

Icchok Grynberg



This is me, Icchok Grynberg, in my restaurant in Spain. Since I was the main chef in this restaurant I'm wearing a chef's cap in the picture. The picture was taken in the late 1980's, but I don't remember who took it.

In 1972 my wife Miriam died. I couldn't live without her in Brazil. So I left the entire fortune to my daughter and left in 1973. I asked to be transferred to Germany. I worked for an American hotel concern, which had its hotels all over the world. They transferred me to Cologne, later to Dusseldorf. I prepared a hotel inauguration there and became the chief cook. When I came from Brazil, I missed my homeland, the place where I was born. I went to Poland for four days. At the time, everything was relatively expensive in Poland. The dollar exchange rate was unfavorable. So I couldn't stay long. I went to Goworowo for a day and a half. It wasn't a pleasant experience. I knew everything had been burnt down in Goworowo. But some local Poles, who used to work at my father's bakery, recognized me. 'Oh, you are Gdaluk's child!' [changed version of Father's name - Gedala]. There were two boys...'. They meant me and my brother. They helped me find Father's birth certificate and they let me spend the night at their place. Then I went back to Germany.

In the hotel in Dusseldorf I met my current wife, Krystyna. She was working there. When I saw how good she was with her hands I proposed. At first she didn't want to marry me, but eventually we got married. Wife was born on 25th May 1933 in Wyszogrod on the River Vistula. She's a Catholic. She has good memories of Jews in Wyszogrod. She used to go to them, and says that as a child she spoke Jewish [Yiddish] as well as Polish. My wife is very much in love with me. I am her entire world.

In 1976 we went to Spain for holidays. And I liked it there. I told myself: 'I have a wife now, I won't be an employee. I will be working for myself.' I met my future partner, Edward, there. He had a restaurant, but had no cook. He said: 'Let's start a company. You will be a cook, I will be a waiter.' That was our agreement, and all went very well. It was in Mata Lascania, by the Atlantic Ocean, near Portugal. A beautiful place. And I stayed there. I had some savings - 35,000 German marks.

Based on this I received a permit for starting my own business. I worked with that Spaniard for a year, and then I told him I didn't want to do that any more. I was a known specialist by then. I wanted him to rent the restaurant to me. I signed a lease for five years. When he saw how well everything was going, he didn't want to renew it. He refused.

One day I saw three burnt restaurants between local hotels. They had been standing there for four years and nobody wanted to buy them. I told myself: 'I'll do it, I'll buy them.' I went to that Spaniard, the owner of the restaurants, and said: 'Listen, I want to buy it.' He looked at me as if I was a madman. But I knew what I knew. I took the walls down and made one big restaurant. I called it 'Alfonso', from the name of the Spanish king Alfonso. It was very popular. My previous partner, when my old clients were looking for me, would tell them that I had died. But they finally found me and came to me. I already had a good name. Everyone knew me. Usually there were no empty seats in the restaurant. You had to make a reservation. What was the house specialty? Everything was special! In the menu it said: 'with one day notice, you can order anything you want'. There were Japanese meals, Chinese, Hungarian, Spanish... all! There was nothing I wouldn't prepare. And so it grew... until I retired in 1987.