

THE FIRST DAYS OF THE GREAT WAR

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Lev Stelman

The First Days of The Great War

excerpt from the documentary tale "family history"

On the Eve. JUNE 1941

I was almost 10 years old (without two months) when the Great Patriotic War began. Father, Mother, [my] younger brother and I lived in Minsk.

My father, Stelman Natan Isakovich (Nison Itskov according to his passport), was the director of the newly built Russian school No. 28, located in the Storozhevka district. In the first elections to the Soviets in 1936, in accordance with the new Stalin Constitution, he was elected to the city council.

Mother, Rozova Maria Matveevna (Malka Mordukhovna according to the passport), worked as a senior researcher at the Belarusian Academy of Sciences, specialized in protection against toxic substances.

My brother Isaac, or Izya, who was only four and a half years old, went to a nursery school for family, relatives and friends.

I am Leo, or Lyonya, for my family, relatives and fellow practitioners, by the beginning of June 1941, I had finished the third grade of school No. 28, where I was accepted a year earlier than expected, because I could read, write and count, and also under the patronage of my father.

We lived in a wooden two-story annex to the brick building of School No. 15, which was located on Gorky Street (now Maxim Bogdanovich) next to the headquarters of the Belarusian Military District. Our apartment was on the second floor. My dad had built it when he was still working as the principal of school number 15, which was then Jewish. After the closure of Jewish schools in the country, Dad was transferred to the director of the new Russian school No. 28, but there was no director's apartment there, and we stayed to live in the former, on Gorky Street. In a large family of Minsk Stelmans and Pinks, our apartment was considered the best, it was separate and had four rooms (dining room, living room, bedroom and kitchen), although all the rooms were small and there was no bath and toilet. All other relatives lived in communal apartments, with most families having one room.

The first three weeks of June 1941 were sunny and calm. Summer promised to be good. Nothing foreshadowed the impending catastrophe.

I had already begun the summer holidays. My cousins of school age who lived in Minsk, like my school friends, went to pioneer camps, and preschool children went to summer cottages with nursery schools; some lived with their parents in summer cottages rented in villages.

Mom really wanted me to go to the pioneer camp from school for at least one month, but I categorically opposed it. I had already been to such a camp once, and from it I have unpleasant memories. I stated that I would never go to the pioneer camp again, and I did not go. But my mother was going to heal her heart for a month in a trip to Kislovodsk (she had a congenital heart disease) and wanted to attach me somewhere.

Grandmother saved. I knew only my mother's grandparents. Papa's parents were no longer alive by then. Papa had only one sister Riva (in the marriage of Novodvoret's).

Grandmother Rozova (maiden name Golub) Eta (Ethel) Veniaminovna was the eldest in our large family. She had raised nine of her children and, almost without interruption, began to help raise her grandchildren, who, by then, were already twelve.

Grandfather Rozov Matvey (Morduh) was a proletarian. He began as a tailor's apprentice, independently learned to read and write in Yiddish and Russian, in 1924 he joined the party on the Lenin call. Before the war, he had worked as a tailor and cutter at the Minsk October clothing factory. Five of his children already had their own families. The eldest is my mother. She was 39 years old. She was followed by seniority: Uncle Fima, Aunt Sonya, Uncle Benjamin and Aunt Bella. Family lived separately from their parents: the first three — in Minsk, Uncle Benjamin — in Mogilev, Aunt Bella — in Bobruisk. The remaining children: Aunt Dora, Aunt Katya, Uncle Misha and the youngest Aunt Mira, she was 17 years old, lived with her parents on Ambulatory Street. Before the war, there was a street in Minsk with that name. It was located between the current Krasnaya Street and Skorina Avenue. The house of grandparents was located behind the school under construction then, which after the war received No. 23. The house was communal: one-story, wooden, pre-revolutionary buildings, with two entrances. In the entrance, where they lived, there were six rooms of different sizes and a large common kitchen. The Pinks' room was the largest, but their family was rather big. This room was the heart of the whole large family.

Izya and I liked to be in my grandmother's house, and we often went there. Recently, Mom had let us go alone, on the condition that I would lead Izya by the hand. Grandmother always had fun, especially on weekends, when the younger aunts, Katya and Mira, were at home. And there was a novelty that we had not yet had: a radio, a large black plate on the wall. The voices emanating from the plate were hard to make out, but peppy, though hoarse-sounding, Soviet songs lifted the mood. Very often we met there our cousins, Maya and Alla — the children of Aunt Sonya. The real fun began. Grandmother made our favorite treat — egg yolk, crushed with sugar, and let [us] go into the courtyard,

which served as Ambulatory Street. The street is quiet, cars almost did not appear there, and there were always plenty of neighboring children — there was someone to play with. By the way, the general toilet was also on the street.

Sometimes, Grandmother took me with Izey to her sister, Haya-Tsypa, who lived behind the Storozhevka, in an area called Prespa. My grandmother had two sisters and one brother, but Haya Tsypa was her favorite. She had four children — two sons and two daughters. One daughter was born at the same time as my aunt Katya, and they were called by the same Jewish name — Crane, in memory of my great-grandmother.

My cousins Felix and Remka, the children of Uncle Fima, visited my grandmother much less often. But then, our family and the families of Uncle Fima and Aunt Sonya would go to “Dacha” – country summer home – to stay there for the summer. Kids would stay with grandparents and working parents and unmarried aunts would come on evenings and weekends. And there were days when all the cousins who lived in Minsk, together with their parents and, of course, grandparents, got together. Most often with us. The last time before the war, this happened on New Year's. There was a big tree with toys and sweets; beneath it were gifts. Gathered nine children aged 3 to 14 years. The oldest was commanded by Clara. She composed a play, assigned roles and helped to make costumes and masks from clothes, and then with a noise and laughter a children's play was played to the general delight of adults. Since then, our large and friendly family no longer came together.

My grandmother saved me from the pioneer camp, offering me a month to go to the cottage, which Uncle Fima rented for his family in the village of Ostroshitsky Gorodok, near Minsk, where he worked as the director of a peat-mining enterprise. Mom agreed, and I was delighted — there would be my cousin, also Felix, but Rozov, whom I knew well, and we were friends, although I was two years younger. And grandmother's presence also mattered. True, she could not be with me all month, she could not leave her husband for a long time working and the children who lived with them. But her presence, even at first, made the situation reliable. Departure day was scheduled for Saturday June 21st. We were taken to the cottage by Uncle Fima.

Nursery schools also went out of town to the country in the summer. The place that was allocated to the nursery school, where my younger brother Izya went, was in the village of Krasnoye Urochishche, close to Minsk along the Mogilev highway. Departure was scheduled for Monday, June 9th. The night before, the four of us went to Gorky Park for the first performance that year with the participation of Moscow circus artists. In Minsk at that time there was neither a permanent building for the circus, nor a permanent troupe. For performances, with the onset of summer, a circus tent was held at the same place in Gorky Park every year. Acrobats, tightrope walkers, jugglers performed in the first section, gymnasts worked under the dome, but everyone was waiting for the second section — the

new attraction "Swimmers and Seals". When we returned after the break, the arena already had a large, room-sized cubic aquarium filled with water, and two or three seals were swimming in it. Then the lighting was turned off (only the aquarium lights remained), the music became louder, and the three girls, who appeared from somewhere above, dived into the aquarium and began to swim and play with seals. Everything was very beautiful and unusual, which is probably why I remember it.

Izya was escorted to the country by my mother. Izya was already sitting on the bus, but he still did not leave. Mom sent me to a nearby store to buy two cakes, and Izya and I ate them with pleasure.

And on Sunday the 15th, in the morning, Mom, Dad and I went to visit Izya [in] Krasnoyarsk. First we rode a long bus, then we walked. The cottage was located in a school building near the village. We stayed there for several hours. The conditions for the children were quite decent, Izya looked cheerful and satisfied, he liked the cottage.

A few days later, my mother left for Kislovodsk. Dad and I escorted her to the train. She was in a good mood. She had recently completed her dissertation, gone to Leningrad to her reviewer, Professor Zelinsky, and had received a good review, had made arrangements for her children, had prepared food for three days in advance, and felt free, ready to rest in a sanatorium. Mom was driving south for the first time. The only thing I regretted was that I did not find the time to go to the performance of the Moscow Art Theater, which was touring in Minsk at that time.

Dad and I stayed in the apartment together. Dad got sick the very next day. He said that he probably had caught a cold in a draft. He was prone to colds. Doctors said he had weak lungs. Just in case, Dad did not go to work and stayed at home for three days. I devoted this time to preparing for the Saturday move to Ostroshitsky Gorodok. I had two problems that I had to solve. Go to the library, pick up books to last for a whole month, and buy a fishing rod. There was a lake in Ostroshitsky Gorodok, and I had decided that it would be nice if Felix and I went fishing.

