

My life 1924-1966

Jan Rocek

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INTRODUCTION

For years our sons and friends have urged us, Eva and me, to write the stories of our lives and for years I have resisted. I had more urgent things to do, and besides, though our stories are certainly unusual, they are hardly unique. So many much more talented writers have written their stories, stories far more unusual, revealing and interesting than ours. Moreover, I have a rather poor memory and so all I could produce would be fragments, occasional and unsystematic recollections. Furthermore, for a long time I was convinced that though my memory was poor and I remembered far less than many others, the few things that I could recall I remembered correctly -- that my memory was limited, but very reliable. Unfortunately, I relatively recently realized that not even that is true, and that I made mistakes even in matters I thought I remembered exactly. So why write at all? Well, perhaps some day one of our grandchildren might want to know more about us and the times during which we lived -- though I don't know why they should. I myself have never been very interested in my ancestry. I always found it much more interesting to think and learn about the present and speculate about the future and prepare for it than to concern myself with the past. Still, they might be different from me in this respect, as they are in so many others. And besides, I have sort of promised a number of well meaning friends that I shall try to write something about my life and it seems that if I don't do it now, at the age of 78, I never will.

PRAHA (PRAGUE)

Mother

I was born on March 24 1924 in Prague, actually in a private hospital or sanitarium named Sanops in Prague-Smichov. When I was little I was close to my mother, Frieda or Friedericke, later in Czech Bedriska, who played with me and loved to read to me. She was born on September 7 1895 in Jablonec nad Nisou (Gablonz and der Neisse) to Abraham Löbl (Loebl) and his second wife Leontine nee Gutmann and grew up in Jablonec, a German speaking town in the Sudetenland, the northern part of Bohemia. At the time she was growing up girls could not go to a gymnasium (college preparatory high school) and so she spent a year in Lausanne, Switzerland, in a private school (pensionat) to finish her education and to learn French. During World War I she was a volunteer nurse. Also during that time she and her friends used to stuff cigarettes for the soldiers and she learned to smoke. She had a much older half-brother, Hugo Löbl, born July 16, 1875, from her father's first marriage, who became a very successful industrialist and owned a large electrical supplies factory in Jablonec. He was married to a very nice lady, my aunt Lilly, born May 18, 1894, and they had two daughters, Hella and Susie. Susie was my age and Hella was five

years older and very beautiful. Mother and I used to be invited to their elegant large villa in Jablonec.

As far as I am aware Mother never lived in a Czech-speaking town until she married Father in 1922, and she never learned Czech very well. She spoke it, of course, particularly after 1933, when Hitler came to power in Germany, and Father forbade the speaking of German in our home, but she was never comfortable with it. When I was little she read to me German fairy tales and a bit later Schiller's romantic poetry and even his drama "William Tell." I loved both the poems and the drama and learned one long poem, "Die Bürgschaft," by heart probably at the age of five. When she was reading to me she would sit in the large stuffed easy chair in our festive dining room and I would sit on the ground on a large pillow. I still remember little fragments of several of the poems today. When I was little Mother had a small business at home; she made painted handkerchiefs and similar things and even employed a helper. She must have been quite artistic and had an interest in paintings, but never painted herself. She was much more interested in physical activities than Father, played tennis, was a good swimmer, and liked to hike, skate and sled. I liked to go hiking with her, but cared less for obligatory walks in our neighborhood. She also took me swimming, skating and sledding. I particularly remember a two day hike in the Krkonose (German: Riesengebirge) mountains when I was eight years old. Together we climbed the tallest mountain in Bohemia, the 1603 m high Snezka (Schneekoppe); it was a very windy day and I held on to her afraid that the wind would blow me away. We then spent a night together in a hotel in Spindleruv Mlyn before returning the next day to Janske Lazne to Father and my sister Helga. Unfortunately, Mother became very ill in 1936 or 1937. It turned out that she not only had very high blood pressure, but also a serious coronary disease and deteriorated rapidly. From a formerly physically active woman she became very easily tired, had to lie down a lot, and Father, Helga and I took over household chores. In Terezin, she spent almost the entire time in the hospital. In addition to her heart condition she got paratyphoid fever, chronic pleurisy and finally a stroke that paralyzed the right side of her body so that she could no longer get out of bed. Staying in the hospital for almost the entire time we were in Terezin was possible since my cousin, Erich Klapp, who was also her physician, was the first doctor to arrive in Terezin and therefore assumed charge of the health establishment. I visited Mother regularly in the hospital. In the fall of 1944 she went to Auschwitz with my father and my fifteen year old sister Helga and there certainly directly into the gas chambers.

Father

My father, Hugo Robitschek, was born on June 12, 1887, in a small Czech town, Popovice near Benesov, about 30 miles SE of Prague. He was the youngest of 7

children (there may have been more, but I knew of only six siblings who lived to adulthood) of Friedrich (Bedrich) Robitschek and Josefine (Josefa) nee Rosenzweig. He was quite young when his father died, probably thirteen or fourteen; his religious mother forced him to go to the synagogue every day for a whole year to pray for his father and he did not particularly enjoy it.

Father finished four grades of a gymnasium and then a business school from which he graduated with an equivalent of a high school diploma.¹ As a young man he must have led a fairly active life. He later told me that he had his first sexual experience with a maid when he was only 14 years old. He was not a good student and I was shocked when I once came across his old report cards and found that he even had had a failing grade. He must have fallen in with a group of German students at the time when dueling was still popular. He recalled one duel held in a friend's apartment while the friend's parents were away. It ended without bloodshed when one of the duelists tore through a large oil painting with his rapier. He personally knew the famous Prague journalist Egon Erwin Kisch and there is a mention of Father in one of Kisch's books, "Soldat im Prager Korps" (Soldier in the Prague Corps). Father recalled how a large group of young men walked with Kisch over one of the Vltava (Moldau) bridges where toll was being collected. Kisch ordered everybody to say "the last one will pay." Kisch was the last one and did pay - but only for himself; the others were gone and there was nothing the toll collector could do. Father met Kisch at the train station at the beginning of WWI and Kisch parted with him yelling across the station "Auf Wiedersehen im Massengrab," (see you in the mass grave). During the war Father's older brother, my uncle Otto, once arrived in the same place Father's unit was staying; when he asked about Father he was told that he "sauft and brüllt," (drinks and yells [meaning sings]). He also must have led a fairly active sexual life. He told me that he once thought that he had been infected by syphilis and decided to shoot himself, but fortunately it turned out to be a false alarm.

Nothing of that remained when I knew him. He was a serious and very responsible person, fully devoted to his family. He never met with his friends from his younger days except once. When I was about eight years old and our family was vacationing in the mountains, Father and I visited an old army buddy of his. During this visit we were served the most unforgettable venison meal; I have been searching in vain for an equally heavenly venison for the rest of my life. Father never drank, except for a glass of beer when it was very hot in the summer and that happened not more than half a dozen times over the course of a year. The only alcohol in our house was rum kept in a cut glass carafe and it was only used one teaspoon at a time, added to a cup of tea -- a custom which he brought

¹ He was therefore entitled to serve in the army in the officer training program as a "one-year volunteer" (Enjährig Freiwilliger) -- it was voluntary only to the extent that the other option was to serve for three years without officer training.

home from Siberia. He used to sing when he was younger, but stopped completely when he started worrying about the future during the depression and when the Nazis came to power in Germany. He did have a mistress, his secretary, a married woman, who was obviously very devoted to him and to our family.² He told me that the relationship started only after Mother got ill and the doctors discouraged her from having sex. His older brother understandably disapproved of that liaison and it led to some conflicts between them. Despite all the frankness with which he told me about his life (that all happened when we were in Terezin and I was between 18 and 20 years old) he never told me anything about sex -- he probably assumed that at that age I must know it all and I was too shy to ask. Surprisingly, considering his own background, or perhaps because of it, he expressed the hope that I would have my first sexual experience with the woman I was going to marry.

Father must have inherited some money when my grandfather died, although he told me that it was badly mismanaged by his guardian, somebody from the Petschek family,³ who used it to his own benefit. Still he was able to purchase a small paint and varnish factory together with his elder brother, Otto Robicek.⁴ When WWI started both my father and uncle were called to serve. Father fought first on the Serbian front, where he was injured and then, after he recovered, on the Russian front where he was taken prisoner of war quite early in the war, probably sometime in 1915. He spent time in a Russian prisoner of war camp in or near Tashkent, Uzbekistan. He was in an officers' camp while the men were in a different camp under far worse conditions and where about 90% of the 20,000+ men died in a typhus epidemic. Summers in Tashkent were unbearably hot and to escape the heat in the crowded living spaces Father built -- obviously with the permission of the camp commander -- a little hut from sticks and mud next to a brook within the camp perimeter. He kept a photograph of his "house." The officers were also allowed to go swimming in the river. However, they had to sign a pledge that they would not attempt to escape and were then escorted by armed guards. Father considered that an insult to his honor -- he would either sign or be watched by guards, but refused to sign if his promise was not trusted. He never joined the bathers' group. Because of a suspicion that he participated in an escape plot, he was later transferred to a "punishment camp" near Vladivostok at the eastern edge of Siberia. The officers still received their officers' pay which in the

² I was married in a suit made from material Father bought at the beginning of the war and which she kept for the entire period and gave me when I returned to Prague. I still have the suit and wore it at the celebration of our 50th wedding anniversary.

³ The Petscheks were the richest Jewish family in Czechoslovakia. They owned coal mines and banks.

⁴ My uncle's name was spelled differently probably because the clerk registering his name when he was born changed the spelling.

beginning was sufficient, but with the inflation during the war it became progressively worth less and less. To support themselves (I don't understand what they received as prisoners and what they had to buy) Father and two of his friends started manufacturing shoe polish from soot and tallow and sold it in the area; they obviously must have been able to move around fairly freely. They would also go to the market and in the winter buy milk in solidly frozen blocks. To pass the time in the camps Father also started a stamp collection. To get the stamps he wrote to some embassies and they obliged; he brought the collection back with him on his return to Prague.

Later he joined the Czechoslovak Legions, an army formed primarily from Czech and Slovak prisoners of war. The Czechoslovak Legions in Russia accomplished a remarkable feat: to secure their return route home after the war, they occupied and held the entire length of the trans-siberian railroad until they evacuated everybody to Vladivostok. From there the legionnaires proceeded home by ship either via America or, as Father did, around India and through the Suez Canal to Trieste, Italy. The Russians were not very pleased with the fact that the small Czechoslovak army in effect controlled the vast territory of Siberia and called them instead of "Chekoslovaki" (Czechoslovaks) "Chekosobaki" (Czech dogs).

Father returned home only in 1920, two years after the end of the war. He and uncle Otto rebuilt the factory and both of them worked there until our deportation to Terezin (Theresienstadt) in 1942. During WWI uncle Otto was hit by shrapnel in the abdomen, a very serious wound which not many people survived; I don't know whether he recovered sufficiently to return to the front. Because he was not taken prisoner, he returned to Prague as soon as the war ended.

Father liked music. When I was little he would sing a lot, mostly arias from German light operas and operettas, like Johann Strauss, German drinking songs and many other songs. However, the singing stopped when things got bad with the rise of Hitler in Germany and the depression. When I was little my parents used to go quite frequently to the German theater and later Father purchased a radio and liked to listen to music during meals. Mother, on the other hand, was practically tone deaf. Neither of my parents played any musical instrument nor did any of my parents' siblings. The only musical person in the family was my uncle Rudolf Klapp, the doctor, who was married to Father's sister, aunt Klara. Their son, my cousin Erich, also a doctor, was a gifted musician and played the cello very well.

When I was little I was a bit afraid of Father. He was a highly principled and somewhat stern man, who did not believe in displaying personal emotions. As far as I remember he kissed me only once -- the last time I saw him when I was in the transport from Terezin to Auschwitz. I assume that he did kiss me when I was a

small child, but I don't remember that. When he was angry, he almost never resorted to physical punishments, but would not talk to me, usually for several days. I found this very hard to bear and tried desperately to break his silence; I later discovered that the best way to make him talk to me again was to start asking questions about his war experiences. However, this was not because he liked the military; quite to the contrary, he returned from the war as a confirmed pacifist; I was never allowed to have any toy arms, no toy guns, sabers, or soldiers. He changed his attitude only when the threat from Germany became evident, and he would have gladly defended the Czechoslovak Republic. In later years we became very close. I loved Father very much, and he certainly was the dominant influence on me.

Other members of the family

I was very fond of my grandmother, Leontine Löbl, Mother's mother. She was the only grandparent I knew. She lived first next to us in a separate one-room apartment on the same floor of the house and later, when we had to move, with us in our apartment. Grandmother was paralyzed by a stroke, wore braces and a cane and walked with difficulty. While she lived in her own apartment she had a woman taking care of her and at the same time helping Mother with us, sort of part-time nurse and nanny. I used to play chess and dominoes with Grandmother. I think that she was from the Czech town of Domazlice and she therefore spoke Czech better than Mother. I remember her as a very kind and nice person to whom I would go when I felt unhappy. She died in 1935 at the age of 77.

My sister, Helga, was born in 1929 when I was five years old. She was a redhead like I and had a round face. Once as a little child she got hold of scissors and while sitting under the table managed to cut off a lot of her hair. I also remember when she took her first steps: she walked, but always had to hold on to someone. Then one day she got a new toy, a little wooden lion on wheels with a string; holding on to the string gave her enough confidence that she took her first independent steps. As a small child she was quite sickly; she preferred just to lie on a sofa and was not very interested in games. My parents were obviously worried and preoccupied with her health. I don't remember much of what was done, but I do recall very clearly that at one point the doctor prescribed a grey ointment containing elemental mercury, which was massaged every day into her entire body. Nevertheless, she did get better after the age of about three and then had a normal childhood. Because of her early illness or the treatment, she was a somewhat slower learner. As I was five years her senior I helped her with her school work and would even go to school to talk to the teacher instead of my parents, so that my relationship to her was a bit like that of a third parent. She was a very nice person with a sunny disposition, much more popular with the other children and also much harder working than I. I can't remember that we would ever had a

conflict or fight.

My wife, Eva, got to know Helga before we ever met; she worked with her in Terezin in the fields. Eva remembers that Helga always talked about her older brother whom, as Eva later told me, she loved and admired, and she kept reciting poems she learned from him (me). It is sad that my own memory is so faulty that I have no more recollections of her short life. She was 15 when she went to Auschwitz and too young and perhaps even younger looking to have a chance to pass through the selection. To Mengele she did not look like a good enough slave to be worth keeping alive for a few more months.

I had a number of uncles and aunts and quite a few cousins. The family, my uncles and aunts, got together every Sunday afternoon, the men for a game of cards, "tarok," a game popular among Austrian army officers. In the earliest days that I remember, the four card players were Father, his older brother, uncle Otto Robicek, uncle Rudolf Klapp, the physician, husband of Father's sister aunt Klara, and uncle Wilhelm Fried, the widower of another of Father's sister's. Uncle Wilhelm was the oldest and when he stopped coming, his son-in-law, Otto Flusser, took his place. Otto Flusser and my cousin Elsa were the parents of twin girls, a redheaded Susie and blond Liesl, who were shipped to England in 1939 at the age of eleven just before the outbreak of the war with one of Mr. Winton's children transports.⁵ My aunts gathered for conversation in another room; regular participants were Mother, uncle Otto's wife, aunt Mimi, Father's sisters aunt Rosa, aunt Klara and later, after she moved to Prague from Radnice, aunt Ema. Uncle Otto's mother-in-law, Matylda Fiala also came quite often. The site of these regular family meetings rotated among the principal participants. They took place in the afternoon and refreshments were always served but everybody went home for dinner. My many cousins on my father's side, who were almost 20 years older than I, came just occasionally; I was glad to see them and enjoyed the company of young adult relatives. Otherwise I restricted myself mostly to sampling the available food in both rooms. One time this resulted in a late night call to our doctor, my uncle, who brought with him a surgeon to make sure that the

⁵ An Englishman, Mr. Nicholas Winton, came to Prague in 1939 and began to organize transports of Jewish children to England; England was willing to accept children under 18, but no adults. The children were placed either in foster families or boarding schools. When we visited Prague in 2000 we saw a Czech movie, "Vsichni moji blízcí" (English version "All my Loved ones") based on Winton's children's transports. At the end of the movie was a list of the over 600 children Winton saved, but the list passed by too quickly to be readable. I knew that the Flusser twins got to England and it occurred to me that they might have been in one of Mr. Winton's transports. With my son Martin's help I got hold of the list and indeed found their names there. I started searching for them and finally got in touch with Mr. Frank Barratt of Edinburgh, Scotland, who had been married to Susie. Unfortunately she had died in 1995 and her sister Liesl a year later. When they came to England they were placed and brought up in the Oulton Abbey boarding school. To my surprise I found that my cousin on my mother's side, Susie Löbl, later Lind, also came to England with one of the Kindertransports.

suspected appendicitis was diagnosed properly and that the surgeon could operate without delay. However, careful examination revealed that the cause of the severe stomach ache was not the appendix, but the excessive number of strawberries I consumed as I alternated visiting my uncles and watching the card game for a while with visiting my aunts and listening to their complaints about domestic help.

My early life in Prague

In the early years of my childhood we spoke mostly German at home. My name was Jan Kurt, but at that time I was always called Kurt or more often by the diminutive Kurtl. We of course also spoke Czech with Czech friends and neighbors and with our maid. My best friend, Milos Milota, was Czech. Being from the German speaking part of the country, the “Sudetenland,” Mother’s Czech was far from perfect; Father was bilingual, but had had only German schools. My parents subscribed to a German newspaper, the “Prager Tagblatt,” a very good paper whose editorial staff was largely Jewish, and we used to go to the German theater.⁶ When I was five years old I went to a German (mostly Jewish) private kindergarten and there fell in love with the daughter of the lady who ran the kindergarten. Her name was Liesl and when my sister was born I wanted her to be name Liesl. My parents selected the name Helga, but accepted my choice as the second name, so that my sister was named Helga Liesl, but the name Liesl was never used. However when I started elementary school I went to a Czech school. At the moment when the German National Socialist (Nazi) party with their vicious anti-Semitic program gained the support of a large fraction of the German population and Hitler came to power, Father prohibited the use of any German in our house and I and my sister grew up as Czechs.⁷

I did not think of myself as Jewish. I was not a member of any religious group. I knew that my mother was registered with the Jewish community, but also that my father left it when he returned from WWI. I grew up with the belief that being Jewish, like being Catholic or a member of one of the protestant religions, meant

⁶ My cousin Elsa’s husband, Otto Flusser, was the head cashier of the “New German Theater” and I sometimes got free tickets from him.

⁷ After the war one was supposed to prove ones Czech or non-German ethnic background by getting a certificate about the ethnicity indicated during the 1930 census. The demand for these certificates was so huge that the archives could not handle it and -- at least on the day I came to get my certificate -- allowed people to find their census sheets themselves. I was in complete shock when I discovered that in 1930 Father listed the family as German. In the light of what had happened it seemed inconceivable and I had forgotten that things were so very different just fifteen years ago. I did not know what to do and then took the census sheet, hid it under my clothes, walked out of the office, brought it to Eva’s home and there burned it. Obviously I never got the certificate that my family had been of Czech (or Jewish, which was also acceptable) ethnicity, but I could claim that the census form could not be found; I somehow managed without it and by now I can’t even remember for what purpose the certificate was needed.

belonging to a religious community, participating in religious education and going to a church or synagogue. I remember being taken to a synagogue only once in my life to visit a very old uncle during the Day of Atonement. I never heard of anybody celebrating seder or Hanukkah, I never went to a bar mitzvah or a Jewish wedding.⁸ I never heard a word of Hebrew or Yiddish. We celebrated Christmas and Easter like everybody else, of course in a totally non-religious way. After Hitler came to power in Germany and Father somehow discovered that Christmas trees were originally a Germanic custom, we had Christmas without a tree but still with presents and a festive Christmas Eve dinner. We never talked about religion in our home; I once asked Mother why she did not leave the congregation and her reply was that she would not do it at a time when Jews were being persecuted. I knew that some of my relatives were Zionists and one of my older cousins, Frieda Ehrlich, actually went to Palestine with her husband as one of the early pioneers in the twenties, but later returned because life on the kibbutz was too hard. I considered myself Czech and had actually strong patriotic feelings, quite similar to my gentile classmates. My sister was even a member of the Sokol, a quite patriotic Czech physical education organization.⁹ I knew that during WWI Father had joined the celebrated Czechoslovak Legions, the army formed from prisoners of war fighting against Austria-Hungary for an independent Czechoslovakia. While there certainly was some anti-Semitism in Czechoslovakia, I do not recall experiencing any during my childhood. After all Thomas Masaryk, the president and founder of Czechoslovakia was famous, among many other things, for his defense of a Jew, Hilsner, against the accusation of ritual murder and for his strong condemnation of the entire belief in ritual murder by Jews.

Father left the Jewish community when he returned from WWI and learned that his very religious mother was no longer alive. He wanted me to select my own faith when I was old enough to decide for myself. Because he did not want to influence my own choice, he never talked about religious matters and never told me what his beliefs were, although I am now sure that he was an atheist. However, he was very emphatic about his belief in truthfulness and lying would have been the

⁸ Even my cousin Hedda, who later emigrated to Palestine, had a civil wedding in the beautiful town hall of Prague's Old Town. When aunt Mimi died, she was cremated in Prague's crematorium.

⁹ Earlier my parents thought of sending me to Sokol, but on the day we visited the Sokol gymnasium the boys exercised with wooden poles as if they were rifles and my very pacifistic father did not want to join me a potentially militaristic organization. He obviously was not worried that the Sokol would instill militaristic ideas in my sister, and by that time, because of the growing German threat, his pacifism must have given way to the need to defend the country. By that time I was no longer interested; I was never good at or attracted by physical exercise.

worst crime I could have committed. He told me many times the story of the boy who cried wolf, many times quoted a German proverb “Wer einmal lügt dem glaubt man nicht, auch wenn er dann die Wahrheit spricht” (Who lies once is not believed even if he later speaks the truth), and repeatedly told a story about how, when he was a soldier, his whole unit (platoon?) did something (I don’t remember what it was) and was called to a “rapport” and each soldier was individually asked whether he knew why he was there. All of them answered that they did not know, only Father admitted his transgression and was the only one who was not punished. I still remember the first time I was caught lying: I must have been perhaps four years old and still was supposed to sleep after lunch. Father came into to bedroom and asked whether I had slept and I claimed that I did. Somehow he knew that it was not true and I got a lecture about the evils of lying and it obviously made a lasting impression.¹⁰ The emphasis on truthfulness was also very much in tune with general ethical beliefs in Czechoslovakia at the time I was growing up. President Masaryk’s motto was “Pravda vitezi” (Truth prevails) and the country’s most celebrated 15th century hero, Jan Hus, was admired for his adherence to the truth as he saw it even under the threat of excommunication and death by being burnt alive at the stake. In a widely quoted letter from his cell before his execution he urged his followers to “allow everybody to have [his] truth (pravdy kazdemu prejte).”

Later I loved to read the witty epigrams and poems of the Czech journalist and satirist Karel Havlicek (1821-56), like his irreverent poem about the arrival of Christianity in Russia (The Christening of St. Vladimir) . Havlicek was originally a seminarian who became disillusioned with the church and became an outspoken atheist and critic of the Roman-Catholic church and of churches in general as well as of Austro-Hungarian dominance over the Czech nation. He was a leading force in the Czech national revival, and became very popular and respected, and after his exile and early death was considered a martyr for that cause. He probably affected my views on religion. In 1997, on our trip to Cortina, Italy, we stopped in Bressanone (Brixen) at Casa Havlicek, Havlicek’s place of exile, to pay our respects.

Our family lived in a suburb of Prague, Strasnice. When I was little we had a three-room apartment. The rooms were fairly big -- about 5x5 meters or 270 sq. ft. There was the bedroom with my parents’ two large beds, my sofa, and later also Helga’s little bed. It also had two big armoires with my parents’ clothing and carefully starched and ironed bed linen from Mother’s dowry, a small table and

¹⁰ I remember another incident which must have happened at about the same time. I hated to have to take a nap after lunch and got very bored. I was still in a little bed for children which had a metal frame and string netting on the sides. I had a pair of little play scissors but they proved good enough to cut the strings of the netting quite thoroughly. My parents were not pleased with my effort, but it was certainly not as serious a transgression as lying about having slept.

two chairs and a vanity. The living room had a table and chairs, a desk where I did my school work, a bookcase, a sofa, and an "American" (Edison) stove: a huge ornate iron stove with a number of small mica windows. The stove was filled with coke or anthracite from the top once in the evening and once in the morning and one had to start the fire only at the beginning of the heating season, a great advance over the ceramic stoves we had in the other rooms, but rarely used -- ashes and slag had to be removed daily. The living room was the only room that was heated, but there were connecting doors to the other two rooms. The third room was a formal dining room with elegant dark furniture; it was used only when we had guests. It also had display cabinets with china figurines, a silver tea set which Father had brought from Russia, and a huge easy chair in which Mother sat when she read to me. The apartment also had a kitchen with a coal stove, an adjacent little room for the maid, a small pantry room, and a bathroom with a coal heated hot water stove where we took a hot bath every Friday. On other days we just washed in cold water. A fairly large balcony overlooked the street; it had a table and a sofa and we would sometimes eat there in the summer. There was also a small balcony looking onto the yard and used mostly for storage. On the same floor was a one-room apartment for my grandmother and her nurse; the nurse also doubled as a sort of nanny. My grandmother spent most of the day in our apartment. Later we had to move into another apartment in the same block of houses, but that was in the beginning of the Depression. From then on we had a three bedroom apartment almost identical to the previous one, but our grandmother now lived with us and slept on the sofa in the living room -- we no longer could afford the nurse and perhaps somewhat later the maid. After my grandmother died in 1935, I slept on the living room sofa bed and Helga advanced from her little children's bed to my former bed in my parents' bedroom.

Although Father was a co-owner of a factory, we lived quite modestly and thriftily, particularly after the onset of the Depression. One of the first things people could do without when times got difficult was new paint, and Father's business suffered considerably. In the earlier years we did have a live-in maid, as was very common among middle or upper middle class families. Neither we nor any of our relatives in Prague, including my uncle Rudolf (a quite successful and prosperous physician), or any of my older cousins (a lawyer and a doctor) owned a car. Only my very rich uncle Hugo Löbl in Jablonec had one, of course with a chauffeur. I remember the amazement of the family, when, probably in or around 1939, a letter from a fresh immigrant to America reported that "Imagine, in America almost everybody has a car and nobody has a [live-in] maid." We never ate out, and used a taxi only once a year: when going to the train station with a lot of luggage on our annual vacation in the mountains. Not even Father's factory owned a car or truck. We did not have a phone, though some of our relatives and, of course, the uncle who was a physician, did. Except for one summer vacation in Austria in my early childhood before Helga was born, we never traveled outside

the country. We ate well, but jam (only home made), honey, or “babovka” (German Gugelhupf, a sort of high coffee cake) was served only on Sundays. I don’t remember that we ever had a guest for dinner or that we would have been invited for a major meal.

Almost every year we went for a summer vacation, mostly in the mountains. I particularly remember one or perhaps two vacations in Orlické hory (Eagle mountains); I think I was eleven or twelve year old, and there was a girl about my age there and we were sort of in love and corresponded for a few years. I still remember her name: Herta Nussbaum; she was from Brno. I also remember the enormous quantities of mushrooms, boletuses, which grew there at the time, and which Father, Helga and I collected and Mother cleaned and dried.¹¹ It was the last nice vacation we had as a family.

I had a number of toys, though very few compared with what children have nowadays. I got some presents each birthday and each Christmas. My most extravagant toy was a beautiful black pedal car with lights, a horn, a windshield, and a crank; all my uncles and aunts together gave it to me perhaps for my fourth or fifth birthday. I actually don’t remember using it a lot; it was later re-painted and refinished for Helga. I also got some money, which I put in a savings account and never used, and of course I received books. Also, for every birthday I got a can of pineapple and a jar of strawberry jam, my two favorite food items. My favorite toy was a scooter that I rode all over our suburb of Stranice, sometimes to the railroad station to meet Father, and even to (very unsuccessful) French lessons from a teacher who lived at least two or three miles away. Sometimes we rode it together with my friend Milos Milota; the scooter was not really meant to be ridden by two people and our ability to steer it when we rode together was somewhat limited. I remember that once we were going pretty fast down a hill and ran into a man who was neither particularly amused nor very friendly after our a bit-too-close encounter. Another memory from my scooter riding days is that Mother sent me to get some bread from a bakery, which was quite far, probably a mile or so from our house. The bread was not yet ready and I had to wait till it was taken out of the oven and while I waited I was allowed to watch the bakers at work -- I was very impressed how they could knead two loaves of bread at the same time, one with each hand. When the bread was finally ready, I ate a large part of the fresh hot loaf before I got home -- it was the best bread I ever tasted.

¹¹ It was at during that vacation that I won against a chess master. He played without looking at the chessboard against a group of chess players including Father and won, while I beat him although he looked at our game. The slight difference was that he was playing ping pong with me and chess with the adults.

In the summer of 2001 Eva, our grandson Thomas, and I visited the area, and I managed to find the hotel, Orlická chata, in which I had stayed with my parents and sister so many years before. It looked a bit shabby and the area around it had changed a bit – the beautiful blue field of flax was nowhere to be found.

For Christmas in 1937 I got skis and a prepaid trip to the Krkonose mountains with the Czechoslovak Club of Tourists. The one thing I wished for but never got was a bicycle, and I was quite annoyed that Father, who had had a bicycle as a young man, had given it away and did not think that one day he would have a son who would urgently desire it. I also got a tennis racket and took some group tennis lessons, but was never good at it -- I preferred ping-pong.

While the Depression affected us, it affected others far more. I remember one incident, probably around 1934, when a boy in my elementary school class fainted from hunger -- there were no school lunches. I also remember beggars ringing our doorbell and usually being handed some food which they ate while sitting on the stone stairs outside our apartment door.¹²

Milos Milota, who lived on the floor below us, was my closest friend; he was three years older than I, but we played together a lot. I got a ping-pong set even before I could read and write, and we played almost every day on our living room table, which was about half the size of a normal ping-pong table. It was perfect -- I could reach to the net. Uncle Rudolf gave me an old thick physician's appointment calendar and we used it to record the scores of every game we played. Milos's father was a very strict disciplinarian and I was afraid of him. Milos and his younger sister Libuse were frequently beaten with a switch for minor transgressions. Milos used to help me occasionally with my homework. I still remember one instance that astounded me. I was supposed to write a simple essay, something like "My day," and could not think of much. Milos wrote it for me and described how I entered a streetcar to go to school: "I recognize the familiar faces of the other travelers." I never noticed and much less could recognize strangers, even though I might have seen the same people many times, and I was absolutely astonished that Milos, and obviously most other people, did notice, remember, and recognize even strangers to whom they had never spoken. The difficulty of remembering and recognizing people has stayed with me for my entire life.

Schools

I started elementary school in the Prague suburb where we lived, Strasnice, when I was 6 years old. It was about a 15 minute walk to school and except for the first day I always walked to and from school by myself. During the first few weeks I sometimes needed some help since -- in 1930 -- we spoke mostly German at home and I was not completely fluent in Czech, but that lasted only a short time. I was

¹² In most houses in Prague the house doors were locked only at night so that during the day everybody could walk up the stairs to the apartment door. Uncle Otto's apartment house was an exception - there one had to ring a bell and my aunt Mimi would send the house key down in a little cloth bag on a string from the window.

very fond of my first grade teacher, Mrs. Harnachova, and used to visit her for many years and she even visited us after the war. Because the population expanded and the school building did not, I had to walk a bit further, about a mile, to classrooms in temporary wooden pavilions during the last two years of elementary school (fourth and fifth grade).

Schools were more socially integrated than they tend to be in the US. Because most people lived in apartment houses and elevators were still rare, the social stratification was vertical. Poorer people lived on the ground (first) floor, where people could peer into their windows, or even in basement apartments, and on the less accessible upper floors, whereas the richer ones lived on the second and third floors.

As a child and as a young man I was a flaming redhead and my entire body was covered by a dense network of freckles. Father was a redhead, too, and so was my sister Helga, while Mother had black hair. Being a redhead was not pleasant for a young boy. Redheads were quite rare in Czechoslovakia and therefore very noticeable. I must have heard children calling at me innumerable times:

Zrzy, zrzy, co te mrzi?
Ta zrzava palice.
Podivej se do zrcadla!
Vypadas jak opice.

In an approximate translation:

Rusty, rusty, what is troubling you?
Your rusty bean.
Look into a mirror!
You look like a monkey.

It was believed that Judas, the betrayer of Christ, was a redhead and that therefore redheads were generally shifty characters. On the other hand, it was also believed that spitting into one's sleeve when meeting a redhead brought good luck and I have seen countless people doing just that as they passed me on the street.

At the end of the 5th grade, in 1935, I passed my admission exam for a high school, in my case called a gymnasium, an eight-year school prerequisite for university study. One of the compulsory subjects taught for six years in a gymnasium was Latin. The majority of the children, whose parents had no plans to secure an advanced education for them, continued for three or four more years in a secondary school (called mestanska skola, or Bürgerschule in German). There was definitely a tendency for middle class children to go to gymnasium (high

schools) and for children from working class families to go to secondary schools, although poor children could attend a gymnasium and could easily obtain tuition waivers. Other high school options were a “classical gymnasium,” with six years of Latin and four years of Greek, or the “real school” (realka, or Realschule in German), with only modern languages and an emphasis on mathematics and preparation for science and engineering; the “realka” took seven rather than eight years to complete. The real-gymnasium was the most popular choice of the secondary schools with a balance of classical and modern languages (German from grade one, Latin from grade three, and a second modern language from the fifth grade).

For me, the change from elementary to secondary school came as a bit of a shock. From elementary school I was accustomed to be one of the best pupils without ever having to do any studying at home. I carried the same working or, rather, non-working habits into the gymnasium, and suddenly found myself doing rather poorly. Moreover, I was not really interested in most of the subjects. I actively disliked anything that had to be memorized, particularly life sciences, which required memorization of the descriptions of animals and plants, and I actually hated Latin. Neither did I develop any strong interest in history with its memorization of names of rulers and dates of their reigns and of battles. I liked mathematics and later physics (given only in the third year of the gymnasium). I liked to read, but not necessarily what was required by the school curriculum. My parents did not pay much attention to my school work. Mother could not understand it because of the language barrier and her own limited education, and Father took the attitude that I was to be responsible for myself and that if I didn't want to study, I did not have to go to a gymnasium -- it was simply up to me. So I floundered around as a mediocre student. I almost flunked the fourth grade because of Latin; we had an eccentric teacher who flunked almost one third of the class and I was saved only by passing a sort of make up exam (“reparat”) at the end of the summer vacation. Because of Father's paint factory, which I should have joined and eventually taken over and inherited (my uncle, the co-owner, had no children), it was always assumed that I should study chemistry and so, at the end of the fourth grade of the gymnasium I tried to get accepted into a chemistry “industrial school” (prumyslova skola) which would replace the upper four years of the gymnasium. I did not get admitted and therefore stayed in the gymnasium. At that time our school, because of its size, had three fifth grade classes, each one with a different modern language: French, English and Russian. By the time I found out that I was not accepted into the chemistry school, the French and English classes were already full, so I was assigned to the class with Russian. I started working more seriously in the fifth grade, but at the end of it I was expelled from the school together with all students who were considered Jews under the existing German race laws.

Life in Czechoslovakia

I now realize that I suddenly got to the summer of 1940 without recording what preceded it. Let me go back to 1935. At that time Czechoslovakia was prosperous, having recovered from the depression of the early thirties, and the general mood was very optimistic. Thomas Masaryk, the revered founder of the republic, was still president. In school we learned a song with the text

Taticku stary nas
sedivou hlavu mas
pokud Ty Jsi mezi nami
Potud bude dobre s nami
Taticku stary nas

Our Old Father
your head is grey
as long as you are among us
all will be well with us
our Old Father

and we sincerely believed it. Masaryk, then 85 years old, resigned later that year and was succeeded by his hand picked successor and long-time co-worker Eduard Benes. For years, Benes had been minister of foreign affairs and was a well respected statesman who served as president of the League of Nations at the time of the Italian invasion of Ethiopia.

Czechoslovakia was aware of the rising power of nationalism in Germany and built a strong modern army and a sophisticated chain of fortifications along the German borders. As far as I remember and could judge -- I was only 11 years old - everyone was confident that what was happening in Germany could never happen in the democratic Czechoslovakia. Czechoslovakia accepted some German refugees, the most prominent among them the writer Thomas Mann. However, a pro-Nazi German party under the leadership of Konrad Henlein started gaining strength among the German population of the border regions, the Sudetenland, They started to demand unification with Germany under the Nazi slogan "Ein Volk, ein Reich, Ein Führer" (One nation, one country, one leader). The situation grew much more tense after the German annexation of Austria in March 1938, as a consequence of which many new refugees entered Czechoslovakia, among them Mother's closest childhood friend, Steffi Fried. I still remember the words "johlende Menschenmenge" (howling crowds) which Steffi used in her description

of the mob greeting the Nazis and turning against the Jews.¹³ Steffi did not stay long and continued on to her sister in Holland, and later succeeded, via Portugal, Africa, and Cuba, to get to New York, where we met her after our escape.¹⁴

At that point Czechoslovakia felt threatened, but firmly determined to defend itself and confident in its army, its fortifications and -- mistakenly -- in its allies, France and the Soviet Union. In May the army was mobilized and we were preparing for an attack. Everybody got gas masks and we wore them even to school. We glued strips of paper on the windows believing that that would protect the windowpanes from shattering during air raids. There was a blackout and I remember walking in the streets with a flashlight with some sort of a civil defense group. Spirits were high. I can't judge whether adults felt as confident as my contemporaries and I (I was 14), but if they did not they certainly didn't show it. During the mobilization people rushed to the army even when they were not called.

Then came the negotiations of the Western powers with Hitler, Lord Runciman's visit to Czechoslovakia and eventually, in September 1938, the Munich capitulation to Hitler's demands followed by Chamberlain's boast that he had secured "peace for our time." Czechoslovakia had to give up all its border regions with Germany and with them all its fortifications. The country was thus left totally defenseless. Poland and Hungary joined in and at the same time occupied Czechoslovakia's border regions with Polish and Hungarian populations. President Benes resigned and left for London and was succeeded by Emil Hacha, the president of the Supreme Court, a decent, but entirely powerless old man. The nation was devastated and demoralized. A new right wing government was formed. In March 1939 President Hacha was summoned to Germany and forced to sign an agreement by which the western part of Czechoslovakia, Bohemia and Moravia, became a German protectorate. The Eastern part of the country, Slovakia, declared its independence under the rule of a fascist priest Tiso. On March 15, during a snowfall, the German army occupied what was left over of the former Czechoslovakia. The radio urged everybody to stay calm. I remember

¹³ It is strange how I remember this one word I never heard before or after -- I looked it up in the dictionary only now, 62 years later. Her description of what had happened in Vienna must have made a tremendous impression on me.

¹⁴ Hers was a sad story: she was married to an Austrian lawyer and, in order to work with him, finished the gymnasium in the evenings and then earned a law degree. They divorced pro forma to protect his law firm, she left and he stayed in Vienna; they had no children. However, during Steffi's absence her husband took a lover, fathered a child and married the lover, and Steffi's pro forma divorce became real and final. Steffi stayed in New York working as a companion for a rich emigrant old lady, one of the Petscheks. She was such a good and understanding person that, after the war, she sent packages to her former husband and his child, and when she went to Europe for vacations she would meet with him. She died in New York in the early sixties.

Father hearing the news and saying “a clovek jde dal jako kun” (and one goes on like a horse).

On the surface life continued, very subdued, but still went on. Father, then 52 years old, started thinking of emigration and made some attempt to get a visa to one of the Central or South American countries (I don't remember which it was), and hoped to start there again manufacturing paints. Mother at that time was already very ill, I was 15 and Helga only 10. Obviously the project failed; there was not enough time. He also tried to get me and Helga to England, asking for help from one of his distant relatives of the very rich Petschek family, but they refused.

Very soon various orders and laws against the Jews were instituted, not all at once, but one following the next in short intervals. One of the first, or perhaps the first was the order that all Jews had to get a red letter “J” stamped into their identity card, a sort of internal passport everybody had to carry. Then came a registration, I only vaguely remember standing with my family for long hours in lines somewhere in a great hall. Then the Jews had to give up radios -- I have a recollection of having to carry our radio to some distant collection place. Later we had to turn in skis, stamp collections (I asked a friend to keep my collection for me), pets (we did not have any). There were restrictions on what Jews could buy -- their food rations were smaller than those of non-Jews, and there were also restriction on the times one could shop. Jews were allowed to use only the last compartment of the last car of the streetcar and their travel by train was restricted. Then came the order that all Jews had to wear yellow stars with the word “Jude” (Jew). Then came a curfew at 8 PM. I do not remember the sequence or the timing of the various prohibitions and orders, but there were many more and new ones were announced frequently. I do remember that the wearing of the yellow stars came some time in 1941. I remember meeting a former classmate and he greeted me jokingly as “sheriff” because of the star. However, talking to Jews became risky, people would be denounced as “zidomil,” Jew-lover. I remember a fascist Czech newspaper, “Vlajka” (The Flag) which was posted not far from our apartment warning people, who would even acknowledge former Jewish friends or neighbors by winking, with a little verse “mrky, mrky, mrk, pana svrbi krk” (winky, winky, wink, the gentleman has an itching neck [for a rope]). Many people were intimidated; others, however, made a point of at least greeting, and even secretly visiting their Jewish friends.

Work

After I was prohibited from going to school, I worked for a while in the office of Father's factory. The factory was in a suburb of Prague, Hostivar, just one train stop away from the suburb we lived in, Strasnice, and Father and my uncle Otto,

the co-owner, commuted there daily by train. The Strasnice train station was about 15 minutes from our apartment and the Hostivar station less than 10 minutes from the factory.¹⁵

I liked the office work, but then Father found me a sort of an apprentice job with one of his clients, Mr. Kleinhampl, who owned a machine shop which manufactured steel furniture, mostly for doctors' and dentists' offices. I must admit that I did not like the work there very much. Previously I lived a very sheltered life and was not used to the ways of workers, not hostile, but crude. I liked working with machines, the lathe, the drill, and I even did some spot welding and learned a little bit of regular welding (I once learned by painful experience that a fresh weld is still very hot even though it is no longer glowing red). But most of the time I had to just work endlessly with a file and smooth the spots where the iron tubings forming the frame of the furniture were welded together. It was hard and terribly monotonous work, and I really hated it. Moreover, the owner was a very stingy man and instead of using proper welding rods, he used just narrow strips of sheet metal -- and they were harder and more difficult to file. (He also severely reprimanded me once when I was washing my hands, of course with cold water only, that I must turn the water off while soaping and washing them before rinsing. "One pays for water, and one pays dearly" ["Voda se plati, a draho se plati"]). While I was a rather poor and lazy student when in school, I now discovered that I really wanted to study. In my last year of school (the 10th grade, the 5th grade of the gymnasium) I started Russian and became very fond of our teacher, a WWI refugee (or emigree, as was the usual terminology of the time)¹⁶ from Communist Russia. I brought my Russian textbook to work and used the lunch break to study rather than join in the discussion with the others. In the end, in spite of my dislike for the work there, it probably saved my life, because later on in Auschwitz, I was able to claim that I was a metal worker and

15 When my parents married, about 1922, there was a very serious housing shortage and they lived for a while in the office building of the factory before an apartment for which they paid a deposit was completed. The factory, which had the name Frantisek Christof nastupce (successor), had just a few workers, about six, two secretaries and a salesman. It also had a small laboratory where Father tried out new or modified paint compositions. Later on I used that laboratory as a source of chemicals for my home lab. The factory manufactured paints and varnishes. At that time, in 1940, it must have already had a German "Treuhänder," basically an overseer, but I don't remember having had any contact with him - I assume that he just occasionally came to collect money and otherwise left Father and Uncle to continue running the factory. Later they were forced to sell it to a German - I have no idea who he was and whether it was the Treuhänder himself or somebody else, but they still continued to work there until their deportation to Terezin.

16 I believe that before WWI Alfred Bem was a professor of the University of Kijev. While he was teaching us at the gymnasium he also lectured at the Charles University in Prague; he was a wonderful teacher who read us Russian poetry and was able to get even me excited about studying a language. It just so happened that his daughter was a schoolmate of my friend, Arnost Reiser, and later married Arnost's uncle. From Arnost I learned that Bem was arrested by the Soviet secret police in 1945 and taken to Russia; he was never heard of again.

lathe operator.

The Chemistry Course

Late in 1940 or early in 1941, the Jewish Community opened a series of re-training courses (“Umschulungskurse”), to re-educate young Jews for practical jobs instead of academic study. Under this guise they also opened a chemistry course, probably listed as a course for training chemical technicians, and I was accepted into it. Because Father owned a paint factory, it was always assumed that I would study chemistry, although at the gymnasium I was not particularly fond of the subject. This time things were very different. Having now been denied education, I discovered a great desire to study. I loved the course and was really very happy in it. We had some excellent teachers, good lectures and even laboratories, though improvised in an apartment house never intended for a laboratory. The lectures were on inorganic and analytical chemistry and some physical chemistry principles; in the laboratory we did qualitative inorganic analysis. I almost immediately became enamored with chemistry and from that moment on it was clear to me that chemistry was what I wished to do for the rest of my life. I worked and studied enthusiastically and quickly became one of the best students in the course. I often studied with one of my classmates, Milena Polertova, and we reviewed and debated chemistry -- there was not the slightest romantic undertone to our frequent meetings.

Once, I had an unpleasant accident in the chemistry course. We checked our laboratory equipment out every day and returned it in the evening. While standing in a line waiting for my turn, I dropped something and quickly bent down to pick it up. Unfortunately, the student right behind me was obviously tired of holding a ring-stand (essentially an iron rod about half an inch thick and three feet in length on a heavy iron base to which one could attach various rings and clamps) in his hand and put it down on the floor and I rammed it right up my rear, about 1/2 inch from the anus. I ended up in the Jewish hospital where they removed the pieces of clothing from the wound and sewed me up. I must have missed part of the course. For my 17th birthday I received an approximately 1000 page university textbook, Votocek’s “Anorganicka chemie” (Inorganic Chemistry), and immersed myself in it.

Dye Shop

When, in the fall of 1941, the first transports of Jews from Prague started, the chemistry course came to an abrupt end (after only about four months), but it still gave me a good foundation in chemistry, and particularly a firm resolution to continue my studies. The first transports went directly to Poland, to the Lodz ghetto. These transports consisted mostly of wealthy people whose property

was of immediate interest to the Nazis or their collaborators. Included from my family were uncle Hugo Löbl from Jablonec (Gablonz), Mother's half brother, his wife aunt Lilly and her mother; their children, Hella and Susie were fortunate enough to have gotten to England before the outbreak of the war. Uncle Hugo owned a big factory and large villa in Jablonec, although of course he lost them when the "Sudetenland," where Jablonec was located, became a part of the German Reich after the Munich dictate in the fall of 1938; he then moved to Prague and lived in a quite modest apartment. My aunt Rosa, one of Father's sisters, was also in one these early transports to Lodz. Aunt Rosa was a widow, not wealthy, but she owned a nice villa in Strasnice, the same suburb of Prague where we lived.

