

Sheindlia Krishtal With Her Friends



My roommates at the hostel of Kazakh State University in Alma-Ata. From left to right, upper row: Valia Soloviyova, I, Sheindlia Krishtal. From left to right, lower row: Frida Kofman, Sima Shtern and Etia Leiman. Alma-Ata, 12.12.1941. We were photographed by a photographer from the University on the day of Sima's departure.

In 1939 I finished school and decided to enter the philology faculty at Kiev University. My classmates Alla Fisenko and Fania Wolfman also went to the University. They finished school with honors and were in a privileged position, but I firmly decided for myself that I would fight for myself and get there on my own. I passed all exams successfully and entered the philology faculty of Kiev University. My Jewish classmates also entered higher educational institutions. There was no national segregation at that time.

When I was a 2nd year student we were trained to be medical nurses. The war was in the air. We didn't believe that Hitler could attack the Soviet Union. Newspapers and radio programs were convincing us that this could not happen.

When the war began on 22 June 1941 students went to excavate trenches in the vicinity of Kiev. Soon evacuation was announced at the plant where my brother worked. My father, Fira, Faina and I evacuated with Samuel's family to Alma-Ata in Kazakhstan [about 4 thousand km from Kiev]. Our trip lasted for about two months. We went on a freight train that was continuously bombed on the way. We went through Kuibyshev where Riva and her 6-months old daughter had to stop. Lilia got ill from exhaustion and had to stay in hospital for 6 months. Faina stayed in Kuibyshev with Riva to look after Lilia and Samuel, my father and Fira went to Alma-Ata.

Lecturers from Moscow and Leningrad Universities were also in evacuation and taught at my University. There was a very high level of teaching at our University. There were students from all corners of the Soviet Union in our hostel: Rumania, Ukraine and Russia. We were young and didn't focus on hardships - we were not starving and that was all right. We made soup with flour and water that we called zatirukha. We had meals at the canteen. I took an active part in public activities. I always went to Komsomol meetings and was a political officer in our troops that were sent to do agricultural work.

I studied and worked at the radio committee in Alma-Ata and wrote about the situation at the front. I wrote about Polish, Russian, Jewish and Ukrainian soldiers and their heroic struggle against fascist occupiers. In 1944 I finished university in Alma-Ata and continued my work at the radio committee until re-evacuation was announced in 1945. How happy we were to come back home. There were fireworks on Victory Day of 9 May 1945 - people came out into the streets congratulating each other on victory, crying and laughing. We - my father and I, Fira, Faina, Riva, Lilia and Samuel with his family - returned to Kiev.