# THE WALL Growing Up Behind the Iron Curtain

This wonderful book manages to be both creative and insightful, documenting life behind the Iron Curtain during the Cold War in words and graphic design. Peter Sis's use of color in his intricate illustrations highlights and enhances the matter-of-fact language of his text. He has managed to create a journal, biography, and social/historical commentary that is fascinating reading for children and adults alike

"Many of Peter Sis's readers were not yet born when the wall came down'. His brilliant autobiographical picture-book deserves to become a minor classic, keeping in the collective memory a shameful period of history which must never be forgotten."

—Tom Stoppard

"The ecstatic energy and big-spirited inventiveness of the artist's drawings make the once all but unimaginable realization of that dream visible for all to see."

—The New York Times Book Review

"Younger readers have not yet had a graphic memoir with the power of Maus or Persepolis to call their own, but they do now,"—*Publishers Weekly* 

Awards: Caldecott Honor Book; Robert F. Sibert Award – Medal; Bologna Ragazzi Award for Nonfiction; American Library Association Best Books for Young Adults; Publishers Weekly Best Children's Books of the Year; School Library Journal Best Books of the Year; Boston Globe-Horn Book Award; New York Times Book Review Best Illustrated Books of the Year; Golden Ribbon Award (Czech IBBY).



dreamscapes, Peter Sis shows what life was like for "I was born at the beginning of it all, on the Red appear in the Iron Curtain, and news from the West But adolescence brought questions. Cracks began to of a Young Pioneer, stood guard at the giant statue of a child who loved to draw, proudly wore the red scar Through annotated illustrations, journals, maps, and side—the Communist sidediscouraged but not easily killed. invasion. But this brief flowering had provided brought to a sudden and brutal end by the Soviet-led Stalin, and believed whatever he was told to believe. a glimpse of new possibilities– wanted to see the world and meet the Beatles, this He let his hair grow long, secretly read banned beat poetry, rock 'n' roll, blue jeans, and Coca-Cola slowly filtered into the country. Sís learned about was a magical time. It was short-lived, however, Prague Spring of 1968, and for a teenager who books, and joined a rock band. Then came the of the Iron Curtain." -creativity could be

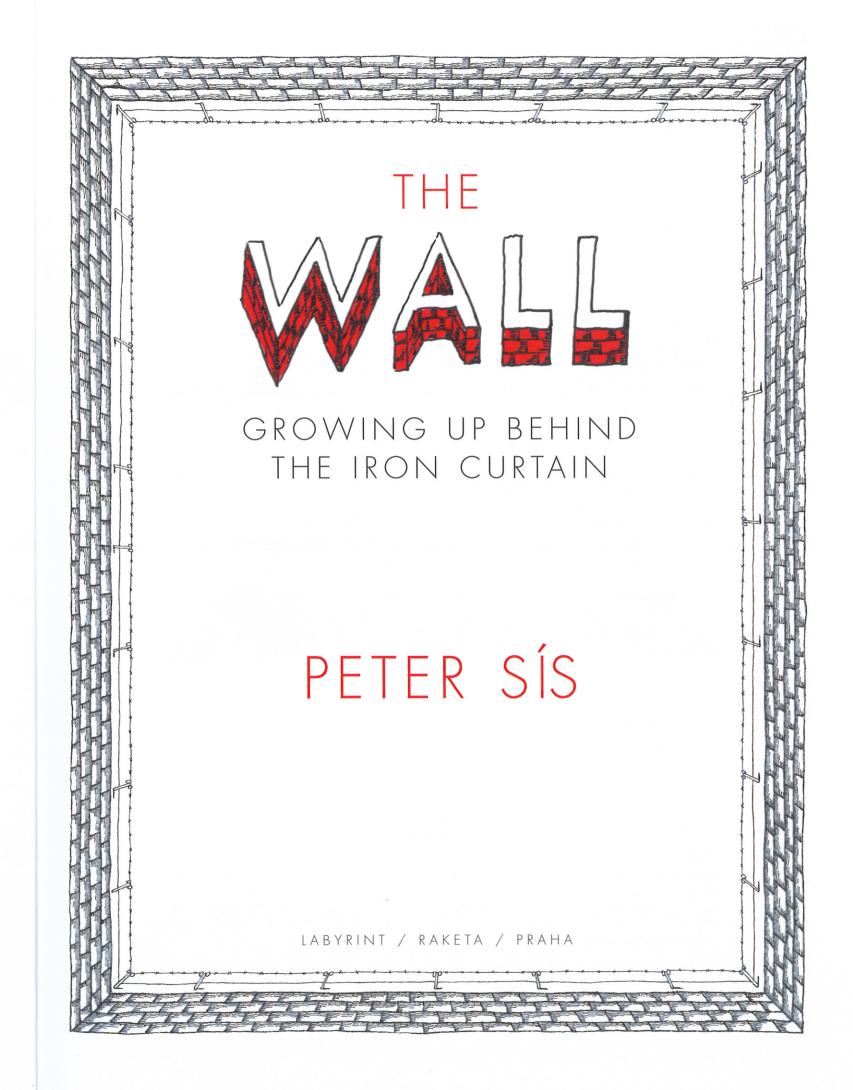
PETER SIS is an internationally acclaimed illustrator, filmmaker, painter and author. Born in 1949 in Brno, Czechoslovakia, and grew up in Prague. He studied painting and filmmaking at the Academy of Applied Arts in Prague and the Royal College of Art in London. His animated work is in the permanent collection of the Museum of Modern Art. He came to America in 1982, and now lives in New York's Hudson Valley with his family. Peter Sis is the first children's book artist to be named a MacArthur Fellow. His many distinguished books include Starry Messenger: Galileo Galilei, Tibet Through the Red Box, Madlenka, Rainbow Rhino, The Tree of Life: Charles Darwin, and The Wall: Growing Up Behind the Iron Curtain.

## Raketa

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#### INTRODUCTION

We don't have to go far back in time to see that the map of the world keeps changing. In the twentieth century alone, the changes were often cataclysmic. In 1917, the Russian Empire was swept by a revolution that brought the Communist Party to power and established the Soviet Union. At the end of World War I in 1918, the Austro-Hungarian Empire fell apart and several countries gained independence. Czechoslovakia was one of them. But after two decades of democracy, Czechoslovakia was taken over by Nazi Germany. Then, in 1939, World War II erupted. The Allies-the United States, Britain, France, and the Soviet Union—defeated Germany and Japan in 1945 and liberated the countries that Germany had occupied. After the war, responsibility for governing these countries was divided between the Allied forces. Most of eastern Europe and the eastern part of Germany fell under Russian control and became known as the Eastern Bloc. The rest of Germany was in the Western Bloc, led by the United States. The Soviet Union and the Western nations managed their territories in very different ways. The Western Bloc countries were all independent democracies, while the Eastern Bloc was tightly controlled by the Soviet Union. But not everyone in the Eastern Bloc countries wanted to live under totalitarian dictatorships, and many people began leaving for the West. To prevent a mass exodus, the Soviet Union fortified the borders around much of Eastern Europe and eventually built a wall that cut the city of Berlin in half. And so Europe was divided—symbolically, ideologically, and physically—by what Winston Churchill, the British statesman, called an Iron Curtain. By the 1950s, the United States and the Soviet Union each had nuclear weapons, but both sides knew that using them to fight another war would be devastating, and for the next forty years the two superpowers coexisted in a tense standoff, avoiding all-out war. This period was called the Cold War. It lasted until the Berlin Wall fell and the Soviet Empire collapsed. I was born at the beginning of it all, on the Red side—the Communist side—of the Iron Curtain.

