

## Pursued Through the Streets by the Secret Police

Erika Lajdova  
April 2016



*Two survivors, Erika Lajdová and her husband  
Juraj Lajda on their wedding day*

The invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968 by Warsaw Pact forces had been a big shock for me. A year later, while I was still in high school, a friend introduced me to the Scouts movement, but in 1971 even that was outlawed under the repressive system. No one was allowed to speak about it again. There was no freedom of speech anymore.

I first heard the Divine Principle in September 1972, when I was a student of Biology and Chemistry at the Comenius University in Bratislava. Half a year later, our leader, Betka, asked me to go on a pioneer mission to the Czech town of Jihlava. I found work in a laboratory there and soon made friends with some students to whom I introduced the Divine Principle. At that time, we had a book containing twelve chapters as well as a selection of True Father's speeches and a further sixteen

documents for use as study material. We always had to keep this literature in a safe place. I used to go down into the cellar of the house where I lived and hide this reading material under a large heap of coal. I hid other reading matter in pots and pans in the kitchen cupboards.

We used to have monthly meetings with about twenty city leaders. On those occasions, our discussions included guidelines on what to do if the police arrested us. Our activities conflicted with the communist system. By anticipating what could possibly happen, we were at least in some way prepared when the trouble started.

Things began to happen after the secret police found a membership list and systematically visited everybody on it. One day they arrived at my apartment in Jihlava and threatened me with prison if I were to continue with such "subversive activities." After that, ten of our members met in Morava, about seventy kilometers away, and we pledged to carry on witnessing regardless of the threats.

### **The heat rises**

On January 28, 1974, the secret police visited me again, searched my apartment, arrested me and took me to a prison in Brno. There, over a period of four months, I underwent interrogation before receiving a sentence of eight months in prison. I spent my twenty-first birthday in a prison cell, which I shared with young mothers who had killed their newborn children, prostitutes, thieves, and other criminals. In those surroundings, I had to keep my faith, which was not easy. I gained ten kilograms, since we ate mostly dumplings, no vegetables or fruit and almost no meat. I spent the second half of my prison term in Bratislava.

After my release, I wanted to continue studying. Usually ex-prisoners had no opportunity to attend university, especially if their sentence had come from conducting religious activities. Yet, despite some initial doubts, I went to the Czech town of Pardubice and entered the university there. Another sister, Majka, lived nearby. We met from time to time but always had to make sure that no one was following us. Sometimes we traveled to meet other members in various cities. Every meeting was precious to each of us, just to see and talk to each other for a few hours.

My happiness did not last long however. In the summer of 1976, I wanted to go to Prague to visit a sister named Marta. We intended to join a labor brigade to go picking strawberries.

### **Running as if being hunted**

Our mistake was talking in detail about it on the telephone, which alas was bugged. At the railway station, I saw a man who raised my suspicions. Intuitively, I heard a spirit say, "Return to your dormitory and hide the literature you left there! Bury it deep in the ground!" Suddenly I felt so anxious that I rushed back to the student hostel, grabbed the material in question and buried the whole lot at a suitable place nearby.

When I returned to the station, my train to Prague had already left so I had to wait for the next one. My "shadow" was still there. When the train arrived, he followed me onto it. I was alarmed. I kept thinking to myself, If he needed to go to Prague, why didn't he take the first train? He must be an agent, and he is following me. What shall I do?

I was so tense. It felt as if I were in a thriller movie. At the railway station in Prague, I saw the man talk to some policemen that then came up to me and asked to see my documents, which I showed them. Although they allowed me to continue on my way, I nevertheless felt the noose tightening. Escape would not have been easy because I was carrying several bags and a case. I went up a flight of steps and saw two secret policemen searching for somebody. What on earth should I do? First, I deposited some of the bags at the left luggage service and then went outside to the tram stop.

There I met my next "shadow." However, I managed to muster up whatever courage I still had to ask him if he could tell me where I could find a map. I added that I wanted to visit my aunt. That agent escorted me to a displayed street plan of Prague, even helping me by carrying two of my bags. He then offered to accompany me to my aunt's house but I turned that down.