Later transports went to Terezin (Theresienstadt). My cousin Erich Klapp was the only medical doctor in the first of them (Ak1).¹⁷ People who were summoned for a transport, usually with a three day notice, were allowed to bring 50 kg (110 lb) of luggage with them. Since they correctly assumed that there wouldn't be much of an opportunity to keep white bed linen clean, the Jewish community provided them with an opportunity to have them dyed. Our laboratory was converted to a dye shop and both the teachers and the students of the chemistry course continued working there. We offered a selection of two colors -- blue and brown and had a lot of work to keep up with the demand.

During this period of time I had another accident. I stood on a stool stirring the cloth in a large pot with dye; the pot stood on tripods and was heated with gas burners. I lost my balance and instinctively grabbed the pot and the boiling dye solution spilled over me and I was badly scalded. I ended up in the hospital again, but healed fairly rapidly and could return to work. I remember that we worked through the winter of 1941-42 because I have a clear recollection of our finished products drying on clothes lines in the attic, being frozen solid.

I was not about to forget chemistry and so I started a home laboratory in the former maid's room (at this time we of course could not have a maid), and I also used the kitchen, which had gas and water. I used the double window as a sort of exhaust hood and installed there a primitive hydrogen sulfide generator.¹⁸ In retrospect I have to admire the tolerance of Mother as well as of the other tenants of the house. I had a good friend from the course, a short swarthy boy, Karel

¹⁷ Each transport had a designation, usually a letter or letters sometimes combined with numerals. The first five transports A,B,C,D and E, went to Lodz in Poland, transport F went to Minks. The first transport to Terezin was Ak, probably for "Aufbauskommando" (building command). It consisted of only 342 men whose task it was to prepare Terezin for the arrival of the many more transports. It was also referred to as Ak1 because the next transport of 1000 men (officially transport H), which arrived only six days later with the same task, was usually called Ak2.

¹⁸ Hydrogen sulfide has a penetrating odor of rotten eggs.

Kohn, and he and I used to prepare complicated mixtures for each other to analyze. I remember the pleasure of going to the store in downtown Prague to buy some chemicals and, as I already mentioned, I also got some from Father's lab. Once I also prepared some silver nitrate by dissolving -- with my parents' permission -- an old silver pocket watch.

New restrictions and orders concerning Jews came out all the time. It was at about the time when the transports started and when I started working in the dye shop that we were ordered to wear the yellow Jewish star, with the inscription "Jude," sewn firmly on the outer garment. There was also an 8 PM curfew. Generally I did not experience any difficulties of hostility except once. I was walking with Kohn on Vaclavske namesti (Wenceslaus Square) in the center of Prague and talking when suddenly I saw a fist in a leather glove just in front of my face and was hit and fell down on the pavement. It happened so fast, I did not even see the man. I was not injured, just knocked down and in shock. I got up and ran, quite shaken, to the streetcar and made it home. Nobody seemed to notice or pay any attention.

Transport

In May we received our summons to the transport. We were ordered to present ourselves, I think on May 12, to the great hall which used to be part of the Prague trade fair (veletrh, Messe). I remember very little of the preparations. We packed our permitted 50 kg into suitcases, two suitcases per person, with clothing and some, mostly non-perishable, food. We were given transport numbers, mine was Au1 698, which also had to be painted in large letters on the suitcases. From then on the transport numbers essentially replaced names. My parents managed to hide a few things with friends and neighbors. People living one floor above took some rugs, a lady who used to make girdles for Mother hid the only painting which we now have from my childhood home, Father's secretary hid material for a suit (it became my wedding suit), a classmate of mine took my stamp collection, a camera and binoculars, somebody hid some jewelry. I remember that the lady who ran the milk store offered Mother that she would hide some things for us, but don't remember whether we took advantage of her offer. With just a few exceptions, I got all of the things back after the war. I remember that relatives came to help us pack, say good-bye, and cooked a very good last meal for us.

On the appointed day some volunteers from the Jewish Community helped us carry the luggage. We went by street car. I don't remember the reaction of other people riding with us -- I have the feeling that they were embarrassed, afraid to show sympathy, and rather looked away. I certainly do not remember anybody being unpleasant or expressing pleasure at seeing us go.

The exhibition hall was large and there were straw mattresses on the floor and that was the first time I came into closer -- but fortunately not too close -- contact with SS officers. The man in charge was called Fiedler and he carried a large flashlight -- a flashlight of that size was then called "fiedlerovka." I have very little memory of that experience, except that I do remember one frightening moment, when a group of SS-men came to a family located close to us and starting searching them. It was clearly the work of an informer -- they went straight for the man's shoe, tore off the sole and found hidden money and led him away. He did not return.

TEREZIN

I have really no recollection of the way to Terezin. I think we went in passenger cars to Bohusovice and walked from there. The luggage was put on carts and transported for us. We did get it back. At that time there were still non-Jewish civilians living in Terezin and we were confined to barracks. Our family was separated. Father and I were together in barracks for males, the "Sudetenkaserne," Mother and Helga were in the womens' barracks, the "Hamburger Kaserne." One could not move freely around -- only occasionally were we allowed to visit the womens' barracks in small groups. We were in a large hall densely filled with double three-level bunk beds -- six people on each bunk bed with only a very narrow space between. There were 400 men in one hall, which probably served in the past as a large storage area. We went to work assigned to a "Hundertschaft," a group of 100 men (a century) and sent wherever we were needed. I remember very little of this period.

One trivial recollection I have from my stay in the Sudeten barracks is about the latrines. They were obviously not meant for so many users and there were lines of men waiting for a seat. Special guards were assigned to keep order, to keep people in line and to encourage people inside the stalls to hurry up. I still remember the constantly repeated words: "Dress outside, the line is growing!" ("Oblekat se venku, fronta roste!"). I also remember a fairly original verbal encouragement painted on the walls by an anonymous poet: "Shit cylinders, shit cubes, but above all shit fast" (in the original: "Serte valce, serte krychle, ale hlavne serte rychle"). As far as I recall, I fainted only once in my life, and that was while waiting in a latrine line when I was sick with an ear infection.

Family

Father was in good health, but Mother was very ill. She suffered from a serious heart disease. Her doctor was my cousin Erich Klapp, who by virtue of being the first physician who came to Terezin, became a member of the Council of Elders and was in charge of the health department. Mother did not stay in the barracks for very long and soon was moved to the hospital and remained there for the rest of her stay in Terezin. I visited her there regularly, but remember only one occasion when we went together for a short walk outside the hospital. I did not realize at that time how young she really was -- only 47 when we came to Terezin.

I was close to Father and saw him frequently. Father, who was 55 when we came to Terezin, originally worked in a lumber yard, but got a hernia. Because he was a reserve officer he was then assigned to the Ghattodienst and became commander of a small unit.

Inside the ghetto there were two groups of Jewish “police” maintaining order. The “Ghettowache” (Ghetto guard) who, in lieu of a uniform, had caps with a yellow band, was basically responsible for order outside the barracks. The “Ghettodienst” (Ghetto service), with caps with blue bands, was responsible for order inside the barracks, such as keeping the lines at meal distributions. The Ghettodienst did not have any weapons, and I never heard of any case where there had been any problems, much less where any physical force was needed. The same was true for the Ghettowache, though I have the feeling that they were issued wooden cudgels more as a symbol of their office than for actual use.

Father derived some advantage from this position in the Ghettodienst -- he was later able to move to a small room in the “Kavalier Kaserne,” which he shared just with one other person; it happened to be a brother of the famous writer Egon Erwin Kisch; Father knew Egon personally and is even briefly mentioned in one of his books.

My sister Helga was only 13 when we came to Terezin. She lived in the girls home, L410, and worked in agriculture, where she met and talked a lot with Eva before I knew her.

I don't remember when and where we met as a family, but I certainly saw all the members of the family frequently after the entire non-Jewish population was moved out and we could move freely inside the ghetto.

Besides my immediate family there were many other relatives in Terezin: Cousin Erich Klapp and his father, uncle Rudolf, the old doctor, and his mother, aunt Klara. They survived, but Erich did not and they never quite recovered from the loss. Father's elder brother, uncle Otto, was in Terezin and survived together with his even older (78 years in 1945) mother-in-law, Matylde Fiala. The reason why several older members of the family survived was that Erich Klapp, by virtue of his membership in the Council of Elders, could protect most members of the family until the fall of 1944 when he himself was deported and murdered. However, at that time old people were excluded from the transports. Cousin Fritz Treulich, a very capable engineer, became the director of the central laundry in Terezin and in this function was protected together with his wife Mali and two little children Helena, now Eisler, and Eva, now Holzer, both of whom now live in Switzerland. Fritz's mother, my aunt Ema, born 1872, also stayed in Terezin and survived, but four of her other children perished together with their families.

Sick

Not too long after our arrival I got sick with a mid-ear infection. I lay in a sick room and things did not get better in spite of a very painful eardrum perforation

performed by a former military doctor. Eventually I was transferred to the hospital in the "Hohenelber Kaserne" and Dr. Tarian performed a skull trepanation. I remember the beginning of the surgery, namely the anesthesia -- the doctor had no other equipment and simply put a piece of gauze over my nose and started dripping ether on it -- some of the ether got directly into my nose and I started choking, but then fell asleep. I was in the hospital for quite a long time, but I could not tell how long, definitely several weeks, maybe a month. The hospital room was large; I would guess that there were some 14 to 20 beds there. Many patients died. For many years I was convinced that an intravenous infusion is administered only to patients very near to death, because I always observed that people would be put on an infusion (probably of saline solution or glucose) and then died. One man, who was shot in the head by an SS-man, was brought into our room and hallucinated and yelled obscenities through the night before he died. The doctors and nurses were very good, but their means were limited. There were of course no antibiotics. The earliest sulfonamides (Prontosil) were already known, but I don't remember to what extent if any they were available. I don't remember getting any.

After I was released from the hospital I was still sent for recuperation to a sort of sick room, where we still had a nurse taking care of us. It was located in the former school building, L417, the building which today houses the museum. I remember that once -- and that was a very big thing and happened only once -- we got a small piece of real butter, somewhat rancid, but still butter, probably taken from people on a freshly arrived transport.

Jugendheim

Eventually I was declared fit, moved into a "Jugendheim" (youth home) for boys, Q710, a fairly large room with some thirty or so boys and one somewhat older supervisor, ("Zimmerältester"). I remember him, because he told us that he had been imprisoned at the "Kleine Festung," the "Little Fortress," very close to the Terezin ghetto. It was a terrible place where prisoners were routinely beaten to death. I don't remember how and why he got there nor how he managed to get out of there alive. I also recall that at that time Fredi Hirsch, the well known youth educator and organizer, lived in the same house but I had little contact with him. The other very clear memory I have from that time was the number of fleas that tormented me -- I would get up at night trying to catch and kill them; I was very sensitive to flea bites -- they itched for a long time. There were also many bed bugs, but for some reason they did not seem to bother me much, although they would sometimes fall into my face and I would squish them. Although I remember the problem with fleas most vividly from that particular period, they were omnipresent and a constant bother throughout our stay in Terezin; I became pretty adept at catching them. Other people were more sensitive to bed bugs and

I remember seeing people take apart their beds, pouring kerosene into the joints and even starting small controlled fires at the edges of the bed frames.

By the time I left the hospital and the sick room, Terezin had changed dramatically. The entire non-Jewish population had been moved out and their houses converted into living space for more inmates. Terezin was opened up so that one could move freely within the limits of the ghetto until curfew, except for spaces reserved for the German "Comandatur" and the access street to it¹⁹ and other spaces occupied by the German forces. As far as work assignments was concerned, Terezin was organized on a seniority system. When I finally was ready to start working again I discovered to my great surprise that I had enough seniority to be able to select to some extent what I wanted to do. Of course, I opted for work in the kitchen -- the only place where one could get enough to eat. The food was wonderful; not only was there enough of it, but as it was also specially prepared by the cooks for themselves and the rest of the kitchen personnel, it was much better than what was distributed to the ordinary ghetto inhabitants. However, the work I was assigned to was carrying coal from the cellar to the kitchen on the second (or third?) floor in big crates with two bars so that two people could carry it. Unfortunately, the work was too hard for me particularly after my surgery and the long time spent in the hospital and I had to give it up after just a few days. I then started working in the "Landwirtschaft," (agriculture department), in the vegetable fields. It was not very strenuous, it was outside, but I was never much of an enthusiast for gardening and field work. I carried with me a small German booklet on organic chemistry²⁰ and studied it in any free moment.

The Chemical Laboratory

One day I was sent with a wheelbarrow for some manure and on the way I passed what used to be a gymnasium, a "sokolovna," a building which must have been built by the Czech Sokol organization for physical exercise and community activities. I looked into the windows and to my amazement I noticed glass bottles, which, as I clearly recognized, came from our chemistry course -- they still had the large black numbers painted on them to identify the laboratory table (we did not have proper benches, just regular tables) to which they belonged. It was a chemical laboratory. I walked in and introduced myself to the director of the

¹⁹ It was unthinkable that Jews would be allowed on the street used by the Germans. There was just one crossing which only people with a special permit were allowed to use as long as no Germans were in sight. Everybody else had to go around the whole ghetto when they needed to get from one side of the restricted street to the other. The crossing had gates and was guarded by the Ghetto wache.

²⁰ I cannot remember where I got or borrowed it.

laboratory, Dr. Adolf Pollak from Prague, and he gave me a sort of examination of my knowledge of chemistry. I must have impressed him. I asked whether I could work in the lab and he promised to find out. He was refused on the grounds that he could not justify the need for another person in the lab -- he had already two, one middle aged man, by the name Fischl(?) and a young blonde woman, Trudy. Neither of them knew any chemistry; it was rumored that Trudy was assigned to the lab because she was the lover of somebody higher up in ghetto administration. However, Pollak gave me permission to come to the lab after work, which I did enthusiastically. Some time later the lab received a large shipment of chemicals from Prague and I helped with its unpacking and sorting. For me it was an incredible delight -- I handled each flask containing a pure chemical reagent with pleasure and excitement. Now, with a decent store of chemical reagents, the lab could do more work and could therefore justify another member and I was finally reassigned there. I was very happy.

The laboratory did all kinds of totally useless work, mostly analytic in nature, but it was fun. We analyzed all sorts of things which came into the ghetto, determined fat content in milk, nitrogen (protein) content in meat products -- once and only once, we got a fairly large number of cans with hashed meat, euphemistically called liver pate. After analyzing it for water, fat and nitrogen content (Kjehldahl analysis) we consumed what was left over. I even have to admit to the only falsification of results I did during my scientific career: since we found that the various cans gave very similar results, I decided to stop the analysis, invent similar figures for the rest of the cans and eat the meat rather than unnecessarily destroy it for the purpose of a useless and superfluous analysis. We measured how much noodles gained in weight when cooked; these samples, too, were welcome because we could eat them afterwards -- but the amounts were rather small. We determined the water and salt content of bread; later on, when Professor Leo Lederer, a physical chemist and a German refugee living in Holland before his deportation to Terezin, replaced Dr. Pollak, he even developed a mathematical model of moisture distribution throughout the entire loaf of bread. We determined water content in wood samples, analyzed soaps and washing powders and probably other items I no longer remember.

We were trying to do soil analyses for the agriculture department (Landwirtschaft). The choice of chemicals we had at our disposal was limited and so were the literature sources -- we had just a handful of books, less than a dozen. Even more limited was our combined knowledge. I had studied chemistry just for a few months and at that only inorganic chemistry and qualitative analysis. Pollak had a Ph.D. in chemistry, but was really a metallurgist with very limited knowledge of analytical or food chemistry and the other two members had no chemistry background whatever. So, by default, I became sort of the expert particularly in the analytical area, though a very inadequate one. I experienced

great problems with soil analysis. We were trying to determine calcium, potassium, and most importantly phosphorus. The problem was that the standard procedure for phosphorus determination was based on precipitation with ammonium molybdate and we did not have any and were denied its purchase because molybdenum was an important element for the war industry. Another method for determining phosphorus, which I knew from textbooks, was based on its precipitation with magnesium and ammonia, but that required working in ammonia rather than in an acidic medium; however, the addition of ammonia caused the precipitation of copious amounts of iron(III) hydroxide making the method useless. Finally, I thought that I solved the problem -- I learned somehow that citric acid will prevent the precipitation of iron(III) hydroxide and so I started precipitating phosphorus as magnesium ammonium phosphate in the presence of citric acid. The problem was that I could see no precipitate forming. To induce crystal formation I patiently scratched the walls of the beakers until a reasonable amount of it formed, then I filtered it through a filter crucible, heated it in a small furnace and weighed the result. I was surprised to find that the filter crucibles could be used only once, the next time they stopped filtering -- no liquid would come through. Finally, after performing a number of analyses using my method, I discovered that citric acid inhibited not only the precipitation of ferric hydroxide, but also of the desired phosphorus compounds, and that what I had been weighing was glass which I scraped off the walls of the beakers with the glass rod and which then melted and clogged the pores of the filter crucibles. Curiously enough, after the denial of permission to purchase the needed molybdenum salt, we suddenly got two packages of it from two different sources and could then perform proper phosphorus determinations..

Some time later I met Arnost Reiser, whom I knew from the Prague chemistry course, introduced him to Dr. Pollak and he, too, started working in the lab. I was delighted to have my friend as a lab colleague. Later on his sister Susie, also from the chemistry course, joined us as well.

One day the German supervisor of the agriculture department, Mr. Kursavy, came to the laboratory with an urgent request: he wanted the lab to make drinking alcohol for him and his friends. This became a high priority of the lab and Dr. Pollak took charge of it with his usual energy and determination. Kursavy provided us with some dirty sugar swept off the floor and we learned -- with the advice of some consultants whom Pollak approached -- to ferment it into alcohol. We cut many narrow glass tubes into small pieces ("Rashig rings") and filled with them several wide glass tubes connecting the top of one section of the column to the bottom of the next, building thus a rather monstrous distillation column (none of us had the slightest idea about distillation). The fermentation took about a week and we then went on to distill and did produce alcohol. The problem was that the distillation was very slow and so we ran it 24 hours a day -- except that

for some reason the water was turned off every night between midnight and 3 AM and without cooling water the distillation had to be interrupted. This led to a major accident. One night, when when I was on duty I decided to have a little nap during the time the water was turned off. I lay down on the lab table and to make quite sure that I would wake up I opened the water tap so that the sound of flowing water would wake me. Unfortunately, it did not and by the time I finally did wake up, there was a lot of water on the floor. I mopped it up as well as I could and when the boss arrived and asked why the floor was wet, I told him that I decided to wash the floor. What I did not know, was that he had a huge treasure hidden under the laboratory cabinets -- namely many cartons of cigarettes which were used as currency in the ghetto -- and they were all soaked. I still don't understand why he did not kill me or at the very least throw me out of the lab.

One day we were given molasses instead of sugar and fermented them in the same way in about 10 gallon demijohns (large narrow-necked glass bottles); however, when we came in the morning we found out that the fermentation went very quickly with the formation of a thick foam and almost all the fermented product was on the floor.

Not all of the alcohol was delivered to the Germans; some of it Pollak used for his friends. He organized a party in the laboratory to which I and the other members of the lab were also invited. The party got a bit too wild -- I remember being very upset when Pollak's sister, Hermina, broke a lot of irreplaceable chemical glassware and one of the guests thought it very funny to take scissors and cut off the ties of other guests. Another memory from this party is that of one drunk member questioning another whether she was a Zionist with the words "Jsi Salom nebo nejsi Salom?" (Are you a Shalom or aren't you a Shalom?).²¹ I did not enjoy this type of "entertainment."

Once Pollak decided to entertain us by demonstrating the preparation and properties of nitrogen triiodide, a deep brown powder which, once it was dry, would explode even at the touch of a feather. The explosions in the small quantities were quite harmless, but the powder spread around the lab and created mini-explosions on almost every step. We were quite concerned how the Germans would react to it, but fortunately, most of the nitrogen triiodide was gone by the time the next German visit arrived.

We also did some synthetic chemistry. Dr. Pollak decided that we should synthesize saccharin for our own consumption and for family and friends. It was

²¹ Zionists were nicknamed "Salomaci," because they used the greeting "Shalom" and were to some extent disliked by others because they in effect constituted a sort of ruling and privileged class in Terezin. Their leading role in the ghetto came naturally because they were the only ones who had an organization while the assimilated Jews had none.

a fairly complex synthesis starting with toluene. I remember a runaway permanganate oxidation phase of the synthesis when the reaction overheated and the contents ended up on a wall and up to the ceiling, but we learned and managed to produce small but usable quantities of the sweetener and I got my first experience in synthetic organic chemistry.

Later Pollak decided to synthesize chloropicrin, trichloronitromethane (from picric acid), a toxic and highly irritating liquid tried as a war gas during WWI; we worked in gas masks and rubber gloves. The idea was to use it against the omnipresent bed bugs, but I don't believe that the experiment was crowned with success. A total failure was the attempt to prepare acetaldehyde by way of catalytic hydration of acetylene. Pollak managed to get an acetylene generator. The acetylene formed from calcium carbide by dripping water on it, was then lead through flasks with a solution of mercuric sulfate which was supposed to catalyze the addition of a water molecule to acetylene, thus converting it into acetaldehyde. We were pleased when we started smelling acetaldehyde, but our pleasure and satisfaction did not last long. A few minutes later there was an explosion and the whole room from the lab bench up to the ceiling was filled with thousands of particles of very fine soot; fortunately, the explosion was not at all violent and nothing else happened, but this was the end of the attempted acetaldehyde production. In any case, how Pollak hoped to convert the aldehyde to ethanol remains a mystery to me.

Another important activity carried out under Dr. Pollak's leadership was the making of soap -- we managed to get some fat or tallow and I remember smuggling it out from some place in a can suspended between my legs -- obviously the amount of it was not too large. I spent an entire night studying a book on soap-making and thus overnight became the soap expert in our laboratory; the soap making was successful. Later on, already under Prof. Lederer, we made some artificial honey by hydrolyzing sugar -- I have no idea how we got it -- with phosphoric acid.

At one time we also did some blood analysis. The blood was precipitated with trichloroacetic acid and the separated plasma was then analyzed for residual nitrogen by the Kjeldahl procedure. The amount of the separated plasma was not very large and once, trying to suck it into a pipet, I managed to get it into my mouth; we did all the pipetting by mouth without any protection. I had no idea from whom the blood was, certainly from a sick person, but fortunately nothing happened.

We had an interesting and unusual experience when one day a German (SS?) requested that we make some Eau de Cologne for his girlfriend. We had some perfume ingredients that came to us from Prague from the liquidation of some

shop, and we had the alcohol, and Arnost Reiser undertook the task. He made sure to prepare a most vulgar smelling concoction and then to prepare a beautiful label for the flask -- he was very good in drawing and painting. For the model of the label he selected the famous "No. 4711" original Eau de Cologne, but he substituted "606" for "4711" -- a clever, but very dangerous joke. The number 606 stood for Salvarsan (Ehrlich-Hata 606), the first effective anti-syphilis drug. Fortunately for Arnost, and possibly for all of us in the laboratory, neither the donor nor the recipient were clever or educated enough to understand the joke and its implication.

When I joined the laboratory it was located in the "sokolovna." Next door to us was a laboratory monitoring water quality, certainly a more useful activity but probably less fun than what we did. The third laboratory was a microbiological laboratory, headed by a former Czechoslovak army major, Dr. Pavel Fantl, a man with a great sense of humor, who was also a good cartoonist.²² The building, probably the most modern in Terezin, had central heating and the stoker lived quite comfortably, though not legally, in the basement near to the furnace. This provided him with a private place, certainly preferable to a crowded room in the barracks. At one time Dr. Fantl managed to get some very official looking papers informing the poor man that a rhinoceros for biological experimentation would be delivered to the laboratory and would have to be stabled in the place occupied by the stoker -- the poor man believed it and was in panic, and we all of course derived great pleasure from the joke and its effect.

Later the building was converted into a hospital used mainly for typhoid fever patients and the laboratory was moved into an old apartment house, I believe that it was in block GIV, and later we moved again into what was called the "Bauhof" (building court) where most of the mechanical and other shops were concentrated. By that time Dr. Pollak had left the laboratory, was succeeded by Professor Leo Lederer, and the laboratory staff was joined by Dr. Walter Eisenschimmel, whom I knew from Prague from the chemistry course. I think that Arnost Reiser's sister Susie also joined us only after our move to the Bauhof. I don't remember whether Fischl and Trudy were still with us; I don't think so.

The work in the laboratory was very interesting and I could learn a lot of new chemistry; moreover, the laboratory offered an entirely stress-free environment. However, although we occasionally got some food samples which could be used to subsidize our diet, these subsidies were very few and in very small quantities and we were constantly hungry. If one wanted to feed oneself and one's family

²² I recently discovered to my pleasure that some of his cartoons -- but not the author -- have survived and are in the Yad Vashem Archive; some of them are reprinted in "University Over the Abyss," Elena Makarova, Sergei Makarov and Victor Kuperman, Verba Publishing Ltd., Jerusalem 2000.

members better, one had to find a more profitable line of work; that was, I believe, the reason why Dr. Pollak left -- he was senior enough that he could get a job which gave him a better chance to supplement his rations. Arnost Reiser also managed to get to work for some time in the bakery, but I was neither aware of any such opportunity for myself nor I did not seriously try to find a more nourishing type of activity because I was far too happy to be able to spend my time doing chemistry.

Room 127

After a few months in Q710, I moved into a smaller room in Q708 with a group of eleven other boys; we were very compatible and became very good friends. Most rooms in Terezin had three-level bunk beds; our room, number 127, had four of them and there was another room behind us whose inhabitants had to walk through our room. We decided to rebuild the room. I don't remember who was the driving force behind it -- certainly not I-- and who designed it. However with a lot of stolen material including wood from crates used to transport laundry, we completely rebuilt the room, built a little corridor for the occupants of the other room to pass through without disturbing us, built a platform with four beds over the corridor and built a table and two single beds in the corner under the window. These were used as sofas or as seats at the table by everybody during the day and served as beds at night. We left only two of the original four three-layer bunk beds. There was still room under the platform for a closet for coats and for shelves. The stolen wood and particularly the laundry crates had to be disassembled quickly and any identifying numbers removed, because there was a danger of somebody coming to check. My principal contribution was to bring some potassium permanganate from the lab. When the wood was painted by its aqueous solution, it produced a very nice and durable dark brown stain. There were a number of very clever guys in our little group and the room became really quite nice. There was even a secretly hidden hot plate (hot plates were illegal). Because electricity was very uncertain and there were frequent black-outs, we made a hole through the main wall into the next house which was on another circuit so that we could have at least some light if our circuit was down. I have no recollection about heating; I am fairly sure that there was none, but I don't remember suffering from cold. There was one communal toilet for the whole floor on the balcony and a washroom on the ground floor -- we were on the first floor or what in the US would be considered the second floor. The toilet was a source of certain concern since some fastidious people did not want to sit on a seat used by so many others, but their aim was not always perfect. Somebody cut out a miniature toilet seat out of plywood to be used as the key ring for the toilet and it was artfully decorated with an inscription "Drz se manyry, dej do diry" (Mind your manners, aim at the hole)

I can recall almost all of the eleven people with whom I shared the room. I had one of the “sofa beds” in the corner of the room -- like all other beds it followed essentially the same construction: four posts connected with four boards on the outside and two more boards inside the post at the head and foot of the frame; three or four long boards connected with two short ones and resting on the two inner boards formed a base for a straw mattress. The other corner bed belonged to Egon Loebner, who survived the war, emigrated very soon after the war to the US, became a physicist, worked for the Radio Corp. of America, then joined Hewlett Packard, served for two years as the U.S. scientific attache in Moscow,²³ and unfortunately died in 1989 of cancer. On the platform were two sets of beds, one pair occupied by Tom Löwenbach, now Luke, who survived the war due to unbelievably heroic efforts of a Czech political prisoner and a Czech doctor who in Mauthausen amputated his frozen toes with a pocket knife. His companion and friend, Jan (Honza) Bondy, now Loding,, from Hronov like Luke, was lucky: his mother married a Swede and Honza and his kid brother were therefore transferred to a special section for foreign nationals of neutral countries in Bergen Belzen where they survived and got to Sweden very shortly after the end of the war. The other two platform beds were occupied by Otmar Karpfen, who was a cook in Terezin and was always generous to me and later to my girlfriend Eva when he was distributing food and we were in the right line. After the war he studied at the Technical University, got a C.Sc. (=Ph.D) in an engineering field, and moved to Slovakia. We started corresponding after 1989 and met in 1990; unfortunately he died in 1995. Next to him was Karel Hahn, a very nice guy, who did not survive the war. Another member of our room was Petr Herrmann; we always made fun of him, because he tried to plan his time and allocate exact amounts to various activities and we teased him about how he planned the dates with his girlfriend. He returned to Prague, became an acoustic engineer and married a Czech gentile; he and his wife Jarka, a professional musician, left Czechoslovakia in 1968, and lived in Caracas, Venezuela until the late nineties.²⁴ Next I remember Stepan Alt from Moravska Ostrava, a very nice guy, who did not survive the war. Another member of the group was Ota Adler, who returned to Prague and, I think, became a tailor. Next there was Maxi Lieben, who as far as I remember, was an electrician and was responsible for our connection to the electrical circuit to the other house. He lives under the name Mordechai Livni in

²³ He and the U.S. ambassador to the USSR were the only two Americans admitted to the launching of the Soviet spacecraft Soyuz which docked with an American spacecraft. We visited Egon in 1964 and 1979 when we were in California and he visited us several times.

²⁴ We visited him there and also in his cottage in Maine, and he and his wife Jarka visited us in Chicago. Since his wife died in 1999, he has been planning to move to Texas to be with his daughter, but must wait until she becomes a U.S. citizen. He now lives in Prague where we visited him in 2002.

Israel and is very active in Beit Terezin²⁵ affairs. We visited him during our first visit to Israel in 1993. Another member of the group was a somewhat withdrawn young man who constantly studied mathematics and whose name I cannot recall -- as far as I know he did not survive. It was a very congenial group and I don't remember that there were ever any arguments. I may have been the oldest in the room and in any case was declared "Zimmeraeltester," the "elder" of the room; I don't recall that this function imposed on me any specific responsibilities or provided me with any particular authority. I can't remember how long we lived in room 127, but I think that it must have been somewhere between one and a half and two years. It seems strange, but I don't remember any turn-over in the room, as if nobody from our group was deported to "the East" before the final transports in the fall of 1944. I may have forgotten or maybe the population was by this time reasonably stabilized and the transports to Poland were filled almost exclusively from new arrivals.

General situation

The situation in Terezin was certainly very bad: overcrowding with up to 60,000 people in a town that used to have a civilian population of just a few thousand, poor sanitary conditions, constant hunger, very high mortality particularly among older people, and periodic or constant fear of transports to "the East." The conditions were particularly brutal for old people. The Jewish administration made the harsh but understandable decision to sacrifice the old, particularly the very old, and to try to save the youth. So while we had crowded, but still livable accommodations, many old people lived in dank dark former storage magazines in the old Terezin fortifications, lying on straw mattresses on the floor with barely enough space to walk between them and very little daylight. Or they lived under similar conditions in the attics of the old houses. It was sad to see old people beg the cooks who distributed the soup "please from the bottom" hoping to get something more nourishing than the empty liquid from the top. They did not live long and there were over one hundred deaths per day. They were not mistreated in any overt way, there was no brutality and nobody was killed, but they just died. (There were several executions in Terezin, but that happened before my arrival.)

We were incomparably better off. We, too, were constantly hungry, though not really starving. Still I remember that many times I would hang around the kitchen

²⁵ Beit Terezin (Terezin house) was founded about 1970 by former prisoners of the ghetto Terezin in Israel; it developed into an educational institution incorporating a museum, archives with collections of documents and art work from the ghetto. It is located at Kibbutz Givat Hayim Ihud, about half-way between Tel Aviv and Haifa. For many years Mordechai Livni (Max Lieben) was chairman of the "Theresienstadt Martyrs Remembrance Association," the legal body behind Beit Terezin.

waiting for possible seconds after all people had been fed. I don't quite remember the system, but we must have had some food cards for every meal and everyone was assigned to one of the kitchens located in one of the former army barracks. I also don't remember much of what we were fed. I think it was just black "coffee" in the morning. We did get some solid food, probably at noon; I remember that about once a week we got one "buchta" a sort of a bun from white flour (I felt very proud and virtuous, when I sometimes managed not to eat it and bring it to Mother who was in the hospital), we had some unpeeled potatoes -- I remember those in particular, because we were amused that Prof. Lederer would, as a civilized person, carefully peel them while we ate them, of course, with the peels. Naturally, Lederer could not afford to throw away the peels, so he dried them and then made a soup from the dried peels and ate them in this form. I think there was some meat in a hashed form. I also remember a sort of porridge made from millet, but I am sure the repertoire was richer. There were also soups, whether just alone as the evening meal or with some solid meal I cannot recall. I do recall that one of the most frequent and for me least favorite soups was something called lentil soup, but the resemblance to lentils was very minimal indeed. Of course, we ate everything, nobody could afford to forgo a meal or a part of it. In addition to that we got a portion of bread which as far as I can recall was delivered to the houses where we lived. We also got some margarine and once a week(?) a small amount of sugar. (I remember how happy I was when I once succeeded in tricking Father - I poured my sugar ration into his coffee without him noticing it; he drank it and commented how much better the coffee tasted, but did not discover or did not admit that he discovered the reason.) The bread was transported on hearses, drawn and pulled by men; this was the general and only means of transportation in Terezin. There were many hearses, they must have brought them in from many Jewish communities. They were also used to collect dead bodies and they were a very common sight. Whether the same ones were used for the dead and for food, I don't know, but they looked the same.

At one time there was no salt in Terezin and only then did I realize how essential it was and how terribly bread and other food tasted when it was completely salt-free. Until that time I was not even aware that bread contained salt. As a result of the salt-less period I started salting quite a lot later on and while I am trying to reduce salt intake and Eva salts very little, I still like salt and find it hard to enjoy food with very low salt content.

I should emphasize, that I do not recall any fights for food or any thefts. At least to me it seems that every thing was very well organized and functioned surprisingly well and people were disciplined and behaved in a civilized way. We hardly ever saw any of the Germans. The gates to the ghetto were watched by the Czech gendarmerie but even with them we had little contact.

One dramatic event in the life of Terezin was the taking of census of the ghetto. I don't remember when it took place, but I do remember that everybody except the very sick had to get out of the ghetto to some huge meadow, form columns and lines and squares and stand there for hours and hours to be counted. For us young people it was not particularly exhausting and neither did we fear that there might have been a much more sinister reason to get us standing all in one easily controlled place -- we had not yet heard of and therefore did not think of mass executions. It must have been very different for old people and people with more imagination. It was at the very least an incredibly stupid enterprise. I do remember that at the end of the census, when it was already slowly getting dark we, the young people, helped to organize an orderly return to the ghetto.

Cultural life

The ghetto had a wonderful collection of intellectuals and artists and a flourishing cultural life, in a sense very free, perhaps the least restricted place within the German Reich. After all, the Nazis knew well that none of us was supposed to survive, so they did not seem to care what we did in the last moments before our extermination. Cultural and other events had to be reported, but in general the term "Kamaradschaftsabend" (friendship evening) was acceptable. There were concerts, theater, operas, lectures, poetry readings, active painters, courses in all kinds of subjects, debates and discussions.²⁶ I tasted just a very small sampling of it, but still the time in Terezin was intellectually the most stimulating period of my life. I attended lectures on philosophy, physics, analytic geometry, history, history of art, theater performances,²⁷ and cabaret type evenings.

The most famous cabaret type of entertainment were those of Karel Svenk (Schwenk) -- they were light and upbeat and one of his songs became the unofficial Terezin anthem:

Karel Schwenk: Vsechno jde

1. Jarni boure ozvenu kdo prehlusi
Komu smich byl do kolebky dan
Komu plakat bez priciny neslusi

²⁶ Elena Makarova, Sergei Makarov and Victor Kuperman in their book "University Over the Abyss," Verba Publishing Ltd., Jerusalem 2000, list 2309 lectures held in Theresienstadt between the year 1942 to 1944.

²⁷ Cf. Elena Makarova, Ekaterina Neklyudova, Sergei Makarov, Victor Kuperman and Alex Leltchouk: "Long Live Life! or Dance Around the Skeleton; The stories about Theater and Music in Terezin Concentration Camp 1941-1945," Verba Publishers Ltd., Jerusalem 2001

Kdo zna lasku a je milovan

Kazdy at uz taky nebo onaky
Zkratka kdo je na tom svete rad
Ten se nikdy na nikoho nemraci
Vesele si zpiva castokrat

Refrain:

Vsechno jde kdyz se chce
Za ruce se vezmeme
Navzdor krute dobe
Humor v srdci mame

Den co den stale jen
Sem a tam se stehujem
A jen ve triceti slovech
Smime psat

Hola zitra zivot zacina
A s nim se blizi cas
Ze si sbalime svuj ranecek
A pujdem domu zas

Vsechno jde kdyz se chce
Za ruce se vezmeme
[Ja, ty on, my vsichni] (po prvni a druhe sloce)
[A na troskach ghetta] (po treti sloce)
Budeme se smat!

2. Kdo po meste nad Vltavou zatouzi
Komu turin s kavou nestaci
Komu ceska pisen dusi rozbouri
Kdo se jako otrok plahoci

Kazdy at uz taky nebo onaky
Kazdy kdo tu neni prilis rad
Ten si jiste najde duvod nejaky
Aby si moh' s nami zazpivat

Refrain

3. Kdo kavalce treti patro obyva
Komu vadi temnych hradeb stin
Komu zena v Krivoklate zahyba

Na koho pad' kasarensky splin

Kazdy at uz veri nebo nadoufa
Ze I pro nas slunce bude hrat
Ten si ani tentokrate nezoufa
Kdyz slysi mars terezinsky hrat

Refrain

In a very loose and poor translation:

Karel Schwenk: Everything goes (i.e. everything is possible, everything can be done)

1. He, who can drown out the echo of spring's thunderstorm
Who received laughter in the cradle
To whom it does not become to cry without reason
Who knows love and is loved

Everybody whether such or other
In short, whoever is glad to be alive
Never frowns at anybody
And cheerfully will often sing

Refrain:

Everything is possible if you want it
We will hold hands
In spite of the cruel times
We have humor in our hearts

From day to day
We move from here to there
And are allowed to write only
In thirty words

Hey, life begins tomorrow
And with it comes the time
When we will pack our little bundles
And go home again

Everything is possible if one wants it
We will hold hands
[I, you, he, we all] (after the first and second stanza)
[On the ruins of the ghetto] (after the third stanza)

We will laugh

2. Who longs for the town on the Vltava river
For whom turnip with coffee is not enough
Whose soul is moved by a Czech song
Who labors like a slave

Everybody whether he is such or other
Everybody who is not too happy to be here
Will certainly find some reason
To sing with us

Refrain

3. Who lives on the third level of the bunk
Who is oppressed by the dark shadows of the ramparts
Whose wife in Krivoklat flirts with another
Who suffers from barracks blues

Everybody whether he believes or gave up hope
That the sun will shine even for us
Does not despair even now
When he hears the Terezin march being played

Refrain

The song had a light tune and really helped us to keep up our spirits. It became immensely popular. The reference to Krivoklat relates to a group of women who were sent there for a time to plant trees in the woods, although there is little reason to believe that they were or even had much of an opportunity to be unfaithful to their husbands who stayed behind in Terezin.

I heard Svenk and the song the first time when I still stayed with Father in the Sudeten barracks and the performance was also attended by some Czech gendarmes who seemed to enjoy it as much as we did.

Some of the lectures took place directly in our room 127. Arnost Reiser gave a marvelous course on analytic geometry, arguably the best course I ever attended. Most members of our room participated. Gustav Schwarzkopf, later Solar, gave in our "Jugendheim" (youth home) an extensive series of lectures on the art of the 19th century. The workshops even made him a projector with which he could project pictures from a book onto a screen. Gustav Schorsch and Rabbi Murrelstein held a public debate, also in our youth home, on the question of whether the New Testament contains new elements not present in the Old Testament; understandably, the rabbi took the position that it did not. Schorsch

gave a lecture on Masaryk and also one on Hus, the famous Czech religious reformer and rector of Prague's Charles University who was convicted of heresy at the Konstanz Council, excommunicated and burned at the stake in 1415; these were not commemorative accolades, but very critical analyses of their philosophical positions and contributions in the light of their contemporary societies.

Gustav Schorsch

Gustav Schorsch, born in 1918, was just a six years older than I, but he became one of the greatest influences on my life. He was undoubtedly an exceptionally gifted man. He had deep penetrating eyes and a magnetic personality. He almost always wore the same clothes, particularly a green suede jacket. Before he was expelled from the university as a Jew he studied philosophy, but he was also very active in the theater and as a very young man started and directed his own theater group. In high school he translated Lucretius' "De Rerum Natura" from the original Latin into Czech. He transformed Thomas Mann's story "Tonio Kröger" into a radio play. He was deeply and very genuinely concerned with moral values. He could have easily gotten a comfortable job assignment, but he preferred most ordinary manual labor. He had a deep interest in young people and in their intellectual and moral development. He was a perfectionist -- he could recite poetry superbly, but would not do it publicly when he felt that he did not achieve the level he was striving for. In Terezin he organized and directed the theater performance of Gogol's "The Marriage," lectured on philosophy, discussed historical figures, debated the originality of the contributions of the New Testament. He gathered about himself a group of young followers or apprentices.

I don't quite remember when and where I met him. However, I do remember that following our first discussion of my self-formed philosophical views, he encouraged me to write them down and later compare the development in my thinking. I started attending his lectures on philosophy, primarily on Henri Bergson, with whom he was obviously very impressed, but he was also quite aware of, and indeed emphasized, the temporary nature of any philosophical system. It was not just lectures. We had many discussions about philosophy and about all kinds of other things, poetry, how to read poetry, theater, ethics, politics. At an earlier stage he joined the Communists but became utterly appalled by their attitude that the ends justify the means. He was shocked when the party asked one of its female members to seduce somebody they wanted to convert. He became definitely anti-Communist and his attitude protected me from the seductive Communist propaganda ("justice for the poor, the downtrodden, the workers, the powerless, free education and medical care for everybody, end of exploitation by the rich, etc.") after the war. He was also the first one to explain

to me human reproduction -- it may sound incredible, but at the age of 19 I was quite ignorant; Father never spoke about it and Mother showed me some pictures about chromosomes, but I did not dare to ask anybody about the mechanics of sex.

Schorsch, I think, believed in Henri Bergson's "élan vital" (vital impulse) as a special force responsible for generating new forms of life.²⁸ I was very impressed by Schorsch's description of the experiment in which the German biologist Driesch²⁹ separated a fertilized egg of a sea urchin in the early stage of cell division; instead of dying the two halves of the embryo developed into two normal urchins -- in Driesch's view a clear demonstration that the future of the urchin could not have been predetermined in the embryo, but that a life force was at work. My roommate and friend Egon Loebner and I got hold of a copy of Henri Bergson's book "Matter and Memory" and we woke early every morning to study it before we went to work. Schorsch also encouraged us to read Kant's "Prolegomena,³⁰" which I started reading together with Vilem Pollak, a very gifted youngster. Although he was only 16 years old, he managed to read the entire book, while I gave up. At the same time, with all his interest in philosophy, Schorsch encouraged me to do something else, such as concentrating on chemistry.

Schorsch introduced me to the theater. He would let me come to rehearsals which gave me good insight into what he expected as the director. I felt that one gets much more out of seeing the performance in its formative stage than just watching the final product. He also introduced me to poetry. He gave me a typewritten copy of poems of the two Russian poets, Jesenin and Pasternak; this copy later played a role in my starting to date Eva.

The Murrelstein Affair

Sometime in the spring of 1944 Terezin was being prepared for a visit from the Swiss Red Cross. In true Potemkin fashion Terezin opened a coffee house, some stores, a very nice children's pavilion for a handful of selected children, even a park with a band stand in the middle of town; almost a spa-like setting. It was claimed, though not confirmed, that the SS commandant Rahm would distribute cans of sardines (something totally unheard of in the ghetto) to the children when

28 Henri Bergson, 1859-1941 was the leading French philosopher of the early 20th century. His most important work was "L'Evolution créatrice" (Creative Evolution) published in 1907.

29 Hans Adolf Eduard Driesch, 1867-1941, German biologist and philosopher.

30 Immanuel Kant, 1724-1804, prominent German philosopher. "Prolegomena zu einer jeden künftigen Metaphysik die als Wissenschaft wird auftreten können" (Prolegomena to any future metaphysics which will be able to appear as a science), 1783. His most famous work is the "Kritik der reinen Vernunft" (Critique of pure reason).

the Red Cross committee arrived and the children were trained to complain “Again sardines, uncle Rahm?” To be able to demonstrate how well people lived, a few well known “prominents” were each assigned an entire room for themselves, where they could live with their wives. To create the necessary space for these “luxurious” accommodations, many more people were squeezed into attics, hot in the summer and cold in the winter, with no windows, just lying on the floor on straw mattresses. Sidewalks were scrubbed by hand and people were not allowed to use them, they had to use the streets. This was carried out by the Jewish administration on orders from the Germans; I could not and cannot judge how enthusiastically they followed or even anticipated orders. What infuriated me, however, were the posters deriding a dirt-loving character, “Herr Schmock,” who did not like all this cleaning up and making things look pretty, that were plastered everywhere on the order of the rabbi Murrelstein, who was in charge of the “Verschönerungsaktion” (beautification project). This was certainly adding insult to injury by somebody who was generally viewed as a totally spineless collaborator of the Germans, an opinion already based on his activities in Vienna, where he played a major role in helping in the organization of the transports.

I was young, idealistic and pretty stupid and decided that this insult should not be left without a response. So I composed a rather silly verse:

Herr Schmock antwortet:
Aussen kanst Du schmutzig sein
Wärest Du nur innen rein
Mein lieber Herr Murrelstein.

or

Mr, Schmock responds:
You can be dirty on the outside
If you just were clean on the inside
My dear Mr. Murrelstein.

Susie Reiser typed it for me. She used a typewriter, one of the few in the ghetto, located in the office next door to the laboratory. She typed it several times using several layers of carbon paper, producing a total of 44 copies of my “masterpiece.” I brought them home to our room and my friends enthusiastically volunteered to paste them all over the ghetto. Later it turned out that the distribution was somewhat uneven with a very high proportion of the leaflets ending up on the outside of building L410, the girls’ home.

