

## OUTLOOK BY THE BAY magazine

### PRAGUE: MY LONG JOURNEY HOME

By Charles Ota Heller  
Abbott Press (2011)

Local author Charles Ota Heller begins his compelling memoir with scenes of his early childhood in Nazi-occupied Czechoslovakia. Throughout years of persecution and hiding, with his education interrupted multiple times, his family splintered and his safety threatened, Heller survived and thrived to fully embrace the American dream of success. This is the story of his journey, but it is so much more. It is the story of a loving family, of blood ties, of devotion and of the strength of the human spirit. Early on, this well-written narrative pulls the reader into a complex and sinister world as seen through the eyes of a young boy from a mixed marriage. With a Catholic mother and Jewish father, Heller, raised as a Catholic and unaware of his Jewish roots, becomes one of the “hidden children.” The author’s voice is authentic and clear as he describes his confusion at the taunts of his former friends, his grief at losing his beloved great-grandfather, his anger at the restrictions imposed upon him for his safety and his longing for his absent parents. Much later, his memories will make you smile as he recounts his first taste of Coca-Cola and confesses his enduring fondness for Spam—a staple of the CARE packages that sustained his family in the refugee camps. If you are searching for a World War II era memoir to read, you can find books that recount more harrowing scenes of violence and more moments of high stakes drama. That is not to minimize the danger and profound losses that the author’s family suffered. But what makes this book stand out from the others is not those types of details. Rather, it is the author’s ability to firmly plant the reader within the time period and to expertly weave the often tragic and sadly neglected history of the Czech Republic around a central gem of a story of survival. Your heart will be moved as you follow this family’s struggle, sacrifice and courage. And you will be left with feelings of warmth and admiration as you see

how the author, with integrity and courage of his own, confronts and resolves his past with his present. Don't miss this book, which was recently awarded the "Mark of Quality" by *Writer's Digest*.

~Vicki Duncan