is running, go and ask if they will accept you." So I went and this teacher Kůra was like, "But the course is already running and it wouldn't be anything for you man." We talked it over there and he said finally, "You know how to do all this. You know what, in two weeks there are the exams for new TV mechanics and technicians and I will sign you in. If you do the exam well I will give you a job, if not, you can try again next year." I passed with an A and I started working as a TV mechanic. If you remember I was studying at the German technical school, but I never talked about it much. For twenty years I was working as a TV repairman (laughing).

Did you go back to the law?

Yes, I did. I worked for the Counsel for Crimes of Communism, Documentation, and Investigation in the 1990's.

What long-term effects did prison life have on your health?

Well the ear is the first thing. I'm deaf as a post in that ear and I think that I had a problem with my colon and problems with my blood because of prison life. In January 2008 I had an operation where they took about 20 centimeters out of my colon because I was bleeding into my intestines. I also have a medical statement that I have only 2,700,000 red blood cells and in 1959 I had 3,300,000, but a man is supposed to have about 5,000,000. I had problems with hemoglobin. All the problems I've had is a result of the radioactivity.

When you look at your life and what you went through, is there anything you would want to say to young people?

I would only want to tell them to work as well as possible and to not believe in people who speak too much. They should always look to see if one is doing what he says. People today talk too much.

Thank you for the interview.

Hubert Procházka was arrested for eleven years of prison as a member of a group “Beneš Scout Revolt.” He also worked three years in the so called Tower of Death where uranium ore was milled in the Jáchymov labor camp “L”.



“Live in the way that you won’t do any harm to anyone else.”

Interview with Mr. Hubert Procházka

What do you remember about your youth?

I was born December 27, 1930 in Brno in a family of psychiatry professors whose name was like mine, Hubert Procházka. My mom was also a doctor, but at that time a housewife. I have a sister who is two and a half years younger than I, who is a doctor of Pathology in Prague. My dad was shot in 1935 by a madman at Zelný Market in Brno. Mom was Czech, so we moved to Hradec Králové where we lived until 1946. Then my mother was a head doctor at the Janské Lázně spa working with radiology. We lived there until February of 1948. Then they fired her and for about two years she was without a job. Then she started working in the physical therapy department in Pardubice. During that time we lived in a family house in Heřmanův Městec¹. That house was established and remodeled by my grandfather.

How did you struggle through World War II when you didn't have a father?

My mom had a normal doctor's practice as a neurologist so we made it through the war quite well. I went through the five classes of primary school then I started a classical eight-year grammar school, which I had to postpone for a year. Since I was born in December I went to school a half year earlier. I lost a year after primary school and then at the beginning of the occupation, the Germans were using a principle of Nationalsozialistische Arbeitpartei and they thought I was a member of the Bourgeoisie, so I wasn't accepted to the Grammar school. However, it was changed again in another year, because at that time, changes were happening quickly. I graduated in 1950 and I went to study medicine for one year at Hradec Králové. Then they threatened us that they would change the Medical Faculty to the Army Academy so I transferred to Prague.

Do you have any special memories of February 1948? Were you politically active in anyway?

I was a member of the National Socialistic Youth and a member in scouts. I was active as a scout since the age of seven. I was with the water scouts, but then in 1947 I got out of it a little bit, because I left Hradec Králové and moved to Janské Lázně the contact was limited and in the border land there isn't this tradition. My mother wasn't a member of any political party, but more or less she was cooperating with The People's Party. She was giving lectures to the party about various medical fields, mainly about physical therapy. So we could say that she was more or less politically active.

How did you get to the National Socialist Party? Was it your decision?

It was strictly my decision because the rest of the family was Christian. I voted for the National Socialists because I was convinced that it stood furthest on the right.

In which year did you join?

In 1946 we moved from Hradec Králové because my mom traveled to the United States to study polio for over half a year. She received a scholarship from the American Red Cross and from one of Roosevelt's foundations. Roosevelt himself had polio, he was practically working

¹ Heřmanův Městec – a town in Eastern Bohemia, in the region of Chrudim.

on a chair all the time. For the time that she was away, we stayed at Heřmanův Městec for about a year. She left in October and came back around Easter of the following year, so it was almost one whole school year. Then I was kind of jumping from one school to another. In my first year of grammar school I went to Chrudim, then another half year to Trutnov, and the rest of the time up until graduation I was in Chrudim. It wasn't possible to do it any other way.

How would you define your anti-state activity? Were you actually aware of doing something wrong?

Yes, of course I was... We started to issue leaflets and I also started a contact with two agents Milan Eliáš and Marcal. They were connected to the CIC², the one named Milan had an uncle in the American Embassy in Germany. So they had a straight connection to Germany and I worked as a wireless operator. In addition to that, because of our Christian relatives, I was also helping monasteries that wanted to be in touch through letters. So I was going to them and distributing letters. This whole thing was organized by an abbot from Želiva monastery, Vít Tajovský. I was asked to help with this by the dean named František Kolář. I was reliable because my aunt was an assistant to the head nun of the Sister's School. At the beginning of the war the whole monastery moved to Rome. My mother cured Mr. Tajovský during the war and saved him from being put into war. The information I was distributing was up to date in 1949. Then monks were imprisoned one after the other, so it wasn't that up to date anymore. We were doing three different routes. The first one I did with the Dean, because he had a motorcycle. The other two I did alone, because it was not as conspicuous. However, they didn't find this out about me, only the leaflets.

When did you start helping and when did you start printing the leaflets?

I started in 1949. Before that year the situation was completely different. The Sokol³ gathering in 1948 was very anti-communistic, but after that the regime was stricter. Generally, people thought that the situation could not last for a long time. Gradually they started suppressing the free information from the media so we all wanted to inform people about the truth, whether it was international or national information. The edition was from a hundred to two hundred printed copies. The conditions for copying were really hard at that time so we had to use stencils. It wasn't really easy to produce a high number of printed copies. Because it was done in Eastern Bohemia the center for everything was in Heřmanův Městec. That was the town where the majority of people from this group came from.

How often did you distribute the leaflets and who wrote them?

On average, once every two months. The terms were not fixed of course. When there was a lot of news we wrote the comments on them as quickly as possible so that it would still be up to date. The content was set after the agreement and then each of us prepared one response. Then we laid it out and edited it. We were distributing it unofficially of course, putting it into people's mailboxes.