-P.S.

THE WALL
GROWING UP BEHIND THE IRON CURTAIN
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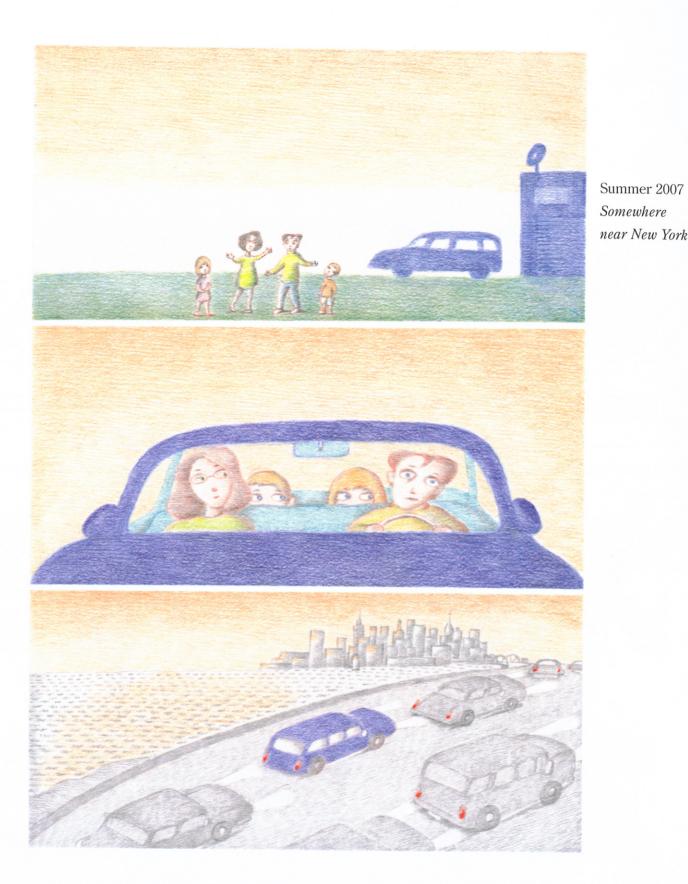
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"This is a special day! I'm taking you to your first rock concert!"



"I went to see this same rock band almost forty years ago!"



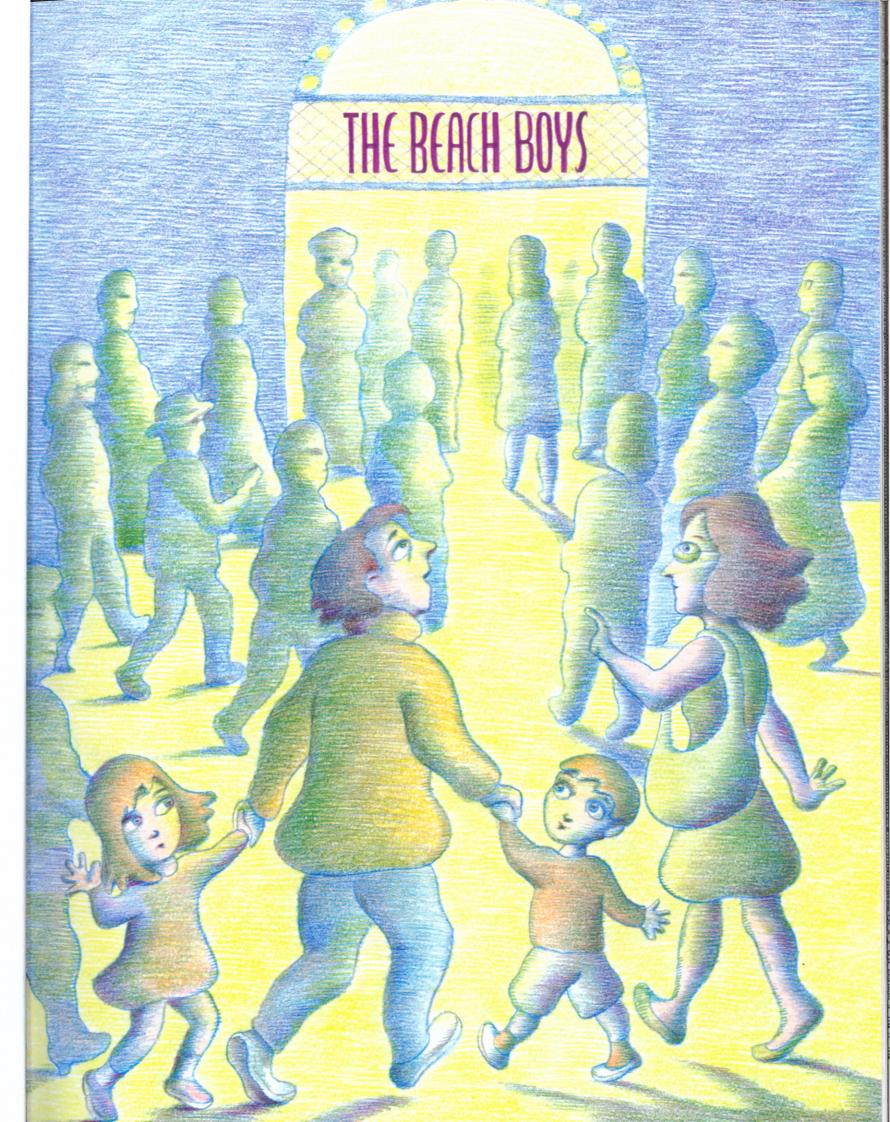
"Dad, how come they keep on giving concerts all these years?"



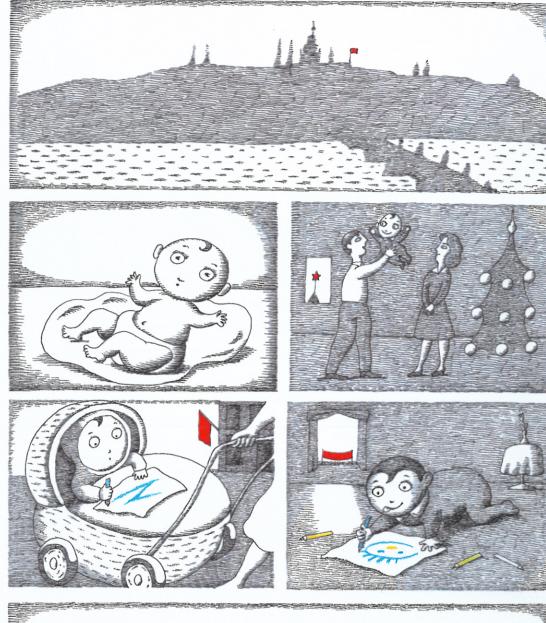
"The one I went to didn't end well..." "Why didn't it?"



"It's a long story. I would have to tell you about a certain boy..."