I was so naive that I did not realize how easy it was to identify the typewriter on which the pamphlet was written. By about 10 AM the next day two gentleman from what must have been something like the ghetto’s secret police found the typewriter, found out who used it, and Susie Reiser of course had to admit that I

was the author. They took me straight to Murrelstein, at that time probably the most powerful man in the ghetto administration. I was left with Murrelstein alone in a fairly large office and he started by asking "So, I am not clean enough for you?" I felt very heroic and told him what I thought. He was amused. He could easily have put me into the next transport or sent me to the dreaded "Small Fortress" to be beaten to death, but surprisingly nothing happened to me. Actually, he made sure that I would not be in any of the next several transports so that nobody could accuse him of revenge. However, whenever he saw me in the streets, he would call me and introduce me to his friends as the "young man who thinks I am unclean." I was very proud of what I did and expected praise from Schorsch -- and was very disappointed when he expressed his disapproval, though I can no longer remember for what specific reason.

The affair had its last act after the war in Prague. Murrelstein and Freiburger, both members of the "Ältestenrat," the Council of Elders of the Jewish ghetto administration, were the only ones arrested for collaboration with the Nazis. Murrelstein called me as a witness, and I, of course, gave a totally truthful deposition. Mindful of how hungry we had been when we were prisoners, I brought some sandwiches with me to the police facility where he was being held. Murrelstein in a grand gesture turned them over to Freiburger. As far as I know, neither of them was ever tried; they were released after some investigation.

Eva

I was not very interested in girls. For a while I was secretly in love with Susie Reiser, but never told her. I had one date with another girl, but found it boring. Then something unexpected happened. Along with many other young people I volunteered to help people to carry their luggage during the transports in June 1944. The people in the transport were first concentrated in the "Hamburger Kaserne" (Hamburg barracks) and from there we helped them towards the trains as far as we were allowed to go. A girl dragging a heavy suitcase asked me for help. I carried the suitcase and then we started talking and talked for quite a long time. I found our talk very pleasant. The next time we met by chance when I was walking from the Kavalier barracks, probably after visiting Father or Mother. In my recollection we started talking again and this time the talk turned to poetry. I offered to lend her my collection of Jesenin's and Pasternak's poems and we went together to pick it up and that gave me a good reason to see Eva again. She remembers it differently and we will never know who is right. In any case, I fell in love and we started dating regularly on June 26 1944. We used to go to the edge of the ghetto, on top of the ramparts or in the moats or around the "Sokolovna." We would sit and talk about everything. I told Eva about Schorsch, about Bergson's philosophy, she talked about operas and sang arias from them -- she was at that time singing in the chorus of Smetana's "Bartered Bride" performed by her former

music teacher Raphael Schächter, a very talented musician. I brought a chemistry text and talked about chemistry. We read poetry together. We read Dante's "Purgatory," part of his "Divine Comedy." We talked about everything, families, our lives, philosophy, literature, music, paintings; I have never known anybody with whom I felt so close, so at ease, with whom I had so much in common and with whom I liked to be so much. It was wonderful. I would pick Eva up at the place where she stayed with her mother; I never really learned to whistle, but I did manage somehow to whistle a brief note which was our signal and on which Eva would come down and join me. Our relationship was much more intellectual and spiritual than physical, though eventually, and it was after we had been dating regularly for quite some time, I dared to kiss her, the first time in my life that I ever kissed a girl. But that was as far as it went. I made one attempt to sit Eva on my lap, but that was very vehemently rebuffed. I met Eva's mother and even her father, who was sick with tuberculosis. Eva met my father. It turned out that she actually knew my sister Helga, with whom she worked in the "Landwirtschaft" (agriculture) and who, according to Eva, used to tell her about her older brother. However, I don't believe that she ever met Mother, who was confined to the hospital. When I was leaving for "the East" three months later we exchanged addresses of our gentile friends in Prague.

My feelings about Terezin

For people who were in Terezin until the end of the war, Terezin was a terrible place, the worst they lived through. Of course it was bad -- hunger, diseases, fear of transports, crowded conditions, total lack of privacy, high mortality: it was a huge prison.

Curiously enough, for me and others who have been through the hell of Auschwitz and other concentration camps, Terezin seemed almost a paradise. No gas chambers, no brutality, no beatings, our own clothing, at least some solid food, work under no terrible pressure, generally no direct contact with the Germans, freedom of movement inside the ghetto, and an enormously rich cultural life. Of course there was the curfew, but one got used to it. There were transports and these were times of great anxiety, but one got used even to them and one always foolishly hoped that they wouldn't resume, particularly when there were long pauses, as in 1944 when there were no transports from January to mid May, and then peace and quiet again from May 18 to almost the end of September. Moreover, as far as I remember, it was mostly the most recent arrivals in Terezin who were sent on to "the East" as we used to say, because that was all we knew about the destination. I can't remember that we lost anybody from our room 127 until the fateful transports of the fall of 1944 which emptied the ghetto of most young people and took me to Auschwitz and my parents and sister to the gas chambers.

Curiously enough, I have to admit that I personally can count at least some of the time spent in Terezin as one of the good times of my life. Yes, I was constantly hungry and suffered from fleas, but on the positive side I felt, until the fateful fall of 1944, reasonably safe from transports to the East, I had work which I loved, I lived with people I liked and who seemed to like and respect me, I developed a very good and almost adult relationship with Father. I was in the most intellectually and artistically stimulating environment in which I have ever been, and most important of all I was in love for the first time and found -- as it later turned out -- a partner for life.

OSWIECIM/AUSCHWITZ/BIRKENAU

Transport

A huge series of transports from Terezin to Auschwitz started in the fall of 1944: within one month, from September 28 to October 28, there were 11 transports totalling 18,402 people.³¹ We were told that we were needed for work and were led to believe that we were going to a new camp; this claim seemed supported by the fact that old people, I believe over the age of 60, were excluded from these transports.³² Consequently the only members of my family who survived were old people, my uncle Otto Robicek, born 1877, his mother-in-law, Matylida Fiala, born 1867, and Erich Klapp's parents Rudolf b. 1869 and Klara, b.1880, and another aunt, Ema Treulich, b.1872. The only exception was my cousin Fritz Treulich. He was a very capable engineer and became the director of the Terezin laundry which served the entire ghetto. He was needed and thus survived in Terezin together with his entire family, his wife Mali and daughters Helena b. 1935 and Eva b. 1939.

Nobody, or at least nobody around me who would have told me, knew anything about what going to "the East" meant. I did hear the story that somebody received a strange card from "the East" where his or her relatives wrote that "they were very close to uncle Josef." It was strange because uncle Josef was taken to a concentration camp much earlier during the occupation and the family was actually informed that he had died there. People did not want to understand the meaning of the message, so instead it was interpreted that "the Nazis are really not as bad, in reality they did not kill uncle Josef, just transferred him to another camp and informed the family that he was dead in order to intimidate people."

During these massive transports my cousin Erich Klapp obviously could no longer protect me or my family. I was in the first of these transports of 2,499 people on September 28, 1944. Eva and her parents followed on October 19th. Erich Klapp himself was deported to Auschwitz in the same transport as my parents and sister, on October 23; I have heard that -- unlike others who went through a selection -- he was called out by name and immediately executed.

Everybody who was in the transport had to report to the Hamburger barracks, the same place where I met Eva for the first time three months earlier. The one thing I do remember was that when Father came to say good-bye to me, he kissed me --

31 "Terezinska Pametni kniha," Vol. I, Terezinska Inicivativa, Melantrich, CR 1995, p.73.

32 Re-reading my letter from 1946 (Appendix) reminded me that we were explicitly assured that we will be working in Germany, will remain in contact with our families in Terezin, will probably return to Terezin and will remain on the books as Terezin "residents."

something he had not done for many, many years; he considered kissing or any display of emotions between grown-up men inappropriate and unmanly. It surprised and touched me. Did he know or suspect more than I did? I do remember one much earlier conversation with him, still in Praha, on the balcony of our apartment, probably in 1940, when he said to me: "Hitler will lose the war, but he will succeed in killing the Jews."

There is very little I remember from the trip. We were in cattle cars with a pail for a toilet. The train was strictly guarded and we were strictly prohibited from throwing anything out of the train. We heard that in one car somebody forgot and threw out a piece of paper after he ate some food which he had wrapped in it; a guard opened the door and asked who threw the paper out. The man admitted that he had done it and was shot dead on the spot and his body was left in the car. Nothing dramatic happened in our car. We were all young and in spite of the apprehension managed to keep up our spirits and even managed to sing. I can't remember how long the trip lasted -- the distance is less than 200 miles and I don't have a recollection of a terribly long trip.

Arrival in Auschwitz

Again, my memories are foggy. We were ordered out of the railroad cars, to leave everything behind, and to form a line which proceeded to an SS-officer, probably the infamous Dr. Mengele, who stood there and with a flick of a thumb sent us either to the right side (his left) or the left side. He just inspected people visually, probably asked some people a simple question before deciding whether the person should go immediately to the gas chambers or be allowed to live for a while and work for the Reich. I was sent to the "good" side without being asked any questions -- I was 20 years old and in good health. We did not have the foggiest idea what was going on. I do remember fairly vividly the four chimneys with flames shooting out at the top.³³ I had no idea what it was and rationalized it as some industrial plant -- I had previously heard some rumors that one worked in Auschwitz under very hard conditions with a high mortality rate and assumed that the chimneys belonged to some factory.

We were marched in a column between tall barbed wire fences to a large hall where we were ordered to undress completely and to leave everything behind except eyeglasses, belts and shoes. From there we were driven to a group of "barbers," prisoners, who shaved our heads and body hair both under the arms and around the private parts, smeared us with some very stinging liquid, perhaps carbolic acid, and then we proceeded to the showers. After the showers we each were handed a

³³ After having completed writing these memoirs I reviewed a letter I wrote early in 1946 to a friend of my mother, Elsa Kohn (see Appendix) and there I speak of only one flame. I therefore have to assume that my recollection of four flames is incorrect.

shirt, pants, a jacket, vest and a cap and were driven out naked and wet into the cold early morning air. Most of us still had our shoes; only those who came with fancy high boots ("kanady" meaning Canadian boots) lost them to some of the older prisoners and probably got wooden clogs instead. We had no towels, so that we had to put the clothes on our wet bodies and then we stood for a long time somewhere between barracks. We did not get the usual striped prison garb -- they obviously had run out of them, but our jackets had an inserted rectangle of the standard striped prison material on the back; in addition it had a wide red stripe painted down through the middle of the back.

We finally got our first meal, some sort of soup. We had no spoons and we were given the strangest assortment of vessels -- no plates or bowls, but old pots, wash basins, and chamber pots. As we had no spoons we had to eat and lick the soup like animals, everything to make the degradation complete. We then got into the barracks -- large structures, perhaps originally Polish military stables. We were so crowded that nobody could lie down, the only way to squeeze in was for one person to sit leaning against the wall, for the next person to sit between his legs and lean against him, and so on and so on until the last person in the row reached the low masonry structure, perhaps part of the heating system for the stables, which ran through the middle of the barracks lengthwise. I would estimate that there were some ten to fifteen people in each row and there must have been some forty or fifty rows, one next to the other -- I believe that we were 1,000 people in a single barrack. How anyone could sleep under these conditions is a mystery -- but I was only 20 years old and at that age I could sleep in any position. At one end of the barrack was a small room for the kapo, a prisoner with unlimited power over everybody, who always walked around with a stick and communicated only by yelling or hitting. Many kapos were homosexuals and had young boys, perhaps eleven to thirteen years old, living with them. They would delegate their power to them and the boys could be worse than the kapos themselves and nobody would dare to say a word. They were often the ones distributing the soup, very arbitrarily and unevenly. Nobody could dare to protest anything the boys did or he would have been immediately beaten up by the kapo.

On the other end of the barrack was a huge barrel serving as a toilet; sometimes in the morning it would overflow. I remember at least once having to carry it out and empty it with some other prisoners and it would spill over our feet.

Very early during our stay we were ordered to write postcards, of course in German, printed and limited to a very few words, to our families in Terezin. We were told to write that we are well and hoped that they would join us soon. I tried desperately to weave into it a message warning Father not to go and not to volunteer with Mother if he did not have to; I had some faint hope that his position in the "Ghettodienst" could have protected him. I have no idea whether

he ever got the card and whether the hint could have been understood. In any case I am sure that Father was far too principled a man and would not have left Mother to go alone even if he fully understood the futility of his joining her.

Life in Auschwitz

In a way it is fortunate that one has the ability to forget -- and I have been particularly good at doing it. I remember surprisingly little of our stay in Auschwitz, although I spent almost a month there.

We were moved into another barrack which had three tier bunks and there we could at least lie down on the bare boards. There we were so many of us squeezed on each level of the bunks, that we had to lie on one side and everybody had to turn to the other side on command at the same time. I remember that we were forbidden to keep our shoes on in the bunks and that I violated the rule because I was afraid that someone would steal them. The kapo caught me, ordered me to come down from the bunk and slapped me in the face, but was decent enough to ask me to remove my glasses first. I have no recollection that we had any facilities for washing, but I am not sure. I also don't remember what daytime toilet facilities were there; there was of course no paper and at first I found it difficult not to be able to wipe and tore out a pocket of my vest for this purpose (that is actually why I remember that I had a vest), but of course the vest had only four small pockets so that was not a solution and I had to get used to the idea that other animals also exist without toilet paper and we were certainly less than animals. I also remember the signs "Eine Laus dein Tod" (One louse your death) - I did not understand whether it was meant as a warning to avoid lice because they might infect you with deadly typhus or as a warning that we would be killed if lice were found on us. In any case it did not make much sense, we were given lice infected clothing, there was no way of getting rid of the lice even though we spent a lot of time hunting for them and squashing them; there were also no inspections looking for lice -- they would have found them on everybody. Fortunately, neither the Auschwitz nor the Meuselwitz lice carried typhus.

Another memory which springs to mind concerns shaving and I don't remember whether it refers to Auschwitz or to Meuselwitz. The Germans liked people to be clean shaven, but of course they did not provide any means for shaving. On the other hand it could be to our advantage to look as well as possible. I have a recollection of standing in a group of men in which somebody had a tiny piece of soap and a razor blade (not a razor, just the blade) and trying to shave with it.³⁴

³⁴ It may be that later in Meuselwitz, but certainly not in Auschwitz, we could occasionally get a shave from a Polish-Jewish prisoner, but the recollection is so foggy that I can't be sure.

I already mentioned the food distribution. My only recollection is that one day I had a washbasin with a lot of red beet soup and it was so bad that some people could not eat it -- that was the only time I could eat as much as I wanted, but since that time I don't eat red beets. I was recently told an episode I had completely forgotten. My distant cousin, George Horner, told me that he met me when he arrived in Auschwitz two weeks after me, with the October 12 transport. When he got his first soup, he would not touch it and I asked him to give it to me if he was sure that he would not be able to eat it. Later of course he was able to eat his own soup.

One basic feature of the camp were the "Appells." Every day we were required to stand in rows and columns to be counted by an SS-man. Sometimes one had to stand for hours.

After a few days somebody told us that the flames we saw were the crematoria for the gas chambers, but we could not believe it. The thought was so monstrous, so totally unbelievable, that it took us several days to accept it. I remember a friend of mine from room 127 in Terezin, Egon Loebner, crawl in horror and utter panic on the floor under the bunks.

I remember an episode when a "Schreiber," a clerk who kept the records helped a young boy in a peculiar Auschwitz way. He was recording everybody's age. As he was going down the line he came to this boy, who answered the question obviously truthfully "Fifteen" and the Schreiber slapped him in the face, then asked him again "How old are you?" The boy repeated the answer "Fifteen" and was hit again and that happened once more and the boy started to cry. Finally the boy got the message and next time the question "How old are you?" was posed, he answered "Seventeen." The Schreiber nodded, recorded the age and walked away. He may have saved the boy's life at least for a while, though in a somewhat peculiar way.

Another memory which comes to mind is of one of the kapos who would yell and scream at us and wave his cane (every kapo had a cane and most of them used them without hesitation for the slightest reason) when somebody was within earshot, but behaved in quite a civil way when nobody could hear him. It was claimed that he was a Hungarian physician.

A more sinister recollection is that of a body of a prisoner hanging in the electric wires of the fence. The dead body was left there for quite some time so that everybody could see it. Whether it was a case of suicide or murder by somebody having forced him to run to the fence, I have no idea.

A positive recollection is that of Jirka Wachtel lecturing on Czech history while

we were standing somewhere between the barracks and had nothing to do but wait. Jirka was three years older than I. In Terezin he had been sort of in charge of younger boys in the same “Jugendheim” I lived in. Now, in Auschwitz he seemed to have decided that we should do something positive for our education. One could see it as a demonstration that in spite of all the misery, degradation and humiliation, while being forced to live far worse than animals in the middle of the death factory, he and we, the audience, still demonstrated our humanity at least to ourselves.

My most devastating recollection is that of a large group of children being led to the gas chambers. The children had been in Auschwitz for a long time and they knew exactly where they were going. They must have gone through a selection and did not make it. We were locked in our barrack, but we could see through the cracks between the planks. The children, I would estimate their ages between eight and fourteen, did not cry and went without any resistance or protest. Because they obviously had been in the camp for some time, many of them had managed to acquire spoons. Knowing only too well that they would no longer need them, they threw their spoons away so that we could find and use them. The picture of the column of children throwing away their spoons is something I will never forget.

The “Leipzig transport”

Auschwitz at the time served as a huge slave market. Representatives from German industries would come and select people for their factories. During one such occasion they were looking for “Metallarbeiter,” metal workers. I knew that physically I was not very strong and that I would not do well in a situation requiring heavy physical labor. I assumed that working in some sort of machine shop or factory would most likely require less physical strength. Moreover, I did have the brief experience in Mr. Kleinhampel’s shop and thus raised my hand and claimed to be a lathe operator. This turned out to be very lucky. I was selected for the transport to a munitions factory in Germany near Leipzig. We were a relatively small group, I think some two or three hundred people. We received winter coats (with a wide bright red stripe painted down the back) and underpants, perhaps they also exchanged our rags for cleaner ones. The underpants were made from tallithim, black and off-white Jewish prayer shawls, obviously as a calculated insult and humiliation. We left Auschwitz on October 27. I remember the date because it was one day before the Czechoslovak Independence Day, October 28, and there were rumors that the Germans might want to kill a large number of Czechs on that occasion as they did on March 7, Czechoslovakia’s first president Masaryk’s birthday, when about 4,000 Czech

Jews from the September 1943 transport were gassed.³⁵ We felt very lucky to be leaving Auschwitz before that dangerous date. We had not been tattooed, perhaps because we were not staying within the Oswiecim administrative area, but I don't really know what determined who would be tattooed and who not.

³⁵ Cf. Rudolf Vrba "I Cannot Forgive," Regent College Publishing, Vancouver, British Columbia 1997.

MEUSELWITZ

The camp

Upon arrival in Meuselwitz we were led to a small concentration camp nestled inside a large factory. The large factory buildings -- I would guess that there were about six of them, formed a sort of letter "L" and our barracks were inside the two legs of the letter. Administratively, the camp belonged to Buchenwald, but we never had any direct contact with the Buchenwald concentration camp.

Compared with Auschwitz the accommodations were certainly a big improvement. As far as I can recall, the Czech Jews together with some Hungarian and Dutch Jews occupied two barracks, each divided into several rooms. In each room there were three-layer bunks, fairly narrow, but each of us had his own space, a straw mattress and two grey blankets made of some ersatz material, but still blankets, one used as a sheet and the other as a cover. We each got a regular soup bowl and even a spoon -- what luxury!! For food we got black "coffee" in the morning, some soup at noon and again in the evening, and in addition a small loaf of bread to be shared among three people. We did not get any knives, but we soon learned to make them for ourselves in the factory from broken metal saws and used them to cut and divide the bread. To divide it fairly became quite a procedure. I and my bunkmates developed the system that one would cut the bread into three thirds and the other two would then chose their portions and the order of cutting and choosing would rotate. Others even managed to make elaborate balances specifically for ensuring fair and precise division of the bread -- our only solid food for the entire time except for one single day during our entire stay in Meuselwitz when we got a few potatoes.

A major problem was whether one should eat the whole ration at once in the evening or save some for the morning "coffee." I usually tried to keep one slice for the morning, but sometimes I did not succeed and when there was an air raid at night I always ate the morning slice figuring that it would be a terrible waste if I was killed so hungry with a slice of uneaten bread left behind.

I would estimate that there were about thirty people in one room and perhaps six rooms per barrack. The rooms had a stove and we had some coal and could make a fire and some people toasted their bread. I remember a little episode when one of my roommates, one of the twin brothers Stern (Bedrich or Beda and Jindrich or Jindra, later Stanek), managed to bring some oil from the factory and fried his bread in the oil. I warned him, that the oil was undigestible mineral oil and that paraffin oil is used as a laxative (here my chemistry background came in handy), but he would not listen, until he found out for himself.

There were, of course, the daily "Appells" (roll calls) which required standing in front of the barrack in formation until the SS managed to count everybody and got the count right. There was however one exception. One SS-man, I think he was a noncommissioned officer, was so exceptionally decent that he told us not to stand outside and he counted us inside our room -- this was an unheard of consideration totally against regulations and he was certainly the only one who would do it. He also behaved to us in a very civil way in other ways, no shouting, no screaming. Once he got a bit drunk and started talking about us as "my Jews." It was claimed that he fought on the Russian front in the Crimea, contracted malaria and was therefore transferred to lighter duty of guarding concentration camp prisoners.

The "Kommandant," commanding officer, was an SS-officer, strict but not sadistic -- there was no random beating, only punishment for what he would consider a violation of the rules. People were beaten for not meeting their quotas at the factory or for other transgressions. The commandant would call out "Schemel," a stool would be brought out and the prisoner would receive a number of strikes from the guards with rubber truncheons; rubber truncheons were standard equipment all guards carried all the time. We were always required to stand in formation and watch the administration of the punishment. I remember in particular the beating of a well respected older prisoner, a Polish Jew, who already had grey hair and who, I think, was a survivor of several camps. He was charged with quality control in the factory. His crime was that he let some defective pieces go through, obviously not wanting to endanger the people who made them. He was sentenced to a certain number of strokes. When the beating was over he was able to get up. What impressed me was that the "Lagerälteste," a soft spoken Hungarian inmate given certain responsibilities for the operation of the camp, went up to him and in front of the SS embraced him. It was an act of courage and defiance, but nothing happened to him.

The most gruesome case of a public beating I remember was that of somebody who allegedly tried to escape, but perhaps was only too exhausted and simply stayed behind -- it was certainly no organized escape plan. He was put down on a stool with two SS-men standing on each side and one over his head. The two on the sides were beating him with rubber truncheons; when he moved the third man hit him over the head with his truncheon. When the man fainted they poured a pail of cold water over him and the beating continued. I have no idea what happened to the man -- I think that he was alive and they led or carried him away, but I doubt that he could have survived for very long.

In the camp there was also a fairly large contingent of Polish Jews, who occupied two additional barracks. I think that they, or some of them at least, were moved with the factory equipment from somewhere in Poland, perhaps Czestochowa, when the Russian front came dangerously too close. The place where they were

before must have been far worse than Meuselwitz with people being beaten to death by a vicious kapo or overseer with a huge wrench -- we experienced nothing like that.

Besides our immediate camp there was another big section separated by a barbed wire fence and that was a women's camp with about a thousand Polish women reportedly from the Warsaw uprising (August-September 1944), an uprising which the German army brutally suppressed while the Soviet army stood by and did nothing.

The camp had a washroom and a sick room and there was a Dutch Jewish doctor available to treat certain medical problems. We occasionally got clean shirts, supposedly disinfected, but they were full of lice anyway. Fortunately, the lice did not seem infected, so they were just a nuisance and we spent a lot of time picking them out and squashing them between our fingernails -- but it was a losing battle.

My boots wore out and I got a pair of wooden shoes, clogs. They were not very comfortable to wear, but to my surprise I found out that they protected me against the cold of the frozen ground much better than my old leather boots. We did not have socks, but I think that we managed to get some pieces of rags to wrap our feet in.

My bunk was in the corner of the room. One of my two bunk mates was Vilem Pollak, a seventeen year old friend from Terezin, with whom I had tried to study Immanuel Kant (he persisted but I gave up). The other was Jan Sander, one year younger than I, who was a nephew of the former Czechoslovak minister of health affairs, Dr. Meissner. Across the aisle were Karel Svenk, a well known entertainer, the actor Jiri Süssland (Cajlajs) and his older brother Vilem. This group was older than ours; Vilem Süssland was already 29, Svenk 27 and Cajlajs 24; both Svenk and Vilem Süssland came to Terezin with the first transport, Ak1 on November 24 1941, together with my cousin Erich Klapp. We were all good friends, sort of two triumvirates. I remember very few other people from our room except one man by the name of Salus who used to come and talk to the older guys of our aisle. He claimed to have once been Leon Trotsky's secretary and kept on extolling the importance of eating eggs for brain development.

The fact that we divided everything equally among the three of us benefitted me on one occasion. I found some bulbs or roots which I thought were edible, or actually I did not think about it much, we were just so hungry that we would try anything. However, as a good friend I shared my find with my two bunk mates and as a result we all got sick, but nobody too badly.

In spite of the fact that everybody was constantly hungry, there were no cases of theft among us -- there was a spirit of friendship and camaraderie. We were all in it together and nobody tried to improve his lot at someone else's cost. I remember just one case where someone was caught stealing some bread -- he was not from our group -- and he was punished by having to hold two full pails of water, one in each outstretched arm left and right of his body and standing there for a long time. I don't recall who imposed the punishment, whether it was the Germans or the prisoners themselves.

The factory

We worked in the Hasag factory. Most people worked in the main hall making anti-aircraft shells -- just the metal parts, no explosives. Their work was important; they had to produce a certain number of pieces each day. I was lucky in that I was assigned to a small shop which made matrices for bullets -- hardened steel cylinders with a precisely bored and shaped hole into which pieces of steel were pressed to form the bullets. New matrices were needed only when the old ones wore out and they were not in short supply and making more of them would not accelerate the production of bullets -- we were not the bottleneck. Consequently, I worked under no particular pressure and had no quota as far as I can recall.

My experience with lathes was of course limited to just a few days several years earlier in Mr. Kleinhampel's shop. When I was assigned my job at the lathe I did not know what to do and claimed that this lathe was a bit different from the one I had been used to. I was a bit afraid that I might be punished for having claimed to be a lathe operator, but nothing of that sort happened. The German civilian worker showed me how to operate the machine and what I was to do. It was very simple -- I just had to reduce the outer diameter of a short steel cylinder, about 6 or 7 cm long and about 4 cm in diameter, to a slightly smaller diameter and I learned that very quickly. The only problem was at night when I became very sleepy, particularly around four o'clock in the morning. When I dozed off the cutting tool would continue to move until it reached the spinning part of the machine, the chuck, and the tip of the cutting tool was broken off. Fortunately, the regime was fairly benign -- I was shown how to sharpen the cutting tool and soon could repair the occasional damage myself. The work was of course totally monotonous; I could not speak with anybody and so I tried to pass the time away by reciting for myself all the poems I remembered.

We worked 12-hour shifts with one hour for rest. I don't remember what happened during the day shift, but I assume that we were taken back to the camp to get our soup. I do remember however that during the night shifts we could sleep for one hour -- except there was no good place and the few places like

benches were already taken. So I put my coat on a central heating radiator and lay down on it. The radiator was perhaps 8 or 10 inches wide and through it one could hear the thumping of enormous presses on the floor below which continued throughout the rest time -- the heating pipes carried the sound only too well -- but I somehow managed to sleep all the same. The presses on the lower floor were making the heavy sheet-metal parts of the "Panzerfausts," bazookas.

I can't quite remember why, but for some reason I tried to make a cigarette holder from a piece of bone I found somewhere -- other people must have done things like that. I tried to do it perhaps just to do something different than to turn the same identical pieces on the lathe for 11 hours a day or night or perhaps somehow might have hoped to sell or trade it for some food -- I don't know. In any case, my experiment was not a success. I cut a nice piece of bone with a saw but when I tried to shape it on a grinder, there was a terrible smell of burnt bone and I had to give the project up.

The few German civilian workers on the shop floor had very little contact with us. They never abused us but also did not try to do anything for us -- they were just "correct" and kept their distance; of course, a guard was always present. The only positive case which I seem to recall was that somebody got a needle and thread from one of the civilian workers; of course, nothing like that was available in the camp.

I had a serious accident in the factory. I was changing the chuck of the lathe and dropped it on my foot and it injured my right big toe. The doctor in the camp had some ointment and bandages -- I remember that the bandages were of crepe paper and I think that I was allowed to stay out of work and in the sick room for a few days. The toe healed, but I lost it later to frostbite anyway.

We did not have Sundays off or at most half a day. If we did not work in the factory we had to carry some crates from one place to another -- it seemed just to make us work -- I remember carrying long wooden crates of "Panzerschreck," another anti-tank weapon.

Air raids

There were fairly frequent air raids and in the beginning we loved them. During the alarms we were brought back to the camp -- it was only a few minutes walk -- and we did not have to work. By day we could watch the aircrafts high in the sky with the condensation trails behind them and by night we watched the flares -- we called them "Christmas trees." The air raids became very regular, almost every day, the first one around noon and another one at night. It was a most welcome proof that the Allies controlled the skies and were winning the war. We felt very

safe, sure that they would never bother with a little town like Meuselwitz, until during one bright sunny day the bombs were suddenly falling on us. One fell close to our barrack and knocked in a wall, but fortunately the roof held, so that I don't think anybody got injured. However, when the bombs started falling some of them fell into the women's camp and the women broke out of the camp and ran into a small wooded hill just above the camp. For some reason a lot of bombs fell exactly into this place and many of the Polish women were killed. One of the guards later told us that one of the allied aircrafts got hit and disposed of all its bombs, unfortunately exactly into the area where the women were seeking safety. Men from our camp were ordered to go up to the woods and collect the remains, often just pieces or severed limbs. I did not have to go because of my foot injury. A number of factory buildings had been damaged, even though a bomb which went right through the building and ended up in the middle of the power station failed to explode. The Germans had casualties, too. There were air raid bunkers in the cellars of the factory. One bomb, however, penetrated all the way through into the shelter and exploded there, killing a lot of people. After that, whenever I was in the camp during an air raid, I would crawl under the bunk, not out of fear -- I was not really afraid -- but because I thought that the bunk might hold up the roof if the barrack should collapse.

The air raids on "our" factory -- there actually were two of them, the first one during the day and a second one at night -- changed a lot of things. For one, it took away the pleasure and the feeling of safety when air raids were announced. Second, until the raids, the Germans had used the shelters in the basements of the factory buildings while we were led back to the camp with no protection. After the experience of the bomb penetrating all the way into the underground shelter, the policy was changed. For the Germans, fairly elaborate underground shelters were being dug into the side of the hill next to the factory. We, on the other hand, were now to use the basement shelters in the factory; the thinking must have been that if the factory got destroyed, they would not need us anyway so we might as well go together with the factory. Being in the underground shelters was far less pleasant than being able to watch the raids from the outside or from the barracks. The concrete structures of the factory with metal ductwork amplified the sound of the anti-aircraft guns and of the bombs and one had no idea what was going on; one just heard the noise and had to sit and wait. Each explosion sounded like it was right next to us. One of the worst experiences was one night raid when the Polish women who were in a shelter next to us became hysterical and started praying loudly.

With part of the factory destroyed and our work not being a bottle-neck, I was assigned to other work. There was a place nearby, where logs (needed to support the construction of the air raid shelter being dug into the mountain side) were impregnated with a salt solution to protect them from decay. There we had to

load the logs on small iron cars on rails, then push them into a chamber which was first evacuated and then filled with a concentrated solution of salts under pressure. The logs were thus saturated with the salt solution and after some time we had to remove them. This treatment made them very heavy and so the work became very hard. That was not what I bargained for when I claimed to be a lathe operator, but there was nothing I could do about it.

Sometimes we also had to go and remove debris from bombed out buildings -- I don't remember much of it, except a little episode when I had to go to the bathroom and a guard took me there and waited for me outside. Since I took a bit longer than he thought was necessary, he chased me back to the work area hitting me a couple of times with his truncheon; I have to admit that it felt good to sit down for a while and that I did take a bit longer than absolutely necessary.

We were also given the opportunity to volunteer for bomb excavation work -- it was really voluntary for a reward of an extra slice of bread. I volunteered several times. Most of the times the bombs were in fields around town and we had to dig big pits into the ground following the path of the bomb. We dug large square holes of about six by six feet and probably some ten to fifteen feet deep. The 250 or 500 lb bombs usually fell fairly straight down into the ground but in the end would turn sideways and even slide upward a foot or so. The bombs left the soil loose and discolored; a German soldier, a demolition expert, who accompanied us in addition to our guard, would probe the ground with a long metal rod and determined the places where we had to dig. Once the bomb was exposed one of us, and not the demolition expert, had to remove the fuse.. It was almost always a seventeen year old boy, Jirka Porges, who volunteered. We all stood around and did not take shelter, so that it would have made no difference -- had the bomb exploded we all would have been killed. Once the fuse or fuses (I think that there might have been one at each end of the bomb, but I am not sure) were removed, a metal plug with a ring was screwed in and the Germans dragged the bomb away -- we no longer had anything to do with it. In the evening, after we returned to the camp, we got our extra slice of bread.

Once we were digging in a town among bombed-out houses. In the rubble I found a copy of a German bible and took it to the camp -- I believe that it was the only book in the camp. I started reading parts of it and was particularly taken by the Book of Job -- it sort of rang a bell. I don't recall finding anything else of use except perhaps some rags which I used as foot wrappings.

Evacuation

One day in early April we were told by one of the guards "You are lucky -- the Americans will be here in a couple of days." It was at a time when the American

army was advancing rapidly, but a day or two later came the bad news. The American advance was halted. There was a battle in the "Thüringer Wald," (Thuringian Forest) a low mountain range about 70 miles SW of Leipzig; Meuselwitz is about 20 miles south of Leipzig. That unfortunately gave the Germans enough time to evacuate us.

Meuselwitz had a large briquette factory which made briquettes from compressed coal dust. These briquettes, about 7x2.5x2.5 inches, were widely used for heating. On the particular day of our evacuation, I think that it was on April 12, there was a trainload full of briquettes standing in the railroad station. We got orders to clear the railroad cars, throw the briquettes on the ground and get into the cars. These were open freight cars and we were squeezed more than hundred people into a car. There was not enough space to sit, just a small fraction of us could, but these places were immediately occupied by a group of far more aggressive Polish Jews who alternated them among themselves. We, the Czech Jews, did not have a chance.

We had no food and I don't remember that we were given any water, but I also don't remember being thirsty so perhaps we did have some. It was also quite cold so that thirst would not have been our principal problem. The trip took about five days and it was a horrible experience. We were exhausted from standing -- for several days and nights we were just standing in this terribly crowded car and could hardly move; one person went insane. Perhaps on the third day we stopped next to a train with some turnips and were able to help ourselves to some of them.

Eventually the train arrived in Kraslice, a town formerly on the Czechoslovak side of the old Czechoslovak-German border but then, after the annexation of the Sudetenland in 1938, part of Germany. There we were finally allowed out of the train and could spread out a bit along the tracks and on the low slopes next to them. After a day or so of rest a German military train arrived on the other tracks followed by dive-bombers in hot pursuit. They bombed the train, but also managed to hit one or two of our cars which started burning. I don't remember whether anybody was hurt; we were all outside and the planes must have used small bombs.

However, there was another very bad effect of the raid. We were told that the good citizens of Kraslice did not like our presence and thought that we presented a danger to them -- such as attracting dive-bombers. So the SS decided to move us. At this point we were given some food -- they obviously still had some bread and potatoes. The distribution of potatoes resulted in a tragedy. One guard was throwing the potatoes down from a railroad car and a group of prisoners tried to collect them. Another guard perhaps did not know what was going on, saw a group of prisoners pushing and perhaps fighting, and simply started shooting.

Jirka Porges, the young boy who always volunteered to defuse the unexploded bombs, was hit in the back; he survived but remained paralyzed from the waist down for the rest of his life.

The march³⁶

We left the train and set out to march. We each carried our grey blanket and I probably had my soup bowl and a piece of bread we got before the march. Up to that point I carried with me my -- and possibly the camp's only -- book, the Bible, but when I knew that we would have to march I did not want to be burdened with any unnecessary weight and threw it away. That was the only time my friend Vilem Pollak got very angry with me. In a furious and almost insane rage he picked up the Bible and kept it for himself.

I have only a very foggy recollection of all that happened next. I remember that we were led to some churchyard in a small village and spent the night there sleeping on the ground. My last recollection of my friend Vilem Pollak is from that night. He disappeared somewhere and did not return, but I don't know when and how he died. We were told again that the Americans would be there very soon and the guards started disappearing. I think that all or many of us dispersed into various directions, at least some certainly did, and some managed to avoid being caught later on.

I just have a vague recollection that I once tried with a couple of other people to run away, but I don't remember whether it was after this first night or later on. In any case, we were caught by some local policemen, put into some jail or maybe just a stable or shed. The way we looked, it would have been impossible to hide without some help. We were walking skeletons in rags, red stripes painted over our backs, hair shaven off and later, in order to save on the effort of a full shave, just a broad swath about a one or one and one half inch wide cut down the middle of our skulls from the forehead to the neck. We must have been quite a sight. Probably the next day we were turned over to our guards and reunited with our group. At this point we were not punished for running away, everybody knew that the end of the war was very close and the guards did not seem really to care except for their own survival -- I don't think that the camp commander was still with us. The one clear memory I have from this failed break-out was that, as we were kept in that shed or whatever space it was, local young boys came to look at

36 A much more contemporary and therefore certainly more correct description of our life during this period was given in the letter one of my friends, Vilem Süßland, wrote while we were together in the hospital in Zatec. His letter dated June 7, 1945 was recently published in English by Makarova et al. Cf. footnote 27 and included in the Appendix. I am intentionally writing these memoirs according to my current recollections and have not corrected them to reflect the more contemporary descriptions.

us and when we begged for food they amused themselves by feeding us raw potato peels and watched with interest and pleasure as we devoured them. They did not give us any decent food, they had too much fun watching us like animals in a cage eating those raw potato peels.

Unfortunately, the advance of the American army changed directions and instead of moving straight east across the old Czechoslovak-German border, turned northeast along the Krusne Hory (Erzgebirge) mountain range. That gave the Germans time to gather us again -- or at least most of us. From then on the real march began, each day perhaps ten miles or a bit less. They were not trying to lead us to any specific place, they just kept us marching as long as they could between the two approaching lines, the Russian and the American.

In the beginning there was no food at all and we got terribly weak. We slept outside in the mountainous area and at the end of April it was still quite cold; it must have been there that I got my frostbite, though at the time I was not aware of anything. We were incredibly weak and hungry and started collecting whatever seemed edible, nettles and dandelions, but there was essentially nothing. One day we came across some sugar beet and I remember trying to eat some, but even as hungry as I was I could not eat much.

A bit later the guards arranged for us to sleep in barns and even to get a bit of soup in the evenings. At some point we must have even gotten some potatoes. I don't remember getting them, but I do remember that one night we slept in some barn and when I woke up two people, Ing. Stein and his son, both had died of exhaustion during the night. They had saved a few potatoes and I took and ate them -- they did not need them any more.

One day our friend Karel Svenk decided that he could not go on and hid in the straw. He must have been found and shot. Several days later I became so exhausted that I decided not to go on and frankly I did not care whether they were going to shoot me or not. I had become terribly weak, suffering from severe diarrhea and had watery blisters all over my body. So I just lay there pretending that I was dead. A guard found me and believed that I was indeed dead -- not surprising considering the way we looked -- but then another guard tested it by pouring water in my nose as I lay on my back. I could not prevent myself from moving, probably coughing or something. To my surprise the guards did not kick me, beat me up or shoot me. Instead they organized some sort of a wagon and put me and several other prisoners who could no longer walk on the wagon and we were pulled along with the rest of the marching group. I don't remember whether the wagon was pushed and pulled by the other prisoners or pulled by a horse or ox; it is hard to believe that any of the other prisoners would have had the strength to pull the cart, but I have no recollection of a draft animal. My diarrhea and

exhaustion were getting worse and I was no longer able to get off the wagon and simply had to let go into my pants -- the only thing I could do was to stuff some straw on which we were sitting into my pants. I remember, that the Dutch doctor DeVries, who was also on the wagon, got very angry with me for that and reproached me how I could have discussed philosophy with him some time ago, and now behave like that.

Liberation

One day, it may have been May 8, 1945, the guards disappeared and we were left in the middle of some fields. It was a bright day and it was late in the day. We saw a village not too far away, but we were in no condition to get there. We just managed to crawl into a nearby haystack and spend the night there. There were four of us: Jiri (Jirka) Süssland (Cajlajs, the actor), his brother Vilem (Vili), Jan (Jenda) Sander and myself. Vilem Süssland was in the best shape, as far as I remember he walked and was not on the wagon, but he wanted to stay with his younger brother who was in a very bad shape. The next morning Vilem managed to get to the village and get help. He came back with some people -- I think that they were the Czech "Revolutionary Guards" with red arm bands. They brought along a flat wagon and they took us to the village and cleared one room in a farm house for us. The room had four beds, one in each corner and a bucket (to serve as a toilet) in the middle. We all had terrible diarrhea.

People were coming and bringing us food -- all kinds of food. Some must have heard that starved people should start out with a light diet, so I think we got some chicken meat, but others wanted to give us whatever they had and so we got butter and bread and possibly lard, I don't remember, but I do remember the butter. I also got a pair of old boots and I was very happy to part with my wooden clogs. After a few days they took us again on an open wagon to a hospital in the nearby town of Zatec (Saatz). It was a very hot sunny day and a slow trip.

In the hospital

My first memory from the hospital is that we were put on stretchers in a corridor and a doctor took one look at us and ordered a bath and no food. At the moment Jenda Sander heard that verdict, he immediately ate what was left of the butter we got in the village; he had it hidden under the blanket and it was melted and already quite rancid because of the long trip in the hot sun, but he would not give it up. Fortunately, it did not have any fatal consequences. After the bath we were put in a room together with two other fellow prisoners, formerly from Vienna. Sadly, Jirka Süssland was so exhausted that his heart gave out and he died during the second night in the hospital. An elderly nun was sitting with him the whole night.

The hospital was actually run by German nuns and the doctors were German, too. The nuns were very nice and I felt that the doctors took proper professional care of us. We kept gradually improving. Both Jenda Sander and I had frostbites on our feet; some of the toes turned completely black. The surgeon amputated my big toe on my right foot, while the little toe fell off by itself. There were also frostbite on some of my other toes and some parts of them which turned black, but they did not have to be amputated. For some time we could not put our feet down on the floor, because they would start bleeding, but gradually things improved; our diarrhea got under control and we started gaining weight. Vilem Süsslund was at the beginning in far better shape than we were, but then suffered a sudden reversal and he died about two months after liberation of intestinal tuberculosis. I do not remember much about the two Austrians -- I think they improved sooner and were released much earlier.

I remember that one day the Czechs caught one of our guards and brought him to our room and asked us to identify him. The others recognized him, but I am so very bad at remembering faces that I could not. I don't know what happened to him. After my friends confirmed that he was one of the guards they took him away.

After some time Jenda and I were able to use wheelchairs and once we got used to them we would race along the long hospital corridors. Later we started walking with a cane, first in the hospital garden and later outside and finally we were released on the same day after about four months in the hospital. What I find hard to understand today is, that after being inseparable friends throughout Meuselwitz, the march and then the entire hospital stay, we never met again and did not even exchange letters. We both must have had a strong desire to leave the past behind and to concentrate fully on our new lives. All I heard about him was that he studied medicine and became a doctor. It was only during our visit in Israel in 1996 when we met with Lena Makarova that I inquired about him in the hope of meeting him again, but unfortunately learned only that he had died two years earlier.

In the hospital I became quite friendly with one of the nuns. She was a very cheerful person and we used to talk. I even asked her why she joined the order and I was surprised by her answer. She was from a liberal and not very religious background, her father was a Social Democrat, but she was afraid of men and sought refuge in the convent.

During the war I was sincerely convinced that only Germans were capable of the terrible atrocities they committed, that it must be a special trait in the German character. However, there were two incidents in the hospital which led me to change my mind, and to accept that inhumanity is not restricted to one nation, but

can appear among any group of people if the conditions are right and if people are allowed to act without being accountable for their acts.

One case which shocked me was the following. One patient in the hospital was a young woman, probably there because she had contracted a venereal disease. But she liked to talk to us, and among other things told us that she became a friend of a man named Roth -- she had no way of knowing that he was with us in Meuselwitz, but was better off than the rest of us, because he was an electrician and could fix radios for the SS guards. She told us with pleasure how he would interrogate captured Germans and extinguish burning cigarettes on them. I was shocked. I would have never believed that a Jew, particularly one who had gone through the same hell as I had, could act like that.

One day an older man was brought to the hospital. It turned out that he was a Czech who had stayed in the Sudetenland after it had become part of Germany; the vast majority of Czechs fled to what remained of Czechoslovakia after the Munich dictate. When the Czech Revolutionary Guards came he was put in a detention camp together with all the Germans. He had no papers to prove that he was Czech. Finally a family member came, identified him and got him released. However by the time he got to the hospital he was so undernourished that he looked like one of us and died within a few days.

Today, after so many years and having learned about so many terrible things people have done to other people, these two incidents would probably not affect me particularly, but at that time I was very sensitive and they deeply shook my belief in the moral purity and superiority of Jews and Czechs over Germans. However, they did teach me a lesson that became a firm principle for me for my entire life: never to judge somebody by the group he or she may be a member of, and never assign traits or characteristics to an ethnic or national or any other group of which one became a member by birth or external circumstances and which one did not choose voluntarily and consciously.

As soon as I could, I wrote to Prague to find out who survived and to reestablish contacts. I wrote immediately to Father's secretary, Jindra Seidnerova, and she came to visit me. Up to this point I did not know whether my parents and Helga survived -- I knew that my parents did not have the slightest chance if they were sent to Auschwitz, as at 57 and 49 they were far too old, but I still harbored some hope that they may have stayed in Terezin. Mrs. Seidner's visit put an end to that hope. Her first words were "Your uncle Otto is alive." She did not have to say more. I was devastated. Although I had expected that my parents did not survive, only now did the verdict become final. There was still a small chance left that Helga may have escaped death, but she was only fifteen and short and looked younger, and so the chances were very dim. I never heard of her and she

obviously went with my parents straight into the gas chambers.³⁷

I memorized the address Eva gave me of her adopted gentile “aunt” Jindra Schierova, and wrote to her. Eva came to visit me very soon after she got my letter, which she received on May 29, exactly on her 18th birthday. From then on we started a regular correspondence, though she later reproached me that my “love letters” were mostly reports about how my diarrhea was improving. She came to see me again a bit later.

