

**Jan Matys**

**MEMORIES**

**of socialist construction, the “normalization” regime,  
and quite recent times**

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## **Foreword**

When I came to Slovakia in 1978 due to various circumstances, I found myself in an admirably tolerant and a bit exotic environment. I felt rather as a guest there which permitted me to see matters with some distance and humor. Stories written by life often overcome human fantasy. I have long been keeping a number of adventures in my mind and thinking of how to put them down. Finally, it was the memories by Juraj Charvát, authentically describing the times of pre-war Czechoslovakia and the beginning of the Nazi occupation<sup>1</sup> that inspired me to write “*Memories of the Darkness*”. It is concerned with the most problematic period of recent Czech and Slovak history, the years 1969-89. I also supplemented memories of my studies and military service (1959-69) and miscellaneous memories glued together with amateur playing music which was my fondness since youth. In “Teacher’s memories” I described the last two years of my teaching (2002-2004) which often relishes with horror. Finally, I also attached two of my older articles already published in MOSTY, a Czechoslovak Magazine<sup>2</sup>.

Life brings us a lot of experience and information. A good artist can characterize a man with a few strokes of his brush. When casting memories, one has to choose the characteristic stories among an inexhaustible many of them. Let a reader of these lines judge to what extent I have succeeded to do that. Some events are worth of engraving in the marble; others may be written in the dust for the wind to sweep them away.

## **Studies**

### ***At the Technical College (1959-1963)***

It was my passion for electrical (and steam) engines that brought me to the technical college specializing in power electricity<sup>3</sup>. I had probably been inspired by a book by Russian authors describing construction of electrical- and steam-engine models using very simple materials – empty conserves, wires and cartridge-cases. Though I did not excel at workmanship, I was still able to make a model of an electric engine. I was not interested in radios – one- or two-lamp receivers, which were popular that time.

However, it was not easy to get into the college. Although my father was a Communist Party member<sup>4</sup>, his parents came from the middle-class (i.e. they were of “bourgeois origin”). We lived in a block of flats with a large garage. My teacher once asked me about the possibility of parking in the garage. I let him know that the house used to belong to our family. This was probably the reason why the school did not recommend me for studies. I only got there subsequently after my father’s appeal.

The first three school years (of four) I was “in my element” there. Apart from some exceptions, the lessons had a good standard and I took the 2<sup>nd</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> position in the class according to grades. My weak point was technical drawing and I had to catch it up during weekends. Until recently I had a heap of quartos with matrix-drawings of machine-parts in my

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<sup>1</sup> in LISTY, No.1, 40, 2009

<sup>2</sup> it is now included in LISTY

<sup>3</sup> at Praha 1, Na Příkopě 16

<sup>4</sup> In 1948 he had no choice; if he had not entered the Party, he would have been dismissed from Ministry of Finances; a lot of (about 70 000) intellectuals were “sent to production” that time.

drawer and I used them for envelopes. This solid training turned out useful later on, when I worked in the factory and also many years later when I was teaching – I could teach technical drawing. In the final school year, that was devoted to special subjects (e.g. motor windings), I mostly felt bored; long hours our class-teacher examined student P., whose uncle taught at the college.

There were however some exceptions among the fair teachers. Mrs.P., who taught us mathematics and chemistry, told us for long hours about her family problems and she tried to compensate for this by a lot of homework, calculations from the digest. On the other hand Mr.C., who taught us power engineering, only read the textbook. During an inspection at the classes a student confused capacitor-batteries with storage batteries and the professor did not correct him. Once we got a new Russian teacher, a middle-aged lady. At first examinations, all students failed (i.e. they got 5-marks) except for me – I got 3-. Her acting was however only short; she was sacked, allegedly for theft. Another time we got an old man as a substitute for teaching chemistry. He looked like a professor from the times of Austro-Hungarian Monarchy. He presented us a theory of Creation and an ancient concept of chemical elements and compounds. I had bad luck with him, we did not understand with each other.

There were practically no problems with discipline in those times; everyone (except from that protégé pupil) respected that he could study. I don't remember (with one exception – in a history lesson) that any teacher had to caution us for speaking during the lesson. The lessons of Czech and Russian (and optional lessons of German) were solid as well, which was a good base for further studies and teaching languages. Physical education was also remarkable; in spite of my clumsiness I started to exercise more and at the university I even became a gymnast. What a contrast with the “gym” which I experienced when I was teaching<sup>5</sup> at Educational Training Centre, where the trainees refused heating-up, only chased the ball; while some only sat on the bench with ear-phones on their heads and even refused to take on dresses!

The spirit of 50s was maintained by a few of the teachers, the school janitor and the headmaster. The rallies on February 25<sup>th</sup><sup>6</sup> and 1<sup>st</sup> of May were obligatory, as well as signing petitions against “American imperialists”. Once a week, there was a study of political “creative” songs via school radio. Our class had missed these studies because we had a practical workshop training that day. Once it resulted in an odd situation at the military-training lesson: the teacher let us line up and ordered to sing “*Over burned land, across rivers of blood...*”<sup>7</sup>. Only one student sang, the others stood silent. The teacher silently disappeared and later on it became known that we should have been accused of sabotage. This gym-teacher asserted that he had a “*class instinct*” and that he could recognize whose parents are intellectuals and who came from a worker's family. If someone did something bad, he always asked about his father's profession. Nevertheless once his instinct had failed; the student concerned only had a mother and she was a worker. He said he would have to verify her class origin thoroughly ....

Before the manifestation on May 1<sup>st</sup> we were given a list of slogans to be chanted in the procession. However students have invention: our class-mate H. modified the slogan “American pirates will not reverse the wheel of history!” to “Let's drown American aggressors in the Red Sea!” in a typical Prague slang.

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<sup>5</sup> As a substitute

<sup>6</sup> „Victorious February“, Communist coup in 1948

<sup>7</sup> Song of Czechoslovak soldiers fighting on the East front in WWII.

There was some kind of “thaw” in the political climate since the 2<sup>nd</sup> year, the period of Nikita Khrushchev was coming. It was possible to speak more directly, the war period was over. Nevertheless I never dared to entrust my views on politics to any of my school-fellows; my father warned me before that although he didn’t know my views either<sup>8</sup>. “Anti-state proclamations” were punished by sacking and a record in one’s dossier. Neither in the fourth year before the school-leaving exam, when the youth of Prague started to meet at Mácha Monument at Petřín<sup>9</sup>, I dared not to speak my mind either (I became an enthusiast at discussing at the university). Our Russian teacher Pistoriusová asked us whether we are going to sit for examinations in Youth-socialist-movement uniforms. We refused that unanimously.<sup>10</sup> She argued that we had the privilege of marching in the street holding a red flag, which was punishable in her youth...

