

## Gustawa Birencwajg



This is my mom Gustawa Birencwajg (nee Blum) in the 1960s. The picture was taken in Warsaw.

In Warsaw my father was working as the head chef of the canteen in the hospital on Woloska Street, later in the Stolica building corporation, not earning much and my mother would say: 'Listen, I don't have enough to make ends meet.' And he'd say: 'If you keep talking like this I'll get a job that pays even less than this one.' So there was nothing to talk about. Mother really suffered, she never loaned money. However much she had, that's what we lived for.

One evening my father felt ill, but it quickly passed. Some time later he also wasn't feeling well, the paramedics came and pronounced a heart attack, it turned out it was his second one. But he was the kind of man who didn't worry about his health. My mom organized his 60th birthday party and told him: 'Go see a doctor.' 'Oh, there's no need to see a doctor, I don't go to any doctors.' He had a

third heart attack at night and they took him to hospital. I went there to visit him, mum visited him a day before he died. He didn't feel he was dying. He took his false teeth out, because they got broken somehow and told her: 'Go, have them repaired and bring them back at once.' She said: 'They won't do it at once, maybe in the morning.' He said: 'Well, so bring me those teeth back in the morning.' In the morning, at 7 am, there was a phone call from the hospital. My father was in great pain, he didn't call the night doctor, some woman doctor came and gave him a shot to the heart. They didn't have the kind of treatment then as they do today. This was in 1966. So he died.

My mother was left alone in the apartment. How old was my son, Wlodek, by then? He was in 9th grade, so 15 years old. I was divorced by then. And Wlodek said to my mum: 'Grandma, perhaps we can live together, it would be merrier for us.' So he talked me into it, and Mother and I agreed to have our two apartments exchanged for one larger one.