

Rifca Segal In Israel



This is me, Rifca Segal, in Eilat, being photographed with a camel. I was very scared and I didn't know how to keep as far as possible from the beast. But my nephew, Talic Segal – who is now living in California but who was still living in Israel at the time –, insisted on having my picture taken. He told me “I'll stay close and nothing will happen”. Well, nothing happened.

In 1977 I wanted to go to Israel myself. My husband was more fearful than me: “What if the Securitate calls us for an inquiry?” I said: “If they call us, fine, let them take away our jobs.” I was a chief accountant, I would have been the one they would have demoted. And even if they fired me, it wouldn't have been the end of the world. I was an accountant. But they would have kicked him out of the educational system for good. And one day I got mad, I didn't go home after work, I went to the Public Garden, which is very beautiful. My husband phoned at my workplace, he phoned my friends, I was nowhere to be found. He suspected something, and he came to look for me in the garden. And he saw me, he came and sat beside me. I didn't want to talk to him. But we didn't have arguments. I can say it actually was an ideal marriage. And he said: “Tomorrow we go and we draw the paperwork to be granted permission to go to Israel.” And then I said: “We had to get to this point, me not returning home from work?” “Fine. What if the Securitate calls us in for an inquiry?” We were lucky, I believe it was a once-in-10-million chance. They didn't call us in before we left, nor after we returned. It was enough for them to call you there and ask you: “Whom did you meet there? What did you talk about?” For it was a matter of state treason. We had such a blind luck. They probably gathered information about us, they knew what sort of people we were. We were both fearful by nature. Oh my, had they called us in, I think I would have gone insane. They didn't call us in, neither me, nor my husband.

We stayed there for a month. But a nephew of mine – the son of Itic, my husband's brother – was getting married 10 days after our residence permit expired. And you could ask to prolong it. My husband and I: “Oh my, they will say we defected, that we aren't coming back. My mother is

there." My mother was still alive. "The Securitate will call her in for an interrogation. They will torture her." My husband: "No, we're not staying for the wedding." It was his nephew. I said: "I want to stay for the wedding. What is 10 more days..." And that's when I telephoned my director, and told him: "File a request in my name, to prolong our residence permit, a leave of absence without pay for 10 days." And he filed the request. When I returned, the Securitate didn't call us in, or anything like that. But my director told me: "Why did you telephone me? They called me in, they asked me what you told me." And we had made a mistake, for we had greatly wronged him. For they [the Securitate] intercepted everything that came from abroad. And they thought we were communicating using I don't know what code. Oh dear, how it was in those days!

I went to Israel for 4 times: I first traveled there in 1977, then in 1988, in 1993, and then in November 1999 - February 1, 2000. On every occasion, I stayed there for 3 months. Only the first time, when I went there with my husband - I was employed, he was employed - we applied for a 30-day visa, but we stayed there for 40 days. I never wanted to stay there for good. I enjoyed my life over here. I had Romanian friends, Christian friends... my colleagues were very nice, I still have Christian friends, and no Easter or Christmas goes by without them inviting me to come.

I liked many things in Israel. Yet there was one thing I didn't like, that there were soldiers on guard everywhere I traveled. When I went to Jerusalem to see the tomb of Jesus, it was guarded. If we went to a cinema, they searched us from head to toe. We were afraid everywhere we traveled, lest there should be a suicidal bombing. I said: "Is this what I should come here for? I have such a good life in Romania. I don't belong here." And a freak coincidence happened on our visit in 1977, for my uncle Heinic was traveling to Israel as well, he was in Jerusalem, and I went to see him. And they said: "Rica, stay here with your husband. Look, I will give you money, you can open an accounting practice. I can't promise you anything for your husband, I can't promise him a teaching position, for it is more difficult. But he knows Ivrit, and here all the Jews who came from Romania want to learn Ivrit, he will teach private lessons." And I said: "Not for the world. It is beautiful here, but I can't live with this fear." All the more so since my mother and brother had stayed over here, in Romania.