*Laws of heredity* were officially dismissed that time and it was proclaimed that all people have the same talent. If there were any differences in grades between the intellectual’s and the worker’s children, it was explained by claiming that intellectuals devote more time to their children. It is therefore necessary to help the students of worker’s families. Nobody may fail! It is interesting that it had really come true: there were 39 pupils including 5 girls in the class at the beginning and only one girl failed during studies. I was nominated an “official for studies” and I had to fill in the overview of grades. There must have been red points in the list of names denoting who comes from a worker’s family. The reason for this was not clear. It probably was an instruction from the superiors. If somebody failed or was weak at questioning, I was brought in. It was evidently my duty to teach them the missing matter; many times I even did that.

It seems to me that the education of that time was much more soundly organized than today; in spite of various limitations due to politics most teachers were mature personalities and they had practical experience of their disciplines. When I came in the same rooms 40 years later as a teacher, I was literally shocked by some facts. The teachers had to lock doors to their sections to prevent stealing! One had thus to carry keys everywhere. Often there was little readiness to help, there was even perfidious spitefulness and harassment among teachers...<sup>11</sup>

According to my view, I had governed our branch quite well during my studies. 40 years later, when I had to teach the basics of power electricity at High Professional School<sup>12</sup>, i.e. to teach fresh graduates using the textbook of our former teacher, Mr. Javorský, it was tough going, but I was able to do it.

Today students mostly prepare for an exam only and they forget the matter afterwards to make room for new facts. There is a lot of information coming via TV and Internet.<sup>13</sup>

In this life period, there were also other activities apart from lessons (though related to school): a winter skiing course, picking of hops, my first paid work at the construction of Orlick Dam, a holiday practice at MEZ Works at Vsetín (which inspired me later on to move to

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<sup>8</sup> My parents thought that I am too young to have any opinions on public matters, we never discussed about that

<sup>9</sup> Karel Hynek Mácha, Czech romantic poet, Petřín – a hill over Prague

<sup>10</sup> 40 years later, in 2002, when I was teaching at this school, I got known that she had been a wife of a prominent theatre director and she was still alive; she was almost blind and still kept her communist persuasion, although she was sacked after 1968.

<sup>11</sup> For more details see “Teacher’s Memories”

<sup>12</sup> Vyšší odborná škola – prolonged studies after „maturita“-examinations

<sup>13</sup> See my “Teacher’s Memories”

Valachia)<sup>14</sup>, canoe expeditions with friends on the Lužnice and Vltava rivers. All these were a great experience except for some illnesses after returning from the skiing course. It was the period of Semafor<sup>15</sup>-songs and tramping songs at the bonfire (I devoted myself to classical music and didn't know these songs well that time). A hunk of bread from a country bakery had an unrepeatably flavor, rivers were (mostly) clean enough for swimming and two hundred crowns<sup>16</sup> were enough for a two-week expedition. For a whole summer I walked barefoot.

After the school-leaving (maturita) examinations I experienced my first international working camp at Slapy-lake (Živohošť). It was first time that young people from both sides of the Iron Curtain could meet. I had the first opportunity to practice conversation in 3 world languages; I could only speak Russian well. As I dared not speak directly about politics, I spoke with an exaggerated irony about the “constructions of socialism”, principles of Marxism etc. I mostly spoke to Dutch students. They took me seriously and regarded me as a true-blue communist. Most Czech participants avoided speaking about politics.

### **At the University (1963-1968)**

In the same year (1963) as I left the college, the borders to the West first opened and western tourists started to arrive. At the same time a political thaw took place and the screening due to “class origin” was virtually discarded. There was no problem for me to pass the entrance examination; I had to decide where to study. I wasn't attracted by power electricity any more, I was driven to something higher and more abstract. According to directives, however, alumni of technical colleges had to continue in the same branch. So I was enrolled at the Electrical Engineering Faculty and sent to a holiday job – hay harvest in the Šumava and a temporary job at ČKD Praha Works as an entrance practice. We also passed some rehearsal of mathematics. However, my sister's boyfriend, who studied at Faculty of Technical and Nuclear Physics (FTJF) of the Czech Technical University, persuaded me to change the faculty. To do this, I had to find a student who would change contrariwise. The lectures at FTJF had already started; I had to catch up on the delay.

FTJF was a small faculty with a “family” atmosphere but high demands. Many of the lecturers were top specialists in their branches, but one could also sometimes meet an average teacher who acted as a caricature there. It was 5-years' study and for whole 4 years mathematics (including its individual disciplines) was the main subject. Since 3<sup>rd</sup> year we were separated according to subjects of study. Most talented students were assigned to theoretical and experimental physics; I was classed to solid state physics. There were also engineering branches e.g. physical electronics or nuclear reactor technology. For the physical branches, the fundamental subject was theoretical physics, especially quantum mechanics. There was some school reform in 1967 and we were given the opportunity to finish our studies at Charles University, but all of us refused to do that<sup>17</sup>. There was some rivalry between the schools.

I specialized in the physics of semiconductors. Among our lecturers there was Prof. Helmar Frank, a native German from Prague, and Prof. Adéla Kochanovská, an older lady, who emanated the spirit of pre-war times. She taught us radiocrystallography and we called her “Czech Marie Curie”.

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<sup>14</sup> A hilly region in the north of Moravia

<sup>15</sup> A popular musical theatre

<sup>16</sup> In the official exchange rate of that time about 30 USD

<sup>17</sup> The students of experimental and theoretical physics had to change the school

We had to work hard in the first year; it was a great help that we worked together, we taught each other. A great number of students failed, only a half finished 1<sup>st</sup> year and quarter of those who started finally graduated. The lecturers didn't spare us, the recording of lectures needed full concentration. The matters rolled upon us. Hardly ever was I able to follow the matter in the course of lectures; I could only make the matters clear in the exam-period when there was absolute quiet. I used to start with maths that was most difficult and the other exams went smoothly. There was only one collision – with Prof. Matyáš, who taught us the basics of solid-state physics. I was falling asleep at his lectures and he had remembered me. It was only the fact that I had studied with very good records so far which saved me from failure.

