

Vera Sonina Together With Students



This photograph was taken in 1937 in one of the suburbs of Leningrad. We went there to ski. It was not just a walk, but a training session. You see, at that time I was a student of the College of Physical Culture. Now I'll tell you how I got there.

When I finished my school, my childhood (not easy childhood) terminated also. I started working. But I already worked part-time, being a schoolgirl. We made envelopes for an envelope workshop. I made all my friends sit down at the table and organized the process. Most difficult for me was to keep still for a moment, therefore I brought material for envelopes from the workshop, gave the task, counted envelopes, carried our production back to the workshop. One more: I decided that it was easier to work with a song, so I kept a check on everybody singing.

My work after school was also connected with envelopes. Shura worked in an institution, which was engaged in dispatching of huge amount of some materials. They needed a person for packing those materials in envelopes. It was me, whom they put on to do that job. I had surprisingly adroit hands. I worked faster, than two my colleagues. One of these colleagues used to take herself hundreds of envelopes that were packed by me. And I did not dare to tell anybody about it, because I was very much afraid to lose my work. There I worked during 2 years. My salary was crummy, but for our family every kopeck was important.

All the time I was interested in theatre and in everything connected with it. I had no money to buy tickets. But I kept in touch with my former friends of drama school, and they told me all theatrical news. That was the way I got to know about admission to the studio at the Theatre for Young Spectators. [State Theatre for Young Spectators in St. Petersburg (Leningrad) is one of the oldest children's theatres of Russia. It was founded in 1922.] The studio prepared actors, mainly for children's theatres. I went there to participate in casting. And you remember that I was very short, slim, and big-nosed. They considered me to be apt for travesty. They gave me scholarship of 16 rubles, and I gave up my job. Simultaneously I entered a studio for adults (Sladkopevtsev, an actor was its director). [Vladimir Sladkopevtsev, an actor was born in 1876 and died in 1957.]

They got to know about it in the studio at the Theater for Young Spectators. They did not like it - that is why I had to leave the studio. Then I decided to enter Theatrical College. [The Leningrad College of Theater, Music and Cinematography (nowadays Theatrical Academy) was founded in 1918 as School of Actor's Skill.] For some reason it seemed to me that I was too young for that purpose. That was why I forged my age in the passport without hesitation. At the College there was large entry. Before the entrance examinations entrants had to pass through creative selection (it consisted of 3 tests). I happily reached the third test, but at that moment they found out that I had forged my passport and immediately kicked me out. So I got nothing and looked like a fool. But fortune is variant: I met a remarkable person. A year before that, Pauline Conner, an American dancer came to our city. She opened a dancing school in Leningrad. And I got to know that she invited extra students. Total number of students was planned to be 8. Rector of the Leningrad College of Physical Culture named after Lesgaft (his surname was Zelikson) put a gym hall for her disposal. The hall was amazing! There were mirrors and ballet railings on the walls - the hall was equipped according to high standard. Besides me, all schoolgirls were students of the College of Physical Culture (gymnasts).

We (newcomers) began to study together with those girls who had already studied a year. It was difficult, but of paramount interest. Unfortunately we studied with that remarkable ballet dancer only a year. Stalin decided to expel all foreign experts from the USSR. Pauline Conner also left our country. By the way, when she was going to visit cold Russia, she took several fur coats with her. All these fur coats she dealt out to her senior schoolgirls, therefore no fur coats fell to our share. But the point was not in fur coats: we lost our dear friend and a remarkable teacher. At the same time rector Zelikson was dismissed. His post was occupied by a person named Nikiforov. Nikiforov helped us very much. We, students of Pauline Conner were absolutely depressed, we did not know what to do. And the new director took us in. We became students of the gymnastics department. It happened in 1936.