² Counter Intelligence Corps (CIC) was an American intelligence service established during WWII in December 1943. Its task was to search for and eliminate German agents in the ranks of allied armies. After WWII its activities were focused on the Soviet Bloc, and especially in the 50's it recruited and trained agents who were employed to work within the region of Soviet influence including Czechoslovakia.

³ Sokol – The Czech association of Sokol (ČOS) is a civil association, whose almost 190 000 members attended voluntary sports and physical activities in clubs of Sokol. It promoted versatility and cultural activities.

Do you remember the names of your colleagues who helped you write and deliver the leaflets and were thus consequently sentenced as well?

Naturally, those were guys who were attending the grammar school or college in Chrudim or they had recently graduated. There wasn't a big age difference between us. There were also other people sentenced with us who were older. The main group from Heřmanův Městec was plus or minus two years apart in age. There were Mirek Kabeláč, Milan Netušil, Josef Řehák, and Vláďa Doležal,... As time went by, we didn't only edit the leaflets, but we also got in touch with two agents – Eliáš and Marcal and we were delivering some spy information too, mainly about the airport in Pardubice. That was always an army airport so there was always a big interest in it. They had their own operator and a radio transmitter, but they wanted to have a plan to fall back on. The second reason was that the radio didn't work sometimes. They had troubles with that.

Where did you get the contacts for the two agents?

It was through a schoolmate (B. Capoušek) also a guy through our group who contacted me together with my mom's patient. Together we talked about radios. Fortunately, there was no one else who knew about it. The secret police had me on a list because I had officially kept a radio as an amateur operator until 1949. Then they took my license away. I had some receivers left, but I had to put away all the transmitters, I didn't want to risk it. The one I used for this purpose then was bricked in a chimney of our house because I was sending out messages, just in case of emergency. The agents had their own operator, but sometimes they needed to check and sometimes they had problems with their own one. When that didn't work I had to substitute. We were all nineteen or twenty years old. I was locked up a week after my twenty-first birthday.

How did it happen?

I was traveling from Hradec Králové, where I was studying medicine for the first year, to Heřmanův Městec, almost every single weekend. Later when I was in Prague, nothing was very easy. I was meeting my schoolmates and other people from the group who studied in Prague. We weren't meeting periodically, more by chance when we needed something, then we just arranged it and went somewhere. Coincidentally and I was really lucky at this time, I met my friend at a tram stop at Wenceslas Square. It was before Christmas and I was going to go back home that evening. This boy told me that my schoolmates from the group were locked up two or three days previously. So I went home and when the secret police came for me in the evening I was lucky in that I was ready for it. I had the chance to destroy a lot of things before they came. I did this from the spring of 1949 to midway through 1951, before I came to Prague. So it lasted for about two years, maybe a little more.

Were you aware of any monitoring? Did you have a feeling that they put someone on you?

I was riding motorcycles professionally. In 1950 I was nominated to go on a six-day race, which was taking place in England, but the invitation was rescinded. In 1951 the invitation came again, but all of a sudden I was told that I wouldn't go anywhere. This six-day race is always taking place in September or October. In late August the two agents we were cooperating with were locked up. I assumed that I had to be a suspect as well.

That was a sign for you then?

Yeah, but I unfortunately didn't take it really serious. If I had taken it seriously, it would have been possible to get over the border and I wouldn't have stayed here. I wouldn't have any other option then to run away. It would have been the only possible option for me.

When were you locked up and what was the process like?

On January 4, 1952. Before Christmas they were interrogating me all night in Bartolomějská Street⁴. In the morning they released me and I didn't wait for anything. I hopped on my motorbike and went straight to Heřmanův Městec to destroy the radio. If that didn't go well then there would be a bad ending for the whole family because it was in the family's house. So I destroyed it successfully and on January 4 I was definitively locked up. It happened in the evening on Charles Square when I was coming home from school. They took me back to Bartolomějská. They left me there for four days. I was in such a state that it would be hardly possible to transport me somewhere. Then they took me to Pardubice. The whole group was investigated in Pardubice in the state police department. In Bartolomějská I had a hearing and of course I denied almost everything. I only admitted that I knew the people from the group and they offered me cooperation. That was unacceptable for me, but I made an agreement with them that I would think about it. During the second interrogation there was nothing to think about and I had to say it and sign a piece of paper with a statement that I was not going to cooperate with the state police. This way, things started moving in a certain direction. At first they were trying to convince me to work for them because they needed some people, especially people who knew foreign languages. At that time I was already able to speak English and German very well. So for this reason I was a really attractive person for them. Yet, we didn't make any agreements (laughs) and then a big storm started (fight) and of course I answered on the first punch. I knew Jujitsu and I was even boxing for a while, but that didn't help in the end. At first it was three on one and I don't even know how many of them got together on me there after that. They really finished me in a bad way, it cost me three teeth and one ear. Today I hardly hear out of my left ear.

Where in Bartolomějská was this happening?

In some police room and I don't know where because they were always blindfolding me. When you don't know the building it's hard to get any chance of orientation. We went up the steps, down the steps, and then they turned me around three times, and took me somewhere again. What sense did this have, I don't know? Maybe they were trying to depress me. They could have had my trial anywhere, it wouldn't have mattered. I knew I was there and that they were interrogating me, but why were they making such theatrics, I don't know. Because this wasn't clear to me, it didn't depress me at all.

Did someone give you first aid?

No, no one through the whole investigation process gave me first aid. I don't think they even had a doctor there.

Were you alone in Bartolomějská or were you with someone?

For the first two days I was alone and before they took me to Pardubice they took me to an escort room where there were three or four of us. I hardly saw the people because they threw me into the room in the evening and took me out in the morning. I don't remember anything.

How did that beating affect you? How did you explain it to yourself?

One had some information about the methods of investigation that the SS had. We knew that and these methods would not be better or worse. I personally wasn't really surprised about all of it.

⁴ Bartolomějská – a prison in Prague.

What did they want, if I may say it this way, to beat out of you and what were they interested in?

