

Jan Matys

A Handful of Reminiscences

1959 – 2004

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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 occupation¹ 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 my military service (1959-69). Most of the memories are more or less related to music which was my fondness since youth. In “Teacher’s memories” I described the last two years of my teaching (2002-2004).

The Czech version of *Memories* also includes some additional stories: my dealings with gypsies, working at Slušovice Cooperative Farm, engaging in development at TESLA Rožnov Electronics Works.

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.

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Jan Matys

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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 electricity². I had probably been inspired by a book by Russian authors describing construction of electrical- and steam-engine models using very simple materials – cans, 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 member³, 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 2nd or 3rd 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 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.Č., 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 teaching⁴ at

²at Praha 1, Na Příkopě 16

³ 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.

⁴ As a substitute

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 25th ⁵ and 1st 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...*”⁶. 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 1st 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.

There was some kind of “thaw” in the political climate since the 2nd 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 either⁷. “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 Petřín⁸, 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.⁹ 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

⁵ „Victorious February“, Communist coup in 1948

⁶ Song of Czechoslovak soldiers fighting on the East front in WWII.

⁷ My parents thought that I am too young to have any opinions on public matters, we never discussed about that

⁸ Karel Hynek Mácha, Czech romantic poet, Petřín –a hill over Prague

⁹ 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.

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...¹⁰

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 School¹¹, 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.¹²

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 Orlik Dam, a holiday practice at MEZ Works at Vsetín (which inspired me later on to move to Valachia)¹³, 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 Semafor¹⁴-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 unrepeatable flavor, rivers were (mostly) clean enough for swimming and two hundred crowns¹⁵ 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

¹⁰ For more details see "Teacher's Memories"

¹¹ Vyšší odborná škola – prolonged studies after „maturita“-examinations

¹² See my "Teacher's Memories"

¹³ A hilly region in the north of Moravia

¹⁴ A popular musical theatre

¹⁵ In the official exchange rate of that time about 30 USD

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 3rd 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 that¹⁶. 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”.

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 1st 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 2nd year I prospered best, I had “decoration”. However, I had to overcome a crisis in 3rd 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 4th 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 5th 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) structures¹⁷ 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.

¹⁶The students of experimental and theoretical physics had to change the school

¹⁷ MOS structures are the base of most electronic circuits today; I had no idea of their importance that time

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 1st year, we learned to criticize the centralistic model of economy in the 2nd. 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 3rd 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 4th 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.

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 a canoe-expedition, on the next ones we were taking part at international work-camps, both at home and abroad (West Germany, Sweden)¹⁸. 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 Bixi Academic Ensemble which performed in St. Nicholas at Lesser Town of Prague. There were many marvelous experiences. Unfortunately, it finished too soon...

¹⁸ The work-camps were organized by Service Civil International (SCI). We had established its Czech subsidiary.

Memories of the „Darkness-period“

The “Real Socialism”

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 Czechoslovakia¹⁹ 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”*²⁰.

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 15th 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 40th 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. 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

¹⁹ Praha, Rožnov pod Radhoštěm, Piešťany (Slovakia), Slušovice

²⁰ Vasil Biľak was the one who wrote the „invitation letter“ for Russians

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 “mised” 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.²¹ 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 Piešťany²², 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 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

²¹ By irony, later on we learned from the Japanese experts what we once used to know.

²² Tesla Piešťany was originally a branch factory of Tesla Rožnov

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 MITEL²³, 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 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.

²³ Canadian telecommunication firm MITEL sold Tesla a license for a calculator and a CMOS memory chip

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%²⁴. 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...

Back Home

In the year 1984 I entered a new established *Realization Centre* of the Institute of Physics ČSAV²⁵ 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.

²⁴ The Japanese expected a yield of 60% with a much more complex chip of 16kbit dynamic memory

²⁵ Czechoslovak Academy of Science.

The Institute was headed by Mr. Aleš Tříška, my former colleague at the faculty. In 1970²⁶ 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 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 Moravia²⁷, which produced many advanced products including computers. 18 months later I was caught up by the November²⁸ 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.

²⁶ i.e. after the Russian Invasion

²⁷ See *Memories of Slušovice*

²⁸ Or “Velvet”

Shooting the rapids

I may have succeeded to pass through the “normalization period”²⁹ 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. Holubová³⁰, a historian of 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*”

²⁹ The term „normalization“ was introduced by party leaders

³⁰ Dr. Holubová published two novels. She was detained for helping her friend to emigrate

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.

Music-related and other Memories

School days (1951 – 1968)

We had a grand piano at home which my Mother used to play occasionally; her favorite composer was Chopin, but she was able to play any music at sight. (Many years later, when I had mastered the viola, we even played the Viola Concerto by B.Bartók). When I attended the first school classes, an instructress was coming to give my two older sisters piano lessons. My sisters called her "duck" and neither of them wanted to play first. Once the "duck" came and a chase begun. The older of my sisters, Lída, fell over and broke her arm. Seeing such scenes I wished to play another instrument. My mother brought me to Model Musical School at Voršilská Street in Prague 1 and I was enrolled to the violin class of Mrs.Zdeňka Křížová. Prof. Křížová was an older lady; she was one of the last pupils of the legendary educationalist Otakar Ševčík.

The beginning was promising – there was a friendly atmosphere in the school and at school concerts some performances were passionately applauded. I was especially fascinated by lessons of ensemble playing, which were lead by Prof. Jan Faust. We rehearsed all the details, including sitting at the front of the chair and holding the bow vertically to prevent its breaking. We studied a composition for 4 violin voices and piano by our professor; although I played the 4th voice, I could play all the voices by memory. Occasionally we took violins out of the cases and played spontaneously without a conductor. Finally, there was a concert in Smetana Hall. I had my leg broken and I played with a plaster.

Later on, we advanced to an orchestra led by pensive Prof. Lidmila. We studied greater compositions, but their preparation often lasted rather long. I remember the cantata Vernal Song by Lidmila that we called "Vernal Roar". Prof. Lidmila was incessantly smoking which obviously was fatal for him; during preparation of the "*Unfinished Symphony*" by Schubert he began to cough and he died of cancer within a month. The Symphony was then "finished" under a Conservatory professor with the help of former pupils. The atmosphere in the school was later marked somewhat by the professors' rivalry and maybe also by politics.

After the successful beginning I began to have technical problems in practicing solo-pieces; it might have other causes besides my clumsiness³¹. Finally, I was rescued by changing the violin for viola. The viola was especially demanded for orchestra. I could go back to the basics of violin technique and appreciate music itself. For several years on I practically led the viola section of orchestra, as talented pupils were not interested in viola. During the years however, I got a little tired... It was only when I was 20 and I was already studying the 2nd class of the Technical University, when I entered the class of Prof. Jan Kratina. He taught me a much more effective playing technique. He explained to me the fundamental principles, so I could check myself and I played a quite different way in a short time. We studied compositions by Campanioli, Fiorillo, J.S.Bach, P.Hindemith and a contemporary Hungarian composer D.David. Together with my class-mate Arno Záruba³² we studied Concerto for 2 violas and orchestra by A.Vranický. Our professor also promised us the study of *Harold in*

³¹ E.g. I was tall and the violin was too little for me

³² Who later committed suicide

Italy, which is the principal romantic work with solo viola, and the Chacona by J.S.Bach, but there was too little time. Maybe, I could have become a professional violist if I had been able to practice more and there weren't some problems around³³ that weighed me down.

