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# A Ukrainian Woman's Testimony

**M**y husband, Antin Iwachniuk, and I came to Canada after World War Two, having been sponsored by relatives. First we went to Winnipeg, but upon Bishop Isidore Borecky's advice we moved to Toronto. We arrived in Toronto early in 1950. I went to see Dr. Nobel, the head of the College of Physicians and Surgeons, about re-entering the medical profession shortly after we arrived in Toronto. He asked how much my husband earned. Though I wondered what my husband's income had to do with my qualifications as a doctor, I told him he was an architect by profession, but now earned a living working on construction. He said the sum was enough for us to live comfortably and advised me to go home, cook and keep house. He said that because I was a physician, my services might be enlisted in the event of a war, but until that time, the best place for me would be at home. He concluded our interview by saying that if that arrangement did not suit me, I could return to Ukraine, where Stalin would probably ship me off to Siberia. I knew enough English to express my heartfelt wish for the Soviets to come to Toronto and ship him off to Siberia. He became angry at my rejoinder and though later we met often, we barely acknowledged each other.

At that time it was difficult for women to be accepted in hospital internship programs. One thing that irked me, in particular, was that a female physician could not perform a complete physical examination on a male patient unless there was another male present. This condition was completely incomprehensible to me and struck me as a relic from the stone age.

As a doctor, who worked on a tobacco farm and had to face a future as a domestic at best, I decided that because my desire to practise medicine was so strong, I would resort to the law of the

jungle since the circumstances forced upon me had put me into a jungle. I pleaded my case for a chance at internship at Women's College Hospital. After long and painstaking deliberations, I was conditionally hired by the hospital as a maid. I was told that my deportment and work habits would be observed and that a decision regarding my internship would be made based on my performance. I was a qualified surgeon, but to maintain my sanity under these circumstances, I rationalized that my new role in Canada was that of an actress on a hospital stage. Only the head nurse on the floor was supposed to know my true identity and profession, but I'm sure some of the other physicians and even some patients knew.

Finally I was told to go home, stay away from the hospital for a month to erase me from the staff's memory and when I came back, to replace my pink maid's uniform with the white one of an intern. During the course of the next year I worked day and night, going home only for the occasional meal. Every other Sunday was mine. I finally wrote my examinations in Montreal in December 1952 and opened my practise in gynecology in January 1953. I practised in Toronto until my retirement in 1979.

In 1974 my husband and I endowed the Iwachniuk Studies and Research Fund at the University of Ottawa to promote scholarship in the field of Ukrainian studies. This was our professional contribution to education in Canada.

[Recorded in Proton Station, Ontario, 9 November 1981].

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*Dr. Iwachniuk died in 1987.*

BY NADIA IWACHNIUK