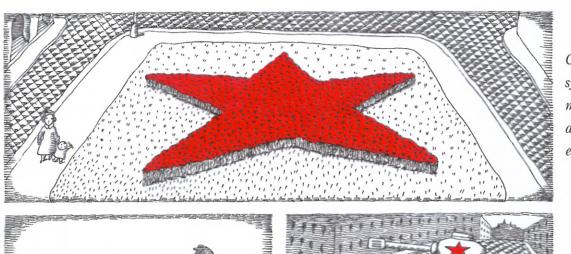


1948.
eviets take
control of
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d close the
borders.



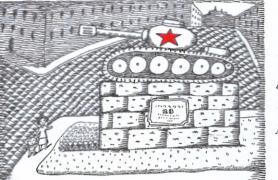
e People's a enforces vew order.



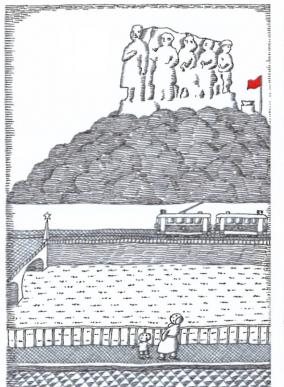


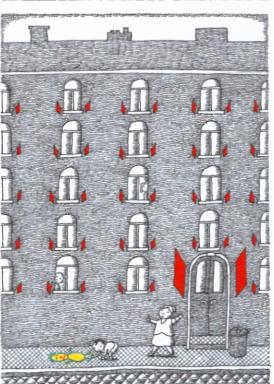
Communist symbols and monuments appear everywhere.





The Czech government takes its orders from Moscow.

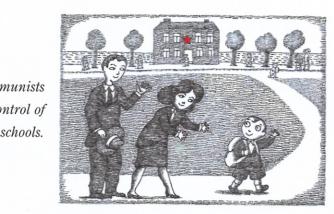




The display
of red flags on
state holidays—
COMPULSORY.
People who
don't comply
are punished.

At first he drew shapes.

Then he drew people.



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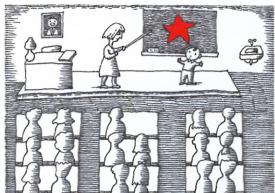
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parade

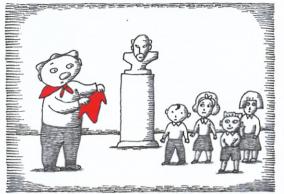
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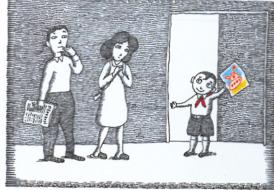
Russian-language classes—
COMPULSORY.

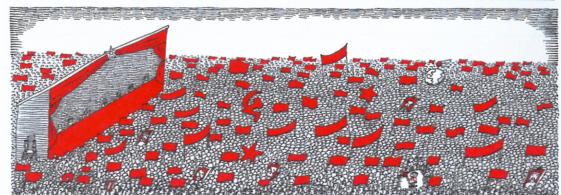


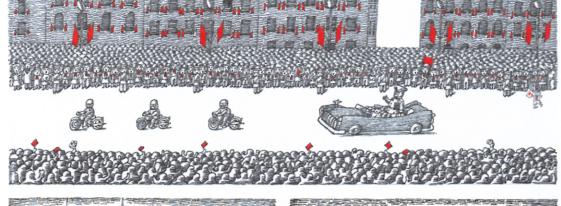


Political indoctrination—
COMPULSORY.



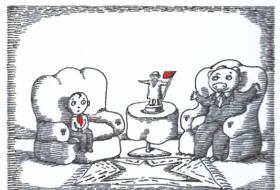






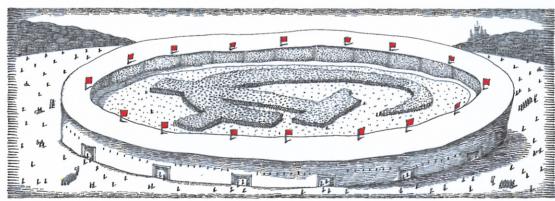
Public displays of loyalty—
COMPULSORY.





Children are encouraged to report on their families and fellow students. Parents learn to keep their opinions to themselves.





Citizens
participate in the
Spartakiad—a
mass gymnastics
exercise glorifying
individual
subordination to
socialist ideals—
COMPULSORY.

After drawing whatever he wanted to at home,

1956.

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1961.

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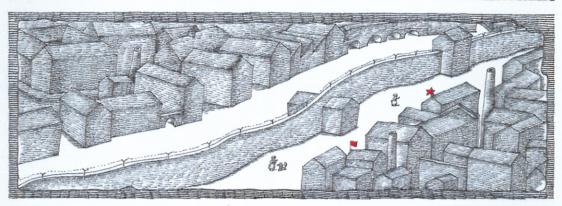
in half.

he Iron Eurtain ng East

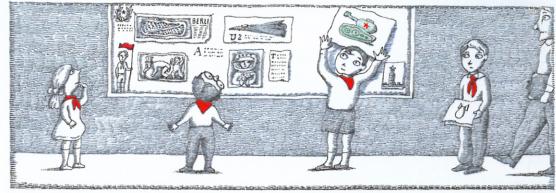
West is

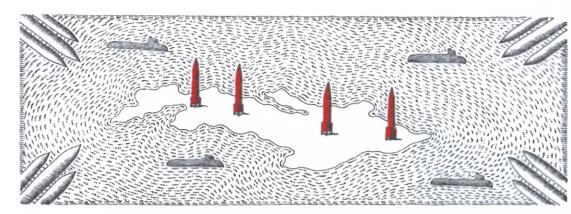
thened,

he Cold calates.









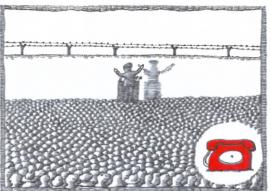
October 1962.
Soviet missiles in
Cuba are aimed at
the United States.
Nuclear war is
narrowly averted.

June 26, 1963.

President John F.

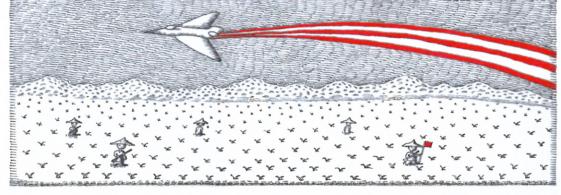
Kennedy visits the

Berlin Wall and
declares, "Ich bin
ein Berliner—
I am a Berliner."

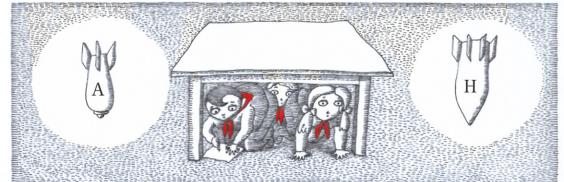




November 22, 1963. President Kennedy is assassinated in Dallas, Texas.



The United States and Communists fight in Vietnam.

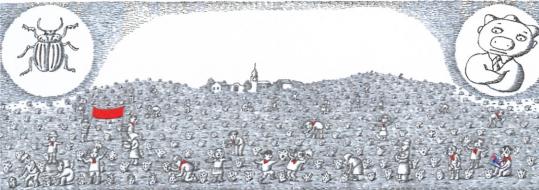


Nuclear war is a constant threat.