During the last year of my studies (i.e. 1967-8) I entered *Brixii Academic Ensemble* which mostly performed early music³⁴ in St. Nicolas Church. The conductor was Jiří Portych, my former schoolmate from Voršilská Street. There was a mixed-voice choir and an orchestra composed of Music Academy and Conservatory students and amateurs. There were distinguished soloists performing with us. At our concerts the church was crowded. At Christmas 1968, during my military service, I performed with Brixii Ensemble for the last time; it was Czech Christmas Mass by J.J.Ryba.

Serving in the Army (August 1968 –July 1969)

I fell in the army in Brno on August 1968. It had been my wish to serve far away from home. It was a “hot” summer, full of political events. I took my viola with me; it turned out to be especially useful when we were confined in barracks after the Soviet invasion – I could enjoy myself and the others by playing pieces of classical music and popular songs. When the atmosphere after the invasion calmed down, I was commanded (against my wish) to teach “military education” at The Chemical Engineering College in Prague³⁵. This teaching practice was very useful for me many years later, when I worked as a teacher. Under the influence of my father I had never had a positive attitude to military matters; however my attitude changed under the influence of the officers I was serving with. They supported the new political development (even after the invasion) and were quite devoted to their work.

On winter holidays I spent a month at Liberec for a practice at a regiment. I often visited my granduncle Jiří Šíma³⁶, who lived there. In the leisure time I went skiing in *Jizerské hory* Mountains. Once I set out across the whole crest to Hejnice; I turned back late at night, in the moonlight. In July, at the end of my service, I came to Liberec again with my students. There was a military training course taking place and I was the commander of a provision troop. The Americans were just landing on the moon. The students in my troop had almost a model attitude to military service and the training was going on in a friendly atmosphere.

I have to mention that population was at friendly terms with the army those times. Soldiers were helping at farms and constructions where necessary and drivers willingly took hitch-hiking soldiers in cars. In our barracks in Brno we used to climb to a swimming-pool that was behind a fence and it was tolerated. When I walked in the city in my uniform, children used to speak to me: “Soldier, give me a badge!” I felt a little puzzled.

The Soviet invasion had broken the Czechoslovak Army's spirit. After the screening that took place after 1970 the basic officer's cadre left. The new recruited officers were not so motivated and swindled. At some regiments a dull chicanery took place. I was called to several military exercises, the last time in 1984, during the incident caused by the shooting down of a South Korean airplane. Most of my colleagues – reserve officers got befuddled in a pub daily.

³³ E.g. too strict conditions in our family

³⁴ I remember music by Caldara

³⁵ Vysoká škola chemicko-technologická

³⁶ His brother Josef Šíma was a painter, who lived in Paris

Rožnov pod Radhoštěm (1970 – 1978)

After one year's study stage at the Institute of Macromolecular Chemistry ČSAV in Prague (I recall it with mixed feelings) I joined TESLA Rožnov Electronic Works situated at a small town (of 10 000 citizens) in the middle of Walachia (northern Moravia), characterized by a hilly landscape, many wooden houses of logs and conservative traditional customs. There was a huge factory developing a new branch of industry, which was built during the 50's and 60's. The factory employed people from a wide neighborhood; there were about 6000 employees. There were rich cultural activities in the town – 2 theatre ensembles, 2 folklore groups (with dancers and a dulcimer band), a brass band etc. It was not difficult to find musicians for a string quartet among so many highly qualified people. I came in August, our quartet met first in September, and we kept regularly rehearsing for 5 years. We started with adaptations of traditional songs and worked ourselves up to *Preludium and Fuga* by W.A. Mozart. In addition to some solo performances we participated in performing masses at Dolní Bečva, especially at Christmas; several times we performed the popular *Czech Christmas Mass* by J.J.Ryba there. Three of us were also members of *Folklore Ensemble Radhošť*.³⁷ The ensemble preserved the local cultural traditions and it also represented the factory at various events, mostly of political nature – official visits, caucuses of Militia etc. When we set out for a tour, there always was a political officer to supervise our program. After the year 1968 some texts were banned. For example, in the “Spinning Party” dance sequence we had to leave out the words:

*“We'll drive out all the specters that frighten us at night,
The whole the land will be joyful, the whole the land will be ours”*

which were considered too dangerous.

For Christmas mass we took on more musicians to our quartet and we rehearsed at the Cultural Club; once a colleague-musician from Radhošť Ensemble heard us and he resented that we played religious music (it was the Czech Christmas Mass by Ryba); performing in a church was considered as politically undesirable. We had to promise him to stop... In winter 1971 we were commanded to perform for Soviet troops at Frenštát. I took a draught of alcohol for courage and refused to go; although I was the only to do that, it was still acknowledged by the others.

Our *dulcimer-band* of the Radhošť Ensemble played almost everything by memory, only some dance-sequences were written in a score. We played each song in various keys, usually in the fourth cycle (i.e. D-G-C-F...). There were two woman singers, but sometimes the band sang as well. That was my trouble – they were too loud so I couldn't hear myself; moreover, I often didn't know the text. Once I found out that my voice went bad, so I stopped singing altogether. I only started singing again when I was in Piešťany – we used to have Sunday duties in the factory there and one could sing there enough and to spare.

I had to play “contra”, i.e. the rhythmic-harmonic accompaniment on the viola. It needed a good musical hearing, but the classical violin technique was ballast there. Sometimes I preferred to hold the instrument on the breast in the “gipsy”-position. I alternatively played “contra” and improvised.

Our cellist, Jaroslav Bém, who played in both the quartet and the dulcimer-band, and who was also a skilled accordionist and pianist, introduced us to ThDr. Vilém Hýbl, vicar of the Czechoslovak-Hussite Church, of which he was a member. Dr.Hýbl was an experienced chamber-music player and former conductor of Walachian Symphony Orchestra. Although his vicarage was at neighboring Valašské Meziříčí, he used to serve the holy mass at an evangelic church at Rožnov, located at a park next to Walachian Museum. Jaroslav was his

³⁷ Radhošť is a mountain near Rožnov, spun around with old pagan traditions

organist. Once we were invited to play at the mass with him. It was on March 7³⁸, there was still snow all around. There were 7 people at the mass – the priest, the vergger (an old lady), one believer and 4 musicians. Mr.Hýbl told a joke about a priest who served a mass in an empty church: there was a slater on the roof who started to believe in God. ... Our quartet played “*Oh my little son ...*,” the beloved song of T.G.Masaryk and “*Ave Verum Corpus*” by Mozart. The vicar gave a long lesson, proving the existence of devil. After the mass, the vicar expressed thanks to us but noted that Czechoslovak Church doesn’t recognize the virginity of Mother Maria.