I always thought that my friend Arnost Reiser came to visit me, but he assures me that it was not he but his sister Susie. The Reisers made me a most generous offer to stay with them when I got back to Prague until I could find more permanent accommodations. I enthusiastically and gratefully accepted. My childhood friend, Milos Milota, also came to see me and so did my uncle Otto, who survived the end of the war in Switzerland together with his mother-in-law. Towards the end of the war the Germans allowed some people to go to Switzerland; I don’t know why and under what conditions. In 1945 my uncle was already 68 years old.

³⁷ I never could bring myself to think of or to visualize my parents’ and sister’s last moments in the gas chambers. To this day I cannot think of it for more than a fleeting instant and immediately turn the thought away. Perhaps it is cowardice, but I simply can’t and perhaps don’t want to face it.

PRAHA (PRAGUE)

I was released from the hospital after about four months, in September. I remember that before my release somebody, some local Czech organization, took me to a warehouse full of things left over by the Germans who were forced to leave Czechoslovakia and I was able to select some clothing. I also recall that I went out for a walk with Jenda Sander and bought a beer -- it was the first beer I ever drank and I was 21 years old! Father sometimes offered me a sip when I was young, but I just smelled the beer and did not want to taste it, unlike my much younger sister who liked it. I am still not much of a beer lover -- a bad Czech.

In Prague I settled in with the Reisers. Their family owned a large house practically in the center of town, just across from the main railroad station, but separated from it by a park. When Arnost and Susie returned (their parents perished in Auschwitz and their younger brother Jan died in Terezin of tuberculosis), they managed to get a small two-room apartment on the top floor. It had a bathroom and a small hallway, but no kitchen. Susie, Ruth (Arnost's girlfriend and later his wife) and their cousin Eva who survived the war in France, lived in one room, while Arnost, myself and Felix Pollak, a friend of the Reiser family who served in the British army and returned to Czechoslovakia after the war, lived in the other room.

We had a very nice time -- all young people with Arnost at 25 the oldest and Ruth at 19 the youngest and we all started new lives as free people. Eva would come over frequently -- she lived just some 10 or 15 minutes away on foot with her mother and, of course, I started visiting her regularly. The Reisers were a musically gifted family and together with Eva Reiser's father, Arnost's uncle Egon Reiser, they would perform entire operas, playing the piano and singing. Since I unfortunately did not share their musical talents, I usually hid in the other room. There were a number of visitors and very interesting discussions, even an attempt at some semi-formal classes, but they did not work out as well as Arnost Reiser's analytic geometry course in Terezin. One of my nicest memories from that time are the Sunday mornings when we would all get into beds in one room and Arnost would read Kipling's "Just So Stories" aloud to us. I can't remember now with any certainty whether he read the stories in English or in the Czech translation, but I think that it must have been in the original English supplemented by Arnost with some translations and explanations for those of us whose English was very limited. Those days I also spent a lot of time in a not very successful attempt to learn to type.

Because I had been prohibited from going to school from 1940, I had completed only five of the required eight years of the gymnasium. I was, of course, not the only one in this situation. The government established special courses for people

returning from concentration camps or from the army to learn material that enabled them to take the final examination, the so-called maturity examination, required for enrollment at a university. The course lasted about four months and at the end we took the examination. It was very easy and we certainly did not learn or were expected to demonstrate even a fraction of the material we missed -- in my case, three years of gymnasium. My final report card was very good except for two D grades: one in physical education and one in drawing. I was thus able to enroll in the chemical faculty of the Technical University (something like an Institute of Technology) for the spring semester of 1946. To earn a little bit of money I tried to teach a young Slovak officer, who returned with the Russian army and was my classmate in the course, some mathematics and trigonometry. My illusions that I taught him something were shattered when one day before the "maturity exam" he asked me "tell me, what actually is that sine?" Still, he passed as we all did.

The first one to leave the Reisers' apartment was Felix Pollak. One day he declared that he has consumed his entire supply of Churchman cigarettes and therefore had to return to England.³⁸ Then Ruth moved in with a girlfriend of hers and I felt that it was time for me to leave too, although I enjoyed living with the Reisers very much.

My uncle Otto was able to get his prewar rental apartment back and invited me to move in with him, although aunt Klara and uncle Rudolf Klapp already shared the small two room apartment with him. I accepted. The Klapps had the larger room and uncle Otto and I slept in the smaller one. Aunt Klara, who was 66 at the time, cooked, but was not exactly a gourmet cook. When her husband did not seem enthusiastic about the meal, she would ask in a sharp tone "Didn't you like it?" and he would answer meekly "Oh yes, but it was filling."

University studies

Very soon after Germany occupied the Czech part of Czechoslovakia and established the "Protektorat," all universities and other institutions of higher learning were closed down, many students and faculty imprisoned, and many more sent to work in Germany. When the universities reopened in 1945, after six years, there was a tremendous influx of students and the facilities were totally insufficient -- in addition to the fact that they, and particularly the equipment, were badly damaged or destroyed. To deal with this situation students were allowed to take exams whenever they felt ready regardless of whether they attended lectures or not; many students had studied and learned a lot of chemistry on their own during the war years, particularly those who were lucky enough to

³⁸ In England he studied chemistry and later worked for Kodak. When we were in Denmark after our escape he was able to secure a job offer from Kodak in England for Arnost.

find jobs related to their studies or providing them with enough free time.

Laboratories were a special bottleneck. It would have been impossible to run the laboratories for an entire semester in the usual fashion of several hours a week. Instead they were run on a very intensive schedule. Once one got a slot, one worked in the lab the entire time, eight, ten, or more hours a day until one completed the prescribed set of experiments; I do not think that the number of experiments had been in any way reduced.³⁹ It was of course impossible to attend lectures at the same time, and we relied mostly on mimeographed lecture notes and/or whatever books were available.

Although I used to be a rather poor student in the gymnasium, I loved the study of chemistry and became one of the top students, though not the fastest one, in the class of about 2,000. Some students were able to take advantage of the relaxed rules and graduate in two years or even faster, while I took three and a half years, almost the full normal four year period of specialized chemistry study. Unlike in American universities we had no outside courses except for physics and mathematics, though only as much as was considered necessary for a future chemist. On the other hand, we had numerous courses on a variety of chemical technologies, such as metallurgy, glass and ceramics, organic and inorganic chemicals, dyes, the sugar industry, water technology, explosives, fermentation technology, fuels, and others.

I attended very few lectures during my studies -- I found it much more useful and profitable to study from books and occasionally with colleagues, often Milena Polertova. However, I did attend lectures of Dr. Wichterle on reaction mechanisms. These lectures were not part of the otherwise rigidly prescribed curriculum; it was not a course for which one could get credit or take an exam, but I found the lectures and particularly Wichterle's personality and presentation fascinating. It was an entirely new look at chemistry, not a cataloging of

³⁹ Getting a place in the labs was difficult and one had to wait. Once new spaces opened one had to be there on time or one would lose one's chance. I had very little money and was very thrifty, but once, when I was worried that I might be late and miss my chance for a spot in the lab, I even took a cab -- an unbelievable luxury. It was a funny experience. When I told the driver where to take me he became very uneasy and suspicious and then told me that at the beginning of the war he was hailed by somebody to drive to the same chemistry building I wanted him to take me now. When he arrived there, he was asked to wait and after a while the men who hired him returned with an elderly gentleman who carried a bottle of a yellow liquid. He was asked to drive to some place outside of Prague. At one moment, when he drove a bit faster around a curve, the old man, whom the younger one called "Professor" told the driver "You must drive more carefully, we have two liters of nitroglycerine here and we don't want it to explode." The elderly gentleman was Professor Kraus, the chair of the Department of Explosives and he was ordered by the Germans to remove the nitroglycerin -- they themselves did not want to handle it. Only then did the frightened cabbie noticed the military vehicles in front and behind him. The nitroglycerin was safely dumped in a remote area, but he never wanted to have anything more to do with any chemist.

compounds, their preparation and properties, but an attempt to understand the relationship between structure and reactivity, to be able to predict properties and reactions, to bring logic and understanding into a science which up till then was presented largely as a collection of facts. Wichterle also wrote a little book on organic chemistry, which I found most refreshing after the tedious descriptiveness of the principal book I used to study organic chemistry (written by the famous Swiss Nobel prize winner Paul Karrer).

Eva

Back in Prague we immediately resumed dating, except that there was less time for poetry and philosophy. We were both focused on our studies, Eva catching up for all the years she has missed in the gymnasium and studying Latin and Greek in addition to all the other subjects, and I at first preparing for the “maturity exam” and then starting seriously with my chemistry studies. Eva managed an almost incredible feat -- not only did she catch up with most of the material she missed during the five years when she was out of school, but she became one of the two top students in the class and graduated with straight “A’s” and, of course, with distinction. But we did find time for long walks, for theater and for movies.

Eva acquired a little dog, a wirehaired fox terrier named Bibi, a daughter of the dog, named Jolly, she had gotten at the beginning of the war and which she had had to give up.⁴⁰ Bibi was a regular companion on our walks.

Eva joined us frequently at the Reisers and I became a regular visitor at Eva’s home and a regular dinner guest. One time, when I was walking Eva home, after one of the evenings at the Reisers with several other people including Milena Pollertova,⁴¹ she started crying and I could not understand what was the matter

⁴⁰ Early after the German occupation, Jews were prohibited from owning dogs or other pets, and the pets they owned had to be destroyed and a document from a veterinarian certifying that he had performed the execution had to be presented to some office, perhaps the police. Eva’s mother managed to save Eva’s dog, Jolly, by giving it to some gentile friends and taking another dog, which she got from the dog pound, to the veterinarian instead. The veterinarian offered to write the death certificate and to find a new home for the dog for a modest fee. A slight problem arose when he asked for the dog’s name and Eva’s mother of course did not know it. But she very quickly responded that the dog’s name was “Tumas” (Getit), the way one would call the dog in Czech when one wanted to give him something to eat, assuming that every dog would respond to this call.

⁴¹ I met Milena in 1941 in the chemistry course organized by the Jewish community and we used to study together at her home, which was in the part of Prague that was the former Jewish ghetto, and where many Jews who lost their houses and apartments were forced to move, usually into quite cramped conditions. She had a real interest in chemistry and we spent a fair amount of time together, but it was a strictly professional friendship. After the war we started studying together again, this time in her mother’s villa, which was returned to them, in a fancy part of Prague not far from the Technical University.

with her. Finally, she offered to break up with me. I could not understand why and finally she told me that she was convinced that I really loved Milena and she would not want to stand in my way. It took a lot of effort to reassure her that I regarded Milena only as a good colleague but had no interest in her as a woman.

Once I was house-sitting for a friend of my parents, Mrs. Kühnelova, in the Prague suburb Strasnice where I grew up. At that time I was living in Strasnice in uncle Otto's apartment. So I was able to play the host and to invite Eva to join me there -- I don't remember what I offered her, but it felt very nice to be together alone in a place which was at least temporarily mine. Being together alone in a house and safe from any intruders did not result in anything we could not do under her mother's guardianship -- Eva was far too modest and I far too non-aggressive for that, but it still was a very nice feeling to be just by ourselves.

We spent the summer of 1946, the first summer after my return to Prague, together, of course under her mother's supervision. Some friends lent her mother a nice cottage in the woods some 40 miles from Prague. Eva slept with her mother in a small bedroom and I slept in the large living room, the only other room in the cottage. Because the place was quite isolated and far from any other dwelling, I slept with an ax under my bed, though I have no idea what I would have done with it had an intruder appeared; fortunately, we had no intruders except a dog which jumped through the window right on my stomach when Bibi was in heat.

At the time I was preparing for my math exam and found the standard Czech textbook very difficult to study from by myself. Arnost Reiser lent me an excellent English text, something like "Calculus for Scientists and Engineers" but the problem was that I knew practically no English. Eva knew a lot more and so we studied together every day and she translated for me the difficult phrases such as "if we substitute," "it follows" and so on, and we managed to go through the entire book during those two months. We had a wonderful time; after spending several hours on math and solving the problems for each chapter we would go for long walks in the woods, visit the nearby ruins of castles, Zebrač and Tocník, ride bicycles, pick berries and mushrooms, and mostly talk. One day we tried, completely unsuccessfully, to teach Eva's mother to ride a bicycle, though it seemed ridiculous to us that such an old person could even think of riding a bike -- she was 47 at the time.

We somehow forgot to get engaged. It was simply obvious that we would get married as soon as Eva finished school -- at the time a married woman would not be allowed to attend the gymnasium -- and we set the wedding date for June 26, 1947, exactly three years from our first date in Theresienstadt. It was about a month after Eva's graduation from the gymnasium and she was the first one of her

class to get married except for one classmate who had to get married earlier and was therefore not allowed to graduate. We had a civil wedding in the Clam-Gallas palace in Prague's Old Town; the palace substituted for the traditional place for civil weddings, the ancient Old Town City Hall which had been seriously damaged during the Prague uprising at the very end of the war. Eva's entire class came to our wedding. After the wedding we had lunch in Eva's apartment with just a very few invited guests, uncle Otto, who was my witness, Dr.Kocna, Eva's witness and an old lawyer friend of her father and the family, his wife, and Eva's "aunt" Jindra and her son Zdenek. Eva's gymnasium class came later for dessert. We then left for a short honeymoon in a small pub with a few guest rooms less than 15 miles from Prague. We went for a long walk, ate dinner and finally retired to our room for the wedding night -- two totally inexperienced virgins.⁴²

Eva's relative, Otto Munz, a cousin of her father, who had emigrated just before the war to Canada and then had moved to the US where he became a patent lawyer and was reasonably well off, visited Prague shortly before our wedding to take care of some family financial matters. He gave us a generous wedding gift, something like 50,000 Czech Crowns, which we used to pay for a honeymoon trip to Yugoslavia. The trip was organized by the Czechoslovak state travel agency, Cedok, and it was not luxurious. It started with a very long train trip to Yugoslavia in 3rd class compartments with hard wooden benches. With eight people to each compartment, we were fully packed and managed to sleep only by one person putting his head on the other person's lap and the other in turn putting his head on the first person's back. The train trip was followed by a not particularly comfortable bus ride to our destination, Crikvenica, a place where Eva had vacationed as a child with her parents. We were accommodated in a modest hotel with beds that kept collapsing under us. For me it was my first time at the seaside and I remember my first reaction: the sea looks just like I imagined it -- no overwhelming impression.

We had a good time. We went for walks, visited the market and the harbor. We swam, although Eva kept very close to shore, constantly afraid of sharks. We lay on the beach in the sun and read Oscar Wilde's "Lady Windermere's Fan" aloud together in English, dividing the roles. This was the last book we ever read together because Eva found my reading too slow for her. We even went dancing, or more correctly pretended to be dancing, since Eva was not a very good dancer and I had never danced before and thus had not the slightest idea what to do. A

⁴² Eva's mother had arranged for me to see their family physician a short time before the wedding to get some basic instructions. I was so naive that I even asked him whether one undresses completely for the intercourse, whereupon he replied "That's why we have skin so that we would not to be naked." How he was able to keep a straight face I don't understand, but he did. A couple of days before the wedding I went to a drugstore and bought a large supply of condoms so that I would not have to suffer through that embarrassing ordeal again too soon.

picture of us “dancing” in Crikvenica survived. We also drank our first Turkish coffee, took a boat trip to a nearby island (Eva got a bit sea sick), visited Opatia and found the house where her aunt and uncle used to live and which still had the sign “Villa Munz.” We took a ship to a nearby town of Novi; I remember that the ship was leaning to one side and I worried what we should do if it capsized. Our visas were not for Yugoslavia, but specifically for Crikvenica and we had to get permission to go for a trip to another town. We even got used to drinking wine mixed with soda water. We had our first glass of it just after we arrived, tired after the long trip and very hot, and we both felt tipsy, but we soon learned and were able to consume much larger amounts -- an entire carafe of wine for the two of us - - without any effects.

An important political event took place while we were enjoying our honeymoon in Crikvenica. Czechoslovakia was invited to join in the Marshall Plan and accepted. A few days later, the then foreign minister, Jan Masaryk, the son of the founder and first president of the Czechoslovak Republic, Thomas Masaryk, was summoned to Moscow. After he returned -- and clearly on orders from Moscow - - Czechoslovakia withdrew from the Plan. When this happened we had a foreboding that the future of the Czechoslovak Republic was grim and that we perhaps should leave. But I was in the midst of my university studies and Eva was about to start in the fall, we had just gotten married and somehow hoped that things wouldn't be too bad and that we would have time to decide after we completed our education. It was a bad mistake.

The Glass Factory

I needed some industrial experience. My cousin Fritz (Bedrich) Treulich became director of a plate glass factory in Olovi, a small town in northern Bohemia, and he invited me to work there during the summer. Shortly after returning from our honeymoon, Eva and I went to Olovi, rented a room, and I started going to the factory while Eva tried for the first time in her life to cook and keep house. Her cooking experience was extremely limited and moreover there was almost nothing one could buy -- everything was rationed and the local shops were very poorly supplied.⁴³ But we had a good time and enjoyed being together. My cousin was not only a very capable engineer, but also fully devoted and fascinated by his work, and took immense pride in the quality of the glass he was producing. He was delighted to be able to show me and sometimes also Eva the entire operation. I liked working in the factory -- it was not much work, but I was able to see every aspect of the glass production process and play around in the laboratory and do

⁴³ This was the Sudetenland, the formerly predominantly German border region of Czechoslovakia from which first the Czech population had to flee in 1938 after the Munich dictate and then the German population was expelled after the war. People who moved in now were sort of colonists, a mix of people who came with all kinds of motives.

some analytical work.

It was also an opportunity to impress Eva. One day I left some test tubes with a silver solution standing overnight in the lab and a silver mirror deposited on the walls. When I tried to clean a test tube with a brush, the test tube exploded and so did the next one. So I demonstrated my magic test tubes to Eva and she was duly impressed. At the end I wrote a detailed report on the whole operation for which I later got full credit by the Department of Glass and Ceramics (though credit in Industrial Espionage would have been equally appropriate).

After I finished working in the glass factory we set out for a long hiking trip in the mountains. We had very little money for the entire trip. By misfortune, the first village we came to was the seat of the local glove industry. Eva at that time loved gloves (these days she never wears any gloves unless it is very cold, but at that time wearing gloves even in the summer was considered elegant) and I could not resist buying her not one, but two pairs -- they were much cheaper than in Prague. However, this unexpected purchase exhausted almost all our funds, which were supposed to last for the entire trip, and from that moment on we had to be very thrifty indeed. We had some adventures. Twice we managed to walk into some sort of prisoner-of-war or similar camp, but had no problem explaining who we were. We got totally lost in the woods during a persistent rain and learned there that the claim that lichen grows on the northern side of the trees is a myth -- it grew on all sides. We descended into a valley and came to a house with some very nice children who would have invited us in, but their parents had gone to town and had locked them in. Finally we arrived in the late afternoon tired and soaked to the bone at a large hotel at the top of the mountain; the hotel was totally devoid of any guests. We asked for the price of a room and then immediately inquired how far it was to the next village. They understood and offered us a room with only one bed for a lower price which we could just manage. They also understood that we would not be eating there, but we could afford to buy some hot tea. The staff of the hotel was very understanding and nice and even dried all our clothes for us. Another time we walked along the Czechoslovak-German border and met a Czechoslovak border guard on a motorcycle who looked at us with suspicion -- people were smuggling things from Germany -- but after talking to us for a while he must have decided that we were all right and since there was no place to stay he invited us to his house, where he and his wife offered us a very nice guest bedroom, which we gratefully accepted.

Vacations

Although we studied and worked hard, we always took time for a summer vacation. In 1948 we made a long bicycle tour of "Cesky raj," ("Czech paradise") in north-central Bohemia. We had ordinary single-speed bicycles and each of us

carried a small backpack; we slept in youth hostels and visited several old castles and ruins. When we stayed in Zelezny Brod we asked about a cheap place to eat, misunderstood the directions and ended up in an empty luxury hotel, the “Krystal Palace.” We were all dusty from the road and in shorts and several waiters in tuxedos descended on us and we were too shy to admit our mistake. So we sat down and ordered the very cheapest food we could find on the menu. But then Eva noticed that they also had fresh strawberries and she wanted them. So we ordered one serving and it came with a finger bowl; we had no idea what to do with it and had lots of fun debating whether we should wash the strawberries or our fingers before or after and in the end decided to use it for all three possibilities.

One of the yearly summer vacations that I remember was with our friends Jiri Mostecky and his wife Eva. We went to Slovakia and hiked in the “Slovensky raj” (Slovak Paradise) and then in the Lower Tatras. Eva Mostecky developed knee problems and had to abandon the trip, and we continued by ourselves. There were no accommodations and we carried no tent or camping equipment except a blanket. The only people living on top of the mountain range were shepherds who during the summer tended sheep on the mountain pastures for an entire village. Their huts were extremely primitive -- they had an open fire in a fireplace with no chimney, and the huts were used not just for sleeping for the two or three shepherds, but also, at the same time, as smokehouses for the excellent sheep cheese. We asked and got permission to sleep with them inside on the floor on some brushwood that we gathered in the vicinity. The huts were filled with smoke and our eyes watered whenever we lifted our heads from the floor. In retrospect I am surprised that we did not have the slightest concern sleeping there with a very attractive young woman and an obviously not very robust protector in total isolation with two or three men who lived there for months alone in the mountains, but they behaved like perfect gentlemen. We had to get up very early in the morning, at about five o'clock or earlier, when they began the laborious job of milking their sheep.

In 1950 our lives changed: we got a small, a very small, motorcycle: a 90 cc (5.5 cu in) Manet made in Slovakia. It was very weak and had a strange design -- two pistons with a single head and a sparkplug. It was not legal for two people to ride it, but we did anyway. It happened occasionally that we were stopped and Eva had to get off and walk far enough to be out of sight of the police before she could get on again and we could continue. One time she talked us out of a problem and obviously argued so persuasively that the policeman finally asked “are you a teacher?” Already in the first year of ownership of the motorcycle we drove all the way to Slovakia with a labmate from the university, Jiri Vogel, and his then girlfriend Jitka. Jitka got her mother's permission to go with her boyfriend Jirka only because she would be with Eva, who, as a married woman, was qualified to

act as chaperone, even though she was younger than Jitka.⁴⁴

In 1954, I had a bad accident. We wanted to visit aunt Klara and uncle Rudolf, who at that time had moved to a Jewish old peoples' home in Marianske Lazne. It was already getting dark, but not dark enough to turn on the headlights. Suddenly I saw in front of me the heavy wooden beam of the gate protecting a railroad crossing. It was too late for me to stop and I would have hit it with my neck, which could well have killed me. I managed to swerve, hoping to slide under the bar, but did not quite succeed. I hit my head on the metal frame holding the reflecting glass, but fortunately just between my right eye and the temple. Eva did slide under the gate and was not hurt, but I was unconscious. Someone stopped the train and put me on it and took me to the hospital in the nearest town, Rakovnik. There was a doctor there but no nurse to assist him and so Eva had to help him while he sewed up the gash on my head. I had a concussion and the doctor said that it would be good to put some ice on my head, but the hospital's ice machine was out of order. So Eva took two buckets and walked across town to the brewery and got ice for me and for some other patients as well. Arnost Reiser offered to come and pick up the motorcycle and drive it back to Prague.

In 1956 we advanced to a larger motorcycle, a CZ 125 cc; CZ stands for Ceskoslovenska Zbrojovka, Czechoslovak Armament Works. We did not enjoy it for long. We were ready to go for a vacation trip, but when I went down to the yard of our apartment house in the morning, the motorcycle was gone. At first I could not believe it; I thought that I must have put it somewhere else, but it had just disappeared without a trace -- even though the yard was locked at night. The police just wrote up a report and I heard from them again only once when they wanted to know whether the motorcycle was still missing. We still had our old Manet, and Arnost Reiser offered to come with us. So I rode on the Manet and he and Eva on his CZ 125, and we set out for southern Bohemia. We had a tent I borrowed from a colleague, but we used it only twice. The second time was when we were already near the southern borders in the Sumava mountains. We started a fire and Arnost and I went in search for water. We asked a local woman and she not only directed us to a spring, but also told us that there were some very dangerous soldiers ("they are not our people") in the area and that just last month a young woman "also from Prague" was killed because she refused their sexual demands. ("Protoze jim nechtela dat" -- "she did not want to give them"). We did not want to alarm Eva, but quickly extinguished the fire and were very nervous the whole night whenever we heard an approaching motorcycle, which we assumed

⁴⁴ When we returned from Slovakia, Jirka Vogel and Jitka were gone -- they escaped across the border to Germany without a chaperone. They married and Jiri found his first job opportunity in Ethiopia where he directed a tanning factory and later taught at the university at Addis Ababa; after a few years he immigrated to the United States. We met both of them after our escape in 1960 in Boston where Vogel taught at Boston College.

must have been a military patrol. After that we slept in small inns. Later we were able to replace the stolen motorcycle with another one of the same make and size.

February 1948

Between 1945 and 1948 Czechoslovakia enjoyed at least partial democracy. Eduard Benes, who had been president before the Munich pact of 1938 was president again, the press was relatively free, people could travel more or less without restrictions. Although most of the pre-war political parties were abolished, ostensibly because of charges of collaboration with the Nazis but in reality because they were unacceptable to the Communists, there were four political parties: the Communists, the Social Democrats, the National Socialists, and a Catholic party, the Peoples Party (Lidova strana). The elections of 1946 were free and the Communists got some forty percent and together with the Social Democrats held a majority. Immediately after the war there was a lot of sympathy for the Communists, partly because they were among the most persecuted of the political movements during the Nazi era, partly because the Soviet army liberated a large part of Czechoslovakia, and mostly because of good organization and clever propaganda. However, the government was a coalition with ministers from all four officially sanctioned parties. Later, in 1947, the mood of the country started changing. The Communists' grab for power became more apparent and they quickly started losing support. Up to that time the Social Democratic party was led by a crypto-Communist,⁴⁵ Zdenek Fierlinger, but he was deposed in a party congress and replaced by an anti-Communist. It became clear that the Communists could not win the next elections and without the support of the Social Democrats could not hold on to power. They therefore triggered a crisis. The non-Communist ministers resigned with the understanding that their resignations would not be accepted by the non-Communist president. The Communists mobilized the "Peoples guards," a private Communist army organized nominally for the protection of factories from saboteurs and enemies of the state. The minister of defense, another crypto-Communist, General Ludvik Svoboda, refused to get the army involved. Under tremendous pressure, the old and ailing President Benes finally gave in and accepted the resignation and named the chairman of the Communist party, Klement Gottwald, as the new prime minister. With that the Communist usurpation of power was complete. Many of the leading persons of the other parties fled, many others were arrested and later tried and sentenced on trumped-up charges, and some were executed.

⁴⁵ By the term crypto-Communist I mean people who were either secret members of the Communist party and paraded as either unaligned (Svoboda) or as members of another party (Fierlinger), or people who simply served the Communists and followed their orders. I have no information whether Fierlinger and Svoboda actually were secret members of the Party, but they certainly did what the Communists wanted them to do.

Neither of us was ever a Communist -- I was well immunized against it by Gustav Schorsch. Still since we strongly believed in social justice, we leaned more to the left. Eva joined the youth organization, "Svaz ceskoslovenke mladeze" (Czechoslovak youth alliance) and I actually applied to join the Social Democratic party after the congress in which the pro-Communist leadership was ousted. Fortunately, my application got lost, so that I never became a member. After the Communist takeover the Social Democratic party was simply merged with the Communist party and all members automatically became members of the Communist party unless they took the rather courageous step to refuse and risk retributions. This is what my friend Arnost Reiser did, but very few people showed that much courage. While we disapproved of the tactics of the Communists and particularly of the outrageous appeal to class hatred and envy when they instituted the "Millionaires' tax," a highly punitive and confiscatory tax on people whose property was valued at or over one million Czechoslovak Crowns, we were not opposed to the nationalization of banks and large industrial plants. We liked the concept of free schools and medical care. However, we were always confirmed democrats and in the moment that the Communists usurped power in a totally undemocratic way they lost any remaining sympathies we may have had for them.

Eva after the war had a good friend in her class, Helena Pilarova, who was very good to her and helped her to catch up with a lot of material, particularly with Latin. We used to invite her and her boyfriend, Jenda Cap, and they were at our apartment just after the February Communist takeover. We got into a fierce argument during which Cap called me an "utopian idealistic socialist" and we never met again.⁴⁶

The country changed dramatically. The borders were closed; to leave the country one needed an exit permit which was granted only to reliable party members and supporters and almost invariably only to people who would have to leave their families behind as sort of hostages; there was certainly no way for legal emigration. Still, during the first year many people managed to cross the borders and escape at considerable risk, but that became more and more difficult and dangerous as time went on. The media became totally controlled and lied blatantly. There were purges, many students and faculty were dismissed or fired from the universities and the secret police started arresting suspected "enemies of the state." Ordinarily we too would have probably been expelled from the university as my father was a capitalist, a factory owner, and Eva's father a lawyer. However, the fact that our fathers were killed in the concentration camps counted as a mitigating circumstance and also allowed us to lie about their professions. My father became a technical

⁴⁶ Only at the urging of Eva's closest friend, Milada Tautermannova, did Eva meet with Helena again in the late nineties, but they never talked about politics again, just old school memories and family matters; by that time Helena was divorced.

clerk and Eva's father just an employee of a law firm, not an independent lawyer exploiting his employees, in his case, one secretary. People started disappearing for a year or so and then would confess in show trials to things they could not have done. One lived in fear. The society split, non-Communists would not speak with Communists; they could not trust them not to report them or to inform on them. Everybody, or at least the younger people, had to "volunteer" for work "brigades" and undergo indoctrination.

I remember well the first "free elections" under the Communists. There were pre-printed paper ballots with the names of the official candidates of the "National Front," i.e. Communists, with a token representation from the remaining two other approved political parties, and in addition one received a blank ballot. One was just allowed to cross out the names one did not want to vote for or cast the white ballot as a rejection of the entire slate; no write-ins were permitted. There was no election campaign -- nobody could speak out against the Communist government without being immediately arrested for "crimes against the state." It was strongly encouraged that all inhabitants of each apartment house go voting together. When we entered the election room, a classroom in a nearby school building, we had of course to give our names, which were then checked off, and we received the two ballots. Then we were told: "There is a screen on the other end of the room and you can use it if you want, but most people want to demonstrate their support of the National Front and cast their ballots openly directly into the ballot box right here." And, of course, there were many people watching and taking notes. I was not very brave, but still did not want to turn in the ballot as I was asked to; instead I went behind the screen. As far as I remember, there was no pencil there, but I came prepared: as a futile gesture I crossed the whole ballot with a little piece of lead broken off a pencil. I stuck the piece of lead under my thumb nail so that I could cross the ballot by just drawing my thumb over it. It did not make the slightest difference: the official slate won by over 99% even in small villages where people knew exactly how people voted.

Everybody had friends or relatives who were in prison. Eva's mother's cousin, Pavel Hasterlik, who fought with the British army against Germany and was a very religious Protestant who worked for the YMCA was sentenced to some twenty years. My friend, Vladimir Tomek, with whom I shared a lab as a graduate student at the university and who later worked at the Ministry of Chemistry, was a Social Democrat who refused to join the Communist party. He was sentenced on ridiculous trumped up charges of spying for the US to many

years, most of which he spend in uranium mines in Jachymov.⁴⁷ Later, when I already worked in the Academy, I had a technician, Karel Eisler, whose father was imprisoned during the Slansky affair -- he was accused and convicted of negotiating an allegedly unfavorable trade agreement with the British, an agreement which the government accepted and signed. A colleague of Eva, Erika Hach and her husband were imprisoned for trying to leave the country illegally while on vacation in Yugoslavia. The father of another colleague, Josef Rudinger, who was actually a confirmed Communist himself, was also in prison for many years. So was the father of Eva's classmate, Irena Zertova-Poduskova; her father was a director of a factory where something went wrong and, of course, this could not have been just an accident, it had to have been an act of sabotage and a scapegoat had to be found. The brother of my student Frank Mares was in prison for religious activities -- a group of Catholics got together to discuss religion; any unauthorized group gatherings were viewed as dangerous. The father of a colleague was in jail allegedly because he participated in some silly seance. The sister of one of the Institute's secretaries was in jail, too. These are just the cases we were personally aware of, and we had only a very limited circle of friends and acquaintances.

One lived in fear. For instance, once I was studying at home with a colleague late into the night and suddenly the door bell rang and when we opened the door a policeman appeared. We were petrified, but it turned out that my colleague's wife, worried when her husband did not come home, called the nearby police station, as we did not have a phone.

We had to go to celebrations such as marching every May 1, the Communist Labor Day, and even to punch the clock, although it was a holiday and the celebration was "voluntary." One had to parrot the stupid phrases and express confidence in the party and in the Soviet Union. Most of all one had to very careful what one said in front of the children.

Graduate Studies

⁴⁷ His wife, who had to support herself and their little daughter, could not get a job as a wife of a "traitor" until she divorced him - she remarried him immediately after he was released from prison in an amnesty in 1960. When I was in England I bought a nice little dress for their daughter and we even dared to invite Tomek's wife to our apartment to give it to her. The fact that we felt quite nervous and at the same time very brave for inviting the wife of a convicted spy and even brought her a gift, speaks for itself of the atmosphere we lived in. Tomek's real "crime" was that he had not informed on his wife's cousin, who had asked him for information which Tomek had refused to give him. The cousin had been recruited by the Communist secret service by threats and intimidation. He did not have enough strength to refuse, but was so enraged that he offered to provide information to Radio Free Europe as well as sort of revenge; he was caught and implicated Tomek. Because of his exposure to radiation in the uranium mines Tomek never dared to have another child. In 1968 he and his family managed to escape to Ireland where we visited them in 1980.

When I finished with my “Ing.” (Engineer) degree in 1949 I wanted, of course, to continue towards a doctoral degree and approached then Docent Otto Wichterle. The first problem he gave me was to determine the velocity of a critical reaction in the manufacture of the European version of Nylon, polycaprolactam, namely the Beckmann rearrangement of cyclohexanone oxime into caprolactam.⁴⁸ Industrially, the reaction was done in a batch process and Wichterle wanted data which could be used for a continuous operation. In this way I was introduced to my first kinetic measurements. Wichterle himself knew very little about kinetics and I had to discover almost everything for myself, which was certainly a good experience.

It was just at that time that a new system of graduate support was being established, the so called “aspirantura,” a three year fellowship for graduate studies. The principal driving force behind the establishment of this fellowship system, patterned after a Soviet model, was professor Frantisek Sorm, then Professor of Organic Technology but also Secretary General of the Czechoslovak Academy of Sciences and soon to become director of the Institute of Organic Chemistry and Biochemistry of the Academy. In the beginning, all the fellowship holders or “aspirants” worked with Sorm and I was -- I believe -- the first one (at least in chemistry) who applied for the fellowship while studying with somebody else. Eventually I or Wichterle succeeded, but it took over half a year working without financial support. Later professor Wichterle managed to get me some money from the industrial plant which benefitted from my measurements to compensate me for my unpaid period.

I finished the work relatively quickly, in about two years, and submitted my thesis for a Ph.D. equivalent, the “Doctor of Technical Sciences.” I then received a warning from the professor of organic chemistry, Rudolf Lukes, that I would be drafted for two years of military service immediately after receiving my degree. So I withdrew the thesis and asked Professor Wichterle for another project, specifying that this time I would like to work on a more organic chemistry subject. Wichterle had an enormously creative mind and hundreds of research ideas. So he brought me a full drawer of index cards with research ideas and asked me to select a problem myself. He made fun of me for my preference for theoretical concepts and as I was going through the index cards he would stand behind me and occasionally pull out a card saying that this could be potentially useful and

⁴⁸ Wichterle discovered this polymer independently during the war. Only when he filed for a patent, did he learn that there was already a secret German patent for the same polymer and polymerization process. Under Wichterle’s guidance Czechoslovakia shortly after the war quickly started manufacturing polycaprolactam in quite substantial amounts. The polymer was first known under the name of WINOP for Wichterle and his two coworkers Novotny and Prochazka, and later as Silon.

therefore was nothing I would be interested in. I finally selected a diene addition to thionylamines, a problem which led to a new but totally useless class of heterocyclic compounds.⁴⁹ I still remember the thrill when I came to the lab one morning and found the flask, in which I carried out the reaction the previous day, filled with beautiful crystals of a new compound, a compound nobody before me had ever seen. I imagined that it was a feeling like an explorer must have had when discovering a new land.

I completed the work in 1953, but submitted only the earlier work on the Beckmann rearrangement for my thesis, somehow thinking that I might use the diene addition work for some later purpose. The defense of the thesis was carried out in a rather formal way, open to the public and with quite a lot of students coming to watch. There was an appointed "opponent" who criticized the work and I had to respond, but I did get his criticism ahead of time and thus could prepare my answer. Then there were questions from the committee and finally from anybody in the audience. My opponent, a noted professor of physical chemistry, Rudolf Brdicka from the Charles University, was in fact quite critical of the work and I am afraid that I was rather aggressive in my response. Of course, he really understood kinetics and I was completely self-taught. I was the first person who graduated under the new system at the Chemical Faculty of the Technical University and received the degree of "Candidate of Sciences," equivalent to a Ph.D.

Military service

As an "aspirant" I was entitled to abbreviated military service, something similar to the ROTC, and as chemists we were assigned to the chemical corps. We had military lectures every Saturday and sometimes some rudimentary drill training, and then spent two summers in the barracks. Our military commander was a Major Felcman, who was a chemist himself, but graduated from only a high school level chemical institution. He was impressed that we not only had engineering degrees but were doing research and working towards doctorates. He treated us very well and with a certain level of deference. He himself had a checkered history. He served in the Czechoslovak army, then in the Slovak Army, fought against the Russians, then managed to cross lines and to join the Czechoslovak units fighting on the Soviet side against Germany. On one occasion he gave us a fairly detailed account and instructions on how to run over to the enemy, hardly a part of the standard military curriculum. On another occasion he told us that he was supposed to lecture to us about the organization of the platoon, but that the professional officers are so stupid that in the case of a war we would have to take

⁴⁹ Wichterle wanted to know whether compounds with the structure $O=S=N-R$ would form five-membered rings like sulfur dioxide $O=S=O$ or six-membered rings like nitroso compounds, $O=N-R$; I found that the new compounds had a six- rather than a five-membered ring.

over anyway and so he would rather tell us about the organization of divisions and brigades. We were all very fond of him, but that fondness certainly did not extend to any other members of his staff.

We had a nice example of military stupidity. We got a document that was classified "top secret" about the military use of poison gases -- except that it was a word-by-word translation of an article I read earlier in the American chemical journal "Chemical Reviews" available in every science library around the world. Perhaps the army was worried that the enemy could find out that somebody in the army could read and even translate from English.

The first summer we were in Jaromer for basic training and the noncommissioned officers and junior officers hated us for getting away with such a short time of service and so they tried to make things difficult for us. For instance, when we failed to sing loudly enough while marching, they ordered us to don our gas masks and sing with them on. But overall it was not too bad; we were among friends and colleagues. One serious incident occurred when one of our colleagues wrote a card home in which he disclosed important military secrets, such as the fact that we had to get up at whatever time it was and, what was far worse, that our officers are idiots -- just imagine if this information got into the hands of the enemy. He dutifully presented it for censorship -- he was clearly not too bright -- and the young officers saw a wonderful case which they could prosecute and get him sent to a military prison. He was saved by Major Felcman, who yelled at him non-stop for ten minutes in front of the entire unit and then announced that his transgression was so severe that he did not have enough authority to handle it himself and would have to take it back to Prague to present to his superiors -- and that was the last time anybody heard about it.

Because we served only during the summer and only for two month at a time, we did not have our heads shaved as ordinary recruits did. However, we were expected to have reasonably short haircuts. During one inspection a friend of mine, Jaroslav Plesek, was ordered to have his hair trimmed, but he somehow forgot or perhaps ignored the order. The next week he was ordered to have his head completely shaven as a punishment while I at the same time was ordered to have my hair trimmed. We went together to the barber: Plesek sat down in front of the mirror, closed his eyes and did not open them until he was done and could turn around without seeing himself in the mirror. In the next mail he received a tress of hair from his girl friend who cut it off as a sign of sympathy.

I was not a good soldier. One time they dragged us through mud and then ordered us to clean up and appear in formation in the yard of the barracks in about five minutes. We had high boots and we were not supposed to wash them with water -- I still don't know how one was supposed to get the wet mud off -- but

everybody of course did. My problem was that I have a rather high instep and my boots were anyway quite tight. When the leather got soaked washing off the mud I managed to put on my left boot, but try as I might, the right one would not go in. I finally appeared late in the yard while everybody else was already standing in formation, with one boot and one sneaker. I was so agitated that I put my rifle in my left hand and saluted with my right -- one was not supposed to salute when one held a rifle and it always had to be in the right hand. There was a lot of laughter. Another time we were practicing throwing dummy hand grenades; the next day it was the real thing, but I forgot to notice that the direction where we were to throw the grenades had changed from the first day. I threw my grenade in the old direction -- right at the place where the officers stood watching our performance. What saved them and me was that I was a very poor thrower, so that the grenade metal band attached to the safety pin did not have time to unwind and the grenade therefore did not explode. They had to call in a demolition expert to detonate it.

Our second summer training was in Liberec and there I had the unpleasant experience of having to use a flamethrower, a really frightening weapon. We also practiced chemical decontaminations of items supposedly contaminated by mustard gas. The work had to be done in very heavy rubber suits, gloves, boots and in gas masks; it was not a very pleasant experience in the summer heat, particularly when we had to run in these outfits.

The third summer we were again in Jaromer, but this time I was assigned to the laboratory and we had a very easy time. The commanding officer of the lab brought a big bottle of denatured alcohol and our job was to purify it so that he -- and we -- could drink it. We were all experts in this decontamination procedure. One very onerous task was that we had to play canasta, a rather boring card game, with him for hours on end. Otherwise we played around with the chemical detection of nerve gases and saw a pretty frightening demonstration of the effects of a nerve gas on a poor dog.

The Academy

When I finished my graduate studies with Otto Wichterle and received my Ph.D. equivalent degree, Candidate of Sciences, I hoped that I could stay with Wichterle, but that was out of the question -- firstly because I was not politically qualified to deal with impressionable young students, and secondly because Wichterle now headed the Department of Macromolecular Chemistry and I had avoided learning anything about polymers and was really interested in organic reaction mechanisms.

Wichterle recommended me to Professor Sorm who headed the Institute of Organic

Chemistry and Biochemistry of the Czechoslovak Academy of Sciences. He was a Communist and a very influential man who also served as General Secretary of the Czechoslovak Academy of Sciences and had been one of the prime movers in establishing it. He later became President of the Academy. Every job application had to go through a Communist Party personnel officer whose sole job was to see that only politically reliable people could get into any position of importance or significance. My application was rejected on political grounds in spite of excellent professional recommendations. A short time later there was a change in the party personnel officer and I got the job after all. I heard different versions of what actually happened. One was that my mother-in-law employed a seamstress who had some connection to the personnel officer. The other was that Sorm really wanted me and managed to get rid of the personnel officer who refused my application.

In any case I started working at the Academy in the summer of 1953 just at the time of the “currency reform,” during which a very small amount of old Czechoslovak Crowns were exchanged at a 5 to 1 exchange rate, but larger amounts at only 50 to 1, meaning that most of the old money became worthless. Bank savings deposits were treated a bit better. My first memory of coming to the lab was that I could not open a drawer and asked someone in the lab next door to help me. He said “Oh, you just have to jam a scrap of paper into it,” took out a 1,000 Crown note and stuck it into the lock. This was Frank Sipos, who later escaped in an interesting way.⁵⁰ He now lives in New Jersey and we are still friends.

I was in the Section of Organic Synthesis headed by Jiri Sicher, who studied in England during the war. He and Josef Rudinger, who also got his education in England during the war, and who was in charge of the peptide section, were unquestionably the best chemists of the Institute and also did a great job of bringing the foreign language Czechoslovak chemical journal “Czechoslovak Chemical Communications” to world standards.⁵¹

⁵⁰ In 1965 Frank and his family managed to go for vacation to Yugoslavia and to get to a resort directly on the Italian border. One day he ordered his wife and children to collect sea shells and drift “accidentally” into the Italian side. Once they were there, he started running toward the border with a Yugoslav border guard in pursuit. He tripped and fell, but fortunately directly over the border and landed on the Italian side, and was saved by an Italian border guard. He wrote me a detailed account of his escape and I just had the letter with me when we were passing through Boston on our way for a hiking vacation in the White Mountains. We were invited to a party at the Westheimers and I regaled the company with the story of Sipos’s escape; Professor Woodward immediately offered Sipos a position in the Woodward Institute in Basel, Switzerland, but Sipos preferred to find a job in America.

⁵¹ Both Sicher and Rudinger left the country after to Soviet invasion in 1968 and settled in Switzerland and both died at a relatively young age of cancer like many other Czech organic chemists. During WWII Rudinger served in the Royal Air Force and hunted German submarines; he liked to tell stories about his war time experiences.

Sorm asked me to “look into chromic acid oxidation,” because chromic acid was being used in the manufacturing of progesterone from cholesterol, and they encountered some difficulties during the oxidation step. I decided to start looking at a very simple model compound, methylcyclohexane. That started my life-long interest in oxidation chemistry and specifically in chromic acid oxidations. Sorm was very different from Wichterle -- he just selected a broad field without specifying any particular approach, while Wichterle had numerous detailed ideas although he would not mind at all if I selected my own. In any case Sorm did not object to my approach, which launched me into physical organic chemistry, and he did not complain that I never came anywhere close to providing him with specific advice on how to improve the yields of progesterone.

Later I branched out into different types of compounds including alcohols; the chromic oxidation of alcohols played a very important role in my life later on. Through the oxidation of tertiary alcohols I became acquainted with the work of William Sager. I later met him and in 1966 he hired me to the new Chicago campus of the University of Illinois and we became very good friends. I am indebted to him for the great opportunities Chicago has offered me. The oxidation of a secondary alcohol, isopropyl alcohol, brought me at first into conflict, then into collaboration and finally friendship with Frank Westheimer and his wife Jeanne. Frank brought us to America and had an enormous influence on our life after our escape from Czechoslovakia.

The Institute was a good place to work. As part of the Academy, it had a preferred status; we had a far better supply of chemicals and equipment than universities, no teaching responsibilities, and very little distraction from research. That does not mean that research equipment was freely available to us. Although we had more of it than the universities, there was only one infrared and one UV-visible spectrophotometer for the entire institute and they were under the control of specialists who would also interpret the spectra. When I needed to use the UV-visible spectrophotometer extensively, I got permission to use it by myself at night, after normal working hours, but I lost my permit when it was found out that I was doing my measurements in acetic acid, the vapors of which were not exactly beneficial to the instrument.

