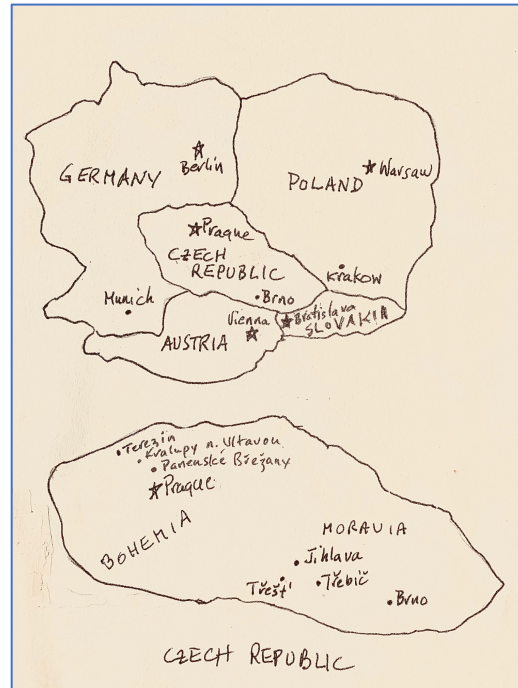


## Letter to Family & Friends

### Some Things I Learned from my Travels to the Czech Republic in 2013 and 2014



Map of Central Europe & Czech Republic

Travel destinations included Vienna, Brno, Krakow, Jihlava, Třešť, Třebíč, Terezin, Panenské Břežany, and Prague.

Czech Republic is divided into two provinces: Bohemia and Moravia.

Grandfather Alfred Neumann grew up in Bohemia near Prague.

Grandmother Rosa Neumann née Grunberger grew up in Moravia near Jihlava.

#### Preface

In July 2014, I wrote a letter to friends and family after completing a trip to Europe, our second in seven months, with my friend and colleague, Joan Zegree. The trip included ten days in the Czech Republic and three days in Poland where Joan has been investigating her Polish roots. The impetus for our travels in Nov. 2013 and June 2014 was a 1937 modernist apartment building I inherited in my father's birthplace of Brno, Czech Republic. The building had been commissioned by my grandparents in 1937 and was confiscated by the Nazis and then the Communists. It was unknown to me until my father recovered it in the early 1990s and its re-emergence led to a world of discoveries.

The following is some of what I learned during those first two important trips, updated in 2021 for this website.

July 3, 2014

Dear all,



My grandparents, Rosa and Alfred Neumann, in England in 1943.

My friend and colleague Joan Zegree and I just completed our second research trip to the Czech Republic in seven months. How did we get hooked into this ever-expanding project spurred by my grandparents' 1937 apartment building? Or as some might ask, "Why wander around 'old Europe' trying to excavate information from the past?"

Take my word for it: search and discovery is an addictive brew. This is especially true for previously unknown family history in the context of the cataclysmic events of World War II, the Holocaust, and Communist rule. Add the fact that the discoveries have often been accidental, seemingly coincidental, and sometimes maddeningly contradictory. And stir in all of the remarkable people we have met along the way with their own stories, memories, and perspectives. The result for me has been a rich experience.

In the process of investigating my grandparents' building on Křenová Street in Brno, we gained information from local historians, architects, lawyers, and our guides as well as from our own archival searches. We were told, unfortunately, that some of the records pertaining to Jewish-owned property were destroyed by the Nazis and others who dumped or burned precious files, and rats who chewed their way through aging archives. The result is that we have also had to rely on old-fashioned detective work. Joan is very good at this. She is attentive, knowledgeable, and tireless in tracking down clues.

The following is an abbreviated version of our discoveries during our trips to the Czech Republic in Nov. 2013 and June 2014. Some of the other stories we uncovered will eventually be told as well.



Photo: Anne Newman

Joan on the Charles Bridge in Prague in Nov. 2013. She is rubbing the image of the dog on the bronze engraving because legend has it that this will guarantee a return trip to Prague. It worked!

