

# Family who went through the war...

Memories of memories



There are no uninteresting people in the world.  
Their fates are like the stories of planets.  
Everyone is a special, different,  
and there are no planets like them.

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When we were little kids, we enjoyed listening to our parents' stories. Then our lives and our deeds pushed old stories aside. Time has passed. Much has been erased in memory: Dates, names, geography. Today, as I try to restore their stories in memory, I'm scolding myself: Why not remember the details! Why didn't I write it down? And to ask, to clarify, alas, no one now. Parents were modest, unobtrusive, and did not like to repeat the same story dozens of times. Although, what was an interesting, amazing and even heroic, life they have passed. It took 75 years after the Victory, but for the people of their generation, still, life is viewed through a three-sided prism: BEFORE, IN TIME and AFTER WAR.

## **Before the war**

Our father, Boris Mirvis, lived in Moldavanka and was a member of one of the first pioneer units of the city of Odessa at some factory. He was even a delegate to the First All-Soviet Union Pioneer Congress in 1929. I vaguely remember his stories about the convention, and the songs they sang:

“Hello cute Karthoshka -thoshka - thoshka

Pioneers ideal,

He doesn't know the pleasures,  
if kartoshka (potatoes) didn't eat...”

But I remember well the pioneer ties he was presented with in speeches to the pioneer squads, and the pioneers of various schools and students at History faculty of University, recording his memories at home.

Then he studied at the University and began to work in local newspapers. Soon he became a professional journalist, He worked in various newspapers and before the war was an Odessa's correspondent of the republican newspaper in Ukrainian language "Na zminu" (На зміну).

The filings of newspaper with his articles were somewhere in the apartment. He rarely spoke about them, although one article: “In Odessa again a fight”, about a fight, "wall to wall", between the youth of two Odessa districts, caused great resonance and, even, a change in the city Komsomol leadership in the late thirties.

With us, he talked more about the atmosphere in the newsrooms, about typography, about Soviet censorship -- about what was not permitted to talk about in official memoirs. He very disliked lacquers, pods, sticks and adapters – people, who didn't tell the true

Once in his editorial office was an interesting case.

Journalists are people with humor, and love to pinch each other. In newspaper staffed was a member of the "nugnik" breed. Do you know who they are? These are people who have no talent, but they always write about what is "nugno" (“needed”) by party bosses. It's about making carrier progress and thriving. Do you know the basic meaning of the word? (In Russian, nugnik means toilet)

One day, the chef editor of newspaper's goes into the hallway and feels something's going on. "The nugnik" sits, pressing to the ear of the phone, and quickly, and diligently, something writes down. When he saw the editor, he waved, do not disturb, and pointed his finger: "Wo! The first-class material." Suddenly, from another room, jumps out, clutching his mouth and bent almost in half, one of the employees, runs down the stairs and begins to laugh wildly. Then another one. The editor walks into this room. One of the "Hokhmaches" (jokers) sits with a phone, the cheeks stuffed balls of wet paper to change the voice, and something dictates. Other employees sit with their mouths shut so as not to laugh. The editor realizes everything right away. "Hokhmach," from the next room, dictated to “nugnik” something like this: "I'm, a pensioner Hotubenko, from the village of Fedoseyevka Belyayevsky district, asked the pioneers of our school to dig a well in my yard. The guys amicably took up the cause, but before they had time to dig one meter, as from under the ground hit a powerful fountain of oil ...". At that moment, all those in the

room could not stand and burst out with such laughter that the walls trembled for several days, and the legend, in waves, several times bypassed all the editorials of the city, changing and supplementing with new details.

Our mother, Maria (Musya) Rutstein, graduated from vocational school in the early thirties and became a revolver turner.

At this time, other "Nuzhniki" already of High Soviet Union scale, reported: "In Komsomolsk-on-Amur has been built aviation plant! The machines have been already installed. Pipelines work. Urgent need of turners-locksmiths-collectors!" "I know the city will be! I know the garden...!"

