

Marietta Smolkova In Jerusalem



This photo is from 1993, when I was in Israel. I liked it very much there. Everywhere abroad I mostly go to museums, but in Israel what I liked most was contemporary, modern life. I was fascinated by the local agriculture, I liked how they're capable of making use of water. My husband and I didn't consciously consider emigration, my husband was too old to start over somewhere else, and I was glad that I didn't have to abandon Aunt Gusti, who died in 1972. My husband and I weren't Zionists, so leaving for Israel didn't tempt us either. But we did take an interest in events over there. In 1948 Israel was created still with the support of the Soviet Union, it became a problem the moment the Communists realized that Israel wouldn't belong to the Eastern Bloc. So from that time on, all information about events in Israel was very biased. In 1968 we were very happy due to the growing freedom, the possibility of traveling. A year earlier my brother-in-law and his wife had been in Europe, and we met them in London. I won't forget how on Mustek in Wenceslaus Square my husband and I saw the Soviet tanks arriving, it was very ugly. My brother-in-law paid a dear price for the August invasion. He was very frightened by it, he managed to send us a telegram, whether we were all right and what could he do for us, and four days later he died of a heart attack. The revolution for me came at a time when I had already long been retired. What changed my life the most was the possibility of travel, which we used copiously. Many new people appeared in my life. I could finally freely keep in touch with my childhood friend, Lidka Kozlikova. Her son liked bicycling a lot, and often would pass by the Bernstein Chateau in Northern Bohemia, about 14 kilometers from Melnik. And as he was always riding by, he would apparently always say to himself, this is how I'd like to live one day. He studied construction in Chomutov, and then Lidka and her family emigrated to Germany in 1969. Later she and her husband moved to be with her sister in Canada. Between the years 1969 and 1983 our contact was sporadic. Lidka used to write to her mother in Mseno, near Melnik, from where I then sometimes got news and photos. Then in 1983 Lidka and her husband paid to have their Czechoslovak citizenship cancelled, so that they could come visit their aging relatives in the CSSR. They were here for the first time in 1983, only a few days before my husband's death. After the revolution in 1989, Lidka's son returned to Czech and bought the chateau, which had become quite dilapidated during the Communist years. He found employees in the town, and gradually repaired and improved the chateau, which is a

protected historical site. Today he lives there with his girlfriend, and both of them are very hardworking and clever people. They don't have the chateau as a tourist attraction, but offer it for various social and company occasions. But when a person comes there, he can take a walk in the chateau park, part of which is also a golf course, and sit down on the chateau terrace, where they sell food and drink. Lidka died recently, in the spring of 2005. Lidka's widowed husband, who's approaching 90, moved to the Czech Republic to be with his son, and helps out at the chateau.