Petr Vavruch, the first 30 years

This text was inspired by a chapter in the book *Kandidáti další existence* by Stanislav Brouček who came to South Africa and interviewed me at home.

Dr Brouček was not interested in me personally but in our family's emigration experiences. He followed a prepared sequence and asked me a number of questions. My answers were off the cuff so they needed editing. They are at the end followed by the emigration experience of Olga Mangold and then extensive notes, all accessible from the text.

Skip the parts that do not interest you!

Many thanks to all contributors, editors and proofreaders, you made the text so much better!

NOTE
I suggest that you leave the picture galleries open in separate tabs or select 'Open link in new tab' when opening a link.

OUR BOURGEOIS FAMILY

I was born on the 24th February 1942 in Prague, not on the left bank where we lived but in Vinohrady which is a nice quarter above Václavské náměstí. My mother, Marie (Máře) Vavruchová née Kořánová travelled to the clinic with my brother Aleš by tram. The tram, as it seemed to them, moved much slower than normally and when they arrived at the clinic, the doctor quipped that my head was already coming out. Yet he still used forceps and deformed my ear. It was not yet 8pm so the doctor got to the cinema in time.

My mother was 36. I was younger than my brothers Aleš and Pavel by 16 and 14 years respectively.

My fascination with numbers comes from my mother, she always counted everything. So I like my date of birth, 24/2/42, we lived at U Písecké brány 24 in Praha IV and our telephone number was 748-24 (the first number to Vila was 518). This text has 124 pages. My parents were married on 12/4/24. We emigrated on the 12th April 1969. The telephone code for Czechoslovakia was 42. And, of course, 42 is the answer to everything.

Hradčany used to be Praha IV when Staré Město was Praha I, Nové Město (founded by Charles IV) Praha II and Malá Strana was Praha III. Praha V was the Jewish quarter, Josefov. Later, our part of Hradčany became part of Praha 6, joining Dejvice and many additional suburbs. However, the red numbers (‘číslo popisné’), like our 266, did not change and remained linked to the old quarters, in our case to Hradčany.

I was told, probably falsely, that I was born during the war because my parents thought it might prevent my father (1), JUDr Ladislav (Laďa) Vavruch (1895-1967) from being sent to Germany to work and also because there was a little bit more milk (2) and other foodstuffs provided to families with small children. They thought that having my rations they would be better off. Whatever was the reason for my birth, I think that in the end they were giving me their shares. Aleš in particular cared for me.

It was not quite enough and although I was not skinny when I was little and

breastfed, I was later undernourished until our family doctor suggested that I should get a big bowl of oats porridge with a blob of butter on the top every morning. I always demanded a bigger blob.

It so happened that I did serve a purpose. I was a diversion from the horrors of the Nazi occupation particularly for my mother, and a source of entertainment, for example when we went to visit somebody and I demanded "švůj čaj" (my own tea, rather than a sip from my mother's cup). In the end, it did not matter that, against their hopes and expectations, I was not a girl.

I also contributed to the 2% increase in the Czech population during the war while Poles and Ukrainians lost one third of their numbers.

According to my mother's diary, she wished so much to have a baby for many long years. That might be a good justification for what she did. But for me it is highly unsatisfactory because she did not write why it had not been possible to have a baby earlier.

Also, she wrote how grateful she was to my father because he was friendly to me. Isn't that what every father is likely to be? I should have read that diary when people who knew what happened were still alive. I did not read it because I was not interested in my first cute little tooth and my funny first words. I did not know that my mother was putting cryptic messages in it.

About three months after my birth, Reinhard Heydrich was assassinated. German soldiers were searching all houses from top to bottom for the para-troopers. When one came to my crib, he quipped, "That's not one of them".

My first memory was feeling claustrophobic in the deep-box pram. Or maybe I just fancy that it was my first memory.

Robert Jan Kořán

My family was both communist and bourgeois. My grandfather, my mother's father, Robert Jan Kořán (1859-1943) (3) was a factory owner. He had a sugar factory in Cerekvice nad Loučnou, halfway between Litomyšl and Vysoké Mýto in Eastern Bohemia. That was our bourgeois origin which,

of course, did not go well with the communist regime.

Robert Jan, his father Jan Kořán (1831-1907), his son–my uncle–dear brother of my mother, RNDr Viktor (Vikin) Kořán (1897-1984), as well as Robert Jan's brother, Ing. Jindřich Kořán (1868-1952) were all exceptionally technically gifted. Vikin wanted to be a scientist but Robert Jan commandeered him in 1924 to come to Cerekvice. He would have been an outstanding scientist.

Typically, Vikin came up with some, often outlandish, idea and then he discussed it with his father until late at night. All those innovations cost a lot of money. Robert Jan just went to borrow more money from banks. So in fact the factory belonged to the banks. Which was, of course, a wonderful argument to use in the communist period by my father and by my uncle–that we actually didn't own anything!

After Robert Jan's death, Vikin became the CEO for the last few years while also consulting at an impressive number of other sugar factories. Vikin wrote about various aspects of sugar production: technology, economy, power plants, water management, planting sugar beet etc. He continued to write after the communist takeover when he could not use his own name.

At the time of crisis, to protect the business from rich capitalists, the formal ownership of the factory was changed from a private company to a limited company but almost all shares still belonged to our family. It made little difference at the time but prevented us from getting anything back when the communist regime collapsed in 1989.

After 1989, we could have perhaps fought for the three beautiful houses in Cerekvice (across the road from the factory). It would have been messy. They belonged to my grandmother, Marie Kořánová (Horebabička to us, 1874-1956). She was forced to sell them after the communist takeover in 1948 but she never got any money for them. How to prove it?!

Cerekvice, the Hausmans and Vikin

Apparently, I was in Cerekvice a lot during the first 5 years of my life. I see in my mind the grand staircase, the kitchen covered from top to bottom with white tiles, the big sitting room with the skin and head of a tiger near the

entrance. Vikin's first wife, Olga (Olu), was once caught lying on the skin naked. When I mentioned it to her daughter, whom I call Slávina, she said, "Yes, but do you know that Vikin could call, 'Máňa, bring me my slippers', and she would bring them to him in her mouth like a dog?"

I perfectly understand that. It was a role for my mother. She loved to perform and entertain. In my childhood, from time to time, she put on an animal mask, covered herself with a blanket that had a leopard pattern on it, dropped to all fours and tried to frighten me. It worked better when I was very small.

Vikin also liked to entertain, particularly ladies, but it was always his idea, his playfulness, never somebody else's script.

Olu belongs to the category of family myths and legends. She was extremely gifted in many ways and probably more than little spoilt (she came from a family a lot richer than were the Kořáns). She was very artistic and an accomplished translator (e.g. Richard Halliburton's *The Royal Road to Romance*). Obviously, she was a real character and so I insisted on meeting her, for the first time, before our emigration. She decided that she would call herself 'uncle Olu' because, according to her, I already had too many other aunts. I let it pass even though I did not think two were too many. Mistake! If I asked her, she might have told me that I had more aunts–those I was not supposed to know about. (I don't know if there were any.)

Before his work in the family firm, my father had a good job at the Ministry of Commerce and managed to be sent for further education to Paris in 1922. When he was there, the Kořáns visited him and Olu came from London to join them. My father selected a hotel for all of them that he considered clean and adequate. Olu gave it one look and moved to a better hotel.

Olu's father, MUDr Jaroslav Hausmann (1872-1923), was a surgeon and a gynaecologist. He was also the owner of a fancy clinic in Legerova near Václavské náměstí and a grand villa in Jevany built in 1908, as well as a co-founder of the famous soccer club *Slavia Praha* (flag). Well, they first founded it as a bicycle club. [At the time of writing, Slavia was at the top of the Czech Premier League by 16 points. The club now belongs to a Chinese investment group]

Olu's brother Ing. Jaroslav (Jája) Hausman (1907-1976) was the editor of *Svět motorů*–for many years the only Czech motorist magazine.

As a racing driver he achieved, as a co-driver to Zdeněk Pohl, the 2nd place in Rallye Monte-Carlo 1936 in the category under 1500 cm³ driving a Škoda Popular (also mentioned here). In 1945 Jája designed a scooter, Rodeo (not Mahindra Rodeo), and a motorised wheelchair (text in Czech; Hausman(n) family links in Czech).

Jája was also participating in aeroplane races–with Vikin. Vikin loved to fly and was elected chairman of the Czech *National Aero Club* (6).

In one of the aeroplane races, Jája and Vikin overshot the runway and hit a shack. As they were the first as well as the organisers of the race they decided that they won it.

Our bourgeois origin caused numerous problems for us. In 1948, Vikin worked at Česká cukerní a.s. from which he 'escaped' (says Marian) but ended up with a horrendous political assessment, completely devoid of truth.

Well, if you are a class enemy you are a class enemy! He tried to fix it by writing to the prime minister, without success of course. He struggled and in 1951 he worked as a coal miner in Kladno which must have partially improved his political profile. He then held routine technical positions in some Czech and Moravian sugar factories and joined Potravinoprojekt in 1955.

The only Czechoslovak Nobel Prize winner in chemistry, Jaroslav Heyrovský (1890-1967) knew Vikin who was his first assistant. Heyrovský lived in a house over the fence from Vila. (His wife was Kořánová but not related to us; she was from Prachatice in southern Bohemia.) There is correspondence dated from 1951 to 1955 between Vikin and Heyrovský when Vikin was unable to find a suitable job. Heyrovský tried but could not help him.

Vikin was not a Communist but his views were decidedly left wing–which, of course, meant nothing to the Communists. In Vikin's case, his views were simply an expression of his boundless generosity. (7)

In Potravinoprojekt, Dr Karel Polák promoted planting sugar beet seedlings and Vikin designed, in his spare time and without pay, the necessary machinery. This method was not, in the end, adopted. With Dr Ing. Alois Dolínek, Vikin designed a clarifier which became, at Dolínek's insistence, their joint patent. That is probably how Vikin met Čepička. (8) [In this very long note, starting with Čepička, I have attempted to describe the communist rulers of Czechoslovakia]

Vikin also had an extended stay in Slovakia where they apparently did not mind his bourgeois origin so much. There he designed machinery for drying agricultural products. He just excelled at innovative design solutions.

May 1945 (I was 3 years old)
During the last days of Protektorat our family was in Cerekvice.

According to Pavel, partisans were at one stage hiding in the factory and, fortunately at another time, Germans searched the whole factory standing all men facing the wall with their hands up.

It looks like there were different types of partisans because the partisan female leader seen in my father's 16 mm film was shot and killed a few days later, presumably by a rival group or the Russians.

My family listened to the BBC and other allied radios which was a crime punishable by death. They did not invite Pavla Beličínová, my nanny, originally Horebabička's maid, to listen. She was a Slovak (9) and might have had some dates with German soldiers. But she knew what was going on and since they invited our maid Bety Bauerová (1890-1984), Pavla hated Bety. For the same reason she disliked my brother Aleš who was, she believed, responsible for excluding her.

In May 1945, my family followed the end of Nazi regime on the radio and from the 5th May 1945 they could also hear the Czech radio broadcasting from revolutionary Prague and calling for help. Patton's US 3rd Army that was in Plzeň was not allowed to liberate Prague, it had to be the Red Army that came from Berlin only 4 days later. Prague was in fact saved by 'Vlasovci'– general Vlásov's anti-communist *Russian Liberation Army* (10).

In Cerekvice, I complicated the situation. Playing with my cousin Marian Kořán, I walked backwards and sat on the white hot elements of an electric heater. It was bad. Now there was a worry: how are they going to carry me if they have to run.

Marian and I were great buddies. I was supposed to sleep in the afternoon, he, one year older, did not have to. So I refused to sleep and insisted on playing with him.

Vikin decided to participate in the revolution. He took a few volunteers and went to the railway station to disarm a train of Hungarian soldiers. That was not a hopeless exercise. Two days later, 25 km away in Kameničky, two divisions of Hungarians, 26 000 men, switched sides. Some gave weapons to the partisans and went home, some even fought the Germans.

While Vikin and his pals negotiated, a motorised unit of German army unexpectedly arrived. Some Czechs escaped, some tried to hide but were found, some were released but Vikin and Mr Vodička were arrested.

That was a big scare for my family because earlier the same day the Germans hanged a young man, a postman and another family man in Cerekvice because somebody obstructed the road by placing a huge log across it. Fortunately, this time the Germans just asked the Protektorat police to take the men. The police put Vikin and Mr Vodička in prison in Vysoké Mýto. It is not clear if they were supposed to be executed (Pavel's version). German officers took over the whole ground floor of our house. They left quietly early in the morning on the 8th May 1945.

So my family spent the revolution in high anxiety about Vikin's fate. That was a real scare, real fright. Not a 'strašák'. Strašák (scarecrow) was my mother's favourite description of something difficult that needed to be done but we did not feel like doing it.

When the front got real close, the family and employees spent most of of their time in a bunker built in the factory. Provisions were stored in a big old kettle. Marie refused to go there, she stayed in the house. Mrs Vodičková sat there

howling, interrupted only by blaming very loudly Vikin for her husband's uncertain fate. Jari sat there like a statue.

Vikin returned frozen (he was arrested when the weather was warm and did not have warm clothes in the prison), hungry and exhausted. Instead of sleeping, he, with the help of my mother, found red and yellow materials and made a Soviet flag to display on the factory.

Besides the terrible pain caused by the white hot heater, I don't remember any of that. I remember the garden, where there was an under-size tennis court, an apricot tree (I got some apricots, not many), a long shack used for bowling (but not in my time) and 'rezerva', a rounded concrete tank meant for fire fighting but mainly used by my mother to swim in. In my time, they sometimes kept rezerva empty and I was driving a pedal car in it.
[It is still there visible and accessible from the road. But the sugar factory is no longer there, replaced by two other plants, and the main building has been completely modernised]

My mother would swim in anything, even in mountain lakes. My father avoided water. He did not avoid sun. When he could not sunbathe for a lengthy period, he used his (very primitive) 'horské slunce' (ultraviolet light lamp) apparatus.

My mother loved water–and amusement park rides available once a year at 'Matějská pouť'.

Apparently, we did not always stay in the same rooms in Cerekvice.
I remember only our room downstairs because there was a jar of honey on the top of the wardrobe, out of reach. It was there to use when there was absolutely nothing else to eat. From time to time we had some old high quality chocolates with worm holes in them. The worms were gone so we enjoyed it.

I only went to the tower once. There was a small room at the top, Ivan's (and my mother's) favourite place, with a lot of flies thus it was nicknamed Mušín. Presumably my mother chased them away when she wanted to relax there. After liberation, when Red Army soldiers occupied the house and took most of the rooms, Mušín was the bedroom of Russian female soldiers.

It was the third time Russian soldiers stayed in Cerekvice, after Suvorov in 1799 and 1813.

I remember my grandfather Robert Jan holding me in the passage to the kitchen on the first floor at Cerekvice and smiling at me which is remarkable because he died when I was only one year old. I am sure about this memory.

My mother wrote that he was so pleased that I was born that he took me, on his own, to church to thank the Lord. I did not cooperate. The organ playing frightened me so much that I was screaming there.

In Cerekvice in 1947, I also made my worst faux pas. I climbed all the way up into a small locomotive and a factory worker followed me to show me around. As he was almost on level with me, I took his cap off his head and threw it down to the ground. Furious, he slid down the ladder to pick it up and gave me a terrible look. He did not dare to punish me.

Later he became a member, as a workers' representative, of the board of directors (the photo includes him, Vikin's son Marian and me); and the CEO when the company was being nationalised. My father was then working in the government organisation that was nationalising sugar factories. Vikin was also involved. Nationalisation of industry was driven by Social Democrats rather than the Communists. The Communists had more profound plans which they implemented later.

Our cars

I remember the Tatra 57 extended wheelbase six-seater standing in Cerekvice on bricks after the wheels were bartered for some food. My brothers did not like that car because its engine was much weaker than our previous Chrysler. Chrysler was still around, in my time it probably belonged to the factory. It had a huge cylindrical stove sticking out of the trunk at the back to make gas by partially burning wood. There was no petrol available for private cars.

And there was a small car, Aero, perhaps Aero 662, standing in the yard in Cerekvice and which we, a group of boys, tried to push to see if it would start.

Fortunately, it did not because we did not know that one needed a Bosch key to turn on the ignition. I loved cars–and trucks: one of my first words was ‘auto’ and when I was bigger, Mr Škrba was allowing me to go with him in his lorry.

My father liked Tatra cars (photos in a Czech article). They did not require much maintenance unlike his first car, Renault (I don’t know which model), that, in 1924, required valve adjustments every few hundred kilometres.

Apparently, Vikin wanted a sports car. Unfortunately, he did not have enough money so he bought only the chassis and drove in it on a makeshift seat. A complete contrast with my father who bought relatively cheap cars and had the body made or improved by the famous company *Sodomka* in Vysoké Mýto. After the war, the firm was nationalised and renamed *Karosa*. Josef Sodomka was left in charge but then he was imprisoned for 3 years.
[Today the plant belongs to *IVECO*. It is one of the biggest and best factories in Europe producing buses, a beautiful plant!]

My father believed that the safe speed of driving was 80 km/h. In his time he was probably right. My mother drove a bit faster and hit a pear tree.

Much later, as a doctor, Aleš needed a car, so he was looking for cheap old cars all the time. One day, somebody brought an Aero to Vila to show Aleš. Obviously, a two-seater was not big enough for Aleš’s extended family.

At one stage he had a very old Škoda that went well but only downhill. Much better was his 4 seater Tatra 75. It just had weak brakes. Going down Letenská ulice, I had to go on the pavement to prevent hitting the car that stopped in front of me. I also replaced the valves of the engine. The engine, flat four ‘boxer’, did not have engine heads. One had to pull out the whole engine block that included the head from the two pistons on each side.

Then, with my incompetent help, Aleš bought a Wanderer that needed a general repair of the engine. That was done in Suchdol with the whole family participating. Wanderer was almost big enough for Aleš’s family. It probably needed many more repairs because we emigrated in Tatra 77.

Prague

One day a boy in the neighbourhood called me ‘fat arse’. I thought that it was because I was fat, which I was not, and only much later I realised that it was his class hatred.

We played outside, in the garden but mainly in the streets, running around, kicking the ball etc. all the time. Often, I came home completely exhausted. So I was not fat.

When I was a little boy, I had a scooter, a cheap one. (In fact the second one. The first one was even cheaper, it had wooden wheels, I could not use it.) The handlebar broke off near the wheel, I fell forward and I hit the road. There was a lot of blood and I acquired some grit that is still embedded in my knee.

My closest friends were my classmates Honza Brodil who could see us from their flat (the top floor window above ‘altánek’ (summer house) on the left in the photo of Vila) and Jindra Pilař who lived round the corner in a basement flat. Honza is now dead; after the ‘Velvet revolution’ of 1989 I saw him only once. I am very pleased that I can see Jindra when I come to Prague, he discovered me a few years ago on Internet.

Jindra has surprised me because he was one of very few people who under great pressure refused to accept the Russian occupation of 1968. Most people just did it to get on with their lives.

Later another classmate, Petr Kasa, an avid reader, became my very good friend as well. RIP. I did not read much other than the communist daily *Rudé Právo*. Instead, I went to the small local cinema called *Bruska*, close by at the beginning of Dejvická ulice. Almost all films that did not have age restrictions were marked with a triangle which meant that the ticket cost next for nothing to children. Of all the films that I watched at *Bruska*, I remember one.

In winter, skating was done at tennis courts beyond the other end of ‘Kadetka’, that means close to the tram stop ‘Pražský hrad’. The main entrance to that military compound is facing our street. In our family, we called the compound Kadetka (officers’ academy) which it was before WWI.

During Protektorat, it was the barracks for ϟϟ.

At the skating ring, the entrance fee was very reasonable and when one was hungry, it was possible to buy a slice of bread with a thin layer of mustard spread on it.

Alternatively, there usually was ice on a pond next to Jízdárna Pražského hradu (1694), that means the horse riding hall of the Castle, now used for art exhibitions. My classmate Petr Šteffek lived a bit further behind Jízdárna, a few metres from the current presidential villa built recently. His father was a gardener there.

Šteffek did not like the ice patch much because other boys were bigger and when they played their rudimentary ice hockey, they made him a goalie. But quite often there was nobody there and so we could skate without being bothered. Šteffek remembers his early life there with a lot of nostalgia. (11)

If you go down from the tram stop 'Královský letohrádek' to Vila, you see how steep it is. Ideal for sledging in winter. I had an old but sturdy sledge and we went all the way across our road and on the pavement. There were hardly ever any cars in U Písecké brány.

Šteffek remembers that place for another reason. We went together to Scouts, albeit the Roman catholic version, when we were just 5 years old– thus before the organisation was banned by the regime and our two scoutmasters imprisoned. The clubroom was a few steps from the entrance to St Vitus cathedral–look left and you see the windows. In summer, we sometimes went with our scoutmasters, we remember only one name, Standa, to the flat grassy knoll next to the steep road near Vila.

Šteffek: *"There was a row of strong trees, I think maple. We played a game of hiding behind those trees and shouting the names of people whom we saw. For me, it was the first group to which I belonged and it was great to do something with all the others. Father Šebor was also with us from time to time, he could walk on his hands and had a motorcycle, so for me he was a real Somebody. My dad explained to me why the Scouts were banned,*

I was very sad and I have hated the Communists ever since."

We had another friend who called himself Bořek. When his father, Count Dohalský (12), stayed in the military compound that has the main gate facing our street, Bořek could take us to the huge garden that is seen from the tram. He was a wild and reckless character for which we admired him and it was wonderful to run around in that garden.

I can't believe that I was a bully. Jiří Landa who was younger than us wrote to me that four boys, Vavruch, Kasa, Brodil and Skrbek attacked him on their way home from school and pushed him to the ground. He had some scratches from that. Later he became good friends with Skrbek.

All that is completely wiped out from my memory. If it happened, the action was probably led by Kasa and Skrbek was not there because, if I remember well, he belonged to the group of boys with whom we were waging wars–that consisted almost solely of throwing stones. The fourth boy might have been Jindra Pilař but he would not participate much. He does not remember it either. Or it was Bořek, or there were only three of us.

We were fighting among ourselves as well. Once Kasa threw a sharp stick that hit me just under my eye. My father then wrote a letter to school telling them that Kasa was a dangerous character.

Jindra was a victim of bullying at school, until he came under protection of Karel Kozák who was from a military family and wanted to become a professional soldier himself. Well done, Karel!

Domeček

All that running in the street did not make me a sportsman, it just boosted my stamina. I needed that. When I was a little boy, it was just terrible for me to walk from the bus stop in Křiváček or Nespeky to Domeček and a sheer torture to walk two more kilometres from the train station in Pyšely. Domeček was our weekend house close to the river Sázava in Ledce near Nespeky, about 30 km south of Prague. It was built just before the war and it was a real blessing much later when my brothers' children were small.

According to Majka, when my mother first wanted it, it met with resistance from her parents as well as from my father who was always careful with money and knew that it would require a lot of maintenance. In the end he liked to be there.

Ledce belonged to Vaništa, a farmer who got it (typically for one third of its value) in terms of the land reform after 1919. It was so called ‘zbytkový statek’ that means a bigger farm that could not be further divided to applicants for land in order to maintain its viability. He leased a strip of his farm land to people who wanted to build weekend houses. He refused to sell the land. The Communists took it from him and made it a ‘state farm’ which often suffered from poor management and shortage of workers. Bringing in Gypsies did not help. [Ledce now belongs to Ing. Vaništa and Domeček as well, one half bequeathed to him by Vikin’s widow Zdenka and the other half sold to him by Marian for 200 000 Kč]

Vaništa had a telephone connected to some manual exchange. He allowed us to use it and when we finished, he asked the exchange how much the call cost. Then he told us how much we must pay him. We used it once or twice.

The Sázava was just a few hundred metres from Domeček. It was nice to swim there although the water was, I think, getting dirtier and dirtier over the years. We had two small wooden Maňásek boats (in Czech), one with a blue painted strip for Aleš and one with a red strip for Pavel. That was fun.

At Domeček on Sundays my parents were busy in the garden or my father was putting linseed oil on the wooden walls. I did not much participate in any of that. When all work was done, my father liked to read aloud good novels or the Bible. I liked that.

What I did not like was when they tried to force me to drink goat’s milk fetched from Barochov over the hill.

One weekend my father took me and my niece Helena to Domeček. He brought a tin of ‘meat’ which was really just pieces of fat. Helenka refused to eat those ‘špeky’ and when forced, she vomited it. So he slapped her. To this day she vividly remembers standing there covered in vomit and

shivering with cold.

She was slapped by him more than once. I was slapped by my father only once. I was holding some jam on the tip of a knife and was clowning with it. I was warned, I did not listen, the jam fell on the tablecloth, I was slapped. Now I wonder if he felt that he did not have the right to hit me or that I was hit only once because we loved each other.

Another memorable stay at Domeček involved my brothers and their first wives. It was a bad idea. I was just a little boy so I did not understand the underlying tensions, I just saw what happened.

There were two issues. On the top of the wardrobe downstairs, there was a vase with some dried flowers. It had always been there. One wife wanted to throw it away and put some fresh flowers it the vase. The other wife objected. They quarrelled.

The second case involved me, I did not want to eat something. One wife was happy with it, the other was not. They quarrelled. This time it got so bad that Zdenka was hysterical. She was lying upstairs and Pavel was wiping her face with a wet cloth. Lída was, of course, calm and collected.

In the forest above Domeček, slightly to the right, there are my father's two or three firearms buried in the ground. He put it here, his army pistol and a 'Flobertka' (probably a .22 or 6 mm single shot target pistol that my mother liked to shoot) after the German occupation. All weapons had to be surrendered to the Germans, to keep them was punishable by death. We tried several times to find them but the forest had changed and my father's markings had disappeared.

