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HELENA'S POLITICAL AUTOBIOGRAPHY

I was born in 1980, in one of the former Eastern European countries, Czechoslovakia. My country was ruled by a Communist regime from 1948 to 1989. It was a regime that did not allow people to say what they thought; it was a regime that did not allow most of the people to travel; it was a regime that did not allow people to go to church. But most importantly, it was a regime that had a significant impact on what beliefs my grandparents and parents passed onto me. All of this helped to shape the "Helena" as I am today.

As a little child, I spent most of the time with my beloved grandparents, the parents of my father. I loved listening to the funny stories from their childhood. Unfortunately, not all of their life stories were filled with happy content. Some of them described their experience of human cruelty practiced by the Czechoslovak Communist government in former Czechoslovakia between 1948 – 1989.

When the Communist party took over in 1948, its main goal was to mollify the so-called "class struggle" by creating a society without classes. This ideology was based on Marx's, a major founder of socialism and communism. Marx believed that the most critical problem in a capitalist society, which Czechoslovakia was between 1918 and 1948, was the division of two main

economic classes: the working class and the class of owners, the capitalists. He described this situation as a conflict “between the people who own nothing and thus have to work and the people who own property and thus command the resources on which the lives of all others depend.” Marx stated that in such a system, the capitalists always exploit the working class. He considered this fact critical, because in his eyes, what we do defines who we are. Furthermore, such a dissimilarity creates a significant tension between these two groups, separating them from each other.

Marx saw the solution of this problem as creating a society where “common ownership of the means of production would give rise to a cooperative human type.” How did the Czechoslovak communists apply this ideology? Simply, the new government confiscated the assets—for example, farms, factories, and physicians’ offices—of the Czechoslovak “capitalist class” for the purpose of launching the “common ownership of the production means.” From that moment on everything was supposed to belong to everybody. From that moment on everybody was supposed to be like everybody else. No distinctions were allowed in terms of people’s ownership, thinking and beliefs.

How were individual families affected by these changes? Did such a system bring harmony and happiness into the lives of the Czechoslovak people? To answer these questions, I want to use my grandmother’s description of her experience as she narrated it to me. She said, “ When the Communists took over, many Czechoslovak policemen and soldiers were ordered to rob the households of the capitalists. One day in 1958, they came to our house as well,

stealing our antiques, jewelry, and all of our money. Then your grandfather, uncle, and I were put in jail for eight years to be punished for our Catholic faith and for disagreeing with the Communist regime. At that time, your father was only 16 years old. When he returned home from school for lunch on the day we were arrested, he found an empty locked house with a cop standing in front of the door. The cop announced to him that he should not count on seeing his family for a few years. Furthermore, your father was forbidden to graduate from high school and had to start working as a bricklayer helper. None of us knew about the other family members for almost six years.

During our imprisonment, the Communist cops tortured us by not giving us sufficient food, locking us often in a dark cellar for long hours and treating us like a herd of sheep. Unfortunately, there were thousands of families who had undergone the same experience. All of us were told that using such unimaginable human cruelty served as special training to bolster our comprehension of how to become a part of the class where everybody was just like everybody else. All of us were supposed to become a part of the Communist mass. Nevertheless, many of us did not give up our hope for a better future. We knew that such oppression could not last forever.”

My grandma shared this story with me in 1986, when I was six years old. I still recall her voice and facial expressions. She did not sound angry or bitter at all. I felt that she wanted to convey an extremely important message to me. Unfortunately, my young age did not allow me to fully understand the meaning of

my grandmother's words. Notwithstanding, my brain recorded them verbatim, enabling me to keep them in my memory.

Later that year, on June 30, 1986, I, a proud first grader, returned home with my grade report of straight A's. I wanted the whole world to know about it, especially my "daddy." When I showed him my grades, he smiled but his smile was permeated by a little bit of sadness as well. He took me aside, putting me on his lap and said, "Helena, I am very proud of your achievement but one day when you are not allowed to study at the university because of your family background, please don't be ashamed of who we are." Even though I did not understand my father's words fully, I knew that I would never give up my big dream of receiving my university education.

In November 1989, the Velvet Revolution, the tangible embodiment of the disagreement of the Czechoslovak people with the Communist Regime, took place. During the days of the occurrence of the Velvet Revolution my grandfather on my father's side was dying from liver cancer. When I sat on his bed at noon on one of the final days of the Revolution, both of us heard bells ringing. The bells' sound symbolized the freedom brought to our country by the abdication of the Communist government. My grandfather seemed to be very calm and happy. He turned his head to me and with a strong voice said, "See Helena, we have always hoped to gain our freedom again. We have always fought for the truth and we won. Please always remember this and never let go." These were the last words of my grandfather before he passed away two days later.

Today, I am 23 years old and I have a much better understanding of what message my grandparents' and father's words conveyed. All of them were trying to teach me about the significance of protecting mine and other people's freedom and rights, which has become one of the most important goals of my life. All of them were trying to teach me that I must always stand for what is right.

I believe that one of the best ways of preventing the oppression of people's rights is to get involved politically. That is why I decided to join the union of the Christian Democratic Party and the Czechoslovak People's Party (KDU-CSL) in 1998. The Czech Christian Democratic Party is considered a center-wing party. In other words, its members cannot be strictly defined as liberal or conservative. Most of the members support "laissez faire" in most but not all areas of life. They advocate limited government involvement in some areas, such as educating children and assisting the poor, where individual initiative could be inadequate in promoting social welfare. The KDU-CSL members also see advantages in preserving the environment, advancing the arts and sciences, and improving transportation and communication. In other words, the KDU-CSL aims to create an efficient society that does not only aim to accumulate wealth but also acknowledges the importance of the people's spiritual and moral progress.

I consider promoting all of these values extremely critical in order to create a healthy political culture within any country.