I got no regular pocket-money from home, the only money I had was a stipendium of 200 Kčs (30USD). I ate at home and had no other needs. In 2<sup>nd</sup> year I prospered best, I had “decoration”. However, I had to overcome a crisis in 3<sup>rd</sup> year when I was expending a lot of energy to comprehend the incomprehensible – the *quantum mechanics*. This energy was then missing elsewhere, including my further life.

The 4<sup>th</sup> year was relatively quiet; in our main subject – the theory of solids – we had to fill many pages with complicated mathematical expressions suggesting Chinese signs or hieroglyphs. Luckily, we didn't have to reproduce it; only some understanding was needed. The whole the 5<sup>th</sup> year was devoted to diploma. I chose an experimental task at the Institute of Communications in Prague 4. I had to prepare Metall-Oxide-Semiconductor (MOS) structures<sup>18</sup> and measure their characteristics. The work also included some theoretical calculations. I didn't fully understand the meaning of this work that time, but it became to be very useful later on. My colleagues at Tesla Piešťany were using my formula for high-frequency capacity still in 1984, when I was finishing my career in the field of semiconductor technology.

I also have to mention the lessons of *humanitarian sciences*, which (at least at our faculty) got out of the traditional ideological scope and it even inspired some of my colleagues to ordinary studies of philosophy. While we were listening to conventional lectures on the history of workmen-movement in the 1<sup>st</sup> year, we learned to criticize the centralistic model of economy in the 2<sup>nd</sup>. There was an economic crisis taking place in 1963 and the economist Ota Šik tried to put through a market-type socialist economy. The student committee invited Mr. Šik for a chat. The lecture-hall was overcrowded so I was not able to get in. We could listen to interesting lectures on history of philosophy in 3<sup>rd</sup> year. We could freely discuss the matters in the training courses. It was however not imaginable to defend capitalism. But we discussed the model of several political parties. None of us attended the planned lectures of “Scientific Communism” in 4<sup>th</sup> year; we only had some training-courses on sociology. In the years 1969-1970 the cathedra of humanitarian sciences was routed as a “nest of counter-revolution”; even the blue-blood communists were sacked.

I finished my studies in June 1968 amidst the political bustle. It brought us optimistic perspectives and an unrepeatabe feeling of freedom. On the other hand there was the end of my studies, that was giving me some plan for my life, and a tight bond with my parents who provided a home for me and also employed me at most weekends. I felt an ultimate need to leave home. It was the military service that was liberation for me.

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<sup>18</sup> MOS structures are the base of most electronic circuits today; I had no idea of their importance that time

The years of studies would have been unthinkable without relatively long holidays. One got into a quite different world and could regain power. On first holiday we organized an canoe-expedition, on the next ones we were taking part at international work-camps, both at home and abroad (West Germany, Sweden)<sup>19</sup>. I was not able to use all of the opportunities; in 1970 the borders were closed.

During my studies I worked myself physically, I trained at various sports. I also studied the viola at Prof. Jan Kratina and was member of Brixii Academic Ensemble which performed in St. Nicholas at Lesser Town of Prague. There were many marvelous experiences. Unfortunately, it finished too soon...

## Memories of the „Darkness-period“

The period of “*real socialism*” under presidency of Gustáv Husák is said to be a blank spot in our recent history. Most of those who remember are silent on that; they are probably ashamed of their failures. According to the media, the “totalitarian regime” is to be blamed of everything what happened. As if people were defenseless against the despotic rule. In this period (1969-1989) I lived at various regions of Czechoslovakia<sup>20</sup> and the attitudes of the people there to the existing situation were quite different.

In Slovakia most people ignored politics and they were not scared of speaking about anything. For example, in the year 1980 we went on canoes downstream on the Váh singing the popular song “Are you sleeping, brother John?” with changed lyrics: “*Who is hanged with Husák? The Federal Government with Biľak*”<sup>21</sup>. All of us laughed, including a colleague of ours who was party member. On the other hand, in 1972 at Rožnov, there was an annual meeting of our local folklore-ensemble and a fellow-musician (teacher by profession) pronounced these words: “We have analyzed the proclamations of the 15<sup>th</sup> Party Congress and I have pledged these socialist causes....” It is difficult to say whether it was sincere; we never spoke about politics.

There has been 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Prague Spring 1968 recently and the media mentioned the spontaneous resistance of Czech and Slovak people to Russian intruders, and the nation-wide unity. However what happened next?

The intruders took the strategic objects – airports, the radio, barracks, military bases etc. and demonstrated their power by shooting into the air and blocking transport. They extorted various concessions by a thread. Although their first attempt to establish a collaborator’s government failed, they won a popular Slovak politician Gustáv Husák, who was a good speaker. Already during the negotiations in Moscow he came to conclusion that the national resistance wouldn’t endure long and he took the opportunity offered. In fact, he took over the role of János Kádár (Budapest, 1956) but he lacked Kádár’s qualities and capitulated too much. In addition, his nomination also had an ethnical aspect: there were two Slovak politicians at the head of the state. Czech regions were apparently discriminated against the Slovak ones – there were no investments, as they were expected to be the future battlefield.

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<sup>19</sup> The work-camps were organized by Service Civil International (SCI). We had established its Czech subsidiary.

<sup>20</sup> Praha, Rožnov pod Radhoštěm, Piešťany (Slovakia), Služovice

<sup>21</sup> Vasil Biľak was the one who wrote the „invitation letter“ for Russians

When Slovak people saw the shabby towns and villages in Bohemia and Moravia, they deduced that “*Czech people are lazy*”. The methodology for political subduing of population was obviously provided by Russians. It was virtually the same “brainwashing” as that used at the framing-up of Rudolf Slánský et al. in 1951, but it was done nation-wide. The key point had been “to plead guilty”. The rest went on smoothly.

### **Rožnov pod Radhoštěm (1970 – 1978)**

I experienced this kind of “catechization” (or screening) at Tesla Rožnov Electronic Works. I had worked there in the research and development division since August 1970. It used to be a pioneering enterprise within the Eastern Block. That time, however, the authorities had no idea about the future significance of electronics, so they inconsiderately classified the top managers and experts as “chefs of counter-revolution” and sent them to their branch-factories, particularly to Piešťany in Slovakia, where they were thankfully accepted. By coincidence, I also moved to Piešťany a few years later, even voluntarily.

The first defectors to the new regime were pardoned whatever they did during the invasion, and they had been authorized to judge their “misled” colleagues, who didn’t want to change their belief. The party members had to hand in a new application to renew their membership. All employees were given a blank to express their attitudes to the significant events of Prague Spring: Appeal of 2000 words, the establishing of new political clubs and parties etc. Later on, employees were called to personal interviews, where the main point was their attitude to the invasion, which was euphemistically called “armies’ entry” in Czechoslovakia. Subsequently a new leadership of Trade Unions was elected with sturdy communists and verified persons dominating.