Two weeks on the road. They come to the Far East in, I wanted to say, the city, but there is no city -- a few buildings and barracks, and those are not enough. They go to work in the factory...

What a factory! Only the site has been cleared. No walls, no lathes. Bosses say: "You Komsomols, you can take any tasks on your shoulder. Build a factory, install the machines, and then work!

"But how so? After all, the whole country has already been reported!"

"It's none of your business! Do you know about Komsomol discipline? Do what they say." And young turners had to retrain as builders. She worked for a year, and then picked up some gastric contagion, which tormented her all her life, budding new sores, and bringing their number and variety, in her expression, to "the bouquet of my grandmother." She was sent back to Moscow due to illness.

The good worker, Komsomol member, she was sent by a technical assistant to Kaganovich's, one of members Central Comity, secretariat. She did not personally encounter Kaganovich, sometimes she saw him from afar.

She did not lose time, graduated from law school and so it happened that in the end she returned to Odessa. She had a good track record. Before the war, she moved into office and worked as a district judge.

One day, our parents crossed paths and they got married. They lived together for fifty-nine years, and only Death first separated, and soon, connected them forever.

But then, in 1937, as the fairy tales say: "They began to live, to live..." But that's in Tales. And in reality... soon began

## **War**

War is a disaster. War is deprivation. War is a great suffering for all. And for those on the front line who fought and died. And for those who in the second echelons provided and organized support for the front line. And for those who are in the rear, working to exhaustion, eating in hunger, supplied the front with weapons. And for those who have suffered from

the German occupants. And for the unfortunate refugees who fled the Germans. And for children born on the road, on the floor railcars. And even for the inhabitants of the distant rear, who were "sealed" to settle the refugees.



Shortly after beginning of the war, my father was called to the Navy. The Germans approached Odessa. The command of defense did not separate: a sailor or an infantryman - all to the front. The battalion in which the father was, has been built to send to the front. Suddenly somebody shouted to my father: "Boris! And what are you doing here." It was Markovich, with whom my father worked in one of the Odessa newspapers. "As you can see, I'm going to the front." "No! No! It's no good! You'll be more useful here." The battalion continued to be built for the march. The team was told: "On--...." Suddenly Markovich jumped out of the headquarters and waved his hands: "Wait, him say." The commander commanded: "Leave!" Read the order: "Red-fleet sailor Mirvis, out of line three steps forward. The rest: Right! Step Marsh!" Thus, began the service of my father in the newspaper, Odessa's naval base, "Voroshilovskiy Zalp."

"The newspaper was produced by Schwarzman, Mirvis and Markovich - "The Three Musketeers," as journalists of other newspapers called them." - This is a quote from Andrei Nezvedsky's book "Odesskie zametki", about the defense of Odessa. (Courtesy of the President of the Sydney War Veterans Association E. Solovey)

Seventy-five years have passed. Today, we realize that it was a feat! But then, for them, it was just a job, duty. Deadly. But necessary. And without the right to say, "No." The combat task they had was one – in time to release the newspaper and help to maintain the morale of the soldiers at the proper height.

With "Lake" (fotocamera) and a notebook... Three days to walk ... Beautiful words...

And, in reality, war is not just a walk. It was necessary to get to the front line, often under fire, to talk with the deathly tired fighters and commanders, sometimes to watch the battle, and then, getting to the editorial office, in a trembling ride on passing car, on his knees, to write an article, to give it to the set and to race for combat operation at sea, already on board large or small warships. And then again, a new job.

And on the road different things happened. How many times he came under the usual fire, he did not even count. But, one time, he was walking along the mountainside. Somewhere there was a solitary German plane and began to dive on him. They used to have so much for a fun. But there was either a large boulder, or a rock, and he managed to hide from the machine gun fire.

