

This is a United States Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with Mr. Robert Budway on August 31, 2020. And Mr. Budway is in Washington, DC. I, the interviewer, Ina Navazelskis, am in Falls Church, Virginia. The interview is being conducted via telephone, and it is an audio recording.

Mr. Budway, first of all, thank you very much for agreeing to speak with us today. And I am going to ask-- I'm going to start our interview with the most basic questions, and we go from there, OK?

Yes.

OK.

All right.

So can you tell me what is the date of your birth?

I was born in August 2, 1928 in Oak Park, Illinois. That is a part of Chicago city.

Oh, so August 2, 1928. And that was one of my questions, where were you born? So you were born in Oak Park, Illinois.

Yes.

And what was your name at birth?

My name was first Robert. And I have initial Roy after my father. And our last name, of course, is Budway.

Budway. So tell me-- I mean, we're going to be talking about Czechoslovakia and the years that you spent in Czechoslovakia growing up and the war years-- how is it that you came to be born in Chicago?

My mother was at that time-- she was not an immigrant. She had lots of relatives there, and she was not the only person from the relatives in Czech who were visiting United States. Their relatives brought three girls on-- they were visiting Czechoslovakia, obviously after First World War. And they find these two brothers and sisters and had children. And my grandparents were Czech, and they have only one daughter.

So for me, when I grew up, it was a puzzle, why would they let my mother go alone to Chicago, the United States. But it was meant only temporary. But mother did like that and was very independent woman. And she married my father, whose name was William Roy Budway. And he was a native of Canada, Ontario.

And did he have any Czech background at all?

My Czech background comes from the fact that the family, the young family of my parents, obviously was the victim of the economic downfall of which was called Depression. And my father was-- they were both young, and they were not financially able to really carry on with young family. I was only one year old when the crash spilled loose in the United States and everywhere in the world. So I was only one year old when that happened.

And I understand that my father kept looking for work. And the more he kept looking, more he was leaving out of Chicago, west. And my mother, eventually, respond to her parents in Czechoslovakia, pick up the boy, and come home. So I did appear, in what was mother's home, about in 1932. I wasn't four years old.

OK, but--

I--

--we want to go back a little bit. Your father, you say he is from Ontario. But was he-- did his ethnic background, was that also Czech, or was he--

No, no.

No.

I believe the family was actually in Ottawa, Ontario.

OK.

And they must have been there a couple of generations already. Why they'd emigrate suddenly to United States, I don't know. But I know that my father was you born there. And the family moved from Canada slowly to New York State into Illinois. And that is where my mother met my father. That's where they married and began family. And I was the only child of that family.

And did you ever know your father?

Yes, I have learned to know much more, almost 40 years later, who he was. He introduced himself and call himself. And there was a reason how it happened. Because I had unfortunately had a very sad episode about visiting Czechoslovakia during the communist regime. And I was apprehended as somebody who was charged with espionage and with other acts against the communist regime. And I was tried on charges espionage.

And case received quite a bit of publicity, not only in Europe but actually in the United States. And that's how my father make connection that this person is me. He's strong. And that's how I reconnect with my family again here in the United States.

That's amazing. So that means that this took place in the Cold War years when you were arrested. And it's outside of what we are going to talk about today. But this is an answer to my question about did you know anything about your father. And so if I understand what you're saying properly is that sometime in during the post-war years, you visited Czechoslovakia, you were arrested, you were charged with espionage. The case received a lot of publicity, not only in Czechoslovakia but in the West.

Your father saw this, learned of it, and made the connection that this is his son who is arrested in this way. Is this correct? Am I understanding it properly.

That is correct.

OK.

The only thing I can add, besides charge of espionage, I was also charged with subversion.

Oh my, OK. And just to let us know, at this point, what year did this happen?

This happened 1962. I had visited the country before, 1957, '59, and 1962. I was very sure of myself that I'd conduct myself properly and that I'm safe. But I obviously make a mistake.

Hmm, well, perhaps towards the end of our interview we will talk about this. But right now, I'm going to go back to your childhood. And so back to when your family, that is your mother and your father split.

Yes.

Do you have any memories of your father when you were still a young boy, a toddler, about three years old when you left for Czechoslovakia?

No, I don't. I suddenly simply wake up one day, and I was in a small farmhouse in small village in Western part of the country. It was called, itself, Czechoslovakia. And I don't remember anything my connection with Chicago, the place of my birth and anything, how did I get into Czechoslovakia, and how did I find myself in small village, which was called Těchonice.

Těchonice. And so in other words, you have no early memories of Chicago at all.

No, I don't.

OK. And from what you understood later, was your parents split one of-- did they split from one another or was it simply a case that your father went looking for work or did he abandon the family or did your mother give in to pressure from her own parents? What happened?

I believe-- I believe that it was inevitable. They didn't serve. And I finally met my father. Whatever he say to me, it's very much same what my mother did say. They were young, and they simply didn't have a chance in the situation, which economically was getting worse and worse.

She hold on for a couple of years, as it's clear. Because when the economic crash came, I was hardly a year old. And when I find myself with her traveling without remembering anything, I was close to be four. So I still have some knowledge of some baby English. Because my Czech grandmother demonstrated many years later that she still remember that they tried to communicate with me, and mother taught her a few English words. But that I don't remember. That I only heard from my grandmother.

OK. So your first memories really start when you are in the small town or small village of Těchonice. Is this how you say it?

Yes, that is correct. It is in the region at that time-- the region was Klatovy. Klatovy was what we would compare to county capital. But at that time, that was far away from the little village of Těchonice. It goes up Western part of a country.

Yeah, I've looked on the map, and it looks like it's close to the Southwestern part. In other words, not far from the border of Bavaria in Germany. And if you go further South and you'd come to Austria. Would this be correct?

Yes.

OK.

That is correct. But of course, for me at that particular time, Bavaria was far away place.

Of course.

My outlook for a number of years was just the village of Těchonice around a cluster of few villages, because Těchonice was a parish for these other villages.

Ah.

And that-- the other villages were called Velenovy, Strážovice, Neprochovy, Žďár. Velenovy will become important, because I will have something to say about my friend, Václav Florian.

OK. So can you spell Těchonice so that in the future people would know specifically? They would be able to accurately find it on the map. How do you spell Těchonice?

OK, I will try. Let me see. Start with T-E-C-H-O-V-I-C-E. And, of course, on the second letter after T, there is a little comma. So it's pronounced, Těchonice.

OK, I have something that has T-E-C-H-O-N-I-C-E, Těchonice, not with a V. Which would be-- and it looks like it's not so far from this Klatovy that you mentioned.

Mm-hmm.

Is this the--

I would not-- there are, of course, similar words. There are similar places, like [INAUDIBLE]. But that would be near Klatovy. But Těchonice is a unique place, because I did not find any other Těchonice in entire country.

OK, OK. Tell me a little bit what it looked like.

All right, Těchonice had about 52 families. So the population those days was roughly always between 200, 250 souls living. And it was unique to me that inspired that in was very homogeneous.

Těchonice did have, actually in its pool house, a family from Germany. They came from Munich. And however, the parents of that family spoke nothing but German and never really mastered much of any skill to communicate with anybody but in German. Their children spoke Czech very well, and I was friendly with them.