While the institutes of the Academy were developing and expanding, the universities were degraded to mere teaching institutions with primary emphasis on the political correctness and loyalty of the faculty, and very little emphasis on or opportunities for research. Most of the best people went over to the Academy, leaving the universities in rather sad shape -- particularly since the institutes of the Academy also had the right to train graduate students and award advanced degrees. Graduate training did not involve any formal course work or classes, just the

presentation of a significant enough piece of research and its defense. The only formal exam was in Marxism-Leninism⁵² and a Russian language exam -- I am not sure, but a second foreign language may also have been required.

I was essentially free to do whatever I wanted so long as I got reasonable results and published.⁵³ I got a technician and later a graduate student (“aspirant”), Frank Mares, with whom we became good friends and who later also escaped to the US and had a very successful career in industry.

In addition to my principal research work I became interested in building distillation columns and together with a friend, Jiri Farkas, built a few. I was also in charge of the library, i.e., advising the library staff and trying to help with acquisitions through exchanges.

Because of my interest in acidities and acid catalysis, Milos Hudlicky asked me to contribute a volume on acid catalyzed reactions to his extensive series of books on preparative chemical reactions.⁵⁴ I accepted the offer jointly with my friend Jiri Novak and from then on every week we spent three long evenings working in the library after hours. I enjoyed working on the book and enjoyed also the many discussions I had with Novak, who was a Catholic intellectual educated by the Jesuits. I never finished the book. When we escaped in 1960, Novak was informed that the book could not be published with my name and so he found another collaborator, Jiri Zemlicka, with whom he completed and published the

52 When I was an “aspirant,” i.e. a graduate student with a fellowship, I took my Marxism exam with a group of other graduate students. One of them was somewhat older, already with several children, not very bright, and terribly nervous and scared. The examiner was very kind to him and asked him the easiest question. He read to him the beginning of Marx and Engels’ *Communist Manifesto* “A spectre is haunting Europe, the spectre of Communism” and asked him to identify the source. The student did not know. So the examiner told him the source and asked him to comment on the present situation. The poor guy thought for a while and then suddenly burst out: “It is still haunting, particularly the farmers.” Although, not surprisingly, he did not pass the exam on that day, the examiner arranged for a private retaking and then passed him.

53 The rule in the Institute was that papers had to be presented to the director, Prof. Sorm, without authors and he would decide who the authors were. It was not as bad as it sounds - he would never put somebody on the paper who did not participate in it, but he wanted to decide on which papers he would put his own name and he was also opposed to the inclusion of the names of technicians. In my case he put his name only on my first paper. Malicious gossip had it that he put his name only on papers he understood.

54 Hudlicky was a docent (something between Assistant and Associate Professor) at the Chemical faculty, but was later dismissed for political reasons and found work in the Research Institute for Pharmacy and Biochemistry, the same institute in which Eva was employed. He was an incredibly active person, wrote several books himself and edited this large series. He and his family escaped in 1968 and he became a professor at the Virginia Polytechnic Institute. He specialized in fluorine chemistry.

book.⁵⁵

This was actually not my first experience with book writing. I once reproached Wichterle that his very original book on organic chemistry had no references. So, when a new edition was due he asked me whether I would be willing to supply the references and I gladly accepted. He brought me drawers of index cards which he used in writing the book and I had to research each compound or reaction to find the original reference. It was not easy; Wichterle's notes were most sketchy -- sometimes the journal with page, sometimes a name, sometimes just the reaction. It was a lot of work, but it gave me pleasure to do it.

Children

While we both were studying, we did not want to start a family, but after Eva graduated with her Ing. degree and started working at the Research Institute for Pharmacy and Biochemistry in 1951 and I was approaching the end of my graduate studies, we decided to go ahead. However, Eva was unable to become pregnant. I had my sperm count tested and was proud to be told that "I could serve as village stud bull." Eva was originally told that because she spent her developing years growing up in the camp, her uterus was so underdeveloped that she might never be able to have children or would have a number of miscarriages. She was put on hormones -- these were not synthetic ones, but natural ones isolated from the urine of pregnant women -- and we were told to have sex as often as possible. After a while Eva's mother noticed that Eva was getting sick, vomiting and after a short time eating again happily and made the correct

⁵⁵ Thinking of my friend Jiri Novak brings to mind two dangerous incidents. One was after he was expelled from the University and prohibited access to it -- he already had his Ph.D but was still doing research with Professor Wichterle. He came to me and asked me whether I would allow him to use my lab to finish a synthesis which needed just one more step; I agreed, of course. Normally, nobody would have paid any attention, but unfortunately, the experiment resulted in an explosion which shattered several windows, and started a fire. If it had been established that I, a graduate student, illegally allowed an unauthorized person who had been banned from the University to use my lab, it could have led to my expulsion. Fortunately for me, Professor Wichterle saved me and Novak by accepting responsibility and falsely claiming that he had given him permission. The second incident happened when I was already in the US, at Harvard, and a friend told me that he was going to Prague and asked if I wanted to send something. I remembered that Jiri used to talk about curry, the Indian spice, which was not available in Prague. I don't remember why he was interested in it, but I bought a jar of it and gave it to my friend Bob Wall and asked him to give it to Jiri when he visited the Institute where I used to work. Bob did not meet him, but was so intent on delivering the package that he somehow got in touch with the Czech underground and asked them for help. Fortunately, they were wise enough to turn him down. I shuddered when I thought how I could have gotten my friend in contact with the underground and arrested because of a silly little gift. It taught me how impossible it was even for a very clever and educated American used to a free society to understand the conditions in a totalitarian police state. Like many of my other Czech chemist friends, Jiri Novak died of cancer at an early age.

diagnosis. At the same time Eva also managed to do a very nice piece of research in the course of trying to reproduce a synthesis described in a paper published in the Journal of the American Chemical Society, the prime American chemical journal. She was able to prove that the paper was wrong and provide the correct interpretation and identification of the products. She submitted this work as her Ph.D. thesis. She received her Ph.D (called Doctor of Technical Sciences) while already significantly pregnant -- perfect timing.

We had a literature club with two chemical friends, Jiri Novak, who worked in the lab next door to me at the Academy, and Karel Syhora, who, being considered politically unreliable, found refuge in some kind of institute for egg research. We would meet regularly every Tuesday in the home of one of us and report on interesting journal articles -- we had divided the principal chemical journals among us and each of us was responsible for a set of journals. On Tuesday, January 12 1954, Eva did not come to our meeting and when I came home she was not there either. I was surprised and asked where she was and her mother responded: "you can guess three times." We did not have a due date and Eva worked the entire time, so I was a bit unprepared. I went to the hospital, but there was nothing I could do; men were not allowed in -- in fact I could not see her until she was well enough to walk down to the visiting room and I could not see the baby until a week later when Eva came home. So I just walked aimlessly back and forth in front of the hospital for some time and eventually went home and the next day went to work where I got a phone call that a boy was born at about 10 AM.

I was a very enthusiastic father. We had an experienced lady give Martin⁵⁶ his first bath and to demonstrate to us how to do it, but it was I who gave him his second bath the next evening. Eva had very little milk and I assisted in feeding, which in the beginning was complicated: we had to weigh the baby before and after the attempted breast feeding and then prepare the appropriate amount of formula to make up for the mother's missing milk. Later, after Eva developed a bad inflammation of the breast and could not breast feed at all, it became simpler. Since Eva was an evening person, but had difficulties waking up in the morning, whereas I was the exact opposite, she took care of the baby in the evening and late into the night and I, who woke up much faster when Martin cried in the early morning hours, fed and changed him then.

Martin was born in January and it was a rather cold winter. Our room was heated by a coal stove, but it was not warm enough and we used to put burning candles

⁵⁶ I remember that we were definitely looking for an "international" name, not one which would be unique to the Czech language. The same consideration applied later in naming Thomas, although the Czech version is missing the "h." Besides, Tomas became a very popular name among those who remembered and admired the democracy of pre-war Czechoslovakia, because it was the first name of its founder, President Masaryk.

around him on the table, when we were changing him after the bath, to keep him warm. We, particularly Eva, were very concerned about infections and we all would go near the baby only with a face mask covering our mouth and nose; Eva even insisted on boiling and ironing the diapers for many weeks.

At one point I was very worried about Martin's hearing. He reacted nicely when he could see us and followed our movement, but lay totally undisturbed when I clapped my hands behind him or rattled keys or threw them on the floor; this lasted for quite some time and I was afraid that he might be deaf.

We borrowed a little wooden bed with wheels from some friends. Unfortunately, Martin developed the habit of sleeping in a kneeling position and rocking back and forth in his sleep with the result that the bed rolled all over the hardwood floor of our room, making a lot of noise and interfering with our sleep. In retrospect I don't understand why I didn't do anything about it, such as removing the wheels, but I probably did not dare to do something with a borrowed piece of furniture.

We had no difficulties conceiving our second child, but there was a serious problem carrying him to term. Eva started bleeding very strongly and had to be hospitalized and was essentially immobilized for an extended period of time. When Thomas was born it turned out that one of his feet was folded upwards, touching his shin. We were obviously quite concerned, but several weeks of regular exercise took care of the problem. Unlike Martin, he was quite a nervous child and would react to any sound in the room.

We were very lucky with both our boys, experiencing none of the problems so many other parents complained about, and we had a lot of fun with them. Actually I seem to have offended some people by claiming that we wanted children simply for fun -- it seemed like a frivolous and not dignified enough reason.

Since Eva was working and we lived in my mother-in-law's apartment, Eva's mother took care of the children during the day time and also for most of the summer when she moved with them to the small village of Skryje, some 40 miles from Prague. At first we rented some rooms and later a dilapidated old farmhouse. We visited every weekend on our motorcycle. Martin loved the motorcycle and, when we did not watch him, would lick the dusty red reflecting glass on the rear fender. We used to take the children to the river with Eva holding Thomas on her lap while I had Martin sitting in front of me on the gas tank and the dog, Bibi, running behind us, a mode of transportation not too highly recommended by safety experts; however, we would not take the children on the motorcycle on normal highways.

I have one precious memory of that time. I was going for a walk with Martin, I would guess that he was perhaps five years old, and I was telling him about the moon and the fact that (at that time) nobody knew how the other side of the moon looked. Martin asked "Nobody knows it? Not even you?"⁵⁷

The Academy of Sciences owned an old castle in Bechyne and a small chateau in Liblice and employees of the Academy could get permits for vacation stays there. We were in Bechyne with Martin in 1955 when Eva was pregnant with Thomas; it was just at this time that Martin insisted on riding on her shoulders rather than mine. It was also at the time when we tried to potty train him. He would happily sit on the potty for infinite periods of time just sliding around but refusing to do what was expected of him and then he even refused to eat and got us all terribly worried. The people in the restaurant tried to prepare all kinds of things for him to entice him to break his hunger strike.

At the time, at the age of about 18 months, his vocabulary was very limited. He divided animals into two categories: large ones were "haff," the Czech sound for a dog's bark, and the small one were "pipi," the Czech children's name for birds. Horses, cows and deer were all haffs, birds and cats were pipis. The hallways of the castle were decorated with hunting trophies and Martin would point to every mounted head of a deer and happily yell "haff" until we came to the library, where a bust of Stalin immediately evoked another enthusiastic cry "haff, haff." We quickly took him out of the library.

In the winter of 1956 I took Martin for a short vacation to the hotel Martinovka in the Krkonose mountains. Eva could not take so many days off and so she stayed in Prague with Thomas and joined us only for a few days towards the end of our stay. The weather was miserable and Martin and I had to stay inside for several days. Finally I could not take it any more, and took Martin out for a walk. We followed a trail marked by poles sticking out of the snow some 50 ft apart. I planned a triangular route first uphill and then on another trail downhill towards a third trail which would bring us back to the hotel. The walk up went well, but when we turned in a sharp angle downhill there was a strong wind blowing into our faces and Martin started crying. I covered his face by some plastic and carried him and then suddenly the trail markings disappeared. I became terribly worried -- I did not know whether I should turn back and retrace the entire trip in the deteriorating weather or continue in the hope of finding the markings and the trail again. I thought of what would Eva say if we got lost and if Martin or both of us froze to death there. As we are both here, it must be obvious that I did find the

⁵⁷ This level of confidence in my omniscience did not last too long. On another walk, this time in Bethesda, Maryland, some five years later, Martin asked me a series of questions which I could not answer and had to admit my ignorance. After a while he commented "Daddy, besides chemistry, you really don't know much!"

trail again and we made it back safely, but I experienced some very frightening moments.

I remember another time in Bechyne -- probably in 1958 when Thomas was two and a half years old. We were sitting on the bank of the river and Thomas was holding a twig over the water and "fishing." He leaned over too far and suddenly fell into the river head first and got stuck with his head in the mud -- he did not have a chance to utter a sound. Fortunately, I was sitting right next to him and grabbed his legs which were sticking up and pulled him out. The same year both boys got infected with sores, impetigo, and I remember bandaging them and feeding them yeast. We had a lot of experience with impetigo, it was very common in Terezin and was believed to be the result of vitamin B deficiency; yeast is a rich source of the B vitamin.

Here is another memory from this early childhood period which I found funny. Martin was looking at a box of chocolates which he got the previous evening from some visiting friends, and suddenly turned to me "Daddy, I bet this chocolate won't be here tomorrow!" "How come?" "Our Mommy is a big chocolate eater" (Nase mama je velky zavec na cokoladu). Martin did not care for chocolate that much and it was not that healthy for him anyway.

The Hungarian Uprising

1956 started as an exciting year. First came Khrushchev's "secret speech" exposing Stalin, then a Polish mass strike and the return of Gomulka to power and finally the Hungarian revolution. Things there progressed rapidly. Hungary freed political prisoners, allowed other parties besides the Communist to form and have a real say and finally Hungary even left the Warsaw Pact. We followed this progress with great hopes and immense sympathies. The Communists were very nervous and finally started preparing us for the loss of Hungary. We were elated. Then came the Russian invasion, the revolution was crushed and we were devastated. The Party called a meeting of all members of every section of the Institute, and a Party representative, in our case in the Section of Organic Synthesis it was Jiri Farkas, an otherwise thoroughly decent and nice man although a Party member, read to us a "proposed" version of a cable to be sent to the Hungarian Academy of Science. "We, the members of the Czechoslovak Academy of Sciences, congratulate our colleagues in the Hungarian Academy of Sciences for their victory over the counterrevolution." We were in the small office of the section chief, Jiri Sicher, and were asked to vote. Nobody dared to say a word, nobody dared to vote against, nobody even dared to abstain -- everybody raised a hand voting in favor of sending the cable. I never felt as humiliated as then. I voted, as did all my colleagues, most of whom had the same feelings as I, in favor of something I found deeply offensive and on our part was the height of

cowardice. The Hungarians risked their lives and many were killed, many more imprisoned, persecuted, and the lucky ones, who managed to escape to the West, had to leave everything behind -- and we did nothing, did not even protest and did not even have the guts not to raise our hands. I felt that it was morally the bottom to which one could descend, the ultimate degradation. This became one of the principal reasons why I did not want to live under a regime which had forced me to behave this way and much less did I want our children to grow up in such an environment.

Secret Police

One day, probably in 1956, I was asked to come to the entrance of the Institute. There was a gentleman there who introduced himself as Mr. Schuh and told me that he was from the Ministry of the Interior and that he would like to talk to me. I had no idea what that could be all about nor did I know what the Ministry of the Interior actually meant. I said, yes, of course we can talk. No, he did not want that, he wanted me to come to the Ministry office the next day. I did. Besides "Mr. Schuh" there was another man there and they were quite friendly, they offered me a cup of coffee and started asking me lots and lots of questions which did not make much sense.

They wanted to know all about me -- what I did in the Institute, what I did privately, where I had travelled, how I liked the Institute, whether I wanted to be a professor, whether I wanted to have a car, what I thought about the director of the Institute, Academician Sorm, whether I did not feel unappreciated and overlooked, and dozens and dozens of other questions I can no longer remember. I responded that, no, I did not feel that I was being discriminated against, that I had been treated very well, no, I did not want to be a professor, no, I had no interest in owning a car, everything was just fine. Then they started asking me whether I could help them. I replied that my expertise was so narrowly specialized that it would be most unlikely that they could use it, but that they should ask the presidium of the Academy which would be able to direct them to the most competent expert in any given field. Yes, they knew all that, but they were particularly interested in me because I was such an outstanding scientist -- which was of course nonsense, I was just one of many scientific workers working in one of the many institutes of the Academy. One or the other of the two men left the room from time to time and then returned. The conversation went around in circles and did not lead anywhere and, finally, after several hours they let me go. Because of all the questions they asked about the Institute and about Sorm I reported it to him and I also talked about this strange experience with friends and colleagues. Friends told me that I was a fool, that the "Ministry of the Interior" in fact meant the Secret Police, and that they are obviously trying to recruit me as an informer. The only strange thing was that usually they would have something to

blackmail and to threaten a prospective informer with, and I was not aware of anything of that sort. At that time I heard of a number of people who had been pressured to act as informers. It became clear to me that the Secret Police managed to form an extremely dense network of informers, albeit unwilling ones, throughout the entire country.

They soon called me back for another meeting. This time they started rather aggressively. They claimed that they had told me that our meeting and its content had to be kept absolutely secret and that I violated that secrecy. It was not true -- they had not said anything of this sort during the first meeting. Then they ordered me to prepare and sign a handwritten statement that I understood the secrecy of our meetings and that I was not to divulge them to anybody under any circumstances. After that they calmed down and continued the conversation from the first meeting only with more emphasis on "helping" them in their work. During the first meeting I must have told them that I was in charge of the Institute's library. This time they brought some small clippings from chemical journals and wanted me to identify the journals from which they were taken, obviously a trivial task which I found hard to refuse without telling them clearly and openly that I would have nothing to do with them -- and I was not brave enough to do that. "Mr. Schuh" gave me a code name by which I should call him, but I never used it and never called him.

The next meeting was in a coffee house in the "Army House." I don't remember anything particular about that meeting. Then came another meeting in the building of the Ministry. Suddenly the tone changed dramatically: no pleasantries, no coffee, just a glass of water after some time. "We had so much confidence in you and you have disappointed us. We know everything. Confess!!" I had no idea what I should confess to. Although there was no threat of physical violence, the environment was very threatening and intimidating, and I was scared. I eventually convinced them -- but it took a very long time -- that I really did not know what crime I had committed and what I should confess to. Finally, they pulled out an envelope which looked as if it had been rolled over by a muddy wheel of a cart and then showed me a letter I had written to my cousin's husband and the microfilm which had been enclosed with it. The letter was not damaged and showed no sign of having been run over by a wheel.

The origin of the letter was the following: My cousin's husband, Dr. Otto Saxl, a pediatrician, was director of the Childrens' Hospital in Brno and had many years earlier earned the title of "Docent," meaning that he was qualified and entitled to teach at a university. He was very interested in becoming a professor. We visited him and my cousin Hedda one summer, and he asked me whether I could get him a copy of a draft of a new law regulating the awarding of academic ranks and positions. This draft was just being circulated at universities for "comments and

inputs,” an obviously totally pro forma activity. Saxl’s relations with the Brno Medical School were not entirely friendly and so he turned to me. I promised that I would try to get it. Since I was no longer at the university myself, I did not have direct access to the document, but I asked my friend Jiri Mostecky if he could get it for me. He did, but I had to return it soon. So I asked the Institute’s photographer to copy the document for me on a microfilm -- this was years before xerox. I returned the original to Mostecky and sent the microfilm to my cousin in Brno. Some time after that my uncle Otto Robicek visited our relatives in Brno and when he came back I asked him whether Saxl got the microfilm. He did not. So I repeated the procedure and sent it to him again and this time it arrived.

What the Secret Police had was my first letter and the microfilm. They claimed that they got it because “it was damaged in the mail and an alert postal clerk thought that the content was suspicious and sent it to us.” In reality Otto Saxl’s mail was being checked because he had been in Palestine during the war and moreover he joined the Czechoslovak Army in exile and fought on the Allied side against Germany. Anybody who had been in the West was suspect because he could have been infected with wrong ideas about freedom and democracy and was therefore dangerous. It was general knowledge that they censored international mail, but it did not occur to me that they would censor domestic mail as well. They also produced a letter from the Ministry of Education informing them that, although the document was not marked “Secret,” it was still of a “confidential nature.” Actually, I was glad to receive this information, because had they told me that the document was stamped “Top Secret” I would have believed it, too.

They wanted to know from whom I got the document and I have to admit that I told them; later I was relieved to know that it had no ill effects on Mostecky.⁵⁸ Then they told me that I had committed a crime and they would have to turn the case over to the State Prosecutor, unless I could persuade them of my devotion and loyalty to the regime: the only way I could do that would be to work for them. They wrote out a long report on the case and brought it to me to sign and informed me of my right to add something in my defense. I said “I would just note that I never would have sent the letter by mail if I had the slightest suspicion that it was not legal,” whereupon they reacted in a very offended and threatening way: ”Comrade Engineer, are you suggesting that you don’t trust the confidentiality of our mail which is guaranteed by our constitution?” I was so flabbergasted by the cynicism of that response that I waived my right to add

⁵⁸ Mostecky later became Rector of the School of Chemistry. He was a Social Democrat who did not refuse membership in the Communist party when the Social Democratic party was abolished and its members automatically became members of the Communist Party after the Communist take-over in 1948; he used his party membership to help many other people. While he was a member of the Party, he was certainly not a Communist. We were and remained good friends, and we visit him when we are in the Czech Republic.

anything and signed.

I did not accept the invitation to work for them in order to avoid prosecution, but also did not reject it explicitly -- I simply did not say anything and they immediately gave me my first task: to write all I knew about Jiri Mostecky.

At the next meeting I told them that I had not written anything about Mostecky, that I couldn't do it, that I didn't think I had done anything illegal, but if I did I was willing to bear the consequences. If they thought that they had to turn me over to the State Prosecutor, then they would have to do it. They dismissed me with the words "You will hear from us," but fortunately I never did. Why I managed to get away with my refusal to work for them I don't know. Moreover, I was rather surprised when, not so much later, I got permission for a study trip to England.

This experience was another major factor in my desire to leave the "Communist paradise" with my family.

Visit to England

In about 1957 Professor Sorm decided to organize a conference of chemists from the "Socialist block countries" with the idea that he could persuade them to coordinate their research efforts and thus avoid duplication. Three young scientific workers, Jiri Farkas, Milos Kraus, and I were charged with the responsibility for organizing the meeting. The conference was to be held in a small chateau belonging to the Academy of Sciences in Liblice near Prague. We had equipment for simultaneous translations and recruited and tested qualified interpreters. Finally we had a sort of dress rehearsal in Liblice and at that occasion all the bosses were present -- Academician Sorm, the section leaders of the Institute and, as it turned out -- most fortunately for me -- also Academician Wichterle.⁵⁹ Wichterle had a bad cold and decided to treat it with hot wine and the other prominents joined him to make the cure more effective. They were sitting at a table drinking and we young subordinates were politely standing around them and listening to the conversation.⁶⁰ Sorm got into a good mood and started bragging, that thanks to him Czechoslovak chemistry was now so well regarded in the world that he could send any of his people wherever he wanted. Wichterle

⁵⁹ The most prominent of the professors, scientists and scholars were appointed to membership in the Czechoslovak Academy of Science; the first set of academicians was selected relatively fairly based on scientific and scholarly merit with only moderate emphasis on politics and additional members were elected by the membership. That changed later, particularly after 1968, and Academy membership became much more politically determined.

⁶⁰ Of course, it did not occur to Sorm to invite us to join in, he -- the prominent exponent of Communism -- had a very developed sense of rank and status.

reacted quickly and took him up on this statement by asking “Could you send Rocek to work with Ingold⁶¹?” Sorm answered yes, of course he could.

Wichterle’s question constituted a critical event and turning point in our lives. Several days later, back in Prague, I approached Academician Sorm and asked whether I could indeed write to Ingold and ask for his permission to work for a short time in his department; Sorm gave his consent. I wrote to Ingold with Jiri Sicher’s help, and received a positive response and the Institute started the process of applying for a visa and exit permit for me. I started taking English lessons to improve my very limited knowledge of the language. It turned out that there was a problem with the visa, not with the British visa⁶² but the Czechoslovak exit visa. From what I heard it was at first refused, but then Sorm guaranteed my return and it was finally granted after considerable delays and my trip materialized just before Christmas 1957.

I was incredibly excited. My modest per diem support was for a six week stay. I took the first flight in my life on a British Viscount airplane which was practically empty. The only other passengers were a very distinguished looking English gentleman and his wife. The man was very nice and explained and demonstrated to me the complex British currency system -- this was before Britain went decimal -- and provided me with other useful information. I thought that he must have been a nobleman, but then it turned out that he was the chauffeur at the embassy. I remember being a little nervous being in the airplane so far above ground, but was greatly reassured when I noticed the RR, Rolls Royce, symbol on the plane’s engines. I also clearly remember my first view of London from the air -- a network of yellow lines formed by sodium street lights; at first I had no idea what they were and could not figure it out.

Somebody at the Academy Institute gave me an address of an elderly Czech couple from whom I rented a room with breakfast for a very modest price, I believe that it was 10 shilling and 8 pence per day, while my per diem was, I think, three pounds. I tried to spend as little as possible on food to save for some of the other marvelous things available in London, particularly the fantastic Terrylene (polyester) clothes and drip-dry shirts. Sometimes I ate just a 3p chocolate bar from a vending machine at the underground (“tube”) station for dinner, sometimes I splurged on a 6 pence bar, and other times I ate some bread and cheese. However, while I lived very thriftily, I certainly did not starve -- I ate

61 Christopher Ingold at University College, London, later Sir Christopher, was the founder of modern mechanistic organic chemistry.

62 To get the British visa I had to visit the British consulate in Prague. From there I took the street car back to the lab. I did not notice anybody -- I was too excited -- but shortly after I returned to the Institute I was told that a secret policeman followed me all the way and then inquired who I was.

good lunches at the college cafeteria and compensated for the meager dinners when I was invited by my wealthy cousins. The room which I rented had a gas heater which had to be fed with coins and although it was quite cold in December and January, I never dreamed of using it and rather put on more clothes when I went to bed. In this way I was able to save enough money for presents for my family and for some clothes for myself: my first drip-dry shirts, Terrydene pants and even two suits for myself (Terrydene, at about £10 each); neither polyester nor drip-dry materials existed in Czechoslovakia at that time. I also saved enough to extend my stay by a week and to do some traveling.

Because of the delay with the exit permit, I arrived at the wrong time -- everybody was just leaving for the Christmas vacation. Professor Ingold assigned me to his close co-worker, Clifford (Bunny) Bunton who assigned me space in one of his labs and let me choose a project. I decided that I wanted to learn a technique I had only read about, dilatometry -- measuring the rate of a reaction by carefully monitoring the change in volume. It was a very bad choice: I selected a technique which was soon thereafter completely forgotten and replaced by various spectroscopic techniques, but I worked diligently with my thermostat and dilatometer and got some usable results, and Bunton generously included my name on two of his publications. After a few days I was left alone in the lab with my only occasional companion being the custodian, who came to check whether everything was all right and to make sure that the lab had not been set on fire. After about two weeks the lab filled up again, Bunton and the students were back from their vacations and I had more of a chance to practise my very limited English. It came as quite a shock to me that neither Ingold nor Bunton spoke any German; I had always thought that, with the dominant role of German chemistry before WWII, no chemist could exist without knowledge of the German language. But I gradually managed to communicate in English and even to understand it, which was harder. I went to several lectures and was immensely impressed by Professor Ingold's lecture, an impressive performance of re-creating in front of the class, with his eyes closed in deep thought, the mental process which led him to classify reactions according to their mechanism. It was without doubt one of the greatest classroom lectures I ever heard.

I found everybody at University College incredibly friendly and helpful, from the custodian and the students up to Professor Ingold and his wife. Bunton invited me several times to his home -- the first time I was in a home which was really heated by a fireplace with coal -- and he took care of me in almost every way. He took me to a session of the parliament and to Hampton Court. I also met and had interesting discussions with most of the other faculty members; John Ridd invited me to his home.

I probably did not learn a great deal of new chemistry during my stay there, but I

enjoyed the time immensely and it had an enormous effect on me and on our entire future life. I used my free time to visit as many places in London as I could -- museums, markets, the docks, the courts, and of course chemists at other universities, particularly those working on oxidation reactions, such as Hickinbottom at Queen Mary College and Waters at Oxford; Waters treated me to my first glass of English cider. I met with Professor Barton at Imperial College and made trips to Cambridge and even to Glasgow⁶³ and Edinburgh in Scotland where I visited not only the universities but also made a pilgrimage to Loch Lomond. Invariably I had wonderful receptions from extremely friendly people.

I also immediately made contacts with two of my cousins on Mother's side, Hella and Susie nee Löbl. Hella, who is five years older than I, was married to a wealthy and very successful Englishman, Derrick Kleeman. Susie, born the same year as I, was married to Stanley Lind; the Linds were not rich, but lived very comfortably. Both families were unbelievably nice to me and we quickly re-established close family ties. I was a frequent guest at their homes, I met their children, and they sent gifts to our children. I talked very openly about the situation in Czechoslovakia with them, but I found that I simply could not do it with an open door -- I always had to get up and close it, even though we were sitting in a private apartment with nobody present; it was a deeply ingrained habit that had developed into an obsession.

I also met with another relative, Liesl Flusser, a daughter of my late cousin Elsa Flusser. Liesl and her twin sister Susie got out of Czechoslovakia in 1939 with one of Mr. Winton's childrens' transports. They were eleven years old at the time. Their parents did not get out and were killed at Auschwitz. The meeting was a bit of a disappointment. Liesl, a nurse, was not very interested in talking and took me to a movie and that was all. I also met Beda Eisler, the brother of my technician and friend Karel Eisler. The only visit I did not enjoy was with an English chemist who was a Communist and who tried to convince me how fortunate I was to live in a Communist country -- and of course I did not dare to say a word. I also looked up Felix Pollak with whom I shared a room for a few months in 1945 when Arnost Reiser invited both of us to stay with him; the three of us shared one room of Arnost's two room apartment. By this time he was a chemist working for Kodak and married to Olga, a very nice woman who took me shopping. I remember how overwhelmed I was seeing the abundance of fruit in the market at the time when in Prague one had to stand in line to get a few oranges. She also helped me shop for apparel. I recall how Felix showed me slides from a trip to Switzerland and how I felt that I will never be able to see anything like that and was a bit annoyed that he was sort of showing off.

⁶³ When I was shown the library of the Glasgow university I made a faux pas: I said to the librarian something about this being my first stay in England, but was immediately sternly reminded that I was in Scotland, not England.

At the time I came to England I was very naive. I knew that the Communists were lying and that almost everything they claimed about the situation in Czechoslovakia was untrue and changed practically from day to day with the changing needs of the Party.⁶⁴ However, since I had no direct information about life outside of the country, I did somehow believe their claims that everybody under capitalism was terribly exploited and that such improvements as general access to medical care and to higher education were possible only under communism. So I sort of believed that we had to suffer all the deprivation of personal liberty in order to provide the working class with these new opportunities. When I came to England I was shocked to discover that the British Public Health system was better than ours and that higher education was practically available to everybody and that the British at the same time enjoyed full freedom, freedom of speech, freedom of the press, freedom of travel, and had no reason to be afraid of the secret police. I visited “Speakers’ Corner” at Hyde Park and listened to all kinds of orators, some crazy, some expounding all sorts of political ideas. I noticed that there was a policeman there and I approached him and asked him why he was there and whether there were things people were not allowed to say. His response was that the only restriction was that “You are not allowed to insult the Queen.” In addition to full freedom and real democracy, I saw that materially people also lived in every respect far better than in the “Communist Paradise.”

My stay in England changed my attitude completely. No longer was I willing to let myself and my family suffer “for the good of the workers,” no longer did I believe any of the anti-western propaganda, and my supreme desire was to leave Czechoslovakia and to bring my family to the West. I did not want our children to have to grow up in a system where they would have to learn to lie, to suppress any independent thought and just to repeat what the system expected of them on any given day. I begged my cousins and their husbands to see whether they could help us get out and I had some crazy ideas how to do it. I wondered about getting us out with false passports, or getting us out with a boat if we managed to get to a seashore in Yugoslavia, or perhaps even landing a plane somewhere near the border and flying us out of the country. They were too sensible to be receptive to any of these ideas. Finally I had to return. I am not an emotional person and I have cried very rarely in my whole life. But when I was on the plane back to Prague I went

⁶⁴ A particularly hilarious example was the situation of Yugoslavia and Tito, who at first was a great hero, a victorious Communist fighter against Germany. Then when he dared to disobey Stalin he suddenly became the “bloody dog Tito,” a stance which was later moderated a bit and we jokingly called him “the not-so-bloody not-quite-dog.” The official assessment of Tito fluctuated so rapidly that it caused serious concern to students taking the Marxism-Leninism exam, and they were relieved when one day they found a sign on the door of the Department of Marxism-Leninism “There will be no questions about Yugoslavia on the exam.”

to the toilet and wept bitterly -- I was leaving a free country and returning to the prison named Czechoslovak Socialist Republic with very little prospect of ever getting out.

Back in Czechoslovakia

My visit to England had changed my life. From that moment on I thought all the time about a way to escape; Eva was very positive about it and I would have never attempted it without her full, courageous and enthusiastic support in spite of the obvious dangers. We shared our views with our best friends, Arnost and Ruth Reiser, and they too were ready to try, with Ruth being particularly keen.

Not too long after my return in February, 1958, I got an invitation to attend a conference on the mechanism of oxidation reactions organized by Professor Hickinbottom of Queen Mary College in London and I got permission to attend it. I believe that the conference was held probably in the spring of 1959. We conferred with the Reisers and they gave me the name and address of an old family friend, Nelly Palache, a retired actress. This time I took with me passport photographs of all the adults and children, still with the hope that one could somehow get false passports.

Second visit to England

The conference was not large and only a very few foreigners were invited. There was one Russian, whose name I don't remember, and who was always accompanied by somebody who was obviously watching him. The Russian and I were the only participants from the Communist bloc countries. Then there were two Americans, Harvard professor Frank H. Westheimer and University of Washington professor Kenneth Wiberg, both of whom had done important work on chromic acid oxidations, work with which I was intimately acquainted. Frank Westheimer was really the father of mechanistic chromic acid oxidation chemistry, and his Chemical Reviews article on the subject was the starting point for anybody working in the field; I don't think I have ever read another review article which provided such a rational analysis and deep insight in its subject. However, I have found some facts which seemed to put certain aspects for the generally accepted "Westheimer mechanism" in question and I had published a communication proposing an alternate mechanism in the British journal *Science & Industry*. I don't recall any other foreign participants at the conference.

This time I went as an official guest of the conference and as such had a room in the elegant Cumberland Hotel next to the Marble Arch. As soon as I arrived I found a message from Frank Westheimer to come to see him in his room in the same hotel. I knocked at the door and a young man opened and introduced

himself: "I am Frank Westheimer." I was so surprised that a famous professor could be so young and blurted out "I thought you were much older," whereupon Frank replied "Yes, I am." Frank was born 1912, so he would have been 47 years old at that time.⁶⁵ Then we had a long discussion -- I asked all kinds of questions about America. I knew from the Communist press how exploited professors in America were, particularly at private universities whose rich owners, I was lead to assume, lived somewhere in grandiose villas while the poor professors had to supplement their meager salaries by working as waiters at night. I remember asking him whether he had a car and when he said he did I asked "of course, it is a second hand car, isn't it?" whereupon Frank told me my first American joke: "Q.: What is a pedestrian? A.: A man with two cars, a wife and a daughter" I also asked about anti-Semitism in America, about whether he ever had a Negro invited to his house and many other questions. Frank later told me how amused he was by my interrogation. In any case I found out that the "terrible" capitalist system was very different than what we were lead to believe even after we discounted 90% of what we were told.

I also spent a lot of time with Ken Wiberg. We went together to Oxford where we visited the grand old man of oxidation reaction and of free radical chemistry, W. A. Waters. Ken told me how to construct my own gas chromatograph, which I later did when I returned to Prague. He invited me to come to work with him at the University of Washington.

Of course I visited my cousins again. They were as nice as could be but not crazy enough to get involved in some harebrained rescue mission. I also visited the Reisers' friend, Nelly Palache, who was most enthusiastic about our plans to escape and was much more willing than my cousins to work on some crazy scheme; I left the photographs and personal data with her.

The day we visited Oxford with Ken Wiberg we returned early in the evening and I did not feel like wasting my time in my beloved London by going to bed early and set out for a walk and walked all the way to the Houses of Parliament. By the time I got there it was past midnight and I had a sudden pressing problem. All the public bathrooms were in the underground stations and they were closed and I was in urgent need of one. Finally, in utter despair and in fear that I would be caught by a policemen and arrested, I found some stairs down to the Thames and enriched its waters. On the way back I walked through the famed Soho district where I had expected to witness the excesses of capitalist decadence and immorality but to my surprise found it utterly asleep. I entered a bar and drank a glass of something non-alcoholic. There was just one couple there, nothing else going on. Finally, on

⁶⁵ The scene repeated itself in 1981 at Thomas' wedding. When the father of Martin's friend, a patent lawyer with a degree in chemistry, was introduced to Frank Westheimer he also expressed his surprise at Frank's young age and received exactly the same response as I did 22 year earlier.

the street I was approached by a girl asking me whether “I was interested in business,” a question she had to repeat before I got the meaning and politely refused. I returned to the hotel at about 2 AM and saw a group of women waiting for a bus at the corner of Hyde Park, until it occurred to me that there were no busses at that time and that they must have been waiting for something else. So much for my wild adventurous night life in London.

On the professional side, I thought that my lecture, which had been polished and rehearsed a dozen times, went well. I was most impressed by Westheimer’s and also Wiberg’s lectures and thought that they were a class above all the other lectures I heard.

Sometime during my stay in England I discovered that I had lost a little notebook with all the addresses of my relatives and friends in England and generally in the West. It must have slipped out of my pocket perhaps during a subway ride. The loss of the addresses did not bother me - I had already made all the contacts - but I was petrified that somebody would find it and try to mail it to me or perhaps send it to the Czechoslovak embassy thinking that he or she was being kind and responsible and doing me a favor. As I had never admitted to the Czechoslovak authorities that I had any relatives or friends in the West, this could have had dire consequences, at the very least some very unpleasant secret police interrogations, quite possibly a suspicion and accusation of secret contacts and espionage and quite likely loss of the job (a position at the Academy of Sciences was certainly considered a privileged position which should be held by loyal and trustworthy citizens) and with it perhaps an assignment to some chemical plant outside of Prague. The loss of the notebook kept me very worried for quite some time, but fortunately for me whoever found it - perhaps the cleaning crew of the subway - probably threw it into the trash.

Trip to Poland

After I came back we began thinking even more seriously about ways to get out. A colleague from the Academy, Cerny, the group leader of the steroid team, owned a car and invited us to join him, his wife and young daughter on a trip to Poland in the summer of 1959. We gladly and gratefully accepted because we were eager to find out whether it might be easier to escape from Poland than from Czechoslovakia. We did not have passports or visa, we just got permission for a “small border contact” allowing us to go to the tourist center Zakopane on the Polish side of the Tatra mountains, but not further into Poland. It was an interesting experience. Poland was totally different from Czechoslovakia. At the crossing the Polish border guard, instead of inspecting the content of our car, invited us to the station and gave us a lecture about how the Russians murdered

the Polish officers at Katyn.⁶⁶ He assured us that the Russians would be defeated and generously promised us the return of the “Podkarpadska Rus” (Subcarpathian Ukraine), which the Soviet Union annexed in 1945. He showed no fear that we might denounce him, although he could have been very easily identified as the guard who was on duty at the given crossing at that time. In those days nobody in Czechoslovakia would have dared to say a word against the Soviets outside of the closest circle of intimate friends. When we arrived in Poland and had a little snack at a restaurant, we started talking to the man who shared our table and asked him what he was doing. He quite openly said he was a “speculant,” a black market operator, an admission which in the Czechoslovakia would have landed him immediately in jail. He also wanted to know what we had to sell; he was interested in plastic raincoats or shoes.⁶⁷

We were surprised to find that many roads had a speed limit of 5 km (3 miles)/hour and that there were about as many horse or oxen driven wagons as automobiles. The main road was new and had a nice concrete surface, but all side roads were dirt roads covered with mud. In Zakopane we set up our tent in a park in the middle of the town; there were already many other campers there, but no sanitary facilities except a few trees at the edge of the park and that area was clearly heavily used. The town is beautifully located under the Tatra mountains and we had several nice hikes. We took a cable car to the top of one of the mountains; with us in the gondola was a young Polish woman who was scared to death, she kept looking down and repeated the words “death” in Polish over and over.

Being so close to the ancient city of Crakow, we tried to visit it, although we knew that we were not supposed to. We had bad luck: we were stopped by the police and they demanded to see our identity cards. I was petrified, because being reported as illegally traveling more deeply into Poland would make it quite unlikely that we would be permitted any travel outside the country in the future. It would mean a mortal blow to any hopes for escaping. Eva and I sat frozen in the back of the car; we did not move and did not respond to the order to hand the policeman our ID cards. We were extremely fortunate: the policeman somehow did not notice us and was satisfied by having the ID’s of the driver, our friend

⁶⁶ This was a place where large mass graves of Polish officers were discovered still during WWII by the Germans. Under the Communist rule the official version was that the mass murder was committed by the Germans and not by the Soviets, but this was a crime the Nazis were in fact not responsible for.

⁶⁷ We were told a joke which characterized the difference between the two Communist countries well. Two dogs meet at the Polish-Czechoslovak border running in opposite directions. The Czech dog asks the Polish dog where he was running.”To Prague.” “Why?” “I am hungry.” Then the Polish dog asked the same questions and the Czech dog answers “I am running to Warsaw, I want to bark.”

Cerny, and his wife and was busy writing down their names. We were enormously relieved when he then ordered us to turn around and return to Zakopane without remembering that he did not get the ID's of all occupants of the car. I can still feel the fear and panic of that situation when we saw our entire plans for our future going down the drain. Later, after we were assured that nobody checks passengers on the busses, we took a bus and did visit Crakow, its castle and cathedral.

Visiting the cathedral was a novel experience for us. It was full of worshipers -- people of all ages; in Bohemia we were used to seeing only tourists and a few old people, mostly old women, in the churches. We also had a little incident while waiting to enter the cathedral: a priest noticed that the little daughter of our friends -- she was probably five or six year old -- was eating. He got very indignant and berated her mother how she could permit such a profane activity while waiting to enter the cathedral.

Otherwise the trip was a failure -- we did not find out anything about escape possibilities via Poland.

ESCAPE

Sometime in the fall of 1959 I talked to the technician from the next-door lab, a young girl who just returned from a summer vacation on the Baltic Sea in East Germany. She told me that she had been on a German ship going from Sassnitz, on the peninsula Rügen, to the Swedish harbor of Trelleborg and that the passengers were allowed to visit the Swedish harbor. I found that truly amazing and supremely important if indeed true. She said she did not join the Germans visiting Trelleborg, because they would have stamped her ID and that could have gotten her into trouble back in Prague. I kept talking to her again and again trying to get more information but without arousing suspicion that this was the particular point I was interested in, but I did not find out anything more. I could not quite believe the story, but she kept repeating and confirming it. If it were true, it would offer a wonderful escape route and obviously I would not mind having my ID stamped. I shared the information with the Reisers and we started looking for a possibility of going to East Germany. The girl also told me that there were American ships anchored waiting to enter the Polish port of Stettin (Szczecin) and that they got in rowboats so close to them that the seamen threw them oranges.

Early in 1960 we got our car, for which we had waited three years and for which we had -- at the time of applying -- deposited money in a bank account which we were not allowed to touch without voiding our car application. We had no choice in the make or color of the car but we were very happy with our grey East German four-door Wartburg, with a three cylinder two-cycle engine.

One problem was that that Eva had a driver's license good only for a motorcycle, but not for a car and she failed the first drivers' test she took. Only authorized state run driving schools could legally teach driving -- there were no learners' permits -- and the lessons were very expensive. So one evening I took her to what I thought was a very quiet and safe area and tried to teach her parallel parking, which had caused her a problem in the last test. I made just one little mistake: I forgot that the nice quiet street I had selected in the Prague suburb of Strasnice was close to the radio transmitter of Prague's second radio station. As Eva was practicing parking, suddenly there appeared a police motorcycle with a sidecar coming from the opposite direction and stopped just in front of us. I froze, but Eva had much more presence of mind and said "let's quickly change places," because she was of course illegally in the driver's seat. We tried, but succeeded only half way: When the policeman came she was just on my lap. The policeman told us "we were watching you driving around the radio transmitter, what are you doing here?" But then he saw Eva on my lap and began suspecting that maybe we just had a love affair. He demanded our ID's but did not believe that Eva was really my wife and started testing her. "What are the names of your children? When were they born?" (All this information was in the ID.) Obviously

she passed. Then he suspected we might have been drunk, but it was clear we were not. Again he was becoming more suspicious with respect to that radio transmitter and Eva understood the danger and quickly said "Officer, I have to make a confession: I flunked the drivers' test and my husband was teaching me how to drive." It dawned on him "You were driving" and Eva responded totally calmly and naively "But officer, that is not allowed." I sat through the whole exchange in frozen stupor totally unable to do or say anything. The penalty for letting an unauthorized person drive was loss of one's driver's license and that would have meant that we would have to give up any hope for an escape using the car. Whether the policeman really believed Eva or not we don't know, but in any case he let us drive home, although he followed us almost the whole way. I vowed that never again would I try to be Eva's driving instructor, but she passed the test on the next try without any help from me.

We found that the government travel agency, Cedok, was offering a trip to East Germany by car, and we and the Reisers immediately registered for it and put down a hefty deposit. Of course we would not know for a long time whether we got in, so we also registered for another trip to Poland in spite of our unsuccessful exploration from the previous summer -- and we had to put down another deposit. Now we had to establish a good record. Eva and I became members of the automobile branch of the "Svaz pro spolupraci s armadou," the Association for Cooperation with the Army, and we had to exhibit some activities. We went to incredibly boring meetings and I volunteered to be a judge on some sort of a kids' competition. In the meantime Eva's mother diligently decorated windows at prescribed Communist holidays. We went of course to the First of May (Labor Day) parades and did whatever we could to establish a record as good loyal citizens.

We got through the first step and got into one of the groups for the East German trip. However, when we went to our first meeting, the group's leader gave a small welcoming speech, expressing his hope that all of us present would actually go together to Germany. He warned the group however, that "there are some people here who want to go with their whole families and one couple -- ha, ha, ha, -- would even like to take the grandmother along!!!" He advised us to leave the children behind (not even to mention grandmother), because it would be most unlikely that an entire family would be allowed to leave the country together. We were depressed, but since we were not interested in visiting East Germany, but only in an escape, we did nothing and waited. Each of us needed recommendations from our place of work and the trade union. The head of my department at the Institute of Organic Chemistry of the Academy of Sciences, Jiri Sicher, knew me too well not to be suspicious, but he gave me the recommendation anyway. Since I was a reserve officer, I also needed permission from the army. Because my mother-in-law did not work, she needed to secure a recommendation from the

“Ulicni vybor,” the “Street Committee.” Eva got her recommendation from her place of employment, The Research Institute for Pharmacy and Biochemistry, without any problems, though her lab partner and good friend upon hearing that the children and the grandmother were to go with us said: “I can see it now: you are all going to run away and I am going to end up with a Communist in the lab.” Perhaps in order to prevent any interventions and appeals, the decision on the issuance of the exit visa was announced only about one to three days before departure and it came separately for each of us. I think that my mother-in-law’s permit came first, but we all got them just on time for the departure date. However not all of the Reisers got their permits; they could not go and we had to leave Prague without them.

