

PERSONAL NARRATIVE GUIDE

What is a Personal Narrative?

A personal narrative is “a personal account which offers details, analysis and a personal opinion resulting from a particular happening or event, that has been experienced by the writer”. It is a narrative that is about you/your family experience. This may be a combination of personal story, photos, description of your family in Czech Republic/Slovakia.

Some things to consider when you write your personal narrative.

- **Who is the audience?** - Anyone interested in knowing more about the experience of Czechs and Slovaks migrating to Canada - mostly our own community, but also others with a historical interest
- **Why are we asking for your story?** 2018 marks the 100th Anniversary of Czechoslovakia and 50th anniversary of the Prague Spring. These are touchstone events for our community to tell stories about how and why we came to Alberta. But these are not the only reasons Czechs and Slovaks decided to immigrate here. All stories about migration to Alberta are welcome. They will commemorate both the migration and the contribution that our community has made to this province.
- **Which language should you use for your story?** English, Czech or Slovak are acceptable. Everything will be translated into English.
- **How long should the story be?** (no more than 1000 words)
- **What will we do with the stories?** SVU will publish them in a bound volume.
- **Additional opportunity:** The Alberta Women’s Memory Project (AWMP) further invites women from our community to submit to the AWMP website [<http://awmp.athabascau.ca/call/>] their personal story of coming to Alberta. This is a project started a number of years ago and maintained by Alberta social historians and archivists. The website is dedicated to presenting and archiving the experiences of women. The AWMP invites narratives as well as digitized files of other documents like diaries, letters, and photos. There is no limit as to the length of the narratives that go on this website

HERE ARE SOME SUGGESTIONS THAT MAY ASSIST YOU IN YOUR WRITING

Items to consider in a personal narrative	Some suggestions	The Prague Spring (1968) as an example
<i>Family Origins</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Write about your country and region of origin. • Was the region known for anything? • Write about where you/your family came from. 	
<i>Life before the event(s) that led you to come to Canada</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Think of you and/or your family and the sort of life you led prior to leaving 	
<i>What prompted you to come to Canada?</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Second World War • War survival • Economic hardships • Job opportunity in Canada • Joining friends or family in Canada • Met someone from another country • Immigration/Migration/Refugee • Seeking a new start in Canada 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Political upheavals, 1968 or 1989
<i>What are your memories of that time?</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Was there a pivotal “event” that led to the decision to leave Czechoslovakia? • How long before you acted on that decision to leave? • What sort of discussions did you have with family and friends? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If you left in 1968, what were your impressions of Dubcek as a person and politician? • What, in your opinion, did the people think of him? Did you believe in what he was trying to do? • How did you view the Prague Spring? • How did you perceive and react to the invasion by the Warsaw Pact troops?
<i>Can you describe how you and your family came to Canada?</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What were you doing (work, study or other) prior to leaving Czechoslovakia? • Which border did you go to? • Was it guarded or unguarded? Did you decide to cross there? • Did you try to find a “legitimate” way i.e. an invitation to obtain a visa and cross the border or some other legal method? • What method of transportation did you use when you left Czechoslovakia? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How was your leaving affected by the Prague Spring? Did it affect where you crossed borders, how and with whom? • How did the political climate affect your leaving? • What was the effect on your work, study and other activities? • How did it affect your relationships with others?

<p><i>Impact on the family</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>How many in your family – immediate or extended – elected to leave the country?</i> • <i>Were there reasons why some family members chose to remain in Czechoslovakia</i> • <i>How many of your family now are still alive in Czechoslovakia?</i> • <i>Did any members of your family join you later?</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>How did the political situation affect decisions made by other members of your family with respect to emigration?</i>
<p><i>Making the choice where to go after leaving Czechoslovakia</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>What information did you have about possible countries where you could immigrate?</i> • <i>How much time did you have to plan?</i> • <i>Where and how did you get that information from (friends, networks, advertisements)?</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>If the Prague Spring forced you and/or your family to leave, was there an “underground telegraph” that informed people which country had the most receptive embassies and/or consulates that were receptive to giving people asylum?</i> • <i>Did any country establish quotas of Czech political asylum seekers and were you informed of this fact?</i> • <i>What was the easiest country to go to first?</i> • <i>In coming to Canada did you have to travel or stay in other countries i.e. Germany, Netherlands, Switzerland, England or even Scandinavia?</i> • <i>Did you have to ask for asylum?</i>
<p><i>Your thinking on the life ahead after you left</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Did you think that your stay away from home would be short term or long term?</i> • <i>Did you have any particular skills or knowledge that could be useful in later life, i.e. languages, professional credentials?</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Did the political climate in 1968 lead you to believe that you could return at some point and did you plan on that? Or did you assume that a door was closing forever?</i> • <i>How clear was your thinking at the time?</i>

