

2. Beginnings in Prague

My father finally came home from the war but unfortunately, we found out that he had taken to the bottle. The officers' mess did not stock beer but they had rum, so he learned to drink it and became an alcoholic. Despite our family being otherwise upstanding, this unfortunate fact was dragging us down. It was 1920 and I was almost fifteen years old. I decided to go to Prague since the responsibility for the family fell on me. My eldest brother, Jenda, married early when he was twenty-one. He lived in another town and worked at a brewery, but he had a family of his own. In short, it was up to me to take care of our family.

A return ticket to Prague cost 7.50 Crowns, but when I saw there was not even enough money to buy bread at home and I had 10 Crowns, I bought two loaves of bread and I took the train without a ticket. When you take the train without a ticket and you have money to pay the fine, it is not so bad. However, when you're broke, you have to keep an eye out for the ticket inspector, it's winter, the floor is slippery, and you have to move from one car to the next, it's pretty tough. When I would see the conductor coming, I would go outside, crouch, and then move on to another car. When he came there, I went back again.

In short, I was cheating the rail company and did so for about a year. However, I ended up paying back all of it. When I was a member of the National [Economic] Council I was entitled to free travel all around Bohemia, but I never made use of it.

I briefly come back to my recollections of my father, though. He never was a member of any political party but he was a fighter of sorts, an organizer. When he came to a large mill, two months later they already had a union, because he knew how to organize that sort of thing. Before World War I, the workday was twelve hours long and there was no kind of social or health insurance. The Czechoslovak republic established basic social rights and labor laws as early as 1920. In America, they only came in 1930 or 1932. The Czechoslovak republic was an astonishingly progressive country in terms of social policy.

The miller used to plead with my father not to organize anything, but my father would not give in so he got fired. Because of this he often switched jobs and ended up paying dearly for it. When he was old, he had nothing left and would come have lunch at my restaurant at Repr¹.

After World War II, at my house, we always ate at one o'clock, sometimes at half past one or two. We usually had someone stay for lunch, maybe a minister. But my father said he wanted to eat at midday so I made arrangements for him. The kitchen manager had a small office from which to oversee the kitchen and that is where my father always used to eat his lunch. He would have roast or smoked pork, a piece of duck, and two glasses of beer – without fail.

Later on, when the Communists stole all that from me, they told him: "How long do you think you're going to come here for your grub, old man?"

¹ The Municipal House in Prague (Obecní dům, originally called Reprezní dům hlavního města Prahy)

He replied: "This is what I get for all my work for the unions? I don't even get a meal." But now I've skipped many years.

* * *

In the year 1920, our family had no source of income and my mother was at home with three children. When I started working, I was earning only 100 crowns a month. For a family to live decently, to eat and dress properly, you needed at least 300 per month.

I was lucky, however, to be employed at a company dealing in imports and exports called "Paclt a spol" (Paclt was the name of the owner) which had a branch in Milan. Back then, the situation in Italy was so bad that when the company was sending several freight cars of goods, let's say five cars of malt and two cars of hops, one employee had to go with the train and bribe officials all the way from the Italian border to Milan. At a small station, he would pay twenty lire, at a larger station, he had to pay between fifty and one hundred. Otherwise they would have disconnected five or seven cars from the train. The Italians had to sort this out.

I am a democrat and I've always been against Fascists, but I have to say that later on, when I arrived to Italy as a successful person, I saw that the place was in much better order. It so happened that a hotel had made a mistake and overcharged us by a hundred lire. When the receptionist found out, he drove thirty miles all the way to the Austrian border to catch up with us and he told us: "I made a mistake, here are your hundred lire." He was afraid of being fired because of his mistake.

But going back to the Milan branch. Back then, the goods we were sending were payable upon receipt of documents. We would only get paid upon producing a bill of lading that proved that the goods had reached Milan. It was called a "bill of credit" or "akreditiv" in Czech. The reason for this practice was that the goods cars would sometimes get robbed, or confiscated. This was much less likely in the case of our company, however, because malt and hops are inedible and not easy to sell.

My boss was one of the first skiers who went to spend the weekend in the Krkonoše Mountains in northern Bohemia. There was an express train that had two cars and sometimes carried only very few passengers that my boss would take to go there.

One Saturday afternoon, he asked me: "Jarda, how long are you going to stay at the office today?" We used to finish at 2pm on Saturdays – we called it "English Saturdays". I answered: "I have some work to finish so I will stay until six or seven."

"Do you know how to receive a telegram?" he asked.

"I think so, Sir," I said. I was fifteen at the time. Telegrams arrived at the post office and they would call to deliver them. The agreed sign of our company was "Pajos", as in Paclt Josef. That day there was a call from the post office. A voice asked: "Is Pajos there?"

