

Meet Renata Laxova

One of "Nicky's Children"

September 26, 2013 Rotary Event Guest



Age 7 (1938)



2013 (still very young)

I was born on July 15th 1931 in Brno, in what was then Czechoslovakia. My name was Renate Polgar, an only child in an average middle class Jewish family, raised to speak both Czech and German. My father was an accountant, my mother stayed at home with me; I had a peaceful, happy, secure childhood and enjoyed swimming, ice-skating, gymnastics. I was in 2nd grade of elementary school when, in March 1939, Hitler marched into my country which became the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia. Slovakia remained independent and Nazi friendly. Toward the end of 2nd grade, I realized that Jewish children were no longer allowed to participate in the previous activities which I had enjoyed so much, we were no longer welcome at school and many of my former friends avoided me and refused to play with me. Thanks to my parents' initiative, I was included in one of Sir Nicholas Winton's Kindertransports, (although at the time, my parents were not aware of his role in their organization).

At midnight, on July 31st 1939, two weeks after my 8th birthday, I said a tearful goodbye to my parents at the Prague railway station and left - on the 5th Kindertransport from Czechoslovakia - for England, where I spent 7 years, cared for by a Lancashire Quaker family, a father (a conscientious objector) mother, with their 5 1/2 year old little boy. We became and have remained close, my "foster" brother's daughter is named for me, our own elder daughter is named for my English family. We are in constant touch. I received an excellent education at an English Grammar School in Morecambe, Lancashire.

My parents survived the war. In 1941, they were accused by the Gestapo of being part of an international spy network and were expelled from Brno to Slovakia, my father's birthplace. My mother assumed a stranger's identity and documents and survived as an unmarried nurse in Slovalda. My father went through several labor and concentration camps. They were reunited after Czechoslovakia was liberated in 1945.

I returned to Brno in 1946, completed High School and attended medical school. In 1948, the Communists took over the government of our country for the next 40 years.

I married Tibor Lax, also a Holocaust survivor, a veterinarian, in 1951 and we had two daughters, Daniela, b.1955, now a pediatric cardiologist and Anita, b.1957, now a scientist. Anita has a son, Alexander, b.1992, for whom I wrote my memoir* which describes the above events, as well as life in Czechoslovakia under the Communists.

We emigrated to England once more in August of 1968, after the Russians and other Warsaw Pact forces invaded Czechoslovakia and we arrived in the United States in 1975. I worked as a pediatric geneticist at the University of Wisconsin, Madison, Medical School. Tibor worked as a veterinarian until his death in 1997.

When asked or invited, I speak to school children or other interested groups, not only about my own experiences, but about other memoirs written by those who have lived through comparable events in other parts of the world. None of them should be neglected or forgotten.

*Renata Laxova: Letter to Alexander-a Memoir. Custom Editorial Productions, Cincinnati, 2001.

In addition to the above mentioned published memoir in 2001, I published a revised and modified version in the Czech language, in 2010, entitled "Dopis Alexandrovi" publ. by Barrister and Principal in Brno, Czech Republic.

I am currently an emerita professor of Medical Genetics and Pediatrics at the University of Wisconsin School of Medicine and Public Health. I have published many papers in prof. journals, chapters in books etc.

My main professional interests included service, teaching, administration and research in the areas of mental retardation, developmental disabilities, genetic disorders, prenatal diagnosis and counseling and -most recently cancer genetics .

Since retirement I have served on several committees, mostly at the University, and have tried to help whenever possible in the community.

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