

Helena Najberg With Husband Jakub, Son Jerzy And Daughter Lila



This is me, Helena Najberg, with my whole family: my husband Jakub, son Jerzy and daughter Lila. I don't remember when the photo was taken. Who took it? Maybe some photographer or a friend. I don't remember. I even don't know where it was taken. Maybe on holidays or during some weekend outing?

My future husband and I worked in the same department. I was a typist and he worked in the warehouse. Was it love? It's hard to say. At first I was a bit confused, but I saw he was a good man, calm, didn't drink. At first he did a bit of drinking, because of his buddies. So I thought to myself: 'why should I look for great love, a prince on a white horse?' I always joke that we were married three times. At first on the 26th of September, because my husband couldn't stand it that I was sleeping on a thin straw mattress on the floor and mice run all over me. So he took me here, to this house. But we weren't married yet. There were no civil marriage offices yet. The wedding was on 19th January 1946. It was a great wedding, all the friends from work were invited. And some whom we didn't invite came as well. There were almost 100 people at that wedding. And the wedding was here, in this apartment. We carried out all the furniture, there were these benches along the walls and a table in the middle. Everything was temporary, of course. I went to my wedding in a borrowed dress, because I didn't have anything to wear. And then the third wedding, a normal civil marriage, on 2nd May 1946. So I never knew which anniversary to celebrate.

We never had a traditional wedding, but we went to one like this, it was our neighbors' wedding. It took place immediately after the war, I think in 1946. They had a traditional Jewish wedding, under the canopy, with a rabbi. I remember they asked me and my husband to walk around this canopy, because that's the custom, but we didn't know how many times to do it. So we kept walking and walking and finally they started tugging at our clothes that it was enough. Well, we didn't know much about this, because I had never seen a Jewish wedding before the war.

It was difficult for us at first. We didn't make much money, the salaries were very low. I didn't have anything to wear. I only had what I brought with me and those were 'wonderful' things from the camps, because I didn't have money to buy anything. The first presents I got from my husband were 2 pairs of stockings. That was something, I had been walking barefoot, only wearing shoes. And these shoes had really twisted heels, so I looked 'wonderful,' like a 'princess.' And only later, slowly, slowly, you'd buy something, sometimes get something from Unra, some clothes. And later, when I got this pension and my husband did as well, it was easier for us, because we had more money.

We have two children: son Jerzy and daughter Lila. Our son Jerzy was born on 19th June 1947 and our daughter Lila 10 years later, in July 1957. Our children were very much planned. My husband loved children very much and wanted to have 5 of them, but I was working, so I'd say: 'How are we supposed to raise these children?' Our son is named Jerzy Bronislaw. After he was born I was the one who took care of him. Unfortunately, I only had three months of paid leave, so we had to employ someone to take care of the baby when we were not at home. We both had to work and we couldn't leave a baby alone. So after these 3 months we employed this German woman. My husband found her somewhere, I don't remember where. It didn't bother me that she was German. Anyway, she spoke Polish well. I had to have someone to help me and it was difficult to find someone then. My daughter was 10 years younger than my son. We were planning a second child with my husband, but I had a miscarriage in 1955. It was a boy. And later I didn't become pregnant. I thought I'd stay with one child. But it wasn't to be. Lila was born on 25th July 1957. We named her after my childhood girl-friend. Like my son, she only spent the first 3 months at home with me. Later we had to find someone to take care of her. This time it was a Pole. Her name was Jadzia.

Our children knew who they were, they knew of their parents' past, they knew about Jewish customs, tradition. We told them about it, my husband more than me. Especially my son would listen with his mouth open when my husband told those stories. Because he had a lot to tell. And he could tell interesting stories, it was impressive. We talked and my son would say: 'How could you have survived all that?', because it was difficult to believe that we managed to survive for so many years together afterwards.

But we didn't even take them to the synagogue. Well, when my daughter moved to Canada she'd go to the synagogue sometimes. When I visited, we'd go together. But we could never stand those sermons. I never celebrated any Jewish festivals with my children. My children knew there was a holiday, because there'd be matzah at home, but there'd always be bread next to the matzah. But we always celebrated non-Jewish holidays. There was always Christmas, a Christmas tree, presents, like in every Polish house.