"Yes," I answered.

"Spell it out please."

So I started: "Pavel, Anna, Josef, Otto, Sun."

"There is a telegram for you," the voice said. It started with the word "akreditiv", but I could not understand a word of Italian. There had been talk of this bill of credit for over two weeks. It concerned a shipment of hops that took a very long time to arrive. The company risked losing a million crowns on the deal. Mr. Paclt used to sell hops for a fee had bought it with his own money. He had thought he could make some money by speculating on the price, but in the meantime, the cost plummeted. This was because in Bavaria, they learned to grow hops more efficiently and so the price of ours fell.

Back then it wasn't easy to reach someone by telephone in Špindlerův Mlýn in the Krkonoše Mountains, but it was possible. I could not understand why they had not called from Milan and sent a telegram instead; had they used a telephone, it would have reached us faster.

I was a loyal employee and realized I had to act. I went to Strossmayer Square and took a taxi with Mr. Burda who always used to drive our boss. The company did not have its own car then, it was the year 1921. I told him: "Mr. Burda, we're going to Špindlerův Mlýn." He said: "Have you gone crazy?" "I have a message for my boss." Burda asked: "And he asked you to bring it over?" I nodded yes.

We arrived to Špindlerův Mlýn at night and Mr. Paclt was naturally at the bar. When they called him up, he asked me: "Jarda, what happened?"

"We received this telegram."

He read it and asked: "Who sent you?"

"No one. I knew there is a lot at stake."

He lifted me up in his arms so that I bumped my head on the ceiling and said: "That's fabulous, I'm raising your salary by 500 crowns." He didn't know that I was only earning a hundred per month. Back then, a civil servant with a high school diploma had 480 crowns. I suddenly had 600. This was the start of my career.

When my boss came back from skiing, he summoned the managing clerk and told him: "Would you please buy a new desk and place it here in my office? Mr. Jaroslav is going to sit with me from now." I was then able to learn a lot from him.

But at home, things were going poorly. My father had started drinking heavily and what's worse, he started beating our mother. This is something I cannot stand. When I was seventeen, they called me from the mill telling me to come over. They told me that my father had gotten drunk again and threatened our mother with an axe. I told my boss that I needed to go home and he nodded: "No problem."

I went home and threw my father out. "Dad," I said, "you need to go." He asked me: "Dear son, do you know you are throwing me out of my own house? And when am I to go?" He owned a half of the house. I told him: "You must go now because you beat our mother and I will not stand it."

"Well perhaps we could..."

“There is nothing to be done anymore.”

Although he was a bad father, he still was my father. It took me to years to come to terms with it. One simply has to act on such a thing, even if you are only seventeen. It would have been the same had I been twenty or thirty. But I learned to cope in the end.

Then came my two brothers Pepík and Frantík to tell me that my father went drinking every Tuesday and Friday and that they wanted to ask him to come back home but they wanted me to agree as well. I told them: “I am against this, it will do no good.”

“He promises he will make amends,” they pleaded.

“You know he’s an alcoholic.” I was wiser than them, but I relented. Sure enough, three months later they came back asking me to throw him out again. This time I did not help them. I said: “No way, I’ve already dealt with this once and I did not agree with his return then.” The thing was that he was stealing the money I had been sending my mother so she would have nothing left at the end of the month. She had to give him the money and he would beat her on top of that.

Later on, around the year 1922, he stopped working altogether. He became what used to be called “*krajánek*”. Such a person would go from one mill to another. Surprisingly, as a mill hand he still had a good reputation. For instance, he would see a miller who would tell him: “Pepík, our daughter is getting married and we will spend the next two weeks in another mill. Why don’t you come here?” So good was my father’s reputation that they would put him in charge of an entire mill. When he was in charge, he didn’t drink. He would only drink two or three beers a day so as not to damage his reputation. He really did this conscientiously.

In the end, I had to ask him to leave the house again. Our mother was happier for it. Out of the three hundred crowns that I used to give her (it later became five hundred) she gave away one half – it was in her nature. She would give her last to help others. Sometimes a child needed new trousers, another time, someone needed a pair of shoes.

* * *

One more memory from back home, when we were all together and nobody had any idea that there was going to be a war (WWII) and that our father would be a source of so many worries. Once, before the war, dad brought home a small puppy – in his pocket. It was a poor little thing and its eyes wouldn’t stop crying. We then found out that the dog had fleas that were getting into his eyes. Mother took him and slowly dipped him in water so all the fleas crawled up onto his head. When she thought they were all there, she pushed his head under water and all the fleas ended up in the water. The eye problem caused the puppy a lot of suffering and our mother spent a lot of time on it, but he grew up to be a cute dog that became like a member of the family.