During this entire time Eva was absolutely supportive and enthusiastic and did not show any fear even though she was as aware as I of the seriousness of the risk. Had we been caught we would not only have ended up in jail for a long time, but the children would have most likely been taken away and been indoctrinated and “educated” in some governmental institution. In retrospect I am surprised that we were willing to risk all that, and even more that Eva never voiced the slightest concern or opposition. I certainly would never have attempted the escape if I had not had her totally wholehearted support and misplaced trust.

The last days before our departure we destroyed all records that could have implicated other people as having been friends of traitors. We started burning correspondence and all kinds of papers with names or addresses on them under the kettle in the laundry room,⁶⁸ but it seemed too much and we were worried that it might become suspicious, so we then took the remaining papers and walked around the nearby Vaclavske namesti (Wenceslaus square) and threw the torn pieces into various trash containers. We also had to consider the not unlikely possibility that we would be caught. In order to have at least some things to put on when we would have gotten out of prison, we put a few essentials into a suitcase and deposited it in a luggage storage room at the main railroad station. It was a curious selection of things: my wedding suit, my electric shaver, which I had gotten from my cousin’s husband in England and treasured, an old and tattered leather briefcase I somehow still had from my high school days (I don’t remember who saved it for me during the war), and not much more on my side -- I don’t remember what Eva put in the suitcase for herself. We gave the deposit slip to

⁶⁸ Each house had a laundry room with a large coal fired kettle for boiling the laundry and large wooden tubs for washing. Its use rotated among the families living in the house; each family had its “wash day.”

Helena Eisler⁶⁹ and we also gave her our jewels, which came mostly from Eva's family and particularly from her uncle Vilem Werner, a goldsmith who had perished with his entire family. Helena was the only person whom we told our plans. A few days before we left I also brought my typewriter to my graduate student, Frank (Frantisek) Mares.⁷⁰ He was quite surprised by my insistence that he keep it until we return. Otherwise we did not remove anything from the apartment -- we thought that if we were caught we could claim that it happened on the spur of the moment and that is was not premeditated; I don't know whether it would have made any difference. Also, if we had visibly removed things, the police could have found out who was hiding them for us and we would have thus seriously endangered other people; every citizen had the responsibility to report anybody suspected of trying to leave the country illegally. We also took a small suitcase of family photographs to aunt Matylda, the 93-year old mother-in-law of my late uncle Otto and asked her to keep it while we were on vacation. Another part of the preparation was that I sent a set of my reprints and a microfilm of Frank Mares' thesis to Ken Wiberg at the University of Washington.

We drove in a convoy -- I think we were thirteen cars -- and we spent the first night in a small hotel on the Czechoslovak side of the Czechoslovak-East German border. We had to leave Prague without the Reisers, because they did not have their exit permits, but then they suddenly appeared: they had gotten their permits after all and caught up with us.

In the morning we were ready to cross the border. At the border the cars were subject to a fairly thorough inspection up to the time when a border guard ordered Ruth Reiser to unpack a suspicious looking package. She did and produced a potty for her four-year old son Pavel (Paul). There was a lot of laughter and the border guard was embarrassed and speedily concluded the inspection.

⁶⁹ We were very close to Helena. She was the daughter of my cousin Fritz (Bedrich) Treulich, who at the time lived in Sokolov in northwestern Bohemia near the East German border where he was working for a coal mine as engineer. When Helena studied at the university she lived with us for a few years around that time when Martin was born; she had one of our three rooms. She and Martin were very fond of each other. Martin called her "Nena" and that was one of the first words he learned, about the same time he learned to say "Mama" and "Tata." She lived with us until the time Thomas was born and we needed more space. Helena was very pretty but very shy. One day Eva decided that she should meet my laboratory technician, Karel Eisler, and invited Karel, his parents (Karel's father had just gotten out of jail where he had been because he had somehow been connected with the Slansky wing of the party), Helena and her sister Eva. Helena and Karel got married in the spring of 1960 and we drove them from the wedding ceremony in our new car. Helena later managed to send us all the jewels and most of the other things we left there. I could thus wear my wedding suit for the celebration of our golden wedding and Eva could give a diamond ring to each of our daughters-in-law and still keep one for herself.

⁷⁰ Typewriters were not that common at that time; ours came from Eva's father's office.

Dresden

Our first stop was in Dresden. We had written earlier to Christa Meyer, an East German chemist whom we had met a couple of times during her visits to Prague -- the first time when she brought me a set of reprints from her professor who was working on reactions of hydrocarbons and whose results had some relevance to our work on the oxidation of the same compounds. We liked her and had a number of interesting and quite emotional conversations -- such as when she described her memories of the bombing of Dresden -- and she repeatedly invited us to visit her and her husband in Germany and offered us assistance. Specifically, she offered to give us German Marks that we could later repay in Czechoslovak Crowns during her future visit to Prague. Normally the amount one could legally exchange during trips even to Communist countries was quite limited and private exchanges were illegal, though they would have been difficult to trace. When we wrote to her that we would be in Dresden she was very enthusiastic and, as we found out later, repeated her offer to lend us some German money in a card written to Eva and addressed to the Research Institute of Pharmacy where Eva worked. Because trading money was illegal, she offered to "help in whatever way we can." The card however arrived only after we had left Prague and after our escape the above phrase assumed -- for the Meyers -- a much more dangerous meaning when it got into the hands of the secret police, as it certainly did.

Christa met us in the hotel where we were staying and introduced us to her husband, Rudolf Meyer, a physicist. They were eager to show us Dresden and to take us to the famous art gallery. In Czechoslovakia we were most careful not to mention our hopes for escape to anybody except Helena Eisler, and Eva was shocked when I suddenly and without any prior consultation with her told the Meyers directly: "We are not really interested in seeing Dresden or any art treasures, we have only one interest and that is to get out. Can you help us?" We had never met Rudolf before and had no idea about his views -- he could have been a Communist for all we knew -- and we put ourselves completely in their hands. They were shocked. I asked them about the possibility of getting into Berlin -- that was a year before the infamous Berlin Wall⁷¹ was built -- and about the visit to Trelleborg I had heard about from my friend's technician. They knew nothing about the latter, and as for getting into Berlin, one needed German IDs. But Rudolf promised that he would make inquiries and meet us again in Potsdam, where our convoy was supposed to arrive in about three days. He didn't not know Potsdam, but remembered the name of a church, "Garnisonenkirche"

⁷¹ In 1961 the Communist erected a high wall around the entire Soviet sector of Berlin to stop the all too frequent escapes by East Germans into the Western sector. The thousands of people fleeing the "Communist paradise" to be exploited by the western capitalists became an embarrassment to the Communist government they could no longer tolerate. The Wall finally came down in 1989 with the collapse of Communism.

(Garrison church), because Hitler once gave a speech there. He suggested that we meet there; since we did not know exactly what time of day we would be able to get there, we agreed to try every hour on the hour.

Potsdam

We continued our tour through Germany. I have just a vague recollection of being in a picturesque rural place with lots of water where we were taken on a boat punting through shallow canals. A couple days later we arrived in Potsdam and went to the place where the Potsdam Conference between Churchill, Truman, and Stalin took place at the end of WWII. The whole group went to the chateau Sans-Souci, but we, of course, were not interested in it but wanted to cut loose from the group and meet Rudolf Meyer at the Garnisonenkirche. We started claiming that our poor children were deadly tired and we had to get them to the hotel. The children were not very cooperative -- instead of looking tired they bounced around happily, but we still managed to pester the tour leader long enough that finally, to get rid of us, he let us leave the group and take the children and Eva's mother to the hotel. We then started looking for our meeting place. It turned out that it was not all that simple. Every person we asked seemed to be new to Potsdam after the war and nobody knew of the Garnisonenkirche. It took us a long time until we finally found somebody who remembered that indeed there had been such a church, but it had been completely destroyed in an air raid and then directed us to an empty plaza with a heap of stones where the church used to be.

We waited for almost an hour when we suddenly saw several cars approaching us, stopping and a number of men jumping out and coming towards us. Our first thought was that Dr. Meyer turned us in and that the secret police came to arrest us. But no, it turned out that these were all Rudolf's friends whom he had asked to advise us. So we held a brief meeting, the result of which was not at all promising. They said that it was impossible to get to Berlin without German ID cards and there was clearly no way we could get them -- particularly considering that there were, with the Reisers and Eva's mother, nine of us. So that was the verdict: forget it! We were depressed. It was tantalizing to see Berlin on the other side of the river, to walk by the short, but unfortunately far too well guarded bridge which led to Berlin, and not to be able to get there; at that time it was quite easy to get from East to West Berlin by train. We felt defeated, but did not give up.

Later in the day we spent several hours in a long and entirely candid conversation with Rudolf Meyer. We told him of our history and that of our families during the war; he told us that he served as a German soldier in Norway. We also tried to convince him that they should go to the West as long as it is possible for them; it may be too late for us, we missed our chance in 1948 or shortly thereafter, when

many people still managed to escape, but they could still do it. He did not see why. They had good jobs in Dresden and had even just bought a piece of land there. Whenever they wanted to go to the West, they went to Berlin, crossed easily to the West sector, where they were issued West German papers with which they could travel wherever they wanted and then return to their home in the East. I assured Rudolf that there was no way this could last. With thousands of Germans leaving for the West, “voting with their feet” each month, the Communists would most certainly close this only remaining loophole in their otherwise impenetrable iron curtain. And we tried to describe to him the life in Czechoslovakia, a fully totalitarian police state. At the end we asked him to try to find out more about possible escape routes. If he did have any useful news for us, he should write using the name Eva Martin and mail the letter to general delivery. We gave him a list of places where we would be able to check at the post office.

At the Baltic Sea

From Berlin our caravan continued to the Baltic Sea and the East German-Polish border. I again managed to pester the expedition leader, Dr. Munk, with the need of “our poor little children” to get to the hotel early, so that they could get some rest. He finally let me drive ahead just to get rid of me. We had no specific plan in mind, just wanted to be away from the surveillance of the group and to be able to explore the situation. We drove fairly fast but at one point we were overtaken by a white Studebaker car with Swedish licence plates. We had two contacts in Sweden. Jan (Honza) Loding, formerly Bondy, who was one of the boys from my room 127 in Terezin, now lived in Sweden and we had his address. We also had the address of Karel Eisler’s uncle. We had some notion that if we could send them a message, they could perhaps manage to get Swedish papers for us, meet us in Germany and smuggle us to Sweden, or perhaps find somebody who would take us over by boat. In any case it was worth trying to send messages or just one message. We decided to send it to Loding.

I followed the Swedish car as fast as I could, but certainly could not overtake it on the open road; the Studebaker, a much stronger car with only two people, was much faster than our overloaded Wartburg. However, I managed to overtake it in a rather reckless way in the narrow street of a small town through which we were passing and where he slowed down as any responsible driver would. It was a scene like from a gangster movie. I then kept driving in the middle of the road so that he could not pass me again. When we were out in the open countryside, I started signaling the driver to stop, which he did -- I wonder what he and his wife must have been thinking about being ambushed like that!!! I asked him to take Eva in his car and told him that she would explain to him what we wanted. So Eva got into the Swede’s car and they drove ahead and I followed them. In the beginning he drove quite fast, but as Eva was talking he drove more and more slowly as

Eva's explanation of our situation and of our desire to escape seemed to capture his attention. Finally he stopped the car and Eva came back to our car. It turned out that the man was obviously quite sympathetic to our cause; by sheer coincidence he was also a chemist and he promised that he would deliver the message. We actually don't know whether the message ever was delivered; in any case there was no action from anybody on the Swedish side. This episode slowed us down a bit and we were surprised and shocked when we arrived at our destination only minutes before the remainder of the group. It would have been very difficult to explain had they seen us with the Swedes.

We next moved into a tent camp on the coast. This was the coast about which my friend's technician had spoken -- where they went by rowboats to American ships waiting to enter the Szczecin harbor, and where American sailors threw them oranges. We did not want oranges, we would have liked them to take us on board. We could see several ships anchored in the distance and we found the place where one could rent rowboats. However, only four persons were allowed in each boat. So the Reisers got one boat, but we had to get two: I had the boys in my boat and Eva took her mother. We started rowing out into the sea. Patrol boats came by and told us that we were not allowed to go further out and that we should turn back, but we ignored them and they did not seem to care too much. However, we did not seem to make any progress. Although we were already quite far from the shore, the ships did not seem to get any closer and we were not even able to recognize to which nation they belonged. It was getting pretty late and finally, after perhaps one hour or more rowing out into the sea, we decided that it was hopeless and that we had to give up and return. The way back was somehow much harder, perhaps the wind or tide was coming from the shore, but it took us several hours to get back, quite exhausted. It was ironic that in the end we were happy to be safely back on East German terra firma. So this was another failure.

We had one disturbing episode during our stay on this particular beach. Ruth Reiser talked to a young German, who told her that the Swedes were very nice to people who managed to get there and allowed them to stay; on the other hand the Danes "don't like us Germans and send people back." This bit of information worried us a lot later on.

Our big hope still lay ahead. We were not too far, only some 120 km or 75 miles from Sassnitz, the place from which my informant, my friend's laboratory technician, claimed one could go to Sweden and be allowed to visit the Swedish harbor of Trelleborg. The question was how to get there? Arnost Reiser knew of a university in Greifswald and so we concocted a story about a chemist at the University of Greifswald who was very interested in Eva's work on anti-cancer drugs and invited her to visit him. We managed to get permission, and Eva, Arnost and I set out for Sassnitz, leaving the children with Ruth and Eva's mother. We

arrived in Sassnitz and looked for the ticket office for the ferry. It was closed, but Arnost, who carried out most of the conversation in his impeccable German, found out where the cashier was -- in a nearby pub. Arnost found him but learned that the crossings were sold out. However, with the help of a gift of leather gloves he persuaded the cashier to save nine tickets for us in case they were not claimed by the people or organization which had reserved them. We were supposed to come a few days later.

After a couple of days our entire group moved to another tent camp on the island Rügen on which Sassnitz is located. On the way we stopped in the harbor town Stralsund. There was a store selling all kinds of ropes and other boating supplies and some people were buying ropes for their cars in case they needed to be towed. I got the crazy idea to buy some ropes which we could tie to the railing of the deck of the ship and use the rope to slide down into the sea.

I can't remember when and where, but we visited several post offices looking for general delivery letters for Eva Martin. It turned out that Martin was a fairly common family name in Germany: there were several letters for people named Martin, but none of them for Eva Martin. On one occasion a woman heard us speaking Czech and immediately struck a conversation. She was from the Sudetenland and we found that most people from the Sudetenland -- rather than being bitter and hostile towards us for having been forcibly evicted after the war -- were rather friendly and liked to talk about cooking recipes. So we got into a conversation with her and in our desperation started asking indirectly but still very recognizably about escape possibilities. The woman was somewhat taken aback, but then said "Let's go into your car, I have to be careful, you know, I am a Party member (Ich bin doch eine Parteigenossin)" and then she told us to be very careful not to contact any of the fisherman, because they all work for the secret police. Eva gave her another present, I think another pair of gloves, but we did not get any more useful information out of her, just this warning.

On the appointed day we slipped out of the camp, drove to Sassnitz, got our nine tickets and got on the German ship Sassnitz, a huge ferry boat with railroad cars at the lowest level, two decks of automobiles and several more passenger decks. Eva and I had our ropes wound around our bodies under our jackets. To prepare the children I told them that it sometimes happens that a ship runs aground and starts sinking and that in that case one simply had to jump into the water and quickly swim away from the sinking ship so that one would not be sucked in with it when it went down. The kids registered the information, but were not frightened. We walked a lot around the ship -- being with children made it easier, one wanted to show them everything -- and we even managed to get all the way down to the railroad cars, which one surely was not supposed to do. Each car was sealed with a wire and a lead seal, but I had a pair of pliers in my pocket with which I easily

could have cut the wire and gotten into the car. We were debating it with Arnost and he firmly refused. If they checked the seals before allowing the cars to leave the ship, we would be caught and it would be difficult to explain how we got into a sealed freight car by mistake. Of course I don't know to this date whether they did indeed check the seals or not. In any case, I lost my courage and gave up on this plan.

We noticed a group of Swedes and approached one man and asked him whether he could smuggle out our children and Eva's 61-year old mother; we would then jump overboard. It turned out that he was an owner of a small factory who was returning from a vacation trip with his workers and he felt that he would have to consult them; he could not take the risk without their knowledge. After a while he came back with tears in his eyes and told us that his workers did not want to do it, but he also warned us that they overheard some people, obviously secret policemen dressed as railroad workers, talking about very suspiciously behaving Czechs; he warned us to be very careful. But he also promised that he would alert the Swedish harbor police to pick us up if we decided to jump.

We got quite alarmed and indeed noticed that some very unfriendly railroad workers kept following us. So we first decided to get rid of the incriminating evidence. I went to the toilet, unwound the rope from my body and placed it into a little pack. I gave it to Eva, she went into the ladies toilet, and disposed both of her and my rope in the place for ladies sanitary napkins. We then tried to be as inconspicuous as possible and waited for the landing. When the ship landed in Trelleborg my mother-in-law made a feeble attempt to leave the ship with the children, but was turned back. In the meanwhile we had found out that the story told us by that lab technician about being able to visit the harbor had indeed been true, but because of too many defections the practice had been stopped. We then considered whether we should jump -- we had to be on the top deck. It was again Arnost who had more sense and warned us that we would kill the children if we jumped from that height. I did not know and obviously did not want to take that risk -- I still don't know from what height one can safely jump, but I am inclined to think that he was right.

So we gave up and I felt totally defeated. I can still remember the terrible feeling when the ship started out on the return trip. We were so close to a free country, just a few yards away and now I watched Sweden, the promised land, receding into the distance and we were returning to that place of lies and fears where the children would grow up bereft of human dignity. I also expected to be arrested upon our return to Germany. I snapped out of my depression and tried to behave as a normal tourist would. We bought duty free chocolate and wrote postcards to be sent to our places of work. I would have liked them to be sent from Sweden to pretend that we were there and were voluntarily returning home, but that was

impossible to arrange. And so we approached again the German harbor of Sassnitz. To our surprise and very considerable relief nobody paid any attention to us when we were leaving the ship. We were very glad indeed that they did not arrest us and did not even request to see our I.D.s to make reports back to Prague.

We returned dejectedly to the camp. To pacify our fellow travelers we distributed the duty free chocolates we bought and told them that the tickets were arranged by Eva's mysterious friend from the University of Greifswald. We sat down to dinner and a while later we heard little Thomas -- he was four and a half years old -- telling people how we had been on a ship and how "Daddy told me that sometimes a ship can sink, but that we would just jump into the sea and swim away from the ship and we would be safe." Fortunately, nobody paid much attentions to him. Later somehow the tour arranged for most other people to make the same trip on the "Sassnitz" which we had prepared and conducted in so much secrecy and with such disappointing results.

Warnemünde

In a couple of days we drove on to our last destination on the sea coast -- another tent camp, this time near Warnemünde. I think that it was during this trip that we were stopped by a rather intoxicated German soldier -- after all our Wartburg was a German car -- who asked for a ride. He told us first how he was recruited into the "volunteer" army. It was a very classical story: they got him drunk and he signed up not quite knowing what he was doing. We also learned from him that the borders with West Germany were strictly guarded and full of trip wires which went off all the time even when a hare triggered the alarm; they also had speedboats with which they would catch people trying to escape by sea. Not a very cheerful prospect or one to improve our depressed moods.

We settled in our tent and went to explore Warnemünde gloomily. We heard that there was a ferry boat going to Denmark and wanted to see it, but were rudely thrown out by a German worker. We then went to a stationary store and wanted to buy a postcard with the picture of the ferry ship, but were roughly rebuffed by the sales lady: "You would not expect us to advertise a ship of a NATO country? That would really be asking too much!" We were pretty uninformed and did not really know that Denmark was part of the NATO pact, but we were glad to hear it. We were still worried by what that German had told Ruth, namely that Danes return escapees. So we did not accomplish anything and returned to the camp even more depressed and reconciled to the idea that we were going to return to Czechoslovakia and would spend the rest of our lives under communism, as would our children.

In the evening we went to a tent where a number of people had gathered just to

chat. There was a visitor there, a guy from another group who made the same tour as we did but travelled by bus rather than by cars. They followed the same route but were a day behind us. He came with a “gossip” (drbecek): Somebody from his group was on the same ship we had been on, the Sassnitz, and managed to jump into one of the open freight cars as they were being pulled out of the ship. He was on Swedish ground before the Germans could do a thing. I ran out of the tent in total disgust. Eva followed me and I complained bitterly: “You see, we could have done it, we are just cowards; it serves us right.”

The next day we went again to Warnemünde and walked along the shore in a very bad mood. There were telescopes there through which one could watch the ships on the sea after inserting a 10-Pfennig coin. Since I was so depressed, I at least wanted the children to have some fun and so we joined a line in front of one of the telescopes. Ahead of us were two little German boys. Suddenly I saw one of them to point out to a ship and heard him say to his friend: “Here comes the Seebad Ahlbeck back from Denmark.” I immediately struck up a conversation and asked about the “Seebad Ahlbeck,” a relatively small ship from which one could jump without any fear of injury. The boys said that it was a German ship and that one could take a trip to Denmark and back and buy duty-free chocolates and cigarettes on board. We brought the information back to the Reisers and Arnost managed to talk the cashier again into saving nine tickets for the next trip for us should there be any left unclaimed.

In the meantime I was still very worried about this claim that the Danes would return refugees to Germany. I decided very logically that we needed to talk to a local person who was not a Communist and would not turn us in. There were not too many locals around -- the town was overrun by tourists -- so I had the brilliant idea of going to the local cemetery, not a place frequented by vacationers and also a place where one could guess the social status of the family.⁷² There were very few people there, but we did find an elderly lady tending her late husband’s tomb; however, as soon as we started a conversation and broached the subject of what happens with people trying to escape, she fled in terror. After this failure we went to the local church where people were just leaving after mass. This time, we had better luck: our victim, another elderly lady, was not scared, understood why we were interested, blessed us, but unfortunately did not know a thing. The Reisers by that time declared that they were fed up with us, that we were dangerous fools, and they left for the camp, which was some 30 minutes by car away.

At this point we were ready to give up. We could not take the risk of attempting

⁷² In Europe it was not uncommon to engrave on the tombstones titles, honors and even occupations if they would add prestige and status to the deceased and the family.

an escape only to be extradited back to the Communists. Eva's mother and the children were waiting for us in a little park and we were going to pick them up and go back to the camp. Then I noticed a little stand with a man selling smoked fish. I hate fish, but Eva loves it and so I thought I should do at least something for her to cheer her up if I could not get her out of the Communist paradise and when I was in such a lousy mood. I got into the line and waited patiently for my turn. In front of me was a youngish man. After a while an elderly couple approached him, greeted him as an old friend or acquaintance, and started talking with him. I listened to the conversation and understood that he used to own a store in Warnemünde, but no longer did; I assumed that it was nationalized and that he had lost it. So this was a local man who was probably not a Communist. I still purchased the fish and then ran after him and started the conversation in my usual highly sophisticated way: asking for the time, trying at the same time to hide my watch, and then immediately starting to wonder whether by any chance people may not be escaping from the ships when they land in Denmark. Well, they did. And what happens to them? The man was no fool "They don't like us Germans, so they send us to Germany, to West Germany, not back to the East, but they would keep you."

This was wonderful to hear and it made perfect sense and explained the garbled information Ruth had gotten earlier. We rushed back to the ticket office and indeed they held nine tickets for us, but the Reisers were back in the camp and most of the passengers had already boarded the ship. We had no choice -- there was nothing we could do. We felt very bad about leaving the Reisers behind, but this was our only chance. It was the last day, the last boat leaving on this day and the next morning the entire group was going to start on the way back to Czechoslovakia. We got into line. Behind us was another friendly Sudeten German lady, who wanted to chat with us. However, they had oversold the tickets, and we were the last ones to get on the ship, while the Sudeten German behind us did not. We were glad not to have her hanging around us.

I was exploring the ship with the boys while Eva was still debating with her mother, who had still not decided whether she would join us in the escape. The ship was quite small, just two decks and we seated ourselves at the stern of the ship, but we also walked to the front and got sprayed with water from the waves, which I somehow welcomed as a preparation for the jump. I offered to buy some chocolate, but the then six-year-old Martin refused with the words "Perhaps we will have to jump into the water and then the chocolate would get ruined." After about two hours the ship reached the Gedser harbor of Denmark and was tied to the pier. Shortly before that Eva finally convinced her mother to jump -- she claimed primarily to avoid the questioning by the police after our escape.

Escape

It was a beautiful sunny Sunday afternoon, the 24th of July 1960. People with valid travel documents were leaving while almost everybody else was watching the shore and people on it. I assume that a lot of people of Gedser like to promenade along the water front in the harbor and watch arriving and departing ships, and on a sunny Sunday afternoon there were quite a few people there. While everybody's attention was focused on the shore side and on the Western tourists leaving the ship, we were preparing to jump into the water on the other side. We were practically alone in the back of the ship. Eva told me that she could not jump by herself and asked me to push her in. She climbed on the railing holding Martin and I pushed her and immediately took Thomas and jumped with him into the water.

We had never discussed the details of the escape, never thought beyond the moment of jumping into the water. Eva just swam around the ship and -- as she later told me -- handed Martin to a Dane after questioning him seriously whether he was indeed a Dane and whether he was indeed sure of it. He seemed to have passed the test. What Eva did was much smarter and the right thing to do. For some reason I thought that I had to get away from the ship. I saw across the harbor some stairs going into the water and I aimed in their direction, swimming on my back with my right hand and holding Thomas with my left. I lost my glasses and my sense of direction. I thought that I needed police protection from the Germans and so I kept calling: "Help, send the police!" I could not see the stairs and found that I was aiming at some sort of a wooden log structure, I don't know what it was to this day. At the same time the Germans launched a rubber raft with two seamen or policemen and they were catching up with me. I reached the log structure just a moment before the Germans reached me. There was a man in the water calling at me in German to give him Thomas. I did not know who he was and was not as smart as Eva to ask him whether he was Danish, but I had no other choice: the uniformed Germans were already catching up with me. I handed him Thomas. I was totally exhausted and actually had my hand on the rubber raft and expected that they would drag me in and back to the ship. But then I heard the wonderful words: "Also da kann man schon nichts mehr machen" -- "So there is nothing more one can do" and they left and paddled back to the ship.

I was helped out of the water and, together with Thomas, we were taken to some office, probably in the customs office. However, I did not know what had happened to Eva and Martin and nobody there could tell me. It seemed that the harbor had two separate offices, one on each side of the harbor, and there was no connection between them. I got a bit hysterical trying to persuade them that they must not let the ship leave until they made sure Eva and Martin were safe. It took what appeared to me a very,

very long time, but finally a minibus arrived with Eva, Martin and Eva's mother and we were all united. Eva's mother, who was then 61 years old, later told us that she waited until we all bobbed up above the surface, then took off her coat and shoes and let herself fall into the water; she was not a very good swimmer. Somebody threw her a lifesaver and then they came with a boat to help her out of the water.

We were taken to the nearest hospital in Nykøbing, where we all got a bath as if we had not had enough water already. As all our clothes were soaked, they lent us blankets and we thus continued our trip to Copenhagen wrapped in blankets like saris.⁷³

We were exhausted both physically and mentally, but ecstatically happy that we had succeeded. Finally we were free and confident that we would be able to bring up our children in a free country without having to teach them how to lie and pretend.⁷⁴

Copenhagen

We arrived in Copenhagen at night. There were reporters and photographers there, but I don't remember much of it, except that we have some newspaper clippings showing us wrapped in the hospital blankets -- we, or actually our pictures -- made the front page of a Danish newspaper. Eva was certain that her mother resembled Indira Gandhi. We had a very exciting and exhausting day behind us. We were received by the police, a special section for foreigners, and informed that unfortunately I would have to go to jail until they checked me out. They apologized for that and I remember responding that I expected to end up in jail and that I was very happy that it was a Danish and not a Communist jail. Because of the children, Eva and her mother would stay with the kids in a pension run by a Mrs. Vives located just across from the police station. I spent the first nights in the downtown police station and answered a number of questions.

My first concern was about the Reisers. I was terribly worried about them, felt very badly that they were left behind, and I tried to convince the Danes that they should do something to get them out. I knew that the Reisers had a good friend

⁷³ After our escape was discovered, our Prague apartment was of course sealed by the police. Shortly thereafter Petr Sagher, the son of my cousin Hedda Saxl, came to visit us and then reported to his mother and stepfather that "The Roceks were not home, they must be on vacation, but they must be very important, because they had their apartment guarded by the police" Hedda and Otto Saxl had already heard about our escape via radio Vienna and were very amused.

⁷⁴ However, for many years I suffered from a nightmarish dream in which I by some mistake on my part went back to Prague and did not know how to get out again.

who was somehow connected with the British Secret Service and who I thought was at that time somewhere in Germany and could help them. The response was quite negative. They told me that it is quite possible that they will give us asylum in Denmark and would do the same for the Reisers if they were here, but it is out of the question for them to actively help them in their escape. However, because of this conversation they knew all about the Reisers and I was absolutely delighted when I was called down to the office of the president of the foreign police the next day and informed that the Reisers had just safely landed in Gedser.

When we did not return and no police came to the camp to investigate our escape, the Reisers concluded that we must have succeeded and that the police therefore still did not know who we were and from which group we were missing. The Reisers then decided to follow us. In the middle of the night they informed the tour leader that they had problems with their rather old car and would have to have the car checked in Warnemünde⁷⁵. They left the camp very early in the morning, managed to get tickets to the morning crossing of the Seebad Ahlbeck and followed our example. They had the advantage of being told by a seaman -- in response to Ruth's direct question -- that they, the Germans, have to respect the sovereignty of the Danish waters. The Reisers therefore learned that they would be safe from the moment they were in the water, something we did not know. On the other hand, they were watched; the lower deck from which we jumped was closed and Arnost actually had to fight with somebody who tried to restrain him.

Ruth with the children, Jan (8) and Paul (4), were placed in the same pension where Eva, her mother and our children were staying, and Arnost joined me in jail, though in a separate cell; in the beginning we were kept strictly apart.

We were soon transferred to a large jail, probably somewhere in a suburb, I don't really know where it was located. In a way it was an interesting experience. The jail was well organized. I was held in strict solitary confinement. I got my food in my cell. When I needed to use the toilet, I gave a signal by pushing out some sort of flag and a guard then took me to the toilet, which I could not flush -- the flushing had to be done from the outside by the guard after he made sure that I did not try to dispose of any incriminating material. Prisoners were supposed to go to the toilet only for "number two," and were given some sort of bottle to urinate into and keep in the cell to be emptied once a day. I refused to do that and the guards were not happy to have to lead me to the toilet more often than they were supposed to, but somehow they tolerated it.

We were taken to exercise daily for one half hour. There was a large round area

⁷⁵ The day before they explained our absence by claiming that we obviously and understandably must have had car problems because our car was so new, but anyway, both explanations were accepted as equally plausible.

divided into numerous pie-shaped sections. The dividing walls and the outside wall was solid, but instead of a roof there was a heavy wire mesh grate to let in air and the sun. There was a watch station in the center and around it a narrow circular space through which one could enter the individual sections. It was all organized very efficiently. We were led in single file, the first one entered the last section, the last prisoner the first section, so that one never passed another prisoner and thus could not talk to anybody. In the pie shaped exercise area -- I would estimate that they were some twenty or twenty five feet long and some eight feet wide at the wide end -- one could walk or run a bit. Also when we were taken to a shower, there was no chance to communicate with another prisoner, but it was all done in an orderly way without any mistreatment. Similarly when I was taken to the downtown station for some more questioning, I would go in a truck or bus with small individual compartments, just large enough for a seat and even with a little window covered by wire mesh, but again with no contact with anybody else. The only time the vigilance to prevent communications among prisoners was a bit relaxed was during the Sunday religious services which I once attended out of boredom and curiosity.

Only one of the prison guards spoke some English and another some German, but unless one of them was on duty I could not communicate with anybody. I asked for and got a beginner's text of Danish, but did not make any progress and could not concentrate on any reading material. I became a bit impatient particularly because they at first told me that it would be just a few days -- I thought that they meant three or four -- and it kept dragging on.

I was informed that the Czechoslovak ambassador or somebody from the embassy wanted to talk to me and I was quite willing to tell him why I did not want to live in the country under the present regime, but I was told that I did not have to talk to anybody if I did not want to and I felt that there was an implied suggestion that I should not, so I refused the visit. I did write a letter to my boss, the director of the Institute of Organic Chemistry and Biochemistry of the Czechoslovak Academy of Science, Frantisek Sorm. The purpose of the letter was to protect my friends by declaring that I did not have any friends there, that I could not trust anybody because all the other people in the Institute were satisfied and bought off by the advantages and good working conditions available to them. As I later learned, the letter was posted on the bulletin board of the Institute together with Sorm's reply to the "traitor Rocek"; he did not bother to send me a copy. However, I later found out that some people misunderstood my letter and its purpose and took my disclaimer of having had no friends literally, and were offended by it. In a curious coincidence I learned about one of them during our visit to Australia in the fall of 1999, and at the urging of our common Australian friend, Edith Sheldon, I called Milos Cihar right there from Sidney. He was very pleased to hear my explanation, and I was glad that I could reassure him -- I later

learned that he died the next day.

I immediately wrote to Sir Christopher Ingold who sent me a very nice reply expressing regret that I “did not jump overboard a bit earlier” since he would have had a good temporary job for me and suggested that I might want to consider Canada, where his own son now lived. He also wrote to several other people, including Niels Bohr, Ken Wiberg and most importantly to Frank Westheimer. Niels Bohr⁷⁶ wrote a letter to the Danish foreign police, of which I was informed by the police president who was very much impressed, but it did not seem to accelerate the asylum procedures. Frank Westheimer reacted immediately with a wonderfully worded offer to “work together for a while” and included a \$200 check. Frank’s letter and offer completely changed our lives and de facto determined our entire future.

After a while the Danes decided that there was actually no good reason why Arnost Reiser and I could not talk to each other while waiting to be granted asylum and we were allowed to be in the same cell during the day, which made the wait much more bearable. Eva discovered that when she got terribly unhappy Mrs. Vives called the police and they brought me in from prison to console her. The first time her distress was very genuine, but when she saw the effect of it she repeated the performance a couple of times later and so we had the chance to see each other a few times during my incarceration. The Danes were very nice and I could not have wished for a better stay in jail. During my jump into the sea I had lost my glasses and so they took me out of prison to the royal optician to get new glasses.

The news of our escape made its way into many newspapers, not only in Denmark, where we made the front page with large photographs, but also in Germany, England, and even the New York Times. The Reisers’ friend, Nelly Palache, noticed the article in an English newspaper and -- although it did not mention names -- immediately identified the Reisers and us and right away notified Arnost’s wealthy uncle in Boston, Robert Reiser, as well as my cousin Hella Kleeman and her husband Derrick. Robert Reiser financed Nelly’s trip to Copenhagen and offered to pay all expenses for the Reisers, while the Kleemans did the same for us. In addition, Eva contacted her relatives in America, Otto and Jaro Munz, and they all sent us some money.

We were finally released from prison after 18 days, much longer than we had originally expected, but bureaucracies always work more slowly than one would like. Nelly immediately took care of us and arranged for all of us to move to a

⁷⁶ Niels Bohr, the 1922 Nobel prize winning physicist, who proposed the first useful model of the atom and played a part in the development of the atomic bomb, was Denmark’s greatest scientist and is regarded there as a national treasure.

small hotel in Esrum, a small peaceful and isolated village, and even wanted to hire body guards to protect us and particularly the children from a possible abduction, but we were assured that that was not necessary.

In the meantime I tried to contact a Danish chemist I had met in England, Ulrik Kläning; he had also worked on chromic acid oxidations. Unfortunately, it turned out that he was seriously ill. However Kläning's wife worked with a biochemist, Peder Olesen Larsen, who came to visit us and actually offered Eva a temporary job. To Peder's embarrassment the offer was later withdrawn because his boss, Professor Kjer, did not want to risk offending Sorm, with whom he had friendly relations. However, Peder's father, a minister, offered us the use of his summer cottage -- an offer that we very gladly and gratefully accepted, particularly because we were rather uncomfortable about the Kleemans having to pay our Esrum hotel bills. Peder's father⁷⁷ made his offer in the most tactful way, "under one condition," namely that we would not pay him anything because he would have to pay taxes on it. So we moved to Birkerød and spent time going to Copenhagen trying to check up on our visa situation and other related affairs, but we also had time to do a little bit of sightseeing. We had of course very little money -- though certainly enough to eat well and buy whatever we really needed -- and tried to spend as little as possible. When Eva and I spent the day in Copenhagen we would usually not eat and wait to having dinner when we returned to Birkerød. That did not bother me very much, but Eva really suffered: she becomes very unhappy when she is hungry, and particularly was tormented by all the tantalizing wonderful open faced sandwiches in the shop windows all around us. Sometimes we simply could not resist and splurged.

One late evening a Czech voice asked to be let in and my mother-in-law immediately recognized the voice of our old friend from Terezin, Thomas Luke. Tom escaped in 1948, got to Australia and became an Australian citizen. He studied in America and was currently living in Geneva and working at the United Nations. He drove all the way from Geneva to visit us, and it was a great reunion. He even offered to take us for a few days to Geneva, which he could have done with his diplomatic car, but Eva's mother refused to take responsibility for the children and so we could not go. He brought each of our boys, who at that time had no toys except a cheap plastic boat, a battery operated toy gun which shot sparks when the trigger was pressed. It was touching that Martin told him that he did not have to bring any gifts. A little later, while we were already in the US and without the slightest hint from us, but to our great pleasure and pride, Martin removed the little electric motor from the gun and installed it in a boat to run the

⁷⁷ Peder's father was a very kind and generous man. He was also a scholar who wrote a lot about Kierkegaard. He was however not very tolerant toward Catholics and surprised us when in our first meeting he made the statement: "It is the devil's dream to get the Communists and the Catholics together." We thought that we did not understand him, but he repeated his assertion.

propeller -- "swords into plowshares" in action. Tom also brought some things for us and I remember wearing his silk shirt for many years.

Finally, after about three months, the visa arrived -- there was just a minor problem: the Americans needed passports to issue the visa and the Danes were ready to issue us foreign passports as soon as we presented them with the visa. It took some doing and running back and forth between the American consulate and the Danish passport office, but the problem was finally solved. The Reisers left at the same time for England, where Arnost had a job at Kodak waiting for him.

Our stay in Denmark was most wonderful -- we were really free, we had succeeded, we and our children had a future and I had been offered a wonderful start at the world's greatest university!! The people were incredibly nice to us and we even had the chance to enjoy Tivoli, the Pinacotheca, and our new friends took us for some sightseeing trips. We were invited several times at the Olesen Larsens and also at the homes of a business friend of the Kleemans -- he had a very nice and friendly family and lived in a charming house set in a lovely garden. There also was a biochemist who had spent a sabbatical in the US who took special care of us and invited us to his home; I remember that his children brought from America models of American cars and were very proud of them. The same biochemist -- I am ashamed that I don't even remember his name -- even brought us a stove when it turned colder; the Olesen Larsen's cottage had no heating. He also took us for a visit to Hamlet's castle, Elsinore, which we enjoyed a lot, but bored our four year old Thomas. I chided him and told him that he better pay attention, since in America he won't have any chance to see anything like that because there were no old castles there. His response: "No old castles? Good!!!" (It does seem ironic that he became an archeologist) We are still friends with the Olesen Larsens and the Heiedes -- Kristine Heiede is Peder's sister.

England

Our trip to America was organized and paid for by the International Rescue Committee (IRC, an organization we have been supporting ever since). Because of my two cousins in England and because I had so many wonderful memories of my two stays there, I asked whether it would be possible to go via England and spend a few days in London, and IRC was able to arrange it. We stayed with the Kleemans and frequently visited the Linds, and besides that I took Eva to visit some of the places she knew only from my pictures and description. The boys got a ride on a double-decker London bus. The Kleemans' chauffeur took them to the bus station in a Rolls Royce and then followed the bus to pick them up again when they got off -- they loved the bus, but a Rolls Royce did not mean anything to them. The Kleemans took us to our first musical, "My Fair Lady." At first I was appalled that G.B.Shaw's play -- I was and I still am very fond of Shaw --

would be made into a musical, but to my great surprise we both loved it. We also visited the Buntons -- to Eva's great embarrassment: after I had returned from my first visit to England with lots of photographs, including one of Bunny, Eva commented on what a singularly handsome man he was, and I had told him about Eva's assessment during my second visit, when I did not expect that they would ever meet.

My cousins, Hella Kleeman and Susie Lind, took the boys for some shopping to enrich their very sparse wardrobes. The kids were not very appreciative and criticized my cousins' selections, not being aware that they still retained enough Czech to understand them.

AMERICA

From England we flew with Pan Am -- after refueling in Shannon, Ireland -- to Boston and on to New York's then Idelwild, now Kennedy, airport, where we went through immigration and received our green cards. Eva's father's cousin, Otto Munz, and his wife Gerta were waiting there for us. There was also a representative from the IRC and pictures were taken which then appeared in the newspapers. Then we parted: Thomas and Eva's mother went with the Munzes to Annapolis, while Martin joined Eva and me on a flight to Boston, where we were met at the airport by Frank Westheimer.

Cambridge

Frank took us to his home in Belmont where we met his wife Jeanne, who then took charge of us and made our new start incredibly easy. She arranged for us to stay for the first couple of weeks with a wonderfully nice lady, Isabella Halsted, a member of a distinguished old Bostonian family,⁷⁸ who welcomed us to her house with the words "Call me Iby and here is the refrigerator, use whatever you want."

Frank took me to the university, introduced me to his group, and assigned me a large space in a beautiful and very well equipped lab in the new Conant building.⁷⁹ It was a wonderful environment to work in and a very stimulating group. However, I remember how shocked I was at the first group meeting, when Professor Westheimer was at the blackboard giving his interpretation of some findings, and a young graduate student, Charlie Perrin,⁸⁰ sat with his feet on the table, puffing on a pipe and saying "This is nonsense." I could not believe it. In Czechoslovakia nobody would have ever dared to speak to a professor like that, although in retrospect I have to admit that I used to have some quite lively discussions with Professor Wichterle myself, but Wichterle was young and very different from the typical European professor. Frank suggested that we work together to settle some of the differences of opinion we had on the mechanism of oxidation. The results clearly supported Westheimer's mechanism as far as the

⁷⁸ Iby's father was Charles Hopkinson, a painter who painted one of the American presidents. The family owned a forty acre estate in Manchester, Massachusetts. The fact that Dr. Halsted married Ann Roosevelt, FDR's daughter, after he and Iby got divorced is indicative of the society which the Halsteds frequented.

⁷⁹ When I joined the laboratory I had to get safety glasses and Frank decided to demonstrate to me how shock resistant they were. So he took his own safety glasses and threw them with full force on the floor -- and they shattered. But I still believed that they were more impact resistant than ordinary glasses and got them and wore them.

⁸⁰ Charlie was probably the brightest student in the group; he became a professor at UCSD.

formation of an intermediate ester of chromic acid was concerned, but not the proton transfer to an external base.

Jeanne took Eva, found us a large apartment -- actually the entire second and third floor of an old house on 36 Garfield Street, which was owned by the university and located only about ten minutes walking distance from the lab.⁸¹ The rent was only \$100/month, but the rental office requested a deposit of \$100 in advance and we did not have any money yet. Eva recalls that Jeanne Westheimer just told them “I am Mrs. Westheimer, Mrs. Frank H. Westheimer, and I assure you that they will pay” and that took care of it. Jeanne even negotiated with the office to pay for the paint and Eva started painting the walls with a daring combination of grey and yellow. Jeanne personally helped clean the house and even cleaned the oven of many layers of accumulated burned fat by herself, though at home she had a full-time maid.

Just about at the time we got our apartment Eva received an urgent letter from her mother asking her to request that Thomas join us in Cambridge -- Otto did not treat him well. It was not badly intended, but Thomas was not happy there. So Thomas, aged four, soon arrived by himself on a plane from Washington -- the “unaccompanied minor” program had not yet been introduced. It was of course Jeanne Westheimer who drove us to the airport; she took care of us in every respect and the boys started regarding her car as ours. Thomas arrived with a little lunch box with some toys. It was really touching to see the two boys together again. Thomas ignored us all and sat down on the floor in the middle of the airport with Martin to show him all his treasures.

The house was empty, but Jeanne made a collection of necessities from among her friends, and one day she rented a U-Haul trailer, had it attached to her car, and we went from house to house to collect pieces of furniture. We got all we needed and more and it all came from prominent people, mostly from scientists. We had things from Robert Woodward (later a Nobel prize winner), Konrad Bloch (later a Nobel prize winner), from Ron Vanelli (Director of Laboratories), chairs from Harvard’s president Pusey⁸² and many others I can no longer recall. One day I was coming home from the lab and in front of the house stood a car with a bed on top and a very attractive young lady struggling to pull it down. I offered to help and asked where she was taking it and she pointed to our house. She introduced herself as Ann Büchi, the wife of MIT’s chemistry professor George Büchi; she was amused when I corrected her pronunciation of her own name; Büchi was

⁸¹ We looked up the house in 2001: it is still there, but the university sold it to private owners, who did some renovations, but did not change the outside much.

⁸² Many years later we gave the Pusey chairs to Eva’s mother and, after she died in 1993, they were refurbished and are now in Thomas’ and Karen’s home in Newark, DE.

originally Swiss and I pronounced it the German way and at first did not understand her americanized pronunciation.

Occasionally the boys would come to the university. I vividly remember Martin's very first visit, during which he got his first English lesson from Frank. Frank drew a picture of the sun on the blackboard in the seminar room and taught Martin the word "sun." They would also occasionally visit me in the laboratory and I would try to impress them with my rather limited glassblowing skills. One of these laboratory visits had a rather worrisome outcome: Martin developed a blister on his stomach. Eva assumed that it must have been poison ivy, a strictly American problem and thus proof that our children were already real Americans. However, our pediatrician, an elderly Austrian lady, disagreed with Eva's diagnosis and said "If I did not know that it is impossible, I would swear that it is a mustard gas burn." Bob Purdy, in the lab next door was indeed working with mustard gases and must have spilled some on a bench against which Martin leaned. It was not serious. Another time I left Martin in the Peabody museum while I went to the lab to finish some work. When I came back I found him in conversation with Harvard's Professor George Wald.

