

# The life 1968–2000 of an expat

JAROSLAV NAJMAN



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Jaroslav  
Najman  
[1980]

The author was born in 1945 in Msene Lazne, Central Bohemian Region. Following primary school in 1960, he was employed and educated as an aircraft engine mechanic at Walter Aircraft Engine Factory and military enterprise Aircraft Repair Works in Prague. He completed his education at a technical high school in Prague with a high school diploma in 1965. That same year, he was drafted into the Czechoslovak Air Force in Ostrava, where he completed his military service in late 1967. Following his military service and until he emigrated to Sweden in 1968, he was employed at the Aviation Research Institute in Prague. Having Sweden as his home base, he worked in Nigeria, Iran, and Indonesia until 1987, when he accepted a management position with Nyge Aero AB in Nykoping. Before returning to Sweden, he married his wife, Nancy, in the Netherlands. The political situation in Czechoslovakia was rapidly improving after the 1989 events, and he started considering returning. His decision was accelerated after his business plan was accepted by Duncan Aviation company in Nebraska, USA. Finally, in 1994, he returned to Prague with his family to work as CEO of the newly established LOK-Duncan Aviation company at the Kbely military airport. In November 2000, he regained his Czech citizenship.

1968-2000

# The life of an expat

JAROSLAV NAJMAN

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# Foreword

This book is penned by a foreigner who has never resided or worked in an English-speaking country. It delves into the lives of expatriates—individuals who have spent a substantial part of their existence in foreign and exotic lands. Some sought monetary gains, others pursued adventure and an escape from the monotony of developed nations, while some craved cultural understanding and engaged in charitable endeavors. Many embarked on this journey for a combination of these reasons.

Being an expatriate is distinct from mere travel and visitation. It involves immersing oneself in the local community and culture through work. Such experiences shape one's character, comprehension, and behavior, often engulfing individuals to the point of marriage, starting families, and embracing a new way of life. It becomes a complete commitment.

## Czechoslovakia 1945

The world war that ravaged the globe for six long years was ending. The Russians were closing in on Berlin while the Americans and their allies made progress on all fronts. Eventually, the Japanese capitulated under pressure from US forces and the Russians in the Pacific and Manchuria.

For the people of the occupied Czech Republic, the light at the end of the dark tunnel began to shine. The nation emerged from the war relatively unscathed, with minimal material damage or loss of human lives. The warring factions had chosen to wage their major battles elsewhere.

Czechs are masters of survival. Despite being a small Slavic nation confronted by a larger German population in the West, they had experienced and survived numerous occupations by their German neighbors and other formidable nations. Yet, they never succumbed to assimilation and remained the most Western Slavic nation. The Czech people learned to adapt, sometimes reluctantly complying with new rulers, collaborating with them, or even emigrating and partially assimilating. But when the moment was right, they would rally under the Czech banner, even if fleeting.

Humor is deeply ingrained in the Czech character, allowing them to joke about everything, admire and dislike foreign elements, harbor jealousy, and possess strong political opinions when the threat of persecution is absent. In trying times, they tend to focus on their own families and affairs, allowing the ruling powers to have their way. The nation boasts numerous war heroes who fought in the last two wars, but many were punished and forgotten during the communist regime.

This distinctive Czech character finds its embodiment in Jaroslav Hasek's book „Soldier Svejk,“ featuring a main character who feigns stupidity but is clever, constantly mocking his superiors.

Sudetenland, a region neighboring the German, Austrian, and Polish borders, historically inhabited by a German population, was bestowed upon German artisans and farmers by Czech kings. This substantial minority, compris-

ing three million people, unwillingly became Czech citizens in 1918 during the dissolution of the Austrian Empire.

The loyalty of the German population towards Czechoslovakia was minimal, if not non-existent. They looked to Hitler's Germany as their beacon of hope, longing to become part of it.

In 1938, England, France, and Germany signed the Munich Declaration, conceding Sudetenland to Germany in hopes of averting an imminent war. The Czechs wanted to defend their country, but England and France were their closest allies, and Russian assistance was contingent upon the participation of the former two nations. The situation seemed hopeless as the main Czech defense lines lay in areas along the border predominantly populated by Germans. Thus, in late 1938, German troops crossed the Czechoslovakian border, receiving a warm welcome from the German population. One-third of Czechoslovakia's territory became occupied, purged of its Czech inhabitants, leaving the rest of the country defenseless at Hitler's feet. In March 1939, the remnants of Czechoslovakia fell to the Germans, who declared a German protectorate called Bohmen und Mahren. Slovakia became an independent country aligned with Nazi Germany, marking the onset of the Dark Ages and paving the way for Czech revenge in 1945.