Including the curriculum vitae it made three pages of protocol. For almost five months I didn't say anything on myself. When I could stone wall them I did. What they found out from the others and they proved me guilty of was the distribution of the leaflets. In my case they were interested in the radio and the radio connection. Since I was an amateur operator until 1949 I was officially allowed to have my own amateur radio. In 1949 they banned it, took my license, and I had to cancel the official radio, which I did. Yet, I had another radio, which I had built up in the chimney. We didn't use the chimney and they didn't find this one. After the first interrogation I went to Městec and destroyed it, because I didn't want to put the whole family at risk, I couldn't live with that idea.

How did it end with the two agents? What happened to them?

They crossed the borders a couple times and they were caught of course. When my group was investigated, the investigators didn't make the connection between these two things. A guy named Zdeněk Dušek didn't say it to anyone else. That was a big advantage and the others from our group were not connected to that thing.

After four days in Bartolomějská they took you to Pardubice, what happened there?

There were normal investigations, but I was in solitary confinement, which was appalling. It was a real small room with four small windows, none of which could be closed completely. That was in January. They turned the heating on for one hour a day. It was a complete disaster.

What was the food like there?

There were two or three potatoes from the bottom of the pot without anything on them. We were saying once with caraway seeds and once without. They were not even salted. We also got some water-downed soups and some fake coffee in the morning.

Did you meet anyone from your group when you were in custody in Pardubice? Did you sit together?

For my entire incarceration I was in a solitary cell. I saw only one of them who they showed me and asked, "Do you know each other?" "We do." So then we turned our backs on each other and that was it. That was the end of the confrontation. It was like being in a crazy house. Then they took us to the prison in Chrudim. There we waited for the trial, which was open to the public. Taking part in Heřmanův Městec, in Sokol Hall. Yet, the public was in quotes, whoever actually wanted to come, couldn't come. They choose who would be there and they brought in party functionaries and workers. I don't know who else they brought in, but they were trying to make a circus out of it. It took three days and it was a huge attraction. That was right after the 20th of June. They took people from the party and they were showing us off as wild animals.

What was the process of this three-day trial like?

They requested that one would repeat the same thing that was on the written statements from the interrogations. I was not shy and I started arguing with the head judge about the communist ideology. The funniest thing was that those idiots were recording this and playing it out over the town's public announce system. So my discussion with the judge was broadcast for quite a while until they found out what we were talking about. The sentence was eleven years for high treason and spying.

What happened to your colleagues?

The highest sentence was fifteen years for Mirek Kabeláč. They made him the leader of the group. He was older than us by about three years and they did everything how they wanted. Then they brought in the agents, Milan Eliáš and Dušek. I started to be afraid for the second time because I got the messages from them for the radio, but they didn't say anything. They kept it to themselves.

What was the name of your process and how many people were in your group?

We were called the Beneš Scout Revolt – named after President Beneš⁵. The abbreviation was S.O.B., there were fourteen or fifteen of us and they caught everyone. The lowest sentences were two or three years. No one was lucky to escape.

Do you remember the name of the judges or the chief prosecutor?

The judge was a Hungarian Jew named Roth. Then he changed his name to Rudy. The chief prosecutor was Čížek. It was a noble cast, both of them were bad guys. It was a deterrent process. There was not much happening in that area so it came across as something quite handy for them and that's why it took three days.

What ran through your head when you heard the sentence at court?

We didn't take it seriously at that time, we were very foolish.

Where did they take you after the trial?

After the court they left us in prison in Chrudim and then they took us to build a dam in Křivanovice. That was only through the summer, only a short time, maybe for three weeks. The dam was built at the beginning of the fifties. Then they took us back to prison. They found out that in the working camp by the dam there were mainly, "měsíčkáři"⁶ who were farmers who didn't meet their quotas. The place wasn't guarded much, but it didn't really hit us that we could escape from there. To be honest with you though, we didn't really have a place or a way how. All our escape routes we had ready before were already blocked and to try to go through was to risky in 1952. That wasn't really possible. Then in mid-August they took us to Jáchymov⁷. They took us to the central camp named Bratrství (Brotherhood). That was the central camp in Jáchymov by the mine where there were two camps. The normal camp had pits and the other part was separated and served as a central building. There we waited for three or four days and they distributed us to different camps. I was taken to "L"⁸ with Milan Netušil.

What did you do in the camp?

It was a really small camp with about three hundred people. We crushed the iron ore⁹. There wasn't any other work. We were surprised about that. Right away I was put into the tower be-

⁵ **Beneš** – Edward Beneš was the second President after T.G. Masaryk from 1935 to 1938. He was also a President in exile in 1940–1945 and the President of Czechoslovakia after the War (1945–1948). Together with T.G. Masaryk and M. R. Štefánik, he took part in the resistance movement during WW I and he is one of the founders of Czechoslovakia.

⁶ "**Měsíčkáři**" – formed from the Czech word for "a month" = měsíc. These people stayed in prison only for a month or a couple of months.

⁷ **Jáchymov** is a spa town close to Karlovy Vary, near the German border. Working camps for prisoners were often established near these mines and political prisoners tend to call them "concentration" camps. Historians rather prefer working camps – concentration camp is a term connected with Nazism. Concentration camps existed in Southern Africa already in the early 20th century. Great Britain built them there during the Second Boer War. In Czechoslovakia there were "vindictive" prisoners and later also political and criminal prisoners. Prisoners were used as cheap labor.

⁸ **Camp called "L,"** sometimes called also a camp for liquidation. There was "a tower of death" where the prisoners were coming into direct contact with radioactive uranium.

⁹ The narrator means ore that contains uranium.

cause I was almost deaf. They put me on the main grinder. There was a lot of noise and no one wanted to be there. With one ear I didn't really mind it, so I was working there.

What did that mean?

In the tower we worked on the rock that contained a lot of iron that was brought by cars where it was put in big boxes and from these put into smaller ones. The iron ore was measured and according to its size it was sorted into these boxes. Out of the boxes two prisoners took it out and threw it onto a big wide conveyor belt. When there was about fifty tons ready in one big box, it was all crushed and processed as one load. From the bunker it went to the grinder and was ground up. Then it was sent back up to the tower where the soft part was taken with a sieve. The big part was falling back down into the grinder and this way it kept rotating until everything was ground. Meanwhile, the soft-seated fraction was barreled. The barrels were then stored and once every two or three days, depending on how it went, it was always put into about thirty wagons. Half of these wagons were loaded with poor iron ore. They also brought low quality ore in open wagons, which was only sorted and the loads on different cars were being mixed into big containers that would fill a wagon. That made fifteen to twenty tons. The high quality iron ore was processed how I described in the tower and was loaded into closed wagons.

