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INTRODUCTION

We present you a publication, which is a collection of texts from the local Polish and Czech press, honoured in the "PL-CZ Local Press Awards" competition.

The competition was organised by the Press Club Foundation and supported by a grant from the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs. We would like it to contribute to the appreciation of the role of the local press in redefining and creating regional identities and to the promotion of its role in social life.

Furthermore, we simply honoured interesting texts. Those which are the best at presenting the functioning of local institutions, local economy, social problems as well as history, culture and national heritage. We wish you pleasant reading.

The competition team

LUBOŠ PŘÍHODA

1969 in Liberec

Reigime wanted to block out the memories of victims from august 1968

Almost a year has passed since five armies of the Warsaw Pact occupied Czechoslovakia when in 1969 Gustáv Husák was elected as the head of the KSČ¹. All the organs of the government were regretting and trying to withdraw their previous statements made in August 1968 about the occupation and anarchy. The word “occupation” had to disappear from the historical dictionary and be changed into brotherly and international help.

There was no place for nine Liberec victims in the occupation, or as French philosopher, Jean-Paul Sartre, said in changing the meaning of Marxism, Leninism, Breznev and Husák war crime. Not even for eight-year-old Nádenka Škávowa and her seventy-four-year-old grandmother Maria Vodákowa from Desná in Jablonec. Memories about them were supposed to be erased.

No small mercy

The apogee of twisting the events from 1968 happened in Liberec region when “An

¹ KSČ- The Communist Party of Czechoslovakia, (Czech: Komunistická strana Československa)

instruction following from a crisis situation in county's party administration and in the Liberec county," was published in 1971. Earlier the metal plates commemorating the victims were removed from the city and were melted under supervision in Ostašov foundry. Because of shameful pamphlet "An instruction," many people were exposed to the dismissals and persecutions and their families starved and lived in poverty. Surprisingly, a pamphlet blamed the victims and not the "brotherly international help."

"The responsibility for this tragedy, eight dead victims in Liberec, lies on the then government of county committee of the KSC, ONV² and the National City Committee. It is a result of irresponsible acts toward disorganization in the party and in the country and creating unconstitutional counter-revolutionary organizations. It's not surprising that in serious crisis adventurers are provoking clashes and then it has to end tragically. Still, often citizens, who are not involved in the conflict, become the victims.

Undesirable and unacceptable

In consecutive years, there was no reference in media to the victims of the August 1968.

Any sort of information about it was "undesirable and unacceptable." Even putting the flowers in the places of memory was unacceptable and was treated almost as a crime.

² ONV- The National County Committee

“When an allied army entered on 21 of August in 1968 it was an act of international help,” said Adolf Hájek, the secretary of County Committee of the KSČ (...). Occupation, which ruined the plans of the Prague Spring, was a bloody tragedy but the cynical Bolshevik authorities would never admit that.

What is it all about

Liberec was a third city after Prague and Brno, which showed resistance to the occupation. In 1969 they spoke against the politics of the Central Committee of the KSČ. StB³ did everything to provoke those events (...). It seems that two separate staffs worked simultaneously. The Coordination Committee and Extraordinary Committee, they were taking care of preparing and training agents and provocateurs. This gave them an excuse for the interventions of the police.

They wanted to, “cause a serious riot, which would explain an armed intervention. It would also prove that a contra-revolutionary movement exists and a ‘brotherly help’ is needed. That is why the Soviet Union gave a lot attention to it. The chief of StB was responsible for the action. At the same time all the committees were preparing the means of preventing other actions,” (Kronika událostí 1968-1971 for the Menzel Committee.)

On 5th of August, the management of the County Committee of KSČ printed in a liberal newspaper an information for or the citizens. “We have to prevent shots, riots and

³ StB-State Security, (Czech: Státní Bezpečnost)

imprudent behaviors. Help us in August to keep an order, peace and safety for the sake of all our citizens!" (...).

Growing anxiety

In the last minute, on the 19th of August, Vpřed printed an analogue information to the "citizens of Liberec region," to the authorities of County Committee of National Front and a council of ONV in Liberec. "A few cases of illegal distribution of leaflets and other actions leading to that disorder like slogans, instructions, persuasion have been discovered in our county."

A few companies and plants joined to the information on the first site of Vpřed tittle "Peace and order- the guarantee of consolidation," (...). The board of KPCČ, ROH⁴ and managers signed under it and most of them have written "Stop it, we won't let them, we'll punish them!"

On that day, the extraordinary session of ONV was convened. Josef Peci, the secretary of ONV, informed that Jozef Lenárt was speaking about what he learned from the hard core in Ústí nad Labem to which attended 1200 people. He was taking about weapons that are pilfered and about our army, which has over thousand of emigrants from abroad, and about that, leaflets are sent from Prague and the National Committees should be careful about students and highschoools (...).

⁴ ROH- Revolutionaly Trade Union Movement ,(Czech:Revoluční odborové hnutí)

Nothing has happened yet

Anxiety in Liberec started to arise on the evening preceding the anniversary of “The day of shame.” “The ten commandments,” which were copied by authorities explained how citizens should behave on that day. In the afternoon of 20th of August 1969, people were putting flowers in a place where Liberec citizens died. Either shot by soviet soldiers or crushed by the wall, which fell down after a tank drove into the arches of pillars supporting Radnice hotel. Also they were putting flags there and in the evening they lit the candles. Individual places had metal plates with the names of victims. More and more people were gathering there.

Reserves standing behind a beech

At nine o'clock in the evening, Coordination Committee and a secretary of OV KSČ, Štěpánek, decided that the ranking officers will tell the people to disperse. However, it never happened and about one hundred young people were standing next to the post office. At eleven p.m. Coordination Committee gave VB⁵ a signal and they blocked the ground. They've left only one exit through Sokolska Street. As a result, youth did disperse but 10 people were arrested and interrogated.

“Sixty VB officers were participating in the action but we had a reserve of thirty one men.” During an action we didn't have to use nightsticks or any other safety measure.

⁵ VB- public safety

Nobody was hurt. Nearby to the VB unit in Pasterska Street, a militia unit composed of 30 people waited just in case. But they didn't have to intervene. Flowers from the front of the town hall were removed and black flags were hung in a few places.

This situation wasn't exactly what StB wanted to achieve. Slogans were the worst misdemeanors. What people cared about was to put flowers in a place of memory. The climax of the events happened the day after.