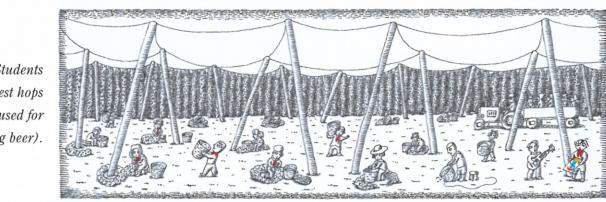
He drew tanks.

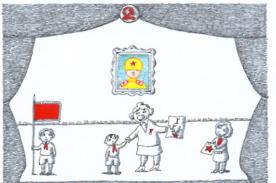
He drew wars.

oslovak
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med on
U.S.A.



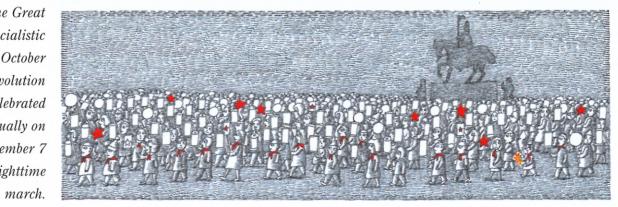
Secret police are watching everyone.







Russian films glorifying Soviet ideals are shown regularly to schoolchildren.



All of the above—
COMPULSORY.

Telephones are bugged.

Display of Western flags—

### PROHIBITED.

Only the official art, Socialist Realism, is permitted.

Certain
books and
films are
banned.
Art and
culture are
censored.

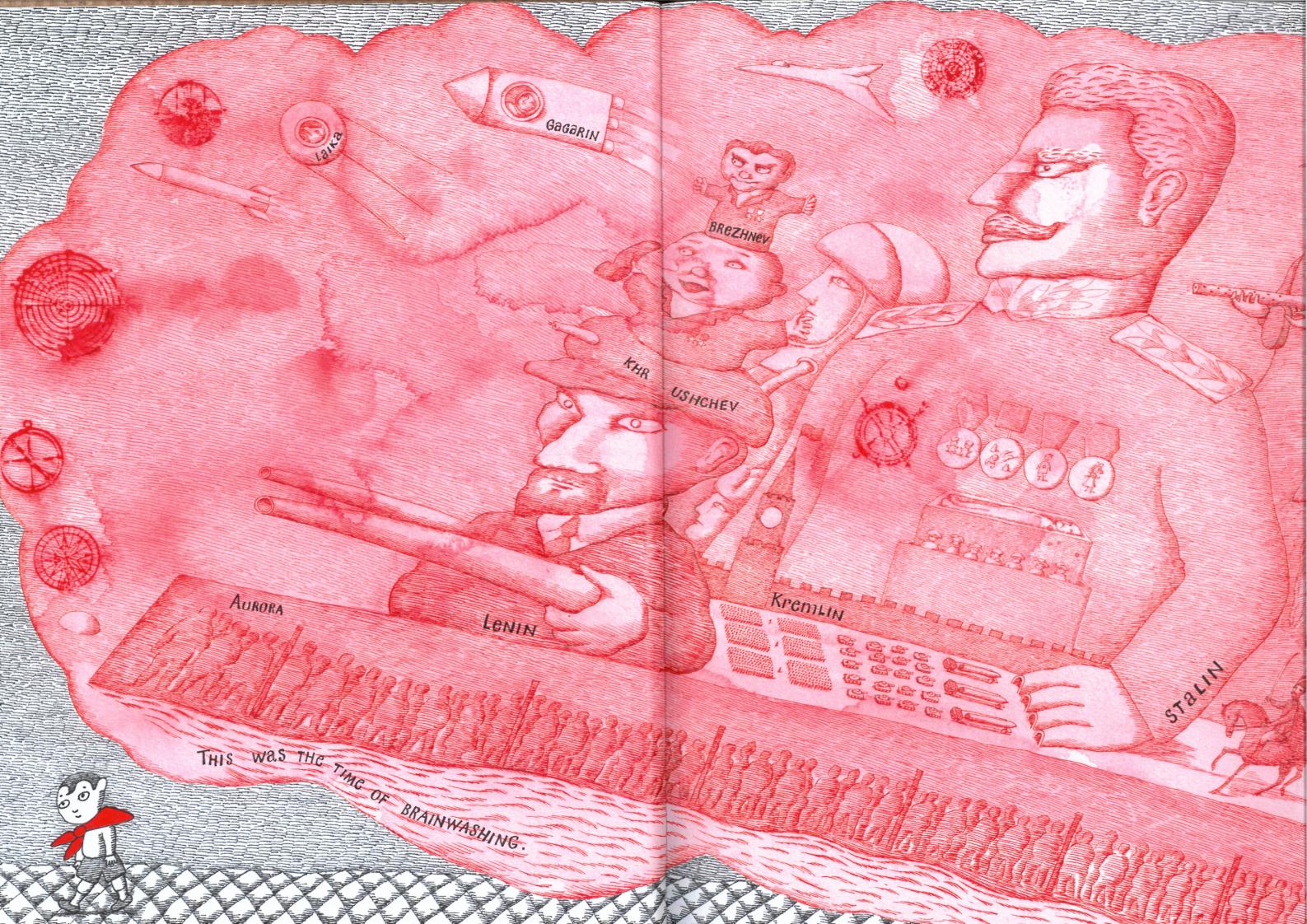


Western radio
is banned
(and jammed).

Letters are opened and censored.

Informers are rewarded for snooping.

There are shortages of almost everything. People stand in long lines.



















#### FROM MY JOURNALS

#### 1954

**IME** 

My father has been drafted into the Army Film Unit. They sent him to China to make a film.

We're supporting world peace by not eating meat on Thursdays.

We are all encouraged to get a pen pal in the Soviet Union. I've chosen Volodja in Leningrad. Our letters are graded.

#### April 1956

My father's cousin Lamin is in prison as an enemy of the state. My grandmother talks to my parents about it in German so my sister and I won't understand. But we understand some of it. He was on a national volleyball team that was going to a tournament in the West, and the players were all planning to stay there. The secret police found out. Lamin is twenty years old and will be in prison for the rest of his life.

#### February 1957

We went on a skiing vacation in the mountains on the western border. Soldiers with dogs came through the train looking for "subversives" trying to cross the border. The soldiers checked our skis and told us if we saw anyone who looked suspicious or behaved strangely, we should tell. When we

got off the train, there were two extra pairs of skis, and two people were missing!

#### November 3, 1957

The Soviet Union launched a rocket carrying a little dog named Laika into space. I wonder how the dog is going to land?

#### 1958

We were given our Young Pioneer scarves at the Lenin Museum in Prague—all except Dežo Hlaváč because he is from a Gypsy family with "too many children" and is not considered ready.

#### March 1959

There is a story in our schoolbook about a Russian man who is a class enemy. He hides his wheat harvest in his cellar instead of giving it to the village cooperative. His son, who is a Young Pioneer, finds out and reports it. The family kills the boy. His name is Pavka Morozov. He is a hero. We are told that if we see our parents doing wrong, we should report them.

#### June 1960

We are rehearsing for the Spartakiad.
I'm in the ten-to-twelve-year-old group.
Our part is called "Joyous Spring." We wear green shorts and yellow shirts. Each age group has its own segment and different uniform colors. The women are spectacular, and the soldiers are the most daring.

