

# Albright's Family Tragedy Comes to Light: Secretary Says She Didn't ...

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The future secretary of state, left, with her mother and other members of her family after their postwar return to Czechoslovakia.

## Albright's Family Tragedy Comes to Light

### Secretary Says She Didn't Know That 3 Grandparents Were Jewish Victims of Holocaust

By Michael Dobbs  
Washington Post Staff Writer

Madeleine Korbela Albright was almost 2 years old when her parents whisked her out of Czechoslovakia in March 1939, less than two weeks after the Nazi occupation, giving up their life as a prominent Czech diplomatic family and saying goodbye to many relatives. Eventually, she and her parents came to America, where Madeleine followed in her father's footsteps into a diplomatic career that culminated two weeks ago when President Clinton made her the first female secretary of state.

Albright has spoken movingly of her past and of the importance that her family's experience with Nazis and later Communists has had on her political views. But she says she never was aware of what happened to family members who stayed behind in Czechoslovakia: Research by *The Washington Post* shows that more than a dozen relatives, includ-

*now* *young* *parents* *old to learn*  
*we country for about 10 days to 12 days. This happened*  
*about 5/10 o'clock in the evening and by 11 o'clock the same*  
*night, we all these were on the train to Belgrade with*  
*two small suitcases which we were able to pack in a*  
*of hurry. That was the last time we saw our parents alive;*  
*and that will come from a long time*  
*years he could not. The*

A tearsheet from a family narrative that was written 30 years after World War II by Madeleine K. Albright's mother. THE WASHINGTON POST

ing three grandparents, were killed as Jewish victims of the Holocaust.

In an interview last week, Albright, who was raised a Roman Catholic and now is an Episcopalian, said her father and mother never talked to her or her two siblings about the relatives' fate or their Jewish background. She said she

found the new information "fairly compelling" but wanted to conduct her own research into her family and its fate. "Obviously it is a very personal matter for my family and brother and sister and my children," she said.

"The only thing I have to go by is what my mother and father told me,

how I was brought up," Albright said.

She said her parents said of her relatives only that they died "during the course of the war."

Albright defended the choices her parents made and said she cannot question their motivation. "I believe

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During her tenure as U.N. ambassador, Albright toured Prague last summer with first lady Hillary Clinton.

BY RON EDMONDS—ASSOCIATED PRESS



Madeleine Korbela, about age 9, on the grounds of the Czech Embassy in Belgrade after World War II.

PHOTO COURTESY OF DAGMAR SIMOVA



Madeleine K. Albright at witness table during her confirmation hearing last month before Senate Foreign Relations Committee.

BY RAY LUSTIG—THE WASHINGTON POST

## Many Albright Kin Were Killed as Jews

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that my parents did wonderful things for us," she said.

The new information was uncovered during research for an article for *The Washington Post Magazine*, scheduled for publication Sunday, about Albright's family's experiences in Czechoslovakia in the late 1930s and 1940s. The information is based on documents in German, Czech and Jewish archives, Auschwitz transportation lists, and interviews with friends and family members in Europe.

Captured Nazi documents now in the possession of Holocaust researchers show that close relatives of Albright's who remained behind in Czechoslovakia during World War II—including the grandparents, her uncle and aunt, and a first cousin—died in Nazi concentration camps. Albright, who was born in Prague in 1937, spent the war years in London, returning with her family to Czechoslovakia in 1945 after its liberation from the Germans. Her parents were granted political asylum in the United States in 1948 after a communist coup in Czechoslovakia.

Albright comes from a family of Czech Jews who owned a building materials business before World War II, according to interviews in the family's home village. Albright's father probably embraced Roman Catholicism around the time of the war, according to Josef Marek, who worked closely with Albright's father immediately after the war.

Like many other assimilated Czech Jews, Albright's father, Josef Korbela, considered himself a Czechoslovak patriot first and rarely referred to his religious background. Under the racial laws introduced by the Nazis following the takeover of Czechoslovakia, however, a family like the Korbels would have been considered 100 percent Jewish.