A few slaps in the face

Liberec, Thursday 21st of August 1969. Some citizens ignore public transport and decide to walk on foot to work. Courageous ones are dressed in black or are wearing black bands on their arms. A flashing neon light, "Husák is a moron", is on the chimney of Textilliana. It will stay there for a few days till somebody will remove it. Nobody knows what is going to happen but an armed force is waiting for an opportunity. Next to the memory plates there is now more flowers. There also is more and more people next to the town hall. VB officers try to convince people to put the flowers in crematorium.

"Gradually eight thousands of people have gathered there. Only then provocateurs could do what they wanted to. For instance, in the VB report, we can read that a group of young people assaulted and insulted a citizen who was reading Rudé pravo⁶ on

⁶ Rudé pravo- the official newspaper of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia.

Praska Street. This fragment was about Mr. Drázsky who undoubtedly was working as a provocateur. The case was publicized and used as an example. Also they issued a warrant to remove people from the streets.”

Provocateur as a narrator

Josef Drázsky speaks about this in an article from, “Dělník studentům.” “Group of young people were standing next to the town hall,” printed Vpřed on 16th of September. “I was listening to them for a while and I have to admit that they were’ t there to commemorate the victims. They wanted to insult the Communist Party, comrade Husák, The Soviet Union and its army. I saw that a few of them was snatching communist newspapers, tearing them to shreds and then throwing them at the flowers and candles. I took few torn newspapers and I went to report the incident to KSČ.”

Drázsky is also telling how around ten young men, “organized troublemakers,” attacked him and beaten him up. He was rescued by VB patrol (...).

„VB removed people from the street with the help of ČSLA⁷. People were screaming and shrieking because VB was preventing them from commemorating the victims and leave the flowers there.” (...)

⁷ ČSLA- Czechoslovak People’s Army, (Czech: Československá lidová armáda)

Nightsticks in action

As people were leaving from work the more and more gathered on the streets. Police was repeating announcements that they have to disperse and chasing people away from Praska Street. People were responding, “They were screaming, throwing with stones and brick or smashing shop’s windows. Nightsticks, teargas had to be used...” Civil militia units from southern Czech counties had to join VB officers (...).

“When we’ve made it to Liberec the situation was critical,” said in *Nástup*⁸, from 28th of August, one of the militia officers. “The majority of VB officers were hurt and some of them need doctor’s help so they were glad that we came and replaced them on Praska Street where contra-revolutionary riot was the worst. We were under a hail of stones. Hooligans were shooting at us from slingshots with bolts. They were throwing bags and pulled out windows from the roofs (...). On the barricade they were throwing with ashtrays but also with planks. Only cooperation between VB and armored cars we’ve stoped the riot.” Of course, all those stories were told intentionally by, “heroic,” militia officers.

Leave him, he is our!

8 *Nástup*- Czech an Leipzig newspaper

StB had strong army units and organized a group of thirty agents who collected information. It had to, “provoke young people to attack VB officers who were already waiting on the streets.”

Provocateurs incited a considerable part of young people and initiated a parade from Gottwald Square through Praska Street to the town hall.”

Somebody, probably an important comrade, was supposed to deliver gasoline, stick and stones. However he couldn't avoid the punches even though VB officers tried to protect him and shouted, “leave him, he is our!” Although this even had thousands of witness it never was carefully analyzed

Directed by national authorities

According to the province Authorities SNB⁹ in Ustí nad Labem (...) at 1 p.m. on 21st of August, “another five or six thousand people came to Liberec.” Later on, crowd was removed from Praska Street. In a daily newspaper Průboj appeared, “It turned out that those young people were not only from Liberec but also from neighborhood. They gathered on Gottwald Square and then moved towards Praska Street. At the same time elder people were supporting them, “Keep on going! Truth will win!”

“What truth?” asks Průboj from 25th of August. “That the socialism is good?” (...).

⁹ SNB- National Security Corps, (Czech: *Sbor národní bezpečnosti*)

“The crowd took flagstones and wounded a few VB officers. People broke shop windows, and robbed it. Then they entered Dunaj bar and drunk wine and beer. They build from bricks, planks, benches and ashtrays. The crowd shot from slingshots, they thrown bottles, firecrackers and wounded eighteen VB officers more. “

“The situation was getting more and more serious, teargas and water guns didn’t help. After midnight, VB was supported with armored cars. Intervention finished at 2 a.m.”

“We have to mention the courage, prudence and self-control of the officers. Especially because no gun was used,” Průboj sums up the SNB protocol, “so the citizens of southern Czech province could know how contra-revolutionary attack looked like.”

At night on 21st of August, a riot in Liberec was over but hunting begun. Warmed up officers behaved as efficient police dogs. “Our officers took part in searching at nearby ruins, bushes and gardens, where they found groups of hooligans,” militia officers are telling in an article, “How it was in Liberec,” printed in Nástup on 28th of August 1969. “We found the majority of them in catacombs under Dunaj bar, where they were drinking stolen wine. One of the hooligans had cigarettes from the nearby shop hidden under his clothes. The youngest one was a first grade student. The part of them were his elder friends and the rest was middle-aged vagabonds.”

For sure, militia officers have had adequate instructions. Their success was celebrated by a new hard core of People's Militia in Česká Lípa on 13th of August, a week before an anniversary. Representatives of KSČ, army, Department of Foreign Affairs and delegation of the Soviet Army all gathered there. The member of Central Committee of KSČ, Otakar Rytíř gave a speech and he said, "As a hard core of the party we will help to improve relations... and we assure that we'll obey the directive of CK LM, which was passed on to the units. Hunting for people is a proved by the words of D.M. from Liberec, which went out in Vpřed, a Liberec periodical, form 9th of September 1969. Then Eduard Žďárski was its editor in chief. "Nearby Lipa Cinema , when riot on Gottwald Square was over, one of the ladies opened the door for us a let us in so we could hide. I she didn't, probably they would kill us."

Quotations are based on Kronika událostí 1968-1971 for the Menzel Committee. If otherwise, a footnote is attached.

The abridged version of the article. The whole article is published in Czech.

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BARTŁOMIEJ KURAŚ

A studio from another world

The first private postwar film studio in Poland was established in Cracow. The production of an American movie has just begun there. The studio, partly founded with the support of the European Union, is recognizable for anyone who travels the A-4 motorway from Cracow to Katowice. Those thirteen cosmic domes near Alwernia cannot be missed. Nevertheless, not everyone is aware of the fact that this is one of the most modern film studios in Europe.

Roman Kalinowski, the director of promotion, admits that the studio has not been boastful recently, since it has been organizing itself. 'Nowadays,' he adds, 'filmmakers from all over the world are working there with the help of the newest technologies.'

'This is a great example of well-invested money in the development of innovative economy. The passion of entrepreneurs along with the European Union subsidies helped to create a compound using very modern solutions in the audiovisual sector,' admits Barbara Malczyk of Lesser Poland Regional Development Agency, which helps entrepreneurs obtain grants from the EU.