These actions had no direct impact on people’s thinking, some made fun of it. Nevertheless with some key persons missing, the existing “production democracy” was weakened.<sup>22</sup> People of inferior qualities promoted to key positions, the opposing of projects became a formality. Workers were often given unrealistic tasks and there was nepotism taking place. The expression “preventive bugging” became a common term. No wonder that it not only marked people’s health but also the firm began to stagnate. The prospective production of MOS devices was transferred to Piešťany due to wrong decisions. In 1980 the famous factory looked like a fortress guarded by machine-guns and dogs. I visited this enterprise that time as an employee of Slovak Academy of Science and I was interrogated as a Slovak spy and forbidden to enter the factory.

### **In Slovakia (1978 – 1984)**

When I entered the detached workplace of the Slovak Academy of Science in Piešťany which was associated with Tesla Piešťany<sup>23</sup>, I found myself in a quite different ambient. Owing to staying in a temporary wooden dormitory I quickly found my feet in the new collective. However, as regards the work it was rather specific. The chief (Doctor) had absolute power, all the ideas belonged to Him. Nevertheless, we organized interesting chats, discussions, parties and sport undertakings. I presented a chat about the origin of Czechoslovakia. We also discussed about prospects of democracy; most people were skeptical. They argued using the

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<sup>22</sup> By irony, later on we learned from the Japanese experts what we once used to know.

<sup>23</sup> Tesla Piešťany was originally a branch factory of Tesla Rožnov

words “*Quod licet Jovi, non licet bovi*”, i.e. what is permitted for God, is not permitted to the bull. As seen from today, they might be right.

Having found that any work at the laboratory is useless, I took steps to be directly engaged in the factory and I took part in the realization of 1kbit CMOS static memory (see lower). Later on I entered a new shop of Tesla set up for a licence of Toshiba. I became an employee of Tesla Piešťany and I turned back to my original field of interest – MOS (Metall-Oxide-Silicon) technology, which was the theme of my diploma and my initial work at Rožnov.

The system of work in Tesla Piešťany was rather specific – it would need another chapter to describe. In short – it suggested the principle of communism – some people realized themselves in work, others only attended the factory. The employees could accordingly be classified to “*vaulting horses*” and “*horses for breeding*” (which was a terminology invented by one of the managers). The technology and know-how was mostly transferred from Rožnov. There also was a development section with a “strong person” – Vladimír Áč, the chief designer. He had a monopoly of reason; when a competitor appeared, he shifted him away. However, by establishing the Japanese license shop his monopoly was by-passed. This shop needed highly qualified and motivated persons and his “opponents” could find there a good job. The shop was constructed for production of 16kbit dynamic memory. I became a member of a supervisory group of 4 workers. However, it was decided by the management of Tesla to produce here “illegally” also the CMOS static memory MITEL<sup>24</sup>, the one I had already worked before. Now it was in hands of my former colleagues at the Academy.

The CMOS memory should have been realized at the Institute of Communications in Prague (VÚST) but they were not able to produce functionable devices. The director of Tesla Mr.Pfliegel initiated establishing a mixed team of Academy and Tesla workers to solve the problem and to “cut them out”. I worked in this team with Mr.Kavický of Tesla and we really succeeded in finding a mistake in the circuit layout and produce functionable prototypes. It was closely observed by Tesla management, because the project was in jeopardy. (It had been a rather jammed matter. On the base of a license of the Canadian firm *Mitel* there were several people of both *Tesla* and *VÚST* for a practice in Canada who had to realize the project. The calculator was attributed to Tesla. Later on, a Canadian expert was called to Piešťany; he found some principal shortcomings, especially in the process management. He could not find a partner able to tell him what was going on there. He wrote a critical report recommending appointing a *production engineer* who would monitor the whole process. It seems likely that the leadership of Tesla didn't take his recommendations seriously – or they were not able to realize them).

## Becoming a Production Engineer

Some time after I joined the license shop, other two Canadians appeared in Tesla. I was invited to meet them together with some other colleagues. The first of them (Vietnamese by origin) displayed a strong displeasure over conditions in our country and refused to speak about technical problems. As I was an active speaker, my colleagues who were in Canada suggested me to turn the conversation to music; they knew that his daughter played the piano. But it was of no use; he distributed application-forms for work in MITEL among us, fell out with the director of Tesla and left. The managers of Tesla were frightened, but the second Canadian, Mr.Aitkin, stayed faithfully with us. Most of the time I discussed with Mr.Aitkin

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<sup>24</sup> Canadian telecommunication firm MITEL sold Tesla a license for a calculator and a CMOS memory chip

together with Mr. Mancel, the chief of our group. Occasionally there was also Mr. Adamčík from VÚST (Prague). Nobody appeared from the Academy, who were formally responsible for the project. The consultations took part in an office in the morning and in the clean rooms in the afternoon, because Mr. Aitkin was not allowed to meet the Japanese. However, when saying good-bye, Mr. Aitkin told us that he had known everything before he left for Europe... He wrote a report containing the sentence “ it has been only recently that a *production engineer* was appointed...”, referring to the above mentioned report of his forerunner. Who did he think by that? As he probably didn't know anything about the Slovak Academy of Science, I deduced that he thought me, because I really did the work. I didn't controvert him, and so I became the production engineer of the memory chip with a silent consent of my superiors. Nevertheless I often had to remind my colleagues of Mr. Aitkin's words: there must be one person responsible – who ever wants a competence, he must also take the responsibility.

So I undertook to produce a device which had still not been fully developed. The Canadian license process couldn't be simply realized on the Japanese production line representing a higher generation of technology. Nevertheless, the plan of production (which is *the law* in socialism) was already fixed; it expected production of large volumes with a low yield of 5%<sup>25</sup>. After a few preliminary experiments (showing many problems) I decided to stake on a quite new process comprising elements of more advanced Japanese technology: HCl-doped gate oxide, thick layers of chemically deposited (CVD) oxide, edge tilting etc. There were also problems in cooperation with the group of dynamic measurements (made on a unique apparatus SENTRY). They were rather self-important saying that we didn't need their help. When a catastrophe came up they only appeared to tell me that the chips were too slow. That helped me to find the way out. Finally, after several months' work, quite different results appeared – the yield reached about 50%! It was mostly thanks to a devoted work of my colleagues on the production line. We succeeded in the last moment – there was already some investigation being done by the party organization, suspecting me of something wrong (sabotage?). I even had to conceal some data before the deputy director who supervised the project. It seemed strange to me that nobody asked me about the state of the art, though I was the one who was in charge to collect data and make decisions. I only understood that later on: the managers didn't trust their subordinates and they fully relied on their “counselors” – remnants of feudalism?

