

David Ryvkin



This is a photograph of my husband's brother David Ryvkin. It was taken in 1944, somewhere at the front. In September 1953 I got permission to visit my husband in the camp. My son Mark was two years and eight months old then. Our family council decided that I should go there with my child. David, my husband's elder brother, who lived in Moscow, went with us. Immediately after our arrival in Vorkuta, carrying my luggage with me, I went to the administrative department of the Vorkuta labor camps: they were a part of the Soviet Gulag system, which was situated in the center of the city. So carrying my luggage and child, I went there. When I showed them the letter from Moscow, the employees started running and bustling, asking me, 'And who is your husband?' They probably, thought that Isaac was 'a high-ranker.' I was surprised. All that time, my brother-in-law

stood aside, and at that moment he disappeared somewhere. So I stood alone with my child, carrying a heavy suitcase. I had taken along food. It was cold in September, and everything was already covered with snow. The mine was situated rather far away, and on my way there it was necessary to jump over drains. I took Mark, carried him for a certain distance, left him there, went back and dragged the suitcase. And so on and so forth. Suddenly, a soldier from the watch-towers said, 'Hey, woman, don't be afraid, no one will take your suitcase here.' But nevertheless I was afraid that the suitcase would be lost, and so I continued and reached the mine. When I showed the papers at the mine, they also started running around and became nervous. They had never arranged visits to political prisoners before. A lot of people came to look at me: the situation was strange. I was standing and waiting, and the officers were running about, probably preparing a room for our meeting. And at that moment I saw a woman, probably a prisoner without a guard, filthy and dirty. Her child was also dirty, wearing rags, and lacerated gumboots. It was hard to talk in the presence of a guard watching us. I spoke mainly about our relatives, their health status, because during the period of my husband's absence, my father had an insult to the brain. And the officer hurried me up, 'Faster, faster, or you will miss the bus!' I left and got onto the bus. An employee of the mine accompanied us, and David masked that we were acquainted. When we arrived, the employee carried Mark to the hotel. I was afraid, that the boy would cry, but everything turned out all right. The employee opened the room for me, and stayed with us for some time. He had probably been ordered to do so. I said, 'Excuse me, but I have to put my boy to bed.' Only then he left. There were two beds in the hotel room. As soon as my son fell asleep, a woman walked in. She was probably on a business trip or a private eye. She took the second bed. I went out of the room to talk to David and explained to him that the next day I was going to have a second visit to my husband. He said, 'I have no place to spend the night.' I replied, 'Come to our room late at night.' At about 1am, he entered very quietly. That woman was already sleeping, and David put his leather coat on the floor and prepared to sleep. I lay without batting an eyelid, and because David coughed, I also started coughing, and all the time I was afraid that it would wake that woman. David left at dawn.