

Elkhonen Saks And His Sister Ite Saks



This photo shows my sister Ite Smuul-Saks and me at the reception of the Latvian embassy in Estonia in 1997. My sister Ite was one of the first journalists to develop the Estonian Soviet press in the postwar years. She was a member of the editorial boards of many Estonian newspapers and magazines, and the leading journalist of one of the central Estonian newspapers, Noorte Haal [The Voice of Youth]. She worked real hard but still managed to finish the Faculty of Estonian Philology at Tartu University by correspondence. At the same time she married a young writer, Juhan Smuul. He was an Estonian from the small island of Muhu and came from a simple fishing family. He had only elementary education, but, undoubtedly, possessed a big literary gift. Ite was the first editor of

his works, his number one supporter and critic. His works were a great success. He soon became one of the most popular writers in Estonia, and the secretary of the Union of Estonian Writers. He received the Stalin prize for the poem entitled Stalin, and the Lenin prize for his Ice Book. Popularity and money turned him into a drunkard and idler. The family soon broke up. After the divorce Ite reverted back to her maiden name Saks. At the beginning of the 1950s, a big anti-Semitic campaign was launched in the Soviet Union. Ite was forbidden to work as a journalist, because she was Jewish, and besides 'the niece of an American spy', Uncle Josef. Ite started doing translations at home. From childhood on she knew Latvian well. Since then she has translated over thirty books from Latvian to Estonian, as well as many plays for the theatre. In 1997 Ite was invited to the Latvian embassy in Estonia where, in solemn atmosphere, she was awarded the 'Three White Stars Order' from the president of Latvia. She also received other distinctions from the Estonian president as a sign of recognition for her efforts to promote Latvian literature in Estonia. Ite is a member of the Union of Writers in Latvia. In the 1980s Ite actively participated in the political life of Estonia. She was one of the organizers of the National Front in Estonia, and also the contact person between the Estonian and Latvian National Fronts. It was her contribution to the restoration of Estonian independence. Now her age and health no longer allow her to work.