

Address to CBF by
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The sister towns of Frydek-Mistek stand on either side of the river ~~the~~ ~~river~~ Ostravica - Frydek on a steep hill to the North ~~of the river~~, and Mistek to the South. Up to the first world war, both were part of the Austrian Empire: Frydek in the province of Silesia, Mistek in North-Eastern Moravia. By the time I was born in 1919, both had become part of the newly formed Republic of Czechoslovakia. The German and Polish frontiers were only a short distance away.

Our paternal ^{line} forebears, back to at least 1680, lived within a 20-mile radius of Mistek. ~~with one of two villages within 25 miles of Mistek.~~ They earned their living as village innkeepers and distillers under tenancies granted by the local archbishops.

Jews in the Czech lands were after 1726 free to practice their religion but were subject to many restrictions. Until 1780 they had to pay special taxes, live in Ghettos and wear distinctive clothing; they were excluded from most trades and professions, and not allowed to own land or property.

After 1948 all restrictions were theoretically removed and Jews were able to move around freely, but many town councils, such as that of Mistek, barred Jews until 1867. However, a few were permitted to settle in the adjoining village of Koloredov, where our grandfather HermNN Löw rented ~~some~~ farmland from 1855 and bought it 20 years later, when Jews were permitted to acquire property.

Across the river Ostravica, the Frydek town council had been more liberal. The first Jewish ~~es~~ family arrived in 1825, and by 1863 eight families enjoyed permanent residence status, and half as many again had temporary residence.

By about 1850 there were enough Jewish families in the area to form a Minyan. This met first in a member's home, ~~but~~ later there was a separate prayer room, with Bima and Ark, scrolls and eternal light, and finally, a Shul was established in rented premises above a pub some 20 yards from grandfather's property in Koloredov. There was a Chazan who also acted as Shochet.

By the 1860ies which brought increased trade and industry to the sister towns, Jewish entrepreneurs were beginning to arrive. They ^{established} ~~setup~~ several large textile mills which soon prospered ~~and so~~ did the spirit and liqueur manufacture set up by our grandfather. Friedek had a Jewish doctor, a Jewish miller and a Jewish brewer. The Jews were enjoying equal rights and held considerable commercial and social standing. What was originally a loose small gathering of co-religionists began to grow in a closely integrated congregation.

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In November 1863 permission was obtained from the provincial government to form an official Jewish religious community and to raise funds for the building of a synagogue, or temple as it was called, to serve the sister towns.

There followed a search for a suitable site, which had to be in Frydek yet in easy reach of Koloredow where most Jews still lived. Eventually a large garden site on the steep incline leading from the river bridge was acquired from the Archduke Albert of Austria. Many busy & anxious months of planning & fundraising ensued. A bank loan had to be secured against bills of exchange from individual members. The summer of 1864 saw the laying of the temple foundation stone and the start of building. Finally, on 14th Sept 1865, 8 days before Rosh Hashana ~~1865~~, the temple was officially opened by the District Rabbi in the presence of town and provincial dignitaries. The Congregation, at the time comprising only 33 families, could not afford a regular Rabbi. Services were conducted by a Cantor, who also doubled as Hebrew teacher.

In the succeeding years, many more Jewish families came into the area so that by the late 1880s the synagogue had to be extended. It also received the addition of an organ and mixed choir in line with the growing Reform Movement of the time. A Jewish primary school and meeting house was built next door, two school teachers and a Rabbi were employed, and a Cemetery was built on the outskirts of Frydek.

Our grandfather, who had been one of the founders and moving spirits of the Community from the outset, became its President for 27 years until his death in 1906. His wife Fanny outlived him by 16 years. Both were prominent members not only of the Jewish community but well loved and respected in the town for their charity to Christian neighbours.

By the end of the century, the congregation stopped to grow. This was due to the attraction of Vienna, the centre of the Empire. Ambitious young Jews went to Vienna to study and many of them stayed to build a career there. Of my grandparents' 10 children, only two remained in Mistek. My father Heinrich carried on the business. He married in 1913 and moved with my mother Mitzi into the house in Koloredov which he had built some years earlier and in which I was born the 4th of five children. Magda was the youngest.