#### 1961

We watch an American movie called On the Bowery at school. It shows poor people sleeping in the street. We're told this is how people in a capitalist country live.

#### April 12, 1961

The Soviet Union launched the first man into space, Yuri Gagarin. When he returned, he landed safely in Siberia.

#### April 28, 1961

We welcome cosmonaut Yuri Gagarin to Prague. I wish he had brought his dog Laika with him.

#### June 17, 1962

The Czechoslovak National Soccer Team plays Brazil in the World Cup soccer championship final in Chile. We lose.

#### November 1962

Every May we stand guard at the giant Stalin statue. But now the statue has been blown up. We will stand guard at the smaller monuments...

There is a five-year plan for the whole country. We are building socialism. America is a capitalist country. So are France, Britain, Italy, and Holland. But my schoolbook tells me that America is the most capitalistic and decadent of all.

The very best Young Pioneers from all the socialist countries are invited to a camp in the Soviet Union called Artek.

I took first place in the Historical Museum Drawing Competition.

#### September 1963

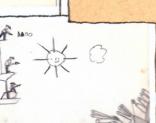
Colonel Jan Pixa was named a Hero of the Czech Socialist Republic—for his ingenious plan for catching "disturbers of the border," people trying to cross over to the West. He made a fake border so the "bad guys" would think they had gotten through. When they saw the American flag and were greeted by secret service men disguised as American soldiers, they'd think they had reached the West. The defectors would tell the secret service everything they knew and name their friends. What a surprise when the defectors found out they weren't in the West after all and were going to prison for life. Colonel Pixa is a hero.

I built a scooter that collapsed when my sister, Hana, was riding it downhill.

She hates me!

My school visited the Mausoleum to view the embalmed body of the first working-class Communist President of Czechoslovakia, Comrade Klement Gottwald.

It was scary.



















and pieces s from the st begin to rough the Curtain.

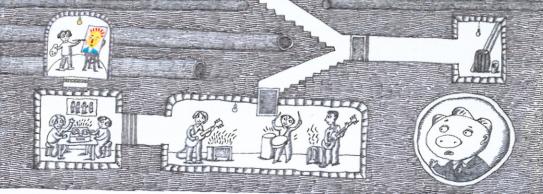
e Beatles! ich one is which?)

Elvis, e Rolling es, Radio nbourg... e secretly pe songs.

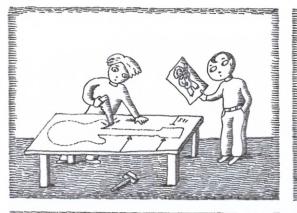
verything the West colorful lesirable.



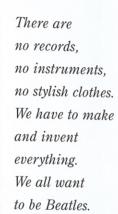
Citizens age fifteen and over must carry a photo I.D. at all times— COMPULSORY.

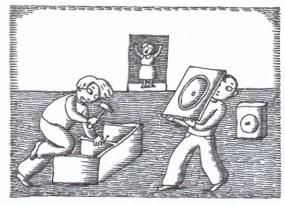


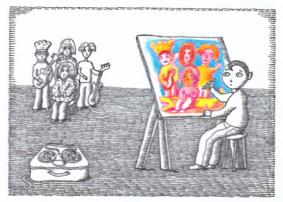
Slowly he started to question. He painted what he wanted to—in secret.



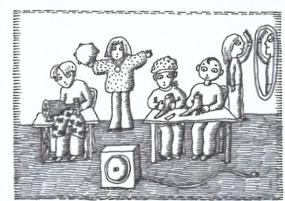




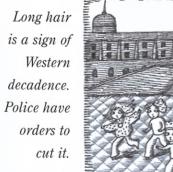




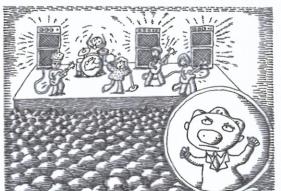




We make our own shoes, shades, electric guitars...







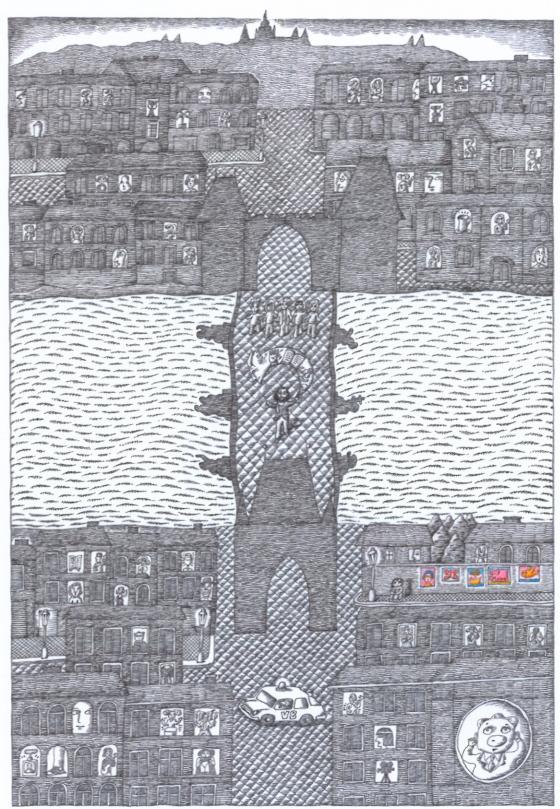
Rock music is against the principles of Socialist art.

He joined a rock group and painted music.

nnuary 1968.
The new head
of the
Communist
government,
Alexander
Dubček,
has good
intentions.

Slowly, our orld begins to open up.

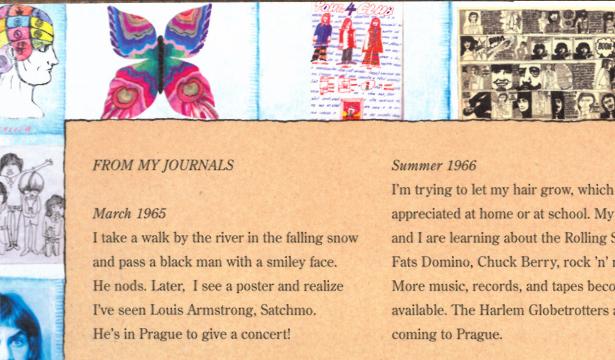
Censorship is lifted.



The old guard and the police are nervous.







I'm trying to let my hair grow, which is not appreciated at home or at school. My friends and I are learning about the Rolling Stones, Fats Domino, Chuck Berry, rock 'n' roll. More music, records, and tapes become available. The Harlem Globetrotters are

> December 1966 At first blue jeans are permitted as a uniform of the working classes (but only people with relatives in the West or those with hard currency who can shop in the special store TUZEX are lucky enough to have them). Then the government changes its mind. Jeans are a sign of Western decadence.

> February 1967 I form a rock group with my friends, but we have no instruments and we haven't settled on a name vet. My father makes me get a haircut. I paint

people with long hair. May 1967 We start making instruments. It's hard to make an electric guitar. You plug it into

the radio and it blows a fuse. June 1967 We play songs by the Rolling Stones, Them, Small Faces, the Troggs. My friend Zdeněk is an amazing guitarist. MATURITHÍ PLES August 1967

Hop-picking time again—a good way to meet girls. After working all day, we get together and sing Beatles songs.

