

Mark Kabakov And His Father Volf Kabakov



This is my father Volf Kabakov and I.

The picture was taken in 1940 after I entered Moscow specialized Marine School.

My father was an officer, i.e. performing office functions. Such profession was called clerk in the west. Clerk was supposed to work in different branches, one day in one, tomorrow in another etc. My father was such type of a clerk. Though he was called the economist or statistics expert, all the same it changed nothing.

Father was hot-tempered He had a hard life which made his temperamental character even more acerbated. He was declared peoples' enemy and imprisoned in 1929 being charged with bourgeois views. He was exiled to Solovetskiye Islands [about 1000 km. to the north from Moscow].

He got off with that pretty easily and was released in 1932. His incarceration in GULAG left an imprint on his further life. Father was broken down.

That year 1932 he left mother and married another woman. He was still thinking of mom and he loved me very much. It is hard to say who had a bigger influence on me. Both of my parents equally took part in my raising. After divorce, father was very tender and affectionate to me.

Moreover, I spent most of my childhood with father. The reason for it was that my mother's apartment was in the basement- father had much better living conditions. The most important for parents was to care of me, but not thinking of their offences.

I was born in Leningrad in 1924. I went to school at the age of 8. I went to a common Russian school, not far from the house, we lived in. School premises were in three-storied building. I was impressed by first years of my studies.

I had two buddies, whom I had been friends with all my life, Lyonya Volodarkskiy and Misha Kouznetsov. I made friends with Misha Kouznetsov in the first grade and kept friends with him till the end of his days. I was not a social activist, but I did well in studies. I read a lot at my leisure, went to the cinema, played football.

The fact that father was declared the peoples' enemy and incarcerated was taken by me as a tragic mistake of the authorities, bringing sorrow in our family. The tribulation, opened door to trouble for me and my family as before father's imprisonment I had mother and father and after that the family severed.

As a result my childhood became joyless. I think that my childhood ended with my father's arrest and woe was upon our family. Sometimes at night I used to dream what would have happened if father had not been behind the bars: we would have gone for a walk, he would have bought me a ball and a bicycle... The dreams looked cheerful, but the reality was sad.

When I was in the 8th grade, I found out that the first specialized marine school was to open in Moscow. I went to specialized marine school # 1. It was the only marine institution in Moscow. Nobody spurred me on, it was my idea to enter.

There was a tough competition for admission. There were 5000 applications were submitted and only 500 could be admitted. 8th, 9th and 10th grades were admitted. I passed my entrance exams and went through physical test.

Squads were formed from the freshers. 10 grade - 1st squad, 9 - 2nd squad, 8 - 3rd squad. I entered the 2nd squad of the Moscow Specialized Marine School.

My admission was not affected by my father's past. I turned a new leaf. We did not live in the dormitory, but at home. We were like ordinary Moscow schoolchildren, but in the uniform.

Apart from the school curriculum we were taught the fundamentals of marine service. We were taught how to tie the knots, do simple work on the deck, all kinds of marine disciplines, boating and sailing. We were loaded with work. We even had dancing classes.

Being the students of the school we were not conferred any military ranks. I was merely a student of the specialized school. My being Jewish did not influence my admission. There were several Jews among students. I had school friends. Many of them are dead now. Our school was founded in 1940 and it was disbanded in 1946.

Those who finished that school were sent to naval academy. Depending on the performance the students were sent to certain schools.

The top-rank students had a choice of either to marine engineering academy named after Dzerzhinskiy, where navy engineers and mechanics were trained (I chose this one) or naval academy named after Frunze, training navigators. Both academies were in Leningrad.