

Robin Robert Zoufalik was born on March 25, 1958, in Prague, Czechoslovakia. He grew up in a non-religious household in a modest two-bedroom apartment near a theater with his parents, Vaclav and Hana, and his older brother, Rene. His father, once an office worker, was pressured into various low-level jobs due to not being part of the Communist Party. Eventually, he became a cab driver, frequently transporting important figures around Prague. Robin's mother was a hat maker, and together the family lived a humble, restricted life with limited access to opportunities under the Communist regime.

In the early 1960s, with hopes for a better future, Robin's parents started planning their escape. Their tight-knit group of friends, eight families in total, gradually escaped over the years, setting the path for others. In 1966, when Robin was just eight, his family made their move. After scouting the safest border, they crossed by sneaking through after cutting in front of a car as the gate lifted. Once over the border, authorities detained them briefly to confirm they weren't government operatives, given that Robin's father drove a "Tatra," a car associated with the government.

The family's journey continued with six months in a Vienna refugee camp, followed by a transfer to another camp in the Austrian Alps, where Robin began learning Russian. After nearly a year, they received approval to relocate to the United States, where the UN provided them with passports and arranged their flight to JFK Airport in New York. From there, they settled in Houston, Texas, where Robin began learning English and attending school. Adjusting to the new culture and freedoms in the U.S., Robin noticed the contrast to his sheltered upbringing in Czechoslovakia, where there was limited information and strict behavior expectations in schools.

As he grew older, Robin's interests expanded. He enjoyed skating, played hockey, and spent summers swimming in the Vltava River in Prague. His childhood memories included holiday traditions, like keeping a live carp in the bathtub for Christmas dinner, and family visits to their summer house in Oleško.

After high school, Robin chose to pursue an engineering degree at Southern Methodist University (SMU) in Dallas, attracted by the school's blend of Liberal Arts and technical programs. He studied Mechanical Engineering while working in a co-op program to support his education. These jobs covered his tuition, and he also found time to play sports, including hockey, coached by a Czech expatriate. College was significant for Robin, both academically and personally, as he met his future wife, Katie, there. Following a brief dating stint with her roommate, Robin and Katie became a couple and eventually married, staying together for over 40 years.

Graduating in 1982, Robin's early career involved various roles, beginning with an oil service company, which he left after four months due to a layoff. He went on to work as a gauge engineer and later as a sales engineer for a train company, eventually transitioning into selling air conditioning on the East Coast. His career progressed as he moved into business development for an architectural firm, where he focused on securing projects and generating revenue. In addition to his day job, he worked as a business

development consultant and led cultural tours in the Czech Republic, connecting people with his heritage.

Robin's Czech identity remained central to his life, culminating in his role as the Honorary Consul for the Czech Republic in Pittsburgh. This volunteer role allows him to foster community connections, authorize official documents, and support Czech representation in the U.S. He has organized gatherings and events, expanding the Czech community and sharing his culture. This role brings his life "full circle," given that his family once fled from the Communist government, and now he represents the Czech people abroad.

Reflecting on his life, Robin credits his mother as a foundational influence, providing strength and inspiration. His in-laws also shaped his life with their love and motivation, and he values the lasting friendships he's maintained since the early 1980s. His advice to others is to "be happy, believe in yourself, take chances, explore, and cherish friendships." His biggest regret is never having lived in New York City, a dream he held due to its cultural significance, but he feels fulfilled in his personal and professional life. Robin's message to future generations is to focus on happiness, embrace self-belief, and prioritize relationships, as they are irreplaceable in life.

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