September 1967 There's a rumor that travel restrictions

will be lifted. If I can get an invitation from a family in England or Western Europe, I can apply for a passport.

I've written to the Record Mirror, a magazine in London that has a pen pal column. I sent a photo and a list of my favorite groups.

October 1967 Our group, which we've named New Force, gives a concert at the Central Puppet

Theater. The stage is so small there is no room for the drummer. I meet Alena. I need boots with heels. Expensive! (Get money from Grandma?)

November 1967 A date with Alena. We walk up and down

Wenceslaus Square. I draw comics for the school magazine, like those I've seen from San Francisco. Make posters for a rock club called Olympic. Hurray!

January 1968 Dubček elected First Secretary of the Party. Gives a speech about freedom!

February 1968

Hundreds of letters arrive from Record Mirror pen pals... Have to write back, many letters a week...Get map of Europe... Hitchhike? The only way to do it.

March 1968

A rally for Dubček! We all march. He is calling for "socialism with a human face."

May 1968

Censorship is lifted! We can have long hair and wear jeans! But our school magazine is shut down. The principal complains of anarchy.

June 1968

I've learned how to tie-dye shirts and am getting pretty good at it. I tie-dye everything I can get my hands on. The government archives are being opened. I was never told that my uncle Vladimir died in the Communist Leopoldov Prison. The guards killed him. My parents kept this news from us kids. We hold a poetry slam at school on the main staircase! I have my passport with permission to travel to the West. Yippee! I'll go by train to Paris, cross the Channel, hitchhike to London and Liverpool...meet the Beatles? The Soviet Union is planning big maneuvers all over Czechoslovakia this summer.

Summer 1968

I'm leaving for England! Back in August with records and posters and pictures...

#### May 1965

Allen Ginsberg, the American beat poet, comes to Prague. Students make him our Kral Majales (King of May). Then the secret police accuse him of subversion and deport him.

#### August 1965

A U.S. college all-star basketball team plays in Prague. The best players are some twins and Bill Bradley.

#### November 1965

The Party newspaper mentions this wild woman called Elvis Presley. It turns out she's a he.

#### March 1966

My dad came back from France with a 45 single by the Beatles—"A Hard Day's Night."

A group of guys with long hair meet in front of the National Museum and get chased by the police. When they are caught, the police pull out scissors and give them haircuts.













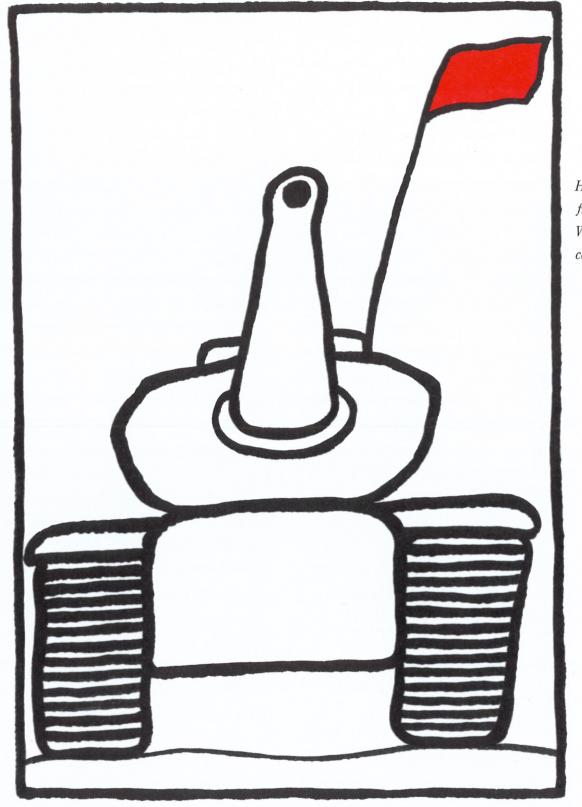




August 21,
1968.
500,000 troops
from the
Soviet Union,
Bulgaria,
East Germany,
Hungary, and
Poland invade
Czechoslovakia.

Ordinary
citizens try
to persuade
the invading
oldiers to leave.
They change
street signs to
confuse them.

The Czech
progressive
government
is sent to
Moscow for
"reeducation."



Help from the West doesn't come.



Then—it was all over.

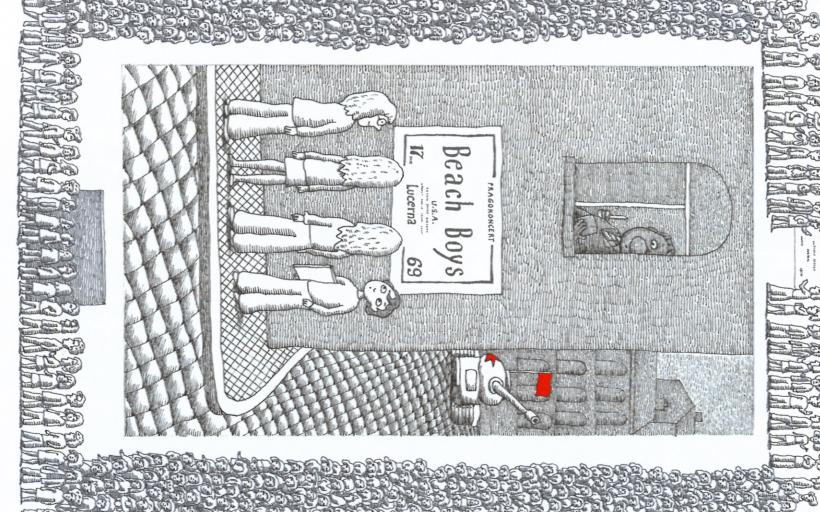
Russian tanks were everywhere.

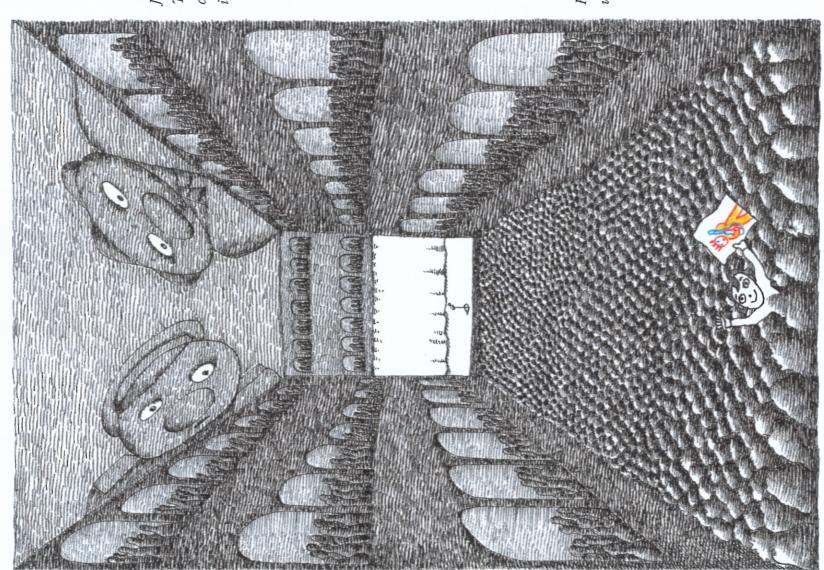
after the Soviet
invasion,
the Beach Boys
are invited to
Czechoslovakia
to give rock
concerts.