There were also two families from Austria, from Vienna mostly. They must have been coming into village after the war, which Vienna, of course, was reduced to a small-- economically to a small [INAUDIBLE] for people like that. So they went there.

And then there was a one family, which had-- sometimes certain generations would call them [NON-ENGLISH], That was I understand Jewish family. However, I knew that house as [NON-ENGLISH], because that was later on clear to me that there was an older man, and he was grandfather of my friend whose name was Václav and nickname was [? Věna. ?]

And he apparently was son of his mother. Her name was Julia. And father's name was Václav. And he came from village of Velenov. That I didn't know then. Because he had actually-- his parents were living in Velenov. That will become important point to reference later on in my story about this family.

OK. So right now, thank you. But for right now, what we're doing is we're trying to get the context. So the context, if I understand it so far, is Těchonice has about 250 plus people living in it. And--

That is--

Correct?

That is correct then.

Then, at that time-- at that time when you were growing--

At that time.

--up there in the '30s. And that it was a rather homogeneous place. There was one young German-- well, there was a German family there. And the children spoke Czech but the parents only German. And then there were two families from Austria who were there. And then there was the two families who were Jewish. Is that correct?

Only one family.

Only one family that was Jewish?

I'm trying to explain that there were in the village people who would refer to this Jewish family when it was, I believe already, in 19th century known as Schwartz.

Schwartz. You mean like the word S-C-H-W-A-R--

And that family apparently have only one daughter. Her name was Julia. And she married outsider, Václav

Florian. The outsider was from village of Velenovy And there were younger generations like me, we refer to the house always [NON-ENGLISH], while the older people were calling them [NON-ENGLISH].

I see, OK. So the daughter's maiden name--

It's the same family.

Yeah. The daughter's maiden name was Schwartz. She married someone named Florian. And they had a child who was your friend.

Yes, he also have a brother, younger brother, whose name was Slava. His Czech's name Slava. He was about three years younger. But I was very attached and very friend for much of our growing up. With Věna or Václav. And there was a reason for it. We did not know how it happened, but we could trace it eventually, as we were growing older why we were still close to make us friends.

Well, what was-- what kind of conclusion did you come to?

Because of her [INAUDIBLE] mother's name, were just simply called, Jula. And I found out that my mother and Jula were the same age and were friends in school, apparently very close friends. I do have a diary, which my mother kept. And there are three entries from Jula Schwartz. And they did have a small grocery store.

And therefore, when my mother came back from the United States, somehow along, her friend Jula have two boys. And my mother had one. And I was very close-- I was only one year apart from Jula's boys Václav. And so I already come as a kid very close [INAUDIBLE] when I went to-- when mother went to shopping, which was rarely, into the house of this grocery store, which was run by her friend Jula, whose name no longer was Schwartz because she married Florian.

Got it, got it. So let's go on describing other parts of Těchonice. So the rest of-- you say that this was a place where there was a parish, which means there was a church, at least one church in Těchonice. Was that correct?

Yes.

And was it a Catholic church?

Yeah, it was a Catholic church, yes.

And does that mean that most of the people who lived there, aside from the Jewish family, were Catholics?

Yes, and particularly my friend, Florian, house resident right next to the church.

Oh, I see, I see. And was that in the center of town, in the center of Těchonice.

I beg your pardon. I did not hear that.

Was that in the center of the village of Těchonice, the church?

I did not understand.

OK, can you hear me better now?

Yes.

OK. I was asking whether or not-- where the church was located in town.

That is our churches were located in the center. That also play important part, because my house was

located, or my home at that particular time, on the other side of the village. And as a five- or six-year-old kid, it was already adventure to walk from one end of the village with mother or without mother to the house of my friend, Václav Florian.

OK. Describe for me, a little bit the village, itself. Did it have-- did it have paved roads?

No, it wasn't very-- It was one of those many, many villages in the Western part of a country. It's economic dependent on agriculture. There were a few tradesmen, and none of them could afford to live on trade alone. They all had to have a small land to grow food. And I believe the Schwartz were exactly in the same situation like everybody else.

Some may have a larger holding in that village, because the family from which my grandfather came out was a large owner of--

OK.

The only back why so many of his brothers and sister ended in Chicago, apparently before First World War is that it was a large family. My grandfather comes from family of 10. And five of them immigrate to Chicago well before First World War, possibly already even at the end of 19th century.

OK, that explains a lot. That explains a lot why there would be so many relatives in Chicago.

Yes.

So what was your grandfather's name? In other words, what was your mother's maiden name?

It was-- my mother's name was maiden name, Marie Sebesta. And I will spell the Sebesta, S-E-B-E-S-T-A. And of course, S would have little hook, again. So it will be pronounced, Sebesta.

Sebesta. And so your grandfather's name was Sebest?

Sebesta.

Sebesta.

And his first name was František, which means, Frank.

OK. And was he from the same village or from someplace else?

No, his family already probably lived in village more than couple of generations. I do trace these five generations back.

Wow, that's a long time to be able to trace back five generations. That brings you into the 17th century.

Yes. So they were there for a long time. They were, I believe, the second largest land owners in the village, that family. But of course, because having so many children, five went to America, and the rest of them did have to have about three. My grandfather, his brother, and his sister-- two brothers-- they all have a little holding from the large estate, which was, of course, diminished through best [INAUDIBLE] existence.

So it meant that the children split the large estate between them.

Yes.

And about how many hectares did your grandfather have?

I believe anything between five or six.

That's not a lot. You know that?

No.

Yeah. Was he able to feed the family on five or six hectares of land?

He did not have a large family. He come from large family, but his only daughter was my mother.

OK. And he had no sons?

Yeah. And he did manage very well. Somehow along everyone managed. I had the impression of my childhood that everything was fine. There may have been one or two families which definitely had a difficult time. And one was the German family.

You mentioned that, yeah.

Because it remains still a question and puzzle to me why weren't they suddenly there. They must have gone shortly before my arrival there.

Mm-hmm. OK, so they hadn't been in that area. Now the town, Těchonice, was it part of what we know as the Sudetenland?

No. No, this was the only German family. I believe nobody later on when I think of German invasion and occupation of a country. I believe 99% of people never come in contact with any Germans.

OK, OK. So let's go back now about village life and how your grandfather and grandmother lived. Can you tell me what they grew on the five or six hectares that they had?

The biggest crop, which was fast money, was, of course, potatoes and of course, sugar beets was also biggest crop. But they grow mostly wheat. And livestock, of course, was also very important. But it was never but maybe four cows and some few pigs and chickens and geese. And that was exactly practically the case of everyone who lived there.

OK. And what kind of home did you have?

Would you repeat that?

What kind of home did you have? In other words, can you describe the house that you grew up in?

I must admit that I felt very privileged. The house was at the edge of the village near West of [INAUDIBLE]. And it was rather large for many other houses there. I lately find out that originally it wasn't meant to be some kind of inn, in Czech called "hospoda". Therefore, it has a large four rooms, which was unusual.

