

Bohumil (iii) Voleský – BITS FROM LIFE

There is nothing like clarifying all the doubts. So I hereby confirm that I was really born and there are appropriate papers to confirm it. During my life I learned not only how to read but also to write. And so I decided to briefly write down what I remember from my life and the digital file of it will be attached to the extended family tree that I am currently putting together. This year of 2018, I will be 79 years of age and I have been working on this family tree for several years already. A great impetus for doing so came from the notes my father Bohumil (ii) prepared in the middle of the second world war for occupying Germans in a desperate attempt to document our racial past to help free my uncle and aunt Zátka from České Budějovice who got arrested by German Gestapo. Also a hand-prepared family tree of the Bayer and Matouš family from my mother's side offered invaluable information reaching more than 250 years back. It is obvious that folks consider language as the most important communication medium. That's why I am preparing these brief memoirs of mine in both languages – my native Czech and also in English, the language which we are using now as we live in Canada. That happens to be the native tongue of our children and likely also for further generations of our family.

Birth

I was born in Praha, in a small hospital in Londýnská street located in Vinohrady quarter of the city. There, we newborns got almost interchanged for our mothers and so I only hope that I am not Olda Koudelka. Later on, when we attended the same early-school class with Olda, we tried to verify this somehow but with no success during those dark pre-DNA times. So we happily celebrated our common birthday with than rare icecream (provided by Olda's parents from their restaurant "At the Fatso") as one man.



Then Olda moved away and I remained alone – without the icecream.

My earliest memories could be dated at around the age of 3 years with somewhat hazy recollections of my younger sister Marie's arrival (eventually married Bodenlosová).

As young children we spent some short times with our grandparents Voleskys in their summer house in Klánovice by Praha, recuperating after a bout of whooping cough. I remember raking with my grandpa the sandy garden path there in a zig-zag pattern of wooden floor parquettes.

Childhood



Our family was spending the last two years of World War 2 in the village of Konárovice by Kolín in the villa of my mom's parents, grandparents Bayer. There was a huge orchard garden full of fruit trees that we children climbed for the fruits. My faithful buddy Áda Kolský, two years older me, taught me all kinds of boy mischiefs. We particularly enjoyed conferring in my father's car that stood immobilized on wooden blocks in the barn – could not be driven during those war years. That car, a Škoda make, had a name – Terezka, I don't know why. Maybe because it was a part of the family. My dad commuted to Konárovice for weekends from Praha where he was managing operations of the company started by my grandpa. It focused on manufacturing of woodworking machinery. That company is probably to be blamed for me being named Bohumil because this family-owned enterprise bore the full name of my grandpa and my father. It was anticipated that in the future I might be enmeshed with its operations too.

And maybe rightly so as I liked machines and mechanisms since my early age. However, the communists nationalized and expropriated the whole enterprise right after the war. It must have been truly horrendous for both elder Bohumils coming to work one day only to be forbidden to even get close to the buildings – ending their ownership and lifelong efforts. Only with a great deal of luck they escaped arrest and imprisonment. Such robberies were the hallmark of communist rule in Czechoslovakia.



Schooling

While I started my schooling in Konárovice, at the end of the war, we returned to Praha where my father was fortunate to have been able to find a rather large apartment in Myslíkova street No.4, downtown just around the corner from the river Vltava. I remember that we children rode our christmas-gift bicycles inside it and throughout. Then girls poured into our boys-only school in Vladislavská street as the school became co-ed. After eight years there, I entered a middle engineering school (1953-1957) located in Preslova street in Praha-Smíchov, just across a river bridge close to our apartment.



And what pranks we did there one can read in a special web-site for our class L4 there (in the Czech language only): <http://www.spoluzaci.cz/876513>

That strange “L” designation was given to our class signifying our specialization in ship building. This, however, did not have anything to do with my own liking of water sports through which I somehow found my way among a then-forbidden water-scout troupe. It clandestinely continued functioning within the Prague Yachtclub and there through paddling on our prams and charming summer camps I also managed to learn sailing all the way to the

junior Championships on a one-class sailboat (“Pirate”). I am eternally grateful for all this experience that made for a wonderful teen-age and life-long friendships.

With one friend from that circle, owing probably to some energetic surpluses that could not be drained away through polishing and sailing regatta sailboats, we got into tackling wild rapids and white-water racing – on a double canoe. That appeared the right and challenging activity that cost us many demolished canoes - that we learn to design and manufacture too. Wonderful manual exercise !

