Archivist on a Bicycle

Jiří Fiedler

Archivist on a Bicycle: Jiří Fiedler

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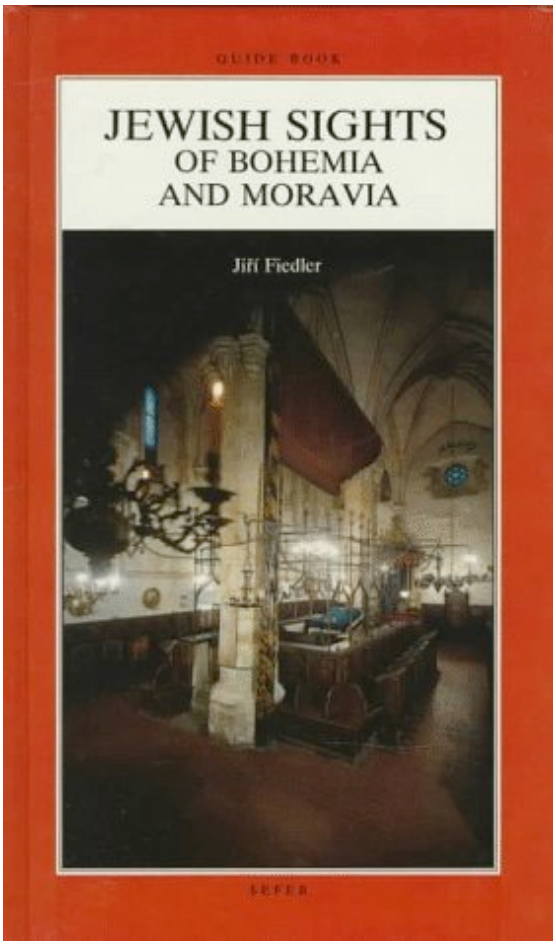
Preface

In January of 2014, Jiří and Dagmar Fiedler were found stabbed to death in their Prague apartment. For nearly one year, the unusual double murder, one of the few such committed in Prague, remained unsolved. In February of 2015, police reported that Jiří, 78, and his wife Dagmar, 74, were killed by a 29-year-old Czech, Dalibor C., who had met with Fiedler several times to solicit his professional advice. The murderer was apprehended after he tried to sell the jewelry, books and other items he stole at a pawnshop.

Jiří was a linguist, writer, translator and editor by profession, but his avocation was bicycling through the Czech lands, collecting old postcards, and maps, and documenting old churches, fortresses and Czechoslovakia's extinct Jewish communities. Starting in the 1960s, working alone, unpaid, and at some danger to himself and his family, he mapped former Jewish communities, photographed former synagogues, Jewish homes, and cemeteries, and built up an enormous archive in the small Prague apartment he shared with his wife and children.

In 1991, after the Velvet Revolution, he was finally able to publish his work as *Jewish Sights in Bohemia and Moravia*.



When the Jewish Museum was returned to the Jewish community by the Czech government in October 1994, he became an employee there until December 31, 2012. At the time of his death, he was digitizing his files and creating an electronic encyclopedia of Jewish communities in the Czech lands. It has 1,670 entries.

This Memorial eBook is a tribute to him.

Chapter 1

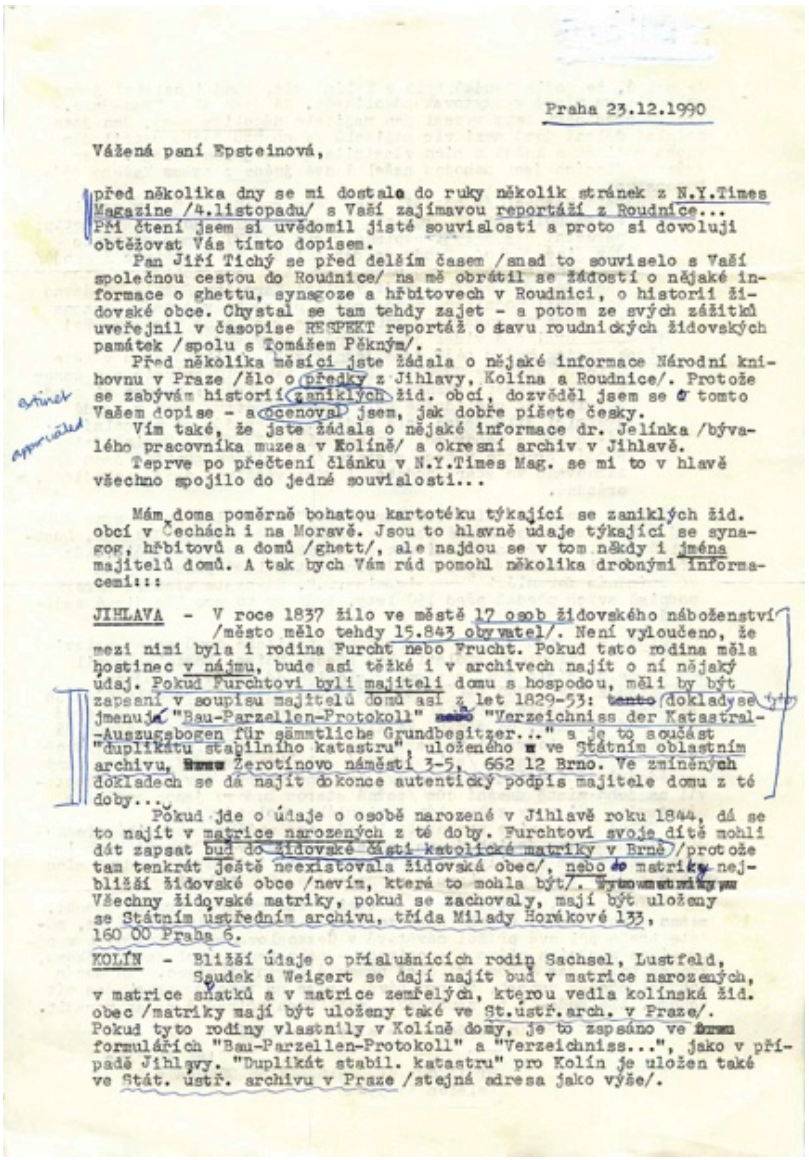
~ An unsolicited letter, by Helen Epstein ~

In December of 1990, I was living in Cambridge, Massachusetts with my husband and two very young children and researching a book that would become *Where She Came From: A Daughter's Search for her Mother's History* (*Nalezená minulost* in Czech).

My mother, Franci Epstein, had died in the spring of 1989, six months before the Velvet Revolution, and I had decided to mourn her by writing a book about her family. She and her parents had been deported to Terezín when she was 22. Her parents had been transported to the East and murdered. A (baptized) Prague girl, she had never known much about her ancestors.

I did much of my research in the libraries of Harvard University and — in those days before the internet — mailed dozens of letters to institutions such as the Jewish Museum in Prague, the Museum of the Diaspora in Tel Aviv, and the Archive of the Jewish People in Jerusalem, inquiring about the Rabinek and Sachsel families. I placed ads for them in the *New York Times,* the *Bulletin of the Czechoslovak Society of Arts and Sciences*, and the newsletter of the International Society for Czechoslovak Jews. No luck.

Then one day, the mailman handed me an unsolicited letter from Prague.



Praha 23.12.1990

Vážená paní Epsteinová,

před několika dny se mi dostala do ruky několik stránek z N.Y.Times Magazine /4.listopadu/ s Vaší zajímavou reportáží z Roudnice... Při čtení jsem si uvědomil jisté souvislosti a proto si dovoluji obtěžovat Vás tímto dopisem.

Pan Jiří Tichý se před delším časem /snad to souviselo s Vaší společnou cestou do Roudnice/ na mě obrátil se žádostí o nějaké informace o ghettu, synagoze a hřbitovech v Roudnici, o historii židovské obce. Chystal se tam tehdy zajet - a potom ze svých zážitků uveřejnil v časopise RESPEKT reportáž o stavu roudnických židovských památek /spolu s Tomášem Pěkným/.

Před několika měsíci jste žádala o nějaké informace Národní knihovnu v Praze /šlo o předky z Jihlavy, Kolína a Roudnice/. Protože se zabývám historií zaniklých žid. obcí, dozvěděl jsem se o tomto Vašem dopise - a ocenoval jsem, jak dobře píšete česky.

Vím také, že jste žádala o nějaké informace dr. Jelínka /bývalého pracovníka muzea v Kolíně/ a okresní archiv v Jihlavě.

Teprve po přečtení článku v N.Y.Times Mag. se mi to v hlavě všechno spojilo do jedné souvislosti...

Mám doma poměrně bohatou kartotéku týkající se zaniklých žid. obcí v Čechách i na Moravě. Jsou to hlavně údaje týkající se synagog, hřbitovů a domů /ghett/, ale najdou se v tom někdy i jména majitelů domů. A tak bych Vám rád pomohl několika drobnými informacemi:::

JIHLAVA - V roce 1837 žilo ve městě 17 osob židovského náboženství /město mělo tehdy 15.843 obyvatel/. Není vyloučeno, že mezi nimi byla i rodina Furcht nebo Frucht. Pokud tato rodina měla hostinec v nájmu, bude asi těžké i v archivech najít o ní nějaký údaj. Pokud Furchtovi byli majiteli domu s hospodou, měli by být zapsaní v soupisu majitelů domů asi z let 1829-53: tento doklady se jmenují "Bau-Parzellen-Protokoll" nebo "Verzeichniss der Katastral-Auszugsbogen für sämmtliche Grundbesitzer..." a je to součást "duplikátu stabilního katastru", uloženého ve Státním oblastním archivu, Žerotínovo náměstí 3-5, 662 12 Brno. Ve zmíněných dokladech se dá najít dokonce autentický podpis majitele domu z té doby...

Pokud jde o údaje o osobě narozené v Jihlavě roku 1844, dá se to najít v matrice narozených z té doby. Furchtovi svoje dítě mohli dát zapsat buď do židovské části katolické matriky v Brně /protože tam tenkrát ještě neexistovala židovská obec/, nebo do matriky nejbližší židovské obce /nevím, které to mohla být/. Všechny židovské matriky, pokud se zachovaly, mají být uloženy se Státním ústředním archivu, třída Milady Horákové 133, 160 00 Praha 6.

KOLÍN - Bližší údaje o příslušnících rodin Sachsel, Lustfeld, Saudek a Weigert se dají najít buď v matrice narozených, v matrice sňatků a v matrice zemřelých, kterou vedla kolínská žid. obec /matriky mají být uloženy také ve St.ústř.arch. v Praze/. Pokud tyto rodiny vlastnily v Kolíně domy, je to zapsáno ve formulářích "Bau-Parzellen-Protokoll" a "Verzeichniss...", jako v případě Jihlavy. "Duplikát stabil. katastru" pro Kolín je uložen také ve Stát. ústř. archivu v Praze /stejná adresa jako výše/.

Unsolicited letter from Mr. Fiedler, December 23, 1990

"Dear Mrs. Epstein," it began, *"A few days ago I happened to come across a few pages of the* New York Times *with your interesting reportage about Roudnice. I became conscious of certain connections in my mind and that is why I allow myself to disturb you with this letter.*

"A little while ago, Mr. Jiří Tichý (maybe in connection with your trip to Roudnice) asked me for some information about the ghetto, the synagogue and cemetery in Roudnice... A few months ago, you asked for some information from the National Library in Prague (it was about your ancestors in Jihlava, Kolín and Roudnice). Because I myself am engaged in researching the history of the now-extinct Jewish community, I found out about your letter and appreciated how well you wrote in Czech. I also know that you wrote to Dr. Jelínek to the

director of the Regional Museum in Jihlava, to the National Library and to the Central Archive in Prague."

I found this a little creepy. Maybe Czechs researching Jews all knew each other?

"*I have at home relatively rich files covering the now-extinct Jewish communities of Bohemia and Moravia. They are mostly documents concerning synagogues, cemeteries and houses, but sometimes you can find in them the names of their owners... Maybe on your next visit you could go to the State Central Archive, or else ask someone who has the time and who knows how to read German Gothic script to do so for you. I don't have the time to do it myself. But if you need me, I will be happy to advise you.*"

There followed some extremely detailed data on Jews and their properties in Jihlava, Kolín and Roudnice.

I have to confess that I didn't try to understand who my correspondent was or why he had taken so much trouble to write me this unsolicited letter. My husband and I had two children under the age of five. His work required frequent travel. My mother had died a year earlier and we had no family in Cambridge to help out.

I wrote Mr. Jiří Fiedler a thank-you letter and told him I would come see him when next I could get to Prague, but that it might take a while.

But the next summer, we travelled to Prague. I sent my boys off to the Technical Museum, and walked to the Albatros Publishing House to meet with my mysterious correspondent.

Mr. Fiedler had a desk in the offices of the children's publishing house. He was then 56, an elfin man with a pronounced stutter who seemed as modest as his tiny vase of dandelions.

He asked if we could speak in Czech.

I said of course. I always spoke Czech with my father, who was a Czech patriot and had represented Czechoslovakia in two Olympic Games.

Mr. Fiedler told me that collecting Judaica was his hobby. He had scrutinized his family tree many times searching for a Jewish ancestor to explain it and found none. "Some people smoke," he said. "Some people strangle little girls in parks. I bicycle around the country documenting dead Jews."

I wasn't sure I had understood him correctly. Though I'm told I have 99% Czech Jewish genes, I missed out on the one for black humor. Perhaps, given his long and solitary preoccupation with dead Jews, I thought, Mr. Fiedler was pleased to be meeting a live one.

I told him that I was trying to write a book about my maternal ancestors based on a 12-page family history that my mother had left me before she died. It began with her grandmother and read like the libretto of a 19th century opera.

Therese Frucht, according to my mother, was born in Iglau sometime in the 1850s, the daughter of an innkeeper. After an unhappy love affair with a young Czech, Therese was married off to a Jewish peddler. They settled in Vienna where their four children were born. When the eldest son was seventeen, he died. Nine months later, Therese hurled herself out the family's fourth floor window...

My own mother had died of a brain aneurysm in the spring of 1989. I was now the oldest person in my family and the only daughter, I told Mr. Fiedler. I wanted to document my mother's 12 pages and had already started by researching the history of women and Jews in the Czech lands, paying special attention to innkeepers and peddlers. Almost right away I had had a lucky break. A Harvard student went to the Vienna's Central Cemetery, found Therese's tombstone and made a rubbing of the inscription. I now knew that she died on May 5, 1890 in at the age of 46.

Mr. Fiedler listened attentively and, at the end, smiled as though my story could not have made him happier. I had no idea that he himself had spent hundreds of hours documenting tombstones in Jewish cemeteries. I was uncertain what to make of him. Someone whose hobby was Jews? Really? But I had little time and he seemed to know the territory.

Mr. Fiedler advised me to go to the State Central Archive and search for the name Frucht in the (incomplete) registers of Jewish communities and order the *matriky* (birth and death records) for Iglau, now Jihlava.

The *matriky* were two-foot-long, hundred-year-old tomes, annotated with goose quill and ink. Those of the Jewish community of Jihlava began in 1867 and as I read through the names, I noticed their creeping secularization — the *Samuels* became *Sigmunds* and *Moses, Maximillians*; the *Rachels* and *Esthers* became *Thereses, Josephines,* and *Franziskas*, as my great-grandmother, grandmother, and mother were named. I noted *Hoffman, Heller, Steiner, Weissenstein...* nothing resembling *Frucht*. Then I spotted *Maximilian Furcht*, son of Samuel and Marie, married in 1872.

In the 1880s and 1890s, there were more Furchts: Alois, Elsa, Olga, Adolf, two Josephs, and two more Maximilians. Had my mother or her mother or Therese herself transposed the letters *u* and *r*? I copied down all the names, then hurried back to Albatros.

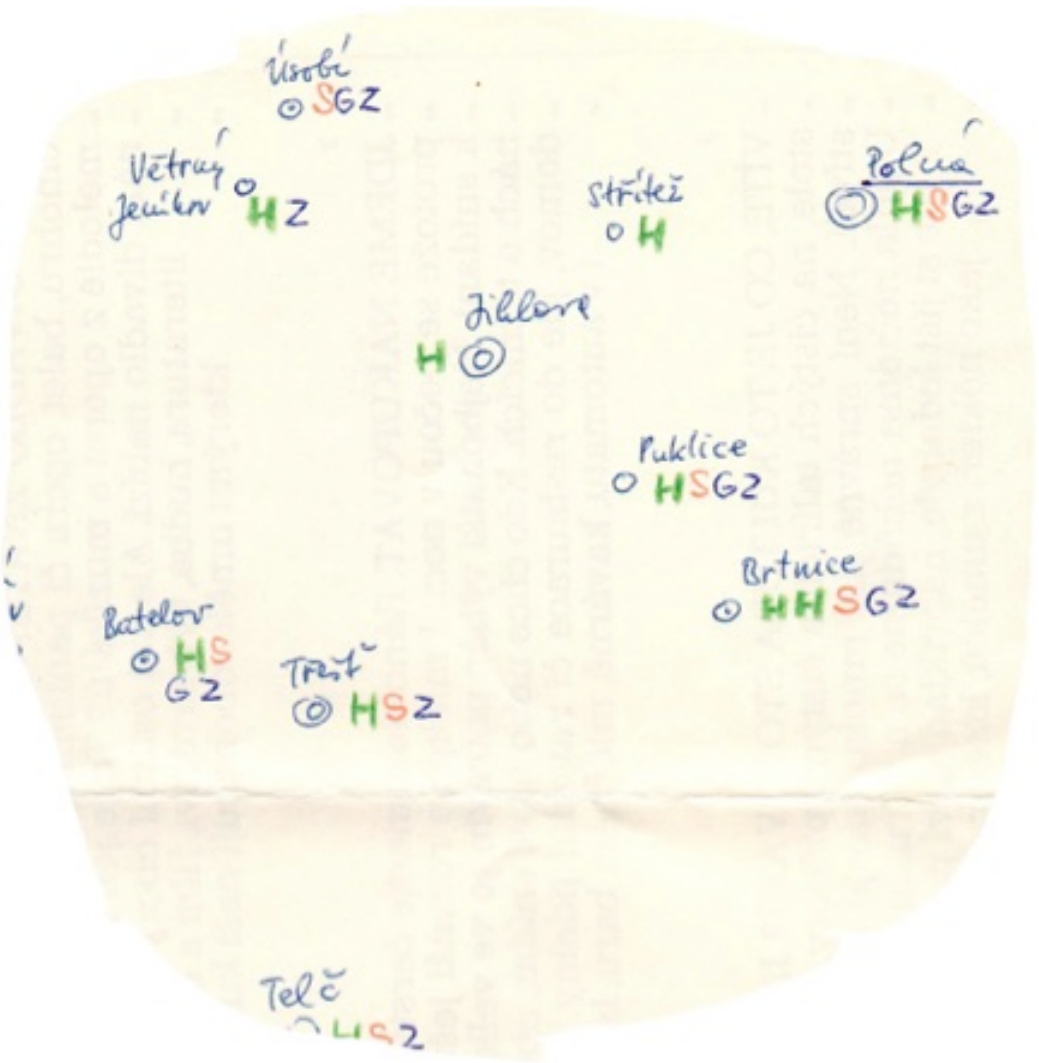
When I told Mr. Fiedler I had found no Fruchts in the *matriky* but a roster of Furchts, he said that such transposition of letters was common. Who would not prefer *Frucht*, a name that meant "fruit," to *Furcht*, one that meant "fear"? He had studied linguistics, he explained. He was also an historian, so he knew that Furcht was an uncommon name in the Czech lands. He could not recall ever having come across it.

He suggested I rent a car and drive to the Czech-Moravian

Highlands, have a look at Jihlava, but not expect to find much there. Jews had been expelled from all the royal cities in the fifteenth century and had returned to Iglau only in 1848. He was certain that Therese had been a Czech-speaking country Jew, from one of the hill towns where Jews had been protected by the nobility. Hadn't I said she had a Czech lover? If I started early, I could be back in Prague by sunset.

"Okay," I said.

He made a dot for Jihlava on a sheet of paper, drew seven dots around it and told me about those hill towns.



Key to Mr. Fiedler's map of the Czech-Moravian highlands:

H — Hřbitov (cemetery) and is in green because of the grass
S — synagogue
M — modlitebna (prayer house or room),
G — ghetto, (or Jewish Street)
Z — Zámek (or castle) for orientation and context
K — Klášter (monastery)
Two circles for a town, smaller circle for small town, smallest circle for a village

First, *Puklice*: five or six kilometers from Jihlava, with a three-hundred-year-old cemetery. Second, *Brtnice*: seventeen kilometers southeast. Very old community established in the first half of the fifteenth century. Several remarkable tombstones. Synagogue torn down recently to make room for a department store. Third, *Polná*, associated with the ritual murder trial of Leopold Hilsner in 1899. Good museum. I should also try *Větrný Jeníkov, Třešt, Batelov,* and *Úsobí*. There were, of course, no Jews left in any of these places.