Aha, OK. And did--

And it has [? well ?] located at the beginning of the village. So it has a number of advantage. I felt very good. And there were a number of families nearby. And everyone had [? quite a bit of ?] children. So obviously I did have many friends immediately as a child. And I definitely was very quickly at home there.

The only thing what set me out different in the village was my name. And that was up when-- that was what quickly become a little bit uncomfortable for me. Because my mother had a habit to use my nickname and call me in English, Bobbie. And I did not like the name.

[LAUGHING]

And that set me immediately apart in school. And at the beginning, of course, Czech version of Bobbie was Bobik. So I was known as Bobik, even to my good friend, Veka Florian. He called me Bobik, and I called him

Veca.

OK, how do I spell both nicknames?

Bobik?

Mhm.

B-O-B-I-K. And I have a comma on, so it was sort of "Bobeek." And I didn't like it, because sometimes some little dogs were called the same way.

Oh.

And I begged my mother not to call me that way. But she did have some difficulty to remember.

[LAUGHING] And your friend Florian's nickname, how do we spell that?

Veca, it was just there too many Vecas, too many Václav. So it was a usual name that was common, and he had no difficulty with his nickname. It was called, V-E-C-A.

Veca.

And I have no problem when he called me Bobik, because I know how we meant it.

Yeah, that makes a difference to a child.

Yes.

OK, so did your grandfather-- was he an active farmer as you were growing up?

He was one of those wonderful grandfathers, which a great many literary people write about grandfathers. He was definitely-- my grandparents, both of them, were loving and caring people. And they were very happy having somebody in the house. Because they both come from large family.

And at the beginning, the purpose was what do we do when we get old? So obviously, they count on me as somebody who eventually will take over. They did not say it, but I could feel it already from a very early age that I was their little boy who was everything to them.

So in other words--

So I live in very loving family. I never had any-- I never experienced hunger. I've never experienced anyone for anything. So I've never experienced any abundance of anything.

Uh-huh. Now, was your mother happy coming back to live in her village after having lived in Chicago?

After living in Chicago, I find very quickly by the age of six that she regretted that she left the Chicago. Because I was no longer aware that such a place like America exists. And once in a while she was working hard on the fields and it was hot and sweaty, I remember her suddenly standing up, looking in the sky, and wiping the sweat from her forehead and say, "For this, I came back from America."

And I remember that. And that became also something I kept in my mind. It's [INAUDIBLE] and great, itself. And it was also a problem when I finally got arrested, because I was charged, not only [? with espionage ?] but that I imported fuel rocks, which supposed to have uranium-- what supposed to have been uranium ore.

Oh, excuse me. This is something that goes much later on in your story. And in some ways it's--

Yes, but I just want you to know more that at about age six, I was aware that I was somebody who was

outsider.

OK, that's the important part, that your mother--

I was aware of being outsider. Because even when I went to school, I was aware I was outsider, because I was not immediately registered in this school. There was some problem with my citizenship.

In what way?

I believe that I didn't know that time, but my uncle, brother of my father, was a mayor of the little village.

Who was he to you? He was the brother of your grandfather?

Yeah, and he was a mayor. And I think he's smoothed that situation. Because I believe that it was a young country. When I went to school, the country was only 15 years old. And therefore, it did not have yet all these legal requirements with United States that's not clear. I was not admitted immediately to school, because I was not denied education, but there was a question that I would have to pay fee.

Aha, I see. Because--

Because--

--you were a foreigner.

--I was not a citizen.

I see. Because you're born in the United States and you have US citizenship, then you are regarded as a foreigner. And foreigners pay fees. Was this the--

Right.

--understanding of it?

That is clear. That is exactly what the issue was. And of course, in that village, that was a rather sensation and odd that it would happen.

Tell me--

But it did happen, in my case. It, obviously, did not happen in the case of the German boy.

Interesting that it didn't. But that's closer to home rather than the United States, which is across the ocean.

So it was some consular issue and some law. And of course, director of the school was aware of it. Nobody else in the religion would have dreamed about it.

OK. So here's another question about village life and what kind of economic development there was there. I want to ask about modernization. I asked before if the roads were paved. Now I want to know was there electricity throughout the village?

Yes. The electricity was-- and I remember when the electricity came to the village. It may have been hardly a year or two later, because I was already aware what was going on. Because there were a few electricians who lived in the house, because our house was big, during that time when the electrization was going on. So I was just sort of a kid who always looking what they were doing.

So electricity came about 1934 or 1935. But running water was already there.

OK, so you had indoor plumbing?

Yes, running water was there already. The roads were not paved. They were all dirt road. And it was a typical agrarian type of village, a farming village where smell of manure and running birds and animals and something so normal that we didn't think much about it.

We have little ditty song about the Těchonice how it look. We may have been a little derogatory. I remembered it would be difficult to translate it in English. Because it was all colloquial titles to make fun over the village. Because it rhymed well with nothing but manure and so on.

Well, so did the kids make up this song?

I beg your pardon.

Who made up this song?

I think it was kids. And it must have been generation before us, because it properly passed from kids to kids. But otherwise, surprisingly there was a cultural life going on there. It had its own dynamic. It went around the years, periods, you know. Spring was, of course, always exciting. Because in the spring, there was a village festival.

The village did have a volunteer fire department, which was, of course, consisting of nothing much. It has a theatrical production, at least one production per year or maybe even two during the winter. It has a school with three classrooms. This is also going to be important when I talk about my friend, Florian. Because each classroom had two grades. Except the last classroom had four grades. So obviously it was a challenge for the teacher.

Of course.

But all teachers did try to also [INAUDIBLE] contribute something, so we children have a play too. And of course, we did have two grocery stores. One was actually collective done by the priests. So it was not competition for a main store or Schwartz store, you know. And it did have a bakery. It had a butcher. It had a number of interests in the family from out here. We're all either seamstress or tailors.

And tell me, did it have a cinema?

No.

And did it have a library?

It had a library. And I'm well aware of how many books there were in that library. It has [INAUDIBLE] public lib... [NON-ENGLISH] means village library, which consists hardly about 50 books.

OK, OK.

And it was, again, a volunteer housed in the house of one father who I have learned to know later in life too, because I was desperate to read. And after I exhaust the school library, which was also hardly 50 books, then I was given a tip, why don't you go to see so-and-so. They have libraries. So I find out yes, it has a library.

OK, OK.

But it consists about of 50 books, little shelf in a farmhouse.

So was there anybody who had a radio?

Yes, I, in fact, make so many [INAUDIBLE] about the problem of communication. It has about, I believe, about five places whom I haven't read. And one of those was school director. One of them would be the

parish priest. And I know that two pops would have a radio. My friend, Florian, did not have a radio. We did not have a radio.

And a bakery had a radio. So there were about five radio receivers in the village. I saw a newspaper I [INAUDIBLE] that I did come in contact with the newspaper. That is a complicated story. And in 1936 and '37 I was able already to read well. And my grandfather was getting a newspaper, which described all Spanish Civil War. So I was though, informed. Already, I had-- six or seven-year-old that there was a country in Spain, and it was in war.

And I was intrigued by all these names like, Franco and Madrid and Barcelona. Also [INAUDIBLE] I did not realize that I was getting fascist propaganda, because these were fascist paper.

Were they printed in Czech?