All we had was an air gun. I shot a bird, it was hurt but not killed. It made me feel very sad so I did not do it again.

Bourgeois and poor

My childhood was very different from my brothers' who could buy a fresh bread roll with ham every day on their way home from school. Or their

grandmother, ‘Malá babička’ (Little granny), Anna Vavruchová née Klapilová (1863-1944), wife of Rudolf Wawruch, would buy it for them. Aleš was her favourite and he loved her back.

'Little granny’ was the name I coined for her when I was 3 and my mother wrote it in a caption in my photo album. It was soon adopted by others, except Pavel. Some years ago, when I used it, Pavel was cross. She was, he corrected me, ‘Bábinka profesorová’ (because she was a wife of a ‘profesor’). That makes me think that he resented, for the rest of his life, any changes that I brought in. Perhaps because he was sorry that he lost his status of ‘the little one’.

But he felt superior because he was handy and I had, according to him, ‘volšový pracky’ (not dexterous, olše=alder tree, pracky=paws; many years later, Pavel took it back). Yes, I dropped and broke most of my father’s gramophone records. Clumsy!

Life was different in my time. When I was at high school, I walked past an Italian ice cream parlour at the bottom of Myší díra every day for three years and bought myself ice cream only once.
[Myší díra was the old road to Hradčany, built by Albrecht z Valdštejna in the 17th century. Chotkova ulice was built in 1831 to move goods from the railway line that ended in Dejvice]

I think that I had proper ice cream for the first time at the reception of Lída’s and Aleš’s wedding in 1949. I ate a lot of it. I wonder if Lída’s half-brothers also remember that.

We did not eat honey, quality chocolate or sardines. Those were my childhood dreams as well as *Ovomaltine*. Once my grandmother Marie Kořánová, ‘Horebabička’, who lived on the top floor in Vila had a can of *Ovomaltine*. I was allowed one spoon, I still remember the taste. (13)

And another time we had a small can of peanuts with a funny picture on it. Alas, just one tin. Raisins were stored in the pantry but they were kept for Christmas sweets. My mother would not be denied that pleasure and would make every year up to ten kinds–always displaying a list of them stuck on a cupboard. [So you know what I now eat every day, except that I eat better nuts]

I had my first banana in 1949 at the age of 7 when I was leaving the hospital ‘Bulovka‘. I did not like it. I was in the hospital in strict isolation on the suspicion of whooping cough. I believe that they gave me penicillin which was still rare. (The more standard treatment was to wrap up in blankets to sweat.) Aleš, a medic at that time, climbed the fence and in his white coat slipped in to visit me. Thank you, Aleš, I really appreciated it! [Decades later, that experience made me stay with little Rudolf as much as possible when he was in a hospital in the Transvaal]

Much later on, I was in Bulovka twice again. Once to have my tonsils removed. That was a good thing to do, they were rotten to the core. Before that, I suffered from sore throat almost continuously. Nothing really helped. I was gargling various mixtures. I was still very young when I poured together two different medicines. Just after I put it on the table, the glass exploded so violently that I could not find any big pieces of glass lying round.

As a child, I did not realize that we were bourgeois. Yes, we lived in Vila but, just like almost everybody, we had little money. What I felt most was that there were hardly any Christmas or birthday presents. It came as a shock to me after the first three happy years–happy for me, not for the nation. In early days, I even got a lot of presents for my name day. I was spoilt.

I did not have many toys. I envied Marian, who had some wonderful technical toys in their rented villa. Marian did not seem to appreciate it. Most of my toys were inherited from my brothers and they were in various states of disrepair. Toys that were older than that, like my mother’s blockhouse and shop or my father’s stone block building set were considered too valuable to allow me to play with them–not surprising seeing that I hardly ever played inside.

Right after the war, my father was the only person in Vila who was employed (except Bety who was employed by us), he had two sons studying and he had a lot of expenses both with Vila and Domeček. My mother was not always careful with money (her brother Vikin was worse). Then Ivan and Alena graduated and Ivan step by step took care of the maintenance and improvements of the ground floor (central heating in 1962). Originally, Vila had had central heating on all floors. Unfortunately, it was early days for that innovation and it did not work. The radiators were still left in some rooms but

the boiler in the cellar was gone.

Before his retirement, my father was the chief accountant (CFO) of Čechofracht, a state-owned company that had about ten freight ships mainly for commerce with China. His salary was just average and it became worse when he went on pension as soon as he could, in 1955. The pension was small and while my mother had been working for a few years already, she did not get much either.

I did not much like what we had. For example, the heavy custom-made furniture (some of it is in Miluška's house in Oucmanice). I envied people who had much cheaper, Scandinavian looking furniture.

Everything was old, we could not have anything new. When I needed a bed because there were too many of us in Vila, an old metal frame was put on rough wooden legs–building construction site timber quality. It was done by my friend Jindra's father, a kind and helpful man, 'pan Pilař'. When my mother needed a bed, I took various small tables, cut off their legs, put them together and put two horsehair mattresses on the top of it. It was narrow and very hard.

My bicycle (actually my father's) was about 1925 model made solidly by the Austrian company Puch. It was very heavy and a butt of jokes, 'puch' means bad odour in Czech. Pavel had a better bicycle but I was not allowed to use it.

Our skis were 'sensible'. They were suitable, sort of, for downhill as well as suitable, sort of, for walking and running. Very old-fashioned. My father's skiing style was also very old-fashioned and safe and that's what he taught me.

The Ministry of Foreign Trade, where my father worked before he was deployed to Čechofracht, had a lorry with a tarpaulin cover that was used for trips to the mountains. My father and I did it quite a few times. We started very late at night on Saturday, froze for about two hours–the cover was poorly sealed making the sub-zero outside temperature even worse–stopped for hot tripe soup and then continued to freeze until we arrived there. We could ski

the whole day and return at night again.

I was not a sportsman. I never managed to master skills and techniques that were needed in various sports. A few times I tried and failed. I succeeded only when no technique was necessary. So I was second in a ski race when our primary school class was sent in the winter of 1955/6 to Krušné hory. That so amazed my classmate Petr Šteffek that he mentioned it when I was 70. He, a born sportsman, expected to be second–after undisputed Ivan Hůla (+2022). I repeated good results in long distance running at high school.

And I was also good at walking on stilts. I could run on them quite fast, walk up and down stairs, jump on one of them and hold them in front of me, not the proper safe way in my armpits. Unlike my brothers, I did not have a tennis court, or money to go to one, or a ping-pong table. But I had their stilts.

Besides my father, who brought me up? My mother was very interested in me during the first three (war) years. She recorded my progress, the funny words I used and what I could do. It was not too difficult to care for me because she had Pavla to help her. She took me to one of the last performances of Kašpárek–Vojta Merten and she devised a good night saying, ”Petřínečku, dobrou noc, vyspi se na zdravo a na růžovo a ať se ti zdá něco hezkého nebo nic” to ward off my frequent nightmares. But later she always had so many other activities going on...and then she was forced to start working.

During the day, I was left with Bety. Except that I was not sitting at home. I was a street kid. Nevertheless, Bety cleaned my shoes and made sure that I was properly washed in the evening and nothing was neglected in the morning: dressing, breakfast, school bag and toilet. It took time so Jindra and Honza had to wait for me outside and then we had to run. With my mother absent, it was my sister-in-law Zdenka who found me as a ‘neglected child’ and spent a lot of time with me. That was great.

Jarmila

My mother did accompany me when I was a little boy and needed to go somewhere, e.g. to ‘rytmika’ which was Jarmila Jeřábková’s (14) class for small children on the top floor of Palác Metro at the corner of Národní

třída/Na Perštýně (owner Kleinhampl). The place was called ‘Ateliér’ and there was a big (that’s how I saw it, remember I was little) wooden floor and we ‘danced’ on it under glass ceiling dressed in simple, faintly coloured tunics. Pavel remembered with glee that Aleš was also forced to do that and it did not suit him at all. Presumably Pavel did it too and did not mind.

Jarmila was very much around after I was born and spent a lot of time at Domeček. Much later I went, both in summer and winter, always on my own, with Jarmila and her sons Radvan and Zbyněk, younger than me, to their cottage at the edge of Krkonoše near Rokytnice. There, for the first time in my life, probably in January 1955, I was smitten with a rather wonderful girl, Ljuba Černá (*1941, in Czech). They had a cottage over the hill.
[Both Radvan and Zbyněk (a prominent film sound engineer) died a few years ago. I missed Radvan, my fault. Zbyněk invited me for delicious baby chicken meal. Ljuba and her husband were also there]

In summer, Ljuba made us ‘perform’ a play that she knew by heart about a cobbler. I was the cobbler. The audience (of about half a dozen) rewarded me with a big laugh when I declared about how well I sleep, the wrong way round, “Jak si ráno lehnu, tak se večer probudím.” (How I lie down in the morning, that’s how I wake up in the evening). [Close to my current lifestyle.]

At the Mikulíks’ cottage, I called Jarmila ‘Jarmila’. Some of her friends tried to correct me: how could you, a little boy, call her Jarmila, you must say ‘paní Jarmila’. So in front of them, I did so.

OUR COMMUNIST FAMILY

My father, Laďa Vavruch, Taiček

So we were ‘bourgeois’ and, at the same time, we were a communist family, but only my immediate family. My father had been a Social Democrat since 1919. In 1921, the left wing of the party split to became the Communist party of Czechoslovakia, KSČ. My father didn’t follow them and stayed in the Social Democratic party until 1948 when the party’s new left wing [in my opinion treacherous] was absorbed into KSČ. The Social Democratic party was then dissolved as in Stalin’s eyes Social Democrats were dangerous enemies.

My father was in the left wing of the party mainly because he considered the right wing party leadership to be idiots. He did not indoctrinate me. If it was necessary, he just answered questions. When he did so, he never departed too far from the official narrative. For example, when the Korean war started, the communist official line was that capitalist South Korea attacked North who then had the right to liberate South. That was an outright lie, South was not at all ready for the war and, quite quickly, North took most of the peninsula. My father’s explanation was, I remember it well, that North attacked South but that was because South was preparing to attack North. (15)

Once in the garden in Cerekvice, he told my mother, “One day, this garden will be enjoyed by all people, not just by our family.” I wonder if it ever did. There is nothing left of it now.

Over many years, my father invested a princely amount of money in an annuity. When the regime changed, that was an easy pick for the Communists. He lost it all but it did not change his views.

From 1924 to 1947, my father was one of the directors in Cerekvice. He was in charge of sales, purchases, logistics, administration, accounting and all other non-technical functions.

I remember how disappointed I was when I saw two office desks in Cerekvice, old fashioned with roulette lockable covers, and neither one was my father’s, they both belonged to Vikin! My father clearly did not believe that he needed one.

It was boring for him and he stayed in Cerekvice as little as possible. He did not feel at home there and he would have much preferred to read philosophy: Spinoza, Kant and so on, to dance or to play the piano. When he had time, my father practised piano four hours a day, but never in Cerekvice. Of course, when he was in Cerekvice, he was diligent, meticulous and fully engaged. He was a great help to Robert Jan.

He danced a lot, almost naked. In my uneducated opinion, he greatly modified the Isadora Duncan's (16) method (that was very feminine) to suit a male performer making it much more muscular and to project strength. He was perhaps influenced by a flashy book he possessed on men's health, strength and beauty.

My opinion was contradicted by an expert, Eva Blažíčková: *"It's not about muscles!!! Take a good look at the photo where his right hand is stretched forward. But it's not just a hand outstretched! There is a perfect understanding of Duncan principles in terms of movement–the distribution of energy in the body, the location in the centre and the movement into space. That's the miracle! The people in that noble society knew why they admired it. It somehow contained fundamental philosophical questions. No bullshit, no decorations, no descriptions, no explanation of why or otherwise. In addition, the movement in the photo has clear, readable content."*

That 'noble society' was *Společnost Elisabety* (sic) *Duncanové* proposed by my father and led by PhDr Emanuel Siblík (1886-1941). Then there was Emanuel Frinta (1896-1970) who lived in a flat facing Metro in Národní třída and liked to make drawings of the dancers. He was so excited, "Such long legs!" See the list of his publications for children; he was also giving drawing lessons to Pavel.

I was sitting on the lap of Karel Svolinský, designer of a window in St. Vitus, when he took a thick pencil and sketched a picture of a train going over a bridge with a village, a stork etc. underneath. "That's no good", he said (he was wrong) and made another picture *Petříčkovi* in pen and water colours: farm animals coming to say "Hallo" to a dog, Rek. Dated 1943.

My father's involvement with Duncanism started with his encounter with Tanta.

It also triggered his romantic interest in Jarmila. He called her 'Moonlight Lady' and was madly in love. But Jarmila, wisely, decided to marry Ing. Ladislav Mikulík, our good friend.

I was a little boy so I don't remember Tanta. I just remember her teeth in a glass in the bathroom.

My father tried to teach me to play the piano but soon gave up. Perhaps he saw that my fingers were too short, his hands were big with long fingers.

When we were de facto scouts, we were singing a lot and it was good to have a guitar. It was not easy but I finally got a nice one. I learned the accords D, A7 and simplified G. So much for my musical career.

My father liked to sing and he sang very nicely. Following his example I was also singing until, alas only recently, I discovered how awful I was. So I stopped. Too late! Sorry everybody!

One of the books written by my father was a strictly Marxist treatment of Kant. Kant tried to merge idealistic and materialistic philosophy, or perhaps gave birth to both, and my father criticized it. The book was rejected by publishers because there was no point in confusing people by discussing idealistic philosophy, everybody knew that only materialistic philosophy was the correct one. There was also professional jealousy as my father was not in the profession. So the professionals, who knew much less than my father, were giving him silly advice what to study to understand it better.

I did not like his style, his sentences were too long and complicated. He said that it was necessary to express exactly what he had in mind.

My father read in four languages: Czech, German, French and English. He read an enormous amount of specialized literature and good fiction like Thomas Mann, Dickens, Balzac, Théophile Gautier, Tolstoj, Dostojevskij...and

Jirásek. When I read books by Karl May borrowed from Ivan, he was cross with me. He was amused by *The Pickwick Papers*, he almost laughed. That was rare. I heard him telling a (feeble) joke only once, he was not good at it.

In architecture, he liked the Gothic style and often showed me how previously wonderful Gothic structure was completely ruined by Baroque renovations. I did not understand it, I liked the Baroque. My father held equally strongly negative views about ballet, I did not mind that.

He unreservedly admired works of František Bílek, I often did not understand why. By the way, Bílek's daughter Berta was my mother's classmate and she congratulated me and Blanka on our wedding. I think that it was Bílek's son František who sent me a long and sincere letter from South America.

Unfortunately, my father was not very talkative. He knew so much and told me so little! Perhaps because I would not be able to discuss things with him. He liked discussing philosophy or other serious matters but not at home. The best place was a café frequented by local luminaries, including, before the war, by JUDr Emil Hácha (2) who also participated in discussions.

My father did not like to quarrel but he quite often critically communicated in writing with my brothers and others. Because he did not talk much at home, his little speech every year at the Christmas Eve table was so memorable: "Tak dětičky jsme se zase sešli…" Perhaps he kept so much in himself and that was the reason why he could not sleep. Night after night.

He certainly did not want any grieving. He did not want pets because they die. It was not easy but I managed to get a dog, Dášenka, named after a 1933 book by Karel Čapek (strangely enough, Čapek called his dog Dášeňka). She was hard headed and did not listen to me. Obviously, she did not think I was high enough in the pecking order. Fortunately for all of us, she died after a vaccination before we got used to her.

My father had some really particular habits. He believed in chewing everything thoroughly (I forgot how many times), it drove Robert Jan and Vikin crazy when they were eating with him, they both ate very fast.

He kept his left hand clean by touching everything only with his right hand. I am still trying to do that.

He was instructing all of us to stand and walk upright minding the 'three points' which needed to be pushed forward or back.

Every evening, he put some oil (I think ricinoleic acid) on his scalp and then combed it off with very fine head lice comb. I don't think that it really worked to prevent baldness. Do you want to know about his penis?

I believe that he was hungry most of the time and that's why he ate hard chewy sweets/candies that were given to him on all occasions. They ruined his teeth.

My father liked to ski and he believed that real skiing was in deep freshly fallen powdery snow called 'prašan' (prach=dust) which, of course, required a different technique, i.e. 'telemark skiing'. After the war, he managed to go just once more to practice it in the Austrian Alps.

He took my mother and myself for a few days of skiing at Jestřábí boudy in Krkonoše (in Czech). I was barely 9 but had to be listed as 10 years old because to get to the chalet in winter was considered too difficult and dangerous for smaller children. As it happened we went up there in zero visibility in a snow storm.

Another heroics occurred the previous summer at Domeček when my father gashed his leg with an axe and I had to run to the farm in Ledce for help.

My father took me to Krkonoše more than once. Over the years, in summer, he took me to various other places, mainly in Moravia and Southern Bohemia. It was always on the cheap, by train all the way or first by train and then on our heavy bicycles (the second one was ladies bicycle), and we slept where we could, never in hotels, and the sheets were not always freshly washed.

My mother did not participate in our bicycle tours but she liked to go skiing with us. In the summer of 1960, she went with my father, Pavel and myself to Slovakia. There, in a restaurant, we were told that no food was available.

"Nič", said the waiter, he probably hated Czechs. My response "Když nič tak nič" (When nothing then nothing) was then used in the family.

Once my father took Radvan and Zbyněk with us on a bicycle trip but they hated it. With their faster bikes, they had to wait for us all the time.

When travelling, my father wrote with special ‘inkoustová’ pencils that left permanent marks so he did not have to worry about pens. In the mountains, we were wearing sandals without socks which allowed rain to drain from the sandals. We had plastic raincoats without hoods and simple berets.

My father’s interests went beyond Duncanism. For example, he was on the committee of *Společnost Boženy Němcové* (article in Czech) that managed to get Němcová’s statue (in Czech) erected at the island Žofín next to Národní divadlo in 1955. The chairlady of the society was a naturalistic novel writer Anna Maria Tilschová (in Esperanto; in Czech; photo). My father then maintained a close personal friendship with her until her death in 1957.

Then Jarmila Lormanová (1910-2000) took over chairmanship of the society. When asked to read an obituary written by Pavel at my father’s funeral, she, to her horror, discovered that my father was a member of KSČ. She flatly refused to read it. She changed her mind only after being told a bit more about my father. Of course, we knew that we could ask somebody else.

Lormanová did not read Pavel’s text. She rewrote it, very nicely, and then she did not mind presenting it.

My mother was blissfully ignorant about politics and the regime’s atrocities. When she was working, she applied to become a member of KSČ. She was rejected after they discovered that she believed in God.

I also believed in God and went through the motions in the catholic church. I believed until I realised that I no longer believed. I went to the magistrate in Prague 6 and asked to be removed from the church. They just told me to consider myself removed. It did not occur to me to tell the church, I was not in any contact with them for years. I don’t remember in which year it was,

I was probably a young teenager. I did not know that by canon law, the church does not recognise, allow or accept such resignations.

Humans are wired to have spiritual needs and they experience reward when they practice it. Karl Marx is quoted: “Religion is the opium of the people”.
[Die Religion...ist das Opium des Volkes. In full: Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world, and the soul of soulless conditions. It is the opium of the people]

I can’t escape that. I make a point of looking up to the sky and thanking my fate when I avoid some serious danger–which was invariably caused by my stupidity. And I send greetings via the moon to my mother, my father and the increasing number of dead relatives, plus other ‘dear ones’.

My father might have been a wide-ranging polytheist and, perhaps, I am an agnostic rather than atheist now because I can’t believe that living structures like the cells in my body, with all their complex chemical processes and mysterious ability to live, could have just assembled themselves by a series of lucky chances. But I am not trying to solve the problem, I am delegating it. Life on Earth appeared soon after the Earth formed, 4 billion years ago.
I believe that it came from outer space. So let those intelligent beings who live where the life came from agonise about its origin.

I am quite happy that our ancestors were tiny worms that lived 2.1 billion years ago and fed on even older microbes, let the origin of those worms and microbes remain a mystery to us.

Ivan Rozmanitý
At the primary school, we liked our Russian language teacher, Ivan Rozmanitý. Ivan lived or studied with his brother Hubert (Berta, *1926) in Russia, so he was somehow politically protected. We were told that he was an old scout from Valašsko but Berta claimed in court that he was born in Slovakia (in Czech). Their early life is a bit murky, was their surname some sort of clue? We did not question anything, to us they were from Valašsko and studied in the Soviet Union, good! What was important is that Ivan decided to do scouting with us and later Berta joined him.

In 1953 our whole class went to the ‘School in the nature’ which was not

in the nature at all. We were in a magnificent villa in a small town Krásná Lípa in extreme northern Bohemia. There Ivan selected a group of boys and played a game with us by hiding messages for us and giving us various tasks, some of it at night. Of course, he denied that he was the author of the messages, so it was very mysterious and intriguing.

At the following year's 'School in the nature' in Jiřetín, there was a pond nearby and there was an old raft and the boys became 'Pirates' and we cut a piece of black drape in an abandoned theatre (17) and made a pirate flag. Now the selected group was comprised of 6 boys. Unfortunately, I had a sore throat when the other boys first went on the raft, so I did not become the admiral (Ivan), captain ('Keňar' Ivan Hůla) or one of the officers (Vláďa Mach, 'Derviš' Petr Šteffek and 'Petříček' Petr Kasa). Honza Brodil and I were just deck hands.

Back in Prague, Ivan created a special group for us within the young pioneers organisation. He could do that because he was instructed by the head-mistress to organise the young pioneers (a highly politicised children's organisation) at school. A few more boys were added, then, a few months later there was a girls' group and the next year new groups of younger children as well.

It could not last forever, so we stopped being pioneers and became 'young tourists'–perhaps following an example of another old scout in Prague, a popular author Jaroslav Foglar. Finally we ended up in Svazarm, the regime's militaristic organisation. Nevertheless, we were doing the same thing all the time. It was the summer camps and during the year we had regular meetings in some club room and, although not too often, went for a hike.

One memorable camp was in Příběnice. It was very close to an island that was inhabited by Adamites in the 15th century. To get our provisions, we had to cross the river Lužnice on a flat boat and walk with a four wheel cart about 3 km to Malšice. That village's claim to fame is that it is on the first electrified railway line in Austria-Hungary, Tábor-Bechyně, built by František Křižík in 1903 (700 V DC, today 1.5 kV).

Berta brought his .22 rifle so shooting it was a new, unusual activity for us. Also, that was where I passed my badge of solitude.

At the camps, there was no luxury. We paid for the camp but nobody could pay much so economy was paramount. For example, for breakfast we always had a slice of bread with cheap jam that was purchased in big pails. Some of us had black teeth at the end of the camp.

The tents were always on a structure called ‘podsada’ (in Czech), Czech invention. We did the normal scouting things, built a tower from logs, learned the knots, competed for badges. The most difficult was the badge of silence: not to say a word during 24 hours, the most scary was the badge of solitude: to leave the camp for the night and sleep on the ground somewhere in the forest without being spotted by anybody. Those were parts of ‘the three eagle feathers”. The third test was 24 hours without eating anything.

Jarda (Veteš) Humhej was in the second year’s group called ‘Zálesáci’ (Woodsmen, officially known as ‘Zelená družina’=green crew) led by Berta Rozmanitý. Jarda supplied valuable memorabilia: a magazine from January and February 1958 where I am mentioned, under my first nickname ‘Vávra’, as the person who prevented publication of the previous issue because I was ‘learning how to disassemble’ the group’s cyclostyle duplicating machine.
In another document, we have Jarda’s and the crew’s commendation notices, duties roster of five crews at a camp, probably at Soutice, the round badge of Zálesáci (virtually identical to the wolf’s head (18) in Junák-skaut badge), etc.

At our camp in Soutice, when the sun was low throwing long shadows, I stood with a big axe above my head, looked at my shadow and shouted, “Don’t I look like Jánošík?” So my new nickname became Jánošík.
[I used it when I communicated with the scout archive in Prague]

Later Šteffek jumped barefoot on that axe that was thrown with the blade up under his feet by Jarda. Without any telephones or means of transport, it was a struggle to get an ambulance to take him to the hospital.

When we were in Svazarm, the secret police finally took notice of us and interrogated some of us; I was disappointed that I was not interrogated.

Ivan lost his teaching job and became a stagehand in a theatre. Scouting was definitely not allowed in Czechoslovakia.

Strangely enough, on a high school trip to Krakow and Warsaw, we saw scouts! All those years, scouts were allowed in Poland.

In the early days, when we were pioneers, I had an incident with Petr Šteffek. One day. he didn't come to school with his compulsory red scarf of young pioneers and when I asked him about it he said that he would not wear such a rag. So I ran to Ivan and told him what Šteffek said.

He said that we would discuss the matter at a meeting in the afternoon. Petr Šteffek and I would be there. By the allocated time I was deeply ashamed of what I had done and I was terrified that Ivan would raise the issue. But he did not! He just taught me a lesson. I was 10 at the time and I have never done anything like that again. I would never become Pavlík Morózov.

I could not meet Ivan when I returned to Prague the first time in 1991. He had drunk himself to death a few years earlier.

When I was young, I was a convinced Communist and stupidly assumed that everybody was. Then I realised that it was full of ideologically justified lies and gangster practices. My communist belief came mainly from the newspapers and from schools, although at school it was not so straightforward.

In the last years of primary school, our class teacher Marie Heppnerová, a very kind lady, was not politically engaged at all, but the head mistress was. She was a fanatic and everybody disliked her.

Jindra kept the names of our classmates in the picture of Marie Heppnerová and grade 7 pupils (19). By the way, it was probably Marie Heppnerová who made me stay behind after hours and read aloud *Babička* because I was a slow reader. I don't know in which grade it was. The intellectual giant, Václav Černý, considered *Babička* to be the most Czech of all Czech books.