Everybody was helping us -- I don't think that anybody had an easier and more exciting start in America than we did. My late mother's old girlfriend from Gablonz, Steffi Fried, came to visit us and, although of very limited means herself, bought Eva many things for the household. One day Steffi was home alone when a woman came to deliver curtains. She thought that it was somebody sent from the cleaners and wanted to tip the woman, but then it somehow did not seem right, so she invited her graciously for a cup of coffee. Eva returned just when Mrs. Pusey, the wife of Harvard's president, was leaving. One day Ibbey Halsted called us that she was getting a new washing machine and we could have her old one, which was still perfectly good. My friends from the lab helped me to move it and set it up for us and we had our first good washing machine ever.

We were frequent guests at the Westheimers and were invited by them for our first Thanksgiving dinner⁸³ and to many parties. Frank and Jeanne treated me much more as a friend and a faculty colleague than as a post-doc, and made a real effort to introduce me to as many important people as possible. I just regret that I was not bright enough and a good enough chemist to be able to take full advantage of it. I remember a dinner with Louis P. Hammett, a very famous chemist whose book "Physical Organic Chemistry" was sort of a bible for people of my ilk which I had

⁸³ That was where Eva learned how to celebrate Thanksgiving. The next year she already gave a Thanksgiving dinner of her own and invited all the single students of the Westheimer group. Without the slightest warning she suddenly asked me to carve the turkey, which I had never done before. I was surprised and a bit in a shock, but I somehow managed (though not very professionally).

studied thoroughly back in Prague. I was seated next to Hammett, expecting to learn something momentous about his views on science, but I was disappointed when the great man entertained the company with a story about a collect phone call he refused to accept. I asked him about an interesting concept which he had proposed and of which I had made use, the Zucker-Hammett hypothesis, and his answer was succinct: "It was a mistake." We were also invited to the celebration of the Westheimers' 25th wedding anniversary, and of course got to know their two daughters, Ruth and Ellen, very well. We were also invited to a theater performance in which Ellen played a role.

At the first research group party that I attended at the Westheimers I also learned -- albeit too late -- what a daiquiri was. It was very hot and I thought I was drinking lemonade.

At the Westheimers we met all the important people of the Harvard chemistry faculty: Robert Woodward,⁸⁴ Paul Bartlett,⁸⁵ Konrad Bloch,⁸⁶ E. Bright Wilson,⁸⁷ E.J. Corey,⁸⁸ and many others. The one person whom we did not meet at the Westheimers was Louis Fieser, a man whose fame was claimed to "grow with the square of the distance from Cambridge." Indeed he, his work on steroids, and his many books were very well known in Prague; he was probably better known than any other member of the Harvard chemistry faculty. It seemed that in Cambridge he was no longer able to attract graduate students and had only a few Indian post-docs. I was never quite sure what was the reason for Frank's deep dislike for him, whether it was the way he used to run the department when he was chairman, before being deposed by the younger guard, whether it was because he was the inventor of napalm (jellied gasoline that made flamethrowers far more deadly and horrible) or for ethical questions having to do with the employment of his wife Mary, or his support of cigarette manufacturers until the time when he himself developed lung cancer. In any case Frank, normally so polite, pretended not to hear me at all when I was telling him that Eva and I went to Fieser's famous annual lecture on incendiaries.

⁸⁴ Nobel prize in chemistry 1965, a brilliant synthetic organic chemist.

⁸⁵ A leader in physical organic chemistry; he trained a whole generation of physical organic chemists and his Ph.D. graduates and post-docs occupied a large number of faculty positions in physical organic chemistry at U.S. universities

⁸⁶ Nobel prize in physiology and medicine 1964. A leader in biochemistry; he elucidated the biosynthesis of cholesterol.

⁸⁷ One of the foremost physical chemists of the time.

⁸⁸ Nobel prize in chemistry 1990 for developing new synthetic methods for complex organic compounds.

Thanks to the Westheimers we got also invited to the Blochs, the Woodwards, and later, when Eva started working in Bartlett's group, to the Bartletts' student parties. When we finally left Cambridge and moved to Bethesda, our boys stayed the last night with the Woodwards.⁸⁹

I had the good fortune to have Don Dennis⁹⁰ for my lab-mate. He and his wife Marilyn were wonderful; they essentially adopted us as part of their family. They undertook to introduce us to American life, bought our kids their first hamburgers (they were 10¢ a piece then), took us to picnics,⁹¹ invited us numerous times, introduced us to inexpensive shopping. One day they took us for an outing to the sea north of Boston. Eva was always afraid of sharks, but Don assured her that the water there was too cold for them. However, as soon as we arrived at the beach we practically stepped on a dead shark, but Don argued that this only confirmed his previous statement -- it was too cold for them to live there.

In the beginning, when we had very little money, Eva would go shopping to the Boston farmers' market on Haymarket Square, but only on Saturdays shortly before closing time, when unsold vegetables were almost given away at truly bargain prices and she would just buy whatever was available. She would take the heavy shopping bags by subway to Cambridge's Harvard Square but then, instead of taking the bus to our street, would drag them on foot all the way to save the 10 cent bus fare. We also would buy day-old bread and simply try to save in any possible way. Considerably later I splurged on our first wine, a bottle of Chianti in a woven basket, all for the exorbitant price of \$1. We soon learned about Filene's Basement, where clothing of all sorts could be bought at bargain prices.

Jeanne Westheimer's care of our family extended into every area. One day Eva got a call from Jeanne asking her whether she did not have anything to tell her. Eva did not know what Jeanne meant and was quite surprised and confused. Finally Jeanne let her know that she found out through the grapevine that I had asked Frank's secretary to recommend a doctor for Eva. Jeanne was obviously concerned that we were looking for an abortionist and was very relieved and happy to hear that the problem was an unwanted tapeworm rather than an

⁸⁹ Mrs. Woodward made her own applesauce and the boys demanded that Eva do the same: "If Mrs. Woodward can do it, you can do it, too."

⁹⁰ Later Professor at the University of Delaware.

⁹¹ One day Don invited Martin, Thomas and me to join him and his sons Drake and David, for a "boys only" outing into the nearby mountains. The two girls, Tyrin and Robin decided to stay with Eva so that she would not be lonely; Marilyn after all had the baby Eric to keep her company. Because the Dennises had at that time five children -- and later six -- Jeanne was convinced that they must be Catholics. Don's response was: "No, we are just sexy Protestants."

unwanted baby.

In the late spring of 1961, we talked about possibly getting a car and Don Dennis discovered for us a splendid twelve-year old Cadillac for \$90! We loved the car, but it had a sad end. Until then we had owned only two motorcycles and then our escape car, the Wartburg, all of which had had two-cycle engines. So we were used to adding oil to the gas but there was never any oil in the engine to check and nobody told us that that was what one had to do with a four-cycle engine. Moreover, while the Cadillac started without any problems when it was cold, it was impossible to get it started when the engine was hot; as a result of that I learned never to turn the engine off when taking gas. Thus, very unfortunately, the oil was never checked either by me or by the gas station attendant (there were no self-service pumps at that time); the sad result was that one day I heard a loud banging in the engine which foretold the untimely end of the car. After that we bought our first new car, the cheapest which was available, a Ford Falcon for \$1,900. By that time I had learned my lesson, and knew how to check the oil.

We also met an old friend. One day I was called to the phone and there was George Vogel, with whom I had shared the lab when I started working in Wichterle's group in 1949. When we got our motorcycle in 1950, we spent a part of our first motorized vacation with him and his girlfriend Jitka in Slovakia.⁹² He then escaped over the border and got a job as a director of a tanning factory in Ethiopia, but later managed to get to the U.S. and in 1960 was a professor at Boston College. I was delighted to hear him on the phone. George asked whether we would like to meet and, of course, I was eager to see him again, but he was very cautious. I did not understand why. Then he told me that he did not know whether it would be dangerous for me, because he was a refugee. He was under the impression that I was there on an official visit; I assured him that we were refugees, too. He came right over and we spent almost the entire night talking. We then saw quite a lot of the Vogels and he invited us for our first barbecued steak -- we were too thrifty to buy any beef during the entire first year.

During our stay in Cambridge, Frank also gave me some money to attend my first American Chemical Society Meeting, which at that time was held in Chicago. Bob Blakeley, a member of Frank's group, offered to take us there in his old VW

⁹² During that trip we had a most improbable experience. We were driving a different route via a town in Jablone nad Orlici, a place Eva visited as a child, while the Vogels were driving directly and we were supposed to meet in the Mala Fatra in Slovakia. At one place the cable on my clutch broke and we stopped and tried to find a little missing piece. We walked up and down perhaps some 100 yards along the road, but could not find it. Instead we found strewn along the highway a set of camera filters, all undamaged, except one which was cracked. When we arrived the next day in Stefanova in the Mala Fatra, George Vogel was in a bad mood. He was an avid photographer and had lost his entire set of filters somewhere on the way; it was a good set, only one filter was cracked.

Beetle, and on the way we stopped at Niagara Falls. It was an unforgettable trip. We traveled very modestly, one night we slept in some field, but in Canada we purchased a whole basket of wonderful fresh peaches⁹³ and had a wonderful time. In Chicago we stayed with an old friend of my mother, Elsa Kohn. The only thing we did not like on the trip was driving through Gary, which, with its iron works and flames and smoke everywhere, looked like the gates of hell, and Eva stated emphatically: "I would not want even to be buried here" referring to the entire Chicago area -- famous last words.

Working in the neighboring lab at Harvard was a very clever young woman of Japanese ancestry, Pat Traylor, who always seemed to make the best comments during the Westheimer group meetings. We became friends with her and with her husband, Teddy Traylor,⁹⁴ who worked in Professor Bartlett's group. Teddy was very interested in music and they took us to our first American musical, "Oklahoma," which Teddy, who seemed to know all the operas of the world, declared to be the American analog of Smetana's "The Bartered Bride," probably the most famous Czech opera. The Traylor's also introduced us to Gilbert and Sullivan. One day Teddy offered Eva a job as a sort of his assistant and so Eva started working first for him in the Bartlett group and later, when he left to accept a job at San Diego, she became a regular post-doctoral fellow with Professor Paul Bartlett.

Eva's mother, who joined us after spending about a month in Annapolis with Otto Münz, also started working as soon as she could. Her first job was in "The Window Shop," a small restaurant opened by a group of Viennese Jewish refugees who came before the outbreak of the WWII. Later, I think that it was thanks to Steffi Fried, she found a wonderful job as a companion to a wealthy old couple from Germany living in a residential hotel in Boston. The man, Mr. Loeb, was Jewish and a former banker; his wife was not Jewish and was a professional

⁹³ We shocked Blakeley by eating the peaches with the skins; he always peeled his carefully.

⁹⁴ Teddy had an interesting history. He was part American Indian and his half-brother lived on a reservation. He was a high school drop out, who at the beginning of the war joined the merchant marine only to discover that he suffered from sea sickness. He spent some time in England and became an avid reader. Because he had served in the armed forces, after the war he was entitled to free education under the "GI bill." Since he had not finished high school, no university would admit him, but he managed to get accepted by some small college. After a year he transferred to UCLA and earned his Ph.D. with Saul Winstein, one of the most prominent physical organic chemists. He got married, had several children, and worked for a chemical company. One day he got into a car accident -- he collided with a young American-Japanese girl, a chemist working in the same place; some time later he got a divorce, married her and they came together to Harvard, Ted as a post-doc to work with Professor Bartlett and Pat as a graduate student with Frank Westheimer. In 1961 Teddy got a job at the new San Diego campus of the University of California where he quickly rose to full professor and prominence. Unfortunately he died of lung cancer in 1993.

musician. The Loeb's were art collectors and my mother-in-law cooked with original paintings by Kokoshka and other modern masters hanging over and around her.

We also had time to visit the area museums. During one such visit Thomas, who must have been about six years old asked me rather loudly, "why are these people naked?" pointing at a painting of Adam and Eve. I told him that these were the first people, so they did not have any clothes yet. He thought for a while and then retorted: "Daddy, this is strange, I would have thought that they would have looked much more like apes." I must admit that I was rather proud of this. Another time he asked the supreme authority, his older brother, why a certain picture which he did not like was in the museum. Martin explained "a painting does not have to be good, it just have to be famous to get into a museum." We did not get bored when we were with our kids.

We always liked to go to the theater, but in the beginning could not afford it. Steffi Fried, during her visit, took us to the theater for the first time, and it was a rather devastating experience. We saw Beckett's "Waiting for Godot" in a terribly run down theater, the Charles Playhouse in Boston. We were almost the only people in the audience and it was all very depressing. So our first impression of American theater was very disappointing and particularly Eva was quite depressed after this experience.⁹⁵ But later we started going to the Loeb theater in Cambridge and saw some good performances in much nicer theaters and we have, of course, seen many wonderful theater performances since.

Our entire two years in Cambridge were just like a dream -- everybody was so nice and wonderful, we never encountered one hostile or negative reaction. Although I was older than everybody else in Frank Westheimer's group and had a totally different background and many deficiencies, I felt totally accepted and among good friends. We were invited and Eva started to invite people herself. A Harvard faculty member, Martin Gouterman, arranged for Martin to be accepted on full scholarship to a wonderful private school, the Leslie Ellis School, which was associated with the Leslie College of Education; later Thomas got accepted too, first into preschool and then into first grade. By a mistake on the part of the school he skipped kindergarten and thus started first grade a year prematurely. A friend of Iby Halsted, Katherine Goodman, a painter, offered us the use of her summer home in Vermont, where we had our first American vacation. There was just one slight problem which I encountered there. The room had only fireplaces and I knew nothing about flues so that we slept in the cold after the first

⁹⁵ In Prague the main theaters were very elegant large buildings elaborately decorated with paintings, carpeted hallways, large foyers, gilded chandeliers, velvet covered seats -- originally built by or for the nobility or emulating the same style. There were practically always full and people generally dressed up for going to the theater.

unsuccessful experiment with the fireplace. One time Ibbey Halsted let us use the only new building (she called it “the motel”) on her family’s estate and also gave us some furniture from there in spite of the very obvious disapproval of her old aunts. Arnost Reiser’s uncle, Robert Reiser, was also very nice to us, inviting us several times and offered to loan us money so that we could afford better furnishings for our home, but we preferred to live on our own income without debts.

We enjoyed participating in some of the social activities at Harvard. I particularly remember the elaborate departmental party with a play making fun of the faculty, particularly of Robert Woodward. At that time it was clear that he was a serious candidate for the Nobel Prize and everybody knew that he was expecting it. So the student playing Woodward was sitting by the phone and waiting for the call and singing a song about it based on one of the Gilbert and Sullivan tunes.⁹⁶

Because at that time there were very few refugees coming over we were a bit of celebrities. Eva was invited to speak to the Harvard Womens Club, which she did. I was invited to write an article for Readers Digest, which I declined.

But most importantly, being at Harvard and particularly in Frank Westheimer’s group was a superb professional and educational experience. I have never met anybody with a more rigorous approach to science and research than Frank. I was already tremendously impressed when I read and many times re-read his Chemical Reviews article on chromic acid oxidations, which summarized the field with perfect logic and organization. It was wonderful to discuss science with him and to listen to him during the weekly group meeting. I also attended his lectures on physical organic chemistry for graduate students, and it was a true delight to follow his logical reasoning. I also greatly enjoyed Paul Bartlett’s lectures on advanced organic chemistry. Overall, the two years I spent at Harvard were the most stimulating and interesting years of my life as a chemist.

Washington

Frank Westheimer was extremely helpful in trying to find me a permanent position. Through his help I had many invitations to give talks in departments like Princeton, Pennsylvania State, Brandeis, Albany, and many others. I was also invited to speak at Delaware because I knew the head of the department, Bill Mosher, who had done some work on chromic acid oxidations and whom I had met when he and his colleague and friend Professor Beachel, a physical chemist,

⁹⁶ Woodward did receive the Nobel Prize not too long after that performance. I was a bit surprised when during the party the wife of Professor Paul Doty came to me and noted “It is a strange feeling to be at a Christmas party and not be pregnant.” I really did not know how to respond to this opening of the conversation.

had visited Prague.⁹⁷

My first job offer came from Karel Wiesner, a prominent Czech chemist at the University of New Brunswick in Canada. I accepted, and because of this acceptance I turned down a likely offer from the University of Toronto, which I would have liked much better. However, it later turned out that Wiesner promised more than he could deliver -- namely a job for Eva. He wanted her to apply for a fellowship and make herself younger because the fellowships were limited to people under a certain age and Eva was already older. After that Frank, who had the highest ethical standards of anybody I knew, agreed that I could withdraw my acceptance. I sometimes wonder how our lives would have developed had we gone to New Brunswick. One attraction they offered was that any resident of the province was entitled to shoot two bears each season. In any case I am very happy that we stayed in the U.S.

Not too long after New Brunswick fell through, Frank recommended me to the Catholic University of America in Washington, D.C., and I got the job. The chairman offered me a starting position as Associate Professor with a salary \$8,000, but the administration considered that excessive and reduced it to \$7,900.

When it became known in the group that I was moving to the Washington area, Carl Shellenberg⁹⁸ offered to rent us his house in Bethesda, a very good area just north of D.C. We were more than happy to accept; it was just perfect for us. It had three bedrooms, a large living room with a dining area and a nice garden. Anatol Eberhard, another member of Frank's group, offered to drive our U-Haul truck for us to Bethesda and would not even allow us to pay for his return trip.

In 1962 the chemistry department at Catholic University was not in a good shape. It was in steep decline since the days when it had a number of good physical chemists under the chairmanship of O. K. Rice. It had a lot of "dead wood" and only one good organic chemist, a young Assistant Professor, Robert Moriarty, who had joined the department just a year earlier and whom I knew from Harvard where he had been a post-doc in E.J. Corey's group. There was a new department

⁹⁷ I was delighted to have American visitors and tried to show them around Prague a bit. Beachel told me that his wife was Czech and he was going to visit her relatives in some small town outside Prague. They had a Czech driver and interpreter, because they did not speak any Czech and did not expect the relatives to speak any English. When I found out about the arrangement I rushed to warn them to be very careful because I was sure that the interpreter would be working for the secret police and would report anything incriminating. They thus could get Beachel's wife's family unwittingly into very serious trouble. This warning to Professor Beachel later helped me in America: Mosher was able to testify to the State Department as to my anti-communist feelings.

⁹⁸ Carl had an M.D. degree, and had worked at the National Institutes of Health before deciding to get a Ph.D. in chemistry with Frank Westheimer at Harvard.

head, Basil de Baskerville Darwent, a physical chemist who had done some good work and had a concept of quality. The department soon divided into two camps, Darwent and the new more research oriented faculty vs. the old timers. Darwent later hired another very good organic chemist, John Eisch, with whom we became friends.

On the personal level, we liked life in the Washington area. There was something exciting to be in the seat of power of the most powerful country on earth, to go to the Capitol and hear senate debates, to live not too far from the White House, to visit the Library of Congress and walk by the Supreme Court. Most of Washington is really beautiful and life in Bethesda was very good. We joined a babysitting club, a group of people exchanging babysitting services without any exchange of money; it happened to be a very nice group of educated liberal-minded people, some of whom were associated with the Unitarian church. We became friends with John Krasny and his wife Mary. John was Jewish, born in Vienna, studied in a textile school in Liberec, Czechoslovakia, and spoke a few words of Czech; the boys fondly remember his favorite phrase “ja te zabiju” (I will kill you) and they assured him that he spoke the best Czech in Parkwood (the section of Bethesda we lived in) besides our family.

We also became friends with several Czechs, primarily the Rechcigls; Mila was a biochemist who worked at the Agency for International Development (AID); his wife Eva was very nice and helpful on many occasions. Through them we met Sasa Borkovec, a chemist with the Department of Agriculture, who played the guitar and sang old Czech songs at many of the parties, and his wife Vera. After Eva started working for “Research Resources, Inc.” we improved our financial situation sufficiently to start furnishing the house with Danish furniture, to which we had become addicted during our stay in Denmark. We also started going to theaters⁹⁹ and taking real vacations. The first vacation, in 1963, was to Newfoundland, the next one, in 1964, a trip across the whole United States to California and back in our Ford Falcon. During the spring break we drove to Florida, saw our first palm trees, and our first alligators.

We also met the Sagers again. Bill Sager, a chemist who got his Ph.D. with Paul Bartlett at Harvard and who, at that time, was teaching at George Washington University in Washington, DC, had published work on chromic acid oxidation very similar to mine and actually “scooped” me -- he published the correct mechanism for the oxidation of tertiary alcohols just shortly before we did. We met him and his family for the first time in Boston at the home of Norman Lichtin, a chemistry professor at Boston University who used to come regularly to Harvard seminars and who was an old friend of the Sagers. The Sagers were then

⁹⁹ We particularly liked a tiny theater called Theater Lobby hidden behind a church.

just on their annual migration to their summer home on their island on Lake Meddybemps in Maine. They were incredibly friendly and immediately invited us to visit them in Maine, which we did and had a wonderful time with them; It was there that I had my first -- and last -- water skiing experience. Bill took the boys fishing. In Washington we saw the Sagers quite frequently.

In 1964 our landlord, Carl Shellenberg, accepted a position at Johns Hopkins and needed money for a house in Baltimore, and offered to let us buy the house we were renting in Bethesda. We were more than happy to do so, and were excited about owning a house for the first time in our life. We were told that we had to go through a lawyer and asked our friend, John Krasny, to come with us to the lawyer for the closing. The transaction was a bit unusual. We first bargained about the price: Carl wanted \$20,000 and we tried to convince him that this was an unreasonably low price and that we would like to pay more. We argued for a while, but eventually gave in - he would not accept a cent more. We had the feeling that the lawyer was a bit bewildered. Then the lawyer told us that he was obligated to inform us of a codicil prohibiting the sale of this property to any Negro, Jew or Armenian, but that the codicil was now unenforceable. Carl said "Well that does not concern you anyway" and Eva responded that it did. "You aren't Armenian?" "No, but Jewish." We had been in the same research group for two years and he did not know, but now he wanted to know right away, right there in the lawyer's office, how did we manage to survive the war. After we satisfied his curiosity, at least in brief outline, we finally closed the sale and became house owners. John Krasny begged us to invite him again the next time we would be buying a house.¹⁰⁰

Our life in Washington was almost perfect. The only thing we used to have in Prague and which we did not have in America was a dog, and so for Eva's 38th birthday in 1965 I bought her a wirehaired foxterrier puppy. It was a beautiful purebred dog; he was named Jolly in memory of Eva's first dog, which she had gotten at the beginning of the war. He very quickly became the center of the family life and only a few weeks after we got him Thomas came with the question "How could we ever have lived without Jolly?" We took him everywhere with us, starting with our hiking vacation in the White Mountains in the summer of 1965.

We liked life in Washington a lot and I could not complain about the university: they were nice to me and Darwent certainly favored me. But I wanted to do more than just teach my courses and do my research. I would have liked to be involved in general university policy matters and I felt that that would have been quite

¹⁰⁰ Not too long before that we had received some "Wiedergutmachung" money from the German government as compensation for our years in the concentration camps. With these funds and a loan from Eva's mother we were able to pay cash for the house and did not need to take a mortgage.

inappropriate and unethical to do so at a religious institution when I was in fundamental disagreement with its basic tenets. I therefore made it clear that I would be interested in another position, although I did not actively seek one. I was approached by Brooklyn College and they seemed seriously interested and were speaking of an offer at the level of \$12,000, a lot more than I had at Catholic U. I told the head of the department, Basil Darwent, and was quite concerned that he would consider me ungrateful and get mad at me, a reaction I certainly would have encountered from Sorm in Prague. Darwent's reaction was quite different: he said that he would have been ashamed to hire somebody nobody else would try to hire away from him and immediately used the offer to get me a promotion to full professor and a substantial salary raise to \$11,000. That was very nice, but it did not change my feeling about involvement in university affairs. However, I turned down the feeler from Brooklyn College because Eva -- the only time in our life -- asked me not to take it because she did not want to live in New York.

Sometime in 1964 Bill Sager was recruited as a new department head for the Chicago branch of the University of Illinois and he immediately tried to recruit me. I visited Chicago (the university was then still in its temporary location at Navy Pier) and talked to the dean, Glen Terrell and got an offer, but I could not make up my mind. Bill was very patient and did not pressure me. I finally accepted the offer after Bob Moriarty reported that Roger Adams¹⁰¹ from Urbana, whom Moriarty met at a meeting, expressed the opinion that the Chicago campus will eventually become the primary campus of the University of Illinois.

As soon as we were allowed to apply for U.S. citizenship, after five years of residency, we did. We had a little bit of a problem, because they wanted us to write to Czechoslovakia to get some documents, perhaps birth certificates, but we finally found a sensible official who understood that we neither could nor would like to do it. We needed two witnesses who had known us for most of the time we had spent here. Don Dennis served as one witness, Bob Moriarty as the second. Bob came to pick us up; the moment he opened the door our dog, Jolly, raced out of the door and we all had to chase him in our best suits and dresses, worried that we would be late, but we did make it on time.¹⁰² We got our citizenship just before leaving for Chicago and immediately applied for passports. What a wonderful feeling it was to be finally full fledged citizens of a free country and to hold our U.S. passports in our hands!! And shortly thereafter, in the fall of 1966, we moved to Illinois where I would spend my next 29 years at the

¹⁰¹ Adams was one of the most famous chemists of his time and was singlehandedly responsible for transforming the Urbana chemistry department into one of the best departments in the country.

¹⁰² Our citizenship examination took place in Rockville, MD. I was asked what the 19th amendment to the constitution was. When I replied correctly that it gave suffrage to women, the judge asked me a follow-up question: "Do you agree with it?"

University of Illinois and where we by now have been living in the same house in Wilmette for over 36 years.

Illinois

From here on our lives were not that unusual and I shall therefore mention the period from 1966 to the present year of 2003 only briefly.

I found it very exciting to be at a new campus and I am grateful that I had an opportunity to play at least a modest role in its development. My administrative involvement started quite early thanks to Bill Sager, who nominated me to several important campus committees, such as the search committee for the dean of Liberal Arts and Sciences and the Executive Committee of the Graduate College. The latter eventually resulted in my appointment first as Acting Dean in 1969 and then as Dean of the Graduate College in 1970, a position I held until 1979. After a one year sabbatical leave I returned to the Chemistry Department first as Acting Head in 1980 and as Head one year later. In 1993 I was appointed Vice Chancellor for Research and Dean of the Graduate College. I retired in 1995 at the age of 71. In the earlier years of my life as administrator I was able to maintain a respectable level of research activity and keep my grant support, but later I felt that I could not manage both activities well enough and decided to give up research.

On the personal level our life was very good. We had a charmed family life with lots of work but also with time for great family summer vacations with travel and hiking and - during the year - for theater. Eva started teaching freshmen students in the Department in 1969 and became a very successful and admired teacher; she retired in 1994 after 25 years of teaching. Both our sons did exceptionally well, with Martin, a National Merit Fellow, going to Harvard and Thomas, a National Merit Finalist, to Princeton. Both earned their Ph.D. degrees, got married, provided us with two grandchildren each and followed our footsteps in not only becoming academics themselves, but also marrying wives who became academics, too.

Our otherwise peaceful time was shattered when Martin, at the age of 20, had a terrible explosion while working as a student at CERN in the summer of 1974, and had burns over 50% of his body; we did not know for almost three weeks whether he would survive.

APPENDICES

Letter of my mother to her friend 1941

[Translation (from German) of a letter from my mother, Frida Robitschek (Bedriska Robitschkova) to her friend Steffi Fried who was at that time probably still in Cuba before being able to move to the U.S.A.]

February 23, 1941

Dearest Steffi:

A few days ago I received a card from your brother in which he gave me your address. I hurry to write to you, to welcome you in your new home [country], to tell you how much I wish you happiness and peace for your future life, may for you the New World really mean a new world and let you forget all the difficulties of your past. How was the crossing? And are people there nice to you? Are you among strangers only? According to what Josef writes you now have the position previously held by Irma¹⁰³ which, if I am not mistaken, is that of a cook. Hardly the ideal occupation for you¹⁰⁴ but at least for the time being the essential knowledge.¹⁰⁵ I don't doubt that later, when you are allowed to join¹⁰⁶ Irma, you will find a more suitable and satisfying job, more appropriate to your extensive knowledge.

I have heard that your friend¹⁰⁷ left last month for S. Paulo in Brazil. Please let us know when you get news about his arrival. It would give me great pleasure if he would write directly to me or to Vally.¹⁰⁸ I forwarded your

103 I assume that Irma was Steffi's sister. I knew that Steffi had a sister living in Holland and that was the first place she went from Prague on her flight from Vienna in 1938, i.e. still before the outbreak of the war, and I assume that she, too, fled when the Germany occupied Holland.

104 Steffi earned a law degree in Vienna in order to be able to work with her husband in his law office.

105 I don't understand the meaning of that phrase.

106 This may mean that Steffi was at that time in Cuba waiting for permission to immigrate to the US.

107 This must refer to Franz Welten, Mother's cousin who, as far as I remember, ended up in Bogota in Colombia.

108 Vally or Valerie Kuenhelova was the sister Franz Welten's wife, Teresa. Teresa and Vally were not Jewish, actually Teresa was a very devout Catholic. Aunt Teresa was very ill, suffering from what I believe must have been rheumatoid arthritis, and was bedridden for long periods of time.

greetings to all your girl friends, also I have only now transmitted your earlier letter, I had the wrong address and all the mail was always returned. Fourteen days ago she came herself to see me.¹⁰⁹ Friederl¹¹⁰ is very unhappy and very nervous in spite of good news. She would like to be with you but does not dare to ask you whether you could help her in some way. Poor Teresa¹¹¹ had a very bad winter both health- and otherwise. The severe cold weather is just so bad for rheumatism and she is missing the usual cure in the Swiss Alps.¹¹² She has now been for a longer period of time with her mother¹¹³ and with Eva.¹¹⁴ Eva is supposed to join the business of Trude,¹¹⁵ but so far Trude was unable to come here. For Teresa this all is very difficult, it is also almost too much for her. Currently she is in bed with a flu. I actually have the same, but the doctor calls it elegantly bronchitis. I actually have not felt well for quite some time, which makes me very sad not so much for my own sake, but because instead of working myself I have to be served by my husband and children. Particularly now when I am not allowed to touch anything. Kurt¹¹⁶ prepares breakfast and supper, knows how to make tea, potatoes, cauliflower, Swedish tea,¹¹⁷ coffee and fried eggs. He is at this time again at home. The

109 I don't know who "she" is -perhaps it refers to Friederl in the next sentence.

110 Friederl, a diminutive of Frida, Schifferes the daughter of Mother's very close friend who died in childbirth; by that time Frida, also called Zapi, had married Walter Robitschek who left for the USA in 1939, and she was waiting to follow him. She succeeded just before the USA entered the war. She and Walter, now Robichek, now live in Bethesda, MD.

111 Obviously Teresa Welten was at that time still in the "Protectorate Bohemia and Moravia", the name of the occupied remnants of Czechoslovakia after the annexation of the Sudetenland to Germany and the establishment of Slovakia as an "independent" German satellite state. Later, still during the war, she succeeded in following her husband Franz with their daughter Eva to South America.

112 High altitudes seemed to relieve her problems - that may also have been the reason why Franz has chosen Colombia - of course I don't know whether he had any other options.

113 As far as I recall her mother lived in Moravia in a small town or village.

114 Her and Franz's daughter.

115 I don't know who Trude was.

116 I used to be known by the name of Kurt; actually the name on my birth certificate was Jan Kurt.

117 Tea made in milk instead of water; I remember it was recommended by my cousin, Dr. Klapp, probably particularly for bronchitis.

workshop¹¹⁸ is so cold that he was getting sick all the time, now he has some stomach problem and has to be a bit careful. Besides, the vocational course¹¹⁹ in which he has been registered for half a year, is scheduled to start next month. Helga brought home a quite good report card.¹²⁰ Since she is going to this school she is enjoying learning much more, but works sometimes at night till 11:30. Hugo¹²¹ is very busy, goes as always every day to H.¹²² and returns only in the evening.

And now, my dear Steffi, be heartily embraced and assured that I think of you often and a lot and hope to to hear from you directly soon.

118 This was obviously written at the time when I was working as a sort of apprentice in the metal workshop of Mr. Kleinhampl.

119 Reference to the chemistry course which was listed as a vocational technician training course

120 This must have been from some private illegal school, since Jewish children were not allowed to attend regular school after the summer of 1940, but I don't remember what kind of arrangement it was.

121 My father.

122 Hostivar - the Prague suburb where my father's and uncle's factory was located, one train stop from the suburb, Strasnice, where we lived.

I kiss you heartily
Yours Fridl

Greeting from husband and children

I also wish you all the best and send many greetings
Kurt

Me too
Helga

Letter by Vilda Süsland from Zatec (Zhatec), June 1945

[This letter was sent by Vilem (Vilda, Vili, Willi) Süsland to a friend from the room which we shared in Zatec hospital. Vilda, his brother the actor Cajlais (Zeileis, Jirka, Jiri Süsland), and Karel Schwenk, the author of Terezin's famous cabarets and actor shared the three-level bunk bed just across the narrow aisle from Vilem Pollak, Jan (Jenda) Sander and myself in Meuselwitz. I was together with Vilda, his brother and Jan Sander the entire time from our arrival in Meuselwitz until Vilda's death in the same hospital room in Zatec. Vilda at first seemed to be by far the strongest of the four of us, but then suddenly got very ill and died about two month after liberation. The letter written very shortly after liberation describes life in Meuselwitz and our evacuation and the march afterwards far better and in far more detail than I could possibly remember. However, I do not think that I was part of the first "escape" from the railroad tracks, at least I don't have the faintest recollection of it.

Elena Makarova kindly let me have a copy of the original Czech letter as well as of this translation; the translation appeared in her book "Long Live Life!", Verba Publishers Ltd., Jerusalem 2001]

7.6.45

My dearest Ili:

You cannot begin to imagine my surprise when I got your letter in my hands.

I can describe everything in detail: poor Jirka¹²³ and I went through everything together until the very end. I would much rather talk to you in person, but that would probably be hardly possible for you. So, let me at least describe everything briefly, since I, too, am ill and terribly weak.

I saw Franta the last time in Auschwitz, when he was leaving with his brother Töpfer and I think that also with Petr Engelmann for Gliwice. At that time Jirka was not yet in Auschwitz and I actually felt sorry that I could not go with Franta in the same transport. I assumed that Jirka would be able to stay in Terezin somehow. But, unfortunately, Jirka arrived together with Schwenk, and I was terribly happy that we would all be together. We managed to get into a single transport called "Leipzig" as metalworkers. We waited in Auschwitz exactly one month, then we, the "metalworkers", were sent to a small town called Meuselwitz in Thuringen, where they had a small concentration camp ready for us and where we were going to work in the HASAG munitions factory. There were about 2,000 women in the camp, mainly Polish women from Warsaw; and so they isolated one block and gave it to our group. Apart from the three of us, other acquaintances in the group were Bubik, Honza Roubichek¹²⁴, and Vilem Polak ... but beyond that, I don't know anyone in the group that you might have known. After a few days, they immediately put us to work. They divided us into a day and night shifts and put the specialists on lathes. The rest of us, who had no idea what was going

¹²³ Jirka Süsland, Cajlajs, Vilda's brother

¹²⁴ My name at that time should have been spelled Robitschek

on, were shown how to work on large automatic machines or made to work at the train station or in other auxiliary jobs. They split Jirka and me up by assigning us to different halls, but at least we both worked indoors, which, despite a lot of disadvantages, was a huge advantage especially in winter, because we didn't have to freeze like, for instance, Schwenk and Bubik. This was the start of a stereotypical life for us: long work shift, very little food, then sleep, then the factory again in the morning. All day, you look forward to a piece of bread in the evening. And so it goes every day including Sunday, with no rest; one week the day shift, the following week the night shift, air raids every day in the vicinity and two raids directly against our facility. Bombs fall into the camp, too; many women are killed, mainly Polish, but some of ours get wounded as well. During the air raid, Schwenk, Jirka, and I sit next to the stove, pressed against one another, hoping that if it hits it'll either take all three of us or none of us. We live for the news. We manage to get hold of a newspaper. That's the only thing that keeps us going. Jirka and I are ecstatic that we are together; the others are jealous of us because we have each other. Jirka is able to bear everything better, much better than I, mainly the hunger, but, on the other hand, the moment there are no news, he gets terribly depressed. Karel has a tough time tolerating the hunger, but mainly he freezes terribly while working outdoors. The work is very hard for him. He's intolerant, hysterical, and quite unpopular - only the two of us understand him. Bubik is an absolute failure: I don't even want to talk about it. Jirka and I remain reasonably healthy throughout, and it is a surprise to us both what a man can survive in such conditions.

One morning, they send us from the factory to the camp. We know that the Americans are getting closer. Word is that they're evacuating Meuselwitz and liquidating the camp. It travels through the camp at the speed of light. They load up the whole population of the concentration camp - men and women both - into trains. There are now about 300 men (the men's camp had been enlarged to accommodate 100 Polish Jews and about 50 of all different nationalities from Buchenwald). We ride in open wagons, crammed in like sardines and with practically no provisions. We have our entire SS escort with us. They have no provisions either. We have no idea where we are going. Some people say the Sudeten, some say Dachau, but not one knows anything for sure. But it's a change, it's movement, and the mood is reasonably decent.

Looking back on it now, I think that the time from our evacuation to the end was probably the most horrible thing we had ever had to live through. But this may be because my view of that time is colored by the tragic death of my brother.

We are really moving toward the Sudetenland. In about four days, the train stops at the border station of Graslitz (Kraslice). We're not going any further. The train is stopped on the side railing. For the first time, they give us something to eat: one loaf of bread for ten

people. We live in the wagons, freeze during the night, and are glad of the occasional opportunity to be able to sit down. Those who know how to fight, mainly Polish Jews, get to lie down while others must stand. These Polish Jews are a chapter onto themselves, possibly because they are the last to have arrived and the healthiest, most ruthless, most ready to fight. We look forward to the morning - maybe there will be something to eat. Well, one loaf for 16 people. Some beginning. The Poles sniff out a pile of potatoes. Before Jirka and I make our decision, the pile is swarming with 70 Poles. Jirka and I stuff our pockets, but the Poles have large bags handy. The potatoes disappear into the bags. Suddenly the SS arrive, there are shots into the air, we run back, each with about ten potatoes. Poor Karel got nothing, he is indisposed. He has had terribly swollen feet for some time and cannot walk. The situation stabilizes somewhat. We make fire and bake the potatoes. Polish women get some greens in the meadow and cook soup from them. The Poles and the stronger people among the other nationalities cook thick potato soup, potatoes and spinach, and similar things. This is how the first differences arise. Some are hungry, others less so, some even get a piece of bread from the SS for a service rendered.

Back to the wagon. Better to go back earlier than later, maybe we will get to sit down. Naturally, Jirka and I get there too late. Still, we have some luck: one of us can sit. Jirka sits down while I stand. He's pretty good, that boy, much more quick on his feet than I. The third day. No bread as far as I can remember. Fighter-bombers attack the train station in the evening. They aim at the munitions train on the neighboring siding, but also machine gun the neighboring wagon of our train by mistake. There are dead among the Poles and the women. During the air raids, Jirka and I lie in the wagon, we only get up and run later when everybody is already fleeing toward the closest wood. The SS are helpless. They're more afraid than anyone else. The wagons are empty: everyone has fled. For some reason, Jirka is running slowly. "Stop fooling around," I call to him, "maybe it'll be okay." He's caught up to me. He'd returned once for blankets since we don't know it around here. Two friends wave to us. We join them and go into the forest. We visit several houses and get a little something to eat. No one even wants to think about putting us up for the night. They are all afraid. We have similar experiences in several more houses. Two of us therefore want to return: at least we got something to eat and each of us has a piece of bread in his pocket. The third suggests waiting for morning, the fourth is for starting toward Karlovy Vary right away. A Volkssturm trooper who meets us on the way finally makes the decision for us. After a longish, incoherent conversation, he willingly escorts us back to the railroad station. We tell him about the fighter-bomber attack. This is how we get back to the train station where the Volkssturm trooper hands us over to the SS with a great deal of satisfaction over a job well done. The SS sends us back into the wagon. In the meanwhile, almost everybody has returned, except for a few, who are brought in the next day, one by one. So far, it's one to nothing for the Germans. On the fourth day, I believe we get one loaf of bread for sixteen people and one can of meat for twenty. We have to take especial care when the food is being divvied up: real hunger is beginning and some people are turning into total animals. Throughout the day, we see tremendous number of aircraft

passing overhead. Another huge air raid somewhere - things are moving again. The roads are getting busy. A lot of vehicles filled with the military and civilians arrive. There is considerable chaos. We have to fall in front of the wagons and they divide up what's left of the provisions. One loaf of bread and a sixth of a can of meat per person. They line us up on the road and we start marching. Something is going on. The Americans must be advancing again. The intended destination of the march is Falknov. Darkness falls quickly. We notice that the gentlemen from the SS, from the highest to the lowest, had made themselves scarce. We jubilate: we are free! We'll spend the night somewhere and let the Americans take us prisoner in the morning. The evening is wonderful. Free for the first time. We break up into small groups. I go with Jirka, Honza Roubichek, his friend¹²⁵, and Vilem Polak. After dark, we get stopped by the Volkssturm, marched to a small town and put in prison, and then to yet another place where other captured groups are waiting already. Many of the Czechs are missing. Even so, they'd managed to collect quite a few of us. The Hungarians and the Poles welcome us with malicious smiles. Well, the score is two to nothing for the Germans. The American advance has apparently been stopped in this sector. The gentlemen from the SS come back one by one and immediately start lining us up again for a march. Vilem Polak stays behind in the village with high fever. The rest of us are to start marching again - apparently until the end of the war. They'll apparently drag us all over the Sudetenland until just before the end of hostilities, and then they'll shove us over to the Czech part of the Protectorate so we, as a starving mob, will not forage for food among the Sudeten Germans. At the same time, the gentlemen from the SS can see to their own provisions there. And so it starts: first Karlovy Vary, Podbozhany, Ludice, and toward Manetin, then toward Plzen and again as if toward Louny, finally Zatec and then maybe Litomerice and Terezin. Every day, we cover 20-25 kilometers. Some people have one clog, others may have a real shoe on the other foot. Karel Schwenk is barefoot. His feet are horribly swollen. We often march through mountains. It is snowing, and Schwenk's feet make a splashing sound in the snow. He says that he can't go on any more and starts falling back. The SS push him along with the stocks of their guns, and he manages to continue. The three of us are getting worn out. The food - we just don't know how to fight for it. Jirka is the only one who from time to time manages to get something for me and for Karel. How happy he is when he holds in his hand a piece of bread that some old German woman had tossed to him from a house when the SS weren't looking, or when he snags a piece of turnip or beet and a few potatoes!

Another dry day, we tell ourselves and happily bite into the sugar beet as if it were the greatest delicacy. We sleep outdoors.

¹²⁵ Jenda Sander

It's cold enough, but we huddle and so we are all right, especially when we have something in the stomach or when Jirka finds a butt somewhere and matter-of-factly lights it up under the blanket in front of Schwenk. But waking up in the morning and more marching: that's not so good, especially when the rain starts up again. Another 25 kilometers today. We don't even look where we are heading any more. We're hungry, that sugar beet burns strangely in the throat, and nearly every one of us gets diarrhea. The ditches are lined with crouching men and women. Jirka and I have to drop our pants often. Sometimes it's not even worth it to buckle our belts. The more turnips and cold potatoes and the less bread, the more often we have to jump into the ditch. The Poles are experts in fighting for bread, and they cook delicious potato soups in the evening. But all that jumping into the ditch really weakens you. In the evening, they chase us into a barn. We are all worn out and don't even look for food. After the obligatory fight for a place in the barn, we bury ourselves in the hay and fall asleep. Jirka's diarrhea is getting worse; he is beginning to be afraid to eat. We continue to march every other day. We go from village to village, sleep in barns, and sometimes get a slice of bread, about once every four days. We get some potatoes, too, and sometimes even soup. We are very hungry. Jirka's diarrhea is even worse now. Often he cannot hold it back any more, sometimes he loses control with the simplest movement. It depresses him terribly. Neither the fellow prisoners nor the Jewish doctor nor the SS doctor recognize this kind of suffering for the horror that it is. Poor Jirka is refusing all food now. We are especially afraid of the night when we have to lie down all crammed together and everybody starts calling up pigs that shit all over themselves. He and I lie next to each other, and I can at least protect him from the Pole next to me who is willing to beat him because he had lost his bowels again. Ili, you can't imagine what Jirka suffered. We are both terrible weak now, don't shave any more or even wash. I feebly forage for food for us, but I am horribly weak myself.

Most of the Czech ran away on the march. There are just a few of us among the Poles and the Hungarians. Yesterday, I hid Schwenk in hay in a barn because he couldn't go on any more. From that day on, I know nothing of him. Jirka and I decide to try to run away, too, but it is no longer possible because we are too weak. The SS catch us immediately and send us back. Again, we are

in a barn. After a long argument, we decide to hide ourselves in the hay in the morning and not go on any further. But I don't trust the scheme. In the early morning, at Jirka's insistence, we climb up to the second floor and bury ourselves up there, firmly resolved not to continue. In the morning, everyone has to fall in. The SS are searching the top floor. Everything seems to be all right. We hold our breath. But the inspection today is a thorough one. SS boots are coming, someone is sticking a rifle into the haystacks, sees us already. How pleased he is - got two of them at once, they were so well concealed, and still I found them! "Auf! Los! Ihr Schweinehund!" But Jirka refuses to move. I say that he is my brother, that he is terribly ill and cannot get up. At the same time, I beg Jirka in Czech to get himself together so we can come out. But he wants to get shot. I join him, but the SS-man will have none of it. He has no orders to shoot, so he beats Jirka in the head with the butt of the gun for a long time until I manage to pull him out of the hay by force. The SS-man then chases us with his rifle butt downstairs into the yard. Jirka's head is bleeding heavily. The transport contains about 20 ill people already, who ride on a cart. I beg them to let Jirka on the cart, too, because he can no longer stand on his feet, but they refuse, saying that if he was strong enough to climb up in the barn, he is strong enough to walk.

The poor Jirka hangs himself on me, all bloody. We start out again in the company of a screaming SS-man. Outside the village, Jirka sinks to the ground. I drag him to the ditch. I am ordered to leave him there and march on. I cannot move. The SS-man resorts to force again. He beats me with his rifle butt. Jirka begs me to go. The SS-man is pounding me like a crazy man. Farewell, Jirka, the Germans are ahead three to nothing now.