They were printed in Czech. And they were not nobody really actually subscribe to that. They were sent there by the fascist party, which was lead by former General Gaidar was his name. And apparently, there were three people who were loyal to this General Gaidar. And their loyalty was not because he's been a fascist. His fascism was more or less directed Italian type of fascism.

Gaidar was a regular soldier during First World War. And three men in this village was serving in his company. And he was a corporal, and they, therefore, were very faithful or loyal to their former corporal. And apparently, I was under impression later on, when I find out who it was, that there were only three people in that village who were fascist.

But to my horror, last year, I visited the country again and visited and learned to know there is a library-- there is a chronic village historian who recorded what was going on in the village for maybe 400 years. And I did get access in the neighboring village, a little town we just call Stríbrné Hory in my town, Nažovské Hory, and I found out that there were parliamentary elections in the country in 1935. And I have some memory about it.

And I found out that out of that village, I expected only to find three fascists. But unfortunately, I was horrified, and I had the statistics of our result of the election. There were 25 fascists.

Wow, in small--

In that village.

And 25 out of 250?

Yes. And the fascist party had become-- actually, since it was a politically very fragmented country and every village was, too, in that village alone, I believe there were 11 different parties.

My goodness. Well this is an interesting type of situation. Because many places, if you were to talk about farming villages-- and the place that you described sounded very remote, in some ways, extremely remote because of the economic development in it, what stage it was at-- most people would be apolitical, particularly if they're farmers and for what is important to them are the seasons and whether or not the crops will grow. But if--

True.

--what you're describing now sounds like people who had political views, you know, that they had some kind of engagement in a point of view and a world view and a political kind of sensibility. Did you remember the grown-ups talking about politics?

Yeah, yes and no. As I say, political figures in that village puzzles me even today. I know the result of those parliamentary elections that there was even one commoner. But I knew correctly who the communist was. Because that was the librarian.

Really?

That was a librarian. And the reason I know it, because no grown-up men would talk to somebody who is only 10 years old. And I find myself on some grazing field where the cows, and he was there too. And he started to talk to me. And he let me know that he was a communist, and he talked solely about Russia. He apparently felt that I'd conclude. That must have been going in his mind that I'd be receptive, because I was reading all these books.

Oh, I see.

So I knew who was the communist. But I felt that I knew who could possibly be only the fascists. I felt it would be the miller [INAUDIBLE] and grinding for flour mill and the baker and my grandfather, because they were the faithful soldiers who would serve the emperor during First World War in the Balkans.

So this--

And the corporal was [PERSONAL NAME] [? Gaidar, ?] who become famous general during the First World War, because he deserted the Austrian army and then find himself in Russia where he made the name for himself, and after the war-- of his daring.

He was sent to a military school to France to Paris and become well-known military man. But he was corrupt and was caught. And as a result of it, [INAUDIBLE] out of the army. And he founded a political party. And it was called [? BLIKA ?], which was a fascist party.

So are you saying that your grandfather was a supporter of this particular man?

Yes, they were. And as I know my grandfather's background as a young man, because from large family, one of the brother of his father was a priest in Vienna. And what you do sometimes with so many children, they would send-- if there were any kids problem, they would send them to Vienna. I'm talking before the First World War Vienna.

Right, mm-hmm.

And the priest, the uncle would take care of them. And my father and my grandfather had a position in Vienna by learning the trade as a tailor. And that my grandfather political orientation in then Vienna was very socialist. He was a follower of Karl Renner, who was one that time a socialist mayor of Vienna. And my grandfather would run out of Vienna because he took part in some demo socialist demonstration, and his boss knew it. And that time in Austrian empire, if you didn't behave in one place, you were sent back home.

I see.

And that's how my grandfather from socialists ended in Těchonice and during the First World War in the Balkans war and where he met this future fascist leader. And I believe that is because he never-- my grandfather died at the age-- in 1944. He never really didn't know what fascism was and how it ended. So I believe all these fascists absolutely in Těchonice were babes in a wood totally unaware what they were part of.

I see. And did your grandfather ever talk politics to you?

No, he did not. I do remember on that year, 1935 elections, that I happened to post some posters on a house on the side on the wall of the house. He did not use anything in the village except his own house, advertised few posters, because they received these posters again.

And I [? circulate ?] those newspaper, because none of those three fascists which I knew wouldn't spend money on newspaper. They would send this paper free. And they have to circulate them. And I was one of-- I carried from our house to the next house. And during that time, I read them.

So can you tell me were there any other newspapers that made their way to the village, or was it only this one?

I believe the priests had one Catholic newspaper, which was a Catholic well-known paper. And I see them, but I believe they circulate only from the priest to one of other village, the one of other house. And I only remember they were coming to buy subscription, because I collected stamps. And the boys who carried those paper gave me the stamp.

So I am aware only two paper. One apparently was Catholic paper. I believe it was called "Lidové noviny." And it was a Catholic paper. Because I know the biggest, strongest party at that in my time was agrarian party. And then there was, of course, a Catholic party, which was for [? lidová strana ?].

And what about news of the government and people like President Masaryk and so on, was there any kind of government newspaper? Was there any Democratic--

No.

--newspaper?

I am not aware of anybody-- certainly, I am sure that a school director would have newspaper. But I don't think so that anything ever come out of school house.

I see, I see.

If I have ever learned anything in that village, it was to be Czech. And that I have learned in school. And if I have learned any "ism," it was nationalism. That was there [INAUDIBLE] and a mostly young generation, not particularly in my generation.

And how do you explain it? How do you explain if that was a very strong kind of sentiment?

I have often engaged in sort of a reflection and analysis of the situation, which I was there. Because I find that village very hard-working people who understood what they were doing. More or less, they were serious people that took care of their family. And they were not practicing any evil-doing.

Yes, there were a few frivolous little things out there that somebody would argue about, some little piece of land or anything. But otherwise, it was a religion which presented to me quite harmonious way of living and sharing, I think, and particularly family. I did not find there any antagonism against each other. I did not find any party-- they were dancing during winter dances, which were called [INAUDIBLE] or balls, and which was usually sponsored by some political party. The agrarian party would have definitely ball.

Then there were tradesmen, which few tradesmen. They would have ball. The firemen would have balls. And as I say, they did support of such activities, but they were very thrifty. Everyone was very thrifty.

Going to the high school was not something every kid can aspire there to go, because high school was located already two hours of walk in the little town of Plánice. And because Těchonice were not part of the investment when school was built, you have to pay fee. And therefore, I find myself in that high school, and my grandparents have to pay a fee. And the fee was going high.

And I will talk later on, because Veka Florian too went into that high school. That means his mother and his family have to pay a fee too, because they come from village Velenovy. And they were not part of the early investment in the school, which was built at the turn of the century. And it was explained to me later on why I had to pay a fee. And therefore, out of the village of Těchonice, there were hardly two or three kids who went to the high school.

So if I understood right, when it comes to education, the school that you had in Těchonice had three rooms, you told me?

Three rooms, yes.

Yeah. And in two of the rooms, it was two classes each. So that means four grades.

Yes.

And in one room, it was four classes. So that means eight grades in total. So after--

Right.