What exactly did you do with the grinder and what were the conditions like?

I had to make sure a stone wouldn't get stuck and one of the two slabs couldn't crack. The grinder consisted of two huge slabs that were grinding against each other. In between those the rocks were falling down and been crushed. There was a lot of dust and noise. You could hardly see anything there especially when the rock or material was dry. Usually it was dry and they stored fifty tons of it. In the storage boxes it was drying very quickly. Of course it depended on the weather, for example during the fall it was wetter, but then it got dry again. That was a nonstop operation. That means three shifts each for eight hours. Everything else was managed according to this. According to that and to which shift you worked, that's what the routine looked like, right. Everyone except for the night shift was getting up with the morning shift that was at 5:15 or something like that. The loaf of bread was split in thirteen slices so you would get about 15 decagrams of bread a day (0.33 pounds). Hunger was terrible in the beginning until Stalin and Gottwald's deaths. The hunger was so terrible until the cult of personality started and then it got a little better. I didn't even weigh 50 kilograms (110 pounds). You must consider that I was 15 centimeters taller than I am right now because I've gotten shorter now. I was a relatively young man and we all looked like this.

What did you wear for work? Did you have any gloves or masks?

We wore what we normally lived in. We wore something called, "Halina," which was made from a higher quality of sack or bag material. We had trousers in this fashion and also a jacket. We had one long pair of underwear underneath, a shirt, and a hat. Beside that we got linen pants and a linen jacket for summer. That was everything. We didn't have anything else. We didn't have any special working uniforms because those idiots thought that all these working places on the surface weren't radioactive. They didn't even admit it was radioactive down below in the shafts. Sometime in 1954 or 1955 they brought us some air masks, but those were for little kids. You really couldn't breathe in those. So when it was very dusty we were using damp clothes and we covered our nose and mouth and tied them behind our heads. That was all. We didn't get any other care.

How long were you on the grinder?

After one month all working positions rotated, but that didn't mean that everyone went everywhere. One had to get some practice with the grinder and find out when he can push it, when not to, and when you should stop things for a while. Of course I couldn't stop it very often because there were guards, Russians. There were a minimum of Czech employees and all of them who were Czech, were not doing any manual work. They were either bosses, but there were many of them or they were guards. So I didn't go to throw the iron ore to containers very often because I never really liked working with shovels, not that I couldn't learn it, but there were people who liked shoveling more than me. So in our group we were switching the positions a little bit. Our group had about thirty people and we formed the staff of the tower. For example, one of us wasn't able or well handed to roll the barrels. We were rolling the barrels through the storage and that was about 150 meters long. The barrel or a bucket with a lid was rolling when you kicked it well. We had hooks to give them direction and then to lift them up because three barrels were stored on top of each other. Not many people could do it really well, so it was better if someone went to do something else then break his legs trying to do this. Each barrel had to weigh a minimum of 60 kilograms (132 pounds). All barrels were weighed. So I can't really tell you how long I was at the grinder, but it was at least a third of the time I was in prison. That means a third out of three and a half years.

How many people do you think lost their lives there or left with permanent health effects?

I suppose that all of us had some permanent health effects. Those who worked down in the deep holes, who were digging out the iron ore and those who all worked on "L" had to have some health damage for sure. It wasn't documented anywhere. One had to stay in these radioactive zones for the effects to be apparent. That is a diametrically different mechanism of damage then for example an explosion of nuclear weapons. You can't really compare them as they are different. The illness you get from being exposed to uranium radioactivity looks different. No one really knows how it looks. In the time when they were supposed to study it, no one really did it. That means that all these examinations are done post factum with a long time lapse. They started examining it in the seventies. That was with a twenty-year lapse.

Was it called "A Tower of Death" according to the mortality rate?

I don't know if we can say mortality. That didn't really occur there because while you are exposed to the radioactivity there is some time of latency when the changes in the organism happen. These changes are gradual and each organism individually reacts to it. For each person it comes out in a different a way. Only if they examined a certain amount of people, at least thousands of people could they identify these trends. No one ever did that, although an obligation existed at Jáchymov from the second half of the 1930's. During the first Czechoslovakian Republic they were measuring the activity, taking measurements in the mines, and checking the employees. So the Communists knew very well where they were sending us. There were no questions marks about these things and there were already rules for this under the Department of Health and Human Services. No one took this into consideration and everyone was pretending that nothing serious was happening and that there were no potential risks.

How was it with injuries? Were you ever injured?

With injuries it was really disastrous because there was one nursing room for the whole camp. There was one room for a nurse's room and another room with four beds where the injured could stay. The doctor who served there was a vindictive prisoner and he was a real

jerk. Only a few of these vindictive prisoners were as bad as this one. He was a German living in Prague and he was a SS doctor and originally he was a pediatrician. As a pediatrician he served the SS and then he was sentenced and he worked at our camp. There were big problems with him because he didn't take any of the injuries seriously and his favorite phrase was, "Oh my grandma suffered from this as well." Fortunately I didn't have any big injuries that I couldn't take care of myself.

Were you aware of the risks in the conditions you worked? Were you taking measures to protect yourself?

Of course I was aware of that. I studied physics for doctors with Professor Santholzer who was one of the most well respected researchers from the Institute of Radiology. So he told us a lot about radioactivity. How could I prevent myself? All I could do was tie a cloth over my nose and mouth. I simply couldn't do anything else.

How did Jáchymov prison affect your own health?

First of all, I had skin cancer. The most critical were the alpha rays from radon because we worked in areas without ventilation. Sound ventilation was implemented in the beginning of the 1960's. In spite of the fact that the administration concerned with mining put these notices out in the 1950's, no one put this into practice. It took another 5-7 years before conditions started to get better. It improved probably in the mid 1960's because everything was dependent on ventilation in the chutes. As for the work places where the material was processed and where the material was ground there was a lot of radioactive dust, but those places closed in the second half of the 1950's, maybe 1956 or 1957. The iron ore started to be processed chemically at that point. So because these things are not happening any more there's no point in studying the effects. Even though someone was studying the changes, they could only look at the after effects and not the original health. These effects were counted up to be the result of age and work, not necessarily where they worked and the effects of radioactivity. The Institute of National Health began to examine the Jáchymov mines in 1959. Yet, the institute was attached to the mines, it wasn't an independent organization. Together with the cancer I also have damaged joints. I am 15 centimeters shorter and I have an artificial hip joint. I should get another artificial hip joint in the next half of year. My backbone is damaged as well, since my spinal discs are disintegrating. My fourth vertebra pulls forward towards my stomach. So actually I can't really move that much so the vertebra won't move further and I won't pinch my spinal cord. Then I would have to be in a wheel chair.

