

Ruth Strazh With Her Mother Esther Brodowski, Mother-In-Law Fanny Strazh And Son Maxim



This picture was taken, when I was in exile for the second time. Sitting from left to right are my mother-in-law Fanny Strazh, this was when she visited us there, my son Maxim Strazh and my mother Esther Brodowski. I'm standing behind them. This photo was taken in Slobodskoye settlement in 1952. On 14th June 1941 early in the morning our doorbell rang. There were three

individuals at the door: one wearing a marine uniform, another one was a civilian and a militiaman. They were armed. They told us to pack our things. The militiaman seemed to be a nice guy, and he told me in Estonian that we were to be sent to Siberia and I had to take warm clothes with us. We got off at the village of Molotovsk, Kirov region. We were sent to the kolkhoz in Slobodskoye. My sister was 12 and I was 16. My mother, my sister and I worked at home. We knitted jackets from cotton packthread. We had to do this work. The shop gave us bread coupons, for 500 g bread per day, while the rate for non-working people was 200 g bread. We lived in a local house and this was terrible. We never lost hope that the war would be over and we would go home. We didn't know then that there was nothing for us to wait for. The men were imprisoned in the Gulag camp. Most of them were sentenced to five years in camps, and in 1946 the survivors started to be released. However, members of their families were in exile for a lifetime. I managed to somehow find my school friend Yakov Strazh. He stayed with us for a month. Yakov went to Slobodskoye and Kirov to arrange for my release. He visited all local managements, but it didn't work. Though officially I was already Yakov's wife, the local leaders thought that ours was a pro forma marriage. Yakov had to go back to Tallinn. His vacation was nearing its end. Some Estonians started coming back from exile on their own, without waiting for any permission. I was afraid, of course, particularly because I had no passport, but then I finally made up my mind and took a train to go home. Fortunately, there were no ticket collectors in the train. My husband and his family were waiting for me at the platform. This was in February 1948. At the end of 1948 my son was born. I was happy, since my husband wanted a son so very much. We gave him the name of Maxim after my father. When we returned home from hospital, my son had a brit milah ritual. When our son was three weeks old, I was arrested. That was on 16th December 1948. I was allowed to take my son to jail with me. I refused to have him with me. I knew he might die in jail. I was taken to the jail in Tallinn, and my son stayed with my mother-in-law and my husband. I spent half a year in jail in Tallinn. On 16th June 1949 I was taken to the office of the warden and he told me he had received my verdict from Moscow. I was deported to Kirov region. I was to spend three years in deportation. I was kept in Kirov prison for a few weeks. Then I was sent to Nagorsk, 160 kilometers from Slobodskoye. Mama told me she was trying to arrange for my moving to Slobodskoye. She was told at the commandant's office that I could move to Slobodskoye, if I had my son with me. Mama wrote my mother-in-law, and she brought my son to Slobodskoye. Maxim was ten months old. I was allowed to move to Slobodskoye and some time later my husband arrived. My husband, my son, my mother and I lived together. I went to work at the timber storage. I worked as an accountant clerk, releasing saw timber. Yakov also went to work at the timber mill. Maxim grew up a healthy child, bright and strong.