

Raissa Smelaya



This is a photo of me, taken before my daughter Irina was born, in Kiev in 1949. During the war I was in evacuation in Karmakchi in Kazakhstan, where I worked at a military mechanic plant that was evacuated from Central Russia. After the liberation of Kiev my mother and I returned there in the summer of 1944. Victory Day on 9th May 1945 was such a happy day! People seemed to have forgotten about their hardships and losses for the time being. Everybody went to the streets exchanging hugs and kisses, greeting each other, singing and crying. My mother went to work as a dressmaker at a shop near our house. I studied at the Cinematography College and in the meantime I finished a higher secondary evening school and received a certificate. In college I joined the Komsomol. I was very happy about it. I still have my Komsomol membership certificate. I couldn't find a job upon finishing college: most of the cinemas had been destroyed during the war. I went to work as an assistant accountant at the shoe factory where my father's brother Jacob had

worked before the war. I had a training period and learned to operate calculators promptly. I found my school friends that had survived and returned to Kiev. We went to the cinema and dance parties together; we were young and wanted to enjoy life. I got married at the beginning of 1948. A friend of mine who worked at the Fire Department of Kiev invited me to a party at her workplace. Leonid Yakovenko, the head of the Investigation Department, asked me to dance the whole evening. Shortly afterwards he became my husband. Leonid didn't know his parents. He was raised at a children's home. He is ten years older than I. He returned from the front with the rank of a major. My mother took it easy that Leonid was a Ukrainian man. What mattered to her was that he had an apartment because I was poor and miserable. My friends were jealous of my luck. We had a civil ceremony at the registration office. My mother and her sisters bought a big goose; it was their wedding gift. In the evening my mother arranged a wedding dinner for us. We had roasted goose and a bottle of wine. My aunts and my friend Zina, who had introduced me to my husband, came to the wedding. After the wedding I went to live with my husband. He had a two-bedroom apartment in Lipki, the best neighborhood in Kiev. There was heating, gas, a bathroom and a kitchen in this apartment. Soon we took my mother to live with us. My daughter, Irina, was born in February 1949. I left work after she was born and became a housewife. My husband provided well for the family.