

Igor Lerner's House



This photograph shows our house in Olgino of Leningrad region. Here I'd like to tell you about our life in Olgino. We came there saving ourselves from starvation in Ukraine.

Mom together with children went to Tashkent (to her sister), and father together with his brothers moved to Olgino (a settlement near Leningrad) to mother's brother Abram. About 2 months later we also arrived in Olgino. First winter we lived at the place of my uncle. I went to the 1st grade (I had to study in the 1st grade twice, because I did not know Russian). In Olgino I had to live very long: till 1963. My uncle was engaged in bookselling. I remember well that at home he had a grand piano, and there were a lot of children's books on it. I drenched myself in them to my heart's content.

Here I'll get back to our trip to Tashkent. It was then when I traveled by train for the first time in my life. For some reason I remembered Kharkov railway station very well. There I saw a big overhead road and it impressed me much: I guessed how it was possible to build such a construction. We spent a lot of time moving to Tashkent with changes. After our arrival in Tashkent I was so tired that felt tinnitus and my legs trembled. I also remember a huge bridge across Volga. And my 1st trip by automobile happened in Olgino: our neighbor took us to the river by a small lorry.

I attended a school in Olgino. Elementary school was situated in the red wooden house, and the secondary one - in the white house. People used to say that in Olgino there were 2 schools: red and white. I studied very well. But it happened that I had to study twice not only in the 1st, but also in the 10th class. I'll tell you about it later.

So, we (my brothers also) studied at school. Daddy worked as a worker at a factory. Later he met a friend who helped him to get a job of a seller at the market. 2 years later my father was appointed a deputy director at a grocery store. Very soon he became its director and worked there till the beginning of the war. At first Mom did not work, but soon authorities introduced food cards into practice. They gave more food for worker's food card, therefore Mom went to work at a knitting factory Krasnoe Znamya ['Red Banner' in Russian] in Leningrad. She worked there 2 years, and

then began sewing at home. Mom was a very good milliner and a seamstress: in Ukraine she made clothes for all village inhabitants. When I came to my College wearing a jacket made by Mom, students joined the queue wishing to have jackets similar to mine. Mom needed neither fashion-magazines, nor patterns. She fearlessly brought in new styles.

We could not live together with my uncle's family very long. We handed in an application about separate place of residence. As a result we got a small room and a very large kitchen (the most part of it was occupied by a huge stove). It was impossible to live five together in that small room, and my elder brother wrote a letter to Stalin (so resolute he was!). As a result, a local official came to us and ordered to replan our kitchen and change the stove. After it there appeared 1 room more. The situation changed for the better, though still we were cramped.

We were not rich and not poor. At first we bought food in the shops. We did not starve, but later there appeared a card system (I already told you about it). You see, even before introduction of that system, our life was getting worse and worse: in shops there was nothing except pickles, sauerkraut, kvass and black bread. After introduction of food cards there appeared long lines near the shops. Sometimes Mom worked late in the evening and came to Olgino by last train. We waited for her, because at her factory mothers with many children received meals. Therefore sometimes we waited for her till 1 o'clock in the morning. Beginning from 1935 (when father became a deputy director at the grocery store), we lived better.

We never left such a good place as Olgino for vacation.

In Leningrad region Olgino was a very prestigious place for vacation. In summer a lot of Leningrad citizens came to Olgino with their children to spend summer holidays. I had many friends among those children, but we met only in summer. I swam perfectly (mastered all styles). In winter I skied much. At school I attended a historical circle. I was fond of history, and our teacher entrusted me with making lectures for my schoolmates. I also attended a photographic circle. Behind the staircase in the small lumber-room I used to process my films.

I liked to go to different parties arranged at school. In Olgino there was a good library. In the former times there lived many Finns, Poles and Germans. During the Great Terror all of them were arrested, and their books were collected into library. Therefore the library was very rich in books. I read much, I always liked reading very much. At home we subscribed to newspapers. We were great friends with my brothers all our lives long. We gave no troubles to our parents. Only Jacob liked to fight sometimes. Several times Mom was invited to school because of it. It seems to me that our parents brought us up properly. They never beat us, but achieved much using words, suggestions, and serious talks. They served as an example to us: father never smoked or drank vodka. When he got ill, doctors recommended him to smoke special cigarettes for asthma. Till now I remember my sincere surprise: Daddy smoking a cigarette!

Political life of the country did not avoid us. At school we (schoolchildren of the 4th grade) voted for execution of Nikolaev, the murderer of Kirov. Parents never talked about politics in our presence.

Steam locomotive connected Olgino with Leningrad. We used to go to Leningrad to a bath-house (there was no bath-house in Olgino).