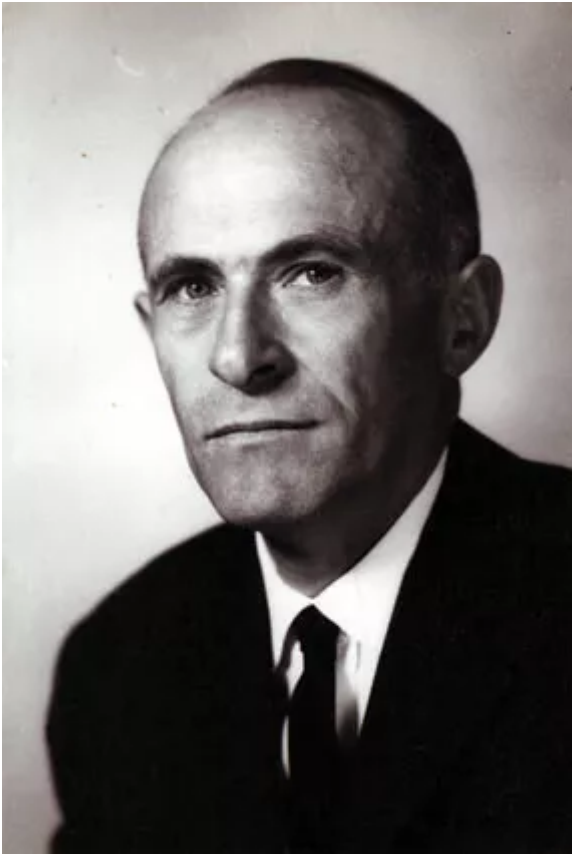


Henryk Holder



This is my husband, Henryk Holder, after March 1968. The picture was taken in Warsaw by a professional photographer.

The first time I met Henryk was before the war. After graduating from school I started attending sewing classes at ORT [the Society for the Propagation of Labor among Jews]. At ORT, I met Blima Ramler from Kolomyia [now Ukraine]. I renamed her Lidka. She was a very good student of sewing, unlike me. She did all the machine-sewing for me. She was a lovely girl: small, dark. We remained friends even after ORT. She graduated and went back to Kolomyia. Once she came to Warsaw with her fiancé, Henryk Holder, to see an exhibition. They knew each other from school in Kolomyia. In Warsaw, they stopped at my and my parents' house and stayed for two days. Then she invited me to Kolomyia and I spent ten days there. They behaved as if they were married, which they weren't.

She was five years older than him. He was born in 1914 in Szczerc near Kolomyia. His father worked in an office in the court in Kolomyia. His mother died before the war from diabetes, on the train to Truskawiec [a resort around 140 km north-west from Kolomyia, now Ukraine]. He had an older brother, also a lawyer, Izio, Izaak or Izydor. Henryk graduated from a secondary school in Kolomyia and then studied law in Lwow. He only took his exams there, but he studied at home. He graduated before the war. He worked in Kolomyia in the law firm of his friend.

Around 1938, Lidka wrote to me because she was getting married to Henryk. I even got her a special hat at my milliner's and sent it to her by mail. I know that until the war she was a very

popular seamstress in Kolomyia and her husband worked at a friends' law firm as an apprentice. They didn't have children.

In 1944 in Lublin I worked in the office of General Grosz. I wrote up orders on the typewriter. And once the order was to transfer somewhere a Col. Henryk Holder, son of Michal. Could it be the husband of my friend from before the war, Lidka from Kolomyia? Could there be another man with the same name? I wrote to him without thinking much of the future, only because he was someone who knew me, remembered me... He came to visit, which was very kind of him. I told him all about myself and asked about his wife. Both she and his entire family died.

So later I thought, 'What do I care which one it is?' Since I knew him from Lidka's stories and believed he was a decent man, we got together. I worked in the office of General Grosz. I wrote up orders on the typewriter. And once the order was to transfer somewhere one colonel Henryk Holder, son of Michal. Could it be the husband of Lidka? I wrote to him without thinking much about the future, only because he was someone who knows me, remembers me... He came to visit, which was very kind of him. I told him all about myself and asked about his wife. Both she and his entire family died. After the Germans entered Kolomyia, his brother committed suicide in the Ghetto. He left behind a wife, Marysia, also a lawyer, and their daughter. Some acquaintances told me that Marysia left her child in front of a store and did a runner. She told me she gave the little one to the nuns and never saw her again. So I don't know how it really was. Anyway, she is gone. Marysia remarried after the war; her new husband was an army lawyer, and they lived in the same house we did and had two children. My husband's father must have been killed during the war. Lidka was also killed. She wanted to get through to Hungary. She was caught near the Romanian border. They took off her shoes and she walked barefoot to Kolomyia. There she was shot. When the Germans came, my husband fled further east. That's how he ended up in the army, in a school for officers in Ryazan [in the Soviet Union then, now in Russia, around 200 km south-east from Moscow]. They did pre-military training. Then, I guess, he must have joined the Berling army.