After he left, I noticed that two other agents were hot on my heels. I could not take a taxi, since that would have enabled them to discover my destination within a matter of minutes. So, close to despair, I returned to the railway station. The two men followed me.

I jumped aboard a waiting tram with one of them still following me. I pretended to clip a ticket and just as the doors were closing, I jumped out again. My shadow, locked in the tram, started cursing. I was shaking with fear but also felt liberated. When I arrived at our members' apartment and explained all that had happened, both sisters became intensely frightened. We went out to the yard and hid some of our literature there. The police did not show up on that day or the next. Under those circumstances, we stayed a few days together.

I mention this incident in such detail because it was a clear demonstration of help from the Spirit World. I am physically rather clumsy and hardly able to escape six or seven well-trained policemen. The whole situation would have required some kind of superwoman, which is something that I clearly was not.



### **Backlash against patriotism**

The next wave of persecution started in January 1977, when a human rights document, Charter 77, was published and distributed. At that time, the Secret Police were rounding up all political and religious dissenters. In March, the police came to the building where I was attending class and arrested me along with two other colleagues. They interrogated us at a police station in the town of Hradec Kralove. My interrogation lasted all day until midnight when they locked me up in a cell. It was like being in an icebox as the window was wide open to the cold night air. I kept my coat on and wrapped myself in the bed covers. I was shivering not only with cold but also with fear. I tried to figure out what was going on. My first arrest and imprisonment had cost me my studies, but God had then given me another chance. Now, however, even that second chance was hanging completely in the balance. I reasoned, however, that the situation was largely in God's hands and that, if need be, I was willing to accept the loss of a university education forever.

When the disciples of Jesus were in prison, an angel opened the gates for them and they were set free. Al-

though I did not hold out any hope of an angel liberating me, I firmly believed that some sort of miracle would happen. Taking comfort from such a notion, I fell asleep.

In the morning, two young women -- one a Romanian arrested for theft and the other a Pole caught smuggling something across the border -- joined me in the cell. I gave each of them a back massage because they were not feeling well and I encouraged them to do exercises. We sang songs together, and I told them some fairy tales. How deeply these young women longed to see good win over evil! They seemed like children, with their eyes shining. We forgot we were in prison and became completely involved in the stories. It was incredible! At the time, they did not look like criminals at all but more like beautiful women, supporters of goodness.

During my next interrogation session, I refused to say anything. I asked for a piece of paper, on which I wrote that I would not try to convert anybody at school and signed it. At that, the tide turned in my favor. The public prosecutor issued an order to set me free and told me to return at certain intervals for control purposes.



*The city of Pardubice, today in the Czech Republic, where fear of police reprisals caused the writer to bury religious literature in the ground*

### **Return to "normal" life**

When I returned to my student hostel, people looked at me, not knowing what to think as they had heard that the police had searched my room. For a while I felt exposed. After some time, though, the tension lessened and people forgot about everything. Nevertheless, I continued to worry, especially about being kicked out of school. One day, the vice-chancellor invited my mother and me in for a talk. He said that because I was a good student, he would be sorry if he ever had to expel me. He added that because I had not yet received a prison sentence, I could continue with my studies. If there were a verdict, he would see what he could do. He was a fantastic person! At that time and under those circumstances he could have kicked me out without further discussion.

After some time had elapsed, the court summonsed me. Fortunately, my lawyer was a person sent by God. He tried to gain time by repeatedly asking for new evidence and witnesses. That strategy delayed the verdict.

Eventually, three days after my graduation, I received a suspended jail sentence of two years. This meant that only if the authorities ever caught me witnessing would I be sent to prison for a year. I was relieved at such relative leniency and very happy. Thanks to God's intervention and protection, we had won the game!

In those days, I walked with God, talked to him, sang songs for him, and felt like his daughter, thinking that Eve before the Fall must have experienced similar feelings. The only difference seemed to be the surroundings; all manner of filth and difficulty filled mine.