The Sudeten Germans were now part of the Third Reich and actively participated in Nazi atrocities throughout Europe, with over 300,000 of them perishing in the war while wearing German uniforms.

As the Second World War drew to a close, General Patton's troops occupied the western part of the Czech Republic, including the industrial town of Plzen, in April 1945. Scouts of the US army were also spotted in other parts of the Czech Republic, but the main force halted 30 km West of Prague due to the Yalta agreement, which defined the post-war borders of influence. Regrettably, Czechoslovakia fell under the sway of the Soviet Union and remained so until late 1989.

I am confident that my country boasts numerous courageous individuals who were, are, and will be ready to defend our homeland. Many Czech soldiers, pilots, and others perished while fighting against Hitler across Western and Eastern Europe, Africa, and even the Far East. Unfortunately, the Czech population, known as the protectorate Bohmen und Mahren under the Germans, caused little trouble for the occupying forces and instead toiled in factories to support the German war machine.

Resistance against the German forces remained relatively minor. Small groups of resistance fighters and members of the Czech underground were mainly wiped out after German Protector Heydrich's assassination by brave Czech paratroopers sent from London. In response, the Germans unleashed terror, instilling fear in most Czechs as they indiscriminately executed Czech intellectuals and annihilated two Czech villages. A Czech traitor betrayed the hiding place of the courageous paratroopers to the Germans, leading to their last stand in the cellars of the Orthodox Church in Prague.

By May 1945, when the war was nearing its end, the Czech Republic stood as the last enclave in Europe, still occupied by German forces. As mentioned, General Patton halted his advance just short of Prague, allowing Russian troops to arrive from Berlin and „liberate“ the city. The Czechs welcomed the Russian army, unknowingly embracing their new masters.

On May 5th, the citizens of Prague launched an uprising, receiving support in some areas from General Vlasov's renegade Ukrainian Army, which had switched sides in the hopes of leniency from the victorious Russians.

Regrettably, their hopes were dashed, and most of General Vlasov's soldiers were hunted down and killed by the Red Army in the woods outside Prague.

German troops and ethnic German civilians now sought to escape to the West, hoping to reach the American occupation zone in search of better treatment and leniency.

In the tumultuous years following the war, the German population in Czechoslovakia became the target of Czech retribution. Following the Potsdam Conference Allied agreement, approximately three million ethnic Germans were deported to Germany, leaving behind their possessions and the land they had inhabited for centuries.

Sudetenland now stood nearly empty, devoid of its original inhabitants, with abandoned villages, businesses, and farms. Once a productive part of Czechoslovakia, it was gradually repopulated by Czechs who recognized the opportunity to start afresh by taking over the properties left behind by the expelled German population.

Replacing three million people required extensive effort and spanned several years. Following the communist takeover of Czechoslovakia in 1948, the „Iron Curtain“ descended along the border with West Germany and Austria, rendering significant portions of the former Sudetenland restricted military areas.

Thus began the Cold War.

## Acknowledgment

I have penned this book primarily for my children, Mark and Kim. However, I have also written it for my wife, Nancy, who provided me with a solid family foundation after my life as an expatriate spanned seven countries in pursuit of personal fulfillment. I wanted to present them with a glimpse into my life long before they became part of it.

This book also serves as a heartfelt tribute to the past and to my family, friends, and colleagues worldwide, many of whom are no longer with us. One such person was my father-in-law, Char, who passed away in November 2000.

My sister, Jitka, and her family often provided me a temporary home in the USA. Through Jitka, I forged an enduring friendship with Stana Novak and her family in Miami. It was with them that I stayed during my flight training in Miami.

In Sweden, my dearest friend Bert and his family permanently warmly welcomed me.

I pay homage to my father, who approved my decision to emigrate and provided financial assistance. I am also grateful to the Rahlen family in Orebro, who invited me and helped me settle in Sweden after the Russian occupation.

During my early professional years, I received support and understanding from Bengt Kronby, the technical director at Nyge Aero in Nykoping. He offered me my first aviation employment in Sweden, which helped me hone my skills and advance in my profession. This opportunity opened the doors to my future assignments abroad.

