

TUČEK, Vladimír
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Abstract

Vladimír Tuček was born to a Jewish mother and a non-Jewish father on September 20, 1927 in Prague. When the Germans arrived, his parents divorced so his father would not be fired for having a Jewish wife. The mother lived with them for a short time, and had Vladimir baptized. The family did not practice Judaism.

Jews were forced to wear the star, and he and his Jewish classmate, Karel Vronský, were expelled from grammar school. Vladimír had not observed any anti-Semitic behavior in school before the war.

His mother Anna was deported to Theresienstadt and soon afterward to Auschwitz, where she died. One of his brothers was deported to Poland to work in a salt mine, where he died. One handicapped aunt died in a concentration camp. A maternal aunt Eliška was deported in 1944 to Theresienstadt, where she caught typhus, but survived. Another aunt, Berta, married a Czech Aryan, and that saved her.

Vladimir was deported in 1944 to Bystrice to a concentration camp for children of mixed marriages and spouses of Jews. The concentration camp initially had no toilets, and its blankets were flea-infested, but hunger was not an issue. Vladimir says he was never hungry. A friend who worked in the kitchen made separate, tastier food for him.

The camp had many artists, who gave cultural performances on many Sundays. They included musical artist Jára Pospíšil, dancer Jarský, pianist Kopecký, singer Špaček, trumpeter Victor Tomašu and the Deuch brothers.

Vladimír and some friends escaped on May 1, 1945, because they heard that the Germans were destroying camps. Other friends had given them train tickets. On the way to work one day, they hid in the railroad station basement until they could board their train. German police, who were checking for refugees, also boarded. The friends showed their work book from the camp, and a paper signed by the commander-in-chief. Vladimir thinks that the German police did not understand, so did not detain them, and they arrived in Prague.

Vladimír's being a teenager, aged 16 to 17 years old when in the concentration camp in Bystrice, helping him cope with the situation.

Oral history interview with Vladimír Tuček

1-10 min.

Vladimír Tuček was born September 20, 1927 in Prague to a Jewish mother Anna and a non-Jewish father. His mother was born in a small village, Bělečko, and his father was from Prague. His entire family worked at the post office. In 1939, his father divorced his mother because she was Jewish, and he was trying to protect his family. If he had not gotten divorced, he would have been fired and the family would not have any money. She remained living with them for a while, but shortly afterward moved in with her sister

Before the war, mixed marriages did not cause problems in Prague or Bělečko. The only people who had a problem with it was a family in Bělečko who owned a newsstand. They were strongly against Jews and loved the Germans. Bělečko was a small village with few stores. Anna's brother Josef also lived there. A repairman, Josef was known for helping people around the village. Vladimír was brought up in Prague, but spent almost every holiday in Bělečko.

Vladimír wasn't brought up in any religion, but when the Germans came, he got baptized in 1939. His mother was not baptized. Her family did not practice Judaism. His grandmother, Matilda Cinerová, knew how to read Hebrew, and taught it to Vladimír.

His mother had two sisters, Eliška and Berta, both of them survived war. She also had two brothers.

10-20 min.

Vladimír had attended general school and grammar school in Prague- Žižkov. He had not seen any anti-Semitic behavior in school before the war. But in 1939, he was forced to leave grammar school because he was a child from a mixed marriage. He and his Jewish classmate, Karel Vronský, were expelled at the same time

The occupation had a huge effect on Vladimír's family. His parents had to get divorced, his mother couldn't work with her sister because as a Jew, her sister couldn't have any staff. They had to start wearing the Jewish star. Her brother got denounced many times by the family that owned the newsstands. The Czech police dealt with the first denunciation but when the Gestapo took over, it was much worse. He ended up at a salt mine in Poland, where he died. Vladimír's grandmother had to sell her store and died eventually, before the

transports came. One of her sisters was handicapped and was sent to a concentration camp, where she died.

20-30 min.

Vladimír's mother, Anna, was the first to get sent away. Before that she couldn't work with her sister, but the sister found Anna a job through the Jewish community. Anna started to work at a brewery's huge warehouse. From time to time, Anna took things from the warehouse, which contained many objects, mostly furniture. Most likely, the furniture had been taken by Germans from Jewish homes, Vladimir says.

