

Chana Perelman



This is my mother Chana Perelman, nee Kaplan. She was going on vacation and I went to see her off. I took her picture when she popped out of the window as the train was leaving. The picture was taken in Tallinn in 1968 at the Baltic train station. My mom was loved by all families I knew. She was very modern and advanced, and not everybody liked that. It was the Soviet, namby-pamby time, and besides there was a special moral in Jewish families. Mother did not fit a traditional understanding of a Jewish mother and our family did not have patriarchal traditions like other families had. Mother discussed all things with them, even about intimacy. I found out about those things from her, not from my friends. I had known since childhood that I was not found in the cabbage. When I became older, it was my mother who told me that the first man should not be the husband obligatorily, but the beloved man. She also said that the experience should be in such a way that there should be no abhorrence to those relationships later. I am very grateful to my mother. At the same time Mother was very gullible. My cousins always hoaxed her, and when it was revealed Mother was the first to laugh at a successful hoax. In a word, she took after Grandmother. Both of them were very gullible, tidy and strong. When we came back to Tallinn from evacuation I never saw my grandmother wearing a kerchief, only a hat. Mother remained stylish and elegant until her death. Mother worked after the war. At that time Russification started in Estonia, and the authorities decided to open a Russian drama theater in Tallinn. My mother was offered a management position there. She was supposed to do everything from scratch - find the premises, hire actors, work out the repertoire. Later on many of those actors became famous and left for Moscow, but they were starting out in our drama theater. Mother was constantly taking good care of them. First, she was an administrative manager, then the chief administrative manager. Then she was offered a job at the traveling agency Intourist. It was very prestigious. They needed a person who was fluent in foreign languages and with good manners as she was supposed to communicate with foreign visitors, who had a different understanding of upbringing, femininity, culture, communication. Mother fit them perfectly, though she was 70 years old. She was fluent in German, Finnish and English, but still she had to take exams in those languages at

the Tallinn Teachers' Training Institute. Of course, it was a mere formality, as everybody understood that she had good language skills. She passed the exams and was offered the position of the chief administrative manager at Intourist. When the first and only variety show in the Soviet Union, Astoria, was opened in Estonia, Mother was offered to be in charge.