I drove to Jihlava with my Czech friend Jiří Tichý who is half-

Jewish. My history was also his.

We parked on the Town Square, disfigured by a department store. We visited the house where Gustav Mahler grew up, noting that the memorial plaque was filthy and the walls stank of urine.

Mahler plaque in Jihlava, 1991

Brtnice Street was nearby, so we drove to Brtnice, the second town that Mr. Fiedler had suggested and, as soon as we saw it from the road, I felt a sense of peace and familiarity.

We met a Mrs. Matlová. Eighty-five years old and surrounded by her hens, she could have been standing in the eighteenth century. I explained that I was an American, trying to track down my great-grandmother Therese Furcht, who might have been born here about 150 years ago.

Mrs. Matlová looked me over and began to talk. It was in 1921, when she was fifteen, she said, that she began working for the Furchts — old people who sold old clothes. People used to say *U Šmulíka*, at Shmulik's.

We set off for the cemetery. It was surrounded by a tall stone wall, and had large wooden doors locked with a padlock. Jiří gave it a sharp tug, and there, directly facing us, were several tombstones that read FURCHT.

The next day, I invited Mr. Fiedler out for tea. He was delighted that our trip had gone so well and promised to send me a detailed map of Brtnice and its Jewish houses. I asked him how he gotten so interested in documenting Jews.

Helen and Mr. Fiedler in Prague, in the mid-1990s

He told me that he was 10 when the Nazi occupation of Czechoslovakia ended, that he had witnessed the retreat of German soldiers and the arrival of concentration camp survivors, who were given temporary housing at his school.

At 15, he came across an old Yiddish newspaper. He had deciphered the Hebrew characters as though they were hieroglyphs and taught himself to read Yiddish. He dated his interest in local history to about the same time. *Místopis*, was one of the few intellectual pursuits that could be safely enjoyed under Communism. He rode his bicycle down back roads, photographing and sketching ruins of old buildings.

After studying linguistics a Charles University he became a copy-editor and translator of children's literature. But that was a day job. His real passion was photographing and drawing old churches, synagogues and Jewish cemeteries. "Those cemeteries," he told me,

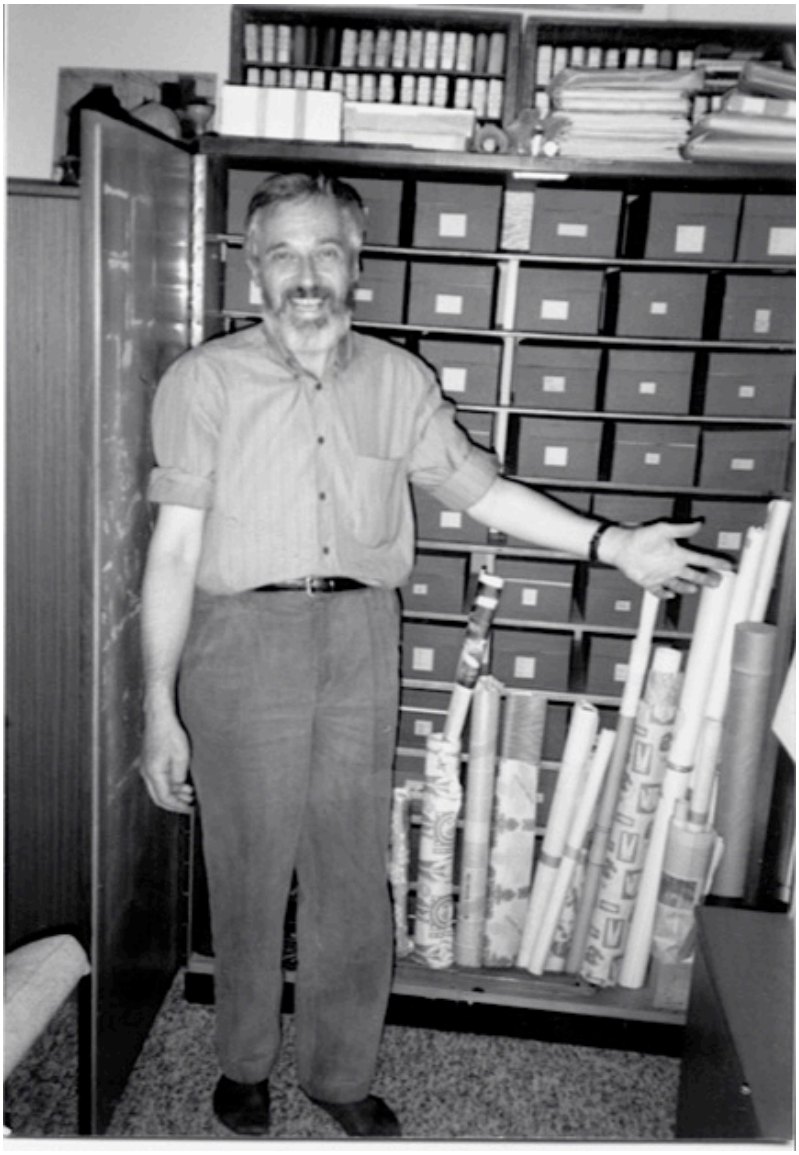
“called out to be photographed.” The tombstones were so overgrown that he began to carry gardening tools on his bicycle. A former schoolmate of his worked at the Jewish Museum and Mr. Fiedler thought he would help him in his research.

In 2015, I learned that this former schoolmate was Dr. Jan Heřman, who was fired from the Jewish Museum in 1971, during the “normalization” that followed the 1968 Soviet Invasion of Czechoslovakia. Heřman subsequently found work as a photographer in a hospital, and was able to prepare a book about Jewish Cemeteries without using the Museum archive. His book was published in 1980 and had a great impact on Mr. Fiedler, who wrote an admiring review. Jan Heřman died tragically and ambiguously in 1986, when he drowned alone in a lake.

Mr. Fiedler told me nothing about this in 1991, just that he himself had never had any luck getting into the Museum archive until after 1989. He had amassed his maps, postcards, index cards of data on the dead, and his photographs alone, and with the help of sympathetic fellow archivists and local historians.

We had so little time together that I didn’t ask any questions. But I knew I had found a friend and ally.

I returned to Massachusetts and started writing the book that became *Where She Came From.* Mr. Fiedler and I became pen pals, exchanging holiday greetings, postcards and jokes. Over the next twenty years, I made several research trips back to the Czech Republic and learned that Jirka, as he asked me to call him, had been instrumental in several museum exhibits, including the Smithsonian’s *The Precious Legacy,* and that he was the preeminent international consultant to anyone researching Czech Jews. He told me that his Judaica collection filled the shelves and cabinets of one whole room of his four-room apartment and included some 70,000 photographs.



Jirka in his home archive, 1994.

I wondered how his wife and children felt about his devoting so much time, money and space to his hobby, but did not ask. Instead, I asked, in 1994, if I could photograph him in his study. He looked aghast and changed the subject but eventually agreed to let me take some photos.

When I got home to Cambridge, I found a letter in a mix of Czech and English:

Praha 2.7. 94

Dear Helenka,

Yesterday was such a hectic day and we probably forgot about something important. I don't know what you had in mind when you were

taking notes concerning my life and work — and on top of that taking photos of me at home — but to be sure, if you wanted as a journalist to write me up, I want to add one important fact. Just so no idealized misrepresentation of my past years ensues.

The expense of the long-running research of Jewish communities, correspondence, photos, travel expenses etc. of course came primarily out of our family budget, to the detriment of the family, but I forgot to tell you that I had significant contributions from two people, probably because they realized that I was a serious person. One was Dr. Desider Galsky who was President of the Council of Jewish Communities in those years and Mr. Mark Talisman. Mr. Galsky sometimes gave me a contribution from his "President's Fund;" sometimes he served as a middleman for contributions from Mr. Talisman. He followed what I was doing from far away, from America and cheered the project on. He was always a very great friend and supporter of the Federation and local Jews. He also knows a lot about the Jewish Town Hall in the past 20 years. I think you should get acquainted and interview him. It certainly would be interesting... Actually I was surprised that you don't already know Mr. Talisman, since he's such an "uncle" of the Jewish community. He's the one who organized and paid for a week's visit to Washington in 1990 for both me and Arno Paříik.

If you speak to him, give him my regards and somehow let him know that I never forget his help and encouragement and I very much appreciate them.

Your visit made me very happy, and once again, I have to express my admiration of your work on three dorot (generations) of your family...

Ahoj, hi, shalom,

Jiří

In 2000, *Where She Came From: A Daughter's Search for her Mother's History* was published in Czech translation as *Nalezená minulost.* I returned to Prague several more times and, each time, Jiří and I spent time together. Apart from the letter above, he never once mentioned his finances.

In 2005, I gave a reading at the Prague home of the American Ambassador to the Czech Republic and begged Jirka to attend the formal reception. After I asked him to stand up to be acknowledged as an important contributor, he complained that I was creating a "cult of personality" around him. He soon mailed me a packet drawn from his extraordinary postcard collection as a kind of commentary on our work together (it appears as chapter 17 of this book).

By the spring of 2007, I had come to regard Jirka as something of a wizard who could answer any question, find any particle of data. But I discovered that he was always quick to point out what he didn't

know. When I asked whether he could find out whether one of my paternal great-grandfathers in what is now Liberec was a doctor or a wheat merchant, he wrote back in his mix of Czech, Yiddish and English:

"In this area, I'm a 100% amhoretz about this item. I know nothing about it and have nothing about it. I sent your question to an expert in Liberec and hope she replies soon..."

Jirka"

He enclosed both her name and her email.

It came as no surprise when, after I learned about the murders and looked for traces of Jirka's life and work online, I found almost nothing. Until recently, Jiří Fiedler had no Wikipedia page. When he was murdered, no one in Prague could locate a CV or interview or short bio. Jiří was allergic to self-promotion and marketing of all kinds. He was a paragon of self-effacement, self-mockery and self-deprecation.

Jirka and Helen in Olomouc, 2010.

In 2010, my husband and I met up with him in his hometown of

Olomouc, where he showed us the house in which he was born, took us up into the bell tower of the tallest church and walked us through the university grounds. He was a fabulous guide and travel companion.

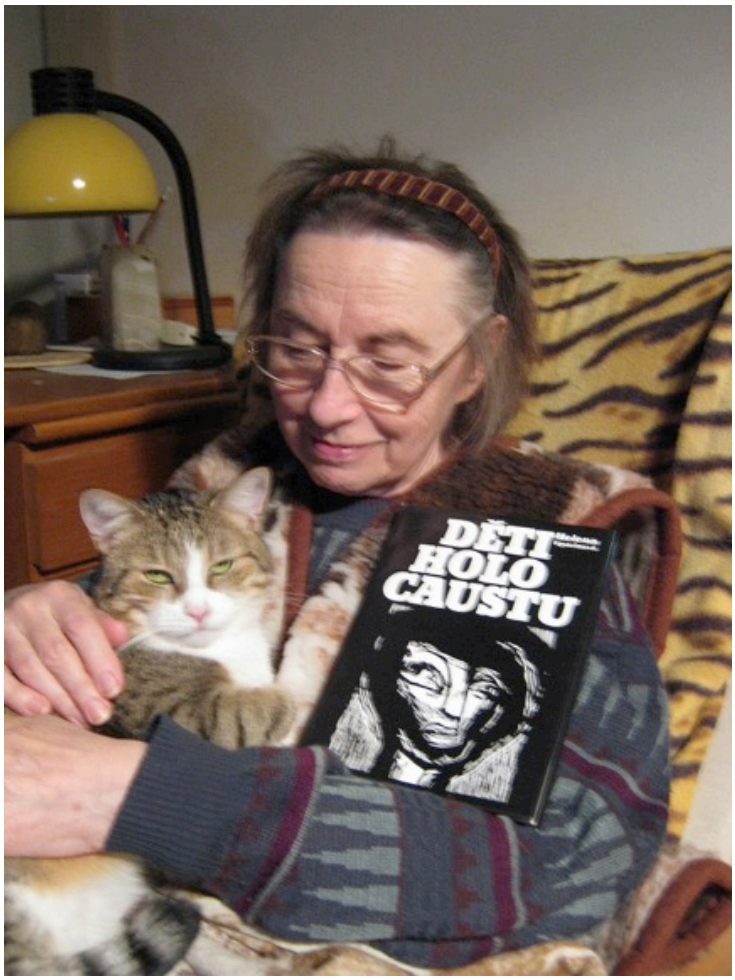
In 2013, he wrote that he had retired, and enclosed some photos:

"Dear Helen and the whole family (including Kashu):

Starting this new year I'll be a pensioner and my email address will be fiedler.xyx@email.cz. I send my best and wish you the most beautiful 2013. I'm enclosing a bad photo of our new cat (whose name isn't Kashu but Minda whose original name was Masha). I hope that the contact between our addresses will work,

Hugs and Kisses,

Jirka"



Dagmar Fiedler with Minda and *Children of the Holocaust* in Czech, c. 2013.

In 2014, just a month before he was murdered, he sent me another one of the linguistic send-ups he so loved.

"Subject: Czenglish

Dear Helenka,

You probably won't find this as tasteful as a citizen of our European country might, and maybe you don't even know the names of some of these Czech personalities. Despite this, I'm sending you this material for your possible linguistic pleasure.

Greetings from

Jirka"

A glossary of Czenglish attached to Jirka's last email to Helen

Living as I do now in Lexington, Massachusetts, so far away from Prague, it's possible to pretend that Jirka is still alive and still trying to organize his voluminous files.

I have learned more actual facts about Jiří Fiedler's life in the process of assembling this memorial book than I ever learned from Jirka himself. His unsolicited letter to me turned out to be typical: he was a modest man. But although I didn't know the details of his biography, I knew we shared values and a complicated cultural history. Not until his murder did I give much thought to the way he

had managed to hold onto his humanity, self-respect, and basic decency under two of the most brutal periods of totalitarianism in the twentieth century.

It was always clear to me that he had done so with grace and a good measure of mischief. He carved out an idiosyncratic life on his own terms, and created not only a unique body of research, but a community – as evidenced in this book of tributes – that reaches across many borders.

The people who have remembered him in the following chapters – in Czech, English and Hebrew – volunteered their time as have their translators. Each gives us a slightly different view of the man who was our friend. For me, his life and work are a daily inspiration.

Chapter 2

~ A unique colleague, by Leo Pavlát ~

I first met Jiří Fiedler on October 1, 1975. I remember the exact date because on that day, I started working at my first job, in the department of artistic and educational literature of the children's and young adult book publisher Albatros in Prague.

Leo Pavlát in the office he shared with Jiří Fiedler for 15 years. Behind him is one of Fiedler's photographs of Jewish cemeteries.

I had just turned twenty-five; he was just over 40. No more than a week had passed when Mr. Fiedler — we addressed one another formally — brought me a typewritten text.

"I translated this for you," he explained. The few pages that he handed me bore the title "Charter of the Organization for the Liberation of Palestine." I read it and told him that the people who wrote it were seeking the destruction of Israel.

Mr. Fiedler — and only in retrospect did I realize how attentively and mischievously he was watching my reactions — responded that the Palestinians were fighting against Israeli aggression, and that Israel was actually an artificial and, moreover, colonial nation.

I couldn't contain myself. I started analyzing the conflict in the Middle East and the causes of the Six-Day War (for Israel, a

defensive war) but Mr. Fiedler didn't seem to be listening. He was checking me out, somewhat mockingly, and I realized that I had just undergone a test of political reliability and passed it.

After the Soviet invasion of August, 1968 and Gustáv Husák's ascent to power, it was advisable — and not only at work — to know who, as we then said, it was possible "to talk to," and in whose presence not to speak frankly. I only later realized that Jirka had tested me by means of Israel and only afterwards suggested that we address one another in the familiar form. He evidently had developed his own method of sniffing people out.

I spent 15 years working at Albatros — until 1990, when after the fall of the Communist regime, I served for four years at the Czechoslovak Embassy — after 1993, the Czech Embassy — in Israel. During those 15 years, I spent most of my time in one room with Jirka. We sat across from each other and started our working day over tea with an unchanging ritual: reading the Communist daily *Rudé Právo* (Red Justice), to which our editorial department at Albatros was obliged to subscribe. Every day began with our exchange of derisive comments about the lies, half-truths, and manipulation of information which that paper published.

Jiří Fiedler reading "Red Justice" in the Albatros office

Jiří was an excellent colleague, a perfect stylist when I was trying to solve an especially hellish problem in a manuscript, a perceptive debater in finding a solution to a publishing puzzle.

In the first years that we shared an editorial office, he was doing

a lot of translating from the Polish and Serbo-Croatian, so that, thanks to him, I read wonderful authors I had no clue even existed. He also introduced me to many of his former classmates at university, among them some black-listed writers, translators and critics, who came to visit him.

He was the one who suggested to me that his friend, translator Dušan Karpatský (then banned by the regime) would be the best possible author for the proposed literary dictionary *A Small Labyrinth of Literature,* that I was to edit. When the dictionary came out in 1982, under the name of our mutual friend, Viktor Kudělka, it caused a commotion both because of its concept, and because it ignored many regime-approved authors.

In 1988, Jirka was the editor of my own book for young adults, *Tajemstvi knihy, The Secret of a Book,* about the history of letters, print, books and their destiny. In our circumstances (1970-1989), when caution and fear of a daring word had conspired to create a more reliable censor than the regime, he and I agreed that the history of the book was precisely the place where one should discuss freedom, morality, and the fear of powerful and suppressed thoughts.

Jirka was one of those people who, even in the most adverse political circumstances, always acted decently, professionally, and didn't allow himself to be intimidated. Two examples: Sometime in the second half of the 1980s, one of the few members of the Communist Party at the publishing house invited both of us to attend the May Day parade. I say "invited," but she was holding a notebook and pen as she stood in our office, to record our response. There was silence. "So. Are you going?" she said impatiently. At that moment, Jirka, always a gentle man, whom, until then, I'd never heard raise his voice, abruptly pushed back his chair, stood up and sharply criticized the "incivility of pretending to invite us, but actually spying on and informing on us."

Jirka was also the person who, in the spring of 1989, brought me *Několik vět (A Few Sentences),* the anti-regime petition, to sign. Our names — like those of hundreds of other people — didn't escape the notice of the Secret Police. That interest in us dated from an earlier time. In my case, because at the end of the 1970s, I began to be active in the Jewish community in Prague, joining the circle of people around the dissident writer Karol Sidon. That interest in me only deepened when I got married and became the son-in-law of another dissident writer, Ivan Klíma.

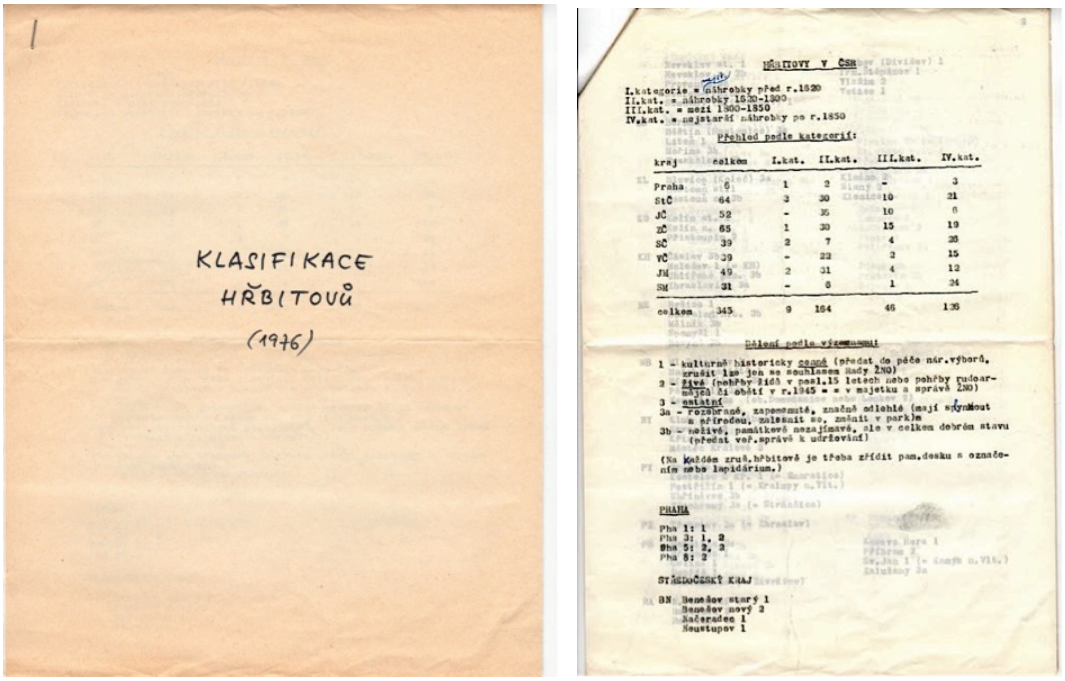
The police was already interested in Jirka because of his documentation of Jewish monuments. I found out shortly after we became close, that he systematically surveyed abandoned Jewish cemeteries, crumbling synagogues and synagogues that had been converted to warehouses, that he photographed them, and kept documents about them in an archive at his home.

