

Rita Vilkobrisckaya With Her Husband Jacob Khonigsmann



I, Rita Vilkobrisckaya and my husband Jacob Khonigsmann photographed at home in Lvov in 2002.

At the beginning of October 1955 my mother introduced me to Jacob Honiksmann, my mother's acquaintance introduced him to my mother and she liked him. On 29 January 1956 Jacob and a friend of his came to see me in Lutsk, where I was worked, and on the following day we got married in a district registry office. The procedure at that time included a one month waiting period after submittal of application for marriage, but Jacob was full of charm and managed to convince a girl at the registry office to marry us and we became a husband and wife. It happened promptly since Jacob could only stay in Lutsk for two days and had to return to his work that was important for him. And for me the only opportunity to go with him was to marry him. I quit my work and came to Lvov. We had a wedding party at a restaurant on 10 March. It was a great party, but we didn't observe any Jewish traditions then. We've been together since then.

We were an affectionate family. We traveled to the Crimea or Caucasus in summer as tourists. We enjoyed traveling. We didn't celebrate at home Soviet or religious holidays, but had birthday parties. We got together with friends at birthdays and weekends to listen to music, discuss books that we read and recite poems by Soviet poets Evtushenko, Voznesenskiy and Rybakov. When Jews began to move to Israel in 1970s we sympathized with them, but we didn't even consider moving to Israel for ourselves, We didn't have any information about Israel, there were no publications in Soviet mass media.

Our house, work and friends were here and we never imagined life in another country. We earned well, went to theaters and cinema, went to restaurants with friends and were not interested in politics. My husband had to join the Party to be able to lecture at College, but in 1980s he resigned from the Party after writing an application for resignation where he explained that he 'disagreed with the policy of the Party and didn't want to be its member'.

My mother and grandmother lived with us. We didn't observe any Jewish traditions. My grandmother died in 1957. We buried her at the town cemetery in Lvov. My mother died in 1989.

She was buried beside my father and grandmother.

Perestroika in 1980s was like new wind for us. There were many books published that had been forbidden before and the Jewish life and culture revived. Jacob has always been interested in Jewish subjects. In the recent years he got involved in the studies of Jewish history being Professor and historian. He wrote several books about the history of Jewish people and Holocaust, they were published in Lvov. He founded the Sholem Alechem society in Lvov. This society studies and popularizes books by Jewish writers. He gives lectures on the history of Jews in Hesed and I help him to collect materials for his lectures. Jacob has involved me in Jewish activities. I read Jewish newspapers, published in the Lvov community in Russian and attend sittings at the society.

We visit Hesed and have many new friends there. We study traditions of our people at Hesed. (We celebrate Jewish holidays and Sabbath at the Sholem Alechem society. We don't follow any rituals or say prayers, but I cook traditional food and we always have matzah at Pesach My husband is a big patriot of Israel. If it were not for my poor health condition (I've had few infarctions and have contra-indications related to hot climate) we would move to Israel. Regretfully, we've never been there, but we've read a lot and watched movies about this amazing country. Since we don't have an opportunity to move to Israel we've committed ourselves to revival of the Jewish nation and Jewish traditions in our country that is our Motherland. However, even now I wouldn't leave my country for Israel.