The library did not work out as I expected. Allowed to take only two books. And on the way home I stumbled and landed my knee on the edge of a granite curb. The sharp pain almost made me unconscious. I sat on the curb for a long time, until the pain calmed down a bit, and then rode home on one leg. Good thing the library was not far. The rest of Thursday and all Friday [I] lay on the couch and read the books [I'd] brought. I read the "Struggle for Fire" in full, the other — "Mine King Solomon" did not finish.

I left the first half of Saturday to buy a fishing rod. I went to the Central Department Store on Sovetskaya Street (now Independence Avenue), it was near the intersection with Lenin Street. Tram number 8, which stopped near our house, drove me to the right stop. I had never traveled alone by tram. But Dad decided that I was already ripe for this, and

gave me money for a ticket and a fishing rod. I did everything myself: I chose and bought a fishing rod, returned home and was very proud of myself.

At the end of the day, Uncle Fima took my grandmother and me to Ostroshitsky Gorodok. Who could imagine tonight that in the morning when we would wake up there would already be a war?

The First Day. June 22

Felix and I woke up around 8 in the morning. It was Sunday, and Uncle Fima was at home in the morning. People who stayed in the cottage that summer were: his wife Aunt Raya (Relia) Strongina, their children Felix (12 years old), Rema (3.5 years old) and housekeeper, Lena. Seven people gathered with my grandmother and me that day. That summer we rented the whole house so there would be enough space. No one in the village knew that the war had begun four hours ago. In our house, as in the whole village, there was neither a radio nor a telephone.

We had almost eaten breakfast prepared by Lena with the help of my grandmother when a passenger car suddenly stopped at the house. Felix and I were the first to jump out onto the porch, the others looked out behind us. A passenger car was a rarity then, and there were only two models known to us. Felix and I immediately determined that it was Emka — the M-1 model of the Gorky Plant named after Molotov. Isaac, the brother of Rai and Uncle Felix, got out of the car. He was an old communist and worked in the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Belarus as the head of the service serving the workers of the Central Committee.

Isaac looked around our lively, smiling faces and, somehow haggard, said: “Yes, you still don't know anything.” A war was already going on, and, seeing from our faces that we did not realize this terrible news, he cried out: “War! Did you understand?! War!” — and so that we would finally understand, he added: “The Germans attacked us. [There is] Fighting along a whole border.”

When the adults took Isaac to the house, taking with them little Remku, Felix and I remained near the car. Seeing it close to us was more important than listening to adult conversations, even about the war. Moreover, everything was clear with the war. We had been brought up on the slogans: “Our Borders are just for us”, “Our army is stronger”, “Whoever comes to us with a sword will die” and the like, and quickly convinced each other that today the Germans would be stopped at the border, tomorrow our troops would cross the border to offence on German territory, and then they would be not far from Berlin. But to sit in such a car and consider, or even touch the steering wheel and various levers and buttons — this is not possible every day. By the sight of the driver, who remained in the

car, it was clear that he did not share our opinion about the war. But he allowed us to sit in the front seat and even explained the purpose of the levers and buttons.

Both uncles got out of the house and headed for the car. The driver immediately requested us, kids, to get out of the car, but Uncle Isaac asked the driver to let us stay in the car and both uncles settled in the back seat. Such happiness does not happen every day, especially when all the neighboring boys see it. Uncle Fima explained to the driver how to get to the office of the peat enterprise. Uncle Isaac asked to turn on the radio, and we drove off. The car drove slowly along a dusty village street, accompanied by boys and dogs. The radio broadcast music, Felix and I were enjoying life.

Suddenly, the music was interrupted, and Levitan's voice announced that in a few minutes a speech would be made by the Deputy Chairman of the Council of People's Commissars of the USSR and the People's Commissar of Foreign Affairs, Molotov Vyacheslav Mikhailovich. The uncles, who had previously been quietly talking about something, immediately stopped talking. Felix and I, too, fell silent. Molotov confirmed that Germany, having violated the treaty, had attacked the Soviet Union without declaring war, and was calling on the entire Soviet people to unite. He ended with the words that became famous: "The enemy will be defeated. Victory will be ours". These words inspired only Felix and me, and uncles noted that there were no details about the situation on the border in the speech, and this was a bad sign.

We got to the office of my uncle's enterprise during Molotov's performance, but remained in the car until it ended. Uncles went to the office to call their superiors, and we proved to the driver how our army would show the Germans. Uncles are back very serious and preoccupied, and what they said sharply diminished our enthusiasm. The news was bad: our troops could not keep the Germans on the border and were forced to retreat, especially in Belarus. A general mobilization was announced, and all industrial enterprises were instructed to prepare for the evacuation. Uncle Fima added that he also had received such an instruction and should go to Minsk for instructions, so now he would go with his Uncle Isaac in his car (he would only drop us off at home), and his driver, who was not already in place, would drive the truck of his uncle's enterprise to Minsk tomorrow morning.

They left, taking with them grandmother, who stated that she should be at home at such a time, since her son Misha could be mobilized. They decided to leave me in Ostroshitsky Gorodok due to the ambiguity of the situation.

There were now two women in the house — Aunt Raya and housekeeper, Lena, and three children. However, Aunt Raya, probably very worried, immediately said that she was not feeling well and should lie down. Lena was mostly busy with little Remka. Felix and I were left unattended. It was possible to think of something, but there was no mood. The

end of the day was dull. I remembered mine. It so happened that we all had ended up in different places. My father was in Minsk, my mother was in Kislovodsk, Izya was in the Red Land, and I was in Ostroshitsky Gorodok. And so I wanted everyone to be together.

Dad learned about the beginning of the war from Molotov's speech. Father invited me to listen to this speech by the manager of school No. 15, who lived on our floor in a separate room and who had a radio tower. Dad immediately forgot about his illness and, being a deputy of the city council, hurried there to find out the details and receive instructions. The bosses in the City Council were at a loss. Dad did not find out anything and got advice: to sit at school by the phone — in case you need it urgently. Dad stayed like this until the end of the day, reassuring worried teachers, but no one from the city council called.

Upon learning of the war, Mother immediately decided to interrupt treatment and to return to Minsk. But it was impossible to get a train ticket that day. Thousands of people vacationing in the North Caucasus rushed to the railway ticket offices. In this troubling time, everyone wanted to be with their family.

On this day, my younger brother, Izya, really felt the war. (We partially learned about the events that took place in this and subsequent days in Krasnoye Uchishche from those fragmentary memories that were imprinted in children's memory. We only knew the details after the war, when we returned to Minsk, and my mother, with her already 10-years-old son, accidentally met with the head of his former nursery school). On the day when the news of the outbreak of war spread among nursery school workers, all of them immediately rushed to their families in Minsk. Only the head of the nursery school, whom they called Aunt Riva, was left with the children (unfortunately, I never knew her last name, and now I have no one to ask). In the nursery school there were about 30 children in three groups: the younger, middle and oldest. Izya was in the middle (4-5 years). Riva also had her [own] daughter in the younger group in this nursery school. And her husband, the commander of the Red Army, was serving on the western border. So, no one was waiting for her in Minsk, and she, herself, presumably, was used to living at army bases. It is possible that this determined her extraordinary decision.

Not far from the school building, which housed the nursery school, within the walking possibilities of the kids, there were barracks of some military unit. Riva took all the children out of school (each carrying his own things and a blanket), formed everyone in line by pairs (the older one holding the younger one's hand), and led them to the barracks. The head of the unit met them with understanding and promised to feed the children, find a place where they could sleep, and help with transport to Minsk. [The] children came to the barracks just at the moment when everyone on the parade ground was listening to a speaker mounted on a pole. This was probably a repetition of Molotov's speech. And it so happened that the children, especially four from the middle group, among whom was Izya,

excited by the new situation, played out and ran on the parade ground, making it difficult to listen to the radio. Riva tried to calm them down and then went to sleep.