Our quartet met weekly for five years. It was probably our activity that inspired dr.Hýbl to re-establish the Walachian Orchestra. Finally, he only established a string quartet at Valašské Meziříčí, for which he attracted our cellist away; our quartet thus ceased to exist. I was later invited to play with them the 2nd viola in the string quintet. We performed compositions by Mozart, Beethoven and also the demanding quintet by Dvořák; in one of its movements both the violas are playing a melody which should have been the American National Anthem (7 flats!). There were experienced players there; still the rehearsals were marked by the vicar’s unbalanced temper. He loudly gave various instructions so we didn’t hear the music; but mostly he bullied the prime violinist Tonda V., whose voice he used to play. Tonda played perfectly, but he sometimes got lost. Their dialogue sounded like this:

-
 - “*Doctor, I thought, that*”
 - “*One shitted himself while thinking*”

After such kind of words Tonda sometimes stood up and wanted to leave. Dr.Hýbl had to keep calming him until the end of the rehearsal; he wouldn’t survive without Dvořák. Once Tonda didn’t come. The vicar took 1st violin and I had to play the American Quartet at sight. There were only two cases when the rehearsal went on in good humor: when the vicar’s son got married and after the vicar’s journey to Soviet Union. After I moved to Slovakia, I sometimes visited Tonda and we performed duos for violin and viola by Mozart; Tonda played them perfectly. I have never since met such a good partner for this piece.

Dr.Hýbl also was an indulgent beer-drinker. He was a frequent visitor to a restaurant that stood at a place where a chapel of his church should have been built. Once a visitor came to his table and asked (in Walachian dialect): “*Hey, gaffer, may I take a seat beside you?*” The vicar blushed and shouted to the whole restaurant: “*I am no gaffer, I am a doctor!*”

I met Dr.Hýbl last during one of my visits of Rožnov when I lived in Slovakia. We met in the bus. The vicar went to Rožnov to serve a memorial mass on July 6^{th39}, accompanied by an old man, who was (as the vicar told me) about 90. Then I got a glimpse of him in a restaurant and then in the evening, as a man was leading him to the railway station; the vicar was hardly able to walk. My friend saw him later on in hospital: Mr.Hýbl was so emaciated that he could hardly recognize him.

Once I played the viola in a band accompanying an amateur theatre ensemble. We were giving the operetta “*Slovakian Princess*” by R.Pískáček in several towns and villages in the region, altogether about 8 performances during the season. Everywhere the house was full and people enthusiastically applauded. The conductor was Mr.Tvarůžek, a legendary bandmaster of *Rožnovanka* brass band. As he was getting well on in years, he sometimes

³⁸ The birthday of T.G.Masaryk (*1850), the first Czechoslovak president; it used to be a state holiday

³⁹The anniversary of burning Jan Hus on the stake in 1415

fell asleep. However he prompted us to start playing all at once, so that people could notice that something happened. The resulting effect of the performance wasn't even disturbed by some technical slips: sometimes the pianist was playing on his own, not regarding the conductor; the singers differed up to one measure over the band or became lost. The musicians always governed the situation in some way.

Two years later Mr. Tvarůžek unexpectedly died. There were about 10 brass bands in the funeral procession that was about one kilometer long.

I met one of the amateur actors about two years later and he told me that their ensemble didn't play any more. They played without any fee, only for dinner and lemonade. And they also wanted have a coffee paid for, which was not understood.

Piešťany (1978 – 1984)

There were three of us. We played a quartet. My brother and me.

- Do you have a brother?

No, why do you ask?

In November 1978 I entered the Department of Physical Electronic of the Slovak Academy of Science in Piešťany, Slovakia. The Department closely cooperated with TESLA Piešťany Works. I was exhausted after the adventures I experienced in Rožnov. However, in the friendly, tolerant environment that governed here I soon recovered. We were housed in a wooden dormitory next to the TESLA factory. I took a violin there and we tried to produce some music. Later on I got acquainted with Eugen Okénka, who was the chief of the mask-design group. Eugen was from a mixed Slovak-Hungarian family and his wife was from Moravia. They had 6 children. Eugen studied in Prague and played the violin there in a student orchestra. We found another two players – Juraj and Peter (both were students) and started to play string quartet. At the first rehearsal, we tuned up the instruments, sat to the stands and Eugen said: "I am your coach". He was the oldest of us, after all. However, after a few times we saw that Eugen didn't keep time. He was out of practice and apparently had never played chamber music. At the next rehearsal we were only three and then we played duos for violin and viola. We tried to play the demanding duos by Mozart (that I used to play with Tonda), but finally I was dismissed. Eugen got a recording of the viola sound, played by a Music Academy student and played with the tape.

Nevertheless, we continued to perform together in a church on holidays. The organ was played by nun Petra, who also coached a girls' choir. We got a cellist, a music teacher Martha; she had to enter the church secretly. I also started to play the violin in a piano-trio with Marta and a retired piano-teacher, Mrs. Rádyová. It went quite well. Later on we started to play with Eugen a string trio; Eugen already kept the time, probably he had practiced. Once we performed the whole evening at an informal dinner for guests from GDR (East Germany).

Eugen brought me several times to his native town Hurbanovo, where most people spoke Hungarian. He had a modern family house there, but it was empty – his family didn't want to move there. Eugen housed a middle-aged man there, his god brother. He was an inadaptable man who avoided any work and had even killed Eugen's violin teacher. They lived together in a poorhouse and the god brother mixed glass in his food.

This man filled Eugen's house with various (mostly stolen) lumber: there were 4 bicycles, partly rotten melons and books – even the textbook of Marxism-Leninism. Swarms of flies were everywhere. Eugen made a fire outside and started to carry flammable things to it; but his god brother did just the opposite – he was taking the things from the fire and carrying

them into the house. It was funny. In the end Eugen took the violin and the man accompanied him by drumming on the window.

Piešťany was a spa-town and there was a Military Sanatorium there. Once there was an excellent violinist there for treatment, col. Rudolf Mánek. We put together a string quartet together with two music teachers from the local school. Mr. Mánek gave a concert for other patients and we performed a quartet by Borodin. After Mr. Mánek left I continued playing with teachers, but the true music disappeared – it left together with col. Mánek.

When I was working in Prague and at Slušovice in the years 1984 – 1989, I had my permanent address in Piešťany and I stayed there most weekends. During the revolution in November 1989 I brought some placards from Slušovice and we posted them in Piešťany together with Juraj (the violinist and mathematician). We also took part in a great demonstration in Bratislava. Eugen visited Prague with his whole family and presented president Havel with a big bunch of flowers. However, Slovak nationalists began to show their teeth little a little and everything had changed. There were some pamphlets appearing everywhere proclaiming e.g. that Czech people didn't properly take care of the Slovak part of the pipeline, or that Slovakia had nourished Czech people⁴⁰:

*Dance and rejoice
Slovak youth!
You won't any more feed
The lazy Czech swine!*

At once I became a foreigner there. Tesla Piešťany (where I had many friends) went through several transformations during a short period and many people were dismissed. Eugen was the deputy director for business. He was sacked as well. But he wasn't caught off guard: he got a Mozart-like costume (including a wig) and went to the American Embassy in Prague for visa. He had to play the violin for Madam Ambassador to prove his desires. In a short time I got a photo from him, taken at a petrol station: he was standing in his costume with the violin at an inscription: "*Czech violinist from Prague...*" with a drawing of a bottle of wine. Later on he sent me a visit card from an Italian restaurant with a notice "*Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart is visiting our restaurant on Monday....*" Eugen stayed at a homeless shelter (he said it was like a hotel) and he played every morning for the other guests. So he had the accommodation free. He also sent me a poem by a homeless woman Kathy dedicated to Eugen for his music⁴¹:

*If I asked you to walk with me
Would you go all the way to the sea
If I begged you to hold me tight
Would you hold me all the night?
If I need you to be here,
Would you stay near?
Would you do this for me?*

.....

Eugen also performed for old and deaf people, who perceived the music by touching the instrument. Once Eugen was playing at a private party when he had a light stroke; the violin fell from his hands. He had to return home to Slovakia into his wife's care.

