

Vera Dreezo With Her Sister Zoya Zheldakova



This is me beside me my sister Zoya and our neighbour, photographed by our co-tenant in the communal apartment. Kiev, 1938.

In 1929 my father received a room in a communal apartment with five other tenants in the center of Kiev. There was a big kitchen and a bathroom with a big closet shelves inside. The bathroom was used as wood storage - there was stove heating in the apartment before the Great Patriotic War. There were primus stoves and later - kerosene stoves and then when gas supply was installed there were two or three gas stoves brought into the kitchen to replace the old stoves. Two families shared one stove. There were arguments about who cleaned the stove and who didn't. Each family had a bulb in the hallway and an electric doorbell. It was bad when one rang a wrong bell or lit a wrong bulb. Tenants also took turns to wash the floor in the hallway. I remember washing the floors in this big hallway when I was in the tenth form after the Great Patriotic War.

There was a big double bed in our room, some low table by an opposite wall and my sister's bed. There was a coach with a high back upholstered with black artificial leather where I slept. There was an oval table beside it. There was a partial to separate a corner for my mother's brother Meyer. There was a small stove. The window of our room faced a backyard where there was a shed and garbage containers.

The most terrible thing about our apartment were huge red rats. They were there before and after the war. We had to stamp our feet to scare away all rats before coming into the hallway. When we returned to this room after the war there were even more rats there.

In 1938 a refrigeration factory was built in Demeyevka [a distant district in Kiev]. It is still there and I buy ice-cream produced there. My father became a commercial director of this factory that same year. My mother had two dresses: one made of crepe de chine and one of wool. My father had a

suit, a coat and a cap. However, our situation improved a little. My father went to a recreation center a couple of times. His management also promised to give him an apartment since there were five of us living in one room: my father, my mother, two children and my mother's brother Meyer.

My parents liked going to the cinema, theaters and football matches. They were theater goers and went to theaters with their friends. I often went to the theater for young spectators. We had many books in Russian by classical and modern writers. My parents were very fond of reading. We were an ordinary Soviet family. A family of a Soviet employee. My parents were convinced atheists and we didn't celebrate any religious holidays.

I went to Russian lower secondary school in 1936. I finished the 4th grade before the Great Patriotic War.