After the success was announced, the investigation was stopped; however it evidently led to an embarrassment. The formal chief of the project, the Slovak Academy of Science claimed this result, which was valued to 20million Kčs. In fact, they only had provided a few men who worked on the production line as operators (it was quite a qualified work!). I wrote a letter to the director, Mr. Pfliegel. He let the case be investigated and decided for a compromise: I was given a moderate bonus payment and the Academy kept the right to claim the success.

I worked at the license shop for 2 years. After the hectic strain (I was fully engaged in the work for 16 hours a day), when young people started to push me away, I began to think of Prague. Tesla Piešťany was at the top of prosperity that time, they overtook the principal enterprise at Rožnov due to Japanese license. But there was no demand for development workers; everything was thrown into production. I went to Prague and started to look there for a job; but finally I remained in Piešťany for other 2 years. I worked at an inferior shop being paid by the license. But you never step twice into the same river...

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<sup>25</sup> The Japanese expected a yield of 60% with a much more complex chip of 16kbit dynamic memory

## Back Home

In the year 1984 I entered a new established *Realization Centre* of the Institute of Physics ČSAV<sup>26</sup> in Prague. I had been invited there by my former colleague at the Faculty, Libor J. We had to set up a laboratory for deposition of thin optical layers, especially that for lasers. The institute was seated at two locations, one part at Praha 6-Bubeneč, the other at Praha 8-Kobylisy. There was a friendly atmosphere at the former Sugar Making Institute at Bubeneč with articulated buildings set in verdure, whereas in the ferroconcrete building at Kobylisy the people were rather huffish. It evoked a tower of ivory. In the time I worked there one lady committed suicide at the toilet. The building of the Realization Centre at Kobylisy wasn't finished yet; we often had to do manual work. *One must do everything* was the principle; we even had to climb on the scaffolding onto the roof.

The Institute was headed by Mr. Aleš Tříška, my former colleague at the faculty. In 1970<sup>27</sup> he took the opportunity and became the “first man of science” at the Central Committee of the Communist Party. The conditions at the Institute suggested a secret war of spies and mafias; Libor instructed me who could I speak to and what about. His mimicry was so perfect that I never knew what he was working on, though we were in daily contact. After a study period, which took place in the coziness of Bubeneč, we started to realize the project. But it turned out soon that we didn't understand each other – I tried to regard economy while Libor always demanded to gain the maximum. Finally, when he found out that I didn't keep the conspiracy rules my days at the Institute were numbered...

During my stay at the Institute I had the opportunity to take part in a trade-union conference. There was some hot problem to be discussed there. The first speaker was the director, Mr. Tříška. “*I am speaking to you as a union-man, not as a director*” said he, “*I don't agree with that*” and he left. Some more people wanted to discuss, but they were shut up by director's constables. Tříška had an application team of his own; they worked on a cosmic project. There was a weird row taking place that time. The protagonist was a scientist who asked for permission to jog for a while during the shift. His work included long sitting at the microscope and he needed relax. When his request was rejected, he didn't give up. He was arguing that many people went shopping during the shift; it was tolerated because the shops were sold-out in the evening. He was sending complaints to various authorities. The leaders found an ingenious solution: they started to check keeping the dinner-break. The people's wrath turned swiftly against the originator and he finally had to leave the Institute.

One of our research projects there was related to using amorphous silicon layers in the image-sensing electronic tube, the vidicon. I informed Libor that this conception is out of date; there are the Charge-Coupled-Devices (CCD) already used in the world. What more – they had already been developed by my former colleagues at the Slovak Academy in Piešťany! Libor may have acknowledged that, but our cooperation was over in any case.

After leaving the Institute of Physics I found an asylum at Tesla ELSTROJ, a small branch-factory of Tesla Rožnov, situated in Praha10-Vršovice. They developed some advanced technological equipment – the stepper (camera for photolithography) and the ion-implantation equipment (in cooperation with the Soviet Union). I stayed there for 2 years, but I wasn't a

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<sup>26</sup> Czechoslovak Academy of Science.

<sup>27</sup> i.e. after the Russian Invasion

development worker any more; I was a member of the “engineering-assembly group” with a rather low pay. There was a meticulous organization, many friendly people, but also a local mafia. Although I succeeded in solving some particular problems, I was taken as “non perspective” and I couldn’t get through to a better position. I found the way out by joining the popular JZD Agro-combine Slušovice in Moravia<sup>28</sup>, which produced many advanced products including computers. 18 months later I was caught up by the November<sup>29</sup> Revolution.

While working at Tesla ELSTROJ, I began to write critical articles due to a lack of other motivation. Some of them were published in journals and magazines – it was the period of *glasnost* and the editors were instructed to publish opinions of citizens. In spite of the communist regime some journals kept a good standard. It is embarrassing how the journalism has declined since 1989 due to commerce. The censorship could be by-passed by writing “between lines”; the dictate of money is inexorable.

### Canoeing through rapids

I may have succeeded to pass through the “normalization period”<sup>30</sup> without any substantial blemish. I didn’t permit the normalizers to push me to the wall and to act against my conscience. However I had suffered two slashes at the beginning.

A month or two after the screening interview a party official stopped me in the corridor. He took me to his office and asked me to sign the screening protocol. It stated there that I had agreed with the Soviet invasion. It was a lie – I ignored that question as they asked me. I had no idea what to do that moment so I signed the protocol. Shortly later I was appointed a member of the election commission in our house. I had to visit my neighbors and stump them for the elections. I formally visited a few families. When I saw that some friends ceased speaking to me, I got ashamed and decided not to vote in any elections. As my parents were rather pussyfooting, I told them that I am voting at my workplace; conversely, I said at my workplace that I am voting in Prague and I hid myself during the elections. However, my parents had a suspicion that I lied – there must have been some channel between the commissions.

