

Nina Polubelova



My picture was taken in Riga in 1955 on my birthday. The events taking place in the USSR in the late 1940s, early 1950s, didn't affect our family. During the Doctors' Plot my mother was working in the pharmacy, but she wasn't fired, not even nagged. In general, it was almost unnoticeable for us. I remembered the day of Stalin's death: 5th March 1953. I was in the tenth grade. Everybody was crying, when there was an announcement on Stalin's death. I don't know why but I also burst into tears. Maybe I was influenced by the fact that everybody was crying around me: teachers and students. The situation was solemn: there were wreaths everywhere; the school orchestra played a funeral march, there was mourning. I remember that I had to answer a question on the blackboard

in my chemistry class before the mourning meeting. The teacher gave me an excellent mark saying that even on such a hard day for the country I did well. I was flattered by her praise. I cried and mourned after lessons. Everybody was at a loss. We got used to the fact that everything in the Soviet Union was done in Stalin's name. He was a decision-maker and we couldn't picture our lives without him. Life went on. In a while people started coming back from the Gulag, those who were deported in 1940. Then one of our distant relatives was released from the camp. He came to Riga. I knew nothing about him; I didn't even know that he existed. My parents had a long conversation with him, but I didn't take part in it. I remember that I was curious to see the man who had spent many years in Northern camps. After the Twentieth Party Congress and Khrushchev's speech I learnt a lot, but I wasn't interested in politics that much.