

# Rita Vilkobrisskaya With Her Mother Bertha Vilkobrisskaya And My Younger Sister Inessa Vilkobrisskaya



I, Rita Vilkobrisskaya, my mother Bertha Vilkobrisskaya and my younger sister Inessa Vilkobrisskaya photographed at a Photo shop in Vienna in 1947. We sent this photo to my grandmother in the town of Dmitrov of Moscow region.

I, was born on 28 October 1930. I got a Jewish name of Riva at the time of birth, but was always called Rita.

In 1937 I went to a Russian school. I was the only Jewish pupil, but there were Russian, Ukrainian, two German and one Uzbek child in my class and there was a Chinese girl that was my friend; I didn't think about nationalities then. No one ever abused me again, but I remembered that first time I felt so hurt.

On 8 January 1939 my mother gave birth to a girl. She was named Inessa after Inessa Armand, an outstanding revolutionary and Lenin's comrade.

On 22 June 1941 the Great Patriotic War began. Our family along with other officers' families was evacuated to Olevsk town in Altaysk region in Siberia in 1500 km from Khabarovsk. In Olevsk there were four of us: my mother, grandmother, sister and I. Olevsk is a small town in Siberia with one-storied buildings and population of few thousand people. There were not many people in evacuation and the locals were quite friendly with them. We lived in this town during the whole severe winter of 1941-42. We lived in a small room in a communal apartment. My mother went to work. She went to collective farms propagating to collective farmers to fight for bigger crops to give more grain to the front. There was a slogan 'Everything for the front, everything for the victory'. My mother was away for several days. She went to villages and my sister and I stayed at home with grandmother. I went to school in Olevsk. The school was far from where we lived and I had to walk through knee-high snow snowdrifts.

We didn't stay long in Khabarovsk. My father was transferred to the new location of his military service assignment to a small town of Nikolaevsk-on-the-Amur, located on the upper Amur, in 700 km from Khabarovsk, near the border with China. There were no comforts in the house where we

lived. Water was delivered in barrels from the Amur River. There was no electricity and in the evening we lit a kerosene lamp. Soon we moved to Blagoveschensk-on-the Amur, in 50 km from Nikolaevsk and from there we moved again to Voroshyllov town [Ussuriysk at present], in 100 km to the northeast. Like many other families of the military we moved from one place to another so often that we left our suitcases unpacked at a new location. I didn't have time to get used to a new school or schoolmates when we had to move again. All military traveled a lot. They didn't discuss and obeyed orders from their commandment. We packed within three days and loaded our belongings on a truck to go to the new area. I don't remember any specific school or teachers. I wasn't a success with my studies. Teachers treated me indulgently knowing that I wasn't going to stay long in their school.

We didn't celebrate any Jewish holidays, I don't know whether there were other Jews around us, it didn't matter.

Families of the military received good food packages, with tinned meat, milk powder, sugar and candy. We actually didn't feel hungry like it was with other people in evacuation and the local population.

In 1943 my father that was in the rank of colonel was sent to the front.

The Victory Day of 9 May 1945 was a real holiday for all people. We celebrated it in Voroshyllov. In the morning the radio announced that war ended victoriously. We went to the street where there were crowds of people greeting each other. We believed that the worst was in the past, that when father came back our life would be a continuous holiday. My father took us from the Far East in 1945. My father, my mother, my little sister and I left for a new work destination of my father in the town of Langenzersdorf, near Vienna in Austria. My father was there in occupational troops.

At that time my father was transferred to Noggels town in 50 km from Vienna, my father was on military service in the Soviet occupational army. My father was a high-level officer and in accordance with his rank we received a 5-room mansion. There were servants working for us: few housemaids, a cook and a cleaning woman. We took it for granted and believed that father deserved it. My mother didn't work. Her Yiddish helped her to communicate with Austrians and she picked up sufficient German rather promptly. At the beginning of a week Soviet children were taken to a boarding school. Once a week children of the military were taken to boarding school by truck. Inessa went to school in 1946 and there was a girl - Inga - and a boy from our town that were taken to school by car.

The boarding school was located in a beautiful town on Badenboyville near Vienna. It was a resort and our school was housed in an old fortress. We came home at weekends. We studied all mandatory subjects of the Soviet school curriculum. There were teachers from the Soviet country and we wore school uniforms that were also brought from the Soviet Union. Our school was in a distant castle and I only communicated with our schoolmates. After classes we did our homework and played in the yard. We celebrated Soviet holidays and studied Soviet patriotic songs and verses. There were 3 tenants in one room where we had comfortable beds, sinks, toilets and desks. There were children of various nationalities, but it didn't matter to me.

In autumn 1947 my father's assignment in Austria was over and shortly afterward the Soviet troops left Austria, too. My father was offered to chose a job in Kiev, Riga, Odessa or Lvov. My father liked

Lvov when he was there in 1944 and he chose this town. We moved in here in September, 1947. My father was deputy political officer in a rear aviation unit. My father got a beautiful spacious apartment in Pushkinskaya, the central street in Lvov. My grandmother joined us soon.

I went to a Russian secondary school for girls - girls and boys studied separately at that time. There were few Jewish girls in this school, it wasn't important for me, but it seems to me that about that time I began to differentiate Jews by name and appearance. There were Ukrainian and Polish schools in Lvov, therefore, there were mostly Russian girls in my school since it was a Russian school. I got along well with my classmates. My classmate Lilia became my lifetime friend. We did homework together and went to the cinema or discotheque together.

In 1949 I submitted my documents to the Faculty of Economicsy at the Institute of Polygraphy. I passed all exams and became a student. There were many Jewish students in my group. There was a meeting where we joined trade unions - there were trade union units in each organization - and each student stood up to say their first name, surname and patronymic. I counted 11 or 12 Jews then of 25 students in my group. However, I only studied few months with this group since I fell ill with tuberculosis. I had to take an academic leave to go to hospital. There were no medications available, but my father managed to get some streptomycin. It worked well and put me on the way to recovery. After hospital I spent few months in a great military recreation center in the Crimea. Between 1950 andthrough 1953 I spent my summers in recreation centers for the military elite where my father made arrangements for me. I traveled there alone, but always made friends. Those were magnificent recreation centers for the military elite. There were comfortable single rooms with all comforts facing beaches. The food was nice and sufficient and there was entertainment: dancing or cinema in the evenings.