

Lazar Sherishevskiy



This is me, Lazar Sherishevskiy, a prisoner of the GULAG. This photo was taken in 1946, I sent it to my mother and she kept it. I wrote a poem for my mother on the backside.

This reflection of your son's look,
The imprint of his features,
The reflection of his reality and dreams,-
Is what he's enclosed in an envelope.

There is no need in retouch

Or a frame...

As if giving my soul to my fate,

No adornments - this is how I am,-

My Mummy,

Whatever there is in me- I give it all
To You.

I was arrested in spring 1944. It all started in the reserve unit near Gorkiy, when the KGB special unit [responsible for checking political reliability of the troopers. There were special departments in all civil offices, army units and in prisons] reviewed my personal information and found out that my father had been arrested. They also took away from me my notebook of poems where I wrote about the hardships of life in the army. They arranged for an informer to become my friend. This man started talking to me about collectivization, arrests, i.e., tried to provoke me to express my thoughts. He talked provocatively of the regime and then wrote his reports, actually presenting the situation as if I was saying whatever he told me. These reports were then presented as evidence of witnesses. In late March 1944 the special department finalized its work. He brigade headquarters arrested me. Our division officer and a major from Moscow were waiting for me there. They declared I was writing anti-Soviet poems and that I was the son of an arrested man and that I was an enemy of the Soviet power and arrested for this reason. Then they transported me to Moscow.

In Moscow I was taken to a building in Prechistenka Street. This was the headquarters of Moscow military Corps. I was taken to a weird cell. There were cement floors, cement walls and no window. I didn't distinguish between day and night. Twice a day they put a bowl of some cereal and it was impossible to know between breakfast and dinner. Nobody disturbed me. One day the door opened and I was taken up the stairs. I decided they were going to execute me. I came outside. There was a blue bus waiting at the entrance. The bus arrived at the Butyrskaya prison. I filled up some papers and was taken to an investigation cell 95 of the Butyrskaya prison. There were 25 prisoners in it. I was taken to interrogations where they asked me about this poem about Stalin. What I found out was that in 1944, when investigation officers realized that I might protest against this poem. What they wrote was sufficient to take me to a tribunal that sentenced me to 5 years in a camp and 3 years of limitation of my rights. I was convicted for anti-Soviet talks. He sentence started as follows: 'Feeling anger to the Soviet power for his father's arrest Sherishevskiy had wrong and critical thoughts, did not trust authorities, condemned their actions and had anti-Soviet discussions and is sentenced thereof'. Then it continued: 'For anti-Soviet propaganda expressed in anti-Soviet discussions with the military and decadent poems qualified under Article 58 Item 10 part 2, he is sentenced to 5 years in a camp and 3 years of limitation of his electoral rights with no confiscation of property due to having no property'. I was put in prison on 22 March, and on 12 May I was exiled. I was sent to a camp near Moscow. I received a camp robe. There was a plant there. The plant manufactured electric engines, electric winding for camp power plants, vehicle spare parts, cable hoists for mines, plastic plates and mugs for camp ware. I got very weak in prison. I was pale, weak and had scurvy sores. I starved in the camp. I worked at the construction design office and then went to work at the chief mechanic department.

I took part in amateur concerts writing reprises and songs. There was a cultural education unit in the camp. There were professional musicians there. They toured to camps in Moscow region giving concerts. I was invited to the ensemble to be in charge of the literature unit. In spring 1947 I was assigned to this ensemble. We rehearsed during the day and went on concerts in the evening. In 1948 Beriya issued an order to relocate all camps in Moscow region and the central part of Russia to Siberia and Kazakhstan. Our ensemble of about 30 of us - actors, musicians and artists -

boarded trucks that took us to a railway station where we filled a cattle transportation train that moved to the north, to the construction of railroad from Salekhard [about 2000 km northeast of Moscow] to Kolyma. [About 7000 km northeast of Moscow] - the 2nd Transsiberian railroad behind the polar circle.