

Galina Shkolnikova



This is me before our departure from Alma-Ata to Leningrad from evacuation in 1945. We were at the 'Dom Sovetov' hotel, where 'Lenfilm' actors and clerks lived. I was trying to find a nice posture in order to look beautiful. My most distinct recollections are connected with the time of our evacuation to Alma-Ata, when I was 4 years old. But I also remember our boarding school during the blockade. I recall my mother, being on duty, walking into our room, approaching each bed, bending over each child. And I was so jealous because she didn't come up to me immediately. I started crying bitterly. Even though she had explained to me that she was a doctor and had to treat me the same way she treated other children because some of them didn't have mothers. I understood it but didn't stop crying. I also remember crossing the road across the Ladoga Lake on a motor boat and railroad bridges. In Alma-Ata we lived in a pise house with the family of my mother's older brother. [Editor's note: A pise house was a house with walls built out of straw mixed with clay; the floor was also clay.] Later we got a room in the hotel, where the Lenfilm employees lived. I went to a kindergarten in Alma-Ata and learnt a song there. It went: 'A Jew slowly crossed the road' and so on. I was 5 years old and it was the time when mother commenced my Jewish upbringing. At that time and during my school years she kept telling me, 'Don't forget that you are a Jew and won't get away with something your Russian friends will be able to get away with'. My husband-to-be and many other Jews, with whom I spoke about it later, heard almost the same thing from their relatives. I was convinced that if I wanted to achieve something I had to work more and harder. It became my belief. I also said this to my children when the time came. The most striking thing in Alma-Ata was Victory Day. I heard about it when I was in the hotel entrance hall and on my way to the kindergarten. The kindergarten wasn't far away and I walked there on my own. I ran the whole way in order to tell the children about it, because almost no one had a radio at home. And still, when I recall that moment, I hear the happy screaming and see the cloud of dust, which was the result of our happy tramping and jumping around.