### **Brno: How is that pronounced? Try BRRRno**

Brno is located in Moravia, the eastern portion of the Czech Republic, and has approximately 400,000 citizens. It is two hours southeast of Prague by car and 1 1/2 hours north of Vienna. Although second in size to Prague, and with a much lower profile, Brno has six universities, is the seat of the national judiciary, was home to Gregory Mendel who performed his genetics experiments there, and boasts a famous racetrack. Students are everywhere which makes it seem young but in fact it is 1000 years old like Prague.



Brno rooftops from my hotel room.

Photo: Anne Newman

Beginning in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century and continuing through the time my grandparents lived there from 1913-39, Brno was known as the “Manchester of the East” because of its hugely successful textile factories that sold cotton and woolen goods throughout Europe.

Other types of manufacturing enterprises were situated in Brno as well. Alfred and Rosa, together with some of Rosa's relatives, developed a business that sold food machinery for butchers and bakers. My grandparents must have been a good team. My father wrote in his 1990 memoirs that although his parents only had a high school education, "my mother was well versed in arithmetic... (and) my father was a good businessman... (who) built up a fortune from scratch." In fact, Alfred often traveled in Europe tending to his clients and finding new ones.

At the time my father was growing up in Brno in the 1920s and 30s, approximately 30% of the town's population identified as German and approximately 2% identified as Jewish. World War II changed everything in Brno and throughout the country. Most Jews fled, like Alfred and Rosa, or were murdered by the Nazis and their collaborators. The Germans were expelled shortly after the war ended, and a second wave of Jewish emigration occurred after the Communists took over in 1948. During the forty years of Communist rule until the Velvet Revolution in 1989, everyone suffered. Religions were not tolerated, private businesses were confiscated and nationalized, and freedom of speech and freedom to travel were severely curtailed.

Fortunately, the Czech Republic is again a democracy, thanks to the collapse of Communism throughout the region in the late 1980s and Czechoslovakia's own Velvet Revolution. But the largely homogeneous makeup of the citizenry today reflects its tragic history. There are very few Czech Jews or Germans living in Brno or elsewhere in the country. Czechs we have talked to who are old enough to remember the previous eras have not forgotten the oppression and brutality of the Nazis and the Communists. Perhaps this has contributed to their particular pride in their country's previous accomplishments, including its architectural achievements during its first experiment with democracy between the wars.

### **Křenová Street: Where the Story Begins**

Before I tell you more about modernist architecture in Brno, I want to introduce you to Křenová Street, where my grandparents lived and worked from the time of their arrival from Prague in 1913. Křenová Street is also where they constructed their apartment building during the very tense year of 1938.

Brno is marked by hills—hills at its center and hill beyond. My grandparents' apartment building, however, is situated in the flatlands on Křenová Street, just outside the center of town. Křenová Street begins not far from the old "Jewish Gate," one of five gates to the city during the Middle Ages.





Photo: Anne Newman

View of Brno from the hill where Špilberk Castle sits.

We learned the best way to Křenová Street from our hotel in the city center is to follow the gentle grade of the old “Jewish Street,” filled with shops and pedestrians. After a little curve, and at the top of the steps leading down from the shopping district to the railroad station, one can see the apartment building.



Photo: Joan Zegree

Crossing the large plaza-like intersection towards Křenová 14 in Brno in June 2014. The train station is behind me.

My sister Elizabeth and I were not raised in the Jewish religion or any other faith, nor was our family's history discussed much, so I was intrigued by the discovery that Alfred and Rosa lived and worked in an area of Brno rich with Jewish history. I had not realized the extent of antisemitism that had existed for centuries in Central Europe before the Nazis. In fact, Křenová was the only place where Jewish traders could stay overnight during the several hundred years when Jews were forbidden from living in Brno and in other large towns in the region.

Jews finally began to experience more freedom during Joseph II's short reign from 1780-90, but full emancipation was not granted until 1848. That makes the short period of democracy between the two world wars, when Alfred and Rosa were growing their family and their business, particularly meaningful. In fact, Czechoslovakia was the only country in Central Europe to sustain its democracy from the time it was created after World War I until the Nazi invasion in 1939.