Rest was interrupted by a sudden raid of German aircraft at a military base. A siren howled, the first explosions of bombs and the chatter of machine guns rang out. The children had not even had time to get scared when a terrible explosion shook the building in which they were located. Izya remembers how he was thrown into the air and hit his head against the wall, then for a long time there was a lump on his forehead. But the main blow fell on the next room, in which the middle group slept. Part of the ceiling collapsed there, and the children were seriously injured. Riva received an order to urgently collect all the uninjured children and, despite the ongoing raid, explosions and machine-gun crackling, to run to the landfill, where there were trenches and dugouts. Izya remembers that Aunt Riva fled with the children, carrying her daughter in her arms. Children jumped into the nearest trenches and lay down, covering their heads with their hands. Fortunately, no one was injured. Under fire Riva crawled from trench to trench, checking the children. Later, when the German planes flew away, she placed the children in the dugouts — so that each had children from the older group. In Izzy's dugout were Rivina's daughter and two of the older group — a boy and a girl. More than four children did not fit in the dugout. It was not fit for a long stay — just a hole covered by a shield sprinkled with earth; a narrow gentle slope with a parapet led into it. Riva brought the children food from the military kitchen and their belongings. They slept that night in dugouts on the ground, wrapped in blankets. And the injured children were transferred to the medical center of the base, and then, together with other wounded, they were taken to Mogilev, where they were admitted to a mobile hospital.

Second Day. June 23

In the morning, Aunt Raya stayed in her room, and Lena fed us breakfast early. There was nothing to do, the weather was beautiful, and Felix remembered that we were going to go fishing. We took our fishing rods and went to the lake. Felix was eager to show me how to fish, and to show how good a fisherman he was. We sat at the lake for a couple of hours, but, except for a few very small fish, suitable only for live bait, we did not catch anything. A quiet, cloudless and calm day and the calm expanse of the lake inspired confidence that yesterday's fears of adults would not be justified and hostilities would be waged in Poland. But I did not want to discuss this topic either. When we returned home, silence was broken by the sound of a flying plane. It was very high, and its affiliation could not be determined. We decided that this was our plane. I really didn't want German planes to fly over us. But soon the sound intensified, and we saw two more aircraft that were catching up with the first.

"These are maneuvers," suggested Felix.

As a senior, he considered himself more competent.

But suddenly a new strange sound was heard, it seemed that a motorcycle was riding through the sky. Children and a few adults jumped out of the houses. Everyone was looking up. The first plane escaped from the other two, and it landed on its side. The motorcycle sound intensified.

"I know what is it!" shouted Felix. "It shoots gun machines! This is an air battle!"

And just at that moment black smoke fell from the first plane, and it began to decline. It dawned on Felix. He finally figured out who was who.

"Hurrah!" shouted Felix. "Ours won! German airplane is falling!"

I did not immediately understand why Felix came to this conclusion, but also cried out "Hurray!" Of course, German planes couldn't fly so far, chasing one of ours, they would have been hit by anti-aircraft guns, but on the contrary, it was quite logical: ours had shot down an impudent German.

Meanwhile, the crashed plane sank so low that it hid behind the edge of the forest at the back of our street, and after a while we heard the sound of an explosion from the plane crashing to the ground. The victorious planes accompanied it, probably to the crash site, circled over this place and flew away.

Excited, we ran to our house to tell what we had seen. We were met by Aunt Raya in a bathrobe, disheveled, with a wet towel on her head:

"Where are you hanging around?" She attacked. "You have to sit at home, and not run around the streets when they shoot around. My head is breaking apart from all this. I forbid you to leave the house," and went back to her room.

The dinner Lena fed us inspired Felix with another idea. He took me away from Lena and shared:

"I remember the place where the plane crashed. It is not far. Let's run away, see what is there, and (to my reminder of his mother's ban on leaving the house) . . . do not pay attention, no one will notice, we are fast."

I, myself, liked this idea. I don't know what we expected to find there, and, of course, did not think that the enemy pilot could survive, even if he was wounded, and that he undoubtedly had weapons. It was simple curiosity, it was this that pushed us to this dangerous adventure.

We were armed with two long and thick sticks when we bravely entered the forest. We were going to go to the place of the explosion, which, according to estimates, was east

of our house. But, in this direction, there was no road, not even a path, and we had to make our way through the dense undergrowth. As thoughtful readers of Fenimore Cooper, we periodically left signs on trees and bushes to find our way back. On the way, we saw many mushrooms and berries and tried to remember these places in order to return in the following days.

We walked for a long time. I began to get tired. We did not see any changes around us. The forest was big, the plane was small, and we were even smaller. I began to doubt that we could find a plane, and suggested that Felix reschedule the search until tomorrow, before we got lost. But Felix was adamant. When the undergrowth became completely impassable, Felix finally stopped and said that we probably had taken the wrong direction and had missed the plane, that we needed to go back and go in a slightly different direction.

We went back. That is, we thought that we were going back, but very soon, without finding a single sign, we realized that we were lost. Felix did not care about finding the airplane, just to get back home. But we did not know in which direction our home was. Then we remembered that the plane had crashed somewhere east of our house, which meant that we needed to go west. We did not have the hour, but since we had gone out after dinner, we had walked for a long time and it was already almost evening, which meant that the sun was in the west. But it was not visible; either the forest was too thick, or the sun was in the clouds. For some reason, moss on the trees grew from different sides. We decided to go in the direction where the sky was brighter. We climbed onto a tree, orientated ourselves and set off again. In the end, thoroughly exhausted, took some road. And then we saw the sun — it was already very low. And we went towards the sun. Returned home late in the evening, completely exhausted. And there a lecture from Aunt Rai was waiting, after which it got worse. So this day ended for me mediocre.

On the same day, my father was trying to find Izya's nursery school. Dad decided to pick up Izya from the nursery school and transfer him to Ostroshitsky Gorodok. I understood: at such a time it would be better if the children were together. At first, he checked whether summer residents had returned to Minsk, but the nursery school was closed. Then Dad went to the Red Land. The school, which housed the nursery school, was also closed. He went around the whole village, asking residents. Only one person recalled that he had seen yesterday how a column [line] of children had moved towards the forest. Dad went around this forest, there was no nursery school. Some army units were visible behind the forest, but it never occurred to Dad that the children could be there. He thought that maybe he had missed them and they were already in Minsk. But when Dad returned, the nursery school was still empty and locked.

Izzy and the whole nursery school, this day, were in the dugouts at the training ground of the military unit in the Red Land. When there was no alarm, they crawled out of the dugouts and played in the sand. Aunt Riva brought food.

The unit commander promised to transport the children to Minsk.

My mother in the distant Kislovodsk managed to buy a ticket to Minsk in a third-class train, but only for the day after tomorrow.

That morning our Grandparents and Aunts Dora, Katya, and Mira said goodbye to Uncle Misha, who had been drafted to Red Army. Then, Grandfather, Dora and Mira went their separate ways. Aunt Dora worked as an accountant in the headquarters of the Belarusian military district. Aunt Mira — in the assembly shop of the Minsk Radio Plant. Aunt Katya was a teacher at a village school near Minsk and, since summer vacations had already begun, she stayed with her grandmother.

All three daughters of Aunt Sonya were not in Minsk either. The eldest — fourteen-year-old Klara — in a pioneer camp in the village of Talke near Pukhovichi, where she was working as an assistant pioneer leader, and the two youngest daughters — five-year-old Maya and three-year-old Alla — were resting with their nursery school in a cottage in the village of Novy Dvor.

On this day, Aunt Sonya and her husband Avsei visited these places. Everything was calm there. Both the pioneer camp and the nursery school were working fine. Sonia and Avsey decided not to take the children: let them stay outside the city until the situation clears up. Who would have thought that they had hours and not days?

And Aunt Riva, my father's sister, took her children — the twelve-year-old son, Felix, and the nine-year-old daughter, Rosa — from the pioneer camp. They were three of them that day — the father of the family, Uncle Zakhar, had gone on a business trip the week before and, by that time, had not yet returned.

Third Day. June 24

This day for me and Felix began boring. Aunt Paradise strictly forbade moving away from home more than ten meters. Tired of yesterday, we got up late and after breakfast we hung aimlessly around the house. It was already the eleventh hour when we heard a distant rumble, like thunder, from somewhere in the south. An old man from a neighboring house said it was a rumble from Minsk. Soon a large black cloud appeared over the place from which the rumble had been heard.

"The Germans are bombing Minsk," said the old man and [he] returned to the house, leaving us in a terrible shock. This could not be, because . . . it should never be. Our

faith collapsed, we resisted, as we could, shouting to each other that the old man was wrong; we did not believe it because we did not want to believe it.

But a few hours later a truck stopped at our house, in the back of which, was my dad, Uncle Fima, Grandfather and Aunts Katya and Mira [who] were sitting on a pile of bags, and Grandmother was in the cab next to the driver. Dad and Uncle Fima told us what had happened in Minsk.

In the morning, Dad called Uncle Fima from school, and they agreed to meet to coordinate their activities. My stay in Ostroshitsky Gorodok somehow connected them. The center of Minsk was chosen as the meeting place — the corner of Sovetskaya and Lenin. The time was 10 o'clock.