The dog understood everything, including what we said, and he also did everything with us. We used to ride little boats on the river Jizera. The dog never went into the water and if he

had to, he didn't like it. But he would come onto the boat with us and we would capsize the boat so that he got used to the water. After a while, he began to like it.

Our boys used to jump from the bridge into the water. The dog always shook with fear. He also wanted to jump, but was afraid. In the end, he jumped and then felt like a hero. He would get excited when on Sunday afternoons we would say: "Boys, let's go hare hunting." For that we needed the dog to go with us.

We would do it in such a way, that a boy would stand at the top of a hill with Brok (the dog's name) and we would drive the hare up the hillside. The hare would get startled by them and because a hare's front legs are short and its hind legs are long, they aren't very good at running downhill. Brok would chase it downhill and the hare would roll down because it couldn't run fast enough. We would then chase it into a field of beets where it was easy to catch it. One could say that it was poaching, but we would catch maybe two hares and carry them proudly across the village.

The land belonged to a certain Mr. Hegr who liked us, but he told us: "Boys, you must not do this." So, we stopped, but the following year we went hare hunting once again.

Brok didn't like lying on the bare floor. If there was nothing else to lie on, he would take a lace out of a shoe, put it on the floor and put his front paws on it. It made him feel like he wasn't lying on the bare floor anymore.

When we arrived back home from Prague between half past three and four, Brok was always waiting for us at the station. For three years we didn't know how he knew it was Saturday and that we were coming. One Thursday, the postman came to our house and told our mother: "Gran, (this is what people used to call her) the boys are coming. She replied: "Why should they be coming on a Thursday? They're not coming until Saturday." "But I ran into Brok, he went to the station in Chotěvov."

Later on, we found out that our mother had a lady who would come help her do the laundry and also clean the floor. That Thursday, they were doing the laundry and the lady said: "Look, gran, the floor is already stained, let me clean it now so that we don't have to do it on Saturday." This is how we found out that Brok knew we were coming, whenever the floor was being cleaned.

The dog would also accompany us to the station on Monday at five in the morning. He would always whine when he saw us leaving and the conductor asked us: "Is the doggie coming too?" Of course, he wasn't. Brok had to go home and he had his own path. Back then, the way it was in the country, when a boy came across a dog, he would reach for a stone and throw it at the dog. That is why Brok would always run between the fields so that he wouldn't run into anyone. In short, he was a clever dog.

* * *

Back in the day, every boy had to learn to play the violin and I was no exception, despite not having a great interest in it. The lessons cost two crowns a month. I used to go to an instructor, a Kapellmeister named Šulc, and I skipped lessons whenever I could. Sometimes,

after three months of absence, he would tell me: "You have to come play sometime!" I carried my violin in a case that had metal studs on it and it made a good sleigh whenever there was ice on the roads. We made a slide down the hill and I would ride down it on my violin case.

I learned to play for seven years from when I was seven up until fourteen. But I had no talent. It was hopeless. My mother would tell me: "Play me something." At first, I played a folk song called "Pod našima okny" (Under Our Windows) using only two strings. I somehow managed that. Then I played another one called "Pec nám spadla" (Our Oven Topped). But once I started playing more difficult pieces, it was impossible to listen to. After a while she said: "For the love of God, my boy, please stop. It sounds as if you were pulling a cat by its tail."

So I gave up music when I was fourteen. But when I was eighteen or nineteen, the boys needed a double bass for their band. They had a cello, a piano, two violins but no double bass. They told me: "You're going to play double bass." They arranged with Mr. Šulc to give me some four hours of double bass lessons. I liked it more than the violin, but I didn't know how to play it as much. I only knew how to play it in C major. Nevertheless, I had some success because every now and then I would turn the bass around and slap its back. We played at afternoon teas – the Vašata boys and Jirka Kazimour.

Later on, when I leased the restaurant in the Municipal House and the mood was right, it happened twice that we sent the musicians to sit down at the table and we played ourselves. I remember playing the bass twice at the wine bar of the Municipal House and once even in America. In the Czech quarter in New York on Second Avenue, there was a restaurant called Little Czechoslovakia where a good friend of mine, Honza Michalčík, used to play. Once I talked him into lending me his bass. He was afraid and said I'd break it. I laughed and said: "Don't worry, I won't break it." And so I had success with a double bass in New York too.

