

Stefan Minc In Walbrzych, 1948



This is me in 1947 or 1948, in Walbrzych.

After the war, in March 1946 I returned home from the Soviet Union with my wife, Maria.

At the beginning I was in Lodz. There was nobody left from my closest family, and Bela, my fiancée was also gone.

I was continually in touch with my uncle Adolf Fajner, the one who lived in Manchester. After the war he played the role of a link between the family members who were still alive.

Everyone would ask him to find out about the others. When I realized that nobody had survived out of my closest family, I decided to go to Walbrzych, to Lower Silesia.

In Walbrzych I got registered at the Central Committee of Polish Jews and they helped me a bit.

They would receive, for example, things from UNRRA , but as help for Jews, who had suffered during the war. So I would go over there from time to time.

I was also accepted into the Polish Workers' Party, because I was a committed left-winger.

The man who recommended me was Arnold Mostowicz. This was a pre-war communist and a friend of my brother Wladek, who knew that he was a communist.

I was also recommended by Kujawski, who worked in the ceramic industry union.

At first I was working at the Tilsch porcelain factory - it is called The Walbrzych Porcelain Factory nowadays.

At the same time, I was active in the labor union.

A few months later I was elected secretary of the board of the labor union section of construction industry materials, which included ceramics.

Later I was elected as vice-president of the regional board in Wroclaw. And then I was picked for the national union secretary in the field of construction ceramics.

1948 was when I took my first vacation. It was also that summer that my first fiancée from before the war, I mean Bela, Izabela Handelsman, came to Poland, and showed up in Walbrzych.

Prince Bernadotte had rescued her out of Bergen Belsen, where she had caught consumption.

The fact that she survived is probably due to her knowing German - and she was also a 'dolmetscher.' 'Dolmetscher' means translator. In the last years of the war she was shipped off to Sweden, where they cured her.

She returned to her older sister, who lived in Dzierzoniow, near Walbrzych.

Bela had my address, she came to Walbrzych and found out that I had a wife and a child.

But still, she was determined to see me. Our meeting was very tragic. We both cried.

Fate had done it to us, she did not blame me at all, she knew I had not done anything wrong.

My wife was very anxious what might come out of this. Later she told me so. But, you see, I told Bela right away: 'I have brought my wife here, whom I love.'

I never stopped loving you, obviously, but this is where things stand.' Bela understood this and went back to her sister. Bela was even more involved in the left wing movement than I was.

The shape of Poland at the time was very much to her liking. This was the Poland she had dreamt about.

But since her feelings for me had not died down, she was afraid she might cause some complications in my family life, because, after all, my wife was not to be blamed for all that happened.

We already had a child. In August 1946, as I told you, my first daughter, Anna, was born.

So as a result of all the bitterness, and because of her fear that she would not be able to just watch all this calmly, Bela went back to Sweden, and stayed there for good.

We lived in Walbrzych until the end of 1948. In October 1948, at the National Convention of the Union of Construction of Ceramic Industry and Related Professions, I was elected secretary of the National Board - which meant we had to move to Warsaw.

The first week I lived in Warsaw in a hotel. But apartments were already being prepared.

So I had a choice: we could get an apartment immediately in a very distant part of Żoliborz, basically in Bielany, or we could wait a bit for another apartment - in Mokotów, in the Warsaw Housing Co-operative, at Dąbrowskiego Street.

I wanted my wife to decide. So I brought her here to come and explore, and decide which one she wants.

My wife did not hesitate for a minute, she chose Mokotów, and said: 'I can wait these few months.'

So in fact I brought my family here on 22nd January 1949. And this apartment I still have today.