Working for Schreiner Airways in the Netherlands allowed me to engage in exciting work in exotic countries as an expatriate. It was not only a well-paid job but also a way of life. Working under simple and, at times, harsh conditions in these exotic locales sharpened my decision-making abilities. We often had to improvise while prioritizing safety precautions. During this period, I became an international individual, collaborating with people of diverse nationalities and professional backgrounds.

When I encountered difficulties obtaining my Swedish citizenship due to frequent travel and work outside of Sweden, Sterner Aero at Dala Airport in Borlange offered me permanent employment.

Within the next few years, my citizenship was granted. Working in that part of Sweden was a memorable chapter in my professional and personal life. Sterner Aero, a family-owned innovative company, employed experienced helicopter pilots and mechanics.

1987, I began my second tenure with Nyge Aero as the Production Manager. Three years later, I succeeded Bengt Kronby as the Technical Director. Since my initial employment in 1969, the company has expanded its scope of work and relocated to the former Swedish Air Force base in Skavsta, just outside Nyköping. I left the company in 1993 and returned to my homeland, the Czech Republic.

The final six years in Sweden were enriching for me and my family. Both of my children were born there.

I must express my gratitude to my friends Steve and Wayne at Duncan Aviation in Nebraska, who assisted me in 1994 when establishing a Joint Venture Company in the Czech Republic. When Duncan Aviation management decided to terminate their involvement in the joint venture, Steve proposed and facilitated a smooth ownership transition.

Lastly, I sincerely appreciate Tomas, the owner of DSA a.s., who stepped in during the year 2000 and provided the necessary funds to purchase Duncan Aviation shares, thus preventing the dissolution of the LOK-Duncan Aviation company.

This book serves as a recollection of my memories, feelings, and experiences, presenting a small window into my life as an expatriate.

## Introduction to Part One:

*In this part of the book, I recount the events in 1968 in Czechoslovakia, the historical backdrop against which my life unfolded, and the factors that influenced my decision to become an expatriate. From my upbringing in a communist country to my education, the seeds of my future adventures were sown. My dreams of flying and exploring the world were born during this time.*

*Join me as I share my journey from Czechoslovakia to becoming an expatriate, embracing new cultures, and embarking on thrilling adventures. It is the story of my life—the life of an expat.*



# Chapter 1

## Czechoslovakia and Sweden 1968–1972

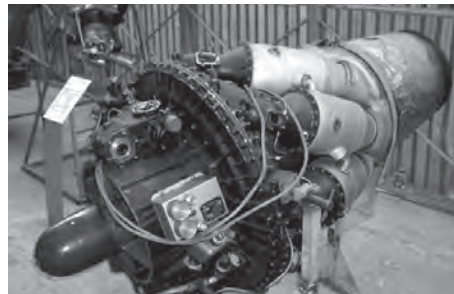
In 1968, I was employed as an aircraft mechanic at the Aviation Research Institute in Prague. I was excited about working with newly developed Czech aircraft and engines. It was much more challenging than my previous job at a military engines overhaul facility doing monotonous and repetitive mechanical work. My working place was at the engine testing department, and my post was to assist design engineers in setting up rigs for the testing turbine and compressor wheels of the newly developed Czech-made M-701 jet engine. We had an older Russian jet engine commonly used on MIG-15 aircraft installed at the engine test cell. We used this engine to tap higher-pressure air from the engine compressor. The air was diverted via large tubes towards the tested turbine wheel installed in the torque measuring unit. In addition, many probes and pressure pickup points are installed in the outer casing of the turbine wheel. Subsequently, connecting tubes and cable harnesses were drawn from the test cell into the test cabin, well insulated from the noise and heat produced by our pressure air generator, the older Russian engine. I assumed a new role in the test cabin: running the engine or helping to read the testing instruments. I liked the job and the well-educated people around it.

I had some pilot friends in the Institute I knew and flew with at Tocna Airport, a sport aircraft facility. Mojmir was a glider instructor, design engineer, and demo pilot; his friend Jiri worked at the wind tunnel facility, and Lada worked in the simulator department.

