

Mira Dernovskaya



This portrait was taken in Leningrad in 1954, the year I graduated from the Leningrad Electrotechnical Institute. I am 25 here.

After finishing the 10th grade of school in 1948, I entered the Faculty of Radio Engineering at the Leningrad Institute of Electrical Engineering.

At school I liked chemistry most of all, but Jews were not admitted to the faculty of chemistry at the university. There was no admission to any faculty at that time at all because of anti-Semitism.

I entered this Institute quite accidentally, thanks to a recommendation by a friend. I was going in for gymnastics then, and was a member of the city gymnastics team. I passed the entrance examinations very well. With such marks, and as a sportsman, I was admitted to this prestigious faculty to major in radio-location.

When I was in my first year, there was one curious event. Mum received a letter from one of the pre-Baltic states from our distant relative Dora, who was searching for us.

During the war Dora was in a ghetto, but survived owing to a miracle. Later she moved to Israel. This letter, about which we didn't speak to anybody, was the reason for my being called to the First Department for a 'conversation'. [Editor's note:

The staff of the 'First Department' or 'Special Secret Department' consisted of employees who had access to state secrets of defense and other industries.

They were not allowed to travel abroad for 10 years or more, but their salaries were higher than that of average employees.] However that conversation didn't have any special consequences. But this is an indication of how well coordinated the censorship or some other appropriate service was then.

In my third year at the Institute I was transferred to another faculty, the Faculty of Power Engineering. They were forming a group of students there to be trained for a new specialty, the 'electric drive', and gathered people from different faculties. I majored in this subject, and I graduated from the Institute with distinction in 1954.

After graduation I was assigned to the coal industry, and I found myself at a research institute in the city of Stalino. I became a junior researcher, and frequently descended to coal mines.

The staff of the laboratory consisted of fourteen employees: thirteen men and me. I worked there for two years and persuaded the chief of the department to let me go to Leningrad.

I was even given letters of recommendation to various establishments, but I didn't take advantage of them, and immediately after my arrival I went to the machine-tool factory, where I was preparing my thesis as a student.

I got a job in the Chief Designer Department right away as a designer of the 1st category, as I already had experience in the field. After that, for twenty years, I worked as a project designer.