It was, however, not until after the fall of Communism, when we met

again at the Jewish Museum in Prague, that I grasped how invaluable Jiří's work actually was. His knowledge and archive were so extraordinary, that but for him, a substantial portion of modern Jewish history in Bohemia and Moravia would have been lost.

Using the archive he had been carefully compiling since the 1970s, he created for the Museum a continually expanding electronic encyclopedia of Jewish communities. It has become the basic source of information on Bohemian and Moravian Jewish family and community history that countless researchers — amateur or professional, living in the Czech Republic or abroad — can now consult in private.

From the beginning of the time we worked at Albatros together, in the 1970s, he set out every year on his bicycle bound for the countryside and coming back with new material: maps, detailed notes, and photos from some former Jewish site.


KLASIFIKACE
HŘBITOVŮ
(1976)

HŘBITOVY V ČSR

I.kategorie = náhrobky před r.1620
II.kat. = náhrobky 1620-1800
III.kat. = mezi 1800-1850
IV.kat. = nejstarší náhrobky po r.1850

Přehled podle kategorií:

kraj	celkem	I.kat.	II.kat.	III.kat.	IV.kat.
Praha	6	1	2	-	3
StČ	64	3	30	10	21
JČ	52	-	35	10	6
ZČ	65	1	30	15	19
SČ	39	2	7	4	26
VČ	39	-	22	2	15
JM	49	2	31	4	12
SM	31	-	6	1	24
celkem	345	9	164	46	126

Dělení podle významnosti

1 - kulturně historicky cenné (předat do péče nár.výborů, zrušit lze jen se souhlasem Rady ZNO)
2 - širší (pohřby židů v posl.15 letech nebo pohřby rudoarmějců či obětí v r.1945 = v majetku a správě ZNO)
3 - ostatní
3a - rozbořené, zapomenuté, značně odlehlé (mají splynout s přírodou, zalesnit se, změnit v park)
3b - neživé, památkově nezajímavé, ale v celkem dobrém stavu (předat vnř.správě k udržování)

(Na každém zruš.hřbitově je třeba zřídit pam.desku s označením nebo lapidárium.)

PRAHA

Pha 1: 1
Pha 3: 1, 2
Pha 5: 2, 3
Pha 8: 2

STŘEDOČESKÝ KRAJ

BN Benešov starý 1
Benešov nový 2
Načeradec 1
Neustupov 1

Fiedler's inventory of Jewish cemetaries, 1976

The stories he told me about his trips testified to the suspicion of people he encountered, to their hatred, to the possibility of denunciation. Sometimes he had to pack up his camera and flee from the place he was interested in documenting; sometimes he was obliged to explain what he was doing to authorities. So rumors about him undoubtedly reached the Secret Police.

In his dealings with the police, Jirka observed the rules of the game, like those who signed Charter 77: he was doing nothing illegal; on the contrary, he was showing a concern for historical monuments, in the interest of the state.

At the same time, he was uncompromising, as evidenced by a complaint against the police he sent to the Jewish Community in Prague in November 1987. How many people at that time dared to publicly accuse the Secret Police of anti-Semitism? It was no surprise to anyone familiar with the situation back then that the representatives of the Jewish community behaved like cowards and rudely rejected him.

Before 1989, with some rare exceptions, only people other than those in official positions in the Jewish community took their religious and cultural heritage seriously: members of the *minyan*, who conducted regular religious services; activists ashamed of the obsequiousness of the Jewish Community, and, in a category by himself, Jirka. Even though he didn't belong to any Jewish organization or have any Jewish family roots, he devoted a large part of his life to Jewish culture.

I understood it as a personal expression of his Czech and humanitarian character.

All of this comes to mind when I think about Jirka, but over and above it, what I remember best is his wit, often bordering on black humor.

A typical example: I had told Jirka that I was planning to go to my father's cottage in the country over the summer. He wrote me a note in which he said he found out from the Secret Police where my father had his "hacienda" (in Přívětice). He supplied me with some of his hand-drawn maps and sketches of Jewish sites in the vicinity, with his code: the area across the border is marked as "Imperialists and their lackeys"

Key to Fiedler's map of Přívětice and its surroundings:

H — Hřbitov (cemetery) and is in green because of the grass
S — synagogue
M — modlitebna (prayer house or room),
G — ghetto, (or Jewish Street)
Z — Zámek (or castle) for orientation and context
K — Klášter (monastery)
Two circles for a town, smaller circle for small town, smallest circle for a village

There was no message or note for a colleague that he did not round off with an original saying, or with a linguistic playfulness that drew on his extensive language resources, alluding to the Communist regime with Cimrmanesque fantasy. How many times did I say to myself that Zdeněk Svěrák and Ladislav Smoljak, the creators of Cimerman, the famous fictitious character, could have found in Jirka an excellent collaborator.

Everyone who knew Jirka has his or her own stories about the tricks he played. I have even more, simply because we shared an office for so many years. Once, I was editing a book by the chief of our department, the writer Ludvík Souček. It was titled *Kdo byl kdo — Who was Who*, an encyclopedia of famous international personalities for young people. The first page-proofs came back from the printers and I noticed that in the company of the names Shakespeare, Churchill, Galileo, and Caesar, there suddenly appeared Josef Novák — the most common of Czech names.

I didn't understand what this entry was doing there but as I started reading it, I was the first person to have the honor of discovering that Josef Novák never did anything remarkable in his

entire life. That he liked to eat pork knuckle, drink beer, complain and gossip. There was a lot more about Josef Novák written in this encyclopedia style. I read the entry to the very end, where I learned what he was doing there: even those people who never do anything outstanding deserve at least symbolic recognition alongside the great, because there are many more nameless people in history than famous.

A quick look at my office-mate made clear who had written this entry. He had done so after I had readied the manuscript for the printers and left it unguarded for a few minutes. Then he waited for me to find out. I prefer not to think about what would have happened to me had I not noticed, and the entry about Josef Novák would have gone to press.

Another of Jirka's pranks: I had the habit of bringing little yogurts to work. The yogurts were in glass jars that were supposed to be rinsed and returned to the store. For each return, you got a crown. I didn't want to take only a couple of them back, so I waited until there were a few: once I decided to wait until there were 100. Meanwhile I went off on vacation. When I got back, I saw that all the windowsills of our office were decorated with my little yogurt containers. None of them were empty, however. They were all rinsed and brimming and playing off one another in a myriad of colors. For the uninitiated, Jirka put up a sign explaining the installation as art, the work of an unknown genius.

When I remember Jirka, I have to smile, even if I feel sad at the same time. May his soul be bound among the living.

Chapter 3

~ A fabulous fabulist, by Jana Štroblová ~

Jirka and I got to know each other well during our student years in the Faculty of Philosophy and Philology at Charles University during the late 1950s. He was there between 1953 and 1958; I was a year behind him. On the one hand, we were a gang of friends who went hitch-hiking together; on the other, we were students who developed a series of cultural protest actions from readings of half-forbidden poets, exhibits of half-forbidden artists to theater performances that had been closed down right after their premiere – events which Dušan Karpatský – his closest friend – describes in detail.

Jirka as a student

Jirka was famous for his unending good spirits, though he once told me that he lived in constant fear of losing people close to him, was prepared in advance for possible disaster, and that no evil could surprise him. But he skillfully hid this aspect of his personality and never let it spoil any merriment. On the contrary, he was a fabulous fabulist and accomplished prankster, the source of a lot of

entertainment. One of his pranks was to create a fictional employee named Constance Besserová and locate her in the Odeon Publishing House, where for several months people received and kept her mail.

I was able to enjoy Jirka's undying sense of humor and mystifications the most when, toward the end of the 1960s, I invited him to the Albatros publishing house to co-edit the Veronica series of booklets, which included poetry, stories, cartoons and trifles. We published it between 1967 and 1969. Originally it was supposed to have been a book for teenage girls, but we printed it more like a magazine that came out twelve times a year.

From the beginning, it had a light-hearted quality. Its mission was to teach its readers not to take themselves too seriously, holding up an intentionally distorting mirror to interviews with various fictional starlets, mocking too much concern with fashion by showing ridiculous imaginary models, etc. For Jirka, this was the perfect job. He even created an advice column in which he often cited the Language of Flowers (an elaborate medieval system of symbols in which flowers replaced words, e.g. a white rose meant I am innocent; a yellow rose, I am jealous; an orchid, is it possible to soften your heart?) and various love manuals. He signed the column with a woman's name.

Unfortunately, this kind of merriment did not last long. All sorts of fun ended with the Russian invasion of 1968. Many projects were canceled. I lost my job. Jiří continued to work for Albatros but in the editorial department for arts and education.

Jana Štroblová and Jirka

After that time, we did not see one another often but when we ran into each other, our encounters were warm. Dagmar wasn't very gregarious, though we all liked her very much. We got together a few times for our children's birthdays. We handed down a crib and some clothes for their sons, which we, in turn, had been given by someone else. None of us were particularly well-off at that time.

My husband, who had also been part of our student crowd, ran into Jirka shortly before his murder and they agreed that all of us would get together soon. It didn't happen. And he never received the postcard portrait of an ancient lady in a wide-brimmed hat which Jarká, another friend from our old crowd, sent him in honor of his lifelong passion of collecting old postcards and annotating them for the entertainment of his friends. The world is a much sadder place without him.

Chapter 4

~ My lifelong friend Jirka, by Dušan Karpatský ~

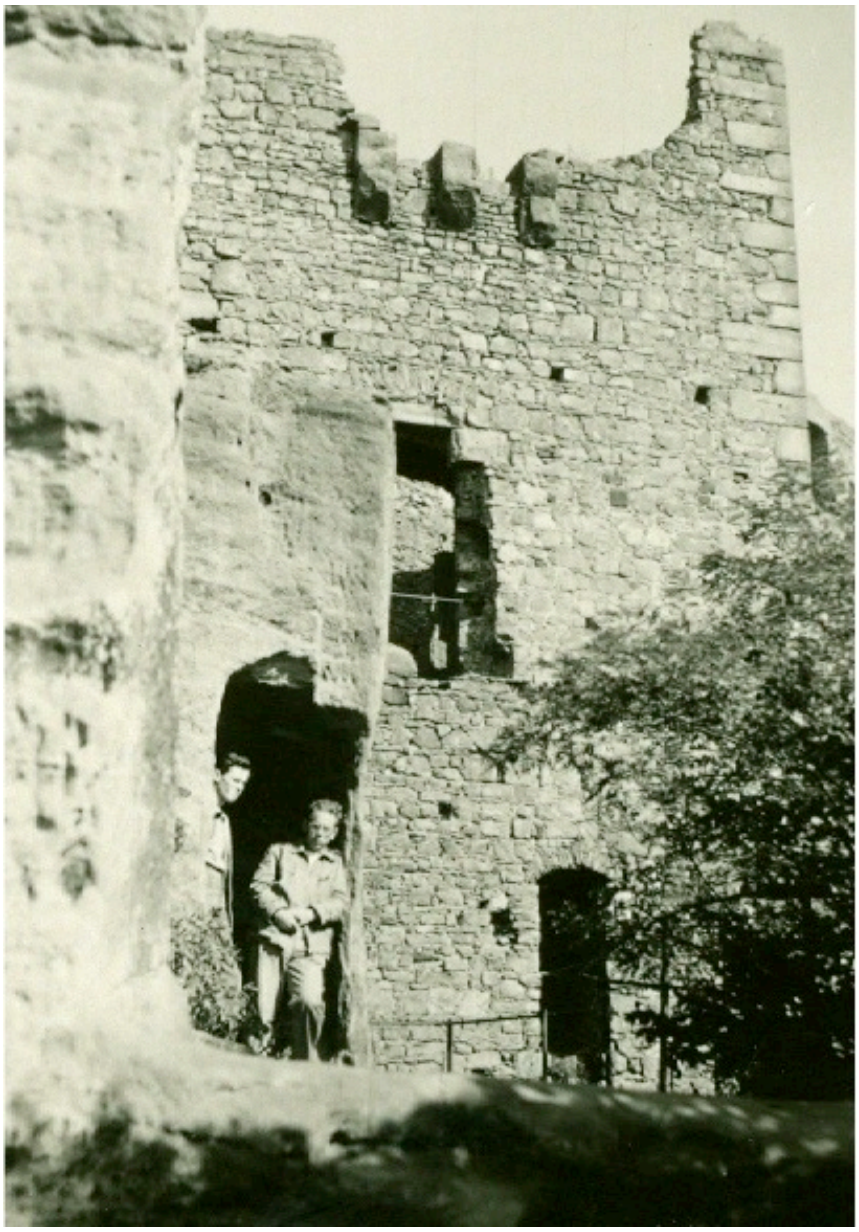
At close to 80 years of age, one might seem to have developed a certain degree of resistance to bad news arriving more and more often. But the message I received on February 23, 2014 truly horrified me. "*Our dad (Jiří Fiedler 1935) and mom fell victim to a dreadful crime,*" read the note signed by the sons of my lifelong friend. Jirka and Dagmar were murdered in their apartment in the Prague neighbourhood of Stodůlky. The questions of when, how and why remained partially unanswered a year after the funeral. But regardless of what the authorities determined, a terrible wound will be left open. How could anyone kill two such kind and good people?

Jirka was more than a brother to me. Since the autumn of 1953, when we were lucky enough to become students at the Faculty of Philosophy and Arts of Charles University, we spent a lot of time together — and not only going to lectures and seminars.

Jirka *(left),* his first wife, Dagmar Zemanová, and Dušan Karpatský

For some reason, we took our secondary field of studies, then named Serbo-Croatian, more seriously than our primary fields. First of all, there were only three of us studying it that year. And secondly, our official relations with Yugoslavia were developing in a way that resembled the title of one of Lenin's works — *One step forward, two steps back* — so sometimes it was not easy to make things related to our field public. Led by our practical language teacher Vladimír Togner, we began our attempts at publication quite early. The satirical weekly magazine *Dikobraz* published the first result of our efforts — the Czech translation of Branko Ćopić's short story *Afrikáni*, in June 1956. We signed it with our shared pen name of Jidu Kafić, but Dikobraz would not accept that. In their wisdom, they signed the translation with my name and send the royalty check to Jirka.

But that did not spoil our relations. We kept on using our pen name almost all the time, for our quips and pranks and the stories we took turns inventing when our teachers' explanations were a bit too dull. Our nonsensical efforts of those times are evidenced by the two samizdat volumes, *Opera Skoro Omnia* (*Almost Complete Works*) and *Hustě chumelilo (It Snowed Heavily).* Jirka was tireless making up various puns. Deep in my archive, I still keep various ingeniously crafted banners of non-existent partisan detachments and pictures from the life of Constantia Besserová, a mysterious person born in Jirka's head long before the (fictional Czech) Jára Cimrman came to life.



Dušan and Jirka in 1956 in Český ráj, the so-called Bohemian Paradise

In the “decisive” year of 1956, we were especially active: we took two hitchhiking trips (to Slovakia and to the Bohemian Paradise) and, together with the indologist Vladimír Miltner, we also eagerly worked on our wall poster originally called “..?.....!” *[sic]* and repunctuated it to its later title of “?!” *[sic]*, which eventually made the dean haul us over the coals and nearly expel us from school.

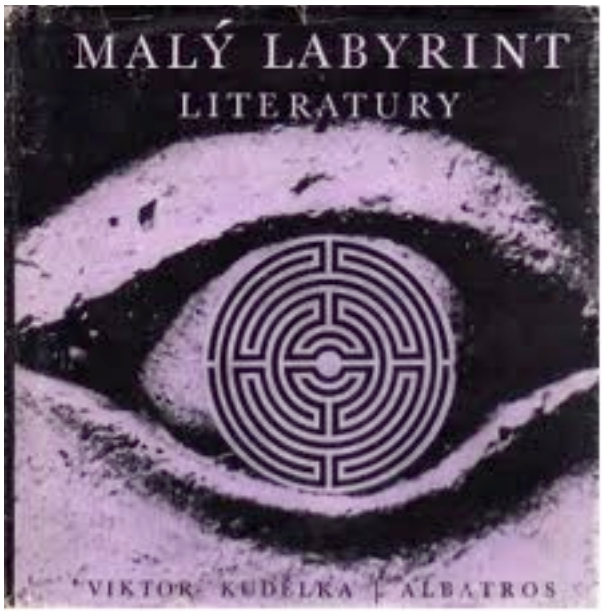
Left to right: Vladimír Miltner, Dušan and Jirka.

Towards the end of our studies, we both embarked on translating in earnest, supported by our “publishing mother,” Irena Wenigová, in every possible way. She was then only a few years older but declared us to be her sons, which strengthened our brotherly relation even further. Our collaboration with Odeon, where she worked as an editor, lasted until the publishing house, which was never properly appreciated, closed.

This collaboration gave birth to Jirka’s translation of Vjekoslav Kaleb’s collection of short stories *Stairs and Nothing Else* (*Schody a nic víc*, 1966), Danilo Kiš’s *Pages from the Velvet Album* (*Ze sametového alba*, 1974), Petar Kočić’s dramatic satires *The Badger on Tribunal* and *Trials* (*Jezevec před soudem* and *Souzénium*, 1978), Miroslav Krleža’s three-volume allegorical novel *Banquet in Blitva* (*Banket v Blitánii*, 1975) and book of novellas *One Thousand and One Deaths* (*Tisíc a jedna smrt*, 1966), Dragoslav Mihailović’s novel *Failure* (*Prohra*, 1979), Borislav Pekić’s novel *The Defense and the Last Days* (*Obhajoba a poslední dny*, 1983), the dramatic *War Triptych*

(*Válečný triptych*) of Ivan Raos included in the anthology *Five Croatian Plays* (*Pět charvátských her*, 1966) and other of Raos's "triptychs" released by the Dilia publishing house, and many other texts included in the comprehensive anthology of Husein Tahmiščić *Poetry of Sarajevo* (*Sarajevo, město poezie*, 1971). Apart from his work for Odeon, Jirka also released other splendid translations: the unfinished novel of Ivo Andrić *Omer-Pasha Latas* (*Omerpaša Latas*, 1981) and a selection from Branislav Nušić's autobiography *Thirteen Loves, Fourteenth Death* (*Třináct lásek, čtrnáctá smrt*, 1974).

As an editor of educational fiction for the Albatros publishing house, he gave me – in 1976 a more or less "prohibited person" – the task of compiling the *Small Labyrinth of Fiction* (*Malý labyrint literatury*) released in 1982 and 1983 under the name of Viktor Kudělka and edited by the future director of the Jewish Museum in Prague, Leo Pavlát, which was not only of significant financial help for me in those difficult times, but also led me to one of my biggest "literary adventures".



Karpatský's *Small Labyrinth of Fiction* (*Malý labyrint literatury*)

After the revolution in 1989, Jirka could finally dedicate himself fully to his old love, for the sake of which he travelled hundreds of kilometers, and that resulted in the book *Jewish Monuments in Bohemia and Moravia,* published in 1991. Jirka's ongoing work was disrupted by his senseless tragic death.

In his funeral oration at the Motol Crematory in Prague, Leo Pavlát spoke for my soul when he said: "There are many of us here from the museum and the Albatros publishing house, friends from student years, and all of us have their image of Jirka in their souls: his

knowledge, strength of opinion even in bad times, his helpfulness, friendship, his special sense of humour. This all remains a memory after the crime the Fiedlers fell victim to. We only feel grief now. But in spite of it we are also grateful for having known Jirka and being able to be close to him. We feel grief for his wife Dagmar, too. The memory of the righteous is blessed."

Two letters from Jirka to Dušan Karpatský (1956, 2013)

Belgrade, 14 October 1956

Dear Dušan!

I could write you a whole book but to save your life I will limit myself to a short letter.

First of all, I am sending my most passionate greetings to you and Jiřinka and the boys and all maidens and semi-maidens.... to this whole narrow-minded world of ours.

I can see you sitting at school sleeping, yawning, and drudging away at the monstrous hydra of the paper, and I feel for you heartily (i.e. from the very bottom of my heart). Sorry I cannot reinforce the frontlines.

Here, everything is awesome. I am sure you would be interested in many things but it is not common to send intelligence reports in ordinary letters (diplomatic pouches are more suitable for that).

I will start with the general political issues. Briefly: The Czechoslovak Socialist Republic and the German Democratic Republic are the last Eastern European states with no friendly relations with Yugoslavia. They do like us here, though. They would be happy to hear the economy is worse in our country but it is unfortunately not so.