--eighth grade, that's when you had to go to the high school in [? Planovy ?]? Is this what you're saying the town was.

No, after or I could go already in Plánice at the fifth grade. Otherwise, if I didn't go, I would get out of elementary school eighth grade. And that would be end of my education.

OK, and at what grade? You say first grade you could go to [? Plánovice ?]?

From the fifth grade.

Fifth grade, five.

I finished fifth grade. And at sixth grade, I went into Plánice.

Got it, Plánice. And there you continue into what would be the equivalent of high school?

Yes. And from there it was normal time. Again, I have the opportunity to go to gymnasium, or some trade school, or some specialized school [INAUDIBLE] business schools and things like that. That, of course, in my case, would be a wartime. And that was already, as a foreigner, a restriction.

OK. We're not there yet. I'm still talking your childhood in the 1930s and wanting to find out more about it. Can you tell me, did anybody have an automobile in your town?

No. Not at all. It would be rare if we saw-- I think we saw a number of automobiles that can be count on one hand per year. And it would be a real show. All kids will be simply [? aping ?] on a car has passed through. And it would also never be really a private automobile.

Although. I must correct myself. I have an uncle who was younger brother of my grandfather who was high military official. He had, at that time, a car already in the yard. He visited the village in the army car twice in my time.

That must have been exciting.

Yes. And I did not see him, because my grandparents, or particularly grandmother-- when he arrived, he arrived without announcement. And he was seen in the distance walking to our house, grandma quickly called me and put me in the cellar, because I was barefooted and rather-- and i was very sad. Every kid was, though. I wasn't certainly something they did not want to advertise.

So I had never really face-to-face met my uncle who was so high until 1945. And he was instrumental that when I announced that I am going to leave the country and join United States Army, nobody in my family was for it. And when he arrived, I was already grown up to 18-year-old. And I met him for first time. And when he heard it, he approve of it. And in fact, everybody in the family finally accepted it.

Well, isn't that interesting, you know, what kind of an effect it had? So this was when my question started with does anybody have a car, and it goes to the one person whom you knew who just came to visit 2 times. And the first time was not very successful, but the second time sounds like it made up for it.

A funny footnotes to this story is when I arrived finally after about five years-- I was in the Army of Occupation in Germany-- when I arrived to Chicago and reconnected with mother's family, younger generation who remember mother and remember me as a baby, they all asked me about this uncle. Because from their parents, they heard nothing but great stories. I jokingly say to them, "I don't remember him well, because every time he come on visit, I was still in the cellar."

[LAUGHING]

And so they have fun to hear this story, because they already know. Because he eventually become [INAUDIBLE] where he was also sentenced to get [INAUDIBLE] Germans caught during a war. And he was in number of concentration camps. And somehow he survived. And somehow he get back to the army. And the first two years he become brigadier general.

OK, tell me this part. When during World War II, how was it that he got sentenced to concentration camps? What happened?

What I know, he was already doing [INAUDIBLE] a Republic very high ranking army officer. He commanded a certain large group of army in Slovakia, where he become responsible for certain defense region of Slovakia against possible invasion from Hungary. And so he obviously already had a reputation and had quite an education. He was the only, out of 10 children, one who was given education already during the Hapsburg monarchy. He was getting education, not only in Bohemia, but also in Austria.

And he also, during First World War, deserted from Austrian army and joined the Czechoslovakian Legion in Russia. And he have also what they call particularly in the move all the way across Russia to Siberia. I was evacuated from Vladivostok come after First World War. Almost three years after the war, he become also one of the elite in the army.

OK, the Czechoslovak Army.

Czechoslovak Army. And obviously, during the [INAUDIBLE] of Czechoslovak state. He also was a personal assistant to one of the general and general staff, General Elias. Elias become a prime minister during the occupation who was executed. So obviously, he had too many connection with--

Excuse me, General Elias became a--

Elias, yes.

--prime minister during which years?

He was a prime minister during early years of the occupation when a political hat was there. He was prime minister under President Hacha.

OK, can you give me years? Because I don't understand the significance until I know what years these meant. When you say Protectorate, do you mean when the Nazis already invaded?

Yes, Nazis were already in power. When he become a permanent minister, then the Nazi occupied the country on March 15, 1939. There were two prime ministers who changed greatly, because there were number of resignations until finally the country become Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia. And with the president, who was no longer president of a count--, he was called [NON-ENGLISH] president, which was interesting title. I can't simply translate it.

It's OK.

But he was mostly a state president. And he was assisted by take-- he was assisted by minimum-- the Czech did not have much of a government. It was a source of a schedule. For lack of words, I do have it, but I can't explain it.

Excuse me. Maybe I'm asking too many questions on this. The real question was what happened with your relative who was this high military officer under the Nazi occupation? What was his fate?

I believe this must have taken place in 1940, when he became a prime minister. He was actively in touch with a British group in London. And that was what happened. There were hardly about six positions in the government. And he was President Hacha's-- actually, he was very close to the president. I have both of them [INAUDIBLE] actively and secretly communicating with England on this affair absolutely somebody.

I do know very well that history, but I can't just suddenly put it in short.

No, no, it's OK. I don't mean to ask you the history. It is truly your relative that I was interested in. And what is his name? What is his name, your relative, the general?

General Elias. E-L--

Was that your-- your grandfather's brother was General Elias?

No, oh my-- no, no, no, my grandfather young brother was called Sebesta too, except he was called Joseph.

Joseph Sebesta.

Joseph Sebesta. And he was known by fancy nickname, Pepa, Uncle Pepa.

Uncle Pepa.

And when you say Uncle Pepa, you shake. And he was a idol. He was somebody to look up. An Uncle Pepa ended very badly under any regimes.

OK, so what happened under the Nazi regime to Uncle Pepa? That was my real question.

But obviously, he was very demobilized immediately by the US. The Czech Army did have-- and as a defense of the Republic, they did have an organization among top. No military personnel who have [INAUDIBLE] certain expertise. I believe his expertise was in administration.

And he was-- there were controversies, [INAUDIBLE] I believe in 28 regions. And each of them had secretly had been responsible already organized some action how to plan for defense of a country and in case where the country is going to be independent again that they were able to immediately establish Civil Rule or some organized system. And he was a part of one of this-- his assignment was part of Slovakia, that I know.

And apparently, that was all secret. In fact, there is a book. And I have sent the book back, back to some relative, some distant relative, who was interested because somebody published book. And one chapter was describing his role. In case [INAUDIBLE]. In Czech, it's called [CZECH], resistance.

OK, now I have the word. The worst part of planned resistance, which military planned before they were demobilized. Some left, of course, abroad to England to Russia. But some of those who stayed in were organized secretly, and he was a part. And apparently by 1940 or '41, he too was arrested on the city of [? Platno ?]. And I think his first trial he was tried for treason. I know that there-- and there were two types of treason.

And then he was also tried a second trial for treason was in Berlin already. Then he was someplace in East Prussia that I know already during the German occupation. And then from somehow along how he get evacuated from East Prussia all the way and ended in Bavaria.

