

Semyon Vilenskiy With His Friend Ivan Karpov



An amateur photo. My friend Ivan Karpov, whose father was a priest, and I in the hospital near Orenburg, where my stepmother worked. 1941. I am 13 years old here.

I went to the Russian gymnasium across the street from our home. My sister studied in this gymnasium. Later it became a Russian school. There were very good teachers in it. I studied well and didn't have to work hard for it. I was fond of Russian literature and read a lot of Russian classical books. I became a young Octobrist, and a pioneer at school. In summer my parents usually rented a dacha [countryside cottage] near Moscow where my mother, my sister and I enjoyed the quietude, the birds singing, fresh cow milk that peasant women from a neighboring village brought, and each other's company. Many other people from Moscow also rented dachas

and we socialized with them. We usually made new friends in summer. We got together to play the lotto, to party. My father joined us at weekends. He brought food with him. We rode bicycles, bathed in the river and got suntanned by the end of summer. I had many friends at school. We went to the cinema and theaters, played with a ball at the school stadium and nothing betokened the gloomy years to come. Like all other children of my age I was careless and had no premonition of the upcoming war.

In 1941 my mama was seriously ill, she had a mental disorder and had to stay in hospital. My father wanted to send me away from Moscow for the summer and he sent me to his acquaintance, whose Russian [Common] name was Polina Mikhailovna, or Perlia Mendeleyevna Cheushevskaya, this was her Jewish name, in May 1941. After my mother died she became my stepmother, but my father and she only saw each other several times. This was a recreation center in the steppe near Orenburg. [about 1200 km southeast of Moscow]. She was director of this recreation center. On 22 June 1941 the war began.

During the war I stayed in the recreation center with my stepmother. I didn't go to school. She bribed some officials who issued me certificates about finishing another form at school. I lived in tents in field hospitals and transported the wounded from the railroad station. I was 13, when the war began. My stepmother was eager to please me fearing that I might run away and then my father might leave her. In 1943 she was made responsible for organizing an evacuation hospital. It was slowly moving to the west till it joined the combat forces. She perished at the end of the war dragging a wounded military from a battlefield. In 1943, when this hospital moved to the front line, I went back to Moscow. According to the documents I had finished the 5th form, but I didn't spend more than two months at the school desk through this whole period. In Moscow I finished the remaining years at school in two years as an external student. I also joined Komsomol then.