

Berta Mazo And Her Neighbor Elena



This photograph shows me together with my neighbor Elena Chushnik. I do not remember who took it.

When we moved to Leningrad, I was a pupil of the 5th form. It happened in 1928. Grandmother and grandfather remained in Malaya Vishera, and after grandmother's death in 1929 grandfather moved to our place. He died before the war and was buried at the Preobrazhensky cemetery. We lived in Leningrad in a large two-room apartment until we left for evacuation (in 1941). In one room we lived four together with our parents and my sister, and the other room was occupied by my aunt Anna Yakovlevna (you remember that she was not married).

In Leningrad I studied at a very good school near the October concert hall. The school was rather interesting. Our teacher of physical culture was Ivan Edmundovich Kokh. He also taught fencing at the College of Physical Culture named after Lesgaft, fencing was his profession. He was a remarkable teacher. I also remember our teacher of literature, she always created a friendly atmosphere in the class. At school I had a friend (we are still friends) Raisa Lukoshkova, nee Bleksmit. In our class there were several Jews. I remember Sonya Kamenkovich: she often invited us to her place, she played piano, and we sang. By the way, our singing-master was also very good. Later she married Alexey Antonov, a chief engineer at the Space Equipment Corporation. Now they live in Moscow and we keep in touch.

Besides my school studies, I was engaged in music lessons: a teacher came to our place. Later my sister started studying piano with Klara Efimovna Stolyar. My sister was talented and quickly left

me behind, though she was younger than me. So I gave it up. My friends and I spent free time skating in the Tavrichesky garden [a big garden in the center of St. Petersburg] or preparing for school parties: we usually put different performances on the stage (once I recited Christ Has Arisen there!). Together with my parents we used to go to Sestroretsk for summer vacation (later I started coming there with children). Once when I was a pupil of the 7th form, I was in a pioneer camp. It was situated near Luga [a suburb of St. Petersburg]. There was a large lake and a small part of it was enclosed for little children. As for us, we used to get out of it and swim to the opposite bank of the lake (it was great!). Our PT teacher swam together with us. On the opposite side of the lake there was a tower, all children used it to jump down into the water. I was very much afraid of diving and never did it, though children tried to persuade me. A friend of mine was very good in diving. At that camp I was some sort of a pioneer leader.

I finished my school and entered the Polytechnical College, faculty of industrial transport. At the College we often arranged dances, and I liked to dance very much. I also remember that when we were students of the 1st course, they taught us to march. Those studies were only for girls and other students called us Death Battalion (as a joke). In summer we used to go for practical studies. Once we (about 15 students) went to Magnitogorsk, there at a metal works we were engaged in time-keeping. We also went to Zaporozhye [in Ukraine], there we did the same, moving by steam locomotives wigwag.

Members of our family started their way back home (to Leningrad) in 1948. Serafima went first. She settled at my aunt Liya in Belinsky Street. She entered the Leningrad College of Foreign Languages, which was situated in Smolny [Smolny is a complex of buildings in St. Petersburg used as a residence of the city administration]. I remember that at that time we sent her potatoes from Sverdlovsk. Daddy was the next one to leave for Leningrad. He found out that our apartment was occupied by some people, but he managed to evict one room from its unlawful possessor. So we returned to Leningrad to that room. My husband remained in Sverdlovsk for some time, but at last they called him back to Leningrad.

While we were in evacuation, a family from a destroyed house lived in our apartment in Leningrad. Almost no furniture remained in it. Later a husband of the woman died, and she remained alone in one of our rooms. Of course, it grieved me to see the changed city after our return: I saw a lot of destroyed houses. I know not much about the destiny of my college friends: some of them left, some of them remained in Leningrad. Victor Zhuk, for example, survived during the blockade of Leningrad, and his mother died.

We all lived in one room: not large, with 2 big beautiful windows. Our neighbors Elena Mironovna Chashnik and her parents lived in the same house, but later they moved to Petrogradskaya side [a district of St. Petersburg].