

Boris Lesman, The Interviewee



This photograph was taken in Petropavlovsk-Kamchatskiy near the house where I lived. I do not remember who took this photo.

I arrived in Sovetskaya Gavan on the Pacific Ocean: conditions there were even harder than in Vladivostok. [Sovetskaya Gavan is a city in the Far East of Russia.] [Vladivostok is a city-port in the Far East of Russia.] A nightmare! I went to headquarters and said 'As I got to the Pacific Ocean, I ask you to give me an opportunity to go further - to Kamchatka.' I already got to know that in Kamchatka one had an opportunity to serve only 3 years, whereas in Sovetskaya Gavan it was possible to spend a hundred years or even more.

They told me that in Kamchatka there were no duties of a commander. I said 'Guys, I'll give you a receipt that I do not object to be appointed to any post, but in Kamchatka.' My wife and my child (1 year and a half old) were together with me: they lived in a barge (there was no other place for living). It was heated by means of a small stove: ice on one side, warmth on the other one. That was the way officers lived at that time. Certainly, they sent me to Kamchatka.

We got to Vladivostok, got on board the steamship, and went to Kamchatka, to Petropavlovsk-Kamchatskiy. [Petropavlovsk-Kamchatskiy is a city in Kamchatka.] My wife cried (she was a girl, 20 years old, having a one year and a half old son). I said 'Do not worry, we are naval! I am sure that there we will find thousand friends of mine!'

We came there three days before the New Year day, on December 27. I knew that the hydrographic department was situated in the city center. I came there and opened the door 'Oh, my God! All my guys! Guys, it is necessary to find for us a place for living. It is urgent: we have a little child with us.' - 'Sure, come with me to my place!' said one of them. That was an example of real naval friendship! I brought my family to him and went to my military unit.

Later we moved to my study and lived there for about a week or more. There was a narrow sofa, where my wife and my son slept at night, and I spent nights on the desk. In the morning we went to the restaurant (it was situated across the street, thanks God!), had breakfast and they went for four-hour walk - until 12 o'clock, because I had to work. At 12 o'clock they came back, they warmed themselves, we had lunch, and at 2 o'clock in the afternoon (officers had a 2-hour break) they went for a walk again! At 6 in the afternoon they got back, I made dinner for them using electric stove.

Several days later my son got ill: he got covered with blisters, his temperature was very high - nightmare! I seized him and ran down from the mountain to the regional executive committee of the Communist Party. I pushed aside all the sentinels and ran directly to one of the secretaries. When he saw me, he understood that I was not one to be trifled with 'What happened?' - 'I have no place to live, my child has very high temperature, he is dying!' He called the manager of the regional Health Department - not less - and told him 'Take this officer and help him.' - 'Let's go, faster!' He immediately made a telephone call and said 'There is a place for your child; they will take him to the hospital.' Several days passed, and I asked my chief 'Where shall I bring my child after the hospital?' - 'There is no place for living.' I ran to Headquarters of Kamchatka Fleet.

I went directly to the member of Council of War, a rear admiral. He was the second important man afloat, after the Commander! 'You see, I have a sick child, I have no place to bring him after the hospital treatment: my family and I live in my study.'

At that time they were in the process of building a two-storied wooden house, not far from the headquarters. The rear admiral made a telephone call 'Comrade Khryashev, come to me.' Major Khryashev was the chief of the navy housing department. 'What about our new house? Is it already occupied?' - 'Not yet, we will do it tomorrow.' - 'Give this officer a room.' - 'Yes, sir!'

That was the way I got a room in a two-room apartment. The guys, my friends, nearly killed me: 'We stay here for 4 or 5 years! We pay 700 roubles per month to rent a room! And you got it during your first month here!' A blessing in disguise.

It was a block of 8 flats: 4 apartments on each floor. We lived on the second floor: the larger room was occupied by the chief of communication service Vassiliy Pudrikov. We lived in the smaller room. We used firewood to heat premises and had to bring water in buckets.