While working at the facility in 1960, Mojmir tested a new glider called Standard. His glider broke up in midair due to a flutter of the vertical fin, and he



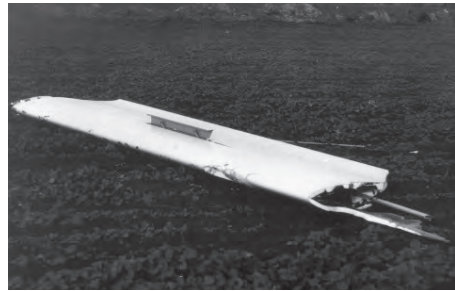
VZLU Prague 9 entrance.



M-701 jet engine.



The Standard glider before the crash.



The Standard glider, after crash, wing remains in the field.



L-29 Dolphin training jet aircraft.



L-39 Albatross

lost both wings while trying a maximum speed with extended air brakes about 500 meters above the airfield. He managed to bail out. While descending on the parachute, he saw the glider fuselage smash down on the airfield and observed the wings spinning in the air. They found them later in the fields some distance from Letnany airfield.

The old rescue parachute could not direct the descent, and Mojmir had never jumped. The wind took him over the Aircraft Research facility, where his parachute got caught on the tall lamp post where he remained hanging with his

feet one meter above the ground, just about lunchtime, when the workers were walking towards the canteen. Many did not realize what happened and thought Mojmir was undergoing a weird training.

Mojmir was a soft-spoken man and asked them politely to help him get down. After this accident, the wings of the glider were redesigned.

The working environment at the Research Institute was relaxed. I remember that some employees were sunbathing on top of the flat roof building or went to visit friends at other departments. Many times, we had to wait for work assignments.

The Institute tested and certified both L-29 and L-39 military jet training aircraft. These two types became primary training aircraft for all Warsaw Pact Air Forces and communist countries worldwide.

## My Swedish connection is in Prague

The G. family, our neighbors in an apartment building in Prague, had relatives in Sweden.

The family was of Slovak Jewish origin. Mr. G. escaped during the WWII war to Russia and joined a Czech military unit attached to the Red Army fighting Germans on the Russian front. His sister Eva and the rest of the family ended up in a German concentration camp.

However, the International Red Cross organization managed to get the sister of Mr. G. Eva released from the German concentration camp where she was held and sent to Sweden. She was just 16 years old then and very lucky. She met her Swedish husband, Gote, in Sweden and married in Orebro in central Sweden.

Mr. G. came to Prague with Russian troops, settled there, married, and started working as a police officer. They had two children, a boy named Jiri and a girl named Sascha.

In 1967, the Czech communist regime started to show some liberal signs, and it was easier to travel, meet foreigners, and express opinions. Family G. invited Mr. G.'s sister, Eva, who lived in Sweden, to come with the family to visit Prague. They went by the end of June 1968. In our building, there were mainly living good communists, so the appearance of a Swedish family created some controversy among them.

The family had two daughters, Christina, 18, and Lena, 12. We young men, I was 22 then, were curious and tried to communicate with Christina. I had no foreign language knowledge, but somehow, I could befriend Christina. I took her around Prague and finally got permission from our air club to fly with her in a two-seat Czech plane. I was a reasonably experienced pilot. It blew her away, and I could do no wrong after that.

People on the street made remarks about her Western dress code, but I did not care. The family was leaving after about two weeks, and on departure, Christina gave me a little envelope with a short letter in English and a five 5-dollar

note. It was a good amount of Czech money on the black market. I could feel that Christina was in love with me. After two weeks, there was a letter again, and now it was my turn to write. My old glider instructor lady was an English/Czech translator, and with her help, I could answer her.

## Prague Spring events

In the spring of 1968, the people of Czechoslovakia were excited about the liberal changes initiated by Alexander Dubcek. He spoke about socialism with a human face under the leadership of a reformed communist party. After 20 years of a communist dictatorship, it amounted to the opening of a pressure cooker. People wanted more than socialism with a human face but genuine democracy. The Russians quickly understood that it would end communist rule in Czechoslovakia and the downfall of communist domination in Eastern Europe.

We could read the truth about long-prohibited subjects, listen to new ideas, and those who could afford it even travel to the West. But, very soon, the events started to accelerate, and before long, the communist party began to lose control over the events. Nevertheless, we enjoyed it and never saw “the dark clouds” building up in the east.

The Russians pretended to negotiate in good faith with Czech leaders. Still, they were planning a complete occupation of Czechoslovakia under the pretext of invitation by loyal Czechoslovakian Communist party members.

