

Stela Astrukova With Her Husband Yosif Astrukov



This is a photo of me and my husband Yosif Astrukov.

It was taken on 13th October 1945 in a studio. The back of the photo is like a postcard. There is a seal of a studio but it is unreadable.

On the back it is written '5th November 1945 to mama and papa from Stela and Herz.' I wrote that.

The photo was a present to my parents. I am pregnant in my first month and I am radiating happiness.

My husband is in military uniform and he is smiling. Those were not happy times for him because he had problems at his work for being a Jew and he could no longer serve.

I am dressed in my wedding gown which was sewn from the cloth of an overcoat of my uncles.

My husband Yosif Hananel Astrukov (1912 - 1996) and I were in the same prison - the Pleven one but we had not met there.

He had spent two years underground. He had been district secretary of the UYW [Union of Young Workers] in Sofia.

He had become a member of UYW in 1936 and he had been much higher in the organization hierarchy than me.

His illegal name was Herz, made up by his friends. Herz means heart in German, because he was the soul of every company.

My husband finished high school, started studying law but he was expelled from the university for his participation in an attack against Tsankov.

[Prof. Alexander Tsalov Tsankov, Prime Minister of Bulgaria from 1923 to 1925, terror activities were typical for his governance.]

His relatives collected money and sent him to study in Belgrade.

When the Germans came there, he left for Prague. He finished his first and second year of studying there and when the Germans came, he went back to Belgrade.

We stayed there five or six months but when the persecutions started again, he returned to Sofia.

He immediately joined the resistance, but in 1941 he went underground. He was underground from 22nd June until 26 November.

In 1942 he was caught because he was betrayed. He was sentenced to death.

But the jury was bribed - for 250 000 levs his sentence was changed to life imprisonment. In prison he shared a cell with Traicho Kostov [A Bulgarian Communist Party functionary.

In 1949, following Stalin's example for seeking enemies among the party members, he was accused of anti-party and anti-state activities and sentenced to death after a public process.

He was posthumously rehabilitated.], whom he much respected. Although Traicho Kostov fell into disgrace later on, he always spoke in his favor.

Until he was imprisoned, my husband had finished three years of medical studies.

Dr Shailov [a famous dermatologist] invited my husband to work in the Jewish hospital when he graduated. I was still studying.

The party obliged him to become assistant commander in the army for the second time.

The first time he occupied that post was immediately after 9th September during the war but the Defense Minister Damyan Velchev banished all Jews from the army and my husband continued his studies.

The second time he served in the army, he worked with the son of Vassil Kolarov [One of the leaders of the Bulgarian Communist Party]. At some meeting my husband ordered to place portraits of Georgi Dimitrov first, Traicho Kostov, second and Vassil Kolarov, third on the walls.

Petar Kolarov [Vassil Kolarov's son] was furious and found out that my husband had shared a cell with Traicho Kostov.

So, he accused him of being a 'kostovist'. He was expelled and was left unemployed. We were starving again...

When Traicho Kostov was rehabilitated, so was my husband. He was elected a deputy.

He became a chairman of the Jewish cultural and educational organization in 1961.

For about 30 years we lived for the first time a calm and financially stable life.