

Yanka Prodanova Natan (nee Ovcharova)



My wife Yanka Prodanova Natan (nee Ovcharova) in Sofia in 1970.

My mother died in 1958. She was buried in the Jewish cemetery in Sofia, but she didn't have a Jewish funeral because her husband arranged the funeral for a Saturday, when no Jewish funerals are carried out. He didn't want to wait because of the heat. So we remained my father, my brother and I. I met my wife Yanka, a Bulgarian, in 1957 at the Institute for Rationalizations. She was a librarian after which she became a telephone operator there. We got married in 1959.

It happened to me to have problems because of my Jewish origin. In Czechoslovakia I studied aviation engineering - well, I graduated and when I came back a friend of mine introduced me to the Personnel Department at the Air Force, where I wanted to work. However, I was received there very coldly. Later, when I was working for the Metal Cutting Machines Plant, I learnt that all our Jews had been expelled from the Interior Ministry. At the Military Academy, I had a very intelligent man for director - colonel Kalanov - whose opinion was not influenced by my origin, because he had been a partisan together with Jews. So, he welcomed me very warmly at the Military Academy - and when I told him I wanted the position but as a civilian - he said: 'O.K, we'll have a civilian at the position.' This was after Israel was constituted. And the attitude to us was connected with the security problems under the influence of the USSR. This is not a question of anti-Semitism - it was an institutional problem. After the Suez Crisis in 1956 they became more fastidious to Jews. Then the Hungarian events of 1956 came in focus, it was said that the Jews had organized them, and institutions became more suspicious towards us. I was a member of the Bulgarian Communist Party, but there have always existed suspicions against me.

When I came back from Czechoslovakia and started work in the Metal Cutting Machines Plant, the doctors' plot in the Soviet Union started. While I was still in Czechoslovakia, in Bulgaria started the trial against Traicho Kostov. I was in the Pleven's jail together with him, our cells were on the same floor. We used to walk together and we would often go to him to listen to his lectures. I knew Traicho Kostov in person and that turned into just one more suspicion against me. After I came back from Czechoslovakia, the trial against Rudolf Slansky began - he was the general secretary of the Czechoslovak Communist Party. Soon after it, in Romania was initiated the trial against Ana Pauker - one more strike against the Jewry. So - there was a certain negative reaction against the Jews on an international level. Almost all my friends moved to Israel after it was set up. I felt awkward about leaving, because I was sent to Czechoslovakia as a scholarship holder of the Bulgarian Government, so I decided to stay here. I also wanted to gain experience here.

My wife Yanka comes from Stara Zagora and her parents are from the town of Radnevo. She has uncompleted university education in a faculty of law. During the period the Jews were persecuted, her parents Dinka and Prodan Ovcharovi moved to Plovdiv to save the shop of a Jewish family. Prodan Ovcharov was a tradesman in Radnevo - a bit strange, Tolstoyist, vegetarian. After I got married, we lived in a small rented flat that was destroyed later, and we were given an apartment, which we shared with other people. Then we moved to another place and finally I managed to buy a flat of 150 sq.m. (four rooms and a kitchen) from a friend in Maria Luisa Street in 1972. We still live there. My friend was fed up with this apartment, because there were tenants in it. We managed to move in 1975, but we continued with the law suits against the last tenant for three or four more years, because he didn't want to move from there.