They were still talking on this corner when they were distracted by the exclamations of passers-by, stopping and pointing to the sky towards the Government House. Dad and Uncle Fima also began to look there. Many planes were flying in orderly rows in their direction. And as they approached, new rows of aircraft appeared, due to buildings obscuring the horizon. Then an airplane rumble began to be heard, gradually increasing.

"These are bombers," one of those standing determined.

"It seems they are flying in the wrong direction," the other said.

No one on the street understood that these were German planes and that they were flying to bomb Minsk.

When the first planes were very close, Uncle Fima began to count them. He managed to count only about a hundred. The planes suddenly violated their orderly rows and began to decline rapidly, the rumble intensified, a whistle was added to it. And immediately the terrible thunder from the first explosions seemed to shake the air, the earth and the surrounding buildings from all sides. Broken windows rained down. The facade of one of the buildings collapsed on the pavement, breaking wires, scattering debris in all directions, forming a cloud of dust and smoke. People jumped out of a stopped tram. The bombing continued uninterrupted.

"There's a bomb shelter here! All here, in the bomb shelter!" someone shouted.

Everyone on the street, and Dad with Uncle Fima, ran to the voice.

They stayed at the bomb shelter for about three hours. It was completely filled with people. They listened intently to the ongoing bombings, fearing that each next one would be fatal, would fall into the building and would block the exit from the bomb shelter. One of the bombs hit their building, but, fortunately, did not block the exit.

When the bombing stopped and Papa and Uncle Fima left the bomb shelter on Sovetskaya Street, they saw a terrible picture. Almost all the buildings in the center of the city that could be seen were completely or partially destroyed. The street was filled up and partially littered with debris and parts of building structures from the destroyed buildings, it was difficult to go through it.

Even [while] in the bomb shelter, Papa and Uncle Fima had developed a plan for further action, which was strictly followed. First, they went to the house where Uncle Fima lived, in the area of Novo-Moskovskaya Street. Fortunately, it turned out to be intact, and the uncle's house was not injured. A truck with a frightened driver was also in place. Uncle thanked fate and himself for being so prudent with the truck, quickly packed up the most necessary things and loaded them into the back.

Then they drove to our house. They went around to bypass the city's center. Our house was far enough from the center, and Dad hoped that it had not suffered from the bombing. But — no luck. The bomb had hit the school building number 15. Apparently, they had aimed at the neighboring headquarters of the Belarusian military district. When we arrived, the wooden extension to the school, where our apartment was, was burned out. The nursery school opposite was also burning. No one extinguished them. It was impossible to save anything. My father only had in his pockets some money and a certificate of City Council member.

The next point of detour was the house of [our] grandparents. Fortunately, their area had not been affected, and grandparents were at home. Aunt Katya was with them. They were getting ready to leave the city. Grandfather had sewn several bags from pieces of various fabrics, and Grandmother had collected all the most important [things] in them. They hid the larger bags in the cellar that their youngest son Misha had once dug to store potatoes for the winter, and they were going to take smaller bags with the most necessary things with them. They were waiting for Douro and Mir [to return] from work. But Uncle Fima, who was afraid of a second raid, persuaded his parents and Katya not to wait for Dora and Mir, to go immediately to Ostroshitsky Gorodok, and leave them a note with explanations and advice to get there. They threw bags into the truck (Grandfather still managed to put the main part of the sewing machine into his bag) and left the city.

Still on the road, in the back of the truck, Aunt Katya, continuing to worry about her remaining sisters, began to persuade Uncle Fima to allow her, after arriving in Ostroshitsky Gorodok, when all the bags were unloaded, to go with the driver to Minsk again and to pick up Dora and Mira right from work. Uncle Fima initially resisted, he did not want to force the driver to drive the car once again, but everyone else supported Aunt Katya, and he agreed.

Aunt Katya managed to get only her sister Mira released from work. Dora's manager would not let her leave; the headquarters of the Belarusian military district, where Dora worked in the accounting department, worked around the clock. But Katya grabbed the family of their neighbor Weinstein, with his wife and two children: son Boris (a couple of years older than Mira) and daughter Dusey (a couple of years younger). All this took Aunt Katie a lot of time, and everyone began to worry. Especially when, at about five o'clock, we understood from familiar sounds that a new bombing of Minsk had begun. But Aunt Katya was lucky: they managed to leave the city just in front of it. Everyone was happy about her arrival, only Aunt Raya showed obvious dissatisfaction with the appearance of the Weinstein family. She could be understood: 16 people gathered in the house, and everyone had to be fed and put to bed. However, from the experiences of this day, she again became ill and retired to her room. Nutrition issues had to be decided by Grandmother and Lena. Adults spent the rest of the day discussing what to do tomorrow. Some believed that it would be better to wait for some time in the Ostroshitsky Gorodok; others, those who owned cars, suggested driving as far as possible and then waiting there. The decision was never made, postponed in the morning. They only decided that the driver would sleep in a car that was two hundred meters from the edge of the forest so that it would not be stolen. And where the rest would sleep (except for the owners), everyone decided on their own.

On this day, my mother was still in Kislovodsk; Izya — at a military base; Aunt Riva was waiting for her husband; their house on Khlebnaya Street had not been damaged by the bombing.

Fourth Day. JUNE 25

The fourth day began very early. It was still dark when we were awakened by knocks on the door and the screams of the driver calling Uncle Fima. It turned out that a group of "Red Army" had driven him out of the truck and was going to pick up the car. Uncle hurried to them along with the driver, Aunt Katya ran after them. At first, loud voices were heard, and then the sounds of a truck driving off. Our delegation returned in shock — not so much from the loss of the car, but from the fact that the "Red Army", although they were in the Red Army uniform, spoke German among themselves and were definitely paratroopers. This observation stopped the discussion: without a doubt, we must leave, and immediately. No one objected.

Uncle Fima went to his work and returned with a large, black horse, pulling a rather big cart. But this cart was, nevertheless, smaller than the truck body, and all the bags brought in twice, plus those that were collected in the country, clearly did not fit in it. It became clear that we needed to review the contents and number of bags. Aunt Raya, as

the mistress of the house and cart, defended her belongings. Grandmother's bags suffered more, but Grandfather still managed to defend the sewing machine. The Weinstein bags, of course, suffered the most. Only my dad and I were calm: Dad had nothing, and my things that my grandmother and I had brought on Saturday were placed in a small bundle.

While the men were packing bags in a cart, the women prepared breakfast and food on the road. A slight delay before departure was due to Remka. It turned out that Aunt Raya did not want to take him with her. She said that Rema was still too small and weak to travel, it was not known where and how much, and, therefore, she agreed with the housekeeper Lena, and she agreed to go with Rema to the village where she had been born and to stay there until the boy's parents returned. Grandparents tried to persuade Paradise to take the child with them, proving that, at such a time, it is impossible to separate the family, and everyone glanced at Uncle Fima. But he was silent, and Aunt Raya acted in her own way. However, at that moment, everyone believed that we were leaving for a few weeks, in extreme cases, months.

When we left Ostroshitsky Gorodok, it was already light. Nobody imagined the final goal of our route. But, instinctively, everyone wanted to be away from Minsk. The Moscow highway was about 16 kilometers from the Ostroshitsky Gorodok, and the shortest path to it was along the Old-Vilenskaya road. The order of movement of our group was established from the very beginning and was maintained throughout the day. The procession was led, in turn, by my dad and Uncle Fima, holding our horse under the bridle. At the top of the mountain of bags in a cart sat Aunt Paradise, who declared herself sick. At the end of the cart, legs dangling, sat Weinstein's wife, who was really sick and had difficulty moving. The rest, including grandparents, followed the cart. Sometimes only grandparents would sit next to Weinstein's wife for a few minutes.

We walked along the Old-Vilenskaya road almost alone, but there were a lot of people on the Moscow highway: single people, couples, families, groups. For some part of the way we walked along with the artists of the Moscow Art Theater and the Moscow Circus. They carried everything: backpacks, bags, suitcases. Small children were carried in strollers, carried on arms or on shoulders. The more intelligent ones pushed laden bicycles or prams, pulled garden carts. Our group could be envied; we carried nothing in our hands.

The Minsk-Moscow railroad runs parallel to the Moscow highway, but people who visited the intermediate stations between Minsk and Borisov said that there was no traffic on it, since the Minsk station had been completely destroyed. There was still hope that the station in Borisov could still be used, and this clarified our goal today — to reach Borisov.