When we went dancing at some ball, for example at Brodce, people would tell us: "Please, you have to do something about that dog of yours, Brok. It howls all night, it misses you." Because of that, we used to take the dog with us. Our mother sat on a bench with other women and Brok sat there too and didn't move one bit. The dog knew he had to behave and sit quietly until we left.

We were well known in the area. There were four of us – Jirka Kazimour and three Vašatas. Our brother Jenda was already living away. Wherever we went, there were four extra dancers. But once, when I came to Benátky, I got stopped by two mothers who were reprimanding me for not having danced with a girl called Mařenka. I told them I didn't know her at all.

"Look at him, he says he doesn't know her," said the women angrily. The thing was, me and my younger brother Pepík looked almost identical. This was his business, but I got told off instead of him.

We had a very happy youth, despite the difficulties. We used to meet outside the village – there were always ten, twelve, or even fifteen of us. We would sit and sing maybe until midnight. Later on we would make bonfires and our mother would come with us. We had found a little valley that we called the Valley of Youth where we went every Saturday. We made a bonfire, sang songs and cooked sausages over the fire. Those were great times.

I had some interesting experiences in those days. For instance, I became acquainted with Jan Herben. Senator Jan Herben wrote a book entitled *Hostišov* where he beautifully describes the landscape and people of that area. I liked it so much that I decided I had to go and see this place in person. I went to Votice, that's one station beyond Benešov, and then walked around three miles up a hill.

I went there and was just poking around when suddenly a voice from a nearby garden called: "Are you looking for someone, young man?" I answered: "I'm not looking for anyone I'm just having a look around because I've read the book *Hostišov*." The man said: "I wrote that book, I am Herben. Come in, do you want coffee?" I said: "No, thanks. I'd rather help you with something around the garden." He agreed: "That's good, you're young, I can't climb up there anymore." He wanted me to climb up a tree to cut off a dead branch.

We started talking and I asked him: "Mr. Senator, can I ask you something?"

"What is it? You can ask me whatever you want."

"I've met several Slovaks who told me there is no Czechoslovakian nation and that they are Slovaks and we are Czechs."

Herben began to explain: "I'll tell you how the Czechoslovak nation was born. When we were drafting the first declaration, we saw that we were nine or ten million Czechs. There are three million Germans and two or so million Slovaks. Therefore, Germans would be the second largest ethnic group in Czechoslovakia. So we decided we would be the nation of Czechoslovaks."

I said: "I am glad to know how to explain to the Slovaks how this came to be."

But then he added: "It is difficult to explain this to Slovaks. The educated ones are more Hungarian than Slovak. When someone was to get a public office in Slovakia, that person had to be fluent in Hungarian. I have to say I am worried about how things will develop in the future. I hope the next generation will be better, but I know that when we carried out a census in Slovakia, officials were asking people whether they were Slovak or Hungarian or German or Czech, one farmer answered that it was all the same. But the official asked him to decide: "Are you a Slovak?"

The farmer finally answered: "Then I suppose I am a Slovak."

We then spoke of other things and he said: "You should come to the Senate, you can sit at the gallery and listen to the proceedings. You are young and curious and that's a good thing." I asked: "So anyone can come there?"

"Anyone. You just need to show your identity card," he told me.

I never got around to going to the Senate because I never had two hours to spare, I was always busy with other things. But he invited me to come and see how business is conducted in the Senate. So this is how I met Senator Jan Herben. It was in the year 1924 or early 1925.

I did not end up going to the Senate, but that did not mean I was not interested in politics. Back then, Jaroslav Stránský was at the helm of the National Labor Party. The party held meetings in Lucerna, then in Vinohrady and later on at the Národní dům (the National House) in Smíchov. I became a supporter of the party and I also came to know Vladimír Krajina. The party did not last long and it soon merged with the Czech National Social Party. It so happened that long before World War II I was close to the Czech national socialists².

* * *

But let me tell you some more about my work during those years. Although our company had a managing clerk and an authorized representative, I became the right hand of our boss in the space of a few months. Let's say someone wanted to take a day off, they would come to me first and say: "Mr. Jaroslav, I need time off" and I would work it out with the director. Up until my military service, I was practically second in command. We had three accountants and when I came into the accounts department from director's office, I saw that one of them hadn't done anything all day long.

It was only later on that I realized that everyone has problems of their own and when one does, he will only do the bare minimum. This was something for which I reproached people, but when I came back from the military service they could not recognize me, that's how much I had changed.

I encountered some bad luck straight at the beginning of my military service. On arrival to Čáslav, I came up to a lance corporal and asked him: "Listen, Franc, where can I get a taxi around here?"

"A taxi? What for?"

"To get to the barracks with this suitcase," I responded.