With all probability, this entire intensive exercise contributed to the lucky fact that I may be one of the few who do not complain about sore back in this advanced age. With my buddy nicknamed “Kushna” we were like water twins for these years.

Eventually, we had to decide whether to become paddlers – or engineers.

At that time we were both University students (ČVUT – 1957-1962). Those student years were just magnificent and since studies went well, I graduated as a Mechanical Engineer with the



specialty in chemical and food engineering – and healthy ambitions. This I am mentioning because it steered my course throughout the rest of my life.

Trick No.1

One, and me in particular, just could not heck the communist system. Since my early years and throughout all my studying years, I yearned to get to know the world, travel, learn new things and

see how they are done elsewhere in the world. However, that was out of the question. The crude, outright sadistic and dangerous totalitarian regime in power then destroyed many who dared to move against it. To avoid it was impossible and any attempt to escape it was mercilessly punished. How to handle that ? Those thoughts occupied minds of our small and tight group of friends and my own blood just boiled. I eventually bet everything on my strength - the “study” card. There was a strict requirement for engineering postgraduate studies and that was to spend at least 3 years outside university in professional practice. Upon graduation, I was allocated a position with the “Central research institute of food industry” – and you better work, comrade ! Upon a rather rare interview opportunity with the Director of the Institute he voiced his opinion: “Voleský, university postgraduate studies ? Just forget it !” Sheer luck, however, worked for me. The Institute happened to be a “teaching institution” for doctorands – but it was like a secret and they never had anyone there. The Ministry of education was threatening that this prestigious academic mission may get cancelled. And this is how it happened that they came to me pleading if I would consider enrolling there. Following a small tactical pause and haggling, I “magnanimously” accepted – and I was in. In less than a year’s time, however, the Ministry abolished their program there anyway and I was transferred to the ČVUT faculty where I always wanted to be to start with.

Practically the whole postgraduate first year I spent on some exams and mainly in correspondence with Canadian universities. Why specifically Canada ? - a) I liked it; b) the USA would have been too “capitalist” (for the commies) to let me go to; c) the UK was rarely giving scholarships. And the surprising result were various scholarship offers by 6 different Canadian universities. I chose the University of Western Ontario in London, Ontario – a scholarship for bio-engineering post-graduate studies that I wanted to do and this was even with a generous air-fare contribution !

To marry - and across the Ocean

My application to continue doctorate studies in Canada was submitted to the Ministry of Education in Praha. As could be expected, they were taking their time so I even managed to get married and in a special way – on a combination honeymoon

trip to France. The totality at home was probably somehow rotting from inside and every once in a while let somebody out – with no foreign exchange that people had to secure somehow. And so our consideration was – either a wedding at home or escaping the ceremony and relatives and get married on a honeymoon trip that we much preferred. So we organized an unusual simple wedding abroad at the Czech consulate in Paris. Without suspecting much adventure in that, we humbly boarded a train in Praha and shortly found ourselves gazing at Paris with our family friends there – with our eyes popping out. We hurried to the Czech consulate in an attempt to confirm and organize everything. They coldly informed us it is out of the question, they are busy, etc. With our jaws dropping and waving the permission papers, they finally took pity at the prospective newlyweds and somebody came with a thought of the “Bastilla Day”. That meant that on the 14th of July, the biggest French holiday, the consulate might not be as busy with virtually no people “tripsing in for visas and such” – but the Czechs were supposed to work and could conceivably perform the wedding.

It was July and we showed up as agreed – accompanied by a few friends from the “Black Theatre of Praha” that happened to just be performing in Paris. We were welcomed by a short and pudgy



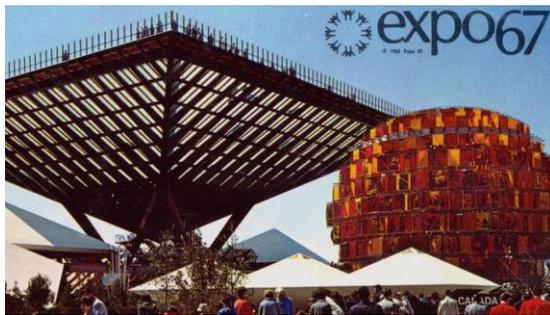
comrade consul of a Napoleonic posture accentuated by a big medal hanging over his tummy on a tricolor ribbon from his neck. He looked “just splendid” in front of his huge desk with two large windows overlooking Paris right behind him. This colorful background looked even more absurd when he started to read the official ceremonial text full of “socialism” and “socialistic family” that he apparently saw for the first time. Following the cheeky bride’s several unsuppressibly loud chuckles, comrade Consul grew progressively unsure and started to skip lines to shorten his and our torture. The speech then lost any continuity but we survived – to become a husband and wife, a married couple.