I don't remember other teachers, except Randová because she was a real

character. She bragged that she knew all navigable rivers in Bohemia so you could drop her anywhere on a river bank and she would know where she was. Her favourite saying was “Všechno jde, I chcíplá kočka jde–stáhnout!” (Everything can be done, even a dead cat can go–to taxidermist).

In her cabinet, she was breeding silkworm moths and we were bringing her mulberry leaves from trees near ‘Pražský hrad’ tram stop. It was interesting to see how the silkworms covered themselves with silk. The trees did not belong to anybody in particular and we loved to eat mulberries.

She had strange methods that irritated me. Once, something got stolen, which was unusual, she investigated and I interfered by throwing in clues that could be interpreted as if I was guilty (I was not). She saw through it and to stop me she shouted, “Now you caught yourself with your little claw”.

Randová taught sciences, i.e. physics and chemistry. She was good at demonstrating things but demanded attention from everybody. Once some boys were not listening, quietly discussing something else. She was just using a small scale so she threw a handful of little scale weights at them.

Jindra: *“For our final exams, I selected physics. Randová held an afternoon session with us and, wanting us to succeed, she allocated a question to each of us. I got Pascal’s law about the same pressure in all directions. It was demonstrated with a glass gadget with a piston and holes in all directions. She actually suggested that I use it and spray the commission with water. Which I did and got the top mark.”*

High school, 1956-9

After the 8-year school, there was some choice. One had to send an application to the selected high school. I did not really want to go to ‘Hellichovka’ (also ‘Neruďák’, currently Jan Neruda Grammar School in Hellichova ulice, Malá Strana) because it was such an old building (built in 1876, page in Czech). I would have preferred the modern high school in Dejvice, however, for some reason, it was not possible.

So I applied to that old school where quite a few famous people graduated over the years. Yes, the building was old, clearly it did not change much since

it was built, it even had an individual tile stove in every classroom. However, that was not what made the school exceptional.

To be accepted, I had to pass two exams, maths and spelling. I don't remember the maths exam, the spelling was a dictation about the National Theatre in Prague that burnt down in 1881. It was all about words that start with 's' and those that start with 'z'. The pronunciation of these letters is ambiguous. I tried to listen very hard if I could hear any difference. I was not sure about any of the words. When the dictation stopped, I looked at my neighbour's effort. He looked quite confident–and he had almost everything the other way round! So I corrected my work according to him. And that's how I got to Hellichovka.

When I first came to the high school, I addressed a teacher, as I was used to do in the primary school, "comrade teacher". She corrected me: in that venerable school, there were no teachers or comrades, there were professors.

It is quite amazing how many remarkable people were at Hellichovka, my classmates, our first schoolmaster, our professors… (20)

Marie: *"Overall, Hellichovka's spirit was much more free than elsewhere, we played theatre, the boys worked with Divíšek on backdrops, mathematician Špaček in black cloak could teach mathematics without hurting us; he then went back to the university where he belonged and from where he was previously fired for political reasons.*

Always smiling, the historian Vejvalková was also a well-educated and generous lady, and so on.

And Malá Strana was what we needed at that time, the girls went to the gym to a mysterious garden right next to the Infant Jesus of Prague. Sometimes, we went home through the Castle, which was charming especially in winter with the Ledeburské terasy nobly weathered..."

Věra: *"I think that we were lucky to experience a few older teachers who were*

real personalities. I am referring to the mathematician Karel Špaček, who kept us in a state of vigilance with his erratic tests and exams, as was the case with physicist Tesařová. She differed from Špaček in that she did not like the theatre and was always happy to test us in the days of final rehearsals. So most of us came prepared just to prove her wrong."

Špaček was employed by our broad-minded schoolmaster, Pacholík, after Špaček lost his teaching job at the university for political reasons. Pacholík also employed a biologist Jan Otakar Martinovský (1903-80) who was in trouble because he was an old Scout. He wrote *Katolický skauting* in 1937 and nine other publications.

During the Prague Spring, he became the deputy chief of Junák (the name of Czechoslovak boy scout organisation). Junák was then disbanded again in 1970 (thesis in Czech, film with English subtitles with Martinovský's face for a second at 17:45). [Today, there are a few competing scout organisations in Czechia]

Klára: *"Martinovský was widely literarily active, he wrote educational publications, short stories, the book Příroda - velké divadlo (Nature - the great theatre, 1946) and its continuation published in 1948. He was just over 50 so to us he seemed old and we called him Myšák."*

He also wrote papers based on his research as well as herbals (in Czech: chapter, obituary (in Czech), 47 scientific papers).

That could not last, the regime had no use for the broad-mindedness of Pacholík. In 1958, he was replaced by a hatchet man František Kopecký.

Charlotta Pocheová-Kotíková (English texts), great-granddaughter of the first Czechoslovak president T G Masaryk, studied at Hellichovka a year before us. She remembers that as she approached her school-leaving exam in 1958, the new school management led by Kopecký came up with the idea that students from wrong class origin families should not be allowed to matriculate. However, some older professors who had taught there since the First Republic, such as professor Vejvalková and also professor Vetter, bravely opposed that. [I did not know about that.]

If Kopecký succeeded and the same thing happened the following year, I might not have been able to matriculate.

Klára: *"Regarding the popularity of teachers, I would put in the first place our history professor Emanuela Vejvalková for her ability to stay on top of things and for her relationship with us without any embarrassment for her handicap."*
[She had a hunch back]

Eva: *"Sometimes, using examples, Vejvalková gave us a piece of advice, such as the difference between the needs and wants."*

Klára: *"I would also like to mention Radim Palouš who taught us chemistry and I did not want to believe that he was originally a philosopher. Whom I did not like at all? The new geography teacher who came with Kopecký. We called her Godzilla after the Japanese horror movie."*

So not all teachers were popular. Eva: *"Our physical education teacher for girls, a lady, was not tall but for some reason she did not like short girls. We were not able to play basketball or volleyball, so she really made life hell for us. I finished the gymnasium with a handicap complex. In my university, I studied forestry, there were only 2 girls, so we had to do the sport with boys. And, suddenly, I was OK! We did swimming and cross-country skiing, which I loved, so no problems. Actually, I still do both sports, just came from cross-country skiing, 10 km–beautiful!"*

Věra: "*We francophones were unlucky because we were taught by a Viennese German Ela Fabry, who was usually one lesson in front of us and had an atrocious French pronunciation, so when I came home they asked me what language I was speaking."*

Back to the good professors:
Marie: *"I remember well Radim Palouš who put his hand on his forehead and talked about philosophy…"*

Palouš once told us, *"When you were small, you thought that when you would go to school, you would be big and that would be great. Somehow it was not that great. At the primary, you thought the same about going to high school.*

Now you are here and you have a dream about your next step. It's always the same." Quite dark and fitting for a philosopher.

He taught us -ný, -natý, -itý, -ičitý, -ečný... (Czech endings showing valency of molecules), I am still good at that. Unfortunately, my friend Gustav Entlicher told me that it was all for the birds because there were just a few hundred chemists in Czechia so they could just as well talk about chemistry in English.

Some of us remember Palouš with anxiety, he made us study hard and that was not always easy.

Eva: *"I was always worried about Palouš. Just his arrival to our classroom made me shiver...so I tried to learn his subject and, somehow, I succeeded but only by rote learning."*

Palouš left after one year and a young professor took over. His regime was much softer, making much of Palouš's hard work dissipate.

Karel Vetter (1886-1956, page in Czech) founded the tradition of amateur theatre at our school. A descendant of the Old Prague family, Vetter learned French in his impoverished older sister's French nursery for young children from better Prague circles. He translated, edited books and taught French and German at various grammar schools between the two wars, where he also directed student performances. His pupils allegedly included Božena Půlpánová, Vlasta Fabianová and Jiří Krejčík.

Vetter is listed as an art consultant on Krejčík's directorial debut, the film *A week in the quiet house* (1947) and it is likely that the perfect portrayal of the old Prague milieu is to his credit.

Karel: *"Filming Vyšší princip, Krejčík chased us down the stairs of Neruďák as extras. And I remember when we ran for the third time, the front door opened during the shot and two coal-men with their big back buckets came into the shot. Krejčík roared at them frenetically. One of the coal-men took the bucket off and hit Krejčík. Stunned, we were chased into our classrooms."*
Vetter was already retired when Ota Pokladník, the schoolmaster at

Hellichovka, invited him in 1948 to lead the Dramatic society. In collaboration with professor Jaroslav Divíšek, he gradually built a real school theatre. The school chapel was rebuilt to become an auditorium (for us it was ‘aula’) with a stage, a complete lighting setup and a cloakroom in an adjoining classroom. Thanks to all this, it was possible to handle even the technically demanding titles of the world repertoire.

Divíšek with a group of helpers then provided highly professional decorations for the productions. He came from Sobotka and was highly technically minded but was not pushing it. Instead, he tried very hard to give us some appreciation of fine arts. None of that was in the curriculum so he saw the gap.

When Divíšek presented something, he got terribly excited, he almost started to choke. Perhaps due to his excitement, he was able to engage us, so even those who would find descriptive geometry difficult managed quite well.

He was an academic painter, pupil of Oldřich Blažíček and Cyril Bouda (page in Czech). He was an expert on landscape paintings of Southern Bohemia and had his own theory of why there are more painters and sculptors in various European countries and writers and poets elsewhere. He believed that it was due to the climate. Divíšek was also interested in automotive history and engaged some of us in renovating his vintage Bugatti. He made many parts himself, we did not do much. That was not his purpose. Instead, again, he wanted us to get some appreciation, this time of some extraordinary engineering design. According to Karel, Divíšek’s Bugatti T54 was the racing car in which Prince Lobkowitz killed himself at age 25.

There was something in the air at that school. One year, we had astronomy. It was to be presented to us, there was no exam. Except that it was not presented at all. Instead, professor Klein, a fresh graduate from mathematical-physical faculty, spoke to us about famous foreign composers, particularly Beethoven. He saw the educational gap, I presume.

Marie: *“I chose Latin for which we had an external professor Pečený who looked like from the Austrian monarchy, wore a light beige jacket with a vest from which he pulled out his pocket watch on a chain. And a bow tie. Maybe*

he wasn't that old but he was an amazing expert on Latin. We had one hour a week, which was pure craziness but the school at that time underestimated languages, both living and dead, with the exception of Russian, of course. Pečený decided that in an hour a week he could not teach us Latin so he chanted with us, almost sang, hexameters, I still remember some of them.
Vī-pe-ra sē-pe jacet pul-chris sub flo-ri-bus prā-tī
(The viper often lurks under the beautiful flowers in the meadow or something like that.) Try to recite it in Latin!
When I go to see an ancient play in a theatre, I understand the meter and I like it. The professor was brilliant, and in the six months he had us, he gave me an understanding of the hexameter in which most of the ancient literature is written."

I know that Karel remembered more of Pečený's Latin than most of us, particularly more than myself. I use just two or three phrases.

Vetter's opening production in 1949 was *Antigona* by Sophocles, translated by Ferdinand Stiebitz (page in Czech, another) followed by Molière's *School for Husbands* and Shakespeare's *As You Like It* with Jan Tříska (page in Czech, article in Czech) playing Oliver. That play was a great success– considered to be one of the best school theatre productions ever.

Another achievement was *The Flood* by Klicpera in 1953 again with Tříska. That play went on tour and so did the old French *The Farce of Master Pierre Pathelin*. And so on, including Molière's *The Hypochondriac* and *The Broken Jug* by Heinrich von Kleist, altogether 14 plays directed by Vetter (page in Czech, scroll down to more recent illustrations).

During his time, Vetter also cultivated recitation competitions and literary evenings, among others Jan Neruda, Božena Němcová, Old Chinese poetry (presented at Jiráskův Hronov in 1954), Russian classics etc. The most famous became Comenius' school play *Diogenes*. The evening was included in the program of *Comenius International Celebrations* run by UNESCO.

Vetter's approach was both artistic and educational, cultivating talents, but refusing nobody. Vetter paid strict attention to the correct pronunciation, verse

and meter (stressed and unstressed syllabic pattern that gives poetry a rhythmical and melodious sound), and above all he was able to transmit his own refinement to his students. Among them were famous Czech actors Milan Neděla and Jan Tříska, as well as actor, publicist and historian Jaroslav Someš (page in Czech). [I used Someš's original Czech texts for these pages]

After the sudden death of professor Vetter, professor Ladislav Novotný (page in Czech) became the head of the Dramatic society. He was also our class teacher. Novotný was not universally admired. He had a few nicknames, some of them nasty, perhaps something to do with the unpredictability of his character. I did not use the nicknames because I did not have strong feelings about him. Today, I believe that he managed to maintain and promote the fame of Hellichovka for quite a few years.

Novotný started at Hellichovka in September 1954. A lover of poetry and theatre, he acted as an extra in Realistic Theatre. After he took over the dramatic society, he completed Vetter's two planned productions, Věra Panóva: *Girls* and Josef Kajetán Tyl: *Devil on Earth*. The latter won the first prize at *Šrámkův Písek* in 1957.
[Šrámkův Písek is a nationwide festival featuring a dozen productions that won regional competitions. It's a showcase of leading non-professional theatre companies]

This shows that Novotný might have had even more artistic ambitions than Vetter. To achieve success, he invited some past students and professional artists, such as Goldoni translator Jaroslav Pokorný, TV directors Pavel Březina and Míla Sobotka, actors Kohout, Vítová, Korbelář, Štěpánek and Svatopluk Majer, director Karel Jernek (page in Czech) and his wife Jiřina Stránská–their daughter Klára Jerneková studied at Hellichovka at that time.

Jernek could direct only operas in the National Theatre while Stránská (article in Czech) stopped acting in 1949. They both suffered from hunger for theatre and devoted themselves unreservedly–certainly not just for Klára.
The period of their cooperation, 1959-1962, was probably also the peak of the Novotný era, it was represented by:
1959 - *Philip II* by Émile Verhaeren, great performances by Jaroslav Someš as Don Carlos, Josef David as Fray Bernardo and Věra Matějková as Countess of Clermont.

1960 - *Fear and Misery of the Third Reich* by Bertolt Brecht, Czechoslovak premiere.

1961 - *The Liar* by Carlo Goldoni (article) with Petr Šporcl, Klára Jerneková and Věra Matějková. It was presented at *Šrámkův Písek* in 1961 and a shortened version on television. The play was translated by Miloš Hlávka (page in Czech) during the Protektorat. As he was not allowed to use the original title in the National Theatre, he named it *Benátská maškaráda*. The fact that Novotný and Jernek used this translation got a lot of flak because the Communists accused Hlávka of being a Nazi collaborator. He was not and he died in the Prague uprising fighting the Nazis.

1962 - *Return of Alcesta* by Artur Maria Swinarski (page in Polish).

Novotný directed a number of future professionals including Jan Miller, Petr Šporcl (page in Czech), Vít Olmer, Jaroslav Someš, Klára Jerneková (article in Czech, more gossips in Czech), Milena Steinmaslová (page in Czech), Jaromír Hanzlík (page in Czech), Jiří Štěpnička (page in Czech), Martin Štěpánek and Martin Stropnický (article in Czech).

Eva: *"I had only minor roles in about three plays, once with Tříska, however, the dramatic society also organised poetry readings and cultural events at places like retirement homes. There were 3 or 4 of us going out, one would read something, I would recite and perhaps we would play a scene. It was very popular and Novotný used it to promote himself and the school. Novotný chose me for this, supporting my interest in writing poems and encouraging me to present them. I even won some prizes in the poetry competition."*

In his private life, Novotný was unlucky. He had fallen in love with his student, Anděla Kernová, one year older than us, and divorced his selfless and modest wife. We believe that his new marriage was not without problems even after he became a father. He tried to solve it with alcohol which led to more problems, this time at school.

I was not a member of the Dramatic society. However, I showed my face in some productions, always playing the least demanding role. Because the

roles were unimportant, I was never given any instructions and was left to my own devices–my role was always my interpretation. That suited me fine because I did not like instructions.

I remember that I had one sentence in Alois Jirásek's *Lucerna*, two small parts in Brecht and a role in *The Liar*. *The Liar* was my favourite, it was so witty and poetic! Although I myself did not say much, if anything, I can still recite some passages of the play.

Gustav had a crucial function at the school theatre because he soon became its lighting technician. He did it single-handedly and with his usual precision and reliability. But he was not always precise. "Have a look what I could do," said Gustav while throwing his knife into the ground, aiming effortlessly. "I'll aim next to your foot." "Don't do it," I said, "I already had a knife in my leg before." He threw and hit my instep. He aimed well because he missed a vein so there was not much blood.

Gustav and I were putting together a board of photographs of graduates. Those boards were displayed in friendly shops in the middle of Prague.

Being a jerk, I insisted that the first three photos were of Karel and Honza followed by myself and Gustav. That was because Karel, Honza and myself fancied ourselves as 'the three francophone boys' while all other boys had English as the third language. The rest of the board was misogynistic. (See Karel's video about his project in 2016)

The girls would have nothing of that. They shouted at me and went to the shop to move the photographs–mixing boys with girls. I don't have a photo of that final arrangement. You can also see the last school year's photograph.

I did not give much attention to writing on the board. The letters were uneven and messy–good enough I thought. I left the board overnight with Gustav who scraped out all the letters and did it properly. Gustav and I were quite different. That did not stop us from having a good time together, particularly in trips to Warsaw (with the whole class) and Písek (for a theatre performance). Písek is a town with the oldest Gothic bridge in the Czech republic.

In Warsaw we got lost. It was late, streets were almost empty and we did not know that we should ask for *Warszawa glówna* (now *Warszawa centrálna*). We tried nádraží, vagzal, station, maybe even gare, nothing worked. So we just walked on and we were very, very hungry. I looked up and saw a naked woman in the first floor window. I pointed her out to Gustav who excitedly said, “Is she eating?”

Gustav’s best friend was our classmate Walter Krebs. We are sorry that we don’t know where he is or what happened to him.

Honza Mazáč (+2021) was an unrestrained element in Hellichovka, bordering on mischief, for which they wanted to expel him. He appeared to be a person without a hint of worry about the consequences of his tricks. We worried about him a little and admired him a lot. And we enjoyed parties that he organized with Karel.

Honza: *“We were sent to harvest hops in Hořesedla. The less energetic people filled three or four ‘věrtelů’ per day, at 2,80 Kčs each, the greyhounds seven or eight.”*
[Věrtel=quarter drum, about 23 litres, historically wooden, later metal bucket or a basket]

“I myself managed to get the function of the so-called tipster who was tasked with a long pole to remove the remains of hop plants from the highly suspended wires. True, I earned more crowns, but oh…

We slept on the first floor of the farmhouse where combine harvesters were parked in the yard. I really can’t remember with which classmate we tried to start up one of these machines. We tried it several times until we burned the starter. And because our dive into agricultural technology was not unnoticed, we not only did not receive the money earned but, in addition to that, had to pay a considerable amount after returning to Prague.”

The big photo is from the hop harvesting in 1956.
[I was not there because of my hay fever, otherwise it was compulsory]
Another incident involved both Honza and Karel–who wrote: *“During the breaks we, class A, waged wars against the other classes. I brought a piece of rubber rope about 2 metres long and 1 cm thick. Honza made projectiles*

out of a blackboard rag and we shot it to the end of the corridor at the boys from class C. I was holding one end of the rubber but no one else wanted to participate, so Honza tied the other end to the handle of our class door. Very quickly we cleared the corridor. The shots were so powerful that it might almost kill someone. But the corridor was 'clear'."

It might have been Honza who brought us our class song, a First Republic pub song (perhaps also sang in a less vulgar version by Jára Kohout–watch his *Tři kroky od těla*):

"V pondělí nédělám, v úterý vólno mám,
ve středu sí lehnu, ve čtvrtek sé nehnu,
v pátek já márodím, sobotu próchodím
v neděli vů-bec né-dě-lám.
Trouba kdo prácuje, život si zkrácuje,
vlasy mu pádají, zuby se víklají,
ocas mu névstává, žena mu nédává,
a proto vů-bec né-dě-lám."

During the summer holiday, Karel and I borrowed a canoe and did the Lužnice and the Vltava. It was great except that we had to paddle 43 km along the Slapy dam after we drank a bottle of white wine each the previous evening.

Honza also made a river journey with Karel during one of the holidays: *"At that time in our crew was Jana, the daughter of Dr Milada Horáková. I must give you the background: After the [Petr: sadistic] execution of Dr Horáková in June 1950, her daughter Jana was cared for by Dr Horáková's sister Věra Tůmová and her husband Pepík who belonged to a close circle of friends of my parents. We met Jana only a few weeks after the unbelievably evil act of the regime, during a holiday stay with other good friends of our family in the Demänovská valley in the Low Tatras. I remember being told that inconspicuous 'civilians'–secret police agents–were constantly snooping around the house in which we stayed. When I think about that situation today, I must appreciate the bravery of my parents and their friends. After returning to Prague, it did not take long and my parents were called in to be*

interrogated by the secret police but, fortunately, no significant repression affected them at that time." [Dr Horáková was a National Socialist which was a Czech democratic party founded in 1897. During his studies, Aleš was a member as well]

There were some girls that I particularly liked, falling in love with Marie quite nicely at a tree planting excursion to Špindlerův Mlýn. I think that the girls were not interested because I was such a jerk at that age.

Marie had small roles in a few plays: in *Devil on Earth* she was a little devil in hell and she was a maid in *Lucerna* (she later played Hanička in Kladno) but she went on to Semafor and played in the opening night of *Člověk z půdy* on the 30th October 1959. So she was the first to sing *Včera neděle byla*. Here is that song sang by Marie's identical twin sister Jana. Marie also played and sang in the first 'Zuzana' play, *Zuzana je sama doma*. Listen to another song from that play, sang by Jana. The sisters also sang together. Finally, Marie was in *Taková ztráta krve*.

Marie introduced us to some Czech translations of modern foreign literature, I particularly remember *L'âme enchantée* and *Девятый вал*. Jana sometimes came to our class and we did not know the difference.
Allow me to diverge: *Taková ztráta krve* was Eva Pilarová's first play in Semafor in 1960. Pilarová in my favourite *Co ve městě se povídá*. With Waldemar Matuška. Ach, ta láska nebeská. Pilarová in *Rekviem*.

It was not all roses in our class. I was told that there was bad blood between Kitty and Nina, two of the beautiful girls in the class, over a one-eyed character who claimed to be a pilot. Previously, they were good friends.

Or as Věra remembers: *"Our classmate, Anna Lafatová, mistakenly believed that I was dating Olmer and made a big scene."* (As if it concerned her!) I did not know any of that because I was quite oblivious those days.

Kitty Kepková will be remembered for inviting us to their chalet in Jizerské hory. We had the time of our life there.

Nina Martinicová later won the *Queen of Majáles* title. Somehow, I did not participate in any Majáles, a cheeky student demonstration with a long

tradition (15th century) that the communist regime, despite its best efforts and occasional brutality did not manage to tame, so it banned it after 1966. Perhaps I thought that Majáles belonged only to the humanities students (page in Czech).

I don't know how it happened that Nina became my partner for the ceremonial opening dance at our graduation ball that was held in Obecní dům. Nina and I knew the steps well enough but were not allowed to dance. I can just guess what was going on between Nina and the dance master.

Then there were Mima and Eva Hořejší, they were amazing. Friendly and generous, they knew how to organise things. They threw a great party for everyone, making their grandfather pay for it. It included food and drinks (e.g. punch). We danced and played games, it was fun. They invited some of us to their weekend house in Jevany and we went together to Konopiště (about 10 km from Domeček). The composition of the group varied with possible bias to francophones. And they brought a bear to school. It was quite a mission to take him all the way home to their villa in Střešovice, we could not go by tram.

Honza: *"If I remember correctly, we first decided that the animal might prefer to move freely outside the school. So we took him to the nearby field of Malostránský Sokol (close to the cable car terminal). No doubt the bear liked it there, so when he was released from the strap, he didn't hesitate for a second and in an instant he was in the crown of one of the trees. But then it took him a long time to be persuaded to come down."*

Eva: *"My father worked 2.5 years in Vietnam, after the departure of the French and before the Vietnam war. He helped to build the wood industry for them as they have a great selection of wood. Once his workers found a mother bear with four cubs. Apparently, the Vietnamese people do not have the same feeling for animals as we do, so they killed the mother and two cubs and decided to sell the other two to foreign workers.*

My father was not present, so they sold one cub to his neighbour, a Slovak. He put the little cub in a garage, where my father found it. The cub was close to death. My father bought it and stayed two days with him–in bed! Fed him

first with a pacifier, later from a dish. So my father was for the bear a real mother and the bear showed his affection to him till the end of his life.

Couple months later, my father went home so he took the bear with him. And we did not have a better idea than to take him to our school! Maybe you remember the fuss that day, we came with him...and then we had to leave!

During the summer holiday, the little bear was with us in Jevany, in the cottage. Later, in November, it became impossible to have him in Prague. Fences of our house were nearly destroyed by onlookers as Gouto was a comedian, when he saw people, he always showed up. So my father made an arrangement with Dvůr Králové Zoo. Gouto lived there ten years, even bred twice. Unfortunately, some sadistic visitor threw him a dry sponge which swelled in his stomach and before the vets could find the reason, he died."

I was very proud of being bitten by a bear. Not seriously of course and no wonder, he was tired and fed up with the long walk. Eva's emigration is described in her book.

Just like in primary school, I had to run every morning to be at Hellichovka reasonably on time. I ran downhill through the steep path called Myší díra from 'Chotkovy sady' down to Klárov in Malá Strana. There, at the bend of Chotkova ulice, if the right tram was coming down, I jumped into it. Trams had open doors and moved quite slowly there. Otherwise, I kept on running.

For a while, I tried, quite successfully, to be a fare dodger. Then, one day, I decided that it was not the right thing to do.