At such critical moments I always realized that there is nothing to lose: the intellectual work was very undervalued, qualified manual workers lived much better than engineers. At *Tesla Rožnov* – a top manufacturer of electronic devices, valued even in the West – development workers had to earn extra money by heavy physical work to cover their basic expenses. They mostly worked in the cathode-ray tube production shop. The cleaning of tubes’ throats at the conveyor belt was an athletic feat. One had to take a 16kg-tube from the belt, fasten it on a carousel, wipe out the rests of graphite from the throat, clean it and carry the tube to the other belt. All this had to be done at a trot, running across the hall. One always had to work for one hour; then there was half-an-hour’s break. The experienced workers knew how to cheat...

My friend, who worked there regularly, suggested to me to do one shift. When my chief saw me running in the dungarees, I got a pay rise and I didn’t dare to take another shift. However I was doing a lot of manual work that time – digging trenches, helping at constructions, etc. It was my physical training. In Slovakia, in contrast, it is unthinkable for an intellectual to work with a mattock; they respect estates’ honesty.

In the period 1984-1988, when I worked in Prague I occasionally visited Mrs. Miloslava Holubová, my mother’s schoolmate and a family friend. Mrs. Holubová<sup>31</sup>, a historian of

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<sup>28</sup> See *Memories of Slušovice*

<sup>29</sup> Or “Velvet”

<sup>30</sup> The term „normalization“ was introduced by party leaders

culture, had signed the proclamation *CHARTA 77* and she asked me to join them. She lent me some illegal literature, including the essays by Václav Havel. I hadn't read the proclamation itself – she said it had been confiscated by the police during a search. However I didn't dare to sign the proclamation on account of my parents. I also had some doubts concerning the destination of the Western society; I thought that democracy could be realized in another way, it needn't be driven by consumption.

When the five “brotherly armies” occupied our country in August 1968, I was serving as a soldier in Brno. I entered the army shortly before and my specialization was the military chemist. Any fighting with the intruders was out of question. We only joined the general protest of citizens and tried to discuss with the Russian parachutists who were guarding our depot of arms. Some of them were quite perceptible; but they were exchanged for some rigid primitives in a week. When we were permitted to go out, I went on a tram and one man incited people to lynch me. The people however stood silent. We discussed the situation with my comrades at the barracks. We concluded that it was necessary to wait “*until it shits itself in Russia*”. If the socialist countries had to discuss using weapons, it's the evidence of exhaustion of communist ideology: neither an alliance nor a state can rest on the bare force. Finally, 20 years later, it really happened.

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<sup>31</sup> Dr. Holubová published two novels. She was detained for helping her friend to emigrate

## **TEACHER'S MEMORIES, 2002-2004**

### **Technical College at Příkopy**

When I was finishing my work at the Educational Centre at Vysočany in spring 2002, I found out that my “motherly” College at Příkopy was looking for a teacher. I couldn't imagine at first that I could teach at a so prestigious school; I went there immediately and spoke to the deputy headmaster, Mrs. Zámečnicková. I met there an old teacher who had entered the school just after I left it. He informed me that only two of the teachers who taught me are still alive: Mr. Brouček and Mrs. Pistoriusová. By coincidence both of them taught us Russian and both were “dissidents”. Mr. Brouček left the school after the year 1968 on account of politics. He is in good health and lives alone at a cottage in the mountains; he only goes below to meet people in winter. I met him at the school-farewell party. Mrs. Pistoriusová, who was a persuaded communist, was still excluded from the party at the screening. She is almost blind now and she still believes in the ideals of communism. Our devoted teacher of electricity<sup>1</sup>, Mr. Javorský, was the headmaster for many years and he died recently, in 1999. His textbook is still the “bible” of the school.

My main teaching load was laboratory practice. In addition, I had to teach electricity and technical English at the post-graduate course<sup>2</sup> and a few lessons in the computer classroom (there were few teachers who could teach computer operation).

For the holidays I took the job of a taxi examiner. I had to take a taxi and speak a foreign language pretending that I was a foreigner – many taxi drivers were cheating the foreign customers. I didn't like this job – I am not able to pretend. Once a rainstorm came and the water in the Vltava began to rise. It was the “millennium” flood in most of Bohemia causing much damage. One district of Prague (Karlín) had to be evacuated and partly demolished. The water also got into the underground and interrupted the transport. But the flood also affected the beginning of the school year in the college – one of its buildings had become flooded and was full of mud.

The teaching staff met in the last week of August, one week before starting lessons. I was assigned to a room which I shared with a vigorous septuagenarian; he was appointed my instructor. We went to the festive meeting that took place in a classroom. There was a seat free beside my instructor so I asked him whether I could take it. “No, you can't sit here. It is the seat of my colleague Kš, who has been sitting here for 20 years. Find another seat.” As there only was a seat in the first row, just in front of the headmaster, I took a chair and sat in the aisle between the forms. There were the problems related to the flood on the program: e.g. some students couldn't take the second examinations because the transport was cut off in some districts. “*There's no excuse. One must keep to the regulations,*” said the headmaster. After the meeting I asked my instructor about some organizational matter. “I have no time for you,” said he “find it out for yourself in the school rules.”<sup>3</sup> Virtually, there was a heap of books of the school regulations in the common room. However there were only a few days before the lessons and I had a lot of things to prepare. So I never more turned to my instructor and I preferred to work in the common room.

In the Technical College, especially in the post-graduate courses the level is substantially higher than that at the Educational Centre. Moreover, I had to prepare for 4 subjects at once. So I took the lessons on electricity as my main subject – I had to teach fresh alumni there

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<sup>1</sup>Or electrical engineering

<sup>2</sup>Vyšší odborná škola

<sup>3</sup>I got known later on that there had been Mr. Kš sharing this room with him for many years and the headmaster “separated” them before I came

roughly the same as I learned here 40 years earlier! I had to get through the subject matter from the Coulomb law for static electricity until the three-phase alternating current.

### **The Post-Graduate Courses**

The 1<sup>st</sup> year of the post-graduate course was rather motley. On one hand there was an alumnus of a business academy who was very diligent but was lacking technical thinking. On the other hand there was a graduate in the field of communications who was clever but hung up. He was permanently interrupting my explanations and trying to take me down. I tried to explain him that I welcome any discussion but it must be fair. After many vain attempts I ordered him out. He made a complaint against me and the deputy director apparently acknowledged his complaint; he came to reprove me. He admitted no discussion about the matter.