### **Brno Architecture Between the Wars**

My husband Don and I decided to keep Křenová 14 because of its architectural and historical value. The apartment building is an example of the modernist school of architecture, influenced by the Bauhaus, which flourished in Brno and other parts of the world in the 1920s and 30s. The Bauhaus was an arts and crafts school founded by the architect, Walter Gropius, in Weimar,

Germany in 1919, after the end of World War I. It became associated with a style of building that included simple lines, the avoidance of ornamentation, and a focus on function to facilitate daily living. The Nazis hated modernism and forced the school's closure in 1933.

Contemporary architects and historians have written books about the particular style of Brno modernism during the era



Façade of Křenová 14.

Photo: Joan Zegree

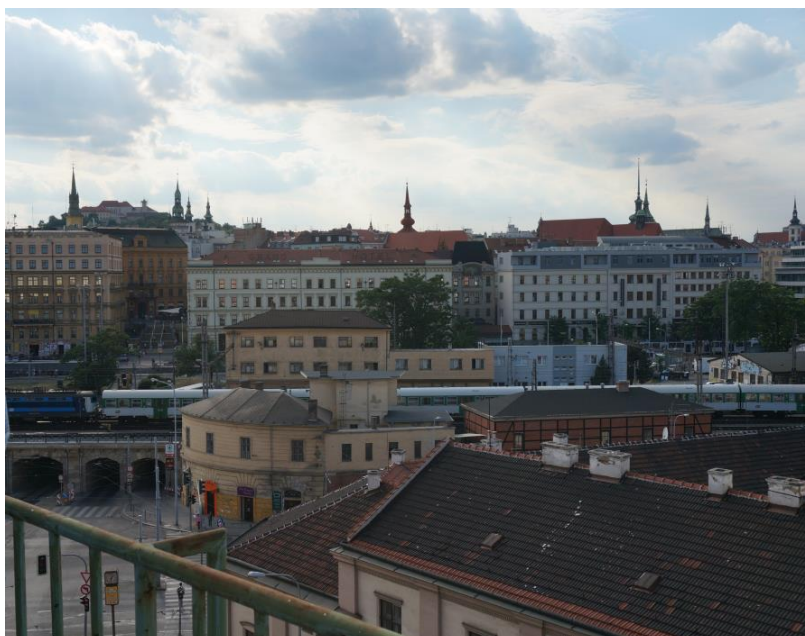


between the two World Wars. During that period, called the First Republic, Brno was a multicultural city with architects from various backgrounds working together and influencing each other in ways that profoundly shaped the culture and aesthetics of the city. For an introduction to the modernist architects and their buildings in Brno during the interwar period, see the Brno Architecture Manual website ([www.bam.com](http://www.bam.com)).



In 2013, Křenová 14 was designated a cultural monument by the Ministry of Culture in Prague because of its style and the era in which it was built.

Rear of Křenová 14.



View of Brno and the train viaduct from Křenová 14's penthouse apartment.

Photos: Joan Zegree



A sample of the mixture of architectural styles in Brno which preceded the modernist movement.



A comparison of Brno modernism with older styles. The blue commercial and residential building on the right was designed by Otto Eisler in 1930-31.

Photos: Joan Zegree

Although there is no proof, it is believed that the architect of Křenová 14 was Otto Eisler, a well-known architect and landscape designer in Brno in the 1920s and 30s. He was Jewish and born in a small village in Moravia, not far from my grandmother's hometown of Třešť. His brothers owned one of the largest construction companies in Brno during the interwar period (1000 employees at its height), and they collaborated on many buildings together.



We know that the Eisler construction company built Křenová 14 because the 1937 plan of the building was signed by Artur Eisler, head of the company. I received the plan one day in the mail



from our lawyer in Brno. The Eisler brothers also built the Villa Tugendhat, a private home designed for a Jewish couple in 1929 by Mies van der Rohe. This magnificent house has been renovated and is now a UNESCO World Heritage site. It sits on one of the hills in Brno overlooking the city.

Entrance to the Villa Tugendhat with a view of Brno beyond.



The discovery that the same construction company built Křenová 14 and the extraordinary Villa Tugendhat with its unique engineering features was a thrilling moment for me. I learned this in 2013 from a pamphlet called “Jewish Brno” that I received in the mail from a contact in Brno who had survived the war.

View of Villa Tugendhat from garden.