After the 1st world war the community was further diminished as families moved to the new capital, Prague, or to the fast-growing industrial city of Ostrava.

I remember my childhood as a very happy one, though we children were early on aware of latent anti-semitism arounds us. The area in which we lived had a large German-speaking minority. The Jews who had soaked up the German-speaking culture of the Austrian ruling class were blamed by the Czechs for adding to and supporting the German element. Indeed the language spoken in our home was German, if only because our mother, who was born in the Hungarian part of the Monarchy, spoke very little Czech. Also the language taught in the Jewish primary school, which all of us attended until it closed down in 1929 for lack of Jewish pupils, was German. Although my two brothers passed on to the local Czech grammar school, we three girls were sent to the German high school in nearby Ostrava, where over half the girls, as well as the Headmaster, were Jewish. However, we spoke both languages, and had many friends amongst both the local Czechs and Germans.

This began to change when Nazism rose in Germany. Mother, who came from a very assimilated background, became an active Zionist and my sister and I joined Zionist youth clubs. Our German school friends became noticeably cool, if not openly antisemitic. Things became much worse after the Nazi occupation of Austria and Kristallnacht. Most of our relatives, on my mother's and my father's side, lived in Vienna and their situation was increasingly desperate. But by then, I had gone to England to study.

^{The} On March 14th 1939, Germans who had previously occupied all frontier areas under the infamous Munich agreement, moved into our home town. The following day Prague and all of what is now the Czech Republic were occupied and, ~~the same night,~~ ^{the} Frydek temple was

burned to the ground by local Nazis by order of the Germans. ^{to} The scrolls and other valuables had been previously removed ^{by them.}

Two days later Father was ejected from his office by a so-called aryaniser appointed by the Germans to begin a systematic process of ex-propriation. ^{My} father was obliged to agree to the carefully catalogued handover of all his assets, ranging from bank accounts to farm and factory buildings, down to the smallest item. In the following week all Jews in the town had to report to a central locality to hand in their jewellery, household valuables and radios, under threat of arrest.. Their Czech neighbours, with a few honourable exceptions, joined in the general Jew-baiting. ^{The following June}

By April 1939 ^{my} two brothers had joined me in England. ^{after} Father had to bribe some Nazi official to issue ~~an~~ exit visa. My older sister was in relative safety for the time being, living in Slovakia with her husband and small daughter. (Slovakia was then a nominally independent Nazi puppet state.) Magda had entered into a shortlived marriage to a non-Jew. He refused to emigrate and Magda would not leave without him, I managed to secure a British entry visa for my parents but too late. The war intervned and they were trapped. The only means of communicating with them was via our Yugoslav relations until they, too, fell under the Nazi jackboot.

^{Magda} relates how, in September 1939, endless streams of German army units passed by our house on their way to the conquest of Poland, which was soon completed.. In mid-October, rumours started to circulate that all male Jews in the area were to be transported to Poland. On hearing this Father took the first train to Prague. It turned out to be the last train not to be searched by the Germans. The rumours soon proved true - ~~all~~ Jewish men ~~from~~ age 15-60 from the area were deported to a place called Nisko in Poland, dumped in the middle of a forest miles from the next village and told to build a camp. Many died from cold and hunger, some managed to escape to Russia and a few returned home only to be deported elsewhere some time later.

Father remained in Prague., where Mother and Magda joined him in a rented apartment.. Still hoping for a chance to emigrate, Magda took up a course in baby nursing and Mother, aged 53, learned to make costume jewellery. When the Germans put a stop to all courses, Magda worked in the Jewish Community's nursery. From 1941 onwards, Jews had to wear the yellow star on their clothing. Our parents had to leave their apartment and crowd in with another family, with food rations for Jews severely cut. Finally, in July, 1942, they were ~~sent to~~ ^{deported} to the Theresienstadt Ghetto, Magda, now divorced, followed in September..

