

Rachel Randvee's Wedding Photograph



This photograph shows my first husband, Yakov Gershanovich, and me. We got married in Tallinn in November 1946. My fiancé was a Jew and an old bachelor; he was 38 and I was 17. He was very fond of me; as for me I was tired of wandering about my relatives' apartments - I wanted to have a place of my own to live in, and my fiancé had a room. There was neither a synagogue nor a rabbi in Tallinn at that time but we did observe some of the Jewish wedding traditions. The wedding took place in Uncle Samuel's apartment. A chuppah was set up there; an old friend of my father's who was a very religious Jew recited the blessing, then the wine glass was broken. So I was married off in November 1946. Yakov Gershanovich, my husband, had a small workshop. He was supposed to work there making half-stock for the shoe factory. But that was just show. In fact Yakov's business

was speculation: he purchased and re-sold commodities that were in short supply. This was considered a grave criminal offence in the USSR. Yakov even tried to engage me in his affairs. He would send me to a bank to buy state bond certificates as he thought them more reliable than Soviet money. I went to the bank a few times but then I realized that this could get me in trouble and refused. That was our first great quarrel. In the summer Yakov managed to get us two places in a health center in the resort town of Parnu. Everything was wonderful there but my husband kept disappearing from my sight for some reason. He turned out to be a reckless card player; he lost a fortune through gambling. We lived together for nearly two years; fortunately, we didn't have any children. Yakov Gershanovich was arrested in 1948, right in our room, and sentenced for speculation to eight years in jail. This marriage hadn't brought me happiness, but I still waited for my husband's return for three years. While visiting my friends in 1951 I met a young man from Riga. We liked each other, dated, and corresponded, but eventually drew apart due to some circumstances. However, I decided never to return to my first husband and obtained a divorce in the spring of 1952.