

Tobiash Starozum's First Wife Maria Gofman



My first wife Maria Gofman. Photo made in Moscow in 1941. This was her last photograph and this is how she imprinted on my memory. At that time phones were a new device in life and it was in fashion to be photographed in this manner.

Esther wanted us to move to Moscow. In her letters she discussed options with us. In one of her letters she suggested that I married a woman from Moscow and that she had found one for me. At the beginning of 1941 - I believe it was February, our family went to Moscow. We stayed with Esther. They had a spacious 3-room apartment and we lived with them illegally for 3 months. We admired Moscow.

I got acquainted with a nice Jewish girl Maria Gofman, born in 1922. She had just finished the Library College. We got married soon. We had a civil wedding ceremony. Maria's parents liked me. Only marrying a girl from Moscow didn't give me the right to reside in Moscow. Maria's parents wanted to help me. Their son was an engineer at a construction agency. They were hiring workers from all over the country. I could go to any town where Maria's brother could hire me as a worker for Moscow. But the war interfered with our plans. It was not a good idea to have with illegal status in Moscow. In May 1941 my father, my sister and my mother went to Vladimir, the nearest town to Moscow. They rented a room there and my father and sister went to work at a shop. I stayed in Moscow until my coat was stolen and I turned to militia. They checked my documents and I had to sign the paper that I would leave the city within 24 hours. I went to Vladimir.

On 22 June 1941 the war began. It wasn't a surprise to us, we had already lived through one beginning of the war. Maria's father came to Vladimir to let me know that Maria was in Kazan where her brother got a job. Maria's father needed to move his belongings to Kazan from Moscow. I helped him move, but then it turned out that they didn't need me in Kazan. I didn't have a right to reside in Kazan, but I was hoping that my family life would help me to acquire a legal status. However, I had to make some arrangements, because at that time anybody with problems with his documents could arise suspicion and be charged of espionage.

I met an old Jewish tailor at the market (incidentally). He gave me accommodation with him and I helped him with his work. Maria was visiting me, but it was clear that our family life wasn't going to

improve. She was young and depended on her parents much. I didn't know anything about my family. I had a letter from them where they wrote that they and other refugees from Poland were to be deported - it was called "evacuation" in a civilized way - to Middle Asia. I knew I had to follow my family. I said "good bye" to Maria and it turned out to be our farewell. In 1942 Maria got cancer. Her parents moved her to Moscow for medical treatment. She died of cancer in 1944. She was buried at the Jewish corner of a cemetery in Moscow. I went to her grave when I was in Moscow.