

Solomon Epstein's Parents



This photograph was taken in Leningrad in 1937 and shows my parents. Now I'll tell you about them and about my childhood.

My parents got married in Vitebsk in 1921. Both my brother and I were born there, too. David was born in 1923, and I was born in 1925. A year later our family moved to Leningrad and we started our life there (I know nothing about the reason). We lived in Zhukovskogo Street, in the city centre, in a communal apartment.

I lived in that house during 50 years. For the first time I left it in March 1942 for evacuation (we moved along the Road of Life across the Ladoga Lake). After the end of the war I returned home to that house and lived there till 1975.

By now the house is reconstructed, and some very rich people live there. When we made it our home in 1924, our apartment looked rather strange: the floor of one its part was situated higher than that of the other one.

Between these levels there was a stairway of 9 steps. In our apartment there lived 6 families (they had got 9 children (boys) in total). So we used to slide down from that stairway on my father's furriery boards.

When I reached the age of 7 (and David was 9), parents brought us to the House of Art Education for children in Chaykovskogo Street. The House was founded by 2 friends, 2 enthusiasts of art education for children Solomon Davidovich Levin and Konstantin Alexandrovich Kordabovsky.

They invited remarkable teachers. There we studied the following subjects: drawing, painting, sculpture, architecture, archeology, history, music, scenic movement. In 1937 Palace of Pioneers was opened and our House moved there.

Solomon Davidovich became a manager of the art department, and Konstantin Alexandrovich went on teaching children. I studied in his group till the beginning of the war. Besides I studied at school (certainly).

My school was situated near our house. Behind our school there was a small garden, where we played lapta in summer and skated in winter.

Mom and Dad were born in 1890s. Mom finished a gymnasium, and Daddy studied several years in cheder. Mom frequently said as a joke that she had married an uneducated person. In Leningrad Mom entered the College of Foreign Languages, graduated from it and taught German language at school.

At home we had collected works of Schiller in German. [Johann von Schiller (1759-1805) was a German poet and philosopher.] As for me, I read Schiller's works translated by Zhukovsky. [Vassiliy Zhukovsky (1783-1852) was a Russian poet and translator.]

I do not remember any political events discussed by our parents. As far as we were concerned, we were pioneers and Komsomol members and we took it with great enthusiasm. On the whole, our childhood was very happy.

The Palace of Pioneers protected us from the nightmare around us (as I understand it now): in fact it was the time of Great Terror. And we were fine (like inside a cocoon).

Parents had got many friends. I was surprised when I noticed that one of them had suddenly stopped visiting us. Parents used to explain: he had left.

Later I understood that those people were arrested. One day I was playing in the street near our house, when my father told me passing by 'Solomon, Kirov was killed.' I guess I remember it because father looked very excited: he understood that a great wave of reprisals would follow.

Father earned money by sewing. But when authorities started persecutions of private craftsmen, he had to find job of a worker at the Aluminium factory.

There he worked perfectly well, too. He was awarded a copper teapot for his work. Later he found job of a cutter at a workmen's cooperative association, but there it was necessary to fulfill the plan. Father could not stand it and got back to his work at home.