

Romana Holder In The 1950s



This is me in the 1950s. It was probably taken in Warsaw, where I lived with my family. I needed a photo for a pass to get into the Office of the State Council, where my husband worked.

I got married in Katowice, in December 1945. Before the war my husband was married to my friend. She was killed during the war in Kolomyia [now Ukraine]. So later I thought, 'What do I care which one it is?' Since I knew him from Lidka's stories and believed he was a decent man, we got together. When we met he was in the First Army, in the prosecutor's office. I didn't even know what a prosecutor is. Had I known, maybe I wouldn't have decided to be with him... And he was the prosecutor for a long time. Luckily, in 1950 they fired him, most likely because of his Jewish background, and hired a Pole in his place. He was let go before all those trials, but in his time there must have been trials, too. I don't know; he never told me and I never asked.

After the wedding we lived in Katowice. My husband was then transferred to Warsaw. I followed him in a short time, for I wasn't my own from then until the end of his life. We got an apartment which belonged to the Army: three beautiful rooms, a bathroom with a window, a maid's room. I had my first child Piotr in 1948, but he died within 12 hours. In the army hospital, in Warsaw, he was taken to the other world. In 1949 my second son, Jerzy, was born, so we hovered over him. I even went to Wroclaw [to an expert in high-risk pregnancies] to give birth to him. Then we came back to Warsaw. There was a very good nanny and a maid. So I finally went out to work. In 1954 I went on a year-long drafting course. I completed it, I even have the certificate, but I can draft just about as well as I can sew. So obviously I didn't work in that line, but as a secretary in an office of this state enterprise, Construction of Housing for Workers, BOR. First I was in the department of

planning, but I just couldn't get it. Even today if they ask me to plan something, you can guess what it's going to look like. We had a manager who couldn't even sign his name, illiterate. So I said, 'I don't want anything to do with that kind of education.' Later I was the secretary of the main Director. I was bored witless, I read books, because he went to conferences every day and there was nothing for me to do. I didn't work there long, a year maybe. After that, I don't think I worked anywhere else.

When my husband was fired in 1950, he was a colonel. He moved to Mr. Bierut's legal office. I can't remember if he worked there until Bierut's death [1956], but afterwards he became the manager of the Office of the State Council.

During the summer we went to those government resorts, in Bulgaria, Hungary and the GDR. But I wasn't proud of that or happy about it. I knew people held it against us, particularly that we were Jews.

We had many acquaintances abroad. Before 1956, my friend from school, Zula Wermus, who survived the war in the Soviet Union, decided to go to Israel. She came to our house asking my husband what she should do. And she went, with her husband. Then, after 1956, my husband's secretary left, a colleague he really trusted, Fels. He went to Israel with his Polish wife, who wanted to go, too; she was a smart girl. The sister of my husband's first wife, Andzia, was also in Israel. She even wanted to come back, but her son, Icchak, didn't. He was 13 then, in a kibbutz he liked a lot, so they didn't come back. Our friends the Gotfryds went to West Germany. A friend of my husband's from Kolomyia went to London and worked in a bank. I didn't have anyone that close who went abroad.

I keep on wondering why I didn't think of going abroad right after the war. In 1956 when everybody was leaving I asked my husband 'Maybe we should go, too?' But he said 'Go if you want, I'm staying.' So what was I to do? Take my son and leave? I was uneducated, untrained, I didn't have anywhere to work, I didn't know what to do. So I stayed...