

## Mieczyslaw Najman Shortly After WWII



That picture was taken in Walbrzych, in western Poland, after I left the army, in 1945. But I used to wear my uniform all the time. I even kept my weapon with me. No one paid attention. I left the army. My commander told me, 'Stay, they'll make you an officer soon.' But I said, 'I don't want to.' I wasn't itching to become an officer, because I didn't want to have anything to do with the military, I wanted to be a civilian. I had enough. But I still wore the uniform, and still carried the gun with me. No one cared. The Home Army guys were turning up. One night I see something's happening on the street. I approach, our soldiers are beating a guy to death, I ask them why. 'Because he's from there! (the Home Army).' I say, 'May be, but no one gave you the order! I make the call, ten MPs will come here and take you away!' They let him go, but they beat him badly, broke his hand.' It turned out the guy was my wife's friend. One day I come home, he sits there. When he saw me, he called, 'This is the man who saved my life!' And then, 'I wouldn't have told you, but you see, there's this gang, a big stink is coming, they'll be killing Jews, throwing them out of trains?' It was 1946. He's telling me all this. I said to my wife, 'Krycia, if this is so, if you love, what will you do?' 'Where you are, there I am.' And within a single day we left the children with my wife's parents, because we couldn't take them with ourselves and went to Walbrzych. We left everything we had. A few days later the tragedy: the pogrom in Kielce took place. We arrived in Walbrzych, went to sleep with all those refugees, repatriates. We spent the night there, and in the morning I went to fix us up with a place to stay and a job. The town office, a long queue. I finally got to see the official, I ask him who's in charge here, and he says, 'Who are you? Who told you to sniff around here?' And this other guy, a lieutenant, another veteran looking for lodgings, pulls out his gun and says to the official, 'Come on, take off this fur coat, take it all off, you son of a bitch, you reactionary, where were you? With the Germans, you were a Volksdeutscher? And now you work here?' And the official goes, 'Gentlemen, please, don't kill me.' I say, 'No one's going to kill you, but you beware and give us what we're entitled to. I've come here with my wife and children and I have no place to stay.' He says, 'Don't worry, we'll find something for you. For now, you spend the night at this German woman's, and in the morning I'll have something specially for you.' A detached house, a German lady still lived in it. All furnished! I had never seen anything like that in my life! The furniture made of white birch, gold birch, armchairs, beds beautifully polished. And a beautiful garden. Everything

from A to Z. The cellars - full of food. Four rooms and a kitchen downstairs, and three rooms with a kitchen upstairs. And a car on top of that. 'Well,' I say, 'it suits us just fine.' I took my wife, we went there, took out the food we had. The German woman gave us all she had, sugar and all, waited on us very decently. She wants for no one to harass her, for her to be able to live in peace. I say, 'I won't allow anyone to harm you. Eat what's yours, I don't want anything. We'll take nothing from you, I guarantee you peace.' There were four mines there, I go to one of them. The director. Good day, I tell him what my profession is, that I left the military, I want to work because I have a wife and children to provide for. We weren't officially married. I already have a place to stay, and whatever job you can offer me, I'll take it.' He says, 'You see, there's this job: there are the mines, all these workers, and we have a problem feeding them. I'll give you three trucks and two Germans with guns and you'll drive around, offering coal in exchange for food. And so I rode like that for a month but then something didn't click. The director was an endek from before the war, I learned only later. I ask why I am fired. He says, 'You got it wrong, there was a misunderstanding. You didn't understand what we meant. You'll work, you'll be the head of the whole supplies department, we congratulate you.'