Unlike at primary school, I did not have a monthly card for trams. At the primary school I needed it, particularly in years when I had to go every day all the way across Prague to *Vinohradská nemocnice* to get an injection against hay fever. The injections were gradually stronger and stronger and my arm swelled more and more and I had to sit there awaiting further reactions.

The primary school was further away from home than the high school and it was uphill. So to get to school I just ran along Kadetka to the next tram stop

‘Pražský hrad’. The tram stop ‘Královský letohrádek’ did not exist.
My father taught me to save, he gave me 50 Kčs every month but I was not allowed to use it until, after a number of years, there was enough to buy a 50 cm³ motorcycle Pionýr. That was in 1957. I never used it to go to school.

At the end of our studies, we got a full report with all subjects while matriculation consisted of only four subjects: Czech, Russian, maths and another. My ‘another’ was physics. I remember only the oral Czech and written Russian. In the oral Czech examination, my subject was Czech literature between the two wars. I waffled on and on about Čapek which infuriated the external examiner, a hard line Communist. That’s because Čapek, unlike quite a few intellectuals in his time, was not a Communist, he even wrote *Why I am not a Communist*.

Well after midnight before the Russian written exam, I got a phone call from Karel that the subject would be *Eugene Onegin*. Unfortunately, I was finished, totally exhausted, unable to go back to the book. So my essay about Onegin was dismal. I think that they gave me a good mark only not to spoil my report.

Růžena Štéglová, 1959-61
In 1959, I matriculated with very good results and wanted to study. However, our local organisation of the Communist party (of which my father and both my brothers were also members), in a very strong statement, did not recommend me to study because of my bourgeois origin. My brothers got their university degrees several years earlier so they did not have the same problem.

I did an apprenticeship as a car mechanic at Prague Bakeries in Vysočany. I was in the workshop there for two years and near the end also acted as a purchaser (21). After that, due to the kindness of a lady in the HR department, Růžena Štéglová, the bakery recommended me to study at the technical university. It was formally presented as if the company needed engineers, there were no strings attached, I did not have to return after the studies.

Mrs Štéglová warned me to be careful and not to fight the regime. She knew that the students were becoming radicalised at that time. To me the warning

was laughable because I was still a convinced Communist. I even applied to become a member of the party. My application was rejected despite the fact that I was the chairman of the communist youth organisation (ČSM) in the bakery. I was also a member of the Union of Czechoslovak-Soviet Friendship (SČSP) and, of course, of the communist trade unions, ROH. Later, in Vienna, I admitted only to ROH seeing that membership in ROH was compulsory.

Some of the other apprentices hated me for my political work and, I believe, they prepared a trap for me. At the end of the shift, we washed our greasy hands and then washed the washbasin clean for the next person. Except the guy who was before me did not wash it. OK, I thought (that was a mistake) and did not wash it either. After me was a trained boxer and when I refused to clean it, he closed my eye by hitting me. I asked, “What should I do?” and one of the more sympathetic onlookers said, “Wash it!” Looking through the other eye, I calmly washed the washbasin. Fortunately, they did not do it to me again, perhaps it was not as satisfying as they hoped it would be.

Our residential organisation of the Communist party did not get excited by my new application to study but did not strongly object this time. They assumed that by then I got close to the working class–in fact I mainly got close to one beautiful girl, Vlasta Staníčková (1941-2021). It started in December 1960.

My mother liked Vlasta but my father had some misgivings about her. He was probably right seeing that she did not marry me because I was only a few centimetres taller than she was. I learned her true reason much later.

Mrs Štéglová did not help Vlasta who was in the factory office reconciling the numbers of bread rolls manufactured and sold using an adding machine. She could not study because her father was a pharmacist (as well as a doctor) until the Communists took the pharmacy away from him. As he had his own business he was also a class enemy–very bad!

Later Vlasta got better work in Heyrovský’s institute in the photo lab. It is disputed how she got it. I believe that it was my mother’s recommendation over the fence of Vila, Vlasta believed it was her father’s achievement as her

father knew Heyrovský. Vlasta managed to start studying only much later. Vlasta was my second big love. When I was 15, in 1957, I was barely surviving my very painful, very serious first love. When it started, my suffering was unbearable. So I went for a very long and fast walk, the first in a series of my love-related long walks, most of them because of Vlasta.

Technical University (ČVUT, 1961-6)

The university dug out the old, strongly worded very negative letter from our residential organisation of the Communist party and they again decided not to accept me. The year was 1961, hard-line Communists still ruled everywhere although the regime was not as deadly as under Stalin and Gottwald.

So my father visited the minister of agriculture, who was also an old Social Democrat. The minister phoned the university and explained to them that I was all right...and I was accepted. However, they did not really trust me and two years later did not allow me to pick up an opportunity to study in Moscow.

My high school classmate Honza Mazáč had quite a similar experience (22).

Another requirement to be admitted was passing the university's entrance exams. First time, in 1959, it was easy, no problem. After two years in the workshop, I was rusty and was quite concerned if I would make it. I did. Fair and square. Quite unlike the way I was admitted to high school in 1956.

The first six months at the university were killing me. In line with somebody's hair brained idea, I was supposed to continue working half days and study half days. I no longer worked in Vysočany but in a small workshop in Holešovice. It was impossible because I spent half the nights smooching Vlasta. Sometimes I just slept for a few hours at work. After a while, I asked the bakery to let me go. Nobody objected. And not much later Vlasta married her considerably taller dance partner.

Studying at the university did not present too many problems with money. It was free, no fees. It could not be otherwise, most people were poor. However, some books were expensive so I often bought the previous, obsolete edition and once a cheaper Slovak version–that did not work.

While almost all students had–and needed–a multifUkrajinaunctional logarithmic slide rule, I used my father's cute but tiny and very simple rule. Somehow I mana-ged. I had a proper one only after my mother sent me one to South Africa.

In the fourth year, I managed, by exaggerating my experience, to become an assistant in the Automotive department. My function was to photograph and print pictures from books and magazines. That time, there was no photocopy machine or scanner.

To make extra money, I travelled with Karel Duba and his group (23) and carried their drums and speakers and whatever they had. It was frequent and it lasted quite a long time until I was replaced by a Gypsy whom they liked more.

During summer holidays, I had a vacation job delivering bread at daybreak (!) for the bakery–using Praga 150 panel vans that I was previously repairing.

As a student, I went, with my new running skis, to Náměstí republiky which was a terminal for buses belonging to various enterprises going to Krkonoše. I found a bus with kind people and a spare seat. I spent the afternoon in the mountains and, after dark, I knocked on a door and found another lot of kind people and a spare bed. Another day of running round on skis and another bus to return to Prague. I had a cheek even then.

The best friends of my parents were Dr Jan Květ, art historian, and his wife whom we called PíEva (Mrs Eva). In 1961, their son Honouš invited me to a week long training camp for winter tourism instructors that was held in Rýžoviště near Harrachov and consisted, in the middle of harsh winter, in sleeping in tents.

On our way back to Prague, the old bus that was used lost a wheel and the bus left the road but fortunately nobody was hurt.

Mrs Štéglová was right. By 1963, I was losing all illusions about the Communists. The country was changing, too. There was a painfully slow and gradual liberation process and some people tried to test the limits of freedom.

Thus *One day in the life of Ivan Děnisovič* by Aleksándr Solženícyn was printed in Czech in a literary periodical. I loved it.

There was a professor at the university who took a liking to me and often referred to me during his lectures. That was, of course, highly embarrassing. One day he asked me to entertain pensioners in Šárka with some poetry. Instead, disregarding the pensioners' tastes and expectations, I read them *Ivan Děnisovič.* On the top of it, I read it very badly. The other poetry presenter, much better, was Blanka. I married her later that year.

Neither Blanka nor I remember the name of that professor. He must have, somehow, known her, too. I don't think that he was invited to our wedding.
[Google knows Blanka's maiden name and it pops up right on the first page, therefore I dropped it]

Another professor said that I looked like a scarecrow with my beard. I wrote to him that he would not say that to some famous Czechs who were wearing a beard. Then I shaved.

Blanka liked to travel so the first year we went to Hungary, the second to Yugoslavia, both trips using my motorcycle ČZ 175 with a trailer, then to East Berlin and Romania using Škoda Octavia Super 1.2 which I shared with my father-in-law. The highlights in Hungary were Balaton, the Margaret island in Budapest and, the greatest: whipped cream! One could buy confectioner's cakes and cookies with real whipped cream on it or even whipped cream on its own, unbelievable! Once we hit a flock of birds and fried them for supper.

On the Yugoslav island Hvar, it was the best fish I have eaten in my life.
In Romania, the scary night travel when, by the local road code, one had to switch off headlights completely when meeting oncoming traffic because their vehicles did not have dipped headlights.

I had a good friend, Petr Hlaváček, serious, focused, with excellent technical mind, a good soccer player, and one of few people who actually learned Russian–after so many years we were learning it! Unlike myself, he never took any short-cuts. When he visited us, he was nicknamed 'Petr Wild' while I was 'Petr Domestic'. That 'wild' was a good joke in his case. He died young so I did not see him again. He left a good wife and a son.

The university provided recreational/sporting opportunities and I took canoeing. One afternoon, the instructor took a novice on his canoe and, to be safe, gave me his watch to hold. The novice did well but I went under and nobody wanted to contribute to me for the cost of repair.

At the end of 1966, I graduated, the course took 5 and half years. When students finished their studies, they were allocated jobs based on the requirements of the industry. I was only one of three students who got jobs in Prague. For that I was grateful to Ing. Antonín (Tonda) Hau (1932-2011) of the Institute of Motor Vehicle Research (ÚVMV, then in Lihovarská ulice) where I was, before and after my year in the army, helping him design automatic transmissions. We managed to have a transmission for a bus made and assembled and were testing it.

Tonda proposed the subject for my thesis and was my opponent when I defended it at the end of my studies. It might interest you that I used an analogue computer for my research. Later, at ÚVMV, we used a Belarusian digital computer Minsk situated at Praga factory.

Army

During my university studies, I had military training every Saturday in a big military compound on the outskirts of Prague, in Motol. We climbed in and out of a tank without actually starting it, dug shallow holes in the ground to protect us against enemy bullets, threw hand grenades and shot *samopal vzor 58* (similar in appearance and better than AK-47) and Bren machine gun. One day, I came home very happy because I "hit the enemy with a machine gun" which upset Blanka who thought that I should not be hitting any enemies even if they were just metal discs.

This training was followed by a one month camp at the end of my studies–my only real army experience. I quite liked marching in formation and liked to drive Praga V3S (V means military, 3 tons, Special, that means off-road capability) with an extremely noisy air-cooled Tatra engine. I was so good at it that the officers let me drive all the time despite the rule that driving should be rotated among soldiers.

That scheme saved me one year of the compulsory two year military service.

I was allowed to serve my one year in Prague. It was highly irregular and, of course, my mother was involved. She was at that time a chairlady of the local branch of the sports club that was under the communist regime called Slovan (24). She did not actually exercise at Sokol/Slovan, she just loved to participate in their amateur theatre productions. Once or twice I joined her in children's roles.

Slovan Dejvice was close to the offices of the Ministry of Defence and she knew a number of officers who were exercising in the club. For a bottle of the best French cognac from Tuzex (25), I was called to serve in Prague where children of prominent functionaries were serving.

The barracks were next to Hotel International in Dejvice, the largest 'Socialist realism' building in Prague. The barracks were obviously built at the same time as the hotel because the hotel was one of Čepička's (who was the minister of defence) projects to please Stalin. The style of the barracks was a toned down style of the hotel. It is just a few tram stops from our Vila.
In that faux military unit, there was no drill or training. They did not issue us any weapons, they did not even show us any. We just slept there. During the week I went to work in the army's truck engine testing facility that was not far away. We got permissions to leave the barracks for the weekend.

Seeing that we were such wonderful soldiers, we were quickly promoted; those of us who signed up to stay in the army were promoted all the way to sub-lieutenants before the year's end.

In that testing facility, we were running Tatra engines of Praga V3S to destruction. I did not involve myself much in it. And only occasionally I had to do an overnight guard duty, that means to sleep in the hut at the gate of that compound, again unarmed.

It was not difficult for the new owner of the French cognac to justify my placement there seeing that I was an automotive engineer and the army's testing facility might need people like that.

Very soon, after a few weeks, the prominent youngsters, without permission, started to leave the barracks for good, so I followed them, left the barracks and lived in Vila. I don't know if anybody remained in the barracks for the rest of the year.

Before I left there was an incident with a sheet on my bed. Somebody stole it. I was furious so in my rage I stole a sheet from another room. In the process I discovered that some sheets were not army issue, they were not the same quality. So I brought some sheets from home and exchanged them for the hemp sheets with army stamps on them.

I lived in Vila because my marriage with Blanka had disintegrated. She was seduced by Arnošt, her colleague in 'Krátký film' (a state owned company that was making documentaries and short films) where she worked in the travel department (visas, passports etc.). No idea how my mother managed to get that job for her.

Well, a year before that, I had another affair with Vlasta. And it was Vlasta who told me that she saw Blanka kissing Arnošt in a car. What a coincidence! It convinced Blanka that Vlasta was a horrible person–how could she rat on her like that?!

Arnošt had a wife and son and the wife did not like it at all. The four of us had a meeting in their flat and it was three of us against her. I felt sorry for her. In her frustration she threw a bottle of some liqueur not aiming at anyone in particular. The bottle hit the wall, burst to pieces and the liqueur was oozing down to the floor.

Blanka and Arnošt do not remember any of that. Arnošt, always a gentleman, would never, according to Blanka, drag her to a hysterical encounter like that. According to Scott Adams when someone remembers something and someone else who was also there does not believe that it happened then it did not happen. However, this happened or did not happen almost 60 years ago so maybe it happened.

Our divorce proceedings were slightly spoilt by Arnošt who insisted that

Blanka should bring a lawyer to the court. I was not prepared for that so they made me look quite bad. It did not make much difference. Neither party disclosed to the court the real situation and soon it was over. Arnošt was not there so after the proceedings, Blanka and I went together to have some ice cream.

Vlasta was busy having a son, Petr, with her tall husband so I went to the dance hall Vltava and met Zdenka Hovorková (*1949), a law faculty student. Most of my time with Zdenka, I was not sure how serious she was about me. I still don't know. She is a riddle, wrapped in a mystery, inside an enigma.
[Winston Churchill, about Russia, 1939]

End of 1967

'Jonáš-klub' (Klub spřízněných duší), of which I was a member, was a free debating society that took its name from a play in Semafor theatre–possible because the regime had other worries at that time; the secretary was Madla Vaculíková (+2020, in Czech). My presentation there on the 20th November 1967 was in the style of Semafor and its subject was the stolen sheet in the barracks. It was an enormous success.

The next day I was walking to Vila still reliving my success from the previous night. I met Bety and she told me that my father died in Ratboř. I was shocked. An officer walked towards me and I did not salute. He shouted at me. I told him to go to hell ("Di do prdele!"). Now he was shocked. I explained it to him. He understood.

I went to Ratboř as fast as I could. I was in a terrible state. First my divorce and now my father's death. It was too much. My father's last words were "Už dost" (That's enough). My father in one sentence: He was 100% good.

At his funeral, Blanka's grandparents, the Líškas from Ctiněves (26), approached me, without Blanka's knowledge, and asked me if I would consider reconciliation. I had to reject the idea and I was really sorry that I had to do it to them, Jan and Marie were such wonderful people.

A few months later I had another presentation at Jonáš-klub. I tried to interest them in automatic transmissions. It was a monumental flop.

August 1968

Already in 1963, I was completely disillusioned with the official propaganda. In fact I was thinking that I should do something to go to prison just to demonstrate that I was against the regime. So many lies, so many gross injustices, lack of freedom and human rights, destroyed currency, the country going downhill compared to the West. While between the wars, Czechoslovakia was among the most advanced countries!

In 1968, I became a member of the district committee of the Club of Committed Non-Party Members (KAN) which was the second hardest anti-communist organisation during the Prague Spring in 1968 (the hardest was the association of former political prisoners). For us, Dubček was not good enough, he was still a Communist. We did not know that the party hierarchy supported him not because he was great but because he was harmless. Our illusion was that Czechoslovakia could liberate herself.

On 20 August 1968, the committee had a meeting which carried on until late at night. When I got home, just after falling asleep, somebody phoned to tell me that we were being invaded. Soon I heard planes flying low above Vila. It was dawn. I went out and ran through the city full of Russian soldiers.

As I was coming down from Letná, somebody shouted at me: “At last they are here!” That was just one hard-line old-style Communist, an exception.

Some communist leaders were afraid of democracy because they remembered how Communists were hanged from lampposts in Budapest in 1956.

Most of us were in shock and quite crazy. Crossing the bridge I threw a pile of leaflets brought in by the Russian soldiers into the river. The Russian soldier didn’t shoot me. At the other side an officer wanted to take my transistor radio so I grabbed his pistol in his holster. He was pulling my radio, I was pulling on his holster. It was a stale-mate and we both let go.

Near the radio station, all of a sudden the Russians started to shoot. They were terribly nervous, being surrounded by crowds of people telling them that

they had no business being there. We ran. I don't know where they were aiming, probably in the air. The flat on the fourth floor in Karlovo náměstí No. 2, which Blanka got in my name but lived there with Arnošt and then sold it to me, had bullet marks of shots coming in through the window frames and into the ceiling. 82 people were killed during those days while 300 others were seriously injured.

After our emigration, my mother did not manage to keep that beautiful flat.

Vila

Before I married Blanka on the 23rd November 1963 (one day after JFK's death), our floor in Vila was becoming very crowded.

Vila was built in 1912 by my grandfather Robert Jan Kořán in Hradčany near Belvedér (27). At first, it was just a residence for one family with a staircase from the ground floor to the first floor in the middle of it. Today only the second section to the top floor survives showing how the original staircase looked like. This section was not in the middle so it could stay.

When there was a need to house my parents with two little boys because their flat in Dejvice, despite being fancy, was not good enough for my sickly brother Pavel, Vila was divided into three flats with a staircase at the back leading to individual flats. The original entrance was walled up.

The ground floor was occupied by Zdeněk and Eliška Vavruch and their children Ivan and Alena, much later just by her son Ivan and his family and Alena's mother-in-law (see the Lochovský story).

My parents and their two sons Aleš and Pavel had the first floor. I wonder if the choice of floors was influenced by my father's reluctance to sleep on the ground floor–although in Vila the ground floor is elevated.

Robert Jan and his wife Marie selflessly took the less spacious top floor.

Robert Jan believed that children should be physically active so he built a swing with various extensions like horizontal bar and gymnastics rings–the

rings were not there in my time. I did not use the bar but enjoyed the swing and was jumping off it real far. The construction was, like everything built by Robert Jan, of top quality so it survived to my days and was still safe.

Outside the entrance, at the back, there was a huge pear tree. Unfortunately, the period between being able to climb it to get some pears and the tree dying of old age was just a few years.

And there was ‘mišpule’ in the corner until it was removed by the new owners. Pity, for me the fruits, after exposed to frost, had wonderful taste!
[There is a tree like that in the farm museum in Worcester, Western Cape]

Near that corner, the fence was low. When I was working in the Bakery and ÚVMV, I stepped over the fence and jumped all the way down to the neighbours’ pathway and ran out of their open gate to the tram stop at today’s ‘Hradčanská’. It saved me two or three minutes of running.

From the end of 1965, the original bedroom on the East side of Vila and the boys’ room (East and South corner) were occupied by Aleš, Zdenka and all 5 children from their original marriages plus their daughter Aleška. Luděk escaped to Prague from Hodousice in Šumava at the end of April 1965. Marta was taken to Prague from Svatá Kateřina on the 7th December 1965 (32).

Until I got married, I slept in the biggest room, called ‘Modrý pokoj’ (South, street side, now a chapel) with both my parents. Pavel and his new wife Majka lived in the study/smoking room (South and West corner) and in Bety’s very small room (West). Bety then slept in one third of the original kitchen (West) under the window, the other parts being kitchen and bathroom. The parts were separated by curtains.

I rejected the idea that Bety should be asked to move to her sister in Svinářov where she had a room with her furniture–used once a year for a few days.

From June 1966, Aleš, Zdenka and their combined family lived in Ratboř, near Kolín; and I lived from 1963 to 1967 with Blanka in one room of her parents’ flat (28). In 1968 there was just myself, my mother, my brother Pavel, his wife Majka and their new child Lucie, as well as Bety, in the flat in Vila.

EMIGRATION (12 April 1969)

My family considered emigration once before. If they had to escape Hitler who clearly wanted to eliminate Czechs from Bohemia and Moravia by combination of Germanization, killing us and expelling us to the East, my family would go to Paris where they would survive by my father playing the piano in some bar or a hotel lobby.

I mentioned that my father was in Paris for one year and my mother's second language was French.

After the invasion in 1968, we finally knew for sure that Czechoslovaks were not allowed to decide what to do, all crucial decisions would always be taken in Moscow. There would be no freedom. As a family, we had to make some decisions. There was a vote to decide if we should emigrate. Almost all women were against emigration and all men for. Marta was for emigration from the beginning which I did not know when I insisted that she, although very young, should be allowed to vote.

After lengthy discussion the women agreed it was better to emigrate but of course they didn't like it very much. Neither did I because Zdenka didn't want to emigrate and our relationship was getting better during that time. Also I had an interesting job and a wonderful boss. I was, of course, aware that I was likely to lose it all not if but when I would engage in anti-communist activities. With luck, I might have ended up as a tram driver.

For a number of months after August 1968, Czechoslovak authorities did not stop people from emigrating but they were forced to draw a line if it was too obvious. So we all applied for passports at different times and as much as possible at different places.

Passports were not good enough for leaving the country. We had to have an endorsement stamp in the passport specifying where one could go and for how long. In the end it became a farce as people were getting stamps to go to "all countries in the world, valid for one day"! That situation could not last very long.

To get the stamp we had to get an invitation from a foreign country, and we all got an invitation from Gabriela, countess Žerotín (29), a family friend living in Vienna. My mother's grandfather Dr Schwarz was a personal doctor of Gabriela's grandfather and my grandmother Marie was a good friend of Gabriela's mother. Between the wars, Gabriela used to come to Prague to visit my mother. She was five years older.

We did not shout from the rooftops that we were leaving but quite a few people knew it. I gave Vlasta all my gramophone records and to say goodbye to her, I borrowed Majka's ID and booked a hotel room near Florenc and the Museum of Prague for 'Mr and Mrs Vavruch'.

As we were concerned that we would be stopped at the border despite having the right documents, we took four routes and none of the groups was one whole family. I went in Aleš's Tatra with Aleš and his daughter Marta. Aleš's wife Zdenka and some of the children went by train. Pavel and the other children went by another train, and my mother and Pavel's wife Majka with her daughter Lucie went by plane.

Majka had sewn in her handbag all our degrees and other important documents, otherwise she travelled very light. All groups crossed the border roughly at the same time on the 12th April 1969.

We all travelled light–having only one suitcase each. We simply left almost everything behind. I should have been suspicious why my mother did not seem too concerned about leaving all her precious stuff in Prague.

Vienna

In Vienna, as agreed by pointing a finger on a map, we met at an underground station. First I had to fetch my mother and Majka at the airport, which became a problem–I went to the wrong airport. Now we went to Gabriela but she was not expecting us and was not at home. We did not tell her about our plans in order to keep it as secret as possible. We waited.

She lived in a tiny flat in the old city centre of Vienna. She was not well-off. When we brought our suitcases, even if each of us had only one, the flat was chock a block full and it was clear that only my mother could stay there. So the rest of us had to find somewhere else to sleep. Gabriela suggested that the Roman Catholic *Caritas Wien* could accommodate us. When we finally found it they said that they can take only small children with their parents.

So that was a partial solution. Somehow I found a cheap hotel and went there with my nephew Luděk and niece Marta. Unfortunately, after we booked in, I discovered that I did not know how to lock the car. I couldn't leave it like that because there was still a lot of stuff in it–stuff that we couldn't fit into Gabriela's flat. So after paying a considerable part of our funds for the hotel I had to sleep in the car. We couldn't carry on like that.

Gabriela organised that we could put all our suitcases in the cellar of a Czech family. And we all sneaked into *Caritas* and shared the beds there. From time to time somebody slept in the car again. We received some money from an American charity organisation and *Caritas* (brought to us by Gabriela).

Somehow we received money from the wife of Jiří Voskovec, from the Secretary of the Austrian Writers Union Herr Gunter and from a Slovak writer Ladislav Mňačko (30). He helped us greatly by paying a deposit for a beautiful flat.

First we were looking for all sorts of cheap places like basement apartments in dilapidated buildings. We were lucky that Pavel, after many unsuccessful enquiries at several agencies, found a beautiful flat in an expensive suburb next to the channel. It belonged to Count Spork. He was divorcing and wanted to rent it out quickly.
It was completely empty except for one double bed (I suppose Spork hated it) and some kitchen utensils. And perhaps that small table. Most of us were sleeping on the floor. Gradually we got some very old furniture. I was no longer there when my family was leaving the flat to go to Sweden. The small table collapsed and valuable jewels spilled out on the floor from a secret compartment. We returned it.

As soon as we could, after our arrival in Vienna, most of us started to work. My nephew Luděk was in a factory sewing tarpaulin covers for trucks. He was the only one who could use the heavy construction worker gloves that my mother packed for all of us assuming that we would have to do some dirty work in Vienna. My nieces Helena and Oliva were helping in Nahodil's (not a pleasant fellow) confectionery shop. Marta and I were selling newspapers in the street. I did it completely wrongly, too aggressively, because I was desperate to sell as much as possible. We also distributed leaflets which was very tiring, we had to walk up the stairs to the highest floors in every building. With our car we were also delivering newspapers.

Aleš crashed Tatra in the crazy traffic in Vienna because the car's brakes were not too good. The car body was made of thick metal so the damage was cosmetic and no repair was necessary.