^{North of Prague} Theresienstadt ^{is an old German town surrounded by thick walls.}
~~the~~ ^{the} ~~civilian~~ ^{population} was ~~collected~~ ^{collected} in order to make room for the Jews, ~~at first~~ ^{at first} ~~only~~ ^{only} from the Czech lands, but later ~~also~~ ^{also} from Germany, Holland, Denmark & Austria. When the town became too full

(4A)
It was an old Austrian garrison town
surrounded by thick walls. The Germans
wished the ~~native~~ Czech civilian in-
habitants to make room for the Jews.
Father, ~~who was 70 years old~~ by arrival,
husbands & wives, were split up. ~~Father~~
Mother lived in a large barracks for
women & worked in the kitchen.

Father ^{who was 70 yrs old} was put in the barracks for old men
where he was soon joined by two of his
brothers deported from Vienna. Conditions
were terrible rations for non-workers
reduced to a minimum. Father died in
February 1943 ~~starving~~ from starvation
& pneumonia. His brothers followed him
at short intervals.

Hagda worked in a children's home
caring for 25 boys of 6-7 yrs old. She
ate and slept with them & soon became
very attached. All but one of them were
deported to ~~Poto~~ Auschwitz in Sept 1943
and, as she found out later, were sent
straight to the gas chamber, ^(men, women, & children)
Deportations took place regularly
when the Ghetto became too full. People
were told to report to the railway station
put ^{into} a train of cattle trucks & never
heard of again. It was thought they had
gone to a labour camp.

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The following is an extract from Magda's memoirs,
translated from the Hebrew: -

On December 13th 1943 my mother was summoned to report for a transport East two days later ~~and~~ I volunteered to join her. Just then a parcel had arrived from Vienna for the last of my uncles who had just died. It was given to my Mother who divided the contents in two to take along on the journey, half a fried chicken ^{each}, some cake, bread & other goodies. The cattle train was already in the station and everybody had to show their deportation order. Volunteers were told to wait. My mother had already entered a wagon. Each person was allowed one suitcase which had to be left on the platform. The luggage was put into the last two wagons and we, some 50 voluntary deportees, were heaped on top of the suitcases, our heads touching the wagon ceiling. I could no longer see my bag, although I may well have been sitting on it, the ~~same~~ bag with half the contents of the parcel which Mother had divided in two. For many months afterwards in Auschwitz I still dreamt about that parcel. We all crowded in. Then the wagon door was closed. The wagon had a small window about 60 by 60cm. There was a single bucket for all 50 of us which we passed with its contents from hand to hand, above everybody's head, up to the window where a friend of mine was responsible for emptying it out of the window. He also managed to peer outside and told us the names of the stations we were passing through so that, eventually, we knew that we were in Poland.

We travelled for about two days and a half. Sometimes my friend tried to talk to the railroad workers who would curse us in Polish, or say: "You dirty Jew, give me you watch, you are going to die anyway." One evening the train stopped for many hours, then moved on again for 5 minutes and stopped again. All though the long journey we had been sitting in a dark wagon. Suddenly the door was opened and we found ourselves blinded by searchlights. There were shouts of "heraus" (out) in German.

^{We} ~~People~~ were in shock. On the platform we saw people in prisoners' striped pyjamas, their head shaved, sticks in their hands. They approached the wagons and started beating the new arrivals. The wagons were high and it was hard to step down. The young managed to jump but the older people and the children simply fell on top of each other. People were looking for their suitcases but were shouted at to leave everything.

At that moment I thought to myself: What is this, a madhouse? People in pyjamas, and all this shouting. What crazy place have we come to? ~~We were blinded~~. They separated the men from the women. We were shouted at to stand in rows of five and march. We had no idea how lucky we were because normally a selection was made immediately on the platform and the ~~unfit~~ were exterminated the same day.

old and

as well as mothers with young children

concentration camp

We started marching and saw a gate headed with the words "Arbeit macht frei" (work liberates), the entrance to Auschwitz. We walked along the narrow path between the barracks and the barbed wire. We saw more men and women in striped clothes and had no idea what was going on. We noticed that the women prisoners were staring at the children amongst us. Children were an unusual sight in Auschwitz. They normally went straight into the gas chambers.

