

Chapter 12

1968

1968, January to March

The New Year was greeted with snow and mild frosts, 3–6 degrees below zero. In the week from January 8 to January 14, the temperatures dropped to 10–13–17 below. A sudden thaw set in from January 16, and the weather was mild until the end of the month.

January 21. Holy Mass was celebrated for our father Tobiáš Rychlík, who would have been 100 years old.

February 22. As in the last few years, the co-operative members had a festive annual meeting to celebrate the final dividend.

At the start of March there were still mild frosts, with night temperatures 3–7 degrees below. After March 15 it warmed up, and sowing started on March 20.

In March a new political wind started blowing, and the newspapers were full of discontent with the government of President Antonín Novotný. And so, under public pressure, President Novotný resigned on March 22, and with him went many ministers and other leading functionaries.

March 30. A new president was elected, army general Ludvík Svoboda born in 1895.

A political turn-round set in. Political prisoners were released, and innocent people condemned after 1948 for political reasons were rehabilitated. A change also set in in the schools. The name of First President T. G. Masaryk had not been allowed to be spoken in schools for twenty years, but now he was once more spoken of in school as “The Liberator”.

1968, April to July

April 5. The apricot trees came into bloom.

Otherwise, April was dry and warm until April 29, when there was a thunderstorm with welcome rain but also with hail.

May. This year the lilac trees were already in bloom on May 1.

May 20. The hay was cut, but the crop was poor because April had been wholly dry.

May 25. Singling of the beet was already completed.

There had been plenty of rain in May.

June 2. Brother František celebrated his 60th birthday and went into retirement. He would receive a pension of 920 crowns monthly.

From June 10, the road through the heart of the village and on to Nesvačilka was asphalted. [The writer’s own street, which was a side-street to this, had been asphalted in 1962, so I suspect that this really means “re-asphalted”. There was a reference in August 1947 to its being “rolled”.]

In June, small pensions were increased. Mine went up from 360 crowns monthly to 400.

June 24. 24-year-old Bohumil Král of No. 92 was run over by a private car, and was killed on the spot.

The greater part of June was dry.

At the start of July, temperatures rose to 31–33 degrees.

July 8. The harvest started.

July 9. Světlá Králová [no house number given] graduated as a doctor of medicine. This made the fifth doctor from Těšany, two men and three women.

The “People’s Party”, which had been suppressed since 1948, was re-established.

Wet weather set in, and slowed down the harvest.

1968, August

August 10. The wet weather continued, and the SAC could not complete the harvest. The wheat was

sprouting in the standing water.

August 17. The harvest was finally completed in spite of great difficulties. The corn had done well, yielding up to 50 cents per hectare. Members received nine cents per measure from the private plots.

August 21. Before 5 o'clock in the morning, I switched on the radio, and heard the voice of the announcer, broken by sobs, saying that during the night troops from the Soviet Union, Poland, East Germany, Hungary, and Bulgaria had entered the whole territory of the Czechoslovak Republic. "We are being invaded, we are being invaded," she said in a tearful voice.

Throughout the day, armoured vehicles, tanks, and lorries full of armed Soviet troops came along the road from Klobouky to Brno. By the manor house, and elsewhere in the village, crowds of astounded people were shaking their fists and shouting to the soldiers, "What are you doing here? Go home, go back home!" And everywhere was full of weeping and lamentation.

Panic was breaking out among the people. The shops were overflowing with people buying provisions, and in a short time bread, flour, and sugar were sold out.

The radio constantly informed us of the progress of the armies, and how in the towns the soldiers were firing on unarmed people. Suddenly the announcer said, "When you hear the National Anthem coming from your sets, it will mean that we can no longer broadcast from the studio, that we are occupied." Soon after this, the Anthem was indeed heard, and then there was silence. But not for long. The broadcasting staff started transmitting from a secret substitute studio, and continued doing so throughout the night. They urged people to stay calm, and to avoid bloodshed.

People went off to work early as usual, but they came back. None of the factories in Brno was working, nor were we in the SAC. The workmen who came back from Brno told how the foreign soldiers were conducting themselves, stealing and firing on people. On walls, placards in Russian and Czech started appearing, saying, "Occupiers, go home, nobody invited you here."