Hollywood praise

Alvernia Studios was set up by Stanisław Tyczyński, the founder and former owner of the RMF FM radio. The domes, built at the beginning of the Century, supposed to be a new radio location, because the Cracow authorities tried to remove it from old Austrian fortifications near the Kościuszko Mound.

The conflict was finally averted, the radio could broadcast from under the mound, and the cosmic town halfway between Cracow and Kielce was left empty. After Tyczyński sold the radio to a German media group at the end of 2006, he invested the money in the domes.

In 2008, Alvernia Studios submitted an application via a consultancy company for a grant within the Innovative Economy Programme. It has already received 3 parts of the grant, the first two in 2009 and the third in 2010, and now is expecting the last money transfer. The project is considered to support innovative programs in which modern technologies play a significant role.

The project, officially entitled 'Running the studio and the film plan through the implementation of innovative production technologies and processing motion picture', is worth 17.9 million PLN. The subsidy, 8.8 million PLN, was in 85% covered by the EU (7.5 million PLN), whereas the remaining 1.3 million PLN was obtained from the Polish government.

Thanks to the grant, which significantly speed up the project, the company could introduce to the market a new, comprehensive service of film photographs available in the highest possible standard, known as 4K which makes the image resolution four times bigger than full HD. It also facilitated the Alvernia Studios the occurrence on the worldwide film production market.

‘The subsidy was only the small amount of money which was invested in the first private postwar film studio in Poland. We created workplace for filmmakers, unique not only in Poland but also in Europe,’ praises Kalinowski.

The EU grant helped to professionally equip the studio with a 2000 m², spherical, blue screen which reaches the ceiling of the largest dome. There is no such a big screen in Europe.

With the use of a computer, the actors playing on the background of this screen can be placed in any possible scenario. Moreover, it can be done in the three-dimensional technology and the highest possible resolution. A special set of lights synchronized with the cameras allows you to create the illusion of natural light from any latitude. 24 cameras are working in so-called Motion Capture system. It was used to make special effects in; for example, ‘The Lord of the Rings’, where human movements were given to the animated characters. The EU founded also a professional film laboratory opened in May near the domes.

At the opening of the film festival in Cannes the Hollywood Reporter, prestigious film magazine, presented the Alvernia Studios as one of the most promising film studios all around the world.

Like a science-fiction movie

The Alvernia Studios looks like a cosmic building not only from the outside. Semicircular interiors are just like in science-fiction movies; round staircase has metal railings covered with some alien patterns, sliding doors with the fingerprint scanners looks like the gates from Darth Vader's spaceship and the restaurant is similar to that from 'Alien', somewhere at the end of the universe, where alien survivors sit. Someone had a vivid imagination.

There is also a ubiquitous symbol of dragon, which is the official logo of the company, which can be easily explained. The dragon is Stanisław Tyczyński's favourite symbol. Nevertheless, no employees, including those hired thanks to the EU grant, seem to be lost under the domes. Despite the lack of placards on the walls, they move flawlessly between thirteen domes connected by glazed corridors. The only signs you can find there are those indicating toilets, probably for confused guests. The first-time visitor must feel lost in this cosmic maze.

Face every film challenge.

In the central dome there is Tyczyński's office. In the next room, looking rather like Master Yoda chamber, the films are converted.

'I am working on 'Śluby Panieńskie' directed by Filip Bajon. The film is set in historical scenery, so, with the use of the computer, I am removing every sign of modern civilization from the scenes shot in natural landscapes; for example, I am deleting pylons from the landscape,' explains, while staring at the screen, Witold Wnuk, a computer effects specialist.

In another dome there is a sound studio which looks like cinema. Thanks to such a solution it is possible to rip the audio to make sure it will be excellently heard by the audience in the real cinema. The Alvernia Studios was the first company in Poland awarded with the Dolby Premier Studio certificate for providing high quality services.

The film music is recorded in the professional studio in yet another dome. It can host a 120 piece orchestra. Specially designed walls with rotating shafts and covered with various materials give the sounds proper colour, depending on the type of performed music: jazz, rock or symphony. The so-called death star, which name origins from Lord Vader's spaceship, is hanging from the ceiling. Its folding arms can change the sound geometry in the room. An Englishman Andy Munro, considered to be one of the best, is responsible for the acoustic project of the studio.

‘Any British or American studio would not be ashamed of the equipment we use here, explains Piotr Witkowski’, head of the recording studio. He knows what he is talking about, since he worked as a sound engineer in Los Angeles, New York and Chicago.

‘We are ready to face any film challenge that domestic and foreign filmmakers will come to us with’, assures Kalinowski.

And what if they run out of electricity? ‘It is not our concern. In one of the domes we have our private power plant,’ explains Robert Kalinowski and allays the concerns about power crisis in the studio.

Vampires and the train

The company is focused on the production of not only science-fiction movies, as its appearance might suggest. At the beginning of August in the U.S. the production of a comedy about New York female vampires started and gathered some Hollywood stars such as Sigourney Weaver, Alicia Silverstone and Krysten Ritter. The Alvernia Studios is one of the co-producers and is responsible for the special effects. So far, it is the biggest Polish studio investment in American film.

At the same time, Tyczyński’s studio is involved in the production of the new film by Andrzej Saramonowicz entitled ‘Jak pozbyć się cellulitu?’ which is being prepared with the cooperation of the Warner Bros.

Very soon, the studio will start its first independent project. They are going to film in the three-dimensional technique the musical called 'Szalona Lokomotywa' based on the works of Witkacy and the music of Marek Grechuta and Jan Kanty Pawluśkiewicz. Krzysztof Jasiński will prepare the libretto.

It all looks like an American Dream came true in Poland with the help of the European Union. Is it really true?

Unfortunately, the company has some complaints about the lack of exit from the motorway, from Cracow, to the right which could make the trip to the studio much easier. There is such an exit on the other side of the motorway, from Katowice. In order to get to the studio from Cracow you have to drive through Chrzanów about 20 kilometers more.

'Who and why permitted to close several exits from the motorway including those to Krzeszowice or Alwernia', argues Kalinowski.

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BARTŁOMIEJ KURAŚ

Congress for Orawian not for Slovaks

Community authorities are organizing the First Orawian World Congress. Although, the region is primarily located in Slovakia only Orawa people of Polish origin are invited. Slovaks want to make an intervention in the department of foreign affairs in Poland and Slovakia.

