Fira Usatinskaya With Her Husband And Friends

This is a picture of me, my future husband Michael Aronovich and some friends. We were photographed during the parade on 1st May in Kreschatik in Kiev in 1949.

My family was in evacuation in Sosedkovo, Nizhniy Tagil region during World War II. In September 1943 I passed my exams for the 10th grade at school and entered the Faculty of Economics at the Mining College in Nizhniy Tagil. At the end of 1943 Makeevka was liberated from the Germans and we began to pack to go home.

I was a secretary at the town military registry office where I worked until summer when I went to Kiev to enter a college. I just wanted to study. I stayed with my mother's distant relatives. I hadn't known them before, but my mother wrote to them and they invited me to stay with them. I went to a few colleges, but they refused to accept my application since I didn't have my certificate of secondary education and my examination record book wasn't valid. I sent a request to Nizhniy Tagil and they sent me my documents. I was accepted for the 2nd year at the Faculty of Economics of the College of Light Industry. I also received a room in the hostel with five other girls.

I finished my studies in 1949. I had a nice group of friends in the hostel. We celebrated holidays and went to the cinema, museums and parks on the slopes of the Dnieper River together. We also went to theaters that had also returned from evacuation. We like going to parades on 1st May and 7th November. After the parades we went for a walk in the city. There were many Jewish students at college, but there were also students of various other nationalities in our group. I was involved in Komsomol activities and was a member of the Komsomol committee of the college. I took part in Komsomol meetings where we discussed issues associated with our studies and in amateur art activities. I organized contests and concerts. I met my future husband at the college. However international my views were I wished to marry a Jewish man, although I didn't observe any Jewish traditions at the time.

I graduated from college in 1949 and got a job assignment to a leather plant in Nikolaev [regional town, about 400 km from Kiev]. I specialized in economical leather production.

In summer 1950 I went to attend a traditional meeting of fellow students in Kiev. I met with my future husband Michael in Kiev and we realized that we were in love with each other. We spent several days going for walks and kissed in the parks, but then I had to go back to work. We corresponded for a year and in summer 1951 Michael came to see my parents in Makeevka to get their consent to our marriage. A month later we had a civil ceremony at the registry office in Makeevka. My mother made me a fancy dress of crepe de Chine, and Michael's parents bought him his first suit. We could only afford to buy one ring - for me. We didn't have money for a ring for Michael, and, besides, men didn't wear wedding rings since they were considered to be a vestige of the bourgeois past. We had a small wedding party. We didn't have a Jewish wedding. We just invited our close relatives and friends.