I did not see much of Vienna, I did not go to the Prater or to any museums or palaces. I ate bread with Rama margarine and soup. With that and a lot of physical activity I lost 7 kilos, which was good but not pleasant.

I remember how I envied Pavel who walked round with a pack of biscuits. What I did not know was that he had only one pack that he brought from Prague and that it lasted him two weeks. He lost 6 kilos. Much later I learned that the children did not go hungry, they ate as much as they needed. I am very pleased about that.

The only fancy meal Pavel and myself got in Vienna was from Mňačko,
I still remember that round dumpling and tasty meat. He wanted to get me employment at the service station where he was taking his Volkswagen for service. I felt so unwelcome there that I didn't follow it up.
During the first desperate days in Vienna, we considered becoming missionaries! We spoke to somebody in the Catholic missionary office and he basically discouraged us. Probably he did not think that we were the right candidates.

Soon we were in Vienna without my mother. I think that she fooled us, she wanted us to leave Czechoslovakia, but she returned to Prague within the

time limit specified in the stamp in her passport. So the grand plan of leaving as the whole family did not quite work. We couldn't argue with her that she should stay in Vienna as we didn't have enough to eat. We had to accept that she would go back. She also returned because of Bety who was left behind on her own and did not want to move to her sister.

After my mother's return to Prague, she was called to the police a few times but they didn't follow up. On the face of it she did not do anything wrong. She finally emigrated to Sweden in 1978. Her emigration was not a big problem because she was joining her family and giving up her pension. But she wanted to take Bety with her and Bety was not a member of the family. There was a need to bribe someone to acquire the permission for Bety to leave. The bribe was given on our behalf by Ing. Mikulík.

As for the rest of us adults, we were tried in absentia and sentenced to 10-15 months in prison. I got only 10 months because I was younger and they assumed that I was following my brothers' lead. The first thing I did when I returned to Prague in 1991 was to get a certificate that my sentence was null and void. Staying abroad without permission was no longer a crime.

Funnily enough, our cousin Ivan Vavruch was sentenced with us.

Moving on

Immediately after our arrival in Vienna, we went to various embassies and we discovered that nobody wanted Czechoslovaks any more. Earlier, in 1968, all countries were helping. Unfortunately, by the time we arrived in April 1969, they stopped doing that. I remember a visit to the British Embassy where there was a lady sitting with dogs under her feet. She asked whether we had been fighting in the Battle of Britain which was a stupid question.

There were only three potential countries: the United States, Australia and South Africa. The USA took very long to decide, at least 3 months, and furthermore we had a problem with my brothers' memberships in the Communist party–although they now presented themselves as Social Democrats and Pavel found a good job at an insurance company that belonged to the Austrian Social Democratic party. We were concerned that they would reject us because the Americans were quite capable of using

their spies in Prague to check on us.

I didn't fancy Australia. I saw the people waiting at the Australian embassy and I didn't like the look of them. The South African embassy was different. There were more classy people there. The problem was that South Africans didn't take doctors, the South African Medical and Dental Council didn't allow that. Only much later, after many doctors left the country, the Council changed their rules, and at one time Aleš actually considered moving from Sweden to South Africa.

They didn't want Pavel either. They didn't see how he could find suitable employment after being an editor of cultural magazines in Prague.

They were happy with me, I was an engineer. They promised to fly me to South Africa within a fortnight. That was good because I didn't enjoy selling newspapers and I couldn't speak German. Also their estimate of the salary I would get in South Africa was enormous compared to what I was getting in Vienna. So I thought it would be good to go and support my family from there–which I did.

After I was employed I sent all my spare money to them every month even after they moved to Sweden. Since they didn't need the money in Sweden, Pavel invested it in shares at the wrong time. Later, he returned the money to me in Prague.

The family gave me most of the foreign currency they had to take with.
I immediately and in a very stupid and costly fashion returned it all to them after I arrived in South Africa and was accommodated and supported by the government.
To let me in, the South Africans had a few requirements. The most important one was that I had to be 100% against communism. Less than 100% was not acceptable. The second was that I would never be employed by a black person which I happily promised.

On the day of my departure, Aleš had to wake me up. He wondered if he should but in the end did it. He wondered if he should have done it for the rest

of his days. Of course, I also had some doubts.

The South Africans took me in a bus-load of immigrants to Munich, by plane to Frankfurt and then on to Johannesburg in Lufthansa's Boeing 707.

South Africa (arrival on the 16th May 1969)
From Jan Smuts airport, we were driven to the city on the half-finished free-way.

They accommodated us, the whole group of immigrants, in a small hotel in Kerkstraat (I did not know that it was Church Street), in the centre of Johannesburg. At that time, Johannesburg was much safer than it is today. For me, it was so different. I saw a black man with a big stick in front of every building and I was wondering at first if the stick was meant for me.

I walked into the Anglican St Mary's cathedral and was approached by Mr Chew who played the organ there. He invited me to dinner at their flat. We had macaroni and cheese but I was unable to eat the whole portion, my stomach was not used to too much food.

The South Africans took care of me completely, I just don't remember how much pocket money they gave me. They brought me from Europe without any commitments. If I decided to leave the next day, there was no problem. They could at least make me learn Afrikaans within a year or so, otherwise I should return some money to them. It was all based on their assessment done in Vienna. They didn't do all that to help me, they expected me to be an asset.

In Kerkstraat, I had to share a room with two nice younger lads Jiří Martínek and Franta Chramosta, electricians, who were racing on sledges in Czechoslovakia. I have adopted their saying, "Život není péříčko" (Life is not a little feather).

Every morning we went to the Employment Bureau where they were looking for jobs for us. My roommates found a job very fast because their poor English was not so important, it was a German company and they could

speak some German.

I spoke very bad English and my comprehension was even worse. A lady from the Bureau took me to some engineering company, we got tea and she said, “Thank you for the nice tea.” I was amazed: How can tea be kind?

I had been learning English on and off my whole life, starting with the English English pre-primary school in Vodičkova ulice. Our family friend Evička Květová, sister of Honouš, took me there and then she tried to teach me herself. During high school, I was going with my classmate Věra Matějková to one of the blocks of flats built by Václav Havel’s grandfather next to the current Dancing House. There, Božena Kopřivová taught us using the top class method developed by Antonín Osička (1888-1949) (Czech page). And so on. No method worked for me. I learned to speak English only in South Africa when I forced myself to think in English.

After a week they found me a job at the Chrysler factory in Silverton near Pretoria. And again they paid my full board in Hotel Impala, now NIX, in Visagie Street in Pretoria, until my first salary.

The mad receptionist at the hotel, who sometimes shouted and screamed and tore off my map of Czechoslovakia from the wall, first put me in a room with an Italian. Somehow it just didn’t work. So she wanted me to join some Czechs. They were rough characters with whom I did not want to be, not at all like my friends the electricians. So I moved to a room with a young Afrikaner, Johann de Wet. Learning about his views was my first exposure to racism. When I arrived in South Africa, I was definitely not a racist, I did not understand how anybody could be.

Johann was a great help. I got only one thin blanket from the hotel and before I could buy another one, I was freezing at night. I was never so cold as when I was sleeping under one blanket in Africa. Johann lent me his army coat, made from the same rough thick green material as we had in our army. Shani de Beer lived in Pretoria at the same time but we did not meet.

Changing jobs...and girlfriends

In Silverton, Chrysler manufactured only obsolete engines and rear axles. The body parts were imported from Australia as ‘knocked down’ items. The paint quality was top class, assured by Mrs Smrčková in the lab. Unfortunately, the exposure to the fumes killed her eventually.

The main model assembled in the factory was ‘Valiant’, which was still quite popular when I arrived. After a year, the field behind the factory was filled with unsold cars.

My job was not clearly defined, it was some sort of technical administration. So I became proactive, revised the whole lot of documentation, most of it wrongly. They were not cross with me, they quite liked me, I just corrected it back to what it was.

Soon after my arrival in South Africa I felt that I was completely lost. I could not speak properly. I knew nothing about banks, insurance, how to behave, that one doesn’t reach over the table and rather asks someone to pass you things, that the small plate for bread is on the left, and that butter or jam for spreading on bread is first placed on that plate. So I had to learn all that and more. I drew a line and never learned to use the fork upside down.

Many Czechs were different, they considered South Africans to be idiots. For them it was perhaps a defence mechanism.

Being hopeless meant that I could not date a sophisticated Jewish girl whose dream was to open an exclusive restaurant in Sandton or a student whose dream was to marry a doctor.

Being stupid, the electricians and I went to Warmbad to lie in the sun the whole day. There was a lot of suffering and pain in my life.

To improve my English, I went to the Pretoria Technikon and after a year I passed English second or third language standard 8. A year later I did the same for standard 10. Technikons were higher education institutions focusing on vocational education.

In the first course, I met Anta Gritsopoulou, a young hairdresser. Her Greek family wanted to kill me and she suggested that we run away. I discussed the situation with my Greek colleague at Chrysler who described Anta and her family in such a degrading way that I gave her up. I don't think that she was that bad.

Then I dated Madellon du Toit, a divorced lady with two cute children. She was a translator at CSIR and, with her brother, took me on my only visit to Lesotho. Apparently I was a disappointment to her so she dropped me.

I was learning but I could feel that others did not see my improvements and saw me in the same light as I was the first day I arrived. So it was necessary to move from job to job–always starting on a higher level than before.

My second job was made possible by Karel Smrčka who was quite prominent among immigrants. He was teaching us English. He was not perfect but he was better than we were. Once he was teaching us food vocabulary and he said 'lettuce', and I, always joking, said "Let us pray." To that he said, "But you never come to church!"

True, I only went once like most of us. We were a great disappointment to Father Zdeněk Čížkovský (1921-2004) who was torn away from his happy stay among rural Zulus to face us, heathens. We did not know how to behave, inside and outside church, we did not really care much. I helped him only very modestly by contributing to his magazine, Jaro (JAR is Czech for the Republic of South Africa and jaro=spring). I did not know that some Czechoslovaks borrowed money from him and never returned it.

My second job was a mechanical designer in the Technical Services Department of CSIR. CSIR was a big conglomerate of research institutes established by the government. The main campus was at the edge of Pretoria. That institution had two parts, one official and the other secret–where they were developing rockets and other weapons.

That time I lived in a flat in Schoeman Street, overlooking Pretoria's art gallery, with Pepa Živný, a kind man, also an electrician. Unfortunately, Pepa

had a drinking problem and after a few years returned to Czechoslovakia.

At CSIR, my supervisor's hobby was theatre so the highlight of my stay at CSIR was my participation in an amateur production of Shaw's *Saint Joan*. I had one sentence in it. When I first pronounced it they rolled their eyes and made me learn it not as a sentence but as a series of sounds so it would sound English, more or less. I played a French knight and some people commented that I sounded French.

In the programme they mentioned that I acted at high school which was famous for its theatre productions, not mentioning my very minor roles there, and in Šárka, not mentioning that I was bad in the plays.

There was also a tragedy. My friend and colleague at CSIR Zdeněk Krofta bought a new Renault 16, was showing off how fast it could go, did not stop at a stop street, was hit by a bus, did not recover from a coma and was left to die after about 10 days.

After a year at CSIR, I travelled to Cape Town to find my next job. For that, I borrowed Pepa's big Australian station wagon in which I could sleep along the way.

In Cape Town, I did not sleep in the car but in the house of Petr Mužík (1938-2015), an accomplished yachtsman, in Sea Point, on a steep incline just under the house of his parents, Karel and Jirka Mužík, Czech patriots.

I repaid Petr for his hospitality by killing a litter of kittens. He was so grateful.

If I remember well, Majka knew Jirka's brother who lived in Czechoslovakia and told him that I was desperately lonely. That information was out of date. Jirka's brother told Jirka and Jirka told Alice Elahi (1926-2020), a painter, in Pretoria. Alice invited me to tea. Her sister, Diana Brooke (1924-2014), then invited me as well and became my new flame. To make it possible, she sold me her mother's old Mini so I could come to visit her at night.

She was a pianist and when we met some Czechs I had to introduce her

as the head of the musical department at the Pretoria Technikon.

Much later, Mr Elahi, a Persian frustrated because he only had daughters, chased me away from his house and called me “dirty, filthy man”. I did not like it seeing that I was quite innocent. What happened was that somebody walked in when Diana and I were making love on her hospital bed. She was in the hospital to have her nose straightened. It was her idea, I did not complain about her nose.

So Elahi house was closed to me but not Diana’s other sister’s house in Johannesburg. Virginia and her husband welcomed us as a couple and he took me for a short flight in his small plane that he used to visit his mother in Port Saint Johns. I found the flight boring.

Diana civilised me, helped me with English, had my teeth fixed to the more advanced South African standard and also gave me things. She gave me a bed because I did not have any, she gave me a chair on which I sit every day and a table knife that I still use every day. She wanted to give me valuable books, some good quality shares and her father’s jacket that R S Brooke used when he was a member of Parliament but I did not take any of that.

Diana visited Prague with her second husband, widowed Karel Mužík (her first marriage many years earlier to a pilot was short lived), and to his great displeasure she spent a lot of time with my family. Vikin wanted me to marry her but I did not think that was a good idea. So Vikin and I had words.

Diana was furious when I told her that I was dating Shani despite the fact that she and I were no longer a couple. We were just friends when she and her mother gave me a cake for my 30th birthday. Now she threatened to tell the authorities that I was divorced and not single as I declared to them.

When I arrived in South Africa, I did not have the divorce papers and I did not correct it when I had them. I did not think that it was important so I married Shani as a single man and when the Czech consul Adam Piňos was translating our marriage certificate, there was a problem. I had to persuade him to change it in the translation and submit a note that ‘single’ was an error.

I did not think that lying to the Czech authorities was wise seeing that I was married in Prague.

I didn't find a job in Cape Town. Instead, I got my first job as an engineer from Dr Dick Dutkiewicz (+1998) at Eskom. I knew nothing about power stations so I first spent 6 months at Arnot and one month at Grootvlei power stations before I moved to the Mechanical Research Laboratory that had been founded by Dutkiewicz in Rosherville between Johannesburg and Germiston. By the time I got there he had left for Eskom's head office. From 1973, he was a professor at UCT (University of Cape Town).

I thought that I would be involved in something revolutionary like solar energy. No chance. The work was focused on improving the operation of coal-fired thermal power stations. My main task was to find a way to ensure that pulverised coal entered the boiler uniformly from all inlets. I researched it and managed to do a few simple tests before I left.

Afterwards, from time to time, I came across some information that showed me that the problem has not been satisfactorily solved to this day.

For the research, I needed a lot of articles from journals and chapters from books and there was Shani de Beer at Eskom's central library who was sending it to me. Our first date was on the 21st April 1972.

I had at that time a room in single quarters in Rosherville, as old as the power station. I took Shani there after our second date, we remember it well. By that time I had a better car, yellow Fiat 128. Yellow was considered to be the safest colour.

After two years I felt that it was too quiet in the research lab and that I needed something more active. So I went to Mobil Oil where I visited customers and advised them on fuels and lubricants. Now of course, I first had to learn fuels and lubricants. After a few years, they transferred me to Cape Town. I liked that and stayed in the company for 30 years.

During most of those 30 years we lived from salary to salary. We had spare

cash at the beginning when we both worked; we travelled and we bought a stand in southern Johannesburg's Glen Vista. Then we had children and we bought a house that we could not afford. There were two windfalls, one of them was selling the stand, which we used to extend the house and to build a swimming pool 'for children'.

Before I went to Mobil Oil I applied for a job in an engineering company. They didn't take me because, apparently, I couldn't remember my names!

When I started my first job at Chrysler, they asked me about my names. I wanted to assimilate so I said 'Peter'. They asked me about my second name and I was not sure so I just said Matthew. Then they asked me if I had a third name. In South Africa, some people have three names although that is an exception. I said Robert, it sounded English to me. So I was Peter Matthew Robert and I had all documents, my bank account, insurance etc. in those names. Quite unlike in Czechoslovakia where, like everybody else, I used only one name.

Then my mother sent me my birth certificate and I discovered that I was Petr Rudolf Robert Matěj. I received the certificate just before that interview with the engineering company. When I was there, I couldn't make up my mind whether I should tell them the names in my South African documents, or the proper names I was planning to use in future. So I sounded like a complete idiot.

And I was one. In my ignorance, I called myself Matthew instead of the correct Matthias (in Czech). Much later, my mother pointed it out to me.

After the first few years I had a feeling that I was adapting but Mobil people saw that I was still rough at the edges. So they sent me to the Dale Carnegie course titled according to one of his books: *How to win friends and influence people*. That was a good thing, I was a new, improved man.

What I didn't learn there was how to pronounce English correctly, I retained my bad pronunciation. It would have required another course, my supervisors at Mobil considered that. In the end they decided that Dale Carnegie was

enough.

QUESTIONS ANSWERED

ABOUT EMIGRATION

The main reason why we left Czechoslovakia was not economic but moral. We expected that the regime would become more hard-line again and we didn't want to live in that. For instance, children might hear different things about politics at school and at home. That was very dangerous. If a child told at school what he heard at home, it could mean prison for the parent.

I assumed that I would have some children, and what was I going to tell them? Am I going to make it difficult for them, by telling them what I believe and urge them not to repeat it? Or should I lie to them as they would be lied to at school. That was just about the main reasons why I decided to leave.

In a way, as a child I was fortunate that there was no criticism of the regime at home. My father was well aware of the brutality of the regime but believed that it was compensated by good things. For example, there was no unemployment. (31) This had its roots in his undefeatable optimism.
When it was raining, he always saw that somewhere on the horizon the sky was already clearing. Real Pollyanna.

In other families, like in Vlasta's, the father had to warn his children: "If you say at school what you hear at home, I will go to a prison camp and you might never see me again!" There were many prison camps in Western Bohemia where the political prisoners had to mine uranium for the Russians. Looking from Krušné hory (Erzgebirge), we saw many white squares at night–they were lights at the fences of the camps. Almost a quarter million people were in camps, thousands did not survive it.
The regime did not tolerate indifference. Everybody had to show and proclaim his or her loyalty at every occasion. During "elections" one had to take the voting papers and put them straight into the urn ignoring the booth that was available there. We had to demonstrate that we were happy with whomever the regime decided we should vote for.

When Václav Havel with his friends wrote Charta 77 (in 1977), the regime

assembled all prominent cultural and other personalities in the National Theatre and, after listening to speeches, they all had to sign that they were against Charta 77. That time virtually none of them had a chance to read it.

This was a carbon copy of what the Nazis did after Heydrich's death. Cultural personalities gathered in the National Theatre to show anger against the low life bandits who killed Heydrich (except that he was probably killed on Canaris's orders in the hospital). Quite a few of those who demonstrated their loyalty to Nazis in the theatre were in fact involved in the anti-Nazi underground. Showing approval of the assassination was punished by death.

According to Majka, another reason was a worry that the Russians would start treating Czechoslovakia like a gubérnyja. Would they send our army (possibly with Luděk in it) to the Chinese border? I have completely forgotten this concern which looks like one of Pavel's inventions.

Ondřej listened to Pavel and was not getting married because it would not be wise seeing that the family would have to run again soon. Pavel had these ideas, e.g. that we could not stay in Austria because Austria was likely to be taken over by the Russians. In the end he loved his stay in Vienna and saw his move to Sweden as a painful downfall.

ABOUT OUR EMIGRATION EXPERIENCE

At the beginning, my biggest problem was that I was spoiled rotten. I was used to living in a big family, either in mine or in my first wife's, and all of a sudden I was all alone, thrown into a foreign country, foreign language, foreign environment, where everything was completely different. All that was difficult for me. I was waiting desperately to get some letters from Vienna. It took a week for my letter to reach them, one week for them to answer and one week for their letter to reach me. That was terrible. On top of it, after one week I changed my address when I moved from Johannesburg to Pretoria. Then the only way for me was to stop being spoiled. That was that.

It helped my psyche that I found friends among Czechs. First of all my friendly electricians who also came to Pretoria. They were the first who managed to buy a car, a new Volkswagen Beetle. When they went somewhere they took

me with them. We went to Lourenço Marques, today Maputo in Mozambique, where we had a great time eating lobsters, drinking beer, meeting black girls in the bar and going to the beach.

Then there were Zdeněk and Vlasta who were staying nearby in Hotel Maranatha. They were the only Czechs invited to our wedding in 1972. Zdeněk later made some dubious decisions, left Vlasta and lost his job at the Department of Water Affairs. Today Vlasta does not speak to me. When she visited Cape Town with her dying second husband, I wanted them to come in the afternoon because I sleep in the morning.

Despite all the difficulties, stress and suffering I believe that it was a good thing that we left. My relatives are happy in Sweden and Switzerland and would not dream of returning to Czechia. In the end they all managed very nicely. In my case, it made me stronger. It makes a lot of difference if you are exposed to situations where you are on your own.

After my marriage, I swore allegiance to South Africa but that was in front of a different flag than we have now. I considered myself to be a South African of Czech origin. After everything changed in South Africa (and in Czechia), I realised that in fact I was a Czech living in South Africa.

I don't see it as my fault. In 1972, "I am a South African" had a completely different meaning than "I am a South African" today.

Today I do not know many Czechs in Cape Town. There are a few Czech families but they are not mixed like mine and they do not invite us when they meet. There was a time when some friends came to see us to celebrate New Year's Eve, like when Czechoslovakia was splitting on the 31st December 1992. We were pulling down the Czechoslovak flag and then raising two flags and singing anthems. Most of those people are gone from our life.

My friends from my youth are still in Prague, my extended family is in Europe and my only friends here are my family.

When one is so far away, one sometimes builds relationships with relatives

better and deeper than when one is living with them in the same town.

A few months after I left Vienna, Sweden sent a commission to Austria wanting, on the face of it, to help social cases, but in fact to find people in certain professions. They found my brother Aleš, a medical doctor, and decided to take the whole family. They put them in a camp in Alvesta where they taught them Swedish.

The people were supposed to be in the camp long enough to learn the language so they could start working or go to school. However, my niece Marta told me that they let her go to school with only rudimentary Swedish and sent Aleš to work as a psychiatrist with not much more. It might also explain Pavel's unhappiness in the Västerås municipal gallery although, in the end, he became the director there.

It would have been natural if I followed my family to Sweden. I started to learn Swedish. However, I had a problem. What would I think of myself if I ran away from South Africa without achieving anything! At least I had to get a job as an engineer. When I finally did, I got married and that was the end of it.

ABOUT SOUTH AFRICAN SOCIETY

South African society is, unlike the Czech society, extremely diverse. My daughter married an Indian guy from Durban. He comes from a suburb which is quite different from where we live in Cape Town.

My wife goes to a Calvinist church, which is traditionally an Afrikaans church, so most people there are white Afrikaners (Boers). She has her well respected position in the church.

My former bridge partner, an Englishman born in Egypt and also a colleague from work, was telling us how he met an Afrikaans family during a holiday. He was surprised how nice those people were. He didn't realise how this talk could affect my wife when he implied he did not expect something like that from Afrikaners.

Coloured people mostly also speak Afrikaans but they live in a different area

because under apartheid they had to. Their suburbs are killing fields full of gangs and drugs.

We moved to a suburb which was predominantly English and of course white because non-whites were not allowed to own a house in a white area. Our suburb is still mainly white because today it is not good enough for up-and-coming non-whites and too expensive for the rest. Also, in more expensive suburbs people have maids, gardeners, cooks, nannies etc. who are all non-whites. So there are many more non-whites in more affluent areas.

If we generalise with regard to only white people in South Africa, compared with the Czechs the biggest differences are moral and religious. Of course there are affairs but it is not seen as lightly as in Czechia where everybody sleeps with everybody else. And in South Africa people who are not Muslims, Jews or Christians etc., like me, are in minority.

Then the Czech attitude to stealing; under the communist regime the Czechs were saying, “Who doesn’t steal, steals from his family.” That was a long time after T G Masaryk felt obliged to declare: “Don’t be afraid and don’t steal!” (Nebát se a nekrást!)

I thought that I was cured from stealing at an early age. When I was five I went to an English pre-primary school in Prague (not sure how many days a week, all I know is that I did not learn anything). It was in 1947, the last year before the new regime closed it.

In the pre-primary, I stole a rosary from a girl whom I quite liked. It was investigated but they didn’t search us so I got away with it. However, the investigation gave me such a fright that I felt I didn’t have the nerves for that. When I came to CSIR in Pretoria, I found a ball point pen that the previous incumbent left in an otherwise empty desk in the office, I took it and gave it to Diana. She was horrified that I stole it. Maybe she overdid it but I realised that I had quite different norms from what was acceptable in South Africa.

ABOUT APARTHEID

I was always against apartheid and I always voted for the liberal party that

was in opposition to apartheid. In Johannesburg I was actively helping another opposition party. When apartheid ended, it turned out that white liberals were as bad as white racists as they did not understand black people at all, even when they were fighting for them. Our voting and other actions against apartheid were apparently completely meaningless.

I voted with the apartheid government only once. Near the end of apartheid, they came up with an idea of giving coloureds and Indians their own separate parliaments. There was a referendum, only whites could vote. The liberals said that it was not good enough and they were right, it was not. So they decided to vote against it! I asked the coloureds at work if they wanted their parliament. They all said yes. I went to the voting station undecided. I took the ballot undecided. I went to the booth undecided. I agonised. Then I voted for the separate parliaments.

It is true that I do not understand blacks. I don't understand their lack of gratitude and grace.

Helen Suzman (1917-2009), who was for many years the sole liberal member of parliament and always fought for black people, presented an open, free of charge lecture at the University of Cape Town. There was not one black person in attendance! She fought in parliament, she engaged herself in individual cases, and, after all that, there was no appreciation from the blacks.