The length of the Moscow highway from the Staro-Vilenskaya road to Borisov is approximately 50 kilometers. The weather remained excellent that day. But, when the sun rose higher, it became hot and hard to go. We began to stop for rest — the farther, the

more often — in places where there was a shadow and grass for the horse. At the stops Felix and I explored the surroundings in search of something interesting. Many could not stand the difficulties of the way and got rid of part of the luggage. Abandoned suitcases and bags lay along the highway. I remembered a suitcase that contained a wealth of wealth: large sets of colored pencils, paints and paper. I put only a few pencils in my pocket — Dad called us; we need to move on.

The heat intensified. Taken food supplies and especially drinking quickly ran out. But the worst was yet to come. In the afternoon German fighter planes appeared. They flew low over the highway, firing machine guns at those who were walking. There were cries of the wounded and, all those around, including us, threw themselves under the roadside trees. On the road there were dead, wounded and abandoned things. A young woman was killed right next to us. She was lying on the pavement, and her little daughter was sitting nearby and asked her mother: "Get up, get up." Aunt Katya took the girl in her arms, and then she and Mira took her in turn, until they passed her to the soldiers sitting in the truck, which was driving east. Until the end of the day, German fighter jets appeared several more times, but people were already watching the sky and, noticing a jet, were making signals "Airplane!", and there were fewer casualties. But the horror of waiting for a raid, the fear of not having time to run to some shelter — a ditch, a tree, a bush, a hole, something — all this exhausted [us] more than the need to go and go. And every time people asked with anger: "Where are our planes?"

When we arrived in Borisov, it was already dark. The train station was working. The freight train stood on the first path, and all who came climbed into the cars through the only wide-open doors without steps. The men threw bags into one of the wagons and helped the women climb into it. Actors of the Artistic Drama Theatre and the City Circus also tried to get on the same train. Uncle Fima agreed with a local resident: he left him a horse and a cart and received a receipt in return for their return upon request, as well as a loaf of black bread and a broken kettle for water. With this, we drove further east.

On the same day, my mother finally left Kislovodsk. But the train moved very slowly and often stood for a long time. The reason was the military trains going west and various types of trains with evacuated and picked up refugees, rushing to the east. By the end of the day, my mother realized that, at this speed, she would not get to Minsk either tomorrow or the day after tomorrow.

Izzy's nursery school was still at the military training ground. They were fed, but the commander of the military unit did not dare to take them to the destroyed Minsk or maybe there were no free cars.

Aunt Sonya and her husband Avsey decided to take their children home from the summer camps, but in the New Yard, where their younger daughters Maya and Alla were

with the nursery school, and in Talca, where their eldest daughter Klara worked in the pioneer camp, there was nobody and no one could tell them where the children had gone. Having spent almost the whole day searching, Sonya and Avsey returned to Minsk (their house on Nemige Street had not been injured from the bombing). Their children had not come home.

Aunt Dora continued to work at the headquarters of the Belarusian military district; her immediate boss did not let her go. She spent the night alone in a room on Ambulatory Street, if she was allowed to leave work (the house also survived the second bombing).

Aunt Riva, with two children, was waiting for her husband; she was afraid to stay in Minsk, but was even more afraid to leave alone, without her husband.

In Mogilev, Uncle Benjamin (who worked there as a civil engineer), learning about the bombing of Minsk, put his wife Sarah, son Garik (3. 5 years old) and daughter Nelya (1 year old) on a train and he, himself, went to the military enlistment office. Uncle Benjamin fought the whole war and ended it as a major of the Polish army.

Fifth Day. June 26

We slept the night on bags. Tired of the long road and the excitement of yesterday, I slept like a murdered man. So said Dad. He, himself, slept little — he was tormented by doubts, he reproached himself for not being able to find Izyu, for not reaching his sister and persuading her to leave with us without waiting for her husband.

When I woke up, our train was standing, the door was wide open, and Dad and Uncle Fima were looking out of it. I also looked at the door, and then, climbing onto the bags, in a small window high on the wall of the car, opposite the door. Freight trains also stood on both sides of the adjacent tracks. Between the trains were low, paved platforms.

“This is Orsha,” someone from the platform answered my father’s question. “There are a lot of railways, and they are all occupied by trains. The station is nearby, on the left, and opposite the field and beyond it is a forest.”

Uncle Fima said that he was going to the station and would draw water into the kettle. Grandmother asked him to look for some food, but not to be absent for a long time — and suddenly the train would start.

And then, suddenly, the roar of low-flying aircraft and the crack of machine guns, familiar to everyone from yesterday, arose. And, in addition to them — the whistle of falling bombs and the roar of explosions. Someone shouted: “On the wagons!”, And everyone quickly climbed into them, helping each other, but could not close the door. Most people lay on the floor and covered their heads with their hands. Grandmother tried to look out on

the platform, call Uncle Fima, but Grandfather dragged her from the door. My dad pushed me between the bags and covered me on top. Explosions of bombs and machine-gun fire came in waves. Screams and groans were heard from all sides. The car was shaken when the bomb fell close. At some point, the explosion happened very close, the car shook especially hard, and, after a short time, it smelled of smoke.

“Why are you sitting in the carriage!? The car next door is on fire! Save yourself! Run to the forest!”

It was the voice of Uncle Fima. He jumped into the carriage and began to throw away [out] the bags. The car was quickly empty. Uncle Fima was the last to jump to the ground, after he threw away our last bag.

Dad grabbed my hand and dragged me under the train car on the next track. There we waited for the next wave of bombing and got under the train car on the next path, and there, too, we sat for quite some time. And now, sitting under one of these cars, I said the words that were then long remembered in our family: “When will they finish shooting? Enough! Why don't they make peace?”

Having jumped out from under the last carriage to the field, we managed to run some part of it, until the next wave of bombing began. Dad pushed me to the ground and lay down beside me. The field turned out to be seeded with some kind of cereal that had already grown high, and it seemed to me that we were not visible from the planes. And they, going on [with] the bombing, flew just above us. Lying on my back and looking at the planes, I quietly fell asleep. About this, then they reminded me for a long time and laughed.

When Dad woke me up, German planes were no longer visible. The sun was high and it was hot. I wanted to drink and eat. We went to the forest. It was much cooler there, and we perked up. Dad said that the first thing to do was to find relatives. There were many people in the forest, sitting in groups under almost every tree. We walked along and across, and in circles — and all for nothing. Once we reached the opposite edge of the forest, but were stopped by an armed Red Army man who said that it was dangerous to go further because you could run into German paratroopers. Having the experience of the Ostroshitsky Gorodok, we believed him. When we noticed that we were passing by one and the same group of people a second time, Dad began to scream, to call Uncle Fima. So we walked, calling out “Fima! Fima!”, until some man leaned out from behind a tree and barked: “Quiet! What the hell Fima! I will just hit you to calm you down at once!” And we calmed down.

But just after that, we were lucky. Some woman from the group we were passing by suddenly stopped us: “It seems to me that you are the people whom two young women have been looking for recently”. We immediately realized that it could be Katya and Mira.

Answers to Dad's questions about their appearance confirmed this. Dad decided to go in the same direction where they had gone. He said that there was a high probability of finding Grandparents, since Katya and Mira should periodically have returned to them in order to check if we, ourselves, had found them. And so it happened: we found them literally a couple of hundred meters away. Grandparents and our entire company. While we were drinking water and even chewing something, we were told the latest news brought by Uncle Fima from the railway station. There they had already begun to pull away freight trains damaged by the bombing and were promising to take a special train by the evening, to evacuate all the refugees gathered in the forest. The food we were given was scarce and I remained hungry. But Felix and I were still able to run through the forest in the vain hope of finding something interesting.

And in the evening, a rumor really spread through the forest that the train for refugees was on a free path. Everyone rushed to the station. The train turned out to be composed of suburban electric cars, which was, of course, much better than the freight train. When we approached it, the first cars were already fully occupied, and we went along the train in search of empty seats. We stopped at each car, and Katya and Mira climbed into it to check if there were any empty seats. In one of the cars, they found one free compartment, formed by two hard seats for three people each and a small wall table between them. One such compartment was not enough for us. Leaving [them], just in case Katya with Mira and Paradise, who said that she was very tired and could not go further, to guard this compartment, we went on to search further. In another carriage there were two empty seats, the Weinsteins settled on them.

In the forest, Grandmother and Uncle Fima, from time to time, raised the question of the fate of their bags, agreeing each time that they were most likely lost forever. Uncle Fima even tried to get to the place where they had been left, but they did not let him in. The place of the bombing had been cordoned off under the pretext that there could be unexploded bombs. And so, when the search for empty seats on the train was almost completed, my grandmother suddenly saw two very familiar bags, peacefully lying side-by-side on the platform.

