

Zussya Rivkin



This is a photo of my elder brother Zussya Rivkin. The photograph was taken in 1939 in Moscow, at my brother's working place. Before the war, Zussya worked as a manager at a soup-kitchen which belonged to the People's Commissariat of Internal Affairs, in Moscow. They persuaded him to enter the Party, but he refused. In general, he spoke negatively about the regulations of this department. In the first days of the war Zussya left for the front. He served as a sanitary instructor. Near Rzhev their front-unit was marooned. We received letters from him, when they were encircled. He wrote that food and mail to the soldiers were dropped by parachutes from airplanes. He also wrote that they killed many horses, hinting probably, that the soldiers ate horse meat so as not to die from starvation. In one of his last letters Zussya wrote that he would hardly manage to get out from this mess. Later, we received a notification that my brother had disappeared without a trace. After the end of the war I tried to find traces of him, but in vain. In 1942 we received a notification about Zussya's death. In July 1944 another notification was received: it was about Mendel's death. We kept it from our parents. It happened the following way. It was necessary to go to the regional military registration and enlistment office to re-register officers' certificates. Aunt Mussya also received a certificate from Mendel, but at that time she wasn't able to go there and asked me to go instead. The manager of the financial department told me, 'It's good Mussya Yakovlevna hasn't come. Mendel Borissovich has been killed.' I cried, 'Tomorrow my parents will come here to receive their certificates. If my mother gets to know that her second son is gone, her heart will break.' I was sobbing so painfully that they decided to call the chief. He ordered his subordinates not to show Mendel's documents to my parents when they came. The employees of the regional military registration and enlistment office hid Mendel's documents so meticulously that when these

documents were required for putting his name on a memorial board of the College, where he studied, they couldn't find them. I took this notification and went to a girlfriend, because I couldn't return home. I was still crying. I asked her, 'Ida, what shall I do?' She answered, 'Tell your mother that you have a toothache, and that's why you are crying.' When I went home, my mother started to apply lotion on my teeth. Aunt Mussya returned from her work. I said, 'Mussya, let's go for a walk.' I told her everything. My aunt was a party member and always had her party card with her. We went into the courtyard and she put this notification inside her party card. Ten days later, my mother had to go to the regional military registration and enlistment office to receive money according to the certificate, which was 400 rubles. We had a relative in Tashkent. Mussya and I went to him. He said, 'Don't worry, I shall give 400 rubles every month and you'll take the money to your parents.' But it was necessary to undersign the certificate.