They do not have the concept of universal humanism as we do. They have 'ubuntu' ("I am because we are") which is a collectivist idea of every person belonging to the community. Unfortunately, if you are not part of the community, for example if you are a foreign black, you are not human, you are nothing, you are an insect.
Helen Zille, the leader of the liberal Democratic Alliance party should understand blacks. She was an activist, she fought along with them against apartheid. And yet she used Twitter to say that colonialism had some positive aspects like infrastructure, schools and hospitals. She had to (grudgingly) apologise for that slip and, while she was still the Premier of the Western Cape, she was banned by her party from making public statements.

Many blacks are very sensitive. It appears that they will forever feel to be victims of colonialism and apartheid. To them any positive aspects of colonialism are immaterial in comparison with their suffering and to mention them highly irritating. They don't know that how they feel about the past depends on them and not on some redress which would never be enough anyway. They would like whites to apologise and to suffer but it would not help.

I have nothing to apologise for. My privileges consisted merely in being able to live normally like I would in Europe. I was not responsible for the blacks not being able to do the same and I did not support it.

Too many blacks still support the former president Zuma. Why? They do not understand corruption the same way as we do. To them, the chief is entitled to take what he wants. In exchange, the chief provides for them, he gives them what they need. So they wait, and demand, to be given what they need. They do not have to do anything useful to get it. This culture of entitlement is arguably the most serious brake against the upliftment of South Africa.

Blacks want jobs. Unfortunately, for some of them having a job means only that they are entitled to be paid. Nothing else. To perform in the job is not a part of the equation. They have the job, don't they? Well, there are some white people in South Africa who behave the same way.

There is a difference between grand apartheid and petty apartheid. Grand apartheid is a lofty idea, just as communism is a lofty idea where in future everything will be beautiful, all people will meet the ideal standard. Everybody will be happily working, there will be plenty of everything for everybody, etc.

Grand apartheid is similar in a way. Everybody will have the same rights in their own area where every nation will rule itself. That was impossible because it was impossible to separate people so cleanly. It turned into various nonsense rules of petty apartheid, things were forbidden where it didn't make sense. For us, the whites, it was all right, we could live normally. That was our privilege.

In Cape Town I was going to work by train. The front wagons were for whites. Then when apartheid was falling apart there was only one wagon for whites.

Unfortunately, that was also the wagon for smokers, so I didn't want to go there. But there was no way out. I was in another wagon sitting among coloureds who smoke wherever they want. I like coloured people; they are crazily reckless and full of jokes. In the end, it wasn't too bad.

ABOUT EDUCATION IN SOUTH AFRICA

The white schools in SA were on the best international level. The government was giving the same amount of money to white schools and to black schools. However, there were five times more black pupils than white pupils.
The justification was that the money came from white people's taxes.
Hardly any black people paid taxes.

Blacks pay 'black tax' which means that if a black earns some money, he has to share it with his relatives. That is debilitating.

In the last years of apartheid, the black schools also suffered from the slogan "First liberation, then education!" The radicals were vandalising the schools, burning textbooks, breaking the furniture. They did not want anything to work.

How to fix it after apartheid? There were radicals who didn't care if the white schools were going down. They were quite happy if they went down to the level of black schools. So at one stage they were trying to forbid parents supporting the schools in white areas because poor parents in other areas could not do that.

Today it is the Black Teachers' Union, who is preventing improvement. They are full of corruption, supporting and promoting teachers who don't care, are frequently absent, come to school late or drunk, and abuse school children. The government does not act–the teachers are their voters.

ABOUT THE CZECH LANGUAGE

I have three children, Carlien is the oldest. I was trying to do Czech with her more than with the other two. As I was away working long hours during the

week, it was not enough. She did not understand me. She spoke Afrikaans with her mother and I didn't understand that. She was becoming quite unhappy that she could not communicate with me.

It was an agreement with my wife that the children's first language would be Afrikaans. But we lived in a predominantly English suburb. The neighbours who had children of the same age, spoke only English. Our children started to learn English from them. That was the language I was using with my wife. So Carlien one day realised that I would understand her if she was using the language she was using with the neighbours. That made her happy and it also made her lose all interest in Czech. I kept on trying, it was not enough.

When she lived a few years in České Budějovice, she had to learn Czech from scratch.

Carlien was born in 1975 and by that time my Czech was in a bad shape. That was one of the reasons I used high Czech with her. When I visited my relatives in Sweden it took me about a day before I switched to the colloquial Czech.

When my mother first came to visit us, I was terribly ashamed that I couldn't speak. I tried to cover it up by preparing sentences before I said them.

About a year after her my nephew Luděk came to visit us and that time my Czech was at rock bottom. I was not ashamed in front of him. He was in South Africa for about two weeks and that saved my Czech. I say that it moved to the other half of my brain. Basically I learned to speak Czech again. Of course, it helped when I started to go back to Prague and also when I worked in the Czech consulate in Cape Town for half a year after my retirement from Engen.

Perhaps because I re-learnt Czech on my own without lasting influence in any location or community, my Czech is unique. That puzzled an expert, Vojtěch Dubčák (Pygmalion type), when I recorded some words for him. I am pleased that my 'h' is correct, voiced as it should be thus in the phonetic alphabet [ɦ]. Of course, my English 'h' is also voiced, typical for my atrocious English

pronunciation. In this case it is alright because voiced ‘h’ is, according to Dubčák, common in South Africa. Voiced means that the sound is produced in the mouth cavity, unvoiced at the back in the throat. Czech ‘ch’ [x] is unvoiced.

The strange thing was that after a long absence, when I first came back to Prague, I heard how ordinary people ‘sang’ when speaking. I don’t notice it any more.

My Czech is good now so I listened to Ondřej’s urging. He wrote “Nezapomeň na češtinu!” (Don’t forget Czech!) on about twenty tiny pieces of paper and spread them in my luggage.

ABOUT MY FEELINGS
Coming by train from Vienna and crossing the border of Czechoslovakia for the first time in 1991, I had a very strange intensive feeling.

The train stopped on the Czech side. I jumped out because I needed to buy something to drink. In that railway station shop they tried to short-change me, I disputed that, it took time. So when I was returning to the train I felt that I had to run to catch it and just made a short cut over the rails. For that I was apprehended by the police. I remembered the bad old days in Czechoslovakia and behaved like a dog who lies down with the paws in the air. It worked beautifully. I became submissive which made them feel good and that served the purpose.

That was a reaction I would never use in South Africa. In South Africa I would apologise but would deal with them as equals.

Senator Moserová stopped by in Cape Town on her way from Australia. She brought her play about a son who emigrated and his mother at home was writing a letter to him over the whole play. At the end one finds out that he was actually dead. A very good play. There was a discussion afterwards and the senator was suggesting that emigrants left because they were not brave enough to stay behind and fight against the Communists.

I didn’t quite agree with her. I felt that to emigrate also required a bit of courage. But that was not the main thing. I was trying to tell her that our problem with people living in the Czech Republic is that we envy each other.

They envy us that we got out and became rich although we didn’t necessarily became rich, and how comfortably we lived when in fact it could have been quite tough, particularly in the beginning.

And that we envy them that they could live in our homeland. It is hard to say whose envy is worse. I personally felt that I was envying them more that they could live there all the time than they could possibly envy me. I was trying to tell all that to senator Moserová but she was not really listening.

First page

Autobiographies are all lies, you never reveal the whole story

Olga Mangold: Our emigration in 1968

In 1968, my father, RNDr Ivan Vavruch (4), was 49, my mother Maruška née Bártů was 40, my brother Štěpán was 11 and I was 14. Even at that age I was aware that there was 'something' (later known as the Prague Spring) going on in the life of my country.

On an apparently more innocently banal level, the summer holiday was approaching and this meant that, for the first time in our lives, we would be allowed outside the country. Since my parents were not members of the Communist party and, what is more, we were practising Catholics, this had not been possible before. We would spend a week in Nessebar, Bulgaria, at the seaside! My father, the only one with any experience of travelling abroad from his youth and from his study year in the USA, wouldn't stop talking of the beauty and wonder of the sea. We were so excited!!

The train journey took us across Austria and Yugoslavia to the small seaside resort Nessebar, where we arrived safely with our suitcases filled with swimming things and some pots and pans, since we were staying with a family where we could do our own cooking. The Communist party minder / supervisor made sure nobody would 'get lost' along the way - we were about 50 people, all families of the staff of my father's University of Chemistry and Technology (VŠCHT Praha).

Once in Nessebar, we were quite free to explore and enjoy the seaside region. A wonderful experience!

21st August 1968

And then, on the 21st August, everything changed. We had no radio or telephone, but the whole town was abuzz with the news: the Warsaw Pact troops had invaded our home country. Rumours, panic, uncertainty: what should or could we do? The answer came with the communist minder: we were all to pack our things immediately and take the next train home. Some people of our group didn't turn up, they probably tried to get a boat to Greece, to the 'West'. The rest of us boarded the train, which took us part of the way and then stopped in the middle of nowhere (we later found out it was in Serbia, near the village of Svetozarevo) and all the Czechs and Slovaks were told to get off. We were walked to a kind of field camp with big tents. This is

where we stayed for the next four days, sleeping in the tents, cooking and washing at tables outside.

The village people were very friendly. They made us feel that they were on “our side”, brought us some food and hugged us when we were told to move on. My father was asked to make a little speech to thank them and we sang our national anthem. Quite a moving moment. I was proud of my father.

We were then made to get on the train again, and this time it took us all the way to Vienna. And no further. The border was blocked, no trains were running to Prague. We had to leave the train again and stood waiting at the Vienna central station while my parents were trying to see what we could do. While Štěpán and myself were standing there alone, somebody approached us and slipped us some money. This was quite a shock - it was then I realised how serious the situation was. We were refugees.

By this time, the Viennese authorities were getting organised and we were taken to the refugee centre in the big ice skating hall. Hundreds of mattresses lining the floor of the skating rings. Public facilities and some showers, soup kitchen to serve us all. A Jewish organisation approached us to find out if we were Jewish - in which case they would have helped us. My mother’s distant cousin Robert Beck lived in Vienna - we went to see him to get some advice and more detailed news.

My father had lived through a similar situation while he was studying in Boston at MIT (he had obtained a grant for one year) while the communist coup in ČSR happened in February 1948. He decided to return back to Prague immediately because he didn’t want to leave his mother, Eliška Vavruchová, alone, she was a widow.

This time he had a family of his own to look after. He tried to contact several former colleagues at universities in the USA and at UNESCO looking into possibilities of jobs. My parents felt that it was time to get out - somewhere, anywhere, since it was still not possible to get a train back home to Prague. They applied for visas to Canada, USA and Australia.

Things got even more difficult when my brother and I got chickenpox. We were rushed to hospital for consultation and told to stay in quarantine. Which was achieved by putting a rope around our four mattresses with a sign

saying: quarantine!!! Which frightened the people around us, of course.

We stayed in Vienna from the 28th August to the 4th September. In the morning of that day a voice announced over the loudspeaker that there was a train leaving for Switzerland in the evening, anyone wishing to take it should contact the refugee camp authorities. Just like that. So that's what we did.

We grabbed our luggage (still the same bathing costumes, pots and pans) and got on the train. And travelled overnight, 1st class (!) to Switzerland. We arrived early morning - my father trying to wake us up to see the impressive mountains (we were too tired for that) and asking us what we knew about this new country. I said "Grenoble" (wrong, of course). My brother had no idea. My parents said chocolate and Geneva and watches and our new home until we could go back to Prague.

Switzerland

At the train station in Rorschach, near the Swiss-Liechtenstein border, there was a local committee to welcome us (!!) to Switzerland. We were given a room in an old hotel, where we got breakfast and where we could stay as long as it took my father to get a job.

In the meantime, some local people gave us some clothes (it had clearly got much colder than in Bulgaria), took us to see typical Swiss places (I was particularly impressed by the Swiss cows actually grazing and running around on the meadows without breaking their legs (!), by the cute curtains in the windows and by the trains running on time) and after a week or two I also joined classes at the local secondary school. Hardly understood anything except maths, of course. My mother had tried during the previous summer holiday to teach me some German - which I hated of course, but the little I knew turned out to be more useful that anyone would ever have expected.

1968 was a time of economic boom and chemists were sought after. My father got many interesting job offers very quickly: in research, industry, teaching. He opted for Ciba-Geigy (now Novartis) in Marly, near Fribourg; the enterprise seemed to offer attractive opportunities for research. After about a month in Rorschach we packed our cases again and took the train to Fribourg. The local train station seemed to me terribly small and disappointing. The first impression was rather off-putting. We were met

at the station and taken to the local–very modest–refugee facility in a disused factory. Some improvised bunk-beds were all it held. Cold, grey. Our first contact with French, which is the main language spoken in Fribourg, quite a surprise for us.

Fortunately, we only had to stay for about a week - my father's employers made sure we found a small flat quite easily and we sort of settled down a little. We were granted a loan of 2000 Swiss francs (which we were asked to pay back six months later) to help us get the basic stuff and the local social service provided some second-hand furniture. My bed was terrible, with the springs coming out! But on the whole, the whole experience for us children felt more like a kind of exciting adventure, which we were sure we would be able to relate to our friends in Prague once we returned back home. Next summer, probably.

Our having a permanent address made it easier to stay in touch with our family in Prague. Grandmother Eliška was able to send us some things–for me there were also some school books (maths, Russian!) so I could keep up and get ready for the college entrance exams. In Fribourg, quite accidentally, we discovered a girl's high school (with nuns in long black robes as teachers!) that accepted me: being able to join a class was interesting and helped me make progress in German, Latin and French (the hardest for me) quickly. Most importantly, I also made some friends. It was certainly more difficult for Štěpán, who really had to start German from scratch and had to change from primary to high school after two years. Fortunately, our parents could help us with both German and French (and even Latin) and we got a lot of help from many different people.

My father's job at Ciba-Geigy went very well at the beginning and my mother's language skills enabled her to get various secretarial jobs in Fribourg. We were in close touch with many other refugee families and with some local people through school, jobs and church.

The big decision

While things seemed to be running quite well, my parents had to face one of the hardest decisions ever: should our family go back to Prague, now, or maybe later, when things have calmed down and the political situation might allow it? Should we stay in Switzerland? They wrote many letters to family

and friends, asking for advice, doubting, debating - and got as many different replies: Come back, Don’t come back, Stay, Don’t stay, How could you?! and so on. Aunt Máňa came from Prague, they spent whole nights discussing, weighing up pros and cons. How about grandmother Eliška? My father’s research? Vila? The situation behind the Iron Curtain got worse and my parents finally applied for political asylum. They were granted refugee status easily and we got the blue Geneva convention passports.

By the time my parents told us we were not returning to Prague any time soon, we children had already adapted a little and it wasn’t that hard for us to accept. It was only later I understood a little how hard it must have been for them! In 1971 they got an official letter from the attorney in Prague informing them they had been sentenced to 15 months of imprisonment for leaving and staying out of the country illegally. There was no going back home then. The hardest moment for my father was when grandmother was dying and he couldn’t be with her and couldn’t go to the funeral!

Our time at school went well and my parents were very eager to seize the opportunity at long last to be able to travel and discover the many wonders that culture and nature in Europe had to offer. We travelled a lot. Camping mostly. We loved it.

Unfortunately, the economic boom did not last and my father’s job was gradually cut down and he was finally forced into early retirement. At the same time, his health had already deteriorated and he was constantly in pain. In spite of this, he continued writing virtually every day and publishing (!) from his office at home up until the age of 83 (in the field of Irreversible Thermodynamics, the last publication in the Chemical Abstracts 2002). He got comments and letters from scientists and former students from all around the world, who had read and appreciated his articles. This made him feel useful and very happy. He was a really dedicated scientist.

My mother kept on working until 64 and even after her retirement, she was incredibly eager to discover anything to do with culture, especially music and always had interesting details to relate to us all. That was her world.

They had sacrificed their home for the hope of liberty and for the future of us, the children. Were they happy at all with their emigration? Maybe partly, sometimes.

My father went back to Prague a couple of times after the fall of the Iron Curtain. He went to his sister Alena Lochovská's funeral. In 2001 one of his dreams came true and he travelled to Prague to receive the title of 'Professor of Charles University'. He had waited 33 years.

My mother never wanted to go back. For me, this was not easy to understand, and I tried to persuade her, but I had to accept her decision.

Final remarks

This is the story of our emigration. This how I remember it, how I feel it. Some of it may be inaccurate, some important details may be missing. I have added some photographs to illustrate our 1968 odyssey: they show our family in the camp in Svetozarevo, the refugee camp in Vienna and during our early days in Switzerland.

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We missed Prague, our friends and relatives that were left behind. What we did not quite appreciate was that they felt the loss perhaps just as strongly. Olga's cousin, Zdeněk Lochovský expressed it recently:

"We did not live in Prague and I have only sketchy and somewhat vague memories of our visits to Vila and our stays at Domeček. When I was 12, I would start to be interested in my extended family. But that's when you all disappeared; first Ivan and his family and then other relatives from Vila and Ratboř. To this day, I remember how badly I took it. My classmates often talked about their experiences with their cousins, uncles and aunts, and I didn't have anyone like that! In short: you left a gap, that's how I perceived it. I only heard about you sporadically, occasionally and indirectly. In addition, the care for my grandmother Eliška remained entirely on the shoulders of my mother. That I only realized in retrospect.

After 1989, I met a few times with Pavel and Majka, I visited them in Sweden in the early 1990s. We have seen each other several times. About once a year we write to Štěpán. But that's all. Reportedly, I have several dozen relatives, whom I have never met, and therefore no relationship or interest in ourselves has developed between us. I couldn't even name them, and I don't know who's related to whom. I don't want to evaluate it in any way. In short, this is reality and, in fact, history today."

NOTES

(1) My biological father was probably a character called Klíma. My mother left some clues (fathers underlined in red) but we might never know the whole story. I always thought that my father was quite old when I was born in 1942 (he was almost 47) while this fellow was 68! And he was ugly. Aleš and Pavel disliked him. I see in it an inconsiderate streak my mother sometimes displayed.

My mother and Klíma were translating Rudolf von Delius' (1878-1946) 1926 booklet *Tanz und Erotik* at Domeček. The translation was published in 1940, so this factoid was a red herring. As such, it helped me a lot at the beginning when it was difficult for me to accept the situation. That was my denial phase.

It was quite interesting to see how Majka's disclosure affected me, it was really something. My son Rudolf said that it was hectic, it was. I am happy that now I can say: Who cares! Or, in the strange modern Czech idiom: "Už to neřeším!" Rather, I am amused by that. I am still an honorary Vavruch.

Now I know that such a disclosure is a bad idea (in my parlance 'a bum idea') but, unfortunately, by my nature, I was unable to keep it from my children. I believe that Aleš wanted me to know and that's why he told Majka.

If you are interested, here is some information about Klíma:
Bibliography References Životopis Knihy

It is possible that my mother achieved what she wanted and lost all interest in Klíma. In his letter dated the 16th March 1943, he wrote: "…Those seven words really touched me [referring to my mother's uncaring birthday wishes]...letter for which, again, I will not get a reply...yesterday, I spoke to Ladislav [nobody else called my father Ladislav] at Wenceslas Square and he told me that you would return to Prague next week...Kiss Petříček from me…"

Another flame of my mother was JUDr Jaroslav Kose (mostly in Czech), that was serious. As I see it, the problem was that his beautiful daughter was deaf.

His wife Vlasta, leader of Czechoslovak Girl Guides (in Czech), returned to my mother her love letters after his execution by the Nazis (the letters are kept in Västerås archive).

My father was born in Kroměříž where his father, Rudolf Wawruch, was a ‘profesor’ (high school teacher) at German ‘reálka’.

Vavruchs lived in Haná, the most fertile region of Czechia between Kroměříž and Olomouc in Moravia. Until recently, before the Internet, we did not know that Vavruchs probably came from Ukraine or Belarus, we thought that we came from Poland and that ‘vavry’ meant something in Polish. Well, maybe some Vavruchs did come via Poland.

Our favourite false news was that the family was impoverished nobility. That is true only about the Polish Gardavsky family (PDF in Czech 17 Mb) that appears more than once in our family tree, the mother of Rudolf Wawruch was born Gardavská.

We knew about Ondřej Jan Vavruch (Andreas Ignaz Wawruch, 1773-1842) from Němčice nad Hanou who might have accidentally killed Beethoven by giving him an overdose of a lead-based cure, maybe as a wound dressing. For me, it is interesting that he went to the same high school in Kroměříž as, much later, Robert Jan Kořán.

We do not know how this Wawruch was related to us. However, Němčice is the town from which, by some accounts, Vavruchs spread to other places.

Heavy metals were commonly used in medicines of that time and it was theorised that Beethoven consumed large amounts of lead from illegally fortified wine. Putting lead sugar into wine was a very common practice to sweeten cheap wines, and despite being outlawed in most European countries during the 18th century, the prohibition was difficult to enforce and production of lead-fortified wine (which originated in Roman times) continued unabated. Beethoven particularly liked sweet wine, therefore Beethoven’s chronic consumption of wine tainted with lead is a better explanation of his hearing loss than other causes.

There are documents showing how highly regarded Dr Wawruch was.
He certainly did not treat Beethoven for money, Beethoven did not have any.
Rather, Dr Wawruch did it because he was a musician himself. *Back*

(2) During the war, milk was purchased in shops that used tiny galvanised cylindrical measures for pouring it. The daily ratio for adults was at first one-sixteenth and later one-thirty-second of a litre. That was a few drops, so it was purchased on a weekly basis. The shopkeeper used scissors to cut off the relevant pieces from the rations card issued for the month.

If you are surprised that the Germans in occupied Czechoslovakia allowed higher rations for Czech children while they wanted to eliminate, after the war, all Czechs from Bohemia and Moravia, you must understand that 'Protektorat Böhmen und Mähren' (March 1939 to May 1945) had a Czech government with 'Staatspräsident' Emil Hácha (1872-1945) and an army of 7000 soldiers including 40 generals. (In Czech: Hácha v Berlíně and Vládní vojsko)

Some of the ministers were involved in the anti-Nazi underground, general Alois Eliáš was one of them, he was executed on the 24th June 1942.

While the ministers tried their best, they could not do much. Protektorat was ruled by a German appointed by Hitler, e.g. Reinhard Heydrich who was the 'Stellvertretender Reichsprotektor' (Deputy/Acting Protector).

Edvard Beneš (1884-1948) abdicated as the Czechoslovak president after the Munich Agreement but then installed himself as the head of government in exile in London. At one stage he ordered Hácha to resign in protest against German brutality. Hácha, despite his failing health, knew that he had to selflessly soldier on. After Heydrich's death, he was forced to make speeches in which he expelled Beneš from the Czech nation. Beneš never forgot insults like that but in this case would let mortally ill Hácha go in May 1945. Not the Communists: Hácha was beaten and arrested by NKVD agents and he died in prison hospital six weeks later.

Hácha's situation was misunderstood even by Voskovec and Werich who, in safety in the USA, wrote and broadcast a song in which they blamed

Hácha for the terror in Protektorat.

In 2018, Czechia recognised Hácha's merits and issued a postage stamp with Hácha's portrait. During Protektorat, only Hitler's face was on postage stamps.

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(3) Robert Jan was born in Sedlec, North of Plzeň, on the 24th May 1859. His father was a mechanic at the local steel works. Robert admired him so much that he adopted his name Jan. Robert Jan was right, Jan was exceptional: he was both skilful and inventive so he could invent and design new instruments and machines and make them. He also enjoyed making, by forming and soldering, pretty vessels and boxes. And thinking about perpetuum mobile.

His inventiveness came to full fruition in his second employment, in Moravia. Employed as a machine fitter at a sugar factory in Kvasice near Kroměříž, he was soon promoted to concentrate on his designs and improvements. The factory belonged to Emanuel von Proskowetz (knighted as Proškovec; in Czech); it was built by his brother-in-law, Ferdinand Urbánek, grandfather of Anna Maria Tilschová (a writer and a friend of my father).

So Robert spent his childhood in Kvasice. The economic situation of the family was improving only gradually thus there was barely enough food for the growing child. He was skinny and quite wild.

He was wild and reckless even as an adult. A few months after their marriage, he took his wife on a boat. The boat capsized, she hit herself and lost a baby. Fortunately, her father was wrong, she was able to have more children: Eliška, Vikin and Máťa.

Robert learned German the hard way by having to go to a Roman Catholic, Piarist, German high school in today's Masarykovo náměstí in Kroměříž even though he could not say a word in German, it was tough (see from left: Laďa's gymnasium - Rudolf's reálka - church - Robert Jan's school with a balcony on the second floor). He slept in the dormitory, the food was bad and inadequate. So he walked 10 km to Kvasice on Sundays and brought some food with him

to Kroměříž.

He enrolled in the army as a ‘one-year volunteer’ and got a honourable discharge after 10 months.

Good German allowed him to study in Heidelberg where his professor was Robert Bunsen (1811-1899). Unfortunately, after a year, the fumes in the laboratory affected Robert’s lungs, he was spewing blood. He returned to Kvasice. Bunsen was understanding, he sent Robert a very friendly letter.

Back home, in December 1881, he was offered employment as a chemist at von Proskowetz’s new sugar factory in Všetuly near Kroměříž.

Six years later Robert Jan became the chief technical officer at Všetuly and two years later the CEO. He worked there for 18 years. He married Marie Schwarzová in Litenčice on the 6th June 1894 (see the anniversary photo).

After Všetuly, Robert Jan was, briefly, the CEO in Hulín and then the construction manager in Trenčianska Teplá in Upper Hungary (Slovakia). The foundation stone for that sugar plant was laid in 1900, the full production started a year later, Robert Jan knew what he was doing!

Now he wanted his own factory. First, in 1901, he rented from Aristides Baltazzi a sugar factory in Napajedla. In the 1902 photo, you can see that he was enjoying himself. My mother was born in Napajedla in 1905. Were her siblings, Eliška and Viktor, pleased? No! They locked themselves in the bathroom and shouted, “We don’t want her!”, “We don’t want her!”, “We don’t want her!”…

The lease in Napajedla ended in 1906. It was time to move on–to Cerekvice.