⁴⁰ In reality it was quite absurd; for the whole post-war period of Czechoslovakia the national income was re-distributed for the benefit of Slovakia ("money-pipeline")

⁴¹ The whole poem is in Appendix, p.78

I visited Eugen after he came home. He didn't play the violin any more. I repaired a bicycle for him and he acquainted me with two interesting people. One of them was a retired German physicist who played the viola in a unique way: he improvised the music by heart and it sounded like *Caprices* by Paganini. This highly-educated man however suffered from persecution mania: he was persuaded that the German secret police were shadowing him... The second man of interest was an inventor of a "*perpetuum mobile*" that he had in a shed in his yard. It was a large wooden wheel, 2m in diameter, with several mechanisms attached. The rotating wheel lifted sand from a heap to the top of the shed; the sand was then falling on the blades and returned to the ground. The wheel was driven by a motor which was fed from the power distribution network. In addition, the wheel drove a generator which loaded an accumulator battery. The inventor believed that the whole machine produced energy and it could solve the energy problem in the desert. There had allegedly been many journalists interviewing him. I tried to suggest that he measure the consumed power (or energy), he somehow didn't want to understand.

Eugen tried to study the theory of relativity and he wrote "*Letters to Albert*" where he criticized this Einstein's theory. However then he had another stroke and he was laid up limp in bed. A year later our German friend called me to come, saying that Eugen is going to die. When I visited him, he was nothing but skin and bones and he hardly recognized me. His wife nourished him as a child. I wanted to play one of the Hungarian songs that he taught me, but his wife didn't wish that. She said she was grateful for every moment he slept. I understood her words fully a few years later when I cared for my father.⁴²

A Worldwide Net of Chamber Music

The Czech Early Music Society was established by Prof. Miroslav Venhoda in the early 80s. I became its member while I was still working in Piešťany. Early music became very popular thanks to flutist Milan Munclinger and his ensemble, who gave a series of concerts "*J.S. Bach and his time*" in Prague for many years. Munclinger opened every concert with a witty speech; they played in "authentic way" on mostly modern instruments. In contrast Venhoda's ensemble played on original, mostly forgotten instruments. The Society organized the Summer Schools of Early Music; originally it took place in Kroměříž, then it was moved to Valtice (Southern Moravia) where it is still organized every year.

I first attended the 2nd Summer School at Kroměříž that was held shortly after Prof. Venhoda's death and later on I attended this undertaking regularly. The School originally had not only musical, but also spiritual content. The participants constituted a fraternal society and every day started by singing the Gregorian Chant. The instructors didn't bear themselves as demi-gods but they spoke to the participants on an equal footing. The accommodation was quite modest – we slept in a gym on mats. In the evening we went out to the square where we played and sang together. There were also some foreign ensembles taking part. It was impressive when we were singing spiritual music at posters with communist ideology. This spiritual dimension has somehow petered out during the time; the performance is now preferred. The students are practicing to be the best and there is no time left to meet friends and enjoy music.

Summer School brought me to choir singing and Gregorian Chant. I could start here on a blank page without any reminiscence. But it also brought me, indirectly to the viola d'amore, which was the instrument I only knew from my father's narration. And finally to *Amateur Chamber Music Players*, an international society (its head-office is in New York).

⁴² My father died in June 2008; he was 96 years old.

The word “amateur” doesn’t mean a “dilettante” here – it may even be a top professional. It means the one who plays music to enjoy oneself and share that with others. ACMP members rate their level themselves according to specified criteria. Every other year ACMP publishes the Directory – separately for USA and other countries. There are some dues to be paid, but it was forgiven for members in poor (e.g. East-European) countries.

I was an ACMP member in the period 1990-2005. For a few years I represented the Czech Republic in the International Advisory Council. There were many interesting rendezvous during that time. Shortly after I filled-in and posted the application form, an English pianist appeared; we played some pieces for violin and piano, including the Spring Sonata by Beethoven. It was at my parents’ flat, shortly after the Velvet Revolution. Later on I used to regularly play string quartet with another ACMP member, Mr.Fähnrich, in whose house chamber music had been played since his grandmother’s time, who studied piano with Antonín Dvořák. Among our foreign visitors I well remember an American cellist who stopped here on her journey around the world. She presented us with a CD, on which her son and daughter play the piano quintet by Dvořák with Czech pianist Rudolf Firkušný. We also played with Mrs.Sonia Letourneau, an Australian violinist and conductor, who stayed at my parents house.

Cycle Tour in Holland and Germany

My first job after the Velvet Revolution was guiding foreign visitors at Memorial Terezín (Theresienstadt), a former Nazi concentration camp. As soon as I saved enough money, I set off for a bicycle tour across Holland and Germany combined with playing chamber music. A travel agency took me and my bicycle to Amsterdam. I was roaming around, but the musicians were not at home. So I rode to the coast and stayed overnight in a camp. As the weather was extremely warm, I only took a sheet sleeping bag to save on the load. However the night was rather cold and I was shivering all the night; it was the same every night, except for two when I was invited to stay. I went down the cycle way along the coast. It passed across sand dunes and I could only watch the sea sometimes. On the left, there was a fenced protected area. I remember several friendly meetings at the resting places. Only once I could afford to swim in the sea – I had to hurry to be in time. The water was rather cold. In The Hague I slept in a camp and in the morning I set off to look for Mr.Rjikmans, my host. He lived in a little alley that wasn’t on the map; the search took me two hours. Mr.Rjikmans brought together a string quintet with two violas. I had always played 2nd viola in such ensemble and now I was to play 1st viola.⁴³ My host had prepared a peculiarity for the beginning: a quintet by Joseph Haydn where the 1st viola was almost unplayable; after a few vain attempts we had to change parts and Mr.Rjikmans took 1st viola for this piece. Then we went through the common repertoire (Mozart, Beethoven) and also attempted to play Dvořák that was unknown for them; we managed it all except for one repeat. Finally we had a chat at the table. It was getting dark when I set back for the camp. I arrived there after the closing hour and the receptionist wasn’t there; luckily some campers remembered me.

I went on along the coast up to The Hook of Holland and turned inland. After a while I had another musical rendezvous: I played the duo “Für zwei obligaten Augengläser” by Beethoven with a professional cellist. After crossing the Dutch-German border I got on the train and continued along the Rhine. In Mönchenglabbach I stayed with a pharmacist; I played there some Beethoven string trios with two ladies – music teachers. The rest of my tour along the Main and the Donaukanal was nice but my overloaded bicycle broke down; I

⁴³ Of course, I had to play on a borrowed instrument; I couldn’t carry a viola on the bicycle

had to get on the train. At the border I however had to get off again and ride on my wrecked bicycle through the shabby border region in the night weaving in and out among trunks...

I also had a rendezvous on my business trip to Hungary in 1994. I visited a musical family there, who lived in a large block of flats in Budapest. The father was a professional musician and translator. A cellist came there to complete the quartet. They had two nice girls. I even found two violas d'amore there – there is a viola d'amore solo in some Hungarian opera.

