

HOPE SPRINGS ETERNAL

Joy Tilsley

1. Tony Coles, Brad Hanner, Diane Koenig, Lloyd Stone, Uta Coles, Clive England, Ted Parker, Maria Theresa Verner, Wayne Cathcart, Eric Verner, Mike Henwood.

2. Joe Zinni, Renald Dussault, Sandra Cathcart, Ambassador Peter Hancock, Shane Kennedy, Joy Tilsley, Carol Kennedy, Susan Henwood, Ron Halpin.

3. Bianca Mueller, Lynne Dussault, David Derose, Lorraine Zinni, Françoise Halpin, Ofelia England, Dorothy Derose, Phyllis Parker, Laura Stone.

4. Manuel Dussault, Andrew Derose, Allison Zinni, Sarah Halpin, Terry Hanner, David Zinni.

5. Clayton Hanner, Natalie Derose, Julie Anna Henwood, Mathew Parker, Crystal Kennedy, Michelle Parker, Erin Hanner, Chantel Kennedy, Alexi Halpin, Jeffery Henwood, Nitro Stone (dogchien).

I arrived in Warsaw about three years ago at the beginning of what was said to be the longest and coldest winter since the War. It was dark when I got up in the morning and dark when I came home from work. Coming from a tropical African posting, I thought Warsaw was just about the greyest, ugliest city I had ever seen, so I concentrated on the one bright spot - the opera and ballet. London or New York it is not, but there was, and is, a steady stream of excellent performances for which you can get tickets, and they are affordable.

Then the spring came. The days got longer, the leaves came out on the trees, the Poles planted flowers everywhere, and Warsaw suddenly became a pretty city. There were lots of parks to walk in, beautiful old palaces (lovingly restored after the desolation of the War) to explore, and interesting towns to drive to on Sundays.

Politically, it was spring too. We began to invite Solidarity people to dinner occasionally. You could call them at home, and talk to them with no more problem than you would face in phoning anyone in this part of the world. Now those same people are senators and ministers. We have to fight our way through a barrage of secretaries and staff to get to them, just like ministers everywhere. Now they are busy people with a country to run.

When I arrived, a dollar was worth about 240 zloties. We didn't try to buy anything at the Polna Market, except eggs and whatever fresh vegetables could be found, and we bought some meat at the diplomatic meat store. Eggs cost about 40 or 50 zloties each and you could get beautiful fillet (when they had it) for a pittance.

Now the Polna Market has lots of interesting things (from time to time) -- imported cheeses, oranges, lemons, bananas, even mangoes and melons -- all at what appear to be colossal prices. Now an egg costs about 500 zloties. But we get about 9000 zloties for a dollar. I get a little dizzy making the calculations sometimes (not being much of a mathematician). Sometimes, I don't bother to try - I just hand over a large denomination note and meekly take what they give me back. If I work it out with a pencil or calculator later, it seems OK.

New hotels and stores are opening up. There are more things in the stores (sometimes). The opera and ballet are still there. The winters are still cold and grey, and the days are short. But today the sun is shining, and spring is coming. The prices are going up, but so is the exchange rate (for us foreigners). Everything is changing, and yet it is the same. The telephones don't work any better. But it is a very interesting time to be here, and I wouldn't have wanted to miss it.