The invitation for the party, which will take place in the next year, is already on the website of Jabłonka. It is written in English and Polish. "First Orawian World Congress is a meeting of people who feel attached to Orawa, those who identify with the land and look for their roots here. This meeting is for Orawian who scattered all over Poland and the world. This world congress is conceived as a multigenerational meeting for all Orawian who live in Poland and abroad. We want to invite all Orawian to Jabłonka, those who live in the Polish Orawa and those who have left their homes for the various reasons. We also invite their families, relatives and their descendants. We invite all who love Orawa."

In a word, there is no word in Slovak. There's not mentioned that the huge part of Orawa is located in Slovakia and that the Slovaks minority live in the Polish part of Orawa.

On the First Orawian World Congress will be built a monument with a plaque having an inscription solely in Polish.

“It’s an absurd. How they can organize Orawian World Congress without the help of Slovakia. The majority of Orawia is located in Slovakia. On top of everything else, no information or invitation in Slovak, the first language of the majority of Orawians, was given. Authorities of Jabłonka are thoughtless or they do it intentionally to make relations between Poland and Slovakia worse. We will intervene in with the departments of foreign affairs of Poland and Slovakia,” promises Franciszek Harkabuz, a vice-chairman of the Society of Slovaks in Poland and inhabitant of Orawian village, Harkabuz.

“I feel awkward that my own community is not inviting Slovak community to organize such a convention together. Orawa, after all, is a shared land of Poles and Slovaks. In addition now when we are in EU we have open borders,” says Jan Basisty, the chairman of the Society of Slovaks in Jabłonka.

The authorities of Jabłonka don’t think that their actions are inappropriate. We’ve asked Bolesław Wójcik, the vice mayor of Jabłonka to make a stand on the issue but he just announced that we try to change it into a political problem. According to him, “We need to think long and hard about the point of inviting Slovaks to the Congress of Orawians.”

The mayor of Jablonka, Antoni Karlak, the initiator of the congress, explains, “We want to organize a congress of Polish Orawians, those who live in our country and emigrated abroad. That’s why we’ve prepared an invitation only in Polish and in English. If our decision upsets Slovaks, we will reconsider the form of the Congress. But the Society of Slovaks won’t rule over Polish Orava. Besides we’ve offered to the representatives of Society of Slovaks from Orava to cooperate in the organization of congress,” he claims.

Nightier Harkabuz nor Basisty, the members of the Slovak minority authorities in Polish Orawa, don’t know about it.

“The announcement made by the authorities of Jablonka didn’t include the information that Orawa is mostly inhabited by Slovaks and without this information there is no possibility of cooperation with the Society of Slovak in this project,” believes Harkabuz.

Orawa

Orawa lies in the basin of the Orawa River and is a tributary of the Black Sea. The majority of the region is located in Slovakia when the smaller part is located in Poland. From the north-west Orawa surrounds Tatras. From other sides it borders on Polish Podhale and Slovak Liptov.

Until 1918, Orawa belonged to The Kingdom of Hungary. Then the Slovak lands were named Upper Hungary. After the First World War, Poland and Czechoslovakia were struggling for the region. Then Orawa was divided. In 1938, the Polish Army, taking advantage from the fact that Hitler invaded Czechoslovakia, took Orawa lands lying in Slovakia. One year after, after outbreak of the Second World War Slovaks cooperating with Nazi Germany revenged and took away whole Orawa.

After the Second World War, again Poland was struggling for Orawa with Czechoslovakia. Before they established today's border many conflicts about the region arose (i.a. Jablonka.)

COMMENTARY

WE SHOULDN'T DIVIDE ORAWA.

In Alsace, France, where are the headquarters of European Parliament no one is afraid to admit that this border region owes a lot to the Germans. In South Tyrol, recognized as model of respect towards minorities nobody is afraid to admit that their heritage comes from Austria. In both regions were areas of international conflicts, just like in Orawa.

European Union joined Poland and Slovakia, changed everything and integrated border regions.

People in the community office in Jabłonka are behaving as if they didn't have a clue about it. Authorities of Polish part of Orawa don't want to admit that it is also a part of Slovakia. There is one year left to the Orawian World Congress. Let's just hope that until then authorities will change their minds and they will organize a congress which will unite and not part Poles and Slovaks.

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ADAM HUDEC

Hradec cuisine: bosáky, žahour and vejmrda

Under an odd name may hide a tasteful food with an interesting history.

Zakudlanka, kočičák, friko or cmunda.

If one of the Hradec grannies will offer to her cousins from far away a vejmrda probably, they would think that she is kidding or she mixed something up. Still, when they will take the offer they will get a delicious mix of chopped apples, horseradish, vinegar and a beef stock. Some of Hradec dishes have interesting history. One hundred years ago, one of them gave a nickname to the inhabitants of Jindřichův Hradec.

1. Žahour (old Czech berry topping)

Even a word “žahour”, makes locals’ mouth water. It reminds them of curd cheese dumplings, crepes or buns with thick berry topping. However, if you want to get the authentic taste there is much more to do than overcooking fruits with sugar. You have to add cream and butter with a pinch of flour or starch.

“My grandmother taught me how to thicken a žahour with a pudding,” reminisces fifty-six-year-old accountant, woman named Dana Hrušková. “My son and daughter love dumplings with a berry topping since they were kids. They don’t leave here any longer but every year they ask me if I will make dumplings for them when they come to visit next time,” she laughs. Žahour is not a novelty in Hradec. As early as in XVI th century thanks to this delicacy made from wild fruits, grated gingerbread and sugar Czech called inhabitants of Jindřichův Hradec a nickname “Žahour.”

2. Šterc

“Šterc tastes and looks similarly to the škubánki with poppy seeds.” Explains saleswoman Eva Máchová.

“It’s easy to prepare this dish. I grate potatoes the day before and I add flour fried in butter. Then I sprinkle the šterc or vošouch with sweet poppy seeds cooked in milk. It’s best with buttermilk but it is impossible to convince children because they hate it,” laughs Máchová.

Recipe from vareni.cz advises cooks too replace poppy seeds with chocolate or sweet curd cheese and serve it with white coffee. Another site labuznik.com advises to cook a šterc, also called vošouch, with fried onion, mushrooms, greaves and cabbage.

3. Hlavička

Hlavička, called by elder people nádivka, is a typical spring dish. There are two reasons for that. Apart from the fact that it's usually served at Easter, fresh nettles are in it.

Nádivka resembles odd, salty kalach. To the thick semolina and milk you have to add eggs, cut bun, chopped smoked meat and some spices. Then you have to scorch it. Hlavička is served diced.

“You can eat it hot or cold,” says Jana Šimková, who was taught how to prepare this Easter dish by her mother-in-law. “I make it only at Easter. Although young nettles should be added to it, I prefer to add a leek instead. My friends also add dried mushrooms.”