Blonay

In October 2000 I took part on a session of the International Advisory Council at Blonay in the French part of Switzerland. I traveled by train and arrived late in the night. For the rack railway train I had to wait nearly one hour and I was the only passenger. In Blonay I had to ask for Hindemith Centre, where it took place. The meeting was naturally in English but at the table we had to speak French – so I didn't speak much. At the session, each member had to speak about the conditions for playing chamber music in his country. I said that there were relatively good conditions for amateurs under the communist rule even though culture was sometimes misused for politics. After "The Velvet Revolution" some people became rich by by-passing the law. One cannot expect that these people would donate to culture. On the other hand teachers, who are the bearers of culture, fell to the bottom of society.

My speech produced some embarrassment; one man asked me about something with disbelief. In contrast, the Rumanian member spoke about "the paradise of culture" in his country since ancient Rome⁴⁴. I also met a representative of Slovenia. We played some music (I played 2nd viola in a quintet by Brahms) and there was an excursion in the Alps. The countryside was too civilized to my taste, there was no wild nature seen in the mountains. Nevertheless most of all I enjoyed the 12-hour traveling from Prague to Blonay; there were nice and intelligent people on the train and we chatted all the way. The rowdies apparently travel by car.

In August 2003 I spent a week in Wales. It was in a region where Welsh language is generally spoken and also all inscriptions are in Welsh. My host was a retired pharmacologist, who had worked in USA. He was an excellent pianist and cellist. I took the viola d'amore with me; as I went by air, it was necessary to carry it without a case, only wrapped in a cloth, the bow separately⁴⁵. However I mostly had to play the violin and an extremely long "upright" viola, which is designed for playing as a cello. I also took part in a rehearsal of a local amateur orchestra. There was a German couple and some local people playing with us. Finally we performed the Trout Quintet by Schubert.

The Manhattan String Quartet

In November 2002, shortly after the terrorist attack in New York, there was a chamber music master course taking place in Prague, "*Dvořák in Prague*". The coaches were the members of the Manhattan String Quartet. There were exclusively American students and the course included playing together with Czech musicians. The partner on Czech side was *Heroldův klub*, a Prague club of amateur chamber music players. As I was out of practice that time, I hesitated at first. The playing took place in the hotel where the participants stayed – probably for safety reasons. I was sent to a group coached by the 2nd violinist; apart from him there were two young ladies, playing the violin and the cello. We first played a few quartets that I had brought – Komzák, Borodin, Mysliveček. They were much better than me. Then another cellist came and the well-known C major Quintet by Schubert appeared on the stands. I knew

⁴⁴ I traveled across Rumania in 1970; the people in the mountain area were extremely poor.

⁴⁵ On my way back the airport guards inspected the bow for a long time to see if it wasn't an arm

it very well from listening but I had never played it. I was going to give up and leave. They persuaded me to stay, which gave me some encouragement; I warmed up gradually and we mastered it all. On the same day we were also invited to a concert of the coaches.

I finished my membership in ACMP in 2005; I had run out of vigor. My membership in the International Advisory Board had been finished earlier; probably due to my speech in Blonay that might have been misunderstood.

You'll never Step in the same River

I had a friend living in Prague who collected musical instruments and played in several amateur ensembles. I bought several nice instruments from him; one moment I had several violins and violas, 3 celli and a double bass⁴⁶. Unfortunately, I had to sell most of them because I couldn't keep them safely; my apartment was in a block of flats and it was very dry. When moved to Prague in 1984, Mr. Boreš sent me to some amateur orchestras. However I was accustomed to playing chamber music, so I preferred to sing in a choir.

In 1988 I moved to Moravia to enter the famous *Cooperative Farm Slušovice*. The economy of this progressive farm was based on market principles; this enhanced the importance of the local parish priest, who was a Salesian. He organized several activities directed mostly to youth: a singing choir, dancing lessons, 1st Holy Communion, taking a video about St. Agnes (who was being canonized at that time) etc. I sang there in the choir and occasionally played the viola with the organist. The hectic events in 1989 put these cultural activities aside.

Hiking and Singing

My school days were rather marked by peculiar weekend farming of my parents at a lonely house at Davle, south of Prague.⁴⁷ We used to go there in an overcrowded train. There were many young hikers on the train who were playing camp-fire songs and I envied them their freedom. Many of the songs were about horses; my father didn't like songs about horses, I didn't know why.

There was a specific style of traditional brass music in this raftman's region⁴⁸. A well known composer of popular song Antonín Borovička lived at Davle and his brass band accompanied funeral processions to the cemetery at St Kilian church. Today lots of cars are rushing there.

Secondary-school students were regularly sent as hops-picking teams to farms. We had obligatory skiing courses in the mountains at the college and privately we organized canoeing expeditions on holidays. All these were opportunities for singing camp-fire and other popular songs.

In 1963 the borders were opened and tourists from the West were arriving⁴⁹. On the other hand we could take part in international work-camps both in our country and abroad. We sang traditional songs of various nations there; later on the songs of Beatles became popular. At the same time university students established a hiking movement – *the Student Path*. The participants of a Path were hiking in groups across an attractive region “from pub to pub” singing and making pranks. I took part on two Paths during my studies. After the year 1970 the Path movement had to be renamed to the Academic Hiking Club (TAK). I returned to these activities in 1984, when I turned back to Prague. It was an oasis of freedom in those

⁴⁶ I had some extra money for my invention

⁴⁷ A lot of work with little effect; I was sick every Monday

⁴⁸ E.g. the song „Roll out the barrels“ by Vejvoda comes from this region

⁴⁹ People could see that the propaganda about the poverty in capitalist countries told lies

times. The Path movement still exists – but one-time students have become pensioners. In the sixties the participants sang traditional and patriotic songs; now every group has a songbook of their own.

I used to take the viola or the guitar to the Path with a mixed success. After 1989 the onset of capitalism turned everything upside down: one became a rich renter, the other a poor teacher. The ethos has changed. Nevertheless the tradition has survived.

During my studies I bought a guitar and learned the basic chords. My first song was “Greenfields” both in English and Czech versions and I sing it even now. Playing the guitar showed out to be very helpful when I began to teach.

The Viola d’Amore

My father was a lawyer and he worked at the Ministry of Finances. He often told us about a colleague of his who played the viola d’amore for his colleagues’ amusement; he performed at various parties and meetings⁵⁰. I had never heard the viola d’amore in practice.

When I entered the Early Music Society, I heard people play various historical instruments: lute, hurdy-gurdy, viola da gamba... When I read an article on the viola d’amore by František Slavík⁵¹ in the Society Newsletter, I went to Brno to visit him. I was mainly attracted by the possibility of chordal playing on the instrument⁵². The principal problem was to get the instrument – I had no spare money that time. Finally Mr.Slavík sold me his second instrument.

I often visited Mr.Slavík and was in regular contact with him until 1997⁵³. But he never taught me – he referred me to Mr. Jiří Šimáček, a concertmaster of National Theatre, who performed on the viola d’amore in Prague. My contacts with Mr.Šimáček were sporadic, but it had an interesting effect: it stimulated me to translate. I translated his article about the viola d’amore in English for ACPM members and it had brought some interest⁵⁴. Mr.Slavík asked me to translate his *Compendium of the Viola d’Amore* (written in German) in English. It was a challenging work and it took me about 2 years (in addition to my teaching at the Training Centre). The work included 60 pages of text, tables and musical examples; there were also original compositions by the author: the *Daily Study Tables* and three *Concert Preludes*. The Italian virtuoso John Calabrese called it the “bible” of viola d’amore. I presented the work at the Viola d’Amore Society Congress at Michaelstein in 1996.

