

JOSEF JOSTEN

I was born in 1949, the year after my father (together with my English mother, Patricia) escaped for the second time from Prague. I was enrolled in Czech language classes in London from a young age. However, I felt I was starting on the back foot as some of the children already spoke Czech with their parents at home, so I did not enjoy the experience.

After their escape, my parents had help from English relatives to buy a house, so they settled in London relatively quickly, allowing my father to begin issuing the FCI news bulletins within a year or so. But it also meant that they were able to offer sanctuary to other escapees. Vladimír Krajina, Jaroslav Stránský, Lumir Soukup (Jan Masaryk's private secretary) – and apparently many others - stayed for varying periods in our house before moving on, sometimes to the USA or Canada.

My father, as I remember from early days, was strongly driven to address the suffering of his home country and of the surrounding nations under communist rule. He dearly loved his English family, but worked very long hours, was rather quick-tempered and demanded high standards of all his co-workers. Unfortunately, that meant he was sometimes disappointed: not least with me, when I tried to earn some pocket-money doing clerical work at his office in Holland Road. One of his collaborators for whom he had the greatest respect was Father Lang (who also found time to send encouraging notes and cards to me).

My father was a gifted journalist, with an instinct for a good story and no inhibitions when following a lead. If he needed an entry to a restricted meeting or event, he would always find a creative way in. His campaigns in the British and international press courted trouble from the Czech State security Service, adding yet more stress to my mother's life. She was totally loyal to my father and his cause, which required considerable flexibility and perseverance.

After my father's death in 1985, my mother took several years to sort through all his papers, contributing most of them to the archives at the British Library, Palacký University in Olomouc and University at Lincoln, Nebraska in the USA. She also prepared material for a monumental biography by Dr Milada Polišenská of the American University of Prague, which was published in 2009 under the title of "Zapomenutý Nepřítel – Josef Josten". Dr Polišenská hopes to publish a revised English version in due course. I shall also be publishing a brief biographical booklet in the next few months. Both these publications will be made available to BCSA members when they appear.

Martin Josten, August 2021

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