"Show me your papers!" he demanded.

Unfortunately, I got assigned to his company. He was a long-serving lance corporal and I made a fool of myself in front of him. This was in the year 1925.

I spent only six months doing my national service, however, because I was taking care of my family. In fact, I don't think they should have even drafted me in the first place. I was earning 2,200 crowns a month at the time and my boss paid me half my salary throughout my service.

I managed to get permission to travel to Prague on Fridays. Every Friday, there was a football match or some other form of exercise, and I would be on my way to Prague at that time. I would arrive at eight in the evening and go straight to the office where I would work until

² Not to be confused with the German national socialists. During the occupation, the Nazis suppressed the party and many of its members were arrested and killed, or went into exile or the resistance.

one in the morning. I would spend Saturday and Sunday at work as well. On Sunday evenings I went dancing at Lucerna. Early in the morning on Mondays, I went back to my unit. I arrived by taxi, got changed from casual clothes into my training uniform, and arrived to the parade ground between nine and nine thirty. They tolerated this.

I was a conscientious soldier, but in this sense I benefited from some special treatment. This would be hardly possible today, but back then, family circumstances were taken into consideration. Nevertheless, I was so tired that when I had to stand guard later in the day on Monday at the munitions depot, I regularly fell asleep. I was so tired that I couldn't help it. I stood in the cold in high boots leaning against the doorframe and slept. When an officer came around for inspection, the other lads knew I'd be sleeping so they always made some noise to wake me up. Guard duty usually lasted past midnight. Today I marvel at how I was able to sleep while standing up.

I had a good friend, Pepík Sykáček, who was afraid of the dark. He used to tell me: "Would you please take my turn tonight?" The guard duty was from eleven to one and the depot stood right next to a cemetery.

I told him: "The dead won't harm you, it's some of the living you may want to avoid."

His family owned a farm and I liked homemade *jitrnice* sausages, made from pork liver. He said: "I will give you two *jitrnice* if you take the two hours around midnight. "I will take four hours of guard duty in your place, as well." I always took the guard duty in his place – it was three or four times over winter.

He was seeing a certain Mařenka, who worked for the captain and who was the company commander. Every Friday, the captain would tell him: "Sykáček, see to it that everything is in order." He was seeing Mařenka and when the captain and his family went away for the weekend, he stayed at his place with her.

However, one day he broke up with her. When I asked him why he told me: "I'll tell you how it was. I came over and she wanted to go straight into bed. I said, but aren't we going to eat something? She told me, well I have some cakes and a *bábovka*. But this stuff was not for me. Because you taught me to go to Lebedas' for sandwiches I always brought eight or ten of them and she would eat them all and then go straight back to bed. I'd had enough of this. This was all lovemaking and no food."

* * *

Before I went to do my military service, the company director travelled with another employee to our Italian branch. During that time I was practically in charge of the company. I was quite good at it. Until one day, when the director came back, I told him that I had bought a train car-load of shellac. He asked me: "Which kind?" "TN." "Where did you buy it?" "In London." "For how much?" He followed it in the newspapers. And then he asked: "Jarda, did you specify that you want it baked?"

But when they loaded the shellac onto a ship, they put it next to the chimney and so it became baked. It then turns into small flakes that would be needed by only one company in

Benátky that produced silicon carbide. I found out that they were using ground shellac in the production of grinding wheels.

The boss told me: “Jarda, if it’s baked, I will smack you.”

When he saw it he didn’t smack me, he just gave me a push and said: “What are we going to do with it now?”

So I went to the silicon carbide factory – the director was called Polák. I told him: “Mr. Director, I think we can do business together. I have some shellac.” He nodded: “We will buy it off you.”

“I will supply you will shellac, but I will be honest with you,” I said. “The product is baked, so I will grind it for you. Just tell me how you want it and I will grind half a train car-load for you.”

He stopped me: “Wait, I don’t want half a car-load, just send me five crates. There must be no impurities. We have a laboratory for this. There must be nothing but shellac, you must guarantee that.”

I sold it to him with a discount, but not such as to lose out. We ended up making quite a bit of money on the deal in the end. I did have to buy a machine that could grind shellac to the desired fineness. I brought a sample to Polák and he said: “That’s it, but as I said, if it’s not right, I will refuse it and you will have to come collect it from us yourselves.”

Some three days later, he called me to Prague and said: “I will buy your shellac. It has to be the same as your sample.” So in the end, I was able to get out of this difficult situation without tarnishing my reputation. I managed to sell the baked shellac well and nobody else could have needed it than that silicon carbide factory in Benátky.

