

11. England

When we got to England, we found out that they couldn't give us more than three months' residency because they were not allowed to rule otherwise at the airport. They also searched us. It was a normal search.

Within a month, we received a letter asking us to come to the Home Office. There, they exchanged our passports for a temporary document. I regret not keeping my original passport because they had written in it that my wife and I had the rights of British citizens before we were to receive British citizenship. There were very few of these cases, maybe a few dozen.

They also recommended that I get a business license, but for this I needed an associate. Unfortunately, I found a very bad one. I wanted to get a restaurant license and I put £500 into it, but the man didn't show up at the meeting with the lawyer where we were meant to work out the details of the deal. This guy essentially stole my £500. This is the sort of luck I had. I was very inexperienced. When someone comes from a small country like Czechoslovakia into the bigger world, they can get burnt many times, but I eventually found my way around England as well.

In London, we lived on Manchester Street, which was quite a fancy area near Baker Street. We leased the Czech National House and I paid £2,000 initially for it. We worked really hard. It was a rather neglected business, but in the end, thanks to the help from Czech pilots who had fled Czechoslovakia for a second time, we were successful. I helped many of them when they were trying to get out of the country at the beginning of the war. I met many of them in England after they had fled for the second time. They liked us. Every two weeks, they came to London with some money and they practically spent it all on Czech food and Czech drink. Well, mainly on drink. They drank so much, it was unbelievable. But I think that many young military men, even pilots, do that everywhere.

The business was going relatively well. We also lived reasonably, so we were able to pay back the £2000 that I had borrowed from the conductor, Rafael Kubelík. It was he who had lent me the money for the National House at the beginning. He didn't want it back. He was willing to just give it to me, but I said to him, "Good accounts make for good friends." And we became good friends. We trusted each other. Later on, when my daughter Linda was already married and had a little boy, that's my grandson Pavel (who recorded these memoirs and had them published), Rafael Kubelík became his godfather at his christening.

I was in the priority group to emigrate to the United States. As a politician, as a member of the National Council, I had the so-called "paragraph C". Those were people active in politics whose safety was under threat at home. They got permission to enter immediately.

I really liked England and I wanted to stay there, but everything was rationed at the time. Only those who were buying through the black market made good business. We conducted business by buying pig heads that could be bought freely. My wife made head cheese (*tlačěnka*) out of it.

The customers loved it, so it sold really well. I could have bought a pig on the black market, but I didn't want to. If I were caught, it would become known that I had the same rights as a British citizen and that would be embarrassing. Nothing bad would have happened, but I had to act just like the locals did. They were so disciplined! It was unbelievable.

For instance, in Prague when people got on a bus, everyone was pushing, old and young, everyone tried to get on first. Whereas in England, when a bus came and there were 30 of us waiting, let's say 26 got on and the conductor said, "That's it", and no one said a word. The rest would wait for the next bus. Then it was we who were first to get on the next bus and I liked that tremendously. I told myself that I couldn't buy goods on the black market, that it went against my conscience. When they were treating me respect, I couldn't act disrespectfully even though I could have made a lot more money.