At this Congress I first met Prof. Jaroslav Horák⁵⁵, a soloist and chamber music player on the viola d’amore. Shortly before that he became a widower. I started to visit him regularly. Professor told me some stories – how he entered the Czech Philharmonic Orchestra, about their legendary conductor Václav Talich and about their tour to Switzerland where they met Rafael Kubelík.⁵⁶ R.Kubelík gave each orchestra member a medal, however the expedition leaders ordered to hand them over; Mr. Horák was the only one who retained it.

⁵⁰ He was dr. Čeněk Burkoň, a man with a moving life: once a personal secretary of minister, he had to work as a switchman. At last he came to the Ministry of Finances as a philatelic expert.

⁵¹ F.Slavík (1911-1999) was an expert in the field of thermics of silicates. He studied the violin and viola d’amore at Prague Conservatory, pupil of Rudolf Reissig. Composed music for viola d’amore and wrote many articles in the field of musicology.

⁵² Viola d’amore has 7 playing strings (usually A-d-a-d1-f#1-a1-d2) and 7 sympathetic (resounding) strings. The body has the form of old viols. For viola d’amore composed eg. K.Stamic, A.Vivaldi, P.Hindemith, L.Janáček

⁵³ There was a big flood in Moravia that year; Mr. John Calabrese just performed at Hukvaldy (Janáček Festival) and at Slavkov (Austerlitz) and I heard his concert there; Mr. and Mrs. Calabrese also succeeded to meet Mr. Slavík in Brno. At Hukvaldy he performed “*Intimate Letters*” by Janáček with Kubínovo kvarteto.

⁵⁴Some of the author’s statements were however criticized by Mrs.Ronez-Kubitschek

⁵⁵ Jaroslav Horák (1914-2005), violinist in Czech Philharmonic Orchestra and professor at Prague Conservatory

⁵⁶ Rafael Kubelík, son of violinist Jan Kubelík was the conductor of Czech Philharmonic Orchestra after 1945 and he emigrated in 1948

Mr. Horák was a staunch royalist and he often said “*Democracy is bad*” (and he might be right). He established with some other orchestra members an early music ensemble *Pro Arte Antiqua*. His cooperation in a duo with the double-bass player František Pošta was a unique one⁵⁷. At the end of his life, Prof. Horák turned back to his early compositions and composed some pieces for viola d’amore and other instruments.

Several times I presented myself as a viola d’amore player at the “Czechoslovak New Year’s Eve” at Strání on the Moravian-Slovak border. I played in a jam-session with a traditional local band there.⁵⁸ I have also played a traditional garden party of the Academic Hiking Club (TAK) in Prague at the beginning of summer, on June 21.

When I was teaching at Litoměřice (North Bohemia), I got to know about Miroslav Velišek, who performed at many churches and castles in this region with his trio. They mostly played arrangements of classical pieces for voice, viola d’amore and organ. Mr. Velišek composed several pieces for viola d’amore solo, recorder ensembles etc. We often met in Prague and played some new arranged (or composed) pieces. In 2005 Mr. Velišek was assaulted in front of his home in Teplice; he was knocked insensible and was seriously injured. After leaving the hospital he gave his last concert.

Guiding, teaching and singing

In spring 1990, when the revolution was over, I started to look out for a job at my existing places of work – Piešťany and Slušovice. I saw no prospects there. I decided to turn back to Prague; I still had a small room at my disposal in my parents’ flat. I enjoyed the atmosphere of liberty and looked around what to do. For a while I stayed at our lonely house at Davle and worked in the forest. Then I replied to an advertisement of the National Memorial Terezín⁵⁹ who were looking for foreign guides. I guided in English at first, then also in German. It was an interesting job, though a little sad. I would meet people from various countries, including the survivors who told about their experience. Once I was embarrassed when a Dutch group collected money to tip me; gradually I got as much in tips as my official income. It permitted me to buy a new bicycle and I set off for a tour (see above). However I sometimes got tired after completing several “rounds” in the former Nazi Ghetto; one round took more than one hour. I always tried to match my explanation to the visitors – there were students, families, old people... I often felt myself as a worn gramophone record. My colleagues (mostly women) did it another way – they recited their explanations like actors in the theatre, which was much more economical. “*If two people do the same, it isn’t the same*” says the proverb.

A colleague of mine conveyed an offer to me to teach English at the *Litoměřice Grammar School*⁶⁰ and I took it as a challenge. I also had to teach German, which I didn’t master too well. The school-year was beginning and I had to teach 7 courses and each course was using a different textbook. I was flooded with information – names of students and colleagues, the subject matter, etc. It looked hopeless. What finally helped me – was singing and the guitar. I reduced the subject matter and if I wasn’t able to prepare for the lesson, I taught English and German songs. It was accepted by both the students and the headmaster except for one course – the privileged “language” class. These students were rather bold; fortunately they were taken over by an American teacher later on. As a supplementary matter I was using the modern translation of the Bible and some literary works, including Shakespeare and Oscar Wilde. I also worked out my own summary of English grammar. In the German courses I

⁵⁷ According to one critic “*Pošta’s bow was like Tizzian’s brush*”.

⁵⁸ It was this folkloristic region that inspired Janáček for composing his opera *Jenufa*

⁵⁹ Terezín (Theresienstadt) used to be a fortress; there was a prison and Jewish ghetto during WWII.

⁶⁰ town Litoměřice (Leitmeritz) lies about 5 km away from Terezín

concentrated on the three most difficult parts of grammar: the *Rahmenkonstruktion* of sentence, declination of adjectives and past tense (Preterit, Perfect). I also taught priesthood novices at the Theological Convict and I sang in the Teachers' Choir.

The teacher's pay was very low – I was an unqualified teacher; the headmaster provided me a room free so I stayed in the school.

I was very exhausted at the end of the school-year. I turned back to guiding at Terežín. In the meantime the conditions had however changed: there were less visitors and it was difficult to stay overnight – the dormitory where I had stayed was closed and the camp was full of gypsy prostitutes (from E15 Highway), who were making noises all the night.

After some hesitation I entered the Educational Training Centre⁶¹ at Vysočany District in Prague. In addition to languages I also taught my profession – electricity and physics. It was much easier for me – I didn't need prepare so much. There was an experienced deputy headmaster, Mrs. Hromířová who took care of the harmony among teachers – it positively influenced the behavior of pupils. There were still good pupils in the school at that time; in the years to come power electricity ceased attracting young people and the quality of the pupils decreased.

Once I took my viola with me to the school and I started to prelude in my room when I was waiting between my lessons. When I finished the Preludium by J.S.Bach, I heard applause behind the wall. My colleague – a math teacher – then told me that it was nice, but she couldn't teach while I was playing.

When Mrs. Hromířová retired, the conditions in the school became worse. There was an active trade-union organization of teachers in the school and they often criticized the headmaster. Finally a matching of force took place, the headmaster won and the "rebels" had to leave the school. I was rather disappointed and tried out my luck at other schools – The University of Agriculture, a nursing college, a technical college. In 2002 I turned back to Vysočany. I was accepted for teaching part-time there with a promise that I could continue to teach in the next school year. I mostly taught English. There was a friendly atmosphere among the teachers of languages. We often sang in our room with the guitar and sometimes we turned back to Russian songs that we used to sing in our school days. Once I stood in for somebody and I sang a Russian song to the students – these pupils hadn't already learnt any Russian. It had a great success and one boy asked me to sing the Russian (Soviet) national anthem. Why not – I sang one strophe with the pathos of those times; I was then asked to sing the *Internationale* as well. I sang it and I explained the students that this (originally French) song was the first national anthem of the Soviet Union...