The sugar factory in Cerekvice was built in 1873-5 and was owned by sugar beet farmers. It was badly managed and went bankrupt. In 1887, Mr and Mrs Kadlčík bought it in auction with her money and 10 years later JUDr František Kadlčík died. They had no children. Mrs Kadlčík was furious that half of the factory went to the Charles University so she changed her name back to her maiden name Marie Jesslerová. She did not want to sell her share but Robert

Jan was not giving up. Finally in 1907 she shouted, “To hell with it!” (probably Čert to vem!) and sold it for 300 000 crowns. In a way, it was prophetic.

The factory was in a very poor shape and primitive, labourers were bringing the sugar beet in baskets on their back, but Robert Jan immediately started rebuilding it. Only raw sugar was produced until 1919 when a modern refinery extension was added.

In 1907, there was no electricity in the house and water was brought by hand on wooded pails from the well. Paraffin lamps and candlesticks (polished every Friday) were used. There was a coal stove only in one room. The building, built from stone, was very cold in winter but not cool enough in summer. There was no garden. Gradually, it all changed.

At first, the Kořáns stayed there only during summer holidays. They did not expect to live there because of their children who needed to go to school. Everything that was needed for the holidays was brought by train in big baskets. The cool box was filled with ice delivered from a restaurant. It was needed as there was no cellar. Dishes were washed in a wooden tub–until Olu showed her disapproval.

After WWI started, everything was becoming more difficult. There was no coal in Prague, thus Vila had to be abandoned and the family moved to Cerekvice. By that time the factory had an electricity generator and the house was electrified. There was still no electric fridge and the ice was no longer available which was a big problem.

Robert’s brother Jindřich was born when Robert was 9. Jindřich had a much easier childhood which, according to my mother, made the two brothers very different. Robert was a fighter, a creator, did not spare himself, Jindřich just went comfortably through life.

Jindřich Kořán was a mechanical engineer (Dresden). He worked in a number of sugar factories: in Dymokury, Kvasice and the longest, as the CEO, in České Meziříčí and in Sereď (Slovakia). Unlike Robert Jan, Jindřich patented his inventions, he had 17 of them. (Jan also had a few patents.) Jindřich built a villa in Prague 6 but quite far from Vila, at No. 6 Glinkova ulice, close to the

third oldest railway line in continental Europe. (5)

Jindřich was one of the first people riding a motorcycle, was a member of Sokol, played the violin and harmonium and was quite good at painting in oils.

He had four daughters, thus my mother had four female cousins while my father had four male cousins named Vavrouch. The wrong surname was an error by a priest in Kojetín–quite understandable as there were other Vavrouchs in the town but no other Vavruchs.

'Strýček Jindříšek' is also buried in Bubeneč in Prague 6–next to the wall on the left. Diminutive names were, and still are, very common in my family, I am trying to fight it.

There is a very interesting Czech article (11 Mb) about Jan Kořán, Robert Jan, Jindřich Kořán, Vikin and Ivan Vavruch (4).

So my mother's Kořán family originated in Western Bohemia but there was never ever any contact with our relatives there. Our Kořáns lived in Moravia, so to my mother, even after many years in Prague, we were Moravians. Traditionally, there are many differences between Bohemians and Moravians. The latter are closer to the melodic Slovaks.

The surname Kořán is much more common than Vavruch in our country and we had to explain that we had nothing to do with the rich butcher in Prague also called Kořán. Rich butchers were also class enemies to the Communists. The map shows that Kořáns live mainly in central and western Bohemia.

Names Kořán and Vavruch appear together in a novel by Karel Klostermann *Ze světa lesních samot* published in 1894 and, perhaps based on that book, in the work of comedian duo Jiří Grossmann and Miloslav Šimek in the late 1960s. *Back*

(4) Prof. RNDr Ivan Vavruch, DrSc (1919-2006), son of my father's brother JUDr Zdeněk Vavruch and of my mother's sister Eliška (formally Alžběta), worked in Cerekvice as a chief chemist during the war because Czech universities were closed and there was a danger that he would be sent to

work in Germany. He studied privately and graduated in 1945.

His involvement with science started already during the war, his first paper was published in 1941 when he was 22. It concerned ‘polarographic maxims’ which made him one of close collaborators of Jaroslav Heyrovský. Ivan spent one year at MIT and returned to Czechoslovakia in 1948 after the communist takeover which made him partially protected from abuse based on his class origin. He was allowed to teach but he was held back despite receiving a number of prizes for his research. Ivan became ‘Professor’ 40 years later than he should have been. Associate professor in 1953, professor in 2002. One of the first DrSc in the country.

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(5) The oldest railway line in continental Europe was built in France in 1827 and the second was České Budějovice-Linz in 1828. The third one (in Czech) led from the station Praha, later called Praha-Písecká brána or Bruska, today Praha-Dejvice, to Lány. Thus Praha-Dejvice railway station is the oldest in Prague although Dejvice was not part of Prague until 1922. The original building (1831, later modified) is still on the other side of the line. The sleepers cut at first from sandstone and rails made from cast iron proved hopelessly inadequate, there was a steep learning curve.

All those horse-drawn railways transported only goods, that is mainly timber, coal, stone and grain.

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(6) On April 6 and 7, 1946, the 1st General Assembly of the ČNA (Czech National Aeroclub) took place in the Prague Air House. RNDr Viktor Kořán was elected chairman of ČNA. Karel Novák from Jindřichův Hradec was elected to the ČNA Central Office as an alternate.

MUDr Jaroslav Hausmann
Jája Hausman

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(7) In the family note after Vikin’s funeral on the 7th December 1984, his

noble nature was described as follows: *“He loved the whole nature with all her creatures but more than that, he loved all people and was good to all of them, even to those who were doing harm to him.”* Back

(8) Very long comment about the leaders of communist Czechoslovakia, drawing heavily on Karel Kaplan’s *Mocní a bezmocní*, 68 publishers, 1989. Back

Alexej Čepička was son-in-law of the first ‘workers’ president’ Klement Gottwald. (Gottwald’s daughter would have preferred one of the top Soviet leaders but none of them took the bait.)

Čepička survived Nazi concentration camps, was a hatchet man in post-war Kroměříž, minister of trade in 1947, of justice in 1948 (suppressing church activities) and of defence from 1950 to 1956 when he was demoted to head the Patent office.

Documentary about Čepička in Czech

Stalin liked Čepička because Čepička enthusiastically tried to prepare the Czechoslovak army for an attack on Western Europe in line with Stalin’s plans in 1951. The Czechoslovak army was to occupy a part of France. Čepička was the only Czechoslovak not criticised by Stalin.

However, after two years, Stalin accepted economic projections showing that the attack would ruin the Soviet Union–and quietly abandoned the plan. So quietly that he did not tell Čepička. Soon after that Stalin died. Čepička, for the rest of his life, believed that the attack would have been a good idea.

Chruščev did not have the same ambitions as Stalin and quickly got tired of Čepička (who unwisely remarked in front of him that Svoboda was a spy) but it took a few years before Čepička was demoted. Vikin had a high regard for Čepička, unlike many young men who served in the army under his rule.

Čepička held the army in such a tight grip that when he departed, its leadership was in a crippling shock. Nobody dared to command, the discipline disintegrated. It was also costly, 8 warplanes were destroyed in accidents.

When Stalin died in 1953 I was heartbroken. I even ‘composed‘ a little ditty about ‘ever-living Stalin’. Gottwald died a few days later but that did not seem to concern me. Later I devised a false conspiracy theory that Gottwald, an alcoholic, discovered, after Stalin’s death, Stalin’s booze cabinet and took a wrong bottle which poisoned him. Stalin had poisoned a few people.

Gottwald was not the boss, that was Stalin. (A Czech video about Gottwald including Jan Masaryk’s despicable behaviour at 10:40) When Stalin felt like it, he allowed Gottwald to argue with him and at least once he accepted, after a long discussion, Gottwald’s argument. That was when Gottwald defended his decision to ignore Stalin’s order to request Red Army intervention in the 1948 communist coup. The Red Army stationed in Hungary was ready to enter Czechoslovakia. From then on, Gottwald obeyed–and lived in fear. Fear was normal, that was the keystone of Stalin’s rule and his winning strategy: nobody–but absolutely nobody–could feel safe. It worked.

In Moscow, before and during the war, Gottwald did have enough courage to try to save Czechoslovaks who were arrested by the Soviets for no good reason. There were only a few cases when he succeeded.

As president, Gottwald decided who would be executed (240 people were executed for political ‘crimes’ in Czechoslovakia) but it was Stalin who told Gottwald what to decide. In particular when it concerned the top officials like the second most powerful man in Czechoslovakia, Rudolf Slánský (born Salzmann).

Before condemning people, Stalin usually waited for their confession. That was delivered by highly skilled interrogators/torturers. In Czechoslovakia, the torturers were local but they were supervised by Soviet ‘advisers’. Early on, Soviets insisted that the KSČ leadership invited Soviet advisers.

The Communists altogether killed about 4500 people (mainly in labour camps), sentenced 200 000, while 300 000 emigrated when they could. Why did so many Communists participate in those horrors? For some, it had three phases. The first applied to most of them. It was ideological fanaticism (today called activism). For those who progressed, it was intoxication with power.

And, as it was, in the third phase they became petrified.

From an interview with one of those who were responsible:
“What do you think today about the judicial crimes in the 1950s?”
“It was the right thing to do.”
“What???” “The party wanted it.”
“And the rehabilitation of the innocent comrades?”
“It was the right thing to do.”
“Why?” “The party wanted it.”

‘Party’, of course, meant the few people on the top who were puppets of the Soviets.

When Franco’s regime in Spain wanted to execute a prominent Spanish Communist, Stalin sent a message to Franco requesting, as a professional courtesy between two dictators, to spare him. Franco replied, “Sorry, can’t do it, and anyway, you killed more Communists than I did.”

In Gottwald’s last years, after Stalin denied him a one-on-one meeting following a discovery of eavesdropping equipment in Gottwald’s office, Gottwald avoided Stalin, sent Čepička to Moscow when necessary and simply carried out all instructions from the Kremlin. This situation, plus his venereal disease, made Gottwald a broken and apathetic man.

After Gottwald’s death, the Communist party politburo took too long to decide what to do with the body. To display it like Lenin’s (and, for a while, Stalin’s body as well) the body has to be embalmed without delay. That was not done so the body later started to fall apart. The cold room in the basement at Vítkov where for a number of years Gottwald’s corpse was kept when not on display (which was right above it) is worth visiting.

After Gottwald’s death, Antonín Zápotocký (Zápotonda to us) (in Czech), the butt of jokes for Stalin (so was Chruščev) became president.

Stalin had pretended amazement that a person who wrote novels could be a prime minister. Zápotocký felt obliged to send his novels to Stalin with

a letter explaining that he was writing only in his spare time and was not neglecting his job. He also expressed regrets that his books were not translated into Russian.

In March 1953, there was nobody else who could become president. Čepička had lost his sponsors, Stalin and Gottwald, and Rudolf Slánský was in well-deserved Hell.

Zápotocký was deeply morally flawed, indecisive but due to his folksiness had a better reputation among his countrymen than he deserved. He was decisive in one thing: he refused to rehabilitate falsely prosecuted comrades. Instead, Zápotocký accused those of them who demanded rehabilitation of not being good Communists because they were throwing bad light on the party. Also he had never stopped hating Slánský. The terror continued in inertia until Chruščev dismantled the system.

His other worry was that those people could demand a compensation! So what if they were innocent? Surely they did something bad! Let us sentence them for their real crimes with the sentences matching their time spent in jail. Then they could be released. That's what happened to Josef Smrkovský. The rehabilitation started only in 1955.

Zápotocký's most famous lie was when, a day before the monetary reform, he assured the population that there would not be a monetary reform .

Zápotocký gradually lost the real power to the first secretary of the Communist party, Antonín Novotný (in Czech). In those days, party secretaries were top dogs and when they lost influence they were demoted to become government ministers!

When Zápotocký died, Viliam Široký was selected by KSČ to take over. He was the prime minister and previously a token Slovak in the leadership (while nobody bothered to ask the Slovaks what they thought about it). His portraits were printed (the president's portraits were everywhere, in early days next to Stalin's). Then an unexpected problem arose. That Široký was particularly nasty and probably an active Soviet spy, was not a problem. The problem

was that Antonín Novotný had cultivated a special relationship with Chruščev and Chruščev ‘suggested’ to the Czechoslovak comrades that Novotný should be president. Novotný then combined both top jobs in the country.

Novotný was the only president with whom I shook hands. Rather brainless and a hard-liner stuck in class struggle but personally not a bad person.
He knew that the president’s function was less important so he did not exert himself in it. Instead he spent a lot of time tending his garden at Orlík castle and playing mariáš.

Novotný promoted rehabilitation of innocent comrades, except Slánský who was the leading early organiser of the terror, Smrkovský who wanted back his party positions, and Gustáv Husák.

Husák saved his life by default...and grit. He was one of very few who endured physical and psychological torture and did not confess.
He maintained his innocence which caused the interrogation and the trial preparation to drag on and on. In the end he was sentenced, based on testimony of some despicable characters, only to life imprisonment. That was because Stalin was dead and hanging was no longer in fashion.

Psychological torture worked because most of the Communists hanged and imprisoned at that time were true believers. While the party rejected them, they unfailingly stuck with the party. If the party wanted them to confess, they should confess. There were also highly believable threats concerning their families etc. And beating. Smrkovský counted the hard hitting slaps.

Novotný, who fancied himself as a top class ideologue, believed to the end that Husák was a Slovak bourgeois nationalist, thus guilty as charged, lucky not to be hanged, and rightly imprisoned for many years.

Other than selective rehabilitation and amnesty (article in Czech), Novotný did not want any changes. He blocked all reforms as much as he could.
As he could do it less and less (which highly irritated him) without renewing terror, he earned the Kremlin’s most damaging label of ‘liberal’. Consequently, the Kremlin did not defend him in January 1968, particularly when the

alternative for the post of the first secretary of the party, Alexander Dubček, was a faithful friend of the Soviet Union. The Prague Spring began.

Novotný was arguably the best Czechoslovak kisser. At the beginning of the video, Dubček avoids kissing Brežněv but Novotný does a reasonable job, he could do even better. Kissing like that is foreign to our culture.

On the other hand, Brežněv must have remembered that Novotný strongly protested when Chruščev was kicked out and he replaced him in 1964. Perhaps Novotný's fatal mistake was that he never tried to understand Slovak mentality. He rubbed them the wrong way.

When the Slovaks continued to rebel and nearly everybody else got tired of Novotný during the Prague Spring in 1968, Ludvík Svoboda became president. Young people like myself would have preferred a reformist party secretary Čestmír Císař ("Císař na Hrad"=Emperor to the Castle). Smrkovký wanted to be president but was made chairman of the National Assembly instead.

Svoboda was president when the Warsaw Pact armies invaded Czechoslovakia. In Soviet eyes, the invasion was fully justified considering both external and Czechoslovak internal factors. Externally, the Kremlin did not want to lose control of Czechoslovakia and internally the KSČ's undisputed rule in the country was in danger. They had no use for Dubček's 'communism with human face'.

Twenty-one years later, Gorbačov decided to help the embattled KSČ by removing the main irritant. He summoned the 1968 aggressor countries to Moscow and made them issue a statement. There must have been a heated discussion because Gorbačov felt obliged to issue a separate statement that included the word 'wrong/literally mistake'.

The Czech communist daily *Rudé Právo* of the 5th December 1989 followed its well-established practice of lying about everything and attributed the paragraph that the invasion was wrong to all assembled countries.

But the Russian original in *Pravda* is much shorter:
At a meeting in Moscow, the leaders of Bulgaria, Hungary, the GDR, Poland and the Soviet Union said that the entry of their troops into Czechoslovakia in 1968 meant interference in the internal affairs of the sovereign Czechoslovak state and must be condemned.
This illegal intervention interrupted the democratic renewal in Czechoslovakia and had long-term adverse consequences. History has confirmed the importance of using political means to resolve all issues, even in the most difficult international situation, and to strictly adhere to the principles of sovereignty, independence and non-interference in internal affairs in relations between states, in line with the provisions of the Warsaw Pact.

The Soviet government's statement: *On Monday, the Soviet government adopted the following statement on the entry of the armies of the five Warsaw Pact states into the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic in August 1968. Czechoslovak society is now critically reassessing its experience of its political and economic development. It is a natural process that many countries go through one way or another. Unfortunately, the need for a permanent socialist renewal and a realistic assessment of current events has not always been a matter of course. Especially in situations where these events intertwined and required bold responses to the demands of the times. In 1968, the then Soviet leadership adopted a unilateral stance in an internal dispute concerning objectively mature tasks in Czechoslovakia. This unbalanced, inadequate approach and interference in the affairs of a friendly country was then justified by a sharp confrontation between East and West.*

We share the opinion of the presidency of the Central Committee of the Communist party and the government of the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic that the entry of the armies of five socialist countries into Czechoslovak territory in 1968 was not justified and that in terms of all now known facts the decision on it was wrong.

As I see it, while abandoning the outrageous lie of 'brotherly assistance', the communist leaders kept on lying: sovereign state? principles of sovereignty?

independence and non-interference in internal affairs? No! In 1968, Czechoslovakia was no more than a subservient satellite country.

General Ludvík Svoboda in short:
A legionnaire; Czechoslovak Army; fled to Poland in June 1939 to form a Czechoslovak military unit in Kraków; the whole unit captured by the Soviets; Svoboda sentenced to death to be shot the next morning; saved by his contacts in Moscow (he believed it was Stalin himself); celebrated his rescue with his jailers by drinking vodka the whole night; worked to evacuate Czechoslovak soldiers; purged Communists from that group; negotiated with the Soviets without authorisation; commander of the Czechoslovak army on the Eastern Front; minister of defence; told president Beneš in February 1948 that the army could not be used against the Communists; replaced because Stalin wanted somebody more proactive (Čepička) so the Soviets simply sent a message that they did not trust him; still in the government for a while but then badly mistreated in the notorious Ruzyně prison; refused to shoot himself; released from prison to work on a lowly farm; invited by Chruščev to meet him in Prague; restored to his rank again; commanding the Military Academy; retired to write memoirs; president; yielded to the Soviets after they invaded Czechoslovakia 'to prevent bloodshed'; took it easy as president; removed for 'health reasons' to allow power-hungry Husák (Czech video 52') to take over in 1975.

To fend off traitors who invited and welcomed the invaders, Husák, to reassure the Soviets and thus stay in power, became a traitor himself. He betrayed his reformist friends and long-time followers and several of them ended up in prison under his rule. Husák-hnusák (=scumbag).

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(9) Pavla's father was a forester somewhere in the middle of Western Slovakia. No doubt that she was a Slovak nationalist till her death. If she hated all Czechs, she excluded me. I visited her in Bratislava in 1993, two years before she died. She gave me an expensive snack, beef tongue, and talked glowingly about their then prime minister Vladimír Mečiar who, with the Czech prime minister Václav Klaus, dissolved Czechoslovakia making Slovakia independent again on the 1st January 1993.

The first time the Slovak Republic existed was in 1939-45 under Nazi oversight and from the 29th August 1944 under Nazi occupation (to combat the Slovak National Uprising). Before that, Slovakia was de facto independent in 1450 under Jan Jiskra z Brandýsa (jiskra=spark).

Why should Slovaks hate Czechs? Of course, not all of them do. As I see it, they were disappointed by the First Republic (1918-38). They expected to be liberated by the Czechs and then set free. That did not happen because Czechoslovakia needed their numbers so that the 'Czechoslovak nation' (there is no such thing, unfortunately) was by far the biggest in the multinational republic. That was contrary to the Pittsburgh Agreement. T G Masaryk (TGM), because he knew that Czechoslovakia first needed to sort out her German problem, brushed any criticism aside quoting technicalities. "I liberated you", he told Andrej Hlinka.

Without Masaryk, Slovaks would today be Hungarians. In the whole of the Hungarian part of Austria-Hungary, Hungarian was the sole official language. There were only 500 Slovak primary schools–where Hungarian was taught every day–and more than 1100 'dual-media' schools.

Masaryk did not have constitutional powers to implement the Pittsburgh Agreement but he had enough influence to do more than he did. It was tricky. To give autonomy to the Slovaks would surely make the Germans want it as well. That might not have been a bad idea, unfortunately too many Czechs opposed it.

By his origin, and he freely admitted it, Masaryk was not much of a Czech. If he was not the son of the Emperor Franz Joseph I–and I believe that he was–his father was a Slovak. And his mother was speaking German to him.

As far as I am concerned, instead of going to Wilson with his maps, he should have gone to Karl and said, "Hey cousin, what can you do for us when my old man is gone? Let's talk!" The federal arrangement proposed by Aurel Popovici for Franz Ferdinand would have been a good start. *Back*

(10) The *Russian Liberation Army* (ROA), 'Vlasovci', were like Vlásov himself (one of Stalin's best generals defending Moscow), mainly prisoners of war.

It was much more pleasant to be in the ROA than in a German POW camp. Strictly speaking, the name ROA was short-lived as it was officially renamed, on the 14th November 1944, the Armed Forces of the *Committee for the Liberation of the Peoples of Russia* (KONR), with the KONR being formed as a political body to which the army pledged loyalty. Then, on the 28th January 1945, it was officially declared that the Russian divisions no longer formed part of the German Army, but would directly be under the command of KONR.

Some Russians allied with Germans participated in terrible war atrocities. It was not Vlasovci as such because the ROA was established only in 1944. The Soviets committed atrocities, too, it was not just Katyn. And, of course, the Germans were the worst–the behaviour of ϟϟ in Prague (Masarykovo nádraží) and elsewhere is well known and documented.

Near Prague in April and May 1945, Vlásov (in Czech, in Czech) thought that it was bad form to betray Germans, despite the fact that Hitler did not trust his army and used it, with mixed results, on the front only once or twice on Himmler's insistence. It was general Sergěj Bunjačenko, the commander of the 1st Infantry Division (13 000 men), who saved Prague. Vlásov in the end gave up and did not stop Bunjačenko.

The 1st division engaged in fierce battle at the South-west with Waffen-ϟϟ units, particularly the section Klein of ϟϟ Wallenstein that had been sent to level the city on the 6th May 1945. The ROA units armed with heavy weaponry fended off the relentless ϟϟ assault, and together with the Czech insurgents succeeded in preserving most of Prague from destruction. The next day, they fought against ϟϟ Wallenstein in Pankrác and other parts of the city. Perhaps that was when the Czechs needed it most.

In Prague, ϟϟ had more than 30 000 men led by Carl von Pückler-Burghauss who wanted to bomb the Czechs to submission and was one of the last Germans to capitulate–on the 12th May 1945. What he did after his capitulation is not clear. Probably he shot himself after shooting and wounding a little girl who then died in the hospital. Her mother and her grandmother poisoned themselves and five other staff members also killed themselves. (Article in Czech: I felt sorry for the dog...and the girl, of course.)

Virtually only the ugly part of the Old Town City Hall was destroyed when a part of the tank division of ϟϟ Wiking managed to get there on the 8th May. The tower was also hit and the clock was badly damaged. The destroyed wing was never rebuilt allowing an unhindered view of the splendid St Nicholas church. [Bergvliet High School choir once had a concert in that church]

There are two great St Nicholas churches in Prague, the other one is in Malá Strana.

Due to the presence of Communists (notably Josef Smrkovský) in the ad hoc formed *Czech National Council*, Bunjačenko's 1st division was asked to leave the city on the 7th May. The Communists that were involved were later disciplined for being in a council that was not authorised by the Soviets and for allowing to be helped by the enemy–although it is believed that the permission to help was never actually given to Vlasovci and Vlasovci decided to fight ϟϟ anyway. 1 minute video: Vlasovci welcomed by Czechs in Smíchov.

On the 7th May 1945, Vlasovci liberated Ruzyně airport, stopping German jet planes Me 262 that were attacking both Vlasovci and the Czechs. Vlasovci then tried to surrender to Patton's US army.

The Allies, however, due to previous agreements with Stalin, had little interest in aiding or sheltering the ROA, fearing that such aid would severely harm relations with the USSR. Soon after their failed attempt to surrender to the Americans, Vlásov and many of his men were caught by the Soviets. Many were simply shot by the Red Army units on the spot.

Naturally, the Soviet government labelled all ROA soldiers as traitors. Those who were repatriated were tried and sentenced to long term detention in prison camps. Vlásov, Bunjačenko and some other leaders of the ROA were tortured, tried and hanged in Moscow on the 1st August 1946.

The regular German army, mainly units stationed in Prague, did not understand why the Czechs should start the revolution when the war was clearly over but felt obliged to protect many Germans that were living in Prague. They had a point, many Germans were maltreated after the

liberation.

The worst atrocities happened outside Prague. For example 763 (or even more) German civilians, including five women and six children, were murdered in Postoloprty in June 1945.

The *Czech National Council* consisted of prominent Czechs who managed to avoid arrest and execution by the Germans despite their involvement in the resistance. Besides Smrkovský they included literary historian Albert Pražák, Social Democrat Josef Kubát (imprisoned in the 1950s), architect Augusta Machoňová-Müllerová, art historian Zdeněk Wirth (founder of conservation of historic monuments system in the country) and a military man, captain Jaromír Nechanský (executed in the 1950s). The military commander of the uprising, general Karel Kutlvašr, was in prison from 1949 to 1960 (in Czech).

The uprising (in Czech) was planned to start on the 7th May 1945 but started, spontaneously, two days too early. When Vlásov's army left, the German regular army (130 000 soldiers) fought their way back to Prague however they did not try to level the city. Instead, they negotiated a safe withdrawal on the 8th May. But not all German fighters left. ϟϟ and other units stayed including many snipers (some of them Hitlerjugend youngsters) so there are quite a few memorials of fallen Soviet soldiers after they finally arrived on the 9th May (article in Czech), one day after German's capitulation to the Western allies. Shooting continued for three more days.

