

Mark Golub's Aunt, Riva Petrenko, And her Husband, Pavel Petrenko



My Aunt Riva Petrenko and her husband Admiral Pavel Petrenko during a vacation in Karlovy Vary in 1958. Riva was born in 1907. After graduating from secondary school she enrolled in the Financial Faculty of the Kiev Institute of Public Economy and graduated in 1930. She met Pavlo Petrenko, a Ukrainian, at the Institute. He was a student in the Sugar Industry Faculty. They soon married. Upon graduation Pavel got a job at a sugar factory and Riva at a bank in Kharkov. My grandmother and grandfather didn't hear about their marriage. I don't think they would have accepted Riva's marriage to a man of a different faith. Other relatives knew about their mixed marriage and they accepted it. The times and attitudes had changed. As a party member, Pavel was sent to study at the Academy. He got a job assignment with the Pacific Navy. Riva followed him. She got a job at a bank and made a career of it. She became Director of Fish Industry Crediting. After my father was arrested [in 1937 on false charges of espionage], Riva decided to visit him at the prison camp. It was a heroic decision that presented a risk to her career and even to her and Pavel's lives. However, everything turned out for the best. While she was away the bank management was arrested. Riva would have been arrested, too, if she hadn't stayed away from Vladivostok. She didn't return to Vladivostok. Pavel was transferred to the Chemical Weapons Department of the Naval Ministry in Moscow. He received a room in a communal apartment. Riva got a job at the bank. From the beginning of the war Pavel served at the Baltic Navy and Riva evacuated to Aktyubinsk in 1941. After the Aviation Institute evacuated to Charjou she got a job as an accountant at the canteen there. She returned to Moscow before the Institute was reevacuated. Pavel made a successful career and was promoted to rear admiral and head of the Navy Chemical Department. Riva died in 1997, a few years after Pavel. She was an imperious and capable woman. She was devoted to her family, helping and supporting her parents. In the last years of her parents' life she promised to visit them in Kiev each year and she kept her promise.