

Elena Drapkina, 1940



This photograph was taken in Minsk in 1940, when I was a schoolgirl. In 1941 (right before the war burst out) I finished 9 classes.

In our family there were 3 children: elder brother Hirsh was named in honor of my paternal grandfather.

Hirsh was born in 1920. The next child was me, Elena (born in 1924). And my younger brother Saul was born in 1929. Saul was lost on November 20, 1941 in Minsk ghetto together with Mum.

I attended kindergarten, later I became a pupil of the school no.34. After a while we were moved to the Stalin school no.21. My elder brother Hirsh studied at school and had a hobby: he liked to dance and was rarely at home.

We together with my younger brother Saul stayed at home. I remember us building a steam locomotive of chairs. As our parents were busy with their work, I spent all the time with my younger brother.

At school we had very good teachers. They taught us in some sort of a mixed language: one word in Russian, another word in Belarussian.

Teacher of geography was Uzbek, and Russian language was taught by a Georgian woman. History was taught by a married couple of Rubinchiks: sometimes he taught, sometimes she did. Their lectures were very interesting.

Yakov Meltserzon was our from-master and taught us physics very well. All pupils knew physics perfectly: it was impossible not to know it. If it was necessary, Meltserzon gave supportive lessons to pupils who were below their schoolfellows in class.

When after the end of the war I arrived in Leningrad, I had to pass only 2 examinations to enter a stomatological school (I was hors concours as a war participant):

Russian language and physics. In spite of 4 years of war, I went through the exams successfully (having only 1 month for preparation). I think it happened due to Meltserzon's contribution.

Recently I read biography of the latter Nobel prize winner (Vitaly Ginzburg, a physicist), where he wrote that before the war he was a pupil of a Minsk school, and it was Meltserzon who planted his love for physics. So I was very proud of the fact that I and the Nobel winner were taught physics by the same teacher.

My brothers and I studied at school. Before the war I finished the 9th form. I remember that when I was a pupil of the 3rd form, I concerned myself with children's technical station, where we tried to cultivate cotton.

My cotton grew high, but did not ripen: there was not enough solar heat for it. My cotton was shown at the exhibition in the House of Government.

We lived near the river, and I managed to swim well at the age of 12. All children had to meet requirements of special classification standard for young sportsmen [it was called Be Ready to Work and Hold the Line].

A coach saw me at the competition and invited me to his sports group. I agreed. At that time in Minsk there was the only swimming pool in the House of Red Army, I started training sessions in swimming (brace style) at the city sports society.

I held several records of Belarus in that category of swimming; I also took the 6th place at the all-Union competition for girls of my age (aged 12-14).

I participated in all-Union competitions of five cities in Kiev and in all-Union competitions in Tbilisi. Children were brought there from all republics. It happened in 1939.

At the same time I studied in theatrical studio at the Palace of Pioneers. There I got acquainted with Masha Bruskina.

So that was my childhood and it was not a time of stress.