I also had an attendance of the headmaster, Mr. Hildebrand, at one of my lessons. At the beginning I rehearsed the subject matter thoroughly by questioning the students in the forms. This way I wanted to demonstrate what they had learned. This rehearsing permitted me to follow up with the explanations. As the students were more obedient than normally, there were a few minutes left. I skimmed in my notebook and chose a problem to solve. It seemed to me that I mastered the lesson well; however according to the headmaster it was *average*: The rehearsing was too long, I didn't keep the time plan of the course, I repeated excessively specific words and the problem didn't fit to the explanations. I consulted about it with Mrs. Zámečníková and she recommended me to write my standpoint on the record of the attendance. So I wrote my standpoints on every headmaster's record and I was probably the only one to do it; the headmaster was always right.

There were no fundamental problems in teaching technical English as I had had a special course at the Academy of Science and a long practice. There was a student in the course who spoke English better than me and he sometimes corrected me. However the students were lacking some fundamental technical knowledge – e.g. they couldn't explain the function of a microprocessor.

But finally, it was the teaching in the *laboratory of electricity* that became fatal for me, although connecting and measuring electrical circuits was my pet subject when studied at this school.

### **The laboratory practice**

The practice in using and measuring the electrical equipment started in the 2<sup>nd</sup> year of studies, after students had mastered the theory of electricity. Each class was divided into three groups with about 10 students each. Accordingly, there were three teachers for each class. One of them was the chief teacher who set down the method; the other two were his "helpers". However, all three were fully qualified teachers. The groups were "rotating", so every teacher got in contact with every student. In addition to laboratory work, there was questioning after every three laboratory jobs. I was the "helper" for three of my colleagues; I got on well with two of them but I wasn't able to relate to the third, Mr. Kd, who was one generation younger than me. The third member of our group was of the same age as me. He used to be a teacher of Mr. Kd.

The first laboratory job was to connect a circuit for demonstrating Ohm's Law, without switching on the current. We had no meeting in advance and I was not able to prepare for the job – I was extremely busy with other lessons. The main problem was to know the location of the meters in the toolboxes and the sockets. When the lesson started, I told the students that I was teaching here first time and they understood that. But my colleague Kd didn't – he started shouting at me some instructions which however didn't correspond with the situation. Finally

we succeeded in connecting the circuit and (on the initiative of a student) we switched on the current – and the fat was on the fire. We didn't keep the method. There was no danger – the voltage was low.

I was shocked - how can teachers behave to each other such a way? Dress each other down in the presence of students? I visited the headmaster and made a complaint against Mr. Kd. The headmaster agreed with me but he asked me not to mention it any more; Mr. Kd was the president of trade-unions at the school. It may be taken as a professional deformation – teachers tend to see everybody as a first-former.

In November I fell into a crisis – I lost my footing and walked like a body without a soul; even students asked me what the matter was. I didn't fit in well with my instructor and wanted to change the room – but it was impossible. I was already going to take a leave but Mrs. Zámečnicková encouraged me – she told me that I was needed here. One teacher was seriously ill (he died of cancer later on), another one – my colleague “helper” – was so bad that he had to rest at every step when he went up stair<sup>4</sup>. Fortunately, a new colleague came to our room and he encouraged me.

At that time an attendance was announced at my laboratory lesson. The job was the use of the oscilloscope. I tried to prepare for the lesson well. However, when I came to the laboratory to teach, there was another apparatus on the desk and its cable was missing. The lesson started with filling in the evidence arch of the presence and the protocol; I didn't feel well and it took me much time. Then I was looking for a cable together with a student. There were the headmaster and his deputy, Mr. P. watching us. After some time they left and soon later Mr. Kš appeared and brought me the missing equipment. The rest of the lesson went normally on, but there was no attendance. The result: the lesson was *substandard*. I contacted Mr. P. and proposed to him to repeat the attendance when the lesson was normal. But he didn't speak of that – it was clear that the situation had been arranged. They were trying to cut me down to size.

In the 2<sup>nd</sup> semester I didn't continue teaching electricity in the post-graduate course but I taught English in 2<sup>nd</sup> year. They were the same students that I taught in the laboratory. My qualification for teaching English was disputable – I had the 1<sup>st</sup> Certificate and teaching experience – my lessons were still valued as good. The students were apparently more interested in English than their profession. Once there was the magnetic circuit in our laboratory job. When I asked the students what is the magnetic induction like<sup>5</sup>. “It was something in 1<sup>st</sup> year. I don't know” said one student. And that was one of the best classes in the school!

The market mechanism entered schools: our teachers used to teach us *for life*; now students learn for exams and then forget that. The school is becoming a theatre. In the case of laboratory practice it was a kind of gymnastics: *connect – measure – write the protocol* without any interest in the essence of the job.

The work went on quite well in the 2<sup>nd</sup> semester; however an incident occurred during a laboratory lesson in May. I used a nonstandard way of questioning and it was considered as *infringing the school traditions*. I couldn't understand that – I perceived it as nonsense. The headmaster and some other teachers were very conservative and uptight and I was apparently provoking them. I decided to leave the school though I had nowhere to go and the school had no substitute for me. I might have been more diplomatic...

My contract automatically ended in July.

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<sup>4</sup> He died within a year.

<sup>5</sup> Magnetic induction B is one of the fundamental concepts in magnetism

## ***The Apprentice Training Centre***

During summer holidays I was looking for another school where I could continue teaching. I was going to overcome what I had experienced. However it was not easy; my formal qualifications for teaching at secondary schools were insufficient. Finally I entered the Technical Apprentice Training Centre at Prague-Záběhlce, which originally specialized on railway transport. Now there were also two additional professions – electrician and bookbinder. The Centre served as some kind of “remand home” for those dismissed elsewhere. Accordingly, the quality of the trainees who entered the Centre was very heterogeneous. The uncontrollable pupils had to be expelled in the 1<sup>st</sup> year<sup>6</sup>. The Centre also provided consultations for working people who needed to enhance their qualification.<sup>7</sup>

I explained my qualification and experience to the deputy headmaster Mr. Čihák and he offered me an interesting teaching load – mathematics, physics, electricity, automation, automation equipment, English and German – altogether 7 subjects. I had no idea how I could manage to teach so many subjects; most of them I mastered well, but I also had much to study... Nevertheless I was glad to have a job so I didn't argue. Finally I managed everything except the matter of automation for the 3<sup>rd</sup> (highest) year – a colleague of mine had to substitute for me at the last moment. It was pretty difficult subject matter and I had never seen it before.

### **The Adults**

The working students had to pass 10 consultations during the school year with examinations after each semester. It took place on one weekday and I had to teach a block of 6 hours. They were attentive listeners, still it was quite demanding for me to teach intensively without a break for so long. I taught them German, physics, electricity and automation. A German lesson was refreshment for me: we started by singing, I explained some grammar, and then the students practiced dialogues in pairs. I made use of the method “learning through teaching” – the students were reading the dialogues and correcting each other.