Benátky is close to the place I was born and I went to school there. I knew of it thanks to my friends who worked there. The factory employed some four hundred workers. Its parent company was in America on the Niagara River.

This episode increased my reputation even more within the company. They said I had a good knack for business, having managed to sell the shellac. I made a pretty decent career at Paclt. When I was 26, I was already earning 3,000 crowns a month – much more than the average salary of a civil servant with a secondary education.

One day, Mr. Paclt telephoned me and said: “Jarda, you’re on holiday now, but would you do me a favor? The restaurant U Procházeků is doing good business, but in spite of that they always have to borrow money against their property. They keep losing money somehow. You’re a resourceful man, go and take a look at it. Do it for me. Go there for three weeks and I will compensate you. When things get moving again you can take some time off.”

So I went there. After the first two weeks I knew how the business was run and where employee theft was taking place. The members of the Paclt family were very interested in the matter because Mrs. Paclt was related to Mr. Procházka, the restaurant owner.

The restaurant was situated on Letná on Belcredi Avenue³ – close to Paclt, only a little further up the street. I liked the job very much and I managed to put the house in order. I liked the restaurant very much, but even more so I liked Mrs. Procházková. She has now passed away. Mrs. Procházková was my future wife's aunt. Mr. Procházka told me that he would like me to stay for good, but since I was earning 3,000 crowns I countered: "You can't pay me that much."

"How much do you need at the very least?" he asked.

"I need at least 1,200 – I have to have that because I give a thousand to my mother and I need two hundred for myself." The thing was that he would spend 150,000 crowns every year at the bar of the Splendid hotel. What remained went into repayments for the building.

I told him: "When you start making half a million, you will give me..." He interrupted me: "I will give you quarter of a million!" I shook my head: "No, I don't want to be your business partner, I want to be your employee. You will give me a hundred thousand when I make half a million."

I got down to work with such a verve – not least because I wanted to show what I could do to Mrs. Procházková. In the first year, Procházka's company made 750,000 crowns and he dutifully paid me my hundred thousand.

At the time, it was considered to be the best "Pilsner restaurant". It was widely known. All of Prague said that U Procházků has the best beer. As I was earning lots of money, I rewarded the best employees. To be employed at U Procházků meant you had a pretty good income. I was doing well and I married Linda, Mrs. Procházková's niece.

Later on, Mr. Procházka inherited some property in Italy where his uncle used to live. He was a member of the aristocracy and owned the Birra Moretti brewery. When the uncle died, he bequeathed Mr. Procházka and his wife a million lire each – some million two hundred thousand crowns at the time.

Around that time, Procházka became acquainted with a certain Dr. Winternitz, who travelled to Italy with him and on the way back they stopped over in Switzerland. While they were there, Winternitz told him: "You have no experience in these matters. I will deposit this money in my name." This scoundrel deposited the money in his own name and then presented a bill for his legal services for 613,000 crowns.

This was an unbelievably large sum of money for two years of work. Realistically, it could have been sixty or seventy thousand. Besides, we didn't need a lawyer. We had no legal disputes and the business was doing so well that it didn't need to borrow any money – we had already paid all our debts.

When I received the bill I told Mr. Procházka: "He's played a very dirty trick on us, this is not possible." I took off and went over to Winternitz's office and told him: "Doctor, I am coming to kick your ass."

³ The street is now called Milady Horákové. The restaurant was housed in the building number 609/60.

“How dare you?” he cried.

“I am just saying, that I am going to kick your ass.”

He led me to his own separate office. He asked me: “Have you gone mad?”

“I haven’t. But this bill is robbery in broad daylight.”

He stopped to think for a while and then he said: “If you don’t tell anyone of this conversation, I will pay you a thousand crowns each month.”

“You’re crazy,” I said. “I earn a hundred thousand a year, I don’t need your thousand.”

“You’re being paid too much.”

“I work hard to earn my salary whereas you charge six times that for nothing.” Then I added: “I am not after more money, I have enough.” (I was buying paintings at the time. And what a collection it was! All of them were left behind after we had to leave the country in 1948.)

I left his office feeling angry. On my way out, he kept saying to me: “If you don’t tell anyone about this conversation, I will pay you a thousand crowns every month.” I told to myself: “Take a deep breath and calm down.” As I left I told him: “I will think about your offer.”

I went to Letná to Mr. Procházka’s office and announced: “Mr. Procházka, I’ve just been to see Winternitz. I went there to kick his ass, but I didn’t in the end. He offered me money if I keep quiet about it.”

“That cannot be true!”

I said: “Go to the telephone in the other office and I will call him. I will tell him, Doctor, I changed my mind on my way from you. I don’t want a thousand a month, I would spend that straight away. You can give me six thousand every half year instead.”

