

Pessya Sorkina



This photo of me was taken in 1930s in Leningrad.

We arrived in Leningrad in 1930. After our arrival we stopped observing kashrut.

In Leningrad I found job (at that time I was sixteen years old). Mom and Daddy attended synagogue, but Mom seldom visited it. As for me, I went to the synagogue during holidays - it was very interesting to be present at the synagogue during holidays [the St. Petersburg Great Choral Synagogue was closed under the communists, nevertheless at holidays a lot of people gathered there despite the prohibition of authorities].

In Leningrad Daddy was not able to find job according to his profession, therefore he worked at vegetable stores as a storekeeper. Those vegetable stores were usually situated in cellars.

I started working in 1931. At that time there were labor exchanges and it was not easy to find job. I was sixteen years old, and hence I was registered at the labor exchange for teenagers. They assigned me to a job of a copyist at the Electrosila factory. [Electrosila Factory is a Leningrad Corporation for construction of electric machines - one of the largest USSR factories in this sphere.] I managed to learn how to copy when we arrived in Leningrad. We had no place to live, and our relatives in Leningrad could not invite us to their apartment (it was very small). That was why we rented a room for some time. The owner's son was an engineer, and he taught me copying.

While I was working at the Electrosila factory (I do not remember what year) I entered an evening course of its technical machine-building school. [Technical School in the USSR and a number of other countries was a special educational institution preparing specialists of middle level for various industrial and agricultural institutions, transport, communication, etc.] I finished it and

entered the Leningrad College of Aircraft Instrument-Making [it was founded in 1941], evening course again.

At that time we had no problem entering a college, though we were Jews. At that time there was another problem: it was necessary to be a worker or to have parents-workers. And if your parents were not workers, it was impossible to become a student. I remember that I entered the technical school, studied there two days and was sent down: my Daddy was an employee and I was an employee, too. Next year the rules were changed and I entered the technical school again. And later place of parents' work became insignificant.

So before the war I worked at the Electrosila factory. In 1937 we all quaked with fear when the personnel manager came in: we knew that he was going to get someone's head blown off. A lot of Jews were fired only because they were Jews. But nobody paid attention to me.

I never changed my name or patronymic. Everybody called me Polina, though actually my name is Pessya Solomonovna (it is written in my passport). You see, I am a daughter of wise Solomon. My coworkers never asked me about my nationality. I know that many of my friends disliked Jews, but we were friends at work, visited each other at home. I guess they did not know that I was Jewish.