Photos: Anne Newman





One day, in Nov. 2013, while exploring Yellow Hill in Brno where Otto Eisler designed several houses, we were fortunate to meet Eva Šamánková, a Brno native and retired architect, who showed us her house that was designed by Eisler in 1936. We also met her daughter who introduced us to the owner of Eisler's own home nearby and arranged for us to see the house which is in a park-like setting. Both Eisler homes are light-filled, airy, and beautiful.

Left - Eva in her garden. Below – Eva's house, designed by Eisler.



Eisler's home which was featured in the 1932 exhibit on The International Style at the Museum of Modern Art in New York.

Photos: Anne Newman

## Ancestral Tour of Moravia

Before beginning this trip to Brno, I was encouraged by the Jewish Community and Museum in Brno to contact Jaroslav Klenovský, the Moravian historian and architect. Mr. Klenovský has written books about the Jewish communities in Moravia up until World War II, and agreed to provide a genealogy study of my father's ancestors.

From his work, I learned that our paternal family tree in the Czech lands goes back at least to the beginning of the 18<sup>th</sup> century when records were available. The villages in Moravia where Grandmother Rosa's ancestors lived, and the villages in Bohemia where Grandfather Alfred's ancestors came from, are clustered together in each region, reflecting the centuries-long restrictions on where Jews could live, how they could earn a living, and who was eligible to marry.

In addition to providing the genealogy study, Mr. Klenovský gave us a day-long tour of the villages in Moravia west of Brno where Rosa's ancestors lived, including the Jewish quarter and Jewish cemetery in Třebíč. Many of Grandmother Rosa's ancestors lived in Třebíč and her father grew up there. The old Jewish quarter and Jewish cemetery, dating from the Middle Ages, together with the 13<sup>th</sup> century basilica there, are now a UNESCO World Heritage Site.



Photo: Joan Zegree

What an extraordinary opportunity to hear this scholar speak on site about the history and architecture of these towns and to have him point out the buildings in which my ancestors lived. I was thrilled and grateful.

Interviewing Jaroslav Klenovský during our tour. He was kind enough to let me record him.





A home of one of my grandmother's ancestors in the Jewish quarter of Třebíč.



Photos: Joan Zegree

Standing in front of the memorial in Třebíč dedicated to the Jews who were deported there on their way to Terezin, including members of Grandmother Rosa's family. Mr. Klenovský designed this memorial.

Třebíč is also the place where, on May 18, 1942, its Jewish citizens as well as those from surrounding towns were forced to gather during their deportation to the concentration camp at Terezin. That group included eight members of Rosa's family from Třešť: her father Albert, sister Charlota, brother-in-law Norbert, nephew Leo & Leo's wife Sonja, brother Hilbert, sister-in-law Eleanora, and nephew Petr age 10. None survived the war.

## An Unexpected Treasure Trove

One morning Joan and I went with a driver to my grandmother's hometown of Třešť, a village in the Bohemian-Moravian highlands. We were looking for the location of my grandparents' old food machinery factory. Fortunately the town is not big and we finally spotted a large squat one-story building at the address we had been given. We asked our driver to drive down there but there were no signs, no people, and few cars, and I heard him say, "This is weird!" I silently agreed but was determined to explore it. While I wandered around looking for the entrance, the foreman came out and asked what we were doing there! The driver explained in Czech, but it was not until I mentioned the old name of the factory, Meissner & Spol., that his face lit up with recognition and he gave our driver the directions to the proper location.

It was truly weird and wonderful that, after all these years, the old name of the factory was still recognized. Thanks to this man's help we were able to find the latest iteration of the old factory, now named differently and located across the street from the original building. The director there immediately granted us a visit and led us into his conference room, whereupon he left for a few minutes. He returned with a couple of cardboard boxes containing original pamphlets and photos from the factory in the 1920s and 30s. These documents had been found by a worker during the

Communist era and taken home for safekeeping. A few years ago, the worker's son brought in the box of materials. The old food machinery factory is significant in our family's history. Its success financed Křenová 14 and my grandparents' escape to England during the war.