I did that and he answered: “No problem, I will come to you this evening and we can arrange the details.” I added: “Naturally, I won’t tell anyone of this.” All the while, Procházka was listening in on the other telephone.

That evening, Winternitz came to our office and sat on Mr. Procházka’s desk. I told him: “Doctor, I told Mr. Procházka about our conversation – it was my duty.”

He answered: “How could you...” But I took his glasses off and slapped him as I had promised.

Our office had swing doors – it was on the third floor which was where we had our offices. He was quite small compared to me and I threw him out of that door. I literally threw him out, but luckily the butcher was walking up the stairs and he caught him in his arms.

After this I told Procházka: “It’s either me or Winternitz.”

He answered: “You can’t leave us.”

“I am of the same opinion,” I said, “but you have to decide between me and him.”

A week later he told me: “I can’t let Winternitz go, but I cannot tell you why.”

I was surprised: “Have you murdered someone together? I don’t see what else could make you keep him.”

“No, we haven’t. But you will have to apologize to Winternitz in front of the employees who witnessed the incident.”

“What incident? All I did was kick his ass,” I told him.

Then he said: “In that case you will have to leave.”

I had a twelve-month notice period and a big salary. I was already quite clever and I had a lot of experience. I said: “Alright, I’m leaving,” and I got on a motorcycle to see my mother in Brodce – or in Horky, to be more precise. But when things are meant to go wrong, they do.

As I rode through Vysočany, startled horses ran out of a building right in front of the car I was behind. The car’s fenders were up and I crashed straight into them and smashed my leg. The bones below my knee were sticking out from my trousers. I fell in front of a tram that stopped only half a meter in front of me. I was unconscious and I came to in a car – I don’t even know if it was an ambulance. I felt something warm – I was bleeding and that’s what made me come to my senses.

At the hospital in Bulovka they told me that they would have to cut my leg off because the injury was very severe and the whole area was badly damaged. I told them I wouldn’t let them cut my leg off.

They said: “Then you will die.”

“So I will die – but with both legs.” In the end, they managed to save it.

I was on my notice period and my wife was bringing me food to the hospital because I was spoiled from the restaurant and I didn’t like the hospital food. This happened in the year 1934. We had been together for some time and had our daughter, Linduška, who was born in 1932.

I had spent almost four years at Procházka’s and eleven years at Paclt’s – from 1920 to 1931.

One day my wife brought me lunch to the hospital and told me: “I rode through Karlovo náměstí and saw large signs for Prazdroj.”

I noted: “That’s Černý pivovar, a restaurant belonging to the Bártas.” The building stood on the spot where Černý pivovar used to be. The old building got demolished and a new, modern one was built in its place.⁴

I said to my wife: “The Bártas went to see me at Procházka’s around two years ago, offering me five thousand crowns a month if I go over to them.” They ran another restaurant called Koruna. I had already gained a reputation for being a good manager so they approached me.

⁴ The new building referred to here still stands at Karlovo náměstí 292. It was built in 1934 on the site of the original medieval building that housed a brewery making dark beer – hence the name Černý pivovar or “Black Brewery”.

I told them: "You're crazy. I'm earning 10,000 per month at Procházka's." In fact, I was only earning 8,000 then, but I told them I was earning ten thousand.

They were surprised: "That's impossible! No restaurant manager in Prague earns this kind of money."

So I asked them to leave: "That's beside the point, good day. I won't consider your offer."

Around the same time, I was approached by the sons of the owner who ran an establishment at Václavské náměstí called Evropa. They also offered me 5,000 and I told them the same thing.

I was thinking about all this when I was in hospital and I asked Linda to bring me letter paper to write to Bártaš. I wrote to them saying that I was in the hospital and that I would like to go back to their offer regarding the restaurant they had on lease – Černý pivovar. It was a well-known restaurant. They also ran Koruna which was an excellent restaurant on the lower corner of Václavské náměstí. I wrote to them that I would be interested in their offer.

The two brothers came to see me two days later. One of them was the owner while the other had no stake in the company. They asked me what my conditions were. I said: "Ten thousand per month and 20% of the profit."

"We cannot offer that, what we had in mind was five or six thousand. That's a decent offer."

I ended the conversation there – I told them goodbye and they left. However, the one who owned the restaurant came back and told me: "We can't give you what you're asking. We could give you eight thousand, but no share in the business."

I answered: "These are my conditions and I won't settle for any less." I didn't tell them that I was still on my notice period and that the company would have to continue paying me for another nine months.