<p><i>How were you treated when you arrived in Canada?</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>What were your experiences when you first arrived?</i> • <i>Was there a government program assisting you, or did you arrive on your own? Were the authorities in Canada sympathetic towards you?</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>If you arrived as a refugee, what sort of facilities were you first detained in?</i> • <i>Did Canada have programs in place to assist you?</i> • <i>How simple or otherwise was the process of “seeking asylum”?</i> • <i>Were the authorities in Canada sympathetic towards you?</i>
<p><i>Your reception and acceptance in Canada</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Was there a Czech/Slovak community in Canada with which you connected after arriving, or did you have to find other Czechs/Slovaks and create your own community?</i> • <i>Did you prefer instead to assimilate into Canadian society and not seek out other people from Czechoslovakia?</i> • <i>How did Canadians treat you? Were people accepting or were you resented?</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>How did Canadians view the Prague Spring?</i> • <i>What sort of reception did you find in Canada and your new community as a refugee after you arrived?</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Job Prospects and Later Employment</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>What were the initial job opportunities?</i> • <i>Did you find work easily or was the search for work difficult and more protracted?</i> • <i>Where did you first start work after you left Czechoslovakia?</i> • <i>Did your language skills prove to be a hindrance or help in securing work? Did you need or was any help offered to build on your language skills?</i> • <i>How long did it take for you to find stable work?</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>What were the initial job opportunities for you as a refugee?</i> • <i>What assistance was there for you for job placement or for development of your language skills?</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Early days in Canada</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Describe what your early days in Alberta were like? What helped and what made it difficult?</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Describe what your early days in Alberta were like? What helped and what made it difficult?</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Your Children (if applicable)</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>If you had children who were born in Czechoslovakia, how did they cope with the new social and linguistic environment?</i> • <i>Did you encourage them to continue speaking Czech?</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>If you had children who were born in Czechoslovakia, how did they cope with the new social and linguistic environment?</i> • <i>Did you encourage them to continue</i>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>If you had children after you left Czechoslovakia, did you teach them Czech so that you would have a Czech speaking household?</i> • <i>Were there any Czech language classes available anywhere?</i> 	<p><i>speaking Czech?</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>If you had children after you left Czechoslovakia, did you teach them Czech so that you would have a Czech speaking household?</i> • <i>Were there any Czech language classes available anywhere?</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Your community?</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Were there other migrants or refugees in the community?</i> • <i>Were there other Czechs in your community? If yes, did you tend to gravitate to these people vis-a-vis the wider community?</i> • <i>What steps did you take to assimilate into your new community? E.g. school, clubs (sporting or other), interest groups, etc.</i> • <i>How active were you in forming organizations or initiating activities, e.g., clubs, meetings, events?</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Were there other migrants or even refugees in the community?</i> • <i>Were there other Czechs in your community? If yes, did you tend to gravitate to these people vis-a-vis the wider community?</i> • <i>What steps did you take to assimilate into your new community? E.g. school, clubs (sporting or other), interest groups, etc.</i> • <i>How active were you in forming organizations or initiating activities, e.g., clubs, meetings, events?</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Involvement in Canadian Life</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>If you were single when you left Czechoslovakia and later married, where and in what circumstances did you meet your eventual partner?</i> • <i>Did you get involved in Canadian community life? If so, how and how were you received?</i> • <i>How did you get to know people?</i> • <i>Have you drawn your circle of friends from fellow Czechs or the wider Canadian community?</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>If you were single when you left Czechoslovakia and later married, where and in what circumstances did you meet your eventual partner?</i> • <i>Did you get involved in Canadian community life? If so, how and how were you received?</i> • <i>How did you get to know people?</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Contact with Czechoslovakia</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>After you left Czechoslovakia, what kind of connection did you have with friends and family at home?</i> • <i>Did you feel the need to return home? Did you return? If so, when did you return?</i> • <i>What are your connections today with family and friends in the Czech Republic or Slovakia?</i> • <i>Are you the prime mover in maintaining contact with family and friends?</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Did you return to Czechoslovakia after the Prague Spring? If so, when did you return?</i> • <i>What are relations today with family and friends in the Czech Republic?</i> • <i>Are you the prime mover in maintaining contact with family and friends?</i> • <i>After you left Czechoslovakia, did you follow subsequent developments and events in Czechoslovakia? For example,</i>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>After you left Czechoslovakia, did you follow subsequent developments and events in Czechoslovakia?</i> • <i>Did these events encourage you to think about returning to Czechoslovakia to live and work there?</i> 	<p><i>did you follow Charter 77 or similar passive protests?</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Did you follow the events leading up to the Velvet Revolution in 1989? What were your perceptions about the Velvet Revolution?</i> • <i>Did these events encourage you to think about returning to Czechoslovakia to live and work there?</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Current thinking about Czechoslovakia</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>What are your most vivid memories of Czechoslovakia?</i> • <i>Did you retain your Czech citizenship?</i> • <i>Aside from friends and family, do you feel in some way that you are still tied to Czechoslovakia, either through nostalgia, a sense of pride in the development of the country since 1989, its rich history or culture? How do you balance these feelings with your new identity as a Canadian citizen?</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>What are your most vivid memories of Czechoslovakia?</i> • <i>Did you retain your Czech citizenship?</i> • <i>Did you ever consider the amnesty offer and all its consequences by President Husak in the 70s?</i> • <i>Aside from friends and family, do you feel in some way that you are still tied to Czechoslovakia, either through nostalgia, a sense of pride in the development of the country since 1989, its rich history or culture? How do you balance these feelings with your new identity as a Canadian citizen?</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Thinking about Canada and Life in Alberta</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>How do your children think of their cultural identity - predominantly Canadian or partly Czech?</i> • <i>What is your sense of your Canadian identity? Which aspects of Canadian life and history do you feel you can connect with?</i> • <i>Do you have any regrets about coming to Canada? Do you feel at home here?</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>How do your children think of their cultural identity - predominantly Canadian or partly Czech?</i> • <i>What is your sense of your Canadian identity? Which aspects of Canadian life and history do you feel you can connect with?</i> • <i>Do you have any regrets about coming to Canada? Do you feel at home here?</i>