August 23. At the council office, we signed sheets of paper at the head of which we demanded that the occupying troops leave our country, and that the leading members of our government, who had been shut up by the occupying troops in unknown locations, be released. The President was in the castle under supervision.

The hospitals in Brno were broadcasting appeals to donors to come and give blood for the wounded (whom the Soviet brothers in their love had fired on).

At noon, there was a one-hour strike throughout the whole republic in protest against the occupation.

On August 23, President Ludvík Svoboda flew out to Moscow for talks on the current situation. Before his departure, he said that he would return the same day – but he didn't.

August 25. Throughout the night and almost to the middle of the day, tanks and armoured vehicles of the Soviet army were again coming through, and the radio said that there were now half a million foreign troops in our republic.

The radio transmissions throughout the republic had been co-ordinated. Central Bohemia spoke for three minutes, then western, eastern, and southern Bohemia similarly for three minutes, then Moravia and Slovakia got their turn, and so we knew what was going on throughout the republic. And the radio told us how the soldiers everywhere were conducting themselves, stealing and firing on people, and in spite of this saying that they had come to free us from counter-revolution.

August 26. At 9 o'clock in the morning, the bells rang from all the churches and sirens howled for fifteen minutes (even here in Těšany) in protest against the occupation of our land, and people heard them with tears streaming down their faces.

The main road was again full of troops throughout the day.

August 27. Again, at 9 o'clock in the morning, the siren sounded and the bells rang (for fifteen minutes) to welcome our delegation, which with President Svoboda at its head had been negotiating in Moscow since August 23.

At 3 o'clock in the afternoon, President Svoboda gave a sombre address, and from its tone we felt that the negotiations in Moscow had not gone well for our country. Then the first secretary of the Czechoslovak communist party, Aleksandr Dubček, spoke sadly and movingly, and said that in Moscow they had been forced to accept harsh and ignominious conditions which for the moment had not been announced.

August 28. Bread and milk were again to be found in the shops.

Groups of people were standing in the streets. People had no taste for work, and were talking about what had been happening. Some were cursing, others weeping, and everyone was asking how they could claim to have come to suppress the counter-revolution when there had never been any. We had been living and working peacefully, and our friends, whom we had called brothers, had shamefully attacked us.

Prague announced that it already had 25 dead and 400 wounded.

The radio announced that each day of the occupation, damage worth 65 million crowns was being done. Russian soldiers were acting like barbarians, demolishing, breaking, and destroying. People driving their own cars were warned on the radio that foreign soldiers were stopping private cars for examination and taking gold objects, watches, and above all transistor radios.

The national flags on public buildings were flying at half mast, and in some places black banners had been hung. All the signposts on the roads had been taken down, and in the towns all the street names and house numbers had been removed, so that the occupiers could not find out where they were. The newspapers had ceased to appear, and when a sheet (two sides) did appear it had been printed in some secret printing shop, because the print works were occupied by the invading troops.

In the towns, soldiers spied and searched for the radio transmitters, but nobody betrayed them, nobody said anything when they were interrogated. Perhaps never in the past had nations been so united as Czechs and Slovaks were now in this misfortune.

In the towns and villages, the walls were full of placards and notices in Russian and in Czech. The young were fearless, and wrote up witty sayings like these.

Lenin, wake up – Brezhnev is going mad
Grandfather Frost brought us tanks for a present
Ivan, come home, father is drinking away your boots
Hide your hens and geese so the Russians can't take them
We kept watch towards the West, and the East attacked us
During the war, we waited for you for six years, but now we will remember you for two hundred years
People, buy yourselves combs, the day of the louse has arrived
The news is flying across the whole world, Ivan the Terrible murders children
Red Scarf, turn around, the Russians have attacked us, we don't know why

[Many of these have rhythms and rhymes which have been lost in translation. "Grandfather Frost" is the equivalent of Santa Claus. "Red Scarf" alludes to a song in which the singer doesn't understand why his beloved has turned on him.]