How did the guards behave and in what ways did they persecute you?

There were polite ones and worse ones, but there were fewer of the polite ones of course. We had to go to brigades, which meant compulsory employment outside of work. During that time we couldn't go to the prison house and if they found you there that wasn't good. There were guards who never checked on us, especially if they knew the commander was not in the camp. They were giving good reports to each other. When the commander was around they were much more active.

Who were your prison mates? Did you know anyone who worked with you in the tower?

At the beginning there was my accomplice, Milan Netušil, but after half a year he was taken to Příbram. He was getting relatively better over there. In our group you got contacts very quickly. You either got contacts immediately or you didn't get in touch at all. It depended on who it was. Mainly there were political prisoners and there was also a group of fifty vindictive

prisoners, those were the Germans or German-Czechs who were sentenced for cooperation with the Germans during WWII according to the vindictive decrees. These people were released in 1955 and some even in 1954. There were many interesting people. Some people were quite famous and from the upperclass. There was General Paleček, the head of our missionat occupation administration in Germany, Doctor Jan Pospíšil who was a General Secretary for Minister Stránský, really high quality people. There was also the son of the Social Democratic Minister, Zdeněk Bechyně and also many great clergymen like Josef Zvěřina who was a theologian and art historian. From him one could hear a lot of interesting things. There was also the head of the Czech Jesuits, Mr. Pepek Cukr. That was really a class of men and there were many others like that.

Were there any Communists there with you?

There was only one who came after the process with Slánský. His name was Vavro Hajdů, who was from Slovakia. For some time he was our representative in the UN and he was also a civil servant in the Ministry of State Affairs. He was quite nice and polite for that time.

Did you ever meet any civilians working there? Do you remember any of the guard's names?

I remember the names of the main commanders, Mr. Píbil, for example, one can't forget that of course. There were no civilians working there at all.

Not even women, for example in the infirmary?

At the working camps, that was unacceptable. The first woman came when the prison hospital at Jáchymov was opening in 1955. She was there as a head nurse and part of the main staff in the surgery unit. I don't remember the name now, but I already recalled it once because people from UDV¹⁰ wanted to hear my opinion about the head staff in the hospital. The second half of my prison stay I was in the prison hospital. I never worked in another working camp after that. For three weeks I was at Mariánská hospital, where I was as a doctor liquidating a flu epidemic.

So after three years they transferred you to the hospital?

They took me there not because they wanted to, but because they had to. I got jaundice. At that time there was an epidemic of jaundice and thanks to the kindness of people that worked there I started work there. From all the mukls¹¹ the highest boss there was Professor Koch, a sergeant from Bratislava and father's friend. They served together during World War I in a hospital in Udine, Austria. In 1920 they established an army hospital in Bratislava together before demobilization started. So I was transferred to the hospital. One fact that also helped was that it was already 1955 and in 1956 the grinder was shut down and the iron ore was processed chemically. So they would have had to transfer me somewhere else no matter what.

Where was the hospital located?

The hospital was located near to the new headquarters of Jáchymov, just a little way from "L." From the crossroads there was a field and today there is a factory for tram buses. Then there was camp "L," the processing work place with the tower, and right next to that was the

¹⁰ ÚDV – Counsel for Crimes of Communism, Documentation, and Investigation. It was established in 1989 and besides communist crimes investigation, it was also processing the history of this period. Since 2008 some of its functions were taken over by the newly established Institute of Total Regime Studies.

¹¹ "Mukl" – someone who was in prison, the word "mukl" itself comes from the abbreviation of – "a man on death row" (in Czech: muž určený k likvidaci). It was a label given to political prisoners imprisoned by communist or Nazi regimes that were not supposed to be released and were supposed to die in prisons or concentration camps. Later on, this label started to be used for all political prisoners.

central camp headquarters. This camp always worked in two different ways. On one side for transportation and on the other hand there was "C" block where there were building groups. They built the town Ostrov upon Ohře and other buildings.

While you were in the hospital what were your responsibilities?

That was at the end of 1955 and the situation was completely different. I started to do physical therapy. I exercised with people after their operations and injuries. I learned this from my mom who worked in Janské Lázně. Then because there wasn't a dermatologist they bought me a book on dermatology and I had to learn how to do that. Fortunately for a short amount of a time there was a Doctor Standa Novák who was a dermatologist. Then they took him to Leopoldov¹². I learned a lot from him. Besides that I worked in the infectious diseases department as a nurse. The boss there was Doctor Hlaváč, a Slovakian from Žilina. He was a pediatrician, but he also was an expert with radiology and tuberculosis, which was a big problem at that time. He taught me a lot. After him there came Honza Šmíd, who was an army doctor and the family doctor of the Beneš family¹³. He was also an excellent doctor. Unfortunately, he only stayed for a short amount of time and then he was taken to Leopoldov. So finally, I was taking care of the whole infectious diseases department myself and a doctor of internal medicine was coming to check on me once or twice a week. This department wasn't really an infectious diseases department. There were three rooms for tuberculosis and one for jaundice. There were also problems with curing syphilis. These people were also getting special treatment for staying in two rooms as well. It was documented that they had syphilis and when they came to prison they had to get treatments. Then I also had two rooms with dermatology illnesses.

How long did you serve there?

I served there until November 6, 1958. At that date I was released because they reviewed my process and I don't know how, but they shortened my eleven years to seven. I then should have been released on January 4, 1959 but they released me with 10 years of probation on November 16, 1958 and I was lucky they didn't give me my human rights back. That saved me from being sent to PTP.¹⁴ As a citizen without rights I didn't have to go to the elections and I didn't have to do the compulsory service in the army. I had some problems around that after the pardon of the President in 1960. I got a blue book because I had jaundice. I really went through that illness and I had permanent effects from it. Until today I am on a diet that is not really strict, but I am on a diet.

So the jaundice was harmful to you?

