

## *Hana-Maria Pravda (Mrs Cohen).*

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As the first series community begins to take root, Abby & Co. are joined by Mrs Cohen, who seems to be incessantly cooking in the kitchen, looking after the two children and keeping Wendy from temptation. Mrs Cohen was played by the Czech actress Hana-Maria Pravda.

How did Hana-Maria start out in acting? "We have to go beyond pre-diluvian times! I was born in Prague and I went to grammar school, like everyone else. You will find out that with many actors when they were children, they just knew they were going to be actors later on. So it was not a decision that I suddenly took at the age of twenty-five. I had acted from childhood, from the age of four, when I played Red Riding Hood. Professionally, I was cast as a juvenile at the age of sixteen in Prague, and then came Hitler. Being Jewish I was imprisoned for three years, which was pretty horrendous. This was from 1942 to 1945. I lost fourteen of my relatives there. It is now fifty years on, but people should not forget. Strangely enough, people of about forty don't want to talk about it, but the very young ones do. In a way, coming back to Survivors, I found out in the war that people who were very grey, not particularly bad people, under pressure and danger were sorted out between 'devils' and 'angels'. Some were risking their lives for other people, while others grabbed what they could, stealing etc. The fact that so-called 'civilised' white people living in Europe can behave, not like savages because that would be insulting the savages, in this way is unbelievable. It is almost like a science fiction plot; making a factory to kill thirty thousand people a day! It's more than science fiction! Being a healthy young woman I was put to work and not to the gas chambers. Every day we worked in a small village on the border between Poland and Germany. When the Russians came the villagers said they never knew there was a concentration camp! They hadn't seen anybody!! This camp was a branch of Auschwitz! On the 'death march' to Belsen I ran away, as they (the Germans) were shooting the people who couldn't walk and so on. It was quite an adventure. I escaped, being young and full of optimism. This experience did at least teach me to be unafraid of poverty and to judge people simply by whether they are good or bad.

"I made my way back to Prague in June 1945 and because I was quite well known as a young actress, I joined a theatre there. Acting was without doubt the best therapy in the world for me as all the feelings came out. This really cured me.

"I married a wonderful actor called George Pravda, who unfortunately died ten years ago. He was one of the healers for me. I wanted to have a baby. This was natural, having seen so many people killed. Then the communists came and again there was a feeling of uncertainty. So we escaped from Czechoslovakia, illegally as we were told not to apply for a passport. We arrived in Paris in 1948 and stayed there for about a year. We couldn't get to England at that point, so we went to Australia. We founded our own theatre company in Australia. After five years there was a touring company from England with Dame Sybil Thorndike. We were doing a play called Of Mice and Men, by John Steinbeck, and she came along to see the play. Afterwards, she said to us, 'What are you two doing here?' I replied that we were earning a living and she replied 'You don't belong here. You must come to England.' My husband said that in England there must be so many brilliant actors and there wouldn't be room for two more and with an accent to boot. She replied, 'Rubbish! In a forest another two trees can grow, but in a desert, nothing!' So she gave us two letters of introduction and we came to England. We absolutely fell in love with England. Everything seemed so green and beautiful. I soon got TV work, as there was so much more going on in those days and they didn't import so much foreign material. Within six months George was playing in the West End!"

How did Hana-Maria get the part of Mrs Cohen in Survivors? "I hadn't worked with Terry Dudley before. I had a very good agent and he got me the part."

Was Hana-Maria happy to go on location to Herefordshire? "I wasn't all that happy to be away from home, but I was overwhelmed by the beauty of Herefordshire. It was in August and it was absolutely gorgeous. My husband was traveling a lot in James Bond movies and soon. I stayed in the hotel at Ross-on-Wye. I didn't want to rent a cottage as I can't stand cooking. I adore being pampered in hotels!

"I remember the atmosphere while filming Survivors with great pleasure. Especially, I remember the two children vividly. I also remember this very strange feeling that in the series, people only but not things were destroyed. It wasn't gory at all, indeed it was very English. The children were so very sweet. I love acting with children as I think that they take away all the pretence. I like children as individuals, and these two children were so absolutely sweet. I remember Tanya Ronder every time I go into a sweet shop,

because I asked her once what sweets she would like. I imagined that she would want a big box of chocolates but she said 'No, I want crunchies !' I had never had a crunchy bar before. I bought her a lot

of crunchies and tried them myself. I found that I too loved them. So I now buy them from time to time and whenever I do I think of her!"

Was Hana-Maria upset at not being picked up for the second series? "Yes, I was upset about it, because I loved the first series so much, I guess they just didn't need a grandmother for the second series. But then, watching the second series I could understand why I wasn't picked up because it was turning slowly into a 'western', with small groups of people threatening each other. It was a bit like cops and robbers. There seemed to be very little psychology left in it. I think that, somehow, the human factor evaporated. I had heard that there were problems with the scripts and where the following action was going to be and what the series was aiming at.

"It is terribly hard to go on with successful, psychologically true science-fiction unless you have a philosopher and highly talented writer like Jack to go on with it. It had possibilities of a deeper perspective, much beyond action adventure. A wonderful science-fiction film is Solaris by Tarkovsky. Survivors could have continued much in that mode. Actually, I thought that the combination of Terry Nation and Jack Ronder in the first series was a very good and interesting one.

Does Hana-Maria believe that another series like Survivors would hold interest for the viewers? "I don't see any reason why something like Survivors shouldn't be launched again as there are so many possibilities in the script. Looking at the current scare about killer viruses from Africa, you have the theme of a new series of Survivors."