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Das mehrsprachige Webportal publiziert fortlaufend Informationen zur historisch-politischen Bildung in Schulen, Gedenkstätten und anderen Einrichtungen zur Geschichte des 20. Jahrhunderts. Schwerpunkte bilden der Nationalsozialismus, der Zweite Weltkrieg sowie die Folgegeschichte in den Ländern Europas bis zu den politischen Umbrüchen 1989.

Dabei nimmt es Bildungsangebote in den Fokus, die einen Gegenwartsbezug der Geschichte herausstellen und bietet einen Erfahrungsaustausch über historisch-politische Bildung in Europa an.

The Pictures of the Coffins Are All That is Left to Me

Although many years went by since the Second World War and the subsequent expulsion of the German population from the Czech-Slovakian territories, older citizens of the small village of Pařezov in Western Bohemia still remember the events vividly. Tereza Krutinová, born Arnold, is one of the most experienced contemporary witnesses. The hardship of the war years culminated in one single day, when the young women lost her entire family due to the expulsion.

Even though Mrs Krutinová is already 83 years old now, she remembers details of humorous, but also dreadful war time stories very clearly. If she were to write down all these stories in a book, she would never be able to finish the work. *"Even a thick novel would not be enough!"* she said and threw up her hands when I started to interview her. But she was very kind and agreed, together with her daughter, to tell me at least about the most important moments of her life.

The village that is today called Pařezov was then called Paresau. Since time immemorial, it had been inhabited mainly by Germans. Paresau was situated next to the Czech village of Postřekov, and there were no conflicts between the German and the Czech part of the population. The Czechs spoke German very well, and the Germans understood Czech. *"Young people went dancing together, the adults worked together, and nobody made any differences."*

Mrs Tereza was born in Paresau on 3 October 1920 to German parents, Josef and Aloisia Arnold. From childhood, she spoke only German. Mixed marriages were normal then. But when she fell in love with a Czech miller and wanted to marry, the war had already conquered the whole of Europe. *"We had to go to the office at Horšovský Týn to get a marriage permit. The whole way on the bus we sat silently next to each other and didn't say a word. We*

were afraid that we might not get a permit, because I was German. My sister and my father went with us. When we arrived at the office, we met an elderly man with grey hair. He asked what we desired. We told him about our fears. We loved each other very much, and I was already pregnant with our first daughter, Hana. When we heard that there was no problem, we hugged each other, and there was great joy. My father invited us for lunch at a restaurant, and even ordered red wine. On the way back, we would have liked to sing the whole time." The couple's parents had no objections. Both fathers were chimney builders and knew each other well. The wedding took place in April 1939. The bride was 19 years old, and the groom was four years older. Already in August 1939, they were happy about the birth of their first child, little Hana. Mrs Theresa did not know Czech, then. One year later, she still could not speak Czech. Once, she ran home from the mill crying, and told her father that she would not go back, because she could not understand anybody. Her father bought her Czech books, and now she speaks quite well. Only every now and then, you can hear the German influence in her pronunciation. Mrs Krutinová's children spoke Czech, but they also understood German.

During the war, the relations among the people were still good. Neighbours knew each other, and it was not important where a person came from. The borderline developed in the nearby village of Draženov, and when people had to go to Czech Domažlice, e.g. to see a doctor, they needed a transit permit. The Sudetenland belonged to the Germans... Germans and Czechs suffered from the same hardship during the war, and everybody prayed that it might end soon, whoever would be the winner. When they were bombed, they just hid in the cellars, there was no other shelter. During the war, the family did not suffer so much from hunger, because they lived at the mill and could grind their own flour. However, her father in law often gave the last reserves to others, and then the family could not even cook dumplings. *"I would not wish a war upon anybody, not even upon my worst enemy."*

The Postřekov region is famous for the bravery of its citizens. When the war drew to an end, the terrible "death marches" went through the region, and the Germans drove the wretched Jews forwards until they were utterly exhausted. Those who could not go on were shot on the spot. A few could escape by luck. Then the simple people took the exhausted Jews in, risking their own lives by accommodating them. Mrs Tereza's father in law once found an exhausted Jewish woman in a canal and took her home. That was in the winter of 1945, and they looked after her until the end of the war. Her story came to a happy ending. She found the rest of their family and went to Egypt.

