

Solomon Epstein's Brother David And His Relatives



This photograph was taken in Leningrad in 1932.

You can see my brother David and our relatives. Here I'd like to tell you about him and about his role in my life.

David was a remarkable person. He also was tall and kind. I painted his portrait many years after his death. Uncle Vladimir took care of David. He advised him to enter Naval School after 9 classes.

That Naval School cadets used to be invited to enter the Military College named after Frunze, and David became its cadet after finishing his Naval School.

David was much taller and stronger than me. He had got sports categories in 6 different kinds of sports. My brother was handsome and purposeful. He perished in the battle near Stalingrad during the war.

David was a yachtsman (a steersman of the first class). He often took me with him to his yacht club. I got used to work as a sailor and became very fond of yachts for their beauty. Once David brought home a second-hand album Instruction for Fans of Sailing by a Swedish yachtsman.

That album was full of photographs of yachts, and it choked me up. There were also drawings for construction of yachts, and I decided to start making models. I saved money (mother gave me some money for lunch at school), bought wooden rulers and cut details for yachts.

At home I had got 3 small assembly jigs, where I assembled my yachts. Unfortunately all of them were lost during the blockade.

I saw him for the last time in the window of the Military College named after Frunze. He waved a farewell. It was right before the evacuation of his College to Astrakhan. It was supposed that cadets would finish their studies in Astrakhan and go to the front line as naval officers. But their studies lasted not long.

When Stalingrad battle was in its heat, all cadets were sent there into the hell. Most of them were killed. Recently I painted David's portrait. He is about 19 years old there, but I never saw him at the age of 19. Here I'd like to read you his letter he wrote to Aunt Sonya. David wrote it before their departure to the front line.

Dear Aunt Sonya!

I am sorry that it took me so much time to write you back. We have just finished the 2nd course, but the situation requires our departure to the front line. At first they wanted to send us there as privates, but later they changed their mind and gave us the ranks of officers.

At present we are near to finish the infantry school and become lieutenants of infantry. So my naval service has terminated, but I survived. It can't be helped, because it is necessary. Soon I'll be at the front line. If I manage to survive in Stalingrad, I'll fight further. We'll see!

I received the last letter from my parents a long time ago. At present I know nothing about them. I guess very soon the front line will get close to their location and it is useless to write them.

That's all for today.

Write me please while it is possible.

David,

the former man-of-war's man,
now the infantryman.