For sure it was, the truth is that I didn't turn yellow when I was ill so it was hard to see that I was not healthy. It was Doctor Honza Šmíd that found out about this.

Were you ever in touch with your family?

The contact was very limited because if you could write letters from "L" twice a year it would have been a miracle. Out of the three and half years I stayed there I had one or two visits. When I was at the hospital it was much better.

¹² Leopoldov – a prison in Slovakia.

¹³ Beneš family – family of the second President of the Czechoslovakia, Mr. Edvard Beneš.

¹⁴ PTP – Supporting technical battalions of the Czechoslovakian army were established in 1950 for so-called "politically unreliable people" who were subjects of the military law. People in PTP worked in mines, or on military buildings, on civil buildings, and other construction projects. From the last months of 1953 to May 1954 they were all closed down.

Was your family persecuted in any way?

My sister wasn't allowed to take her graduation exam and it took her five years before she could take it. Then she wanted to enter medical school and that took her another four years to be accepted. She wanted to be a dentist and in that year they were accepting more dentists so they took her. My mom wasn't affected much because after a year and half of unemployment she was the head of a physical therapy department in a hospital in Pardubice. Professor Řehor got her a position there and then when they built a new hospital in Chrudim she commuted daily from our hometown, Městec. There she started doing neurology as well because there was either one or sometimes no neurologists. She worked as a neurology consultant as the hospital needed. So it was okay for her.

Do you remember your prison number?

Of course, AO6997. That was my number when I came to Jáchymov. According to this number you could find out on which day exactly you came. These files still exist as there are about twenty thick books because there are about 16,000 names of people who went through that.

Were you officially rehabilitated?

Of course, without the rehabilitation I couldn't have any rights to claim. I was rehabilitated in 1990 or 1991. I handed in the demand already in 1968, but no one really took care of that at that time.

What comes into your head when I say Jáchymov?

Well opposing things, it was a great school for me on one side of knowledge or moral things in total, but on the other hand I paid for it when I consider my health. I can't tell you that I didn't count on being sentenced. I would lie then, because I was aware that what I was doing could be dangerous for me. I really expected everything would work out fine and I would have time to escape.

What helped you to survive?

All kinds of work and my interest in many things helped. I didn't believe that Communism would fall during my lifetime or in 1968 that the regime would get better. That was impossible and I was always realistic about that.

Do you think that we devote enough attention to this historical period?

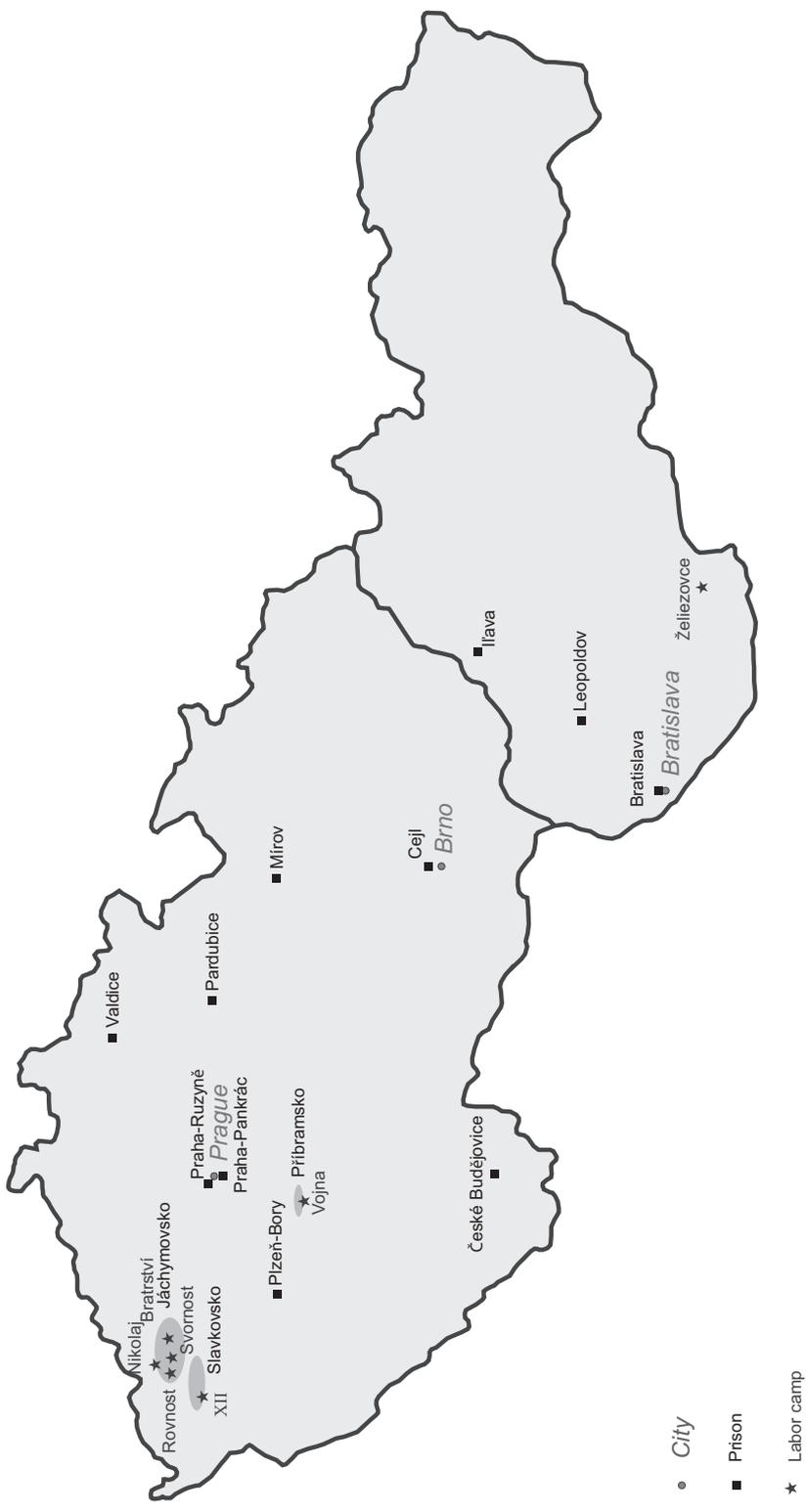
A minimum of it and when we do, it is really misrepresented. First, at school kids aren't taught the history the way it should be taught. In the best case they finish with WWI. Also imagine which teachers were there and how were they hired. There were some normal people among them, but the majority came from communist families and the families that didn't want to shit into their own nest. The same thing works for historians. Don't tell me that during the eighteen years after the Velvet Revolution there was any solid material written out that could be true and accurate. Have you seen anything like that? I haven't yet!