4. Bosáky

Bosáky, drbance, klouzáky or simply hairy dumplings. Those names may not sound attractive but Hradec dumplings are quite often in the locals' menu.

“They are made from grated potatoes but you have to squeeze water out first,” explains Vlasta Kůrková seventy-six-year-old retiree.

“We used to have a special press. Now you have to do it by hand. Basically that's the

most complicated part.” Recipe by itself is not difficult for an experienced cook. Flour, salt and eggs have to be added to the mass of potatoes. Ready pie is rolled and dumplings are cut out. Later they are boiled and strained.

“Bosáky are delicious with stew, pork and cabbage and they have to be lightly fried with an egg,” Kůrková says. “My friends love them but my grandson complains that they are sticky. It’s a new generation,” she adds.

5. Kulajda

According to the Internet recipes, this thick cream soup with potatoes has to have all sorts of mushrooms, fresh or dried.

However, Dana Hynková, fifty-four-year-old cook from kindergarten, prepares the dish differently. “Children were pulling out mushrooms from soup. So, we replaced them with dill and now they like it. There are many ways how to prepare this dish. If you use chanterelles, your soup won’t be as dark. My husband likes when I add an beaten or boiled egg to kulajda,” says Hynková.

You have to be very careful about the vinegar, so the soup won’t get so sour. Because, as the cookbook from southern Czech says, is hard to balance the sourness and regain a nice taste.

6. Kosmatice

It might sound crazy to prepare a cutlet from the flour of elderberry; still the recipe for Kosmatice is back in fashion and is very successful.

“The flours of elderberry are coated in the mix of milk, eggs and delicate flour,” says Jiří Pospíšil, forty-nine-year-old locksmith. “I like to add beer, I think that kosmatice tastes better that way. So, the next what you have to do is to fry and eat it,” he adds.

His sister-in-law, taught him how to prepare this dish. As he says she adds honey instead of beer and covers kosmatice in cinnamon sugar. When he said he want to eat salty kosmatice she added thin slices of ham and cheese. “At least once in a year we should eat a cutlet form nature, not from butcher,” he sums up.

7. Zelníky

Dried green pancakes from Hradec bakeries only outwardly resemble those authentic one.

“Zelníky are made from flour mixed with small pieces of sauerkraut, pepper, caraway seeds, sauce made from pork and an egg,” says forty-three-year old cook from kindergarten, Hana Matoušková. “Then you have to roll the pancakes, which later on are baked in the oven,” she explains one of the ways to prepare it.

However, according to different recipes you have to cut square form rolled dough. Then you staff it with the mix of sauerkraut, cover in egg white and bake it. There is also another way. You can dilute dough with milk, put it into a form and bake it as a stuffing.

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JACEK DROST

Laces are made by fellas

Did you ever look for a needle in a haystack? I did. To be precise, I did not look for a needle but for the lacemakers, and not in a haystack but in Koniaków. Still, the level of the difficulty was almost the same. I didn't get any help from the local authority, and I couldn't count on the local priest or the police. But I did found a lacemaker after all! - writes Jacek Drozd.

“Did you ever make a lace?” I have unexpectedly asked the cyclist, who appeared on the horizon. “Me? No...” answered an old local man, and he rode away in haste as if he was afraid that he could say too much.

I arrived to Koniaków, the highest placed village in Silesia, running low on fuel. I was sitting on the curb smoking a cigarette and I was wondering how I would get back. The nearest petrol station was 7 km away. But because of the curvy roads and hills I feared that I won't make it to the pump.

I was worried about one more thing. Laces. Laces from Koniaków about which I was supposed to write about. First, I had to collect my thoughts. Koniaków, Laces. Laces, lacemakers. Koniaków is famous for its laces and nothing on earth will change it. Women are making doilies, tablecloths and thongs causing male's imagination run

wild. All those things make this little unusual Beskids' village internationally famous. Luxurious lingerie is as sweet and as famous as Coke or even better. An expert literature on the subject was published. Exactly. Nothing to add. As I was musing about what else I can write about laces, that old local man has appeared on the horizon.

His odd behavior gave me food for thought. Maybe under official believes about crocheting exists a dark secret hiding that laces are made by fellas. As I thought about that, I decided to find the true lacemakers, born and bred in Koniaków whose lases won't be second to none. I have called the village administrator Teresa Stańsko but she did not answer the phone. I have heard through the receiver, "the person you've called is not available at present." Since I couldn't find any help from local authority, I have decided to ask the local priest.

Fr Jerzy Kierra the rector of St Bartłomiej's parish answered to my question about lace making man after a while. He has say that he has heard something but nothing specific. "I've never crochet," said Fr Kierra and added, "I can thread a needle and sew on a button but I don't know how to crochet. You have to be very precise to do it, like women are. They are like those laces; delicate, still they will outlive us. The fair sex has a lot of power," he explained to me.

As he was speaking, I have interrupted suddenly. "But maybe someone from parishioners did confess to crocheting?"

“Oh no. Even so, I couldn’t tell,” answered the priest.

“In that case is crocheting a sin? If it is a sin, will a lacemaker be absolved?” I kept on asking.

After a while, Fr Kierra explained that making tablecloths or doilies doesn’t breach God’s law or any other to be precise, so it’s not a sin and there is no need to make a confession about it. Lace makers can crochet to their heart’s content.

Jarosław Wałach, a sergeant, who serves as a constable in Koniaków also was disturbed by the question about the lacemakers. He honestly told me why.

“I am a constable here for one month now,” reported Sgt Wałach. He cannot know much about the art of crocheting because he lives in Istebna. He assured me that he’ll ask his predecessor. And that was it.

I decided to find an answer on my own. I got to the cabin of Tadeusz Rucki. As we were sitting under colorful parasol I asked him if he crochets. He mischievously smiled at me and said, “Long, long ago I’ve tried to. I do many other things. I do woodwork, for instance. My fingers have cuts,” he got out of answering the question. He gave me to understand that he does want to cross-question him, whereupon he eagerly talked about his wife’s beautiful laces. One of them is displayed in the Museum of Art in India. I’ve also learned that being a husband of a lacemaker is

particularly fine. He had to lower his voice and said, “Woman loads off the steam and I have more time. For example, there is a match on TV. I can watch it in silence when she is making laces and counting knits.”

I was still looking. Someone told me that Józef Bieleńcz, postmaster in Istebna, makes laces. “Laces? Me and laces? Yes, but it was a long time ago. When I was six or so, we sold a few to Cepelia¹.¹⁰ Nothing special...” he assured me. Józef also said that he is 60 right now and he has started to work in the post 40 years ago.

