

***I WAS ALWAYS THROWN BY THE QUESTION OF WHERE
MY CHILDREN WERE***
Květoslava Princová (*1950)

For her the toughest thing was anxiety over her children. For instance, when the secret police asked whether she knew where they were. She never knew where the question was directed, or what would follow. They knew more than she did as to whether something had happened to her children since she'd seen them. Likewise, she never knew whether the all-powerful secret police wouldn't use them to put pressure on her. *"I was always thrown by the question of where my children were, even though I always tried to have somebody look after them. But when I was without them sometimes and the police asked about them the question flustered me,"* says Květoslava Princová, the mother of three children.

"What kind of question is that?" she asked herself. *"Could something have happened to whoever was looking after them?"* Květoslava Princová, originally a chemist, joined a community that attempted to escape the reality of totalitarian Czechoslovakia by living in the countryside. The Communist regime persecuted all shows of independence and all members of the underground that tried to live as they wished, for instance in their own style and with their own music. The only possibility was to settle somewhere out of the way and create a space where friends could visit and where parties, concerts or religious seminars could take place. It was later referred to as the "old buildings period". Princová and her husband passed through three, as the Communists gradually drove them out of each such "old building". Květoslava Princová was among the first signatories of Charter 77 and after the fall of communism became office manager of the first post-Communist mayor of Olomouc. She later worked for a charity and provided aid in the Balkans and ex-Soviet states. She co-founded humanitarian aid training at CARITAS – Higher Social Vocational School in Olomouc and in 2007 a master's course in the field at the Sts. Cyril and Methodius Faculty of Theology at Palacký University in Olomouc.

Květoslava Princová was born in 1950 in Lipník nad Bečvou. She grew up in a Catholic family and her grandfather and father had been members of the Christian Democrats. They recommended that she not apply to study the humanities after secondary school as she was unlikely to be accepted. So she graduated from the University of Chemistry and Technology in Prague. As soon as she enrolled she became involved in protests and strikes, though that all ended with the self-immolation of Jan Palach. Princová found herself by coincidence in contact with the Němecs, whose apartment on Prague's Ječná

St. played host to a remarkable community of intellectuals and opponents of the totalitarian regime. The situation at the time was debated there and she came into contact with the underground. She graduated in 1973, when so-called normalisation began and the Communist regime shored itself up. Květoslava married Jan Princ, who was still an assistant at the University of Chemistry and Technology. The wife of poet Ivan Martin Jirous offered her lodgings at their flat in Prague. At the time her husband, a legendary poet and spirit of the Czech underground nicknamed Magor (Madman), was in jail.

However, the secret police gradually increased their control over all public events. There was nowhere to run in the city, so a plan to move to the countryside was hatched. Princová and her husband acquired their first old building in Rychnov u Verneřic in North Bohemia. *"We were in Prague, but then the repression kicked in. So we said that we would buy land in the country. It was tense in Prague."*

Things started great. Květoslava Princová got a job at the local school as teachers were lacking in the region. But then on New Year's Eve 1976 a party in Rychnov brought together everybody the regime regarded as their greatest enemies, from Václav Havel to the actor Pavel Landovský. The Princs also got involved in the Charter 77 movement and the secret police didn't take long to respond. They were thrown out of their jobs and then monitored. *"We were always careful. When we organised something, or when we bought a house. We basically had to be careful all the time."*

They were forced to leave the house in Rychnov when an expulsion order appeared in their letterbox. Prior to that tear gas grenades had been thrown into their house, which became virtually uninhabitable. They tried to soldier on, but in vain. The official letter informed them that a bus turning area would be built on the spot, despite the village already having one. The building was then blown up and no turning spot was ever built. It was merely a pretext. The Princs were involved in virtually no openly anti-Communist, resistance activities. *"But we discussed politics. I also copied books. We spoke about them and lent them out. For instance by Solzhenitsyn, who was banned."*

They then rented a rectory in Robeč, though they were also expelled from there. It was winter and fortunately they were taken in by friends. They passed through one other place before ending up on a farm in Moravia, near Olomouc. The regime was coming to an end by then. *"The children never had a go at us,"* says Princová. She wasn't afraid, but her parents were. About her and the grandchildren. *"But we were lucky enough not to have to live a lie. We were free. Admittedly we had our traumas, like everybody, but it was our decision."*

When the regime fell Princová headed the office of the mayor of Olomouc. She later worked for a charity before teaching at Palacký University in Olomouc, where she headed the humanitarian studies section at the Sts. Cyril and Methodius Faculty of Theology. She has written a number of publications on that subject. In 2017 she received the university's commemorative medal. *"Doctor Princová is a very good and inspiring example of a person who actually lives that which she lectures students about,"* said the head of the department Tatiana Matulayová.

"When I teach I like to explain how things were before. I regard it as important. Our granddaughter is in ninth grade. She herself signed up to do a paper on the Charter. We discussed it for around two hours."

Text by Luděk Navara