

Russian Passenger Ship 'Ilitch'



At the end of 1948, we left Shanghai on this ship, 'Ilitch.' Paul and I had been active member of Soviet club that opened in Shanghai in 1943. There were parties, concerts, films and lectures about the USSR. After the victory over Germany, and later Japan, the prestige of the Soviet Union grew, especially among the Russian-speaking population of China. In 1948, a Shanghai Russian newspaper published an announcement that all interested Russian-speakers could depart for the USSR. We decided to go to this remarkable country, which defeated fascism, where all people had equal rights and all people were heroes. We were not afraid of the difficulties. We were glad that our son could grow up in such a wonderful country. We were to travel to Vladivostok. After three days, the ship arrived in the port of Nakhodka, not Vladivostok. We were told: 'Choose! Siberia or the Urals.' We were afraid of Siberia, and we decided to go to the Urals. We traveled for one month, and at last we arrived at a town called Krasnoturinsk. We lived through this period thanks to my mother. She went shopping, stood in lines, bought food, sold our things - our clothes, porcelain - prepared meals, looked after my child, and encouraged us with Jewish humor. Our neighbors in the Urals had been deported from Estonia. They helped our family assimilate to the new conditions of our everyday life. After the amnesty in 1953, our Estonian friends went back to Estonia. They said we should go live there. From 1953, we too could move wherever we liked, except the capital cities. So we found ourselves in Estonia, in the town Kohtla-Järve, where I have been living since 1953. We would probably be fully assimilated by now, if it were not for my mother. She lived with us until her death in 1962. She kept the house, and helped us bring up our son. She didn't let us forget that we were Jews. She told our son about her family, Jewish traditions and holidays; she cooked Jewish dishes. Thanks to my mother, my son and his children realized that they are Jews.