When Germany was defeated, the organised expulsion of the Germans began. *"Most Czechs were sympathetic, but there were also those who took the machinery and the farms and drove the Germans away."* Those living in mixed marriages were allowed to stay. *"I could stay here, because I had a Czech husband. I was also allowed to let my parents stay with me. But my sister had an eleven-year-old son out of marriage, and she had to go to Germany with him. My parents did not want to let her go on her own, and so they decided to go together with her."*

Thus, Tereza Krutinová lost her entire family in 1946. All her friends and relatives had to leave. Only three mixed families were allowed to stay in the village. Suddenly, she was all alone among Czechs, and her loving husband was her only support. But she never thought about going to Germany, because she had been born in the Czech Republic and did not know any other home... Even today, she remembers how she accompanied her parents to the train station.

"We drove in a cart pulled by oxen. I had my daughter Hana with me, and little Hansi in the

pram. I cried the whole way there and back. I went with them to the train and was almost pushed into it as well because nobody knew that I did not belong with them. I can still see my mother sitting on an old trunk. Her lips were all blue. Everybody was crying, the young people were standing; only the old people were allowed to sit on suitcases. Those were cattle wagons, with no toilets, and anything but comfortable. Then the doors were closed, and I never saw my parents again."

The expelled Germans were allowed to take luggage of not more than 70 kilos. They could only take the most basic things with them: a bit of clothing, a blanket, a cooking pot and some food. When they came to Germany, they had to be taken in and accommodated by other people. Most of them did not know anybody there. Mrs Krutinová's parents travelled to the French border. Five years went by before she could make contact with her relatives – but only through letters. Meanwhile her parents had died, and only photographs of their coffins came from Germany. *"I asked the office at Domažlice to let me go at least to the funeral. But I did not get permission."* It took another ten years until she could lay down a flower on her parents' grave.

Although the war was over, SS men were still hiding in the woods around Postřekov. A boy from Prague and five of his comrades wanted to drive them out of the woods. Mrs Tereza's father in law could not dissuade them from doing it. The simple weapons of the villagers were no match for the SS-men's weapons. All of them were shot dead or tortured to death. *"I remember men coming from the village and asking for white table cloths to cover the bodies. One of the boys even had three children."*

People's memories of the Russian soldiers are not good, either. *"They went from house to house, searching everything. From my husband, they took away the watch he had been given by his great-grandfather. That was a precious thing, then. They even took our last potatoes."* Mrs Terza had to cook for twenty Russians who had remained in the village. In contrast, the American soldiers left a positive impression. *"Once two Americans came and asked whether they could stay overnight. There was enough space. I gave them fresh bed linen. They were such tidy people; they even left their feet outside of the blanket when sleeping. When we woke up in the morning, they had already mucked out and swept. My husband said, 'Prepare a proper potato soup for them!', and I generously put in whatever I had. They had brought excellent canned food. They let us try it, and when they departed, they bought beer for everyone to drink."*

In 1951, the communist party of the ČSSR set up agricultural cooperatives. People had to part with their fields and cattle. *"We were only allowed to keep one cow and a small field behind the house. We all became agricultural workers then. Those who did not want to become part of the cooperatives were resettled. Our relatives sent us foreign currency."*

Štěpán Krutina died on 21-02-1969, when he was only 53 years old. From then on, Mrs Terza had to raise her five children on her own. She seldom spoke with them about the terrible events during and after the war. Those memories are very painful for her, even today. Nevertheless, she took the time to tell us everything, with help from her daughter.

Milena Jirincová