

Bella Kisselgof And Her Mother Sofia Rivkina



This photo, taken in Fergana in 1942, shows my mother, Sofia Rivkina, and me, Bella Kisselgof during the evacuation. At the time, I was 6 years old. The photo was to be sent to Papa who was at the front, but we didn't know his new mail box address and so could not send it to him. I went to the 1st grade when I was in the evacuation. It was a Russian school. I hardly have any school memories. I remember a Tatar girl with whom I shared a desk. There were many evacuated children from many towns at that school. I didn't know their nationality - it was of no interest to me.

I remember that my first teacher came from Leningrad. I finished three grades in Fergana. Mama hardly had any food at all during the war. We didn't have meat or even common food products. We had cereals and flour, but Mama kept all the food we had for me. I remember that when Mama boiled potatoes and gave them to me, she drank this water from the boiled potatoes. We survived due to the fruit in Fergana. Grapes were inexpensive. Mama used to buy a kilo of grapes and this would be our lunch. Another good thing was that the weather was warm. I remember going to the post office every day to check whether there was any mail for us. I was a little girl and the postal workers recognized me at the post office and gave me all the family's letters. Papa's letters were rare and he perished in 1943. Mama wanted to send a photograph of me and her to Papa, but we didn't know the number of his field mail. We kept the photo and Mama used to say that we would send it soon. In 1943 after the Battle of Stalingrad we received notification that my father had perished. I remember Victory Day, May 8, 1941. Strangers in the streets cried, laughed and kissed. There were fireworks in the evening, the first fireworks I had ever seen in my life. I didn't understand why Mama was crying when everybody around us was laughing. Mama was thinking about Papa.