

Bella Chanina With Her Father Semyon Fichgendler



This is me, Bella Chanina, with my father Semyon Fichgendler. This photo was taken in Kishinev in 1951. This photo was taken on 1st May after the parade. My father and I met after the parade where he had been with his colleagues and I with my college. One of our acquaintances took this photo of us.

Soviet troops liberated Kishinev on 24th August 1944. I returned to my hometown with my college before my parents came there. We were accommodated in a hostel and first thing in the morning I ran to our yard. Our apartment was half-ruined, there was no furniture left. My mother and father returned a few months later. Papa went to work at his Champagne factory. We stayed in the ruins of our house, gradually fixing the roof and building up the walls. The town authorities reimbursed our expenses for restoration of our house in part.

Our classes in college began in the winter of 1944. After finishing the college I received a diploma of a vine grower and wine maker. The dean of our faculty, a renowned wine maker in Moldova, Ivan Isidorovich Cherep, offered me to be a lab assistant at the department. It didn't seem interesting to me and I still regret it. I went to work in the Winemaking Industry Department. In 1950 there were incredible crops of grapes. It was really disastrous, there were not enough boxes, fuel for transportation, barrels and big containers for wine. All department employees were sent to sovkhoses to help them resolve problems. I was in Kamenka. Once I went to the chief of our department in Kishinev and said to him that I wouldn't leave till he gives a direction for me to get

fuel. All of a sudden, a tall swarthy man with an aquiline nose stepped into the office from the balcony. He was wearing a tight-neck jacket and high boots, imitating Stalin's style like many bosses did at the time. He must have heard our discussion. 'Give her as much as she needs' – he directed.

It turned out later that this was the chief of the Department of Wine Industry from Moscow, Azarashvili, a Georgian man. During that visit of his he made tours to all wineries, including my father's. He liked what my father was doing and they became friends and Azarashvili visited us at home. He suggested that I should go to postgraduate studies in the Agricultural Academy in Moscow. I found this idea attractive and submitted my documents to the institution, but they refused without any explanation, but in those years it was clear that the reason was my nationality. This was when the campaign against cosmopolitans began. I remember the much ado about the 'Doctors' Plot'. It didn't touch upon me directly, but I remember meetings at work with ridiculous accusations against Jewish doctors. Everything ended with Stalin's death. So many people around were crying, but I kept silent. I didn't go hysterical. In my heart I was hoping for changes.