

## Alone in an Unknown Environment

The news of Irena's difficult situation became known to Jasha Brauns, who was living in Italy; he then alerted his parents that Irena was alone and asked them to take care of her. In July, she received the unexpected offer to move in with the family of Dr Moses Brauns and his wife Betty, both having survived the Holocaust. We remember that, at the time of the Kaunas ghetto, Irena was a close friend of their son Jasha. The offer was thus accepted with pleasure.

Living with the Brauns was certainly the best thing that could have happened to Irena. They were wonderful people and extremely kind. Their apartment<sup>1</sup> was in the very centre of the old city and they did their best to provide a comfortable and healthy life for her. This was not an easy task.

Betty Brauns, Jasha's mother, had survived the Stutthoff camp while Moses, the father, had survived Dachau. After the war Betty and Moses Brauns returned to Vilnius. Jasha never came back. He went to Italy to study medicine and after that to the United States where he became a successful surgeon. Jack Brauns – by this time he was called Jack – begged his parents for a number of years to come to the United States. In 1960 he managed to obtain permission for his parents to emigrate to America.

In October 1945, Irena joined the *Salomėjos Neries Gymnasium* in central Vilnius. She felt secure and happy in this middle-sized school in the old town. She particularly liked her teacher of Lithuanian literature, Vanda Zaborskaitė. Irena remembers how this cultured woman, who was creative and interesting in her lessons,<sup>2</sup> would stress the moral values to be learned from literary works of the past.

After graduating from the gymnasium at record speed<sup>3</sup> and with a gold medal, Irena began to think about a career. Her initial intention was to study psychology, always with the same idea in mind: to understand and help people.<sup>4</sup> In order to explore the possibilities for entering this field, she went to Moscow to visit a famous academic (a good friend of Uncle Sasha), Professor Rubinstein,

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1 Situated on Trakų St. 18.

2 She later became a University professor. She was expelled from the University in 1956 for ideological deviance.

3 In three years instead of the usual five.

4 This quest was probably prompted by her mother who used to travel to Vienna just to attend conferences where Adler, Freud or Jung were speaking.



ILLUSTRATION 18 *A school photo, 1946–47 – Irena in the left 3rd row aisle seat (family picture).*



ILLUSTRATION 19 *After school graduation ceremony in June 1947. Irena is first on the left (family picture, unknown photographer).*