

Ilia Rozenfeld With His Wife Yelena Mestechkina



I, Ilia Rozenfeld, and my wife Yelena Mestechkina, Kiev, 1947. This photo was taken on our wedding day. And my son Alexandr Rozenfeld. This photo was taken on my son's birthday in Kiev in 1951.

In 1945 I obtained a job assignment in Kiev. My father was very happy: he always wanted me to leave this provincial town for a big city. Kiev was ruined and at first it was a severe probation for me to live there. I was employed by a design construction office. I stayed with my companion from Poltava for about ten days, but then they let me know that it would be decent for me to move out. I moved to the design office where I worked and slept on desks there. Two months later my Polish friend from Poltava Yuzik Poznanskiy got a job assignment to Kiev and we received a room on the 7th floor of a hostel in an old building in 9, Franko Street. We received bread cards for 400 grams of bread, egg powder and sometimes some meat. It was impossibly little to make a living. We took our cards to the canteen in Narkomzem (ministry of land resources) in exchange for a meal of some thin soup and boiled cereal. We exchanged whatever we could for food at the market. I made soup with canned meat in a meat can on a spirit lamp and it lasted for few days. We dressed in God knows what and had shoes with the soles tied with ropes: there was no money or place to buy new shoes.

Those were beautiful years of my youth, when I had many friends. We went to operetta and opera theaters, and to concerts of symphonic and classical music in the Pervomayskiy Garden. We often gathered in one apartment, and once my friends sent me to a girl living nearby to pick up a record player from her. I liked the girl and invited her to join us. So I met my future wife Yelena Mestechkina. Yelena was born to a common, traditional and I would say religious Jewish family in Kiev in 1924. Her grandfather Iosif Mestechkin and her grandmother and her father's brothers perished in Babi Yar. Yelena, her father and mother were in the evacuation. In 1947, when we met, she was finishing the Kiev Medical College. We dated for few months and got married in the same year of 1947. We had a family dinner party and there was one guest: Yelena's cousin brother from

Moscow. Even my parents couldn't come from Poltava - this was a hard time. They sent us a greeting telegram.

We moved into my wife parents' small two-bedroom apartment in a two-storied wooden house in 32, Artyoma Street. There were water supply and a toilet in the yard. The house was heated with a stove consuming huge quantities of deficit wood. Yelena and I shared a very small room and her parents and 7-year-old younger sister Zhanna slept in the living room.

On that day in August 1947, when we registered our marriage in a registry office, Yelena went to her first job in the laboratory of the Podol district hospital where she worked for 50 years from then on. In 1949 our son Alexandr was born. He grew up like all Soviet children: he went to a nursery school, kindergarten, and school and spent his vacations in pioneer camps.

Our life was gradually improving. Since 1948 I worked in the Design Machine tool Institute 'Giprostanok', and in 1953 I was promoted to chief of sector. In 1954 my Institute gave us a small two-bedroom apartment with 16 and 9 square-meter rooms. However, this was our own apartment, and I think that our life improved significantly from then on. In 1960 I went to work in the Academic Institute and entered an extramural postgraduate course in Moscow. In 1963 I defended a dissertation. I didn't face any prejudiced attitudes.