

Faina Melamed And Her Brother Boris And Sister Esfir Melamed



This is me, Faina Melamed (first from the left), my brother Boris Melamed and sister Esfir Melamed. This photo was taken in Samarkand in 1943. My brother came on leave from the army. He put on a cap to cover his short haircut.

After I finished the 5th form in 1941 in Samarkand, Uzbekistan, the Great Patriotic War began. I remember the day when the war began. Our relatives from Kazakhstan were visiting us. We went to swim in the lake: I, Esfir, Boris, Ania, my mother's cousin sister and Sopha, my mother's niece. We were going past the club where we used to go dancing in the evening when we heard Levitan on the radio. He broke the news that the war began. My father was 46 and had stomach ulcer, but he said he didn't want to stay at home when such disaster happened. He felt he was bound to go to the front in 1942.

There were people in evacuation in Samarkand. During the war we were selling our belongings and books (my father had a big collection) to buy food. Esfir continued her studies in medical college during the war. During their practical training my sister was so accurate with her diagnostics that it surprised her teachers. My sister received food coupons in college. My mother made zatirukha [a kind of porridge] from corns. We ate everything eatable to survive. It was possible to buy bread, but it was far too expensive and besides, one had to stand in line a whole night to get it. But when we managed to buy a loaf of bread how happy we were! My mother made lemonade, we cut bread in small pieces and enjoyed the meal to the utmost. We were always feeling hungry!

My brother Boris was mobilized to the army in 1943 and in a month went to the front. My mother kept praying for Boris and for father. She lit an oil wick (there were no candles) and recited prayers. My father perished in 1943. We received a notification that my father perished defending our Motherland. My mother kept this notification for a long time, but it got lost when we were moving into a new apartment and I don't know where my father perished. My brother was an attendant and then a medical nurse assistant in hospital. He was wounded and was taken to hospital and then demobilized. He returned home in spring 1945. He continued to study in medical college.

After finishing his college Boris went to work as a doctor. In 1951 he wanted to get married, but my mother and the girl's parents were against it since the girl's name was Leya like my mother's and this is against Jewish rules. [Editor's note: This was a custom among some branches of the ultra-Orthodox.] Boris went to Odessa at the invitation of aunt Yeva and stayed there. However, he failed to find a job in Odessa and he moved to Pervomaysk, Nikolayev region, where he went to work as a surgeon in hospital. He was a good specialist. Boris never complained of anti-Semitism. He worked in Pervomaysk about 10 years and then he moved to Illichevsk where he went to work in a polyclinic. Boris was married twice. His first wife's name was Yeva. She was a very beautiful Jewish woman, but Boris couldn't provide for her to her liking and they divorced. In the 1960s he married a Russian woman named Lena. They had a son named Yuri. They lived 8 years together, but then they divorced. I was helping my brother to raise his son. After finishing school Yuri finished the Railroad College in the 1980s. Later Yuri took down to business. He owns few leather and children's toys stores. He is a very wealthy man. He has a big three-storied house. He married a Russian girl named Lena. They have a daughter named Svetlana. I love my nephew dearly and he also likes me and my husband. He supported his father and now he supports us. My brother Boris died in 2000 and was buried in the Jewish cemetery in Odessa.

After finishing medical college Esfir worked in Samarkand for some time. In 1952 she followed her brother to Odessa. She couldn't find a job in Odessa. This happened in the height of the period of Doctors' Plot. The railroad department employed her as a doctor in Tsvetkovo railway junction. She was the only doctor in the area and got great medical experience in all spheres: she practiced as obstetrician, midwife, cardiologist, etc. She was much respected and valued for her professionalism, kindness and responsiveness. Once her patient said that she wanted her to meet her son who returned from the army. Half a year later my sister married this man. His name was Anatoli Kurmaz. He was Ukrainian. Anatoli worked as a mechanic at the aerodrome. In 1956 my niece Victoria was born.