Do you have any recommendation for the young people who are trying to find their way of living, how to go through life with heads held high?

I think this recommendation is really simple. Live in the way that you wouldn't do any harm to anyone else.

Thank you for the interview.

The main prisons and labor camps in communist Czechoslovakia



Labor camp Vojna



Labor camp Vojna in the 1950s.
*Photo archive of the Mining Museum
Příbram – The Vojna Memorial.*



The Vojna Memorial – entrance to the former forced labor camp Vojna.
*Photo archive of the Mining Museum
Příbram – The Vojna Memorial.*



The Vojna Memorial – wash-room.
*Photo archive of the Mining Museum
Příbram – The Vojna Memorial.*



The Vojna Memorial – accommodation for prisoners.
*Photo archive of the Mining Museum
Příbram – The Vojna Memorial.*

A letter from prison

Česka Lípa, 2. srpna 1954.

~~Ústřední soudní věznice v Liberci~~

Odesílání a přijímání dopisů jest povoleno:

1. Vyšetřovaným kdykoliv, se souhlasem vyšetřujícího soudce.
2. Trestancům každou třetí neděli v měsíci.
3. Trestancům v třetí disciplinární třídě každou první a třetí neděli v měsíci.

Přijímání nezdravých závěsů jest povoleno:

1. Vyšetřovaným každý čtvrtek se souhlasem vyšetř. soudce.
2. Trestancům každou první neděli v měsíci.
3. Trestancům v třetí disciplinární třídě každou první a třetí neděli v měsíci.

Pište čitelně jen na linky!
Na ohraničený levý okraj nepište!

Čís. km. ~~12~~

Disc. třída: ~~1~~ **Čestovnice**

Jméno: **Štěpánová Zlatica**

Draze! rodiče,

děkuji vám oběma za návštěvu, měla jsem radost z toho, že vás opět mohu oba vidět. Dobře vypadáte, jen ty, tatko, jsi trochu zohledl, ale to se čas brzo upraví, vid. líp Ti obvi, když jsi silnější. - A jako obvykle ráno hned s tím, co bylo od vás fotožornala: 1) páda bylo viděta, ada jsi dostali můj poslední dopis se Znojmem (psala jsem ho asi kolem 15. června). Chtěla jsem o něm od vás fotožka, ale nijakou z poslední doby, třeba se pájradu do Liberec, pak jsem děkovala Hadravovi za balíček a jichko' rozhodnu od vás správu, nevíme jak to s nimi je. Adresu, draba' mamko, svěť, je to L. H., Ždíkov ep. 177 a kempská. - 2) též jsem pro jednou pojedete, budete tak brzkou a přivezte mi o sobě troletou mydlo a ~~šampon~~ ~~šampon~~, též jsem měla o pondělí, a nějaké ~~šampon~~ ~~šampon~~. - ~~šampon~~

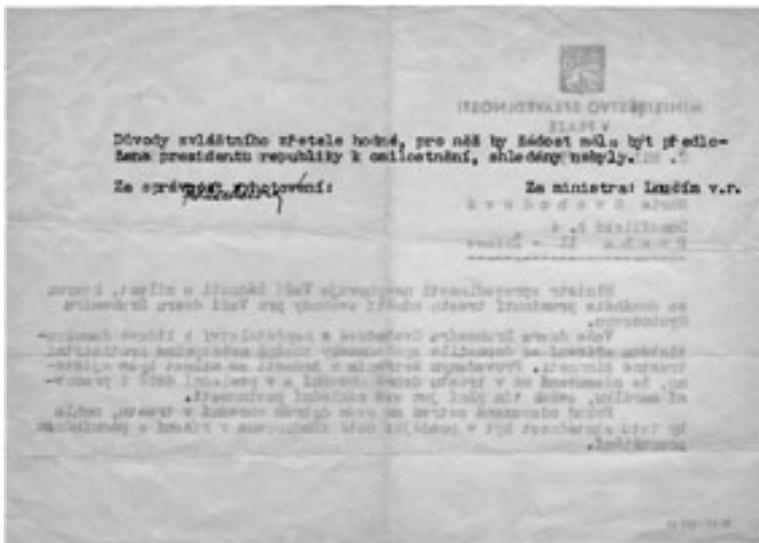
2.

~~_____~~
~~_____~~
To nejhlavnější si nechtávám na konci, draci, podice,
a jiním vš, aby se nespouštěly naproti do živjenskí věstí nemu-
siva primární (P. P. P.) J. Bohovi, aby vám poslal doporučením pro od-
borníka lékaře zde v Lipsu, a recepce na kapy, které jsem měla
od něj ve 2., také by vám mohl sdělit, jak mám zde pokračo-
vat v léčbě. Jelikož se vám ani líky, nově poslat, a zřídka je si
na ministerstvo poslat; jaksi mi jistě by kapy, a patř, i si-
tavní (Blaskov) v injekcích. Doufám, že se vám po dovolené
záměru jistě vrátím; jak to zde bude a balíčky, se živjenskí jsem
je měla po operaci poslaty lékařem kněžské (P. P. P.), bez ohledu
na to, zda se vám nějak práce nebo ne. - Druhá (P. P. P.) jsem
dostala od vás, draci, podice, peníze a děkují za ně mnohokrát.
Snad se také jednou dočkám dne, kdy budu za svou práci dostát
vám takovou odměnou, abych vám nebyla tak na obtíž jako do-
sud. - Snad po této návštěvě jsem přidala o potrolem' jet v. Hvi-
tov a tak' žijí v očekávání, co se bude dít. Budu-li mít štěstí,
mohly bychom se konečně po dvou letech vidět. - Draci, podice,
za všeho, co pro mě děláte, vám mnohokrát děkují a čekám na
zprávy od vás, hlavně na odpovědi ke všem mým otázkám. To
jsem děláte přání, abychom se mohli vidět, ať už vstaly, jsem lépe a
kapy, tak se vám děkují. - Druhá (P. P. P.) jsem
~~_____~~
P.S.