General coldness and derisiveness towards Russians and Americans. They do not seem to understand our slogans like: "The Soviet child is our example." Radio interference and other forms of preservation are alien to them. People openly saying "I am not a Communist and will never be." are allowed to study at universities. There are many more police officers in Belgrade than back home. They are commonly laughed at and very unpopular.

Unemployment is particularly striking in Belgrade. Depending on their qualifications, the jobless are paid about 50% of the wages they would be getting for work.

Newsstands in the streets sell: New York Herald Tribune, Life, Post, Les lettres françaises, l'Unità, Известия, Литер. газета, Правда, *numerous Italian, West German and other magazines. There are public American and British reading rooms, furnished just like PIK. I try*

not to look in the bookshop windows; it is so painful when one is short on cash. It is just impossible to list all the books they have here. Bookshops are mostly focused on the Western world. Nearly no Soviet authors, not any of ours. Russian classics are abundant. 80% of the films are Hollywood-made, both bad and good, sort of similar to the good and bad Soviet films we have at home. Also some French, English, Italian, Mexican, Swedish, Polish, Czechoslovak and Russian films are shown and there is a children's film festival (10 days long) going on in 4 cinemas at the same time. Quite a few of our films are being shown (The Emperor's Nightingale/Císařův slavík, The Prairie Aria/Árie prérie, *etc.*) *and* The Red Baloon/Červený balónek. *Unfortunately, they will be showing it in three days when I am in Sarajevo.*

It is difficult to calculate the real exchange rate of the dinar to the crown. The difference to our grocery prices is other than the one to industrial goods or the wages. It could be 1 Czechoslovak crown for 25 to 30 dinars. (...)

I am staying in one of the suburban dorms. It is free and I get 3 meals a day. The hospitality is enormous. I have already had various Oriental tidbits, the best being baklava and spritzer (a Belgrade speciality made of lemonade and boza).[1] *Chocolate, coffee etc. are five times cheaper than in our country.*

Serbo-Croatian is a Slavic language. Those who do not speak it (like me, for instance) can try Russian, German, Hungarian and so on. The local people speak so fast that my ears can hardly catch half of what they are saying. In Belgrade, they only accept Serbian. Croatian is either obscure to them, or sounds ridiculous and some even hate it. They say it is the other way round in Croatia. Boga mi, *those Serbs can swear!*[2] *Their curses make the hills green and the trees blossom.*

My dear Dušan, I am sure you are already dying of ove[3] *jumbled thoughts of mine. I know I am writing pell-mell and probably too much but I do not want you to complain later that I left you with no information and news. (...)*

Sa toplim pozdravom[4]

Jirka

Prague 7 February 2013[5]

(...) For a while we've watched a little show under our windows. Mrs. Ivanka Zemanová with her daughter Kačenka live in the neighbouring residential block (connected to ours on two floors for fire protection reasons) and I guess her husband has his permanent address here, too, as he voted (for himself) in our district in the

presidential election. We share the same voting room, curtain and box... On election day, I was throwing away some garbage when a bunch of reporters taking pictures and shooting videos surrounded me on my way to the garbage container because the candidate with his family were just leaving the building next door. He posed for them for a while and then walked off slowly, with dignity and nodding his head to and fro, heading to the voting room. I walked right after him at the same pace (I could not pass him) carrying my garbage and the reporters were stepping back and jumping aside. This way we hit the headlines and became parts of history together. (I expected Miloš to ask, "And how are Dušan and Ema?", but he didn't).[6] We now have those bodyguards' cars changing in shifts under our windows more or less discreetly and sometimes we catch sight of the winner being taken home carefully. In the mornings, we can regularly witness another sophisticated ritual when the secret agents are loading the daughter Kačenka into a limousine and driving her somewhere to school... They will surely be moving somewhere better and safer very soon. Dagmar said, "So I will never meet that lady in the supermarket nor in the subway." (I did not see what she looked like so I would not be able to identify her even now). But thanks to the victorious election our sidewalk has been cleaned more often for a week now and even burglars seem to avoid our houses temporarily due to the increased presence of gunslingers. Krleža would probably have written a short story about that...

I salute you with a delayed voting motto: "chumps can only elect chumps".

Jirka

Chapter 5

~ A truly holy man, by Mark Talisman ~

My involvement with Jiří Fiedler can be traced back to June of 1963, when I went to work for Congressman Charles Vanik in Washington, D.C.

Congressman Vanik was the only Czech-American in Congress at the time; he represented a district in my hometown of Cleveland, Ohio. He was a popular and progressive politician, whose family had emigrated to the United States from Rokycany. His father and his grandfather had been the local butchers, and he still had relatives there whom he visited yearly. He also had a long-standing interest in human rights during the years of the Cold War.

I became Congressman Vanik's chief of staff and, in 1968, organized his first trip to Israel, stopping in Prague. I wanted to revisit Josefov, the Jewish Quarter of Prague.

When we arrived in what was still the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic, Congressman Vanik was treated with the tender loving care reserved for the only U.S. Representative of Czech descent in Congress. To sweeten the visit, the Czechoslovak officials arranged a special visit to the Maisel Synagogue for a night tour of the interior by Dr. František Kafka, who appeared in a white lab coat, rattling a large iron ring of ancient-looking large keys, one of which opened the heavy front doors of the synagogue.

Inside the Maisel Synagogue in the 1960s *(photo: Jewish Museum, Prague)*

Mr. Vanik and I were led through this remarkable building, filled as it was with so many of the unique collections of kiddush cups, torah finials, large and small menorahs, unique clocks — and the spoils of the Holocaust, collected and catalogued as the Jews of Bohemia and Moravia were being deported. I was forever changed by this visit. When one sees 1,400 torah *yadim* in drawer after drawer or several thousand kiddush cups most inscribed with family and individual names, the true scope of the Holocaust comes into sharp focus.

There had been plans to exhibit the collection of the Jewish Museum before 1967, but the Six-Day War brought them to a halt. Then the Soviets invaded Czechoslovakia in 1968. For the next 15 years, I negotiated directly with representatives of the CSR to create and produce a large exhibition.

In April of 1982, an agreement was reached between the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic and the United States to create what we ultimately called *The Precious Legacy: Judaic Treasures from the State Jewish Museums in Prague*.

A poster for The Precious Legacy exhibit

The work was done under the orthodox Communist regime, which was keenly interested in its outcome. We worked closely with Dr. Bedřich Nosek, Dr. Vladimír Sadek, and dozens of Czech and American scholars and researchers. We also became aware that the exhibit was providing employment to a large number of non-museum people who spent days following and reporting on us. Even praying in the Old New Synagogue had its risks, as we found out after 1989. Rabbi Daniel Mayer, privy to all our conversations at Sabbath dinners, turned out to be a source for the Secret Police, as did our partner Dr. Nosek.

It was in that mistrustful context that I first met Jiří Fiedler. A diminutive man, he introduced himself at the kosher restaurant during one of our visits to the Jewish Quarter. That restaurant was the place where the then few American tourists could meet members of the local Jewish community and eat homemade gefilte carp, hot soup, and *flanken*.

He was not Jewish, Jiří told me when I asked. He explained that he rode an old bicycle with a saddle basket over the rear wheel, stuffed with tools that included his notebooks, his camera (a simple early Kodak), film, a bottle of water and a lunch pail.

He set off on a carefully researched itinerary on the weekends. Everywhere he biked, he told me, there were former Jewish buildings. Most had been converted to some other use many times over, so it took detective work to find an older person, old enough to remember whether it had been, in fact, a Jewish building. He would then go to the local repository of records to check. Then he photographed and added to his files this building, its documentation, the community, the cemetery.

Jiří had found burial plots in empty fields and under the cement slabs of Soviet-era blocks of buildings. He mapped cemeteries that would have been lost to history but for his work. One such site is

buried under the huge iron legs of a broadcasting transmission tower which scars the skyline of Prague.

He once explained his work as an effort to expiate the guilt he felt on behalf of his nation, for what it had allowed to happen under the Nazi occupation to its Jewish community — of which, as he reminded me, less than ten percent survived. He did what he did so that the memory of the Jewish community would not be totally obliterated, as the people were. I had never met anybody like Jiří and, for a while, doubted that he was for real.

Eventually, he became one of my heroes and I regarded him as among the purest souls I had ever met. Both Jiří and his amazingly tolerant wife, Dagmar! She was the only one who might have been able to stop her spouse from courting disaster for himself and his family. It couldn't have been more provocative to the Communist state.

Dagmar was supportive of her man, but quiet. When I asked how she felt about his passion, she replied, "And what would you have me do, Mark? He is at peace personally and most content when he returns from his forays all over the country. When he can't go he's unhappy."

Dagmar and Jiří were a team and she was stoic. She understood that, if she tried to deter his efforts, he would have had a safe, dependable and dull life, but would have died inside, as so many around him.

Their choice became my personal standard as we were subject to indignities at the Prague airport and our hotel rooms were ransacked. I was paranoid at being followed by a white Škoda with a license plate reading ACE1 as I recall, and by two sets of people — always the same two — following us on foot as we moved around Prague. I was always imagining what Jiří had to undergo and the calm with which he did so.

He wanted to collect his documents into a book but there was no way of doing that until after the Velvet Revolution. I worried about endangering Jiří and his work by meeting with him. He had connections all over the world. He engaged in lengthy discussions at coffee shops. Sometimes he even invited people to his small apartment in the vast block of flats where outsiders were noticed fast, and reports of their visits sent to higher-ups. I also worried about the financial toll that his hobby was taking on his family.

Throughout this intense time, Jiří was our blithe spirit, never expressing concern for himself, although sometimes worrying about what it might mean for Dagmar.

Then the inevitable finally happened. Jiří usually set out on his trips to the countryside from the last stations of the Prague subway. He was not the only person to bring his bike on the Metro and probably not the only one who was called in by the Secret Police after inadvertently leaving a package unattended.

It was in 1987, two years before the Velvet Revolution. Jiří told

me he was waiting to board his train home. His briefcase was filled with notes and papers and undeveloped film. He steadied his bike with his right hand, and hooked the handle of his briefcase on the handlebars. In his left he held a large bundle of kindling for the grilling which he loved. He was a master of being able to maneuver the very fast, steep escalator, and time his move into the subway car.

This time, because of the bundle of kindling, he tossed his briefcase in the subway car first, then tried to move the rest of his cargo. But the subway doors closed and the train moved off. He quickly understood that his briefcase would surely be handed over to the police, then to the Secret Police, "the inquisitors," as he called them. He was right. A few days later, the call came, a voice telling him where and when to appear two days hence for a "discussion".

Jiří told me in great detail about this interrogation. An officer was ushered into the room. "You would not believe the medals on his chest. There was a backless stool on which I was told to sit. The assistant pulled over a bare hanging light bulb right in front of my eyes. For three and a half hours we had our discussion."

As I recall, Jiří mustered his real strength and responded to all the harsh questioning by asking if "the Captain" had read the constitution of Czechoslovakia. He cited the various articles guaranteeing his right to exercise his basic freedom of expression, and to simply document the history of the Jewish people, their meeting places and cemeteries.

He asked why the Captain was against such an activity after so many of Czechoslovakia's Jews had been murdered by the Nazis. If you persist, Jiří told him, I will file a complaint against you and your manner with me today. Jiří Fiedler wrote this letter to the leadership of the Jewish Community [Editor's note: Leo Pavlát provided this correspondance]:

Prague, November 29th, 1987

Representatives

Jewish Community Council of Czechoslovakia

Gentlemen,

I would like to bring the following matters to your attention.

On November 25th of this year, I arrived in one of the National Security buildings on Bartholomew Street. I had received an invitation and was met by a man dressed in civilian clothes who questioned me. He introduced himself as Captain Kučera and, from his comment that he had an interest in Zionism, I deduced that he was an employee of the State Security System.

During our conversation we discussed three subjects.

1. Despite the fact that the initial one was my long interest in the history of defunct Jewish communities and their immovable assets, Captain Kučera quickly steered the conversation toward questions of Zionism. I commented that both Jewish religion and the history of defunct communities were distinctly separate concepts from Zionism and that I did not think they should be considered together. Captain Kučera indicated that Judaism and Zionism were closely connected and mutually dependent, hence by rights, they should be explored simultaneously.

2. Captain Kučera asked if I was a believer. (Religious affiliation has been neither questioned nor officially documented in this country since the 1950's. Emphasis has been placed repeatedly upon every citizen's right to privacy in religion. The State on principle, does not document religion.)

3. The following subject of our discussion was, in my opinion, the most serious. Captain Kučera asked me whether I was "of Jewish origin". I objected and replied that the last and most recent individuals who had broached this subject had been the Nazis.

Captain Kučera explained that at his place of employment, it was considered general practice to describe persons of "Jewish" or "non-Jewish" origin. The reasoning, he continued, was the existence in this country, of many individuals who neither identify with nor believe in Judaism, but are still of "Jewish origin" by birth.

This was not the first time that I had been questioned about my religious background by a member of our State Security and I am also aware that other summoned persons have been questioned similarly by our police.

I cannot help but wonder whether this labeling by our security forces of persons of "Jewish" or "non-Jewish" origin could be indicative of a primitive and dangerous suspicion for the potential in some of our thus labeled fellow citizens, for hostility or other undesirable, even criminal tendencies...

In short, I consider these practices to be symptomatic of antisemitism and racism.

It has been my intention to acquaint you with these shameful instances, so that you, the representatives of the Council of Jewish Religious Communities could use your strength and reputation to the best of your ability and within the spirit of our democratic and ethical traditions, to resist and prevent the occurrence of such undesirable practices.

Greetings

Jiří Fiedler

Brdičkova 1916

155 00 Prague 5

Ten days, later, Jiří received the following response:

Prague, December 8th 1987

Mr. Fiedler,

This letter is in response to yours of November 29th in which you draw our attention to events that occurred in your presence at one of the National Security Buildings on Bartholomew Street on November 25th 1987.

We considered your information very seriously and have therefore decided to review the events that preceded it. We must inform you that in our opinion, your letter was quite biased. You neglected to mention certain facts that, had you communicated them, would have cast a completely different light upon the whole matter.

We believe that, while you are not a member of any of our Jewish communities, you feel strongly that there should be no indication or signs of racism or anti-Semitism in our country. These, as you mention in your letter, are undemocratic, undignified phenomena, devoid of any socialist ethics or teachings.

At the same time however, the question arises, as to whether the wording of your own letter, forwarded by you, to additional addressees, might not result in the exact opposite impressions in the minds of those recipients.

You mention that you were invited to the building on B. Street because of your long-term interest in the history of defunct Jewish communities and their immovable assets. According to our information, you were merely called upon to collect your bag and identity card, after you had notified the department on Bartholomew Street about their loss. Had you intended during your visit to further a good cause, you might have mentioned by way of background, the events that had preceded it.

Let us now contemplate real manifestations of anti-Semitism.

You are aware that many of those of us who are members of Czechoslovak Jewish communities have survived the most horrific period of human history, namely World War II. It was a time during which unspeakable horrors were perpetrated upon the Jews; they were dying by the millions in Nazi concentration camps and gas chambers.

But we must strongly disagree with the comparison, in your letter, of our police officer who, as he was returning your lost bag, questioned you about your Jewish identity, with the methods of the Gestapo during the Nazi occupation of our country! Such a comparison is demagogic, inappropriate and inapplicable. We assure you that there is not a single Czechoslovak citizen for whom the Jewish faith

is a reason for persecution or any other form of abuse.

You yourself are able to conclude how many Jewish communities have disappeared because of those very tragedies that affected them during World War II. No one, to our knowledge, is preventing you from performing the research of your choice here in the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic.

It is true that anti-Semitic tendencies did not end with the conclusion of World War II. Many of us were aware of it here in this country in the 1950's, but those years are far behind us.

There are no demonstrations of anti-Semitism here now, similar to those in Austria, France and elsewhere. On the contrary, we consider our organizations here in the Czechoslovak Republic to be the guarantors of a peaceloving life and future for us and our children.

Mr. Fiedler, we consider your letter to be an active attempt to initiate a campaign within Czechoslovakia, against our state organizations and against our whole political system. That is a goal with which we cannot possibly agree.

Representing the leadership of CJRC

František Kraus *Bohumil Heller, Chair*

Secretary

Jiří did not leave it there. He immediately wrote another letter:

December 14,1987

Council of Jewish Religious Communities

Czech Socialist Republic

110 0 Prague 1 — Old Town, Maisel Street 18

Gentlemen,

I feel duty bound to respond to your letter #873/87 of December 8th 1987, signed, respectively, by the Chair, Mr. B. Heller and Secretary, Mr. F. Kraus of the CJRC.

I was neither waiting for nor expecting an answer to my letter of November 29th 1987, but in view of your response, I sense I must contact you one more time in an attempt to redirect some of your misconceived statements.

I deliberately did not mention the loss or return of my bag in my recent letter because I did not wish to complicate or prolong it unnecessarily with this insignificant episode. The question was only marginally related to the contents of my letter and I do not think

that it would have "cast a completely different light" (as you wrote) onto the whole matter. The only significant point to consider might have been that the invitation that I received, as well as the few other items found in the bag, may have drawn the attention of the police to my interest in Jewish subject matter. The return of the bag could then have been a coincidental reason or opportunity for a member of the State Security to have a formal conversation with me.

An uninitiated reader of your letter may have received the impression (from your words) that I had been summoned to Bartholomew Street. In reality I had been politely invited, by telephone; that a member of the State Police had been exploring my connection to the Jewish religion, in reality the staff person was dressed in civilian clothes, while the uniformed policeman had left the room, or — worse — that I had been comparing interrogations by the Gestapo with the activities of our current authorities. Not a single one of such ideas or thoughts is expressed or reflected in my letter, nor did they enter my mind.

What you did not mention in your letter to me was the most important item and the very reason that I wrote to you in the first place, namely the question of an individual's Jewish or non-Jewish origins.

Perhaps I am overly sensitive about matters of — maybe even fictitious — racism, but be that as it may, I considered it to be my duty to draw your attention to them. I had no intention of criticizing the entire state security system.

I wondered whether it is possible that perhaps isolated individuals in supervisory or didactic roles could be influencing their students in undesirable directions.

As for the conclusion of your letter, in which you accuse me of initiating a "campaign" against our organizations and the political system throughout our country, I consider such an accusation utterly unjustified and quite absurd.

Greetings,

Jiří Fiedler

Nearly three months passed and then Jiří received this letter, cutting off all possibility of working at or with the resources of the Jewish Community:

Prague, 4th March 1988

Mr Jiří Fiedler

Brdičkova 1916

155 00 Prague 5

Mr Fiedler,

The Council of Jewish Religious Communities (CJRC) responded by letter on 8.12.1987 to your complaint, submitted to them on 29th November 1987.

Copies of the complaint, as mentioned by you, in your letter, were also sent to numerous additional addressees.

Those recipients who dealt with your complaint — and, may I add, responsibly and conscientiously — have communicated back to us in agreement with the view we provided to you at the time, namely they, too, assessed your complaint as a provocation.

The CJRC dealt with this matter once more at its meeting on February 24th 1988. As a result of our deliberations, we regret to inform you that we no longer find it possible to work or deal with you (an illegible hand written word follows).

We enclose herewith an article by Václav Doležal from Rudé Právo, *in an attempt to clarify some of our views on these matters.*

We ask that you take these matters into consideration.

For the Leadership of the CJRC,

František Kraus

Congressman Vanik and I knew František Kraus and poor Mr. Heller. Kraus was a captive of the ruling party because of criminal activities he was found to be engaged in. As I was told early on, Kraus was a petty criminal caught red-handed and became their stool pigeon and harsh front-man for purposes just like this correspondence. Vanik used Kraus as an example to his colleagues of the status and state of mind of those leading the pitiful government of Czechoslovakia. This exchange was Jiří Fiedler at his best.

Jiří himself never raised the subject of his expenses. When I questioned him about how he could afford to pay for his weekly jaunts, he seemed puzzled, almost indignant. We sometimes paid him small sums of money, and helped fund the printing of his book *Jewish Sights of Bohemia and Moravia* in 1991.

As the age-old phrase says in the Jewish tradition, when a person dies, May his memory be as a blessing. What more perfect a prayer could be said for this truly holy man we all loved so much. May he and Dagmar rest in peace for their work is truly done.

Chapter 6

~ A courageous man, by Olga Hostovská ~

Jiří (Jirka) Fiedler was my older colleague from the Philological Faculty of the Charles University where I started to study in 1954. Though his specialization was Serbo-Croatian, he also dabbled in my specialization, Polish. In the politically charged year of 1956 he put up on a bulletin board his translation from the work of Polish satirist Janusz Osęka — a thought-provoking text pondering whether the question "How much is five times five?" has to have an unequivocal answer.

Olga Hostovská in the 1950s.

Fiedler's interest did not only focus on Slavic languages. He was an inquisitive philologist. Once he chanced upon a bilingual journal written in German and Yiddish and Jirka did not give up until he (like Profesor Bedřich Hrozný who pursued the secret of the Hittite language — i.e. based on comparative study) penetrated the mysteries of the language of East-European Jews.