The Red Army saved Prague from destruction, albeit indirectly. On the 6th May they rolled over the airport in Dresden capturing most of the remaining German bomber planes that were supposed to burn Prague to cinders.

There were some Ju-88 bombers left in Hradec Králové and there was a man, Viennese Czech, Adolf Chlup, who, leading a group of his pals, sabotaged them all.

There were 1600 barricades built in the streets. Czech casualties were higher than French casualties when Paris was liberated. The Czechs became 'bandits' and the Germans were not too selective about whom they would kill.

Altogether 340 000 Czechoslovaks died during the war, including 270 000 Jews. Less than half a percent of the 85 million who died in the war.

There are several memorials of fallen Czechs, like the one near Vila. There a Czech was wounded by a German sniper and when a Czech doctor tried to help him they were both killed. There are no memorials for fallen Vlasovci, about 300 of them. There are some memorials with inscriptions 'Unknown soldier(s)' and it is assumed that most of them were Vlasovci. [A memorial for Vlasovci was erected, despite Russian protests, in Řeporyje district of Prague. Although there was far too much politics in this project, I cannot fault the inscription on the memorial.
Good summary of ROA's involvement is in Czech here] *Back*

(11) Petr Šteffek: *"I once talked to president Beneš in the Castle garden. I told him that we bathed in the fountain and he was interested in it. Then I was taken to Vítkov where he was exhibited after his death, the Castle employees were brought there on a Praga RN lorry by the Castle driver Hranáč. Sometimes my dad took me to Lány with Mr Hranáč, I liked that.*

When another driver refused to take me with him, I went home and cried. I went to the garages often because they had three beautiful old English presidential cars. They let me look at them. I was also allowed to go to the joinery, our neighbour Mr Roubal worked there. They lived where the presidential villa is now, and we stomped sauerkraut in a barrel for grandma Roubalová.

I was very small when I first went to the greenhouses and soon I knew quite well how to plant vegetables and flowers. There was also a large apiary in the garden and Mr Smažil who was in charge there took me inside.
About two years ago, the policeman in Jelení příkop was quite surprised that I grew up there. I went under the president's house, further than one is normally allowed to go and took pictures of where we lived. I was glad that the policeman was a nice guy. We talked and he told me that he wanted to work in the President's protection but they didn't accept him because they thought that he was politically unreliable.

I had a plan that when Schwarzenberg would become President, I would go to his wife Tereza to drink coffee and talk to her about those nice times in the

house. But he didn't win." [Sweet dreams by Šteffek, I don't think that he knew her] *Back*

(12) Officially, there were no aristocratic titles allowed but people used them anyway–and they still do. The titles were banned not by the Communists but by one of the first laws promulgated in democratic Czechoslovakia when it was founded in 1918.

Václav Vlk st. about Bořek's namesake:
"I will only mention the fate of the nobleman Zdeněk Bořek Dohalský of Dohalice, a prince from the old Czech family first mentioned in 1395. He joined the resistance immediately after the Nazi occupation and was helping the prime minister general Alois Eliáš who secretly collaborated with the resistance and Edvard Beneš. After the arrival of Heydrich and the arrest of Eliáš, Dohalský was hiding until Gestapo found him quite by accident. The attempts to save him, in which the nobility, Czech prison guards in Pankrác, even the commissioner Gall of Gestapo in Prague, who was in secret contact with the Czech resistance through his mistress Herta Bauerová, a half Jew, were ultimately unsuccessful. On orders from Berlin [Petr: Himmler's] "to exterminate those who were not yet handed over to the courts and whose files were not closed", he was executed on the 7th February 1945 in the Gestapo prison in Terezín's Small Fortress." (Czech original) (Also)

Bořek quite understandably ignored my request for a contact. His brother:
Hrabě Antonín Bořek-Dohalský (1944-2017) *Back*

(13) *Milo*, available in South Africa, is a mild version of *Ovomaltine*. (Isn't it amazing that I have remembered the name of the stuff all those long years?) Unfortunately, Nestlé now ruined it, it's too mild. *Back*

(14) Libuše Kurková & Bohumíra Cveklová: *"Paní Jarmila did not moralize, preach or reprimand. But her fragile, noble personality, unshakably serious and discreet, formed a kind of unwavering barrier against vulgarity."*
Jarmila Jeřábková Jarmila Jeřábková (same with pictures) *Back*

(15) When South Korea was reduced to only a small area around the harbour Pusan in the South-East, the Security Council of the United Nations

voted to defend it. The Soviet Union walked out and did not veto the resolution. Why? That was explained in Stalin's letter to Gottwald. Stalin considered American action to be foolish, he correctly predicted that the Chinese would get involved and that the Americans could not defeat Chinese.

In the war, United Nations, with 21 countries participating, mainly Americans but also South African pilots, helped South Koreans to defeat North Koreans who were now supported by Soviet pilots. The northern capital Pyongyang was taken. At which stage the Chinese invaded Korea with one million troops. South Koreans and the UN were pushed back to the 38th parallel.

For Mao this war was god-sent. He got rid of many hundreds of thousands former Nationalist Chinese soldiers who surrendered to him. He just sent them to die in Korea.

You know the joke: Russia goes to war with China. The first day, one million Chinese soldiers surrenders. The second day, another million Chinese soldiers surrenders. The third day, the third million Chinese soldiers surrenders. The fourth day, Russia surrenders.

The war was probably caused by an American mistake. Before the Cold War, the Americans and Russians divided the Earth into their respective spheres of influence. An American official forgot to include South Korea in a map that covered states that would be defended by the USA and nobody noticed it until it was too late. *Back*

(16) La Scapigliata: *"Isadora Duncan copied poses from ancient Greek art, and she tried to add movement. The result was considered pioneering at the time."*

Glimpses of Isadora Duncan (taken secretly, she did not allow anybody to film her). This selection includes slow motion
Isadora Duncan choreography performed in The Joyce Theater, New York, on 19 June 2017. The music is *Scherzo, Symphony No. 9 in C Major 'The Great', D 944,* by Franz Schubert.
Lori Belilove & The Isadora Duncan Dance Company highlights, 2013
Isadora Duncan Repertory Dance Company (solo performance).

Isadora Duncan choreography performed by Sylvia Gold in the late 1970s. Gold grew up in The Bronx and took dance lessons from Irma Duncan who was one of Isadora's adopted daughters who were called *The Isadorables*.
The music is *Moment Musicale № 3* by Franz Schubert.
Isadora Duncan choreography performed by Julia Pond.
The music is Chopin's *Prelude №* 7, Schubert's *Moment Musicale*, Chopin's *Minute Waltz* and Chopin's *Mazurka* (choreography improvisation).
Isadora Duncan choreography performed by Catherine Gallant.
The music is *Three etudes* of Alexander Scriabin.
Dancers under the leadership of Louise Craig Gerber
Five Brahms Waltzes in the Manner of Isadora Duncan danced by Tamara Rojo, The Royal Ballet.

Alexander Wertyński sings *Sergěj Jesénin - Písmo k dámě* (Letter to a lady) inspired by a farewell note, left by Sergěj Alexándrovič Jesénin in his room in Hotel d'Angleterre in Leningrad (Saint Petersburg) in Russia, after his 'suicidal' death on the 25th December 1925:

До свиданья, друг мой, до свиданья.
Милый мой, ты у меня в груди.
Предназначенное расставанье
Обещает встречу впереди.
В этой жизни умирать не ново,
Но и жить, конечно, не новей.

Na shledanou, drahý, na shledanou,
zůstaneš v mém srdci navěky.
Spočten osud, není na vybranou
Svede nás až zítřek daleký.
Umírat – na tom nic nového není.
Ani žít však není novější.

Goodbye, my friend, goodbye.
My love, you are in my heart.
It was our fate that we should part
And be reunited by and by.
In this life, it's not new to die,
Though, after all, to live is not new either.

Mike Putintsev: До свиданья, друг мой, до свиданья

The short life of that „golden boy" of the turbulent years of post-revolutionary Russia was full of alcohol, short romances and also as many as four marriages. However, his deepest and also most painful experience was his short love affair followed by a marriage with Isadora Duncan.

The young, famous and shockingly handsome Russian poet met the ageing American star during her tour in Russia in 1921. The next year, both of them–already a married couple–were travelling in Europe and in the USA. However, the worldly life with Isadora–who was still the bright shining star of international artistic dance stages–only increased his depressive moods, which were intertwined with manic behaviours especially after overdosing alcohol.

It was not rare when, after checking out, the artistic couple left their hotel apartment in a total mess, with piles of empty bottles, smashed mirrors etc. Unable to continue any kind of established existence and urged by his nostalgia for Russia, in 1925 Jesenin was back in Moscow.

After having made one more marriage with a newly acquainted girl from the ‘upper society’ (without having divorced Isadora) he hanged himself (maybe) on Christmas Day in a hotel room, leaving only the note written–as some witnesses claim–with his own blood. *Back*

(17) Jiřetín was in the former Sudetenland (watch Germans). The German inhabitants were gone, many buildings were abandoned. We went to some of them, found thin walls and had fun kicking holes in them.

Removing Germans from Czechoslovakia, almost 3 million of them, is a dark part of our history. It was done cruelly, particularly in early stages, possibly provoked by Soviet agents, as a retribution for the Czechs killed by the Nazis.

The number of German casualties differs vastly depending who reports it. The high estimate is 300 thousand killed (thus 10%) but that is too high and perhaps invented to match Czechoslovak war casualties.

Back

(18) ‘Wolf’s head in Junák-skaut badge’: In fact, it was a dog’s head, the

head of Bohemian shepherd. It comes from an imaginary symbol of ‘Psohlavci’ (The dog heads; you can Google ‘psohlavci-Images’) invented by Alois Jirásek for his novel. Jirásek wrote about Chodové led by Jan Sladký Kozina.

Kozina was the leader of Chodové at the end of the 17th century. With his wife and 6 sons, they lived as a quiet, god-fearing family. When the ancient privileges of Chodové were threatened, he defended their rights.

This culminated in disagreement with the local magnate Wolf Maximilian Laminger von Albenreuth, ‘Lomikar’. Kozina was judged responsible for the peasant rebellion, arrested and executed in Pilsen on the 28th November 1695. Before he was hanged, he shouted, “Lomikare, Lomikare. do roka a do dne zvu tě Lomikare na Boží súd” (Lomikar, Lomikar, in one year’s time we’ll meet for the Lord’s judgement). A year later, Laminger, at a banquet, joked about it. He had a stroke and died. *Back*

(19) In the grade 7 photo, thanks to Jindra Pilař, we know the names of most of us. *Back*

(20) I call it ‘primary school’ and ‘high school’ just to make it simple. In fact my ‘primary school’ was called ‘8-year secondary school’ (which included primary school grades) and the ‘high school’ was ‘11-year secondary school’ (which had only grades 9, 10 and 11).

This arrangement was supposed to be a copy of the Soviet system after the Communists destroyed the excellent Czechoslovak system inherited from the Habsburgs (e.g. 13 years for gymnasium). They just did not have the nerve to make it ‘10-year’ like in the Soviet Union. After my time, the system was improved to ‘9-year’ and ‘12-year’.

Aleš and Pavel went to another venerable high school, in Křemencova ulice. Aleš excelled there but Pavel had problems. As I see it, he did not readily submit to authorities (see how he sits in the primary school). He learned what he wanted, when he wanted. That did not work and he was almost kicked out of Křemencova.

Masarykovo I. státní československé reálné gymnasium, Praha II - Nové Město, Křemencova ul. 12 was founded in 1871 as *Císařsko-královské české reálné a vyšší gymnasium v Praze* and moved to Křemencova ulice in 1894. It survived until the Communists closed it in 1949. Some of its famous graduates are listed in the Czech web page. 120 of its graduates and students were executed by the Nazis. *Back*

(21) *Pražské pekárny a mlýny n.p.* (n.p.=national enterprise), previously, from 1850 to 1948, and again from 1994, 'Odkolek'. The bakery was in Vysočany, Ke Klíčovu, from 1913 to 2005.

In the communist regime, there were no salesmen trying to sell to factories. It was the other way round: companies had purchasers who had to search for provisions. *Back*

(22) Honza Mazáč: *"In order to improve my political profile by getting close to the working class, I joined a firm that repaired equipment for large kitchens. After a year, I applied to study at the Institute of Physical Education and Sport, ITVS (named according to the Soviet model, later renamed to the Faculty of TVS). There I could study physical education together with geography at the Faculty of Science.*

There were entrance exams for both subjects and I had a very good feeling about my performance in them. No, I was rejected. I did not want to accept it so I took advantage of the fact that my sister's brother-in-law worked in a research institute located in Tyršův dům where the ITVS was as well. He went to the head of the study department who was an acquaintance of his.

She showed him my file. It turned out that I met the required criteria without any problems but I was rejected based on the report from the local organisation of the Communist party. In every street at that time there was this organisation whose members had nothing to do but sniff around and report their findings to the appropriate places. And so it happened that some bitch wrote in the report that as the son of the owner of a major publishing house Mazáč, I had not the slightest precondition to become a physical education teacher and promote in the young generation the spirit of the regime. In addition, my mother had a maid to come to do cleaning, which was

almost a crime at the time.

But all that was a lie! My wonderful dad, who died when I was ten, had nothing to do with the family of one of Prague's biggest publishers. And the 'maid' who used to come to us, especially before the holidays, to help my mother clean up was my sister, who was already living with her husband at another address.

Without delay, I included these facts in an appeal and was then accepted without any further problems." *Back*

(23) *Karel Duba - instrumentals (1962-1967)*
Karel Duba and his band with singers (1963-1968) (audio 1 h)
Karel Duba and his band with singers (1963-1968) (audio 28') *Back*

(24) We still called it Sokol but Sokol was, as an organisation, disbanded by both the Nazis in 1939 and the Communists in 1956. Sokol was inspired by 'Deutscher Turnerbund' (in German) and founded in 1862 by two Czech nationalists of German origin, Miroslav Tyrš (Friedrich Emanuel Tirsch) and Jindřich (Heinrich Anton) Fügner. Sokol was already hated by the Habsburgs but they let it operate (except during WWI) because in the Austrian monarchy there was, most of the time, much more freedom than in the 20th century totalitarian regimes.

Tyrš had similar ideas to Duncan people (see pages in the book or my PDF version of the pages). Following his interpretation of classical Greeks, he considered aesthetics of movement, perfection and total control of the body more important than the physical performance. In all that he fundamentally differed from the German Turners.

Today, the organisation is called Sokol again but it is modernised. *Back*

(25) Tuzex had shops where one had to pay with capitalist currency or Tuzex vouchers called 'bony' (worth 5 Kčs on the black market) to buy goods which were not available in normal shops. Ordinary citizens could not buy Western currencies unless they had 'devízový příslib' for a specific trip to the West. Even then only small amounts were allowed. *Back*

(26) Very long comment about Říp, Čech, Libuše, Šárka, Samo, genes…

Back

Blanka and I liked to go to Ctiněves to visit her grandparents. Once we made love on an edge of some field and a villager chased us all the way to the nearest train station. Blanka remembers our relationship as a sexual roller-coaster but overall she has a positive opinion of it. I could have joked: “It’s your fault, you brought somebody fourth into our relationship.” But I don’t joke about it, my conscience is not clear.

Ctiněves (in Czech) is a small village next to Říp, a prominent hill in a flat countryside. The hill is a true magnetic mountain, an iron mountain, it’s made of nephelinite, olivine, magnetite/lodestone and so on. There’s not enough magnetite to mine for, but it’s enough to draw lightning. Telephone, television and internet transmissions in the area often don’t work, and planes flying over the mountain can have problems with their navigation systems.

Luboš Motl about Říp, Libuše...:
“According to the oldest one among the Czech legends, the Praotec (forefather, Urvater in German) Čech and his cohort came to this hill in North Central Bohemia more than 1400 years ago. When he reached the summit of this unnaturally steep hill, he announced that “This is our promised land, abundant in milk and honey, let’s settle here and establish a new nation”.

With such a Genesis story, a nation isn’t supposed to flee the promised land en masse. Later, another mythical ruler of the Czechs, Princess Libuše, forecast a new city whose fame reaches the stars–Prague.

Libuše selected Přemysl as her husband. After her death there was ‘The Maidens’ War’ with Šárka’s suicide by jumping off a cliff in Divoká Šárka after falling in love with Ctirad and feeling guilty (and rightly so) for his torture and death. [Divoká Šárka is just further to the left from the bus stop where I went downhill through the forest with Carlien and her children]

Libuše’s prediction was an overstatement so far but it was realistic enough and we’re not supposed to think that it’s clearly better for all of us to move elsewhere.

Czechia has seen quite an exodus of brains and skilful hands because the main waves of emigration primarily involved the Czech elite or near-elite that became politically inconvenient for the new intolerant rulers at some point. So after 1620, the Habsburgs started to re-catholicize the overwhelmingly protestant Bohemia (the protestant domination was clearly a good reason to call Czechia a typical part of Western or even North-Western Europe politically). Lots of Czech protestants, including the guru of pedagogy Jan Amos Komenský, had to escape (to the Netherlands in his case).”

In between Praotec Čech and Libuše, there was a real person who was not a Czech or even a Slav, Samo. Samo was either a Frankish (from today’s Belgium) arms merchant or a Greek Jew (Samuel?). He became a founder and ruler of the union of Slavic tribes in central Europe and one of the most important figures of the Slavic world in the earliest middle ages. Most of the information about Samo comes from the Chronicle of Fredegar. He was to arrive to our territory with his armed retinue in 623 or 624, during times when local Slavic tribes fought with the Avars.

Originally his main intention was to protect his business interests from the Avar raids, but eventually he joined the Slavs and took part in several victorious battles with the Avars. He was to show such great bravery and command skills that he was elected ruler. The Samo’s Empire was situated in today’s Bohemia, Moravia and Silesia and probably also in present Western Slovakia, Lusatia and in part of Saxony.

Samo had, besides the Avars, another strong enemy–the Frankish Empire in the west ruled by King Dagobert. Dagobert wanted to expand his power further east but the Slavs under Samo’s leadership did not want to accept it. It led to the famous Battle of Wogastisburg (the most probable locality is the hill Rubín in Northwestern Bohemia) where the Franks were defeated and Dagobert had to make peace.

Samo died probably in 659 and after his death the union led by him disintegrated and Slavic tribes continued to develop independently.

According to some sources from the baroque period, his successor was his son Moravod who ruled in the Morava river basin, and who was allegedly the ancestor of the Great Moravian Mojmír dynasty.

If Čech did arrive and brought his language to Bohemia, it does not mean that he brought the whole nation. The nation was already there. And they, just like most Europeans, were at least a three-way mixture (proportions vary).

First the original Mammoth hunters–Mesolithic hunter gatherers who, before acquiring some genes from the Neanderthals, were dark-skinned, blue-eyed and tall. 8000 years ago, early Neolithic farmers from Anatolia arrived in a mass. They had dark hair and eyes and were shorter. They were the builders of Stonehenge etc. Then in waves, some of them 5000 years ago, mainly male warriors and cattle herders invaded from Eastern steppes; they had horses, wheeled carriages, and bronze weapons.

In the book *History of Rome and the Roman people*:
"It is a commonly held misconception that ancient people left some unknown 'Urheimat' and migrated to their position on the map as ready made packages of culture and language. The truth, as always, is much more complicated. The genetics in Europe seem to have settled down around 3500 BCE, the bronze age in southern Europe." (Timing is still disputed.)

Slavs do not possess a common ethnicity, far from that, they just belong to the same linguistic group. It's just the languages, not the genes. *Back*

(27) 'Belvedér', correctly *Letohrádek královny Anny* (Anna Jagellon, wife of Ferdinand I Habsburg), is a unique structure in central Europe, pure renaissance-style summer palace completed in 1565; in my opinion quite ugly and useless.

My mother sold her portion of Vila before she finally legally emigrated to Sweden for 65 000 Kčs and bought a Trabant car for her brother Vikin with the money. (Trabant manufacture)

The other half of Vila was sold by the Lochovský branch of the family for

24 million Kč and renovated by the new owners for another 18 million Kč if I remember well. *Back*

(28) The top floor of number 2 at Náměstí I P Pavlova, the last window on the right. Apparently not far from the clinic where I was born.

Back

(29) Gabrielle ze Zierotina Freiin von Lilgenau
(German: Gräfin Gabrielle von Zierotina Freiherr von Lilgen)

Gender:	Female
Birth:	19 May 1900 Blauda (Bludov), Šumperk District, Olomouc Region, Czechia
Death:	25 June 1982 (82), Vienna, Austria
Immediate family:	Daughter of Graf und Herr Karl von Zierotin, Freiherr von Lilgenau and Freiin Zdenka von Podstatzky-Prussinowitz und Thonsern. Wife of Klodvig Stein. Sister of Gräfin Mária Margit Zierotin; Gräfin Helene ze Zierotina Freiin von Lilgenau and Margarete, Gräfin und Herrin von Zierotin

Karl Emanuel von Zierotin (* 13. August 1850; † 26. Dezember 1934)
Herr auf Blauda, Preuß und Meseritz, Statthalter in Mähren, kaiserlicher Kämmerer, Ritter der Eisernen Krone und Franz Josef order. Er hatte drei Töchtern:

Maria Margarethe (* 4. Mai 1898 Blauda; † 8. April 1984 Kapfenberg) verheiratet mit Karl grf. von Arco

Gabrielle (* 19. Mai 1900 Blauda (Bludov); † 25. Juni 1982 Wien) verheiratet mit Chlodwig v. Stein

Helene (* 1. Januar 1903 Blauda; † 29. März 1985 Košice) verheiratet mit Karl Ritter v. Mornstein *Back*

(30) Mňačko was a Communist but he became more and more critical of the regime which he displayed in non-fiction books where he described various serious problems. He emigrated to Vienna in 1968. He returned to Slovakia in 1990 but disagreed with the dissolution of Czechoslovakia and moved to Prague. After his death, his study was recreated in a villa in Bubeneč. I went there and left a thank you note to him there. *Back*

(31) In Czechoslovakia during my time there was, at least officially, no unemployment. In fact everybody was supposed to work. In the ID, there was the all important stamp of the organisation where each person worked. Who did not have the stamp could be prosecuted for being a parasite (unless she was a housewife). To change a job, the employee needed a permission from the current employer (a mild kind of serfdom). *Back*

(32) Marta: *On St. Nicholas Day in 1965, Lída, Zdenka and Aleš woke me up. They ordered me to get dressed immediately, because a taxi was waiting for us. Nobody explained anything, I was in shock, I cried, I didn't have time to take anything with me except my clothes. The taxi took us to the train to Prague, I was still crying, Zdenka was clearly ashamed of me. I fell asleep.*

I was not welcome in Prague. They already had little space there and now I came! Helena was never interested in me, Luděk had enough worries of his own after his escape from Hodousice on the 20th April 1965, Oliva was disappointed that she wasn't having as much fun with me as she used to.

I was needed in Svatá Kateřina in Šumava, I helped Lída with the children. In Prague, I was redundant and I was not allowed to get close to Aleška–probably not to hurt her in any way…

My stay in Prague was very tiring - during the six months I lived there, several unpleasant things happened. Moving to Ratboř in June 1966 improved things a lot.

Back

THOUGHTS

Autobiographies are all lies, you never reveal the whole story. To me, that is an indisputable fact, just like the following:

Life is a miracle, it can't be fully explained. Other than life, there have been no real miracles. None. Past, present or future.

Life has no meaning. That is great, you can give it any meaning you want.

First of all, you need to be lucky. Then it helps if you make the right decisions and learn from bad ones. Self-confidence is healthy.

There is nothing after death except memories and the genes that you might have passed on.

The predominant personality trait of Homo sapiens sapiens is stupidity.
It is made worse by our creativity, our hysteria and our 'best intentions'.
Human stupidity makes me sad. My own makes me furious.

It's hard to say if hereditary autocracy or totality is worse. In the former, the stupidity can be right at the top, in the latter it is spread among people. The best type of government is an enlightened dictator. Unfortunately, they are hard to find.

In the world affairs, none of us, ordinary people, will ever know what is really happening.

Today's mass hysteria is called Climate Crisis. As revealed in a sweeping survey on climate anxiety in ten countries, half of young people think that humanity is doomed. They are right of course, only their timing is wrong.
In the end, all life on Earth will end and the Earth will be destroyed. Right now, the sky is not falling.

The climate 'scientists' are modern versions of medieval astrologers.
They lie to save their grants. Mainstream media misinform because their function is to manipulate, they are very successful at that. Politicians promote it because they are cowards or they want to promote themselves. They know that it is just ideology and not science.

There has been climate change on Earth for 4 billion years. Some species die, some adapt. We will find a way as we have done over the last 200 000 years.

Yes, humanity is transforming the Earth because there are too many of us. But compared to other factors, our contribution is limited (~7%). So is our ability to stop climate change. Unlike our ability to ruin everything.

I support clean air, clean sea, clean environment, recycling, the Amazon forest, dolphins, smokeless generation of electricity (including nuclear!)–but I do not support any activists and fanatics who are trying to ‘save the world’.

Most of them, spoilt brats, have a hidden agenda. If they want no growth, low consumption, no meat, no private cars...billions of people in developing countries already have all that and they don’t particularly like it.

Activists hope that electric cars will destroy private ownership of cars. The fact is that the existing technology of lithium batteries is a bad idea for a number of reasons. The activists are blissfully ignorant about that. Hydrogen might be better.

Climate change is just a pretence, their goal is to destroy our civilization. While I strongly dislike gretenism, I keep my deepest contempt for the left-wing’s ‘cancel’ movement.

~~24/8/20~~ 8/10/21