When we met he was in the First Army, in the prosecutor's office. I didn't even know what a prosecutor is. Had I known, maybe I wouldn't have decided to be with him... Since I knew him from Lidka's stories and believed he was a decent man, we got together.

Then he went to the front and I stayed in Lublin. He was in Warsaw the day after it was liberated [17th January 1945]. I still have a letter from him in which he says that Warsaw was all gone and that the Germans should be shot, beaten, murdered. And I went through that miserable city later, too. I went from Lublin to Berlin with the army as an ensign. I was demobilized in Katowice.

In Katowice, in December 1945, we got married. After the wedding we stayed there. We occupied a room in an apartment at Francuska which used to belong to some Germans. But that didn't last long, we soon got an apartment at Zamkowa. There were five rooms in the apartment, plus a huge kitchen and a maid's room. I don't know what we needed such a big place for. We had a male servant, but he didn't have much work, because we always ate at the canteen. All he did was sew on my collars. Actually I don't know what he did in that apartment, nothing went on there. We had an army car, a beautiful green Audi. My husband had friends from Kolomyia living in Katowice. Those were Wilf, whose law firm he had worked in before the war, and the three Gotfryd brothers who survived the Kolomyia Ghetto.

My husband was then transferred to Warsaw. I followed him in a short time, for I wasn't my own from then until the end of his life. We got an apartment which belonged to the Army, at Belwederska [a representative street in Warsaw]: three beautiful rooms, a bathroom with a window, a maid's room. I had my first child Piotr in 1948, but he died within 12 hours. In the army hospital, in Warsaw, he was taken to the other world. In 1949 my second son, Jerzy, was born, so we hovered over him. I even went to Wroclaw [to an expert in high-risk pregnancies] to give birth to him. Then we came back to Warsaw.

My husband was the prosecutor for a long time. Luckily, in 1950 they fired him, most likely because of his Jewish background, and hired a Pole in his place. He was let go before all those trials, but in his time there must have been trials, too. I don't know; he never told me and I never asked. When he was fired he was a colonel. He moved to Mr. Bierut's legal office. I can't remember if he worked there until Bierut's death [1956], but afterwards he became the manager of the Office of the State Council. My husband was fired from there as well, in 1968. They kicked him out for giving preference to Jews. That was all a bunch of lies, of course-no one talks about that today. I think this picture was taken during that period.

I keep on wondering why I didn't think of going abroad right after the war. In 1956 when everybody was leaving I asked my husband 'Maybe we should go, too?' But he said 'Go if you want, I'm staying.' So what was I to do? Take my son and leave? I was uneducated, untrained, I didn't have anywhere to work, I didn't know what to do. So I stayed.

When my husband got fired in 1968, Cyrankiewicz was still Prime Minister. So he gave my husband a retirement pension which could support us: 5000 zloty for the three of us. But they took away our apartment, of course. It was 1972; they persisted so we moved out. The apartment we're in now was waiting for us, so to speak, because the building was newly finished when we moved in.

After that ordeal, our doctor friend Askanas sent my husband to recover in this health resort near Warsaw, owned by the government, for we were still allowed to use it. Then Marysia, my husband's sister-in-law, called that she had a translation lined up for him. She worked for 'Ksiazka i Wiedza' [a publishing house established in 1948 in Warsaw] and she'd recommended him there. So my husband started translating from Russian; all those beautiful volumes: Lenin and such... Then he did German as well: Marx's correspondence and legal texts. From then on he was a translator. He died of a heart attack in July 1980, when he was vacationing in Jadwisin [a government holiday complex near Warsaw]. He was buried in the military cemetery in Warsaw. And that's how a life ends. He lost his mother, father, wife, then he lived through that terrible war in the Soviet Union where he suffered a lot, not being very enterprising and unable to find a job... And then they ended his life with that worthless accusation, a foul and evil thing to do [the accusation of mismanagement of human resources and his consequent firing, in 1968, led to her husband's health deteriorating].