Toward the end of the sixties, fate brought us together again at the Albatros publishing house, which was then state-run and publishing children's literature. I had been working there for some time, together with several other schoolmates from the Faculty, and Jirka became the editor of the department of literature, dealing with art and science. Surprisingly we both successfully survived the

(political) purges of 1970. I then went on maternity leave and, in 1973, I moved with my family to Italy.

Upon my return to Prague in 1980 I was employed at Albatros again, this time not as a member of the editorial board but in sales in the foreign department. I had brought back from Italy a collection of biblical fairy tales by Alberto Moravia, one of which I translated into Czech. I offered it to the journal *World Literature*. They rejected it. I offered it to the youth journal *Ohníček* [little fire]. They liked it, but said that the genre was not suitable. I also tried the theoretical journal for children's literature *Zlatý máj* [Golden May] and failed again. I mentioned it to Jirka when we met in the corridor and he told me: "Try to offer it to the Jewish Yearbook (*Židovská ročenka*) and he gave me contact information for the editor Hana Housková. She accepted my small work and published it in the Yearbook in 1983.

A couple of months later I was invited to visit the passport department at the Ministry of the Interior in Žižkov, where two employees of the Secret Police were expecting me. They chose this place to be less conspicuous for me as a person with dual citizenship. Their very first question was: "What do you have in common with the Jewish Community?" I explained to them, how my translation ended up at the Jewish Yearbook, but I kept quiet about the fact that my father, Egon Hostovský, had edited the Jewish Yearbook for some time in the 1930s, and that as a result, I didn't feel uncomfortable there. They wanted to know the name of the colleague who suggested that option to me, and I am ashamed that I was not able to tell them that it was none of their business.

Slightly later I had the opportunity to listen to Jirka's colorful account of the way his own interview at the Secret Police went. I was overcome by a surge of remorse: I felt that I had been the cause of the attention that the security organs had paid to Jirka, although the comrades might have been acquainted with his activities in other ways. Unlike me, Jirka behaved courageously and when, towards the end of the interrogation, they asked him to keep the content of the interview to himself, he answered – characteristically – "On the contrary, I will tell everyone," which he did and was even happy when he found out that the chairman of the Jewish Community allegedly declared: "If Fiedler shows up here, I myself will throw him down the stairs!"

When Jirka died, I read in one of the obits that he, in fact, was not Jewish. Of course, seen from a purely orthodox perspective, he was not, but how can anyone in our mostly atheist post-Holocaust society apply such absolutist criteria?

It was the writer Henryk Grynberg who cheered me up, when he wrote to me: anyone named Fiedler, is doubly a Jew, because *Fiedl* is a Jewish instrument and *Fiedler,* a characteristically Jewish profession.

Chapter 7

~ A man of an earlier generation, by Arno Pařík ~

Jiří Fiedler and I were brought together in the early 1980s through our mutual interest in Jewish monuments. I knew him for nearly three decades but learned very little about his private life until after his death. He never talked about it with me; we talked about our work.

Art historian Arno Pařík with colleague Jana Doleželová, circa 1984

I was always aware that we belonged to different generations. He belonged to the generation of Czechs who had been children during the war and young people during the 1950s, a generation that still had memories of the democratic First Republic of Thomas G. Masaryk. I noticed his nice way of dressing and speaking, as much as his pronounced stutter. Responsible, well-organized, enthusiastic about whatever he was doing, Jiří seemed to believe in Masaryk's idea of accomplishing small, achievable local tasks. To me, his belief in a different system than the one we lived in was key. Perhaps it was his experience of so much when he was so young that facilitated his attitude of ironic detachment towards all political regimes. I rarely heard him tell a real joke, but he was able to make a joke out of anything, often at the expense of his friends.

Jiří was born on March 4, 1935 in Olomouc where his father Dr.

Viktor Fiedler was director of the District Health Insurance Company and his mother Vlasta was a teacher. He had two younger siblings.

After the war ended in 1945, the family moved to Prague and, at eleven, Jiří was sent to the newly-established King George School of Poděbrady (a small, all-boys boarding school 30 miles east of Prague where Václav Havel, and the film-makers Miloš Forman and Ivan Passer were also students). Modeled on British boarding schools, the King George School carefully selected its students. The boys studied the arts and sciences, Latin, Greek and English, played sports, and were subject to strict discipline. After the Communists closed the school down for "class-bias," Jiří returned to Prague and graduated from another gymnasium in 1953.

That fall, he enrolled at the Faculty of Philosophy and Philology at Charles University and graduated in 1958 with a dissertation on Czech student slang. After a brief first marriage, 18 months of military service, and a second marriage to Dagmar Portychová, Jiří wound up at the Albatros Publishing House.

At the time we were introduced, Jiří shared an office with Leo Pavlát, then an editor, now the Director of the Jewish Museum. Jiří had already published his first articles about synagogues in *Český zápas,* the newsletter of the Čechoslovak Hussite Church and in *Věstník*, the publication of the Jewish Community. When I asked him if he was a member of the church, he said no. When I asked him if his family was Jewish, he also said no. I didn't press him. He disliked small talk and was a master at managing his time. We always had work issues to discuss. We sat at his desk at Albatros or I picked him up in the afternoons and we talked as we walked to the Metro together — we always worried about being overheard.

I was 12 years younger than Jiří, born just two weeks before the Communists took over in 1948. Part of my family was Evangelical Bohemian but there were also some Jewish relatives (at least two of them perished in Auschwitz). I grew up in the New Town of Prague and studied Art History at Charles University from 1968 to 1974. I wanted to work in my specialty, but I refused to join the political organizations that were then mandatory. For four years I worked as a night watchman and janitor until I was accepted as art historian at the Jewish Museum in March of 1978.

My official job was to take care of their art collection, and to catalogue the children's drawings from Terezín and works by artists of the ghetto. At the time, the Museum had no interest in anything outside the confines of its collection. But I was always interested in the historical sites, some of which I had seen during my childhood vacations in Turnov, North Bohemia. I traveled around the country to see these neglected monuments. So, of course, I heard about this man named Jiří Fiedler who had been riding around the countryside on his bicycle since the early 1970s, documenting extinct Jewish communities.

It's perhaps difficult for people who didn't live through those years in Czechoslovakia to understand why Jiří and I and others got interested in these traces of Jewish existence in the Czech lands. No one was allowed to talk about them; no one took care of them; and slowly they began to disappear with time or with deliberate help — like the Jews themselves had disappeared in the 1940s. The buildings and cemeteries had been completely neglected since the war. There were no descendants nearby to take care of them.

For us, the preservation of the Jewish heritage somehow became a symbol of the preservation of the memory of prewar times and of a different kind of society. Perhaps our interest was a form of unconscious resistance to the constraints of our unfree "socialist" society. Whether or not this is true, Jirka was the only person I knew so deeply interested in the Jewish past and willing to talk about it. In my opinion, it was his way of finding some freedom and to demonstrate against the condition of the times and the régime.

After an initial period of mutual mistrust, we found a wide range of common interests. We often traveled to forsaken Jewish cemeteries together. More and more often, Jirka would chat about them or go home to his archives and come back the next day with little sketches of cemeteries hidden in woods or overgrown fields. Twice I visited his old apartment, where he had built a floor-to-ceiling labyrinth of shelves, completely filled with boxes of card files and filing cabinets filled with documents, research literature and notes from local archivists. It was so crammed that you had no space to walk between them, and it is still a mystery to me, how he managed to build this extensive archive while holding down a full time job.

All these things made him a very interesting and attractive colleague and friend. I trusted him because he had been recommended to me by people I respected, and because he was so open and so good. Maybe I trusted him even more because he stuttered. He was risking a lot. At the time, most of the workers at the Jewish Museum were collaborating in some way with the regime. Most people didn't talk to strangers about anything — certainly not about Jews.

Over the years I discovered Jirka's curiosity about many unusual things. His father had been an amateur painter and Jirka liked primitive and naive artists like Grandma Moses. He often asked me questions about art and artists.

At Albatros, he translated dozens of titles from the Polish and Serbo-Croatian but, on his own time, he amused himself by reading obscure Yiddish newspapers like the East German *Vorwärts* and the *Sovietish Gejmland*. As a child he had produced a hand-written encyclopedia he called *Vševěd* (Know-it-All) in 40 hand-written notebooks; at Albatros, he later published the children's encyclopedia *OKO (The Eye)* of many such little books. He was, I soon learned, a passionate cyclist who had traveled all over the Republic. He kept detailed "travel diaries" of his trips from 1948 until 2007.

Related to these travels, was his interest in collecting local picture postcards. His father had collected postcard reproductions of famous art. As teenagers, Jirka and his younger brother Pavel were mainly interested in postcards of historical structures that were not depicted on official postcards. They photographed neglected sacred buildings, small chapels, synagogues, abandoned ghettos and Jewish cemeteries in the Czech countryside. They took photographs of these endangered remains, enlarged and printed them themselves, and distributed them as postcards to a limited number of like-minded enthusiasts. Jirka became known for having one of the largest collections of such postcards, many of which later appeared in a wide range of publications.

Before November of 1989, it was not possible to utilize Jirka's broad knowledge publicly. After the Velvet Revolution, he began to be a valued participant in exhibits and publications. He had begun to work on his guidebook *Jewish Sights in Bohemia and Moravia* and on our collaboration *Old Bohemian and Moravian Jewish Cemeteries* with the photographer Petr Ehl in the 1980s, before the revolution.

Jewish Sights in Bohemia and Moravia was the first book published in English by the Sefer publishing house (in 1991), with a grant from the United States, and was published in Czech a year later. As a document of art history, it is a nicely written summary of Jirka's original research and the first such complete work in Czech. The book became an invaluable source for everyone studying Jewish history. He continued his part-time research until he became a full-time employee of the Jewish Museum in 1995. After that, he earned his living from his "hobby" for the next 16 years. Later he was very critical of *Jewish Sights* and regretted that he had not included more research on more places.

I read the first proofs of *Jewish Sights* and often sent him my own articles to edit and proof-read. He was the best proof-reader I ever knew and a meticulous researcher.

In November of 1990, we were invited by the Jewish Heritage Council to participate in a conference called The Future of Jewish Monuments, in the United States, where we met experts devoted to research on Jewish sites in Germany, Holland, Alsace, England, Spain, Morocco, Greece, and Turkey, who shared challenges similar to ours. Jiří was designated "Czech Research Director" of the *Survey of historic Jewish Monuments in the Czech Republic,* published by JHC in 1995. It included a register and detailed information on 419 Jewish cemeteries and 221 remaining synagogues. While that report is a landmark document, Jirka had far more — and more detailed — data than the JHC was interested in, but participating in the conference was an opportunity to make contacts and obtain some financial support.

It was the first time either of us had been in the U.S. and we made good use of it. While I met with friends, with whom I had prepared *The Precious Legacy* exhibit, Jirka disappeared whenever he could and

made his way to the Jewish cemeteries and synagogues of Brooklyn — which he would tell me about late at night. In Washington, D.C., Mark Talisman gave us a personal tour of the White House, then took us by a special subway to the Capitol — it was like science fiction! We had never thought we would see these things with our own eyes! We toured the Library of Congress, the Lincoln Memorial and local museums.

Pařík and Fiedler in front of White House, Thanksgiving day 1990

After the Velvet Revolution, more foreign visitors came to Prague, Czech natives or descendants of Jewish families who were looking for family graves. Jirka was able to provide them with more information than the State Jewish Museum and other institutions. In October 1994, he became an employee of the Museum and worked there until December 31, 2012. He worked largely on his own, supervised only by the Museum Director. He continued to work for the museum even after his official retirement, digitizing his extensive archive. His very last work was to prepare historical texts for a new exhibit at the Meislová Synagogue of 40 Jewish communities.

In January 2008, when I turned 60 and he was 72, I had a birthday party and Jirka surprised me both by coming (late) and bringing a collection of idiosyncratic gifts that must have taken him several days to create.

Arno Pařík with his 60th birthday present

The most elaborate was a pink sun hat that I took to be Jirka's surreal vision of a happy retirement. It has a white (bridal?) veil, and is decorated with red hearts, old buttons, a teddy bear holding the Israeli flag, a toothbrush, a devil with a pitchfork, a plastic lizard, a silver Eiffel Tower pendant, and a label reading "Pilsner Urquell, Part of Czech Culture."

It's really a mixture of folk and pop art, a bit like a wedding bonnet, evoking vacation, recreation, infantile regression. Maybe it was inspired by, as he called it at the time, his own "pre-crematorial" stage of life and the false illusions of pleasure that 60-year-olds still dream of. Maybe it was his way of seeing me (a child of the 60s, compared with his own, more serious generation), as a reckless bon vivant? In any case, it's a valuable work that I now keep on display at home.

He also gave me a hideous, sleeveless dress. Painted on the front is the slogan "60 years of Struggle against Kitsch." On the back, the Mosaic Tablets with Stars of David (the symbol of the Jewish Museum in Prague) and funny Czech congratulations written in Hebrew letters. It all came in a bag from H&M marked "UNISEX — fashion for sixty-year-olds" (in Czech) on one side and "UNISEX — fashion for future seventy year-olds" (in Slovak) on the other...

Jiří Fiedler showing off his handiwork

Even at the time of his death, at 78, Jirka was conducting a far-flung correspondence using his museum email address, so that it was always possible for scholars and researchers from the Czech Republic and from abroad to ask for his professional help. He responded promptly, and often recommended the services of local specialists whom he had trained.

That possibility no longer exists and he will be very sorely missed. Fortunately, his digitized encyclopedia of Jewish communities remains. His photographs of Jewish monuments, his books, and his memory will stay with us and continue to serve future generations.

Chapter 8

~ A fellow scholar and a rare human being, by Wilma Iggers ~

I was born Wilhelmine Abeles in Horšovský Týn, Czechoslovakia in 1921 and fled to Canada in 1938, when I was 17 years old. After graduating from McMaster University, I earned my Ph.D. from the University in Chicago in Germanics and taught in several colleges and universities.

I started my research about Bohemian Jews in 1963, collecting materials through the 1960s and 1970s for the anthology *Die Juden in Böhmen und Mähren: Ein historisches Lesebuch.* It was translated into English as *The Jews of Bohemia and Moravia: A Historical Reader* but, despite my best efforts, was never published in Czech. This book examines the social and cultural history of the Jewish community in Bohemia and Moravia from the Age of Enlightenment to the middle of the twentieth century (1744 to 1952). It contains excerpts of many kinds of texts: family histories, newspaper and magazine articles, wills and letters, descriptions of life and customs, portraits of important individuals and families; stories of individuals. Practically all reflect a difficult struggle for survival.

Die Juden in Böhmen und Mähren: Ein historisches Lesebuch, published in 1986 in German and in 1992 in English.

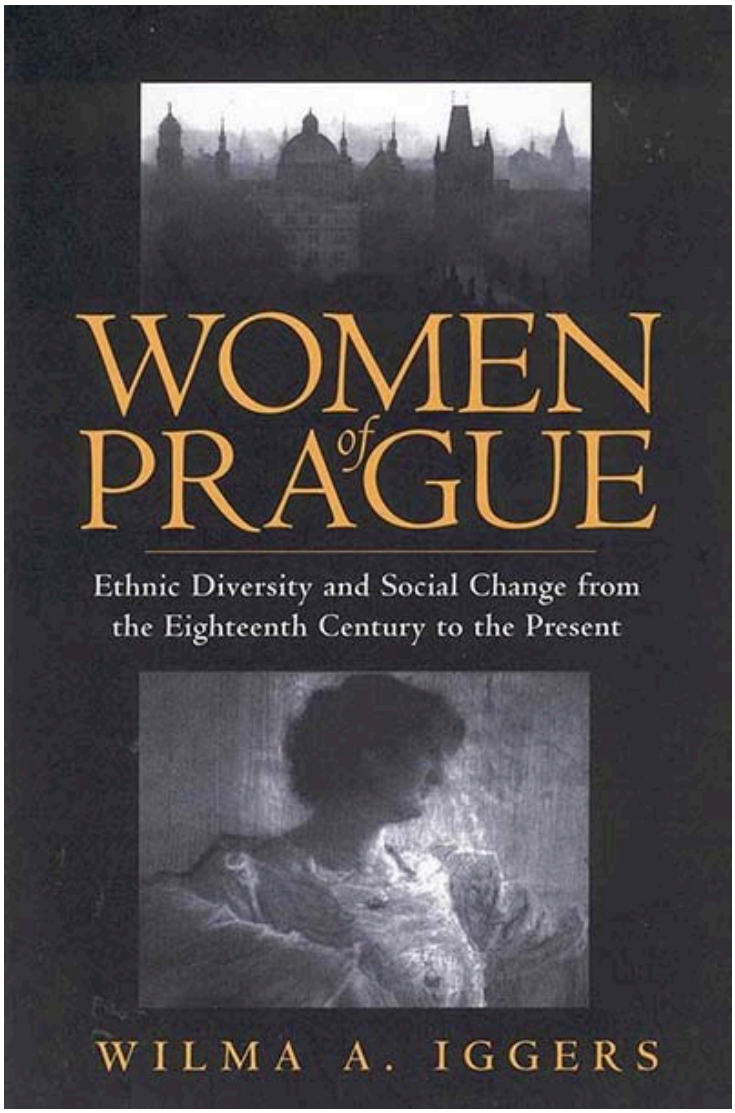
It would have helped me a great deal to have found enthusiastic colleagues in Czechoslovakia. Instead, during the 1970s, when I went to Prague almost every year, I couldn't even get into the Jewish Museum to do my research. The witch at the entrance refused to let me enter. The people who worked in the Jewish Museum as well as the people who ran the Federation of Jewish Communities and Congregation avoided me. Once I caught them over lunch when they couldn't run away. One of the scholars at the museum, after canceling or postponing many appointments, finally told me that she never wanted to meet me. Everybody was scared. They didn't know what might get them into trouble. Maybe I should have been more understanding but I found them gratuitously nasty in addition to being spineless.

It's difficult for people today to understand the atmosphere of paranoia under the Communist regime. Arno Pařík was one of the very few helpful people I met in the 1980s. We were taking a taxi together to see a man who had promised me some interesting material. I gave the taxi driver the address of his apartment and, after we got out, Pařík told me quite sternly that I should never tell a taxi driver

where, exactly, I was going. I should only give the name of the nearest subway station. That gives you an idea of how things were then.

One day when I was in Prague, before 1989, I got a call from Tomáš Pěkný who said that he and Jiří Daníček and some other people would like to meet me at a café on Malá Strana. They told me that my book had been translated into Czech. Did I want it published? I told them yes of course and took some notes. After our meeting was over and I was walking down the street, they came running after me to tell me to destroy my notes. Then I heard nothing more. Nothing ever happened to the manuscript. Several other people talked to me about a Czech translation, but it never came out. A man named František Kraus was the worst. He was the librarian of the Jewish Community. I sent him a copy of the book in German because I thought it belonged there of all places. When I asked him whether he had received it, he told me in a disparaging way, “Oh yes, I gave it away to someone.”

Then I published an anthology of texts about Prague women, *Women of Prague: Ethnic Diversity and Social Change from the Eighteenth Century to the Present*. These texts included letters, diaries, newspaper articles, biographies and autobiographies by and about women including Božena Němcová, Milena Jesenská, Gisa Picková-Saudková, Berta Fanta, Ruth Klinger, Grete Fischer, and Jiřina Šiklová. Like the first book, it was published in English and German editions, but not in Czech.



During my years of research, I had been contacted by a retired professor of German named Alois Hofmann who told me he had some unique material that he was willing to sell to me for $200. It sounded great, so I went to his Prague apartment. His wife served me cherry strudel and was very charming. Later, I discovered that the stuff Hoffmann gave me was readily available in other places, so I sent him $100. He wrote back that since I was a Jew, he expected that kind of stingy behavior.

All this background serves to give you a better understanding of my pleasure in meeting Jiří Fiedler. I met him around 1985, I think through Arno Pařík, and he was a very welcome surprise. Jiří Fiedler seemed like a totally unselfish person — which I could appreciate as a researcher who also doesn't mind doing things I like to do for free. He was warm and helpful, and didn't seem nervous about being seen with me. I felt that through the years I could ask him for

advice on subjects going beyond his specific work. There was never any mention of money. We were colleagues, engaged in what was for a long time an esoteric activity.

Fiedler seemed unafraid to invite me to his apartment, showed me many photographs of cemeteries, synagogues and other buildings of Jewish interest. I noticed his stutter and wondered what kind of a childhood and background he might have had that caused it. He answered many of my questions, especially whom I could contact in the communities where my ancestors lived. He also gave me advice about genealogy, which I never much pursued. Except for Paříк and a young woman then a librarian, he was one of the few people in the Jewish Community and in the Museum I felt comfortable with.

