

Vera Sonina



This photograph was taken in St. Petersburg not later than in 2000. I remember that one day I had a wish to have my photo taken for no particular reason. Looking at this photo taken almost at the end of my life, I'd like to tell you about its beginning.

I regret to say that I know nothing about my grandparents, especially about my great-grandmothers and great-grandfathers. I do not remember anybody of them alive. But I will never forgive myself that I did not ask my Mum about our relatives. You know, we had so hard times that there was no time for conversations.

I was born in 1918 in Zaporozhye. We lived there only 4 years, but I remember myself from two-year-old age, therefore I can tell you something about the Zaporozhye period of our life. We lived very poorly. My father worked at a grain-collecting station. [Grain-collecting station was an office, where merchants brought grain bought from peasants.] Mum never worked. But once together with my sister we were searching something in Mum's things and came across her corset, her white bone fan and father's waistcoat of fantastic beauty. These things gave us possibility to judge about standard of living of their owners. But happy life of the family ended with my birth. Certainly the point was not in appearance of the next child in our family (I was the sixth one, including the died girl), but in the date of my birth: I was born in 1918, i.e. a year after the Revolution. Therefore I remember nothing except poverty. I do not remember if we lived in a house or in an apartment, but I know for sure that we lived in the main and luxurious street named Sobornaya. I can tell nothing about the Jewish community of Zaporozhye and about that of Smolensk (where we moved soon), too.

When I was about 4 years old, my father got seriously ill. Later (when I was already adult) Mum whispered in my ear that Daddy could not accept Revolution and had fallen ill out of grief. I do not know whether it was true, but indeed father could not go on working. And he was the only earner in our family. My Mum had a sister, I do not remember her name, because we always called her simply Aunt. She was always rich (and my Mum was almost always poor). We did not love her. When she visited us in Zaporozhye, she always took a view of our room with disgust and said 'Bela, it is impossible to live this way! Where can I sit down here?' This Aunt lived in Smolensk. Parents decided to move there to be close to our relative. In Smolensk we lived about 2 years.

Certainly I consider Petrograd-Leningrad to be the city of my childhood. Do not forget that though we lodged in the awful apartment, it was situated in the most beautiful place of our city. We realized the beauty which surrounded us; it was unconscious, but clear. We even bowed our thanks to the beautiful. It was a special ceremony: I composed verses, beautifully wrote it down, and we buried that sheet of paper in the Summer Garden.

I worked in the Theater for Young Spectators about 27 years. After that I taught callisthenics at courses for coaches. Later I worked at a House of Culture teaching dancing. [Houses of culture in the USSR were large establishments with various forms of cultural and educational activities: exhibitions, dancing parties, various circles and studios.] I do not work only 5 years. My last place of work was at school #214. I worked there 8 years as an elocutionist, conducting a studio. I guess that the main result I achieved there was attraction of my pupils to good literature, to verses. They won different competitions, traveled all over Russia free-of-charge. Five of them visit me until now. Each time they tell me so kind words that I feel uncomfortable to repeat them. But they also say sad things: their intelligence and love to verses differs them from their coevals very much, people call them *rara avis*. And I answer that they can be proud of such a title. I think that this kind of people will possibly help to rise all educated people here, and they will be able to turn our life for the better.

Last two years I live in the House of Veterans of the Stage. I like everything here, but I lack activities. I have already asked managers of our House to find some children or young people whom I can teach dramatic reading.