With daddy Volesky, sr., we had a secret pact that if the Education Ministry turned down the PhD-abroad application, I would just take off for Canada from Paris right then and there, no matter what. But they did issue the necessary permit ! For a 1-year study sojourn in Canada – to do the doctorate. An obvious impossibility in 1 year but I did not even try to be explaining anything to anyone – and when the newlyweds returned from the honeymoon trip, the first thing was to book the air flight – to Canada. I don’t even know now why was it that the flight was from Paris to Montreal. Maybe because that was all the Canadian airfare grant money covered. And so shortly I was on the train to Paris again. I remember that I got a special Czech ministerial contribution of \$5 for my travels. So I used it to buy myself a Coke on the train that brought me to Paris where I slept at the friends’ and next day they delivered me to the airport.

Waiting there was a long slim Air France Boeing 707 for my first and thus historic Atlantic crossing.

The date was September 6, 1967.

The Air France boeing hummed and hummed, we did not even get lost in the immense blue skies. There was not all that much to see, only water and some more grey atlantic water deep underneath us.



And so I found myself in Montreal, Canada, where some other family friends picked me up. I had several sunshiny days to visit the famous Expo-67. And then I hopped into a smaller plane for an hour-and-half flight to London, Ontario, where was my university. This flight enjoyed a gorgeous view of thousands of small lakes whereby the continuous land phase was slowly giving way to what became the continuous water phase with islands, gradually

morphing into water bodies of the proverbial Great Lakes. These were the first real impressions of the immense Canadian land –

And for me started a whole new and different phase of life.

How I became a Canadian

Through my studies – that’s why I came to Canada and that was what I wanted. And so I studied hard – and did my new research. All new things, bioengineering is a new and very multidisciplinary field. The name of my new Ameri-Canadian academic supervisor was Zajic – from Moravian grand-parents. “You are an engineer alright, now you need that BIO-,” he proclaimed in his loud American accent and registered me into several postgraduate courses – microbiology, biochemistry, biophysics. Students in these courses all had several years of these subjects. Me – nothing, nada, zilch. In my blissful engineering ignorance I thought that perhaps

ants were the smallest creatures on earth. Well, it was quite a hard haul but “there is no way that a Czech king would leave the battle” (king Jan of Luxembourg). And so I survived, honorably defended and have my Canadian doctorate. But I am getting ahead of myself here -

The postgraduate study was only one side of things, the second one was the Czech officialdom. As it came to handling my Canadian sojourn with the Czech authorities, I had to take quite a gamble there. The spark of the Prague Spring 1968 was soon snuffed by the invasion of Russian tanks and soldiers of the Soviet occupational force. We watched it all on Canadian TV with my wife Zuzana. Still studying medicine in Praha, she came to spend her summer vacation with me. But she was not going to go back into that invasion mess ! It was relatively easy to get a year extension of our stay for both of us and she was trying to figure out just what it would take to finish the final year of her medical studies - in Canada. After passing 5 basic sciences exams first, it would have taken to study medicine all over again. “After 5 hard years of medical studies in Praha, I just cannot hack this”, she concluded. A year later, the situation in Praha did not look all that hopeless and so we considered her return. Hesitatingly, we took the gamble and she did fly back in September 1969. And that happened to be exactly the time when the communist trap shut its borders – trains stopped at the borders, all flights were recalled from the air, no travel out. The iron curtain drew closed, shut down.

Zuzi in Praha, me in London, Ontario – but with a firm resolution to eventually somehow get her out again. So she was pulling through her final medical year and I kept applying to the Czech consulate and the Education Ministry for extensions for finalizing my study in Canada – I need to write my dissertation, I need to defend it, etc.etc. The officialdom unpredictably went along until the game was over with the last and final extension until July 15, 1970. Zuzana’s convocation was in June 1970.