But another stupid case was much more dangerous. One day, having collected materials on the front line, he, together with the photographer, caught a ride to the headquarters, where the editorial office was based. Seeing that two red-fleets sailors are getting on the car going to the rear, some officer, major, jumped up to them. He was quite drunk. Therefore, no argument that they are journalists, come back from the job, here we say documents, etc., he did not listen, did not hear and did not want to hear. If you translate what he was saying, waving a gun, from his language to literary, it sounded something like this: "I ....., you deserters, running away to the rear, right here, right now, with these hands, right in this body I shoot you." It was good that the driver noticed a passing patrol, and they repulsed the journalists.

Death, in war, can find you in the most unexpected place and in the most unexpected time. And to avoid death, sometimes, you can also quite unexpectedly.

Here, imagine - The passing car goes about, in a minute and waiting for father. He's impatiently horns him. My father is about to jump out of the house where the editorial office is located. At this point, he was called because a typist - cannot make out the handwriting. The father stops for a few seconds, holds on to the door handle and dictates the phrase. Suddenly, an air raid hits to the next half of their house. His Majesty the Case!



When my father was taken to the front, my mother and her family were evacuated. The road brought them to Uzbekistan, and my mother was sent to the city of Andijan to work as a city judge. Her competence included cases, up to a certain level. She understood the rigors of wartime laws and always tried to be fair. Many cases were about ordinary theft in enterprises and collective farms, although there were others. But she singled out two cases especially.

One day she had to judge a postman. He was lazy to bring letters and threw them in the well. When they been got up, there were many soldier's letters and even funerals notes. At that time, almost every family living in Andijan, someone was at the front or evacuated nowhere. How people waited for these letters! How many tears were shed in anticipation! For some, perhaps it was that last letter... My mother, the wife of a front-line soldier, knew and understood all this. She could have sentenced the postman only for a few years "for unconscionable performance of official duties," but said, "You committed a terrible betrayal! Without delivering letters from the front and notification of death, you killed the soldier again." And she referred the case to the high court under the article, which carries a much harsher punishment. I still remember the indignation on her face, and in her voice, when she told me this story, fifteen years after the war.

I remembered this case two years ago, already here in Sydney. The boxes of undelivered letters were found in the garage of an Australian postman. He just lost his job, but possible for somebody there were lifechanging letters too.

And here's another case - 14-15-year-old children worked in factories during the war for 12 hours. There is no need to tell that everyone was malnourished and exhausted.

In the dock sits a fifteen-year-old boy. Almost a child. His offence is that during the work he huddled in some secluded corner and slept in it for

several hours. This, in wartime, was considered a crime. The prosecution was witnessed by a workshop master. During the judicial investigation, my mother realized that there was a long-standing feud between the master and this boy. And the master, practically, as they say today, deliberately "set up" him.

Mom asks the kid: Why did you fall asleep?

Teenager: I was tired, I didn't have any strength.

Mom asks the master: How do you know how long he slept?

Master: I saw him go there to sleep. I saw him sleeping there. I saw him wake up and go back to the machine.

Mom: Did you try to wake him up?

Master: No. Let him be responsible for his actions.

Mom: So! You intentionally contributed to the commission of a criminal offence, instead of preventing it as you should be!

And put the master in prison, and the boy acquitted.

The War gave everyone a living of grief. And Mr. Death, her brother, mowed people indiscriminately and at the front, and even in the distant rear. Touched his scythe and our family. My mother's mother, our grandmother Paulina, a relatively young woman, died in Andijan from some trifling disease. And my mother's brother, Abram Rutstein - a student of Moscow State University, a philologist, a clever young man, for his scientific work received a reservation from army, but went to volunteer for the front, became a tanker, and died near Moscow, in his first battle. But the rest of our family still won both the War and Death and survived them to spite all odds...

As soon as Odessa was liberated, the family returned to the city. Dad was always proud that on their pass to Odessa there were numbers from the top ten. A new, post-war life has begun. And soon after the war I was born.

But it's a different story, and I'll tell it someday.

*A huge thanks to my brother Alexander Mirvis, for his help in writing this story.*

Paul Mirvis

Sydney.