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My hometown, I experienced two world wars, even fighting in one of them, a cold war, executions, concentration camps, three great empires and their fall, the rise of a fourth empire, classical democracy, fascism, the dictatorship of the proletariat, socialism with a human face, communism and its fall, the restoration of capitalism, and the collapse of a state that had been so difficult to create. That's really a lot for one human life; probably not many people in human history will experience that much.

I was struck by an idea from Palacký, whom I read from time to time, that the history of the Czech nation is in many ways more instructive and