We have seen some ominous signs of something serious happening. The Russian troops had exercised in the Czech Republic and Poland. The Czechs did not understand the danger. We were still a communist country and a member of the Warsaw Treaty. Who would expect occupation by our allies from the east? The guns of our Army were pointed at the West.

I enjoyed the relaxed political climate the remaining three months before the Russian occupation. I flew a lot, towing gliders on glider championship for ladies at Rana Airport. I met my cousin Lida, a very experienced glider pilot; I towed her in her glider back to Moravia at the end of the championship.



Airport Rana, 1968 ladies championship.  
Sitting in a Zlin C-205 glider towing aircraft.



Pavel V. in Demant glider at Tocna Airport.  
With my friends at Tocna Airport sitting in Blanik glider.

Finally, I had the honor of glider towing the best Tocna airport glider pilots, Vaclav and Vojta, to a tournament for men in Vrchlabi, Krkonose mountains! I stayed there for the event and towed them back when it ended.

At the beginning of August, I paddled the Sazava River with my friend glider pilot Pavel; it was the last memorable event before the Russian occupation.

The evening of August 20, 1968, was uneventful. I sat in the local pub with my friend Rudy, drinking beer for a few hours, and returned home. My brother woke me with a stone face the following day, telling me the Russians were there. We had been joking about that possibility, so I did not believe him. He opened the window and told me to look outside. I did, and simultaneously, I heard a distant sound shooting. Looking down at the street, I saw tanks with white stripes painted across the turret. Military exercise was the first thing that came to my mind. One of the tanks left the road, traversed the pavement, crushing the trees, and finally settled in the middle of the park. I knew we were occupied. But, like most of my fellow citizens, I was afraid, confused, and angry. I walked downtown, as no trams or buses were in service. I saw them everywhere: tanks and trucks full of soldiers, and to my surprise, they were more confused than us, looking around with puzzled eyes. Every Czech spoke some school Russian, and we were asking the soldiers a simple question. Why?



Russian Occupation, August 21, 1968, Prague.

The Russians went for the key locations in Prague, such as ministries, radio and television stations, major intersections, and bridges. The anger flared up, and young people started setting barricades around the Czech radio station and setting fire to several Russian tanks. Russians began to shoot, first over the heads of people surrounding them, into the buildings, and finally into the people. Despite my military service experience, I was unprepared for this scary feeling. People were running for cover, crawling on the ground, and screaming. There was no armed resistance, but people were extraordinarily united in their passive opposition. Direction signs, street names, house numbers, and anything essential for orientation in Prague were removed to make life difficult for the Russians. After spending the first two days of occupation in Prague center, on the third day, I decided to take my motorbike and drive to Tocna airport to see if the Russians had taken the airport. On the way, I was stopped at several roadblocks and searched by Russian soldiers. On the road in the Branik area, I saw a car with bullet holes and blood on the driver's seat. One man standing nearby told me that the driver was probably driving at night, disregarding the curfew imposed by the Russians.

When I arrived at Tocna Airport, I was surprised to see many of my friends discussing the situation. Strangely, no Russian troops were anywhere near the airport.

The Russians started to reform the society, united in resistance against them. They started from the top, arrested the entire government and the president, and flew them to Moscow. There, under pressure from Russian leaders and disconnected from the development in Czechoslovakia, they have signed a document legalizing the occupation. Only one member of the Czechoslovakian government dissented. They returned to Prague after one week in Moscow as the Soviet regime puppets. Czechoslovakia was a communist country, and very soon, the Russians found within the Czechoslovakian communist party some supporters and sympathizers. The most prominent was a Slovak communist, Gustav Husak, who skillfully played the country's savior role. He stayed in power until 1989.



My flight instructor, Lada.



Commemorative plaque for Marie in Prague 1, Klarov

The wife of my instructor, Ladislav, Marie, also a member of Tocna Air Club, was shot by a Russian soldier on the street at Klarov Prague 1, August 26, 1968. She was 26 years old and the mother of a 2-year-old son. I attended her funeral in Motol on August 30, 1968.

Suddenly, I saw no future in my mind. It was like somebody pulled down a black curtain, and I knew I would leave the country. And I was not alone. How to start? I was never in a foreign country except Poland while in military service. The family, G., passed a message to me from Christina in Sweden, telling me I was welcome to stay with her family in Orebro if I managed to get to Sweden.