In downtown I saw a fine figure of man. I couldn't believe my eyes because he carried two picture books about... laces from Koniaków. Two of them! Unfortunately, immediately it was clear that this man was just a carpenter. His name was Józef Skórzak. When I asked him about the books, he said that they belong to his wife, who has won them in a lace competition. He will look through them, but that's it. He knows a lot about the laces. His wife, his grandmother and, mother-in-law are lacemakers. “What about you? Did you ever crochet?” I insisted on Skurzak. “I have tried but it makes me nervous. You have to count all the time in silence so you won't disturb the others,” smiled Józef Skórzak. One lacemaking lady Anna Kałol revealed to me that many man try to crochet. Her husband used to help her with the bigger orders. She said that he has learned fast but they don't want this to spread.

I gave up hope to meet a true lacemaker and then somebody, probably Tadeusz

¹⁰Cepelia- Polish Art and Handcraft Foundation.

Witos, who cannot crochet but has learned how to tat when he had to be in a hospital, send me to Dominik Legierski. I thought that he was joking but I've decided to try. Finally, I found a true lacemaker. Born and bred in Koniaków.

Dominik wasn't willing to talk about his work, but we did broke the ice. "I had begun when I was 7 and now I am 17. So it's been 10 years," revealed the lacemaker. He tats in any spare moment, usually after school and on Saturdays, more often in the winter than in the summer. He is in grammar school in Istebna, he wants to become a cook.

"If you want to make a lace all you need is an idea, thread and a crochet hook. Patience is crucial," he added. He models his works on nature. Flowers and floral motifs are his favorite patterns to crochet. But also he makes other things like lingerie, thongs for instance.

There is no problem with threads. In the store you can buy Turkish thread, one Czech imports chenille form Czech and sells it among the lacemakers. Dominik also has his favorite crochet hook.

"It is my hobby. You can relax, because when you start you have to be very precise and concentrated. Every purl and knit has to be counted. If you'll make a mistake on one flower it just won't fit to the rest of the pattern," said the lacemaker.

Dominik's mother, Teresa Legierska, added that her son learned to make laces by himself. He has worked out how to do it just by looking at women crocheting. Now he is often better than lacemaking women.

"Yes, crocheting man is exceptional. But all he does is perfectly counted and finished," she evaluated.

At the beginning, his brothers were astonished and he almost gave it up. However, when Helena Skorupa, folklore expert told him that there is no such a rule that man cannot crochet all his dilemmas ended. In the end, I've tried to talk Dominik into taking a photo. "Oh no. It would be too much," he gets out of it. Still he gave me his card, " Lacemaking. Dominik Legierski." If I didn't have it, I would think that lace making men do not exist.

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ANDRZEJ SZATAN

No more bottoms up

As I was moving towards the cash register I felt sweat running down my back and my legs trembling. Bottle pressed my side. Damn, at any moment, hidden by the cloak it will slip out of the belt and smash in front of the counter. I was in full view. Sweaty, with a dry throat, not only from fear, I put on the counter two baps, kefir¹ and a bar of soap. Things that I wanted to pay for. I took out two sixty-seven, as woman said, and I put it in front of her.

In a moment I'll be in heaven, I thought, when I was standing outside the supermarket. A few hundred steps to the gate where no one will see my mystery. One or maybe two sips, beneficial for my body.

Suddenly someone laid a hand on my shoulder. An old lady was standing just behind me.

"I've seen it," she said, "Is it so irresistible?" she asked.

I felt like an unprepared student called by the teacher. Again, I felt sweat tickling down my back. I've mumbled something, something that I couldn't understand. I've wished that ground would swallow me up.

She must have felt my embarrassment.

“You should do something about it,” she said. “It would be too bad if you end up like this man,” she pointed a man who just has picked up a fag and moved towards the wheelie bin. He was carrying a can of beer in the pocket of his dirty and riddled windcheater.

My name is Stefan. I’m an alcoholic.

I have been drinking for thirty years. I just want to say something important. Alcohol is amazing. It can do so much. It can end your marriage. End your contracts of employment. Destroy your friendships. Empty your bank accounts. Damage your liver and brain. There is just one thing. Alcohol doesn’t solve any problems.

In 2007, three years ago it got too far. One day I woke up on the mattress in the hospital corridor. I’ve had stitches in my head and bandage all over it. I’ve run away. The day before in the morning, somebody found me lying on the pavement in a pool of blood and called the police. After a few days, it happened again. Pavement. Police. Shame. My boss didn’t believe me this time. I’m weak. Just as a little boy who can’t carry his books across the street to the school because they are too heavy.

“You can work here under my conditions or you can leave now.” He told me.

My first A.A. meeting was in Gorzów Śląski. I didn’t want to go there but it was one of

the conditions of the therapy. Five men who were holding each other's hands began to recite, "God please, give me serenity so I could change what I can change. Give me courage so I could accept that I cannot change everything. Give me wisdom so I could distinguish those two."

I was reading from the board in front of me. I didn't understand much of it. "I don't know if God exist," I thought. "I can't feel his presence." Many times I screamed at him, "God I don't want to live like this! Help me!" and I was drinking again. "He didn't help me," I thought then. I begged him when my mother was dying and I couldn't stop drinking for a few days and I didn't make to say goodbye before she died. I saw her when she was lying in a coffin already. I begged, "God, I know that I don't pray very often but if you really exist give me the sanity."

After this prayer, anyone who wanted raised a hand and spoke. As in school. They spoke about all their problems.

"We don't judge, we don't criticize, and we don't give advices. Every one of us shares ours experiences," said the leader of the group. "We speak about our sorrows, cheerful moments, about our ups and downs, about all our difficulties."

"I'm happy that I'm here," begun Kazik.

"I'm happy that I'm here," said Michał after ten-minute Kazik's speech.

It sounded like it was learned before. “What the fuck are you happy about?” I thought after an hour. “About airing your dirty laundry in public?” Yes, dirty laundry. One of them said that he cheated on his wife, another watches porn. Somebody else opened letter of his daughter. I felt that the group wants me to speak but I didn’t raise my hand.

My name is Stefan. I’m an alcoholic.

I’m fifty five and my life was miserable. Alcohol was the love of my life and I waited for a bottle as for the great lover. Not my home, not my family but vodka was all what mattered. Because of it my wife left me and I was fired.

“You’re an alcoholic. You have to start the treatment,” my wife told me many times when I was coming back home in the morning.

“I drink because I want to,” I replied.

“You drink because you have to,” she said then. “You’ll always drink. You’re infected by this.”

