Berta Grigorievna Shkolnikova

This is Berta Grigorievna Shkolnikova, my husband's mother. She was born in 1902. She taught Yiddish before the war in Belarus, and was a secretary at a factory. In 1924, she married Abram Shkolnikov and as a soldier's wife traveled with him and three of their children, even during war. Fear was so strong in Stalinist times that in 1953, my mother-in-law not only burned all of her Jewish books, but also her work records.

Her son - and my husband - Grigorii Abramovich Shkolnikov was an officer who finished among the best at the Pacific Ocean Naval Academy and obtained a post on a submarine in the north. When he was 25 he was removed from his post because of his Jewish background. He wrote to the Central Committee of the Communist Party, and the same committee that forced him to leave the

submarine offered him a position on a minesweeping trawler, where he quickly became the navigator of the flagship and spent 468 days clearing mines in the Baltic Sea.

We married in 1955, when I was 19. I was a student at the Leningrad Institute of Film Engineers. As the wife of a soldier, finding work was difficult. With the help of my husband and his comrades, I organized courses in film mechanics in a prison camp in the city of Liepaya and, after my husband's demobilization, we returned to Leningrad. I worked as an engineer, and Grisha worked in the construction bureau of the Svetlana factory. In 1987 he was accused of being a Zionist - at that time in the group there were five Jews and one was planning to leave for Israel - and Grisha was forced to leave Svetlana.