On the other hand, teaching physics according to the curriculum was quite unrealistic. The students hardly ever knew any physical concepts from primary school and now they had to master the whole subject matter for a technical college during 20 teaching hours! For examinations I only demanded some elementary knowledge – otherwise all would fail! In the lessons of electricity and automation I was teaching qualified and experienced electricians and it was quite difficult for me – I had to prepare the lessons with care.

### **The Trainees**

There were three professions taught at the Centre: railway operator, electrician and bookbinder. In addition to English and German I taught mathematics, physics automation and automation equipment.

The railway-operator and bookbinder classes were mixed –half boys and half girls. There mostly was a peaceful and friendly atmosphere in these classes though they were not good at technical subjects. On the other hand the electricians were boys only. They had surplus energy and they created various sorts of naughtiness to “test” the teacher. I taught mathematics,

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<sup>6</sup> It was necessary to give the corresponding reason

<sup>7</sup> Which was for some professions demanded by law.

physics and automation in three such classes E1, E2 and E3 respectively in addition to a few lessons of English and German.

The boys in the E3 class were mostly tall hulks; they were in the 3<sup>rd</sup> year of apprenticeship. When I entered their class room for the second time, some of them began to shout loudly and continued doing so for the whole the lesson. After two of them were excluded, the atmosphere in the class step by step became friendly. One of the boys was a guitarist and we even produced some music in one lesson. There was a strikingly decent boy among them. We got acquainted on the way from the bus stop. He was a nephew of a well-known film director. He told me that he was attending the third apprentice training centre now; the instruction at the previous two was rather strange: they had e.g. to learn long texts by memory.

Teaching physics<sup>8</sup> in E2 was still more peculiar. Before my first lesson there, a colleague of mine informed me that he had heard the boys settle a plan on how to disturb my lesson. Virtually – they were permanently pushing each other, raising their hands to go to WC (which was banned during the lesson) and even a flame appeared at the rear of the form – burning gases from a gas pistol. I contacted their class teacher. “That isn’t my business,” said he, “they are quite good during my lessons”. So I continued to teach even in these “harsh” conditions. Neither such themes as lasers or holography<sup>9</sup> were attractive for them. Finally I agreed with Mr. Čihák to classify only a part of the trainees in the 1<sup>st</sup> semester – the others would have to attend additional lessons in 2<sup>nd</sup> semester. Only then the atmosphere in the class changed for better. There was only one student who showed some interest in physics – however he thought that there is nothing necessary to learn because one can find everything on the WEB. We played a “little softball” between the forms at the end; I wondered why so clever boys were behaving in such an absurd way.

However E1 (the youngest) was the class to which I devoted most energy. Their results in mathematics were surprisingly good; however they were not able to solve problems given by text. It was the class of my heart. I’d rather not mention such cases when we had to knock-out one trainee<sup>10</sup> or when another trainee shot me with a sling. We parted as good friends.

I also taught another class which was leaving the school that year. I taught them automation. They were mature young men and they even gave me a present – a photo of their class with a letter of thanks. However when I rehearsed the basic principles of automation with them – the *Boolean algebra and Karnaugh's maps* of logical functions (it was the matter which they had practiced both theoretically and practically), I found that only few students understand that. I invited the students to the blackboard and we discussed the problems together; the students who understood the matter explained it to the others. Once I cautioned a student for talking. He willingly brought me an extraordinary homework – a chart of an automation device with a description of its function. It was an antiquated device at the level of 50ties; it had been copied from the textbook. There were still the vacuum diodes used there. I asked their class teacher whether she teaches them such matters. “Yes, I do,” said she “it’s quite modern”. She still lived in the age of steam!

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<sup>8</sup> i.e. my branch

<sup>9</sup> I worked in this field at the Czech Academy of Science

<sup>10</sup> The boy ran around the classroom pouring water on the floor

## Epilogue

When I was leaving my last teaching post at Záběhllice<sup>1</sup> I was furnished with three month's salary. As my nephew, who had stayed with his family at my parents', had moved away, I could stay with both my parents for last two months; my mother had pains and was losing weight, still she refused to go to hospital. She had never been in hospital; she was healthy for all her life. However, as her pains increased, she was finally transported to hospital. She died of cancer of the intestines in October 2004 after being operated on against her will. She was 90 years old.

I stayed with my father. He even sponsored my new computer. Later on we let one room to two students so that father wouldn't be alone when I was at work.

My first idea was to go back to guiding. My sister Olga was very successful in this branch; she even guided Queen Elizabeth II during her visit to Prague. I contacted an agency and really started to guide, but I found that I couldn't do this job. The historical centre of Prague changed into Babel during a short time. The exteriors of historical buildings were renovated but something quite different was going on under the new façades. Old houses got into the hands of new owners (mostly foreigners) who threw out the original residents and started tourist trade or other business. It was done by the "*invisible arm of the market*" actuated by our today's president, Mr. Václav Klaus. His adherents took control of Prague Town Hall and they supported the commercialization of the historical centre. It can be demonstrated in the case of the *Civic Spa*<sup>2</sup>: This popular recreation resort in the centre of Prague was changed into a Casino. Instead of hundreds of Prague citizens there are sporadic rich visitors who drink wine or enjoy boat trips guarded by security guards. The inhabitants and visitors of Prague may only envy the Viennese their Donauinsel with an unlimited area for bathing in the very centre of Vienna. One has to steer clear of the centre of Prague today unless one belongs to those who don't know how to spend their money....

When I gave up guiding in Prague, I tried the job of a security guard. I served in a hotel owned by a Ukrainian. The conditions there evoked the times of Generalissimos Stalin: I had to change shoes standing on one leg and they ordered me to run up and down on the staircase as a punishment for speaking to foreigners. I could not hold it out for a single month.

I became a client of the employment agency. They were sending me to various mysterious places around Prague where most people spoke Russian. The firms I was sent to were mostly faked. Finally fortune still smiled on me. I noticed an announcement that the National Theatre was looking for older people who could speak foreign languages. I became a gate-keeper /receptionist at the ballet division of National Theatre in the former St. Anna Monastery. After a year I was moved to my present workplace at the deposit of scenes.

Davle-Sloup, October 17, 2009

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<sup>1</sup> The Apprentice Training Centre at Praha-Záběhllice

<sup>2</sup> Občanská plovárna; a swimming pool on a raft