We were also in Trest to revisit the work of a schoolteacher and her students whom we first met in November 2013. They had interviewed the last remaining people who knew the Jewish citizens there, including my grandmother's family, and witnessed their deportation from Třešť to Terezin via Třebíč on May 18, 1942. These interviews are part of a national project which has taken place throughout the Czech Republic and is called "In the Steps of the Disappeared Neighbors" ([www.jewishmuseum.cz/en/asoused.htm](http://www.jewishmuseum.cz/en/asoused.htm)).



Photo: Joan Zegree

This is a MixMaster for bakers manufactured by the old factory. Hanák was Rosa's sister Malvina's married name. Malvina ran the shop for bakers at Křenová 7 in Brno across the street from Alfred and Rosa's shop for butchers. Křenová 7 is also where Alfred and Rosa lived on the second floor as of 1923, and where my father grew up from age 3. That building no longer exists.

In Třešť, we met up with Margit Meissner who traveled there from her home in Bethesda. Margit is the 92-year-old widow of Frank Meissner who was born in Třešť. Frank was my grandmother Rosa's nephew and was the only one of his family of origin who escaped the Holocaust. He was forever haunted by this fact but it did not prevent him from making the most of his own life. I had told Margit of the students' project in Třešť after I came back from our trip in November 2013. We agreed to meet here so she could see the project for herself. Margit brought her two granddaughters, Lynn, age 24, and Rita, age 20, from America. Lynn and Rita's presence was a tangible sign of the hope and energy provided by each new generation of a people who were targeted for extermination.



Photo: Joan Zegree

Students in the former synagogue of Třešť, wearing t-shirts Margit and I bought for them at the Holocaust Museum in Washington.





Photo: Joan Zegree

At the Jewish cemetery in Třešť with the schoolteacher, Helena Štumarová, her students, Margit (in the white sweater), her two grandchildren, Lynn and Rita to her right, and me. Some of my father's ancestors are buried here.

### **An Exhibit to Remember**

Through Margit, we learned about the opening of an exhibit in Jihlava, close to Rosa's hometown of Třešť, and decided to attend. The exhibit was based on a book by a journalist in Prague, Judita Matyašová ([www.czechsophieschoice.com](http://www.czechsophieschoice.com)) who was present for the opening. She wrote about the eighty Czech teenagers who went to Denmark in 1939 to prepare for immigration to Palestine. After Denmark was invaded by the Germans in 1940, the group could no longer go to Palestine and instead eventually fled to Sweden with the help of the Danes. One of the teenagers was Frank Meissner, Rosa's 16-year-old nephew. Margit and her granddaughters' presence at the opening again added much to the occasion.

Jihlava has an important museum that chronicles in new and expanding exhibits its history and the history of the region. We had met two of its historians in November 2013, Dr. Radim Gonda and Mr. Ladislav Vilimek, when they came to meet us in Třešť and gave me a book they had written about Rosa's family. We were happy to see them again and to visit Jihlava for the first time. Mr. Vilimek is a walking encyclopedia of the former Jewish communities in the Bohemian-Moravian highlands and he gave us a tour of the Jewish cemetery in Jihlava. He also invited us into his home where we met his wife and saw his office where he does all of his research on an old computer!



Photo: Joan Zegree

Margit at the exhibit in Jihlava surrounded by students and her granddaughters Lynn (standing far left) and Rita (kneeling far right). The panel behind the group describes the story of Margit's husband, Frank, who was one of the teenagers who went to Denmark in the fall of 1939. He and others later escaped to Sweden with the help of the Danes after the Germans invaded the country.

### **Jewish Museum in Prague Opens '10 Stars' Exhibit**

As you can see, there are many efforts throughout the country to acknowledge, honor, and document the mostly vanquished Jewish community. We learned from our guide in Moravia, Jaroslav Klenovský, that the long planned "10 Stars" project to which he has contributed, was opening this summer. This project is co-funded by the European Union and extends the Jewish Museum in Prague to 10 renovated synagogues throughout the Czech Republic (<http://www.jewish-heritage-europe.eu/2012/12/17/czech-republics-10-stars-project-in-the-news/%E2%80%9D>). We made plans to attend the opening of one of the "Stars" in Nová Cerekev, a small village also in the Bohemian-Moravian highlands.

At the opening, we were glad to see Arno Pařík, a historian at the Jewish Museum in Prague who helped develop this remarkable project. We had first met him in November in Prague, thanks to an introduction by his colleague (and Joan's cousin), Jacek Nowakowski, Senior Curator for Research and Acquisitions at the US Holocaust Museum.