Well, they loaded Jirka onto the cart after all, and from that moment on, he gets to ride along with us. In the evening, we meet again in a barn. I really thought that he wouldn't survive the day. He looks terrible - skeleton-thin, filthy (well, me too...). Our bodies are all scratched up. Lice are eating us alive. We have thousands and thousands of them: we don't even try to catch them any more. I pull Jirka's pants off so I can wash them for him at the pump. He is so grateful that you'd think I had done something extraordinary for him. He is terribly depressed because he is unable to keep himself clean. The Poles in the barn call us Shitty Süsslands and won't let us lie down anywhere. We are all alone among them now. I manage to put up a feeble defense against them: but what good are my words against their violence? You cannot imagine how we hate them. We can't find a single person who would help us, no one who would show us even a little consideration. Jirka doesn't want anything to eat any more, but he would like a little coffee or tea. I manage to find some. He smiles, says "It's good, Vilda, we'll make it. We've already survived Hitler, so how much longer can this last?" The next day, we march on. Jirka rides on the

cart, I walk. In the evening, we see each other again in a barn. We are both weakening rapidly, especially Jirka, who can barely walk because of the terrible diarrhea.

One day, we see a lot of activity on the road again - more carts with soldiers moving away from the Protectorate. Chaos again.

The SS lead us off the main road onto a field path. We stop by the Ohre River. They unloaded the sick on the path. The sick limp after us toward the Ohre. They tell me that Jirka and four others were left behind on a meadow.

I go back there, surprised that the SS let me leave the bivouac. When I get to the meadow, I see Jirka there, lying in the full sun. He is badly smeared with his own excrement, covered with flies; in a word, in frightening condition. He smiles at me faintly and weakly waves his hand. Beside him lie Honza Roubichek, his friend, and one Pole who is showing no signs of life. We are all horribly weak, and I cannot even get the boys in the shade. Toward evening, I manage to drag Jirka to the nearest haystack. We decide to spend the night there. Before going to sleep, I decide to limp to the nearest village to find something to eat. The village is full of Poles. I find out that the SS had left the bivouac and that all soldiers had evacuated the village. Well, this is really the end. I jubilate, don't even look for food and rush back to the boys as quickly as I can. Our mood is excellent: tomorrow, we'll head to the village and will be saved. For now, we crawl inside the haystack and happily fall asleep. So, Jirka, you don't have to fear the Poles any more, you have peace from now on. If you need to go, go ahead right there in the haystack without any concern. How happy he is! We'll be free again, there will be theater, there will be friends, a beautiful summer, and mainly freedom.

When we wake up, the sun is bright. I push the boys to get up, but in vain. Only Honza Roubichek's friend staggers to his feet, the others are totally out of strength. I am desperate. I thought that Jirka would be able to make it to the village. Roubichek's friend and I leave alone and go to the village. We get lots of food. They're waiting for the Russian Army. I return to the haystack with food and coffee and again beg the boys to pull themselves together and stagger to the village, but in vain. With the best of will, they cannot manage it. Then help appears like a miracle. Two young men show up on bicycles, with guns, with the tricolor on their breast. They are Czechs, and they are coming to help us.

Jirka is in ecstasy. "Hello boys," he cries, "we're saved, I'm sure you'll be able to help us get to the village." The Czechs with the guns get back on their bicycles without a word. In a nearby field, they requisition a horse-drawn rig complete with driver, and take us to the village. They put us up in a room in one of the houses. There are four beds. They bring us everything we need. They are wonderful, wonderful; we are immensely grateful.

Finally, I can wash Jirka off a little and put him in bed. He looks horrible, like a skeleton, with weak heartbeat, famished, utterly worn out, weakened by the constant diarrhea. Our bodies are all scratched up to bleeding because of the lice. We have thousands and thousands of them. But otherwise, our mood is good. We need a doctor for Jirka. Jirka is in the worst condition, the weakest. Honza Roubichek and his friend can't get to their feet either. Besides diarrhea, they have badly frostbitten feet. I am in better condition than the others: at least I can keep on my feet and help Jirka a little.

Jirka is quite impatient. He keeps calling for medical help, but I can't find anyone who could help. There is no doctor in the village. I am at my wits' end. I give him some valerian drops: if I let him, he'd drink the whole glass. He passionately longs to get better, to survive. I rage over my helplessness.

Our friends who had brought us to the village return in two days. They promise that they'll take us to the hospital in Zatec tomorrow morning. Jirka especially welcomes the news, but so do the rest of us because we all need medical attention. The next day, they really load us on a flatbed wagon and take us to Zatec, where we are handed over to doctors and sisters of mercy. They delouse us and put all four of us in one very nice room. We are exhausted, and fall asleep after our baths. We are all pleasantly disoriented by opium. The next day, Jirka gets a shot to strengthen his heart, a shot of grape sugar, and an infusion. From time to time, he hallucinates. He keeps calling the nurse, and is scared that he'll soil the bed. I lie on the bed next to him. The nurse has already told me that things are very bad. I know that poor Jirka is struggling with death. The situation becomes critical during the night of 12-13 May. The poor man keeps opening his shirt, keeps yelling "breathe, breathe!" He yells "atmen, atmen!" at the nurse in German. After that, he has great difficulty breathing, and his breath becomes irregular. He passes away at a quarter to twelve on May 12th, 1945...

Dearest Ili, I send you warm greetings. Yours,

Vili Süssland.

Letters to Elsa Kohn¹²⁶

[Elsa Kohn was a friend of my mother who managed to get to the USA just before the outbreak of the war. Elsa's father had lived in the US for a certain period of time towards the end of the nineteenth century and perhaps became an American citizen and on that basis the American consulate issued Elsa, her sister Berta and her brother Otto¹²⁷ visas - possibly bending the rules a bit to help them to get out of Nazi occupied Czechoslovakia. Elsa's brother, who had changed his name to Kilian, was a Prague dentist. He never married and Elsa lived with him and took care of his household. I started corresponding with her after returning to Prague after the war and she kept my letters and later gave them to me. When we came to America, Elsa and her brother and sister lived in Chicago and we met her for the first time and stayed with her and her brother while attending our first American Chemical Society meeting in the early fall of 1961 in Chicago. At that time Otto Kilian practiced general medicine, but he died not long afterwards. Elsa still lived in Chicago when we moved there in 1966 and we used to visit her occasionally. She later moved to an old peoples' home in Michigan to be close to her nephew George Klein, Berta's son, who was a professor at Western Michigan University and, as a child in Prague, a playmate of Eva.]

Jan Robicek¹²⁸,
1946

Prague, January 2,

Praha II., Washingtonova 23¹²⁹

¹²⁶ Translation from Czech.

¹²⁷ Perhaps Otto was even born in the US, though I don't think so. In any case he managed to get to the US first.

¹²⁸ This was obviously before I legally changed my name to Rocek, but I did not want to use the correct spelling of my name, "Robitschek," because the usage of "tsch" instead of "c" (with an little "v" sign over it) was German.

¹²⁹ This was Arnost Reiser's address - I lived with him at that time.

Dear Aunt Elsa¹³⁰, I was enormously pleased to hear about you and your dear ones from Mr. Popper¹³¹ and to learn that you are doing reasonably well and most importantly that you managed to get to the US in time. The last news we had about you during the war was that you were in some internment camp for Americans in Germany and we did not know how you were and we doubted that you would make it to America before the end of the war. I knew of course that your brother was already there, I think that you yourself let us read his letters to you.

I now want to describe to you briefly what had happened to our family. On May 15, 1942 we arrived in Terezin after three days in the Prague trade fair building. It is very hard to describe what life in Terezin was like, because it was by no means uniform. Everybody lived differently depending on what chances had determined his fate. As you probably remember, Terezin was an old fortress and thus an ideal place for establishing a closed camp. There are only about four roads leading out of Terezin; everything else is surrounded by ramparts so that guarding it was very easy. Before the war, the town of Terezin had about 4,000 inhabitants, but in addition there were about ten large military barracks of which only a part was occupied by soldiers and the majority was used only for storage. For the ghetto, of course, every space was used including the historically oldest ones under the ramparts, i.e., actually completely underground with almost no light and terribly wet.

At the time of our arrival there was still a civilian population in the town; Jews lived only in the barracks separated by sex, with a strict prohibition of visits and gendarme guards always at the barrack gates. We went to work only in groups and in town we were not allowed to use the sidewalks which were reserved for the Aryan population only. The first impression of Terezin was very unpleasant; we arrived just a day after a big affair when the Germans discovered a way in which cigarettes and food got into Terezin illegally. The result was the

130 Elsa was not my aunt, but for children it was customary to address close older friends of the family as aunts and uncles and once started one usually retained this custom even into adulthood.

131 Otto Popper was a law partner of Eva's father. He managed to get to the US before the war and also lived in Chicago.

immediate disbanding of the “Ghettowache”¹³² a sort of very influential police of the Jewish administration, threats of the most severe punishments, constant roll-calls, renewed orders to turn in all forbidden objects such as money, cigarettes, canned food, creams and ointments, writing utensils, postage stamps and a huge number of additional things I can no longer remember. We expected new inspections, new punishments, etc. Our transport was supposed to continue right away to Poland, but some people were exempted and stayed in Terezin. We were among those who stayed because of my mother’s illness and also because my cousin, Dr. Klapp, was one of the important personages of the Jewish administration. He protected us from all transports until 1944.

Mother became seriously ill with pneumonia immediately after our arrival, the transport was no trivial matter for her, but she overcame the crisis relatively quickly mainly thanks to medication we brought with us and did not give up despite strict orders to do so. She had to stay in bed for a long time because her overall health had badly deteriorated, and she was in urgent need of hospital care. Thanks to Dr. Klapp she was able to stay in the hospital. In the beginning we did not see each other at all because there was no access to the women’s barracks -- particularly not for newcomers. I also got ill early on, first with a flu, then with laryngitis which finally developed into a mid-ear infection which eventually required surgery -- trephination¹³³ -- which under the prevailing health conditions healed very slowly. Helga was also ill, but not seriously. Father was well essentially the entire time, he actually bore up the best in our family, except that he contracted a hernia early on¹³⁴, so that he had to change his occupation, but otherwise he did not suffer from any health problems.

When we arrived in Terezin Father was 55, Mother 47, Helga 13 and I 18. In the beginning therefore Helga did not work at all; later she worked in a vegetable garden and continued this work until her deportation to Auschwitz. It was good that she was working outdoors

132 Ghetto-guard.

133 Or trepanation: chiseling out the infected part of the bone behind the ear.

134 While carrying heavy loads working in a lumber yard.

and that sometimes, of course only very rarely and taking a great risk, she could have some fruit or vegetables and occasionally even brought some for us. She was extremely good and cared for Father and Mother; Mother of course needed it most of us. Mother worked only for a very short time when she was relatively well, otherwise she spent the entire time in the hospital. She got sick with paratyphoid fever, chronic pleurisy and finally suffered a stroke from which the right side of her body was paralyzed so that she could not get out of bed. In between there were periods when she was better and of course her mental state changed accordingly. Father worked from the time when he contracted a hernia in a unit which was similar to "Ghettowache¹³⁵" I wrote you about; he was very content there, worked very hard and with pleasure and was very much liked by the people he came in contact with -- and there were very many of them. On the basis of his diligence and conscientiousness, he became commander of a sector and that meant a lot because he accomplished it entirely without favoritism. Before becoming sick I worked as a concrete worker, then for some time in the vegetable fields, then I carried coals and finally I got into a chemical laboratory where I was until the end of my stay in Terezin. This was very nice and interesting work but of course it had the shortcoming that materially, i.e., in terms of food, it provided nothing except for a very brief time towards the end. The food situation in the ghetto was very variable. In essence we were constantly hungry, but it was not so catastrophic that one could not bear it for some time. Otherwise I have to say that hunger belongs among the most terrible experiences I had, particularly in its constant form.

By the fall of 1942 all the civilian population of Terezin was gone and the gendarmes disappeared from the gates of the barracks and stood from then on only at the town entrances. After some time contact between man and woman was completely free. Living quarters were of course separate. Even marriages were permitted, but it was paradoxical that it was strictly prohibited to have children and abortions were mandatory. Terezin was slowly becoming the so called "Musterghetto" which was supposed to convince foreign visitors how humanely and kindly, actually with paternal care, the Jews were being

¹³⁵ Actually, it was the "Ghettodienst" or ghetto service, which kept order inside the barracks.

treated. As a result of that the outward appearance of the town was being improved, house fronts were being painted, sidewalks washed, a beautifully equipped children's pavilion for about 15 children was built and used only on the day of the visit of the Red Cross Commission while in reality children lived in terribly crowded awful rooms. A park was built in the town square, a music pavilion erected, a coffee house opened, shops, a reading room, a lecture hall, simply a perfect Potemkin village. In order to accomplish all that, people, of course, were forced to work harder and in order to provide enough space several thousand people were sent to Poland¹³⁶. The maximum population in Terezin was about 60,000 and then it was reduced to 30,000 only to be able to show the Commission how comfortably and beautifully people lived there.

After a while we got so used to Terezin that it appeared to us natural and we were glad to be there because, though we did not know anything about Poland, we suspected that it was much worse there. And there were a number of nice things, I had good friends, developed a closer relationship with my family than ever before, I had work in which I was interested and, in particular from the perspective of what came later, it appears to me today as quite a nice time. Neither my narrative abilities nor the limited scope of this letter make it possible for you to gain a fair image of what one calls the Ghetto Terezin.

In September 1944 I was transported from Terezin and we were told that we were going to work in Germany and that we would probably come back to Terezin, that we definitely would be in constant contact with Terezin and that legally we will remain on its roll. The destination of our transport was not clearly determined, but there was talk about Dresden or something in its environment. We went, however, directly to the concentration camp Auschwitz. I later learned that my parents followed me about a month later and went, in all probability, directly into the gas chambers.

We arrived in Auschwitz at about 2 AM and at first I could see nothing but barbed wire fences with high voltage electricity and floodlights and several machine gun towers and some large fire in the distance. Then

¹³⁶ Auschwitz.

we were chased out of the railroad cars, of course without luggage, and we marched single file to an SS-man who asked people how old they were, whether they were healthy, etc., and depending on the answer divided the stream of people onto two sides. Only much later did I learn that the other stream of people, older or sick, went directly into the gas chambers and that the fire we saw was fire FROM THE CREMATORIUM. Then we were led into a large hall, where we had to undress, and then into a bath [showers] after first having our hair cut and shaven on the entire body. The only belongings we were allowed to keep were our shoes and the belt (they took our shoes anyway later¹³⁷) and we received a shirt, pants, a vest, a jacket, a cap and foot-wraps.¹³⁸ Then we were given postcards and we were ordered to write that we were working in Germany, that we were well and looked forward to our families joining us soon. It was forbidden to write down the sender. We lived in former military structures, up to 1,000 people in each. Our food consisted of one liter¹³⁹ of soup and a slice of bread, sometimes a little piece of cheese, half a slice of salami or a teaspoon of jam (of course of special military quality for concentration camps). I reported as a lathe operator and I thus managed to get into a transport that was supposed to go to Leipzig, and we succeeded in leaving after about a month. I won't write more details about Auschwitz, there are things that simply defy description.

We arrived in a factory not far from Leipzig and worked there under conditions which were a bit better than in Auschwitz, but still exactly calculated so that nobody could last longer than a definite and very limited time. Moreover, the situation there kept worsening. I worked in the factory on a lathe, outside on removal work [after bombing], excavating unexploded bombs, etc. I got slowly but gradually and inevitably weaker.

On April 12, 1945, when the front approached closely and we hoped

137 As far as I recall I kept my shoes until they fell apart, but many people with better boots lost theirs to some of the older inmates.

138 A rectangular piece of cloth, about 1 ft by 1.5 ft, to wrap a foot in and used instead of a sock.

139 About a quart.

that our imprisonment would end soon, the worst happened to us: we were evacuated. We rode in open railroad cars, more than 100 people in a car, for five days, practically without any food, so crowded that we could not even sit, could not sleep and a lot of people could not tolerate it and had nervous breakdowns. Then we were attacked by an English airplane and we had several deaths. We had experienced two heavy bombardments before while we were still in the factory.

Then we walked on on foot, did not get anything to eat; in the end we got terrible diarrhea and were so weakened that we could no longer go to relieve ourselves or hold our stool. It was simply slow dying and I had no other wish than that it would go faster. Suddenly the Germans ran away and on the 9th of May the Czechs found us, took us to a village and after two days to a hospital.

When I arrived there I weighed 49 kg (I am almost 180 cm tall).¹⁴⁰

Closer details of the journey cannot be described, I really did not know what was happening to me and could not separate reality from a dream...

I was 4 and 1/2 months in the hospital, they amputated two toes on the right foot (frostbite) and only there did I find out that my parents with Helga went also to Auschwitz. What happened with them there was immediately clear to me.

I am now in Prague, living with a friend and will take my “maturity exam¹⁴¹” shortly, then I want to study chemistry.

As far as property is concerned, we received together with my uncle the factory buildings: the equipment had been liquidated a long time ago. Besides that I got back a small sum which my father had hidden with an acquaintance and I am living on that. One cannot make any big plans, we don't know yet how things will develop.

¹⁴⁰ 108 lb, 5 ft 11 in.

¹⁴¹ High school graduation exam.

[This letter was not dated, but must have been written in January 1958 during my seven week stay in England (mid December 1957 to early February 1958)]

Dear Aunt Elsa and all my dear ones,

Many thanks for your nice letters: I was tremendously pleased and you can't imagine how good and wonderful it is for me to know that we have not lost contact after so many years of separation and that we have in foreign countries as good and nice friends as we had before and that their friendship towards us -- and of course also ours towards them -- is as true and warm as if we could see each other regularly and lived in the same town. I accept with great pleasure Aunt Elsa's kind offer that I can write to all of you together and she will translate my Czech and share them with you: it will enable me to write much more in the short time I have available than I would have been able if I wrote to each of you separately.

So first our brief history from 1948: both of us, my wife Eva and I completed our chemistry studies at the university. I was then awarded an "aspirantura," something like a three year stipend or fellowship and I then earned another title with a nonsensically sounding name (Candidate of Chemical Sciences), approximately corresponding to an English Ph.D. Eva found employment in a pharmaceutical research institute, where she in about two years managed to complete very successfully a project which made it possible for her to earn the title of Doctor of Technical Sciences, essentially equivalent to my title, except it was the old name used before the reorganization. She is still working in the same institute on developing cancerostatic compounds. Unfortunately, some of these compounds are physiologically very active and Eva occasionally suffers from unpleasant allergies; it is nothing serious and it will certainly go away once she starts working with different types of compounds. I think that she is quite satisfied in the Institute in spite of some things and some people she does not particularly like; of course, it would be very difficult to find something else in Prague. After I finished my three years of "aspirantura," I went over to the Czechoslovak Academy of Sciences, which is the highest scientific organization in our country and whose institutes have a more theoretical rather than practical emphasis. The conditions there are

very decent, much better than anywhere else and I am satisfied, considering the limitations of local possibilities. Because I worked on a problem on which there is little experience locally, I got permission to visit England and specifically the institute of Prof. Ingold, who is the founder of this modern direction of organic chemistry. As you may perhaps imagine, there were a number of problems connected with the visit (I am not a party member and probably don't have a very good reputation in the political sense), but finally the visit did materialize thanks to the intervention of my boss.¹⁴² The bulk of the six weeks which I was allotted passed very fast and now I have just a little over 14 days left. That's about all about our work. Now about the family. We have two boys, four year old Martin and two year old Tomas, very charming children, particularly when asleep, otherwise terrible dragons and a big strain on the nerves for all of us. To get both of them to bed in the evening is such an exhausting project; on the rare days when I come home on time, I mostly lie down with them and often fall asleep before they do. (I am now working on a book and I get home very late about three times a week). Otherwise the boys are awfully nice and I just got a letter from Eva where she writes that she had to go early in the morning to take care of something, and Martin said that it was a pity that he is not yet grown up so that she would not have to go out into the dark by herself. A few days ago he brought 20 hellers [about 3 pennies] to grandmother (Eva's mother) who lives with us and takes care of the children and said: here you are, I broke your alarm clock, which, unfortunately, was true. Because Eva works the entire day she has a lot of work in the evenings often till midnight and then she gets up at 6 AM. It means that our life is reduced to the necessary minimum, we have very little time to visit friends or to receive visits; occasionally we go to the movies and very rarely to the theater. In the summer we are renting a very dilapidated house in a village from somebody who moved to the (formerly German) border areas; the children with my mother-in-law spend the entire summer there and we visit them on Saturdays and Sundays, that is Saturday evenings, because everybody has to work Saturday mornings and it is impossible to arrange to have free Saturdays. We use a motorcycle. So far we do not have enough money for a better means of transportation; perhaps

¹⁴² Frantisek Sorm, Director of the Institute of Organic Chemistry and Biochemistry, where I worked, and at that time Secretary General (late President) of the Academy of Sciences and a very prominent and influential member of the Communist Party.

it will be possible in the future. Of course, the current situation is that life is getting more expensive and difficult and in spite of the fact that we both have relatively decent incomes, we have to think carefully before buying anything. I definitely do not want to say that we are badly off, but, for instance, it would be very difficult if Eva could not work; although there are many families living on less than the salary of each of us, I am unable to imagine how they do it. When I compare our conditions with those in England where people with only one working member of the family can afford even to travel abroad, then I have to admit that the living standard in our country is much lower. For instance, if the Institute had not paid for my trip, I certainly could not have afforded it. I want you to understand: I am writing this strictly for information and not because we would need or want something; on the contrary, I do not think that it would be good for me to receive a shipment from abroad. I think that if for instance our authorities knew that I have a number of friends and relatives abroad, I would not have been able to come here. I don't know.

Of course, the hardest thing to tolerate is the personal situation under which one lives in Czechoslovakia: that one has to watch every word, that one always has to think what one says, with whom one talks and who is listening and that one has to teach the children all that from early childhood on. I think that is the main reason why I would like to get out at any price, but it is totally impossible; there is absolutely no legal way and no illegal either. It is obvious that they would never have allowed me to go to England if I did not have my family in Prague and they thus have a guarantee that I have to return, which I will now find even much harder after having learned about life in England, when I saw that their social security for every person is equally good or better [than ours], [that they have] free medical care, etc., etc, a number of things we were told are achievements attainable only in a "socialist" country. Up to now we could find some solace in the thought that with the total loss of personal freedom we are somehow paying for a number of social advantages which now exist compared with the prewar situation; now I see that the same is possible even to a better degree with the full preservation of personal freedom. This is the principal impression I am bringing with me from England and it is, I think, an

answer to what dear Frida¹⁴³ wanted to know. I remind you all of course very urgently, that this letter is meant only for you and not for your friends, although I believe that they might find it interesting: the ways by which reports come back are very complicated and with the miniscule number of people who have the opportunity to leave for a short time the territory of the Republic, it would be very easy to determine the source of the information and that it could have very dire consequences -- not only for me but also for the children -- you can perhaps imagine. So once more: absolutely don't talk about this letter with anybody further, it is meant only for aunt Steffi¹⁴⁴, Tereza¹⁴⁵ and Friederl.

As far as the outlook for the future is concerned, it does not appear to us in Czechoslovakia too rosy: we all fear that the situation cannot be changed except by war and that would not be a solution, because it would basically mean a free country but without people, which perhaps would not be a great loss, but somehow it is not what we would like.

I think that is about all I can write and I hope that it is enough; I would like to emphasize once more that I am very glad that I got so nice and good news [from you] and I would like to assure you all that we are always thinking of all of you and wish nothing more than to meet you sometime during our lifetime. Dear Elsa I want to thank you very much for the nice gift¹⁴⁶ for Martin; it is very kind and I hope that Martin will one day have the chance to use it and to thank you personally. As far as your questions about what I want to have done with the savings book, I would of course want it to stay with you. But, if you moved, it may be prudent to send your address to Eva's family in Canada with

143 Frida or Frieda or Friederl, daughter of my mother very close friend who died in childbirth, married Walter Robitschek (now Robicheck) and emigrated to the US.

144 Steffi Fried, my mother's best friend, married a gentile Viennese lawyer. After the German annexation of Austria they divorced "pro forma" in order to protect the law firm; Steffi escaped via Prague, Holland, France, Africa, Cuba and finally settled in New York. Her husband in Austria had a child with a lover and the "temporary" divorce became permanent. Steffi died in the mid sixties.

145 Tereza Welten, wife of my mother's cousin Franz Welten; they emigrated before the war to Colombia.

146 I believe the gift was a certain amount of money put in a savings account. I have the feeling that Elsa believed that she somehow owed the money to my late mother.

which we are in occasional contact by way of Eva's elderly aunt. I don't know whether in another 10 years I will be as lucky as this time to get in touch with you. I hope that now that I have described you our situation in enough detail, it may be possible to write to you through one of our older relatives; for old people, who don't need anything from the state, are not looking for a job and don't want to go for a business trip abroad, etc. the occasional written contact with a foreign country is quite harmless. I am therefore assuming that you keep in contact with each other and that it therefore would suffice to send a message, in some way, to one of you.

I am ending with heartiest greetings and many thanks for your kind news and the knowledge that we have in you the same good and nice friends as before. At this occasion I would also like to assure aunt Tereza -- very belatedly-- that we were all shaken by the news of the death of uncle Franz, of whom I had always been very fond.

I now remembered that you might be interested that I found two cousins in London, Hella and Susi Loeb¹⁴⁷, now Kleeman and Lind resp., both having good marriages and living very comfortably and having two children each. They were terribly nice to me and I spent a very nice time with them. Tomorrow, I am invited for the weekend to Hella's house at the sea shore.

I kiss you once more heartily and
I am still yours

Honza

The Canadian address: Mrs. J.K. Munz, 15 Rose Park Crescent,
Toronto 7, Ontario

Please confirm the receipt of the letter!!

¹⁴⁷ Daughters of Mother's half-brother, Hugo Loeb, managed to get to England before the outbreak of the war. Their parents were deported to the Lodz ghetto and perished.

Letter to Frantisek Sorm ¹⁴⁸

[I sent this letter from the Copenhagen prison, very shortly after our escape, to my Prague boss, Professor Frantisek Sorm, the director of the Institute of Organic Chemistry and Biochemistry of the Czechoslovak Academy of Sciences. The sole purpose of the letter was to provide an alibi for all my friends and colleagues, for my technician and my graduate student, and for my immediate boss (with whom I was on very good terms) by stating emphatically that I did not have any friends and that I did not share my anti-communist views with anybody. I later found out that some people did not understand the intent of the letter and felt hurt.]

August 2, 1960

Dear Professor Sorm,¹⁴⁹

Although there is certainly no point in my apologizing, I would like to assure you that I deeply regret that I had to betray your confidence because I wanted to live like a free person.

Although, from the professional perspective, your institute offered the best environment that I could have wished for, from the personal side for precisely the same reason it was the most intolerable workplace for a free-thinking person, a place where it was impossible to find a single politically and morally independently and honestly thinking person. It is a place where everyone -- from technicians up to group leaders -- sold their conscience for favorable material conditions and professional opportunities, and furthermore, an environment where I always felt spied on by superiors, my closest colleagues, and those who worked for me, who, even if they weren't party members, were so deeply influenced by their communist upbringing, that the dictates of the party were more important to them than their own judgement.

Because I was unwilling and unable to adjust to this spirit and because I could not find a single friend, I will give preference to much more modest material conditions where I will not have to have my beliefs approved.

I am sorry that I had to choose the route of flight, but the Czechoslovak government -- as you know -- provides no legal possibility for emigration.

¹⁴⁸ Translated from Czech.

¹⁴⁹ Literal translation: Esteemed Mr. Professor - standard Czech salutation.

Professor Sorm's response¹⁵⁰

[Response to my letter addressed to the director of the Institute of Organic Chemistry and Biochemistry, Academician Frantisek Sorm. Most likely the statement was written by some staff member on Sorm's behalf or orders, and would have certainly been reviewed and approved by him - nothing of any importance in the Institute would have happened without his approval. The statement is characteristic of the standard communist rhetoric of the time. To what extent it reflected Sorm's real views is impossible to guess - one might even consider a somewhat remote possibility that it was written and posted in order to enable him to make my letter exculpating my friends and colleagues available to the staff of the Institute. Sorm at the time was a powerful communist, not only Director of the Institute but also President of the entire Czechoslovak Academy of Sciences, a position he held until the Soviet invasion in 1968, when he was stripped of all his functions after publicly opposing the invasion and occupation.]

J. Rocek, an employee of our institute, escaped abroad with his entire family during a tourist trip to the GDR¹⁵¹. He committed this deed with full premeditation at a time when the capitalist forces, particularly USA, to which Rocek is most likely aiming, are striving to unleash a new world war, in order to slow down the rapid process of liberation of exploited colonial and dependent nations, and in particular because they are afraid of peaceful competition with the socialist camp and its constantly increasing prestige. He committed this deed at a time when, with the official support of the reigning Adenauer regime, a program of revisionism and retribution is being promulgated in West Germany posing a direct threat to our motherland. There is no doubt, that the forces of imperialism would engulf the world in a new and unimaginably destructive war without any hesitation and pangs of conscience, if only the might of the socialist camp and the world-wide movement of the socially aware strata of the working people would not stand in its way. Science carries an immensely important task in the quest for lasting world peace, because it is science on which the forces of capitalism rely, after having completely lost its moral face and even its economic predominance. It is therefore imperative for socialist science to reach permanent superiority over capitalist science in all sectors. It is therefore in the field of science that the truly decisive fight is taking place, and all self-conscious socialist scientists are aware of the importance of this morally just and honest fight. Our work place,

¹⁵⁰ Translated from Czech.

¹⁵¹ German Democratic Republic (Communist East Germany)

which has grown into a beautiful, self-aware collective, successfully fulfills the mission of socialist science in the section of chemistry and all our workers can be proud of the results we have achieved. Even Rocek, to whom our society gave multiple advantages and support, which allowed him to develop into a highly qualified specialist and also to achieve a high material and cultural level, could have been equally proud. Instead, Rocek fully consciously committed a deed, which has a single name - treason - an act which is condemned from time immemorial with the feeling of deepest abhorrence, contempt and disgust. There are two possibilities which could have motivated the act of the traitor Rocek. Either it was cowardice resulting from his extreme and generally known individualism and his lack of trust in the forces of socialism, or a cynical perfidiousness stemming from hidden class enmity.

The traitor Rocek is now selling to our enemies his expertise, which he gained thanks to the trust of our society, and his abilities which he could develop only thanks to our splendid collective. The actual loss for us is negligible, because Rocek worked on a decidedly fringe problem. However, we have to think hard about one aspect. The discovery of a traitor in a collective striving to reach beautiful and noble goals was always considered a supreme tragedy and so is it also with the evaluation of the treasonous escape of Rocek, to whom our collective always extended full - even if we know today undeserved - trust. It is therefore the duty for us all to improve further our educational work, on the part of the management of the Institute, on the part of the party and trade union organizations, and also our vigilance and never permit a repetition of the Rocek case.

As a document of the character profile of the escaped Rocek we are making available a copy of his letter which was received by the director of the Institute.

UNIVERSITY COLLEGE LONDON - GOWER STREET WCI

DEPARTMENT OF CHEMISTRY

Telephone 80510X 2920

2.8.60

Dr. J. Rocek,
Postboks 70i,
Kobenhavn S.V.,
Denmark.

Dear Rocek,

Why did you not jump overboard two months ago? It would have been so much easier to get you a temporary job here, without the offer of which it will be hard for you to get into the country, and which you will need while you are deciding what to do permanently. On this last question I think the opportunities in U.S.A. and Canada are freer than here, and that Canada particularly is a very good country for the young because it is developing so very fast. My son is there so I know something about it.

To return to more immediate things, we cannot offer you anything in this Department for the coming session because all the money is allocated now. I have been in touch by telephone with Hickinbottom, and he is going to enquire about the position at Queen Mary. He is going to write to Wiberg and Dewar and I am to Westheimer.

I think that for temporary purposes you would have to go into a research concern rather than productive industry, because only so could you give your service from the beginning, and not require a period of training which would be waste of time if you are not to remain. I may try some other possibilities.

My wife and I are both going abroad later this week, but Bunton, to whom I have shown your letter, will be here the whole of August, and I have asked him to open any letters that come to me from Denmark, or Canada or the United States. He will certainly be writing to you while I am unable to .

I am sure the Danes will be friendly to you and your family. I will write to Neils Bohr to tell him who you are.

Yours sincerely,

C. K. Ingold

C.K. Ingold

HARVARD UNIVERSITY
DEPARTMENT OF CHEMISTRY

22 Oxford Street
Cambridge 38, Massachusetts, U.S.A.

August 9, 1963

Dr. Jan Rocek
Postboks 781
KØBENHAVN S. V.
Denmark

Dear Jan,

I just learned from Professor Ingold that you have left Czechoslovakia and are now in some minor difficulties in Denmark. I am sure you will be able to find a suitable position in which to exercise your scientific training. If, however, you would like a temporary position which would give you an opportunity to do a little chemistry while you are looking around for something more suitable, I may be able to work out something for you here. The only difficulties will lie with the American Immigration Authorities, but I cannot assure you that these difficulties will not prove troublesome.

By good fortune and coincidence, I have available a grant from the Petroleum Research Fund for the investigation of the chemistry of chronic acid oxidations, and (subject to the very real difficulties mentioned above) can offer you a salary of something like \$7,000 a year as a post-doctoral Fellow. I realize that neither the salary nor the position is adequate, but it might serve as a temporary refuge while we sought something better for you. There would, of course, be the pleasant prospect of making a real contribution to chronic acid chemistry in the process.

If you are interested in this possibility, I hope you will write me your curriculum vitae, together with birth-dates and schooling for your wife and children. Meanwhile, I shall get all the information I can concerning the immigration regulations, so that I will be in a position to make you a formal offer or, alternatively, will know what hurdles must be overcome before I may legally do so.

Meanwhile, I have enclosed a Casater's check which I hope will be of some use to you in the present emergency. I do not know whether I shall later be able to find some other fund from which I can send you some additional support; I very much hope that I will be able to solve the immigration difficulties so that, in the event that the idea of coming here appeals to you, we can enjoy a brief period of scientific collaboration.

Sincerely yours,

F. H. Westheimer.

NEWSPAPER REPORTS

Danish *Berlingske Tidende*, July 25, 1960, report with picture of “our” ship, the *Seebad Ahlbeck* p. 186

Pictures of our arrival in Copenhagen on the front page of the Danish *Ekstra Bladet*. We are wrapped in the blankets we received in the hospital in Nykøbing after our jump in the sea. From left to right: Eva’s mother (61), the Danish Director of the Foreign Police, Eva, I with a sleeping Martin (6), a police officer with Thomas (4) p. 187

Second half of same page: Report on the escape with the picture of the 43-year old smith Jens West, who went into the water to help us and to whom I handed Thomas. p. 188

Report on the English newspaper *Daily News* p. 189

New York Times, July 25 and July 26 p. 190-1

Arrival in New York, October 27, 1960 p. 192

Philadelphia Daily News article December 10, 1963 p. 193-4



Czechs, Kids, Granny & All Go Overboard for Liberty

The ferry's destination of record was Denmark, but the real goal of the Czech family that boarded it from an East German port was freedom.

How He Worked It

The latest family group to wiggle through the Red Iron Curtain arrived at International Airport yesterday to settle here permanently. The members were Jan Rócek, 36, and his wife, Eba, 33, both research chemists; their two children, Martin, 6, and Thomas, 4, and Mrs. Rócek's

mother, Mrs. Anna Trojan, 61.

Rócek said he made the freedom leap by the ruse of joining an automobile club. While on vacation, the family decided to escape through East Germany. Driving to Warnemünde, they boarded a German motor launch for Gedser, Denmark.

Leaving the boat was forbidden, but as it neared the slip, the Róceks and Mrs. Trojan plunged into the water and made it safely to Danish jurisdiction. They eluded a German patrol boat.

Rócek, who will do research in theoretical physical organic chemistry at Harvard where he has a fellowship, said that while economically conditions are not bad in Czechoslovakia, the people live under a rigid political control.

"I was not willing to disguise my views and bring up my children where they would have no freedom of conscience or belief," he said.

OUR ROOMS
, COLORFUL
A DOND

5 Czechs Jump Ferry To Ask Danish Asylum

COPENHAGEN, Denmark, July 24 (AP)—A family of five Czechoslovak refugees jumped overboard from an East German ferry in the Baltic port of Gedser today as the vessel was mooring. They requested political asylum in Denmark.

Witnesses said a man and a woman, each with a child in arms, climbed the rail of the ferry and jumped into the water. They were followed by an elderly woman. People ashore threw lines to the swimmers.

The police said the five had traveled by car to Warnemuende, East Germany, and bought round-trip tickets for Gedser.

Czechs Take Watery Way to Escape



Two of five Czechoslovak refugees, who jumped an East German ferry, enter police station in Copenhagen. Names were withheld by the Danish authorities to protect them.

COPENHAGEN, Denmark, July 25—Two Czech families totaling nine persons have jumped into the sea and escaped from the East German tourist ferry boat Seebad Ahlbeck of Warnemünde at Gedser, Denmark, since yesterday. The first group, including two children and a 62-year-old grandmother, jumped into the water and were rescued by Danish spectators yesterday after a fight with the East German crew, who tried to prevent them from getting to shore. The second group, with two more children, jumped today. The heads of two families are scientists from Prague. If granted political asylum, the families intend to go to England and then to Canada.

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Leap to Freedom. Dr. Jan Rocek arrives at International Airport with wife, Eva; children, Martin, 6, and Thomas, 4, and mother-in-law, Mrs. A. M. Trojan. Czech family leaped from boat and swam to freedom in Denmark. They were brought here by International Rescue Committee. —Story on page 68

They Choose Freedom

At the Risk of the Entire Family

Scored article of the story of refugees who have found freedom in America.

By JOEL LIEBER

WASHINGTON. — "I was morally desperate. Every day I had to pretend and lie. You couldn't say what you thought. There was no honesty in my life. You can't go on living that way. If you have to live like that, you don't have to live at all."

Looking sensitive and thoughtful, Jan Rucek, now a Washington, D. C., chemistry professor, probed at his bizarre past. The introspective Czech scientist reflected on the terror and loss of freedom that made him flee his homeland.

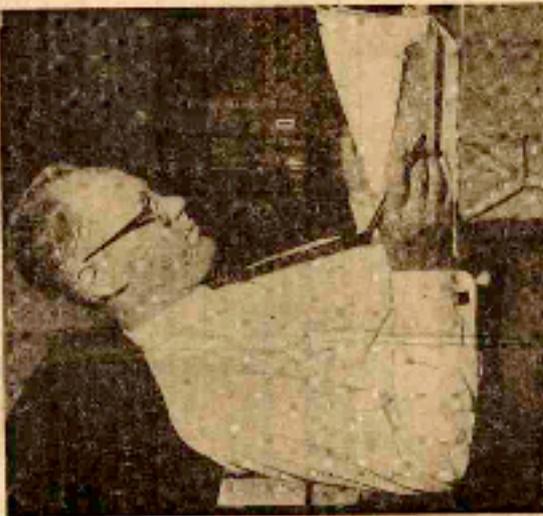
A MAN OF STRONG PRINCIPLES, Rucek doesn't use words like liberty, freedom and nobility when discussing his actions. Those words seem to embarrass him.

But had his most profound impulses not been stirred by those concepts, he never would have taken the extraordinary risk that finally released him from tyranny.

In the summer of 1940, for a frantic few minutes the red-haired chemist took to his mother, wife and two young sons aboard a small East German freighter in a coastal town. "Yes, I heard something about a woman in wet clothes." But no one knew for sure.

Finally, he found the safe and untroubled Polish workers had helped them ashore. "I was only 15 minutes until I found out, but it was such a long time. Unsettled of the moral right that led him to assume the responsibility for the lives of his children, he specified: "I knew we would be imprisoned if we were caught. I also knew the children would probably be placed in an orphanage. But a man has not only the right but the duty to put the children in the best possible situation."

WHEN THE SHIP pulled into port and the passengers lined up at the railing, Rucek and his family stood to the back of the ship. He saw the passengers and crew lined up at the railing amidships. Suddenly he swept up one of his sons and jumped over the side into the water. Then his wife, grasping another son, jumped overboard. A moment later Rucek's children were released to the



CZECH SCIENTIST JAN RUCEK ... leaped into Baltic Sea to freedom

socialism that erupted into the Prague press, Rucek said he never even read the 1956 Hungarian results. "It was pointless. You know you couldn't believe anything in them."

VOICE OF AMERICA and Radio Free Europe should provide more information about life in the states, Rucek believes.

The programs should reply to the Communist charges about American life, giving the Czech people, for example, the details of the American medical health

many receive compensation, and retain their homes and cars as well.

"You see, there is no unemployment in Czechoslovakia now. But the Czechs remember their terrible unemployment during the depression. And that's what unemployment means to a Czech—the memory of their children dying from hunger. So when they hear about 6 million unemployed Americans, they assume they are all starving to death."

FOR JAN RUCEK, the greatest part of his new life is "the freedom to say what I am thinking."

"I don't have to close the doors or whisper. I could never say my father had a factory. I used to say he was a clerk. Now I can just speak the truth. I can argue, or disagree—and say so."

Perhaps the greatest difficulty for Rucek behind the curtain is the political atmosphere. He has no "bunker" for talking about ideas and politics. He has found what he wanted—the simple right to talk, and a respect for different opinions.

But in addition to quenching his thirst for ideas and talk, he has given something to his country, too. Despite his communist's strength and personal scientific talents, he has contributed his personal scientific resources to his newly adopted land.

FORGEBLOW: A college

...port and the passengers lined up at the railings. Roczek and his family strove to the back of the ship. He saw the passengers and crew lined up at the railing amidships. Suddenly he swept up one of his sons and jumped over the side into the water. Then his wife, grasping another son, jumped overboard. A moment later Roczek's 91-year-old mother plunged in. Hoping to divert attention from the rest of his family, Roczek struck out for a jetty 200 yards off. Fully dressed and keeping his son afloat, he found the going slow. Then the Germans lowered a rubber lifeboat and paddled after him.

As Roczek reached the jetty he saw a man in the water wading toward him, his arms outstretched. "He called for me to give him my son. But his German was too good. I didn't trust him."

As the boat bore down on him, Roczek decided he had no choice but to trust the man. He turned over his six-year-old son, pushed himself away from the rubber boat, and scrambled onto the pier.

Governor Frees Repentant Escaper
NASHVILLE, Tenn. (UPI) — Gov. Frank Clement has granted executive clemency for a Chicago man who surrendered 23 years after escaping from the DeWitt County workhouse.

Clement granted full freedom to Leroy Owens, an ex-convict who escaped from the workhouse here after serving less than six months of a one-year term for larceny.

Owens, 58, surrendered early last month and appeared before the State Board of Pardons and Paroles. The board unanimously recommended his freedom.

...it was such a long time." Uncertain of the moral right that led him to assume the responsibility for the lives of his children, he wondered: "I know we would be imprisoned if we were caught. I also know the children would probably be placed in an orphanage. But a man has not only the right but the duty to put the future of his children at stake to secure freedom for them."

"My wife agreed that we had to risk the whole family. Her agreeing made it easier."

AS A CHEMIST in Prague, Roczek had enjoyed great economic privileges. He had a good salary, a large apartment and a car. "But those things are nothing. I couldn't live myself in a life of success, distrust and dishonesty."

The burning point for him came late in 1956 when he, along with other scientists, had to sign his name to a certain telegram. The cable was addressed to the people of Hungary, and it appealed to them for putting down "the fascist uprising."

"That was the ultimate humiliation for me — having to sign my name on that telegram." From then on, his goal in life was to find the proper escape route.

He knew that personal action was his only chance. He recognized that the fiery re-

Puffs Sicken 400, Baker Arrested
MADRID, Spain (UPI) — Police arrested a bakery manager when more than 400 persons suffered food poisoning after eating his special Mother's Day cream-puffs.

Children traditionally share cream-puffs with their mothers on Mother's Day, which is celebrated Dec. 8 in Spain.

...by temperament. They don't commit such rash acts."

FOLLOWING HIS escape, he was aided by the International Rescue Committee. Harvard University offered both he and his wife, also a chemist, research positions in their chemistry department.

In the fall of 1962, the 29-year-old scientist moved from Cambridge to Washington's Catholic University of America, where he is now an associate professor of physical organic chemistry.

His wife works at a research company, and his two boys, now 7 and 9, attend public school in neighboring Bethesda, Md.

Asked what was holding the Czech people down, Roczek replied: "Unlike Hungary, Czechoslovakia is not occupied by Russian troops. So, the Czechs are controlled by an extensive and fantastically well-organized secret police."

Anyone can be drawn into the web of this secret police. The least suggestion of disagreement with policy, the slightest misdeed — and the secret police have a hood on you and blackmail you into their service, he said.

He also pointed out that the Czechs have become mass murderers of their lot because they are led to believe that nothing better exists outside their own country. Their radio and newspaper reports make America seem like a wonderful place, Roczek pointed out.

The Czech press, he continued, always harps on the three "great evils" of American life: mass unemployment, no social welfare for the working man, and the racial hatred.

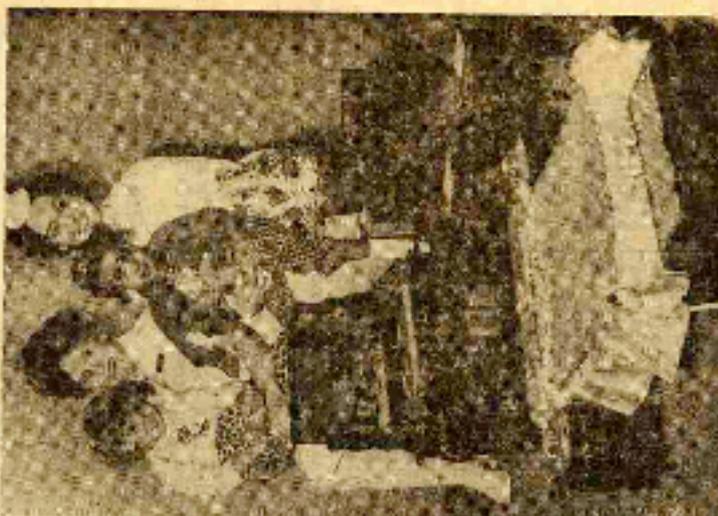
Long free up with the network of lies and propaganda

...believe anything in them."

VOICE OF AMERICA and Radio Free Europe should provide more information about life in the states, Roczek believes.

The programs should reply to the Communist charges about American life, giving the Czech people far examples, the details of the American medical health programs. They should say that although 4 million Americans are unemployed,

YONGROW: A college student from Atlanta who is working for freedom started



BEDTIME STORY: Set of doll-size furniture made by patient at Philadelphia General Hospital is admired by John patients Mary Demp (left), 6, and Linda Gavin, 3. Hooping toys at hospital's Christmas bazaar are nurses Monica McCallan (left) and Patricia Polka. (By Jane Photo by the Wire)



Mother, probably wedding picture, 1922 (?), age 27



Father, probably wedding picture, 1922 (?), age 35; I remember him only without the mustache



With my sister Helga, around 1936 (?); in 1936 she was 7, I was 12 years old



Wedding picture, June 26, 1947



A rare occasion: at a ball, probably 1952



As a Czechoslovak soldier, probably 1956



Eva's Retirement, 1994