"These are our bags!" she screamed and rushed to them. Grandmother easily recognized them, since the last ones sewn were from pieces of fabric of different colors and were full of numerous patches. Uncle Fima also began to look around the sides of the bags, but there were no others. Dora found her stuff in one of the bags, and in the other, the main part from her grandfather's sewing machine. When Uncle Fima, lifting this bag, said that it was too heavy and that it would be better to throw this piece of iron out, Grandfather was indignant: "You will still see how this piece of iron is useful to us!" (This "piece of iron" really saved us in the hungry winter of 1941-1942.)

Since we did not find additional free places, we had to be accommodated in one compartment, which Katya and Mira had saved. The problem was that there were only six seats, and there were nine of us. Given that two were children who could be put on their knees, and that four thin people (such as my grandmother, my dad, Katya and Mira) could be put on a bench for three normal people, you could somehow sit and even sleep. But Aunt Raya, from the very beginning, left with Katya and Mira in this compartment, announced that she was so tired in these two days that she had to lie down, and to lay down on one of the seats, taking it completely. And when we returned, she said that she was completely ill and could not get up. After two seats in the second seat had been allocated for grandparents, one was left — for four adults who could use it in turn. Felix and I were easier: he sat down at his mother's feet, and I, the youngest, was fourth in the opposite seat or on someone's lap there.

Our train departed when it was already completely dark. Everyone was hungry, but, all evening, no one left the car in search of food, fearing that the train might move at any moment. Curious people already had learned from the train crew and had shared within all the train cars that the train was scheduled to transport the refugees, that the train crew was assigned to take us directly to the destination which had not yet been indicated. But when we would reach it, everyone would be registered and would stay there, until we would have a chance to return home.

"That means now we have become legal refugees," my dad said.

On the same day, my mother's train from Kislovodsk continued to move north, but, because of the long and increasing frequency of stops, it had traveled less than yesterday.

Izzy's nursery school was still at the military base in the Red tract.

Aunt Sonya, at the end of the day, was finally able to hand over the keys to the warehouse [that] she was in charge of, and, together with her husband, Avsey, (the photo shop in which he worked, near the Rodina movie theater opposite the central square, had been destroyed during the bombing on June 24) would go in search of their children the next day. Their children had not appeared in the city.

Aunt Dora continued to work. Aunt Riva continued to wait for her husband.

Sixth Day. June 27th

Having left Orsha, our train headed east towards Moscow and everyone hoped that the capital would become our destination. It was believed that this was good; the Germans would never reach there; our government would never allow enemies to enter Moscow!

The train moved slowly, stopping at each station and, between them, passing military trains to the west and trains with evacuated equipment and workers of these plants to the east.

When the train stopped, passengers immediately jumped out of the wagons to get at least some food and water.

We were able to pass through Smolensk safely, but, in Vyazma again came under German air raids. As soon as the sounds of air raid rang out, all the passengers of our car habitually would run up in search of shelter. Only my aunts Katya and Mira went on strike this time and decided to stay in the carriage. Tired of a sleepless night and the lack of a permanent seat, they occupied both vacated seats in our compartment. Lying on them and trying to distract themselves from the sounds of the air raid, they loudly repeated the same spell: "You cannot die twice, but everybody dies once."

The final destination we reached that day was Mozhaysk, the last city in front of Moscow. We arrived there when it was already completely dark. Before the war, the distance from Minsk to Mozhaysk could be covered in six hours, but we had spent twenty-four. But, in Mozhaysk [we were] stuck all night. But, here, we managed to get hold of food and to use real toilets.

On the same day, my mother's train stood more than it moved. She first received reliable information about the bombing of Minsk from refugees from oncoming trains.

No changes in Izya life. There were raids by German aircraft. Children continued to live at the training ground and sleep in dugouts; good, the weather remained good. There were no problems with food. Riva regularly visited the unit commander. He still promised to help.

Aunt Sonya and Uncle Avsey again went to the New Yard neighborhood in the morning to look for their youngest daughters, Maya and Alla. They spent almost the whole day in the New Yard, and to no avail. No traces of the disappeared nursery school were found. Then they went to Talca to look for their older daughter, Clara. . Also no trace of the pioneer camp. They did not return to the city. They decided to continue the search tomorrow. Meanwhile, the pioneer camp, with Clara, that day had been put on a train with wounded Red Army soldiers. In Mogilev, the train fell under the bombing of German aircraft. Children jumped out of the cars and hid in the forest. When they returned, out of 350 there were only 85, including Clara. They were put on another train. And the nursery school, in which Maya and Alla were, returned to Minsk that day.

Aunt Dora — her boss finally allowed her to stop work. (Everything that happened to her after this day, she told me when she was already old.) She decided to go to her parents and sisters, who, she thought, were in Ostroshitsky Gorodok. Buses did not go there, and

Dora went on foot. A pregnant neighbor and her five-year-old daughter went with Dora. When they reached the Ostroshitsky Gorodok in the evening, we had left it two days before. The neighbor suffered very much after the long walk and Dora took her to a medical center. There, Dora found out in which house the director of the only local industrial enterprise was renting a summer house. Dora found only the young nephew Remka and the housekeeper, Lena. Dora was lucky that she found them: one night later, and they would have [already] gone to Lenin's village, and Dora would not have known what to do. Now she knew that her brother, along with her parents and sisters, had gone towards Borisov along the Moscow highway, and realized that she should follow them. She stayed overnight in this house with Lena and Remka.

Aunt Riva was still waiting for her husband, and in vain. The train in which he was returning from a business trip to Minsk was no longer allowed.

In Bobruisk, Uncle Boris (husband of Bella's mother's sister, who worked for the local newspaper), when the Germans approached Bobruisk, put Aunt Bella, their son Marik (5. 5 years old) and two daughters, Maya (4 years old) and Ada (2. 5 years) on a train and he went to the draft board. (In the war, Uncle Boris was a war correspondent, wounded, lost his foot.)

Seventh Day. June 28

In the morning, our train still stood in Mozhaisk. The train crew and the station manager only shrugged their questions. The authorities, somewhere in Moscow, were deciding something. Refugees crowded around their wagons, fearing to leave and languishing for lack of news. Finally, the first alarming message came: a locomotive had been disconnected from our train. Then the second: Moscow was not accepting, had stopped letting in, and was passing-through trains with refugees;. Moscow was already overcrowded with refugees. Once again, life continued in the train-car, and it was not known how long we needed to wait. Last hopes were dispelled when the locomotive began to attach to the other end of the train. At about noon, our train went back — west, to meet the advancing German troops.

It was clear that, at some point, the train would have to turn, in order to go around Moscow, and head east again. In the car, geography experts were found, who identified the points of travel where the train could make a turn. There were only two of them: Vyazma (and further to Kaluga and Tula) and Smolensk (and further to Bryansk and Oryol). The next point would have been Orsha, but no one wanted to remember about it. Most expected that the train would turn south (there nature is better) in Vyazma.

The train moved as slowly as yesterday. Before Vyazma, everyone held their breath and clung to the windows, but the train drove through the station without even stopping. They began to worry. It was already known that the Germans had captured Minsk. The next big city along the route was Smolensk. When we approached it, it was already dark. Then the train slowed down and stopped. And, suddenly, an air raid siren howled. After that, reflections blazed in the windows; the first explosions thundered. It went on and on. But, despite the raid, everyone remained in the car. They preferred the risk of being in the car during an air raid to the risk of falling behind the train at night in the front-line city. The widow seats were occupied by the most fearless people. And indeed, the train soon continued to move. But where? Was it possible it was fleeing the air raid but taking a wrong direction? Periodically, someone would cry out: "It seems we are turning!", And then everyone would raise their heads and look at him with hope. But the train did not turn and did not slow down before turning. It seemed to even be accelerating. Finally, those who were looking out the windows shouted amicably: "We are turning!", And everyone said "Hurray!" and clapped their hands.

In Mozhaik, when it became clear that the train would not go to Moscow, Muscovites and those who had relatives or friends in the capital, plus residents of the Moscow Region and cities where it is easiest to get from Moscow, got off the train; besides, from Mozhaik to the capital there were electric trains. So many got off our wagon that, now, there was enough seating for everyone. So it was no longer necessary to sit (or sleep while sitting) in turn.

On the same day, my mother's train finally stopped, when it became known about the surrender of Minsk to the Germans. Mom had no choice but to join the stream of refugees and to find a place in one of the refugee trains going east, in the hope that her family was alive and had been able to leave Minsk.

