

Bluma Katz With Her Group Mates, Students



This is me with my group mates, students of the Agricultural College. We were photographed at our testing site. This photo was taken in Kharkov in September 1946.

I finished school in 1940. I wanted to study foreign languages and become a translator. My mother's distant relative Yekaterina Spiegelman, who lived in Kharkov had graduated from the Philological Faculty of Kharkov University and worked in a publishing house. My father went to Kharkov with me. I passed exams and entered the Faculty of Translators of College of Foreign languages. There was no problem for Jews to enter higher educational institutions at that time. Admission was based on the marks and origin Children of workers and peasants had more chances than children of non-manual workers. I studied German and English. My father went back home and I stayed with Yekaterina and her husband Vitaliy.

I finished the first year in College. On 21 June 1941 I passed my last exam and the next morning I was to join my family in Ozarintsy. I had sent my parents a cable and was planning to do some shopping to buy presents on Sunday. On the morning of 22 June 1941 I woke up early in the morning and started packing. Yekaterina and her husband were not at home. I was about to leave, when Yekaterina ran into the apartment and turned on the radio. She had a scared expression in her eyes. The radio announced that the Hitler's Germany attacked the USSR without announcement of the war violating the peace treaty. We listened to news from the front line and were concerned about our army retreating and incurring huge losses. Later there appeared rumors that fascists were exterminating Jews and taking them to ghettos. Yekaterina decided that we should leave Kharkov. We took the last train leaving Kharkov. The trip was fearful. Germans were close to Kharkov. German planes often attacked the train.

We arrived at Timashevo village of Kuibyshev region and were accommodated in a local house. All local residents sympathized with evacuated people and tried to help as much as they could. A metallurgical plant from the central part of Russia evacuated to Timashevo. Yekaterina, her husband and I went to work at the construction of this plant. I worked winch. In spring 1942 the

plant started operation and I went to work at the shop manufacturing heads for cannon shells. We delivered rough blocks for cannon shell heads on carts and I removed wire edges from them with a file. We received workers' cards for bread. Of course, we had little food, but we could manage on it. There was a Komsomol committee at the plant. When we heard about admission to a course of radio operators, many employees applied to the course. I was one of them. There were over 100 attendants at the course. We had classes after work in the evening. We were trained to work with a telegraph unit. After finishing this course we were sent to military units near Oryol in Russia. We were to be radio operators. I became a telegraph operator at the regiment headquarters. We were accommodated in barracks and received military uniforms. We were privates. I stayed there for two months before the commandment issued an order releasing those who had studied in colleges before the war.

An Agricultural College opened at Kinel station near Timashevo. All former students were sent to study there regardless where they had studied before the war. There were no entrance exams. All we had to submit was a request. I became a student of the Faculty of selection and seed farming specializing in phytopathology, plant diseases. We were accommodated in a former school adjusted to make a dormitory. I didn't have any clothes, but the uniform fufaika jacket, skirt and boots that I received in the army. Nobody cared about such things then. We received bread cards and had one meal per day at the college canteen. I shared my room with 5 other girls from various places of various nationalities. We shared everything we had: clothes, food and books. In the evening we talked about our prewar life, made plans for the future peaceful life.

On 9 May 1945 the war was over. This was a happy day. People greeted each other and shared the joy that the war was over. Yekaterina and her husband went back to Kharkov. I decided to stay in college in Kinel. In June 1945 I passed my summer exams successfully and became a 4th-year student. I also finished the 4th year in Kinel and then the college moved to Kharkov. I studied my last year in Kharkov. I lived in the dormitory. Yekaterina and her husband supported me and gave me money.