I needed a passport and Visa to Sweden, where I knew the family. Fortunately, the Russian occupation force was busy searching for leading figures of the Czech government and other officials and left the middle-level authorities to function as usual. About a week after the occupation, I got my passport and invitation letter from Sweden. I remember walking uphill toward the Swedish Embassy, where I applied for a visa. The Swedish lady handling the visa applications spoke Czech perfectly and asked no unnecessary questions. Two weeks later, I got my Swedish Visa, and my dad paid for my airline ticket to Stockholm and said go; there is no future in this country.

So, on October 1, 1968, I boarded IL-18 of Czechoslovak Airlines without telling my mother. I was armed with 40 Swedish crowns, three booklets about Sweden, the USA, and Canada, and a few other possessions in a small travel bag. I left the country with low expectations, many hopes, and no foreign language knowledge. Leaving Czechoslovakia in October 1968, I never believed I would return one day. At that time, the communist block looked quite invincible. There was a standoff between the Soviet Union and the USA when comparing military might and nuclear parity. The Russian military base in East Germany was just 480 kilometers from NATO headquarters. I was leaving my country proud of the Czech and Slovak people united in resistance against Russian occupation despite the hopeless situation. Unfortunately, we had no friends or allies; the emigration was the only solution for me and many others. Later, I observed, sadly, on television news in my home in Sweden, the “normalization” process led by the Czechoslovak communist party. This time, it was not the Russian troops but the Czech police, people’s militia, and the military who were the oppressors. Some brave people were still struggling against the regime, but most people adapted themselves and fell in line with the new order.



Swedish Embassy in Prague.



View of the US Embassy in Prague.

## My expatriate life: Arrival in Sweden

When the smoking, old Russian turbo-prop IL 18 with me onboard approached Arlanda Airport, I looked curiously out of the aircraft window to catch a glimpse of my new home. It was terrible weather, but I saw pine trees, rocks, and lakes just before landing. I was 22 years old, a boyish-looking young man, and it was evident where I came from just by looking at my clothes. I was nervous that the Czech painter, a longtime resident of Stockholm, was not waiting for me. He was the contact provided to me by family Rahlen a few days before I left. Looking around after leaving the customs, I saw a middle-aged man holding a sign with my name. I was relieved and happy. I forgot his name, but in any case, it was the first time and the last time I saw him.

We rode the bus from Arlanda to Stockholm Central train station, and my escort wished me good luck and bought me a train ticket to Orebro, where family Rahlen was living.

I had a few hours to spare and decided to walk around the town, admiring Strandvagen and the old town, everything so different from Prague. All the houses and the Swedish Royal Castle were built for the exact purpose, without too many decorations. I noticed people were looking at me briefly, wondering who I was. The way I was dressed gave me away. It was rather cold, so I returned to the railway station to wait for my train. Sitting on the bench, drunk people approached me several times, asking me for cigarettes.

Finally, I boarded the train, which left precisely on time, 18.06. The train steward came by to check the tickets, punched a hole in mine, and told me something I did not understand. I later discovered he was a saying-change train in Halsberg, something my Czech escort from Arlanda forgot to tell me.



My flight to Stockholm on October 1, 1968. R  
Russian troops marching at Prague Airport terminal in August 1968.



Stockholm Central Train Station 1968.

Strandvagen.





Stockholm Castle.



Swedish trains 1968.



Orebro arrival platform.



Orebro railway station.

I watched the Swedish countryside passing by, lakes, forests, and rocks until it darkened. The train was supposed to arrive in Orebro at about 20.00, but we were still speeding in the country then. I knew something was wrong, and I went to find the train steward and showed him my ticket. He quickly discovered my problem and that my vocabulary was far below the minimum in any Western European language. He collected my luggage and let me get off the train at the next station in Skovde. The personnel at the train station took care of me and guided me to the next train going to Orebro. Later, I found that if I stayed on the first train, I would end up in Oslo, Norway, and probably would be a Norwegian citizen today.

Finally, the train stopped at Orebro station after a short ride, and I saw on the half-open platform the family Rahlen, Gote, Eva, Christina, and Lena waiting. All were cold and worried but happy. I knew I was home.