Photo: Joan Zegree

The newly renovated synagogue at Nová Cerekev, one of '10 Stars.'

The renovated synagogue was stunning in its colors and design, and the panels of the exhibit as part of the '10 Stars' project about the long-vanished Jewish community was thought-provoking and poignant.

### Four Stars of Our Own

The year of 1922 must have been a very good one. We spent time during our trip with several remarkable women born that year.



Margit

*Margit*, whom I've already introduced you to, was born in 1922 in Austria and grew up in Prague. She was sent to Paris by her mother just before the war to learn dressmaking and fled

Paris on a bicycle after the Nazis invaded. She then somehow found her mother who was incarcerated in a camp in Southern France and they eventually escaped to the U.S.

Margit has had many careers including working as a story analyst in Hollywood, dress designer and businesswoman also in LA, teacher and community organizer in South America, and developer of curricula for children with disabilities in her local school system. And this was before she became a docent for the U.S. Holocaust Museum and gave speeches about her experiences and the lessons for today. Margit wrote a marvelous book about her life called *Margit's Story*.



Display at US Holocaust Museum's gift shop in Washington, DC which includes multiple copies of Margit's book!

Photo: Anne Newman



Lilka

*Lilka*, the Polish mother of Jacek Nowakowski, Joan's cousin, is a survivor of the Holocaust, and lives on her own in Krakow. In the summer of 1942, Lilka escaped the ghetto of Stanislawow with her mother, brother, and other family members. Only she and her mother survived. Her story and excerpts from her speech at a service marking the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the concentration camp in Belzec can be found at [www.spiderkedelsky.com](http://www.spiderkedelsky.com). In June 2014, Joan and I had two wonderful dinners with Lilka and Jacek in Krakow when we were there for three days in the middle of our trip to Brno.



Joan and Lilka at dinner in Krakow. Lilka's son Jacek and other family members were also present.

It was a very special experience for me to be in Krakow with Joan and her relatives. Joan's parents, whom I met in the U.S., were both from Poland and Joan has traveled extensively there to learn more about her family's history.



Joan at the vegetable market in Krakow.

Photos: Anne Newman





Photo: Anne Newman

Main square in Krakow

Two hours outside of Krakow is Auschwitz-Birkenau. We drove there with Jacek who selected a guide for us at Auschwitz. After that tour, Jacek himself led us through Birkenau which is adjacent to Auschwitz and where most of the gas chambers were located. Auschwitz-Birkenau is one of the concentration camps where my grandparents' relatives who stayed behind in Czechoslovakia were murdered. There are no adequate words for the experience of visiting this place. Hearing the stories of unbelievable cruelty and depravity, seeing the photographs of doomed families with their young children trudging towards their fate of unbearable suffering and loss, and viewing the acres of desolate landscape marked by barracks, gas chambers, and crematoriums was an experience I will never be able to digest. I was very grateful to have Joan and Jacek with me during this truly heartbreaking visit



Vera

Near the end of our June 2014 trip, we explored the villages in Bohemia near Prague, where my grandfather's ancestors came from. We accomplished this with our guide and interpreter there, Helena Slavíková.

Grandfather Alfred was born in Kralupy nad Vltavou north of Prague. But nearby Panenské Břežany is where he lived before he married Rosa, and where his father was born. There we met *Vera*, a woman who has lived every one of her nine-two years in the same house in that village. We found her with the help of the mayor of the village. Despite our unscheduled visit to her home where she has a lovely garden and three cats, Vera was very welcoming and full of spirit! She was too young to have known my grandfather or his relatives, but she provided amazing stories of the war years there.



Vera with our guide  
Helena and me.

Photo: Joan Zegree

Panenské Břežany also happens to be the village where Reinhard Heydrich, the high-ranking Nazi known as “the Butcher of Prague,” was living with his family. Heydrich had been appointed by Hitler in November 1941 to be Acting Reichprotector of Bohemia and Moravia. In January 1942, Heydrich chaired the Wannsee Conference near Berlin which organized the implementation of the ‘Final Solution to the Jewish Question.’ This was the Nazis’ plan to round up all European Jews and deport them to Poland for extermination. Vera was hired to do yard work at the villa in Panenské Břežany where Heydrich was living. She did not meet him but did meet his wife. Heydrich did not live there long. In June 1942, he was mortally wounded by Czech and Slovak soldiers while being driven from his home in Panenské Břežany to his office in Prague.