Archive of K. Pinerová.

Each letter from prison had to be censored, because it might have contained some forbidden information, complaints about treatment, or a negative comment on Communism. It was a censor who finally decided whether a letter would be sent or not. Unsent letters have been stored in personal files of the prisoner. Small things in a letter were blackened so the reader could not read it. Prisoners themselves sometimes called these letters to be stylistic essays because they could never freely write about what they had felt, lived through, or what their anguishes were. Mrs. Stuchlíková here writes a letter to her parents, where she is by the way also asking them, to bring her some little things she was missing in prison when they are coming for the next visit. What were the little things she wanted we cannot find out though, since the censor completely blackened this part of the letter. We can only argue and guess what was anti-communist and improper about the words.

A suit for pardon



The reply from the Ministry of Justice on a suit for pardon of Drahomír Svobodová (nowadays Stuchlíková) is from 1959. We can see that in spite of the fact her behavior meets expectations and she even fulfills all working quotas, this suit can not be granted since Mrs. Svobodová is only fulfilling her basic obligations and said in other words, she just does what she has to. That was not enough to be released of course. *Archive of K. Pinerová.*

Photodocumentation



Area of the former mine pit at Rovnost, Jáchymov, 2006. Former uranium camp looks like a meadow with bushes today.
Archive of T. Bouška.



Entrance to the labor camp Nikolaj in 2006. Only very few can imagine what once stood here.
Archive of T. Bouška.



One of the few remains. This used to serve as dressing room at former Rovnost labor camp.

Archive of T. Bouška.



Stairway to the pit Eduard. This is where prisoners used to walk every day from and to the camp Nikolaj.

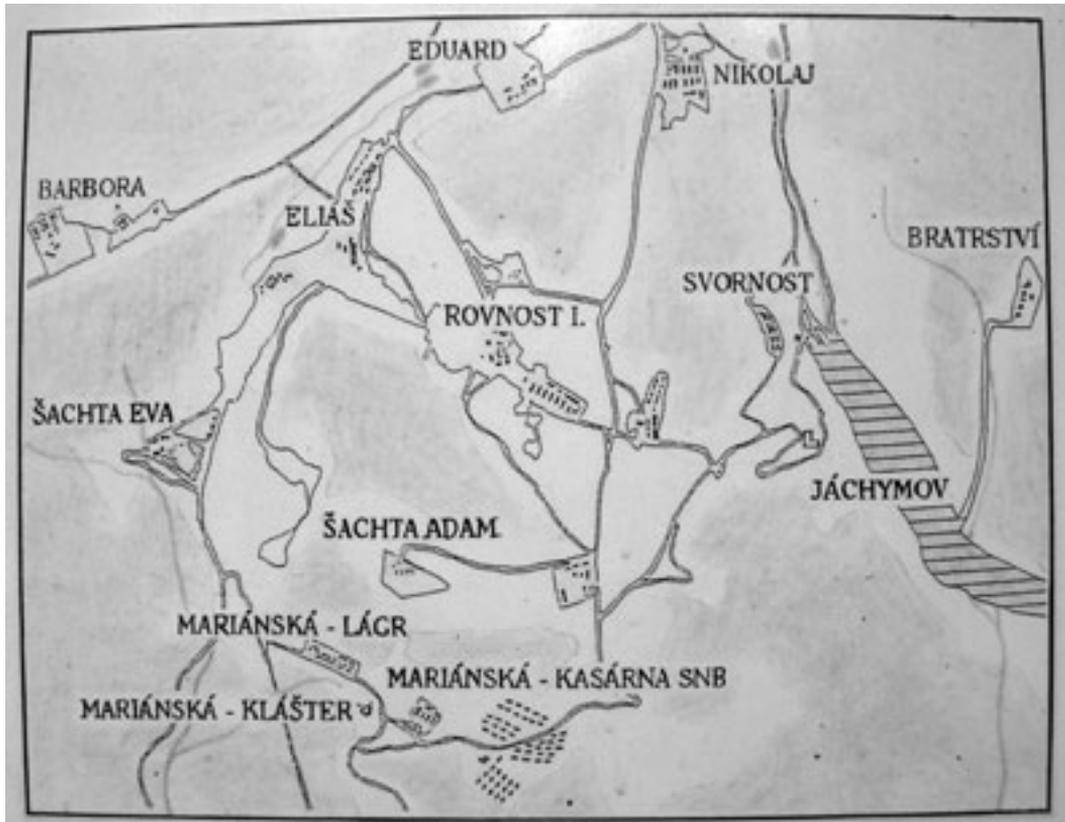
Archive of T. Bouška.



Prayer beads by Jozef Kycka.
Archive of T. Bouška.



Hand made of electric wire in the 1950s.
Archive of T. Bouška.



Map of former uranium mines and labor camps around the town of Jáchymov (as of 1952).
Archive of T. Bouška.

About the authors



Tomáš Bouška – PhD. candidate at Charles University in Prague, Department of Political Science since 2006. Member of steering committee of the International Oral History Association Conference in Prague in 2010. Member of the Czech Oral History Association. Main field of interest is oral histories of political prisoners and survivors of jailing in the 1950s in forced labor camps of so called Jachymov district (former Czechoslovakia). Researcher in the field of Finnish prisoners of war and usage of oral history in Finland. Author of the initiative *politicalprisoners.eu*.



Klára Pinerová – PhD. candidate at Charles University in Prague, Institute for Economic and Social History since 2006. Scientific specialization is prison service in the 20th century. Theme of her MA thesis was „Development of the Penitentiary Subcultures in Czechoslovakia in Years 1948–1960.“ Participated on the project „Prague Faculty of Arts in the Years 1969–1989.“ Researcher in the field of postwar penitentiary system in Germany. Member of the Society for Economic and Social History and the Czech Oral History Association. Co-author of the initiative *politicalprisoners.eu*.

Czechoslovak Political Prisoners

**Life Stories
of 5 Male and 5 Female
Victims of Stalinism**

Tomáš Bouška Klára Pinerová

Translated in English by Kamila Nováková and Justin A. Osswald.

Cover and design by Kafka Design.

Cover photos by Tomáš Bouška. Front triple photo is Augustin Bubník's prisoner's portrait from his interrogation file. Backside photo is a barbed wire near Ruzyně prison in Prague, the Czech Republic.

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