In the Red Tract, where the nursery school was still at the military base, the head of the military unit kept his promise. On this day, in the early morning, loading the children on a military truck, he took them, along with his retreating unit, to Mogilev. There, the head of the nursery school, Aunt Riva, managed to find a place for the children in one of the cars for the refugee train.

Having learned that Minsk had been captured by the Germans, Aunt Sonya and Uncle Avsey stopped further searches for their daughters and decided to go east from Belarus, hoping that their girls, together with the nursery school and the pioneer camp, had already been sent there in an organized manner. They reached the town of Bykhov and managed to catch a train there.

Aunt Dora and Lena, with Remka, left Ostroshitsky Gorodok in the early morning. Lena, with Remka, went to her village. (Lena lived there [for] the whole war, passing off

Remka for her son, and, although many villagers guessed who he really was, no one gave her to the police. After the liberation of Belarus, Uncle Fima took both of them to his family. When Remka married, Lena moved in with his family, where she lived until her death. Remka also sent documents to Israel to recognize her as the "Righteous Among the Nations of the World.")

And Dora went east. But not along the Moscow highway, as she was afraid that the Germans might appear there primarily, but along parallel, secondary roads. A small group of other refugees caught up with her along the way, and she walked with them. They decided not to go to Borisov, but to go to Orsha.

On this day, Uncle Misha was in the Minsk region in one of the detachments of the Red Army, randomly retreating. (A friend who had fought with him in the same unit told Mira after the war. He had seen him for the last time that day. Uncle Misha did not return from the war. The official response to the request was: "Missing.")

Aunt Riva stayed in Minsk with her children in a house that soon ended up inside the ghetto.

Five Days On The Train For Refugees.

June 29 - July 3

Having escaped from Smolensk, our train first headed southeast to Bryansk, where it turned and, following almost strictly east through Oryol, Lipetsk and Tambov, reached Penza, where it turned again and, moving approximately northeast through Saransk, reached Alaty, which turned out to be our final destination.

These five days of our journey I remembered worse than the first seven days. Maybe because they were less eventful. These days there were no raids by enemy aircraft, no whistles and bombings, no machine chirping, no dead or wounded. And there was already an established routine of road life in them, with the same concerns: catching food at the stops, getting boiling water, going to the toilet, and getting news from the fronts. If the station had a radio - listen to it. The battle for Smolensk began these days. If there was another train with refugees nearby, look for acquaintances from Minsk. Between stops outside the window, all days were the landscape of central Russia: fields, coppices, villages, herds of cows. Even the stations that had been built in the main cities of the regions (former provinces) before the revolution looked the same and therefore were not remembered.

Felix and I got two seats near the window and sat on the stretches there, looking out the window and making grandiose plans to defeat the Nazis. At stops, we jumped out of the car earlier than anyone else in order to have time, among other things, to run and

stretch our legs. The weather pampered us: it was sunny, but not hot. If the stop was in the middle of the field planted with something edible, this was considered a great success. You could fill your pockets and wrap [it] in your cloth. Aunts Katya and Mira did not lag behind us — just like youngsters.

But there were some oddities. At one of the stops, Katya and Mira got two cans of black molasses somewhere and put them under the table. But, unfortunately for the aunts, at night they arranged for themselves a place to sleep on the floor between the seats. At night, the cans overturned, and the molasses fell on our aunts' hair. So they passed with glued hair, until there was an opportunity to wash their hair. This event, too, was then long remembered.

In the early days, residents of the places we traveled did not pay any attention to us, but as we moved east and dispersed refugee trains across the country, local residents began to take an ever-greater part in our destiny. Individual peasants and collective farms brought various products to the trains that stopped and the latter did it for free. Toward the end of our journey, some collective farm specially prepared lunch for our train. Not far from the station, right on the meadow, they put together and set up long tables and benches. Two boilers with borsch and porridge, sliced bread, a stack of plates and a pile of spoons were placed on each table — self-service. All passengers were invited to dinner for free. Our train stopped on the way and arrived at this station when it was already getting dark. There were not enough tables for everyone at the same time, so dinner ended in the dark, under the light of kerosene lamps.

I also remembered this dinner because a small incident happened there. In the dark, I walked away from the table where our whole company was sitting, into the bushes of my own need and, returning, went out to another table. Realizing that I was mistaken, I, still calmly, went around the neighboring tables, but there were none of ours there either. Panicked, I decided that they probably had returned to the car without noticing my absence. I ran to the train, which was black against the dark sky. But, on the way, I thought that my dad could not have left without calling me and I turned back to the tables. And again returning to the tables, I automatically went the same way as we all originally had walked from the train, looking for a free table. And when I found this table, I saw Dad at it, and then everyone else. They were talking animatedly, my place was not taken, and I, assuming an independent appearance, took it to continue the meal. No one paid attention to me, and my absence took no more than a dozen minutes, but the horror that gripped me over these minutes remained with me for life.

But perhaps the main event of these days was the news about my little brother. I don't remember at what stop (Izya believes that [it was] in Morshansk), Dad met a friend from Minsk who had been on a nearby refugee train. From the conversation, it turned out that he had met Zakhar Novodvoretz (the husband of Aunt Riva's father's sister), and he

told him [Dad] that he had not been able to get into Minsk and did not know if his family had escaped or had remained, but remembered that he had seen the Minsk nursery school in one of refugee trains, which was heading to the city of Kazan, and, in this nursery school — his nephew. Since Uncle Zakhar had only two nephews, Izya and I, this meant that he had seen Izya. The message was like a balm for everyone, and especially for Dad, who felt guilty that he could not find Izyu. And only the bitterness, because his sister and nephews remained, most likely in Minsk, overshadowed his joy.

We arrived in the city of Alatyr on July 3, the day when Stalin made a radio speech with his famous speech: "Comrades, citizens, brothers and sisters! . . ."

On the same day, mother also arrived at her final destination, the city of Borisoglebsk, located halfway between Voronezh and Saratov.

Izzy's nursery school really got to Kazan. On the road, not far from Mogilev, their composition was bombed.

Aunt Sonya and Uncle Avsey were taken to the city of Namangan in Uzbekistan. Their eldest daughter, Klara, was probably headed farthest — to the Siberian city of Novokuznetsk. During this journey, she, like the other refugees of her train, wrote on the wall above the taps with boiling water, her name, her parents' names and the name of the destination of the train.

And, in Minsk, Sonya's younger daughters, Maya and Alla, were taken from their nursery school by the sister of our grandmother, Haya-Tsypa, who also had remained in the city. (The whole family of Hai-Tsypa, including the daughters of Aunt Sonya, died in 1942 during the shooting of the Minsk ghetto, with the exception of the daughter of Khaiy-Tsypa Kreina, who was able to escape from the ghetto and join the partisan detachment, participated in military operations, was wounded and transferred to "Big land" to the city of Tashkent. After the war, Kreina came to Minsk.)

The family of Uncle Benjamin (Aunt Sarah and the children Garik and Nelya) also came to Uzbekistan, to Ferghana.

Aunt Bella, with her children Marik, Maya and Ada, found themselves in the village of Novo-Burasse near the city of Engels on the Volga River — in the German Autonomous Region.

The most difficult thing was for Aunt Dora. On foot, limping, she reached the city of Orsha only by June 30th. She couldn't get on the train and, somehow, got to Mogilev. She was lucky; at the station there was a military train with the wounded, which was heading to Kaluga. She asked for this train. All the wounded were sent to the hospital, and Aunt Dora with them. She was treated on a par with the wounded for a couple of days, but, then, they figured out who she was and sent [her] out of the hospital. But she already felt much

better and, in addition, one of the nurses who was leaving for the front gave her her daily meal. With this meal, Aunt Dora joined one of the refugee trains, which brought her to the city Chkalov (Orenburg).

Appointment Point — Alatyr.

July 3 - Aug 13

In Alatyr, a small town on the southern outskirts of the Chuvash Autonomous Republic, we arrived in the afternoon, on a fine day. We turned out to be the first organized refugees in this city, and, possibly, in the republic. Therefore, the authorities met us as polar explorers, wintering on an ice floe at the North Pole: solemnly, with speeches, music and flowers. Hungry and tired refugees did not expect anything like this, were surprised and a little embarrassed. Then we were taken in a column to the city center, to the school, which was given for our residence. The school was the only place where so many people could be accommodated. School desks had been pulled out of the classrooms and, instead of them, the classrooms were densely packed with narrow iron soldiers' beds, covered with soldiers' blankets, as in the barracks. We were registered, then assigned into rooms, where we could leave our stuff. Then we were invited to lunch in the school gym, turned into a dining room. The food was probably delivered from a restaurant or a good dining room. In the following days, it was much worse, probably from the kitchen of the local garrison. Whoever had money could eat in a restaurant, but we had no options. On the first day, after a hearty and tasty dinner, we went to the bathhouse and went to bed in a normal bed. Thus began our life in a refugee camp.