Ten months

Rock music fans will be together under one roof.

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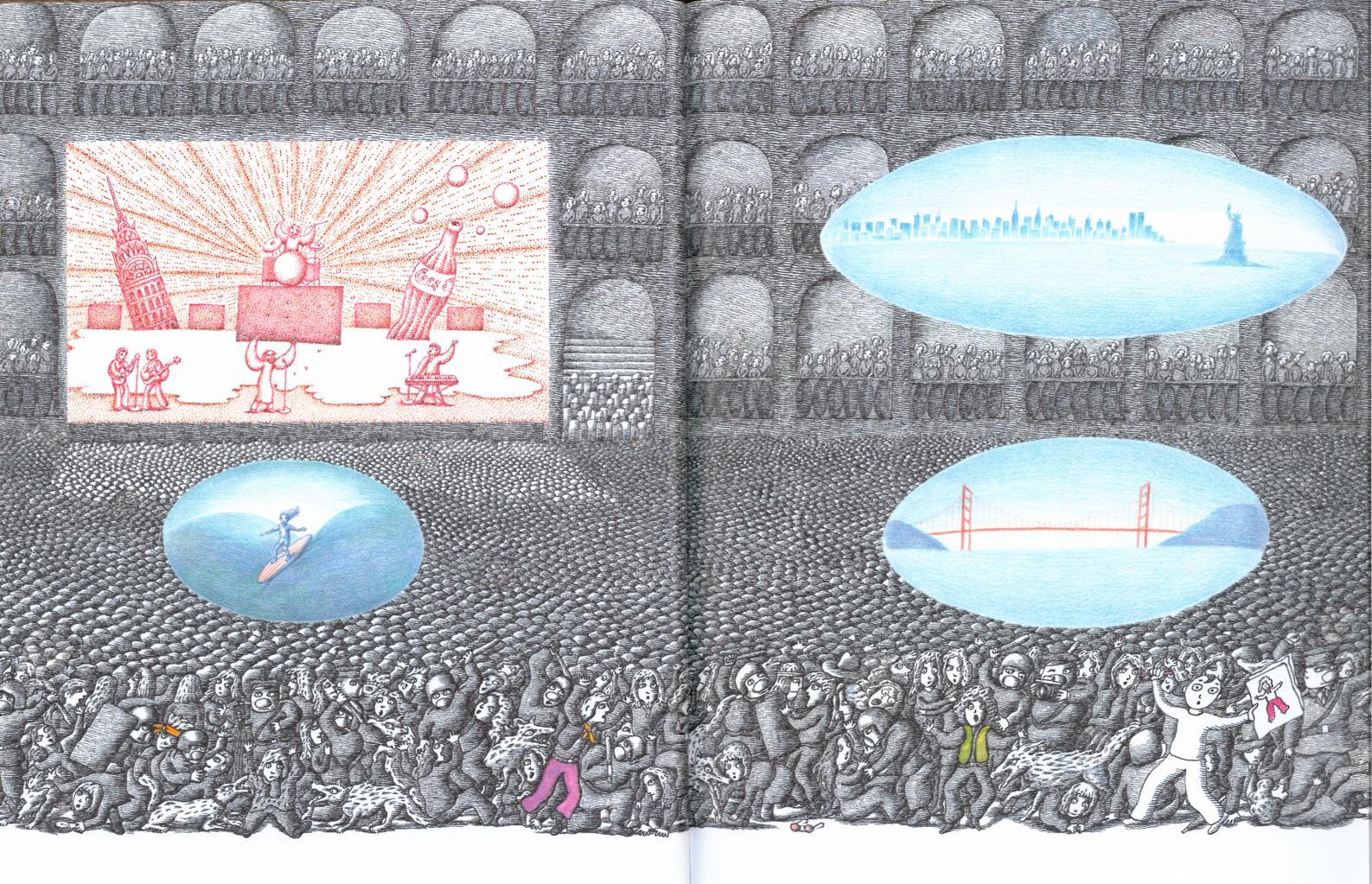


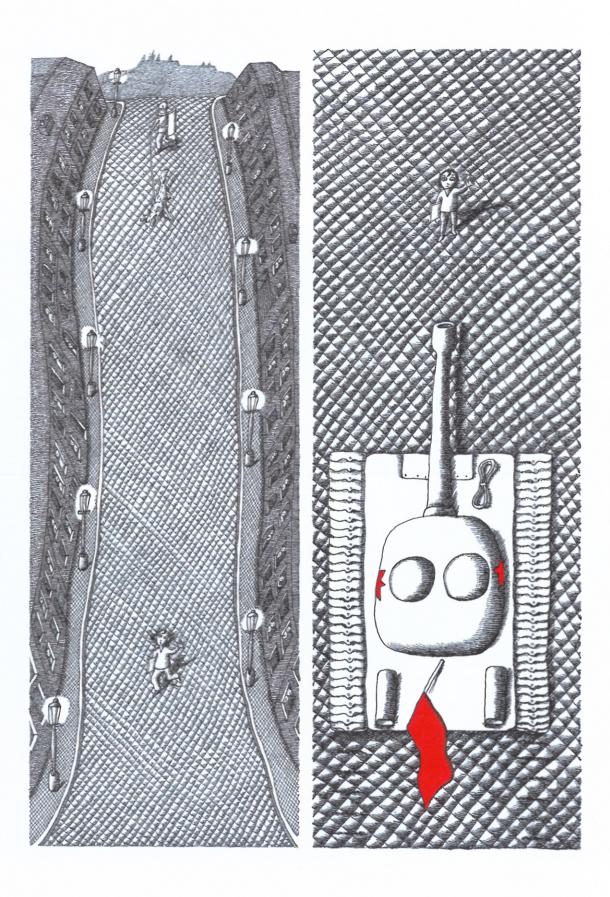


June 17, 1969.
The Prague
concert takes place
in Lucerna Hall.

Police with dogs wait nearby.

The Beach Boys arrived. America to the rescue!

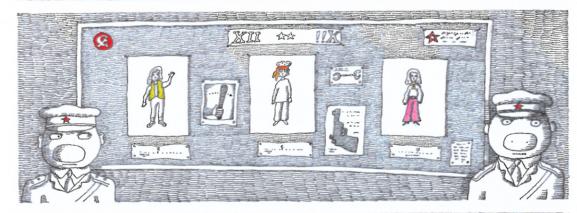






Anyone considered a threat to the new order is interrogated.



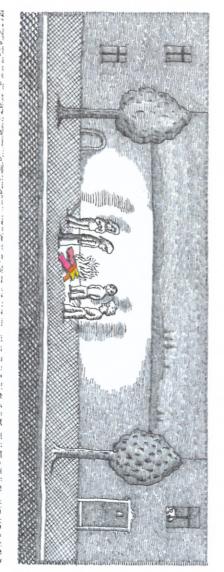




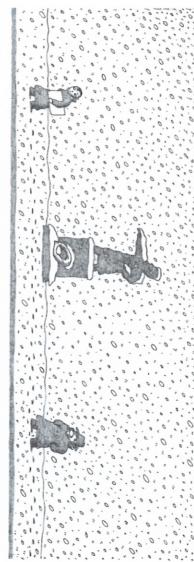
The dreams could be kept to himself,

but the drawings could be used against him.