The mother, like other Jews, wore the Jewish star. She worked in the warehouse until 1942, when she was sent away. Before she lived with her sister, she stayed with Vladimír and his father. But they were afraid that a strange neighbor would denounce them, so Anna moved away. The neighbor had a problem with everything: noise, mess and people. She argued constantly with people.

Vladimír visited his mother very often. He remembers the day his mother found out that she was getting deported. He said goodbye to her at home, but wasn't allowed to go to the train station because it would be too hard for him and Anna.

Anna got deported to Theresienstadt, but shortly after, she was transported to Auschwitz, where she died. Her sister Eliška was deported in 1944, because she had good connections. She was sent to Theresienstadt where she caught typhus, but survived. Anna's younger sister Berta married a Czech Aryan, which she hadn't divorced and that saved her.

30-40 min.

After Vladimír got expelled from grammar school, he attended public school, where he learned German and English. Then, he started working in a factory named Blaniček and Malec. The factory was owned by his mother's cousins, the Vaníček brothers.

He worked in the factory until 1944, when he was sent to Bystřice to a concentration camp for children from mixed marriages or spouses of Jewish people. He had never seen the Gestapo before he had been ordered to go to a German office to register. Soon afterward, he was sent to the camp in 1944. He took some clothing, pliers, a screwdriver and a flashlight.

He had to go to Praha-Bubny railroad station, where he was forced onto a train that went to Bystřice. His father took him to the station and introduced him to a colleague. His

father told Vladimir that his colleague would take care of him. But in the camp, Vladimir took care of the colleague. When they arrived in Bystřice in June 1944, the Germans were waiting.

40-50 min.

The train first took them to Toršovice to an abandoned farmhouse converted into a hostel. They lived there for a few days and then walked to the concentration camp. The camp was surrounded with barbed wire and it still looked like a construction site. There were no toilets.

Vladimír lived in barrack number 2, a large space, where more than 50 people lived and slept on bunk beds. When more people came from Poland, the camp issued four-level bunk beds. In front of the entrance, there was a small space that served as a washroom. His bed was next to the washroom. Vladimír and his friends had news about where the battlefield was, so they knew when the Russians came.

His bed was next to a man from Prague, next to Mr. Martinec and next to the Sýgler brothers. One of the brothers spoke fluent German, which earned him a job as assistant to the camp commander. The rest of the inmates viewed that as an advantage because he told them information about the camp and the Germans.

Vladimír was friends with the boys he worked with, who were the same age: the Pelešek brothers, Jára Pospíšil and Kopecký.

50-60 min.

The Pelešek brothers had had a bakery in Prague-Nusle, but both of them studied medicine. They also loved photography and made many photos of the Bystřice concentration camp. Together, they sneaked in a camera. They even sneaked in colored slides and projected them in barrack number 4. The negatives are now in the Bystřice museum.

A typical day in the Bystřice camp started with the ring of an alarm clock, breakfast and then work. Lunch was at noon but overall they worked around 12 hours a day, except in winter, when daylight was shorter, they worked for around 10 hours a day. In the evening, they had some time for themselves.

Some days, the Germans would check the barracks to be sure they were clean and no one was hiding anything. The Pelešek brothers had sneaked in the camera. They, and Vladimír, worked in a furniture factory and walked there every morning through Bystřice. The factory was next to the railroad, so there was easy access from other cities. The factory

management knew about this, and sometimes even helped. They managed a meeting for Vladimír and his father.

In spring, his father wanted to see him again, so the father even persuaded a Soviet soldier from Romania to let him meet Vladimír. The Soviet soldier knew that Romania was occupied and the war would be over soon, so he let them meet.

Vladimir had contact with his father through notes. Every month, he could write 30 words to him. Vladimir could also receive packages, which were of course first searched by the Germans. Vladimír always had to give the Germans something from his package so that they would let him keep the package.

60-70 min.