In Alatyr, only the radio reminded [us] of war. During the news broadcast, refugees usually would gather in the central square, under a speaker mounted on a pillar, to listen to Levitan's voice. The main event was the battle of Smolensk. After days with reports about many defeated cities, the long battle of Smolensk inspired hope that a turning point had come in the war, after which the Red Army would expel the Germans from our land and we could return home.

Felix and I explored a new city. Its central part was built up with one- and two-story brick houses; the rest of the streets were built up with wooden, one-story houses. Of interest to us were the remains of an ancient fortress built by Ivan the Terrible when he conquered Kazan, the Sura River, wide enough for small ships and flowing into the main river of Russia — the Volga, and a park with a summer barrack-type cinema, where we went to watch a movie. I remember the movie *Shchors*. The historical and revolutionary film about the legendary commander of the Civil War, Nikolai Shchors, so inspired us that we returned to school in absolute confidence in our victory near Smolensk.

However, a few days later, the Germans captured Smolensk and the news announced that our troops had left cities that were close to Moscow. We realized that our return home would be delayed for a long time, that we had to, somehow, arrange a life in the evacuation. The authorities of the city understood the same thing. They liquidated a refugee camp at school and resettled us in private homes. At the same time, large families were divided. My dad and I settled with my grandparents and aunts in one of the rooms of a wooden house near the railway station and the main post office. The family of Uncle Fima and the Weinstein family were settled separately. However, everything was close in Alaty.

The owner of our house was a lonely old man, a bit mentally inadequate, and with a very loud voice. The only furniture in the room was a table. On it lay a loaf of black bread, which the city allocated, for free, daily, to our united family of six people. The free meals we had been fed at school stopped, and we were forced to live on our own funds, which were very limited. The first time I felt what hungry days were. I remember how I looked with greedy eyes at this loaf of bread, which gradually decreased during the day, and my grandmother, who assumed the role of manager of the bread, slowly cut me an extra slice [above] the norm, and I slowly chewed it . . .

Having finished with the resettlement of refugees, the city authorities began to look for work for them. This process took several weeks; we divided our free time between the railway station and the post office; we tried to find our relatives, whom the war had scattered throughout the country. There were two possibilities for this. The first was based on the newly organized Refugee Documentation Center, located in the city of Bugulma. All refugees had to send to this Center information about themselves and related relatives, including the address of their current stay, and could also attach information about those who were absent, asking for their addresses, if they already existed. Dad, of course, did all this as soon as information about the Center appeared. He indicated the address: Alaty, the main post office, on demand, and, after that, we went to the post office every day. It was a reliable method, but very lengthy, since the Center was immediately inundated with a huge amount of information, which, moreover, was continuously updated due to the movements of refugees, and everything was done manually, and the staff of the Center was small. (Through the Center, we found out the addresses of the other aunts: Sonya, Dora, Bella and Sarah — the wife of Uncle Benjamin, but this happened much later, when we left Alaty.)

Therefore, we used another opportunity. Every day we would come to the railway station, holding in our hands copies of the same lists as those sent to the Center. Daily, several refugee trains stopped at Alaty station. In addition, there were also refugees on scheduled trains, who, for various reasons, had changed their destination. We were looking for refugees from Minsk. If you were very lucky and found a friend – [you and the friend]

exchanged lists. So, Uncle Fima met with his workmate, who, together with his young wife, was heading south. They talked, and Uncle Fima gave them his list.

If you were very, very lucky, you could meet a friend who had met and had spoken with the person you were looking for. So, my dad, on the way to Alaty, met a man who had talked with Uncle Zakhar, who had seen Izya and even had found out where he was being taken. Also, through a chain of acquaintances, the first of whom had read the message of my cousin Clara, Aunt Sonya found out where her daughter was. Uncle Avsey urgently left for Novokuznetsk, took Klara and, returning to Namangan, went to the draft board. (Uncle Avsey was a front-line reconnaissance man in the war, was seriously wounded and returned from the war without one leg.)

My friends and I were no longer lucky.

In the city of Borisoglebsk, my mother found work at a poultry farm — plucking chickens, and in her free time — just like us, she went to the railway station for the same purpose. And then, one day, she saw a woman on the platform, [who looked] very similar to her younger sister, Mira. She was walking with some man. With a cry of “Mira, Mira!” my mother ran after them. . Having caught up, to her great disappointment, she saw that this was not her sister. But, talking to them, she found out that they knew her brother Fima, and, moreover, [that] they had only recently seen him. They had a list with all the names that he had given them. . . And although, for some reason, Uncle Fima had missed my father and me on this list, my mother did not believe her eyes: there were her parents, brother and sisters. Mom kissed the young woman and her companion, immediately sent a telegram to Alaty and, picking up her suitcase, left Borisoglebsk, squeezing herself into the next train with refugees heading north towards Alaty.

We continued our daily trips to the station and the post office. I usually went with Dad. Waited for news from Mom. We knew that she was not in Kislovodsk. The sanatorium replied to Dad's request that she had left on June 25th. And now she could be anywhere in country. . . We hoped, at least, for news from someone, who, having seen our lists, would remember that he had met her at some station, and would inform [us]. And maybe would tell her address. But there was no news. And we all went. The girl in the window at the post office already knew us all well. When she would see us, she would immediately say: “There is nothing for you.”

Dad got an appointment to work as a school principal in the village of Atrati, 10 kilometers north of Alaty, and while paperwork dragged on, we continued to come to the post office. And, one day we were finally lucky. That day, Dad and I were alone. As soon as the girl in the window saw us, she smiled and called:

“I have a telegram for you.” she said “Really, but I can't give it to you, because it is in the name of Yefim Rozov, but you can read it. ”

When Dad read: "I'm urgently leaving for Alaty. Beckoning," he did not immediately believe what was written. It really was hard to believe. This was a miracle! To celebrate, I hopped around Dad; he was also ready to dance. We ran home to please the rest. And then I went to Uncle Fima's house, and together with him and Felix, we went to the post office, took the telegram and brought it to our house so that everyone could read it. A joint dinner was arranged that day (without Aunt Rai, who was feeling sick). At this dinner, for the following days, they set up a duty at the station to meet Mom.

And how happy we all were when we finally met. But one of my mother's first questions was: "Where is Izya?" She was surprised to learn that, knowing the location of his alleged location, we had made no attempt to pick him up. But, after Dad explained that he had wanted to pick him up after moving to a permanent place of work, she decided: "Well, the next day after moving, I will go to Kazan".

She really left right after the move, with a stop four kilometers from Atrati. She spent several days in Kazan, jostling in lines at various organizations and spending the night at the train station, and eventually found Izya in one of the suburbs where children from the Minsk nursery school were being housed in the building of a local orphanage. Seeing his mother, Izya grabbed her skirt and did not let go until they got out of there. We received a telegram: "We are leaving by train to Saransk, meet me." And again, my father and I went to the station for a couple of days in a row, to meet the Kazan-Saransk train. When we were [with] them, Izya had the same bag with his stuff and the same blanket with which he had left the Red Tract.

"Thank God one family has already gathered," my grandmother said. "God willing, and the rest will also gather."

By this time, none of our family was left in Alaty. City officials searched for refugees in alphabetical order.

The first job was received by old Weinstein. He worked as a salesperson at the Alaty store, so they did not have to leave the city. His son, Boris, was drafted into the army.

Uncle Fima got the second job. He was sent as a chief engineer to a peat-mining enterprise in the village of Shutov, six kilometers from the city of Shumerlya, eighty kilometers north of Alaty.

Aunt Katya got the third job: as a school teacher in the village of Altysheva — approximately in the middle, between Alaty and our Atraty. Aunt Katya agreed that Aunt Mira would be able to work as a pioneer leader in this school. They wanted to stay in Alaty before the start of the school year, but, after the semi-insane owner of their room tried to break in through the window at night, and they had to run away and sleep the night in the Weinstains, they left Alaty the next day.

A year later, Aunt Katya, and another six months later, Mira voluntarily joined the army. Aunt Mira became a signalman, but was soon injured and returned. Aunt Katya was a nurse throughout the war, participated in the crossing of the Dnieper and ended the war in Hungary.

Dad got the last job, and we were the last to leave. Grandparents decided to go with us, they did not get along with their sister-in-law Raya. We all moved to Atrat on August 13, just on my birthday. It was the first, but not the last time, when we moved somewhere exactly on my birthday. This did not happen intentionally, but for some reason quite regularly.

March, 2011.