

## Siima Shkop With Her Husband Victor Mellov



This is me with my husband Victor Mellov. Our son Oleg took our picture at home. I have children's books in my hands. I made the illustrations for those books. The picture was taken in Tallinn in 1998. When I was a student, I started making posters, took part in the exhibitions, even got a prize for my poster devoted to the Days of Estonian Culture, taking place in 1947 at Tallinn stadium. Besides, I liked making illustrations for books, especially for children. Upon graduation, I sought a job with a publisher of children's books. I was given an assignment for probation - to make

illustrations for fairy tales. The art council approved of my work, but still I was not hired. The director did not like Jews and did not even conceal it. Only several years later, when another man was in charge of the publishers', I was hired. I made posters dedicated to some memorable dates, events, but mostly they were political. I made many of them. Each of my political posters was to be approved by the central commission of the communist party of Estonia. They were supposed to put a stamp on my sketch with a note that it was ideologically correct. I never held back that I was a Jew. Knowing that in the Soviet Union it is dangerous to keep in touch with relatives abroad, I still mentioned in my forms that my sister was living in Israel. I was never persecuted, even during the campaign against cosmopolitans. When I finished the institute, I joined the Party right away and I became a member of Artist Council of Estonia. I did not have any conditions to do my job - the three of us were living in one dark small room. When I received a prize for my poster, I was given a room in the graphics workshop. I think that in Estonia the campaign against cosmopolitans was not as spread as in other parts of the USSR. I worked a lot. I took part in many exhibitions in Estonia and all over the Soviet Union. I was awarded prizes twice. I painted a lot, made portraits of my relatives and friends. I did not give that up when I was employed by the publishers for making illustrations for books. My husband worked hard. He wrote a lot. His pen name was Andres Valaa. He did not have a lot of spare time, but still he did not want to spend it in the family. He liked loud parties and gambling. Of course, it was not easy for me, but on the other hand he was an interesting person and I loved him. Victor's friends were also very interesting people. I did not mind if they came to us. It was very important for me that Victor treated Jews with deep respect. He had no drop of anti-Semitism in him.