“A man is not a cactus, it has to drink. Plus, a life is like a beer, once bright, blonde and next dark.” I’ve tried to turn it into a joke.

You have to come to your senses because you’ll die from alcohol poisoning.

“Remember that then nobody will come to your funeral,” I’ve heard once.

We lived like two strangers under the same roof. There was only one thing between us. Lock in the front door. Today I know that she was right.

I have two children. My thirty-year-old son moved to England five years ago. Actually, he ran away. He said that he doesn’t want to look at this. My daughter, who is twenty-four, doesn’t have a good opinion about me as well. She saw me drunk more often than sober. When she turned eighteen police officers took me out from home in handcuffs on her eyes.

“I’m ashamed of him,” she said once. My wife reminded me about that when I was moving out of the house. As my legacy I left them a four thousand debt in housing association and a threat of eviction. Later family had to go to the court. I was conscious of bank loans, which I was paying back before the police car took me away.

My name is Stefan. I’m an alcoholic.

Three years ago when I came to rehab clinic in Oleśno the therapist asked me why I came there.

“I’m a drunk,” I’ve said. “I would like to change my life. I’ve tried but I couldn’t make it only by myself. Vodka was stronger than resolutions. Maybe you’ll help me. Please! I

don't want to end up like my friend who wakes up every day with a hangover and has words written on the wall saying, "I'll quit tomorrow."

"Why do you drink?" she asked another question.

"Because... I have problems at work and at home," I said after a while.

"Maybe you should think if those problems arise from your drinking," she answered after a moment of silence.

Later she put dozens of questions to which I gave the honest answers.

"You're not a drunk," said the therapist after an hour. "You're an alcoholic."

"What's the difference? It's all about vodka." I replied.

"Huge," I heard. "A drunk can stop drink but doesn't want to. Alcoholic wants to but doesn't know how.

"Ok, I'm an alcoholic," I admitted. "And I'm ashamed of it."

"Ashamed?" she asked and met with silence.

"Are you sick?"

“Yes, I’m a diabetic,” I replied.

“Are you ashamed of it?”

She saw my astonishment and just before I’ve managed to answer that I’m not ashamed of it because It’s not a shame to be a diabetic I’ve heard that alcoholism is a disease just as diabetes.

At the very end, she asked if I was ever hiking with a backpack full of stones.

“Who carries stones into mountains?” I answered with a question.

“Recovery from alcoholism is like hiking with backpack full of stones.” She explained. “Those stones are like all your problems caused by your disease. You cannot erase your memory. You have to talk about it so it’s not as heavy, difficult any longer. Speak as long as you’ll stop to feel their weight. Speak as long as they won’t hurt any more. I’ve understood that A.A. meetings are not for airing dirty laundry. Since then I raise my hand on every A.A. meeting.

“If you thing that what they say is stupid raise your hand and say something smart,” the therapist said when I told her about my first meeting.

My name is Stefan. I’m an alcoholic.

Once, when I've had to write an essay about the history of my drinking I did remember about the stones in my backpack. My essay was thirty five pages of school notebook long. Hundreds of stones. It took almost an hour to read my essay aloud and when I've finished I met with a silence.

"How do you think Stefan," we were using first names at the meetings, "how many stones did you throw away from your backpack? Elżbieta, the therapist interrupted the silence.

"Many, because I feel much better, as I would washed the dirt away," I replied.

I was fourteen when I got drunk for the first time. I've got drunk with moonshine on my sister's wedding. In college, I wasn't innocent too. Alcohol was my way to deal with the stress. Once when my employee smelled alcohol form me called me to his office. He said then," Jędrek, remember. You can drink before work, after work, even in work but never instead of work. If you drink and you'll do what you have to I'll pretend that I didn't see. But if you won't do your job it will end badly."

I shouldn't took it so seriously.

From my first business trip I returned without glasses and even dry-cleaning couldn't help my clothes. During my first foreign trip I've got so drunk that relations between Bulgaria and Poland were in danger. One year after pretending to be a ticket

inspector on a bus, I ended at the police, because the driver went there.

Once I've returned from a match without my six year old son. Scared wife started to search for him. She found him on a couch in one of the restaurants to which I went often.

One or maybe two years later, she had to search for our child again. I went with him for a company bonfire and I came back home alone. Rafał, my son, was sitting alone crying in the edge of woods. It was a miracle that nothing bad happened. Once time I fell asleep in a restroom of the same restaurant. When I sobered up a little, no one was there and I had to jump from the first floor through the window. If I were sober, I would hurt or even kill myself. It happened that I slept on a lawn or pavement near our house but I never went to a drunk tank. In March 2005, I got out of the detention. I was freed of all the charges but nobody believed that I wasn't guilty of molestation. People were spitting on the pavement in front of me. Children were throwing at me. I wanted to commit a suicide but doctors saved me. Priest, a friend of mine said that it must have been a sight that I'm needed in this world. I've ran away from people from my town to the other to the other end of Poland.

That's enough of examples from my essay.

"Is your job fine?" my friend from college asked me after few years.

“I can drink thanks my work.” I answered.

My name is Stefan. I’m an alcoholic.

It takes time to learn how to live differently. Three times a week for a half of the year. I had to travel twenty kilometers on a bus, on bike or on foot. Not all of us did make it. Later on, I had to travel two not three times a week for a three-hour meeting.

“Hi dad, I’ve waited for you to call for five years,” I heard through the receiver when as sobering up alcoholic I’ve called my son.

I had tears in my eyes and my voice was shaking with emotions. “Why I didn’t do it before?” I was asking myself.

“I’ve heard from mum that you’ve stop drinking, that you’re fighting with alcohol.” He said. “I’m very happy about it”

“I’m not fighting son.” I replied. “No one can win with vodka. “I’m learning to live next to the alcohol.”

Since that phone call, I often dial his number. On the New Year’s Eve 2009, my son called first with wishes.

“I love you dad,” I heard at the end.

“I love you to,” I said. “And I’m sorry about all that put you through.”

When we finished our conversation I’ve cried again. “I love you.” I’ve never heard that from my son before. Even when I went with him to the cinema, on holiday, when I bought him presents or when I was hiding his excesses from my wife. “I suppose nobody was pointing a rifle at him when he was saying that,” I thought.

I’ve get back Marzena, my daughter too. Although we don’t live together, since I don’t drink we visit each other quite often. In my small rented room, she shares all her secrets with me. Only my wife cannot forgive me. I’ve put her through the mill. She recently told me that she has applied for a divorce.

“You’ll pay me for my wasted life,” she announced.

The trouble is that you can’t practice your life first. It’s all serious from the very beginning. Cleaning your dirt takes time.