## Orebro and family Rahlen

The family lived in a smaller, more comfortable wooden villa with a small garden in Rynninge, on the outskirts of Orebro. I recall my first meal after arrival, consisting of sandwiches that everyone around the table took: sliced bread, salami, ham, and slices from a block of hard cheese. However, it took me a few minutes to master the usage of a Swedish cheese knife.

I have learned that Swedish people love to eat sweet bread called limpa sweet mustard and drink milk with their meals.

We talked, assisted by Eva, who could still remember some Slovak words after all those years. I was tired and happy when they showed me my room and bed. My first night in Sweden was dreamless.

The following day, I went with Eva to the police station to report my decision not to return to the Czech Republic and ask for asylum.



Water tower, Orebro.



Orebro castle.



Eva, Christine, and Lena at their home.

## Working for Johnson Hill Kuvert AB company

Gote and Eva quickly arranged contact with some potential employers, and I have accepted to work as a service mechanic for machinery at envelope company Johnsson & Hill in Orebro. The advantage of this employment was that I could use my mechanical skills and that the company employed many Yugoslavian workers, primarily women, who could help me communicate. In addition, some ladies from Slovenia spoke a language very similar to Slovak.

Everything went so fast, and four days after I arrived in Sweden, I was working and earning my own money. The family, R., lent me a bicycle and provided me with a meal box I could heat at work. As long as the weather was fine, I was biking to work. Once the weather turned nasty cold, I went by bus. Standing at the bus station with many Swedish people was a challenge, especially when they asked me questions I did not understand. One day, the bus driver asked me something while selling me a bus ticket, and I did not know what to answer with my limited vocabulary. So, I said I do not know. He shook his head, gave me the ticket, and drove. Later, I discovered his question was whether I wanted a one-way or return ticket.

My first foreman was Holger, a very kind and patient middle-aged man. It was obvious that he enjoyed being surrounded by younger Yugoslavian ladies.

I was learning my job quickly, and he liked me, but I knew I would not stay long with this company as my life was about aviation. The envelope production facility was a reasonably new and modern large hall on the outskirts of Orebro, with large windows offering a highway view. It was a rather hot, noisy place full of spirit and glue fumes. However, the envelope production and printing machinery seemed to be of quite advanced technology, requiring only one worker to run it. The machines were about 6 meters long and consisted of many rollers, guides, and handles forming the envelope from a pile of precut paper, which was continuously fed into the machine. The paper passing through the machine was quickly folded into an envelope; glue was deposited correctly, and the required

logo or text was printed. Two ladies at the end of the machine were checking and putting envelopes in boxes. My job was to watch the smooth run of the devices and assist if anything went wrong; nevertheless, the main job was to reset the machine every time a new size or type of envelope order came in. Resetting the machine and doing a test run took several hours.

I wanted to learn Swedish quickly and enrolled in evening classes for foreigners. It was a crowded class, and



Johnson Hill AB, 1961



Club 700 Drottninggatan Örebro.

I soon found that sitting between two Turks was not precisely the right way to learn Swedish. I gathered all Swedish learning books I could get hands-on with and started studying independently. My biggest problem was that I could not find the Swedish Czech dictionary. My father sent me one much later. I knew I would remember words much better if I wrote them down. So, I started to copy all the exercise books, and very quickly, I was much better at expressing myself in writing than in spoken language. Holger told me once; you are a strange guy. You can write Swedish but not talk. It lasted for a while like that, but very soon, I could master spoken Swedish quite well. I was active and joined the local wrestling club to stay fit and get to know Swedish people. It further accelerated and improved my spoken Swedish.

In the meantime, Christina found a Swedish boyfriend, and I moved away from the family into a rented room in a nearby house. We stayed as good friends, and the first Christmas I spent with them.

There is an old saying about Swedish and Scandinavian girls: they are easy to get but hard to keep. I was a handsome blond guy, looking younger than I was, and I had my share of girlfriends despite my language handicap and foreign background.

Club 700 and Folketspark (Peoples Park) was Örebro's most popular dance place, where I met my first Swedish girlfriends.

## Air Club Örebro

After making some money, I started to miss flying and visited the local air club. The members were friendly; one was a Swedish-Finnish pilot who owned Czech Zlín aircraft on which I was licensed and could fly well. They helped me to validate my Czech pilot license and get a type rating on Swedish MFI-9 aircraft. Now, I could fly free of charge, as I was a qualified glider towing pilot. Finally, I had friends I could relate to via flying. We had parties at the airfield and spent some time together in town.