

Solomon Epstein's Brother



This is a photo of the picture I painted in 1999.

It shows my brother David as a cadet. I painted it many years after David's death. Here I'll tell you about David - a remarkable person.

My brother and I loved uncle Vladimir, the husband of my father's sister very much. He was a strong and kind Russian man, a naval officer. He was our idol. Uncle also loved us, especially David.

David also was a remarkable guy. 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.

So during my childhood I was crazy about several things: fine arts, models of yachts, sailing sport and contests in physics and mathematics.

That was the reason why after the end of the war I handed in applications to 3 colleges: the Academy of Arts, the University and the Shipbuilding College.

Now I understand that our parents brought us up very well, but according to the rules of that time. We were brought up as persons of excellent qualities: ideal people, absolutely impractical.

Our parents believed that a person should have heavenly thoughts and be honest-minded. I have been a romanticist since my childhood. But I guess that our parents practiced the only proper method of upbringing. I believe that otherwise all people have to go on their hands and knees and grow dog-teeth.

I already told you that David was a remarkable person. 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