“God please, give me serenity so I could change what I can change. Give me courage so I could accept that I cannot change everything. Give me wisdom so I could distinguish those two.”

“I’ve changed myself,” I was saying goodbyes to my friends.

My name is Stefan. I’m an alcoholic.

Why do I say it so often? I do it so I can say one time, "My name is Stefan."

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MILAN HLOUŠEK

Sheriff and a former prisoner from Chodov

Chodov. I'm sitting comfortably in an armchair with crossed legs, listening to the old stories about the Wild West and travelers' settlements. I was casually gazing at the wall, at the pictures of the chieftains of Native American tribes and gunslingers whose heads are worth a lot of money. Like an interrogation in a dim light of a lamp with a wildly gesticulating sheriff who is a master behind his desk. He has just begun to tell a story and it changed his face features. The smile became a grimace of an old man fighting with bad memories. It's just like if, an old forester Frank, Ladislav Nykl from Chodov (69 yr) would be showing his dark past to me. I learn from it that he never had an easy life and he was rather an exile. He was an unnecessary element, the enemy of communist regime.

Exiles

When Nykl was 17, he set up a group called Exiles. As he says, it was the weaker part of famous then Prague Visegrád and Karlovy Vary Hot Riders. They weren't true scouts or travelers but a little bit of both. They were thinking about the escape through the hills, shortly saying, they wanted to do anything that was against the regime, but they didn't know what they are going to do exactly. "All of this was rather

boasting and chattering,” admits Nykl.

But the clouds were on the horizon. It was 1962, Czech creeper was moving towards the red east and it was extremely easy to fall out of favor. One young traveler went to the prison just because he wasn't working, just wandering with some guys and they stole two bottles of milk. However, then the system saw it differently. Nykl is an outsider, who will go to the prison for 2 years and 10 months. “We were supposed to be an egregious example, so they pronounced us as a disruptive organized group and told the stories about it in schools.”

Reckless teenager learned how cruel communism was. Before Christmas Eve he was escorted to the prison camp in Sýrovice near Podbořany.

Major's torment

In Sýrovice, Nykl became a witness of events confirming the cruelty totalitarian regime. “It happened in spring at the beginning of farm work when we were digging up turnips. One of the prisoners, former pilot from west, major Štiglic, decided to run away. He did it; he made an excuse that he has to go to the toilette. He couldn't walk fast or run and the guards caught him immediately. It was shocking to see him being drawn to the camp. He was covered in blood and the captain standing at the entrance shouted at us that if we try to escape will end up as he did or he will shoot us,” he raised his voice.

On the next day, Štiglic was hanging on the fence and his hands were tied to it. Blood was trickling down his temples. “Nobody could give him anything to drink or eat. They tormented him for four days. On the fifth day, he wasn’t there. Only a smudge of blood was left on the fence. Nobody ever heard of him again. I can only guess, but I think they buried him,” Nykl fell silent for a while.

Shot prisoners

In the spring time in 1963 Nykl was moved from Sýrovice to Vykmanov. In that labor camp, cruelty was present from the very beginning.

It was a beautiful day and the group of prisoners was playing soccer outside. When a ball fell on the forbidden part of the terrain one of the prisoners went for it. He approached the fence and waved at the guard that he will reach for it. Just as he bent up over the fence, a guard brutally shot him with a machine gun. A prisoner fell dead...

Because of this memory, even today Nykl is lying awake at night. What he wants is justice. Apart from bad memories and emotional scars the prisoner has to deal with physical pain. In the prison, his feet got frostbite and he went through rheumatic fever, which caused the heart damage.

“They’ve got scared that I will die so they moved me to the civil hospital in Karlovy

Vary. I was discharged from prison and military service,” he said.

Card 77

In the end of 1970, Nykl set up a settlement Forth Hills and established a band named Pekelníci. Later on, he became a chief sheriff of the united settlements in Karlovy Vary, which unified five nomadic settlements, together around eighty people. “After five years I gave my star to the younger generation and after another year it all was over,” once, a famous sheriff clapped his hands.

At the beginning of 1977 everything was still up in the air. When he’s read the announcement about the Card 77 he knew he has to sign it. “Because I believed that all men should be free, I signed it and sent it to my friend from Prague. Of course it didn’t reach him and it was resent to StB¹¹.” Nykl explains why his name is not on the official list of Card 77. Shortly after it, he was dismissed from work. He was interrogated and his apartment was rummaged during night. “Once, they’ve took my bible that I’ve carried with me during vagabonds. Police officer looked through it and asked, what’s this? An Old Testament, a New Testament. We’ll show you our testament.”

An enemy

¹¹ StB- State Security, (Czech: Státní Bezpečnost)

Around 1980 Nykl was supposed to be added to the StB list of enemies.

“I was followed and controlled who I was meeting and where I was going. They were asking about me and people snitched on me. As an enemy, I had to be imprisoned or killed. They didn’t manage to do it because in 1989 began the Velvet Revolution. A few times, I’ve heard from people from the Ministry of Community Safety that they don’t want me there. It was an order to move from the Republic but I refused,” said the old forester and raised his head. “Yes, my life was dappled as an American flag.”

Never ending interrogations

Until now, only media were interested in Nykl’s experiences from Vykmanov and Sýrovice labor camps. Today the Documentation and Research Office of Communism are interested in his knowledge. “They’ve contacted me because they’ve read my article on the internet where I was describing how one young man was brutally shot. Also, they were interested in the of major pilot Štiglic in Sýrovice. It was hard to remind all the memories, events and names but I could remember some of them. It was just fifty years ago and most of those people are already dead,” said sad Nykl.

When this year he was testifying to the record it was the first time when he really wanted to do it. “I don’t want to punish anybody. I just want to show how communism worked, now we can say aloud how it was to live under a regime. Many people say

how wonderful it was but they forget about those people who were imprisoned, tortured and killed. I hear all the time that bread and beer were cheaper. But I can't forget the cruelty," he raised his finger to emphasize it.

Grey haired man is still sitting in front of me. His steady gaze is holding my attention and we're slowly changing the subject to something more cheerful. As the discussion becomes livelier, the sheriff is more and more into it. We're talking about his works and I can't keep up with all magazines, articles, newspapers he is taking out. He wrote loads of texts about the Wild West. About gold seekers, Native Americans, desperate murders and he didn't omit the legendary Buffalo Bill, who travelled to our region.

Although the health of Nykl is poor and he is getting a small, only 6500 Czech crowns, pension and he doesn't leave his apartment very often he is still a dreamer. He will never deny his truth and he is going to talk about it as long as he can breathe. We wish him strength!

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