And he take-- because of his military expertise, he took part of-- And I know the name of Bavarian town which was [INAUDIBLE], which was supposedly resisting our American advances. And he'd become a organizer of resistance and also the American Army. So he, in fact, ended actively and for a few weeks as a soldier. And he received very high awards from the US Army. I do not have this information on my fingertips,

because--

No, no, I mean, I sorry.

--I do have it in my files.

No, no, no, I am sorry, because I'm asking distracting questions. But when you said he had been arrested by the Nazis, that's when my ears picked up. And I wanted to know what was he arrested for, where was he imprisoned, and what happened later? And it turns out that it's quite complex. It's not--

It's complex, and it was treason. There were two charges. One against that and one of them was a treason and then a high treason. Now I get it, "velezrada," treason against state and then high treason.

Well, those are usually charges that end in execution.

Yes, and that is a surprise that it did not. Because it was suddenly keep moving from Berlin to some obscure place in Prussia.

So when you say--

[INAUDIBLE] concentration camp.

Yeah. So this is the other thing that needed to be established. When you say he kept moving, that means he kept-- he was in prison, and his prison location was changed from one place to another.

Yes.

But he was not a free man.

No, he was not a free man. And that he was not executed is one of those good fortune for him.

Yeah. And then he ends up in Bavaria, again, one must assume, in prison. And so therefore, if you-- you may not know this, but it would have been a unique way of providing resistance and helping the Americans while you were still a prisoner in a concentration camp. That would be one of my questions is how do you do that?

OK, I believe he was participating in one of those marches, which they called dead marches.

Ah, I see.

And that's how he found himself in Grafenau. Now I know it. It was called Grafenau.

Grafenau

Yes, Grafenau. And that's where he ended and when he was discovered by the American Army that he has military expertise. He immediately organized group. And he participated in capitulation of Grafenau and two other places.

I see.

And he'd become-- he'd become later on when he finally get in the country. A commander of the Western part and ran [? what is called ?] have military district where he was actively. There are pictures of him with even the General George Patton.

That's amazing. I mean, he sounds like he was quite an unusual person and, of course, had quite an unusual destiny. And an experience is what happened to him during the war. And did you ever meet enough? You met him afterwards, because he's the one who told your family that he approved that you would leave for

America. Did you ever hear him tell any part of his story to you?

This happened about in 1947. And it must have been in April. I was getting ready. I already know where to report [INAUDIBLE] and military attache already had my papers. And I was just waiting for a certain date, and suddenly he appear in his new general's uniform.

I make the runs, because he visited my grandmother, mostly because she was a widow of his brother. That was-- he was a gentleman [? every inch. ?] And then he find me there. And that is the first time I was able to face him already as a grown-up now. I did not have to face him in a barefoot.

And then he said that he knew all about my existence. And he said, "What are your plans? What you doing?" And when he find out, then he said, "You're doing the right thing. You go as fast as you could. And you are going to have, not only good meals, you're going to [INAUDIBLE]." He absolutely knew a great deal about US Army. And he assured grandma and everybody, "He is doing the right thing." Because he, himself, apparently knew that situation in Czechoslovakia was not going to end very well.

I left Czechoslovakia about hardly nine months before the communist took over. And apparently he knew something.

OK, and his name was Joseph Sebest?

Joseph Sebesta.

Sebesta.

Just like my mother's name.

Sebesta. Your mother is Marie Sebestova, and he was Joseph Sebesta?

Yes. As you know, the Czech female names were always end in ova.

Yeah, yeah. OK, thank you for sharing that about your uncle. He seems-- of your grand uncle, actually, you know, your grandfather's brother. And let's go back now to your town.

So one of the questions that comes to mind-- when you were telling me that you were reading newspapers and learning about the Spanish Civil War and that this was a fascist paper, one of the questions is that if they were printing news about the Spanish Civil War or propaganda, was there news about the neighboring country, Germany, in those newspapers as well? And was there news about Adolf Hitler? And how much did people know there in your village about what was going on in Germany?

Well, by the time of 1928, the village suddenly, to my surprise, was actively following what was going on in Germany and the threat to the country. I believe that some of them did get the message when Austria deplored Anschluss. I do remember that I did not know the meaning of the word Anschluss. But I do remember one illustrative newspaper magazine, which was called [INAUDIBLE] where the word Anschluss was a headline.

And being a reader, I kept reading it and wondering what it means. But I knew already that country was true getting to be intense. And I do believe that tension already spilled already in our attitude toward our German classmate, who was [INAUDIBLE] to know just quarrel on [NON-ENGLISH] means hunt, German hunt.

I see. So in other words, did that change? Did people start treating this boy differently?

No, it was us kids. I believe the village had a healthy respect for his mother. Because she has a very hard-working person. There a very hard work-- she contributed a great deal of labor to lots of farmers who need help. And she need, of course, help from them too. Because it was very poor family.

The husband was sort of indifferent. I had a very, very interesting encounter, which [INAUDIBLE] his attitude. Because when the Czechoslovak Army declare first mobilization in 1938 in May, I was the only kid in one place with the radio where the people were listening. I was the only-- I don't know why my mother took me there.

OK.

It was in one of the pub, one of the beer hall, hospoda, the Czechs say. And there was a-- I did not-- when I think of it, I was amazed how aware suddenly the people. I did not think of them that they'd think of a country where we could [INAUDIBLE]. Because the mobilization was declared that evening. And by morning, I could see how readily some of the fathers of my classmates were marching-- received their marching orders and how they received already the announcement.

The end of announcement was President Beneš [INAUDIBLE] a mobilization. And in that moment, where I was sitting with all those people, everybody get on its feet, because they played the national anthem. And everybody got on its feet, except him.

So the radio plays the national anthem. Everybody is listening to the radio, because Beneš is declaring mobilization.

Yes.

And everyone stands up, but this man does not.

No. And what happened, everybody patiently wait until the anthem was over. Then the young people begun to attack him. And of course, [? older ?] have to separate him. I kind of wonder if sometimes in my analysis of those events if he knew what was going on? Why did not he get-- why didn't he get up?

Did he not speak Czech?

And he did not speak Czech. But yet his name was so Czech, "Soukup." He was on the mercy of the village, because you lived in what is called pool house, which was supported by the village.

Wow. What was his last name?

What was the reason that the family find itself there? And that both parents-- his wife definitely was Bavarian. She was definitely not able to master one word in Czech. He, I would not know if he knew Czech, because he never spoke Czech.

What was his name?

But his children--

Yeah.

And his children were as Czech as I was.

What is his name? What was his last name, this man?

The last name was Soukup. And that's a Czech name. That's not a German name. Soukup is S-O-U-K-U-P, Soukup.

Soukup, Soukup.

I do not know the first name, but I believe it would be Hans or Jan in Czech. Because his son, only son while he had three girls, were called Hansa, which is nickname for John, Jan.

I see, I see. OK, OK. So this was the radio broadcast of mobilization? And was yes before the Munich Agreement or after the Munich Agreement?

That was before. That was the first Czech mobilization. That was in May. The second mobilization took place [? alright ?] in September same year. But this was the first signal of tension, first awareness of everyone, then the world is not going to be same again. Village was changing.

Well, that's interesting, yeah.

I think it was changing. I found out that there were suddenly people who really besides their work and thinking only about substance and existence, they suddenly were aware of the country in danger.