The last time I saw Jiří was in 2012, in his office at the Jewish Museum when he was 76 and I was 91. It was a very nice visit. He gave me a book and I remember criticizing part of the German title — it was *Böhmische Wald*. That was not the standard name and I told him that it should read *Böhmerwald*. I rarely pointed these kinds of mistakes out to anyone else because they were already in print, unlikely to be corrected, and I didn't want to hurt anyone's feelings. Jiří, however, urged me to always point out mistakes in the record. He gave me his very interesting article about Isaac Meyer Wise. I cannot find the last letter I got from him, but I liked that he always began: *Važena a Mila Pani Profesorko! ("Esteemed and Dear Mrs. Professor.")*

I regarded him as a fellow scholar and a rare human being.

Chapter 9

~ A man on a bicycle, by Evelyn Friedlander ~

Years ago, in the distant eighties, I went to a lot of conferences on Jewish cemeteries in Germany. That was where I first heard stories of a man on a bicycle, traveling around Czechoslovakia recording Jewish sites. Under the Communist regime, this was a suspicious activity and he was frequently harassed. But what for me was the most striking and poignant of all, was that he had not a hope in hell of having his work acknowledged, let alone published.

Time passed and I became chair of the Memorial Scrolls Trust in London.

Offices of the Memorial Scrolls Trust, London

During the second world war, the Nazis confiscated most Jewish property including about 1,800 Torah scrolls. These were sent to the Jewish Museum in Prague where each one was meticulously recorded, labelled and entered on a card index by the Museum's staff with a description of the Scroll and the place it had come from. After the war, they were transferred to the ruined synagogue at Michle outside Prague where they remained until 1963.

One of the Czech Torah scrolls

That year, a London art dealer, was offered the opportunity to purchase the 1,564 remaining Scrolls from the State-controlled Jewish Museum. He contacted one of his clients, philanthropist Ralph Yablon, who bought and arranged for the transport of the scrolls to London.

By 1964, Westminster Synagogue (where Ralph Yablon was a founding member) had taken possession of the 1,564 Torah scrolls. The synagogue set up the Trust whose mission it became to send the scrolls to communities and institutions all over the world that would use them in religious services. The full story can be found in the book *Out of the Midst of the Fire* by Philippa Bernard.

In 1997, Jiří Fiedler came to London and paid a visit to the Trust. There he met my predecessor Ruth Shaffer and a series of snapshots document what was obviously a happy meeting of minds.

Ruth Shaffer and Jiří Fiedler

The Trust was eventually to form a close bond with the Jewish Museum of Prague and in 2006 they collaborated on an exhibition called *The Second Life of Czech Torah Scrolls*. I went to Prague for the opening and there I finally met Jiří Fiedler. By now he was much sought-after for his vast and unique store of information but he remained his quiet, reclusive self.

In 1991, the fruit of all those bicycle trips was published in Prague as *Jewish Sights of Bohemia and Moravia.* It became the Trust's bible. Jewish sites are listed and illustrated with a photograph or a line drawing with the site's exact position, a history of the local Jews and the names of people of note. Often these places are mere hamlets which would be almost impossible to locate in any other publication.

During the 2000s, Mr. Fiedler was officially employed by the Prague Jewish Museum, but I sought to avoid troubling him unless it was really necessary. He was working feverishly to finish his documentation, aware that the years were racing by and he was fearful that he would not have time to finish his self-appointed work. As we now know, he was right, although not for reasons he could ever have anticipated. The Torah scrolls had been collected and brought to Prague sixty years earlier from many collection points throughout Bohemia and Moravia. He was the only person we could go to for information about these former Czech communities.

The Memorial Scrolls Trust is grateful to have the opportunity to add its voice to this tribute and to acknowledge how helpful and

important a contribution Jiří Fiedler's scholarship has made to its work. He will be much missed.

Jiří Fiedler with remains of Torah scrolls

Chapter 10

~ The guy who knew everything, by Sam Gruber ~

I first met Jiří Fiedler in 1990, when I was casting around for participants for a conference called “The Future of Jewish Monuments.” This conference was one of the first attempts to find out who was doing what with respect to the documentation, protection and preservation of Jewish monuments around the world. Bill Gross, a member of the Jewish Heritage Council of the World Monuments Fund, which was sponsoring the conference, said to me: “You’ve got to bring these two guys from Prague, Pařík and Fiedler, they know everything.” Bill offered to pay their airfare. That was my introduction to Jiří, the guy who “knew everything” — but was extremely modest about it all.

A few months later, Arno Pařík and Jiří Fiedler arrived in New York City. It was their first trip to America. Arno’s English, which has always been his own special version, was much better than Jiří’s, who chose to speak mostly in Czech. So I got to know Jiří mostly in translation. Even so, his subtle humor mixed with whimsy and wonder came through. Then, and even later when Jiří did write and speak in English, I mostly learned about his work — and very little about his personal life.

Arno and Jiří were a wonderful pair. They were excited, a little nervous, and indefatigable in their exploration of New York, including excursions through Hasidic Brooklyn. Though we didn’t know it, that was the beginning of a six-year collaboration. Soon afterward, the World Monuments Fund teamed with the United States Commission for the Preservation of America’s Heritage Abroad to initiate countrywide surveys of Jewish cemeteries and other sites in many countries. Jiří published his essential book *Jewish Sights of Bohemia and Moravia* in 1991, and about the same time was engaged to coordinate the Commission’s survey of Jewish cemeteries in Czechoslovakia.

Jiří was amazingly generous with his knowledge and time, a fact I always attributed to his appreciation of being brought to America. The budget was very small — but every penny meant something to Jiří and his colleagues who had done so much with so little for so many years. We were paying $10 per completed survey form and while it was almost insignificant money in the United States, it was almost an income in Czechoslovakia in the early 1990s.

I remember budgets and invoices from the time. Almost every fax and postage stamp was invoiced since prices were high and money was so tight. The Jewish Museum had not yet been returned to the Jewish Community by the government, and there were not many other sources of income for a specialist in Jewish heritage! Over the next few years,

we published two versions of Jiří's Czech survey, where his information was collated, edited and expanded by Phyllis Myers and myself.

Most of my memories of Jiří from that time are through correspondence. I still have many of his long lists, comments and corrections, typed on very thin paper — and often condensed into tight blocks of text, presumably to save paper or postage. I had a computer but he did not, so his pages of information were inputted into a database and tables in New York. He always sent me his material by mail since faxing was too expensive, but I think, too, the legacy of Communist-era secrecy made him cautious about using the fax machine at the Federation of Jewish Communities or at the Jewish Museum. As a professional editor, he was a stickler for detail and we Americans seemed incapable of correctly applying the many Czech diacritical marks, so he was obliged to make a lot of corrections.

In 1993, the first edition of our report was presented at a reception at the Czech Embassy in Washington. Jiří's work was celebrated but he could not come. There was some conflict with work needed at the museum, but I suspect shyness was part of the reason. On at least one visit to Prague I visited Jiří at his apartment — it was my first subway ride outside the Prague Center — but at other times it was hard to locate him or lure him away from work. I think lack of a common language was part of this, but also, he was always extraordinarily modest about his enormous achievement.

His legacy is great. The documentation and preservation of historic Jewish sites in the Czech Republic rests on the foundation he laid.

Chapter 11

~ He told me where to go, by Ruth Ellen Gruber ~

Jiří Fiedler told me where to go, and I went.

I first met him, along with Arno Pařík, in 1990 or 1991, when I was just beginning research on my book, *Jewish Heritage Travel: A Guide to Eastern and Central Europe*, which first came out in 1992. My aim with that book was to put back on the map the hundreds of Jewish heritage sites that, because of the Holocaust and the Communism that followed it, had slipped into oblivion.

For months, I traveled thousands of kilometers throughout the region. My trips were voyages of discovery, archaeological explorations; there was little literature available, and few visitors ever ventured to seek out such sites. To help me find places to visit, document, photograph, and write about, I relied greatly on the few individuals in each country I visited who had carried out Jewish heritage documentation on their own.

Jiří Fiedler was one of these people.

I must have gotten his and Arno's names from my brother, Samuel D. Gruber, who was then the director of the Jewish Heritage Council of the World Monuments Fund.

At one of my first meetings in Prague with the two, Jiří and Arno sat me down and read me lists of synagogue buildings, Jewish cemeteries, and old ghetto quarters, all typed on flimsy sheets of paper, which they had compiled during their own, often difficult, often lonely explorations.

We pored over their lists. They told me which Jewish cemeteries and synagogue buildings they thought were the most important for me to see and include in my book. Somewhere in my files I still have these lists and handwritten jottings from our first meetings. They are tangible talismans of a time before websites, before email, before digital databases, before Facebook groups, when these flimsy pages, and Jiří and Arno's first-hand knowledge, formed the most comprehensive trove of information on Jewish heritage sites in what is now the Czech Republic.

"It's probably my passion to fill in the blank places," Jiří told me in one of our many conversations. "Christian churches, chapels, castles were listed in books, but not the Jewish monuments."

Jiří continued to be an important guide — both personally and later through print, following the publication in 1991 of his comprehensive book *Jewish Sights in Bohemia and Moravia.*

He continued to advise me over the years, as I researched subsequent editions of *Jewish Heritage Travel*, including the most

recent one, which came out in 2007: he took time, at my request, to read through the entire, 100 manuscript pages of the Czech chapter and checked it for updates and inaccuracies. *"Excuse my horrible khutzpe (lot of small corrections, lot of maybe saucy notes, objections and suggestions),"* he wrote me in an email, when he sent back the chapter with his notes and corrections highlighted in yellow. "*Excuse my wrong and primitive Czenglish language, please,*" he added, with typical self-deprecation.

Jiří's observations also provided a sort of running commentary through the chapter on Prague in my 1994 book *Upon the Doorposts of Thy House: Jewish Life in East-Central Europe, Yesterday and Today*. In that chapter, titled "A Circle Game: the Golden City, Fame-Crowned Prague," I pictured Prague as a bull's eye, centered on the Old Town and the old Jewish quarter, which already were awash with mass tourism and commercial exploitation. I then ventured further and further away from the center, where I found Jewish cemeteries forgotten or abandoned, and synagogue buildings in various states of transformation and neglect.

Jiří told me about abortive clean-up operations and even what he called a modern day "pogrom" in the 1980s that toppled stones and destroyed monuments in one outlying Jewish cemetery. All in a city that already, since the fall of communism, exalted its Jewish heritage and made a fetish of it in its tourist-packed historic center, barely two miles or so away.

The furthermost outer suburb I visited was Uhřiněves, once an independent village, where there is a synagogue building and Jewish cemetery. Jiří prepared me for what to expect and what to look for: at that time, the cemetery was devastated, and the synagogue was used as a laundry.

It took some time to find the cemetery, I wrote.

"It was hard to tell where the forest ended and the cemetery began. Tall trees continued without a break. Heavy undergrowth made an impenetrable barrier. I could just see a couple of tombstones stuck in there, tightly wedged amid the brush... I walked along the perimeter of the cemetery wall, looking for somewhere I might be able to enter. But I didn't look very hard. I didn't really want to go into that cemetery. It was too lonely; the sense of unease I had felt walking down the path grew stronger. The noises in the forest grew suddenly more disturbing. The devastation was too depressing.

"I had brought with me a photocopy of the entry on Uhřiněves from a book on Bohemian Jewish communities published in the 1930s. It had a photograph of the synagogue, then neatly maintained and set behind a low picket fence and pruned ornamental trees. It also included photographs of eight worthy members of the Uhřiněves Jewish community... solid, stolid, unsmiling burghers: three of them from neighboring villages, all of them sober and prosperous looking in dark suits, tight collars, and ties.

“I thought of the washing machines where their pews must have been. And I imagined that if I had pushed my way into the forgotten forest cemetery, I might have been able eventually to find their graves.

“Or maybe not. ‘There’s been fantastic devastation in this cemetery,’ Jiří Fiedler told me. ‘Many modern tombstones were stolen after the war. A new memorial to the Holocaust was demolished, too. It was a monument in the shape of a large, granite stone with a memorial plaque. This plaque was stolen.’”

That was more than 20 years ago, and I must admit that I haven’t been back to Uhřiněves since.

Since then, of course, many things have changed.

The synagogue was returned to Jewish ownership in 1995; the laundry was removed and the community now rents out the restored building as office space and for other commercial use. A memorial to the destroyed Jewish community was erected on the outer wall of the building in 2000. Uhřiněves, meanwhile, has developed a relationship with the Finchley Reform Synagogue in London, which, thanks to the Czech Torah Scroll project, uses a Torah scroll from the synagogue.

The Jewish cemetery has been cleaned up to some extent, too, with signage installed to tell its history. On a rainy day in 2012 a ceremony took place there to make the 70th anniversary of the deportation of Jews from the village. I don’t know if Jiří attended; but he certainly was there in spirit.

Chapter 12

~ Through the window of a hospital, by Dana Mihailovici ~

The first time I met Jiří Fiedler was through a window of a hospital for infectious diseases in Prague. It was August of 1967. I was 17 years old and hospitalized for jaundice. I shared a hospital room with a young woman named Dagmar Fiedlerová. She was in her late twenties, also had jaundice, and she was the wife of a man named Jiří.

Visitors were prohibited from entering the premises, so my parents and Dagmar's husband would stand below our window and call up to us. My parents came every day to visit me; Jiří came every day to visit Dagmar. This went on for at least a month, maybe longer.

Dana Mihailovici in 1967

I was already interested in mathematics — I took part in the Math Olympics — and I spent most of my time in bed working on my math problems. Dagmar couldn't believe how a young girl could spend so much time doing math. She also noticed that I was wearing a Star of David around my neck and I told Dagmar that I was Jewish. She told me that her husband was deeply interested in all things Jewish. Since he and my parents met almost every day when they came to visit us, they started talking to each other too.

I was born in 1950 in Prague and lived in the apartment where my father had lived before the war with my grandmother, who was murdered in Treblinka. My father had served with the Czechoslovak Free Forces during the war and, like many of those soldiers, was persecuted in the 1950s, fired from his job and consigned to manual labor. My mother was in Auschwitz and had a number on her arm, which she made no attempt to hide. I'm sure Jiří talked about many things with them.

Finally Mrs. Fiedler and I both got out of the hospital and went our separate ways. I had my graduation exams to pass, then came the Soviet Invasion in 1968, the Occupation, then a year of university. In 1969, I obtained a permit to travel to Israel on a work program and never returned home. I was an only child and it was a big shock to my parents. I finished my studies in Jerusalem and married a Jew of Romanian descent. After I completed a Master's in statistics, I began working, had a family, and completely forgot about the Fiedlers.

My interest in tracing my Czech family roots began in the 1990s but it was only after I retired in 2006 that I could pursue genealogy seriously. In 2010, while I was visiting friends in Prague, someone suggested I read *Where She Came From* by Helen Epstein in the Czech translation. So I was in Prague when I came to the chapter describing a man named Jiří Fiedler who was interested in Jews and read how important a role he had played in the story. Not only did I recognize him, but I thought he could help me too. He had met me and my parents after all!

I found a telephone book and began to look for him. There were six or seven Jiří Fiedlers listed and I dialed them, one after the other. No one was home. The first person who answered was the one I was looking for.

Jiří told me that he remembered me and my parents very well and, when I said I was going back to Israel the following day, he invited me over and the three of us had dinner that night. We had such a great time that every year after that, when I was in Prague, I called or saw him. We also exchanged about 30 emails and he helped me a great deal. We never once discussed money. His work was all done out of friendship.

Chapter 13

~ A researcher's Researcher, by Paul King ~

In the late fall of 2003, a posting on JewishGen made mention of the new Electronic Encyclopedia. This was my first acquaintance with the name and writing of Jiří Fiedler.

That first JewishGen posting was followed by one from Czech Jewish genealogist Julius Müller. The Electronic Encyclopedia was a collaborative effort by Fiedler and Daniel Polakovič, he wrote. Their undertaking drew upon the well-organized collection of data stored over many decades in Fiedler's personal home archive.

These data had been amassed through archival and library research, correspondence, and extensive fieldwork. Five examples of the work-in-progress, arranged according to individual villages and towns, were available online: Brandýs, Dambořice, Dobruška, Horazdovice, and Příbram. Desired material, as it became available, was only obtainable through the ordering of a CD which would contain vital data (births, marriages, deaths) as well as brief historical, topographical and architectural features of the specified towns/villages.

I took *Old Bohemian and Moravian Jewish Cemeteries* out of my University library. I found a description of the cemetery where many of my ancestors were buried. After four years of more or less intensive genealogical research, the family's past was becoming more tangible. I then learned from the website of the International Association of Jewish Genealogical Societies' Cemeteries Project that Jiří Fiedler had explored my ancestral cemetery of Radobýl in 1991 "using notes of the Státní Židovské Muzeum Praha, the history of the village of Drážkov, and the census of 1724 and 1930."

In the late summer of 2005, my wife and I visited Prague and engaged Julius Müller for a day trip to my ancestral villages. At one point we had difficulty finding the path to a cemetery (Czellin), which was rarely visited. Julius phoned Jiří Fiedler, described where he was standing, and Jiří gave directions. Simply amazing. All I could make out was the faintest indentation in a pasture suggesting a very old trail to the neglected cemetery.

In the late fall of 2005, I received a booklet from Matana, the corporation formed by the Jewish Community of Prague to maintain, preserve and restore Jewish sites. Completed in 1992, *Židovský Hřbitov, Drážkov, Kamýk nad Vltavou* contains 34 pages supplying a historical overview of the cemetery since the 17th century, and an architectural summary comparing it with other cemetery structures in Bohemia. Informing Jiří Fiedler of the booklet, which does not contain his name as author or referent, I received the astonishing reply thanking me for informing him of its existence. It was a

classical case of the left hand not knowing what the right hand has done, since Matana and Jiří Fiedler were both part of the Prague Jewish Museum complex.

On occasion, a correspondent would write something like the following: "Jiří Fiedler of the Prague Jewish Museum said that a survey of the [Rokycany] cemetery from 1890 exists in the Jewish Museum." Or, "I would like opinions on the book *Old Bohemian and Moravian Jewish Cemeteries* by Arno Pařík, Jiří Fiedler, Petr Ehl, which I currently have in my possession. It is listed, on JewishGen and other places, as a good resource for information on Czech villages. However, there isn't a stitch of bibliographic information in the book. Not even a sentence that says 'I got my information on town history here.'"

So the academic in me prompted a reply. I pointed out that Jiří Fiedler was responsible for the extensive personal research on Bohemian and Moravian cemeteries. By accessing through one's favorite search engine the "International Association of Jewish Genealogical Societies – Cemetery Project" and entering Czechoslovakia, you may discover, through using 'Find' and entering "Fiedler", how many and which cemeteries he personally surveyed, mostly in the very early 1990s. I received a reply from the inquirer: "Thanks for all your information about the Jiří Fiedler book. I feel much more confident using it now." For a lengthy check of cemeteries examined by Jiří Fiedler see iajgsjewishcemeteryproject.org/czech-republic/index.html

In July 2009 I had a genealogical interest in obtaining any written information on the Dobříš cemetery. Unable to elicit a response from the Matana organization, I turned to Jiří Fiedler, since the IAJGS Cemetery Project online indicated that he had carried out a survey there in 1992. I had scheduled a visit to Prague and considered going to the Dobříš cemetery, but first I had to know whether there was a burial list, and secondly the physical state of the tombstones. I also asked a question about the whereabouts of Jewish victims who succumbed to an epidemic in late 1848. I informed Julius Müller of my correspondence and he relayed that having just spoken with Jiří on the phone, I would be advised to seek out Dobříš material at the Jewish Museum archives. This I did and burial records for Dobříš were waiting for me when I visited in August.

Jiří did reply to me at the end of July. A four-page email was neatly catalogued for any later reference. He began, at least for me, with a florid statement: "*Your research of traces of König families is very interesting and thrilling. But I am afraid my minute information will be only a few stones for your big mosaic.*" He proceeded to supply me with information about the Dobříš cemetery and a König in the county (of whom I was aware and who was not connected to my family). Then he supplied information from seven villages where the König ancestors resided, bibliographic references, brief histories, and contact addresses of individuals and organizations

that might be of assistance. He closed, apologizing for his English, although it was quite clear with only a few minor grammatical errors and several ambiguous translations from the Czech into English. The latter he cleared up in a following email. Except for Dobříš, all the information Jiří supplied was unsolicited.

In a second email, I asked about varying orientations of tombstones and received a reply stating "*I know hundreds of cemeteries*," and explaining that the way tombstones face depends upon the contour of the land and local or regional custom. Regarding cremation of Jews who died in an epidemic, this is "out of the question", but they might be buried in mass graves.

Two genealogical correspondents of my acquaintance wrote to Jiří asking about burial ground information for two Beroun towns. He began his reply with: "*Unfortunately, I am not able to practise a family or genealogic research. Let me list only a few relevant (?) sources.*" There follows exact details of archival location and file numbers in the National and Regional archives with additions of filial archives in case material is not found, and names of archivists each with their email address. As was his custom, his email was accompanied by a referent number. He was a researcher's Researcher.