A few weeks later I read in the newspaper that our school is looking for a teacher. I began to guess something. When I was saying goodbye to the deputy headmaster at the end of the school year, he told me: "Colleague, you have a **nonstandard** teaching method!" Well – one has to respect the standards. Long live democracy and liberty!

After holidays I continued to teach at the same Technical College, where I studied 40 years earlier. But that is another history...

⁶¹ Originally Apprentice Training School

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 electricity⁶², 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 course⁶³ 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.”⁶⁴ 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 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.

⁶²Or electrical engineering

⁶³Vyšší odborná škola

⁶⁴I 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

The Post-Graduate Courses

The 1st 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 2nd 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 stair⁶⁵. 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 2nd semester I didn't continue teaching electricity in the post-graduate course but I taught English in 2nd year. They were the same students that I taught in the laboratory. My qualification for teaching English was disputable – I had the 1st 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 like⁶⁶. “It was something in 1st 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 2nd 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.

⁶⁵ He died within a year.

⁶⁶ 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 1st year⁶⁷. The Centre also provided consultations for working people who needed to enhance their qualification.⁶⁸

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 3rd (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,

⁶⁷ It was necessary to give the corresponding reason

⁶⁸ For some professions it was demanded by the 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 3rd 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 physics⁶⁹ 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 holography⁷⁰ were attractive for them. Finally I agreed with Mr. Čihák to classify only a part of the trainees in the 1st semester – the others would have to attend additional lessons in 2nd 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 I had to knock-out one trainee⁷¹ 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!

⁶⁹ i.e. my branch

⁷⁰ I worked in this field at the Czech Academy of Science

⁷¹ The boy ran around the classroom pouring water on the floor; I gave him a boxing blow.

Epilogue

When I was leaving my last teaching post at Záběhlice⁷² 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*⁷³: 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

⁷² The Apprentice Training Centre at Praha-Záběhlice

⁷³ Občanská plovárna; a swimming pool on a raft

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Poem

Would You do This for Me?

If I asked to walk with me
 Would you go all the way to the sea?
 If I begged you to hold me tight
 Would you hold me all the night?
 If I need you to be here
 Would you stay near?
 Would you do this for me?

If I asked you to love me always
 Would you both nights and days?
 If I begged you not to cry
 Would you be able to watch me die?
 If I need you up till the end
 Would you stay as my friend?
 Would you do this for me?

And if I took my last breath in your arms
 Would you be scared or alarmed?
 And if I told you a sincere good-bye
 Would you try not to cry?
 And when I pass to the other side
 Would you remember me deep inside?
 Would you do this for me?

*To my very dear friend Eugene.
 Thank you for the music.⁷⁴
 Kathy*

Uděláš to pro mne?

Šel bys se mnou k útesům,
 kde moře řve a hučí?
 Držel bys mě celou noc
 pevně v svém náručí?
 Budeš při mně blízko stát,
 až se budu v noci bát?
 Uděláš to pro mne?

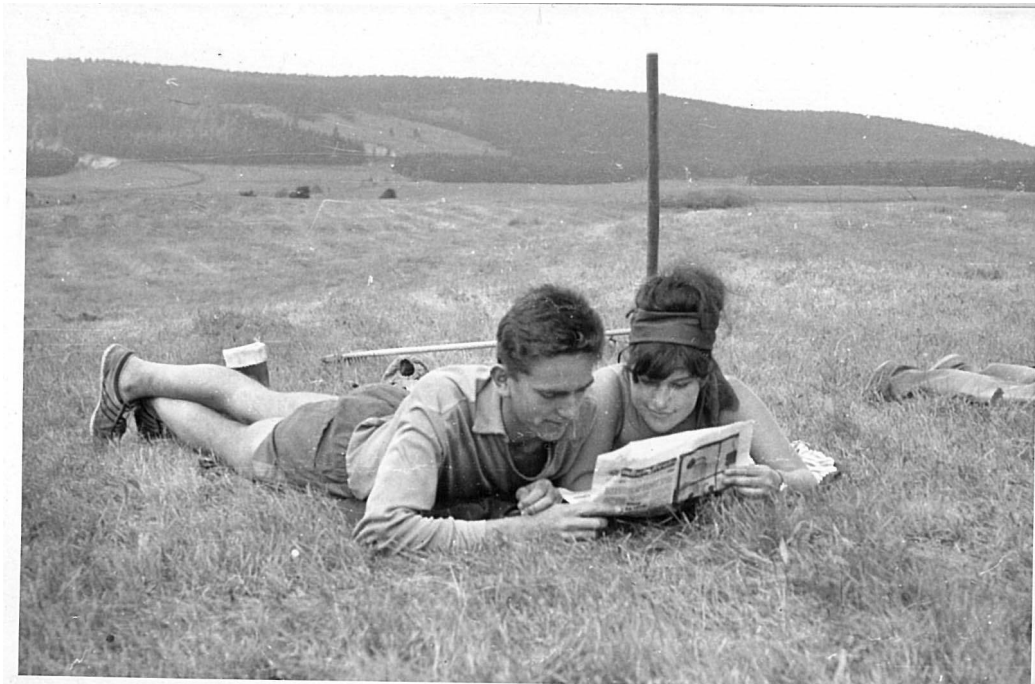
Budeš milovat mě vždy
 věrně dnem i nocí?
 A budeš schopen neplakat,
 Až uvidíš mě umírat?
 Při mé smrtelné posteli –
 zůstaneš mnou příteli?
 Uděláš to pro mne?

Zatlačíš víčka mých očí,
 až vydechnu naposled tvém náručí?
 A budeš schopen bez breku
 kynout mi na cestu za řeku?
 A po svém upřímném loučení
 budu moct dál v tvém srdci žít?
 Uděláš to pro mne?