Many people tried to run from the camp. If they got caught, the soldiers would beat them 25 times with a stick. If they didn't get caught, they would replace them with their father. Vladimír saw them beat up people who had tried to get away. The punishment had to be administered by one of the prisoners. If he beat too lightly, he would be beaten up himself.

There were more punishments in the camp. The prisoners would get punished if they made a mess. Some punishments were collective – everyone had to walk in squats. One of the worst punishments was having to stay in the concrete bunker.

SS members were Germans, Slovaks and Rumin. He met the Rumin only once, when they let him see his father and for a second time. He saw him in Bystřice in a store. The Romanian was crying because he just found out about the occupation of Romania.

70-80 min.

The camp had a doctor named Sláma. Every barrack and every group had its own leader.

Vladimír worked at the railway station. He unloaded boxes of grenades and ammunition and then loaded them onto a car that transported the weaponry to a warehouse. It was very hard work, so he tried to get out of the job, but the Germans wouldn't let him. The warehouse exploded shortly after he left.

He worked also digging trenches near Benešov. A German soldier was watching them, but he wasn't very smart. They dug as far to Petrovice.

He stayed in the concentration camp until May 1, 1945. Near the end of the war, Vladimír and his friends realized that it would be wise to disappear because they had heard that the Germans were destroying entire camps. The friends agreed that they would escape on the way to work because no one would become suspicious. They had other friends who had given them train tickets. On the way to work one day, they hid in the railroad station basement until their train arrived and they boarded it. But in Bystřice, the German police boarded the train and looked for refugees. The police asked all passengers for identification. It was too late to get off; guards were watching the railway station. The friends showed their work book, that said they were members of the camp, plus a paper signed by commander-in-chief Karaš. When the Germans saw the signature, they let the friends go on their way. Vladimír thinks that they didn't know what it all meant.

When the friends arrived in Prague, they did not go home because the Germans might search for them at home.

80-90 min.

Information came from the residents of Bystřice, where they worked, so leaving the camp for work was easy. They worked in Neveklov as drillers and at another time, they worked as diggers at the airport. They had to hide the planes once by placing sticks around them.

One boy was shot when he tried to escape. Vladimír didn't see it, he heard about it after war. The boy tried to escape at night, when the risk was the highest.

The camp's blankets were infested with fleas. On Sunday, when there was no work, the prisoners hung out the blankets in an attempt to get rid of fleas. The camp and the prisoners had to be clean.

90-100 min.

The doctor was good. He gave medication to sick inmates. Before the washrooms were built, they washed themselves in the nearby pond.

Toward the end of the war, he was working in Petrovice, but he didn't see the railway, so he didn't see the transports.

After the war, Vladimír witnessed some violence toward the German people. This included people killing a German immediately upon hearing him shout "Heil Hitler." In

Prague, when Vladimir saw a boy who had worshiped the Germans while in the concentration camp, Vladimir wanted to beat up the boy.

Vladimir had been expelled from grammar school in October or November 1942. Then he attended public school and later started working in the factory.

When the inmates worked on the railway, officially they were workers for an Austrian construction company, so the work book was held by the company. Just before the friends escaped, they got their work books back, which helped them very much.

The camp had many artists, who gave cultural performances on many Sundays. Artistic inmates included Jára Pospíšil, dancer Jarský, pianist Kopecký, singer Špaček trumpeter Victor Tomašu and the Deuch brothers.

100-110 min.

Once they held a soccer match, but the ball got destroyed because they were playing on a has-field. (?)

There were many interesting stories. When he was working at the airport, a boy stole clocks from a plane. Nobody told on him because everybody was very scared. Once, when the camp wasn't finished and they didn't have toilets, they just dug a hole. One day, planes attacked the camp, and many boys ran away while their behinds were exposed.

The food was interesting. The kitchen head was named Čechmar, who cooked German food that was not tasty. Vladimír had a friend who worked in the kitchen, and would cook tastier food separately for him. It wasn't good food, Vladimir was never hungry. There were even times, when he enjoyed himself. When it was very cold, around -15 degrees Celsius, Vladimír and his friends would create things to do, including games.

Vladimír was 16 to 17 years old when he was working in the concentration camp in Bystřice, so he was able to cope with the situation.