We were led to a hut with three tiers of bunks. Around a table in the middle sat some old-timer women prisoners, Poles and Slovaks. Their job was to tattoo numbers on each newcomer's arm. I asked one of the girls: What is this place? She merely shrugged and pointed with her hand as if to indicate we were going to heaven. I had no idea what she meant. My number was 71396.

Here I should explain that my Mother and Magda were put into the so-called family camp in Birkenau which was part of Auschwitz. They did not wear prison clothes (although their own were taken away and replaced with illfitting rags, and their heads were not shaved. This was camouflage in case the Red Cross came to inspect the camp. In fact they never arrived and after 6 months the entire camp was sent to the gas chambers. Magda was saved when she was selected by Dr. Mengele with 2,000 other men and women for work in Germany. From July 1944 until April 1945 Magda was a slave-worker clearing up bomb damage rubble in Hamburg. *transport*
x to make room for a new one, Each transport comprised about 5,000 persons.

I continue reading from Magda's Memoirs:-

Around 6th April 1945 we left Hamburg for Belsen. We travelled in open cattle wagons and though the distance was short, it took two days, to and fro, forward and backwards. On the way we saw many prisoners on trains (mostly men) and also many corpses falling off the trains.

• *in Belsen*
At long last we arrived and were crowded into an empty barracks, about 450 women. We were very tired but there was no room to lie down. We sat down, legs apart, each woman between another's legs, the only way we could get some sleep. This is how we spent the night. The next morning we could walk around freely. There was nothing to eat or drink and no one told us what to do.

The entire camp was full of corpses - wherever we stepped there were corpses - it was horrendous. If you did happen to bump into a living person, they and their clothes were full of lice - that's what started the typhus epidemic. We soon found out that there was no food at all in the camp. As for water there were two taps turned on

for only 2 hours a ^{day} ~~time~~. People were fighting to get to the taps and many drank from the polluted water holes. We girls discovered there was a field just outside the camp where the Hungarian guards grew beets for cattle food. Sometimes we were lucky enough to get through the barbed wire and if the guards did not shoot at us we managed to get hold of some beets.

Two days after our arrival we noticed that the SS-Guards were putting strips of white material on their sleeves, they obviously knew they would have to surrender. Our spirits soared. The following day the white strips had disappeared and our spirits sank again. We could hear the noise of canon and shellfire from afar.

Around the 4th or 5th day an SS-guard came into our room and chose a few girls, including me, for what he called some 'interesting' work. We were given ropes and had to tie the hands or feet of the corpses and drag them into piles. This kept us busy the whole of that day. The following day the sound of canon had come closer, the guards had once more donned the white strips and we felt they were in utter chaos. Only the Hungarian guards appeared to keep some order. They never missed a chance to shoot at some of the girls.

In this way seven days had passed with no food and almost no water. Wherever we went there were corpses. People simply dropped on the ground. You saw someone walk then suddenly collapse in front of you.

On April 15th shooting became heavier. An SS-man, white strips on sleeve, asked for three girls to transfer some chairs to SS headquarters. I volunteered with two others and, as we approached we saw a white flag on the roof of the building. Then we saw a jeep emerging from the entrance and soldiers jumping off. They did not wear German uniforms - we were wild with excitement. Another jeep appeared and another and then a lorry. Then we saw the SS camp commander and other high-ranking officers lining up in front of the ~~headquarters~~ ^{arrivals}. We stood there fascinated and realised they had come to set us free. I ran as fast as I was able to the girls' barracks shouting "We're free, we're free" - and then I collapsed.

When Magda came to, she was in a British Red Cross hospital suffering from typhus. ~~On~~ ^{On} recovering she was offered a job as waitress in the Red Cross canteen. She weighed 30 kilos as against 70 kilos before her deportation. Some 2 months later, our brother Hans, who had returned to our home country an officer in the Czech Army found out that Magda was in Belsen. He requisitioned a jeep and set off to bring her back with him.

overlooked