*Mému předraženému příteli Eugenovi.
 Díky za hudbu od srdce.
 Kathy*

⁷⁴ The autor of this poem – see Picture 17

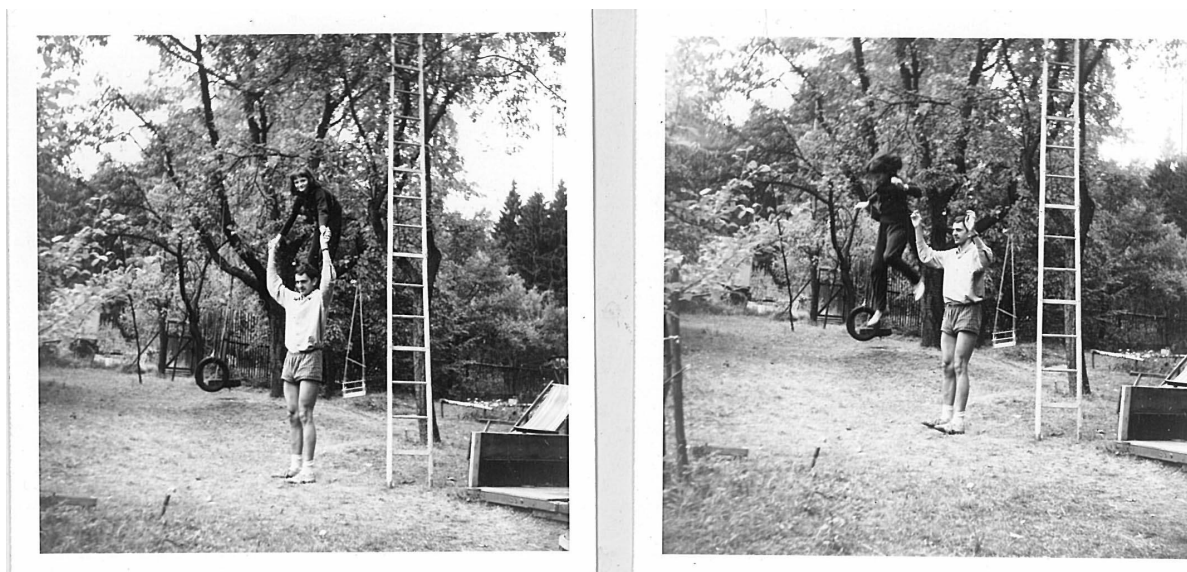
Pictures



1. Mezinárodní pracovní tábor / *International work-camp*, Abertamy, 1965



2. Mezinárodní tábor pro tělesně postižené / *International camp for the handicapped*, Hudiksvall, (Švédsko/ Svenska), 1966



3. Zákon akce a reakce (s neteří Věrou) / *The action and reaction principle*, Sloup 1976



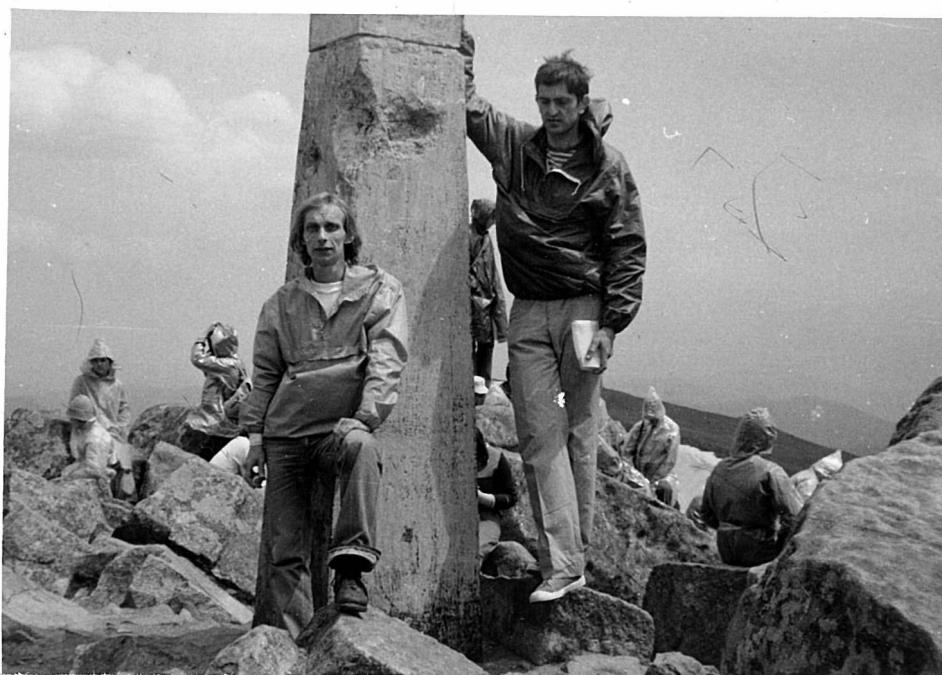
4. Na pasece U Vašků (Gusta s přítelkyní, Vladimír Klimeš, Anežka) / *At the "U Vašků" highland farm, Hutisko 1977*



5. Valašský bál / *Walachian ball*, (J.Bém – cello, J.Štrunc – prim), Rožnov 1977



6. Na cvičení / *military training*, Liberec 1978



7. Na vrcholu Ďumbieru (s R. Senderákem) / *At the highest peak of the Low Tatra*, 1979



8. Olašské cigánky / *gypsy girls*, Hurbanovo 1982

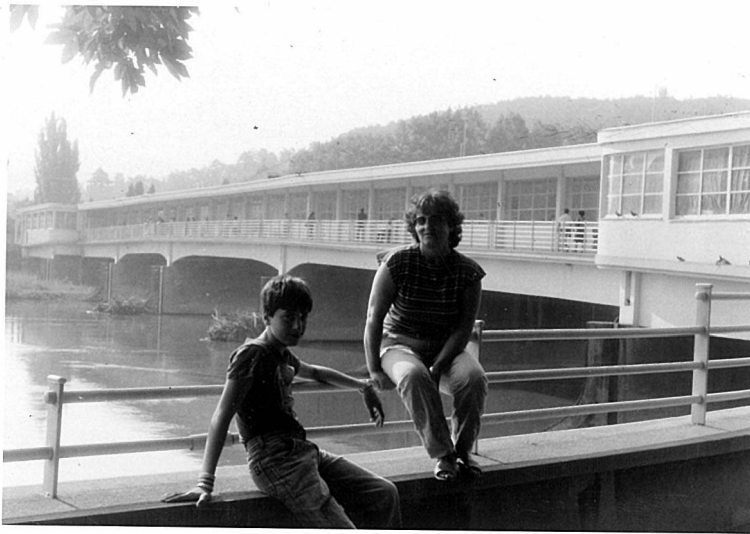


9. Rodinná idyla při stříhání ovcí (matka, neteř Ivana, otec, sestra Olga) / *a family idyll at cutting sheep (mother, niece, father, sister)*, Sloup 1983



Jarní hry / *Spring games*, Čertova pec u Topolčan, 1983

10. Vítání jara /



11. Paní Šauliková se synem / *Mrs. Š. with her son*, Piešťany 1985



12. Oslava narozenin v Tesle ELSTROJ / *Birthday party at Tesla ELSTROJ, Praha 1986*



13. Vyhlídka sboru Křížkovský – púltá stezka v Prachovských skalách / *Hiking with friends at the Czech Paradise conservation area, 1986*



14. Kvarteto u Fährnichů / *String quartet at Fährnich's* (Z. Knor, Vl. Fährnich, Sonia Letourneau), Praha 1994



15. Setkání hráčů na violu d'amore / *Meeting of viola d'amore players* (G.Olcese, J.Horák, J.Calabrese, M.Maršálková), Praha 1995



16. Neobvyklé sdružení (se Zd.Švitorkou) / *Unusual combination (with Zd.Švitorka)*, Praha 2000



17. Eugen Okénka mezi americkými bezdomovci (zleva autorka veršů Kathy) / *E. O. among the American homeless (author of the poem, Kathy, on the left)*, Marco Island, FL, 2001



17. Československý Silvestr / *Czechoslovak New Year's Eve* (manželé Grycovi, Minksova muzika z Velké nad Veličkou), Strání 2001/2002



18. Před hájovnou ve Sloupu / *At the forestry house at Sloup, Davle-Sloup* 2008



19. Dědeček / Grandpa / Davle-Sloup asi 1880

The author, *Jan Matys* (born 1945 in Prague) graduated at Technical College in Prague and at the Faculty of Technical and Nuclear Physics of Czech Technical University. He worked as a development worker and production engineer in the field of solid-state electronic devices at TESLA Rožnov Electronic Works and at the Czechoslovak Academy of Science. After 1990 he has mostly taught at secondary schools. He is active as non-professional musician, journalist and translator.