Her application for a still formally justifiable visit of her husband away for regular studies in Canada was approved. Not for a vacation but only for 14 days. He is supposed to come back by then, “go and bring him back !”

She was allowed to go for a short trip to Canada, the heavy-handed bureaucracy shot itself in its own foot, according to its own rules.



And so we became Canadians – making a long nose at the commie system. However, their heavy-handed “normalization” period was very forceful and the commie totalitarian “paradise” separated us from our families and friends for many years to come – until the evil system collapsed in the end (1989). Nothing lasts forever but time keeps flowing by as our lives tick away and such systems could do a lot of damage while they last. We did not want to be another “lost generation”.

Professorial profession



I always liked the academic profession – and when I got first several job offers I chose that direction. Eventually, it was one of the best Canadian universities that attracted me – McGill University in Montreal. Lecturing, research, research grants and laboratories with outstanding students, conferences and presentations all over the world, the best students at all levels – and also an attractive possibility of sabbatical years for advanced learning around the world.

As the years went by, our family grew. First Monika and soon after her Martin, growing so fast (photo from 1998).

There was an interesting nomination I received from the Canadian



National Research Council for an exchange visit to the Czechoslovakian Academy of Sciences. Based on a bilateral agreement, that institution did not want to lose the opportunity for its members to visit Canada and so the exchange visit for me was approved for several months. First, they did not know how to handle this Czech-Canadian but eventually I had unfettered access to probably all laboratories of the Microbiological Institute engaging merrily in all kinds of debates in the Czech language. After 14 years, this was my first visit back to Prague. More



followed later and nowadays we enjoy a Prague visits on a yearly basis. During sabbatical years for different lengths of stay we visited also Puerto Rico (Mayaguez), Switzerland (Lausanne), and later without the family even Australia (Melbourne), Brazil, China and Singapore.

In the meantime, the children were growing up in English and French, and even Czech spoken at home with us and grandmas. Later on, they were more tied up in their respective schools whereby Monika made it all the way

through the medical school (M.D.) and specialty orthopedic training while Martin became a software specialist and a co-owner of dance studios. How does that go together? “Try to be a salsa DJ without a computer”, he likes to quip.

It is unbelievable how 31 years of my professorship flew by in Montreal at McGill.

My [Professional Resume](#) is summarized elsewhere, supported by more than 200 scientific journal publications and 3 books.

My hair receded into a silvery hard-core residual crown– I am not certain though where is the proverbial wisdom of the advanced age –

A new star appeared on our family skies - his name is Lucas (*2008), our grand-son from Monika. A cheerful addition to our [family tree](#) that I managed to put together as one of my “retirement projects”. It lists some 2800 related people and records the Volesky and other related family lines back to 1560.



Florida “retirement”

With the end of 2004 I delivered my last regular university lecture, my last doctorate students graduated shortly after and I closed my research laboratories. The retirement age is upon me with all the pleasures of deserved but perhaps illusory freedom and pleasure-work mainly on the computer that represents unending challenges and connectivity with the world. At last, we can be escaping months of cruel and long winters in Montreal to the Florida sunshine.

The status of Professor Emeritus supposedly brings along no duties, only privileges.

However, a professor’s job, to a certain extent but constantly, means inventing and generating one’s missions and projects – nobody else has ever been telling me what to do and how.

Excellence in it is taken for granted. That all may be fantastic – but after long years there is no stopping this life-long “creative engine”.

And so, Florida, its special climate and nature, charmed me with its [Everglades](#), a unique system of vast wetlands that have been to a good extent drained by man-made canals totaling over 2,000 km. Mainly to gain agricultural land and space for whole new cities. Only to discover that it was really done all wrong – as is being discovered and ascertained lately.



And it all has to be quickly restored now – before some 8 million people living in South Florida run out of fresh water. This problem is compounded by the warming climate and rising seas that seriously threaten the flat and low-lying Floridian peninsula. It is absurd but it is all the result of man trying to “conquer” nature.

And I became somewhat involved in these issues of this world unique techno-ecological puzzle of a giant scale. It has all the facets – science, environment, ecology, population, politics, climate, nature, technologies – and, naturally, finances of the magnitude that only Americans can afford in this world bursting in its seams.

And in summertime we look forward to visiting Praha again.
Life is so beautiful -