And you are 10 years old at this time?

I wasn't even 10 years old, because I would be in-- I was nine and 1/2.

Got it, got it. OK.

Nine and 1/2.

And then did like-- so Munich Agreement happens the same year. I believe--

That Munich Agreement happened, yes, on the fall.

Yeah

In the fall. The Munich Agreement did not mean the end of the country. It meant that country with dismembered and put on the ruins and on the knees. It meant capitulation and its assertion of great deal of territory. That was a different story, which happened then 1939 in March. That was the end. That also bring great changes. And it affected not only me, but also Václav Florian.

OK, so let's talk first about how did this Munich Agreement-- what effect did it have on your village and, if anything, on your family?

Munich Agreement did not have much of any effect, only awareness that there will be-- that we are not safe.

OK.

There were maneuvers also conducted. I think they were early swing maneuvers. These maneuvers suddenly army appear in Těchonice within a few hours. And they have a maneuver. And I do realize and know-- at that time, I did not know-- that the maneuvers were defensive move.

When the army show up under some maneuvers, it was already giving up the part of the country. Because they appeared in Těchonice for a couple hours and kept moving into inland. And that is a different story. The entire village was then up in a up. Because they knew that the war is imminent.

But that the village, itself, this was the first time that you had seen army maneuvers in the village at all?

Yes, this is the first time I have seen any man in uniform, besides my uncle from distance.

OK. And was your village part of the territorial changes? Or did you stay within Czechoslovakia proper?

I did not get a sense of your question.

OK. My question is after the Munich Agreement, you say the country is divided, yes?

Yes, the country become divided, because Slovakia also become in a political crisis and division of the

country become imminent. And it come apart then following year, six months later in March.

OK.

Munich is a source of a disaster in a waiting room. It's waiting.

Got it. [LAUGHING] That's a very interesting way to put it. But it sounds quite accurate, disaster in a waiting room. You know, you have one disaster, you're in a waiting room, you know another one's coming.

Yes, another's coming. It was imminent that country would not be able to economically survive. It was absolutely not feasible because then in Těchonice first appear a first refugee. He was a young guy, only two years older than me, from Carpathia, from a distant part of the Republic, which was called Podkarpatská Rus. And it is known in [? atlas ?] in the Western part [INAUDIBLE] as Ruthenia and today, part of Ukraine.

That's right, that's right. And why was this person a refugee in Těchonice?

I think he had some distant relatives. And it was again the miller, one who identify as one of the fascists.

Yeah, yeah. Now, you'd mentioned very early on that your best friend was Florian, Václav Florian, yes?

Yes.

Did you boys talk to one another about what's going on here about all these changes?

Yes, Václav Florian, at that particular time, was still in Těchonice.

OK.

He would leave as the family would leave when his grandfather passed. And his grandfather passed in a good time, if I might say. Because as an old man, he was a Jewish. But his grandson was Mischling, half-Jewish.

OK.

And during this crisis, his grandfather passed away. And as a result of it, the family then moved, because the father of Václav was better of being in other neighboring village, because his parents had a better condition for him to farm. They had better farms. He did not need to be in Těchonice with a small grocery store and few fields. So obviously, family moved. That was a time when we parted.

Although we were very close and we visited each other at least for one year we were in contact with each other until he too went to high school. Then we reconnected, because then that is-- if you want to continue and talk about what happened to me and to Václav how we parted, then I continue that way.

OK, hang on just a second. I want to ask a few questions before we go there. And the first one is his grandfather was named Schwartz, that was his last name, yes?

Yes.

And do you know when he-- you said he passed at a good time, so probably before the war starts. Do you know about what year this was or even what month it might have been?

I believe it was definitely a year. It was someplace like the end of 1938.

OK. So the Munich Agreement has happened?

The Munich Agreement already did happen when he passed.

OK. And his wife that is Florian's, Václav's grandmother, had she already--

She was-- I never met her. She was no longer alive. Because only grandpa was there when in 1932 when I arrived and when I finally made connection [INAUDIBLE] good friendship. He had only grandfather, just Jewish grandfather in Těchonice. But he had grandparents on his father's side nearby village.

OK.

Velenovy.

Got it. So we were talking about Václav, who's half-Jewish, his mother Julia, who is entirely Jewish, and his father, who is not Jewish but who is Czech.

Yes.

Is that correct?

His mother was called, Jula.

Jula. And his father's first name, do you know what that was?

The first name was-- I do not know the grandfather's first name.

No, no, no, the father's first name, Mr. Florian's first name.

Oh, Mr. Florian, Václav. He was Václav, too. The father was Václav.

OK. And Václav Florian, the father, was not Jewish?

No, he was not Jew.

OK, OK. So we've got that established that-- now, were there any other Jewish families aside from this one in the village?

No, there was not. And I could come-- I have colorfully it really, in my mind went through about five to six villages all around, which were sort of satellite of Těchonice. None of them. I believe that this was a Jewish family, which may come there much more earlier than 19th century and that the Jewish community was more in places like Horažďovice and Plánice, [PLACE NAME], small town. In a small village, they were simply a rarity. And this were the Schwartz.

OK, OK, thank you. Thank you for laying that kind of background for me that in your part of the world in your part of this southwestern part of Czechoslovakia in this circle of small villages of which Těchonice was sort of the center, it really was the only Jewish family around. And to find more, you'd have to go to towns, actually, towns in the district rather than villages.

Right.

Is that--

You have it right.

OK.

That is exactly as I experienced and as I remember it.

OK, so now let's talk--

I do know--

Yeah?

I can't identify then what Jewish families would be other places. But definitely, this is not in Těchonice or around Těchonice at all.

Yeah, OK. And that was your world. When you were a young boy just about to become a teenager, age 10, 11, 12, and so on, that is your world. You don't go beyond that area. You don't travel beyond that area.

I live my life very intensely up there. And it became-- I must admit that the roots of my upbringing are Czech. Of course, it was not my home. And I did regret that I have to leave it. As my mother regretted leaving Chicago, I was leaving with regrets. But I did the right thing too. And I was fortunate to be able to do it in time.

OK, and we'll come to that. But right now, we have those big years that is the central part of our story. And that's from, I'd say, 1939, you say March 1939 until the end of the war. And I would suggest that we talk a little bit about this time but also postpone to have a part two of our interview another day. How would you--

Yeah, that's fine.

Yeah? Because we're talking in detail, and I'd like to capture all of this detail.

Mm-hmm, yes.

All right, so let's go to what happens to Těchonice in March 1939, half a year after the Munich Agreement?

It [? come a shock ?] and it became clear that the morning on March 1939, which suddenly early in the morning we find ourselves assemble in part of the village and reading in a poster that the country ceased to exist and then become a Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia. And for first time, every announcement became in German and in Czech. At that particular time, we were still going to school. We were shocked and in sort of disbelief.

And our teacher was a local from nearby village. He was a former army officer, who only a few months ago was mobilized ready to defend the country. And he had to explain to us what happened. And I would give you one example. Because for first time, suddenly we have learned that we must listen carefully, and we must also be careful what we say and to who we talk to.

