

Irina Golbreich With Her Husband Aron Golbreich



My husband and I having a stroll in Riga in 1985. We were photographed by a street photographer.

I was enthusiastic about perestroika at first. I had a hope that these promises of a better life would not remain mere promises and that life would change. There was finally some freedom of speech, and people were no longer afraid of the all-powerful KGB. There was freedom of the press, and people didn't have to listen to foreign radio stations any longer. Our newspapers published everything one would want to read about. Also, people were allowed to travel and no longer needed the approval of district party committees, correspond with their friends and relatives living in other countries and invite them to visit us. People resumed their freedom of religion. There was no longer a ban on religion, and people had the freedom of choice. For those, who were born in Latvia and remembered life in Latvia before it was annexed to the USSR, this was a return to normal life, though for those who were born in the USSR and never knew a different life this was something new and different.

During perestroika the Jewish life in Latvia began to revive. In 1988 the Jewish cultural society was officially registered. In recent years it has significantly grown and strengthened. Jews finally felt themselves to be Jewish. My husband Aron returned to Jewish life. He read many books about the history of the Jewish people and their religion. Aron knew Hebrew in his childhood. He restored his knowledge to read the Torah and prayers. Aron went to the synagogue on Sabbath, and on Jewish holidays he and I went to the synagogue together. We observed Jewish traditions at home. On Friday evening I lit candles and prayed over them. On Saturday my husband went to the synagogue. I stayed at home, but I did no work at home. I left whatever chores I had for Sunday. On Saturday my husband and I read aloud and visited our friends or went for a walk. We celebrated Pesach, Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, Chanukkah and Sukkoth, the biggest Jewish holidays, at home. We just couldn't follow all traditions strictly, but we did our best.