

Dora Feiman And Her Landlady



This photo was taken in the evacuation. I'm sitting at the table in the room which I had rented. My landlady is beside me. This photo was taken in Alma-Ata (today Kazakhstan) in 1943.

Evacuation was prompt in Estonia. Our acquaintances from Tartu decided to go to Almaty. They suggested that I go with them. I thought that after I found a job in Almaty I would be able to have the rest of my family join me. In the beginning I had to look for a job where my lack of knowledge of the Russian language was of no importance. I got jobs on farms or worked on road repairs. Gradually I learned to read and write in Russian. My neighbor was the railway station logistics manager, and his wife, a very kind woman, often helped me in a neighborly way. When I learned enough to talk with her she promised to talk to her husband and ask him whether he would find a job for me. I went to the HR department and the manager interviewed me. She said I had to improve my Russian language skills, but she trusted I might manage as I was. She offered me a position as a file controller in the railway office. I was to enter the information on movements of trains and materials assigned to the department. Of course, this work was difficult for me in the beginning. I had a German-Russian dictionary with me, and it helped me at first.

My co-worker, who had evacuated from Russia, helped me. We shared a room which we rented from a landlady. I'm very grateful to this lady. She taught me how to generate the files and corrected my mistakes. I worked in the logistic department till the end of the war. Of course, I didn't earn much. We received employee cards for 400 grams of bread per day. My salary was just enough to pay for this ration of bread. There was saw dust in this bread and it was under baked, which made it heavy. It looked more like a piece of clay. My food was bread and water. However strange it may seem I wasn't slim. I was rather plump. I walked three kilometers to work. It was all

right in summer, but in winter each day was painful. I had no winter clothes. My acquaintance gave me an old coat. It wasn't warm, but it was better than nothing. As for shoes, it was a nightmare. I left home wearing sandals and I wore them all through the first winter. I walked on snow and ice in them. Perhaps, that's why I have ill legs. The climate in Kazakhstan is better than in Estonia. The air is dry, and the summer heat or winter cold isn't as unbearable as in Estonia. However, winter temperatures dropped to -30 or -40°C, and I was always freezing.