(G Šternberk 4)

The Story of Ms. Šestáková

I remember my father had CSK 50.000 in savings. That was a lot of money.

After the monetary reform, he was left with CZK 500.

Helena Šestáková, née Nodžáková, was born in Slovakia on November 11, 1928. This was where she grew up; she lived here until 1945. Since early childhood, she helped her mother on the family farm. They were not very wealthy so they had to do with what they grew on the farm and made themselves. Her dad, Josef Nodžák, had to travel over the border to work. Years of labor in Belgian mines affected his health very badly. Josef loved working on his fields and was an excellent farmer. However, when he returned from the mines, this kind of activity became difficult for him. The fields were located on steep sides of hills and he found himself short of breath ploughing. When, in 1945, his two sisters came to visit, he heard that in the Czech part of Czechoslovakia there were countless fields and houses abandoned by the Germans (who were subject to removal in their turn, after the war) with nobody to tend them so he decided to move to a small village called Jílová. Immediately, despite his wife's protestations, he started to give away or sell the property in Slovakia. However, when they came to Jílová, they were given one of the worst houses in the village, with a leaky roof where rats had their spree. They had to share the house with a German family so there was really very little space there. They stayed together between October 1945 and May 1946 when the Germans were removed from the country as part of the post-war retributions. During this time, they became as if one family. Helena's dad used to work in Germany for a short time, and therefore had no trouble communicating with the second family. Frida, daughter of the German parents, picked up perfect Slovak during the half-year they lived together and interpreted for the mothers who would otherwise be unable to communicate. When time to leave came, all of them cried bitterly. The Germans hoped they would return to their house one day; that, however, was never to be.

The family lost virtually all their savings during the monetary reform of 1953. The money that was earned with difficulty came almost to nothing. Helena's father was devastated, but he knew there was no way back. There was nothing left from what they previously owned in Slovakia, so they had to stay in Bohemia with the little money they were left with. Most members of their Slovak family returned to Slovakia, only Josef and two of his brothers remained. In the autumn, the state started to demand a portion of the farmers' production. Unsurprisingly, Josef and other farmers did not like the idea. Josef briskly decided to sell his large farm rather than to share his harvest. His health was too bad for him to take on such heavy labor and nobody else could replace him. His sons were too young and everyone else had work enough. They moved into a smaller house on the other side of the village.

By that time, Helena was nineteen and married. She had to share the house where they moved with her parents and her husband František's grandparents, so they did not have much space. The previous owners of the house had moved to Šternberk, leaving behind a bull, a cow, a pig and about 35ha of land. Soon after the arrival of Helena's family, Jívová founded its Integrated Agricultural Cooperative (IAC). Confiscations of property and land began immediately. When they came to Helena's home, she had to turn over the cow and the all the fields. The family was allowed to keep only a strip of land behind the house to grow potatoes on. Although the large field became IAC property, the family still had to work on it and they were given only a small portion of the harvest in return for the work. The IAC also paid a the minimum monthly wage, CSK 250 to Helena and CSK 600 to František. They had to make ends meet with what they had. As Helena puts it: “Bad times, but there was enough to live on!”

Helena is 84 now. She has five sons and many grandchildren, and it is her large family that makes her happy. She keeps a small piece of land behind her house and spends much of her time on it, as she was used to do throughout her life. Despite the lifetime of manual labor in the fields and forests, Helena's health is still excellent and she feels good. She often thinks about her youth. Watching people and how they treat each other today, she feels dismayed, and she is happy to have lived in the previous times. She has always been used to mutual support and helpfulness, something that is hard to come by nowadays.

Processing straw

Ms. Helena Šestáková with her son

Šternberk high school

Authors:

Aneta Šestáková, Petra Motlová

Teacher:

Mgr. Alena Niklová, Mgr. Hana Havlíčková