

Asia Matveyuk With Her Stepbrother Samuel Girshel, His Wife Dora Girshel And Asia's Father Third Wife Zhenia Leikind's Daughter Bella



I, Asia Leikind, photographed after I returned from the army, I hadn't demobilized, wearing a Soviet uniform of the period of the Great Patriotic War, sitting from the right. From the left is my stepmother Freida's son Samuel Girshel and his wife Dora is between us. Standing on the right is Bella, my father third wife Zhenia Leikind's daughter. This photo was taken for the memory on the occasion of Samuel's wedding in Nikolaev in 1946. This was our first postwar reunion after WWII.

In 1939 I entered the extramural department of Pharmaceutical College and became subject to military service like all other medical employees. I was appointed director of the pharmacy in Peresadovka village of Nikolaev region. On 7 August 1941 retreating Red army troops were moving through Peresadovka. I was enlisted into a field engineering brigade. In this engineering brigade I was chief of the so-called sanitary unit consisting of me, a sanitary bag, a gas mask, a small-caliber rifle and a sanitary cart. I also acted as a pharmacy supervisor. We were retreating. I dragged the wounded, applied bandages and helped them as much as I could. I was appointed chief of the chemical department of the pharmacy headquarters. It evacuated to Kuibyshev [present Samara, Russia, 1400 km from Kiev]. Sanitary headquarters of the Red Army was in Kuibyshev.

Some time in late September 1941 we arrived in Kuibyshev. Chief of the sanitary headquarters offered me to enter the Medical Academy in Kuibyshev, but, being raised as a patriot, I was eager to go to the front. I served in the sanitary unit and was chief of the pharmacy of the regiment. We no shared duties at the front: I went with assistant doctors and sanitary attendants to pick the wounded at the front line. I mobilized a field hospital and received the wounded, cleaned their

wounds and applied bandages and sometimes I closed their eyes and heard their final sighs.

In early 1943 I was sent to the 28th Guard Division that had recently escaped from encirclement. Chief of medical logistics of the division had perished and I replaced him. This was a major's position and I was promoted to senior lieutenant. I went across Ukraine with this division. We liberated a number of towns in the south and east, Moldavia, Poland, Romania and Bulgaria. Our unit was a rear unit of the frontline following the regiment. We got under firing and bombings, but the Lord guarded me. I might have perished many times, and I remained safe just by chance. In 1943 I received medal 'For valor'. The war was over, when I was in the Bulgarian town of Yambol near Sophia. We came there in the end of 1944. We were accommodated in the houses and I must say that Bulgarians greeted us happily and sincerely. Our division stayed in Bulgaria until January 1946. I was responsible for medical supplies, and they didn't demobilize me.

Samuel was recruited to the army in 1935. After WWII Samuel returned to Novopoltavka. He stayed to serve in the army. During his leave he married Dora Kogan, a local Jewish girl. Samuel served in Semipalatinsk where the Soviet atomic and hydrogen bombs were developed. In 1955 there was a huge accident when a bomb exploded and many people, including Samuel, were killed. His wife Dora became a widow. They didn't have children.

In 1945 my father returned to Novopoltavka. Fascists tormented my adoptive mother Freida Leikindto to death in 1941. My father asked my advice about Zhenia, our neighbor, whose husband perished during the Great Patriotic War. He wanted to marry her. I understood that my father would have a hard life alone and encouraged his intentions.