"I have always thought of myself as a Czechoslovak Catholic," Albright said in the interview Thursday. "My parents were of the generation who thought they were the children of a free Czechoslovakia, the only democracy in central Europe. This was their pride [and] that is what I grew up with."

Albright said that she had received a number of letters with information about her family background since the 1989 collapse of communism in Czechoslovakia and particularly since 1993, when her name began appearing in the papers as the U.S. ambassador to the United Nations. Some of the letters contained erroneous information, such as the claim that she was born in Belgrade.

In this context, Albright had also received "the occasional letter which would say something about the fact that my family was of Jewish origin," she said. "This obviously has become more intense the more my name has been in the paper and [in connection with] my current job [as secretary of state]."

### Jewish Origins Cited

The question of Albright's religious background was raised in December by Arab newspapers, which cited unourced reports of her Jewish origins as a basis for attacking her nomination as secretary of state. Questioned about these reports, State Department officials said she had been raised a Roman Catholic and had converted to Episcopalianism following her 1959 marriage to Joseph Medill Patterson Albright, scion of a wealthy newspaper family.

Some Albright relatives and family friends in what is now the Czech Republic said they had long known of her relatives' fate. "My children know very well about every detail," said Dagmar Simova, Albright's first cousin, who stayed behind in Czechoslovakia after the 1948 coup and has had only sporadic contact since then with the American branch of the family.

When Simova learned in the summer of 1945 that her parents and sister—Albright's aunt, uncle and cousin—had died in the Holocaust, Albright was only 8 years old and was considered too young to be told, Simova said.

Family members who died during the Holocaust included Albright's two paternal grandparents, Arnost and Olga Korbela, according to documents made available by a Holocaust research center supported by the Prague Jewish community. The documents and a family friend suggest that Albright's maternal grandmother, Anna Spieglova, was killed by the Nazis as well.

The records, which are based on transportation lists captured from the Nazis at the end of World War II, show that some of Albright's relatives were killed in the gas chambers at Auschwitz. Others died of typhoid and malnutrition at a holding camp at Terezin, where Czech Jews were kept before being sent to Auschwitz.

In an unpublished, unfinished 11-page family narrative made available by Albright, her mother made no reference to relatives who died in the Holocaust. In the memoir, written after Josef Korbela's death, in 1977, Mandula Korbela attempted to describe his "turbulent life." The memoir ends abruptly in 1945, just before the Korbela family returned to Prague from London.

The manuscript describes in detail how Albright's parents succeeded in leaving Czechoslovakia in March 1939 with their nearly 2-year-old daughter, 10 days after the Nazi invasion. Mandula Korbela recalled that her husband returned to Prague from England just two days before the invasion.

"With the help of some good friends and lots of luck and a little bribery . . . we managed to get the necessary Gestapo permission to leave the country," wrote Mandula Korbela, who died in 1989.

### Roundup of Czech Jews

Albright's chances of surviving the Holocaust had she and her parents stayed in Czechoslovakia would have been very slim. The German authorities insisted that registrars provide detailed records of everyone of Jewish descent.

Josef Korbela's file at the Foreign Ministry contains a birth certificate issued in March 1941, describing him as "Jewish."

Of the 80,000 Czech Jews who were rounded up and sent to Terezin in 1941 and 1942, the survival rate was approximately 10 percent. Most of the survivors were young men and women who were "selected" to perform various menial tasks at Auschwitz rather than being sent directly to the gas chambers.

While the subject of the Holocaust was evidently too painful for the Korbels to discuss with their children, they apparently did discuss the matter with friends in Yugoslavia, where Josef Korbela served as a diplomat both before and after World War II. Brief references to the tragedy have appeared in the Yugoslav press, based on the reminiscences of a now-deceased Yugoslav journalist, Pavle Jankovic, who was very close to the Korbela family.

Of all the Jewish communities in Eastern Europe, the Czech Jews were probably the most assimilated. Survivors of the Holocaust recall that the Czech Jews went to their deaths at Auschwitz by bursting into song. Roughly one third sang a Jewish anthem; another third sang the *Internationale*, the anthem of the communist movement; the remaining third sang the Czechoslovak national anthem.