Ditta

Our 4th star is *Ditta*, my father’s younger sister who fled Brno with their parents, Alfred and Rosa, at age 16 in April 1939. She lives by herself in a charming Jane Austen era house in Bath, England and often accompanies the family on vacations in Europe and America. Although it is painful for her to remember the early part of her life due to the close relatives she lost during the war, she has tried to help as much as she can. She misses her late husband but still loves to read,

travel, and be with her family and friends. A champion swimmer in her youth, she still looks slim and fit.



Aunt Ditta and me at a friend's home in Santa Barbara at Christmastime.

Photo: Elizabeth Newman-Smith

### **A Lasting Legacy**

The last day before we left for Prague, we toured Křenová 14 with the Brno architect and professor, Petr Pelčák. Prof. Pelčák has co-written books about interwar architecture in his city, including monographs on Otto Eisler and other Jewish architects who were working there during that time. During the tour of Křenová 14, he pointed out various architectural details common to the era and to Otto Eisler which was another highlight of our trip.

The building was in great shape. The garden in the courtyard looked cheerful and well cared for. The stairwell had a fresh coat of white paint on the walls and bright orange on the railing and elevator. We will change that color as Prof. Pelčák showed us that the original paint was green. He did this by sticking a key into a keyhole and turning it a few times. This left specks of the original color on the key! The tenants we met were welcoming and seemed proud to be living there. They would like the poorly insulated windows on the back to be replaced to make it warmer in the wintertime, but understand that the restrictions and added costs of renovating a “cultural monument” have contributed to the delays. This fall we will begin these last major renovations with the help of our very competent and dedicated building manager in Brno.



If nothing else, this project has raised the profile of an architecturally interesting building from a tumultuous era that survived many dangers and is now thriving. It is part of my grandparents Alfred and Rosa's legacy.



Petr Pelčák, during his visit to Křenová 14. One of the tenants prepared for his visit by bringing up the file on the building from the Brno Architecture Manual's website!

Photo: Joan Zegree

Well, that's enough for now. Hope you all are well and enjoying the summer. Love, Anne

p.s. Many thanks to Joan for accompanying me on these journeys and providing invaluable help and moral support as well as her editing skills on this text; Joan's husband Spider, my husband Don, my sister Elizabeth, our guide and researcher in Brno, Monika Postbieglová, and Jaroslav Klenovský for their editorial comments on this text and help with the research; our lawyer and building manager in Brno for their help in understanding the history of the building and my grandparents in Brno; Petr Pelčák for sharing his expertise in interwar architecture and the life and work of Otto Eisler; Arno Pařík and Jacek Nowakowski for sharing their vast knowledge of the Holocaust; Helena Slavíková for her intrepid guiding and research services in Prague; Helena Štumarová and her students, Ladislav Vilímek, and Dr. Radim Gonda for their research into my family in Třešť; František Dvořák, the factory director in Třešť for sharing the materials of the old factory; and Eva Šamánková, her daughter Eva, and Lenka Konečná for welcoming us into their homes in Brno and providing insights about the architect Otto Eisler.

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Note:

The journeys that Joan and I took in 2013 and 2014 in the Czech Republic and Poland taught me about some of the searing events my grandparents and millions of others, including the four women highlighted here, experienced during the Second World War. It would be a terrible irony if the lessons of their time were ignored now. As I write this, the danger signs in the United States are flashing red—signalling the ascension of would-be autocrats and their followers. But I believe that if enough Americans understand what is at stake—including a government that is responsive, transparent, and committed to justice—there is hope.

NB:

Aunt Ditta died at her home in Bath, England in Aug. 2015.

Vera died in 2015 or 2016, according to the mayor of Panenské Břežany.

Margit died at her home in Bethesda, Maryland in July 2018.

Lilka still lives on her own in Krakow, Poland.

Edited Oct. 2021