In August 2011, I wrote Mr. Fiedler in advance of a Prague visit. This time I was inquiring about the availability of specific locations of interest to me in his Community Encyclopedia. He gave me the names of three people that I might contact since it was summer, and various Jewish Museum employees would be on vacation. In addition, he provided the Metro line stop and exact address of the Jewish Museum archives and added "See you soon," but because he was ill and absent from work the two days I scheduled for the archives and the nearby Smíchov cemetery, I never met Jiří Fiedler.

A correspondent from Verona informed me that Jiří's book on *Jewish Sights of Bohemia and Moravia* noted that Wallenstein set aside a residential street for Jews in Jičín. The correspondent, an expert on the Jews of Liberec, noted that the famous Thirty Years War general, Wallenstein, had castles in three places but preferred Jičín, his fourth palatial estate, as his home base. The Jičín houses were owned by Jacob Bassevi, thus indicating a close link of the famous general with the Jews of the town. Fiedler's book became a general source for another inquiry. "D D asks about her relations who died in Krnov in 1916. According to Jiří Fiedler in *Jewish Sights of Bohemia and Moravia* Krnov is in Silesia near the Polish border." Another JewishGen member pointed out the value of *Jewish Sights*. "I use Jiří Fiedler's book to look for place names that are not in the Badatelna registry. It follows almost the same logic – small places in Fiedler are grouped around one main place and the same goes for Badatelna."

In the course of making an order for material from the Community Encyclopedia, Mr. Fiedler informed me of what was available, what was "in embryonic stage," and what was not included in my request list.

In the early summer of 2013, I was making final corrections to a paper on the Familiant Decree of 1726, which I was to deliver at the beginning of August. Through information regarding Rabbi Isaac M. Wise having performed illegal marriage ceremonies, which may have caused him to flee to America, I contacted the author, the late Tomáš Pěkný. Pěkný told me that after he wrote his book, the Secret Police confiscated his manuscript notes and he could not provide me with a source. At the same time, the genealogist Julius Müller wrote me that he had seen a manuscript or booklet on "The Youth of Rabbi Wise" written by Jiří Fiedler and based on a lecture he gave in 2004.

I contacted Jiří, telling him of my impending paper and he sent me three versions of an unpublished article on the early life of Rabbi Wise in Bohemia. And then, shortly before departure for Boston, I received from him material taken from four villages which were part of his Community Encyclopedia project showing the sudden increase in marriages following annulment of the Familiant decree in 1848. This was clear evidence that many illegal marriages had taken place in the last years before termination of the Decree and now were being legalized under the regime. It was a generous release of material, gratis, in the name of scholarship.

Writing to me on 12 July 2013, he exclaimed: "*Excuse my very poor 'Czenglish,' please.*" I could not help but laugh. After nearly 40 years in Israel, I tell people that I have lost some of my native tongue and not mastered the language of my adopted land, so that the end result is that I speak "Hebrisch". He made a correction on my attributing to him that Rabbi Wise fled Bohemia because he was about to be punished for conducting illegal marriages. He then added in a not entirely clear statement that "*I presuppose the first marriage of I. Wise was 'illegal' (i. e. only religious Jewish marriage without official consensus)*". It would appear that Jiří intimates that Rabbi Wise's own marriage was not state-approved, rather than marriages he conducted which were religiously condoned within the Jewish community but may or may not have received the approbation of state authorities.

My last email from Jiří Fiedler was dated 27 July 2013. As a mark of a growing confidence in our epistolary relationship, Jiří had requested that I try and find information about a native Czech artist who spent the latter part of her life in Israel. I promised that I would make the effort by contacting a person in the Art History Department of the Hebrew University. He replied thanking me for the effort and then he added, harking back a day or two, to my interest in legal and illegal Jewish marriages in the 18th century. "*As for contingent punishment of 'illegal, religious only' weddings, let me recommend two names from history or sociology of Bohemian and Moravian Jews — my older 'aunt' Prof. Wilma Iggers and my younger 'sister' Dr. Helen Epstein.'*"

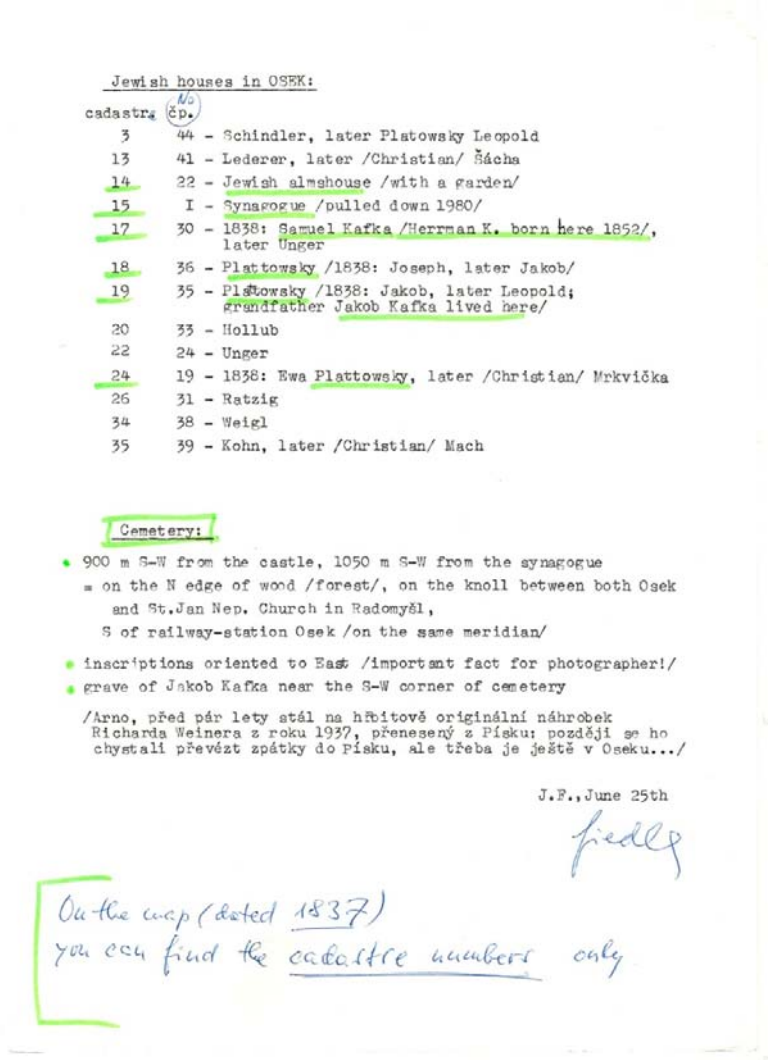
Chapter 14

~ The man with the maps, by Amira Kohn-Trattner ~

I was born and grew up in Tel Aviv. My mother, Ruth Kohn and my father, Dr. Eliyahu Kohn, often spoke about their lives in Czechoslovakia and early on I became very interested in what my parents called "*mischpochologie*". My great-great grandfather, Leopold Kafka and my great-grandmother, Marie (Miriam) Kafka were both born in Osek. Leopold was Franz Kafka's grandfather's youngest brother. My great-great grandmother, Amalia Kafka, also lived in Osek for some years. According to Anthoney Northey's book *The Kafka Relatives*, and my mother Ruth Kohn's family stories, the Kafkas were kosher butchers in Osek.

It was through my interest in them that I became acquainted with Dr. Arno Pařík, at the Jewish Museum in Prague. In the late 1990s, my husband and I were traveling to Southern Bohemia to visit the village of Osek and decided to visit Arno in his office the day before. We asked him whether the Museum had any archival material on Osek and its Jewish residents. Arno got up from his chair, said "just a minute!" and came back into the office with a rather thin, bearded man wearing a red, long-sleeved T-shirt whom he introduced as Jiří Fiedler.

I explained my background and asked him for any information he might have.



Jewish houses in OSEK:

cadastr.	No čp.	
3	44	- Schindler, later Platowsky Leopold
13	41	- Lederer, later /Christian/ Šácha
14	22	- Jewish almshouse /with a garden/
15	I	- Synagogue /pulled down 1980/
17	30	- 1838: Samuel Kafka /Herrman K. born here 1852/, later Unger
18	36	- Plattowsky /1838: Joseph, later Jakob/
19	35	- Plattowsky /1838: Jakob, later Leopold; grandfather Jakob Kafka lived here/
20	33	- Hollub
22	24	- Unger
24	19	- 1838: Ewa Plattowsky, later /Christian/ Mrkvička
26	31	- Ratzig
34	38	- Weigl
35	39	- Kohn, later /Christian/ Mach

Cemetery:

- 900 m S-W from the castle, 1050 m S-W from the synagogue = on the N edge of wood /forest/, on the knoll between both Osek and St.Jan Nep. Church in Radomyšl, S of railway-station Osek /on the same meridian/
- inscriptions oriented to East /important fact for photographer!/
- grave of Jakob Kafka near the S-W corner of cemetery

/Arno, před pár lety stál na hřbitově originální náhrobek Richarda Weinera z roku 1937, přenesený z Písku; později se ho chystali převézt zpátky do Písku, ale třeba je ještě v Oseku.../

J.F., June 25th

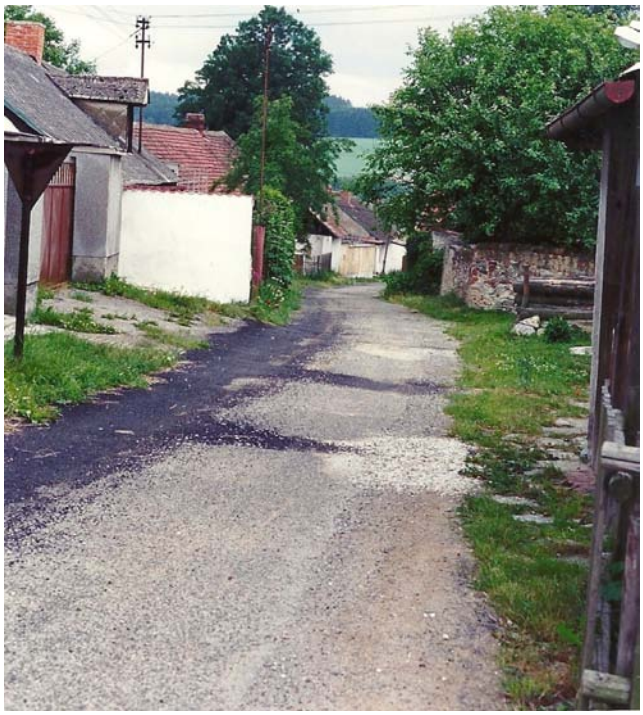
fiedler

On the map (dated 1837) you can find the cadastre numbers only

Jiří's list of the Jewish houses in Osek

Jiří searched his files on the spot and gave us two important documents. One was a list of the Jewish houses in Osek, which included the Kafkas'. He told me that my great-great grandfather Leopold lived with Samuel Kafka (his uncle) in house no. 30 and that he also had lived in house no. 35. In addition, Jiří gave us an 1837 map of Osek and wrote on it "with cadestre # only" — identifying the Christian village and the location of the "Jewish Village." He also gave us directions to the Jewish cemetery, which was located inside a little forest, drawing an arrow so that we could follow the road and find the hidden cemetery.

With these documents and information, we were able to find the Jewish Street in Osek and the houses my ancestors lived in and came from.



Street in Osek

It seems (from photos I have seen) that the village hasn't changed much over the years and it was a meaningful experience to walk on the same roads my ancestors walked on and see the houses where they lived. The cemetery was a bit difficult to find but without Jiří's map, we would probably not have found it at all.

Chapter 15

~ From the Society for the History of Czechoslovak Jews, by Rabbi Norman Patz ~

The members of the Society for the History of Czechoslovak Jews continue to be devastated by the murders of Jiří and Dagmar Fiedler. Jiří was doing the work our society also has as its mission and we benefitted over the years from his scholarship, wisdom and graciousness.

The premeditated and banal nature of the crime makes it even more horrifying to us all.

My wife Naomi and I were privileged to know Jiří over the years. With his unique and encyclopedic knowledge of Czech Jewish communities, he helped us prepare for our visits to Dvůr Králové and Jihlava, and gave us additional specifics as Naomi researched the monographs she wrote on these communities.

In all of the work on which we consulted him, Jiří instantly gave us the key leads we needed. We were not fooled by his modesty and diffidence: he was absolutely heroic, courageous and even fearless in the noble task he began in the dark Communist years and continued even as he began to age. He understood the significant role that Jews have played in Czech history. The guidebook he wrote is a miniature cornucopia of information, and the contents of his uncompleted encyclopedia of communities will be both a source of vital information and a challenge and inspiration to the next generation of researchers. His works are a treasure. Helen Epstein's eulogy for Jiří in the *New York Times* was entirely accurate and richly deserved. She expressed the shock and sadness we all felt and continue to feel.

Naomi and I tried to meet with him every time we visited Prague (not always successfully, given his hours and travel), and he was always responsive to our emails no matter how busy or indisposed he was.

In Jewish cemeteries, the stone monument erected over the grave of one whose life was cut short is a stout tree trunk cut off and left

as a naked stump, shorn of its branches and leaves. Sadly, Jiří Fiedler merits such a monument.

May the memory of this righteous man, this tsaddik, and that of his wife who we never met, become a blessing.

The president of the Society, Dr. Eva Derman, and all our members, join me in this message of condolence to Jiří and Dagmar's family and to his colleagues at the Museum. May God comfort you in your grieving and bless you with healing and good memories.

Chapter 16

~ A gap impossible to fill or heal, by Václav Fred Chvátal ~

“So this is what Václav Chvátal looks like,” said Jiří Fiedler and shook my hand, “Judging by your handwriting, I thought you’d be older and fatter.”

We were standing in the Jewish cemetery of Hroznětín (Lichtenstadt) in 2005. The cemetery had just been repaired and a group of us met there in order to organize the complex documentation of all the graves. There were five of us altogether. My job was to survey and map the cemetery.

Jiří Fiedler and I had been corresponding for several years by then, and because I had sent him some copies of my notes, he was familiar with my handwriting. Jiří was one of the famous experts whose work I admired (at the beginning only from books) and who was in many ways a model for me. So I had been very much looking forward to meeting him in person and working together at Hroznětín.

This meeting marked a new and significant stage in my own professional work, during which we met quite often and which bore fruit in several publications and for me, personally, in a great and invaluable education. Jiří was a strict teacher — sometimes even annoying about getting even the smallest detail right. His meticulousness, however, made profound sense: it never happened that one of his texts included any unfounded conjecture. He was as critical of my texts as he had been during his editorial work as a proofreader at his publishing house.

“Find some student to edit your manuscript!“ he’d say.

His strictness, however, always became a friendly benevolence and willingness to help whenever he saw that I couldn’t keep up with his incredibly broad knowledge. Then he would explain things with an adorable matter-of-factness and so modestly, that I sometimes forgot what a great man was talking to me.

A few months after our first meeting in Hroznětín, I visited Jiří in his office at the Jewish Museum in Prague. It was the first time I could take a look at his notes and the computer database he was working on: its structure, complexity, attention to detail, and unimaginable scope absolutely amazed me.

We agreed that the Jewish monuments of the Tachov district were, in 2005, far better researched and documented than in the 1990s when Jiří wrote his first book. Several of the Jewish cemeteries were also in much better shape, due to reconstruction, organized by our museum. So we decided to write a new book about Jewish monuments of the Tachov district that would also include a part of my documentation of tombstones including transcriptions and translations of epitaphs.

In 2006, we visited Jewish cemeteries in the Tachov district together and outlined the content of this book. In the process, I remember shocking some inhabitants of Lesná, who had no idea what was happening when we invaded their home with a tape measure, and measured their kitchen and front hall, checking it against an old map of the synagogue that the old building had once been.

We wound up publishing a bilingual Czech-German book with Zdeněk Procházka's publishing company that combines Jiří's texts about the history of Jewish villages and monuments, his photographs, and my contributions about Jewish cemeteries and documented epitaphs.

We were so happy with the success of this book that the following year we decided to extend the project into a series of books on Jewish history and monuments, with each book dedicated to one district of Southwestern Bohemia.

The next in line was the district of Domažlice, south of Tachov. We had plenty of material. All we were missing were a few legible photos of tombstones. Those were supplied by photographer Radovan Kodera. I needed them because during the crucial phase of the preparation, I was living in Finland. I therefore prepared the transcriptions and translations from his excellent photographs.

My contact with Jiří Fiedler had to change at that time to email correspondence, but even then Jiří did not compromise his carefulness. Following his instructions, I had to change the color shading of the markers in the map of Jewish monuments several times so the dark red could not be mistaken for brown.

Even before the book on Domažlice was published, the synagogue in Kdyně was repaired and opened with great fanfare. Our museum supplied the interior of this beautiful building with an historical exhibition of local Jewish settlement with photographs, objects and texts including epitaphs. Jiří surprised us by coming to the opening — and was so greatly and unabashedly happy about the building and perhaps about that evening's opening that I almost didn't recognize him. I was not used to Jiří revealing his emotions so visibly and publicly.

In 2012, we published our second book together — about the Jewish monuments of the Domažlice district. It was also successful. Many people asked when the next book would be published. I always replied that it depended on Jiří Fiedler, as there was no substitute for his database of notes and knowledge, but that he was always busy and in demand, and could not be rushed.

In the fall of 2013 we started to talk about preparing a third book about the Jewish history and monuments of the Klatovy district and the Šumava Mountains... Our work was interrupted by evil, unexpected and malignant. When I learned about the murder, I did not want to believe it. His other colleagues and friends, and everyone who knew Jiří, shared this feeling. We were left with a gap that is not possible to fill or heal.

Chapter 17

~ A selection of postcards from Mr. Fiedler ~

From the time Jiří Fiedler was a child in post-war Czechoslovakia, he collected old postcards of people and places. He liked to annotate these postcards and send them to a small circle of friends.

In 2005, during a reading Helen Epstein gave at the residence of the American Ambassador to the Czech Republic in Prague. She introduced him as the leading archivist of the nearly extinct Jewish community of the Czech Republic. Jiří later complained that she was creating a "cult of personality," and shortly afterwards sent her this bundle of postcards.

All the texts are satirical; none are meant to be taken literally. They are an expression of the absurdist and subversive humor that links Czech writers Hašek to Hrabal and Havel. The letter is fictive. The captions to the postcards provide patently false information and demonstrate the Central European art of not taking anything — history, religion, genealogy, and above all oneself — too seriously.

Dear Helenka:

An unexpected supplement to your family history: Yesterday when I was leaving the US Embassy, I was approached by a Mrs. Bubeníčková who supposedly worked as a cook for 30 years for the recently deceased Monsignor John of Nepomuk Furcht, a parish priest in Puklice, and who supposedly rescued part of his estate from a fire. Mrs. Bubeníčková wasn't at the Embassy reception (she didn't get an invitation), so she's sending you a few of the older photos that the Monsignor was saving as family relics. I'm copying the brief captions for these photos selecting them out from his nearly illegible, handwritten, very intimate diary notes which (fearful of the curiosity of the villagers) he wrote in his own peculiar language. In 1945-46, after performing forced labor in Bremerhaven, the Monsignor spent several months living among Canadian soldiers in Germany, picked up a little bit of their spoken language, and in his diary, wrote in that dialect, which he called "beizik iizi inglish" (Basic Easy English).

Wishing you a happy flight over the large puddle,

Jirka

FANNY FURCHT: *SAM NOUTS TU GRIIN NAMBAZ* (Some Notes to Green Numbers)

1 — *Anidentitifikeitid memba of Furcht femili (hauziirer) on skwee in Brtnice 1911?*
(Unidentified member of Furcht family (peddler) on square in Brtnice, 1911?)

2 — *It's mii ez yang priist* (It's me as a young priest)

3 — *Mai lavli grendmadza Lilii Hecht-Furcht. e vainshtube-zingerin in Viin-Vyena, 1915* (My lovely grandmother Lily Hecht-Furcht, a wine cellar singer in Vienna 1915)

4 — *It's mii wis aua skaut jeeni membez from Jihlava distrikt in Dalmaciya* (It's me with our scout junior members from the Jihlava district in Dalmatia)

5 — *Semyuel Schworzhat, e memba of femili klen, in Nyuu Yook (kaad sent tu mai ensesta Franci Zeiner)* (Samuel Schwarthat, a member of the family clan in New York [card sent to my ancestor Franci Zeiner])

6 — *Mai grendfaadza Furcht wis hiz neiba Springl in Karlsbaad (foto Adler, aua faa rileitid ankl)* My grandfather Furcht with his neighbor Springl in Kalsbad, Foto Adler, our distantly- related uncle)

7 — *Mai liti grendmadza (anda hat) in spaa Poděbrady — bat wich iz shi?* (My little Grandmother and a hat in the spa town of Poděbrady — but which is she?)