August 30. The broadcasting station had not yet been returned to its owners, and the radio was still transmitting from secret places. It was constantly urging calm and consideration, in fear that hotheads might cause bloodshed.

1968, September to December

September 1. The conditions which our government had been forced to accept in Moscow were beginning to be fulfilled.

Minister of the Interior Josef Pavel and many others had to resign, and as in 1948 many people were fleeing across the frontiers. Likewise many students who had been on holiday abroad were not returning home.

Certain periodicals such as "Literary Papers", "Student", and "Reporter" were suppressed.

The Russians were deeply insulted by what had appeared on the walls, and laid down the condition that everything had to be obliterated and that soldiers were not to be called "occupiers".

September 7. The broadcasting station was again transmitting from its own studio, but it was not allowed to speak as before. There was censorship of the press, radio, and television.

September 15. Daily newspapers were appearing regularly again, but with blank spaces where the censor had cut something out.

The soldiers of the five states were still in our country, but we could not find out about them when the radio and the newspapers were no longer allowed to tell the truth.

Almost every day, the troops of the occupying armies were moving in heavy vehicles either towards Brno or away from it.

And so it appeared that we were no longer a sovereign state, but a Russian protectorate.

September 22. The gardeners' federation arranged an exhibition of fruit and flowers in the "Hospitality Union" room at No. 151. There were 55 exhibitors in all, 33 from Těšany and the rest from surrounding villages and from Brno-Komárov [a suburb towards the SE of Brno]. On show were 191 varieties of apple, 93 varieties of pear, 16 varieties of grape, and also peaches, quinces, almonds, and walnuts.

September 28. The SAC straw stack burnt down. The fire had been started by schoolchildren.

September, like August before it, had been wet.

In October, the gathering of the grapes by the SAC took almost 14 days. In all, 560 cents of grapes were collected. 525 cents were delivered as the quota to the wine-making enterprise, and 445,000 crowns were received for them. The SAC pressed wine from the rest. The extent of the vineyard was 15 hectares.

October 21. During this week, the occupying troops from Poland, Germany, Hungary, Bulgaria, and even part of the Russian contingent, left our homeland. But according to the announcements, perhaps 100,000 Russian troops were temporarily remaining.

October 28. On this state holiday, there were demonstrations against the USSR in Prague, Brno, and Bratislava.

The weather had slightly eased, and the SAC lifted most of the beet by combine.

From November 15 there was an increase in the price of manufactured goods, and some things, such as for example matches, were not to be had.

After the partial departure of the foreign troops, tension eased, but people were still seething, and everywhere the soldiers appeared the people let them know that they were uninvited guests.

November 17. Students were on strike in Prague, Brno, and Bratislava against the occupation of Czechoslovakia, but the Russians didn't care. They continued to maintain that they had come to liberate us from the "counter-revolution", even though the whole world had condemned them as invaders.

After December 10 it started to freeze and night temperatures fell to 15 degrees below zero, but before the festival the frost eased and the weather was mild.

A year was ending bleakly which had started so hopefully.

The following inhabitants died during 1968.

February 26	Cecilie Polešovská	No. 96	73 years old
April 23	Jan Viktorin	No. 194	87 years old
April 23	Apolonie Štěpánková	No. 2	69 years old
May 20	Marie Horáková	No. 216	75 years old
May 20	František Dudek	No. 213	74 years old
May 25	Barbora Hnilicová	No. 65	83 years old
June 13	Josefka Čermáková	No. 12	63 years old
June 24	Bohumil Král	No. 92	24 years old
August 8	Žofie Hnilicová	No. 229	74 years old
August 31	Jan Kostrhon	No. 259	70 years old
September 20	Rudolf Mandelik	No. 160	64 years old
October 3	Ludvík Rychlík	No. 169	73 years old
October 5	Františka Králová	No. 176	74 years old
[no date]	Božena Chaloupková, visiting from Bošovice		
December 13	Marie Haraštová	No. 73	81 years old
December 19	Matěj Poláček	No. 21	67 years old
December 20	Josef Novotný	No. 47	62 years old