

Tinka Kohen, Pepo Kohen And A Friend In Jerusalem



This is me (in the middle) with my husband Pepo and a friend of ours on the hill above Jerusalem during our visit to Israel in April 1980. This was our first visit to Israel. We spent two months with our relatives in Tel Aviv and Jerusalem. We didn't have any difficulties to get visas. They were not a problem to get for Jews who had relatives in Israel. All of our relatives left for Israel when the Jewish state was established in 1948. We met with them when we went to visit. Before democracy came in 1989, we went to Israel three times and after that three more times. When we were leaving for the first time, we went to get our passports at the police station. There they delicately hinted to us that if we saw or heard anything special, we should call them when we got back. But we told them that we were going on a friendly visit to see our relatives and friends and we weren't interested in anything else, so we wouldn't be of use to them. We kept a regular correspondence with our relatives. But I remember the following incident. My sister-in-law often went to the Israeli embassy before diplomatic ties were broken. And each holiday she received invitations for parties. One day there was a policeman waiting for her in front of her home and he took her to the station and asked her, 'You often go to the Israeli embassy, why do you go there, what do you talk about inside?' My father was also interrogated about his visits to the embassy. And they were made to sign a declaration stating that no political issues were discussed in the embassy. The wars in Israel in 1967 and 1973 brought us to marry our son Valeri to a Jewish girl. At that time our daughter Leah was married to a Bulgarian from a family who did not have any feelings for the problems of the Jews. At this point I told my son that only a Jew who experienced and understood the problems of Israel, could understand the Jewish tragedy. And so if he would marry a Jew, I told him, she would have a different view on the events there. The breaking of diplomatic ties between Bulgaria and Israel also hurt me a lot - here the Jews were called aggressors and so we mixed only with Jewish friends so that we could talk and share our opinions more freely.