Our classmate was the German boy, Hans. He was still in Těchonice, and he was still our classmate. And we did that morning suddenly teachers sent him on errand. Unusual, because usually he would send teacher on errands send girls. I don't know why, but on errand. And usually it will be something show up getting message to director who school was two floors. So he sent him on errand. And he wasn't coming out of that errand right away.

We did not know why. But that was done the teacher took time to inform us in confidence what is taking place, what we can expect, and how we should behave. And it comes many years later that I did contact the teacher. In fact, I contacted him many years later. And I remind him and thank him how he talk to us. And he say, yeah, had to arrange that with a director to send the German boy on a run, because he did not trust that something else might come out of it.

But I personally have found out that that was no fear, because Hans had become as Václav Florian was my good friend. Hans have become my lifetime friend too until he died.

Oh, my goodness. Oh, my goodness. So the half-Jewish boy in town was your close friend and so was the German boy, Hans?

So it was, but I am responding to your question. People began to be careful there were changes. And us

children in school, we were beneficially a few things. Because we are Czech army, of course, have a great deal of supplies. And it was food supplies and sugar, particularly too. We were getting extra ration of sugar and honey from the reserve, which apparently was someplace stashed as a reserve for the army.

So obviously, there were some kind of benefits of all what was happening. The kids did have it, you know? Because--

What did the teacher say? Excuse me to interrupt, but what was-- first of all, what was the name of the teacher, if you remember it? And what did he say? When he was talking to you when he sent Hans on this long errand, what was he telling you?

Well, he was a very patriotic teacher. He was from neighboring village, also parishioner of Těchonice. So he understood very well. He knew history of the kids. He also knew very well where I come from. Because when my mother arrived with me on this godforsaken place, she had to get out of this railroad station, and it was winter and walk with me. And first village was his village, and stop in his house, in his father's house, who happened to be friend of my grandfather. So he absolutely knew of my arrival in that village.

So obviously, he knew who he was talking. And he [INAUDIBLE] not to forget who we were. It was a patriotic in a way speech. But he cautioned us about being careful and not to be talking to anybody just not to even say to anybody what he's telling us. I could no longer recall. But it was simply that we would have to part with all symbols. And he point out the picture of the first president of the Republic that will be all removed.

And he also allowed us to watch from the window the march of German army in the distance. Because being a second floor, we had good view and a distant highway, which was [INAUDIBLE] because the highway going from South of our country from [PLACE NAME] [? Budejovice ?] moving to [? Strakonice ?] [? Horažďovice ?] passing. We could see that there was a movement in the highway.

Yeah, yeah.

And we could see him being in a state of shock. We did not know if we had to be sorry for ourself or for him, because he was in pain. And I could not repeat the words after all that time. But I know the reason we understood why he sent Hans Soukup out of classroom for errand. He didn't want to talk openly to him. He had every confidence that we will do what he is asking us.

I see, I see. And what was his name?

His name is Behensky. His first name is Václav. The country is full of Václavs.

[LAUGHING] It's true, it's true. And how--

Behensky, it's a little long name, but I spell it. B-E-H-E-N-S-K-Y.

Thank you.

Yeah, it's right, Behensky, B-E-N-- B-E-H-A-E-- I'm sorry, I start all over.

OK.

B-E-H-E-N-S-K-Y, Behensky.

Thank you. Thank you, very much. Well, you know it's a rare thing at a time like that for a teacher to kind of warn and guide his students. Because no one talks to you publicly. There is no newspaper to tell you what's going on.

There is no news. There is no-- and people report that over and over again that when changes like this happen, there are rumors. Rumors are everywhere. But there isn't hard information. And there isn't any kind

of guidance, because people get frightened.

Immediately, what he says to be careful about who you speak to, that's how public life turns. Whereas the day before you could share whatever views you had. When changes like this happened the second day, well, it can become dangerous.

I have asked later in life many Czechs of my age who live in a town that they get a different experience than we in a village. I know that there were attempt to listen to radio. The radio play nothing but one just sound. It was actually-- I have learned to know it was Smetana's symphonic poems from "The High Castle," which was in Czech called "Vyšehrad." It's was tones, first three tones of a play on harps. And it evokes our source of a historical, mythic past of the country, something going thousand years back.

Wow.

I'm sorry. I hear the sound. I'm sorry.

It's OK. That's OK.

I hear the sound. I know the poems. And that was all what we heard on radio that day. There was no announcement, except it must have been well prepared some place in the region of Klatovy that these posters were posted immediately. They did not address invasion, just occupation of country took midnight. By morning 8 o'clock, these posters were everywhere already in the entire region.

That's amazing.

So how quickly they are who deliver them, I would not know. But it must have been by motorcycle by the region of town of Klatovy. It must have been some gendarme going around and keep posting this announcement. Because countryside find it only like that.

Wow.

And then later on, apparently, I know that again mother took me to the inn where they tried to listen to the radio, and there was no announcement, except this [? song ?] from Smetana "My Country," which is in Czech called, "Má vlast." And it's a first symphonic poem, which is called "High Castle." It's a castle when you enter to Prague from the south of a country called Vyšehrad.

I know that area. I know that area. I know what you mean. It's--

And that was what was going on hour an hour until we gave it up. Because I don't know when regular broadcasting start that I don't know. But I know that people listened for hours to [INAUDIBLE]. It did not. The only thing was the posters and that's it. And from a distance, they could see the movement of troops. But Těchonice, including all these little villages I named, did not see any Germans on that day.

OK. And what about Václav Florian, was he still in your--

No, Václav Florian, at that time, what I'd described, was in a different class. He was in the second class. He was in the fourth grade.

OK. But he--

This is very interesting question. I did not ask him-- he did not have the-- the class he did not have the problem. Because it was a class only of Czech. And I considered Václav, and everybody considered him as a citizen of that village and citizen of the country.

OK.

So the teacher was a lady. She did not have to go to this cautious approach. I'm sure she told them

something similar.

OK.

Because she was the wife of the director. So they must have met early in morning and apparently agreed how they would do to tell these children. Fortunately, school had something about 120 children from four different villages.

That's a lot. That's--

That was a lot that my class was a largest of it all. I believe it was well close to 50.

And you were in which class at this point?

I was in the fifth-- first class, but fifth grade.

You were in the-- OK.

And Václav was in fourth grade. So he was in a different classroom.

Got it. And it was after this year that you would go to Plánice?

Yes, that would take two more years. Not year, actually year and half more. Then Václav was no longer in Těchonice. He was in a school on the village of Velenovy. And Velenovy was hardly 20 minutes, half an hour from Těchonice. And the road to Plánice sort of merge in a different places. And we, therefore, were able to reconnect again. We saw each other daily when he finally went to high school.

OK.

When Václav went in high school, I was already in the second year of high school. Václav was in the first year. And we walk together from village of Zborovy. About hour every day, we see each other in the recess noontime. We also saw each other afternoon walking [? on our ?] way.

I visited him sometimes when there was a holiday in his village. He visited me. But that did not last too long, because his days in high school were counted, as was mine. Because we will then arrive to a critical year of 1942, where our lives changed.

OK, at that point-- I'm sorry that I'm interrupting. But I think that at this point it would be good for us to pause. I'm going to stop the recording for right now.