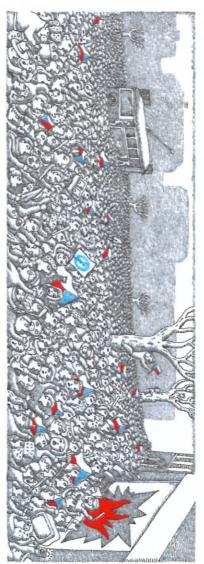
The Iron
Curtain
descends
again.



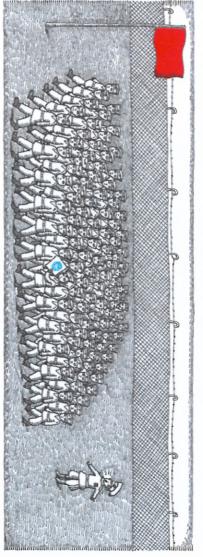
Alexander Dubček is replaced as head of government.



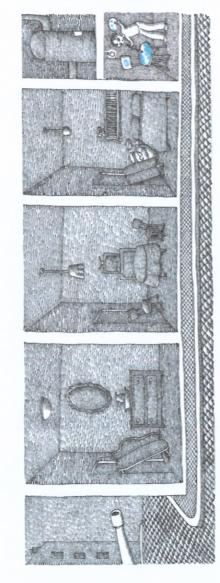
The secret police provoke riots so the government can exercise tighter controls.



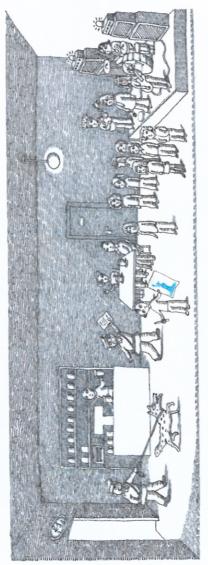
Military service—
COMPULSORY.



He stopped drawing and was left with only his dreams.

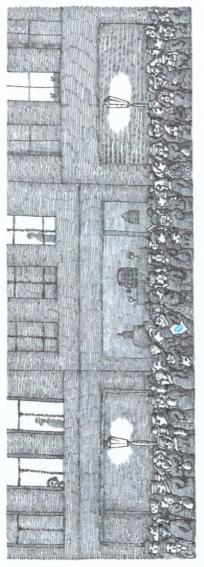


Phones are bugged again, mail opened, people watched.

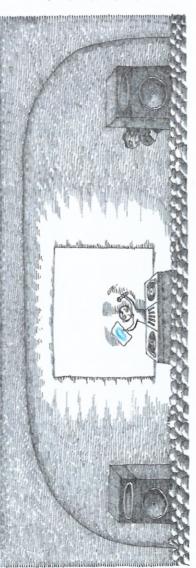


art is banned again.
Free radio stations are jammed again.

We stern-style

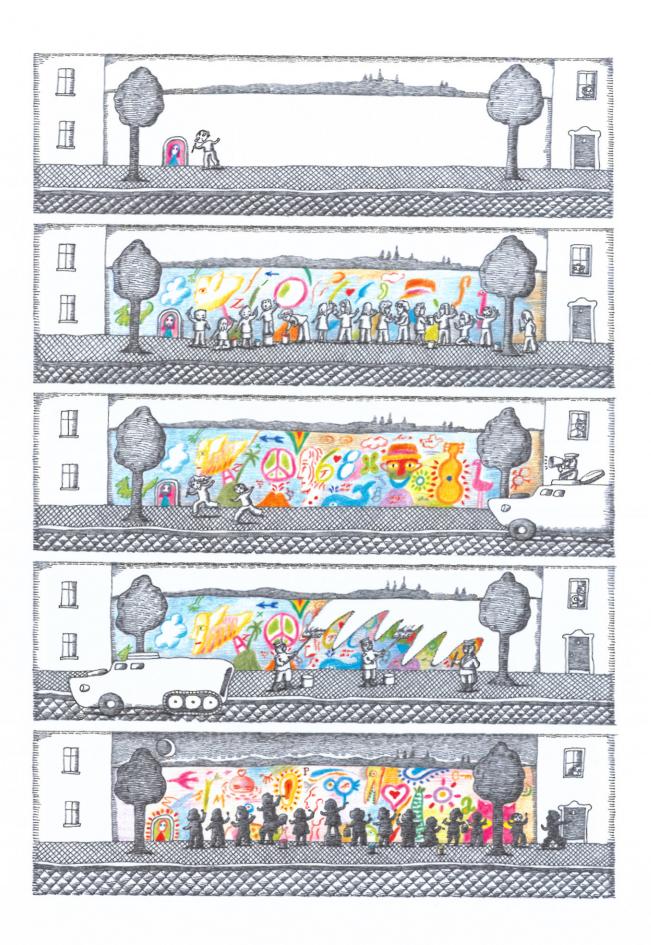


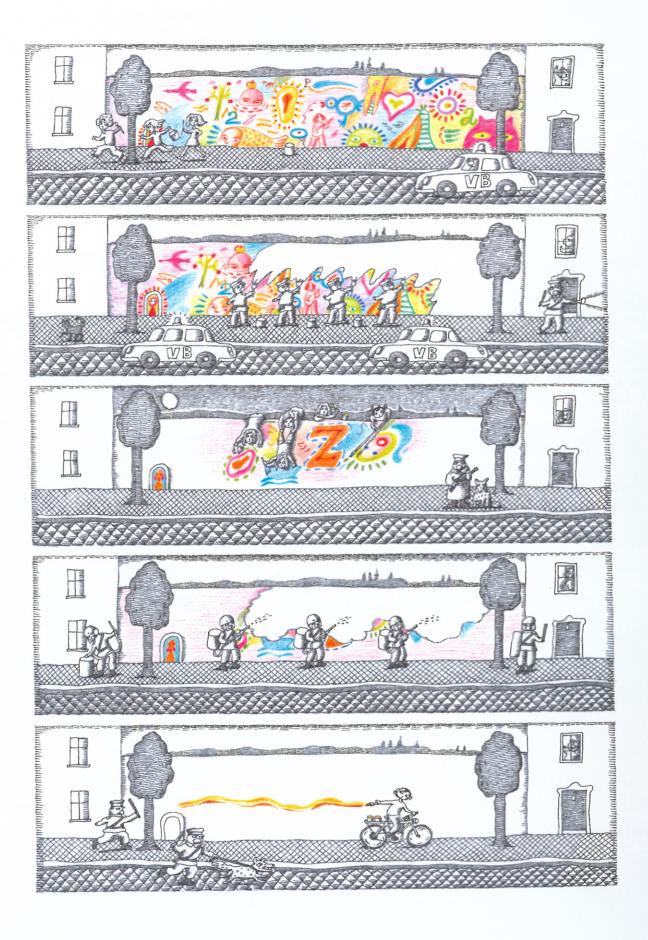
Banned
books are
secretly
translated,
copied, and
circulated
as samizdat.



Discotheques
are a new source
of information
about popular
culture.

But he had to draw. Sharing the dreams gave him hope.





Everyone wanted to draw. They painted a wall filled with their dreams...

and repainted it again and again.