The next day, they came with a lawyer and a contract – ten thousand a month and 20% of the profit for a duration of five years. I needed to make sure they wouldn't fire me after six months, that's why the contract was to last five years. However, I wasn't bound to stay, since the lawyer didn't put that in the contract.

I had one more condition – I wanted to be the only one who could hire and dismiss staff. Not even the owners would be allowed to do so. They appointed two nephews – Mr. Vainer and Mr. Pekárek – who were meant to act as my assistants in case we would come to a disagreement.

I went to work on October 1 straight from the hospital. They still had to carry me up and down the stairs. They also had to carry me down to the cellar where we were setting up a stock room. They had experience running a self-service café, but not a restaurant – in that respect I was at the top of my game. I was there from October 1934 to January 1936.

They told me that they thought I drew on thirty thousand crowns outside my salary so I wouldn't get paid for the first three months, which I agreed to. They also asserted that the overall profit was twenty thousand.

I laughed: “Come on, I’m quite good at accounting. Can you tell me who came up with this number?”

“Mr. Pedan.” He was a high-ranking official at the city hall.

I couldn’t hold back and I said: “What an idiot! I negotiated a ten crown premium for every hundred liters of beer from the Pilsner brewery. I managed to get you a 20% discount on gas and a discount on electricity. This in itself should bring you eighty thousand. And what about the profit from sales?”

Confused, they tried to explain it further.

“Why are you trying to me a fool out of me?” I retorted.

They said angrily: “Alright, take your fifty thousand and the twenty on top.”

But I was adamant: “No, a hundred thousand. And I will take it right now as I see who I am dealing with.”

And so we parted ways on bad terms, since I left a week later. I was in the kitchen with my brother and another female employee. It was after work and we were having a chat. Suddenly, Pekárek – the one who was put there to keep an eye on me – came in and said: “I just fired Šedivý.” He was a waiter.

“Why did you fire him?” I asked.

He said that he ordered him to bring beer to a table and that the waiter said: “Not yet, they want beer with their dinner.” Pekárek raised his voice: “I order you...” The boy answered: “I take orders from the guest. He wants a fresh beer with his meal.”

“It’s an order!” Pekárek shouted.

But Šedivý would have none of it: “You have no right to give me orders, I take my orders from the guest. Besides, I was hired by Mr. Vašata.” Pekárek fired him nonetheless.

Later on, my friends told me that when I heard this, I turned completely pale, turned around, and said: “Good night, gentlemen.”

This happened at midnight and at 1:00 a.m., the Bárta brothers come to our home – we were still living in Žižkov back then. They arrived by car and brought a basket of fruit from the restaurant – oranges and all the best food – and a bunch of flowers. They also brought a written apology and said they would be glad if I came to the restaurant every day, even if it were to be only for a couple of hours. They wanted to be certain that I was going to come.

But the next morning, I came to Koruna and said: “Me and the forty people who came with me from Procházka’s are leaving.”

Bárta answered: “But Mr. Director, you can’t do this.”

“Oh yes I can. I can” I told him.

“But we have a contract.”

I said to him: "Read the contract. You broke it – no one had the right to dismiss that man."

"Then let him apologize to Pekárek."

That angered me: "What? Those who came here with me are people of character, they don't need to apologize. It would be up to Mr. Pekárek to make his apologies. But it's too late now. This simply shouldn't have happened."

He tried to play it down: "Such a trifle."

I objected: "This is a serious matter. How would I look in front of my employees?" I decided to quit on their behalf without having spoken to anyone about it.

Suddenly he said: "Wait a moment, I have to call my brother to go to the slaughterhouse." And so we went outside together. We spoke about the situation. We walked down Národní třída and then to Žofín. Finally, we went back to Václavské náměstí. There he pointed out to me: "Look, Mr. Director, this is Evropa. It is a failed business. It belongs to the company Emraiz and sons."

I nodded: "I know the place."

"It will go bankrupt by the end of the year. They still have to pay rent." They had to pay for the lease to Maceška and they had lots of debt.

I knew Emraiz well. Paclt, the company where I worked earlier, bought malt from Emraiz and sons. The company had its offices next to the park by the National Museum. The restaurant Evropa was across the street from Koruna.

Among other things, Bárta told me: "If you don't want to go back to Černý pivovar, we will buy a restaurant in Vršovice. You can run it all by yourself."

I felt offended by his proposition: "I will be there with only four employees? And what of the others?"

"Nothing. That needs to be sorted out," he replied.

"No, I'm not going to run a pub so that I can play *mariáš* (a Czech card game) with some old geezers there. That's out of the question. A pub in Vršovice is not suitable for someone of my caliber." I found it insulting. So that was the end of our business together.