

Feiga Grienblatt



This is my aunt Feiga in a sanatorium, she is sitting second from left.

The picture was taken in 1937, probably, the most somber year of the Soviet history.

Look at the tense unsmiling faces of her sanatorium acquaintances. The watchful eye of a portrait is hanging over them. Looks like it is A. A. Zhdanov. This picture is indeed a document of the epoch.

Aunt Feiga was my maternal grandmother Gitl's younger sister (all in all there were six children in the family: sons Iosif, Boris and Solomon and daughters Gitl, Feiga and Frida). Feiga was born in Orsha in 1899.

In 1924 she moved to Leningrad and entered the First Medical Institute. In 1929 she was assigned to work a doctor in the Urals [this had nothing to do with anti-semitism: it was a common system in the USSR to send the institutes graduates to work in some region of the country by 'assignment'].

In several years she returned to Leningrad, where she lived till the end of her life. Feiga was considered person subject to the draft. [Women in the USSR with secondary and higher medical education were registered at the military Committee and were subject to the draft in war time.]

When in 1939 the World War II broke out, she was summoned to military service. She took part in the 'liberation' of the western Ukraine and later in the war with Finland.

Thus, she participated in war since 1939. She served in the medical sanitary battalion attached to a military airdrome during the war with Germany.

She was in the war during 1941-1945, obtained a rank of a Major of medical service and was awarded for service in battle with the Red Star Order and the Order of the Patriotic War, and

various medals.

After the World War II aunt Feiga returned to Leningrad. She lived in a communal apartment in a small room of 14 sq. m. Our family - my mother, me and my maternal parents - were in Alma-Ata, capital of Kazakhstan at that time, where we had evacuated when the World War II broke out.

My mother wanted to return home to Kiev, where we lived before the war, very much - but there was nowhere to go back to for us in Kiev, all our relatives perished and our rooms in the communal apartment were occupied.

And Feiga wrote a letter to my mother, saying that since there were so few left of them, they had to get together. Mother went to Leningrad. Grandparents and me also came to Leningrad several years later, after mother and aunt Feiga managed with great difficulty to obtain bigger space for us in another communal apartment.

After demobilization in 1945 when Feiga returned to Leningrad she worked on Vassilyevsky Island as the Head of the Therapeutic department in a hospital. Anti-Semitism was very strong after the war. It did not really touch upon our family, but it was too possible not to notice it being displayed.

Aunt Feiga also faced difficulties exactly in those years. When the 'Doctors' Plot' [an alleged conspiracy of a group of Moscow doctors to murder leading government and party officials. In January 1953, the Soviet press reported that nine doctors, six of whom were Jewish, had been arrested and confessed their guilt. As Stalin died in March 1953, the trial never took place.

The official paper of the party, the Pravda, later announced that the charges against the doctors were false and their confessions obtained by torture.

This case was one of the worst anti-Semitic incidents during Stalin's reign. In his secret speech at the Twentieth Party Congress in 1956 Khrushchev stated that Stalin wanted to use the Plot to purge the top Soviet leadership] was started in 1953, we were very much afraid that she would be arrested or fired. Many Jewish doctors were treated like that at that time.

Fortunately, she was simply dismissed from the position of a department Head and made a common physician. Probably, the hospital Management respected her and her services.

After Stalin's death she was soon again appointed Head of the department. Unfortunately, not all Jews survived like that the persecution in those years.

Aunt Feiga took a very important part in my fate. She was a lonely person, she did not have a family of her own. She assisted us during all her life. I owe her so much.

Feiga lived a long life, almost all of the XX century, and died in Saint-Petersburg in 1994. As all my relatives, she is buried in the so-called Jewish ground at the Yuzhnoye (Southern) cemetery in Leningrad - though they were not religious people, as most of the Jews in Soviet time.