8 — *Srii "frivol" geelz from yang kampeni of mai grendmadza* (Three "light" girls from the young company of my grandmother)

9 — *Anna, best frend of mai grendmadza* (Anna, best friend of my grandmother)

10 — *Meibii Franci end Hanči ez kabaret-staaz in Praag?* (Maybe Franci and Hanci as cabaret stars in Prague?)

11 — *Veri faa rileitiv (sam Epstein from Roudnice) ez e soulja dyuring eksesaiz niia Pardubice* (Very distant relative Sam Epstein from Roudnice as a soldier during exercises near Pardubice)

12 — *AnklRudi wis Zdenka* (Uncle Rudy with Zdenka)

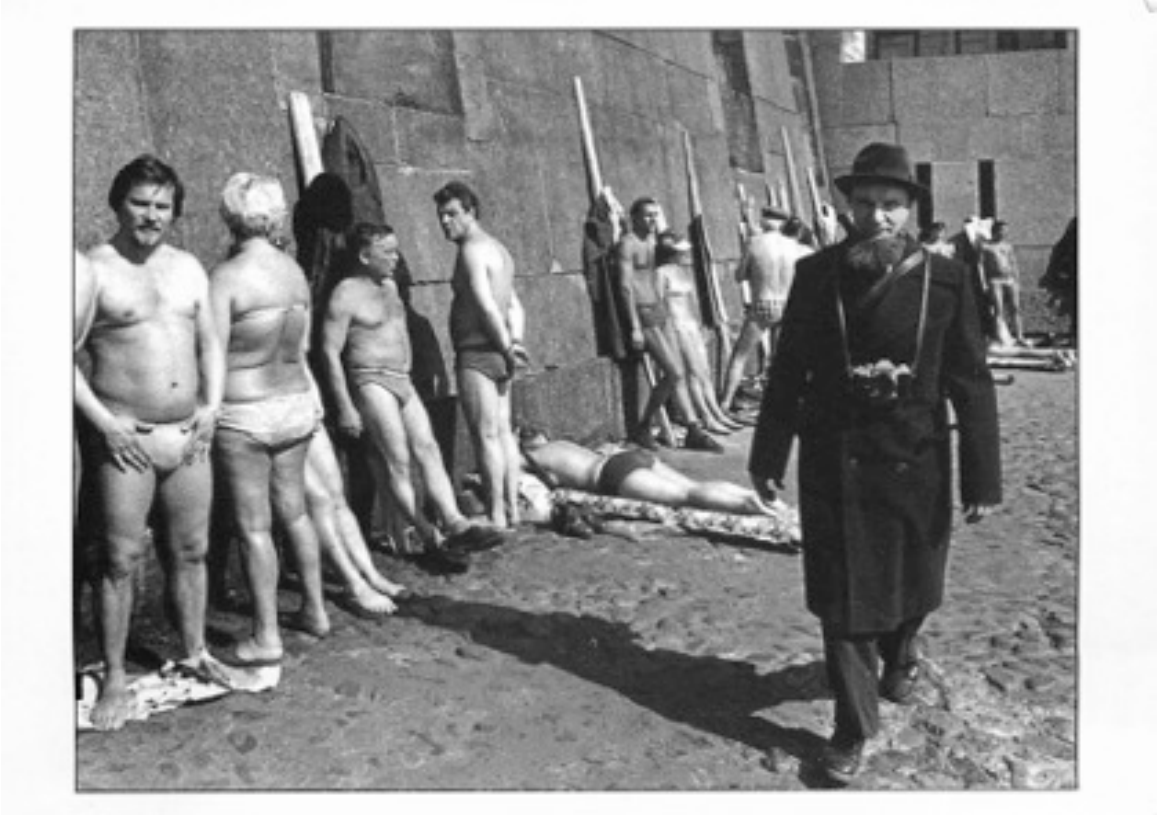
13 — *Berta Furcht (from ketotik paat of femili) in Lourdes* (Berta Furcht from Catholic part of family in Lourdes)

14 — *"Mistik" oo "spiritist" vyuu of mai madza, Brtnice 1927* (Mystic or spiritist view of my mother, Brtnice 1927)

15 — *Elejedli yanga bradza of Kurt Epstein (?) in spaa Joachimsthal-Jáchymov*
(Allegedly younger brother of Kurt Epstein(?) in the Joachimstal-Jacymov Spa)

16 — *Franci Schonová, mai faa rileitív living in Praag, dyuring hea profesnenl jeeni (wis hea madza Pepi) in Paris (in front of soukoold "Taj-Mahal" hotel) — ebaut 1936* (Franci Schonova, my distant relative in Prague during her professional journey with her mother Pepi in Paris in fron of so-called Taj Mahal Hotel about 1936)

17 — *Mai iavli kazn "tetichka Helenka", dz laast fiimeil memba of Furcht klen from Brtnice* (My lovely cousin "Auntie Helenka" the last family member of the Furcht clan from Brtnice)



18 — *Not mai rileitivz! It iz e gruup of soukoold "nyuu Rashnz" klouz bai dz "dagenmauer" in Yerushalayim* (Not my relatives! It is a group of so-called "New Russians" close by the Wailing Wall in Jerusalem)

Chapter 18

~ Jiří Fiedler's last email to his old friend Jiří Drbalek ~

November 22, 2013.

Hi Jirko:

I'm glad that you wrote back right away. At my age, it makes a person happy to know that this or that person is still alive and even capable of thought and communication...

I myself was employed from 1969-1992 at the Albatros Publishing House as an editor of educational books and encyclopedias. At the same time, I was doing a lot of translating, mainly from Polish and Serbo-Croatian. And in the years 1992-2012, I worked on the history of about 800 Bohemian and Moravian Jewish communities in the Jewish Museum. (It had been my hobby already at the beginning of the 1960s, so that I made a profession of the hobby. For example, I thought up an "electronic encyclopedia of communities," which is now the germ of a mega-project that probably no one will continue (see jewishmuseum.cz — on the title page, click on "Encyclopedia of Communities" in the left column).

But I spent a large part of my time working at the museum taking care of thousands of inquiries, and consulting abut various "historical" problems (genealogical inquiries of descendants, histories of communities, buildings, cemeteries, etc).

I've finally been 100% retired since the beginning of 2013, even if I'm still completing some work I promised to do for the Jewish Museum.

Above all, at the age of 78, I'm trying to take a "pre-cremation inventory" at home. My room (in a block of *panelaks*)[7] looks like a collection point for garbage from a Hrabal's film: books, binders, filing boxes, and all over the floor stacks of sorted and unsorted papers (publications, correspondence, xerox clippings), leaving only a narrow trail for my feet. Going through all of it and getting rid of tons of useless papers seems an impossible task.

Before I do that, I'm trying to scan about 90,000 negatives of architectural sites, which I photographed since the late 1950s. Most of those monuments and buildings look different today than they did then or don't even exist anymore, so that these old snapshots often have documentary value (and maybe no one else ever photographed them to begin with).

I'm almost done with the scanning (someone is doing it for me and of course it costs a lot of money) and then I have to identify the scans in the computer, title them properly, organize them under the

thounds of keywords for each community, and when possible (when they are actually needed) rotate each photograph, reverse it, lighten or darken it, sharpen it, get the contrasts right, and crop it. Even a 60-hour day wouldn't be enough.

I send the scanned photographs to interested people, for free of course. Some regional museums and archives as well as a few private enthusiasts who have their own websites have received a few thousand. For example, I just sent about one thousand photos of church buildings to the photo archive of the Litomerice diocese and tomorrow I am sending another thousand to the photoarchive of the of the Slovak National Museum in Martin. I already placed far more than a thousand photos on the interesting pages of www.znicenekostely.cz, and sending hundreds more to the administrators of www.pamiatkynaslovensku.sk.

Apart from that, I'm dusting off (or rather carefully reworking) my old translations, in case by chance I find some patron who might want to publish them. A few years ago, six volumes of collected writings of the Bosnian writer Ivo Andrić came out and now, at the end of November, seven volumes of the writer from Zahgreb, Miroslav Krleži (I have a translation in both collections).

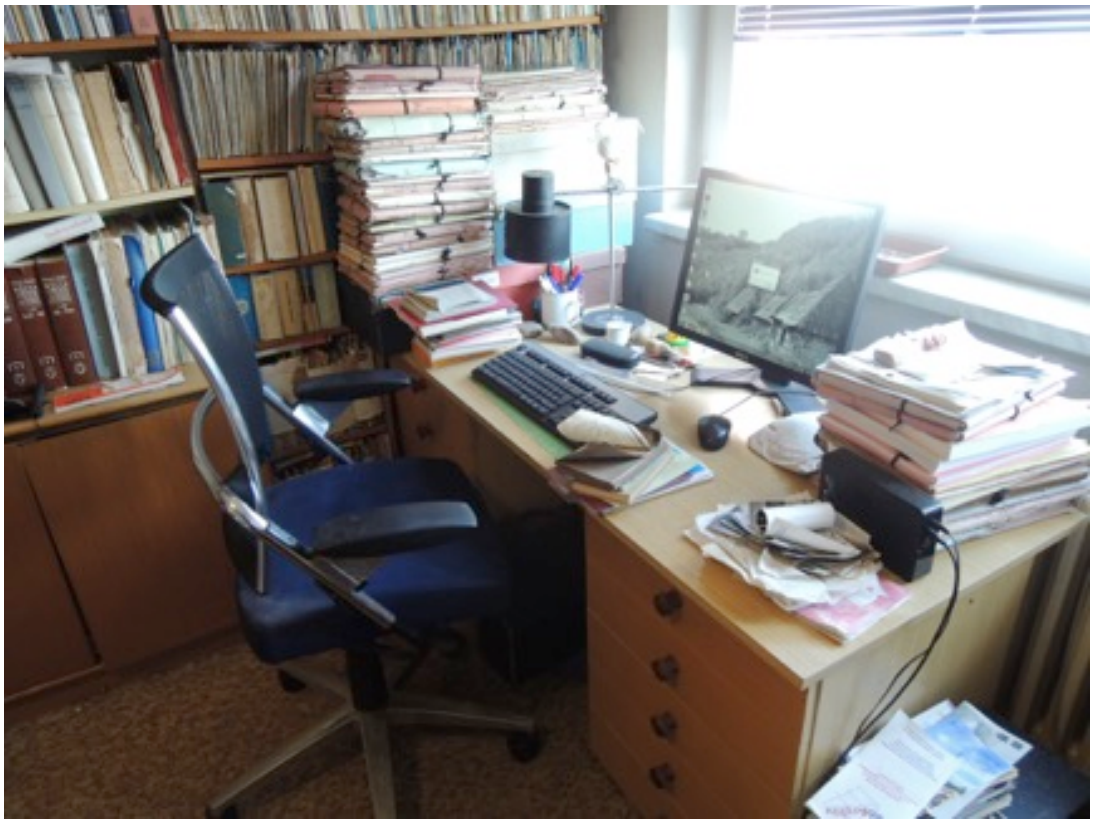
As you see, I'm not idle. My wife and I are, of course, on all kinds of pills, tablets and granules, tinctures and ointments, so that we'll last another month or year.

Our boys —- twins — reached adulthood in October; they're 45 years old. We have three grand-daughters and a three-year-old grandson. And at home, we have the warmth of our cat Minda. We cultivate our most necessary cooking herbs on our glassed-in balcony. A certain Mr. Zeman was registered until recently in the building right next door (and during the elections he voted in the same place as we did). Today, he is "a present to the Republic"[8] Forty years ago, by chance, I photographed a dilapidated fortress in Novy Veseli, that Zeman later bought and restored, so that he could hug the trees. *Those are the paradoxes, Mr. Sladek...*[9]

I'll try to attach some old photos from the Doctors' Home [where they met] in the early 1960s, primarily shots to the west of the old apartment building that no longer exists — they have nostalgic value. They were taken with a children's camera, which focused only on the center of the image. Forgive the miserable amateurish quality — you can delete them. Give my regards to Paul Holečka! I see that some of the old guard, the boys from Zborova, are still breathing.

Pardon all my drivel. I send you my best,

Jirka



Jiří's desk at home

Contributors, translators and acknowledgments

Václav Fred Chvátal

Václav Fred Chvátal was born in 1968 and is a graduate of universities in Finland and the Czech Republic. Since 2002, he has been engaged in research of Jewish cemeteries in the Czech Republic, Finland, Poland and Germany, publishing five books and more than 50 other publications.

Helen Epstein

Helen Epstein (helenepstein.com) wrote about Jiří Fiedler's murder in the *New York Times* on March 8, 2014. She was born in Prague in November of 1947, flew to New York City with her parents in August of 1948, and grew up in Manhattan. She worked as a journalist and journalism professor at New York University for many years, and is the author of six books of non-fiction, including *Children of the Holocaust* and *Where She Came From*. With her husband Patrick Mehr, she co-founded Plunkett Lake Press, the publisher of this eBook.

Offices of the Memorial Scrolls Trust, London

Evelyn Friedlander was the Chair (2004-2014) of the Memorial Scrolls Trust in London (memorialscrollstrust.org)

Ruth Ellen Gruber (Photo: Chuck Fishman)

Ruth Ellen Gruber has chronicled Jewish developments in Europe for more than 25 years. Her books include *Virtually Jewish: Reinventing Jewish Culture in Europe*; *National Geographic Jewish Heritage Travel: A Guide to Eastern Europe*; *Letters from Europe (and Elsewhere)*; and *Upon the Doorposts of Thy House: Jewish Life in East-Central Europe, Yesterday and Today*. She coordinates the website www.jewish-heritage-europe.eu.

Samuel D. Gruber

Samuel D. Gruber is an architectural historian, historic preservationist and managing director of Gruber Heritage Global (GHG) – a cultural resources consulting firm. For more than twenty years he has been a leader in the documentation, protection, preservation and presentation of Jewish cultural heritage sites around the world. Gruber was founding director of the Jewish Heritage Program of World Monuments Fund and is author of *American Synagogues: A Century of Architecture and Jewish Community* (2003) and *Synagogues* (1999) and numerous reports and articles.

Olga Hostovská Castiellová

Olga Hostovská Castiellová is an editor and translator who was born on March 20, 1936 in Prague. She is the daughter of Czech author Egon Hostovský. Between 1954 and 1959 she was a student in Czech and Polish at Charles University. In 1966, she married Gennaro Castiello

and between 1973 and 1980, lived with her family in Italy. She translates mostly from the Polish and Italian and publishes under her maiden name. Between 1993 and 2002, she devoted herself to the publication of the writings of Egon Hostovský.

Wilma Iggers

Professor and author Dr. Wilma Iggers was made an honorary citizen of her hometown Horšovský Týn, in 2002 and in 2004, received the Czech State prize "gratias agit" for her activities on behalf of the Czech lands. Her books include *Karl Kraus: a Viennese Critic of the Twentieth Century, The Jews of Bohemia and Moravia: A Historical Reader* and *Women of Prague: Ethnic Diversity and Social Change from the Eighteenth Century to the Present.* Wilma Iggers and her husband of over 66 years Georg Iggers had distinguished careers as American university professors. After their retirement, they pursued research, dividing their time between Buffalo and Göttingen.

Dušan Karpatský

Dušan Karpatský (originally Rosenzweig) was born in 1935 in

Trebišov, Slovakia. As a translator and literary historian, he devoted himself to Czech and Serbo-Croatian literature, which he studied from 1953 to 1958 at the philological faculty of Charles University. From 1958 to 1970, he worked as a teacher in grade school, and editor at the Czechoslovak Broadcasting Company and two literary magazines, *Plamen* and *Sešity*. In the 1970s and 1980s, during the so-called normalization, he published under different names. After the Velvet Revolution, he joined *Literární noviny* and worked there until the end of 1995. He has translated more than one hundred works from Croatian, Serbian, Bosnian-Herzegovinian and Montenegrian literature, and translated Czech and Slovak poetry into Croatian and Serbian. He published a collection of his correspondence with writers in Croatian as *Epistolar* and an expanded version in Czech as *Listář*.

Paul King

Paul King was born in Toronto in 1942, grew up in the small town of Whitby, Ontario, and earned a doctorate in Political Science from UCLA. After teaching for four years at the University of Calgary, he made *aliya* to Israel in 1975. In Israel, he worked for research institutions and taught college. His genealogical interest in his Czech roots began in 2000.

Amira Kohn-Trattner

Dr. Amira Kohn-Trattner (amira.kt5@verizon.net) is a psychotherapist in New York City and a past president of the Society for the History of Czechoslovak Jews.

Dana Horová Mihailovici

Dana Horová Mihailovici was born in 1950 in Prague. For four decades, she worked as a statistician in Haifa. She has three children and four grandchildren and since 1994 has been researching the Heitler, Fanta, Motz, Taussig, Pik, Bondy, Landesman, Strelinger, and Leimdocharfer families.

Arno Paříik

Arno Paříik (arno.parik@jewishmuseum.cz) was born in Prague in 1948 and received his doctorate in art history and aesthetics at the Philosophy Faculty of Charles University. Since 1978, he has worked at the Jewish Museum in Prague, focusing on the history of the Prague Jewish Town, synagogue architecture, Jewish sites in Bohemia and Moravia, 19th and 20th century Jewish art, the art of the Terezín ghetto, the history of the Jewish museums, and museology. He has been involved in the preparation of the international traveling exhibitions *The Precious Legacy* (1983/85), *Where Cultures Meet* (1990/92) and *Jewish Treasures from Prague* (1990/97) in the US, Israel, Europe, Australia and New Zealand. He is the author of many journal studies, catalogues and publications including *Jiří Fiedler a dokumentace židovských památek*, Judaica Bohemiae, The Jewish Museum in Prague, 2015, Nr. I.

Rabbi Norman and Naomi Patz

Norman Patz is a retired congregational rabbi and President Emeritus of the Society for the History of Czechoslovak Jews. He and his wife Naomi have been frequent visitors to Prague since 1983. Both hold honorary doctorates from Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion. Naomi Patz is the author of *The Last Cyclist*, a reconstruction and reimagining of a lost cabaret of the same name written by Karel Švenk in Terezín. In addition to her monographs on

the destroyed Czech Jewish communities of Dvůr Králové and Jihlava, she is the author of seven books.

Leo Pavlát

Leo Pavlát was born in 1950 in Prague and graduated from the school of journalism at Charles University. From 1975 to 1990, he worked as an editor at Albatros, the publishing house for children and youth. Under the Communist regime, he participated in unofficial activities at the Jewish Community in Prague, considered a “subversive, Zionist element.” After 1989, he became second secretary of the Embassy of Czechoslovakia (from 1993 of the Czech Republic) in Israel; and in 1994, Director of the Jewish Museum in Prague. He is the author of many articles and four books for children. Since 1995, he has edited the bi-monthly half-hour radio broadcasts of the Jewish Community in Prague, and is a consultant to the Ronald S. Lauder Foundation in the Czech Republic.

Jana Štroblová and Jirka

Born in 1936, Jana Štroblová is a poet, writer, and translator, author of over a dozen books. She studied Czech and Russian at Charles University. Between 1960 and 1970, she worked as a children's book editor. She was fired for her political activities and for the next 20 years had great difficulty publishing her work. After the Velvet Revolution, she began working in radio and in 1994, for Radio Free Europe.

Mark Talisman

Mark Talisman served as chief of staff to U.S. Representative Charles Vanik, from 1963 to 1975. He then created the Washington Action Office for the Council of Jewish Federations of North America and served as its director for 18 years. In 1983, Talisman established the Project Judaica Foundation with his wife, Jill, and has been its president ever since. Its first exhibition was the Precious Legacy in partnership with the Smithsonian Institution. He

was founding vice chairman of the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum created by President Jimmy Carter. Talisman continues to teach and is a consultant to a number of non-profit organizations. He is a consultant to a number of nations regarding democratization.

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[1] Boza — Fermented drink popular in the Balkans and the Middle East.

[2] Boga mi! (Serb.) — Good Lord!

[3] Ove (Serb.) — These.

[4] Sa toplim pozdravom. (Serb.) — My warmest greetings.

[5] This letter is about the election of Miloš Zeman (Fiedler's neighbor) to the presidency of the Czech Republic.

[6] Miloš — Czech President Miloš Zeman.

[7] panelak refers to a cheaply-built high-rise apartment building, characteristic of the communist period,, made from panels of composite materials rather than bricks or wood.

[8] A pun substituting the word “present” for “President”.

[9] *To jsou ty paradoxy, pane sládku* (“Those are the paradoxes, Mr Sladek” is spoken by Vaněk in Václav Havel’s play *Audience.* Vaněk, a dissident writer, is forced to work in a brewery, so that he can contribute to society rather than be an intellectual burden on it. This play was originally read among a small group of friends, then recorded .The recording became so popular that many Czechs could quote it verbatim, despite the fact it had never been performed on stage.